

# CHRONICLE

## SEVERAL MID-YEAR GRADUATES

by Gabi Mohos

Every year there are students who graduate after the first semester. This year, there are quite a few early graduates - seven to be exact. In order to graduate early, stu-



dents must have enough credits completed by the second quarter of their senior year. This year, the semester ended on February 5.

Guidance counselor Mr. Plantz explained, "Students choose to graduate early for a variety of reasons, but the most common reason is that students want to get a head start

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## WELLNESS DAY HELD TO AID HEALTH ISSUES

by Simone Schwarz-Eise

*Editor's note: some quotes are anonymous due to their personal nature*

Since March of last year, the COVID-19 virus has been on everyone's mind. All across the country, people have in some way been affected by the pandemic, especially students. They went from getting an exciting surprise two-week vacation to the slow realization that the break from school would be much longer than expected. Suddenly, students couldn't see their teachers or friends in person

and had to transition to online learning.

This abrupt change of lifestyle had a significant effect on students' mental health. In response, Averill

COVID Isolation: I Felt Like I Was Suffocating" told the personal stories of many teenagers during the pandemic. It featured a teenage girl living in Brooklyn and how her men-

tal health and mind-set changed over the lockdown. Alya said, "I felt like I was trapped in

my own little house and everyone was far away."

The article featured evidence showing how adolescents depend on their friendships to maintain a sense of

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### Health & Wellness



Park held a district-wide Wellness Day on January 28, prompted in part by a letter sent in by a student who was concerned about the mental health of their peers.

A *New York Times* article entitled "Teens in

## A KINDNESS REPORT: STUDENTS ASSIST OTHERS WHILE LEARNING

by Paula DeAndres

The past year was undoubtedly challenging; every day there was a new piece of chaotic news to taunt us. However, good news began to spring up everywhere and it was this that brought the world together. You can find good news anywhere, and if you look hard enough, you can find it right in front of your own eyes.

At Averill Park, teacher's assistants Mrs. Rohl, Mrs. Dobert, Mrs.



Gawron and teacher's aide Mrs. Teal continue to do their busy jobs with an inspiring amount of

passion, despite how COVID affects their jobs. When former secretary Mrs. Hale resigned, her duties were redistributed to other staff. Rohl, Dobert, Teal, and Gawron were given the mailroom duties - sorting the mail, putting it in people's mailboxes, etc. They knew past secretaries had brought in students from special needs classrooms to help with the mailroom jobs. This inspired them to continue the tradition, and to allow

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### MID-YEAR (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

on attending college. Students will often enroll at a local community college for the second half of their senior year. Students also graduate early so that they can enter the workforce full time."

There are additional reasons other than wanting to go to college early. Some students will graduate early to enter the workforce, or are unhappy with their high school experience and want to get it over with. Some may ap-



pear to graduate early because they got held back a year and just needed to take a couple more courses to pass high school.

However, graduating high school prematurely isn't exactly what colleges are always looking for. In fact, the majority of colleges prefer to accept students who took their entire senior year, not just half of it. The reason for this is that they want to see students taking as many courses as they can. This issue can easily be worked around however. Plantz stated that, "if the student has a good plan to take college classes after they graduate early, that should not be a detriment to getting accepted into a 4-year college."

Whatever the reason for early graduation, the Averill Park counselors are prepared to help students do what they need to do to thrive in their life's path, whether that is going to college or starting a career early. And all seniors who finish high school early are welcome to be in the graduation ceremony held at the end of the year.

### WELLNESS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

self-worth and to manage their anxiety and depression. A recent study of around 4,000 high school students found that almost one third reported feeling unhappy or depressed in recent months.

When students at Averill Park were asked about their mental health during the times of coronavirus, one student said "This year my mental health has had its ups and downs. Definitely in the first part of quarantine my mental health was very low. I lost a lot of friends and was struggling." Another student revealed, "I would definitely say my mental health has changed a lot during COVID. I have lost and gained a lot...and school has become a lot harder, with just transitioning to high school, being in harder classes...my mental health has most definitely become worse. I am more sad and I have just become bored all the time."

Students were also asked how they cope with their anxiety and other mental health issues, and what helps them get through the tough times. One student said, "To relieve stress, I work out each night, and I keep my room clean because it helps me feel in control. I also listen to music." This same student said that some activities presented during Wellness Day taught them additional strategies to deal with their stress.

Ms. Favro, a student assistance counselor at the high school, was interviewed

a few days after Wellness Day and was asked about her recent experiences with AP students. She said she was very surprised and happy when the students kept their appointments with her. She anticipated some students might be afraid of talking to her virtually over a meet when they were used to meeting in person. However, students kept coming and they seemed to understand



their need for connection. To stay connected, they utilized various kinds of virtual connections with her, their family and their friends.

Favro was also a part of the Wellness Day planning team. She revealed that the students bringing to light the issue of mental health was a huge motivator for her and showed how important it was.

Favro presented two lessons on Wellness Day: one was yoga and the second focused on addiction in the family. She also sat in on a lesson by the Rensselaer Plateau Alliance held by Molly Freiburg, a wellness and meditation expert. Favro said she agrees with Freiburg's belief that being in nature can be an extremely good way to reduce stress for some students. She added that everyone's coping methods can be

different and that what works for some people may not work for others. For some, mindfulness practices can be really helpful, whereas for others it's helpful to carve out more structure and routine, which is an area which she can help with. She is also able to help students link with an outside counselor, if needed.

Wellness Day shed some light on aspects of health that many students had not seriously considered before COVID. Favro hoped that as a result of the Wellness Day, greater awareness has been brought to mental health issues, and there will be more students opening up about their mental health to the

counselors. As for the negatives, she expressed concern that some students might be "triggered" by parts of the Wellness Day. However, she believes that most took something positive from the day, like a new coping tool or validation of how they are feeling, and the knowledge that they are not alone.

Hopefully, life will soon begin to return to normal and we can go about our usual school days, train for our sports and play games, and hang out with our friends. When that does happen, as a result of living through the pandemic, many of us will have grown more self aware, learned some important coping skills for life, and appreciate the normal things that we used to take for granted.



# RATE YOUR TEACHER!

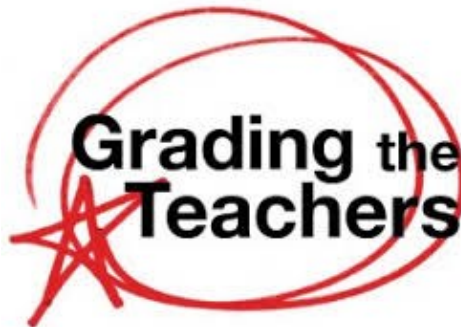
## UPDATE ON STATE-REQUIRED TEACHER REVIEWS

by Sophia Maddalone

During March of 2020, the New York State Education Department notified school districts across the state that completion of state mandated APPR/teacher evaluations would not be required due to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. However over the 2020-2021 school year, APCSD teachers and administrators were left to wonder whether these annual teacher evaluations would be conducted.

According to APHS principal Mr. Quiles, teacher evaluations will occur, but will be conducted differently from years past. Throughout a typical school year, the APPR/teacher evaluation process consists of two observations per year between October and May. One observation is announced and the other is not. Usually a pre-meeting occurs before the evaluation, and then a post-conference follows. A pre-meeting does not occur with the unan-

nounced observation, only a post-conference. Two different officials observe the person being evaluated; one is the building principal and the other is an administrator. During the observation, school administrators use the



Danielson Framework rubric for the teaching evaluation instrument.

This year, the New York State Education Department took into account the various forms of teaching - in person, hybrid and remote learning - and allowed school districts to submit a variance as to how each district would like to evaluate its teachers.

The variance is a modification of the normal APPR/teacher evaluation process. The main goal of the variance APCSD requested was to reduce the amount of time teacher evaluations take.

"Our variance was approved just before the holiday break," said Quiles. The variance approved for APCSD eliminated unannounced evaluations and pre-meetings. Tenured teachers now have one announced observation and a post-conference. Untenured teachers will have two announced observations with follow up post-conferences. While there will be no pre-meetings, teachers will be required to fill out pre-meeting questions which will be discussed at the post-conference.

Another key element included in the APPR/teacher evaluation process is the use of the Danielson Framework rubric for the teaching evaluation instrument. Categories of

the rubric are used to evaluate the teachers performance. "In a normal year the teacher evaluation rubric has twenty-two components; this year we will only be using nine components," said Quiles. "Those nine components are the ones that we feel are most relevant to being effective in a remote and hybrid environment."

Not only will the variance change the way teachers are evaluated, it changes the way teachers are graded during the evaluation. "The total scores are going to be done at the domain level instead of the component level of the rubric," said Quiles. Instead of scoring every component inside of the domain category there will only be a score at the domain level.

Quiles added, "The administration at the high school will each be doing twenty-two to twenty-five evaluations apiece." Teacher evaluations at the high school will begin February 12 and will be completed before the start of April break.

# WHY DID SO MANY SWITCH?

## VIRTUAL NUMBERS RISE AS MORE STUDENTS STAY REMOTE

by Carly Antolick

If you're a hybrid high school student, you likely saw a reduction in the amount of your in-person peers, as many students chose to become fully virtual after the December break. This may have come as a surprise to many due to the relatively few COVID cases within the Averill Park School District and the high school's



rigor in taking every precaution to prevent the spread of

the virus. From a student's perspective, however, there were many reasons as to why they chose to stay at home.

The first (and perhaps most obvious) reason for transferring to fully remote learning was concern about big gatherings and traveling for the holidays. "Both me and my family members are high risk due to health problems," said sophomore Ashley McGarry. "My mom knew

that it would be worse after the holidays since people would travel to see their families."

This fear of a post-holiday COVID spike was rational, as the school district did see a rise in cases after the break. However, many of these cases did not require school-based contact tracing. "People leave for Christmas

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## ROHL (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

the students to experience something new in their routine daily lives.

When asked what the students' attitude towards the mailroom job was, Rohl replied, "Oh, they love it. They love getting out of the classroom, because most of our kids are in with us all day. So you say 'Time for the mailroom!' and they get very excited. They love it."

Rohl loves her job, too. Her duties include bringing older kids in the special needs program out for community service and work experience. They had taken students to places like AJ's Pizza, ShopRite, and Rensselaer Manor Nursing Home to volunteer before COVID. In recent years, Rohl and her colleagues also supported special education teacher Mrs. Ryan and taught a community work program class. Even with the pandemic, they are continuing those activities to the best of their ability. They take the students to the places they need to go and genuinely support the kids.

Making a difference in their students' lives makes these staff members

happy. "We feel strongly that the kids do get work experience, so it makes us feel good," said Rohl.

The mailroom process has also changed slightly due to COVID. In past years, adults brought two

student. The job takes about 10 minutes as the adults help the students sort the mail.

As with any job, it comes with unique challenges. For Rohl, it's making sure the mail ends up in the correct slot. She admitted to some-

on the letter to the names on the mailboxes. She also mentioned, "...and even having to think because some of the pieces of mail say volleyball coach, and so then we have to figure out, 'who is the volleyball coach?'"

A final piece of being a teacher's assistant and aide includes the Backpack Program. Elementary students and special needs students pack food from the regional food bank for kids. The high school students' role is that they pack bags for students and then deliver them to the elementary schools, so students can be sure to have a supply of food when they go home for the weekend. However, during the pandemic, the staff have been packing the bags, but in normal circumstances, the students would do it.

Providing assistance while practicing and learning skills makes these activities beneficial for everyone involved. The fact that it is enjoyable for the participants makes it only that much better.



students to the mailroom at a time. The desk in the mailroom has since been moved closer, causing the students to bump into each other. Now, one student goes in at a time. This means that instead of two students interacting, it's one staff member and the

times running back and peeking to make sure it had all been put in the right box.

Despite its challenges, the job also has its rewards. Rohl enjoys going over vital skills with the students, including reviewing the alphabet and matching the names

## VIRTUAL NUMBERS RISE (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

and they throw caution to the wind," said sophomore Isabelle Relyea. Her message was validated, because many people still decided to see their families or friends over break, despite the pandemic.

Other students chose to go virtual after seeing a decrease in their in-person class sizes. "No one else was going," sophomore Ava Graziano said. "It be-

came me being the only one in my classes." For many students, social interaction was a big part of their decision to go to school in the first place. Having no one to talk to or interact with in a classroom, aside from a teacher, would result in a loss of that social connection.

Some students chose to remain hybrid, however, in order to maintain a

sense of normalcy. When asked why he chose to be hybrid, senior Colin Hansen said, "Because it's my senior year!" Last year's class of 2020 missed a lot of their senior year due to the school closure, so it's understandable that some of this year's seniors would want their year to remain as normal as possible. This need for normalcy is not unique to just seniors, though. "I feel like I need

school." said sophomore Christian Romer. "I need to wake up and act like it's last year again."

Hopefully, in the near future people can begin getting their vaccinations and COVID cases will decrease. If we all do our part to stop the spread of this virus, we can all be back in school soon.

# PEER TUTORING CAN WORK FOR YOU

## NHS PROVIDES HELP WITH YOUR CLASSWORK

by Katie Armlin

In a year as difficult as this previous one, it is even more important that students receive the academic support they'll need to be successful in a year of COVID-19 craziness. One great resource students can utilize is the National Honors Society (NHS) peer tutoring group, consisting of tutors that are both seniors and members of NHS.

The Averill Park High School NHS advisor, Mrs. Rees, explained how this program came about, "NHS has a service component to their admission criteria. It is one of the four pillars of the NHS (leadership, character, scholarship, service). In the past, students have only used community service that was achieved during their first three years of high school to meet this 30-hour requirement. Administrators and myself began to think about how service could be targeted toward our own community in the high school, and so we piloted a peer tutoring program last year. Mrs. Leach

(an assistant principal at APHS) has been the one to spearhead a lot of this work."

By helping NHS fulfill their responsibility of community service and by giving students a great outlet

student's life easier by guiding them through homework and review. Even though we have wonderful teachers at APHS, sometimes hearing it from another student's perspective can help a student learn."

To make this program

mostly works with students on Algebra I and II. Within this virtual format, Deck expressed that, "Sometimes it is a challenge if the student I'm tutoring doesn't regularly check their email, and it is a challenge with math to be able to present my screen, but I've figured out a way to make it work."

While this virtual format isn't necessarily ideal, the NHS tutors have been working very hard since first quarter to make sure that this experience is both effective and useful. If anyone is interested in getting a peer tutor, they can reach out to one of their teachers or their guidance counselor, who can then refer them by using the [peertutoring@apcsd.org](mailto:peertutoring@apcsd.org) email. There are plenty of tutors for all different topics, so don't be afraid to reach out!

It's just as NHS Secretary Molly Cummins explained: "We all know that this is a difficult time to learn right now with the constant change of being virtual or in-person, and that is okay. Just know that there is always someone available to help you. It's not a sign of weakness to ask for help!"



to utilize when they need a little extra help, the peer tutoring program has been a great success. Seeking out a peer tutor doesn't necessarily mean that a student is failing or badly falling behind, but it can help offer the extra support we all need during these troubling times.

Senior and NHS President Emma Burdick explained, "Our biggest hope for this program is to make a

possible, the technology department created the [peertutoring@apcsd.org](mailto:peertutoring@apcsd.org) email that teachers and guidance counselors can use if there is a student in need of a tutor. By looking at the classes a student may need help with, they can then be matched with one of the NHS tutors. From there, tutors reach out to students via email, schedule a time, and set up a google meet.

Senior Gabby Deck is one of the NHS tutors who

# WINTER ONE ACTS UNDERGO CHANGE

## SEVERAL OPTIONS EXIST FOR POPULAR SHOWCASE

by Ashlyn McGarry

Winter One Acts has been a tradition at Averill Park for some time. If you don't know what they are, Winter One Acts is a group of shows written and directed by students in our own school. They can be comedic, or they can be serious.

However, this year they won't be called Winter

One Acts, because normally the shows happen at the beginning of January. Due to the complications caused by the coronavirus, the shows have been pushed to the spring. Preparations however, will begin sometime this month.

Although they won't be in the winter, One Acts will still be happening, and depending on the situation,

there are a few different ways they could be presented. Option one, which would be the best-case scenario, consists of an outdoor in-person performance. Option two would be a little different; the one-act would be filmed beforehand, and then have a premiere date when the video would be released. Option three would be similar to how the recent Off Broadway Play-

er production of [Miss Nelson is Missing](#) was premiered; all of the one-acts would be filmed fully virtually and released as a video.

If you would like more information, the OBP club has a Google Classroom and an Instagram where updates are posted regularly. If you would like to join the Google Classroom, you can do so by using the code [mjawduj](#).

# WHAT DO YOU PREFER?

## THE DIGITAL OR PAPER ASSIGNMENT DEBATE

by Caroline Nero

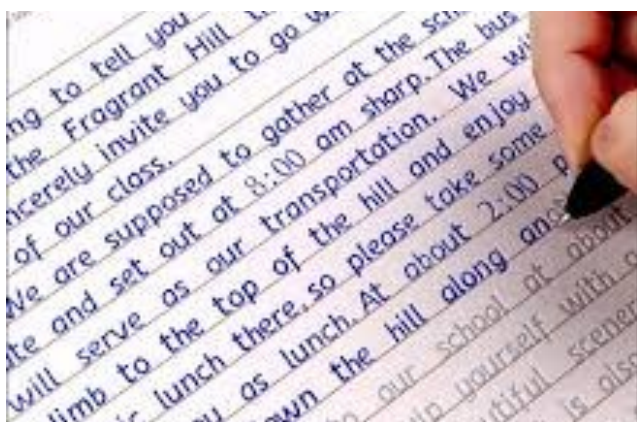
With the ongoing pandemic, many teachers have been forced to switch their assignments to a digital version rather than paper copies. Even though there isn't another option at the moment to omit digital assignments, in future years when students will be fully in-person for school, both paper and digital assignments should be compared to see which is more efficient for a larger group of students. This has brought up the question: "What type of assignments do students prefer?"

Both digital and paper assignments have their benefits and detriments. Students have different opinions on the topic as well, so it's hard to decide which one is truly better. Many students have a preference for only one of the assignments, while some students have a more neutral opinion. This makes it complicated to see which assignment is the most preferred, as everyone tends to have a different perspective.

With digital assignments, you're more able to always have the assignment with you and have no chance of accidentally "losing" your work, which prevents students from getting a zero simply because they left their assignments at home. Along with that, many students agree that digital assignments tend to be shorter and can be completed quickly. This gives students more motivation to complete their work, as they know that it won't

take them too much time. Digital assignments are also more convenient because, when you are finished with your work, you can easily turn it in on the Google Classroom page.

Of course, there are also negatives as well. According to some students, staring



at a screen for hours to do schoolwork can cause headaches. While it doesn't help that we currently attend school from our computers, many students still get headaches from staring at their Chromebooks

for too long, even during in-person classes. Also, with the entire Internet at your fingertips, it can be very difficult to finish online assignments. Knowing that you are only one click away from any of your favorite websites can cause students to get distracted from the work they are trying to complete. Students definitely have a variety of different opinions on whether or not they like digital assignments,

but most can agree that there are both positives and negatives associated with them.

Students also have differing opinions about paper assignments. Paper assignments have been shown to be beneficial for remembering the content. So this helps students to score well on their quizzes and tests; writing the content down will cause them to remember it better. Students have said they tend to be more focused while do-



ing paper assignments. Since it's just pencil and paper, you can't get off track from your assignment. You also don't have to worry about formatting your text or deleting spaces so you can add your answer in, which makes writing the answers much easier than having to do it all digitally. Having to format what you want on the a computer can be a hassle; therefore, students can acknowledge that it

is much simpler to do paper assignments than it is for digital.

Although paper assignments can be great, some students claim they can be annoying to deal with. Binders and folders can get unorganized very easily, and who has the time to organize? Along with this, paper assignments can also be a waste of paper. Sometimes students are given countless handouts that could easily be digital. Not only is this an organizational stress, but it can also be a waste of trees. Although students have a large range of opinions on the topic, they can easily recognize that there are both pros and cons to paper assignments.

Overall, students have mixed opinions about what type of assignment they prefer. Some like digital assignments better, while others prefer classic paper assignments. A number of students are even neutral on the topic, as they have positive opinions about both. This suggests that a mixture of both types of assignments is what students will prefer the most, especially since so many people are neutral on the topic.

While many students do have a strong preference for one assignment type over the other, the majority of students either don't really care about the topic or have an impartial opinion. Therefore, there is no preferred assignment type shared between students, but rather a large range of different opinions and ideas.

# NEW SPACE EXPANDED FOR TECHNOLOGY A DEDICATED ROBOTICS LAB CREATED FOR STUDENT USE

by Mackenzie Rockwell

When social studies teacher Mr. Blais retired at the end of the 2020 school year, the question of what would happen with his room was on everyone's mind. Blais' hallway neighbor, Mr. Duff, is a technology teacher at Averill Park, teaching courses such as Computer Science, Principles of Engineering, Civil Engineering and Architecture, Intro to Engineering, and Robotics. All of these classes require computers in addition to a variety of other forms of technology.

Duff's old room was only a little larger than the normal classroom at APHS, which made it tight because of all the technology utilized there.. Upon news of Blais' retirement, Duff began to plan on how he could utilize the now empty room for extra space. His goal and proposition was to take down the wall separating the two rooms, a long and hard process to approve and carry through with. Over the summer, instead of taking down the entire wall, a door was placed in between the two rooms.

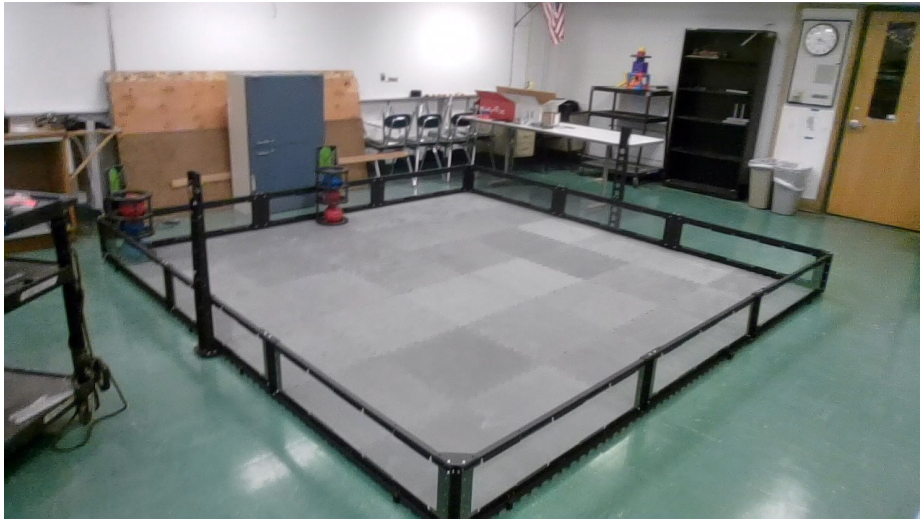
These conjoined rooms now serve all of Duff's classes, in addition to acting

as a home for the Robotics Club. The Robotics Club

uses this room as an arena for practice while the other technology classes utilize it as a workshop during the day.

"It gives the kids a permanent place to practice," said Duff, adding that he'd like to host competitions "with other schools at some point."

Duff and his technology students are all very grateful for this excellent addition to the technology department.



## **We Want Your IDEAS**

The Averill Park Chronicle wants your story ideas. Send them to any Journalism Club member, or to Mr. Strich, The Chronicle's advisor.

# EXAMINING SOCIAL MEDIA HABITS

## STUDENT AND TEACHER USE OF TECHNOLOGY

by Ava Ferriero

As a result of the fully virtual lockdown at Averill Park High School caused from COVID-19 in March of 2020, the amount of boredom that arose in each household greatly increased. As people could no longer see their friends, go to school, participate in sporting events, or go anywhere other than the grocery store, using technology and social media became one of the main cures to boredom.

Since becoming disconnected with friends and family, people have relied on social media to allow them to stay in touch with others. The question is: "What is everybody doing to stay connected, and how is it affecting students?"

For starters, a teacher's perspective on social media is completely different than a student's. "I definitely think students use it a lot," stated English teacher Ms. Mouzakes. Mouzakes shared what platforms she,

along with her fellow teachers, use and also explained how she believes social media should be used in "careful consumptions," avoiding hab-

using TikTok or Snapchat," she said. Social media can be helpful in a variety of ways, but when used too much, it can be distracting and harmful - in



its to become too extreme.

"I believe teachers use Facebook and Instagram, but on a whole, I don't think there are too many teachers

many respects.

On the other hand, students have a different opinion of social media. "I do notice that students are on their

phones a lot during classes." said freshman, Paula DeAndres. "Scrolling through Instagram or Tik Tok can be very distracting, especially during a class. Not only do you miss out on everything your teacher is saying, but you waste time." By saying it this way, DeAndres contributes a whole different view of how social media is truly affecting students, sometimes negatively.

Social media's toxicity can be reduced, however. "During the lockdown, many people lost their jobs. Possibly, social media is helping them find the scarce job offers available." DeAndres said, but added, "All in all, I think that social media is dangerous, especially to the already-frail mental health of high school students."

Many people have different opinions on social media and how its addicting elements can affect everyone. There's always some good and bad, but all in all, social media helps people in various ways and is relied upon by many different people around the world.

# MESS HALL RELOCATES

## LOCAL EATERY OFFERS SEVERAL DINING CHOICES

by Julie Hale

Picture this - it's a Monday night, you just got home from a long day of school and are super hungry. You look in your refrigerator and pantry but nothing looks appetizing. Now what? Have no fear! The Mess Hall is here to save you! This restaurant has just what you're looking for - a delicious meal.

Formerly located near the Sunoco across from Averill Park High School,

they've moved locations. The Mess Hall can now be found at 8905 NY-66 in Averill Park.

In the midst of the pandemic, many restaurants are struggling to stay afloat. So if you are ever in

need of a meal, the Mess Hall supports in-person pick up



and even has the indoor dining area open if you'd wish to sit down. Soon curbside pickup and delivery options will be available.

The Mess Hall is open Monday-Friday and offers breakfast, lunch and dinner.

They have a set breakfast and lunch menu and those options can be read

about on their website (<https://www.messhall518.com/>). For dinner, there is only one main special offered per night, and it changes daily.

Additionally, the Mess Hall offers frozen to-go meals.

There's no need to spend time waiting to figure out what you want to eat or spending the day at the grocery store; preorder from the Mess Hall and swing by for your food.



# EDITORIAL PAGES

## WAVE AFTER WAVE — RIDING OUT THE PANDEMIC

by Mia Lucey

COVID-19 has affected so many people all over the world. There were lockdowns, quarantines, and even store shutdowns. Many small businesses have closed permanently because they lost so much money over the past 11 months. March 2020 to July 2020 was considered the “first wave” of COVID-19 in the U.S., while this past August to the present is considered the “second wave.” Our world has been affected so much by the deadly virus, but the real question is, will the second wave affect us more or less than the first wave?

Originally, we were only supposed to be in quarantine for two weeks. That

plan quickly took a turn for the worse. In the first wave, there were 154,478 deaths in the United States. Yes, 154,478 people died from a



virus. Shortly after being put into a national lockdown, COVID-19 was labeled as a global pandemic. Families couldn't see each other. Res-

taurants were shut down. Stores closed. The world became a ghost town. By being locked up and stuck at home, the mental well-being of people drastically declined. This decline in mental health caused a spike in suicide deaths. Kids were home from school. In Gardner-Dickinson, I had no learning for a solid three weeks. We were sent home with

work, but we had no teacher-student interaction until we started using Google

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## VIRTUAL SCHOOL HOURS: THE LOGICAL CHOICE

by Katie Doran

With the current pandemic, students are constantly changing between the virtual and the hybrid schedule. While it can be challenging to learn from home, there is no question that the ability to sleep in is a benefit for every student.

The hybrid schedule has the school day begin at 7:49 AM. Initially, this does not sound terrible. But when you focus on the broader picture of a student's day, the day does not actually begin at 7:49.



For those following the hybrid model and going in every other day, this time means waking up anywhere

between 5:00 and 7:00 am. The average student has roughly three and a half hours of homework according to brookings.edu. With after-school sports beginning again, it is common for student athletes to be getting home around 6 PM. By the time homework is finally finished it is almost 10 PM. This results in students getting to bed and asleep as late as 11:00 to 11:30 pm. This leaves only seven hours for students to sleep, one hour short of the necessary amount of sleep for teenagers. In order for students to

get out of the house on time, most will skip breakfast or eat very little. This is resulting in a less efficient day with shorter sleep times for students.

The virtual schedule is more realistic for a student's learning expectation. Students can wake up around 8:00 am and have an hour to eat breakfast and prepare for their day. There is no concern to wake up earlier in order to get to school on time. The timing of the virtual schedule also

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# EDITORIAL PAGES

## HEY, TURN OFF THAT WEBCAM!!

by Ava Repecki

As a result of virtual learning, some students don't like turning on their cameras for several reasons; they either feel like they aren't looking their best or have a background they don't feel comfortable showing.

There are specific reasons why people might not want to show their backgrounds on camera. They could have things hanging on their walls that they wouldn't like people seeing, like a picture of them and friends or a few paintings they wouldn't like shown. Also, the background of where they are



could be messy.

Another reason is that they wouldn't want other students or the teacher to

hear background noise. Some people's dogs could end up barking or a family member could be doing something embarrassing, such as unexpected singing.

Some people don't like their voice. They might not like it because some think their voice sounds higher than it is. Or they may think it sounds as high and squeaky as Spongebob. People might not want to show their face be-

cause they are not looking their best. They might think their hair doesn't look great or that they look like they just woke up. Maybe they think that their clothes are dirty or don't match.

In general, some students don't like turning on their cameras. They don't like the way they look, or their background could have things that they don't want people seeing, or they just don't feel comfortable. There could even be many more reasons why people don't like to do either of these, but these are the most common ones people don't like turning their cameras or microphones on.

## SECOND WAVE (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

Meet, a face-to-face meeting app you use over the computer. For the rest of the school year, we were "home-schooled." Only seeing our teacher's faces on a screen. Never seeing our friends. It was strange.

However, it wasn't all bad. Only being able to see some of my family, social distancing from my friends, and not getting to play sports - it was hard. But it taught me a lot. I learned to be grateful for what I have and not to take advantage of anything, because it can be taken away in the blink of an eye.

Our first quarantine starting in March was the best thing that could have happened to any of us. Although we couldn't see our friends and family indoors, we were able to see them OUTSIDE.

Social distancing was a thing we came up with early on. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cautioned that people needed to stay six feet apart from individuals who were not in your household at all times.

As spring approached and the breezy, sunny days rained upon us, it became easier to cope with separation. Getting to leave the house, even just to go for a walk, was so nice. Walking became an everyday occurrence. It also made it easier to see friends and family as well. We could go for walks together and still maintain the six foot guidelines.

Over the summer, sports started to pick back up. We still had to wear masks, but it meant we got to play, so we wore them.

The second wave of COVID-19 is a little different. While we still have to wear masks and social distance, some things have changed. The fall weather neared and it was getting colder. This restricted us from going outside to enjoy some fresh air. We were only allowed to go to school every other day. Some schools didn't go in at all - they have been completely virtual since September. The holiday season was also upon us; Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's made cases skyrocket. People became anxious from sitting inside for so long. They took a chance and went out for the holidays. Now, 10 months later, the U.S. has had more than 455,000 deaths due to the virus, lead-

ing the world. Internationally, there have been more than 2.29 million deaths. The spread is rapidly increasing and we need to find a way to stop it.

COVID-19 is increasingly more dangerous by the day. Different people have been affected by this virus in all different ways. Statistically, the second wave of COVID affected us more. However, I personally feel as though the first wave affected me more as an individual.

In regards to my experiences, I have learned that I am a strong individual and I can persevere through hard times. Look back on your own experiences, and tell me this - did the first wave of COVID-19 affect you more or less than the second wave?

# EDITORIAL PAGES

## WHAT IF THE PANDEMIC NEVER HAPPENED?

by Emma Hanlon

On December 31, 2019 the Chinese government confirmed dozens of cases of an unknown “pneumonia” virus. At the time, there was no evidence this virus could infect or be spread by humans. This quickly became the most popular news headline across the world, marking the beginning of what would become the coronavirus pandemic. This changed how we work, learn, and interact with each other, creating a more virtual existence across the globe. And now a year later, it is clear that this pandemic will have an everlasting impact on our lives.

We continue to mourn the loss of the student section at football games and the many other things that are not permitted under COVID restrictions. The life we

took for granted has become a distant memory. Instead, the large student section cheering for our school sports



teams turns into bland glances behind masks.

Since March of 2020 the sudden change of our routine, social isolation, and the fear of getting sick, or getting others sick, has had a colossal impact on our society. The coronavirus has changed all aspects of our lives and has done so with

negative consequences. According to psychiatrists, the American psyche has changed dramatically, with an

increasing diagnosis of chronic stress, depression, and anxiety.

The everlasting battle against COVID-19 has tested the population of the world, but we have proved over and over again that we will persist. We have introduced online learning and work environments that con-

tinue to improve. We began to interact with friends online more than ever before. But these challenges have also made us grateful for the life we long to return to. We all live in question of our plans for the future, but what if the pandemic never happened at all?

Many students believe that without the pandemic, they wouldn't be the person they are today. Julie Hale, a sophomore, said, “It felt like I took a gap year both academically and socially.” This “gap year” has allowed everyone to explore new hobbies, and learn more about themselves. Maybe you're a stress baker who emerged during the pandemic, or someone who takes their frustrations out on video games.

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## THE WORLD IS GOING SILENT

by Bella Berstein

Do you ever find yourself in a room filled with people, some of your closest friends or family members, but you still feel alone? You feel ignored, you feel stuck, almost like you are alone in a field and not a soul is around. But in this field, you hear the sound of messages being sent, voices echoing over each other, loud music playing from someone's Snapchat story, TikTok sounds replaying. This field



is the society we are living in right now. A quiet society. They've “won,” and there is no turning back.

Since technology is so widespread, we've gotten to the point that it only takes .006 seconds to receive a text sent from the USA to England. The world has changed. And by the world, I mean the people. How we act towards one another has changed drastically. I will be talking to my own mom and she will be so absorbed in Facebook that

she won't hear a word I say. She will simply be nodding her head.

Another thing I have noticed is that we do things to gain other people's approval and acceptance, rather than for our own good. I could be having the worst time of my life at a party, but still post a picture of me being there so that everyone knows I was there. We strive for the most followers, the most

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# EDITORIALS

## WHAT IF (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

If the pandemic never happened, the student body could have had a normal year. Instead of walking into school with our friends during the warmest months of the school year, we were stuck in our houses. Now, we aren't even able to see our friends from the other side of the alphabet, or in some cases — at all.



Not to mention, our lives no longer have a consistent schedule. Waiting week by week to see if the school remains virtual or hybrid is taxing on our entire school. Some students no longer have the motivation to do their school work, or even show up to their online classes.

Ultimately, almost

every aspect of our lives was changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. We could list everything that has changed and what would happen if they didn't, but frankly, it isn't worth it. While we cannot reverse the damage of the past, we can make the most of our future.

## SILENT WORLD (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

likes. When someone doesn't answer you, you overthink and wonder if they are ignoring you or simply aren't on their phone.

Social media has affected our mental health, but we can't just give it up. If we did, we would be afraid we were missing out on something. There is no way to change this growing problem.

Social media plays such a big impact on the way people communicate. Sometimes people don't talk to me if I am on my phone and, because of this, we miss out on a conversation. Or other times I am trying to talk to them, but they are just on their own phone nodding their head like they are listening. The pandemic is not doing any help. Humans are turning into walking phones. They

look down at their phone more than they look up and lock eyes with a human. I am sure if you ask someone what color the eyes of the person they just talked to



are, they would not be able to tell you.

I am scared for the future, as technology is growing by the second. Is everyone not going to talk? When I walk down a busy street, I feel as if everyone is alone in

their own bubble. We don't see each other, and soon we will be on different planets. The news headlines will read "technology finally took over."

Oh, and people

don't read anymore. When I read, people look at me or they go "Bella, you read?" all surprised. Yes, I read! And when I read I feel like I am not in my bubble anymore, but I am LIVING, I am in the book.

I just want everyone to talk again. TALK! It is a gift. It is my favorite thing. I love when I am gone for the whole summer without my phone. Every conversation I have I remember. I will admit when someone texts me I forget what we are talking about. Society has changed so much due to technology. It is a sickness, and it will never be fixed. Technology won and society will forever be quiet. This is just the start to a horrible new chapter.

Now think about your own life. What would you be like with no social media, no phone in your pocket? Would you be more social? What do you see?

I challenge you to try — and send me your responses at my school email.

## VIRTUAL HOURS (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

allows students to complete their homework at an earlier time, allowing them to get to

bed sooner. This also helps students get the necessary sleep they need as teenagers.

While virtual learning is difficult, the time spacing has been a large relief. If schools

could start later in a regular year, more students could focus better as a result of getting more sleep.

# HUMOR

## VOTER FRAUD LEADS TO FALSE ELECTION!

by Sam Bonesteel

Thank you – this may be the most important thing I've ever written. I just want to share with all of you the efforts we've made and are continuing to make to expose the tremendous voter fraud here at Averill Park High School. We have something here that we used to call election day, and many tremendous, bad things happened during this ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous time. As the true class president I have no higher duty than to defend justice here at the high school and uphold rightfulness. And that is why I am determined to protect our election system, of which I feel is being held under siege.

For days leading up to this election we were all warned to not prematurely announce a winner. And yet,

our opponent, seeming to predetermine the outcome of this tremendous election, orchestrated an effort to anoint a winner without certain key classrooms being

the victory of this test of prowess. It was all very, very strange.

Today I will detail some of the shocking irregularities, abuses and election

known recipients with absolutely no safeguards of any kind. The irregularities we have seen prove that they did not foresee how hard this election would be to win and had to resort to corruption, abuse and fraud, attempting to tear down Averill Park's tremendous voting system.

In some classrooms teachers sent out ballots to students regardless of whether they had desired to cast a vote. We've received online ballots from students who had transferred recently to another school but have not yet had their Averill Park email terminated. Ballots have been counted online with impossible email sent dates from days to months ago. Some emails were



called. Some teachers routinely stopped counting ballots before their next class, without the entirety of votes being accounted for, and our opponents wanted to claim

fraud that have been revealed recently. What we have seen in our opponents, and there is evidence, just so much evidence, is the relentless push to email many ballots to un-

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## EXCUSES, EXCUSES...

by Owen Perala

We have all been late to class. It's just something that we can not prevent. The hard part is saying *why* and then getting out of the situation.

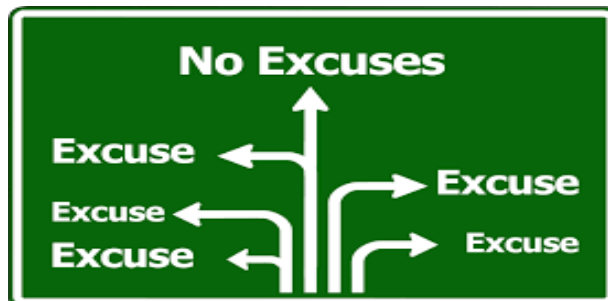
Normally, this isn't too hard to do as you are totally a perfect student who never does anything wrong, and your teacher always believes you. And now that school has been going virtual it's gotten a lot easier to explain why you were late. Whether you were taking a nap or playing some video

games, you ended up late to class, and if you don't know what to say, don't worry about

some of the go-tos that are pretty common, especially with online school. Simply

you of this. It would be almost impossible to prove that this isn't the case, as computer issues are basically inevitable.

When someone says, "I was in the bathroom," they will normally end up okay. This is something that is a completely natural occurrence in our daily lives and can't be avoided. Most of the time teachers will understand, but a certain few insist that you should have gone earlier or showed up and then



it, there are plenty of excuses that a teacher would have to be crazy to not believe.

So let's start off with

saying, "Sorry my computer was not working" is a perfect example. There is nothing your teacher can do to deny

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## FRAUD (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13)

signed with a different signature than fits the email address. This fraud is abusive, it is irregular, and it needs to stop.

This year, more than most, the election for student council class president has seen tremendous irregularities and anomalies. Often a teacher miscounts one or two votes, but this past fall we've seen very, very large differences from past elections. Very large differences. Along with that, extreme anomalies regarding missing votes. Votes have

been destroyed. In fact, I heard that in a classroom we



found five thousand ballots crumpled in the waste paper

basket. Crumpled up in the recycling bin, those votes were found to possibly have been thrown away by my opponent's administration. Were they counted? No, my opponent has been sure to create a large difference in the vote counts by recycling ballots.

In fact, in some classrooms the votes were even wrongly switched from me to my opponent, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. Clearly we need recounts in every class and

we'll find that the students of Averill Park High School are being wrongly cheated of their rights to select the class president that they want. The process of counting votes must be allowed to be revised and continued. In order to defend the honesty of the vote by ensuring that every vote is counted, and every fake or duplicate ballot is terminated. This is not just about honoring all the students who voted the right way, it's about ensuring all Averill Park students can have faith in this system and all future elections.

## EXCUSES (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13)

answered nature's call.

One more go-to excuse is stating that you were held up by another teacher or class. This is very common and happens all the time in both virtual and in-person classes.

Now you've got some solid excuses to use the next time your WiFi "cuts out." So what's next? Now that you know what to successfully say as an excuse for why you were late, it is time to know exactly what *not* to do.

Try to avoid going into too much detail. The more information you give them, the more of a chance there is to slip up. It is important to remember that many of your teachers pride themselves on stopping mischief and poor behavior in their classroom, detecting and eliminating threats when they arise.

Give them even the slightest bit of suspicion and, to that teacher, you are the number one suspect in the case of Little Jimmy's missing pencil and all the other problems that happened in the

classroom. You are class enemy number one. While your excuse may have worked for the current situation, if your teacher doesn't fully believe you, your name is going to be added to your teacher's naughty student watch list. Keep your excuses brief and

bring up something involving your pets or other animals. If there is something most people can agree on it is that animals are pretty fun. But nothing pulls on someone's heart strings like talking about your cute pet in some sort of negative situation. For

called the best excuses for explaining why you were late to class, not for how to be a good person.

Another option is to just say you were always here. If your teacher doesn't have you marked for attendance, just say they must have somehow missed you. If they claim they just saw you join, say that you just rejoined the meet because it was lagging. This method is certainly guaranteed to cause some confusion and quite possibly drive your teacher insane. If you play it correctly this excuse is almost guaranteed to work.

We are all busy people. Sometimes time gets the best of us, and we end up running a few minutes behind. On occasion we need a good excuse for why we were late. Due to our current situation it has gotten a lot easier to make up excuses to why we were. It can be as simple as saying you are having issues with your computer. So, next time you find yourself running late, just use one of the many great excuses at your disposal.

teachers won't find anything off about what you have to say. Maintain your credibility for when you will have to make another excuse.

Now that you know some solid excuses and know what to avoid, it's time to break out some of the best of the best excuses. The ones that will make your teacher feel like they were the ones late to your class.

First option is to

example, your dog just puked, or your cat fell and probably lost one of its 9 lives. Saying that your pet was sick or hurt is an easy excuse to explain why you were late.

Most people have some kind of a special spot in their heart for animals, and saying this will certainly trigger some kind of sympathetic reaction, replacing any suspicion placed upon you. While it is manipulative, this article is



# AVERILL PARK'S YOUTH IN GOVERNMENT LOCAL BRANCH PROVIDES LEGISLATIVE EXPERIENCE

by Tyler Michaels

Youth and Government - what is it? Well, on a national level, Youth and Government is a program organized by the YMCA where students participate in a youth-led model of the state government. Averill Park has its own school branch, with a very specific focus, open to all students.

The entire organization has five branches: legislative, press, executive, judicial and the school branch. In the legislative branch, students will write bills and practice debating, while the press branch writes articles about what is happening within the program, ultimately creating a newspaper during the state conference. Then there is the executive branch. The executive branch is composed of the governor and their cabinet, which decide which bills to sign into law, and which to veto. Lobbyists do not write bills of their own, but rather write speeches to help influence the passage of other bills. Next is the judicial branch which holds mock appellate arguments before a panel of youth judges.

Two years ago, local resident Alan Michaels helped Averill Park form a school branch for the program focusing on the legislative branch. "I wanted to introduce it to Averill Park because I had such a great experience when I was younger, and it had such a great influence on me," said Michaels. "I wanted to share that positivity with others."

The club initially started with seven members, and this year, numbers have nearly doubled.

"I first joined because of a mixture of pressure from my friends, and I've

always loved political and social studies. This was right up my alley," said sophomore Owen Perala, who has been a member of the club for two years.

At the conclusion of each year, students have met with other participants from around New York at the Desmond Hotel for a full three-day state conference.

can be nerve-wracking, but once you finally stand up to speak, it is truly exciting. Other members of the club have agreed that this extracurricular activity helps bolster our public speaking, and is simply a lot of fun.

"I like how at the end of the day it's a bunch of people who are coming together with similar interests and are all here to just have fun" commented Perala.

If anyone is interested in joining Youth and Government, I encourage you to look into the program, and join the Averill Park branch in the fall. "Do yourself a favor and join" said Michaels. "You will first have a lot of fun; second, you will meet great people; and third, you will learn valuable skills you won't forget."

Youth and Government has been a great experience for me, and I hope you consider joining!



Averill Park is part of District 2 - the Capital District. Every week students meet with participants from other schools, where they help work on writing a bill or practicing debates. Bills can concen-



trate on any aspect of the law, but popular topics include prison reform, education laws, and gun control.

Legislative students debate in the state capitol, within the Senate and Assembly chambers. There, they finally present the bills they have worked on, and help sway the passage of other legislation. With the help of their cabinet, the governor decides which bills they will sign into law. Unfortunately, the state conference last year was fully virtual, and will be virtual again this year. However, this has not stopped Averill Park students from eagerly participating.

Youth and Government has been an amazing experience for me, and I've felt it makes me a better public speaker. Sitting in a district or state conference

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# SHE'S OUT ON PATROL!

## APHS WELCOMES THE NEWEST COVID MONITOR

by Dani LaPier

Averill Park has many hall monitors, but one of our newest additions is Kelly Wehnau. Hired by the school to be a temporary COVID monitor, Wehnau has been working here since November.

Before starting at Averill Park, Wehnau worked as a nurse at several different places, including the Troy VA Clinic, Van Rensselaer Manor, and Ludders Assisted Living, which is based in West Sand Lake. Now, Wehnau gets to take her experience as a nurse and use it to help here in the high school.

As a COVID monitor, Wehnau's jobs are similar to those of a regular hall monitor, except hers are more focused on contact tracing and keeping everyone safe at school during the pandemic. Some of her duties include sitting outside bathrooms, taking people's names and ensuring that no more than two people are in the bathroom at a time (as per contact tracing and social distancing guidelines), waiting at the cafeteria to sign students in, monitoring lunches in the LGI, and waiting outside at dismissal to help students get on the bus.

What is Wehnau's favorite part of the job? "I can say this in all honesty, I love the people I work with," she revealed. "I've never worked with such a nice group of people. Everybody is so friendly and helpful and I just really like that about the job." She also enjoys the students she gets to interact with, doting on

how pleasant everyone is.

One aspect of her new job that is less pleasant is having to

up their new house. They recently purchased a house in Poestenkill, and have been busy working with a contrac-

tor to get it livable and restored.

Wehnau is also very creative; she loves decorating and enjoys sewing, painting, reading, and traveling (when we aren't in a pandemic). She has two children and three grandchildren who also take up much of her time.

"With Covid, you don't get to see your family as much as you'd like to, which is difficult," she said. "That's kind of heartbreaking, but you want to make sure everybody is safe in the long run."

Although she hasn't been here long, Wehnau is already proving to be a great addition to Averill Park High School. From helping to keep students safe, to making our school more efficient, she is a valuable asset to the community. We thank her for everything she has done so far and wish her luck as she continues her job here at APHS.



stand outside in the nasty weather. When the buses are being loaded at the end of the day, the rain or snow can make for an unpleasant experience. However, she really enjoys the atmosphere here at Averill Park. "It's something totally different than I've ever done before," she noted.

While she could retire, Wehnau says she has no desire to because this new job is currently the perfect fit for her.

In her personal life, Wehnau and her fiance have been fixing

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# MAKING THINGS SAFE FOR APHS

## MR. NATALIE SPENDS HIS DAYS DOING WHAT IT TAKES

by Members of the AP Journalism Club

When hundreds of people visit a school each day, that building is bound to get dirty. And if you're responsible for keeping that building clean, you can't slack off, knowing it will all repeat itself the next day. Fortunately, Averill Park has found a highly energetic person who is passionate about what he does - Mr. Natalie, a day custodian at the high school.

Quick to joke, pleasant to be around, and willing to work extra hard at his job, Natalie's the perfect fit for a custodian position. He also comes across much younger than he is, with an impish grin and a can-do attitude.

Natalie is a graduate of Mohonasen High School. "I was a captain of the football team and I wrestled...I was for the most part a good kid...I skipped school a few times and got in trouble for that," he admitted. "I was a normal kid."

Out of high school, Natalie didn't want to be burdened with college loan debt, so he didn't go. He said, with regret, "Don't let money become an obstacle for you, like I did."

Natalie tried a few jobs, including working as a custodian at Mohonasen, before working at UPS. He spent 25 years driving for UPS, retiring in 2013. Feeling like he needed to stay active, a few years later Natalie's son, himself an Averill Park graduate, suggested to his father that he might consider working for the district. Natalie had taken the Civil Service Exam and thought he "would enjoy it more than UPS," so applied for a job. And in September of 2018 Natalie started working for Averill Park.

Working at the high school, Natalie claims his "favorite part is interacting with the teachers and the staff. Every student is well behaved, courte-

ous, and takes care of the school," he said. He spends his days "trying to get all of the jobs done in a way that each and every staff member wants done," he said, fixing things,



cleaning, and setting up for events, "making sure everything is set up perfectly and as planned."

Natalie is trained to work with a variety of things, from electrical to chemical, which comes in handy as every day is different. "My job at UPS was super repetitive," Natalie said, but working at the high school is "not the same heavy lifting, 'running around all day' job (as UPS)." Also, at Averill Park he says he "gets to work with tons of awesome people and students." And, holidays are "all a bonus at AP."

Natalie works long hours, counting both at home and at school. He generally logs 7-8 hours a day at Averill Park and works on his house an additional

faculty." Now the custodians "spend more time cleaning and being more cautious."

Averill Park takes COVID seriously. "If you don't follow the safety rules then it can pose a danger," said Natalie. "If we don't do our jobs like we're supposed to, everybody could get sick." He stressed the training the staff go to train them to be safe and avoid the risks of injury. Additionally, he said all employees are "given protection against current chemical usage and cleaning supplies by the district. Gloves, masks, disinfecting...there's a lot of layers to it."

"Anything that the staff needs as far as keeping everything clean - they do a really good job of getting what we need," Natalie said of the Averill Park district. "We're definitely trained and given the proper tools and equipment."

Natalie agreed that COVID has caused more stress to his job, but "it is worth it in the end" because of his love of his job. "It's better than being home, because I get a paycheck and I get to work with a lot of awesome people."

When asked if his salary has gone up because of having to deal with COVID contamination, Natalie paused. "Well uh, I don't know...now you've got me curious," he said with a laugh.

Natalie said he doesn't have a "least favorite" thing about working here. "I love it!" he says

15 -20 hours a week if he has time.

The job isn't always easy. The "most challenging part is getting all of the jobs done at the right time and making sure everything is right and perfect," he said. And that was even before COVID.

The coronavirus pandemic has certainly added to his responsibilities at the school. "Cleaning has changed," he said. "The biggest part of it is we have to take more time because if we miss anything at all it will impact students, staff, and

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# A DRIVING FORCE AT AVERILL PARK

## MEET ONE OF AP'S TRANSPORTATION EMPLOYEES

by Members of the AP Journalism Club

One would think driving a 14-ton vehicle over snowy, hilly roads while simultaneously being responsible for the safety and behavior of a large group of school-aged kids would be high on the list of stressful jobs. Not for Ed Gray, though.

"It's easy," Gray said when questioned about his work as an Averill Park School District bus driver. "I think if you enjoy what you are doing, it's much easier."

Gray, who grew up in South Troy, now he lives in Speigletown. He worked for 28 years at Stewart's, managing the Wynantskill store, retiring at 50 but "got bored quickly" due to a lack of interaction with people. He considered driving a school bus and selected Averill Park because he was familiar with the area. He had no prior experience with driving a bus, but said he "has a lot of grandkids" so he knew he would like working with kids. He passed his Commercial Driver's License test, started working as a substitute driver, and found he "loved it." He has now worked for 10 years as a bus driver at AP.

Gray has driven a set route for many years now, and also used to drive lots of field trips and sports teams, especially basketball teams, but has cut back on that. His day starts at a 5:45 am, then he goes home in the middle of the day and comes back at the end of the day for his evening run. He has driven his present route so long that he's had everyone on his high school run since they were in sixth grade. With so much familiarity, it's no wonder Gray falls into the habit of referring to those on his bus as "his kids."

When asked how his riders would characterize him,

Gray said, "They'd describe me as very easy to get along with...a fun kind of person...if kids want to sing at Christmas, that's OK by me," he said, and mentions transporting cheerleaders who leave behind glitter "that will still be there (on

taken a lot of wrong turns since we do a new route every day," he joked.

Before COVID, there were also lots of interactions between bus drivers. "I would get there at 1 pm instead of 2 pm and just sit

be considered. According to Gray, snow storms are only occasionally difficult. "The ones that are toughest," he said, is "when you're driving in the middle of it. You have to slow down," adding that "the buses go really well in the snow."

"It does not matter when you get there, as long as you get there safe."

Pre-COVID, Gray doesn't feel there were any real big challenges he faced as a driver. In fact, he found it easy and fun. He certainly doesn't have trouble with his riders.

"I've had maybe six write-ups in my ten years," Gray said. He's even taken over routes that were causing other drivers problems. "Within three days I knew every one of their names," he said.

"Instead of my first reaction being to write the kids up, I try to go a little deeper with the kids myself," said Gray. He hates to write up a rider. "Usually it's just a kid having a bad day," he said. "I think if you respect a kid, they'll respect you back." If he senses a kid is having a bad day, "You do what you can to try and make their day better for them."

It seems Gray has found the perfect way to spend his time in "retirement." He's found a job that he seems very passionate about and can lead his kindness to. When asked what his favorite part of being a bus driver at Averill Park is, Gray answered without hesitation: "Interacting with the kids day-to-day."

*Note - This article was written as a collaborative effort during a 15 minute virtual interview with Mr. Gray during a Journalism Club meeting held on February 3.*



the bus) a year later." His philosophy is "Let them have fun, as long as they're safe."

"COVID has made that (safety) a little more difficult since they can't sit next to their friends," Gray said. COVID has had an impact, but Gray takes it all in stride. One of the biggest problems is "not seeing a kid's face since September" due to all of the mask wearing. Additionally, because of the hybrid system and number of changes to the schedule, "we've

there, talking to the other guys," Gray said. The drivers used their break room for socializing, but COVID changed that for them as the bus drivers cannot meet there anymore.

Coronavirus or not, Gray stressed the importance of safety as he spoke, something he thinks his passengers probably don't take into account. Road conditions (some of Gray's route takes him on dirt roads), other drivers and weather all have to

# FITTING RIGHT IN TEACHER AIDE JOINS AVERILL PARK

by Zareena Ansari

“You can change someone’s life by the words you say,” one of Averill Park’s newest teacher’s aides, Mrs. Sliwinski, said. Describing something similar to the butterfly effect, she added, “I think people fail to realize that they are people too, with feelings and personal lives. I think we all need to be more kind to one another whether you are a kid or an adult.” After all, a fluttering butterfly in Senegal can lead to a tsunami in America.

Displaying a kind heart and pure intentions, Sliwinski proves to be mindful of others, and an excellent role model for patience.

“I do hope to build relationships with my daily students,” she stated. “I think it takes time and you need to get to know people to build any relationship. I hope to get to know more students when school gets back to “normal” and we can all get back together.”

Sliwinski’s hopes of building bonds with students create clear expectations and atmospheres towards her everyday life. Agreeably, a day filled with engaging discussions, lasting moments as a class, activities, and an open learning field is a perfect day in school. “I think I am seen by staff members as a new

employee who is quiet and basically keeps to herself - I do hope in time I will meet more people and make new friendships,” she said.

Although at-home learning instructions have

lifestyles through friendships and bonds that were unbreakable through the variety of the student body. She stated, “In high school, I was friends with a variety of students. In life, you will meet people with

ferent “cliques” about others will surely shine through.

Talking about her family, she says, “I have worked with kids my entire life. I have a step-daughter who is 14 and learn a lot from her as well. I have six sisters and we have all helped each other grow and learn throughout our lives. I think having that many siblings has helped me learn valuable skills that I feel are helpful with being a teacher’s aide.” The phrase “everything happens for a reason” could not but fit so smoothly. Sliwinski’s past and current family experiences have proven to shape her outgoing character, and allow her to “click” with others easily.

Discussing teachers, she stated, “Something I have noticed about a teacher in particular would be they all really go above and beyond to make it work through this pandemic. I



proven to be notoriously difficult, Sliwinski has intentions of getting accustomed and blending in with the staff and making new friends.

Sliwinski was a quaint social butterfly in high school, discovering many

many different views and attitudes, and you need to learn how to deal with different opinions and lifestyles.” Her presumably manageable time skills, passion for learning, and experience with dif-

(continued on page 20)

**GET INVOLVED**  
**Join the Averill Park Journalism Club!**

The Averill Park Chronicle is looking for writers, editors and photographers. Virtual meetings are held the first Wednesday of each month at 3:15 pm.

## NATALIE (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17)

of his job. Working simply makes him happy, and from what the group of curious students gathered, he seems to always put other people before himself, and know what he really wants in life.

Reflecting on his

present employment, Natalie said, “I didn’t think I’d be working when I retired, but I really enjoy it here.” And when asked for any messages for the students, he said, “Anything you put your mind to, you can do...don’t let anything get in the

way of accomplishing your goals.”

*Note - This article was written as a collaborative effort during a 15 minute virtual interview with Mr. Natalie during a Journalism Club meeting held on January 6.*

# NEW HORIZONS FUNDRAISERS, AND MORE!

## INTERNATIONAL CLUB SEEKING SUPPORT FOR GOOD CAUSES

by the APHS International Club

Every year, International Club (formerly New Horizons Club) raises money and supplies to aid Averill Park's sister school in the Dominican Republic. The club does so through a variety of fundraisers and donations, including the talent show, chocolate sales, generating shoeboxes filled with supplies, and holding garage sales. However, due to the pandemic, none of this has been possible this year despite the dire need.

The Dominican Republic is on an island located in the Caribbean Sea, neighbored by the country of Haiti. Due to rampant poverty and environmental disasters in recent decades, the Dominican Republic has experienced an influx of Haitian immigrants in search of relief. This has led to widespread racism, discrimination, and conflict that con-

tinues to divide the island. The Haitian-born population is often assigned to menial and low-paying jobs, includ-

ing house cleaning and working on sugar plantations, or is even forced into detention camps. Conditions on these plantations and camps have led to interna-



ing house cleaning and working on sugar plantations, or is even forced into detention camps.

Conditions on these plantations and camps have led to interna-

national human rights concerns, with reports of slavery-like working environments and indentured servitude.

derstanding and compassion between them. For many students, this school provides crucial, and often otherwise unavailable, supplies and services, such as food, shoes, and medical support. However, the school is heavily dependent on our funding.

This year, the club is running several online fundraisers, including a raffle and a GoFundMe page. Please consider donating and/or taking part in these fundraisers. Even a few dollars can send a child to school for several days.

The raffle will kick off on Feb 17, and prizes will include themed gift baskets and gift certificates donated by local businesses. More information will be available on the International Club Instagram.

If you have any questions, please email the International Club president Fiona Carroll at [21carrollf@apcsd.org](mailto:21carrollf@apcsd.org) or the International Club advisor Mrs. Apelanz at [apelanzc@apcsd.org](mailto:apelanzc@apcsd.org). The club can be found on Instagram at [@aphs\\_international-club](https://www.instagram.com/aphs_international-club).

**Please consider contributing to the International Club's**

### TEACHER'S AIDE (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19)

am married to a teacher and I know they are struggling just as much as the students to make it work."

Sliwinski admires each and every teacher that makes a pandemic look easy. Talking about teachers had quickly become an admirable sub-

ject, describing how flexible and accommodating teachers here at APHS have become.

"You can change someone's life by the words you say." Sliwinski described that clearly when she stated, "The most difficult part about

being a teacher's aide is seeing students disrespecting their teachers and other students. I think people fail to realize that they are people too, with feelings and personal lives. I think we all need to be more kind to one another whether you are a kid or an adult." Her compas-

sionate and sympathetic outlook on not only students but staff as well, builds the base of a meaningful teaching career, even as an aid. Mrs. Sliwinski is a warm-hearted, outgoing, social person, who cannot stop giving.

# COVID-FRIENDLY VALENTINE'S DAY IDEAS

## IT JUST TOOK A LITTLE INGENUITY

by Emma Deo

Since the coronavirus pandemic hit the United States, our everyday lives have changed tremendously. No more large gatherings, indoor dining, or even small get-togethers with friends without the impending risk of catching the virus and possibly giving it to friends and family, which has really put a damper on holidays in 2020 and now, 2021. Valentine's Day was another national holiday affected by COVID. So you may be wondering: What was I supposed to do for Valentine's Day this year?

First and foremost, remember that this year's plans could not mirror your plans in previous years, so thinking outside the box was essential. Keep in mind that social distancing, mask wearing, and the United States effort to stop the spread of COVID-19 has not come to an end for any holiday thus far, and it remained that way for Valentine's Day, too.

Considering that most restaurants do not offer indoor dining yet, and eating unmasked in a large group poses a serious COVID-19 risk, you could have tried cooking a meal at home this year. If eating outside was possible, then that was definitely the preferred method for eating around others. If it wasn't, you needed to be sure to stay at least six feet apart from each other while enjoying your meal, and staying masked when not eating, just as a precaution.

To completely eliminate the risk of getting COVID-19 altogether, you could have had a virtual date. You could have FaceTimed, spoken on the phone, or even set up a

Google Meet or Zoom call with your partner. Going about your evening as normal, but in your respective houses to adhere to

way to do this was to all watch the same movie on your own, but set up a FaceTime or Google Meet so



the COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Another way to get a sense of normalcy was to watch a movie together, virtually. One

that you could still talk and see each other while the movie played. You could also have used the TeleParty

Chrome extension to simultaneously stream a movie across you and your friend's devices so you could watch together, in real time, with an option to talk to each other through the chat feature.

While these methods may not have felt the same as previous years, you could still connect with other people outside of your household – without breaking guidelines and putting others at risk of getting infected. If you put in the effort now to stop the spread, we can continue to stay in school in the hybrid setting, and hopefully return to normalcy in the somewhat near future.

## THE HISTORY OF VALENTINE'S DAY

by Sydney Davey

Do you ever wonder where Valentine's Day came from or how Valentine's Day became a holiday? Or how Valentine's Day got its name? Valentine's Day is celebrated every February 14 across the world. You may get candy, flowers, or gifts from loved ones or your special someone on that day. But Valentine's Day wasn't always celebrated with chocolates and roses. So, how did the first Valentine's day come to be?

Valentine's Day is a very old holiday. The first Valentine's Day was supposedly in the year 496. Valentine's Day came from a Roman festival named Lupercalia. Lupercalia was in the middle of February and it has many dark origins. Men hit on women by actually hitting them.

From February 13-

15, the Romans had a feast which celebrated Lupercalia. Men sacrificed a dog and a goat, and after they killed those two types of animals they whipped women with the hides that they



used to kill the animal with. Young ladies or women would actually wait in line for the men to whip them. They thought this would make them more fertile. Young men picked the names of women from a jar. The people would be coupled up for the remaining time of the festival. They

would also be together longer if they really liked one another.

Ancient Romans might also be the reason for the name of our modern day of love. Emperor Claudius II killed two men, both of them named Valentine, on February 14 in the 3rd Century AD. Their pain and suffering was honored by the Catholic Church with the celebration of St. Valentine's Day. Pope Gelasius first rearranged things in the 5th Century with mixing St. Valentine's Day and Lupercalia to get rid of the atheist rituals. The festival was a more dramatic interpretation of what it once was. Gelation could also be confused with St. Valentine's Day. The word Gelatin means "lover of women."

Over time the holiday grew sweeter.

# THE PAST HOLIDAY SEASON WASN'T THE SAME

## COVID LED TO MUCH INTERFERENCE WITH FAMILY TRADITIONS

by Sarah Wallace

Christmas. The most wonderful time of the year. Or is it? Well, I mean it was 2020, so what more could we have expected? It was a Christmas kept under wraps but ultimately our safety comes first.

The past year was one I think we all hoped to leave in the past or bring change to as families all across the district had to sacrifice being with their loved ones this holiday season, including my own. For the holiday season, my family and I usually accompany my grandmother and extended family to an evening mass where we then all proceed to my grandmother's for a delicious roast accompanied with casserole, dressed greens,

mashed potatoes, toasted rolls and a savory cranberry sauce.

While the food had



stayed the same this year, the guests and plans had not. Church was at a limited occupancy and restricted us from attending, my distant relatives were unable to visit us,

and we opted out of signing Christmas carols together, my grandmother's personal favor-

ite, due to the potential of dispersing the virus. I am sure that my family was not alone in suffering through this unfortunate change of events, as several other families did too.

I had the opportunity to ask several students in the high school how COVID-19 affected their holiday season. Take for example Olin Wagner, a senior who had the most "interesting Christmas thus far" in his life. Spreading the holiday cheer with his extended family is one of the most important parts of Christmas but he was unable to enjoy their company this year, as it was spent alongside his immediate family instead of eating alongside his grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. While the Christmas dinner stayed the same, the company did not, and that is one of the most saddening aspects of COVID-19's toll on the holiday season.

The same goes for senior Mackenzie Rockwell. For Rockwell, the holiday season is

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## BOWLING (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24)

ing team, said he felt as though games were more akin to a sort of practice due to the regulations and changes. The games were quite different with a new format due to regulations, as the teams "couldn't actually go to other houses [bowling alleys] to bowl against other teams," said freshman Anna Wicks. "We bowled at our house and they bowled at theirs and we didn't know how good we were doing until (girls coach) Minkler found out their scores at the end of the game. That was kind of hard but it also pushed us to make sure we were doing our best so we could beat the other team."

With the changes of format and game layout,

there was also a change in scoring. The prior method involving geographical divisions and coaches texting scores and putting them into Google Sheets was no longer supported.

But this quieter experience was still greatly appreciated nonetheless, as the opportunity was seen as "some normalcy to this crazy year," said Wicks. "Bowling on the team with my friends was really one of the only things I did outside of school and I really looked forward to it." Willett agreed, appreciating the "in-person interaction with classmates."

Even with all the regulations, guidelines, and precautions taken, there was still the looming risk of

COVID. Medici said, "It was also a bit stressful worrying about the possibility of COVID right around every corner, with exposure, quarantine, or being put on pause and the season ending abruptly." This concern was valid as the times have shown, and as the team did experience quarantines as a senior on the girl's bowling team was quarantined and missed about a week and a half of practice and activity.

Many seniors are leaving the team this year, their final season different but still an opportunity for future games and competitions as well as final good-byes to the team. "Being a senior this year, it was very exciting to still get to bowl

with the team," senior Lindsey VanAlstyne said. "It meant so much, we're kind of a big family that just sticks together no matter what." VanAlstyne was able to finish her year with a new record, scoring nine strikes in a row and earning a 266 in a game out of a possible 300.

Parker Brown, the only senior on the boy's team, had scored second highest in the state out of a pool of over 320 bowlers last spring. Due to the quick closure and quarantine at the time, he was unable to play in a state finals. Fortunately, he was able to play again this spring.

The teams' return as lower risk sports is just the beginning of a larger wave of sports now returning for the upcoming season.

# BUCS POUND CHIEFS 31-9 IN SUPER BOWL LV

## TAMPA DEFENSE STIFLES MAHOMES

by Wyatt Thorsen

When Tom Brady left New England in March for Tampa Bay, the Buccaneers, their fans, and their city all began to dream. They began to dream about what was truly possible: they dreamt of a Super Bowl. And on a recent Sunday night, those dreams came true.

The Kansas City Chiefs came into the game hot and ready for a repeat of last year. Dominating the league, going 14-2 in the regular season, the Chiefs picked apart opponents like nothing, week after week. When Kansas City and Tampa Bay met in November (during Week 12) Mahomes and the Chiefs surged to a 27-24 victory over the Brady-led Bucs. The Bucs hadn't lost a game since.

Kansas City head coach Andy Reid said, "I didn't see it coming at all." He also stated, "I thought we were going to come in and play these guys just like we've been playing teams, and it didn't happen that way" (CBS Sports). Reid was exactly right. The Bucs' defense, led

by Todd Bowles, absolutely crushed the high-powered Kansas City offense. Patrick Mahomes, the leader of the pack, completed 26 of 49 pass attempts for just 270 yards and two interceptions, one of which resulted in a



field goal for Tampa and the other was the "nail in the coffin" for the Chiefs.

Brady on the other hand threw for just 201 yards completing 21 of his 29 attempts. The difference between him and Mahomes was simply that Brady threw for three touchdowns, whereas Mahomes and the Chiefs' three scoring drives resulted

in field goals instead of touchdowns.

"Obviously I didn't play the way I wanted to play," said Mahomes. "They beat us pretty good, the worst I've been beaten in a long time" (CBS Sports).

he was running for his life. The Chiefs had a couple key injuries to their linemen that resulted in the constant pressure on Mahomes which also led him to being sacked three times.

While the Kansas City offense wasn't present, the fans in Tampa Bay most certainly were...sort of. Due to the effects of COVID-19, 22,000 fans watched the game from the stands and 7,500 of those fans were health care workers invited to watch the game for all of their service. Raymond James Stadium was filled to about 38% capacity and the other 62% were cutouts to fill the empty seats.

Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers wrote a few pages into the history books on February 7, and there is a good chance that the team writes a few more in the coming years. With Brady, his ol' pal Rob Gronkowski, and a lethal defense, the future is bright and anything is possible for the Super Bowl 55 champions, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

### HOLIDAY SEASON (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22)

the one time of year where her family gathers together in celebration of good food and even better company. Unfortunately due to COVID-19, Rockwell was unable to celebrate Christmas with her grandparents, the one time of year where they can all be together. "It was obviously expected due to the situation of the world but it is still a saddening realization," she said.

Unfortunately, Rockwell isn't the only one who

had to experience a holiday season without their loved ones this past year. Several people within our community have vastly different traditions stemming from individual religions. I asked Isabella Bernstein, a freshman, about her holiday traditions only to find out that her family and herself celebrate Hanukkah instead of Christmas, which intrigued me to learn more. Her family is spread out all across the state, a large group of them living down in

New York City, which led to the sad realization that they do not get to visit each other much. Instead of having a service all together, they had a virtual service via zoom with her synagogue, where Bernstein' community gathers together.

"This year wasn't like any other year," said Bernstein. "We didn't really eat anything and it was saddening as nothing exciting was happening. It didn't feel like a holiday."

A season meant to be filled with joy, hope and love was filled with unfortunate change, sadness and lack of togetherness. Let's hope to have a "holly jolly" Christmas this coming year, leaving the pandemic behind us and building new traditions with our loved ones. There is a beneficial takeaway from this past year, however: togetherness is everything, and let's never take that for granted again. Here's to a hopeful 2021!

The Averill Park Chronicle

# Despite Obstacles, Averill Park Bowling Teams Complete Season

by Alex Gaboury

A year categorized like no other is bound to mean significant changes. School is different, sports are different - every aspect of life is, if not altered, then at least influenced by current events. Heading into the winter season at Averill Park, sports were experiencing difficulties due to high-risk transmission concerns, gatherings, and close contact. The one sport that was able to practice and compete, however, was one of the most often misunderstood - bowling.

Bowling is often seen as more recreational than competitive, often more outing than sport, but that is simply not the case. "When people think of bowling they

think of the fun open bowling they do with friends," Coach Medici of the boy's bowling team explained. "They don't



realize the strategies, oil patterns, and stress of competition when bowling head to head against other bowlers. Bowling is not only a

team sport, it is also individual."

The Averill Park bowling season had been

interrupted in the spring of 2020, canceled due to the threat of COVID-19, canceling the efforts of many who had worked to make that

team. The bowling team was able to start up again this year, but once able to practice again, it looked very, very different.

Social distanced matches were separated from opponents as mandated by school districts, with a lack of spectators (games were live-streamed instead), and only learning rankings post-game. All these things transformed the usually bustling and busy Hi-Way Bowling alley from what it usually was: a place filled to the brim with teams and eagerly watching onlookers into the quieter and distanced experience of all things in the time of COVID-19.

Hunter Willett, a freshman on the boy's bowl-

(continued on page 22)

## FAVORITE

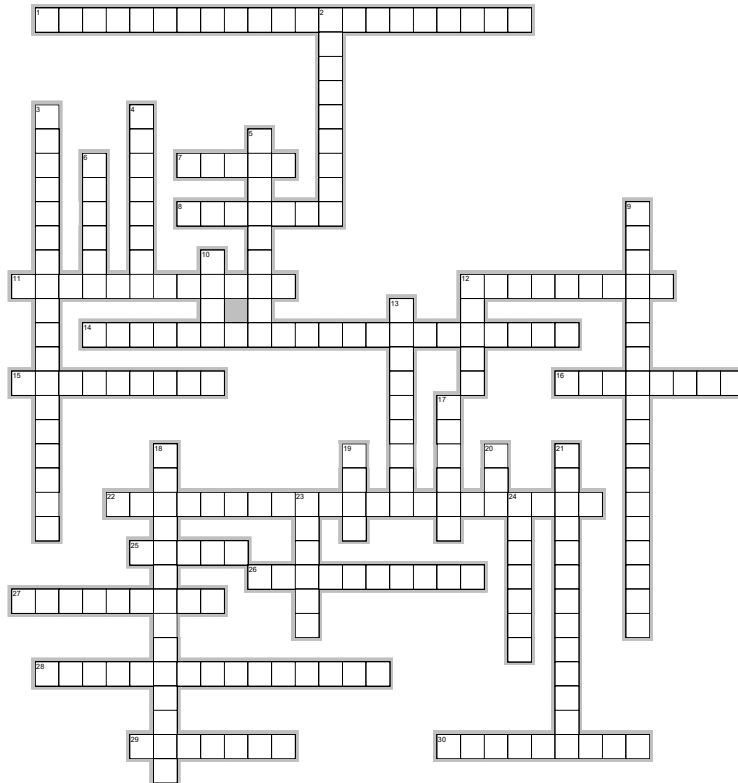
## STORE

## CROSSWORD

Match the STAFF MEMBERS with their FAVORITE STORES

\*Note—Don't Leave Spaces In Puzzle

- |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| AMAZON                   | ANN TAYLOR               |
| ARMY+NAVY                | BARNES N NOBLE           |
| THE CHRISTMAS TREE STORE |                          |
| DISNEY                   | EBAY                     |
| EMS                      | GARDEN NURSERY           |
| GREEN TOAD BOOKSTORE     | HOME DEPOT               |
| JC PENNY                 | LOFT                     |
| HONEST WEIGHT FOOD CO-OP |                          |
| THE LITTLE BOOK STORE    | LOWES                    |
| MACYS                    | MARSHALLS                |
| MICHAELS                 | THE MOUNTAINEER          |
| PATAGONIA                | PENZEYS                  |
| PIER1                    | SHEFFIELD PTTERY         |
| TJ MAXX                  | TOY R US                 |
| TRUEVALUE                | TRADER JOES              |
| TRULY RHE                | WOODCRAFT                |
|                          | WHITE HOUSE BLACK MARKET |
| WOODCRAFT                |                          |



## Down

2. Malenfant
3. Sorriento
4. Kimberling, Pauly, Shupe
5. Galcik
6. Dutcher M, Freeman
9. Fairchild
10. Daviero
12. Ashline, Heilmann, Marrufo, Schmidt
13. Blostein
17. Rohl
18. Miller
19. Strich
20. Stone
21. Hale
23. Agnew, Gregory, McKeough
24. Gildersleeve

## Across

1. Mein
7. Rees
8. Gibbins
11. Minkler
12. Hotaling, Quesnel
14. Caruso, Gierthy
15. Clark-Apelanz, Medici, Perry
16. Klepsch
22. Mackey
25. Engel B, Fox
26. Oldendorf
27. Ford
28. Church
29. Otty
30. Engel S