

GRiFFiN Gazette

Homecoming is in the Air

Homecoming Week Recap

By: Abigail Woods

As HOCO Week wraps up, the Homecoming Dance looms right around the corner. So much work went into these past few days, and students have really shown up with their school spirit. The dance takes place on October 3rd at 7pm at GHNO, so make sure that you are there!

The work put into this past Spirit Week was planned over a period of two months. Last Saturday, members of Spirit Committee showed up at 8am and stayed at the school until 6:30pm hanging up the posters and setting up decorations. Many morning breaks and lunches were spent brainstorming and coming up with ideas on the whiteboards. Spirit Committee members created over 40 posters since the beginning of the school year to replace posters from previous years that had been thrown out. Still, they persevered and came out on top with amazing designs and fun decorations.

Spirit Committee also collaborated with Dance Committee after the student body had voted on the theme for the dance: Odys-Sea. To match the theme, each day had a nautical focus (except Friday). The dance itself has been planned since the beginning of the school year. Many theme ideas were discussed, but the committee ultimately decided to have the homecoming theme be voted on (like last year). Students almost unanimously voted for an Odyssey-themed dance.

The dance is planned to be outside on the turf, weather permitting; however, it will be moved to the gym if it rains, so be ready to bring socks or a change of rubber-soled shoes to dance the night away in.

The annual Homecoming Volleyball Game is on Friday at 5pm for Varsity, with more volleyball games to follow. Be sure to wear all of your red, white, and black to bring the spirit and cheer your heart out. Have fun if you are going to the dance, and go Griffins!



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Preserving the Green

How we're keeping the renovated field game-ready and safe for use

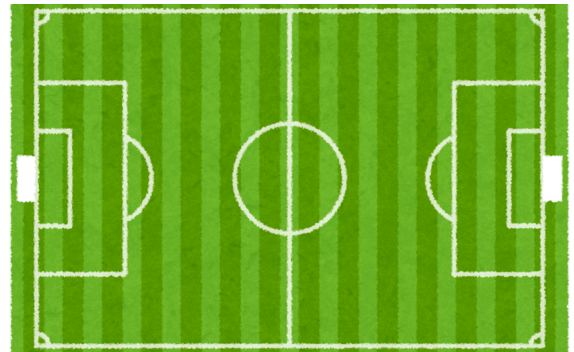
By: Claire York

From a bumpy and pot-holed dirt patch to a luscious field of gently waving grass, you may have noticed a slight transformation of GHNO's athletic field upon returning to school after summer break. Prior to the renovation of the field, several grades had access to it during recess and break time - meaning around 1,441 students used the field daily before afternoon practice even started! Here at our school, we are proud to be rooted in truth, goodness, and beauty but even the strongest roots of the field were not enough for all that wear and tear.

After much thought, GHNO decided to redo the athletic field so that students using the field could have a safe and consistent place to practice and compete on. The cost came out to around \$130,000 total for the leveling and installation of the new grass. The first water bill coupled with the new field came out to approximately \$10,000 and going forward, professional maintenance will come out to \$2000 per month.

The renovation was only possible through the donations of the generous GHNO community specifically through support of the Community Investment Campaign, the annual Griffin Gala and a capital investment from Great Hearts Texas.

Going forward, the field will follow a zoned use plan in order to preserve the integrity of our brand-new field. We can't wait to see y'all out on the sidelines cheering for our home game field sports and admiring our wonderful new space!



GRIFFIN LIFE



Welcome, Chi Chi The Senior Class Celebrity

By: Macbale Mamo

Move over Seniors, there's a new star in the class. Every class has something that makes it unique, and for this year's seniors, something that stands out is Chi Chi - a chia seed plant that has become somewhat of a "class pet" for seniors in Dr. Paddock's HL classes. Chi Chi has become a familiar part of the class and has brought plenty of fun and memorable moments throughout the school year. But how did Chi Chi become the unofficial senior class pet?

Brooklyn Wassner, a senior from the class that came up with Chi Chi, said "I was in class during Senior Thesis workday, and I was ahead of my work, and Dr. Paddock just handed me a chia seed pet. So I made the cheesy pet in the senior area with water, and I put chia seed all around it. It was like a joke."

Though started as a joke during senior thesis workday, Chi Chi has become a memorable part of the senior class. While it may be just a chia pet, Chi Chi represents the fun, creativity, and memories that make senior year special for everyone. As the school year continues, Chi Chi will surely be a big piece of the senior class.

A Q&A with Mr. Amen Getting to know the Upper School's New Art Teacher

By: Cora Brackett

GHNO is thrilled to welcome several new faculty members to the school community! Although new to GHNO, Mr. Amen is no stranger to Great Hearts: this is his sixth year working with Great Hearts, having previously taught Art at GH Monte Vista South and Forest Heights. One of our Gazette reporters had the chance to sit down and learn more about Mr. Amen.

Q: What is your favorite part about teaching?

A: "Getting to see that moment it clicks for a student & they get it"

Q: What is your favorite sport that you like to play/watch?

A: "I enjoy football & rock climbing. I wish I was [good] at basketball"

Q: What is your favorite dessert?

A: "Paleo blueberry coffee cake"

Q: What is your favorite art medium?

A: "Drawing gives me the most peace but I enjoy testing weird materials"

Keep reading on the next page to learn more about other faculty members with the Gazette's "A Day in the Life" teacher profiles!



Mr. Emslie
9th Grade

A Day in the Life of Mr. Emslie: Rocking His New Position as Griffin Faculty!

By: Sophie Copeland

Nathan Emslie is a new teacher here at GHNO. He primarily teaches ninth grade, as well as mock trial. He's only been here for a short time, but Mr. Emslie is well liked by the students and faculty. Mr. Emslie gets up bright and early at five in the morning and gets ready for his day. He makes his lunch and breakfast, then grades classwork or does a bit of personal reading. Then he heads to school.

This is Mr Emslie's first teaching position. He graduated from Hillsdale College this spring, (with high praise to the institution), and he's very excited to see what this school year will bring. He is looking forward to talking about the 20th century and reading The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald with his classes. One of Mr. Emslie's greatest passions is teaching. This was partly inspired by his mother, who started her own school when he was a child. He spent part of his tenth grade year here at Northern Oaks, and he worked as a camp counselor for a time as a teenager.

When he was growing up, Mr. Emslie took 10 years of gymnastics, and he can still do a backflip! He's also one of 12 children, 4 of which continue to attend our school. He goes to bed at about 10:30pm, and on his weekends he goes to church, sleeps in, hangs out with his siblings, and prepares for the week ahead. Mr. Emslie tends to be pretty busy and works hard, but he's loving the school so far, and especially enjoys getting to know his students.

Teacher Essentials

- Books
- Wake up: 5AM
- Gymnastics
- Hillsdale
- 11 Siblings



A Day in the Life of Mr. Austin: How Does He Do It All?

By: Sophie Copeland

Mr. Austin is a long established teacher at the school, with a well rounded 12 years teaching. He teaches seventh, ninth, and tenth grades, and runs the choir and varsity swim team. He gets up at 4:15 in the morning most days to go to swim practice and then comes to campus.

He spends 1st period prepping for the day ahead, and then teaches 2nd-6th period. Now, the question on everyone's minds is, how does he balance everything he seems to get done every day? After all, Mr. Austin has 8 kids (including a baby), manages two extracurriculars, and has a lot of teaching to get done. Not only that, he's actually working on grad school at the same time! Well, when asked, Mr Austin said that he's just really good at planning, making detailed lists of everything he needs to get done, and organizing them to fit his schedule. He doesn't have a lot of free time, but more than free time he loves being a teacher, stating that his favorite part of teaching is getting to play music all day.

On his weekends he goes to swim meets, takes his kids to activities, works with the choir, and goes to church. He ends up going to bed around 10:30 at night after a long day. Mr. Austin has been to Europe six times, and when asked about his fabulous taste in ties, said that he gets them from various sources, and his inspiration is a personal importance on aesthetics. Mr. Austin is well loved, and works hard every day, earning the respect of students and faculty alike.



Mr. Austin
7th, 9th, 10th Grade

Teacher Essentials

- Music
- 8 Kids
- Swim
- Europe
- Wake up: 4:15AM

Ciao Italia!

Info meeting on Oct. 21 in Room 214

By: Juliet Alcott

This summer, GHNO students can attend the second-ever trip to Italy. Co-led by Mr. Adrian Ophals and Mr. William Rerick, the trip allows students to visit Venice, Padua, Florence, Siena, and Rome while gaining up to three college credits, appreciating art, savoring Italian dishes, and experiencing famous landmarks.

The trip lasts from June 2–10, 2027 and includes transportation, two meals a day, and centrally located hotels.

“The trip is not just about art; it is an appreciation of the Trevi Fountain, Spanish Steps, Colosseum, and Roman Forum, while experiencing the cities’ history and food,” Mr. Ophals said.

Led by a full-time multilingual tour director through the trip-planning organization WorldStrides, students will not only experience Italian culture but can also gain college credits.

“High school students can earn up to three college credits through certain activities we have planned throughout the trip,” Ophals said. “In Padua we will study and create carnival masks, in Florence we will take a cooking class, and in Rome we will study how art developed through patronage by imitating a patron in the Renaissance.”

The Venetian mask-making class allows students to discover Carnival costumes and traditions while constructing masks of their own. The cooking class is guided by a Florentine chef and allows students to prepare traditional Italian dishes. Students will also visit St. Mark’s Basilica, the Sistine Chapel, the Arch of Constantine, and public parks.

“I am most looking forward to the Villa Borghese because it hosts some of the most beautiful art in the world compressed into a really small space,” Ophals said.

Villa Borghese is an 80-hectare historic public park located in the center of Rome. The park is home to the Borghese Museum, which houses the marble sculpture Apollo and Daphne.

The trip is co-led by a former GHNO art teacher and will provide students with time to appreciate Italian art through visits to churches and opportunities to sketch art pieces. While art is a major focus of the trip, it is not its sole focus.

“It’s a very casual atmosphere,” Ophals said. “There is not going to be a test or anything, but the trip is there to allow students to experience Italy, getting an overview and appreciation of European art and life while eating great food.”

Overall, the trip is designed to allow students to visit Italy and have fun. While cost may be an issue, the more students sign up and the sooner they sign up, the greater the discounts.

“When I studied abroad in Rome for my junior year of college for about five months, I was really moved and shaped by learning about the beauty, art, history, and intricacy of interpreting this art,” Ophals said. “I would love to be able to share this appreciation because there is nothing quite like it.”

Art & Culture



Trip informational meeting: *Italy*



Date: Wednesday, October 21, 2026

Time: 7 pm

Location: Great Hearts Northern Oaks
Room 214 Upper School

Learn More:

[EducationalTravel.com/](https://www.EducationalTravel.com/) Rerick-8498

Trip ID: Rerick-8498

Contact: Mr. William Rerick

• ArtbyRerick@williamrerick.com

• Mr. Adrian Ophals
adrian.ophals@greatheartstxschools.org

WorldStrides
Educational Travel & Experiences



ITALY

USA





Student Voice



The Shirane Exchange Program A Paid for Trip to Japan

By: Brooklyn Wassner

Studying abroad is something a lot of highschoolers dream about doing, but actually getting to travel to another country such as Japan is a whole different experience. Recently one of Northern Oaks' own, senior Briar Dohner, got to travel to Japan through the Naoko Mitsui Shirane program. She decided to apply after first hearing about it from alumnus Benjamin Alcott.

"I chose to apply to this trip because the values aligned with my own personal values in the skills the trip aimed to equip young students like me with work skills I had interest in developing," Dohner said.

The three-week trip is designed to help high school students learn about new cultures, practice public speaking and build connections with people across the world. During the trip students got the opportunity to speak at the US Embassy in Tokyo and give a presentation. Besides visiting official sites, the main goal of the program is to give students a real look at daily life in Japan. During the last week, students lived with host families. Briar stayed with a family that had a mom, dad and two daughters that she grew very close with during her stay.

"My favorite moments were lingering at the dining room table and talking with my host family...even though we had to communicate through a phone, I had some of the most meaningful conversations I've ever had with this family," Briar said.

Of course going to another country and connecting with students that may not even speak your language is difficult. However the students quickly learned that language barriers don't stop them from forming meaningful friendships.

"I thought going into this trip connecting with students that did not even speak the same language as me was going to be challenging and there would be no real connection because of the obvious language barrier...However, once my eyes were open, I soon came to realize that though we did not speak the same language, we were just teenagers excited to learn as much as we could from each other. And we had far more in common than you would expect," Dohner said.

For anyone thinking about applying in the future, Briar's advice is simple: just bring an open mind and a real willingness to learn.

"Be genuine in your application. The most valuable thing you have to offer in your application is your desire to grow and an eagerness to be transformed for the better," Dohner said.

Ultimately, the Naoko Mitsui Shirane program offers much more than a typical school trip. By combining real-world leadership opportunities with authentic daily life in Japan, the experience gives students a fresh perspective on the world and shows just how much common ground teenagers share, no matter where they come from.

To apply you must be a junior during the 2026-2027 school year and be heading into your senior year for the 2027-2028 school year. The upcoming trip takes place during June of 2027. The application is now open and closes Sunday, November 1, 2026. To apply visit the Naoko Mitsui Shirane Foundation; at shiranefoundation.org



**Naoko Mitsui Shirane
Foundation**

SUMMER IN JAPAN 2027

Scholarship Trip

Two weeks in early June 2027




REQUIREMENTS

Must meet ALL of the following requirements:

- Be a junior attending a high school in Bexar County or residing in Bexar County.
- Be expected to enter your senior year at your current high school in fall 2027.
- Be a U.S. citizen and be able to acquire a U.S. passport if selected.

APPLY

www.shiranefoundation.org
**Application Due by
Sunday, November 1, 2026**

Must submit the following by the application due date:

- A current high school transcript (official or unofficial)
- One letter of recommendation
- A reply to the Shirane Foundation's email confirming your application and responding to the requested questions.




@SHIRANE_FOUNDATION




TRIP INCLUDES

- ✓ Visit Iconic Cities
- ✓ School Tours
- ✓ See Historical Sites
- ✓ Experience Cultural Exchange
- ✓ Homestay

SCHOLARSHIP COVERS

- ✓ Round Trip Airfare
- ✓ Ground Transportation
- ✓ Travel Insurance
- ✓ Lodging
- ✓ Food & Entrance Fees while in Japan

SHIRANE FOUNDATION

The Shirane Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to bridging relations between Texas and Japan through youth exchange. Its mission is to strengthen these ties by immersing students in real-life business, cultural, and government experiences through a summer trip in Japan. Founded in 2016, the Foundation continues the legacy of the late Mrs. Shirane and her vision to inspire and shape future generations of global leaders. The upcoming 2027 Japan Trip will proudly mark the Foundation's 7th Scholarship Trip, furthering its commitment to building lasting connections and fostering mutual understanding.

MS. NAOKO MITSUI SHIRANE
 Learn more at
www.shiranefoundation.org/about

Pumpkin Spice and Everything Nice

By: Emma York

According to local coffee shops and bakeries (even though Texas weather hasn't got the memo), fall is here! And so are the long awaited pumpkin spice everything's of fall. But, why is pumpkin spice the fall flavor?

The pumpkin spice flavor is a sweet blend of common spices— cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, cloves. These exotic spices originated along the trade routes across Asia before the 16th century. Through these routes, the now very expensive spices were sold and traded all across Europe. Eventually, plantations were cultivated and produced these same spices more easily and efficiently, making them more affordable for the common people.

In European tradition, the most rich and expensive cuisine was saved for holidays such as the Christmas season. Thus, these spices were served in such dishes and their distinctive taste and smell became the symbol of the festive season. In America, early English and European settlers first combined the dynamic duo, pumpkin and spices! They combined their seasonal tradition with the Native American traditions and mixed honey, milk, and these distinct spices and baked them in a hollow pumpkin. This created a spicy, sweet layered pastry: pumpkin pie's great, great, great, great grandfather. These settlers, keeping with tradition, served this rich and expensive dish on their core holidays including the newly founded Thanksgiving. During the 1930s spice companies such as McCormick and T&T tried to find a more economically friendly solution to buying nine spices to bake a pumpkin pie. And just like that, pumpkin spice was born!

As the readily available spice and soon canned pumpkin industries improved, many more pumpkin products appeared, made and enjoyed in the fall, carrying on the now unknown European tradition of saving spices for holidays.

Pumpkin products were generally considered desserts due to their rich flavors but then came the pumpkin spice latte. This drink spread like wildfire through the United States in the early 2000s due to a certain coffee chain's marketing. This changed the populace's view of the flavor: it now appeared as hand soap, perfume, drinks, pastries, etc. It has become a cultural phenomenon: thanks to tradition and clever marketing successfully tied to cooler weather and comfort.

But for some, it's much more than that... It's a lifestyle! Sophomore, Josie Wilkinson, said, "It is absolutely never too early for pumpkin spice! I grew up eating pumpkin pie and pumpkin bread, and ever since I discovered all the places that do pumpkin spice year-round like me, I get some whenever I can! I love making pumpkin bread and muffins and trying to find cute shops that sell pumpkin spice goodies all year round. To be honest, I probably eat more pumpkin spice than vegetables! My favorite 'pumpkin spice find,' though, is the pumpkin chai!"

Sophomore Bella Pokorny, shared, " Fall has always been my favorite season, but my love for pumpkin spice specifically came from my love of baking. I love how it makes the house smell and how you can spin it into either sweet or savory recipes. My favorite pumpkin spice goodie is pumpkin crumb cake muffins. (see recipe to the right!). Pumpkin spice makes everything better, but around the beginning of fall, I go all out. I try to make something pumpkin around three or four times a week! If pumpkin spice is ever wrong, I don't want to be right!"

From the spice trade of ancient times to the early settlers in North America, from hand soap and candles to drinks and pastries, Pumpkin Spice truly is a timeless classic. Who needs an official start of Fall on the calendar? Pumpkin spice is here— So is fall! (one day the weather will catch up!)



Bella's Pumpkin Crumb Cake Muffins



Ingredients

- 1 and ¾ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice (store-bought or homemade)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup canola or vegetable oil
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup packed light or dark brown sugar
- 1 and ½ cups canned pumpkin puree
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature
- ¼ cup milk, at room temperature*



Crumb Topping

- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ cup packed light or dark brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon store-bought or homemade pumpkin pie spice
- 6 Tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Maple Icing (optional)

- 1 and ½ cups confectioners' sugar
- 2 Tablespoons pure maple syrup
- 2 Tablespoons milk
- pinch of salt

Recipe Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 425°F (218°C). Spray a 12-count muffin tin with nonstick spray or line with cupcake liners.
2. Make the muffins: In a large bowl, whisk the flour, baking soda, cinnamon, pumpkin pie spice, and salt together until combined. Set aside. In a medium bowl, whisk the oil, granulated sugar, brown sugar, pumpkin puree, eggs and milk together until combined. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients, then whisk everything together just until combined and no flour pockets remain.
3. Spoon the batter into liners, filling them almost full.
4. Make the crumb topping: Whisk the flour, granulated sugar, brown sugar, and pumpkin pie spice together until combined. Using a fork, lightly mix in the melted butter until crumbs form. Don't over-mix. Spoon crumbs evenly on top of the batter and gently press them down into the batter so they're snug.
5. Bake for 5 minutes at 425°F (218°C) then, keeping the muffins in the oven, reduce the oven temperature to 350°F (177°C). Bake for an additional 16–17 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. The total time these muffins take in the oven is about 21–22 minutes, give or take. Allow the muffins to cool for 10 minutes in the muffin pan as you make the icing. *For mini muffins, bake for 11–13 minutes at 350°F (177°C) the entire time.
6. Make the icing: Whisk all of the icing ingredients together until combined and smooth. Drizzle over muffins and serve warm. Cover tightly and store at room temperature for 1–2 days or in the refrigerator for up to 1 week!