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Winter 2024





Members of the Boys Cross Country team gather at the FHSAA State Championship in November. L-R Nathan Robinson '27, Charlie Morgan '25, Marcus Giles '28, Wyatt Hollingsworth '26, Richard Nichols '24, Timmy Jackson '24, Arlo Kistner '27, and Thomas Nichols '27.

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On the cover: Grade 3 students Ella Willingham and Zoe Knight have a blast at Spartan Fest. Read more on page 19.



Head of School Valorie Baker with St. Johns' campus therapy dog, Byrdie

Letter from the Head of School

Dear Spartan Families,

What a busy and productive fall semester we had, full of successes in academics, the arts, and athletics.

In September, we celebrated the opening of the Nichols Family Art Gallery, in the foyer of the Performing Arts Center, and it's been wonderful to enjoy that space as we spend time in the Performing Arts Center for Senior Presentation, plays, concerts, and more. If you haven't been to see it, start with a look at page 20, and then find some time to visit soon!

I'm proud that St. Johns is home to two National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists this year—a testament to our rigorous academic curriculum—and we were thrilled to witness as nine seniors signed their commitment to continue their academic and athletic pursuits in college. You can read more about that on page 12.

I also want to thank each of you for your support this year. Whether you have given of your time, talents, or treasure, we appreciate your gifts to the School. Your support helps advance St. Johns' mission and goals to provide the best possible education on the First Coast. Thank you.

Fondly,

Valorie Baker
Head of School



SCHOOL NEWS BRIEFS

Lower School

Lower School Town Meeting

St. Johns' Lower School celebrates and advocates its Caring School Community. As part of that Caring School Community, Head of Lower School Mr. Otis Wirth leads regular meetings with the entire Lower School student body. "The idea is that when everyone hears the same message, the community becomes even more robust," says Wirth. This community meeting is called the Lower School Town Meeting.

Town Meeting a celebration of students, sharing the learning that is occurring in the classrooms, and getting to know our fantastic staff better. Portions are also dedicated to social skills, emotional stability, and the Character Foundations program. The meeting is geared toward students, and parents are encouraged to come.

The meeting is organized and loosely led by Wirth, but with the students largely in charge. Two students act as emcees for each meeting, introducing the highlighted segments and students, and additional students serve as mic runners and help out in other ways.

One segment is called "Look! I am Awesome." Students nominate other students for kind deeds or being thoughtful. In a traditional setting, the teacher does the nominating, and the students often try to "win." But in this format, the students celebrate each others' successes and everyone wins. The power of a student who recognizes another is huge.

"In the Caring School, we consistently teach children – 'Yes, I am a good person, and so are you,'" says Wirth. "Imagine if the entire world took on this mantra!"



Early Math Introduction

Our very youngest Spartans got a leg up on their math literacy in the fall with an introduction to addition and subtraction through fun, concrete exercises. First, Math Specialist Cathy Braude introduced students to their new math kits and played a few games with them. Then, the kits went home so the students could play with them and get comfortable with the basics at home. "These fun games work as an early introduction to math concepts," said Braude, "with the goal being that they leave Pre-K4 with the ability to count to ten with ease, and this will give them an advantage in starting to add and subtract within ten."

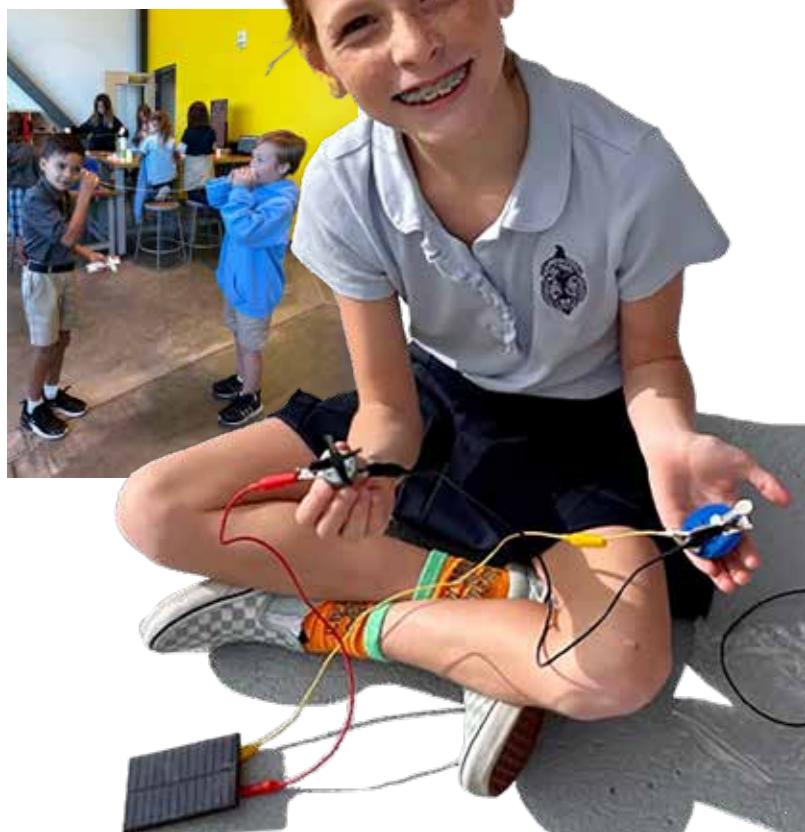


Science, Science, Everywhere!

In the Lower School classrooms, science education has many outcomes, including helping students foster a sense of curiosity about the world around them, developing critical thinking skills, and encouraging hands-on learning. Science education also lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the natural world and helps students cultivate scientific literacy, enabling them to understand and critically evaluate scientific information and claims in everyday life, now and as they move through Middle and Upper School.

Last semester, Lower School students put all of that into action in the classroom. Pre-K4 spent some time in the fall learning about the life cycle of an apple. During an apple dissection activity, they used their curious minds to predict how many seeds were inside an apple, and then used a few of their senses to feel, smell, observe, and taste the apples. Then, students took home bags of the remaining seeds, hoping to plant them with their parents.

In the Academy, Grade 4 scientists built circuits using solar panels for powering a motor. Through the activity and subsequent discussion, students gained an understanding of human impact on their environment and the significance of using natural resources.



Middle School



Focus on Service

Another primary focus for the Middle School is service, and the division incorporates a focus on service in various ways. One day in December, Middle School Student Council Advisor Mrs. Jennifer Cumberbatch and the Middle School Student Council volunteered at Miriam's Basket in Orange Park. The nonprofit works to provide clothing and other necessities to children in crisis.

Students learned about the mission of Miriam's Basket from Executive Director Linda Grabowski and how their volunteer service will benefit children in crisis living in the greater Clay County area.

St. Johns students sorted new donated clothing according to size, gender and the type of clothing item. Students also helped place the items on the racks accordingly and came away with the understanding that their volunteer work made a difference in the lives of local needy children.

Middle School Advisory

New this year, St. Johns' Middle School is revamping its Advisory program and implementing an extended Advisory period each Thursday. The goal is to give students and advisors dedicated time to really get into the issues that Middle School students face.

The leap from Lower School to Middle School can, in itself, cause a lot of stress for students. "Middle School Advisory helps prepare each student for the emotional jump that comes with understanding and learning of the daily routine that is Middle School life," said Head of Middle School Ben Magidson. "Throughout our curriculum, we teach and learn about circumstances and expectations in order to further strengthen our division and community"



“Great 8” Heads to the Mountains

In September, the Class of 2028 experienced an iconic memory of St. Johns Country Day School—the Mountain Trip, to the wilds of Western North Carolina. “This weeklong adventure in the mountains underscores the importance of cooperation and working together in teams,” said Grade 8 English teacher Thea Burke.

The itinerary featured team-building activities, ropes courses, whitewater rafting, and much more, immersing students in an environment that may be different from any they may have experienced before, where they are challenged to work together, stretch, and grow.

Over the course of the week, students had fun canoeing and swimming in a pristine mountain lake, and spent time in small groups building trust and cooperation through ropes courses and other guided activities. Students challenged themselves physically and mentally throughout the week. They

hiked longer and carried heavier loads than many thought they could. They eagerly tried new things they might never have attempted in their ordinary, daily lives. In addition to creating lasting memories, students worked together to find creative solutions to prevail in the woods. Students learned the importance of “leaving no footprints” as they explored the environment without disturbing the natural habitat. Finally, on an eight-mile journey, students learned to whitewater raft on the exhilarating Class 3 rapids of the French Broad River.

“Through this unique opportunity, our Spartans learned about themselves, each other, and the world around them,” said Burke. “These are essential knowledge and skills that will guide them through the rest of their Middle and Upper School careers and into the wider world beyond.”



Upper School



St. Johns Interact Club

Interact Club is a service club sponsored by the Rotary International. St. Johns' chapter is sponsored by Rotary Club of Orange Park and works to serve others while developing leadership skills and connecting with other leaders in the School and community.

The name "Interact" was created from the words "international" and "action" and the goals of the club align with those of Rotary International: promoting peace; fighting disease; providing clean water, sanitation, and hygiene; supporting education; saving mothers and children; and growing local economies.

"I really like being able to mentor students," said Club Sponsor Heather Velasco. "I love to make a difference in the community and to create that foundation of philanthropy and service learning that hopefully will carry them throughout their lives."

While the guidelines are for each Interact club to organize at least two projects every year, St. Johns' Interact

hosts dozens of events and projects every year, from a school supply collection drive in August, a river cleanup, and Mr. St. Johns, the fun "pageant" that this year raised more than \$3700 for the American Cancer Society.

Interact President Kate Jacobs loves the way the club works to make a difference both at School and in the community. "As president, I love seeing how I've made a direct impact. As members of the club, you obviously see what the club does, but as president I've been seeing a bigger impact, and that, even in high school you can really make a difference."

The club will be participating in Relay for Life this spring and is also raising money to package meals for Rise Against Hunger next year. "I love that we can get people from the whole community all working together to create 10,000 meals for people who need them," she says.



Thigpen Named 4H President

St. Johns Spartans accomplish many amazing things both inside and outside the classroom, and it's a pleasure to be able to laud them for both. In October, the Florida 4-H Council announced a newly elected president for 2023-2024, our own **Taylor Thigpen '24!**

Taylor has been a member of Clay County 4-H for nearly 10 years and has taken 4-H to heart, competing in 4-H Gator Pit (an entrepreneur funding competition similar to Shark Tank) twice. He attributes the success of business, Plant King, Inc., in part to the leadership skills he learned through 4H and the startup money he earned from winning 4-H Gator Pit.

Over the last two years Taylor has served as the President of the Clay County 4-H Teen Leadership Council, mentoring other young people, leading community service projects, and served as a youth liaison to the 4-H Association advisory group. Taylor also works with other organizations helping them to fill needs and reach goals, all while attending St. Johns, maintaining his GPA, and staying engaged with Spartan Life. Congratulations Taylor!

Homecoming

Sponsored by the Student Council, Homecoming Week included themed dress days, the Homecoming parade, a pep rally and lip sync contest, Spartan Fest, fall sports recognitions, and the Homecoming Dance. Congratulations to the Upper School for winning the coveted Spirit Stick at the pep rally and to the Class of 2024 for securing the victory in the Homecoming contest!



Taylor, second from left, and Hayden Russell '30, second from right, were featured at the 51st Annual Florida Farm Bureau Farm-City Luncheon. Taylor gave the main address and Junior Florida Cattlemen Member Hayden sang the national anthem.





St. Johns Presents the Class of 2024

Spirits were high as the Class of 2024 gathered on a rainy November day to celebrate their Senior Presentation, one of the major landmarks on the road to St. Johns graduation.

Starting with brunch at Azaleana Manor just for the senior class and a few faculty and administrators, Senior Presentation is an opportunity for the soon-to-be graduates to spend time together as a class, look back on their years at St. Johns so far, and look ahead to what's to

come. After photos, food, and a few sage remarks from President of the Board of Trustees Nick Courtney '03, the ceremony began later in the afternoon at St. Johns' Performing Arts Center.

In one of St. Johns' newer traditions, the Senior Class elects their own speaker for Senior Presentation and the Class of 2024 has elected Upper School English and Journalism teacher Hope Dorman.



"This day is for the parents and family members, for the faculty and staff, but most importantly, this day is for the Class of 2024," she began, "and so my speech is for you."

She proceeded, in a heartfelt and hilarious way, to call out memories of the students from through the years. The audience laughed (and cried) as she told them all that they are smart, talented, athletic, and high-achieving. But also that they are more. "And before you leave this place

and the safety and support it provides," she said, "I want you to hear and fully understand what I mean when I say that. You are more.

"This is what I mean fully: You are more than your grades. You are more than your voice. You are more than your sport. You are more than your scholarship. You are more than your clothes. You are more than the number of friends you have. You are more than the wealth you accu-

School News Briefs



mulate. And as the acceptance letters get closer, please remember you are more than the colleges you get accepted into and even more importantly please remember you are more than the colleges you do not get accepted into. You are more."

The seniors stood as Head of Upper School Jackie Lentini read each of their names and, finally, Mrs. Baker read the words of founding headmaster Dr. Edwin P. Heinrich, presenting the Class of 2024 to assembled family, friends, and classmates:

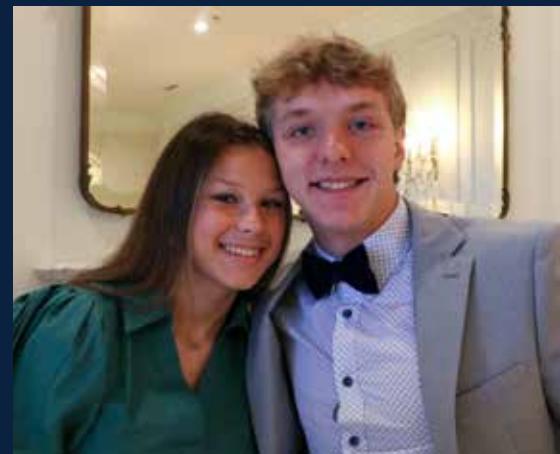
As a teacher I present you to the academic world that you may enter it and meet its demands honorably and successfully.

As your Headmaster I present you to your schoolmates so that they may accept you and look up to you as their leaders and their shining example.

As your friend I present you to your parents so that they may accept you as adults who have come into their own and who are to be dealt with from henceforth on an equal basis.

As your fellow human being I present to you your calling in life that you may always have the wisdom to recognize it and the strength to live up to the divine calling in your life.

Congratulations, Class of 2024!





Athletics



Nine Sign Athletic Commitments

On Early Signing Day, November 8, St. Johns was thrilled to celebrate 9 seniors and their commitments to take their academic and athletic talents to the next level in college. These include:

Baseball

- Seth Alford
- Trevor Bradley
- Kody Daneault
- Jack Ensell
- George Gilson

Girls Basketball

- Mary Kate Kent

Girls Soccer

- Sofia Avila
- Roxy Mathews

Softball

- Jules Raimondi

At the ceremony hosted by Director of Athletics John Sgromolo, coaches talked about each student-athlete, and students took the opportunity to thank those who had helped them along the way.

"Today is not the destination," said Coach Sgromolo, "but you are now stepping on the starting line."

Senior Nights

Fall sports celebrated their seniors with Senior Nights. Shown here, Swimming for **Jacob Kuramoto, Isabela Rudy, and George Auchter** (absent), and Volleyball for **Kate Jacobs**.



Spartans Earn FHSAA GPA Recognition

This fall, St. Johns is honored to be home to three teams that earned places in the 2023 FHSAA Fall Sports Academic Team Championships.

Each season the Florida High School Athletic Association Academic Team recognition program honors teamwork not only in competition, but in the classroom as well. The program recognizes teams in each of the association's sanctioned and recognized sports, naming an Academic Team Champion in each classification based on average GPA. To qualify, a team must be a FHSAA member senior high school that has a team average of at least 3.0 on an unweighted 4.0 scale. The program recognizes teams in each classification with the highest GPAs. This fall's recognized Spartan teams include:

- Boys Cross Country (10th in Class 2A, 3.514 Team GPA)
- Volleyball (10th in Class 2A, 3.2 GPA)
- Girls Golf (16th in Class 2A, 3.518 GPA)





Photo: Mary Kate Kent '24

Performing Arts

Fall Cabaret

This fall, St. Johns' Performing Arts Department hosted a Fall Cabaret production featuring the St. Johns Singers. "This more intimate environment allowed attendees to join the Singers right up on the stage and really be a part of the experience," said Choral Director Cara D'Emanuele.



Peter and the Starcatcher

The fall Performing Arts production was PETER AND THE STARCATCHER, a play about finding one's place in the world. The story follows a young orphan boy (played by AJ Hawk), who is simply known as "Boy," and his friend Molly Aster (Cordelia Painter). Molly is a Starcatcher apprentice, and together they embark on a journey to protect a mysterious trunk from falling into the hands of the villainous Black Stache (Sergio López-Díaz) and his pirate crew. The trunk contains a substance called "starstuff," a powerful and magical substance that has the ability to make people fly and grant other extraordinary abilities.

In the end, the play reveals how Boy becomes Peter Pan, along the way taking the audience on a unique and humorous journey capturing the spirit of Peter Pan.



Winter Concerts

During the last full week of School before Winter Break, the Performing Arts department hosted two concerts full of wonderful numbers by our student musicians. First, immediately following the Tree Lighting Family Event, the Winter Band Concert featured numbers by the Grade 5 Band, Middle School Concert Band, and Upper School Jazz Band, with a number of guest musicians and soloists. Then, a week later, the Winter Choral Concert brought vocalists from K-5 and the St. Johns Singers. Congratulations, musicians!



All-County Band

For many years, St. Johns Country Day School has participated in the Clay County Honor Band. This ensemble is made up of students from all county schools who audition for the right to earn a place in the group. "It's like making a musical All-Star team," said Director of Bands Cindy Glass.

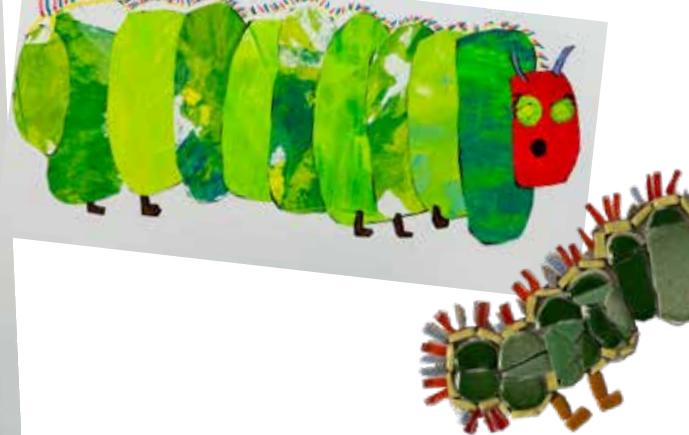
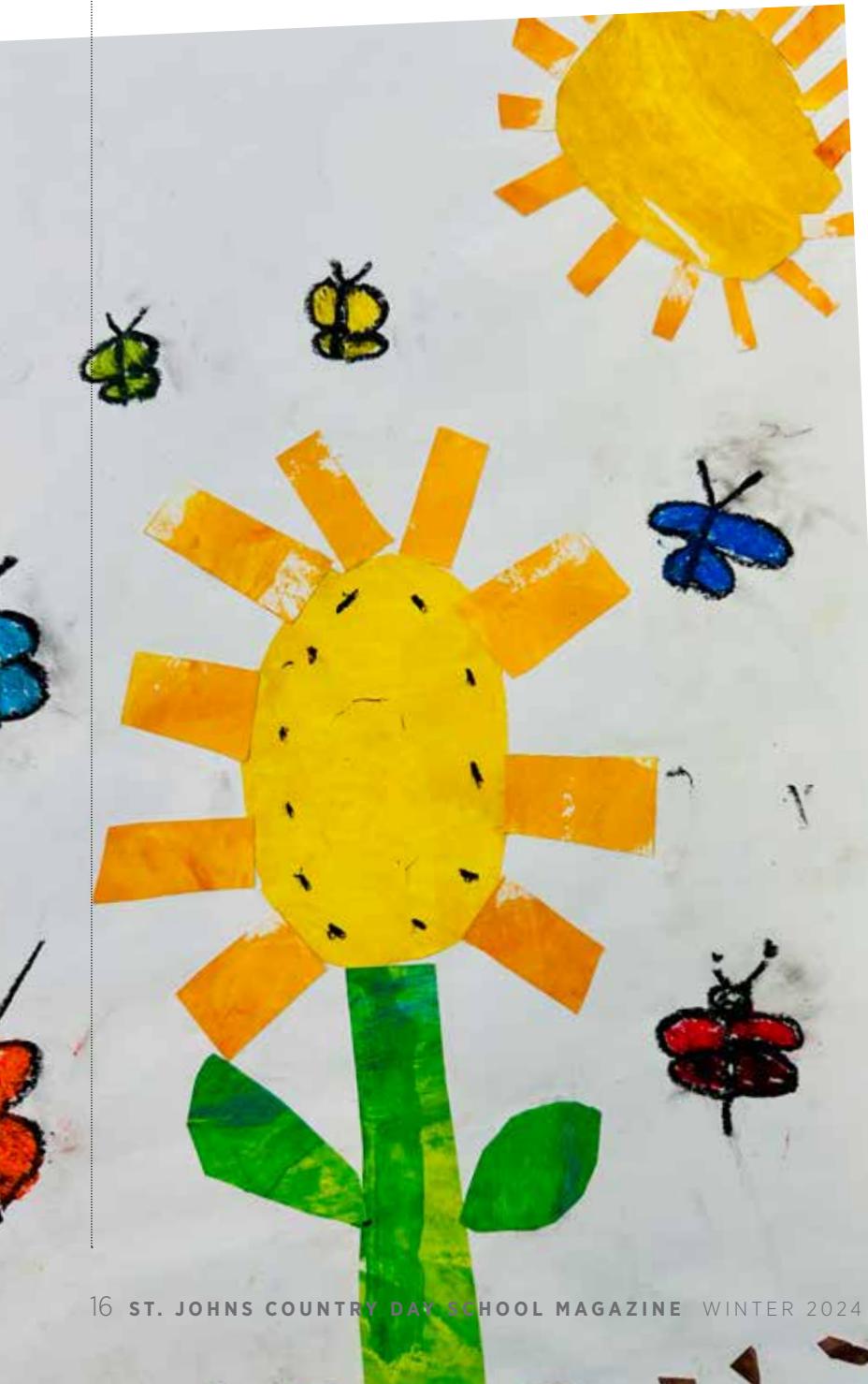
This year, two St. Johns students chose to audition for the group and were named as members of the group: **Timmy Jackson '24** and **Addison Wagstaff '26** were selected for the trumpet and clarinet sections, respectively.

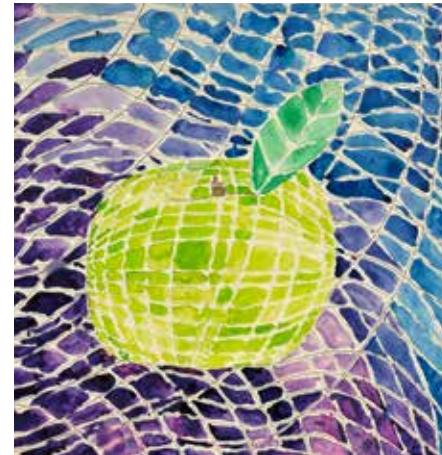


Visual Arts

Lower School

Last semester, Lower School students completed grade-level visual arts units on the work of Eric Carle, the famous author and artist who created books including *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*





Middle School

Middle School Visual Arts students are building the skills that they'll put into action in Grade 8 when it comes time to work on one of the department's curricular art mosaics.

"Grade 6 worked on a fruit mosaic project that is great prep for their work on the ceramic murals in the future," said Visual Art Department Chair and Middle School Art Teacher Anna Reynolds.

Students completed a large fruit drawing, which broke the object down into smaller pieces to help students figure out how multiple colors work together to form one image, just as it would in a mosaic with tile.

Grade 7 students put skills into action on a cut paper mosaic. They started with

an idea and searched for inspirational images online, then they drew their vision and made a composition out of it. They put the object (in this case a parrot) into a space, put a border around it, and figured out the spatial relationship of the image inside of a border. Then, they cut paper collage to make a mosaic.

"Grade 7's next steps will be designing the Athletics mosaic," continued Reynolds. "They'll work with the Athletics department to format that panel." Working with Director of Athletics John Sgromolo and coaches, they'll have a meeting to determine what should be depicted on the upcoming artwork.



Upper School: AP Portfolio

St. Johns' student-artists thrive in AP Portfolio, which challenges them to investigate materials, processes, and ideas. "Students create art by practicing and trying new things," said Upper School Art Teacher Pam Ayres. "They undergo critique panels, where their art is reviewed and discussed. Then they rethink and revise."

It takes tremendous amounts of dedication and perseverance to build a successful portfolio. Students work across classes including 2D design, printmaking, and ceramics, truly understanding multiple techniques and media.

"AP Portfolio students must think, act, write about, and interpret the world as artists," said Visual Arts Department Chair Anna Reynolds. "This course is an opportunity for them to work outside of the constraints of teacher-guided classroom assignments."

Junior Kelsey Gregson spent much of the semester working on her portfolio, which focuses on natural elements-- prints of the cycles of a butterfly, small etchings with shells, and needle-felted birds.

"Kelsey takes knowledge from one class and applies that to others," said Ayres. "It's helping her build her portfolio in a really dynamic way, applying her technical knowledge across multiple classes."

Other Upper School students building their AP Portfolios include Juniors Rowan Fix and Grayson Moody.





Spartan Fest

Spartan Fest had a new location, but the same great fun! Spartan Fest took place on Friday, October 27, in the Heinrich Way Loop. Students and their families enjoyed face painting, carnival games, inflatables, a photo booth, and more before heading up to the fields to watch the Homecoming soccer games. None of it would have been possible without the tremendous support from Spartan parent volunteers.



ST. JOHNS CELEBRATES FOUNDERS DAY

On Thursday, September 14, 2023, St. Johns Country Day School proudly commemorated the anniversary of its founding. The day was an occasion to not only celebrate the many successes we enjoy today, but also to reflect on the School's remarkable journey since its inception on September 14, 1953, when it welcomed its first 26 students in a modest building at the intersection of Highway 17 and Kingsley Avenue.

Today, St. Johns Country Day School has evolved into an academic powerhouse, setting the stage for a day of celebration that commenced on the Quad. Here, a heartwarming tradition

unfolded as the Class of 2024 was paired with their Grade 1 Buddies. The air was filled with anticipation as each first grader's name was called along with those of their senior buddies. Each group crossed the Quad to finish by casting a penny into the fountain and making a wish for their year ahead together.

While the seniors and Grade 1 students headed to the playground to get to know each other and have some fun, the festivities continued with the grand opening of the Nichols Family Art Gallery, in the Performing Arts Center's foyer.

Welcoming everyone to the ceremony, Head of School Valorie Baker extended her heartfelt gratitude to the Nichols



family for their instrumental role in transforming this dream into a reality. "I want to thank the Nichols Family personally," she said, "for all that you have given to St. Johns and for making this space available to our students and alumni."

She went on to commend Anna Reynolds, Chair of the Visual Arts Department, and the entire art department for their relentless dedication to conceptualizing and crafting the gallery. "I would like to thank Anna and our art department for the work that they have done, and that they continue to do, and for the level and presentation that they bring to this school. Now that we have a space like this for our students to display their work, it's absolutely amazing."

Taking the stage, Ms. Reynolds expressed her appreciation for the presence of all attendees and lauded the invaluable contribution of Upper School Art Teacher Pam Ayres. "Her gallery expertise has seen us through this initial process...and

has opened up so many areas for our curriculum in terms of helping the students understand the process beyond the classroom, taking art out into the world, and how we appreciate it, and we can teach the students to curate and appreciate and go forward from there."

Ms. Reynolds introduced President of the Board of Trustees Nick Courtney '03, who extended heartfelt gratitude to the Nichols family for their exemplary leadership and inspiration. "In many ways, the Nichols family exemplifies the spirit of giving, giving of both their time and their treasure in our community."

With that, a symbolic ribbon was cut, officially unveiling the gallery. Attendees were invited to peruse the diverse collection, which featured artistry from both current students and accomplished alumni. As they engaged with the artists and explored the many thought-provoking works on display, a sense of appreciation and wonder filled the beautiful new space.

Alumni Profiles

Parker Bryant '15



It's rare to find someone who not only knows what they want to do by age 5, but is working their dream job within a year of college graduation. Meet **Parker Bryant '15**, a dolphin trainer at St. Augustine's Marineland. She's also an assistant swim coach for St. Johns' varsity team and Spartan Aquatics (SPAC).

But before all that, she came to St. Johns as a sophomore in high school. Parker remembers most the strong sense of community at St. Johns, and that stays with her to this day. "St. Johns gives you a family, no matter how far away from each other you might end up being." And being on the swim team gave her an even smaller family connection within the school. "I love being on the pool deck now and having former swimmers come back," she says, "seeing people I swam with or who came after me, or now even ones that I have coached."

After graduation, she started off studying marine science at Florida Gulf Coast University. She stayed

there for two years, and then switched to Florida State for her final two. She was thrilled to be able to have a college experience that was the "best of both worlds." At FGCU, she kept her focus on school and work. Then, when she went to FSU, she got to experience the big football school environment, joined a sorority, and reunited with her sister, Whitten Bryant '17, when the pair overlapped there for two years.

But her path changed even beyond the school that she was attending. "So many kids still don't know [what they want to do] when they're in college," says Parker, "and I went through that, too, because when I initially went to school for that marine science degree, I knew I wasn't going to use any of it for dolphin training, so I thought, 'is dolphin training the actual route that I want to go?'" She didn't want to follow through with a marine science degree knowing that it wouldn't relate to much of what she aspired to do, so she considered changing her whole career path. "I thought, 'I'll just be a teacher. I really like kids. I enjoy working with them', so that was my backup plan—becoming a teacher."

And then her dad intervened. "My dad being my dad, we went to Sea World one day and he asked one of the trainers what their degree was in. And they said psychology." So that settled it. She changed her major to psychology and realized, once on her new path, that everything she was learning in psychology was very much going to relate to being a dolphin trainer.

She graduated from FSU in May of 2019 and that fall she started a Marineland internship, which was about 5 months long. "It's like a working interview," she said. "After that, I went to do an internship at Disney for two weeks. The supervisor from Marineland called me and asked, 'how do you feel about coming back for a full time position?'" and that was that. She was on her way.



Now, her days are filled with Fish Prep (sorting and preparing restaurant-quality fish for the dolphins' meals) and training, and she wouldn't have it any other way.

"I love dolphins because they are so smart," says Parker. "They outsmart us every single day, which can get frustrating at times because you think as a human that you are smarter than everything. But dolphins, they outsmart us so it challenges you. We'll go out and think that whatever we are going to do is going to be super easy, and then one dolphin is like, 'Joke's on you!' and it's not going to go the way that you thought. Every day is different."

She also loves getting to know the dolphins' personalities. "You wouldn't think that dolphins have distinct personalities, but they absolutely do," Parker says. "I love knowing how they are different from each other, what each one finds more reinforcing, what they don't enjoy, how they learn, and what trainers they interact with better. Just like people are going to get along with some people better than others, it's the same thing with dolphins. Some have a stronger relationship with certain trainers, some are more 'I get along with everybody.' So knowing how individual they are is really cool."

Marineland currently has 15 Atlantic bottlenose dolphins, and Parker works with all of them. She trains them on health checks, making sure they willingly participate in necessary parts of their care like blood draws, stomach samples, etc. Each trainer is assigned as a husbandry trainer to specific dolphins. "It's the husbandry trainer's job to make sure that they're comfortable with all of these behaviors. Making sure that they're all as healthy as they can be is the most important part of our job."

Marineland doesn't allow trainers to have "favorites," so Parker is sly on this subject. But, she says, "it's natural to get closer with the dolphins you work with a lot and with whom you've gotten to build strong relationships."

One dolphin she mentions is Niele, who came to Marineland with little to no in-water experience. He would do the poolside programs when there were no people in the water with him; the trainers wouldn't get in the water with him. "He was deemed a 'B' animal," Parker says, "an aggressive animal. But I was put on his team to work towards doing the in-water programs," says Parker, and now he does all three. "He's come such a long way in such a short amount of time. Now the fact that he was considered a monster is crazy."

Parker is in her dream job now, so it's difficult to imagine what might be next. But when asked how things could get even better, her goal is to continue to grow at Marineland. Right now she is a Marine Mammal Specialist 3. "There are different levels within being a trainer, from 1 to 3, then Senior Trainer, Assistant Supervisor, and Supervisor," she says. "So I'm in the middle of the pack right now." She'd like to be Assistant Supervisor or Supervisor someday, she says, "but as you go up the pyramid, the number of spaces gets smaller, so it could be tricky to get to that point. But this is my dream job, so I don't want to give up on it and miss out on those opportunities."

In the little time that's left when she's not at Marineland or on the pool deck at St. Johns, Parker stays busy with her dogs, or, these days you can often find her crafting. She also likes to get out of the house, visit family, or just get out and do things around town.

A dream vacation, if she were to take one, might be to Australia. She's SCUBA certified and the Great Barrier Reef has been on her list. Meanwhile, you can find her beachside at Marineland, doing exactly what she's always wanted to do.

Scott Goldstein '15

Scott Goldstein '15 says that his time at St. Johns helped solidify his love for working in entertainment. But, he says, "I really was fortunate with my teachers at St. Johns. Theater Tech with Mr. Geary was always a blast, it was great to work until just before the show opened running cables and programming boards. I think that solidified my love for working in entertainment on a deadline."

He also credits Mrs. Pam Ayres, who he says was "great at moving between the high and the low in conversations; plus her endless knowledge of the art world was always clear." Coach Jay Birmingham "was always an influence on me," Scott says. "I loved his outlook and still think of him every time I work up the courage to



go out for a run." And Coach Jody Hale was also great, Scott says. "He told me once that he's never hungry and never cold because he always has snacks and a jacket in his backpack. I follow his advice on every tech scout."

Ms. Leslie De Stefano was also important, Scott says. "She always emphasized the connection points between subjects. I think that's a great way to look at learning, a holistic approach to information that makes understanding new things much simpler." Plus, he says, "St. Johns always had a bit of a different flavor to other private schools in North Florida," which he enjoyed.

After St. Johns, Scott attended the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and graduated with a bachelor's of fine arts in filmmaking and a concentration in production design. Then he moved almost immediately to New York City. "I graduated, went to LA for a school trip, spent two weeks at home in Florida, and then my endlessly supportive father was kind enough to drive our family SUV in caravan with me

and my U-Haul to New York City,” Scott says. “He and my brother helped me move in.”

Scott had spent summers after his sophomore and junior years in college in New York as an art PA on TV shows and commercials, so, he says, that made the adjustment easier. “I got lucky with an internship opportunity after my sophomore year of college and most of my connections have branched off from that.” And as to the legendary difficulty in finding an apartment in New York, Scott says “It’s funny, you’ll never find a place worthwhile more than about 25 days before you need to move, so there’s no point even trying. Everything in New York is mildly inconvenient, but putting in the effort leads to a return.”

Scott says he’s never really considered himself an artist. “For the most part,” he says, “I just had a deep love of the arts. I certainly made a few short films at a young age,” he says, “and my family watched a ton of movies. We were Blockbuster junkies through and through.”

He was an intern & later an Art PA on *At Home with Amy Sedaris* and has been Assistant Art Director on *American Horror Story* for the past two seasons. Scott says he loves working in the Art Department. “I usually start my day in the office trying to sprint through a drawing that construction needed yesterday,” he says. “From there, we’re dealing with sets going up on stage, locations that need ground plans, and occasionally scenery to be installed onsite. It’s fun, a bit nerve-wracking sometimes, but it’s great seeing it all come together.”

Asked about his favorite thing that he’s worked on, he goes back to the winter before he graduated from college. “I designed a tiny short film called *Lance (in a Neckbrace)* that went to Sundance. I had about \$200, I’m sure I went over budget and put too much of my own money into the project. I turned down a paying job in NYC because I liked the script so much,” he says. “And it was a great crew. I’m still close with the director and producer, plus the film has some legs, too. It’s in the *Cards Against Humanity* festival right now.” (Check it out at www.cahfest.com)



More recently, he was navigating the effects of the SAG-AFTRA strike. An agreement was signed in December 2023, but the strike shook the entertainment industry—including work for Scott—for most of 2023. “The day the SAG strike was called, *American Horror Story* shut down,” he says. “It was weird. We were in a major scramble to get drawings ready for an art-heavy location, and all of the sudden in the middle of the afternoon it just stopped.” He was able to travel a bit and got out of the country, but “I definitely went a bit stir crazy,” he says. “I don’t love having more than two weeks off.”

If we were to find him with a little time off, though, he says he’d head back to Croatia or Germany. “I’m a big fan of driving a little Fiat in Europe.” More locally, though, he enjoys exploring New York City, “cosplaying as a street photographer,” he says, “or visiting my parents in Florida.”

If he could offer one piece of advice to current St. Johns students exploring a career path, Scott says, “I would say that, contrary to popular myth, there is a lot of work in film, TV, theater, and the fine arts. I’m fortunate to have parents that are endlessly supportive, but I know that’s not true for everyone,” he says. “The myth of the starving artist is so tried and true that I cringe at even referencing it, but it is ultimately a myth. I’ve had roommates who were painters, gallery assistants, studio musicians, street artists, and graphic designers,” he says. “None of us ever missed rent. It’s definitely worth looking at art schools in college searches.”

Chris Harvey '00

It's hard to know where to start with **Chris Harvey '00**. He has been and done many things in his time so far. His website is titled "Called to Wander," and his life path demonstrates that as truth.

A 2000 graduate of St. Johns, now he travels the continent in a converted RV with his wife, Lindsay and two dogs, Everest and Huckleberry. "I credit many of the relationships and experiences I had in [my years at St. Johns] for helping me to become comfortable with the life I have chosen to lead," says Chris. The path between here and there has been winding.

Chris transferred to St. Johns at the start of his sophomore year and says he immediately felt welcomed into the fold as if he'd been there for years. "I appreciated the fact that every teacher and staff member truly cared about me," he says, "even though I proved to be a handful over the years!" Chris particularly credits Mr. Rod Fisher who was, he says, "a rock" to him.

"Mr. Fisher saw my overly-extroverted and humorous personality emerging before it reached the level of needing to be tapered down a bit," remembers Chris. "He had a way of encouraging better decision-making without berating me. And he never missed a basketball game, something I cherished about a man who seemed to always give



and pour into students many hours before or after school each day."

And, he says, Señora Pat Fernandez taught him patience. "I remember fighting her tooth and nail over learning all of the Spanish she was teaching me.... Now I spend half of each year in Mexico where I know beyond any doubt it is the foundation that Señora Fernandez laid in my life that allows me to communicate with locals during these trips."

But by far, Chris says, the teacher who had the biggest impact on him was his AP Lit teacher, Mr. Joe Warner. "I realized later that Mr. Warner was trying to teach us how to adjust to becoming adults, and to be true to ourselves in a world that could care less how we turned out," says Chris. "That class was foundational for who I have become and who I still aspire to be."



After graduating from St. Johns in 2000, Chris went first to Georgia Tech to study mechanical engineering. He eventually landed at the University of Florida and graduated in 2004 with a bachelors of science in business administration and a focus on management. Right after graduation, he hit the road. “Over the next four months, I traveled solo thousands of miles through South America, reaching Machu Picchu and ultimately celebrated my 23rd birthday in Tierra del Fuego.” He made his way back to Orange Park and eventually took a job teaching science at Ed White High School. He was named Ed White’s Teacher of the Year in 2010, and continued to travel as often as he could.

In 2011, Chris left the classroom for the chance to partner with a college friend on a documentary film, *American Made Movie*, which explores the impact of U.S. manufacturing on culture and economy. He continued to produce a half dozen films over the following years, still traveling as much as he could. His trips were now primarily to Utila, an island off the coast of Honduras, during the winter months. “During one of those trips,” he says, “I was baptized in the Caribbean, on Christmas Day, in an event that changed the course of my life.”

He met his wife, Lindsay, on a mission trip to Cuba in 2013 and they were married at sunset on a dock over-

looking a bay on Utila, just feet from where he had been baptized. Eventually he and Lindsay made their way to Green Cove Springs’ Seemark Ranch, where they became foster parents to eight kids. He continued his work in documentaries for a while, but “eventually,” he says, “it became clear that my God-given calling was to focus on the children.” So he stepped away from the studio and focused full-time on being the best possible foster parent.

He and Lindsay parented 24 children over the next two years, as many as eight at a time. “We were responsible for every aspect of their lives, the same as any parent would be for their own children,” he says, “and we managed to have a positive impact in most of the kids’ lives.”

Over time, the pair began thinking about driving from Alaska to Argentina. On a weekend away from Seemark, they met a man standing on the side of the road who had recently finished driving the route they wanted to take along the Pan American Highway. They saw it as a sign.

By 2018, several of their foster children had been reunited with family members and a new set of foster parents arrived at Seemark. “Just as clearly as God had led us to Seemark, He led us into a new adventure,” Chris recalls, “one that is still ongoing.”

They purchased a truck and slide-in camper and

by the end of March they were on their way northwest toward Deadhorse, Alaska, the state's northernmost drivable point. "If we were going to drive from Alaska to Argentina," Chris says, "we wanted to go from the absolute top of Alaska to the absolute bottom of Argentina."

What happened over the next few months changed the couple's course, purpose, and plans for the next few years and has continued to affect them to this day. They continue their life on the road, though, Chris is careful to mention, no two days are ever the same. "Depending on whether we are on a "travel day" or finding a longer term place to stay a few days (never more than three days in one place)," he says, "the day could be crazy and full of problem-solving." They rarely know where they are going to sleep from day to day. "This is probably the biggest change in living on the road, where I have learned to embrace uncertainty more than I ever thought I could," Chris says. "I like structure and routine. But the idea of moving from one place to the next, waking up to views of mountains or desert, beach or ponderosa pines, overcomes the anxiety of not knowing where we may end up."

Their days are quickly filled with logistics—from when to buy fuel to where to find groceries—but the couple makes time for meaningful work as well. Sometimes they take on jobs locally and they earn money as "influencers," pushing content to their website and social media. Chris also freelances, helping companies design and implement website content strategy with a focus on search engine optimization. Recently, the pair have started "work camping," stopping in South Dakota's Custer State Park for five months at a time to work in a guest lodge there.

Though they've been traveling for most of the past five years, they tend to migrate back to certain places. "Our favorite place to rest for longer periods of time is a single, sandy beach along the Bay of Concepción in Baja California Sur, Mexico," Chris says. "It is here where our hearts are most content and where we can

have a 'million dollar view' each day for just a handful of Mexican pesos." They winter each year in Baja, hosting meetups and leading caravans through the area in effort to fundraise and bring awareness to nonprofits in Baja.

They visit friends and family as much as they can, and when they leave Baja this coming April, they'll set out on a journey to visit each of the contiguous 48 states. They're undertaking the trip to honor Lindsay's father, who passed away unexpectedly last summer, and Chris also hopes to meet up with as many members of the Class of 2000 as possible. "Our 20th class reunion should have taken place during the summer of 2020," says Chris, when COVID intervened. "Despite trying to get a series of informal get togethers in the books, most of us deferred our reunion to a later date in time."

"All of our lives have taken us in different directions, but I believe that part of the opportunity I have in front of me is to do my best to try and have at least a cup of coffee with anyone from the Class of 2000, wherever they might be."

Whether and how Mr. Warner's grand lesson from AP English breaks down into simple life experiences for anyone who comes across Chris' story, or whether it remains just a big elusive idea, "the reality," he says, "is that whether we wander or find ourselves planted in one place, whether we build or run a Fortune 500 business or operate our own medical or law practice, or drive an hour to work in a cubicle, whatever we do - we are part of a much bigger story than we could ever imagine."

Keep up with Chris, Lindsay, Everest, and Huckleberry on all their adventures at CalledtoWander.com.

Nominate an Alumnus!

Have an alum you'd like to read about here?
Send it to us at info@sjcds.net!



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Alumni Notes



Former Staff Mini Reunion

Several former staff, and Spartan parents and grandparents gathered for a mini reunion in October: L-R former Grade 5 teacher Anne Auchter Gibbs (mother to **Elizabeth Byers '87** and **George Auchter '89**, grandmother to **George Auchter '24**), Former Head of Lower School Mary Helen Cauthen (mother to **McCall Thoemke '97** and **Cary Benefield '02** and grandmother to **Caris Morgan '28**, **Charlie Morgan '25**, and **Douglas Benefield '35**), Former Head of Lower School Jim Edwards, Former Head of Upper School Mary Virginia Fisher and Assistant Headmaster Emeritus Rod Fisher (grandparents to **Kendall Proffitt '28**, **Brynley Proffitt '29**, **Fisher Proffitt '31** and **Mila Proffitt '31**), and Former Middle School & Admissions Administrative Assistant Brenda Jones (mother to **Matthew Jones '01** and grandmother to **Ethan Jones '29** and **Rian Jones '31**).



2000's

◀ **Meagan Eddy Bishop '08**, her husband, **Garrett Bishop '13**, and their son Gavin were thrilled to welcome baby Mason Elliott in July. The family lives in Fleming Island. Garrett has recently begun his career as a real estate agent and co-owns a construction company with his brother and father. Southern Construction Concepts services Clay County and surrounding counties for all your custom home needs. Meagan left her career as an elementary school teacher to stay home and raise their family. She manages their vacation rental in New Smyrna Beach, assists with design projects, and creates recipes for her food blog, *Prosecco and Pineapple*.

2010's



▲ **Natalie Shaykh '13** married Ramsey Grissom on September 30, 2023, in Paphos, Cyprus. The bride and her family grew up traveling to the beautiful country to visit her mother's family, so it was a very special place for their nuptials. Spartan wedding party members and guests included maid of honor and sister **Diana Shaykh '19**, groomsman and brother **Ramzi Shaykh '09**, **Philip Robbins '09**, **Parker Robbins '20**, **Jordan Robbins Rechcigl '10**, and the following Class of 2013 graduates: **Caroline Robbins**, **Vipul Patel**, **Lauren Sado**, **Jacob Dautel**, and **Lexi Frasier Dautel**.

Auriel Haack '16 has taken a new job at Washington, DC's Folger Shakespeare Library as an education coordinator.



▲ **Carolyn (Killea) Sarif-Killea '11** married Trevor Brandt-Sarif in December 2022 and welcomed new baby Alexander Sarif-Killea on September 22, 2023.

Sydney Monroe '17 visited former St. Johns teachers Jen and Steve Knapp in Ecuador before they moved to Spain over the summer.



▲ **Jordan Robbins Rechcigl '10** and her husband, Kevin, welcomed baby girl Evelyn Marie on May 29. Evelyn joins her older brother James.



▲ **Maylee Gouin '19** got married on July 29, 2023 with two of her favorite fellow Spartans by her side—her brother, **Micah Gouin '19** and her best friend, **Bri Enter '19**.



▲ **Kevin Aiosa '13** moved to Colorado in May of 2021 and married Austin Averett in August 2022. He currently works as an electrical engineer for Avidyne.



▲ **Megan Rogers '14** was selected to do the flyover for the Navy vs. Notre Dame game in Dublin last August. She, of course, was rooting for Navy.



▲ While attending a Gators football game in the fall, Director of Technology Anne Gorman ran into **Abbey Lantinberg '21**, who is a Cicerone at the University of Florida.



▲ **McKenzie Cooper '17** graduated from Jacksonville University with honors in May 2021 with a bachelor's degree in English and minors in education and history. She went on to the University of Florida where, in August 2023, she graduated with distinction with a master's degree in mass communication with an emphasis in science and health communication. She also obtained a Health Communication Graduate Certificate.



▲ **Lizzie Stoeber '20** traveled to Liverpool, England last summer as a part of the USA baton twirling team and was team captain for the Allstars Twirling Academy. Her team won 2 gold medals and came home as world champions! (Front row, 3rd from left)

St. Johns Band alums gathered in November at Florida State University and University of Florida when former band director Michael Warren was in Tallahassee for FSU's annual PRISM band extravaganza and in Gainesville for the UF-FSU football game.



FSU: **Julia Andrawis '21, Kaley Burnside '21, Liam Woolard '20, Michael Maytin '20, Justin Shipman '22, Mr. Warren, Josh Soffler '20, and James Woolard '20**



UF: **Lizzie Stoeber '20, Zach Dommick '21, Mr. Warren, and Robert Morris '22**

Alumni Winter Weekend

In December, St. Johns hosted a weekend of alumni events, starting with an Alumni Night at a boys basketball game. The informal evening featured food and fun preceding the game, plus plenty of time to catch up with fellow alumni. Alumni then joined Spartan parents and students to cheer on the team. Many alumni brought their children, which made for a fun family evening!



George Auchter '24

Above: Ian Mamea '27, Elliott Graham '28, Camden Cooper '28, Lily Weldon '23, Carter Graham '25, Cookie Myers '23, Dylan Reach '27, Grayson Moody '25, Erik Williams '27, Deavyn Coleman '26, Logan Reese, Coach

Ian Gibson, Luke Holcomb '27, Andrew Hightower '23, John Moore '99 and daughter, Cole Ferguson '14, James Rechcigl, Jordan Robbins Rechcigl '10, Liam Bielek '20, Riley Davison '20, Britt McTammany '87, Jessica Linge

'20, Lilly Peterson '20, Parker Robbins '20, Emma Harward '21, Matt Drake '17, Patrick Weaver '03 and family, Drew Petty '13 and Cameron Petty.

The festivities continued on Saturday with a Spartan Cricket match at St. Johns. Cricket Club Sponsor Mr. Josh Stern and nearly two dozen current and former Cricket Club members got together for a friendly match.



Above: Ava Johnson '23, Sarah Robinson '24, Jack Pearce '25, William Cooper '23, Hunter Hopkins '23, (obscured: Jay Ramroop '27), Nathan Kipnis '27, Nathan

Robinson '27, Joseph Shimko '20, John Cabrera '22, Blake Sheftall '27, Jackson Powers '20, Michael Wyatt '19, Parker Robbins '20, Rhett Sessions '17, Mr. Josh

Stern, Alex Mosborg '19, David Mosborg, Richard Wilson, Chris Wilson, Westin Cowherd '25, Sam Hopkins '23, Richard Nichols '24, and Marshall Martin '23.

In Memoriam

Stewart Bentley Ira, father of **Winslow (Ira) Colbert '73, Elizabeth (Ira) Williams '76, and Mary Stewart (Ira) Farnell '79**, passed away on December 30, 2023.

Michael McMillan, or "Mr. Mac," former Upper School science teacher and father of **Sean McMillan '90**, passed away on Monday, December 18, 2023.

Dr. Frederick W. Schert, father of **Emily Schert Sana '96, Mary Schert Ferris '99, and Bethany Schert '04**, died in August 2023.

Cody Vincent '00 passed away in October 2023 and a memorial service was held on November 9 in St. Augustine.

Bette Hagel, mother of **Robin Hagel Cooper '75**, died in August 2023 in Jacksonville

We love to hear your news!

Alumni, visit sjcds.net/alumni to send us your updates and let us know if you prefer to receive "1953" electronically.

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SPARTAN PREPAY

The Alumni Remission program will be available through the 2025-2026 school year. To lock into the 40% remission rate, you must pay a one-time deposit of \$25,000 by May 1, 2025. For more information, visit sjcds.net/alumni or contact Director of Admissions Kelly Risdon (krisdon@sjcds.net).



St. Johns thanks those who served on the 2023-2024 Board of Trustees:

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Save the Date!

- **18th Annual St. Johns Spartans Golf Tournament:** Friday, April 19
- **A Day at the Downs:** Saturday, May 4
- **Graduation:** Saturday, May 25



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Mr. St. Johns Richard Nichols '24 and Miss St. Johns Calli Berrang '26 wave as Alumni Dad John Maierhoffer drives in the Homecoming Parade.