

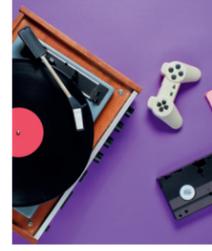


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HABITAT FOR HUMANITY: CULTIVATING COMPASSION, COMMUNITY

by Rachel Lyubansky

Eleven years ago, history teacher Mark Foley turned to address his eighth hour with the same question he'd used to start all of his classes that day: "What do you do to volunteer in your community?"

The response was a resounding "nothing," the same answer that had been thrown at him all day.

Growing frustrated, he called on Hannah Mohr, planted in the front of the class with her hand raised high.

"What do you do?" she demanded.

Foley brought up his experiences with Habitat for Humanity, how he'd started volunteering in college, his first spring break trip to Mississippi.

"Well, why don't we do that here?" Mohr pressed.

And, Foley recounts, "Then it was kinda like, I guess we're gonna do this."

So they did.

"We just took our thirteenth trip to Mississippi," English teacher Laura Koritz smiled, "[Though] personally I started doing it in high school."

In fact, both Koritz and Foley, as though cosmically connected, were introduced to Habitat (at different times and before meeting each other) through the same man: Bill Sutton, or "the godfather of the Habitat trips," as Foley describes him.

"For both of us," Koritz explained, "that really changed our trajectory. Neither one of us thought to ourselves we're gonna go become high school teachers and do this exact same thing...[but] I had this notion of what the world was like from an academic perspective," she paused to laugh softly at herself, "I had read a lot of books about other people and places... I had [just] never really experienced something real, maybe ever, before going on that trip. It opened my eyes to just connecting with

people and caring about people; feeling like that's what I wanted to do with my time."

Foley was quick to add to this sentiment. "It's changed my identity around my values...it helps you feel like you belong. Just being in Mississippi, as strange as it is, feels almost like being home."

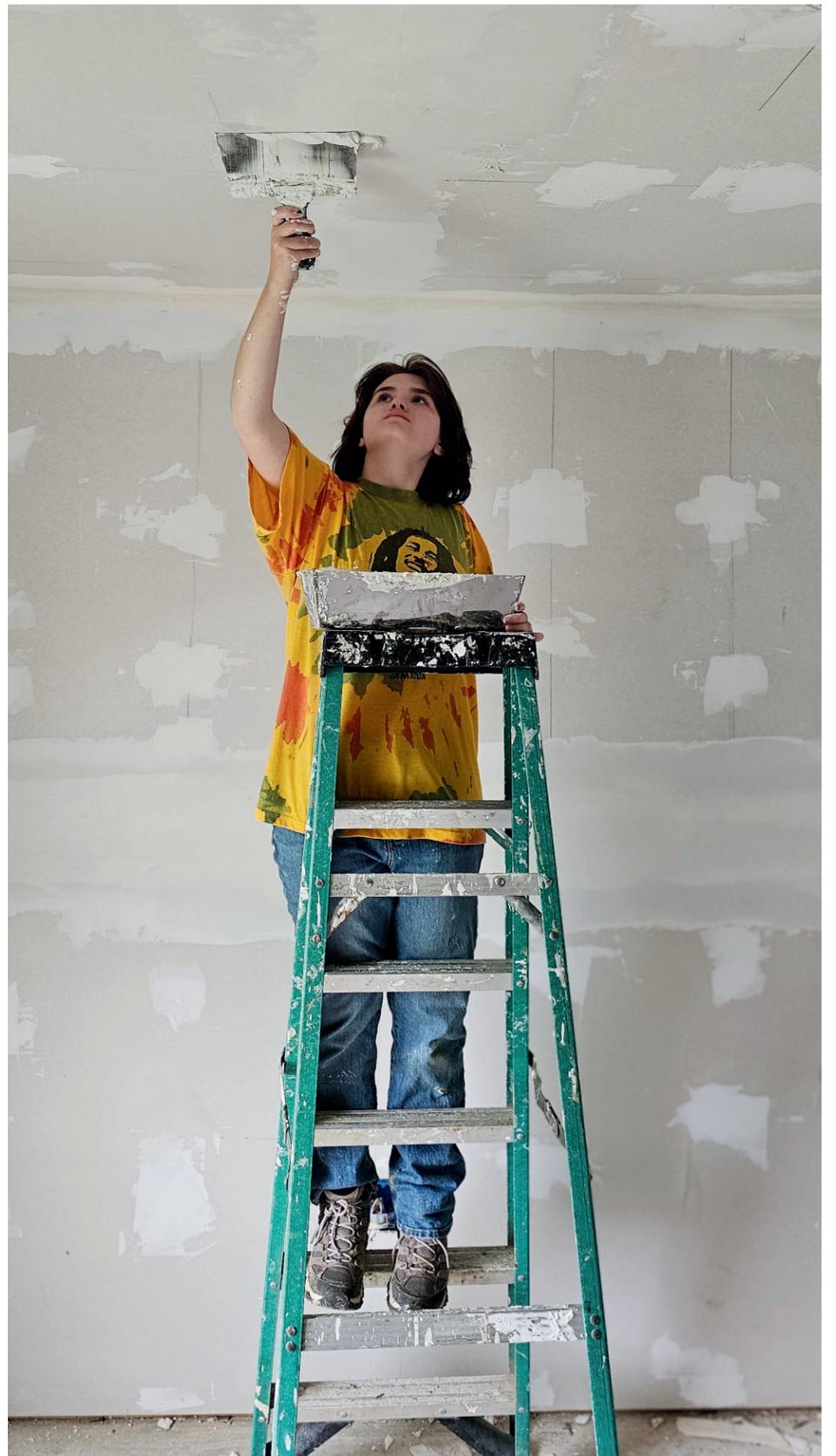
Though he credits Habitat with exposing him to new foods, new music, and new art, it's the community that has impacted him the most.

"...personally and spiritually it's really deepened my faith as well...it's really valuable for me to be in these rooms with people. And it's not a Christian trip, but the feeling that people have, of drawing together in community, loving each other as friends, working for justice, building homes together for people who need them, I don't really know what's better than that," he said.

"...what Bill called it," Foley continued, "was the 'reciprocal dynamic of blessings,' which means that we give to them by coming there. We bring our money, we bring our energy, we bring our time. We build homes. But then they give back to us, by making us feel welcome, allowing us the space to draw together in community... It makes me feel good that this still exists. Because that feeling was core to my survival for a long time. That feeling of belonging with people in the community. And I still feel that way."

It's a feeling that seems to be echoed by everyone involved in the organization.

"It was a beautifully powerful experience," recalls history teacher Scott McBride, who only recently was introduced to Habitat, joining Koritz and Foley on a Mississippi trip two years ago.



NEW PAES CAREER LAB TO OPEN

By Ruby Pittenger

Recently, study hall was transferred to the third floor after the new PAES Lab was created. Though we heard the name PAES in the announcements, many were left wondering what this actually meant!

PAES stands for Practical Assessment Explorations System, and the lab will be a classroom primarily used for students with disabilities to learn more about a future career that they are interested in. In this system, students are able to explore various careers, with students acting as employees and teachers asking as supervisors.

“For students who are interested in the field of construction, but [might say to themselves] I have never done any construction type work, you'll go into the lab and do some modules that are part of their program. That will help them get ready for that construction job,” explained Assistant Principal Melissa Kearns.

For students in the general education setting, assisting with this change will also be an option. There will be an opportunity to guide the students involved in the PAES Lab and lend a helping hand.

“We're also looking at opportunities that bring in students from the general education setting that may want to help some of their peers or students with disabilities, so that may be an option too,” added Kearns.

Teachers who will be a part of the lab have taken extensive lengths to be properly trained for the lab.

“All staff that will be facilitating have watched videos about PAES, took a day and observed a full functioning Lab at Bloomington High School, and went through a full day of training with a staff member from PAES to see how to correctly implement all of its parts,” said Special Education Instructor Abbie Charleston.



Adding this lab will be a big advancement not only for Urbana, but for the state of Illinois.

Currently, there are PAES Labs “only in three schools in the state of Illinois. There is one up north in Chicago, one in Livingston, and then Bloomington,” said Kearns.

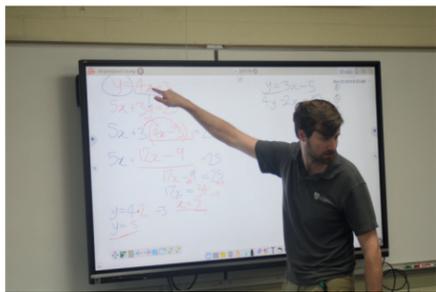
Urbana is proud to become fourth on that list!

The lab is set to open after we return for winter break. Not only will this change open doors for students with disabilities, but allow everyone to make a change in the community.

“I think there's a real need in our community for more vocational support for our students and we are just going to be one of the first schools to do it,” said Kearns.

Stay tuned for an update on uhsecho.com as the PAES Lab gets underway second semester!

NEW TEACHERS FIND SUPPORT



By Valentina Gonzalez-Ahuerma

It's easy to assume that your teachers have been here their entire lives, but you will be surprised to learn that two of our own teachers are not just new to UHS this year, but are new to living in the United States!

Math teacher Dylan Rispoli has now been teaching for four years, but the first three years he lived and worked in Portland, Victoria in Australia. He came to Urbana with his wife, who is originally from Champaign.

Not knowing very many people in the community and joining a new school, he was definitely more on the anxious side of things. But our math department brought him in with open arms this first semester.

“I have a very supportive team around me where I feel like I can be my authentic self,” he said. “I've loved getting to know the students here and to see what a strong community there is within the school. After I visited the school and met the staff, I haven't looked back.”

Our second UHS teacher that is new to the US is PE teacher Leandor Gonzalez, who taught for eight years in Argentina. In addition to teaching there, he taught in sports clubs and worked as a strength and conditioning coach.



Gonzalez used to live in Argentina, but recently joined the cultural exchange program for teachers that applied him to various schools. Once he had his interview at Urbana, he knew he wanted to come up here with his wife.

“I had an interview with this school and another one in Denver, but I liked this one better because it was a bigger school and I have the chance to develop myself a little more in sports, which is a great interest to me,” Gonzalez said.

In the same shoes as Rispoli, Gonzalez was pretty nervous coming to a new country and school. He also had the added difficulty of potential language barriers. Like Rispoli, he cites his department members as a huge help.

“I am grateful for having a great mentor in Ms. Porter, and awesome coworkers who help me a lot every day,” he said.

Now the First semester is coming to an end, both teachers finally feel like they have settled down and are excited for the 2nd semester to start!

EXCLUSIVE CLUB CONVO: PHILOSOPHY AND DEBATE

By Danyla Nash

Two of our newest clubs at UHS are thriving under the sponsorship of UHS English teacher Mr. Matt O'Brien.

Let's dive into the background of how both Philosophy and Debate Club came to be and what keeps students coming back consistently.

How often do you contemplate humanity and the world around you? Well, that's exactly what Philosophy Club is for!

Philosophy Club specifically began through an email O'Brien received from a student, asking about forming one. With a degree in Philosophy, O'Brien was the perfect sponsor.

He quickly noticed that “a lot of students were excited about starting the Philosophy Club,” so he pursued it this year.

The goal of “Philosophy Club is to have a greater discussion of fundamental questions that are at the heart of human life,” said O'Brien.

At a meeting, students can expect deep discussions about topics such as ethics, thought, existence, and meaning, just to name a few. There are tough topics but remember that philosophy quite literally means “love of wisdom!”

Whereas Philosophy Club is all about the gray areas of life, Debate Club is a chance for students to choose a side and argue it against an opponent.

“The overall goal of the debate club is to create a forum for students to engage in discussion on a multitude of topics that interest them, ranging from silly...to something like if social media is beneficial to society,” said O'Brien.

Also student-driven, Debate Club stemmed from a student noticing the inconsistency of having a Speech class, but no Debate Club.

Both clubs are certainly ones to look for if you've had questions or want someone to talk to about the less surface-level parts of the world around us.

Questions and different perspectives are truly something we can safely assume O'Brien is comfortable with, considering the purpose of both the Philosophy Club and Debate Club. Through hosting these clubs, O'Brien is building a space where students are able to safely build public speaking skills and discuss topics that most don't have the opportunity to talk about during their average day in school.

Interested in joining? Philosophy Club meets every other Tuesday in Room 2217 and Debate Club meets every other Thursday in Room 2226. Listen to the announcements for updates!

A BOWL OF FROSTED FLAKES

The holiday season is a stressful time for many of us. Do we really need to add complexity to our lives in these times? In the year 2024?

No. What you need is something simple. Something dependable. Something true. Something real. You need a bowl of Frosted Flakes.

By Brandon Birkhead

This recipe only has two ingredients, and negligible prep time. All you need is to go to nearly any store, and buy your Frosted Flakes and whichever milk you desire. You may choose to buy the off-brand of Frosted Flakes, and use whichever milk you want (almond milk is the best substitute for dairy in this case). A bowl of Frosted Flakes will not judge you. You are safe.

You must now choose a vessel. A bowl of course is the preferred choice, but creativity is encouraged. You could use a large mug, a particular big cup, an outrageous sized salad bowl – for those with large appetites. The world is yours.

You must first pour your Frosted Flakes into said vessel, and this is non-negotiable. There is a word for those who put the milk in first. Psychos. Place the proper amount of flakes into your vessel – which is however much you want. Be free.

You will now finish the dish with milk. How much milk you ask? Yes, you are absolutely correct. Drown those flakes. Leave no survivors. If you can see the cereal you haven't added enough yet. Could you hold back on the amount of milk? Certainly, it is a free country, and you are allowed to make poor choices, but you will be robbing yourself of the experience of a proper bowl of Frosted Flakes.

All that is left is to enjoy. Take your favorite spoon and go nuts. This dish is best enjoyed while looking outside the window, yearning for spring. The holidays are stressful, but this? This? If properly enjoyed you will find peace. You will find what is most needed in these times.

Serenity.

IS EDWARD SCISSORHANDS REALLY A CHRISTMAS MOVIE?

By Sanaa Parker

Scrolling through IMDB's "The Top Christmas Movies of All Time," I was shocked to find Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* listed at #12. I've only ever seen Johnny Depp's iconic costume during Halloween and thought to myself does Tim Burton even *do* Christmas movies? Sure, there's *Nightmare Before Christmas*, but again, I'm only watching that movie during Halloween!

So I sat down to watch it for the first time. Here's my verdict:

The movie starts with a grandma telling a story to her granddaughter about Edward's tragic tale: the inventor who made him gave Edward organs, limbs, and all his body parts. Well, almost. The inventor died before he was able to give Edward hands!

Now we fast forward however-many years later, and this rando comes up to Edward's house, sees him and his scissors for hands, and decides *I wanna take him home with me!* Umm, I don't know about you, but that sounds like a STRANGER DANGER situation to me. Anyways, she takes him to this bright neighborhood with pastel houses, and to her home where other randos live (people she calls her family).

Throughout the movie, we eventually see that this rando's family members are starting to use Edwards for things like cutting the bushes in the shapes of animals, or the family members cutting lettuce, or the smallest thing, like cutting a string on a shirt.

They even use him as the stick for a shish kabob (and other foods that probably have no flavor) at a barbecue she randomly throws to please these people whom she calls her "friends." It's really all just to see Edward and what he can do. I think that's weird behavior, but hey.

She even lets people take Edward to their houses to do yard work and other chores. Already this is nothing at all like a Christmas movie. The gift is supposed to be giving, not taking and using someone for your own benefit!

We also see in the movie that Edward is not able to do regular daily tasks like picking up a cup of lemonade without any struggle or touching his face without cutting himself, creating scars. Even when he's excited, he almost pokes someone's eye out in the process. But who is helping Edward? Makeup is not enough!



Throughout the movie, Edward has these sad flashbacks of his inventor, who we all know is dead as a doornail. Perhaps the only one who loved him, it makes it even harder to see all these random people that he doesn't even know using him and him not being able to really do much about it because it's just...sort of like a normal thing happening now? Doesn't sound very jolly if you ask me.

This movie has no Christmas songs, no Christmas tree as big as a house, not even a child being left at home trying to survive a night from random burglars by using ornaments, holiday trains, and garland to survive.

Overall, *Edward Scissorhands* is just boring, sad, and not the least bit jolly. If you're looking for your typical Christmas movie, go watch *The Grinch*.

All I have to say is if you THINK this is a Christmas movie, I just need you to really...think again!

HOLIDAY GIFTS FOR BADDIES

By Vincent Podroykin and Sanaa Parker

It's the holiday season! And while we all love to give gifts to everybody and anybody, we are on a budget because it's getting too expensive here (might just have to move to Canada or something). So let's find gifts that show that we love somebody, while also showing love and care to our checking account!

WINGSTOP RANCH

A small, but oh-so-delicious ranch from Wingstop will run you only \$1.39 and \$3.69 for a large if you want to splurge! Cheap, Delicious, and Nutritious (well, maybe). With a steal like this, who even needs the wings?

AQUAPHOR OR VASELINE

Now that winter is upon us, that means chapped lips that look more crunchy than a freshly opened bag of chips! Aquaphor or Vaseline is the perfect gift! They hydrate, provide long-lasting moisture, and even taste good if you want a no-cal snack!

\$5 BIGGIE BAGS

Now, I think we all love to get big every now and then, so why not treat somebody to a \$5 Biggie Bag from Wendy's? It comes with a burger, nuggets, fries, and a drink! Getting big is fun, and all for \$5 (well, we'll ignore tax for this one). Shut up and take my money!

DEODORANT

You may think this is random, but it is really a necessity, especially for those going through their Winter Arc! Plus it comes in all kinds of different scents, so you can find the perfect one for each of your friends. You can get all of your shopping one in one aisle!

5 BELOW GRAB-AND-GO

None of these speaking to you? Play a game and head to 5 Below with a blindfold (and a trusted friend). Find an aisle, slap that sucker on, and start grabbing! Whatever's in your hand is bound to meet someone's needs (just remember: if it's heavy, it's probably expensive!)

SPICY SEVEN: POP CULTURE MOMENTS OF 2024

By Vincent Podroykin

As we prepare to say goodbye to 2024, let's look back on some of the pop culture moments that kept us captivated all year!

1. BRAT

Charli XCX's album *BRAT* was released on June 5 of this year. The album, paying homage to the club/rave scene, gained massive popularity over the following weeks. Heralded by some as the best album of the year (sorry, Swifties), the album was made even more popular by KamalaHQ, who used it to encourage young people to vote.

2. Sabrina Carpenter

While Sabrina Carpenter has had herself a career for a while now, it earned a boost this summer. Songs like "Espresso" and "Please Please Please" were almost everywhere. You couldn't escape a single TikTok video, store, phone, or radio station without hearing at least one of them. Still can't!

3. Love Island

Love Island USA returned with its sixth season, its most popular one yet. Premiering on June 11th, it was all anyone could talk about on social media.

Fans were obsessed with the cast of islanders and all the drama that occurred, both on and off the island.

4. Kendrick-Drake Beef

Rappers Kendrick Lamar and Drake went at it throughout this year. Their beef, which was long overdue after throwing shots at each other since 2013, finally came to a climax in 2024. Lamar's verse on "Like That" set the whole scene in motion. The leak of Drake's diss "Push-ups" on the 13th of April caused Lamar to drop "Euphoria" not even 3 weeks later. The following days would consist of both of them dropping tracks on each other. Announced as this year's Super Bowl halftime show performer, it appears Lamar had the last laugh!

5. Nikocado Avocado

Nikocado Avocado is a YouTuber whose mukbang videos sent everyone into a coma due to the amount of food that he ate in one sitting. At one point weighing over 400 pounds, in September he posted a video showing a dramatic weight loss over a two-year span. For those two years he had just been posting pre-recorded content. Everyone was sent into a confused frenzy, wondering "Is this real?" "Is this a hoax?" but the true question is: is everything on the internet fake?

6. The Diddy Scandal

Sean "Diddy" Combs is a person who doesn't need an introduction, especially if you've been following any kind of celebrity news. Long forgotten as a music artist, he came back into the spotlight due to the many lawsuits brought upon him, including sexual assault, child abuse, harassment, bribery, racketeering, the list goes on...Over 120 victims have bravely come forward with their stories and are awaiting justice.

7. Nara Smith

Nara Smith was one of the most popular creators this year, combining a calm and classy demeanor with a creative side. She started filming videos of making homemade breads and cereals from scratch, but later evolved into personal products like sunscreen and deodorant. And here is where the backlash began. Fans standing too close to her and her husband Lucky Blue Smith noticed the telltale signs of must. Not the best look (or smell) for models making their living by promoting their own personal products!



DOES UHS NEED A WINTER FORMAL?



By Lily Kacich

As winter comes around, most people just look forward to our two week winter break, but what if we had some kind of school dance to come back to? Vice-Versa has always been a popular school dance and winter formals are pretty common also.

So why doesn't UHS have one?

The last Vice-Versa dance was in the mid-2000s, but according to students attending UHS at the time, it was never really consistent over the years. Sometimes we had them and sometimes we didn't.

In the last three years, we have had winter dances: Habitat for Humanity hosted a Valentine's dance in 2021, a Sneaker Ball was hosted by the African American Club in 2022, and Habitat again hosted a winter dance in 2023. Yet, none of these dances approached the ticket sales or excitement of dances like Homecoming and Prom.

One reason could be that none of these dances are sponsored by classes. Homecoming is sponsored by the senior class and Prom by junior class. Perhaps the sophomore class could take on a Vice-Versa or winter formal?

"I would go to a school dance in-between homecoming and prom for sure," said senior Simone Askimnyva. "I love dressing up and I love dancing with my friends and spending time getting ready with them," she added.

Not only are dances fun and bring good vibes, but they also provide overall unity.

Senior Helen De La Cruz sees how an upcoming dance can positively impact the student body. "It motivates the students to do well in school for a certain period before the dance," she said.

Assistant Principal Jessica Hines agrees with the fact that students have better behavior and participation in school weeks before the dances, and that there is data to support this.

Opening doors to a new dance in January or February will not only give students added motivation to improve their academics and behavior, but will also give the school more spirit during the cold winter season.

Sounds like a win-win!

WINTER BREAK HOROSCOPES

We all know we have two weeks of vacation in our futures, but want to know more?

By Alex Schwartz and The Echo Staff



Capricorn (December 22-January 19): The holidays are a very busy time (in a different than normal way). As a Capricorn, you can always find a way to help. Put your skills to good use and help out others who may be feeling overwhelmed by things to do over the holidays. They'll be forever grateful!

Aquarius (January 20-February 18): As an air sign, you're assumed to be anti-social and detached from others. Sure, you value your alone time, but who doesn't? This break, own it. Read, watch a marathon of your favorite movies, host a self-care night with yourself. You've earned a break from the chaos that is high school!

Pisces (February 19-March 20): Seasonal depression is hitting a lot of people this time of year, but you are an optimistic person: a good find these days! Just remember not to be too trusting and especially try to avoid any Virgos or Leos like the Bubonic Plague. Save your positive energy for the rest of the world!

Aries (March 21-April 19): Plenty of people love shopping, but Aries bring that to a whole new level. It can be a great way to get some stress out, but when going shopping, have someone there to keep you in check. Listen to a good friend's advice this break. You wouldn't want a fourth air fryer!

Taurus (April 20-May 20): Some people think you are lazy. But maybe they are just doing too much! There will be many times you will wake up to a bunch of stuff to do, and then go right back to sleep. That's ok! Remember that there's nothing wrong with taking time for yourself.

Gemini (May 21-June 20): Going to parties can be a great way to maintain good social health, especially for Geminis because you love to hear others' opinions. Just remember not to fold your back when playing limbo. If you find yourself in a disagreement this break, stay strong!

Cancer (June 21-July 22): Feelings can be a lot! And the holidays can just amplify this. As a Cancer, you are a very emotional person. So when you are feeling down, fill that void by playing whack-a-mole ten hours a day. Well, or at least finding a healthy way to release all of those emotions!

Leo (July 23-August 22): Leos can sometimes be seen as egotistical, but that's probably because you're misunderstood. Having confidence is never something to hide, just so long as you also take time to reflect on ways you can improve. Use this break to get to know yourself a little better and set some goals for the future. Yours looks bright!

Virgo (August 23-September 22): The need to have everything be perfect is understandable. Sometimes we think of buildings as pieces of perfection, with their perfect symmetry. Don't stare at them too long though, don't fall over! That is to say, try to keep yourself grounded. The quest for perfection can be a tough one.

Libra (September 23-October 22): Everybody likes a good joke! You have a great sense of humor and know that laughter is the best medicine. Remember that when you stub your toe next week. Sometimes it isn't about making others laugh, but reminding ourselves to not take our own lives too seriously.

Scorpio (October 23-November 21): Scorpios can have a bad wrap, as people tend to think of them as fiery and jealous. Don't let the negativity get to you. Sure, you're passionate, but you're also selfless and not afraid to fight for what's right. People around you will see that this break as you come to the rescue of a loved one!

Sagittarius (November 22-December 21): Over break, many people will expect things from you and you may get overwhelmed from all the asks. Remember that you can say no. No one, and I mean no one, can keep up if they're being pulled in too many directions. Maybe take a page out of the Taurus's book and get some sleep!

FANNIE MAY FESTIVE FUDGE

By Savannah McClain-Crook

Mrs. Amanda Perez-Rosser is known throughout UHS as a guru in the Family and Consumer Sciences Department, so she is the perfect source for the perfect holiday recipe! Though her recipe is written on a physical card, she was kind enough to share it digitally so we could all have it.

So why is this the perfect holiday recipe? "I like this fudge recipe because it is really rich and tastes delicious. It also makes a lot of fudge, so you can gift it or freeze it. It can be made in advance, which can be helpful," she said.

This recipe also has a personal connection for her. "I have fond memories of making this with my grandma and mom for a dessert for the holidays," she said.

Ready to get cooking?

Here is what you will need:

- 4 cups granulated sugar
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup unsalted butter
- 25 regular sized marshmallows (not minis)
- 1 package milk chocolate morsels 12 ounce
- 1 package semi-sweet chocolate morsels 12 ounce
- 2 ounce unsweetened baking chocolate
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Instructions

1. Line a 15 x 10 x 1-inch baking sheet with parchment paper. Set aside.
2. In a large mixing bowl, add marshmallows, chocolate morsels, unsweetened chocolate, and vanilla extract. Set aside.

3. In a large saucepan, combine sugar, milk and butter. Over medium high heat, bring mixture to a boil while stirring constantly. Once boiling, boil for a full two minutes.

4. Pour hot mixture over marshmallow and chocolate and beat with whisk attachment until melted and smooth (may take several minutes).

5. Pour into prepared baking sheet and refrigerate for about 3 hours (or overnight). Remove from refrigerator and cut into 4 large rectangles. Wrap in parchment paper and store in airtight container until ready to use.

6. When ready to use, cut into bite sized pieces and enjoy.

QUIZ: WHICH BOARD GAME ARE YOU?

1. HOW DO YOU TEND TO SPEND YOUR FREE TIME?

- a. Makin' money!
- b. Doing something with friends
- c. Reading a book
- d. Causing a bit of fun trouble

2. WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE FLAVOR?

- a. Savory
- b. Tangy
- c. Sour
- d. Sweet

3. PICK A DISNEY CHANNEL SHOW!

- a. *Good Luck Charlie*
- b. *Ant Farm*
- c. No Thanks.
- d. *Gravity Falls*

4. WHAT SUBJECT ARE YOU BEST IN?

- a. Business or Social Studies
- b. Language Arts
- c. Science
- d. Art or Music

5. PICK A COLOR!

- a. Green
- b. Blue
- c. Red
- d. Pink

6. WHAT'S YOUR GO-TO DRINK?

- a. Energy drinks
- b. Coffee/tea
- c. Water
- d. Juice

7. PICK A HOLIDAY MOVIE GENRE!

- a. Comedy (*Home Alone*, *Elf*, *Why Did I Get Married*, etc.)
- b. Anything Hallmark!
- c. The Classics (*The Grinch*, *Frosty the Snowman*, etc.)
- d. Childhood Favorites (*The Santa Clause*, *Polar Express*, etc.)

5 NONFICTION BOOKS TO FILL WINTER BREAK

Stymie winter break boredom with these nonfiction options that are just as good as their fiction counterparts.

By Rachel Lyubanksy

***In the Kingdom of Ice: The Grand and Terrible Voyage of the USS Jeannette* by Hampton Sides**

In 1879, no human had ever set foot on the North Pole. The harrowing voyage of the *USS Jeannette* unravels the journey of Captain George Washington De Long as he attempts to be the first to do so. Filled with sweeping adventure and a motley cast of characters both on board and back at shore, *In the Kingdom of Ice* offers a dramatic escape from reality. The men endure polar bears, starvation, Arctic temperatures, and each other. A thousand miles from civilization, they face the impossible, the unprecedented, and the unknown.

***Dreams From My Father. A Story of Race and Inheritance* by Barack Obama**

Barack Obama's first memoir, originally published in 1995 as he was beginning his campaign for the Illinois Senate, follows him as he navigates the turbulence of childhood and young adulthood. Born in Hawaii to a white mother and Kenyan father (who divorced when he was two), Obama chronicles his identity of growing up bi-racial. The book is a testament to family and purpose, told by Obama before he was touched by fame. He

writes with a passion that is both engaging and honest, detailing his struggle to sort the tangle of his identity, and the people and places who guided him.

***The Best American Sports Writing 2020* by Glenn Stout**

This collection of sports journalism has it all: a bank robber on a bicycle, an illegal sex-trafficking ring, the explicit minutia of death by heatstroke, baseball as therapy, and tiger hunting. Each with its own unique style and perspective, as offered by the variety of authors, *The Best American Sports Writing* is a neatly curated, fascinating ride. Held together by the world of sports, yet unafraid to swerve in wild directions, it is a thoroughly enjoyable and educational experience.

***Why Empathy Matters: The Science and Psychology of Better Judgment* by J. D. Trout**

Using cognitive and neuroscience, Trout delves into the importance of empathy in modern society. Why haven't people yet figured out a humane system in which to function? Is it possible to learn the skill of empathy, and could it be used to



improve lives on both a personal and global scale? Threaded with engaging psychology studies, *Why Empathy Matters* remains as accessible as it is educational. Trout ranges from definitions, to applications, to criticisms of empathy, providing a comprehensive guide to an expression often lacking in today's world.

***New Collected Poems* by Wendell Berry**

Published in 2012, this book takes the

entirety of Berry's previous *Collected Poems* and adds works from his more recent books. An extremely accomplished poet, Berry's gentle and wandering style is an easy entry point into the world of poetry. Largely focused on the brilliance of nature, Berry writes of bucolic hills, roaring waters, and the staggering splendor of trees. He praises the wild, his words knitting a pocket of peace in which to sit cloaked in wind and sun and the beauty of language.



FALL SPORTS WRAP-UP

By Valentina Gonzalez-Ahuerma

Now that the fall sports season has come to an end, athletes come together to reflect on their fall seasons!

Boys soccer player Anthony Becerril has been playing his sport for about 13 years. Though he has many great memories, there is one from his final season as a high school player that stands out most to him.

"Scoring the winning goal against our rival school Champaign Central gave me the feeling of adrenaline rush that goes through my body. Seeing the ball go in the back of the net then running to the crowd is something that I will always remember," he said.

Another athlete that fought very hard in his last season was cross country runner Mohammed Amrani.

"Our team really showed what it meant to be determined and all the hard work we've done paid off

at the regional meet. It was the team's best race all season and we all got to celebrate each other's accomplishments," he said.

This final athlete to speak with us isn't a senior yet, but he showed that has the ability to be a real leader for the football team. Junior CJ Blanden talks about how the team improved compared to the last couple years.

"The season had a lot of ups and downs. Our record didn't show how much better we got as a team, but I knew personally we got a lot better from previous years both as a team and individually. Overall, I really had a lot of fun this season and enjoyed working with all of my teammates," he said.

Although the fall sports season has come to an end, the winter sports season begins. Be sure to check out some games for yourself. Best of luck to all athletes!

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY: CULTIVATING COMPASSION AND COMMUNITY

Continued from Page 1

“To see the students... come together, work together, over the period of the week, that was really uplifting to see.”

Though McBride is new to Habitat, he’s spent much of his life in service to others.

“I volunteered with [the] Special Olympics all through college...my late wife [and I] went together and did this, and we did it several summers in a row,” he recalled, his face warming with the memory. “It was so beautifully exhausting.”

Spanish teacher Zak Sutton (the aforementioned “godfather’s” son), has been involved with the organization since he was four.

“I’ve gone on five trips now with Urbana students...I started to love it, and crave it every single year, mainly because of the sense of community.”

Then, there was the actual construction work.

“School was always hard for me, [in terms of] paying attention and stuff like that,” Sutton stated earnestly, voice dipping into something more pensive, “but working with my hands, doing physical labor, was easy to pay attention to, ‘cause I saw what I was doing, and you get that instant reward of, ‘oh that nail went into the wood, awesome, I’ll do that again,’” he grinned.

There is real value to be found in concrete learning, in absorbing information not through lecture, but through action.

While the trip centers around the construction and contribution to communities, there is also an emphasis on the historical context on which Mississippi is built.

“To go see those places, where history was made, was really powerful,” said McBride. “I remember very vividly the night we went to the Emmett Till museum...and I’m reading all this stuff, and it’s so powerful to me, and tears are running down my [face]... All of it was just wonderful.”

The group also visits the civil rights museum in Memphis, passing through the Lorraine Motel, where Martin Luther King was assassinated.

“That’s the way to do it.” McBride stated, “Just like when I tell my stories about Afghanistan or Iraq or all these places I’ve been...when you can impart something that you have seen or felt or sensed...and have that taught in a classroom...” He exhaled, “...we talk about this stuff, but then to see it, experience it, feel it, there’s no substitute for it. None.”

He offered a smile, somewhat sardonically, leaning back in his chair. If given the chance, “I’d take my history class and we’d just hit the road... Let’s not just talk about how laws are made, let’s go to the capital and see where it’s done, and then talk through it...Let’s get on the ground.”

Therein, perhaps, lies the heart of Habitat: Let’s get on the ground. Let’s get a group of people together and give back. And it seems to work rather marvelously.

Sutton recalled last year, “...one of the first houses that we were working on when I started here at Urbana got finished, and the family got to move into it, and...after that happened they invited us into the house to walk through...and see now that it was a home.” He remembered seeing the rooms anew, walls alive with pictures, and how emotional that was. “...It was so powerful, so rewarding, and also made [me] so happy to see the whole mission of the organization being fulfilled.”

It’s the people, the community that is built, that is remembered.

“It’s always the van rides there,” senior Raidon Soutchay said, “even if you don’t know that person, or you had maybe a past relationship with that person, you still get to connect with them more...”

Soutchay just got back from his second trip, and mentioned the way Habitat has influenced other facets of his life.

“...it changed my perspective on things, and people...I don’t have to be just stuck in my own bubble, I can venture out, and meet new people.”

Sutton described a similar impact.

“Every time I come back from a Habitat trip I’m better at connecting with other people.” He nods, “Overall I just have more [of a] vibrancy for life. I’m just happier. I’m more present.”

He pauses, words bright with palpable excitement. “It does something. I’m not sure exactly what it is. But it’s really good.”

Foley, too, praised the importance and long term effects the trips can have on students.

“...I think America is really bad at nurturing young people through big transitions... [and] one of the things I value about [Habitat is it’s] really time for people to reflect and...think about who [they] are, and what [they] want to do.”

It creates a space to process the crossroads questions of high school.

“Am I gonna go to college and do what I want, or am I just on this treadmill?” Foley voiced. “And [it] kind of [opens] them up to some experiences that are maybe different, gets them thinking differently.”

“If any student decides to go on this trip,” Sutton insisted, “I can almost guarantee it will be the most meaningful week of their high school career...”

And the opportunity is open to everyone. Habitat for Humanity meets every Friday at 7:30 am and right after eighth hour, with students choosing whichever time is most convenient for them.

Tying up the whole experience, Koritz offered a metaphor.

“There’s a way that people fish for catfish down there called noodling, where they go out in the muddy water, and catfish make these holes in the mud, and then they hide in the holes. And people ...stand in the holes, and with their hands feel for catfish...” She smiled slightly at the image.

“I feel like all the time, no matter where we are, there’s this kind of thread or way of being that’s in alignment with things like love and truth and belonging, and that’s really hard to find and be in alignment with...it’s like sometimes you’re just standing out in the cold mud, and you don’t really feel anything, and you’re trying to get a hold of that, but... in Mississippi...it just becomes really easy to grab hold of that. And I think for some people they’ve never felt that.”

This is perhaps the vision Koritz and Foley had eleven years ago, showing up with fifteen kids in the principal’s office, to grab hold of the reciprocity of blessings.

R&B, HIP-HOP TOP SPOTIFY WRAPPED



By Ruby Pittenger and Lily Kacich

On December 4th, Spotify released their long-awaited Spotify Wrapped. Let’s take a look at our students’ top artists this year!

Senior Jalen Johnson’s top artist was Drake, which came as no surprise to her as he had one song at the top of her playlist.

“Drake was my top artist only because ‘Her Loss’ has carried me all through 2023 and ‘24,” she said.

Continuing the trend of R&B, Frank Ocean’s soft and calming sounds were a popular artist for many this year, including senior Noah Hamilton.

“He has a really calm voice and his music makes me feel like I’m in space,” he said.

The rap genre was a welcome change in tone this year, influencing many.

“DMX is my number one artist because of his mix of different genres of music. It speaks to my soul in a way other music can’t,” said sophomore Shaq Adams.

For sophomore Henry Wertz, it was all about future Super Bowl halftime show artist Kendrick Lamar.

“He puts a different level of effort with the emotional depth and storytelling. He sounds good,” he said.

Music can have a huge impact for teens allowing them to disconnect from the real world for a while and find some inner peace.

“Whenever I listen to Juice Wrld, I just feel so understood and feel at peace, like I’m just there in the moment,” said sophomore Aidyn Spanglo.

Junior Kamarion Kersh even uses his top artist, Yuke, to inspire his own music.

“I get a lot of inspiration off of him that I use in my own music. When I first started out making music, I would listen to him and other artists with a similar style. His vibe, aesthetic, and style really resonate with me,” he said.

Despite different artists and genres at the top of their Wrapped, what unites students through music is the deep personal connection we make to them, how the artists we listen to can reflect our own stories and emotions.

Wrapped helps us to wrap up our year!

JIMBO #1 BY MATT CHAVIRA

Sophomore Matt Chavira was inspired to create comics from an early age.

“When I was four, my mom’s cousin painted me a picture of Spider-man. I still have it hung above my bed and that inspired me to make comics,” he recalls.

Some of Chavira’s best ideas come when he least expects them. His character, Jimbo, came about just this way. “I was doodling in a notebook and I drew the character Jimbo by accident. Then I thought to myself, what if he was in the real world?”

And so Jimbo’s story was born!

If you’ve enjoyed what you’ve seen here, be sure to check back at uhsecho.com for updates to Jimbo’s story!



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FINAL CHANGES TO FINALS?

By UHS Echo Staff

FALL 2024

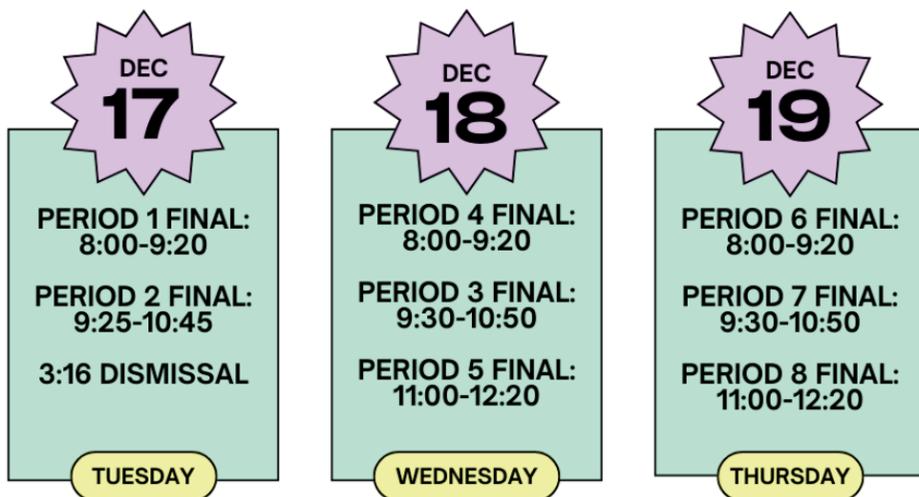
This school year, new guidelines will shape how final exams are conducted, marking a shift from past years. Final exams or assessments will now account for 20% of students' semester grades. This harkens back to the pre-Covid years, when the required 20% final exam rule was suspended due to e-learning.

Course teams will still decide on how they will approach the final exam, with some requiring end-of-semester or unit projects, some presentations, some portfolios, or some even opting for the standardized standard multiple choice exam.

Finals must take place during the designated exam period and early finals will require administrative approval.

As the semester winds down, be sure to wind up your preparation!

FINAL EXAM SCHEDULE



QUIZ RESULTS: WHICH BOARD GAME ARE YOU?

By Danyla Nash

MOSTLY A'S?

If you answered mostly A, you're Monopoly! You've got leader-like characteristics and tend to be more work/business oriented than most. You're assertive and get things done on time in addition to not being afraid to step on toes to get to what you want in life. You've got your life together, but can still socialize wonderfully if put into the right environment.

MOSTLY B'S?

If you answered mostly B, you're Shoots and Ladders! You tend to go with the flow and aren't really in a rush.. You don't overthink or over complicate very many things, and conflict isn't really your thing. You can have fun and defend yourself and your friends, but for the most part, things tend to roll right off your back.

MOSTLY C'S?

If you answered mostly C, you're Operation! You tend to be very serious and can be a bit uptight at times, but you make sure things get done. You ride solo most of the time and if you have the choice, you won't choose to work in a group. With you, early is on time and on time is late. Especially when it comes to deadlines or specific dates.

MOSTLY D'S?

If you answered mostly D, you're Candyland! You've got a creative eye and tend to look on the fun side of things. You might come off as a bit disorganized to the outside eye, but you're walking to the beat of your own drum and aren't afraid to show it. Falling anywhere between spoken word poetry, to hand painted art, you find different ways to express yourself and are truly in love with the beauty of the world around you.

THANK YOU SPONSORS!

