



The next athletic director  
PAGE 2



'The last Cowboy'  
PAGE 8

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SCHOOL NEWS

A new identity for Hills: The Broncos PAGE 2

By Kate Zydor

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IN-DEPTH

How Covid will change Hills forever PAGE 6

By Jared Mitovich



THE SENIORS

# New beginnings for the Class of 2021

Celebrating their accomplishments after a year like no other

SENIOR SPOTLIGHTS

Sylvie Najarian

Her 100th lacrosse goal



SCAN TO READ

Alex Nasano

Hills senior takes to the sky



SCAN TO READ

SENIOR SPOTLIGHTS

Alex Kostantas

His Hills wrestling legacy



SCAN TO READ

Valentina Cannao

Leaving her mark on theater



SCAN TO READ

26 states.  
200 Hills seniors.  
CONTINUED ON PAGES 4-5

## Getting to know the valedictorian and salutatorian

THE SENIORS

By Lauren Eusebio

As this unconventional school year ends, the Pascack Hills Class of 2021 will have an in-person graduation ceremony on June 16. Students, teachers, and families are greatly anticipating this celebration. Among the speakers at graduation, valedictorian Noah Hirshfield and salutatorian Jenna Golub are sure to inspire the crowd with their speeches. They are not only top students but high school sweethearts as well, supporting each other in and out of the classroom.

Hirshfield is an AP Scholar with Honor and was a semifinalist in the 2021 National Merit Scholarship Program. He dedicated his four years at Hills not only to exceeding academic expectations but being heavily involved in school affairs. As president of the National Honor Society and captain of the Varsity Tennis



NOAH  
HIRSHFIELD  
Valedictorian

JENNA  
GOLUB  
Salutatorian

team, Hirshfield has proven himself to be a hardworking leader at Hills. Other accomplishments include his membership in DECA and the Spanish Honor Society.

Jenna Golub is also an AP Scholar with Honor and was a commended student in the 2021 National Merit Scholarship Program. She has left a lasting impact on the Hills community and beyond. Golub is an award-winning research student and former president of the Pascack Valley BBYO chapter, as well as a part of both the National Honor Society and the French Honor Society, and a dedicated member of Project Paterson.

The news of their academic triumph came as a welcomed shock to both parties.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

OPINION

## Committing to college during Covid

By Anabelle Joukharian and Madison Saks

The 2020-21 school year has presented numerous changes to how Pascack Hills and colleges operate, especially for the Class of 2021. Many seniors have had to prepare for college and find ways to adjust to the new college application and acceptance processes. The elements that decide if one would be accepted into a college or university have differed this year compared to previous years.

There have been upsides to entering college during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some students have found benefits in using technology instead of  
CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



SCHOOL NEWS

From treating injuries to running athletics: Steve Papa

By Briana Keenan

Steve Papa is the current athletic trainer for Pascack Hills. On April 12, the Pascack Valley Regional Board of Education approved him to be Hills’ athletic director starting July 1. This position became vacant due to the retirement of the current athletic director, Phil Paspalas.



Outgoing athletic director Phil Paspalas.

Papa said that he was “always involved in sports” as a high school student, and knew that he wanted to pursue sports and work in a career related to the medical field.

He went to Kean University for his undergraduate and masters degrees, and then attended Montclair State University for a two year education leadership program, allowing him to be hired for his current position at the school.

Before working at Hills, Papa worked at Park Ridge High School for four years. He is now in his 19th year at Hills.

As the athletic trainer, Papa realized that he also enjoys managing athletics, leading him to gaining the position of the athletic director. “I became more interested in the administrative part: scheduling games, planning, running, and just being part of the athletic program here,” he explained.

Papa discussed his goals as the new athletic director, including hiring new coaches, his replacement, and implementing student life to bring athletes together. One of the new coaches has already been picked, he reported.

In addition to the goals mentioned, Papa wants to help athletes and coaches at Hills in “any way he can by providing tools for success.”

Hills student athletes shared their personal experiences with the new athletic director. Alana Kimball is a rising junior and softball player at Hills. She expressed her appreciation for him. “Papa makes sure that every athlete is at their best, and is always working very hard to be able to help out all the people he can. He’s helped me get back to softball quickly whenever I’m hurt, as he does for all the athletes at Hills,” she said.

Sylvie Najarian is a current senior at Hills. She played lacrosse, ran cross country during the fall, and did indoor track during the winter. Najarian echoed similar thoughts about Papa’s response to athlete injuries.

“I have Papa to thank for my recovery. It’s been very comforting to know someone like him is ready to help at any second and since freshman year, I have always trusted him,” she said.

Papa emphasized his goal to help Hills’ student athletes. “I hope that all the athletes get the recognition they deserve. That doesn’t always mean wins and losses, but the positive experience built along the way,” he said.

Najarian stated that she thinks Papa will succeed in his new position when he officially transitions into the role of athletic director.

“I think Papa is going to be a great new athletic director. As the trainer, he has created an environment within Hills athletics that is very friendly and welcoming... I think he will be able to bring that environment to the school on a wider scale,” she said.



Papa sitting in his office after school. (Briana Keenan)

SCHOOL NEWS

A new identity for Hills: The Broncos

By Kate Zydor

This school year, the mascot change has been a pressing and widely debated topic among students, parents, and faculty in the Pascack Hills community. As was approved a few months ago, Hills’ mascot is now known as the Broncos.

“When thinking of the Broncos name in correspondence with Hills, determination and grit are two words that come to mind. Students and educators alike exhibit their own forms of hard work during their time at Hills whether that may be in learning, athletics, clubs, or all. This, among other qualities, has made the community stronger,” said Hills freshman Alexa Sipos, a member of the mascot logo committee.

The student body has been referred to as the ‘Broncos’ in various school-wide emails and school announcements, which has started to give this new title a sense of meaning. Merchandise has been introduced as well to help students, teachers, and parents embrace the changes and take pride in the new mascot.

Recently, there was a school-wide poll to help determine the design and format of Hills’ new logo. The school community was able to view several potential ideas and provide input about the future Broncos logo.

“The [mascot committee’s] efforts, feedback, and ability to work together have been crucial factors for the current success of the selection,” stated Sipos.

The committee met with a graphic designer to discuss the design of the logo and how it will be integrated into the school. Factors being considered include

how it will look on a uniform, which font will be used, and how the colors will be represented.

After the designer provides the committee with sample logos, the team “will be evaluating those samples, offering suggestions... and sharing our opinions on what we like best,” said English teacher and committee member Ed Sandt.

The committee has debated whether to just include the head of the horse in the logo, or to also add in some of the torso and legs. “There has been consensus that the image should be bold, but not overly complicated. It should be recognizable and lasting,” stated Sandt.

The committee is keeping open the possibility of revision and editing, and it is choosing not to confuse the school community by making changes to an already public design. They are hoping to have their work completed by the end of the school year, with a June 8 meeting to examine the designers’ samples and decide how to proceed.

Committee members have worked to ensure a smooth transition from ‘Cowboys’ to ‘Broncos.’ Despite the mascot change being controversial, students and staff have an opportunity to share their thoughts so the final product is something they will be happy with.

In addition to the mascot logo, further decisions will need to be made as the rebranding of the school gets underway. Along with the upcoming school year, the mascot rebranding marks the start of a new era for Hills with the potential to leave a positive impact.



Hills students cheer at a 2019 pep rally. (Joseph A. Sorrentino)



THE SENIORS

Noah Hirshfield and Jenna Golub named valedictorian and salutatorian

By Lauren Eusebio • Continued from Page 1

“I was surprised just because there are so many hardworking and intelligent people in our grade who I could have pictured being salutatorian,” Golub expressed. “But I think it does represent the amount of work I put in throughout high school.”

“I just felt really proud of myself when I found out I was valedictorian because I’ve worked really hard, so I was happy to see that pay off,” Hirshfield added. “Our grade has so many great students, so I was really proud of myself for the achievement.”

To be named valedictorian or salutatorian is not an effortless feat. Achieving a perfect grade point average required academic dedication and discipline.

“I always tried to understand the material as we were going through the unit,” Hirshfield said when asked about his study habits. “I made sure to take my time with my work throughout the unit and then I didn’t need to study as much by the time the test arrived.”

Golub took a different approach to her studies. “I would study a few days before a test and usually study for one to three hours the day before the test, depending on how much information was going to be on the test.”

Both Hirshfield and Golub were able to enjoy the social aspects of high school while also being the top two students in their grade.

“I definitely had a good balance between work and social life,” Golub noted. “I would try to incorporate my social life into schoolwork, like doing homework at Starbucks with my friends or having group study sessions.”

Hirshfield expressed similar sentiments. “Even though a lot of my weeknights were spent doing work, I was always able to hang out with friends on the weekend. I think it’s really important to take time off from work to avoid getting overwhelmed, so I always saved time for fun.”

Hirshfield and Golub plan to pursue similar fields after being influenced by the Hills faculty. “I plan to study either biology or chemistry in college on the Pre-Med track, but I’m not sure which major I’m going to pick,” Golub stated. “Before high school, I was more of a humanities person, but ever since freshman year biology and sophomore year genetics, I’ve been a science girl — shoutout to Doc. Doing genetics got me interested in different types of disorders, specifically neurodegenerative diseases, so that’s definitely something I’d want to explore further in college.”

“Doc” refers to Dr. Martin Edelberg, teacher of Biology and Research in Molecular Genetics at Hills. As a three-year research student, Golub and Edelberg have formed an admirable bond, evident by the high manner in which “Doc” speaks of the salutatorian.

“In baseball, experts describe the rare



Valedictorian Noah Hirshfield and Salutatorian Jenna Golub.

player that excels in all aspects of the game as a five tool player,” Edelberg wrote in an email. “Jenna is the five tool student, excelling in every characteristic needed to be an outstanding student as well as a phenomenal person... Jenna achieves her success without compromising her integrity, her morals, or her friendships. Jenna also attains her success while remaining upbeat, positive, helpful, friendly and possessing a great sense of humor.”

Hirshfield plans to major in either biology or neuroscience on the pre-med track. “In high school, I always enjoyed my science classes,” he explained, “and all of my science teachers inspired me to want a future in the science/medical field.”

Martin Shields, Hirshfield’s AP Biology teacher, had nothing but kind words to say: “I was lucky to have Noah in class last year. He’s an exceptional student and a great person. He set the learning bar high while also keeping things fun.”

Although on similar career paths, the valedictorian and salutatorian are headed to different parts of the country for their college education. While Hirshfield will be down south at Duke University, Golub will stay true to her East Coast roots as she ventures off to the University of Pennsylvania.

“I’m really excited about a lot of things Duke has to offer,” Hirshfield said. “I’m really looking forward to meeting new people from all over and making new friends. And, of course, I’m excited for the college basketball season.”

Golub expressed her eagerness to explore Penn in the fall. “I’m super excited to live in Philly. It’s such a fun campus and there’s so much to do and experience there. I’ve met a lot of people already who

I really like, so I’m excited for that, too. And Greek life, of course!” With eleven different sororities at Penn, Golub is sure to have a busy rush season.

Hirshfield and Golub have spent four years together in many of the same Honors and AP courses, growing as students and individuals alongside each other. As they celebrate their respective accomplishments as valedictorian and salutatorian, they are able to acknowledge and appreciate each other’s hard work.

“Jenna has worked so hard and deserves this more than anybody. I’m so proud to be standing next to her at graduation,” Hirshfield praised.

Golub quipped, “He doesn’t deserve this at all. Kidding, Noah is the most naturally intelligent person I’ve ever met, and even though it’s frustrating for me that he can understand new material at ten times the average human speed, he is super smart and hardworking and definitely deserves valedictorian.”

Hirshfield and Golub aren’t the only ones to show pride in their respective accomplishments; their close friends also had kind words to share.

“I couldn’t have been happier for [Noah] when he told me he was the valedictorian,” senior Nikhil Indugula expressed. “I’ve had over 20 classes with him and I’ve seen how hard he works every day. He deserves everything that he’s accomplished and I’m looking forward to continuing our friendship for the next four years and beyond.”

Senior Victoria Pietrunti described Golub as “someone who never fails to work hard at everything she does and is always so determined for success. When she told

me she was officially salutatorian, I was beyond happy for her because she has such a strong, positive presence in our graduating class. No one deserves this more than her, not only for how great academically she is, but for what an amazing friend and leader she is as well.”

Hirshfield and Golub’s fellow students as well as teachers and faculty congratulate them on their respective achievements of valedictorian and salutatorian for the Class of 2021.

ABOUT THE WRITER

**LAUREN EUSEBIO** served as Opinion Editor of the *Trailblazer* and editor of the Pascack Recap this year, but the graduating senior also has a YouTube empire. Since her channel began gaining traction in May 2020, Eusebio’s videos have taught others how to use the editing software After Effects and have included topics like Eusebio’s college application experience. Her channel, “lauren,” recently surpassed 285,000 subscribers. Her most popular video has 4.3 million views and counting.

Eusebio reflected on how her channel has changed her life: “I’ve gained a lot of self confidence since starting my channel. I now have a community of people who support me relentlessly and constantly look forward to watching my content. It has also allowed me to become majorly financially independent, and I’ve been able to save a lot of money for college. Most importantly, I’ve helped hundreds of thousands of people learn how to edit regardless of their age or previous knowledge. The fact that I’ve allowed people to discover a new hobby or even passion is something I don’t take lightly.”

Eusebio will attend Brown University in the fall. She plans to continue her channel and use Brown’s open curriculum to pursue her passion.

NEWS ROUNDUP

- **Benjamin Chianchiano will succeed Steve Papa as Hills’ athletic trainer**
- **The Board of Education approved Dr. Daniel Fishbein, the former head of schools in Ridgewood, as interim superintendent following the resignation of Dr. Erik Gundersen**
- **Project Paterson held its annual school supply drive**



Dr. Daniel Fishbein will be interim superintendent of Pascack Valley Regional starting July 1.

# Where the Class of 2021 is headed

By Mackenzie Blowers

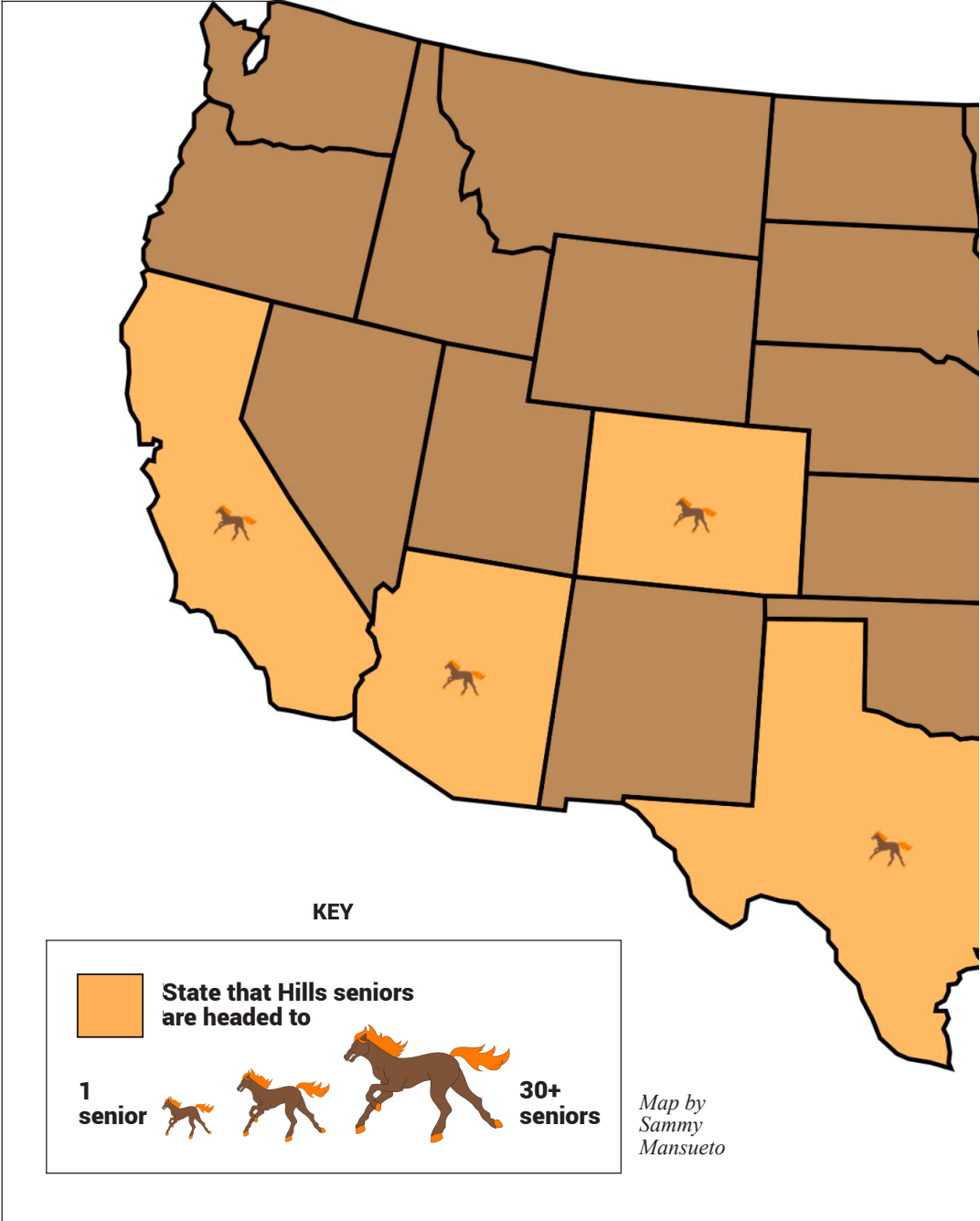
THE SENIORS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

- ARIZONA**  
Arizona State University  
University of Arizona
- CALIFORNIA**  
San Diego State University
- COLORADO**  
United States Air Force Academy  
University of Colorado at Boulder
- CONNECTICUT**  
Fairfield University  
Quinnipiac University  
Sacred Heart University  
University of Connecticut  
University of New Haven  
Wesleyan University
- DELAWARE**  
University of Delaware
- FLORIDA**  
Florida Atlantic University  
Florida State University  
Nova Southeastern University  
Ringling College of Art and Design  
University of Florida  
University of Tampa
- GEORGIA**  
Georgia Institute of Technology
- ILLINOIS**  
University of Chicago
- INDIANA**  
Indiana University  
Purdue University
- LOUISIANA**  
Tulane University  
University of New Orleans
- MASSACHUSETTS**  
Boston College  
Mount Holyoke College  
Northeastern University  
Springfield College  
Tufts University
- MARYLAND**  
University of Maryland
- MICHIGAN**  
University of Michigan
- MISSISSIPPI**  
University of Mississippi
- NORTH CAROLINA**  
Duke University  
Elon University  
High Point University  
University of North Carolina  
Wake Forest University
- NEW HAMPSHIRE**  
Dartmouth College
- NEW JERSEY**  
Bergen Community College  
Drew University  
Fairleigh Dickinson University  
Lincoln Technical Institute  
Monmouth University  
Montclair State University  
New Jersey Institute of Technology  
Ramapo College  
Rowan University  
Rutgers University  
Seton Hall University  
Stevens Institute of Technology  
Stockton University  
The College of New Jersey
- NEW YORK**  
Binghamton University  
Columbia University  
Fordham University  
Hamilton College  
Marist College  
New York University  
Pace University  
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute  
St. Lawrence University  
Syracuse University  
Yeshiva University
- OHIO**  
The Ohio State University
- PENNSYLVANIA**  
California University of Pennsylvania  
Carnegie Mellon University  
Dickinson College  
Drexel University  
Franklin & Marshall College  
Lehigh University  
Muhlenberg College  
Penn State University  
University of Pennsylvania  
University of Pittsburgh  
Villanova University
- RHODE ISLAND**  
Brown University  
Johnson & Wales University  
University of Rhode Island
- SOUTH CAROLINA**  
Clemson University  
University of South Carolina
- TENNESSEE**  
Vanderbilt University
- TEXAS**  
University of Texas at Austin
- VIRGINIA**  
James Madison University
- WISCONSIN**  
University of Wisconsin at Madison
- INTERNATIONAL**  
University of York (U.K.)  
Trinity College Dublin (Ireland)

DISCLAIMER

The information presented above was collected in collaboration with @phcommitted2021 on Instagram, where members of the Class of 2021 were able to voluntarily share their postgraduate plans. Responses were collected from Jan. 7 through May 11. The list and map of postgraduate plans represent information from 150 students and may not be comprehensive.



Fast facts about the Class of 2021. (Graphic by Mackenzie Blowers and Jared Mitovich)

5 TIME ZONES

26 U.S. STATES

3 TOTAL COUNTRIES

FURTHEST DESTINATION

CLOSEST DESTINATION

University of York  
York, England

Lincoln Tech  
Mahwah, NJ

3,359 MILES FROM HILLS

6.7 MILES FROM HILLS

Rutgers University

MOST POPULAR DESTINATION

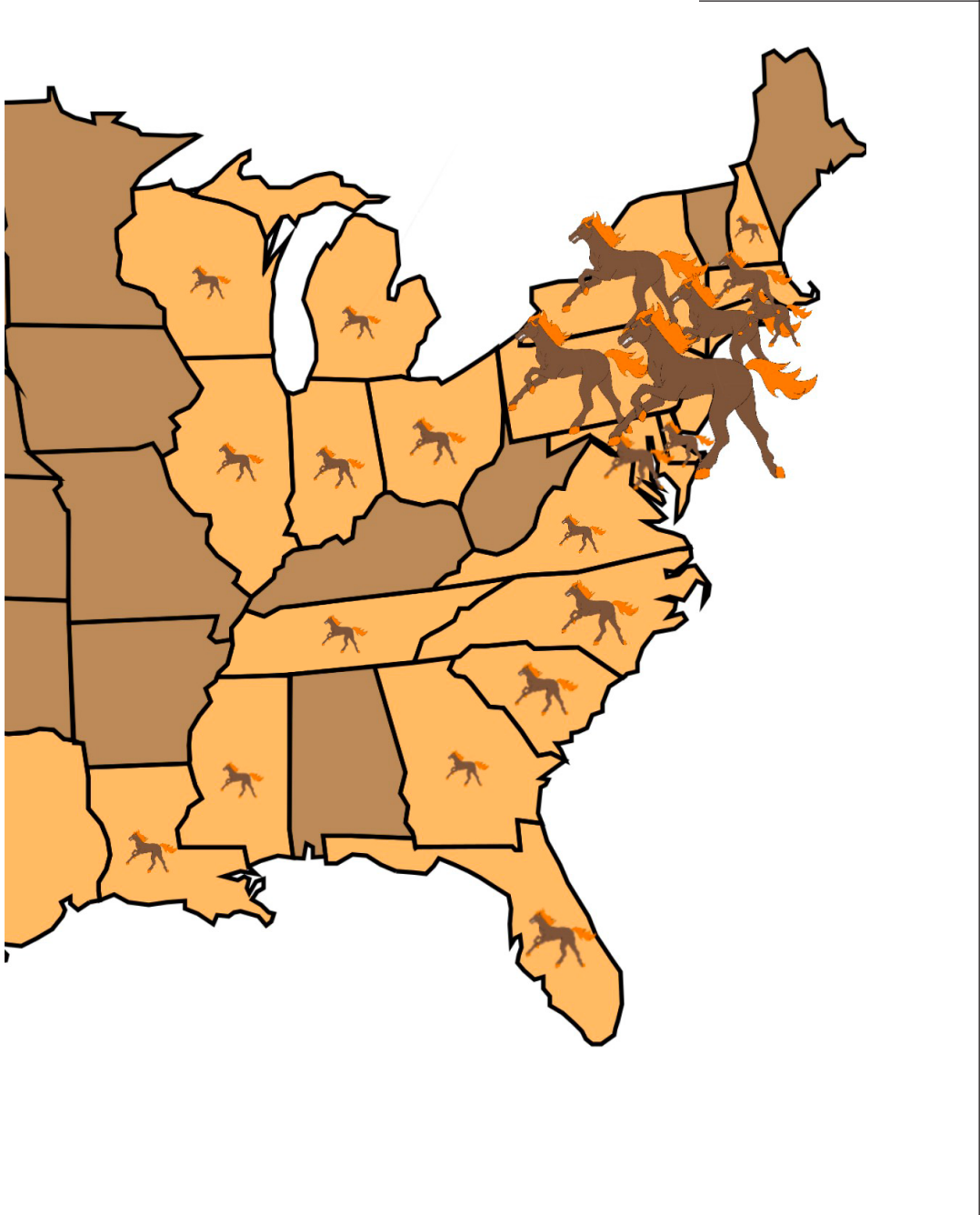


# Through their eyes: College applications

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

OPINION

By Madison Saks and Anabelle Joukhadarian



The Class of 2021 sits for a photo on the bleachers. (Joseph A. Sorrentino)



experiencing events in the way they would have without the pandemic.

Anna Kostoreva, who will be a student at Rutgers University this fall, stated, “It was much easier to explore the colleges as most of the ‘visits’ were virtual, so I didn’t have to spend additional time on the route to and from college. In addition, many of the sessions only lasted for an hour or so, leaving me with lots of time for other activities; if I applied during the pre-Covid-19 era, each visit would probably take up most of my day.”



Anna Kostoreva will attend Rutgers University this fall.

Although there are some students who have taken advantage of the virtual lifestyle, others have found it to be an obstacle when readying themselves for college. Many seniors found that not having the chance to visit the schools in person was counterproductive and did not allow them to become familiar with the colleges.

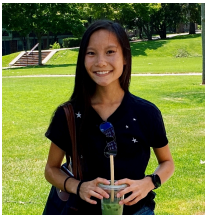
Nicole Litt, who is committed to the University of Texas at Austin, said, “It was definitely hard to apply since I wasn’t able to tour as many schools, and it made it difficult to write the ‘why’ essays.”



Hills senior Nicole Litt is a rising freshman at the University of Texas at Austin.

Not only was choosing the right school more complicated, but applying to the school in the first place became more competitive as well. This year, students were not obligated to include their SAT or ACT scores. This benefitted the students who did not obtain the grade they desired, but it came with disadvantages as well.

“Although I submitted my [SAT/ACT] scores, many people who didn’t have a preferable score saw this as an opportunity to apply to a lot more schools,” explained Olivia Chin, a rising freshman at Dartmouth College. “Therefore, the number of applications to every school increased greatly, making acceptance rates go down.”



Olivia Chin will attend Dartmouth College this fall.

Despite many seniors having a hard time with college applications, some students found that Hills’ hybrid schedule helped to give them more opportunities to have a lenient schedule and more time for college applications. A majority of the seniors appreciate Hills’ efforts in giving them a memorable last year of high school.



Maeve Rossig will attend the University of South Carolina.

Committed to the University of South Carolina, Maeve Rossig said, “I think we’ve been really fortunate to now finally get so much of a typical senior year back, and I also think it’s given me a much more open schedule to get everything done during this really busy time.”

“This year ended up being better than expected in the beginning of the year because we are now able to have in-person events like prom and graduation! The school has done a lot for us relating to the end of the school year,” voiced Larissa Aquaviva, who will attend the University of Mississippi.



Hills senior Larissa Aquaviva is a rising freshman at the University of Mississippi.

Despite the unprecedented ways that colleges have been working through the pandemic, the majority of seniors continue to have hope and high expectations for their college experience. College tends to offer different experiences than that of high school, so many students going off to college are positively awaiting for the new environment.

“Pascack Hills was an interesting experience, but I’m looking forward more to what’s to come,” said Matthew Bourghol, a rising freshman at Purdue University. “I’ll definitely miss my friends, but... I’m looking forward to the freedom of college, and getting closer to achieving my dream.”

***“I’ll definitely miss my friends, but... I’m looking forward to the freedom of college, and getting closer to achieving my dream.”***

**– Matthew Bourghol, rising freshman at Purdue University**

Photos from @phcommitted2021 on Instagram.



IN-DEPTH

Pandemic causes permanent changes to Pascack Hills

By Jared Mitovich

After a school year of hybrid learning, it won't just be the freshmen who lack familiarity with life at Pascack Hills. This fall, 3 in 4 Hills students will have never experienced a full year of pre-pandemic high school.

The high school experience has been drastically changed by Covid-19, and the "typical" day at Hills will be permanently altered. According to interviews with administrators, teachers, staff members, and students, the challenges of the pandemic have provided an opportunity to take a look at every part of Hills, keep what works, and change what does not.

Principal Tim Wieland said that this opportunity extends to Hills' schedule, which was known as the "Pascack Schedule" before the pandemic and was changed to a four-day rotation this year. This fall, the schedule will change once again.

"The restrictions we've had this past year have caused us to go [to an eight-period schedule] a little bit faster than we would have," Wieland explained. "Because next year is such a clean slate, it doesn't make sense to go back to the old schedule if then we were going to change it the following year."

The new schedule will have eight periods, something students were surveyed about this year when they met with their guidance counselors. According to Assistant Superintendent Barry Bachenheimer, students will be able to choose to take another class during the additional eighth period or have a "Pascack Period" study hall.

**"There's a great opportunity this September to take a look and continue what's working... to hit the reset button and do a little better."**

**– Assistant Superintendent Barry Bachenheimer**

Upperclassmen will have priority for spots in classes, and freshmen will be placed into study hall with the exception of those taking performing arts classes.

While the exact details and time lengths of class periods are still being finalized, Bachenheimer said "the major thought is that Monday is always Monday," meaning an end to the four-day cycle so that each day of the week has its own rotation. Wieland suggested that students could see all eight of their classes on Mondays with a seven period rotation Tuesday through Friday.

In addition to giving students greater choice in what classes to take, the eighth period is viewed by staff members as beneficial to students' mental health.

"I think a good thing this year is that there were more times built into students' wellness," said English teacher Virena Rossi. "I don't know how, but maybe that eight-period day is a way students can kind of figure out what's important to them."



The front of Pascack Hills. (Stephen Schmidt)

The schedule is a clear way that school will be different for students and staff this fall. But the pandemic has forced many other changes to the typical school day.

Outdoor events, one-way stairwells, and directional arrows in the hallways are examples of Covid precautions that were implemented this school year and could become permanent.

"I can imagine us at least starting the [2021-22] school year having potentially the lines on the floor and the one-way stairways," said Wieland, "to make sure the flow goes as smoothly as possible in between classes."

"I actually really liked performing outside," said Hills junior Dream Maywether after the spring concert in May. "I think they should do this every year in the spring."

Wieland expressed support for "some type of plan where over the course of four years, [students] have the opportunity at least once to have an outdoor performance."

The district is awaiting more guidance from the state before making final decisions on whether to adjust certain Covid-19 precautions this fall. Preparing for the outside chance that the Covid-19 vaccine is mandated for students and staff, school nurses Tara Wholey and Rose Welyczko have started collecting vaccination records from students when possible.

"I think there's a role for the school to educate people as much as possible" about the vaccine, Wieland expressed, although he does not expect vaccines "will play a part" in the full reopening of school. He believes most teachers are already fully vaccinated.

In Welyczko's view, the success of the 2021-22 school year "goes back to everyone being responsible for how they're feeling and just staying home if you're not feeling well."

Beyond the constraints of the pandemic, students and staff were clear that Google Meet would still have some role in their daily lives — even though New Jersey schools will not be allowed to provide a virtual learning option for students.

"After using Google Meet for meetings for clubs, I think it should definitely be used in the future to avoid students finding different rides home than the bus if it is a meeting after school," said a Hills

junior who requested to be anonymous.

Bachenheimer said use of the video conferencing platform would change from "something we have to do to something we can do" in the name of convenience.

Referring to Google Meet and other remote learning platforms, Director of Technology Paul Zeller said "it can only help to keep these tools in place." He said virtual classes help prepare students for college, where online courses were prevalent even before the pandemic.

"What if you have some nationally renowned speaker who lives in St. Louis, who can't fly here to be in your classroom, but can really deliver a good message to your classroom?" Zeller remarked to explain how Google Meet will be used in the future.

Despite its ability to host everything from job interviews to extra help meetings, Google Meet has made it easier for students to fall behind in class.

"We had some students who really struggled," acknowledged Bachenheimer, who said the district is planning "acceleration classes" during the summer and fall so students can "come in and get the support they need" with the curriculum.

**"I am a freshman and didn't really get to experience high school, so I can't wait to see what's to come next year."**

**– Francesca Celli, Hills freshman**

Hills is also preparing for its first-ever sophomore orientation. The program will be for this year's freshmen, who did not have a typical introduction to high school.

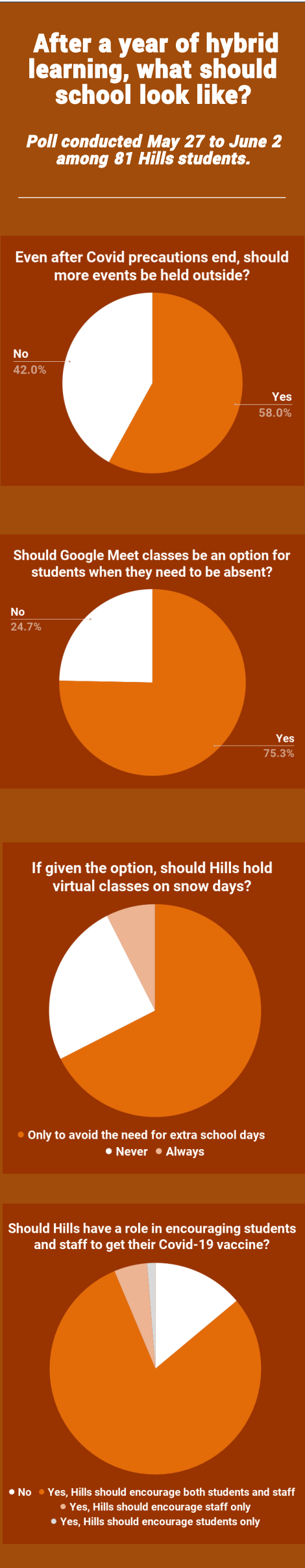
"We don't want [underclassmen] to feel disconnected" during the anticipated transition to fully in person learning, Bachenheimer said.

While the improving trajectory of the pandemic offers a new beginning for Hills, students and staff said the difficulty of the past 15 months has created a desire for many things to simply go back to the way they were.

"I am most looking forward to seeing my friends and really feeling like I'm in school," said Hills junior Trayee Jha.

Rossi and Wieland stressed the hope for more human connection when Hills opens its doors this fall, with the principal painting a picture of math students "out in the halls working on things" like they used to.

The permanent effects of the pandemic on Hills will not reveal themselves the moment that students return to packing the bleachers at football games, or eating lunch in the cafeteria. But over the years to come, teachers and administrators say, the conversations forced by Covid-19 will become sustained discussions about how to make Hills better.







The Pascack Hills Players during their spring play, "Sister Act." (Contributed by Riley Solomon)

## LIFE AND STYLE

# Masks: a forever trend?

By Kaitlyn Verde

As more of the population is becoming vaccinated against Covid-19, the current unknown circumstances leave Pascack Hills students to wonder if masks are here to stay. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention encourages people to continue following state, local, and business rules and regulations.

Accordingly, on May 28, Governor Phil Murphy lifted the mask mandate for New Jersey. There are several instances where fully vaccinated people are still required to wear a face covering. This poses the question: Will they be a forever trend?

From a medical perspective, those who have gotten the vaccine are no longer required to wear a mask outside or social distance. Many are preferring to stay masked, especially since there are unvaccinated individuals remaining. At first, it may have seemed annoying - now, though, there are more and more benefits to wearing a mask.

"As a teacher, I usually have a cold all throughout winter," stated Vani Apanosian, an English teacher at Hills and the advisor of the *Trailblazer*. By wearing a mask, she observed that "I haven't had a single cold this year."

Normally in school settings, students closely interact with each other, which causes the spread of colds. This year, though, everyone had to social distance. Flu cases have been at an all-time low due to people constantly wearing masks. Seemingly, not only have masks slowed the spread of Covid-19, they also minimized the typical winter flu season.

Masks are more readily available than any other trend due to their necessity — and many have turned it into a versatile fashion statement. This past year, brands have used the pandemic to their advantage, promoting safety alongside captivating face mask designs. Stores profited by selling unique masks, and customers have a new way to support small businesses that were struggling during the pandemic. This has helped many continue their aesthetic style and gain confidence while wearing a mask. There are now face coverings for every occasion. People are sporting different

styled face coverings for both formal and casual events. From the gym to family gatherings, having a variety is not only stylish, but allows you to change out masks to continue staying healthy. In your current wardrobe, you are sure to have several different colorful and patterned masks to complement your fashion looks. Between neutral tones and striking bold colors, they cover all outfit possibilities. This has brought a new level of accessory coordination to make masks a cohesive part of one's outfit.

With the current prom season, many students have decided to match their masks to their outfits. Most would have never imagined that they would be shopping for masks to wear on their big day.

Even in everyday life, everyone from social media influencers to high schoolers have been coordinating their face coverings to their clothing. With the near-endless amount of complementing fabrics and prints, there is truly something for all. Prom attendees are finding masks made out of the same material as their stylish attire, which has allowed Hills' upperclassmen to regain a sense of normalcy while partying on the dance floor. It provides a custom, personal, and unforgettable look to go with an outfit.

It seems that masks are here to stay, at least for a little while. Arguably, they are a new beginning for both forward fashion trends and maintaining health and safety.

A mask matched with a prom dress.  
(Vani Apanosian)



## A&E

# Innovation in the arts department

By Justine Marinkovic

Throughout the past year, all of the classes, clubs, and organizations have had to make adjustments in how students participate due to the pandemic. The Pascack Hills theatre, band, and choir organizations were forced to figure out new ways to perform safely.

The fall theatre production was available via link for viewers to stream. The club had to take time to edit the play virtually before audience members could view it from their homes.

The spring show, "Sister Act," was presented to an in-person audience, outdoors, similar to the spring concert that was put on by the choir and band.

"Theatre and choir have been extremely difficult this past year than what anybody was used to. We faced a lot of challenges not only in terms of our rehearsal process, but our performance. One of the most difficult challenges we faced [during the spring show] was the inability to perform as a group until the end of the rehearsal process," said junior Scianna Scott.

Scott continued to say, "Both the theatre department and the music department contain a very tight-knit group of students, and not being together throughout such a large portion of the process was not easy. In the end, we made the best out of a difficult situation, and I'm really proud of the product."

The Hills band and choir were able to hold their spring concert on May 17 outdoors on the track. They were unable to hold a winter concert in person; however, the directors came up with a safe way to hold the spring show in person as restrictions started to fade.

"The most challenging part of teaching choir during Covid is the isolation the kids feel when they sing from home alone. This experience is extraordinary for all of us," said choir director Margarita Elkin in an email. "Google Meet does not allow us to sing together with the mics turned on (the delay creates messy chaos)."

Elkin and her students landed on a solution. "Our rehearsals are going on with the muted mics, when everybody participates by following my directions. Very often, I divide the kids into groups (sectional practices with sopranos, altos, tenors, or basses), and at the end of the class, we meet all together for a combined rehearsal."

Choir students like junior Michael Blackford said they have still been able to have a more normal end of the year. "The concerts are always so much fun, and they are what we prepare for all semester," said Blackford, "so it was nice to have that slightly normal end to an insane year."

Hills junior Sean Manole said, "Having to put together a concert amidst the pandemic seemed incredibly daunting at first. There were so many details that made this goal seem hard to reach. However, the band would practice not only during school hours, but on Sunday afternoons as well. This helped boost our confidence and gain a sense of readiness."

Manole continued to say that "In the end, every member of the band felt a huge sense of accomplishment; because we finally regained a part of ourselves that we had missed since March."

Throughout the pandemic, students nationwide were forced to adapt to a rapidly changing system of safety regulations very quickly. In a department such as the arts, live performance is an essential part of the full experience which cannot be replaced. The arts department was able to adapt to a new way of bringing their performances to life based on the regulations that were handed to them; and constantly changing.

"It's been a very hectic year, and it's incredibly emotional to have our talented musicians perform live tonight. It's been 17 months since our last live concert in December 2019. But because of all the dedication and amazing spirit that our musicians have shown we never stopped making music," said Elkin.

# Senior Yemie Woo wins rising star award

## THE SENIORS

by Riley Solomon

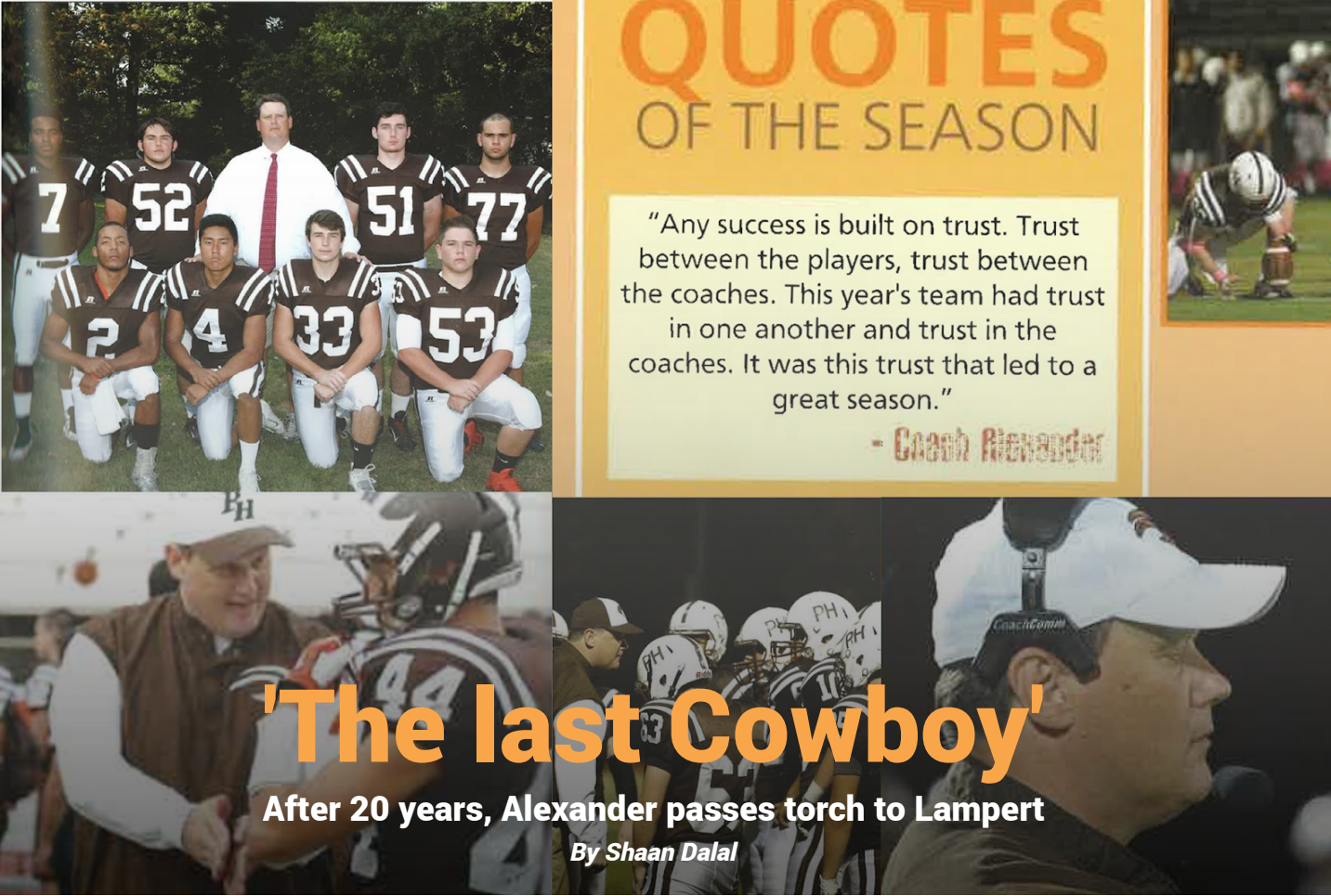
As friends and fellow members of the Pascack Hills Players anxiously crowded around their computers at their homes, it was announced via livestream that Hills senior Yemie Woo won the esteemed Papermill Playhouse Rising Star Award for Best Solo Actress for her role as Deloris Van Cartier in Hills' production of "Sister Act." Past winners of the Rising Star Award include notable actors and actresses from New Jersey, including Tony winner Laura Benanti. Woo is the first Hills student to win this award, and this is Hills' first-ever win in any of the high school theater awards that they have entered in and been nominated for.

Expressing her gratitude to have been

nominated and receive the award, Woo said, "Watching the performances of the other nominees made me all the more appreciative of theatre, especially during this crazy year." She also noted the diversity among the winners and nominees, adding, "I was also so encouraged to see nominees and winners of color, although there were few. I saw it as a small step towards a new, more inclusive theatre industry."

As she prepares to study musical theater at Pace University this fall, Woo thanked the directing team and her castmates for "being so supportive and loving" and for helping her achieve this win.





A collage of Alexander over his 20 years as head football coach at Pascack Hills.

Brooks Alexander recently announced his retirement as head football coach at Pascack Hills after 20 years in that position. Alexander made the announcement on April 10 in a memo sent to football players and their families.

When asked about his seemingly sudden retirement from coaching, Alexander explained that his decision was not something that he had necessarily planned. “I felt the staff was in the proper place to continue moving forward,” said Alexander. “[I felt] that a change may be good for the program.”

Throughout his 20 years as head coach at Hills, Alexander certainly has many fond memories. When reminiscing about his earliest memories as a coach, Alexander recalled a story from his first year at Hills.

“When I was hired in 2001, the [then] superintendent named Dr. Ben Tantillo jokingly said ‘you have five years to get us into the playoffs or you can look for another job’,” said Alexander. “In 2005 [year five], we made the playoffs for the first time in more than a decade and as they say, the rest is history. We made it eight more times in my career.”

Not only did Alexander create memories for himself as a coach, but he has also created fond memories for his assistant coaches and players over the years.

“I think my favorite memories are of the opportunities I had to talk about coaching and teaching philosophies with Coach [Alexander],” said assistant football coach and fellow social studies teacher Nicholas Scerbo. “He’s been a great role model for me.”

“My favorite [memory] is [from] the day before a football game. He would say

‘Boys, the hay is in the barn,’ which meant that we have prepared and it is time,” commented graduating senior Alex Kostansas.

Hills’ incoming athletic director, Steve Papa, selected former assistant coach Evan Lampert to succeed Alexander as Hills’ new head football coach. Alexander praised Lampert as “the right and best choice to succeed me as head coach.”

***“The athletes of this school have been a focal point of my life for 20 years. My love for Pascack Hills will never cease.”***  
– Brooks Alexander

“It is imperative that the head football coach at Pascack Hills possess a deep understanding and knowledge of our school, culture, and students,” explained Alexander. “As a former Pascack Hills player and student, Coach Lampert has the necessary love for Pascack Hills.

“Knowing that Coach Lampert is ready, willing, and able to lead his alma mater made the decision easier. Still difficult, but easier.”

Although he has only been head coach for a few months, Lampert has big plans for the future of the program. Lampert made it clear that his goals as a coach are to grow the program and make Hills football the best that it can be.

“A major goal here at Hills is building up the numbers and essentially doubling the amount of student athletes that we have competing on the football team,” said Lampert. “It will take time, but this program is going to be contagious, and more students are going to want to give

football a shot. The ultimate goal is to prepare our student athletes for life after football and give them the tools to succeed.”

Lampert went on to talk about the value of having good coaches in charge of the athletic programs at Hills. “I think one of the most valuable things you can give someone or something is your time, and I give a lot of my time to Pascack Hills,” Lampert explained. “I’m very fortunate to have coaches on my staff that share the same devotion to this program as I do, which is why I know big things are ahead for the football program. We take this job personally because we are representing family members and friends that still reside in the community.”

Although he is stepping down as the head coach, Alexander has no plans to leave Hills anytime soon. He may be coaching football elsewhere, but he will still be teaching history and coaching golf at Hills.

“The athletes of this school have been a focal point of my life for 20 years. My love for Pascack Hills will never cease,” emphasized Alexander. “I have been so fortunate during most of my time as head football coach at Pascack Hills... I have often said that I am the luckiest coach in America because I get to coach at Pascack Hills. I still believe that sentiment.”

Alexander has made his love for Hills and its students clear over the years. He hopes that former and current players, parents, and students alike will remember his years here fondly.

“I have often thought there was a certain dignity in knowing when it is time to move on,” Alexander said. “It’s time.”

## Retiring staff

By Darcy Bergstein

Pascack Hills physics teacher Brendan Field announced to students in May that he will be moving to Boston for a two-year appointment which focuses on educational work. He will teach physics again in two years.

Field has been teaching at Hills for 10 years. He has taught every physics-type class during that time, including CP, Honors, and AP 1, 2, and C. He also founded the AP Physics C program at Hills.

When asked about what his advice for incoming students and teachers would be, Field answered, “For teachers, it’s really important to be yourself in the classroom. If you pretend to be something else, it won’t be genuine. Be yourself and enjoy yourself; students will know if you’re not. For students, always do your best. Concentrate on doing your best and worrying about what you should do.”

Field is moving on to a new opportunity next year and will be missed by both Hills students and staff.

Other staff members leaving at the end of the 2020-21 school year:

- Robert Buccino, teacher and coach
- Scott Ernest, teacher and coach
- Gloria Gordon, speech therapist
- P. Erik Gundersen, superintendent
- Mike McTigue, custodian
- Phil Paspalas, athletic director



## DEAR READER,

Thank you for taking the time to read our end-of-year print issue. In a world that is increasingly online, it is our belief that there is still value in being able to hold these stories in your hands.

As we depart Pascack Hills, we want to thank our readers for supporting the *Trailblazer* in a year like no other for news in the Pascack Valley Regional High School District. From Covid-19 to the mascot removal, and all of the stories in between, we sincerely hope you have found the *Trailblazer* to be a trusted news source.

We are grateful that you have let us be the eyes, ears, and voice of Pascack Hills, and we are thrilled to pass the torch to Riley Solomon and Justine Marinkovic as next school year’s editors-in-chief. The *Trailblazer* will continue to report with Hills Pride in new and exciting ways.

With gratitude,  
Jared Mitovich and Mackenzie Blowers  
2020-21 *Trailblazer* Editors-in-Chief