

VIP®

Quinceañera Reflections: A Year of Memories

Interview with Quinceañera: Sabrina Leon

6th Annual Summer Service Project

Meet the VIP Connect Club Presidents

Year 12
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Reflecting on VIP's 5th Annual Summer Camp Service Project



The summer of 2023 witnessed an incredible six weeks of impact and camaraderie as Very Important Purpose (VIP) hosted its 5th Annual Summer Camp Service Project. Welcoming bright-hearted volunteers from middle and high schools, including Christopher Columbus, Belen Jesuit, Saint Brendan, American Heritage, Westminster Christian, Pinecrest Glades Academy, Pinecrest Preparatory, Downtown Doral Charter Upper School, St. Thomas the Apostle, Miami Arts Studio, Immaculata-La Salle, West Broward, and Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart, the atmosphere was charged with enthusiasm and dedication.

Each week, a new group of spirited individuals embarked on a journey of service, visiting various organizations across the community. The impact was far-reaching as we collaborated with organizations such as Ronald McDonald House Charities, The WOW Center, Title 1 Migrant Program, Patches, GiGi's Playhouse, and Hope 4 the Homeless. Our activities were diverse, ranging from hosting water days and karaoke events to cooking for families and arranging play days, creating moments of joy and support for those in need.



Each volunteer was educated about the purpose and significant work undertaken by the organizations we visited. We aimed not just to serve but to provide an understanding of the critical roles these establishments play in our community, fostering a sense of awareness and empathy among our volunteers.

Throughout the six weeks, we witnessed the power of service, creating not just memories but fostering personal growth. The summer was not just about the services rendered; it was about the lessons learned, the eyes opened, and the hearts touched. The impact was immeasurable and left a mark on all involved.

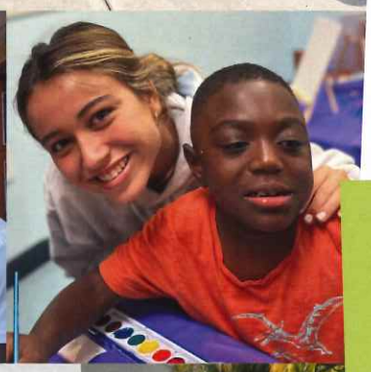


As we reflect on this incredible journey, the spirit and dedication displayed by our volunteers were truly commendable. The essence of community, support, and selfless giving was palpable throughout the entirety of our service project.

The success of the 5th Annual Summer Camp Service Project has only ignited our excitement for the future. With an unwavering commitment to opening the eyes of the youth to the immense power of community service, VIP eagerly looks forward to continuing this meaningful endeavor. The Summer Camp Service Project is not just about making a difference; it's about shaping a generation committed to creating positive change, one act of service at a time.















VIP Summer SERVICE PROJECT

VIP Very important Purpose

Embrace an Unforgettable Summer of Giving Back at VIP's 6th Annual Sleep-Away Service Project!

Very Important Purpose invites middle school and high school teens to embark on a rewarding journey this upcoming Summer 2024. Our Sleep-Away Summer Service Project offers a unique opportunity for teens to dive into a world of empathy, compassion, and service. With several weeks to choose from, teens will have the chance to make a real impact in their community, working alongside various local organizations and within our own foundation. The best part? Volunteers will earn up to 100 hours of valuable community service by the end of their stay.

What's in store for our enthusiastic volunteers?

- ☑ Learn essential life skills: teamwork, effective communication, and leadership.
- ☑ Gain a deeper appreciation for life by supporting local organizations in need.
- ☑ Engage in daily forums with inspiring guests.
- ☑ Enjoy a variety of activities, from sports like soccer, volleyball, basketball, to fun events like Talent Shows, Karaoke Nights, and Game Nights.
- ☑ Get hands-on with cooking, baking, and everyday routines.
- ☑ Earn a CPR certification.

Summer Camp Price: $1,000 per student

Price Includes:

- ☑ Accommodation at our Homestead Cabin "El Escondite"
- ☑ Breakfast, lunch and dinner all full days
- ☑ Transportation to all facilities
- ☑ 4 shirts that must be worn when out of the cabin.

At VIP, our mission is more than just a camp; it's about opening the eyes of our youth to the realities faced by the less fortunate. We collaborate with organizations aiding those with special needs, developmental disorders, hospitalized children, and low-income families. Throughout the camp, our volunteers get hands-on, engaging directly with these organizations. Our goal is to showcase the difference they can make, instilling in them the power and impact of their actions.

Our 2024 Dates:

- ☑ June 10 - June 15 (Boys)
- ☑ June 17 - June 22 (Girls)
- ☑ June 24 - June 29 (Boys)
- ☑ July 8 - July 13 (Boys)
- ☑ July 15 - July 20 (Girls)
- ☑ July 29 - August 3 (Boys)
- ☑ August 5 - August 10 (Girls)

Join us for a summer of service, growth, and making a difference. Let's together create a memorable and impactful summer for the betterment of our community!

VIP STAFF

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"Sabre for a Day" Opens Doors to Future Education









Saint Brendan High School hosted several 'Sabre for a Day,' a special event designed to welcome middle school students from Middle Schools such as Saint Brendan Elementary, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish School, Epiphany Catholic School, and others. This initiative aimed to provide these young visitors with a firsthand experience of what attending Saint Brendan High School entails. During their visit, the students had the opportunity to explore the diverse offerings at Saint Brendan, including sports, extracurricular activities, and the layout of the high school.

Offering this chance to middle school students, who are in the midst of deliberating on their high school choices, holds significant importance. It allows them to immerse themselves in the school's atmosphere, engage with its array of sports and activities, and gain a better understanding of the overall environment. This experience serves as a valuable tool for these students in their potential interest in the offerings of Saint Brendan High School. We eagerly await the continuation of 'Sabre for a Day' and hope to see more schools offering similar invaluable opportunities!



Christmas Spirit at Conchita Espinosa Academy

December was filled with Christmas cheer at Conchita Espinosa Academy. Students in Mrs. Batista's 4th Grade class enjoyed hot chocolate while decorating their classroom Christmas tree. Ms. Vazquez took charge of decorating the 2023-2024 Christmas Display incorporating decorations crafted by various grades. Mrs. Valhuerdi's 2nd Grade class published their first book, titled 'Where Are Santa's Elves?'" Adding to the festive vibes, Mrs. Plantada's First Grade class embraced the Elf on the Shelf tradition, and in Ms. Del Rio's Pre-Primary class, young learners crafted homemade snowmen. And that's just a glimpse of the holiday happenings at Conchita Espinosa Academy!



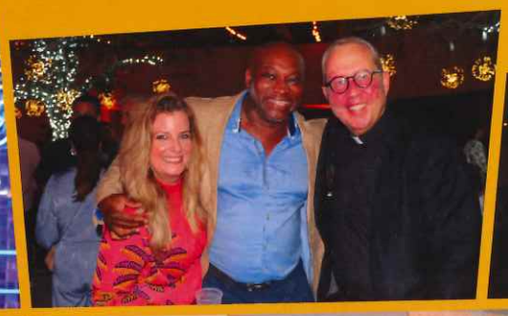




Culinary Night Fever at Belen Jesuit High School

On Saturday, January 27th, Belen Jesuit hosted its annual Culinary Night Fever, signaling the start of the much awaited Tombola festival. This year saw a remarkable turnout, with over 1,400 attendees enjoying the lively atmosphere filled with music, delicious food, refreshing drinks, and enthusiastic dancing. Many popular restaurants and bars also took part, enhancing the event's appeal and making it a memorable celebration for all.

















Archbishop Coleman Carrroll Celebrates the 25th Anniversary Silver Gala

On February 24th, families and faculty united to celebrate 25 years of the legacy of Archbishop Coleman Carroll. The night was celebrated with dinner, a silent auction, and lots of dancing! Congratulations to ACC and to many more years of celebrating!









Divine Savior Academy Radiates Kindness

The compassionate spirit of Divine Savior Academy students shines bright across all four campuses, where they've dedicated 10,000 hours to service. Together, they've packed over 80,000 meals and assembled 1000 hygiene kits for those in need within our local community, as well as assisted at a farm where they fed, cleaned and cared for the animals. Their commitment extends beyond charity; they've also taken to cleaning the streets, demonstrating a profound sense of responsibility to their city.

These acts of kindness not only benefit the community but also instill in students the invaluable lesson of community involvement and the power they possess to make a positive change. Divine Savior Academy's students are truly making a difference!



Campus Service Initiative: Our Lady of Lourdes Donates 1,050 Pairs of Shoes to Global Micro-Businesses

The campus of Our Lady of Lourdes welcomed representatives from Funds2Orgs to retrieve a remarkable collection of 1,050 pairs of shoes. These shoes were collected during the fall semester by the "Our Soul's Purpose" service organization, led by junior OLOL students Alyssa Bascuas and Olivia Delgado. The effort of these students will now impact micro-businesses across 25 countries worldwide as the donated shoes find new homes and purposes.

Quinceañera Reflections

A Year of Memories with Sabrina Leon

How did you decide to celebrate your quinceañera by flying to Paris and London?

I decided to celebrate my quincinera in London for a number of reasons. For starters, London has been one of my favorite cities ever since the first time I visited. The views are beautiful, as well as the food, and to be able to go back again was truly a blessing. My family and I also love to travel, so I thought why not make it a family trip and celebrate for two weeks instead of one night!

What was the inspiration behind choosing a trip and photoshoot for your celebration?

The inspiration behind the idea of a photo shoot was because of the outcome of my sister, Sabrina's quincinera photos. My family, the photographer, as well as the makeup artist, all had an unforgettable experience and I was excited to have the same for mine. Having the best team, and traveling to other places, like Paris, really added to the experience.

What was the process like planning a quinceañera trip to Paris and London?

A lot more than you can expect goes into planning a quinceañera trip to Paris and London including a photoshoot. From picking out your dresses and checking the weather in London to making sure it won't rain on you during the photoshoot, there are many things you wouldn't think to think of until you are actually there! Prior to the trip, picking out destinations for the photos was a big one! London is such a beautiful city that choosing only a few places can be difficult, so to make it a bit easier we actually chose destinations according to my dresses and how they would match in those spots. A lot of the coordination happens before we even leave Miami to make sure that everything runs smoothly the days of the photoshoot. My mom, my sisters, and I met several times before to assign a dress, a hairstyle, and a makeup look to every photoshoot location. The process was long but definitely so worth it since I gained an unforgettable experience from it.



What were some of the highlights of your trip to Paris and London during your quinceañera celebration?

If I'm being honest, it's difficult to choose just a few of the highlights of the trip because the whole thing genuinely felt like a dream. But if I had to name a few, I would definitely have to include having my hair and makeup done every morning and the endless dinners at the end of the night with everyone. The process of getting all ready for the pictures and deciding what spots we were gonna visit that day was all so exciting even though we would wake up at around 4am to get the best shots. The dinners at the end of the nights with everyone will always be one of my favorites since we got to talk and laugh about everything that happened that day.

What advice would you give to someone considering a non-traditional quinceañera celebration, such as traveling abroad?

If there was one piece of advice I could recommend to others doing a celebration like mine, I would definitely say to not let the stress of it all get to you. Even if you plan your trip and photoshoot perfectly, life happens and there will be some minor obstacles you might have to overcome. But always remember your initial purpose of why you went and what you're there for. Remember that no matter what, just have fun and stay reminded that it is already a blessing to be able to enjoy an amazing experience like that one. We were able to have so much fun in between the photoshoots which made the experience twice as fun.

Did you have any favorite locations or activities you experienced during your time in Paris and London?

One of my favorite experiences during my trip was visiting Buckingham Palace during the changing of the guards. This was something I have wanted to witness for the longest time and having the opportunity to watch it and capture a photo was definitely a check off my bucket list! I strongly recommend it because it truly is a one of a kind experience.

Can you describe the experience of picking out your quinceañera dress?

The process of choosing and designing my quinceañera dress was truly magical! My inspiration for my dress was actually my sisters quinceañera's dress but with my own personal touch. From choosing out the dress to designing the off the shoulder sleeves and how long the train should be, it was a long but so exciting process. I went back and forth several times to try on the dress and a few modifications were made including even the smallest details like the sequins on the top. The end result was nothing far from perfect and my dream quinceañera dress! Thanks to sbidhwishoqjs

How did you capture the memories of your quinceañera trip, particularly the photoshoot in Paris and London?

To capture the memories of my trip, particularly the photoshoot, my whole family took part in taking photos throughout the trip including all the funny moments behind the scenes so we can look back and relive the experience. I strongly recommend asking whoever is there to videotape and take photos of the behind the scenes to save the memories. Now I can look back and remember the beautiful experience!

Can you share a special moment or memory from your quinceañera celebration that stands out to you?

One very special memory from my celebration that will always stand out to me is in between the shots in the photoshoot my sisters covering me with a coat to keep me from the freezing weather in London! Taking the photos in my dresses in the London weather was definitely a challenge but such a wonderful experience especially with my sisters running with a coat every time on the way back to the car! This memory and many more is what made the trip so unforgettable!

Finally, what would you recommend to others considering a non-traditional quinceañera celebration, especially one involving travel and exploration?

One thing I would recommend to others considering a celebration like mine especially involving travel and exploration is to really take your time to do the research on what places are worth visiting on your trip. If you are doing a quinceañera photoshoot as well, make sure to dedicate a few days to visit the important landmarks because speaking from personal experience, while taking the photos you will pass by some really beautiful places that you will for sure want to explore some more.

MEET THE VIP CONNECT CLUB PRESIDENTS

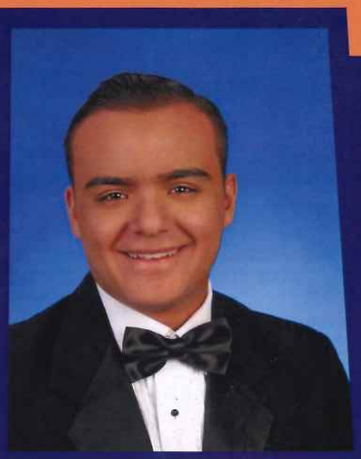


RAQUEL ARISTA
CARROLLTON SCHOOL OF THE SACRED HEART

Serving others has always been a passion of mine, instilled in me from a very young age by my parents. Having been born and raised in Miami, I love this city and I want to help it and its locals thrive.

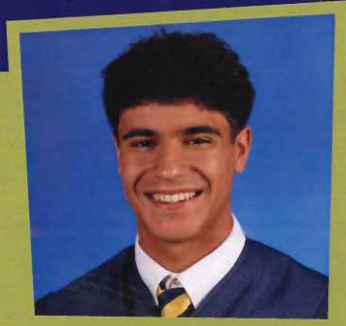
I am thankful to VIP305 for the amazing opportunity of joining a community of service. My goal this year as Carrollton Club and VIP305Miami Youth Board President is to motivate the teens in our community to serve and develop a sense of responsibility for supporting the wellbeing of our community.

The students in our schools are blessed and God's blessings should compel us to give back and help those less fortunate. As Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, the charitable foundress of the Sacred Heart said, "Let us leave acts, not words. No one will have time to read us."



GIOVANY OJEDA
MIAMI ARTS STUDIO

Serving our community through various events is by far the most impactful thing this club does. I have been able to be involved in sandwich events, drives collecting socks, purses, and school supplies, basket making events, and seasonal events like Trunk-or-Trunk and The Christmas Bazaar since 10th grade. This service was something I originally initiated to bring to my school. I was actively searching for how to meet my demands for service hours at school. Looking for community hours during covid was very hard. After many weeks of seeking opportunities, I found VIP305 Miami, and I knew I wanted to be part of this organization. I wanted to follow its approach to community service and bring its ideas to my school so I could help other students like me. So naturally the best way to do so was to make a club. I decided to talk to Yessika Siles of VIP305 Miami because I was interested in becoming an ambassador. In that way, I could represent the organization at my school through the club. Thankfully I was able to open it with the help of my principal who has helped me every step of the way. That is how I got to be president of the club at my school.



DIEGO HAMUD
BELEN JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL

For the past 2 years at Belen, I have been working with VIP305 to expand the club and get more teens to work with us at our events. It's always been a passion of mine to help and serve others, and I am grateful to Yessika and Amy for helping me do that and be apart of the organization for such a long time. I've been nominated for the Silver Knight Award, and I hope to win it to expand VIP305Miami to greater heights.



AMANDA CREWS, ALYSSA CREWS, AGUSTINA CARBAJALES, AND ISABELLA PANTOJA,
IMMACULATA - LA SALLE HIGH SCHOOL

Throughout the course of this year we have had the amazing privilege to join the VIP Connect 305 club in serving the community. Volunteering and contributing to our community through vip 305 has fundamentally altered our lives and impacted it in profound ways. It's been such a beautiful experience to be able to meet new people, have new diverse experiences, and overall be a part of a community that is so strong and passionate about what they do. We've found ourselves to become more empathetic and connected to the world around us. Overall, our eyes and hearts have opened immensely and we could not be prouder to be apart of this amazing organization.



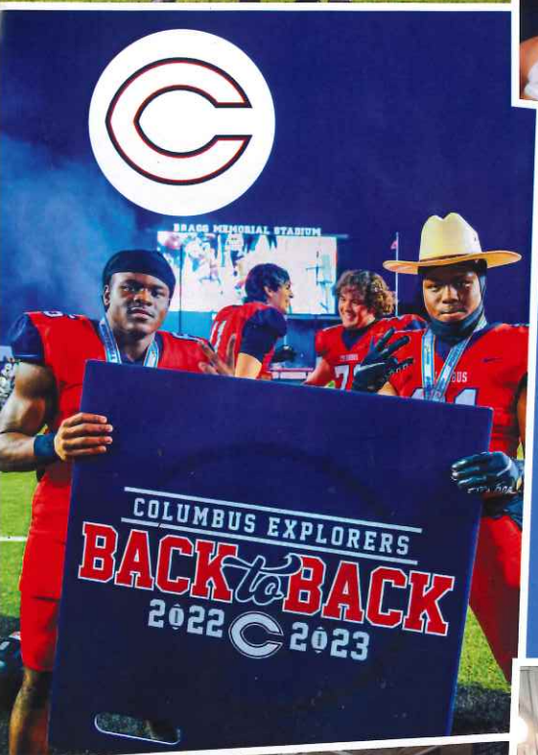
SEBASTIAN LOPEZ SILES,
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL

I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to serve as the club leader of Very Important Purpose at Christopher Columbus High School. This experience has taught me the true value of community and the profound impact of selfless service. Giving back has not only bettered the lives of others but has also allowed me to grow immensely as a person. It's a privilege to lead a club with such a meaningful mission, and I'm honored to be part of something that extends beyond myself, fostering a spirit of generosity and kindness that I will carry with me always.

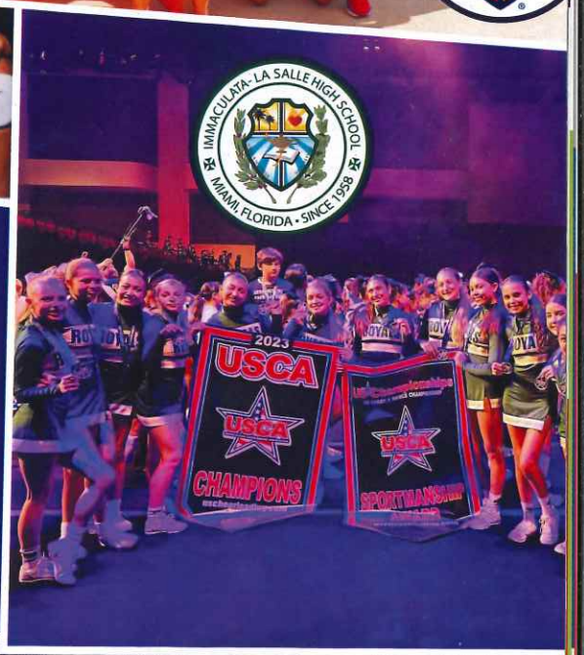








Explore the Excitement **of High School Sports & Clubs**













Belen lacrosse, water polo win.

Gulliver water polo wins, too. Plus baseball, softball, tennis.

Written by: Miami Herald Staff Reports



Rafael Antun scored three goals, including the winner in double overtime as the Belen Jesuit boys' lacrosse team edged Calvary Christian 7-6.

Trailing 6-2 in the third quarter, the victorious Wolverines rallied with four unanswered goals to force overtime.

Belen had a much easier time in its next game against Florida Christian. **Belen Jesuit 7,** Calvary Christian 6 (2 OT): Rafael Antun 3 goals; Max Cabanas 2 goals;Luke Collings 1 goal; JC De Sautu 1 goal; G Andrew Candela 10 saves. Bel 1-0.

Belen Jesuit 18, Florida Christian 0: Luke Collings 3 goals; Nicolas Hernandez 2 goals; Adrian Navarro 2 goals; Marcos Lapido Rodriguez 2 goals; Matias Cabanas 2 goals; Jaime Torres 2 goals; Alec Hernandez 1 goal; JC De Sautu 1 goal; Lorenzo Magarino 1 goal; Adriano Vizoso 1 goal; Jack Balsera 1 goal, 11-12 from face-off; G Noah Callejas 4 saves. Bel 2-0.

WATER POLO

The Belen Jesuit boys' water polo team went 3-1 at the Ian Supra Memorial Tournament in Orlando.

The Wolverines beat Windermere 21-7, West Orange 9-8 and defending state champion St. Thomas Aquinas 8-7. Belen lost to Winter Park 12-11 in overtime.

Leading the team was Lucas Levy with 11 goals, 5 assists and 7 steals. Goalie Austin Marrero had 32 saves in the tournament.

Belen's next game will be against Miami Country Day on March 11. The Wolverines are 6-2.

The Gulliver Prep girls' water polo team reached the finals of the Ian Supra Memorial Tournament, placing second overall.

In the semifinals, the Raiders beat Winter Park 14-6 as captain Kathleen Serig totaled 5 goals, 2 assists and 3 steals. Freshman Isabella Ten Have had 3 goals, 3 assists and 2 steals. Reese Rosenthal, a junior, added 1 goal, 2 assists and 3 steals. Julia Fogel, another junior, had 2 assists, 1 steal and 2 blocks.

In the finals, Seminole edged Gulliver Prep 13-12 in overtime. The Raiders are 6-3.

The Gulliver Prep boys' team made it to the finals, too, dropping the title to Dr. Phillips-Orlando 14-9.

In the semifinals, the Raiders (6-3) defeated Seminole 11-10 with captain Gabe Lewis recording 5 goals, 2 assists and 3 steals. Senior Victor Gordon had 3 goals, 1 assist and 2 steals. Sophomore Sebastian Piedra added 5 assists and 3 steals, and sophomore Matthew Preston had 2 goals and 1 assist.

MORE WATER POLO

GIRLS: Ian Supra Memorial Tournament in Orlando: Gulliver Prep 17, Dr. Phillips-Orlando 6: Reese Rosenthal 2 goals, 5 assists, 4 steals; Sophia Kingston 6 goals, 2 assists; Sophia Beltran 10 blocks, 2 steals, 1 assist; Isabella Ten-Have 2 goals, 2 assists, 4 steals. GP 4-2.

GIRLS: Ian Supra Memorial Tournament: Gulliver Prep 24, Gainesville 8: Sophia Kingston 8 goals, 2 assists, 3 steals; Kathleen Serig 7 goals, 3 assists; Sofia Beltran 8 blocks, 4 assists; Emma Preston 1 goal, 5 assists, 2 steals. GP 5-2.

BOYS: Ian Supra Memorial Tournament: Gulliver Prep 23, Olympia-Orlando 7: Alberto Escobedo 5 goals, 7 assists, 2 steals; Patrick Gardner 7 goals, 1 assist, 1 steal; Gabe Lewis 5 goals, 2 assists, 1 steal; Sebastian Piedra 2 goals, 1 assist, 4 steals; Matthew Preston 2 goals, 1 assist, 4 steals. GP 4-2.

BOYS: Ian Supra Memorial Tournament: Gulliver Prep 18 West Orange-Winter Garden 11: Alberto Escobedo 6 goals, 3 assists, 3 steals; Sebastain Piedra 2 goals, 4 assists; Gabe Lewis 4 goals, 1, assist, 1 steals; Victor Gordon 3 goals, 1 assist, 4 steals. GP 5-2.

SOFTBALL

St. Brendan and Westminster Christian each won two games to open the softball season.

The Sabres edged AIE 3-2 with pitcher Julie Miranda earning the win.

Braddock 17, Varela 1: Joy Vidal WP, 6 K; Belinda Magena 3-3; Vanessa Builles 2-2; Vidal HR. Brd 2-0.

Lourdes 15, Southridge 0: Fr. Mia Rivera WP, 4 IP, 0 R, 6 K; Jr. Sophia Pierro 2-2, 2 HR, 5 RBI, 4 R; Soph. Valerie Portuondo 3-3, 2 2B, 4 R; Soph. Jaqui Perez-Abreu 2-4, 2 RBI. Lour 1-0.

St. Brendan 3, AIE 2: Rachel Rodriguez 2-3, 2 RBI; Marley Nielson 1-2, R; Madisyn Llerandi 1-3, R; Julia Miranda WP, 7 IP, 1 ER, 11 H, 4 K. StB 1-0.

St. Brendan 13, Palmetto 0: Marley Nielson 2-2, R, RBI; Erin Perez 3-3 2 R, 2 RBI; Ashley Saud 1-3, R, RBI; Kristin Stoia WP, 3 IP, 0 H, 0 ER, 2 K. StB 2-0.

Westminster Christian 14, Key West 1: Kaley Dyer WP, 4 IP, 0 R, 2 H, 0 BB, 4 K; Gigi Khoury H, BB, 2 R; Dylan Lesman 3 H, 2 R, 2 SB; Casey Lesman 2 RBI, 2 R, SB; Mya Rodgers 2 H, 2 RBI, 3 R, SB; Jas Armenteros 2 H, RBI; Abi Barboza H, RBI, R, SB; Kaley Dyer H, RBI; Alexa Bender H, RBI, R. WC 1-0.

Westminster Christian 9, Key West 1: Kaley Dyer WP, 7 IP, 0 ER, 1 R, 2 H, 2 BB, 5 K; Gigi Khoury H, 2 RBI, 2 R; Dylan Lesman 2 H, R, SB; Casey Lesman H, BB, 2 RBI, SB; Mya Rodgers H, 2 RBI, 1 SB; Jas Armenteros H, R; Kaley Dyer H, RBI; Alexa Bender H, 2 BB, R, SB; Abi Barboza H, 2 R. WC 2-0.

BASEBALL

Doral Academy baseball is off to a good start. Credit to Michael Torres and his teammates.

Doral Academy 15, COHEA 4: George Pardo 3-5, HR, 3 RBI; Jadyn Nunez 1-1, 3 R; Leo Hernandez 1-2, 3 RBI; Sebastian Berrios WP, 2.2 IP, 0 R, 2 H, 7 K. Dor 2-0.

Doral Academy 6, Palmetto 5: Jadyn Nunez 2-2, HR, 2 RBI; Gabriel Milano 1-3, RBI; Michael Torres 1-3, RBI; Michael Torres WP, 2.2 IP, 0 ER, 4 K. Dor 3-0.

McArthur 12, Nova 6: McA: Eliecer Rodriguez WP, 5 IP, 2 H, 0 R, 5 K; Tyler Smith, 3-5, 2 R, 7 RBI, 2 HR; Ray Gonzalez 3-5, HR, RBI; Garvey Person 2-4, 2 R, 2 RBI. N: Jaiden Delgado 1-2, 2 BB, 2 RBI.

TENNIS

GIRLS: Palmetto 8, Lourdes 0: No.1 Mia Sorrentino won 8-0; No.2 Madeleine Chellas won 8-1; No.3 Arianne Rodriguez won 8-0; No.4 Sophia Jarauta won 8-0; No.5 Ariana Gil won 8-0. Plm 2-0.

BOYS: Palmetto 7, Columbus 0: No.1 Mike Larionov won 8-0; No.2 Beau Gibson won 8-0; No.3 Matteo Sama won 8-0; No.4 Paul Sasso won 8-3; No.5 Matteo Tucker won 8-0. Doubles: No.1 Gibson/Larionov won 8-0; No.2 Guarino/ Sama won 8-1. Plm 2-0.

Read more at: https://www.miamiherald.com/sports/high-school/article285930866



SJNCS

COMMUNITY COMPASSION IN ACTION

Very Important Purpose (VIP) recently collaborated with Saint John Neumann Catholic School on National Service Day. The students (4th grade - 8th grade) dedicated their time to preparing sandwiches for the homeless community. VIP expresses deep gratitude for the partnership, emphasizing the impact of collective action in fostering compassion and support within the community.

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Sailing into Summer

VIP305Miami Tours Odyssey of the Seas with Happy Holidays

VIP305 Miami was thrilled to join Happy Holidays for an exclusive tour of Royal Caribbean's Odyssey of the Seas, where they were joined by a lively group of quinceañeras preparing for their upcoming summer celebration onboard. Departing from Rome, the cruise offered a plethora of entertainment options and breathtaking views, leaving VIP305Miami eagerly anticipating the quinceañeras' special voyage. Heartfelt thanks were extended to Happy Holidays for the unforgettable invitation, promising an exciting summer filled with cherished memories and new adventures at sea.

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Ronald McDonald House Charities® South Florida

Volunteers Bring Joy and Support to Families:

An Afternoon at Ronald McDonald House Charities







In an exceptional display of community service, volunteers from the Very Important Purpose organization went on a heartwarming field trip to Ronald McDonald House Charities. Their visits, conducted on both October 7th and October 14th, were marked by a collective effort to support families coping with the challenges of having sick children receiving treatment.

Ronald McDonald House Charities stands as a beacon of hope, dedicated to providing housing and resources to these families during their time of need. The student volunteers from Very Important Purpose eagerly joined this noble cause, extending a helping hand to create an atmosphere of fun and care for the children and their families.

Throughout the day, these dedicated volunteers worked to set up various engaging stations featuring a range of activities and relays. Their goal was clear: to bring joy and a much-needed break to those enduring long-term hospital treatments. The impact, however, extended beyond the children themselves. Parents and siblings also found enjoyment in the event, making it a truly humbling and fulfilling experience for all involved.

The enthusiasm and unwavering support exhibited by the volunteers from Very Important Purpose were nothing short of extraordinary. Their commitment to spending a Saturday afternoon serving the community, and their dedication to spreading happiness and support, truly made a difference in the lives of those they touched.

The impact of such community service not only brightened the day for the families at Ronald McDonald House Charities but also served as a testament to the power of collective kindness and support. The selfless actions of these volunteers echo the spirit of goodwill and the immeasurable impact of lending a helping hand. As the day came to a close, one sentiment rang loud and clear: gratitude. The families, the staff, and the community at Ronald McDonald House Charities expressed their heartfelt thanks to the volunteers from Very Important Purpose for their invaluable contribution and their unwavering dedication to making a difference in the world.



Yessika Siles and **Amarette Suarez** from Very Important Purpose were awarded the August Volunteer of the Month by Ronald McDonald House Charities. Their selfless acts during the Summer Camp Service Project made a significant impact. Together with VIP volunteers, they prepared and served home-cooked meals to families at RMHC. The summer project ended in a heartwarming day at the VIP Foundation, offering families a joyful water-filled event with a petting zoo and delicious snacks. It was a deeply touching and memorable occasion, and Very Important Purpose is grateful for their partnership with RMHC.



Spreading Halloween Joy:

Very Important Purposes 3rd Annual Trunk or Treat & Haunted House Experience

Very Important Purpose (VIP) marked another successful year with its 3rd Annual Trunk or Treat and Haunted House Experience on October 28th. The event wasn't just about the typical Halloween festivities; it was a celebration of inclusivity, community spirit, and spreading joy to those who truly matter to VIP.













VIP Very important Purpose

With a turnout of over 60 dedicated volunteers, VIP extended a warm welcome to various local organizations close to their heart. This heartwarming event was specifically designed to bring Halloween cheer to those often overlooked during the holiday season. VIP opened its doors to organizations catering to children with special needs, developmental disorders, hospitalized children, and low-income families. The volunteers played a pivotal role in making the event a success. Their enthusiasm and commitment were evident in every task they undertook - from creatively decorating cars for the Trunk or Treat to assisting VIP staff and ensuring the seamless execution of Halloween-themed activities. Activities included everything from face painting to candy distribution, a pumpkin station, and various Halloween-themed games and entertainment.

The event was a testament to VIP's mission of providing a day filled with joy and laughter for these special organizations and their families. VIP was able to transform their dreams into reality with the help of their dedicated staff and supportive sponsors. The festivities included a diverse array of attractions: a trackless train, a haunted house, pumpkin carving, face painting, canvas painting, a petting zoo, delectable food, a photo 360 station, and an abundance of endless fun.

The smiles on the faces of the volunteers and the invited organizations were a testament to the success of the event. VIP's commitment to creating an inclusive and joyful space for everyone shone brightly throughout the celebration.

Through this heartwarming event, VIP demonstrated that Halloween is not just about ghosts and ghouls but also about the spirit of togetherness, kindness, and making cherished memories. Very Important Purpose once again showcased that its commitment goes beyond mere festivities; it's about building a community that thrives on inclusivity and joy. VIP achieved its goal of spreading Halloween joy and making a difference in the lives of those they hold close to their hearts.

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VIP Very important Purpose

Very Important Purpose's 5th Annual

Christmas Bazaar & Toy Drive

Very Important Purpose celebrated its 5th Annual Christmas Bazaar & Toy Drive on December 8th and December 9th, marking the occasion with a Christmas Winter Wonderland. Our foundation transformed into a festive environment, welcoming individuals with special needs, developmental disorders, low-income families, hospitalized children, and their families to share in the holiday magic.

The foundation was filled with Christmas decorations, and the trees on the property wrapped in lights set the festive mood. The event featured various activities, including a Petting Zoo, Pictures with Santa, Snow, Christmas Movie, Canvas Painting, Christmas Activities, Beverage & Snack Distribution, and a Toy Drive Distribution. Volunteers, numbering over 70 throughout the two-day event, played a key role in organizing, setting up, cleaning up, and ensuring the success of these activities.

In addition to our Christmas Winter Wonderland, our 5th Annual Bazaar showcased a selection of vendors, offering a platform for small businesses to shine and make sales. VIP believes in creating a festive atmosphere that not only celebrates the spirit of Christmas but also gives back to the community.

The festive atmosphere included gingerbread house decorating, a meet-and-greet with Santa, toy distribution, a petting zoo, a Christmas movie screening with popcorn and hot chocolate, and even a bounce house. We extended our reach by inviting several organizations, spreading the spirit of giving and sharing the joy of Christmas with an unlimited number of invited individuals. Very Important Purpose is grateful for the support of our community and the dedication of our over 70 volunteers, contributing to the success of this event. We look forward to continuing our tradition of spreading love, joy, and goodwill in the years to come.











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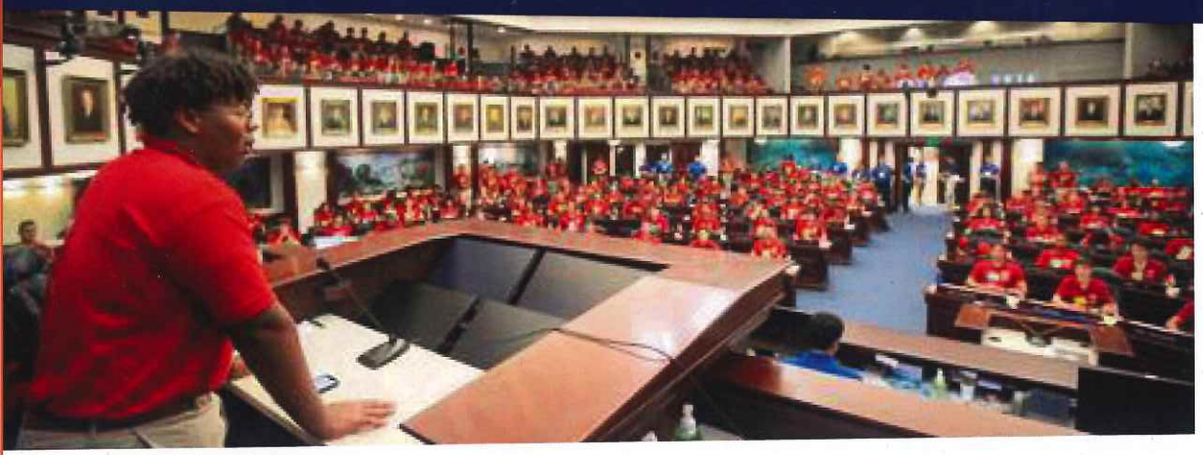
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We formed our own government — I'm governor! — and created Florida's future leaders' | Opinion

BY MARTIN SEALS (Miami Herald)



Florida Boys State is the experience of a lifetime. God, honor, country — this is what drove us for seven very intense days this summer.

I am a senior at Christopher Columbus High School in Westchester and took part in the brilliant experience that is Florida Boys State, a program of The American Legion that was founded in 1935. Boys State is considered Florida's premier youth leadership program.

It happens each year at Florida State University campus in Tallahassee. American Legion posts across the peninsula nominate two male rising seniors per school or area; about 500 boys from the Panhandle to the Keys descend upon the state's capital to participate in this prestigious program.



I had the honor of being nominated to attend on behalf of American Legion Post #31. Participants are some of the most successful boys in Florida. We excel in JROTC, debate, student body government. We have founded and led clubs, captained sports teams, become entrepreneurs, been valedictorians. Boys State puts many of the skills developed from these leadership roles to the test.

While at FSU, we built a mock state replica of Florida from the ground up, forming city, county and state legislatures. By the time we were finished, we had created a fully functional state government. Boys State's motto is to learn by doing — and that's exactly what we did.

Elections were held every day. Delegates are given a randomly pre-established city, county and political party. Everyone in your dormitory hallway is part of your assigned city. Everyone on your dormitory floor is part of your assigned county. Each county consists of two cities. The Federalists and the Nationalists are the two mock political parties governing the state.

I was a proud Nationalist. Delegates already had to worry about whether they might win a preferred position, but there's a second dynamic of possibly winning the position for your party. As a cherry on top, your roommate will always be a member of the opposite party. So, you're basically "living with the enemy."

There are all kinds of ways to represent yourself as a leader. Whether by giving a speech, engaging in a debate or helping form a group consensus, we had to be ready to argue for ourselves and what or who we each believe in regardless of how uncomfortable it might feel.

Participating in elections are one of the biggest components of Boys State. The process for electing leaders in all branches of government is detailed and immersive.

While competitions for elected seats began, Boys State complemented the program by continuing to educate the delegates on how their state and county work. Participants attended mini workshops over the vital, things, such as how a bill becomes a law, how to create an effective bill and how to create a winning campaign.

The revered Bob Knight's Florida School of History provides every delegate a deep dive on our state's history and how it effects us today. The Boys State School of Law prepares participants for the program's own bar exam. If you pass, you can attain a position in the Boy's State Judiciary, most likely on the Supreme Court. The courses hold weight and create a gateway to obtaining other high positions at Boys State.

All this makes the Boys State experience like no other. All of the rigor, including getting into, preparing for and participating in the program, is worth it once you have contributed to the machine that is the mock state.

Newly appointed Supreme Court judges conduct judicial reviews and make rulings in high-level cases. The legislature holds its session, passing, negating and debating bills created and drafted by fellow delegates. The governor merges everything together by implementing laws and managing the state with the help of his trusted cabinet.

I, surrounded by some of the smartest boys in the state and with the help of my cabinet, had the honor of being elected governor, the highest elected office at Boys State. My rise to this coveted position could not have happened without them. For all of the intense competition, I have never seen such an amazing, unbiased example of teamwork, camaraderie and support as I saw at Florida Boys State.

As a bonus, it all happens in the very seats where the actual lawmakers work — in Florida's Capitol. And there's another wildcard: Boys State's very own "Fourth Estate," its news team, the PressCorp. The team was dedicated to bringing the truth and news of the mock election process to our dorm doorstep every single day.

The greatest part is that we do all of this while making friends, creating a network, and synthesizing Florida's greatest future leaders. We hope to see you here!



SPECIAL CORNER:

LINK CLUB AT CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL: FOSTERING INCLUSION AND KINDNESS



BY: MRS. GONZALEZ-ROJAS & MRS. MARTINEZ (CO-MODERATORS OF LINK)

The LINK Club at Christopher Columbus High School is making a significant impact on the school's culture and the greater community by promoting acceptance and inclusion. LINK, which stands for Learning about Inclusion and Nurturing with Kindness, aims to promote understanding, embrace diversity, cultivate empathy, celebrate unique talents, and create a more inclusive society. John-Barry Bertamatti, the founding president of LINK, is the driving force behind this initiative. His journey to create this club began during his sophomore year when he first volunteered with the special needs community. Instantly inspired and deeply committed to this cause, John-Barry decided to channel his passion into something more significant, giving rise to LINK. His vision and leadership set the tone for the club, inspiring numerous classmates to join the cause.



One of LINK's remarkable initiatives is its partnership with Great Heights Academy (GHA), a school for children with special needs, founded and directed by Ms. Khia Lopez. Through this partnership, LINK students have formed lasting friendships with students at GHA, fostering acceptance and mutual understanding. These connections bridge gaps and break down barriers, emphasizing the importance of inclusion.

LINK also hosts sports clinics in collaboration with GHA, preparing athletes with special needs for the Special Olympics. These clinics, led by GHA Special Olympics Coach Luis Delgado in collaboration with LINK and the different athletic programs at Christopher Columbus, help these athletes reach their full potential while fostering camaraderie and boosting self-esteem and confidence.

The Friendsgiving Feast is another standout event, allowing students to come together, share a meal, and strengthen bonds. This event promotes the value of friendship beyond labels and emphasizes that there is room at the table for everyone.

During the holiday season, LINK hosts a sensory-sensitive Christmas event, Elfstravaganza, offering a safe and inclusive space for those with special needs. This thoughtful initiative allows everyone to enjoy the festive season in their own way, without feeling overwhelmed by sensory overload. Guests are treated to several holiday activities, including cookies and milk, holiday crafts, and a picture with the big man himself…Santa!

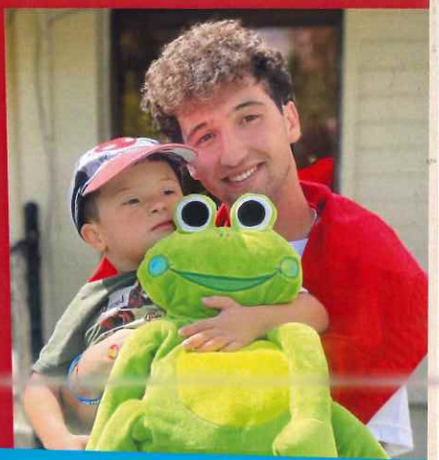
Perhaps the most anticipated event of the year is the Night of the Stars Inclusion Prom, created by John-Barry. This is a magical evening dedicated to teenagers and young adults with special needs. The club members go above and beyond to ensure that these teens have an unforgettable night filled with dancing, laughter, and making lifelong memories. It's an event that epitomizes the spirit of LINK.

LINK members are characterized by their commitment and enthusiasm, and the club teaches them invaluable life lessons such as empathy, compassion, and the importance of inclusivity. The impact of LINK extends far beyond the school years, leaving a lasting legacy of acceptance and kindness.

Due to its success, LINK has inspired others to join in the cause. This year, Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart has started their own LINK chapter, demonstrating that its spirit can be shared in different educational institutions. For schools interested in starting their own LINK chapter, please reach out to the LINK moderators at Christopher Columbus High School, Mrs. Gonzalez-Rojas (jgonzalez-rojas@columbushs.com) or Mrs. Martinez (dmartinez@columbushs.com).

In conclusion, the LINK Club at Christopher Columbus High School is a shining example of youth-driven positive change. LINK's commitment to promoting acceptance, inclusion, and kindness has a profound impact on the school and the broader community. By fostering connections and building bridges, LINK shows the power of students to make the world a better place, one act of kindness at a time.





To learn more about the LINK

VIP Connect Club Presidents Nominated

for Miami Silver Knight Award

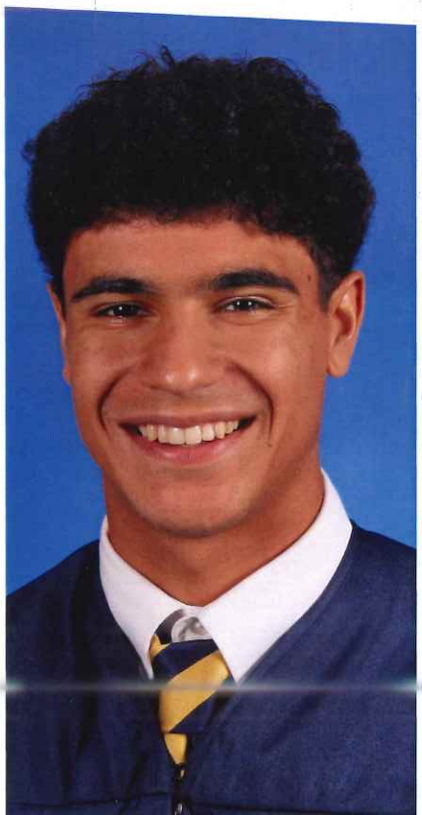


Giovany Ojeda

Giovany Ojeda, the esteemed President of the VIP Connect Club at Miami Arts Studio, is not only a standout candidate for any future endeavor but is also nominated for the prestigious Silver Knight Award. Giovany has consistently demonstrated exceptional dedication, hard work, and a genuine passion for community service throughout his impactful tenure with us. From the outset, Giovany's unique drive and commitment to making a meaningful impact were evident. As he tirelessly promoted our events and supported our community, his efforts proved instrumental in the success of our initiatives. Giovany's effective communication skills and natural leadership have significantly expanded our reach, garnering widespread support for our cause. What truly sets Giovany apart is his unwavering dedication to making a positive difference, embodying the spirit of our organization. His commitment to excellence and adaptability to new challenges have been key factors in his contributions to our mission. As Giovany embarks on his college journey, we are incredibly proud and grateful to have had him as the President of our VIP Connect Club. Notably, Giovany's exceptional contributions have earned him a nomination for the Silver Knight Award, a recognition well-deserved for his outstanding work. His impact has been far-reaching, leaving a lasting impression on both our team and the individuals we serve. In conclusion, I wholeheartedly recommend Giovany Ojeda for any opportunity that comes his way. His work ethic, dedication, and passion for community service make him an exceptional candidate, and I am confident that he will continue to positively influence those around him, leaving a significant impact in his future endeavors.

Diego Hamud

Diego Hamud, the President of the VIP Connect Club at Belen Jesuit High Schools, has been announced as a nominee for the prestigious Silver Knight Award, recognizing his remarkable contributions to Very Important Purpose (VIP), a nonprofit organization. Over the past two years, Diego has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to community service through his involvement in various impactful initiatives. A standout endeavor includes his integral role in preparing and distributing meals to the homeless in downtown Miami. Diego's dedication to ensuring that those less fortunate have access to meals reflects his genuine compassion and desire to make a positive impact on their lives. Diego's spirit extends beyond homelessness outreach. He actively participated in engaging with individuals with special needs at the WOW Center, contributing to the creation of a fun and inclusive environment for everyone involved. Additionally, his selfless efforts at the Ronald McDonald House, where he assisted in cooking meals for families facing medical challenges, provided crucial comfort and support during challenging times. Furthermore, Diego played a vital role in VIP's outreach program to schools in Homestead, an area grappling with economic hardships. Actively involved in delivering gifts and organizing entertainment for these families, Diego brought joy and a sense of community to their lives. Diego Hamud's exceptional work ethic, dedication, and genuine compassion make him a standout candidate for the Silver Knight Award. His multifaceted contributions to VIP showcase his commitment to community service and exemplify the positive impact individuals can have on their communities. As he stands nominated for this prestigious honor, Diego's story is one of inspiration and a testament to the transformative power of leadership and selflessness.



WESTMINSTER SENIORS SHINE: RECOGNIZED AS POSITIVE PEOPLE IN PINECREST

Congratulations to seniors **Dylan Hannon**, **Avah Lopez** and **Nina Valdes** for being named Positive People in Pinecrest by the Community Newspapeer



Dylan Hannon

Dylan completed an internship at the University of Texas at Austin where he worked on climate science research using astronaut photography to study the change over time of forested regions. He's a volunteer at the Miami-Dade Animal Services Center and at Old Cutler Presbyterian Church. Dylan is also the vice president of the finance club at Westminster and is involved in multiple honor societies.



Avah Lopez

Avah is a talented lacrosse player at Westminster and has received multiple athletic accolades from the Miami Herald. She teaches lacrosse to younger children during the summer at Westminster's Fun Camp. She is also involved with student leadership, is in a number of honor societies, and helps create yarn balls that are used to make blankets for local homeless shelters.



Nina Valdes

Nina is vice president of Cooking for a Cause, has hosted collection drives for Chapman Partnership for the Homeless, and has been involved with hurricane relief efforts. She has been on multiple mission trips to the Dominican Republic, is a part of a number of honor societies, and has been on the varsity cheerleading team since her freshman year."

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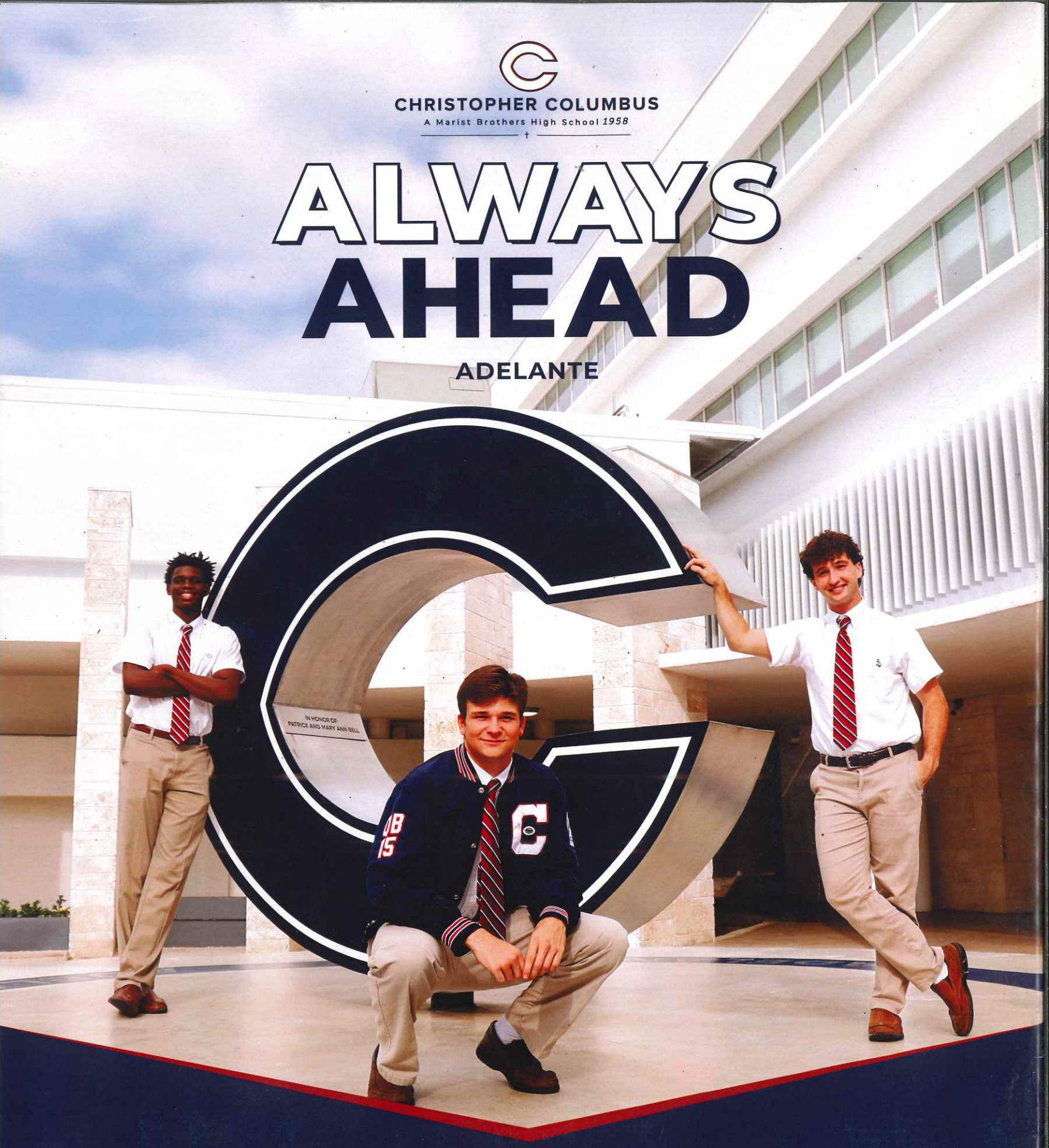
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