

## New and Future Security on Campus

by Allie Chung and Timothy Ne-sanelis  
News Co-Editor and Match Assistant Editor

Just over a month ago, on Sept. 9, two North Port High School students were arrested on charges of “written or electronic threats to kill.”

These incidents follow a disturbing recent increase in threats posted on social media against Sarasota County Schools, as outlined in a message by the superintendent.

But for the current 2024-2025 school year, approved legislation from the Sarasota County School Board is necessitating that schools across the county employ new technology. This aims to not only make schools safer, but also to eliminate fears many students carry with them to their classes.

Sarasota County is giving priority to security measures due to culminating worries about school safety. According to CNN, as of Sept. 19, the United States school system has experienced 50 shootings in 2024. The new security measures are expected to increase parents’ and students’ feelings of security in addition to thwarting possible threats. One of these security measures is the Open Gate metal detection system.

Open Gate is designed for the automatic screening of students in transit, including their backpacks. Regardless

of age or grade, anyone who wishes to step foot on campus will be required to walk through the machines. Stu-

dents who show up to campus past 7:21 a.m. will be required to enter the Main Office and are still expected to walk

through an Open Gate device.

With the addition of these machines, county officials do not wish for Sarasota County schools to have the appearance of an airport or prison. Pine View’s School Resource Officer, Eugene Williams, also holds these concerns, yet he believes that the metal detectors will not take away from Pine View’s aesthetic.

“There’s going to be at least three units open. They’ll be installed in front of the school and if the Rivendell gate ends up opening, there will either be an Open Gate device installed there, or there’ll be some sort of a fence or a gate installed that keeps all the students going through an Open Gate,” Williams said.

Open Gate devices work to increase campus safety in the least intrusive way possible. However, if the alarm is set off, the student will be separated from their backpack and the staff member at hand will work to discover the cause of the disturbance.

Chief of Police of the Sarasota County Schools Police Department and the Executive Director of Public Safety, Jacob Ruiz, understands that this process possesses a learning curve. Ruiz is aware that training employees to operate the devices plays a significant part in overcoming this. However, he credits the

system’s success and agility at Riverview to the students.

“What is required of me? What can I bring in? What should I have on me to make sure that I don’t make it go off...Kids also have been well prepared now to realize, ‘I’m going to bring this, this, or this,’” Ruiz said.

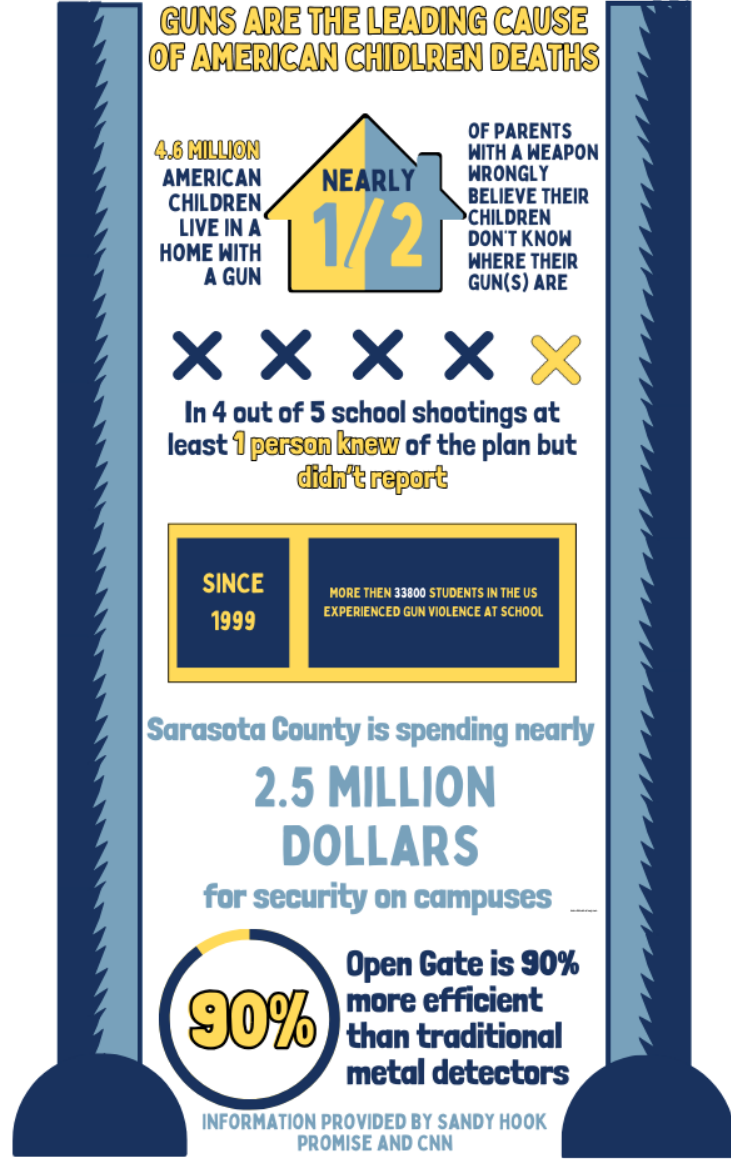
If a student is aware that they have an item that will set off the machine, they can present it to a staff member before passing through.

According to Ruiz, at Riverview High School, where the metal detectors have been in place since this spring, binders with metal strips were discovered to have triggered the alarm. E-cigarettes and vapes are also detectable.

However, if a threat unfortunately manages to get around security and into the school, more security additions to protect the staff and students on campus have been greenlit for implementation, including the Omnilert Gun Detection system.

“Basically, if a camera picks up the person carrying a firearm, it will set off some kind of notice,” Ruiz said. “A live person will confirm if that’s a firearm and then notify [police] right away.”

continued on page 4



GRAPHIC BY ALLIE CHUNG AND ROBYN SCHOENBERG

## Acceleration of Digital APs

by Jakob Roche  
Opinion Editor

AP exams are going digital. Students have many questions.

Most of this concern stems from the recent changes of AP mock exams. Since the AP tests are going digital, an authentic mock exam would have to be digital as well, however, this is much easier said than done.

The Torch Staff reached out to Dr. Wiley for an interview on the topic, however she was unavailable, so we interviewed two AP teachers and an AP student instead.

Why was the transition to electronics made to begin

with? While the details of the decision are not clear, College Board has made a statement that an individual who had access to the physical AP test packets distributed the information online. This action caused the invalidation of many student’s tests.

With the tests going digital and data being end-to-end encrypted, the goal is for future situations like this to be avoided.

“That was kind of the straw that broke the camel’s back. That was, you know, the last little bit it took to push College Board to be like, no, no, we’re not doing this anymore,” Miller said.

An unaddressed detail

posed by digital exams is the location of testing. The traditional method of using the gym has its obstacles when transitioning to a digital platform.

“Now, we’re not going to have the gym...We’re back to ‘Which six classrooms are you going to use for this?’ How does that work?” science teacher Jason Miller said. “There’s a whole lot of challenges that are going to have to be overcome in order to make this work.”

One of these challenges is that Wi-Fi bandwidth in the gym is likely unable to support

continued on page 4

## The New Norm in Band

by Aly Zaleski  
Asst. Editor-in-Chief

As Pine View plays a tune of goodbyes for longtime band director Victor Mongillo, it welcomes the former Director of Bands at Riverview High School (RHS), Norm Vagn.

After teaching in Illinois, Vagn found he needed a place that truly valued the lessons that music and arts had to offer. He soon discovered Sarasota and went straight into directing the Riverview High School Kiltie Band in 2004.

Moving further into his career at RHS, Vagn took over the role of orchestra director and IB Music teacher.

“Mr. Vagn has an enter-

taining personality and always made class a stress-free environment. His humor and understanding of music made every explanation easy to understand,” said Liam Brinson, a former student of Vagn in his IB Music class at RHS.

Being fully immersed in the musical talent of the school, Vagn took it upon himself to work with the RHS Jazz Band.

“I built up the Jazz Band... That was my thing,” Vagn said. “That’s part of the reason why I came here [Pine View]...Getting it as a class would be too good to pass up.”

continued on page 2

## index

- 1 News
- 5 Sci & Tech
- 6 Entertainment
- Features
- 10 Sports
- 12 Humor
- 14 Opinion
- 16 Focus

Sports, p. 10



Danica Aten: Swimming Trials A dive into Danica Aten’s swimming at the Olympic trials

Humor, p.12



Pitbull to Pine View The secret identity of Dr. Covert is revealed

Opinion, p. 14



Voting is Vital Voter participation on all levels upholds the democracy and its constituents

Follow us on...



Facebook:  
@PineViewTorchDotCom



Instagram:  
@pvtorch



# Introducing HS Assistant Principal: Kira Bryant

by Sivan Levy  
Web Editor-in-Chief

With the introduction of many new school policies, Kira Bryant, the new High School Assistant Principal, is here to facilitate the school's transition.

Bryant received her bachelor's and master's degree from the University of West Florida before beginning her professional life. She recently transferred from Booker High School. There, she worked as the Assistant Principal of Curriculum before deciding to make the switch to Pine View.

"Pine View School is an amazing place, and I'm so honored to be here, so it was a really great opportunity for me to come and be part of the family here," Bryant said.

Coming into Pine View, Bryant's main goal for this school year and beyond was to be able to connect with students on a personal level.

"One of my favorite parts is being in the car line

in the morning...I'm getting to know kids that way," Bryant said. "So, I'm helping kids with reminding them about their IDs, and making sure that our campus is safe and secure. But it's really great to have that time with students, to get to know them informally and greet them each morning."



Another main focus of Bryant's is not just to familiarize herself with student's paths in high school, but also to understand what they're planning for their futures. She specifically mentioned how much she enjoyed watching the graduation online last year and being able to see what the students' fu-

ture plans are. She's looking forward to being a part of that this year and being able to support students to help them reach their future goals.

When not working at school, Bryant enjoys spending time with her family, watching basketball, as well as going to the beach.

It's not just the students that Bryant has made an impact on, but her coworkers too. Alycia Poteralski is Bryant's administrative assistant, and has worked closely with her over the time she's been at Pine View.

"Mrs. Bryant has been such a welcome addition to Pine View's admin team. She is always calm and willing to help. I'm so thankful that I get to be her assistant," Poteralski said.

Though Bryant has been working at Pine View a short time, the impact that she's already made on her students and coworkers is evident.



## The New Norm in Band

by Aly Zaleski  
Asst. Editor-in-Chief

The fact that Pine View has Jazz Band as a class is very unique. Vagn put the effort into making that an option for his students and loved it. So, the appeal of Jazz Band being a specialized course at Pine View stuck with him.

Another reason for Vagn's switch was that classic Pine View experience.

"I've always admired the Pine View bands," Vagn said.

As a band director, Vagn had seen the Pine View bands before in competition at events like the Florida Bandmasters Association Music Performance Assessment. The talent of the

Pine View band, having won new awards year after year, is one to be recognized.

"The students seem to be very motivated and into the music," Vagn said. "I can tell that band is their release. That's why I love music, too."

Vagn's passion for music itself helped him to bring so much success to his music classes at Riverview High School (RHS).

"Asking [Vagn] questions about jazz theory and harmony served to be the foundation of my music theory understanding," Brinson said.

Through his career starting in Illinois to his years at RHS, Vagn has been a confident teacher, ensuring that his students get

the fullest musical experience. Making the most of this opportunity at Pine View is his next big achievement in the world of teaching.

"After twenty years at Riverview, starting a new job was a leap of faith. So far I have not regretted it one bit," Vagn said.

As a musician himself, Vagn's way of teaching and directing music directly relates to the musician. It's his passion. The path he has taken that has led him to Pine View is sure to continue to fuel that passion and lead Pine View's bands to new and exciting places.



# Alyson King: Harvard Grad and Foster Parent

by Ana Easter  
Match Asst. Editor-in-Chief

At a school celebrated for its high rankings, the spotlight is often on student achievements, leaving the faculty overlooked. Teaching is frequently undervalued, seen as a profession with little profit; however, the impact that teachers leave on students' lives is immeasurable in terms of money. With over 30 years of teaching experience, high school English teacher Alyson King came to Pine View this year having already altered the lives of countless children.

King had not always planned on pursuing a career in education. With experience playing the cello, she began college with plans to enter the music industry.

"I was a music major first. Then I just realized my favorite

ing children in need extends well beyond the classroom.

In her personal life, King was able to change the lives of many underprivileged children by opening her home and providing a safe environment to children in the foster care system.

"My husband and I started fostering children when we were 26 years old, and we fostered about 40 children in 20 years and then we stopped and started again because we adopted one of my sixth grade students and his little sister," King said.

King's love for helping children and her experience working with them is reflected in her teaching.

"You can tell she has a lot of experience working with kids and teaching by the way she talks to us and handles certain situations.



PHOTO BY ANA EASTER

part of music was working with kids, so I switched to be an elementary education major," King said.

After beginning her career teaching kindergarten at the Penobscot Indian Island Reservation in Maine, King attended graduate school at Harvard, where she earned her master's degree in risk and prevention. She then began teaching as a crisis intervention counselor and dropout prevention teacher at multiple schools around Florida.

After taking a break from teaching, King moved on to work with incarcerated youth in prison, followed by teaching for a year at Pine View, then Out of Door Academy and Sky Academy.

By guiding children through difficult situations as a counselor, King was able to provide support for many students in need and found it very gratifying.

"I taught at risk children for years and years and years and it's very rewarding because you get to see major progress and you really are offering them something when you have those high expectations," said King, whose passion for help-

She's really good at making what she teaches interactive and engaging, we play a lot of games which I think helps," a current student of King's, sophomore Ingrid Cushman said.

The ability to make class engaging and entertaining stems from King's deeply rooted love for English that began when she was a child.

"English has always been my favorite thing; I still have my grandmother's spelling bee pin she gave me from the 1930s when she was in elementary school. It's always been something I've loved. I love reading and I love writing, so it just made sense for me," King said.

King looks forward to getting to know her students, as she finds the environment at Pine View to be very welcoming.

"One of the things that's so nice about it is everybody does their homework, and everyone is so polite," King said.

With all of her experience teaching and helping students, the Pine View community is lucky to have King teaching this year.

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY ALEX LIEBERMAN/GRAPHIC BY ALLIE CHUNG

## The Sarasota County School Board Election

**Thomas ("Tom") Edwards ran for reelection for his District 3 school board seat. His two opponents were Thomas Babicz and Greg Wood.**



PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM EDWARDS VIA X

### Who ran?



PHOTO COURTESY OF KAREN ROSE VIA LINKEDIN

### Karen

**Rose, the current chairwoman of the school board, ran for reelection for District 2. Her opponent was Liz Barker.**

### A note about districts

In the school board race, the county is divided up into five "districts" to ensure candidates come from all over the county. School board elections are nonpartisan.

### Who won?

Tom Edwards was reelected, winning 55.76% of votes in his race, and Liz Barker won her race against the current chair by 2.76% of votes.

### Upcoming dates

**Liz Barker will begin her term at the Sarasota County School Board meeting Nov. 19.**





WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE DIGITAL APS?

# Acceleration of Digital APs

by Jakob Roche

continued from page 1

hundreds of test takers simultaneously. However, the exam platform accommodates to this concern.

Wi-Fi is only needed to start the test and to submit answers. If connection is lost in the middle of the test, students can continue without disruption and answers are saved for up to four days after the exam is taken. In addition, the tests are designed to save work even if a device's battery dies.

Right now, administration

is working to adjust the changes posed by a digital exam. One of the possible solutions is moving the AP tests into teacher classrooms. However, a requirement by college board is for seats to be at minimum of five feet apart, making the space needed for hundreds of test takers quite large.

"That seems reasonable to do for a two-week period of time, but for two separate two-week periods of time [both the mock and AP exam times], it has more of an interruption on classes," Wolfinger said. "Will that interruption on classes hurt more

than not giving a mock exam?"

Regarding the debate of getting rid of a mock, a concern is that it may not be feasible to use a large amount of classroom space for four weeks of testing.

"We are, in some respects, looking at the success and trying to attribute it to the mocks when it's what teachers and students have been doing in their classrooms all year that may have been the reason for the success. We have kids who are really good test takers, so maybe they don't need a full mock," Wolfinger said.

Although these details

have not been formally addressed, Miller claims answers will be disclosed soon.

"The tests aren't until May, and the people who are responsible for solving these problems are working very diligently to solve them...It's not going to be an easy thing to figure out, but I have faith that they'll figure it out and they'll make it work," Miller said.

While the process of refining the transition to digital ap tests is still in progress, students are finding ways to stay optimistic. For example, sophomore and AP Seminar student, Krish

Gandhi has hope that the burden of writing the lengthy AP Seminar essays will be relieved due to the digital aspect of the exam.

"I feel like it will be easier and more accessible. It will definitely be less work on the hands," Gandhi said.

While there are many factors to take into consideration, AP class instructors such as Miller believe that all schools, staff and students can adapt.

"We'll figure it out. I mean, this is Pine View," Miller said. "We got a lot of smart people around here."

## Civil Engagement Beyond Voting

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY JIAYI ZHU  
GRAPHIC BY ALLIE CHUNG

### 01 Build a voting culture

- Spread the word. Talk to friends and family who are voting age and support the discussion. Support voting rights organizations and legislations.
- Local organizations such as ACLU of Florida, All Voting Florida, and Common Cause Florida promote pro-vote legislations.



### 02

#### Volunteer



- Attend voter registration drives, apply to be a student poll worker/poll greeter
- Participate in door-to-door canvassing, phonebanks, text banks, direct mail, and literature drops to inform and engage voters.
- Volunteer at a local campaign, attend campaign events

### 03

#### Advocate



- Sign petitions, join a march
- Call, email, write letters to your local, state, and national elected official
- Attend public meetings, like school board meetings, to see local officials and voice your opinion.
- Pre-register to vote!



APPLY HERE TO  
BECOME A STUDENT  
POLL WORKER



PRE  
REGISTER  
TO  
VOTE

# New and Future Security on Campus

by: Allie Chung and Timmy Nesanelis

continued from page 1

Omnilert, which utilizes advanced AI to locate firearms, was selected to be installed into nearly 5,000 security cameras to secure 45,000 students and 5,200 faculty across 56 schools in Sarasota County, the largest installation of its kind in Florida.

Other security technologies, such as A-phones and Fortify FL, have already been installed at Pine View. A-phones, which are cameras that allows staff control who enters Building 17, Building 16 and the main office, are the newest addition of security technology at Pine View this year.

"When I came to school at the beginning of the school year, and I saw the A-Phones installed, I was ecstatic," Williams said. "Anything that could help my job and keep

everybody on campus safe: I'm for it."

Additionally, if students see or hear anything that could result in violence against oneself or others, they can provide tips through FortifyFL, which are then routed through Williams, local police, and state officials.

"Anybody on campus are our eyes and ears. You report things if you see something that doesn't look right, you hear something that doesn't look right," Williams said.

While the county does not have a specific deadline, they intend to implement these

security measures in all high schools as quickly as possible.

With these new changes, Ruiz knows how difficult it can be to adapt to new developments on school grounds. However, he hopes that students and parents can appreciate the county's concern for the safety of the student body.

"Our brains can't com-

plain and be appreciative at the same time

of something," Ruiz said. "So, when you're worried about something or you have some kind of complaint or anxiety about something, try to think about something that you're grateful for that overshadows it."

With tragedies occurring in our

schools due to fire-

arms across the nation, the addition of new security technology in schools across Sarasota County is the first step towards permanently ending the tragic cycle of school violence.





# Climate Change: Accelerating Storms

by Andrew Ashby  
Entertainment Editor

In early August of 2024, many communities in Sarasota had to deal with an unexpected and devastating flood. At first, Tropical Storm Debby seemed to be a minor storm, but quickly gained strength as it approached the Gulf Coast, causing torrential rains over Sarasota and surrounding areas. Streets turned into rivers overnight — nearly 20 inches of rain fell in less than 48 hours.

According to climate experts, storms like Debby are becoming more frequent and intense due to global warming. Worldwide rising temperatures are leading to warmer oceans, which fuel tropical storms and increase the amount of precipitation.

Florida, in particular, faces greater risks as its rate of sea-level rise has historically been higher than the global average. Projections show that in 15 years, Florida could experience sea-level increases of eight to 24 inches, depending on the scenario. Additionally, as sea levels rise, storm surges and flooding are expected to become more severe.

This reality hit home for Sarasota residents, who were caught off guard by Debby's rapid escalation. Many houses were flooded and damaged. Senior Rayna Parker had a great deal of water inside and around her house.

"It got all over the hardwood flooring and all that. Our yard also got completely flooded and our street also got completely flooded ... it was intense, lots of flooding," Parker said.

Even after the storm had passed, the water continued to rise, preventing many from leaving their homes for days as well as causing more damage.

Laurel Meadows, a community in east Sarasota, suffered greatly from the storm in particular. Debby devas-

tated nearly every home in the area, and residents scrambled to save what they could, but many had to evacuate with just their essentials.



A local street outside Parker's house on Worcester Road in Ridge Wood Heights floods after Tropical Storm Debby. PHOTO BY RAYNA PARKER

Nearby Laurel Meadows in Palmer Lake, biology teacher Angela Wilson also struggled throughout the storm.

"As the storm came, [the water] just started rising so fast. And at one point ... my car was almost underwa-

ter, and we had to clear the garage and start getting both of the cars in," Wilson said. "Then, by the time things settled, the water was about a foot away

who needed them. The Red Cross and FEMA arrived swiftly, but the damage was already immense.

Climate scientists point to warm-



The Laurel Oak neighborhood in Sarasota flooded intensely after Tropical Storm Debby. PHOTO BY PARKER WILDING

ing oceans as a key factor in driving the increased intensity of tropical storms. The rising sea levels not only amplify storm surges but also decrease the land's ability to drain water, keeping floodwaters higher for longer periods.

Storm surges, which are expected to become more powerful, already cause tens of billions of dollars in damage per storm, and even a small increase in surge height can disproportionately flood buildings and disrupt evacuation routes.

Although the floodwaters slowly began to recede, the impact would be felt for months later. Amidst intense natural disasters, we must assess how the climate will change our future forecast.

**Editor's note:** This story was written before Hurricane Helene and Milton.

## AI in Education: Packback

by Anna Zhang  
Match Layout Artist

ChatGPT. Bots. Algorithms. And now, Packback.

Among the immeasurable world of computer perception and processing, a new AI platform for inquiry-based discussion, writing assignments, and

she said. "...[Students] will get immediate feedback, which could give them an edge that they did not have before."

On the other hand, AI has already had negative impacts on thinking and education.

"Look at ChatGPT and how immediately it was used for cheating and

Director-General for Education UNESCO, which provides technology trainings for teachers.

"Our work must be infused with urgency as we endeavor together to ensure that our education systems play a key role in getting humanity's transition into an AI world right," Giannini

wrote in a UNESCO paper in 2023.

**Left: Packback's logo featuring their motto, "Fearlessly curious." The program uses AI to aid students' writing.** PHOTO COURTESY OF PACKBACK INSTAGRAM



instructor coaching has come to Pine View: Packback.

The program, which is a reliable source to improve writing and receive advice, has been implemented in English I and English II classes.

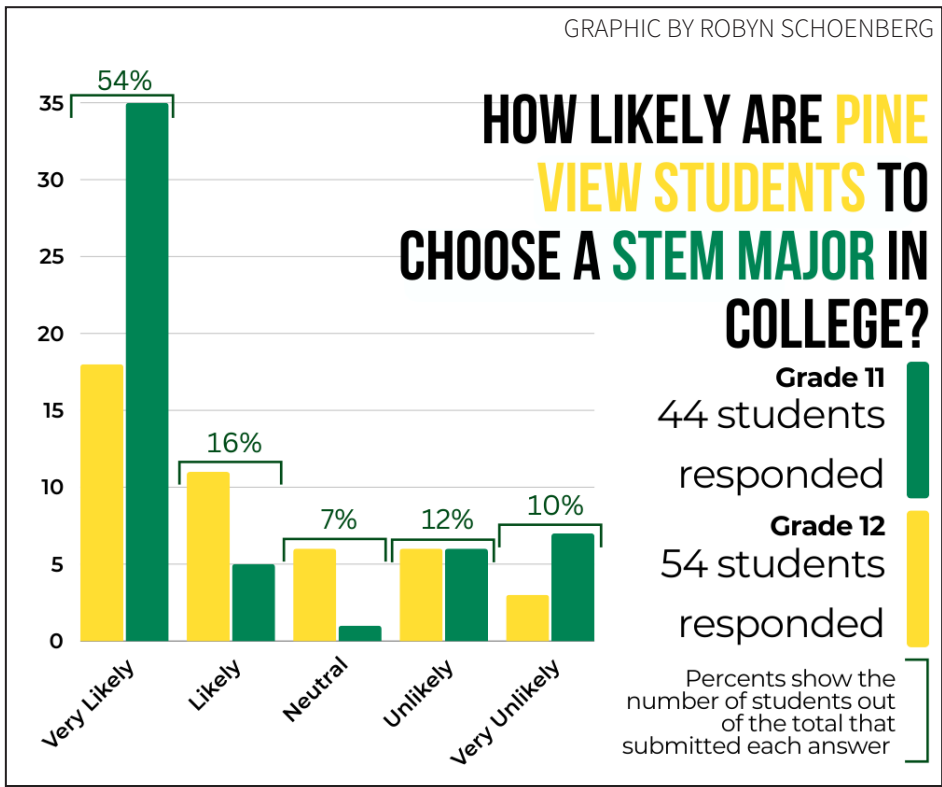
Megan O'Mahony, the head of the English department and English teacher, has recently started using Packback.

"...I think it potentially has a lot to offer, so I am feeling positive about it,"

avoiding work ... at the end of the day, it is helping our society to become less intelligent," O'Mahony said.

However, AI can be beneficial and save time. Last year, it was partially used to grade the writing FASTs — the irony of which was not lost on the class of 2027, whose prompt was about AI. Substantial amounts of money and time were saved due to this choice, according to O'Mahony.

Stefania Giannini is the Assistant





# The “Tric-star” of the Show



Tricarico (front) poses for promotion pictures for the “Newsies” at Rise Above Performing Arts Center. PHOTO PROVIDED BY JOEY TRICARICO

by Dasha Shabunina  
Broadcast Editor-in-Chief

The curtains open, and junior Joey Tricarico steps out into the stage light. The play has started. With a smile, he begins the performance he’s been working on for months.

Tricarico has a passion for theater. He has acted in Pine View Drama Club productions like “The Addams Family” and “Beauty and the Beast.” At Rise Above Performing Arts Center, Tricarico has acted in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “Cinderella,” “13: The Musical,” “Newsies,” and is currently starring as Percy Jackson in “Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief.”

Tricarico has been involved in theater since seventh grade, though he dabbled in a few school plays in elementary school before moving from New York to Florida. His experience on stage however, goes way back. From an early age, Tricarico did competitive dance.

“At the very least, I was four when I started [dancing], and it was mainly hip hop – that’s where I was strongest at – and I learned jazz,” Tricarico said. “And then I took ballet. I was terrible at it. I still am terrible at it, but I took ballet, and then eventually, years later down the road, I would pick up tap.”

Unable to stick with dancing after leaving his studio in New York, he turned to acting. Junior Jackson Mitchell, Tricarico’s best friend and his companion in theater, agreed it wasn’t a bad decision. He joked he’d want [Tricarico] to shout me out in his Oscar acceptance speech.”

“[He’s] just so energetic,” Mitchell said. “I think that’s the biggest thing, is he really comes to life on stage...I think it’s something that he has always loved, and he is really pretty good at.”

However, Tricarico doesn’t want to pursue a career solely in acting.

“Once you start professionally auditioning, every single person that walks into that audition room can sing, act, and dance, and most likely, they can do them better than you,” Tricarico said. “You’re going to hear a million ‘no’s’ before you manage to get a ‘yes,’ and financially, that’s not a situation you want to be in.”

As of now, he plans to minor or double-major in theater while also getting a degree in something else as a backup. Nevertheless, theater has provided him with many useful skills that can be used in many situations.

“I’ve gotten better at social interactions with people because with theater – especially high school theater – you tend to meet a wide variety of people with a wide variety of reasons as to why they’re there,” he said. “I am there because I genuinely enjoy doing it and have fun doing it...I like the little nuances and getting to work and interact with people.”

His experience backstage has been key in forming some of his closest friendships.

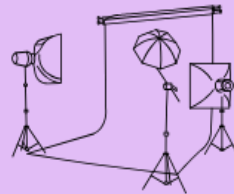
“When you find kids that are passionate about theater...you kind of just geek out over musicals or just audition for stuff together and hope that you get into it,” Tricarico said. “Overall, I have a lot of good friends that are from theater, both at Pine View with the Drama Club and outside of Pine View.”



Joey Tricarico and Isabella Kulawik, playing Gomez and Morticia respectively, performed in the “The Addams Family” in a Drama Club production Feb. 2023. PHOTO COURTESY OF ISABELLA KULAWIK

## EVENTS RESCHEDULED DUE TO RECENT STORMS

PICTURE DAY  
SUPPOSED TO BE: SEPT. 25  
NOW: NOV. 14



CLASS OF 2025  
BASKETBALL  
TOURNAMENT  
SUPPOSED TO BE: SEPT. 27  
TBA RESCHEDULED DATE

MR. PINE VIEW  
SUPPOSED TO BE: OCT. 18  
NOW: FEB. 21



PHOTO COURTESY OF  
ELLIE LEVY



PINE VIEW BAND  
CONCERT  
SUPPOSED TO BE: OCT. 15  
NOW: OCT. 29

MARIE SELBY  
BOTANICAL  
GARDENS  
CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER  
NOTICE



PHOTO COURTESY OF  
VAN WEZEL VIA  
INSTAGRAM

VAN WEZEL EVENTS  
ALL OF THE 2024 SEASON  
WAS CANCELLED



# Stepping into a lifetime of dance

by Jenna Hinck

Match Layout Artist

Whether it's at the bar or on the stage, freshman Sadie Valente dances for hours weekly. From a young age, Valente has loved to dance. After attending Stage Door Preschool of the Arts, she fell in love with their dance program, Stage Door Studios.

"At the preschool, us students were put into a ballet and a tap dance for an end-of-year recital," Valente said, "That's how we figured out we all loved dance."

This was just the beginning of Valente's passionate journey into dance. For Valente, dance is more than just an activity. She has used dance as an outlet and met some close friends.

"I love dancing. It's one of the ways I express myself," Valente said.

Not only is dance a fun extracurricular, it's also a form of art and expression for many dancers around this age.

Ever since her first performance, Valente has been friends with Alyssa and Talia. She met them in her pre-K class and started dancing with them around the same time when she was three. They have been friends ever since.

"We joined the actual studio together in kindergarten," Valente said. "We have all been dancing there and for the most part on the same competitive team, ever since. We've always kept in touch over the years."

This first performance was the start of Valente's love for dance with her friends. As they have grown older, they still dance together and compete on the same team.

Valente does many forms of dance including lyrical, hip hop, tap, jazz ballet, and sometimes leaps and turns class. Dance consumes a lot of her time.

"I do like seven hours a week, three on one day, four on another, and over the weekends," Valente said.

To spend that much time on something, you need to love it. Many of these classes have taught her more than just technique, for example, ballet.

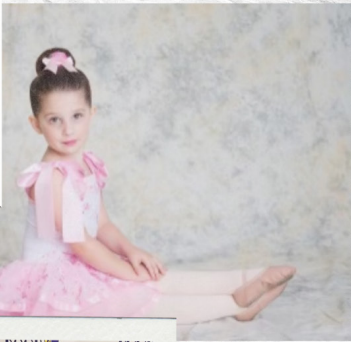
"In particular, ballet teaches discipline. You have to do these certain things. It's very precise," Valente said.

Although the lessons learned in dance are different than the ones learned in everyday life, they carry on what is experienced in a lifetime. In ballet class, the teachers are precise with steps at the barre. After many critiques, eventually the dancers learn to do these things without being told. This is discipline, which is similarly taught in school. With most not even realizing, lessons like these are taught in dance. Dance continues to be a fun, social, and beautiful activity for Valente to experience.

GRAPHIC BY ROBYN SCHOENBERG  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF SADIE VALENTE



In costume, Sadie Valente (left) poses for a photo with her friends. Valente has been dancing for over ten years.



Years later, Valente (right) poses with friends Alyssa and Talia. Dance has provided Valente her closest friends.

# Libraries in Decline

*Does anyone go to the library anymore?*

by Madelyn Bailey  
Humor Editor

According to 2022 statistics from the Institute of Museum and Library Services annual Public Library Survey, the average number of library visits each year per person has decreased by 49.1% over the last decade across the country. In Sarasota County, this trend can be noticed among all age ranges, but especially among teenagers.

“I just wish the students would read a little more books”  
Patricia Morgerson,  
Pine View library and media technician

Jenny Duckworth, the youth librarian at Fruitville Library, has noticed that teenagers rarely visit the library, despite youth services being offered to everyone from ages 0-18. This has left her department in need of answers about the lack of teenage visitors.

“We’re trying to figure out an answer still because if we had an answer

for that question, we’d probably be able to get them in a lot easier,” Duckworth said.

Steffanie Cain, an adult services librarian at the Frances T. Bourne Jacaranda Library, blames the low number of teen visitors on scheduling conflicts.

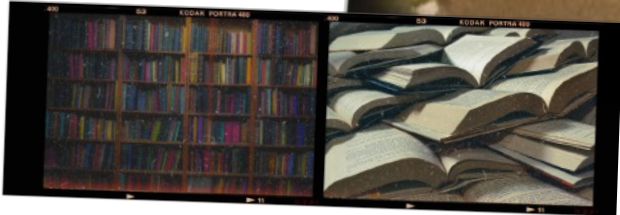
“Once you get into the school ages it becomes harder to fit in time to come to the libraries among extracurriculars and school,” Cain said.

At Pine View, students have easy access to a library. Despite this, library and media technician Patricia Morgerson noticed that among the estimated 75-80 high school visitors a day, the students are hesitant to check out books. Morgerson attributes this to technology.

“They are on their phones all the time; they don’t have the desire [to check out books],” Morgerson said.

Regardless of why students choose to read fewer library books, libraries remain a useful resource.

“There’s such a large choice of books to kind of get your imagination going. You learn new things; you discover information about things that you never knew existed,” Duckworth



said.

Aside from books, local libraries offer services such as printing, computer access, mobile hotspots, newspapers, magazines, and access to mobile databases.

As for Pine View students, Morgerson hopes that students will start to prioritize reading and shift away from video games and social media.

“I just wish the students would read a little more books,” Morgerson said.

GRAPHICS BY ROBYN SCHOENBERG AND JIAYI ZHU





# PINE VIEW'S LOST ART

by Elena Herman  
Features Editor

What do you see when you imagine Pine View? Is it a tree-lined quad wedged between colorful buildings? Is it the sleek grey rectangle called Building 17? Maybe it's the engineering building, the choir room, the media center, or everything inbetween?

There are many different versions of this beloved campus. In fact, if you asked an alumnus what they see, you might get a surprising answer. Their strongest memory might be of the removed portables, or the Batman bench, or even something you've never heard of before. Did you know that the Student Union was once covered in murals?

Art, like students, comes and goes. Amazing-

## PORTABLE MURALS

Though once an intrinsic part of the Pine View experience, portables aren't the most appealing pieces of architecture around. However, many students may remember the beautiful murals that adorned the sides of portables one, three, and five. These murals were made by students much like the ones at Pine View today: lovers of science, culture, and history.

Pablo Gonzalez was one such student. As a class of 2019 alum and Pine View art program veteran, he was given the opportunity to jazz up John Schweig's portable with an image that personified US government.

"Mount Rushmore is such a visually incredible feat... I wanted to have something that was striking visually. I really was referencing Andy Warhol... and that's what inspired the decal effect," Gonzalez said.

Working with his friends to finish it, Gonzalez created the Mount Rushmore scene out of spray paint and summer free time. The result was almost as iconic as the mountain itself--a one-of-a-kind pop art painting to liven up a very old portable.

Now, Gonzalez continues to brighten the world as a professional artist. He credits the confidence to pursue art to the enthusiastic support of former art teacher Retsy Lauer.

"That was really important for me at a school-like Pine View where everyone was trying to get into an Ivy League or become a lawyer or a biologist... I feel like if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have had the hope to pursue art as a career," Gonzalez said.

ly, though, it has the power to bring people together, especially in a community as tight-knit as Pine View. In recent years, students have opted to take more core-subject classes and academic electives like A.P. capstone in lieu of art electives. However, former Pine View art teacher Retsy Lauer says that art still has an important role to play in education.

"It just creates a whole person. You take reading, writing, science, math--all that stuff. All that stuff has art in it... art rounds out everything. It should pull everything together," Lauer said.



A student poses with the murals made by one of Cathy Wojtkun's fourth-grade classes. The murals were created in the 90s. PHOTO PROVIDED BY PINE VIEW ARCHIVES

Though the Mount Rushmore mural and others are certainly missed, they hopefully will not be forgotten. In any case, their effects will live on forever.



Gonzalez's mural stands completed on John Schweig's old portable. Gonzalez created the mural during the summer after graduating from Pine View. PHOTO PROVIDED BY PINE VIEW ARCHIVES

## STUDENT UNION MURAL

Did you know that the high school side of the Student Union used to be covered in murals? Students from the class of 2004, overseen by former art teacher Retsy Lauer and Principal Steven Largo, once decorated the walls with paintings from bottom to top. Both various and numerous, the murals brought a sense of culture into the liveliest place on campus.

There were two main murals: one of Pine View's past, present, and future, and one with a jungle scene including trees, monkeys, and pythons (of course). The former was made up of three circles: one showing Pine View's old campus, another with the current, and the last showed Pine View's future through the lens of the 2000s.

"[The artists] took the media center and made it look futuristic, like the Jetsons... now, it would be totally different than what it was then, because our concept of future is different. That was cool," Lauer said.

Not only are these paintings a glimpse into what Pine View students were like two decades ago, but they're a predictor of where they are now. The main artist of the jungle mural, Allie Sheldon, certainly picked a topic that was close to her heart.

"She actually studies monkeys... she was our own Jane Goodall!" Lauer said.

Unfortunately, the murals were painted over around a decade ago and have nearly been lost to Pine View's collective memory. Could the empty spaces in the Student Union be brought back to life?



Students eat and socialize during the Pine View Fair. The murals they sit by were painted over during renovations to the Student Union. PHOTO PROVIDED BY PINE VIEW ARCHIVES

## CLASSROOM PROJECTS

by Robyn Shoenberg  
News Co-Editor

Alongside the murals in the Student Union, countless student-made banners were strung up, adorning the walls. The abundance of colors, shapes, and textures added personality, comfort, and a student touch to this hub on campus.

"It was kind of like a literary adventure," said former AP Literature and Composition teacher at Pine View, Paul Dean. "You walked around the cafeteria, and you could see different authors and the motif of one of their books."

AP Lit students were tasked to put together a two-to-three-foot poster about an author of their choice, and they "went crazy" for it according to Dean.

When it came time to put up the posters, all the AP Lit students held a large banquet during lunch time. Students would set up tables and bring food related to their author to share with others.

"They were pretty enthused about it, the students," said Dean. "It's part of the creativity I think every human craves, and it was presented to them. Very few people complained about it, I don't think anyone did."

This creative tradition brought together the student body and brought life to the walls of the Student Union and classrooms. Even after the banquet, the posters continued to stay up year-round until the next class of AP Lit students left their mark.

## FINDING THE ART AGAIN

Art is deep-rooted in Pine View's past and has a place in the future of the campus.

"Murals and art across the board add a sense of building a space that becomes yours," said art teacher, Haley Brown. "If you're part of making it, it's now part of you that's there, if you grow up around it, I think it's something that you look back on fondly."

There are many opportunities for students to bring life to campus through creative projects.

"I'm open to hearing ideas, anything that's going to make our campus more beautiful, ... especially from our students," said Middle School Assistant Principal, Melissa Abela. "They have so many gifts and talents that I know that can be utilized."

If a student has an idea for the mural, they first have to come to confirm the spot with administration, and then come with a sketch and purpose

behind the project. What will it do for Pine View and why do we need it?

Personally, Abela envisions a mural, possibly nature themed, on the huge, blank wall along the parking lot next to Building 16. While Brown advocates for a mural outside the gym, making it the "snake pit" or "snake's den" to increase school spirit.

Whatever the place, adding art is a chance for students to not only add life and spirit to campus, but also to leave an impact.

"I had a very wise principal ask me that question... What is your legacy? What legacy are you going to leave for the rest of the generations to see," said Abella. "It's like leaving your little thumbprint, or you know 'I had a part in that.'"



## Paris Olympics, Local Connections

by **Lindsay Luberecki**  
Asst. Editor-in-Chief

Whether it was gymnastics, water polo, rugby, rowing, or one of the 28 other sports broadcast around the world, millions of people in the United States tuned in to the 2024 Paris Olympics this summer.

Some of those viewers may recall hearing mentions of Sarasota. Quite a few of the famous Olympic athletes are connected to this county.

For example, rower Clark Dean grew up in Sarasota and graduated from Pine View. He subsequently attended Harvard and graduated in 2023. This was his second Olympics; in 2021, he went to Tokyo, and he noted some differences between the two. The Tokyo Games took place while the Covid-19 pandemic was occurring, so many restrictions were in place for safety and health.

“[This year] we finished racing on the third and I didn’t fly out until the twelfth...totally different from Tokyo, in which the day we finished we got sent home,” Dean said. “We got to spend over a week just going around Paris, watching other sports, seeing the city, and seeing my family and friends...that’s always going to be something that I cherish.”

This Olympics, Dean rowed in the Men’s Eight, and he and his team won a bronze medal. He explained how the experience of being in the race itself was very different from their last high-stakes race, the 2023 World Championships.

“In 2023, we had a good heat as well, and we just fell

flat in the finals,” he said. “Two minutes in [in Paris], we’re saying we are better...it adds a lot of excitement and a lot of energy.”

Men’s gymnastics also has ties back to Sarasota in the form of three Olympic athletes. Men’s Olympic team members Brody Malone, Stephen Nedoroscik and alternate Shane Wiskus train at EVO Gymnastics, located in Sarasota.

We spoke with Syque Caesar, Head Coach of the Men’s Senior Elite Program at EVO. Caesar is a retired gymnast.



**Swimmer Emma Weyant waves to the crowd in Paris. Weyant won a bronze at the Games this year.** PHOTO VIA INSTAGRAM

“I was a gymnast my entire life,” he said. “I competed [internationally] for Bangladesh, which is my home country where my parents are from [and went to] ultimately the Olympics in 2012.”

After retiring, Caesar went into coaching and was hired by EVO in 2022. EVO offers all levels of gymnastics training. In 2021, the gym came under new management which wanted to invest in the field of men’s gymnastics (a small and underfunded field in the US). This investment has created a unique situation for the Olympic athletes training there.

“We are paying these athletes, they’re professional athletes. That’s a first for men’s gymnastics,” Caesar said. “On our end of the sport, basically after college you have to make a decision, how do I keep training if I can’t pay for groceries ... we wanted to flip the script on that and become more competitive internationally.”

In the Paris Olympics, the Men’s National Team won a bronze medal, and Nedoroscik, who has affectionately been dubbed “pommel horse guy” by America, additionally won a bronze in the individual pommel horse event. Caesar had great things to say about them.

“When [Malone] came to EVO he had a severe leg injury ... he put himself on the team again,” he said. “[Nedoroscik] went out there, did his job, came back as the most decorated men’s gymnast for USA ... [Wiskus] did a phenomenal job getting himself ready if he was called upon.”

In addition to rowing and gymnastics, swimming has local ties. Olympic athlete Emma Weyant, who won a silver medal in 2021 and a bronze in 2024 in the 400m individual medley, was a Sarasota Shark. Weyant began swimming with the Sharks in elementary school. She now swims at the University of Florida.

Additionally, Canadian swimmer Summer McIntosh currently trains with the Sharks. McIntosh has been to two Games and won three gold medals and one silver medal



this year in Paris.

“She’s with us now and has been with us a little over two years,” Head Coach and COO of the Sharks Brent Arckey said. “At this point, she’s still with us, she’s still training, getting ready for the rest of the year. She’s back in the water now.”

He also expressed congratulations to the two swimmers for their successes.

“Both of them are great representations of the community...high achieving young ladies,” he said. “Their work ethic is second to none.”

These three major sport connections to Sarasota have had impacts post-Olympics at home, too. Men’s gymnastics can be a more unknown field in sports, and EVO has seen a rise in enrollment post-Paris.

“It skyrocketed after the Olympics,” Caesar said. “It wouldn’t have been possible without the attention we’ve received from our star athletes.”

Arckey expressed a similar idea about how the Olympics have brought their team together.

“They of course are very proud of them,” he said. “Really excited for the team and that the team gets to see somebody at this level.”

When it comes to the future, it’s still uncertain, but this is likely not the last we’ll see of some of these athletes – even if they return in a different way.

“I always say, I don’t know if I’m going to be racing in LA yet, but I’m 100% going to be at the LA Olympics,” Dean said.

As gymnasts continue to train at EVO, rowers continue to practice at Benderson, and swimmers continue to put hours in the water with the Sharks, we can certainly look forward to seeing more Sarasota at the 2028 Games.



**Men’s Olympic Gymnastics team members Stephen Nedoroscik (above) and alternate Shane Wiskus (top) compete at the Olympic Trials. The athletes train at EVO Gymnastics in Sarasota.** PHOTOS PROVIDED BY SYQUE CAESAR

## Diving into Danica

*Junior Danica Aten qualifies for the Olympic Trials in swimming*

by **Katerina Mazzo**  
Webmaster

Many watched the Olympic Games this July and August, but for junior Danica Aten, the Olympics started months ago.

Swimming runs in her family: Aten has been swimming since she was 6, following in the footsteps of her mother, who swam in college, and her brother, who also competes. She has now been swimming for the Sarasota Sharks for seven years.

als for the 200-meter breaststroke.

The trials were held in Indianapolis at the Lucas Oil Stadium, more well-known as the home of the Indianapolis Colts.

Her teammate Addison Sauickie swam for the

Sharks her whole life and now swims as a freshman at Stanford. Sauickie and two other Sarasota Sharks swimmers also qualified for this year’s trials. Sauickie was especially happy for her teammate as now they would be going to the trials together.

“Dan got her Olympic trial cut at that meet and I was there, as well, to watch her get it, it was super exciting,” Sauickie said.

Aten explained that although the news was exciting, it wasn’t exactly shocking, since she had been working towards that goal for a while. However, training for the Olympic Trials was not easy.

“I was training just for that event for months and was focusing only on that,” Aten said, explaining that it was a very chaotic time in her life.

Training and swimming is very time consuming for all

swimmers. Aside from the trials, she goes on recruit trips for swimming.

“I’ve been gone like two days a week for the past few weeks, and it has been hard making up school,” Aten said.

Time management and focus is what helps her to be a good swimmer and student. This comes as no surprise to Sauickie.

“She’s a really hard worker, she’s very serious which I really respect,” Sauickie said.

Despite being two years apart and going to different schools, Aten and Sauickie have been good friends since Aten was moved up into Sauickie’s age group on the Sarasota Sharks swim team.

“Over the past few years, we’ve gotten really close,”

Sauickie said. “I really want her to go to Stanford so I’m trying to get her to come here.”

She is already going to the trials, exploring college swim teams, and she is ranked first place for women in the Class of 2026. Aten is only going up from here, so make sure to keep an eye out for her in the 2028 Summer Olympics.



**Left: Junior Danica Aten prepares to dive into the pool. Aten qualified for the Olympic Trials this summer in the 200-meter breaststroke.**

PHOTO PROVIDED BY DANICA ATEN  
**ABOVE:** PHOTO BY KATERINA MAZZO

At a swim meet in December 2023, Aten found out that she had qualified and in June, she went to the Olympic Tri-



# Torch Tries: Rock Climbing

## Torch staffers attempt bouldering at Sarasota rock-climbing gym

By Jiayi Zhu  
Editor-in-Chief

**Editor’s Note: This event was not school-sponsored and all participants were required to fill out parent-signed waivers.**

Bouldering has climbed in popularity and has officially made its first mark in Sarasota. Project 24, a 19,000-square-foot climbing gym, is anticipated to open next spring. Like many others, though, The Torch couldn’t wait and decided to get a taste of climbing at the newly opened Project 24 micro-gym.

On Sept. 22, Entertainment Editor Andrew Ashby, Humor Editor Madelyn Bailey, Sports Editor Athena Erbe, Web Editor-in-Chief Sivan Levy, and Assistant Editors-in-Chief Lindsay Luberecki and Aly Zaleski put on their climbing shoes and attempted to scale the wall (after learning the proper and inevitable way to tumble and fall). I (Jiayi Zhu, Editor-in-Chief) tagged along as well.

There were general feelings of fear and excitement upon seeing the climbing wall. Ashby and I had gone climbing before; for everybody else, it was their first time climbing. Before starting, I asked everyone how well thought they would do. Some felt slightly more confident, while others seemed to have already lost all hope.

“I think I’m going to do okay. I have experience on my side, but I also don’t have luck on my side,” Ashby said.

“I think I’m probably going to fall, probably early on. I don’t think I’m that good at rock climbing,” Bailey said.

“I think I’m going to get less than a foot up off the ground because I’m afraid of falling. I don’t know, maybe I’ll do better than I thought I would,” Erbe said.

“Terrible. I’m going to fall. Mark my words, in like two minutes, I’m go-

ing to fall and die,” Levy said. Two minutes later, Levy did, in fact, fall. Luckily, she did not die and was able to complete quite a few routes. The routes were graded with the V-scale, a common grading system used to measure the technical difficulty of a climb.

V0-V2 routes are generally considered easy to intermediate, V3-V6 routes are intermediate to difficult, and so forth. The next hour passed by smoothly, and most of us were able to complete the beginner V1 routes without any major problems. Luberecki was even able to get a video of herself to prove to her unbelieving mother that she could successfully rock climb. About an hour and a half in, though, there were some apparent frustrations. Levy was attempting to scale a red V2/V3 route, with Ashby giving guidance from below.

“Try putting your right foot where your right knee is,” Ashby said. “No,” Levy said, thudding onto the ground subsequently.



**Sivan Levy is deep in concentration while scaling the yellow route. Levy accomplished multiple routes of various difficulty levels at the gym.** PHOTO BY JIAYI ZHU

Obviously, rock climbing is a lot harder than it looks. After attempting a green V2 several times to no avail and with much frustration, Zaleski thought of an idea: pretending to be a warrior in the midst of an intense cliffhanging battle. Falling would no longer be an option. The stakes were higher. “I think my technique of pretending to be a warrior might work,” Zaleski said.

Naturally, I put on the playlist titled “EPIC WAR MUSIC,” starting with “Divine Ascent” by Sonic Savors (an arguably fitting song for the occasion). With purpose anew, Zaleski started to climb. While perhaps not the most comprehensible, I voiced affirmations like “The Trojans are coming, the British are coming. You’re Paul Revere.”



**Lindsay Luberecki smiles and poses for a photo while climbing the yellow route. Luberecki conquered the yellow, and almost made it up the purple route.** PHOTO BY JIAYI ZHU

The other Torch students joined in: “Avenge us,” Ashby said while staring up at Zaleski.

And avenge us she did! In a matter of minutes, Zaleski easily completed the route that had once seemed so difficult before. It was the end of a battle, and she had emerged victorious.

“I’ve realized this is just a mindset thing,” Zaleski said.

The purple V1 route gave some of us difficulty, too. Bailey tried to start the route several times, but couldn’t find a firm hold. With some guidance and determination, Bailey and Luberecki almost finished the route, which definitely counts for something.

“I hate the purple [route],” Bailey said, who was seen face down on the gym mat a few minutes before.

Despite the challenges, we left Project 24 with new experiences and high spirits.

“I really like this place. I think it was super fun and I’m definitely going to come back soon. Bouldering is not necessarily a natural talent of mine, but I tried...I had fun and that’s what matters. #positivity,” Luberecki said.

“I faced my fears. I climbed to the top of a few paths, so I think that was cool,” Levy said.

Even for returning climbers, this experience proved to be memorable. It’s safe to say this won’t be the last time The Torch climbs to new heights.

“I think I found a new hobby. I’m definitely coming back here. Climbing with my friends was a lot more fun and comfortable... I rate it a 10/10,” Ashby said.



**Aly Zaleski scales the wall, following the green route. Zaleski was proud of herself for finishing multiple routes.** PHOTO BY JIAYI ZHU

## BANNED SPORTS EQUIPMENT

Technology is always evolving, advancing, and spreading into every aspect of life, including sports. While the influence of efficient technology in sports is unavoidable and is usually embraced, such as in using aerodynamic bike attire rather than traditional wool, where should the line be drawn? When is the advantage they provide unfair? When is the engineer dictating the results rather than the athlete? During the Olympics, when even a millisecond makes a difference, this controversy is brought to the foreground. Here are two disputed pieces of sports equipment and why they were banned.

### Nike Alphafly Shoe

- Eliud Kipchoge became the first person to complete a 42 km race in under two hours wearing the, then unreleased, Alphafly shoes.
- The shoe has a thick sole, made of lightweight Pebax foam, and a trio carbon fiber wedge that gives extra cushioning and energy return.
- A 2017 study found them to be 4% more efficient than other marathon shoes.
- As a result of these controversies, World Athletics banned shoes with a sole thicker than 40 millimeters, or more than one plate in the sole, disqualifying Alphafly. They also banned prototypes: shoes need to be available in retail markets four months prior to competition.
- Vaporfly shoes are still permitted, with almost half of the top 150 marathon times set by runners wearing these trainers.
- Vaporfly still has a 1.5% increase in efficiency, but its heel is only 31 millimeters.



### Speedo LZR Racer

- Speedo and NASA collaborated to make this swimsuit out of polyurethane plastic material and designed it to reduce bluff-body drag and skin friction, thus increasing speed.
- Michael Phelps wore the Speedo LZR Racer at the Beijing Olympics the year he won eight gold medals and broke seven world records.
- 98% of the swimming records broken during the Beijing Olympics were broken wearing the LZR Racer.
- Similar swimsuits were developed using neoprene, a rubbery fabric often used in wetsuits. It’s water-resistant and insulative.
- Due to the copious number of records broken with these designs, World Aquatic set bans that disqualified these swimsuits, including the Speedo LZR Racer. Now, swimsuits must only be made of textile material, knee-length suits for men, and shoulder-to-knee suits for women.





# Pitbull To Pine View

By Terry Shen  
Managing Editor

If you look up “Pitbull to Pine View” on Instagram, you will see a (non-school-affiliated) account by Pine View students dedicated to bringing rapper Pitbull, whose real name is Armando Christian Pérez, to Pine View School. Teachers and students alike cooperated on creat-

tion on change.org had over 350 signatures. Graduation speeches and classroom conversations have included references to this idea, yet Pitbull has not come. Or has he?...

The latest post from the page, as well as the most recent mention of the movement, was in 2019. What happened?

Well, the obvious an-

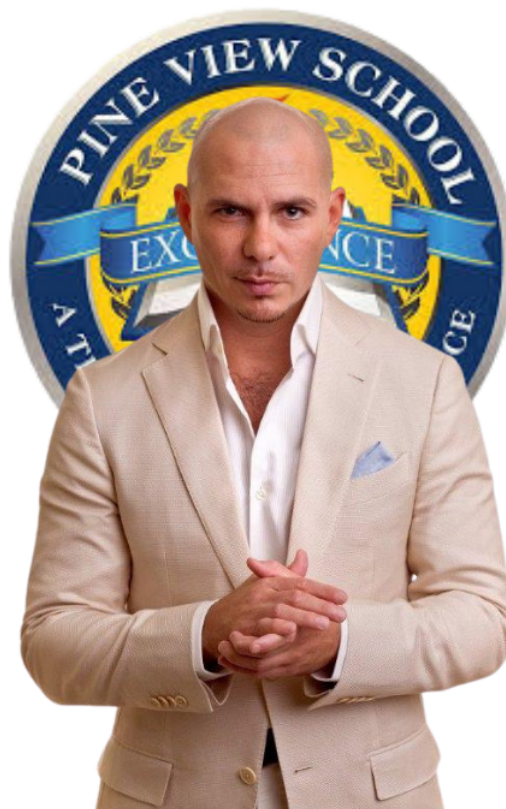
likely. The only logical reason is that Principal Dr. Stephen Covert...has switched places with Pitbull.

Pitbull, intrigued by the movement, decided to visit Pine View (secretly) – and fell in love with it. Then, he asked to trade positions with Dr. Covert. How did we not know?

Think about it. Both are proudly bald. Dr. Covert sang “Fireball” at Cobalt, and Mr. Worldwide probably sings “Fireball” every day, everywhere. Dr. Covert studied the Spanish language in college, and Mr. Worldwide showcases both Latin rhythm and Spanish rhymes in his music.

So, as all Pine View students have learned in mathematics, the transitive property dictates that Dr. Covert must be the Pitbull we have long requested.

Pitbull, in Dr. Covert’s place as Principal, has been diligently working on the job’s various roles and responsibilities, but has realized its taxing nature. He’s a musician at heart; this explains



GRAPHIC BY MADELYN BAILEY

Maybe Pitbull will get used to his job after a while; although, everyone knows that being Principal is harder than being a world-famous performer.

Meanwhile, Dr. Covert has been taking over Pitbull’s world-wide tour. He has enjoyed venturing the world to spread music and joy to all. Whether this has been Dr. Covert’s dream job from the start, or if he has only begun getting used to it, one fact remains certain: #Dr.Pitbull-topineview.

Dr. Covert should embrace this new role openly, and perform for all students at events like Cobalt! Who would be opposed to a special concert with only Dr. Covert performing? I certainly wouldn’t be! Please come back and perform.

why we have hired both a new choir and band teacher. He is emphasizing music and the arts, yet has been burdened by paperwork, new regulations, and worst of all, parent complaints. A high-profile performer, Pitbull is used to constant security at concerts, which explains the new security precautions.



Principal Dr. Stephen Covert serenades a crowd with Pitbull’s hit songs. Covert has replaced Pitbull on his world tour. GRAPHIC BY ANA EASTER

ing short videos for why the performer ought to visit and perform at Pine View. A peti-

swer is that the original students who started the trend graduated — but this is un-

# Lord of the Pythons

By Athena Erbe  
Sports Editor

Jiayi Zhu, a senior and Editor-in-Chief of The Torch, closes the curtains in frustration, watching chaos ensue outside. A few dozen students are now stuck in school after the doors locked early. This is because it is the day before Thanksgiving break.

“How could this have happened, now we are trapped! Let’s not waste time and go out to get story ideas for the next issue. This is the perfect time for good news!” Zhu said.

**Jiayi Zhu:** After walking for a while, I reach the Student Union, a great place for gossip and interesting news. I open the door, and the sound of noisy students hits me almost immediately.

I see a group of middle schoolers battling with impromptu speech and debate tournaments about the SKIBIDI bill, passing around a cute python stuffed animal for turns to speak. But that order soon collapses as they begin shredding the stuffed animal. The students scream across the cafeteria, retrogressing back into our ancestors.

The group split into two

sides, one being STEM supporters and the other being humanities supporters. I witness this scene and take a newsworthy photo of the clash between the two sides...

**Ava Lenerz:** I heard that the path to Building 17 was blocked since a student had broken a water pipe, turning the sidewalk into a small stream. I am in good luck as I have built a makeshift raft before. So, I head to the far-off Building 16 as soon as I finish putting together my raft.

However, I get stopped by a gang of kids that jump out of the red building, threatening that they can beat me in chess. They pull out a magnetic chess board, and I use all my efforts and knock down their king, allowing me passage to Building 16.

I enter the building, which is dead silent. I could almost hear the

ghosts of bad students floating around. Since there is no response when I knock on each door, I prepare to go to the office for more information.

But, on my way out, I seem to hear a sudden howl, followed by laughter from the second floor. So, I head upstairs and see a glow of light. I knock, but no one answers the door. Frustrated, I attempt to kick the door down, but my toe suffers more than the door.

**Sivan Levy:** After five seconds of hesitation, I walk into the gym, and a thousand dodgeballs bombard me at once.

“Stop, stop, I brought candy with me,” I said, pulling a huge bag of candy out of my tiny bag. The at-

tack immediately ceases, and a group of kids gather around me, fighting for candy.

After they calm down a little, I walk around asking if they



GRAPHIC BY MADELYN BAILEY

stairs up to the second floor to check on the conditions of the other classrooms in Building 17.

When I enter the hallway, I find a classroom is completely boarded up with messy words scrawled with red paint warning against entering, as expected of an English classroom that had just read the disastrous “Lord of the Flies” novel.

I also hear the noisy chatter of high school students in the lounge discussing how the middle schoolers completely split into STEM vs Humanities factions. They are trying to knock each other out using a variety of methods, like using textbooks and bragging about how many digits of pi they can recite. But, the arguments can only get so far since the rescue trucks are coming soon.

I peered out of the foggy window from the second floor and saw Levy, Lenerz, and Zhu returning to Building 17. Seeing that they were safe, I returned to the journalism classroom, as the faint sound of rescue helicopters fills the air over the chaos and havoc outside.

have any news for the school newspaper, but they only glare at me and use a string of Gen Alpha slang to scare me off, suggesting that I have overstayed my welcome.

I gather my things and take off before they can launch another attack. I learn that they were part of the humanities faction and had built a wall out of history and English textbooks to block out the STEM faction.

**Athena Erbe:** As all the other students left the building, I climb the





# Choose Your Path: ID Badges

by Allie Chung  
News Co-Editor

You step onto Pine View campus and feel the impending doom that awaits you at the doors of Building 17.

Your student ID, grasped tightly in your hand, is your only chance of surviving the building's guard stationed throughout the day. Merely 50 steps away, you have to make a choice that will define your character, that could twist the trajectory of your life: deciding whether or not to hold the door open for the people behind you.

After the earth bending trek, you have reached the door.

Make no mistake, a decision of such importance requires significant con-

sideration. However, for every second that you delay your peers move closer to their destination.

Choose wisely, should they be let in?

## CHOOSE TO HOLD THE DOOR OPEN

Upon displaying your ID badge to the camera outside Building 17, you open the door and decide to glance back. You see your Impartial Derivation teacher, Mrs. Algaebruh struggling to balance a large stack of papers

with her morning coffee. Out of the kindness of your heart and perhaps a plan to ask for extra credit in the future, you hold open the door and allow an ID badge escapee into the building.

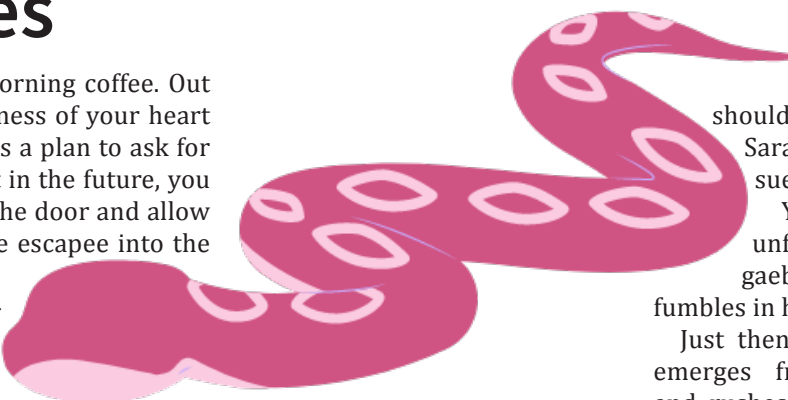
Mrs. Algaebruh rushes into the building without even acknowledging your good deed. In the middle of her frenzy, she drops a piece of paper from her very large stack. You consider returning her document but after her ungratefulness, you are no longer in a charitable mood. You pick up the paper, read it, then gasp in horror. POP QUIZ.

If only you did not hold open the door, Mrs. Algaebruh would have been locked outside with no means to distribute the quiz. If only you followed school policy...

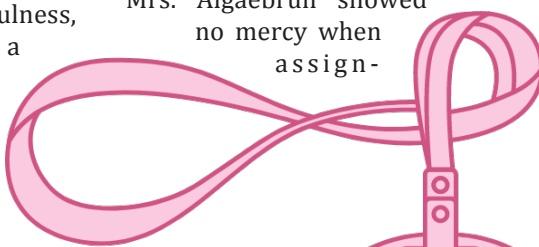
## CHOOSE TO CLOSE THE DOOR

Upon displaying your ID badge to the camera outside Building 17, you open the door and decide to glance back. You see Mrs. Algaebruh running full speed ahead at you

After all, she should have utilized her Sarasota County issued teacher ID. You watch the fury unfold on Mrs. Algaebruh's face as she fumbles in her bag for her ID. Just then, a rogue python emerges from the bushes and rushes straight towards Mrs. Algaebruh, apparently attracted to the Pine View colors on her badge. The python coils around her feet and sends her crashing to the floor, scattering the pop quizzes in various puddles of water from Tropical Storm Helene. While in a fit of screams and distress, Mrs. Algaebruh yells, "See! If only you had kept open the door!" But after a moment of hesitancy, you reply, "And let a python run wild inside? No thanks." Yes, you probably won't get that extra credit you wanted, but you saved a lot of thankful students from a brutal quiz. Moral of the story: do not hold the door open in Building 17.



GRAPHIC BY ALLIE CHUNG



**Mrs. Algaebruh**  
Impartial Derivation teacher

GRAPHIC BY MADELYN BAILEY

# The Office: Torch Branch

by Ava Lenerz  
Match Editor-In-Chief

Before scanning the QR code to dive into the mockumentary of The Office: Torch Branch, here's what a typical day in the Torch Room is like.

Any attempts at productivity usually go to waste when Timmy Nesanelis enters the room. His rants often annoy the people around him, especially Ana Easter.

Easter has sat across from Nesanelis, a person who Sivan Levy has described as a "D-1 Yapper," for the past two years. She has been learning how to tune out his voice as it drones on.

But Nesanelis isn't the only talker in the room. Journalism Advisor Chris Lenerz often goes off on long spiels about football, much to the dismay of the staff.

Lindsay Luberecki, who has been in

journalism for six years, frequently rolls her eyes at Lenerz' antics. Here

harsh judgement is due to her advanced age, as she is tired of his horrible jokes.

Lenerz' spiels are often accompanied by beard combing sessions, which, to Robyn Schoenberg, are more horrifying

ing than any joke Lenerz could come up with. Schoenberg has been in journalism for years but still hasn't gotten over this habit.

The freshies (freshmen Torchies) wonder why they joined the class in the first place after seeing the insanity of the staff. But even students who joined last year, like Levy and Elena Herman, often look around to see if everyone else just witnessed the latest

situation.



PHOTO BY MADELYN BAILEY



PHOTO BY AVA LENERZ

## Check PVTorch.com

Scan the QR Code to watch The Office: Torch Branch Mockumentary!





# Voting is Vital

*Voter participation on all levels is crucial*

by Terry Shen and Lindsay Luberecki  
Managing Editor and Assistant Editor-in-Chief

With Election Day coming up fast, there's an age-old question that continues to be asked: what is the point of voting?

Political apathy is a feeling that many, especially those of our generation, have experienced in recent years. It's defined as a lack of interest toward politics. Voter apathy is a lack of interest specifically in elections, and it can be caused by a sense that voting won't change anything in the current system. Echoes of "it's just one vote, it doesn't matter" can be heard each time an election rolls around.

While the existence of the electoral college does place less value on some single votes than they would have without it, the notion that your vote doesn't matter is still incredibly dangerous and untrue.

First, multiple elections in recent history have been won by an incredibly small margin of votes. According to Virginia Wesleyan University, there have been over a dozen elections decided by a single vote or ending in a tie over the last 20 years, and there have been many more that have been close. One famous example is George W. Bush's win of Florida's electoral votes in the 2000 presidential election by just 537 votes.

Also, if everyone had the

same mindset that their individual vote didn't matter, then no one would vote! Even if your vote holds less power on its own under the electoral college, it's an incredibly powerful tool when combined with others.

Another cause of apathy and lack of participation in politics in recent years is discontent with the options and dissatisfaction with the political state of the country in general.

According to a Pew Research Center survey from 2023, 65% of Americans reported always or often feeling exhausted when they think about politics. And, according to a 2023 Gallup poll, in most years since 2007, more Americans have reported feeling "very dissatisfied" with the state of the nation rather than "somewhat dissatisfied" or "satisfied."

However, it's vital to not let discontent or exhaustion stop you from casting your vote in November. You're not just voting for a single person to sit in the Oval Office – you're voting for an entire administration. You're voting for viewpoints, policies, future decisions.

In the current political state, where a third-party candidate is widely unachievable, it's important to approach the ballot box not with a sense of apathy and dissatisfaction but instead with an intentional mindset of voting for the wid-

er future.

Who you vote for now could help set the stage for a candidate in the future to run who you would be more satisfied with. It's up to us to create the political world we want to see, and that starts with voting for the bigger picture just as much as a single candidate.

Also, much of creating

If you were asked to name a Sarasota County Commissioner, would you be able to? How about your State Senator?

that bigger picture comes from participating in more than just the presidential election. Voting for the US Senate and House of Representatives is key to creating a federal government that properly represents voters and their wants. It goes further than that, though.

While casting ballots at the federal level is important, one ought to remember that participating in state and local level elections is as well.

If you were asked to name a Sarasota County Commissioner, would you be able to? How about your State Senator?

The most famous and uproarious news often stems from national-level politicians and events. However, in our

daily lives, the problems and solutions around us can often be attributed back to the state and local governments.

From sewer services to street maintenance, a common misconception is that officials elected to the U.S. House of Representatives or Senate have jurisdiction over all issues. This, however, is not true. The reality is that these elected officials pass legislation that impact the country as a whole — not specifically for their districts.

Take roads as an example. The federal government can pass legislation — such as the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act — to rebuild or bolster our infrastructure, but it is the local and state governments who implement the federal funding.

A call to your federal representative will likely only lead to a referral to a local official, who may be better suited to assist you. Therefore, while a call to your D.C. representative will inform them of your opinion regarding roads, it is really your local leaders who can better create the change you wish to see.

One possible reason for the misunderstandings of governmental functions is the additional energy it takes to understand the complex nature of such bodies of governing. The differences between "Dillon's Rule" and "Home Rule," state issues and federal issues, and more topics can understandably discourage constituents from participating, especially when many are already subject to political apathy. For

those who engage or wish to engage in government, issues that are physically "close-to-home" are incredibly important to understand. By simply researching more and learning about the direct effects all levels of government have on daily life, voters take the important first step in eliminating misconceptions regarding the political process.

One local issue on the Nov. 5 ballot for Sarasota County Schools (SCS) is the "Millage Referendum," which provides nearly 20% of the SCS's budget. For over two decades, the referendum has granted taxpayers' funds to schools, all while keeping Sarasota's funds within Sarasota. Providing funding for longer school days, increased teacher pay, devices for school safety, and more, this referendum is pertinent and critical to understand; just like legislation passed by Congress, these local issues demonstrate why being informed on all issues is so important. Keeping up to date on politics includes understanding who or what makes the decisions at all levels.

Because of the large (and often underemphasized) impact that state and local leaders have on our lives, it is important to both understand the sharing of power between federal, state, and local officials, as well as participate in all levels of government.

As Election Day quickly approaches, we must ensure we understand who and what we are voting for. Remember that the upcoming presidential election will not only determine the next four years, but also our country's history. Remember that Sarasota County itself has over \$2 billion in its budget, a large amount for either positive or negative changes, but how it is used is up to the voters. The political process includes more than just the surface. The ballot must be voted in its entirety.

To pre-register to vote, those who are 16 or older can follow this link: [registerto-voteflorida.gov/home](https://registerto-voteflorida.gov/home)

While primary elections are vital to deciding who gets put on the final ticket, data shows that approximately 80% of eligible voters consistently do not vote in presidential primaries. In Florida, only 27% of registered voters voted in the 2020 presidential primaries.

CARTOON BY ELENA HERMAN

DATA FROM STATES UNITED DEMOCRACY CENTER





# The Fear of Politics

by Aly Zaleski  
Asst. Editor-in-Chief

“You can be whatever you want to be.” This is the motto I was raised on. In fact, I think this is the motto a majority of our generation was raised on. The idea of hard work and perseverance being the fool-proof plan to future success is something that is deeply rooted in a lot of our minds — that is, unless you like politics.

As a kid who was always talkative, there could’ve been a community board of adults who assumed I’d become a lawyer or politician one day. Like many kids still confused about what life has to offer, I took that notion to heart. Living through a time when politics have been at the forefront of every news channel and social media site, it was an easy thing for many of those in our generation to become involved with.

During the 2016 presidential election, I was only 10 years old. While this isn’t the age where I reached the height of intellect, I was able to start slowly grabbing onto phrases, names, and new ideas. The divisiveness that was sparked during this period was, while exhausting to many, absolutely fascinating to an outspoken kid like myself.

As those next four years panned out, that fascination slowly turned into disdain. The hate that arose due to the onslaught of troubling news during that time caused many who cared to turn away.

As disheartening as it was to watch a generation that was meant to “save the world” be turned off by such

Despite some of the genuine good work of political coverage in the news, not every writer is honest and not every source is reliable

chaos, what was even worse was the decline of personal investment in politics. As someone today who would still love to fight for change, often times I’m far too worried about the opinions of others to do so.

During my time in journalism, I’ve discovered the many different paths my future can hold. One of them, admittedly one of my favorites, is political journalism. A step back from the direct involvement of actual policy makers, political journalists are still able to invoke real change by bringing light to untold stories and influencing

the uninformed to fight for their beliefs.

Despite some of the genuine good work of political coverage in the news, not every writer is honest and not every source is reliable. While this isn’t a new discovery, it’s definitely a huge realization that has brought on far too much hatred towards the field of political journalism. In turn, it’s been changed to the likes of entertainment outlets, going against its true purpose.

While a necessary practice, politics is still an overwhelming scene nowadays. Those who have lost their fight have made way for a loud minority of violence, anger, and fear. As students like me take their next steps into college and inevitably the workforce, it’s a hard truth to face seeing the cracked and loose stones we have to walk on.

## Voting For Mature Audiences Only

by Ava Lenerz  
Match Editor-in-Chief

This year, tensions run high due to the upcoming presidential election. By Nov. 5, millions of people will have participated in our democracy and cast their votes. Millions of people above the age of 18, that is.

As a 16-year-old, it is frustrating to understand politics and be interested in the well-being of our country but not have a direct say in it. This holds especially true for me. This year, not only can my parents vote, but my brother turned 18 and can now vote as well.

For instance, during the Sarasota County School Board election, we took a family “field trip” to go vote, and everyone was so excited for my brother. My whole family got their “I voted” stickers, which really epitomized the fact that I cannot vote.

There are a lot of kids in high school that care deeply about our country’s government, but it feels like there is nothing we can do since we are un-

der the voting age.

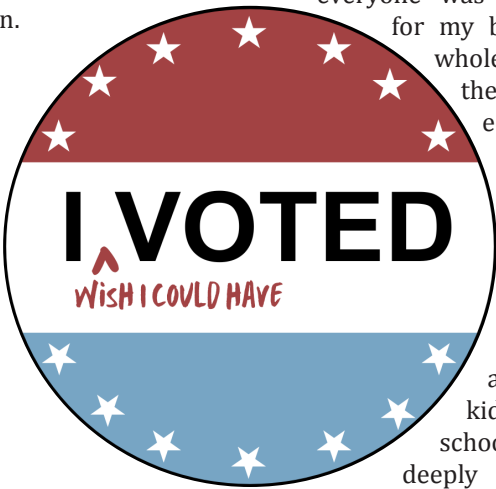
I understand why we can’t vote. Not only are we minors greatly influenced by our parents and peers, but many kids are not mature enough or don’t care.

That being said, it is still irritating because anyone in the country, no matter their age, can be immature or misinformed on a matter.

I’m not suggesting we change the voting age; nonetheless, it is difficult to not have a voice in such an important and historical event that affects all our lives. Fortunately, there are ways to be involved even if you are under 18, as discussed in the “Civic Engagement Beyond Voting” infographic in the News section.

Both teens and adults must make sure they stay educated on the candidates and not spread false information that could affect this sacred responsibility.

Voting is a privilege. Adults must be responsible with this unalienable right and make sure their vote isn’t wasted. For now, I’ll have to be patient. And when I can finally vote and turn in my ballot, along with the rest of U.S. voters, I’ll remember how fortunate we are to live in a time of freedom, equality, and democracy.



## [student voices] Are you going to vote?



Riya Greenberg, Senior

“Yes, I am voting this election. I think it is super important to have a good representation of younger voices in the community because how can you get an accurate representation of who the people want, as their president, when you only have a certain demographic. I think that everyone that can vote should vote to get the most accurate, full circle response.”

I think voting is a meaningful part of growing up. It’s right by my eighteenth birthday, so it’s really exciting and it comes along with more responsibilities and being able to share your voice.



Ray Rini, Senior

“I think I would probably vote this election because it’s important to get your voice out there and support candidates who do what you believe in, even though I’m not the biggest fan of either candidate’s policy.”



EllaRose Sherman, Senior

## the Torch

Editor-in-Chief: Jiayi Zhu\*  
Asst. Editors-in-Chief: Lindsay Luberecki\*, Aly Zaleski\*  
Managing Editor: Terry Shen

Match Editor-in-Chief: Ava Lenerz  
Spark Editor-in-Chief: Timothy Nesanelis  
News Editors: Allie Chung, Robyn Schoenberg  
Sci & Tech Editor: Alex Lieberman  
Entertainment Editor: Andrew Ashby  
Features Editor: Elena Herman

Sports Editors: Athena Erbe, Lindsay Luberecki  
Humor Editor: Madelyn Bailey  
Opinion Editor: Jakob Roche\*  
Web Editor-in-Chief: Sivan Levy  
Asst. Web Editor-in-Chief: Andrew Ashby  
Webmaster: Katerina Mazzo

Asst. Match Editors: Ana Easter, Timothy Nesanelis  
Match Layout Artists: Jenna Hinck, Anna Zhang  
Adviser: Christopher Lenerz  
Principal: Dr. Stephen Covert

\*Denotes member of editorial board.

The Torch covers topics, issues, events and opinions of relevance to students grades nine through twelve. The Torch is published four times a year by Pine View School and maintains membership in the Florida Scholastic

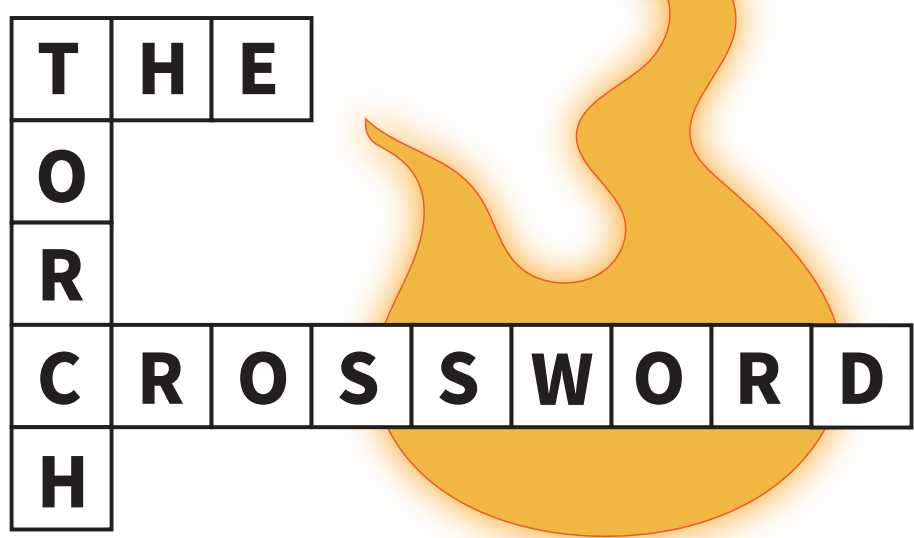
Press Association. Press run is 800 copies. Editorials. Unsigned editorials represent the views of the editorial board. All other articles reflect the opinions of the individual authors. All stories are subject to prior ap-

proval by administration. Guest columns and reader input. The Opinion section of The Torch is an open forum for editorial commentary. The Torch welcomes guest editorials written on topics relevant to readers. Contact the

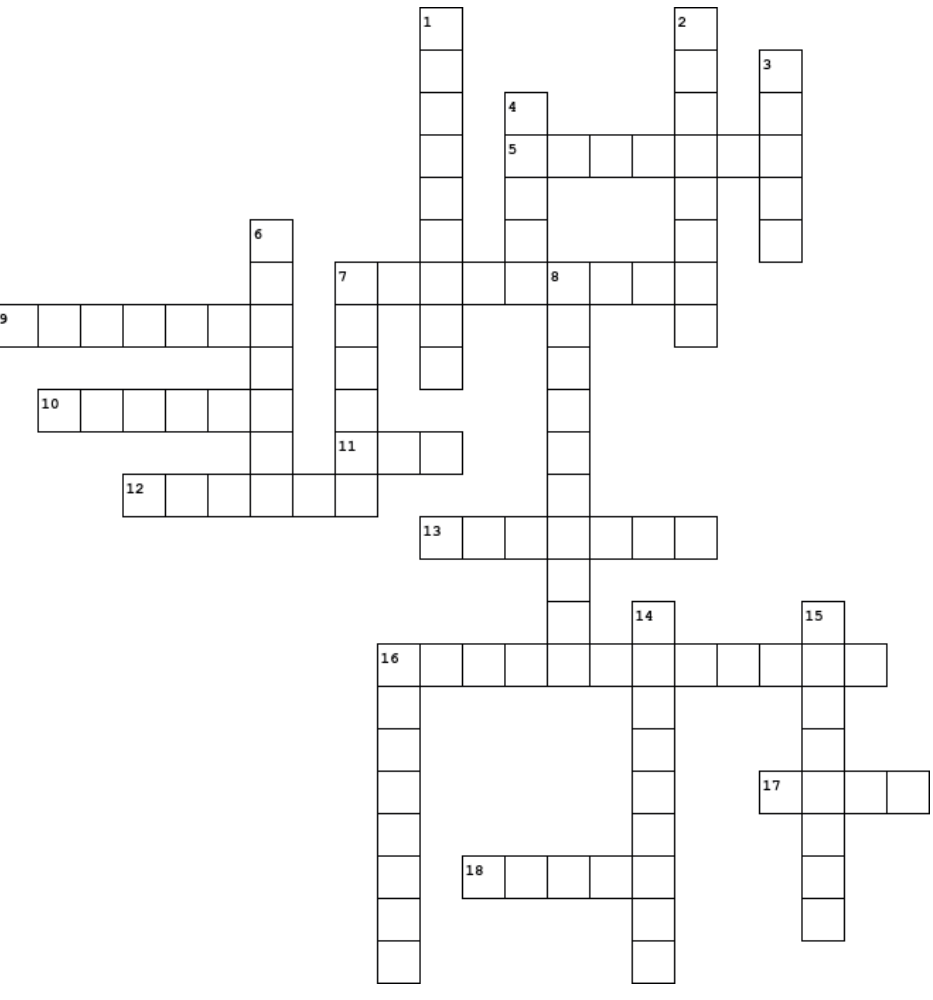
Opinion Editor at [jakob.roche@pineviewtorch.com](mailto:jakob.roche@pineviewtorch.com) to discuss an idea. Submit story ideas and comments to the editors at the email addresses given at the beginning of each section. Sponsorships and subscriptions.

To purchase a sponsorship or subscription, email [terry.shen@pineviewtorch.com](mailto:terry.shen@pineviewtorch.com). The Torch reserves the right to refuse any sponsorship.





Hints correspond to information shared in the stories throughout this issue, including through QR codes. The first person to bring their completed version in Room 117 in Building 17 will win a \$5 gift card. Good luck!



across

down

1. Who did Sivan Levy describe as a “D-1 Yapper”?
2. What month has Mr. Pine View been rescheduled to?
3. What industry did Alyson King originally plan on entering?
4. How many hours a week does Sadie Valente dance?
6. Who pretended they were a warrior to scale the rock wall?
7. What is “For Mature Audiences Only” (in the Opinion section)?
8. What does Morgenson attribute the lack of book check-outs to?
14. Where on campus did the Class of 2004 paint the walls with a mural that has since been covered?
15. Who painted the Mount Rushmore painting on Schweig’s portable?
16. What is the new A.I. program freshman and sophomore English classes are using?
5. Who was re-elected in the Sarasota County School Board election?
7. In the “Civil Engagement Beyond Voting” graphic, what is the second method?
9. What is Dr. Covert’s alter ego?
10. What swim team does Olympic trialist Danica Aten swim for?
11. What is the most important thing in childhood according to Jiayi Zhu?
12. What sport did Clark Dean participate in at the Olympics?
13. What referendum provides nearly 20% of Sarasota County School’s budget?
16. What is Joey Tricarico’s current role at Rise Above?
17. Who worked at Riverview High School for 20 years before starting at Pine View this year?
18. What section of The Torch is Madelyn Bailey the editor of?

# The Conversation Pit

Recognizing the little things

It’s noon. The sun beats down, but the oak leaves provide clusters of shade. I make mud pies out of pine needles and the sodden earth. I ride the bus home and sit in the front. As years pass, I measure my height: I reach my mom’s chin, then her nose, then her eyes, until finally, I grow too tall and can’t measure my height that way anymore.

When I think back on the early years of childhood, it feels easy and simple. Every experience, big or small, was new. There wasn’t any time to think far into the past or the reality of the future. The most important thing was “now,” and, at most, hopes for what tomorrow held. That is what made childhood so magical.

With the end of high school approaching, and college applications in progress, it’s impossible not to think about the future when it feels like life is only just starting. It’s impossible not to think about the past when it feels like I’ll be leaving everything behind.

But lately, I’ve found the most peace in appreciating the little things that are happening all around us, at every moment. A morning sunrise. Smiles from strangers. The breeze foreshadowing fall on a hot day. A new person to laugh with.

It’s the beginning of an end, and I don’t want to waste any time. I want to experience new things and love the old



Jiayi Zhu  
Editor-in-Chief

things. I want to cherish the time I have before it becomes a distant memory. I want to remember everything.

The most important thing was “now,” and, at most, hopes for what tomorrow held. That is what made childhood so magical.

To appreciate the little things, take in every second. When everything feels like it’s moving too fast, focus on the present and match the constant pace of every second, minute, and hour. There’s life all around us. It’s just a matter of taking the time to acknowledge it

and give it form.

We’ve grown a lot, but there’s something to learn from our younger selves, too. So, take it all in. Don’t get caught up in the ‘What-ifs?’ Know that despite the uncertainty, it’ll all work out. Make the memories now, and savor every second of it.

## A special thank you

## to our sponsors...

Our publication would not have been possible without the gracious support of our sponsors. We sincerely thank you for your contributions.

# Platinum Sponsor

## GreatVas Gentle Vasectomy

## Bronze Sponsors

ICW Life

## Family Sponsor

Pete’s Sweet Treats

The Majorsky Family