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The Evolution of Security at Pine View—*The Torch*: April 6, 2022

For as long as I've attended Pine View, an intrinsic part of my experience at the school has been learning in portables and taking long treks from one end of our open campus to the other to reach said portables. Losing the portables and having them replaced with Building 17 was a major change for everyone, and it brought about ripple effects that many hadn't considered; new and improved security-based technology became one of the leading differences on campus. Originally, I wanted to cover a more in-depth look on the extensive camera equipment now deployed around campus, but administration was understandably hesitant to divulge as much information as I intended to share. Thus, the angle of this story evolved into highlighting the perspectives of the people behind the walkie talkies: our school's security monitors, Jessica Auerbach and James Hawkins. It was through their insights that I gained a much stronger understanding of the ins and outs of school monitoring, and I hope that this piece humanized and shed light on Auerbach and Hawkins' dedication. They're often seen as more serious faces on campus, so getting to hear their perspectives on the threat our school received in December 2019 and how that shaped how they handled their jobs was deeply touching.

Change has been a hallmark of this year at Pine View; with the addition of Building 17 and removal of the portables, security measures on campus have also evolved.

Building 17 comes with a myriad of new security features. According to School Resource Officer (SRO) Eugene Williams, 46 cameras were installed in and around the building. Williams monitors these cameras, as well as preexisting ones that are situated throughout campus. Footage can be pulled and reviewed as needed.

In the event of a lockdown, the stairwell doors in the new building will close and lock automatically, helping keep intruders out. Tinted windows, automatic locks on doors, and recessed walls that form safe corners all help guarantee safe classroom environments.

"I feel confident with all the features of the new building," Williams said. "It's not just me and the security personnel — it's every staff member, every student. Everybody's eyes help to keep the place safe."

Campus security monitors Jessica Auerbach and James Hawkins comprise the security personnel Williams mentioned. Pine View is divided into three areas that are meant to have their own respective monitors; Auerbach looks over the shell lot and the south end of campus, while Hawkins handles fields, Building 16, and the north end of campus.

Former security monitor Theresa James' departure left the middle of campus — including the quad and areas surrounding Building 17 — without an official monitor. With the portables no longer being a concern, Auerbach and Hawkins monitored the area during their days before Ed Leduc, Pine View's newest security monitor, was hired and started March 23.

"One of the things that I've really made sure of is that I'm always visible. Yes, I'm supposed to be south campus, but you will see me all over; if anything happens and if you guys need anything, you know

that I'm here," Auerbach said. "We have a big campus. There's a lot of nooks and crannies, so I'm roaming around all day."

Though Auerbach started working as a security monitor in 2019, she was no stranger to Pine View. Years prior, she was part of the fifth grade Career Day projects through her work as a retail manager with Build-a-Bear. When a monitorial aide position opened at Pine View, she took it before becoming a security monitor the following school year.

"Working in retail and running a store, I had to be aware of everything that was going on. If I'm talking to you, I'm always seeing what's going on behind you. And as a manager, I always had to know what was going on within my store," Auerbach said. "To me, this is the same thing. The shell lot is like my store, like my house — this is where you guys are, and I want to make sure that I see what is going on."

Auerbach and Hawkins knew each other before she started working at Pine View; she trained him for half-marathons in the past. While Auerbach is on her third year at Pine View, Hawkins has been a security monitor for 16 years. Much like Auerbach, he started out as a regular aide before taking on the security position when Bob Reed retired.

Hawkins starts his days in front of Building 16, grouping the elementary students by grade before they enter the building — "making order out of the chaos" is how he described it.

When Hawkins started working at Pine View, the area near Building 16 was where fields was held. This separated PE from fields, preventing game disruptions and arguments; with the portables now gone, Hawkins said that "we're getting back to the normal" that existed before the portables.

"Coach Joe and Mark — everyone will have their own area now. That'll be wonderful. But it's kind of sad to see [the portables] go because it reminds me of Mr. Largo, Coach Donovan, and Mrs. Abrams — just some cool people," Hawkins said.

Auerbach and Hawkins were both on campus the day the school was threatened in December 2019.

"In the back of my mind, I thought two things: one, it's some knucklehead going, 'I want to get out of class'..., or it's someone really meaning it," Hawkins said.

"As somebody in security, but also as a Canadian who never experienced anything like that before, I was glad [admin] kept us involved so we could be on the lookout... I felt comfortable and supported enough to be able to know if anything happened. They were right there," Auerbach said.

Working at Pine View has led Auerbach to wanting to pursue teaching as a career; she plans to get certified in the future. Hawkins will retire in the next few years, though he hopes to come back to Pine View to perform his folksongs.

"When it gets down to it, the kids are growing. And I'm growing the same way — I'm 63, and I'm still learning. Only a fool says, 'I've learned it all and seen it all,'" Hawkins said. "Everything changes... Everything goes in a big circle. Especially down here at fields, it's going to be like it was before. Everything is evolving."

You're allowed to be 17—*The Torch*: May 20, 2022

As I begin approaching adulthood, I've found myself reflecting more and more upon my teenage experience and the extent to which it has lived up to the adolescent archetype presented in movies and TV shows. I've watched friends fall into the trap of losing themselves in an attempt to fit what they thought constituted young adulthood, and as much as I'm proud to not have had to navigate through those struggles, there came a point in my life in which I felt I was missing out on teenage-hood. That's what this piece addresses: lost time and the societal pressure burdening teenagers to exist and present themselves in the way the media portrays the young adult experience. When writing this piece, my intention was to reach underclassmen who may be seeing those expectations unfold in front of their eyes and let them know that there's more to adolescence than a restrictive, cookie-cutter perspective.

Life is like a rollercoaster. We enter this journey eager to become tall enough, mature enough to experience the big thrills. Once the ride and a good portion of our lives are over, we'd do anything to live it all over again.

So, if life is a rollercoaster, then adolescence is the steady inclination to the top of the ride, the feel of the wind in your hair, the sight of a whole new world unfurling around you — only to get stopped right before the big drop. Anticipation abounds as teenagers await entrance into adulthood, to feel the highs regardless of the lows, the twists in exchange for the turns.

Caught in limbo between childhood and adulthood, it should come as no shock that many teens push the envelope to chase the thrill of nonlegitimate “adulthood.” Adolescent rebellion isn't anything new; the rulebreakers of the '80s and '90s became the overprotective parents of today, and modern teens will eventually shift into their parents' roles. That's part of the cycle of life — rebelling and then joining the cause.

Modern teenage exploration and self-expression, however, has been shaped by today's media mediums. In a 2018 study, the National Center for Biotechnology Information found that the average American child signs up for a social media account by age 12 — the peak of awkward adolescence. Upon the creation of their first Instagram and TikTok accounts, these children pick up on the fact that attention in the form of likes, views, and follows comes as an exchange — and teenage awkwardness impedes their involvement in this deal.

Now more than ever, children want to avoid the awkwardness of adolescence because of internet-born “cringe culture,” which is harassment targeted toward people who openly share their unconventional interests. It has evolved into shaming children for being children, both on and offline. Under these beliefs, innocence is humiliating. Naivety is embarrassing. Childhood is something to be ashamed of. Children are forced to choose between growing up or facing incessant harassment. It's no shock some choose the former.

It doesn't help that the most successful teenagers on social media are those that mimic adult behaviors. MRI scans shared by neuroscientist Shannon Odell reveal that the brain's visual cortex is increasingly activated when viewing posts with high numbers of likes, meaning that we inherently pay

more attention to these posts — and children consume this type of content more frequently as their internet accessibility increases.

Seeing how teenage influencers succeed, young audiences turn to cosmetic, wardrobe, and behavioral changes to attract the same attention their idols get. This relationship is defined by late Stanford psychology professor Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, which posits that observation is a key part of shaping behavior.

In a 2016 study, market research company Mintel found that one in seven American children aged 12 to 14 wore makeup for the sole purpose of looking older. As for the wardrobe department, preteens aren't a distinct market anymore. Teen-oriented clothing and makeup chains like Justice and Claire's have been shutting their physical doors since pre-pandemic times. Once they reach middle school, adolescents have two distinct apparel pathways: child or adult-oriented. Seeking approval both on and offline, adolescents choose the latter, donning particular types of clothes for the sake of "fitting in."

Doctoral psychology and neuroscience student Leon Li found in a 2021 study that by age three, children value fitting in over personal preference. That desire to "fit in" — and effectively avoid ostracization and bullying — is the crux of this issue: teenagers are being pressured into abandoning their awkward phases in favor of dangerously embracing mature behavior at a young age.

When young adulthood is interpreted through the lens of modern media, some may feel inadequate — as though "average" experiences aren't enough when compared with the exploitation and overdramatization of teen experiences portrayed online and on the big screen. But beyond the universal uncertainty that occurs during this time, teenage-hood can't be defined in merely one way.

Adolescence is a growing pain. Giving it up to chase internet-born pipe dreams only causes more suffering. To live as oneself — regardless of whether this aligns with the portrayals of teenage existence in media — is the sole route to truly finding oneself.

Be embarrassing. Make mistakes. Stay in. Go out. Do what you want — not because you're living a fantasy created by media, but because you're living your own life. You're somewhere near 17 — the experiences you have now will be ones you look back on in five, ten, 15 years. Let them be ones you can laugh at instead of regretting.

Bidding adieu to Jenny Reyka—*The Torch*: May 20, 2022

If there's one person who best embodies Pine View School, it's Jenny Reyka. It would be impossible to walk into the office without being greeted by her, and she, without fail, recognized and referred to each passing student, teacher, or school staff member by their name when interacting with them. Her spirit and kindness extended far beyond her work as a receptionist; in being a breast cancer survivor, her advocacy led to Pink Fridays for the office staff, and she spearheaded many breast cancer awareness activities within our school community. As one of Pine View's Key Club co-sponsors, she organized volunteer opportunities for high school students through the Kiwanis — and that's how Reyka and I grew closer over the course of my high school career. She was a constant in my life, and when I heard the news that she was retiring, I jumped on the opportunity to highlight her inextricable impacts on Pine View. She is someone who our community will never forget; even when the time comes that her name is no longer spoken on campus, it'll be because of her influences on others that Pine View continues flourishing and growing. I wanted nothing more than for this article to capture all the love our school holds for her.

Receptionist Jenny Reyka smiles as she recalls some of her favorite memories from her tenure at Pine View. Each time she delves into a new story — like the time she shoved a cupcake in former school deputy Lynn Brown's face — she's stopped by a new smiling face.

"I was called to the office," one student explained, fidgeting with the bottom of his shirt.

"Oh, that's right," Reyka said, nodding. "You need to see Nurse Banko in the clinic."

Another student handed Reyka a few dollar bills, asking her to please pass the money onto someone he couldn't find.

"Okay. I'll hold it so I won't forget it," she said.

In the middle of her explanation that both she and social studies teacher Lois Myers attended the same middle and high schools in Ohio, an elementary school student dressed in Star Wars gear entered the office with an expression that, after her 22 years at Pine View, Reyka recognized as timid confusion.

"Hey, I like your shirt!" she said. "Do you need any help?"

"I was called to see Mr. Sprinkle," the student said.

"Go to the hallway. Make a left. Fourth opening on your left is Ms. Bufkin. He'll be in there with her. Thanks, honey," she said, before returning to marvel at the odds of her and Myers ending up at the same school all those years later.

After each brief conversation, Reyka smiles.

"This is what I love most about the job," she said. "Every day, it's a new adventure. I love the busy. I love the crazy days when my head's spinning. Those are the best."

After 22 years of laughs, practical jokes, and countless memories at Pine View, Reyka will retire before the start of next school year.

“I’ll miss getting up at 4:45 in the morning the most,” Reyka said with a laugh. “No — I’ll miss the kids, the staff, the friends. I try to learn the kids’ names, make them feel welcome. That I will miss.”

Reyka’s ability to make students, parents, and staff alike feel welcome in the office is what parent and office volunteer Brenda Firlie credits as the reason her family so quickly felt at home in the Pine View environment.

“We came from St. Louis. I remember calling the office and talking to her, and then one day coming in. She made us feel welcome from that first day,” Firlie said. “I remember going in there and feeling like we had a best friend heading out. It’s been that way ever since. She was an instant connection.”

That same sense of connection is what led to receptionist Maureen Borden working at Pine View in 2012. With Borden’s three sons having attended Pine View starting in 2004, Reyka called Borden when the receptionist position opened.

“She’s the heart and soul of Pine View,” Borden said. “When I would call, I loved when she picked up the phone because I knew I would get help ... With my boys, we’ve had a beautiful Pine View experience because she’s here.”

Though her official position may be receptionist, Reyka’s work at Pine View cannot be limited to just one title. A breast cancer survivor, Reyka has led staff-wide, monthly “Wear Pink” days with the purpose of raising money for Relay for Life, noting how special the events are to her — and how “anything with pink, I like, with the breast cancer awareness,” she said.

She’s a mentor, a guide, a shoulder to cry and laugh on — and Class of 2021 alumna Meera Nair knows this well. The two grew to know each other during Nair’s Key Club presidency, as Reyka has sponsored the club for the past five years.

“I don’t think I would’ve been able to get through Pine View without her by my side,” Nair said. “Seeing Mrs. Reyka whenever I came into the office, I knew I could go to her and just be myself ... Seeing her was the light of my day. Throughout all my years at Pine View, she was the main person on the staff that I bonded with.”

Reyka’s work at Pine View began by chance. After she and her husband moved to Florida, they opened a balloon store and adopted their daughter, Jessica Reyka. Reyka stayed at home for a couple of years before interning at an LTM balloon store. A Pine View kitchen manager came in one day and told her about an opening on the kitchen staff; because she knew that her daughter, Jessica Reyka, was going to go to Pine View, the job was a great fit.

Reyka worked in the kitchen for two years before spending six months in the ESE department and another six as a secretary. When the front receptionist position opened, Reyka took it, saying that she “never looked back.”

Second-grade teacher Misty Tucak recalls when she and Reyka sold dodgeball t-shirts together, oftentimes competing to see who could sell more. It was during those moments that “we learned so much about each other’s work ethics. We complemented each other ... She’s such a good friend. I’m going to miss her so much. There’s nothing she wouldn’t do for anybody. She is the rock of Pine View,” Tucak said.

Reyka's presence at Pine View has bonded the community in ways that will be felt long after her retirement.

"There'll be a lot of tears shed when she goes — mine included. I couldn't have asked for a better person to introduce us to Pine View and guide us throughout the years," Firlie said. "She will always be fondly known to my family. She has a special place in my kids' hearts."

In the coming months, Reyka looks forward to traveling and visiting her daughter in Denver.

"I'd like to volunteer. I can come back and volunteer here," she said, smiling. "I've loved getting to know the kids, seeing them come in second grade and then graduate... If there's one thing I want to say to Pine View, it's 'Wake up and smile.'"

Math Madness team wins big—*The Match*: May 26, 2022

Pine View serves students grades two through twelve, which brings about many unique coverage opportunities for our journalism department. We stay involved with the happenings in our elementary school through our elementary newspaper, *The Match*. Writing Match stories is an endeavor unlike any traditional piece for *The Torch*; being able to capture the heart of these experiences while also keeping our writing on a level that's understandable—but not too “babyish”—for our audience can sometimes be a difficult feat. When interviewing these six Math Madness competitors, I was blown away by their maturity and excitement regarding the national championship they won. Each described their intentions to continue pursuing math-related work, regardless of how confident they originally were in themselves when they began the program. They inspired me in a way I wasn't intending when I headed into the interviews, and I'm excited to hear what all their futures hold. I hope that this story is something they can look back on in a few years' time; maybe they won't remember me, but perhaps this coverage will bring back memories that otherwise would've faded at the hands of time.

After weeks of practice and virtual competitions during lunchtime, the fifth-grade Math Madness team won first place in the virtual Math Madness National Championship tournament April 28.

The Pine View Math Madness team started last year and was originally open to both fourth and fifth grade. Now boasting 50 registered participants, the team has been limited to only fifth-graders, all coached by fifth-grade math teacher Andy Vitkus.

A handful of team members — like fifth-graders Adalee Heath, Jaxson Heid, Justin Kim, and Daniel Michael — have been on the team since last year.

“We lost 39 to 40 in the quarterfinals last year, so I continued because I really wanted to win,” Heid said.

“I continued playing because I wanted to keep contributing my efforts to the competition and do my best and see if we could win this year — that's what I was thinking, and we won. That's pretty good,” Michael said.

The team has also seen a handful of new faces, like fifth-graders Isabel Lopez and Victoria Petrova.

“I wasn't here last year, so I didn't really know what happened with the team until this year. I learned about the team, and I like math, even if I'm not too good at it, so I decided to try it,” Petrova said.

Two national Math Madness seasons are held during the year: fall and spring. During this year's fall season, the Pine View team fell short of qualifying for the national tournament. That changed in the spring. Kim ranked as one of the top math competitors in the country during the spring qualifying trials, which helped bring Pine View to the national bracket.

Participating fifth-graders met in Vitkus' room during lunch on Wednesdays to compete. Because the tournament was open to schools across the country, live matches rarely occurred. The team found out whether they advanced by the ends of the week. Pine View's advancement was determined by the

combined points earned from those who scored in the top five during the week's match; those scores were based on both their accuracy and time.

With 32 teams originally participating, Pine View progressed onto the next level each week, eventually winning in the finals against James McDade Classical Elementary. The team was shocked when Vitkus told them the news.

Despite the success, the team remains humble, noting how this can bring them to greater success in middle and high school. They're thankful for what the competition has taught them.

"It made me feel more collaborative. I haven't really been on a team where I knew a lot of people before," Kim said.

"Six out of eight was my highest score, but I never thought I'd do as well as I did," Lopez said. "Even though I'm not really good at math, it helped me."

"I always doubted myself and thought I wasn't that good at math. My mom would always tell me that I was. This showed me that I was good at math," Heath said. "I started off scoring one out of eight, two out of eight. This year, I got an eight out of eight, and I was really proud of myself. Math Madness showed me that I could do it."

Crossing the line: The politicization of school boards—*The Torch*: October 28, 2022

Much like countless other counties throughout Florida and across the country, Sarasota County has become a hotbed for controversy regarding school boards. The August primary brought about heightened conversations, especially given Charlie Crist's and Governor Ron DeSantis' endorsements of some of the candidates. When discussing with my peers, I found that we were united in our frustrations that political affiliations were now implicitly part of the school board election process. Whether liberal or conservative, we wanted to be rid of the newfound, large-scale involvement in our local politics. In crafting this piece, I worked to highlight all facets of this frustration; regardless of personal political leanings, students can be united in the fight toward the success of our own counties.

“[T]he election of members of the district school board shall be by vote of the qualified electors of the entire district in a nonpartisan election,” reads Florida statute 1001.361.

That statute has governed management of school board elections in the Sunshine State for nearly 20 years. Following recent state involvement in local school board affairs, however, it seems as though this former promise to nonpartisanship is going by the wayside.

In the Aug. 23 primary, three of Sarasota County's five school board seats were up for grabs. Three candidates — Tim Enos, Robyn Marinelli, and Bridget Ziegler — were all endorsed by Governor Ron DeSantis, who publicly supported 27 other candidates in their respective district elections.

“Florida has led with purpose and conviction that our school system is about education, not indoctrination,” DeSantis wrote in a Tweet the day of the primary.

DeSantis added that his 30 endorsements were “committed to the student-first principles of the DeSantis Education Agenda,” the governor's initiative to “keep woke ideology out of our schools” and “educate, [not] indoctrinate,” among other ideals, according to his website.

Following DeSantis' endorsements, Florida Democratic gubernatorial candidate Charlie Crist announced seven of his own for school board candidates across the state.

Crist's and DeSantis' endorsements were unprecedented in Florida. Never before have major political figures gotten so involved in local affairs — and yet their involvements speak to a new national wave of political inundation in environments that operate most effectively under nonpartisanship.

Because of statute 1001.361, school board candidates don't run with affiliations to any party. They're not supposed to advertise themselves as Democrats or Republicans, with the understanding that their work overseeing school districts directly affects students — and that, for the good of all students, politics should stay out of the classroom.

This issue lies not in the endorsees' political affiliations, but in their crossing of the line of nonpartisanship in local elections, elections specifically designated as nonpartisan. Educational environments shouldn't be reduced to political conquests — not when students' academic and mental well-beings are on the line.

After 19 of his 30 endorsements won their respective elections, DeSantis may have succeeded in his goal of “get[ting] the Florida political apparatus involved” in local affairs, but students only suffer when their educations are impeded by political agendas. They deserve — we deserve — to be seen as more than just pawns in a greater political scheme.

Surviving Ian: The experiences and aftermath of Hurricane Ian in the Pine View community—*The Torch*: October 28, 2022

The Pine View community was unexpectedly hit and affected by Hurricane Ian in September 2022. The release of *The Torch*'s first issue was delayed by the hurricane, so the staff began brainstorming how best we could cover the devastation wreaked by Ian while also inspiring hope within our community. That's where this Feature article came into play; divided into three mini subsections highlighting Pine View's response to Ian, I put together this article within a week's time in order to meet our new press deadline. I'm incredibly proud of the fact we were able to communicate the different efforts our community embarked on during times of such immense uncertainty. The chaos of countless interviews and the weaving together of this overarching story reinvigorated my passion for journalism and reminded me how much this medium means to me. If there's one story that really helped me realize I could see myself pursuing journalism as a career in the future, it was this one.

Pine View community cleans up

In the wake of Hurricane Ian, Pine View came together Oct. 5 to clean up debris that littered the campus.

Principal Dr. Stephen Covert sent an email out to the Pine View community about the clean-up Oct. 4. Within a few hours, nearly 80 students, parents, teachers, and community members signed up to help between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Many students volunteered to earn hours for Bright Futures. With some facilities like electricity and WiFi not having fully returned throughout the county, some said they were bored during their time off and wanted to see some familiar faces again while helping. Others expressed their interest in giving back to the community that has afforded them so much.

Former Pine View student and current Suncoast Polytechnical High ninth-grader Yegor Tkachenkn volunteered with his friend, ninth-grader Nik Indoursky, who heard about the opportunity through his mother.

"It feels good to help and volunteer for our community. I want to help out in any way I can," Indoursky said.

Several students weren't new to the clean-up process; they'd spent time following the hurricane, volunteering through local community centers, hospitals, and churches. Twelfth-grader and senior class president Jacob Koshy and ninth-graders Isabel Jerome and Juliette Pauling were such students.

"My reason for pitching in today is because I feel at home here. Because my home was affected, I came to help. It makes me happy, knowing we're a family here," Koshy said.

"At home, I do a lot of yardwork, so I figured I had a pretty good expertise in this scenario and should help out here. I want to get back to school as soon as possible — I want to see my friends," Jerome said. "It's nice being here today because I get to see some friends and it has been awhile."

"I wanted to come and help out our community. They needed help here, so it's nice giving back and volunteering for such a large campus. It's fun, too, seeing everyone," Pauling said.

Eleventh-graders Shireen Kaveh and Shannon Hickey spent the day working all throughout campus together.

"I like being outdoors and the weather was nice today, so I thought, 'Why not help?'" Kaveh said. "Plus, I got to see Shannon."

"Watching the news and seeing the destruction in North Port and Port Charlotte, I felt that I should help out. I love Pine View so I thought I should assist," Hickey said. "I'm proud of Pine View and Sarasota County for coming together after the hurricane."

Pine View parent Leslie Turbeville is a former teacher and school administrator. He felt called to help Pine View after handling the damage his own house experienced.

"My daughter's in tenth grade and has been here since second grade, so we want to help the school any way we can," Turbeville said. "The community is pulling together pretty well. Hurricanes seem to bring people together; unfortunately we have them, but it's inspiring to see people support each other and do what they can."

Ninth-grader Thomas McLaughlin and twelfth-grader Nicolas Liberoni emphasized the importance of collaboration, unity, and community following the hurricane.

"I saw the email that Dr. Covert sent out and thought it'd be a good chance to volunteer. It's nice that we can get the school ready to open back up," McLaughlin said.

"It's crucial to help out the Pine View community during times such as these. It shows that the community can get together and be something greater than just individuals," Liberoni said.

Students initiate fundraising efforts

Over the past few weeks, students and community members alike have come together to help Sarasota County and other communities affected by Hurricane Ian.

Service-oriented clubs like UNICEF and Key Club recently held restaurant fundraisers and donation drives.

UNICEF's Oct. 10 Chipotle fundraiser raised \$116, which twelfth-grader and club president Julian Chauhan plans to have donated to the Save the Children 2022 Hurricane Relief Fund. The fund's mission is to restore and provide supplies to child care centers.

"Since our club is committed to providing humanitarian relief to children, it only made sense to help those affected by something so close to us," Chauhan said. "[The outcome] made me feel comfortable and proud, knowing that our community is quick to mobilize to help others."

Key Club held a donation drive in exchange for community service hours Oct. 17. Twelfth-grader and club president Rose Calleja was inspired by donation drives launched by other Key Clubs in the area.

"There's a lot of people in Sarasota who were hit and affected by the hurricane, so I thought [the drive] was a good way to help a cause that we're passionate about as a club," Calleja said.

With donations ranging from nonperishable foodstuff to aluminum foil, Calleja said the 60-some items Key Club collected will be sent to shelters and relief programs in south county.

“It makes me feel really proud that the club can come together to support our communities,” she said.

Other initiatives were organized more individually. Eleventh-grader Shanika Farah lived in Fort Myers during Hurricane Irma; her experiences shaped the way she felt she could help Sarasota County following Ian.

“I still remember all the stuff that happened down there a few years ago, with the flooding and people losing their homes and not having power for days,” Farah said. “Knowing what happened then, I really wanted to help now.”

Farah organized two separate fundraisers: one through GoFundMe, which raised \$2,500, and one through the American Red Cross, which garnered over \$800. She and her parents spread the word through social media, and the donations took off from there.

“I think these fundraisers were successful because people want to help, but they don’t know how,” Farah said. “Everyone that I’ve talked to — my family, my friends — wanted to help because their houses were fine, and they saw the devastating effects on other people. These fundraisers were common ground for helping.”

She intends for the GoFundMe donations to be utilized in Sarasota County’s school system, whereas the Red Cross donations will be sent directly to the foundation and used accordingly.

Farah and her family also received donations from friends they knew through a New Jersey youth ice hockey team. The donations include boxes full of shampoo, chapstick, blankets, toothbrushes, and over 800 toothpaste tubes, all of which will be distributed to families in need in Sarasota County.

“I feel grateful that I’m able to have this platform and help people. From a humanitarian aspect, it’s a really good feeling to know you’re helping people who are in need right now,” Farah said.

School administrator leads the way

Time was ticking as floodwaters raised in North Port Sept. 29. The school administrators running the Lamarque Elementary shelter reached out to Elementary Assistant Principal Roy Sprinkle in a panic, explaining that water was rapidly approaching the switchbox for their generator — which was the only reason over 250 medically fragile evacuees had access to oxygen.

“It that electricity goes, you’re counting a matter of minutes before they lose oxygen and lose their lives,” Sprinkle said.

Having spent eight days during and following Hurricane Ian at Sarasota’s Emergency Operations Center (EOC), Sprinkle worked with police, fire and state rescue, and the National Guard to make a plan to evacuate more than 250 people sheltered and stationed at Lamarque.

Due to the intense flooding in North Port, school buses were the only feasible transportation medium for evacuation. Sprinkle directed bus drivers to Lamarque via radio. The drivers managed to get

through high water, fallen powerlines, closed bridges, nearby sinkholes, and other assorted debris — the drivers Sprinkle spoke to described it as “a bad action movie,” he said.

Seven hours of transport and organization later, all Lamarque evacuees were brought to the Tatum Ridge shelter in north Sarasota.

“Those bus drivers and the dispatch were our heroes,” Sprinkle said. “[I’m] absolutely not.”

Sprinkle’s contributions to the county during and after the hurricane didn’t end there; while at the EOC, he communicated with county shelters and ordered portable showers, toilets, 3,500 meal ready-to-eat (MRE) packages, and thousands of gallons of bottled water, which were distributed to surrounding shelters.

“One of the biggest challenges in dealing with the different municipalities is making sure everyone is working together, especially with the Lamarque situation,” Sprinkle said. “Everyone is eager to help and that’s why they’re there, but you need someone to guide the ship. It was a challenging, nail-biting experience, but it was successful.”

Sprinkle attributes his 30-year tenure working in elementary, middle, and high schools as the reasons he was able to manage the shelters, considering “we deal with crises in schools—if you’ve done it long enough, you learn to remain calm in those situations,” he said.

Despite the efforts he contributed to, Sprinkle remains humble.

“It was something that needed to be done, so I did it,” he said. “That’s the bottom line. Almost all my colleagues would do the exact same thing — I just happened to be there... and I’ll do it again if they need it.”

Lora Tobias—*The Torch*: January 29, 2023

This article, beyond any others I've ever written, is the one I'm most proud of. Having the unique privilege of interviewing and sitting down with a Holocaust survivor was an experience I'll forever be grateful for. It was through speaking to Lora Tobias that I felt myself reconnecting with my own history. My paternal grandmother was born in a Polish camp during the 1940s and thankfully immigrated to the United States when she was young. She passed away the day before I turned four years old; my memories of her are very limited, reduced solely to smiles and the whispers of a few conversations on her and my grandfather's leather couch. Speaking to Lora was almost like speaking to the grandmother I never got to have a deep, substantial conversation with because of the circumstances that drove us apart. I chose to refer to Lora by her first name throughout this article to further humanize her experiences; calling her "Tobias" felt too clinical and detached for my liking. Her husband, Sigmund, was also a Holocaust survivor — he passed away a few days ago. His loss reminds me of why *The Torch* embarked on our Holocaust Remembrance Project, and I hope Lora's story continues to motivate others in the same way it did for me.

Amidst a flurry of Sarasota parkgoers sits 92-year-old Lora Tobias. Shaded from the bright afternoon sun, she makes herself comfortable in a jumbo red camping chair and keeps her hands busy, flicking through photographs and historical records that lay in her lap. Among them are black and white pictures of weddings, first days at school, and secret meetings in the woods — all of them carry stories she shares with excitement.

Her eyes light up when she picks a book out of the pile. It's the 2018 edition of the Schriesheimer Jahrbuch, which roughly translates to "Schriesheim Annual." A castle adorns its front cover.

"This is where I resided — Schriesheim," she said. "I was the last Jewish child born to the village, before the Nazis."

Born in 1929, Lora lived her first nine years in Schriesheim before she, her parents, and her maternal grandfather fled Germany in 1938 to escape Nazi rule.

Schriesheim was home to Lora's family for close to three centuries. Her first recorded ancestor was a Jewish man named Baruch, who moved to the village with his wife and children in 1652. When Lora was born, twelve Jewish families lived among the village's four thousand residents. They had a synagogue — the only evidence that it existed is a picture of Lora standing in front of it.

Recounting all the non-Jewish friends her mother had, Lora notes that there was little discrimination in Schriesheim when she was young. She recalls people joining their Passover festivities, and because the family maid was Christian, Lora left her shoes out to receive Christmas presents during the winters.

Things began changing when Lora started going to school. Adolf Hitler had taken control of Germany by the time she attended Lutheran kindergarten.

“Every morning when we attended school, instead of saluting the German flag, we saluted a swastika,” Lora said. “Then we’d all say a prayer to God, asking to safeguard Hitler and keep him safe from enemies and give him a long life. That’s how we started the day.”

The Hitlerjugend — Hitler Youth — often came into Lora’s kindergarten classroom, encouraging the students to “be good German boys and girls and swear allegiance to Hitler,” she said.

Lora remembers kneeling bedside one night and reciting prayers for Hitler after finishing her Hebrew ones. Her parents were shocked.

“My parents had to explain to me that I couldn’t pray for Hitler anymore — that I was to say my Hebrew prayers, and that I was a Jewish child, but I had to try not to call attention to myself,” she said.

Lora grew lonely as she moved up through the grades. Her former friends began either avoiding or harassing her.

“I wondered, ‘Why? Why am I different? Do I look differently, just because I go to a different place to pray?’” she said. “I just wanted to belong. Why couldn’t I belong? What’s the difference — that I went to synagogue on Saturday?”

She fondly recalls her first-grade teacher, for he treated her like all the other children; to him, she was just a student who loved reading, writing, and math. It was during first grade that she remembers walking through the Schriesheim woods with one or two of the only other students who’d interact with her, pretending to be Hansel and Gretel.

Second grade, however, “was a horror,” she said. Her teacher vehemently hated Jewish people. He forced her to sit in the corner of the classroom, surrounded only by empty desks.

“He treated me as though I’d contaminate the rest of the students,” she said. “I remember one time I’d raised my hand and wanted to answer a question, and he shouted at me and told me, ‘You sit down, you dirty Jewish pig.’ He encouraged the other children to abuse me at recess time ... I had to hand in my homework, and I’ll never forget — he’s standing there over a garbage pail, ripping up my homework, as if my paper was contaminating his hand.”

Avoiding physical and mental torment was close to impossible. Children threw stones at Lora during recess time. She’d hide behind a woman who sold cookies to the students; years later, Lora discovered that her protector was the grandmother of Schriesheim’s former mayor, Hansjorg Hoeffler.

Lora went to a private school in Heidelberg for third grade. She rode the morning train to get to school in fear, hoping that nobody else from the town was on it — if she was caught, she would be beaten up.

All the while, her parents’ business dried up, as nobody wanted to associate themselves with the family. Brownshirts would stand outside their front door, recording the names of anyone who dared support the business. Such names were announced by the town crier and later displayed in the heart of Schriesheim alongside signs that read “No Jews Allowed.”

“I remember the Nazis coming in and ripping our telephone out of the wall,” Lora said. “The radio was confiscated. All our letters that we got from family in the United States were censored. Lines were blacked out. I couldn’t understand this. How could I be a threat to the country? I’m just seven years old. How do I threaten them? What do I possess? What did I do? Why am I a danger?”

The family housekeeper, Sancha, was forced to leave because of the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, which prohibited Jewish people from hiring those under 45 years old. Still, Sancha would sneak into the house in the middle of the night to sit next to Lora's bed. Lora last saw Sancha in 1936, when she snuck into the woods to meet with the family one last time.

Having already escaped Germany with his wife, Lora's maternal uncle found strangers to sponsor the family and give them affidavits in the name of finding safety in the United States in 1936. In the meantime, Lora's family started selling their belongings — including their familial 21-room house, which her great-grandfather purchased in 1840, and the nearby vineyard.

"It was like a fire sale — everybody suddenly wanted to come in," she said. "When it came to money, everybody wanted to come into our store. Nobody wrote names down. Nobody was ostracized."

Lora, her parents, and her maternal grandfather later got visas from the American government. Her passport — issued June 2, 1938 — is particularly unique; a law went into effect June 1 that all Jewish passports needed to be inscribed with the letter "J," but Lora's doesn't have one.

Before receiving visas, all people needed to undergo mental and physical exams. Because Lora's other maternal uncle — Uncle Ludwig Oppenheimer — suffered from spinal meningitis as a child, he was unable to receive one. The family was at a crossroads but ended up leaving him with money and sending him to a nursing home with the hopes of bringing him to the United States in 1939. Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia prevented that from happening. She later discovered that Ludwig died in the Gurs concentration camp in 1940.

The family was escorted to the Heidelberg train station with torches on their last night in Germany. Before taking the train to Berlin, Lora and her father visited her paternal grandmother to say goodbye. She gave them her prayer book, which Lora later donated to the Holocaust Museum.

"The last time I saw my grandmother and my father's sister was at the train station, waving goodbye to us as the train sped through," Lora said. "After we left, they went to Holland and were rounded up. The Dutch people betrayed them, and they ended up in cattle cars sent to concentration camps. Most of the family in my parents' wedding picture were all sent to different concentration camps ... Only two of my cousins survived, hidden by fundamentalist Christians. They're the only relatives who survived from such a big family."

A historian in Schriesheim found records regarding Lora's deceased family members only because their history in the village dated so far back.

"I was glad to know what happened to them because at least I could acknowledge that they were dead and how they died," she said. "I wish I could tell them, 'We survived. I'm still here. They didn't destroy us.'"

Lora and her family arrived in the United States October 6, 1938 — a hurricane caused their delay. They lived by the beach in Belle Harbor, New York, before moving to Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

When World War II broke out, Lora's family had to register themselves as enemy aliens because they were German nationals. Because she was so young, Lora didn't understand the war; rather, she was growing more accustomed to the United States. With Franklin and Marshall College nearby in Lancaster, she visited the college library to borrow books and learned how to swim at the college's pool.

Lora was sixteen years old when World War II ended. She graduated high school and went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees, teaching fourth grade in the Bronx before becoming a reading specialist and teacher trainer. She and Sigmund Tobias married when she was in her early thirties.

Lora has visited Schriesheim many times. The Jewish cemetery in the village is maintained to this day. Lora remembers offering to send funds, only for the mayor to promise her that they had it covered.

In Germany, little square blocks called tipping stones serve as reminders of those who've died. Each one carries a different name; they're in the pile of pictures Lora keeps with her.

“The names are for my family, for the deceased people — my mother, my father, my grandfather, my uncle, and me. I said, ‘I’m still very much alive!’” Lora said with a laugh. “They put them in front of homes that were owned by Jews; we may be gone, but we’re not forgotten.”

During one visit, Lora and Sigmund went back to her former Lutheran school.

“I walk up the steps and I’m speechless. I just don’t know what to say. I spread my arms and in my best Italian, I yelled, ‘Ritorna Vincitor!’ That’s from Aida, and that’s the way I felt — ‘I have returned victorious!’” Lora said.

She notes that she has always been open to sharing her story; doing so is important to her “because it’s true,” she said. “You can’t deny it. It happened to me. If you don’t believe me, I can show you pictures. I can tell my story.”

Lora beams as she talks about her two children and two grandchildren. When considering their futures, she envisions a world that will treat them and their peers indiscriminately; the fact that this has yet to happen “sickens me,” she said.

“I hope the generation of my granddaughter will do something to save this world, to care about it. It’s for them that we need a positive future — not a destructive outlook on life where you hate other people,” Lora said. “We’re all in this world together, and if we don’t preserve it, it’s not going to last. I want my grandchildren to have good lives and a wonderful world without hatred.”