

TALLULAH FALLS SCHOOL ON CAMPUS

MAGAZINE

SPRING 2024



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Girls IN SCIENCE

A GROWING NUMBER OF GIRLS ARE PURSUING
STEM CAREER PATHS AT TFS





SCHOOL ON THE SLOPES



On January 22, 2024, the upper school spent a wildly wonderful day on the slopes in Maggie Valley, NC, at the Cataloochee Ski Resort. "Everyone was really enjoying themselves," said senior Luka Kutateladze. "It was one of the best skiing experiences I've had in a while."

The annual ski trip is a favorite tradition among TFS students, and it is often the first experience with snow for many boarding students from countries with warmer climates.





06 Students at TFS Middle School learn digital design from 2006 TFS Alum, Stephanie Witham Dorantes.



08 Here at TFS, we have a growing number of girls excited about science, and pursuing career paths in STEM fields.



28 Students engage in active reading with *A Long Walk to Water*.



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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



LEADERSHIP AT TALLULAH FALLS SCHOOL

I recently visited with the fourth and fifth graders to talk about leadership. I want to spark that interest in our students at an early age to help them be the best they can be.

I shared with them three things that not only define good leadership but also provide a foundation to be successful at TFS and in whatever field they choose to study in college or pursue as a career in the world of work.

First, always do what is right. We want all of our students to develop that way of thinking as a habit.

The second thing is to **help other people.** Every good leader I know goes out of their way to help other people. It is doing the right thing. It improves your self-worth while developing one of your strongest leadership skills.

One final piece of advice I shared with them is that once the objective has been accomplished, **the leader must give full credit to everyone who helped them.** Giving full credit to everyone involved, creates a sense of camaraderie, and people will look forward to helping with future missions or projects.

Throughout this issue of On Campus Magazine, the stories weave together a picture of a unified community building connections and learning from each other. Through this, we sharpen our minds, develop character, and grow as leaders.

We recently celebrated International Week on our campus. Our international students designed different presentations that represented their cultures. As students prepared and worked together for this highly anticipated event, they learned about the qualities and the confidence it takes to work together, to create, and to lead.

Our winter sports season is a perfect example of our students working together as teams, helping and learning from each other and their coaches, and growing as leaders. As a result, several of our teams had great success within the region and at the state level.

These life lessons continue beyond the walls of Tallulah Falls School. When you read stories about our alumni, you will see a reflection of the lessons they learned years ago.

The magazine showcases multiple types of leadership that happen daily on our campus. As you read through this edition, you will see and feel how every story reflects our mission as we continue creating a culture of leadership at Tallulah Falls School that develops character and strong academic preparation.

Larry A. Peewy

PRESIDENT AND HEAD OF SCHOOL

2023 Fall Awards

President and Head of School Larry A. Peevy announced this year's outstanding student, teacher, faculty members, and senior staff member at the fall awards assembly Wednesday, December 13. Congratulations to these individuals for their contributions and commitment to our TFS community.



This year's annual Christmas card design contest winners were also announced during the awards assembly. Junior Raegan Duncan designed the upper school's winning card, and eighth-grader Stella Radford designed the winning card for the middle school. Congratulations to this year's Christmas card design contest winners.



OUTSTANDING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT
KEELY FRANKS

Keely Franks is an extremely well rounded student. She consistently turns in excellent work and gives her time and attention to all academic endeavors. She is a huddle leader for FCA, plays basketball, and is on the yearbook staff. She has participated with the reading bowl team for the last two years and she is involved in choir. Keely is a role model to others in and out of the classroom.



OUTSTANDING UPPER SCHOOL STUDENT
SUSIE SUN

With a heart for others and an unwavering commitment to excellence, Susie is an integral part of the TFS community. A weighted GPA of 4.36 and 10 dual enrollment courses on her transcript showcase her intellectual prowess. She is a driving force in various aspects of the school – varsity cheerleading, varsity tennis, student ambassador, and a founding member of the Secretary of State Student Ambassador program.



OUTSTANDING MIDDLE SCHOOL FACULTY
JO KIMBREL

Jo serves as both a physical education teacher and the middle school athletic director. She is always working for the good of the school. She brings cohesiveness to the middle school athletic program. Her students benefit from her knowledge and leadership as she is always encouraging them to do their best. Her contributions are invaluable. She inspires confidence in faculty, staff and students alike.



OUTSTANDING UPPER SCHOOL FACULTY
LIZ BARACCO

Liz's commitment to learning is not just a profession, it is a passion. Her love for her students radiates in every interaction, and her upbeat personality creates an environment where curiosity and enthusiasm thrive. She maximizes class time and crafts intentional assignments that diversify learning opportunities. She happily shares her expertise and fosters a culture of continuous learning among faculty. She is a phenomenal teacher and community builder.



OUTSTANDING STAFF MEMBER
JON BENSON

Jon creates a healthy and exciting community for boarding students. He takes time to examine the big picture as he wants the boarding experience to be memorable for the students. He takes time to listen and learn from them. He has helped to restructure the TFS nursing program to better meet the needs of all of our students. His 20-plus years of experience are evident in his work with our students.



OUTSTANDING STAFF MEMBER
BRANDI WOOD

Brandi is an indispensable asset to our institution. As director of creative services, she has been instrumental in reshaping the narrative of Tallulah Falls School. She has created cohesive branding and established a visually unified and positive image for the school across various mediums. Her quiet yet effective leadership style, positive attitude, and sense of humor elevate the atmosphere of the work environment.



LIGHT IN THE MOUNTAIN
MICHAEL ROGERS

Michael wears many hats and is called many things, but his official title is director of plant services. He does an outstanding job running his department and always has a positive, can-do attitude regardless of the situation. He leads a team of dedicated staff to make sure we have everything from electricity to transportation. He is a peacekeeper as he provides gifts of peace and comfort to those he serves.

2024 STUDENT-TEACHER ACHIEVEMENT RECOGNITION

Every January, we eagerly anticipate the announcement of the STAR student and STAR teacher at Tallulah Falls School. This year's recipient is senior Jake Wehrstein. Wehrstein will graduate in the top five percent of this year's graduating class.

Upon graduation, Wehrstein will have completed 12 honors-level classes, taken 16 dual enrollment courses, and earned 54 college credit hours - just four hours short of junior standing. He currently has a 4.65 GPA. Wehrstein is a member of the National Honor Society and a TFS Ambassador.

Outside of the classroom, Jake dedicates the majority of his time to his passion for soccer. He is a key player for the Lanier Soccer Association during the off-season and a valuable member of the TFS varsity soccer program. Since 2020, he has served as a US Soccer Referee, demonstrating his skills as a player and his commitment to the sport in various roles.

In addition, Jake is actively involved in serving the community. He has volunteered for Circle of Hope, and he played an integral role in organizing a shoe drive for Get Real Ministries.

As part of the honor, Wehrstein recognized upper school history teacher and soccer coach Jeremy Stille as STAR teacher. Stille played a significant role in his academic and personal development.

"Mr. Stille is one of the most perceptive and intelligent people I've ever known," said Wehrstein. "He helped me adopt a more nuanced worldview and instilled a passion for learning inside of me that was not there before. His dedication to teaching has inspired me, along with many other students, to be the best versions of ourselves."

It has been a joy for Stille to observe and participate in Wehrstein's growth as a student and young man during his time at TFS. "Jake grew into his voice and interpretation and analysis of history. He is a quiet student, but that makes his comments all the more well thought out and impactful," said Stille. "The two traits that allow Jake to stand out amongst his peers are his tranquil demeanor and his ability to accept constructive criticism and turn it into actionable improvement goals."

The Student-Teacher Achievement Recognition (STAR) program honors Georgia's highest-achieving high school seniors and the teachers who have been most instrumental in their academic development, according to the PAGE (Professional Association of Georgia Educators) Foundation. Wehrstein's SAT score of 1430 qualified him for STAR student at TFS; however, he tested again on a later date and scored 1530!



PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS

TFS presidential scholars are students who maintain a 4.0 GPA, have no major discipline issues, and have no more than 15 demerits. Presidential scholars are invited to an off-campus dinner each semester to celebrate their achievements. On Wednesday, January 10, upper school students who made the presidential scholar list for the fall semester dined, bowled, ate ice cream, and enjoyed the time together at Clarkesville Lanes. "The food was really nice, and it was fun to relax and enjoy friends and friendly competition," said senior Caden Walker. "It is nice to be recognized for our hard work."



MERIT MATTERS: CELEBRATING CHARACTER IN STUDENTS



Part of the TFS mission is to help our students develop positive character traits. The goal is to prepare leaders with good character who can make decisions without thinking about them. The Merit System is designed to incentivize and celebrate exemplary conduct and contributions within our student community. This system fosters positive behavior, encourages acts of kindness, and nurtures a culture of service. Through a structured point-based approach, students accrue merits for demonstrating qualities such as respect, responsibility, empathy, and active participation in both academic and extracurricular activities. Acts of service, leadership, and mentorship are also recognized and rewarded, creating an environment where individuals are motivated to uphold the highest standards of conduct consistently.

Dean of Students Jimmy Franklin gives merit points to juniors Timothy Beck and TJ Cox, as they wipe down the tables and push in all the chairs at the end of the third lunch every day. "It is not their job, they have not been asked to do it," Franklin said. "They do it voluntarily." Cox and Beck feel like it is the least they can do to help out the kitchen staff, who serve over 500 meals a day. "We just like to help out the lunch staff since they are some of the most hardworking people on campus," said Cox.

The top 10% of students on the merit list are awarded a special trip. Merit trips occur once a semester based on the previous semester's merits.

2024 SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECTS

The Capstone Project is a Tallulah Falls School milestone that students begin during their junior year. Students research an issue of interest to them and complete a research paper on the topic before presenting it to a panel of judges made up of members from the local community and TFS faculty and staff. The speech is the culminating activity of their year-long project. Students grow as thinkers, researchers, writers, organizers, and presenters through this process.

Brenda Boonstra, director of undergraduate admissions at Piedmont University, judged several speeches. "I was very impressed with the chosen topics – some tough ones – as well as the research that went into their presentations," said Boonstra. "Each student seemed very well prepared and thoroughly interested in what they were presenting."

Students opened with anecdotal introductions, often from personal experiences, to draw the audience into their topic before they shared background information, facts, statistics, and details. They included opposing viewpoints and defended their position. At the end of their presentation, the judges asked questions, often leading to conversations about the topics the students have become passionate about over the year.

SAMPLE OF 2024 SENIOR CAPSTONE PRESENTATIONS

JIAHAO (JASON) YANG	ELIMINATING FOOD WASTE IN SCHOOLS
DAVID YATES	PROTECTING THE RIGHTS & WORK OF DESIGNERS FROM THEFT
AIDAN WOODSIDE	UNFAIR HEALTHCARE FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR
CADEN WALKER	SPORTS OPPORTUNITIES TO YOUTH IN IMPOVERISHED COUNTRIES
MILOS VUJOVIC	EUROPEAN ENERGY CRISIS
SUSIE SUN	PROS & CONS OF STUDYING ABROAD
POLA PILICKA	HOW THE FITNESS INDUSTRY CREATES UNACHIEVABLE BEAUTY STANDARDS
PIPER ALLEN	SENSATIONALIZING DOMESTIC ABUSE AMONG CELEBRITIES & ITS EFFECTS
KYNDAL ANDERSON	FINDING WAYS TO HELP PEOPLE WITH ADHD TO FIND SUCCESS
AUSTIN BALL	MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES FOR ATHLETES
ARIEL KELSICK	PINK TAX
ADDY MCCOY	DRUG ADDICTS: INCARCERATION OR REHABILITATION?
JOSEPH MCGAHEE	THE NEED FOR BETTER RECOGNITION OF US VETERANS
HENRY RICKMAN	HOW MISINFORMATION PRESENTED AS TRUTH LEADS TO NEGATIVE EFFECTS
IVA RISTIC	GENDER INEQUALITY IN ATHLETICS
MANDA MANDIC	HOW DOES MICROBIOME IN OUR GUT CONTROL US?
CARTER MILLER	THE INEQUITIES EXPERIENCED BY THE IMPOVERISHED
ELLIA TANENBAUM	GLOBAL WARMING CAUSED BY THE MEAT INDUSTRY
MOLLY MITCHELL	IMMIGRATION LAWS & EXCEPTIONS
BLAIR MOORE	STOPPING THE STIGMA BEHIND PSYCH WARDS





Nnamdi Ezunu

How Coaches are Pushing the Wrong Lessons with Young Athletes

Senior Nnamdi Ezunu's topic focused on educating athletes and coaches on over-training, recovery, and workload management. "I was interested in this topic because of my background in athletics and my interest in the medical field," said Ezunu. "Being an athlete made me want to make sure I checked off every single box to make sure I was the best athlete I could be, but then I realized how it helped my overall quality of life." Ezunu wants athletes to know the importance of sleep, hygiene, nutrition, and stress management, and the capstone helped him do that.



Emma Burke

Eradicating Truck Driver Shortage Issues

Senior Emma Burke saw an improvement in her writing, speaking, and organizational skills. "It wasn't easy, but it will help me so much," said Burke. "When I get to college and have to write – this prepared me for that. I am ready." Burke's presentation focused on the lack of experienced truck drivers and regulations that make it less appealing to enter the industry. "I was interested in this because my dad owns a trucking business, and I know that he experiences truck driver shortage issues," said Burke.



Josiah Turney

The Effects of Social Media on Behavior/Discipline Problems

Unrestricted internet access and its effects on youth is a controversial topic, but senior Josiah Turney was eager to explore it nonetheless. "Parents don't realize how easy it is," said Turney. "They need to be educated and take action. Surveys indicate that children are exposed to inappropriate content even when doing homework." Turney addressed the effects it has on mental issues, development, desensitization, addictions, and disorders. Turney felt like he matured through the project. "I found a way to look at a topic from a different perspective," he said. "I stood from a parent's perspective. I learned to see the world through a different lens."



Girls IN SCIENCE

Senior Emilee Jones peers through a microscope during a lab in Liz Barraco's college biology class. She observes different shapes of bacteria the class grew after swabbing surfaces around the school. She is fascinated by what she sees.

"I want to study diseases," said Jones. "Living through COVID was a good first-hand experience. We were literally watching scientists figure out the disease and then develop the vaccine – that was inspiring." Emilee will attend the Georgia Institute of Technology in the fall. She plans to pursue a biology degree and a biochemistry minor before continuing her future studies in oncology. "My favorite science class is college biology because I love studying about life and the different ways humans interact with nature and the organisms that we can't see but are all around us and inside of us," said Jones.

With state-of-the-art equipment, plentiful resources, and connections, girls at TFS are finding their future in science. Jones is only one of multiple girls passionately pursuing the sciences. "We offer a variety of competitive, high-level science classes," said science teacher Liz Barraco. "It isn't just memorization, it is application. Students are setting up their own experiments, testing hypotheses, and coming up with their own conclusions."

Senior Katarina Foskey is currently taking three science classes. "I find science interesting

because it is the study of everything we interact with daily, and it is factual," said Foskey. "I like things that make sense, and I like making sense of things." She is fascinated by animals and how they adapt to their environments, and she also loves studying physics – things in motion. Foskey plans to pursue the sciences

The underrepresentation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) continues to persist. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in 2023, women make up only 28% of the STEM workforce.

as she continues her education. "Science is creative problem solving," said Barraco. "Women are incredible problem solvers. They are channeling their problem-solving into scientific thinking."

When senior Dani Prince was ten years old, she ran across an article in National Geographic about how the brain can be connected to prosthetics. "I want to go into the medical field to help people," said Prince. "I want to specialize in prosthetics. I'm really drawn to taking something like a robot and using it to improve someone's daily life." Prince will attend the Georgia Institute of Technology in the fall. She will pursue an undergraduate degree and then further degrees in biomedical engineering.

Barraco sees that when women are encouraged to focus on what interests them, it is often science, which is all about questions and discovery.

Junior Marina Dumas has always found science interesting. During her high school years, she is looking to see what interests her the most. Last summer, she interned at an Adirondack Fishery Research Program and Cornell University field station in upstate New York. Currently, she is exploring plants by preparing to compete in the forestry event in the Science Olympiad. This summer, she plans to intern or volunteer in the medical field.

Dumas is inspired by chemistry teacher Beth Huebner. "I love the way she teaches," said Dumas. "I want to be able to emulate her and be able to talk about anything related to chemistry and be an expert on it."

"We have incredibly passionate science teachers," said Barraco. "They are genuinely interested in science. We are scientists who educate."

Senior Jenna Chesser has enjoyed every biology class she has taken at TFS. "The teachers have challenged us to think deeper and to understand where we come from," said Chesser. She is currently taking honors human anatomy with Ashley Patterson and college biology with Barraco. Chesser plans to study exercise science at Anderson University in the



Megan

Katarina

Jenna



fall. "I've had a lot of positive results with my own physical therapist," said Chesser. "And I've been able to shadow and volunteer at clinics to get an idea of what that career path looks like." She will seek a career in physical therapy or as a physician's assistant.

For girls at TFS, there are unlimited possibilities in the field of science. In every science class on campus, girls are preparing themselves and being prepared.

Senior Jane Ibemere is obsessed with genetics. "I used to do Punnett squares for fun in my dorm room," said Ibemere. "I think it is so interesting how we inherit traits or how babies

in the womb can take in so much information about their mom, just through being there and living life through her." Ibemere plans to study biomedical engineering and genetic engineering in college.

Even as girls begin high school, they are already preparing to pursue science as a future career path. Freshman Megan Prince plans to pursue a career in STEM. "I just love all sciences. I've always enjoyed learning about the different aspects of science, like the different elements of macromolecules," said Prince. Freshman Agnes Hogan is fascinated by bones. "I think the composition of bones and how they work in the body is very

interesting," said Hogan. She sees herself working at a museum one day – perhaps with fossils. If it has to do with science, Hogan and Prince are ready to dig in and learn more. The two will compete with Dumas in the forestry competition at the Science Olympiad.

Science teacher Beth Huebner believes that when a student likes something that is challenging to them -- that will connect them to science. "I want my students to know that they do not have to shy away from challenging topics, and I encourage them to make the vocabulary their own and go with it. I know that my students are bright and capable and I want them to know that too."



Marina

Dani

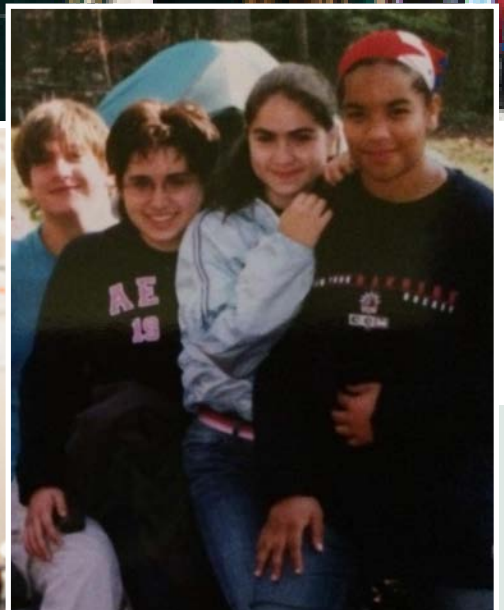
Jane

Emilee

Agnes

STEPHANIE WITHAM DORANTES

CLASS OF 2006



As an eighth grader, Stephanie Witham Dorantes ('06) read the Harry Potter series at her home in Pachuca, Mexico. The boarding life at Hogwarts intrigued her. At the same time, she was eager to escape constant bullying at school. She knew about North Georgia from visits to her grandmother. "I went into my dad's office, logged in on his computer, and searched for boarding schools in North Georgia," said Dorantes. She emailed Rabun Gap and TFS. Both sent her information on a VHS recorder. "One of the kids in the video at TFS said that everyone had at least one true friend, so I wanted to come," she said. In the fall of 2002, Dorantes began her freshman year at TFS.

"My favorite year was my first year because I was changing so much. I broke out of my shell," said Dorantes. "I made really good friends with people from all over the world. We were like a huge family, I didn't even know what grade people were in." Teachers, dorm counselors, and coaches poured into her life.

"Coach Neal and Coach Campbell helped me a lot," she said. "I was not a sporty girl, but when I got to TFS, I got into sports – I ran cross country."

Life in the dorms was an adventure for Dorantes. "There were a lot of us from different cultures, but it was like living with a bunch of siblings." She loved going on weekend trips, hiking, and camping. "We were in charge of our own trips. We had to organize them," she said. "We learned responsibility, and we found ownership."

After graduation, Dorantes attended SCAD for one year before completing the Disney College Program. From there, she attended the Universidad La Salle Pachuca in Mexico, where she received a degree in graphic design. She taught in several capacities before returning to TFS to teach graphic design, yearbook, technology, digital arts, and media production.

"My objective with all of my classes is that they develop a basic understanding of technology, design, and composition," said Dorantes. Students learn about coding and managing a computer in fifth grade – by the eighth grade, they are proficient in Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop and are completing projects like t-shirt design, album covers, stop-motion animation films, and the middle school yearbook.

Dorantes gives helpful advice and direction to students on their projects. Recently, she helped seventh grader Quinlan Flanders create a stop-motion animation film. "I like learning how to animate the frames, making the backgrounds, and bringing my little characters to life," said Flanders.

For Dorantes, her time at TFS helped her to build character and to become the best version of herself, and now, she is doing the same for her students every day.

El Amor AT TALLULAH



When Spanish teacher Matthew Crotta traveled to Puebla, Mexico, for a semester teaching abroad, one of his students decided that Matthew needed to meet his sister. "My brother is Cupid in this story," said Veronica Crotta. When Matthew and Veronica finally met, they only had two weeks to get to know each other before Matthew returned to the States. "We didn't see each other for over a year, but we kept in touch through email," Veronica said. In 2004, they were married. "I saved all the emails and gave them to Matthew as a wedding gift," she said.

They stayed in Mexico for Veronica to finish college before returning to the United States. "When we moved here, I wasn't familiar with the culture or the traditions. I only knew some English," said Veronica. "I just had to learn it."

Fast forward 20 years. Matthew and Veronica teach Spanish next door to

each other here at TFS. When Matthew needs help with pronunciation, he pops into Veronica's room for clarification, and Matthew helps Veronica with curriculum ideas. "We are constantly talking about Mexico in class," said Matthew. "We celebrate and teach Mexican history and holidays, and talk about the relationship and history between the United States and Mexico," said Matthew, "I also talk about the vast diversity in the country to break down negative stereotypes."

In addition, the Crottas like to share Mexican music and food with the students to give them a taste of the culture.

TFS is not just a place where the Crottas work, their four children attend or graduated from here. "I love the environment and the culture — it is a friendly culture," said Veronica. "I love the camaraderie between teachers and students. There is such a welcoming environment here."

INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHTS

Sophomores Valentina Arias Camargo and Lia Sanjur Santos are from Panama City, Panama. As first-year boarders at TFS, they have learned a lot about independence and respecting others. "I have to be aware of my health and chores, and even keep track of my food, travel and documents," said Arias Camargo. "In the dorms, we come from so many different countries and cultures. We have to learn about each other and respect each other," they said.



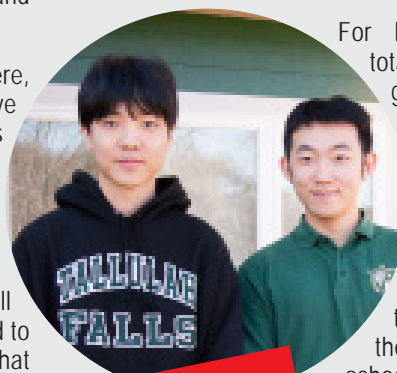
Both are flourishing in the classroom. "Here, learning is interactive," they said. "We have activities to understand how our studies relate to real life. What we learn has a reason and we are learning faster."

Arias Camargo is on the swim team and Sanjur Santos plays basketball. "There are such nice facilities and equipment. All of this has helped me to be motivated and to practice," said Arias Camargo. "I have what I need to become better." The girls feel like the coaches are really watching and helping them improve. "We can concentrate on our goals here," they said. "All the coaches and teachers are helping us pursue the same goals."

Senior Jiahao (Jason) Yang is from Xian, China. "It is right in the middle of China. The city is not a national city. I don't see international people there," said Yang. "Here, I have learned a lot about different cultures. It has given me an international perspective of the world, which I think will help me do better in my future."

Yang has excelled at TFS in academics and in his personal growth. "I have learned a lot about independence and built genuine friendships," he said.

Yang has made a life long friend with Bohan (Jason) Dong who is also from China.



For Dong, TFS has been a totally new experience. "I get to meet new friends in different classes," said Dong. "I've become much more proficient in English through my studies over the last two years."

Yang and Dong are able to help each other with their studies when they are at school, and when school is on break, they enjoy traveling together.

WE ARE TALLULAH

With 88 international students representing 28 countries here at TFS, it is always exciting to celebrate our students from around the world as they share their cultures and traditions with the student body during International Week.

As part of the week's celebration, food services showcased dishes from our international students' homelands. Students sampled recipes from Serbia, Panama, Vietnam, Hungary, and Spain.

At the culmination of the week, several of our international students gave a spectacular performance showcasing music, dancing, and other aspects of their cultures. The show began with the traditional flag processional before hosts and masters of ceremonies Lily Desta representing Ethiopia, Lucía Luceno García representing Spain, Luka Kutateladze representing Georgia, and Ellia Tanenbaum representing Costa Rica welcomed the audience to the show. They kept the crowd entertained with their friendly banter and enthusiastic introductions for each group's performance.

"It was fun to share our cultures, especially with the little kids," said Luceno García. "It was a proud moment for me as I watched how my international friends all chose to represent themselves." The hosts enjoyed engaging the audience. "We wanted to include the crowd into the show," said Tanenbaum. "It was fun to see the audience get involved."

The audience joined in with the lively dancing, singing, and clapping to the rhythm of the unique and entertaining music from all over the world.

Upper school counselor Rainen Cantrell organized the week's events. "I learned so much about where our international students are from - their cultures, traditions, foods, and pride for their country. They even used family heirlooms as part of their presentations," said Cantrell. "This week showed the depth of what our international students are bringing to the TFS community."

Students also attended presentations on South Africa, China, Mexico, and international travel and career opportunities.

"The celebration of our diversity and cultural differences gives TFS students a window into the wider world as they become more engaged as global citizens striving to make a difference in the world around them," said Cantrell.



Masters of Ceremonies

Lily Desta, Ethiopia
Lucía Luceño García, Spain
Luka Kutateladze, Georgia
Ellia Tanenbaum, Costa Rica



United States Drama

CJ Augustine, Austin Ball, Justin Graham, Anna Grant, Maddie LeBlanc, Addy McCoy, Sam Ketch, Molly Mitchell, Brit Shaw, Jake Wehrstein, Andrew Whittle



Danny An and Angelina Kim,
South Korea



Mexico Vocal Performance
Fidel Ayala Vasquez



China Vocal/Dance Performance
Le Ngoc, Han Dinh and Kexin Ma



Luka Kutateladze, Georgia



Afro-Caribbean Dance Performance

Tahj Charlton, Lily Desta, Gabby Heard, Nnamdi Ezunu, Jace Ibemere, Christian Lloyd, Joliet Okoronkwo, Aidan Woodside, Daniel Vigille-Garnet

Other performances included:

China Piano Performance
Qianfeng Xu

Mexico/Cuba Dance Performance
Lily Turpin and Fidel Ayala Vasquez

Asia K-Pop Dance Mashup
Le Ngog, Han Dinh, Angelina Kim, Kexin Ma, Bohan Dong, Sihheng Sun



Spain Alma Española Dance Performance
Alvaro García Breton, Carla Guil, Javier Bachiller Mateo

Xiao (Tyler) Xin

CLASS OF 2014



After a family friend told Xiao (Tyler) Xin about Tallulah Falls School, he and his family followed through with some internet research. Xin decided to travel from Shanghai, China to Georgia to attend TFS. "It was my first international experience," he said. "It was quite shocking – so different. People were super nice. The food was delicious. It took some time to get used to the accent."

When Xin arrived at TFS as a boarding student, he had traveled across the world, but it didn't feel like that to him. He didn't feel distant or isolated in the dorms. "People worked to make me feel at home," Xin said. "The counselors were great. When I had things concerning me, I knew who to talk to. We played basketball together. They were good friends, but they also followed discipline to ensure we were on a good track."

Xin believes that TFS provided him with a strong academic program. "We had a variety of choices for things we were interested in and competitive classes that showcased our readiness for college," he said. "As an international student, learning English, especially writing, was a huge plus."

Xin explained that all of his classes required a lot of writing nearly every day. He learned how to write formally and express his thoughts and words carefully. "This helped me to tackle college," he said. "I always feel comfortable expressing my words well, especially as an engineer. Being able to be a good writer is a huge plus. I appreciate that I learned how to do the writing right."

Xin also excelled in math during his time at TFS. "I had the honor to enjoy many classes with Mrs. Harris," said Xin. "She is one of the greatest educators I have ever met." In addition, Harris was the Math Club Sponsor and Xin, president of Math Club.

After graduating from TFS in 2014, Xin attended the Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Indiana. He graduated with a degree in computer science in 2018. "I worked for Google right after college for a few years as a software engineer," said Xin. "I started working for Meta in June of 2022." He works on the system that delivers ads on social networks like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc. "We have to make sure that the commercial content is beneficial to the viewer and the advertiser," he said. Currently, he is working with a team to deliver content in an environmentally friendly way to reduce their carbon footprint.

Xin has a word of encouragement for students at TFS. "Don't give up. Keep doing your work," he said. "TFS is a magical place. It is not something you can just experience anywhere. Seize the moment."





Gabe Iluma
CLASS OF 2020



When Gabriel Iluma ('20) arrived in Kelli Bly's English class, he brought along images of gnomes and hid them around her classroom. "I found them behind posters on the wall, in books, in the filing cabinets, and even in the candy jar on my desk," said Bly. "He graduated nearly four years ago, and I occasionally find one. As a student, he was intense, but he also had a playfulness about him."

Iluma was a boarding student from Abuja, Nigeria, who spent four years at TFS. "I got to know great people I am still friends with," he said. "People I met at TFS are my best friends now."

For Iluma, the people were the best part of TFS. "Ms. Bly is an incredible person; she was the first person to recognize the writing ability in me," said Iluma. "Even though people had higher grades in the class, she gave me the award for best English student, along with a card. In it, she reminded me to work through my disappointment and not give up despite the hardships I've faced. That was the first time I felt seen for my ability to impact people through my writing, and the feeling has never left me. I still have the card."

Iluma is a senior at Stanford University, completing a double major in product design and computer science. "I have a deep fascination with the design process and have brought that to my product management and software engineering work experiences at companies like Google, Autodesk, and Seesaw," said Iluma.

He serves as software development firm Autodesk's Fusion 360 ambassador for SU. In this role, Iluma organized and moderated a fireside chat between Autodesk's CEO Andrew Anagnost and CMO Dara Tressder. "I'm truly honored to be able to organize such experiences for my peers, and I'm looking forward to the next one," Iluma said. After graduation, he will join Autodesk as a full-time product manager.

Iluma's dream is to see international businesses flourish in the African market. He is passionate about working with data-driven businesses as they approach new and exciting territory. "I want to hone in on my design expertise with machinery and build my ability to communicate with experts," said Iluma. In January 2023, he launched Iluma Consulting to help international companies venture into Africa. "I want to bring impact to Nigeria – bring some economic stability and jobs," he said. "I've witnessed people struggling their whole lives, and things are only getting worse."

But this is not the only way that Iluma is impacting his world.

Iluma is working on several film projects, directing, writing, and producing historical pieces, particularly African stories that have not been told before. As part of a campaign to direct a feature film on Nigeria's legendary political activist and Afrobeats pioneer Fela Kuti, Iluma directed ZOMBIE!

a short film approximating the first scene of the feature. The film won an Independent Short Award, moving Iluma closer to his dream of making the full film. "Everything is in place to make it happen – the script is done, I know who to cast, I know how and where to film it. I just need the opportunity," said Iluma.

Iluma also served as director, writer, and producer for OUI – a documentary on the Cameroon Migrant Crisis distributed by Journeyman Pictures. The film explores the horrors of the Cameroonian civil war and juxtaposes them with the hopeful visions of the future of the interviewed Cameroonian refugees living in Nigeria. "The film touches on so much of who I am. It's one of the best things I've ever made," said Iluma. "And these are only a few of several projects. I want to redefine what African cinema means."

Bly continues to encourage Iluma. "Any scripts I write, I let her read them because I trust her so much," he said. Bly saw Iluma's gift for understanding literature and his beautiful writing. "I am especially touched that he has trusted me and valued my opinion as he has shared with me some of the impressive scripts he has written for the film projects he has managed over the past few years," said Bly.

"She'll always be the first person I send my scripts to because I know she will read every line," said Iluma. "It is rare to find people so supportive. I will always hold on to that."



TALLULAH₁₂

MANNERS • RESPECT • COMMON COURTESY



Lower and middle school students piled into the bleachers on a blustery winter morning for their regular Wednesday assembly. No one looked particularly focused, but that soon changed.

At each assembly, the group works on developing strong character and finding ways to strengthen their core values – the Tallulah 12. Today, the topic was accountability.

Each house provided fifteen players for the Marble Accountability Roll. The goal: get a marble from point A to point B by working together using 12-inch lengths of PVC pipe without dropping the marble – until it lands in the bucket a specified distance away. Each person is responsible for their section of the PVC, and the entire group of students needs to be accountable for the final outcome. If the marble falls, the group must start over at the beginning. As each player received their length of PVC pipe, they worked to make sense of their task.

The signal was given, and the roll began. Suddenly, the air was busy. The air heated up. Voices rose. Students tried to prepare and plan. Those in the bleachers became cheerleaders and the players – serious competitors.

The first round was easy. Players were close together and ran the marble to the bucket without a hiccup; however, when directed to spread out, the energy changed again. Plans changed. They started. They failed. They started over. “We didn’t want to let the group down, so we had to focus as much as we could,” said eighth-grader Elsie Sims. “It helped us talk and work through stuff. We had to figure out what worked and what didn’t work.”

The cheerleaders pleaded with them to get to the bucket, while the competitors now moved to communicate more effectively after they dropped the marble over and over. They realized it would take some work. It took stabilization, mobilization, focus, and time.

“The marble roll helped us understand accountability,” said sixth-grader Savannah Pastor. “We had to make sure that everyone knew what to do and always be ready.” Finally, the groups figured out an effective system. One by one, marbles plopped into the bucket as celebratory cheers roared through the room. “It was hard to get to the end,” said sixth-grader Sophia Franklin. “I didn’t think we would be able to get to the bucket, but we did!”



At TFS, we have a strong focus on building character, confidence, and commitment. We promote social connections and leadership opportunities with collaborative projects and friendly competition. The school adopts monthly themes throughout the year that focus on different character aspects we want our students to carry with them into the world. This comes to life through assemblies, mentor meetings, and other activities. Advocating for these principles fosters a strong sense of unity within a community.



After School Done Differently



TFS serves our lower school families with an after-school care program designed for our fourth and fifth graders. The goal of the after-school program is to offer a safe and engaging space for our younger students.

After the students check in and have a snack, they can choose some quiet time to work on homework, read, or play a board game. If they would like to be more physically active, they may choose supervised open playtime.

Free time is followed by daily explorations ranging from fine arts enrichment to physically active ones. The group gets moving on campus by utilizing the climbing wall in the SAC, going on hikes, or engaging in various other sports. Fine arts enrichment includes crafts, STEM projects, and other art projects.

Every Monday, they meet for a book club discussion, and throughout the month, they work on activities and projects related to the themes found in the book. In January, the group read "Iceberg" by Jennifer Neilson. "I like how the main character Hazel believes she can follow her dreams," said fourth-grader Maizee Fleming. "She never gave up."

For their visual arts endeavor, they created a scene as if looking through a ship's porthole with multiple mediums. The group also wrote a short script to create a trailer for the "film" inspired by the book.

Students even created calming jars with their favorite colors. TFS fifth-grader Wrenn Christensen put blue dye in his calming jar because he wanted it to match his lava lamp. Middle school counselor Elizabeth Kyle helped him decide the best way to



add color to the formula. The group was mesmerized by the creations they made during craft time. "The glitter is so shiny, and I like how it spins when you shake it," said Allegra Perry.

The Joy of Piano

Dr. You Ju Lee, professor of piano at Toccoa Falls College, presented a concert to TFS students, faculty, and staff. Lee has won numerous awards and performed recitals in Asia, Europe, and the United States. She is also the artist director of the U.S. Regional Osaka International Music Competition in Atlanta. "We were delighted to have Dr. Lee with us today," said President and Head of School Dr. Larry A. Peevy. "It was a wonderful opportunity for students to experience a true professional artist at work."

Lee's performance with pieces by Chopin, Shubert, and Liszt inspired students, especially our budding musicians. "Classical music talks without words," said senior and pianist Marija Ivanovic. "All the pieces she played had their own story. I felt the communication and connection with her and her music. I was amazed by her skills."



BILLY BURRELL

CLASS OF 1948

Billy Burrell came to Tallulah Falls School as a first grader in 1938. At the time, the lower grades met in different houses. "First grade was in the basement of one house, then we went upstairs to grades two, three, and four," said Burrell. After grade four, he moved across campus to another house. "It housed three grades – fifth, sixth, and seventh, which was my grammar school," Burrell said.

When Burrell was promoted to eighth grade, he went to the main building where he spent his high school years. Classes started early so that the boarding students could work in the afternoon. Burrell was a day student, so he took the bus home at 12:30 each day.

"I loved TFS because it was different from most schools," said Burrell. "We were up there in wide open spaces. They called it the light in the mountains because that is where we were." For Burrell, it was home, and it was community.

"We always celebrated the seasons of the year," said Burrell. "We would have presentations in the auditorium. Different classes would provide a program or a skit, and the ladies from Atlanta who sponsored the school saw that we had a big Christmas time. They would bring up small toys and other gifts for the older students."

Ms. Ida Fitzpatrick was the resident trustee and director of the school during Burrell's years at TFS. He also remembers Ms. Yula Dillard, but he seems to remember Ms. Mary Griggis the most. "She was a large lady - a tall woman," he said. "All she had to do was walk down the aisle, which was enough of a warning to behave."

At the time, students graduated after year 11. There were 21 students in Burrell's graduating class in 1948. That fall, he attended Bob Jones University. It was during his time there that he began preaching. Burrell would hitchhike from Greenville, SC, to Mount Carmel Baptist Church in Demorest to preach on the weekends.

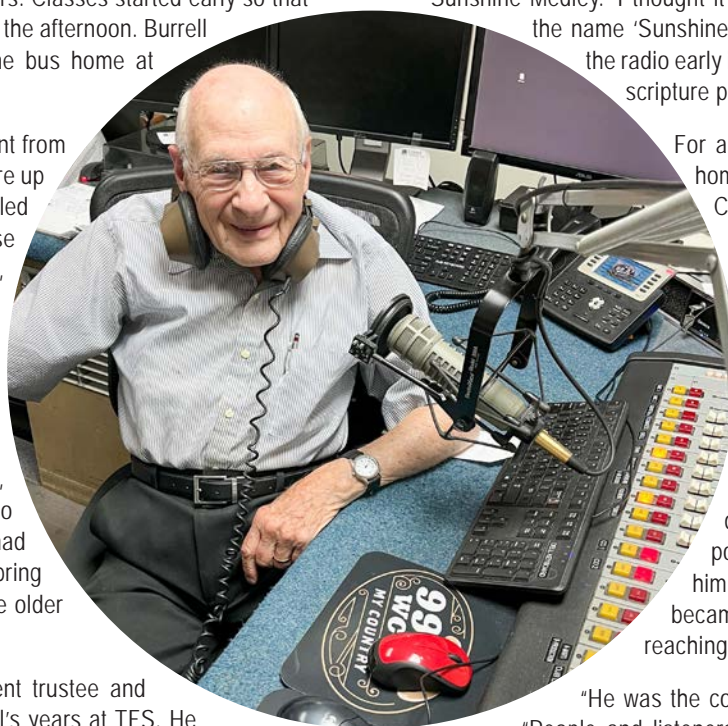
Burrell soon became a full-time pastor. He pastored several churches before he became the pastor at Hazel Creek Baptist Church in Mount Airy, where he served for thirty years.

"When I was called to the ministry, I knew it was for preaching, but I had a built-in desire to expand that ministry through the radio," said Burrell. He began working in radio at WLET in Toccoa. He wanted to create a musical program with a devotional. "I saw an old 78 RPM record labeled, 'Sunshine Medley.' I thought it said 'melodies,'" he said. "I adopted the name 'Sunshine Melodies' for the half hour I was on the radio early in the morning sharing uplifting songs, scripture passages, and a prayer time."

For a long time, Burrell made tapes on a homemade recorder and mailed them to Cornelia's 250-watt WCON AM station. In February of 1954, John Foster took over the radio station. In 1965, Foster ran into Burrell in the old Cornelia Post Office. "I was in a tight and needed someone to fill the morning show temporarily," said Foster. "He came in every morning at 5:30 a.m. for 60 years. I never found his replacement." Foster could always depend on him. In bad weather, the police would go and get him and bring him to the station. Eventually, the station became a 100,000-watt FM radio station, reaching millions of listeners.

"He was the community's pastor," Foster explained. "People and listeners would stop by, and he would pray for them." Burrell didn't choose his songs beforehand; he prayed and asked God to tell him what to play. "Billy carried around his CDs in an old toolbox," said Foster. "He is humble, joyful, and always thankful."

In July of 2022, Burrell went on the air for the last time at the age of 92 after 68 years of radio ministry – the longest-running weekday radio show hosted by the same person in North America. Billy Burrell brought rays of light to homes across Northeast Georgia for seven decades through his "Sunshine Melodies."





EXPLORING ARTISTRY

THROUGH VISITING ARTISTS



Throughout the year, art teacher Stephanie Stuefer invites artists to speak to her classes about their work. “I want my students to see the integration of real-world experiences in visual art and design,” said Stuefer. “Bringing in visiting artists bridges what they are learning to professional applications and careers.”

Will Morel ('03) returned to share his work as a creative director and producer. “My life is branding and communicating,” said Morel. “Being a creative is like being in a laboratory. We are discovering things that work, and we are figuring out how to communicate a message.”

Morel talked to students about the process of directing and producing an ad campaign for Astepro nasal spray. Students saw the minute details of the rough outline of a 3D image, accurate color profiles, and the attention to detail in the light reflection. “We make sure all the elements play together,” he said. “My job is to make ideas look good and put them all together to sell a product.”

Morel also talked about his work on a team responsible for developing the rebranding for Verizon. He showed students examples from his work with promotional material he helped develop for the company.

Morel encouraged students to consider composition, color, cohesiveness, and focal point. “This is what the people who are creating think about,” he said. “We have to ask ourselves, ‘How do you communicate the message?’”

While Morel was visiting, students were working on product advertisement posters. Students shared their work with him, and he offered encouraging feedback. “We are thinking about how other people will view the product, and we are trying to portray something without saying it,” said junior Ayshah McDonald.

Freshman Sophie Smith focused on using color to show perfume mist. “I’m using different mediums so that the watercolor stands out,” she said.

Students also had the opportunity to visit with Justin Groom and Becca McCoy, who shared with students about their Atlanta-based startup, Leafmore Studios. They offer merchandise, original fine art, and creative services. Groom is an artist, illustrator, and concept designer. McCoy is all about performing arts, photography, and writing. Students were inspired by Groom and McCoy’s enthusiastic approach to growing through success and failures and seeing the courage it takes to put their work out there even when they don’t know what the outcome will be.

“Students saw both ends of the spectrum of careers in the visual arts,” said Stuefer. “They met with two independent artists at the beginning stages of a path and with Will, a highly successful, Emmy award-winning, established artist working in marketing and advertising.”

Above all, Stuefer believes her students were able to see that art builds skills for any career. “We give and share feedback and suggestions, use our imaginations in a multitude of ways, and think like an inventor,” said Stuefer. “All of these skills translate into any field. That may be the most marketable skill – creativity.”



For a second time in a row, Tallulah Falls middle school took the combined GIAA State Championship. It was the culmination of a season in which the swimmers as individuals and as a team saw progression in each meet. It began with the season-opening Fall Frenzy prior to the home opener meet, The Hawaiian Luau. The Lady Indians won the meet while the boys were second. The Jingle Jam and Holiday Invite proved as tuneups for the squads, and set the stage for the last three meets. In the 'Aho Me Hearties' home meet, the boys came in first and the girls fourth.

At the Habersham Championships, the swim teams combined to take gold, with nearly every swimmer posting a PR. Then came the finale, the GIAA State Championship.

The girls were runner-up, as were the boys, though TFS combined for the overall state title. The girls featured a pair of relays that won gold - 200 Medley and 200 Free, while Henry

Dumas led the boys with an individual state title in the 50 Breast. Throughout the season, Dumas was sensational for the boys, recording seven first place finishes and 10 top-five swims. Logan Thompson, Thatcher Tatum, and Sebastian York individually were in the top-five often. The boys 200 Medley Relay (Sam Belk, Thompson, Dumas, Brody Irvin) had consistent success, as did the boys 200 Free Relay (Thompson, Belk, Irvin, Dumas). Ida Patterson was always showing up in the top-five, and finished first in eight meets. Veronica VerBerkmoes, Elizabeth Stafford, and Lexi Gibson also had multiple top finishes.

The girls state-title relay teams consisted of VerBerkmoes, Patterson, Stafford, and Gibson. The swim teams have six boys and seven girls that will move up to the high school level next year, though of the aforementioned swimmers, Dumas, Thompson, and York will return for the boys, and Gibson returns for the girls.



Tallulah Falls School has decided to leave the Georgia High School Association (GHSA) for the Georgia Independent Athletic Association (GIAA) beginning in the 2024-25 school year. This will place TFS in the 2024-26 reclassification cycle for GIAA.

"TFS has long been a member of the GHSA and has appreciated the association throughout our tenure, yet strongly feels the growing GIAA will best suit the needs of its student-athletes, coaches, and community," said President and Head of School Larry A. Peevy.

GIAA (gjaasports.org) provides a structure that aligns better with private education, allowing independent schools a more inclusive

voice at the table and more input in enhancing the combined athletic and academic experience. While still providing competitive opportunities, both in simple team participation and for those who desire next-level options, GIAA provides a stronger allowance for attracting students locally and from around the globe.

"Over and over, with the help of Athletic Director Scott Neal, we examined the pros and cons of both associations, sought continual input from our coaching staff, and discussed with other independent schools their reasons for staying in GHSA or for joining GIAA. We concluded that the GIAA would enrich the overall TFS student-athlete experience and more closely align with our mission," stated Peevy.



The best season in school history has a chance to be a stepping stone for what's to come. Tallulah Falls swim for the first time had both the boys and girls finish inside the top-10 at the state meet. It was the reward of hard work, countless laps in the pool, and the proverbial blood, sweat, and tears.

When the final ripple settled in the Georgia Tech Aquatic Center on February 7, the leaderboard showed the Lady Indians as 6th and the Indians 8th. For the girls, it was the best finish in program history. For the boys, it was close to it, as they had finished 7th in the 2019-20 season.

Altogether, TFS had 10 top-10 finishes in events, including a couple of individual state championships for junior Madison Dampier. Dampier, along with Mattie Patterson, Carsyn Griffis, and Henry Rickman, all had qualified in multiple events individually. The strength came in the relay teams, where the girls had three in the top-10 and two in the top-five, while the boys had all three relays in the top-10 including a podium 3rd-place finish in the 200 Medley Relay (Rickman, Caden Polley, William Xu, and Grayson Penland). Dampier's state titles came in the 100 Fly (defending her previous state title) and the 200 Free, both in school record time.

The 100 Fly time was an All-American cut, and Dampier is now only the second TFS athlete to win three state championships.

Others to post top-10 finishes at state included: Girls 200 Medley Relay (4th with a school record time), Patterson (5th in 200 IM & 6th in 100 Fly), Girls 200 Free Relay (5th), Boys 400 Free Relay (6th), Boys 200 Free Relay (8th), and the Girls 400 Free Relay (9th).

Tallulah Falls hosted several big events, including the season-opening Mask-Erade, the Hawaiian Luau, Holiday Invitational, Shiver Me Timbers, and the Light in the Mountains Invitational. Each meet saw several swimmers post PRs, season-bests, and even school records.

In the state meet alone, TFS broke six school records (twice in a few events), and had 15 season-best times by individuals and/or relays. Head coach Tamara Griffis pulled the team closely together early in the season and that unity showed particularly in relay events.

The boys state relay teams included those from the 200 Medley Relay as well as David Plaisted, Cole Borchers, and Teagan Penland. The girls state relay teams consisted of Addison Albury, Dampier, Griffis, Patterson, Molly Rickman, Adelaide Tatum, and Olivia Bonner.

While Henry Rickman will graduate this spring and head off to nearby Piedmont University to continue his swim career, the boys roster was otherwise all underclassmen. The girls are in a similar spot, where lone senior Marija Ivanovic moves on. With nearly the entire team coming back, along with talented up-and-comers from the middle school level, this year could be a preview for things to come.



**MADISON DAMPIER
STATE CHAMPION
100 FLY
& 200 FREE**



**RICKMAN, POLLEY, XU, AND PENLAND
3RD PLACE - 200 MEDLEY RELAY**

A SHOOTING STAR

TFS SHARPSHOOTER SHATTERING SCHOOL RECORDS

Brianna Walter has had a massive impact in her short time at Tallulah Falls School. The Sugar Hill, GA native has a disciplined regiment and thrives on positive energy as each shot gets her closer to perfection.

TFS hit the mark when Walter decided to enter for her senior season, a move that obviously didn't come without a little trepidation.

"At first I was worried about transferring to a new school, especially my senior year, but after being at Tallulah Falls for a semester I absolutely wish I'd been here all along," states Walter. "The environment here is very friendly. It often feels like a big family. Tallulah has also been extremely supportive of my precision rifle endeavors. The school went above and beyond to not only accommodate me while I was achieving my goals, but to support me in a way I am very grateful for."

To date, the standout precision rifle athlete has already set the school record in a 3x10 match three times, beating the prior record then her own twice. Her 298 on December 5, against Buford is the current record, but with Brianna, that may not be safe for long. To put it into perspective, prior to her arrival, only twice had someone fired a 292 or better in team history. Brianna has achieved that nine times this season. She has helped elevate an already-elite program to new levels, being the top scorer in what has been the top four team scores in school history, including an 1160 against North Gwinnett on November 15. Through the first half of the season, Walter and the rifle team are 14-0 heading into the GHSA State Championships on March 15-16.

"The records show me how far I've come from the beginning of my athletic career, but it's not something I dwell on," adds Walter. "My main focus is on my process. My goal for the rest of the year is to commit to my process every shot and to be positive after every match, no matter what."

That short-term memory is what keeps her from getting complacent. Other ingredients to her recipe of being a sharp-shooter include earplugs, music pre-match, positive vibes, and not looking at the score.

"Not worrying about the score helps a lot, especially while I'm shooting a match," says Walter.

"In rifle, we have earplugs we use to stay more focused. Listening to music before a match helps too. After every shot it's helpful to have a positive attitude, which is made easy with the encouraging environment provided by the school, the rifle team, and my amazing coach, Coach Tim [Stamey]."

Walter also holds the school record for a 3x20 match with a 591, a full 14 points better than the next best. She competed at the Women's Air Rifle Olympic Team qualifying event in December in Colorado, shooting a 622.4 in the 60-shot standing match, then recorded a 60-shot standing PR of 624.0, giving her a two-day score of 1246.4.

That gave her a 20th-place finish overall, edging out one prior Olympian and first place in the Under 18 category in the nation.

That type of success doesn't come overnight or without discipline. Walter has worked at it daily for several years.

"I've been doing riflery since freshman year," states Walter. "My routine is pretty similar to the routine of a standard college rifle athlete. I practice multiple times a week. Most days when I'm not practicing, I'm doing some sort of training (strength, balance, or running). Before matches I refrain from eating foods with a lot of sugar and from drinking caffeine or energy drinks. I wouldn't say it's too difficult, it's just a lot of commitment."

With her best days still ahead, both as an athlete and as an individual, Brianna knows rifle is a big part of her future.



"I like riflery, it's pretty fun," says Walter. "My dream is just to keep improving. I plan to join the University of North Georgia's rifle team. They're really nice and I feel they will support me in my riflery; I just want to go somewhere with a good rifle team, and where my major can be something related to math."

While there is zero doubt of her abilities in the range, the same can be said about her work in the classroom, where she holds a 4.03 weighted GPA that has her on the Presidential Scholar list, and is a member of the National Honor Society. Tallulah Falls has helped in both areas of her life. Walter is also president of the skateboarding club that she started, and a member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the recycle club.

"TFS is a wonderful school with an incredible rifle program," adds Walter. "Both have already left such a large impact on my life that I will forever be grateful for. Within the rifle program I hope to help my teammates improve their shooting. They're all incredible athletes and I'm thankful to have such amazing teammates. Within the school I hope to leave an impact with the skateboarding club the school graciously let me start earlier this year."

PRECISION RIFLE



An already-accomplished program had unprecedented success in 2024. With the arrival of senior Brianna Walter, the Junior Olympic Qualifier has helped push the team to new heights.

Walter's sharp-shooting has been a part of the top four team scores in program history, including a school-record 1160 against North Gwinnett in November 2023 was just one piece of the 14-0 season that culminates in a GHSA State Championship finals appearance on March 15-16.

Walter herself has scored 292 or better nine times, including a record 298. Prior to her coming to TFS, that score had only been achieved twice. It's not just her though. Seniors Marc Crotta, Joseph McGahee, and Ethan Simmons have been phenomenal this season, as each was instrumental in the state sectionals against Paulding County and/or the state semifinals home match against Kendrick.

The four seniors, joined by juniors Kylee Loudermilk, Chloe Erwin, and Leah Rogers, and sophomores Mitchell McGahee and Zeek Pruitt, rolled through the regular season, putting up high scores along the way. The record books have been rewritten, with five of the top six team scores in school history coming this year.

One of the many highlights of the season includes capturing the program's first Area Championship after finishing runner-up each of the past two seasons to rivals Lumpkin County.

The trio of Walter, McGahee, and Crotta qualified for the National Junior Olympic Championship in Standing Air Rifle, which will take place in April at the Colorado Springs Olympic Center.

An incredible performance by Tallulah Falls on March 16 in Ware County resulted in a State Runner-Up finish. The team shot a 2328, 16 points better than the previous school record, and was just 10 points behind champions Camden County. Camden is a 7A program, as is East Cowetta (3rd Place).

Brianna Walter fired a 590, while fellow senior Leah Rogers had a 581. Junior Chloe Erwin shot a 579, and senior Joseph McGahee had a 578. Junior Kylee Loudermilk had a 577. It's significant that each of Tallulah's five shooters were in the top-20. No other team did that with 93 of the state's best shooters. Walter went to the finals individually, and shot a 590 to place 5th (finishing 3rd based on season average). That marks the best individual finish in TFS history in Precision Rifle at the State Championships.



SEASON RECAP FOR TFS MIDDLE SCHOOL BASKETBALL



PHASAVANG



JAMES



POPHAM



WHITE & MCENTIRE

The MS basketball teams treated fans to a memorable season, both for the boys and girls. Both squads surged through a long season with appearances in the Tri-State Conference Championship games. The boys won to go back-to-back, while the girls finished runner-up.

The Indians had a roster brimming with seasoned veterans, fresh off the conference title in 2022-23. Coach Nathan Stanley had the boys rolling in the second half of the season, with the first half seeing the team go 5-3 overall. After the break, TFS went 9-1 to the finish.

Throughout the season, Brantley Addison dominated in the paint with a near double-double every time out. Asa Popham was stellar on the offensive end, and key performances by Lincoln Hicks, Ethan Phasavang, Grantley Smith, Woods Irvin, and others were instrumental in the team's run.

Despite falling twice to rival Towns County in the regular season, including in overtime at home, the boys finished on top in the one that mattered most. But to get there, the Indians had to roll past both Nantahala and Rabun Gap, the latter of which made it close late in the semifinal round. In the championship, TFS beat Towns County 41-37 with a second-half comeback to claim the second straight title. Tallulah Falls ended the season 14-4.

The boys B-Team, coached by Jake Carver, went 0-7 on the year with a youthful roster. Many of the players on the team look to contribute to the A-Team next year as several eighth-graders move up.

The Lady Indians, coached by Jenny Long, opened the season with a win over Trinity Classical, then dropped the next three before finding some traction. From there, Tallulah went 10-5 the remainder of the schedule. At one point, the girls won four in a row to close out the 2023 portion of the schedule. Then the squad won five consecutive until falling in the championship.

TFS beat Highlands in the opening round of the Tri-State tournament at home. Then came a 33-28 monumental win over Towns County in the semifinals. That marked the first win over Towns in three years. A tough Summit Charter team had a great shooting night in the title contest, giving Tallulah Falls a final mark of 11-8.

Payton McEntire often led the team in scoring, along with Handley James, Mia Kerr, Nora Mitchell, and Linda White. The entire team contributed to the season's success. McEntire, White, and Sofia Alderfer all move up to the high school next year, but next year's group will have big-game experience and progressed in their skills on the court.

JUNIOR VARSITY BASKETBALL



KAFSKY

The JV girls basketball team, led by coach Jo Kimbrel, had a solid season at 7-4. With a roster only six deep, that's quite an accomplishment. The Lady Indians defeated Lanier Christian in the opener, beat Stephens County twice, and Athens Academy to start out 4-1 in the first half.

TFS had a total of five straight wins until a speedbump of three consecutive losses late in the season. A Lia Sanjur last-second layup gave the Lady Indians a win over Rabun County in their finale, ending the season on a high note.

Sanjur was fantastic, averaging 17 points per game in nine appearances. Marian Nino was good for 13.5 points per game and had great post play. LB Kafsky, Gracey Eller, Carla Guil, and Joanna "Asea" Molodynska made up the rest of the roster. Varsity manager and senior Tahj Charlton also stepped up for the team when the numbers were low, and even scored a couple of 3-pointers along the way.

The girls had three 50-plus point games throughout the season, and outscored their opponents 393-141 overall.

The JV Indians were 9-5 overall and 3-1 in region play. Several players got the bulk of their minutes on the JV team while also having their fair share of time at the varsity level, including Brian Neely, Judah McIntosh, Bryson Perdue, Todor Stanimiriovic, and others. Neely and McIntosh ended up emerging as varsity starters and did very well throughout the season.

The JV Indians started their season 4-0 after wins over Lanier Christian, Towns County, White County, and Stephens County. They later picked up victories over Lanier Christian, Prince Avenue Christian, Elbert County, and Commerce. The Indians had a double-overtime win against Commerce in their home finale.



SANJUR



MOLODYNSKA



NEELY



PERDUE

VARSITY LADY INDIANS BASKETBALL

All throughout the 2023-24 season, Lowell Hamilton's Lady Indians varsity squad battled adversity. The injury bug hit hard at times, and the team was left short-handed often. Juniors Breelyn Wood and Haygen James built on their skill sets with big seasons, flooding the box scores each game.

A blowout win over Lanier Christian Academy opened the season with a bang. By the Christmas break, TFS stood at a respectable 5-5, and won their first game in 2024 again over Lanier Christian. A tough five game slide followed, which including dropping the first three region games. Defeating Elbert County in back-to-back games had the girls back on track. The roster was thin following that game, and the bench wasn't deep enough to claw out another win the rest of the way.

TFS ended with an 8-14 overall record and lost by six against Elbert County in the region tournament play-in game with a playoff spot on the line.

Wood earned All-Region status, averaged 14 points per game and over seven rebounds per contest, leading the team in scoring, rebounding, and blocks. James averaged nine points and nearly seven rebounds per game, while Allie Phasavang led the team in steals and 3-pointers. Rebounding was a strong point for TFS, as Wood, James, Adrijana Albjanic, and Millie Holcomb all came up with over 100 boards, and Phasavang was just a couple shy.

Seniors Phasavang and Albjanic were consistent. Junior Millie Holcomb had a breakout season, and freshmen LB Kafsky, Gracey Eller, and Joanna Molodynska all got their first varsity experience. Tallulah Falls will feature a solid core heading into next season.



WOOD



PHASAVANG



Varsity and MS cheerleaders brought the energy throughout the 2023-24 season, cheering on our Indians and Lady Indians!

VARSITY INDIANS BASKETBALL



VALASIUK



BAIN

A young roster with very few players who had varsity experience still kept the status quo, advancing to another state playoff appearance under coach Cody Coleman. In a season marked with several ups and downs, a couple of senior leaders led by example while the young players are primed to learn from the experience.

The Indians began the season on a high note with back-to-back wins over Lanier Christian and White County, as a handful of players got their first taste of varsity level basketball. Sophomore Timothy 'Neyo' Bain was one such player, as he made an immediate impact in the opener against Lanier Christian, tying a school record with seven steals in a game. He later topped that with eight the next time the teams squared off.

An 11-game losing streak quickly followed the 2-0 start, as the boys kept trying to find their footing while dealing with injuries among other challenges. The next win over Lanier Christian was just what TFS needed, and a region victory over Elbert County and later against eventual region champs Athens Christian was huge for the team's morale.

In the region play-in game against Commerce, the Indians grabbed a win that secured a fifth consecutive playoff berth. In the region semifinals, TFS played well against Athens Christian, losing by less than 10 points as Bain put up a 30-point performance. Tallulah Falls ended as the 4-seed from 8-A DI, and dropped their road state playoff game at Jasper County to end the season.

The Indians finished 7-22 overall, as senior Zakhar Valasiuk earned All-Region honors. Bain and junior Hayden Bootle were Honorable Mentions. Bain (11.2 PTS) and Valasiuk (10.1) were the leading scorers, while Bootle (8.7 PTS, 6.5 REB, 23 total blocks) had a solid season as well. Bain's 58 assists and 67 steals led the team. The latter marks the third-most in a single season in TFS history, just shy of the record of 73. Seniors Valasiuk and Sam Ketch were instrumental to the team's success and proved to be great leaders throughout.



BOOTLE



A LONG WALK TO WATER

Kim McClurg's seventh-grade English class read "A Long Walk To Water," by Linda Sue Park. A true story following two Sudanese children – Nya and Salva – as they struggle to find clean water in an attempt to survive unimaginable challenges. As part of their prereading assignment, students conducted research on Sudan, the tribes of Sudan, the Sudanese War, the Lost Boys of Sudan, waterborne diseases, and the author. Students presented their research to the class before they dove into the text.

mark examples of figurative language and the author's language that stands out to them, they ask questions of the text, and they write about something that surprised them."

They ask each other and McClurg questions:

"Did you find the idiom?"

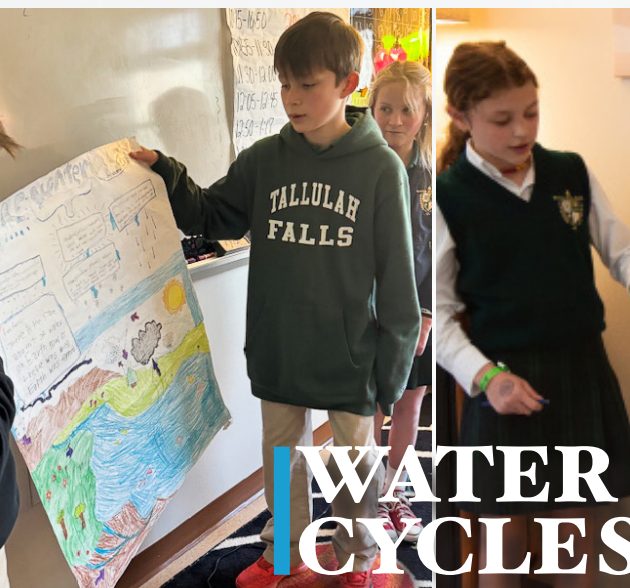
"Do you see the imagery?"

"These are the pictures painted by the writer," McClurg explained.

Once they had all the background information they needed, students were prepared to engage with the text. Tools for the assignment included highlighters, sticky notes, and notebooks along with a figurative language identification flipbook each student created.

"We read this book because it teaches strength and resilience -- two character traits that every middle schooler must have in today's world," said McClurg. "Salva is a man who showed incredible persistence amidst horrible circumstances, and no matter how bad things got for him, he never gave up, and he figured out a way to help people. Students learn that they can do difficult things, but that it takes diligence, strength, and hard work to be successful."

While classical music played in the background, students helped each other and worked independently referring back to their flip books for help. "The class is involved in active reading," said McClurg. "As we read in class, they



WATER CYCLES



Fourth-grade students presented their water cycle projects to the sixth-grade science classes, and the sixth graders continued the collaboration by presenting their cycle projects to the fourth graders. They learned about the rock, water, carbon,

oxygen, and nitrogen cycles. "I enjoyed learning about all the other cycles that help the water cycle," said fourth grader Jase Cox.

Building shared knowledge connected students across grade levels, and

strengthened their research and communication skills. "Having the opportunity to share our knowledge with younger minds was a great experience. We enjoyed showing them what we learned about the cycles," said sixth-grader Josie Brooks.

Every Buckle Has a Story



TFS Equestrian Club members competed in the Newton County Saddle Club Horse Show at the Olympic Horse Park in Conyers, Georgia. This was the fourth and final show at the end of show season. All six girls placed in several different events, and several club members won championships.

Senior Brooke Hayes won the championship in Hunter, Pleasure Driving 14-18, and Versatility. She won reserve champion (second place) in Halter Youth and Trail Youth. She also won overall High Point of the Year in overall youth. In addition, she won the Piedmont Equine Excellence Award for High Point Pony with Willie.

Junior Victoria VerBerkmoes won the championship in Trail Youth, Jumper, and Showmanship. She won reserve champion in Gelding Halter and Color Halter. Sophomore Isabella McClain won the championship in Halter Youth and the reserve championship in Pleasure Driving. Sixth-grader Cadence Beecher won the reserve championship in Pleasure Driving, Showmanship, and Green Driving. Sixth-grader Savannah Pastor won the championship in Mare Halter, and 12 and under Jumping. She also won the reserve championship in Green Driver.

Championship winners received a coveted belt buckle trophy for their win. This year, four girls brought home buckles. Hayes won her second from the Newton County Show. "I wear them almost daily," said Hayes. "If I have on a pair of blue jeans, I have on my buckle. People ask questions and I get to tell them about my championship and I get to tell them about my passion."

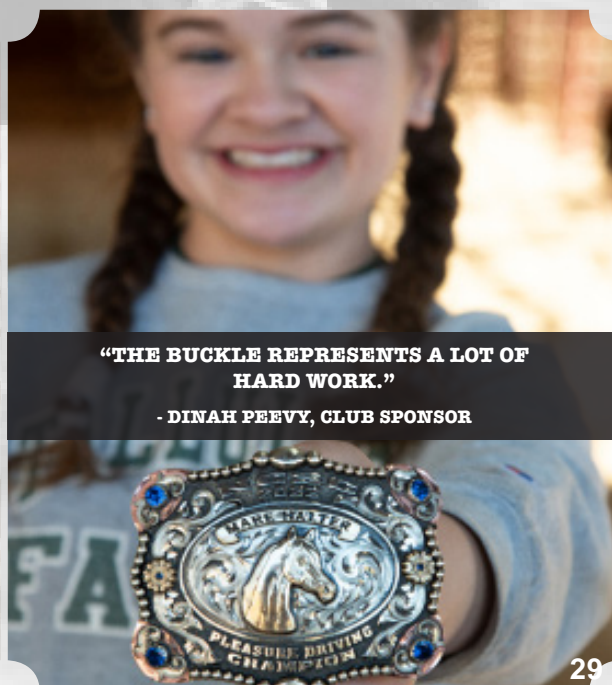
"The buckle represents a lot of hard work. When they look at that buckle, they remember the hundred degree heat and the freezing temperatures that they endured during training," said club sponsor Dinah Peevy. "They have amazed me. I am so proud of them."

Equestrian club members practice several days a week year round conditioning the horses and practicing patterns. Closer to competition, they are at the barn every day cleaning harnesses and show carts, making sure the trailer is loaded, and getting the horses clipped and bathed. "We do the "dirty work" – we clean up and get ready to go," said Hayes.

The girls know that Peevy will never put pressure on them to win. "Every time we are about to show -- before we step into the arena, she reminds us to do our best and have fun," said Hayes. "We do our best, and as a result, we come home as winners!"



**YEAR-END CHAMPIONSHIP BUCKLES
ARE THE CULMINATION
OF HARD WORK AND SACRIFICE.**



**"THE BUCKLE REPRESENTS A LOT OF
HARD WORK."**

- DINAH PEEVY, CLUB SPONSOR



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