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decriminalization



BLOT GRAPHIC BY KARA PETROSINO

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CHS sweeps the Congressional App Challenge

Three separate student groups take first, second and third place for their original applications



PHOTO COURTESY OF RINA PESHORI'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Senior Brigid McCarthy of Manasquan, left, demonstrates her second-place app, GreenGarden, which aims to support the conservation efforts of at-risk insect species through a virtual garden.

By ZOE CONNER-BENNETT

Known as the artsiest of the MCVSD career academies, CHS is widely recognized for its professional level TV and radio programs, advanced graphic design classes and extraordinarily talented art students. Though not often commended for its computer programming courses, CHS made an impressive name for itself in the 2020 Congressional App Challenge: and it isn't the first time.

The Congressional App Challenge, according to its website, is "the most prestigious prize in student computer science." Started in 2015, the competition judges apps created by middle and high school students, broken down by congressional districts. The only requirement is the submission of a video demonstrating the new application; the focus of the app and the language it's created in are up to the students.

Advanced Java Programming teacher Laura Gesin has been incorporating the challenge into her curriculum since 2016. A student group from CHS has won the competition every year except 2017, though the school still received an honorable mention. The past two years, however, CHS has taken first, second and third place in the challenge.

Senior Ava Turner of Middletown, along with seniors

Jake Polvino of Tinton Falls and Nate Riehl of Wall, placed third in the competition with an app called Roomiez. It was designed as a platform for students to find their perfect college roommate.

"My group and I came up with this idea because most kids in this generation do not have a Facebook account, yet that is the way that most college roommates are found," Turner said. "We wanted to create an app that makes it easier and more accessible to find a college roommate that is the perfect match for you."

Other student winners, such as senior Melody Lin of Freehold, also used the competition as an outlet to address issues close to her heart. She was a member of the first place group that created CollabraCart, inspired by her own experience with a hunger relief organization called Food Not Bombs.

"I've seen how many people need food," Lin said. "Our app is intended to help those in need, specifically for those in need of groceries. It's a way to build networks of people willing to volunteer time and money."

Students in Gesin's class developed their apps throughout most of the first marking period, having to work both in-person and remotely. Lin believes the

circumstances of the competition were less than ideal, and that "communication was difficult" for her group.

Turner agreed that, while she and her group had access to FaceTime and Google Meets, it was difficult to coordinate schedules.

"It was definitely more challenging this year to participate online because most of the time, we all weren't in the building at once to talk about our code and any problems we were running into," Turner said.

Even so, the work that the students and Ms. Gesin put into the challenge is an accomplishment to be very proud of.

"Placing in the competition feels amazing," Turner said. "To be recognized for our hard work and time spent is truly rewarding."

In the celebratory email chain that flooded CHS inboxes when the winners were announced, teachers congratulated the hard work of the coding students under the guidance of Ms. Gesin.

"[The students] worked hard under very difficult conditions and developed amazing apps," Gesin said. "I don't doubt that some of you will use apps they develop someday."

SGA to implement new writing center starting late January

By KRISTEN GALLAGHER

We've all been in this situation before: feeling almost ready to submit a research paper after reading it over countless times, but still wishing to hear someone else's opinion before the teacher grades it. After all, it can be easy to overlook an error.

This position can be frustrating, but it can now be solved with the opening of the CHS Writing Center.

The CHS Writing Center, set to open this month, will allow students to have the opportunity for their work to be reviewed by peer editors.

Senior and Student Government Association (SGA) Executive Brigid McCarthy of Manasquan formed the idea for a writing center in her SGA campaign platform after realizing many colleges have a similar resource available to students. Now,

she is turning her plan into a reality.

"Because of the changes that we had to deal with this year, I really wanted to spend some time doing something for myself... that would help a lot of people," McCarthy said. "I wanted to take this opportunity... to put the time I had towards something I cared about."

Students seeking help with their work will email

See WRITING CENTER, page 2

Condon combats coronavirus despite uncertainties

MCVSD school nurse joins fellow healthcare workers in receiving the vaccine

By MADISON BEEKMAN

Every Thursday for 16 years of her 30-year career in nursing, Dorothy Condon would retire from her school nurse duties at CHS just to continue healthcare work in the Recovery Room of the Shrewsbury Surgery Center, also known as the Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU), and Operating Room. But now, in Condon's third and most demanding year as District Head Nurse/Health Services Coordinator, she hasn't been able to return to this second occupation.

"As the district Head Nurse, I oversee the nursing coverage of our other buildings, constantly monitor how many positive cases we have on a daily basis, how many students and faculty on self-quarantine due to exposure, order PPE for the district and report all information to administration," Condon said. "I spend a great deal of time on my computer now preparing reports and tracking numbers. Presently, I'm planning the next phase of COVID, vaccinating our students and staff."

This vaccination process started with Condon herself, as she received her first dose of the Moderna vaccine on Monday, Jan. 4. Despite healthcare workers being offered the vaccine first, Condon explained that the process was harder than she'd expected.

An email on Dec. 30 said that nurses could begin registering to get vaccinated, but Condon spent five days trying to make an appointment, as "finding a place that had open reservations was near impossible." Ultimately, she found that Visiting Nurse Association in Asbury had a few open spots.

On the day of the appointment, Condon waited outside for about 40 minutes and then another 20 until it was her turn.

"[The vaccine was] well worth the wait! I feel like there's a light at the end of the tunnel now. My second

vaccine will be on Feb. 2. [I] feel confident that after I receive my second shot, I'll be less fearful taking care of students and faculty with symptoms," she said.

Her role as the CHS school nurse, along with the other nurses in the district and worldwide, has drastically



PHOTO COURTESY OF DOROTHY CONDON
Condon displays her sticker after receiving the Moderna vaccine.

changed since the coronavirus outbreak in March. Some of the new responsibilities they hold include monitoring the daily "Red Light, Green Light" COVID-19 screenings and contact tracing.

"When we learn of a positive case we do school-based

contact tracing which includes notifying parents that their child has been identified as a close contact, sometimes notifying the bus driver that they have been identified as a close contact and also home high schools if the positive student plays sports or participates in home school programs," Condon explained. "We spend a great deal of time answering parent and faculty questions, and some of us are still teaching, like myself."

One of her most important tasks currently is preparing for teachers in the district to receive the vaccine, as they are in the next tier of those who will be eligible.

Teachers were sent a district-wide survey asking who wants to be vaccinated with a deadline of Wednesday, Jan. 13, which was made into a spreadsheet of all teachers and whether they are opting in or out. The goal is to have numbers ready for the Monmouth County Health Department once they finish nurses' vaccines.

Right now, teachers are supposed to start getting vaccinations at the end of the month, but only "time will tell," according to Condon. She is also "willing to have our district school nurses vaccinate their school's teachers. However, this may not be possible as the vaccine needs to be kept at a certain temperature and we may not be able to accommodate this requirement."

Despite the controversy surrounding the vaccine, Condon has faith in modern medicine and healthcare and has experienced no obvious side effects, besides a sore arm. She hopes that the vaccine will prevent her and others from being the next COVID statistic and that the return to normalcy is nearby.

"Vaccines save lives. I never had any qualms about it and anxiously awaited its arrival. I'm hopeful that we can get back to business and a 'new normal' as quickly as possible," she said. "I want my students at CHS to be able to participate in all the great programs we have that make our school so special."

Class of 2020 students return virtually for Alumni Day

By ELLA LUKOWIAK

At the end of last year, CHS upperclassmen were met with familiar faces once again: Class of 2020 graduates on Alumni Day. As with many other traditions this year, however, the entire event was held virtually.

"We knew that we still wanted to do Alumni Day, but we also knew that doing it in person wouldn't be an option for many COVID-caused reasons," said senior class council member Francesca McCaffrey of West Long Branch.

With any virtual event, no matter how many accommodations are put in place, there will always be certain aspects that cannot be replicated.

"It's always fun seeing your old friends on alumni day and then watching them get kicked out by a convenient fire drill, but we couldn't exactly get that this year," said senior class council member Nate Riehl of Wall Township.

McCaffrey agreed that upperclassmen may have missed getting the chance to visit with the alumni, but believes the content was about the same as in past years.

"From a functional standpoint though, I don't think that it was less informational or helpful than it has been in the past," McCaffrey said.

However, there were several new topics covered this year that were not present in the past, such as COVID-19 protocols with students' universities and colleges.

Junior Lana Tomchuk of Middletown said that while it was helpful to hear about these things, she didn't expect COVID-related discussions to dominate the event so heavily.

"I definitely gained some useful information from the event, although I am not sure it was as informational as I expected," Tomchuk said. "I think COVID definitely took

over the event."

Riehl also explained that from the beginning everyone understood that the event was not going to be as informative as in past years.

"Although I had a role in planning it, the council knew that there wouldn't be as many people joining the call and it wouldn't be anything close to the same experience as it was in the past," Riehl said.

Senior class advisor Erin Wheeler believes, however, that the smaller number of students, approximately 50, joining the call would help to further the impact of the event.

"I think it may have been more impactful because students weren't forced to attend," Wheeler said. "The only students who attended were those who were interested in hearing what the alumni had to say."

[WRITING CENTER]

McCarthy, who will then match the student with an editor. The edits will take place virtually via Google Docs, Google Meets and emails.

The program will work by combining the powers of different clubs, including National Honor Society (NHS), SGA and the Inkblot. McCarthy is thankful for the dedication and support of others.

"Getting all the Inkblot editors on-board was so easy, and they all love to write and edit just as I do," McCarthy said. "A big help has been the adults in this process. I have to give all due credit to Mrs. Lane of NHS and Mrs. Morgan of SGA... they've given me full creative freedom.... [and] they've both been very trusting."

Science teacher and SGA advisor Leah Morgan supported the idea of the writing center, but McCarthy spearheaded the project.

"Other than giving the green light and helping Brigid navigate some obstacles and brainstorm some ideas, this project has been totally put together by Brigid," Morgan said. "She has coordinated the students, teachers and everything needed to get it off the ground. From the original proposal she pitched to Mr. Gleason to the kickoff — it has all been Brigid."

McCarthy reached out to other students for assistance, including senior Ravenna Gemignani of Oceanport for promotional posters and logo designs.

"It's been a while since I've done any graphic design work, so I wanted to help out as much as possible," Gemignani said. "To prepare, Meg Ellis and I have been collaborating on coming up with a logo design for the writing center. I also worked with Brigid to come up with a unique color palette for the poster set."

Sophomore Keegan Foy of Wall thinks the Writing Center will be a useful tool and she plans on using it at least once a month. Older students may recognize what a teacher looks for in a writing assignment, so Foy thinks "it is helpful to have a student who has been through the same classes checking it over."

In the future, McCarthy plans on providing editing resources, creating a virtual workshop, and engaging a more diverse edit board in addition to the current Inkblot editors. Though she is concerned about student participation in the Writing Center, she keeps a positive attitude.

"It is such a hard thing to ask for help in general," McCarthy said. "I think a hardship will come with the engagement, but I think it's one that I'm ready to approach."

Morgan, however, sees the Writing Center as being successful for years to come.

"I hope that students will be able to take advantage of this opportunity to improve their writing skills for assignments, tests and college applications," Morgan said. "I also hope that the Writing Center will be a great legacy for Brigid to leave CHS."

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1 in 300



PHOTO COURTESY OF JACK OLDENSKI

Oldenski celebrates winning "Most Improved Player" at a summer basketball camp in August 2017. He was diagnosed less than a year later.

Oldenski wears his game face through sickness and Fortnite

By FRANCESCO THORIK-SABOIA

Sophomore Jack Oldenski of Middletown played in a Fortnite tournament on Dec. 13 with two teammates. This was far from an average tournament: he was up against over 200,000 competitors. Oldenski and his two teammates won \$400 each for placing in the top 150 teams out of about 70,000 teams. But before he got to such a high level of competition in Fortnite, he played basketball.

Oldenski played basketball for about seven years until he was diagnosed with Osgood-Schlatter's disease, a lump below the kneecap that causes severe pain, when he was 13 years old.

"I was probably playing with [the disease] for a couple months," Oldenski said. "Progressively, it got worse because I wasn't really treating it. It got to the point where I had really bad pain in my knee and then I realized that I had to go to a physical therapist."

He had to go to physical therapy for about six months, after which he decided to stop playing basketball.

"I was pretty upset. I played basketball for seven years at that point and I really enjoyed playing basketball. But it eventually felt a little dry. In hindsight, it's probably because I never really took a break," he reflected.

After quitting basketball, a new competitive fire arose in Oldenski's heart with Fortnite. According to Oldenski, serious practice sessions and tournament rounds in Fortnite usually take about two to three hours, so combined with extensive solo practice, it makes for a very time-consuming e-sport that requires a lot of dedication. However, Oldenski showed a lot of natural talent for the game in his first and favorite tournament.

"They hosted an event called the Fortnite World Cup, and it had a \$50 million prize pool. I played on a relatively bad computer and I managed to make \$300 in the solo events of the World Cup," he explained. "That was the first time I was like, 'I could actually be really good at this.'"

Oldenski continues to compete in Fortnite and is planning to return to competition soon.

"I feel like in a way, it's changed my life," he said. "I feel like it's going to help me in competitive aspects of my life in the future."

Class of 2020 reflect on their college decisions, offer advice to the next graduating class

By JACQUELINE LITOWINSKY

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, young adults have faced unique and difficult challenges. When thinking about the consequences of a deadly disease, these issues wouldn't necessarily be the first to come to mind.

"I haven't been able to visit many schools, so that has made it harder to decide where I want to apply," said Senior Madeline Williams of Wall. "I believe that realistically there's a chance that I'll have to do school remotely depending on where I go."

Both high school seniors and college students are experiencing many drawbacks as they deal with the college application process and being a college freshman during a time of social distancing and mask wearing.

The college search and application process, usually made complicated by test scores and recommendation letters, is now burdened by a pandemic that has killed over 1.6 million people worldwide, altering the senior experience dramatically.

"COVID-19 has mostly impacted my campus tours since most schools didn't allow guided tours anymore," said Senior Kiera Higgins of Sea Girt. "I was still able to drive through some schools, but it wasn't really the same as getting information from a student on a tour."

College students, whether they're taking classes from home or on campus, are facing many unprecedented restrictions because of COVID-19. Universities across the country have differing protocols and students, including CHS Class of 2020 alumnus Neil Estrada, a freshman at Cornell University, were forced to make tough decisions.

"I was only home since Thanksgiving, which from what I understand is what happened at the overwhelming majority of universities in the country. My school will return in the spring, but with a fully online schedule, I'm debating if it's worth returning myself," Estrada said.

CHS Class of 2020 alumna Alexa Feder, a freshman at the University of Connecticut, said that there are firm protocols when taking classes on campus.

"UConn had pretty strict rules in place regarding COVID-19 so it was definitely hard to meet people," she said. "You're not allowed any 'guests' in your dorm rooms. In the residence halls, RAs are quick to hand out citations."

Seniors are thinking about all of these factors as they apply to various universities and make plans following graduation.

With the added worry of a pandemic, Senior Brooke Stark of Manasquan carefully tried to map out her future.

"Right now, after graduation I plan to attend the college I choose just as I had planned before COVID-19," Stark said. "Hopefully, by that time things will be at least a little bit better and more under control."

Feder recommended that seniors stay positive as they approach their future in uncertain times.

"Just remember that you are not alone in this process," she said. "Nobody knows the 'right' answer because there isn't one! It's extremely important to stay optimistic and excited about this new chapter in your life. Just follow your college's rules and make the most out of it."

"Nobody knows the 'right' answer because there isn't one."

ROVING REPORTER

Q: What are you asking Santa for this year?



Freshman Allison Quinn of Howell

"All I really want is for everything to return to normal."



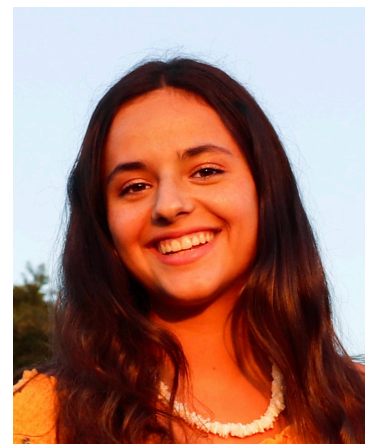
Sophomore Luke McGrath of Middletown

"I am asking Santa to have schools keep snow days. If it's snowing outside no one wants to sit on Zoom calls."



Junior Elena Jay of Eatontown

"For Christmas, I'm asking for a goth girlfriend."



Senior Francesca DiMiceli of Middletown

"A couple more hours of sleep and a long, well-needed hug."

Home school COVID-19 safety setbacks affect MCVSD

By ALEX DORNEMANN

All over the country, schools have been dealing with COVID-19. Monmouth County's 32 public schools, including all five MCVSD schools, have not been exempt from this.

Many school districts have closed for the holidays due to students spending time with their families, including Freehold Regional, Middletown and Monmouth Regional. Middletown North has also had to shut down twice.

This raises concern for students attending MCVSD schools who participate in activities at their home schools, have siblings there or take a bus managed through that district.

Sophomore Danielle Lirov of Marlboro explained the precautions she is taking to participate in Marlboro High School's drama club.

"We do all our rehearsals online with virtual backgrounds and we had our show online," she said. "All clubs and activities except sports are virtual to reduce the spread of COVID. Currently, we are doing a Seussified Christmas Carol 100% virtual."

Like MCVSD, Marlboro High School also uses a hybrid schedule, but there are some differences. Instead of Wednesday being a half-day at home, each cohort alternates at-

tending in person.

"Some of my theatre friends have gone virtual recently due to the spike in cases," Lirov added.

Additionally, at multiple schools, they don't have all the same classes with the same students like the underclassmen do at CHS. Having the same classes with everyone can reduce the spread of COVID-19 as if one person in a class tests positive, only a few people they were exposed to would be at risk.

"Unlike us, they don't have every class with the same people which increases the possibility of COVID exposure," Lirov said.

Sophomore Mindy Preston of Howell commented on how in her hometown, the party culture remains relatively unchanged and the in-school guidelines seem looser than those of CHS. Preston noted the importance of social distance as the pandemic continues.

"The majority of my friends went all virtual because we have like a thousand kids and a lot of them had COVID cases... a lot of people are partiers and I think they shut the whole school down," Preston said. "There was a Halloween party and a lot of kids went and a lot of them got COVID."

In-person guidelines rule the school for hybrid students CHS continues to adjust to social distance and safety guidelines

By NINA KOLODCHAK

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, CHS has efficiently adapted to the ensuing regulations.

Rules to manage interactions between both students and educators are in place to prevent the spread of germs, but this does not guarantee adherence to them.

Though these rules remain necessary, many are disregarded in the midst of our ever-changing lifestyles.

"I think the hardest regulation to follow is social distancing. With so many kids in the school, it's easy to overlook when you're walking in the hallways, coming into the school and leaving the school," said design teacher Nicole Casper. "If I see any of my students, especially ones in my classroom, going up to talk to someone, I remind them that we need to follow social distancing."

Even with this occasional negligence, CHS students believe that these regulations are sensible precautions against the virus.

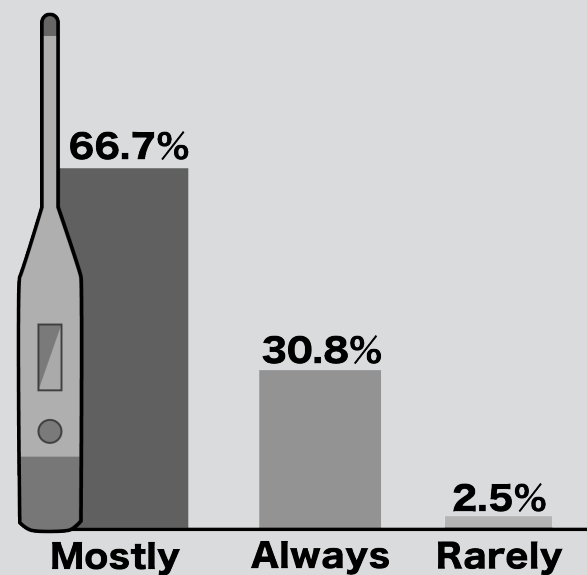
"I think that these regulations are really effective," said sophomore Anna Sicilia-no of Ocean Township. "They make school, at least for me, a much safer place to be, and that's an amazing thing."

Many students also appreciate staff efforts to make the unfamiliar circumstances as "normal" as possible.

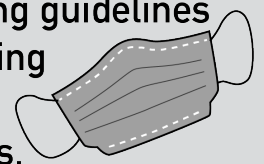
"I think that the regulations are pretty reasonable," said senior Jacynth Apora of Manalapan. "The teachers enforce them, but they aren't very nitpicky about our behavior and still give us the freedom to see our friends and make things closer to what they were before quarantine started."

Regardless of individual opinions, members of the CHS community have come together and are taking the best actions to make school as enjoyable and safe as possible.

"I think that all of the staff and students are doing a great job following the regulations and adapting to the changes," said US history teacher Bill Clark. "Everyone is doing their best, and I really appreciate that."



I _____ follow school building guidelines when passing classes, eating at lunch, and during other activities in and out of class.



BLOT GRAPHIC BY DANI McLAUGHLIN
A survey of 45 students from Dec. 21 to Jan. 4

Home for the holidays: students celebrate over break

By LUKE SASSA

During normal times, many students within the CHS community partake in cherished holiday traditions alongside friends and family. However, with the pandemic raging on, most students have had a wrench thrown into their plans.

"Typically on Thanksgiving, I meet with my family friends since I don't have any immediate family nearby. We all gather at one person's house and each family brings a signature dish, but we couldn't do that this year," said senior Nawaal Mudassir of Manalapan. She explained that the pandemic forced her family and friends to alter their plans, as they instead divided up the food between households and celebrated on their own.

Mudassir wasn't the only one who saw a drastic shift in the way their family celebrated Thanksgiving, as senior Rachel Fisher of Ocean also noted that her family had no choice but to improvise.

"My Thanksgiving plans were different this year because we usually have a large gathering at my house, but instead my family only saw my grandparents and we kept our masks on throughout the night," Fisher said. She mentioned that her immediate family even ate dinner in a separate room from her grandparents to keep them safe.

In addition to seeing her Thanksgiving plans go by

the wayside, the Hanukkah celebrations Fisher had become accustomed to also had to change.

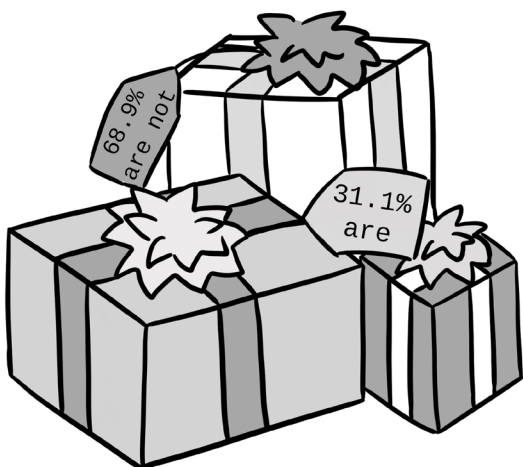
"This year is different because we aren't going to be seeing our extended family and exchanging gifts with them as easily," Fisher said. Still, she indicated that she has felt a sense of enjoyment during this holiday season in spite of her inability to see extended family.

The same issues have arisen for the many students at CHS who are unable to gather with loved ones in celebration of Christmas.

"This year is definitely a bummer because seeing my cousins and my family is something I always look forward to, as I only get to see them a handful of times throughout each year," said junior Drew Lepping of West Long Branch. His household typically visits extended family in Pennsylvania for the holidays, but will not be doing so this year in an effort to keep elderly family members safe.

Senior Catie Procyk of Colts Neck also saw her out-of-state Christmas plans deteriorate, as her family's annual trip to visit relatives in North Carolina was canceled. Still, she has tried her best to find a silver lining in the midst of a tough situation.

"The holiday season feels more lonely this year, but I feel like my brothers, parents and I have gotten even closer because of it," Procyk said.



spending the holidays with people outside of their immediate family.

Daily health screenings help 'stop' the spread of COVID-19

By BRIGID McCARTHY

of the **65%** of CHS students that have been dishonest on the daily health screening...



did not have a parent or guardian fill the survey out



lied about taking their temperature



did not mention that they took a fever-reducing medication



ignored a symptom

CHS School Nurse Dorothy was promoted to district Head Nurse last year, starting in September 2019. She joked about jumping into the position at the wrong time.

"I've been working 18 hours a day since March," she explained.

When the pandemic broke out last spring and all 16 schools in the Monmouth County Vocational School District shut down, Condon, under Superintendent Charles R. Ford's direction, was teamed up with a few other employees across different schools in the district: their objective was to figure out how to safely reopen, specifically starting with the minute a student walks in the building.

"Someone on my team, his name is Tim Lutcza, he is a culinary instructor and his kids played very competitive soccer... this young guy, his name is Raul, he made an app for them. That's the red-light-green-light app. He made it for the soccer kids going to soccer practice," Condon said. "[Lutcza] had it on his phone, and he said 'Dot, he could probably make an app for us and we could tweak it to our needs.'"

Condon worked with the aforementioned Raul DeSai all summer to code what became the "Traffic Light Survey," a daily health screening application that analyzes relevant symptoms and habits of any person entering the building, and gives them a pass with a "green light" or denies them entry with a "red light."

"Those questions are driven by the New Jersey Department of Health," Condon said. "Every time a new update comes out, I update the app. That app keeps evolving and evolving."

Students fill out the questionnaire before school, and the day's responses are all automatically saved to a digital spreadsheet: useful for not only health-related reasons, but also attendance and contact tracing whenever necessary. As per the survey's confidentiality agreement, these spreadsheet depositories of student health information are secure, accessible only to each school's nurse and principal. Condon, however, as Head Nurse, can review health information across the district.



In the morning, if and when a student's survey result gets a "red light," an email is immediately sent to both Gleason and Condon. It isn't often concerning when it does happen; Principal Gleason and Condon both recalled frequent instances in which students received what Gleason called a "false positive."

"Mr. Gleason will sit out at the back table behind us, and what he's doing is he's updating me with who triggered a red alert," Condon said. "Most often it's because they made a mistake."

"People are taking maybe an Advil or something like that for aches and pains... and they'll get the red stop sign," Gleason said. "I think there's probably more of that that takes place than anything else," he concluded in agreement with Condon.

As Condon reflected on CHS's hybrid opening, she cited the app as instrumental to the school's relative success in containing community spread.

"The app has been really, really good. I'm glad we invested in it," Condon said. "I don't know how long we'll have it... this time next year I hope we can go back to normal."

Students discuss honesty on CHS's health survey

By LILLIAN CHEN

The MCVSD returned to partial in-person learning in October, and with the cautious re-opening after months of remote attendance came a plethora of precautionary measures taken to ensure the safety of students and staff.

One such safeguard was the "Traffic Light Survey," a daily screening that determines whether a student may physically attend school based on potential COVID-19 related symptoms or recent exposures to the virus. After filling out the survey, which asks students if they have come in contact with a known case of the virus, if they have experienced any potential symptoms recently or if they have taken a fever-reducing medication recently, they will receive either a "green light," allowing them to attend school physically, or a "red light," meaning they will attend remotely for the day.

"My home high school, Allentown, has no screening process, not even a [temperature] check," said senior Erin Burke of Allentown. "I would imagine that this is because their student body is roughly 5 times our population. Our student and faculty population lends itself to our ability to screen accurately in comparison to other institutions."

The Traffic Light Survey relies heavily upon student honesty, as it is taken before entering the building and therefore there is no way for faculty to confirm or deny that the answers are entirely accurate prior to a student coming to school. In some cases, if a student were to answer dishonestly and come to school, it could pose a serious health risk.

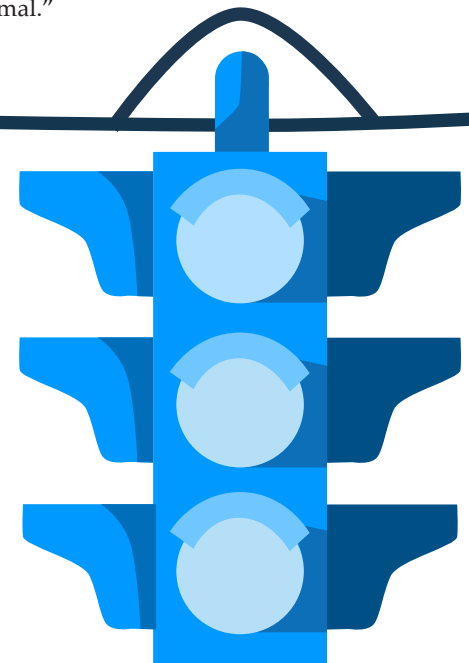
"I answer [the survey questions] honestly, if I don't feel sick I don't take my temp," Burke said. "I have only ever lied once and it was during allergy season when I had a slight sore throat and no other symptoms... I knew it was allergies because I have the same symptoms every year."

Students who say they aren't always truthful generally agree it is because they know their bodies better than the survey does. An anonymous sophomore corroborated this point, saying, "I have seasonal allergies, so I lie about the symptoms often. I know with almost 100% certainty that my symptoms are a result of allergies, and I don't want to cause any concern by saying I have them. If there were a change in symptoms, or I felt I might be sick with something other than allergies, though, I would answer the question differently and not show up to school... I consider myself to be diligent about the rules and safety precautions, but I won't spark worry when there's no reason for it."

While some students commented that they don't take their temperatures if they feel they don't have to or will sometimes lie about symptoms, others said that they treat the survey and their answers with much more severity.

"I don't think I've lied about anything on there. I usually do take my temperature each morning since my family's at high risk for COVID so I try to do whatever I can to stay safe," said sophomore Quinn Bender of Holmdel. "I think it's a pretty accurate and efficient way to screen students as long as they're 100% honest with the questions."

Many students understand the responsibility of answering the survey accurately for the sake of the health



of those in the building and answer the questions as precisely as possible to an extent.

"I would say most people are truthful," Burke observed. "I don't know of anyone who actually checks their temp before they leave the house, and some people will lie about the fever-reducing medication because we all take ibuprofen for reasons that could potentially get us denied, like chronic pain that presents as soreness or aches."

The Traffic Light Survey is simply another way to protect those at CHS in the time of COVID-19.

"Almost any way to monitor or screen a student relies on their honesty, just like this survey," said sophomore Amanda Riordan of Manasquan. "I care more about the health of my peers than my attendance to school. If I felt sick, I would not show up. I choose to believe that most of my peers live under this philosophy as well."

"I care more about the health of my peers than my attendance to school."



Misuse of medication brings drug classification into question

By Zaina Saif

According to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), "A drug is a substance intended for use in the diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment, or prevention of disease." The two main classes of drugs are non-prescription drugs and prescription drugs. Non-prescription drugs are commonly called over-the-counter (OTC) and are bought without a prescription. Rx drugs, also known as prescription drugs, are obtained through a prescription from a physician or other licensed medical professionals.

The fastest growing drug problem in the US right now is the misuse of prescription medications. Health teacher Leah Morgan said that there are concerns with the abuse that surrounds prescription drugs, especially among teenagers.

"There is that misconception that because doctors give prescription drugs, they must be safe," Morgan said. "People forget that there are side effects and a risk of addiction that comes from misusing your medicine."

There is also a growing concern about the abuse associated with OTC medications. OTC medications provide treatment for many conditions, including headaches, common cold, allergies, tobacco dependence and heartburn. The most commonly abused drugs include sleep aids, caffeine, laxatives and steroids. These drugs are abused by excessively taking the drug to achieve weight loss or euphoria.

"Some of the ways in which a way a person might abuse OTC drugs are simply taking too much, taking it for too long, or taking it when they don't need to take it," Morgan said.

These two classifications of drugs are determined by the FDA. For a drug to become OTC, it is regulated by the FDA through a drug monograph. The FDA regulates the ingredients in the drug, the doses, formulations and labeling requirements. The prescription classification is in place to minimize the risk of patients misusing dangerous drugs. With new drug applications, even drugs that are eventually destined to become OTC are first approved as prescribed drugs.

"Over the counter drugs are easy to obtain and they can be abused," Morgan said. "I suppose my biggest concern is education. There's really not going to be any movement on making them either illegal or putting them behind the counter, so the best option we have to prevent misuse is the use of education."

Despite the risks, some people believe that there should be a wider access to over the counter medication. Leslie R. Walker, the chief of the division of adolescent medicine at Seattle Children's Hospital and a former member of the FDA, argues that increased access to common medications, like for asthma, cholesterol, diabetes and contraception, would benefit many people.

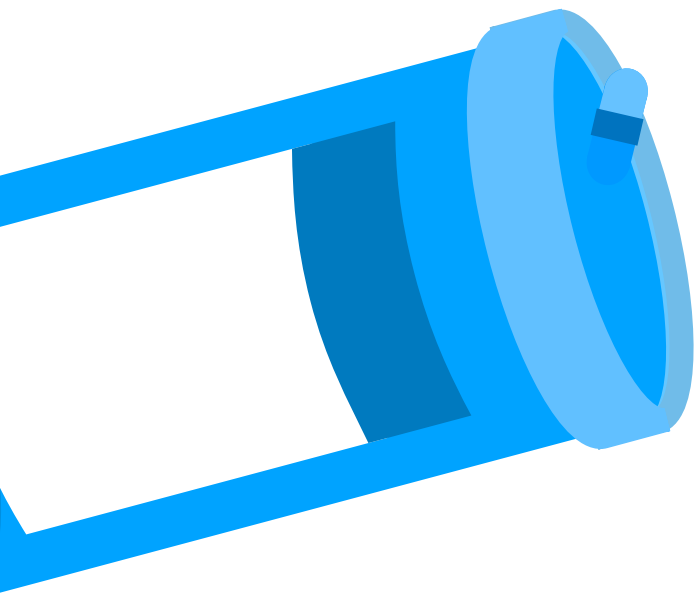
However, Walker has many opponents. Michael Carome, a physician and the deputy director of Public Citizen's Health Research Group, believes that some drugs deserve a "loud 'NO'" when it comes to making the switch to OTC. Some classes of drugs clearly meet the standards to be sold over the counter. Others don't.

"It's all about the customer and how they can respond to doses and side effects," Carmone said.

The FDA drug approval process is a long and careful one, so if any drugs do make the switch from prescription to OTC, it will be safe for the public. The process is made up of standard review and priority review. During standard review, the goal is to get a drug through the approval process in ten months. This type of review is applied to a drug that offers no new improvement to the market. Priority review is a process reserved for drugs that offer major advances in treatments where none exist. This whole process usually takes six months.

Morgan said that being well-informed is the best way to minimize risk when dealing with easily accessible drugs.

"Simply, be educated. Only take medication when you need to take medication and follow the directions as closely as possible. Don't take anything that you don't need to take and when in doubt, ask a doctor or pharmacist."



20% of high school students have been offered, sold or given drugs, on school property, in the past year.

therecoveryvillage.com

Rx Drug decriminalization debated nationwide

By Kaitlyn Delaney

With several states across the U.S. pushing to legalize recreational marijuana use, widespread drug decriminalization came into question as well. In the 2020 election, Oregon became the first state in the U.S. to decriminalize all drugs under Measure 110, sparking controversy over the benefits of doing so.

"Measure 110 decriminalizes the personal possession of small amounts of illicit drugs, including cocaine, heroin, Oxycodone and methamphetamine," Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) reported. "It also reduces the penalties for possessing larger amounts."

According to the Foundations Recovery Network, those who oppose decriminalization fear what the change could lead to, such as widespread legalization. Drug decriminalization may lead to an increased supply of drugs, which would inadvertently decrease drug prices. With greater accessibility and a lack of fear of legal prosecution, some fear that temptation for experimentation would increase, along with addiction rates.

Senior Luke Sassa of Matawan shared these concerns, explaining that decriminalization may not be the best option for all drugs.

"Although harsh penalties for certain drugs should be lightened, we shouldn't decriminalize every drug out there," Sassa said. "The current penalties serve as an important deterrent, and I fear that in the absence of such laws, drug use will spike."

However, as detailed in Measure 110, drug decriminalization does not protect drug dealers and addicts from prosecution. According to OPB, under current laws, the possession of drugs is considered a misdemeanor but is classified as a felony if the offender possesses a larger amount of drugs, has two or more prior convictions for possession, or any prior felony convictions.

Under Measure 110, possession of drugs is considered a civil violation and is punishable by a \$100 fine without the possibility of jail time. More serious convictions that would previously be considered felonies are now considered misdemeanors and are punishable by

a maximum of three months in prison or one year on probation.

By decriminalizing all drugs, states would prioritize the rehabilitation and recovery of drug addicts rather than their punishment. According to the Drug Policy Alliance (DPA), many addicts who need rehabilitation and treatment avoid getting help to hide their addiction and protect themselves from prosecution. The DPA further explained that decriminalization across the world has reduced addiction, overdose and HIV/AIDS, while criminalization in the U.S. does the opposite.

"More than a million people are arrested each year in the U.S. for drug possession, but this has done nothing to reduce the availability of drugs or the harms they can cause," said Jag Davies, the Director of Communications Strategy at the DPA. "What we're doing doesn't work - and actually makes things worse."



Recovering addicts attend rehab remotely amid COVID restrictions

By Nina Kolodchak

The increased potency of drugs in recent years has entailed an expanding need for standard addiction help programs, however, the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic has made certain adaptations inevitable.

Virtual addiction therapy has become quite popular as it is an accessible resource for 90% of the US population, according to Coalition Recovery.

These systems operate similarly to an in-person program, incorporating individual, group and family therapy sessions through a screen. Much like a physical psychiatrist, virtual doctors are qualified to diagnose a patient's condition and prescribe proper medication.

Due to distance and unsanitary conditions, difficulties may arise pertaining to the shipment of this medication. Unfortunately, keeping the virus in mind, this process is often the most convenient option.

Nancy Kolodchak, a former physician's assistant,

believes that though virtual help is an easier form of an in-person program, it may not accurately measure the depth of a specific person's situation.

However, sources suggest that online addiction help may be the future of drug recovery and treatment. According to Psychology Today, only 10-12% of addicts seek in-person help for their addictions. Facilities often demand that potential patients abstain from consuming substances before treatments can begin, a task that proves difficult for many struggling addicts.

Numerous online treatments are available to everyone using technology and disregard this requirement, appealing to those with stronger dependencies on addictive substances. The chance to recover from addiction in a casual, inclusive environment is something that draws an increasing portion of the population to virtual therapy, an outlet for the struggling even in darker times.

Nancy Kolodchak is the author's mother.

Marijuana legalization sparks controversy in NJ

By Isabella Ji and Michele Roman

A ballot in the 2020 election allowed New Jersey residents to vote on the legalization of marijuana, following the lead of other states who legalized cannabis previously.

For two years, New Jersey state lawmakers fought to legalize marijuana by trying to mobilize enough support to pass the bill. After being shut down several times, lawmakers decided to let voters respond to the question "Do you approve amending the Constitution to legalize a controlled form of marijuana called 'cannabis?'"

According to preliminary results given by the Associated Press, 67.1% of the citizens who voted in favor of legalization. The vote gives approval to anyone over the age of 21 to purchase marijuana, similar to states that passed this legalization already. However, other regulations must come into play and be passed before one can obtain the drug.

Junior Madeline Cheevers of Little Silver acknowledged that marijuana may be a problem for adolescents.

"As marijuana is a gateway drug, there may be problems that can arise. Some of which might be increased use from underage kids or increased traffic accidents from driving high," Cheevers said.

Despite the negative perspective of marijuana legalization, The New York Times explained that with the pandemic placing financial strains in New Jersey, the potential extra tax revenue and new jobs will be beneficial for the state. Lawmakers believe that New Jersey has the potential to bring about \$126 million a year.

Sophomore Olivia Borella of Matawan said that the cannabis market can bring a large income.

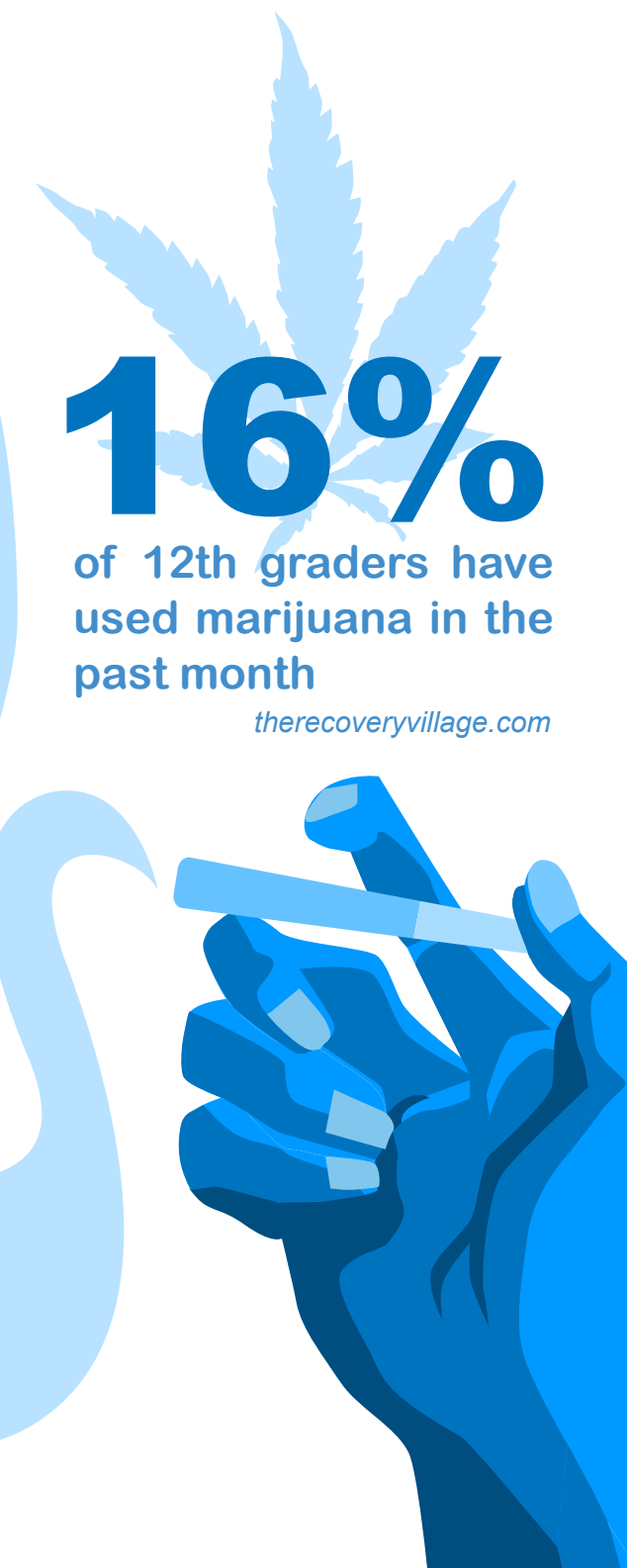
"I think that the new legalization of marijuana is beneficial in New Jersey because people buying legal weed will help boost the economy," Borella said.

Sophomore Cameron Fleming of Oceanport commented on both sides of the argument, acknowledging the benefits and dangers of legalization.

"Marijuana legalization will be beneficial for the future, as the illegal stasis of marijuana [is preventing] thorough research on the medical uses of the drug," Fleming said. "It is currently only used to treat two illnesses, and might have the ability to treat more. The only cons that I could tell are that it would be easier for teenagers to get access to marijuana, which would be detrimental to their brain development."

16% of 12th graders have used marijuana in the past month

therecoveryvillage.com



DRUGS:

addiction, legalization and decriminalization

Artists must choose to create for their audience or for themselves

By NICOLA DEGREGORIO and ISABELLA JI

The compulsive draw of publicity and making money disturbs the world of artistry, making artists question their motive to create: for themselves or for their audience.

Though it is possible for an artist to create with intention of fulfilling their creative vision, the likelihood of their piece gaining great business and notoriety is usually lessened. With the intent of earning a greater following or wealth, an artist's purpose shuffles between their personal creativity and their desire to please their audience.

There are musicians who have spoken out on their experiences with writing songs. For instance, Rolling Stone Magazine reports that on average the compensation awarded to musicians from streaming companies, such as Spotify, is anywhere between \$0.006 and \$0.0084 per stream. The rock band Pink Floyd credits this malicious business practice to creating a battle in which artists either suffer monetarily but follow their creative vision, or mindlessly produce music in order to put food on the table.

"For almost all working musicians, it's also a question of economic survival" said Roger Waters, David Gilmour and Nick Mason of Pink Floyd. "They cannot afford the 85% pay cut Pandora asked Congress to impose on the music community."

Senior Ryan Kudless of Marlboro agrees, saying that artists definitely produce music for the purpose of gaining a greater audience.

"I would say that most artists nowadays, especially musicians, make art to pander to a specific audience, like TikTok and Ariana Grande for example," Kudless said. "Most of the songs on her new album are clearly created for the sole purpose of being turned into TikTok trends."

Not only can the loss of creativity in the arts be accredited to the meek funds earned from streaming

services, it is also due in part to the debilitating nature of record labels. Chancelor Johnathan Bennett, known by the stage name Chance the Rapper, is an independent artist, who shared in an interview with Billboard that he felt a newfound freedom after dropping his label.

"That's the cool thing: I can do whatever I want. And I've got to really flex that unlimited capability of an independent artist... I have a certain responsibility and I feel like conforming to the mixtape to mixtape to album rule would just defeat the whole purpose of not signing [with a major label]," Bennett said.

Entrepreneur Danilo Vicioso says that the construct of a record label and their ability to mandate what an artist produces, when it is produced and when it is released

limits the creativity and control an artist has over their craft.

"When major labels promote artists, the marketing efforts executed are very similar tasks to that of indie artists: post on social, run some paid ads and do a PR push. And yes, I know that a label can much more easily get a feature in Complex Magazine, but what does that mean in 2018?," Vicioso wrote in Medium.com.

Evidently, the publicity responsibilities of independent artists and record labels promoting their artists draw quite a few parallels, only differentiating in the feasibility of being recognized by major publications.

Junior Giulia DeFabritus of Freehold said that constantly creating for others prevents enjoying the creating process itself.

"Someone I knew from middle school used to really love drawing, and she started her own social media accounts for it," DeFabritus said. "Eventually, she ended up quitting altogether because she felt like having to consistently make art in order to avoid losing followers made it more of a chore than a hobby."

Junior Aidan Cole of Neptune City, a student artist, says that he puts thought into everything that he posts on social media to gain more likes.

"Personally as someone who posts singing videos and drawings, I definitely will post things that are more likely to get likes," Cole said. "I'll usually get more likes on a cover of a rock song than say posting an original song, so I'll usually post more covers."

On the contrary, DeFabritus explains how she follows her own creative incentive when creating artwork despite pressures to create for one's audience.

"Although I sometimes feel this way, at the end of the day I usually end up doing what I personally think is best," DeFabritus said.

91.9%

of CHS students think artists should fulfill their own creative vision rather than appeal to what their audience wants



BLOT GRAPHIC BY DANIELLE MCLAUGHLIN

A survey of 45 students from Dec. 21 to Jan. 4

Music can benefit patients living with dementia and Alzheimer's



PHOTO COURTESY OF SAMANTHA SKOLNICK

Skolnick's grandmother dances to Czech Polka songs at a recent wedding.

By SAMANTHA SKOLNICK

My grandmother, Cleonor Skolnick, was diagnosed with dementia seven years ago, and she slowly has begun to forget memories, places and even me. Yet, there is one thing that she always seems to remember, the old Czech Polka songs that she sang and danced to throughout her life.

Both dementia and Alzheimer's disease cause memory loss, however, music has the power to benefit many patients. According to the Mayo Clinic, the area in the brain for musical memories is left untouched by the diseases. This means that a memory of a specific person may be harder for a patient to remember, compared to the memory of their favorite song's lyrics.

Junior Gina Dige of Howell shared that she had witnessed a case over the internet in which this had happened.

"I've actually seen a lot of videos where patients can play the piano perfectly or even remember the steps to their ballet routine just by playing the music. It's fascinating to see them thrive while they listen or while they play," Dige said. "I have seen patients smile at the music, especially music they listened to as a kid or an adult before they lost their memory."

Listening to or playing music also

helps relieve side effects of dementia and Alzheimer's, including stress, anxiety and depression.

In a study by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, researchers found that the effects of depression were reduced when music was introduced to the patient. Classical music and lullabies are typically used, especially when a patient is anxious before going to sleep.

Music therapy often helps people suffering from these illnesses and even those who are just dealing with the effects of aging. Inspiring patients to hum or sing is a way to help with cognitive abilities such as talking. It is one of the best ways to help patients communicate, even when they may be nonverbal, and it can improve the quality of life for many, especially those who may not see many people, such as patients at nursing homes during the pandemic.

Anyone who has a family member who suffers from dementia knows what it is like to watch them forget, and one of the worst fears being that they will forget you. Yet, with music therapy patients can be themselves.

"Music is so powerful in so many ways and it's incredible to see it bring someone completely back like that, even for a moment," Dige said.

Art has been used to change mindsets and shape opinion

By ADINA SAKS

"Art helps you express the feelings you can't put into words," said freshman Kelly Meehan of Wall. Because art is so easily conveyed and seen, it has often played a manipulative role in society. It has proven to be dangerously easy to control and often has in the past, by the most notorious and evil people in history.

One may wonder how propaganda can so easily lead seemingly ordinary people astray, causing them to practice and accept shocking and disturbing prejudices. According to an article written by Mount Holyoke College, propaganda works through the act of division. It creates a fine line between the "us" and the "them," emphasizing to the viewer that anyone different from them and what they believe is a threat to their wellbeing. Dehumanizing the opposing side often leads people to justify the horrific deeds they commit. This dangerous message is most commonly found in different forms of art: political posters, movies and cartoons.

According to Mount Holyoke College, propaganda through the form of political posters and cartoons is the most simple and straightforward way to instill an image in the public. To no surprise, it is also the most unrealistic way to communicate. In order for propaganda to function, the message it portrays must work as an extreme and often misguided call to action. The more simple it is, the more easily it will be received. And regarding propaganda, the use of art is about as direct as you can go.

Nazi Germany's use of racism and anti-Semitism as a form of crowd brainwashing is perhaps the most infamous example of propaganda. After Germany's defeat in World War I, many Germans felt a growing sense of anger towards the outside world. Hitler, with the use of propaganda, channeled that anger into the detrimental dividing line of the "us" and "them", blaming Germany's defeat and financial problems on Jews and other minorities.

Messages of Nazi nationalism were printed everywhere and on everything, making Hitler and the "Motherland" flawless in the eyes of the people. The Nazis wanted absolute control over their people's minds and hearts, and sneaking their messages through the arts was one way to exercise that power.

Using art as propaganda has never been an unusual occurrence. For example, posters in the Soviet Union showed farmers smiling and whistling while they worked. Political cartoons warned of the dangers of having personal freedom, reminding people that to be better off than someone else was an act of treason against the state.

In North Korea today, propaganda posters are filled with happy smiling soldiers and agricultural workers, boasting of Kim Jong Un's brilliance, while thousands of North Koreans suffer cruel punishment in concentration camps and are unable to leave the country.

These dictators have all used art as a means to subjugate and brainwash their citizens. Other cases of propaganda are more subtle and arguably less evil. Take Uncle Sam, a famous figurehead used to convince young men to go to war, farm difficult terrain and believe in "correct" American ideals for over a century.

The history of art used as propaganda is a horrifying one. The power of the canvas to manipulate people is incredible as it is formidable. However, this doesn't mean that art is inherently propaganda. For it has also been used for great causes and movements, moving people's hearts and making them think for themselves.

History teacher Tom Ross agrees that the power of art in our society is immense.

"In general, I think art is incredibly important," Ross said. He believes that art can easily capture the essence of a belief or idea, and that we rely on art to understand the people and objectives of our past.

"[the arts] reflect the beliefs in society at points in time; they're like snapshots," Ross said.

“It’s a wrap” for movie theaters

Streaming services signal end of an art form

By KATHERINE MANATOS

It’s time to say our final goodbyes to old leather recliner seats, oily, buttered popcorn and overpriced candy, as movie theaters are closer than ever to closing for good.

In the past five years, theaters have experienced a jarring decline in attendance and profits due to the rise in streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu. Streaming services give people the ability to watch from the comforts of their own homes, making them a popular choice. Business Insider claimed that there was a 3.5% drop in attendance in theaters from 2015-2016, and Indiewire states that in 2019, the box office was down 9% from 2018.

While the numbers seem bleak, some think this is just a temporary slump for the theater industry.

Charles Rivkin, CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America, quoted Sterling Bagby, the late co-founder of B&B Theatres, stating, “Everyone has a kitchen, but everyone still goes out to eat.”

Many others also believe that the experience of attending a movie is enough to keep the theaters alive. Indiewire explains that in a 2018 Art House Convergence survey of approximately 22,500 moviegoers, 65% of those asked considered their local art house theater valuable to their overall quality of life.

To some, theaters are just plans when there’s nothing else to do, but others live for the experience. Senior Meg Ellis of Freehold feels the latter.

“Nothing beats having that shared moment with everyone else in the theater during a plot twist or even a really bad ending,” Ellis said. “It’s pretty surreal.”

While some are wondering how theaters are going

to recover, others are thinking ahead to the next step of the theater decline. Some even consider the revival of drive-in theaters. Currently, there are 500 operating drive-ins in the country, but one big problem with drive-ins is it has to be the “right” movie.

Business Insider explains that drive-ins must play a popular blockbuster in order to even gain hopes of attracting attendees. Therefore, drive-ins are not a plausible option to replace theaters as a new way to release movies that do not belong on streaming services.

Film lovers are worried about the results that the death of movie theaters will have on small indie films that are normally released in quaint theaters.

Junior Kara Petrosino of Colts Neck believes that the change will be beneficial for everyone.

“It’s obvious that, at first, the switch was very jarring and production companies were having a hard time. But now it seems that these companies have gotten more used to the switch to streaming,” Petrosino said.

Petrosino said that this will improve moviegoers’ ability to watch films and help indie films to gain recognition. Ellis agrees with her.

“I think we’ll be starting to see a lot more low-budget independent films with more creative freedom, which is super exciting,” Ellis said.

While theaters closing may be viewed as the death of an art form, others believe it opens new opportunities.

Gina Duncan, an associate Vice President of Film and Strategic Programming at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, thinks that streaming services and theaters are both here to stay.

“Streaming and cinemas should be able to coexist — the issue is how,” Duncan said.

Fast fashion: trendy or destructive?



PHOTO BY LANCE MCCORD OBTAINED THROUGH CREATIVE COMMONS

Thrift stores such as the Kitty Hawk in North Carolina are low-cost alternatives to buying fast fashion.

By SARAH RAU

It takes as much water to make a single cotton t-shirt as it does for a person to drink for 900 days, according to the World Wide Fund for Nature. Rivers in China, India and Bangladesh are now polluted with cancer-causing chemicals due to wastewater from factories.

The topic of fast fashion is a controversial one, as it offers accessibility and low pricing despite causing many environmental problems.

The fast fashion industry is doing considerable damage to the environment. Fast fashion is clothing made for the purpose of short-term trends rather than quality or sustainability. While the negative environmental effects are evident, fast fashion has flourished over the past few years and writers at GlobeNewswire predict that it will continue to do so.

Sustainable fashion items may be better for the environment, but there are some advantages to fast fashion that keep customers coming back. Styles and preferences change over time. Sustainable fashion is made to last, but sometimes change can be good. Buying a few more expensive pieces to wear for years to come can quickly become boring. The main reason fast fashion is popular is because it’s changing

Sophomore Anna Siciliano of Ocean Township

believes fast fashion is not bad in moderation and appreciates the fact that trends can be used to connect to other people.

“You do waste a little bit of money, but it’s not like you’re wasting a lot of money because it’s small things,” Siciliano said. “Plus, you want to fit in with everybody so it’s kind of cool [in that way].”

Siciliano also argued that fast fashion items are not necessarily thrown away so quickly. “Scrunchies blew up like a year or two ago,” Siciliano said. “I still have scrunchies and I have one in my hair right now.”

Fast fashion stores like Gap and Forever 21 are also known for being more accessible and having lower prices. This can outweigh the negative effects of buying fast fashion for some.

Despite fast fashion’s increasing popularity, those willing and with the right resources are choosing not to follow the crowd. Sustainable fashion and thrifting are environmentally friendly alternatives to fast fashion. At the slow fashion brand Study NY, they use slower production schedules so products are not made hastily, pay their employees fair wages and maintain lower carbon footprints.

To reduce their carbon footprint, sustainable fashion brands like Study NY make higher quality clothing to extend the life of each garment and reduce the amount of clothing in landfills. Sustainable or slow fashion brands keep the environment in mind by producing clothing that is high enough in quality to last a long time. However, as shopping slow fashion is more expensive, it is not an option for everyone.

Senior Melody Lin of Freehold said she tries to support ethical fashion and avoid fast fashion.

“I am definitely against fast fashion. I think that it is terrible for the environment and the people who go into making it,” Lin said. “I can’t remember the last time I went into a store with fast fashion.”

Sophomore Mindy Preston of Howell had a more neutral approach, feeling that fast fashion is unhealthy for the environment, but admitting to owning some fast fashion items.

“Half of my clothes are hand-me-downs, so I keep my clothes for a very long time. I probably own [fast fashion], but I also didn’t make the conscious decision to buy it.”

While fast fashion companies are known for their lower prices, trendy styles and accessibility, their methods are damaging to the planet. For those who can afford it, long-lasting classic items from ethical fashion brands are worth the investment.

Mystery monoliths are appearing around the world



PHOTO COURTESY OF UTAH DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY
The Utah Department of Public Safety Aero Bureau encountered an unusual structure known as a monolith in Red Rock County, Utah on Nov. 18, 2020 while working with the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

By SABRINA LIDING and KELLY MEEHAN

Monoliths are huge, 3 meter metal structures that appear and disappear at random times and at random places.

The first monolith was discovered on Nov. 18, 2020 in the middle of a Utah desert. However, using historical Google Earth satellite images, online detectives found they first appeared in Oct. 2016. This sparked a chain reaction of more than 70 monoliths popping up around the world from California to Australia.

Many conspiracy theories have been developed. Some people think aliens dropped them and others claim the dead sculptor, John McCracken, made them.

John McCracken was a simplistic sculptor who loved science fiction and died in 2011. According to The New York Times, his son claimed that the first monolith was a John McCracken piece. He explained that McCracken loved the idea of extraterrestrial beings visiting Earth and would do something like this to resemble aliens.

However, McCracken’s close friend, Ed Ruscha, said “It’s unlike him [McCracken] to be a trickster of someone. A monolith in the desert? It’s so universal that it could be anybody.”

James Hayward, another one of McCracken’s close friends said “I looked at the corners as much as I could; they are made by a machine called a brake, which bends metal. When you bend metal with a machine, the corners are not sharp and crisp. They’re rounded.” McCracken preferred making his sculptures by hand.

Matty Monahan, known professionally as Matty Mo, has also been hinting that he is the creator of the monoliths. Monahan is a Mexican contemporary artist who created The Most Famous Artist, a group of artists who sell and promote their works on Instagram. His group posted a picture of a monolith he was creating on Instagram and announced he would be selling monoliths for \$45,000 each on Dec. 4, 2020. He admitted that The Most Famous Artist has installed monoliths before, although he neither confirmed nor denied if he was the one to make the first monolith in Utah.

Some think the monoliths are unlike anything we’ve seen before. Others realized similarities to past events that have happened.

Freshman Brandon Kopp of Marlboro said that this is the “2020 version of Stonehenge. Maybe in 100 years, in our grandkids’ history classes, there’s going to be a lesson about the monoliths of 2020.”

Junior Jacob Irwin of Middletown, the host of the radio show “The Agents of Chaos,” shared his perspective on the monoliths.

“It’s possible that the first one stood for something, like eluding to a possible 2001: A Space Odyssey remake... but after that it probably just became a trend or was a clout seeking thing,” Irwin said. “I do have to say that I am slowly going insane trying to keep track of them all because there have been what seems like dozens of them.”

Guidelines are necessary to help end the pandemic

On Thursday, Jan. 7, 4,194 people died from the coronavirus in the United States, surpassing 4,000 for the first time and setting a new record high. On Tuesday, Jan. 12, the United States beat that record, with 4,327 people dying from the coronavirus.

The COVID-19 pandemic is getting worse, not better. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said that these alarming numbers are due to the recent holiday season.

"As we get into the next couple of weeks in January, that likely will be a reflection of the holiday season travel and the congregate settings that usually take place socially during that period of time," Fauci said in an interview with NPR.

Fortunately, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Highly effective vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna have been authorized for emergency use by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and as of Jan. 13, over nine million people have been given a first vaccine dose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Furthermore, President-elect Joe Biden, who will take office Jan. 20, plans to speed up vaccine distribution by immediately making all doses of the vaccine available instead of holding some back to be used as second doses. On Jan. 12, the outgoing Trump administration also announced that they would be starting this policy. Although this has caused some concerns on ensuring the availability of second doses within the recommended time frame, Biden is confident that this will not be an issue and believes this action is necessary in order to make good on his promise of delivering 100 million doses within his first 100 days in office.

While the situation is looking up, this doesn't mean the rules and regulations currently in place go out the window. Even as doctors and professionals continue to discover new information about the virus and its spread, it's crucial to continue practicing social distancing and mask-wearing.

With the recent holiday season, it is likely that we'll see another spike in cases, hospitalizations and deaths, just as we did after Thanksgiving and Halloween. This has happened because of the disregard for the current government mandates, as families gathered close and unmasked for hours to celebrate.

Two weeks after Thanksgiving, Healthline reported that the number of cases went up 20%, the number of hospitalizations was up 21% and the number of deaths increased by 39%.

As of Jan. 13, the U.S. has confirmed over 22 million COVID-19 cases in total and total deaths surpassed 380,000. Experts at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation predicted that by Apr. 1, the U.S. will exceed 560,000 deaths if these current trends continue.

The end of the pandemic will come with the establishment of herd immunity, where a significant portion of the population is immune to the virus and it therefore cannot spread as easily. Fauci told NPR it's likely that 50% of people would have to get vaccinated before a clear impact is made, but it'll take between 75 to 85% to establish herd immunity. He hopes that this process will begin in late March or early April, when the vaccines are expected to be distributed to the general public.

"Once we get there, if in the subsequent months, April, May, June, July, we get as many people vaccinated as possible, we could really turn this thing around before we get towards the end of the year," Fauci told NPR.

We're all tired of this "new normal" that we've been living with for almost a year now, but things are looking up. However, that doesn't mean we disregard every other rule in place. If we continue wearing masks, social distancing and listening to the professionals in conjunction with the new vaccine administration, we can hopefully get back to regular life by this spring or summer while also reducing the amount of devastating fatalities.

Mental health deserves to be treated as importantly as physical health

By ELI TAPIA

We live in a world that never stops moving, and although mental health awareness has quickly become a trending topic, many times it's overlooked and pushed aside in fear of slowing us down. The case isn't the same when it comes to physical health, however, which quickly becomes a priority before any other responsibility.

If a person suffers from a physical injury or disability, accommodations are made and their health is prioritized in order for a safe and speedy recovery. Mental illness is harder to spot, harder to talk about and therefore harder to seek help for.

Mentalhelp.net conducted a poll of over 2,000 people in which they surveyed people's willingness to talk about their health, both physical and mental.

76% of the participants said they would very likely talk to a significant other about their own physical health, while only 28% would very likely open up about their mental health.

In the same fashion, they studied mental illness in the workplace and found that 63% of

participants are comfortable with calling in sick from work if they show symptoms of a physical illness while 59% of people surveyed said they would be "very unlikely" to call in sick if they showed signs of depression or mental illness.

According to Stat News, mental disorders affect more than 20 percent of American adults, and these disorders are often linked with physical illnesses like diabetes and heart disease. They also increase risks of physical injury and death through violence and suicides.

When talking about mental and physical health, the two go hand-in-hand and should be thought of as interconnected issues. Poor physical health will increase the likelihood of developing mental health issues in the same way that poor mental health can lead to physical conditions that can be terminal.

Health as a whole should be prioritized before any responsibilities. Physical and mental health should stop being referred to as separate issues and should start being treated with the same concern.



BLOT PHOTO BY LEIGH LUSTIG

Kate Fitzsimons, a motivational speaker and life coach originally from Sydney, Australia, addresses students at Communications High School on Feb. 25, 2020. She discussed the importance of managing negative emotions and being in control when choosing how to respond to difficult situations.



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Should the COVID-19 vaccine be mandatory?

Would a government-issued mandate help or hurt the American public?

By RYAN LEMBERGER

Scientists and doctors can not force people to take vaccines. However, with the COVID-19 vaccine being approved for emergency use by the FDA in less than 11 months, the public has concerns over long term effects and being forced to take it by the government.

As coronavirus cases continue to surge despite the vaccine rollout, people are wondering if they can be mandated to take the vaccine. Federally, there is no constitutional power that can force citizens to take a vaccine. States and corporations, however, can impose laws that require citizens to have a vaccine in order to enter a business or establishment.

In August, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told Americans at a town hall meeting hosted by Healthline that he does not think there will be a vaccine mandate in the United States, but it will be highly encouraged.

"If someone refuses the vaccine in the general public, then there's nothing you can do about that. You cannot force someone to take a vaccine," Fauci said.

The CDC doesn't know how many vaccines will be needed to create herd immunity, but other sources including Vox Media estimate that 70-80% of the world will need to take the vaccine in order to end the pandemic.

While it is still unclear how many doses will be

administered before the end of January, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services said that the goal of Operation Warp Speed, the government vaccine rollout program, is to have 300 million doses of a "safe and effective vaccine." This goal has since been proven unrealistic because of unexpected problems with the rollout.

A likely mandate in many states would require students to take the vaccine to attend school. Currently, the biggest problem with getting children vaccinated is that clinical trials have not been completed for those under the age of 16.

Since each person needs two doses of either already approved vaccine, according to Forbes, it is unlikely that it will be available before mid-March, or even April for the general public. This will lead to any questionable vaccine mandate likely being pushed off until fall 2021.

Sophomore Lucy Battista of Tinton Falls is excited to take the vaccine when her turn comes.

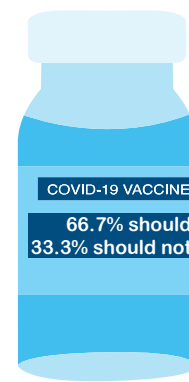
"It is so stupid for people to talk about their risks with the vaccine because there is risks with everything," Battista said, given there is scientific evidence to back up the vaccine's safety.

She also said that she did not think the vaccine was politically influenced despite the controversy with some of President Donald Trump's tweets and comments.

"I think people try to say that to justify them not getting it, but at the end of the day this is not a political

thing," Battista said. "It is about health and safety. Scientists and researchers would not push for this vaccine and get it as soon as possible if they didn't think it was the right thing to do."

Overall, there is a lot of controversy surrounding the newly approved COVID-19 vaccine. While the government can not require its citizens to be vaccinated, they highly recommend it. Ultimately, citizens should be free to make their own choices without any governmental influence.



I think the government
mandate
COVID-19 vaccination

BLOT GRAPHIC BY LIAM UMBS
A survey of 45 students from Dec. 21 to Jan. 4

Political party-owned media could further political bias

By CARLA VREELAND

In this day and age, the spread of misinformation can be disastrous.

With growing technology designed to show us only what we want to see or anything that will keep our attention the longest, we should not have to go to extensive lengths to find true, unbiased news.

However, with watered down, whitewashed history as well as news stations airing distorted facts, it has grown to be nearly impossible to find impartial information.

This is not only the case with news sources, but also with our classrooms and textbooks.

Sociologist, historian and author James W. Loewen spoke about his research into the American history curriculum and education. He explained that providing students with an insufficient education will prevent them from developing the understanding to navigate through inaccurate information that is often based on opinion and attempt to seek out impartial facts.

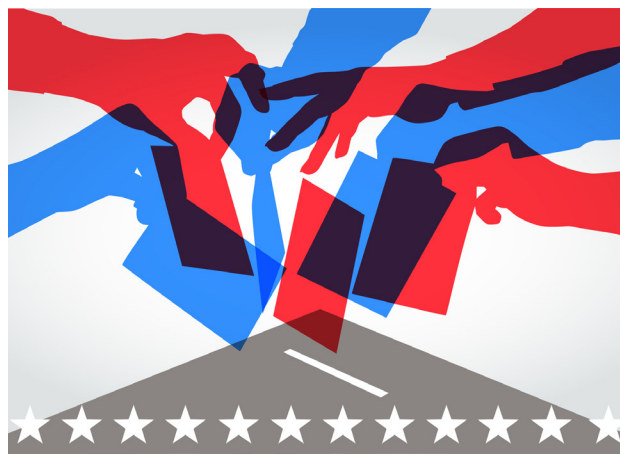


ILLUSTRATION BY DANNY DE GRACIA OBTAINED THROUGH CREATIVE COMMONS
According to a study from Pew Research Center, people are more likely to interact with news sources that agree with their ideas.

Those students will join the majority of adults, becoming people who often do not think to look elsewhere for news, but actively try to avoid learning information that conflicts with their viewpoints.

According to a Pew Research Center study, people are more likely to interact with others as well as get their news from sources with like-minded ideas, as well as unfriend those who disagree with their perspectives.

If political parties were to own news and broadcasting companies, it would only heighten the already immense polarization throughout the country, as well as increase bias information getting to the public.

Senior Erin Burke of Allentown discussed how biased new resources could easily skew statistics toward their viewpoint and agenda and how political parties should not be controlling the information that we are fed.

"I doubt that we will ever live in a world where news is completely unbiased," Burke said. "But this idea was the partial catalyst of a steep descent into a divided, misinformed nation."

Should members of Congress have term limits?



PHOTO BY JESSICA RODRIGUEZ RIVAS OBTAINED THROUGH CREATIVE COMMONS

The longest serving member of the U.S. Congress was John Dingell, a congressman from Michigan who retired after serving 59 years and 21 days in the House of Representatives.

By MAGGIE SCHNEIDER AND ELI TAPIA

In today's politically charged environment, arguments are constantly being made on how to improve politics in order to better serve the people and their needs. One of the most discussed topics recently has been whether government officials, specifically members of Congress, should have term limits.

The 22nd Amendment sets a two-term limit for the President of the United States. In 1947, a Republican-

controlled Congress sent the amendment to the states, and in 1951 it was ratified. According to a 2013 poll by Gallup, 75% of Americans support term limits for Senators and Representatives. So why have term limits never been placed on members of Congress?

Throughout history term limits for members of Congress have been set. The Articles of Confederation, the first constitution of the United States, established term limits of six years for members of the Continental Congress. However, these term limits did not continue into our modern-day Congress. The Supreme Court case of U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton ruled in a 5-4 majority that the Constitution did not allow states the right to limit the terms of their elected Senators and Representatives.

It is not uncommon for Senators to serve more than 40 years in office for their home state, and often get the perks of remaining in office. The "seniority system" is described as giving special privileges to members of the Senate and House of Representatives. It enhances the power of committee chairs, who set the agenda and preside over the committee, which reviews legislation. It even helps to elect the Speaker of the House and the Majority and Minority Leaders of the Senate. By not having term limits for congressional members, people are elected to positions based on their seniority in Congress, rather than their merit or qualifications.

The most common argument against congressional term limits is that elections serve as a way to re-assess the ability of an elected official to remain in office. However, citizens often become complacent with the

roles of their elected officials and become accustomed to their Congress members. So, oftentimes incumbent office-holders often remain in office when they are up for re-election. Another common argument is that term limits can prevent favorable government officials from continuing to pass legislation and make an impact on our government. While this can be true, there are many other positions in government where elected officials can continue to make legislative change. Bernie Sanders, for example, held office as mayor of Burlington, Vermont from 1981 to 1990 when he was elected to the House of Representatives until 2006, when he then became a senator for Vermont. A political career can be made out of holding office in numerous government positions, rather than remaining in the same position for decades.

Setting a limit can be beneficial in avoiding corruption and improving the honesty and transparency, as well as efficiency, of our government and its employees. Seniority is celebrated in Congress, and long-standing government officials tend to base their political votes and legislation on whether it will be advantageous to them. Senators and representatives often become uninfluenced in their views and mindset, which leads to no progressive change happening. An influx of new members of Congress could pave the way for new, modern ideas and legislation passed.

By enforcing congressional term limits for members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, we can avoid corruption in our government and allow for transparency and honesty with our elected officials.



HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

2020 was the year of staying home with family, rather than the parties and vacations that usually come with the holiday season. See how CHS students and staff celebrated their holidays and spent their breaks this year, safe at home.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GINNY CLEVENGER

Fitness teacher Ginny Clevenger spent her break with her husband, two daughters and their dog, Indy. The Clevengers host a Christmas Eve party annually, but the tradition will have to wait until next year. "Although I missed the tradition of seeing everyone, it was way less hectic. I don't know if I enjoyed it more, but I enjoyed it. Good holiday, [it] will be better next year," Clevenger said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF FRANCESCA DIMICELI

Senior Francesca DiMiceli of Middletown stayed home with her immediate family and celebrated the holidays via Zoom with her extended family. "I didn't enjoy this holiday half as much... I hope that next year we can be all together again," DiMiceli said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF EMMA BAROFSKY

Senior Emma Barofsky of Ocean celebrated Hanukkah this year with her immediate family by making potato latkes and Hanukkah gingerbread houses rather than starting off the eight nights with more than twenty family members.

"I got to spend the holidays with the people I love that mean the most to me, and that's what really matters."

- Danielle Hannah



PHOTO COURTESY OF EMMA BAROFSKY



PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIELLE HANNAH

Senior Danielle Hannah of Middletown spent her holiday break baking while quarantining so her grandmother could safely join them for Christmas. While the break was much quieter than usual at the Hannah household, "I enjoyed the holidays about the same as I previously had," Hannah said.