

# The Oracle

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## SA hosted six Japanese visiting college students

by Joey Duty

In the week following Thanksgiving break, six Japanese college students from Kyoto, Japan came to Shaler Area. These students are members of a policy studies class at Doshisha University, in which once a year the students travel abroad to help fix an issue in foreign country. Through Shaler Area's Japanese language classes, the college students were able to teach Shaler students about healthier nutritional habits.

"In this program we want to go to overseas countries and then we carry out a project about Japanese culture. Our value is that we want Americans to never forget the happiness of having a meal. The students in Shaler were interested in Japanese culture so we had extra incentive to come here," Doshisha University student Kaho Murakami said.

One of the main focuses in their program was centered around the state of American school lunches, and their thoughts may surprise you.

"I enjoyed the lunches, I don't know why some students don't like them. I ate the vegetable wrap and quite enjoyed it. However, the small number of choices for a school lunch is a concern," Kaho said.

In both Japanese and English, the college students lectured about traditional Japanese cuisine, healthy eating habits, and how to prepare healthy snacks that are common in Japan.

"What they brought was more than just nutrition, but they're also talking about the manner and the way in which you treat food and treat other people and treat yourself. If students really think about this, it could have a positive impact on their lives," Shaler Area Japanese teacher Mr. Steven Balsomico said.

Along with nutritional advice, the Doshiesha students provided a great opportunity for Shaler students to listen to and practice with native level Japanese speakers.

"I study Japanese. I'll never be perfect, I'll never be a native speaker. So the ability to hear natural flow, and natural words from native Japanese speakers is incredibly useful for the students. Also, let's face it, it's more exciting to talk to a native Japanese person than it is to talk to me, so it gets students more excited and interested in having conversations in the language," Mr. Balsomico said.

This privilege was not lost on the Shaler Japanese students however. There have been near unanimous positive reviews about their lectures among students.

"The entire experience was super cool to see how



Japanese teacher Mr. Steve Balsomico and the six Japanese visitors

actual Japanese people speak and teach. I learned a lot about the food culture in Japan and I learned what they defined as healthy food. My girl Nanami was actually the GOAT, I made her tea," Japanese level three student Will Emmons said.

Thankfully, the Doshisha students' trip to America wasn't exclusively limited to visiting Shaler Area. Before teaching at Shaler, the college students visited some of America's most famous tourist destinations.

"Before coming to Shaler, I visited Disney World in Florida which was a ton of fun. My favorite part had to be Epcot, and I bought a lot of souvenirs, especially in the Norway section of the park. Also, some other students went to New York City before coming to Shaler," Kaho said.

Inevitably, there was some culture shock for the Doshisha students who now had first hand experience of the American way of eating. Their small appetites were no match.

"The portion sizes were definitely a shock. The doggy bag culture at American restaurants is very surprising. Not to mention the complementary chips which makes it difficult to eat all that you were given," Kaho said.

Along with the portion sizes, the college students

took a liking to some local Pittsburgh cuisine as well as some American dinner staples.

"I thought the Pittsburgher from Primanti Bros was huge and delicious. This isn't necessarily American food, but I really enjoyed eating hard shell tacos which I ate with my host family," Kaho said.

Despite their mostly positive experience in Shaler Area, one issue in which the Japanese students were taken aback by was the amount of food waste.

"The fact that we as a society only recognize and do nothing to change our food waste problem is terrible. The Japanese students absolutely loved Shaler; they talked incessantly about how much they enjoyed working in this building and meeting the students. Even still, they were absolutely shocked by some of the things they saw regarding food waste," Mr. Balsomico said.

The Doshiesha students' visit to Shaler Area serves as a great example of the positive effects of cultural exchange. Shaler Area students learned about the health benefits of Japanese cuisine while also enriching their own view of American culture as it takes an outside eye to truly see the truth of what we live in.

## Holocaust speaker keeps her parents' stories alive

by Jack Salego

Due to the amount of time that has passed since the Holocaust, many survivors are no longer with us, making first-hand accounts of the Holocaust increasingly difficult to obtain. In light of this, Debbie Stueber, a daughter of two survivors, has begun carrying the torch, retelling her parents' inspiring stories. She is the daughter of Kurt and Edith Leuchter, two survivors of the Holocaust who share their own stories to inspire others and spread awareness.

"I feel an intense responsibility to carry on my family's story. Who's going to tell the stories if the children and the grandchildren do not? One of my



Holocaust survivors Kurt and Edith Leuchter

hopes actually, is to take my story and share it with somebody outside, outside my world, you know, so that one day when I'm no longer here, some-

body can share it. One of my dreams is to speak alongside a World War II veteran or a descendant who knows the story," Stueber said.

To help reach more people, Stueber is part of the Generations Speaker series at the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh. The series is a collection of stories from Holocaust survivors and their families. Not only are speakers getting harder to come by, but the amount of education

taught on the subject is just not enough.

"Most Jews know either something or a great deal about the Holocaust. I want to reach non-Jews. Only 25 states in the United States require Holocaust education, and Pennsylvania is not one of them. It's highly encouraged, and as far as I know, just because it's required, there aren't supposedly any requirements. You develop your own curriculum or, you know, you say one thing during a class or whatever. Since 2020 when COVID hit, I said to myself, 'I need to start seeking out my own presentation,'" she added.

Her mother Edith was born in

Cont. on pg 2



OPINIONS

Let’s put the social back in social media

by Jack Salego

Walk through the school, the city, look around at a stoplight, or anywhere you go. You will see plenty of faces, but a scary percentage of those faces are staring down at a phone. It is not just Gen Z, no matter how much the internet says so. Phones have become an integral part of our lives nowadays and it is not all bad. The ability to instantly take a photo, send information, and connect with people anywhere is a technology that was science fiction just 50 years ago.

Then comes social media. It is not a necessity, but merely an addition. It is an interesting addition nonetheless, but its evolution is slowly regressing. Some people use social media just to post their Christmas photos or their family’s birthdays, while others post every little event in their lives.

What is happening now is that social media consists of large open spaces and then extremely personal spaces. The positive aspect is that people can comment and reply to other comments on a public post on social media, which is great for debate and just simple interaction about a topic online.

“On the one hand, I’ve been able to keep up with friends and family around the world and even learn from some educational accounts that I follow,” anatomy teacher Tim Taylor said.

Then comes the other half: private stories, close friends lists, backup Instagrams (finstagram), friends only TikToks, etc. The list goes on and only expands year after year. Social media platforms are consistently adding features that allow you to upload posts to a select group of people you select yourself. This feature is good for allowing people to junk post things that interest them but are not worth showing every single follower. It sounds good in theory

until you actually look online. People start using a close friends feature, and they soon use it so much that something that could be posted publicly ends up there, too.

Although social media is more popular than ever, it feels as though we are more isolated from each other than we have ever been. Some people care so much about their image and appearance online that they never post publicly, have a blurry profile picture, yet still end up having over 1000 followers. Their bio says nothing about their age, their picture barely shows what they look like, and they are a private account with no posts. If you are lucky, their bio might say what high school they go to. This is the opposite of what social media was meant to do.

Social media is supposed to be, well, social. Connecting with anyone in a matter of seconds should be amazing, but it simply does not play out that way. People are connecting less than ever, and when they do connect it can become a toxic and extremely opinionated community. People thrive in their own communities online, but do not venture out far from that.

“On the other hand, I do find that a lot of the information on social media is overproduced and inauthentic at best and inflammatory hot takes at worst, which helps to polarize us into groups of like-minded people,” added Taylor.

This new era of social media habits is in full bloom, and I do not mean that in a positive way. There is no guarantee that you may get added back by someone, but there is a guarantee it will notify them that you added them. If they do not add you back or leave you on open, it just causes embarrassment. To further this embarrassment, you can tell if someone reads your texts or not, so you know if you are being outright ignored. Why add anyone new if

they might just ignore you? That question is the basis of everything social media has become. Depending on the platform, you can see who screenshots, shares, or even views your profile. These scenarios are universal, and almost always awkward or even embarrassing.

The only solution that stops this embarrassment is becoming more private, literally. Creating a private account or private story allows you to post what you want whenever you want, to only who you want to see. If private, no one can share ugly photos or funny pictures of you, even if you are the one that posted them.

It is not the end of the world, but it is sad to see. Although I got to enjoy the later days of Vine while it was here, I will never experience the hype of 2011 Twitter, the peak of Myspace, or the peak of Yik Yak. All of these bring nostalgia to people older than me and the message is clear: I will never understand because I simply just was not there.

“I remember everyone who made a MySpace would just list everything that they were interested in, post their favorite song, and post some fun pictures. It was more like a static website of ‘here’s who I am’ rather than ‘here’s how perfect my life is’ that we see a lot of now. Things were way less produced,” Taylor said.

The hope is that one day we can stop worrying about other people screenshotting any photo that is not worthy of being framed so that we can make social media less judgemental and more relaxed. People will only continue to become more reserved if we maintain this judgemental “cancel culture.” We text and post way more casually than we speak in person, so we should stop taking the rest of social media so seriously.

Holocaust speaker keeps her parents’ stories alive — from page 1

Bruchsal, Germany, while her father was born in Vienna, Austria. Her mom was deported from Bruchsal, Germany, to France on October 22nd, 1940. Her father left Vienna for Belgium in 1939 before ending up in France.

In France, they met in an orphanage as children. Kurt was hidden in a boys’ correction home to avoid the Nazis, and eventually became part of the Maquis (French resistance fighters). After the war, they emigrated to the United States in 1946 and met once again, which interestingly occurred in front of the Museum of Modern Art. Her father also went on to fight in the Korean War.

Debbie makes it very clear that the problems Jews faced over the Holocaust never disappeared. Even though the Holocaust was officially over in

1945, the ills of prejudice and anti-Semitism are still prevalent today. Most notably, this is seen through the ongoing war between Israel and Palestine.

“I have family in Israel. Luckily they’re safe, but it doesn’t matter if I have family or not. The population in the world of Jews is 0.2% of the whole world population. Everybody knows somebody there who is affected directly by it, whether kidnapped or murdered,” Stueber said.

Another issue running rampant to-



Debbie Stueber

day that Kurt and Edith want people to tackle head on is misinformation. Given that they speak on such an impactful subject, they know better than most how common it is. In this day and age especially,

it is not only important to be informed but also to have that information come from the right sources. The messages and the points of presentations are lost if the information holding them up is biased, fabricated, or inaccurate.

“My father’s message to students

every single time when they join us for our Q&A, to students specifically: don’t just look at one website, don’t just read one article, don’t just watch one program, watch all of them. Make your own decision as to what is right and what is wrong.”

Even if some things in the world are up for interpretation for what is right and what is wrong, this is not the case with anti-Semitism. Nothing should ever come close to the horrors of the Holocaust.

“Three out of four of my grandparents were murdered in Auschwitz. I have a much smaller family because of what happened, but I also consider myself extremely fortunate because my parents survived,” Stueber added. “So, I will speak until I can no longer speak.”



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## The Oracle

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# Gene Steratore: behind the scenes of a ref and TV analyst

by Matt Purucker

Gene Steratore’s officiating career culminated in being the referee of the biggest game in football, but it took him a long time to reach that mountaintop. As both an NFL and college basketball referee, his life was full of non-stop traveling and nights entailing three hours of sleep. However, it was all worth it to him in the end.

So, how did Steratore become such a successful referee? The answer is a love of officiating that started from a young age. Before Steratore would go on to officiate the NFL and NCAA Men’s Division I basketball in front of millions of fans, he started refereeing games at the local level.

“My dad [Gene Steratore, Sr.] was part of the first group of officials for the Big East when it was formed in 1980. So, I grew up with it in my home. I refereed my first basketball game with the YMCA in Uniontown when I was 13,” Steratore said. “Asbury played Central Christian in a fifth grade girls game, and it was one of the scariest things I ever did in my officiating career. But, I was hooked from that point on.”

Although Steratore did not know it at the time, he was beginning his journey to officiate the biggest game in American sports. Along the way, he developed a strong mentality that guided his career.

“In officiating, the best compliment you can get is that you weren’t recognized. Officiating games in front of millions of people every night requires that you know your goal is to do the right thing for the game, even if you aren’t appreciated for all the stuff you did right. But, if you make a human error, because we are all imperfect, you know you’ll be chastised and ridiculed for it,” Steratore said.

This philosophy helped him develop the strength of mind needed to officiate games at the highest level, and reflecting on his time in the NFL, it also helped him handle the intense scrutiny the league has for its officials. A common misconception people may have about NFL officials is that they show up for games, officiate them, and go home

until it is time for the next game, but that could not be further from the truth.

Working as an official in the NFL entailed roughly a 30-hour week. Generally, Monday and Tuesday were spent reviewing the previous game and navigating through the NFL’s referee grading system from the league office. All seven officials on an NFL field are graded from three different angles (sideline, end zone, and television) on every play of every game. Those angles are all saved on an official’s individual Zip drive that is given to them on Monday morning to be reviewed.

“[NFL official graders] watch every play a minimum of seven times because every official in football only has a responsibility for two or three players (or a certain area). For example, I never saw Dez Bryant catch the ball. I only saw it under replay,” Steratore said, referring to Bryant’s overturned catch in the 2014 NFC Divisional Playoff game. “When I was an NFL official, if you made six or seven mistakes throughout the whole season, you probably didn’t get a playoff game. You had to be right about 98.3% of the time.”

On top of his NFL workload, Steratore also officiated about 80 NCAA men’s basketball games during the NFL season, and neither the NFL nor the NCAA appreciated him refereeing for the other organization. Steratore had to make many sacrifices to keep up his lifestyle, but he could not resist the personal challenge that it brought to him.

On Steratore’s X (formerly Twitter) page, his pinned tweet is a 2018 quoted tweet from the Big Ten Network. It is a microcosm of his offici-



Gene Steratore officiated 15 years in the NFL and officiated 22 years in NCAA Division I basketball. (CBSSports.com)

ating career, going from refereeing the Minneapolis Miracle to a Minnesota-Penn State game in Happy Valley.

“I’m probably the last guy crazy enough to officiate both sports. The process psychologically and emotionally consumed several men and women I’ve worked with just in the NFL alone,” Steratore said.

Along with the stress brought on by four to five college basketball games and an NFL game every week, Steratore also took great pride in managing the stress brought on by the screaming of coaches from the sideline after a call.

“I felt that it was such an amazing practice in self-control. The majority of the time coaches weren’t right about what they were talking about, but the art of it is diffusing that highly heated situation. About 80 percent of what they were saying was emotional, one-sided thought,” Steratore said.

Steratore got it down to such a science that he knew the exact time when a camera would focus on him after making a call and a coach started yelling.

“I knew I had about five to seven seconds to hopefully diffuse this completely adolescent, profanity-laced behavior and I had several tricks that I used to help diffuse them. When I had

a coach come running 10 yards onto the field in football, I would walk over to him knowing that TV was on me,” Steratore said. “I would tell him to meet me at his sideline, and when he followed me like a good duckling, I’d tell him he could say all that he wanted to say, but after I responded, that would be the end of the conversation.”

During those 15 seconds of television, Steratore did his part to show empathy for coaches, while also having the awareness to hold those coaches, his fellow officials, and himself accountable to protect the integrity of the game. For Steratore, the idea of empathy and awareness to protect the integrity of the game extended to holding spectators accountable, too. He recalled an instance where he had to interject to stop a fan from harassing him.

“I would know the rhythm of the guy’s yelling, and I wanted to be patient with him. Later, I would spin on that mid-sentence, and I would briefly make eye contact with him. Because he was human and embarrassment set in, he’d shut down right away,” Steratore said, “All the people around him were not entertained by his profanity, and he was ruining a lot of their experiences that night, so in doing that I did the game and the spectators a good service.”

Despite that, as a referee, there was only so much that Steratore could do to assuage coaches and spectators. There were specific circumstances that people were mad at him regardless of what call he made. Especially since the advent of instant replay as a tool to help referees make calls, officials like Steratore have been put under the microscope, even receiving death threats.

“I had a retired FBI agent that was my own personal security person that met my family and anybody that was close to me. He drove past my house once or twice a week in a plain red car,” Steratore said. “On occasion, my kids were removed from college for three or four days at a time because people would make death threats toward myself and my family.”

One of those calls made with the assistance of instant replay late

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# Pulitzer Prize journalist shares her passion for journalism

by Julia Barbati & Kamaria Mutadabur

Paula Reed Ward, a journalist whose career path changed because of an internship and is now working for the Pittsburgh Tribune Review, has spent the past 26 years covering stories from animals to tragedies. Although this was not her original plan, she has made a name for herself within the journalism world and was part of a team that won the Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News in 2019.

After graduating from Thomas Jefferson High School, Paula dreamt of becoming a foreign correspondent and traveling the world, but one internship when she was 20 years old changed her whole plan.

“During my junior year, I did an internship at the Harrisburg Patriot and when I was there they teamed me up with their night cop reporters and their court reporter and it completely changed my path. I decided that I wanted to cover criminal justice,” she said.

Her first experience with a homicide case was during her internship which opened her eyes to what it would take to do her job and see terrible things frequently. She arrived on the scene and saw a man’s body hanging out of a car. She was forced to deal with the man’s fiancé and her own emotions after he had been shot to death driving through the intersection.

“[The man’s fiancé] came running into the scene screaming the most horrific scream and collapsed at the side of his car, sobbing hysterically. It was the first time that I recognized the human side of it and the empathy that we have to have when we’re doing this job,” Ward said.

After college, her journey to becoming a journalist took her to Savannah, Georgia. While she was there, she reported for a daily newspaper and covered the night cops reporting. Then in Georgia she received her masters degree in criminal justice and focused on criminal topics. She was able to get involved and understand the psychological perspective behind a criminal, which she was fascinated by.

Her journey continued as she started reporting court cases before coming back to Pittsburgh to work at the Pittsburgh Post Gazette. About three years ago she took a job with the Pittsburgh Tribune Review.

“I cover courts and so my beat involves state court. I also cover federal court which tends to be more white collar or complicated crime and the appellate court. When things get appealed at the state or federal court level and the Supreme Court issues decisions on those, I write about that as well. I get to have a nice combination of courtroom drama,” she stated.

Sometimes she finds it challenging to balance the workload between everything she does daily and the larger projects she works on. Despite this, she continues to find joy in her work and what she shares to the public. On the other hand, she still understands the magnitude of the things she covers daily.

“I know society needs good stories. I feel like there’s so much more drama and compelling information and life changing material in the stuff that I cover versus happy feature stories,” Paula said.

Oddly enough, it was a feature story that helped her understand the power of journalism and why journalism is so important. It all began with a dog named Brutus.

“I was going to do a story about these animal shelters and them being overcrowded. I began my story by describing a dog’s last day at the shelter. There was a dog named Brutus who was there. He was next on the list to be euthanized. He had this gross skin condition and his medicine was super expensive and so nobody wanted him. My story began with Brutus on his last day,” she said. “The staff who loves him stops at McDonalds and they get him a cheeseburger and they come into work and they take Brutus out in the yard and play ball with him until he no longer



Paula Reed Ward

wants to play. They give him his two cheeseburgers and then he lays on their lap and they kill him, put him in a garbage bag, and throw him in the freezer to be incinerated there.”

She had yet to know that her story was going to be in the center of the Sunday paper. She then received a call that morning stating that Brutus and twenty six other dogs had been adopted.

“I have enough of those kinds of examples where something that I have written has changed somebody’s life or has changed policy or has changed law or the face of Congress. I’ve done all of these things. When they happen enough to make you continue to love what you do and want to make a difference in doing so. That’s what journalism is to me.”

She specifically keeps stories that are meaningful to her in the front of her mind because of the attachment and impact they had on her.

“A couple adopted two kids from Ethiopia and brought them to live here in Pittsburgh. They were... making them sleep in a bedroom without a mattress and no furniture and stripped down walls. Their two biological children were white kids, well-treated. So I did a story. Ultimately they were arrested and charged. The five-year-old boy had chemical burns on him because they were forcing him to sleep on a mattress that was soaked in urine and feces. I wrote that story and I was so full of disgust and anger and rage,” she shared.

Despite the anger and frustration from this horrible event, Paula was able to see the positive outcome of this situation. Although she was at the forefront of something so terrible, she was also a part of the happy ending.

“A couple adopted them and they are perhaps the nicest people on earth. I went and I spent two or three days with the family, and I just observed them. It was so wonderful and lovely and the complete opposite of this horrific, terrible situation that they had been in before. I wrote a story that I freaking love so much, even to this day. I’m super proud of that, both because it shows the resilience of people, kids in particular, but it also shows good in the world,” she said.

For Paula, reporting stories is much more important than just sitting down and writing something. It serves the purpose of paying attention to the things happening around and affecting you and your communities. With paying attention, comes holding people accountable for when things go awry.

In order to hold others accountable, it is incredibly important that the information you are receiving is accurate. This can make the job harder, but more fun for Paula as it can sometimes lead into ‘the chase for information’.

“Our jobs as reporters are to hold all these entities to account. Hold them accountable for the decisions they make, but also to make sure when some-

thing goes wrong that it’s exposed so that we can fix it and do better the next time,” Ward said.

Thankfully due to her strong skill sets in investigation and research, finding information isn’t incredibly difficult for her.

“This is why my job is fun. It’s like putting together a puzzle,” Paula said. “So the idea is that you always have a way to protect yourself because you don’t ever want to publish false information. So while I’ve definitely had people who have either exaggerated or maybe had something that they sent you down the wrong path, I don’t think I’ve ever been burned by one of those,” Paula said.

Unfortunately however, there will be some who don’t take these rules and efforts into account. In the times of the 2016 election, claims of ‘fake news’ swept the country, changing the grounds of the media and news forever. As claims grew more frequently, actual fake stories grew even greater. This presented many problems for journalists all over the nation.

“We’re still fighting it, actually, and it’s really awful and makes me sad angry. I have had people who shout fake news or other derogatory, terrible things at me. Most of the time I just ignore them. Occasionally, I have been unprofessional and didn’t ignore them. I try not to be that way very often, but it’s insulting and it’s frustrating,” Paula said. “I can’t even explain it because if people would realize what the media actually does right is tell stories about your community and be a watchdog of your government agencies to make sure that they’re not doing stuff that’s wrong.”

In other words, the media is not supposed to be the bad guy. They are meant to be on the public’s side to give information about things not heard or seen.

Unfortunately, due to the ‘fake news’ movement, the journalists who take their jobs seriously have been painted as the enemy and sometimes, not trusted. Take the shooting at Michigan State University from February 2023 as an example.

“Michigan State’s administration created a sign and a screenshot for people to have on their phones that has a big green circle with a slash through it. Inside it says ‘No media’, which they are handing out to students like candy so that they can (show) if a reporter approaches them to talk about what happened. It’s absolutely awful because it again makes us the enemy.”

The portrayal they have on television makes gaining trust especially hard. On television, journalists are portrayed as pests that keep nagging at a person for information with zero respect for privacy. In real life, especially for Ward, this is not always true.

“When I do my job, I have to go and ask terrible questions in really sad and terrible situations. I’m not a jerk. If you are a person who has just been the victim of something, I walk up to you and say, ‘Hi, my name is Paula, I’m a reporter for the Trib and I am writing a story and wondering if you would like to talk to me’. That’s what I do. I’m not like, ‘Tell me what happened!’ You see this nonsense on TV. That’s not how we do it,” she said.

Surprisingly, even to Ward, more often than not, people want to talk to reporters.

“We’re all humans and we need to share things that are painful and we need to express how we’re feeling and we need to make sense of stuff. And the way you make sense of stuff is talking about it,” she said.

Paula has shared and presented her passion for journalism throughout the years. The journey she has taken and continues to travel has held meaning for her. To be able to make others aware of the truth about their communities and governments as well as hold them accountable for when things go wrong, motivates her to continue doing it.

“Journalism almost always wins,” she said



# Mr. Albert marches in Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade

by Will Emmons

On November 23, 2023, Shaler Area saw a familiar face at the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. Shaler Area Elementary School band teacher Mr. Scott Albert, along with six other Pittsburgh-area band directors, marched alongside each other. He has been playing music all of his life, but he has not gotten to march in a parade in a long time. “I have played and marched through high school and college for a total of nine years. After college, when I started teaching, I either directed bands, assisted, or was a clinician throughout my career,” Mr. Albert said.

The Saluting America’s Band Directors allowed people to register for a shot at being part of the parade by filling out questions about your musical experience, the school you teach at, and any outside of school activities.

They had done an event before this for the Rose Bowl Parade, and though Albert only expected them to select returning musicians, he took his shot at marching.

“I never thought I would be picked to participate in this group. My expectation was that the group would take



Mr. Scott Albert at the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade

most of the returning directors who marched in the Rose Bowl Parade. When I received the notification that I was accepted, I was surprised and

shocked to be selected into the group,” Mr. Albert said.

Through the Saluting America’s Band Directors program, 400 band directors across the country came together at New York City’s Sheraton Times Square Hotel.

The band directors were advised to get to bed early Wednesday night because they had to report to the buses as early as 2 a.m. on Thanksgiving.

“I was actually up at 12:30 a.m. and our call time to be on our bus was 1:30 a.m.. I realize most people would think that is so early to be up, but the atmosphere of Herald Square in Macy’s at 3:10 a.m. rehearsal was stunning,” Mr. Albert said.

Although there were some extreme hours on Thanksgiving, their regular days consisted of early practice hours and some more exciting things afterwards, like appear-

ing on FOX and Friends, a FOX News TV program.

“My typical day was a four-hour morning rehearsal followed by lunch. Then there were scheduled afternoon performances and evening sightseeing,” Albert said.

It was an amazing experience for Mr. Albert. This opportunity wasn’t just music; he got to see landmarks in New Jersey and New York City, along with musical performances and the National September 11 Memorial.

The New York City community gave a warm welcome and even showed up to their early morning practice on Thanksgiving to get a preview of the show.

“When we warmed up that morning for our dress rehearsal, I was amazed how many people that live right there were up and watching us rehearse,” Mr. Albert said.

The overall experience was enjoyable and Albert made lifelong memories and friendships.

“I would 100 percent do this again. The experience of getting to be a band kid again was awesome. That is what it felt like to me when I participated. I made new friends with other band directors from around the country from California, Georgia, and Alaska,” Mr. Albert said.



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# A look at the challenges of being a basketball referee

by Brady McGuire

As basketball season gets into full swing, hopefully you have the opportunity to check out a game whether it may be youth league, high school, college, or professional. If you have already seen a game, you probably have heard the officials being criticized throughout the game. Whether it be from coaches, players, fans, parents, or the student sections, officials hear it from everyone. What no one ever considers is the officials’ point of view.

Whether you are a player or coach, everyone makes mistakes. Players and coaches are human

and aren’t perfect. No matter the mistake, players and coaches are taught to move on and stay in the moment of the game. So why do we expect someone to be perfect just because they are a referee?

Just like playing or coaching a game, officiating a game is not an easy job.

“Basketball is especially difficult because so much is going on all at once and as a ref you are watching multiple things at once,” WPIAL basketball official Mr. Eric Schott said. “For example, in a simple pick and roll there are a bunch of things you are looking for and that’s only a couple of seconds and then there’s something else. The game just keeps moving so there’s really no time to relax or reset, there’s always another play coming that you have to be ready for.”

On top of the difficulty of actually making the calls, officials have to deal with the scrutiny from fans. With the uprising of social media, these environments are becoming even more hostile.

“The reason why a lot of people don’t want to ref right now is because they see referees getting attacked, especially on the internet. People on the in-

ternet can be much more vicious on their phone than they can be face-to-face because they don’t have to pay the price of knowing how much they hurt someone,” former NFL and NCAA basketball official Mr. Gene Steratore said. “So now, when they go to public games, they feel like they can call those refs things that they wouldn’t even think of saying before.”

With so many people telling you how bad you are at your job, even though they may not know what they are talking about, officials need to have internal confidence in their calls.

“You have to be confident on the floor or you’ll be second guessing yourself all the time. You can’t

be second guessing yourself and thinking about plays that already happened. You have to move on and focus on the action happening right now. Confidence doesn’t mean that you are always right, it just means that you believe you made the right call,” Schott said.

No matter the call, every official knows some of their calls will not be agreed with. One of the challenges is how to deal with those who don’t agree with a call.

“It’s diffusing a highly emotional situation, to bring it down to where you can navigate it. The art of doing

that, truly for me, became more of what I was addicted to in officiating than actually getting the plays right,” Steratore said.

Even though this may seem like a lot to deal with, this is just the tip of the iceberg of an official’s job description. What people don’t see is all the communication and responsibilities an official has without even blowing a whistle.

“At halftime, we discuss plays and situations during the first half. We identify any problem players or coaches and how we will address them in the 2nd

half,” WPIAL/NCAA basketball and baseball official Mr. Quinn McGuire said. “During close games in the 4th quarter, we will discuss the end of the game responsibilities. Who has the (possession) arrow, how many timeouts each team has, and which official will have the last shot.”

Just like players and coaches, officials will talk and improve their skills after the game as well.

“After the game, we discuss the game and certain plays. It is an open communication between all three refs to discuss plays to get better. We never work a perfect game,” McGuire said.

Along with officiating anywhere from two to five games a week, officials have families and work jobs along with officialting.

“I wake up and then begin work at 7 a.m. I finish work at 5 p.m., then I eat dinner and prep my bag for the game. I leave for the game around 5:30 and the games start at 7:30. The games usually end around 9 and I get home around 9:30-10:30,” McGuire said.

Considering everything from busy schedules, to chirping from fans, players, and coaches, and the expectation to be perfect, it is obvious why there is an official shortage across the nation.

“I believe the harassment that officials take from parents and fans is just too much for young officials to deal with on a daily basis. It takes thick skin and the ability to tune out the outside noise,” WPIAL basketball official Mr. Bill Gubba said. “I wish more parents and fans would think about it this way, if you went to your job and got yelled at all day long, would you want to continue doing that job?”

There are times we all get caught up in the heat of the game and criticize a bad call, but there is a time where we have to draw a line. The sad reality is that if this type of behavior does not stop, there may be a chronic shortage of officials.

“Believe me as an official, I would love to get every call right for the best interest of the game. Reality is that at times there is a call missed, or a judgment that is made that not everyone will agree with. I wish that spectators would be more understanding with the misses and move on to the next play, like most coaches teach their players,” Gubba said.

**"Believe me as an official, I would love to get every call right for the best interest of the game. Reality is that at times there is a call missed, or a judgment that is made that not everyone will agree with."**

**-- Mr. Bill Gubba**

T H E GRID		What gives you the ick?	Where do you go on a first date?	Favorite Rom-Com?	Last movie that made you cry?	Favorite love song?
Freshman Logan Milligan		people who say girl dinner	Burger King	Cars	The art of racing in the rain	Careless Whisper -- George Michael
Sophomore Rose Molnar		when they are rude to their parents	A park	10 things I hate about you	Bridge to Terabithia	Can't take my eyes off of you -- Frankie Valli
Junior Nolan Chieu		when they don't like chicken	Canes or Popeyes	Crazy Rich Asians	The Greatest Showman	Modern Jam -- Travis Scott
Senior May Engel		selfish people	A park	500 days of summer	Manchester by the Sea	Beautiful Boy -- John Lennon
Faculty Mr. Connelly		messy or disorganized	mini golf	10 things I hate about you	Marley and Me	Your Song -- Elton John



# Behind the scenes of a ref and TV analyst — from page 3



**CBS rules analyst, former NFL and NCAA referee Gene Steratore talks to The Oracle staff.**

in games was the infamous Calvin Johnson ‘catch’ back in 2010. With 24 seconds left in the game, Detroit quarterback Shaun Hill found Calvin Johnson in the end zone for what appeared to be a go-ahead touchdown. However, upon further review, Steratore called it an incomplete pass.

“Because technology wanted to come into the human element, we had to decide when a catch finally ended. During my Calvin Johnson play, there was no interaction with the NFL office in New York like they do today, so it was just the replay official and me making the call,” Steratore said. “I told the replay official that it’s a catch but he told me that he had to go through all these things to finish the process of the catch. I wasn’t extremely happy that someone was telling me all these nuances to define a catch, but he was smart enough to know that’s how the NFL wrote this replay situation.”

The Calvin Johnson ‘catch’ had massive repercussions on the definition of a catch in the NFL for the next seven years, but it also gave rise to the prominence of the rules analyst position (Steratore’s current job) that is on every NFL broadcast today.

“Mike Pereira hired me as a referee, and the irony of it was that the first game Pereira was a rules analyst for was the Calvin Johnson game. While I was under the hood, the announcers brought Pereira in and he gave this wishy-washy statement, which I’m kind of learning myself. But then, Brian Billick pressed Pereira, telling him that he was hired to say what he thought (not what I thought),” Steratore said. “And just before I clicked the mic on, Pereira said I was going to say incomplete, which I did. Literally, he got a three-year extension that day, and that play started what became a future job for me.”

Ironically, Steratore and Pereira did not meet again in person until 2014. Steratore joked with Pereira during breakfast the day of the 2014 NFC Divisional Playoff game between the Cowboys and Packers that he was glad that they would not have to go through a Calvin Johnson ‘catch’ scenario again; but, even the Dez Bryant ‘catch’ game was not the last time instant replay would determine the outcome of a major call for Steratore.

That last time for Steratore would occur in his final game: Super Bowl LII. For football players, Super Bowl Sunday is an event unlike any other, and for Steratore, his preparation for the 2018 Super Bowl and the secrecy of it was unlike any other.

“You’re wired when you referee a Super Bowl from three hours before kickoff until you get in the shower after. So, everything I said for seven hours is taped on NFL Films. They have not released all

of it because they can’t. People have to retire and die (probably me being one of them) before you all get to hear everything,” Steratore said.

Late in the fourth quarter, quarterback Nick Foles threw the game-winning touchdown pass to tight end Zach Ertz to put the Philadelphia Eagles ahead of the New England Patriots with 2:21 remaining. However, it was uncertain that Ertz maintained control of the ball crossing the goal line, so it went to instant replay.

“The NFL was telling me in my headset that he didn’t survive the ground and it was incomplete. But, they just showed him in the air. In the process of replay, you have to see the whole play. You can’t just go to the last part of it,” Steratore said. “So, I saw

the play from the beginning and had a longer than normal conversation on the field of the Super Bowl defining what I just watched, telling about 10 people from the NFL, who were all my supervisors, that this is a touchdown.”

After going through another dramatic instant replay ordeal, Steratore joked at the time that it was time to retire from the NFL.

“Calvin didn’t catch it. Dez didn’t catch it. Zach Ertz caught it, and I figured that this was my ticket to retire because someone finally caught it,” Steratore said.

In true Steratore fashion, he went on to referee a basketball game the next day at Northwestern University against the University of Michigan, before retiring in June of 2018.

After retiring from officiating, Steratore was hired by CBS as a rules analyst. During the Elite Eight game between San Diego State and Creighton last year, Steratore was tasked with breaking down the ending sequence of SDSU’s 57-56 victory.

When a play like the SDSU-Creighton foul happens, Steratore will hear in his earpiece that the producers are sending him to a certain game, and he will get about 20 seconds to watch the play, digest it, and push a button that allows him to talk to millions of people.

Steratore needs to know announcers, referees’ names, the city the game’s played in, and be able to quickly and accurately determine the correct call before jumping to the next game. Especially during March Madness, it is incredibly stressful because, at its peak, Steratore works 13 hours straight.

After the SDSU-Creighton game specifically, Steratore had to hurry down to Studio 43 from his own studio to do a post-game analysis at the CBS

Broadcast Center.

“Within 30 seconds of the game ending, I heard my producer tell me that I needed to be downstairs on the table with Jay Wright, Charles Barkley, and company. I needed to be dressed in my suit, run downstairs, get rewired, and explain that play in 45 seconds,” Steratore said. “So, after my staff frantically dressed me like a scarecrow, I hustled down there, and the producers made sure I was ready to go on the air. Right before I sit down, Charles looks at me and goes, ‘That ain’t no damn foul, bruh.’ I told Chuck not to start this with me and that we could talk later tonight, not live on national television.”

Steratore enjoys his current job as a rules analyst, but he also emphasized the shortage of officials across the country. They have to work in a much more toxic environment today than when Steratore was younger and social media did not exist.

“The reason why a lot of people don’t want to ref right now is because they see referees getting attacked, especially on the internet. People on the internet can be much more vicious on their phone than they can be face-to-face,” Steratore said. “Unfortunately, because of how things have evolved, a lot of people like this [expletive], which feeds into those individuals. So when they go to games, they feel like they can call those refs things that they wouldn’t even think of saying before.”

While officials like Steratore often face criticism and ridicule from media outlets and individuals at a national level, even referees at a local level must regularly handle harassment.

“Whether you come out of the locker room in front of eight people or 80,000, almost instantly, you’re not really liked. This uniform and this position puts me in a place where the majority of people are thinking that me, this one individual, is going to mess everything up tonight,” Steratore said.

In addition to his role on television, Steratore has traveled across the country trying to raise awareness about a shortage of sports officials to the nation’s youth. He hopes to encourage America’s youth to

develop a culture of appreciation for officials and become officials. Since so many athletes know and love the games they play, they are prime candidates to become officials.

“Part of why I retired was to try to get this message out. I want to talk to all the young athletes in America because 97% of high school athletes (stop playing) after graduating. If you’re an athlete, there’s a lot that you love about sports other than just playing.”

Along with encouraging young athletes to become referees, Steratore

hopes that he can be part of a broader movement to stop hate of various forms and become a voice for empathy in general. Using his reputation as a renowned referee, Steratore seeks to make that change.

“Another reason I retired was to work with CBS, getting to befriend people like Jim Nantz, Tony Romo, who I never thought I’d get a chance to meet more than a couple times. I was really lucky to get on this stage,” Steratore said. “At this point in my life, the platform I have with CBS has allowed me to start making a difference in the lives of people that are willing to listen. If just 10% of people are willing to make a change, willing to listen, willing to stop hating, and willing to develop empathy for people in general, not just officials, it would be great for society.”



**Coach Byron Smith argues with Gene Steratore during a game at the University of Wisconsin in Nov. 2016. (AP Photo/Andy Manis)**



# Q&A -- learning more about the SAHS faculty

Several staff member talked with The Oracle – here is a small sampling of their answers

Mr. Steve Balsomico



Q: What is the craziest place you’ve been to?

A: So I’ve been to a lot of crazy places, but one of the ones that really sticks with me is this tiny restaurant in a back street in Tokyo that specialized in what they called “gross out food”. At this restaurant you would go up to the counter to order the special and they would take a live frog hopping around the counter, they’d flip it over, cut out its heart and you would eat the heart while it was still beating. It was really crazy. It did not taste good at all, but I was there so I ate it.

Q: What was the first car you bought?

A: This might be even worse, but it was a 1990 purplish-pink Ford Escort that had those automatic seatbelts where you turn on the car and the seatbelt automatically pulls across and it’s very uncomfortable and terrible. It was purplish pink and had a spoiler on it, but I bought it because it was really cheap.

Mr. Cory Williams



Q: What was the first car you bought?

A: A 1990 Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera. It had like 85,000 miles on it, it was not my first choice of car. The car ended up being 4500 dollars or something. Then I drove the thing until literally the doors wouldn’t stay closed and they would fly open on you when you were going around bends on a highway and the only thing that would hold the door closed was the seatbelt being attached to the door. It was pretty dangerous, pretty dumb and then we gave that car up and then they raced it in this thing called the Cornfield 500. It is like a junk car race they do up around farmers’ fields up where I’m from in Meadville so pretty funny stuff. It didn’t survive the race.

Q: What is your fattest moment?

A: When I was in high school I tried to eat 100 wings. I tried to eat a benji with Worm, my buddy. So we did our best to eat 100 wings, but I was

stopped when the establishment we were at stopped bringing out the all you can eat wings. So I ended up falling short, but I ended up eating somewhere around 95 or 97 wings and that was just me by myself. It was really bad and it got really gross about an hour later and that was that.

Mr. Matt Hiserodt



Q: Could you tell the story about the Jamaican pig that can chug beers?

A: When people go to Jamaica as tourists, they rarely go and experience the real Jamaica. I really wanted to leave the resort, so I had them call me cab and I told the cab driver, “I want you to take me to the best jerk chicken place around where I can get some authentic Jamaican jerk chicken.” We were dropped off at what I would call a village that was pretty much just a bunch of shanty-like dilapidated huts. I went out and I placed my order, and as we’re sitting there waiting for her to cook the food, I looked over, and there’s this pig pen with a fence around it. It had a sign that said you could take a beer and feed it to the pig for a dollar. When we were sitting there waiting, another group of four showed up. They paid the dollar and the owner of the pig went to get their beer, threw it into the pen, and from the shadows of the pen lumbered the most grossly obese farm animal I’ve ever seen. The thing kind of just staggers up, bites into the can and sucks out all the beer from it, throws it off to the side and then lumbers back into the shadows and disappears again. What struck me about that experience was that feeding that obese pig beer one dollar at a time was probably that guy’s only source of income.

Q: What inspired you to become a teacher?

A: I was very much like my parents. My parents actually met at a singles table on a cruise ship back in the 1970s. So when I was growing up, they both always loved traveling, so they always exposed my sister and I to a lot of traveling and they always encouraged us to travel. When I was 16, I became an exchange student in Argentina for

a summer. I went to a business school and the main subject there was English. Our English teacher quit abruptly; she just walked off the job. They were in dire need of an English speaker, and they didn’t want to fall behind in their studies compared to their competition at other high schools, so I kind of just became the de facto teacher for the remainder of my stay there. That experience especially sparked something in my mind that said, “hey, you know, this is something I’d be interested in pursuing more as a person.”

Mr. Tim Taylor



Q: Best concert you’ve been to?

A: When I was 16, I went to see Nine Inch Nails and David Bowie in Camden, New Jersey, and that’s crazy if you don’t know anything about those groups. So we went in my friend’s mom’s station wagon. He’s like, ‘just make sure you don’t mess up the car.’ We went, but it rained a lot. It was an outdoor concert sorta like Star Lake so we had lawn seats. It was super muddy, super wet and people started running and sliding down the hill since it was a slight grade making it a mudslide. So my friend James and I are like, ‘that’s awesome, let’s do it,’ and we got head to toe covered in mud. We went back to my friend’s station wagon and he was like, ‘you’re not riding in this thing,’ and he had a tarp in the back so he had to unroll this tarp and we had to sit on this tarp the whole way home and he just cussed us out the whole way home from Philly which was an hour drive.

Q: What was the most irresponsible purchase you’ve ever made?

A: When I was 17, I pulled into my bank to go to the ATM, but this guy goes ‘hey, you want some speakers?’ And I was like, ‘what?’ And he insists on me buying these speakers, and he ends up selling me this set of big 4-foot tall house speakers out of the back of a white van. I was so naive where I didn’t really think much about it I just thought wow this is a great deal and I bought them. They were fine but I realized that they were probably stolen or total bootlegs because I was 17 and didn’t know any better. When my friends asked where I got them I said, ‘ummmm some guy at the bank had them

in the back of a van’ and they called me an idiot because, why would you do that? I probably dropped 300 dollars on them which in 1995 was a fortune. Growing up in Philly, I’m usually really good at spotting a scam, but that was like my one moment of weakness

Mrs. Dina Donini



Q: What’s the most irresponsible purchase you’ve made?

A: I bought these little plastic finger hands after seeing them on Instagram that go on each of your fingers. I initially got them to mess with my dog because the video I saw had someone petting a dog with them, but my family has since become tormented by them. I hide them all over the house like in the fridge next to my son’s chocolate milk or in my husband’s car whenever he goes to work. Everyone is so annoyed by them; the madder they get, the more I use them. So I guess that speaks to my character.

Q: Do you have a favorite student slang? Could you use it in a sentence?

A: I can definitely use it in a sentence, but I had to ask what it means. Somebody told me I was “drippin” and I didn’t know what that meant. So yes, “Mrs. Donini, you are drippin today.” I now know what that means, but I didn’t at the time.

Mr. Kevin Mosbacher



Q: What’s a challenging aspect about being a parent that you weren’t prepared for?

A: I have four kids that range in age from 14 to 28 and they all still live at home. I kind of thought that after they went to college that they would move on, but I guess they like us so much that they want to stick around.

Q: Being a Phys. Ed teacher, what’s the most entertaining game to watch students play?

A: Speedball is fun to watch, but my favorite unit to teach is badminton because I play with the kids and they have fun trying to beat me which doesn’t happen very often. It’s been a couple years since a student beat me.

To see the full interviews -- scan the QR code or visit ShalerOracle.com

