ELECTION

Despite enthusiasm about midterm elections, CHS students slow to register

BY EMMA BROWN

As California’s Nov. 8 election day draws closer, members of Carmel High School’s senior class who are eligible to vote seem to have reached a consensus: Despite a desire to vote, the overwhelming majority are currently unregistered.

Eligible students primarily attribute their hesitancy to register to a lack of knowledge about ballot measures and candidates.

“It’s all so distant and abstract,” says senior Jim Moreau, who will not be voting in the midterms. “I am a legal adult; however, I don’t pay taxes or don’t own property, so a lot of this stuff doesn’t impact me directly. Granted, it impacts my family, but I don’t know much about the measures I’d be voting on, so I would just be voting for my family’s political party.”

Others have struggled to determine what political party to register with, as well as what issues are important to them.

“For now, I would register as an independent,” says senior Athena Marnell, who currently unregistered. “I’m really excited to be able to vote, because I want to feel a part of our democracy and start to learn more about political issues,” senior Jerry Marnell says.

In recent years, young voters have become increasingly influential in election results as the demographic’s rate of registration has risen. In 2020, approximately 50% of Americans aged 18-29 were registered to vote, up from 36% in 2018.

“Voting for my family’s political party is fine, but I don’t know much about the measures,” senior Jerry Marnell says.

Despite an overall hesitancy about the logistics of voting, most CHS seniors recognize the importance of the process.

“Right now the folks who are participating have a lot more political power than me,” says senior Athena Marnell.

“From any area within the district, but a by-trustee-area election suggests that a candidate can only run to represent the region in which they live and only the people within their region can vote for them. The hope is to ensure that what matters to constituents throughout CUSD is reflected in each board member, allowing everyone to have a voice.”

“Right now the folks who are participating have a lot more political power than me,” says senior Athena Marnell.

“However, it’s clear that this system needs reform. The current system is broken.”

The switch to a by-trustee-area election system has been a topic of controversy among the community and the district itself. While the transition’s intent is to create more equity throughout Carmel Unified, it means residents in the district’s most populated areas lose some of their influence on election outcomes, a reality that doesn’t sit well with all of the community.

“I would like to see our board engage with LULAC and those entities to find out what their concerns are so we can address them rather than reduce or remove representation,” says Drew Lander, a candidate in the 2022 CUSD Board of Education election. Lander proposes the board investigate alternative methods of responding to LULAC’s letter of demand before diving straight into the project and creating new boundary lines for regions.

In order to equally divide the district, there must be 4,500 residents per trustee area. Ideally, the board would divide CUSD into regions of Carmel, Carmel Valley, Pebble Beach, Cachagua and Big Sur, but in order to group 4,500 people evenly throughout five
Teen voting is essential in upcoming elections

After a summer in which previous legal precedents were upset, during this year’s midterm elections the rights of marginalized groups and the integrity of the nation are up for debate. In an era when the validity of elections has been unduly called into question and portions of Americans may not head to the ballot box in November, it is more important than ever that teenagers vote to protect their interests.

In recent years, young adults have become more engaged in politics, with an 11% increase in youth voter registration from 2016 to 2020, according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. Preceding the 2020 presidential elections, social media posts about politics were virtually inescapable, with many teenagers utilizing their platforms to share their beliefs. In an age where politics seems tangible, where the consequences of policy and government action affect the lives of teenagers, such interest from young adults makes sense.

The issue is that passion doesn’t always carry teenagers to the polls. While 50% of Americans aged 18-29 did vote during the 2020 election, half of that population chose not to engage themselves in the democratic system. Whether this was a result of a lack of interest in politics or an unwillingness to vote for either candidate, the ripple effect of their inaction can be felt today.

Teen voting is essential in upcoming elections

The landscape of American politics is analogous to dominoes: When one representative is elected, their presence as a member of the governing body and, most importantly, their vote affect more people than their presence as a member of the governing body and, most importantly, their vote affect more people than their presence as a member of the governing body and, most importantly, their vote affect more people than their presence as a member of the governing body and, most importantly, their vote affect more people than their presence as a member of the governing body and, most importantly, their vote affect more people than their presence as a member of the governing body and, most importantly, their vote affect more people than.

To be able to vote is to have tremendous power. It is often difficult to express our beliefs. Most aspects of our lives are dictated by our parents, our family or our school. Yet we are presented with the enormous responsibility and exciting opportunity to create change in the world around us and form a new society that we want to live in.

As teenagers, it is often difficult to express our beliefs. Most aspects of our lives are dictated by our parents, our family or our school. Yet we are presented with the enormous responsibility and exciting opportunity to create change in the world around us and form a new society that we want to live in.

Students who are 18 can register to vote at sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration, and those 16 or 17 years old can pre-register to vote at sos.ca.gov/elections/pre-register-16-vote-18.

Students who will be 18 years old by Nov. 8 can register to vote at sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration or can submit a paper voter registration form to Monterey County’s elections office in person or via mail. To be eligible to vote in the upcoming election, students must submit all necessary documents by Oct. 24.

When registering to vote, students must submit personal information as well as how they plan to vote, either in person or through the mail, and the political party, or lack thereof, that they prefer.

Proposition One asks voters to weigh in on a state constitutional right to reproductive freedom, namely abortion.

Propositions 26 and 27 discuss the legalization of gambling, with the first pertaining to sports betting at licensed institutions, while the latter would legalize mobile sports betting, taking the revenue and dedicating it to public institutions looking to create solutions to homelessness, mental health support and tribal economic development.

Proposition 28 mandates funding for art and music education in K-12 institutions, and Proposition 29 would create stricter requirements and regulations for dialysis clinics.

Proposition 30 would increase taxation on personal income more than $2 million by 1.75%, allocating the money generated to zero-emissions vehicles and wildfire prevention programs, while Proposition 31 would uphold the ban on flavored tobacco.
BY SHAYLA DUTTA

While Carmel High School students are enrolling in fewer Advanced Placement courses than in previous years, overall scores are beginning to improve from the impact of the pandemic alongside continuing to reflect the effects of different demographic and academic factors.

CHS currently offers 18 different courses for Advanced Placement, a program created by the College Board as an opportunity for high school students to earn college credit based on their score on a summative exam administered in the spring. Over the course of the last 15 years, the school has brought enrollment from 201 students taking 324 tests to, at its peak, over 1,000 tests being administered to 456 students.

In the 2021-22 school year, 428 students took a total of 822 exams, marking the recent decline in enrollment.

“What we’ve done is we’ve changed the philosophy in terms of—and this I think is true of all classes, not just AP—thinking that you would be passionate and interested about,” CHS principal Jon Lyons explains. “It just shouldn’t be, ‘I’m going to take six AP classes, and I don’t know why.’”

Counselor Darren Johnston, the school’s AP coordinator, can help account for the general rise in enrollment; Johnston explains that when he was hired for the 2007-08 school year, only 50% of CHS students were enrolling in AP courses, but by the mid-2010s AP culture at the school was a large part of the push to increase that number.

“We haven’t done as well as comparing to other high-performing schools in terms of our pass rates,” Johnston says, “but I think that’s almost entirely because of our open access. There’s some data that was published years ago that, for students, taking one AP class is unmatched by anything else they’ll do in preparation for college. So that was a big goal around 2010-11—getting every kid to take at least one.”

Another factor influencing enrollment has been the rise of the dual-enrollment model. In years past, CHS offered AP United States History, a class that has recently been dropped in favor of Monterey Peninsula College’s United States History. The MPC class is still taught on campus by CHS teachers, but does not feature the end-of-year exam required to obtain college credit.

“That’s always going to be part of the conversation,” Lyons says. “Which do we feel is the best model for that particular subject and for that particular teaching experience and learning experience?”

Generally, CHS’ AP scores have outperformed the national average. From 2018 to the past school year, the school’s pass rate has averaged about 73% with an average score of 3.22 (out of 5), compared to the national average of 2.99. The outlier is the average pass rate from the 2020-21 school year, dropping from 73.4% to 65%. The national average for the 18 AP courses CHS offered that year was 62.2%.

Despite the rebound in scores, the effects of the pandemic learning year are still being felt in classrooms today. According to Jason Maas-Baldwin, who teaches AP Environmental Science and AP Chemistry at CHS, some of the foundational knowledge teachers expected to be present for more advanced courses is lacking or absent entirely.

“The classes build on each other,” explains Barbara McBride, who currently teaches AP Language and Composition, a class offered to juniors. “When I was teaching AP Literature, I was able to move a lot more quickly because they had already developed foundational skills [in APLAC] that were applicable to AP Lit.”

This speaks to another component of scores: grade-level or other demographic differences.

“When you compare our statistical data across different demographic groups, you see very few of the sort of disparities you would expect,” Johnston says. “Or the sort of disparities you see happening in other states or other school districts.”

McBride approaches AP Language in score of only 0.1 between ethnic groups, but the 2020-21 school year, marking the return from COVID-19 lockdown, saw a drop in the average scores of Hispanic students. Hispanic families in CUSD tend to live in more remote areas and may receive poorer internet service for online school, a probable explanation for the anomaly. The 2021-22 year saw a smaller spread in scores again, as the biggest difference between ethnic groups was 0.3 points out of the 5-point scale.

CHS’ AP instructors have seen differing trends across departments as to how grade levels, particularly with seniors, impacts their AP scores.

“Even though we offer a place to freshmen and sophomores, obviously if you’re doing a college level course, the closer you are in age to being in college, that’s a benefit,” says McBride, whose sentiment is echoed by Mass-Baldwin, who notes the valuable experience and test-taking skills seen in seniors.

It’s also true that some AP courses offered primarily or exclusively to seniors see lower pass rates than other classes.

“I find the juniors to be particularly motivated because the seniors, they’ve gotten into college,” McBride adds. “The AP score is icing on the cake.”

Neither the motivational drop in seniors nor the lack of experience in underclassmen preclude students from achieving strong scores, even on the exams known to be the most difficult.

“I’m more focused on the skills that the students get, especially in AP World History,” explains AP World History and AP Government and Politics teacher Brent Silva, who sees strong results for his sophomore history class, has observed lower success rates for his senior students. The social science teacher attributes this to several factors, including declining motivation and larger class sizes for the seniors.

AP Calculus AB instructor Steve Nacht has a different approach to the difficult calculus course he is teaching for the second year.

“My philosophy is that I’m more concerned about exposure to the subject than I am on whether you’re going to pass the exam,” Nacht explains. “I sort of have that dichotomy going on. I want my kids to pass the test, but for the kids who are struggling, the exposure of calculus is by far the most important thing for me.”

Although Lyons characterizes AP tests as useful experiences designed to challenge students, he stresses the fact that scores are only markers of a moment that cannot authentically assess a student’s full experience and ability.

“AP is not the only indicator of success,” the principal says. “It’s a data point. Ultimately, we want students to be successful. That’s our goal.”

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CHS’ AP Scores and Enrollment

Students Enrolled

Tests Administered

# of Tests by Department

Pass Rate by Department

Average Pass Rate

graphic by SHAYLA DUTTA
Please, don’t forget the students

BY SHAYLA DUTTA

To those who have been involved in Carmel Unified School District’s discourse on stadium lights, COVID-19 protocols, the superintendent hiring process or the district’s public records, this is a plea to keep our community’s youth in mind.

Despite being the subject of many of the issues that have arisen in past years, students have been largely left out of these discussions and considerations. An example is the current issue gripping the community: whether CUSD can install stadium lights on Carmel High School’s multi-use field, the topic of discussion at a Sept. 6 special board meeting, which served as a platform for nearly 30 community members to denounce the project.

Several people attempted to make comments on behalf of the students, often related to the success or importance of the CUSD students and staff. In his book “Metaphysics of Morality,” philosopher Immanuel Kant claimed that intoxication was unethical because it reduced cognitive function, making us no better than animals. Kant believed in a categorical imperative, and many of the speakers offered serious feedback or valid complaints. Yet it is important to note that the proposed changes seek to benefit not only the current community, but thousands of students, parents, friends and teams for years to come.

One resident asserted that the actions proposed in the Environmental Impact Report would change the soul of Carmel. It’s rallying more constructive support for Carmel’s future generations means changing the soul of the town, then perhaps it is something worth considering.

For any large project taking place in a small community, there will be impacts and drawbacks. When weighing them, it is important to do so with the students in mind.

Another community effort that appears to lack consideration for the students affected is the onslaught of Public Records Requests burying CUSD staff in an excess of busywork. The California Public Records Act requires any government records be disclosed to the public upon request. CUSD has received more than 70 of these time-intensive requests since the start of the 2021-22 school year, with 16 currently pending.

The pushback against these requests is not, as some have suggested, an attempt to hide uncontrollable actions or communications, but rather frustration against petty legal action that is ultimately being used to obstruct the district.

To those behind these requests, please keep the students in mind. The vast quantity of these requests serve only to drain resources that could otherwise be devoted to CUSD’s students and staff.

Struggles with the district on other issues, such as the past struggle with its COVID-19 protocols, are also issues that, in the end, can take away time and money from students. Some individuals have taken the extreme action of launching unfounded attacks on the character of CUSD’s staff, volunteers and officials, from which no one stands to benefit. Those who have done so exhibit a clear disregard for the targeted staff and the community they serve.

To those who have helped to improve the safety and community through alternative perspectives and outside feedback, thank you. But when formulating these opinions, arguing against the school board or taking action on important topics, please don’t forget the students.

OPINION

Get Philosophized

How do we minimize harm within a dangerous situation?

BY EMMA BROWN

Emma Brown is a utilitarian humanist and a self-described rationalist.

As fentanyl deaths have gripped the international community in recent years, government agencies around the world have sought solutions to rising overdose rates, with some implementing safe injection sites and clean supply lines in order to control the use of drugs. In Vancouver, Canada’s public health system has funded the dispensary of fentanyl in furtherance of their “harm-reduction” strategy, a national plan to reduce drug-related illnesses and overdoses by providing users with safe needles and pharmaceutical grade opioids, according to The New York Times. The program doesn’t encourage users to quit, but rather acknowledges the struggles of overcoming addiction and looks for solutions from there.

Fentanyl, a potent opioid, has contaminated the supply of much of the heroin bought and sold on the black market, and the strength of the substance often leads to accidental overdoses as a result of users’ lack of knowledge about the composition of the drug purchased. In 2020, 91,799 Americans died of drug overdoses, according to the Center for Disease Control. Of those deaths, 75% involved opioids.

Even as overdose rates have risen in the United States, many Americans are hesitant to implement similar “harm-reduction” policies. To assess whether safe injection and dispensary sites should be introduced, one must first analyze the morality of the programs themselves.

In Plato’s telling of a dialogue between Socrates and Protagoras, a Greek teacher, the two debate the merits of akrasia, a Greek term that means acting against a person’s best judgment. Socrates claims that the theory of akrasia is inherently flawed: if someone knows what is best for them, they would act in that manner. He infers that if someone is acting in a particular manner, it must be because they believe that they are doing what is best, or they just don’t care about the morality of their choices. Simply put, the philosopher believes that actions speak louder than words.

Looking at addiction treatment through a Socratic lens, it seems like a complete misjudgement of morality. Harm-reduction programs perpetuate a cycle of substance abuse, allowing addicts to continue to use with no attempt to resolve the root issue. The family members and friends of the fentanyl users continue to watch their loved one live with an addiction, forced to deal with the side effects of their using.

Socrates would claim that people who put drug use over all else believe that they are doing what is right. Yet the philosopher recognizes that causing harm to oneself and others is immoral and, as a result, would find that drug users could not be acting in akrasia and must simply have skewed judgment or priorities instead.

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Discourse between the Carmel Unified School District school board and community members continues after the Environmental Impact Report presentation that took place Sept. 6, with some local residents arguing the district needs to address safety and environmental issues before the installation of stadium lights at Carmel High School.

Anti-lights advocate Robert Kahn has been vocal about his concerns with the plans to install lights on the CHS athletic field.

“This isn’t an issue about whether to create a night sports complex,” Kahn says. “This is about if this is the best plan moving forward, from an environmental standpoint and from a community standpoint.”

Khan is a homeowner in Carmel with a house in Carmel Views, a neighborhood that he says has a clear view of the school’s field and would be prone to the light pollution stadium lights would give off.

“The superintendent, Ted Knight, has framed it in a way where it is either lights or no light,” Kahn says. “It really gets down to how we can support the students and the board in a way that provides all of this, but in a way that is sensitive to the environment and the character of Carmel.”

According to Carmel Municipal code, Carmel-by-the-Sea has laws set in place to prevent street lights, giving the town clear night skies unpolluted by city skylines, causing some residents to feel that stadium lights are violating this long-standing rule.

Community member Charlie Wahle voices his concerns with both the environmental impact the stadium lights would have, as well as the recent environmental impact report that was presented last month. The report presented Sept. 6 is the second, after community members found flaws in the original report and asked for a revision.

“The first report was sloppy and full of mistakes, and it just did not look like they took it seriously,” Wahle says. “So we criticized it.”

Both Khan and Wahle have vocalized issues that they see in the most recent EIR, saying even though it is slicker and more professional-looking, it is biased in favor of installing lights.

“Is it biased towards the outcome the district is seeking?” Wahle says. “And although it is not uncommon in EIRs, it’s not the right thing to do.”

Wahle, who has worked with ocean conservation in science and policy for nearly 30 years, incorporating science into policy-making, says that the report raises some red flags, pushing the decision towards a pro-light outcome.

“The report somehow managed to include some really bad pictures of the scenery that are to provide a baseline of whether this is going to be a problem or not,” Wahle says. “The pictures were blurry, they were from strange locations, and some of them were taken when it was foggy. The views were really obscure so when you superimpose lights on top of that it doesn’t really look like much of a problem.”

Members of the anti-lights group have asked for another report to be completed.

Plans for stadium lights indicate the prospect of more home sports events, which has led resident Fran Dillard, who lives in a home that neighbors the high school, to also raise concerns over safety.

“The school’s number one priority is to make sure that the campus is safe for students,” Dillard says, “and if it’s safe for students, why haven’t we seen a copy of the emergency access route?”

This has raised some concerns for Dillard, as the safety route was not included in the EIR or the original proposal for the lights. And, with small parking lots that parallel Highway 1, she claims that evacuation by vehicle could cause chaos.

Apart from safety concerns, Dillard and many other anti-stadium light advocates express that the CHS campus is not the right location for lights and are pushing to have the lights installed at Carmel Middle School instead. Dillard notes the abundance of space available at CMS, which, at 62 acres, is more than three times the 20-acre high school campus.

Even with strong support from Superintendent Ted Knight, it is unclear what the future of the stadium lights will look like. The discussion around the lights will continue during the next CUSD board meeting, which is set for Oct. 19, with the board planning to vote on the issue Nov. 29.

**Redistricting cont. 1**

regions, the district has realized that the boundaries might have to be unusually configured.

Board members, with the help of hired demographers, are currently looking at a number of map possibilities for the new region lines, all of which the community can give feedback on through public hearings or through email. The CUSD website even offers a feature that allows community members to create their own maps that the CUSD board will take into consideration.

“We’ll see how this community responds to this change,” Hull says. “The intent is always to have better participation, more participation, more representation of all of the voices across the district. This is one way to do that.”

Demographers have been collaborating with CUSD to draft maps of regions for a by-trustee-area election that meet federal and state requirements.
Death of longest-reigning British monarch sends ripples across seas

By Sara Eyjolfsdottir

When Queen Elizabeth II, Britain’s longest-reigning monarch and the longest recorded female head of state in history, died Sept. 8, many, including CHS students with connections to the United Kingdom, were left with tremendous uncertainty and upheaval.

The queen’s death preceded 10 days of national mourning before her state funeral Sept. 19. The process, dubbed Operation London Bridge, was put in place to handle all matters following the queen’s passing, including the announcement and the official mourning period. People around the world have joined to pay their respects and reflect on her reign and impact, and those with British connections in Carmel were no exception.

“She was an incredible woman to have held onto power for so long and still remain fairly respected,” says CHS senior Greta Beesley, who was born in the U.K. and consistently goes back to visit the vast majority of her relatives that still live there.

Elizabeth II ascended the throne in February 1952, aged 25, and in September 2015 she surpassed Queen Victoria and formally claimed the title of longest reigning monarch in the history of the British Empire.

“For the nation, it’s maybe not a shock seeing as she was 96, but it is definitely a huge change seeing as she was such a long-lasting figurehead,” says senior Clare Cook, who moved to the U.S. in October 2019 after living in Surrey, England. “To lose that is quite upsetting for a lot of people.”

For most, Elizabeth II was a constant, stable icon in a rapidly changing world. The monarch was a symbol of national pride, and even though she may not have been the political leader of her countries, she ruled the domain for over seven decades.

“Her role as a monarch was very traditional and played a large part in British identity and culture,” Cook says, “even though I think quite a lot of people in Britain, including me, may not have fully realized that on a day-to-day basis.”

The news of the historic leader’s passing broke around 6:30 p.m. BST on Sept. 8, following recent news that the queen was in poor health and that royal family members were rushing to her side.

“I found out about the queen’s passing when my mother texted me and was very upset,” says junior Grayden Miller, whose entire mom’s side of her family is from the U.K. “Americans without any British connections tend to struggle to understand the established relationship between a queen and a citizen, since presidents can only serve for up to eight years.”

The queen held varying degrees of significance for those with connections to the U.K., but was a quintessential symbol of British culture and history.

“I’ve grown up knowing about the royal family, and she’s always been an important figure in my life,” says junior Emilia Gorton, whose father and many other members of her family were born and grew up in England.

“For my dad, she was the only monarch he’s known, so it has definitely affected him.”

Elizabeth II is succeeded by her eldest son King Charles III, a return to a king on the throne for the first time in 70 years.

“I’m hoping he will be a wise ruler, given that he has had plenty of time to prepare,” Beesley says. “But as a person, I think his history with Princess Diana definitely tainted people’s views of him.”

With such a long-lasting aspect of the British monarchy now gone, many countries and individuals are left wondering about its current state and their role within the system.

“Her passing, although it was mostly set in place because of her age, is a big change,” Beesley observes. “We now have a king, and how is that going to be different for the country?”

“I think a lot of people in England are reevaluating the monarchy as a whole with Charles as king,” Cook says.

Following the queen’s death, anti-monarchist protestors took to the streets to protest King Charles’ ascension to the throne, resulting in some arrests and adding to the impact of Elizabeth II’s passing.

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Coral club plans to educate elementary students on warming oceans

BY MAGGIE JOHNSTON

The CHS Coral Club started when senior Lillian Paul took a trip to Molokini, an islet of the coast of Maui and saw the state of coral for herself. As she saw that the gradual warming of the oceans and the tourist population stripped away its vibrant color, Paul noted how coral life on the shore was depressing. In Maui, there were patches of colorful coral with the occasional school of fish, but for the most part the shore was bare.

“It is having an exponential decline,” says Paul. “If the coral reef system is not there and is not healthy, there will be no backbone to support all of the marine animals in our oceans.”

This club president has previously done research on coral and the process of its bleaching but seeing it for herself this August sparked something within her.

Along with devising a waste diversion plan, the club is additionally developing a water filtration system using rain water at CHS.

To further the spread of eco-friendliness, a sustainability commissioner, the Environmental Club continues to spread awareness for the 2022-23 school year.

Because of a lack of responsible composting taking place by students at CHS in previous school years, the club’s members desire to put in place a useful composting system to improve the school’s environmental conditions.

“I think we’re going to be doing a lot more hands-on projects this year and trying to create those two significant changes on campus, finally getting compost, because that’s the main change,” says CHS senior Sagit Melton, Environmental Club co-president.

The school district has also been considering hiring a sustainability coordinator to assist the club with promoting local environmental sustainability and solve the compost crisis on campus.

“Environmental Club, for five years, has been advocating for the district to hire somebody who was paid full-time to implement sustainability measures on campus,” says science teacher Jason Maas-Baldwin, the club adviser.

The goal of this position is to end up diverting more waste away from the landfill and instead reuse it through recycling and compost. While the possible candidates for this position are still being considered by the district, the club is now focusing on beach cleanups along the Monterey Peninsula as well as partnering with California State Parks to restore natural habitats within Monterey County.

Environmental Club developing composting system at CHS

BY AVERY PALSHAW

With hopes of implementing composting and hiring a sustainability commissioner on campus, Carmel High School’s Environmental Club continues to spread awareness for the 2022-23 school year.

Because of a lack of responsible composting taking place by students at CHS in previous school years, the club’s members desire to put in place a useful composting system to improve the school’s environmental conditions.

“I think we will have a big impact on our community,” Schmidt adds.

Along with developing a waste diversion plan, the club is additionally developing a water filtration system using rain water at CHS.

To further the spread of eco-friendliness, awareness to other students, members of the Environmental Club will be promoting solutions to environmental issues through the CHS daily bulletin.

“This club president has previously done research on coral and the process of its bleaching but seeing it for herself this August sparked something within her.

Another way the group plans to educate the district is by hosting a viewing of “Chasing Coral,” a documentary about the disappearing coral reefs around the world, in the CHS amphitheater where all the ticket proceeds will be donated to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to support research nationally.

The president of the Coral Club is optimistic for the upcoming months and the effect that the club will cause in the local marine ecosystem by informing Carmel residents.

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ASL Club’s unheard voices speaking out

BY GRAYDEN MILLER

Will Carmel’s American Sign Language community be heard?

This school year, CHS’ newly established American Sign Language Club is working to remove the stigma around ASL and build a community of signers under the leadership of ASL teacher Mia Baglietto and senior club president Brielle Coombs.

The club plans to host deaf and hearing presenters, go on field trips, watch movies and play games as an interactive way to progress on their signing journey.

“ASL is not just a sign language lab than a sign language class,” says Baglietto, adding that the club serves as an opportunity to hang out and sign rather than teach and learn.

After scheduling conflicts hindered some students’ ability to take the ASL class, the club was established to allow signers to continue with their passion and re-route the path of their ASL journey, with accessibility to the language being an issue.

But learning through a new medium can lead to complications.

Despite the new club’s enthusiasm, ASL consistently faces the misconception that it’s the easier way out, versus the written language alternatives of Chinese, Spanish and French. Yet ASL can accommodate different learners.

“I’ve had a lot of students that said that they have taken a different foreign language and then taken ASL,” Baglietto explains. “And they actually used the ASL because it just clicked.”

Sophomore Dannica Watkins explains her situation as an ASL II student, saying, “I’m not good at controlling my voice when it comes to speaking, so it’s a lot easier to use my hands.”

Watkins plans to continue learning the tactical language.

Baglietto, who is deaf in one ear and hard of hearing in the other, explains, “Deaf doesn’t mean dumb,” and adds that those who can hear aren’t conscious of the lack of accessibility in everyday life for deaf individuals, like covering one’s mouth while speaking.

“Deafness is not in hearing people’s faces,” Coombs says. “They don’t care until they have someone close to them who has this problem. It’s like environmental issues—if you don’t see the pollution, you’re not going to worry about it.”

The club’s main intentions are to make others aware of the importance of ASL and its effect on the CHS community, which consists of few ASL speakers. In the absence of an ASL program at the middle school level, many students don’t get the same exposure as they would in Spanish, French and Chinese.

In working to spread awareness, the ASL Club continues to welcome new members to lunch meetings every other Tuesday in Room A.

Interact Club grows closer to Carmel Valley Rotary through community service

BY MINNA TROKEL

The CHS Interact Club is starting anew after last year’s limited connection with the Rotary Club of Carmel Valley through increased communication with Rotary and organization of future joint projects.

Taking action to live up to their club’s name, CHS seniors Katie Shin, her co-president Julia Blakely and faculty adviser Bruce Dini bring new perspectives on reaching beyond the campus. The club officers know connecting to the local Rotary Club is a vital starting point since the community fundraiser was the same night as CHS’ homecoming dance, which most of Interact’s members were attending.

Sophomore Emma Shin, the CHS club’s vice president, was one of the members who had to choose between the two events.

“I’m going to try to attend in the future, but I don’t know my schedule yet and will have to see,” she says.

The officers hope to avoid this problem, but know it is inevitably going to be a factor in the Rotary Club and Interact Club’s future collaborations.

Hoping to maximize attendance, the CHS group has decided to organize separate service activities, such as a campus cleanup last Sunday, but still plan on attending Rotary Club-organized events, such as a fundraiser for buying trees to plant at the Forest Theater on Oct. 19.
Mock Trial heads to first in-person tournament since 2019

BY ELLA GAILY

Since CHS Mock Trial was founded by former federal prosecutor Bill Schrier in 2004, the titles under their belt prove that they don’t only compete in simulated court trials, they win them. Now the team is eager to return to the Empire Chicago international tournament after the pandemic kept them on the bench.

Empire consists of around 600 to 700 mock trial members from around the globe. The CHS team has been attending since 2014, and won the entire tournament in 2016, yet the team’s last appearance was via Zoom in 2020 because the team chose not to compete in 2021, having just returned to in-person school and trials.

Now the team is relearning the art of presenting a case in a physical trial. According to Schrier’s observations of their quick mastery of Zoom trials, they’re up to the challenge.

“It was entirely new and it wasn’t me teaching students as much as us figuring it out together,” explains Schrier about trials online. “Now we’re in a situation where no one on the team has had an in-person case.”

The team is doing everything they can for members to feel confident, as seen through their commitment to summer meetings and multiple in-person scrimmages since August.

“This year it’s kind of like starting from scratch,” junior vice-president Shayla Dutta says. “You don’t know how to move or conduct yourself. The movements and articulation you learn over the screen are vastly different from what you would do in person.”

Schrier, senior president Sophia Cho and Dutta all shed light on these differences. Competing in a courtroom requires voice projection, eye contact, knowing when and where to stand, using hand gestures, independence from notes and higher stakes overall.

“It hasn’t been anything that I didn’t expect because mock trial is such a learning experience,” says the president. “And these added questions of where to position yourself and when to stand up are just part of the process. People have been doing a phenomenal job with that so far.”

The members attending include Emma Brown, Cho, Dutta, Sara Ejolfsdottir, Connor Grammoni, Erin Ike-miya, Rose Matthews, Nicole Mirski, Brianna Sciuto, Ava Valdez, Scarlett Wennerholm and Grant Xu.

However, the team is looking forward to the real focal points of their season. Following their return, scrimmages will begin for the county and state tournaments that await their arrival in the spring.

“Empire is considered the less competitive of the tournaments,” explains Cho. “Empire is really a place for us to improve trial skills for witnesses and attorneys, and to build a team, so when we hit the rest of the season, we can hit the ground running.”

The competition takes place from Oct. 21-24 and will be recorded on Vimeo.

Robotics team gets gears rolling with t-shirt cannon, community outreach

BY NICOLE MIRSKI

The CHS robotics team, Team 2035, kicked off the school year with their t-shirt cannon at the Shoe Game Rally and have more community outreach plans, competitions and projects scheduled.

The Robotics team showed their school spirit by constructing a machine to launch shirts at people in the bleachers, and the team has plans to continue this newfound tradition, but their spirit doesn’t stop there.

“One of our focuses this year is to expand the community outreach,” says senior and club president Zack Seifert, who has big plans regarding the team. “We want to go down to the middle school and elementary schools to show off our robot and inspire the younger students to pursue STEM [science, technology, engineering and math].”

According to Seifert, many members of the team have been interested in robots and mechanics since they were in elementary and middle school and wanted to be the reason others find their passion. Because of the variety of responsibilities available, from programing to building, there is a spot for everyone on this no-cut team.

“We try to bring as many people as we can,” Seifert explains.

With robotics competition CalGames starting on Friday, team members are working on their robot during Monday lunch meetings and even over the weekends.

Rory Lambert, the lead programmer and a four-year member, is working on making the robot autonomous.

“During the actual competitions there’s a 15-second period where the robot has to drive itself,” explains Lambert, who is also teaching his new teammates how to write code. “It’s genuinely a great experience, and I enjoy every minute of it.”

CHS alum Teddy Small, who worked at the Naval Postgraduate School as a machinist and welder for about five years and recently joined the NASA Ames Research Center as a fabricator and welder, has come back to the high school to help Team 2035.

“When I graduated, I knew I had to come back and mentor the robotics team,” explains Small.

Ever since the Robotics Club started in 2007, Tom Clifford has been the go-to man for all things robotics. He is entering his 16th year as the coach, but this year is slightly different: Clifford retired from teaching at the end of the last school year.

“My retirement hasn’t really affected things too much,” Clifford says. “It’s kind of awkward not being on campus if a kid needs a permission slip or wants to ask a question, but nothing really really changed. I really enjoy watching and helping students solve difficult problems.”

Team 2035 continues to welcome new members of all experience levels in Room 40 every Monday at lunch.

“Empire is considered the less competitive of the tournaments,” explains Cho. “Empire is really a place for us to improve trial skills for witnesses and attorneys, and to build a team, so when we hit the rest of the season, we can hit the ground running.”

The competition takes place from Oct. 21-24 and will be recorded on Vimeo.
After witnessing a rise in the number of students participating in the fall sports season, some CHS sports programs, including football, field hockey, tennis and boys’ water polo, have taken measures such as co-trotted teams to mitigate the strain.

“In field hockey and football we got to a point where we just stopped taking new folks,” Carmel High athletic director Golden Anderson says. “Having larger rosters, you always have more equipment than you need, but we’re to the point now where we’re right up against having more players than equipment.”

Football, which has 96 combined varsity and junior varsity players, compared to 81 during the 2021 season, has nearly run out of gear, with only two leftover helmets and around eight leftover pads. Being a full-contact sport, equipment breaks easily, meaning that extras are always needed. If there aren’t any, the program is forced to stop taking players.

“We’re trying to keep as many people as we can,” says Anderson, who also acts as the varsity head coach for the CHS football program. “But at some point, we had to put some structure around it because the teams also have to get together, bond, learn and then move on.”

For sports like girls’ tennis and boys’ water polo, which are encouraged to not cut players, the issue was not a lack of equipment, but instead an overwhelming number of people trying out for the team. During the 2021 season, tennis had 17 players and water polo had 39. This year, tennis currently has 23 players and water polo has 44.

Tennis, which typically has four available courts, had a court vandalized at the beginning of the year as well, reducing them to three playable courts for several weeks.

“Somebody poured some motor oil on the court, so we had to dig it out and patch it,” says Leslie Tracy, who has coached tennis at CHS for eight years. “That left me with three courts and 27 girls. We had to quickly think on our feet, and we decided to split the team into two cohorts; we have a red and a gray.”

Because the tennis program does not have a JV coach, members of the gray team practice on Mondays alongside the red team and have solo practices on Fridays, limiting the amount of time they get on the court. The red team practices Monday through Thursday. During matches, players are able to scale up or down between teams depending on their skill level.

Like tennis, water polo experienced an outpouring of freshman and sophomore candidates, causing head coach John Norall to split the JV team, composed of 29 players, into two separate cohorts. Each cohort plays a minimum of 12 games during the season, ensuring that everyone has their time in the water.

“COVID gutted our program,” Norall says. “Before COVID, with previous coaching staffs, we’ve had 60 to 65 kids—that’s a lot for a water polo program. Now people are starting to know that there’s a water polo program, and people want to join. I think that we’ll continue to see growth into next year, and then we’ll even out.”

Anderson speculates that the spike in freshman and sophomore players may be related to the new physical education rules, which require sophomores to participate in PE classes instead of solely freshmen. At CHS, students are allowed to play a fall sport instead of taking PE, which some freshmen do. Now that there are sophomores in PE as well, it means that there are more students opting out of PE and electing to play a fall sport, likely leading to the increase of underclassmen on JV teams.

While the majority of fall sports have seen a participation increase, girls’ golf and girls’ water polo have not. Golf, which had 11 players during the 2021 season, currently has the same number, while water polo, which had 28 players last year, is down two.

BY AINSLEY HENDERSON

Girls’ tennis saw an increase in participants this year, causing the team to split in two.

Field hockey junior varsity and varsity teams have reached maximum capacity after boosts in participation.

The increased number of players in the football program has led to a gear shortage, mainly helmets and shells.
CHS freshmen show promise in fall athletic programs

BY SOPHIA BONE

After getting used to the lower stakes of middle school sports, walking onto campus to try out for a spot on the varsity team as a freshman might sound intimidating, but for a handful of ninth-grade athletes, this decision is allowing them to not only raise their own game but contribute to the overall success of Carmel High School fall sports teams as a whole.

At the North Monterey County Invitational on Sept. 17, freshman Lila Glazier placed sixth individually with a time of 19 minutes flat and helped her team win second place overall at the cross-country meet.

“I worked really hard and was proud of everyone else on my team too cause we all placed in the top 25 in the race,” Glazier humbly explains.

With a passion for trail running and strong self-determination to continue to improve, Glazier has been getting faster and faster since she discovered her love for the sport in sixth grade. With a dad as an ultrarunner and free time during COVID-19 lockdowns, cross-country came easily to this underclassman.

Free time during the pandemic also allowed Odessa Peinado to pursue her sport at a more competitive level. When her other interests of soccer and swimming were no longer available, Peinado began to focus on improving her talents in tennis, a sport that had previously just been a game she played with her family. With the addition of a private coach and through competing in weekly tournaments, she quickly became the No. 1 player on the girls’ tennis team.

“It feels pretty cool, but I know that it comes with a lot of challenges because I am playing the best people on other teams,” mentions Peinado, who finds herself competing against individuals up to four years older than her on the other side of the court during matches.

Jack Balas, the only freshman who made the boys’ water polo team, has played the sport since fifth grade with lots of prior experience. Head coach John Norall explains that most freshmen who come out for water polo have not previously played before high school, thus giving Balas an advantage in addition to his overall maturity as a player.

“He came into the season with a lot of knowledge about the game and is remarkably level-headed for his age, which is not something you typically see in a player until junior or senior year,” Norall comments.

Fellow teammate senior Jim Moreau says Balas’ talent will be exciting to watch throughout his high school career.

“He is good right now and helping us win right now, but his senior and junior year he is going to be doing some really good things for the water polo program,” adds the four-year varsity water polo player.

Lizzie Descalzi, the only freshman on the girls’ varsity volleyball team, is also the youngest player who made the cut, even over seniors who have been in the program all four years.

“It was a little intimidating trying out for varsity,” Descalzi comments, “but one of the coaches pushed me to do it, and while it was hard at first to bond with the team, they are so nice, so it got way easier once we got to know each other.”

The outside hitter attributes her growth as a player to support from coaches and family along with consistent hard work. Playing for Sand City Volleyball Club in her off-season and beach volleyball in her free time, she pushes herself to be her best and has goals of becoming better at defensive diving and communicating with her teammates more as the season progresses.

It is safe to say that the athletic programs will continue to thrive with increasing support from underclassman standouts.
Singer Songwriters Guild shows return, no strings attached

BY JEAN LEWELLEN

With an upcoming show Oct. 21 and a track record spanning over a decade, the Singer Songwriters Guild is an environment for young musicians to gain experience in performance and explore their connection to music making.

The club provides members with a supportive setting to collaborate with other musicians while learning the ins and outs of performance on a more independent scale than school-offered courses. Performing members participate in the setup and breakdown of equipment, which teaches students how to apply this to performances, making learning the technical aspects of performing live music a priority.

What does club president Riley Mabry enjoy most about the club?

“Definitely getting to watch other people,” Mabry says, “especially people that I know don’t have the most confidence that turn out to be really awesome performers. That still helps me learn and grow as a performer.”

On the singing side of things, the club provides freedom regarding song choice for performances, as long as they are school-appropriate and of reasonable length. For select songs, the club has a colorful array of swearing substitutes so students can still play some of their favorite songs.

“Singer Songwriters Club is a really supportive atmosphere for new performers and for experienced performers to gain more knowledge about their own personal sound,” club vice president Alexis Pine says.

Students are also encouraged to write their own pieces, and the club functions as a social center for musicians to find individuals that can help them find and develop other instrumental or vocal parts for their songs.

“The students that come through this school are the most talented musicians I’ll ever get to play with,” notes club adviser Marc Stafford, who is a member of the Bubba Pickens Band and has headed the club since it was formed. Stafford has a long history of performing, having played in a total of four bands since his high school days.

Along with their free upcoming performance in the CHS cafeteria, which takes place from 6-8 p.m. Oct. 21, the club puts on a variety of other shows throughout the year, including The Band Show, the club’s largest collective performance, composed of a number of student bands. The Band Show will take place in the CHS performing arts center Feb. 10.

The guild meets every Wednesday at lunch in Room 25 to discuss performances and other club activities.

Crochet club hooked on stitching for charity

BY BRIANNA SCIUTO

What brings meaning to art?
To members of the CHS Crochet Club, the answer is simple: the impact it has on a person. This year, the program is taking its craft a step further by focusing on how the art of crochet can make a positive impact on Monterey County’s needy.

Under new leadership, the year-old Crochet Club is already set up to donate their work to hospitals and homeless shelters.

“We’re looking for ways to turn [crocheting] into a way to give back to the community,” explains sophomore Mackenzie Nesbitt, who serves as the club’s vice president.

Every Friday, a handful of high school students gather in Room 16 and dedicate their lunchtimes to crocheting blankets, hats and toys for various charities. Among their most anticipated projects are beanies the students will create for newborn babies at Monterey’s Community Hospital. Throughout the year, students will crochet red hats for donation to the hospital in February to raise awareness for heart problems in newborns.

The club will also dedicate some of its projects to Al & Friends, an organization that prepares meals for the homeless.

A charitable Crochet Club is an unlikely concept, but to club president Elizabeth Chan, it is only natural. Crochet and charity go hand-in-hand.

“Caring someone else’s happiness will always be more gratifying than if I had just kept the project for myself,” Chan says.

The club faces obstacles as they make the transition into a more ambitious program. Chan and Nesbitt are finding that they must organize fundraisers and seek out sponsors to combat a lack of funding for materials.

But club adviser Holly Lederle has faith in the program’s leadership.

“They run it themselves,” says Lederle, the CHS photography teacher. “They are totally and completely self-motivated. They contact everyone themselves. They’re doing it. I’m just here to hold a space for them.”

Chan and Nesbitt also make sure to welcome beginners because maximizing their membership means maximizing their impact.

“They bring in new people all the time, which is really neat,” Lederle explains. “They’ll walk you through how to get started. . . . I’ve seen great progress in somebody who’s here just one or two lunch periods.”

Freshman Lily Biggs is a prime example of this progress, having found a long-term passion for crocheting during the first meeting.

“I started doing it on my own the day after,” Biggs says.

Nesbitt has also benefited from the club’s guidance.

“I actually learned how to crochet in the crochet club,” she adds. “I didn’t really know anything, but now I’m the vice president.”

Although Crochet Club is still taking its first steps at CHS, members hope that it will end up outliving them at the high school.

“I think it would be really cool to establish a lasting club at CHS,” says Chan, expressing her eagerness to weave the program’s legacy into the school.
Biology Club helps students navigate scientific career paths

BY SAGE MELTON

Junior Gia Panetta jumped at the opportunity to take charge of the club, which focuses on scientific research and learning about career paths, as she feels it has been hard for her to learn about her interest in science due to classroom limitations.

“It’s hard to find a real passion for something or keep going in it when there’s a test to study for next week and it’s more about the grade than the actual experience,” says Panetta, who hopes this club will allow students to dive into their passion in a more relaxed setting.

“It allows for conversations between people interested in the same thing, and in class it’s less discussion-based and more learning the facts,” senior club member James Ahn adds.

With the help of advisor Thomas Dooner and vice president Shayla Dutta, Panetta has already been able to organize a long list of activities for this year.

“They started out with their first meeting and they had a guest speaker who was a Carmel High graduate in the sciences,” explains Dooner, when discussing the value of the club’s career-path focus.

The club hosted CHS graduate Madelynn Whittaker, a current bioengineering PhD student at the University of Pennsylvania, as a guest speaker through Zoom to talk about the work she has done with the CRISPR gene editing technique and stem cells.

After receiving recent funding, the club has now turned its focus towards the process of conducting a CRISPR gene editing lab, which will take about a month’s work of research and planning.

“Gene editing is really interesting since you can literally be changing the human genome,” junior Grant Xu adds.

Who does Panetta recommend should join the Biology Club?

“Anybody who even just has an inkling of interest in biology and wants to learn more about it,” Panetta says.

Later in the year the club also hopes to visit the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the California Academy of Sciences and the San Francisco Zoo, each of which focuses on a different field of biology. Students will also expand their experience through lab tours and possible volunteer work with local elementary school science fairs.

Over the next month, Biology Club students will prepare to conduct their first lab on CRISPR gene editing.
Currently working behind the scenes with the drama program on this year’s fall play, a rendition of William Shakespeare’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” Carmel High School’s Theater Tech Club fills the often-overlooked roles that keep productions running smoothly while helping its students learn responsibility and find work and volunteer opportunities outside the school.

Beginning a second year since its inception in fall 2021, the club takes on roles such as creating sets, managing lights and effects and positioning props onstage. Shows can take weeks of extensive preparation and rehearsal preceding their official opening.

“We make sure things run so people can do the things that they love,” says junior Riley Mabry.

The upcoming production, a contemporary take on “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” directed by drama teacher Gracie Balistreri, opened Sept. 29 and runs through Friday’s 7 p.m. closing performance. Tickets will be available at the door.

The club plans to work on several upcoming events, including the Visual and Performing Arts show, dance and music concerts, and the spring musical. Previously, Theater Tech contributed to school performances, including TedX Club events and poetry slams.

The Theater Tech Club offers volunteer opportunities not only for shows within the high school, but also at community productions and events such as the upcoming Tularcitos Fall Festival. Under the tutelage of theater manager and club adviser Jeff McGrath, students learn versatile skills useful not only in the context of the club, but in the broader scope of their lives going forward.

“Organization and communication are critical to the success of theater,” McGrath identifies in particular. Students also gain experience with technical skills specific to theater tech. Dedicated members of the tech crew, or “techies,” often have a specialty within the production. Whether it be lights, props, sound or stage management, these skills translate into useful experience in the wider theater community as some students seek work with professional theater companies.

“You learn about teamwork, you know how to handle stressful situations, you learn when you have to sit down and when you have to move,” adds club president Lilly Trokel.

Despite the quantifiable rewards, the best part of the club, according to its members, is the people.

“There’s a very specific culture that goes with performing arts,” Mabry says, “and just being able to be a part of that is really fulfilling.”

For regular meetings, the club convenes at lunch in the theater blackbox on Fridays.

BY TERESA FRAHM

Club members gather around set piece for a recent meeting.
Barbara McBride: Bringing passion and inspiration to the classroom

BY SCARLETT MCCOLL

While other children would turn on their televisions to be immersed in the worlds of their favorite cartoons and characters, young Barbara McBride waited patiently for the joy of singing about adjectives and verbs alongside the commercials of “Schoolhouse Rock.”

“I always loved words,” says McBride, now the Carmel High School English department chair. But it wasn’t until her senior year of high school when she first read “Tintern Abbey” by Romantic poet William Wordsworth off a random page in her English textbook that she realized, “I have to spend my life doing this.”

The long-time educator currently teaches AP Language and Composition and English II Honors, while substituting for a colleague’s English II college prep class. McBride also holds the title of professional learning coach, working with teachers, running staff development days and spending much of her time in her office in the administration building.

“I love helping students find their path,” says McBride. “If I can help students find their voice, express themselves and help a little bit on their path to having a joyful, meaningful life, then that’s good work that’s worth doing.”

Fellow CHS English teacher Dale DePalatis says he considers himself blessed to be able to work with McBride for the past 25 plus years.

“She not only knows how to develop an excellent curriculum,” DePalatis adds, “but also cares about the students.”

McBride developed Carmel’s APLAC class in 2003, but took a break from teaching the course after the birth of her second daughter in 2011, never planning to return to it. That changed when Whitney Grummon, former APLAC teacher and a close friend of McBride’s, passed away suddenly in 2018 from skin cancer. Being apart of the McBride’s community at CHS students and McBride’s community at large are incredibly lucky to have her knowledge and passion surrounding them. She is an outstanding example of someone who does exactly what they love and puts everything into it.

“I am a joyful, meaningful life, then that’s good work that’s worth doing.”

When you’re choosing a career, you’re going to spend the vast majority of your life doing that work,” the passionate teacher says. “Of course it needs to be work that pays the bills and allows you a sufficient lifestyle, but you’ve got to love it.”

The importance of this “magic combination” is what McBride hopes will stick with her students the most.

CHS students and McBride’s community at large are incredibly lucky to have her knowledge and passion surrounding them. She is an outstanding example of someone who does exactly what they love and puts everything into it.

“This is my 32nd year teaching,” notes McBride, “and I literally love it as much as I did on day one.”

Heading the English department and serving the staff as a whole, McBride’s contributions to the CHS community are considerable.

More about McBride’s teaching philosophy, coming soon to the next issue of The Sandpiper. Stay tuned.

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Directed by Olivia Wilde and packed with beautiful cinematography and a star-studded cast, including Florence Pugh, Harry Styles, Chris Pine and Nick Kroll, “Don’t Worry Darling” (2022) is a striking, eerie film at first glance, but filled with subtle flaws at the second.

The movie takes place in Victory, a small and seemingly perfect desert town inhabited by those working on a top-secret project, the Victory Project, and their Stepford-esque wives: all beautiful, perfectly coiffed and incredibly similar. Their only jobs? To cook, clean and support their husbands through everything.

Alice (Florence Pugh) and Jack Chambers (Harry Styles), a married couple living in Victory, seem wonderful. While Jack works, Alice spends her days living the life of a housewife, and when they’re together, they are the perfect image of a happy, healthy couple, yet as the movie progresses, their relationship, along with Alice’s perception of Victory, begins to fracture.

During the first half of the movie, while Pugh and Styles are portraying a tight-knit couple, their on-screen chemistry is good but nothing special, and they have an easy, comfortable dynamic helped on by the script, not necessarily Styles’ acting.

As a big name in the music industry, Harry Styles’ performance in “Don’t Worry Darling” was highly anticipated, but ultimately not spectacular. While his acting skills, especially during the movie’s second half, aren’t anything to discredit, it is hard to separate the on-screen character Jack from the actor that plays him. “Don’t Worry Darling” is not Styles’ first shot at an acting career, but even after roles in “Dunkirk” (2017) and “Eternals” (2021), he still isn’t up to the challenge of playing a nuanced and troubled character like Jack.

He may be able to handle acting overall, but some of his scenes don’t deliver the deep emotions and conviction they should.

On the other hand, Pugh’s emotions and dedication to the role are palpable, and viewers see her classic frown several times as Alice’s perfect world begins to shatter. Having multiple solo scenes, the “Midsommar” actress lives up to all of the expectations she is placed under, portraying a self-assured, strong woman in a world out to make her doubt herself.

While the film may falter in some places, the costumes and set are beautiful and encapsulate an upper-class ’50s lifestyle, one filled with potlucks, parties and delightful romps, including a drunken Jack teaching Alice to drive his sports car in the middle of the desert. The long dresses and sharp makeup coupled with the yellow-and-blue-toned background certainly make “Don’t Worry Darling” visually appealing.

The cinematography also helps to show Alice’s inner turmoil, mainly while she is in the ballet studio. The symmetry of the dancers, which repeats throughout the movie, gives viewers something to latch onto and follow. When combined with the ominous half-buzzing, half-singing music, it’s beautifully nerve-wracking.

Even though it is packed with dazzling shots, the movie occasionally feels like it is looping over and over and over again. The beginning is paced nicely, setting up the characters and their lives, but the middle, when Alice begins to investigate Victory’s dark secret, feels repetitive.

The supporting cast is star-studded, and Pine, playing the charismatic Frank, the head of the Victory Project, and Gemma Chan, his powerful, educated wife, add to the movie’s thrills. It’s unconventional for a director to act in their own movie, but Olivia Wilde is a perfect fit to play the pristine Bunny.

No spoilers, of course, but the plot twist and aftermath evoke shocked mutterings and even a few gasps. It is the perfect climax, followed by the perfect end, leaving a few things up to the viewer’s interpretation.

Despite rumored drama between Pugh, Styles and Wilde while filming, the movie does an excellent job of avoiding any and all tension that may have arisen. 7/10

‘Don’t Worry Darling’ aesthetically pleasing, but lacking
BY AINSLEY HENDERSON

While his performance isn’t shabby, Styles lacks the emotional acting skills to truly play Jack Chambers.
CAS Tip of the Month:

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Horoscopes

Aries
During the spooky season, spectors seem to appear out of the blue. But when someone ghosts you, don’t be surprised. If only you would’ve had a crystal ball to predict that imminent heartbreak.

Taurus
You slippery little snake. Taurus, must you go around luring people out of peace and into a den of vipers? It seems as though you carry bad omens in your back pocket. Perhaps some apologies are overdue.

Gemini
No matter what, you never seem to settle down. It’s like you’re engaged in a competition with unaware opponents to see who can be the busiest. Take some of the weight off your shoulders, and breathe for a moment. There’s no need to be constantly working.

Cancer
Cancer, will you please quit it with the negativity? It seems that all you’re capable of doing is drawing rain clouds closer to the people around you. For someone with such natural cheer, it seems that you’ve been awfully down lately. Try to bask in the light for a little and restore your shine.

Leo
You seem to have run into a spot of bad luck lately. Try to consult your inner snapping turtle and ask them to bring out the best in you. You’re far from your full potential.

Virgo
Virgo, you sweet little swallow, singing songs to put others at peace. Your beautiful soul rings out wherever you go. Keep flying high, and be careful to not let the sadness of others hold you down.

Libra
Little Libra, you’re slowly redeeming yourself. For decades you’ve been the villain in every tale ever told, but it seems as though you’re finally on the come-up. Make sure you don’t relapse into evil, and try to stay the course to redemption.

Scorpio
Despite your proclivity towards stinging, there’s a sweetheart under your hard shell. Scorpio, lean into your soft side this month and accept the gifts from the world around you.

Sagittarius
Silly Sagittarius, it seems as though you aren’t getting the message. Despite your best efforts, not everyone will be enamored by your constant attempts at flattery. Lay off the overbearing compliments, and try to take a different approach.

Capricorn
You seem to walk around with your head in the clouds, but that’s not a bad thing. That way, you get a view of the beautiful sky. No matter the situation, you always see the best in people.

Aquarius
Congratulations, Aquarius, you’ve replaced Libra as the most evil sign. You are the ultimate foe, slaying the happiness of others and slashing through dreams. How dare you plow people down in your pursuit of pleasure. Reevaluate your priorities and try selflessness for once.

Pisces
You refract light wherever you go; you’re like a disco ball! Your constant shine makes the world a more beautiful place to be.