

# Wolf Tales

*The Newsletter of  
Gorton's Class of '65*



*'The strength of the wolf is in the pack'*

May 2020, Vol. 72



Steve Tuers, John Volpe, Marilyn Rabadi (history teacher and liaison for the Gorton alumni) and assistant principal Jamie Morales stand in front of the plaque honoring Coach Volpe on his 90th birthday and his outstanding basketball career. The plaque hangs in the hallway near the girls' gym.

## Welcome Home, Coach

It was an honor long overdue and made possible by the Gorton Alumni Association—John Volpe was honored with a plaque highlighting his 33-year career as varsity basketball coach of the Wolves.

The winningest coach in the history of all Yonkers sports, John was joined by Assistant Principal Jamie Morales and history teacher Marilyn Rabadi, our Alumni liaison to Gorton, for the presentation. The 22x26 plaque hangs proudly near the girls' gymnasium.



**Tuers  
De Force**

As a former student and player of Coach Volpe, it was an honor to drive him to our alma mater and join him in a tour of Gorton—a tour full of treasured memories.

First stop, naturally, was the boys' gym where he began his coaching career in 1959. He fondly calls it "The Pit." It was deafeningly quiet and immaculately clean, seemingly preserved in time.

See **COACH** on Page 4

## Special Report

# Why Johnny Can Read... And Graduate

**Editor's Note:** The following is an abridged version of a four-part series about the progress of Yonkers' schools. It was written by Diana Dombrowski and Gary Stern of *The Journal News*. It was edited by Alex Poletsky.

In 2015, Roosevelt High School was a "failing school" by state standards after a decade of poor test scores and a graduation rate below 60% for several consecutive years.

A state takeover or conversion to a charter school neared reality. Last year, Roosevelt's graduation rate was 94%.

In the early 2000s, one out of three students did not graduate with their class. Then reforms instituted in the early 2010s began to gain traction. Graduation rates inched higher and by 2016, Yonkers was the first of the state's "Big 5" cities to see its graduation rate (83%) exceed the statewide average (82%).

During the 2020-2021 pandemic period, its graduation rate hit 91%. Those numbers were pumped up, no doubt, by relaxed standards. Still, Yonkers equaled Westchester's overall graduation rate in 2021, no mean feat since many city students didn't have laptops or a reliable Wi-Fi.

"We don't have kids talking about their fancy vacations," Gorton Principal William Shaggura said. "A lot of them don't leave the city limits. We've had families face economic crises during the pandemic."

The city rose to the challenge by giving out 13,000 devices, mostly laptops, and worked with a cable provider to get Wi-Fi hotspots to hundreds of students.

In 2020, 80% of Yonkers' 25,000 students were classified as "economically disadvantaged," 19% had special needs and 13%

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**MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE**—The gang is back in Danbury, CT, for outdoor dining. Guest of honor is Malcolm Brown (center). From left, Jo Harter Irish, Ursula Belle Healy, Yvonne Sullivan Price, Malcolm Brown, Elen Freeston, Alex Poletsky and Steve Tuers.



**PROM NIGHT**—The grandson of Barry and Lorna Reynold Jacobs, Tyler, poses with his girlfriend Macy before their Garner High School senior prom in North Carolina. He will be attending Coastal Carolina University in Conway, SC, this fall, majoring in sports management.



**A LAST SALUTE**—Four years ago I was asked to give the First Salute to my friend, newly commissioned Marine 2nd Lt. Alex Vallorosi.

It was a great honor for me to be chosen for this special occasion and somehow I managed to squeeze into my 51-year old Army jacket.

Now, Capt. Vallorosi has honorably completed his four-year tour of duty. I know that now he will continue to honorably serve our country. Alex, I salute you again!

—Kevin Henry



**WAITED TOO LONG**—Oft-postponed due to the pandemic, Alex Poletsky and his wife, Karen Kaczmarcyk, welcome Alec Poletsky and his Virginia family to their home in Somers, NY. From left to right on the couch are Alec's wife, Neleh, and children, Dimitri and Nella, along with Karen. In the SRO section are Alec and his dad.



## **COACH** (from Page One)

In my imagination, I pictured our head janitor, Mr. Caruso, coming in with a cup of coffee for coach, like he did after every practice. That was before Gorton's home games were moved to Emerson for better accommodations. But John and "The Pit" will be forever one and the same as well as his sideline antics captured in film on Alan Funt's *Candid Camera*.

From that moment of "ancient" history, we entered Gorton's new era.

Gorton is now an Academy of Medical and Health Professions magnet school. There we met Dr. Michael Wszolek, the head of the department. Gorton students enrolled in the program must take one to two medical courses per year to complete their state high school requirements.

We went up the stairs where we passed one of Gorton's more famous classrooms, that of Gertrude Braslow. "She was a tough teacher," John said, "but nice." Miss Braslow was a member of Gorton's first graduation class and taught at Gorton from 1930 until her retirement more than 35 years later. Her homework assignments in current events came to my mind immediately.

We then passed the auditorium, home of our assemblies, concerts, plays, homework studies, pep rallies and graduations. A much newer green curtain still drapes the stage. Across the hallway, we were greeted by an enthusiastic secretary at the school's office.

Coach, probably out of habit, went directly to his cubicle slot to see if he had any mail. Me, I remembered Marian Zorilla, Judy and Greg's mom, the first person you saw when you entered the office.

Coach then looked over at the principal's office, now Will Shaggura's office. John spoke deeply and fondly about James Cavanaugh, who was principal when John arrived at Gorton in 1959 as a social studies teacher. When Cavanaugh named John the boys' varsity basketball coach, it was a ground-breaking moment—Volpe became the city's first non-Phys Ed varsity coach.



**The boys' gym—"The Pit."**



**Dr. Michael Wszolek gives John a tour.**

"He was a great man. He was a God to me," John said.

Before we left, we were given a Gorton Wolves T-shirt with the words, "Tradition, Leadership and Excellence"—three words that can best describe the Coach.



He told me how happy he was about being back at Gorton High School. And with his plaque firmly in place, he will be there, and in our hearts, forever.

***Steve Tuers was a member of Gorton's championship basketball team and is a lifelong resident of Yonkers.***





## Priceless Memories



## I'm Not Only A Good Sport, I AM a Sport

I have always considered myself to be a pretty good sport, but recently, I discovered that I actually AM a really good sport, literally. However, apparently, that only became a fact 20 years ago, when my first grandchild decided "Grams" was not easy to say and declared me "GAGA" forevermore.

Which brings me back to my discovery.

A few weeks ago, I took my 4-year-old granddaughter to a local kids' park and playground. There was the requisite assortment of slides and swings and the usual apparatus we were all accustomed to when we were growing up.

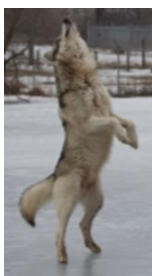
That included that merry-go-round thing, where you sat on the edge or in the middle, holding on for dear life, while one or more playmates ran in circles, spinning it as fast as possible, while simultaneously creating a deep ravine around it. This one however, came wrapped in a safety net, so the chances of being flung into space were slim to none.

There was also a zip line, which I wish we had had at Trevor Park and a hard plastic  
See **PRICELESS** on Page 6



Trumpet with her pups, Kral, Joe Darling and Babs.

## Happy Mother's Day, Trumpet



Dancing With the Wolves

Trumpet the news—the wolf pack at the Wolf Conservation Center in South Salem is expanding.

Mexican gray wolf, Trumpet, born five years ago, the proud parent of a new litter along with her mate Lighthawk. The litter was born on April 30.

With high-pitch peeps and squeals, the two male pups, Kral and Joe Darling, and their sister Babs, announced their debut to a global community of onlookers via the WCC's live webcams. To see them on Wolf Cam, go to <https://nywolf.org/>

## From Gorton To Drama on The Potomac

Fletcher Knebel was born Oct. 1, 1911, in Dayton, Ohio. During his youth the family moved around frequently, finally settling in Yonkers. Despite the many moves, Fletcher was an excellent student. In 1929, he graduated from Gorton High School.

He spent the following year studying at the University of Paris, before transferring to Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. After college, Fletcher worked for several newspapers: Coatsville Record in



## Did You Know?

Coatsville, PA; The News in Chattanooga; the News Bee in Toledo, OH; and The Cleveland Plain Dealer.

During WW II, Fletcher served in the U.S. Navy attaining the rank of lieutenant. After the war, Fletcher became a syndicated columnist. His column, Potomac Fever, satirized politics and government.

During 1960, he wrote a chapter on John F. Kennedy for the book, Candidates 1960. Writing the chapter for this book

See **KNEBEL** on Page 6



## Parry's Ponderings



### Shortage Alert! Blinker Fluid

Not only is there a shortage of baby formula, blinker fluid also seems to be in short supply. I know this because so few people (especially here in the south) seem to use their turn signals.

### Gone is the Wind

I may not be able to roll back the tide but it seems I am capable of controlling the wind. It's been an unusually windy winter and spring, so last weekend I bought some wind chimes and hung them up on the porch. It has been calm ever since.

### Ain't No Doubt About It

This one's from the Internet: If all the talk about gender has you confused, just try milking a bull.

**Don Parry (C65) was awarded Westchester's Safest Teenage Driver Award and is a Vietnam War veteran.**

### KNEBEL (from Page 5)

made him realize his passion for writing and he went on to pen 15 books, most of them fiction and all of them dealing with politics, intrigue and social issues.

His best known, *Seven Days in May*, was co-authored with Charles Bailey.

The book is about an attempted military coup in the U.S. and was #1 on the New York Times best seller list for almost a year.

It was later made into a movie starring Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas and Fredric March. Fletcher said he got the idea for the book after interviewing Gen. Curtis LeMay, who went off-the-record to accuse President Kennedy of cowardice in his handling of the Bay of Pigs debacle.

After the success of *Seven Days in May*, Fletcher went on to write several more

books, dealing with subjects such as a mentally ill president, political repression in Central America and black militancy in the U.S.

Throughout his life, he was known as a "colorful character." He supported the legalization of marijuana, which he



started smoking in 1968, saying it was better for him than whiskey. He was married four times. In 1993, after a long bout with cancer, Fletcher, a member of The Hemlock Society, died by taking an overdose of sleeping pills in his home in Honolulu.

He left two notes saying he was ending his suffering from lung cancer and heart ailments. He was survived by his wife, a son Jack, three grandsons and one great grandchild.

**Joan Lawless Kennedy (C65) is a member of the Yonkers Historical Society.**



### PRICELESS (from Page 5)

climbing wall, with little footholds strategically placed, so that the ascent was doable and a safe landing platform with grips was awaiting at the top.

Had this particular play piece been available to me at my park decades ago, chances are I would have been spared a broken leg. Instead, I had a stone wall, with nothing but the occasional toe hold and a flat, slippery surface at the summit, no grips and an iron fence much too distant to grab. The subsequent fall from "place" was one of those life lessons, resulting in a permanent odd gait.

I pursued many sports over my lifetime, none too seriously, except for baseball,

again at Trevor Park, that rewarded me with three broken fingers during different games. Bowling broke my heart, volleyball broke my fingernails and a brief stint on the *Press Republican* shuffle board team broke no records. Throughout it all, I remained a good sport.

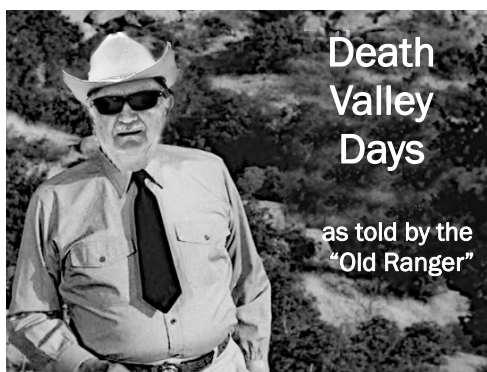
Back to the playground. I continued perusing it and was drawn to the outer perimeter, away from all the equipment. It was there I spied an odd little circular wall, about three feet high and enclosing a ring full of soft dirt. There was no one inside it, nothing happening. I was left to try and determine what use this crop circle imposter might serve. Miniature dog show venue? Fire pit for the park tenders? Race track for toddlers? I was stumped.

As I circled the circle, I came upon a sign. No, not from the heavens, a literal sign. That's when I was alerted to the astounding fact that I am and will forever be A GOOD SPORT! And WHAT a sport I am! The sign said, "GAGA BALL"!! It went on to describe its origins and the rules. I was dumbfounded and dizzy with joy.

Thank you Israel, for thinking up this gentler form of dodge ball and for teaching me that "GAGA" means hit-hit or touch-touch! I am truly touched by what a hit it has made of me. I am also totally justified now in declaring myself a good sport!

**Yvonne Sullivan Price was queen of the '65 senior prom and is a retired school administrator.**





Joe Mikulsky at Artist's Palette.

California's Death Valley conjures up scenes of desolation and death. It's truly a land of extremes.

The lowest elevation in North America lies in Death Valley in the Badwater Basin, 282-feet below sea level. Just 84 miles to the west, the highest elevation in the Lower 48, Mt. Whitney, stands at 14,505-feet. There is still snow at its summit even though temperatures in Death Valley have already hit as high as 108 degrees this spring.

Death Valley holds the world's record for high temperature at 134° Fahrenheit, although some meteorologists have disputed this. From 282-feet below sea level to above 11,000 feet at Telescope Peak, Death Valley National Park has quite an elevation difference as you drive from one end of the park to the other.

Our first stop was Mosaic Canyon, just east of the valley floor. It is a very narrow, steep-walled canyon lined with marble walls polished as smooth as glass from millennia of wind and water erosion. Embedded along the walls are "mosaics" of marble stone broken up and forever arranged in beautiful patterns. The canyon is a natural art gallery as you walk along the narrow passage.

Just "down the road a piece" are the Mesquite Sand Dunes with some dunes reaching more than 100 feet. While we were there, high winds created a sand storm that severely restricted our exploration and did some etching of our car's paint and windshield.

As we drove south toward Furnace Creek  
See **DEATH VALLEY** on Page 8



Annie walks through Mosaic Canyon while Joe gets a hands-on geology lesson.



Mesquite Sand Dunes.



Joe takes his temperature while Annie 'signs' their location.

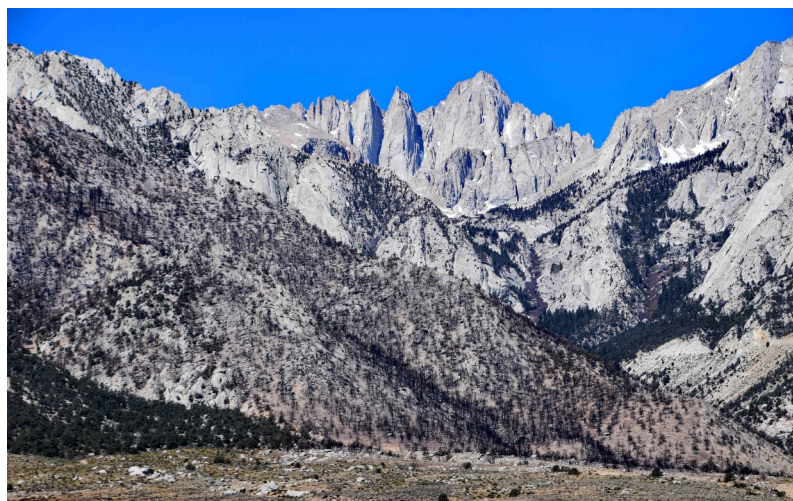




Joe hitches his wagon to the old 20-mule team.



Zabriskie Point, its valley, and the Golden Canyon.



From the lows to the highs: Badwater Basin at 282 feet below sea level (left) to Mount Whitney's 14,505-foot height.

## **DEATH VALLEY (from Page 7)**

and the park's visitor center, we passed many areas of beautiful, multi-colored rock formations. We made a stop at one of the many once-productive borax mine sites. The raw borax was scraped off the ground surface (mostly by Chinese laborers "recruited" in San Francisco) and refined right next to the mining areas. After processing, the borax was transported 165 miles away, by 20-mule team wagons to the nearest railroad depot.

We took a break at the Furnace Creek visitors center and reveled in the fact that it was only 71 degrees and that a bit of rain fell on us—a very rare thing indeed.

After a short break, we headed to Zabriskie Point—a vantage point with magnifi-

cent views of the valley floor and Golden Canyon. Although you see many different types of colored hills in Death Valley, Zabriskie Point captures the park's diversity all in one place.

A relatively short drive from Zabriskie Point, and almost directly below, is Badwater Basin on the valley floor. A small pond of "bad" water is still there but that will evaporate when temperatures rise. Again, rain greeted us there—another very rare occurrence.

One more stop. Artist's Palette is a mountain side with numerous deposits of different minerals that resemble the different paint dabs on a real palette. Hiking trails allow those young enough to scramble over the varied colored hills.

It was time to drive back to our motel in Lone Pine, about a two-hour drive over two mountain ranges.

Death Valley is in the rain shadow of three mountain ranges which accounts for its dryness: first the Sierras, then the White Mountains, then the Panamint Range.

The ride back was on a two-lane highway with long portions of narrow road with twisty mountain passes and then long stretches of almost flat straightaways. Going down the last grade you are rewarded with a beautiful view of Mount Whitney, just west of Lone Pine.

***Joe Mikulsky is Wolf Tale's West Coast photographer. He is also a founding member of the North End Surf Club.***





## Nothing to Do? Go to Van Gogh

Dear Janet,

We're studying art and would like to know more about Vincent Van Gogh. Any suggestions?

Mia and my cousin Vinny

Dear Mia and Vinny,

We all know that April showers bring May flowers and that the Mayflower brought the Pilgrims, but for my best "buds" and me, April showers brought April flowers. Not the live, garden variety, but the Beyond Van Gogh, The Immersive Experience ones.

If you're not familiar with it, it's an exhibit in three rooms that tells the story of Vincent Van Gogh (who else?), his life and works. The first room walks you through a maze of picture frames, with information about the man and his life. The second room gives you a visual introduction to the movement of lights as they cascade down one wall and across the floor by your feet. The third room is the pièce de résistance. It's unlike any other event I've ever experienced.

VanGogh's works are projected around the room, covering the four walls and a few free standing displays in the middle,



## Ask Janet

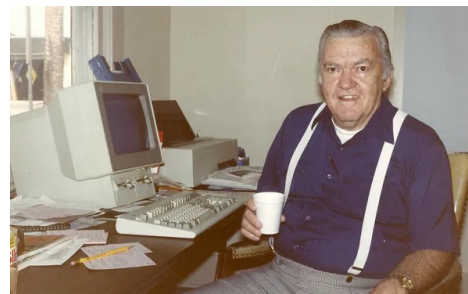
so you become "immersed" in his paintings. The opening display is in black and white and the color slowly fills in and you're on your way to an amazing show. There are still photos that sometimes morph into motion, with flowing flower petals cascading across the walls and floor. It is truly something to behold.

But who is this man, Vincent Van Gogh?

He was a Dutch painter who lived from 1853-1890, born to an upper-middle class family. In his early career, he was an art dealer until depression took over his life. He turned to religion and began missionary work in Belgium but later returned home to live with his parents. He took up painting in 1881 and moved to Paris where he met members of the avant-garde, including Émile Bernard and Paul Gauguin.

His earlier works were dark and included paintings of still life and peasant laborers, but he gradually added more color and brightness to his paintings, especially after spending time in Arles in 1888.

## 'Topless Mom in Undies Rescues Pet Goose From Bald Eagle'



## Editor's Note

## Lou Grant, With a Splash ...Of Panache

He didn't write that headline above, but if Barney Waters were alive today he would have—and it would have been on the front page of The Herald Statesman.

Picture Ed Asner as Lou Grant—and then add spaghetti sauce stains on his tie. That was Barney. He was a two-fisted, hard-drinking journalist from the glory days of local newspapers. He had a personality bigger than life.

"He was a newsman in the best of the old -world traditions," said Al Neuhaarth, former chairman and CEO of Gannett Co. Inc. Neuhaarth and Barney went way back to Miami, working on competing newspapers and then at Gannett. Often in their careers, they would, "go outside and settle it like men," even though later on it was for drinks at a newspaper's favorite watering hole.

Barney was the editor of The Herald

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See **ASK JANET** on Page 10



## ASK JANET (from Page 9)

Van Gogh continued to struggle with psychotic episodes and delusions that became more of his focus than on his physical health. He ate poorly and turned to heavy drinking. During an altercation that cut off his friendship with Gauguin, in his rage, he cut off part of his own left ear with a razor.

His younger brother, Theo, supported him financially and emotionally throughout his life. Vincent spent time in psychiatric hospitals until he discharged himself and moved to Auvers-sur-Oise, a commune associated with several artists of the time. It was there that he apparently committed suicide, shooting himself in the chest. He died two days later.

During his lifetime, he was considered a madman and a failure but was later hailed as a misunderstood genius. Posthumously he was considered one of the most famous and influential people in Western art history and his paintings are the most

expensive pieces ever sold. The largest collection of his work can be seen in the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

That said, you don't have to cross the Atlantic to see his works. At the time of this writing, the touring show continues in the U.S. with tickets available in Albany, Atlanta, Cincinnati, Grand Rapids, Houston, Las Vegas, Miami, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Raleigh, Sacramento, Seattle, and Washington DC.

If you live anywhere close to these cities, I suggest you get your tickets now and spend some relaxing time immersed in a madman's art show. You won't feel his depression but instead will be immersed in the beauty of his work and the amazing technology of the presentation.

Gogh Van Gogh!

**Janet Guyon Hanford (C65) is a former cheerleader and was voted Most Versatile by her '65 senior class.**



## EDITOR (from Page 9)

Statesman. He had a seasoned crew that included New York's first female city editor and the state's first female sports editor. His copy editors went on to be managing editors and an executive VP for Gannett. It was there I learned the basics and all the tricks.

When hiring a reporter from an Ivy League school, he said, "He may have a degree from Columbia, but he's going to get his Masters here."

He taught a simple fact of life—first, you have to catch the reader's eye (headline) and then hold the reader's attention (a punchy lead, aka lede.)

He ran a Tee-Ball game on Page One because it was a no-hitter.

After running an expose on mob figures in Yonkers, a "small business man" threatened to put Barney in a box. The next day, Barney put the threat on Page One, in a box. "Cheapest life insurance I ever bought myself," he said.

On one hungover Saturday morning, he sat himself across from me, plopped an *Alka-Seltzer* into coffee, stirred it with a pencil, and said, "Kid, this is not a day for the meek." He passed out.

He recovered in time to react to a reported hijack at the Westchester County airport. He completely redesigned Page One in a heartbeat, or burp, while finishing his cold coffee.

"That was like straightening a picture during an earthquake," he said afterwards.

He saw Yonkers' changing demographics and wanted to print some stories in Spanish. The high and mighty muckety-mucks who signed the checks thought otherwise. "Don't even try it," he was warned.

The best way to get a recalcitrant child to do something you don't want him to do, is to say, "Don't." During a memorable blizzard, Barney saw his window of opportunity during zero visibility. With the empty suits at home having hot cocoa, he published a weather story in Spanish in a classic "Oh Yeah?" moment.

Barney eventually found his way back south, away from snow, to run Cocoa Today, which his pal and sometime adversary, Neuharth, launched in the '60s.

When leaving the Statesman, Barney told the newsroom that he left with mixed blessings—"It's like seeing your mother-in-law go off a cliff...in your brand new Cadillac."

Like local news, Barney became a dinosaur, and not the purple one. He left Gannett but wasn't done. He founded the Merri Island Press in 1989, annoyingly close to Neuharth's flagship paper. He also opened an Italian restaurant, The Villa Roma, in Rockledge, FL., just a meatball's throw from Annie's, Neuharth's restaurant of choice.

"Founding a newspaper," Barney said, "is something that lies deep in the heart of every newspaper person." Thanks to Barney, I'm living the dream...running Wolf Tales.

**Alex Poletsky (C65) is a retired journalist and managing editor of Wolf Tales.**



## **SCHOOLS** (from Page One)

had limited English proficiency. Many immigrant students showed up mid-year with not only limited English but a wide range of formal schooling.

Despite two sometimes tumultuous decades and repeated challenges, Yonkers reinvented its schools by:

- Maintaining stable leadership, particularly at high school principal positions;
- Raising students' expectations through individualized attention and providing safeguards to prevent students from falling through cracks;
- Creating a "college going culture", beginning at kindergarten;
- Emphasizing relationships among teachers, students and parents to build morale and chip away at the schools' still questionable reputation;
- Developing a unique partnership with a research-driven nonprofit, Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE), dedicated to seeing students succeed; and
- Giving students a second chance to pass required courses through "credit recovery" courses.

"I know some people think they push kids through," Helen Friscia said. "There's still this reputation that Yonkers is poor and can't keep up. But when I walk into my daughter's school, they know my child and can talk specifics. The teachers stay after school to help the kids. I feel like the schools want to have this relatable, approachable, loving environment."

### **Testimonials to Success**

State Education Commissioner Betty Rosa said that Yonkers' success is based on its response to its students' needs. "The growth in Yonkers' graduation rate is proof of the innovative strategies city, district and school leaders are using to ensure a high-quality, equitable education for all students," she said.

Dia Bryant, executive director of the Education Trust-New York, credits Superintendent Edwin Quezada for leading the district past traditional barriers formerly found in urban schools. Quezada, who



--Photo courtesy of Tania Savayan/The Journal News

### **Jamal Epps: It was easy to fall through the cracks."**

came to the Bronx from the Dominican Republic at 15, has been a Yonkers educator since 1998 and superintendent since 2016.

"He's a solid leader who knows the complexities of his community and gets what it takes," Bryant said. "In many districts, the focus is on lots of things other than instruction. But Quezada keeps the focus on learning. Yonkers layers one approach after another to help kids."

### **'Back in the day'**

The landmark desegregation case, *United States vs. City of Yonkers*, dragged on from 1980 to 2007. The settlement called for the creation of magnet schools to foster integration and for the state to pony up \$300 million to address racial disparities in education.

Meanwhile, a \$50 million budget hole in 2004 began a set of financial crises that led to layoffs and the near elimination of music, arts and sports.

On top of that, leadership was a revolving door. Between 2000 to 2005, three superintendents resigned or were fired.

### **GED Verses Graduation**

When Yonkers Schools Superintendent Edwin Quezada was principal of Lincoln in 2004, the district was comfortable putting

many students on a path toward a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Lincoln's graduation rate at the time was 49%.

"So back in the day, if you weren't going to graduate on time, we were going to have a GED conversation with you," he said. "We no longer have a GED conversation—it doesn't exist [today]."

Jamal Epps, a 2004 Gorton High School graduate, said there weren't a lot of conversations about going to college when he was in school, or even what to do after high school. He remembers the threat of not graduating being held over students' heads—if you don't pass your classes you won't get a diploma.

"Graduation was only spoken of in terms of punishment," Epps said. "It was easy to fall through the cracks."

### **'The District Was a Disaster'**

Principals spent more time in their offices than classrooms and hallways, teachers' lessons were not seriously evaluated, schools did not support one another, administrators did not always communicate with Spanish-speaking parents, and college prep was not a serious priority.

"The district was a disaster," said RoseAnne Collins-Judon, assistant

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## **SCHOOLS** (from Page 11)

superintendent of the Yonkers Public Schools.

Yonkers had an additional challenge, a rising dropout rate. Education researchers called for changes to help eighth-graders transition to high school, assign experienced teachers to the ninth grade, a pivotal year, and create a data-based "early warning systems" to identify students at risk of dropping out.

In 2007, a federal law set a uniform way to measure graduations and required states to set goals for raising their graduation rate.

In Yonkers, Bernard Pierorazio was paying attention.

### **A New Sheriff in Town**

Pierorazio became Yonkers superintendent in 2005 after his predecessor was indicted for perjury in connection to a nepotism investigation.

A Yonkers native, he attended that city's schools and become a teacher, eventually becoming Saunders' principal, which was named a federal "Blue Ribbon School of Excellence" during his tenure there.

He required all students to take Regents exams like Earth Science and Sequential Math 1 before it was required by the state. He also created communities of teachers and staff to focus on ninth-graders to ease the academic and social transition to high school. He phased out stand-alone middle schools, where many students struggled, and created Pre-K-8 schools. Yonkers also went from five high schools to eight smaller ones.

"Students were suffering from peer pressure in big middle schools and parents were bailing out of the district," he said.

In 2010, the state adopted a slate of Gates Foundation initiatives including:

- Grade-by-grade academic standards (Common Core);
- Standardized test scores to weed out "failing" schools; and



—Photo courtesy of Tania Savayan/The Journal News

**Students visit the Westchester Community College booth at Gorton's College and Career Fair.**

- An aggressive teacher evaluation system.

### **Education Interrupted**

Pierorazio abruptly retired in 2014 after a budgeting error created a \$55 million shortfall. The accounting error was blamed on the school system's finance office that was in "complete disarray" due to previous years of budget cuts.

Mayor Mike Spano sought state relief. Albany came through with a bailout package that gave Spano more control over administrative, non-academic functions of the school system.

Pierorazio's successor, Michael Yazurlo, only lasted a year. He resigned in 2015, accused of watching porn on school district computers.

### **One City, One Goal**

Quezada, then deputy superintendent, got the top job. In 2020 with three years remaining on his contract, the Board of Education gave him a new five-year deal at an annual salary of \$272,295.

"People ask me how we did it, 90% graduation," said School Board President Steve Lopez. "We're no longer fractured like

other big city districts, with the political rifts and turmoil. We're all pulling in the same direction and for the same cause: the children."

"I was going to send my daughter to a private high school," said Faleasa Jones, a Gorton parent. "I thought she would get overlooked in a public school. My daughter said she wanted to do student government. It's the teachers, pushing her.

"The teachers spend time with the kids, engage them, and the kids go to them for advice. When I'm in the school, I see the principal talking to all the students, and I like it."

Theresa Smith, a graduate of the Yonkers schools who is now in her 13th year teaching at Gorton High, has seen dramatic change.

"When I started here, we were breaking up fights in the hallways. No more. Now teachers interact with the kids; nobody is isolated," she said. "We're in the cafeteria with them, we go to sporting events, we direct younger students to older students for tutoring. We want students to build each other up."

**See *SCHOOLS* on Page 13**



## **SCHOOLS** (from Page 12)

Behind the scenes and not part of the state-mandated curriculum, Yonkers added more layers to the road to success:

✓ **Leadership Consistency:** Six of Yonkers' eight high school principals have been in office for at least five years and seven are long-time district employees. "Consistency in leadership is more important than anything else in improving graduation," Superintendent Quezada said.

✓ **A College Culture:** All ninth-graders' transcripts are reviewed to make sure students are on course. More than a quarter of all students now take college-level courses in high school. Students get help with college applications and the all-important financial aid application.

✓ **My Brother's Keeper:** In 2016, Yonkers joined the national initiative created by President Obama to address gaps in opportunities for boys and young men of color. Yonkers schools oversee 26 chapters for 2,500 participating students.

✓ **The Buck Stops Here:** Many Yonkers teachers were laid off and rehired over the last 15 years, some more than once. Previous administrations played a game of chicken with Albany over education funding. Spano took responsibility for the schools' financial well-being because "our future rests in us having a stable school district," he said.

✓ **Public/Private Partnerships:** The Yonkers schools have signed up dozens of local and national partners to create opportunities for students, including colleges, nonprofits, community groups, businesses and arts institutions.

✓ **Credit Recovery Courses:** These programs allow students who fail required courses to take condensed versions so they can earn the necessary credits.

Sherian Gomez, 16, a sophomore at Gorton High, took credit recovery courses last year in global history and English. She said she found the instruction improved her work in other classes, too. "The teachers really explain things—then you have it in



—Photo courtesy of Tania Savayan/The Journal News

**Lisa Seale teaches a chemistry class at Roosevelt High School Early College Studies. Seale, who grew up in Yonkers and went to Gorton High School, said students get so much more assistance than they did when she was a student.**

your head, the next day, when you're in other classes," she said. "I really got the Russian Revolution in global history, what it meant."

Over the previous five years, Yonkers' graduation rate went up an average of 4 percentage points between June and August because students earned credits during summer. Quezada said credit recovery gives students a second chance without cutting corners.

### **Life After High School**

Knowing that many Yonkers students would be the first in their family to attend college and would need guidance the schools couldn't afford, the district established a nonprofit—Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE).

The nonprofit's initial goal was immediate: help students graduate and get into the best possible, and affordable, college. YPIE opened college centers in each high school and made Naviance, a widely used college-planning software program, available in Yonkers schools. Small-group instruction was offered in Algebra I to help borderline students pass the Regents exam. Staff and volunteers provided assistance with every aspect of the college application process, from essay writing to applying for financial aid.

### **Shifting Gears**

Around 2015, YPIE changed its mission to address a troubling trend—students who graduated with average grades weren't cutting it in college.

"The stronger a student's academic profile, the more likely they are to make it," said Sam Wallis, YPIE's executive director since 2019. "They also need life skills, social and emotional readiness and a direction. We work with them to build them up. We want them to be armed for what's to come."

Nearly a quarter of all students applied to the program as ninth graders. The students get intensive academic supports at the YPIE College Zone in downtown Yonkers. They choose a major—entrepreneurship, film or science research—and work with professionals from major companies to get a college-like experience in high school. Students are there from 2:30 to 6 p.m.

### **The Road Seldom Taken**

What makes YPIE's updated approach uncommon is that its efforts don't end in high school; the agency breaks the traditional wall between K-12 guidance and higher education.



## **SCHOOLS** (from Page 13)

A post-graduation summer program prepares first-generation college students for the social and academic transition to college. Then YPIE coaches continue to meet with students monthly, in person or virtually, for the first two years of college. Seventy-four percent made it to their second year of college. Financial strains, not lack of trying, led to 25% dropping out or not attending college at all.

### **'We're There for Them'**

Quezada supports standardized testing as a way to measure student progress but disagrees that test scores alone show that students are ready for college.

"Our kids have experienced a lot," Quezada said. "If these measures of career and college readiness were accurate, I would never have been successful in college. "I had to do five years to get my bachelor's. I was an immigrant. It's about more than scores and grades."

"The students come to school with the resilience to go on, which speaks volumes about the adults around them," Shaggura said. "We want them to know we're there for them, we'll figure out how to help. It comes down to loving our students."

Gabriely Garcia, 18, a senior at Gorton, said her teachers can overcome anything because of their commitment to the students. A C-student at a Manhattan Catholic school in Manhattan, she's an A-student since transferring to Gorton.

"The teachers bring the energy," she said. "They do whatever they have to help you out, but they don't stress you. It's like family. I take pride in my grades now."



## ***Back to the Garden To Never Forget***

Greetings Alumni and Friends of Gorton High School.

This month's column will cover some quick updates regarding Association activities, followed by some news from our partners at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier Society of Honor Guards on the remembrance of Memorial Day.

Leave your checkbooks closed...no one is soliciting financial support for either of the events. We'll save that for another time.

First, the Alumni Association will be sprucing up the Garden a bit as we enter the summer season. Also, I am delighted to announce the search for new/additional board members from later graduating classes is proceeding nicely. Two candidates will receive board approval before month's end, and will be announced in the June edition of Wolf Tales. Additionally, we have several more prominent candidates under consideration.

Second, news from our partners at the Society of Honor Guards of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier immediately follows. It is an outstanding way to remember and honor Memorial Day. It also features two pieces, a reading and short video entitled *In Arlington*.

See **ALUMS** on Page 15



### **Alumni News**

## **Class of '65 Veterans** † (Deceased)

**Tom Boynton** USAF  
**Malcolm Brown** Lt. Naval Reserve  
 † **Bill Camperlengo** Army Vietnam  
 † **Bill Cherko** Army  
**George Conway** USAF (husband)  
**Dennis DeLillo** Army  
**Ray Debenedictis** Navy (husband)  
 Capt. **Michael DiPietro**  
 Army Active (son-in-law)  
**John Eberhart** Navy  
**Bob Edie** Army Vietnam  
 † **Capt. John Esau** Army 2½ tours Vietnam, 173rd Airborne Brigade  
**David Farr** Army Vietnam (brother)  
**Ric Farr** USAF  
 † **Wayne Ferguson** Army Italy  
**Dean Hamilton** USMC Vietnam  
 † **David Owen Harris** Navy  
**John Harter** Army Korea (brother)  
**Jerry Healy** Army Vietnam (husband)  
**Maj. Russell Healy** USAF Active (son)  
**Kevin Henry** Army Vietnam  
**Barry Jacobs** Army  
 † **Jim Johnson** Army  
 † **Ralph Johnson** Army  
 † **Terry Kennedy** Navy (husband)  
**John E. Knox** Naval Reserves  
 Petty Officer, 3rd Class  
**Dan Laino** USMC  
**Mark Laino** USMC (son)  
**Mike Lekhmus** Army  
 Afghanistan (son-in-law)  
 † **Capt. Donald Leonard** USAF, Vietnam  
**Rick Maher** Navy  
**Des Mas** Army, Vietnam  
 † **Jim Masterson** Navy  
**Michael Mauro** Army 101st Airborne  
**Nick Mikulsky** Army Ranger  
 Afghanistan and Iraq (son)  
**Ricky Milnarik** Navy  
**Mike Morrone** Army Vietnam (husband)  
**Jack Nicholls** Army  
**Joe Paretti** USMC Dang Ha, Vietnam  
 11th Engineers (husband)  
**Don Parry** Army 101st Airborne  
 Vietnam  
**Vincent Policelli** USAF (husband)  
**Dennis Porucnik** USAF Thailand  
**Ron Trautvetter** USAF (husband)  
**Dennis Wasiczko** USAF Thailand  
**Rich Whittaker** Army National Guard





## Joan Maxwell Dockins, C63, Art Center Director

Joan Letitia Maxwell Dockins, a 1963 Gorton graduate, died April 21 at the age of 76.

Born Oct. 24, 1945, she was the youngest of three children born to Mary (nee Kirkpatrick) and Donald Maxwell. Following her graduation from Gorton, Joan attended college at Hunter and SUNY Oneonta.

Joan married Darryl Dockins in San Francisco, CA, Jan. 15, 1969. She had three sons: twins Matthew and Mark Dockins in 1970 and Michael in 1972.

The family moved back to Yonkers from Palo Alto to be closer to Joan's family.

Joan spent most of her career helping companies relocate employees to new locations. Upon retirement, Joan and Darryl moved to Alliance, NE. Joan became Associate Director of the Carnegie Arts Center until they moved to Ponte Vedra Beach, FL., in 2012.

Joan leaves behind her husband, three sons, two brothers, James Henry Maxwell and Peter Gilmore Maxwell (C60), her daughter-in-law, Gwenola Marie Dufour Dockins, two grandchildren, Benjamin Claude Dockins and Gabriel Darryl Dockins.

## George Kiorpes, 90, Professor of Music

Dr. George Kiorpes of Greensboro, NC, died April 27, at the age of 90.

Born Sept. 25, 1931, in Yonkers to Anthony and Georgia Kiorpes, he graduated from Gorton in 1949. He was a professor of music at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro as well as the choir director and organist at First Moravian Church in Greensboro.

He is survived by his wife, Suzanne, and sons Michael and Geoffrey. He was recently predeceased by an older brother, Stephen Anthony, also a Gorton graduate.



## ALUMS (from Page 14)

And *Journey Home*, a musical score featuring the U.S. Army Brass Quintet. Both links below are active and ready for your enjoyment.

Have a safe and enjoyable holiday weekend...remember Memorial Day!

The National Moment of Remembrance Act (**Title 36 USC 116 note. Public Law 106-579, 106th Congress**) asks Americans to spend a moment of remembrance on Memorial Day, at 3 p.m. The time was chosen because it's when many Americans are enjoying their freedoms on the national holiday.

The "moment" doesn't replace the traditional Memorial Day observances—it is intended to be a unifying act of remembrance for Americans of all ages.

The poem, *In Arlington*, was written by Bob Martin, then President of the American Rose Society. Inspired by the higher meaning of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to the American people, it is offered as our generation's homage to the iconic poem of WW I, *In Flanders Fields*.

The brilliant production of the dramatic reading entitled *In Arlington* by Treehouse Dream Films with introduction by Gary Sinise fulfilled that intent; it has been well-received and critically acclaimed. It is quintessentially American.

In the final analysis it will help America give voice to and keep bright its sacred duty to never forget all those that have served and sacrificed on behalf of America, in times of war or armed conflict. Like nothing else it will speak for our honored war dead; it will tell their story.

*In Arlington*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRD4CY7rsBg>

*Journey Home* is an original score of music, written by Dr. Sara Corry: It is a perfect choice to celebrate the National Moment of Remembrance contemplated by Congress. This deeply moving music was inspired by 244 years of America's unshakable commitment to its sacred duty to never forget or forsake those who have served and sacrificed on behalf of America in times of war or armed conflict. The importance of this work is that it represents what Tomb of the Unknown Soldier means to the American people and all freedom

loving people of the world.

It has, over the years, become an immortal shrine, representing American ideals of valor, service, duty, and patriotism. "It is symbolic of the spirit of freedom, democracy, and unity which are the cornerstones of our Republic in peace and war."

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier more than anything else, manifests our nation's deepest hopes and, some of our deepest fears when we call young men and women to serve this country. "The Tomb is that one place where we say to those Americans who have died, and to those who serve today and who will serve in the future... 'We will not ever forsake you. We will never forget you'."

*Journey Home* will evoke that emotional connection so appropriate for this Day when love of Country and remembrance of our veterans goes hand and hand.

[2022 - Journey Home - The U.S. Army Brass Quintet - V1.wav \(dropbox.com\)](#)

**Bill Tolany is the president of the Charles E. Gorton High School Alumni Association and a member of the Class of 1964.**





Marchers demonstrate violence against children.

## It'll be a Breeze To Fly to Westchester

Breeze Airways is joining seven other airlines at Westchester County Airport (HPN) with eight routes to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas, Charleston, Norfolk, Jacksonville, Savannah and New Orleans.

The Darien, CT-based budget airline founded by JetBlue's David Neeleman, plans to service smaller cities that have seen reduced service by major carriers. It will be flying Airbus A220 aircraft to meet its plans for nonstop service.

## City Schools Receive \$360M in State Aid

Gov. Kathy Hochul visited Enrico Fermi School in Yonkers during her statewide victory lap for increasing state aid to education by \$2 billion over the previous year.

The \$360 million allocation to Yonkers' schools is about 60% of the state funds earmarked for the new \$1.4 billion Buffalo Bills football stadium. Under their 30-year lease with the state and Erie County for construction of the new stadium, the Bills will also get \$850 million from public taxpayers as well as \$250 million from Erie County.

## History Exam Canceled Over Buffalo Trauma

The state canceled this June's Regents exam in U.S. history and government due to content that could compound student

trauma regarding the Buffalo shooting.

Education Commissioner Betty Rosa wrote, "Our experts determined that there is content on the new Regents Examination in United States history and government (framework) that has the potential to compound student trauma caused by the recent violence in Buffalo."

Newspapers have filed a Freedom of Information request to see the question.

## Sapienza Named City's Top Cop

Mayor Mike Spano named Chris Sapienza as Yonkers' Police Commissioner to lead the men and women of the Yonkers Police Department. Sapienza replaces retiring commissioner John Mueller.



Sapienza, a Gulf War veteran, joined the Marines in 1987 where he served for eight years. He is a 27-year member of the Yonkers police force.

## Ex-Giants NFL Star, City Resident, Dies

Erich Barnes, a star defensive back for the N.Y. Giants in the early '60s and a Yonkers resident, died May 5 in Hastings-on-Hudson. He was 86.

Along with Andy Robustelli, Dick

Modzelewski, Roosevelt Grier and Jim Katcavage on the line, Sam Huff at line-backer, Barnes and Dick Lynch at corner-back and Jim Patton at safety, the Giants turned defensive play into a glamorous part of pro football. With Y.A. Tittle at quarterback, the Giants won three consecutive Eastern Conference titles from 1961-63.



The six-time Pro-Bowl player retired in 1971 with 45 career interceptions, including a then record-tying 102-yard pick for a touchdown.

## Schools, Non-Profit Host March Against Violence

A partnership between Yo Digo No Más (I Say No More) and Yonkers Public Schools took to the streets to raise awareness of sexual abuse and violence against children.

"As a school district, our work must be to educate, bring awareness and offer services to our students and families, who are over 60% Latino," said Yonkers Public School Superintendent Edwin Quezada in a statement. "We must empower our children with confidence and knowledge to use their voices."

## TeachKind Honors Fermi Teacher

Enrico Fermi School science teacher Melissa Flores was named one of three national runner-ups in this Teacher Appreciation Contest from TeachKind.

The group is the humane education division of PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Flores was nominated for teaching students in her Living Environment Science class to consider the impact that humans have on animals and the environment, the group said.

Flores has been a member of PETA since the age of 15, when a teacher taught her about the cruelty and ineffectiveness of experiments on animals.





## City Sees the Light At St. John's Church

St. John's Episcopal Church will give off a glow from dusk to dawn after the installation of 50 LED interior and exterior lights.

"St. John's Episcopal Church is one of the cornerstones to Yonkers' earliest years as a city, dating back over 300 years," said Mayor Mike Spano. "We are literally shining a light on the beautiful architecture and majesty of this sacred church and its place in our history."

The project was funded through the Yonkers Industrial Development Authority and will be managed by the Yonkers Downtown Business Improvement District.

## Singer Mary J. Blige Receives Icon Award

Mary J. Blige, who grew up in the Schlobohm Housing projects, received the Billboard Icon Award for being an influential music maker.

Known as the Queen of Hip-Hop Soul, she was presented the award by Janet Jackson and escorted on stage by Sean "Diddy" Combs.

"I've been on this journey for a long time,

one that didn't always look the way you see me now, one that is filled with a lot of heartache and pain," she said. "But God helped me to channel those experiences and emotions in my music, which is where I started in music."

## Owner Of Tony's Dog House Dies

A man who lived the American dream, Anthony Manousos, 82, died at his Yonkers home at the age of 82.

The son of Greek immigrants who settled in Yonkers when he was 16, Tony worked his way up from dishwasher to owning eateries such as Tony's Luncheonette in Yonkers, A&M Deli in Pleasantville, and Tony's Dog House in Yonkers.

## NYS Raises Toll On Bridge Motorists

The right of passage will cost you more.

Beginning May 1, the New York State Bridge Authority raised the fares by 10 cents to \$1.55 on the following bridges: the Bear Mountain Bridge, Newburgh-Beacon Bridge, Mid-Hudson Bridge, Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge, and the Rip Van Winkle Bridge between Hudson and Catskill.

The Tappan Zee tolls remain at \$5.75 for EZ Pass riders.

## You Don't Need A Ticket to Ride

In a move to help those feeling the effects of soaring inflation, County Executive George Latimer announced that Bee Line bus fares will be free from May 1 to Labor Day.

"That savings is profound for people who use mass transit," Latimer said.

## Meet You At the Fair

The New York State Fair, held from Aug. 24 to Sept. 5 at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse, announced its performance schedule for those who aren't going there for the giant sculpture made of butter.

Newest headliners are Boyz II Men on Aug. 29 and Nelly on Aug. 31. Other acts include Jimmie Allen and Chevelle (Aug. 24); The Art of Rap featuring Ice-T (Aug. 25); N31.i.ko Moon (Aug. 26); Foreigner (Aug. 28); Riley Green (Sept. 1); Tai Verdes (Sept. 2); Gin Blossoms and 24KGoldn (Sept. 2); COIN (Sept. 3); Dropkick Murphys (Sept. 3); and Night Ranger (Sept. 5).



**RE-ELECTED—The Yonkers Board of Education re-elected the Rev. Steve Lopez and Dr. Rosalba Corrado Del Vecchio to serve as president and vice-president, respectively, for another one-year term.**