

# TROJAN TORCH



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Readers,

As the Trojan Torch newspaper continues to grow and evolve as a publication, we want to thank you for your continuous support of our work and writing. Through adversity and obstacles, we continue to attempt to put our best foot forward and offer the most accurate and interesting information we possibly can. I want to thank the rest of the Trojan Torch staff for their efforts during this edition as well as our advisor Rachael Fuller. We look forward to continuing our journalistic work the rest of the year and after.

Elizabeth Carter  
 Editor-In-Chief

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# Robotics

## *"Building Robots, Building Futures: The Plainwell Robotics Experience"*

By Danielle Klein | Staff writer

The Plainwell Robotics Club is a club that invites members to be innovative and collaborative while building connections with other members. While many may not know that this club exists, they are a force to be reckoned with.

According to Plainwell Robotics Club Team Captain, Aiden Mallory '26, "The Plainwell Robotics Club is a club that encourages innovation and creativity by facilitating the engineering process to make a robot to interact with the game each year." When asked the same question, PRC Team Captain, Owen Ferris '25 said, "The Plainwell robotics club is a school club that has multiple robotics teams that work together to build and document a robot that competes in a game that changes every year. It encourages teamwork, critical thinking, and other abilities that will help students in the future."

Both Mallory and Ferris said that PRC requires critical thinking skills and creativity. When asked how many teams the club has this year, multiple sources said roughly seven teams. Based on this information, the PRC seems to be bigger than many people may think. The club has a board of higher members and coaches who decide what the teams are based on students' requests. There are between three or four members per team. So, with roughly seven teams this competition season, there should be 21 to 28 students from PHS involved in the PRC.

If a new student wanted to join the PRC, Ferris '25 says, "A student can reach out to robotics members and coaches so they can join once the season ends (usually around May)." So, all a new student has to do is find a friend or classmate who is involved and get the contact information of the club board to join!

When asked if there are any requirements to join, Blaine Rensi '27 says, "Depends on how many are applying but you have to explain what you can provide for your team and the club plus sign the student handbook for etiquette." Prospective members need to fill out a form and just include why they are interested and why they should be chosen to participate.

Clubs usually have a leadership team or board to keep things running smoothly. So, how does the Plainwell Robotics Club do it? The board who runs the club is made up of coaches and other volunteers. There is a director, president, communications director, technology director, treasurer, and event partner who all work together to make sure events go as seamless as possible.

To obtain money to keep the club going, members said they use sponsors, grants, and even government funding at times. The money that is donated is put into the yearly budget and is managed by the treasurer. The club's tournaments are managed by a company which Mallory '26 shares is, "VEX Robotics, providing the tools to inspire the problem solvers of tomorrow through the use of educational robotic solutions." Rensi '27 added, "VEX is a robotics company that specializes in educational robotics and programming from preschool to college level education."

VRC (Vex Robotics Competition) is explained by Rensi '27; "VRC is the world's largest robotics competition and is ran by Vex and the REC Foundation. The premise of a season in VRC is that a team plans, designs, and builds a robot to compete in tournaments so they can try to reach higher tournaments such as states, or even worlds." Ultimately it is a competition among students, their teams, and the robots they built to see how their robots compare to other teams and their robots. The REC Foundation is the funding and brains behind VEX robotics and their competitions and games.

They have hundreds of programs around the world for VEX. They get their funding from government grants, private donations, and corporate grants.

If you are interested in joining the PRC, there are options to fit your schedule as different times run on different days. This is a great opportunity for students interested in STEM to get hands on experience and connect with other like-minded students.



Robotics team leaders after competition by James Mallory

## Musical Excellence at PHS

By Joel Schober | Staff Writer

Plainwell High School is credited with a high degree of excellence within its music program, such a program wouldn't be possible without the many students involved. Here are some testimonials from some of PHS band members highest achieving members who attribute some of the accomplishments Plainwell prides itself on.

Joshua Pembrook '28 and Brooklyn Barrows '26, PHS band members, are involved in more than 10 programs combined. Such exhibitions include the KJSO Kalamazoo Junior Symphony Orchestra and Jazz Ensemble for WMU. Both of these bands are extremely selective and take a high degree of skill to be a part of. In addition to being a part of Cyclone and Jazz Band, they spend numerous hours inside and outside of school refining their technique and mastery of their instruments.

With a question aimed at understanding their reasoning for participating in so many different programs, they simply replied "Because I just enjoy it, and it's fun making music". Sometimes the

simplest answers are the most impactful because while making music enjoyable, it is only the enjoyment of the music that makes it fulfilling.

As PHS has many different opportunities to create music, they also have many different kinds of bands; Allison Holewa '25 and Warnez '25 are similar as they both have backgrounds in Jazz Band and Wind Ensemble. Another interesting part is that they were also both in the pit for Mean Girls. The pit is a live performance under the stage, where College-level music is played for the musical- involving multiple rehearsals and time spent studying professional music. I asked them both how a sit-down band like Wind Ensemble or pit for example compared to Jazz Band. Both gave similar responses saying they enjoyed Wind Ensemble, however, they liked the laid-back high-performance-driven style of our Jazz Band.

Pembrook, Barrows, Holewa, and Warnez are all members that others can look to for help and for admiration. The music that fills Plainwell High School's halls would not be the same without these individuals.

## Celebrity Influence on Politics

By Elizabeth Carter | Editor In Chief

As the 2024 presidential election drew to a close, the public's opinions and emotions on the outcome have been more polarized than ever. It would seem as though each extreme has reared its head during this race, leaving many with strong feelings on the election. Because of these strong feelings, many celebrities have taken to their platforms to express to their fans and the public who they think should be supported in the election, and what they believe is right politically and

otherwise. Because of the extensive access social media has given us to public figures and their opinions, it would seem only logical that said opinions may be weighing in more heavily than ever before, possibly swaying the outcome of the election.

When students at Plainwell High School were asked if celebrity influence on politics had increased in recent years, an overwhelming majority of 92.3% said it had. When asked if they personally believe celebrities influence election outcomes, the majority still said yes, at 65.4%. While opinions on this subject differ from person to person,

there is evidence supporting celebrity influence on politics. In a study conducted by Harvard's Ashley Spillane, she is quoted as saying, "... More rigorous evidence indicates that these voices (celebrities) are incredibly powerful." She continues on to discuss the United States' young adults lack of trust in political figures, but surplus of trust in celebrities, pointing to said celebrities impacting elections in incredible ways.

Who influenced this election? The majority believes Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish had a heavy influence in promoting left wing ideals, while Joe Rogan and Elon

Musk had a hand in promoting right wing ideals. It is not unrealistic to believe these celebrities may have had an influence on the election, specifically in the younger generation of fresh voters.

Ultimately, it is crucial to democracy that the public educates themselves on all sides of politics, and understands it to the best of their ability without bias from potential influencers. While celebrities have differing opinions on politics, just as the average individual does, it cannot be argued that they do exert a great impact onto the public's political opinions and election.

By Jordyn Miller | Staff Writer

Tracey Bryant, Sue Gower, Sara Doublestein - these names help run PHS and heal the hearts of students and staff alike every day.

This superhero-like trio of the kindest ladies you'll ever meet helps keep the school afloat in more ways than one. From the first faces you see as you walk into the school to the people who will help you navigate the waters of PHS, these ladies are always willing to help whilst offering a smile to brighten your day.

Tracey Bryant is the principal's administrative assistant and has worked at PHS for four years. She does invoices for the high school, finds substitutes for teachers, plans meetings, and checks the calendar for anything school or community related to ensure everything is organized and doesn't get double-booked. Students love to visit her during the

school day and she makes sure she leaves people feeling better than when she found them. When asked if she feels appreciated, she said, "Of course, but I feel like it's a mutual respect thing. I feel like I give the students respect so they give it back." As someone who encounters a diverse variety of students, parents, staff, and community members, Bryant never fails to make everyone she encounters feel seen.

Sue Gower is the school's student services coordinator. Gower has been at PHS for 11 years and works in the student services office next to the main office. Every time someone enters her office or even walks by it, she greets them with the warmest welcome and wave that makes a day instantly better. Gower feels much appreciation from the students saying, "As I am in a fishbowl, I love it when students walk by my office and give me a friendly wave!"

## The Powerpuff Girls



Tracy Bryant



Sue Gower



Sarah Doublestein



Deb Phaneuf

Gower likes to make students feel welcome when they enter her office, as well as have conversations with them. Her favorite memory is when the choir comes and sings Christmas carols for her and the rest of the student services office.

Sara Doublestein is PHS's gym assistant and has been here for three years. She is a hilarious and bright person to be around, and students love to come visit her during the school day. Every day she comes to work, she tries to "stay positive" and enjoys "building relationships with students and getting to know them." Doublestein's favorite memory is when a student told her that they wouldn't have made it through the school year without her. She is someone who listens and many students feel safe and happy in her presence.

These are the "Powerpuff Girls" of PHS. They keep it real but also make sure to treat everyone with respect and brighten days with positivity.

PHS has recently

welcomed a new face to our front office - Deb Phaneuf! She isn't new to the district as she worked at Cooper Elementary for 18 years. In the office, she mainly does anything relating to attendance. So far she has loved seeing all the students but says that it is "Definitely different than elementary; much busier." Phaneuf shares that she loves recognizing older Cooper kids and getting to know all the other students. One life lesson she had prior to working at the high school was to "set goals for yourself that push you outside of your comfort zone, and focus on those goals rather than the setbacks that occur on the way there. Life is not easy but it is rewarding if you allow yourself to fail and grow stronger from it." She plans to continue to follow her goals here at PHS.

## A Year in a Glance - Gypsy Rose Blanchard

By Alyssa Maurer | Staff Writer

As many people know, felon turned internet persona Gypsy Rose Blanchard recently got released from prison. Since then she has been all over the internet in a heaping pile of drama.

Blanchard was convicted and sentenced to prison in 2016 of second degree murder of her own mother Dee Dee. She was abused by her mother throughout her life which is what ultimately led her and her boyfriend (at the time) to end her mother's life. Her then boyfriend was sentenced to life while Blanchard was sentenced to only ten years, but got out after eight. Blanchard wasted absolutely no time after her release, immediately stirring up chaos on social media.

32-year-old Blanchard was released shortly after Christmas 2023, and she was seen out and about with Ryan Anderson, her husband at the time. They got married whilst Blanchard was in prison serving her sentence. Only a few hours after being released she was seen out shopping and getting her nails done. Within a few days of Blanchard's newfound freedom she created a TikTok and Instagram account, gaining a large following quickly due to the interest in her case. In the beginning, she had many interviews with

different people and news stations. During the first few months following her release Blanchard went under the knife and got a nose job. This sparked her collaborating with many influencers on TikTok and Instagram.

Going back to Blanchard's love life, she had a messy divorce from Anderson and very shortly after got back with her ex-fiance Ken Urker. Urker and Blanchard had gotten engaged while Blanchard was in prison, but they had called off the engagement after a few months. Blanchard then released a YouTube video July 9 announcing she was pregnant with Urker's child. She stated in the video that the baby is due January 2025, but people have been speculating that she has been faking her pregnancy or that the child is her ex-husband Anderson's. Since their pregnancy announcement there has been a question as to whether Urker and Blanchard are still together. Over our Christmas break Blanchard gave birth to her baby girl. She named her daughter Aurora and shared that she would not be posting pictures of her baby to keep her life private.

This past year has been a wild ride for Blanchard, getting out of prison, love life drama, plastic surgery, interviews, and pregnancy. Everyone is itching to see what she'll be doing next, as she never fails to keep the public on the edge of their seats.

## ✦ 2024 Heisman Awards ✦

By Easton Healy | Staff Writer

This year's Heisman candidates are Ashton Jeanty, Travis Hunter, Dillion Gabriel, and Cam Ward. The Heisman Trophy goes to the best college football player each year, however, in past years it has usually gone to a quarterback. Critics will call it the Best Quarterback Award, not the Best Player Award. This year is different; the two best players out of these four candidates are not quarterbacks- they are running backs; Ashton Jeanty from Boise State and corner/wide receiver Travis Hunter from Colorado. Arguments can be made from both sides on who should win the Heisman this year.

Starting with Ashton Jeanty, his stats speak for themselves. Jeanty had 2,497 rushing yards this year alone on 344 carries, 29 touchdowns, and an average of 7.3 yards per carry. He is in the top five all-time best running backs in college football, and is almost at the all-time single-season rushing yard record set by Barry Sanders in 1988 with 2,628 yards. Jeanty is first in multiple categories for this season like rushing yards, rushing touchdowns, and average yards per carry. However, Jeanty is not first in number of rushing attempts. This means that Jeanty has done more with the carries that he gets than almost everyone in college football. Jeanty's numbers hold up if we compare Jeanty to the last running back who won the Heisman, Derrick Henry from Alabama in 2015. In Henry's Heisman season, he had 339 rushing attempts, 1986 rushing yards, 23 rushing touchdowns, and an average of 5.9 yards per carry. Jeanty beats Henry in all of

these categories with fewer rushing attempts.

Hunter, on the other hand, is a two-way defensive and offensive player who plays an average of 120 snaps per game. That is not an easy accomplishment. Most high school football players will play both ways because the competition is much easier, but in college, football players will usually choose one position (offense or defense), and stick to that. The last notable player to play both ways in college football was Jabrill Peppers from The University of Michigan. Peppers earned the name "The Swiss Army Knife" because of his ability to play multiple positions and succeed at them. Some of the notable positions he played were wide receiver, safety, cornerback, quarterback, running back, H-back, and linebacker. However, Peppers was not a Heisman winner. He placed fifth in the voting.

The Heisman ceremony was held on December 13, 2024, and the winner, Hunter, was announced. But was Jeanty robbed of this award? When we look at Hunter's stats during the season, they are excellent, but do not hold up well against Jeanty's. Starting with his offensive stats, He is sixth in receiving yards in the nation with 1,152 yards on 92 receptions and is second in receiving touchdowns with 14. For the defensive stats, he had 31 tackles, 11 pass breakups, four interceptions, and 15 passes defended (tied for 5th in the country). These stats are good for one player playing two positions, but are they really so exceptional that he should beat out a top-five college running back of all time? When we compare Hunter to Peppers's season, Peppers played more positions and did more on the field but

didn't even come close to winning the Heisman, while Hunter played two positions and won the award. If the requirements for the Heisman are how versatile and how much you play during a game, the argument could be made that Peppers should have won it in 2016.

Jeanty beats out the last three running backs to win the Heisman statistically, not just Henry. While prior running backs were in the SEC conference which is substantially harder to succeed in compared to the Mountain West Conference that Jeanty plays in, Jeanty has still taken his team to an 11-1 record and a third-seed spot in the playoffs. Hunter did not take his team to the playoffs and Colorado finished the season with a 9-3 record. What Jeanty accomplished this season will go down in not only Boise State football history but college football history, and yet he still didn't win the Heisman.

Hunter's winning of the award caused controversy as some believe it may have been more of a popularity test than anything. Hunter plays for the Colorado Buffaloes, coached by Deion Sanders who was an exceptional player in the NFL. Some people claim that the only reason Hunter won this award over Jeanty is because he is coached and plays for a more well-known program and staff.

Controversy aside, this year's Heisman race was a heated and competitive battle. The award could have gone both ways. These two players will both go down in history because of the seasons they had, Jeanty for breaking multiple records, and Hunter for playing both sides of the ball very well.

# Girls Take the Mat: Plainwell High School's Girls Wrestling

By Grayce Swanson | Staff writer

Women's wrestling at Plainwell High School has exploded in popularity within the past three years. With wrestling being mainly male-dominated, Plainwell High School's girls' wrestling team is a shock to the system being made up of 16 girls; this is major growth from the two team members three years ago. Avery Lynch '26 and Madison Nieuwenhuis '26 are the original members and role models of women's wrestling at PHS. Both of these girls are heavily decorated athletes with regional titles, state placings, and even some national recognition.

When asked how it feels to be role models for women's wrestling at PHS, both girls said that it felt good. Nieuwenhuis stated, "It feels really good, and I'm just very thankful that I get to help all the girls on the team grow in the sport."

The first year is always the hardest as you are taking a leap into a new sport. "As a first-year, wrestling is pretty scary but overall fun." Brooklyn Colvin '28 states. "Being in a male-dominated sport is intimidating but also very exciting."

While the team has grown a lot, they're always searching for more people, Kornelia Dranikowska '25 says, "Wrestling would be more fun if there were more girls. You have to push yourself, and it's something to learn from."

The boys team is extremely receptive of the girls team's growth. Many are unfazed by this change. Nieuwenhuis and Lynch both have brothers that grew up with them wrestling. Dylan Nieuwenhuis '28 states, "Growing up wrestling with my sister was fun; we train together, and get better together."

If anyone knows anything about Madison Nieuwenhuis it's that she's an amazing wrestler. She has national titles, went to an NCAA open tournament and placed, and now she's training for the Olympics. Her brother says, "It's pretty cool that she's training for the Olympics; we have been training together for a long time and it feels good to see all the hard work pay off."

Even though wrestling is an individual sport, there is the thrill of it being the survival of the fittest. Rickey Lynch '25 states, "It's been good growing up with Avery wrestling but, I think that it makes us a little more competitive between the both of us. We're both trying to do better than the other, and we're both helping each other learn."

Nieuwenhuis shares that girls should join the wrestling team because "It's fun, it teaches you a lot of values, and it teaches you to believe in yourself and have confidence."

Being a part of the girls' wrestling team will push you to new levels, and encourage you to learn things about yourself you could not have found otherwise.

## Splish! Splash! Swim! PHS Men's Swim & Dive

By Henry Cox | Staff writer

Plainwell's Varsity Swim and Dive is looking to win their first conference championship in 11 years. The Plainwell Swim and Dive team has had great success over this school's history with multiple conference championships, individual state championships, and even a team state championship. The Varsity Swim and Dive team of 2024/25 is looking to continue this tradition of excellence.

After an amazing season the prior year, where the team barely missed out on 1st at the conference championship with a 2nd place finish, this year's team is looking to up their standards to a new level. Aidan Ranger '26, a junior diver on the team, describes his feelings on the team's shortcomings as, "A devastation of a lifetime." However, he makes it clear that he does not intend to repeat history, "It ain't gonna happen twice." This team is display-

ing their clear intent on winning the conference this year.

As for the team as a whole, junior captain Sam Harper '26 speaks up on his feelings for the year; "I feel very confident in our team's ability to grow and stay determined throughout the season." As a captain, Harper is doing his best to motivate the team and bring out the best in them. From leading by example to cheering them on, he is doing his best to prepare the team for the conference championships in February.

Another captain, senior Austin Susens '25, has also contributed to the team's work ethic. With the biggest voice on the team, Susens uses it to his advantage to cheer others on in practice and inspire the team before meets. When asked about what's going to win this team the conference, he says, "Everyone plays their role." This team is committed to being their best, and it will likely show in a couple months.



Girls wrestling team by Charles Swanson

# From the Classroom to the Boardroom: DECA Launches at PHS

By Dominic Annerino | Staff writer

The newest club at Plainwell High School has recently made its debut, that club being DECA. DECA is centered around guiding kids in their business-minded pursuits, and pushing them to grow in terms of taking leadership and making ambitious decisions. Entrepreneurship plays a big role in DECA as well as students learning what it takes to start something of their own. The DECA program can open up numerous scholarship opportunities for students, as well as teach them real-life skills they can transfer to the workforce.

The DECA program provides students with the opportunity to get involved in competitions, helping them to use their drive to better themselves as well as their peers. DECA also supplies students with informative business presentations, and experiences in business, marketing, entrepreneurship, economics, communications, and even more. Meetings at Plainwell High School are held every Wednesday and all are welcome regardless of your experience or prior knowledge about businesses and running them.

When asked about the club, Sam Eister, DECA advisor, says, "I loved the idea of bringing a club to our school that can help our students learn and grow in leadership skills. DECA is perfect for students who are interested in developing leadership skills, career readiness, business knowledge in fields like marketing, finance, hospitality and management. Our goal next year is to join DECA completing chapters and going to competitions in special career fields students are interested in learning about."

DECA currently involves 275,360 high school students and has 4,018 high school chapters around the globe. DECA focuses on applying classroom learning to real life situations, connecting their approach to business, and promoting friendly and beneficial competition between students. Through DECA, students will become academically prepared, community oriented, professionally responsible, and experienced leaders. Joining DECA is a great way to grow your skills in business and leadership, and gain experience for the next steps after high school.

## Earning Through the Seasons

By Diego Vargas-Ramirez | Staff writer

It never hurts to earn a little extra cash to fund all of the things you want to do - like late night Meijer runs, Applebees hangouts, and movie dates. Sometimes a job can be hard to fit into a busy student schedule so here are a few side hustles that Plainwell High School students do to earn a little extra money throughout the year.

During the winter season, there are plenty of options ranging from easy to difficult to make you some extra cash. With the lake effect snow that hits our area there are plenty of homeowners who would pay to have their driveway taken care of. Shoveling can be a hard task for older homeowners to complete and those individuals can be more willing to pay for their driveway to be taken care of. Although salt costs money, the price of salt can be included in rates so it is not an out of pocket expense. These services can get bundled together so that homeowners can get more bang for their buck.

The most difficult side hustle in the winter is hanging up Christmas lights. Most people already own their own Christmas lights so you wouldn't have to spend much money, but they are very tedious to hang. Also, now that the holidays are over the Christ-

mas lights need to be taken down and you can get paid to remove the lights as well.

During summer there is more time and opportunities to make some extra cash. One of the simpler tasks is going dog walking and dog sitting. If you are an animal lover and are looking to get outside, dog walking can be a fun side hustle for high school students.

The next side hustle for the summer season is power washing. This can be difficult because of the fact that you need your own supplies. Most houses have dirty driveways, so the money spent may be worth the huge profit you can make.

The last side hustle would be lawncare. If you have access to the equipment needed this can be a big money maker.

Finally, the fall season provides lots of opportunities to make some money with the falling leaves and weather. The first side hustle is raking leaves. Lots of people have massive amounts of leaves falling in their yards and not many want to take the time to rake them.

The next side hustle which is more difficult would be cleaning gutters. With all the leaves in the yards, lots are bound to fall in the gutters ultimately requiring cleaning.



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# Unplugging.

By Raleigh Murphy | Staff writer

When it comes to phones, many are torn as to whether they're as necessary as our society has made them, or if we need to unplug.

Two students from Plainwell High School have been interviewed and have given their input. Rachel Sherer '26, when asked if life would be better with or without phones, said, "Life is better with phones because they create meaningful connections, although with the usage of social media, the screens have become more of a problem and a distraction than what they were designed to be; something to create a connection."

Along with that, a couple other students agree that phones have created distance, regressing specifically the teenage mind and the social outlook on life, as we take everything in through the internet, sometimes forgetting to question what's real and what's not.

Another interviewee, Julia Whitney '26, agreed with Sherer saying phones are helpful and we need them for entertainment and communication, but short-form entertainment platforms are hurting attention spans. Three other juniors from the same class were asked to share their screen time, and with solemn looks, they said it was well over 6 hours.

Sadly, it's not only them; millions of people are on their phones, whether talking to family or scrolling social media for hours, and because of this mental health all over the world has declined.

When asked if phoneless hobbies were worth it everyone asked said

they were. If you're looking to break away from your screens and enjoy a phoneless hobby or two, several students have said that drawing, traveling, kayaking, and cooking are all great ways to not only break away from the brain rot but also form a connection between other people and shorten the social and mental distance.



Students ditching their phones in a trash can by Tess Duncel

## Frozen Fun

By Cookie

