

The Mandolín

St. Francis Catholic High School

October 2025

"Spread the word."

Issue 134



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St. Francis Day

BY ALEXANDRA SPITZER '29

The leaves are beginning to change, and everyone is stopping by the Troubie Store to pick up a cozy sweater just in time for one of the most important events of the fall: St. Francis Day! Who doesn't love a school day with no classes and a fun celebration of our school's patron saint, St. Francis of Assisi (and to top it all off, an early release!)?

St. Francis Day is an important part of the Troubadour community, and it allows students to connect with their patron saint and each other through fun activities for every Troubie (and staff member) to enjoy. From the opening mass to the delicious food and the a cappella performance from our beloved Blue Skirts, this year's celebration was a great memory for all.

St. Francis of Assisi was born in Assisi, Italy in 1181. He grew up in a wealthy family, but ultimately chose a life of poverty and devotion to Jesus Christ. He was canonized July 16, 1228, and is the patron saint of animals. St. Francis was known as a genuinely kind man who was always empathetic and forgiving, no matter the circumstances. Every year, Troubies proudly celebrate him as their patron saint, and many students look up to him as an example of virtue and grace.

The theme for this year was "Viva Italia." Some Troubies dressed simply, while others took a more creative approach. The dress up theme was no exception for staff, and many staff members joined in on the fun, wearing colorful, Italian-themed attire to celebrate.

One of the best parts of this year's St. Francis Day was the great cultural element. Olivia Carpenter, a sophomore at St. Francis

reflected on her experience: "It was so culturally immersive," Carpenter said. The Italian Tarantella student dance group and St. Francis's Hula group both performed authentic and well-executed pieces at the closing ceremony, representing the cultural exposure that came with this year's celebration.

This year's St. Francis Day was filled with fun activities, many of which involved food. The food was delicious, and the aroma filled Serra Court. According to Emily Nguyen a freshman at St. Francis High School, "The scent reminded me of an Italian restaurant."

The numerous food stands held many different Italian foods. From Italian soda to breadsticks to tiramisu, the food was delicious, and everyone could taste the effort put into the stands. "I was so glad I went; it brought back so many memories," Emily said.

Many other fun activities were available, one of the most popular being the flower crown station. "It was so nostalgic, and there was so much supplies to work with," Emily said. Many Troubies took home or exchanged lovely flower crowns with each other, and it was a wonderful way for the community to interact and connect with each other.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK HONBO

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The success of this year's celebration has only left students excited for next year. But in the meantime, Troubies are appreciative of the work that went into creating this event.

"I have no negative remarks," Emily said. "Everybody put a lot of work into it and it really showed."

Club Rush

BY EVELYN SAUNDERS '28

Each year, students gather in Serra Court for Club Rush – a lively event where students can explore potential clubs and discover how to get involved on campus. This year's event was a huge success, with over 60 clubs putting together eye-catching presentation boards, setting up their stands and welcoming new members.

The Rapunzel and Pascals were especially eager to join their first clubs at St. Francis. On average, each club welcomed 17 new freshmen members. Maisie Bill, Class of '29, attended club rush and was eager to join several clubs.

"I joined Medicine and More," she said, "and BiOlympiad...because I want to go into the medical field." For Bill, club rush was not only "fun", but also an opportunity to explore her interests.

Whatever our Troubies' interests are, from service opportunities to real-world skills, there were plenty of options to choose from. The most popular clubs this year were Baking Club and Medicine and More, which now have 262 and 210 members, respectively. Some close runners-up were Red Cross, Troubies Who Mean Business, and the Puzzle Project.

To attract new members, clubs put together vibrant poster boards advertising their missions, activities, and goals. "I think it's cool that...all the clubs put in the effort to make boards," Bill says, "And show up on that day to display...what they stand for." Her favorite board was the one made by The Pink Rose Book Club, which featured decorations on "both the front and the back" and "took pages and posted them all over the board."

Like many freshmen on campus, Bill "knew nothing" going into the day. But by the end, dozens of girls got to join new clubs and enjoy looking around at all the groups' displays. Bill said that the only bad part was that "it was muddy", but even so, Club Rush 2025 was a huge success!



PHOTO COURTESY OF **ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER CLUB**

A President and A Believer: Dr. John Moran

BY HANNAH CHITIEA '28

Whether you've seen him bringing killer outfits to St. Francis Day, or chatting with students around campus during his free time, there is no question that St. Francis' new president, Dr. John Moran, is quickly becoming a well-respected figure in the Troubie community.

With a doctorate in educational leadership from UCLA, a master's degree in teaching and curriculum from Harvard University, and a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Massachusetts, Moran brings a stellar and well-rounded skill set to St. Francis.

Moran first pursued a career in education after being inspired by three teachers and coaches who felt more like relatives than instructors: "Some day, what I want to be to young people is what they are to me," Moran said.

Now, with over 30 years of experience, one particular memory in his extensive career stands out most.

"I created a banner for all American cheerleaders, even though the other male leaders were against it because they didn't consider it a sport. When we unveiled the banner, there were many tears of joy, and people stayed for hours taking photos in front of the banner."

Moran described how this experience changed his views on female discrimination in sports: "I'm so glad I insisted on that banner going up for the current and former students, who had won the All-American status in cheer.

It made me realize how inequities in athletics and society still exist for women and how we as individuals can make a difference in changing that equity equation" Moran said. Since the start of the school year, Moran has spent many lunches connecting with students: playing pool, chatting with friend groups, or spending time in Serra Court to better engage with the community. While he has taken time to get to know students individually, not many know much about him, something he has made steps to change by sharing more about his personality and background.

Dr. Moran describes himself as faith-filled, relational, compassionate, and joyful. His favorite vacation spot is Lake Winnepesaukee, New Hampshire, where he spent summers as a child. While most Troubies enjoy Taylor Swift or Drake, Moran especially enjoys "Por ti Volaré" by Andrea Bocelli.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **BILL SMITH**
PHOTOGRAPHY

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Though not many girls relate to Moran's love of classic artist Bocelli, many do resonate with his love of faith. His favorite Bible verses include "Then Jesus said, 'I am the Light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in the darkness, but have the light of life'" (John 8:12), and "The joy of the Lord is my strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

When asked what central parts of his identity are, Moran said "I would first like you to know that I love Jesus Christ with all my heart, and He makes me so joyful."

He also values in-person interaction, and hopes to foster that communication in the Troubie community.

"We were always in face-to-face contact with our families and friends.... I really wish you could have had that experience, and I hope you will look for opportunities to recreate it with yourselves and with your future families. My goal for St. Francis is to be the best school of any type, anywhere—not only the best all-girls school.

I am thrilled and really happy to be here serving all of you amazing young women in your incredible Sisterhood. I am already so impressed with all of you ladies. My mom was a champion of women, and I know she would be proud to know her son is investing in the lives of the young women of St. Francis."

And in perhaps the defining moment of the interview, when asked if cereal is a soup, Moran said, "I would have to say...no', because soup is salty, and cereal is sweet." Regardless of Moran's favorite song, personal values, or stance on cereal and soups, St. Francis hasn't just gained a president, we've gained a true supporter of our voices and dreams. As Moran said, "I believe in each one of you and your ability to do more and to be more than you ever dreamed possible - '...with God, all things are possible.' (Matthew 19:26)".

How Do Sports Injuries Affect St. Francis Students?

BY GEMMA FRISCH '28

According to the National Library of Medicine (NIH), 90 percent of student athletes sustain an injury while participating in athletics. Student athletes receive an immense amount of pressure from peers, coaches, and parents. This leads to a high injury rate as athletes feel forced to make decisions that put them at risk to receive life altering injuries.

Some common injuries that students receive are concussions, sprains, fractures, broken bones, contusions and muscle tears

such as an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tear.

While these injuries may seem like short-term problems, even the most minor injuries can lead to critical physical issues in the future.

For example, the medical journal Brain said that athletes who receive concussions typically develop cognitive complications compared to their peers who had not endured a concussion or similar injuries. Any fractures or sprains can also lead to the development of arthritis and weak joints.

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Overall, any injury is significant and can lead to a variety of lasting painful symptoms. Throughout the recent fall sports season at St. Francis a multitude of athletes have injured themselves on and off the field. I interviewed Alli MacDonald, a sophomore on varsity volleyball, and Lola Fox, a sophomore on varsity flag football. Talking with them about this topic shed light on the dangers of sports and how they have been personally affected.

Gemma: What sports are you currently playing at St. Francis High School?

Alli: I currently play varsity volleyball.

Lola: I am currently playing flag football for St. Francis.

Gemma: Have you received any sports related injuries in your current or past seasons of high school athletics?

Alli: Yes, I recently sprained my ankle.

Lola: Yes, during the season I received a substantial hit to the head. Doctors are still unsure if it is a concussion or not.

Gemma: Can you describe this injury and how it occurred?



PHOTO COURTESY OF SFHS ATHLETICS

Alli: I was injured the night before our first game of the season. I was going to the right to block when I landed on my teammate. I flew to the ground and heard several snaps. I couldn't even walk.

Lola: It was the first play of a game and I motioned one of my teammates. While she was running past me, I went down to get the snap and at the same time my teammate who was motioning collided with my head.

Gemma: How did this impair your ability to play?

Alli: It has prevented me from playing in any game this season. I am now slowly returning to volleyball after a month of rest. My injury prevented me from jumping and made me very weak overall.

Lola: This has impaired my ability to play as I am still on concussion protocol and have been benched.

Gemma: How was your recovery process? What are you still doing currently to recover?

Alli: I have been attending physical therapy and exercising every day. Our athletic trainer, Kelly, has been very helpful and has provided me with any treatment needed such as icing and compression.

Lola: My recovery process has been all right. I have been having to get as much rest as possible to make sure that I am not doing too much to prevent my head from hurting such as avoiding flashing lights, loud noises, and too much screen time.

Gemma: Where did you receive support through this process and how did it impact you?

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Alli: Both my friends and teammates have been super supportive throughout this process. When I was on crutches, my friends always helped carry my bags and helped out any way they could. My teammates and coaches always helped get me involved and make me feel like a part of the team.

Lola: I have received support from everyone including my friends, family, teammates, and faculty at school. It has been really helpful to have so many dependable support systems.

Gemma: Have you felt any pressure to return to your sport while you've been in the recovery process?

Alli: My parents and coaches have made sure not to rush me to prevent my injury from worsening. Regardless, I am still eager to get back on the court.

Lola: Yes, I have felt immense pressure to return to my sport. This pressure has mainly been from myself.

Gemma: Has this injury caused you to worry about re-injury? What steps are you taking to avoid this?

Alli: I am worried about re-injury which is why I am trying not to rush my recovery. I constantly move my ankle to build up strength to speed up the healing process and hopefully play again soon.

Lola: It worries me that when I do come back I might not be able to play like I used to. I have been extra careful outside of sports to help regain strength to come back better than before.

Gemma: What has been the hardest part of this process?

Alli: I think the hardest part for me has been watching from the sidelines. Even though I love cheering on my teammates, I am super eager to return to the court. This desire to play was especially hard during the holy court game which was a super exciting time and I was sad I couldn't participate.

Lola: The hardest part of this process was missing out on fun events and feeling disconnected from my team. I know my teammates and friends just want me to work on my strength and be careful but sometimes I do feel sad that I am missing out on exciting events or games.

Behind the Scenes of A Midsummer Night's Dream

BY MAISIE BILL '29

"[It's] about the legacy of Greek and Roman heroes, characters and myth and storytelling affecting Elizabethan England and affecting our world. I think it doesn't get any better," said Saunders, the director of A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Written by William Shakespeare around 1594-1596, Midsummer is one of his most famous and frequently performed comedies. It is a mixture of romance, magic and mischief as love goes wrong (and right again) in an enchanted forest outside of ancient Athens.

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With a theme of "Legacy" for this year's arts season, the St. Francis theater department thought *Midsummer* was an obvious choice. "It's not only a play that was written 400 years ago, but it's also about a time in 1200 BC," Saunders said.

When asked what details audience members should look for during the show, Saunders hinted at the contrast between the three groups of characters: the nobles, the craftsmen and the fairies. "I think something to watch for is just looking at the differences between the way these groups talk, the way they move, the way they're dressed...but then also I think the comic relief in the show is the play within a play, which is...supposed to be a little bit absurd," Saunders said.

One of the cast's greatest challenges has been mastering the Shakespearean language. Gabriela Liasos, a St. Francis freshman who plays the role of Hermia, described this challenge: "Most everything has to rhyme. And there's a lot of different words that we don't use now...so if you don't put a 'the' or a 'but' in front, it could totally mean something very, very wrong."

Micah Espinoza, a sophomore at Jesuit who plays Bottom, added: "The odd order of the words, or trying to act realistically while sounding so old-timey."

According to Saunders, these challenges come from the manner of the Elizabethan English language: "Most of us use somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 words as high school students. They [Elizabethans] would have had 50,000 words," Saunders said.

"With the exception of the Mechanicals who just talk in regular language, everyone else speaks in verse. Almost every line is iambic pentameter; it's poetry, basically."

Understanding the vocabulary and rhythmic structure is key to bringing the script to life on stage. But beyond learning lines, the cast says what really makes the production special is the environment they work in.

"The way that we work, the people that I'm working with, their work ethic is so great...it just pushes me to be better...and our amazing director, Mr. Saunders makes every day that we go to rehearsal so much fun," said Liasos.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. FRANCIS CATHOLIC
HIGH SCHOOL

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While the cast works on bringing Shakespeare's characters to life on stage, the crew is busy behind the scenes making more magic happen. From building sets to designing costumes and managing lights, their hard work is transforming the stage into the world of Midsummer.

Corinne Atkins, a freshman at St. Francis, involved in tech club, describes the process of set building: "[The sets are] also very old-timey, so you really don't have a lot of wiggle room when it comes to sets. It is kind of basic."

"In any show, the crew is absolutely essential. And it's...an essential part of theater that we frequently, if you just go to a play, you don't see their work," Saunders said.

But the crew doesn't stop at designing and building sets. Safety is one of their top priorities. "All of the legs need to be...exactly the same size. And you need to screw in a triangle...because a triangle is the most secure shape," Atkins said.

With opening night just around the corner, the cast and crew are eager to see all their hard work come together. The first performance of Midsummer can be seen on November sixth and tickets can be purchased through the St. Francis Theater Page.

As the light's dim and the forest comes alive, the audience will fall into a midsummer night's dream of their own.

Interview with Mr. Saunders

BY CORINNE ATKINS '29

Mr. Saunders has joined the St. Francis community this year as a part of our theater department. I sat down with him recently, and learned some fun facts I can't wait to share with all of you!

Mr. Saunders is the current Theater Director at St. Francis High School. He was born in New York City. He grew up in the suburbs of Pennsylvania and went to college in Northern New York. He attended graduate school in Portland, Oregon and received a degree in Directing. Mr. Saunders has lived in many places throughout his life, and is excited to now be living here in California! While a big move can be daunting, Mr. Saunders is taking the change in stride.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BILL SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

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As he told me, "I'm just super excited to have found a job teaching theater. I mean, sometimes you move 3,000 miles and you can't find a job doing something you love, so I feel pretty lucky. Pretty blessed." Well, Mr. Saunders, we also feel pretty lucky to have you as a new member of our St. Francis community!

I asked Mr. Saunders why he enjoys working as a teacher in performing arts. "Because I just have always loved the art of theater. It's just always been something that really spoke to me: as an actor, as a director, or just in general" said Mr. Saunders. He has vast theater experience not just as a teacher, but also as a performer.

"I have done all kinds of different kinds of shows as an actor. I've done Shakespeare, I've done musicals, I've done opera," said Mr. Saunders. The majority of Mr. Saunders' experience in directing has been while working in high schools.

He was the Director at two schools in Washington, D.C.. He directed for 9 years at an all-boys and all-girls school that were across campus from each other. He also taught in Minneapolis, MN; Memphis, TN as well as a few schools in the Bronx, NY. As you can see, Mr. Saunders has a lot of amazing directing experience!

Aside from teaching, Mr. Saunders' family is an important part of his life. While living in Washington D.C., he met and married his wife. Together they have two daughters, a seventh grader and a tenth grader. Actually, one of his daughters is a fellow Troubie!

I hope you will join me in giving Mr. Saunders a warm welcome to our St. Francis community! I can't wait to see what his experience brings to our performing arts department.

Hispanic Heritage Month

BY HADLEY BARNES '29

Every year, people around the world celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. It takes place from September 15 to October 15.

The United States Census Bureau said "In September of 1968, Congress authorized President Lyndon B. Johnson to proclaim National Hispanic Heritage Week observed during the week that included Sept. 15 and Sept. 16. In 1989, it was expanded to a monthlong celebration (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)."

Hispanic Heritage Month recognizes the influence of Hispanic Americans in history, culture, and so much more.

During this month, the independence days for several Latin American countries, including Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico and Chile are celebrated.

In an article discussing Hispanic Heritage month, Smithsonian Museum said, "While we celebrate Hispanic and Latino communities beyond this month, from September 15 to October 15 we give extra recognition to the many contributions made to the history and culture of the United States, including important advocacy work, vibrant art, popular and traditional foods, and much more."

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Hispanic Heritage Month also recognizes many popular Latin and Hispanic figures, like Lin-Manuel Miranda and Shakira Ripoll in the music industry, Frida Kahlo, a well-known painter and Lionel Messi, an Argentine professional soccer player.

Here at St. Francis, you don't have to search far to see the influence of Hispanic culture. It's everywhere! Maybe you've had Spanish food or listened to music by Latin artists, but do you know the history behind them? Hispanic Heritage Month provides an opportunity to look past the basics and think about the culture.

That is part of the mission of Hispanic Heritage Month. To spread the real stories that too often get overlooked. For example, did you know that the first recorded non-Native explorer of parts of what is now the United States was Juan Rodríguez, a Dominican sailor who came to California in 1542? Or that Sylvia Rivera, a Puerto Rican-Venezuelan trans activist, was part of the early LGBTQ+ rights movement?

The month also encourages all of us to celebrate culture in lively and enjoyable ways. Whether it's the Hispanic Month Assembly, or joining the La Familia Club, there are chances to try something new and help support the communities that spread awareness of this important month!

"Your individuality is important, but so is belonging. Recognize the parts of your culture that have shaped your past, and the parts you want to carry with you into the future."

– Sol Peralta



PHOTO COURTESY OF NJEA

Labubus Join the SF Zoo

BY ALLI MACDONALD '28

Whether spotted on backpacks, desks, or keychains, all troubadours have seen the impact of the Labubu craze on campus lately. After all, these collectable designer toys come in many colors and designs so they are hard to miss. Known for their cute, but rather creepy design (pointy teeth, big eyes and colorful fur), these animals are more expensive than you would think. So what makes these collectable furry friends so popular, both inside and outside St. Francis?

Most people are collecting these creatures due to the funny trends on TikTok. Tallas Schaedler, a sophomore at St. Francis, described how she was first introduced to the creatures: "After I saw a few videos about them, I knew that I needed to get one!" Schaedler said.

The popularity of the Labubu most likely came from its exposure on social media, where popular influencers film videos showing off their Labubu collections and unboxing rare editions. Labubus come in a mystery blind box, which leads to races to find limited edition dolls.

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These unique figures do cost a pretty penny. Only available at the store Pop Mart, the starting price for a Labubu is \$50. Some of the rarest Labubus are even selling for above \$100 online. Due to their blind box packaging, many people leave unsatisfied with their Labubu and often trade with others. These high prices have also led to a rise in popularity of fake Labubus, also known as Lafufus.

Whether you are a devoted collector of the furry figures, or think that this is just another trend that will eventually pass, Labubus have definitely found a home at St. Francis.

No matter if you find them cute or creepy, you will certainly be seeing more of the playful collectibles on campus.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **LIFESTYLE ASIA**

The Addams Family

BY DESLYN GALANG '28

Created in 1938 by Charles Addams, the Addams Family remains a delightfully spooky icon with a social edge of pop culture.

Born in Westfield, New Jersey on January 7th, 1912, Charles Addams was interested in the macabre from an early age, which would influence the creation of the Addams Family.

Working in the army during World War II, he had a military occupational specialty creating animated training films in the Signal Corps Photographic Center. The Addams Family would first appear in the New Yorker magazine as unnamed characters in a single-panel comic, and Addams would later publish "Dear Dead Days" in 1957 with the Addams Family front and center.

Since then, the Addams Family has spawned multiple adaptations. The very first Addams Family television property aired in 1964-1966 as a sitcom.

Some other notable adaptations of the beloved characters are the 1991 film, the musical and the Netflix series Wednesday.

At its core, the Addams Family has always been satire, offering insight to society with a campy, dark edge. The Addams Family authentically embodies the macabre without any shame, critiquing society's idea of normal and refusing to conform to its standards. Shown to unconditionally love and accept each other despite their creepy interests, they provide bold commentary on the typical family, something especially seen at the time they first appeared.

Their subversion of tropes was part of why the sitcom, and the entire concept of the Addams Family, was revolutionary during the time of its release. In the 1960s, the average sitcom would have had a picket fence view of the suburban family.

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The Addams Family appealed to people due to its social messaging on the idealized family, as well as its well-defined aesthetic, helping it to stand out in a sea of conventional sitcoms.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **THE ART OF COSTUME**

To this day, the Addams Family continues to captivate the minds of popular culture due to its distinct image and timeless themes. When thinking of the Addams Family, people can easily picture the dark aesthetics, character designs and personality and campy sense of humor, demonstrating how this group of characters has become a recognizable unit. The enduring theme of familial love with a dark edge has retained its appeal, fostering love for the Addams Family for generations to come.

Halloween Costume Ideas

BY NEHA VASANTHAN '28

The sun rises later and sets earlier, the sweater weather is beginning, and Sacramento is uncommonly cloudy. Pumpkin spice lattes are out at Starbucks, fall rom-coms and devastating horrors are on our TVs, and there's only one problem: Halloween costumes.

A creative costume is a must, but it's already October, and there are zero creative ideas flowing in. Pinterest has been completely combed through repeatedly, and yet, the perfect costume has evaded your sight. Still, there's one last place to look for creative Halloween costumes: the 2025 Mandolin October Edition.

Need a solo costume? Get a headband covered in fake snakes and a Medusa costume is practically ready to go.

Sticking with the Greek Mythology theme, goddesses like Aphrodite and Athena are stunning, easy to recreate, and present the perfect opportunity to show off any new jewelry. For the more artistic readers of this article, paint Van Gogh's *Starry Night* pattern on with face paint, and voila – the personification of *Starry Night* has entered the villa. Bonus points if you turn it into a couple's costume, and bring along a Van Gogh – bandaged ear included, of course.

Speaking of couples costumes, Luke and Lorelai from the popular TV show *Gilmore Girls* is an absolute show-stopper. Lorelai's iconic pink tie-dye shirt and jeans shorts from the pilot episode, paired with Luke's Diner merch and his flannel, is an instantly recognizable costume. *Gnomeo and Juliet*, a *Romeo and Juliet* spin-off movie, stars the gnome versions of Romeo and Juliet.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF **PINTEREST**

Gnomeo and Juliet costumes may stump some people, but they win the hearts of all those who understand the reference. Zendaya and Tom Holland's outfits from their lip-sync battle are incredibly ornate, and hilarious. Lastly, Nick Wilde and Judy Hopps from the animated film *Zootopia* are an adorable source of inspiration for a couples costume that can double as a duo idea!



PHOTO COURTESY OF **PINTEREST**

Duo costumes can be cute, funny, or incredibly cool. The pair from *Dumb and Dumber*, in their ridiculous orange and blue suits, is hysterical. Right up there with them are Harry and Marv from *Home Alone*, in full feather-covered and iron-imprinted glory. Perhaps topping both is the fake rap duo played by Timothée Chalamet and Pete Davidson on *Saturday Night Live*. Elmo and the Cookie Monster from *Sesame Street*, Curious George and the man in the yellow hat from *Curious George*, and Chris and Martin from *Wild Kratts* are all adorable. Have more friends to dress up with? Not a problem.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **PINTEREST**

Group costumes are fun and memorable. *Men In Black* (but women of course), founding fathers (with women instead), and Oompa Loompas (as girls), are nifty and charming. One can never go wrong with *The Mario Bros* gang, *The Wizard of Oz* troupe, Disney princesses, *Scooby Doo* and *Mystery Inc.*, and the murder suspects from the board game and movie *Clue*.

This Halloween, there is no need to stress over a last minute Halloween costume, because the most killer ideas are right here.

Horror Movie Season

BY KIERNAN O'CONNOR '29

It's that time of year again, and I'm not talking about Uggs and an iced pumpkin cream chai from Starbucks, I'm talking about horror movies. Becoming popular around the 1920s and 1930s, they've become an iconic form of entertainment. Some of the first being the most famous as for Nosferatu, Dracula and Frankenstein. Ranging from film locations between California to the Czech Republic, much like modern day films.

When you think of horror you probably think of blood and knives, but there's a style for everyone, whether you like slashers or psychological thrillers.

They are found to be so beloved due to the safe way to experience adrenaline and fear. I mean, no one actually wants to be chased down by a masked killer right?

In comparison, psychological horror gets the gears in your brain turning. Developing popularity in the 1960s, particularly after Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho. It was a way to shift from external monsters like vampires and zombies to internal ones. Psychological horror became popular because it taps into our deepest anxieties and allows viewers to confront them safely. Some other fan favorites include the Heretic, the Others and Woman in the Yard.

Whatever your pick, or even if you don't like horror at all, you can't deny it's the perfect way to get into the spooky season.

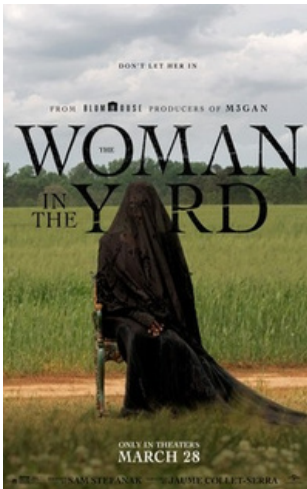


PHOTO COURTESY OF GOOGLE

Slashers are all about the gore, with less focus on a deep plot. Slashers took off in the late 1970s, like John Carpenter's Halloween. Some other examples of famous slasher franchises include Scream and Friday the 13th.

All these movies are classics that follow the same plotline: a group of teens is killed off one by one at the hands of a masked killer.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GOOGLE

Book Review

BY ADA FRUIN '27

Have you ever wondered what your life would be like if you had made one decision differently? Would you try to change your choice if you could? In response to these questions, Blake Crouch's 2016 novel, *Dark Matter*, explores the consequences of actions on the direction of our lives and the ways that regret and speculation can be torturous.

Jason Dessen is just a physics professor. Every day he goes to work, teaches his students and comes home to his Chicago brownstone, his wife and his son. This may not have been the life he envisioned, but he would not change a thing.

One night, Dessen goes out to celebrate his long-time friend Ryan Holder's award, but he never makes it home. He is abducted by a masked man, knocked unconscious and then woken up in a strange room full of people he has never met. They know his name, but nothing about his job or his family. In fact, Jason discovers that in this world he never married his wife, he does not work at the university and his son was never born.

Jason is determined to make it back to his family; he will do anything he can to figure out what is going on and fix it. But throughout the novel, we see him become discouraged that he will never return to his life as he knew it. However, with the help of his unlikely companion, a therapist named Amanda, Jason attempts to uncover the truth about what is occurring. Jason also compares his life to Ryan's multiple times, discovering regrets he did not know he had and setting the stage for the message of how choices change the course of our lives.



PHOTO COURTESY OF [goodreads](#)

Dark Matter is a science fiction thriller, but you do not need extensive knowledge of physics to enjoy reading it. While the novel does introduce the reader to some impressive topics and theories, it does so in a manner that allows the reader to process the information and use it to understand the story.

The novel also elicits a sense of camaraderie among the characters. I often found myself yelling and rooting for them loudly in my head.

con't

While you could sometimes see where the story was headed, it was very thrilling and there were still some unexpected twists. Crouch does an incredible job of creating vivid landscapes; one can visualize themselves in each scene, inciting feelings of joy, disgust, fear and shock.

Dark Matter encapsulates the feeling of wondering about what might have been and if your life would have been better if you had made a different choice. The novel highlights how we are not only what we have done, but what we chose not to do: "We're more than the sum total of our choices, that all the paths we might have taken factor somehow into the math of our identity" (Blake Crouch, *Dark Matter*).

Dark Matter is worth the read, and if you are not familiar with science fiction, it is a great introduction into the literary genre. Readers will be transported into a world of quantum physics without ever leaving their couch. The prose is easy to read with quotes that are surprisingly profound for the laid-back voice of the narrator. It has also recently gained popularity as it was adapted into a TV show on AppleTV. While the first season covers the story of the book, the TV show has been renewed for a second season, which means the story will continue beyond what occurred in the novel.

The book's dedication reads "For anyone who has wondered what their life might look like at the end of the road not taken" (Crouch). If this sounds like you, you should explore the world that Crouch creates.

Stepping Into the Season: A Look at the First Weeks of *Dancing With the Stars*

BY BRYNN BAKER '28

As summer comes to an end, our long nights, swimsuits and 100 degree days are beginning to find a place in the back of our minds until next year. Even an iconic memory of the summer of 2025 Love Island season seven fades away as the leaves start to change color. While we don't have the same comfort until next summer that we will see new bombshells or a messy challenge on our screens each night at six o'clock, this fall brings a new show for viewers who enjoy watching contestants compete and voting on their favorites.

If you love sparkly dresses, lively music, or even an entertaining tango, *Dancing with the Stars* is the show for you!

Season 34, streaming on Disney Plus, features beloved celebrities like Alix Earle, Jordan Chiles, Whitiety Leavitt and Jen Affleck.

The premiere kicked off with the theme of "Personal Anthems" as the celebrities and their partners were introduced. Sadly, the beloved judge, Carrie Ann Inaba, was absent this episode due to illness, but she returned later in the show. There were no eliminations this episode but the scores were carried over to Week Two's theme of "One Hit Wonders." This episode caused a double elimination leading to Baron Davis and Corey Feldman to leave the show.

con't

Charli D'Amelio, winner of season thirty one, made a guest appearance on Week Three's TikTok Night. Songs like "Million Dollar Baby," "Apple," and "Anxiety" were performed, which led duos Jordan Chile and Ezra Sosa and Whitney Lavitt and Mark Ballas to tie for the top spot with 24/30 points. Fifth Harmony singer Lauren Jauregui and her partner Brandon Armstrong were sent home. When asked about how she felt after being eliminated, Jauregui gave a response as blunt as a dance routine with no music. Later, she took to social media saying she had been crying and felt that she had more to give if she had been able to continue.

If you thought *Dancing With Stars* had drama last week, just wait until Week Four's Disney Night. The contestants eliminated were Hilaria Baldwin and Gleb Savchenko. They faced criticism because of the audience's uproar about Baldwin's history as a ballroom dancer, causing them to receive insufficient votes.

Week Five's "Dedication Night" was an especially emotional evening, with each celebrity performing a special dance to honor someone in their life. Dylan Effron and Daniella Karagach paid tribute to his younger sister with a number set to "Rewrite the Stars," sung by his brother, Zach. The pair earned the first four nines of the season for a total score of 36 out of 40. As a special surprise, no one was eliminated this week.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **THE PALM BEACH POST**

In Week Six, the contestants were truly dancing through life during "Wicked Night," a theme filled with songs from the Broadway musical – and now movie – *Wicked*. Leavitt and Ballas earned the first perfect 10s of the season with their quickstep to "Popular." Their 39/40 score was later matched by Chiles and Sosa. The fun came to an end, however, when Rylee Arnolds and Pentatonix singer Scott Hoying were sent home.

Week Seven's "Halloween Night" brought out the cast's eerie side as each pair performed a haunting routine perfectly suited for the spooky occasion. Unfortunately, Elaine Hendrix sustained an injury during morning rehearsals and was taken to the hospital, leaving her and partner Alan Bersten's to be judged based on a video of their last full rehearsal. After a few days of rest, she's expected to return later this week. Leavitt and Ballas emerged victorious in the night's special dance marathon, earning an additional five points toward their overall score. As the evening came to a close, Jen Affleck and Jan Ravník's season ended with a one-way ticket to the Halloween graveyard.

Week Eight's theme will be "Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Night" and will most definitely bring more drama and high energy dances to the table. So Troubies, gather your best criticism and dance IQ, and get ready to tune into Week Eight of *Dancing with the Stars*!



PHOTO COURTESY OF **THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER**

Starbucks Pumpkin Muffins

BY VEDA WAHNSIEDLER '29

Since fall is already here you will need this recipe to save room in your wallet for your iced chais. Get ready for this season by the best grab and go goodie for your morning! These muffins have an addicting pumpkin flavor with delectable cream cheese that melts in your mouth. This Starbucks dupe will have you excited for class and ready to show your Troubie spirit!

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp pumpkin pie spice
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 ½ cups pumpkin puree
- 1 egg
- ¼ cup melted butter
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 stick of your favorite cream cheese

Directions:

Prep: Start by preheating the oven to 350 degrees. Spray non-stick cooking spray onto a muffin tin or festive paper liners. Set aside.

Dry Ingredients: Mix the dry ingredients together: flour, granulated sugar, pumpkin pie spice, baking soda, and baking powder.

Wet Ingredients: Now, this next step will make the whole house smell like fresh pumpkins! In a separate bowl, combine pumpkin puree, egg, melted butter, and vanilla extract.



PHOTO COURTESY OF **100k Recipes**

Combine Mixture: Before we put these yummy muffins in the oven, mix together both wet and dry ingredients. Combine with a spatula so the batter develops a smooth texture.

Assembly: Fill each liner ¾ of the way full with the muffin mixture. Then, grab your favorite cream cheese and add one dollop onto the muffin liners. If you're not a cream cheese kind of girl then no worries, this Starbucks dupe will still taste good without it!

Bake: Now time to bake, cook for 15-20 minutes until ready. This recipe yields 12 tasty pumpkin muffins that will make your mornings before school so much better. Look forward to biting into pumpkin covered sweetness that will be making you want more by the end of class.

What is SF's Favorite Candy?

BY VIOLET PANTON '29



A Note From the Editors-In-Chief

Dear Readers,

As the first edition of *The Mandolin* comes to a close, we want to thank you for caring about the stories that shape our community. Every article, photo, and headline in this edition represents the curiosity, creativity, and dedication of our student journalists. We're so excited to serve as *The Mandolin's* Editors-in-Chief this year and to continue the legacy of student-led journalism at St. Francis. Here's to many more editions to come!

With love,

Mercy Collier '26 and Kate Hwang '27

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