

# FOCUS

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## Happy Pajama Day!



Support the  
Leukemia and  
Lymphoma  
Society



Photo/Emily Sachs  
*School Monitor Dave Centofanti directs morning traffic.*

## Parking Lot Pandemonium

By Nicole Axelrod

With the ballooning populations of the high school and middle school, more parents are pulling into the parking lots each morning and afternoon.

While the majority of parents are always respectful of the rules, many parents driving on school grounds have become a little disorderly. Since the parking lots accommodate both the middle school and high school, security monitors believe that it is extraordinarily important that parents realize the safety issues at hand.

According to two of the security monitors, Gary Liebstein and Don Ahrenburg, some of the issues include the fact that some parents are not being alert, they are driving too fast, they are on the phone or texting, not paying attention, and multitasking in general while driving.

Oftentimes, parents are in a rush to pick up their kids or are coming home after a long day at work, so the parking lots can get very hectic and crowded very quickly. The security monitors did point out that a majority of the parents are completely following the rules and are respectful. However, there are a select few parents who are not following these rules who have brought the issue



Courtesy of Ayden Bauer  
*Students and faculty of HR smile after their weekend at Camp Bernie.*

## Bonding at Camp Bernie

By Lauren Rothmann

The Human Relations (HR) Club embarked on their annual three day trip to Camp Bernie, located in Port Murray, New Jersey on Friday, December 4.

"Our goal is to bridge people together from different walks of life [and] different friend groups," said senior co-president Matthew Streichler.

"We took 32 students on the trip with 3 teacher chaperones, [and] I love the trip. This year was my third year on it and it's an amazing experience," Streichler said.

"I'm so incredibly grateful to have been able to have gone on the HR trip before I graduated and especially with this particular group of individuals. Going to such a small school, it's nearly impossible to not know of everyone but you never get to really know everyone. The trip allows you to forget all of the rumors you have heard and assumptions that you have made about all of these people and actually get to know them for who they really are," said senior Rebecca Regueira, a participant of the trip this year.

to their attention.

Texting while driving in general has always been an issue among teenagers, but now with Driver's Education programs and other driving courses, students now more than ever are learning to drive safely.

"[Parents] should learn from their kids who do follow the rules," said Liebstein.

These parents are, whether they realize it or not, showing the kids who walk around the school grounds how to act when they become drivers in the future. The monitors believe that parents are the ones who should set an example for new drivers.

Liebstein went on to explain that usually, "Most of the parents do follow the rules... [Parents] are sometimes too content in thinking that they are the best drivers in the world, but in this environment, there are safety concerns," he said.

Other parents are also disregarding the rule forbidding double parking and blocking fire lanes. In addition, parents do not always listen to the security guards and their instructions for parking in spots or waiting on the proper lines.

While the school was able to extend parking for more students this year, there still is the difficulty to accommodate more parents as well, as there are only limited spots on the school grounds. In terms of cracking down on the parents with unruly driving habits, there will be no implementation of punishments in any form.

"The parents should be able to [drive on school grounds], but they have to be respectful, follow the rules, and not text on their phones," said Liebstein.

For many members of the club, the trip to Camp Bernie not only allows them to get to know new people, but also allows them to foster new friendships.

"You go into the trip with all of these people that you wouldn't necessarily talk to and come out as a family," said Regueira.

Although, the trip has mainly received praise from students, there have been some who have questioned the trip in regard to exclusivity, and whether HR itself forms a clique after the trip.

"I believe the goal of the trip is misunderstood by many students. [It] is to show students that there is more to the person you are sitting next to in class than their reputation... HR pushes students to see past the reputations and social cliques formed in high school," said senior co-president Alex Silverstein.

"The trip is a really special thing, and it's special for many reasons...The students involved in the trip are amazing. They love to get involved in activities, state their opinions, and be open to their surroundings to make the trip and club as successful as possible," he said.

Despite the negative feedback, HR has been able to overcome its criticism and strengthen as a group.

"We have handled the negativity pretty well which I hope will allow others to understand that HR is an amazing, welcoming club full of amazing, welcoming people," said Regueira.

## SAT: Out with the Old and in with the New

By Nicole Axelrod

The SAT has been the quintessential standardized college-readiness test since 1926, but beginning this year, the College Board has decided to switch things up.

When the concept of standardized pre-college testing was first created, the United States was divided between the ACT and the SAT. The SAT was taken mainly on the East Coast and was considered the more “cosmopolitan” test; it tested students on harder, college-level material and required comprehensive knowledge of complex vocabulary.

The ACT, taken mainly in the Midwest, tested material covered in high school and was considered to be a test of how well students grasped the material they had learned in the past four years. While some of the problems are considered easier, the challenge of the ACT is the short amount of time allotted for students to complete all of the questions per section.

Fast forward to 2015, and students have slowly drifted away from the older and more traditional SAT. Many students have begun to choose the straightforwardness of the ACT over the obscure vocabulary questions of those included in the SAT.

Because of these patterns in test taking, the College Board has decided to remove the vocabulary-based questions. The new test now focuses

on “higher-level logical and reasoning skills” versus “isolated skills,” so the test will measure skills that are relevant and applicable to real life. With the new SAT, it will be harder to use specific “tricks” and “rules” for answering the questions (College Board).

scoring back to a 1600 scale, making the essay optional and twice as long, and combining the Reading and Writing sections.

Some reading passages will now be science-based and require students to read and understand graphs. Newly added “evidence sup-

as much and tutors are less confident on how exactly to teach the new test.

“Not a lot of people have been advised to take the new SAT because there are no samples to practice, and nobody is sure of what is going to be on it. I don’t even know of anyone taking it,” said junior Alli Hamburger.

While the new PSAT, which was administered on October 14, is essentially the new SAT without the essay, many students have already begun tutoring or studying and have already made up their minds about which test to take.

“I think what you’re going to find in the junior class is many students are going to do the ACT because it’s more of a known entity. It’s very much in line with classroom learning, and [students] know what to expect. For those students who have already started preparing, [the ACT] would be the test they would be the most familiar with,” said guidance counselor Susan Binney.

The future of the new SAT depends largely on what happens this first year of its administration. While the ACT versus SAT debate and competition continues to rage on, the College Board was quick to realize that the only way to keep up with the ever-changing wants and needs of today’s high schoolers was out with the old and in with the new.

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**“The new SAT aims to make a student’s performance on the test a better representation of his or her current and future grades.”**

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The new SAT aims to make a student’s performance on the test a better representation of his or her current and future grades. In the past, the complexity and deceptiveness of the test questions made it likely that a student’s score would not be a reflection of their transcript and academic abilities.

Other major changes include more predictability and specificity in the types of reading passages and the percent of questions that require different skills. The College Board is also reverting the test

port questions” demand that students find specific evidence for their answers while removing any personal biases. Tutors and teachers alike have begun to notice that the new test now resembles the ACT in many ways.

From the perspective of many juniors who are taking the SAT during this school year, it does not make much sense to take the new SAT. There are very few practice tests for the test since this is the first year it is being administered, so students are not able to practice

## Climate Survey Hopes to Identify Ways to Improve BB

By Emma DePaola

In November, the school district conducted a survey to gather data based on the community’s views of the school’s climate. This survey was offered to all high school and middle school students, students in grades 3-5, all teachers and staff, and to all the parents of the community. By offering the survey to a wide range of people in the school district, the Board of Education hopes that data results will reflect the perspectives of many people and lead to the identification of aspects about the school climate that require change.

“The ultimate idea behind the survey is to gather data that will assist the district and school board with embarking on a strategic planning process in the 2016-2017 school year,” said Interim Superintendent of Schools Jonathan Ross.

Since survey results will not be released until January, changes to the schools, if any need to be made, will not be implemented until the next school year.

School climate, according to the New York State Education Department, is defined as “the quality and character of school life.” This includes the interactions between students and faculty, the learning environment students are in, and the overall attitude of the school.

The survey was commissioned by the Board of Education, with Director of Guidance Mary Mediate in charge of the committee that chose the instrument by which to administer the survey to the community. Based on the data, the Board of Education will determine long-term goals and priorities, improve college readiness, continue effective teaching and administration, and create an action plan for moving forward in the improvement of the aspects of our school’s climate.

“The survey solicits perceptions on the following: school atmosphere, safety, bullying, equipment and facilities, the school bus, technology, teaching and learning, the principal and administration, extracurricular activities, communication and involvement, the superintendent, school district management, curriculum training, and overall satisfaction,” said Mediate.

Part of the plan for improving school climate is identifying continuous processes of evaluation. This would continue to provide data in the future and to see what could be improved regarding the atmosphere of the school by analyzing the opinions of students, faculty, administrators, and parents in the community.

The Board of Education believes that it is important that

students feel safe and welcome in their learning environment. When students are comfortable in their school, it can have many positive effects such as higher grades, improved standardized test scores, an increase in self-esteem, and less substance abuse, depression, and anxiety.

In order to ensure that students feel completely safe and at ease in school, the Board of Education will analyze the data that will be gathered from the survey in order to identify certain aspects of the schools that should be changed.

“I was impressed with the depth and scope of the questions asked, and I think the survey will generate lots of information if the students took it seriously,” said Principal Patricia Lambert.

The survey firm, Nielson, created the questions in the survey with the experience of administering similar surveys in hundreds of other schools. The specific composition of questions given to students is called the Nielson Harris Interactive Survey. The questions are meant to ensure validity in students’ responses in order to receive accurate results. In addition, the data received from the questions will help to clarify which aspects of the school have the greatest influence on the stu-

dents and community.

On the day of the survey, students were administered the survey by a teacher that they do not have in the current school year, because students were required to answer questions about their current teachers. Thus, possible feelings of discomfort while students were taking the surveys were eliminated.

“The PTA was pleased to see the school district take a proactive role in trying to improve our children’s school experience. Taking in the opinions of parents, students, and staff will provide comprehensive results for administrators to work with. We look forward to seeing the results of survey and will work with the schools to implement any changes,” said PTA co-President Hanna Poplasky.

Some students generally believe that they have good relationships with teachers and faculty, which helps to enhance school climate. Feeling comfortable with one’s teachers can help to provide a welcoming learning environment, thus motivating students to feel encouraged and do well.

“I have always felt very comfortable in the classroom and I have great relationships with all of my teachers,” said junior Jonah Glick.

## Blind Brook Students Learn to Drive in Control

By Paul Soden

On November 14, a group of Blind Brook students attended the In-Control Driving Program in Andover, Massachusetts. Throughout this daylong event, students were educated on the principles of defensive driving through both traditional classroom instruction and hands-on training behind the wheel. According to the In-Control Family Foundation, this intensive curriculum was adapted from Massachusetts and Vermont state police driving courses.

Students began the four- and a half hour-long course by learning about Antilock Braking Systems (ABS Panic Stopping), a technology that prevents a car's brakes from locking, which can be extremely hazardous in inclement weather conditions. Students were then able to put this information into practice and test out ABS vs. Non-ABS cars to discern the extent of the technology's efficacy.

The next segment of the program included a slalom course. This portion of the class offered very individualized instruction on basic steering-wheel hand positioning and vehicle acceleration. The course then advanced to discuss the dangers of tailgating and backing-up, and provided a description of proper lane-changing practices.

Safe driving in extreme conditions was another major focus of the class.

"The course simulates various different road conditions and provides students with accident diversion techniques while also giving them strategies on how to drive more safely," said Lambert.

Additional material covered includes vehicle maintenance, vehicle troubleshooting, airbag awareness, cell phone use while driving, road rage prevention, and emergency avoidance tactics. The course primarily taught on the foundations of environmental assessment and urged participants to be fully aware of their surroundings while behind the wheel.

"The program teaches students that speed is a major factor in automobile accidents and that they must be aware of all of the functioning components of their cars in order to truly be an informed driver," said Lambert. The lasting impact of this program is its ability to provide students with the experience of reacting to hazards while driving, without directly putting them into those situations.

"You never know how you will react to obscure driving conditions, and adrenaline greatly hinders your response to a real emergency. This program gives students the opportunity to prac-

tice their reactions in a controlled environment," said Lambert.

The In-Control Driving Program is a non-for-profit organization that was founded in 2003 by Brandon Bogart, a professional racecar driver, with the aim of reducing mortality rates related to motor vehicle accidents caused by human error. Since its establishment, the program has attracted students of all backgrounds to its Massachusetts airport training tracks.

"The instructors connected to students and made them realize that it is not glamorous to drive fast," said trip chaperone and Security Monitor Joe Funigiello.

In 2007, the Murphy Insurance Agency teamed up with the Murphy Sisters Foundation and pledged their support, stating, "Automobile crashes are the number one killer of people under 45, and In-Control's program has been found to reduce crash rates in new drivers by 70 percent." These statistics attracted even more families and schools to the program, including the Blank family.

In 2001, former student Michael Blank was killed in a motor vehicle accident on Christmas Day. To eulogize his memory and to prevent any other families from enduring the loss of a child, the Blank family created the Michael Blank Memorial Fund. Through

this fund, the Blank's spread the message of the In-Control Driving Program and are able to subsidize the cost of its tuition for Blind Brook students.

"The Blind Brook Community is indebted to the Blanks for offering this incredible experience and for embodying the silver lining of this misfortune," said Principal Patricia Lambert.

The Blanks have promoted participation in the event by speaking at an annual orientation meeting for parents at the high school. During this year's meeting, Mr. Blank began by speaking about the type of car that his son drove on the day of the accident. He posed to parents in the audience the question of whether the outcome of his son's car crash would have been any different if he had chosen to drive a different car. Through this, Blank began to touch on the speed capacity in different car models as well as the importance of regular vehicle maintenance in relation to safe driving.

"[Blank] gave advice that was poignant to hear and spoke about the factor of car model speed in motor vehicle accidents. I can only imagine what he goes through every day constantly questioning what the outcome would have been if his son had taken a different car," said Lambert.

## Ms. Van B Returns to Blind Brook

By Rachel Goodman

After a brief two years of retirement, Blind Brook art teacher Janis Van Bourgondien has returned to the school district as a maternity leave replacement for high school art teacher Meghan Petras.

After being a part of the art department for 40 years, Van Bourgondien, typically referred to as Ms. Van B, retired at the end of the 2013 school year. She is now reunited with many of her old students from middle school who have decided to pursue art and have grown into talented and dedicated artists in high school.

"It's nice for me to see that the students I taught who were very good in 7th and 8th grade, are even better now that they are in high school. The progression and the development of their art skills is really nice to see as a teacher who started with them," Van Bourgondien said.

She is especially impressed by the work of the seniors, as many of them are continuing to build portfolios of their artwork that they will send to colleges.

"I like seeing what the AP kids are doing, their drawing skills, how far they've come...that to me is impressive. That's fun for an art teacher to see, a student that you knew had talent in middle school, to be in their senior year and the drawing has expanded so much they've become so detail oriented and so incredible in

the skill level," Van Bourgondien said.

Initially, most of Petras's students were nervous about who would take her place, especially the Advanced Art, Portfolio Development, and Advanced Placement (AP) Art students who did not want to get off track with their learning and lack the development of skills necessary to advance in the art world.

AP Art, in particular, requires students to produce concentrations every two weeks, adding to a total of twenty-four portfolio-quality works created by the end of the year that will be submitted to and evaluated by the College Board. Petras's departure meant that the district would quickly have to find a well-qualified, experienced individual to fill her shoes and ensure that all deadlines were met and all guidelines were strictly followed.

When Petras announced to her classes that Van Bourgondien was her replacement, students were both thrilled and relieved to hear that she was returning. Because most of her students had already had her as a teacher before, a solid foundation of trust and respect was firmly planted before she even returned.

"I honestly didn't know what to expect because it was her [Ms. Petras] guidance that helped me stay on track with the deadlines and my artwork...Once I found out Ms. Van B was going to be the replace-

ment, I was really happy because it was someone who I knew and had as [a] teacher before," said senior Sanika Mehta, an AP Art student.

Van Bourgondien expressed that she wants to maintain Petras' way of running her classes, and is going to try and follow her style of teaching.

"I'd like to keep up her [Petras'] curriculum. I don't want her program to fall apart," said Van B.

However, Van Bourgondien is undoubtedly going to make her mark during her teaching reprise. As early as her first day back on the job, she immediately became invested in every student's artwork, and has since dedicated herself to getting acquainted with all of Petras' ongoing assignments.

Van Bourgondien is always open to answer any questions, give any advice, or simply just help a student generate ideas for his or her artwork. It is evident that all of her students



Photo/Rachel Brown  
Ms. Van Bourgondien works with art student Rachel Goodman.

are looking forward to a revival of her wisdom and guidance in the coming months as she continues to get readjusted to life at Blind Brook.

"I love having Ms. Van B back, I feel so comfortable asking her for advice on my projects and she is always so helpful. She really loves what she does and it feels just like middle school again!" said junior Lauren Santarsiero, an AP Art student.

## Angel or Devil? Don't Choose.

When I was in middle school, the greatest evil a girl could perpetrate was to show her bra straps. Neglecting to conceal these corrupt contraptions was a mark of the immoral, an overstep of the rigid boundaries of gender, an open acknowledgement of the start of womanhood, and thus, the beginning of an irrevocable descent into the perpetual depravity of her gender.

It may seem like I'm blowing the whole bra strap thing out of proportion, but then again, what else would you expect from a woman? We *are* notorious for being emotional and irrational beings.

If I seem a bit bitter, it's only because I am.

As I've grown older, I have become increasingly aware that the playing field between my male counterparts and me is anything but level. In fact, it is inclined at such a steep angle towards those of the XY variety that sometimes I feel at danger of falling off the field completely.

Having lived only seventeen years, I can't pretend to understand some of the challenges, like the wage gap or paid family leave, that this imbalance forces upon

other women. But what I have experienced—and what hasn't changed in any of those seventeen years—is the toxicity of the Madonna-Whore complex, a dichotomy that extends its tentacles into an alarmingly large portion of my life and the lives of other women.

The complex finds its roots in the early 1900s with the postulations of the infamous psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. But before completely dismissing the Madonna-Whore complex as the ravings of the man who coined various stages of adolescence as “phallic” and “genital,” truly consider the term's meaning.

The complex slyly divides all women into two distinct categories: the Madonna, a saintly individual that disavows all sin, and the prostitute, a debased creature that bathes in wickedness. The former is loved; the latter is desired. And the middle? Well, that just doesn't exist.

The Madonna-Whore complex began as a lens through which men could assess women. Those who inspired lust were the mistresses, the concubines, the temptresses of otherwise honorable men. They were the corrupting factor, while the Madonna purified. She was the mother, the wife, the angel—respected, but not the object of lust.

You may scorn this view, thinking it totally antiquated, and I would agree with you. But that doesn't change the fact that it is just as prevalent now as it was in the time of corsets. The complex has just switched masks to fit with the times.

Now, we possess new classifications for women. We have the slut, the cool girl, the friend-zoner, the girl-next-door, the tease, and the nice girl. There are more, but each of these, positive or negative, has something in common: they all are descriptions based on how a woman measures up to the desires of a man.

Flirts but doesn't go farther? Tease. Pretty, but unattainable? Girl-next-door. Appreciates her sexuality? Slut. Won't date the “nice guy”? Friend-zoner.

These typecasts have been bred so deeply into our culture that it is no longer acceptable to place blame for them exclusively on men. The labels are slapped on women by people of all genders, all races, and in all classes.

A perfect example of this cropped a couple of weeks ago. I was sitting with a group of people—men *and* women—as they debated the merits of two members at the very top of the celebrity stratum, Beyoncé and Taylor Swift. Praise was given to Swift for refusing to bare her midriff, while Beyoncé was vilified for performing in more revealing outfits. No remark was made on either of their singing, songwriting, or dancing abilities—which is what the women are *actually* famous for—yet Swift was still selected as superior, solely for the clothing she wears.

Once again, the Madonna-Whore complex reared its chauvinistic head. In this case, wardrobe titled Swift as the sweet girl-next-door and Beyoncé as the dangerous temptress. Yet, if dating habits had been the topic in question, the labels could certainly have been reversed, with Swift condemned as a serial dater and Beyoncé lauded as a wife and mother.

That a woman can effortlessly bounce from one stereotype to its opposite reveals just how arbitrary the Madonna-Whore complex truly is. The sole determining factor is the attribute that her judges choose to analyze that day.

So if it's so simple to slip from one category to the next, why do we care at all? Why do we, as women, allow these categories to define us, and why do we define each other in that way?

Because accepting complacency towards social norms is easier than encouraging defiance. Because championing the fair treatment of women carries the risk of being called an estrogen-crazed feminist. Because only now are we beginning to realize that adding the label of Madonna or whore removes all other aspects of a woman's identity.

Strip away the saint and the sinner, though, and so many more important layers are revealed. Taylor Swift has used the proceeds from her “boy-bashing” songs to donate \$50,000 to the New York City public school system. Beyoncé is co-founder of an organization, called CHIME FOR CHANGE, that seeks to empower women through increased awareness and education.

I am a seventeen-year-old woman. I adore football and cats. My dancing skills are analogous to those of an unbalanced human pogo stick. I can be a slob when I want and I can dress to the nines whenever else. If my bra straps show once in awhile, who cares?

My personality—just like everyone else's—spans a wide spectrum. It's about time that we started respecting that.

I am not a devil. I am not an angel. Neither are you. And that's okay.

*Lily Werlinich*

Editor-in-Chief, *Focus*

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## Colombia to New York

Junior Carlos Morales

My name is Carlos Morales and I am from Bogotá, Colombia. I moved to Blind Brook in March. Though I'm from Colombia, I was born in Copenhagen, Denmark. At the time, my dad worked for the Colombian Embassy and his job required him to move around often. After living in Copenhagen, my dad got transferred to Washington, D.C. (which explains my lack of an accent). I then moved back to Colombia, and now I am here. After living in Colombia for so long, I became accustomed to that way of life.

One of the differences I saw immediately after moving here was that the teachers and students have a more direct relationship. This makes the teachers more approachable, creating a more personal environment, especially considering the smaller class sizes. This seems to have a positive effect in the lessons because the students share a sort of bond with their teacher, so they are more motivated to participate and pay attention in class.

Teachers also seem to be very energetic and committed to their classes here. In Blind Brook, the teachers try to engage students into working hard using diverse styles of teaching, so the class won't be the same thing over and over again. The classes aren't dull here; teachers make sure to keep them interesting and to avoid the feeling of just doing work by going through the motions. This has even changed my perspective on certain subjects.

Classes that I hated there, I have begun to like here. I am more motivated to do homework, and I even get excited for some classes. Also, people here are allowed to choose many of the non-man-

datory subjects. You have the freedom to construct your own schedule.

I see great opportunity in this freedom. Back home, everyone has the same schedule and everyone in the grade has the same classes. We would also have ICFES preparatory classes every Saturday from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The ICFES is like Colombia's SAT. We took tests for two hours and then had a 30 minute break. We would come back from our break and take another two hour test.

Rye Brook might be a really small town, but it definitely has its advantages. I wake up at 6:40 every morning to get ready for school. I arrive back at my house at around 3:10. When I had soccer, I would arrive at 6:00 p.m. at the latest.

In Colombia, I had to wake up at 5:30 in the morning, while school started at 7:40 a.m. I would get home at 5:30 pm each day. My school was an hour away with traffic, and there was traffic everyday. It would then take another hour to get home. After an exhausting day in school on top of all of the traffic, you don't really want to do anything when you get home.

Here, on the other hand, it seems as if you have time to do anything you want after school. Being in the city where I went to school is completely different. You don't have time to do any of those activities and get your school work done. It is upsetting to think that you are only in school, in traffic, or doing homework.

Something that stands out to me is the school's environment. Having ranked number 33 in the country, according to *Newsweek's* "America's Top High Schools 2015," Blind Brook is held to a high bar, which results in competition. Everyone

works against each other, and instead of supporting our peers, we compare grades and criticize one another. Instead of doing the best we can do, we try to do better than our classmates, just for us to get into what we believe is a "good" college.

In Colombia, we don't think about where we want to go to college until our senior year. Even though where I went was considered the best private school in Colombia, and even though we had those similar pressures to keep up, we never compared grades. As a matter of fact, we helped each other out as much as we could. No one wanted to see the other person fail. We were united in Colombia as a student body, whereas here, there are divisions between grades, friend groups, ideologies—between pretty much everything.

Our high school was just as small as Blind Brook with only 450 students, but there weren't major differences between friend groups. From what I have heard, people here have been friends with each other since they were very young. The cliques have been pre-established since pre-school. This has left a rigidity between friend groups.

The cultures between Colombia and the United States are very different. For example, in the U.S., contrary to popular belief, it is a country that is very open to change. It is accepting of many things and new ideas. In this school there is a pride club, that battles discrimination against people who are "different." This club is indicative of an attitude prevalent in America which makes it a very accepting and liberal country.

Colombia is a more conservative coun-

try, and the wave of LGBTQ+ rights has not hit my country yet. People in Colombia have not been open about their sexuality until now. It is a slower process there because we are not used to these accepting ideas. The question of whether these people should have equal rights has not been brought up until now. It is all very new.

Up until last year, nobody had come out. This year, one guy decided to come out. Even though we were accepting of it, we still fooled around with the idea of him identifying different with his sexuality. Although we are okay with him being him, we are not as progressive, and are not as quick to change as a whole country.

In Colombia, if the idea of a Pride Club had even been brought up, a lot of people would have laughed at the proposal—despite our school being the educated minority in the country.

Everyone likes to criticize Blind Brook, for what is and what it is not. Personally, and especially from a foreigner's perspective, I have criticisms myself. But there are always going to be complaints anywhere you go.

The academics here are rigorous in an environment that fosters learning. We have to be appreciative of what we have, and not critical of what we lack. There's always room for improvement, but we need to find the capacity within ourselves to make changes. The issues here are not because of the faculty. The issues I have witnessed are caused by the students. I have lived in worse places, and I know that there's a lot to be thankful for.

## Be an American: Provide Refuge

Senior Noah Lubin

By Noah Lubin

After the tragic events in Paris, American's have become more skeptical about accepting Syrian Refugees because they fear that terrorists reside amongst the refugees. This has caused presidential candidates, mayors, and governors to announce their opposition to accepting the refugees.

The hysteria culminated in a House bill that would stop the United States from accepting refugees and would require that the Homeland Security secretary, FBI director, and National Intelligence director approve each refugee's admittance. In essence, they would have to claim each refugee is not a security threat.

Truly, though, the bill's solution is to not make the vetting process more secure, but to delay the process altogether. However, the majority of politicians who have succumbed to the refugee panic do not actually know what the screening process entails for all refugees, let alone those of Syrian background.

The process for all refugees coming into the country entails many rigorous steps. They must apply to the United Nation's High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), which will check refu-

gees' IDs and conduct interviews, from which only 1% will proceed. During this stage, Syrian refugees will undergo an iris scan.

Later on, the National Counterterrorism Center/Intelligence Community, FBI, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and State Department, screen candidates for security risks, such as outstanding warrants or criminal violations. Syrian refugees also have an enhanced review by the DHS for applicants' eligibility and credibility.

The DHS and USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate conduct another interview and take fingerprints. Any new information that raises questions causes more security checks, putting a case on hold and possibly rejected.

Then, there the fingerprints are screened against FBI and DHS databases containing watch-list information and previous immigration encounters, along with the US Department of Defense database that includes fingerprint records taken from Iraq and other locations.

All of this happens before an applicant even gets near an airplane.

Refugees are vetted over and over again throughout an 18-24 month pe-

riod. Pending applications are continuously checked against terrorist databases to ensure that new and relevant terrorism information has not surfaced. A refugee can be denied if any security issues arise.

If a refugee can pass all of these stages, then applicants undergo screening from US Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center-Passenger and TSA Secure Flight Program. A successful refugee arrives in the US and applies for a green card, triggering a new wave of security procedures.

It's ridiculous to assume—like many politicians do—that terrorists would voluntarily submit themselves to this type of enhanced security check with government review when the visa waiver process is more straightforward. It only has one simple step.

Anyone with a passport can buy a plane ticket and arrive on U.S. soil. All they then have to do is pass through U.S. customs or get a visa waiver by going to an interview at a U.S. consulate.

The terrifying thing about this is that terrorists know about this easier process. And they're using it. Just look at the San Bernardino shootings: the

woman, originally from Pakistan, was able to get an American visa and then go on a killing spree with her husband, murdering fourteen and wounding twenty-one.

So maybe what the politicians should be focusing on is the visa waiver process, not the refugee screening process.

Few people realize that denying refugees actually plays into the hands of ISIS. If the House bill becomes law, we would be helping ISIS spread their message about the "evils" of the U.S. It is well known ISIS preaches that our nation hates Muslims. By keeping refugees from safety, we make it easier for ISIS to convince other Muslims to join their rank, and cause refugees increased suffering.

America has a tradition of welcoming refugees with open arms, one that has made our nation great. Turning away from the Syrian refugees because of fear destroys this principle and aids the enemy.

We need to act responsibly. We need to realize that our screening process is secure enough to let in Syrian refugees. And we need to formulate meaningful resolutions to keep America safe, instead of just blindly following the fear mongering of our politicians.

## Predict the Future? It's Possible

Senior Leah Kratochvil

The post read: Google Fortune Telling: what does your future look like? Facebook was informing me that two people had recently shared the link.

The link opened a page called betagoogle.com that looked like Google's homepage, but with the subtitle "Fortunetelling." In the search box: "Type here a question about your future." The "Search" button read, "Predict my future." I followed the instructions and began typing, "Will I get into my early decision school?"

But before I even tapped the "I" key, Google began filling in my question for me. I was awestruck. How did Google know?! Wait. No. It wasn't my question Google was typing, but rather a question that should have been mine.

When the cursor stopped self-ambulating, the question read, "Where can I find a safe place?" The suggested searches included questions like, "Will I be reunited with my family?" and, "Is there a place where they will accept me?" I sat staring at my screen, confused, utterly lost, until the page automatically redirected after twelve seconds: "Of course we can't predict your future! But 60 million refugees ask themselves every day if they have a future at all."

Syria. Of course. I'd never felt more guilty, more selfish, more embarrassed. And I imagine that many, if not most people felt the same way after visiting this website.

Betagoogle has baited Americans with our weakness—self-indulgence—and reeled us into a

trap of guilt and embarrassment. In this way, it has raised millions of dollars, and more importantly, awareness, of the situation in Syria.

It shouldn't be this way.

It's not that I'm disappointed that more people probably know about the Syrian Civil War and subsequent refugee crisis, and more money is being donated to the refugees and their wellbeing. But as citizens of a prominent country in the international realm, we shouldn't have to be deceived or "guilt-tripped" into becoming aware, and subsequently into taking action to improve the situation at hand -- whatever that may be.

Alexa.com, an Amazon company for website analytics, indicates that betagoogle.com is currently the 5573rd most-visited site in the US, and that Americans make up 46.2% of all international site visitors. To put that in perspective, Indians make up 15.9%, Canadians 4.3%, Norwegians 2.9%, and citizens of the UK 2.2%.

Another site used for website analytics, SEMrush.com, is currently predicting that if web traffic stays relatively constant, Betagoogle will see 51,600 American visitors in the next month. This means that three months after the site's August launch, 1,720 more Americans are self-interested enough to seek knowledge about their own futures.

Did Google truly feel that the best way to reach people was by creating a website cloaked in a self-interested ploy? Does it really take selfishness to incite Ameri-

cans to selflessness?

Some might say no. The US population is about five times that of the UK, so the US would naturally have a higher percent contribution in total world visitors to betagoogle.com. But India's population is almost four times that of the US, and yet its percentage contribution is approximately a third of the US percentage. Access to Internet in each country is similar. The population of the UK is almost twice that of Canada and almost thirteen times that of Norway, and yet has lower percent contributions than each.

And yes, there are other reasons that one might visit the site -- I visited it at least six separate times just to write this. But the general trend is clear.

Our relative self-focus has secluded us from world affairs. I'm focused on getting into college. For others, the distraction might lie in relationships, self-image, or pursuit of wealth. Is it not part of our duty as Americans to be aware of all of our surroundings? Maybe some newspapers should be free. Maybe public institutions with TVs should be required to show the news for x hours a day. Change that will allow us to shift our focus to helping fellow humans to survive, let alone live, is crucial.

What has Blind Brook done to encourage worldliness? The only class in which I've ever gotten a true exposure to current events was Global 10, when we had quarterly presentations on a recent news story of our choice. This

year, my only class in which Syria has been mentioned is AP Language. Our teachers aren't leaving room for such discussion in their curriculum or time for it in their lesson plans. Our morning announcements include "upcoming events" that have already happened, but nothing about the 30 new refugees (according to Betagoogle) that left their lives behind in the minute since the announcements started.

As for myself, since experiencing Betagoogle for the first time, I have paid more attention to news regarding refugees. I watched a video that summarized the conflict, starting with its underlying origins and comprehensively covering the complexity of the topic. It's called, "Syria's War: A 5-Minute History." Yes. It's five minutes. It's not much, but it's a start. Watch it. On your phone, your iPad. Watch it while you're waiting for likes on Instagram or for someone to Snap you back. Watch it when you simply cannot take another Geometry proof or McCarvill problem set. Make an attempt to at least know what the conflict's about.

No, Google unfortunately cannot predict our individual futures. Nor, I believe, can anyone or anything. The least we all can do is try to understand, because some knowledge of the future needs nothing beyond common sense. And common sense says, if we do nothing more than we're doing now, the situation is guaranteed to never change.

## Fighting the New "Normal"

Junior Ari Shinsky

By Ari Shinsky

Harassment at Blind Brook has become way too much of a norm. It often goes unnoticed by the victim, the bystander, and the bully. The word "faggot" is thrown around as an insult, whether or not the person being insulted takes it seriously. The word "gay," used in a derogatory fashion, is also a popular slur.

However, I rarely see an adult step in and do something about it. This creates an unsafe environment for many students, especially those who are part of the LGBTQ\* community or any other minority group.

School staff needs to be more aware of what kids around them say. If they hear such slurs, it should be their duty to intervene. At the same time, however, it should not solely be the adults' responsibility to try to fix this problem.

Students should call attention to the problem, too. This way, there is more effort in trying to fix issues

like this, because there is definitely strength in numbers.

I constantly hear students calling people or things "gay." According to the National School Climate Survey by GLSEN, 65% of students have heard homophobic remarks such as "fag" or "dyke" used, 30% have missed at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, and 85% were verbally harassed in the past year.

A lot of Blind Brook High School students also assume certain people are gay, or at least not straight because of the way they walk, talk, act or from what they wear. This makes a lot of other students who hear this use of language feel uncomfortable.

Sexual orientation has no correlation to behavior; it only controls the gender which someone is attracted to. Not everyone who walks, talks, acts a certain way or wears certain things is gay, and not

everyone who is gay walks, talks, acts a certain way or wears certain things.

It is understandable that teachers cannot always monitor their students' language because it is very unlikely that a student would use such words to their faces.

But, as teachers walk around the classrooms, if they hear a derogatory term being used, they need to step in and let them know that it is not okay to say things like that. Even better, they could turn the situation into a lesson.

This also applies when they hear this homophobic language outside of their classrooms. When the school staff hears students using these terms in a derogatory way, they cannot just walk past it like it never happened. The issue needs to be addressed.

Students can also help by letting their peers know that they are not okay with them using that kind of language.

People should not feel unsafe in school. Enough stress is put on students already. There is absolutely no need to add more through homophobic slurs.

When people hear homophobia around them, they should bring it up as many times as needed until it dies out. Pull them aside and teach them right versus wrong. Put posters around the school informing readers about the dangers of homophobia.

The TV in the Commons is also a great way to display facts like this. Little by little, we can bring attention to the unconscious homophobia in our school. Our school's PRIDE club already does tons of work to try to spread awareness, education and to eliminate the homophobia.

This issue can only be fixed by the action we all take as students, teachers, security guards, and, quite simply, human beings.

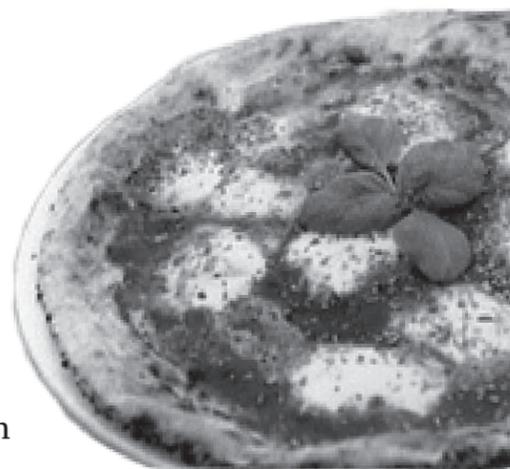
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## ISIS's Greatest Ally: The Obama Administration *an opinion*

By Max Goldfarb

I'm angry. I'm outraged, actually. Seventeen and a half years of living in the United States and I have never feared for my safety—until now.

Every morning my parents wake up before the sun rises and commute to the epicenter of the free world, New York City. Every morning they walk through the main concourse of one of the world's architectural masterpieces of the 20th century alongside 750,000 commuters, tourists, and shoppers.

Grand Central is not your typical building: it is the heart that pumps blood to the entire city. If your heart explodes, you die. Not only would a terrorist attack on Grand Central destroy a cultural landmark that embodies everything that New York stands for, but it would also paralyze the free world as we know it.

If a seventeen-year-old high school student can ascertain such knowledge, then why can't ISIS? There's a simple answer: it can and it will.

It is the responsibility of our leader, our Commander and Chief, Barack Obama, to protect and shield us from such barbaric acts. And he's failing us.

The day before the Paris attacks, President Obama declared, in an interview with George Stephanopoulos, "Our goal has been first to contain, and we have contained them."

Although he was speaking at that time about ISIS's territorial expansion, Mr. President cannot be absolved for utterly disregarding ISIS's global-reach and capabilities.

Twelve hours later, 129 people were dead and 352 were wounded at the hands of the aforementioned radical Islamic organization. This tragedy unraveled on television screens before the eyes of millions of viewers worldwide. I listened to the sounds of gunshots as Parisians and foreigners alike were brutally executed, one by one, at what was supposed to be a quiet meal at Comptoir Voltaire Café, a soccer match between the international powerhouses of France and Germany, and a performance at the Bataclan Theater.

Do I blame President Obama for these horrific attacks? Absolutely not. What I do blame him for is his response and his remarkably un-presidential attitude. He claimed that ISIS's attacks on Paris were a mere setback and that he would stay the course of his ISIS strategy because he believes in its ultimate success.

On the Monday following the attacks, President Obama announced that he planned to proceed with his plan of granting asylum to 10,000 Syrian refugees.

This despite the Congressional testimony given by Federal Bureau of Investigation Director James Comey—a man he himself appointed—that the United States did not have the capacity to properly vet Syrian refugees. Comey said that "a number of people who were of serious concern" slipped through the screening of the Iraq War refugees, a very similar situation to that of Syria.

French Intelligence disclosed that multiple perpetrators of the Parisian

attacks entered Europe by posing as Syrian refugees. Over thirty governors notified President Obama that they are unwilling to accept refugees until questions and concerns about the vetting process were answered and resolved.

In response, President Obama deplorably accused Republicans of being "scared of women and orphans." Sadly, but ironically, one week after the attacks, an eleven-year-old girl in Nigeria blew herself up, killing two people in the name of radical Islam.

President Obama further radiated his egotistical nature when he implied that GOP presidential candidates who are not willing to accept Syrian refugees are bigots or naïve.

President Obama, if I am a bigot for fearing for the safety of my family and friends, then you are un-American for being willing to let Americans die despite the thousands of body bags that demonstrate ISIS's capabilities. I indict you for politicizing an issue of national security.

I find President Obama's aggressiveness towards the GOP alarming as he seems to be nastier to people that disagree with him, rather than to the terrorist group threatening to attack the United States. Also, his dedication to accepting the refugees disturbs me because five of the most powerful Muslim countries in the world, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain, have declined to take a single Syrian refugee. According to Donna Edmunds of *Breit Bart*, these nations believe that "accepting large numbers of Syrians is a threat to their safety, as terrorists could be hiding within an influx of people."

Their concerns are legitimate. It was only the Wednesday after the Paris attacks that five Syrians, discovered with fake Greek passports, were detained in Honduras after attempting to board a flight to the United States.

In addition, Secretary of State John Kerry has expressed sympathies to radical Islam and to ISIS, specifically. Kerry condoned radical Islamic behavior in the case of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks that left twelve people dead just this past January in Paris. He stated that, "There was a sort of particularized focus and perhaps even a legitimacy in terms of — not a legitimacy, but a rationale" when questioned about the rising incidences of terrorist activity this week.

I can't even begin to comprehend John Kerry's rationale for dignifying a terrorist act. President Obama and many members of the Democratic Party, including presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton, have agreed to not label ISIS as radical Islamists.

Are we so blinded by our need to be politically correct that we cannot call people that want to demolish the civilized world what they truly are?

President Obama and the accompanying clown car, your actions and your statements are in the utmost distaste. I personally apologize that there is no legacy left for you to salvage. You gambled that the media and public opinion would protect you and you lost.

When the liberal media turns on you that's when you know you've dug your feet too deep in the sand. But keep drinking the advice of your radical left-wing compatriots while the world bleeds and weeps, Mr. President.



Cartoon/Jeremy Weingarten

## Saying Bye to Biden in 2016 *an opinion*

By Carly Kabot

Vice President Joe Biden finally squashed speculations and rumors about his potential bid for president and many are beginning to see that he made the right choice.

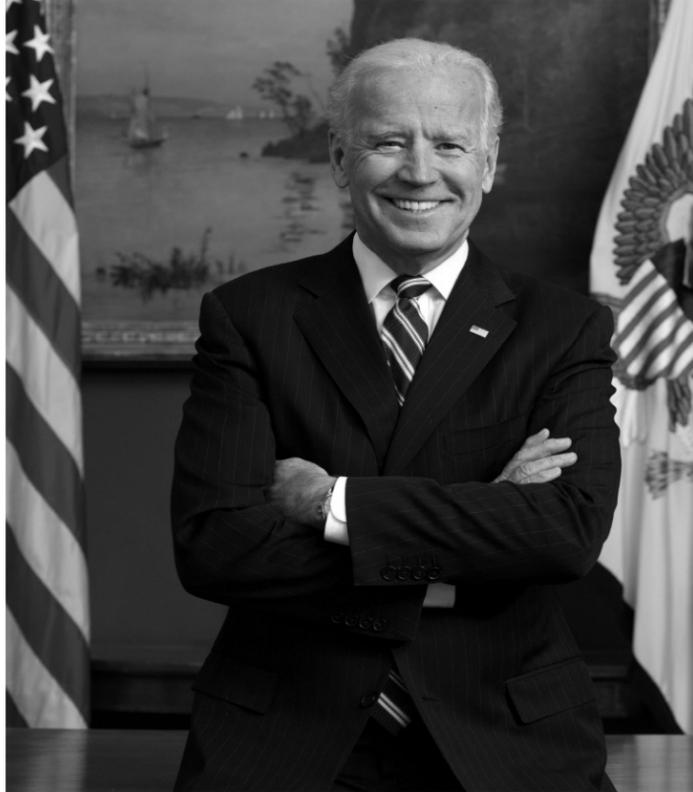
While numerous Democrats would have preferred to have an additional candidate to run against Clinton and Sanders, one with a great deal of experience, Biden knew his chances of winning were a long shot—even though he knows he could still throw punches. More importantly, though, he knew that due to tragic personal circumstances, this was not the opportune time to engulf himself and his family in an all-consuming, demanding, and an utterly exasperating presidential campaign.

Unlike many other politicians, Biden has been very open about the adversity that he and his family have been facing as of late. Without any shame or chagrin, Biden informed the world that his continuing grief for the loss of his son, Beau, from a brain tumor in May has left him unable to fully commit to an arduous campaign. For his candor, the Vice President is due a tremendous deal of respect.

In an interview with Norah O'Donnell, Biden explained that he could not “run for president unless” he was willing to throw his “entire being into it.” And because Beau’s death occurred less than a year ago, Biden is still coping with the immense loss. He explains that although he has coped with this loss for almost a year, he continues to grieve.

Jill Biden, wife of the Vice President, supported the idea of his candidacy. She believed this would be an opportunity to move forth on pressing issues, such as education and potential Supreme Court nominations. But still, as the media promulgated rumors and speculations about Biden’s family life, he knew that he was not ready for such a commitment.

Instead, Biden chose to devote the time needed for a campaign to his family, and especially to his granddaughter, Natalie Biden. The eleven-year-old has struggled immensely with the loss of her father, and the potential added loss of her grandfather’s attention would have been an



*Courtesy of whitehouse.gov*

added burden.

After his presidential candidacy in 1987, hopeful Biden loyalists thought that this would be his best chance to make a bid for the Oval Office. Some part of Joe Biden indeed wanted to run—it was still a

dream of his. Now, that door has most likely closed forever, the key thrown away.

If Biden had decided to run, a much tighter and grueling Democratic election would have ensued. The Vice President would have had to compete with front-runner Hillary Clinton on a great deal of issues where they share a similar stance, which would mean nit picking, and, quite frankly, tearing her apart for his own benefit.

On the contrary, Biden has established that he and Hillary Clinton get along well. While he does not condone her hostility towards many in the Republican Party, he has said, “The only reason to run is because I still think I could do a better job than anybody else could do...That’s the reason to run. I wouldn’t run against Hillary,” implying that he believes her up to the task.

Biden’s decision also plays to the future of the Democratic Party. Let’s face it: Hillary Clinton will likely receive the Democratic nomination for the 2016 Presidential Election, and she would have even if Biden had decided to throw in the chips.

In that respect, a campaign from Biden’s camp would have thrown punches left and

right, attempting to hammer Hillary wherever they could. If Biden had entered the race, we would have most likely see a battered Clinton stumbling into the general election—a potential catastrophe for the Democrats.

At the end of the day, we must respect the Joe Biden for the difficult decision he must have made. To choose between family and the presidency—the needs of blood and the dreams of the soul—is something not done easily. With the presidential race in its current haphazard state, we should be grateful not to have another candidate with only half his heart in the game, and we should honor the man for recognizing what is truly important.

## Taking Aim at Gun Control *an opinion*

By Spencer Kaplan

Gun control is silly. So is a lack thereof. Gun control is a largely misunderstood disagreement, and neither of the two sides really knows what they are talking about.

Liberals argue that the evidence is clear: guns lead to violence, and violence leads to death. “Just look at Australia,” they say. In Australia, there are little-to-no guns and an astonishingly low gun homicide rate. According to gunpolicy.org, there were only 40 firearm related homicides in the entire country in 2012. The one thing liberals often neglect to mention is that when Australia banned the guns after the Port Arthur shooting in 1996, it was mandatory to yield one’s arms. Other countries that have employed similar gun coercion include Nazi Germany, China, Cambodia, and the USSR. So let’s be realistic here: when liberals preach about the success in Australia, they are talking about the exception, not the rule.

On the other hand, conservatives are also misguided in their argument. Most of them are too caught up in the thought of depriving lib-

erty that they deprive themselves of common sense. Yes, one absolutely should have the right to bear arms. But there is a limit to the Second Amendment, just as there is a limit to the First. The First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech, but you still can’t yell “bomb!” on a plane because it endangers those around you. The same logic should be employed to the Second Amendment. One certainly has the right to have a gun, but nobody needs assault weapons, as they hold the potential to greatly endanger those around them.

Every day, you hear a new shooting on the news, and along with it the ensuing calls of liberals everywhere for gun control. But when five students were stabbed on November 4 at the University of California-Merced, the liberals were silent. There were no calls to ban knives and no presidential statement. Here lies the inherent problem. The issue is not about guns; it’s about violence. Guns, like knives, are simply tools used to carry out violence. When people crash cars, do we blame the car or the person who drove it? So why should we blame the guns for

the faults of violent people?

We shouldn’t. Instead of trying to rip guns away from law-abiding citizens or arm everyone to the teeth, a solution lies in investigating the root causes of violence, like economic and public issues, including poverty and social inaction. Perhaps if liberals and conservatives alike focused on these issues instead of constant gun rhetoric, they would actually see a change in gun violence.

Another important aspect to consider is mental health. In many cases of mass murder, the perpetrator gives off clear indications of their motives, whether it is on social media or interpersonal conversations. If we can correctly identify people who may have violent intentions before they commit their intended act, perhaps we can get them the medical attention that they need.

That being said, the mental health infrastructure in the United States is abysmal. According to USA Today, between 2009 and 2012, the states removed five billion dollars from care and jettisoned 10% of psychiatric hospital beds. Furthermore, in 2012, the National Survey on Drug

Use and Health found that about 40% of adults with critical mental illnesses did not receive any treatment in 2011.

One of those 40% who did not receive help was Jared Lee Loughner, a schizophrenic who shot and killed six people while injuring thirteen more, including Gabrielle Giffords, a United States Representative of Arizona. Maybe those six people could have been saved if we had the mental health infrastructure we desperately need.

Now more than ever, with guns in the forefront of public attention, Congress and the President need to take action—but not the action you would think. As an alternative to rambling on with useless bombast, both the Republicans and the Democrats need to come up with a bipartisan solution that addresses the underlying causes of violence in general, not just gun violence.

Until then, we will continue to hear endless news broadcasts about the next mentally ill killer who took to guns to kill as many people as they could.



## Spotlight Students

### Adam Newmark

By Isabella Lazar

Adam Newmark, a senior, is famous at Blind Brook for his skill with voices. He has thrilled audiences for years in countless high school theater productions and is currently half of the duo that provides the daily morning announcements. In the coming year, Newmark will be taking voice-acting lessons to improve his talent.

**Q:** How many plays have you performed in? Is there a favorite role you've had or character you've portrayed? Why?

**A:** This fall production was my tenth show. I performed in every show the school has put on since sixth grade. My favorite character was by far was Audrey II, or the plant, in *Little Shop of Horrors*. It was my first real try at doing a character that was solely based on my voice.

**Q:** How long have you been studying voice?

**A:** It really started during middle school when I began to practice accents and slowly realized I was actually pretty good at it and could pick them up easily. In fact, in eighth grade, during my performance in *Honk Jr.* I was able to use an accent and become a Russian bullfrog... [After puberty hit], I began to practice and read things online to help improve my voice.

**Q:** Where do you take voice acting lessons?

**A:** I haven't actually started taking lessons yet, that will come with the new year. These les-

sons take place in a small office in New York City with an even smaller recording studio. But I have been in a couple of highly selective workshops and have some recordings of myself, even a 30-minute audio book in which I voice the main character.

**Q:** What types of exercises do you do?

**A:** "There are many things [you can do] to improve a voice, whether it be for voice acting, or just public speaking. One thing to do is to grab a random newspaper, (like Focus), pick an article, and just start reading it out loud. A note for that is to pay close attention to your diction and annunciation of the words, which can be extremely important when recording something as the microphones pick up everything. Another exercise is to just do some tongue twisters. The more you familiarize yourself with harder words and get the right movements down, the easier other words will come to you.

**Q:** What is something that not many people know about voice acting?

**A:** Something people might not know is that there are many little tricks and small things to do that impact your voice so much, but we never notice. I'll give you a short example: if you say something normally, but want to come across as warm and opening, smile before and as you say it. You can probably tell the difference, and if not, record yourself and try it.



Photos/Noah Zeitlin  
Adam Newmark pauses from dropping the mic to take a few pictures.



### Emily Goldberg

By Isabella Lazar

Emily Goldberg, a senior, has long been an active member of the community in and around Blind Brook, performing and leading a myriad of selfless acts. Currently, she maintains a leadership role in BBYO, though she is also highly involved in many others.

**Q:** What types of community service do you take part in? What motivates you to participate in these organizations instead of others?

**A:** [Mostly], I work hands-on either with children, elderly or on a site like a park, house or school. I enjoy doing hands-on work much more than simple fundraising because I actually see the change occurring and get to witness firsthand the impact I am making.

**Q:** Which community service organizations are you involved with?

**A:** BBYO is a teen-led Jewish organization that focuses on uniting the global Jewish community through friendship, Judaism and community service. I am the Regional Sh'lichah of Westchester Region BBYO, which means I am in charge of Jewish heritage, social action and Israeli advocacy for all of Westchester.

J-Teen Leadership is a more community service based youth group than BBYO, and through this group I have participated in various projects. One of my favorites is Project Hope, an organization where volunteers can bring kosher foods to homebound Jewish el-

derly...J-Teen has also given me the opportunity to go on service trips where I have built connections with people across America."

**Q:** Could you briefly describe a meaningful experience that you had performing community service?

**A:** When I was eleven, I joined the Mentor Program at Edenwald, a school for emotionally and learning disabled children... I was introduced to a nine-year-old boy who... watched his mother do drugs while various men frequently visited his mother at their home in the short time that he lived there. His severe ADD and depression made it harder to manage an already devastating situation... I chose to continue with Edenwald into high school by joining the "Adopt-a-Cottage" program, where I bring dinner to [his] cottage monthly.

**Q:** What have you learned from your community service projects?

**A:** I have learned that there are so many things in this world that I take for granted. For example, at Edenwald, most of the children there do not have a parent to make them lunch or tuck them into bed at night. Their parents or "role models" were negligent and unavailable to the kids. I learned to appreciate my family, friends and life in general so much more than I ever had.



Courtesy of Emily Goldberg



## What's Special (Ed) to Blind Brook?

By Danielle Barsky

Although the Special Education program in the high school often goes unnoticed, it is an integral aspect of the school system. This department finds its home in the learning center, just across from guidance. From this location, the special education department provides support to all students in need of its services.

There are typically around ten adults who work in the learning center department daily, including six permanent teachers and other aides and assistants who rotate in and out.

This year is Gregory Mottola's and Victoria Maksym's third at Blind Brook, Thomas Kerley's and Elizabeth Campbell's second, and the first for both Carl Barnes and Jenette Conetta. Mr. Barnes transferred from Croton, while Ms. Conetta made a quick journey from the middle school to the high school.

The special education department

has many priorities and goals set in order to give students the best education they can receive. A chief objective of the department is to support students who have learning difficulties by providing a smaller classroom setting to reinforce information supplied in an actual class.

According to the Blind Brook school website, another goal of this department is to ensure that all students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education and equal access to the programs and activities offered at the school.

"We have a series of goals that we establish at the beginning of the school year on students' IEP's [Individualized Education Plan] that we work on fulfilling... We help the students help themselves," said Mottola.

In this way, Learning Center students are prepared for independent work upon graduating from Blind Brook.

The special education department

provides services to a wide variety of students in need of additional academic support.

"The department provides services to any student that has an IEP, or Individualized Education Plan. A student may also have a 504 plan, which is a medical plan that allows some students to receive special education services," said Conetta.

The department also provides aid to the general population of students. Some Learning Center instructors provide additional support to teachers in regular classrooms. This gives Blind Brook students the opportunity to ask the Learning Center teachers for assistance. The overarching goal of this program is to provide a positive academic experience for students with all sorts of learning necessities.

The Special Education department used to provide services to the BOCES group, or Boards of Cooperative Educa-

tional Services. According to their website, BOCES is a program in New York State that "[provides] shared educational programs and services to school districts within the state."

Its goals are to "prepare diverse populations for roles in the global economy," provide "cost-effective shared services to school districts," and enhance student achievement.

Upon the completion of the 2014-2015 school year, BOCES relocated from Blind Brook to Valhalla. According to Ms. Lambert, this is because the program was seeking to expand and Blind Brook did not have the means to facilitate this transition.

With the help of the Learning Center, students can gain independence and prepare for life outside Blind Brook. The department not only strives to help the students in the special education program, but also those in all classrooms.

## Pluralism: A Problem of the Present

By Eleni Kohilakis

Holding a leadership role in a high school club is looked upon very highly by both students and teachers. Each year, clubs like Model United Nations (MUN), Yearbook, Mock Trial, and others attract huge crowds of students eager to participate in extracurricular activities.

Over time, these students become more deeply involved in their choice clubs and, as they get older, seek to join the board. The standard leadership positions available in our school's clubs include president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.

Recently, however, the issue of pluralism has surfaced. There has been much talk about the wisdom of allowing students to hold more than one leadership role in their extracurricular activities, as board positions are limited.

At the moment, the only existing restriction regarding board positions stands for Focus editors. These regula-

tions are self-set because the club believes that conflicts of interest can arise if a student is involved in too many activities.

Aspects of the Focus charter address how a student is not allowed to be on the board of Congress or Senate if he or she holds an editorial position. Additionally, the Editor-in-Chief is not allowed to be a member of Congress or Senate.

Now more than ever, students are speaking up about their belief that due to the scarcity of available positions, restrictions should be placed on leadership. Individuals feel that the school should provide more students with chances to hold leadership positions and not let a select handful of students "monopolize" the boards of clubs.

Sophomore Meghan Comstock is an adamant believer that "everyone should have one position so there are spots for other people to have positions."

Other students, like senior Gianna Messina, also feel that adding restric-

tions would be beneficial: "I don't think it is fair to have a single individual on the board of multiple clubs because everyone should be given an equal opportunity to be in a leadership position in a school club."

On the other hand, some students feel that the current self-regulating system works well and that intervention would be unnecessary. These individuals argue that if a student would like to run for nine leadership positions they should be allowed to because a democratic system is used to elect board members.

"I am the treasurer of Financial Markets club and of Autism Awareness club. It is a great opportunity because I am able to apply the skills that I have learned in one club to the other and vice versa. I have been extremely devoted to both clubs throughout my high school career and I enjoy being able to hold board positions in two clubs that I am passionate about," said senior Griffin Robins.

Others, including senior Max Picker, feel that a more intermediate approach would be most successful: "I think [holding a board position is] a lot of responsibility for a high school student, no matter what year. I think the limit should be two board spots in order to ensure that students are not overextending themselves. I think that this would be a good compromise if somebody is heavily involved in one or two clubs."

So, the question remains, will Blind Brook implement a regulatory system to prevent students from obtaining multiple leadership roles or will our school continue with its current free-election democratic policies?

"One of the things [clubs] are doing is speeding up the process by moving to a digital election process, probably using polleverywhere.com. [Advisors and board members] are also trying to define voter eligibility to assure that only club members are voting," said Model UN adviser Courtney Clarke.

## Get Schooled on Seniors' Favorite Schools

By Sydney Goodman

Every fall, high school seniors go through the intensive process of applying to colleges. Students spend hours filling out applications, writing essays, and editing drafts to the point of perfection, all in hope of getting a "Yes" from their dream school.

With thousands of universities to choose from, it seems as though each student would end up at a unique school of his or her own. But each year, many students end up sending applications to and being accepted by the same group of universities.

In the previous school year, the colleges that received the highest numbers of applications from Blind Brook students were SUNY Binghamton, University of Michigan, Penn State University, University of Wisconsin, Washington University in St. Louis, and Indiana University. The most seniors enrolled in the first two.

For the current group of seniors,

much of the list remains the same, excluding the addition of the University of Pennsylvania. The school with the highest number of applications was Binghamton.

The aforementioned universities are all much larger in terms of student body size and campus than Blind Brook, whose homogeneity, resulting from a small class size, is something many students try to escape upon graduating.

Some of the schools on this list, like Michigan, Wisconsin, Penn State and Indiana, are Big Ten schools. Their social events revolve around school sports. Because of this, the student body is filled with spirit. Although Blind Brook has spirit and cheers at Homecoming sporting events, most of our students do not attend other games of the season, whereas at Big Ten schools, all games are jam-packed.

Every year, University of Michigan reels in a high number of Blind

Brook students.

"I chose to go to Michigan because I wanted to leave New York and do something different. Michigan had all of the academic opportunities I was looking for as well as unmatched school spirit. I couldn't be happier with my decision. Go Blue!" said Blind Brook alumna and junior at University of Michigan Ilana Bruckman.

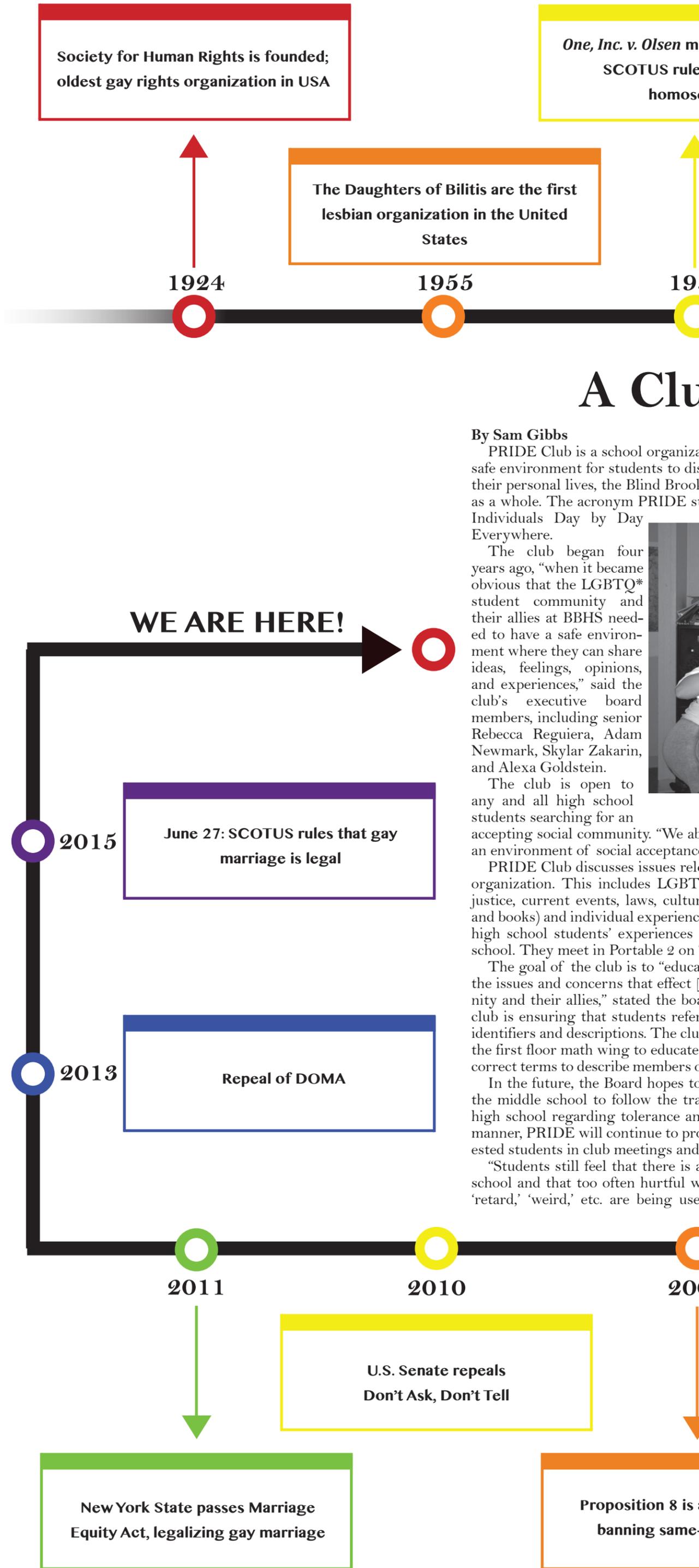
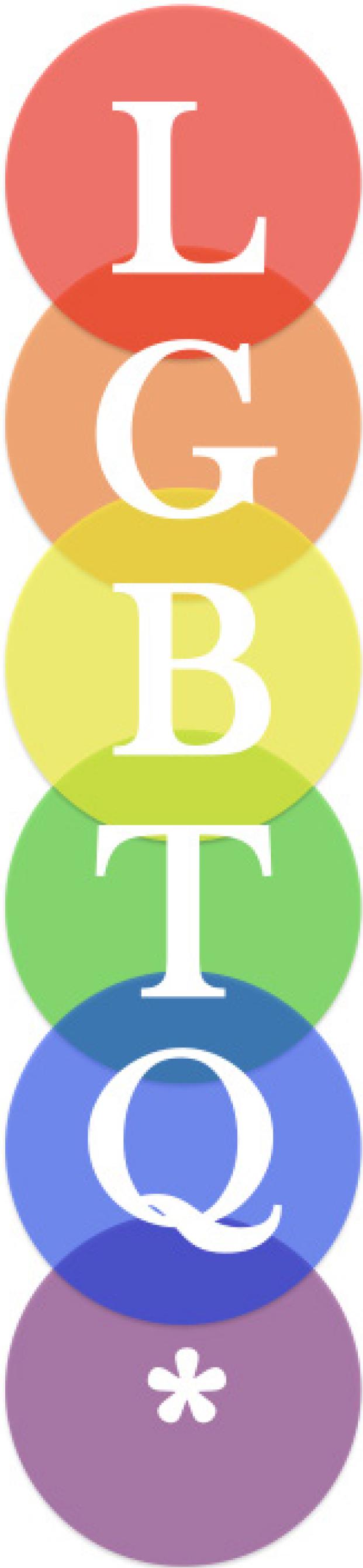
Because the University of Michigan is such a large school, with over 40,000 enrolled students, it offers a wide variety of classes and majors to choose from, so many students with different interests are attracted to the school.

Binghamton University is another one of the most popular schools for students to attend. With its location in New York State and hard-hitting academics, this SUNY school becomes the prime option for many students looking to stay in-state, just a bit closer to home.

"Bing," as it is affectionately called, has several internal schools that offer many different majors and classes, so students can study whatever they desire.

Located a relatively short three-hour drive away from Rye Brook, Binghamton allows students to visit home more often and with greater ease than many other popular universities.

"The main reason why I chose Binghamton was because I was accepted into the School of Management Scholars program there. I felt the program would lead to both short term and long term success for me. Also, when I toured the campus after I was accepted, I just felt like I belonged there and I could easily imagine spending my next four years there. That's what's key with every college choice, making sure that you can imagine yourself succeeding at the university," said Jared Wexler, a Blind Brook alumnus and current sophomore at Binghamton.



## A Club

**By Sam Gibbs**  
 PRIDE Club is a school organization that provides a safe environment for students to discuss their personal lives, the Blind Brook community as a whole. The acronym PRIDE stands for Individuals Day by Day Everywhere.

The club began four years ago, "when it became obvious that the LGBTQ\* student community and their allies at BBHS needed to have a safe environment where they can share ideas, feelings, opinions, and experiences," said the club's executive board members, including senior Rebecca Reguiera, Adam Newmark, Skylar Zakarin, and Alexa Goldstein.

The club is open to any and all high school students searching for an accepting social community. "We also provide an environment of social acceptance."

PRIDE Club discusses issues related to the LGBTQ+ organization. This includes LGBT+ social justice, current events, laws, culture (movies and books) and individual experiences of high school students' experiences at BBHS.

The goal of the club is to "educate the community and their allies," stated the board. The club is ensuring that students refer to each other by their preferred identifiers and descriptions. The club is currently located on the first floor math wing to educate the community on correct terms to describe members of the community.

In the future, the Board hopes to expand the club to the middle school to follow the tradition of the high school regarding tolerance and acceptance. In this manner, PRIDE will continue to provide a safe space for interested students in club meetings and events.

"Students still feel that there is a stigma at BBHS and that too often hurtful words like 'retard,' 'weird,' etc. are being used to describe them."



marks the first time  
es in favor of  
sexuals

USA's first annual  
gay pride parade

Stonewall riots raise awareness for  
modern LGBTQ\* rights

American Psychiatric  
Association removes  
homosexuality from  
list of mental illnesses

58

1969

1970

1973

# Club Filled with PRIDE

ation dedicated to creating a  
discuss the issues that arise in  
k community, and the world  
stands for People Respecting

hurtful way," the Board said.

The Board hopes to remove any stigma and ultimately make the school community more inclusive by embracing everyone's individualities.

Additionally, PRIDE plans to continue its annual attendance at the PRIDEWORKS Convention of students from the tri-state area, as they have done for the past two years. Although BBHS is small, PRIDE has a strong presence and larger club membership than other school districts, according to guidance counselor Susan Binney, the club adviser.

Ms. Binney decided to advise this club because she believes in the "right of each individual person to be who they want to be or who they believe they should be regardless of how they



Courtesy of Rebecca Regueira

absolutely support and create  
e," said the Board.  
evant to all members of the  
Q\* rights regarding social  
al experiences (i.e., movies  
es. The club also talks about  
both inside and outside of  
Thursdays.

ate the school community to  
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faculty and students on the  
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omote a safe haven for inter-  
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ords, such as 'gay,' 'faggot,'  
d inappropriately and in a

identify."

Binney also believes in accepting others for who they are, without them having to self-identify, explain, or defend themselves.

"We do not have the right to harm others, with words or actions, but instead should be educating ourselves to learn about others," said Ms. Binney.

PRIDE Club creates a safe place for students to go, free of judgment, and be accepted for who they are.

"I think that PRIDE club is one of the most unique clubs in the entire school. We have the will to go past boundaries and taboos that most people wouldn't dare cross. People may think that this club is just about gay rights, but it is much more than that. It is the only place where there are no judgments, no bullying, no nonsense, but comfort. It's kind of like a little family, because we are so invested in getting to build relationships and cater towards each other's interests," said secretary Harrison Lawrence.

Finding a place where all are accepted is important, especially in our society today, where a growing number of teens feel like they don't fit in. The international community is just beginning to take strides towards acceptance and toleration, with PRIDE Club at the helm of the ship.

1978

Champion of gay rights Harvey Milk is  
assassinated

1988

World Health Organization organizes  
first World AIDS Day

1993

Don't Ask, Don't Tell issued by  
Department of Defense

1996

President Clinton signs Defense of  
Marriage Act (DOMA), which defines  
marriage as being between one man  
and one woman

08

2007

2004

1997

First presidential debate forum  
specializing in LGBTQ\* issues

Ellen DeGeneres  
heralds new era of  
gay celebrities in the  
media by coming out  
on her sit-com, Ellen

approved in CA,  
-sex marriage

MA becomes first state to legalize  
same-sex marriage

## Is Caitlyn Jenner a Hero?

By Joanna Goodman

Both the dictionary and I define heroism as acting courageously—I've added in acting selflessly as well. But how exactly do we define that courage?

The Arthur Ashe Courage Award defines courage as “strength in the face of peril”. This award should sound familiar, as it sparked controversy when awarded to Caitlyn Jenner. Jenner's name has appeared in the headline a few times since, most recently when awarded Glamour's Woman of the Year Award.

As an adamant gay pride and gender movement supporter, I couldn't help but take note of the controversy. In an interview with *The Times* on the Arthur Ashe Courage Award, Frank Deford, a National Public Radio commentator and sportswriter, stated:



Courtesy of Joanna Goodman

“Caitlyn Jenner is being forthright and honest, but this is something that she wanted, and she has a good fallback position — a reality show, fame and lots of money. There's not a great deal of risk involved in the same way that someone who worked down at the body shop would experience. Bruce Jenner had a good idea that he wasn't going to lose by doing this; his family is in support of him.”

Deford brings to head the crux of the controversy that nagged at me—do we choose to honor famous, fortunate, and attention-drawing Caitlyn Jenner, rather than the unknown souls who show courage each and every day, often in the face of death?

Many believed Lauren Hill was more deserving of the Arthur Ashe Courage Award. Hill had continued playing college basketball even after being diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor, and all the while helping to raise money for cancer research.

And then, when Jenner also beat out Noah Galloway, an Iraqi war veteran who lost two limbs while defending our country and has since continued entering various sports competitions, the Twitter-verse went up in flames.

I saw Galloway's picture circulated on social media, as people expressed their dissatisfaction with Jenner winning the award over him. Tweeters even went so far as to make Galloway's photo the Arthur Ashe Awards account icon.

The controversy was heightened when James Smith returned his late wife Maria Smith's Glamour's Women of the Year Award. Maria Smith was an NYPD officer who died in the 9/11 attacks. Her husband, also an NYPD, conveyed his feelings in an email statement:

“My precinct covered a shelter for transgendered youth. I listened to their stories of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Young people thrown out of their homes or fleeing

from unlivable conditions. They didn't have the luxury of being part of the Kardashians' circus. They weren't living in a Malibu Barbie beach house surrounded by what passes for family in Hollywood. They were truly brave people fighting hourly for existence.”

*Glamour* Magazine responded to the outlash, defending their decision and stating, “Caitlyn Jenner has helped shine a light on the problems faced by transgender youth and given voice to a community that is often unheard. Glamour's Women of the Year Awards recognizes brave, bold women who in their individual ways have all made a significant difference in the world.”

Those opposing Smith see what Jenner has done as revolutionary, and thus deserving of every award presented to her. I myself, having difficulty forming a definitive opinion on the controversy asked seniors Rebecca Regueira and Alexa Goldstein, co-presidents of Pride Club, their opinions. They shared;

“Although Caitlyn has done some controversial things [surrounding her announcement], the world can be brutal and it takes a lot of courage to come out as transgender. It's especially difficult when you've lived such a long life full of achievements... And the fact that Caitlyn is someone of such high celebrity status or at least coverage, being that she is related to the Kardashians, has made a huge impact on the coming out of others and the Trans Community as a whole. Many people have written to Cait saying how she encouraged them to become who they truly are and that's really inspiring.”

However, Jenner is not alone in her actions. Fellow celebrities—those in the Hollywood eye—such as Laverne Cox came into the spotlight having already transitioned. In addition, both *TLC* and *ABC Family* will be airing shows, like “I Am Jazz” and “Becoming Us,” that are centered on transgender families.

Caitlyn Jenner has been an important figure in the movement for visibility in the transgender community. There is no doubt about this. But people still wonder, was this act selfless? Was it taken with no thought of the outcome—good or bad? Did this act outshine those of Hill and Galloway? Was it comparable to Smith?

These questions have no definitive answers, as courage is a lot of things to a lot of different people. Who am I—who is anyone—to define heroism for anyone else? But we can raise the question as to what we want these awards to honor.

Are we, is our society, honoring Jenner because she is a public figure, who in acting publicly was courageous, or is she being honored for the act itself?

## Ladies and Germs, We Have a Case of the Sniffles on Our Hands



Photo/Leah Kratochvil  
A sick student stays home from school.

By Carly Kabot

As the temperature drops, germs begin to stir and foreheads start to heat up. Getting sick is a part of life; it's inevitable that all of us will experience some sort of scratchy throat or achy stomach during the cold months. When masses of people are crammed into small spaces, like a classroom, the spread of germs becomes an increasing issue and that seven-hour school day becomes an endless cycle of sneezes, sniffles and tissue snagging.

One missed day of school can become a heavy burden on a student's shoulders, so much so that many feel it is easier to come in feeling lousy than to rest at home.

Is it the academic pressure at BBHS that makes students feel like three missed days set them back three months? Or is it the monkey-see-monkey-do mentality under which many students operate?

“It's just too much work to make up, it's not worth it. Nobody likes missing school, so everyone avoids it,” said sophomore Lucca Colangelo.

The learning pace of the Common Core curriculum does not stall for anyone, so students feel the need to sacrifice their health and well being for a better grade. Thus, having a heap of work and a bundle of unnecessary stress from missing a day or two becomes a force many do not want to reckon with.

“It's not only that we have a few days of work to make up, but the short time frame we are put under to complete it,” explains freshman Karolina Bertulius.

Most teachers have relatively strict guidelines when it comes to absences. This is done in the best interest of students to keep them from falling further behind. However, the issue with these set-in-stone rules is that not every student learns at the same pace.

Individuals are expected to come in with assignments they missed, but that contradicts the point of taking the day off. If a student is sick enough to stay home, then chances are they aren't doing much other than lying in bed and eating chicken noodle soup.

Nurse Nancy Garretto acknowledges that there are many facets to this issue. She points out that the competi-

tive atmosphere of the school makes students feel like they cannot take the day off. And when a sick student comes into school sick, the “snowball effect” occurs.

“What kids don't always realize is that you are also impacting those around you by spreading germs,” she said.

“Student's performance in school directly correlates with how they are feeling,” said science teacher Tara Strauss.

Strauss stressed that when a sick student comes to school, their body is being overworked because it must do two jobs: focus and heal.

Mrs. Zahl understands that in most families, parents push their kids to go to school. “Unless they have a fever or are throwing up, they are going in,” she says, speaking of her own children.

How can this be prevented, or at the very least, limited? There are certain precautions everyone can take as flu and cold season nears.

Staying hydrated is key. Bring a water bottle to school and refill it throughout the day. It is suggested that the more water means greater health. Along the same lines, it is best not to share water bottles or anything else that comes in contact with someone's mouth.

A second precaution is washing one's hands. Cleaning up before eating or after touching communal items like library books will limit the transfer of bacteria, viruses, and other microbes.

An additional measure to be taken is catching some Z's. Though sleeping a full eight hours becomes increasingly difficult with age, it is imperative to sleep as much as possible to stay healthy. Next, boost your intake of foods high in antioxidants, such as berries, broccoli, vitamin C (oranges) and zinc (red meat).

Finally, speak to your doctor about immunizations available to prevent sicknesses, such as the influenza inoculation. These precautions, coupled with daily exercise, keeping stress at a minimum, and taking time to relax the body and mind, can truly help prevent sickness.

And if you are really that sick, stay at home.

## Baking Snowmen Cupcakes

By Eliana Rosenzweig and Olivia Morrisey

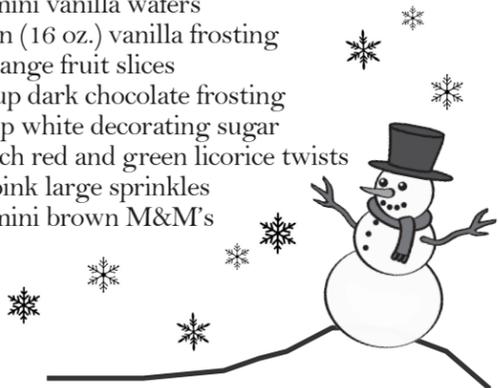
Winter comes with plenty of snow and holiday frenzy, along with the question of what to cook for your friends and family. Whether it be appetizers to desserts, it can sometimes be tough to decide what is easy to make that will please everyone. These recipes put a twist on some classic winter foods that will make everyone feel at home and fall in love at first bite.

### Snowmen Cupcakes

Featured on allyou.com, these adorable snowmen cupcakes will add delectable decoration to your table throughout the winter months. Use the recommended ingredients or spice it up with any candies of your choice to make these cupcakes suitable for all the ones you love. These are the perfect snack to munch on while you watch the snow fall outside the window. Decorate these holiday-themed cupcakes however you like and devour them with your family and friends!

#### Ingredients:

12 cupcakes, baked in colored foil liners, cooled  
¼ cup each red and green decorating sugar  
24 mini vanilla wafers  
1 can (16 oz.) vanilla frosting  
4 orange fruit slices  
¼ cup dark chocolate frosting  
1 cup white decorating sugar  
6 each red and green licorice twists  
24 pink large sprinkles  
24 mini brown M&M's



#### Directions

Place the red and green sugars in separate shallow bowls. Spread a thin layer of vanilla frosting on top of the mini vanilla wafers to cover. Press the top of 12 wafers into the red sugar to coat. Repeat with the remaining 12 wafers and press into the green sugar. Set aside.

Cut 12 1-inch triangles from the orange slices to make the noses. Spoon the dark chocolate frosting into a freezer-weight ziplock bag. Spoon ¼ cup of the vanilla frosting into a freezer-weight ziplock bag. Place the white decorating sugar in a shallow bowl. Spread the remaining frosting on top of cupcakes and make a smooth mound. Roll the tops of the frosted cupcakes into the white sugar to cover completely.

Add the cut orange candy as the nose in the center of the cupcake. Add the chocolate candies as the eyes. Snip a very small corner from the bag with the chocolate frosting and pipe a mouth. Add the pink sprinkles as cheeks.

Cut the licorice twists into 12 6-inch lengths for the bands of the earmuffs. Insert the 2 cut ends into either side of the cupcake for the headband. Snip a small corner from the bag with the vanilla frosting. Pipe a dot of vanilla frosting on either side where the licorice enters the cupcake. Add the like colored vanilla wafers as the muffs. Repeat with the remaining cupcakes.

## Local Productions Arrive Just in Time for Winter

By Allison Chien and Hannah Marrow

The holiday season isn't just about gift giving and Christmas wreaths. It's also about spending quality time with family and friends. And what better way to do that than by attending a festive play or musical? This winter marks the debut of several new productions in Westchester, but will also supply some spinoffs and remakes of holiday classics. There are a wide variety of shows – from professional symphonies to student-made originals – so there should be something to satisfy Grandma, Uncle John, and little cousin George. Here are some recommendations to help make your decision easier:

### Tim and Scrooge

Playing at The Westchester Broadway Theatre from December 3 - December 27

Tickets cost \$50

This seasonal musical is supposed to take place ten years after Charles Dickens' novel *A Christmas Carol*, where Scrooge is dead and Tim's 21st birthday is approaching. As it is nearing the holiday season, Bob Cratchit plans on telling Tim about his inheritance of the Scrooge and Marley Counting house as a Christmas surprise. What Tim's family does not know is that Tim has a Christmas surprise as well: he is engaged to a woman named Allison and plans on marrying her come his graduation from university. Tim never imagined the stress that his decision would put on his family and, similarly to Marley's experience ten years earlier, the ghost of Scrooge arrives to help ease the family's tensions. With scores written by the ever so talented Neil Berg and Nick Meglin, this high-spirited, joyous production is sure to captivate the souls of any age.

### Tarzan

Playing at White Plains Performing Arts Center from December 18 - January 10

Tickets cost \$25 - \$47

Based on Disney's musical animation *Tarzan*, this production features upbeat tunes by the brilliant Phil Collins including Academy Award winners "You'll Be In My Heart," "Son of Man," and "Two Worlds," plus a script written by Tony award-winning playwright David Henry Hwang. This kid-friendly, exciting play follows young Tarzan as he is raised by gorillas after being abandoned on the coast of West Africa. Life for Tarzan is mostly fun and games until a human tribe marches onto his family's land and he finally meets humans like himself. Problems arise as Tarzan begins to navigate the jungle with his newfound human instincts, which inharmoniously begin to blend with his animalistic characteristics. This epic performance is one suitable for the child in you (as well as any other children older than four). So grab your tickets and prepare to be transported into the magical world that is *Tarzan*!

### Jonatha Brooke

Playing at the Emelin Theatre on January 16

Tickets cost \$39

If you're not in the holiday spirit quite yet, this American folk-rock, singer-songwriter and guitarist is sure to interest you! Jonatha Brooke has been a professional musician since her time with The Story, her band from Boston. Brooke is a prolific songwriter, and has penned showstoppers for superstars like Katy Perry. She has also written songs for Disney films and television shows, some of which are *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, *Finding Neverland*, and *Ally McBeal*. If you're around in mid-January, you should definitely check her out!

### Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue

Playing at the Capitol Theatre on December 30 and 31

Tickets range from \$39.50-\$160

Want to hear the sweet sounds of a jazzy saxophone a couple months early of Jazz Fest? If so, Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue is the show for you. The band is famous for its popular jazz melodies that are fully able to excite a crowd. Since its reopening, the Capitol Theatre has proven itself to be a wonderful local venue to see and hear some great music. Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue is no exception.

## The New Franchise Era

By Jordan Kotler

The world of cinema has entered a new era: the Age of the Franchise. Studios are pushing more than ever before to green-light movies that can lead to sequels, prequels, spin-offs, and cinematic universes. Personally, I can't get enough of it.

Franchises give studios the chance to make as much money as possible off one piece of property. Although some of our favorite movies are part of franchises, many have criticized the increasing number of franchises due to studios not caring about quality or originality, and only focusing on the amount of profit they can make.

It may be true that some franchises are receiving too much studio interference, and coming out with poor results, but so many of the films in popular franchises are unique takes on our favorite properties. Movies are not, and never will be the same as they once were, but they are evolving.

The legendary actor Dustin Hoffman stated, "I think that it's the worst that film has ever been – in the 50 years that I've been doing it, it's the worst."

He cited reasons like movies only being made if they can sell, pressure from studios to finish filming in limited time, and digital technology being more important than the film itself.

Though I am not one to argue with the Rain Man, I have to disagree with him on this one. His reasons for movies being weaker than ever before are all true, but it does not exactly make them "bad" movies.

For example, it may seem like the Marvel cinematic universe is the epitome of the problems Hoffman is discussing, but they are the opposite. Marvel has proved they can make fun, distinct movies that leave the director's imprint all over while still being monitored under Disney to fit into the world of Marvel.

These cinematic universes are basically TV shows that release a couple episodes a year. From *Iron Man* in 2008 to *Avengers: Age of Ultron* in 2015 and so on, each film has correlation with the next. But even though all these different movies are a part of the same story, each hero's film has varying style, execution, humor, action, and trademarks.

*Guardians of the Galaxy* is one of my favorite superhero films in years because it was nothing anyone has seen before. No one expected a group of thieves and liars to come together and defend the galaxy with wit, goofiness, and cleverness at the same time.

Under CEO Kevin Feige, Marvel has crafted a universe that contains a mix of different types of superhero films, all headed in the same direction. That's what makes these movies so appealing to my generation. Each movie drops hints of connections, called Easter eggs, with other movies, which excites the viewers for the next Marvel film.

Marvel uses a clever advertising strategy of dropping hints about other mov-

ies in each film.

This plan is effective because as a fan and loyalist, I never want to miss out on what's happening in the universe. One prime example of this can be seen in the post-credits scene of *Avengers: Age of Ultron* when Thanos, a Marvel villain, is shown ready to take over the universe. I am counting the days until we get to finally see him in action.

Even though Marvel is making consistent movies in their universe, it's not such smooth sailing over at 20th Century

Fox. This summer saw the release of the rebooted *Fantastic 4*, in which the director, Josh Trank, ambitiously chose to attempt an interesting sci-fi version on the superhero genre.

I believe the first half hour showed promise for his vision to be fully realized, but because the studio feared the film was too edgy and risky, it took the film away from the Trank and hampered it

into another typical superhero film. The result: a failed franchise.

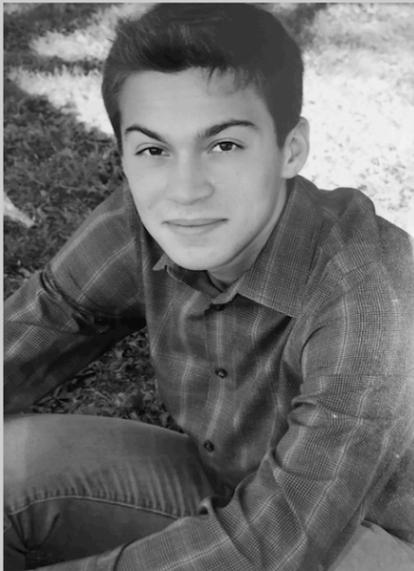
This movie is a perfect example of a studio interfering with Trank's original artistic vision. While franchises are meant to be epic and entertaining, they certainly have their flaws. The main issue of building franchises is that studios are filming them for the purpose of making money. Art-house films win Oscars, but franchises make the big bucks. Although quality is important, the top priority for studios when making movies is attracting an audience.

This quest for an audience is the reason there are so many movies with the same types of plots, characters, and filming styles. Over the last century, the trend in the movie industry has been to take innovative, creative movies that are adored by many all over the world, and then continue to make that same type of movie until it does not make any more money.

In 1977, *Star Wars: A New Hope* was released and became the biggest movie in decades. Following the trilogy came an increase in science fiction/adventure epics like *Alien*, *Blade Runner* and *Lord of the Rings*. Now, we are in the middle of the era of the superhero, where every studio is building its own superhero universes.

Studios are taking these successful, interesting, and fun ideas and throwing them at our faces until we are bored of them. They are so afraid of not making money on a movie that they hardly take any risks when picking which films to make, so they choose the safest option. This is hurting the film industry.

Luckily, however, that is not the case for all franchises—which is good for me, because I love them. Franchises allow me to watch my favorite characters fully complete their story arcs because they have multiple films to do so. I've grown up with these franchises. Wolverine, Batman, Captain America, and Han Solo are all a part of my extended family, and I will follow their stories until it is over.



Courtesy of Jordan Kotler

## Hollywood Women Take a Stand Against Sexism

By Alana Applebaum and Alexa Limb

While women have certainly developed a significant presence in the film industry, sexism continues to be faced by even some of the most prominent actresses in Hollywood. Recently, many of these women have started to speak up and share experiences in which they faced gender discrimination in order to bring light to this serious and pressing issue.

Jennifer Lawrence, a renowned actress best known for her role in the blockbuster series, *The Hunger Games*, recently spoke out about the significant pay difference between herself and her male co-stars in *American Hustle*, Bradley Cooper and Christian Bale.

According to *The Huffington Post*, for their respective roles in "American Hustle," Cooper and Bale each received 9% of the film's profits, while Lawrence received only 7%. She expressed her frustration and concern in an essay surrounding the gender pay gap that she wrote for Lena Dunham's newsletter, *Lenny*.

In her essay, she talks about how women are typically criticized for speaking their minds, while men do not face as much backlash for expressing their beliefs.

"I would be lying if I didn't say there was an element of wanting to be liked that influenced my decision to close the deal without a real fight. I didn't want to seem 'difficult' or 'spoiled.'...All I hear and see all day are men speaking their opinions, and I give mine in the exact same manner, and you would have thought I said something offensive," she writes.

Sexism continues to be a problem not only in the production of films, but also on the red carpet for movie premieres. Red carpet coverage has become increasingly sexist as female actresses are asked questions about their appearances and the designers of their outfits. Men, on the other hand, are most frequently asked about their film roles and acting careers.

This unequal treatment of the sexes has garnered attention to the point where a new movement, the "#Ask Her More" campaign, created by the Representation Project, has called for action to change the way reporters interview actresses. This campaign has prompted many eminent women to push for gender equality both on and off of the red carpet.

At the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) awards, popular film actress Cate Blanchett

decided to confront the sexism issue head on, receiving much praise from supporters of the campaign. Unprecedentedly, she was seen asking a cameraman "if he does that to the guys" after he panned up her body to examine her dress.

Women also tend to receive only specific types of roles such as the "sexy sidekick" or the "generic wife or girlfriend" in movies and television shows, as opposed to the lead roles men acquire. According to *Forbes*, just 21 of the 100 top-grossing films of 2014 featured female leads.

In a 2014 panel, actress Olivia Wilde addressed the issue of women appearing as mostly supporting roles, revealing, "It's really hard to get stories made that are about women -- not just women being obsessed with men or supporting men. And it's really hard to get men to be a part of films that are about women in a leading role."

The movie *Suffragette*, released on October 23, challenges this notion. Starring three-time Oscar winner Meryl Streep - a female - the film traces the feminist movement back to its roots: the women's suffrage movement in 20th century Britain.

Streep, a strong advocate for women's rights, has been vocal about the challenges that she believes face women in today's society. The release of *Suffragette* has helped her gain even more of a voice in fighting this issue. While discussing the movie on BBC Radio 4 *Today*, she talked about how women need to fight against discrimination not just in the film world, but in many other aspects of life as well.

"Women are graduating from film schools, law schools and medical schools in equal numbers as men but they are shut out when they get to the leadership positions. We have to think about why that is," she said.



## Book Review: *The Fifth Wave*

By Samantha Friedlander

The idea of an alien invasion is on the verge of becoming tired; extraterrestrial beings have been a source of human fantasy and curiosity for decades upon decades. The idea that we aren't alone in this uncharted universe gives us something to hope for — most of the time.

But there is always the idea that we may not be alone, and whatever other beings may be out there want to hurt us.

And that is precisely the scenario that plays out in Rick Yancey's novel *The Fifth Wave*. Very recently, the Book Club read this outstanding book, which we all feel will thrill sci-fi fans everywhere. It's a strikingly unique perspective on extraterrestrials.

In this book, the invasion isn't still going on—it's already happened.

The "Others," as the protagonist called them, ravaged the Earth over the course of four "Waves." Each of these Waves swept away more and more of the human population. During the First Wave, the Others sent out an electromagnetic pulse, destroying anything that ran on electricity. The Second Wave came in the form of a tsunami that wiped out all coastlines.

The Third Wave was a genetically engineered virus that made the suffer-

er bleed from every orifice, then cause them to die from a series of seizures. The Fourth Wave had originally taken place in 1995, when the Others implanted themselves into human beings.

However, during this Wave, the Others then instructed the affected humans to "silence" the population that survived the first three Waves. Now, the Fifth Wave is anybody's guess.

If there were ever to be an effective alien invasion, this would be it.

*The Fifth Wave* views all of these events, as well as the coming fifth wave, through the thoughts of Cassie Sullivan. Cassie has escaped a refugee camp, where her father took her and her brother after the Third Wave. She is determined to stay alive, but she's more determined to find her little brother.

While *The Fifth Wave* takes you on Cassie's journey, it also shows the story of a soldier—who is very much human—that is being trained to fight off

the alien menace. Forced to be there, the soldier (his identity is kind of important, so no spoilers here!) shows the reader the other side of Cassie's fight.

These two characters' perspectives make this book an exciting ride. They make you root for them, sob for them, and everything in between.

Cassie is a strong, fierce female lead, whose narration drags the reader into Yancey's world. She keeps the reader engaged from page one. But, speaking as a teenage girl, I found it fairly obvious that this was a male adult author attempting to speak in the voice of teenage girl, especially during the scenes she has opposite Evan Walker, who is the only person she thinks she can trust.

Meanwhile, the soldier's perspective shows the harsh reality of the military training camp he is in. His perspective is darker, but feels real. He offers insight into the goings-on at the camp in a way that both repulses you and makes you

want to read more.

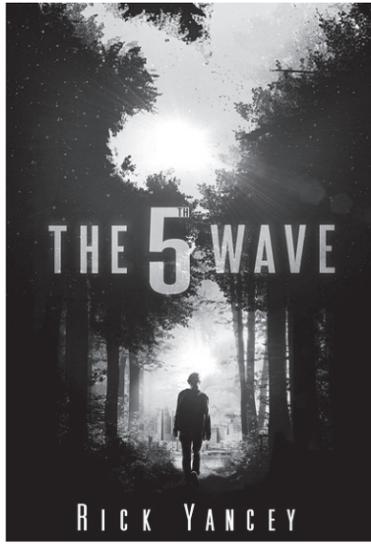
The shortness of each chapter gives the book an incredibly fast pace, also making it a very fun and exciting read. It makes you feel like you're a part of both stories. But, at the same, it doesn't feel as though you're cheated out of the chance to see each character develop. You watch as the same adversity changes each character in amazingly different ways. Yancey provides his readers with a clear understanding of who they're dealing with.

He also manages to use the cliché aspects of alien folklore to his advantage—the lack of trust, the utter destruction, the militaristic regimes. Rather than detract from the overall plot of this wonderfully dark novel, it completes the immersion of the reader into the story itself.

Thankfully, *The Fifth Wave* is the first novel of a trilogy.

And I say thankfully because this book will thrill you, sadden you, toughen you up—and then make you beg for more.

And if you identify as one of those begging millions, you're in luck. On January 15 of the coming year, *The Fifth Wave* will be released as a film, starring Chloë Grace Moretz, Nick Robinson, and Liev Schreiber.



## Farewell, *American Idol*

By Ellie Sanchez

Say goodbye to the once-iconic televised singing competition of the 2000s. The beloved show *American Idol*, once watched by millions of families around the country, will be airing its fifteenth and final season on January 6, 2016.

This high-profile reality television show first aired on June 11, 2002, with Ryan Seacrest and Brian Dunkleman as its hosts and Paula Abdul, Simon Cowell, and Randy Jackson as its judges.

Over the course of the following fifteen years of *American Idol*, many judges would be switched in and out, giving the show a total of eleven different judges.

As opposed to the relatively unstable pattern of judges, Seacrest has remained as the show's host since its conception, with Dunkleman leaving after its first season.

Being one of the first shows of its kind, the amount of success that this unique, competition-based show received was certainly unexpected. For eight consecutive years, *American Idol* was the nation's most-watched prime time program. In its fifth year, the show reached its peak, averaging an astonishing 30.6 million viewers per episode.

In addition to providing weekly entertainment to families across the country, *American Idol* is unmistakably responsible for producing some of the most talented and highly regarded pop stars of today.

Kelly Clarkson, the first-ever win-

ner of *American Idol*, went on to win several prestigious awards after her time on the show, including, three Grammys, four American Music Awards, and an impressive twelve *Billboard* awards, along with many others.

Other notable winners of *American Idol* include Carrie Underwood, Jordin Sparks, and Phillip Phillips. Despite not winning the competition, many former contestants also rose to fame in the music world, including Jennifer Hudson, Chris Daughtry, and Adam Lambert, who recently released his third studio album, *The Original High*.

Considering *American Idol*'s long-lasting and influential success, the question still remains: what finally caused the show's demise?

By the time *American Idol* reached its season fourteen finale, only 7.7 million viewers tuned in to watch. By contrast, *American Idol*'s most watched episode, the season two finale, had 38.1 million viewers.

It is evident that this drastic decrease in the show's appeal over the years had much to do with Fox taking it off the air.

One reason for this decline in interest is the lack of originality throughout *American Idol*'s run. The show essentially followed the same format for over ten years, rarely surprising viewers or giving them something new to anticipate.

"I liked it at first, but after a while it was just the same old thing time and time again. It gets boring," said



Courtesy of NPR.org  
The original idol panel: Jackson, Abdul, and Cowell.

freshman Lilli Trevino.

In addition, the erratic cycle of changing judges has upset many viewers over the years. None of the current judges, Keith Urban, Jennifer Lopez, and Harry Connick Jr., have been on the show for more than three consecutive seasons.

"I know a lot of people were loyal to certain judges, and once their favorite judges left the show, there wasn't really a reason [for them] to watch anymore" said senior Zoe Sanchez.

To top off the show's downfall, a number of new television programs with the same premise as *American Idol* began to steal viewers away.

Among these competitors are

well-known shows like *America's Got Talent*, *The Voice*, and *The X Factor*. A novel show slowly shrunk into an outdated, unoriginal series.

However, despite the many causes of *American Idol*'s failure to maintain viewers, there are still some people who are upset that the show is ending.

"Although I haven't watched it lately, I'm still sad that *American Idol* is going off the air. It was a big part of my childhood, and it always will hold a special place in my heart," said junior Allison Gelfarb.

## A Shot to See *Hamilton*,

By Jamie Kerner

Picture this: a show that combines musical theater with rap and hip hop. A show that depicts Alexander Hamilton's life through song and dance. A colorblind show that has actors portray America's Founding Fathers. Could such a show exist? Would it even make sense? It seems too crazy to be true!

Put whatever preconceived notions that you think you might have about Broadway



Courtesy of Jamie Kerner

musicals behind you, because yes, such a show does exist, and it is called *Hamilton: An American Musical*. *Hamilton* breaks all of the prior unwritten rules of Broadway in order to create something truly amazing. Never before has an entire show been made up of rap music, and not the typical show tunes one would find on the Broadway stage. *Hamilton* has seen many famous faces in its audience throughout its first few months running, including both the President and Vice President of the United States. Through this exquisite show, playwright and creator Lin-Manuel Miranda is able to showcase that education can correlate with the world of musical theater and pop music, and at the same time break through racial molds and stereotypes while still maintaining the integrity of retelling US history.

Miranda, as well as *Hamilton* producer Jeffrey Seller, announced the production's recent partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation and New York City Schools' Chancellor Carmen Fariña. The Rockefeller Foundation is an organization which

works "to promote the well-being of humanity throughout the world." Within this new educational partnership, 20,000 New

York City public school students will have the opportunity to see *Hamilton* on Broadway during Wednesday matinee performances for only ten dollars per ticket. These students will be able to incorporate their classroom studies into what they see in the musical. Not only will

they be able to get tickets to the hottest show in town, and integrate this into their education, students will also be able to interact with cast members for an additional learning experience about our Founding Fathers. This program, which launches in 2016, is an excellent way for students to learn and engage with information about the beginning of our country. This program will not only be an engaging and fun way for students to learn, but will also open the world of Broadway to students. I believe that after seeing *Hamilton*, students will find a new love and appreciation for the theater.

Throughout the musical, Miranda, as Alexander Hamilton, sings -- excuse me, raps -- about not throwing away his shot to start a new life in his new country and help develop it. Just like with *Hamilton*, these students have the opportunity to experience something new -- in their case, incorporating Broadway with their classroom learning -- and I believe these fortunate students should not throw away their shot to take advantage of this.

## High School Actors Mentor Younger Peers



Photo/Daniel Oppizzi

Noah Zeitlin coaches a small group of middle school thespians.

By Paul Soden

On February 5, 2016, Blind Brook Middle School will debut their winter musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Middle school students and faculty alike are currently working around the clock to make sure that the performance is the best that it can be.

To facilitate this process, various high school students who have a strong background in theater have volunteered their time to serve as mentors to the young actors and actresses. These mentors include senior Jessica Bender, sophomores Karen Bender, Lee Price, and Noah Zeitlin, and freshmen Samantha Kalt and Ryan Vogt.

Many of these mentors have been heavily involved in Blind Brook middle and high school productions for several years and are able to bring back what they have learned to the middle school stage. As a result, each mentor has been able to help the show tremendously by sharing their wisdom with the students during rehearsals.

"I got involved in the musical production because when I was in middle school, the high school mentors inspired me. I love musical theater and really enjoy teaching people about it," said Zeitlin.

The different mentors work with middle school actors and actresses to help them improve very focused aspects of their performance in rehearsals. Bender works with the actors and crew in blocking and behind-the-scenes practices, while Price assists with the performer's acting skills and stage presence.

"I could not think of a better way to spend my time than to help out the next generation of performers. Teaching young people about the importance of the arts and entertainment is a goal in my life," said Price.

The mentor program has shown to be extremely beneficial to the middle school students and as it has done in the past, is expected to greatly improve the quality of this year's production.

"Having students that have already been through the auditions

process relieves a lot of middle schoolers' stress and creates a more comfortable environment for them," said Middle School English teacher Cher Treacy, Co-director of the musical.

In addition to helping the students, many mentors are noticing their own performances in the high school's fall production, *Leader of the Pack*, and in their other shows improve as well.

"This program has helped to improve my performance because I can see what the kids in the middle school do incorrectly and try and not to make the same mistakes as them," said Zeitlin.

As an additional benefit of participating in the program, the high school mentors are eligible to receive community service hours for their time. Some of the mentors have earned more than 60 hours through this program in prior years.

Despite this, many of the high school students refuse to accept credit for their work and view the experience as a whole as its own reward.

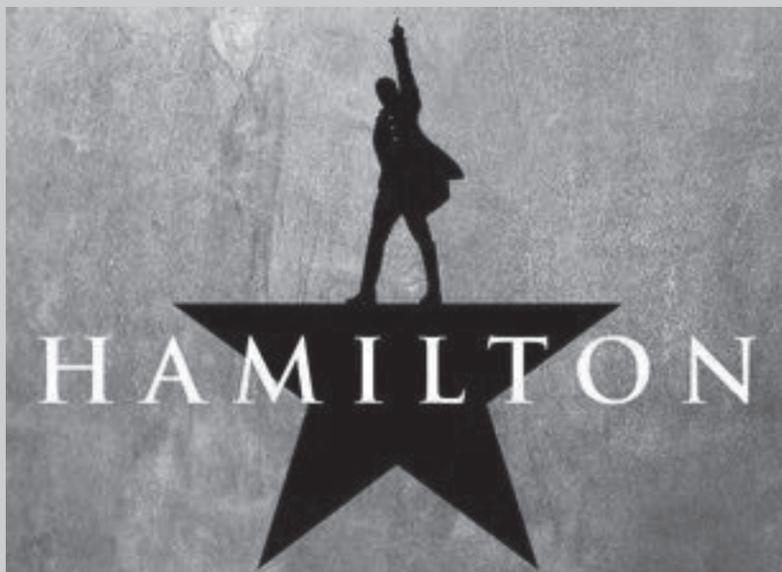
"I do receive community service hours but have not logged many of them in because I love this program so much that I feel would bad to take so much credit for it," said Bender, who, as the production's co-assistant director, devotes much of her free time to attending rehearsals and helping the actors and actresses.

In spite of the program's continued success, it is uncertain whether it will be implemented again next year.

"I have noticed a large difference in the performers' skills as a result of working with the high school mentors and hope that this program continues in future years," said Treacy.

Most of the mentors are eager to see how this year's production will turn out and are interested in participating in the program next year if it is offered because of the extensive rewards that it provides.

"It was an incredibly amazing and rewarding experience to help the middle school students with their musical, and it also helped me with



## go(Ten)na Out of Ten

By Arianna Kohilakis

This century's fixation with technology has posed a brand new problem for smartphone users: finding cell service in locations that may be lacking. What if I'm mountain climbing and I need to call emergency services? How about if I'm at a music festival and get separated from my friend? Or, what if I'm stranded and need to call for help?

Well, goTenna has the solution. This startup company has created a device that allows its users to make their own network when they are off the grid. Cell coverage and Wi-Fi are not needed to activate the mechanism; users simply pull out the antenna on the contraption and wirelessly pair it to iOS or an Android via Bluetooth-LE. In an urban setting, goTenna provides coverage up to a mile away, and outdoors, the device will work in a four-mile range.

The business proposition be-

hind goTenna was conceived during Hurricane Sandy, when a large population of the United States' East Coast was left without power, and therefore without communication. The need for Internet and cell service has been an issue constantly faced by off-the-grid locations and areas of crisis.

Daniela and Jorge Perdomo, the sibling masterminds behind goTenna, received venture capital and seed funding for their project starting in 2013. The goTenna device was launched for pre-order in the summer of 2014.

The pre-sale goal was to sell around 333 goTenna pairs at a 50% discount to make a total profit of about \$50,000. Shipments of the product were made beginning in autumn of this year. Currently, the company is funded by government grants, which aim to provide this product to beneficiaries living in re-

gions prone to natural disaster and climate change.

GoTenna's customers include anyone from hikers and early technology adopters to federal government agencies and municipalities. Simply put, consumers are people who do not want to rely on cell towers, Wi-Fi routers and other such networks.

The goTenna device is a two-watt radio with an antenna powered by a lithium-ion battery that retains charge for thirty to seventy-two hours of continuous usage. If not in use, goTenna's battery lasts for approximately a year and a half.

The device itself weighs less than two ounces, and is small in size (1 inch by 5 inches), making it a handy tool. At \$199, a goTenna customer will receive two network-making devices.

The company exudes confidence in their product, as goTenna co-founder and CEO Daniela Perdomo told to Michael Car-

ney of PANDO Tech Reviews; "We think this will spread pretty quickly once people see what it can do."

"If you're in a situation where someone else gets a message through and you don't, why wouldn't you immediately go out and buy one? Our message is 'No service, no problem,'" she added.

GoTenna is just one example of a start-up company that has produced a highly profitable dollar product. Within less than a year, goTenna has revolutionized the telecommunications industry. Whether hiking in an off-grid area, attending a major event where networks are overloaded, or communicating with friends and family when out of country, goTenna can be used or provide a sense of security. The reliability and efficiency of this new product is garnering the support of many, and the company continues to expand as the product sells.

## The First Step is Admitting You Have a Problem

By Nicole Axelrod

If I had to take a guess, you, the reader, have recently done one of the following: checked your phone for the weather instead of going outside, used your phone for the time instead of the watch or clock in the room, had people text you information and reminders instead of just remembering them, or scrolled through an Instagram or other social media feed. If you find yourself with an inability to cut back on cell-phone use or engaging in online behavior "despite risks and negative consequences," you're certainly not alone.

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has named Internet Use Disorder a real disease, with real withdrawal-like symptoms when it comes time to put away devices. Dr. Kimberly Young first introduced the issue in 1996 to the APA. She also created the Internet Addiction Diagnostic Question-

naire (IADQ) to see if you have the 'disorder.' The Center For Technology and Internet Addiction has a similar "Smartphone Abuse Test," with questions similar to those in the IADQ. The disease has yet to make its way into the DSM-V because it needs further research, but what we do know is that the disease is difficult to diagnose and treat. According to *PLoS ONE*, the centers in the brain for attention and processing emotions, similarly to heroin and cocaine addicts, have changed over time in internet or cell phone addicts, and these people can develop a tolerance the way drug addicts do.

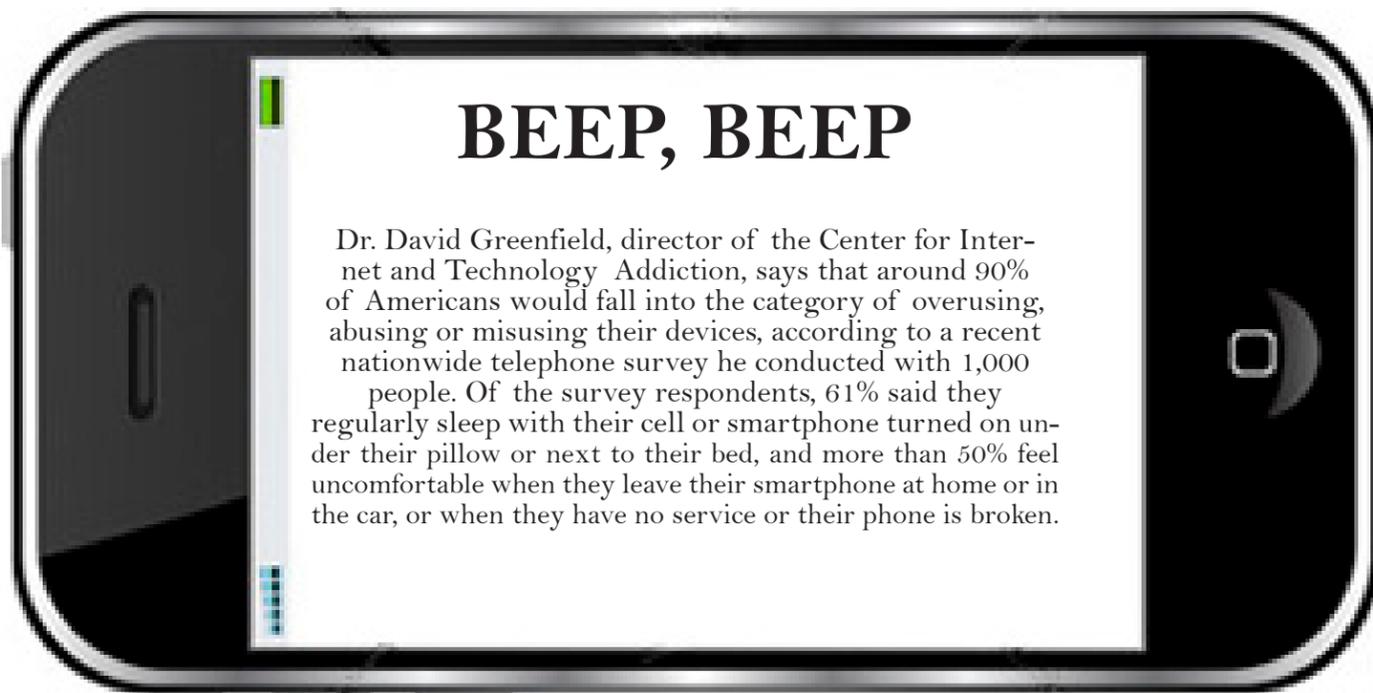
By definition, a cell phone or Internet addict is someone who is "overly occupied with gaming or checking messages or social media, suffers withdrawal when the Internet goes offline, feels the need to spend more time online to get the same 'high,' and neglects their

work or family to stay on a computer or smartphone." People often experience restlessness and anxiousness when they are not able to check social media or without WiFi, and it can go so far as to dull some people's emotions. These problems make cellphone addicts unable to enjoy experiences without documenting them or simultaneously participating in social media.

The addiction often times begins by checking phones and social media accounts in free time, before bed, or in the morning. Over time, this habit can become a part of one's routine. Eventually, one can enter a time-warp-like state, where one stops feeling the passage of time, and one can unknowingly end up spending several worthless hours on devices. Teenagers and young adults often end up staying up late "for no reason" checking feeds, becoming unable to sleep because of the harsh blue light emitted by cell

phones -- which alters the circadian rhythm, the body's natural ability to detect when daylight has turned to night time and it's time for rest.

Some people are more prone to cell phone addiction because they have fewer dopamine receptors, so they need more stimulation to feel a mental sense of reward. The most addictive apps on cell phones have proven to be ones that provide "informational rewards," which are constant reminders of online activity, commonly known as notifications, that pop up throughout the day. These apps include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and many more. Experts are calling it a potentially dangerous addiction because checking the phone during driving has already led to and will lead to millions of deaths each year, whether it be texting, changing music, or scrolling through notifications.



## Swegway...? No Way!

By Jacob Zeitlin

The purpose of technology is—or, I should say, the purpose of technology should be—to improve our day-to-day lives

in one way or another. Such improvements include enhancing our security, by allowing us to monitor our homes and cars remotely; spreading knowledge, by providing people of the Third World with market information so they are neither overcharged nor “lowballed,” or merely entertaining



Courtesy of Jacob Zeitlin

us, with websites where we can watch thousands of TV shows and movies. However, throughout recent history, there have been several “technologies” introduced to the industry that have not benefitted society in any legitimate fashion, thereby wasting time, money, labor, and resources. One such product is the newly popularized Swegway.

The Swegway, as it is widely known, is a type of self-balancing two-wheeled board. The product, which originated in China, is made by various Chinese manufacturing corporations. The first company to produce it, according to *Wired*, was Chic Robotics, which was founded in 2013 and has ties to Zhejiang University. While the true origins are highly debated, *Wired* believes the company first released it in August 2014 at the Canton Fair trade show. Because China does not have stringent trademark and patent laws like the United States, it has been a simple task for other Chinese manufacturers to copy the product unethically. Currently, there are about six companies that are producing similar products.

In addition, the device has been the cause of a great deal of political and legal controversy. In New York, for example, the

“electric hoverboard” has been deemed not street-legal. According to *Gothamist*, the New York Police Department posted a tweet that said, “Be advised

that the electric hoverboard is illegal as per NYC Admin. Code 19-176.2.” However, since posting it, the tweet has been removed from Twitter. The penalty for riding one of these vehicles on the streets in New York City is a fine of up to \$100. Although they are not expressly prohibited by the DMV, they are grouped with Segways as “motorized self-balancing devices,” which are likewise illegal. On the West Coast, these electric vehicles will be made legal by state legislation that becomes effective January 1, 2016. Some countries, such as Germany, have created federal laws banning the devices from all streets. In England, they are only legal on private property.

But let’s take a closer look at why these hoverboards are being ruled illegal. Since their recent release, they have already been attributed as the cause of multiple deaths, including one of a six-year-old in Abu Dhabi, according to Al Arabiya. The boy, who was riding a hoverboard, was accidentally run over by a car. According to *Wired*, some of the devices are made with plugs that do not contain fuses, which is a fire hazard. In London, there have been at least two electrical fires that have occurred while the devices were charging.

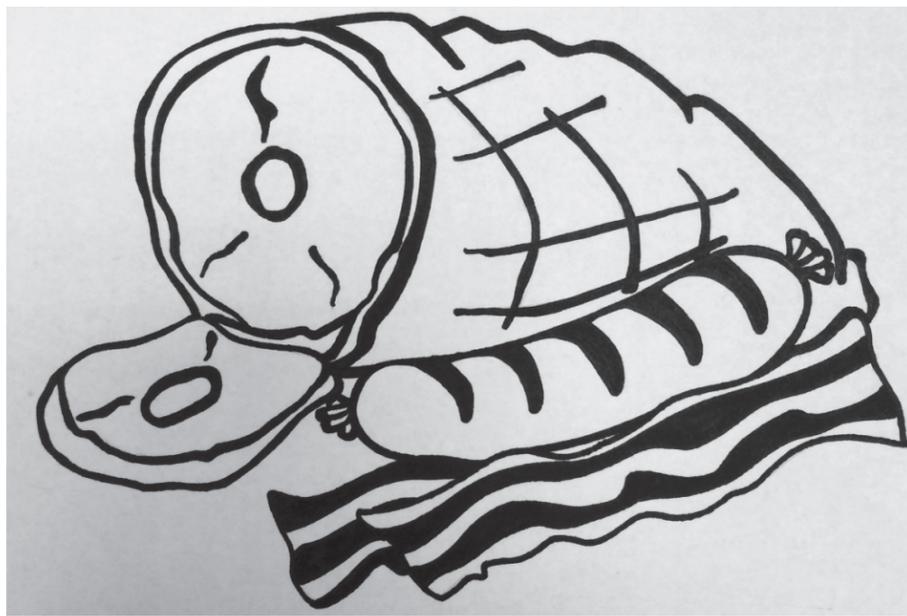
Finally, the device is way overpriced for what it is worth. Starting at around \$300 and going up to around \$600, I simply do not recommend purchasing one of these devices. To me, it is not worth spending several hundred dollars to support unfair trade markets, buy a vehicle that is not street-legal, and put mine and others’ lives in danger.

## Warning: This Food May Cause Cancer

By Rachel Goodman

Processed meats such as bacon and hot dogs hold a special place in America’s heart and stomachs, especially at sports games and summer barbecues. But what happens when one consumes that savory bite of processed meat? Here’s a hint: it’s not just calories, fat, or sodium that’ll be posing health risks. The World Health Organization has recently discovered a link between these processed meats and cancer. Their studies have shown that meat-processing techniques can lead to the formation of carcinogenic chemicals, and these compounds have been appearing in parts of the digestive tract, inducing the onset of bowel cancer.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer defines processed meat as any meat that has been “transformed through salting, curing, fermentation, smoking or other processes to enhance flavor or improve preservation.” These processed meats include bacon, sausages, hot dogs, salami, corned beef, beef jerky and ham, as well as canned meat and meat-based



Illustration/Cayla Chang

sausages. As a result, the American Cancer Society advises that Americans minimize the consumption of processed meats like bacon and sausage, and instead choose poultry and beans.

The World Health Organization claims that 50 grams of these processed meats will increase the chance of developing colorectal cancer by 18% if they are consumed daily. To put this into perspective, 50 grams of processed meat a day is less than two slices of bacon. The average American consumes 18 pounds of bacon per year. Although the consumption of processed meats is not as dangerous as smoking, for example, the risk still exists and only grows as the ingestion of processed meats increases.

States around the nation are already beginning to step up and respond to the issue by placing labels on these processed meats warning consumers about the possible effects. California passed a requirement in 1986 that orders the state’s institutions to create a list of all chemicals and substances identified by World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer as “carcinogenic to humans.” California is also considering requiring warnings about cancer risks associated with the meats for consumers’ benefit. This warning may be in the form of a label on the meat’s packaging, a sign or menu notation where the meat is sold, or “a system of signs, public advertising identifying the system and toll-free information services.”

This announcement about carcinogenic processed meats encourages Americans to adopt healthier lifestyles, focusing on body weight, exercising, and eating in moderation in order to improve their overall wellbeing.



## Climate Change: Hot or Not?

By Alex Nadasi

Climate change has been a controversial topic for decades. On one hand, climatologists say that there has been indisputable evidence proving the Earth's climate patterns are and have been changing for many years. On the other hand, some are still skeptical about such evidence and proclaim it inconclusive. Regardless, climate change (or the lack thereof) has sparked global conversation and led several domestic and international environmental initiatives to be put into action.

Climate change is defined by NASA as a long-term "change in Earth's overall climate" or a "change in the typical or average weather of a region or city." To climate change believers, science proves its legitimacy: increasing levels of gases produced by humans released into the atmosphere are creating a greenhouse effect that traps heat, and ultimately causes an increase in global temperatures. Since the early 20th century, global temperatures have risen 1.4°F which climate change believers attribute to human activity. In a 2010 survey, 97-98% of climate researchers publishing most actively in their field believed that human activity is primarily responsible for global climate change.

Most people have heard of the term "global warming", which describes the increase in Earth's average surface temperature due to rising levels of greenhouse gases. Non-believers of climate change believe the 1.4°F increase in global temperatures to be the effect of normal global cyclical temperature fluctuations -- not global warming. To them, the increase in temperature is within the bounds of normal temperature fluctuations within the past 3,000 years, which gives a margin of +/- 5°F. In addition, this group believes the temperature increase is not the result of human activity, and that global rise of sea levels is not abnormal considering history. Non-believers generally, unconcerned, point to natural climate patterns as reasons for increased temperatures and climate change.

Despite the opposing sides to the issue, many prominent figures have moved to take action in an effort to slow climate change. For example, many world political leaders met in December of 2014 at the UN Climate Summit in an effort to form a global action plan against climate change. The Pope has even taken a strong stance on climate change, saying that countries need to stop abusing the environment, and that any harm against it is harm

done to humanity. Domestically in the United States, there has been a great movement in recent years to "go green," where both people and businesses have made efforts to be more environmentally conscious of their actions. Many companies' corporate social responsibility sectors are focused on environmental initiatives: Amazon, for example, has new solar and wind farms that they say will deliver 1.3 million MWh of renewable energy, or the usage of energy required for 122,000 homes. In addition, companies like Toyota, with its Prius car, and entrepreneur Elon Musk, with his company Tesla, are innovating the automobile industry by producing fuel-efficient cars, moving towards a future where car emissions are negligible and pose little threat to the environment.

A large reason for climate change, as believers see it, is human activity. So why then, does the world continue to increase its fossil fuel emissions when it is fully aware of its potential effects? The answer is fairly simple: profit. As it stands, companies can maximize profit using old techniques that produce large amounts of fossil fuels. Recently, for example, Volkswagen landed in hot water when it was discovered that the com-

pany programmed certain emissions controls to only turn on during emissions testing, causing the cars to appear to meet regulatory standards. As quoted in TheWrap, Tesla's Musk condemns such behavior.

"The rules of the game fundamentally favor bad behavior. The oil and gas companies have basically infinite money. They're using the same playbook as the tobacco industry did," Musk says.

One potential solution lies in government incentives. Consumers, for example, are given federal, and in some cases state, tax incentives on purchases of new plug-in hybrid or electric vehicles. Such rewards give consumers a reason to be more environmentally conscious, and have proven effective.

Whether one believes in climate change or not, the actions taken in response to the issue are undeniable. Though currently the evidence for each side is not completely verifiable, hopefully in the coming years believers and non-believers can agree upon some conclusion and subsequent solution. However, whatever that answer may be and whenever it may be reached, no one can deny that for recent progress in "green" technology, humanity has taken several steps in the right direction.

## Middle Child Syndrome: Myth or Reality?

By Joie Ng

It is thought that birth order affects how parents will treat their children, even if they do not intend to favor one over the other. The eldest child often captures their attention as he or she undergoes new experiences and reaches milestones as the first-born. Meanwhile, the youngest child is given greater affection and gets away with more as the baby of the family.

On the other hand, middle children are often stuck, simply in the middle -- age-wise and treatment-wise. When the number of kids outnumbers the number of parents, each of the latter tends to bond with either the eldest child or youngest child. Many believe that middle children may develop middle child syndrome as a result of this unequal treatment by parents due

to birth order.

According to Health Guidance, middle child syndrome is indicated by feelings of inadequacy, jealousy, and low self-esteem. Other symptoms include identity and behavioral problems. Middle children often have a sense of being unimportant, unseen, and unheard as the attentions of their parents are often preoccupied with their siblings; they often feel neglected. Consequently, these children tend to feel as if they don't truly fit in and may wonder where they belong. The syndrome is often indicated by an "identity crisis."

This said, some struggles middle children endure in childhood can serve to benefit them as they become adults. Caught in conflicts between siblings as children, they often grow to be peacemaking mediators and ef-

fective negotiators. Given less attention by their parents, they have more freedom for individual growth than their brothers and sisters. Moreover, they learn to speak up to ensure that they are not ignored, which is good preparation for when they enter the professional world. In fact, surveys have suggested the possibility that middle children are more likely than their siblings to be successful and enjoy strong social lives and flourishing careers.

However, some have doubts regarding the actual scale of the impact of birth order. Although it has been indicated through research that there are some birth order differences, such differences accounted for less than one percent of the overall variance throughout the subjects of the study. Furthermore, most of the

studies conducted that may have supported the effect of birth order and middle child syndrome have resulted in evidence that lacks reliability and isn't easily repeatable due to great differences within families.

One of the main bases for these doubts is that many other variables can serve to influence a person's personality throughout their maturation into an adult. For example, inborn temperament is thought to trump any effects that may result from birth order or parenting style. This means that if a person is not inclined to be a peacemaker by nature, the birth location as the middle child is not likely to entirely convert them into such a peacemaker.

Research continues regarding the psychological impact of being a middle child.



## Bowling Team Guttered

By Allison Abrutyn

As the fall season has come to a close, many students find themselves bored and longing to play a sport. The limited options for winter sports leave student athletes' capabilities dormant during these cold months. As a result, students and parents have been pushing for the creation a Varsity Bowling team. However, the team was not approved for the winter season.

The desire to have a bowling team at Blind Brook is not new. In the 2013-2014 school year a group of parents got together and sent a letter to the school Board proposing the creation of a bowling team for the 2014-2015 school year.

Within this proposal, the group of parents expressed student interest for the team and outlined the leagues and teams that it would play within Westchester County Section Two's northern division. This proposal also explained how, in high school bowling leagues, each year a sum of money is put aside for college scholarships. As such, students would be given opportunities they do not have in other winter sports. The administration rejected the proposal.

In the fall, the topic of a bowling team was once again brought to administration. This time, however, the campaign was headed by a group of students, led in part by senior Joanna Goodman who is a two-season varsity athlete playing both soccer and lacrosse. "As [it is] my last year in high school I decided I wanted to get involved in a winter sport, however I quickly realized that there weren't many options. I, along with my friends, thought it could be a great thing to add a bowling team," said Goodman.

"I think it would be fun to see the turnout and bowling is a great option for students who do not play basketball, ski, or swim, but still want to join a winter varsity sport," said senior Lana Fabrizi.

Goodman and Fabrizi worked together and organized. They wrote a petition, signed mostly by seniors, who were interested in participating in a bowling team. Nearly 30 people signed it.

"I think it would be a good addition to our school athletic department because it is a different type of sport. I think it would attract a lot of interest," said senior Alex Discolo, who signed the petition.

This petition was brought to Athletic Director Douglas Goldman. Although Mr. Goldman was impressed by the interest shown by the student body for a bowling team, the movement was quickly shut down.

"Because of the school budget, any new programming needs to be pre-approved by the Board of Ed. I need at least a year's notice to create a team such as this and I plan on presenting this along with winter track to the board for next year," he said.

Despite the fact that the team did not get approved, Goodman and Fabrizi remain positive about the attempt.

"While unfortunately, we thought of this idea too late in the year to start it as a sport, we hope that in future years it could potentially start as a club and evolve into a sport on the winter roster," said Goodman.

## Senior Gym Exemption: Benefit or Mistake?

By Kayla Lynch

Exempting senior students from physical education has been a practice in the high school for many years. This policy was created by the New York State Education Department, and the Board of Education for the Blind Brook school district decided to implement it in order to decrease class sizes. This policy states that seniors who play a varsity sport are eligible to be exempt from physical education classes during their sport season.

Many seniors at Blind Brook are appreciative of this rule because it gives them an extra period during the school day to focus on academics. This can be helpful for senior student athletes on days when they have a game or a long practice after school.

"I really like the policy because students who put a lot of effort into their sport are able to have a free period where they would have [otherwise] had gym. The free period allows them to start the homework that they have, helping them to balance the time spent playing the sport and doing school work," said senior Melissa Roath, a member of Girls' Varsity Tennis.

In order to qualify for the policy, students have to pass a physical test at the end of their junior year. This physical test includes drills such as a mile run, shuttle run, and the sit and reach test. Even though seniors are in favor of being exempt from physical education, many underclassmen are opposed to it.

Sophomore Sarah Rattner played on the Varsity Girls' Soccer team this fall season. As an underclassman, she had to work hard to be able to compete with some of Blind Brook's opponents and to earn a starting spot of the team. Rattner is not allowed to be exempt from physical education because she is a sophomore.

"Underclassmen should be exempt because they have to endure the same amount of physical activity as seniors on a varsity sport. They have to work twice as hard to keep up with the pace of varsity," said Rattner.

Other underclassmen agree with the point made by Rattner, and are beginning to question if the policy is fair.

The Board of Education is currently examining the logistics behind the senior exemption policy and considering its removal in the future.

Other high schools in Westchester, such as Edgemont High School have a similar policy in place.

"It is my opinion that physical education classes offer life lessons that are applicable to all students, and by not attending class, our senior athletes are missing out on an important part of their education," said Athletic Director Douglas Goldman.

If the policy is revoked, the size of physical education classes would increase, which is another problem the Board of Education would have to face.

Gym teacher Nazareth Flory said that he is "fine with the exemption policy... it is not my decision, and I have no control over the implementation of the policy."

Athletic Director Goldman, along with other individuals at Blind Brook, believes that the exemption policy should be revoked due to escalating health concerns. Childhood obesity, an important issue that is currently being studied, is continuing to increase in the United States.

Critics of the exemption policy argue that if adolescents do not attend physical education, health problems like childhood obesity will continue to arise.

"There are many wellness issues our nation faces [including childhood obesity] that can be addressed in physical education class. If everyone participates and attends, our school and community will be supporting the overall well-being of our student body," said Goldman.

## Captain Quotes (& hopes)

This season our goal is to continue to foster the team camaraderie that has been developing over the past few years with this core group of girls. We are striving to stay competitive with a very challenging schedule and to make it make it far into sectionals.

**Jackie Handelman, Girls' Varsity Basketball**

Our ultimate goal is the same every year: to bring home the gold. But first, we need to take our season game by game, making sure we are improving as the season goes on. I am very confident we will do well this year as we have both the size and quickness of a high caliber team.

**Kyle Mak, Boys' Varsity Basketball**

I'm really hoping to build this team just as any other athletic sport. With practice everyday and dedication from the girls on the team, I believe this season will be amazing and full of creative choreography.

**Julia Sohn, Varsity Dance Team**

I'm looking forward to watching us improve as a team. We plan on attending multiple competitions so we're working on more complex skills to use in the routine.

**Chloe Greenwald, Varsity Cheerleading**

This year we have a young, inexperienced team, but we plan to prove the doubters wrong by competing and having fun.

**Jordan Kotler, Varsity Ski Team**

My hopes for swim team this year are that as a team we all compete with high standards for ourselves. We have a lot of talent on the team and I believe that with some hard work we can really shine...I'm really hoping [we] can all make it to States for multiple events and truly represent the great swim team we have built up.

**Baptiste Saliba, Boys' Varsity Swim Team**

After last year's playoff run, with our solidified coaching staff and strong chemistry between teammates on and off the ice, the rest of the boys and I are confident and excited to continue our success this season.

**Joey Livornese, Titans Hockey**

## Varsity Basketball Rebounds for the Season

By Lily Koenig

With the winter season already underway, the Lady Trojans have started to anticipate a great season. This year, the team faces a challenging schedule against some tough competition.

Coach Manny Martinez has several goals this season, including a win percentage of over .500 win.

"It will be a competitive season and we are looking to win as many of our twenty games as possible. Our goal is to make it back to the County Center," Coach Martinez said.

This is Coach Martinez's fifteenth season coaching the Blind Brook Girls' Varsity Basketball team and he has led them to the County Center ten times.

"We have implemented more quality shooting drills, rather than quantity shooting into our practices," explained Coach Martinez.

The team also looks to improve its man-to-man defense, which was lacking last season.

Returning for their fourth season are senior captains Jackie Handleman, Sammy Silfen, Emily Sachs and Alli Vaccariello.

This is Jackie Handleman's third year as a starter and she will definitely be one of the keys

to the team's success. Emily Sachs is one of the team's best outside shooters. She will play a huge role in stretching the defense to open things up down low for Handleman. Alli Vaccariello will also play a key role in the team as she looks to come back from last year's season-ending shoulder surgery.

"We are super excited heading into this season. We have a good portion of our team returning and some great new players. Our key to success for this season will be working defensively and shutting down teams. We have an athletic and hardworking team as well as great coaching staff," said Silfen.

Other players on the team include juniors Jamie Broitman and Kaveri Reddy, who, according to Coach Martinez, will likely make a great impact on the team this season. Additionally, sophomores Carly Discolo, Lily Kamin, and Hannah Schaemman look promising and ready to contribute as the season nears.

"Our goal this season is to make it back to the County Center, which we haven't been able to accomplish the past two seasons... We know that hard work and determination will help us achieve this goal," said Discolo.

### GIRLS



Photo/Amanda Capelli  
Trojan senior captain Emily Sachs shoots a 3-pointer in a game against North Salem.

By Hannah Schaemman

After a devastating upset in the first round of 2014-2015 season playoffs, the Boys' Varsity Basketball team ended their season with a 12-7 record. Losing six seniors, three of whom were starters, forced the current seniors to step up and fill the vacant sneakers.

"Our ultimate goal is the same every year: bring home the Gold Ball," said senior co-captain Kyle Mak. "But first, we need to take our season game by game, making sure we are improving as the season goes on. I am very confident we will do well this year as we have both the size and quickness of a high caliber team."

In order to ensure a successful season ahead, Mak practices each day with his team and devotes free time to work on his perimeter shooting, which will be a vital resource in the upcoming season.

"After last year's loss in the first round of the playoffs we were all disappointed," said senior Austin Lavitt.

"We made it a goal of ours to not give up and do something the basketball team hasn't done in four years: make it to the County Center, and strive in the playoffs," he said.

"Kyle Mak and Austin Lavitt were both all-

league players as juniors and will be counted on to provide tremendous leadership this year. Sophomore point guard Jake DiGiansante is a great competitor who will be in charge of running our team. If we can survive a difficult early season schedule, the hope is that we can win our fair share of games this year," said Coach Welsh.

Having nine returning players is advantageous to the team, as they are already familiar with the system. This is also extremely helpful for the players moving up from the Junior Varsity Team, as returning players can teach them the plays and show them what Welsh is looking for. Assistant Coach Jack Adler also helps oversee practices to point out what needs tweaking.

Seniors Kyle Mak and Austin Lavitt are key players providing height and scoring abilities from both inside the paint and outside. While seniors Matt Jaffe and Freddy Heller provide additional athleticism, Matt Dubin, at 6'4, will be counted on to score two more by being aggressive at the block with his post moves.

"This year there is a new vibe around the team... We have fun and that it the biggest difference from last year," said Lavitt.

### BOYS



Photo/Leah Kratochvil  
Junior Sam Brandeis tries to block a shot at the Trojans' loss against Clarkstown South.

## Varsity Hockey Skates into the Season

By Michael Discolo

One of the most anticipated teams to watch this season is the Rye Town Titans hockey team.

After going on an unexpected and thrilling playoff run, the Titans reached its first sectional title game in the hockey program's history, but met their match in the final game, crushed by the highly acclaimed Pelham Memorial Pelicans in a devastating 9-1 defeat. This was Pelham's fifth Section I title in the past seven years.

The season was still considered a huge success for the Titans, despite having many new players and a first year coach. The loss was tough.

"Last year was a huge learning experience for the team. We now have the confidence in us that will take us even further than last season. This year we have a lot of talented kids coming up from the modified team and still have many of our

core players from last year's playoff run. Our main goal this year is to not only make it back to where we were at the end of last season, but to go even further and have another unforgettable season. I truly believe we can accomplish this as long as we stay motivated and determined throughout the entire season," said Coach Jason Head.

This year's team features many talented returning players including senior Max Picker, who, last season, was one of the team's leading scorers with 22 goals and 13 assists and named All-League.

"I think it's important for us not to forget what made us successful last year. If we stick together as a family and keep working, we will change the outcome. It still hurts and it won't stop hurting until we get where we want to go," said Picker.

This season, the Titan's defense will again be anchored by senior goalie Joey

Livornese. His outstanding performance in the net throughout last winter earned him not only an All-League title, but also All-Section Honorable Mention. This year Livornese is a captain and looks to end his high school hockey career on top by using his leadership qualities to motivate his teammates.

"As a team we have just as much, if not more talent this season compared to last. With our solidified coaching staff and strong chemistry between teammates on and off the ice, myself and the rest of the boys are confident and excited to continue our success into this season. With the support of all three schools [Blind Brook, Rye Neck, and Harrison] involved in the varsity program, the boys and myself are prepared for another run to the sectional finals, only this time with a different outcome," said Livornese.

Picker also believes that hard work and

dedication will result in more victories for the Titans. "In a sport like hockey you have to be resilient, and that is one of our best qualities. I expect us to work for every goal, fight for every inch and go 110% until the clock hits 0. You don't become a championship program overnight, and hopefully our experience last year will make us stronger and we can walk away with a section championship and maybe more," he said.

With the team's extremely positive attitudes, the loss to Pelham will only increase the future success for this program. The players now know what it feels like to lose a game with stakes as high as the sectional title and they surely don't want to have that feeling again. With its talented players and their hunger for another shot at a sectional title, the Titans are bound to have a season that will go down in the history books.

# Game Changers

## Kyle Mak

By Max Chalfin

Since his varsity debut in the eighth grade, senior Kyle Mak has played an important role on each of his Blind Brook teams. This spring will mark Mak's fifth year running on the Trojans Varsity Track team. Mak will also step out onto the court this winter for his fourth and final season on the Boys' Varsity Basketball team as a co-captain. Mak's tall stature allows him to successfully play the shooting guard position.

"My best assets as a player are that I am a guard with the height of a big man," said Mak. "This usually gives me a height advantage over my defenders," he continued, an advantage that he uses to successfully shoot over defenders and complete difficult plays.

The team nature of basketball is clearly exhibited in Mak's manner of play. He is never selfish and always looks to pass.

"I am also able to see the court well, passing the ball to the open man for the shot," said Mak.

Coach Mike Welsh has helped instill in Mak the importance of creating a welcoming team atmosphere. The Coach has not only helped Mak improve his basketball skills, but, more importantly, he has helped him to improve as a leader. Mak hopes to follow in past players footsteps and be a role model for younger members of the team.

"I have been a part of many great teams with many great leaders. Sam Adler was a captain that comes to mind and I try to incorporate all of what he did in this year's team," said Mak.

"Kyle is a great leader and a great basketball player. With his upbeat attitude I'm really looking forward to playing under his guidance this season. And honestly he's a just a great guy off the court too," said sophomore Jake DiGiansante.

After a tough loss in the first round of sectionals last season, Mak set an example for the team by work-

ing harder than ever to improve. "Kyle has put in a lot of work this off season and has really emerged as a leader and motivator for our team.

He helps set the tone in practice and makes sure everyone is on the right track," said senior Matthew Jaffe.

Although Mak's height allows for many advantages, he feels that he still needs to improve on the basics of basketball.

"I need to work on getting to the basket more, driving into the lane and drawing the foul," said Mak. He believes that this, in addition to the team's tireless dedication, can help to elevate

the Trojans and bring them closer to their goal of "making it to the County Center tournament and bringing home the gold ball."

"Although I have played many games in my varsity career, the most meaningful one was in the play-off game to send the Trojans to the County Center three years ago against Our Lady of the Lourdes High School. Even though we lost, I learned a lot about leadership and the intensity needed to play at the varsity level," said Mak.

Mak's experiences playing high-pressure games will prove to be an asset to him during the Trojans sectional run this season.

Although this is Mak's final basketball season wearing the Blind Brook Trojans uniform, he hopes to continue playing the game in the future.

"I would like to play basketball in college but personally, education is more important to me. Wherever I go to school, I will try to walk on," said Mak.

Mak has proven himself to be a top competitor on the track team starting when he was an eighth grader. He participates in the 100-meter, the 200-meter, and the 400-meter races, along with the high jump.

"I really look forward to finishing my senior year strong," said Mak.



Photo/Leah Kratochvil

## Jackie Handelman

By Gabriella Lynch

Senior Jackie Handelman sets an example for all varsity athletes by being a dedicated and hardworking member of the Girls' Varsity Basketball team. Handelman has gained experience and benefited by observing the technique and success of past varsity players. This year Handelman hopes to be a role model to those who follow in her footsteps.

Handelman found her niche on the court when she started playing in the fourth grade with an elementary private clinic called CYP. Since then, Handelman has played for the Rye Brook Rebels AAU program with Coach Manny Martinez, who is now the Girls' Varsity Basketball coach.

Handelman played on the team from seventh grade to tenth grade. She said that the program had given her teammates and herself a competitive environment to compete in at a young age. Together they would compete in four games every weekend.

"AAU helped me improve my knowledge of the game and helped me learn how to be a team player," said Handelman.

As a seventh grader, Handelman played a vital role on the girls' freshman basketball team as the start-

ing point guard. In the eighth and ninth grade Handelman played on the junior varsity basketball team where she continued to play point guard and center Handelman made her varsity debut in the tenth grade where she evolved into one of the team's strongest centers.

on the court. Her height gives her an advantage that is really useful to the team. She's also an amazing friend who makes me laugh constantly. We have been playing basketball together for many years and I am excited to kick our last season together off with a bang," said Vaccariello.

situations. In the sport of basketball, quick thinking and teamwork is vital to success. As a captains Handelman makes sure that all her teammates are included and work together well. This contributes to better results on the court.

"One of my main weaknesses is struggling to maintain stamina throughout all four quarters of the game," said Handelman.

Varsity practices help Handelman as they are rigorous and involve all team members in a series of defensive drills and skill training.

"A unified practice helps the team build on our chemistry and positive attitudes," said Handelman. The girls practice for two hours every day.

"This year it is vital that we [the team] work as a cohesive unit and focus on executing everything that Coach Martinez has emphasized, such as strong defense and making sure to work the ball around in order to take good shots," said Handelman.

Handelman hopes to have the opportunity to compete with the varsity team for the gold ball in sectionals. She has no plans to play basketball in the future, but expresses that she will always love and have passion for the game.



Courtesy of Jackie Handelman

Handelman was elected captain this year along with fellow senior teammates, Alli Vaccariello, Emily Sachs, and Samantha Silfen.

"Jackie is an overall amazing player

At the varsity level, Handelman has been focusing on perfecting her athletic skills on the court. She states one of her strengths is her ability to find open teammates in tight