Victoria's Story

N°29

Interview with
Good Shepherd Principal

Quinceañera
Interviews

5th Annual Project
Service Project

Year 10 - Miami, Fl - March, 2023



5th Annual Summer Service Project

Very Important Purpose is hosting our 5th Annual Sleep-Away Summer Service Project for teens in Middle School and High School. We will be hosting our Summer Service Project for six weeks. Teens who participate will be able to serve their community in various ways throughout the week. Each teen will receive up to 100 hours of community service at the end of their stay.

- The teens will learn teamwork, communication skills and leadership skills.
- They will gain an appreciation of their everyday life while working and helping local organizations.
- They will participate in daily forums with invited guests that will encourage them to love themselves and others.
- They will have the opportunity to participate in various activities such as soccer, basketball, volleyball, Zumba, yoga, etc.
- They will be able to cook, bake, and participate in everyday routines.
- They will have the opportunity to participate in activities such as Talent Shows, Karaoke Night, Game Night, etc.



Throughout the week, students will work with different organizations like The Ronald McDonald House Charity, Foster Care Systems, Humane Society Of Greater Miami, Miami Rescue Mission, a Beach Clean-up, and more.

Our 2023 Summer Service Project Dates are as follows:
There will be 1 parent meeting held before camp starts (TBA).

June 12 - June 17
June 19 - June 24
July 10 - July 15

July 17 - July 22
July 24 - July 29
July 31 - August 5

Summer Camp Price: $900.00 per student

Price Includes:

- Accommodation at our Homestead Cabin “El Escondite”
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner all full days
  Transportation to all facilities
- Shirt(s) that must be worn when out of the cabin

VIP STAFF: *Yessika Siles : Founder of VIP 305 Miami & Very Important Purpose*
Amarette Suarez : Program Event Coordinator & Magazine Editor
Valeria Sánchez de Lozada : Campaign Manager
Mauricio Enrique Nunez Calasich : Social Media Marketing

VIP Summer Service Project Camper Reviews

Marie Alvarez
I highly recommend VIP! My boys have been part of the VIP Summer Program for several years and they beg to return year after year! What a wonderful organization that gives back to the community while helping shape young lives.

Gretchen K Arguello
Best camp my daughter has been too. She learned so much and did a lot for the community and still had fun! I would definitely bring my daughter there again! Yessika and her team are amazing!

Diana Pereda
This organization is lead by an incredibly wonderful group of people! Thank you for all that you do! Not only do you provide food to the homeless, organize events to help those in need, you also help students with their required hours to graduate. Always with positive attitudes and smiles! I could not be more proud that my daughter is a part of this community <3

Silvia Fernandez
VIP is an amazing organization. Their involvement in the community is second to none. They have the best service community oriented events. They have a major commitment to teens and encouraging service assignments for them. My son loves to do activities with VIP and Yessika and specifically summer camp service events!!

Sophia Daly
this camp was honestly incredible. it felt like i was on vacation while also doing activities to help people in need in our community. i will definitely be coming back. i 100% recommend it for any teenager.

Gabriela Soto
Yésica and her team are the best. The first time I meet Yésica was in the VIP summer camp in 2021. My Son didn't want to go because he thought he was going to be bored and didn't want to loose his vacation time. I won't ever forget the day I pick him up the last day and he looked at me so happy and said "Thank you Mom, I had the best time "and make me promises him I will enroll him the next summer and make sure his brother will go too. Since then VIP 305 is been part of our family.











Interview with Victoria Orellana

My name is Victoria Orellana, I am 17 years old and I received a heart transplant in December 2017. I would love to share my story all over the world inspiring many young people.

How have these 5 years been since the heart transplant?
They have been years of learning but above all, a lot of patience because I have faced many challenges but at the same time I feel very grateful to God for the second chance of life that I have.

What has been the hardest situation you have had to go through?
Well, it's not really difficult, but they can be a bit uncomfortable because I always have medical appointments, but I know it's for my well-being.

What has been the hardest situation you have had to go through?
Well, it's not really difficult, but they can be a bit uncomfortable because I always have medical appointments, but I know it's for my well-being.

What has been your motivation?
The most important thing I have is MY FAMILY and my friends. They are the motivation to keep going forward.

How do you see yourself in the next few years?
Wow, doing many things. I want to study nursing so I can help many children, but above all, to enjoy my life to the fullest and inspire many children who can face difficult challenges but there is always a solution to everything.

What have you learned the most after everything?
To live life to the fullest, to do things with passion and dedication, always grateful to God for a second chance..

What message do you want to give to today's youth?
That they should be inspired by themselves every day, to be their best version, to be better every day and never give up on what they want.

Have you ever thought of telling your story in a book?
Actually, that is one of my dreams. I believe I can help many young people by not only sharing what I have been through, but also to know that God always gives us second chances.

Do you celebrate your transplant anniversary every year?
Yes, my mother celebrates on my birthday, the day I was born, and another on the day I received my heart.





MODEL UN TEAM RECOGNIZED AS BEST LARGE DELEGATION AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE

Article found on Gulliver's website: **www.gulliverprep.org**

Gulliver Prep's Model UN Team won top honors at Columbia University's 22nd Model UN Conference, earning Best Large Delegation recognition. The Raiders competed against more than 50 schools and over 1,000 students from across the country and teams from Greece and Russia, making their mark as one of the top delegations in 2023. The team also secured an impressive 14 individual awards, including two Best Delegates, three Outstanding Delegates, six Honorable Mentions, and three Verbal Commendations:

Best Delegate Award

Isabella Bonifasi
Jacob Black ; Twilight JCC Werewolves
Siena McKelvey
Sir Percival ; The Court of Camelot

Outstanding Delegate Award

Mateo Lowe
Wu San-Lien ; Formosa 1950
Alex Denesuk
Emmet Cullen ; Twilight JCC Vampires
Willow Olrich
H. von Bingen ; Ad Hoc

Honorable Mention Award

Julia Bueno
William Skinner ; Vought International: The Boys
Katherine Ramirez
Manuel Urrutia Lleo ; Cuban Revolution
Rania Ishoof
Commander Reig Cullen ; Handmaid's Tale
Ana Catherine Guimaraes
Dr. Bernard Kouchner ; Nigeria – Biafra Civil War JCC: Biafra
Eloisa Ortiz-Diez & Mauricio Medal
Italy ; SOCHUM
Sebastian Poliak
Stephen Windor ; Golden Age of Piuracy JCC: English Government

Verbal Commendation

Sebastian Caraballo
Montenegro ; OHCHR
Avery Simon
Richard Fadden – Director of CSIS ; Uncovering the Snowden Files
Nabeel Ishoof
Russia ; SPECPOL



Model UN is a simulation of the UN General Assembly and its other multilateral bodies. In the simulations, students perform an ambassador role while debating topics such as gender equality, climate action, global health, and more. Students who take part in Model UN conferences are typically part of the ***International Diplomacy & Legal Studies Signature Academic Program***, under the direction of Mr. Manuel Santelices. The program is designed to provide students with an advanced level curriculum that introduces them to careers in international diplomacy and law, and through experiential learning, prepares students for life beyond school, advancing skills such as public speaking, critical thinking, and research.





100th Day of School

Many faculty, students and parents look forward to the 100th Day of School where special activities and lessons are planned to celebrate this fun day marking the hundredth day of the school year. The activity most look forward to is the celebration of 100 years where elementary students dress up as a person of “100 years old”. Some of the schools pictured below who participated in this memorable and fun activity were Westminster Christian School and Saint Brendan Elementary.








Spirit Week at Saint Brendan Catholic High School

Spirit Week is a week that most students, as well as faculty and staff look forward to! It is a full week dedicated to showing your spirit and making new memories! Saint Brendan’s spirit week consisted of themes such as country vs country club, athlete vs mathlete, dashing through the decades, as well as activities such as Powder Puff and Field Day! The week was most definitely filled with spirit as well as many new memorable memories made. Go Sabres!








IN THE WORKS



Article by **Victoria Fernandez '23, Student at Divine Savior Academy**

We are living in the habitat of a growing mind: the more it becomes more aware of its surroundings as it adapts, the more we become aware of ourselves. However, such a rapidly-changing environment results in a shaken sense of self. Teenagers are often left with a remaining drive to build up a new narrative.
These changes may be subtle, milestones such as turning a certain age of "reformation" (13, 16, or even 18), or more distressing, sudden situations that can catch off-guard, such as accidents, interruptions in close relationships, or changes in health. The identity that teenagers grew up with becomes almost irrelevant to the new reality of a strange environment. The importance of building a new, positive identity is huge, yet unheard of among too many.

1. Setting a positive mindset (self-talk)

A renewed narrative becomes more possible with a positive outlook on life; it starts with building a mindset surrounded with positivity! The information you are exposed to matters, the people who you hang out with regularly matters, and the conversations you have with yourself matters. Limit negative social media, eliminate negativity in everyday social interactions, and work to build yourself up verbally to build yourself up mentally.

2. Finding your peace (hobbies, routine!)

Free yourself by your passions of interest: music, writing, reading, cooking and baking, exercise, picture-taking, design, whatever it may be that grounds you and your thoughts. You can create a cycle to follow each day: a routine for waking up, spending your free afternoon, or one to follow at the end of every week. You can build yourself up by your passion for Christ. Living day-to-day in a state of peace helps to build you up from day to day.

3. Setting reasonable expectations for yourself (healthy boundaries)

The experience of transitioning from one mentality to another, from one life stage to the next, can be challenging and threatening. That is why time to yourself is extremely important; you may already be overwhelmed, so do not overwhelm yourself with more that does not need to be on your plate! Create your own boundaries, but also leave behind the aggressive expectations you have of yourself. Things like needing to be as perfect as possible or believing you are not good enough to accomplish something are things that are weighing you down, believe it or not. Everyone has the ability to accomplish anything; one needs to have motivation and dedication. Leave behind the past that poisons you. Create a new relationship with the present, and declare positivity and prosperity over your life.

4. Breaking down your walls (reaching out!)

No matter what stage you find yourself in in terms of your relationships, there are always people who love you, support you, seek you out, value you, and care deeply for you no matter what. The people around you can be among the greatest sources of positivity in your life. The kinds of people whose eyes light up when you enter the room. Do not close yourself out from those people, rather find safety with an open heart.

5. Realizing it's okay to feel overwhelmed

Allow me to repeat this to you: it is okay to feel overwhelmed. You are not in a place you were not meant to be in at this moment. It is something set up to bless you forever. Your life is a beautiful journey in the works: believe it and you will see it.

Lastly, remember to be kind and compassionate. You are doing the best you can at this moment, and so is everyone around you, struggling with their own personal battles. You can make a real difference in the lives of others and in your own: a positive one.

Painting with a Purpose

On Saturday, January 28th Very Important Purpose hosted its first Painting with a Purpose event! During the event we invited individuals with special needs and their families to participate in a family friendly event that provided a fun experience and opportunities for both. While the individual with special needs was engaging with our volunteers and having fun participating in activities, their parents had the chance to participate in the event, painting a canvas, which was hosted by Dora Gabay.

The event's purpose was to give the individuals a day filled with fun activities and socializing, while their caretaking parents had some time to themself to partake in the event. The event was a great success and we are eager and excited to host Painting with a Purpose again!











Upcoming Events with Very Important Purpose

Are you ready to be a part of something great? Each and every month Very Important Purpose offers many opportunities to help your community, while also earning those necessary community service hours! Be a part of our purpose and sign up for our upcoming events

- Color Run
- Annual Summer Camp Service Project
- Sandwich Donation Events
- Beach Clean Ups
- Toiletry Donation Events
- Feeding the Homeless
- Toy Drive
- Food Drives
- And so much more!





Scan the QR code to view and sign up for Very Important Purpose's upcoming events!

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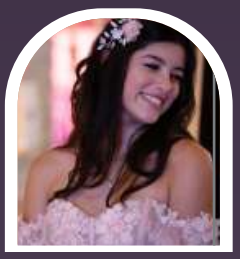
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Interview with Quinceañera Giovana Walder



What is a quinceañera and what does it mean to you?
A quinceañera is very important not just for the parent because they see their child grow up, but also for the child herself because it is a right of passage to becoming a woman.

How did you begin preparing for your quinceañera? What goes into the planning process?
It is very meticulous and there are many little details you need to look out for. We started planning very early and there are many details that need to come together to make the big picture

How many months ahead did you begin planning for the special day?
A while. My quince was in November and we started planning in February.

How did you decide on which venue you wanted to celebrate it at? How many places did you look?
We wanted something very spacious and comfortable for out guests so we knew that we would have a lot of tables and we wanted the dance floor to be an open moderate size. We were looking for a spacious, airy light feel and it took some trys to find the one, but we didnt look at very many.

Did your quinceañera have a theme? If so, what was it? Why did you choose those colors/ theme?
The goal was royalty and I was the princess. The color was my favorite color, pink, because I think it is very dainty and feminine color.

How was the experience deciding on which cake, photographer, and DJ to choose?
I am grateful that my mom knows many people with many talents. Our cake was done by Alejandra, who has a bakery in Miami - Cake Lounge. The same went with the photographer and DJ, they were some of my moms lifelong friends and I am very grateful to have because I don't think anybody else could have done it better

What flavor of cake did you choose?
I am very excited for this one! My favorite flavor in everything has always been red velvet, but since my party was themed with lighter colors we did pink velvet with cream cheese frosting and it was so delicious and the perfect cake!

What dishes did you have on the menu? What is buffet style? Why did you choose those?
For the adults, we aimed for a more sophisticated plate so we had 3 options with fish, chicken and steak and as for the kids we had a buffet where you can make your own with pasta and pizza.

How was the experience of picking out your quince dress?
It was so beautiful because I wanted something that reflected me, my personality and taste so my dress was made by Rosita Hurtado @rositahurtadol and nobody could have done it better. It was me reflected onto the dress and every aspect of my personality!

hat song did you dance to with your father? Why did you choose it?
My dad has dedicated a song each for both my sister and I. Mine was Every Breath You Take and it was the most beautiful moment of my life.

What was your favorite part of the quince?
It was the dance with my dad, it was something I looked forward to since I was very young and Im grateful we brought that to life

f you could go back, is there anything you would change?
No, I think it was perfect and I hope the same for everyone. It could not have gone any better.

BONAVENTURE GOLF CLUB

Bonaventure Country Club
www.golfbonaventure.com
200 Bonaventure Blvd. Weston, FL 33326 (954) 389-2100

Interested in booking a hair, makeup and/or cake artist for your next event(s)? Follow some of the artists who played an important role in Giovana's quincenara!

Hair Artist: @elvira.lazarte.extensiones
Makeup Artist: @timi_poppins
Cake: @cakeloungemiami

To listen to the full interview with Giovana Walde, scan the QR code and you will be taken to our YouTube channel.

Christmas Bazaar

VIP305Miami held our 3rd Annual VIP Christmas Bazaar on December 10th & December 11th 2022. The event was held at our foundation and was a great success! Vendors were invited to participate in the event to help promote their small business. Support our small local businesses by following vendors who participated.

VENDORS

@kristidata
@flakypastryfactory
@coquitobybori
@cambioalnatural
@lolos_boba
@bellayouonline
@project_myimage
@kayaccesoriosbycarmena
@malacandle
@lemanjaswimwear
@lifeispichi
@misquincebysanroman
@the.onlymymysbowtique
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@_ang.made_
@xioma.art
@Klassy_closet08
@miaraffi_usa
@thebio37
@sonrisas_gift
@Yelenasyewelry
@ives_and_bees







Christmas Toy Drive

Very Important Purpose is always aiming to bring a smile to an individual in need at any given chance - being why the Christmas Toy Drive is one of the organizations favorite and most successful event and opportunity. Our community, schools and volunteers play a major role in how we are able to surpass our goals during this time of the year so a big thank you to them! The week of December 5th - 11th, brand new toys, clothing, books, sport balls, etc. were collected and distributed directly to the invited children and families from the Title 1 Migrant Program. We were grateful to have collected so many more, that we visited Miami Rescue Mission to drop off additional toys and items collected. Thank you to everyone who made this possible and until the next Toy Drive!







Archbishop Honor Roll Recipients

Congratulations to the students of Archbishop Coleman F. Carroll students who received honor roll for this quarter! Your hardwork and determination to succeed definitely does not go unnoticed. Keep working hard and doing your best!









French Honor Society Celebrates "La Chandeleur"

February 2nd is "La Chandeleur," or Candlemas. Deriving from the Latin, 'Festa Candelarum', meaning 'Festival of Candles', Candlemas was the day of the year when all candles to be used by churches during the coming year were delivered and blessed. Candlemas, also known as the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, closes the Christmas/Epiphany season. In some countries, Christmas decorations are not removed until Candlemas. In France and other francophone countries, it has become "the day of crêpes." Families and friends make and feast on crêpes together. Tradition attributes this custom to Pope Gelasius I, who had pancakes distributed to pilgrims arriving in Rome. Ms. Longou, Ms. Dubovik and Mr. Samba, along with the French Honor Society, celebrated that day with handmade crêpe for sale during lunch.

Article found on Palmer Trinity website: www.palmertrinity.org









conchita
ESPINOSA ACADEMY

STEAM Mastery members guided the 3rd grade students in making their own slime! Students analyzed and observed chemical reactions as new ingredients were added to the mix. The 3rd graders loved the experience of coming up to the science lab to do a project with the oldest members of our student body.
For the 6th-8th grade STEAM mastery members, it was a great way to share their love for science and develop their communication and leadership capabilities, as they guided the younger students through each step of the process in a way that they would understand. They even took it upon themselves to teach the third graders how to make big bubbles with their slime!" (Conchita Espinosa Facebook)






OMNIA IN BONUM
Shelton ACADEMY

Science Experiment at Shelton Academy

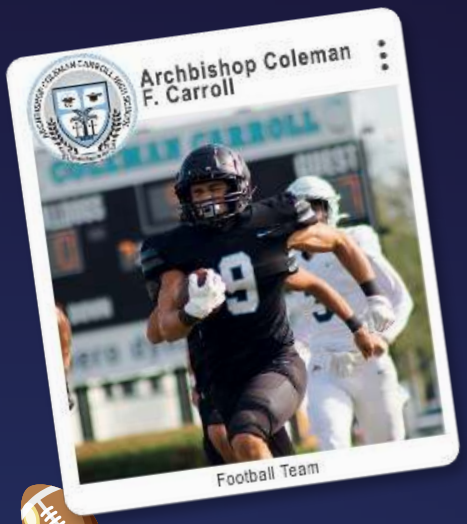
Pictured here are the students of Shelton Academy participating in a science experience to expand their knowledge on caring for our planet. The experiment called for cleaning water after an "oil spill", to show them the effects oil spills have here on Earth. Understanding the importance of caring for our environment, and ways to help it and make a difference are extremely important for us here at VIP.



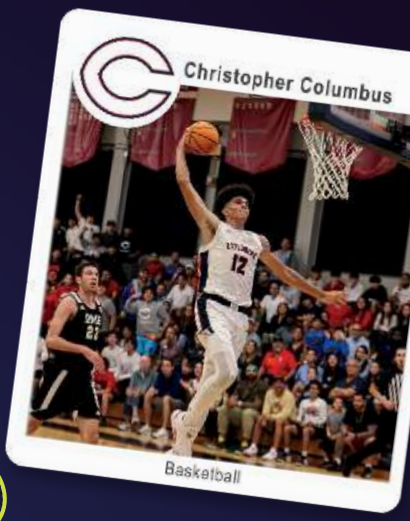




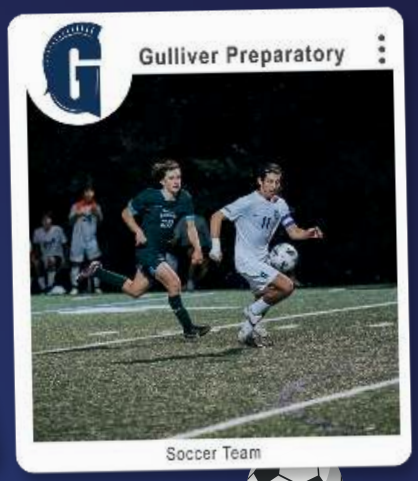

The School Sports World

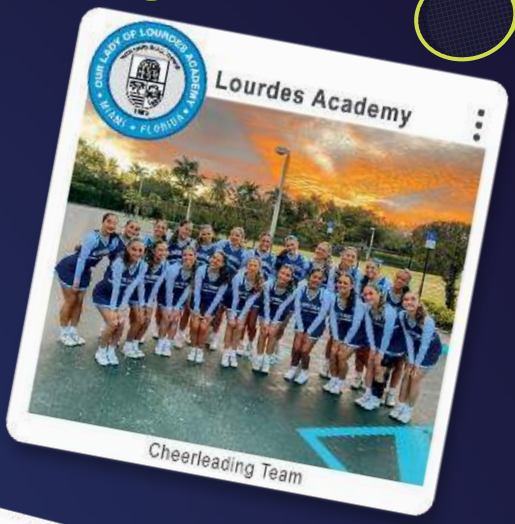
















QUINCEAÑERA'S INTERVIEW Q&A

Featuring: Mia Tompkins, Olivia Laracuente, Elizabeth Yu, Mariana Aguilar, Kaitlyn Hernandez, Sophia Dorta, Emma Yu, Hailey Rosado

What is a quinceañera and what does it mean to you?
-When a young lady turns 15 years old to celebrate with family and friends creating memories.

How was your experience working with Happy Holidays to plan your quince?
-Happy Holidays took care of every little detail making each girl feel special. The girls felt that they were really being celebrated.

Were you able to rehearse for the quince before the cruise? How was that process?
-Yes - because we were a private party, the first "real" rehearsal was on the boat.

Why did you choose to celebrate this special day (quince) on a cruise versus other venues?
-Spending 7 days as a "quince", versus one day was something we wanted to do. We've known each other all of our lives and wanted to spend the entire event together.

How was the experience of picking out your quince dress?
-Stressful for some - easy for others. Most knew what they were looking for.

What was your favorite part about celebrating on the cruise?
-The big parties and the quinceanera photoshoot because they made us feel like "movie stars".

What was your least favorite part about celebrating on the cruise?
-Having to be ready and dressed for the photoshoot before the actual event celebration and the parties were too short.

What destinations did your cruise take you to?
The cruise had 3 destinations: Coco Cay, St Thomas and St Martins, but the group favorite was Saint Martins.

How many months ahead did you start planning?
-Since 5th grade!

What would you recommend to someone who is planning their quince?
-The three things we would recommend is: plan ahead, make a list - check it twice, have mom listen to what YOU want.







To listen to the full interview with these beautiful quinceaneras, scan the QR code and you will be taken to our YouTube channel..

Father & Son Mass and Breakfast

The young talented students at Miami Arts Studio have always exceeded in many artistic forms. From dancing, to singing and drawing, these capable youngsters express themselves without any restrictions! This time, we have the opportunity to show you a glimpse of art looked through the eyes of history. We look at the Hispanic heritage as we congratulate Xanthe Teijeiro, Olivia Sardinas, Valentina Rodriguez, Michael Roces, Madison Soto and Nicole Silah who were selected for the Hispanic Heritage Competition at MDCPS Gallery. Here are some of their beautiful works:





VIP Sandwich Donation Event

On February 7th, Very Important Purpose hosted our Sandwich Donation Event where we welcomed around 30 volunteers in-person to prepare sandwiches as well as lunch bags with snacks, candy and a water bottle inside to donate to Saint Agatha Church: Hope for the Homeless and discussed future events and ideas planned for the 2023 School Year!







Ransom Everglades School

Six students win Gold Key awards; dozens more honored

Six Ransom Everglades students – Chloe Alfonso '24, Natasha do Valle '23, Nicolas Maynulet '23, Andrew Gedde '25, Nicolas Imery '24 and Parker Martorella '23 – each won a prestigious Gold Key in The Scholastic Art and Writing Awards Regional Competition for 2023, a distinction that advances them to the national round of the annual competition sponsored by the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers. RE students also claimed 10 Silver Keys and 28 Honorable Mentions, and many earned multiple awards in the competition honoring excellence in various forms of writing; photography, ceramics and multiple art styles.

Alfonso, who won a Gold Key for Short Story writing, also earned a Silver Key for Science Fiction and Fantasy and two Honorable Mentions. Along with the Gold Key for Ceramics & Glass, Martorella also earned a Silver Key and Honorable Mention in that category. Sylvie Malvezzi '27 earned a pair of Silver Keys for Poetry and Short Story.

The Gold Key winners are students of faculty members Katherine Bufkin, Jorge Guzman, Matthew Helmers and Matt Stock. The regional winners were announced in late January, and the national competition takes place in March. See the list of winners below.



Article found on Ransom Everglades website: **www.ransomeverglades.org**

RE winners in The Scholastic Art and Writing Awards Regional Competition for 2023

Gold Key

Chloe Alfonso '24, Short Story
Natasha do Valle '23, Critical Essay
Andrew Gedde '25, Humor
Nicolas Imery '24, Photography
Parker Martorella '23, Ceramics & Glass
Nicolas Maynulet '23, Critical Essay

Silver Key

Chloe Alfonso '24, Science Fiction & Fantasy
Renee Fonseca '25, Ceramics & Glass
Nicholas Harper '25, Photography

Honorable Mention

Isabel Adler '27, Photography
Chloe Alfonso '24, Science Fiction & Fantasy
Chloe Alfonso '24, Poetry
Anya Bhandari '25, Comic Art
Patrick Keedy Brown '26, Poetry
Valentina Capote '26, Mixed Media
Lucia Rose Dahn '23, Poetry
Lucia Rose Dahn '23, Short Story
Lucia Rose Dahn '23, Writing Portfolio
Jack He '25, Humor
Ysatis Jadotte '23, Ceramics & Glass
Jordan James '25, Poetry
Hudson Kaplan '25, Poetry
Gabriel Karsenti '26, Critical Essay
David (Tian) Luan '25, Flash Fiction
Parker Martorella '23, Ceramics & Glass
Takeo Owens '24, Photography
Vladimir Ponomarenko '25, Poetry
Lily Poses '26, Personal Essay & Memoir
Margaret Seabrook '24, Photography
Santiago de la Serna '27, Photography
Taylor Smith '25, Photography
Ethan Sullivan '25, Photography
Esmeralda Swietelsky '24, Ceramics & Glass
Esmeralda Swietelsky '24, Ceramics & Glass
Sofia de la Torre '24, Drawing & Illustration
Tea Vallone '24, Drawing & Illustration
Nolan Wu '24, Painting
Chloe Alfonso '24, Short Story
Natasha do Valle '23, Critical Essay
Andrew Gedde '25, Humor

Good Shepherd Principal Interview with Mrs. Hernandez

When did you begin your position as principal?
This is my first year as principal of Good Shepherd Catholic school. I started in the summer in June. I hit the ground running right when I got the job. It was really exciting and a dream of mine since I was a little girl to be a principal.

What did the first few days feel as principal?
It was exciting, it was nerve-racking, but most of all I was fulfilled. The moment I started there's a lot there's a lot to learn. I started to reminisce about my days of being in a Catholic school. I started to think about my principal when I was in Saint Agatha and started to bring back what I mostly was fond of from Catholic School. I started to remember my most powerful impactful moments as a student and was able to have the decision making process along with my team to do a lot of things impacted my life, and as a student, and made me who I am today to be a role model to others and to love others like Jesus did and to not expect anything in return.







What is your favorite part about being a principal of a school?
There's so many but if I had to narrow it down, I love being a part of every aspect so I get to be part of schools, by the teachers, I get to be able to pick curriculum and I'm able to help develop and grow teachers. I'm able to help support them to be able to develop and grow a child - those who are enhancing and excelling and those who are struggling so I love that I'm able to help in that department.

What is your favorite day out of the whole school year and why?
My favorite day would probably be the first day of school. The energy in the air is so exciting, the buzz, the smiles, the kids in the hallway. This year was extra special because it was my first year good shepherd, and it was so great to see the community welcome me.

What are your future goals for the school?
My short term goal, which is already ready, is to create a Learning Center which is called Ram Lam Prep now open to Pre-K 2 as well. My long term goal is to see our campus more sport oriented with a baseball field and a track field. I really want to have the athletic campus and structures to have that at Good Shepherd.

If you had no restrictions on what you can do at your school what would it be?
If I had no restrictions, I would love to accept any student in the world who would like to come here and be equipped with everything to be able to serve every type of student because they deserve the best education out there with Catholic beliefs and values.

To listen to the full interview with Mrs. Hernandez, s can the QR code and you will be taken to our YouTube channel.

Special Corner

¿Qué es?

Life is Pichi es una fundación sin fines de lucro que fue creada a raíz de nuestra experiencia como padres de una niña con necesidades especiales y vivir en carne propia las dificultades y retos que eso significa.
El objetivo de Life is Pichi es ayudar a niños que nacieron con el mismo diagnóstico de Sofía, nuestra hija a quien le decimos Pichi, y tienen retraso en el desarrollo intelectual, psicomotor y neurológico.
También queremos crear consciencia porque estamos convencidos que todavía falta mucho camino por recorrer para que las personas con discapacidades sean incluidas de manera masiva en la sociedad.

¿Quién es Pichi?

Pichi es nuestra hija Sofía. A los 7 meses de edad fue diagnosticada con hipoplasia del cuerpo calloso que es la estructura del cerebro que permite que ambos hemisferios se comuniquen entre sí. Si no se desarrolla bien pueden presentarse problemas en el sistema nervioso central.
Con el mismo estudio se dieron cuenta que Sofía nació con un cerebro más pequeño de lo normal, con poca mielina, que es una sustancia que se encarga de proteger una parte de las neuronas y permite que los estímulos nerviosos que envía el cerebro a través de las neuronas circulen correctamente.
Esto ha hecho que Sofía tenga un retraso global en su desarrollo que afecta la parte psicomotora, visual, neurológica, intelectual y social.
Actualmente Sofía, de 8 años de edad, no ve bien (ha sido diagnosticada con discapacidad cortical visual), no mastica la comida, no dice palabras, no camina con seguridad ya que su equilibrio no es perfecto, no sostiene las cosas por mucho tiempo en sus manos y no va al baño sola, por mencionar algunas pocas.

¿Cuál es el pronóstico de Sofía?

Nadie lo sabe. Ningún especialista puede asegurar de qué será capaz Sofía a futuro. Lo único que se puede hacer es terapia, terapia y más terapia que estimule su cerebro y él solo busque las vías para compensar las fallas que tiene, así como utilizar aparatos o equipos que la ayuden a ser más independiente.

¿Cómo pueden ayudar?

La primera manera como puedes ayudar es haciendo un donativo.
No importa la cantidad. Cada aporte ayuda.
La segunda es donando algo que pueda servir a otros niños como sillas especiales, caminadoras, aparatos para la estimulación cerebral, servicios (si eres terapeuta o un lugar donde ofrecen terapias alternativas, puedes donar horas de terapia), por mencionar algunas idea.
La tercera es comprando los accesorios que hace Loly, la mamá de Sofía.
Parte de las ganancias son destinadas a la fundación.





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TOMBOLA SUCCESS

Article by **Teresa Martinez | Director of Communications**

This year the annual Fr. Dorta-Duque, S.J. Memorial Tombola sponsored by the Sarria Family was much more than a festival or Belen's biggest fundraiser. Dedicated to the memory of Anthony Parodi '23, the event was peppered with orange, his favorite color. From the beautiful umbrella display in the Garrido Family Plaza to the Senior Staff shirts and even the Tombola logo itself, orange was the color of the event. With an expanded schedule of events and fairgrounds, Tombola exceeded expectations and broke last year's fundraising record. From February 4- 5, 2023, thousands of people attended, helping raise approximately $1.2 million for the Financial Assistance Program.

"Tombola has always been an event that brings the community together," said Fr. Willie. "Dedicating this year's Tombola to Anthony was a powerful demonstration of love by the Belen family and, in particular, the class of 2023 to his memory and his family. Anthony will always be in our hearts. There's no doubt of Tombola's financial success, but, more importantly, it was a bigger community-building success. Our campus was filled with alumni, future Wolverines and their families, and current students, all having a fantastic time. Tombola is a Belen tradition that we can all be proud of."

Kicking off the festivities was the Culinary Extravaganza on January 28th. With over 35 restaurants and vendors participating, it was the largest culinary event hosted at Belen. Using both the Garrido Family Plaza and the Sarria Family Dining Hall allowed the capacity for this popular event to reach 1,200 attendees. The food, drinks, and music made for an unforgettable night that welcomed parents, alumni, and friends to campus.

Friday night at Tombola saw two firsts come to fruition. Over 500 tickets were sold to students for the Battle of the DJs event on the Sánchez Field at the de la Cruz Stadium. Complete with a concert stage, lighting, and sound, the field was transformed into a place for dancing and fun. Equally enticing to parents, Friday Night In the Quad also made its Tombola debut. Featuring a Latin band that had everyone dancing, a delicious paella, beer, mojitos, and a domino playing area, the event will surely be considered a staple moving forward.

Saturday began with a gorgeous rainbow over Belen which served as a reminder that Anthony was watching over us. The day went on to be spectacular.

Thousands of people made their way to the campus and enjoyed our expanded ride area, additional food booths, and the Alumni Zone complete with a cigar lounge. Our Grandparents Club hosted a popular booth and sold grandparent-specific merchandise in the Sarria Family Dining Hall. The annual Wine Tasting event has outgrown its former venues (Cosculluela Hall and Saladrigas Gallery) with 500 tickets sold this year. It was relocated to one of the newest areas on campus, the Codina Courtyard located adjacent to the Our Lady of Belen Chapel. This beautiful outside space was the ideal setting for the wine event sponsored by Daou. The night was capped by an incredible concert, albeit under the rain, by Juanabe. Rain or shine, everyone at Tombola had a great time.

Sunday may have brought the rain, but it didn't take away the fun. An impromptu dance-off in the Sarría Family Dining Hall by kids and an appearance by Billy the Marlin and Waldo the Wolverine had everyone smiling. The Bazaar in the gym was buzzing with activity. The new art exhibition, "Outside the Lines," in the Saladrigas Gallery was also a popular place to visit. Masses were held in the Our Lady of Belen Chapel and were very well attended. After a brief delay due to the weather, the annual Leo Caraballo Arroz Con Cosas sponsored by Flores Tutoring was held in the Garrido Family Plaza. As always, our resident emcee - Fr. Willie - was having fun on the microphone while the teams prepared the food. Among the judges this year were the President of Our Lady of Lourdes Academy, Sister Carmen Fernández, IHM and Head of School at Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart, Heather Gillingham-Rivas. Team Caraballo won the coveted championship belt.

Tombola came to a close in an epic fashion. With clear skies, the Pep Band got everyone excitedly to the Garrido Family Plaza at the end of the night. Members of the administration, faculty, staff, and parent advisors led a sing-a-long of "Color Esperanza" accompanied by our band teachers. Fr. Willie then took the microphone and, with the seniors' help, announced the raffle winners. Accompanied by Mike García of Ocean Mazda, the grand prize winner of the Mazda CX-50 was announced to be Carolina Menéndez. Then to the crowd's delight and surprise, a confetti shower covered the central patio in orange and white. It was the perfect ending to a memorable Tombola weekend.

"Incredible is an understatement," said Gigi García-Chang, Community Events Director. **"This truly was Belen at its best. Tombola was made possible thanks to the help of so many. Thank you to our faculty, staff, class delegates, advisors, and alumni. A very special thank you to our extraordinary maintenance team, kitchen staff, and security department, who went above and beyond. To all our sponsors, thank you for supporting Belen with your generosity."**

Breaking records was the number of sponsors we had for Tombola this year. Over 55 companies and families joined the Belen Business Partners in supporting this event. With their patronage and record attendance, Tombola was a big success.

"On behalf of the whole school community and especially, the many young men who will be able to continue their studies at our school, thank you, Belen family, and congratulations on a job extremely well done," *said Fr. Willie.*

And the winners are:

The complete list of raffle winners is as follows:

- Grand Prize - Carolina Menendez
- 2nd Place - Monica Amador
- 3rd Place - Juan de lapuerta
- 4th Place - Austin Marrero

We thank our parent delegates and teachers who worked hard to decorate their booths. We are happy to announce the winning booths are:

- 1st place is the Ice Cream & Candy Booth, and the students will win a churrasco lunch!
- 2nd place is the Tapas Booth, and they will win a pizza lunch.
- 3rd place is the Cafe and Desserts Booth, and they will receive a donut treat.











Making a Difference

Article by: Sabrina Villarreal

As Catholics, we are called to serve our community and give to those in need.

Whether you help only a handful of people or thousands, serving your community always makes a difference. Having the opportunity to help other people is a blessing and it is an amazing feeling to know that you helped someone in need. The “Feed the Homeless” service project is one of the most rewarding experiences that I have had in my 10 years at Good Shepherd Catholic School. This service act is done when you get to eighth grade and it is put together by our phenomenal religion teacher Mr. Pages, who makes the experience as memorable as it can be. Feeding the homeless is an extremely eye opening moment. This project helped me see all of the things that I used to take for granted on a daily basis. It really is an incredible opportunity to make a difference in a handful of people's lives.

This project commenced bright and early. We met at seven in the morning at our

school Good Shepherd. We headed to the Missionaries of Charity **shelter and when we got there, there were tents and people** sleeping



on the floor. The amount of people was unexpected, and it blew me away to see that so many human beings just like me were struggling so much.

Upon arriving, we began the life changing experience by going to church. It

was a beautiful mass that helped us start the day off with Jesus in our hearts. Afterwards we all got assigned to different tasks by the amazing nuns who run the organization. Some of us were welcoming everyone in, some were mopping the upstairs floor, and others were preparing the water and the juice. I was welcoming everyone in. Everyone who walked through the door was extremely nice and I tried my very best to welcome them with a smile.

Once everybody was accommodated, we began to prepare serving

the juice and the water to everyone. The people serving needed to serve from the back of the dining hall to the front. This is because the shelter has a first come first serve policy and the people that sit in the back are the first people that arrive. We served the water and the juice and then began to serve the food. Once we completed our given tasks and served all of the food, we cleaned up and washed the dishes. We had a system: someone washed the plates, another person washed the cups, and somebody else dried everything. I enjoyed this experience because I got to hang out with my friends while giving to an organization that really needed it.

I acquired so much knowledge from this experience and so did many of my

classmates that also went on this enlightening journey. We learned that some people are not as fortunate as we are. Realizing that money does not grow on trees and that some people are actually struggling in the world helped me understand a little more about how hard life can really be. Knowing that I can help and make a difference in several peoples’ lives makes me want to do everything that I can to do so. This one trip changed my entire perspective on life which shows you how powerful serving your community is. Opening our hearts to give to other human beings is a blessing that we all possess. Everyone should consider lending their time to those in need; you may find your whole world changed.

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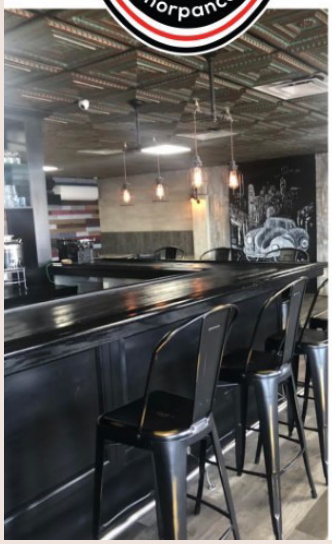
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