# The Phoenicle

A Literary Magazine

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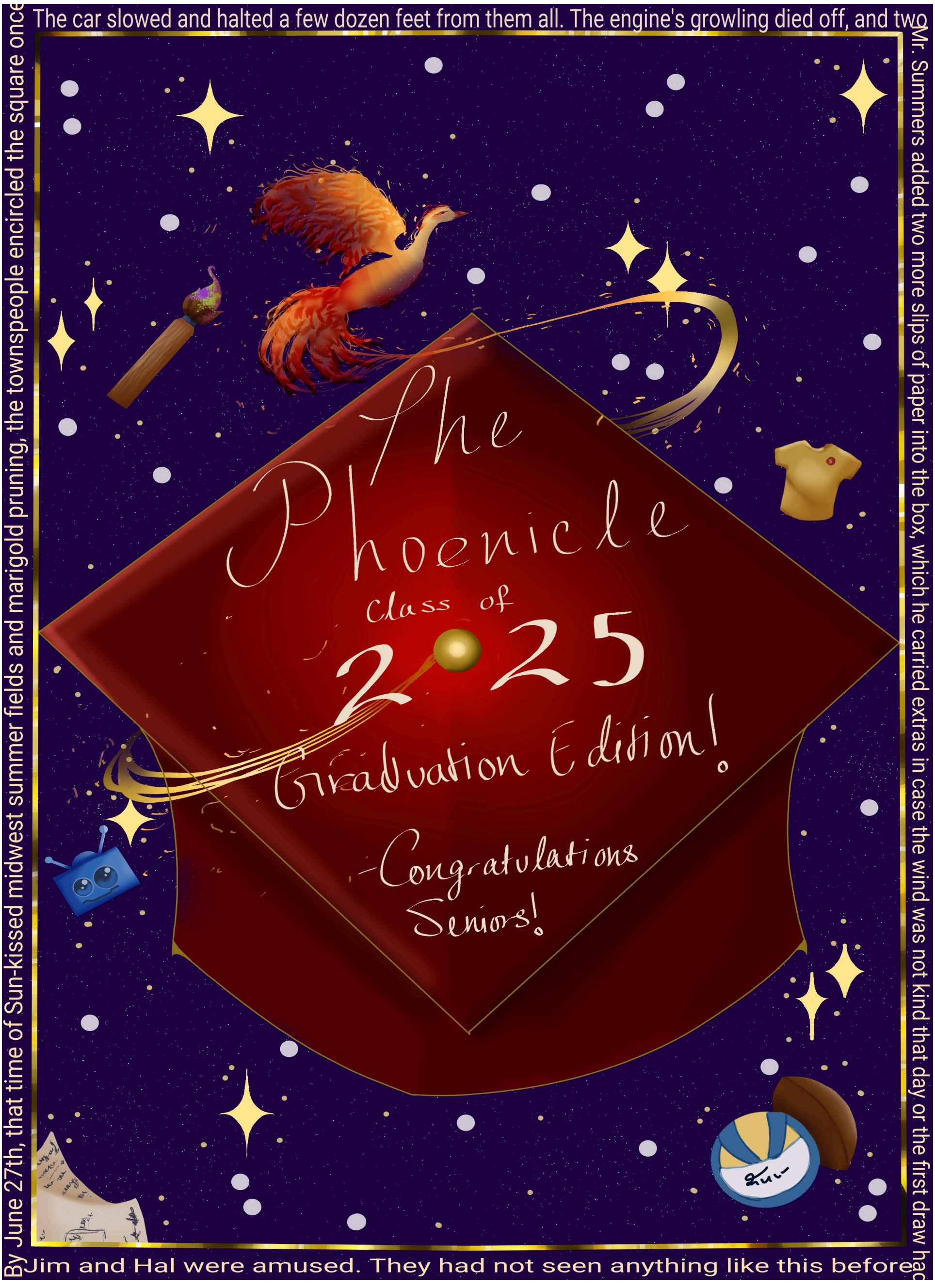

# BDCHS is ART

Gaby Jimenez; Selling art at the Art and Fashion show.

## Competitions and Awards!

**1.**Gavin Quijano, Gaby Jimenez---Selected for SACSN Florida High School Contest.
**2.**Ella Aragon---Third place for Hillsborough County LEAD Black History Month Contest.
**3.**Gavin Quijano, Riley Rabon---Selected for the Law Day art competition.
**4.**Gaby Jimenez, Veronica Mason, Zaylee Udozorh---Selected for Dali HighSchool Surrealism contest.
**5.**Gaby Jimenez---Honorable Mention Jacob Kamis Photography contest.
**6.**Gavin Quijano---Honorable mention for HCC Calex Shenecker Art infinitum.
**7.**Gavin Quijiano---14th Congressional District Art Competition hosted by Tampa Museum of Art.
8.Asiah Masaud(1st), Millie Chiriano(2nd)---Native American/Alaskan Native Art Contest.
9. Gavin Quijano(1st), Ela Jaen(2nd)---BDCHS Charter School Black History Month Art Contest.
And so much more!

Riley Rabon; Exhibiting art during the Art and Fashion show. (right)

Veronica Mason; Selling art during the Art and Fashion

Gavin Quijano; Selling art during the Art and Fashion show.

The night takes place here in our own gymnasium decorated with tables lining each wall with the prospective students and their work that will go on to change the future some day. From intricate photography, pottery from the ceramics classes, drawings from some previous contest winners, and an entire section dedicated to up and coming art students, there is a place for literally everyone and anything. The artwork featured can range from original pieces, fanart, jewelry, and anything else that motivates someone to create! However, after people have had the chance to scout out their favorite pieces and count how much cash they have, everyone is seated for one of the most exciting parts of the night, the Fashion Show!

This year, the fashion show had five categories: Urban Nightlife, Urban Streetwear, Cultural, Cosplay, and African attire where the Urban and African sections are provided by sponsors and the Cultural and Cosplay are provided by the models/students themselves. Don't worry, I did say this was a night for everyone so if you are a designer that wants to show off their own fashion or a dancer that would love to show off their skills, there is room for you too!

**We sincerely hope you join us next year!**

## Welcome Artists!

Over the course of the 2024-2025 school year, we've seen the amazing efforts of various artists achieve and overcome wonderful things with their creative spirit and need for individual expression from all walks of life. Not only do the amazing pieces of art get hung up on bulletin boards along the walls but for those who wish to take their art to the next level, entering contests nationwide has been the pinnacle of these newly acclaimed artists (check out the competition section for a list of a few artistic recognitions!).

The ceramics classes have made wonderful pieces ranging from cultural aspects of worlds on the other side of the planet to memorable holiday themed pieces that are perfect for any room or place. The painting classes have taken amazing freedoms by discovering their own unique techniques through the intricate pieces of artists like Salvador Dali, Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso, Vincent Van Gogh, Frida Kahlo, and Harlem Renaissance artists just to name a few. The drawing classes have been taken through a roller coaster of eras marking the Renaissance era with artists known as the Ninja Turtles: Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Donatello, and Raphael among thousands of historical periods filled with artists that have graced this world with their wonders that are still impactful today. With the help of Ms. Sofilka, more students have been able to explore their own personal endeavors without the limitations of class sizes, resources, or educational value. Thank you, Ms. Sofilka!

The AP art classes this year had some very exciting endeavors to deal with both internally and externally. Throughout the school year, students have had the opportunity to take their art and make something completely their own without limitations for creative expression through their self-created portfolios. Nothing—and I mean nothing—was off the table for these talented artists. From students like Gavin Quijano making a portrait about Samuel Morse, the founder of morse code in morse code—yes, you read that right—the piece was done in morse code, to students that developed astonishing photography pieces that could be put next to the Mona Lisa if they wanted them to, this year was full of artists with the spark and ambition needed to truly love and make art. Every year, around Spring time, just weeks before the portfolio submission deadline, AP-art students are encouraged to show their art work at the Art and Fashion show for exhibition or profit to the amazing sponsors, families, close friends and even strangers that walk through the doors of BDCHS.

Sneha Jospeh; Selling art at the Art and Fashion show.

Octavio Perez-Velasco; Selling art during the Art and Fashion show.

Nerissa Stokes; Selling art during the Art and Fashion show.

About our cover:
The cover on this issue of *The Phoenicle* is an original artwork piece, designed by our very own Nerissa Stokes. The front cover is modeled after covers like those seen on the very famous *New Yorker Magazine*, which is also the original publisher of Shirley Jackson's, *The Lottery,* published in 1948. Our feature story, written by Mckale Samuels, is an original adaptation of that very well known short story of Jackson's. I want to personally thank the students who worked tirelessly to produce this work of art.

Mr.Steslow, Creative Writing Teacher

# -TASTIC

*Mrs. Mitchell's first exhibition of her own work at the Art and Fashion show.*

Among the countless talented artists and amazing people that have supported the endless amounts of creative talent that this school has to offer, there is one key figure behind them all, Mrs. Mitchell. For years now, Mrs. Mitchell has provided aid and encouragement to all kinds of people whether it be in a fun, loving, drawing class for 1st period or the crazy talent that fills the room in the AP-art course during the last blocks of the day. With the year coming to an end and so many of thes amazing people moving forward in their adventures, a special thanks is owed to the teacher behind them all...
Thank you, Mrs. Mitchell!

*Morgan Brooks; Selling art at the Art and Fashion Show.*

*Sam; Selling art at the Art and Fashoin show.*

*Gray; Selling art at the Art and Fashion Show.*

*Induction ceremony for NAHS members and select students from Art classes.*

*NAHS key memebrs:*

*Ela Jaen: President*

*Gavin Quijano: Vice President*

*Veronica Mason: Secretary*

*Pema Skinner: Historian*

*Mariana Rozo:Social Media Manager*

*Kimberly Thelusma: Treasurer*

# The Poets Corner

## and i began to hate.

*By Jaida Percy*

when i was born
i was the clean plate
the seat pulled out
the nod
the smile even when i bled from the teeth
they told me i was “mature for my age”
but what they meant was
“you are easier to hurt when you don't scream”

they always applauded me
for swallowing the fire
for letting the smoke curl up my throat
and spell out forgiveness
in their language
not mine

they said
“rise above it”
so i did
higher and higher
until the air thinned
until the halo cracked like old china
and i learned
heaven is just the name you give the place
you bury inconvenient saints

they called me difficult
when i began to say “no”
they called me dangerous
when i named what they did
and when i stopped smiling
they called it war

it was always i was “too sensitive”
but never they were too cruel
always the one who “misunderstood”
but never they said it like that on purpose
do you know how it feels
to be the funeral and the eulogy
and the body they step over
on their way out of church?

they called it “being the bigger person”
as if size was measured by what you could swallow
and still breathe

i became very big

i learned how to hold silence like a scalpel
i learned how to dress the wound with excuses:
“they didn’t mean it”
“they had a hard day”
“they love me in their own way”

it’s funny—
how love can look like a fist
as long as it apologizes afterward

i played my part
the soft one
the understanding one
the saint in the story everyone loves to punish

but here’s the thing:
even saints rot when left out in the open

so i started writing this—
a formal complaint, really
a resignation letter carved into the spaces between
my clenched teeth

i carried the weight
smoothed out the wrath
like bedsheets in a stranger's home
who swore they loved me
as long as i didn’t raise my voice

and i never did
until i did
and then—
then they said
“see? we told you. you were the villain all along”

you see
it’s not that i wanted revenge
it’s just
i stopped caring who gets caught in the fire
once i’ve struck the match

and now
i don’t want apologies
i don’t want closure
i don’t want to be good anymore

i want to be
unrecognizable
to the people who made me this way

and i began to feel
i don't know why
i thought one day the pain would go away
i thought maybe i was the problem

then i grew up
and i began to hate.

## Those Small Moments

*By Nerissa Stokes*

It's these small moments,
When time stands still,
When the night won't end,
When I can finally feel.

When I'm sitting in my room,
Thinking about everything I am,
And all that I’ve grown from,
And life feels like it's finally began,

In the peace that I’ve forgotten,
I find that in late nights
When my soul is done rotting,
My body balls up all my might,

My heart feels warm,
My mind so bright,
My entire life reborn,
And my life feels alright,

Here I am,
Hoping that these moments,
Don’t leave me again,
And I can hold my childhood temperament,

Happy frames of mine,
I can stay in these happy places,
These beautiful places in my time,
That I'll cherish what’s mine.

It’s enlightening,
The way I’ll say thank you,
To all the beings
That made me feel things too

It’s these small moments,
These small, small, fragments,
These wonderful moments,
That feel like forgotten memories

It's these small moments,
That make me believe,
That my own tragedy,
Isn't all that it seems to be,

In these moments I've learned,
To hold onto all the small,
Small fragments
Of me.

## Rained On With You

*By Nerissa Stokes*

I watched as it rained,
Raindrops cascading
down the window frame,
Of my old haunted place,

The wind cold and bitter,
My breath out strong and bold,
As my boots fill with water,
I find myself in your stronghold,

As my bones are chilled,
I’ll look up at the skies,
And through the heavy rain,
I'll look and see your faces,

I stand here,
My soul bare,
And tone laced,
With every name,

For once, I knew
that I would matter to you,
Even if you drown in silence,
You'd still let yourself hear me,

The solace that brings,
And all the comfort it tames,
Knowing that if the others hate me,
I'll have your name to frame me.

In this puddle,
I'll soak
Until you tell me,
How you found me.

Even as it rained,
I let you see
How I smiled
When your hands comforted me,

For once,
In this frame of time,
I loved,
Who I thought I could be,

And I finally understood,
Why the rain
and thunderstorms,
Chose me.

Why they chose to flow down my window,
Race by race,
Frame by frame,
I had no longer become your foe,

And it makes sense,
The phrase I'm so often told,
That everything in this world,
Happens for a reason or so,

And whether you're up there for me,
Or for anyone else who needs
to feel the same way you cared for me,
Have I ever said I was grateful?

That the rain doesn't hate me
And that if I ever needed to,
I know that you'd let me be
Rained on with you.

# Why We Write

I write for the magazine because it's a quick and easy way for me to share my stories and ideas. I know there's always a possibility of someone stealing my work, and while I'd hate for that to happen, at least that means someone found my work endearing enough to steal, you know? I like writing, honestly. Not just any writing, like writing essays for class or emails or anything like that. I mean actual writing. Writing just because; and the magazine gives me an excuse to do that. No harm in lending Mr. Steslow and crew a hand in creating the magazine.

---Jaida Percy

To write is something that anyone can do, but to write for a purpose is something only the passionate can accurately execute. I write because its the most passionate part of me. It’s really one of the only things that genuinely reminds me of what makes me special, to love, create, and continue to keep trying even when everything feels like it’s telling me to stop. When I write, it feels so much like me, that it doesn’t matter if I’m writing an essay, an assignment, a magazine, poetry, a novel, short story, email, synopsis, etc, it is always me dumping my every thought onto the page for the world to see. According to my amazing teachers and friends, it can either be obnoxiously long for no apparent reason or entirely too heartfelt. Despite all their grievances with reading more than two paragraphs, I can guarantee that it is always going to be a part of me that you’ll get when you read. Hopefully, I’ve chosen the best parts for you to see about me.

---Nerissa Stokes

*The following short story is a creative extension of Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery", and it is written within that context by McKale Samuels.*

# Midwest Tradition

By June 27th, that time of sun-kissed midwest summer fields and marigold pruning, the townspeople encircled the square once more, all a bit more humble than yesteryear. Almost as if it were a staring contest, the folks closest to the Hutchinsons, mutually too, couldn't stop glaring. There were murmurs that then became bumbling chatter, hardly discreet enough to not be heard by the grieving.

Mr. Summers hollered at all, "Settle down, everyone! Nothing you say is doing any good; I'm sure you know. Show some respect."

"We all have to do it anyway. We just do." Bill Hutchinson groaned in a tone so low it groveled. No one could tell if it was from late remorse or his sense of empathy proving to be absent. No one tried to ask.

Maybe everyone had lost it, but there was no shared thought of morals amongst anybody, just the uncertainty of who would be chosen. A few stones in the pile were stained with an obvious kind of red, one that tells a story too often, like an elder would. The cicadas filled in the bit of silence amongst the crowd, in pairing with Mr. Summers shuffling the tickets in the black box. People glared at the box, hoping that their fathers and husbands would be a bit luckier than the Hutchinsons last year.

Mrs. Waters broke the dry air and whispered, "We're doing well on time, ain't we? We could probably have extra time by the end, get everything done an' all; I'd hate to watch it, though."

"Oh, hush about it. Ya gonna bring nothing but bad luck finding silver linings," Mr. Waters teased. Deep down, he felt uneasy as well.

Mr. Summers had just finished stirring the tickets, pulling out a list of names from his breast pocket just after and laying it on the box.

"Remember, everyone, draw one card; don't look until we are done. Y'all got it? I'll start with the "a's" and move down from there."

Before the event could start, the growl of an engine began to approach, emanating from behind the crowd. The vehicle to which the sound belonged was foreign to the villagers: a small, sleek black automobile. It poked around a building and drove through the empty grass lot towards the villagers.

"That's not headed for us, is it?"

"Not to hit us, surely, Beth-Anne. But it is odd; we don't get many passersby," Mr. Waters assured her.

"If any at all," Beth-Anne murmured.

The car slowed and halted a few dozen feet from them all. The engine's growling died off, and two men stepped out of the vehicle carrying a notepad and a photo camera, respectively. One man had a tan suit and hat and a seemingly friendly smile, for someone who had not befriended anyone yet, at least. The other man, in a white rolled-sleeved dress shirt, had a more neutral yet familiar demeanor, like that of a salesman. The circle broke away to the side to face the two men, leaving enough room to get a picture of the center from the man in the dress shirt.

Mr. Summers, just as confused and curious as the others, said, "If you excuse us, there is no one in the stores or buildings, gentlemen," trying to hint at the urgency of the event's continuation. Mr. Summers tucked the list in his breast pocket and slowly walked up to the two men, giving the cameraman a subtle nod to greet him and to dissuade any further picture-taking without the consent of the people.

"Oh, please don't mind us. We are journalists for the Seven Star paper, just up north on the east coast. We were hoping catch a story around here. Jim Anker." Jim held out his hand.

Mr. Summers held out his hand as well and shook Jim's.

"Hal Porter," the second man announced himself and shook Mr. Summers's hand too.

"Summers. It is nice to have visitors, but not today. We aren't really used to this. We can't afford your newspaper anyway; the mail is local, anyway."

"We promise, we don't mean to invade your privacy; we just heard from another small town further north that there is a special tradition that you both used to share: an annual lottery, right? We would just like to document it, since it seems to be quite rare and unique among you folks."

The townsfolk began to chatter amongst each other, saying things like, "Who is this man?" "What does he really want?" "Why is he here?" Although it never came to mind that they were the peculiar ones.

"What is it for?"

"Culture."

"Culture?" Mr. Dunbar, who was now walking, albeit with a slight hobble, stepped out of the back of the crowd. Mrs. Dunbar held him by his arm to make sure he didn't trip.

"That's right, so we can connect with the American people. I'm sure you must be in cahoots in some way with that village a few miles that way."

Hal butted in before another villager could respond, "How about to take the edge off, we could join in? It would be like we were always a part of it."

The people stopped their chatter and swept their heads unsurely. Everybody wondered if this would break tradition; would that be bad? They all depended on Mr. Summers to make that decision. Mr. Summers paused for a moment and decided that if he wanted this to be done quickly and to get them to leave, it would be best just to let them stay. After thinking for a second, staring at the grass, he concluded.

"Alright. But I must warn you, it could get a bit overwhelming."

"I'm sure lotteries can be for most," Jim wholeheartedly responded.

"Do you mind if we ask a few questions? Just to be sure," Hal added sincerely.

Mr. Summers turned around and headed for the box. "I'm sure a few folks won't mind, but we don't know everything; it's a tradition older than ol' Mr. Warner is young, ten times over." A few people quietly chuckled; Mr. Warner swatted off Mr. Summers.

"It's best not to get picked. Everybody will make a fool of ya, that's for sure," Mr. Warner cautioned.

Mr. Summers added two more slips of paper into the box, which he carried extras in case the wind was not kind that day or the first draw had already passed. Mr. Summers returned to the box and unfolded the list from his breast pocket again.

He gestured for Mr. Graves, "Mr. Graves. Do you mind passing me a pencil?" Which Mr. Graves just so happened to carry on his person.

"I'm never without, Mr. Summers." He handed the pencil to Mr. Summers, who quickly jotted down the names of the two newcomers on their own slips.

"Thank you, good sir. We will have to be quick now; this has taken longer than I hoped." Mr. Summers held the pencil out to Mr. Graves, who promptly nodded and took the pencil back.

Jim and Hal were amused. They had not seen anything like this before: a lottery, in a small town of all places, where every townsperson was in it, even the children. They couldn't wait to publish their story. Hal decided to snap a picture of the avenue further down the road.

"I'll once again explain our rules for the rookies: don't take more than one slip out of the box, and keep the ticket folded until all the names have been called. Understood?" Jim nodded for both of them.

Mr. Summers began to list names, "Adams…"

Mr. Adams approached the box and swiftly withdrew a ticket.

"Mr. Anker, you're up..."

Jim stepped to the box, smiling naively. As he sifted through the tickets, he began to quickly search for an opportunity to get a little background. He scanned across the huddled people to see where he could slip in later. Jim reentered the ring next to Hal For now, he settled on the people he stood closest to, first approaching Mrs. Waters.

"Pardon me, ma'am. Do you happen to know who runs this event? I haven't seen a mayor or such just yet."

Mrs. Waters smiled, responding, "We have yet to know; it's just so old. Mr. Summers runs all the town events here; he's a kind man."

"Oh, I was figuring he was the mayor."

Mr. Summers continued, "Dunbar…"

"Sorry, mister. If you'd excuse us." Mr. Waters politely intervened.

Mrs. Waters quickly mentioned, "He owns that coal company just yonder, not a town, like it seems he would."

Mr. Dunbar waddled his way to the box with his wife, interlocking their elbows together. "Didn't dodge the drawing this year, unfortunately," Mrs. Dunbar said jokingly. Mr. Dunbar tittered; he knew well to take it lightheartedly. They returned to their spots in the crowd.

"Delacroix..."

Hal began to wonder why the lottery was set this way; surely, it would be too easy to not get picked. Was the point of it to punish the winner and not to reward the losers? Hal summed it up to the town being small; there's no way that nearly everyone in the town could win something of value except the so-called winner. It was a gag of some sort. But the question still remained: why not just reward the one? He was just as curious as Jim was when they were visiting the northern town.

"Hey, Jimmy."

"Yeah, Hal?"

"Why don't you try asking him what this is for? Why do they do it, ya know? Seven's gonna want to know that stuff."

"I hadn't forgotten; I'm not having too much fun for good."

"And I didn't doubt that, friend. This one's gonna be a hit, no doubt about that either." Hal patted Jim on the shoulder.

Delacroix returned to his spot a few heads down. Jim saw this as a good time to interview another villager. He squeezed through the bodies as generously as he could before calling out to Mr. Delacroix.

"Excuse me, Mr. Delacroix?"

Mr. Delacroix turned towards Jim. "That would be me."

"I'd like to ask, is there a beginning to this tradition? What started this?"

"I must be honest, not even we know; it's just that old. You heard Mr. Summers, right?"

"So I might as well assume no one knows the start either?"

"No, sir. I'm sorry that I can't help you much."

"There's no need to be sorry, Mr. Take care, will ya?"

Jim tipped his hat and smiled. He was starting to get a little frustrated, thinking that these people might be lying. Why wouldn't they know what they're all doing here? Jim decided to meet back with Hal to discuss what they should do if they would ever have too little to report back. He walked behind the few people between them and pulled him aside.

"Graves, you're next."

Jim stared at the backs of heads, some facing him briefly before readjusting forwards again. "Hal, I'm coming up empty, and this report is meant to be full by next week. I'm starting to miss my family; I've been out here in the west too long."

"Don't worry too much, Jim. C'mon, you need a break." Hal walked over to the car and leaned in, pulling out two cigars.

Jim accepted one, lit it, and leaned on the car hood. "The next person called, I'll interview. If it turns out to be nothing, just warm the car up while I jot down what I can."

"Aww, don't be so sour. Let's at least stay to see the end."

"Yeah, you're right; still need to figure that out."

"Hey, I'll take some more pictures of the place; I won't be too far away."

The crowd began to murmur again—things about the Hutchinsons. It was faint and nearly indiscernible amongst all the whispers, but you could make out a few of the voices talking about them getting picked again. Jim furrowed his eyebrows, thinking why that'd be so bad. He had come to believe that because the townspeople seemed so serious about it—no one smiled or snickered—they looked concerned.

"You think it will be them again?" Bobby Martin naively blurted, receiving a brisk strike upon the back of his neck by Mr. Martin.

"Now, Hutchinson…"

# Midwest Tradition

*Continued from page 5*

Mr. Hutchinson slowly and calmly pulled a slip from the box and curled his lips back into a half-smile before silently returning to his children. Davy Hutchinson reached for his father's hand, but it was not met with his own. "Pa...?" There was no response besides a look from the corner of his eye. "Jones..." Hal decided to explore around the people and take photos of the storefronts, houses, and the lazy dog that lay on one of the lawns; there was nothing better to photograph related to the lottery just yet. "We're nearly done, right?" Beth-Anne said "Martin..." He walked a little further around the crowd and nearly tripped over a large stone. He found another nearby, and more just after. Some stones had an orange-red hue, but only on some sides. Hal heard his last name called and hurriedly took a picture of them, brushing it off as artistry. "Porter, newcomer number two…" Mr. Summers scanned the crowd. "He'd best not quit on us now!" Mrs. Dunbar huffed. Hal reentered from the side he originally was standing on and cut through to the box. "'Pologies. I was just was lookin' around the place while I waited." "You're pardoned." Hal grabbed a slip of paper and met back with Jim. "Well, whatcha waiting here for still?" "Something's rubbing me wrong; that man seems a bit bitter, to put it nicely." "Well, you did say the next; stick to your word, it might be good." Jim nodded and agreed to try one last time. He couldn't leave empty-handed; he hadn't told Hal that the previous stories weren't gonna cut it. They were running out of time and interesting stories. Jim walked behind the circle this time, as he was sure he was being a nuisance weaving in and out of the clutter so many times. "Excuse me, Mr. Hutchinson, I'm Jim Anker." He held out his hand but was denied a handshake. "Do you mind if I ask you to hurry? I've got little time or patience enough to talk."

"I don't mean to be a bother; I just want to ask, what happens when a person is picked?"

"Warner…"

The people nearby began to turn their heads, some shaking them "no, don't."

"We throw 'em stones and make them reap the harvest this year."

"Waters…"

"Oh, is that all?"

"It's what he says," Bill Hutchinson pointed to Mr. Warner, "hasn't failed us once; I'm starting to believe it works better that way."

"Watson…"

"Alright, I'll leave you be."

Hal was already behind Jim before he could fully leave the crowd. Jim was visibly stressed.

"Oh, what's it now?"

"It's to choose who does the crop harvest. They toss stones to the person and let them figure out what to do with them, I guess. That's all it is."

"Zanini."

"Harvest? We didn't plan to stay for that."

"I know, it's odd."

"Wait, you mentioned stones? I found some just on the other side of the crowd."

Mr. Summers raised his voice a bit. "Alright, open your slips and raise them."

Everyone was a bit reluctant as usual, and sighs of relief could be heard from some. Hal opened his slip; blank. Jim opened his, and it was marked with a black circle in pencil. Everybody turned to Jim and stared at his raised ticket.

"I'm sorry, folks, I take it that this is for some crop harvest. We didn't plan for an extended stay." Jim answered prematurely.

There was a long pause; people stared harshly at the two.

"Let's be done quick, then," Mr. Summers announced.

"Are they deaf? We said, we didn't sign up for this!" Hal shouted.

Everyone began to walk away from them and bend down to pick up stones.

"Poor men; they don't even know; not a fighting chance." Mrs. Waters huffed while lifting a stone above her shoulder.

"We don't want a 'fighting chance.' We need this to go as it should." Mr. Hutchinson reminded her.

"But we had never done anything like this before, not to outsiders." Mrs. Dunbar handed a stone to her husband, telling her son, "Run on home and wash up, Horace."

The boy did as he was told.

"What on Earth are they doing over there, Hal?"

"I saw the stones over there..."

People began to swarm around their sides, then the front of them, leaving only a wall of a wooden pale blue house behind them. Hal glanced over his shoulder, noticing the dark reddish-brown streaks on the wall, finally realizing what was happening.

"We've gotta get out of here, Jim. Now!" Hal rushed off through an opening in the crowd.

"Hal! What's the matter with you!? Hal!" A stone struck his leg.

"Hey! What's the matter with you people!?" Another struck his head, and he cried in pain; one hit his opposite knee, knocking him to the floor.

"Hal! Hal, help! Hal, please!" He screamed, "You faithless cultists!" More stones began to strike his head.

Hal vaulted into the driver's seat of their car and struggled with the engine. He begged for the car to start, even begged the Lord for mercy, but the car gave out; there was no use. But he had realized that Jim was no longer screaming, and he could only hear metallic thuds that quelled almost immediately after he paid them attention. He feared he was next. The villagers turned to him, wondering if they should do anything about him next, but Hal had already weighed his chances.

"You are all sick and twisted! All of you demons!" Hal stammered, breaking into sweat and tears from terror.

He began to run, stumbling on a few other stones and dropping his camera. He ran so far in the distance, he was far off in the horizon. He'd, unfortunately, never make it home to loved ones either.

"Come on, everyone. We've got lives to live." Mr. Summers broke the silence.

As everyone broke away, while two of the men dragged Jim away, Mrs. Waters walked over to the camera Hal dropped. It had taken one last picture through the legs of the villagers; Jim lay dead in a pool of blood staining his suit, the suit his wife bought him, the wife he would not see after "just one more good story" anymore.

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# Imperial: Heirs of Ruin

## Prologue

By Jaida Percy

The sun is a crown, gilded in fire. A throne of golden thorns—its embers expire. O Empire of light, so bright, so vast; did you not know that dawn cannot last? Marble halls whisper of glories old, of sovereigns crowned in woven gold. Their names are etched in sacred stone, yet wind and time will take their throne.

A sword in a scabbard, a heart in a cage, a kingdom's fate written on history's page. Brother to brother, a kingdom is sworn. Yet all of its heirs were heirs to the storm. A spider's web, a noise within. A blade in the dark, piercing bonds so thin.

O children of Sol, do you see now? I had no care for a mere vow.

To whom shall never read this,

Do you remember how the sun once touched the empire like a blessing? How the banners stretched high, their golden thread catching the light as if they were woven from fire itself? Do you remember the voices that filled these halls—bold, unyielding, certain that they would echo through eternity?

I do.

I remember the way they stood, unshaken, even as the ground beneath them crumbled. I remember the quiet betrayals that festered behind their smiles, the way love twisted into chains, duty into knives. I watched as the weight of their own bloodline dragged them under, as the empire they swore to protect turned its back on them. I watched them fall.

And I did nothing.

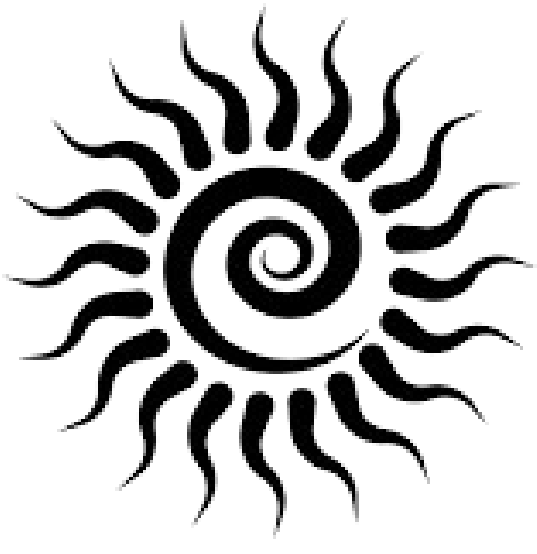
Perhaps that was my greatest sin—not the lies I told, not the truths I buried, but the silence. The waiting. As if history had not already decided their fate. As if I had not already seen the end written in the cracks of the palace walls. Finally. Are you beginning to see what he saw?

They were never meant to last, were they? The sun can only burn for so long before it collapses into itself. That is the curse of those born to rule—they think themselves eternal, but even gods can bleed. Even empires can fall. And fall, they did.

another. But it is not theirs. It never will be again.

Now, the banners are tattered, their golden threads lost to the wind. The voices are gone, swallowed by time. Their names, their triumphs, their ruin… It is all just dust beneath my feet. The world has moved on. The empire still stands, in one form or another. But it is not theirs. It never will be again. Tell me, if you could, do you hate me for surviving? For carrying their memory when they could not? Or would you forgive me, as you always did, even when I did not deserve it? It does not matter. You are gone. And I remain.

So, crumble, Imperial, and shine.



"Myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them."

Albert Camus

# Why leaves change color

Written By Abieku Neizer-Ashun

Long ago, in the sacred Orchard of Pomona, Pomona, the reclusive trees tended to an ever-growing garden of flowers and trees. Forever lush is her grove, always bearing perfect fruit and never changing with its evergreen leaves. Her garden was truly a sight to see; every day her fellow gods and goddesses would come to admire her work, and mortals would come to give her offerings so that her garden would forever prosper. But even with the affirmation of everyone around, Pomona felt that her work was stagnant without it.

One day, due to the recommendation of Jupiter, Vertumnus visits Pomona and her orchard. Upon first glance, Vertumnus is smitten by the goddess' natural beauty and quickly devises a plan to woo the goddess.

Vertumnus transforms into a farmer with a straw hat adorning his head and approaches the goddess, “Fine orchards you keep, Lady Pomona. Never have I seen trees so strong, nor fruit so sweet.” Pomona, not one to be deterred from her work by the common mortal, hardly acknowledges the farmer, “They thrive because I let none disturb them. Not even well-meaning hands.”

“Aye, but even the best soil tires. My own fields lie fallow in winter-rest makes the harvest greater come spring.”

Pomona scoffs at the notion of the mortal, “My trees know no winter. They need no rest.”

Vertumnus sighs, “Stubborn as an old root, you are,” tipping his straw hat and walking away.

Next came a skilled vine-pruner. “These vines are heavy with fruit, Goddess, but see how the leaves crown the branches? A careful cut would let in light.”

Pomona responds with a frown, “I let no blade touch my trees. They grow as they will.”

“But growth needs guidance! Even the finest vines must be shaped-else they tangle and choke themselves.”

“You speak of change as if it is always good. I know better.”

Vertumnus couldn’t help but smirk, “And yet, the sweetest grapes come from the vines that endure the knife.” as the vine-pruner fades into the shadows of the garden.

After that, a battle-worn soldier came upon Pomona Garden, watching with weary admiration.

“Your grove is a fortress, Lady. Not even time dares breach its walls.”

“It is safe because I allow no invaders. Even those who claim to admire it,” the goddess says coolly.

“I’ve seen empires rise and fall. The ones that never bend? They shatter.”

“Then let them shatter. My trees will stand.”

“Even the mightiest oak sheds its leaves,” the soldier said before seemingly vanishing with the wind.

Over and over, failure after failure, Vertumnus couldn’t help feeling frustrated. Yet the god endeavors on. If the goddess would listen to the words of a farmer, pruner, or soldier, she must listen to the god of transformation! Discarding all his disguises, the god stepped forth in the garden in his divine form.

“You dismiss the farmer, the pruner, the soldier... yet all spoke with one voice: nothing lasts by staying the same.”

Pomona was startled by the sudden reveal. “You! The god who hides behind masks. Why trouble me?” she demanded.

“Because I see what you refuse to—your trees are weary, Pomona. They glow green but never burn. Let me show you.” Vertumnus takes a deep breath and exhales, with the breath hitting her favorite apple tree.

It erupts, transforming its leaves into gold, then crimson—a spectacle the goddess had never seen before. Pomona plucks one of the crimson leaves from the trees, admiring its fiery hues.

“It’s beautiful. But will they not die?”

“For a time. And then return stronger.”

“Then maybe, maybe transformation is not a dreadful decay of death, but a brilliant farewell before winter’s sleep,” she said wisely.

“Such is the way of things-my way.” The god of change smiled. Offering the goddess of plenty his right hand.

Pomona looked at the offer and then, so softly that only he could hear, said, “Perhaps… one season. To see,” and accepted the hand, pulling him in for an embrace.

At this moment Vertumnus let out a mighty breath, changing the rest of Ponoma’s trees crimson. Declaring it the first season of autumn.

# Why The Sky Is Blue.

Written By Sasha Ford

The sky, it’s always a blue color even as the clouds below cover it, a soft cushion for the sorrow of the sky above. Long ago, a god had made the Earth for his lover, with hopes of marrying her and impressing her. The lover, upon seeing the small planet, scoffed at the craftsmanship. To her, it was just a ball of rock, glittered with one too many chances for imperfection and corruption. She took the gift as an insult, and never again did she speak to the god. The god, looking upon his creation as if it were his child, began to weep and weep. The sky, modeled blue after the goddesses’ beautiful blue eyes which he so dearly missed. All he could do was watch over the small lifeforms he had created as they grew, watching them become corrupted… He felt as if it were his fault the humans of today had become this way. To him, it was because they were made of a doomed love, born out of the tears and tainted love that the goddess had left behind. He felt as if he had failed all that he had ever done. So whenever it rains, he cries for her, and whenever there is a storm or hurricane, he calls out her name, hoping she’d appear once more for him again. Maybe one day, if we all learned to be one with our soil, would he finally smile again.

# NEWS & EVENTS

## GRADUATION FOR ALL SENIORS!!!

By Sebastian Fernandez

It is officially that time of the year. The seniors graduated last week! I do find it a bit unfair that they get out earlier than other grades, but it's the rules, and I can't tamper with them. There are only 5 days left until we are out of here, too. So if you have any friends that are seniors, I hope you said your goodbyes (unless you live with them, like me) lol. There was a clap-out Thursday, May 15th. Before that, however, the seniors were in an assembly that lasted a while. The actual graduation was on May 17th. Why a Saturday, though? Anyway, it's been a long 12 years, but the students are finally done with high school. As long as they have good grades, passed all their EOCs, and don't have any unexcused absences or suspensions, they are good to graduate! Thank you to all the wonderful seniors who have worked hard to make it to this day!

## BDCHS Awards Ceremony

By Julia Russo

On Wednesday May 14, 2025, our school gathered with administrators, instructors, and the Board of Directors–including Mr. Derrick Brooks–at the Brooks DeBartolo End of Year Awards Ceremony. We assembled to recognize students who have shown excellence in the various fields and disciplines in which they have gone above and beyond the normal scope of academics. At the ceremony, dozens of Phoenix Awards were given to high performing students in the areas of Language Arts, Spanish, Science, STEM, Social Studies and Mathematics. Additionally, students received recognition for a number of scholarships that were awarded, as well as several students who earned industry certifications. The list of honors was quite impressive, to say the least.

Once again, a big CONGRATULATIONS to all of our award recipients–you have earned this recognition and have served our school well.

**Talise Samayoa**
**Outstanding 12th Grade Instrumentalist**

**Gavin Quijano**
**Outstanding 12th Grade Artist**

**Ella Jaen**
**Outstanding 12th Grade Vocalist**

**Silvanna Uzcategui Contrer**
**Phoenix Spanish Scholar**

**Abigail McIntyre**
**Outstanding 12th Grade English Language Arts**

**Xia Collier**
**12th Grade Excellence in STEM**

**Joshua Chao**
**Outstanding 12th Grade Math**

**Jude Alkatib**
**Outstanding 12th Grade Social Studies**

**Benjamin Fernandez**
**Phoenix Sportsmanship**

**Tyler Sylvain**
**Relay for Life Leadership**

**Gavin Quijiano**
**Outstanding 12th Grade Science Scholar**

**Habiba Alkhateb**
**Oustanding 12th Grade Phoenix**

****Students/Underclassmen not pictured above who received awards:**

**Kate Murdock-Anne Frank Humanitarian Award**
**Lillian Patel-9th Grade Vocalist**
**Ethan Huynh-9th Grade Instrumentalist**
**Miguel Alonzo and Allyson Miranda-10th Grade Vocalists**
**Ayla Rusnak-10th Grade Instrumentalist**
**Nora Fernandez-11th Grade Vocalist**
**Matthew Perales-11th Grade Instrumentalist**
**Mrindi Surrenden-9th Grade Science Scholars**
**Armari Rojas-10th Grade Science Scholars**
**Levi Quijano-11th Grade Science Scholars**
**Mrindi Surrenden-9th Grade Oustanding Math**
**Joshua Infante-10th Grade Outstanding Math**
**Valeria Petit-11th Grade Outstanding Math**
**Isaiah Castillo-12th Grade Pursuit of Excellence**
**Amari Rojas-10th Grade Outstanding Phoenix**
**Lila Perez-Velasco-9th Grade Outstanding artist**
**Milie Chirino Marquez-10th Grade Outstanding Artist**
**Nerissa Stokes-11th Grade Outstanding Artist**
**Grace Prator-9th Grade Outstanding English Language Arts**
**Jack A'Hearn-9th Grade Outstanding English Language Arts**
**Sabrina Rojas-Vera-10th Grade Outstanding English Language Arts**
**Valeria Petit-11th Grade Outstanding English Language Arts**
**Jaden McNair-9th Grade Outstanding Social Studies**
**Aaron Matthews-10th Grade Outstanding Social Studies**
**Eduarda Avellaneda-11th Grade Outstanding Social Studies**
**Nicole Betancourt-9th Grade Pursuit of Excellence**
**Elyas Ouaoukorri-10th Grade Pursuit of Excellence**
**Caden Ramos-11th Grade Pursuit of Excellence**
**Pramus Stephnson-9th Grade Outstanding Phoenix**
**Kristofer Gajadharsingh-11th Grade Oustanding Phoenix**

Arjun Nair---Class of 2025
Valedictorian

Rama Mhaskar---Class of 2025
Salutatorian

# PhoeniX RobotiCS 2025

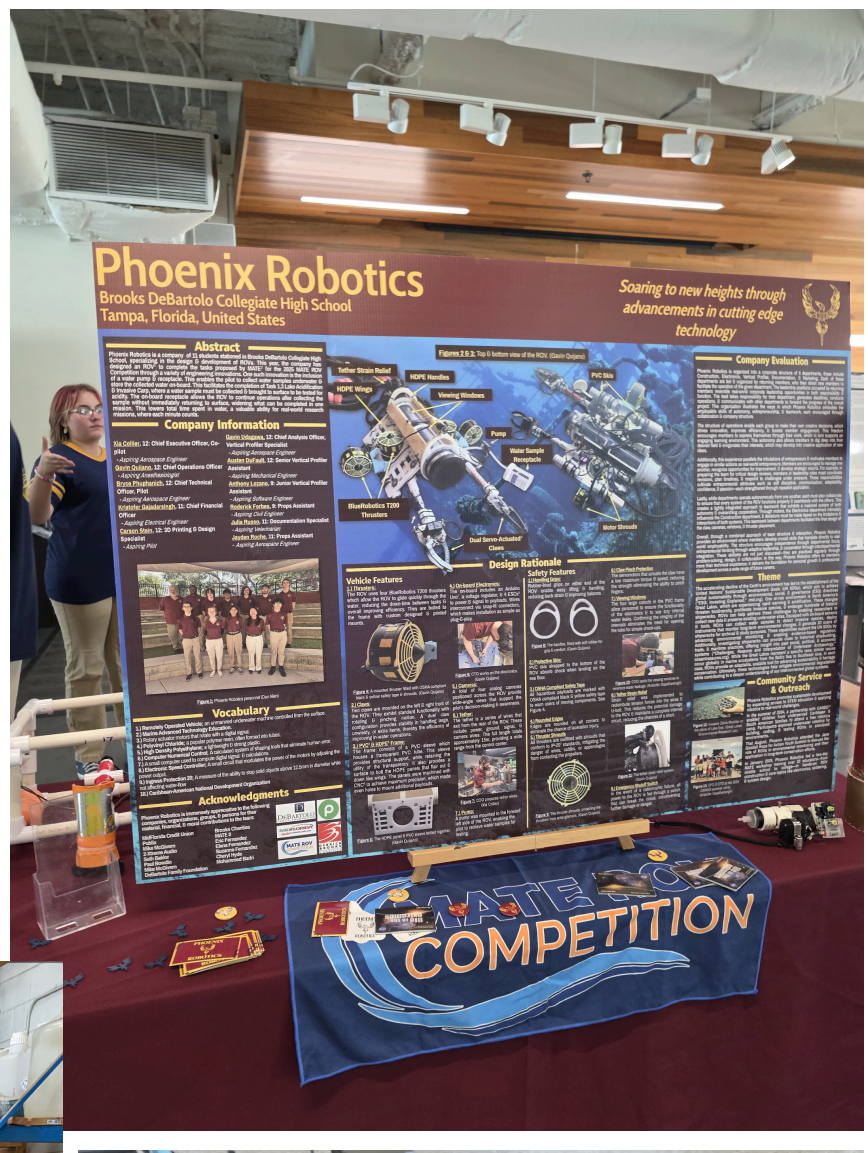
# Phoenix Robotics Wins Back Regionals

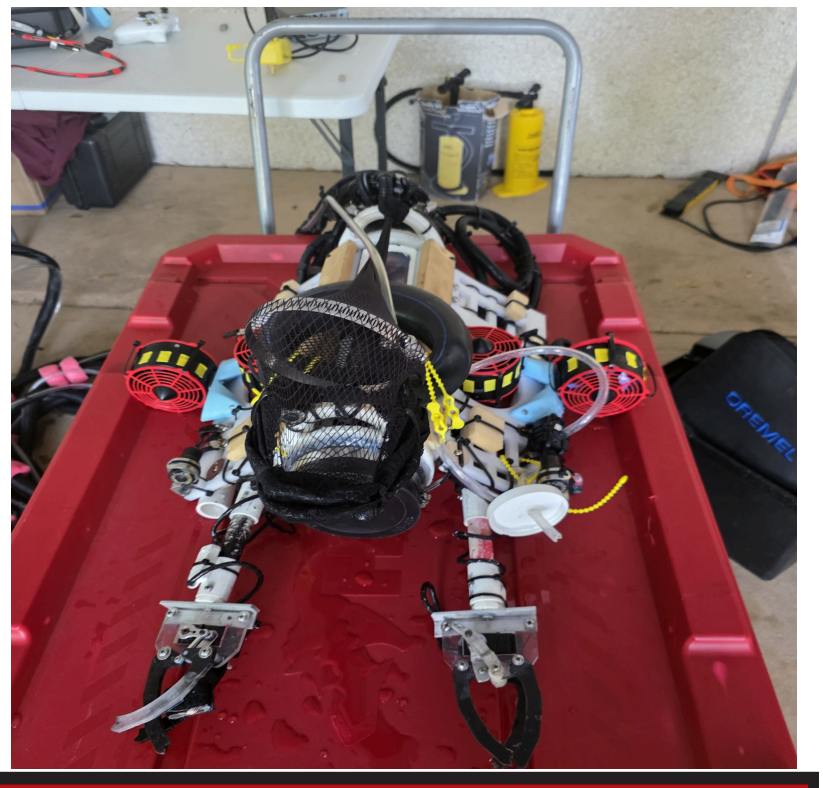
by Bryce Phuphanich

Over this past weekend, our Robotics team went to the MATE regional competition to compete against some of the best schools in the state. After months of preparation, late-night coding sessions, and rigorous testing, the team's efforts paid off in a big way. Phoenix Robotics clinched first place in a thrilling final round, reclaiming the regional title after narrowly missing it last year.

The competition, held at the USF St. Petersburg Campus, featured 6 teams who showcased their custom-built ROVs (remotely operated vehicles) in underwater tasks that simulated real-world engineering challenges. Phoenix Robotics impressed the judges not only with their robot's performance but also with their technical documentation, team presentation, and innovation.

With the regional trophy back in their hands, the team now sets their sights on the international championship in June. Go Phoenix!





PhoeniX RobOtiCS ROCkS!

# THE PHOENICLE SPORTS PAGE

The BDCHS Girls Flag Football was a trememdous success in it's inagural season.

The 2025 Lady Phoenix Flag Football Team

By Lexi Marable

The Brooks Debartolo Lady Phoenix Flag Football team just played their last in-season game, bringing their season to an end with very impressive achievements. Their success is thanks to collaboration of the team and the leadership of Head Coach Moore, Defensive Coach Dumont, and Offensive Coach Wilbur. The Varsity team's end win to loss record was 7-4 and the Junior Varsity team ended with a record of 3-1. On senior night, the team celebrated their seniors Cazlyn James and Tatiana Moore and all of their achievements on the team.

A highlight of the season was the Varsity team's win against Foundation Christian Academy with a score of 25-0, where quarterback Molly Beard earned player of the game. I have had a great experience on the team and I am excited to see what next year holds. Congratulations to both teams of Lady Phoenix with their successful season and great effort! Thanks to Coach Moore, Coach Wilbur and Coach Dumont for your support of our Lady Phoenix athletics.

The 2025 BDCHS Boys JV Volleyball Team

The 2025 BDCHS Boys Varsity Volleyball Team

By Cheyne Lee

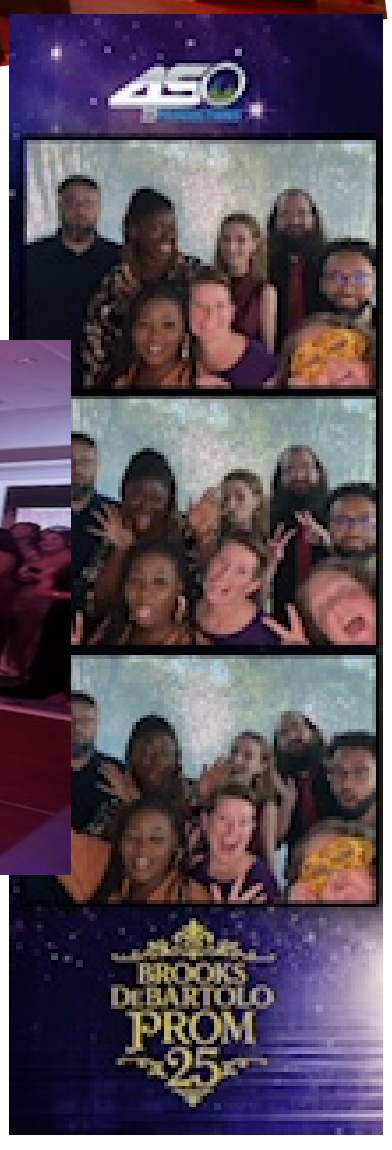
The Brooks DeBartolo Phoenix varsity boys volleyball team had a strong and impressive season, showcasing their skill, teamwork, and determination throughout their games. They played hard and consistently performed well, earning a spot in the regional playoffs a significant achievement that reflects their hard work and growth as a team. Although they ultimately fell short in the regional match and didn't advance further, their journey was a testament to their dedication and spirit. Making it to Regionals was a proud moment for the team and their supporters, and it set a strong foundation for future seasons. Congratulations to Coach Mitchell and the team on an outstanding season.

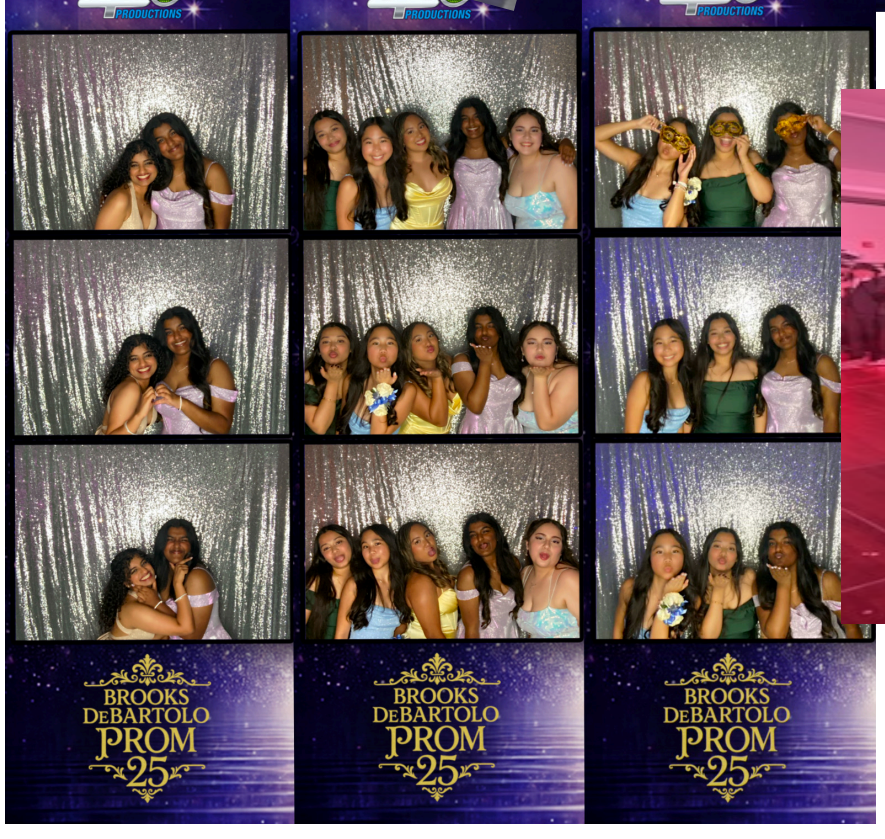
# A Night to Remember

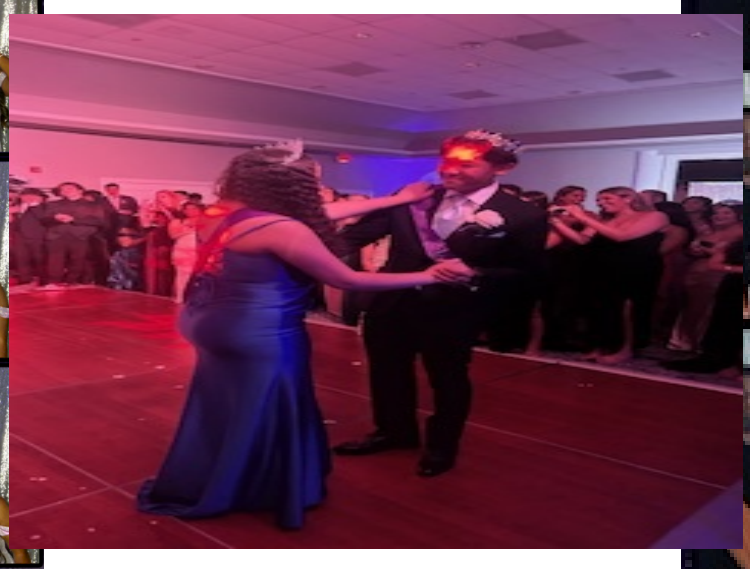
# "Moonlight Memories"

## The 2025 Brooks DeBartolo Collegiate High School Prom

*Prom was a great experience! Everyone's dresses and suits were so cool and it was such a bittersweet feeling to go to prom for the last time. The DJ was actually pretty good, much better than last year for sure. I'm glad that it was not at school like Homecoming, because Hunter's Green was a much better venue. The space was a bit small, but I'm not complaining at all because the decorations were nice and everyone seemed to really like the photo booth idea. I am curious to see what next year will look like... (Annika L.)*

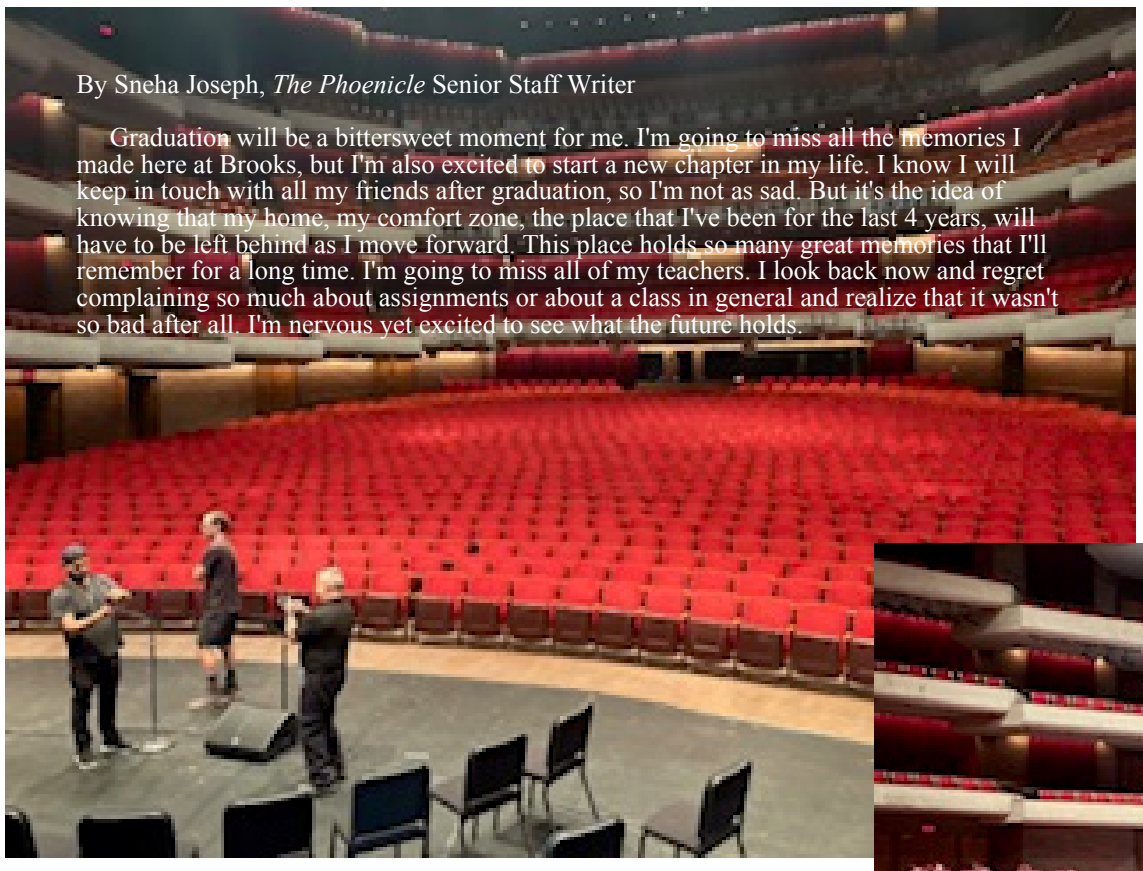


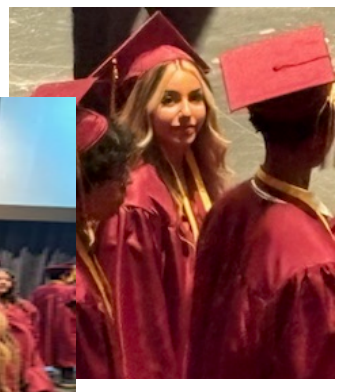
The BDCHS Senior Prom King and Queen

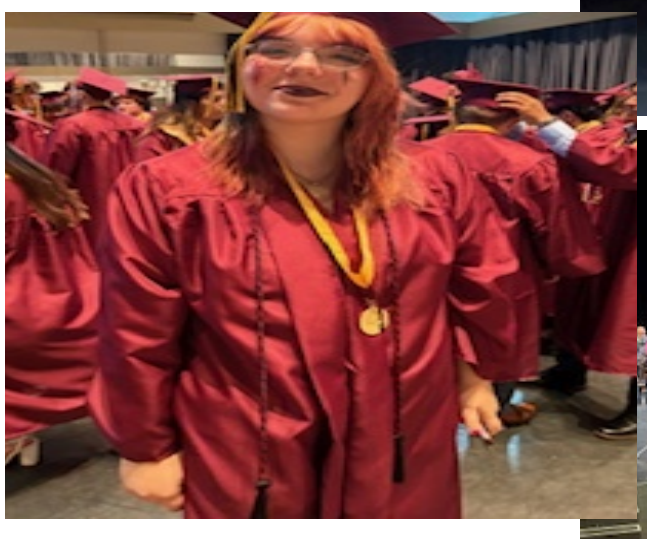
# BDCHS GRADUATING CLASS OF 2025



By Sneha Joseph, *The Phoenicle* Senior Staff Writer

Graduation will be a bittersweet moment for me. I'm going to miss all the memories I made here at Brooks, but I'm also excited to start a new chapter in my life. I know I will keep in touch with all my friends after graduation, so I'm not as sad. But it's the idea of knowing that my home, my comfort zone, the place that I've been for the last 4 years, will have to be left behind as I move forward. This place holds so many great memories that I'll remember for a long time. I'm going to miss all of my teachers. I look back now and regret complaining so much about assignments or about a class in general and realize that it wasn't so bad after all. I'm nervous yet excited to see what the future holds.





By Annika Lumanog, *The Phoenicle* Senior Staff Writer

For graduation, I am going to be sad leaving my friends. We have gone to the same high school since we were 14, and now all our paths are about to change. Not only are we going to different colleges, but also colleges to different states. We will all be very far from each other and probably not going to see each other for a very long time. However, I have to remember that it is how life goes and everyone is constantly evolving and changing. Change is a good thing, even though its sad at first.

**CONGRATULATIONS** to our Seniors who were such a big part of creating *The Phoenicle.* The publication will forever be a part of their legacy at BDCHS:

Kaylyn Fernandez, Annika Lumanog, Sneha Joseph, Bryce Phuphanich, Messiah Williams, Abieku Neizer-Ashun, Yvonne Hawkins, Ava "Lux" Kline, Andrew "Gage" Callaway and Daniel Dykstra.