

THE COMMENTATOR

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The Commentator Editors:

Top (L to R): Jess Pruett (teacher), Tylerson Tweardy, Emerson Post **Middle:** Vrusha Pramod, Nina Henley, Maria McGill, Olive Schreher **Bottom:** Ava Harrison, Maryam Vohra, Nikki Rajan, Saanvi Gourishetty

Pep in My Step



Maryam Vohra
Editor-in-Chief
Copy Editor

The truest sign of a new school year is a new pair of shoes. In fact, the optimal time to buy new shoes is immediately before the school year begins. Mid-August, mid-sale, but right before everything sells out. Since kindergarten, my first days of school have looked the same: a new backpack, a carefully planned outfit, and a perfect, crisp pair of shoes. It started with

velcro light-up Twinkle Toes and somehow, is ending with velcro Vejas (I got tired of tying my shoes). My little tradition can most likely be attributed to my growing shoe size, but that little pep in my step always mattered to me; it is the same pep that gave me the courage to put myself out there, year after year, even if I didn't always know where I was going.

Freshman year: Brooks Ghost9s. Technically, I didn't wear these shoes all the time, but I bought them specifically for track. Coming into Freeman, a big, brand-new space, with brand-new people, I knew I had to get involved somehow. So, naturally, I chose winter and spring track. It was fun at times, but mostly miserable. I complained constantly, but those shoes carried me through something new and uncomfortable every day, pushing me a little farther than I thought I could go. And when I say that, I mean it quite literally. I did not think I was capable of running as far as I did.

Sophomore year: On Clouds. This was the year I started building my shoe collection instead of re-

placing it, shoe by shoe. My white On Clouds, I am proud to say, are still with me today, although they are no longer white. Sophomore year was a wishy-washy one, where I finally found my footing at Freeman, my friends, and my communities. The center is partially to be to thank for this. Not to say I did not enjoy my coursework in my freshman year, but the books we read and the discussions we had truly furthered my perspective beyond my little bubble.

Junior year: Stan Smiths. I wasn't starting a new trend or being different; I got the same shoes as almost every girl at Freeman. The inevitability of high school. Wanting to fit in, but still retain some individuality without being "too different." I struggled with this, often feeling like I could never fit in without the right pair of jeans or the cute new top everyone was wearing. But, eventually, I learned that those things are just material, and I like what I like, even if it is the same as everyone. Even so, I enjoyed wearing my Stan Smiths and even came to rely on them. When I misplaced my On

Clouds but was already dressed, my Stans were there. When my flip-flops broke on the way out, guess who was there? My Stans.

Senior year: Velcro Vejas. If you know me at all, you know that my shoes are almost ALWAYS untied. So, what better solution than Velcro? My senior year was when I participated in one of the most rewarding activities of my high school career. There are few high school experiences I will look back on and call truly formative, not the fleeting ones, like the sweaty chaos of the homecoming dance floor, but those that genuinely shaped my perspective. Nothing has simultaneously built a community and furthered my knowledge more than We the People.

Recently, my government class and I attended the We the People national competition, and all I can say is... What a weekend. We spent the weekend debating constitutional law, running around D.C., and laughing uncontrollably. I learned more than I expected, not just about Congress, but about myself, my classmates, and what I'm capable of. And most importantly, I

learned that Gigi's Pasta is the best pasta within a 100-mile radius.

That weekend, the extra pep in my step didn't just come from the click-clack of my pointy black 'witch' heels, though they definitely helped. It came from realizing that all those years of new shoes, of starting over again and again, have finally led me to believing that they could be attributed to my pointy black slingback heels, also referred to as 'witch' heels, or heels that could kill. That was the goal.

As much as I would love to say my time in high school was nothing short of extraordinary, I still faced the inevitable friendship drama, the unnecessary stress of planning prom, and the infamous senioritis. Even so, it was a fulfilling four years. I grew into myself, saying goodbye to the girl who tried to fit every new trend and to the girl who sometimes was scared to speak her mind.

As I step through each new step of life, shoelaces tied or untied, I know that whatever it is, it will be excellent (thanks, Mr. Peck), as long as I have a new pair of shoes on.

Just The Usual



Nikki Rajan
Editor-in-Chief

Every school night for the past four years, I've sat in the same bed, with the same AirPods, the same pencil, and the same make-shift coffee, and worked until everything was done (despite my very nice study desk next to it -- sorry, Mom and Dad). In fact, I am sitting in this same bed writing this article right now, which is due tomorrow. This very mundane practice is something I'll actually miss a lot. And if I really think about it, it's the mundane things that I got to experience in high school that I will never forget.

I've come to write this after a long, emotional, amazing weekend

of We the People, and it's caused me to reflect on this idea of embracing the mundane. For the past seven months, I've been working alongside my class to research and practice so much that I don't really know what I should be doing now. While in the moment, I saw the practices as a daily step or another thing to cross off my checklist, I think that they were part of what was getting me through the day; I truly, genuinely enjoyed it, and I didn't even fully understand that until it was over. Though I haven't fully grasped the idea of letting WTP go, I have started to think about all my daily checklist items I'm really, really going to miss.

For example, saying hi to my favorite teachers/staff in the morning, who definitely know who they are. Thank you for letting me express myself and being there for me even when I didn't know I needed it. You know that I can talk a LOT, and it's going to be terrible when I walk through the doors of my college campus every morning and can't update you all with every little detail of what I'm doing. High school is super emotionally and mentally tough as

it is, but it would've been impossible if I didn't have you. At least one morning chat a day? Check.

The same goes for my friends who have always been there for me. Guys, what am I going to do when I can't turn to my side during class and make a joke about something dumb like the lights being "ambient," or be there to listen to my rants, or get my random TikTok references!?? I think when people in college look at me like I'm crazy, I will miss our moments together the most. One odd, but always funny conversation a day? Check. And to my family: starting high school was really hard for me; I struggled a lot, I had bad days, but what pushed me back on my feet was your belief and trust in me. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to make you proud. Also, thank you for being the biggest pillars in my life -- and supporting my Starbucks addiction (those who know, know). One motivational hug a day? Check.

Now I'm going to be very candid; I actually wasn't sure about coming to Freeman at first. I didn't think I was going to find my place,

and I really didn't know what to expect. But coming here was the best choice I could have made, for many reasons, but one in particular:

You don't realize that your worldview is expanding until you take the chance to embrace it. I still remember looking at the DSF demographics in my sophomore year and comparing them to America's, almost matching up identically. I say this because until that moment, I didn't understand how lucky we are as a school to be in a place where Culture Day is so diverse each year and where you can walk right across the hall but find someone who has stories from across the world. If I could leave with some advice for the future classes, I'd tell you to move across the hall. Learn about the struggles and the excellence of the people around you, and be open-minded as an adversary to conformity. Freeman is one of those special places where there is knowledge at every corner and in every person. Don't only take that knowledge to do things you are passionate about, but also make sure you do your part by engaging with people who may not look like

you or are like you; you may find that their stories are the ones that will resonate the most with you.

Lastly (gosh, for someone who is always rushing to finish their checklist, I really am dragging this out), I've always been someone known to be ready for the next step, for her ability to move forward, but I've recently found myself wanting to stay stagnant, stuck in time with the people around me in my 'mundane' routine. I have realized, though, that the mornings following every night after I shut my computer, empty my coffee cup, and leave my study desk unused, I wake up sitting on the same foundation, the same bed. As I move on in life, Freeman and everything I mentioned are my foundation -- one that I will always be able to rely on and remember because they shaped who I am and gave me a support system that I will never, never forget -- and that sounds pretty un-mundane (sorry, totally made up that word) to me.

So, honestly, as I look back, I think mundane would be the last thing to describe my high school days. A place that's going to be hard to leave? Check.

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The First of the Lasts



Vrusha Pramod

Online Editor-in-Chief

There is something about the final few weeks of senior year that just hits different. Everything seems

a little more important because I know it is the last time I will experience these things as a high school student. From taking that final first-day picture to making plans with my friends for everything we want to do this year, it already feels like a time I am going to remember. As much as senior year is exciting, it also has this weird emotional side, because I know this chapter of my life is starting to come to an end. The last first day really does feel different. Walking into Freeman for the final time as a senior felt strange in a way I did not expect. I have been so used to the routine of school for years, but this time it hit me that all of it is temporary now. Even just taking that picture before leaving for school felt more meaningful because it marked the beginning of

all the last moments that senior year brings. There is excitement about what comes next, but the nostalgia is also already setting in. One of the moments that stands out most at the start of the year is senior sunrise. Sitting outside early in the morning with my friends, wrapped in blankets and half awake, watching the sun come up over the football field, and feeling those rays of sunshine penetrate my heart. It was one of those moments where nothing huge was happening, but it still felt important because we were all there, starting our last year together. The first football game of the year also brings the same feelings. The stands are full, everyone is excited to be back, and it feels different being there as a senior. Whether someone is on the field, in the band, performing, or just

in the student section, there is a sense that this year means more. At Freeman, those familiar traditions hit differently when you realize it is your last time experiencing them as a student. Furthermore, these last firsts are way more than just events on a calendar that's hanging somewhere on the walls of your room. They are the beginning of the year that you already know is going to go by too fast for you to even begin comprehending. In fact, that's what might actually make it better, since it leaves you with all of summer to be caught up in the nostalgia of it all. These moments for me are the ones that remind me to pay attention, take pictures, and actually be present instead of rushing through everything. And yes, senior year comes with a lot of stress, too, like college applica-

tions, decisions about the future, and trying to keep up with everything at once, but these moments make me want to slow down and appreciate where I am right now. I know that when I look back on senior year, I probably will not remember every assignment or every random school day, but rather the small moments that left my heart radiating with joy. I'll remember the late-night dinner plans with my friends, the first football game of the season, crying with my We the People class in that hotel room at nationals, and walking down the Freeman main halls for the last time, not knowing if I'll ever get the chance to come back. Being a senior at Freeman has made me realize how important it is to appreciate things as they happen, because once they are over, they become memories faster than you expect.



When All Fails, Find Your Routine



Nina Henley

Online Editor-in-Chief

As I near the end of my high school career, I have learned a lot about myself: what study habits I excel at, and how much exercise I need each day to keep me sane. I've learned how I needed to dress for school when I was going to have a heavy workload, and that when my mind needed a change in scenery, the Tuckahoe library was the best place to go to get work done. From all the little things that I have learned, the biggest things were those that didn't have an obvious meaning. One of these "big" things that I discovered about myself

was my intense hatred of routine. Throughout sophomore and junior year, I had this obsession with how each day felt exactly the same as the last. It felt as if the weeks would blur together, and while time was moving forward, nothing ever changed, and I stayed the same. I HATED feeling like my life was on repeat, and doing the same thing every single day started to drive me crazy. My routine felt fixed: wake up, go to school, go to volleyball or track practice, go home, shower, eat, do homework, go to bed. Repeat. To further my insanity, the days themselves started to feel practically the same. I remember driving myself mad dealing with the same conversations, the same people that I saw every other day, the same feeling of drowning in work, and feeling unmotivated to do it. This painfully perfect routine that everyone followed was a concept I would think about constantly. And when something fell out of routine, it could be getting to school late or having an appointment during the day, somehow the repetitive sequence restarted. The summer after my junior year adjusted this perspective. After the multitude of AP courses, long-lasting sports seasons, and days when I thought I was going to die from the amount of stress I

had, summer was a nice change. Working at my local pool as a lifeguard and spending lots of time in the sun with my friends gave me the freedom and relaxation that I had been dreaming about throughout AP testing and final exams. And with the college application process just around the corner, I was fully prepared to enjoy every bit of peace I could. Summer started strong, and I spent all my free time staying social. No routine was needed, and I felt in control of my own little world. Unfortunately, this mindset was temporary. One June morning, only about three weeks into the break, my 5-year-old dog, Fred, was unexpectedly hit by a car and passed away. His death hit my family and me hard, and I began to shut down, sticking to the comfort of my couch. The best part of summer quickly became the worst as I realized I was beginning to miss school. Not necessarily the workload, but the unbreakable systematic regimen that everyone was forced to follow. I started to crave the stability that having a routine gave me. During the school year, no matter how good or bad a day you had, you would have to fall back into your daily routine. If I failed a math test on Tuesday, I still had to go to school on Wednesday, and if I had

a really late volleyball match the night before, my 9 a.m. APUSH class was still waiting for me the next day. The thing that I have come to recognize about routine is that it keeps life moving forward, which, in hindsight, is probably why I hated it so much. With routine, productivity was at its high, and I was able to get a lot done, time being the price to pay. By the time this issue is published, the end of my high school career will be extremely close, and I will never have the painful 9-4 school day, 4-6 sports practice, or 6-10 homework schedule that I have so diligently complained about. Ironically, it is now too late to realize how routines are everywhere, and it is beneficial to have a routine. Simple things like brushing my teeth in the morning and at night, and taking my skin medication daily. By doing these small things, my brain has a little alarm that goes off right before bed or right when I get home from school, telling me I need to do them. Going to school is the most time-consuming routine, but it's still a single activity, and repetition trains the brain to get stronger, handle more information, and help focus. Routine is systematic and unchanging. It is a frustrating part of life, yet the most constant. High school is full of ups and downs,

and the routines that are piled onto you can feel overwhelming and annoying. Despite this, during this time in your life, consistency and stability are a necessity, even if you don't feel like it is. When something unexpected happens or even just a bad day, having structure will give you the control that you need. This way, when life throws something at you, you will have a routine to bounce you back on track. As I finish my last article for 'The Commentator,' I urge you to find your routine. Not just the basic school scenario, but certain things that you do every day that make you feel accomplished. Going on a walk or a run, writing in your journal for 15 minutes, or even reading a book. All of these are small things that will help you in the long run. Find a few things that make your routine specific to you, and it will keep constant in your life. At the end of my junior year, routine was the biggest obstacle of my year. Now, as I look back, I see I was the most academically successful in junior year, and I had matured so much from the consistency and patience forced onto me from the repetitive days. Routine is a tool for growth, and by simply sticking to it, you have bested the hardest part.



Who Knew a Bruised Bone Could be so Symbolic?



Maria McGill
Opinions Editor

I never knew a single trip would impact my perspective so much. During the spring of my senior year, I traveled to New York City for a weekend getaway with my family. An eagerly awaited trip did not end in a way I ever expected, yet I only remember the good times I had.

The first two days were filled with sight-seeing and the most delicious and memorable meals. My favorite was the Orecchiette del Sud pasta dish I ordered at Sette Mezzo. The pain set in at the end of the second day, after walking almost 13 miles around Lower Manhattan, followed by my being unable to walk the next morning; I had bruised a bone in my foot. This strange ache penetrating the side of my foot held me captive in my hotel room while the rest of my family explored upstate New York, the last day of our trip.

Interestingly enough, I vaguely remember the pain in my foot or that day I spent staring at the walls and watching hours of Henry Danger. Every time I think of that vacation, my mind immediately trav-

ers, the ‘amazing cup of coffee’ I got at the Bean and Bean Chelsea each morning, and the breathtaking energy that swarmed the city. I realized that I only remembered the great parts of New York: the time I got to spend with my family and laughed at the interesting differences in city life. I got to see Little Italy, buy a purse from Canal Street, experience the subway for the first time, and admire the perplexing architecture that consumed the city. Those instances, when I was maybe a little dramatic about the pain in my foot, were just little moments overlooked by the lasting memories I gained.

I also noticed that this trip paralleled my high school experience. Looking back at these past four years, I remember each spring break I went on with the friends I met at Freeman, the summer nights of overflowing Sweetfrog bowls and going on walks around UofR, endless cheering at football and basketball games, sitting with friends in the car each morning awaiting the shivering walk into school during the winter, talking about the most fascinating topics in Journalism; I could go on and on. Yes, there were the occasional arguments with friends, the teacher I couldn’t get myself to like, and long nights of studying while experiencing the worst headache, but it just took me five minutes to come up with those examples.

The time I spent getting ready with friends before a football game outweighed the stress of a huge AP Biology test the following week.

Moments in class when I got no work done because my friends and I were looking for prom dresses, live in my mind rather than getting my phone taken seconds later by the teacher I don’t like. Falling flat on my face on the Green Acres stairs while walking to first-block AP Government has now become an ongoing joke with my friends.

Outside of school, babysitting has shown me the importance of independence and responsibility. I tend to overlook the pressure of watching over parents’ prized possessions because of the excitement they show after not seeing me for a few weeks. Memories of searching for cookies and toys at the store stick with me, instead of having to wait for the parents to get home when they said they’d be home by 11:00 p.m., and it was actually 12:30 a.m.

This realization has made me focus on the good things in life: all the nights I went to El Cap for Arroz Con Pollo and the endless supply of chips and salsa, the laughs I shared with the volleyball team each year, every Thanksgiving and Christmas potluck, screaming the lyrics to my friend group’s favorite song at a concert, the memories truly hold no limit. As I’ve learned this lesson throughout my senior year of high school, I have figured out that nothing is ever as serious as it may seem. I know that if I don’t get one job, another one will suit me better; I’ve learned certain opportunities help you grow. I know that if I have a change of heart with my



major in college, that the stress will only be there for a moment.

As this year comes to a close, I have changed so much from freshman year. My perspective, what’s important to me, and my maturity level are just a few things that I have noticed a shift in. Four years of trial and error has prepared me for the many ups and downs that are undoubtedly coming. I have learned that forgiveness is key and honesty will take you far.

It’s crazy to shift my mind back to freshman year looking up to all the seniors and thinking they were so grown up, when I still feel so young now that I’m in that same position. My dad always told me never to wish away time

and now that graduation is right around the corner, I wish I considered his words a little more. I never thought that it would go by in what feels like such a short amount of time, but it did.

Looking back, I would not have done anything differently. As I still live with a little pain in my foot, I hope to carry the mentality, reflecting on what is good and being present, with me as I grow up. When I am older and telling my grandkids stories about high school, I hope I can still confidently express how much I enjoyed my time growing up, meeting some of my best friends, and learning values I hope to keep with me forever.



What High School Doesn’t teach you



Emerson Post
Sports and Copy Editor

I came into high school thinking I was going to be taught everything I needed to know, like how to succeed in life, how to plan my future, how to get things right. And in some ways, I was. I learned formulas, deadlines, how to study, and how to perform under pressure. But no class ever really teaches you what to do when things don’t go as planned, when friendships change, or when you realize that you don’t have everything figured out. High school teaches you how to solve problems on paper, but not always how to handle the ones that actually matter. And somewhere between the classes, the expectations, the long sports practices after school and the simple moments throughout each school day, those were the lessons that ended up sticking with me the most.

An example of this can be found at the beginning of my junior year. After the 5th game of our basketball season, I suffered a torn ligament in my left middle finger, putting me out for pretty much the rest of the season. I had been

working as hard as I could leading up to the season, trying to find a spot for me to contribute to the team, and when this happened, I hit rock bottom. It felt like everything I had worked for was gone, and there weren’t any study materials, or notes lessons I could go to in order to get me through this trial. There was no teacher standing at the front of the room to explain to me what to do when something you’ve put time and effort toward gets taken away.

At the time, I didn’t know how to handle it. I was experiencing more mixed emotions than I ever had in my entire life. I was frustrated at myself (but also the sport), disappointed, and honestly questioning whether it was even worth continuing. It would have been easy to just move on and quit the sport altogether. In a way, that felt like the simpler option. I wouldn’t have any more pressure, no more expectations, no more risk of going through something like that again. But that’s another thing high school doesn’t really teach you: how to sit with disappointment and still choose to keep going, even though it may not be the ‘easy way out.’

Instead of quitting, I decided to come back and play my senior season. Not because it was guaranteed to go perfectly, but because I didn’t want one setback to define my entire experience. That decision didn’t come from anything I had learned in a classroom. It came from going through something difficult and figuring it out on my own.

By the time my senior night for basketball came around, things felt different. I wasn’t playing just to prove something or to meet expectations. I was playing because I appreciated the opportunity that God

gave me to even be out there again. That night ended up being one of my best games ever on varsity, but what mattered more than the performance itself was everything that it represented. It was a reminder to myself, and to others that setbacks don’t always mean the end of something. Sometimes they’re just a part of the process, even if it doesn’t feel like it all the time.

My favorite UFC fighter, Alexander Volkanovski, gave the quote “Adversity is a privilege” after winning the belt back for the 2nd time. But he didn’t have a clear path to winning that belt back. In his 2 fights prior to that title fight, he was knocked out both times, leading to depression, anxiety, and feeling like he wasn’t good enough. But, he didn’t let this define his experience as a fighter. He got back up, worked harder than ever, and ended up on top. Going through something difficult and fighting it out on your own is essential to developing your character as a human-- and they don’t teach you it.

Another thing high school doesn’t really prepare you for is how much relationships can change. Coming in as a freshman, I assumed the people I started with would be the same people I ended with. But at the end of the day, that’s just not how it works at all. Each year felt different, and so did the people in it. Friend groups shifted to the point where I only have about 1-2 friends that I still hang out with from my freshman year. That goes for sophomore year as well. Over time I’ve formed new connections, while some relationships have also just naturally faded. At first, that felt confusing for me. I wanted to keep in touch with every friend for every year of high school and beyond. At the

end of the day, that’s not realistic.

But over time, I realized that this change was normal. People grow, priorities change, and not everyone is meant to stay in the same place forever. That’s not something you can really learn from a lesson plan—it’s something you understand by experiencing it. Looking back, each group of people I spent time with added something different to my high school experience, and added a small piece to what my character is made up of today. Even if those friendships didn’t last the entire four years, they still mattered in the moment.

High school teaches you how to follow a schedule, meet deadlines, and prepare for tests. But it doesn’t always teach you how to deal with uncertainty, how to adjust when things don’t go your way, or how

to grow through situations you didn’t expect. Those lessons show up in moments you don’t plan for like an injury, a tough decision, a shift in friendships, or even just realizing that things aren’t as simple as you once thought they were.

Looking back now, those are the things that stand out the most. Not the assignments or the grades, but the experiences that forced me to figure things out for myself. The moments where there wasn’t a clear answer, but I had to make a decision anyway.

High school doesn’t teach you everything you need to know. But maybe it’s not supposed to. Maybe it’s just supposed to give you the space to start learning those things on your own. And in the end, those are the lessons that stay with you long after everything else is over.



Class of 2026 Where are You Headed?



Rollins College
Brady Finn



University of Maine
Karina Blanco



Virginia Tech
Maria McGuill
Vrusha Pramod
Ryleigh Perks
Jack Yartz
Cate Neely
Grant Lugar
Alex Saunders
Briggs Robinson
Brody Edwards
Vann Wyatt
Grayden Thouron
Conner Johnston
Grady Brookshier
Nebyu Girmay
Ben Britt
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Kate Tittermary
Jameena Pipes
Abhishek Garg
Vival Weatherford
Keshav Suresh
Addie Morton
Hayes Burnside
Holden Curtis
Sahana Muthukumar
Jason Roberts



Virginia State University
Secrit Tart



Northeastern University
Anderson Heitmuller



Liberty University
Ashlyn Jordan



Swarthmore College
Vivien Broughton



Elon University
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University of the South
Paige Suter



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Old Dominion University
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Radford University
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Tufts University
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University of Miami
Taylor Hudson



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Tyler Twardy



Rochester Institute of Technology
Dylan Pennock



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Madeleine Garrett
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Hudson Bender
Drew Nunnally
Marley Anderson
Caleb Jun
Charlotte Ashby



Washington & Lee University
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Harrison Smith



University of Lynchburg
Lucas Oti



University of Mary Washington
Ava Harrison
Shelby Adams



Boston University
Basil Betz



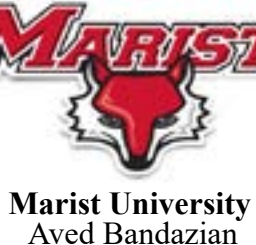
University of North Carolina - Wilmington
Nicole Murphy



University of North Carolina School of the Arts
Duke Friske
Ven Jahn



High Point University
Austen Cohen



Marist University
Aved Bandazian



Messiah University
Jocelyn Brown



University of Richmond
Kyle Bitsko
Ellie Yoder
Melissa Roman
Katherine Ransom
Sylvia Compton



University of South Carolina
Gracie Branson
Kaley Alligood
Alec Kingsbury
Sydney Isenberg



University of Tennessee
Emme Cartwright
Caroline Grubbs



University of Vermont
Thomas Kreutzer
William Luginbill
Jackson Mayfield



Clemson University
Brady Burnham
Bobby Stewart



University of Wisconsin-Madison
Mary Alex Seaborn



Furman University
Perry Reynolds



Florida International University
Alexa Orengo



Virginia Commonwealth University
Ahmad Zahed
Gabriele Martin
Husna Quraishi
Karim Naz Yousufi
McKaylah Beale
Jayla Burgess
Xander Garren
Sophia Romanosky
Brianna Dickens
Hafsa Sadiq Yar Safi
Anesa Nukic
Cameron Burns
Argent Conner
Lee Vitali



College of Charleston
Catherine Brown



Virginia Military Institute
Ben Fendley
Matthias Corbin
Noah Benson
Johnnie Lynn



West Virginia University
Evie Woody
Keaira Killian
Henry Beck
Ainsely Neiman



University of Kentucky
Virginia Thompson



Berklee College of Music
Gabrielle Betz



United States Navy
Rasheen Walker



Workforce
Jeremiah Pernell
Taylor Wynne
Peyton Anderson
William Terminella
Alejandra Yissel Garcia-Molina
Peron Jerry Anderson



Norfolk State University
Kaniyah Piercy



Randolph-Macon College
Jessie Wagenknecht
Bella Lambert



Longwood University
Nate Godzwa
Caroline Baird



Salisbury University
Tyler Stnons



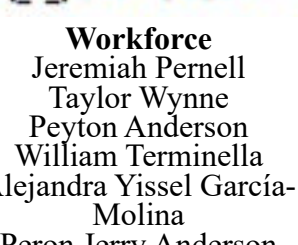
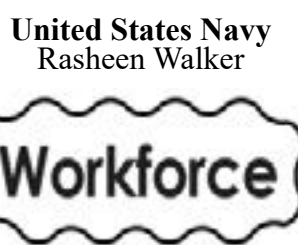
Gardner Webb University
Kayleigh Perks



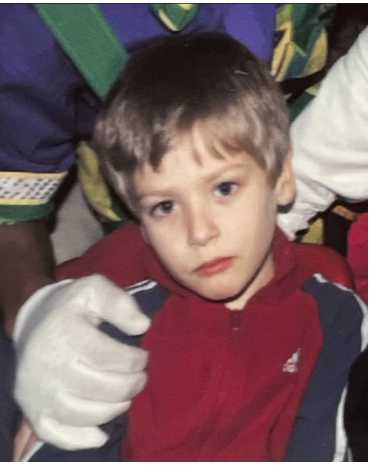
Randolph College
Daren Stinson



Flight School
Heath Woody



For The City That Grew Me



Tyler Tweardy
A&E Editor
Graphics Editor

For a long time, I thought leaving your hometown was the point. When you grow up somewhere, it is easy to convince yourself that the place you know best is the place you need to escape. Richmond was familiar in a way that sometimes made it feel small. The same roads, the same stores, the same neighborhoods,

the same routines. I knew which turns led to school, which streets got crowded after 3 p.m., which places everyone went after games, and which views looked prettiest when the sun started to set. It all felt normal because it was mine.

But now, standing at the end of senior year, I have started to realize that is exactly what made it so special.

Richmond has been the background of my life for as long as I can remember. It has been there quietly, waiting patiently, whilst still holding all of the versions of me I've been.

The nervous freshman who walked into high school, not knowing at all where I could fit in. The student who slowly found a routine.

The senior who is now trying to take everything in before it changes.

I did not always appreciate Richmond while I was living in it. Most of the time, it was just where I was. It was the place I drove through half-asleep in the morning, the place I complained about when there was nothing to do, the place I blamed when life felt repetitive. I did not always stop to think

about how much of my life was built here, I was always too busy counting down to the next thing. Richmond isn't perfect. No place is.

There have been many days when I felt simply bored here, trapped here, or wanting to be somewhere else. There were days when school felt exhausting, when every week felt the same, and when all I wanted was to fast-forward to graduation.

But even on those days, Richmond was still becoming part of me. It was in the late nights after rehearsals, walking out tired but still laughing. It was in the long colorguard practices, when everything hurt and everyone was frustrated, but we still kept going because we cared too much not to. It was in the quick stops at Sheetz or Cookout for food, the drives home after games, the group chats, the inside jokes, and the random moments that somehow ended up meaning more than the big ones.

That is what I think I will miss the most. Not one huge, dramatic memory, but the everyday rhythm of it all. The feeling of knowing exactly where I am. The comfort

of being able to picture every place before I even get there. The way this city has held my friendships, my growth, my awkward phases, my accomplishments, and even the parts of high school I did not love. For most of high school, I was focused on getting through it. I kept waiting for the next milestone: the next break, the next summer, the next year, the next chapter. I did not realize how quickly all of it was passing while I was busy looking ahead.

Now that everything is almost over, I keep wanting to slow time down, even just a little. There is something strange about leaving a place that has known you before you really knew yourself. Richmond has seen me grow up in ways I did not notice until recently.

It has watched me become more confident, more independent, and more sure of who I am.

It has seen me fail, try again, embarrass myself, find my people, lose some people, and learn how to keep moving. I know that after graduation, life will get bigger. I will meet new people, live in new places, and learn how to belong some-

where else. That is exciting, and I am ready for it. But being ready to leave does not mean leaving, emotionally, is easy. I used to think loving a place meant wanting to stay there forever.

Now I think it can also mean being grateful that it was yours for a while. Richmond was not always exciting. It was not always easy. But it was steady. It gave me a place to grow, a place to mess up, a place to come back to, and a place to call home.

Thank you for the familiar roads and the places I swore I was tired of but will probably miss the most. Thank you for the sunsets I did not always stop to notice.

Thank you for the people I met here, the memories I made here, and the lessons I learned without realizing I was learning them. Thank you for being the city I wanted to leave, and the home I know I will always carry with me.

As senior year comes to an end, I am realizing that Richmond was never just the place I grew up. It was the place that grew with me.

And no matter where I go next, some part of me will always belong here.



What I Noticed



Olive Schreher
Features Editor

Your silence isn't empty, it's full of observation. I've spent most of my life being quiet. Not in a way that goes unnoticed, but in a way that allows for everything around to keep moving. Whether it was remaining practically mute in my third-grade classroom, shrill voices echoing around me; communicating only through whis-

pers to my friend Imogene at Passages Adventure Camp amongst the bustling atmosphere; contributing minimally to dinner conversations as my exuberant sister, Delilah, captivated my whole family; or seldom chatting at my friend group's hangouts. Not absent or distant, just quiet. That's how I came to realize so much of high school, and life in general, exists in the background, unnoticed, unimportant, and yet, the most real part of it.

And in this silence I noticed. I noticed you laughing at a joke you didn't really get. I noticed you say something over and over again because you kept getting interrupted. I noticed you almost raise your hand to answer a question but then hesitate. I noticed you feeling down. I noticed you biting your nails. I noticed you walk out of the bathroom teary-eyed. But I also noticed you smile after getting a grade back. I noticed you excited for something after school. I noticed your shoulders relax when you were with your friends.

I noticed your eyes light up as you told a story. I noticed you leaning in when something interested you. I noticed you laugh at something no one else saw. I noticed when you thought no one did.

High school isn't made up of the moments people think. It's not about the football games, or the pictures, or the gossip told again and again.

High school is a collection of small, almost invisible moments that don't feel important until they're over. And the most unsettling, and maybe the most beautiful part, is that most of them happen quietly, while everyone is focused on something louder.

The amount of times I've been told I'm quiet is immeasurable. It used to feel like a constant reminder that I was separate from everything around me, watching life, rather than fully being in it.

But I wasn't, I was moving with it, breathing with it. Over time, I began to understand that being quiet didn't mean being adrift, it meant anchoring in things other people sail past without a second thought.

When you stop filling the space

with your own voice, you begin to hear, or rather see, others more clearly. People are rarely as simple as the version of themselves they present to the world, true feelings arising in moments no one is watching or habits they didn't know they had.

Once you slow down to notice, it changes not only how you perceive others, but yourself as well. Previously, I had thought I wasn't participating enough. Like everyone else had a set of instructions that I didn't get.

But, what I didn't see was that I was participating in a different way. A way that is often overlooked. Paying attention is participating. Catching a split second others miss is participating. Noticing someone isn't fine when they say they are is participating.

Generally, people tend to think the important parts in life are the big events we can point out later, but only a small fraction of life exists in those moments.

Most of it is ordinary and brief and happening when you're not aware it will matter. Consequently, I've learned that

attention is never evenly distributed. Where someone says one thing, someone else may hear something completely different, and someone may be saying and hearing both. Most of what actually matters exists somewhere between these roles, invisible ink in the margins.

You cannot predict which moments will stay with you. Conversations that seem small, looks in the hallways, even a friendly wave across the cafeteria could bring bittersweet nostalgia when you think of high school, and I think some people get lost in the noise when they're really looking for these small memories.

If I could offer any advice it'd be this: you do not have to make everything louder for it to be meaningful. You don't have to turn everything into something remembered by everyone else. What will stay with you is flitting by, without asking to be noticed. The important step is to zoom in and see it while it's still happening. Because, in the end, you won't look for the loud moments. It will be the small ones. The ones that felt like nothing at the time.



More Than Just a Place On a Map



Saanvi Gourishetty
Head of News

When I think about how I got to where I am now, it's weird to realize it all started with a map

in a small apartment in California. I was born there and lived there until I was five. Before my dad's next job placement, he pointed to a world map and asked my sister where she wanted to go. All she said was that she wanted to live somewhere with snow. So that's what we did.

We moved straight to Virginia, and we've been here ever since. I've basically grown up here; so even though I was born in California, Virginia is what feels like home to me. And yes, we got the snow my sister wanted almost every year, even if Virginia weather makes no sense sometimes. It can be 80 degrees and then snow two days later. Or it snows at a time of year when it feels like it definitely should not be snowing. That's just kind of how it is here.

Looking back now as a senior, it's strange to think about how much of my life has been spent in one place and how much I've changed while staying in that

same place. A lot of high school is just trying to figure out where you fit, what matters to you, and who you want to be. For me, one of the biggest parts of that was the Young Democrats Club.

I joined during my first two years mostly because I was interested and wanted to be around people who cared about talking about real things. What I didn't expect was how much it would end up meaning to me. It became one of the few places in school where people could actually share their opinions openly. People listened to each other, discussed things honestly, and felt comfortable saying what they believed. That meant a lot, especially in high school, where it can sometimes feel easier to just stay quiet. It also gave me confidence to speak up in other parts of my life too, not just in that room.

What I liked most about Young Dems was that it felt like a place where people belonged. It wasn't just about politics. It was about

being around people who wanted to think, talk, and care about what was happening around them. It gave people a place to feel inspired and accepted, and I think that's rare. Not everyone has a space like that at school, so being part of one was important to me.

By junior year, I became junior president. Then in senior year, I became president. Going from just showing up to meetings to actually helping lead the club made me realize how much the club had shaped me. I got to help keep that space open for other people, too, which meant a lot. I wanted other students to feel the same thing I felt when I joined; that their opinions mattered and that they had a place there.

Now that I'm at the end of senior year, I've been thinking a lot about how life works out in ways you never really expect. My family moved because my sister wanted snow, and somehow that led me to growing up here, going

to this school, and being involved in a club that ended up being one of the most meaningful parts of my high school experience. None of that was planned, obviously, but that's what makes it special.

I think a lot of growing up is realizing that your life is made up of small moments that don't seem important at the time. A random answer to a question in a California apartment. Moving across the country at five years old. Joining a club during high school. At the time, those things just feel like things that are happening. Later, you realize they helped make you who you are.

For me, Virginia is where I grew up, where I found community, and where I found a place for my voice. It gave me not just leadership experience, but a real sense of belonging. And that's something I'll remember long after high school is over and wherever I end up in the next stage of my life.



Thank You's, Goodbyes, and New Beginnings



Ava Harrison
Arts & Entertainment Editor
Graphics Editor

I have lived in the same area for my whole life. The same town, off the same road, in the same neighborhood, in the same house, and in the same room. For the past four years, I have talked to the same people and have basically had the same routine day in and day out. My routine is so precise that my friends tease me for always bringing the same thing to lunch every day. Thanks, Alexa. Part of my routine is making sure

I have a schedule for the day. I like to follow those schedules down to the wire, but occasionally my friends will break them when they know I need to pause. For that, I will forever be grateful. Thank you, Anesa, Ryan, and Sunjana.

As a senior, I have learned to cut myself some slack when it comes to my routines and schedules, but when I forget, I can always count on my family to persuade me to take a breather. Whether that breather is watching Sharks hockey with my brother (it makes me more stressed), watching the Commanders with my Dad (so does this), chatting with my Mom, walking my dog Dexter, or playing sports (especially basketball and football) around the yard, it always comes at the right time. When I am at college, I will miss the everyday closeness that we have, so expect many phone calls. Thank you for everything that you all have done for me. I wouldn't want it any other way.

School has always been a big part of my life, whether I liked it or not. I could never get away from the homework and studying that was thrown at me. I always felt like I had an unspoken obligation to it. Many teachers and librarians at Freeman made this obligation feel lighter. Thank you, Mr. Pruett, Ms. Hunnicutt, Ms. Floyd, Ms. Northrop, and Mrs. Kaplan, for making me feel welcome and supported. You have helped me come a long way since

my freshman year. I will carry everything you have taught me throughout the years as I continue my education in college.

A special thanks to Victor for always making the drive to and from school interesting. Thank you for putting up with my rants and for putting up with my music taste. As much as I complain about picking you up, I am glad that I do. I would be pretty bored without you.

To my friends who still have to get through one more year of high school, you can do it. It will be over before you know it, so don't rush it. Thank you all for making the school day feel a whole lot more fun, and a special thank you to Khloe for reminding me that I can't avoid all of my work just because I am a senior. I will miss you guys, and I hope you all have a great senior year.

Goodbyes are usually for people, but I wanted to say thank you instead. I will save my goodbyes for the places I grew up. First, I want to start with the creek behind my neighbor's house—the place where I spent most of my time during weekends in the spring and summer when I was younger. It's where I would hang out with friends and clean up trash simply because I was passionate about the environment. I still am passionate about that.

I want to say goodbye to the exact spot where the fort I built with my best friend in the sixth grade lies. Even though most of the fort is run

down now, it still has an immense amount of significance to me.

From the roads I used to run down to my parents' house on the corner at the end of the street, my neighborhood has always been a big part of my life. I will always cherish the memories I have made there. I will never forget the people I hung out with, the activities we did, or the games we made up. This will be one of my hardest goodbyes.

My next goodbye goes to my elementary and middle schools. They are about a one-minute walking distance from each other and about a five-minute walking distance from my house. I have countless memories of playing on Pemberton's playground and running on Quioccasin's track before I attended either school. I remember spending numerous hours with friends and family at these places. No matter the weather, we were outside having fun.

Even though we had a rough start, saying goodbye to Freeman will be difficult. Over the past four years, this place has been where I have spent most of my time. From attending football and soccer games to attending club meetings, theater productions, and dances, I have loved every minute of it. I have made many friends whom I am overjoyed to see daily. I would not be who I am today without my peers and friends I met at Freeman along the way. The thought of not attending Freeman five days a week is quite weird, but somehow

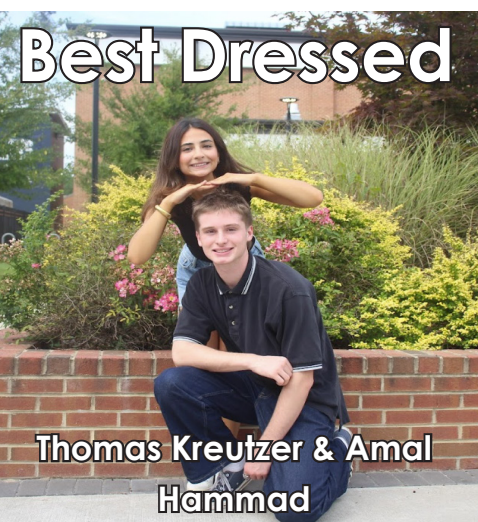
also exciting. New beginnings cannot start without goodbyes.

Now that I have said my goodbyes, I want to look to the future. To Lily, my future roommate, thank you for everything you have done for me since the sixth grade. You have supported me and always shown me that positivity and kindness can take you a long way. You have helped me understand how important it is to be a giver and to lend others a helping hand. I cannot wait to share many college experiences with you.

I realize that my new beginning at college will change everything that has been set in stone in my life so far. I will have to make new schedules, construct new routines, and find new friends. Everything about my life will be different. If you were to tell me that a year ago, I would have completely freaked out. I would have tried to make a plan for something impossible to plan for.

Now, I can confidently say that I am eager to start this new chapter in my life. Yes, I have worries, fears, and doubts, but I have learned that things always work out. Maybe they don't work out the way they were planned, but they always do work themselves out in some way, and it is always okay in the end. Because of this, I am certain that whatever the future holds for me will allow me to succeed, and I will end up being just fine. (I finally learned my lesson. Thanks, Dad.)





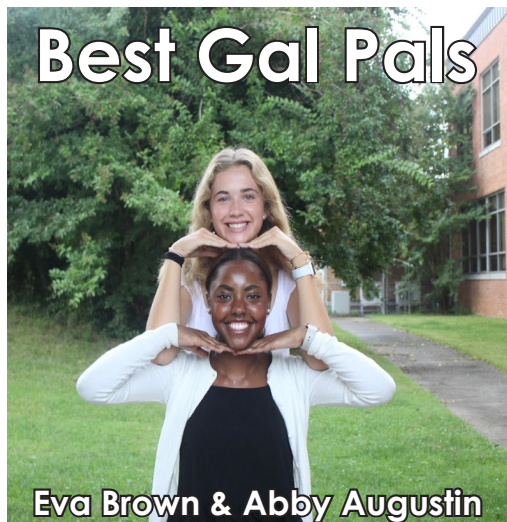
Best Dressed

Thomas Kreutzer & Amal Hammad



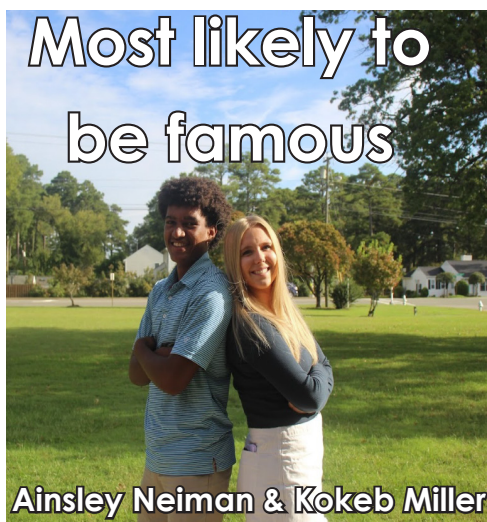
Best Bromance

Hagan Robinson & Caleb Fischer



Best Gal Pals

Eva Brown & Abby Augustin



Most likely to be famous

Ainsley Neiman & Kokeb Miller



Best Smile

Catherine Brown & Abhishek Garg



Most Likely to be on Broadway

Lucie Uruhart & Jack Harris



Most Likely to Get Caught in a Tardy Sweep

Juliet Gardner & Isaiah Thompson



Most Athletic

Addie Morton & Alex Blanchard



Most Likely to Become President

Gabiella Mazzeo & Aaron Shook



Most Artistic

Sarah Fuller & Holden Curtis



Mrs & Mr Maverick

Gracie Branson & Vann Wyatt



Soccer Mom & Dad

Grayden Thouron & Margaux Civeralli



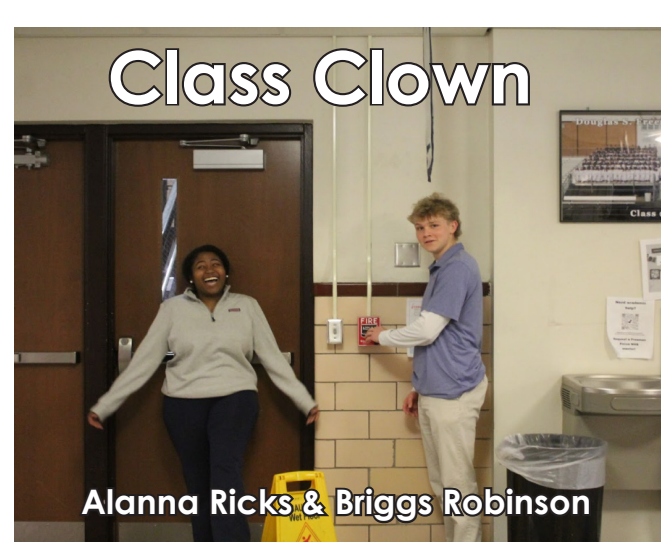
Everyone's Friend

Kaleeah Massey & Hudson Bender



Jack and Jill of All Trades

Marley Anderson & Drew Nunnally



Class Clown

Alanna Ricks & Briggs Robinson



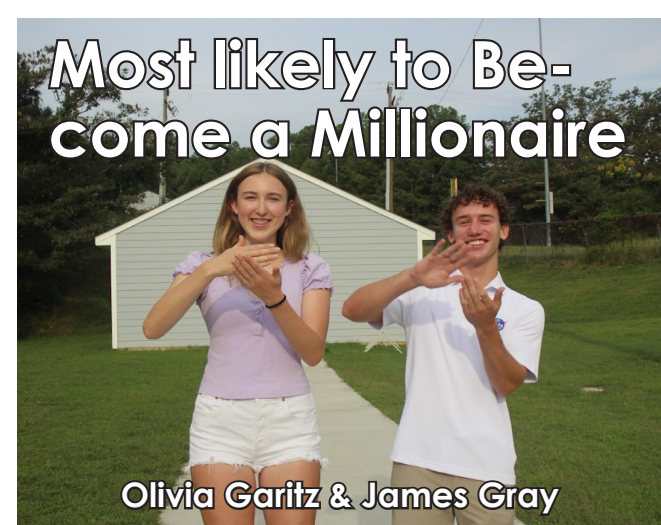
Everyone's Crush

Madelyn Thornton & Kyle Bitsko



Most likely to Win the Hunger Games

Jameena Pipes & Matthias Corbin



Most likely to Become a Millionaire

Olivia Garitz & James Gray



Most likely to win Top Chef

Emme Cartwright & Jack Stoneman



Mr. Pruett
Staff Advisor

This year, Freeman's student newspaper, The Commentator,

was run by a great group of students. Our senior staff, made up of Saanvi Gourishetty, Ava Harrison, Nina Henley, Maria McGuill, Emerson Post, Vrusha Pramod, Nikki Rajan, Olivia Schreher, Tylerson Tweardy, and Maryam Vohra are responsible for a lot in the journalism program. They have to be sure that the junior staff are learning the core tenets of what it means to be a student journalist, while also writing and editing articles, meeting important deadlines, and keeping everything organized so that we can maintain a consistent number of issues each year.

There are always deadlines in

this class and the seniors this year did a lovely job of stepping up and meeting them. I also have to say that this group in particular have been really good at making sure that our paper provides a variety of content for the Freeman community, from covering local county and school news, to features on student artists, clubs, and athletes, to pop culture, to our world news back page, and our consistently creative centerspreads. So, well done. My hope is that you all get involved with the publications at your universities and colleges in the fall. They will be lucky to have you.

While I'm certainly going to miss

this group as they head off to college, they leave behind a program and a newspaper that they helped foster and grow. They've given the junior staff writers great examples of leadership and have been friendly and kind mentors to them. I couldn't be more grateful for that. Beyond all the work, though, we simply had a really good time keeping The Commentator tradition alive. There has always been a unique spirit of community and support within Freeman's journalism program, and this group of seniors saw to it that it continues to be a welcoming and creative space for everyone involved.

The endless cycle of deadlines and interviews, the satisfaction of sending final PDFs to the printer, the export parties; all of it, all of the hours of work and collaboration has made this paper and our school community better. Senior journalists, I am incredibly proud of everything you've accomplished during your time as writers and editors. You'll be missed here at Freeman, but I'm genuinely excited to see the futures you're about to build as you continue to move forward in your personal and academic lives. Thank you for another great year and good luck out there.

-Pruett