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PROPUBLICA PRESIDENT ROBIN SPARKMAN '87 DELIVERS STEVENSON LECTURE

By **Malaika Fonkem '29**
Reporter

On February 3, Ms. Robin Sparkman '87, the co-CEO and president of ProPublica, an investigative journalism organization, returned to Choate as this year's guest speaker for the annual Adlai Stevenson Lecture '18.

Since graduating from Choate, Ms. Sparkman has earned degrees and certificates from Wellesley College, Columbia University, and Harvard University. She began her career at the cable news channel MSNBC before moving to work at the publication, *The American Lawyer*. She later joined StoryCorps as its Chief Executive Officer and, since 2021, she has served as president of ProPublica, an independent nonprofit newsroom dedicated to investigative journalism in the public interest.

Throughout her speech, Ms. Sparkman emphasized the courage modern reporters must have today. "Courage is often very cold, painstaking, hard work, late nights, endless stress, and choosing to speak the truth anywhere," she said. "When you hold power to account, whether at a law firm or Supreme Court, you help bring a little more order, transparency, and honor into our complicated world."



Photo courtesy of Choate Photos

Robin Sparkman '87 speaks at the podium during the annual Adlai Stevenson Lecture.

Ms. Sparkman's speech was an all-encompassing account of her life told through the lens of journalism, starting on Choate's very own campus. She began with remarks about her school tour, interview, and her first official day on Choate's campus, something the entire student body could connect to.

Ms. Sparkman graduated having received various accolades across the HPRSS and English departments, most notably being named the class of '87 Stevenson

Fellow. Serving as Editor-in-Chief of *The Choate News*, Ms. Sparkman discussed her experience and introduction to controversial journalism at Choate, emphasizing the power of asking the right questions and the importance of free speech. Ms. Sparkman referenced a time during her freshman year when she had asked a past faculty member about a drug bust that involved Choate students and at first received negative comments, a meeting with the Head of School,

but never faced the threat of discipline after the fact. "I remember thinking two things at once: how the words of the opinion piece could have so much power that I was sitting there having to defend them, and at the same time, that I respected the First Amendment, that we could respectfully criticize the administration without fear of punishment," she reflected.

Following the speech, Ms. Sparkman held a Q&A session open to all students. When asked

about their thoughts on the Q&A, many students seemed to resonate with her message. Heather Beasley '28 said, "Her words were very inspiring. She seemed extremely committed to getting the full truth, and called us to take action against injustice even on smaller scales within our day-to-day lives." Mia Lo '29 added, "I appreciate her connection to the school, and I really respected her approach to hands-on journalism." Jenell Karikari '27 brought up the role

ProPublica played in various stories surrounding the United States government, saying, "[I] admire how she manages to stay neutral and reports on stories across various political opinions."

A large portion of the work done at ProPublica is investigative reporting that aims to expose injustice across partisan lines, whether big or small. Although Ms. Sparkman no longer works on the editorial side of journalism because she is a publisher at ProPublica, she referred back to one of her newsroom's biggest stories about Clarence Thomas, an esteemed member of the Supreme Court, and his luxury travel on Dallas billionaire Harlan Crow's private transportation. Ms. Sparkman cited the months of digging through public records, making calls, and, most importantly, courage, that it took to write this article.

Ms. Sparkman left the school with an important message harmonious with the beliefs of Mr. Stevenson himself, an homage to his message of the truth going hand in hand with unpopularity, urging students to have the courage to not only raise eyebrows at things that are unjust or false, but oppose them.

Malaika Fonkem may be reached at mfonkem29@choate.edu.

Electric Hearts for First Hurrah

By **Emma Woo '29**
Reporter

Bright lights, pulsing music, and a packed dance floor set the tone for this year's First Hurrah. Held on Valentine's Day, the annual dance brought fifth- and sixth-form students together for an evening of music and celebration during the winter term. First Hurrah is one of several annual dances at Choate, but it is unique in that it is reserved exclusively for fifth- and sixth-form students.

Director of Student Activities Ms. Alex Long explained that although each year's theme differs, the planning process behind First Hurrah tends to follow a consistent structure, beginning with selecting a theme. This year's theme was 'Electric Hearts,' transforming the dining hall with bright blues, hot pinks, and glowing neon accents. With the help of SCOPE to coordinate logistics with outside partners, like the DJ company that regularly collaborates with the School, the decorations, music, and refreshments were curated to reflect the chosen theme.

Because the dance fell on Valentine's Day this year, the refreshments leaned toward dessert-style offerings, complementing the playful and colorful aesthetic of 'Electric Hearts.' Students particularly enjoyed the chocolate strawberries and pretzels, cupcakes, and as always, the split-chocolate-and-marshmallow fountain. New this year, the renovated dining hall also housed a photo booth, where friends could gather to take instant pic-

tures they could take home with them. "It was a lot of fun to take quick photos with my friends using all the silly props, and it was a really cool way to keep memories," Ameya Patel '26 said.

For students, however, First Hurrah is more than just a dance and decorations. For fifth-formers, the event often represents a milestone into joining the upper forms. "It was the first time I went to an official junior-senior event, and it was special to be in that space. I felt so old," Rebecca Huang '27 said.

For sixth-formers, First Hurrah felt vastly different, almost as if it began the farewell events. "We had just a little over a hundred days left, and it was one of our last dances at Choate," Patel shared. "It felt nostalgic since it was like the beginning of the end, and I think my friends and I really just focused on cherishing those moments." She also noted that because the dance is limited to fifth-form and sixth-form students, the environment felt more close-knit than larger campus events. For many students, the dance serves as a reminder of how quickly their time at Choate is passing.

After several years at the School, many students have built strong friendships, creating a familiar atmosphere to celebrate a tradition that members of the community often look forward to. First Hurrah was a night where endless and lasting memories were built and students were given a chance to rejuvenate before the final stretch of the winter term.

Emma Woo may be reached at ewoo29@choate.edu.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: JOURNALISM IS OUR LEGACY

By **Reinah Lee '26**
Editor-in-Chief

Dear Reader,

Legacy. Legacy. What is a legacy? It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see. I want to thank Lin-Manuel Miranda for this wonderful lyric and for creating something magical out of something mundane. Listening to Hamilton got me through long editing nights, and these lyrics encapsulate my final reflections as I wrap up my last issue as Editor.

I'll admit, I came into this role last spring with a little too much ambition. I wanted to completely reconfigure the newsroom social stratosphere of the newsroom, to change the lives of editors through speeches and awe-inspiring leadership, and recreate the scene in High School Musical when Troy Bolton commands a cafeteria into synchronized choreography.

After attending pre-season this fall (Choate Leadership Experience), I left the programming with a surprising takeaway. Previously, I thought professionalism was about separating work from friends, but I was enlightened by Mr. Dennehy and Mr. Gilyard's friendship and how they embraced this connection to strengthen their work. I called our Managing Editor right away and told him it was settled: the editors of *The News* were going to be best friends, and that was final!

It's true, I wanted to turn occasional readers into Choate News stans, and the way to do that — in my mind — was to look inward. I had a vision of my legacy, an AirPlay of my excellence that didn't yet exist but lived in projected form: colored light on a white wall.



Photo courtesy of Reinah Lee '26

Look how cute we are #119.

Some of these ideas included our collaboration with the Deerfield Scroll this past fall. The hardest week of my life, but the proudest moment when I sent the file to print. With the help of anchors Nila, Odie, and Harper, we've launched the Choate Morning Show, a Monday talk show with weather and wits. Thanks to Ms. Markman, we've started an annual trip to the Harvard Crimson — a formative time to bond and take care of each other. For many, it is the first exposure to journalism training beyond our own newsroom. We've jump-started the Masthead Spotify Wrapped, Wallingford Restaurant Lottery, and the third year of What's Shakin' Bacon, thanks to our Arts, Local, and Outreach teams.

No doubt, we endured, and we worked hard. In the last two months, all I have been thinking about is the 119th Masthead of *The Choate News* — the leadership transition, the new year, and

the legacy we are leaving behind. If you're reading this, you are a part of 119, too. If you've ever had a byline in our paper, taken photographs for us, or even just followed us on Instagram @choatenews, you've contributed to the dedication, development, and efforts to uphold creative and ethical student journalism every day. 119, we are a seed, and this is our legacy.

To the Editors-in-Chief and Managing Editor who came before me, Fiona, who I want to be when I grow up, Lauren, who was the first person I called after becoming Editor, and Tiffany, who introduced me to *The News* in a Choate Transport SUV freshman year. I wouldn't be writing this editorial without your guidance and kick-ass leadership. It seems like forever ago that the four of us were all students at Choate at the same time, but your presence still lingers here through the seeds that have sprouted through your efforts. Every time a reader visits our website, they are able to find

an article in seconds. Any time an article is written, reporters read through the *Choate News* Manual, which was so carefully put together by your Mastheads. Through continued revision, launching new initiatives, and simply having the audacity to begin, I'm leaving 119 with this legacy.

This goodbye couldn't be complete without acknowledging our wonderful advisors, Ms. Markman and DeStefis, for overflowing with love and supporting our editors and me since 117. To Mariah from the Health Center, Josiah and Marquis from SAGE, Ivan and Matt from Community Safety, my Wednesday layout squad, Ethan and Ian, and all of our editors, writers, contributors, and readers, thank you for making these four years magical.

With love,
Reinah Elle Lee

Reinah Lee may be reached at rlee26@choate.edu.

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Read it, then recycle it.

Visuals by Reinah Lee, Ann Ma, James Davidson, and Katelyn Nguyen.



FRIDAY, MARCH 27th @ 7:00 PM
SATURDAY, MARCH 28th @ 7:00 PM
SUNDAY, MARCH 29th @ 2:00 PM
Colony Hall

GALLOPING INTO THE NEW YEAR WITH LUNAR BANQUET

By **Sabrina Liu '28**
Associate Editor

More than 200 students filled Ruutz-Rees on February 13 for Choate's annual Lunar Banquet, a student-organized celebration of the Lunar New Year that combined traditional food, cultural performances, and a strong sense of community. The Lunar Banquet tradition began in 1998 as a small Chinese Club celebration and has since moved across campus, from Ruutz-Rees to the Humanities Rotunda, the dining hall, and the Library Reading Room. Growing into one of the largest student-run cultural events each year, the Lunar Banquet is now co-organized with the Choate Korean Friendship Association (CKFA).

According to longtime Chinese Club faculty advisor Dr. Carol Chen-Lin, the Lunar Banquet first began in 1998, shortly after the founding of the club. Over the years, the celebration has expanded across campus spaces and, in recent years, has become free and open to all students, making it more inclusive and accessible to the community.

While the format has evolved, the purpose has remained the same, bringing students together to celebrate Asian culture.

Behind the scenes, months of planning go into making the night successful. Chinese Club President Ryan Liu '26 explained that one of the most challenging parts was juggling many responsibilities at once.

"I think coordinating with different groups such as SAC and local restaurants, and even with both Chinese and CKFA cabinets, took a lot of time and effort," Liu said. "We have to do different things at the same time, like we have to purchase decorations, decide the food order within our limited budget,



Students with Dr. Chen-Lin at Lunar Banquet.

especially when the [Equity and Inclusion] office shrinks the budget this year, and also to coordinate the space and performance."

Liu added that the lack of strict deadlines made planning even harder. "There's no set deadline, homework on Canvas to remind you, and [you] just have to not procrastinate and finish everything as soon as possible to make sure there's extra time for you to make adjustments before the actual Lunar Banquet starts."

Secretary of CKFA Ben Lee '27 said that logistics were especially time-consuming. "The most time-consuming part was definitely

organizing the wait list and also decorating the dining hall," said Lee. "Also, a big part of it was our performance — getting together to practice together."

Each year, food plays a central part in the celebration, and this year's banquet was no exception. Liu explained that he designed the menu to represent Chinese culture. "[I] added some popular dishes like Chongqing spicy chicken, which I know a lot of people like, and I think better represent the Chinese culture, because it's less like American Chinese food and more like authentic Chinese food," he said.

Lee emphasized that the menu focused on familiar home-cooked meals. "We went with classics. We got Korean food, Korean fried chicken, fried rice ... dumplings, the food we usually eat in our homes," he said.

Performances were another major part of the celebration, with students choosing how they wanted to participate. "It's more about having fun with friends than about how good the actual performance is," Liu said.

Despite careful planning, unexpected challenges arose. Liu shared that decorating took longer than expected and that technical difficulties slowed

performance rehearsals. He also described the start of the event as "challenging and chaotic" when more than 200 students arrived at once.

For many attendees, however, the night felt warm and welcoming. Freshman Lucas Du '29 attended his first Lunar Banquet this year and was immediately struck by the decorations. "I thought it was very well decorated, and I liked the colors," Du said. His favorite part of the night was the food. "My favorite part was the food, because it tasted very good," he said, adding that the Korean chicken wings stood out most.

From the faculty perspective, the Lunar Banquet represents more than a single evening of celebration. Ms. Ashley Sinclair, Director of Global Engagement, emphasized the importance of cultural connection and inclusion.

"[It] represents the ability of our students to be able to celebrate something they would have done at home away from home, and be in community with one another," Ms. Sinclair said. She added that she appreciates how students explain Lunar New Year traditions before performances begin, helping others understand the holiday. "Our students really do take the reins on a lot of this," Ms. Sinclair said, noting that while faculty support logistics, the event itself is largely student-driven.

Dr. Chen-Lin also reflected on the collaboration behind the scenes. She expressed gratitude to Mr. Tim Yun for picking up the Korean food from Bonchon in New Haven, as well as Ms. Ashley Sinclair, Ms. Malika Beach-Mehrotra, Ms. Le'ah Griggs, Mrs. Kristin Chin, Mr. Bill Chin, Mr. Gene Wie, SAC Director Ms. Alex Long, and Colleen Kazar for their time and coordination in making the event possible.

As attendance continues to grow, organizers and faculty alike hope to eventually find a space large enough to accommodate everyone who wishes to attend.

The Lunar Banquet is more than a cultural celebration. Through student leadership, collaboration, and shared tradition, it continues to bring the Choate community together, creating a night where students can feel connected, supported, and at home — even far from home.

Sabrina Liu may be reached at sliu28@choate.edu.

Celebrating the Library's Centennial

By **Nick Aston '28**
Staff Contributor

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Andrew Mellon Library, a cornerstone of Choate's academic life for a century. With its original crown molding, antique portraits, and cozy fireplaces, the Library continues to serve as a hub of curiosity and collaboration. As students step into the Reading Room, they are welcomed by quiet chatter and the rhythm of keyboards as peers settle in for nightly study sessions.

The history of the Andrew Mellon Library extends far beyond its construction during the 1925–1926 school year, when it began as a small collection of books from the personal library of the Headmistress of Rosemary Hall. In the century since, the Library has undergone numerous updates to expand student access to resources. As research methods have shifted from physical texts to online databases, the Library now uses a digital catalog system rather than the original card catalog, making research more efficient and accessible for students.

"I think access to technology really changed everything," Director of the Andrew Mellon Library Dr. Sherry L. Marrotte Newman said. "Over the last five years, access to other community resources, such as textbooks, chargers, Apple pencils, and fidget items, has helped make the Library more accessible and useful to the student body."

Dr. Newman also emphasized the importance of student voices in shaping the Library's future, noting that feedback plays a key role in improving its offerings. "I wouldn't know what [students

are] missing until I hear about it, so I think that it would be really nice to hear more from students," said Dr. Newman.

For many students, the Library serves as more than just a place to access tools and information; it is a space for connecting with one another amidst busy schedules. "I always go to the Reading Room to enjoy time with my friends," Chase Gore-Grimes '27 said. "We just do our work while we talk and enjoy ourselves. That's why I love the Library."

Gore-Grimes also shared her appreciation for the Library's multi-use spaces, such as the silent section and study rooms. These spaces address students' diverse needs, making the Library a one-stop shop for everything from recording podcasts to finishing an English paper.

"When you see other people doing work, it kind of makes you want to do work," Gore-Grimes added, describing how the collaborative atmosphere motivates productivity.

At its core, the Andrew Mellon Library reflects Choate's academic culture, where quiet study is balanced with collaboration and community. "The Andrew Mellon Library is a really nice distillation of Choate's dedication to both tradition and progress," Library Assistant Ms. Cole Whitmore said.

Ms. Whitmore's words resonate as the Library team gears up to celebrate its 100th anniversary. The celebration will take place on Monday, May 4, featuring cake, music, photos, and giveaways to honor a century of learning in one of Choate's most beloved spaces.

Nick Aston may be reached at naston28@choate.edu.

College Kickoff Guides Families Through the Admissions Process

By **Eliza O'Neil '27**
Staff Contributor

The annual College Kickoff united families and students for a weekend of information about the college admissions process, aiming to reframe it from a stress-inducing experience into one centered on joy, pride, and growth.

The main event was a Saturday morning panel in Colony Hall, featuring keynote speakers from Georgetown University, Pomona College, SUNY Binghamton University, and Mount Holyoke College. Though representing very different educational communities, each admissions officer emphasized the importance of authenticity and shared insights into how applications are evaluated. Dean of College Counseling Ms. Marcia Landesman underscored this message, noting that "there is no magic formula to getting in [to college]. College admission professionals appreciate authenticity over curated applications."

The weekend also included a family session on financial aid and standardized testing, as well as opportunities for parents to meet directly with college counselors.

For many attendees, the event was both reassuring and inspiring, particularly for parents who gained a clearer understanding of their role in the process. Mrs. Niroupa Shah P'25 and P'27 shared that "the morning panel guests were very candid and emphatic in reminding us what our priorities and theirs are in evaluating candidates," and that it was helpful to receive guidance on the parental component. "It was valuable, as a parent, to hear that my role is to take a back seat," she said.

Behind the scenes, College Kickoff was the result of months of preparation. Ms. Landesman



Invited college admissions representatives posing for photo.

explained that planning often begins in the fall, noting, "We invited our speakers back in September, so we've been thinking about College Kickoff for months." She highlighted that the event requires a coordinated effort across the entire College Counseling office, particularly from Mr. Eric Stahura and Ms. Megan Jackson, as well as collaboration with campus operations, including ABM, SAGE, and ITS. She mentioned that the entire team is prepared to adapt quickly to unforeseen circumstances, such as inclement weather or last-minute speaker cancellations, describing them as "very nimble" and saying, "We're ready ... if anything comes our way."

A major focus this year was addressing misinformation online, where students are frequently exposed to misleading or oversimplified narratives. On this notion, Ms. Landesman shared, "In a moment where social media is full of college admission disinformation,

we'd like students to hear from and listen to trusted experts." She further reflected on the motivation for this priority, offering, "I hope that students will listen carefully to the people who actually read applications and make decisions, rather than strangers on social media."

For many students in the Class of 2027, the early Saturday-morning wake-up was worth it; the event fundamentally shifted how they now think about the college admissions process. Juju Iannace '27 highlighted that her biggest takeaway was "to learn more about yourself to understand what you truly want through your college experience." Each of the institutions represented sought to inspire students to deepen their knowledge of their individual schools and their "why" for attending, warning against the potential pitfalls of obsessing over prestige or acceptance rates. Iannace also appreciated how each panelist focused on student agency, sharing a core insight

she gained: "Students are more in the driver's seat ... you're choosing the colleges you want."

Sophia Lind '27 echoed this sentiment, noting, "I felt like I got a lot of good information about how to approach the application process, and I feel a lot more prepared." For Lind, a particular newfound understanding is that "It's not just looking at your test scores and grades, but your whole identity," and she appreciated the admissions officer's emphasis on "building a community" as they crafted their incoming classes.

For parents and students alike, College Kickoff served as a reminder that the admissions journey should not be rooted in fear, but in excitement and exploration. As Landesman reflected, "This is a big and important process, but students will be encouraged to bring humor and joy to their search. Truly, it can be fun."

Eliza O'Neil may be reached at eooneil27@choate.edu.

BIG BROTHERS AND BIG SISTERS: WALLINGFORD'S COMMITMENT TO MENTORSHIP

By **Jai Midha '27**
Associate Editor

Every kid matters. That is what Big Brothers Big Sisters of Connecticut (BBBSCT) tries to encapsulate in their organization, as they work to uphold their goal of being the state's leading mentoring organization since 1966. They pair kids deemed 'at risk' with professionally trained mentors, being one of the few programs in the country to organize 1:1 relationships for kids in need. In doing so, they give every kid a shot at success. Recently, at their 60th-anniversary annual gala, Wallingford's very own town mayor, Mr. Vincent Cervoni, was recognized as an "outstanding community leader."

Mayor Cervoni was once the chair of Big Brothers Big Sisters' Meriden-Wallingford Chapter, serving kids from the town of Wallingford. After receiving news of his honoring at the gala, Mayor Cervoni said, "I was surprised. I've supported the agency here and there over the past 20 years ... then this came along," he said. "To be recognized for something I did two decades ago is nice. It's the kind of thing that I really



Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

did to support the agency ... and to be recognized for that so many years later is just, to say the least, heartwarming."

BBBSCT Vice President of Philanthropy Ms. Sheryl Spivack Braun spoke about the selection process for choosing this year's honorees: "We look back at major contributors, and Mayor Cervoni was one of

those major contributors, so we invited him to be honored," she said. "His great work ethic and his influence in Wallingford are very important. Having Mayor Cervoni involved really raises the profile. And, as a result, we had some different corporate entities, as well as some other organizations, supporting our cause."

In Wallingford, programs like BBBSCT still exist. The Spanish Community of Wallingford (SCOW) and Boy and Girl Scouts provide similar mentoring services. But, as Mayor Cervoni points out, "What's unique about Big Brothers, Big Sisters in the United States, is that they focus on the one-to-one relationship — the one

child, one mentor." In fact, Choate itself used to have a similar program that was associated with BBBSCT. Through BBBSCT's site-based mentoring program, "Choate students could be mentors to young kids in the Wallingford community. Wallingford residents, the littles, as we call them, would go to some place at Choate so that

they could have this one-on-one activity and time together," said Mayor Cervoni.

However, with recent cuts in federal funding, programs like BBBSCT, which receive government funding to maintain operation, have to turn to other sources to keep their mission alive. BBBSCT has a committee of people who use their networks to secure funding from corporations like Stanley Black & Decker or Burns & McDonnell.

Surprisingly, this year, despite government cuts, BBBSCT has received much more funding than in previous years. Ms. Braun said, "I think that the committee knows how we were so affected by government cuts, and so they really set out to make sure that we got community support, and our honorees, like Vinny, reached out to their entire circle of influence to invite them to come and be funders." In doing so, Ms. Braun highlighted the efforts of Choate's very own town mayor in supporting BBBSCT's cause and fulfilling their mission.

Jai Midha may be reached at jmidha27@choate.edu.

Wallingford Says "I Do" To Community Reading

By **Sophie Chung '27**
Staff Contributor

What if an entire town read the same book and turned it into a month-long celebration? Well, the One Book One Wallingford program, facilitated by the Wallingford Public Library (WPL), aims to bring the town community together in reading and discussing the same book. Instead of announcing the title of the chosen work, the WPL builds suspense by releasing a series of clues. In doing so, the program sparked conversation and friendly guessing across the community. By late January, the book was revealed to be *The Wedding People* by Alison Espach, a New

York Times bestseller. The program has held numerous book discussions and events related to this year's selection, which will culminate in a book signing with Ms. Espach this April.

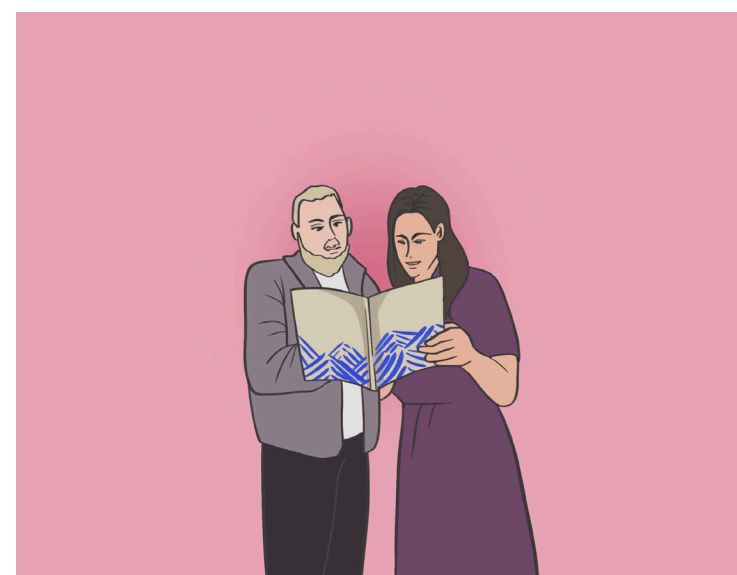
The *Wedding People* is about a professor, Phoebe Stone, who endures significant trauma throughout her life. The novel later explores how her pain and resilience at a wedding force her to confront her past and reconsider what healing might look like. WPL Librarian Ms. Rachel Taylor did overcome challenges while organizing the event, especially in "finding something that will suit a lot of different people's reading

pace and a lot of different perspectives." Cindy Hagan, another librarian tasked with selecting this year's read, picked *The Wedding People* because it discusses a number of topics, such as mental health and self-empowerment, that Ms. Hagan believes will resonate with local readers. Ms. Taylor similarly hopes that people will leave this program "with a feeling of unity in being part of this town-wide program."

In addition to the book discussions, the program has also organized a number of events that build upon the book's themes. One event called, *Let's Talk About It: Suicide Prevention and The Strategies that*

Impact Lives, is a presentation of suicide prevention methods, warning signs, and misconceptions surrounding suicide, open for adults and teenagers to participate. Another program, titled *Glamorous Giving: A Formal Wear Clothing Drive*, by Creative Consignments CT, encourages locals to donate lightly used formal wear. Choate Librarian Ms. Nicole Brothers also worked to promote these programs and events as a Choate representative on the committee.

Through the One Book One Wallingford program, the WPL is working to transform this novel into a town-wide conversation. By pairing *The Wedding People* with discussions and events, the pro-



Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

gram reflects the power that books hold in uniting communities.

Sophie Chung may be reached at schung27@choate.edu.

THOUSANDS LACE UP TO SUPPORT REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

By **Ava Hult-Falk '27**
Reporter

On Sunday, February 8, nearly 1,800 people gathered inside the Wilbur Cross High School gymnasium on a cold morning to prepare for the annual Run for Refugees 5K. Hosted by Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS), the Run for Refugees is one of the nonprofit's largest annual fundraisers. This year marked the race's 19th anniversary, and it raised more than \$100,000 to support immigrant and refugee communities across Connecticut.

New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker participated in the 5-kilometer run and described its high turnout as a strong reflection of the city's values. In a Yale Daily News article, he said, "Thousands of people will come out [to run in the race] to make a statement that New Haven is a place that embraces refugees, embraces immigrants." He

was right, as later that morning, a huge crowd gathered to run the 5k.

Given America's new anti-immigration policies, this year's race felt particularly important for those in support of immigrants. In the aforementioned Yale Daily News article, IRIS's executive director, Ms. Maggie Mitchell Salem, described America's current state as "a pretty cold policy environment for immigrants." She continued, describing how despite the policies, the IRIS team is "showing up" and is there for the refugees. "We won't give up. We are here for them," she said, explaining how both IRIS and the greater population of New Haven have shown continuous outpourings of support for their community, regardless of individuals' immigration status or personal background.

Ms. Salem also shared that IRIS organizers spoke with the New Haven Police Department before the event to discuss the

risk of ICE agents anticipating and attending the race. Some participants were very fearful that ICE agents would disrupt the morning. Fortunately, no agents showed up, and the race was a success. However, the fact that IRIS felt the need to plan for this possibility emphasizes the weight of this year's race and its broader cause.

The legal and social changes in our society have significantly increased the organization's workload. After President Donald Trump P'00 returned to office in 2025, IRIS lost the federal funding that previously supported its refugee resettlement program. Now, IRIS has elected to no longer participate in the federal refugee admissions program after the Trump administration focused it on resettling white Afrikaners from South Africa. While the organization is no longer relocating newly arriving refugees through the federal resettlement system, it has continued to help families already living in Connecticut.

In a year full of policy changes and funding cuts, the Run for Refugees meant even more than it has before. The 1,800 participants who chose to run for IRIS, despite freezing temperatures, showed that New Haven is standing with its immigrant residents during this scary and disheartening time.

Master's Manna Serves Over 21k Locals Amid Rising Demand

By **Suyeong Hahn '27**
Reporter

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Master's Manna, a local food bank founded in 2006 to support individuals and families experiencing homelessness and food insecurity. Since its founding, the organization has dedicated itself and worked with thousands of volunteers, serving 21,983 people last year alone. The most significant service is the organization's food pantry, which allows those in need to come and pick out their own food.

According to Executive Director Ms. Nancy Stockman, this flexibility is important because "some people are vegetarian, some have dietary preferences or health restrictions, and others, culturally, want to eat certain foods." By allowing families to shop for themselves, they can choose items that best suit their needs and preferences rather than receiving pre-selected packaged goods.

The organization's efforts also include the "dining room," which supports anyone in need throughout the week by providing free breakfast and lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays, along with dinner on Wednesdays. Last year, 22,188 meals were served, demonstrating the scale and impact of the "dining room" on the local community.

Despite remarkable changes over the years, Master's



Graphic by Leah Han '27/The Choate News

Manna's growth and journey have been marked by many challenges. Since the organization relies mostly on fundraising and donations, it often faces supply shortages. "We don't get federal funding," Ms. Stockman explained. "We have a board of directors that fundraises and looks for donations." When the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides payment cards for grocery shopping, paused its benefits, many families suddenly found themselves lacking food access. "They had to make their own living and called us up," Ms. Stockman recalled. "That's why

we had so many shoppers last year. We had to help so many people in October and November who suddenly found themselves needing assistance."

While demand is beginning to stabilize, operations have been improved by requiring shoppers to book appointments in advance and through the continued support of volunteers. "We are grateful for all the help we get," Ms. Stockman said, as Master's Manna continues to mitigate food insecurity by distributing food resources closer to communities in need.

Suyeong Hahn may be reached at shahn27@choate.edu.



Photo courtesy of New Haven Independent

Runners participate in the Run for Refugees 5k despite cold weather.

Ava Hult-Falk may be reached at ahultfalk27@choate.edu.

Out with the old...

THE CHOATE NEWS

119TH MASTHEAD VOL. CXIX



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...in with the News

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IMPLEMENT

IMMERSIVE LEARNING

By **Reid Bock '27**
Associate Editor

Every Choate student knows how each term unfolds — the steady pattern of classes, projects, and tests. But every once in a while, that pattern breaks. The classroom is left behind, and learning goes on the road. Whether it's exploring Hartford's historic homes or wandering through an art gallery in New Haven, field trips capture something campus learning alone cannot: seeing classroom curriculum applied to real-life experiences.

Field trips at Choate are rare treasures. However, they shouldn't be. Choate should incorporate more field trips into the curriculum because, when done thoughtfully, they deepen understanding, strengthen class connections, and fuel curiosity. Of course, that does not mean every class should hop on a bus every week. The key is balance, knowing which subjects benefit most from out-of-classroom experiences, and how to make those moments impactful.

American Studies teacher Dr. Amber Hodge recently helped organize a trip for their American Studies class to the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center and the Mark Twain House in Hartford. The idea was simple: bringing literature and history together to the site where it actually occurred. As Dr. Hodge explained, students were "learn[ing] about [the buildings'] cultural context and how we remember and why we remember." Through this experience, students were able to encounter history firsthand rather than simply reading about it in textbooks.

Jaxx Friedman '27, a student in American Studies, agreed with Dr. Hodge. "[It was] great just to see [the Mark Twain House] in person

and use what we learned in class," he said. That sense of discovery, of stepping into an author's world, cannot be replicated. No in-class activity can replicate that moment when the lessons you have studied appear in front of you.

Admittedly, field trips are not simple to plan. Choate's calendar is tight, and missing multiple classes can cause ripple effects across departments. Field trips take time and often require an army of emails and exemptions to pull off. Dr. Hodge admitted that planning them is "very time-consuming," though they added, "I thought it was worth it for our project." The trade-off between logistical difficulty and the opportunity for interactive learning is worth acknowledging.

Some subjects, like math, may not be as well-suited for off-campus learning as others. As Friedman said, "I can't see ... how you would translate a pre-calculus class to a field trip." But other classes, such as art or language, thrive outside the classroom.

Chloe Lee '26 recalled taking just one field trip in her third-form French class to the Yale Art Gallery. Lee said that "it was nice seeing how a lot of the French that we talked about could translate into a real-life experience."

Nothing done in the classroom matches the power of seeing what you have studied unfold in real life. When you witness lessons take shape before your own eyes, learning becomes experiential, enabling deeper understanding. If Choate is truly committed to experiential learning, then adding more field trips to class curricula is a worthwhile investment.

Reid Bock is a fifth-former from Phoenix, AZ. He may be reached at rbock27@choate.edu.

BREAKFAST AND SLEEPING-IN: THE CASE FOR A AND G

By **Anna Park '29**
Opinions Writer

The part of the school day that most people, including me, look forward to most are free blocks. For Choate students, free blocks are much-needed respites in the middle of the class day. They can become sleep-ins, extended lunches, or valuable time to meet with teachers and catch up on work. However, it is often debated which free block combination reigns superior.

The combination I would prefer is A and G. Spread-out frees, rather than back-to-back ones, create more breathing room throughout the week. I currently have D and E free, which means I have four classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. These two days nightmares, as they also include my most rigorous and content-heavy classes. I've caught myself wishing more than once for at least one free block per day so I don't have to go through the ordeal of four classes. Having A and G free perfectly meets this hope because it gives students a free block every day of the week except Wednesday. Conveniently, a typical Wednesday schedule only includes three periods. With A and G as free blocks, no academic day would feel unmanageable.

Yet, there are some advocates for back-to-back frees. "I have C and D free. I think having two blocks in a row is really



Graphic by Ann Ma '28/The Choate News

nice because it allows you to be productive and chunk your time," Mila Mak '29 said. "I only have one class on Wednesday, and [my first] Friday class starts at 12 p.m." This is a valid point; my D and E free blocks allow me to relax in my room for up to 3.5 hours if I want to. But my current free blocks don't give me as many sleep-ins as I would like.

As a highly stressed-out student trying to get through all my commitments and homework, I

end up going to bed later than I should. To me, sleep-ins feel like a saving grace. Having A free means easing into Monday mornings with the gift of a sleep-in, while G free could mean starting as late as 10:15 a.m. on Thursday. That kind of rest makes a true difference.

In addition to the late start on Thursday, having G free allows students to end the school week at 2:05 p.m., giving them an early start to the weekend.

A schedule that distributes stress throughout the week rath-

er than concentrating it on one day allows students to perform better, rest more, and approach their work with increased focus and energy. While each combination of free blocks has its advantages and drawbacks, spread-out free blocks like A and G offer balance, and in a place as demanding as Choate, balance is a necessity.

Anna Park is a third-former from Seoul, South Korea. She may be reached at apark29@choate.edu.

LOST SOCKS AND LOST PATIENCE

By **Laveenya Seenivasagam '27**
Opinions Writer

For many Choate students, the laundry room is one of the most frustrating shared spaces on campus. While it is meant to be a practical and efficient place, poor etiquette and limited resources often turn it into a source of stress.

Especially on busy days like Sundays, overcrowding, mishandled clothes, and a lack of enforced rules make doing laundry more complicated than it needs to be. Choate students need clearer expectations for

laundry room etiquette, and the School must invest in improving its laundry rooms. Without these changes, small inconveniences will persist and continue to provoke unnecessary conflicts.

One of the most common frustrations students experience is having their clothes taken or removed without permission. Rose Lightfoot '26's clothes were taken out early and fell behind the machine. Similarly, Jordy Miller '27 added, "It's pretty bad; sometimes, people take out other people's stuff before the cycle has ended." Such behavior shows a disregard for personal belongings. In some dorms

without proper laundry rooms, clothes are occasionally thrown onto the floor or left in hallways, which adds to the frustration of students and faculty living in those dorms as well.

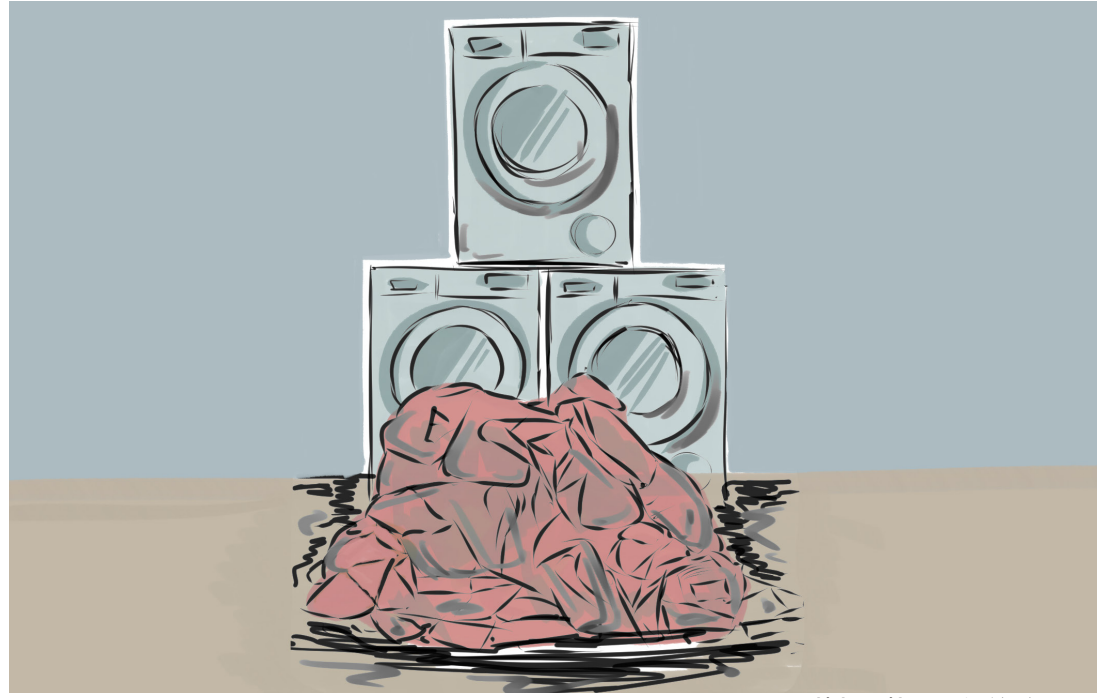
Good laundry room etiquette is simple. Students should wait until cycles are finished, manage their laundry timers, handle others' clothes with care, and never leave laundry on the floor. Systematic use of washers and dryers, along with mutual respect, would significantly improve the experience. Unfortunately, these expectations are not always clearly communicated or enforced. Many students agree

that laundry room etiquette is rarely discussed in dorm meetings, especially early in the year when other dorm rules are introduced. Clearer guidelines established at the beginning of the school year can help set expectations.

While regulating student behavior may relieve some frustration, the issue of overcrowding in laundry facilities needs to be addressed simultaneously. For dorms like Bernhard House, Tenney House, or Memorial House with large numbers of students and an insufficient number of machines, situations such as leaving others' clothes on the floor are bound to happen. To improve these facilities, dorms should install designated baskets for removing finished laundry and expand laundry facilities with more washers and dryers to reduce conflict and overcrowding. Laundry rooms need to be expanded and better equipped.

Better laundry room etiquette is necessary at Choate. Crowding, mishandled clothes, and unclear expectations negatively affect students' daily lives. By establishing clear rules and improving facilities, the laundry room can become a more functional and respectful shared space.

Laveenya Seenivasagam is a fifth-former from Puchong, Malaysia. She may be reached at lseenivasagam27@choate.edu.



Graphic by David Ionescu '27/The Choate News

Conflict Block Creates More Conflict

By **Jinx Hartong '27**
Opinions Writer

For Choate students, Term End Experience (TEE) week is arguably the most stressful time of the year. The library fills to the brim with students, headphones on, and eyes fixated on glowing screens. Coffee cups and highlighter caps clutter every surface as evidence of long nights and even earlier mornings.

For many, the Monday morning "Reading Period" once served as a crucial pause during TEE time: a rare stretch of structured time to sneak in some last-minute review. Now, instead of having Monday morning off to prepare

for the upcoming week, students have been given a Wednesday afternoon "Conflict Block." The intention is understandable. For years, Wednesday afternoon athletic competitions often pulled students out of certain TEE blocks early, forcing them to juggle travel, competitions, and missed assessments. The Conflict Block was introduced to provide flexibility and better support student-athletes and ensure they can balance their commitments.

However, for many others, the removal of the Reading Period has intensified an already overwhelming week. Without the carved-out time on Monday, the burden of final preparation

falls onto the weekends, compressing what was once a steady review period into two already frantic days. Instead of feeling prepared, many students feel scattered and rushed, struggling to organize their time in the final stretch before exams. "Reading Period was the time when I got most of my work time, especially [for] last-minute review," Rahe-wa Ocbazgi '27 said. "Without that time, it's harder to feel fully prepared going into exams."

Still, that does not mean this Conflict Block is without value, as it directly addresses a long-standing imbalance for student-athletes. By increasing flexibility in the schedule, Choate acknowledges the de-

mands placed on students who balance both academics and athletics.

In that sense, the change reflects an effort to evolve and improve. Choate is recognizing the demands put on student-athletes in a new way and has created the Conflict Block in response to those challenges. The tension surrounding this shift does not erase its benefits and instead highlights how difficult it is to design a schedule that serves everyone equally during the most stressful time of the term.

Jinx Hartong is a fifth-former from Chanhassen, MN. She may be reached at jhartong27@choate.edu.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF EDITORIAL INTEGRITY

By **Maia Shah '27**
Local News Section Editor

Dartmouth College's student newspaper, *The Dartmouth*, is America's oldest college newspaper and a pinnacle of student journalism for reporters like myself. Recently, I was shocked to read of a Dartmouth student being compensated for writing an op-ed piece that was edited and crafted by administrators to promote the school's newest artificial intelligence project, Evergreen AI. What struck me initially was not just the shadiness of the story and the inappropriate nature of the request by the school administration, but the deeper implications for journalistic integrity in a volatile political environment that demands its protection.

It's easy to write off this specific offense as an embarrassing mistake, yet it feels inseparable from broader trends in today's media landscape. Over the last few years, conversations about journalistic integrity and the monopolization of the media have centered on the growing influence of corporate wealth in determining the dissemination of information. When Jeff Bezos, the true personification of corporate interest, purchased *The Washington Post*, the question became what it meant for private wealth to hold such a significant stake in a paper trusted to hold power accountable without bias.

While the Dartmouth story is much smaller in scale, it begs the

exact same question: If a student is compensated to write an opinion tied inextricably to institutional interests, and if that compensation is not made transparent to readers, then the publication blurs the line between journalism and subsidized propaganda. I cannot stress the importance of discerning between personal opinions and financial incentives. It is clearly visible at the national level: as billionaires buy up the press and fire entire newsrooms, society must reckon with the perilous state of quality journalism. However, as student reporters who strive to uphold the principles of journalistic integrity, it is concerning to see the same erosion so accurately mirror national problems.

People read an op-ed with the assumption that it reflects the author's raw and unedited opinion. As a student journalist, I find the lack of this distinction today and the blurred lines between impartiality, power, and financial influence troubling. Student newspapers, of course, are uniquely complicated in design. Because we operate within and are funded by the institutions we report for, there are certain pressures and considerations that are not always visible, but are definitely present. It requires diligence, thoughtfulness, and true commitment to ensure that our pages remain independent avenues for publishing student thought. I firmly believe that the current intersection of



Graphic by Ann Ma '28/The Choate News

capitalism and journalism only underscores this responsibility.

When billionaires buy a respected publication, the public must ask if editorial independence can still exist. When a student publication confronts cases of compensated opinion, the scenario and scale may differ, but the principle does not change. If we accept and normalize these relationships,

ethical journalism will become impossible to restore. In both cases, readers are left to question whether money and personal agendas exert undue influence over the narratives they consume.

In a time marked by polarization, misinformation, and declining press freedom, the Dartmouth incident is even more important to document and dissect. While

the \$81.25 the Dartmouth student received for his work on the column might be little enough to be overlooked, it is the symbolism of the act that is important to scrutinize. If we believe journalism still matters, then the independence of even a school newspaper cannot be treated as trivial. It must be defended without exception. After all, if we normalize the idea that insti-

tutions can subsidize student opinion, we cannot be surprised or even outraged when influence similarly controls major publications in the future. It is simple: opinions, at any publication of any level or prestige, cannot be bought, sold, or coerced.

Maia Shah is a fifth-former from New Canaan, CT. She may be reached at mshah27@choate.edu.

THE MYTH OF THE MERITOCRACY

By **Leela Curry '29**
Opinions Writer

For generations, the phrase "the American Dream" has carried a simple promise: if you work hard, play by the rules, and persevere, you can build a better life than the one you were born into. It's a story woven into school lessons, political speeches, and family histories. Yet today, as housing prices soar, student debt balloons, and wages struggle to keep pace with inflation, many Americans are asking a once-unthinkable question: Is the American Dream still real, or has it become a myth?

The dream was never just about wealth. At its core, it meant opportunity — the chance to move up the economic ladder regardless of your background. For much of the twentieth century, that promise seemed attainable for millions. Expanding industries created stable jobs, public investment widened access to education, and homeownership became a realistic goal for working families. While those gains were never evenly distributed, often excluding women and people of color, the overall sense of upward mobility fueled national optimism.

Today, the picture is more complicated. Economic mobility has slowed, and the gap between the rich and the rest has widened dramatically. A college degree,

once considered a reliable ticket to security, has lost its guarantee of a stable job and often burdens one with heavy student debt. Rent consumes a growing share of income, making it harder to save, invest, or even start a family. For many young adults, the milestones that defined the American Dream — owning a home, raising children, and retiring comfortably — have begun to feel distant.

Critics argue these realities prove that the dream is dead, pointing to stagnant wages, declining union power, and policies that favor wealth over work. In this view, hard work alone is no longer enough; where you start matters more than how hard you try. If opportunity depends on uncontrollable preconditions, the promise of equal chance becomes empty.

Yet declaring the American Dream dead can overlook evidence of its enduring resilience. For instance, immigrants continue to arrive believing that effort can still yield opportunities unavailable elsewhere, and entrepreneurs from modest backgrounds still create successful businesses. Additionally, first-generation college students still break barriers that their parents could not.

These stories are real, not merely rare exceptions conjured for inspiration, but they often require extraordinary persistence in a system that no longer makes success the default outcome of effort.

Perhaps the more honest ques-

tion is not whether the American Dream exists, but for whom it exists, and at what cost. The dream has become difficult to reach, but not impossible. It demands more resources upfront, education, capital, and stability upfront than it once did, effectively raising the barrier to entry. As a result, the dream increasingly favors those who already have a head start.

If the American Dream is to remain more than a slogan, it must evolve from a passive promise into an active project. That means investing in affordable education, addressing housing shortages, ensuring fair wages, and creating pathways for people to recover from failure rather than be permanently set back by it. The dream should not require perfect decisions, flawless timing, or inherited advantages.

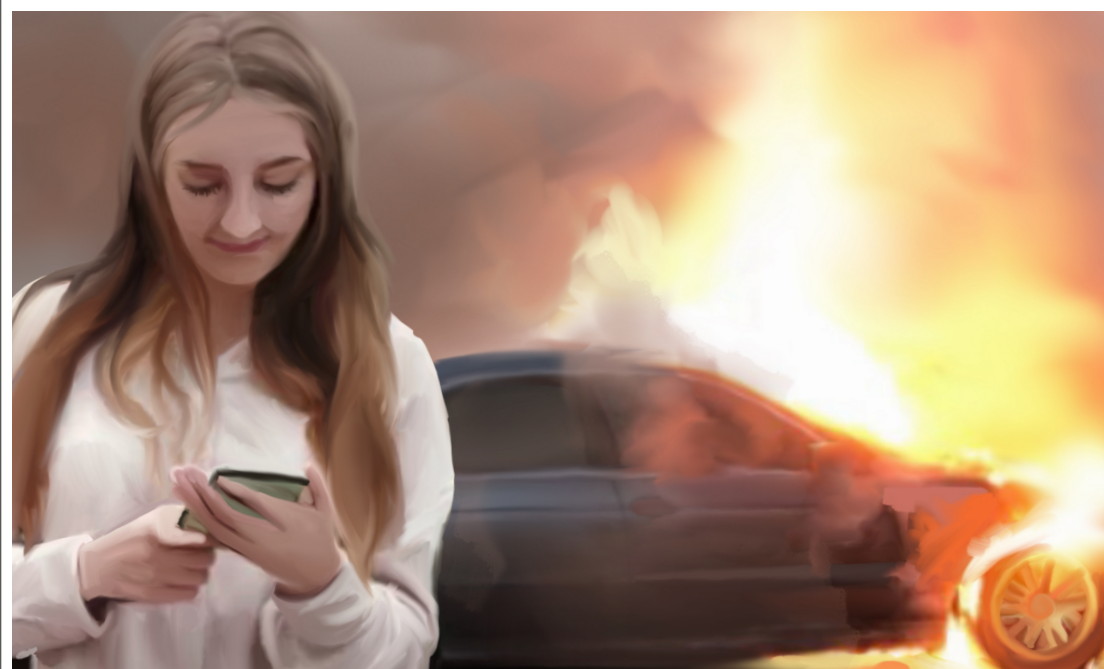
So, is the American Dream real? The answer depends on how we define it. If it means guaranteed success through effort alone, it never truly existed. If it means the possibility of upward mobility, expanded by smart policy, shared responsibility, and collective will, then it is still alive, but fragile. Whether it endures will depend less on nostalgia for what it once was and more on choices made now to ensure opportunity is not a privilege.

Leela Curry is a third-former from Darien, CT. She may be reached at lcurry29@choate.edu.



Graphic by Ann Ma '28/The Choate News

SCROLLING PAST HUMANITARIAN CRISIS



Graphic by Sienna Kim '28/The Choate News

By **Shaleen Sheth '27**
Staff Contributor

Human rights have become hashtags. Over the last few years, activism has become more visible than ever — and paradoxically, less consistent. Scroll through any social media platform, and you'll find an outpouring of solidarity: reels attempting to spread information, political statements in bios, and donation links are just a few of the examples. Some believe this is the democratization of advocacy, proof that social justice activism is accessible to anyone with a phone and an internet connection.

However, if social media advocates claim to care about true global justice, their concern cannot hinge on what will generate engagement. Otherwise, what we call advocacy is more a performance measured by the attention it attracts than by the awareness it raises.

Let's take the example of the conflict between Israel and Hamas. Between 2023 and 2025, Western cities and schools saw massive demonstrations in support of civilians in Gaza. Marches filled the streets of urban areas. Universities cancelled their graduation ceremonies. Influencers and celebrities began taking to social media in droves, speaking passionately about the responsibility to defend the oppressed and stand against injustice wherever it appears in our world.

Yet, as recent anti-govern-

ment protests in Iran led in large part by women resisting state-imposed religious mandates have erupted, the global response has been far quieter. Demonstrators in a nation ruled by a strict interpretation of Sharia law that has suppressed their rights for decades have taken shocking risks to publicly challenge a regime that is unafraid to murder protesters and cut off freedom of speech. This crisis has received nowhere near the same level of sustained international attention online.

Iran is far from the only example. Sudan is currently facing one of the world's most severe displacement crises after catastrophic civil conflict. In Yemen, a war between Houthi rebels and the government has caused widespread hunger and collapsed the healthcare and economic systems. In Myanmar, pro-democracy protesters have faced violent suppression following a military coup. Yet in all these cases, coverage rapidly declined after brief moments of international attention.

None of these crises lacks urgency or victims in need of humanitarian support. Yet, somehow, they are still ignored by mass social media users. Part of this disparity likely stems from the fact that social media platforms are meant to reward content that is visually compelling and easily condensed into a digestible narrative; that is, complex conflicts that resist a straightforward moral framework rarely translate well

into viral posts.

On top of this, activism online has often been used as an identity expression rather than a sustained commitment. Speaking out has become less about advancing a cause and more about signaling alignment with a specific social or political community. Outrage is always plentiful when an issue dominates the headlines, but it collapses as soon as the news cycle moves on. Crises that are equally urgent but are not trending on the news hardly receive acknowledgement.

None of this is meant to suggest that individuals are being malicious in their advocacy goals, nor that every activist must engage equally with every global injustice. The amount of human suffering in the world makes that impossible. But if activism is to mean anything beyond aesthetic solidarity, it can no longer just exist during moments of peak visibility.

Human rights don't merely come and go with the seasons. Just because a burning church in Nigeria is not actively on the news does not mean the Christian genocide has disappeared when we turn our eyes from it. The moral imperative to defend freedom and rights does not expire when a topic stops trending, nor does it apply only to those whose struggles are easiest to ex-

Shaleen Sheth is a fifth-former from Madrid, Spain. She may be reached at ssheth27@choate.edu.

A GUIDE TO CHOATE'S STUDENT LEADERSHIP GROUPS

By **Teya Tejavibulya '28 and Ha Jin Sung '28**
Associate Editors

Bystander Education Program

The Bystander Education Program (BEP) is a campus leadership group that educates Choate students on how to be an "upstander" on topics such as sexual misconduct, healthy relationships, and consent. BEP member Kiki Wenren '28 explained that "the big aim is to decomplicate social norms that condone sexual violence." To aid their mission, BEP often curates presentations for form and School Meetings. On February 3, BEP hosted its yearly Town Hall addressing "Power and Privilege" in relationships. Wenren added that BEP has initiated an anonymous "questionnaire Google form that allows students on campus to answer or ask questions about relationships or sexual misconduct."

Gold Key

Representing Choate throughout the school day, Gold Key Ambassadors draw on their academic, athletic, and artistic experiences on campus during prospective student tours. Gold Key Leaders train ambassadors, serving as mentors who teach ambassadors the art of touring and answer any touring-related questions. Gold Key Leader Amber Yung '26 said, "First-year [ambassadors] might be nervous as they go on their first tours ... so a Gold Key Leader is there to provide guidance and support." Gold Key Leaders meet

about once a month and invite new speakers to each meeting. "Last month, [Head of School Dr. Alex Curtis] came, and he had talked to us about the renovation that's going on at Choate and admission-related things that we then relay out to the other ambassadors," Yung said.

Bridge Team

The Bridge Team consists of fifth- and sixth-form students who receive referrals from any student in the Choate community when they are concerned about a friend's well-being. The Bridge Team then connects students with support services, such as counseling. "The peer-to-peer contact is what makes [Bridge Team] an effective leadership group on campus; people feel more comfortable advocating for their friends," Bridge Team member Finn Wikstrom '26 said. Hannah Yeo '26, another member of the Bridge Team, further explained how the referral process is "completely confidential, so nobody's identity is revealed — not the student being referred or the student who makes the referral." This ensures that students feel comfortable reaching out for help.

Wellness Committee

In an academically rigorous environment like Choate, the Wellness Committee helps students find balance. Wellness Committee member Kaylin Lam

'27 said, "Wellness is about finding balance and prioritizing your well-being while doing everything you need to and want to do." The Wellness Committee specifically gathers student feedback and designs initiatives based on seasonal and campus-specific needs. From addressing seasonal depression to promoting year-round mental health awareness, the Wellness Committee aims to integrate discussions about well-being into everyday campus life. "That kind of balance is very necessary [in order] to have enough energy to go through the day or to not get burnt out," Lam said.

International Student Mentors

The International Student Mentor Program is designed to help new international students feel like they belong at Choate. Incoming students are paired with upperclassmen mentors over the summer, giving them a trusted peer to ask questions about dorm life, academics, and the transition to a new environment. Mentors are required to arrive on campus a few days before school starts, attend orientation, and meet mentees in person. "The main goal is connection," Director of Global Engagement Ms. Ashley Sinclair said. "Feeling connected to others, to the school, and to make sure [new international students] know that they're not here alone." Over time, the program focuses on smaller group meetings that help interna-



Photo courtesy of @choateproctors on Instagram

Students engage in the clothing upcycle event hosted by the C-Proctors. International students feel that Choate can truly become a second home.

Peer Educators

When students gather in dorm common rooms to talk about sleep habits, stress, or time management, chances are a Peer Educator is leading the conversation. Peer Educators are trained student leaders who promote physical and mental well-being across campus. Specifically, they organize dorm presentations, campus events, and interactive programs. While many students know them as peers they can approach for advice, the group emphasizes that they continue to work to destigmatize asking for help. "I wish that more people knew that it is okay not to have all

the answers. It's okay to struggle sometimes, because that's how you grow," Peer Educator member Maelle Davenport '27 said. "I'm just hoping that what we do inspires others to reach out if they need help."

Student leadership groups at Choate play a vital role in maintaining the School's community. Each group contributes to different aspects of campus life, providing mentors and initiatives to ensure campus and student well-being.

Teya Tejavibulya '28 and Ha Jin Sung '28 may be reached at ttejvibulya28@choate.edu and hsung28@choate.edu

Behind-The-Scenes: A Day in the Life of JD

By **Harry Kim '28**
Associate Editor

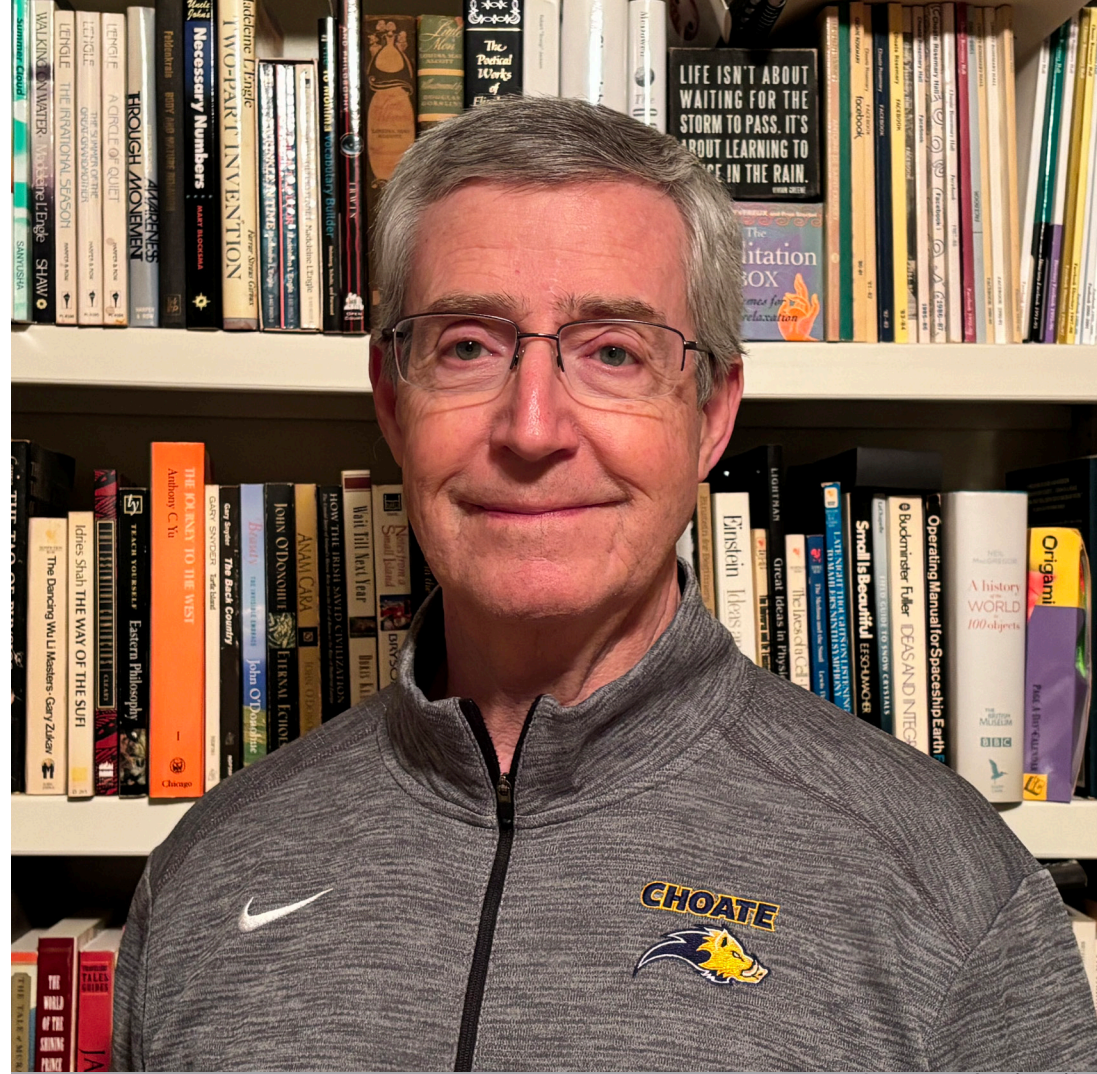


Photo courtesy of Mr. Jim Davidson

Humanities wizard, basketball fan, and Choate's longest-serving faculty member — Mr. Jim Davidson.

as British detective dramas, the Japanese series *Midnight Diner*, or Korean favorites like *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*, which he has watched more than once.

Watching sports, especially basketball games, remains his personal passion. As a longtime fan of University of Michigan Athletics and the Los Angeles Lakers, he appreciates the sense of competition and continuity both teams bring to professional basketball. "I would have to say I was a big [Lakers] fan, going back to Magic Johnson days, a big fan of Kobe Bryant," he said. "Now, I enjoy watching LeBron in the twilight of his career."

Although his daily routine is not much different from that of students, he always makes time for reflection or meditation. "I try to have a 10- to 20-minute segment. Sometimes I'll mix it up with a sort of campus walk, a quiet walk, in that 10- to 20-minute range," Mr. Davidson said.

During weekends, Mr. Davidson makes time for the fitness center, walks on the cross-country trails, or goes out in Wallingford. "I like to be outside as much as I can. I also enjoy seeing my son, who doesn't live too far away. We're really lucky to see him often," he said. "I'm also a pretty big reader, so that's how I enjoy just spending easy, relaxed time." On Long Weekends, he and his wife occasionally take the train into New York City to explore various museums and neighborhoods.

Off campus, especially during breaks, Mr. Davidson returns to Michigan, where he and his wife spend time near Lake Michigan reconnecting with family and friends. In recent summers, he has taken on hands-on projects such as carpentry, deck building, and stone wall construction. "Those are things which I like to do sort of on the side, and I would like to do even more of that," he said.

At the heart of Mr. Davidson's daily routines, he always follows three guiding principles. "What I try to live by is that every person I meet is worthy of respect. The other thing I feel is important is a blend of truth and kindness. Last, I try to ... be mindful of what I'm doing. That is, I try to be as fully present as I can, even when I'm feeling tired, and put myself into the present moment," he said.

What ultimately defines a day in Mr. Davidson's life isn't any single activity, but a consistent attentiveness to students, ideas, and small moments that accumulate into a career. Even after 50 years, he is ready to be fully present at Choate, whether that be through grading papers, revising his basketball plays, speaking at Commencement, or engaging in conversations with students and faculty members across campus.

Harry Kim may be reached at hkim28@choate.edu.

DAY STUDENT COMMUTES

By **Slater Boms '29**
Reporter

Every morning, several day students wait as their friend's car pulls into the driveway to take them to Choate. The day student population at Choate has grown over the past few years and now makes up about a fourth of the entire Choate community. While they may be coming from very different locales, the drive to school is a key experience that unites all day students. Though some students' parents drive them to school and some students drive themselves (when they get their driver's license), many day students arrive on campus in carpools.

Christopher Yuh '26 used to carpool with Jack McGuane '26 from Guilford, Connecticut, before he acquired his driver's license. Yuh said, "I really enjoyed carpooling because it's a great way to bond with the people you carpool with." Besides the friendship that comes with carpooling, Yuh also appreciates the environmental aspect of it. "Carpooling is also more environmentally-friendly than driving alone, and that definitely is a contributing factor as well," Yuh said.

While carpooling can be enjoyable, it also has its downsides, especially the inflexible

schedule. "If I had a free period in the morning, it doesn't matter because other people [in the carpool] have [class] and I would just have to sit around," Theodora Kontomerkos '29 said. Every morning, Kontomerkos wakes up around 6:20 a.m., embarking on her 40-minute journey to school at 6:50 a.m., before most boarding students even wake up.

Carpooling has remained a day student staple for many years. Science teacher and Nichols dorm parent Ms. Zoe Milazzo '16 has fond memories of her daily 15-minute drives to Choate, which she did for all four years. "I carpooled with a very good friend who ended up being from the same area as me, so the carpool was really fun," Ms. Milazzo said. However, carpooling was challenging since day students "operate off of [their] parents' schedule," and "it's harder to be involved." When Ms. Milazzo obtained her own car, there was much more "freedom to go back and forth."

Commuting to school and carpooling remains an integral part of day student life at Choate. For many students, carpooling extends beyond a simple form of transportation, entailing daily routines and bonding.

Slater Boms may be reached at sboms29@choate.edu.



Graphic by Aida Tepe '28/The Choate News

AIRNESS ROCKS THE STAGE!

By **Dylann Kong '29** and **Anna Park '29**
Reporters

The lights dimmed as silence fell upon the crowd. Reverend Aaron Rathbun jumped on the stage, his first rip of guitar filling the theater. Each term, student theater productions are held, captivating the audience with dazzling dance numbers, songs, and costumes. This winter, students performed *Airness*, a thrilling production that follows the main character Nina's story through an air-guitar competition. *Airness* included elements of rock numbers and high-energy choreography, leading to three sold-out shows on February 19–21.

The production process required hours of rehearsal and careful coordination. For student performers, it required balancing a busy academic schedule with long rehearsals. Prudence Chen '28 said, "I find those little pockets of time and make good use of them,"

explaining how she finds time to complete schoolwork in between rehearsal breaks. While rehearsals and performances can be intense, Chen highlighted the dynamic backstage. "Even though we have to be quiet backstage ... we still have time to rest and unwind and make sure we're ready for our cues," she said.

Backstage, preparation extended beyond memorizing lines. Jinx Hartong '27, who played Nina, described how collaboration had a big impact on her performance. "I talked to my cast mates about their characters and how they interpreted their characters, because I think that's what helps me understand how I should interact with them as a character," she said. In addition, Hartong relied on meditation and line run-throughs with dorm prefects to prepare for her first leading role.

The production demanded both emotional and physical stamina. Hartong recalled

learning the final dance number as a particularly memorable moment. "By the end of it, everyone was so tired and sweaty," she said. "But everyone still had a smile on their face and was ready to run it again." For many cast members, acting in *Airness* required both physical endurance and precision, particularly during its rapid comedic timing and choreographed ensemble numbers.

Chen noted that *Airness* stood out from previous student productions. "It's not a musical, because there's no singing," she explained. "It's really just the dance moves, the air guitar." The stage, located in the Arts Annex, also contributed to the show's uniqueness. "I think that it's a really cool experience for students to get that every space can be a theater, not just a traditional stage," she said.

Mr. Robinson described the play as a coming-of-age story. "It's about loving yourself and finding out what your authentic self really is," he said. He emphasized that the show shows "the power of silliness, the power of connection and collaboration, and friendship."

For Chen, one of her favorite moments was playing a dramatic corporate executive in a funny exchange, a character very different from herself. "I love playing characters that ... aren't like me," she said.

As the final chords of the production rang out, the cast took their bows, and the audience cheered. *Airness*, shaped from months of rehearsal, came to an end after providing nights of energetic performances for the Choate community.

Dylann Kong and Anna Park may be reached at dkong29@choate.edu and apark29@choate.edu



Photo courtesy of Katelyn Nguyen '27

Members of the *Airness* cast bow after their final performance.

MR. VIBBERTS VISITS CHOATE

By **Deyi Meng '26**
Features Section Editor

On February 16–17, Choate welcomed audio engineer Mr. Brian Vibberts to campus. Throughout his visit, Mr. Vibberts joined students in the Music Production class, hosted a Q&A session with Arts Concentration students, and participated in the annual Choate In Session event at the Choate Recording Studio in the Paul Mellon Arts Center (PMAC) to showcase his professional recording process and offer advice.

Mr. Vibberts is a recording and mixing engineer who has won seven Grammy Awards and contributed to more than 272 Grammy Award nominations. Although Mr. Vibberts has worked with many famous artists, including Michael Jackson, Metallica, and Mariah Carey, Mr. Vibberts traces his first inspirations back to high school. "I was inspired to pursue engineering and production from a project I did in high school with the band I was in at the time," Mr. Vibberts said. "I learned a lot from my mentors, especially legendary engineer Bruce Swedien, so it's fulfilling to pay it forward."

The Choate In Session series was established in the 2024–2025 academic year. Head of Arts Department Mr. Matthew McLean said, "We have a lot of students on campus who are interested in creating and recording their own music, so we started Choate In Session so they can interact with and learn from industry professionals." For Mr. McLean, Mr. Vibberts' extensive and diverse experience was key when selecting a professional for this year's In Session. "I try to think of people to bring in who are engaged in styles of

music that students are interested in, and the great thing about Brian Vibberts is that he has worked with many great artists and genres," he said.

Mr. Vibberts kicked off his time at Choate by visiting the Music Production class. There, he discussed what it means to be an effective studio worker — emphasizing proactivity, the importance of diversifying one's skill set, and how to effectively use AI as a tool in music production. Furthermore, Mr. Vibberts demonstrated his recording process by recording Suleika Sandi '26 singing a lead vocal while explaining concepts like mic placement. "I really enjoyed it, and Mr. Vibberts was full of wisdom and advice," said Christopher Yuh '26. "He gave advice from the specifics of recording all the way to advice for becoming a producer and musician, and the way the [music] industry has changed since he went through that process."

In the afternoon, Mr. Vibberts joined the Music Arts Concentration students to talk about the music industry and pursuing a career in the arts. Reflecting on the session, Bowen Jin '26 said, "Mr. Vibberts talked about keeping up with the times in the music industry, and that really changed my perspective. I'm a classical musician, but this experience opened my eyes to the possibility of expanding beyond classical and pursuing jazz as well." Jin also highlighted Mr. Vibberts' advice on constant improvement and awareness. "That readiness is going to be crucial in terms of supporting others, securing jobs and gigs when the opportunities arise, and moving up in the music industry," Jin said.

The highlight of Mr. Vibberts' visit was on the evening of February 17, when he participated in Choate's In Session event, offer-



Photo courtesy of Rachel Fan '27

Mr. Vibberts leads a workshop.

ing attendees the chance to observe and take part in a live professional recording session. For this event, Mr. Vibberts selected an original song by Michael Quintero '27 called "Fiona," and Choate student-musicians recorded instrumental parts to the piece, with Simon Podos '27 playing piano, Brooks Mort '29 playing drums, and Rachel Fan '27 playing double bass. Mr. Vibberts produced these musicians, guiding their performances while recording them and explaining his professional process.

Participants of Choate In Session found it to be a very informative experience. "When he was producing, he would consistently take notes," Ethan Yu '29 said. "I found that to be a really good habit because you can communicate better with the musicians and also remind yourself of certain things."

Mr. Vibberts' visit provided students with valuable and practical insight into the professional music industry. "After his visit, there's a palpable excitement for students interested in music production, and that would be my hope: that these students see someone achieving their goals, and this inspires them to continue to be creative and work in the studio," Mr. McLean said.

Deyi Meng may be reached at dmeng26@choate.edu.

Library Portraits Celebrate Choate's Founding Women

By **Ha Jin Sung '28**
Associate Editor

Through the delicate strokes of a paintbrush, remnants of history can be preserved. At Choate, legacies are protected through art — especially portraits that bring historical faces back to life. Three oil on linen portraits of Choate's former headmistresses, Ms. Mary Elizabeth Lowndes and Ms. Elizabeth Loomis, as well as the founder, Ms. Mary Atwater Choate, were recently commissioned in the Andrew Mellon Library Reading Room. Painted by Ms. Susan Boone Durkee, a Connecticut-based portrait artist, these portraits honor the women who shaped Choate's history.

Chief Communications Officer and portrait project overseer Ms. Alison Cady explained that the project began as a part of an effort to give credit to people who were instrumental in the School's founding. "We saw

an opportunity to be more inclusive with early school history ... these women were instrumental to the School's founding and formation," Ms. Cady said.

Ms. Cady emphasized the importance of honoring historical figures through paintings, allowing their legacies to continue. "As each of us becomes part of the Choate community, we choose to become part of something bigger than ourselves," she said. "These portraits are just one reminder of our history and the mission that brings us together here today."

Ms. Lowndes was headmistress at Rosemary Hall from 1971–1973 after serving as an English teacher and dean for five years. For Ms. Durkee, this was her easiest portrait of the three to paint, because she had a full photograph of Ms. Lowndes to reference. "I had an actual photograph with a head, body, dress, and background to work from," Ms. Durkee said.

"It was just a matter of cropping it for the best composition using the old photograph, which was quite grainy."

To add visual and historical detail to the composition, Ms. Durkee added her own unique twist. Ms. Durkee, who lives on Mark Twain's property in Redding, Connecticut, was inspired to include some of Twain's books in the painting's background. "If you look closely on the right, you'll see little Mark Twain books in there," she said.

While Ms. Lowndes is painted in a gown, Ms. Loomis, who served as an English, Latin, French, and History teacher at Rosemary Hall until being appointed co-headmistress in 1909, appears in a grey and white suit. For Ms. Durkee, painting Ms. Loomis was a bigger challenge. "I only had a [picture of her] head to work with," she explained. "I [did] research to find a body and the kinds of clothes that she liked to wear ... it had to be at the right angle so I could put the head on the body so it looked natural."

Additionally, Ms. Durkee painted Brownell Hall — one of Rosemary Hall's historic academic buildings — as the backdrop of the painting. "I was asked to incorporate one of the buildings that [Ms. Loomis] was responsible for overseeing in the background," she said. Ms. Durkee selected Brownell for dappled lighting and a modern look.

Reflecting on her paintings, Ms. Durkee considers the one of Ms. Choate, who founded Rosemary Hall in 1890, to be her most difficult one, because she had to create the entire body herself. "I couldn't see much but a black shawl, partial hands, and a sad face," Ms. Durkee explained. "I had to redress her. I had to take her

shawl off, find a white dress, and then a background, since I didn't want it to be so plain."

Ms. Durkee dedicated over six weeks to researching a dress in the ideal color appropriate for Ms. Choate's age and time period. However, because Ms. Durkee created the dress and body herself, she was free to experiment with color. "I used the Choate colors when I had to add color ... I painted the shawl Choate's royal blue," she said.

Ms. Durkee explained that her relationship with Choate began several years ago, when she painted a portrait of Phoebe Dey, wife of former Head of School Charles Fredrick Dey, commissioned at the President's House. When plans to refurbish the Library Reading Room came about, Ms. Cady reached out to Ms. Durkee again.

Ms. Durkee and Ms. Cady began communicating around early July 2024, with the last of the portraits being delivered on July 11, 2025. Ms. Durkee spent about 3 months completing the painting of Ms. Lowndes and about 7 months painting Ms. Choate and Ms. Loomis, alongside her other portrait projects.

Reflecting on the experience commissioning her paintings at Choate, Ms. Durkee said, "I felt very honored when I was [asked] to [paint the portraits]. I'm glad that they had a woman do it too, because women don't get acknowledged enough in art." Ms. Durkee added that she particularly enjoyed drawing the portraits of Choate's historic female Heads of School and founder. "I have such great respect for women who are leaders and strive to make the world a better place ... it was fun to do these three women, because they were all women who excelled."

Ha Jin Sung may be reached at hsung28@choate.edu.

Meet the Directors of This Year's SDS



Photo by Scarlett Park '27/The Choate News

The directors of SDS pose after a dress rehearsal.

By **Mary Higashi '29**
Reporter

Two strangers in a parking lot at 3 a.m. A series of disastrous, rapid-fire blind dates. Three friends at a chaotic club. These are just a few glimpses into this year's Student Directed Scenes (SDS). Each scene lasts only ten to fifteen minutes, but begins months earlier. SDS is the culmination of the directing class, and this year, seven students stepped into the director's chair to select scripts, cast, and produce each production from February 27–28.

The process started with selecting a script. For some, like Claudia Li '26, the choice was instinctive: one that made her laugh immediately. "The first time I read it, I thought, this is the one," she said. For others, SDS holds sentimental value. "It was the first play I ever [acted in], and it holds a very special place in my heart," Matthew Choi '26 explained.

During Winterlude, the directors turned their attention to casting. The directors emphasized how collaborative and unique the SDS audition process is; no one was cut, and all seven directors worked together to place each actor in a play that would best use their strengths. Alexandros Antonopoulos '26 described it as a "fun, community process," where they were "talking to each other about

who would be good for our show ... [and] who would be good for each other's shows." Rather than competing for actors, the directors worked together as a team.

Yet, collaboration did not eliminate challenges. "A big limitation for SDS in general is the time constraints," Antonopoulos noted. In trying to fit rehearsals around Choate's jam-packed schedules, directors also juggled technical design: sound, lighting, and set construction, on top of their other student commitments. With limited rehearsal time and compressed scripts, every choice mattered. Still, as Choi reflected, "although it is a lot of work, it is very rewarding."

Despite producing independent productions, the directors remained connected and supportive of one another, running technical aspects of each other's scenes. The team has gotten to know each other through taking the Honors Directing two-term sequence, offering directors like Choi "the security of knowing that we trust each other."

Reflecting on the performances, Antonopoulos hoped that the audience "[took] away a greater appreciation for the idea of what it means for art to exist, the freedom of expression that art creates, and how people's lives are impacted by those changes."

Mary Higashi may be reached at mhigashi29@choate.edu.



Photo by Finn Wikstrom '26/The Choate News

The Ms. Loomis portrait hangs in the Andrew Mellon Library.

FIELD REPORT

Choate Winter Record
143 - 86 - 0

Varsity Games

Girls' Swimming (5-4)
vs. Loomis, 101-85

Boys' Swimming (7-2)
vs. Loomis, 99-73

Girls' Ice Hockey (11-9)
vs. Taft, 4-2

Boys' Ice Hockey (11-11)
vs. NMH, 5-2

Girls' Basketball (8-11)
vs. Ethel Walker, 53-60

Boys' Basketball (9-9)
vs. Hotchkiss, 42-59

Girls' Ice Hockey (11-9)
vs. Loomis, 0-4

Boys' Squash (13-7)
vs. Tabor Academy, 3-4

J.V. Games

Girls' Basketball (12-0)
vs. Exeter, 40-27

Boys' Squash (14-2)
vs. Westminster, 7-0

Girls' Ice Hockey (11-2)
vs. Taft, 8-1

Boys' Basketball (8-6)
vs. Loomis, 29-59

VARSITY SQUASH AND GIRLS' WRESTLING TAKE ON NATIONALS

By **Norah Wang '27**
Staff Contributor

After months of demanding practices and long matches, the Girls' and Boys' Varsity Squash and Girls' Varsity Wrestling teams traveled to compete in the National High School Team Championships against some of the strongest athletes in the country.

For the Girls' Varsity Squash team, the Nationals tournament meant traveling to Philadelphia, where they competed at Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania. "For me, Nationals is a very important tournament because we play against strong schools that we did not get to play during the season," Girls' Varsity Squash Captain Maria Jose Soria Cabezas '26 said. Unlike regular matches, where there is more room to adjust techniques and improve over time, Nationals require a focused mentality from the very start.

"My training has been an important part to doing well in this tournament," Cabezas added. The squash team practiced from Monday through Friday for about two hours each day, maintaining a high level of intensity throughout the season in preparation for Nationals. Cabezas also added extra gym sessions to build strength and improve movement off the court. She explained that strength training helped her with "hitting the ball harder and moving better around the court."

Mental preparation was also important for Cabezas. She kept a notebook with reminders of what

she needed to focus on, and used it to reset between matches. About 30 minutes before competing, Cabezas reached out to her family. "I always call my parents before a match, because it helps me stay focused ... [and I also] get advice from them," she said. As a team, the Girls' Varsity Squash members gathered to share individual goals before matches, ensuring that communication kept everyone confident and grounded.

For the Boys' Varsity Squash team, this year marked one of their strongest finishes. "We had the best placement that Choate has ever had in history at Nationals," Boys' Varsity Squash captain Lucas Carlson '26 said. However, due to a snowstorm, the team had to return a day early. "We ended up placing ninth/tenth place ... we were supposed to have a match on Sunday morning against Tabor [Academy], but since both schools had to go back early, we weren't able to finish it," Carlson added. Despite the early finish, the team views their top 10 finish positively. "We're really excited about [our placement]," Carlson said.

Reflecting on his experience at Nationals, Carlson said, "I'm happy with how the weekend went, and I'm really proud of my teammates ... My match was the winning match, so that was fun for me."

Squash wasn't the only team competing at a national-level tournament. The Girls' Wrestling team competed in Nationals at Lehigh University, leaving on February 19, and wrestling through February 21. Girls' Varsity Wrestling

Captain Leanne La '26 described Nationals as "absolutely more intense" because every athlete must first qualify through Prep-New Englands, the regional tournaments, making the competition stronger. With teams from across the country, athletes are "[hungrier] to win," and even a brief loss of focus can change a match.

While practices have been intense all season, La believes what truly defines the team is "the consistency of the work [they] put in" ahead of Nationals. In the post-season, the team focused on specific drills and techniques to prepare for matches. Similar to Cabezas, La believes mental strength is also key. After recognizing that it is difficult "to distinguish nerves with excitement," La focused on controlling her breathing and competing with the mindset that she has "nothing to lose."

The team left Philadelphia with two National Finalists, Rhema Woolcock '28 and Lily Ruznez '26, while Tati Irizarry '27 and Sara McLaughlin '26 were named National Champions. Ms. Katie Moore, the Girls' Varsity Wrestling assistant coach, was also awarded National Prep Coach of the Year, wrapping up their wrestling season with victories.

Whether on the squash courts or the wrestling mat, all teams brought their hard work and dedication to practices and competitions, representing Choate on the national stage.

Norah Wang may be reached at njwang27@choate.edu.

SPORTS FROM THE ARCHIVES

By **Alexis Lee '28**
Reporter

Can you imagine riding horses or shooting rifles after school? While they are no longer offered, horseback riding and riflery were once part of Choate's athletics programs, as covered in Issue 9. Though Choate offers various athletic programs today, the School's archives reveal an even broader range of sports in the past. Over the decades, before the Choate School and Rosemary Hall were combined to become Choate Rosemary Hall, skiing and fencing were offered — winter sports that were once active and competitive but were later removed from the athletics roster.

Skiing

Skiing at Choate did not begin as a varsity sport. From 1939 to 1948, a ski club with approximately 40 Choate students traveled daily to different mountains, competing in informal meets. By 1949, skiing had evolved into an official sport. That year, eight Choate skiers competed in three meets against peer schools such as Loomis Chaffee, the Hotchkiss School, Kent School, and Taft School at Durham and Mohawk Mountains, where they placed first in a four-way match. Given that the ski team reappeared in the 1963 *Brief* issue, it appears the program was reinstated as a club and later as a team. Despite their intermittent appearance, the skiing team achieved notable success, finishing fifth at the Berkshire League Championships at Catamount on February 25, 1976.

Rosemary Hall followed a similar trajectory. An issue of the Rosemary Newsletter newspaper in 1961 describes a recreational ski weekend in Vermont. A year later, a ski club was established by Cynthia Skiff '63 and Patricia Jayson '64, both of whom participated in the weekend Vermont trip. By 1972, Rosemary Hall officially founded a ski team, which practiced at Mount Southington and competed against schools such as Rye Country Day and Miss Porter's School.

After the Choate School and Rosemary Hall merged into Choate Rosemary Hall, the individual skiing programs were also combined and continued. However, possibly due to rising costs and travel demands, the program ended in 1995.

Learning about Choate's former skiing program sparked interest among current students. "I would definitely try skiing," Ben Lee '27 said. "I love skiing, and I know a lot of people who are interested as well. Even my roommate is really passionate about it and wishes Choate had a ski team." Still, Lee acknowledged the logistical challenges that may have led to its discontinuation. "I guess it would be similar to rowing: you have to drive far," he added, noting the long travel time to get to skiing slopes.

Fencing

Fencing has one of the longest and most fragmented histories among Choate's discontinued sports and was offered as early as 1898 at Rosemary Hall. By 1940, it was a six-member team that competed regularly, though no records exist beyond that point.

At the Choate School, fencing appeared in the 1927 *Brief* issue. Although it was not officially recognized by the Athletic Association at that time, the team performed well, finishing second place in the New England Interscholastic meet in 1927 and 1928. 1930 was their best season, with only one loss among seven meets against college freshmen teams from Yale University, Princeton University, New York University, and Harvard University.

Despite its success, the School struggled to sustain its fencing team, which was often small and broke up when members graduated. Fencing last appeared in the 1975 *Brief* issue, and interest resurfaced briefly in 2011 with a fencing club at Choate Rosemary Hall.

"The fact that Choate fencing competed against college freshmen really surprised me," Lee said, reflecting on the School's fencing history. "I think it shows that it wasn't popular among boarding schools." Kate Park '27 noted that fencing requires specialized equipment and facilities. "If [Choate] could provide that, it would be a really unique experience for everyone," she said.

Although students no longer head to the slopes or the fencing strip after school, these programs continue to hold a part of Choate's athletic legacy. While no longer on the schedule, these programs remain part of the School's legacy and memory.

Alexis Lee may be reached at aalee28@choate.edu.

CONGRATS ON SIGNING DAY!



Photo courtesy of Choate Photos

Class of 2026 athletes celebrate their official signing day.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS RELAY RACE BRINGS CAMARADERIE AND CONNECTIONS

By **Elliot Sun '28**
Staff Contributor

Amid splashing water and loud cheers, students and athletes swam across Choate's Larry Hart Pool during the Special Olympics swim clinic. This two-hour event brought together members of Choate's Varsity Swimming team and athletes from the North Haven Special Olympics team to participate in relay races.

The idea for the event originated from Josh Pan '27's experience during the fall of 2024. As a competitive swimmer with over 12 years of experience and a member of the Varsity Boys' Water Polo team, he participated in the 30th annual Special Olympics fundraiser at the Hotchkiss School. The event raised over \$30,000 for Special Olympics globally, inspiring him to bring a similar inclusive spirit to Choate. "That experience really ... rejuvenated this idea," he explained. Reflecting on his own



Photo by Ben Lee '27/The Choate News

The Special Olympics Connecticut team visits the Larry Hart Pool.

experience as a competitive swimmer, Pan compared the fleeting nature of personal swimming records and accolades with making a lasting impact on one's community. "[Race] times in swimming don't matter, because in 10 years, your [personal swimming] records will be taken down ... But what does matter is how you make people feel," he reflected.

After more than six months of planning, Pan coordinated logistics with Assistant Director of Student Activities Ms. Colleen Kazar, Director of Student Activities Ms. Alex Long, Director of Community Service Ms. Melissa Koomson, and Dean of Students Mr. Gilyard. In addition to members of the Choate community, he part-

nered with Ms. Ria Vilano, the head coach of the North Haven Special Olympics swim team, to communicate with their athletes and families.

Gisele Yeung '27, who helped plan and participate in relays, emphasized the importance of teaching and bonding with the Special Olympics athletes. "We taught them a little bit of technique before we jumped into the relays ... [and had] fun," she said.

Will Swan '28, another member of Choate's Varsity swim team, praised the post-race party. "We came up with some really fun celebrations," he said. Reflecting on the day, Ethan Sun '27 added, "I think it's cool that swimming is able to bring these athletes together and that Choate gets to help out the Special Olympics."

Pan's biggest takeaway was that the "Special Olympics is a truly, truly incredible program. They are an organization with over five million participants

across the globe, in 150 different countries." Pan also appreciated the value of sharing the privileges of Choate with other students. "If we are able to spread this kind of privilege [to] others who are less fortunate than us, that's the best thing," he said. Pan also extended his gratitude to "all the adults in Edmonton, Choate, and especially the Choate volunteers who took time out of their Sundays to come to this event."

Students expressed eagerness to return and volunteer again. Swan considered the Special Olympics event to be "a really fun way to ... integrate these two organizations." Pan added, "You can see from the photos, it was a great time." Overall, Choate's Special Olympics relay and swim clinic showed how athletics can unite people far beyond competition and results.

Elliot Sun may be reached at esun28@choate.edu.