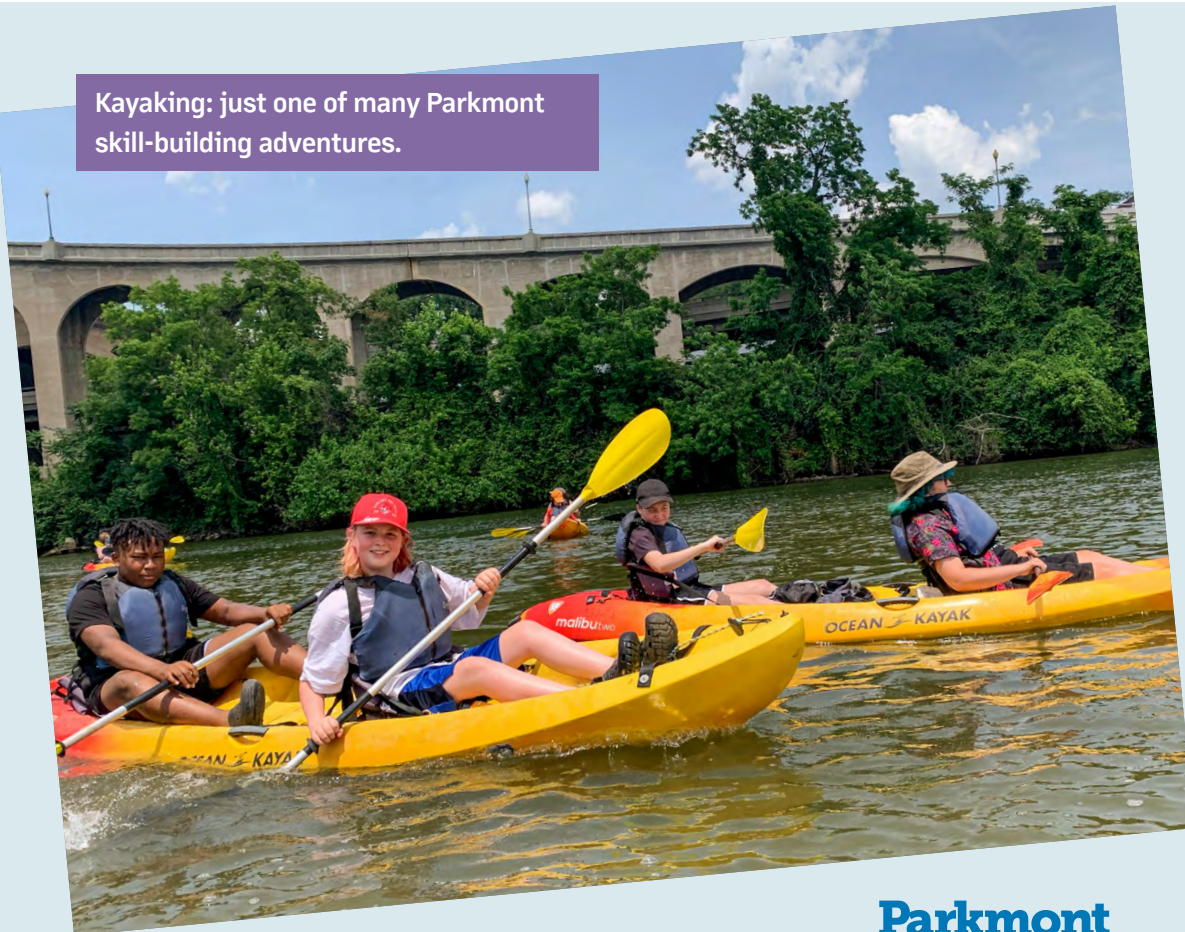


Parkmont School Passing Notes

2021-2022 | SESSIONS 4 • 5

Kayaking: just one of many Parkmont skill-building adventures.



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Celebrating Parkmont's 50 Years

By Ron McClain

In the fall of 1972, Parkmont's founders, inspired by the adventure of adding a middle school level to Maria Montessori's pedagogy, opened their school in Arlington, Virginia. They added on John Bremer's "school without walls" approach from the Philadelphia Parkway Program, and moved into the District as soon as they could. Five years later, they purchased 1640 Wisconsin Avenue so that DC's resources could be central to the curriculum. And they set in motion one of Washington's most important small schools, touching the lives of more than 1,200 students and families while employing the talents of more than 120 young and experienced creative teachers during Parkmont's first half-century.

From the beginning, these values have defined the Parkmont Way:

- ▶ Relationships between young people and enthusiastic teachers that promote growth, confidence, and self-awareness.
- ▶ A school day that allows for



A snapshot of the '21-22 Parkmont family in front of the Parkmont School building — home base for all our adventures!

collaborative work and intellectual adventures. The adventures and conversations important to Parkmont get the time they deserve.

- ▶ Profound respect for the diversity of human talents and personalities.
- ▶ And given that it is our home and destination always, the World is our Classroom, and no one spends more time out in it than Parkmont students.

We are celebrating our 50 years during this '22-23 school year by sharing photos, stories, and personal updates with hundreds of the staff and students who've been part of Parkmont's journey. With some good fortune and support, we'll give an exciting facelift to our cozy home since 1991 that's launched so many young folks and hosted so much camaraderie and affection. ■

Parkmont Staff Summer Adventures

By Ron McClain

After 40+ years of adventuring, Parkmont includes, among its Classrooms, hundreds of sites around the country. One of my favorites is a basketball court on the Havasupai Reservation at the west end of the Grand Canyon where our 1991 middle-schoolers were challenged to a game by a young Native-American woman. She brought the ball and seven or eight friends, thus initiating two and a half hours of delightful, amicable competition. Our opponents showed up the next morning with the horses we'd hired to take us the eight miles of roadless terrain back to our Parkmont van.

All of our Parkmont adventures have been made possible by energetic staff willing to put in a 168-hour week (24/7) or two to take our students on the road. Firm believers in the educational and personal rewards of travel, they do their fair share of adventuring during non-school weeks. Parkmont occasionally provides travel

continues



Bridget scuba dives the gallery in Negril, Jamaica.



Kim wonders what it would be like to live year-round in South Bristol, Maine.



Anthony at Cranny Crow Overlook in West Virginia where he got stuck in a thunderstorm and almost struck by lightning!



Nijole and her nephew take a surfing lesson in Hawaii.

stipends for their ongoing education. We were grateful to continue that tradition this past summer with the generous help of one of our current families! ■



Zulma (and Regan) hiked 1,300 steps up to the Tiger Cave Temple at the top of this mountain! There is a giant golden Buddha statue that stands 278 meters tall at this temple, located in Krabi, Thailand.



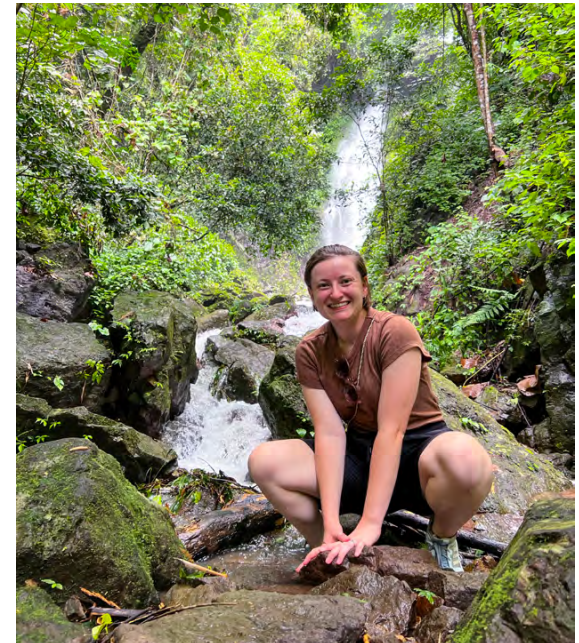
Matt with his siblings at their cousin's wedding in West Virginia.



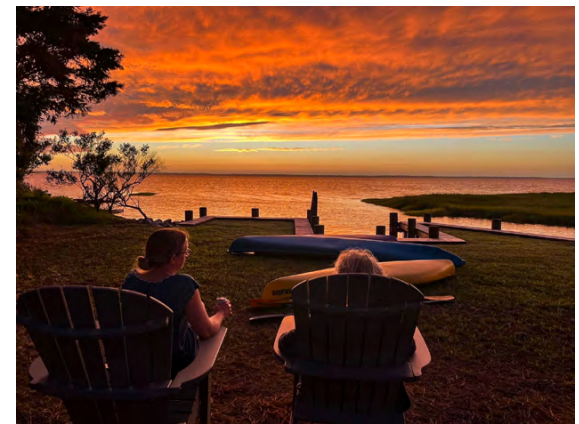
Erin floats on the reservoir in Essex Junction, Vermont.



Ethan explores the Deschutes River in Bend, Oregon.



Regan (and Zulma) went whitewater rafting in Nakhon Nayok, Thailand, even hiking up to the top of a waterfall.



Willa enjoys a sunset in Chincoteague, Virginia.

New and Newly Returning Staff

We are very excited about this year's staff lineup! Last January, our current returning families were introduced to **Regan Wind** and **Zulma Dunn**, recent Providence College graduates who'd spent a year teaching in Thailand (their summer travel destination two months ago). Regan is back teaching math and social studies and Zulma is teaching math and science.

Mike Shoup contacted us last January from Malaysia and returned this summer after a 4-year stint at Mont'Kiara International School. He taught students from around 20 different nationalities at any given time, specializing in IB Mathematics for 10th-, 11th-, and 12th-graders. He traveled to Malaysia alongside his wife Alma, and they returned this summer with their one-year-old daughter, Lyra. Mike previously spent 5 years at Parkmont from 2013-2018 teaching math, history, and science, and using his marathon experience to inspire a new level of staff fitness. He returns as a classroom teacher as well as the Upper School Coordinator, working closely with Nijole on curriculum planning and Advisory leadership. He's a Peace Corps



Regan and Zulma visit Wat Chalong, a famous Buddhist temple in Phuket, Thailand. It is a historical landmark from the 19th century.

graduate, with service spent in Ghana at a small local middle school.

Rhodes Daigle, from Louisiana and Arkansas, is a recent graduate of Hendrix College and was a member of the Arkansas Teacher Corps two years ago. He moved



Mike and his family outside their DC home, having recently returned from 4 years living in Malaysia.



Rhodes exploring Great Sand Dunes National Park, Colorado.

into the area with his partner in August and signed on to be our new Student Support Instructor just as school started. He's an Environmental Science major with a year of experience teaching middle

continues

school science. He's providing in-classroom support for a number of Parkmont students on board this year.

Allie Beyda also returns to Parkmont after a family-starting break of 5 years. A graduate of Rollins College and the American University Masters program in Special Education, Allie tutored at Parkmont while running her own private tutoring business. She is our Learning Specialist, and she's currently testing all new (and a number of returning) students individually for reading skills. She'll work with Rhodes and our teaching staff to establish appropriate modifications for our students with learning differences, and by mid-year she'll be producing individual Parkmont Learning Plans for students with the highest needs for support.



We are thrilled to have Allie back at Parkmont once more!

Leslie Keller has joined us as our next Director of Communications. She's transitioning with and replacing Erin Lidz, who departs for her own family-starting adventure in November after doing a great job for us for the past 5 years and providing stellar communications leadership during the pandemic. Leslie's the first person we've hired who comes to us with a lot of previous communications experience, most of it with TIC Summer Camp, whose focus on technology and sports activities has been popular throughout the Metropolitan area for the past 35 years. Additionally, Leslie has 10+ years of experience in youth development and is currently pursuing her Masters in School Counseling at the George Washington University.



Leslie enjoys a waterfall in Portland, Oregon's famous Japanese Garden.

Christy Ross came to Parkmont in 1993 to teach art and start our Development Office and left after 24 years running Communications, doing Admissions at times, raising more than three million dollars, and handling special projects like Accreditation and Zoning. She returns this year to be our Admissions Director.

And while **Sam Graul** was gone completely for only 8 weeks last year, during the Year of Enzo (Cielo and Sam's one-year-old son), we're delighted to have him back on campus for mornings all year, teaching math and running our tech and facilities initiatives. Sam has been teaching math, science and computer programming, and acting as our tech wizard since 2006. He is also another occasional marathoner. ■



Christy canoeing in the Adirondack Mountain Reserve.



Sam and Enzo.

PARKMONT POETRY FESTIVAL 2022

“Don’t Give Up on Your Imagination!”

By Kim Schraf

April 30 was a picture-perfect spring day, the last day of National Poetry Month, and Finalist Judge Ethelbert Miller declared, “As we can see from this afternoon, the future of poetry is in good hands.” Ethelbert is a longtime champion of our Festival and had recently selected the forty winning poems from nearly 400 submissions representing DC’s public, private, and charter schools. After two lonely years of isolation, the Parkmont Poetry Festival was back in person, housed in the stunning Sanctuary of Zion Baptist Church, Parkmont’s neighbor and frequent event collaborator since 2017.

The poems and the poets were the main attraction, and they did not disappoint. Each reading of a winning poem was a performance in itself, as voices small and large, personalities tentative and theatrical, soared in the regal space. Sixth-graders fresh from navigating the first year of middle school to twelfth-graders with one eye on the looming college horizon found their poetry in dialogue even though they’d never met. Parkmont boasted two middle school winners – Leyu Fikru and Gigi Knight – and eight (!) upper school winners – Abe Silverman, Spencer Millien, Garrett Velsey, Arielle Putterman, Jacob Roberts, Sean Quigley, Alex Harry, and for the third consecutive year, Karla Rodriguez. Shout-out to all of the Parkmont poetry teachers!

When all 40 poems had been read, Ethelbert took a turn at the podium to address the poets. Any opportunity to hear him



Finalist Judge Ethelbert Miller shares a poet’s wisdom with the winning writers.

speaking is a golden one, but it must have been an exceptional moment for young writers to hear:

“As you celebrate your achievements today, ask yourself what comes next? Why did you write your poem? How did your poem change you? What makes it go? Take your poem apart and build it again.” He challenged them that if they continued to write – and he hoped they would – “Be prepared for the miraculous.... Embrace wonder and surprise and the magic and music of language.... Don’t give up on your imagination!” ■

Parkmont Pupils of Prestige

By Mekdi Gebressie

Hey! My name is Mekdi and I am a junior at Parkmont School. I am your Parkmont Pupils of Prestige (PPOP) host, interviewing students who have stood out in either their school work or their commitment to our community. Specifically, the students I will interview are winners of PPOP, which is an award Parkmont gives every week to students that have outshone or bettered themselves.

This session's winners are Marake and Jimena.

Marake

Marake (she/her) is a 7th-grader here at Parkmont School. When I asked for an interesting fact about herself she responded, "I am part of the Gurage people, which is an ethnic group in Ethiopia, and I can dance different kinds of cultural dances, which I think a lot of people in this school don't really know about." Although we do have a few Ethiopian students here at Parkmont, I haven't met one with the same ethnic background as Marake, which was a pretty interesting fact to learn. When I asked why she thought she won, she explained that

maybe her improvement from last year and her commitment to helping others may have made her a great choice. As far as the most challenging part of this new school year, "I think it would be my ML class, Street Law with Regan, and Math class with Matt. I plan to overcome that challenge by asking for help from my teachers and classmates. I can study



Marake

more and do outside research to excel in these classes. But other than that, I am encouraged by my teachers and friends to do better this year so I think I will be fine." She continues to give advice to new or returning students by saying, "I would say if you have any challenges or questions about anything, go to your teachers and ask. They are here to help; don't be afraid to ask for help – you will only learn from it." And with that, I would like to conclude my interview with Marake, a brilliant yet kind student here at Parkmont that makes every student feel welcomed and understood.

Jimena

The next winner of PPOP I interviewed was actually a new member of the Parkmont community. Her name is Jimena, and she is a freshman in high school, 14 years old, and she goes by any pronouns. When I asked about a surprising fact about her she told me, "I used to sing a lot when I was in a choir but I also did a lot of solos. I don't sing as much as I used to, but I do enjoy this hobby of

continues

mine.” She continued to tell me that “I think I was awarded because I stood out in my classes. Specifically, in my English class with Nijole, I assisted my classmates with things they didn’t understand.” As far as challenges that she has been facing this school year, she tells me that it would be trying to keep up with the assignments that are given to her. She decides to solve this issue by creating a better schedule for herself so she will start to be more responsible and accountable for her work. She recommends making connections with classmates and teachers to make the school year entertaining, “asking a lot of questions and being engaged in your classes. But also making connections and friends so you can enjoy the school year.” And with her wise words, I concluded my interview with Jimena. It was a pleasure to speak with her, and it really made me happy to know that the Parkmont community has a kind-hearted, yet humorous, new member to it. ■



PARKMONT'S CLASS OF 2022

Resilient, Ambitious & Promising

By Nijole Gedutis

Our latest group of graduates, like all the classes before them, completed their coursework, wrote thoughtful petitions, made profound connections with peers and teachers, and interned all throughout

Above: They did it! The class of 2022 shows off their hard-earned diplomas just after Parkmont’s graduation ceremony last June.

the city. This group, though, on top of that, had to do it all while in the midst of a global pandemic. Through quarantines and crash-courses in Zoom, hybrid classes and virtual internships, they worked extra hard to make it to graduation. We were delighted to celebrate them by bringing back our tradition of Senior Night – after

continues

dinner at Lauriol Plaza, we took one last ride in a Parkmont van together to Round House Theater in Bethesda to see *Nollywood Dreams*, then gathered at Zion Baptist Church on June 12 to honor them in front of the whole community.

Below are excerpts from the speeches that our teachers gave at Graduation about this remarkable group of seniors:

Mihret

Willa said: Through the petition process, I was struck by your thoughtfulness and strong sense of identity. You wrote about being a fighter when you were young, but said that you are usually calm now. I think the fighter in you remains today and looks like leadership and knowledge of self. You have interned for many organizations that focus on social justice and you're thinking about pursuing criminal justice reform and/or social work. You not only follow the news but you attend protests and events for issues you are passionate about. You've added to the sense of community at Parkmont, getting along well with peers and teachers alike.

Melinda

Nijole said: I could talk more today about things you should keep doing, Melinda

– like, keep being funny, keep growing in confidence, keep caring deeply about your family – but I want to leave you with this: as you move into this next stage, remember that you are not starting fresh – you are already well on your way to becoming an independent adult, one who knows that part of maturing is knowing when and how to ask for help; one who is open to trying new and challenging things – not only ones that are practical, but also ones that are straight-up fun.

Jason

Bridget said: If Parkmont was the kind of school that gave superlatives, I'm sure this person would have been voted Mr. Congeniality, Mr. Popularity, or something of the like. Although this student was only in person at Parkmont for a total of six months, they are well-known throughout the Parkmont community. Whether that is from their lunchtime karaoke sessions in the Yellow Room, popular videos on Tik Tok, or sarcastic banter with peers, this person has a way of making their presence known. While those things may seem trivial, it speaks to a deeper value, a desire for connection and belonging which makes both teachers and friends an essential part of his circle.

Tigist

Sam said: My understanding of how Tigist relates in so many positive ways to the people around her culminated when I had the privilege to be on her final petition committee this year, where I was able to hear her reflect on how she'd moved from Ethiopia to Germany and finally to Washington DC. Just to hear her describe her relationships to her mother, her father, her aunt, and her three siblings was actually a wonderful experience in and of itself. The young, bright individual that I'd known as my student for her entire high school career was no longer my student. Tigist was a young woman who'd taken all the experience and knowledge we could give her, mastered it, and was ready to move on, to take a next step in her life where she would continue to enrich the world and the people around her.

Conor

Ethan said: Conor achieves a number of wins in his last couple of years at Parkmont. A collaboration between him and a Lego Spongebob stop-motion Youtuber results in Conor producing a Halloween-themed script, seen by tens of

continues

thousands. The same year, he finishes his life's work — a 70-page screenplay titled “Delivery”, a story about a pizza delivery boy who has to fight his way out of a college dorm filled with cannibal sorority sisters. The screenplay is something Conor is immensely proud of, and his graduation arrives a few days after the one-year anniversary of its completion.

Bailey

Sania said: I have met few people, students or adults, who take feedback as well as you do, Bailey. Your ability to listen, laugh at your mistakes, and adapt is truly remarkable. I know it will carry you far in college and beyond. Your good humor and growth mindset inspire me and remind me what education really means In addition to embracing challenges and setbacks as opportunities, in the past year you have also practiced a remarkable acceptance.

Spencer

Willa said: In high school, Spencer demonstrated perseverance in the face of academic challenges. He has one of the strongest work ethics I've observed. This year, in my reading group, he usually turned in work early. A+ for promptness,

and it kept me on top of my grading. On the flip side, it also meant I gave him lots of revisions. It could get frustrating for him, but he pushed through, becoming a stronger writer. Similarly, math has been a tough subject. But Spencer put in hours of work outside of class with his tutor and with his teacher, Sania, quietly persevering.

Karla

Matt said: Karla, I met you in the ninth grade, in your first year at Parkmont, as you entered high school in a new and somewhat strange environment. You were placed in my Health class in Session 1 that year, and I was struck by your curiosity, your way of thinking about things, your sense of humor, and the excitement you feel when you learn something new or connect the dots. You were unlike anyone I'd talked to before, in terms of how you understood people and interpreted their actions. You were quick to recognize the humanity in others, and to view them with an unwavering kindness. You were sensitive, too, and spoke beautifully, like a poet. You possessed a maturity that comes from facing real difficulties as a kid, but you had not lost your silliness and your love for life.

Lucas

Bridget said: That kid, now a man, has spent the last five years at Parkmont wearing that giant smile; he is still easy-going, kind, and humble. This year he continued to pursue opportunities for personal growth by improving his skills as a sous chef at Lost Sock and helped the school by offering to tutor middle schoolers, both of which proved his dedication and patience. It's these qualities and the others that I've mentioned that give me confidence that LEWKAS will succeed in the hospitality industry and beyond. Thank you for the delicious treats and giving us a piece of your heart. We'll miss you. ■

Potomac Ecology & a Return to ‘Parkmont Normal’

By Ethan Kuhnhen

Parkmont’s Potomac River Ecology class marked a cautious return to pre-pandemic trip-based learning. The small group of seniors in the class were the first in three years to experience a multi-day adventure, exploring the course of the Potomac River from the headwaters of the river’s South Branch, to its confluence with the Shenandoah River in Harper’s Ferry.

The class focused on the ecological, cultural, and historical significance of the Potomac. A trip-based class, students prepped for adventure and lab-based field trips every week. Some of our standout outdoor adventures included a 9-mile float down the Potomac River as it meandered through the Piedmont region, stream-sampling of several streams in the DC region, an exploration of Dyke Marsh

in the tidal Potomac, and, of course, our final two-night, three-day excursion to West Virginia to challenge ourselves on the wild and wonderful upper-course of the river.

Students in the class had varying levels of experience paddling, so preparing for our trip by giving ourselves time on the water earlier in the session was crucial. By the time we embarked on our overnight trip, students had logged nearly half a day’s worth of paddling experience. Leaving on Thursday, we hoofed it northwest to Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, a town steeped in history and geographic significance as it sits at the confluence of the Potomac and its biggest tributary, the Shenandoah River. We had organized a rafting trip through some of the area’s most popular rapids, a section of the Shenandoah known as the “Steps.” The students navigated through the river with aplomb. No flipped boats! We spent the night in rustic cabins at the Brunswick campground, where students cooked themselves dinner over a campfire. Things felt back to normal.



Kayaking on the South Branch of the Potomac in West Virginia.

continues



Have tent, will travel (also, vans ... and Crocs).

The next day we drove an hour and a half west to the town of Moorefield, West Virginia, where we had set up a float trip along a section of the Potomac River's South Branch known as the "Trough." In this 7-mile section of river, the South Branch flows through some of the most gorgeous scenery in the Appalachian mountains. A deep trough, or gorge, straddles the river for several miles here; the wildlife management areas on either side protect the scenic vistas, providing a glimpse of what life was like here hundreds or thousands of years ago. As we paddled through gentle Class I rapids and long, deep pools, eagles perched on trees

at the top of the gorge, hundreds of feet above us. The calls of a myriad of bird species, and the tranquility of the beautiful late spring afternoon lulled a few of our students to sleep.

After we got off the river, we pitched tents at the Calleva Outfitter's property along the riverbank. Rainclouds threatened from the Western side of the trough so we made a gametime decision to head somewhere dry, settling on a bowling alley in the town of Moorefield. After a delightful evening knocking down pins (alongside a few gutterballs), the rain let up and we drove back to camp where we once again cooked and headed to bed early for



Ethan's Potomac Ecology class poses mid-road in a light-traffic moment.

some well-deserved rest.

Heading home the next day, I thought about how much we had missed these trips in the previous three years. Wet, tired and more than a little stiff from sleeping on the ground, the class had nonetheless taken themselves collectively out of their comfort zones and emerged unscathed. For many of them, this was the first time camping, their first time going without a shower for a couple days, the first time cooking over a fire. It was an experience that we'd talk about for weeks after the trip, and one that, hopefully, has driven them to spend more time in the great outdoors. ■

Ultimate Frisbee

By Anthony Muehlberger

The coach of DCI's Ultimate Frisbee team happens to be someone I played ultimate with for years in the DC recreation leagues. So, when he heard I was working at Parkmont, he asked if I would be interested in getting some friendly games going to inspire more interest in the sport.

Since we had already done ultimate in PM classes, and had played other schools recreationally in sports like soccer and basketball, it wasn't too hard to find enough interested student players. With only a couple of quick practices after school under our belt, we met DCI up at the Carter Barron soccer fields after



Coach Anthony gives players a pep talk.



Parkmont's cheering squad provides sideline support!

school on a warm May Monday. DCI came ready, with two squads, in uniforms, running drills, with plenty of water. We came with a lot of excitement, not much strategy, but a large crew of teachers and students, ready to see Parkmont's inaugural ultimate frisbee opener. And it did not disappoint!

The Parkmont 'Panthers' (a name half-jokingly adopted for that game) only had a few players who had really played, but the game had some really solid athletic efforts, and they learned quickly. Against a much more experienced team, they kept

the game close, competitive, and very exciting right to the end – where they were actually even ahead. With the emphasis on participation, learning, and enjoyment, Parkmont was not just putting in its best players, but whoever said they were interested and ready. It was really awesome to see how many people were nervous, but willing to try, even for just a point or two. So, though Parkmont did end up losing in the final moments, the game was truly a triumph. Even the other team recognized it afterwards – admitting how impressed

continues

they were with how well Parkmont had played, even though most players weren't even in athletic clothing, and had very little experience.

Based on that enthusiasm, I was able to use DCI's contacts to connect with other local DC schools with ultimate programs, and found many who had teams or JV squads who were interested in playing us. We did manage to play another game in May, against the School Without Walls team – where Parkmont was ahead in the beginning despite playing an even more experienced and serious squad.

I was really impressed with how quickly students picked up the basics, and how well they worked together on the field – and I was equally impressed with the show of support from students and faculty walking up to Carter Barron to watch and encourage them. A special thanks to 'Coach Zulma' for stepping up and helping me out on the field, and to Regan for getting and sharing an amazing video compilation from the first game.

I hope that enthusiasm carries over to this spring, and we can get in more games and learn even more basic strategy. See highlights at <https://youtu.be/9ZFzP2uEAIU>.

Go, Panthers! ■

Challenging Regimes

Getting Bothered and Getting Engaged

By Sania Tildon

“We need not to be let alone. We need to be really bothered once in a while. How long is it since you were really bothered? About something important, about something real?”

— Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

This session students undertook the challenge of learning to be bothered citizens. By watching *Fahrenheit 451* and reading first-person accounts of civilians who lived under dictatorships, students learned about the role of complacency in the rise of dictatorships and the need for critical civic engagement.

Students developed a deep understanding of what makes a nation and how dictators build and consolidate power through the online game Nation States. Students wrote rich national histories for their states – states like “Glotropicus” and “The Kingdom of Ice and Fire” – and designed flags and national symbols to learn how nations arise and how national identity grows stronger.

After creating states online, students were presented with daily issues that they had to resolve in a way that would consolidate their power. For example, Dei Antoine

determined that “no one should be above the law” when, after a highly publicized arrest of a national celebrity, the wealthy elite of her nation, Sorimoen Polo, began demanding the right to avoid prison terms by paying off their victims. Recognizing that eroding civil liberties is key to building a stronger state, Mateo Ago decided that the rights to an individual's social media should default to the state after the untimely death of his nation's cybersecurity director led to “public concerns about who owns their social media profiles once they've passed away.”

Armed with the knowledge of how to build authoritarian regimes, students applied their understanding to analyzing nine contemporary dictatorships and opportunities to challenge those regimes. ■

Otakon Anime Convention

By Mel Kates

Otakon is an annual summer convention where fans worldwide come together to celebrate Asian popular culture. From panels and workshops centered around popular Japanese anime and manga to K-Pop dance parties, Otakon is a three-day action-packed experience that has grown since its move to DC in 2017. In fact, Otakon made history this year with over 40,000 attendees, making it one of the highest-attended events hosted at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center.

Parkmont's connection to Otakon started last year when a



Abe adds his Gundam-inspired paper lantern to the collection on the wall.

few students from our school shared they were interested in attending. We agreed to meet on the final day of the convention – when the hours were shorter and there were usually fewer people – so they could get an idea of what it was like. They were met with imaginative, elaborate cosplays, impromptu J-Pop jam sessions in the hallways, and most importantly – the expansive video game room packed with arcade games and console setups.

Seeing how much the students enjoyed themselves last year, we reached out to families in April to invite interested students to attend Otakon with me and Enti as a Parkmont-organized event during the summer. We met at the Silver Spring Metro station on Sunday morning of July 31st and took the 70 bus directly to the convention center. Once we made our way inside, we sat through a couple of panels and Abe even spent some time crafting a lantern in one of the workshop rooms. We spent the bulk of our time, however, roaming around the artist alley and dealer's room, massive areas on either side of the convention center filled with people selling original artwork, anime-influenced streetwear, colorful wigs and accessories, and so much more. Every now and then we'd cross paths with someone in a cosplay we recognized or one we were curious about and would strike up a conversation with other enthusiastic convention-goers.

We stayed there until the very end of the convention, ushered out of the space and back to the bus stop along with all of the other attendees. On our trip back to Silver Spring, we shared our favorite moments from the day and started brainstorming ideas for who we'd cosplay as on our visit to Otakon next year. ■

MIDDLE SCHOOL INTERNSHIPS

Understanding Community-Based Services in the City

By Regan Wind and Zulma Dunn

During the last few months of the school year, our middle-school students were invited to participate in some exciting and challenging internship programs around the city! Every Wednesday afternoon, students would divide into their groups and journey off to either So Others Might Eat (SOME), Gearin' Up Bicycles, or Washington Youth Gardens. Students worked for about two hours each week and gained valuable experiences beyond the walls of Parkmont. Each of these programs offered students a chance to learn important life skills and work with people dedicated to strengthening the DC community.

SOME is a non-profit organization that offers housing, medical care, and other social services to those in need in Washington, DC. Students participated in a variety of activities including sorting out donated items, helping to take inventory, and handing out necessary goods to visitors. Staff leaders reported several students going above and beyond what was asked of them to make sure that all of the supplies were organized and accounted for. This experience gave students an insight into the work that community leaders are doing daily to improve the lives of people in neighborhoods all around us!

Our second group of middle-school students worked alongside mechanics in the local bike shop, Gearin' Up Bicycles. This non-profit organization seeks to provide care and support to any bike-rider with a service request. They also refurbish and repair old or used bicycles to sell back to riders in the community.

Students in this group learned hands-on skills and teamwork as they replaced damaged parts, repaired flat tires, and recalibrated gears.

Finally, as part of the Washington Youth Gardens internship experience, students learned about the process of cultivating and caring for a thriving garden. During gardening sessions, students gained insight into the positive ways to care for the Earth and worked to understand basic practices for achieving bountiful gardens. By the end of the year, students were ready to don their gloves and create their own natural flower gardens!

In addition to creating an opportunity to learn about the incredible service and work that is being done in the city, these internships offered students practical skills, leadership experience, and a glimpse into a variety of professional fields. Our students are eager to continue figuring out their passions and goals, and internship and volunteering opportunities are perfect ways to learn what kind of inspiring work is happening all around them. ■

Out of this World Reading Group Trips

By Bridget Mullins and Willa Reinhard

This year, Parkmont students and staff discovered a magical museum nestled in the heart of the city. Planet Word, billed as “The museum where language comes to life” helped students to realize that words surround us in a variety of ways, not just in books.

In the Spring of 2022, reading group teachers arranged afternoon field trips



Willa and Bridget work with students to discover the secrets of “Lexicon Lane.”

that related to the content of their classes. Two reading groups, Willa’s Perspectives in Writing and Bridget’s Coming of Age in the Now joined together to visit Planet Word. Although many students were initially unconvinced that visiting a place called Planet Word would be fun, they soon were immersed in discovering how language functions and shapes

their lives. The afternoon began on Lexicon Lane as students put their minds to work, collaborating with peers to solve a variety of mysteries and escape within the hour. After everyone was successfully freed, students explored other exhibits within the museum. Students soon discovered secret nooks hidden within

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the stacks of books, as well as walls they could “paint” and transform according to the expression that was chosen. One exhibit that was a hit with the students and staff was the karaoke exhibit, where students learned how songwriters choose words to create lyrics and explored genres, before getting the opportunity to belt out hits by Drake, Eminem, Beyonce,

and more! Students also loved the photo booth where they were introduced to new vocabulary and challenged to embody this by posing in a way to represent the meaning of the word. Other areas that piqued students’ interests included areas where students could practice delivering jokes, act out idioms, or watch books come to life. In the end, Bridget and Willa

had to corral students out of the museum, making promises to return soon to check out some of the areas that the group didn’t get to explore. One final treat, and a lasting memory, was the chance for students to have a short story or poem printed at random for each individual as they walked out the door. Planet Word will surely remain on the Parkmont trip list! ■



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