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Skyline to rename field after Coach Beam

Just hours before being shot, Beam checked in on Titans affected by gun violence

By Joseph Cannon-Wright & Tiffany Cheung
STAFF WRITERS

Skyline's football field will soon carry a new namesake to honor beloved Coach John Edward Beam.

Skyline Athletic Director Koresh Adams announced the decision on Dec. 4. The project had already been in the works and was originally planned as a surprise for the first football game of the 2026 season, but after Beam's tragic death, Adams said the time to announce the tribute was now.

Coach Beam, widely known and loved around Oakland and made more famous in the Netflix Series "Last Chance U," was shot by a gunman at Laney College on Thursday, Nov. 13. He died the next day at Highland Hospital.

Beam spent 22 years at Skyline, five as defensive coordinator and 17 as head football coach. He recorded 160 wins, 33 losses and three ties, winning 15 Oakland

Athletic League championships and 11 Oakland Section titles. His teams had four undefeated seasons. In 1997 he was named California Coach of the Year.

To many, Coach Beam's legacy was how he cared for people.

"He was the big brother that I didn't have," said Skyline PE teacher James Salazar. "He looked after me and made sure I was alright."

Dance teacher Dawn James was close friends with Coach Beam for 33 years.

"He was a colleague. He was like a brother to me. He always looked out for me. He was a role model. He was a force everywhere he went," Ms. James told *The Oracle*.

Less than 24 hours before he was shot, Coach Beam checked in on Ms. James after hearing about the Skyline shooting.

"Did anybody come check on you? Did Coach Sal come check on you? Did anybody come? Because you know, if you need me, I'll be there. You know that, right?" Ms. James recalled.

Many say this moment captured the kind of person Coach Beam was: someone who



The Olympian

ONCE A TITAN John Beam shouts plays from the sidelines during his first season as Skyline head coach in 1987. In more than 40 years of coaching, Beam sent more than 20 players to the NFL and many more to college.

showed up for others without hesitation.

Last week, Ms. James dedicated a dance about gun violence at Spirit of Dance to Coach Beam. The performance was preceded by a slideshow honoring his life.

Laney College also held a tribute on Wednesday, Dec. 10, when more than a thousand people retraced Coach Beam's steps from the main campus to



Photo by Lisa Shafer

ALWAYS A TITAN Skyline Class of 1994 left this banner at the gates of the Laney College football field to remember Coach John Beam, who was shot nearby.

the football field along a path lit with luminaries. On the field, candles spelled "BELIEVE," videos of Coach Beam played on the scoreboard, and a light show created by hundreds of drones illuminated the sky.

As the Skyline community mourns, staff say the best way

to honor Coach Beam is to live out the values he modeled daily: showing up for others, supporting one another through difficult moments, and striving to be the best we can be.

Many will motivate others using Beam's phrase: "Two Claps, Ready, Ready."



Photo by Lisa Leal

MOST TALENTED Borna Mahdavi-Ardebili performs a winning number during the Skyline's Got Talent show on Dec. 4. The talent show, originally scheduled for the night of Nov. 12, was moved because of a school shooting that took place the day before. All eight acts, which included musical instruments, singing and comedy, received loud applause during the third period show.

'Skyline's Got Talent' dazzles audience

By Jackson Masuret
STAFF WRITER

Skyline's Got Talent lit up the auditorium during third period on Dec. 4 as students showcased their skills in music, singing, and comedy, keeping the audience cheering throughout.

The show was produced by students in Yusuke Soi's Stagecraft class and emceed by senior Olivia Diaz.

Sophomore Benjamin Liporace kicked things off with by singing Bruno Mars' "When I Was Your Man," while playing piano. Senior Borna Mahdavi-Ardebili followed with "I'd Give My Life For You," from *Miss Saigon*, which he also sang while playing

the piano, ultimately winning the show and a \$50 gift card through votes by the audience.

Freshman Maia Pung-Yamato performed Chopin's Nocturne in C Sharp Minor on piano.

The final two singing acts were sophomore Carolyn Djaoumi with Shakira's "Try Everything" from *Zootopia* and junior Ray Hollister with "Fairytale" by 1c3 Speak. Hollister sang in Russian against dynamic lighting.

Senior Steven Willett added humor and variety with voice impressions of both real and fictional characters.

The show also featured a band with sophomores Carson Proudfoot and Alexander Mante

on guitar and Mr. Muhammad Ali on drums. They performed "Another Brick in the Wall," while senior Nikhil Dosaanj closed the show with two electrifying guitar solos "Ain't Talkin' 'bout Love" and "Eruption" by Van Halen.

"The talent show was a really cool experience," said Alex Mendoza, an AED sophomore. "I wished it was longer, but the winner really deserved it."

Savannah Lofton and Jahnnessa Jacobs, AED sophomores, said they loved the show and encouraged Skyline to give students more opportunities to showcase their talents — and to give others a break from class.

What Titans need to feel safe

Over the last month, Skyline has faced safety concerns from students, parents, staff, and people all over Oakland. These stem from a Nov. 12 incident in which two students allegedly brought guns to campus and shot another student, who was hospitalized with non-life-threatening injuries. The school went on lockdown for the third time this year.

A Town Hall meeting on Nov. 20 brought school officials, including Principal Rebecca Huang and OUSD Director of Safety Nelson Alegria, to explain their plan for a safer campus. Principal Huang told the audience that the school had added five security personnel, along with a violence interrupter and restorative justice coordinator, and mentioned planned facility upgrades, including two new fencing projects, one stretching from the theater to the front entrance that will be installed over winter break.

This statement by Ms. Huang encapsulates the main objective that Skyline and district leaders seem to be trying to achieve: using security measures to prevent violent incidents that have been plaguing Skyline for years. While these measures focus on security, we believe the root of recurring violence lies deeper with problems with the school culture.

These problems with our culture are showcased with students skipping class, limited connections with staff and weak a student community. Fixing campus culture can be difficult and lengthy, but if Skyline leadership takes the appropriate measures, students and staff will attend school without fear.

One issue holding Skyline back is the normalization of tragic events, like the Nov. 12 shooting. Many students and staff wanted the next day off to process the trauma, but the district kept school open to support students. School resumed with some restorative justice circles and other activities aimed at supporting students. But because of the quick turnaround, teachers could not provide as much help as they would have liked, and many students felt there should have been more therapists and adults checking in on us and listening to our concerns. If the school had done this, we would have felt supported and confident returning to campus.

Instead, the school has prioritized a heightened security presence in which staff are stepping up enforcement of digital passes and school IDs and are conducting frequent sign-ins at the bathrooms. School leaders did implement restorative justice circles for every third-period class on Dec. 11, but many students felt they came too little, too late.

We believe normalization of school shootings and gun violence exists among students. No student should feel comfortable bringing a gun to school, let alone shooting peers. Staff shouldn't ignore conflict, and students shouldn't rush to film fights. Again, this issue is rooted in campus culture, and to fix it, students must step up equally and fight for the changes they want.

The Oracle acknowledges the nuances and challenges of addressing campus safety, where increasing security could lead to more extreme, potentially threatening measures such as pat downs and police on campus. However, we believe the school's response after the shooting was not ideal, and greater emphasis should have been placed on supporting students rather than increasing the security presence.

This is an editorial and represents the consensus view of The Oracle staff.

Grant lets Kasai, McGhee bring Galapagos to classes

By Viviane Toure
STAFF WRITER

After a fellowship in Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, Skyline science teachers Christina McGhee-Esquivel and Maki Kasai are bringing real-world ecosystems into their classrooms with hands-on lessons for their Biology and Physiology students.

Their 16-day fellowship, granted by a program called Fund for Teachers, included six days in mainland Ecuador and 10 days on Santa Cruz and Isabela islands in the Galapagos.

"The trip let us experience topics we normally only teach about," said Ms. McGhee.

On the Galapagos islands, they explored the cloud forest and saw wildlife including tortoises, penguins, sea lions and a wide variety of hummingbirds.



Photo courtesy of Christina McGhee-Esquivel

SUMMER SCHOOL Teachers Maki Kasai (left) and Christina McGhee-Esquivel used this photo of themselves standing near a giant tortoise to document a Fund for Teacher fellowship to South America on social media.

They also loved doing hands-on research.

"We were able to find and eliminate invasive African snails, which are as big as your fist, and collect microplastics on the beach," Ms. Kasai said.

One of the most meaningful moments of the fellowship for Ms. McGhee was meeting a local student group focused on restoration and conservation.

"We got to see them lead us in activities and share their knowledge of their space with us on Isabela Island," she said.

The Galapagos experience emphasized place-based education, inspiring both teachers to supplement their curriculum with this teaching style.

"I plan to have students conduct research on an organism, from their home country, or from somewhere else in the world, that is unique to that locale," said Ms. Kasai, adding that students will then use comparative anatomy in dissections.

Ms. McGhee said she was excited to apply what she learned to the classroom.

"Everything about a trip is amazing and I learned a lot, but I also needed to get back into the classroom with new purpose and that did it. That's why Fund for Teachers was so important," she said.

Fund for Teachers grants up to \$5,000 for individual teachers or \$10,000 for teacher teams to design their own professional learning experience anywhere in the world. Fellows are expected to bring what they learn back to their classroom. Applications for next summer, due Jan. 22, are available at fundforteachers.org.

High turnout energizes girls soccer

By Liam Geissler
STAFF WRITER

Girls' Soccer kicked off the season with 68 students trying out, marking the team's biggest turnout in years.

With packed fields and tough competition, earning a spot on the roster wasn't easy, but the players' energy carried straight into the start of the season when the team won its first game against Hayward.

Senior Monrovia Prinz, the team captain, explained that the sharp increase in players trying out allowed for the creation of a junior varsity team alongside the varsity squad.

The teams are coached by Emilio Navarro-Perez and two

assistants.

Monrovia said she thinks this boost of players will give them a "significant advantage" when playing teams such as O'Dowd.

Last year, Skyline's record was 12 wins, 4 draws and 2 losses with a notable 16-0 win against Life Academy.

So far, Skyline is 1-2. After beating Hayward 4-1 on Nov. 21, they suffered a 4-1 defeat to Castro Valley on Dec. 5 and a 6-0 loss to Berkeley on Dec. 12.

The team hopes to even its record in its next game against Oakland High School on Jan. 7.

The packed turnout for tryouts has Monrovia excited and optimistic. She said she has "good hopes for the season."



Photo courtesy of Dennis Spencer

DIRECTOR X 2 Dennis Spencer directs "High Stakes Testing," a film produced in Kensington in 2022. Spencer is also the director of the Arts, Entertainment & Design Pathway. He says his career was inspired by watching old films when he was a young boy. He also has worked in episodic streaming and television series.

Tom Hanks not only Titan with Hollywood credentials

AED Director Dennis Spencer says lifelong love of movies inspired his

By Vance Kirby
STAFF WRITER

Inside Room 41 is a Hollywood writer — though you may know him better as Mr. Spencer, the film teacher.

Dennis Spencer, also the AED Pathway director, has worked on about 15 major studio films and dozens of independent films. He sat down with *The Oracle* last month to discuss his career.

What made you want to work in the film industry?

Even when I was really young, I think I just had a love of movies. I remember the first VHS that came out when I was probably about 10 or 11, there was usually a channel that was running old movies all the time. I really got inspired through watching a lot of old films.

What have you done in the film industry?

I've made my own films, so working as an independent writer, producer and director. First, when I was younger, I went through film school and worked on professional sets, doing sound work, doing all kinds of below-the-line work like that. As I grew older I had that background of really understanding how sets run.

I worked as a development executive for a studio, and what that entailed was green lighting films, reading the scripts directly from the writers, and working with the writers and directors. Then caretaking the money of the studio by having films made by certain producers that we had deals with, that kind of stuff. After I left that position,

I worked as a writer. I actually encourage everybody to do that first. They really get an understanding of what it takes to make a film on the ground level, and then they can move forward and be what is called "above the line" positions or "below the line" positions.

Do you prefer writing or directing?

I can probably make more money writing, and I have made more money writing.

I directed some stuff when I was much younger, before I was in the studio or anything. And I'm directing now, as I get older, just short films. I really like directing. I'm almost thinking that maybe I should have made more of a career out of it. Writing, I can make more money on it, and I do enjoy it, but there's an arduous process to get your stuff made. So being the director, you're already at the front of getting it very good.

Do you have any advice for aspiring filmmakers?

After the many, many years that I've worked in film: don't give up. It's a game of longevity for many people. You'll see there are writers that have worked their entire career. Maybe they've been working the entire time on several different things, and maybe they only have like two credits, and then after a 27-year career, they're able to finally get that one thing made that maybe gives them notoriety. So don't give up.



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Students share Hanukkah recipe

By Elena Wenzler
& Jesse Rocha-Valadez
STAFF WRITERS

On the third day of Hanukkah, many Skyline students will be enjoying the warm, crispy taste of latkes as a holiday favorite.

These historic golden potato pancakes are a long-lasting tradition with a story just as important as the flavor.

Sophia Lewak, a Green Energy Pathway junior, explained that the reason Hanukkah foods are fried in oil is to remember the small amount of oil that miraculously burned for eight days in the menorah, a central part of the holiday celebration.

"Latkes connect my family by bringing us together to celebrate Hanukkah and share a tradition that millions of people do around the world," she said.



Photo by Jesse Rocha-Valadez

INGREDIENTS

4 Russet potatoes
2 yellow onions
1 egg
1 tablespoon flour
Salt and pepper
Oil
Sour cream (optional)
Applesauce (optional)

First, wash and dry the potatoes. Shred all four potatoes with a box grater, then press them in a towel to get the extra moisture out so they fry better. Finely dice the two yellow onions and add them into a medium-large bowl with the potatoes.

Add one egg and mix everything together. Then add the flour, salt, pepper and any other seasonings you want. The mixture should be able to hold its shape when you squeeze it together, but it shouldn't be too dry (if too dry, add another egg).

Form the mixture into flat pancake shapes (the thinner, the crispier). Heat up some oil in a pan, just enough to cover the bottom. Once it's hot, fry the latkes until they're golden brown on both sides.

Let them drain on a paper towel and eat them with sour cream or applesauce.

This dish is simple to make, filled with tradition, and perfect for celebrating the holiday season.

Recipe from senior Talia Gordon, president of Jewish Student Union (JSU)

The Oracle

The Oracle is a vehicle of student freedom of expression and a public forum for the Skyline High School community. It is produced during the academic year by the journalism class and advised by Lisa Shafer.

We welcome feedback about our content and would also like to hear ideas for future coverage. Signed letters on topics of concern to our community are welcomed.

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