

The Oracle

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SA grad's artwork going to baseball Hall of Fame

Piece shows Pittsburgh Pirates Sept 1, 1971 lineup — first all Black and Latino lineup in MLB

by Dominic DiTommaso

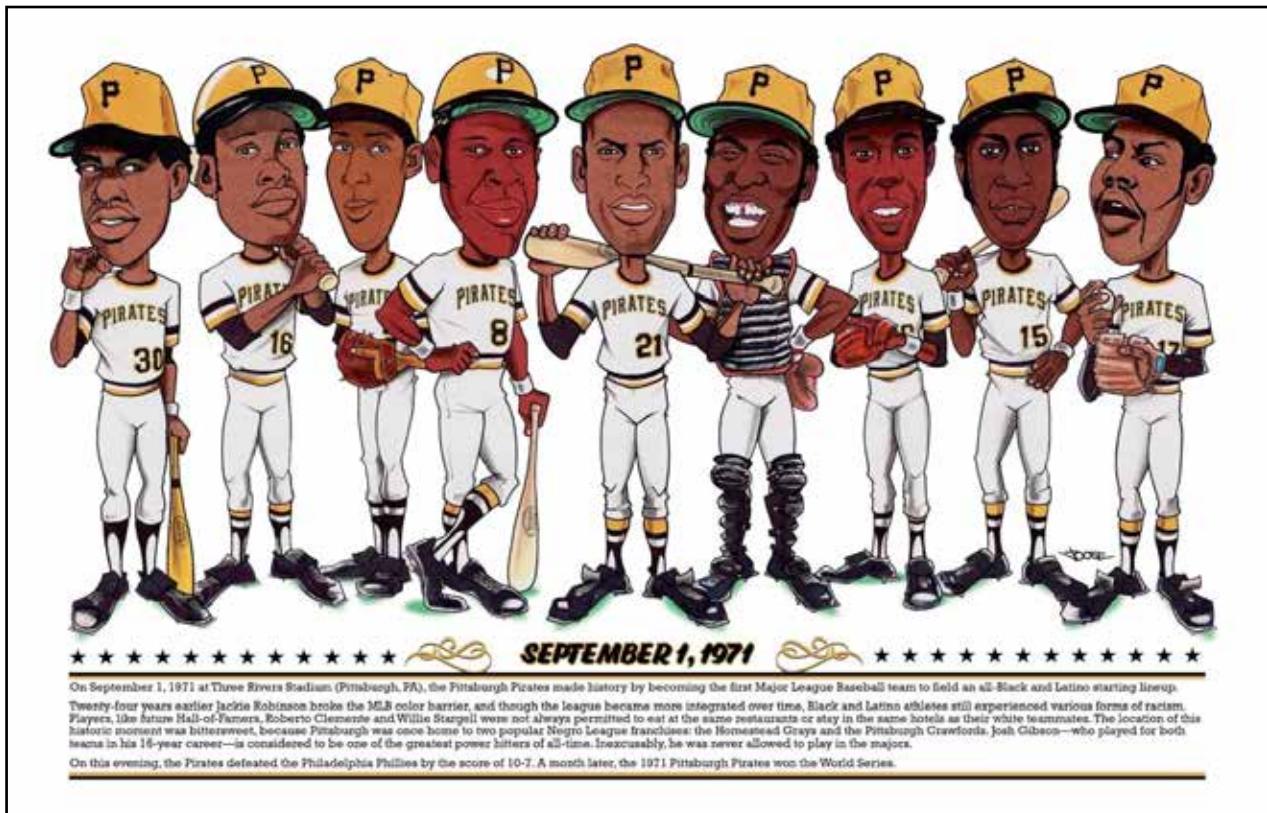
Nestled away on Main St. in Cooperstown, New York, sits the famed Baseball Hall of Fame, which has been in existence since 1939. Home to some of the greats of the sport, it houses artifacts and plaques that represent the likes of Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, and Willie Mays. Now, another name can be added to that list: Jim Shearer.

Shearer, a graduate of Shaler Area and brother of Shaler Area High School English teacher Mrs. Anne Loudon, is more known for his connections to the music world. He hosted "VH1 Top 20 Video Countdown", VH1's "100 Greatest Artists of All Time", and "100 Greatest Videos of All Time", as well as numerous shows on MTV and MTV2. He now hosts "The Jim Shearer Show" on SiriusXM VOLUME, where he interviews musicians and industry talent, as well as talking about music, specifically music from the '90s.

Outside of music, Shearer is known for his love of sports, primarily Pittsburgh sports teams. It was this love, as well as his desire to capture the climate of today, that inspired him to create a drawing of the first-ever all-Black-and-Latino starting lineup in Major League Baseball history when the Pirates debuted it in 1971.

"When all of the Black Lives Matter protests were happening, it felt like a really positive thing in New York City, and then just looking on Facebook and talking to some people in Pittsburgh, it seemed like they didn't have the right idea about it," Shearer said. "When you brought up Black Lives Matter, they automatically wanted to talk about people burning buildings and I said, 'No, you can't think of the movement and protests as some bad seeds burning buildings. It's about equality and lifting up black people on the same level as white people.' I felt the best way to talk about it wasn't necessarily to shout 'BLM' from the rooftops, but through Pittsburgh sports."

The Baseball Hall of Fame contains a fan wing, where baseball fans and people alike can submit



pieces of artwork or memorabilia to be displayed. While his dad helped him get the art to the public, it was Shearer's uncle that made his work being represented in Cooperstown possible.

"My dad gave a copy [of my drawing] to my uncle, and my uncle is a baseball nut," Shearer said. "This summer he went to the Hall of Fame and had a couple copies of it [on him]. Someone he was talking to said they had a fan wing of the Hall of Fame where fans could submit different pieces of artwork. He got me the business card of someone and I just emailed them to humor my uncle not thinking they would get back, and they did get back to me and said 'We would like this for the permanent collection.'"

Outside of what it stands for and the impact it could have, a reason it was inducted is because of the beauty of the actual picture. It features Pirates such as Willie Stargell, Rennie Stennet, and Al Oliver in uniform with the date the all-Black-and-Latino lineup

debuted, September 1, 1971, underneath their cleats. Featured in the middle, with four Pirates on either side, is Roberto Clemente. His position on the drawing and straight expression on his face was purposely down by Shearer.

"I put Roberto Clemente in the middle because he's one of the greatest baseball players of all time and he happened to play in Pittsburgh, so to put him anywhere else I think would be disrespectful to a guy who was nicknamed 'The Great One,'" Shearer said. "The reason I didn't have him with a big smile plastered across his face is because when he played in Pittsburgh there were a lot of times where he was disrespected. Even though he probably liked playing in Pittsburgh, there were probably a lot of things that he didn't like about Pittsburgh, so I gave him a game face in the middle."

Cont. on page 7

Sponsor hoping for better blood drive turnout

by Savannah Schultis

Similar to last fall, Shaler Area High School is hosting its second virtual blood drive. The drive started March 17 and will conclude on March 31. Students and staff can donate blood at any Vitalant blood drive or community donation center.

Physical Education teacher Ms. Marci Jackley, the blood drive sponsor, believes this upcoming drive has a lot more potential than the fall drive.

"Although the last drive wasn't what we had hoped for in regards to donors, we are planning on this spring drive to be great! I just hope that people take the opportunity of Spring Break to get out there and donate," Jackley said.

If you wish to sign up for this opportunity that can save up to three lives, check your grade-level Google Classroom and find the post about the blood drive. Open the attachment and click the link that will take you to the sign-up page. Make sure you mention Shaler Area High School at your appointment so our school can receive credit for your donation.

It's important to take your friends and family to donate as well. Even people who have received a COVID-19 vaccine are qualified for donation as long as they meet all general eligibility criteria.

According to the FDA, blood supplies have been at an all-time low due to COVID and maintaining an adequate blood supply is more crucial now than ever. In fact, people who donate blood are "equivalent to those who work in critical infrastructure industries."

"I think the selfless act of donating blood is so important because of the number of people it affects- an hour of your time really relates to saving 3 peoples lives. It sounds so simple, it just takes a little bit of your time," Jackley said.



OPINIONS

Changing class requirements would promote learning, not just passing

by Savannah Schultis

Imagine this: It's the night before a test that you forgot about or spent too much time procrastinating your studying that you ultimately have to resort to cramming. We've all been there before, but why do we do it? By the time it's 1 a.m., we're surely not retaining information.

But this isn't a worry for a lot of students, as most admit a majority of their schoolwork is about passing at this point, not actually learning.

Students learn what they want to learn or what they think is important to them and their future. Coming from the standpoint of a high school student, there have definitely been many times when I studied a concept just to pass the test. As soon as the test is over, I pretty much forget the information.

There's so many topics I've learned in school that made me wonder, "when am I ever going to need this in life?" Unfortunately, as a result, I'm not motivated to really learn and study that information, as I have "more useful" things to learn and other classes that are more significant to my future.

"In my opinion, school is more about passing than learning. I believe this because I feel like students have a lot of pressure placed on them to do well.

There are few people that I know who actually view school as learning instead of passing. I also think this because even if someone knows the material, they may not do well on a test and get upset. People care so much about a percent and a letter grade more than the learning itself because at the end of the day, it all comes down to your future. The mindset is if you pass, you will be successful in life. Who doesn't want to be successful?" junior Emily Wurzer said.

For many people, school has come down to the grade at the end of the nine weeks. Many base their own worth or self image off their GPA.

This mindset is unhealthy, and a lot of it actually comes from pressure from our parents and the fear of failure and disappointing them.

"My parents are so hard on me about my grades and I'm always worried about disappointing them rather than worrying about not understanding the content. I'd rather get a decent grade than admit to failure and deal with the consequences," junior Sasha Dzurovchik said.

It's in the nature of most parents to be concerned about their children's grades and if they are passing their classes, but some families place more pressure on their kids than others. If you come from a family of nurses, for example, you might feel like you have

to become a nurse and continue the family legacy. The same can go for being accepted into a certain college.

This problem of passing vs. learning won't go away anytime soon if the high school education system remains as it is. In every state, a certain amount of credits is required to graduate. In Pennsylvania, this number is 21. This includes literature, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, and other electives. There comes a point in each student's high school career when he/she feels like a certain history class, for example, won't be of any use to him/her in life. For this reason, that particular class becomes a blow-off class that he/she is just trying to pass.

To fix this problem, there should be more flexibility in student's schedules. From my experience, our high school has a wide variety of courses and electives that can cater to almost any student's plan after graduation. However, under the state law, we are still required to take classes that seem like busy work for many of us and I wish there was more leniency in that.

Courses that will actually prepare students for their individual lives after high school would be far more useful and would encourage many of us to actually learn and retain information.

SAT needs to be deemphasized for college admission

by Corey Sigmund

What is the difference between effect or affect? One letter, right? Somehow this question matters your junior or senior year of high school because it will appear in the grammar section of the SAT, a standardized test that is required for most colleges which tests reading, writing and math skills.

The SAT was first used in 1962 as an IQ test for US Army recruits. It is still being used today, but for college recruits instead of Army recruits and it makes no sense. The SAT is testing how well you can take a test. This standardized test stands in the way of the futures of students and their post-high-school education.

On March 1, 2020 the average SAT score was reported to be a 1059, which would not get a student into large state schools, such as Penn State or Ohio State. In real life though who cares how well you can read a passage and then answer 10 multiple choice questions on it. No employer is going to ask, "What did you get on your SAT?" Yet, this one test seems to stand in the way of students who want to earn degrees for future careers, even though any employer will not care.

Many people relate higher scores to intelligence, but that is not necessarily the case. There is a 25% chance you get every multiple choice question right. The way the SAT calculates scores by correct answers only, there is no penalty for guessing and getting a question wrong.

The SAT just feels like another cash builder for colleges and institutions. You can take this test as many times as you would like in order to get a score you feel is proficient, allowing you to apply to colleges and further your education. You also must pay to send your scores to colleges, just more money given away. Not to mention you can ask the SAT scorers to re-score your test if you think they made an error.

This test could be easily taken off college admissions and no one would complain about it. I mean colleges seemed to be pretty quick to decide the class of 2021 doesn't need these for college admissions because of the pandemic. Why should other classes need them?

Some of the top colleges such as Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard and Princeton have become test optional for the class of 2021. That goes to show if some of the top college programs are waiving test scores for their programs for one year, then they cannot be that much of a factor for deciding who is admitted and who is not.

To go even further Princeton and Dartmouth are not only waiving scores for the seniors this year, but are moving into being test optional for grades after 2021. Two of the top colleges in the country are becoming test optional! These scores do not define a student and many colleges are beginning to see that.

Colleges basing acceptance of students on how well they do on a four hour test is ridiculous and should be taken out of the admissions requirements.

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Have something to say?

*Have a story idea
you want us to cover?*

*Have a reaction (good or bad)
to one of our topics?*

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The Oracle

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The Oracle is the official student newspaper of Shaler Area High School. Although it is published by the journalism classes, one does not have to be enrolled in a class to contribute.

Opinions expressed in **The Oracle** are those of the individual writers.

Letters to the Editor are encouraged and welcome. Any letter intended for publication must be signed, but names will be withheld upon request. Articles and letters may be mailed to the high school (ATTN: The Oracle) or emailed to oracle@sasd.k12.pa.us.

The Oracle reserves the right to condense or omit any letters or articles unfit for publication.

The Making of a Musical

Shaler navigates many challenges to settle on a spring musical

by Hannah Stelitano

As spring quickly approaches, SAHS students involved in spring musical are rapidly trying to prepare for their upcoming performances. In a typical year, musical rehearsals would have started in January, but due to COVID-19, rehearsals only started last week.

New director Mr. Anthony Martello is doing his best to keep the performing arts sane during this time of craziness. After having auditions and call-backs, not getting the rights to the original show proposed, having to do another round of call-backs, securing the rights to another show, and then having to postpone every rehearsal due to COVID-19, Martello has gone through quite a bit of insanity.

"We requested the rights to 'The Drowsy Chaperone', and even announced that as our show. Unfortunately, getting show rights is a tricky situation. You cannot be within a certain number of miles from a professional theater and within a certain amount of time where that theater plans to put on a given show. That's what happened to us, so we had to move on," he said about the issue of not being granted rights to their first choice for a show.

When picking a show this year, Martello had an extremely difficult time. Between losing nearly half of the musical budget from last year's lost performances and factoring in the cost of the rights of the show, the choices are very limited.

Blind auditions, auditioning for a show without actually knowing what the show is, were held before the issues with the rights to "The Drowsy Chaperone". After the audition process, the tentative show was announced. Martello forewarned everyone that the rights were not 100 percent secured, but he let them know that there could not be any more rehearsal time lost.

He started the callback process right before being notified of losing the rights to the show. After that major setback, Martello kept searching for the perfect show and finally decided on "The Wedding Singer".

"We are so excited about 'The Wedding Singer'! We feel like it highlights the very talented students we have here. Honestly, the biggest problem we faced while picking a show was the abundance of talent, we really wanted to showcase as many students as possible. It's a good problem to have," he said.

Shortly after Martello made the announcement, the high school was temporarily shut down due to COVID-19. He had to revamp the whole rehearsal schedule that he spent an enormous amount of time creating.

Rehearsals had to be pushed back further than they were intended to be which means that over the next few weeks, everyone involved in the spring musical will be rehearsing more than ever.

Throughout all of the craziness Martello has been put up against, he still makes rehearsals fun and uplifting. He makes sure that everything is getting done, but he still makes time for rehearsals to be fun.

Everyone involved in the spring musical has been incredibly grateful for his leadership and positive attitude that he takes in tackling the obstacles.

"Mr. Martello's energy makes the musical so enjoyable because it is a fun escape from everyday life. Mr. Martello's dedication to make the musical a really enjoyable experience is truly what makes the show so special to me," sophomore Lauren Lorenz said.

"The Wedding Singer" cast & crew preparing for anything and everything



Cast of "The Wedding Singer" rehearses in the auditorium.

by Cassidy Laffey

With an entirely new directorial staff and a pandemic to navigate around, the spring musical has had to conquer many unique obstacles. This process started with the search for and filling of leadership positions, holding blind auditions, setting up call-backs, losing the rights for the original show and then securing the rights for a new one, "The Wedding Singer".

According to Assistant Director and Vocal Coach Mrs. Jennifer Birch, this show is full of "love, laughter, dashed dreams, and the penultimate realization of even bigger, better dreams!"

"The Wedding Singer" is based off of the Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore movie that is set in the 1980s. It's a fun show that follows Robbie, a wedding singer with a broken heart, and his journey with his co-worker, Julia. There is dancing, singing, and a ton of 80s flair.

Options for shows this year were limited because only certain shows offer streaming rights, which is a safety net that is considered a necessity this year because of the uncertainty concerning COVID-19.

Getting rights to any show is a challenge, but an additional challenge was the unfamiliarity that new director Mr. Anthony Martello had with the Shaler Area talent pool. He wanted to pick a show after he saw what he was working with. At first, he had a list of three potential shows in his head, none of which were "The Wedding Singer."

"The cast impressed us so much that we had to find a show that would showcase as many of them as possible — from a vocal and dance perspective," Martello said.

This year is anything but normal because of COVID-19, and the directors had to completely reimagine what a practice would look like. There are concerns with how the sound travels when the cast is singing. There is a need

for projection so Mrs. Birch can hear where the problem areas are in a song, but with the masks, it is much easier for the singers to damage their voices. It has been a struggle to find the perfect balance.

Birch is optimistic though.

"We'll make a new kind of magic if we have to," she said.

The list of obstacles that the entirely new directorial staff, cast, crew, and pit must face also includes masks blocking expression, keeping six feet for social distancing, where to put the pit, etc.

"We're figuring this out as we go, to be honest. We have plans A, B, C, D, and so on, but we have to be ready for plans E through Z," Martello said.

The ensemble is broken in half to create pods so the same students are attending the same rehearsals, everyone's temperature is taken, and every student must fill out a COVID screening form at the beginning of every rehearsal. Everyone is doing their best inside and outside of the rehearsal space to ensure everyone's safety.

As of now, the plan for the show is to have no, or a very limited, audience in the auditorium, live stream every show, and have everyone on stage wearing masks. This is similar to the fall play, but as we all know at this point, everything is subject to change depending on the guidelines at the given time.

This show is an upbeat comedy that the audience is bound to love.

"This is an 80s rock show with some young adult humor. We're talking side ponytails, neon colors galore, and a lot of talent bursting off of the stage," Martello said.

This show is definitely facing its fair share of challenges, but everyone is working to put on an amazing show, no matter if there is a live audience or live streaming.



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Greg Brown still excited after more than 25 years of Pirates play by play announcing

by Anthony Cugini

Greg Brown has been in the Pirates organization since 1979. He is currently a play by play announcer for Pittsburgh and is regarded as one of the best in the league.

Brown got a quick start to his career in sports getting an internship with the Pirates when he attended Point Park University. Beginning at the internship Brown spent 10 years in the Pirates front office doing whatever was asked of him.

It wasn't an easy road for Brown to become the Pirates play by play broadcaster. He had to do his time plenty of other places before he got his shot in the Pirates broadcast booth.

"I did minor league baseball. I did Bills football. I did some hockey, college basketball up in Buffalo for five years," Brown said.

After getting his first real shot at announcing professional sports, an opportunity Brown had been hoping for opened up.

"Pittsburgh made a change in the announcing booth with the Pirates," Brown said. "They were aware of me having spent 10 years in the front office. That really put me on the map."

Brown got the job and the rest is history. Brown has been in the Pirates booth for the last 26 years. He's made a name for himself with phrases like "Cannonball comin'" and "Raise the Jolly Roger".

When asked about his favorite moment in his Pirates broadcasting history, he did not hesitate to retell the story of the final Pirates game at Three Rivers Stadium on October 1, 2000.

While working minor league baseball games, he got to know many of the players who would eventually play for the Pirates, including Pittsburgh native John Wehner, who was at the end of his career playing a part-time role with the team.

"The last game ever at Three Rivers Stadium was emotional for all of us. I grew up a Pirates fan and

spent a lot of time in that stadium so it was kind of near and dear to my heart. I went into the clubhouse to look at the lineup for the very last game of Three Rivers Stadium history and lo and behold John Wehner was the starting 3rd baseman. It was a meaningless game in terms of the standings but meaningful to many of us," Brown said.

"I sat next to John in his locker and I said 'Can you believe this?' He goes, 'No I can't believe this. I grew up a Pirates fan and there are 60,000 people

at Three Rivers Stadium going crazy. These guys are giving me all kinds of grief because they want me to hit a home run.' John Wehner hit a total of four home runs in his major league career over 10 years. In about the sixth inning the Pirates are down two runs, two outs, and Wehner came to the plate," he said.

"Wehner swings at this 2-1 pitch and hits this line drive toward the left-field wall. At that moment for me, time stood still. My mind is trying to comprehend what's happening here. And I'm realizing this ball has a chance to leave the ballpark. And sure as heck, this ball leaves the ballpark. I was absolutely beside myself. Place went berserk. It was absolutely phenomenal."

Throughout the last 26 years it's been a lot of losing for the Pirates, but Brown has tried to stay positive. From the opening of PNC Park, he always imagined what that would be like.

"If the Pirates got that combination someday. They get a ballpark and they get a winning team, you

won't be able to get into (PNC Park)," he said.

In 2013 Brown was able to see that come to light as the Pirates made the playoffs as a wild card team.

"It was the pinnacle of what I was talking about," Brown said. "A couple hours before the gates opened (the day of the Wild Card game) I looked over on the corner of Federal Street and General Robinson and it was just filled with a sea of black...It was tribal."

The most memorable moment from that game is one that he, and Pirates fans who saw it, will never forget.

"Johnny Cueto, the pitcher for the Reds, dropped the ball (just standing on the mound) and then (on the next pitch) Russell Martin hit the home run," Brown said. "I almost got too caught up in the Martin home run. There's a fine line between being a fan and being a broadcaster."

Over the last 26 years Greg Brown has been the play by play announcer for the Pittsburgh Pirates and he keeps hoping that he gets to see more of what he witnessed at PNC Park back in 2013.



Pirates play by play announcer Greg Brown in the booth at PNC Park

THE GRID		First place where you'd vacation when the pandemic ends?	Humanity ends tomorrow. What destroyed us?	Animated character you wish was real	Cadbury creme eggs are _____	What is your favorite emoji?
Freshman Aly Poliziani		NY city to see Broadway show and Times Square	Online school	Frosty the Snowman	Gross	
Sophomore Valentina Navas		Florida	Zombie apocalypse	Lightning McQueen	Disgusting	
Junior Mallory Moran		Hawaii	COVID-19	Pumba & Timon	Yummy	
Senior Haley Sahr		Merritt Island, Florida	Sharknado	Scooby Doo	Delicious	
Faculty Mrs. Mohr		I am going to build a beach cabana out of my stockpile of toilet paper and paper towels and relax :)	Murder Hornets that have coronavirus	Baby Yoda	Only good when microwaved for a few seconds	DNA emoji, of course

The Oracle chats with author John David Anderson

by Maggie Rea

John David Anderson is an author of middle-grade fiction from Indianapolis, Indiana. His books include Sidekicked, Posted, Ms. Bixby's Last Day, Insert Coin to Continue, Finding Orion and The Dungeoneers. His stories strike a balance between simple, easy-to-read plots for younger readers and complex, human characters that challenge readers to really think about different themes. He shared what the writing process is like for him, and why he writes to the audience that he does.

Q: What was the process you went through to become an author?

A: The process that I took started with having literary heroes and immersing myself as much in their worlds as possible before I even really wet my feet with my own work. I went to college and majored in English, got a master's degree in literature, and then taught literature and writing for seven years. So, I was reading about three books a week, just drowning myself in language and narrative before I really made a concentrated effort to become a writer. That's one way to go about it. Another would be to go out and live life and write about your personal experiences, but I found books to be infinitely more interesting than my own life. I always knew that I wanted to be a storyteller, even from a young age, and a lot of that stemmed from a need to escape to exciting new worlds of my own design.

Q: What made you want to write middle-grade fiction?

A: My very first novel I assumed was young adult, actually, because it had 3 curse words in it. At that time, Harry Potter was just catching fire, so middle-grade was kind of this evolving sphere. A lot of kids read Magic Tree House and then jumped to Stephen King. And then JK Rowling comes along and helps to define this space for 8-13 year-old readers, so I happened to fall into that space at the right time. I always knew that my sense of humor appealed to 11 and 12 year olds. It's impossible for me to write a novel that doesn't include flatulence, for example, or at least have that kind of snarky, sarcastic tween-age edge to it, but at the same time I want to be able to challenge readers and have them ask questions about life and society and their role and agency in it. And that requires a certain sophistication in my young readers. You've got to be curious enough to start thinking about these things, to challenge the



ideas that your parents feed you, to question the world around you. And so it was a combination of those two: finding the sweet spot between my goofy ten-year-old mentality and my desire to get young readers to really think about some deeper growing-up issues that I knew they would be grappling with.

Q: How do you take an initial idea and turn it into a novel?

A: I think that absolutely depends on the book. In my writing, I'm kind of all over the place- I've got fantasy novels, and superhero novels, and realistic novels, and a pseudo-sports novel, and I'm coming out with a ghost story next year, so a lot of it is just me challenging myself to try something new. For example, I wrote a book called Ms. Bixby's Last Day, which is about a teacher who has cancer and these three boys who go to break her out of the hospital. Part of the inspiration for that book came from characters and voices that were in my head, but a lot of it came from me just wanting to write a book that had more than one narrator, to tell a story from multiple points of view. As a writer, I like that challenge of trying something new; I think that's where a lot of my drive comes from to work on a novel. Yes, Star Wars also usually finds its way in there somewhere too. I don't think I've written a novel yet that doesn't have at least a Star Wars or a Princess Bride reference. But I think a lot of it just comes from that merger of artistic challenge and then finding a hook- whether that's a great character, a particular conflict, or an authentic voice- something that hasn't been done before, or at least hasn't been done quite the way I think I could do it.

Q: In a lot of your books, there's an almost gradual plot twist- there's a big reveal at the end, but it also feels like it was there the entire time. What are you wanting readers to get from that?

A: It could just be laziness on my part. I sort of write a first draft and I figure out where I've gotten to, and I'm like, "Nope, I didn't really build up to that at all!" So I sort of reverse-engineer it, add a quote here and some foreshadowing there. But some of my books are specifically

structured in a way to provide a slow reveal. And I think I do that because, for me, it mirrors the process that my readers are going through, in that all of middle-grade is essentially a coming-of-age experience. We're all starting with a sort of blank slate, and then all this stuff gets heaped on us and we have to claw our way to the top and figure out who we are and what we want out of life. And I think that needs to be a revelation that is not an epiphany. I think too often in books you have that moment where you're like, "Oh! Ok, well, we just have to reverse the power flux coupling and now we can totally save the universe!" But you want to have struggled to get to that point. Harry doesn't beat Voldemort with Horcruxes. He beats Voldemort with friends, and with courage, and with love from his parents, and these are not things you can just tack on in book six. These are things you have to be built up from the very beginning. So I'm always trying to do that in my books- trying to have my character's growth mirror the increased tension of plot in such a way so that it seems at least believable that they would emotionally get to a place where they can solve their problems and save the day.

Q: As a writer, what's it like going from the first draft to the final published story?

A: Imagine taking a chainsaw and revving it up and then just shoving it in your belly and tearing your insides to shreds. It's painful. And it gets harder as it goes along. First drafts for me are the most fun thing in the world. When I sit down at a blank screen and I've got all these ideas percolating, and I can let my imagination run free, that's artistic bliss. When I'm on draft seven and I'm working with all of my editor's notes and I'm trying to figure out how to make this clearer, but at the same time not give it away, and at the same time make it deep, but at the same time don't make it cliché, and figure out a metaphor that nobody's ever used before, and learn how to finally use a comma, then I am often literally pounding my head against the screen. So I would say that for me it's a process of diminishing returns. I start at a high level of enthusiasm, and as the process goes on the writing quality goes up but my energy and ability to cope with it goes down. Eventually I get to the point where I say, "that's as good as it's going to get." It's never going to be perfect, but I'm all out of blood, sweat, and tears. And hopefully it's good enough that I'm not ashamed to let the world see it.

Q: When you have a lot of ideas for different stories, how do you pick the one that you decide to turn into a book?

A: This is assuming that when I pick an idea carry through with it then it actually becomes a book, but I actually have like 15 or 16 completed or half-completed novels on my laptop that have never been published. One thing I can tell you is that it's never a consideration of "is this going to sell?" When I de-

NEVER STOP LEARNING



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Grad's artwork going to baseball Hall of Fame — from page 1

Also mentioned in the description of the drawing is Josh Gibson, who some say could be the greatest baseball player who ever lived. Gibson, however, never played in the Major Leagues because of the color of his skin.

"This picture is kind of nuts if you think about it. In 1971, the Pirates fielded the first Black and Latino starting lineup and it was only 24 years earlier that Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in Major League Baseball," Shearer said. "The reason I put Josh Gibson is because he is considered one of the greatest power hitters in the history of the sport. I think it was a shame that we basically had Babe Ruth playing in our backyard but he was never allowed to play in Major League Baseball."

Outside of this drawing, Shearer has done pieces on the Steelers when they won Super Bowl XL and Super Bowl XLIII, as well as multiple caricatures of the Penguins when they won their last three Stanley Cups in 2009, 2016, and 2017. It was his father who helped him get these drawings out to the public, and that was the same for his art of the Pirates.

"I'll send my dad 200 of my drawings and when he's grocery shopping or at my nephew's baseball game, he'll strike up conversations with people and say 'Oh, let me run to the car and get you a picture of this or that,'" Shearer said. "So I thought if I printed my dad a whole bunch of these pictures, it would be an easier way to talk about race in Pittsburgh without using Black Lives Matter, which felt like such a trigger statement for whatever reason."

It is with his dad that Shearer remembers sharing his early sports memories with — memories that helped shape his love of sports today, inspiring the pieces he draws.

"The first memory I have is watching Super Bowl

"I drew it because it was my way of getting fellow Pittsburghers to talk about race. I want them to take pride in Pittsburgh [because] people may think that you can only fight for equality in New York or Los Angeles, but I want them to know that a very historic thing regarding race happened in Pittsburgh."

-- Jim Shearer

XIV with my dad between the Steelers and Rams. We had an old black-and-white TV. So that was the first football game I ever remember watching. I don't think I made it until the end. I probably fell asleep because I was four or five years old," he said.

Fast-forward to today, and Shearer remembers some of his most recent Pittsburgh sports memories, as well.

"In the early '90s, the Pirates finally made it to the playoffs because for years we couldn't get over the Mets who were just a really good team in the mid-to-late-1980s," Shearer said. "So we finally beat the Mets, and we were never able to get to the World Series. And then, of course, the Steelers' last two Super Bowls were huge because the '70s Super Bowls always felt like more of my parents' Super Bowls and Super Bowl XL and Super Bowl XLIII finally felt like my Steelers won the Super Bowl. Then of course

the two Pens Stanley Cups in the early '90s were big and then the back-to-back not so long ago was also huge for me."

Shearer's pull to drawing started when he was young, describing himself as a "doodler" when he was growing up. Mainly in the 1990s, it was common for sports fans to wear or display caricatures of famous athletes of the day. One caricature artist that inspired Shearer was Bruce Stark, and Shearer was even able to buy a couple of pieces of art from Stark before Stark passed away.

"I guess I was so inspired by Bruce Stark that I wanted to create my own version of that and that's why I started drawing sports caricature."

This version is not just visually appealing, but it also has far greater meaning behind the players and words shown. In the end, it was that meaning that pushed Shearer to drawing his art.

"I drew it because it was my way of getting fellow Pittsburghers to talk about race," Shearer said. "I want them to take pride in Pittsburgh [because] people may think that you can only fight for equality in New York or Los Angeles, but I want them to know that a very historic thing regarding race happened in Pittsburgh. This game happened in Three Rivers Stadium."

Shearer has never been to the Hall of Fame before, and has not seen his work presented in Cooperstown. Yet, he cites that it is not the gratification that he gets from having his work there, but rather the impact that the art can have that is what strikes him the most.

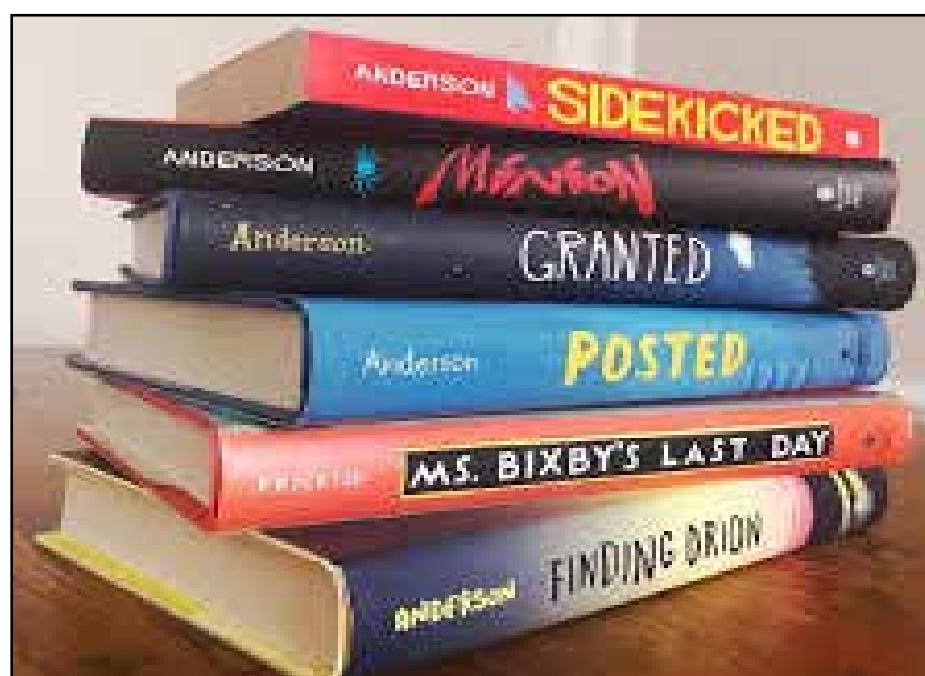
"I'm not big on trophies and awards and stuff like that. But if it can get just someone to think and talk about race and get outside of their comfort zone for a second, that's all I ever wanted from it."

John David Anderson — from page 6

cide that I'm going to write something, I do so whether I know it's going to get published or not. More often not. For me one key to committing to a story is falling in love with my characters. Plots are great, and they keep the pages turning, but when it comes to getting invested, if I'm not absolutely connected to my main character, if I don't feel what they feel, then I'm never going to finish the book. Also, every book is essentially a mystery novel, at least for me. I don't plan anything. I just write and write until I uncover the end for myself. And so every twist of the plot and every new step in a character's evolution is a kind of discovery, which makes the process fresh and exciting.

Q: Out of all your characters, do you have a favorite one?

A: I wouldn't necessarily say that I have a single favorite. I'm really partial to Sam the talking dog in the book *Granted*, because he's a sweetheart, and he's funny, and he adds a whole new dynamic to that book. He's not the main character, but he provides the book's heart. I also really like Lena Proudmore from *The Dungeoneers*—she's a kick-butt barbarian and sort of honors a lot of the strong female influences in my life. I think the characters that I tend to like best, though, are the ones that are the most complicated—the ones that challenge me to see the world in a way that I normally wouldn't. So, for example, in *Ms. Bixby's Last Day*, the character I like best is Steve. Steve



is quirky. His problems and concerns were unfamiliar to me at first. His personality was the most challenging for me to wrap my head around because it's so far from my own. It's that challenge that makes him interesting and a personal favorite.

Q: How has the COVID-19 Pandemic affected you as an author and your writing?

A: I know other authors who have felt their creative life-force kind of drained out, and I feel the same. And it's hard because you see so much negativity and you ask yourself, what can I do about it? Something like this hits, and you feel a weight. There are kids

out there who read what I write, so do I have a responsibility to speak to this moment? And, I would argue, yeah. Not just for me, but for everybody. We all have a responsibility to use whatever gifts or talents or platforms we have to rise up to an occasion. For me personally, it comes down to hope. I've actually written some pretty dark stuff this year, and as I'm writing these things I know that I'm harnessing a lot of the negative emotions I'm experiencing. But underneath that has been this call, this sense that, whatever happens in this book, I'm going to give this character and this reader something to look forward to, something to hope for.

Q: What do you want your readers to take away from your books?

A: I'd like my books to linger. In other words, I want my readers to be a little bit thoughtful or confused or challenged or curious at the end. I want them to enjoy the process, obviously—reading books should be pleasurable—but at the same time, when they close a book, I really want them to have some lingering thoughts and questions wriggling around in the backs of their brains. So that they'll come across an experience—maybe they read *Posted*, and they see something bad happening at their school, and they're like, "Dude. I should step in and say something", or they notice that their teacher is having a day, and they leave him or her a kind note, giving them a Ms. Bixby moment—something that lets them carry the experiences that they've had in the book into their real life. I'm not saying my books are full of deep knowledge that is all of the sudden going to revolutionize the way kids think and act, but I think they can trigger something, they can help young readers make connections to their own lives, and those connections can lead them to do something adventurous or to be a better person or to write and share their own story. If there's any way that my books can inspire people, I hope it's just making them a little more thoughtful about the world around them and helping them understand that everyone has a valuable story to tell.

School planning to renovate outdoor classroom

by Mia Schubert

After a year of significant indoor isolation and remote education, students will likely be encouraged by the idea of gathering in an outdoor environment to learn. Shaler Area High School has the perfect space for this type of education—an open-space classroom situated in a wooded section of the high school campus.

Created more than 15 years ago with the help of a grant, the outdoor learning space was first designed for students to make a connection with the environment and learn through hands-on activities, such as testing water and sampling soil.

The gathering area featured a podium for the instructor and benches for the students. Several students helped to enhance the area. One constructed a small bridge making the area more accessible. Another sanded and stained the bridge, and an Eagle Scout added a unique wooden top to the lectern.

Those features were added more than a decade ago, and since then, the outdoor classroom has only been used sporadically.

Mr. Cory Williams, a history and political science teacher, said he has taken some of his classes to the outdoor learning area over the last three or four years.

"The APUSH curriculum has some lessons that

are conducive to talking about nature in nature," said Williams. "The outdoor classroom also has provided a nice opportunity for low-tech review of content in the weeks leading up to the APUSH exam," he added.

However, Williams also recognizes challenges associated with the external learning space, including access to the classroom area. Commuting to and from the school building takes away from class time, and the path to the area needs to be cleaner and easier to traverse, Williams said.

Last year, the class of 2020 voted to donate the remainder of their class funds to renovate and expand the outdoor classroom.

Teachers welcome this idea. In a recent survey of high school instructors, the majority of respondents recommended improved access to the classroom, a roof over the learning area, and writing surfaces for the students and teachers. Other features such as wireless access, surveillance cameras, trash cans, and a more discussion-enhancing design were also suggested.

The survey was distributed because school administrators are considering restorations to make the area more attractive and useful to a multitude of teachers and students for a variety of different types of class instruction.

"Depending on the lesson, I think being outside in fresh air listening to each other would be a nice

change of pace from the windowless classrooms," Activities Director Mindy Thiel said.

She added that in addition to gathering feedback from teachers, administrators will also be asking students for their input.

Junior Mallory Moran has an opinion. "Spending time outdoors to learn would be beneficial to students because it is hard to stay focused when you are staring at the same four classroom walls every day. It would be a nice change of scenery," junior Mallory Moran said.

While the outdoor classroom is designed primarily for learning, Williams and his class found a unique way to use the space a few years ago for another goal—a year-end service project.

Students cleaned up litter around the campus, removed old and dangerous materials on the path leading to the classroom, and repaired some of the dilapidated benches.

"It was incredibly rewarding to see them take ownership of the project, not just for their own benefit, but so that other students in the future would be able to enjoy the space as well."

That is truly the goal of this renovation project, according to Thiel.

"We want this to be a much-used space once it is complete," she said.



The Oracle
Student Newspaper of Shaler Area High School

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Teachers raise thousands of dollars for charities every year with Denim Days

by Ella Katona

When Shaler Area High School staff members are seen wearing denim, their happiness is not just from being able to wear casual clothing during a work day, but also from helping people in need.

Denim Days started nearly 18 years ago from an idea that blossomed between Mrs. Mindy Thiel and Mrs. Dina Donini. They had approached Mr. William Suit, the principal at the time, about an idea for a staff fundraiser for breast cancer awareness. Mrs. Thiel then came up with the idea to call it Denim Days, where, if staff members donated \$5 or more to the cause, they could wear denim to work.

"We wanted to help charities and fundraisers, but not only that, we secretly wanted to have the chance to be able to wear jeans to work," Mrs. Thiel said.

Mr. Suit agreed to this idea, and the idea raised around \$450 for the charity. It was such a success that it was decided to hold monthly Denim Days to benefit a variety of charities. The success of Denim Days at the high school resulted in the idea being implemented throughout the school district so now there are both high school specific and district-wide Denim Days.

Over the years, many charities, both local and national, have been supported



by Shaler Area staff members.

"We want to choose charities that will impact our district. Every year we support charities who give away scholarships to students who pursue education. Another one, called 'Holiday Help,' is run to help students, so that they are able to have a Christmas present for the holidays," Mrs. Thiel said.

Even with hybrid and fully remote learning, Mrs. Thiel is determined to still make Denim Days a reality and run it like

they would any other year. Due to the pandemic, some charities and fundraisers have become wary to reach out to numerous places for donations. With this in mind, the school board is still trying to look to local charities to help others in any way possible.

"The board is very passionate about helping and filling the needs of the district and our community. Even if there are some bumps in the road, we will make it work," Mrs. Thiel said. "If teachers are still able to come to school on the days I have planned we will still make Denim Days a reality. If not, the staff and I can always try and find a different charitable outreach."

Junior one of few who gets to celebrate a Feb 29 birthday

by Addison Kania

Imagine being only four years old as a junior in high school. That is what life is like for Shaler Area junior, Emma Burkard. Well, sort of. Emma was born on February 29th, 2004. As of 2021, she has only celebrated her actual birthday a total of four times!

The chances of having a baby on Leap Day are pretty slim. Numberwise, there is only about a 1 in 1,461 chance. This is comparable to the chances of getting Zac Efron to fall in love with you! Of the seven billion people in the world, there are only about five million people who share this birthday.

As this birthday is so unique, many fun memories are made on the day. One of her favorite memories came from her fourth birthday.

"On my fourth birthday, all of the decorations were for a first birthday party. I don't remember much, but I hear a lot of stories from my parents and relatives about how mad I was about having a baby birthday party," Burkard said.

Since having a leap year birthday only allows for people to celebrate their actual birthday every four years, it is interesting to wonder why this day was even created in the first place?

When Julius Caesar's time came, the year kept track of by the Romans and the solar year were completely out of sync. This came as a result of the former consuls shortening or extending the year for their own political means. Julius Caesar, a general-turned-consul, re-ordered the calendar to one that is much like ours today.

During the Roman Empire, Julius Caesar established a calendar based on Egyptian solar calendar which included

365 days. However, Caesar and another philosopher made one modification: add a day to every fourth year. That's how Leap Day was born! The Julian calendar was set in place on January 1st, 45 BCE.

Now centuries later, the Julian calendar is still used and Leap Year still occurs every four years. This means that all of the people with Leap Day birthdays have to choose when to celebrate during non-leap years. Most commonly leap day birthdays are celebrated when Burkard does, on February 28, or they are celebrated on March 1. It is really up to the family to decide.

While some people may think that not getting to celebrate your actual birthday every year would be disappointing, Burkard actually does not mind it. She finds that having this birthday warrants a lot more positives than any negatives. She also has a much bigger party when her real birthday comes around!

"It's unique and separates me from a lot of people. Personally, I don't think there are any cons; it's pretty cool," Burkard said.

Of course, having a leap day birthday comes with the jokes like "you're too young to drive" or "what kind of toy do you want for your birthday?" Burkard also says that people have a look of pure confusion when they find out about her birthday.

"Most people are surprised, but it really depends on the age group. Most people my age have never heard of leap day so they're usually just confused," Burkard said.

Although it is an unusual birthday, people born on leap day are considered to be lucky so you may want to start being friends with people who have February 29 birthdays to bring a little luck into your life as well!

The Oracle stories, writers earn national recognition

Several stories produced by Shaler Area High School's student newspaper, The Oracle, were recognized with a Best of SNO distinction earlier this year.

SNO (Student Newspaper Organization) hosts hundreds of high school and college newspapers from across the country.

Best of SNO receives 100 to 200 submissions per day and only about 10 percent are selected for publication.

Junior Dominic DiTommaso was recognized for his feature story on SAHS grad Jim Shearer and his artwork in "Shaler Area grad's artwork going to baseball Hall of Fame" (see page 1)

Junior Alyssa Hillwig was recognized for her feature story on Win McNamee, chief photographer at Getty Images, in "Photographer shares stories from inside the US Capitol on January 6." (see page 10)

Senior Anthony Cugini was recognized for his sports story on a Pirates baseball announcer in "Greg Brown still excited after more than 25 years of Pirates play by play." (see page 5)

Junior Maggie Rea was recognized for her story on the challenges of providing instruction during a pandemic in "Teachers bearing the burdens of ever-changing school year." (see Feb. issue)

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Photographer shares stories from inside the US Capitol on January 6



Images from the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 taken by Getty Images chief photographer Win McNamee



by Alyssa Hillwig

"The entire building had been breached. It was just chaos. It was mayhem. There were people streaming through the building, and there were a lot of very incongruent things happening...rioters were beating on police officers with these big wooden rods, throwing fire extinguishers at them, and spraying bear spray."

Win McNamee, chief photographer at Getty Images, was in the US Capitol building covering the certification of the electoral votes on January 6 when the riot broke out. Although he and the other photographers present were aware that there was plenty of potential for unexpected news, they never could have predicted what was to come.

In his time as a photographer, 58-year-old McNamee has become familiar with life-threatening situations like the attack on the Capitol.

"I covered the first Gulf War, which I think was significantly more dangerous than this. I've been in lots of protests that have turned violent," McNamee said.

McNamee has been engulfed in the world of photojournalism from a very young age. His own father was a photographer who covered ten United States Presidents, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, several Olympics and Super Bowls. Wally McNamee, who notably worked for The Washington Post and Newsweek, indirectly influenced his son through his passion.

"(Photography) was always around the house, I wasn't really paying attention to it much when I was (a teenager), and it wasn't until much later that I became interested," Win McNamee said. "Once I became interested in it, I really started paying attention to everything my father had done, learning as much as I could from him."

It wasn't until college that his interest in photog-

raphy truly blossomed. He began his postsecondary education as an undeclared major at the University of South Carolina with an attraction to the outdoors and interest in oceanography and forestry. It didn't take long for him to find his way to photography.

It began as a hobby after his father gifted him a camera as a graduation present, which he only used to take silly pictures with his friends. McNamee did not originally seriously consider it until he was reintroduced to the field through a friend.

"There was a buddy of mine who worked for the student newspaper, who was also into photography a little bit, and he encouraged me to come by and start checking things out and doing some work there and it was great. I loved everything about it" McNamee said. "It was challenging and different everyday, and I had different assignments whether it was football games or concerts."

The main reason he ultimately found himself so drawn to photography and photojournalism is the changing nature of the field.

"It's a fun profession. You have an opportunity to do a lot of things that, frankly, I'd probably be doing if I wasn't a photographer. I'd be going to (Washington Nationals) games. I mean, I go to like ten a year, but I probably shoot ten a year," McNamee said. "I'm going to a different place each day, I'm seeing different people each day, different things are happening each day. That is one of the things I find most attractive about it."

After working at a local newspaper for a couple of years after college, he moved back to the Washington DC area, where he grew up, where he freelanced for a couple of years, worked as a staff photographer for Reuters for 14 years, and then finally came on board with Getty Images in 2004.

His interest in historical and social events, McNamee relished the opportunities to have his job and his interests blend together.

"I have an affinity for history and politics and social stories, like we saw last year in the wake of the George Floyd killing in Minneapolis. We had a lot of protests here in Washington, DC, and I find those to be fascinating and important, and they're also extremely visual," he said.

On January 6, two teams of photographers had been established to photograph all facets of the day's events. There was an outdoor team set to cover the rally held by then President Trump, and to eventually follow the crowd the mile and a half distance from the rally to the US Capitol, and there was an indoor team set to cover what was unfolding with the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Stationed inside the Capitol, McNamee had

"The entire building had been breached. It was just chaos. It was mayhem. There were people streaming through the building...rioters were beating on police officers with these big wooden rods, throwing fire extinguishers at them, and spraying bear spray."

-- Win McNamee

Cont. on page 11

Photographer shares US Capitol stories

from page 10



been photographing the beginning of the certification process when chaos began to break out.

"I was in the process of trying to transmit some of my pictures from the joint session. While I was doing that, we noticed that there was a disruption happening on the West side of the Capitol, the site where the inauguration was scheduled to take place two weeks after. So I started to get very anxious about what was going on out there because I felt that that was the story and that I needed to finish up what I was doing and try to get out there," McNamee said.

As it turned out, he didn't need to worry about getting outside for photographs as the crowd, much to his disbelief, stormed the building.

"I never thought for a minute that the crowd would end up inside the Capitol. Well, within fifteen minutes or so of first seeing the crowd out there, we started to hear noises that indicated they had in fact gotten into the building and the whole day changed. All of the plans that we had made to cover the story were falling apart rather quickly," McNamee said.

His new priority was to come down from the third floor and onto the second floor, where the disturbances were occurring, to photograph the new main event. There he was met with his first encounter with the day's rioters: about 20-25 supporters of Trump who had come in from the East Senate side of the Capitol.

His first sight of the mob marked only the beginning of the day's insanity. McNamee was met with more chaos as the rioters began to breach the Capitol building from all sides.

"Basically, the entire building had been breached at this point," McNamee said. "I then worked my way down towards Speaker Pelosi's office and I encountered more of the crowd down there, and I started to get some vibes from those folks that they weren't real happy about me being there."

Since McNamee had already worked in dangerous situations before, he was already mentally prepared for a negative reaction from the rioters.

"You have to read the room. You have to be constantly aware—it is called situational awareness. I have a thing I do where I look them in the eye, I talk to them. Just to say, 'you're a human, I'm a human, no problem here,'" McNamee said.

McNamee continued to work his way through the building, taking various pictures around the rotunda before making his way up to the third floor from the Senate side to take more. There, he captured his favorite photo of the day: the photo of a man dan-

gling from the balcony of the Senate chamber.

"It's just very reflective to me of the incongruity—this out of place nature of what was taking place that day. I mean, that's the side of the Senate Chamber, and the Senate Chamber is probably one of the most regimented, decorum-laden places. To see some guy hanging from the balcony is kind of strange to me," McNamee said.

He continued to navigate his way through the building, but shortly after McNamee's return to the photo-filing station, security enforced a massive two and a half hour evacuation of the entire building as a way of removing everybody, primarily the rioters, from the building and ensuring everyone's safety.

Despite the incongruity of the day's events, McNamee never felt physically threatened during the attack; his "blissful ignorance" to the true nature of the events that occurred allowed him to stay calm and collected throughout the battles ensuing around him.

"If I had any idea of how violent it had become

on the western side particularly, what it took for those folks to get inside, I probably would have been much more concerned about my personal safety," McNamee said.

After finally understanding the reality of the situation, McNamee was more disheartened than he was fearful.

"I never thought for a second I'd see anything like what happened in the U.S. Capitol," he said. "It's one of the most iconic buildings we have in U.S. democracy and the U.S. government. To see it attacked by Americans was a painful thing."

Amidst the madness, McNamee paid close attention to the courageous acts of the men and women who he believed were the heroes of the day; he felt that the Capitol police officers played a vital role in protecting the Capitol.

"There were a couple US Capitol police officers trying to defend that door unsuccessfully, but it's one of the things that gets lost in the general telling of this story. The Capitol police sort of took it on the chin reputation-wise, but there were definitely some individual acts of what I would call heroism, trying to do their jobs while they were significantly outnum-

"I never thought for a minute that the crowd would end up inside the Capitol. Well, within fifteen minutes or so of first seeing the crowd out there, we started to hear noises that indicated they had in fact gotten into the building and the whole day changed."

-- Win McNamee



bered," McNamee said. "If you were a law enforcement officer there, it was not a pleasant place to be."

More than anything else, McNamee took immense pride in the work that he and his colleagues were able to accomplish as the chaos erupted that day.

"When I think about all the work that was produced by all of the photographers on Capitol Hill that day, it makes me a little misty-eyed—not because it's sad but because I'm proud of it. (I'm) emotionally attached to my profession and the work that my colleagues and I do, which I think is important."

One thing that he takes pride in is the truth that photographs present. While many media outlets are, or are perceived to be, biased, McNamee asserts there is no bias in the still image.

"The resilience of photojournalism has presented itself to be true and accurate and I think the events of January 6th reflect that quite strongly," he said. "I'm not just talking about my pictures, but everyone's pictures, whether they were inside or outside the Capitol building that day. There are definitely some iconic images that day that are going to end up in a museum. It is an important part of our shared American experience and it is something that I am proud to have contributed to."

In a world that's fully immersed technology, photojournalism has surprisingly survived the technological revolution. McNamee believes that it has prevailed since it provides an "unbiased, non-emotive, informative narrative without taking sides."

The narrative of January 6th has morphed itself to blur along the lines of bias from all political perspectives in our country. No matter what side, there is one key takeaway that McNamee believes was reflected in the day's events.

"I don't think it's a day anybody's going to forget anytime soon. And that's the one potentially positive benefit of that is that maybe it will serve as a turning point for people to be more reflective about the extreme sides people feel somewhat compelled to take on political issues now. Maybe that won't be the case, I hope so. It's certainly a lesson to me, anyway, how not to do things."

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Swimmers complete chaotic but successful season

by Cate Gordon

The Shaler Area swim team ended its season with an impressive record from both the boys and girls. The boys' section record was 3-1 and their overall finish was 6-2. Similarly, the girls produced a 2-2 section record and ended with a 5-3 overall.

The team faced many challenging opponents this season, but the most intense meet was against Franklin Regional. The biggest challenge with that meet was the COVID shutdown that occurred shortly before the day of the meet. The Titans did not come away with the victory, but they showed a lot of strength against a tough opponent.

With COVID-19 delays and cancellations, it was hard for the team to find time to practice and compete. Fortunately the team's dedication and optimism was able to overcome these challenges.

"The times in which our district was shut down was the hardest since we had to forfeit meets and weren't able to practice, but again the team remained positive and we were able to finish the season with one last meet to showcase the hard work that was put in all season," head coach Ms. Abi May said.

The successful season put the team in a good place heading into WPIALs. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, only the top 16 individuals and the top 12 relay teams advanced to WPIALs regardless of how many swimmers met the time needed to qualify. For many swimmers this was disappointing, but senior Lydia Nebiolo was able to persevere through these challenges and represent Shaler in the WPIALs.

This was her fourth year in a row qualifying for the WPIAL championships. She participated in two events: the 200 freestyle and 100 freestyle. Originally she was ranked 13th in the 200 freestyle and was able to move up to 11th place. Similarly, in the 100 freestyle she was ranked 16th and placed 13th by the end of the championship.

"It was an amazing experience. I was lucky and qualified in two events, and I



moved up in the rankings in both events. While my times did not improve, it was still an honor to represent Shaler at the WPIAL championships for the 4th time in a row," Nebiolo said.

The most memorable part of the season was the final match against Pine Richland which was also the team's senior night.

"It was all around an exciting meet because everyone was giving it their last chance to solidify a qualification for WPIALS," May said.

Nebiolo appreciated the hard work that was put into the meet to make it such a special night for all of the seniors.

"Being able to have that special recognition for all of the seniors was amazing, and it was all thanks to the dedication of our underclassmen, coaches, and parents," Nebiolo said.

Season showed team's resilience, promise for future

by Ella Katona

As spring has arrived, winter is officially over and with that, the boys basketball season is as well.

Walking into this season, everyone knew it was going to be different in some way shape or form due to the pandemic and its effect on sports.

"The season was crazy with the uncertainty. Each day was a blessing that we were able to be in the gym. I'm thankful that we were able to get a season in," head coach Mr. Rob Niederberger said.

The season in all went pretty well for the boys and lots of players were happy to be able to get numerous opportunities for varsity minutes.

"We dealt with four COVID shutdowns and also had several season ending injuries to key players. There were several times where we could only practice with ten guys," Niederberger said. "However, I will say this is the most resilient team I've ever coached. The guys battled. We truly epitomized the next-man-up mentality."

COVID cut into the amount of games the boys could play and on their practice time.

This led to frustration for the players due to the inconsistency that they were facing, yet they recovered from each break.

"At the end of the day, I think about all of the other guys and how resilient they are. COVID didn't stop us from attempting to reach our goals," junior Quincy Fana said.

The amount of games played and the practice times were not the only things that had changed this season, but also the way that playoffs were organized.

It was decided that playoffs would be "open," so that no matter how many games a team played, all



Kaden Orga takes a shot vs Baldwin (Tom Rekowski)

teams would be able to get participate if they wanted.

With that being said, the Shaler players did not know how they were going to do as a team because they were a young group. They were at first nervous for the new season, but the coaching staff knew they could be good.

"When you combine that with the injuries we faced I'm pretty sure a lot of people would have written us off. As a coaching staff, we were proud of our guys because they ignored the outside noise. We battled and earned everything we got. This year, we truly established Shaler as a basketball program that isn't going anywhere," Niederberger said.

The Titans had the goal to finish in the top four of their section no matter the circumstances so that they could truly earn their place in the playoffs.

"I think teams need to earn their way into the playoffs. If you have an open playoff, you're lessening the importance of the regular season. It is hard to get in the playoffs, and it is hard to win in there, and extremely hard to win a championship. The 'hard' is what makes chasing a championship great," Niederberger said.

Even with the seriousness of playoffs, the boys were able to still have fun and enjoy as much of the season as they could and really build off of one another as a team.

"Personally, the best moments in my season this year was the start," Fana said. "I think it was nice to come into a gym with a lot of new guys and build off their abilities on the court."

The growth of the team this year leads Niederberger to believe that his group will be a force to be reckoned with for years to come.

"Every day is going to be competitive, but it will make us better. We have talent, but we need to work hard to achieve our goals for the future," Niederberger said. "We are going to push to do something no boys basketball team at Shaler has done before: win a WPIAL and State title."

