

Seniors make plans, decisions for future career paths

Students decide on colleges, alternative routes

By Charles Lations
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Seniors are finalizing their post-graduation plans as their time in high school comes to a close.

Senior Eddie Chareas will be attending the Naval Academy Preparatory School in Newport, Rhode Island, for a postgraduate year before attending the United States Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, where he will be majoring in management.

He said the idea of attending a more traditional college never appealed to him, and he was considering going into entrepreneurship straight away before recommendations from his friends and family swayed him towards the Coast Guard Academy.

“Something I really value in my life is making myself better,

and I think that if I go into the Coast Guard, it’ll help build my discipline and my character,” he said.

Chareas will be playing basketball both at the Naval Academy Preparatory School and for the Coast Guard Academy.

Senior Eamon McKenna will be taking a gap year to focus on building experience in the business world and to grow his own business, where he helps companies tailor their products to markets and become more unique.

He said he chose this path because he finds that learning by doing is more effective for him.

Senior Lily Francoeur committed to Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, to row at the Division I level. She will be majoring in markets innovation and design.

Francoeur said she’s looking forward to the new experiences presented by being in a larger school community.

“[I’m excited] to broaden my experience ... [and] to venture off and have new experiences and



COURTESY OF LILY FRANCOEUR



COURTESY OF NATE GARDNER



COURTESY OF GRAYSON CROCKER

Seniors Lily Francoeur (top), Nate Gardner (bottom), and Grayson Crocker (right) have committed to Bucknell University, Middlebury College, and the College of William and Mary, respectively.

meet new people,” she said.

Senior Grayson Crocker will be attending the College of William and Mary, majoring in statistics. She said the school’s small-town environment drew her in and was one of the deciding factors in her decision.

SENIOR PLANS, page 3

College freshman returns as intern to aid teachers in Spanish classes

By Stella Straub
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

As part of his college winter term requirement, Oberlin College freshman and 2023 Manchester-Essex graduate Wyeth Takayesu observed Spanish classes and looked at how the teachers interact with their students, he said.

Takayesu said he is studying to be a teacher and hoping to double major in a foreign language and English with education.

In his second semester at Oberlin, he will be taking a class where he learns how to teach English to Spanish students at an elementary level, Takayesu said.

“I thought that this would be a great opportunity to practice and get more experience in the classroom, get more experience speaking Spanish, and figure out what it takes to put together a lesson to teach people how to speak Spanish,” he said.

During his internship, Takayesu said he sat in on classes and observed, and then af-

ter classes, talked to the teacher that he was observing about how they came up with the lesson and things that he could do to help the class, as well as presented notes that he took during classes.

“For the project that I’m doing, I keep a notebook with me. I take it to all of my classes and I write down notes on how to be a better teacher, essentially,” he said.

Spanish teacher Michelle Magaña said that it was the beginning of January when Takayesu officially started his internship.

She said he was eager to help with lesson planning, observing instruction, and taking notes during his internship. Takayesu said he was mainly observing her Spanish IV AP class and her Spanish V Honors class.

“I’ve given him assignments where I’ve asked him to find videos with actual Spanish speakers on certain topics. For example, we’re going to be exploring the environment, so I asked him if he could find a video that talks about environmental issues in Latin American countries,” Magaña said during the internship.

She said that this internship gave Takayesu a good introduction to teaching.

“A lot of students that decide to go into education don’t get into the classroom fast enough to



STELLA STRAUB PHOTO

2023 graduate Wyeth Takayesu returned to intern in classes.

see what it’s like on a daily basis [and] the work that goes into getting a lesson prepared,” Magaña said.

Spanish teacher Robert Bilsbury said Takayesu observed his Spanish III Honors class and his AP Spanish Literature class, both of which Takayesu took himself.

“He’s now seeing everything that he’s done as a student from the perspective of a teacher, and I feel like that little shift in how he’s seeing things can be really helpful for him ... now he’s really focusing on how I’m teaching it instead of learning it,” Bilsbury said.

He said he wants to support

INTERNSHIP, page 3

Former student to compete in season 46 of CBS’s ‘Survivor’

Charlie Davis seeks to have ‘good time’

By Gwendolyn Berger
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After graduating from the high school in 2016, alumnus and former co-editor-in-chief of The Independent Charlie Davis will be on the reality television show “Survivor,” according to Emily Longeretta’s 2024 article “‘Survivor’ 46: Meet the 18 Castaways Competing in the Intense New Season,” for the Variety.com website.

Davis attended Harvard University from 2016 to 2020 and is currently attending Boston College Law School. Before starting law school in 2021, he worked as a business immigration paralegal and interned at Cabot Corporation in 2022, according to his LinkedIn profile.

Davis also competed in cross-country and track and field for

Harvard, according to Harvard’s athletics website, GoCrimson.com.

The audition process for “Survivor” is competitive, said Dalton Ross in his 2023 article “How to get on Survivor: behind the scenes of casting season 45” for Entertainment Weekly.

“[The summer before], the casting producers start poring over the thousands of videos already submitted since the end of the previous casting cycle,” he said.

Ross said afterward, the producers reach out to a smaller pool of applicants to ask for interviews, picking the best to send to the “Survivor” host Jeff Probst, and other producers.

“After the producers make their selections ... anyone still in the running meets with the show’s psychologists, completes a background check, and sits down for more interviews,” he said.

SURVIVOR, page 3

‘[The summer before], the casting producers start poring over... thousands of videos.’

- DALTON ROSS

Students compete at DECA district competition at Endicott

Two-thirds qualify, will prepare for States in Boston in March

By Ella Chafe
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Ninety students competed at the DECA district competition hosted by Endicott College on Jan. 11, chapter adviser Barrett Alston said.

Students that are in the business classes spent the past months preparing by practicing role plays and learning key concepts associated with their event, Alston said.

“We also hosted the mock competition where we had judges from the local community come in and help out the students,” he

said.

Alston said he is proud that two-thirds of the students qualified for the state competition in Boston in March.

He said he could see the students enjoying themselves and being happy with how they performed.

“You’re under a lot of pressure, but I also think it’s a lot of skills that are important for high school students to develop,” Alston said.

Sophomore Abby Kent, a first-year DECA student, said she competed in Travel and Tourism Team Decision-Making. She prepared for the competition by studying possible performance indicators with her partner sophomore Laila Meers, she said.

Kent’s first impression was

‘You’re under a lot of pressure, but I also think it’s a lot of skills that are important for high school students to develop.’

-BARRETT ALSTON



ELLA CHAFE PHOTO

Seniors Celia Mann, Caelie Patrick, and Gabbi D’Andrea gave the DECA sign at the Districts competition at Endicott on Jan. 11. They all qualified for the state competition in Boston in March.

noticing the other schools at the competition that only have DECA as a club. She said that it was interesting to see how they compare

Kent, who qualified for the state competition, said Districts was fun and went well.

Senior DECA officer Finn

O’Hara said he placed second in the Business Finance Series event, qualifying for the state competition.

He said he enjoyed the district competition and was happy to see students excited about their performances.

O’Hara said he is looking for-

ward to staying for the entire state competition in Boston, as he had to leave early for the SAT last year.

“I never got to have that final night where everyone hangs out and waits for the results, which is a super fun night, so I’m definitely excited for that,” he said.

Manchester Public Library needs renovations, intends to submit application for state grant

Library staff collects community input through QR code

By Gwendolyn Berger
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

A need for renovations has pushed the Manchester-by-the-Sea Public Library to apply for a state grant that would allow for expansion, library director Cynthia Gemmell said.

She said the library has needed expansion and renovation for a while due to accessibility issues, such as a non-ADA-compliant bathroom, lack of an elevator, and little space for library programs.

“We do the best that we can, but the library has been doing the best it can for a long time,” Gemmell said.

She said the library hopes to expand and renovate via a grant



MANCHESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY

Manchester Public Library created a survey through a QR code that asks for people’s input on changes the library could make.

from the state.

“The reason the expansion is

on the decks right now is because as much as we needed it before,

[the state] doesn’t open up these grants very frequently,” Gemmell said.

She said the application is a long and complicated process. First, the town must vote to match up to \$150,000 for the planning and designing, with the state paying the other half.

“If that happens, we go to the next step ... and then we would find out in October of next year if we are accepted into the planning and design phase,” Gemmell said.

She said the next phase can take anywhere from one year to 18 months, in which the library decides what to renovate.

Chairman of the Library Trustees, David Lumsden, said he took on the job because he always loved libraries and found they were a great place to escape from the problems of the world.

“The library is a beautiful building ... but now, libraries are changing, and the new purpose is not just for books but also to be the center of the community. There needs to be space for ac-

tivities, programs, gatherings, and it should be for [everyone],” he said.

The library has put out a survey accessed via a Quick Response (QR) code that asks the community for details about how the library is useful to them, what improvements they would like to see, and any problems they may have encountered, Lumsden said.

While he has his ideas, he said he wants to get the local students’ and community’s opinions on renovations via the QR code.

“My thoughts are [that] we need a community space, we need a space for workshops, we need a quiet space for teenagers, and we need a media room where students can film their podcasts, workshops ... I have an abundance of ideas,” Lumsden said.

Sophomore Cia Donohoe said she visits the library to take out a book or do her homework.

“I like how friendly the library is ... I think a lot more people would come if they expanded the library,” Donohoe said.

Interim photography teacher joins staff

By August Capotosto
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Interim photography teacher Andrew Lucas joined the art department to cover classes for photography teacher Caroline Hunt Epp while she is on medical leave due to her fight with cancer.

Lucas is teaching photography, graphic design, and videography.

He grew up in Tewksbury, attending one year at Tewksbury High School before transferring to Shawsheen Valley Technical to study culinary arts, graduating in 1993.

Lucas then graduated from the New Hampshire Institute of Art

in 2007 with a bachelor in fine arts degree, he said.

He earned his master’s degree at the School of Visual Arts in New York City in 2009.

Lucas said he spent a year doing product photography at Saks Fifth Avenue, before moving back to New Hampshire to teach at the New Hampshire Institute of Art in 2010.

He gallery-directed and taught photography at New Hampshire Institute of Art for five years before deciding on a more stable job in public schools, he said.

In 2015, he began as a substitute teacher at Lowell High School and obtained his public teaching license in 2016.

When the position opened here, Lucas was intrigued by the school’s high ratings, he said.

He began working in early December when Epp first left.

“I’ve found him to be very knowledgeable and to have a distinguished background in photography, in terms of his education and experience... [and] we’re so happy he’s here,” said art and music liaison Tamara Burns.

Students have enjoyed the hands-on engagement this quarter, sophomore Tao Ramos said.

“I look forward to going to art class when I’m stressed because art allows me to have fun with my classmates by looking at, watching, and making art,” he said.

Students are making prints of their photos and researching famous photographers in documentaries and books, Ramos said.

Lucas said bringing students together at the table is very important to him.

“The prints and books force everyone to share among themselves and get conversations go-



AUGUST CAPOTOSTO PHOTO

Andrew Lucas is a long-term substitute for photography teacher Caroline Epp.

ing about art,” he said.

Lucas said he is here for every student to come and discuss art and photography.

FUN FACTS

- Enjoys outdoor adventures.
- Has hiked and skied Mt. Washington.
- Has photographed weddings.
- Has artwork in private and corporate collections.
- Has three children.

Honors Spanish IV classes take field trip to Boston, MFA

Experience connects to class curriculum, artists

By Isabelle Donellan Valade
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Spanish IV Honors students and world language teachers Robert Bilsbury and Margaret Kane traveled by train to Boston to explore the city and the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), while speaking Spanish for the day, Bilsbury said.

Bilsbury said 21 students attended the trip on Dec. 22.

The trip connected with their vocabulary and the artists they had been studying in class, Bilsbury said.

“There was good energy in the group because we were studying [vocabulary about] the city [and] artwork from Grecco, Velasquez,

and Goya, and there happened to be exhibits of those [artists] at the MFA,” he said.

Junior Aisling Twombly said she enjoyed the trip and understands the benefits of field trips.

“When we’re younger, we go on field trips to add to our learning, but that gets dropped in high school. I think they’re still beneficial, especially if they’re added into the curriculum like this,”

Twombly said.

She initially thought it would be difficult to speak Spanish the entire time, but it wasn’t, she said.

“I feel like we were together as a big group for most of it, so I think

being together with other people that were speaking Spanish made it a lot easier,” Twombly said.

Kane said it’s important to do trips like this because of students’ dedication.

“In this high school, students



COURTESY OF MARGARET KANE

Students from the Spanish IV Honors classes traveled to Boston on Dec. 22 for experiential learning. Students explored the city and Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) while speaking Spanish.

are really hardworking and motivated, and it can feel like there’s not enough time to slow down and have experiences with what they’re learning,” she said.

Kane said the only challenge they faced was cost, but students took accountability.

“Because it was a smaller group, we didn’t ask the school to fund it, so students had to take responsibility for bringing their own money ... which they did,”

she said.

Bilsbury said this learning is important.

“Experiential learning is what you remember ... you’re going to remember the day that you had in the city speaking Spanish and going to an amazing museum and feeling the energy of all those amazing artists,” he said.

Junior Tess Carpenter agreed with Bilsbury’s sentiment.

“I thought the trip was a super

exciting and memorable experience and a great way to keep the class engaged in what we’re learning,” she said.

Bilsbury said he enjoyed all aspects of the trip.

“I love being with the kids and hearing them speak Spanish ... so the train ride was really fun, chit-chatting. But we’re so lucky we have this accessible experience for kids, and the students felt that, too,” he said.

Winter U Block competitions help support community

By Bissy Mitrano
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Before the winter break, a new tradition was introduced by pairing a U block door decorating contest and a food drive to help Beverly Boot Straps, a charity that provides resources to families in need.

History teacher John Mullady adapted the idea from a previous school that helped support a food drive and motivate students to assist others and support a worthy cause, he said.

“It was just for seniors [at his previous school], so it has been on my mind for a while, and I thought it would be something nice to try here,” Mullady said.

The month of December was selected to bring people together



COURTESY OF JOHN MULLADY AND MARY BUCKLEY-HARMON

Senior U blocks of teachers Jennifer Michaud, Erin Fortunato, and Mary Buckley-Harmon won the door decorating contest in a three-way tie. Michaud’s and Fortunato’s doors were inspired by the movies “Elf” and “Ratatouille,” while Buckley-Harmon’s door was inspired by The Elf on the Shelf.

through a charitable cause, he said.

Senior Joanna Shan counted the donations in her class and said the food drive was a success.

Food, toothbrushes, feminine hygiene products, and other necessities were donated, totaling 400 pounds of supplies, Shan said.

Beverly Boot Straps was extremely excited about the amount

of products donated, Mullady said.

Students from the Culinary Club, along with teachers Robert Bilsbury and Erin Fortunato, helped tally donations using a rubric to determine the amount of points a product may be worth, Mullady said.

The door decorating resulted in a three-way tie between the senior U blocks of teachers Jen-

nifer Michaud, Mary Buckley-Harmon, and Fortunato.

Seniors Erik Bischoff and Sander Breuker contributed to the construction of Buckley-Harmon’s fireplace door, inspired by The Elf on the Shelf. The students made personalized elves inspired by activities they each enjoy doing.

Fortunato’s door was inspired by the movie “Ratatouille.”

Junior Maddie O’Grady was credited with inspiration for the door idea for Fortunato’s class, Fortunato said.

The door consisted of a white background, decorated with illustrations of a chef and rats from the movie.

Senior participant Lucy O’Flynn came up with designing the door inspired by the movie “Elf” for Michaud’s classroom, Michaud said.

The door was decorated to resemble an Elf costume that was worn in the movie, along with festive lights and sugary treats.

Michaud’s class worked hard on their door and had a fun time doing it, Michaud said.

“I loved this idea. Mr. Mullady comes up with the best ideas to promote school spirit and create a fun atmosphere in this building, and I hope Mr. Mullady encourages this idea next year ... I also noticed that the [week before winter break] tends to be stressful for students, and it was nice to have something that relieves the stress,” she said.

CONTINUATIONS POST-GRADUATION PLANS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Senior Nate Gardner will be attending Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont, where he plans to major in either Molecular Biology or Biochemistry. He will also be competing in Division III track and field.

Gardner said he was drawn to the school because it has the oldest environmental studies program in the country and its connection to nature.

“The school is beautiful ... it’s in nature, it’s a great spot – there’s lots of hiking, skiing, and they have their own ski slope,” he said.

Gardner said he’s looking for-

ward to continuing his athletic career beyond high school.

“I’m just getting started,” he said.

SPANISH INTERNSHIP CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 Takayesu and any interest he has in teaching.

“He’s just an awesome kid and an awesome student, and I know he’ll make a really good teacher,” Bilsbury said.

ALUMNUS ON ‘SURVIVOR’ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Ross said after the final round of interviews, the final applicants fly to Los Angeles for the final round of casting.

According to Marcus James Dixon’s 2023 article “Everything to know about ‘Survivor 46’,”

for GoldDerby.com, “Survivor” season 46 was filmed in the summer of 2023. The official cast was confirmed today.

Davis appeared in the preview trailer, slamming a law textbook onto a table.

In an interview with CBS, Davis said he wants to avoid law student stereotypes.

“I’m definitely conscious of avoiding stereotypes of arrogance or [being] a know-it-all. I’m hoping [the cast] see[s] that I just want to have a good time,” he said.

The season spans 26 days and 13 episodes in the Mamanuca Islands in Fiji, Dixon said.

Social studies department chair Lauren DuBois said Davis was a

hard-working, disciplined student.

“It doesn’t surprise me at all that he would take on a challenge like [“Survivor”]. I think he could do really well; he just has the discipline and the determination,” she said.

English teacher Allison Krause said Davis was a cheerful and friendly student. Although she was initially surprised to hear that he would be on “Survivor,” she is excited to watch him.

“I was surprised because who would ever want to put themselves through [“Survivor”] but super excited for him. I understand why he was chosen because I think he has really good charisma, and he’ll be fun to watch on screen,” she said.



YOUTUBE.COM

2016 alumnus Charlie Davis appeared at 29 seconds in a trailer for the reality television show “Survivor.”

Senior displays map, history talent through YouTube

Creates, posts maps for family, friends

By Phileine de Widt
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Senior Sam Reissfelder creates map drawings, YouTube time-lapses of his drawings, and videos about history for a wide fanbase.

Reissfelder said he has been interested in history and in recreating maps from memory and images since elementary school.

“In the house we used to live in 10 or 11 years ago, we had a flag pole with a big American flag, and after seeing that, I felt inspired. I started drawing, and as time went on, I got better and better at it,” Reissfelder said.

He has made maps ranging from the world to in-depth creations of states.

When drawing, Reissfelder said he uses Google Maps or other images.

“I prefer to do things with a reference just because it’s more accurate, but I can definitely do

things from memory,” he said.

Seniors Stephen Ross and Kevin McKenna asked Reissfelder to draw them a map of Massachusetts.

“We have a goal to travel around Massachusetts and check off every place we visit, so we asked for a map. It literally looked like an image off of the web,” McKenna said.

Ross said he also appreciated Reissfelder’s attention to detail and use of watercolors.

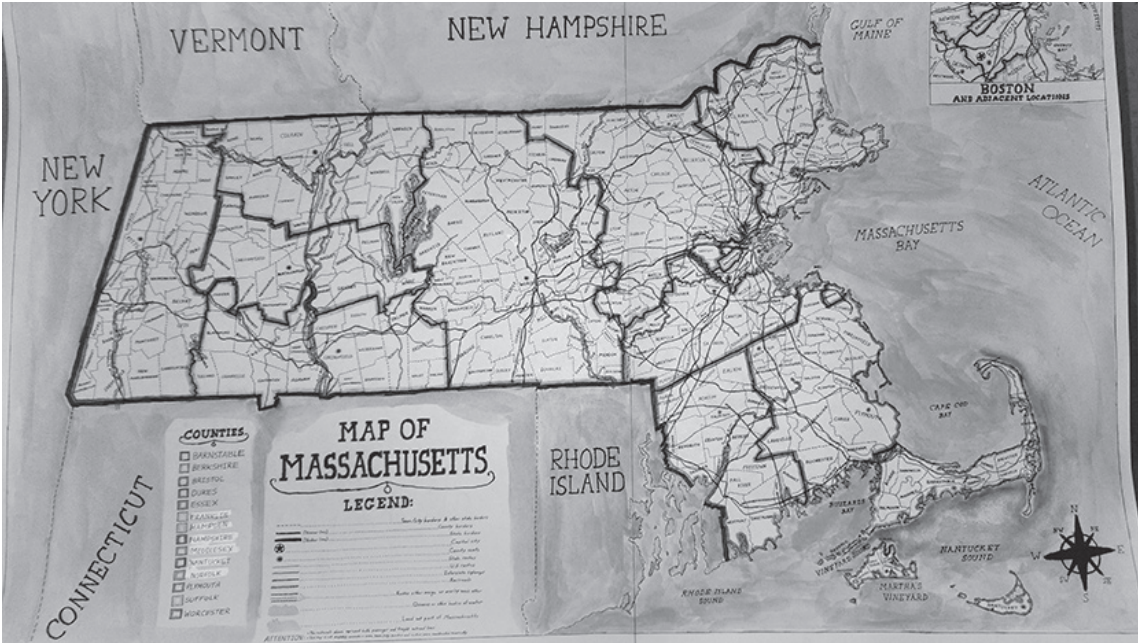
“[His map] definitely gives us the motivation to check off more places,” he said.

Special education teacher Peter Tarpinian, who has worked with Reissfelder for four years, also appreciates his work.

“It’s some of the best fine motor skills that I have seen. I’m encouraging him to play on that ability and look at that for his future,” he said.

Though Reissfelder is still deciding on his plans after graduation, he said he would be interested in working with history and geography.

During the pandemic, Reiss-



COURTESY OF SAM REISSFELDER

Senior Sam Reissfelder drew a map of Massachusetts for seniors Kevin McKenna and Stephen Ross, as they plan to travel across the state. Reissfelder used watercolors and precision when creating it.

felder started his YouTube channel, The World With Sam. There, he posts time-lapses of his map drawings and history timeline videos. The account has reached over 7,500 subscribers.

“At first [the channel] was slow with not a lot of people

watching, but as time went on, more people joined. History timelines are what I feel people wanted to see the most ... I recently did a poll on my channel, and people seem to want Greece,” Reissfelder said.

He said, the time to create his

work varies. Some maps take him a day, while bigger maps, like the one he made for McKenna and Ross, took three days.

Amazed by the precision of the map, McKenna said, “Not many people have the same talent he has.

Two seniors create podcast, inspire self-improvement

By Alessia Omari
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Seniors Eddie Chareas and Eamon McKenna actively work to promote self-wellness and personal growth through their podcast, “Rogue Routes.”

The project was created to help motivate listeners to improve their mental and physical wellness, with each episode covering topics such as competition, personal identity, and constructive criticism, Chareas said.

The process of recording each episode is fairly straightforward, Chareas said.

“We get an idea for an episode the day before, we do research on our own time, then two hours before [recording] we write guidelines on how we want the episode to go,” he said.

The goals that the co-hosts had planned for the podcast have adapted and changed over time, McKenna said.

“Rather than just documenting our thoughts, we want to help others achieve their goals of personal wellness,” he said.

Around one to three hour-long episodes are recorded and uploaded onto Spotify per week, Chareas said.

“We also try to upload around three to five promotional videos on either Instagram or TikTok in order to improve and grow our outreach,” he said.

McKenna said he and Chareas were inspired to start their podcast after observing how well their conversations flowed.

“We both were talking about how good every conversation we have is, so we wanted an outlet

to document that, and podcasts were gaining popularity at the time,” he said.

The podcast’s audience consists mostly of local peers and has even gained popularity among younger students, Chareas said.

“Some younger kids will walk up to me and say they love the podcast, and it just makes me feel really good that I’m influencing these kids in a positive way,” he said.

At the moment, the podcast has 300 followers on Instagram, and 25 subscribers on YouTube, Chareas said.

“Something I’ve done to try and create a stronger, more personal community online is allowing the audience to submit a quote of the day,” he said. “Incorporating the audience more will overall create a better environment for the podcast.”

McKenna said he enjoys the process of working with Chareas.



COURTESY OF EDDIE CHAREAS

Seniors Eddie Chareas and Eamon McKenna created their podcast “Rogue Routes” where they discuss personal wellness and identity.

“He’s one of my best friends and such an efficient worker,” he said. “I don’t have to push him to do anything.”

The podcast’s personal wellness themes have encouraged students to become the best version of themselves, junior Brian

Rosen said. “The message they bring to their viewers is the main reason I listen to it,” he said. “Their advice on physical and mental improvement has helped me and so many others improve themselves.”

SCAR plans Black History Month Events

By Whitney Turner
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

To celebrate Black History Month, the Student Coalition Against Racism (SCAR) has been preparing an agenda of events for the school and broader community to participate in, adviser and English teacher Allison Krause said.

She said the club’s plans include holding weekly meetings open to the school community, Zoom sessions with various speakers, and a community documentary viewing.

“Everything will be open



WHITNEY TURNER PHOTO

Members of SCAR organize and discuss preparations for Black History Month. They will hold an open house every week.

broadly to the student body ... and the documentary would be open to the Manchester and Essex communities at large,” Krause said.

Junior Henry Stevens, a member of the SCAR leadership board, said a highlight of the

agenda will be the open house events.

“We’re holding an open house each week to invite peers in who wouldn’t really know what SCAR is about, do current events, and talk about anti-racism within our own community and

within the broader community,” he said.

Stevens said the group plans to join forces with the Poetry Club.

“We’re hoping to do a collaboration with the Poetry Club to highlight Black writers and artists in our country,” he said.

The club will also be doing daily announcements throughout the month of February, junior Lily Stefanovich, a member of the SCAR leadership board, said.

“A lot of the days, our announcements are going to be for educational purposes, so I think just educating the school as best

as we can is our goal,” she said.

Stevens said the group has been organizing current events, writing announcements, and meeting with Principal Julie Sgroi to plan events such as the

‘We are holding an open house each week to invite peers who wouldn’t really know what SCAR is about.’

-HENRY STEVENS

community movie viewing of “Hidden Figures.” The film is about three African American women who were instrumental in

their work at NASA in 1961. Krause said they have been actively preparing all year by listening to podcasts, taking field trips, and conducting community outreach, she said.

Hornets Buzz online Spotlight highlights students’ achievements

By Libby Mulry
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Mehornets, the athletics instagram account, added the Hornets Buzz Student-Athlete Spotlight to highlight students’ achievements on and off the field, athletic director Cameron Molinare said.

The idea was first brought to her by social studies teacher John Mullady, she said.

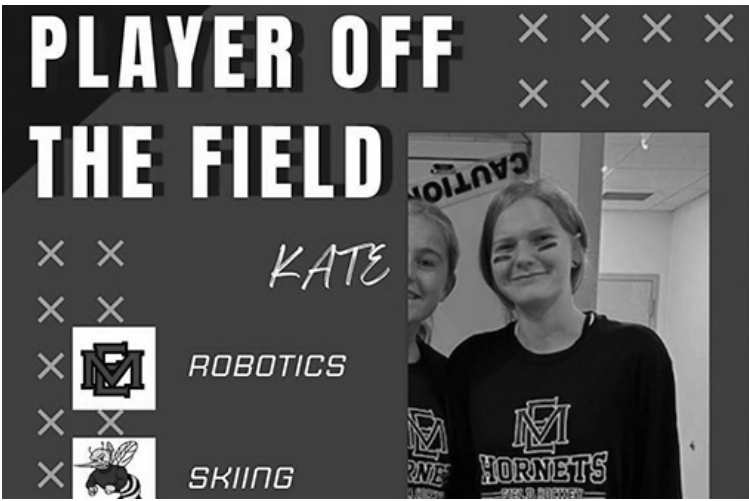
“[Mullady] coined the term Hornets Buzz in one of their social studies classes, and it took on a life of its own. They were hanging newspaper clippings and celebrating student athletes within class, and they came to me and asked if this was something we were able to do on our social media sites,” Molinare said.

She was later approached by business and marketing teacher Barrett Alston with a very similar idea, she said.

“It’s hard to keep up with all of the content and post if I were to take it on myself,” Molinare said.

Limited time led Molinare to use the Instagram page to mostly post results, she said.

“Education-based athletics is much more than just the final scores of games. I personally just



COURTESY OF MEHORNETS

The mehornets account featured senior Kate Bappe and recognized her effort as part of the ski team and Robotics Team.

didn’t have the bandwidth to take it on,” Molinare said.

Alston later approached her with the idea of two independent studies students, juniors Ava Fritsch and Olivia Kent, helping curate content for posting, she said.

Fritsch and Kent make “On the Field” posts

to acknowledge students’ athletic abilities and “Off the Field” posts to acknowledge students’ academic abilities, Fritsch said.

“We’re not just shouting out people that are scoring the most goals but people who are putting a big effort in, who show up, and

are dedicated,” she said.

Kent said it’s important to recognize the effort that all student athletes put in.

“Some people are more in the spotlight than others, so it’s a good way to acknowledge people who normally wouldn’t be,” she said.

Senior Kate Bappe who was recently featured in an “Off the Field” post said it was nice that a variety of students appeared on the Instagram page.

“I like that they’re balancing it out with who gets featured, and it’s not the same six people,” Bappe said.

Molinare said she hopes that the page continues to showcase more students and that it becomes more a part of student life.

“I’m hoping that it grows and maybe becomes an after school club,” she said.

‘Some people are more in the spotlight than others, so it’s a good way to acknowledge people who normally wouldn’t be.’

-OLIVIA KENT

Culinary club educates students about food, cooking

By Mechi O’Neil
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Juniors Ella Arnsten, Charlotte Crocker, Ali Erdogan, and Shay Engelhart are informing students about food through their creation of the culinary club.

The club’s primary objective is to teach students about food and to allow members the chance to explore themselves through cooking, Arnsten said.

The club, which consists of 32 members, meets every other Monday during U-block in history teacher and culinary club adviser John Mullady’s room, Arnsten said.

She said since the school doesn’t offer home economics, she decided to bring the club to the school.

“We wanted to create a culinary club specifically for people who are interested in learning how to cook and things like that,” she said.

Arnsten said she started being more interested in cooking during the Covid-19 pandemic.

So far, the club has decorated



COURTESY OF ELLA ARNSTEN

In their meetings, the culinary club participates in community service activities such as decorating cookies for elderly residences.

cookies for elders living at The Residence at Riversbend in Ipswich at one of their meetings, Arnsten said.

Mullady said he was impressed with their community service activity of cookie-making for the senior residence.

“I know they are hoping to try and incorporate ways of cooking, recipes, and community service opportunities,” he said.

Crocker said she decided to be a part of the club because she wanted to improve her cooking skills.

The club will soon be watching an episode of MasterChef while taking notes on it, Arnsten said.

“Since everyone is pretty stressed with midterms, we thought it would be a good way to still learn but be able to relax,” she said.

Mullady said that he thinks it is beneficial for students that they have the opportunity to pursue the clubs that they are interested in taking part in.

“You can learn about any culture through cooking, whether it’s the ingredients people use or how they share and express themselves through their food,” he said.

Mullady said that cooking is an excellent way to gain new knowledge about other places in the world.



Freshman Ellie Virden:
“I like to talk with friends and text.”



Freshman Ben MacDonald:
“When the power goes out, I like to sit and wait until it comes back on again.”



Sophomore Addison Lai:
“Usually I just light candles or go to my boyfriend’s house to use his generator.”



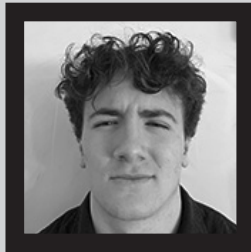
Sophomore Rocky Pratt:
“I practice and train for hockey.”



What do you do during a power outage?



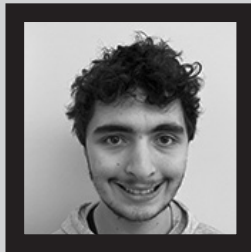
Junior Ella Arnsten:
“I like to sit around and play board games with my family.”



Junior Nick Brown:
“I practice pitching in the mirror so I can work on my form.”



Senior Lily Pilaud:
“I just look for candles to light and any battery-powered flashlights and ... collect all my blankets to stay warm.”



Senior Nick Curcuru:
“Usually I just like to draw.”

High School Sweethearts



“We met in the second semester of my sophomore year of high school in Chicago at the lunch table. My cross-country friends sat on one side, and her band friends on the other. There was a day when she was playing Minecraft during lunch. I wanted, in a relationship, someone to play games with, and so I saw that, and I thought, ‘Alright, this I can work with.’ I eventually asked her out, and we started dating about two months into being friends. I followed her out here two summers ago. I told her, ‘I’m willing to follow you.’ My favorite thing about her is definitely how nerdy she is when playing video games. It’s a big part of our relationship and how we connect with each other.”

- Nick Valle



Enemies to Lovers



“We went to high school together, but we were what you would call the opposite of sweethearts. I found him very annoying. He was kind of a pest. He was one year older than me and went away to college, and then I went to the same college, and we started dating my freshman year. In high school, I distinctly remember playing a scrimmage, and he ran towards me and knocked me into a puddle. That’s literally my first memory of Joe Edgerton. So I didn’t like him a lot. We ended up in a lot of classes together and did debate together. Now, I think he’s funny, but when I was a high schooler, I thought he was more of an annoyance. We had a lot of fun and ultimately realized we actually enjoyed each other’s company. My favorite thing about him is his sense of humor.”

- Elizabeth Edgerton



Reunited at the Reunion

“Kate and I grew up in Topsfield. In high school, when I saw her, I would say, ‘Fair Miss Kate, how art thou today?’ in a British accent. We would chitchat back and forth, but she was into theatre and was with all the popular kids going to parties on the weekend, and I was sportier and always with my teams. We were operating in two different orbits. I definitely thought she was really pretty, but I felt that I didn’t really have a chance with her. At the fifth-year reunion, I was ready to start over with a relationship. Kate Murphy was still single, so we danced a couple of times and went to an after-party. We started dating after that, and then we planned the 10th-year reunion together. Every time I see her car in the driveway, I am happy that she is home. She makes life fun.

- Robert Bilsbury



Hometown Love



“We never went to school together, but we went to the same pool and lived very close in Haverhill. Then, we started lifeguarding the summer before my junior year and his senior year. We were not really friends, but then we all went to a movie together, and then there you go. What we liked so much about each other is that we had a lot in common that I had not anticipated. I thought he was a meathead, but he wasn’t. Through it all we’ve always been each other’s best friend and we’ve always made each other laugh. It has always been fun and very supportive. He is my favorite, favorite, favorite person in the world.”

- Abigail Donnelly



NICK VALLE, ELIZABETH EDGERTON, ROBERT BILSBURY, AND ABIGAIL DONNELLY PHOTOS

Christian Weisse, social studies



“It was my first date after coming out to my family, and I was very excited. It was a guy who ... wanted to take me to the movies, and I thought, ‘OK. I love the movie theater. It’s great. It’s a good time.’ We saw some Marvel thing. We got there, and he was like, ‘Do you want to share popcorn,’ and I’m a germaphobic person, so I was like, ‘OK, fine, I’ll try.’ We sat down in the theater, and he was like, ‘I’ll be right back I gotta go to the restroom.’ Now the germaphobe in me is like, ‘Is he going to wash his hand?’ I left our seats and went and got myself a small popcorn because I was that panicked about just germs. He came back ... and I made an excuse like, ‘Oh I’m a little hungrier than I thought.’ He made such a big deal about it. He was like ‘Wait, so you’re not into me?’ I don’t know if I’m a bad liar or if he was just so offended by me getting another popcorn that he got up and left. We were still in trailers. So, my first official date was ruined by my own germaphobia. I don’t remember what the movie was about because I was, you know, sad.”

Elisabeth Drinkwater, administration



“I was on a date, and I got a really bad bloody nose that I didn’t realize. Then I wiped it and noticed that I had blood all over my face and shirt.”

Teacher Speak:
What is your worst date experience?

Caroline Coshow, French



“I am from Paris, and there is a little war between Paris and the south of France, and so I was maybe 24, and I was in a nightclub. I started to talk to someone, and I was wearing a T-shirt. He was going on and on and on about Paris, and I told him I was from there, and so he was impressed and started to lick my arm because he had never met a Parisian girl. It was a good thing I did not know taekwondo back then.”

Steve Padovani, special education



“My wife and I went to the same college, so she knew me before we started dating. I remember our first date ... on Valentine’s Day, after we had graduated, and we hit it off right away. Things were going well, but then she randomly said to me, ‘Wow, I never realized how short you actually were.’ I’m never really lost for words, and I was kind of lost for words. I didn’t really know what to say. I think I spun it around into a positive, but we joke about it now.”

Journarizzm - What is your flirting advice?



Avabella Mitrano, senior:
“Buy them coffee every morning.”



Mechi O’Neil, senior:
“Serenade her by playing ‘Push’ by Matchbox Twenty on the guitar.”



Charles Latons, senior: “Don’t try to be too funny. It’ll just be weird.”



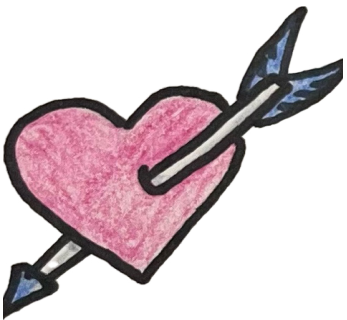
Sam Heanue, junior:
“Flex an impressive talent, like juggling. They’ll love it.”



Phileine de Widt, senior:
“Buy her flowers, hold her hand, and take her to every party cause all she wants to do is dance.”



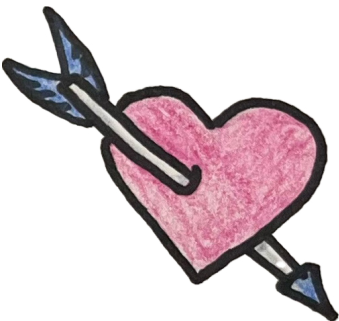
Summer Demeo, junior:
“Just don’t kill the groove.”



August Capotosto, sophomore:
“Run faster than all the other kids on the playground.”



Libby Mulry, senior:
“Don’t talk about seed oils and red meat.”



Sabine Cooper, junior:
“Recite the law of cosines to show how knowledgeable you are.”

ALESSIA OMARI ILLUSTRATIONS
WHITNEY TURNER, ISABELLE DONNELLAN VALADE, AND HANNAH DAVIS PHOTOS

STAFF EDITORIAL

Main doors should be unlocked, monitored in mornings

Keeping the main doors to the school locked in the morning not only creates a nuisance for students and teachers but detracts from what should be a welcoming school atmosphere.

Principal Julie Sgroi said the decision to keep the doors locked in the morning was made by the school’s safety committee, largely out of an abundance of caution regarding school safety. Sgroi said she is concerned about the signal that keeping the doors locked in the morning sends to the student body. She said wants the school to be a welcoming environment for everyone.

“I do question what kind of message it is sending when you’re coming to the school but it’s locked, and you’re just trying to get in the building and learn,” she said.

Teachers said the fact that the main doors to the building

are always locked in the morning creates a problem when the doors are crowded by groups of students trying to get in.

They also said that if the first thing students see in the morning is a locked door it could give them the impression that the

building needs extra security.

Locking the doors for students every morning, even when the school resource officer’s desk is close to the door with a direct line of sight, is an unnecessary extra step that

only serves to make it harder for students and faculty to come to school.

Junior Fiona Flynn, who takes the bus to school, said she has to wait for someone to open the door for her “almost consistently every day, probably four or five days a week.”

Faculty, administrators, and students are all in agreement that keeping the doors locked in the

The fact that the main doors to the building are always locked in the morning creates a problem when the doors are crowded by groups of students.



CHARLES LATIONS PHOTO

The locked front doors in the mornings, due to decisions made by the school’s safety committee, create an inhospitable environment to students and staff and lead to large amounts of crowding.

morning is not only impractical but creates an image problem for the school.

Therefore the only reasonable course of action is to unlock them – if only under supervision – in the mornings.

Sgroi said that a system was in place when she worked in Danvers where the doors would be unlocked for a certain amount of time until school started and then locked for the rest of the day.

Implementing that system at

the high school while also having someone, either the principal or the school resource officer, monitor the doors would allow students to enter the building more smoothly while also maintaining safety.

Road salts ruin natural habitats, cause algae blooms

By Sabine Cooper
INDEPENDENT STAFF

To protect natural ecosystems, the towns of Manchester and Essex should switch to using sand on icy, less-used roads, instead of traditional road salt.

Currently, over 30 states in the U.S. use salt on roads in icy conditions, but many states and towns are making a shift towards using sand to achieve the same purpose on less populated roads.

Using sand over road salt comes with both benefits and drawbacks. Still, for towns near freshwater aquatic ecosystems, using sand can be vital for protecting these natural environments and public health.

According to the United



THOMASBRUECKNER/FLICKR.COM

Sand is an effective alternative to use of road salt in the winter. Salt poses a threat to the freshwater ecosystems nearby roads.

States Environmental Protection Agency, increased salt concentrations in freshwater caused by road salt leads to a phenomenon called freshwater salinization syndrome.

Numerous studies by the EPA show that one effect of freshwater salinization syndrome is an increase in the rate of metals

moving from soils and pipes into groundwater.

This can increase the concentration of radioactive materials such as radium in groundwater and surface water, which poses dangers to natural aquatic organisms and public health and safety.

For example, according to the

article “Road Salt Works. But It’s Also Bad for the Environment” by Jenny Gross for the New York Times in 2022, road salt is high in chlorine, a chemical that can

kill wildlife and potentially be toxic to humans in high concentrations.

Another drawback of using road salt is the increased risk of eutrophication, which occurs in the water when there are excess nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, which allows algae to flourish, causing algal blooms.

After the algae die, the decomposition of the algal causes the depletion of dissolved oxygen that may ultimately cause the die-off of aquatic life, including fish, mammals, and plants, and pose serious risks to drinking

water. This destruction of the natural aquatic ecosystems must end. According to the EPA, while sand doesn’t help to melt the

For towns near freshwater aquatic ecosystems, using sand can be vital for protecting these natural environments and public health.

snow or ice, it increases traction and causes less harm when mixed with water, making it a more environmentally friendly alternative.

However, according to

the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, sand is more efficient on roads with lower traffic, not on high-traffic roads.

This makes it a good alternative on quiet roads, especially those near bodies of water.

To preserve freshwater habitats around the towns, Manchester and Essex should switch to sanding roads that are less traveled in place of road salts.

Faculty Adviser
Mary Buckley-Harmon

Editors-in-chief
Phileine de Widt
Charles Lations

News Editors
Avabella Mitrano
Mechi O’Neil

Features Editors
Ella Chafe
Stella Straub
Whitney Turner

the
INDEPENDENT

The Independent is published monthly throughout the school year. It is a product of the Manchester-Essex Regional High School Journalism class. We welcome letters to the editor from MERHS students, faculty, and community members. All submissions must be signed. The Independent reserves the right not to print letters and to edit the content for clarity and length. While letters can be critical of an individual’s actions, they cannot slander or libel. The staff editorial may be considered the opinion of the staff of The Independent. By-line opinions are written by individual staff members and should not be considered representative of the entire staff. The Independent staff hopes that all Manchester and Essex citizens will take advantage of this forum. The paper is meant to serve the school community, and we are open to suggestions to help it better serve its purposes.

Manchester-Essex Regional High School
36 Lincoln St, Manchester MA 01944
978-526-4412 newspaper@mersd.org
online at <https://www.mersd.org/domain/702>

Opinion Editor
Libby Mulry

Sports Editors
Isabelle Donnellan Valade
Summer Demeo

Arts Editors
Gwendolyn Berger
Hannah Davis
Alessia Omari

Staff
August Capotosto
Sabine Cooper
Sam Heanue
Bissy Mitrano

Boys’ basketball goes undefeated in Cape Ann League

Team works together to hold each other accountable during games, practices

By Mechi O’Neil
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

With an overall record of 13-0, the boys’ basketball team is on their way to being undefeated in the Cape Ann League and having a deep run in the State Tournament, head coach Timothy St. Laurent said.

The team has been focusing on having each player hold the others accountable during practices, he said.

“So far we have been very successful ... but at times we tend to lose attention to detail, so we really stress our senior leaders to hold everyone accountable because it just makes us better,” St. Laurent said.

He said senior captains Cade

Furse and Eddie Chareas have been playing exceptionally well.

“Cade and Eddie tend to be in the game the whole time unless they are in foul trouble or extremely tired,” he said.

St. Laurent also said the younger players on the team have been making an impact.

“Our game against Triton was the first time freshman Graham Lewis came in ... and hit a humongous three-pointer to extend our lead,” he said.

As the team approaches the

‘I want to try my hardest in every moment in every game and set an example for my teammates.’

- CADE FURSE

postseason, Furse said he hopes to end the season with a state championship.

Chareas also said his goal is to win the state tournament.

“I want to try my hardest in every moment in every game and set an example for my teammates,” he said.

Senior Kevin McKenna brings energy to the team, St. Laurent said.

“Both the team and the crowd really gravitate towards him. Any time we are up a certain amount of points, the entire fan section starts a ‘We want Kev’ chant,” he said.

Furse said in addition to McKenna, sophomore Zach Hurd contributes to the team’s spirit at



COURTESY OF DEVIN PISCITELLO

Junior Milo Zeltzer looks to pass the ball to senior Cade Furse in their game against Amesbury, which the Hornets won 86-47.

practices and games.

“He is a dog that is always bringing energy. He just loves to play, and it’s awesome,” he said.

Chareas agrees and said Hurd always brings maximum effort.

“He is always the first to finish

in conditioning, and he always has a good attitude,” he said.

Chareas said he is looking forward to the rest of the season.

“I’m looking forward to the playoffs and the chance to compete,” he said.

Strong team chemistry helps girls’ basketball

Players contribute to every game, beat their competition

By Hannah Davis
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After a successful start to their season, the girls’ basketball team is looking to improve their shooting, head coach Lauren DuBois said.

The team has relied on different players working together every game to beat competitive opponents, she said.

“We have everybody contributing every game, which is the key to our success,” DuBois said.

Senior captain Mechi O’Neil said the team has been working hard to overcome challenges.

“We’re a smaller team, so we really like to push the transition and use our speed,” she said.

The team has an overall record of 10-4, having lost to Lynnfield, Georgetown, Pentucket and Triton.

DuBois said she is hoping to keep improving throughout the rest of the season and is focusing on winning one game at a time.

“We have the opportunity to do really well in the CAL and then put ourselves in a good position for the state tournament,” she said.

Senior captain Phileine de Widt said the team’s ability to lift



COURTESY OF VICKI DONNELLAN

Junior Ella Arntsen drives by her opponent during their game against North Reading, which Manchester won 47-42.

each other up and play together has been vital to the team’s success this season.

“Our chemistry has been helping us bring the energy up on the court,” she said.

Sophomores Lily Oliver and Harper Brooks, and junior Ella Arntsen have helped the team’s strong performance this season, O’Neil said.

“They’re just really good bas-

ketball players who can manipulate their way to the basket but also shoot from the outside, so they’ve been really important for us,” she said.

DuBois said every player has improved throughout this season and helped the team be successful.

“We have a lot of people stepping up on any given night,” she said.

De Widt said the team is hoping to win their next few games to get into a good place for the postseason.

DuBois hopes the team can improve their shooting and be consistent throughout their upcoming games.

“Sometimes we have one quarter lull in scoring, so we really just want to try to work on playing strong offense and defense in all four quarters of every game,” she said.

Gymnastics team has spirit, comradery

By Sabine Cooper
INDEPENDENT STAFF

With a positive team atmosphere, the gymnastics team is working hard to continue into the postseason, despite injuries, coach Chris Way said.

The team, consisting of both Hamilton-Wenham and Man-

chester-Essex athletes, ended the regular season with a record of 5-2.

As they advance towards the CAL Championship meet on Feb. 10, the team is hoping to advance to Sectionals and have individuals qualify for the State Championship meet, he said.

Throughout the season, the team had several successful meets, and they hope to top the team’s previous high score in competition season, Way said.

With a high score of 137 last season, the team is working hard

to beat that after coming close by scoring a 136.9 against Danvers and Masconomet, sophomore Amelia Franklin said.

The team also won against Beverly, which was one of their biggest rivals this season, Way said.

“Our team pulled out a win against Beverly, and the girls performed extremely well for the first meet, with most of the girls hitting their routines without major breaks,” he said.

After that, even with injuries, the team continued to progress,

winning meets against Marblehead, Gloucester, Bishop Fenwick, and Essex Tech, Way said.

In addition to their wins on the mat this season, the team has become closer than ever, said senior captain Lucy O’Flynn.

“We’ve done a lot of bonding activities and had a lot of team dinners,” she said.

The positive team atmosphere is helping to build a sense of community, Franklin said.

“We all know each other, and we’re all really close, which helps to build a good environ-

ment,” she said.

Specific gymnasts on the team have helped to contribute to a positive atmosphere, Way said.

O’Flynn and Franklin have helped to bring positivity and help generate team comradery, he said.

“[Franklin] has set an example of working hard in practice and being willing to help the team in any way possible,” Way said.

As the season wraps up, he is excited to see what the gymnasts are capable of in bigger competitions.

Indoor track in strong position

By Isabelle Donnellan Valade
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Ending their season with a 0-4 record for boys’ indoor track and a 1-3 record for girls’, head coach Nicole Bembridge said she is looking forward to the Cape Ann League championship on Feb. 6.

She said the leadership from

the captains is exceptional.

“They show up to help the team learn ... with an amazing work ethic each and every single day ... [and] they are amazing at leading by example,” she said.

Both teams are very talented, Bembridge said.

She said senior captains Nate Gardner and Charlie Latons, junior captains Megan Hurd and Sabine Cooper; juniors Henry Stevens and Luke Donohoe, and sophomores Cia Donohoe and Abby Kent have all been out-

standing.

“[They] all either automatically qualified for D5 championships or are chomping at the bit to be,” Bembridge said.

Assistant coach Nick Valle said the team is at a good place.

“We’re having fun and enjoying the process of competing and of training,” he said.

Hurd agreed with Valle.

“I think everyone has sorted out [what events] they want to be in, and now we’re preparing for the individual stage,” she said.

Valle said junior Lily Stefanovich brings enthusiasm to the team.

“She’s been a ball of energy, cheering everyone on ... making sure everyone is hyped up. The positivity and the team camaraderie is in an amazing spot right now,” Valle said.

Senior captain Finn O’Hara said the runners are doing well.

“We have a smaller team this year. I think individually everyone’s been trying their best, giving it their all, and they’ve all

been really happy with their success,” he said.

Their team goal is to bring everyone together, O’Hara said.

“We want to try to improve team spirit every day ... and to build stronger bonds between everybody,” he said.

Hurd said their commitment has remained strong.

“A lot of people were sick ... and some are drowning homework, [but] they still show up to practice every day and have the energy to go to meets,” she said.

Boys’ hockey looks to improve ranking before playoffs

By Sam Heanue
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Despite injuries and inconsistent play throughout the early season, boys’ hockey is heading into the state tournament with high hopes, senior captain Quinn Brady said.

The team’s current record is 5-11, placing them as the No. 19 seed in the state tournament. The top 16 teams earn home playoff games.

“I don’t think we are out of the running yet for a home playoff game. We can still get it ... we’ve got a good strength of schedule for the [last five games],” he said.

Brady said the team’s record does not reflect their performance, as they spent the early season playing strong teams from higher divisions.

He said issues with penalties

left the team playing a man down for many games. They hope to decrease their fouling in addition to earning a home game in the playoffs.

Despite these early-season challenges, the team has made great strides in improving chemistry between players from different towns, sophomore Aaron Crompton said.

“It’s a great group of guys from Hamilton-Wenham ... Manchester and [Rockport], and they’ve come together better recently,” he said.

The team is confident that they can do well in the postseason, coach Garrett Stevens said.

“We’re still the highest we’ve been ranked in Division IV in quite some time ... so when we’re on, we’re on. We just need to make sure we stay on consistently,” he said.

Stevens said the team has been



COURTESY OF ZAC CARVALHO

Sophomore Matthew DeOreo turns to go after the puck in a game against Bedford on Dec. 3 at the Dorothy Talbot Skating Rink. The Vikings won the game 2-1, contributing to their record of 5-11

playing well in recent games, and they are looking forward to their schedule for the rest of the season.

He said their most exciting game will be against Northeast Metro Tech, a strong team they

look forward to facing a second time.

“We know the team, and we know the energy ... It’s going to be a physical game, and we’re ready,” Stevens said.

Along with Northeast Metro

Tech, he said the team is looking forward to a tough game against Amesbury for their senior night.

“It’ll be great to come and cheer on the seniors on such a special night, so come on and enjoy the game,” he said.

Boys’, girls’ swim teams earn fourth, sixth at CAL meet

By Summer Demeo
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Both the boys’ and girls’ swim teams had a strong showing at the Cape Ann League Championship meet on Jan. 27 and 28, with the girls placing sixth overall and the boys placing fourth, coach Teresa Holland said.

She said the girls’ 200 medley relay placed second.

Sophomore captain Megan Graeter placed first in the 200 Individual Medley and second in the 100 backstroke. Sophomore captain Sydney Hemme placed

first in the 100 breaststroke and second in the 100 butterfly.

Every girl swam a season-best or a personal-best time in their events at the meet, Holland said.

The girls’ team ended its season with a record of 1-5, and the boys’ team had a record of 2-4.

Junior captain Libby McKinnon said the team environment has been strong.

“We are a super small team, but we support each other in and out of the pool. I think I saw that a ton at CALs,” she said.

For the boys, junior captain Colin Conway placed second in

the 100 IM and the 100 breaststroke, Holland said.

She said the most impactful swimmers this season are Graeter and Hemme for the girls’ team; they are Conway and senior captains Erik Bischoff and Diego Sanson for the boys’ team.

Sanson said the team is very positive and encouraging.

“A lot of the older swimmers and seniors have been helping the younger swimmers fine-tune their technique and figure things out,” he said.

McKinnon also said the young and newer swimmers on the team

have improved greatly throughout the season.

McKinnon has been key to raising team spirit this season, Holland said.

“She gets everyone going ... She came to the boys’ meet to cheer them on, and she just has a great spirit,” she said.

As the team moves into the postseason, they will continue to

support each other, Holland said. The Sectional meet is on Feb. 10 and 11, and the State meet is on Feb. 17.

She said Graeter has qualified for Sectionals and States in seven events, Hemme in two, and Conway in one. The girls have also qualified for three relays: the 200 medley relay, the 200 freestyle relay, and the 400 freestyle relay.

Ski team focuses on individual improvement

By Whitney Turner
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Although they are at a disadvantage due to their small size, the ski team has been in good spirits as their season begins, assistant coach Avery Hayes said.

Hayes has taken on a larger role with the team since head coach Molly Friedman has taken a step back due to her pregnancy, they said.

The team’s current record is 0-9. They have had three races so far, but they are scored against multiple teams for each race, Hayes said.

They said that the group is fast and has been doing well, but struggles to earn top scoring placements against larger teams.

“It’s more about how the individuals do on a team of our size, because larger teams statistically are more likely to get the top

spot,” Hayes said.

Senior captain Sienna Crocker said that having just eight racers makes it difficult to compete against schools with around 20. However, the team has been focusing on individual improvement, she said.

“We’re definitely all improving on our times, and we’re all collaborating well, and teamwork is good,” Sienna said.

The skiers have kept their spirits up well despite having to wait until mid-January to ski, senior captain Grayson Crocker said.

“We’ve bonded since we’ve gotten on the mountain, and it’s

always hard in the first part of the season because we don’t get to go on the mountain ... but we’ve had a good start and everyone’s excited,” she said.

Hayes said junior skier Caroline Willwerth motivates and uplifts the team.

“Caroline definitely gets the social juices flowing; she gets everyone talking and gabbing for team unity,” they said.

Freshman Kiernan Day stands out as an impactful skier, Sienna said.

“She’s really good. She has a lot of experience racing,” she said.

Grayson said moving forward, the team has five more regular season races. Then, they will compete in the interscholastic competition on Feb. 14, which includes the top 7 members from each team, she said.

The team has done well at always showing up and trying their best during dryland practices, Hayes said.

“I’d say their spirit and flexibility with everything has been amazing,” they said.

As the season comes to a close, Hayes said they hope the skiers will continue to progress individually.

Girls’ hockey team learns from losses, stays motivated

By August Capotosto
INDEPENDENT STAFF

With a record of 2-9-1, the girls’ hockey cooperative team, is determined to finish off the season strong, coach Hadley Woodfin said.

On Jan. 6, the team lost 1-2 against Peabody.

“It was tied up until .3 sec-

onds left, and they were able to get a puck in and take the lead from us ... I was proud of the team for fighting so hard, and it was one of our best games this season,” she said.

By playing many hard teams, the team is improving fast, Woodfin said.

So far, they have played as high as Division I and Division II teams.

She said that this level of intensity has helped the players improve and has given them a newfound determination.

Another important game this season was a 2-2 tie against Medford on Jan. 24, sophomore Charlotte Earl said.

“Our first tie of the season told us if we want it, we can have it, and that has motivated us to keep fighting,” she said.

Earl said the team has been making meaningful connections through team bonding activities.

“Team dinners and pre-practice activities have improved our communication in the locker room and on the ice,” she said.

Team building has helped strengthen the relationships between the players which has shown during games, Woodfin said.

“This group is open-minded and eager to learn, making them extremely coachable,” she said.

As of Feb. 5, the team has 5 more games left in the season.

Their current goal is to play each game with intensity and show teams they played earlier in the season that they are more formidable than they were before, Woodfin said.

“We can learn from every loss and take it back to practice to improve,” she said.

Award-winning 2014 alum shares music journey

Alex Valenti works with famous artists

By Avabella Mitrano
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Music teacher Ben Ice-nogle invited 2014 alumnus and Forbes’ “30 Under 30” 2022 member Alex Valenti to speak to the creative writing and music classes about her company “Key Partners,” an entertainment group centered around music management, production, and investment in ventures.

Speaking to the classes on Dec. 13, Valenti said she had a passion for music and put on concerts at the Landing restaurant every Sunday.

“I always wanted to be in music because I was such a music fan. I was always the kid making playlists, and I was always at concerts, paying attention to pop culture,” Valenti said.

She said she attended Emerson College for one year but ultimately decided it was not the place for her.

Valenti then transferred to the University of Southern California (USC), where she received a Bachelor of Arts in music industry and management, with a minor in communications.

“I really wanted to go to USC, but my parents didn’t want me to go to school in California. So I just went for a year where I got the most money. [Emerson] was not for me ... USC was the perfect school for me,” Valenti said.

At USC, Valenti met artists such as Remi Wolf and King Princess while participating in internships. She said she worked with Katy Perry’s team for three years until she started her first company known as 3D Method, which was centered on managing digital influencers. She sold the



F PROFILE
Alex Valenti
COURTESY OF ALEX VALENTI
MERHS alumna Alex Valenti works in music management.

company in 2022.

“I had a lot of success with that ... but I didn’t really want to work on digital stuff anymore. I wanted to work with career artists and producers that are working on really big records ... so I created Key Partners,” she said.

At Key Partners, Valenti manages songwriters and producers with commission and also co-owns songs with writers and owns parts of other entertainment companies through investment.

“[Having ownership] is really good because what sometimes happens is if an artist fires you, you have no cash flow. Whereas with publishing and ventures, I’ll always have cash flow because I own something,” Valenti said.

She runs Key Partners with her former employee Elda Alconz, who manages financial operations.

“It’s really rare to find two women running a music company, so it’s exciting that I have such a great ally in her. We’re hopefully going to accomplish a lot of great things together,” Valenti said.

Key Partners currently works with three artists, six entertainment companies, and 20 writers and producers ranging from Justin Bieber to Daniel Caesar, Valenti said.

Valenti supported her clients in the past at events like the



COURTESY OF ALEX VALENTI/ANDRE HERD
Alex Valenti poses with her clients Peach Tree Rascals after they signed a record deal with 10K Projects/Warner Music Group. Valenti works with several artists and entertainment companies.

Grammy Awards and the red carpet.

“I actually try to send some of the younger kids that work for us to those things now ... I used to go to all of the networking events like Variety, Hitmaker, Brunch, or a women in music event because it’s a great way to meet people,” she said.

Valenti said she initially experienced challenges navigating through the entertainment industry.

“I have had every door slammed in my face. Not only as a woman, but a young person in the industry. So it’s about being able to take every ‘No’ and using your drive to continue on,” she said.

In 2022 Valenti received the Forbes’ “30 Under 30 Award,” which recognizes notable people under 30 years of age in various industries.

“I was extremely shocked and humbled to wake up that morning because I actually didn’t know I got it,” she said.

Valenti said she emphasized to the classes how many jobs are

available in music.

“I think there’s this misconception in Manchester that music is lame and that you can’t have a career in it. So we spent a lot of time talking about the different types of jobs you can have in music ... I liked showing people

that there are opportunities beyond being a doctor or a lawyer,” she said.

English teacher Allison Krause said she attended Valenti’s concerts at the Landing and is proud of her success.

“I always felt like she would do something really, really big. I’m not surprised that she’s making huge moves in the world of music. I just felt like she had something special,” Krause said.

She said she thought Valenti’s presentation to her students offered invaluable insight into songwriting.

“I think that it was really cool for [students] to see someone who came from this exact building, exact town, who’s working with big artists ... She showed them not to count yourself out from doing big things,” Krause said.

Icenogle said he thought her presentation was very beneficial

to the music students because she showed there are opportunities for students in small schools.

“We want to work more together and raise excitement and awareness about the music program here. She’s really invested in coming back to the community she came from and expanding music options,” he said.

Freshman Hazelle Steriti said she was very interested in Valenti’s creative writing presentation and enjoyed listening to parts of unreleased songs.

“She talked about the writing process and how there were many ways to do the writing process ... I just thought it was cool how she showed what she does today,” Steriti said.

Valenti recommends that high school students who are interested in music or writing should learn everything they can about their passion while also maintaining their morals.

“Read books, subscribe to blogs ... and be a good person. Entertainment is one of the only industries where people can get away with doing some crazy things, and I think that the most important thing to do is to hold onto your values,” she said.

New movie reimagines holiday spirit

By Summer Demeo
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

“The Holdovers” stands as one of the best Christmas movies released in recent years. Director Alexander Payne has successfully created a touching balance between comedy, love, and melancholy.

Set in the 1970s, the film takes place primarily at a New England prep school over Christmas break. Ill-tempered Latin teacher, Paul Hunham (Paul Giamatti) must stay on campus with any students remaining at school during the vacation.



MIRAMAX PHOTO
Dominic Sessa and Paul Giamatti star in the new Christmas movie “The Holdovers.” The film is set at a prep school.

He is left with the bright but troublesome Angus Tully (Dominic Sessa). Only three people remain at the school, Angus, Hunham, and the head cook Mary Lamb (DaVine Joy), who is

grieving the loss of her son in the Vietnam War.

Angus and Hunham are initially at odds with each other, but as the movie progresses, they begin to form a father-son bond.

The three become close as they spend the holidays together, and the audience can see changes in the characters throughout the film while they open up to each other.

Angus’ relationship with his real family is strained, and Payne takes the audience on a heartwarming journey as Angus finds his new family.

This movie takes the idea of the “Christmas spirit” past just spending time with loved ones and being happy. Under Payne’s direction, the film shows the true meaning of family as well as sacrifice for those you love.

Sessa and Giamatti’s beautiful acting transports the audience to their storyline. Joyheartbreakingly portrays a mother living with grief.

Since its release on Oct. 27, 2023, the movie was nominated for Best Motion Picture, Musical

or Comedy at the 2024 Golden Globe Awards.

Giamatti won the Golden Globe for Best Performance by a Male Actor in a Motion Picture, Musical or Comedy. Joy won the Golden Globe for Best Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role in Any Motion Picture.

Cinematographer Eigil Bryld achieved the feeling of the ‘70s, making the movie look as if it was actually filmed then. Costume designer Wendy Chuck also contributes to the feeling, placing characters in the style of the time.

“The Holdovers” is the perfect movie for those wishing to find the Christmas spirit.

The movie is rated R for language, some drug use, and brief sexual material.

Drama Club rehearses for Drama Festival set for March 2

Students will perform ‘Death of a Dead Guy’

By Avabella Mitrano
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Drama Club students are preparing for the first round of the Massachusetts Educational Theater Guild’s Drama Festival on March 2, said Drama Club adviser and director Tyler Garofalo.

Garofalo said this year the club will be performing “Death of a Dead Guy” by William Bowman Jr., a 1940 murder mystery and comedy set in a family household.

The final run-time of the show will be from 25 to 30 minutes, within the 40-minute time limit, with six lead characters on stage, Garofalo said.

“I am directing this show for the first time, and I’m new to Drama Fest, so I’m relying a lot on the students and their inter-

est,” she said.

At the beginning of December, more students auditioned than the six roles available. However, the remaining participants will still be able to assist by learning from the main cast, Garofalo said.

“I would love for everyone ... to feel like not just a part of [our] show but part of a bigger drama community,” she said.

Junior Joshua Cohen said he likes how the script is short.

“It’s precise. The jokes hit.

It goes in all the right directions. Since it’s a period piece, the whole thing is written in regional

dialects, which makes it so much fun to read,” he said.

Cohen said he plays Pete Cannon, a humorous unconventional detective character.

“It’s nice stepping away from the other things in school, which can be very serious, and doing a show that doesn’t take itself seriously ... It’s fun,” he said.

Cohen said he really enjoys watching the freshmen get ex-

‘[The script] is precise. The jokes hit. It goes in all the right directions.’

JOSH COHEN



AVABELLA MITRANO PHOTO

Drama Club members and participants of the Drama Festival gather after school to practice their play, which is a humorous murder mystery by William Bowman Jr., called “Death of a Dead Guy.”

cited for the play and hopes they will come back next year..

Sophomore Wren Shanks said he enjoys his role, which is playing Reginald Bascome III, who is

the dead narrator of the play.

“I think it’s really fun ... I get to mess around with life, death, and make people laugh,” he said.

Drama Club will continue to

have rehearsals and practice regularly until their competition, which will be at Saint John’s Preparatory High School, Garofalo said.

Music Honors Society hosts Trivia Night

By Hannah Davis
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

In an effort to raise money for the music department, the Music Honors Society hosted a Music Trivia Night on Jan. 19, band director and MHS adviser Joe Janack said.

He said the members of MHS came up with the idea to host the competition.

“We ran with it based on the feasibility of this type of event and the amount of work that would go into planning the event,” Janack said.

The competition consisted of four rounds, each with 10 questions. Each round focused on a different topic: lyrics, music



COURTESY OF CAROLINE CHRZANOWSKI

A crowd of students and families participate in the Music Honors Society Trivia Night, an event to raise money for the department.

history, music trivia, and MERHS music.

Participants could work as a team or individually, and snacks and drinks were available for pur-

chase. All money raised from the event went to the club’s upcoming trip to New York City in the spring.

Choir director and MHS

adviser Ben Icenogle said the goal of the event was to involve more people in the music department.

“This is a music event that is less centered around performance. We want people to engage with music in any number of ways so [we are] doing something that doesn’t necessarily require musical proficiency,” he said.

Junior treasurer Josh Cohen said he also hoped the event would raise awareness for the club as well as help to make the music department more approachable to the community.

He said there were more participants than expected and the event raised about \$500 for the upcoming music trip.

“We had a lot more people

show up than we were expecting, which bodes well for future events,” Cohen said.

Icenogle said the club is mostly student-run, so students planned the event with little help

from him or Janack.

“The students worked really hard,” he said.

Cohen said the club was able to work

together well.

Freshman Anne Stevens, who attended the Trivia Night, said everyone in attendance seemed to really be enjoying themselves.

“There were a fair amount of people there that weren’t in the music department, and there were families there who were there to support the department,” she said.

‘This is a music event that is less centered around performance.’

BEN ICENOGLLE

‘Blue Eye Samurai’ visually satisfies audiences, engages viewers through woman’s quest for revenge

By Alessia Omari
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

“Blue Eye Samurai” is an eight-episode series that captivates audiences with its engaging plot and beautiful animation.

Created by TV writers Amber Noizumi and Michael Green, the Netflix series was released on Nov. 3, 2023, and was animated by the French studio Blue Spirit.

The series follows a half-Japanese woman named Mizu (Maya Erskine) who disguises herself as a male Samurai during the Japanese Edo period, a time known for its extreme national isolation and racial homogeneity.

Mizu’s striking blue eyes reveal the shame of her European descent to people who encounter her. In order to enact revenge for her existence and suffering, Mizu plans to kill all four white men who were present in Japan at the time of her birth.

Despite having a relatively slow-paced plot, “Blue Eye Samurai” never feels boring. The series spends careful time establishing characters and their motives through long yet captivating sequences. The audience is presented with multiple lengthy flashback scenes that take their time to present Mizu’s troubled childhood.

The series successfully incorporates visually pleasing colors into its historical setting.

Despite being very violent, fight scenes are well-choreographed and satisfying. Mizu’s smooth, well-planned fighting style is best demonstrated during her fights against the students at the Shindo Dojo.

Viewers also follow Japanese Princess Akemi (Brenda Song) and her struggle for independence as a woman during the Edo period. Every now and then, her story arc will intersect with Mizu’s.

The series succeeds in presenting flawed characters, helping them feel more human. Mizu’s



NETFLIX.COM

The lead of the show “Blue Eye Samurai,” Mizu, a half-Japanese woman living during the Edo-period, prepares to enter Kyoto.

goals often fail to make logical sense, but it becomes apparent that she is simply too blinded by her own rage and thirst for revenge.

“Blue Eye Samurai” is a visu-

ally stunning series that presents an engaging plot. The series is rated TV-MA for gore, language, nudity, sexuality, smoking, and violence.