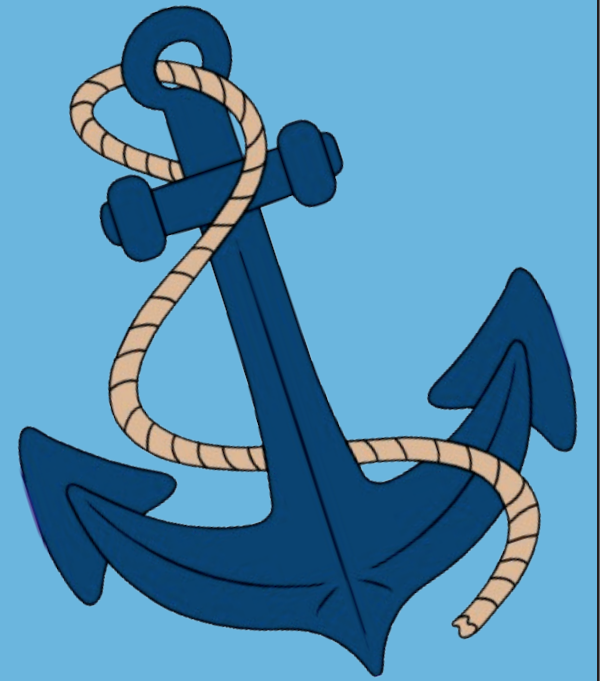


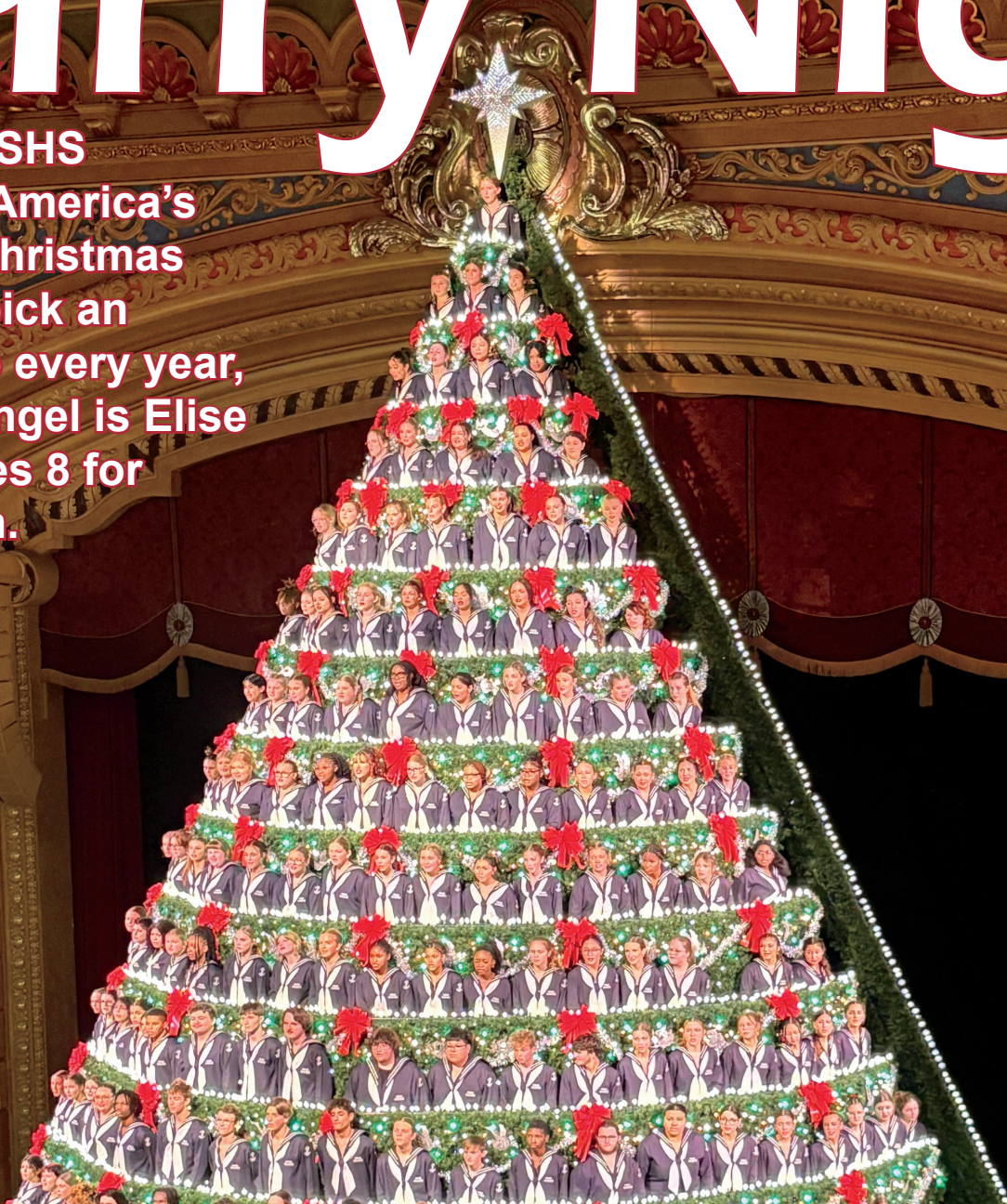
The Sailors'

LOG



Starry Night

Every year the MSHS Allegros sing in America's Tallest Signing Christmas Tree. They also pick an angel for the tree every year, and this year's angel is Elise Mosely. See pages 8 for more information.





Stars On Ice



Student shares about passion for the beauty of figure skating

Stars on Ice is a wonderful blend of music, dramatic movements, and hard-working people from around the world coming together to do something they're passionate about: figure skating.

Started in 1986 by retired American figure skater Skott Hamilton, Stars On Ice is an Olympic run event that takes place in the Spring and holiday seasons, usually in America, Canada, Japan, or China.

The people who participate in the event are world champions, elite skaters, or professional athletes.

This year, during the holiday season, it will be held in Canada.

American skaters Ilia Malinin, Evan Bates, and Madison Chock, three incredibly skilled skaters, will all be participating in the tour. In previous years, legendary skaters Yuzuru Hanyu, Nathan Chen, and Joannie Rochette have also been a part of the program, wowing the audience with unforgettable performances (my personal favorite being Yuzuru Hanyu's One Summer's Day).

This season, I'm most excited for Ilia Malinin's performance. Malinin is an extremely gifted skater, doing flips that were previously illegal; he's even been deemed "QuadGod" by his fans for his impressive quadruple axel. Malinin has been a figure skater since he was six years old. Inspired by his parents, Tatiana Malinina and Roman Skorniakov, his career started in 2019 when he competed in the Philadelphia Summer International. Since then, he's only grown in popularity, inspiring others to start skating and pushing his fellow competitors to put more work into their routine.

In the past Stars on Ice programs, the performance of Yuzuru Hanyu, two time olympic champion from Japan whom I'd mentioned earlier, has awe-struck me. Yuzuru has been a skater for, essentially, his



entire life. Put on the ice at only four years old, he's become one of the most complete skaters of all time. In 2014, at the winter Olympics, he became the first skater to score over 100 points in a short program, scoring a shocking 101.45.

Yuzuru participated in the Olympics until 2022 when he retired due to both a persistent ankle injury and no longer wanting to feel the pressure of competitive evaluations.

Despite this, he still skates. Hosting his own shows that usually act as fundraisers for repairs and reconstruction after natural disasters strike Japan.

His shows are beautiful, to say the least. I feel that "elegance" doesn't quite describe the fluidity and ardor that can be seen when he's on the ice. Out of everything he does, whether it's the jumps, spins, or anything else, to me, his generosity and hydroblade are the most mesmerizing. Myself and numerous other "fanyu" thank him for his contribution to figure skating, and the world.

Circling back to Stars On Ice, I look forward to a balanced mix of graceful and spunky. The variation of ages and freedom of song choice almost guarantees an

interesting and wondrous event, best categorized as a collection of very talented people from all sorts of places and backgrounds doing the same thing with their own artistic whirls and bounds.

The participants who have been confirmed to attend range from returners to newbies, some being world champions, most notably Ilia Malinin and Alysa Liu, others being champions of their country, such as Amber Glenn and Jason Brown.

I haven't been a fan of figure skating for long, only a few months, but Stars On Ice was one of the reasons I became interested. I came across it on my YouTube feed, thought 'why not' and instantly fell in love with the sport. Bringing it up to people I see daily has made me realize how many people have, or used to have, a passion for it too, which deepens my interest and builds my admiration for the change in vibes since the 90's versus now.

Skott Hamilton, the creator of Stars On Ice, was one of my mother's favorite skaters. She recently showed me one of his programs, and I could feel his enthusiasm through the screen decades later. He maintained the same amount of energy throughout the entire skate, impressing the judges, audience, and myself.

Overall, figure skating is a painfully underrated sport. Overshadowed by football, soccer, and basketball, despite being arguably more difficult. Considering how difficult and dangerous it is to even stand on the ice without falling, the fact that people can develop the talent of dancing, flips and jumps on ice is baffling in the best way possible.

To conclude, figure skating is a truly beautiful sport that requires confidence and flexibility. Stars On Ice has acted as a way for skaters to connect and befriend one another outside of competition; it's been the spark that has inspired so many aspiring skaters and helped fuel people's respect and appreciation for other nations' cultures.



By Ava Hardy,
Staff Writer

The Sailors'
LOG



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Our Voice is the opinion message selected by the editorial staff of *The Sailors' Log*. Your Voice is the letters to the editor section. All letters must be signed.

from the editors

New trimester, new you? Nope, same you.

With the start of the new trimester, many students are viewing this as a "fresh start." However, we at the Sailor's Log feel that everyone should be realistic and realize that they aren't actually going to change that much.

If you had trouble completing your work, and paying attention last trimester, you still will after the first week of this trimester.

Simply starting over with the vague intention to be better and no solid plans to do so, will never work out.

Personal improvement requires solid goals and a plan to achieve those goals.

As can be heard in most any class, students nowadays struggle with procrastination above most anything else; thus, sticking to a goal will be a problem for most.

This general attitude from everyone that next trimester will be better has annoyed everyone on this newspaper staff. As the people who always have a finger on the pulse of our school culture, we know better than most that this trimester will be the exact same.

People will procrastinate, struggle, complain, and annoy everyone.

So as we move into this next trimester, if you don't actually intend to change at all and are still perpetuating the idea that this upcoming trimester will be a "fresh start," stop. It won't be.

For you at least, but for the newspaper staff, we are looking forward to lots of growth in the coming trimester.

As we recognize the flaws in this typical "growth mindset" we will be able to improve immeasurably.

We don't intend to change what is already somewhat working for us, but continuing this system of writing, editing, and publishing from last trimester is sure to lead to massive improvement upon it.

In summary, you probably can't improve or change, but we can.

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Let Them Eat Cake

President Trump throws Great Gatsby party night before SNAP benefits are cutoff during government shutdown

There are moments in history when the cruelty of the powerful is so theatrical that it feels scripted. Trump's Great Gatsby-themed party was one of such moments. A glittering spectacle of champagne towers and roaring twenties nostalgia filled Mar-a-Lago while tens of millions of Americans were denied SNAP benefits. The timing was not just bad; it was obscene and repulsive.

The Gatsby theme was not chosen at random. Fitzgerald's novel was a warning about hollow decadence, and about the cruelty of elites who dance while others drown. Yet here was President Trump, turning a cautionary tale into a costume party.

The choice of theme could not have been more grotesquely fitting. *The Great Gatsby* is a novel about the hollow excess of the idle rich, who throw glittering parties while the country teeters on the edge of collapse. Trump repurposed it as the backdrop for his latest spectacle. The irony does not just write itself; it practically screams. A cautionary tale about decadence and ruin became, in his rotting hands (quite literally), a celebration of exactly the kind of oblivious privilege the book was meant to critique.

And the timing? Hours before 42 million Americans were stripped of their food assistance, the president staged a costume ball at his private golf club, complete with a slogan that read, unbelievably, "A Little Party Never Killed Nobody." One wonders if anyone involved had actually read Fitzgerald's novel, since the entire plot hinges on parties that do, in fact, destroy lives. It was less a Halloween bash, and more a lame reenactment of Marie Antoinette's "let them eat cake," while Trump built his fabulous, and cheap, knockoff of Versailles on the ruins of the East Wing.

Marie Antoinette's supposed line (which, yes, has been debunked), "Let them eat cake," has always been a shorthand for elite indifference. Trump's "Gatsby gala" was its modern echo. The message was loud and clear: "hunger is your problem, not mine."



Artwork by Anna Trasky.



By Shane Thompson, Staff Writer

I cannot help but feel total and complete disgust. I think of the mother at the grocery store, calculating whether she can afford milk and bread. I think of the child who goes to bed with an empty stomach. I think of the elderly man who skips meals to pay for his medicine. And then I picture the chandeliers, the tuxedos, the laughter. The contrast is unbearable. It is not just cruel. It is theatrically cruel.

This was not just tone-deaf. It was a deliberate flaunting of wealth in the face of national suffering. At a moment when families were bracing for higher premiums, small businesses shuttered because of tariffs, and refrigerators went empty, Trump chose to remind the country not of their struggles, but of his comfort. Leadership requires at least the pretense of empathy. Instead, he went out of his way to broadcast the opposite: while millions were losing the ability to put food on the table.

This is not just about one single party. It is about a worldview. A worldview where hunger is invisible, where suffering is irrelevant, where the only thing that matters is

the next spectacle. The Gatsby theme was not an accident. It was a performance of decadence in the face of despair. It was a statement that power means never having to care. Because why would they? They are set for life. Is this not what has sparked revolutions?

The French Revolution was ignited by hunger, by the unbearable sight of peasants starving while the aristocrats feasted in halls filled with priceless art, artifacts, and luxury goods to display wealth. Bread was scarce, desperation was everywhere, and yet the nobles carried on with their banquets as if the cries outside their palace walls were nothing more than background noise. And sure, one could argue that the American people are not literally starving, but they are in numerous figurative ways: whether it be with healthcare, debt, the workforce, or anything else. Meanwhile our nation's leaders and the uber-wealthy sit aside and continue to line their own pockets.

History will not forget this. Just as we remember Marie Antoinette's cake, we will remember Trump's Gatsby gala. We will remember the suffering and the glitter, the disgusting juxtaposition of starvation and champagne. We will remember the despair of knowing that the powerful can dance while the poor starve. We will remember the lesson of *The Great Gatsby* that President Trump ignored, twisted, and inverted.

This party was not just another tone-deaf, elitist party. It was thrown by the leader of the free world. Does this not sound aristocratic? Being ruled by the wealthy elite who do not care about everyday people, past their vote? It is completely insane that we have come to the point where the President of the United States can throw such an ill-timed and insensitive party, and not get any significant press coverage, just a couple headlines over the course of a few days. President Obama wore a tan suit and was dragged through the mud for months by the press. It's clear that the United States doesn't have our priorities straight.

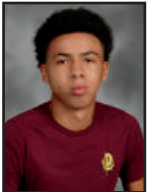
To conclude, we cannot just let them eat cake. I just can't put into words how grotesque this is. This is America's Gatsby moment. We cannot just sit around waiting for our nation's leaders to suddenly grow spines. Trust me, they won't.



"I want a new Xbox for Christmas this year because I can play new games and it'll load faster than my old one."
Dylan Lyonnais, freshman



"For Christmas this year I want new skis because mine are pretty old and don't fit that good so new ones will help me ski better."
Zayne DuBois, sophomore

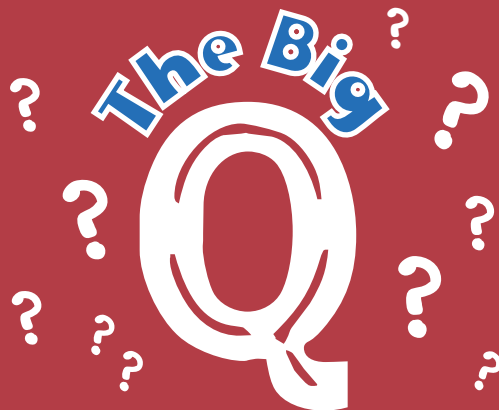


"For Christmas this year I want a new pink iPhone 16 because the back camera on mine is broken and I need to take pictures."
Benji Wright, junior



"Well, I would like a basketball court for Christmas so I can practice basketball."
Rodney Jenkins, senior

What do you want for Christmas and why?



In each edition of *The Sailors' Log*, eight students will be asked their opinion about a current topic.



"For Christmas I want hair styling tools like hair circles because I want to achieve the Victoria's Secret blowout look."
Doniela Arias, freshman



"I want a really big, fluffy, soft blanket for Christmas this year because it'll help me with all of my naps."
Courtney Darrow, sophomore



"I want a lot of new jewelry for Christmas because a lot of my jewelry right now is tarnished so I need to refresh my stock."
Hailey Parker, junior



"I want a new pair of Nike tennis shoes because I have some really beat New Balances right now that just aren't cutting it."
Lydia Ogle, senior

PUMPKINS OR PRESENTS

Debating the *The Nightmare Before Christmas*' principal holiday

By Delaney Farrington,
Staff Writer

Few films divide households, friend groups, and overly invested movie buffs quite like Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Each year, as soon as the first pumpkin spice product hits shelves (mid-July, shockingly), the argument begins again: Is it a Halloween or a Christmas movie?

Lines are drawn. Holiday spirit is tested. Someone inevitably shouts, "Just because it has snow in it doesn't make it a Christmas movie."

In this spirited debate, we explore both sides. The Halloween Loyalists, those who argue that the film is a Halloween movie treat this stance with the same seriousness Sally has when she tries to warn Jack about literally anything. Their evidence? Surprisingly solid--certainly sturdier than the mayor's ability to maintain a single facial expression.

The film opens with "This Is Halloween," an anthem so iconic that people who can't remember their own wife's passwords can recite at least six verses. We meet vampires, witches, werewolves, skeletons, and those three trick-or-treating gremlins your parents warned you about: Lock, Shock, and Barrel. Proof that unsupervised children really are the scariest Halloween creatures.

Everything - from the color palette to the lighting, to the public-domain-friendly Gothic vibe - is unmistakably Halloween.

And really, can a movie that begins with a singing corpse inside a pumpkin truly belong to Christmas?

Jack Skellington himself is walking, talking evidence for Team Halloween. If your main character is a skeleton who casually removes his head to recite Shakespeare, you've made your decision. There's no scenario in which Santa Claus and a skeleton king compare resumes and decide they're in the same seasonal category.

When the movie shifts into Christmas mode, it still always returns emotionally and physically to Halloween Town. It's the place where Jack is understood, where zero percent of the population questions why their leader suddenly bursts into song mid-conversation, and where no one files a noise complaint about the annual pumpkin explosion parade.

If home is where the heart is, then *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is carved straight from a jack-o'-lantern.

But then there are the other people who will fight to the (festive) death to prove the movie is a Christmas film. They're ready



Art by Delaney Farrington

to stake their peppermint lattes on it. And honestly? They have some excellent points.

Despite all the bats, skulls, and "please don't ask where I got these limbs" energy, the story's central conflict is undeniably Christmas-driven.

Jack doesn't hijack Earth Day. He chooses Christmas, becomes obsessed with it, studies it with the intensity of a grad student during finals, and then attempts to be Santa.

Granted, he fails spectacularly between gifting shrunken heads to children and unleashing carnivorous toys onto suburban neighborhoods. But the entire film hinges on the theme of Christmas rediscovery.

Jack's identity crisis isn't about rejecting Halloween- it's about yearning for the warmth, wonder, and joy of Christmas.

Sure, he comes back around eventually, but the heart of the movie lies in his longing: in that wide-eyed moment he stumbles into Christmas Town, softly whispering, "... What's this?" like a Victorian man discovering women wear pants now.

That moment alone is enough for some fans to declare this is a Christmas film. If you cry during it (and statistically, or at least according to the experiment I conducted on my boyfriend's family during our annual watch, someone does cry), welcome to Team Christmas. You can't argue that something isn't a Christmas movie when Santa Claus himself literally appears, is captured by children unsupervised (Again: terrifying), imprisoned by Oogie Boogie, rescued heroically, and then returns to deliver presents..

Then, there's the final faction- the peacekeepers. The "why not both?" people. The ones who, when faced with conflict, simply shrug and say, "It's a multiholiday cinematic masterpiece, Brenda."

And truthfully, the film's magic lies in

refusing to be trapped in a single seasonal box.

At its core, the film isn't about pumpkins OR presents- it's about longing, reinvention, purpose, and the kind of self-reflection that might lead you to stand dramatically on a spiral hill while wind machines blow your cape.

Jack's journey resonates year-round. And the moral - "Be yourself, but maybe don't kidnap Santa"- is evergreen.

Most films pick a holiday and stay loyal. *The Nightmare Before Christmas* looked at that tradition, politely declined, and whispered, "What if we just... didn't?"

Its dual setting allows fans of both holidays to feel at home. Halloween lovers get their creepy charm, Christmas fans get a festive cheer. And Oogie Boogie fans get... gambling? And glow-in-the-dark aesthetics? (Honestly, bless them). The movie historically releases, airs, and resurfaces during BOTH holidays. Retailers put out Jack Skellington merch the moment school starts again, and by December, the same mugs are suddenly labeled "Holiday Edition."

When a movie dominates two holiday seasons, it becomes a cinematic hybrid—like a gingerbread house haunted by adorable skeleton bats. The residents of Halloween Town adopt Christmas tasks in their own spooky ways: The vampires ice-skate (on ice they probably stole). The werewolf wraps presents (with claws that make it a miracle anything gets wrapped). The snake eats the Christmas tree. Zero glows like Rudolph, but even brighter. If the characters don't choose a side, why should we? The final verdict? A movie that celebrates both.

So after all the arguments, all the spirited debate, all the people shouting, "Well, actually..." the truth is this: *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is the rare movie that manages to be fully Halloween and fully Christmas without lessening either holiday's charm. It's spooky. It's sweet. It's weird. It's heartfelt. It contains kidnapping, singing corpses, festive snow, and a man whose head pops off like a Pez dispenser. In short, it's perfect.

Whether you watch it in October, December, or year-round like someone who definitely has a Zero plush on their bed, you're honoring the spirit of the film. Because the movie isn't a battle between holidays. It's a celebration of imagination, identity, and the joy of exploring something new—even if that "something" involves accidentally unleashing demonic toys on unsuspecting children. And that, dear reader, is a holiday message we can all get behind.

Eddie and Stella's Top Ten Holiday Season Activities

1. Watch National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation
2. Attack your friends and family with snowballs
3. Set a trap to catch Santa Claus
4. Say you're going to get someone an awesome present and buy them socks
5. Wear a sensible (ugly?) winter sweater
6. Build an epic snowfort to hide from your extended family
7. Tackle snowmen in your neighbor's yard
8. Befriend an elf who wants to be a dentist
9. Syrup
10. Destroy a gingerbread village to build a gingerbread housing complex

Touching TED Talks

Senior project is replaced by new and exciting TED Talk project

By Estella O'Brien,
Editor-in-Chief

The senior project has long been a hurdle for Mona Shores students attempting to complete their senior year; however, this year the English department has decided to add more parameters to the previously vague "senior project" and instead have students research, write, and give a "TED Talk."

"My motivation was wanting to do something that could be tailored to all types of students--not just the ones who are going on to a four-year university," said English teacher, Jolynn Cox. "And I wanted the students to have a say in their learning by choosing something personal to them."

This personal choice and opportunity to be creative has long been an essential aspect of the senior project, and the choice to better define senior projects this year has, perhaps, actually given students more opportunity for creativity, as explained by English teacher, Emelie Santos.

"We evaluated the caliber of senior projects from the year before and came to the conclusion that students just weren't invested in the projects, which resulted in projects that were not in depth," Santos said. "We wanted students to find their voices and share their stories with one another, since it's the stories which tie us all together. We wanted them to learn from and be inspired by one another. We're hoping the human element of the TED Talk has helped students to see the connections among their stories."

Naturally, a big change such as this may result in some growing pains, as students have mixed reactions over this change.

"The TED Talk as a senior project, instead of something of our choosing, is definitely an interesting choice," said senior, Nia Fritz. "I feel like it overemphasises the 'impactful' part and underemphasises the 'creative' part, since you have to write about something from your own life."

This may be the opinion of those familiar with the previous senior projects, but for those unfamiliar, like senior Rick Lewis, the change is a positive one.

"I am not all that familiar with what the senior project choices were before this year being changed into a TED Talk," Lewis said. "But I think it's a good change because the TED Talk allows people to get their own stories out while also giving them an opportunity to talk about something they're really passionate about."

Whether they were total fans of the project or not, Mrs. Santos feels that every student who presented did an excellent job.

"I think they did really well on their projects," Santos said. "I was so proud of them for digging deep and being vulnerable. It takes a great amount of bravery to be so transparent and I was really impressed with how so many of my students were willing to open up. Everyone has a story worth sharing, and a perspective that is worthy of an audience, and I am happy to give them a platform."

Cox definitely feels the same, as this TED Talk project has led to some powerful moments with her students.



Senior Kendra Hylland did her TED talk on the challenges of injuries (Courtesy Photo).

"What I've read and seen so far is amazing," Cox said "I just had a student come up to me and thank me for assigning this project because of the professional interview component. She said it gave her the confidence to reach out to other experts in a field she plans on going into in her future, and she hugged me. That moment right there is anything a teacher can ask for."

With such a strong impact, it is no doubt that this project has been a success. That does not mean, though, that it wasn't challenging for students.

"My experience with completing this project was like my experience with AP Seminar, it didn't really make sense until the research part, which was the easiest," Fritz said. "It was definitely a journey of trying to figure out what to write about and how research could be incorporated into it. But once I got the hang of it, it was pretty easy to finish."

All who completed this project no doubt struggled with choosing a topic, but in the end all chose a topic with personal significance.

"My topic was on how generative AI threatens those in the field of music," Lewis said. "I chose this topic because music is something that is extremely important to me and I hate to see it be swallowed and occluded by AI that can just puke out 50 albums a day while killing our environment at the same time."

As their students completed this project, the teachers did as well, also choosing personal topics which interested them.

"I did my project on Alzheimer's because my father died when I was a freshman in high school with the disease," Cox said. "The rest of my life has been heavily influenced by the disease and his loss, which added to years of undiagnosed anxiety."

By also completing this assignment, Mrs. Cox and Mrs. Santos likely gained a better understanding of exactly what they were asking their students to do, and the opportunities

for personal growth that came with said assignment.

"This was a VERY labor intensive project," Santos said. "I don't think I realized how much work it would take to complete a TED Talk, but it was therapeutic in a way. It gave me the opportunity to do the research on miracles which strengthened my faith even more. I hadn't revisited those dark moments in my life for a while, and forcing myself to go back was actually healing as it allowed me to see the past with a new perspective."

As challenging as it was, in the end, everyone completed and presented their project, and that in itself is a victory.

"I felt like my presentation went well," Fritz said. "I took a few deep breaths before starting it, and then I gave it, and it was over. It generally felt very quick; one moment I was up there and the next I was already done. It gave me a little bit of relief knowing that we had already spent the whole trimester together, and being able to have notes in front of us was a bit comforting, knowing that I didn't have to memorize this entire presentation like AP Seminar."

Lewis had a similar experience, as his project went well despite his challenges with public speaking.

"I feel my presentation went relatively well," Lewis said. "I'm not the greatest public speaker and many of my words kinda mesh together when I get nervous, but all of what I wanted to say was said in at least some way. I was a little disappointed that I couldn't play guitar for my hook. I didn't want to be too loud in the LMC."

While both teachers no doubt feel proud of their students for this accomplishment, Fritz and Lewis also have specific aspects of their project that they're proud of.

"The aspect of my TED Talk that I'm the most proud of is probably the words that I was saying, the paper," Fritz said. "I felt like it was very well written and that I was very TED Talk-y when giving it. I like how I was very nervous, but able to give my presentation to the people in my class."

While Fritz is proud of the presentations she gave, Lewis is more proud of his research.

"The aspect that I'm most proud of in my TED Talk is the research I did during it," Lewis said. "I had already had a major disdain for generative AI, but I honestly hadn't had my own eyes opened to just how much what I was writing about meant to others, either. We had to conduct an interview with someone as part of our research, and my interviewee Charles Schaub had some excellent insight on how music was crucial to him. I didn't realize the impact of generative AI on what people love."

The choice to change, or at least add parameters, to the classic "senior project" was not easy; however, the TED Talk project offers growth opportunities for many seniors, and that is perhaps the true point of the "senior project." The research, interviewing, writing, and public speaking included in this project are designed to push students out of their comfort zones, and Mrs. Santos has a final message for students afraid of such improvement.

"I know it can be nerve wracking to speak in front of your peers," Santos said. "However, I hope that after it is all done, students walk away with a sense of confidence that bolsters them to continue to get out of their comfort zone because that is where true growth occurs."

Sailor chases television

By Anna Trasky,
Staff Writer

Today, Rich Leist is a producer and casting director with credits in game shows such as Wipeout, Shark Week, and Fear Factor, but once upon a time, he was just a Mona Shores performing arts student.

"I graduated from MSHS in 1998," Leist said. "After graduating, I wasn't sure what I wanted

to do beyond my parents

wanting me to attend college. I knew I was interested in the arts and being creative, which led me to audition for a group called The Young Americans based out of California."

College and California brought new opportunities and exposure to television, opening new doors and sparking new ideas.

"Once I arrived, I started performing with the group and also began taking college classes," Leist said. "I spent two years in school while traveling around the U.S. teaching music with The Young Americans. Through the people I met and learning more about the entertainment world, I realized I wanted to work in TV, I asked for advice from those around me and decided to pursue production."

It's hard to find success alone, and Leist credits others in the industry for his opportunities.

"I got my first opportunity from a Young Americans alumnus I met at a work event —



Casting director Rich Leist. (Courtesy Photo)

Mark L. Walberg," Leist said. "He was the host of Temptation Island and Antiques Roadshow. He made a few calls recommending me, which led to my interview for The Weakest Link."

The uncertainty of every day comes with moments and memories, and after so many years, Leist has built a collection.

"I've had many meaningful moments," Leist said. "From working on Fear Factor to holding a Guinness World Record for

the largest unscripted casting call, but my biggest accomplishment is likely being the first hire to build a casting department at Netflix. From my first job on the NBC lot working next to The Tonight Show set, to building a casting department at Netflix, I have so many favorites. I also love seeing others succeed and helping however I can along their journey."

The future begins in the past, and Leist knows he didn't follow the most perfect path to success.

"My journey was unconventional, but it worked for me," Leist said. "I took risks, but I always bet on myself. When something doesn't feel right, listen to that instinct and take action. You are the captain of your ship."

Ultimately, Leist's ship drifts back to Shores.

"Mona Shores was instrumental in my journey," Leist said. "I have nothing but love for Mona Shores. Hail the colors Blue and White; our loyalty we give."

SAILORS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Every year, an eager class of Sailors enters the world not as high school students, but as graduated young adults. Though each story may be told differently, there will come a day for every Mona Shores student when they will step through the doors one last time. However, the stories of graduated Sailors do not end then.

Moving up from hallways to Super Bowl halftime

By Anna Trasky,
Staff Writer

For the viewer, events like the yearly Super Bowl halftime show or the Primetime Emmys run so smoothly that they may as well be forces of nature, coming and going like day and night. For 1993 Mona Shores graduate Jamye Olthoff, such occasions are not so mythical.

"I work in event production in a variety of roles, on live events or shows that are aired on television, like award shows, Super Bowl halftime shows, and Olympic Opening and Closing Ceremonies," Olthoff said. "On award shows like the Oscars and Primetime Emmys, I am the seating manager and work with the camera director to seat all of the nominees and presenters in the audience for the show. The nominees are seated near their castmates, directors, and producers so that we can get them on camera hugging and congratulating each other on their way to the stage. The seating is carefully planned around which camera is assigned to that person for their award."

Major events are often much larger productions than they seem, requiring dedication and the cooperation of hundreds, even down to the details.

"For 17 Super Bowl Halftime shows and 2 Olympic Opening and Closing Ceremonies, I've gotten to work as part of the Field Choreography team, teaching and directing the field performers that dance around the big stage," Olthoff said. "We have anywhere from 400-1,000 performers at a halftime show, and we have two weeks of rehearsal to teach them choreography, their position on the field, and their entrance and exit. Our team is also in charge of the giant American flag during the pre-game show that is opened during the National Anthem. We have a cast of 75 people who help us do that with only 1 short rehearsal!"

Leadership and coordination are critical to the success of a major event, even if from a distance.

"During the show, I lead a team of 20 people who are working in the aisles of the auditorium,

managing the nominees and presenters during the commercial breaks so that they will be in their seats for their award or for a special 'bit' on camera in the audience," Olthoff said. "We work closely with the stage managers and camera director during the show, and it is our job to let them know if anyone is missing for their award before it happens. One of the cool parts of this job is that I can do it anywhere. I have lived all over the country, but now live back in Muskegon and am able to do the planning for the Oscars or Emmys from home and fly out to California for the week of the show."

Though Olthoff may not have known her career early, she looks back fondly on her time at Mona Shores.

"I graduated in 1993," Olthoff said. "I have lots of great memories of being in choir and Allegros, which was then a show choir that performed at events around town, and being in the marching and jazz bands."

Early connections lead to future success, and meeting allies early can be life-altering.

"I got into event production through a performing group called the Young Americans," Olthoff said. "I spent my college years traveling and performing and becoming a company manager for the Young Americans tours, which gave me lots of experience on stages, in different venues, managing casts and logistics, and I met tons of people. Ultimately, one of those people was Kristen Terry, who hired me for my first Emmys in 1999 and taught me what seating at an Awards show was all about. We've been working together ever since."

When all is said and done, experiences and relationships are vital, and Olthoff recommends making use of any that come by. Any small moment could end up making a big difference years down the line.

"Take advantage of any experiences offered to you along the way," Olthoff said. "If there is a chance to volunteer at an event or something you're interested in, do it! Reach out to anyone that you know in the field that you are interested in. These connections are often what lead to your first job or internship, because they remember meeting you."

Adventure to occupation

By Anna Trasky,
Staff Writer

Advertising is essential to the flow of business and so prevalent in daily life that it's easy to take it for granted. However, commercials don't fall from the sky. Mona Shores alumna Kay Gautraud works behind the scenes of many potentially familiar campaigns, bringing dvertisements to the consumer. "I work as an Advertising Executive Producer," Gautraud said. "Basically, I'm part of a creative team that brings you TV commercials, print ads, billboards, and interactive events to sell products or services."

The production of an advertisement is like putting together a puzzle, requiring the fine balance of many individual pieces and even finer leadership. "My role usually kicks in right after the client 'buys' an ad idea," Gautraud said. "I'm the one who wrangles all the financial, operational, and logistical pieces together. Think of me as the quarterback, the sideline coach, or the wedding planner of the ad world."

Advertisement is everywhere, and so are a plethora of opportunities.

"Right now I'm at Meta, working on the Wearables team," Gautraud said. "We just launched the Oakley Smartglasses in October."

The road to success starts at the beginning, and Gautraud kept her hands full through her Senior year.

"In high school, I took on a lot, serving as captain of both the varsity girls' tennis and soccer teams, and acting as editor for



Advertising Executive Producer Kay Gautraud. (Courtesy Photo)

the school newspaper and yearbook," Gautraud said. "If I wasn't on the field or court, I was out capturing moments. In my senior year, I got to experience so much. Not just the events I participated in, but nearly every activity happening at school."

To any students hoping to follow a similar path, she offers this direction:

"My advice comes from

all that the busyness of Senior year taught me: go out, be curious, try all the things," Gautraud said. "Seriously! Cheer on your classmates at the school play, sign up for that elective you're curious about, even if you don't 'need' it. Try everything that sparks your interest before you have to pick just one thing to turn into a career."

The wonder and longing for the inventive took her far, and it can take anyone with the willingness.

"I love what I do because advertising requires creativity, curiosity, and a sense of adventure," Gautraud said. "This field practically dares you to see the world with fresh eyes, to dive into what people value, celebrate, and find beautiful"

Ultimately, a career in advertising embraces the unpredictable and innovative, rarely boring those who choose to pursue it.

"The best part? No two days are ever the same," Gautraud said. "There's always a new puzzle to crack, a fresh idea to chase, or a wild challenge to tackle."

Curious student becomes a creative entrepreneur

By Emily Dimas,
Staff Writer

For 2015 graduate Colt Pena, his time at Mona Shores feels both distant and foundational. Looking back, he says those years marked the beginning of everything he would eventually pursue.

"I graduated from Mona Shores in 2015," Pena said. "It feels like forever ago, but it also feels like the starting line for everything I'm doing now."

Pena explains that his path wasn't shaped by a single moment, but by consistently chasing the things that sparked his curiosity. Little by little, that curiosity evolved into the creative work he's known for today.

"I just knew I wanted to build something of my own," Pena said. "I kept following the things that made me curious; film, television, business, branding, solving problems — and that eventually turned into acting and modeling, and then building companies, including my newest project, Goobs."

While his achievements might seem smooth from the outside, Pena emphasizes that building something from the ground up comes with complications few people ever witness.

"The biggest challenge is starting from scratch. No investors, no blueprint, no safety net. Every mistake is your mistake, and you learn the hard way," Pena said. "Balancing the highs and lows mentally is a challenge most people don't see, but it's real."

Reflecting on the early stages of his journey, Pena offers straightforward advice for



Colt Pena participating in Squid Game: The Challenge. (Courtesy Photo)

anyone who wants to begin but feels intimidated by the unknown.

"Start messy, don't wait to be 'ready,' because you never will be. Learn fast, stay adaptable, and don't be scared to look dumb in the beginning," Pena said. "Everyone who's good now was terrible at first."

Looking ahead, Pena is focused on expanding his newest venture while continuing to grow as both an entrepreneur and creator. His long-term vision stretches beyond launching a single business.

"I am launching my own company, Goobs. It's going to revolutionize the supplement industry, and I want to scale Goobs into a category defining brand, grow multiple businesses, and keep building things that actually solve problems," Pena said. "One day, I want to invest in other young entrepreneurs so they don't have to start as blindly as I did."

As he sums up his path so far, he hopes students who come from the same hallways he once walked know that success doesn't require a perfect roadmap, just the willingness to begin.

"My journey was chaotic, uncomfortable, and honestly one of the best things I've ever done. It's a mix of doubt, breakthroughs, failures, excitement, and a lot of learning by doing. Nothing about it was super easy, but every step mattered," Pena said. "Your dreams don't come with instructions. You figure it out as you go. If I can do it, coming from Mona Shores with no connections, in a brand new city, and no roadmap, anyone can."

Alumna goes from small dreams to Broadway reality

By Emily Dimas,
Staff Writer

Growing up in Muskegon and walking through the halls of Mona Shores High School, Carly Jibson always felt a pull toward performing.

"There was never any other option for me outside of performing. It was pretty clear, even from a young age, that I was going into show business. To be honest with you, my very first dream was to be in a band," Jibson said. "Unfortunately, there were not a lot of openings for lead singers for a seven year old, so naturally I got into musical theater."

When reflecting on her unconventional path through high school, Jibson admits that her story isn't exactly the typical graduation narrative. Her plans were derailed when a major audition opportunity pushed her to prioritize her dreams over finishing senior year.

"I didn't graduate because I was too hyper focused on moving to New York because I had just gotten an audition for hairspray," Jibson said. "Six months after moving to New York I booked Hairspray, so it all worked out."

While her career has taken her from school musicals to major productions across the country, Jibson says her path wasn't one she walked on alone.

"In the last 23 years, there have been a copious amount of people who have either been influential, offered advice, helped me out or just inspired me. But the person who I will



Broadway actress Carly Jibson. (Courtesy Photo)

forever owe all of it to is my mother," Jibson said. "So much more than a cheerleader or a champion of my dreams, she will forever be the mold of what an integral and incomparable woman should be."

With a career full of accomplishments, both on and off the stage, Jibson reflects on what those milestones truly represent. "I have so many moments that I'm truly proud of. Not necessarily because they look really great on a resume, but because of what it took to achieve them," Jibson said. "You're going to have a lot of people insert their unsolicited advice and opinions about who you should be, what you should look like, and how far you can go... and if you're not careful, those narratives can put limitations on you. The thing I'm the most proud of is that I have achieved a career that nobody thought I would have."

Looking ahead, Jibson remains focused on growth, connection, and creating art that matters. Even with an impressive list of achievements behind her, she says her greatest goal is to keep making work that resonates with people and reminds them they're not alone.

"I still have goals and things I want to achieve, but I think to just continue to have longevity and having fun is the win," Jibson said. "I want to be someone people want to work with and to use art to change the way that someone feels. Make them feel less alone or make them feel really seen. That was what saved me, and that's truly all I'm ever trying to give back."

Sixty-Seven Feet In The Air

Articles By Sara Kim, Staff Writer

Senior excited for opportunity to be Angel in the Singing Christmas Tree

Every year as the air gets colder and Michigan plunges into a long season of winter, Mona Shores prepares for its week-long Singing Christmas Tree performance.

With the tree standing at a remarkable 67 feet tall, this is the tallest singing Christmas tree in the world; similar to every other Christmas tree, this tree has its very own angel at the top. With the enormous responsibility of being chosen to stand at the tallest spot in the Singing Christmas Tree, there is a lot of consideration that goes into choosing said angel.

“The angel represents the spirit and the heart of the Mona Shores Choir,” said choir director Brendan Closz. “The

angel is always a high school senior and is someone who exemplifies the passion for singing and the hard work it takes to be the best you can be. The angel is a person who never gives up, demonstrates kindness to others, and leads by example. It is a position for someone who doesn't necessarily find him or herself in the spotlight regularly, but for one weekend is given their moment to shine!”

This description perfectly characterizes who the angel is for the 2025 Singing Christmas Tree: senior Elise Mosley. Being chosen as the angel is a lot of pressure, but Mosley embraced that role wholeheartedly.

“When I was chosen for the angel, I felt surprised,” Mosley said. “There are many great people in the choir and to be chosen for the angel made me feel very excited and proud.”

Being chosen as the angel is the perfect opportunity to showcase hard-working choir students who may get overlooked. Through Mosley's love and dedication for the choir program, it is clear that she was the perfect student to shine as the angel this year.

“I have been in choir for five years now,” Mosley said. “I have always enjoyed singing and I remember my parents taking me to musicals, Pop Goes the Sailors and the Singing Christmas Tree when I was young. Those experiences inspired me to be a part of the choir community.”

It is evident that Mosley has a deep connection and history with the Mona Shores' choir program, which makes it extra special to her and her family that she was chosen for such an important role in the Singing Christmas Tree this year.

“Elise shows up every day ready to be her best,” Closz said. “She does the hard work each and every day despite adversity. To me, Elise exemplifies what it is to demonstrate a love for both singing and the MSHS Choir Program.”

Determination, dedication, and passion. Those qualities are what make up the angel, and are qualities that Mosley displayed throughout all her years in the choir program at Shores. Choosing the angel takes a lot of careful



Senior Elise Mosley as the angel. (Courtesy Photo)

consideration, but Mosley proved herself to be worthy of the role with her love of singing and choir.

“My favorite part about choir is when we are all working together day after day, trying to improve each song, and eventually, it all comes together,” Mosley said. “It is surreal to hear such beautiful music created by such dedicated and amazing people.”

Mosley continues to be uplifted and supported by the hard-working and passionate singers in the choir. To be a part of a program that connects like-minded and driven people alike is a special experience that Mosley can be involved in.

“I feel sad that this is my last Singing Christmas Tree performance,” Mosley said. “But I am satisfied with my accomplishments and hard work throughout my high school career.”

Although this is Mosley's last performance in the Singing Christmas Tree, it will surely be her most memorable, as she has the honor of being the perfect angel this performance needs.

Director expresses his excitement for first Tree Show

The annual Singing Christmas Tree performance is one that many are eager to attend. With this being the 41st year, the Singing Christmas Tree program finds itself under a new leadership with new choir director: Brendan Closz.

It is a huge responsibility taking on the sole leadership of coordinating the choir program for arguably one of the biggest performances of the year; however, Closz enters this role headfirst and ecstatic.

“I feel a lot of things about my ‘first official year leading the Singing Christmas Tree,’” Closz said. “My two biggest feelings are a deep well of gratitude to be back in my hometown doing the thing that ignited my

love for choral music. The second is excitement! The choir and orchestra kids are sounding excellent and the excitement is growing.”

Through his appreciation and humbleness, Closz's first official Singing Christmas Tree show is off to a great start. It is not easy taking on this enormous responsibility, but his love and desire to lead a great annual tradition shows how Closz is the perfect new leader for the next generation of Mona Shores' choir students.

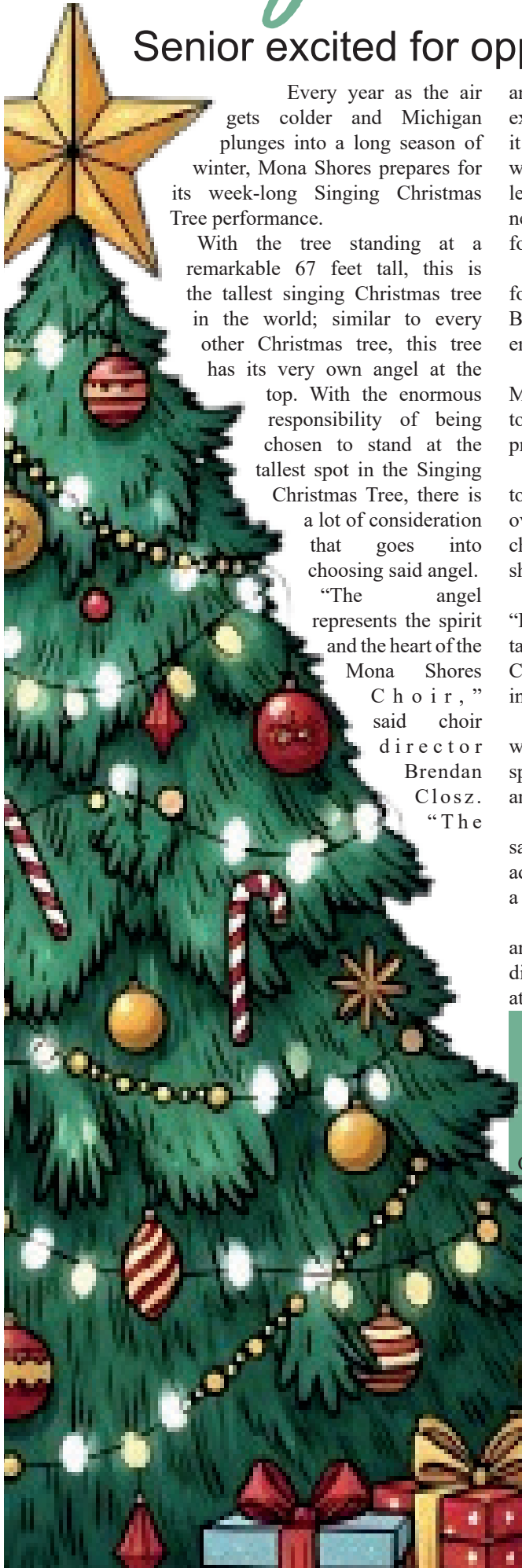
One thing many attendees question in every upcoming show is which songs will be performed at the show. There is careful thought that goes into the songs that would be perfect for the show every year, and it is a process Closz considers meticulously.

“When choosing songs for the

Singing Christmas Tree, I wanted to be sure to include a wide variety of styles and influences while still making sure to celebrate the classic music of the season we grew up with,” Closz said. “Then I threw in some tunes that I would want every singer to be able to experience at least once in their lives.”

From classic Christmas carols to memorable, fun music for the students to sing and perform, the Singing Christmas Tree truly has a tune for everyone. The variety of music that is performed in each show allows the audience and the students to have a great time.

The Singing Christmas Tree is the most ideal way to start off the holiday season—and it is one that the Mona Shores community won't want to miss.



Chatty Cathy

Dear Chatty Cathy, I struggle with procrastination. The only thing that motivates me to do my homework is a deadline set by a teacher.

How do I motivate myself to start assignments NOT right before they're due? Well, here's first what doesn't work. Making up fake deadlines - I tend to just ignore them. Breaking up the task into smaller units to do over time - I like getting assignments done all at once because seeing an uncompleted assignment irks me a bit; also thinking of having a big assignment that will take a lot of time is so overwhelming that I try to avoid it even when it's broken up into smaller pieces. Giving myself rewards or breaks for working - I usually abuse those breaks by giving myself a longer break than necessary and sink back into a state of laziness. Putting work time in my calendar - the lack of a time crunch makes the work go much slower and my mind wanders away from the assignment and I end up getting little or no work done. Pep talks with myself to inspire and help motivate me on why I should get my work done - the inspiration from those fades, and I'm still in a state of "I-don't-want-to-do-anything-work-related." It's like a pit I can't get out of until an alarm goes off and says, "You have something due in a few hours!! You should start that assignment because your grades are at stake!!"

Sincerely,
Expert
Procrastinator

Dear Expert Procrastinator, I see you, and I feel you. Here is a list of unhinged homework tips from yours truly:

Personally, I always go to a cafe and buy myself a fun drink because if I'm not productive, then I feel like I've wasted money. Go somewhere and pick a random person who is also working. You're not allowed to leave until they do. Get the app Focus Friend and earn decorations for a little bean when you stay off your phone.

Give your phone to a sibling or parent and don't let them give it back until you finish a certain amount of homework. Use your phone to film a timelapse of you studying, can't use your phone, and gets you a fun video! Put a super scary or boring movie on your phone so you would rather focus on the work on your computer. Every time you get the urge to stop working, move to a different room/seat or sit in a new position.

In the same vein, work on several different assignments at the same time. If you lose focus on one, switch to another. Spam the wrong password into your phone until it locks you out for an hour. Do work with a group of friends and compete to get the most done, losers have to pay for study snacks. Play intense action music in the background to create the illusion of a panicked, last-minute cram session. Make the lock screen of your phone a picture of a report card with all Fs so every time you pick up your phone, you're reminded of the potential consequences.

Give these a try and find what works for you. Best of luck!

Sincerely,
Chatty Cathy

Anchored in Faith

Students start Bible Study before school with hope of spreading the Gospel.

By Eddie Kuznar,
Editor-in-Chief

Mona Shores students are finding hope, fellowship, and faith in an unexpected place: a student-led Bible study that meets on late-start Wednesday mornings. What began as a small group chat among friends has grown into a gathering of nearly 20 students each week, united by a desire to share the Gospel and support one another.

"The inspiration came from our desire to share our faith with our peers. In the Bible, God has called us to be disciples of all nations, spreading the Gospel wherever we go. Starting this Bible study was our way of living into that calling," sophomore Zoey White said. "My calling to be a leader started in middle school when I began to spend more time at school. No one ever spoke about God openly, and the concept of church seemed weird to most kids. I realized that most of the people I spent time around in my classes had never been told about the Bible. That was the root of my inspiration; I wanted to give people a space to learn about God and ask hard questions without being judged. I also wanted to give a space for believers to feel seen and supported, even when it feels like no one else might agree with them."

The idea to start the Bible study started in a middle school group chat. White and her friends wanted to find a way to share the Gospel with their community. White and her friends began offering breakfast at the Bible study.

"Thanks to the support of parents, teachers, and many friends, we followed through and started a Bible study at the middle school," White said. "This year, we finally brought it to the high school; it may have a different name, but it is the same idea with the same intentions. Every late start, we open Mrs. Santos' doors at 8:30, and we give about 15-20 minutes for students to come in, talk with friends, and grab a donut before we officially start."

The Bible study has quickly become more than just a meeting, it's a source of encouragement for students and staff alike, who have started to notice the positive impact that the study has had on the school.

"There have been multiple occasions where I've had students or even teachers say our Bible study spreads hope and joy when life starts to feel heavy or uncertain," White said. "Since we started this Bible study, we have had a consistent group coming, and even just within that small group, I have seen such growth in confidence and the loving attitudes being shared across our group and into our classes and extracurriculars. The whole reason we started this was to share hope and love within our schools, and I believe that has not only become a reality, but a strong foundation in many of our lives."

Not only does the Bible study strengthen their



Anchored in Faith members pose for a picture during Bible study before school (Emelie Santos).

relationship with God, but it also strengthens the relationships that the members have with each other. These connections have created a ripple effect, strengthening bonds across classrooms, extracurriculars, and the wider school community.

"We love coming into the Bible study each week and just seeing other believers," sophomore Micah Bement, who is also one of the leaders of the group, said. "I think because many of us don't know many other believers throughout the school helps us bond and know that we can support each other and fall back on each other if needed. It is also just so fun to be able to talk with each

other before Bible study and just see how each other are doing so that has produced a lot of new friendships."

Leading a group can be a nerve-wracking experience. Finding ways to persevere through those nerves are crucial to a successful discussion. For Bement, he found ways to calm himself back in middle school.

"My first experience (leading a group discussion) was in seventh grade," Bement said. "I was very nervous but if you have ever taught on God's word you know that you just have to trust that God will speak through you and that is what I did so that helped me be a lot less nervous."

The Bible study has started with a small group of kids, but the group loves to accept people with open arms. This spirit of inclusivity is central to the group's mission, creating a safe space where students can explore faith, ask questions, and build community without fear of judgment.

"Anyone can join. All you have to do is enter through the front doors and come through the front office on late start mornings at 8:30 am," White said. "We would love to see more people come, and hope to see it grow throughout this school year and the years to come. We want to create a strong, tight-knit community where our peers know that they always have something they can be a part of and someone they can reach out to with questions."

The Bible study at Shores has become a cornerstone of connection and encouragement, offering students a place to belong and grow together. With its focus on openness, leadership, and Christ-centered community, the group is leaving a legacy that will endure long after its current members graduate.

"We want to see Jesus at the center of our group and also at the center of our own lives as we go throughout our days at school on our own," White said. "We would also love to see the Bible study continue long after its current leaders graduate, as it has at the middle school. The impact of this group has been bigger than I think any of us ever imagined. Our little Bible study has created a lasting ripple effect, and we pray it will continue to for as long as possible."

Joy in Every Corner

Shores students share a variety of traditions during the holiday season

Student shares her traditions involving Día de Los Reyes

Each household has many traditions during the holiday season. For senior Alizee Lopez, she has her own unique customs for celebrating the holidays with her family.

“Once Christmas passes, El Día de Reyes is next. It is just like Christmas, only a little different,” Lopez said. “It is all about being good to others and staying true to yourself.”

Lopez prioritizes the true meaning of El Día de Reyes by staying authentically herself.

Furthermore, she celebrates El Día de Reyes with important foods and customs with her family.

“One of the most important foods is La Rosca de Reyes,” Lopez said. “It is basically this big piece of bread shaped into a circle, and inside of the bread there is a little baby Jesus. If the piece of bread you cut has the baby in it, you have to make the food for the whole family, and it is a symbol of

getting blessed.”

With all of the delicious foods and family time that goes along with El Día de Reyes, Lopez has plans to carry out her family traditions throughout her future.

“I plan to celebrate these traditions in the future the same way my family does currently,” Lopez said. “I do not want to change anything about what we do or how we do it.”

Lopez exemplifies how the holidays are a wholesome time full of quality interactions with family, along with embodying the gratitude one has for their loved ones. She cherishes the moments spent with her family, creating lasting memories through shared meals, laughter, and the exchange of gifts.

Junior celebrates a mix of Christmas and Hanukkah

The holidays are marked by diverse traditions and customs, each household adding its own touch to the celebration. For junior Goldwyn Boyden, the holidays are very busy and filled with family traditions.

“During the holiday season, we balance both Christmas and Hanukkah,” Boyden said. “We always celebrate both holidays as a family.”

Boyden has a unique way of celebrating the holidays. She, along with her family, mixes both major holidays into a long period of celebrations.

“We each open one present until the last night of Hanukkah,” Boyden said. “Then eventually it leads up to Christmas.”

Boyden has many favorite traditions that come with celebrating both of these holidays. She goes into detail about some of her family customs around that time of year,

including the braided Jewish bread and prayer involved.

“We sing a Jewish prayer every night,” Boyden said. “Also, we eat challah when the holiday season comes around.”

Boyden has many memories that are cherished from past years of celebrating both of these holidays.

“I remember getting very emotional during this time of year when I was young,” Boyden said. “I just loved having my family all together singing and it was all just so beautiful.”

Although Boyden has a unique way of celebrating the holiday season, she brings joy and love to each tradition.

Boyden believes that having these traditions can bring the family together as they celebrate their relationships and gratitude for each other.

By
Julia Campos and
Megan Avila,
Staff Writers

Senior's traditions of Chinese New Year

Each family has their own traditions and their own way of celebrating each holiday. For the senior Sherry Jiang, holidays are an important way of celebrating family and friends.

“Some holiday traditions I have are dressing in red for Chinese New Years,” Jiang said. “I also watch the annual Chinese new year broadcast from China.”

Jiang believes it's important to celebrate the friendships and relationships in your life. Jiang has some favorite memories of celebrating with the people she loves.

“I love going out with family and friends and eating a feast,” Jiang said. “My favorite memory has to be running around with the other kids after we had finished eating and how we would chase one another around the restaurant.”

According to Jiang, there are many traditions within Chinese New Year. She shares how she celebrates and

some of the foods that are a must for the holiday.

“I dress in red during the holiday and also make a fruit platter to honor our ancestors,” Jiang said. “Moon cakes, fish, rice cakes, and oranges are all some of the most important foods in the Lunar New Year.”

When explaining the meaning behind the Lunar New Years, she mentions the true significance of this holiday.

“It's the start of a new year according to the lunisolar calendar and how it reunites families,” Jiang said. “It is also a day that wards off bad luck and honors your ancestors, which typically lasts 15 days.”

Jiang and her family are a great example of how these holidays are an amazing way to bring loved ones together and celebrate each other.

Exchange student shares how he celebrates Christmas in France

There are many ways to celebrate the holidays throughout the entire globe. For example, the exchange student from France, Simon Leroy, celebrates Christmas in a traditional manner.

“I celebrate Christmas by decorating a Christmas tree,” Leroy said. “I also love receiving gifts and believing in Santa Claus.”

Leroy has many Christmas traditions that he celebrates during the holiday season. Specifically, his favorite tradition lies on Christmas morning.

“Christmas morning, when I open the presents, is my favorite part of the holidays,” Leroy said. “Along with enjoying some of my favorite seasonal foods.”

Leroy also elaborates on his favorite memories and family traditions. He explains how he gets together with

his family and celebrates Christmas.

“On Christmas, my family and I all eat together,” Leroy said. “We also open gifts together as a family.”

Leroy has many movies he enjoys to watch over the holidays. He mentions his favorites and how they bring him into the Christmas spirit.

“I love watching Christmas movies,” Leroy said. “My favorite is probably Home Alone, the first one.”

Although many are separated by miles, they are also united by their traditions.

For Leroy, it is important to celebrate these traditions and keep the Christmas spirit alive.

He believes that by keeping these traditions, he can stay connected to his family and the spirit of Christmas, no matter where he is.



From Dad To Coach



Varsity girls basketball coach expresses his love for coaching his own kids.

By Kendall Berghuis
Staff Writer

One of the most rewarding experiences is coaching a sport that you truly love, but being able to coach your own daughters might be a little better than that. Sharing the sport that you used to play with your daughters is one of the best experiences a coach can have.

Girls Varsity Basketball Head Coach, Mike Phillips, has had the honor of coaching all three of his daughters, alumni Ali Phillips, who graduated in 2023, alumni Katie Phillips, who graduated last year in 2025, and sophomore Lauren Phillips, who is currently on the varsity team.

"For each of them, it has been different because of when I took over as the varsity coach," Phillips said. "I coached Ali more when she was younger because I was coaching middle school and JV and had fewer basketball responsibilities. I spent a few seasons coaching Katie when she was younger, but also had help from Shane Clausen and Eric Allen. When I took over as varsity coach back in 2018, Lauren was in 2nd grade, so I haven't had as much time to spend with her. I hope that in these next three years I can make up for some of those memories that I didn't get to create with her when she was little."

As said before, being able to coach your kids almost every day is very fulfilling, as one is able to make many memories with them.

"My favorite memories from being in the gym with them are when they were all younger," Phillips said. "Summer camps, youth basketball, Spartan Showcase, Hoop City, adrenaline games. Those are the things that are the most memorable for me."

Though being your kids' coach is a very rewarding experience for Phillips, there has also been a challenge that he has had to face.

"It is one of the most rewarding experiences," Phillips said. "But, it constantly demands self-awareness to ensure I coach them fairly and objectively, separating my role as their coach and their dad. A main challenge is the perception of favoritism towards my own kids. I know that when it comes to decisions that include them, it can be met with harsher criticism of both them and me. Oftentimes, I was a little harder on them just to prove I was fair to the team, and to make sure they weren't always hearing criticism from me, I made sure assistant Coach DeLong jumped in with his feedback too."

Being able to separate the roles of dad and coach can be hard at times, but it is crucial to act as their coach on the court and dad off the court.

"If they aren't playing exceptionally well and making mistakes on the court, I have to remind myself to treat them like I would any other player," Phillips said. "This can be challenging. Having a great assistant coach helps, but I don't think there is a balance when they are on the court. They get treated the same as any other player. It's when we leave the court that I try to switch over to being just their dad. But, I haven't always been the best at that over the years."

Some may think that it is so much easier to coach your own daughter; in some ways, yes, but in other ways, it might actually be harder.

"It is both: it is easier because I have an understanding of their personalities, but harder because the emotional stakes are much higher," Phillips said. "I have to work harder to avoid any appearance of favoritism."

When talking to Phillips' youngest daughter, Lauren, she also says that having her dad as a coach is a fun and unique thing she gets to experience, but she also shares how it can be challenging as well.

"My dad knows what's best for me and he knows how to help me get better," Lauren Phillips said. "He is always there for me. One thing that comes negatively to having my dad as a coach is that some people might think that I only make varsity because my dad is the coach. It makes me work harder to prove that that's not why I am on the team, I am on the team because I deserve to be."

There are many memories that are made throughout the four-month-long season.

"My favorite memory last year was being able to be with my sister Katie and my dad at practices and games," Lauren Phillips said. "Being able to play with Katie was one of my favorites, but having my dad there too made it even more special."

Coach Phillips shares how special it is to coach his kids. "Coaching them has allowed me to create a unique bond with each of them," Coach Phillips said. "Our time together on and off the court has been unbelievably special, creating memories we will cherish long after their careers have ended."

This experience is more than just wins and losses; it's about family, dedication, making memories, and forming unique bonds, showing how sports can connect families in ways that one cannot describe.

Coach Phillips' commitment to his daughters and his team exemplifies the power of sports to shape character, build relationships, and foster a love for the game that extends far beyond the court.



Coach Phillips posing with two of his daughters Ali Phillips and Katie Phillips (courtesy photo).



Coach Phillips posing with his second daughter Katie Phillips (courtesy photo).



Coach Phillips posing with his third daughter Lauren Phillips (courtesy photo).

Sports/News Briefs

Boys Basketball

The boys have gotten off to a 1-3 start with losses to Hudsonville (63-55), East Grand Rapids (68-57), and Northview (67-41). Their win came against Fruitport (53-46). Seniors Ryan Opsommer and Travy Frederick have led the way for the Sailors thus far.

the year, dropping the first game to Hudsonville (59-40). Seniors Maddie Russell led the way with 12 points, Laynie Russell added 10, freshmen Malia Delasko chipped in 9, and Gabi Koziak had 5. The ladies will travel to Cheboygan Saturday (Dec. 13th) to take on the Chiefs.

with a 4-1-1. Wins came against Byron Center (4-2), Allen Park (8-0), Traverse City West (2-1), and Grand Haven (5-3). The Sailors tied Wyandotte Roosevelt and lost to Traverse City St. Francis. Senior Eli Habetler has led the way in goals and junior Will Nolan has stood tall in net. The Sailors will play Chippewa Valley United on Friday, December 12th.

Volunteer

Varsity basketball is in need of volunteers to work the concessions stand during home games. This counts as volunteer hours. Please see Mrs. Conrad or the NHS google classroom to sign up.

Girls Basketball

The girls have started 0-1 to start

Hockey

The boys have gotten off to a hot start

THE JOURNEY BEHIND THE GAME

The hidden struggles behind baseball's greatest superstars

By Nathan VanEtten,
Staff Writer

For many young athletes who grow up outside of the United States, where opportunities may be limited, and dreams of professional baseball can often feel impossible, baseball for them feels more than just a sport. It becomes a way of life, a new chance, a door that may open up to a future that looks nothing like the one they have always known.

This is clearly shown in the journeys of players from politically corrupt or impoverished countries who take astronomical risks just to pursue their dreams in playing baseball at the professional level. While each individual player's path may seem different at face value, their reasoning stems from the same place. This reasoning is the belief that baseball is the one thing that will actually allow them to be able to lift themselves out of their current circumstances they were born into.

Baseball's global reach is easy to see when you take a peek at Major League rosters, but these rosters don't show the struggle and grind that many players had to go through in order to reach where they are. Specifically, in some South American countries such as the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Haiti, Nicaragua, Cuba, and many others, children often grow up learning the game of baseball with equipment that may be on its last threads. A glove may pass through multiple families as well as multiple generations. A slightly broken wooden bat may look as if a woodchuck got hold of it, but it is still in use. Balls are used long after the stitching comes apart, and you can see the yarn on the inside. Yet some of the world's most talented baseball players are born in these areas.

For these kids, baseball represents their sense of purpose and possibility. It is common for these families to live on barely a dollar a day, often without a stable source of electricity or clean running water. The idea of collegiate athletics, private training facilities, and paid youth Little League is almost unthinkable in these countries, yet so popular back here in the States. The sport of baseball in these countries grows through unkempt dirt fields, crowded streets, and school courtyards with barely enough space for

them to create an infield. And yet, great talent still emerges through this.

The dream of making it to Major League Baseball isn't simply about personal gains or fame. It directly ties to their survival, not only at the individual level, but also for the rest of their family. A single high-level professional contract has the potential to lift an entire family out of poverty and can reshape the opportunities given for generations to come. Players who eventually make it to the United States become the primary financial support for not only their close family, but also are able to financially support distant relatives, further bettering their communities back home. Baseball for them becomes not only a sport but a responsibility, a direct path that offers an opportunity for escape from circumstances that so many others like them are unable to outrun.

This responsibility doesn't just spring upon ballplayers when they hit the age of 18; every year, the age at which meaningful training begins in these countries, and across the globe, is getting younger and younger. In the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, talented children often leave school early in order to focus all of their efforts on baseball. This pressure begins for them quickly, by the age of around 13 or 14, while many people their age in the United States are focusing on pre-algebra and focusing on beginning high school, these kids are preparing for international scouts.

For players coming from countries with political restrictions regarding leaving the country in pursuit of a career or dangerous living conditions, reaching the United States can often involve great uncertainty and may often lead ballplayers to break a few rules along their path. Cuban athletes, for example, have really had no legal way to directly sign with Major League teams, and because of this, many left the island through highly secretive methods before starting the daunting task of pursuing long-term residency somewhere.

Even once these players reach the States, a brand new set of challenges arrives. For instance, the language barrier between the United States and these players' home countries will create daily difficulties. Many of these people will also enter the Minor Leagues with little to no money, having to share tightly crowded spaces with teammates to try and make sure every dollar they earn is saved. The pressure

from the feeling of needing to support family members, and making sure that you can be relied on, intensifies along the process.

That being said, Minor League Baseball is not glamorous at all. Long bus rides to games, incredibly low salaries for the amount of effort put in, and constant relocation from city to city can create a very stressful and demanding lifestyle, especially for a young player living on their own for the first time. The idea of "failing" in America also carries a tremendous weight on each of these players' backs, knowing that if they return home without success, it may feel as if they are returning home without having accomplished anything meaningful. This is the driving fear that pushes international players to work harder, train longer hours, and endure more challenges than they will ever be given credit for.

But when a player receives the long-awaited call-up that they are officially a member of the MLB, the meaning goes beyond being able to play the game at the next level. It means stability for their family. It means more opportunities for the people around them and from their community. It means that every hour sacrificed and every risk taken was not for nothing. This accomplishment often ripples across communities as a whole, helping to inspire younger athletes to chase a similar dream, because when they see a professional athlete who came from a similar area, they are greatly more motivated to pursue that dream, because of how similar their situations may have been.

The United States, with its large stadiums and global representation, represents every one of these athletes' destinations. But the actual story lives on the dirt fields without fences, without perfectly cut grass, without dugouts. Where somehow some of the greatest players to ever touch a baseball first learned to play this great game. And how every individual ball player carries their own story far deeper than words can describe.

The journey from poverty to prosperity helps remind us that baseball has always been more than just the result of what happens on the field. It's about the dedication, determination, and resilience of every individual who laces up their cleats. It's about people willing to sacrifice everything for just a chance to bring prosperity, not only for themselves, but for everyone waiting and counting on them back home.



Jose Ramirez (Courtesy Photo)

Growing up in an impoverished community in the Dominican Republic, José Ramírez saw baseball as his community's lifeline and a way to bring new paths for future generations. Even through poverty and all of the hardships Jose has faced in his journey, he is now one of the most talented players of our generation. Today, the Guardians' star gives back to his community and communities alike by funding local fields, proving that a singular MLB contract has the ability to ripple across generations.