

# the Torch



Vol XXXVIII, Issue III

PVTorch.com

Friday, February 13, 2026

## The Russo-Ukrainian War: Four Years Later

by Hana Mullen  
Graphics Editor

Four years ago, February 24, 2022, Russia, under Vladimir Putin, invaded Ukraine. Since then, approximately 1.2 million Russian troops and 600,000 Ukrainian troops have been wounded, killed, or gone missing.

The Biden administration supported Ukraine with financial and military funding, which has since decreased to conditional support.

Beginning in February 2025, the Trump administration began negotiations with Russia in an effort to end the

war. In November, the U.S. drafted a peace plan including security, military and territorial changes, though disagreements over territory halted any further action.

Ukraine's hopes from the peace talks are to reclaim lost territory, specifically Crimea

and Eastern Ukraine. However, in 2025 Pete Hegseth, U.S. Secretary of War, formerly known as Defense, said this demand was "an unrealistic objective" to the New York Times. His comment still stands, and Russia has shown no interest in relinquishing the annexed territories.

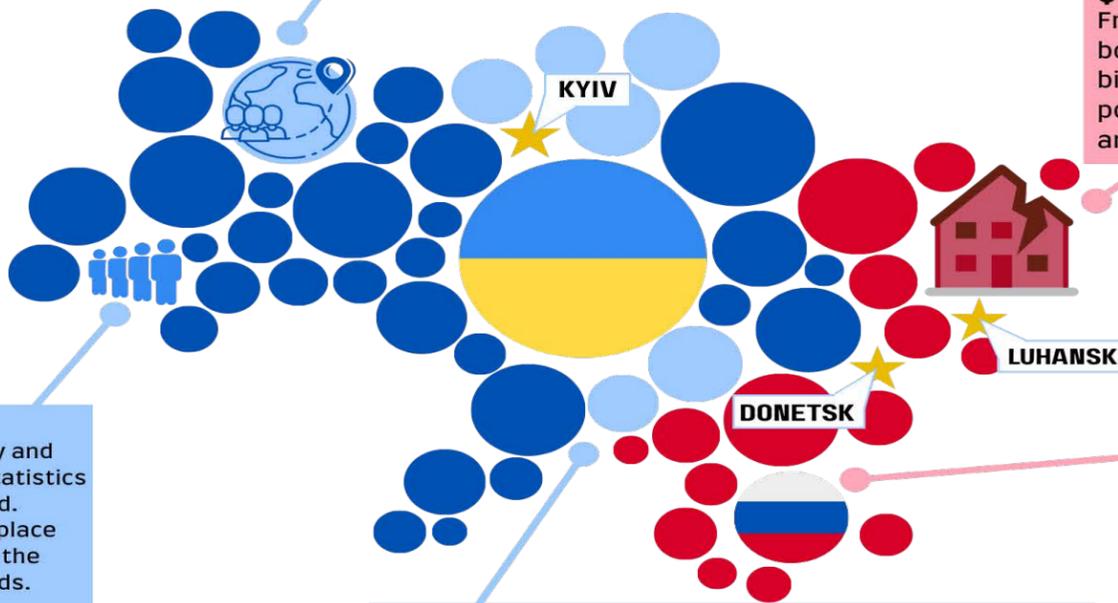
Putin agreed to a week-long ceasefire January 29 due to record low temperatures. After electricity and gas infrastructure was severely cut by Russia for much of Ukraine, heating and power has been rare. Many families are freezing in subzero weather.

- UNWAGED UKRAINIAN LAND
- SEIZED BY RUSSIA
- RECLAIMED BY UKRAINE

**OVER 9.3 MILLION DISPLACED**  
Due to the risk and high mortality rate in Ukraine, 5.6 million Ukrainians have fled the country and 3.7 have been displaced within.

**Sources**  
Displacement: HIAS, Refugees and Internally Displaced People in Ukraine  
Damages: Kyiv School of Economics, 2025  
Casualties: United Nations, 2025  
Peace Talks: Reuters, 2026; The Independent, 2026  
2014 War: House of Commons Library, 2022

**\$176 BILLION IN DAMAGES**  
From 2022 to 2024, drone bombings and artillery have cost billions in direct damage to power grids, residential areas, and cities across Ukraine.



**CASUALTIES**  
Due to confidentiality and bias, real casualty statistics cannot be determined. However, estimates place military casualties in the hundreds of thousands.  
  
Civilians in Ukraine: **14,530** killed and **38,470** wounded  
Civilians in Russia: **390** killed

**THE PEACE TALKS**  
Peace Talks between Russia and Ukraine began only four days after the 2022 invasion but have stagnated. In 2025, the Trump administration backed major peace talks in an effort to conclude the conflict.

**2014: RUSSIA SEIZES CRIMEA**  
Russia's first formal invasion seized Crimea, but the annexation is largely unrecognized internationally. Concurrently, Russia seized the Donbas region, including two oblast capitals: Donetsk and Luhansk.

**FRESHMAN**  
**REGINA SAMGORODSKY**

"The war affects me greatly due to the fact that I myself am a Ukrainian... the war itself horrendously violent, I have lost family to it, and it is horrible... People are growing up in a war-ridden country; Ukrainians did nothing to cause such of sort, they merely desired independence."

**JUNIOR**  
**HARRY XU**

"I know lots of Russian, Ukrainian and Eastern European people at Pine View... it's kind of crazy that it's been [four] years since the start, and I feel like recently in the past few years we haven't had much coverage of it..."

**SENIOR**  
**SAKET RAO**

"I know there are a lot of other people who are seniors from Ukraine... who immigrated to the United States for a better future. I think it's safe to say that human rights should always be priority number one, and if someone is breaking those human rights in any way, it should be monitored, no matter what"

## index

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

**Sci & Tech, p. 10**

The Science Behind Love  
An exploration of one of our most fascinating emotions.

**Humor, p.13**

Which Torch staffer are you?  
Find out which Torch member you are most similar to!

**Entertainment, p.6**

Sarasota Square Says Farewell  
The history of the Sarasota Square Mall and opinions on the renovations.

### Follow us on...



# The Repercussions of Reclassifications

## PROFESSIONAL DEGREES

As outlined in SEC. 81001. of the 'One Big Beautiful Bill Act.'

-  **Medicine:** (M.D., D.O.)
-  **Dentistry:** (D.D.S., D.M.D.)
-  **Pharmacy:** (Pharm.D.)
-  **Law:** (J.D., L.L.B.)
-  **Veterinary Medicine:** (D.V.M.)
-  **Chiropractic:** (D.C.)
-  **Optometry:** (O.D.)
-  **Podiatry:** (D.P.M.)
-  **Clinical Psychology:** (Psy.D., Ph.D.)
-  **Theology:** (M.Div., M.H.L.)

**by Ana Easter**  
Match Editor-in-Chief

In a major legislative move, President Trump signed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act into law July 4, 2025. While the bill is best known for reshaping tax and spending policy, it also included changes to higher education, most notably, redefining the list of graduate programs classified as "professional degrees."

Under the new legislation, graduate programs that are not classified as professional will face lower federal student loan limits than those that hold the distinction. Graduate programs that are excluded from the professional title include nursing, education, sociology, architecture, accounting, and public health, many of which are already facing shortages.

Beginning July 2026, students in professional programs, such as medicine, law, and dentistry, will have the ability to borrow up to \$50,000 per year and \$200,000 over the lifetime of their graduate studies. Students in non-professional programs will face a lower cap of \$25,000 per year and \$100,000 in total.

For both professional and non-professional programs, this represents a significant reduction compared to the previous system which allowed Graduate PLUS loans up to the full cost of attendance.

In a fact sheet published November 24, 2025, the Department of Education justified these reductions, stating: "These loan limits will help drive down the cost of graduate programs and reduce the debt students have to take out."

Despite this, critics argue that the policy fails to reflect the realities of the cost of graduate education. The limits are based off post-graduate salaries, which many feel are not an accurate representation of career values.

"The first year out of school, someone with an architecture degree, it's a very low wage," an architect, a career now not considered professional, for IHG Hotels and Resorts said in an interview with the Torch. "However, they have an earning potential over their lifetime that I don't think that [The Department of Education] is accounting for."

The architect wished to remain anonymous as he did not want to speak on behalf of his firm.

Some professional organizations have expressed concern over the list, with press

releases from many national organizations labeling it as potentially devastating to the job force.

"The architecture community, like a lot of others, is very upset," the architect said. "The American Institute of Architects [AIA], all of the members, are so angry. They just feel like we weren't represented in that room when that decision was made."

The AIA is not the only organization expressing concern, the call for change expands across all of the affected fields, with many releasing petitions to call for a reconsideration of the list.

A letter, signed by 140 lawmakers that was sent to the Department of Education December 12, 2025, asked that post-baccalaureate nursing degrees "be treated equally to other accredited post-baccalaureate health profession degrees."

The main concern among professionals regarding this issue is that it will limit the accessibility of graduate degrees for people who may rely on federal loans to afford their post-baccalaureate educations.

"What it's going to do is keep it very class based," the architect said. "Only wealthy people are going to be able to afford these degrees and it's going to widen already existing gaps."

This issue extends beyond individual students, these changes could have long-term consequences for faculty and program availability according to a sociology professor at the University of South Florida who wished to remain anonymous due to the contentious politics of the reclassifications.

"A long-term implication is that we're going to have less faculty in those areas because people are not going to go to grad school in those areas," they said. "It's going to kill those degrees."

Another main topic of concern is the precedent of labeling certain degrees as non-professional. In their fact sheet, the Department of Education states that the term is merely an internal definition used by the Department to distinguish among programs. However, by creating a formal distinction between professional and non-professional programs, critics argue that the policy will affect societal attitudes toward these fields.

continued on page 4

GRAPHICS BY ANA EASTER, TIMOTHY NESANELIS, AND AVA LENERZ

## WELL-KNOWN NON-PROFESSIONAL DEGREES



Nursing



Education



Architecture



Sociology/  
Social Work



Accounting



Public Health

# the Torch

Editor-in-Chief: Ava Lenerz\*  
Asst. Editors-in-Chief: Allie Chung\*, Robyn Schoenberg\*  
Managing Editor: Jakob Roche\*  
Graphics Editor: Hana Mullen\*

\*Denotes member of editorial board.

Match Editor-in-Chief: Ana Easter\*  
Web Editor-in-Chief: Katerina Mazzo  
Spark Editor-in-Chief: Athena Erbe  
News Editors: Madelyn Bailey\*, Timothy Nesanelis\*  
Sports Editor: Skylar Bredlau  
Asst. Sports: Robyn Schoenberg  
Entertainment Editors: Shriya Ashok, Melissa White

Features Editor: Allie Chung\*  
Asst. Features: Maya Ruffin  
Sci & Tech Editor: Isabel Georgieva  
Asst. Sci & Tech: Ava Lenerz  
Humor Editor: Athena Erbe  
Opinion Editor: Alex Lieberman\*  
Asst. Opinion: Alakh Bhatt\*  
Asst. Web Editor-in-Chief: Andrew Ashby\*  
Director of Digital Media: Nathan DeSou-

za\*  
Asst. Match Editors: Jenna Hinck, Anna Zhang  
Match Layout Artists: Minhkhue Tran, Marina Wissa  
Adviser: Christopher Lenerz  
Principal: Dr. Stephen Covert

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. Opinion. 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. Con-

tact the Opinion Editor at alex.lieberman@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 jakob.roche@pineviewtorch.com. The Torch reserves the right to refuse any sponsorship.

# Behind the Scenes of Class Sponsorship

**by Allie Chung**  
Asst. Editor-in-Chief

For students, class events appear as finished products: a decorated cafeteria, a smoothly run dance, a booth at the fair, or a fundraiser posted on the calendar.

What students rarely see is the work behind those moments. That responsibility falls to class sponsors — teachers who coordinate the logistics, paperwork, and planning that keep each class' traditions and fundraisers running.

At Pine View, class sponsorship is divided by grade level. Currently, the freshman class is sponsored by faculty members Jennifer Weeks and James Froelich, the sophomore class by Liz Ballard and Maureen Condiotte, the junior class by Jenna Molinaro and Misty Tucak, and the senior class by Ashley McLeod, Robin Melton, and Eduardo Maron.

For Weeks, a first-year Pine View teacher, the role provided a chance to fully immerse in the school community. That opportunity, however, came with unexpected demands. Along with other responsibilities, the freshman class office was responsible for organizing two middle school dances: the Polar Party and the Valentine's dance.

"I had no idea how those were run," Weeks said. "I had no idea the amount of time it took just to set up the cafeteria, just to make sure the decorations were

ordered and then hung up."  
For McLeod, the demands of sponsorship extend beyond the school day.

"I don't have trouble balancing the teaching aspect and being a sponsor," said McLeod, a mother of a school aged child. "It's more so my personal life because a lot of sponsorship happens after school, on weekends, at night. That's the difficult part."

In addition to planning events and balancing personal responsibilities, sponsors must also navigate extensive paperwork and approval processes that often go unnoticed by students.

"There are a lot of green sheets to fill out," Ballard said. "Anytime you want to use the auditorium, anytime you want to do anything, any activity that's on campus, you need an approved activity sheet."

That unseen workload, she said, also helps explain why the role often comes with steep learning curves.

"When you do it once [organizing school events] you become an

expert at it, but then the next class steps up and then they've got to learn on the fly," Ballard said.

She said, the workload becomes more manageable when responsibilities are shared, though.

"We are very lucky that we get along really, really well," McLeod said of the senior class sponsors. "That's what they tell you going into your sponsorship: make sure you get along with your co-sponsor."

Ballard echoed that sentiment, noting that she and Condiotte divide responsibilities based on their strengths.

"[Condiotte] is very good with filling out papers and making sure that we've checked all the boxes, whereas I'm more responsible for holding the meetings," Ballard said. "We're very different people, so we complement each other."

Ballard said experienced sponsors like Melton and Tucak often become invaluable resources for navigating the role. Molinaro agreed, mentioning that support from art and theater teacher Haley Brown also

helped make the transition manageable.

Molinaro said she did not initially volunteer to be a class sponsor, but accepted the position last year after math teacher Stephen Folts withdrew. Her decision was shaped not only by school involvement, but also by her role as a parent to a Pine View junior.

"When you have a child, you feel two things," Molinaro said, "You feel obligated, and you also want to do it because then you're involved with her, her friends, and her classmates."

Even with the challenges, sponsors said their motivation ultimately comes from the students they work with. Weeks said one of the most rewarding aspects is "working with the students and getting to know them, getting to experience high school again through their eyes."

For Molinaro, the payoff remains clear as well.

"It's still awesome seeing them and hanging out with them at the fair. It's been great," she said.

Ballard agreed, pointing to the lasting relationships formed over years of working closely with students.

"I really do love working with these kids," Ballard said. "They're sweet kids. They're good kids. I knew them when they were seven, eight years old. So it's pretty cool to see them as almost adults."

**“They’re good kids. I knew them seven, eight years old. So it’s pretty cool to see them as almost adults.”**

Liz Ballard  
Class of 2028 Sponsor



GRAPHIC BY TIMOTHY NESANELIS

NOT PICTURED: Class of 2029 Sponsors James Froelich and Jennifer Weeks

PHOTOS BY ATHENA ERBE AND CALISTA REAM  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF JENNA MOLINARO, ROBIN MELTON, AND LIZ BALLARD

# The History Fair goes school-wide.

by Minhkhue Tran  
Match Layout Artist



Eighth graders Akira Patel and Andrea Wang pose with their history fair project. They chose to study the Disability Act's moves to create accessible spaces for disabled people.

PHOTO BY MINHKHUE TRAN

Posters, papers, and plays; just some of the magnificent displays decorating the History Fair. Starting this school year, this project has become a requirement for students in U.S. History Honors.

The History Fair is a project in which students must pick a historical topic related to a theme and creatively represent their choice. They can either work individually or in a group to create original papers, exhibits, performances, websites, documentaries, and more. Through this project, students are to research historical context and significance.

After presenting in class, students had the choice to compete in the school-wide

competition January 22, and then so on to higher levels if they are qualified.

What was an optional choice for students to complete outside of class in previous years, is now a mandatory because the Social Studies Department wanted more participation. Pine View's U.S. History Honors class was chosen since it lacks an End of Course (EOC) exam.

U.S. History Honors teacher Roberto Lamela is the only one who teaches this class for high schoolers and has tried his best to work with his students. Since this was his first year of incorporating this project into class, he felt nervous yet also determined.

"We learned together. It

was a learning process for all of us. I learned how to navigate through the project and guide them the best that I could," Lamela said.

Students were allowed to choose their own groupmates and topics. They were also given the ability to work at their own pace with some check-ins by Lamela.

Due to the project's required nature this year, students may have felt more pressured.

"I feel like the...optional is a better route..." Lamela said, "...it would be less stressful and more exciting while a requirement may add an addition[al] stress level to students who don't see the excitement."

Some teachers, like Lamela, have decided to just keep the presentation in class.

One of these groups included juniors Levi Szantosi, Alexander Haxhijaj, William Seaman, Percy Wells, and Shivam Patel. Based on the overall theme of Revolution, Reaction, and Reform in History, they decided to create a website specifically centered around the Civil War and how it affects our modern day lives.

"It took a long time to do, but it was very fun working together with four other classmates," Szantosi said.

Also required to participate in the project were all eighth grade US History classes. Including middle school social studies teacher, Liz Ballard's classes.

Ballard is currently the coordinator of the History Fair this year. Her job is to organize the projects and the given resources.

For her students, she let them make their own decisions and after they presented in class, she gave them some feedback to improve their projects for the higher competitions.

Since this was also her first year participating, she decided to be as hands-off as possible and only helped when necessary.

"I made a decision early on that this was not going to be me telling the kids what to do," Ballard said. "If they're going to be competing in a district, state, and national competition, I shouldn't be telling them what to do."

Ballard said she is glad that Pine View got to take part in the History Fair and hopes that her students' projects can advance to higher competitions. She believes that this project really shows off the giftedness of Pine View students.



History fair judge Wilhelmine Wiese-Rometsch poses for a photo. She judged the competition alongside high school teachers including John Schweig and Chuck Carney. The competition took place January 22 and involved eighth grade and high school competitors.

PHOTO BY MINHKHUE TRAN

# A Shift in Classifications

continued from page 2

by Ana Easter  
Match Editor-in-Chief

"There is already such a stigma around these types of degrees within a lot of communities. Labeling all of these as non-professional is going to make things even worse," the professor said.

She explained that this perception can discourage students from pursuing these fields, limiting the diversity within graduate programs.

"Not everybody is made to be a doctor or lawyer" she said. "The diversity of graduates is so important because it contributes to people who are well rounded holistic thinkers and problem solvers."

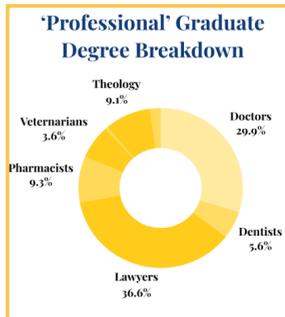
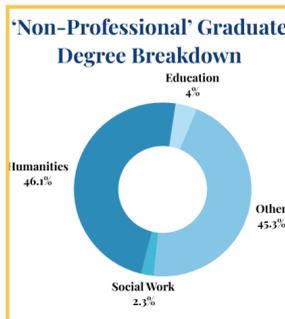
Many of the affected programs, including nursing, education, and public health, are heavily female dominated, raising concerns that the policy could limit women's access to graduate education

and roles in these essential fields. In fact, an article published by Women's eNews, called it "An assault on women in the workforce."

"It's the type of people that make up a majority of these careers, people they don't want to see educated," said the professor. "It feels targeted."

The reclassification of graduate programs signals a shift in how certain fields are valued at a national level. These fields are essential, highly-skilled, and valuable to public well-being, yet professionals worry that placing these limits will reduce access and discourage future students from pursuing them.

For high school students beginning to think about their futures, these changes add a new aspect of uncertainty to the already difficult decision process.



GRAPHICS BY ANA EASTER

# Racing on the Rise

Formula 1 gains a new generation of fans

by Timothy Nesanelis  
Co News Editor

The red lights slowly begin to flicker on, the first, then the second, third, fourth, and finally the fifth. Millions are watching across the world as 11 teams line up their cars in front of the starting line, ready for the latest Grand Prix in the Formula 1 (F1) league. As the lights flicker off, the cars accelerate and excitement explodes.

Despite F1's affirmative reputation and massive popularity, it took some time to get there.

According to F1 itself, the sport is "the highest class of international racing for single-seater formula racing cars."

On tracks spanning 21 countries across five continents, the world-wide phenomenon has captivated audiences since its beginning in 1950.

Yet, despite significant changes to vehicles and iconic drivers that debuted in the mid-2010s, such as Charles LeClerc and Max Verstappen, American viewership of F1 continued to decline, reaching a record average low of just 539,000 viewers in 2018 according to ESPN.

Watching the viewership figures dwindle, American company Liberty Media, bought the F1 league with the goal of bringing the sport to a new generation. Not only did they succeed at creating fans across the United States, but also among the students at Pine View.

Liberty Media fostered a focus on technology and keeping F1 relevant in the digital age, creating the F1 TV app, developing a new brand, and undergoing a complete social media overhaul. The biggest gamble, though, came from the company's push into licensing television and movie contact separate from the races.

Originally released in 2019, Drive to Survive, a Netflix original series showcasing a behind-the-scenes look at the lives of F1 drivers, exploded in popularity. One such fan, junior Niya Bobban, who began to watch F1 around summer of 2024 with her

friend, junior Audrey Hwang, started keeping up with the show.

"[Drive To Survive] encapsulated a lot of what the drivers felt before and after the races, and it gave me a new perspective on F1 racing in general," Bobban said.

However, senior Helene Giraud, who began to watch F1 in May of 2024 because of her dad, a lifelong fan of the sport, wasn't a big fan of the episodes she watched.

"I felt like it kind of focused on certain events of the [2024 F1] season that I think shouldn't have been focused on, or that there were bigger things that happened that they could have made episodes about," Giraud said.

Another entertainment venture, "F1," a movie starring Brad Pitt, which was released in June 2025, also proved to be an immediate success, grossing over \$600 million globally and drawing in more fans, such as senior Zachary Johnson.

"I thought the movie was really cool, and a lot of my friends were into it and they were talking about it," Johnson said. "So, I thought 'I want to get into it so I can understand what they're talking about and talk about that with them.'"

Not only did the show, movie, and updates to F1's image succeed at creating new fans from Pine View, but it brought a whole new life to the sport globally. Races regularly average an American viewership of over double the 2018 figures, and according to F1, the sport had a global fanbase of 827 million people in 2025, a 63 percent increase since 2018.

A new era has launched for F1, and it doesn't look like it'll slow down any time soon.



## HOW TO SURVIVE HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS TRYOUTS

"Don't try to force anything, just play your game and the right people will notice"

-Luke Calleja, sophomore tennis player

"Remember that passion beats talent. Remember to be kind to yourself and others—everyone has their on and off days!"

-Bryn Famiglio, senior weightlifter

"...Focus on consistent fundamentals and a calm routine, show coaches you're dependable under pressure and not afraid to play well."

-Tej Atluru, sophomore golfer

GRAPHIC BY ZENNA HINCK



## SKIMO

What is it?  
Ski mountaineering, or skimo, is a race that combines uphill climbing and downhill skiing.

Why was it added?  
It was added to the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Games because of its growing popularity and strong ties to alpine regions.

Where did it originate?  
The sport evolved from ancient Nordic snow travel and early military skiing competitions, including events linked to the 1924 Winter Olympics.

GRAPHIC BY ATHENA ERBE

## Sarasota Square Says Farewell

by Athena Erbe  
Humor Editor



PHOTO COURTESY OF YOUROBSERVER

Sounds of children laughing echoed off the marble walls, and the carousel horses spun round and round. A trackless train whizzed by, honking its horn at any passerby in its way. A long winding line of eager children and their families coming from the movie theater, while tired parents dragged their children between stores.

These are the scenes of the most popular mall in Sarasota years ago, when it still had numerous shops and lively air. Now, there is only rubble and dirt in place of a long history, with new plans underway.

The Sarasota Square Mall originally opened Sept. 28, 1977, comprised of a Maas Brothers, JCPenney, J. Bryons, and

a six-screen movie theater. In 2003, new ownership by Westfield Group changed the name to Westfield Shopping Sarasota Square, and shortly after, the popular AMC Theatre was added.

Despite the new investments and shops in the mall under new management, profits began to decline. This led to the closure of Dillard's, which was replaced by the long-standing Costco, still here today.

The mall was renamed Sarasota Square in 2019 after ownership changes due to failed mortgage payments.

As a result of financial difficulties in many of the shops, stores began shutting down one by one. For a while, the only location gaining traction was the AMC Theatre, a classic rendezvous point for Pine View students, leaving many disappointed when it was shut down for the construction of the new building.

The mall began its official demolition process, excluding Costco and JCPenney, after Toburn Partners acquired the property and made announcements of redevelopment.

Plans for the new plaza include a 1,200-unit luxury apartment complex, complemented with a large retail, restaurant, and commercial space, as well as a large outdoor gathering place.

Sophomore Beatrice Deguzman is eager to see what the new renovations will bring to the area and hopes it will lead to even more fun experiences. The mall left many impressions over the years, namely getting her ears pierced at Claire's, riding the carousel, and watching movies at the AMC Theatre.

"It was a little sad ... I hadn't been there in about a year, but I still had good childhood memories there," Deguzman said. "We still go to the Costco, but we mainly go to the UTC to shop now."

Junior Jordan Oravec also had his fair share of childhood memories at the Sarasota Square Mall. Throughout elementary school, he often went to what was previously known as the Westfield Mall with his family to shop and play in the many attractions scattered throughout.

"I remember when I was a kid, I'd go there, and there was a cookie place ... and they had this train that would go through the mall, and they had a carousel, too!" Oravec said, reminiscing his fond memories of the mall.

On the bright side, the new renovations will bring even more fun venues for students and their families to enjoy, including a large community area for events and many popular chain food locations like Chipotle and Crumbl Cookie.

"I hope it's better and I miss it all, too," Oravec said, looking forward to the upcoming shops.

While the reconstruction reminds students across Pine View of the nostalgia of the Sarasota Square Mall, the redevelopment present a place where new memories and friendships can be made.



GRAPHIC BY MELISSA WHITE

## The Nostalgia of Malls

[a column]

by Melissa White

Co Entertainment Editor

As the fluorescent lighting reflects off shiny, white tile floors with music echoing through every store, what was supposed to be a "quick" mall trip slowly stretched into one of the first tests of patience every kid had to endure. What seemed to be endless then has now become a faded memory, as the warmth malls once had now feels hauntingly distant — replaced by something cold and commercial.

The change of focus from feelings and experience to consumerism is undeniable. A space that once encouraged intimate, unplanned memories with various spaces for kids and candy machines has now become a transactional relationship. Unique store aesthetics have been replaced with simplistic and straightforward designs.

While corporations play a large role, the increasing thirst for the next big trend influenced by social media is

a contributing factor, too. The growth of online stores has made shopping more convenient, redefining accessibility and eliminating the need for in-person shopping.

The death of malls throughout America not only killed nostalgia, but is slowly creeping in on individualism. The unique styles sold in the past have become recycled designs repeatedly sold at unaffordable prices.

What used to be a diverse space for families and teens has become, at

times, mundane — or perhaps it is a new era of shopping that requires some adjustment.

Despite changes, the mall still functions as a gathering place for many, and promotions make up for expensive prices.

The mall might not feel the same, but our outlook on it defines the future of shopping and the culture we build around it. We can grieve what is now gone or look forward to what comes next.

## UTC Mall Undergoes Growth

by Anna Zhang

Match Asst. Editor

The city of Sarasota residents once knew is ever-expanding, gaining more traction with many new developments. Though the nostalgia of the town many once loved is slowly disappearing, the benefits may outweigh the negatives as the new additions to the University Town Center (UTC), Rose Pearl Tea and MINISO, transform Sarasota into a livelier and more diversified place.

MINISO sells a wide variety of trendy, affordable lifestyle products, including toys and plushies, stationary, beauty, wellness items, electronics, snacks, home goods, and fashion accessories. Furthermore, specializing in a range of tastes, Rose Pearl Tea explores new flavors while honoring the art of tea making, offering a variety of milk teas and seasonal specials.

Freshman Ella Yee sees the mall's additions and growing variety of stores as a positive development.

"I felt like it was missing a bunch of things I like to buy. It is great for UTC to become more like the Florida Mall," Yee said. "I hope more people can shop there. I believe that these shops will have great business because in other locations, they have attracted a

lot of people." Freshman Xiao Zhang believes it might be a bit unnecessary, but an increase in mall size could be a potential positive.

"I think it will be great since that mall has a large variety of

stores, and maybe they will add a similar dining pavilion," Zhang said. "Sarasota, becoming a bigger city, might be great for more diverse foods and products. It will also get more recognition and more tourist attractions, but more people might move here, and we are already crowded."

In an article from MINISO's official website, General Manager of MINISO Overseas Operations, Bella Tu, expresses the retailer's latest move to expand its U.S. operations: "The U.S. market is one of our most significant overseas markets. Our expansion in the south of the country is guided by our goal to bring our fun and affordable products to as many customers as possible, across the United States."

As Sarasota continues to grow, local shopping centers like UTC are evolving into a more diverse destination for students and residents.

GRAPHIC BY MELISSA WHITE

## Lights, Camera, Auction

The bidding war on Warner Bros continues

by Marina Wissa

Match Layout Artist

Harry Potter, Superman, Barbie, and Scooby-Doo — these are only some of the iconic franchises part of modern American "mythology". These characters, recognizable nearly everywhere, all fall under the same parent company of Warner Bros. Discovery (Warner Bros).

Warner Bros, a major American multimedia company, is known for its ownership of entertainment medias and networks such as CNN, Cartoon Network, and HBO Max, among many others.

In early 2025, Warner Bros executives considered breaking up the company to sell its struggling networks to more profitable studios. In October 2025, the decision was made to put all of the studio assets for sale.

Paramount, an American entertainment media conglomerate, and Netflix, an entertainment streaming service, have been the two major players in the bidding war for Warner Bros.

Netflix sought out the film and streaming side of Warner Bros and intended to spin off the cable networks for a bid of around \$72 billion, whereas Paramount wanted to buy the entire

conglomerate for \$100 billion.

The Warner Bros board has repeatedly urged shareholders to reject offers from Paramount with the board unanimously supporting the Netflix deal.

The chair of the board of directors, Samuel DiPiazza Jr., has even made a statement claiming that "Our binding agreement with Netflix will offer superior value at greater levels of certainty, without the significant risks and costs Paramount's offer would impose on our shareholders."

On the consumers side, the general consensus is that both deals are facing scrutiny. Audiences are concerned that a Paramount-owned Warner Bros would lead to a biased, political monopoly whereas Netflix would compromise creative direction.

Paramount's most controversial plan is to combine CNN and CBS under the same parent company. This is due to the involvement of the Ellison family and Jared Kushner, Donald Trump's

son-in-law, all of whom are Republican mega-donors.

Kushner's firm, Affinity Partners, is a significant Paramount investor and financial backer for Paramount's bid for Warner Bros, but Affinity Partners made the decision to withdraw due to the competitive landscape. The Ellison's, however, are insistent on pursuing their bids.

Netflix, as the dominant streaming service, would gain even more power over screenwriters, directors, and actors. Netflix would also likely force films to go directly to streaming, causing many cinemas to be put under financial stress and lead to a decline in cinema culture.

These concerns were so prominent that Christopher Nolan, the chief of the Directors Guild of America (DGA), called an emergency meeting with the DGA to discuss the consequences of a Netflix-run Warner Bros.

The DGA's statement opened by expressing the concerns of Netflix's ownership before stating, "We believe that a vibrant, competitive industry — one that fosters creativity and encourages genuine competition for talent — is essential to safeguarding the careers and creative rights of Directors and their teams." It also stated that

conversations would be held with Netflix regarding their concerns.

Warner Bros is currently in the process of being acquired by Netflix. As the cable network spinoff occurs, the deal should not be closed until the third quarter of 2026.

Consumers continue to share their thoughts on the bidding war even after the Warner Bros board reaffirmed their support for the Netflix deal, calling it the "superior merger agreement."

This industry game of thrones is expected to continue throughout 2026, but one thing has made itself clear: the Warner Bros bidding war highlights a future for entertainment far outside the binary. Producers and consumers should keep a close eye on how upcoming media will be created and shared.

GRAPHICS BY MARINA WISSA



## Blind Date with a Book

In honor of Valentine's Day, the Torch staff brings you romance book recommendations with a twist — like a blind date, you don't know what exactly you're getting! We encourage you to pick a read based on tropes without judging the book by its cover or title. Happy reading!



GRAPHICS BY ISABEL GEORGIEVA

## Sarasota's Used Bookstores

GRAPHIC BY MADELYN BAILEY

Sarasota County is home to multitudes of pre-owned bookstores. Though some remain relatively unknown, the locally owned stores are the best places to find high quality books and a personal atmosphere. Here is a review of some of the best used bookstores in Sarasota County.

### Shelf Indulgence



Shelf Indulgence doubles as a bookstore and café. They sell high quality but inexpensive pre-owned books. The store has a cozy atmosphere, fueled by its many café options, a small outdoor area, and puzzle games to be played while shopping. Overall, Shelf Indulgence is a beautiful shop to find your next favorite novel.

### A Parker's Books and Book Bazaar



A Parker's Books and Book Bazaar is in downtown Sarasota. They offer plenty of options across all different genres, filling the store from floor to ceiling. The books are slightly more expensive than some of the other used bookstores, but they are high quality options. The store also offers a student discount on all sales, allowing you to save on your purchases!

### Selby Public Library Bookstore



Near the entrance of Selby Public Library is a room full of used books and CDs ready to be purchased. The books are inexpensive, with most priced at less than five dollars. All proceeds from the bookstore support the maintenance of Selby Public Library, making it a great place to buy books and give back!

## Teaching Through Touch

*Pine View's Marine Science Fish Tanks*

by Skylar Bredlau  
Sports Editor

Since the spring of 2019, Pine View Honors Marine Science and AP Environmental Science teacher Jason Miller's classroom has been known for its wall of fish tanks, with the blue lights emulating throughout the classroom making it feel like you are under water.

As his Honors Marine Science classes maintain these saltwater fish tanks, water splashes while they inspect the algae-covered rocks, scrape salt creep from the glass, and check their filters for buildup or blockages.

The program was built by Miller, who has taught at Pine View for 19 years.

"I want a wall of fish tanks like in a pet store," Miller told administrators during a science building renovation.

So, with donations and community support, the tanks became a permanent, hands-on learning experience in his classroom.

Miller emphasized that students do nearly all the physical work themselves.

"The idea is to get the kids trained and well-educated so that they can handle things themselves," Miller said. "The only thing I do is disaster control... Otherwise, the kids take care of everything."

According to a student, identified as Alex to protect their privacy at the request of their parents, students clean and maintain the tanks twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays.

"[On Tuesdays] We'll start by cleaning out the tanks," Alex said, "Then we wipe up the salt that creeps up from the saltwater in the tanks. After that we work on the filtering system."

That system has multiple parts that students physically disassemble and clean.

"The top part cleans out the fish waste, and the bottom part keeps the nutrients fresh and recycles everything in the tank," Alex said.

They said students also "flip the algae in the bottom of the tank, which helps recycle nutrients."

Then on Friday, the students get to do tests on the tanks.

"... We do water quality tests, Miller said, "So, the kids get to break out all of the different test kits so that they can test alkalinity, magnesium, calcium..."

Alex said that after they collect their results they "store them as data in a table so we can see if there's any problems with the recycling systems."

Miller also said that the "Excel spreadsheet has data all the way back to 2019 when [they] started the tanks."

That ongoing, hands-on responsibility is what sets the class apart for many students.

Junior Liliana Formal said the hands-on nature of the class makes it stand out.

"I think it's really cool," she said. "I think it gives people a sense of responsibility... but generally I think it's a pretty fun activity and it makes for a very unique class."

Each student or pair is responsible for a tank, rotating tasks as needed. The work often involves physically scraping algae, rinsing filters, and handling equipment.

"Since they're saltwater tanks, there's this thing called salt creep," Formal said. "So, [we

have to get some of that off...without scratching the glass."

For Miller, the value of the tanks goes beyond maintenance and data collection. He said the hands-on work changes how students connect with the material.

"The kids get attached to their fish," Miller said. "They name them... and they develop an understanding of the personality of some of their organisms."

By placing responsibility directly in students' hands, Miller said the tanks turn marine science into something students can feel, manage, and care about — not just study.

Two clown fish are shown swimming in their tank, which is located in Miller's room. PHOTO BY SKYLAR BREDLAU

Kiona Wehlage (junior) is shown cleaning one of the fish tanks on one of the Fridays that the AP Marine Science class designates for cleaning the tanks. PHOTO BY SKYLAR BREDLAU

The photo captures hybrid (red) and regular (purple) zinnias growing in the garden. PHOTO BY DIYA PANTHULU

Jazz Band member Aeon Johnson performs during the winter concert on Dec. 9, fully immersed in the music. PHOTO COURTESY OF NORM VAGN

Louis Philippe roses bloom in the garden, adding bright color to the space. PHOTO BY DIYA PANTHULU

A colorful fish swims through the saltwater aquarium located in Miller's room. PHOTO BY SKYLAR BREDLAU

## Pine View's Scent

*A Memorial That Engages Through Aroma*

by Diya Panthulu  
Guest Contributor

Have you ever stopped to smell the roses while wandering on campus? You may have come across Lilly's Garden, a memorial for former student Lilly Glaubach, featuring roses, a fairy garden, an air plant farm, bird houses, Mason beehives, and so much more.

Freshman Ella Barker played a major role in creating Lilly's Garden, assisting with planting and design.

"A flower garden was chosen because Lilly really loved nature and gardens... she was huge into gardening and plants," Barker said.

Located by the art rooms, Lilly's flower garden features an array of native plants, many of which not only look colorful, but

have a beautiful scent, too. With a combination of perennial and self-seeding flowers, which grow back every year, the garden is sure to be in bloom.

Upon walking in, pink roses, known as Louis Philippe Roses, are immediately seen growing on the wall in the garden's corner, by the beehives.

"When that's in bloom, it is really a beautiful rose to smell ... if you go and smell it, it's fantastic," said Lesley Sachs, Chair of Pine View Associations' Gardening Committee.

Barker helped plant the rose bush a few years ago as one of the first additions to the garden.

The peaceful nature of the garden makes it inviting to students and faculty alike. It is a

calm and quiet place to hang out in one's free time.

"When you have a memorial garden, I think peace is one of the really important elements that it should bring," Sachs said. "And if it also delights your senses and sense of smell, that's all the better."

Walking a little further, hibiscus plants can be spotted as well, some having a faint scent.

"We have some beautiful hibiscus," Barker said, "We've got really pretty pink ones...and there's also another one back here with a really pretty peach color."

Along with roses and hibiscus flowers, zinnias also reside in the garden.

"I picked out these [zinnias]

from the main garden and planted them here on purpose," Barker said. "I picked out the ones with the best genetics, because if you can see, this is a really beautiful hybrid color."

Sachs created the garden with many benefits in mind.

"When we're exposed to plants, it releases certain chemicals in our brains that relax and bring us peace, and that's scientifically proven," Sachs said. "So, my goal and hope in that garden was that students would be able to experience a unique, lush, abundantly colorful place, and just by being near it, they can learn, observe, touch, and smell ... And that it brings them calm and peace."

GRAPHIC BY ALLIE CHUNG

## A Taste of Learning

*Fresh from the garden, packed with flavor*

by Katerina Mazzo  
Web Editor-in-Chief

Five minutes after being picked, food tastes different. In the Pine View garden, students can discover that difference through unfamiliar flavors that are fresher and stronger.

Leslie Sachs, a volunteer and chair of the Garden Committee for Pine View Association (PVA), said the garden introduces students to taste in a way many have never experienced before.

"For a lot of these kids, it's the first time they've had things like kale. They don't know where things come from," Sachs said. "They've never seen it grow before and I find that kids who

are able to see food grow, harvest it themselves, are far more likely to eat it."

Sachs said tasting the food is more meaningful because students are involved in the entire process.

"So every week when we are coming into a harvesting sort of season, we try to have something for them to eat," Sachs said.

The flavor of freshly grown food stands apart from store-bought produce.

"It's also just really cool to eat a local tomato, it is not anything like what you would get at the grocery store," Sachs said. "It's more flavorful."

Fifth grader Robbie McCombie, who works in the garden multiple days a week, said

he has tasted about 30 percent of what has been grown.

For all students, some tastes stand out more than others, and McCombie definitely has his favorites.

"The bananas, they're a lot different because they're... sweeter," McCombie said. "The mustard greens... are very hot, and then it just disappears."

Taste can mean more than just flavors alone, especially in a learning environment.

"I think taste is kind of discovery," Sachs said. "The reward for doing these new skills is a new taste or the opportunity to eat something and try things."

Students are encouraged to explore their pallet without pressure.

"If you don't like something... then just spit it out," Sachs said.

When asked to describe the garden's overall taste, McCombie summed it up simply.

"It's probably 'fresh,'" McCombie said. "We eat everything five minutes after we pick it."

At Pine View, taste is a way for students to learn and explore. In the school garden, they grow, harvest, and try foods themselves, discovering new flavors and experiencing the freshness of what they've helped grow. Every bite becomes a small lesson in curiosity and the joy of trying something new.

## In Plain Sight

*Pine View's architecture encourages openness and independence*

by Maggie Wang  
Broadcast Staffer

Before students ever step into a classroom at Pine View, the architecture makes a statement. That design choice goes back to 1994, when the campus was completed by Sarasota architect Carl Abbott.

According to a Florida Architect magazine article

around a central green space, also known as The Quad. Key elements include the slanted roofs, overhangs and shaded walkways, and buildings separated by open space.

The Florida Architect article also stated, "The architectural team sought to insure a feeling of openness and independence in the siting and orientation."

The Media Center exhibits these features, being described by the magazine as "a focal point for the school."

In a 2018 interview with Your Observer, Abbott revealed the intent behind the campus.

"I designed the campus to encourage individual thought and developmen. Freedom of thought, freedom of association, freedom on every level," he said, referring to how the physical environment impacts students.

By avoiding enclosed corridors and rigid layouts,

published in 1994,

"The horseshoe-shaped masterplan for Pine View takes its direction from Thomas Jefferson's plan for the University of Virginia."

The campus features a U-shaped layout with 14 independent buildings arranged

## Harmony in the Hallways

*Sound shifts from quiet to instrumental chorus across campus*

by Andrew Ashby  
Asst. Web Editor-in-Chief

From the morning bell to shuffling feet, sound here at Pine View is a constant. It is shaped, guided, and constantly negotiated.

For Media Aide Patricia Morgerson, the Media Center's soundscape shifts dramatically over the course of the day. Mornings begin almost silently, broken only by soft music drifting through the room.

"It's very quiet," she said. "There is music playing in the background, we have been playing that since I got here, just instrumental, smooth jazz to keep

it calm."

The music, she explained, is an intentional, soothing presence meant to ease anxious students and set a peaceful tone before the rush begins. That calm gives way to a low roar as students pour in during midday.

"Between the hours of 11:30 to 2:00, it's very loud," Morgerson said. "It's filled, so it's a little noisy, but I try and keep it to a minimal."

Conversation, she noted, is the dominant sound in the Media Center. For instance, chatter softened into whispers, punctuated by reminders to keep voices down. It's a balance between silence and liveliness,

which she believes reflects the evolving culture of our school.

Elsewhere on campus, noise is not restrained — it is cultivated.

In the band room, Norm Vagn, Pine View's band teacher, experiences the school day through waves of organized noise.

"There is a good mixture of students talking, and then the music grows as students start to warm-up," Vagn said.

What begins as scattered sound gradually tightens into something unified as rehearsal progresses.

For Vagn, sound is the clearest measure of growth. Over time, he hears students move from

experimentation to confidence.

"A good rehearsal sounds like every member of the ensemble communicating musically," he said, "The sound 'clicking' where everything comes together is the sound of inspired playing."

Together, these spaces capture a piece of Pine View's auditory identity. Whether it's the hush of whispered voices under soft jazz or the full-bodied roar of a jazz band in rehearsal, sound at Pine View reflects a school that is active, expressive, and deeply human.



## The Science Behind Love

by Daria Shabunina  
Broadcast Editor-in-Chief

It's the start of February, and Valentine's Day is just around the corner. You see your crush walk by and think, 'it's now or never.' Your hands are sweating and the butterflies in your stomach are having a parade complete with a marching band and gymnasts. Either you get a date or face the embarrassment of rejection.

"Hey, can I ask you something..."  
Initial attraction may stem from multiple sources. The type of nervous system — whether calm or familiar — may make a person feel safe. Certain people also trigger individuals' dopamine responses, leading to an increased feeling of happiness or excitement around that person.

Dopamine is a key neurotransmitter in the early stages of relationships, the "honeymoon phase," as it's commonly phrased, but it's not the only one.

According to AP Psychology teacher Robin Melton, norepinephrine increases alertness, and lowered levels of serotonin cause obsessive thinking. Another major component of relationships is oxytocin, the "love hormone". It is released during

physical touch and stimulates deeper personal bonds between people. Oxytocin influences not only romantic relationships but also friendships, family bonds, and other social connections.

Mac E. Lancaster and Dr. Ran D. Anbar discuss this in their article, "How Oxytocin Affects Our Relationships."

"The synergy between oxytocin and dopamine helps explain why we feel excited when seeing loved ones or spending time with old friends. When oxytocin stimulates dopamine's rewarding properties, euphoric feelings result."

The mere-exposure effect can also come into play in initial attraction.

"People start as friends, and the more time they spend together, it [can] turn into something else," Melton said, "...Because you're

more exposed to them, you see them more, it gives you more of an opportunity to create a bond."

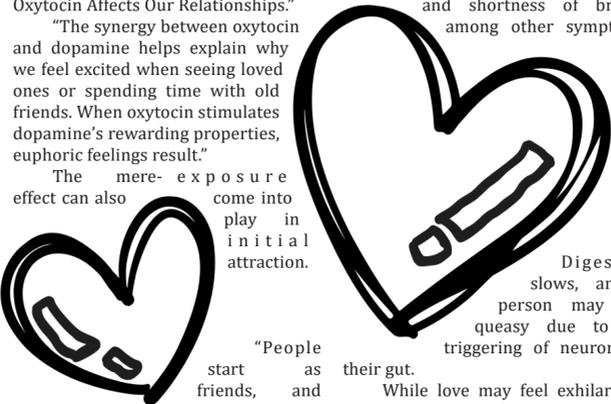
Physically, love activates the sympathetic nervous system, or the fight-or-flight response, and cortisol is increased in excitement. One may experience heart palpitations and shortness of breath, among other symptoms.

Digestion slows, and a person may feel queasy due to the triggering of neurons in

their gut. While love may feel exhilarating while it lasts, break-ups are often hard to go through. The sudden lack of dopamine can cause depression

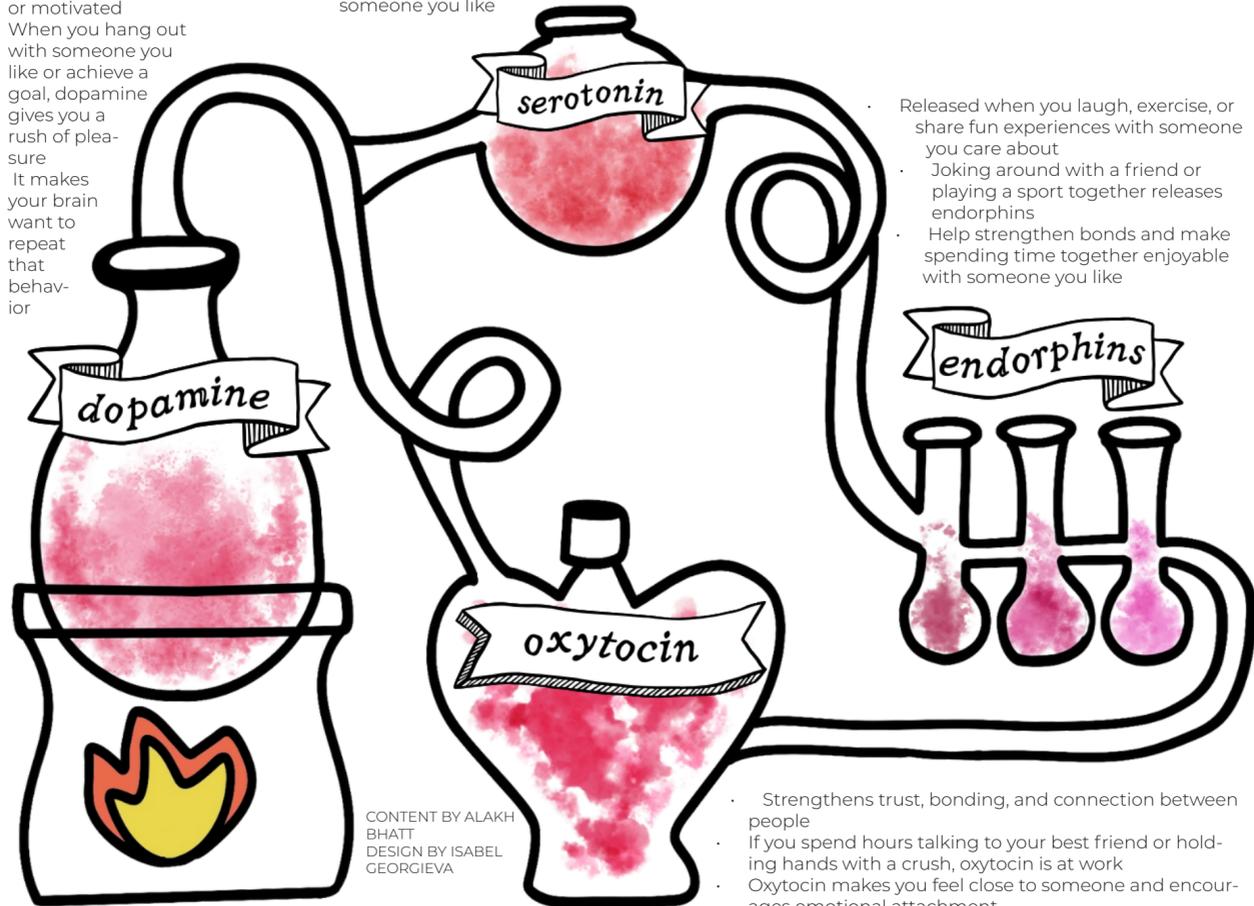
and anxiety as one goes through withdrawal. This is reinforced by the anterior cingulate cortex and insula as they, with deep feelings, increase in activity, processing emotional pain like physical pain without distinguishing between the two.

If a relationship works out, however, love makes people happier and healthier. Endorphins, which reduce stress and raise mood, replace dopamine, which makes the relationship feel less exciting but more fulfilling as "consummate love" is pursued. Vasopressin, a hormone that goes hand in hand with oxytocin, fosters partnership and a want to protect your mate, leading to more long-term connection. The immune system, which temporarily lowers during the first stages, is overall strengthened. In the end, love is full of chemical and emotional ups and downs. "Nobody expects it to be perfect, but at the end of the day, what you end up doing is you accept people for who they are and if they check the boxes of what's most important to you, and you feel that they follow your lifestyle," Melton said.



- Released when something makes you happy, excited, or motivated
- When you hang out with someone you like or achieve a goal, dopamine gives you a rush of pleasure
- It makes your brain want to repeat that behavior

- Helps control mood, sleep, and overall emotional balance
- High serotonin makes you feel happy, calm, and confident
- Low serotonin can make you anxious, restless, or obsessed with someone you like



- Released when you laugh, exercise, or share fun experiences with someone you care about
- Joking around with a friend or playing a sport together releases endorphins
- Help strengthen bonds and make spending time together enjoyable with someone you like

- Strengthens trust, bonding, and connection between people
- If you spend hours talking to your best friend or holding hands with a crush, oxytocin is at work
- Oxytocin makes you feel close to someone and encourages emotional attachment

CONTENT BY ALAKH BHATT  
DESIGN BY ISABEL GEORGIEVA

## Types of Love

CONTENT BY MAYA RUFFIN, GRAPHICS BY HANA MULLEN



- A healthy friendship involves compassion, empathy, and honesty
- Philia involves neurotransmitters including oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine
- With an increase in serotonin levels, there is an increase in security of friendships
- Oxytocin is shown to increase trust in humans
- Balanced serotonin levels increase the stability of moods
- Dopamine rewards the brain with pleasure



- A committed and passionate love between two partners that continues to grow
- Love effects dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin
- Love can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and increase sleep patterns
- Feeling love can also strengthen the body to fight off illnesses, improving health



- Storge is a natural and common love that occurs between parent and child
- It is described as the most natural of the loves
- Storge can provide comfort when you are stressed, anxious, lonely, or depressed
- Hormones like oxytocin play a role in reinforcing storge love



- Healthy appreciation and care for oneself
- This can decrease stress and mental illness
- An increase in self-confidence can also lead to an increase in productivity and motivation
- Achieving goals leads to an increase in dopamine which changes one's brain chemistry to help one feel better

## The Science of Scent

by Alex Lieberman

- The sense of smell involves about 400 olfactory receptors

- Odorant receptors compose half of the largest family of receptors (G-coupled protein receptors) in the body

- Smell and memory are closely linked because of the brain's anatomy. They are stored as one memory

- Childhood creates the basis for smells you like and dislike for the rest of your life

Sources: University of California, San Francisco & The Harvard Gazette

## Perfumes

- Alcohol spreads out the scents in the perfume

- Most perfumes have a three-part smell, with each note being detectable at a different time

- Skin temperature and pH, diet, and lifestyle can all affect how a perfume smells on someone

Source: How Stuff Works  
PHOTO COURTESY OF MUGLER



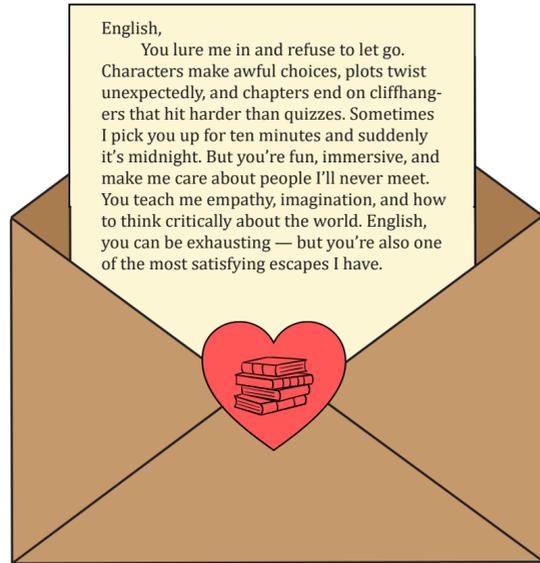
Junior Maya Nowakowski has a special connection to the perfume she wears, Mugler Alien Goddess.

"It reminds me of my mom, because my mom used to wear the same brand. So it's a very homey, nostalgic smell for me," she said.

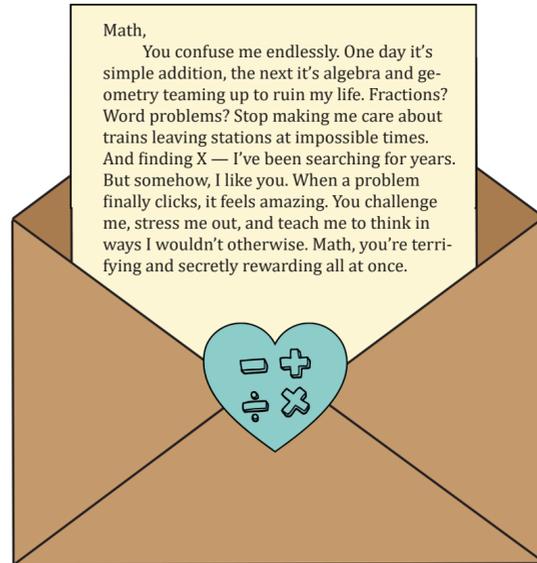
### Dear Subjects,

by Alakh Bhatt

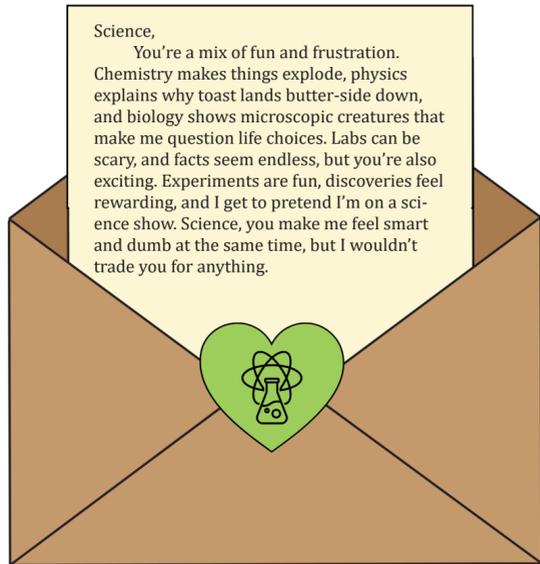
Opinion Asst. Editor



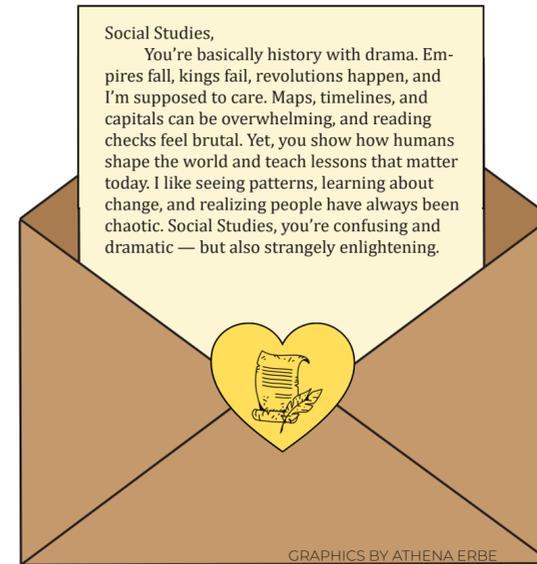
English,  
You lure me in and refuse to let go. Characters make awful choices, plots twist unexpectedly, and chapters end on cliffhangers that hit harder than quizzes. Sometimes I pick you up for ten minutes and suddenly it's midnight. But you're fun, immersive, and make me care about people I'll never meet. You teach me empathy, imagination, and how to think critically about the world. English, you can be exhausting — but you're also one of the most satisfying escapes I have.



Math,  
You confuse me endlessly. One day it's simple addition, the next it's algebra and geometry teaming up to ruin my life. Fractions? Word problems? Stop making me care about trains leaving stations at impossible times. And finding X — I've been searching for years. But somehow, I like you. When a problem finally clicks, it feels amazing. You challenge me, stress me out, and teach me to think in ways I wouldn't otherwise. Math, you're terrifying and secretly rewarding all at once.



Science,  
You're a mix of fun and frustration. Chemistry makes things explode, physics explains why toast lands butter-side down, and biology shows microscopic creatures that make me question life choices. Labs can be scary, and facts seem endless, but you're also exciting. Experiments are fun, discoveries feel rewarding, and I get to pretend I'm on a science show. Science, you make me feel smart and dumb at the same time, but I wouldn't trade you for anything.



Social Studies,  
You're basically history with drama. Empires fall, kings fail, revolutions happen, and I'm supposed to care. Maps, timelines, and capitals can be overwhelming, and reading checks feel brutal. Yet, you show how humans shape the world and teach lessons that matter today. I like seeing patterns, learning about change, and realizing people have always been chaotic. Social Studies, you're confusing and dramatic — but also strangely enlightening.

GRAPHICS BY ATHENA ERBE



### Going 212 during a zombie apocalypse

by Nathan DeSouza

Director of Digital Media

YOU. YEAH, YOU.  
What are you thinking!? A NEON yellow dodgeball shirt? Today of all days? I don't care if it's to get hyped for Spirit Week. You might as well wear a giant sign that tells the zombies, "FREE BRAINS!"

I'm sorry, but in trying times like these, we need to make quick, yet smart decisions, and drawing attention to ourselves is the last thing we want to do.

Oh, right. Formalities. My name is The Destroyer of Brain-Eaters, or Joan, if you prefer. And notice how I'm not walking around looking like a sentient b a n a n a . Clearly,



you need a few pointers on how to survive a zombie apocalypse and how to choose colors that complement you better.

The truth of the matter is, these organ-hungry guys are EVERYWHERE on campus! Some genius cracked a joke at the beginning of the outbreak and said that 'Pine View kids have giant brains' or something, or 'brains as big as shoulders,' something like that.

THAT'S NOT EVEN ANATOMICALLY POSSIBLE!

The fact stands that we can't rely on combat anymore. We must seek shelter, and here's what I've gathered: The biggest mistake you can make here is hiding in the purple science building. Now I know that it might be tempting to hide there and use the chemicals for protection, but let's be honest with ourselves, that'll only be useful if you know how to synthesize things that would actually help us out in a zombie apocalypse. Darn,

I should have taken organic chemistry, besides, the rotting smell of E.

coli attracts them to that place anyway, so we'd be found out quickly.

Hear me out. The awnings would be a great place to scout out. Our existence would literally fly over their heads. Having access to them means we could traverse the entirety of Pine View campus from the skies, without having to worry about them climbing up.

Wait. How do we get up? For that matter, how in the world are we supposed to come down...?

Scratch that idea then. We probably wouldn't survive a week with all the heat that radiates off of them.

The best place to hide, you ask? The two dressing rooms at the back of the auditorium. You didn't know those were there? Exactly. That place has anything and everything you need to survive: shelter, a bathroom, and most importantly, entertainment.

Whether it's playing the backstage pianos or wearing the costumes, you have the

choice of rocking it out or feeling pretty as the world outside collapses. You could get food, as the Student Union is only a hop, skip, and a ramp away, but nutrition will always be overrated when you have the option of wearing that sparkly pink dress.

If there are no other questions, let's head there as soon as possible, before one of them sees...

"B a n a a a - naaaaaaaaaaaaaa..."

WHAT DID I TELL YOU? RUN!



PHOTO ART BY NATHAN DESOUZA

### Our Pine View

A Torch documentary about Pine View's tranquility

by Nathan DeSouza and Shriya Ashok

Director of Digital Media and Co Entertainment Editor

When student laughter and sounds of heavy footsteps cease to exist at Pine View School, the campus quietly echoes those signs of life through footprints in the quad. And when elementary schoolers return from fields, they announce their passing by leaving sand in the stairwell of Building 17, grains tangible underneath your feet with each step you take.

Despite no apparent inhabitants on weekends or when class is in session, Pine View is still teeming with life. In this documentary, we explore the campus's liveliness, spanning areas such as the Ancient Portable City and the Shell Lot. Join us in peeling back the layers of life and finding out what makes our Pine View School uniquely alive.

Watch by scanning the QR code to the right!



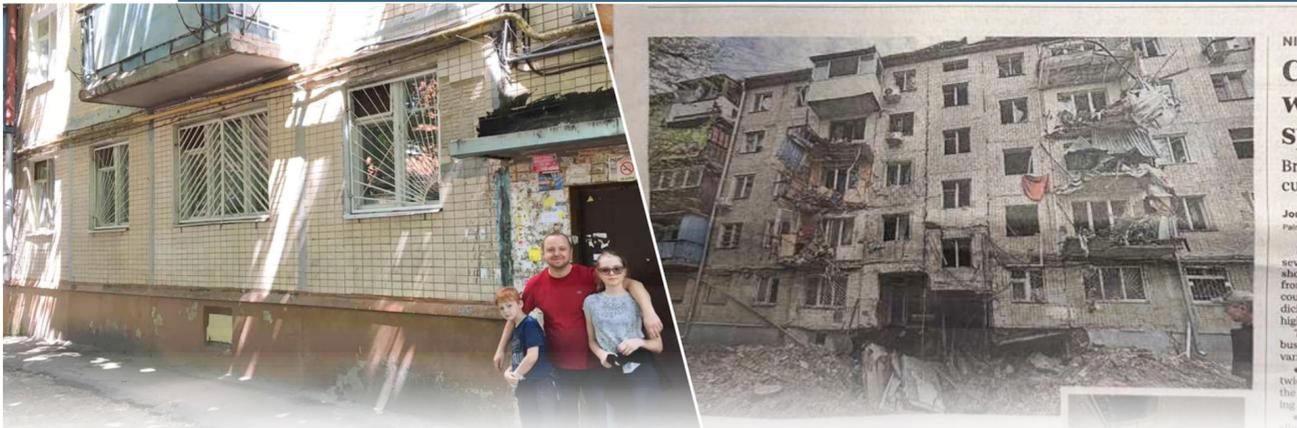
GRAPHICS BY ATHENA ERBE

### Which Torch staffer are you?

by Ava Lenerz

Torch Editor-in-Chief





# Peace on Russia's terms is no peace at all

by Timothy Nesanelis  
Co News Editor

All things considered, I should be Vladimir Putin's ideal Ukrainian. Growing up, I was taught Russian in favor of Ukrainian, a language deemed "too useless" to learn despite the fact that the majority of my family knew the tongue. My Ukrainian family had almost all emigrated from a quaint village in the Ukrainian countryside to a bustling suburb outside of Moscow, Russia, both places I had grown to love.

But after four years of continuous fighting, Putin's actions have demonstrated a clear reality — the ideal Ukrainian is a dead one. I'll never forget getting into the car and seeing my dad in tears as he told me one of his best friends had been killed by a drone, or when he completely froze seeing a Publix newspaper displaying an image of their old home destroyed.

Through over a decade of conflict and the full scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine's struggle to free itself from the grip of its colonizer has left hundreds of thousands on both sides of the ever-chang-

ing border slaughtered, displaced, and emotionally anguished.

In spite of the bilateral suffering, negotiations for peace have dragged on with little progress, as the Russian government continues to deny Ukraine its autonomy, solely offering biased "peace" proposals, for instance, official annexation of 20 percent of Ukraine's ter-

I'll never forget getting into the car and seeing my dad in tears...

ritory and a complete demilitarization of Ukraine.

On December 24, 2025, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy unveiled the government's own draft of a 20-point document detailing the necessary steps Ukraine,

Russia, the United States, and the rest of Europe need to take to achieve peace.

Included within the plan are an immediate presidential election in Ukraine, the end of sanctions impacting Russia, and a complete withdrawal of both Ukrainian and Russian troops from the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine (known as the Donbas), a region under de facto Russian control since the 2014 invasion.

The most important point, however, is a complete security guarantee of not only Ukraine, but all other European nations, crucial for the safety of nations like Georgia or Moldova that also have separatist movements backed by the Russian government.

The document, an altered version of the United States' original 28-point plan proposed in November 2025 by the Trump administration, makes notable concessions, omitting the once non-negotiable Crimean Peninsula from peace talks entirely and leaving the issue of its owner to be discussed at a future date.

It's evident that Zelenskyy and Ukraine are ready for the war to end, but despite giving in to several Russian demands, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs completely rejected the 20-point plan, implying that a plan to protect European nations from further Russian invasion creates "a true axis of war." Instead, the ministry continues its push for a peace plan that perpetuates Russia's imperialistic goals, which it will continue for another four years if need be.

Yet Ukrainians know better than any other country that any peace in favor of Russia's goals is only a facade. On December 4, 1994, Russia, the United



Junior Timothy Nesanelis stands on the steps of the Kharkiv metro system in 2018. From the Battle of Kharkiv in 2022 to this day, the underground stations serve as crucial bomb shelters and children's educational facilities. PHOTO COURTESY OF TIMOTHY NESANELIS

States, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine signed the Budapest Memorandum, a series of agreements detailing the global superpowers' "obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine."

After the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine in early 2014, in which the people of Ukraine ousted the pro-Russian government in favor of a pro-Western one, Russia armed separatist groups in the Donbas and annexed Crimea, a military campaign deemed illegal under international law by a majority of the United Nations' member states.

As a result, it is easy to deduce why Ukrainians felt so jaded by Trump's words at a press conference December 28, 2025, when he claimed that Russia "wants to see Ukraine succeed." He said this as if the facts don't suggest otherwise, from the stories of cruel civilian deaths of tens of thousands of Ukrainians to Putin's claims to former President George W. Bush that "Ukraine isn't even a state," dating as far back as 2001 and 2008.

Russia's denial of peace paints the true reality of Rus-

sia's goal: a complete and utter dissolution of Ukraine's self-determination. As critical peace talks fall apart once again, Ukrainians around the world are counting on Trump to recognize Russia's history of bloodshed and broken promises as he works to end the conflict.

I've witnessed first-hand the suffering that marches alongside Putin's "liberation," a plague on my life since I was five, and there shouldn't be another person, Russian or Ukrainian, who is forced to deal with that pain at the hands of a government that will never accept peace.

TOP LEFT: Nesanelis, his dad, and his older sister stand in front of his dad's childhood home in Kharkiv, Ukraine. His family visited the city in the June 2018, which was Nesanelis' third time visiting Ukraine. TOP RIGHT: A copy of the Sarasota Herald Tribune shows the same building after being hit by a missile strike. The photo, taken by Adelia Sobrenome, was the cover of the paper on June 7, 2022. PHOTOS COURTESY OF TIMOTHY NESANELIS



Nesanelis and his younger sister, seventh grader Paulina Nesanelis, sit in front of the Kharkiv National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre before the war. In 2022, during the Battle of Kharkiv, the building's main theatre was the target of missile strikes, along with other buildings in the area around Kharkiv's Freedom Square. PHOTO COURTESY OF TIMOTHY NESANELIS

# College applications: Less is more

by Robyn Schoenberg

Asst. Editor-in-Chief

The number of college applications submitted nationally has skyrocketed, with acceptance rates plummeting, reshaping how students approach applications. Between 2021 and 2024, applications to some public institutions have increased by as much as 57 percent according to the college admissions consulting firm Spark Admissions.

Pine View is no exception, reaching an over 35 percent surge in applications submitted from the class of 2025 to class of 2026 alone, at an average of over 8.46 applications per senior.

While some may assume this increase in competition pushes students to be more decisive, it may actually lead to a lack of purpose when sending out applications.

"So, what we have is students making applications to a ton of schools," Lance Bergman, Pine View's Director of College Advice for juniors and seniors, said. "I think if I were to ask them, they would honestly say at the beginning of this year, 'yeah, unless I get money, I'm not going.'"

Students may indiscriminately add top colleges to their lists to take a chance, because why not? This is the time to dream big and sending more applications can provide a greater sense of security. Although, more applications don't necessarily mean better outcomes.

"We're likely not going to get many more kids in than we ever do to some of the top, most selective universities,

and that's not because you guys aren't great, but if you applied to 30 percent more applications, guess what? We have rejections," Bergman said.

More applicants will likely lead to lower acceptance rates at the school level. Assuming many admitted students wouldn't commit to these schools without scholarships or significant financial aid, that can sting when decisions are released.

"It not only potentially harms those students who would most seriously consider these schools or viably attend; it also impacts your younger siblings and kids that are in lower grades," Bergman said. "Pine View does have a reputation with some schools."

Schools strongly consider yield — if accepted students actually attend — when reviewing applications. If students send out more haphazard applications, they risk rejecting more college acceptances, leading to some institutions becoming more cautious of accepting Pine View students in the future.

Additionally, for individuals with longer college lists, diffused effort and poor-quality applications becomes a concern. While the Common App has streamlined the application process, each college still means more research, essay writing, and pressure to create worthwhile applications.

"Applying to all the Ivies is maybe not advisable..." Bergman said. "If you're just looking for that name, then your application isn't going to be as resonant as it might

[be] ... All you're really doing is increasing the probability of getting rejected from all."

The culture around college applications is changing, and it's only logical to change with it. Although though t h a t

doesn't simply mean applying to more colleges, it means being more intentional when curating a college list that reflects personal goals and fit.

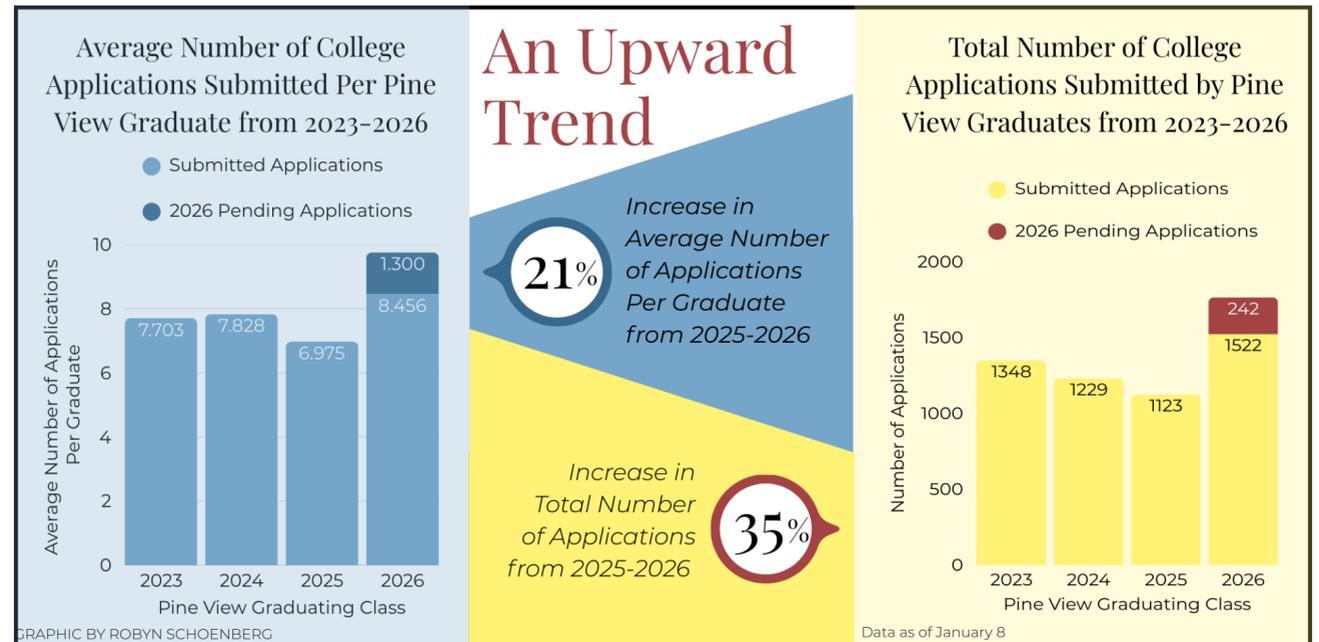
"Now that being said, you could apply to 30 schools, and if... it was a considered list, you're going to get into some percentage," Bergman said. "We could also create a list in which you would get into all of them."

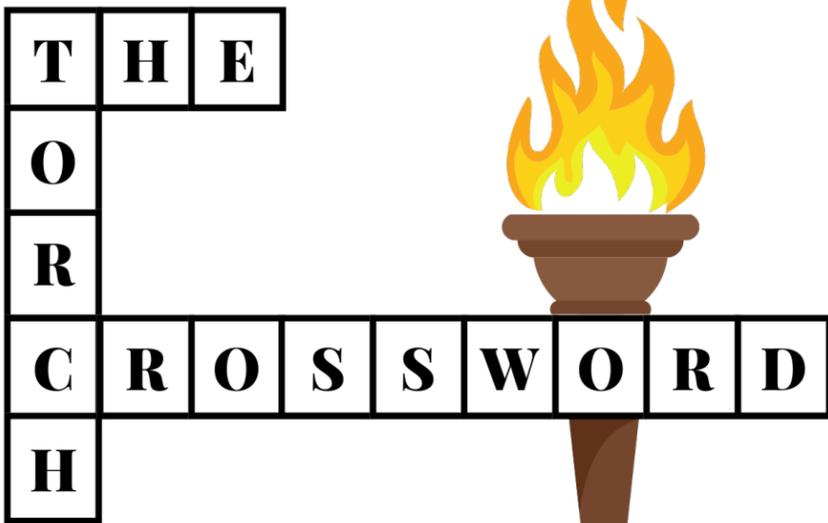
You could also create a list in which it would be tough to get into any of them." Rather than being clouded by prestigious names, look deeper into what each college offers.

At the end of the day, a name will only get someone so far after graduation. The work ethic and aptness to maximize opportunities that carried each person through high school will drive them to excel in whatever path they choose, long after admissions decisions are made.

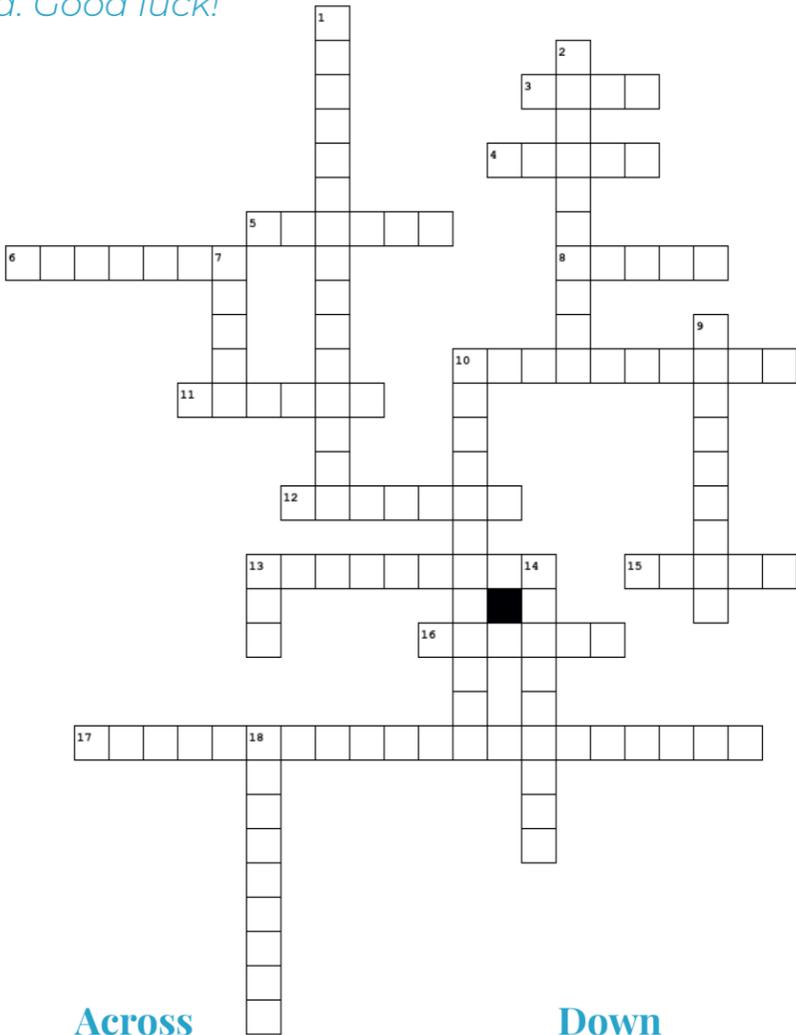


LOGOS COURTESY OF RESPECTIVE UNIVERSITY WEBSITES, GRAPHICS BY AVA LENERZ





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**

- 3. What sport does Tej Atluru play?
- 4. Rose \_\_\_ Tea is a new store at UTC.
- 5. What is the name of the region made up of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that has been under Russian control since 2014?
- 6. What flower besides for roses and hibiscus grow in Lilly's Garden?
- 8. Which new Pine View teacher is one of the freshman class sponsors?
- 10. Which building should you hide in during a zombie apocalypse?
- 11. The word cute is made of the symbols for two elements: \_\_\_ and tellurium. [hint: Check Humor].
- 12. Which streaming service can "Drive to Survive" be watched?
- 13. What do Marine Science students have to scrape off the tanks?
- 15. What do schools (colleges) strongly consider? [hint: Check Opinion]
- 16. \_\_\_ is a natural and common love between parent and child.
- 17. Which assigned book made students cry?

**Down**

- 1. Which used bookstore has a cafe and puzzles?
- 2. Who wears the perfume Mugler Alien Goddess?
- 7. What is the abbreviation of the new sport added to the Winter Olympics?
- 9. Over 9.3 million Ukrainians have been \_\_\_\_.
- 10. Graduate programs that are now excluded from the professional title include nursing, education, sociology, \_\_\_\_, accounting, and public health.
- 13. How many screens did the original movie theater at the Sarasota Square Mall have?
- 14. The bidding war on Warner Bros is between Netflix and \_\_\_\_.
- 18. Which chemical helps control mood, sleep, and overall emotional balance?

## Hear me out...

*Live, Laugh, Love...Lit?*

Across Pine View you can jump into any conversation and find students complaining. We do it all the time for all sorts of reasons.

However, something that used be a frequent point of contention has become less controversial; it even sometimes gets a compliment. This something being reading, or specifically, assigned reading.

Maybe the books have gotten better, or our point of view has changed, but as a senior looking back, I've enjoyed most of the novels.

They get a bad rap since we are "forced" to read them, but they deserve recognition, so, thank you Pine View.

Thank you for the great literature you've introduced to me.

I'll start back in fifth grade. Our summer reading was "The Watsons Go to Birmingham." At the age of 10, I was annoyed that we had summer homework at all (I still am for that matter).

Yet this book introduced us to the the Civil Rights Movement, a part of history necessary to remember. Not only did it teach us lessons critical to our development, but it did so through characters we could relate to.

Similarly, reading "The Diary of Anne Frank" in seventh grade brought a new perspective to students. The fact that we were reading her diary at the same age as when she wrote it made it all the more impactful. Again, it taught us essential history lessons that some may not have learned otherwise.

Jumping to high school we read books such as "The Odyssey," introducing us to Greek mythology, and "Fahrenheit 451," teaching us about the dystopian genre and the importance of democracy.

In later years we studied classics such as "The Great Gatsby," "1984," "Frankenstein; or, The Modern Pro-



**Ava Lenerz**  
Editor-in-Chief

metheus," and "The Scarlett Letter."

Our knowledge of life wouldn't be the same without these quintessential novels.

Yes, there have been duds from time to time. We all remember "The Last of the Mohicans," the book that made us cry and question our intelligence. Maybe "Naked Economics" wasn't the most exciting read either.

Those books can be balanced out by Shakespeare, though. Some people aren't a fan of his work; I can respect that. Even so, you must admit, the writing is top notch.

Shakespeare was the original "killing off the main character" trope. His plays are referenced so much throughout other mediums, you'll be thankful for all of this knowledge in the future.

So, hear me out. I'm grateful for every poem, short story, and book we've read over the years. The themes throughout each piece of literature translate directly into our daily lives, providing us with an understanding of the world we wouldn't have otherwise. Maybe the boring reads, bad books, or rough homework assignments were worth it in the end.

### 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 Sponsors

GreatVas Gentle Vasectomy

The Heart & Vascular

Center of Sarasota

#### Gold Sponsors

Suncoast Science Center

#### Silver Sponsors

The Gorodnitchev Family

#### Bronze Sponsors

Children's Art Classes

The Lieberman Family

#### Family Sponsors

The DeSouza Family  
Dental Care at Palmer Ranch  
The Mazzo Family

Ding Tea Sarasota/Ichiban  
Cafe at Bold  
RiseWell Health LLC