

# WILLOW 101



**Behind the Curtain  
of the Fall Play**

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**Then and Now:  
Tracing the Growth  
of Our Campus**

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**Amplifying Voices in  
the New Podcast Studio**

**PHYSICS CLASS,  
*But Make it Harvard***

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# WILLOW 101

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# VERITAS • UNITAS • CARITAS

Writing by Madelyn Nedham | Layout by Ava Cronin



## NATIVITY SCENE MADE FROM 3D PRINTER

During the season of Advent, Austin Prep's Digital Fabrication Lab brought a modern nativity scene to life, blending technology, art, and theology in a unique display. With the use of the laser cutters and 3D printers, you can clearly see every little detail included in the nativity. From the Holy Family, shepherds, wise men, to the manger and animals. Each piece was carefully designed in CAD software and then brought to life through precise laser engraving and 3D printing. This project symbolizes the Augustinian value of seeking truth through diverse paths. Showing that faith and technology are important for helping us celebrate God's presence in our world. The Nativity story being retold through the 21st-century reminds us that the message of hope and love is timeless. This digitally created nativity scene shows Austin Prep's dedication to bringing faith into every part of learning, even in our most high-tech spaces.



## CHOIR TRAVELS TO IRELAND

Over Christmas break, 30 Austin Prep choir students, faculty, and family members were lucky enough to travel to Ireland on a Celtic Christmas Pilgrimage and Choir Tour. Throughout the trip, participants learned about the country's rich blend of history, faith, and culture during one of the most meaningful seasons of the year. During this trip, Ireland quickly became a learning experience as the group bonded while exploring the Titanic Museum, praying at the Marian Shrine of Our Lady of Knock, and traveling to Galway to start off the New Year together. The final stop was Dublin. Participants toured the EPIC Museum, visited Ireland's heritage through the Book of Kells, and got the privilege of performing a concert at Saint Patrick's Cathedral with the help of Dr. Jessica McCormack, Austin Prep's Director of Music. This was more than just a trip to Ireland. It was a time for our peers to come together and grow closer as a community.

## SPIRIT WEEK & ST. JUDE

Throughout the school year Austin Prep students take part in multiple spirit weeks. During each of those weeks, we partner with St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. St. Jude is a leading pediatric treatment and research center in Memphis, Tennessee, known for treating children with cancer and other catastrophic diseases without charging families for care, travel, or housing, thanks to donations. As a school community, we are fortunate to be in a position where we can help others beyond Austin Prep. Partnering with St. Jude gives students the opportunity to support families facing hardships. Spirit Week becomes more than a school tradition. It gives us the chance to make a difference outside our own campus. Students donate \$20 the week prior to Spirit Week, allowing them to participate. While Spirit Week is full of themed days and school spirit, it also gives the Austin Prep community the opportunity to support something bigger than ourselves while having fun. Some of the students' favorite themes this year have been Rhyme Without a Reason, Jersey Day, and Pajama Day. Our final Spirit Week of the year is being held April 13th-17th. We are hoping to break last year's fundraising total of \$37,000.



# NEWS

Writing by Gavin Huntress / Layout by Sofia Cataldi

## Speed-Painting Extraordinaire



Just before Thanksgiving, speed-painting artist Rob Surrette visited Austin Prep and gave a Hero Art performance for the entire school. During the demonstrations, Rob tells a heartfelt story of passion, determination, and compassion as he speed-paints many famous figures such as Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Rob has been painting since he was only three years old and is completely self-taught, and through this he promotes his idea that with time any dream is achievable. He has performed over 4,000 speed-painting shows and has appeared on many famous television shows and programs. Rob is also an Official Top-Tier Master Fine Artist for Disney and other entertainment companies. He is a close friend of our very own Art & Design Department Chair, Mrs. Pascucci-Byrne, as they attended college together at St. Anslem. Rob concluded his show by revealing a painting of Saint Augustine which he generously donated to Austin Prep. Austin Prep thanks Rob Surrette for sharing his talent and message with the community and we hope to welcome him back to campus again soon.

# Tournament Bound!

This fall, the Austin Prep Girls Varsity Soccer team qualified for the 2025 NEPSAC Class A Tournament after leading themselves through an impressive season. As their bus departed for the game, the community gathered along Aberjona Road to wish them good luck, an admirable expression of *unitas* and *caritas*. When asked what it took to make it to the playoffs Olivia Soto '26 replied, "We simply had to work hard and trust each other through every second of the game. That may seem like a simple answer but it is the truth. We pushed through hard running practices, 6AMs, and intense games as a team. We always gave our best no matter who we were up against and helped each other stay motivated, because we knew that we were able to earn a spot to make the tournament and it clearly showed." The team is a true example that



with grit and determination one can achieve anything. Making a tournament is a great accomplishment for any team. Sophie Rosselli '26 commented, "Qualifying for the playoffs was the biggest moment in my Austin Prep soccer career. After joining the team, the goal was always to make

the tournament and win it. Although we didn't make it very far, it was a big moment for everyone on the team, especially the other seniors. Making the playoffs gave Austin Prep Soccer an opportunity to show the other teams that we can compete at a high level. It makes graduating

and leaving the team a little easier, as we've taken a huge step toward winning the tournament." The Austin Prep community congratulates the Girls Varsity Soccer team on their achievements and looks forward to their continued success in future seasons.

# Future Authors in NaNoWriMo

Each November, the 7th grade class participates in NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month). NaNoWriMo is a former

non-profit organization that was introduced to Austin Prep in 2019 by Ms. Putney and Austin Prep has continued the tradition for the last six years. The main

focus of NaNoWriMo is the one month writing period throughout November, but it really encompasses the entire semester. Before beginning, the students learn about the parts and steps of writing a novel and afterwards they take a section of their writing and refine it to a level that would be ready to publish. The students write an incredible amount of words, with many writing hundreds every single day of the month. This past November, Sydney Veneziano broke the record for the most words at Austin Prep with over 60,000 words! In total, the 7th grade

class wrote over 800,000 words and nine students wrote at least 333 words each day. To encourage participation and celebrate progress at all levels, the English department introduced raffles and milestone incentives for students who exceeded the 10,000 word requirement. At the conclusion of the writing all of the 7th graders received a celebratory breakfast. Congratulations to the Class of 2031 on their dedication and creativity, and best wishes for their continued growth as writers.



# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT:

## Mrs. Michele Brewer

*Writing by Gabriella Wright / Layout and photo by Reid Barrett*



From Peabody, MA to the classrooms and fields of Austin Preparatory School, this Upper School Mathematics teacher and Varsity Softball Coach brings energy, love, and commitment to the community every day. Mrs. Brewer grew up in Revere, MA, and has been part of the Austin Prep family since January 2015. She learned early on the value of hard work and perseverance. These lessons continue to guide her teaching and coaching philosophy.

Over the years, she has become a familiar and inspiring presence both in the classroom and on the field. In the Upper School Math classroom, her favorite memories are the unplanned ones—like when a difficult concept suddenly makes sense. Mrs. Brewer stated, “Those aha moments when math finally clicks and students gain confidence and realize they’re capable of more than they thought” as her favorite moments.

As a Varsity Softball Coach, she helps shape not only strong athletes but strong leaders. She has built a solid softball program by developing players’ skills

and helping them reach their full potential. One of her proudest moments was winning MIAA State Championships in 2019. But it’s not just about trophies and unforgettable Florida spring break trips, coaching has been about building relationships, hard work, and dedicated student-athletes who give their all on and off the field.

Mrs. Brewer’s favorite part of Austin Prep is the community. The students, staff, and core values create a positive environment that is supportive, loving, and fun. It’s a safe place where students and teachers lift each other up. Beyond her roles as a coach and a teacher, Mrs. Brewer serves as a mentor and role model to many students. She takes time to help students who are struggling, offering extra help after school and words of encouragement when they need it most. Her classroom is a place where mistakes are okay and are a learning opportunity. Her field is a place where teamwork and trust are built. Through her dedication, compassion, love, and inspiration, Mrs. Brewer continues to create a lasting impact on the Austin Prep community.

# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT:

## Mr. Alan Chuckran

Writing by Cole Davis / Layout by Naomi Kerrigan / Photo by Reid Barrett

From snowy hills perfect for sledding to wooded trails made for summer bike rides and fort building, Mr. Chuckran grew up on open land filled with adventure and imagination. He is from Bridgewater, Massachusetts, where experiences like these helped shape the energetic, hands-on spirit he brings to his classroom every day. Growing up surrounded by nature encouraged curiosity, independence, and a love of learning through exploration.

After 30 years teaching Physics in public schools, Mr. Chuckran was ready for a new challenge. He decided Austin Prep would be the perfect next step in his career. Though he has been part of the community for less than three years, he has already been impressed by the school's strong investment in its campus, faculty, and students.

A dedicated Physics teacher throughout his career, Mr. Chuckran has taught all levels of the subject. His most rewarding experiences happen when students suddenly connect ideas

and apply what they are learning in surprising ways. These spontaneous “aha!” moments—what he calls “Physics goosebumps”—are what make teaching so meaningful to him. Each school year, he is motivated by the classroom energy, student laughter, and the opportunity to share his passion for Physics.

Students may also be surprised to learn that Mr. Chuckran enjoys baking, especially biscotti. Inspired by his mother, who was an excellent cook and baker, he finds baking both relaxing and rewarding. One of his favorite traditions at Austin Prep is the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter initiatives, which help strengthen the school community. He believes these programs are meaningful examples of service, explaining, “I think the Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter initiatives are wonderful. Great ways to put our words into action.”

Through enthusiasm, experience, and dedication, Mr. Chuckran continues to make a positive and lasting impact at Austin Prep.



# Then & Now

Writing by Izzy Labriola / Layout by Nareg Minassian



**F**rom quiet corners to game-day lights, the campus of Austin Prep continues to evolve alongside its students. This spread highlights familiar places as they once were and how they've been transformed, reflecting growth, resilience, and new traditions. Together, these spaces tell the story of where we've been, and where we're headed.

### 1: Chapel of St. Augustine

Once a quiet, flexible space, the Chapel of St. Augustine was transformed during its 2022 renovation and now features a center aisle. The update reshaped the room's purpose, even allowing the chapel to host a wedding for the first time.

### 2: Upper field and Lower field

The first football game on the upper stadium field was in September 2016. The facility before that was nearly unusable, and the new track and turf field has a significant impact on student life at Austin Prep, namely giving us the opportunity to play football games on Friday night.

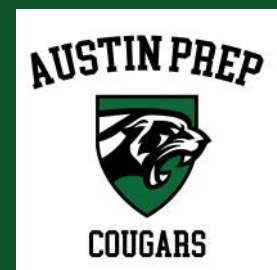
Construction on the lower field athletic complex began just as campus life paused during Covid in 2020. While students were away, progress continued, and by the time they returned, the new facility was largely complete and ready for use.

### 3: Side parking lot

The new parking lot opened to students in December 2025 and added 100 spots, mostly for juniors. Interestingly, it isn't the first time in recent years that we have had a "new" parking lot: once the tennis courts were relocated down to the lower athletic field complex, the old tennis courts offered additional parking.

### 4: Center for Integrated Learning

The Center for Integrated Learning officially opened just prior to press time. The Center features brand-new spaces thoughtfully designed with the guidance of an architect who specializes in instructional environments. The 1,000-square-foot inviting Center features numerous one-to-one tutoring spaces, individual testing rooms, areas for collaborative work, a meeting area, and a fish tank housing 14 tropical fish! This space used to be classrooms.





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# Physics Class, But Make It Harvard

Writing and layout by Madelyn Needham

Austin Prep, in collaboration with Harvard Medical School, has launched an innovative physics elective that brings medical robotics directly into the classroom. Led by Science Faculty Mr. Donati and Dean of STEM Mrs. Amy Foley. The course gives Upper School students the opportunity to see physics in action through real-world medical applications.

Students explore core principles such as kinematics and dynamics through surgical robotics, medical diagnostics, and immersive clinical simulations. Throughout the program, students get the opportunity to visit Harvard Medical School's emergency simulation suites, where they conduct patient interviews, interpret diagnostic tests, and practice procedures including suturing,

laparoscopic surgery, and robotic-assisted surgery.

The learning extends beyond Harvard. Back on campus, students continue their work using model surgical robots, the Anatomage table, and the Digital Fabrication Lab. The curriculum intentionally blends physics with engineering, artificial intelligence, and computer science, reinforcing cross-disciplinary problem-solving skills.

Students notice that this course breaks from the typical physics model. As Maggie Gove '26 put it, "This year's physics class has been different from the other physics classes because it's taking physics concepts such as acceleration and applying it to something like robotic surgery which I had no idea that physics could be used for."

The program concludes

with a capstone project in which students program AI-assisted surgical robots to perform mock spinal tumor surgeries. By applying advanced physics concepts to authentic medical challenges, students gain hands-on experience while exploring potential careers in medicine, biomedical engineering, and emerging health technologies.

Reflecting on the program so far, Mr. Donati said, "The most interesting part of this program is the lack of set structure around it. It has been two years that we are working on this collaboration, and it is always changing, adjusting, improving. The beauty of this collaboration is its almost endless potential."

Through this collaboration with Harvard Medical School, students get to see a whole new perspective on what physics can do.





# Cougar Conversations

Writing by Nareg Minassian / Layout by Izzy Labriola



**T**he *Restless Journey Podcast*, Austin Preparatory School’s official audio series, provides an insightful look at the people, programs, and initiatives that bring our core values of truth, unity, and love to life. Launched in July 2025, the podcast has released seven episodes on a monthly schedule.

Hosted by Mr. Fleming, Senior Director of Communications, each episode features conversations with faculty, staff, alumni, and community members

who highlight distinctive aspects of the Austin Prep experience. “I think the most important thing for listeners to know after listening to an episode is the high level of expertise our faculty and staff have in their respective areas, as well as their deep commitment to our students and the programs that they are involved in,” he shared.

The released episodes are:

1. A Glimpse Into Admissions at Austin Prep, with Director Lisa Simmons. (July 1, 2025)
2. Spiritual life at Austin Prep, with Fr. Armano. (August 14, 2025)
3. The dining experience on campus. (October 15, 2025)
4. Inspired philanthropy, with alumnus Jonathan Pollard ‘97. (November 2, 2025)
5. Previewing the Senior

Class Trip with Disney chaperones. (November 14, 2025)

6. The Austin Prep Nutcracker Tradition, with Ms. Pascucci-Byrne. (December 5, 2025)
7. Previewing the 8th Grade Class Trip to Washington, D.C., with Mr. McLaughlin, Mr. Brady, and Ms. Donnelly. (February 19, 2026)

Listeners gain a deeper appreciation for the expertise and dedication of our educators and staff, as well as the signature programs and events that make Austin Prep unique. One of the signature programs that makes Austin Prep super special is the Nutcracker. Mrs. Pascucci-Byrne commented, “It was an honor to be part of one of the first podcasts! Speaking about a production that has been

so dear to my heart to me as a teacher, a dancer, and a mother was really special, and I was happy to give listeners a ‘behind the curtain’ look at our performance’s history.”

Produced in our state-of-the-art podcast studio (featured in the Fall 2025 issue of *Journey Magazine*), the series also supports student audio projects and potential student-led content.

Other memorable recording moments include Mickey Mouse ice cream sandwiches during the Disney episode, apple crisp from Sage Dining, and Mrs. Simmons’ humorous temperature adjustments in the first session.

We welcome more voices, especially students, into future episodes. Subscribe today at [austinprep.org](http://austinprep.org).



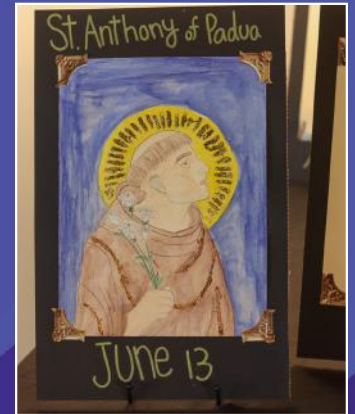
Above: Magdalena Tenreiro's '27 portrait is dressed to dazzle, this Met Gala dress displays elegance and power in her design.

Above: A Kinetic Sculpture created by Avery Adie '30 is a whirlwind of motion and different materials.

# AUSTIN ART

Writing and layout by Noah Rivera

Austin Prep has been busy in the Art Department this fall. Galleries and local exhibits highlight warm tones and layered textures. This fall's gallery included fashion-based designs from the Met Gala, some trendy fashion, kinetic sculptures and cultural identities. This Autumn's edition of Austin Art was a smashing success and the Art Department is looking forward to providing more unique and artistic masterpieces. Well Done!



Above: Caroline Forlizzi's '27 design takes center stage as she created a striking blue dress with a veil.

Above: Looking for inspiration? (Or your keys?) St. Anthony of Padua: Feast date: June 13th.





# A LOOK BEHIND THE CURTAIN WITH MS. CLARK

Writing by Aanya Metpelly / Layout by Noah Rivera

With the conclusion of last year’s successful comedy, *Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon*, Austin Prep was itching for more. A bit of levity and that ‘certain something’ was exactly what Austin Prep’s drama program brought to Meelia stage this past November in their production of *The Internet is Distract - OH LOOK A KITTEN!* The play follows Micah, played by Bella Bianco ’27, as she tries to finish her essay the morning of the deadline. However, she is constantly distracted by different apps, and has to deal with various different things, such as Google, streaming services, and even a game throwing babies at a grandma!

The process of finding a play, as Ms. Clark explained, was fairly straightforward: after searching up popular middle school plays, she found a playwright by the name of Ian McWethy, and found a play by him that she enjoyed. After speaking with other theater teachers, Ms. Clark got a lot of good reviews, with many teachers saying it was a hit. This positive feedback, paired with the school’s new cell phone policies implemented this year, made this the perfect and timely play.

With the conclusion of auditions, Ms. Clark shared that the first challenge she faced was creating the rehearsal schedule. With so many student actors with

other extracurriculars, making a plan that worked with everyone’s commitments was a whole project on its own. To overcome this, she put everyone’s schedules into a spreadsheet to organize and plan; this way, since everything was compartmentalized, it was easier to get people to rehearsals. “Creating a rehearsal schedule is a puzzle piece,” Ms. Clark noted, “and just trying to figure out who’s here, who has to leave early, who can’t be there, and making sure that everyone feels like they are rehearsed enough to go on stage.”

Once rehearsals for the play were in full swing and the performance nights

were coming up, Ms. Clark reserved Meelia Stage for the performance. This allowed for everyone to bond as a cast and let crew members effectively execute their jobs. Ms. Clark shares that for the upcoming year, her next step is finding a way to open up the backstage space.

The show was performed on November 5th and 6th, and was immensely successful on both opening and closing nights. The plans for next year’s play are already in motion. In the meantime, look forward to this year’s musical, *Footloose the Musical*, premiering at the Collins Center at Andover on April 15th and 16th!

# Reaching for the Stars: How the Lady Cougars Made History

Writing and layout by Kristen Manzione

The Austin Prep Competition Cheerleading team, known as the Lady Cougars, had an incredibly successful season this year. This included winning Leagues, becoming back-to-back Regional Champions, and going on to achieve championship status by winning States. More specifically, they won the MSAA Division 4 Championship for the first time in Austin Prep history on Saturday, November 22, at Worcester State University. Throughout the fall season, the team showed a lot of determination, teamwork, and dedication. Their team motto, *I do it anyway*, helped motivate them to push through challenges and always try their best, even when things were difficult.

The Lady Cougars' success came from working together as a team. Instead of only

focusing on winning, they focused on the journey of the season and improving every day. The team committed to competing, working hard to win, and learning to live in the moment. They stayed strong during tough times and used challenges as a chance to learn and grow instead of seeing them as failures.

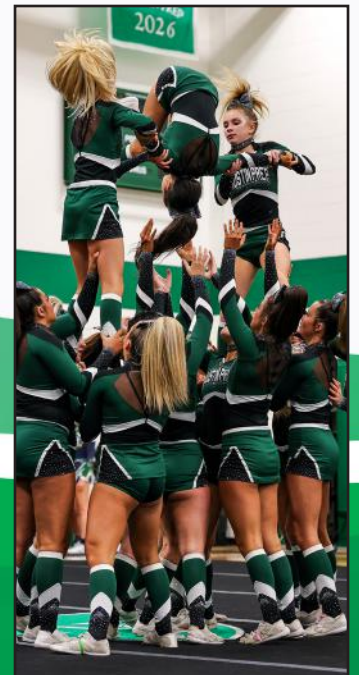
Team Captain Ava Pazzia '26 shared, "By all having the same goal and one dream, we never failed and we always had each other's back, even on the hard practice days." She added, "The highlight of the season to me was seeing all the hard work pay off. Winning States showed me and my team that anything is possible, and if you work hard you can accomplish anything."

This positive attitude helped the Lady Cougars have a strong and successful season. Head Coach Alicia

Harrington stated, "It was such a surreal feeling. It's everyone's goal to win States when the cheer season starts, but the reality is there's only one winner, so at times it can feel like you're reaching for the stars. What made it truly special was watching all of the hard work pay off for these girls. Every early morning, every tough practice, every moment they pushed through self-doubt led to

that exact moment. Seeing their faces when it finally clicked that they did it was the best part. This win wasn't just about the trophy, it was about growth, trust, and believing in each other all season long."

This unforgettable season will be remembered as a milestone in Austin Prep history and a proud moment for Lady Cougars athletes, coaches, and family.



# What makes AP special to you?

We asked a group of students  
'What makes AP special to you?'  
Here's what they said!

*Interviews by Kylie Gagne / Layout by Ainsley Rogers / Photos by Nareg Minassian*



**"The fact that I'm not just growing academically in school, but also growing socially, building new friendships and making new friends."**

*- Christian Salibian '29*

**"The teachers, they're supportive and provide a lot of guidance, and when it comes to your work, they show a lot of support."**

*- Sara Fabrizio '26*



**"The school spirit is so special! I love pep rallies and seeing the school come together."** - *Campbell Wallin '27*

**"I really like the fish tank, I think it's a good addition."** - *Pierce Kelesoglu '27*





**I have a lot of good teachers who help me with a lot of my work and make it fun and a better experience other than just schoolwork.” - Ava Conde '29**



**“The food is really good!”  
- Ainsley Rogers '28**



**“My teachers because they’re very supportive.”  
- Abby Moore '31**



**“The tennis team... we battle, we verse these teams, and we try our best, persevere.”  
- Shane Stuart '26**



**“The students make AP special because everyone is so nice.” - Pheobe Isakson '31**



**“I have a really strong group of friends, and I also love my sport, especially the ski team.”  
- Kalia Shah '29**

