



# Students travel to D.C. for Close-Up program in order to meet new people, broaden political views

Reese Jansma

Reporter

Eight juniors from Illiana Christian High School hobnobbed with U.S. Representatives and Senators, talked with other students from around the country, and visited various sites around Washington DC from Nov. 25-Dec 2 as part of the national Close-Up program.

According to Junior Chase Lindemulder, "The main goal of Close-Up was meeting new people with different backgrounds, improving on our political stance, and learning how to put our Christian values into practice in real life."

Close-Up is a worldwide program to inspire students to find their unique voice and to help them develop the skills and awareness they need to act as engaged citizens for a lifetime.

Lindemulder said a highlight for him was visiting the Capitol Building, but "the overall best part of Close-Up

was meeting people of different backgrounds."

Junior Van Corcoran said, "The goal of Close-Up is to learn more about the government, and the people involved in it." His favorite sites to visit were the War Memorials.

Corcoran shared, "My favorite part of Close-Up was talking with senators and representatives on their policies and beliefs."

Close-Up chaperone, Mr. Jeff White, said, "My favorite part of Close-Up was Capitol Hill Day. I was pleased with the fact that when I asked all of the students who participated, so many of them had different experiences that were their highlights." They got to meet with our senators and with Representative Frank Mrvan. They also got to listen in on Mitt Romney.

White added, "It was a full day of meeting after meeting after meeting, then we followed it up with a really nice dinner, and then we went to Ford's Theater for a play that night."



Photo by Jeff White

The Close-Up attendees gather and drink hot chocolate in the Waldorf Hotel, which is located on Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the Capitol Building.

## German students travel to Goethe Insititut, Christkindlmarket



Photo by Luke Fennema

The German students gather for a photo at the Christkindlmarket in Daley Plaza, Chicago.

Abigail DeBlock

Reporter

On Monday, Dec. 4, the German 3 and 4 classes spent the day at the Goethe Institut and Christkindlmarket in Chicago. Mr. Fennema, the German teacher, said it's important for the German students to visit these places because "the students are given the opportunity to hear from native Germans about what is going on in Germany while at the Goethe Institut" and the students get to experience "an

authentic Christmas market which is a good cultural experience for the students."

The Goethe Institut is the official cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany. It promotes the study of the German language abroad and fosters international cultural exchange. The institute also provides up-to-date information on Germany's culture, society, and politics. German 3 student, senior Maisy Vroom, said she "liked to see the use of German outside of her German class" while visiting the Goethe Institut.

The Christkindlmarket, which is set up in Daley Plaza, offers a variety of traditional German foods, drinks, gifts, and decorations. It provides an authentic German atmosphere. Vroom said she "loved seeing the Christkindlmarket because it was fun to see the different German traditions and goods."

The booths at the Christkindlmarket are also generally run by German vendors, giving students another opportunity to use the language while enjoying German food and tradition.

## Run, Run Rudolph: Reindeer Run participants raise money, show excitement for new auditorium

Ellie Ratliff

Reporter

Over 100 people turned out for the second annual Reindeer Run, a 2.2 mile run/walk around Illiana's campus, held on the 50 degree morning of Dec. 9, 2023.

An anonymous donor offered an incentive for participation. If 100 or more people signed up, the donor would give \$10,000 dol-

lars toward the construction of the auditorium. In total over 127 people signed up, unlocking the money. In total, the reindeer run raised \$14,500 for the auditorium.

Anne-Marie Docter, the mother of two Illiana students, participated in the run. She said that her son wanted to run and they had a great experience.

Sophomore Landon Worries also ran the 2.2. mile race in a reindeer costume.

He said that he is involved in the arts and really wanted to support the expansion of the school's drama department. Worries said, "I absolutely loved it; it was a great experience." He also encouraged everyone to run this race next year and show their support.

Junior Sam Bultema, another participant, said, "It's so fun, and you don't even have to run. You can do a reindeer trot!"



Photo courtesy of Illiana Facebook page

A group of Reindeer Run participants wait at the starting line for Mr. Davids to give the signal.



# Staying home for college doesn't sound like bad idea

Throughout my high school years, I dreamed of going away to college. I dreamed of living on my own and having freedom somewhere far from home. Largely I felt that way because of how big a deal everyone made it out to be. Now don't get me wrong, I still applied to colleges considered "away," but some major factors have helped me decide that it's better for me to stay home, at least for my first year.



Kailyda Anderson  
News Editor

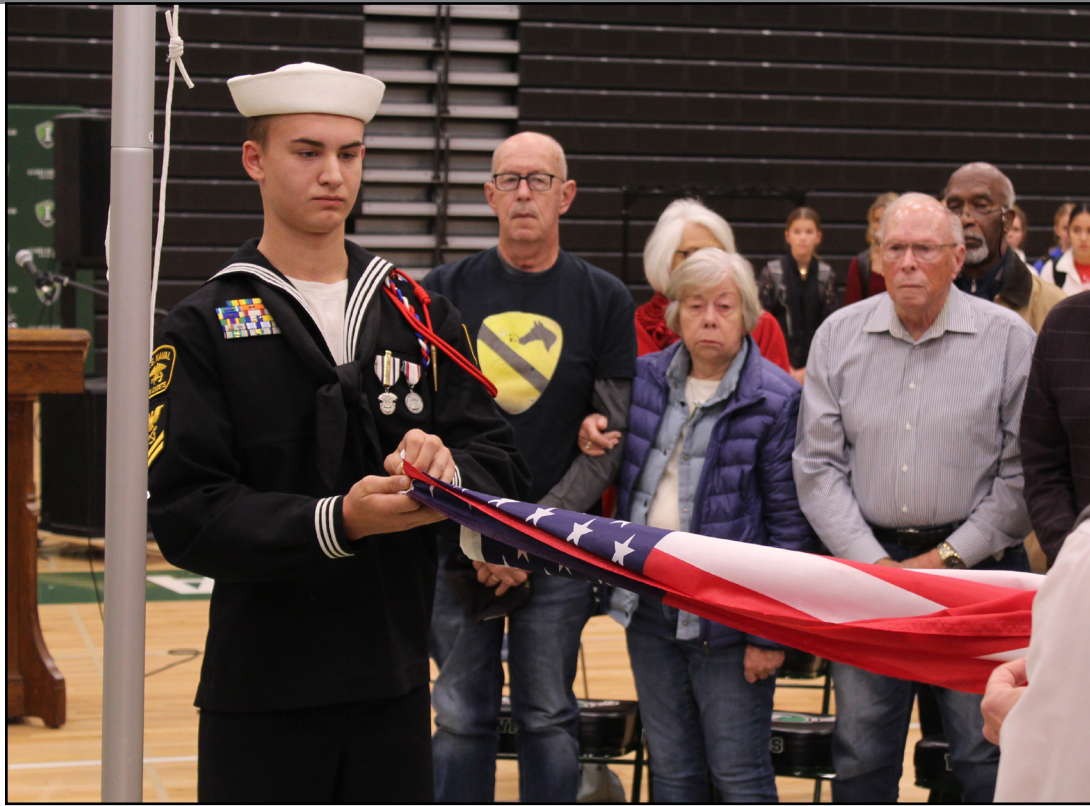
Factor one: the financial aspect. College is expensive. With tuition, books, and room and board, the costs add up. Even with financial aid, it's still pretty costly. Student loans are always an option, but then you spend years paying them off. Scholarships help too, but only a few students get a full-ride. I've gotten a few scholarships, but after financial aid, it's still pretty expensive. Personally, it's cheaper for me to stay home.

Factor two: my family. My family and I are extremely close and I have an amazing relationship with them. If I leave for college and only get to see them on breaks, I would miss them so much and would probably end up getting homesick. I also want to be there for my sister as she continues her journey through high school. I want to be there for all of her accomplishments and achievements.

Factor three: the social aspect. Most kids that go away to college go for the sports games, parties, tailgates, and sororities or frats. Personally, I'm not a huge fan of sports and don't watch them. I'm also not a fan of parties or tailgates, and don't see myself pledging a sorority. Everyone's different when it comes to the social aspect of college. Some people love it and some people don't. I've learned that it's okay to not like those things, and I find fun in doing other things instead.

Factor four: my major. With the major I plan to study, elementary education, I don't need to go far away to pursue that. There are so many amazing education programs nearby and so many teaching opportunities. And since there's a teacher shortage, I'm bound to find a teaching position locally, and I'm okay with that.

I always felt the pressure to go away to college, but with constant prayer, God showed me that I am meant to stay home and that I'm not quite ready to live on my own yet. I can always transfer if I end up changing my mind, but I am happy with my decision to stay home.



Nick Olthoff folds the American flag during the Veterans Day program

Photo courtesy of Jim Kamphuis

## Life as an American Sea Cadet

*Illiana junior eager to pursue career in American navy gets headstart with national program*

Kaelyn Yonkman  
Reporter

Joining any military branch might frighten many people, but for Junior Nick Olthoff, it's something that he's wanted to do since he was nine years old.

Olthoff has been an American Sea Cadet at The Legion in Lowell, Indiana, since he was nine. The US Naval Sea Cadet Corps is the navy's youth development program. Olthoff goes to a meeting once every two to four weeks, and

during the summer and Christmas breaks he goes out around the country. He joined the cadets because he wanted to "...serve [his] country and [he] also wanted new career opportunities."

Once Olthoff graduates the cadets, he wants to serve in the navy for 8 years and hopes to do underwater welding. Being in the cadets gives him an advantage when joining the navy. Olthoff explained, "You get three rankups, so when I'm out of boot camp I'll be a Petty Officer Third

Class."

Being a cadet has opened Olthoff's world to a lot of new opportunities. "We do a lot of marching and shooting guns and being on ships getting deployed on navy vessels. [We learn] vehicle maintenance, and we get to shoot tanks, fly airplanes, work on jets, like anything military-oriented." He said that last summer he got deployed on a navy cargo vessel that sailed out of the Port of Baltimore all the way down to Florida and back.

Olthoff said he enjoys the sense of comradery he has found in the cadets. He said, "I've met hundreds of other kids [from all over the country] that I'm good friends with."

## Robotics team begins season on strong note

*Students keep eye to the future as they work on innovation*

Isabella Girolimon  
Reporter

Illiana's robotics team is off to an impressive start, moving three out of six teams out of the elimination round at the DuneLand Fall Tournament on Saturday, Nov. 18. Two of Illiana's teams made it to quarterfinals, with one team missing the semifinals by only one point.

"They were so close," Mr. Joshua Gabrielse, the team's coach, said. "Their robot at the end of its sequence had to balance on a beam and it hung there for a second or two before tipping off the beam. If it had stayed on the beam, they would have advanced."

Working with the team gives

students the perfect opportunity for craftsmanship and healthy competition. Students in robotics have different roles suiting their different skill sets, which makes for a successful team at competitions.

"The role that I have in robotics is mainly building our robot, and making sure we have everything straight for competitions," said sophomore Colton Sederstrom, a student on this year's robotics team. "There's other roles that other people might have in coding the robot for the controller, and then there's also a driver to drive the robot at competitions. Sometimes there's two."

"I'm a builder," said junior Anthony Burch, describing his experience on the team, "design, drawing in notebooks, and building with tools."

Although building robots may seem like a daunting task, team members said they enjoy

finding many ways to improve their designs.

Daniel Persenaire, a junior, described how he takes inspiration from other teams, saying, "I'll take pictures of other people's robots, seeing what I like, and after the competition, we'll redo our robots."

Burch said he often finds inspiration online. "Just keep drawing, watch a couple YouTube videos, find some cool ideas, and then try to make them better. The internet helps a lot."

Gabrielse guides the students as they prepare for competitions, giving them suggestions and making sure they have everything they need. He said, "It's always up to the kids with what they want to do. How much you want to put into it is how much you'll get out."

Gabrieles encourages new students to join robotics next year. Persenaire added, "[Robotics]

## Pool or not, athletic department tests waters with new swim team

Kenadie Piepenbrink  
Reporter

After two years in the making, Illiana Christian High School now has a swim team.

A number of Illiana students swim competitively, but discussion about a team started this fall when Brenda Vervlied, the mother of two swimmers, approached Mr. Darren DeBoer, Illiana's Athletic Director.

DeBoer said that for the school to have a team, certain conditions would have to be met. First and foremost, there needed to be student interest. Sponsoring a team also had to be financially feasible, and there needed to be a coach willing to take on the challenge of training a new team and organizing everything from obtaining uniforms, finding a pool for practice, and finding meets to compete in.

Illiana's team consists of a brother-sister team of junior Zach and sophomore Haley Vervlied. These siblings have swam for years on other teams, and have won multiple medals. Now they will be representing Illiana Christian High School. They are being coached by their mother, Brenda Vervlied.

With swim being a new sport at Illiana, we are hoping student interest will grow and our team will be bigger each year. There are already several swim meets scheduled, and had their first meet on Tuesday, Dec. 12, in Hobart.

is a good experience to meet new people and try something new."

The team competed at the Region Rumble on Dec. 16 and will take part in three more tournaments in January and February.



Photo by Nathan Sederstrom

Junior Anthony Burch, sophomore Christian Loubriel, and junior Gabriel Seddon stand ringside at Portage High School on Nov. 3.





Carol VanDrunen has led Common Grounds since its inception.

Photo by Kailyda Anderson

# Serving smiles with every cup of coffee

VanDrunen, Czack, and host of volunteers keep Illiana's treat shop open for business

Cheyenne DeJong  
Reporter

Not many high schools boast a coffee shop on the grounds, but Illiana does, it's possible only because of the people who run it, most notably Carol VanDrunen and Kari Czack.

Carol VanDrunen, one of two people in charge of Common Grounds, expects the shop to be more busy when the school ex-

pansion is completed. She said, "It would be great to make it bigger, because the concessions will be more busy too, but right now, we are looking for more shelving for storage."

A popular seasonal drink right now is hot cocoa, often topped with whipped cream and peppermint. Janna VanEssen and Natasha Corcoran often decide what food and beverages are sold in Common Grounds, whether it is seasonal cider or year round doughnuts, while Carol VanDrunen and Kari Czack do

the busy work along with volunteers.

Student requests can make an impact on what the store stocks. "For a long time, we had people asking for Flamin' Hot Cheetos, so we tried them and they were our biggest seller, and the same thing happened with the goldfish," VanDrunen said. Bagels, on the other hand, were not selling or staying fresh for long, which is why they are no longer sold at Common Grounds. Teachers also get discounts of \$1 drinks from behind the counter.

VanDrunen also has the responsibility of keeping all the food and drinks stocked, which means keeping

up with supplies by grocery shopping and storing other items. The donuts and muffins made by Walt's Bakery are always a hot seller. She said, "This is just super fun. I do it for the kids."

Because Kari Czack, another in charge of Common Grounds works Tuesdays and Fridays, the other days are filled by volunteers chosen by Phyllis Bandstra. "Carol is the main lady who runs the coffee shop," said Czack, "I help her out any way I can and come in to work my days."

"I love seeing the kids and serving them and seeing them so happy when I hand them a cup of hot chocolate," said Czack.

# 37 students step up to serve on missions

Gabriella Costello  
Reporter

Applications for Illiana's four service trips closed on Dec. 1, and 37 students applied for trips, with a few students even volunteering to go on more than one of the trips.

Illiana will take students to Uganda and West Virginia in the spring and to the Dominican Republic and Chicago next summer.

Ten students will go to Uganda, nineteen to West Virginia, six to

Chicago, and nine to the Dominican Republic.

Miss Sara Johnson, Illiana's Director of Missions, said that on these trips students "are going to serve Jesus by serving his people. We are going to work with people who love Jesus, and some who don't know him yet. We are going to visit orphanages and churches and food pantries and shelters and schools. We are going to go on safari and on ATV rides. We are going to visit beaches and museums. We are going to have an awesome

opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus while enjoying his creation."

Johnson added, "God calls us [to serve]. We are called as believers to love one another and to honor others more than ourselves. A beautiful way to show love and honor to someone is to serve them. A beautiful way to show our love and honor to God is to serve his people and enjoy his creation."

The students and school fund-raise throughout the year. The students are responsible for 10% of the

cost out of their own pocket and the rest will be covered by fundraisers. The school has already started fundraising by hosting the wiffle ball and dodgeball tournaments. The school plans to host a pulled pork dinner and an alumni volleyball tournament.

The staff chaperoning the trips will be Miss Johnson, Mr. Boonstra, Mr. Slings, Mr. Kruithof, Mrs. Hernandez, Mrs. Cruz, and Mrs. Schaaf. They will be joined by outside chaperones Mary Boonstra, Dave Gibson, and Jan Mulder.

# School calendar to feature big change next year

Joy Ramsey  
Reporter

After a decade of debate, the decision to move exams before Christmas break has officially been made, starting in the 2024-2025 school year.

Over the last seven years, Illiana has slowly moved its start date earlier into August. If the school board had made the decision to keep exams after break next year, the first semester would have been three weeks longer than the second. Now because of this change the difference is only going to be only six days. Although having different length semesters isn't all that important to a full year course, it does greatly affect classes that are only a semester.

Assistant Principal Rachel Drost explained, "[Balanced semesters] allows more time to go in depth on topics you might not normally be able to; in a shorter semester we could still meet the standard, it just limits the depth you're able to go into."

This change, which is planned to continue for years to come, does not have an effect on the start date of the school year either. Principal Peter Boonstra explained how this decision was also dependent on working with our sister schools' schedules and seeing many other Indiana schools having already made this change to an earlier start to the school year.

Boonstra added that this modification will impact other aspects of school life, saying, "[For example], we still have to figure out if this means that some other Christmas activities that we normally do will now have to change."

# Not just for kicks: meet Illiana's hapkido Black Belt

Lucas VanderWoude  
Editor-in-Chief

Justine Olson, a senior at Illiana, has a 1st degree black belt in the Korean martial art of hapkido.

She currently trains at the Lincoln Center in Highland with her sensei Mr. Luke. Mr. Luke is the successor to Master Rick, who created the American Warrior Arts association. She does not currently compete in any competitions because the goal for her specific hapkido class is

to learn self-defense. However, Olson said that there is a hope that she and her fellow trainees will be able to compete in competitions in the future.

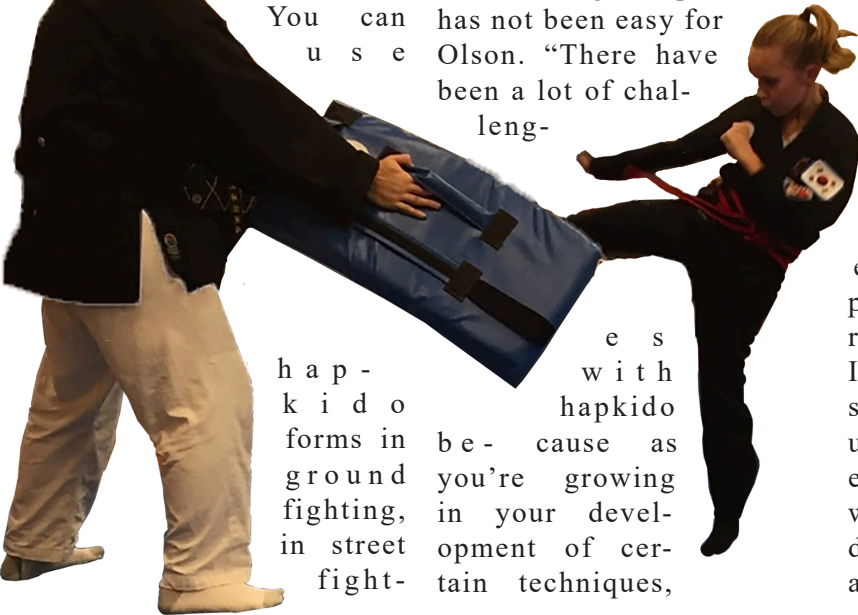
Olson started training in hapkido when she was seven years old. She hopes to pursue becoming an FBI agent as a career, and she thinks that training in hapkido will give her skills that will help her in that field. She said, "There's a lot of things that we learn that can be used in all different forms

of fighting. You can use hapkido forms in ground fighting, in street fighting; it's very adaptable."

Learning hapkido has not been easy for Olson. "There have been a lot of challenges with hapkido because as you're growing in your development of certain techniques,

you're not going to get it first try," she said. "It takes a really long time, especially as you get higher up in belt ranking. It's a lot to process, but practicing every week really helps."

Despite the challenges, Olson has found that practicing hapkido helps relieve stress. "Whenever I get really stressed, it's something that I can do to unwind," she said. "Whenever it's been a really long week, I am able to go to my dojo with people I know and help myself become a





# Taking deeper look into grief and what it looks like in teens today

Reese Jansma

Reporter

Teens experiencing grief Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who did pioneering research on grief, changed our contemporary understanding of grief, understanding it less as an emotion and more as a process. Kübler-Ross identified five stages of grief including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The goal after a loss is to work through these five stages.

Grief counselors at Imagine Northpoint, a service that works with adolescents in Boise, Idaho, suggest that these five stages can look a bit different in teens. They list these examples:

Denial: Teens might deny they have any difficult feelings or that anything of



photo courtesy of Safety4Sea

note has happened

Anger: Teens may express their anger as disrespect, violence, or experimentation with drugs and alcohol

Bargaining: Teens may begin to ask questions about life, religion, or their family's spiritual beliefs

Depression: Teens are at risk for developing clinical depression or repressing their emotions

Acceptance: Teens may appear to reach acceptance quickly, but they could be hiding their feelings

For teens, however, working through those five stages can be particularly difficult. The same counselors point to a study from the National Library of Medicine that discovered teens who have lost a parent have greater odds of developing adverse long term mental health consequences such as depression, anxiety, or substance abuse.

According to Kidshealth.

org, “[Students who have lost a parent] are likely to have many different feelings. And how [they] feel may change from day to day. At times, [they] might feel sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt, or despair. At other times, [they] might feel relief, love, gratitude, tenderness, or hope.”

Not only does this sort of grief affect students emotionally and mentally, but this emotional trauma may also take a toll on the body, causing loss of appetite, extra stress hormones that stunt muscles and joints, and/or lack of sleep. According to Kidshealth.org, teens in grief might feel lethargic or restless, might find it hard to relax and to concentrate. They m “might feel a ‘heaviness’ in the chest, a ‘tightness’ in the throat, or a ‘pit’ in the stomach. Losing a loved one can be stressful. And stress can have some of these temporary effects on the body.”

# Illiana sponsors grief group for students dealing with loss

Cheyenne DeJong

Reporter

In hopes of creating a safe place for students to express their feelings and discuss similarities, Counselors Neil Zandstra and Melanie Benes have developed a grief group here at Illiana. This is a set apart time in the school day where students of Illiana who have lost parents are free to be open, supported, and surrounded by those who have experienced this ongoing struggle. These sessions will last for 7 weeks in which students miss a different period every week, so it is not taking time away from one specific class. This is a strong support group for anyone who is struggling with grieving or mourning the loss of a parent. Zandstra led one a number of years ago and believed there was a need to start another one after a number of teachers came to him saying that there were more and more students who had lost a parent to death this year. Because of this, six students at Illiana were invited to get to know each other's stories and losses in their first meeting led by Ashley Krygsheld.

Zandstra said, “There

will be tears and crying in this group, but there will also be a lot of support. I am so thankful that Ashley has a heart for this ministry.”

Ashley Krygsheld, director of Golden Hope Ministries began the program because “7 years ago, her children's pediatrician lost her son to suicide.” She began messaging her and walking alongside her. It was eye-opening and humbling for her. Krygsheld said, “Neil and I talked about starting a group at Illiana, that would last about 7 weeks.” Krygsheld's goal in the next 5 weeks is for the participants to gain support and know the students who attend the grief group are never alone. Krygsheld wants the students to “know that there is healing and there are other people [dealing with similar situations.]” Her goals are for the students to know that they are not alone.

Krygsheld also runs a grief group through Golden Hope Ministries with meetings the first and third weeks of every month. Golden Hope Ministries is available for everyone, specializing in serving families and kids who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

# Seniors Bayleigh VanderZee and Allison Ohm share their experience with grief

Abigail DeBlock

Reporter

Senior Bayleigh VanderZee is a member of the grief group due to the loss of her mom the summer before her

sophomore year. VanderZee said, “The grief group is a good way for people who have lost someone to relate to each other on the same level.”

Adjusting to the loss has been difficult for Vander-

Zee, especially while at family parties. Her grief journey has been an emotional roller coaster.

“Some days are good, and then others I feel like my whole world has ended and I can't focus on anything,” VanderZee said. “Some days my appetite is completely gone and I haven't slept the same since [the passing of her mom].”

Senior Allison Ohm, who lost her dad her sophomore year, agreed with VanderZee, adding that the grief group will be very successful as she will be able to “grow a strong bond with other kids going through the same feelings of grief I have gone through.”

Ohm advises teenagers who have lost a family member to find a person to talk to and work through grief together. For Ohm, this group has been the

most advantageous tool in her grief journey, and she appreciates having someone to discuss her feelings with. Not being able to come home after a hard day and talk to her dad has been the hardest adjustment for

Ohm.

“Another challenging part has been not having him there for my sports activities supporting me, even though I know he is still up there rooting for me,” Ohm said.



Photo courtesy of Bayleigh VanderZee

Bayleigh VanderZee and her mom



Photo courtesy of Allison Ohm

Allison Ohm and family



# CHRISTMAS CHEER IS HERE

Kelsee Smit  
Feature Editor

During the Christmas season, many stories and traditions take place and people will just go along and never stop to really think about why we do what we do. Or do we just have realities about the Christmas season that we just continue saying without ever questioning if it's actually true? Below are some common misconceptions or questions with just some explanation because we will never know how it started but these are some best guesses or known facts.

**Was Jesus born on December 25?** The day of Jesus's birth is actually never mentioned in the Bible. According to an article in the Washington Post, It was initially believed to have taken place on January 6, but for reasons unknown, the celebration was moved to December 25 in the mid-4th century. But no one actually knows the exact date Jesus was born.

**Did you know that not all Christians celebrate Christmas on the same day?** In countries with large populations of Orthodox Christians\*, such as Russia, Ukraine, Greece, and Romania, Christmas Day falls on 7 January.

**Is Santa the only Christmas character to deliver presents?** Santa is not the only Christmas character – there are many more around the world! In Italy, for example, a kind witch called La Befana is said to fly around on a broomstick delivering toys to children! And in Iceland, children leave shoes under the window for 13 mischievous trolls called the Yule Lads. If the child has been good, they'll find sweets in their shoes – but if they've been bad, the Yule lads will leave them a rotten potato!

**Has there ever not been Christmas?** Believe it or not, in 1644 Christmas celebrations were made illegal in England, and soon after, in the English Colonies in America, too! At that time, members of the government felt that the religious meaning of Christmas had been forgotten, so they banned the holiday festivities. Some people still celebrated in secret, however, until Christmas was once again legal almost 20 years later!

**Wait, Jingle Bells isn't a Christmas song?** We all love to sing along to Jingle Bells, but have you ever noticed that the song doesn't have the word Christmas in it? Or Jesus or Santa Claus? That's because it wasn't originally a Christmas song! The jolly

anthem was published in 1857, entitled One Horse Open Sleigh, and some rumors claim it was first performed at a Thanksgiving service at a church, though the lyrics of the song itself cast some doubt of that account.

**Is Saint Nicholas real?** The history of Santa Claus dates all the way back to the third century, to an actual Turkish monk named St. Nicholas who was famous for helping the poor and sick. Dutch immigrants eventually brought the story of the man they called "Sinterklaas" to New York, where his legend continued. Now we have the jolly figure of Santa, a well-rounded old man who goes down chimneys in the middle of the night to set out Christmas gifts under the tree.

**Do kids still believe in Santa?** According to a 2011 study published in The Journal of Cognition and Development, an estimated 83% of American five-year-olds believe in Santa Claus. During the months of November and December, Santa receives around 32,000 letters daily from these believers! The average age when children stop believing is

eight, according to the 2018 International Exeter Santa Survey.

**Where do Christmas trees come from?** Christmas trees became popular in Victorian Britain. But the Christmas trees were first seen in 16th Century Germany where, at Christmas time, people decorated fir trees with fruit and nuts – and later sweets, paper shapes and candles. Amazingly, historians think the origins of this festive tradition may date back to the Romans and Ancient Egyptians, who used evergreen plants and garlands as symbols of everlasting life.

**Why do people put a pickle in a Christmas tree?** One Christmas tradition that some families do every year is to hide an ornament shaped like a pickle in the tree. The first child to locate the pickle hidden among the pine needles on Christmas morning gets to open the first present, or for some, receives a special treat. There are many different legends as to how this tradition started. Still, it most likely came from Germany and it is most popular in the Midwest specifically Michigan which does have many German immigrants.

**Why do I have to kiss someone under mistletoe?**

This popular kissing tradition may have its roots in Norse mythology. The History Channel reports that Frigg, the goddess of love, promised to kiss anyone who passed under the berry-laden plant after it saved her son's life. It wasn't until the 18th century, however, that the Christmas custom picked up steam in England.

Why do we leave milk and cookies for Santa? In America, the tradition of leaving cookies and milk for Santa Claus on Christmas Eve took root during the Great Depression, when parents encouraged children to keep their charitable spirit alive in the face of financial hardship.

**Why do we eat candy canes around Christmas?** Candy canes date back to 1670. According to History.com, the choirmaster at the Cologne Cathedral in Germany gave the red and white sugar sticks to young singers to keep them quiet during the Living Creche tradition on Christmas Eve.

**Where does eggnog originally come from?** Most historians agree that eggnog is a descendant of the medieval British drink posset, which was made with wine or beer, cream, sugar, and egg, according to Smithsonian.com.





# 'The Ballad of Song Birds and Snakes' Movie Review: Film will leave you hungry for more

Lydia O'Riley  
Sports Editor

In this prequel of "The Hunger Games," 18 year old Coriolanus Snow is a poor man living with his grandmother, Grandma'am, and cousin, Tigris. Coriolanus wants to work for the Capitol to make a better life for his family, so he goes to the academy to be prepared to work for the Capitol. However, the 10th annual Hunger Games are about to be held.

At the reaping (the choosing of tributes to be put into the games), Coriolanus and 23 other academy members are surprised to learn that the final challenge to be chosen to work in the Capitol is being a mentor to the tribute who wins the Hunger Games. Snow gets appointed to District 12's Lucy Gray Baird. Coriolanus's main goal: keep Lucy alive, win the Hunger Games, and become a wealthy Capitol man.

Coriolanus tests the Capitol and himself. He follows a dark journey of selfish desires that leads him to

become an evil, snake of a president as seen in the "Hunger Games" trilogy.

"The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" has many details that foreshadow later events of the movie but that come by so quickly and with so little fanfare that viewers might miss them. So, watching this movie is not a one and done type of experience; it will be enticing to watch again.

"The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes" is a fantasy action movie based on the book written by Suzanne Collins. It was directed by Francis Lawrence, who directed the whole "Hunger Games" franchise as well as "I am Legend." Rising star Tom Blyth played Coriolanus Snow and Rachel Zegler, actress in "West Side Story," played Lucy Gray.

The movie depicts the worst in humanity in Coriolanus, but it also shows us at our best in characters like Lucy Gray. One thing's sure: this new installment in the franchise will leave you hungry for more. Running time: 2hr 37min. Age rating: PG-13.



Rachel Zegler as Lucy Gray in The Ballad Song of Birds and Snakes Photo courtesy of ABC News

# After seven year drought, Zandstra homeroom finally nabs Christmas Homeroom Decoration title



Photo by Jeff DeVries

Ms. Top's homeroom came in second place



Photo by Jeff DeVries

Mr. Zandstra's homeroom came in first place



Photo by Jeff DeVries

Ms. Johnson's homeroom came in third place

Giannia O'Neal-Schultz  
Arts and Leisure Editor

In a stunning and unexpected victory, Mr. Neil Zandstra's homeroom captured the title in the annual Homeroom Christmas Decoration contest on Friday, Dec. 15.

Mr. Zandstra's Christmas theme this year was the movie "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation." Their strategy for winning was to go beyond simply decorating with lights, but to create the

Griswold family dining room from the movie and then to act out the famous scene where some Aunt Bethany, who is asked to say grace, recites the Pledge of Allegiance.

Prior to his win this year, Zandstra, who is very passionate about the competition, had failed to ever win.

Asked about his long losing streak prior to the judging, Zandstra said with a wry smile, "I despise losing. It hurts so bad . . . that I . . . spiral into a deep winter funk,

but [even if we lose again this year], I will still try to look for the good in humanity."

Zandstra added that, all kidding aside, he does enjoy decorating with his students every year despite the long string of losses prior to this year's glorious win. Zandstra said his favorite thing about decorating his homeroom is when his students work together and have fun and socialize together. Winning this year is the cherry on top of the sundae.

The Christmas Homeroom Decorating contest is a big deal for a few teachers beside Zandstra. Miss Top, a perennial champion and lunatic decorator, goes all in every year. Top's homeroom this year did a Hawaiian theme, including a genuine sand "beach," tiki torches, and hula skirts. The get-up was good for a second-place finish, but not good enough to topple Zandstra.

Another serious competitor year after year is Mrs.

Teach. This year her homeroom chose the Grinch as the theme for decorations.

Teach said, "This year we weren't able to do much because of the construction, but in the years past decorating has brought so much camaraderie to the kids in my homeroom. It keeps the kids engaged and it a healthy competition between the homerooms to come up with a design and unique themes that are cool too."



# Wrestling team fights through losses, success determined by perserverance



Photo by Jill Rozendal  
Junior Gage Bambic wrestles against Kankakee Valley wrestler at North Newton tournament on Nov. 25.

Kelsee Smit

Feature Editor

The boy’s wrestling team competed at the North Newton Invite on Nov. 25. The team finished in 5th place. Juniors Gage Bambic and Noah Yannuzzi both went undefeated. Noah Yannuzzi was also

recognized as the best wrestler in his weight class. Then on Dec. 7 they competed against Wheeler and won 40-34.

Coach David DeBoer commented saying, “We have a young team that continues to work hard and develop. We are looking to make progress by covering more

weight classes because we are giving up around 5 weight classes [every competition] which is tough. After all, it cuts down points. We have a young team, we are only graduating a few seniors and we have a really good sophomore and junior class. We are competing well.”

The team’s overall record is 1-2, but they are 1-0 against teams from their sectional. They lost to Griffith in a home meet on Dec. 13 with a final score of 18-41. Their upcoming competitions are on Dec. 16 at the Muster Super Dual and on Dec. 20 against Whiting.

Senior Carson Ulrich said, “Success in wrestling isn’t determined by the number of wins but by the number of times you get up after being knocked down.”

## Boys basketball: new team, new bonds, new goals



Photo by Jim Kamphuis  
Junior Grant Rappold reaches for ball at the first home game against Munster on Friday Dec. 1.

Lydia O’Riley

Sports Editor

The Illiana boys basketball team is off to a slow but promising start with a 2-3 record.

Varsity basketball coach Tom Roozeboom said, “You know, losing seven seniors, to now kind of

putting a whole new team together out there on the floor, it really just takes time to build that camaraderie amongst each other.” He added that building that team is a goal both long term and short term because he wants the team “clicking on all cylinders” by the end of the season.

Senior Andy Spoelman said another difficulty for the team was illness, with a number of players battling and missing because of various ailments.

The team lost its first home game to Munster. Roozeboom said, “It was a stinger...but we know that we are going to do better and they played really well so you can tip your hat to the team that outperformed you. We know that we can play better, and we have shown that.”

Outside of playing basketball games the team has bonding opportunities inside and outside of school. According to Spoelman, in school, the team hangs out together in the hallways and always talks to each other. Out of school, the team gets breakfast together after practice on Saturdays, and even watch Netflix together.



Photo courtesy of Illiana Facebook  
Girls’ varsity basketball sorts and loads coats at Faith and Action Ministry on Dec.7.

## Girls basketball team bonds serving at Faith and Action Ministry

Lucas VanderWoude

Editor-in-Chief

The Illiana varsity girls basketball team traveled to Faith and Action Ministry in Crete, IL on Dec. 7 to sort and move coats that will eventually be given to the homeless and poor.

This is the second straight year that the team has done this. The team sorted coats according to size and style and packed them into cars to be shipped off to the organization’s new location in Chicago Heights, IL. The team also moved materials down from the upstairs area of the Crete location so that they could also be moved to the new location.

This act of service not only helped the community

but it also promoted bonding on the team.

“I enjoyed it because I thought it was fun to bond with my team through service,” said Avery Olthof, a senior who is currently on the team. “I have never sorted coats before, so it was eye-opening to see that other people don’t have something so simple.”

Faith and Action Ministries started in 2009, and their coat ministry is just one part of the many acts of service that they do for their community. Some of their other ministries include the Urban Garden Ministry, focused on giving people access to healthy and fresh food, and the Exodus Projects, a type of mentorship/discipleship/church plant ministry.

# Girls wrestling competes, places in largest tournmant in Indiana

Giannia O’Neal-Schultz

Arts and Leisure Editor

Illiana’s girls wrestling team competed in the Sarah Hildebrandt Invite at Penn High School, an event which made history for being the largest girls wrestling meet in Indiana.

This invite had over 400 participants representing 52 different schools.

The girls wrestling team has trained very hard and it has paid off in the matches. They are undefeated with a record 4-0 in dual meets. Though team scores were not calculated for the Sarah Hildebrandt Invite, many of our girls did place at the meet. Freshman Olivia Rich took first place in her division, freshman Jennifer Bosman took second, freshman Ella Hammer

took third and juniors Gabriella Costello and Hannah Hammer took fourth.

The huge event ran into several setbacks. The computer system keeping track of the brackets kept going down repeatedly throughout the day, and as the Invite then went longer than anticipated, the gym at Penn High was double-booked with the meet finishing and a basketball game

supposed to be beginning.

Junior Khiari Roberson said, “Even though there were struggles I was proud that the team could persevere.”

Senior Sam Banks said, “We were able to overcome the delays by getting our minds set and just practicing what we needed to work on. The girls were able to overcome them and prevail in their matches.”

Coach Matthew VanderLaan said, “We prepare for our competitions by focusing on strength, endurance and wrestling-based movements. What we call a warm-up is what most people would consider a hard workout. What we call a workout, most people would consider to be torture. What we call a game, most people would consider to be a fight!”

## Male Athlete of the Month

December’s male athlete of the month is senior Andy Spoelman.

Tom Roozeboom, boys varsity basketball coach, said that right now, Spoelman is one of the most consistent players on the team.

Roozeboom added, “He does a lot of things that maybe people don’t see. You know, he’s one of the biggest guys out there on the court and still is able to handle the ball. Sometimes he’s our point guard bringing the ball to the floor, so there’s just a lot on his plate and he is still able to perform at a decently high level.”



## Female Athlete of the Month

Sophomore Gabriella Costello is December’s female athlete of the month. Costello has been on the girls varsity wrestling team these last two years and has, according to girls wrestling coach, Matt VanderLaan, “made a big name for herself.”

She earned a second place title in her weight class at both the Highland and Lebanon Invites. She earned a fourth place title at both the Rochester and Penn High School Invites, both of which involved over 400 girls from more than 50 different schools.

Freshman/sophomore wrestling coach Dave DeBoer said Costello is “becoming one of the more vocal leaders on the team and always pushes her team to be better.”





# Editorial

## I’m going to let it shine: How Christians can be a positive influence in the world

With 2023 coming to an end, it’s time to start thinking about 2024 resolutions. Some strive for weight loss, others for saving money, but how about addressing how our actions can improve the lives of others? How can we as individuals, especially as Christians, be a positive influence and make people see the light? Christians are especially called to do this by Jesus: ‘No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light’ (Luke 8:16). We often find that many people, both in the Christian community and outside of it, choose to cover their light instead of showing it. People complain, find fault, reject, criticize, and ridicule others, and see nothing wrong with it. Or maybe they do, but most times there is something going on internally that causes this to happen. Perhaps we believe such mean-spiritedness is our only option for action. But there are other ways we can treat people rather than bringing them down. We can show kindness and respect towards others. We can be a positive influence. Being a positive influence is the impact you have on another person (and yourself) by pointing out strengths and virtues. It is how you are, what you do, and the power

your words and attitude have on others to value what is best within themselves. Being a positive influence helps a person be better today than they were yesterday. Why is it important to be a positive influence? Being a positive influence builds an optimistic,

one sees you treating someone else with kindness and respect, that models how they should treat others as well. If we all practice kindness and have respect for others, a decrease in bullying and self-consciousness is likely to happen. If there is someone being targeted or made fun of,

confidence to encourage others to do the same. Be a leader and affirm the gifts you see in others. 3. Accept others who are different. Know what you believe, but don’t surround yourself only with people who think like you and thus trap yourself in an echo chamber of your own biases. Know what you believe and what you value, but listen to others too. Doing so shows that you value others and opens up honest dialogue, allowing people to learn and grow with one another. 4. Encourage positive influence in others. Place an expectation that once you have demonstrated positive influence, they will pay it forward. Empower others to share positive influence in their daily lives with co-workers, friends, and family. When you practice positive influence with others, you inspire them to realize a better future than they thought possible. You challenge them to demand more of themselves, and you encourage and motivate them to discover their sense of purpose. Imagine what we could accomplish if we could become more influential to those around us. Having a positive influence in this world is crucial. We’re all capable of being a positive influence when we understand the responsibility entailed in wielding our influence.

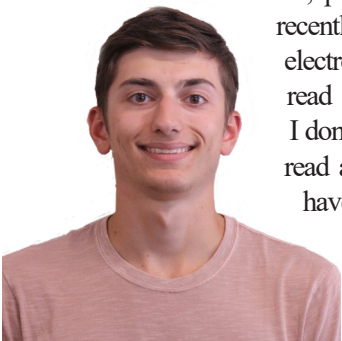
People complain, find fault with, reject, criticize, and ridicule others, and see nothing wrong with it.

affirmative, and constructive experience a person has in their work, family, and/or community, resulting in a happy person. There are so many good things that come out of being a positive influence, such as reducing friction, generating happiness, and helping others to realize their full potential. Being a positive influence means living your life as an example that will contribute to someone else’s success. Here are three ways we can instantly and positively influence other people. 1. Inspire change. If some-

stick up for them. If the situation is dangerous, get an adult involved, but if you stick up for someone they will feel appreciated and cared for. Model how you want to be treated by treating others the same way. 2. Create a demand for others’ talents and gifts. Open the doors for people to realize that something is missing and they have the thing we need. Help people see and understand how what they have to offer will make a difference. Everyone has the strength to make a difference, but many need the con-

## The pleasures of reading in a world full of distractions

Books have been around for a long time. The earliest written work found so far is The Epic of Gilgamesh, a mythical retelling of the life of a king who ruled over the ancient city of Uruk. Since then, millions and millions of books have been written down, printed, and, more recently, converted to electronic data. I have read many books, but I don’t pretend to have read all the books that have been written, for as the writer of Ecclesiastes says, “Of the making many books there is no end.”. When consid-



Lucas Vander Woude  
Editor-in-Chief

ering how long books have endured throughout history, one has to consider: Why do books matter in today’s modern world of cell phones and computers? Our world is full of distractions. Distractions from life are not a new thing, but in recent years the sheer number of distractions has increased at an alarming rate. Anybody can look up pretty much anything and spend hours digging deeper and deeper into the vast trove of information that is the Internet. However, the main thing that is distracting people around the world is the smartphone, which is a portable Internet device that can be used pretty much anywhere. My generation is the first one to be born into a world with smartphones, and I think that they have had a vast impact, not just on my generation, but on older generations too. Not to sound like a grumpy old man, and I confess that I am guilty of this too, but a smartphone is a gigantic time-waster, and it has been proven that spending too much time on it might seriously affect your brain. A study in the Journal of the Association for Consumer Research found that cognitive capacity was significantly reduced whenever a smartphone is within reach, even when the phone is off (unc health care.org). So how do books connect to all of this? Well, in my opinion, when it comes to distracting yourself from the real world, books are preferable to smartphones. This is not to say that smartphones do not have their uses. I have found Google Maps to be very helpful whenever I am driving to an entirely new place. Also, thanks to texting and calling, long distance communication has never been easier. However, spending countless hours mindlessly scrolling through social media or playing games will not lead to a thoughtful and engaged mind. This is where books come into play. Good books make you think; they make you wonder about ideas and concepts that you had never even thought about or noticed before. Also, despite what some people think, they are not boring. I have found that the satisfaction I feel after finishing a good book has outweighed any satisfaction that I get from the mindless stimulation of my phone. In conclusion, I’m not trying to make myself feel better than everyone else because I’ve read a couple books, because I’m not exactly perfect when it comes to cell phone usage. In fact, this column actually led me to reflect on how much time I have wasted on my phone and how much more interesting my life would be now if I had spent that time reading. Maybe I’ll make it a New Years Resolution. But for now, here’s one last piece of advice: Pick up a book. Get lost in it. You won’t regret it.

the

Echo)))

Editor-in-chief

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Kailyda Anderson

Feature

Kelsee Smit

Arts

Giannia O’Neal-Schultz

Sports

Lydia O’Riley

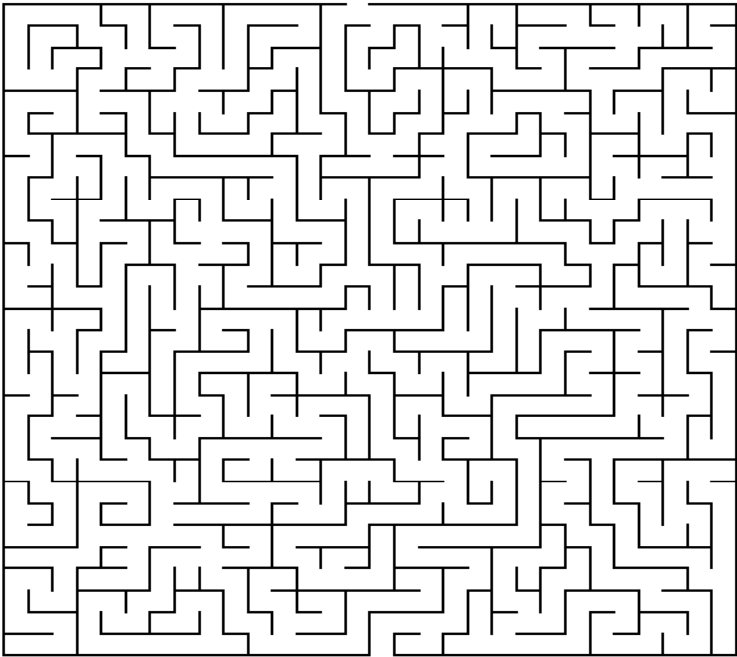
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Jeff DeVries

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Letters to the editor can be submitted to the advisor or sent to the school. All letters must be signed and must not exceed 250 words. They will be printed provided there is enough room and content is not offensive to the general public.

## Help Ruldolph reach the North Pole in time for Christmas!



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