

SYCAMORE

WINTER
2024



CONTENTS



ON THE COVER

Sycamore 7th Grader **Neal Narayanan** played on the 2023-24 7/8 Boys' Basketball team that finished the year with an 11-3 record. Although his passion is basketball, recently, he has started playing lacrosse. He plays piano, competing in the Indiana State School Music Association. His favorite subjects are history and science. Neal enjoys listening to music, playing fantasy sports, and spending time with his friends. This year he visited family in India, a highlight of which was seeing elephants.

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John Huber

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SYCAMORE SCHOOL: THE PODCAST

In 2023, we launched the new Sycamore School: The Podcast to share stories and information with not only our own families but with anyone who has an interest in gifted education, including those at other schools and non-Sycamore parents who want to discover more about what we do and what gifted education means. Our first two episodes featured lengthy conversations with Jennifer Hendry and Julie Clawson, the first two recipients of the Borgmann Inspiration Fund grants. We also sat down with Sycamore's first-year Head of School, John Huber, to find out more about him. The conversations with Julie, Jennifer, and John led to the stories you will read in the next few pages. We have edited the interviews for print, which allowed us to provide additional clarity to the subjects that the three talked about, without removing any of the original ideas behind their thoughts. We encourage you to subscribe to the podcast (available on all major platforms) to hear more of our upcoming conversations with the teachers, staff, and students of Sycamore School.





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The **Sycamore Inspires Campaign** kicked off in the fall of 2022 and is the fourth campaign in Sycamore’s history. The goal is to raise \$2.6 million dollars in gifts and pledges over a two-year period. Our total is currently \$1,974,000. Sycamore Inspires has three purposes: 1) to fully reimagine and build a renovated Media Center (\$1.1M); 2) to continue the Borgmann Inspiration Fund as a source for teacher renewal projects (\$500K); and 3) to maintain the Sycamore Fund for two years (\$1M).

Meeting the needs of Sycamore students has always been top priority, and with each campaign—and annual fund growth—a stronger culture of philanthropy has emerged. Supporters care deeply about Sycamore and its students, and they demonstrate that in many different ways including giving through their time and treasure.

We are thankful for the many contributors who are moved to improve the lives of our gifted students. Your investment in Sycamore will benefit today’s students as well as those yet to come.

To see a list of our Sycamore Inspires supporters, use the QR code or visit sycamoreschool.org/donors.



Find Out More



sycamoreschool.org

Hello to the Sycamore Community!

It is my very great joy to arrive here in Indianapolis to serve as Sycamore's Head of School and to write this very first welcome letter for our alumni magazine!

Truth be told, it's not actually my first time in Indianapolis or even at Sycamore. Back in 2018, I had the pleasure of serving on a Visiting Team as part of the school's regular accreditation cycle through ISACS (Independent Schools Association of the Central States). I was serving as Head of Emerson School, a PS-8 school for gifted students in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I was incredibly impressed by Sycamore's program, and even moreso, its people. I established a connection with Diane Borgmann, and we chatted from time to time in the years that followed. It was clear to me then that Sycamore knew what it was about, and that should the opportunity ever arise to return, I'd jump at the chance. Fast forward five years, and here I am!

One of the phrases that Diane would frequently use is that Sycamore is "too good not to be better." I firmly believe in that mantra, and while I might not use the same words, it is incredibly important that we continue to strive for self-improvement. Part of this is gathering data (both qualitative

and quantitative), soliciting feedback in targeted ways, and sharing information as transparently as possible. Later in this magazine, you'll see results of a few of our surveys to get a sense of what our families and recent graduates are thinking.



To our Sycamore alumni — you are the keepers of the flame, and your history runs deep. I greatly look forward to learning more from you, and I invite you to share your stories, your thoughts, and your feedback. You are the bridge from Sycamore's past to its future, and with your help, this humble institution will continue to thrive and grow.

Please don't hesitate to stop by and say hello!

Be well,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Huber". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

John Huber
HEAD OF SCHOOL

David Schuth

Selected as 2024 Borgmann
Inspiration Fund Recipient





SYCAMORE INSPIRES

The Borgmann Inspiration Fund Selection Committee is proud to announce Sycamore Middle School science teacher David Schuth as the recipient of the 2024 award. As a result, David who has taught at Sycamore since 1999, is planning a once-in-a-lifetime trip to New Zealand in mid-to-late June. While there, he will explore the local wildlife, culture, and people.

The Borgmann Inspiration Fund award is given to a Sycamore staff member each year. Grants support creative, intellectual, and personal growth, and fuel a personal, purposeful interest. The Borgmann Inspiration Fund is a resource above and beyond the many professional development opportunities available to Sycamore staff members each year.

“I plan on visiting New Zealand and seeing as much of it as I can in just over two weeks,” Schuth says. “I have been interested in the Pacific Rim countries for a long time, ever since I could read a National Geographic Magazine.”

Schuth says the four goals of his journey are to visit his best friend from middle and high school who moved to New Zealand a decade ago; to see flora and fauna that he has never seen before except in National Geographic photos; to experience nature

different from that in Indiana; and to soak up new cultural knowledge to broaden his perspective on the world.

“As I have grown older, I have concluded that relationships with other people are one of the most meaningful things a person can experience,” he says. “I love having the opportunity to visit my friends in New Zealand, have them show me around, share their life experiences and the places they haunt, and explain why they fell in love with the country.”

I have always loved and been fascinated by animals,” Schuth says. He recalled that once as a young boy, he was frustrated at another child for throwing rocks at a squirrel — the only time he was ever frustrated to the point of resorting to his fists. “I am excited to have the opportunity to travel to New Zealand during the best time to whale watch for humpbacks, southern right whales, and pilot whales. There are also glowworm caves, penguins, albatrosses, and New Zealand’s kiwis, none of which I have seen in person before.” •

The 2023 Borgmann Inspiration Fund recipients were Sycamore teachers Jennifer Hendry (1st Grade teacher) and Julie Clawson (4th Grade teacher). Jennifer traveled to the Galápagos Islands while Julie explored Australia.

Growth of the Borgmann Inspiration Fund is dependent entirely upon the support of Sycamore parents, graduates, and other friends. Please consider a gift to this Fund. Give online at sycamoregiving.org.

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GIVE ONLINE AT
sycamoregiving.org



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As I have grown older, I have concluded that relationships with other people are one of the most meaningful things a person can experience.

SCHUTH

Lange Family Returns to Sycamore

SYCAMORE
LEGACY



Cindy and Sandy Lange, former Sycamore parents, are back at the school with grandson Grayson.

When Sandy and Cindy Lange decided that they wanted their two children, Kristen ('07) and Alexandra ('09), to attend Sycamore, the school was still in its early days. It had recently relocated to the current building on 64th Street from the original location near the Butler Campus. After graduating from Sycamore, Kristen went to Brebeuf and then graduated from the University of California-San Diego. Alexandra attended University High School and received her teaching degree from the University of Tampa.

Now, Sandy and Cindy have another reason to come back to Sycamore. Alexandra's son, Grayson, is a preschooler at the school. Coming back through the doors of Sycamore seems to have been good for the Langes. They experienced Sycamore again when Alexandra returned for a few years to be a lead Pre-Kindergarten teacher at Sycamore, and now they are full-fledged Sycamore grandparents.

"We are experiencing 'life coming full circle' to have our grandson here in Preschool," Cindy says. "We are delighted to be back again as grandparents this time around."

Sandy recalls being a parent and seeing how their children benefited from being at Sycamore. “Both our girls came away from Sycamore with a solid educational foundation. They knew how to learn and how to manage the educational environment most efficiently,” he says. “The transitions to high school and college were much easier as a result. It’s wonderful to have our grandson at Sycamore. We can already see how quickly he is learning and absorbing new ideas and concepts, and the fact that he likes being there is great.”

When Alexandra and Kristen came to Sycamore, Cindy remembers talking to friends about the options for schools. “We toured four prospective private schools in the area. We both felt the energy and warmth when we came through Sycamore’s front door for the first time,” she says. “There just was no comparison anywhere else. Seeing such happy, engaged children in a challenging and enriching academic environment convinced us.”

Sandy was also most impressed with Sycamore. “There was not only the general atmosphere and focus on the fundamentals of a well-rounded education, but there was also the added emphasis on advanced topics for gifted kids,” he says. “Mainly, it just had the right feel.”

He says they were happily involved in their own children’s activities at school. “We went on lots of field trips with our kids’ classes, attended most all of the music and sports events, and volunteered in the classroom in the earlier years,” he says. “It was great fun, but also it always reaffirmed seeing the school ‘in action’ that Sycamore was the right place for our girls.”

“I always enjoyed working on the Sycamore Auction Committee and Gifts Galore with other moms,” Cindy recalls. “Going on field trips like Camp Tecumseh and Stuckey

Farms at Halloween was fun. Coming in to see the students, in costume, portraying famous Hoosiers was amazing, as was the Third Grade Poetry Day, History Day, and the Eighth Grade Extravaganza, and we loved watching the girls’ volleyball games.”

Many years have passed since they were regular visitors to Sycamore. Those years have given both Sandy and Cindy time to appreciate what the school allows gifted students to do, and what their children gained from the education.

“Sycamore’s environment puts bright kids together with their intellectual peers,” Cindy says. “They are in a special place where they can excel and learn from one another. Gifted kids thrive in this wonderful, stimulating, and nurturing environment. Our girls were well prepared for success in high school and college after being in the Sycamore program from Preschool through Eighth Grade. Their foundation for life-long learning began here.”

It is a story that, according to Sandy, can be told by many parents who spent time at Sycamore. “I think it’s pretty simple — students are afforded the opportunity to push themselves to their highest level of achievement, and so they don’t get bored with learning,” he says. “They learn to accept high achievement as a norm.”

As grandparents of a child at Sycamore, their duties are now a little lighter, allowing both Sandy and Cindy to enjoy retirement while still being involved at school. “My passions are all tied to nature,” Cindy says. “Scuba diving, snorkeling, underwater exploration, gardening, and observing wildlife,” are her interests. “I am enjoying sharing these activities with my grandkids.”

Sandy balances family time with interesting personal projects and visits with family and friends. He says he enjoys doing “property maintenance, which involves lots of tree work and various construction and repair projects. Woodworking, learning to weld, helping a bit with various charitable projects,” are all part of his life. “And sharing all these with the grandkids.” ●

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We both felt the energy and warmth when we came through the door for the first time. There just was no comparison anywhere else. Seeing such happy, engaged children in a challenging and enriching academic environment convinced us.

CINDY LANGE

The Lange’s two daughters are both married with children. Alexandra and her husband, Shawn, also have a baby daughter, Noelle, and Alexandra enjoys being called to sub at Sycamore after having been a former Pre-K lead teacher. Kristen and her husband, Barrett, live in San Diego. She just paused her career in sales to be a stay-at-home mom for her newborn, Marlowe.

JOHN HUBER SUCCEEDED DIANE BORGMANN AS SYCAMORE'S HEAD OF SCHOOL IN JULY 2023. JOHN IS A GRADUATE OF CORNELL UNIVERSITY, AND HE RECEIVED HIS MASTER'S DEGREE FROM VILLANOVA. BEFORE ARRIVING AT SYCAMORE, HE WAS THE HEAD OF EMERSON SCHOOL IN ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN, WHICH IS ALSO PRESCHOOL THROUGH EIGHTH GRADE FOR GIFTED STUDENTS. PRIOR TO THAT, HE WAS THE HEAD OF SCHOOL AT BARNESVILLE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES, AFTER WORKING AT THE WYNCROFT SCHOOL IN PENNSYLVANIA.

John Huber

Head of School
at Sycamore School



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Start by going way back to the earlier part of your 1993 to 2006 tenure at Wyncroft. Tell us about that school and how you got started.

It starts a year before that. My wife, Janine, and I had just graduated from Villanova. We got married right out of college and were both looking for gainful employment. She found a position on Long Island. So, for one brief year before landing at Wyncroft, I was a high school Latin teacher at Kellenberg Memorial High School in Nassau County. With a total of 200 students and about 40 in a classroom, it's about crowd control. To make matters worse, Kellenburg has just eliminated the teaching of every foreign language except Latin. They subsequently hired raw recruits like me. Here I am in my 20s teaching Latin to freshmen who had previously been learning French, Spanish, or another language.

Were they required to take Latin?

Kellenberg was a Catholic school that required Latin. While I realized I did like teaching, I didn't like it in that situation. We didn't have any particular ties to Long Island, so when an opportunity to leave arose, we moved to Pennsylvania. My wife took a job at Temple University, while I found another Latin teaching position, this time at the Wyncroft School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. I spent 13 formative years at that location. I started as a Latin teacher, but worked my way up into administration, serving my final four years as Assistant Head of School.

You are a bicyclist. How did that start for you? Do you find the Indianapolis metro area to be bike-friendly?

I love that we can turn this conversation so quickly to cycling. I started with running. I have three sons, two of whom were born in pretty quick succession. Inevitably, I was driving one of them to soccer. At games, of course, I would be cheering wildly on the sidelines, but I had to decide what to do when practices were underway. I decided to fill that time with running. Eventually, my knees objected to the running experience. A doctor said, "You should try cycling." I learned about road cycling around the hills outside of the Greater Washington, D.C. area. Today, I try to put in as many miles as possible each week. I would say Indianapolis is middling as far as cycling is concerned. If I'm heading up to Carmel from here, these roads are narrow around the school. Biking to and from school is difficult because there is no protected space. In Carmel, I appreciate the nice wide bike lanes and the roundabouts. I also like downtown Indy and my Butler Tarkington neighborhood. You just need to pick riding locations carefully.

What was the best biking city you've been in?

Ann Arbor was very bicycling-friendly, and the city has protected bike lanes. Even with that feature, right before we moved to Indianapolis, I had a garbage truck that just didn't see me, and I had to slam on the brakes. You can have all the bicycle-friendly things like lights, radar, — the whole nine yards — but you still have to keep your eyes open.

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It's the teachers who make the learning experience what it is. We need to ensure that we attract and retain the best teachers. This is a year of analyzing what teachers want and need.

HUBER

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Huber spends classroom time with Sycamore 4th Graders.

Do you ride in the winter?

Of course. The fat tire bike is in our garage, and it's eventually going to come out. Its name is Vinny, and it weighs about 8,000 pounds. It's a lot of fun just pedaling through the forest with the snow coming down.

You have surveyed parents and Sycamore graduates who are freshmen in high school. What's the idea behind surveys, and how will you use the results? Are you looking for an answer to a problem, a validation of being on the right track, or something else?

My predecessor, Diane Borgmann, would often say, "We're too good not to be better." I agree. Feedback has typically been positive, but if you don't ask, you might never find what's beneath the veneer of "We're doing great." The secret is to find a specific topic that is top of mind and then to keep the survey really short. It is then critical to share the results. I think some of it is to try to answer a question. Some of it is we're genuinely curious, and some of it is just serendipity. It may lead to somewhere interesting. It may lead to nowhere. It may spark and generate an idea.

You were an interim Head of School at the the Waverly School in Pasadena, California, a preschool – 12th grade school. How was your experience?

It was a progressive school of about 400 students with two campuses in the shadow of Mount Wilson, which you could see off in the distance. It's a beautiful school just two blocks from the Rose Parade route. They were replacing a wonderful, long-standing head of school. The school was also going through particular challenges in terms of community, culture, diversity, and concerns about the inclusive nature of the institution. I'd never been an interim head before. Because my family stayed in Ann Arbor, I was solo in California. It was joyful but also hard. I made some really good friends there, and I'd like to think that I did some good both for the school and for the board. Ultimately, interim headship is a very servant leadership-based model. You are there to

prepare the way for the next person. I don't know if I would make the move there permanently, but I do miss the mountains.

Where were you born, and how long did you live there?

I was born in Akron, Ohio, and lived there through my high school years. I'm a proud graduate of Cuyahoga Falls High School, a public school. The first couple of years in college, I returned to Akron in the summer. After graduating, we moved to Long Island, New York.

Why did you choose Cornell University?

My older brother had attended Cornell. He went to engineering school, and I looked at the opportunities presented by the College of Arts and Sciences. I started as a physics major. That idea only lasted about a month before I realized I needed to go in a different direction. I'd taken Latin in high school. I was not the best student, but I earned good grades because I could memorize a lot of information and put it back on the test. I remember standing up in my Latin class and saying, 'I'm never going to take this language again.' In college, I had to start language all over again. I learned how to study Latin and fell in love with it. I traveled a weird circuitous path, initially hating the subject I ended up focused on for the next 10-15 years.

What made you a good Latin teacher in the end?

I learned how to teach Latin in the right way. Based on personal experience, I knew the challenges students could have because I had faced those same challenges. Sometimes it's harder to be a good coach or teacher if a subject has always come easily to you. I think it's better when you've struggled, and I struggled mightily.

Tell us about the towns and the cities that you've lived in.

Pottstown, Pennsylvania

It was a city outside of Greater Philadelphia. We had a very good time and raised our boys there, but it was also a suffering, industrial city. Mrs. Smith's Pies had just exited before we got there. The Hill School was its primary boarding school and helped keep the city going.

Barnesville, Maryland

This city was beautiful, and the school sat on 50 acres of land. Our family lived on campus, and we could look out our windows and see waves of grain. The upper third of Montgomery County was made in ag reserve back in the '80s. That meant you could only build one house per 20 acres of land, resulting in wide-open space. I miss the country, the woods, and the orchards. Barnesville is tiny with a population of about 200. There were no stoplights, and what it had in rural beauty, it lacked in infrastructure. I do not miss the half-hour drive to pick up a pizza.

Pasadena, California

I don't miss paying seven dollars for a gallon of gas, but even though it is sort of a car-centered area, it was surprisingly bike-friendly. The area is rich and diverse with wonderful food and culture in every direction you turn. Someone said once that one of the best features of Pasadena is how easy it is to get out of it. Heading into the San Bernardinios makes you feel like you've traveled to the middle of the wilderness.

Ann Arbor, Michigan

First and foremost, Ann Arbor is a college town. We lived a mile from the Big House (the University of Michigan football stadium with a capacity of 101,000). During our first year, we thought it was awesome when games were played locally. It was like the circus coming to town. After year one, however, we quickly became grumpy townies with worries about the road being busy and the inability to get to Costco. But it's a fun,



Welcoming the crowd to Sycamore's Veteran's Day program last fall

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Huber incorporates Lower School playground duty into his regular schedule.

cool town, and I could see myself going back. It's wonderful in the summer. With no game days, there is suddenly access to all of the restaurants that you couldn't otherwise eat at.

You played drums with the Sycamore Band at the Fall Concert.

I played the drum solo for "Wipeout." Music teachers, Matt Murdock and Noah Bucholtz, recruited

me quickly after I made an analogy at the beginning of the school year about trying to be the drummer for the organization. Keeping the beat, speeding up, and slowing down is similar to being the head of a school. I'm not the best drummer, but I have a lot of fun with it. It's a way to connect with the students, and it's a way to share some joy.

Why Sycamore? Why is this a place you wanted to come to?

I had visited Sycamore well before I had sought to be here as Head of School. While working in Ann Arbor at Emerson, I was co-lead for the accreditation team that visited Sycamore in 2018. I'd learned about Sycamore as a member of the gifted independent school community. During the accreditation process, you review curriculum, governance, and finance. You open closet doors and you look under the rug. You're investigating to see if the school is doing what it says it's doing. To be accredited, this happens once every seven years. I fell in love with Sycamore, and I said, "This is a school that knows what it's about. It's successful. It is clear in its mission. It's well run. Most importantly, it's got great people." I went back to Ann Arbor, finished my headship there, did the interim headship out in

Pasadena, and saw the Sycamore opening. I applied, hopeful, because the thought of following in Diane Borgmann's footsteps was exciting. This is a great, great place, and since I began, I've come into school smiling every day.

When you started at Sycamore, what were two or three things that rose to the top of the list as short- or long-term projects?

It's always tricky because change for change's sake is not good. There's a fine balance of change and continuity. At the same time, being new to the role offers a chance to review things and to listen. My priority is to make connections with people and learn what they are most passionate about. I have a chance to absorb some collective wisdom from people who've had their boots on the ground.

I'm fascinated by how schools run and operate. Schools have people who support the mission in finance, fundraising, communications, or enrollment. Then there are those who deliver the mission — the teachers. It's the teachers who make the learning experience what it is. We need to ensure that we attract and retain the best teachers. This is a year of analyzing what teachers want and need. Knowing that some of these things have a dollar sign attached to them, they're not easy changes to make quickly.

What surprised you about Sycamore once you arrived and started to get to know it?

That's a difficult question because I felt like I'd gotten to know the school well before starting. The search process was very transparent, and the depth of kindness of the community was a pleasant surprise. I received support so I would land thoughtfully and safely. My family was cared for as we moved to our new home and began exploring Indianapolis. I had experienced some health challenges. Those appear to be behind me, and now I'm feeling very happy and full of energy, especially when I've had caffeine. ●

SYCAMORE COMPLETES RECENT GRADUATE SURVEY



In November, Sycamore surveyed graduates who are now high school freshmen and their parents or guardians. The survey inquired about the transition to high school and how well Sycamore prepared our graduates, both generally and in specific subjects and domains. We received 20 alumni responses and 23 alumni parent responses. If each response is unique for each family, this would indicate a return rate of 50% of alumni and 60% of parents. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey, there is the possibility that we received multiple responses from a household.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Sycamore is successfully delivering on its mission. Specifically, almost all respondents felt that Sycamore helped students reach their potential (95% from students, 96% from parents) and helped them lead responsible, constructive, fulfilling lives (95% from students, 91% from parents).

Freshmen, and freshman parents, say that graduates feel well-prepared for high school. Across all subjects, noted high readiness for courses and academic habits. They also shared, through comments, that academic pressure at Sycamore is a factor. Parents and students reflected that stress could be tied to many things, including homework, peer pressure, or self-imposed pressure. School leaders intend to reflect on this feedback and will look for connections to our health and wellness curriculum.

The survey did not have questions specifically about twice-exceptional students, but this topic was mentioned in the comments. Sycamore must ensure that the needs of students are met at all grade levels.

Responses revealed disparities between student and parent thoughts on health and wellness. While most answers aligned between freshmen and their parents, we saw much greater student interest in illness and injury prevention, and much greater parent interest in prevention of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use; digital citizenship; sexual health; and social and emotional wellness.

We look forward to using this survey again next fall with the Class of 2024.

How well did Sycamore help students reach their potential?

95%
students
96%
parents

How well did Sycamore help students lead responsible, constructive, fulfilling lives?

95%
students
91%
parents

Caroline D. Bradley Scholarship Winners

by Mary O'Malley

THE PAST MEETS THE PRESENT.



Add her name to the list as the sixth Caroline D. Bradley Scholarship recipient from Sycamore School in almost as many years. The streak continues:

Eighth Grader
TESS EGGESON
is our most recent distinguished scholar.

The first Indiana student to win this full four-year, merit-based, need-blind high school scholarship was Christopher Jones, Sycamore Class of 2009. Recently, he and Tess got together at school to meet each other and talk about the program.

Tess was not yet born when Chris won the scholarship. The two shared stories about the rigorous application and interview process, noting the similarities spanning the past 14 years. The only major difference they determined was since its inception, the pool of students awarded this prestigious honor each year has increased from 16 to 28 nationwide.

Chris explained that for him the most special part about being a Caroline D. Bradley Scholarship winner has been the community of people he has met. Another exciting aspect was attending seminars in Pasadena, California while in high school and as an undergraduate as well. It was at these seminars that he was introduced to his fellow class of scholars.

Chris Jones and Tess Eggeson



“It goes without saying that the CDB scholarship was monumentally helpful for my family financially,” said Chris. I have developed a deeper appreciation for the community of peers that came with the scholarship, something which the Institute for Educational Advancement (IEA) does a great job of fostering for the scholars. When I came to Sycamore in Sixth Grade, I remember meeting my classmates and experiencing a certain feeling for the first time, like I was finally in the presence of kindred spirits. I experienced that same feeling in the presence of the other CDB scholars whom I met at seminars and at self-organized CDB alumni meet-ups, a feeling I found myself yearning for after leaving Sycamore.

“The scholarship ends after four years, but these connections last much longer,” Chris relayed to Tess. “While a student at the University of Miami, I had the pleasure of connecting with a scholar and her family who lived in the area and meeting with them several times. Last year, I met up with another from my class — and now a dear friend — when he happened to be passing through Indianapolis. Through these interactions it feels as if I am permitted a certain refreshing authenticity, like I can let out a breath I have unconsciously been holding in. I’m sure there are students at Sycamore who can relate.”

It was fascinating to see how much Chris and Tess have in common despite their age difference. It speaks to the character of the individuals who receive the scholarship and even more so, what Sycamore School is all about.

They covered a variety of topics and realized during their chat that they both share the love of music.

“Have you seen the movie *School of Rock*?” Chris asked her.

“Yes,” she replied, explaining how much she enjoys music. “I actually play electric and acoustic guitar and sing at the School of Rock in Fishers.”

Tess is the youngest student ever to be involved in House Band at the School of Rock, which is the marketing band for the company.

“I was a music major in college; I majored in Trombone Performance.”

The conversation continued with Sycamore’s past and present discussing what the future can hold for scholarship winners.

At Sycamore Tess has been involved in Spell Bowl and has played tennis since 5th Grade as well as playing with the Hamilton County Tennis Association since 2013. She had the lead role in *Annie, The Musical* and was Gingy in *Shrek* here at school during 6th and 7th Grades.

What is the Bradley Scholarship?

Scholars receive a four-year high school scholarship to an optimally matched high school program intended to meet their unique intellectual and personal needs, as well as receiving individualized support, educational advocacy, and a network of like-minded peers.

The CDB Scholarship was founded on the conviction that our nation’s exceptionally gifted young people are best equipped to reach their full potential in a nurturing, rigorous, and flexible learning environment suited to their individual academic needs and personal goals. Scholars have an outstanding record of post-high school national scholarships, college admissions, prestigious awards, internships, and fellowships along with job and career placement in areas suited to their studies and passions.

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When Tess learned about the Caroline D. Bradley Scholarship from her Sycamore teachers, she knew that she wanted to apply. She said, “I was excited by the opportunity to learn from kids across the country, the opportunity to learn more about colleges that could be a good fit for me, and even to prove something to myself. This scholarship allows me to think more broadly about my high school options. I can now consider what I enjoy, what I need, and what is possible. I am so honored and grateful to have been chosen.”

Middle School Language Arts Teacher Mrs. Beth Simpson was instrumental in Tess’s acceptance into the scholarship program. They brainstormed ideas for her essays and met during the summer, giving her sample interview questions. Later Tess did a mock interview with Mr. Emery, Mrs. Baker, and her, which “she knocked out of the park.”

Mrs. Simpson explained, “Tess is the full package! Uniquely creative, highly intelligent, truly compassionate, intrinsically motivated. Her accomplishments are curated by her passions and polished by her ardent dedication and superior standards. Throughout her essays and interview, Tess’s singular voice communicated her creative thinking, propelling curiosity, and innate love of learning, all of which demonstrate the reason she was one of the 28 recipients of the Caroline D. Bradley Scholarship in 2023.”

“While working with Tess, I enjoyed learning more about who she is, beyond the student I have known since fifth grade. Tess has sung and played the electric guitar in rock bands since 2016. Since 2020, Tess has hosted, written, and produced a podcast called “Little T’s Big Interviews,” where she interviews women who have inspired her, like former Obama White House Domestic Policy Council Director Cecilia Muñoz and journalist and Madam C.J. Walker biographer A’Lelia Bundles. Tess has a strong voice which she uses to make her community a more versatile and vibrant place, and I couldn’t be prouder of our newest Caroline D. Bradley Scholarship recipient.”

Other faculty and staff were eager to share their thoughts:

Brandon Fitzsimmons

Middle School Spanish Teacher:

“Since Fifth Grade, Tess Eggeson has been one of the cornerstones of excellence among her peers in Spanish class, demonstrating a keen interest, remarkable consistency, and exceptional multilingual ability with every new concept, unit, and idea she’s encountered. Her presence on the Ecuador trip in July 2023 was particularly refreshing, with her calm, adaptable, and simultaneously adventurous demeanor — especially in an entirely new and unfamiliar surroundings — emanating a capacity for leadership beyond her years. She will forever serve as Exhibit A of a student who is truly alive in the love of learning.”

Duane Emery

Director of Enrollment Management:

“Receiving the Caroline D. Bradley Scholarship is an incredible honor for Tess, and it is a very public recognition of her academic strength, musical ability, love of literature, and commitment to serving others. During her mock interview and preparation process, I learned so much more about her than I already knew, and her level of preparation blew me away. Tess is one of the kindest, most unassuming, and positive young people who will continue to do incredible things as she moves forward, all while representing herself, her family, and Sycamore in outstanding fashion.”

Whether they are our students from the past, one of our present students, or the ones who will be named Caroline D. Bradley Scholars in the future, Sycamore takes great pride in them. They are a great example of, as the lyrics to our alma mater state, “Our Great Sycamore”! •



FORMER SYCAMORE CDB SCHOLARS:

Chris Jones, 2009: Cathedral High School, 2013; University of Miami 2017

Brian Liu, 2016: Phillips Exeter, 2020; Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Emma Hermacinski, 2018: Choate Rosemary Hall, 2022; Princeton University

Nate Liang, 2021: Phillips Andover Academy

Emily Hackwelder, 2021: Park Tudor School

Dominic Gasper, 2023: Park Tudor School



Julie Clawson IN AUSTRALIA

Julie Clawson traveled to Australia in the summer of 2023 as one of the recipients of the inaugural Borgmann Inspiration Fund award. Clawson, a 4th Grade teacher at Sycamore, began teaching at the school in 2014. The Fund provided a grant that allowed her to go to Australia, hold a koala, and reconnect with Aussie friends who became teachers too.

Julie and one of her new friends from Australia

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“I have a friend and his wife, and they have two kids,” Clawson says. “I worked at Camp Tecumseh with him as a camp counselor 25 years ago. I had always said I’d visit someday, but I didn’t tell him I was applying to this fund. I thought I’d just wait until it happened, and I would have to make the actual plans. He said, ‘Hey, if you ever come to Australia, come see us.’ So I did.”

Julie’s goal was more than tourism. Since she was going to be in Australia for more than two weeks, she traveled with the intent of trying to learn. Julie says she wanted to hit tourist spots, like the Sydney Opera House, but she also wanted to immerse herself in the day-to-day experiences of being in a country so far from home.

This was a solo journey to Australia, and Julie was able to set her agenda without the concern of taking care of others. According to her, it was a great way to travel. Her time was spent based on whatever she decided was best to do, what she felt was most interesting to see, and where she could learn the most about the country and culture.

“I did travel to England by myself when I was 22. That was my ‘I’m an adult now’ moment. I stayed with the family of another friend that I had worked with at Camp Tecumseh,” she laughs. “But the Australia trip was big. I ended up going for about three weeks. Part of the time I was alone but was never actually worried about being alone. Some people said, ‘I can’t believe you’re going by yourself.’ It never crossed my mind not to do it that way.”

“Taking risks and being more adventurous was something I wanted to add to my own life. I’ve realized there’s so much that I can do here in Indiana or within a few hours drive. So many times we get complacent in our everyday life, and it’s easy to do,” she says. “This reminded me that I need to go outside of my comfort zone and try new experiences. I would like my students to realize that, and it’s something I can talk about, helping them try new things.”

Julie taught in a public school in Monticello, Indiana for four years and in Warren Township in Indianapolis for two years. She took time off when her two children, Xavier and Aubrey, were young. When they went to school, she went back too. Teaching is her passion.

“Teaching has always been a part of my life,” Clawson says. “Going to Australia did not have to be tied to our curriculum, but it was hard to be there and not have that in the back of my mind, ‘What can I tell my students about this?’ I knew about the Aboriginal and indigenous cultures in Australia. I wanted to learn more because when I teach Sycamore’s westward expansion unit, we talk about Native Americans and their history, so that was something I wanted to get insight into. I learned the Aborigines had experiences similar to Native Americans in terms of land being taken away. They have a Sorry Day in Australia as a way to recognize how indigenous people were treated and to acknowledge the original inhabitants of the land. I also wanted to take more abstract lessons from the trip in terms of taking risks, fulfilling dreams, and a sense of adventure.”

“Those tangible moments are things I can bring to my teaching.”

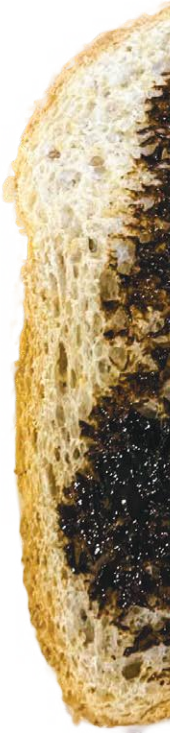
“I think going to a country that speaks the language that you do, and isn’t extremely different from the United States, made it easier, “but there were some learning curves.”

“Just small moments,” Clawson says. “Like learning restaurant etiquette the first time. At a pub-type restaurant, you order at the front, get a number, and they bring food to the table. At a sit-down restaurant, I remember waiting for the bill, and I didn’t see my server. I sat there until I finally found another server. She asked ‘Is everything okay?’ I said, ‘I don’t know. How do I pay?’” Julie discovered that there was a number on the table that was a bit hidden. Sharing that number with the cashier was the key.

“”

Australia has been a dream trip since I was a kid. My dream was to visit a koala sanctuary and hold a koala. This has been on my bucket list since I was eight or 10 years old, and it would never would have happened without this award.

CLAWSON



“There were jarring, culture-difference interactions a few times, so I had to learn as I went. By the second week, I was ready to stay with my friends in Brisbane and ready to eat dinner and have conversations with other people.”

Julie traveled to Australia during that country’s winter season. Her friend, Nathan, and his wife, Sarah, both work in the school system. Fortunately, Julie’s travel plans aligned with a two-week holiday and break from school.

“It worked out perfectly. They had a spare room, and they insisted that I stay with them and their two daughters. We took a trip to a rainforest near their house and to a place that made its own cheese. I had never fished in the ocean before. One day we went fishing off of a pier, and I actually caught a fish.

Nathan is a big sports fan, so he wanted to take Julie to a rugby game and an Australian Rules football game. She went to both of those contests for sports not commonly watched in America. Nathan helped Julie understand the action by patiently answering questions throughout the events.



Julie met Nathan Grady when they were both counselors at Camp Tecumseh in 1998. One of their outings in Australia was attending a rugby match at Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane.

“Their family was amazing and so welcoming,” Clawson says. Nathan and Sarah had lived in the United States for a year. Julie met him when he was hired as an international staff member at Camp Tecumseh.

“I brought over a bunch of stuff for them that they can’t get anymore.” One of their requests was for Clawson to bring Fritos, an item not readily available in Australian stores. They also requested that she cook chili while she was visiting. The couple had eaten chili and loved it during their time in the United States, but it’s not something that’s usually made in Australia.

“I made chili, and the next thing I know, they’re inviting neighbors over,” Clawson says. “I told them they shouldn’t get high hopes. This was a basic chili, but they loved it. They don’t know any better,” she laughs.

Julie also did her part when the tables were turned, sampling the Australian “delicacy,” Vegemite spread. “The first time I tried it was at my hotel. It was just on a piece of bread, and it was terrible,” she says. “I shared this experience with my Australian friends. They explained that I had not eaten it the right way. You’re supposed to



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Clawson on the ferry to Manly Beach

eat it on a good piece of bread with butter and a very light layer of Vegemite. That makes it tolerable. I don't know if I'd call it good. It's funny how they have it in their pantries like we have peanut butter. I also brought Twinkies, and they said, 'Oh! We've only seen these in the movies.'"

Clawson had a collection of toy koalas as a child, and the highlight of her trip was connecting with these beloved animals. In Australia, she learned that a few zoos have interactive koala experiences, so she visited two of these locations including a refuge and an education center. One site, named Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary in Brisbane, employs scientists who determine how to best help the koalas thrive in the wild.

These researchers work on keeping koalas safe and healthy and developing vaccines to benefit the entire population.

"One of the experiences that you pay extra for was to hold a koala and have a behind-the-scenes tour," she says. "I learned more than I thought I would, including about the birth and the babies. I went in when they opened at 10 am and I asked, 'What time do you close?' because they had over 100 koalas, and they were just everywhere. They told me that they close at 5:00 pm. I said, 'All right, see you at 4:59 pm', and I spent all day. I told them that they might need to check my bag when I left.'"

Every time that Julie walked through a forested area, she would look up in the eucalyptus trees hoping to see a koala in the wild, but she did not. Koalas don't have a natural predator, and humans represent the greatest threat. It is more likely that a koala would be attacked by an off-leash dog than a wild animal. Additionally, their habitats are at risk because of deforestation.

There were a couple of things that surprised Julie during her stay. She says the landscape of Brisbane included not only beaches, but also mountains, and a rainforest, and the varying scenery was one of her favorite memories. Clawson and her friends also drove to Byron Bay on a day trip. There they looked out beyond a lighthouse to see dolphins along with whales breaching and migrating. Later that same day, the group found a place that would take them kayaking in the bay.

They went onto the bay in two-person kayaks. The waves they had to navigate drenched them within the first two minutes. Julie recounts that the guide said, 'Just listen to nature, listen to the sounds, and connect.' A whale appeared in the distance, and it was swimming toward the group. "Our guide wanted to paddle closer. He was taking pictures and happened to snap one of that whale's tail. When I look at the photo now, it is a great reminder that I never thought this was anything I would see in my life, and I kind of went outside my comfort zone

and did it.’ We also got close to a dolphin mother and calf. I saw one of them flipping its tail, probably just 100 feet from my kayak. It was the coolest thing.”

Julie also snorkeled in the Great Barrier Reef where she saw sea turtles, small sharks, and a barracuda. “We swam around and they didn’t pay any attention to us,” she says. “It was like jumping in an aquarium, with vibrant colors. It was amazing.”

Even after a 14-hour flight to Australia and a 12-hour return trip, Clawson says it was all worth it. She’s had a lot of time to think about the journey, what she experienced, and how the Borgmann Inspiration Fund benefits both Sycamore teachers and students.

“It’s rejuvenating and makes you consider what you’re doing and why you’re doing it,” she says. “I was there because of Sycamore School. It gave me a chance to reflect on the career I’ve chosen and to realize how lucky I am to love what I do. In the big picture, I realized how much teaching is a part of me and how much this school has become my family. That realization and how I can share it with my students is one of the lessons I learned from this trip.”

“I can still get very teary when thinking back. I’ll go through pictures on my phone and say, ‘Oh, yeah, I remember that.’ I think those feelings will last the rest of my life,” she says. “I will be watching a TV show and unexpectedly they’ll be in Australia. It may be somewhere I visited. I remember sitting on the steps right there at the opera house. It was just so meaningful for me.”

“It was an unreal, unforgettable experience,” Clawson admits. “It made me understand that teaching is what I should be doing, though we don’t have a koala unit in 4th Grade — yet. I need to find a way to tie it into the curriculum and put that in.” ●



(above) Julie spent a day at Kuranda Koala Gardens, mingling with kangaroos, koalas, and wombats.

(below) Crossing the Sydney Harbour Bridge



JENNIFER HENDRY, A FIRST GRADE TEACHER AT SYCAMORE SCHOOL, WAS ONE OF THE INAUGURAL RECIPIENTS OF THE BORGMANN INSPIRATION FUND. SHE TOOK A TRIP TO THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS FOR 10 DAYS IN THE SUMMER OF 2023. JENNIFER TALKS ABOUT THE TRIP AND HOW IT CENTERED AROUND DISCOVERY, COMMUNITY, AND HOW HER TRAVELS WILL BENEFIT HER STUDENTS.

Jennifer Hendry:

BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS



Hendry gets ready for another snorkeling dive.

Many who have never heard about the trips that Jennifer Hendry and Julie Clawson took in the summer of 2023 have two questions: “How does this fund work?” and “What do you have to do to earn the award?” It’s beneficial to understand what they did as part of the application process for the Borgmann Inspiration Fund. Applicants share what they would do if they received the award, why the experience would rejuvenate them personally and professionally, and how it would make them an even better Sycamore teacher. Applicants provide an estimate of their budget. There are several essay portions of the application. Finally, staff members submit letters of support from others who believe the teacher should be afforded this opportunity.

“It was a fair amount of work, I’ll be honest,” Hendry says of the process. “But you know, the Borgmann Inspiration Fund is a huge opportunity and a gift. You need to be willing to do the work because the school is doing a lot for you to offer this opportunity. You have to show that you’re willing to come back and do the work to earn it as well.”

Hendry did the prep work, earned the award, and then came the moment she had to start thinking about the reality of the situation. Did she know anybody who had gone on a trip to the Galapagos before? Was she able to talk to anybody and say, ‘What should I expect?’

“I had spoken with a friend who had traveled there several years ago. We talked about some of the different islands and some of the opportunities that she had taken advantage of before. I traveled with a travel company that I had used in the past. I looked up what the weather would be like in the Galapagos because we would be there in the winter. I would compare it pretty closely to Indiana. Galapagos evening temperatures might be a little cooler than at home in the summer, but it was still pretty humid. Their air conditioning isn’t as reliable as we have here, but it’s hard to complain when you’re in this beautiful tropical area. Being a little warm at night was okay.

Jennifer was away for 10 days total, flying first to Quito, Ecuador, where a lot of people arrive when they’re going to the Galapagos. From Ecuador, you can get to your Galapagos Island either by boat or by air.

“We took about a two-hour flight over from Quito versus taking a two-day boat ride. That’s a long time, plus, I didn’t have enough seasick medication to get through an extra two days on the water.”

Traveling alone, Hendry elected to use a travel company to help with her planning. She had some Spanish skills (much of the primary language of the Galapagos and Ecuador is Spanish), and being a part of a group was a way to better immerse herself in the culture and not worry as much about logistics.

“Except for the main economic center we visited, the Galapagos were less populated than other islands or destinations I’ve been to. We were on the big island for one night after spending many days and nights on a smaller island where we were among only about 30 tourists. In Floriania we stayed in the only hotel on the island, so it provided a great, natural experience. We’d eat dinner at local restaurants to help spread the tourism dollars across the community.”



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I got to sit quietly and consider that there's a reason I do what I do. I thought to myself 'You're supposed to be where you are. You're supposed to be doing this work that you've chosen to do. It's supposed to be your life's work.' That was probably one of the most impactful things for me.

HENDRY

The Borgmann Inspiration Fund is intended to help staff members rejuvenate and bring some renewed excitement back to school. Jennifer had ideas and plans, but the elevated enthusiasm for her job — and her life — was bolstered in unexpected ways.

“Honestly, my main time of reflection actually occurred on the two-hour boat rides between the islands. When I’m here if I’m sitting in a car and I’m not the one driving, I’m probably playing around on my phone, trying to read on my Kindle, or doing something else,” she says. “I’m not necessarily in the moment. Because of my seasickness concern, I didn’t take my phone out and didn’t take out any devices to read. I had just watched one island disappear, and a whole new area appear. It was this great reflective time. It was great to take that break as opposed to thinking about what frustrates me in life or what I need to figure out at school. Instead, it was more a time where I thought, ‘Hey, faces and names of people come to mind who have made a difference.’”

“I could think of families that I had worked with and some that I’ve worked with multiple years. I got to sit quietly and consider that there’s a reason I do what I do. I thought to myself ‘You’re supposed to be where you are. You’re supposed to be doing this work that you’ve chosen to do. It’s supposed to be your life’s work.’ That was probably one of the most impactful things for me.

Understanding Herself and Why She Teaches

The yearly Day of Caring that Jennifer brings to her classroom is a terrific example of what she is passionate about, both as a First Grade teacher at Sycamore and also as a person. The day features both First Grade classes spending dedicated time doing acts of kindness and giving to others. This includes making footwear and hats for those in need in other countries and sending notes of thanks to members

of the active military. Day of Caring is just another element, in addition to the spelling, math, and reading skills she teaches, that Hendry brings to her students.

“One of the things that I liked seeing and hearing about in the Galapagos is the conservation efforts throughout the islands, particularly with the population of native giant tortoises,” Hendry says. “A lot of the main islands have tried to increase the breeding programs because this animal was a huge part of the islands for years and years. However, as more people started discovering the islands as a place where they could live or hunt, the tortoises were carried away for meat. Their fat was used to light lamps along streets and in houses, and that population diminished.”

“Breeding centers have been created to rebuild the populations, and we visited a couple of those. We also got to hear about some of the ways that they’re trying to protect tortoises in the wild. How do they protect the trees that the tortoises want versus how do they protect some of the native trees that they don’t want the tortoises to go toward? One of the most interesting stories was about what happened as they lost their tortoise population and the natural vegetation began to take over. Losing one natural resource resulted in gaining too much of another. As an initial solution, a bunch of goats were brought in to eat the vegetation. But then the goats became wild and ate too much of the plant life, and now they don’t have enough vegetation for the tortoises they’re trying to bring back.

We learned about this idea that was tried and didn’t work. So now how are they going to adapt that? Those true stories can create great creative problem-solving opportunities, even for children as young as First Grade. I love any time I can bring in examples of conservation, caring for our planet, and being a global citizen to children at a young age. I look forward to developing activities and programs based on what I experienced in the Galapagos.”

About Volcanoes, Good Water, Thick Shoes, and Sharks

“Swimming with hammerhead sharks was amazing,” she says. “I never thought that I would say I swam with a school of about 30 sharks. It was unreal. They did not care that we were there and were just gliding around underneath us. We also did a 10-mile hike one day to the caldera (crater) of the Sierra Negro Volcano. It was a clear day. We were able to see six miles across the volcano. The coolest part was the very tropical, almost a rainforest feel, around the volcano. You’ve got the cool mist on you when you get to the caldera. If you continue into the lava field, the topography changes into a rocky desert like the face of the moon. Even the temperature changes — it’s hot. Suddenly, you’re taking off your sweatshirt and layers and putting on a hat to protect yourself from the sun. It was like walking in two completely different countries all in one day. It was challenging, but it was refreshing and rejuvenating.

“These are the reasons you take a trip like this. You’re not going to go anywhere locally and see anything similar.”

And what did Jennifer learn about her shoes and water?

“I have to wear thick shoes. There was lots of walking. Also, not being able to drink the water was something I didn’t realize was an issue until I arrived. The hotels show you when you check in where their safe water sources are, and they make sure you know that’s available 24 hours a day. So you could always refill your water bottle. I’m not a big fan of brushing my teeth from a water bottle. I’ve done it once or twice before, but I was ready to be done doing that by the time I left.”

The group Hendry was with had a tour guide who was with them at all times and was fluent in both Spanish and English. Her experience was aided because many restaurants and businesses welcome tourists.

“The employees working at the hotels and the larger restaurants were either already fluent in Spanish, or they’d worked with enough tourists so that the little bit of Spanish I knew, the bit of Spanish a travel partner knew, plus kind of pointing to things, allowed me to communicate,” she says. “That was a fun challenge.”

After getting back home, Jennifer was delighted that her family survived in her absence. They did well without — or at least made life work — without her.

Hendry says it only took a couple of days back in Indiana to start to think about how amazing the experience was for her. She admitted that she wasn’t even back home when the realization of the breadth of her experiences was already working its way into her memories.

“It was great to get back home and see that the family missed me and that everybody wanted to hear about the adventures. It allowed me to think about what an amazing trip I had. It was the time on those boats, going from island to island, that gave me time to think about the growth that students had made the past year as I worked with them. I considered feedback from that parent who had been frustrated and how we had worked together to find strategies that were going to work. That was an affirmation. I tried to make good productive use of my time. No phone. Two hours on a boat. It was a lot of reflection.” ●



Smart (and Safe) Dining On The Islands

“There were some safe places you could go and get a snack on your own. But there are also places you don’t want to eat at because, in the Galapagos, you really shouldn’t drink tap water. Some establishments are set up more to cater to visitors more than others which serve local people who don’t need to worry about the water situation because their bodies have adapted. So it was another great reason to travel with a group so that I could know, okay, I’m not going to go here because the ice is going to be dangerous. The water that the fruit and vegetables are in is going to be dangerous. So what do they feed you? What are you eating? I had so much fresh seafood, which was awesome. Ceviche is one of the main dishes. It features different squid, shrimp, scallops, and other types of meats cooked using the acid of citrus fruits. The seafood diced up with peppers and onions, makes Ceviche just delicious. Like a lot of the food, it has a little bit more of a Latin flair.”

“This was supplemented with rice and beans. I never went hungry the entire time.”

Jean Wright, 4th Grade (left)
and Susan Grade, Art



Geode ART

IN JUNE OF 2023, Sycamore 4th Grade teacher Jean Wright sent Art teacher Susan Grade an email message asking if she would like to collaborate with her on a 4th Grade Science unit.

Jean had started thinking about the collaboration after seeing a post online about geode painting. She thought that the 4th graders would love to develop some creative and beautiful designs with geodes.

Wright teaches a geology unit in science for trimester one, so examining geodes fits within her curriculum. “The students have been studying geology as part of their science curriculum for a while now,” Wright says. “We start with the layers of the earth, then move into plate tectonics and the Continental Drift theory. That allows the students to make connections and have a deeper understanding of how volcanoes and earthquakes form and what makes them erupt and occur. To finish the unit, we look at minerals and the rock cycle. Students learn how each of the three types of rocks are formed and broken down within a cycle, and as a part of that investigation, we learn about geodes since they can be found here in Indiana.” Students spent a day going on a geode hunt in Sycamore’s outdoor lab, cracking open the geodes they found.

Fourth grade students also explore various art techniques, starting the first trimester with a “People, Places, and the Environment” unit. The geode art project aligned with what Grade was planning for 4th Grade artists.

“I feel that whenever we take an interdisciplinary approach to learning, it helps solidify ideas in the students’ minds and allows them to achieve the higher order of thinking skills we want them to have,” Wright says.

“At the end of last school year, I came across that post on geode paintings and it looked like so much fun,” Jean recalls. I sent Susan a link to the video and some information about what I cover with the students during my geology teaching, and I asked if she wanted to collaborate on this ‘crazy’ idea.”

“After the initial brainstorming, Susan ran with the collaborative idea. All I had to do was join the 4th Graders during Art class for the two weeks they were working on their paintings, so it was a lot of fun for me. Susan did a great job preparing the lesson, tying ideas the students learned in art class to our geology work, and connecting the vision of the project to what I do in Science.

Grade had to do some research into how to create pour paintings. “I watched several videos about paint-pouring techniques. I created a Google Slide presentation to show to students to help them explore different pour techniques and connect to the big idea: How can art help us understand and explore beauty and our natural world?”

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Grade made four different example geode paintings herself, experimenting with various techniques. She learned at a parent-teacher conference that one of the 4th Graders has a grandmother who creates pour paintings. That grandparent directed her to use a few drops of silicone in the paint pours. That helped by making “cells” in the pours. She also ended up buying some kitchen cooling racks. The racks were placed on top of roasting pans to support the painting canvases. The paint was poured over them and drained through the cooling racks into the pans — similar to how Krispy Kreme ices a donut.

In her research, Grade learned about an artist who used rock salt to create a crystal-like look in her paintings.

“Jean had some rock salt for me to try out as a three-dimensional element. The salt could be mixed with Modge Podge and glitter tempera paints, then applied to the canvas and allowed to dry. Modge Podge was also used as an overall sealer on top of the paintings.”

This project provided many different approaches to applying the paint, salts, and colors. Sometimes the results were unpredictable and presented challenges like flaking paint or discoloration due to too much Modge Podge.

“Artists adapt approaches and designs based on the work,” Grade says. “That part of the creative process was a good learning experience for the students.”



Wright, Grade, 4th Grade assistants Claire Voigt and Debra Mullins, and Art assistant Leslie Obst worked together with the students to make sure the process went smoothly. Each teacher supervised groups of students who were working at stations in the art room.

“One of the best parts of my job is being able to work alongside so many talented individuals,” Wright says. “I love collaborating with others. It pushes me to look at my curriculum from a different viewpoint. Susan is so creative, and I appreciated her willingness to embrace my idea. It also allowed me to see and interact with the students in a completely different setting. They were so excited about this project.”

The geode art project also allowed the students to experiment with the principle of rhythm. That required students to let go of the perfectionism that often plagues gifted and talented artists.

“Each artist’s project was a little different but still united,” Grade says. “The artwork shows color and form, unity and variety, and visual movement. I hope that our geode art project reminds viewers of how art can be used to speak about the preciousness of the Earth.” In the end, it is art united with history and science. ●

After the artwork was completed, a display was created in the hallway outside of the 4th Grade classrooms.

“ ”

The project was a wonderful way for students to see that art can bring authentic learning to other subject areas and help us understand our world.

SUSAN GRADE



Sycamore Earns Two Top Indianapolis Awards

Sycamore School won two awards at the IndyStar “2023 Indianapolis Community’s Choice Awards.” These were presented at a November gala at the JW Marriott. Sycamore won the Best-of Award in the Private School category and was also chosen the winner in the After-School/Summer Camp category. Sycamore’s **Melissa Branigan, Tiffany Stahl, Jeremy Kaylor, and Julie SVV** attended the gala and accepted the awards.

Sycamore was nominated and voted on by *Indianapolis Star* readers and the Indy community in August of 2023. Voting narrowed finalists from an original field of more than 450 down to five. The entire list of winners was published in the *Indianapolis Star* and in IndyStar online in November. Congratulations to our friends at The Orchard School and The Oaks Academy for also being finalists in the Private School category.



Sycamore Students Earn Academic Awards

Several Sycamore students participated in the 2023 International Academic Competitions National Championships held in June in Arlington, Virginia. **Evan Ting** (8th Grade) and **Sameer Zaidi** (class of 2023) led the Sycamore team to 4th in the nation as they competed together in the National History Bowl for the first time. They narrowly lost their semifinals match in overtime.

Ting had several top five finishes, as he finished 2nd in the US Academic Bee, 3rd in the National History Bee, reached the semifinals of the US History Bee, and competed in the quarterfinals of the National Science Bee. He also finished 2nd in the US Military History Exam, 3rd in the Biology Exam, 4th in the Latin American History Exam, and 5th in the Ancient History Exam. Zaidi reached the semifinals of the International Geography Bee, National Science Bee, US History Bee, and US Academic Bee.

In addition, **Alessandro Salerno** (class of 2023) finished 4th in the Latin American History Exam and **Nicolas Spalding-Price** (7th Grade) reached the quarterfinals of the National Science Bee. **Evan Glushik** (class of 2023), **Akhil Jois** (class of 2023), **Aditya Bhatia** (8th Grade), and **Leo Salerno** (7th Grade) also qualified for and participated in the 2023 IAC National Championships.

Sycamore’s Prudence Peng Earns Two Awards

Prudence Peng, a current Sycamore 7th Grader, was among the five winners of this year’s School Band and Orchestra (SBO) + Essay Contest for the 4th to 8th Grade group. SBO+ asked essayists to answer these questions: “Tell us about a music teacher who has changed your life. What was it about them that had an impact on you? How did their teaching, personality, or actions differ from other good teachers?” Prudence believes that a great teacher encourages students to enjoy the process and appreciate the opportunities to enjoy music. She mentioned that, while most people would never become professional musicians and play instruments perfectly, a great music teacher would still plant the forever-blooming seeds of love for music in our hearts, minds, and souls. Prudence received a \$1,000 prize, and Sycamore’s **Dr. Matt Murdock** will receive \$1,000 in products from Alfred, MakeMusic, Hal Leonard, and Yamaha. In addition, Dr. Murdock will also receive a Casio PX-S1100 keyboard, a pair of studio monitors from ADAM Audio, and a sound studio from Focusrite. Peng was also awarded \$400 for the Project POTUS Spotlight Award. She created a one-minute video about President Coolidge for the Project POTUS contest, and her video was selected as the Spotlight Award winner.

Quiz Bowl Team Wins Texas Tournament

Sycamore finished 1st out of 16 teams in the Texas Quiz Bowl Association Jamboree in October. That earned Sycamore a berth in the Middle School National Championship Tournament in Chicago in May 2024. **Evan Ting** was the top overall scorer, averaging 113 points per round for the team. Congratulations to Evan, **Gavin Sigua** (both 8th Graders), and **Zoe Singh** (6th Grade) for winning the tournament.

Science Bowl Team Announced

A record 35 Sycamore students from grades six through eight pitted their wits and knowledge against each other during after-school tryouts for a spot on this year's Science Bowl Team. The 2023-24 team, coached by Science teacher David Schuth, included:

Alex Bramhill (8)
Amy Cui (8)
Sawyer Jackson (8)
Allison Jeray (6)
Shayen Maun (8)
Rohan Parikh (8)
Gavin Sigua (8)
Evan Ting (8)
Krishna Una (8)
Justin Warren (8)

The team participated in a high school kick-off tournament at Purdue University in October, facing 16 other groups from high schools around the state. Sycamore landed in 2nd place, qualifying to participate in the High School National Championship Tournament in Washington, D.C. Team captain, **Evan Ting**, was the tournament's overall top scorer.

Student Art Earns Top Prize at Children's Museum

Angela Wang, a Sycamore 5th Grader, won first place at the Indianapolis Children's Museum's Haunted House Art Contest (8-12 years old category). Angela has been participating in this contest since third grade. Her entry was part of the museum's haunted house decor in 2023.

Four Middle Schoolers Perform with Indianapolis Youth Orchestra

On October 29, at The Hilbert Circle Theatre, Sycamore students **Kirill Chesnichenko**, **Amy Cui**, **Prudy Peng**, and **Joyce Tang** helped kick off the first concert of the 42nd season of the Indianapolis Youth Orchestra. Along with other musicians, the four Sycamore violinists performed Waltz of the Wicked, The Inner Planets, and Lion City. Prudy is also the youngest Violin 1 musician, and Kirill is the youngest musician in the Philharmonic Orchestra.

Three Students Earn All-Region Band Honors

Three Sycamore School student musicians participated in the Northwest Indianapolis Indiana Bandmasters Association (IBA) All-Region Band Competition in November. Congratulations to **Leo Salerno**, trombone; **Jane Ai**, clarinet; and **Prudy Peng**, flute. The band rehearsed for eight hours on Saturday and performed an afternoon concert at Zionsville West Middle School. They were selected from more than 200 students and 26 area schools for this event.



Vex Team Earns Award at National Tournament

Alex Bramhill, **Nirdvaita Chandrana**, and **Luke Bramhill** represented Sycamore at the VEX Robotics Speedway Signature event in November and received the Sportsmanship Award for the tournament. This national-level, two-day tournament drew top teams with more than half of the top 20 teams in the US and Canada attending.

Sycamore 4/5/6 Spell Bowl Wins State Championship

Sycamore School's 4/5/6 Spell Bowl team prepares for only one competition all year: The Indiana Association of School Principals State Spell Bowl. On November 13 at Southport High School, they won that event in grand fashion, earning 1st place in the State Elementary Division and earning the overall championship in the Elementary Division by besting a field of 22 Indiana schools. Every team member achieved a perfect score in carrying Sycamore to the win.



Sycamore Middle Schoolers Finish 6th in State in HS Spell Bowl

Sycamore students finished in 1st place in the Class 4 competition and tied for third place overall with Hamilton Southeastern Junior High at the Indiana Academic Spell Bowl in October. **Gavin Sigua, Shruti Abhilash, Amy Cui, and Alex Bramhill** all received Perfect Scores. **Raza Hassan** and **Joyce Tang** both scored near-perfect (8 out of 9 words spelled correctly). That qualified the team for a spot in the State High School Spell Bowl Competition held at Purdue University on November 11. At that contest, the Sycamore team scored 60 out of 72, and the 7th/8th Grade Spell Bowl team placed 2nd in Class 4 and tied for 6th in the entire state. Gavin Sigua and Shruti Abhilash both achieved perfect scores for the second competition in a row, while Alex Bramhill, Amy Cui, and Joyce Tang all scored near-perfect.

Sycamore Wins High School Quiz Bowl Tournament



Sycamore students competed in the Achaean Invitational High School Quiz Bowl tournament at Herron High School on Saturday, December 2. Sycamore placed 1st (out of 16) in Division I, topping a field that included 15 high school teams. The top four schools, Sycamore, Herron HS, Culver Academy, and Carmel HS, all qualified for the 2024 High School National Championship Tournament. Overall, Sycamore's Team A finished 9-1. Team members were **Evan Ting** (2nd overall individual scorer in the tournament), **Gavin Sigua, Jeffrey Kirkendall, and Shayen Maun**. Sycamore Team B finished 4th (out of 10) in the Division II event. That team finished 5-3 and included **Lila Epstein, Alex Bramhill, Raza Hassan, Elin Glushik, and Amy Cui**.

Speedskating Medals for Sycamore 4th Grader

Sycamore 4th Grader **Quin Fortner** had a busy November competing in five speedskating events as part of the Full Throttle Speedskating Club. He raced in Milwaukee, competing in his first-ever long-track race at the Pettit National Ice Center, one of only two indoor long tracks in the US. Fortner earned silver in short track and gold in long track in Milwaukee. He also participated in two meets in Chicago, winning a gold and a bronze medal. Finally, Quin rounded out the month in Muskegon, Michigan, earning a silver medal.

Sycamore Serves Volunteers at Wheeler Mission

More than 20 members of our Sycamore community volunteered at Wheeler Mission's Center for Women and Children in November, working on housekeeping, meal prepping and serving, and groundskeeping.

After work concluded, Wheeler Mission's volunteer coordinator sent the Sycamore team a message. "You all accomplished so much. Our housekeeping staff was thrilled. The women here love seeing young people volunteer and serve them. It lifts their spirits and gives them hope." In total, Sycamore provided 46 hours of work and saved Wheeler Mission \$1462.80 which paid for over 703 meals."

Sycamore 8th Graders Qualify for AIME

In November, Sycamore's Math Team participated in the American Mathematics Competitions (AMC) 10A/B math competition. The AMC 10/12 is the first step on the road to selecting six students to represent the United States at the International Math Olympiad. Sycamore 7th and 8th Graders tested their knowledge with the best math students in grades 10 and under from across the country. The competition consists of two tests with 25 multiple-choice questions each. The tests have a maximum score of 150 points each. **Shayen Maun** led Sycamore on both exams with totals of 115.5 and 112.5. Both scores earned him the opportunity to advance to the next level, the American Invitational Mathematics Exam (AIME). **Gavin Sigua** also qualified for the AIME with a score of 109.5 on the AMC 10A. The AMC also gives recognition to middle school students who score above 90. In addition to Gavin and Shayen, **Justin Warren**, **Evan Ting**, **Pari Ponugoti**, **Kelvin Yan**, and **Krishna Una** received a Certificate of Achievement by having a score over 90 on one of the two tests.

Sycamore Green Team Builds Hammock City



The Green Team is an elective headed by Sycamore Science Coordinator **Anna Freije** and Art teacher **Susan Grade**. Sycamore 7th and 8th Graders who are part of the team developed a plan to build a Hammock City. The idea was to create a space exclusively for Middle Schoolers where these students could read, enjoy a stress-free area, and be in community with others. With the help of Sycamore's Facility Manager, **LeRoy Richins**, The Green Team installed posts and hung 12 hammocks. The Team also enhanced the Sycamore Outdoor Lab, an area featuring new and old plant growth, water, and animals. The enhancement included cleaning the pond, introducing four new Koi fish, and adding another frog to join the one already living there. The Green Team also plans on forming an Outdoor Garden Team in the spring.

Sycamore's Moll Wins IAG Award

Sycamore Kindergarten teacher **Ruth Moll** was honored as the recipient of the 2023 Leadership Award from the Indiana Association for the Gifted at their annual conference. The Indiana Association for the Gifted annually presents this award to a parent, teacher, coordinator, administrator, legislator, or other deserving person whose exemplary leadership and outstanding contribution to gifted education has positively influenced Indiana's children, teachers, schools, programs, and/or policies.





[1]



[2]

- [1] Sycamore students formed the all-grades band and performed during Veteran's Day.
- [2] Sycamore 3rd Grader Alex Rhea during a hands-on visit to the IU School of Medicine
- [3] 6th Graders at MarineLab in Florida
- [4] Nolan Brown and Charlie Lugosch
- [5] Cole Welton, Jacob Salzinger, and Neal Narayanan
- [6] Sahana Khazanic and her brother at the 1st Grade Insect Fair



[3]



[4]



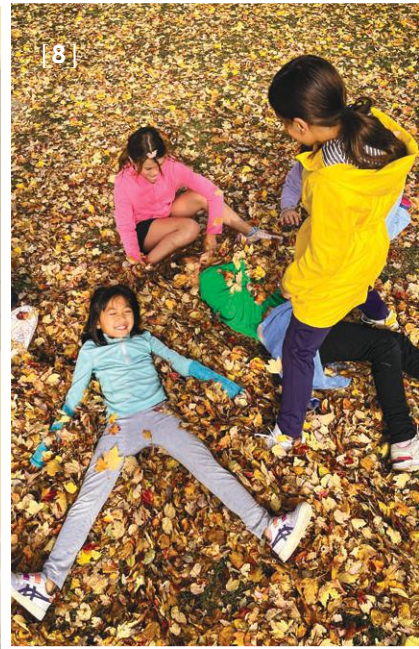
[5]



[6]



[7]



[8]

[7] Sycamore 7th Grader Leni Lee with two of her PreK friends

[8] Sycamore 3rd Graders in the fall leaves

[9] Beckett Wyatt and Alice Howard celebrate a Sycamore soccer goal.

[10] Coach Garrett Guffin with his volleyball team



[9]



[10]

Alumni News and Notes



Alumna Meets the First Lady

Sycamore alumna Elizabeth Schuth ('21), a junior at Westfield Washington High School, is the editor of the school newspaper. She met First Lady Dr. Jill Biden at school in August as Biden and Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murphy visited to talk about the importance of mental health as well as the importance of supporting programs to help students suffering from mental health issues.

Williams Stays Involved in Music at Brownsburg High School

Simon Williams ('23) continues to be involved in music ensembles as a freshman at Brownsburg High School. Simon is a member of the concert band, pep band, and marching band at BHS. This past season, the Sound of Brownsburg earned third place in the Class A ISSMA State finals and 11th place at the Bands of America Grand National Competition.

Drew Wrightson Advances at US Amateur Golf Championships

Sycamore alumnus Drew Wrightson ('17) qualified for the US Amateur Golf Championships in USGA Qualifying at the Indiana Amateur held at the Sand Creek Country Club in Chesterton, Indiana. He finished 38th in the starting field of 312 players competing in August. The field was cut to the low 64 scores. He was eliminated in the round of 64 to Gregory Solhaug of Norway.

A junior at Baylor University and a 2021 Brebeuf Jesuit High School graduate, Drew is a pre-med health science studies major with a 3.98 GPA and was a member of the 2023 Big 12 All-Tournament Team. He was the number-one-ranked junior player in the state of Indiana in 2021.



Park Tudor Panthers in the News

Science

Senior **Aditi Dey**, Class of 2020, attended the International Society of Vascular Behavioral and Cognitive Disorders (VasCog) annual scientific conference in Sweden from September 13–16. She was the youngest attendee among hundreds of scientists from around the world who presented their research on dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. Aditi presented a poster from her ongoing research project “C-reactive protein (CRP) as an inflammatory biomarker for early Alzheimer’s disease (AD) pathogenesis.” She has been working on this research project since her junior year under the supervision of Prof. Silke Kern MD, Ph.D. at the Institute of Neuroscience and Physiology, Center for Aging & Health, Gothenburg University.

Class of 2020 Senior **Rohan Shah** was accepted to Diversity and Innovation Institute’s YiQ program and researched with fellow high school students about Alzheimer’s Disease. Rohan’s meta-analysis was under the supervision of DNOVA Director Dr. Luis Palacio and colleagues and panel representatives from Cummins, Corteva Inc., and Eli Lilly & Company. Rohan’s poster “Genetic Material Loss in the Brain and Its Effect on Alzheimer’s Disease” was presented at the YiQ conference this past summer.

Also from the Class of 2020, Senior **Anastasia Ebersole** completed her requirements at the Susan G. Komen Tissue Bank at Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Comprehensive Cancer Center. She worked under the supervision of Michele Cote, Ph.D., Professor of Epidemiology, Director, Susan G. Komen Tissue Bank, and the Dr. Carrie Ann Glasscock West Chair in Breast Carcinogenesis. Anastasia’s many months of dry-lab research led to the poster presentation “Markers of Vitamin D3 Activity in Normal Breast Tissue and Subsequent Breast Cancer: A Pilot Study.” Anastasia presented her findings at the recent American Association for Cancer Research conference.

Mathematics

Four Park Tudor sophomore students, all 2022 Sycamore graduates, competed in the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology annual high school mathematics contest in Terre Haute. **Kaitlyn Park, Justin Puno, Alex Cheng, and Owen Zhang** placed second as a tenth-grade team among a host of very competitive schools from both Indiana and Illinois. All four placed in the top ten of their respective division and received recognition. Kaitlyn was the top individual scorer among the four with a second-place finish. It took a perfect score to beat her.

Alumnae Help Park Tudor Panthers to Victory

The Park Tudor Girls Soccer team won the 1A State Championship in October. Four former Sycamore students are members of the varsity squad and played for the championship: **Abby Cheng** (’20), **Neela Gussick** (’21), **Eva Berger** (’23), and **Molly McDonald**. “I was so lucky to be on a team with Sycamore alumna who were able to help me navigate such a special and memorable season,” Berger said. “Going into the State Finals, we had something to prove as the returning state champs. Our coaches weren’t certain that we would get past sectionals. We had lost some very key players from last year, through graduation and injuries. We made it to the state semifinals, beating Evansville Mater Dei to get to the finals against Heritage Christian. It was so incredible to play in such an important game alongside other Sycamore alums. It was an unforgettable experience.”

Cheng was one of the recipients of the fall Crown Award, which is awarded by the Park Tudor Booster Club for both athletic and academic excellence.

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Several Sycamore alumni are on the 2023 Park Tudor Men's Tennis Team. Pictured at the banquet are Senior, **Rohan Shah**; Freshman, **Benjamin Murray**; Senior, **Cooper Grabow**; Freshman, **Oliver Gollapudi**; Senior, **Oliver Seifert**; and Senior, **Michael Fryburg**; not pictured: Freshman, **Sameer Zaidi**.

Park Tudor Senior Wins Debate Championship in West Lafayette

Congratulations to **Nicholas Bullard**, Sycamore Class of 2020, who brought back a first place trophy to Park Tudor in the All-World School's Tournament in West Lafayette in September.

Rising Stars of Indiana

CLASS OF 2025

BREBEUF JESUIT PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Larissa Lo

Sam Rudavsky

NORTH CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

Jake Lee

PARK TUDOR

Emily Hackwelder

Daniel Liu

UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL

Michael Cardwell

Lukas Fiur

Murray and Mom Win Tennis Title

Benjamin Murray, Class of 2023, and his mother, **Suzette Solomon**, won the 2023 National Mother/Son Clay Court Tennis Championship held in Wellington, Florida in November.



Middle School Champions Meet Alumni at Quiz Bowl



Sycamore Middle Schoolers competed in the Achaean Invitational at Herron Riverside High School in December with a total of 26 teams as part of a high school Quiz Bowl tournament. Sycamore placed 1st (out of 16) in Division I and 4th (out of 10) in Division II. Congratulations, Eagles, on an outstanding tournament!

Overall Sycamore A finished 9-1 and was composed of:

Evan Ting (2nd overall scorer in the tournament),
Gavin Sigua, **Jeffrey Kirkendall** and **Shayen Maun**.

Sycamore B finished 5-3 and was made up of:

Lila Epstein, **Alex Bramhill**, **Raza Hassan**, **Elin Glushik**, and **Amy Cui**.

Several Sycamore Alumni also competed on seven teams from four different high schools at this event.

Alex Cheng, **Emily Hackwelder**, **Insia Zaidi**, and **Sameer Zaidi** competed on two teams from Park Tudor.

Mikey Caldwell, **John Coutant**, **Marie Coutant**, **Annabel Douglas**, **Lucas Fiur**, **Owen Murray**, **Alessandro Salerno**, and **Ben Wei** competed on three teams from University.

Riva Jain represented Carmel, and **Deke Kandel** competed for North Central.

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When They Come Back...

[1] Several members from the Sycamore Classes of 2020–2023, who are now in high school, returned for the first annual Basketball Homecoming Reunion in early December. The alumni visited with former faculty and staff and cheered the Boys’ Basketball Team on to victory over Park Tudor.



[2] **Audrey Sims**, Class of 2014, came back for a visit with her mother, **Justin Phillips**, who conducted a drug education program for 7th and 8th Graders this fall.



[3] Before returning to Choate Rosemary Hall, **Oscar Hyatt**, Class of 2022, spent some time this early fall to help Coach Savion Sprowl with the soccer teams.



[4] **Ginny Neumeister**, **Matilda Kelly**, and **Hailey Neumeister**, all from the Class of 2023, came back for the All-School Social in August.



[5] **Samuel Clarke**, Class of 2007, who is pursuing a Ph.D. in Computer Science at Stanford University, surprised his former Middle School teachers with a visit.



[6] Carmel Senior **Sara Fulk**, Class of 2020, returned to help her mother, **Lori**, in the Clinic during Grandparents’ Day.





Mike Boatright

Regina Laux

Katie Smith

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