

THE GENERATOR

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MAYOR DRIVES CITY GROWTH

■ by Grace Kavanagh
By improving parks, streets, community, and much more, the mayor has worked to make Sterling Heights better for the past 10 years.

The Sterling Heights Mayor Taylor has led the city for the past ten years, working to improve many things. During this time, the mayor has focused on making the community a safer and more welcoming place for residents to live and work in.

"Mayor Taylor has worked so hard for over 10 years to make our city a great place," senior Jacyln Dudde said. "He has focused on keeping our city safe and fun."

As he moves forward in his role as mayor, he plans to build on the progress he has made, like improving parks, streets, and community programs throughout the

Sterling Heights mayor has created projects and changes throughout his decade in office

over the time he's been mayor. "I love our city," senior Julia Santo said. "It's so pretty to me. I think Mayor Taylor has done a pretty good job making our city more safe."

Our mayor has improved public safety, made the city more green, helped police departments become more open, and has added more homes and parks.

"I'm sure he still has things planned and up his sleeve to add even more to our city," freshman Anthony Pace said. "Especially to help more people in our community who calls our city their home."

In the past 10 years, Mayor Taylor has worked hard to make Sterling Heights a better place by improving parks, streets, and the community so that the residents of our city can enjoy a safer and stronger city.



photo by Brian Figueroa

BATTLE FOR THE SPOTLIGHT

Junior varsity dance team performs their routines for the second time this season

■ by Adalyn Berden

After school gets out, the gym transforms into a stage where teams from all over come to perform their routines they have been working hard to perfect.

Dance team competitions give dancers the chance to grow, which is why the junior varsity dance team spends months preparing for their competition in December.

"To prepare for competitions, we practice our dances full out with all of our facials," junior Gabriella Orlando said. "We go through the timing and counts of our dances. We also make any last minute changes that we may need as well to our dances."

While full out and productive practices are important, dancers also prepare in other ways. Many focus on what they need to do before the competition to do well on their routines. "His personal preparation helps them perform their best when they step on the floor."

"I pack beforehand so that way I am ready and not stressing competition day," sophomore

Alli Girlish said. "I also practice any last minute changes in the dance, so I can be ready for competition. I also make sure to eat a good breakfast in the morning, so my body is fueled for the rest of the day."

Preparing individually significantly impacts the dancer's performance. Packing and practicing last minute changes the night before helps make competition day less stressful and lets the dancer focus fully on competing their dances. Staying prepared helps the dancers do their best on their routines and have fun at awards with their team.

"My favorite part about competition is giving my full out and my 110% on the gym floor with my team and showing everyone who we are and what our costumes and themes are," junior Ava Bridges said. "Going to awards is also fun because we are pumped up. I love seeing our coaches cheering for us and their faces while they watch us dance and when they announce our awards as well."

As judges give out the last award, the competition comes to a conclusion as dancers and their supporters exit the school, and the competition stage turns back into a gymnasium floor.

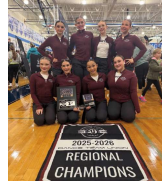


photo by Stefano Basso

SECURE THE SCROLL

The school strives to build awareness, respect, and safety in every click and post

■ by Grace Barry

With social media becoming a bigger part of students' daily lives, safety concern arrives.

"The students find that social media comes with harmful risks like cyberbullying and inaccurate information."

"I think it is important to have profiles private and make sure you know the person you are talking to," Counselor Wendy Johnson said. "Also, making sure you don't over share information and keeping things private. I think it has some benefits, but I personally think that it deprives people's self esteem. I think it impacts kids' self esteem, and I think they compare themselves with what they see online."

Anything that anyone does on social media can be found. Many students in America use social media daily.

"My biggest advice is to not add anyone on social media that you don't know or haven't met in person," School Resource Officer Tyler Wilson said. "I think it is more bad than good when it comes to juveniles. It causes a lot of drama peer to peer. It also causes self esteem issues, and the ability to communicate face to face has been difficult for students."

Cyberbullying happens on social media every day. Social media can affect students'

sleep and emotions, as well as make someone feel worse about themselves.

"I do wish there was a social media safety class that kids go through to learn the dangers of it," math teacher Kristen McGunagle said. "We love it, but it is very scary. I wish it could be regulated. Social media for students has really made them introverted. The social skills are not out there like they used to be."

As social media continues to play a big role in students' lives, it's encouraged to use it safely and be aware that their actions online can affect them.

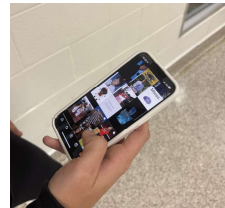


photo by Eliza Lala



photo by Maria Compton

COACH OF THE YEAR

Boys Tennis Coach Stephen Nellis is recognized for his coaching skills with coach of the year award

■ by Leah Police

When the Boys Tennis team stepped onto the courts this season, they carried more than rackets; they carried the steady leadership of coach Stephen Nellis, whose dedication has now earned him the title of Coach of the Year.

"He is a good coach," boys varsity tennis captain senior Vito Pantalana said. "He's really helpful and works with the doubles a lot, he knows a lot about it. He acts like a friend but serious when he needs to be. I'm glad he got this recognition. He deserves it."

With such an honorable title as Coach of the Year and other acknowledgments, some awards needed submissions of Nellis' team stats. Some awards, however, were nominated by other coaching staff.

"For state coach of the year, we had to submit a form with our record with how we did," Nellis said. "We had to write a total paragraph about our season, so there was a little bit of a process with that. The other ones were voted on by the coaches."

While the process itself took some effort, what stood out was what the recognition represented. Moving from paperwork and voting to actually hearing the results, Coach Nellis reflected on what the honor meant on a deeper level.

"I was pretty cool just getting that recognition from our coaches and colleagues that we had such a good season," Nellis said. "It was nice to have the coaches know and respect the things you do in your program and see how hard we work. Everyone works so hard."

Moving forward with Nellis' successful coaching career with this new title, he promises many more great seasons of tennis.



photo by Rachael Larson

NEW BEGINNINGS

Varsity Cheer Comp begins for the 2025-2026 season

■ by Elizia Lala

"Back for More!" The cheer team chants their new motto as the winter season begins.

In addition to the new varsity cheer comp season beginning, there are new competitors that will shape the future of the season. Some have experience with competing already, while others have been newly recruited from JV Cheer. This year, there are three rounds with four stunt groups.

"I feel really grateful that I made varsity comp because I've been trying to make it since freshman year," sophomore Savannah Rush said. "Everyone on this team was very welcoming including the coaches, and they all helped me adapt to my new team."

The coaches for this season are Head Coach Lynn Larocca, and Assistant Coaches Emma Larocca and Rachael Baker. A first impression can be very important to make new people feel confident and accepted. According to Rush, the team and the three coaches have accomplished that. The captain of the team also plays a significant role in making newcomers feel

welcome as well as how the season goes. "As the captain and starting a new season, I try to keep positive energy and lead my team so we can be the best team we can possibly be," varsity cheer captain senior Raegan Powers said. "After having a great season last year, I feel confident that we can strive to be even better this year and overall have a great season."

Since the upperclassmen have upheld a good season in the past year, with new teammates and cooperation, Powers wants this season to feel just like the last, if not even better. This year, the team is competing at 11 events, including four MAC events. At the end of the season in February, they will be at Districts and Nationals.

"As someone new to varsity comp, so I'm hoping to grow to last this season," sophomore Sadie Skurla said. "I want to get more confidence with the skills and routines. Most of all, I just hope to help the team and make a positive impact."

From JV to varsity competition, the cheer team forms a new bond to chant, "Back for More!"

FALCON WRAP UP

Athletes have made many achievements and memories from this fall season

■ by Margaret Castillo and Grace Barry
From the first whistle to the final match up, athletes have marked this fall season with teamwork, determination, hard work, and excitement.

The fall sports worked hard to make this season the best they could. They were determined to win and do well. As the season ended, the athletes were impressed with what they had accomplished even through the struggles of the season.

"This season went pretty well," junior Gabe Hartwig said. "We didn't do the best, but it was fun. It was fun, and we all got along, but we didn't do the best at the games. I hope it will carry our chemistry that we had for the next season."

The varsity boys soccer team's season was difficult, but the guys fought through and had a fun season. Moreover, the Varsity Football team began their season with uncertainty because of the loss of many seniors. They also had a new coach, Coach Ches. These big changes ended up being a big benefit with their record being the best yet in eight years.

"I think it was better than last year," junior Vince Russo said. "It was our best record in eight years. The teams that we

beat, we blew them out. Some were close games, and some were not as close, but it was a good season overall. I'd say the lows of the season were not making plays that I should have and the mental aspect. I wasn't always in my right mind set. Making big plays, getting touch downs, and doing my job were the highs. I think the new coach has changed everything like the culture and family. He is turning everything around for the good!"

During the fall, one of the sports is girls' swim and dive. Every year they do a dual meet, and this year the girls' team won against Warren Woods Tower. They also came in second at the championships.

"It was good; we won dual championships, so we did good," freshman Aubryn Minor said. "I really liked making new friends on the team, especially since I was a freshman. The two weeks before the championships, we had to do Hell Week. I hope that the new captains that we picked are like how they were this season."

As the season ends, the athletes wrap up their season with the results of how their sport went.

HENRY FORD II NEWS BITES

Legally Blonde | Auditions for the school's spring musical, Legally Blonde, are Jan. 12 and 13 at 2:30 p.m. in Room 427. Callbacks are Jan. 15 at 2:30 p.m. in the PAC. Auditions are open to all students.

Lip Dub | Students can scan the Lip Dub QR code to vote for the final song in this year's Lip Dub.

Coloring Book Drive | HOSA is holding their annual Coloring Book Donation Drive from Dec. 2-18. Students are encouraged to donate unused coloring books and crayons for children's hospital floors. Donation drop boxes are located in the main office and room 526.

The Official Falcon Juice | Students and staff may show their school ID for a special Falcon Juice discount at Sterling Heights Nutrition & Energy.

DECA District 7 Conference | On Saturday, Jan. 10, the District 7 Conference for DECA students will compete against other chapters to earn their spot at the State Career Development Conference.

deca.org

Letters | Letters to the editors are encouraged and will be screened for libel, irresponsibility and obscenity. The editorial board may edit or shorten letters as long as the meaning is unchanged. All letters must be signed and include a phone number for confirmation. Request to withhold the writers name from publication for good reason will be considered. Letters can be sent to the above e-mail address or dropped off in "The Generator" room.

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Errors | Factual errors will be corrected on the opinion page or in the news brief written upon request and verification.

DOWN TO BUSINESS

DECA chapter prepares for state and international competitions by creating school-wide events, fundraising and earning money for multiple causes

SERVE TO WIN

Teams clash to face off against girls varsity volleyball

by Dara Razoky
Students packed up the stands to watch boys volleyball teams face off against each other in hopes of winning to go against girls varsity volleyball.
Organized and run by DECA and student council to help raise money for struggling families, teams of six faced off in the gym for a volleyball tournament. The winners of the tournament had the opportunity to go against the girls varsity volleyball team.
"We had to organize the bracket, the timing, and figure it out," junior Lia Raciti said. "We went up to 15 until it reached the semi finals, where we upped it to 21. We made around \$500+ from the event. Student council also set up the best dressed competi-

tion for the tournament."
"There were a total of 16 teams competing to win. DECA picked students from their program to help referee the game. Some varsity volleyball players volunteered to help run the tournament.
"I helped referee and played with the girls volleyball team at the end," sophomore Addison Keller said. "My favorite part was calling out the scores which was fun. During timeouts, me and the other referees would discuss the play. I was with DECA, and they helped set up everything with student council before I was there. My friends asked me to become a referee."
"The referees were careful about their calls, making sure they all agreed on a decision. Referees were positioned at the end lines of

the court and raised their flags to the sky if the play was out-of-bounds.
"Our team name was 'Kiss my Ace,'" senior Ashton Chang said. "I was playing outside hitter. My favorite moment was when I hit seven or more aces in a row. I think lost cause we were just inexperienced as a team. We made it to the finals and lost to the girls 15-21. We only trained once, so I think we did well by winning the competition, then having to verse the varsity girls volleyball team."
"The volleyball event was a success with the money that had been raised. All was accomplished through DECA and student council setting up the event and bringing out teams and events during the game.



photo by Taylor Dena

DONATIONS BRING DIGNITY

Students and staff collect hygiene supplies to help families in need



all photos by Creative Commons

by Grace Kavanagh
Boxes and bins fill up fast with soap, toothpaste, and shampoo bottle donations as DECA runs a personal care donation drive.
"We asked teachers to put a box inside of their classrooms," junior Gim Tavolacci said. "We thought it was important that every kid got items that they shouldn't have a problem getting, especially during the holiday season."

"The teachers helped us out and got lots of donations from students," junior Kodla Victor said. "There were boxes and bins full of products for the foster kids this holiday season."

"I donated a few items for this donation drive for the foster kids," senior Jacya Duddle said. "These kids deserve to have things that they need to take care of themselves."

"I brought in a whole box of toothpaste and about 30 toothbrushes for this drive," senior Kimmy Tran said. "Me and some of my friends came together to bring that many items in for these kids."

Q&A

by Sarah Borland and Grace Kavanagh

Q: What project are you doing and what does it mean to you?

"The project I'm doing is the Sales project and it's basically about planning fundraisers/ events to help raise money for DECA members to attend competitions and conferences. This project means a lot to me because I get to directly support our chapter and give more people the chance to experience DECA. Also, I've learned so much about marketing and organizing events, and it's fun to be involved with the school and get creative with fundraising ideas."

junior Lia Raciti

Q: What does your project mean to you, what inspired it?

"My project is important because we are spreading awareness about the importance of being smart with your money to the youth. My partner Kaitlyn and I came up with the idea because we wanted to connect with younger kids in an impactful way, and we wanted to go to different schools to teach them."
junior Sarah Leseberg

Q: What is the significance of your project, and how did the idea originate?

"This project means so much to me and my group members because it will leave a lasting impact on the community and in children's lives. After recognizing that mental health is an issue in children and how the lack of proper hygiene can lead to feelings of insecurity and shame, it was important for us to create a system to prevent the lasting effects a lack of detergent can have on families."
senior Angelina Yalda

HEALTHY HABITS

by Sarah Borland
Staying clean, healthy, and ready to learn, children are taught good habits as hygiene kits are donated to them.
Students at many elementary schools received hygiene kits this week, helping to make sure that children have the essential tools they need to stay clean and healthy.
"I think it's really cool that the school is giving us these kits," senior Julia Santo said. "It makes it easier to stay clean and healthy every day."
"The kits are about more than just supplies. They teach kids how to take care of themselves. They also help families in so many ways, especially if it is hard for them to get these supplies."

"It's great that they get to learn about hygiene early," freshman Eli Morris said. "Starting habits like washing hands and brushing teeth young really helps later in life."
The kits also teach responsibility. Learning good habits early helps kids later in life. They can learn about hygiene while they are still young and get in a habit for when they are older.
"Honestly, I wish I had something like this when I was in elementary school," freshman Anthony Pace said. "It's nice that these kids are getting support they didn't have before."
By giving out hygiene kits and teaching healthy habits, it helps students stay clean, confident, and ready to learn every day.



photo by Angilia Nikko

by Olivia Brylkowski
Ping pong paddles smacked, students cheered, and sweat dripped as students kicked off their very own student run tournament.
Seniors Joey Grillo, Alban Gjelaj, and Dante Zefi created and ran a ping pong tournament on Nov 6 for classmates that signed up during all lunches.
"The decisions and planning of the tournament wasn't too difficult, but the day of it felt pretty stressful," Grillo said. "We had to make sure all the tables were set

PADDLE BATTLE

up, and during the tournament, people who didn't sign tried to play, and we couldn't let that happen. You just don't really realize how much work and attention you really have to do."
The ping pong tournament hosted by students is one of many opportunities for them to step into leadership roles and bring others together, all while gaining valuable experience and raising money to fund future plans. Even though events at schools can have secured equipment, a set location, and confirmed contestants, the process still brings stress because of the possibility of something wrong. Whether it's not being able to manage time, dealing with injuries, or making sure there is no interference from peers, the students who organize these events have to be able to handle unforeseeable situations and take on that leadership role.
"Being involved makes me feel good in a sense that I am involved with the peers in the school," Gjelaj said. "It's important for me to be involved because it's a way for me to leave a good impression."

Students from all grades were able to sign up and participate in the tournament which not only could be exciting for the students but allow them to see what is possible for their education, as the DECA group leaders who ran and created the event could be seen as role models. The ping pong tournament is one of many examples of students stepping up and creating something for not only for themselves but others around them, which could leave fellow classmates feeling inspired to do something great and be somebody great for the future.
"Our DECA project is about helping the community to be wiser with their financial decisions," Zefi said. "The ping pong tournament helped us fund prizes for future events. Our next plan is probably going to elementary schools and doing a presentation about our DECA project."
"The paddles may have stopped, but the impact of the student-run tournament continues as they finalize their project."

TAKING THE LEAD

Students lead Nov. 4 career fair as part of DECA project

by Evan Schroeder
What started as a simple DECA project turned into a day of opportunity as students learned about all the different careers present at the career fair.
A DECA project run by students had a major turn out for a career fair, so students could learn about all the different jobs for their future.
"It taught me how to talk to professionals efficiently and it was also a huge event that taught project management skills," DECA President senior Anne Fiana said. "I learned that planning early is crucial for success and being prepared

for last minute switches is also important. This will improve my competitions by serving as an example as a big event that I learned from, showing judges my project management skills."
To add, another student who helped in running the career fair with Anne pointed out the struggles that they had in people joining the career fair.
"It was most proud of the turnout and all the students who showed up and talked to the people who were there to explain what they do for a living," senior Vito Pantalone said. "We asked people to see if they had anyone in their family if they would want to come and explain their careers. The biggest challenge was getting people to sign up because we had to rely on other people to ask their family members or friends to sign up for this event."

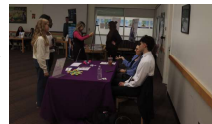


photo by Devin Rasky

While the students were setting everything up and figuring out how to get people to sign up, DECA sponsor Jennifer Milke helped and guided them throughout the project.
"It helped the students of this chapter to develop communication skills and leadership, also helping them with executing a big event," Milke said. "They learned multiple 21st century skills such as communication, problem solving, team work, and critical thinking. Overall, it gave the students a chance to learn about all the different careers in the world, not just the basic ones. The students get to understand more, and a lot of alumni came back for this and gave back to the community."
By the end of the DECA career fair, students left feeling more inspired about the future.

TINSELED TUNES

Students have their favorite Christmas songs and artists

■ by Elizia Lala

’Tis the season where Christmas music is in the air, and students begin to listen to their favorite festive tunes.

Students look forward to playing their favorite Christmas music every year, as the holidays begin to roam. With favorite albums, songs, or artists, Christmas playlists are made that range from old Christmas classics to new Christmas pop.

“I like ‘Christmas Kisses’ because it’s more fun than most Christmas music,” senior Lily Sheats said. “I usually don’t listen to Ariana Grande, but I still love this album.”

“Christmas Kisses” is a pop and R&B EP that was released on Dec. 13, 2013. Christmas pop has been a big part of Christmas music for a long time, famous albums being “Wrapped in Red” by Kelly Clarkson, “White Christmas” by Bing Crosby, and “Merry Christmas” by Mariah Carey. From these albums, people find their favorite Christmas songs that can even come

from movies.

“Christmas Time is Here” plays during ‘A Charlie Brown Christmas Movie,’ so it reminds me of Christmas when I was little,” senior Anna Fugelsang said. “It brings me a lot of nostalgia, and I feel that it encapsulates the sound of Christmas.”

Many students’ favorite Christmas songs stem from nostalgic movies, and they can’t get enough of the childish joy it may bring them. Famous soundtracks from Christmas movies are “The Polar Express,” “You’re a Mean One, Mr. Grinch” from “How the Grinch Stole Christmas,” and “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” from “Meet Me in St. Louis.” All of these beloved, classic movies have their own soundtracks that people find to love.

“I love Christmas music because it makes me feel so jolly,” junior Ropheca Andrew said. “I think Christmas is a very happy time of the year, and music contributes a lot to that happy atmosphere.”

That being said, students put together their favorite festive tunes as Christmas is in the air.



photo by Creative Commons



photo by Taylor Derra

UNWRAPPING THE PLAY

The school’s theatre brings holiday magic to the stage with a comedic yet romantic retelling

■ by Margaret Castillo and Grace Barry

As the cast bows and the curtains fall, the audience applauds the winter play.

On Dec. 4, 5, and 6, the theatre put on ‘The Holiday Channel Christmas Movie Wonderthon.’ As the play came to a wrap, both the cast and audience walked away with various thoughts and feelings.

“I really loved ‘The Holiday Channel Christmas Wonderthon’ performance at school,” freshman Myssia Gilbert said. “Everyone’s been talking about it, and now I’ve seen that it turned out amazing and beyond my expectations. I love Christmas themed plays, so this was the perfect play for me to see.”

“The Holiday Channel Christmas

and ‘Thursday.’ Eventually, as the show got closer, rehearsal was more frequent and spanned until 5-6:30 p.m., with some Saturday rehearsals as well to perfect the play.

“The scariest part of performing is if something goes wrong, it could be with the set or backstage,” junior Cooper Looman said. “The best day of performing was Friday night because the audience was very responsive, which gave us energy on the stage. This play was different because it was a comedy, which means every aspect had to be perfect for it to be a successful show. This may be my favorite play because of how funny it was and the happy memories I made.”

With the drop of the final curtain, the cast starts to prepare for the musical in the spring.

WICKED: FOR GOOD

■ by Leah Pulice

The sequel to the Broadway movie adaptation “Wicked,” “Wicked: For Good” is in theaters now.

Green and pink light spills across the screen as “Wicked: For Good” re-imagines the untold story of Oz, pulling viewers into a world where the bond between two witches becomes the heart of a blockbuster.

Picking up right from where the first “Wicked” left off, fans are brought back to the land of Oz with a continuation and end to the story. Bringing new music, character development, and new plot details, the movie starts with a small time jump from the first movie, showing the start of Glinda taking over Emerald City, the continuation of the Wizard and Madame Morrible capturing the animals of Oz, and Elphaba coming to the rescue via her levitating broom stick.

The first part of “Wicked” adapts the first half of the musical which is the origin story of Glinda, portrayed by Ariana Grande, and Elphaba, portrayed by Cynthia Erivo, showing how they meet and the development of their friendship. “Wicked: For Good” adapts the second half of the plot which shifts the story and starts to overlap with familiar events from the Wizard of Oz, the buildup to the actual events from the classic movie that started it all.

Part one keeps many of the best-known songs and introduces the characters through spectacular musical sequences. Part two has additional musical numbers

created for the film adaptation which may be appreciated for depth and enjoyment, but they are less memorable and not as good as the film’s first iconic songs.

During the decision making and directing of “Wicked: For Good,” famous director Jon M. Chu made the decision not to show Dorothy’s face in the film during the end of the movie. He said he didn’t want to distract the attention away from Elphaba and Glinda: it is their movie and journey after all. He also says he did not want to change people’s perspective on Dorothy and Judy Garland’s performance. It was a homage to Broadway as well as a creative director decision. This did, however, cause discussion among movie goers. In fact, it isn’t Dorothy’s story, and everyone will already picture Garland’s face when they think of Dorothy. Therefore, a recasting would just cause comparison and negativity around the film. Also, seeing as in the original Broadway show Dorothy was portrayed simply as a shadow, it doesn’t matter that her face wasn’t shown. Many found appreciation for Chu through this decision to do something different while also paying respect to the beloved character and original artist.

Having watched both movies multiple times, and having the sound tracks on repeat, “Wicked: For Good” was great. It had a beautiful yet heartbreaking resolution to the story. It teaches an important way about wickedness and how it comes in different ways and also how certain people can change someone’s life for the better.

IS IT ALL FOR THE RESUME?

As extracurricular participation rises, students debate whether commitment comes from passion or resume-building

■ Staff Editorial

With hallways lined with club posters and sign-up sheets, students rush to join another activity. However, beneath the buzz of involvement lies an uneasy question: how many are driven by true curiosity, and how many are only in it for the benefits of college?

While some students suspect that club involvement is often used to boost resumes, many argue that genuine interest still drives participation. They believe most students join clubs to explore passions, build community, and pursue activities that they truly care about, rather than checking a box for college applications. But why do students do it out of

genuine interest? For many, it is a way to connect with people who share similar passions. As academic pressure increases,

Do students have genuine interest in being involved in clubs or is it just for resume building?

12 **Yes, students have genuine interest in being involved in clubs**

8 **No, it's just for resume building.**

clubs offer a space where students can express themselves, explore hobbies, and find a sense of belonging. The shift from obligation to enthusiasm shows why authentic motivation continues to play a

major role in club participation.

Some students believe that some people join just for resume-building, which isn’t necessarily a bad thing. It could depend on the club that people join. For example, DECA is a club that requires a lot of effort and is probably a club students should not just join because they want to resume build. Maybe students could consider another club that may not have that many requirements in order for them to put it on their resume and not disappoint the club. To be fair, there is nothing wrong with just joining a club for resume-building because it is beneficial for universities to see on an application.

In summary, joining a club because one feels eager to do so is a common pattern with students, and it comes with many benefits. Also, to just join for resume-building is also a normal thing to do but might require some effort depending on the club.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

JOINING CLUBS JUST FOR RESUME BUILDING

by sophomore Roshan Padmanabhan

“I think it’s selfish cause there isn’t really love for the club you’re joining, and it’s just for show. You ruin the fun if you’re not involved.”

UCS CHANGING GRADES

by freshman Arbor Baretta

“I don’t think it’s a really sweet thing to do for others. It’s not a big deal, but it is crazy since you get into middle school much earlier than before, and that’s a lot of change for other kids.”

DECA PROJECTS

by junior Sheridan Galloway

“I feel like it’s a really sweet thing to do for others. It’s good community service and helps affect other people positively. This can have a domino effect where this charity spreads to other people.”

ENVY, COMPARISON, AND CONFLICT

■ by Danil Leybin

As the holiday season approaches, more Americans are finding that social media is turning moments of joy into a competition for online perfection.

The holidays used to be about togetherness, like messy kitchens, mismatched sweaters, and laughter that didn’t need a filter. But now, thanks to social media, the season feels more like a competition than a celebration. Instead of living the moment, people stage it for likes

and validation, trading genuine connections with family for digital applause. The result? A holiday that looks perfect on a screen but feels empty than ever offline.

To be fair, why do celebrities feel the need to have a photo shoot just for the holidays? I don’t believe that taking such detailed pictures that cost money is very beneficial for the public. However, it’s not just the holidays, it goes on year round. According to Mischa Anouk Smith from “Marie Claire,” we “run

the risk of turning the world into a backdrop, but real places aren’t props and real people live there.”

Therefore, what’s the point of taking fake photos? There are plenty of vacation spots that are so beautiful instead of using some sort of backdrop that you can take pictures of any season, especially the holidays.

Yet, what does the effect on these holiday photo shoots have on people? People sit and scroll through social media while watching tons of people sit in front of a fake back-

drop and fake decorations which are edited by a professional just for a bunch of likes. People compare themselves to these posts and think negatively about their tradition.

According to Alyssa Greene from “E-Counseling,” “reducing your social media use doesn’t mean you’ll have a picture-perfect holiday, but it can help you shift your focus.” That is something I agree with; instead of scrolling through celebrities’ media, stop comparing your holidays with another person’s.

Social media has transformed the holidays from a season of presence into a season of competition. The pressure to just impress people online steals attention from what really matters: the warmth and family, comfort of tradition, and the joy of simply being together. If people want to really feel the spirit of the holidays, they need to put their phones down, stop trying to become perfect, and start living in the moment again with no fancy photo shoots.

UCS RETHINKS GRADES

The district adjusts grade levels to better support student transition

■ by Sophia Mulka and Grace Waske

UCS has been speaking about major grade shifts in the future.

In 2027, UCS is planning to take 6th grade out of elementary schools and add it to middle school, as well as taking 9th grade out of middle schools and adding it to high school.

According to “Utica Community Schools,” Robert Monroe states, “We would have an opportunity to reimagine how a middle school experience can support the unique needs of students

in 6th through 8th grade and support a successful transition to high school in the 9th grade. The process will include consideration of best practices and research, current UCS building utilization, the academic and mental health needs of students, and timeline.”

As a student who had 9th grade in high school, it was the right choice. Students are mature and ready for the high school experience for freshman year.

According to the Department of Energy, “In a survey of middle

grade school administrators in 2000, 65 percent of respondents selected the 6-8 grade configuration as the ‘ideal’ form of organization.”

Sixth graders are too mature to be in elementary school with kids as young as 4 years old. Also, more time in middle school prepares kids more for high school.

Therefore, these changes seem like the best decision for the future students to come.



photo by Creative Commons

MERRY MOVIES

■ by Dara Rozoky

As Christmas glows on the TV, students discuss what movies they will be watching this Christmas.

Students and staff decide what movies to watch for the holidays at home this Christmas. Many hold traditions every year and rewatch favorite movies.

“I love watching ‘Elf’ with my mom,” senior Julia Merzak said. “I also rewatch the first ‘Home Alone’ movie multiple times once December starts.”

“Every year, I watch ‘The Grinch’ with my sister,” senior Isabella Hillwig said. “Ever since we were little, it has become a tradition to watch it on Christmas Eve.”



photo by Grace Karanagh



photo by Sophia Mulka

A CAFFEINATED DEBATE

by Sophia Mulka and Grace Waske

Dunkin'

There has been a debate over the years: Starbucks or Dunkin'?

Three drinks from Starbucks and Dunkin' were reviewed, and one of the two places were picked for having better holiday drinks.

The hot Peppermint Mocha Latte from Dunkin' was a 7/10. The peppermint flavor was not too overpowering, yet the drink could have used a little bit more mocha flavor.

The iced White Chocolate Signature Latte from Dunkin' was a 4/10. The whipped cream slightly helped to balance out the strong coffee flavor, but the coffee was super strong and lacked the white chocolate.

Starbucks

The hot Caramel Brulee from Starbucks was a 7/10. The coffee was sweet and felt like Christmas in a cup. Although the flavor was very good, the caramel flavor was not very strong.

The Iced Gingerbread Chai from Starbucks was a 9.5/10. The drink had the perfect amount of gingerbread flavor. However, they added a lot of cold foam, making the drink a little too sweet.

When going to Dunkin', the iced Cookie Butter Cloud Latte is a perfect mix of coffee and sweet. When going to Starbucks, the iced Gingerbread Chai is delicious and tastes like a gingerbread cookie. When getting a drink with cold foam on the top, mixing it in will add to the flavor of the drink.

THE GREAT GIFT GRAB

by Margaret Castillo

As Christmas approaches, students rush to get their lists ready.

With Christmas right around the corner, students are making their list and checking it twice. Some of the most popular gifts being wished for are clothes, shoes, and accessories.



photo by Creative Commons

"I want a Moncler jacket," freshman Anthony Pace said. "I want it because it is cool, and I like the style. I just think it looks good, and I need a new coat?"



photo by Anna Harrison

"I want a pink Hollister hoodie," junior Alexa Pauluk said. "I love being comfy, and Hollister sweatshirts are super cozy and keep me warm during the winter. I really liked the color and how oversized it looked. Hollister hoodies are super soft and great material as well. You can never have too many hoodies, and it is super convenient for cold weather."



photo by Elizia Lala

"I want UGG Ultra Minis," junior Kaitlyn Murphy said. "I want them because they are cute for winter, and they are warm. They are also popular and in style."



photo by Margaret Castillo

"I want a digital camera," sophomore Jorge Munoz said. "I want it because all my friends have it, so I want it also. When you take pictures it looks cool and aesthetic."



photo by Margaret Castillo

"I want the Bashful Bunny with a Christmas tree Jellycat," junior Maya George said. "It is super cute, and it would be so perfect as a Christmas decoration for my bedroom. I've been looking at Christmas list ideas on TikTok, and that's where I first knew I wanted it. I've wanted it more as it's gotten closer to Christmas, and I've started decorating."

COOKIES THAT SPARK JOY

From classic favorites to new varieties of cookies, these bites bring holiday cheer

by Sarah Borland

From classic snicker doodles to colorful sugar cookies, students celebrate the holiday season with their favorite cookies.

Students' cookie preferences reveal a mix of creativity, nostalgia, and convenience. Some love the hands-on fun of decorating sugar cookies with frosting and sprinkles, while others stick to the tried-and-true taste of snicker doodles. There are even fans of pre-made, store-bought cookies for their easy preparation and festive designs, showing that holiday joy comes in many forms.

"My favorite holiday cookies are snicker doodles," senior Brooke Zupan said. "They are very yummy and delightful. I make Christmas cookies with my family every year, and snicker doodles have always been my favorite to make and eat."

Many students enjoy the cinnamon flavor of snicker doodles, which are a classic, but others also enjoy the simple taste of sugar cookies. Also, sugar cookies can be fun to decorate with many differ-

ent designs.

"My favorite holiday cookies are sugar cookies," senior Jaclyn Dudde said. "They are fun to make and also to decorate. They also taste great. I decorate it with a bunch of frosting and sprinkles, but I use the whole bottle."

Joy from cookies lasts year-round from every holiday. From homemade sugar cookies to the pre-made ones on the shelf, every cookie still brings happiness to the holidays.

"My favorite holiday cookies are the pre-made ones from the store with the characters on them by Pillsbury," senior Rickie Mayer said. "I make them for almost every holiday but especially Christmas. In my opinion, they are the best tasting holiday cookie and the easiest to make."

Whether the cookies are baked from scratch or picked off the store shelf, the aroma brightens up the house for the holidays. These treats bring friends and families together to celebrate the season one sweet bite at a time.



photo by Elizia Lala

THAT'S A WRAP

Students hold their anticipation for Spotify Wrapped to reveal their year in sound

by Olivia Brylkowski

Click! Listeners will get a recap of their year-long listening history, bringing back countless memories.

Happening again, Spotify Wrapped is expected to be released in late November to early December of 2025, revealing listeners' total listening times, top artists and songs, and so much more.

"I don't really care about Spotify Wrapped," sophomore Robert Hotaj said. "All it really does is tell me how many hours I listen to music for and who I listen to the most, which I kind of already know. The other stuff is just kind of useless."

Once the end of the year rolls around, users of Spotify are given highlights of their top songs, favorite artists, most played genres, and total minutes spent listening. But as this annual tradition continues, fans find themselves disappointed with the summaries Spotify creates for them, leaving some to lose interest altogether.

"I don't believe it's going to fall off," sophomore Daniel Gerber said. "It does have some uninteresting features, but it can be a way for people to connect through music."

Spotify seems to be continuing its annual Wrap tradition during the winter time despite controversy, like Spotify Wrapped 2024, when Drake was listed as the number one artist for thousands of listeners who hadn't actually streamed his music. Despite these frustrations, fans come together to share similar problems across various platforms and bond but also connect with similar music tastes and favorite artists.

"I would say Spotify Wrapped has been pretty accurate because it told me my most played artist was my favorite artist in past years," sophomore Jayden Smartaj said. "I'm sure it'll be the same this year."

As listeners tap through the multiple highlights Spotify has personally created for them, they are reminded of moments that shaped their year.