

# BLAIR

BULLETIN

A MAGAZINE CELEBRATING COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

WINTER/SPRING 2026







Photo by Director of School  
Photography Tyson Trish.

A sly fox has become our latest and most talked about campus regular, happily trotting alongside the deer and squirrels who were here first.

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# FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL



With the close of our historic *All In* campaign last summer, Blair stepped into a new chapter marked by growth and introspection. Having completed an in-depth self-study for our reaccreditation with the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools—a process that occurs every 10 years and touches on every area of school life and operations—we are at a natural point to reflect on Blair’s priorities and values. Reaccreditation concluded this winter with a site visit and recommendations from a team of boarding and independent school educators, serving as a natural segue into our next phase of strategic planning.

As an institution, we have long been committed to articulating what we hold dear—whether through our formal mission statement, the Five Fundamentals, or informal conversations with families and alums as we travel the globe waving the Blair flag. We offer an extraordinary educational experience that prepares graduates to be successful in college and in life, while remaining appreciative of and grounded in the dynamic community and human connections they learned to forge at Blair.

Near the end of their almost quarter-century tenure leading our School forward, former Head of School and current Trustee T. Chandler Hardwick III and his wife, Monie, captured what differentiated us from our peers, seeking to answer the question: “Why Blair?” The result was the Board-approved *Seven Principles That Define a Blair Education*, a clear, lasting articulation of what makes the Blair experience distinct and deeply impactful. While aspects of our work shift with the school year, new technologies and an evolving educational landscape, it is striking how much this foundational document continues to capture the essence of what makes Blair such a meaningful place to learn and grow.

Knowing our students is at the heart of everything we do and, as such, we are purposeful about the size of the school so that this can happen. Our faculty meet learners where they are, challenge them thoughtfully and help them grow into confident, capable young adults. Our goal is to develop the skills that prepare students for success in the next chapters of their educational and professional journeys and, in the process, create a lifelong love of learning and inspire them to contribute meaningfully to society.

Toward this end, our self-study affirmed that Blair continues to emphasize the importance of academic excellence, deep relationships and a focus beyond self. The learning between a great teacher and a willing student in a diverse and dynamic community is one of the most powerful influences in a young person’s life—and engagement in all aspects of our community only deepens this impact.

For me, one of the most resonant of the *Seven Principles* is the fact that happiness is found beyond ourselves. Today’s teens face constant pressure to turn inward, especially in a world shaped by technology and social media. That’s why we intentionally teach and model the value of connection and communication. Across areas of campus life, Blair encourages students to put down their devices, be present in the moment, and engage fully with the people and opportunities around them.

We are continually inspired by the ways our alumni and faculty champion this mindset as we celebrate our shared commitment to the power of a Blair education—and to the relationships that will shape our community for years to come.

Cheers,



Peter G. Curran P’27 ’27  
Head of School

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

## DEREK CHEN '26 AWARDED TOP INTERNATIONAL ESSAY PRIZE

**L**ast summer, Newark Liberty International Airport hummed with the usual din of rolling suitcases and boarding calls, pilots striding through terminals and teenagers glued to glowing screens. Tucked into one corner of a Starbucks, Derek Chen '26 sat with laptop open and phone tethered to the overworked charging station beside him. Intently focused, he looked less like a traveler passing the time than a writer chasing a lead. During layovers and waiting for flights to his next college visit, Derek combed the Internet for traces of the Lenape, the native tribe whose ancestral land is now home to Blair.

The search was frustrating. Many of the links he found online to information were broken, phone numbers rang unanswered and even the number for the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs had been disconnected. He had success connecting with a few live sources, but Derek got the sense that most were too busy to respond to a high school student on a mission. Derek had squeezed every free moment he had into his research, and it had not been easy.

Months earlier, he and three Blair classmates had produced a successful documentary contrasting the views of early American settlers on land rights and responsibilities with the views of the Lenape. The film had earned them a spot at the National History Day Contest, where they advanced to the state level. Their work also caught the attention of a teacher there, who encouraged Derek to enter the 2025 Gilder Lehrman Institute David McCullough Essay Prize in the research category. Named in honor of historian and renowned storyteller David McCullough, the international contest recognizes young writers who combine historical rigor with an excellent narrative. It promised a \$5,000 prize for the winner, but for Derek, the contest wasn't about the money—it was a chance to give voice to a little-known story. Derek got to work researching and writing.

In September, that persistence paid off. Derek opened an email announcing that he had been awarded first place in the prestigious international contest, besting more than 750 submissions from 36 states and countries as far away as Thailand, the UK, Canada, Myanmar, India, Taiwan, Pakistan, China, Turkey and Korea. "His essay stood out to a panel of esteemed judges," the winning announcement

read, "for its exceptional quality, well-crafted argument and meticulous attention to historical detail."

Blair history department chair Jason Beck was not at all surprised. Derek's final paper in Blair's Advanced Survey U.S. History course had been the foundation for his prize-winning essay. "I took that paper and refined it, expanded it for the essay contest," Derek explains.

Mr. Beck, who had watched him plug away at the draft and shape his arguments carefully, saw something more. "Derek's dedication to genuine historical research and scholarship is truly remarkable," Mr. Beck said when he heard the news.

"To date, he has won all of our internal department prizes, so it is incredibly affirming to see him receive the type of external validation all of his incredible work and insight deserves. His is a truly mature and thoughtful intellectual voice. As a department, we are all deeply proud of his work!"

Derek sees his success not as an overnight phenomenon, but as something he has been building for years. Born in California, he grew up in Beijing and, later, Vancouver before coming to Blair. That global experience, he says, has influenced his view of history. "I come from Canada," he says, "and a lot of what we learn there in history is similar to what we learn here—conflict between early Native Americans, who were stewards of the environment, and the British, who were industrialists." In his documentary, Derek and his Blair classmates examined those contrasts. In his prize-winning essay, Derek took the research a step further, uncovering the influence of Swedish and Finnish settlers in the Delaware Valley, whose communal traditions aligned more closely with the

Lenape vision of land and cooperative governance, emphasizing flexible land use rights.

The research process, Derek reflects, has reshaped his understanding of America's past. "It changed my view from being simplistic to dynamic," he reflects. "It was empowering to see tribes leveraging their power and forming strong alliances."

It may come as no surprise that, as Derek looks toward college, he wants to go on and study history or anthropology. Columbia University is high on the senior's list, in part because of its location on Lenape land. "I like that connection," he says, though he has no plans to allow the college admission process to slow down his passion project.

After struggling to connect to historical research for his essay, Derek is now on a mission to make the process easier for others. In addition to serving as manager for the Sand Hill Lenape Historical Foundation's website, he has teamed up with Blair classmate Arjan Singh '26 to build a website that will serve as a repository of information for researchers, educators and students who want to learn more about native tribes in New Jersey. He is now in contact with several of the area's clan chiefs, and the site, which is sponsored by the New Jersey Commission on American Indian Affairs, is expected to go live soon.

For him, the project is a natural next step to the work that earned him first place in the Gilder Lehrman Institute's David McCullough Essay Prize. "I was inspired to make this website because it was so hard finding information on the Internet," he says. "One of the things the essay showed me is that the history I worked so hard to uncover should be preserved." ▀



# GIRLS' BASKETBALL'S GLOBAL GAME

AREK DENG '01

THURAYA ABDUL HAMID '19

TEMI FAGBENLE '11

CAMILLE CLARIN '19

FEMI HAMILTON '12

ANNETTE SNOW '12

SAMI HILL '13

BATOULY CAMARA '15

Since the turn of the century, 16 of Blair's elite girls' basketball players have represented their countries in international play on the global stage. But it's no coincidence. That level of achievement is rooted in a team culture that demands excellence, nurtures confidence and prepares young women to excel on the hilltop and beyond.

ATHENA  
THOMPSON '27

OLIVIA  
MILES '21

AVA  
FAJARDO '26

ZEYNEP  
OZEL '24

FELICIA  
AIYEOTAN '16

ISA  
GRANT '26

ELIZABETH  
ARCHER '24

ONOME  
AKINBODE-JAMES '18



The 2018-2019 varsity girls' basketball team was stacked with international players Camille Clarin '19, Thuraya Abdul Hamid '19 and Olivia Miles '21.

If you ask any Blair girls' basketball player what makes the team special, the answer comes quickly. It's not the league or state championships—though the Bucs have more than their share—and it's not the wins. It's the culture. The camaraderie. The people. You don't build a dynasty on talent alone; at Blair, success grows from toughness, communication and a genuine commitment to one another.

“What makes Blair basketball special is the people,” former player and coach Batouly Camara '15 shares. “It's a group of young women who come together for a common purpose, who want to work, grow and chase big dreams. We pushed one another, supported one another and held one another accountable. It's rare to find young people who actually want to be challenged to become their best selves. That culture is what made Blair basketball different.”

The group prides itself on their defense, team play and doing whatever it takes to succeed. They work

From left: Isa Grant '26, Ava Fajardo '26 and Athena Thompson '27 hold their countries' flags with pride.





The 2022-2023 varsity girls' basketball team shares a moment in the locker room after another outstanding victory.

on individual skills, but believe basketball is ultimately a team game. Hustle plays, unselfish decisions and joy in the competition are all hallmarks of the program. That ethos extends off the court, too. These players are leaders in the classroom, involved in their communities and constantly striving to become stronger students, teammates and people.

This philosophy is exactly what draws young women from around the world to the hilltop. “The Blair girls’ team is unique,” explains head coach Greg Rosnick. “We offer a national-level program within an elite boarding school environment built on relationships and strong connections. That’s rare today—and it’s what families from across the globe are searching for. When students arrive, they’re thrilled to be high-level athletes, serious scholars and still get to be kids.”

What’s most remarkable, however, is where this team-first mindset leads. Despite a team-centric philosophy, Blair routinely produces players who rise to represent their home countries on the international stage. Beginning with Arek Deng-Guelly ’01 representing Great Britain in the 2001 European Championship, a total of 16 players have participated in global competition. The pipeline to international play began to grow in 2007, when former head coach Sue Altman started recruiting high-level players to Blair. Quint Clarke ’87 strengthened that vision when he assumed leadership, expanding the program’s reach and



Coach Clarke ’87 and former coach and player Batouly Camara ’15 pose with the Mid-Atlantic Prep League (MAPL) championship trophy in 2022.

development. With each step forward, the number of Bucs earning national team selections rose right alongside the program’s success.

For many, the opportunity is deeply personal, the chance to represent a cause greater than themselves and feel the pride of wearing their country’s colors. But the opportunity is rare, and the competition to reach this level is steep.

“You, along with 20 or so other top basketball players in the country, have to spend three to four days at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, practicing two times a day in high altitude,” Olivia Miles ’21 shares of her experience qualifying for the 2025 FIBA Women’s AmeriCup. “These practices consist of a lot of learning, but also playing. So, it’s very tiring, and very challenging trying to earn a spot on the team.” For Olivia, the effort was all worth it when she helped the U.S. team capture gold in Chile this past summer, starting five games, averaging 6.9 points and setting a U.S. record of 7.1 assists.

Beyond FIBA tournaments, two Blair alumni have reached the ultimate stage. Both Temi Fagbenle ’11 (Great Britain) and Sami Hill ’13 (Canada) have played in the Olympics—Temi in 2012 and Sami in 2024. Their recognition is further proof that Blair’s collective approach nurtures the confidence, discipline and skill required for the highest level of global competition.

“My highest achievement is representing Canada in the Paris Olympics, but my favorite memories have been winning medals at the AmeriCup tournaments—specifically 2017 (gold), 2019 (silver) and 2025 (bronze),” Sami notes. “These teams were truly groups of friends playing at the highest level, and we had to face difficult games to succeed. Even though 2019 and 2025 weren’t the gold, they were almost just as sweet.”

With more than a decade of experience coaching Blair girls’ basketball, Coach Clarke, known affectionately by his players as “Q,” has seen the positive impact of players gaining experience in international competitions. Along with the opportunity to travel to exciting destinations, Q explains how these players are learning new styles of gameplay and strategies that develop them into better individual players. When they return to the Blair team, he witnesses the girls sharing what they’ve learned and how it can benefit the team as a whole. They are also becoming better prepared for the next level after Blair, being open to learning new styles and new coaching techniques.

Over the past two years, Blair has seen a dizzying number of past and current players competing on the global stage.

While several alums were participating in the women’s divisions, current students like Ava Fajardo ’26, Isa Grant ’26 and Athena Thompson ’27 were spending their summers in the U16 and U18 basketball programs across the world. As Coach Rosnick explains, it’s incredibly gratifying for these young women to be recognized as one of the 12 best under 18 in the whole country to represent in international competition. It is a remarkable honor that doesn’t go unnoticed by the players or the Blair community.

“Blair is not just a basketball school; it is one of the most rigorous academic institutions in the country,” Coach Rosnick adds. “To succeed here, student-athletes must be committed scholars who embrace a close-knit, highly motivated community.” The program’s goal reflects that: to develop not only outstanding basketball players, but also exceptional young women who will lead in college, in sport and in life. That is the secret to Blair girls’ basketball: a program built not on stars, but on selflessness. And, yet, that very culture produces athletes who shine on the world stage—each one carrying the spirit of the Bucs with them wherever the game takes them.

**COUNTRIES REPRESENTED BY BLAIR’S GIRLS’ BASKETBALL PLAYERS IN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION**





**CANADA**  
POINT GUARD/SHOOTING GUARD



**SAMI HILL '13**

COLLEGE: VIRGINIA TECH

“Representing Canada is like no other feeling. It never gets old lining up on the free throw line and listening to the national anthem while wearing the Canadian jersey. It’s an honor to represent Canada and something I don’t take for granted. There is so much pride and passion in those games because you’re playing for something bigger than yourself.”



**GUINEA**  
FORWARD



**BATOULY CAMARA '15**

COLLEGE: UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY/  
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

“Representing Guinea has been one of the greatest honors of my life. A special memory was having the chance to compete in countries like Spain, Cape Verde and others. In Spain, I became the first player to wear a hijab, and that moment stayed with me. Sport is powerful. It breaks barriers, opens doors and allows us to tell our stories in ways words alone can’t. Being able to show up fully as myself on an international stage is something I’ll always carry with me.”



**JORDAN**  
STRETCH FORWARD



**THURAYA ABDUL  
HAMID '19**

COLLEGE: UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

“We’re on a mission to put Jordan women’s basketball on the map, and so far, it has been the most precious journey. With my team and Jordan across my chest, I have found a new love for the game and a new sense of purpose that is so much larger than myself. Listening to my country’s national anthem before tip-off will never not give me goosebumps.”





**GREAT BRITAIN**  
SMALL FORWARD



**ELIZABETH ARCHER '24**  
COLLEGE: AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

"I'm so grateful I was afforded the opportunity to represent Great Britain at the 2025 Euros. I am especially thankful for the relationships I developed with my teammates, coaches and staff. They are a huge part of what made the experience so meaningful. The first time I stepped onto the court in Hungary was a moment I'll never forget—standing there with my country's colors across my chest filled me with so much pride. Competing against players wearing the flags of their own nations made everything feel even more surreal."



**GREAT BRITAIN**  
SHOOTING GUARD



**ATHENA THOMPSON '27**  
COLLEGE: UNCOMMITTED

"It's such an honor, and I just remember being so excited to have the opportunity to represent Great Britain when I was first called up at 15. It's always been one of my goals, so getting to compete in the FIBA European championships the last three years has been a really good experience. I've met the majority of my best friends through it because you spend two months traveling everywhere together and form strong bonds. It's also a reminder to keep working and pushing yourself. Playing for my national team isn't my end goal, but it's a step, and I want to keep competing at the highest level going forward."



**PANAMA**  
POWER FORWARD/CENTER



**ISA GRANT '26**  
COLLEGE: UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY  
(COMMITTED)

"Both of my parents are from Panama, so getting to play for Panama means a lot to me. I love expressing myself through basketball, and it's meaningful to use something I love to connect with my parents and our shared heritage."



**TURKEY**  
POINT GUARD



**ZEYNEP OZEL '24**  
COLLEGE: DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

"It had always been a dream of mine to wear my country across my chest, so seeing my last name on the jersey for the first time and hearing my name announced in the lineup made me very emotional. It felt surreal. I am very grateful for the opportunity and for the trust of my coaches."



**PHILIPPINES**  
POINT GUARD



**AVA FAJARDO '26**  
COLLEGE: DREXEL UNIVERSITY (COMMITTED)

“Playing for your country is an entirely different feeling I hadn’t experienced before. You are not playing for yourself or your family, but for something much bigger. It’s also allowed me to connect to other Blair players like Camille Clarin ’19, who also played for the Philippines. It’s inspiring to see the players who came before me and I want to uphold that legacy.”



**UNITED STATES**  
GUARD



**OLIVIA MILES '21**  
COLLEGE: NOTRE DAME/TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

“It is such an honor to represent your country in international competition. First, trying to make the team is nothing short of a gauntlet. But once the team is announced, it’s very rewarding to hear your name, and then the real fun begins. You get to practice with your new teammates, learn the history of USA basketball and go compete against other countries for the gold! Having the ‘USA’ across your chest when playing brings another level of pressure to the game, but in a good way, because you’re literally fighting for an entire nation instead of an institution or club team. It’s so fun but also a little scary because there is a lot at stake, whether it’s qualification for future tournaments or medal placement.”



# DRAWING

## FROM LIFE

You may not realize it, but you have probably seen Tara Nicole Whitaker '98's work. Maybe you've read *The Princess and the Frog* Golden Book to your child. You may have caught a glimpse of *Weather Hunters* while flipping through PBS or seen the graphic novel *Ariel and the Sea Wolf* on a young reader's shelf. Her illustrations, swimming in bold color, flowing hair, curving ribbons and floating musical notes, jump off the page with warmth and movement. It's no surprise, then, that the artist behind them helps shape animation at The Walt Disney Company, where Tara has built an impressive career bringing stories to life through illustration and animation.

Very soon, Tara's name will appear on the big screen in a new way, with the premiere of *Pierre the Pigeon-Hawk*, her feature film co-directing debut. Starring will.i.am, Snoop Dogg, Jennifer Coolidge and Jennifer Hudson, among others, the movie is one of the most anticipated animated comedies of the year.

The first time that Tara (pronounced Tah-rah) watched an animated film, she didn't just see characters moving across a screen—she saw her future. "Even as a kid, I wanted to tell stories that moved people," she says. Two decades later, she's doing exactly that. Since graduating with a BFA in



character animation from CalArts in 2002, she's served as an illustrator for Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network, spent over a decade at Disney, and helped direct *The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder*, an acclaimed coming-of-age series following Penny Proud on Disney+ and Hulu.

For Tara, directing is where the elements that she loves—storytelling, design, animation and music—all come together. "On a typical day, there is still a lot of drawing involved," she says. She might be creating drawovers or paintovers or giving notes on lighting and design. "It's a bit like conducting," she explains. "You have your hands in a

lot of different areas, and you get to pull all these creative threads together.” That metaphor feels especially fitting because music runs deep in Tara’s family: Her mother was a jazz vocalist, her grandfather a drummer in the Erroll Garner Trio. Growing up, art and music were more a way of life than hobbies in the Whitaker household. From a young age, Tara remembers that her parents “saw this was something I was very serious about.” Growing up in New York and Pennsylvania, Tara enrolled in art classes at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, and once she was accepted at Blair, her parents made sure her teachers knew how important art was to her.

Looking back, Tara credits teachers like former art department chair Rita Baragona P’92 ’95 with nurturing her creative skills and encouraging her to pursue animation seriously. “I appreciated it as a student,” she says, “but, as an adult, I realize not everyone is encouraged in that way.” That sense of gratitude and quiet curiosity about the world around her continues to feed her art today. And, in a full-circle moment, Tara’s artistic success was honored by her alma mater when she was inducted into the Blair Arts Guild in 2023.

Once she graduated from college in California, Tara found that professional opportunities often came through community—from friends in the industry and exhibitions at local galleries. “As an artist, it’s always great to pursue your own work on the side,” she advises. One of those personal projects led to a breakthrough in her career. A serendipitous exhibition at Gallery Nucleus in Alhambra, California, led to an art director at Disney seeing her illustrations. “You never know who might see your work!” she says, laughing. That chance encounter led to a decade of professional opportunities at Disney and a circle of friends and colleagues who kept work coming her way. Today, working as a director has given her a whole new perspective. “I just love being part of a team [with *Pierre the Pigeon-Hawk*] and bouncing ideas off one another,” she says.

Even as her career took off, Tara kept finding inspiration in her daily life—a sketch in a cafe, a trip to the zoo, a quiet minute on the hiking trail with





her dog. “Observing nature, animals and people around you is the best source for ideas,” she notes. Fittingly, it was at her local dog park that she met her husband, Kevin Grellman, a nurse. The two married last fall and now share both their home and their hikes with the dogs that first brought them together.

She and Kevin are eagerly looking forward to the premiere of *Pierre the Pigeon-Hawk* this summer. One of the things Tara is most proud of is the film’s central message: Different is cool. “This movie is about embracing your own individuality and making a positive impact in the world,” she says. “It’s an incredible honor to be one of the first Black women to direct an animated film. I’ve always had a passion for representation and character-led stories with an uplifting and positive message.”

Now, after working for more than two decades in animation, Tara has learned a thing or two. For current Blair students who hope to follow her into animation, she encourages them to be persistent. “It can be challenging,” she admits, “but ignore that little voice that tells you you’re not good enough. I was able to go to the best animation school in the country because mentors made me feel like there was a place for me. There is a place for you, too.”

Twenty years after sketching her first character professionally, Tara is still doing exactly what she dreamed of as a child—bringing stories to life. Grateful for the experiences she’s had so far, she’s eager to keep growing and challenging herself as an artist. “I love figuring out where a story is going, shaping the character arc and making genuine connections with audiences,” she says. “And I love learning from the very talented people I work with.” It’s easy to see how she fell in love with animation in the first place. As Tara puts it, “Just pursue the things that bring you joy, and that will keep you passionate about what you do.” 🎬



in the  
*News*

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## DOUG KIMMELMAN 'POWERS' THROUGH FOX BUSINESS APPEARANCE

This fall, former Blair Board Chair and Honorary Trustee Douglas W. Kimmelman P'12 '13 '15 '22 joined the Fox Business television show *Mornings with Maria* to discuss surging U.S. electricity demand, the need for renewed energy investment and the critical importance of reliable power. He was also featured on CNBC the week after from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. As executive chairman and founder of Energy Capital Partners, the now largest private owner of power generation capacity in the United States, Mr. Kimmelman noted that the nation is seeing electricity demand growth for the first time in three decades. "AI is a big driver, but it's not just AI," he said. He traced the trend to a number of causes, including onshoring of manufacturing, cryptocurrency mining, electricity demand of LNG liquification and the growth of electric vehicles. "We've got a supply problem," he noted. "The United States is still the world's largest provider of nuclear power, and we've got a lot of new nuclear technologies...but we need a lot of new megawatts from all sources, including gas and renewables."



The conversation turned to the energy demands of artificial intelligence, with Mr. Kimmelman noting that "spending is through the roof" among major technology companies. "Our focus every single day, working with the hyperscalers—Amazon, Google, Meta and the like—is on figuring out the electricity side of the resources," Mr. Kimmelman said. "They have to do this in a way that looks at the societal concerns of this build out of new power generation—increasing carbon emissions and higher electricity prices. [The build out has] got to be done in a smart way, so the higher prices are borne by the hyperscalers."

Mr. Kimmelman concluded by noting that energy and AI are deeply intertwined in the nation's economic future. "It's top of the list for the U.S. economy," he said. "We need this trillions of AI [investment] to grow our way out of deficits and power our economy forward."

## THE HOUSES THAT MARCOS BUILT

Blair Trustee Marcos Alvarado '99 made headlines in summer 2025 in *Commercial Observer*, an online and weekly print publication that covers commercial real estate news and trends. As partner and head of U.S. real estate at global investor Sixth Street, Marcos announced a new partnership that will expand affordable housing in the tri-state area. "Sixth Street is pleased to partner with L+M's leadership team to support their continued efforts toward expanding the supply of high-quality affordable housing," he said. The project includes a 530,000-square-foot development on the Harlem River in New York with 542 affordable units, on-site social services and a 2.8-acre park. It also includes ArtSide, a new neighborhood



planned in multiple phases on the Newark, New Jersey, riverfront, and will include 330 mixed-income apartments, 20,000 square feet of commercial space and a performing arts venue.

According to *Commercial Observer*, "Since joining Sixth Street Partners in January 2024, Marcos Alvarado has brought his trademark touch honed over the last two decades to the global investment firm's strategy.

"Alvarado has an impressive resume, having served as president and chief investment officer at ground lease specialist Safehold; as head of acquisitions at investor Cadre; and as a managing director of Starwood Capital."

## ANDREW R. HEINZE '73 RECEIVES PRAISE FOR 'THE BLISS OPTION'

What if you were faced with possibly the last choice you'll ever make? And that choice is a machine that will keep you happy for the rest of your life?

Those are the questions playwright Andrew R. Heinze '73 explores in one of his latest works, *The Bliss Option*. The 2023 Blair Arts Guild inductee has crafted a story that, in the words of Roberta Pikser of *Theater Wire*, "presents itself as something sweet, and in some sense, it is. It is also chilling....It will, and should, stay with you."

*The Bliss Option* has earned praise from theatre critics for its compelling blend of comedy and drama in a near-future world where a government-controlled technology delivers continual comfort and happiness. The play's protagonist,



Dave, resists signing onto *The Bliss Option*, as Stoddard, a charming government employee, urges him to do it.

Malini Singh McDonald of *Theater Beyond Broadway* calls the play "visually striking...with performances that are both precise and deeply human... an unsettling mirror of the lives we live now."

Andy was awarded a New Jersey State Council on the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship, which made the production possible. *The Bliss Option* premiered in October at New York City's Chain Theatre and is now available in paperback. His one-act dark comedy *Exit Strategies* was performed in Mexico in September, and his comedy, *The FQ*, ran at Washington's Jewel Box Theatre early in 2026.

## ANTHONY D'AMATO '06 FINDS SUCCESS WITH FANTASTIC CAT

As anyone who watched the recent television piece on New York's News 12 can attest, Anthony D'Amato '06 is one Fantastic Cat! There are four of them in the band *Rolling Stone* dubbed "the supergroup-you-need-to-know."

The name itself is unconventional, born in 2021 when solo artists Anthony, Brian Dunne, Don DiLego and Mike Montali joined forces and let their NYC waitress choose what to call them. Thus, Fantastic Cat was born. Their sound is as distinctive as their origin story, described by the *Chicago Sun-Times* as "indie rock-folk, rock-country-pop." Each member is critically acclaimed in his own right and, together, they've drawn attention for their music, their humor and those signature cat masks they don when fans least expect it.



After releasing two EPs and two studio albums—the most recent, *Now That's What I Call Fantastic Cat* in 2024—the group has spent the better part of two years touring sold-out shows across the United States. This year, they set sail on The Rock Boat's 25th anniversary tour from Miami to St. Maarten and San Juan, performing alongside acts like Judah & the Lion and Matt Nathanson. Fantastic Cat has also appeared twice on CBS *Saturday Morning*, and their music was featured in the Paramount+ series *Tulsa King*.

As Anthony told the *Chicago Sun-Times*: "Something happened with the four of us together that I think we'd all been chasing in our solo careers. I don't want to say an effortless, since we are all working really hard, but [the new project] seemed to click naturally with people." ▀

# NEW LIFE FOR THE J. BROOKS HOFFMAN '36 HEALTH CENTER

Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas once said, “A building has at least two lives—the one imagined by its maker and the life it lives afterward—and they are never the same.” Built well, a building accumulates new lives as readily as the people who pass through it.





When first-floor renovations are complete, Hoffman House will have an additional 15 beds for boarding students.

On Blair Academy's Park Street, Bunnell House was built in 1890. It was the home of John Bunnell, one of the original founders of Blair Academy. This property was purchased by then Head of School Dr. John C. Sharpe to serve as an infirmary during the great influenza epidemic of 1918 and remained so until a new health center was opened in 1956.

Construction of Blair's new health center began in October 1955 between Insley Hall and what was then East Hall dormitory. The two-story building was built of stucco and cornerstones, matching Insley Hall's aesthetic, with a capacity for 28 patients. Before opening, the building was equipped with a modern kitchen and state-of-the-art audio systems that allowed patients to call for a nurse anywhere in the building.

On April 21, 1956, the building was dedicated and immediately put to the test. A measles epidemic swept through campus that spring, forcing the cancellation of the

prom and making the new facility essential from the moment its doors opened. In the first week, the infirmary admitted 41 patients, 37 afflicted with the measles. In an article for *The Blair Breeze*, Head of School James Howard was quoted saying, "The infirmary opened with a bang!"

Originally known simply as the infirmary, it was formally dedicated as the Hoffman Health Infirmary on May 6, 1981, in honor of Dr. J. Brooks Hoffman '36—a distinguished obstetrician-gynecologist who served Blair as a Trustee for 45 years, including 16 as Chair and 10 as Chair of the Executive Committee—and his loving wife of 66 years, Jane. Brooks' legacy of service at Blair Academy is also honored with an endowed chair in the history department, and, in 1993, the School awarded him the Citation of Merit, Blair's highest honor.

"Brooks loves Blair," Mr. Howard wrote in the spring 1978 issue of this magazine. "He is proud of the School, and his




Nathan Kim '26 (*left*) and Prode Jindahra '26 (*right*) both call the second floor of Hoffman House home.

pride emboldens him to take the kind of initiative for Blair which most of us are timid to take. When I became [Head of School], I had to look hard to find alumni who were willing and ready to work for the School, but I didn't look for or find Brooks. He found me."

In the decades that followed, just as Brooks' relationship with Blair evolved, so too did the building that shared his namesake. Under the leadership of many talented medical professionals, the infirmary evolved into the modern health center in 1988. The second floor served as a faculty residence for some time, home to Head of School Peter G. Curran and his family for their first three years at Blair. By 2022, with a growing student body, Blair transformed the second floor into Hoffman House, a dormitory for 11 students, complete with a common area and shared kitchen, further integrating the namesake's presence into daily residential life at Blair.

"As a small dorm, Hoffman House is a place where everyone gets to know one another really well," dorm head and math teacher Eamon Gara Grady explains. "After study hall, you'll find all of us hanging out in the common room playing video games, watching TV or cooking something in the kitchen. It feels like a big family."

With the opening of the Center for Health and Well-Being in 2025, the Hoffman Health Center is poised to begin yet another chapter. Renovations underway will convert the first floor into eight dormitory rooms with 15 beds and a faculty apartment for the 2026–2027 academic year. As Bunnell House once shifted from family home to infirmary to music center and beyond, Hoffman House, too, will continue to reinvent itself—proving, as Rem Koolhaas suggested, that the life a building lives after its making is often the most remarkable of all. 

# ADVANCED LITERARY WRITING'S EMERGING AUTHORS



Since Blair Academy introduced its advanced curriculum, the English department's elective list has been teeming with compelling options that would set literati hearts aflutter. Students in *Authoring America on the Road* encounter strange characters, philosophical detours and the sweeping landscapes that shape our national identity. *Nuns, Guns and Roses* asks them to rethink assumptions about femininity and masculinity, and Homer's *Odyssey* invites a deep dive into the evolving idea of the hero while following along with Odysseus on his journey home.

But what if there was a class with an even greater ambition, in which each student charts a personal literary voyage based on their passions—one that culminates, after a year and a half, in a substantial manuscript of their own? That was the vision of veteran English department chair Jim Moore, Hon. '93, when he created the Advanced Seminar in Literary Writing. Now in its third cohort, the program is already proving what young writers can do when given space to build something big.

“One thing that strikes me about this class and these students is that a good number of juniors and seniors have an enormous capacity for creative work,” Mr. Moore explains. “They are focused, ambitious and not

wasting any time. This doesn't exhaust them; it gives them energy.”

The class's structure echoes Blair's successful Integrated Science Research program. Before committing to the capstone year, students enroll in Foundations of Advanced Literary Writing (ALW), a course that introduces students to a range of literary forms, including fiction, poetry, narrative nonfiction, script-writing for stage or screen, and literary criticism. The final project invites students to propose an independent project that will result in a significant literary manuscript during the subsequent summer and academic school year. During the next year, the writers get to work crafting their masterpiece—a manuscript of substance that offers them a unique accompaniment to their college applications that could distinguish them in a competitive admission landscape, if they wish to include it.

The final products of the first cohort were as diverse as one could imagine: Carolina O'Malley '26's collection of poetry, Josie Tetteh '26's literary analysis of Jesmyn Ward's novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing* through the dual lenses of Afro-optimism and Afro-pessimism, and Gray Beall '26's horror novel. Throughout the year, Mr. Moore was consistently impressed with the amount of research students committed to their work, particularly in Weston Trish '25's deep dive into the world of historical fiction.

Below is an excerpt titled “Jasper's Arrival to New Amsterdam” from Weston's novel.

“I have departed the realm of man. When we heaved our ropes in Amsterdam we were not just hoisting the sails, but we were summoning the winds themselves. The weight we felt was not that of the sail, but that of every atom of air on planet Earth being set into motion for the sole use of mankind. In Europe the seas are but a colony of man, of which we took from as we pleased, as nature was but a humble vassal to the human race. However when we set forth into the dismal abyss of the Atlantic Ocean, we crossed the border line that marks the realm of nature. We put ourselves into her mighty hands, and offered our mortal flesh to her wrath.”



Mr. Moore consults with ALW students in Clinton Hall, meeting them in spaces that are comfortable and conducive to their creative endeavors.



Cat Zhang '26 fully embraces the challenges her ALW class brings and sees herself growing as a writer through the process.

“ALW was by far my favorite class during my time at Blair,” Weston reflects. “It allowed me the freedom to write something that I was really passionate about. I got to harness the power of doing what I really wanted to and that allowed me to excel.” Now at Hamilton College, Weston continues to work on his novel and hopes to publish it soon.

While Mr. Moore considers the first cohort of ALW a success, he learned a thing or two about instructing the class that has helped him structure the time more effectively for students in the future. By setting weekly deadlines, he not only gives students the structure they crave, but he also spaces out his reading of their work. After poring through thousands of pages of manuscripts, he has, as ALW alums will be happy to know, equipped himself with an iPad to streamline the process of reading and commenting.

This year, Cat Zhang '26 is having no trouble meeting her weekly deadlines while crafting a dark fantasy novel, backed by the steady assurance of Mr. Moore. Unlike some students, Cat was hesitant to take on the daunting course, not seeing herself as a writer capable of the undertaking. While an outgoing leader in theatre and Senior Class Council, Cat struggled at first to put her ideas to paper.


“Mr. Moore saw past the doubt I had in myself,” Cat shares. “He helped me find comfort in writing, where at first I was very uneasy.” Looking back, Cat can see herself grow through her pages, not only as a writer, but also as a person. “To be

in a space with people as passionate as you are, who have so many different ideas, and to be able to develop them together, is a really fulfilling experience.”

“I’ve been really surprised with how much interest there is in the program,” Mr. Moore comments. “This year’s concepts are as intriguing as the last, and the classes have been very supportive of one another. During the first six months, they are hosting writers’ workshops, helping one another through impasses and reviewing their work. They truly get to know one another well through this process.”

Aside from the help of their classmates, Mr. Moore has suggested using AI as a tool in class as well—harnessing its ability to keep track of their work and deadlines, find any holes in their story or identify inconsistencies in their writing. Cat utilizes Google’s NotebookLM to do just that. When she needs to recall the eye color of one of the characters in her dark fantasy novel, she simply asks it to do so rather than flipping through her pages of work. As she developed her storyline at the onset of the class, NotebookLM also pointed out holes that she needed to address.

While some have utilized AI as a powerful literary assistant, others have balked at the idea. “These students are in this class because they want to write,” Mr. Moore explains. “Yes, they want to produce, but really they just enjoy the act of writing and they are almost offended at the suggestion.”

At the end of this year, Mr. Moore looks forward to the conclusion of Ria Chae '27’s etymological exploration of words that don’t translate clearly into English. He is excited at the prospect of a Civil War novel written by George Gimbel '27, and he eagerly anticipates the product of Brandon Wells '26’s mountain of research on 16th-century Japan. It will be the conclusion of a year and a half of work with his latest cohort of students, but it will not be the end. By May, proposals from the next Foundations class will be submitted and the cycle will begin anew, curating the next round of manuscripts beyond the wildest imaginations. 

# LIVES OF SERVICE



When a middle-schooler in Brooklyn walks into an after-school program and sees a team ready to help with their homework, they're not thinking about the strategy, people and organizations that made that moment possible. But, behind that opportunity and thousands just like it, Blair alumni are doing their part every day to make the world a better place—mentoring children and expanding opportunities in their communities.

Blair graduates don't always make the headlines. But across the United States, in classrooms and clinics, nonprofit offices and community gymnasiums, they are helping to feed, heal, educate and inspire—often

in ways that are more felt than seen. A Blair education leaves its mark in many ways, and one of the clearest is through the work our alumni do in service to others, whether professionally or in the hours they carve out for volunteering.

Among the many Blair alumni working in service-driven careers, three graduates, each shaping communities in very different ways, shared how they found their calling and how Blair helped guide their paths. We are proud to highlight their work and hope it inspires you, whether professionally or in your free time, to find a cause that matches your passion for creating a better world.



Each May, nearly 500 students, teachers and staff members come together to contribute to Blair's largest single day of volunteering, called the Day of Service, a tradition that began in 2014.

## Serving Organizations Liz (Brandwood) Ricca '03



From her earliest memories on the hilltop, Liz Ricca '03 understood that serving others was just what one did. The child of longtime Blair faculty members Bob and Joanne Brandwood P'03 '05 '06 '08 '09, she grew up watching her parents pour their energy

into students and community service initiatives. "Working for others defined what they wanted to do with their lives," she says. Their example made it clear from a young age that "Helping others is what you do and something worth building a life around."

Today, Liz is a nonprofit operations consultant who serves as a chief of staff or chief operations officer, roles that have become increasingly important in that sector. Many nonprofits cannot afford full-time operational leadership, so Liz steps in to provide strategic support and project management. Her path began in college, when she first worked during summer breaks with nonprofits serving local children and families. That developed her interest in providing one-on-one support, but she also quickly discovered she loved helping organizations clarify their identities and expand their impact.

Before consulting, Liz spent 17 years at Big Duck, a Brooklyn-based agency that helps nonprofits strengthen their branding, fundraising and communications. "It was surprising to realize how emotional branding can be," she explains. "To change a name or update a logo that a founder may have drawn

on the back of a napkin," she says, "takes trust and a lot of consensus-building."

One of her proudest achievements was guiding an organization named Cure SMA, formerly "Families of SMA," through a major rebranding. The nonprofit advocates for those affected by the rare disease named spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) by funding large, strategic investments and also helping individuals living with the disease. "That name served them well for almost 30 years," Liz recalls, "but they needed something that opened the door to more people, something that said, 'Even if my family is not affected by SMA, I can still be part of this mission.'"

Guiding Cure SMA through that process was fraught with emotion in ways that Liz hadn't anticipated. She remembers sitting in on early meetings and feeling the weight of the organization's history, knowing that the name represented hope for many families dealing with a very difficult diagnosis. "You could feel how important this was to them," Liz remembers. "I didn't want to misstep." There were moments when the room went quiet as the organization's leaders wrestled with letting go of a name they had lived with for decades. But, step by step, Liz helped lead Cure SMA through those difficult conversations around redefining their identity and growth. "It's been amazing to see how they've grown into their identity as they've made big advances in treatment and research," she now says.

Liz notes that one of the key aspects she enjoys about working with nonprofits is that collaborative process. "The nonprofit sector, I learned, has a very collaborative and consensus-building culture," she notes. "In the corporate world, there might be one executive who makes the main decisions, and it's often a very hierarchical decision-making process. But, bringing people together, building buy-in and enjoying that process was something I learned at Blair." Whether singing in the doo-wop club, working on the student newspaper or helping produce the yearbook, she discovered early on that she thrived in environments where she and her fellow students built something together. "Blair taught me how powerful that shared effort can be," she says, "and the nonprofit world is full of that."

Liz encourages current students to explore service in any way they can. "Volunteering and direct service are so



powerful,” she says. “They show you what motivates you and open your eyes to the needs around you. Lean into the passions you already have and look for ways to share them with your community. Making a difference doesn’t need to look the same for everyone,” she notes. She also reminds young people that service can take many forms. “You can contribute on different levels,” she explains. “Some people work at a systems level through national and international organizations; others make an important impact close to home, like helping at a local food pantry. Even if it isn’t your career, you can still volunteer, serve on a board or support a cause you care about. Whatever it is, find opportunities in your corner of the world to engage with your community through your passions.”

## Serving Youth

### Dy-Jae Pearson ’18

When Dy-Jae Pearson ’18 first drove through Blair’s gate as a potential postgraduate, he felt something he wasn’t sure how to describe—something that felt like energy, positivity. He had first run into Dean of Enrollment Teddy Wenner ’96 while playing lacrosse at Choate Rosemary Hall, and the introduction led him to consider Blair for a postgraduate year. A first visit to campus a short time later helped him make up his mind. “The environment was contagious,” he says. “I felt like I belonged there.”

That single year was an important one for Dy-Jae. Playing football, basketball and lacrosse, he found not just athletic

challenges, but a group of teammates and friends who really pushed one another to be their best. “It was my first experience being away from home,” he says. “Blair gave me structure and stability. I saw another world for the first time. At Blair, I found people with similar goals, and that level of success can be contagious. We laughed and joked, but we also worked hard together. That taught me that you can get things done and have fun at the same time.”

After Blair, Dy-Jae earned his undergraduate degree at Bryant University, followed by a master’s in sport management at Hampton University, playing college lacrosse before going on to work for the Atlanta Hawks. But, as much as he enjoyed the excitement of professional sports, he felt pulled to service.



Dy-Jae Pearson ’18 enjoys lunch with a few of the students in Harlem Lacrosse.

“Something told me I had to give back to my community,” he recalls. “I believe in helping foster the next generation, and I didn’t want to wait too long. Now was the perfect time.”



During weekly lacrosse practices, Dy-Jae (*far right*) uses lacrosse to connect with Harlem youth and share life lessons.

Today, Dy-Jae is doing just that through Harlem Lacrosse, the sport-based nonprofit that led to that first encounter with Mr. Wenner. As one of the program’s earliest participants, he knows firsthand the power it can have. The organization seeks to change the lives of youth in under-resourced communities by embedding staff as role models and academic supporters, using lacrosse as a tool to teach life skills, as well as provide discipline and opportunity.

A typical day blends athletics, academics and mentorship, but Dy-Jae says the real magic often happens during study hall. The fluorescent lights buzz overhead as two dozen teenagers settle into their seats, some opening notebooks, others staring at worksheets. Dy-Jae moves smoothly through the room, checking planners, sliding into empty chairs and asking questions. “How are we doing this?” he asks one. “Talk me through it,” he guides another.

He sees students who have struggled to do homework now working through algebra problems, focused. Dy-Jae watches from across the table, resisting the urge to celebrate too early. He knows it takes time to see improvements. Sometimes they come in small, steady increments, assignment by assignment.

“What we are doing is all year-round. This is a lifestyle,” Dy-Jae explains. A typical day for a Harlem Lacrosse student could include playing a game, visiting a Fortune 500 company to learn about working on Wall Street and then on to study hall to finish up

schoolwork. “We’re with them, on the handball courts or in the weight room, working on homework with their tutors. We give them stability and extra direction, especially with academics, which can be the hardest part for many.”

To him, the most rewarding moments come quietly, and it is often in the form of teachers coming up to talk about how much better students are doing in school or parents expressing their thanks. For Dy-Jae, personally watching his kids gaining confidence one step at a time is what fuels him. “That day-by-day progression makes it worth it for me. You see them growing and moving to be where they need to be.”

Dy-Jae hopes Blair alumni will consider getting involved, no matter how big or small the contribution. “People don’t realize it, but you can make a big impact with a little bit of your time,” he says. “A small effort can make a huge difference to these kids.”

## Serving Equity Hudson Taylor Parifax ’05

Long before he founded Athlete Ally, Hudson Taylor Parifax ’05 thought of himself as a kid moving between two very different worlds. Growing up in Pennington, New Jersey, he had diverse interests, and he often split his time between wrestling and theatre. Blair gave him room for both. Once he arrived as a ninth-grade student, Hudson plunged straight in, performing with the Blair Academy Singers and the doo-wop club, staging productions with the Players, serving on the Senior Class Council and wrestling as if his life depended on it.

Hudson had chosen Blair because he dreamed of becoming a state wrestling champion, but once he settled in, his dream began to shift. Blair opened doors of which he hadn’t previously been aware. “I realized there were other galaxies,” he says of that time. “Blair gave me awareness of and permission to think about how the world might be different. That exposure to difference as a 14- or 15-year-old was really formative in my ethical development as a person,” he says. It led to new ideas about who he could be and how he could make his mark in the world.



Hudson has been generous in sharing his message with the community, returning to campus multiple times as an all-school speaker.

After Blair, Hudson headed to the University of Maryland as a theatre major, and he later became a wrestling coach at Columbia University. But, it was a single moment at Maryland, he says, that set him on the path that he is on today.

Hudson had always noticed the divide between his two communities. In theatre, LGBTQ+ classmates felt accepted and at ease. In sports, that wasn't always the case. As someone who saw himself as a leader, Hudson couldn't shake the feeling that silence made him complicit. "We get to choose how we treat each other," he kept thinking. "And this is not okay."

So, during one major wrestling tournament during his senior year at Maryland, Hudson put a small LGBTQ+ sticker on his headgear. It was a small gesture, one he expected few would notice. But they did. Within days, nearly 2,000 supportive emails, many from closeted athletes, came pouring in. Many were full of gratitude and expressed the need for belonging in sports. Hudson read them in tears. Wrestling had shaped his whole life, and suddenly, he understood how many of his fellow athletes felt they had no place in the sport he loved.

That moment became the seed for Athlete Ally, the national nonprofit he has now led for 15 years.

Today, the organization works to ensure that people of all sexual orientations and gender identities can participate

fully and safely in sports. With 30 chapters on college campuses and 400 Olympic and Paralympic athletes serving as ambassadors, the nonprofit focuses on education, policy reform and athlete activism. Hudson travels constantly, meeting with athletes, coaches and teams, helping them see that change only happens when people, often those in the majority, choose to use their voices.

What keeps Hudson going, he says, is a deep sense of hope. "I'm a perpetual optimist. I feel fulfilled by the work I get to do," he reflects. "There are big stories to tell and there are little stories. The little stories mean more." For eight years, he trained every incoming NBA player on LGBTQ+ inclusion, knowing that even one athlete choosing to stand up for others can shift the culture around them.

There have been big victories, too. Athlete Ally played a major role in the Principle 6 Campaign, which successfully lobbied the International Olympic Committee to include sexual orientation in the Olympic Charter. Hudson even traveled to Sochi during the 2014 Winter Games as part of the protest against Russia's anti-gay laws, helping organize athletes who wanted the world to see that discrimination has no place in sport.

Helping spur change on the global stage is something Hudson is proud of, but it's individual athletes finding their voice that moves him most. "We all get to choose how we treat one another," he says. "What kind of teammate do you want to be? These are really important questions for us all."

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In sharing their stories, Liz, Dy-Jae and Hudson all emphasized the same hope: that their work piques your curiosity and serves as a call to connect and act. Each of them would be delighted to hear from fellow Blair alumni, whether you're curious about their fields, eager to get involved or simply want to cheer them on. If their stories resonated with you, reach out! Their doors and inboxes are open. Contact them at:

Liz Ricca: [www.blair.edu/liz-ricca](http://www.blair.edu/liz-ricca)

Dy-Jae Pearson: [Dyjae@harlemlacrosse.org](mailto:Dyjae@harlemlacrosse.org)

Hudson Taylor Parifax: [hudsonstaylor@gmail.com](mailto:hudsonstaylor@gmail.com)





# BUGS LEAD WITH SPIRIT & PRIDE ON 122<sup>ND</sup> PEDDIE DAY

Peddle Week packed the hilltop with Blair spirit, beginning with an early JV girls' tennis win and building through themed dress days, senior stunts and a Friday night pep rally that culminated in the traditional bonfire. Saturday's competitions delivered early victories for Blair, with a community of friends, family and alumni supporting the athletes, but the Peddie Falcons rallied in the afternoon to reclaim the Kelley-Potter Cup. But, as Head of School Peter G. Curran noted, "While the Cup was the focus today, just as powerful were the moments of mutual respect and sportsmanship: handshakes, congratulations and even some grudging admiration between opponents."

Throughout the week, Director of School Photography Tyson Trish and student photographers captured the excitement that defines this historic rivalry, moments now shared in this photo essay.





*OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM*

# Tyson & Gina Trish

## Outside the Classroom



Life as a married couple working together at a boarding school is not without its share of long days. There are the classroom hours, the extracurricular activities, art openings, concerts...the list goes on.

To unwind after those marathon days, Director of School Photography Tyson Trish and Community Service Coordinator and fine arts teacher Gina Trish think they have the solution. They jet off to new places on school breaks to recharge, they get lost in nature on the nearby Paulinskill Trail for a quiet pause, and they fill their cups hiking, camping and exploring art. Another answer they have to their busy days that the Blair community might not know—rehabbing their 130-year-old home. Between the studio hours, dorm duty and more, these two fine arts teachers find joy in sanding, painting and DIYing their biggest collaborative art project to date, their family home. Naturally, art is something the two have always connected on—Tyson first asked Gina on an art-supply run for their design class in college—and it's one of the many things they bond over with their children, Weston '25 and Cameron '27. For this issue of the *Blair Bulletin*, we took a look at the couple behind the lens and easel to get to know them better outside the classroom.

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### Questions for Gina

#### How has your own artistic practice evolved over the years?

**A:** My mom is an artist, so I learned from her first, in a less formal way. Because of her, I was always surrounded by art. When I went to college, I was trained in a more traditional way. The George Washington University emphasized capturing realism and portraiture as the foundation of drawing and painting.

Over the years, no matter where we've lived, I've continued to take classes from other instructors in different disciplines. That's been a pattern throughout my life. When I lived in these different places and took courses from artists with different techniques, I would incorporate them into my own practice, and that's how my work has evolved. Mixed media is something that I've become fascinated with in the past five to 10 years, and experimentation in practice has been a big part of what I will do in the future.

#### You've worked in communications roles within New Jersey's public sector. How does that background shape your approach to community service at Blair as the new community service coordinator?

**A:** Hearing from and meeting people in all walks of life and at different stages of their lives helps me understand how public policy dictates everything in society. I was fortunate to serve under one of the great policy makers in the state of New Jersey, the late Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver. Working with her helped me know the full spectrum of how policy impacts people's lives. As community service coordinator at Blair, and even before that leading Blair's Arts in the Community initiative, that idea of public service is truly at the core of me understanding the needs of people and how community work can help fill those needs, using the resources and the knowledge from working with the state and also the privilege of working at a place that values this type of work.

#### What's your favorite spot on campus for finding creative inspiration?

**A:** I know this is basic, but the art studio is my favorite place to find inspiration, just because it is such a

## Outside the Classroom



Gina with one of her (s)heroes, former NJ Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver.

warm and welcoming space. I feel comfortable, and so my creative energy flows. Aside from there, being outside on Siegel Property is also an amazing spot. I love the outdoors, and I will often take students to paint or draw on campus outside: down by the waterfall for drawing or to the Siegel Property lake.

### Is there a particular assignment, project or moment in the studio that consistently sparks something memorable in students?

**A:** I don't have a particular assignment or project per se, but for me, it's more about the moments of discovery—when students find a new medium that really speaks to their abilities or interests, maybe it's something that they've never used before. I'm constantly trying to implement new methods and materials into my classroom.

So a student who hasn't worked with melting wax before using it for the first time and figuring out how they can build texture in their work with this new medium is so exciting. Those moments of discovery, I think, are the most important.



At Blair, Gina teaches all levels of 2D art and art history.



Blair Arts in the Community brings beauty and a pop of color to the streets of downtown Blairstown.



One of Gina's favorite pieces of her own work is a portrait of a woman named Delores.

When I teach art history, it's the moments when students find personal connections to the works of art or places we're exploring in class. That cultural connection is a profound moment when someone says, "Hey, I've been here before, or my family's from this town in China or in India." When they have a bond and moment of connection with the art that they share with other students—those moments are the most impactful.

### Do you have a favorite piece of art you've created or a favorite from another artist?

**A:** My favorite artist, whom I've taught Intersession courses about, is Frida Kahlo. I love how authentic she was, especially for the time that she lived in. She was such a strong woman. She's one of my [s]heroes because of that, and her art definitely speaks to me. I think it was really bold and courageous.

As far as my own work, I enjoy portraiture, and I did a piece that I liked when I was taking a course at the Montclair Art Museum. I had a

model who was sitting for a painting. Her name was Delores, and she was just an interesting person, and I was able to paint her quickly. I left it kind of loose, but somehow it worked, and I was happy with the outcome. It was a little bit of a turning point for me. I felt as though I could loosen up my style and still achieve the realism and the effect I wanted to capture her essence.

### Questions for Tyson

**Your career has taken you from the Super Bowl to the Iraq War. What assignment or moment as a photojournalist has stayed with you the most, and why?**

**A:** The one that I talk about the most with students is the time I spent with the New Jersey National Guard for *The Bergen Record* in 2008 and 2009. I spent almost two and a half years documenting the lives of New Jersey National Guard soldiers who were being called to serve in Iraq. The people with whom I spent time ranged from 17-year-old kids to 60-year-old grandmothers who had to put their lives on hold. They spent several months training in preparation for deployment and then a year serving in Iraq before learning how to readjust to life at home. The stories I share from that experience often catch the students' attention, especially when I talk about kids close to their age and the experiences that they had.

**What was the biggest adjustment moving from the newsroom to the Blair classroom?**

**A:** The energy of a newsroom and a high school have similarities that I thrive off of. I need to have creativity in my life, and the way I've found that



Tyson is the Director of School Photography, teaching different levels of photography and capturing memorable moments around campus.

here at Blair is through a camera. Shifting to teaching, it was about developing ways for students to find that in their own photography and coming up with curriculum and assignments and activities and things for them to do that ignited that spark.

**As Director of School Photography, you have a unique window into daily life on campus. What do you look for when telling Blair's story?**

**A:** I think the Blair story is all about the community and the moments that define the lives of the students. I'm trying to capture those, whether they're on the sports fields, in the classroom or throughout the experience. As faculty members, we're able to spend time with kids in all facets of their lives and witness those moments, and it's about trying to represent that in pictures.

**What excites you most about teaching photography to Gen Z students, who have grown up with cameras in their pockets?**



Prior to Blair, Tyson was a photojournalist, documenting events as big as the Super Bowl.



Tyson's work with the photo squad has led to Blair students' work being published in the *New York Times*.

**A:** One of the things I love about photography is that everyone can do it. When I was a kid, that was less so the case. You had to have a camera, film and the ability to develop it. Students today have been taking pictures on their phones or their iPads since they were little, so they have a

## Outside the Classroom

fluency in photography that is beyond where I was at their age. It's really fun to leverage that and help them on their path to taking amazing photos.

**If you had to describe one photograph—your own or someone else's—that defines your philosophy on image-making, which would it be and what makes it meaningful?**

**A:** I think it's always the last picture I took. For me, the act of photography is what I love about it. It's about observation, noticing things and trying to respond to that. Oftentimes, when I'm taking photos, that's when I feel most connected to things.

**In your classes, what's the most important habit or mindset you hope students develop?**

**A:** I have a philosophy that I tell the kids that I call "create greatness." While the word may be a little misleading, it's more about the mindset that when you go do something, you're trying to give it your best. I think photography and art is extremely humbling and can test a student's resilience, but it's the mindset that I try to foster for those times in life that do require resilience.

**What do you find most rewarding about watching students discover their photographic voice, especially those who don't initially see themselves as artists?**

**A:** Passion is everything, and it's infectious. I think it carries through to other people. When anyone is passionate about something, whether it's photography or not, it gives energy to the world.

### Questions for Both

**What does it mean to you to raise a family within this community and watch your sons experience Blair as students?**

**Tyson:** It's really special to see them participate as students at Blair, especially after they spent years watching other students here. I think it's an amazing place for students to grow and our kids have benefited from that.

**Gina:** It's wonderful for them to have access to the opportunities the School has to offer that we see our own students taking advantage of year after year. It



During Intersession in 2025, the Trishes took a group of students on an art and culture tour of Cuba.

feels like a great privilege for our own kids to be able to benefit from those same opportunities.

**If you were to curate a joint exhibition of your work, what themes or stories do you think would naturally connect your artistic styles?**

**Gina:** We did a show together in 2019, but it was more of a retrospective of our work. Tyson shared some of his photos from Sri Lanka, and I included some paintings I did from those photographs, as well as images I took at the Women's March. In the future, if we were to do another one, it could be the places that we've visited together and as a family.

**Tyson:** We both share a love of traveling and the outdoors, and we do a lot of camping with our kids. We drove across the country right after we graduated college and camped nearly the whole way. We spent a lot of time driving all over the place, roadtripping and hiking, too. We hiked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and to the top of Half Dome, and we have a deep respect for the national and state parks and really taking advantage of the public lands has been something that's incredibly important to us.

**You've both worked outside of education in demanding, high-impact roles. How do those experiences shape the way you show up for students now?**

**Gina:** We both have a strong work ethic and care deeply about our students. Outside of the obvious creative exploits that we've had beyond education and service, that work ethic and care for others carries through. Hopefully, our students are benefiting from that.



The Trish family is full of adventurers, and traveling is one of the many activities they bond over.

**Tyson:** One of the things I'm proud of here is the photo squad that I've started. It started when I was in high school, and I was searching for an outlet to photograph school sports and things that I did on my own. Creating that as an opportunity for Blair students has been extremely rewarding. I have 15 photographers in my group this season, and a lot of former students go on to do that as part of their college experience, which has been amazing to see. It's opened new opportunities for them, and now I have students' work being published in *The New York Times*.

**Gina:** In the same vein, I started the Blair Arts in the Community after-school activity last year as a manifestation of how I believe in bringing art and service together. Public art was such a bright spot when working for the state because it transformed communities. That's something that I want to continue to bring to Blair and the greater Blairstown area—the public mural project that we've done on Main Street and the seasonal window painting that brings warmth and a sense of place to our downtown.



It might not be Abbey Road, but (from left) Tyson, Cam '27, Weston '25 and Gina have all found a home within the Blair community.

### Do either of your sons have the artistic bug?

**Tyson:** Weston went down a unique path with his ceramics. He was digging his own clay from the river and making his own kiln. He's very process-oriented and focused. He's a maker, and he likes building things. Blair afforded him an opportunity to explore that side of himself, and [fine arts department chair] Kate [Sykes] gave him the room to develop a unique project.

**Gina:** And Cameron's really into guitar and performing arts. And he loves architecture as well.

### Do you find that your creative processes overlap or are they totally different? And what have you learned from each other artistically?

**Tyson:** I'm inspired by the way Gina returns to themes in her work and the subject matter. She did a

whole series on Delaware Water Gap waterfalls and has a way of seeing things differently that makes me want to take a second look.

**Gina:** Tyson's process is more methodical and organized, but that's probably just the difference between the two mediums. They do overlap in some ways. I definitely admire his ability to capture unique angles or find far corners that people wouldn't look for to see details. He's not afraid to constantly get his full body into making a photo—on the ground or up above. And he takes so many photos. I've never seen anything like it before with an artist—to be so fully dedicated and physically immersed in the process of making a picture, making art. ▀



around the  
*Arch*



From left to right: Mercersburg Head of School Quentin McDowell with alum Pablo Coballasi; Blair Head of School Peter G. Curran with parent John Bonello P'27; and Hill Head of School Kathleen Devaney with alum Preston Athey.

## Summit Brings Together Three Schools & Diverse Financial Perspectives

In January, Blair Academy's seventh-annual Finance Summit was jointly hosted for the first time by three schools: Blair Academy, The Hill School and Mercersburg Academy. As in past years, the summit was designed to provide a space for thoughtful dialogue, shared learning, and developing professional connections among alumni, parents and industry leaders.

The program featured three guest speakers with decades of experience and distinct perspectives on the world of finance: Blair parent John Bonello P'27 of Millennium Partners, Hill alum Preston Athey of T. Rowe Price Associates and Mercersburg alum Pablo Coballasi of PC Capital.

Mr. Bonello drew on his experience in macro-driven markets to discuss how broader economic forces shape investment decisions. Addressing current economic conditions, he spoke candidly about inflation, tax policy and the growing national debt, noting that U.S. Treasury yields have

become increasingly unattractive. "We spend more on interest service than on national defense," Mr. Bonello said. "We have all this debt rolling over, and the interest service is massive." He also cautioned that renewed monetary expansion presents long-term risks. "We don't talk about it, but the central banks are printing money again," he added. "It's inherently unstable and unsustainable. We are debasing our currency."

Mr. Athey and Mr. Coballasi offered complementary perspectives shaped by decades of experience in public and private markets. Their remarks emphasized disciplined analysis, long-term thinking and the role of capital in supporting both financial performance and broader economic opportunity.

Together, the speakers represented three distinct pillars of finance—global fixed income, public equity and private equity. Their collective insights offered attendees a clearer picture of what thoughtful investment stewardship looks like in practice, as well as how

thoughtful analysis can support responsible allocation of capital.

More important, the evening served as a reminder that what makes these schools exceptional is not only their academic rigor, but also the strength of the relationships within and among their communities—ties that help prepare students for leadership in an increasingly complex world.





From left: Head of School Peter G. Curran, Director of Advanced Curriculum and psychology teacher Shelly Mantegna, Lil Hyder '27, history teacher Valerie Lohr, Dean of Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Evan Thomas, and Michael Mokrov '27 visited Nashville, TN, for the Open Dialogue Summit at Vanderbilt University. Not pictured in attendance: Blair Board of Trustees Chair Maria Vinci Savettiere, Esq. P'17.

## The Art of Open Dialogue

Imagine sitting in class when a conversation suddenly shifts into uncomfortable territory. The air thickens, eyes dart around the table and someone hesitates before speaking. What happens next depends on how ready a community is to listen and engage with differing perspectives.

These are the kinds of moments a cohort of Blair Academy students, faculty and Trustees explored this fall at Vanderbilt University's inaugural Open Dialogue Summit for Secondary School Leaders. In Nashville, the group engaged with fellow educators and students on fostering open dialogue and intellectual curiosity on

independent high school campuses. The event offered an opportunity to bring back new insights and continue cultivating a culture of curiosity and connection across the hilltop.

"My biggest takeaway from the conference is remembering that, while people have differing opinions, it should not be a reason not to talk to someone," Lil Hyder '27 shares. "It is important to have conversations with people who have different views than you because it is a great way to learn."

Much like Blair, Vanderbilt believes in the power of a transformative education. By inviting thought leaders

from select independent schools nationwide, the university worked to help educators strengthen students' dialogue skills before college. The summit is part of Dialogue Vanderbilt, an initiative to provide resources to re-establish constructive and civil discourse in society.

In attendance was Dean of Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Evan Thomas, who explains, "This conference is the most recent event in a string of dialogue-focused learning events in the education realm over the past year or so."

Last spring, Blair faculty engaged in professional development focused on how best to facilitate challenging conversations followed by an open discourse conference this summer at the Hotchkiss School. Those experiences, paired with ongoing opportunities like Society of Skeptics lectures, current events forums and Alumni Roundtable discussions during the academic year, support Blair's longstanding dedication to dialogue across campus. More often than not, these conversations continue into dorm discussions and the next morning in classrooms, where students continue sharing ideas.

**“It was truly an inspiring few days at Vanderbilt, a meaningful opportunity for conversation and reflection on what it means to have civil discourse. It was also especially impactful to bring together our Board Chair, students, teaching faculty and administrators to collectively take part, and we look forward to continuing to strengthen the relationship between Blair and Vanderbilt moving forward.”**

*—Head of School Peter G. Curran*

“One of the things we learned at this summit is there is an interest and a hunger for more of these conversations,” Mr. Thomas says. “Our students and faculty who attended loved practicing and engaging in dialogue. They're now brainstorming new ways to bring this to Blair—whether it's supporting groups already having conversations or forming a new student group focused on discourse.”

“In many ways, Blair is already implementing these practices by having discussion-based classes and allowing our community to have conversations about things we may disagree on,” Lil adds. “But there is room for a new club where we teach people about open dialogue and civil discourse, and then engage in conversations on more challenging topics.”

A key takeaway from the summit was the importance of making space for different perspectives throughout

campus. Vanderbilt's approach to free expression rests on three pillars: open forums, institutional neutrality and civil discourse. As the university states, “From our beginning, we've believed in the power of bringing together people of differing viewpoints for a common purpose.”

At Blair, open communication and inclusion are a few of the principles that guide our community, encouraging students to think critically, listen respectfully and lead lives of purpose. ▀



Michael, Mr. Curran and Lil took lessons from the Open Dialogue Summit back to Blair to share with the larger community.

# Alumni Roundtables Connect Students with Leaders Across Industries

What does it take to build a meaningful career today? Curiosity, courage and, according to Blair alumni, a willingness to say yes to new opportunities. This year's Alumni Roundtables brought those perspectives to campus, as graduates returned to share how they've navigated paths in fields ranging from renewable energy and law to healthcare and mental health.

## Shoshana Geller '16

*Senior Trading Engineer, Energy Markets at Tesla*



Blair welcomed back Shoshana Geller '16 this fall for a conversation about her unexpected route to becoming a senior trading engineer at Tesla. She walked students through her evolving interests—from studying computer science, earth science and global health at Dartmouth to trying out internships in medical technology and

robotics. Geology fieldwork across the western United States and Canada led to an interest in renewable energy and pushed her to question the long-term economics of fossil fuels.

After two years at a demand-response start-up, Shoshana joined Tesla's Autobidder team, where she now

builds algorithms for large-scale batteries to support the electrical grid and reduce energy costs. During a Q&A, she shared how the rise of AI and data centers is changing both energy demand and the work of software engineers. Her biggest message to students: Follow the interests that keep pulling at you.

## Ryan Class '07

*Financial Markets Litigation Associate, Jones Day*



In November, students heard from Ryan Class '07, who spoke openly about the professional twists and

turns he's taken since leaving the hilltop. In Clinton Hall, he shared anecdotes about how he was trying

different roles, changing interests and recognizing opportunities as they came throughout his career. With more than

a decade of experience across finance and law, Ryan showed how staying curious and gaining experience helped him find work that fits his strengths.

Tracing his path from early finance jobs to law school and, eventually, to major firms like Jones Day, he encouraged students to be not only intentional but also patient. He

suggested that taking time after college before pursuing law school can be valuable and reassured students that everything doesn't have to be planned ahead of time to make a journey successful.

## Kevin Cook '86

*Division President,  
Greater Silicon Valley,  
Sutter Health*



In January, Kevin Cook '86 joined the series to give students an inside look at what it takes to lead within the evolving healthcare landscape. An experienced healthcare executive, Kevin recently joined Sutter Health after serving as a managing principal with Caldwell Butler, where he helped hospitals improve margins, quality and patient experience. His résumé

includes COO and CEO roles across major health systems, including the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System, the University of Mississippi Medical Center and Mercy Health.

Kevin also shared how his eight years in the U.S. Marine Corps and rising to the rank of major shaped his

leadership style. He holds a bachelor's degree from Hobart and William Smith Colleges and an MBA from Boston University. Kevin continues to serve the field through national leadership roles, including as a two-term Council of Teaching Hospitals board member and ACHE faculty member.

## Dr. Carey Zimmermann '97

*Clinical Psychologist &  
Internship Program  
Coordinator, Federal  
Bureau of Prisons*

The series concludes in April with Dr. Carey Zimmermann '97, a licensed psychologist whose career has focused on supporting vulnerable and underserved populations. Dr. Zimmermann has spent much of her career in correctional mental health, serving in multiple roles across Federal Bureau of Prisons facilities, including as staff psychologist and coordinator of both the drug abuse and internship programs. She began her clinical work in addiction psychiatry at Mount Sinai

Beth Israel and supported court-involved youth in New York City as a family therapist. During her visit, she plans to discuss mental health care in jail and prison settings and how to support incarcerated individuals beyond direct clinical work. ▀

# Years of Service & a Lasting Impact

*This year, Blair says goodbye to four longtime community members as they retire—two teachers, a veteran of the Blair mail room and a staff member who has cared for children in Blair's Learning Center daycare. To honor their decades of service, we asked colleagues who worked closely with them to share memories and reflections on the impact they've had on the hilltop.*

## Doc Sayers

### Science Teacher | Started at Blair in 2001, 25 years ago

By English department chair James M. Moore, Hon. '93



It is a quarter-century since Michael J. Sayers, PhD, came in from the cold. We knew, of course, that he had earned his PhD in chemistry from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and had cut his academic teeth at the University of Michigan; those data, at least, had not been redacted from his résumé. But even now, speculation abounds about his activities between the end of his formal education, sometime in the 1970s, and his arrival on the Blair campus in the fall of 2001. Rita Meng '26 and George Gimbel '27 insist there was a stint at Los Alamos, or maybe NORAD, although when challenged, they admit they had “just heard it from someone.” Dr. Annika Rollock '14, herself an actual rocket scientist and former Sayers advisee, cryptically offers that she probably doesn't “have the appropriate clearance yet” to know the full story, but that

“we're not really supposed to share information that doesn't fall under the ‘need to know’ category.” Doc himself makes only oblique references to “software development,” “spherical-sector electrostatic electron-energy analysis” and “the Illudium Q-36 space modulator.” Then he cackles, maniacally.

What is clearer, though, is the profound impact Doc Sayers has made on Blair as a chemistry and physics teacher, science department head, theatre tech manager and dorm staff member. To be sure, he has been an educator who, according to Tae Hwi An '14, “makes learning feel bigger than the classroom...that it really begins when you start asking your own questions, where you really ‘think and talk’ your way through science, just for the joy of it.” But Doc's contributions beyond his Bogle Hall lab are of equal import to the Blair culture: his Intersession classes have explored architecture, publishing and the nature of decision-making; he gleefully inflicts sartorial violences on the community with his collection of Christmas sweaters; he plays woodwind duets with students on the DuBois Theatre stage; and he feeds us baked goods around the holidays and whenever else he can. On long

weekends, Doc marshals the holdovers for all-you-can-eat sushi or “hot pot” on Route 46, and, in annual sacrifice to the gods of late autumn rivalries, he incinerates a chicken carcass during Peddie Week. Natasha Baker '17 recalls that “sitting with Doc as his table foot every week felt more like being with family than attending formal dinner.” Indeed, while Doc's academic influence has inspired more than a few alumni to pursue careers in science—astrophysicist Annika notes that “It's not exaggerating to say he's the reason I am where I am now”—everything else he has brought to us helps make Blair more than just some place kids go to school.

There are many theories about Doc's plans for retirement just across the Delaware in rural Pennsylvania; after all, wasn't the last episode of *The X-Files* set in the Poconos? Let's face it; Doc makes it easy—and fun—for us to imagine strange aerials bristling from his roof or an unmarked helicopter landing in a clearing among the pines in his backyard. It is just as well, though, to imagine what we most hope for him: days of reading or cooking in his woodland retreat, punctuated by the occasional break to hop in his car and wind his way back to Blair to see us.

## Karyn Schar

### *Print Shop Coordinator*

### Started at Blair in 1979, serving a total of 27 years

By her sister, former Blair administrative assistant to the student life office Kathy Otinsky



Karyn and I grew up in Blairstown, just down the hill from John I. Blair's homestead. We spent winters skating on Blair Lake and summers exploring the "high wall," a spot that scared me but never Karyn, who loved climbing trees and didn't fear much. Our "work life" began in the '60s playroom, where we played school at an old secretary desk, teaching imaginary students on a blackboard that our

grandfather painted on a wall. Karyn is 18 months older than I, so she was the leader (or perhaps my first boss?!).

Karyn started working at Blair in the machine/mail room in Ivy Hall and also covered the switchboard in the school office in Clinton Hall. She stayed until 1989 when she left to raise her family. I treasure one fond memory from the mid-'80s: When I temporarily lost my hearing from an illness, she answered phones while I typed the morning bulletin. She looked over, laughed and said, "Look at us...still playing school!" Moments like that remind me how lucky we've been as sisters and coworkers—and how fortunate Blair has been to have someone so caring and dedicated.

Karyn returned to Blair in 2009 and became full-time again in 2018. The job had changed since the '80s, when she operated addressograph machines, updated metal address plates, handled

mailings and made copies on an offset printer. From her office in the Hardwick Hall basement in recent years, she has printed programs, metered outgoing mail and logged hundreds of incoming packages each day.

Beyond Blair, Karyn has spent 35 years as an Avon representative and has worked in day care centers and as a hospice caregiver—roles that show she is very compassionate taking care of toddlers and elderly folks alike. I look forward to more time together making puzzles (which, I have to admit, she is much quicker at than I am), playing cards, shopping, new adventures and time with family. Blair employees and students will surely miss her smile and kindness. I know they join me in wishing her a happy, healthy and very well-deserved retirement.

## Ann Williams

### *Director of Timken Library & History Teacher*

### Started at Blair in 2007, 19 years ago

By Director of Society of Skeptics & history department chair Jason Beck



Ann Williams P'12 '15, Director of Timken Library, coach, advisor, academic monitor, teacher, mentor and, most importantly, friend. In her 19 years at Blair, Ann has shown all of us how we can be our best selves as fierce advocates for students, thoughtful and effective teachers, and

curious and engaged lifelong learners, all by being a supportive and caring presence in all our lives.

Ann transformed Timken Library into far more than a repository of books—she made it a vibrant intellectual hub where students discovered not just

information, but their own capacity for inquiry. As keeper of Blair's archives and institutional memory, she safeguarded our history while helping us understand how our school's past informs our present. Her door was always open, whether a student needed help navigating databases or a colleague sought her wisdom on a challenging situation. She possessed that rare gift of making everyone feel heard and supported while also gently (or even not so gently at the right times) pushing them toward excellence.

What I'll remember most about Ann is her infectious enthusiasm for learning and her stalwart support of every facet of Blair life. She approached new technologies, pedagogical innovations and student needs with genuine curiosity rather than resistance. Whether attending student performances, athletic events or community gatherings, Ann showed up—not out of obligation, but from genuine investment in our shared community.

Ann's collaborative spirit enriched us all. She understood that great

education happens through partnerships: between librarians and teachers, between faculty and students, between colleagues who genuinely care about one another's success, and so many more. She always sees possibilities for connection and growth.

As Ann embarks on this next chapter, she leaves behind a legacy of service, kindness and intellectual vitality. We are better educators and better people for having worked alongside her. Thank you, Ann, for everything.

## Jeanne Fields

*Preschool & Lead Group Teacher | Started at Blair in 2012, 14 years ago*

By Communications Project Manager Heather Sprague



For the past 14 years or so, Jeanne Fields has been a constant at the Childcare Learning Center, caring for and teaching our children. She

has an incredible knack for helping little ones work through emotions and understanding the ins and outs of individuality. The kids light up each morning when they see her.

I speak from personal experience. I worked alongside Jeanne for four years and both of my children attended the Learning Center full time for more than six. From unrestricted art projects to climbing and running outdoors, she always seemed to know exactly what the kids needed. While safety was always a priority, she encouraged kids to discover what their bodies were capable of and always gave them space and confidence to learn about the world around them—and themselves. I've even heard children call the Learning Center "Ms. Jeanne's school," which speaks volumes about the trust, comfort and kindness she genuinely gave to every child she cared for.

Hats off to you, Ms. Jeanne—we hope you're enjoying your retirement! 🍷

**"Ms. Jeanne changed the Sykes family for the better. Her terrifically crafted lessons, from arctic animals to seed germination, made our kids eager to go to school and excited for what new things they might experience in a classroom setting, which is carried with them still today as they enter their teens. Her warmth and sense of humor, the structure she provided our little learners, and deep care she showed for all of us will be sorely missed by the Blair community."**

—*Kate Sykes,*  
*Fine arts department chair*

# MUSIC WITHOUT BORDERS



Blair's Orchestra and Singers perform in the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels and Martyrs in Rome.

Shepherding 110 students onto an airplane and along the twisting roads of Italy—never mind ensuring that their performances in historic cathedrals are exceptional—is no small feat. But Director of Instrumental Music Jennifer Pagotto and Director of Vocal Music Ryan Manni-Brennan are old hands at this. This spring marked the sixth international performance that Mrs. Pagotto has led at Blair. Mr. MB, as he is affectionately known, has led Buccaneers on three international tours.

It might be tempting to assume that performance opportunities like this one to Italy are simply routine at Blair. In truth, they are anything but. Each trip is a complicated and carefully layered orchestration—the result of a sustained and collective effort. These international performances offer a glimpse into the rich and wonderful program that Blair has created for musicians, but their foundation is laid much closer to home, day after day, rehearsal after rehearsal, by students and faculty who are fully committed to their work.



From left to right: Anya Donohue '27, Jane Ambrose '28 and Calista Chen '28 pose for a selfie at the Colosseum in Rome.



Chamber Choir alto Faye Allen '26 (center) is grateful for the opportunity to perform internationally in Italy this year. This marks her second international tour with the ensemble—her first was in 2023, when the Singers traveled to England and France.

The story of the development of Blair's music program goes back decades. The truth is that Blair has long attracted students and faculty who value artistic expression, but a few key developments have made the program what it is today. One turning point came in 1997 with the addition of Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts. It gave rise to a new kind of music program at Blair, one that had the resources to champion the development of instrumental musicians, as well as the Singers. With dedicated rehearsal space and an expansive performance stage, the School was able to imagine a bigger future for the performing arts. Just as important has been the dedicated and talented leadership within the music department. Mr. MB will celebrate his 10th year at Blair this year, while Mrs. Pagotto, who is also chair of the performing arts department, is now in her 21st year. Their long tenure and experience have greatly benefited the performing arts program.

### **Momentum Starts to Build**

Blair's 15th Head of School, Trustee T. Chandler Hardwick III, was there for the beginning of the transformation. He remembers that Blair's vocalists had a robust presence in those days, but the Orchestra was still in its infancy. "I vividly recall the spring recitals of the early 1990s," he says. "We gathered after dinner in the Blair Room, where furniture had been pushed aside to make space for the half dozen or so earnest musicians. There was not a stringed instrument in sight, unless you count the piano, and each piece lasted about two minutes, maybe three."

When Mrs. Pagotto arrived in 2005, she remembers it the same way. "We had a string ensemble of six kids and a wind ensemble of 18. The whole Orchestra was 24."

Raised by two public school music teachers, her father an instrumental music director and her mother a vocal instructor, Mrs. Pagotto grew up in a house humming with music. Though she arrived at Blair with a clear idea for what the program could become, she also understood that growth would depend on students buying into a shared vision of building a Symphony Orchestra and a Jazz Band. "At that time, most students just took music for one year," she remembers. "A key part of developing the program has been instilling a culture that this is something you do for four years, that we are a team and we will grow together."



Director of Instrumental Music Jennifer Pagotto rehearses with the Blair Symphony Orchestra in fall 2025, preparing students for the international performances that are a hallmark of Blair's thriving music program.

But, as interest grew, so did the logistical challenges. With no rehearsal blocks built into the school day, ensembles met during lunch, and Mrs. Pagotto ordered Frank's Pizza weekly so that no one would have to choose between eating and rehearsing. "We were figuring it out as we went," she says. "But everyone wanted it to work."

And work it did. With the opening of the Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts, Mr. Hardwick recalls, "It was a sea change for both the performing and dramatic arts programs." Soon, students began signing up in larger numbers and one could feel the momentum building. The lesson, he says with a smile, was simple: "If you build it, they will come!"

By spring 2009, the Blair Symphony Orchestra was ready for its formal debut. Performing the *William Tell Overture* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the new Orchestra was met with an overwhelming reception. Those present still remember how the DuBois Theatre echoed with thunderous applause that night, as the student body, faculty and staff rose as one to their feet. The next day, Mr. Hardwick wrote a letter to the School's Trustees, lauding, "Last night was the fulfillment of what an instrumental music program can really be. The Blair community was elevated: an Orchestra in a true performing arts hall and an unforgettable performance from 50 students or more was beyond simply a pleasure; it was a remarkable achievement. The long and rousing standing ovation was thoroughly deserved and felt like it was never going to stop."

Theatre Director Craig Evans P'05 '08, who retired last year from Blair and was also in that audience that night, was struck by the musicians' dramatic rendition of *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Recognizing its potential, he invited Mrs. Pagotto and the Symphony Orchestra to perform the piece again at the School Meeting leading up to Peddie Day. Mrs. Pagotto agreed, and an unofficial Blair anthem was born.

When Mr. MB joined Blair in 2016, he stepped into a program already on the rise. Working closely with Mrs. Pagotto, the two quickly developed a solid partnership grounded in trust and a shared ambition to balance tradition with bolder new styles. "We have a really good and easy collaboration that makes it possible to grow," he says.

One of the notable areas of expansion has been in digital music. Now fully housed in Armstrong-Hipkins, the program features what Mr. MB proudly touts as "the best sound system on campus." With two voice teachers on staff, Blair students now have more opportunities than ever to take lessons and explore creative music. With the addition of a new mobile recording studio—housed in Armstrong—students are now able to record their work easily, which is helpful for juniors and seniors preparing portfolios for college.

Across all ensembles, expectations have continued to rise. New ninth graders are quickly brought into the culture of high standards and mutual accountability. "The level of

music-making has consistently risen,” Mr. MB says. “Even through the COVID-19 pandemic, it just kept going.”

Students describe that high bar not as intimidating, but as energizing. Faye Allen '26, an alto in the Chamber Choir and a section leader in the Singers, credits much of her growth as a singer to working closely with Mr. MB. “He always brings the energy! There’s never a dull moment,” she says. “He likes when you make mistakes. He says that’s how you learn.” As



Concertmaster Khang Nguyen '26 performs a violin solo. A gifted multi-instrumentalist, he also plays the piano and drums.



Blair Academy's Jazz Ensemble and Combo performed at The Ellington Club in Rome as part of the American Celebration of Music Concert Series in Italy.

a result, she adds, “I’m not afraid to make a mistake. He’s always there for extra help if we need it.” Khang Nguyen '26, a member of Blair’s Jazz Ensemble and concertmaster for both the Symphony and Chamber Orchestras, credits Mrs. Pagotto with helping him shift from thinking like a soloist to embracing the responsibility of being part of an ensemble. “Before Blair, music was a solitary endeavor,” he says. “She taught me that playing in an orchestra means thinking communally. You are pursuing a shared goal, not just focusing on yourself.”

Today, the music program at Blair proudly boasts exceptional enrollment—73 orchestral musicians and 50 vocal musicians. “It’s great to see how kids are committed to the program,” Mrs. Pagotto says. “The Orchestra was averaging 60 kids for a decade, but in the last four or five years, it’s been even more.”

### Leading by Example

While there is no one secret to getting students to feel so inspired, there is no doubt after talking to students at Blair that the dedication and care shown by the teachers is key. Mrs. Pagotto, for instance, spends evenings learning new pieces at her family’s kitchen table, long after her own four children have gone to bed. Each year, as different musicians join the Orchestra, she painstakingly rearranges each score to suit the evolving makeup.

Students feel that investment. Khang asked Mrs. Pagotto to be his advisor during his sophomore year. “She’s an amazing person,” he says. “She pushes me to be the best version of myself. She gives me so much motivation and support. She’s someone I can always reach out to, even beyond music.”

Mr. Hardwick sees that leadership as essential: “Unlike so many conductors, who dictate and command,” he says, “Mrs. Pagotto leads by example. That quiet setting of the bar, her expectation for self-discipline and excellence, makes students want to do their best.”

Today, the thriving music program at Blair is anchored by performing groups in vocal and instrumental music. Each year, on the beautiful main stage in the DuBois Theatre, students choose from vocal ensembles for mixed voices, an advanced Chamber Choir and several instrumental ensembles, including Symphony Orchestra, Jazz Ensemble,



After a day exploring Florence's historic landmarks, including the Piazza della Signoria, Ponte Vecchio and Michelangelo's *David*, Blair's musicians took the stage in the evening for an unforgettable performance at the Auditorium Santo Stefano al Ponte.

and advanced ensembles of Chamber Orchestra and Jazz Combo.

Beyond performance, Blair students can opt to take a host of elective courses, including several levels of digital music curriculum, songwriting and audio production. Vocalists can join the Blair Academy Singers, audition for the Chamber Choir or the student-run A Cappella group. Young musicians can even take private lessons with conservatory-trained instructors and advanced coursework in theory and composition.

The musical repertoire focuses on tradition and builds upon it. Students still perform works by Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, but are also well versed in the music of contemporary composers like Jennifer Higdon, Florence



Head of School Peter G. Curran (*far left*) and Associate Head of School Ryan M. Pagotto '97 (*far right*) caught up with Michael Diaco '23 and Ellie Hyder '23 to applaud Blair's Orchestra and Singers during their incredible performance at Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels and Martyrs.

Price, Christopher Tin and Herbie Hancock. "We perform works written by our own student playwrights and composers," says Mrs. Pagotto, underscoring the program's commitment not just to performance, but also to creativity and original voice.

International travel extends this work beyond campus. "Every three years, our ensembles embark on international tours, which are integral to our curriculum," says Mrs. Pagotto. These trips allow students to perform in historic venues, participate in a cultural exchange with local performers and audiences, and learn from guest directors.

### Music on the World Stage

Over the years, Blair students have taken the stage in London, Cambridge and Oxford; Paris, Prague, Budapest and Vienna; and throughout Italy. They've also appeared in New York City the past few years. In April 2024, Blair's advanced Chamber Orchestra, Chamber Choir and Jazz Combo performed at Merkin Hall, a recital venue that hosts a world-class concert lineup each season. Last year marked a huge milestone when Blair's musicians performed at Carnegie Hall. "It was a great night for the Blair arts, and many Blair parents joined us from around the world to see their children perform on one of the world's greatest stages," recalls Mrs. Pagotto.

For Associate Head of School Ryan M. Pagotto '97, the importance of these trips extends far beyond the performances themselves. "There's something about being off campus and sharing an experience together that is



Director of Vocal Music Ryan Manni-Brennan conducts in Rome, where visitors filled the pews to hear Blair's musicians perform.

irreplaceable,” he says. Relationships deepen. “It’s the bus rides and getting to know everyone on a deeper level. It becomes an experience they’ll never forget.”

There is also something particularly special about performing in front of European audiences, where locals come out to hear performances in a way that is unique. Mrs. Pagotto sees the effect on her students. “It is so meaningful to them to have this opportunity. They don’t take it for granted that this is something really special. There is an added attention to detail and in being the best we can be. Knowing that we are ambassadors for Blair and we are representing the best of Blair with the world.”

For seniors Faye and Khang, performing abroad crystallized what makes these trips so meaningful. Though Faye lost her phone on a previous European tour, the experience remains one of her most vivid memories. “I’ve never had more fun on a trip,” she says. “You find yourself talking to people you’ve never spoken to before. You think, this person is so cool—why have I never talked to them before? When you have downtime, you just start connecting.”

For violinist Khang, the range of venues is part of what makes the experience incredible. He was delighted that he got to perform in settings he could never replicate at home. “I had the opportunity to play in an intimate jazz club in Italy,” he says, “as well as in grand cathedrals. They have acoustics you just can’t get anywhere else.”

Mr. MB, too, values what international travel teaches, though he notes that logistics are always a challenge. “You don’t really know what the space is going to look and feel like until you get there,” he says. He recalls performing in a French cathedral in Chartres, for example, which was beautiful but had no heat. “That affects our voices,” Mr. MB notes. “You’re shivering,” he says with a laugh. “String instruments go right out of tune quickly, and you stand next to singers you are not used to. It’s a good exercise in being flexible.”

The trip to Italy this spring had, in fact, special meaning for Mr. MB. Visiting Florence, the students toured the city where he once trained as an opera singer. “I’d love to have found the café I used to have breakfast at and share that experience with the students,” he says. The group also traveled to Cremona, his ancestral hometown on his father’s side. “I returned to the homeland. Though with 110 students, it might not be what my father envisioned!”

When meeting with prospective families, Mr. MB often points to experiences like these as being emblematic of music at Blair. “It’s wonderful to be able to tell them that once in your Blair career, you’ll be able to make a trip like this,” he says.


What, then, has driven change over the years to make this program what it is today? Asked what has made the difference, Mrs. Pagotto points first to the School’s culture.



In between musical performances, Blair students caught a guided tour of Imperial Rome, including the Roman Forum and the Colosseum, to learn about the political, social and architectural legacy of ancient Rome.

“There is true support from the administration,” she says. “All students attend our concerts on campus. Blair has scheduled music classes into the daily schedule. It sends the message that this is a really important part of your experience at Blair.”

Blair’s Orchestra has also made a commitment to playing with only students. “It’s not our practice to supplement concerts with adults,” she explains. “Some schools will fill in the brass section, for example, with professional players. We’ve made a commitment to finding what works for us, which gives performers ownership and pride. This is their work.”

Looking back on the arc of the Blair music program—from lunchtime rehearsals fueled by pizza to the most recent performances under the soaring cathedrals of Italy—Mr. Hardwick sums it up perfectly: “It is simply amazing how good they are.” 



Here, principal cellist Claire Zheng '26 focuses on her performance. Next year, she is headed to Northwestern Bienen School of Music to study composition.

# Athletics



Tess Mella '26 races down the course with determination, carving her way to the finish in true Blair fashion.



Eric Bocanegra '27 runs out to meet his opponent in the Blair versus Delbarton wrestling match.



Pami Odusanya '27 powers through the water during a home meet this January.



Mary Ganim '28 drives the lane against Hun in the 2025 MAPL tournament.



Asser Eldemerdash '26 scores a point against the Delbarton School.



The indoor track team leaves it all on the track at the NJISAA prep A state championships.



Coleman Elkins '26 hits the game-winning three over the Patrick School.



## Champions of Crew

By Director of Rowing John Redos '09

Last year was a remarkable one for Blair rowing. Our athletes reached new competitive heights, but just as important, they shaped the identity of the program each and every day. When people look at the results, such as the girls running to the Henley Women's Regatta finals as the only American boat to reach that stage of a high school event or the boys' first Mid-Atlantic Prep League (MAPL) championship since 2008, it can be easy to assume those outcomes were the goal. But for Coach Kat Gould and me, the real work has never been centered on chasing medals.

Our foundation is built on accountability, growth and the joy of rowing. If we create an environment where athletes choose to be here, where they feel empowered, supported and connected, then competitive success becomes a natural byproduct rather than the primary aim.

One of the most important philosophies that Coach Gould and I share is that rowing should not revolve around the coach. The athletes drive the direction of the team. We set standards, provide structure and help captains understand expectations, but the

identity of the year is always student-built. If they want to compete at nationals, we provide the framework. If they dream of international racing, we prepare them for that, too. The decision and the commitment always belong to them. Once they choose to be here, they learn quickly that their teammates depend on them. That sense of responsibility, paired with a space that makes room for challenge and fun in a demanding sport, is what keeps Blair rowing moving forward.

## Fall Season's Small Boat Spark

The 2024 fall sculling season set the tone for the rest of the year. With only 16 spots available and a daily focus on singles and doubles, the fall is where athletes learn to think, feel and move independently. It is intentionally introspective. The long miles, quiet afternoons and technical demands help athletes build harmony alongside chasing speed. We started with our first-ever preseason at Driftstone Campground

on the Delaware River. The experience strengthened bonds and ensured that everyone arrived at the start of school already connected.

The fall became historic when Blair received two entries from the petition process to send both a girls' and a boys' coxed quad to the Head of the Charles Regatta for the first time. Taking 10 scullers to Boston shifted

our sense of what Blair rowing can be. It showed that we could pursue sculling at a competitive level and helped spark a belief that carried into the winter and spring.

## A Long Road Together Through Winter

Winter is when the program comes together to put work in during the cold months in Blairstown. Nearly 45 athletes train side by side on the ergs, the bikes, in the tank and in the weight room. This is often where athletes learn the discipline required to race at a high level. Coxswains help collect and log data, allowing us to track progress and clearly see the habits that

drive improvement. Training follows three progressive phases that build toward spring.

Our culture shines bright in winter. A long-standing tradition is our Post-it note wall. Throughout the season, students write compliments and acknowledgments for one another and place them on the wall. In the hardest stretch of the year, these

small messages brighten the room. The tradition began years ago in the basement of Hardwick Hall when the boys' and girls' captains came together to create a bit of light in our current package room. Today, it remains a clear expression of who we are as a team.

## The Coaches Who Hold the Program Together

None of this would be possible without the coaching staff who show up every day with a level of consistency and care that sets the tone for the entire program. Blair rowing is fortunate to have coaches who give their time, their expertise and their belief to the athletes long before any results appear. Coaches Kat Gould, Dylan Gould, Istvan Csanyi, Dave Uhlig, Annie Gardner, Caitlin Dunne, Will Svensson and Latta Browse model the same accountability and joy that we ask of the rowers. They are teachers first, mentors always, and they pour themselves into the development of young people. Rowing requires long hours, constant attention to detail and a willingness to meet athletes exactly where they are. Our coaching team does this not for recognition, but because they genuinely love helping students grow. Their dedication anchors the program and gives our athletes the support and stability they need to thrive.



For Director of Rowing John Redos '09, Blair holds special meaning as the place where his rowing journey began during his sophomore year. Since returning to Blair as a faculty member and coach in 2018, he has guided the girls' program to three Scholastic National titles, three Stotesbury Cup championships and a second-place finish at the USRowing Youth Nationals in the Women's 4+.

## Spring's Commitment, Courage & Breakthroughs

Spring begins with our training camp at the Olympic Training Center in Chula Vista, California. Last year, we brought 62 athletes. This year we plan to bring 73. Training in warm weather, surrounded by teammates who share the same goals, allows our athletes to establish fundamentals and team identity before returning to a busy and compact racing schedule.



In the spring, Blair rowers take to Paulinskill Lake, where the water offers a rare sense of calm and focus. Even on the windiest days, Blair is fortunate to train in a setting that allows for consistent work and steady progress.

## The Boys Rise to the Moment

The boys' team had a strong spring season in Blair rowing last year. Under the leadership of Coach Gould, the boys have spent several seasons rebuilding their team culture with a focus on resilience, character growth and being team-oriented athletes. The boys entered the spring with trust and purpose.

At Garden State Championships, the Junior 4+ won gold and earned qualification for Scholastic Nationals. In addition, the boys' lightweight 4+ also earned third, qualifying for Scholastic Nationals. The boys won the MAPL team championship for the first time since 2008. MAPL scoring relies on three varsity boats; this victory represented the collective depth and consistency of the squad.

The postseason continued to show the growth of the team. The Junior 4+ earned a silver medal at the Stotesbury Cup Regatta—Blair's first boys' medal at Stotesbury since 2011. The crew then added

a bronze medal at Scholastic Nationals, matching their bronze from 2017. Their year was defined by belief, resilience and the daily choice to take ownership of their team culture.



The boys' crew team had a historic spring on the water in 2025.

## Girls Set a New Standard

The girls entered last spring determined to build on an already strong tradition. They began with a silver medal at Mercer Sprints, setting the tone for a season of consistent excellence. At the Garden State Championships, the girls swept the Senior and Junior 4+ events and qualified both boats for Scholastic Nationals.

At MAPLs, the girls delivered another strong program-wide performance, winning the team championship and earning the All-MAPL Crew award. As with the boys' win, this result reflected the depth and alignment of the squad, not just the speed of a single boat.

The postseason became one of the most accomplished stretches in Blair history.

The girls won the Junior 4+ at Stotesbury for the first time and captured their fourth consecutive Senior 4+ title. At Scholastic Nationals, they earned silver in the Senior 4+ for their fifth straight podium appearance and bronze in the Junior 4+. Two crews traveled to Youth Nationals in Florida, where the Open 4+ made the A Final for the fourth-consecutive year and finished fifth. The U17 4+ won the C Final.

The season concluded with a milestone for the program. The top girls' boat traveled from Florida to the United Kingdom to compete at the Henley Women's Regatta, marking Blair's first appearance at the event. The crew advanced to the finals as the only American boat remaining in any event (at that stage in the regatta) and finished second to a strong Great Britain crew. The week included visits to Leander, conversations with Olympians, afternoon tea and racing on one of the most significant stages in the sport.



From left: Chandler Wildrick '25 (*not visible*), Sophia Shah '25, Alice Xu '26, Riley Bacinski '25 and Emily Tierney '25 brought Blair rowing to the Henley Women's Regatta for the first time in Blair history in 2025.

## Full Program Identity: One Team with a Shared Standard

What made last year extraordinary was the way both squads advanced the program through their own distinct successes. Both the boys and the girls had seasons that would be considered historic in their own right. The boys produced their strongest results in more than a decade, highlighted by a MAPL championship 16 years in the making and a return to the podium at Stotesbury and Scholastic Nationals. The girls matched that excellence with a string of national medals, continued success at Stotesbury and the program's first international final at Henley Women's Regatta.

The MAPL championships are the clearest symbol of who we are as a program. They demand depth, resilience and alignment across multiple boats. Winning both the boys' and girls' MAPL titles in the same year was rare and meaningful. It showed that the program has become more than individual lineups or isolated successes.

The boys' postseason run and the girls' international achievements grew from

the same cultural foundation. Each squad pushed the other. Each squad inspired the other. And each squad demonstrated that Blair rowing is now a place where athletes can compete at the highest scholastic,

national and, when the opportunity arises, international levels.

Last year did not belong to one team. It belonged to the entire program.



Captains Levin Li '25 and Sophia Shah '25 hoist their 2025 MAPL trophies, surrounded by teammates in a moment not seen since 2015. Their elation speaks to a culture where every athlete matters and success is shared.

## A Program Built on Belief

Looking back on the year, what stands out is not simply the medals or the international races. What mattered most was the way

our athletes carried themselves. They built a culture rooted in belief, unity and accountability. They chose to be here. They

chose to commit. They chose to support one another. And they chose to lead. ▀

# Academics





Students meditate in the Center for Health and Well-Being's new yoga room, a serene space with sweeping views of the Bowl, which will undergo a variety of improvements this summer.

## Meet the Self & Society Department

In the glass-lined room on the third floor of the new Center for Health and Well-Being, self and society department chair and Director of Mindfulness Education Sarah O'Neil carefully steps around the half-dozen students sprawled across the floor. From a distance, the sound of plates clattering in the Black Canteen floats by—the only sound, save her voice, in the room for the last 15 minutes. It hasn't been an inactive group, yet not a single student has spoken a word for the entire period.

It is, of course, one of the weekly meditation sessions now common in the self and society curriculum. Unlike a typical class, where discussion takes center

stage, this session invites reflection and observation. Here, learning begins in quiet.

The still moment captures something larger stirring across campus. In the fall of 2024, Blair introduced a new academic department—self and society—that blends the legacy of the longstanding religion and philosophy department with newer initiatives in health and wellness. Under Ms. O'Neil's leadership, self and society brings together a wide range of courses that share a unifying mission: to help students understand themselves and their place in the world.

Describing the department as a “home for reflection,” Ms. O'Neil notes its faculty come from across disciplines—English, art, history and theology—all connected by the belief that education should nurture both intellect and empathy. Four English teachers and one art instructor offer courses through the department, while the school chaplain teaches World Religions and Introduction to Ethics. A history teacher designs and teaches, alongside nine other dedicated faculty members, Foundations of Well-Being II for all sophomores. Ms. O'Neil creates the curriculum for and teaches Foundations of Well-Being I, a course required of all ninth graders, as well as Mindful Living and The Science of Happiness.

Over time, mindfulness education has become part of Blair’s rhythm. What began eight years ago as a single elective class has now touched most areas of school life—

from classrooms to athletics, dormitories and the Chapel program. Another defining aspect of the department is the presence of a chaplain in the classroom, allowing

students to explore faith and belief in an academic setting with an ordained Presbyterian minister.

## Exploring What Makes a Good Life

In Reverend David Harvey’s World Religions course, the same spirit of careful reflection takes a more outward turn. “What makes a good life?” he asks a roomful of 10th graders at the start of a recent class. For a moment, the room falls silent. Then hands rise and the students begin to share what they’ve learned from the Eastern traditions they are studying in the first half of the semester: Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism.

“Confucius would say a good life cannot be lived without kindness and honesty,” one 10th grader offers. Another suggests Taoism’s focus on humility and keeping responsibilities in balance. Together, the class considers whether creating “heaven on earth” is possible—and what it means, in any tradition, to really live well.

The class often ends with a five-minute meditation led by students, using imagery

from the faith in the unit they are studying. It’s a quiet ending that mirrors the department’s larger focus on mindfulness and contemplation. “Ultimately,” Rev. Harvey says, “I want students to know that religion matters. There are eight billion people in the world, and two-thirds have some religious affiliation. Understanding what others believe, and why, helps us all live better, more thoughtful, human and humane lives.”

## The Meaning of Life—Literally

If Rev. Harvey’s class asks students to look outward, to understand how other faiths make meaning, then the Meaning of Life course turns that question inward. On a recent Wednesday in that course, which is cross-listed this year in both the English and self and society departments, the room hums with the nervous energy typical of presentation day. Seniors sit ready with posters and dioramas, and small boats made from construction paper lie scattered across their desks. It is final project day for Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, and students prepare to present their interpretations of the book’s themes through a variety of media, including podcasts.

Through the lens of literature, this class wrestles with some of the most profound questions of the modern era, matters of purpose, alienation and belief. “The 20th century might legitimately be characterized as the century of alienation,” notes retired teacher Bob Brandwood, who taught the class for over 30 years, “when society began to turn away from traditional sources of meaning and struggled to fill the void left behind.” In the 21st century, he adds, new existential challenges, both environmental



Caroline Olsen '28 practices diaphragmatic breathing using the sensory input of a strap around the rib cage.

and manmade, have deepened that search for purpose.

Through works as different as Ernest Hemingway and Monty Python, this class explores how people find hope amid suffering, how they cope with loss and what it means to live meaningfully in a world that can feel indifferent.

During one presentation, a senior points out that Hemingway's protagonist turns to alcohol to numb himself from the horrors of war. "Can you blame him?" the student asks the room. "How does anyone find hope...How do you keep moving forward through death and war?"

English teacher Vicki Patterson, who has been teaching for 30 years, is pleased with her students' progress. "The goal of our Meaning of Life class is to have students question their actions and the consequences of those actions," she explains. "They're really starting to ask: Who are we going to be? What are we going to stand for?"

## What's Next for Self & Society

Both Meaning of Life and World Religions are electives in the self and society department. Students typically take Foundations I and II in their first two years at Blair, then choose from nine electives to fulfill the final class needed for graduation.

Ms. O'Neil, who took over as department chair this year, sees an opportunity to expand those offerings. Two new advanced courses, titled Advanced Seminar in Community Health and Advanced Mindfulness, a community-focused follow-up to Mindful Living, are already in development. Her hope is to expand to four or five advanced courses in the future.

"With 17 teachers, we have the biggest department on campus," Ms. O'Neil says. "But more than that, we are helping students discover not only how they learn and live, but why."

Ms. O'Neil believes that kind of introspection and self-understanding will serve students well beyond Blair. "Cultivating a deep sense of self and self-awareness will help them navigate relationships in life with empathy and compassion," she says. "Good leaders are self-aware, and developing those qualities is essential to becoming one."

Meanwhile, back in the glass-lined room on the third floor of the Center, Ms. O'Neil speaks for the final time, concluding the meditation practice. Students slowly open their eyes, quiet and centered once more, getting ready to step into the noise and commotion of the world beyond Blair. ■



Under the leadership of self and society chair and Director of Mindfulness Education Sarah O'Neil, the new department seeks to help students better understand themselves and their place in the world.

# Arts





The Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration is a haven for Blair artists and creatives.

## What Does It Mean to Be an Artist at Blair?

On a Saturday afternoon in March, the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration glows warm against the bitter cold. On the ground floor, a potter leans over a spinning wheel as clay ribbons coil on the bat. A floor above, editors splice together scenes for a horror flick filmed the night before. In the DuBois Theatre, stage lights flicker awake as the tech crew readies the space for evening rehearsals. It feels, in these moments, like Blair is breathing alongside its artists...steady, focused, alive.

On the hilltop, art is not a quiet sideline. It is the pulse of the community, commanding space in all aspects of Blair life, shaping identity and giving students an outlet to discover the limits of their creativity. Whether sketching portraits, composing music, blocking scenes or designing architectural models, Blair's young artists take risks daily, supported by faculty who challenge them to see more deeply and reach further than they thought possible.

At Blair, being an artist means stepping into a space where curiosity leads, collaboration

thrives and craft is honed with intention. Across the visual and performing arts, students explore mediums with both rigor and passion, learning that the creative process is as important as the final performance or portfolio. It is in these shared studios, buzzing rehearsal rooms and late-night editing sessions that Blair's artists learn not only how to tell their stories, but also to listen to the stories of others.

"Blair artists are curious, technically precise and expressive," Director of Vocal Music Ryan Manni-Brennan explains. "Perhaps, more importantly, they are expert and appropriate risk-takers. They find ways to push their own technique, to build the excellence of the community around them and to honor the work of those who came before."



During two shows a year, Blair artists have the opportunity to exhibit their work in the Romano Gallery.

## An Actress Takes the Stage

For students like Ev Rutt '26, there is no Blair without art. Her disciplines vary as much as the characters she embodies on stage, and her work has grown with her since arriving on the hilltop four years ago. Through the fine and performing arts department, she has found a home within the creative spaces on the hilltop where she can truly be herself.

“The artists in the studio and theatre are a true family here,” Ev explains. “When I first started, I didn’t feel judgment, which allowed me to let loose and find my voice. I’ve been able to apply that to other spaces around campus and build my confidence.”

Her confidence has continued to grow through each character she has portrayed with the Blair Academy Players. Through long hours of rehearsing and digging deep into understanding each role, Ev feels like she carries her characters with her. In the fall, her role as the boisterous Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* spilled over into her collage piece for the *Fall Student Art Exhibit* in the Romano Gallery. She recognized the



On the stage, Blair Academy Player Ev Rutt '26 has transformed into a multitude of characters in the spotlight.

vibrant colors and loud expression as a piece of the beloved role she took with her.

“In theatre, playing so many roles leaves an imprint on your own personality. At times, it can be all-consuming,” Ev says. Between spending time on her Advanced Portfolio projects in the art studio during free blocks to play rehearsals after school, Ev realizes the amount of effort she commits to her work. “All the time spent is worth it. If you enjoy what you’re doing, the time flies by really fast.”



Director of Theatre L'Oreal Carter meets students where they're at and encourages them to take appropriate risks to reach their full potential.

## Looking Through the Filmmaker's Lens



As a filmmaker herself, fine arts teacher Caroline James collaborates with her students on new techniques to craft their work.

Zayden Mirchandani '27 also recognizes the amount of time he commits to his work in a different corner of Blair's artistic repertoire: film. A passion he picked up at his previous school, Zayden came to Blair and flourished under the tutelage of fine arts teacher Caroline James, who introduced him to new techniques of filming. With access to more advanced equipment, he is able to produce films he proudly enters in film festivals on campus and beyond.

“The workload...when you're making art... you can't put a timeline on it,” Zayden shares. “If you are passionate, it doesn't feel like work, but it is an insane amount of time.”

While Zayden doesn't plan to pursue film as a career, he considered it because of the supportive and creative community he found at Blair. Among his classmates, he always finds actors willing to jump in his next film. In his advanced portfolio class, he has found a network of fellow creatives across mediums to discuss ideas

and provide feedback. From photography to architecture to painting, the cohort of advanced portfolio students and teachers meet monthly to share techniques, discuss what they've been working on and offer advice to others in a positive and creative environment.



Zayden Mirchandani '27 stars in his own films alongside classmates who are happy to lend a hand.

## A Soprano Soars

For musician Hope Mueksch '26, art at Blair is built on not only commitment but also joy in music. A section leader in both choir and orchestra, Hope splits her time between the disciplines, which often means giving up some of her free blocks during the day. "You really have to commit to the songs you're learning and practice outside of class," she explains. "But I honestly enjoy it. I love being part of both communities without having to choose just one." Her performing arts community extends into her dorm life in South Cottage as a prefect. Some of the sophomores in her dorm are also members of her piano and soprano

sections, and you can find them singing through the halls of South Cottage or practicing their piano pieces in Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts after school.

Having joined Blair as a junior, Hope immediately recognized that the ensembles demanded both advanced musicianship and personal investment. "The repertoire here is on another level. Our teachers have very high expectations for what they want to showcase," she says. But Hope finds that those expectations come with trust and collaboration. In Orchestra, she notices how Director of Instrumental Music and

performing arts department chair Jennifer Pagotto pushes students beyond simply "playing the notes," encouraging them to shape a collective sound and celebrate one another's progress...high fives included. In choir, she feels the same sense of shared purpose with Mr. Manni-Brennan. "He invests so much of his time in us. We want to meet him where he is, and not because we have to, but because we want to. You can feel that we're all locked in, making music together."

## The Teachers Behind the Talent

One of the common threads tying the artistic experiences of Ev, Zayden and Hope together is the supportive faculty in the fine and performing arts departments, guiding their work while offering the creative freedom to uncover their own potential. These teachers devote themselves to helping students question, experiment and discover, pushing them to develop their own distinctive voice in whatever medium they choose. Their guidance and support allows artists to feel safe reaching outside the box and experimenting with their artistic expression.

"Mrs. [Gina] Trish challenges us to try new techniques in the studio," Ev explains. "It's scary at first, but then surprising to see what we can do. She shows us that every brushstroke matters."

Zayden has a similar experience working with Ms. James. With a smaller class for Film 2, he was able to work closely with her and gain access to her knowledge. As a fellow filmmaker, they shared an understanding of the artistic process, and Zayden never felt rushed to simply meet deadlines. With her guidance and support, he was able to grow as an artist.

The principle of teachers encouraging students to reach new heights continues during play rehearsals with Director of Theatre L'Oreal Carter. "Mrs. Carter knows us really well and sees the potential in all of us that we might not even see yet," Ev notes. "She encourages us to try new ways, and she's not just a teacher or director. She's always checking in on us outside of theatre and being a friend."

At Blair, art is not just a creative outlet, but also an ingrained part of the curriculum and the academic day. Our student-artists—whether experienced practitioners who wish to pursue careers in the arts or curious individuals who just want to try something new—have access to top-notch, on-campus performance and creative spaces along with individual instruction from conservatory-trained musicians and accomplished artists who guide and support them throughout their journey. To be an artist at Blair means discovering who you are while finding the courage to become more. ▀

# Advancement



# Blair Dedicates the Center for Health & Well-Being

The newest addition to Blair's campus is already teeming with life! Students are practicing yoga and meditation in the third-floor studio and enjoying panoramic views of campus through floor-to-ceiling windows. The counseling team is settled into its space, complete with four private offices and quiet rooms, where students can decompress after a challenging day. The Health Center now uses automated medicine cabinets for added safety and efficiency, while state-of-the-art inpatient rooms provide a comfortable place for students to rest and recover. On the ground floor, the community connects in the relaxing student union, complete with a waterfall, soothing sounds, and a variety of spaces to gather, study and socialize.

Every thoughtfully designed aspect of the new Center for Health and Well-Being was on display in October during the official dedication ceremony. The event marked an important milestone in Blair's enduring commitment to fulfilling its mission by ensuring that every student develops the skills and tools needed to thrive—both on the hilltop and far beyond it.

During the ceremony, Head of School Peter G. Curran thanked the multitude of parents, alumni and friends whose partnership and generosity made the Center a reality. He also expressed his gratitude for the leadership of Board Chair Maria Vinci Savettiere, Esq. P'17, whose deep belief in the project was

critical to it coming to life, as well as the efforts of Buildings and Grounds Committee Chair Rob Sigety '75, P'16 '18 '20 '21 and Advancement Committee Chair Neal Sigety '76, P'16 '18 '19, who worked tirelessly alongside faculty and staff to construct and fund a centralized space that brings together all of Blair's health and well-being offerings under one roof.

"We've come a long way from our original Health Center, built in the 1950s," Mr. Curran remarked at the dedication. "At the heart of our mission at Blair is a commitment to graduating students with the tools to lead happy, successful and fulfilling lives. And we are deeply grateful to our health services and



Board Chair Maria Vinci Savettiere, Esq. P'17 and Buildings and Grounds Committee Chair Rob Sigety '75, P'16 '18 '20 '21 dedicated the Center for Health and Well-Being with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in October.

## Advancement

counseling teams for everything they do to provide students with a foundation of well-being they will carry with them long after they leave Blair.”

The 23,000-square-foot facility honors the legacy of the J. Brooks Hoffman '36 Health Center while embracing a future-focused approach to student wellness. The purpose-built facility offers a full continuum of care—delivered in a warm, welcoming space designed to inspire calm, encourage reflection, and prioritize accessibility and functionality.

Designed by HQW Architects, the Center for Health and Well-Being serves as a daily reminder that true educational excellence begins with a commitment to putting students first and making their experience as meaningful and fulfilling as possible.

“Beyond supporting physical, social and mental well-being for the young people in our care, this new facility is designed to serve as a respite—a calming space to study, socialize and practice mindfulness,” Maria Vinci Savettiere shared. “As a parent who saw the impact Blair had on my own son, I’ve witnessed firsthand how transformative the Blair



Blair’s counseling team of Tara Prezioso '96, Director of Counseling Ally Thomas and Melany Jimenez have found a new home on the third floor of the Center for Health and Well-Being.

experience can be. And, as Board Chair, I’m incredibly proud to lead a Board of Trustees that puts the student experience at the heart of every decision we make.”

With the cutting of the ribbon, Maria Vinci Savettiere and Mr. Rob Sigety officially opened the Center, making way for dedication attendees to venture through the doors, marveling at the grand atrium—complete with a living plant wall, dark quartz waterfall, and a flood of natural light from sweeping windows and skylights.

As guests toured the new Center, Director of Counseling Ally Thomas shared what the move means for her team and their students. “Our hallway in Clinton Hall will always hold a

special place in my heart,” she said, “but it’s incredible to be in a space that was intentionally designed for student care. From our private offices and waiting room to the quiet spaces where students can take a breath or meet with clinicians, every detail supports the work we do.”

For Mrs. Thomas and the counseling team, the new Center for Health and Well-Being is more than just a building—it’s a tangible expression of Blair’s belief that caring for students begins with creating spaces that make them feel seen, supported and comfortable. Already filled with energy, light and connection, the Center stands as both a retreat and a promise: That at Blair, well-being will always be at the heart of the community. ▀



Head of School Peter G. Curran addresses the crowd during the Center’s grand opening in fall 2025.

# Maine Terrace Dedication

At the heart of campus lies a place where the Blair community gathers—where onlookers watch snowball fights erupt on the quad in winter, students lounge when the weather finally breaks in spring, alumni share picnic dinners in summer and well-dressed Bucs pose for class photos during Convocation in the fall.

This central spot was alive with energy once again during Peddie Day festivities, as a disco party boogied outside Hardwick Hall for the dedication of the Maine Terrace—a gift from Eric Maine '77 and his wife, Jenny Maine, former Blair faculty member, together with their sons, Jack '13 and Harley Wedholm '17. The Maine Terrace is a welcoming gathering space for students and visitors

and a symbol of the Maine family's commitment to the Blair experience and the lasting friendships made on the hilltop.

“At Blair, we are fortunate to have many passionate supporters whose generosity and care for this institution have made a tremendous difference,” Head of School Peter G. Curran shared at the dedication. “When I think of the many enthusiastic alumni and individuals I have met over the last 15 years, I can honestly say that Jenny and Eric Maine are among the first who come to mind.”



(From left to right): Jack Wedholm '13 and his wife, Maggie, and daughter, Kelly, Eric Maine '77 and his wife, former faculty member Jenny Maine, and Harley Wedholm '17 were back on campus for Peddie Day and the Maine Terrace dedication.

## SHOW YOUR BLAIR PRIDE by making a gift to the School today.

The Blair Fund provides the resources to ensure that Blair students feel known and supported and Blair faculty and staff members have the tools to collectively provide a rich and meaningful educational experience.

To make your Blair Fund gift, visit [www.blair.edu/make-a-gift](http://www.blair.edu/make-a-gift).

Questions?

Contact Scott Kushner, Director of Annual Giving, at (908) 362-2033 or [kushns@blair.edu](mailto:kushns@blair.edu).





Nancy and Hoby Van Deusen '54 in front of the respective faculty homes named for them: the future Nancy House and Hoby House.

## Hoby House & Nancy House: A Perfect Pair

Each June, when alumni from across decades gather and the Alumni Parade begins its familiar procession across the hilltop, one man steps to the front, lifting the 1954 flag high, proudly leading the way as his wife, Nancy, walks beside him. It's a familiar and heartwarming sight, one that perfectly captures the spirit the Van Deusens bring to Blair. For those who know Hoby, this comes as no surprise, as he has spent decades as an engaged class representative, checking in with his classmates, sharing news from the hilltop and helping to organize a multitude of reunion celebrations.

At 89 years old, Hoby's loyalty to Blair spans more than half a century, and

he sharpened his focus on the School during and following his 50th Reunion, sensing that Blair's continued progress would depend upon increased alumni involvement. Since that time, Hoby joined the Board of Trustees and has set a high standard for enthusiasm and impact among Blair's most active graduates.

Hoby's connection to Blair began long before he arrived on campus in the fall of 1952. He followed in the footsteps of his father, Hobart M. Van Deusen '29, and his great uncle, Franklin E. Van Ness, who graduated in 1868. After graduating from Dartmouth College in 1958, Hoby built a successful career in banking, earning an MBA from New York University in 1965 and advancing

to vice president and head of the estate department at JPMorgan Chase. Subsequently, he became the director of planned giving at Columbia University. As Hoby's professional life was taking shape, a second, personal passion was also developing.

Hoby had always had something of a yen for historic homes. While living in a historic home next to The Taft School in Watertown, Connecticut, Hoby served as head of the committee that established the federal and Connecticut historic districts there. Given his love for preservation, it is no surprise what happened next.



Hoby and Nancy at the Hoby House ribbon cutting in 2022.



Hoby House offers Blair a top-tier faculty residence and strengthened ties to Blairstown.

When Hoby and Nancy learned in 2022 that the former First National Bank on Main Street in Blairstown was available, the opportunity to combine their interest in historic homes with their love for Blair felt exactly right. “For years, we had always peeked in the window and appreciated what an attractive building it was,” explained Hoby. “This seemed like the perfect way to help support Blair’s housing needs.” So Hoby and Nancy got to work, and with their signature mix of vision and generosity, provided the lead gift to renovate the former bank into a beautifully restored faculty home for Blair. Today, Hoby House stands as a warm and welcoming two-bedroom faculty residence, complete with the original bank vault.


And, of course, Hoby is never far from Nancy in any of his Blair pursuits. With her own background in banking, as a vice president at Citicorp and Bank of Austria, and director of development at Rumsey Hall School, she has been a partner in every sense: enthusiastic, wise

and supportive. So, when the building next door to Hoby House became available, the Van Deusens once again stepped forward.

With another lead gift, Blair was able to purchase 18 Main Street in 2025. The building has roots stretching back to 1895, when jeweler Enos H. Freeman purchased the lot and constructed the structure to house his growing business. Over time, the site has served as everything from a blacksmith shop in the mid-19th century to the Whitford Bakery from 1932 to 1957 before being purchased and renovated by First National Bank President Theodore Dawes, who added the distinctive stone façade it has on the first floor today and used it as an auxiliary bank office. Once renovations are complete, the building will be dedicated as Nancy House, a three-bedroom faculty residence that continues the Blair tradition of providing teachers with high-quality residential spaces and investing in downtown Blairstown. Together, these projects

reflect not only the Van Deusens’ love of history, but also their belief in Blair’s mission.

Hoby and Nancy’s impact can be seen in the buildings that bear their names, but it is felt even more in what those buildings make possible: a school where talented teachers can build rich and fulfilling lives, where students are known and supported, and where dynamic community, whether on campus or Main Street, is at the center of all we do.

To join the Van Deusens in supporting campus building projects, contact Chief Advancement Officer Craig Hall at (908) 362-2032 or [hallc@blair.edu](mailto:hallc@blair.edu). 

**Blair extends a heartfelt thank-you to the Blairstown Historic Preservation Committee for its help with this article.**

# Loyalty Becomes Legacy for Jim Jenkins '66

Blair Academy runs deep in the Jenkins family. George '32 and his sons, Jim '66 and Bob '69, each carried their Blair experience forward by returning to the hilltop as Trustees committed to helping the School prosper. For the Jenkinses, Blair was never just three or four years; it was for life. Now, as former Board Chair and Emeritus Trustee, Jim has included a bequest to Blair in his will, ensuring that the tradition continues ever, always.

Jim came to Blair from Glen Ridge High School and quickly excelled on the varsity soccer and baseball teams, where he became a star pitcher. His strong academic record and leadership earned him admission to Stanford University,

where he studied English. In 1972, he completed his MBA at Stanford and returned to New York to begin a career in investment banking.

"I attribute much of my success to my time at Blair," Jim says. "I was accepted into top schools, and that wouldn't have been possible if I stayed where I was. Blair was where it all started—a great foundation for college, work and life. From a young age, I knew I wanted to give back when I was able."

One of the most meaningful gifts one can offer the School is time. In 1976, after watching his father serve as Board of Trustees Chair, Jim joined the Alumni Board of Governors. As his brother, Bob, completed his term as Trustee in 1992, Jim's was just beginning, and his steady, thoughtful and thorough service has been critical to the School's governance ever since. Over the years, he has served as vice chair of operations, treasurer, chair of the Budget Committee and, ultimately, Chair of the Board (2006 to 2013).

"Behind the scenes, Jim gave many dedicated, selfless hours and days to phone calls, meetings, public engagements and his own philanthropy to support Blair's mission and ensure its future success," former Head of School and current Trustee T. Chandler Hardwick III said at an assembly honoring Jim's leadership. "His tenure as Chair is characterized by his faithful service,

encompassing loyalty and enduring friendships with his fellow Trustees."

Blair has been fortunate to have Jim continue as an active member of the Board, serving on the Budget, Executive, Governance, Investment and Buildings and Grounds Committees. In 2004, he received the School's highest honor—the Citation of Merit—and became an Emeritus Trustee in 2019.

"The progress that Blair has made since I've been on the Board has been remarkable," Jim notes. "Back in my Blair days, we didn't have enough strong applicants to fill the School. It wasn't until around the time Chan stepped into his role that we saw significant improvements in facilities, faculty, staff and administrators. We started attracting more qualified students and seeing a transformation in Blair and the community."

In addition to giving their time and generously hosting Blair gatherings at their homes in New York and Florida, Jim and his wife, Nevitt, have steadfastly supported key improvements across campus. Their philanthropy has touched Bogle Science Center, Timken Library, Sigety Alumni House, Mason and Freeman Hall renovations, and the Center for Health and Well-Being. In 2014, the Jenkinses established the George P. Jenkins '32 Scholarship to help provide deserving students access to a Blair education with the hope that, one day, they will share the Jenkins family's loyalty to the School.

"It's important to me that, when I'm gone, I'll leave one last gift to Blair," Jim shares of his bequest. "It's a potential opportunity to raise significant funds for the School, and I hope more alumni take advantage of it." ■



From left: Emeritus Trustee and former Board Chair Jim Jenkins '66 with son, Gus, his wife, Nevitt, and daughter, Milli.

# John C. Sharpe Society Welcomes Youngest Member



When Aidan Smarth '20 thinks back to his time on the hilltop, a flood of memories flash through his mind. There were the two years he shared the campus with his brother, Ronan '18; the time he spent as an advancement student ambassador alongside his mother, former Director of Annual Giving Colleen McNulty P'18 '20; and the moments he leaned on the steady guidance of his advisor, Assistant Head of School for Academics Nathan Molteni. But nothing compares to the Class of 2020's unforgettable graduation processional: driving through campus, diplomas in hand, as community members lined Academy Drive to cheer them on during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aidan's graduation from the hilltop may have been unique, but the lessons learned and the community atmosphere he shared with classmates and faculty are the hallmarks of a Blair education. Now as a cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point, Aidan has taken the early steps in forging his financial future and wanted to acknowledge the School that gave him the foundation he needed with a planned gift.

"Blair gave my family and me so much, and I wanted to give back in any way I could," Aidan shares. "My mom inspired me; she is a member of the John C. Sharpe Society as well, and I'd encourage other alums to give back to Blair for all it gave us during our time on the hilltop." ▀



## JOHN C. SHARPE SOCIETY BLAIR ACADEMY

"He found a campus of 11 acres; he leaves a campus of over 300 acres. He found buildings few in number, poorly equipped; he leaves a large group of buildings finely equipped for every school purpose. He found a school provincial in type of 100 pupils; he leaves a cosmopolitan school of 300....He found a school of only local repute; he leaves a school famous throughout the country."

—Albert Myrick Freeman, on the legacy of Dr. John C. Sharpe, Head of School, 1898–1927

The John C. Sharpe Society of planned givers embodies the spirit and ensures the vision of Dr. John C. Sharpe, one of Blair's most influential leaders, is achieved. Planned gifts are the cornerstone of Blair's endowment, and membership in the John C. Sharpe Society reflects a special commitment to the School's future. Interested in learning more? To join Jim, Aidan and other members of the John C. Sharpe Society of planned givers, please contact Director of Advancement Cara Mohlmann to discuss including Blair in your estate plans. If you have already made a provision for the School, let us know by contacting Cara at [mohlmc@blair.edu](mailto:mohlmc@blair.edu).

# *Blair Academy* IN MEMORIAM

<p><b>1939</b> Theodore D. Eisler January 24, 2025 New York, New York</p>	<p><b>1955</b> David R. Stanton November 10, 2025 Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania</p>	<p><b>1968</b> Emery Castimore Jr. November 9, 2025 Augusta, New Jersey</p>
<p><b>1944</b> Raymond E. Fredrick Jr. October 12, 2024 Palm City, Florida</p>	<p><b>1956</b> Richard W. Grieves September 10, 2025 Port Ludlow, Washington</p>	<p>Harrel S. Silverstein August 13, 2025 Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania</p>
<p><b>1949</b> William R. Lantz February 26, 2023 Monroe, New York</p>	<p>James E. Hansen II August 27, 2025 Fort Collins, Colorado</p>	<p>Michael Simonson February 2, 2025 Scottsdale, Arizona</p>
<p><b>1950</b> Harold M. Chumaceiro January 7, 2008 Miami, Florida</p>	<p>E. Bruce Wetzel November 29, 2020 Marco Island, Florida</p>	<p><b>1972</b> Barry W. Miller September 23, 2025 Radnor, Pennsylvania</p>
<p>Noel Davidson March 28, 2023 Avon, Connecticut</p>	<p><b>1957</b> Peter J. Hastings August 26, 2025 Stuart, Florida</p>	<p><b>1977</b> Glen D. Rubin March 5, 2023 Canadensis, Pennsylvania</p>
<p><b>1951</b> Rodney W. Kruse February 9, 2025 Long Branch, New Jersey</p>	<p><b>1958</b> Albert T. Holtz December 6, 2024 Fort Mill, South Carolina</p>	<p><b>1979</b> Wayne A. Stanton October 23, 2025 Center Conway, New Hampshire</p>
<p><b>1952</b> Robert M. Lerner January 27, 2025 West Hartford, Connecticut</p>	<p><b>1959</b> Stuart S. Cohn September 15, 2025 Reading, Pennsylvania</p>	<p><b>1993</b> Dennis M. Zabala February 13, 2025 Somerset, New Jersey</p>
<p><b>Former Trustee</b> Peter W. McKinney October 17, 2025 Chicago, Illinois</p>	<p>William Orchard December 18, 2025 Robertsdale, Alabama</p>	<p><b>1999</b> Aliko L. Clarke June 27, 2025 Reisterstown, Maryland</p>
<p><b>1953</b> George J. Roebelen Jr. February 18, 2025 Suffield, Connecticut</p>	<p><b>1963</b> Timothy C. Knowlton December 19, 2025 Austin, Texas</p>	<p><b>2006</b> Adam Garcia September 4, 2025 Brick, New Jersey</p>
<p>R. Barrett Steelman May 8, 2024 Denver, Colorado</p>	<p>Sylvanus A. Zimmerman IV December 3, 2025 Walnutport, Pennsylvania</p>	<p><b>Past Parent</b> Kathryn P. Romano October 29, 2025 Newton, New Jersey</p>
<p><b>1954</b> John M. Bofinger February 12, 2025 Salem, New Hampshire</p>	<p><b>1965</b> Eric J. Caleca July 20, 2025 Camden, South Carolina</p>	<p><b>Former Faculty</b> William N. Bailey March 5, 2021 Virginia Beach, Virginia</p>
	<p><b>1967</b> Eric W. Garrison September 17, 2025 Shunk, Pennsylvania</p>	

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**1939****Theodore D. Eisler**

Ted attended Blair for his last year of high school and distinguished himself academically, earning a place on the honor roll. He served on the editorial staff of *The Blair Breeze*, covering many school events and often spending extra time in the library pursuing his work. Ted also enjoyed being outdoors and played many rounds of golf while on campus. After graduation, he completed his education on an accelerated track and graduated early from Harvard University in December 1942, in time to answer the call to serve his country in World War II. Ted joined the U.S. Army and served with distinction on the European front as an infantry platoon leader in the 45th Division, 157th Regiment. His courage and leadership under fire earned him two Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star. Following combat, he continued his military service, leading the training film division of the Signal Corps. After the war, Ted returned to civilian life, meeting Janet “Johnnie” Schwab of New Rochelle, New York, in 1950. They married soon after and shared 58 devoted years together until her passing in 2009. Their life was filled with adventure, including extensive travel and numerous safaris throughout Africa, as well as a shared love of tennis. Professionally, Ted began his career as a buyer and merchandise manager at United Merchants before moving into investment banking. He worked at Wertheim & Co. and later Burnham Securities, remaining active in his career until retiring shortly after his 89th birthday. A lifelong athlete, Ted excelled in golf at Quaker Ridge Golf Club and squash at the Harvard Club. He was also an avid reader, a loyal—if long-suffering—New York Giants fan, and had a well-known fondness for Ben & Jerry’s Cherry Garcia ice cream. Ted was predeceased by Janet, his son and a granddaughter and is survived by his daughters, granddaughters and niece.

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**1944****Raymond E. Fredrick Jr.**

During his year on the hilltop, Ray excelled both in mathematics and on the football field. He earned recognition on the honor roll for his performance in the classroom and was also a member of the band, playing the tambourine. Ray went on to attend Princeton University, earning a bachelor of science with high honors in electrical engineering in February 1949, followed by a master of science in electrical engineering in 1953. While at Princeton, he was an active member of the campus club and the marching band. Ray served in the U.S. Navy from 1944 to 1946. After his service, he built a distinguished career as an electronics engineer, earning two patents for his work. He spent more than two decades at Adams-Russell, where he worked from 1963 until retiring in 1985. His expertise remained in demand, and he later returned to the field as a full-time electronics engineering consultant with Assurance Technology Corp. Ray was predeceased by a son and survived by his wife of 47 years, Marilyn, and his children.

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**1950****Noel Davidson**

A two-year Buc, Noel was a noted star of the basketball team. He maintained honor roll status both years and was a member of the Spanish club. Noel went on to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School before serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. After his service, he devoted his career to retail leadership. Noel joined Casual Corner in 1963, when the company operated just seven stores, and played a key role in its growth into a women’s specialty retailing enterprise with more than 1,800 stores and 22,000 employees by the time he retired in 1992. After retirement, he partnered with his wife,

Marsha, to run Bodytalk until its sale in 2021. An avid athlete, Noel jogged daily for decades and had a lifelong love of basketball, continuing to play competitively into his seventies. He also enjoyed skiing and golf. Noel is lovingly survived by Marsha, three daughters and their spouses, two stepchildren and their spouses, five grandchildren and two step-grandchildren.

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**1951****Rodney W. Kruse**

Rodney spent one year at Blair, focusing on his academics and serving as a member of the blue color club. He remained connected to his alma mater throughout his life, supporting the Blair Fund and joining the True Blue Loyalty Society. Rodney was a respected bank president whose career was defined by leadership, integrity and a strong sense of service. He also served in the U.S. Army, where he embraced the values of duty and honor and built lasting connections with fellow service members. A graduate of Monmouth College, Rodney remained deeply involved with that institution, serving on its board and supporting its continued growth. Outside of his professional life, Rodney enjoyed gardening, walking, home projects and especially golf, which he played nearly every day. He loved traveling and sharing good meals with family. A devoted member of Elberon Memorial Church in Long Branch, New Jersey, Rodney’s faith and commitment to serving others guided his life. He was predeceased by his first and second wives, Marie and Augusta, and is survived by a loving family: his son and daughter, stepson, stepdaughter and her husband, step-grandchildren and step-great-grandchildren.

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**1952****Robert M. Lerner**

Bob attended Blair for his junior and senior years, leaving his mark as a member of the band, choir, basketball

## In Memoriam

and baseball teams. He remained a very active Buccaneer throughout his life, supporting the Blair Fund and earning membership in the True Blue Loyalty Society, serving as class representative for many years and participating in class reunions. Bob earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Boston University in 1956, where he met his future wife, Gilda, during his first year. They married just two weeks after graduation. Active in the Phi Epsilon Pi fraternity, Bob soon enlisted in the U.S. Army, completing basic training and serving until his honorable discharge in 1958. He then returned to Connecticut and joined his father-in-law in the family business, Lebon Press, eventually becoming president and guiding the company until 1994, when his son, Andy, assumed leadership. Bob had a lifelong love of music and sang bass with the Hartford chapter of the Barbershop Harmony Society, forming a quartet called Good Fortune that performed for many years. He and Gilda were longtime members of Tumble Brook Country Club, where Bob enjoyed golf and proudly recorded three holes-in-one. Bob was predeceased by Gilda and is survived by his son and daughter, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

### 1953

#### George J. Roebelen Jr.

During his two years at Blair, George was remembered as a quiet, prompt and reliable student, who swam on the swim team and earned recognition on the honor roll during his senior year. In the years that followed, George built a remarkable life as an accomplished engineer and dedicated community leader. He studied electrical engineering at MIT and aeronautical engineering at Boston University, graduating at the top of his class. He spent his entire professional career at Hamilton Standard Space and Sea Systems in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, retiring

### Former Trustee

#### Peter W. McKinney

Peter's devotion to Blair began in the fall of eighth grade, when he first arrived on campus. By his senior year, he had been honored with the position of vice president of the Class of 1952 and held several other leadership roles, including track captain, president of the dramatics club and editor-in-chief of the *ACTA*. Peter's service continued as a member of Blair's Board of Trustees from 1996 to 1999. The Blair bond became multigenerational when Peter's son, Cam, Class of 1994, followed his father to the hilltop. In the years that followed, both remained actively engaged with the School, representing Blair at alumni receptions and events in Chicago, where Peter resided for 58 years. Peter supported Blair through the Blair Fund, scholarship and Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts, and was a proud member of the Leadership, True Blue and John C. Sharpe societies.

Peter was a graduate of Harvard University and McGill University. He played a pivotal role in teaching and developing the plastic surgery program at Northwestern University Medical School and founded The Clinic for Plastic Surgery to provide care for low-income patients. He also served as a professor at Rush Presbyterian St. Luke's Medical Center and taught at Rush University Medical College, while maintaining a long-standing private practice. Widely regarded as a distinguished surgeon, dedicated educator and prolific author, he also had a lifelong passion for sailing.

Peter was predeceased by his brother, Roland McKinney '51, and is survived by his wife, Donna; son, Cam '94; daughter, Ashley; and five grandchildren.

as manager of advanced technology. Along the way, he secured seven U.S. patents, authored numerous technical papers and played a key role in developing the life-support system used by astronauts during the Apollo moon landings. A resident of Suffield, Connecticut, for more than 65 years, George was deeply committed to public service. He served on many town boards, commissions and study groups, helping advance important local projects. In recognition of his civic leadership, he was named Suffield Republican of the Year in 2014. George was also devoted to supporting youth programs, volunteering with organizations including Suffield Little League, Suffield Flyers Ice Hockey, Destination Imagination and Odyssey of the Mind. He will be remembered for his intellect, generosity and the lasting contributions he made to

both aerospace innovation and his community. He is survived by his wife of over 65 years, Faith, his three sons, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

### 1954

#### John M. Bofinger

"Jack" spent two years at Blair, where he was known for his love of waterskiing on Lake George, his good looks, and his athleticism on the varsity basketball and baseball teams. He went on to graduate from Rollins College and built his career at the Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company, working as a meat broker until his retirement. He and his devoted wife of 54 years, Dee, wintered in Vero Beach, Florida, and spent summers at their home on Lake George. Jack especially enjoyed watching football and savoring summer days on the lake, boating and

socializing with family and friends. He is survived by Dee, his four children, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

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**1955**

**David R. Stanton**

A two-year day student, David had the reputation of loving religion classes and being a hunter at heart. He played on the varsity baseball team and was affectionately nicknamed “Monk.” With his warm smile, bright eyes and tireless pursuit of faith, David treated everyone as a friend, even those he had only just met. He was a veteran of the Vietnam War and a devoted deacon in his church. David took greatest pride in his marriage and family, his 23 years of honorable service in the U.S. Army and his alma mater, Rutgers University. Following his military career, David embarked on a second profession as a claims representative with the Medical Inter-Insurance Exchange of New Jersey. In his later years, he partnered with Rock Steady Boxing to combat Parkinson’s disease. David is survived by his wife and the love of his life, Marilyn, with whom he shared 67 years of marriage, his daughters and son, his granddaughters and grandsons, and his three great-granddaughters.

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**1956**

**Richard W. Grieves**

When asked to reflect for his 50th Reunion, Dick shared, “Without Blair, I would not have attended Princeton. It is likely that I would not have then gone on to law school or a career as an attorney. It was the most significant year—academically speaking—of my life.” Even though he spent only one year at Blair, it was a full one. Dick was a member of the international society, the *ACTA*, choir, glee club, quartet and stylus club, all while maintaining his status on the honor roll. During his life, Dick was a distinguished attorney, devoted family man and a person of deep faith. A 1960 graduate

of Princeton University, he served three years on active duty in the U.S. Air Force before earning his law degree from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1966. He began his legal career in public service as a deputy attorney general for New Jersey, later serving as assistant district counsel for the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. In 1987, he joined Northrop Grumman’s law department, where he became a respected counselor and mentor in environmental law, known for his integrity, problem-solving ability and collaborative spirit. Dick married the love of his life, Carol, in 1964, and together they raised two children and adored their three granddaughters. He cherished time spent camping, skiing, reading to his grandchildren and fishing with friends. His faith became central to his life after discovering the Gospel at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in 1975. A lifelong lover of music, Dick sang bass with the Princeton Nassoons for over 60 years and participated in several choral groups. Remembered for his kindness, warmth and unwavering integrity, Dick touched countless lives through his faith, music, profession and love for family. Dick is survived by Carol, his daughter and son and his three granddaughters.

**James E. Hansen II**

Jim brought a genuine warmth to campus and was deeply engaged in Blair literary life. An accomplished writer, he was a member of the Webster Society and press club and he contributed regularly to *The Blair Breeze*. When looking back on his time at Blair, he remembered fondly the freedom of weekends and well-prepared food. He supported the Blair Fund throughout his life, earning him membership in the True Blue Loyalty Society. A 1960 graduate of Middlebury College, where he majored in history and lettered in track, he later earned his MA and PhD in history from the University of Denver. Jim spent his entire professional career

at Colorado State University (CSU), beginning in 1966 and retiring as a full professor in 2003. A gifted and dedicated teacher, he introduced CSU’s first African American history course, founded the university archives and authored multiple university histories, nine additional books and numerous scholarly works. He also served for decades on state and university archival boards and helped cofound a public history master’s program, mentoring generations of students. Jim served in the Army Reserves, was known for his cooking skills and deeply cherished family life. He was a loving father to his son and daughter and, after marrying Nancy in 1986, shared a rich life of travel, theatre, sports and shared interests. Remembered for his integrity, curiosity, kindness, humor and exceptional writing, Jim leaves a lasting legacy in education and in the lives he touched. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Jackie, and is survived by Nancy, his son and daughter, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

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**1957**

**Peter J. Hastings**

Peter spent a full three years at Blair as a true three-season athlete, competing on the varsity football field, the varsity basketball court and running spring track. The 1957 *ACTA* described him as a “gregarious extrovert and always leaving [others] laughing.” After graduating from Blair and attending the University of Connecticut, Peter stepped into leadership of his family’s real estate business. He found his great joy in helping young families purchase their first homes. Peter married his wife, Carol, in 1963, and together they shared 62 years of marriage, raising three children and delighting in 12 grandchildren. A true gentleman farmer, Peter had a lifelong love of nature, animals and gardening. At his Connecticut homestead, he cultivated orchards, gardens and maple sugaring

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traditions that became cherished community experiences. Later in life, he founded community gardens in both Connecticut and Florida, promoting environmental education and stewardship. Known for his warmth, curiosity and boundless enthusiasm for life, Peter brought people together through laughter, storytelling and shared experiences. He will be remembered for his optimism, love of family, deep connection to nature and the many friendships he formed throughout his life.

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### 1958

#### Albert T. Holtz

A proud two-year Buc, Al spent his time outside of class with the choir, the Tweeds club, the glee club, writing for *The Blair Breeze* and playing with the band. He won a prize in his junior year for his photography and, upon graduation, received the Harold F. Walker Memorial Prize, which was awarded to a senior deserving of recognition. Throughout his life, he supported the Blair Fund and was a member of the True Blue Loyalty Society. Al was a devoted and knowledgeable student of railroads, a passion that many classmates remember well from their Blair days. At a time when Blairstown was served by both the Erie-Lackawanna and the Lehigh and Hudson River railroads, Al seemed to know every detail about the trains passing through town—from their schedules to the exact composition of each. Many students arrived at Blair aboard the Erie-Lackawanna passenger cars, and Al was invariably up to date on their arrival and departure times. He carried that lifelong fascination into a professional career as a transportation analyst with Conrail in Philadelphia, where his deep understanding of rail systems found a natural home. After retiring in 2013, Al and his wife, Jane, moved from central New Jersey to Fort Mill, South Carolina. Al will be remembered by his classmates

as a kind, thoughtful and generous presence—someone who truly loved Blair and remained deeply connected to it throughout his life. He is survived by Jane, his friends and classmates.

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### 1959

#### Stuart S. Cohn

Attending Blair for a postgraduate year, Stu could often be found playing clarinet in the band and with the German club while outside the classroom. After Blair, he graduated from Cornell University in 1963 and the Pennsylvania College of Optometry in 1967 before joining a family optometric practice founded in 1904. Over his 52-year career, he became a respected leader in his field, serving as president of the Pennsylvania Optometric Association in 1986. He was deeply loved by his patients and staff until his retirement in 2020. Beyond his profession, Stu pursued many passions, including fly-fishing, flying single-engine planes, traveling to nearly 70 countries with his wife, Carol, and following Philadelphia sports. A devoted music enthusiast, he supported the arts in Reading, Pennsylvania, through leadership roles with the Reading Symphony Orchestra and Friends of Chamber Music. Guided by his integrity and a deep dedication to service, Stu's life reflected his commitment to his profession, community and values. Stu is survived by Carol, his son, his "spiritual" children and their children, a large extended family, and many dear friends.

#### William Orchard

Bill spent two years at Blair, filling his time outside the classroom with many activities and time on the varsity soccer field. He served on the student council, as cochairman of Omicron Kappa Delta, wrote for *The Blair Breeze* and was a member of the International Society, dramatics club and prom committee. After graduating, Bill

served two years in the U.S. Army. He earned a bachelor's degree in religious studies from Florida State University, followed by a master's degree in marriage and family counseling from the University of South Alabama. He worked as an addiction therapist with Mobile Mental Health, where he helped others with compassion and insight. Deeply reflective by nature, his intellectual pursuits and writings on God, religion and science reflected his curiosity and faith. The 12 Steps guided his spiritual life and informed both his work and personal journey. He is survived by his loving wife of 39 years, Donna, his son, stepsons and one granddaughter.

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### 1963

#### Timothy C. Knowlton

Known for his chemistry prowess and spirited antics on the JV football team, Tim made a lasting impression at Blair during his year on campus. He was a member of the international society, going on to earn a degree in Italian literature from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and serving nearly five years in the U.S. Marine Corps, specializing in signals intelligence. He later worked as a bond trader on Wall Street before transitioning to international development and advisory roles with Price Waterhouse, USAID and the U.S. Department of State, serving in countries including Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Afghanistan and Iraq. Retiring in 2010, Tim, an avid sailor, turned his attention to enjoying family trips to Buzzards Bay. He was also licensed in firearms safety, enjoying hunting and shooting as opportunities allowed. When asked why he moved to Austin in 2020, he replied, "Why? Can't ski or play hockey anymore, so why freeze?" Tim is lovingly survived by his sons and grandson.

#### Sylvanus A. Zimmerman IV

Coming from The Pingry School,

“Van” spent three years at Blair, continuing a long family tradition within the Blair community. That legacy began with his grandfather, Sylvanus Zimmerman Jr., who taught chemistry at Blair from 1912 to 1962, and continued with his father, S. Arnold Zimmerman III ’37, and uncle, Paul Zimmerman ’43. His father served on the Board of Trustees from 1971 to 2014 in a variety of roles. While at Blair, Van played for the varsity soccer team and had an interest in cars. He continued his education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he earned his undergraduate degree, and later received his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from the University of Turin in Italy. Van was a longtime resident of Tewksbury, New Jersey, and the owner and practicing veterinarian of Bedminster Animal Hospital in nearby Far Hills. Van was predeceased by his grandfather, father and uncle and is survived by his wife, Carolyn, son and extended family.

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## 1968

### Emery Castimore Jr.

Although “Sam” was at Blair for a short period of time, his obituary notes that “Blair Academy was the cornerstone of his early education and laid the groundwork for a broader outlook on life. When it came to his own children’s education, there was only one option for them.” He remained deeply engaged with and supportive of Blair throughout his life. After earning his veterinary degree from the University of Pennsylvania, Sam returned to Augusta to begin his professional career and raise a family. In the 1970s, he married his first wife, Judy, and became a devoted father to future Blair alumni, Matt ’97 and Robin ’98, raising them on the family farm they called home. Sam built a highly successful standardbred nursery on Route 565, managing hundreds of horses and gaining recognition for his care of No

Nukes, a standout racehorse who won 10 of 19 starts and generated millions in earnings for his owners. As the horse industry faced increasing challenges, Sam shifted his focus to small-animal care, opening a veterinary practice on Route 206 in the home where he was raised. Renowned for his exceptional intuition with animals, tireless availability and deep compassion, Dr. Sam formed lasting bonds with his clients, offering care marked by empathy and humanity. Later, with his second wife, Joan, Sam welcomed two more children and future Blair alums, Nate ’20 and Emery ’23, whom they raised with pride and love. Sam found joy in travel, racetracks, community gatherings, and simple local routines, always accompanied by dogs and fueled by coffee and conversation. A man of enormous heart, Sam remained deeply connected to his family, friends, clients and community throughout his life, never stopping his work of caring for animals and people alike. Sam is survived by his wife, Joan, his four children, daughter-in-law and his three grandchildren.

### Harrel S. Silverstein

Harrel’s four years on the hill were filled with involvement in the outing club (of which he served as vice president), as well as the football, varsity swimming and golf teams—and he was fondly remembered for his wit. A 1972 graduate of Syracuse University, Harrel went on to build a diverse career in marketing and service. He served as retail advertising director at *The Star-Ledger* in Newark, New Jersey, and executive vice president of marketing at Sillery and Partners in Stamford, Connecticut. In later years, he brought compassion and care to his work as a family counselor at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx and Bethlehem Memorial Park in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Known for his kindness, humor and warmth, Harrel touched many lives. Above all, he cherished his

family—his late parents, his beloved wife, Sheralyn, and his treasured daughter—and lived and loved “all the way,” just as in his favorite Frank Sinatra song.

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## 1972

### Barry W. Miller

A two-year Buc, Barry spent his time behind the camera while on the hill. He was a member of the camera club and the photography editor for the *ACTA* while also serving as a member of the golf and soccer teams. He remained supportive of Blair through the annual fund, was a member of the True Blue Loyalty Society and returned to campus for class gatherings. Barry shared 53 years of love and partnership with his wife, Amy, whom he met during their first week at Syracuse University in 1972. Together, they raised two children and found great joy in their granddaughter. A respected leader, Barry served as CEO of the Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center (DVIRC), becoming a pillar of Pennsylvania’s manufacturing community and earning admiration for his vision, integrity and kindness. Defined by optimism and resilience, he met the challenges of a double lung transplant in 2019 with strength, continuing to embrace life through travel, golf, and deep involvement with family and community. A longtime Radnor resident, Barry coached his children’s teams, gave generously of his time, and was known for his warm smile and encouraging spirit. He will be remembered as a devoted husband, father, grandfather, brother and friend who lived fully with an open heart. Barry is survived by Amy, his family, friends and community.

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## 1977

### Glen D. Rubin

Glen was at Blair for one year and was noted to be a born leader and organizer. He worked on the *ACTA*

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and was dubbed the dorm's interior decorator and an actor. After Blair, Glen had a deep love of cooking, with a particular talent for making homemade maple syrup, soups and hot sauces. He also enjoyed gardening, spending time outdoors and sharing life with his family and beloved dogs. In recent years, he rediscovered an interest in black powder firearms. A man of many talents and wide-ranging interests, Glen's professional life was equally diverse. He served as an elementary educator, certified paramedic, EMT instructor, DJ and professional cook. Glen earned a bachelor's degree with a certificate in elementary education from William Paterson University in 1983 and later completed an associate's degree in applied science in culinary arts with honors from Northampton Community College in 2015. Glen is survived by his wife, Rosaline, with whom he shared 22 years, his daughter, son and daughter-in-law.

### 1979

#### Wayne A. Stanton

During his two years at Blair, Wayne found community on the lacrosse field and ski team. He was also an active member of the camera club and photographer for the *ACTA*. Wayne attended Alfred University and lived a life defined by kindness, humor and a deep love of the outdoors. He worked in a variety of roles, holding positions at Wolfeboro Marina, Highwatch, Ragged Mountain Equipment and The Nordic Skier. An avid skier, hiker, backpacker, fisherman, photographer and concert-goer, Wayne took great pride in completing the New Hampshire 48 and the New England 100 Highest Peaks. He also enjoyed ham radio and spent many meaningful years at Camp Kaybeum on Lake Winnepesaukee as both camper and counselor. He is survived by his loving wife, Theresa, his daughter and her husband, and a large extended family.

### 2006

#### Adam Garcia

A four-year Buc, Adam was a stand-out presence on the lacrosse field, serving as captain of the varsity lacrosse team during his senior year. After graduation, he returned to campus often to watch lacrosse games and attend Alumni Weekend. After graduation, he earned both his undergraduate degree and Juris Doctor degree from Boston College and became a core member and partner at Giordano, Halleran & Ciesla, P.C., where he specialized in real estate, redevelopment and construction law. By age 37, he had earned statewide recognition from Best Lawyers and Super Lawyers for his skill as a litigator and trusted counselor. Known among colleagues as "the Adamizer," he combined sharp

legal insight with creativity, calm leadership and genuine warmth. At the center of Adam's life was his family. He was a loving son and brother, deeply connected to his parents and sister, and treasured family traditions and travel. Above all, Adam was a devoted husband to Valarie and a loving father to their young daughter. He found the greatest joy in simple moments—family time at the park, cooking together, reading bedtime stories and sharing life's routines. Adam had a rare gift for building meaningful relationships, forming lifelong friendships through his sincerity, generosity and thoughtful nature. He will be remembered for his professional brilliance, his deep love for family and his ability to make everyday moments meaningful. Adam is lovingly survived by Valarie, their daughter, and his parents and sister. ▀

### Past Parent

#### Kathryn P. Romano

Kay was a gracious and deeply kind individual, profoundly proud of her family and of the lasting impact they have had on our institution. Kay and her late husband of more than 60 years, Dom—an honorary member of the Class of 1951 who served on Blair's Board of Trustees from 1988 to 1994 and was later named an honorary Trustee—shared an enduring commitment to the education of young people. Throughout their lives, they generously supported a wide range of organizations devoted to that mission, with Blair holding a place of particular significance. Their presence can be felt across campus in almost every building, including the Romano Dining Hall, Kathryn Hall, Hardwick Hall, the Romano Gallery, Tracy Hall and Bogle Science Center all benefiting from Kay and Dom's care and support for generations to come.

Kay was a devoted wife and a loving mother, grandmother and great-grandmother whose boundless energy and joyful spirit earned her the affectionate nickname "the ever-ready bunny." A spirited competitor and lifelong perfectionist, she took pride in doing even the smallest things exceptionally well, whether staying up late to finish a puzzle or playing a determined game of cards. Above all, Kay cherished her family. She loved traveling with them throughout the United States and Europe and especially treasured their annual ski trips to Snowmass, Colorado, where they celebrated her birthday together. Kay is lovingly survived by her three children, DJ '74, David '76 and Nina '85; daughters-in-law Cathy and Alice, and son-in-law Tony; her seven grandchildren, Martine '04, Arielle '07, Drew '10, Anthony '14, Alexander '14, Dominick C. '16 and Kathryn; and six great-grandchildren, Iyla, Serafina, Emerson, Tivoli, Giulia and Grady.

# FOUR THINGS WE'RE TALKING ABOUT

## THE BUC STOPS HERE

Head of School Peter G. Curran has kicked off a brand-new podcast, *The Buc Stops Here*, all about the community and connections that make Blair Academy special. The first episodes featured MUSH CEO Ashley Thompson '08 and Douglas Kimmelman P'12 '13 '15 '22, founder and executive chairman of Energy Capital Partners. Tune in and follow *The Buc Stops Here* on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.



## NEWEST ALL-AMERICAN

Congratulations to Blair basketball's Deron Rippey Jr. '26, who was named a McDonald's All-American this February. The winningest player in program history, Deron joins Charlie Villanueva '03, Luol Deng '03, Temi Fagbenle '11 and Sadie Edwards '14 as the latest Buc to be named an All-American.



## HELLO, WNBA!

All eyes will be on the April 13 WNBA Draft and we'll be cheering as former Buccaneer and current Texas Christian University guard Olivia Miles '21 is expected to make her big leap into the league. Go, Olivia!



## INTERSESSION TRIP

Students in the Intersession course "Chasing Waterfalls" visited iconic waterfalls to sketch, photograph and explore their beauty and history. Captured here are the last icicles of winter at Letchworth State Park in New York.

