

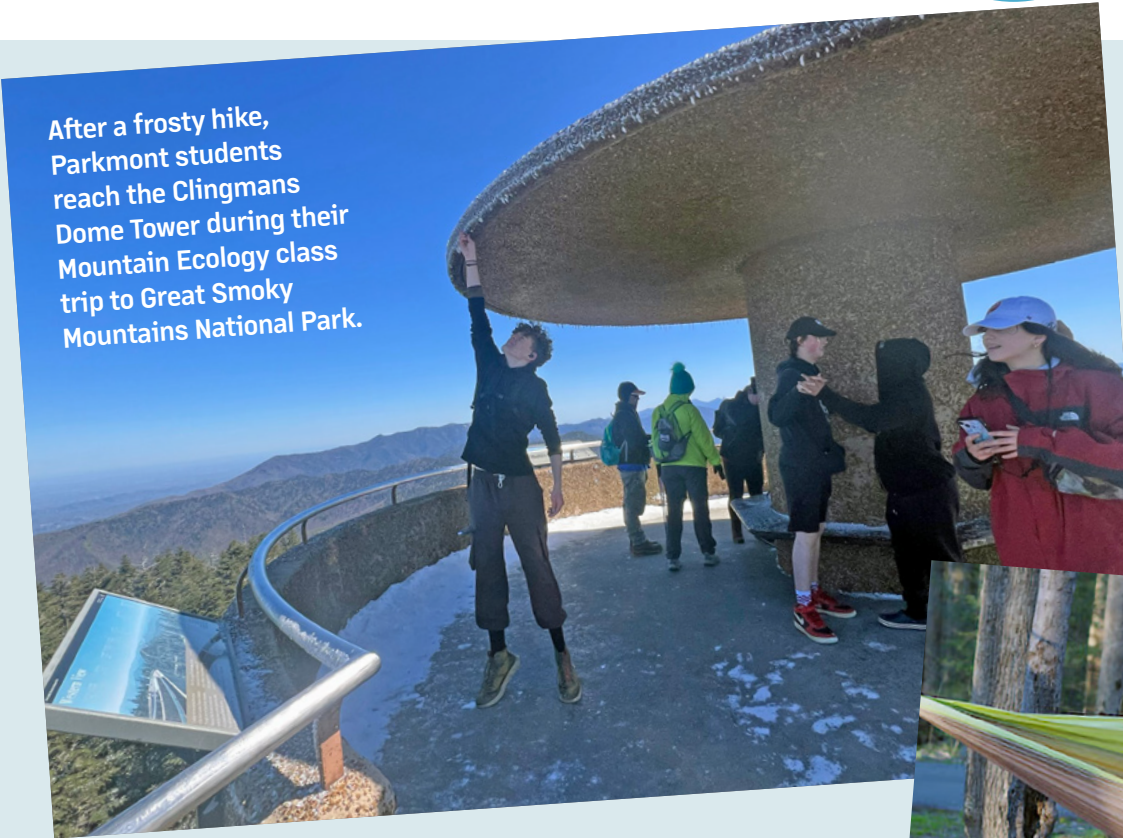


Parkmont School

Passing Notes

SPRING 2024

After a frosty hike, Parkmont students reach the Clingmans Dome Tower during their Mountain Ecology class trip to Great Smoky Mountains National Park.



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Mikiyas updates his trip journal at a Tennessee campground in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains.

PPOP: The Spirit of Parkmont

Leyu, 8th grade

Whether you call it P-POP or say each letter individually, P-P-O-P, the Parkmont Pupil of Prestige award is a tradition that captures the spirit of Parkmont. PPOP reminds us that our teachers recognize and appreciate the efforts we are making to grow academically, personally, and as members of our school community. Every week, at the end of Thursday Announcements, each teacher reveals which student they nominated to be the week's PPOP and why. Their reasons can range from finishing a tough assignment to cheering up a classmate. Ethan, the teacher who manages PPOP, then adds a little bit of suspense by recounting the PPOP winner's achievements before revealing their name. In a small school like Parkmont, you can usually guess who it is as soon as you hear what they did, but we all enjoy the ritual. Everyone gives a full round of applause for the week's PPOP winner, and we head to our Main Lessons feeling uplifted.

The addition of PPOPs to the Parkmont schedule is pretty recent,



Zulma congratulates Kia on his PPOP nomination.

but nobody can pinpoint exactly when it started. According to the teachers I interviewed, they gathered one Wednesday before the pandemic for their regular after-school faculty meeting. Typically in these meetings, the teachers discuss problems they're having with students in the classroom, trying to get

to the root of the issue. Even though their intention was to help, the negativity left teachers feeling pessimistic. To counter it, they decided to end the meetings on a positive note by mentioning the good things students had done since the previous meeting. A few weeks later,

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a topic that came up during the meeting was how to boost student morale. Sam, a Parkmont teacher and the school's technology coordinator, suggested that they share the positive comments they'd made at their faculty meeting with the whole school the next day at Announcements. And the rest is history.

So how do you become a PPOP winner? Every teacher has their own criteria or reasons why they would nominate someone. Often, the reason is that the student made



Jacob shows off his PPOP gold medal.

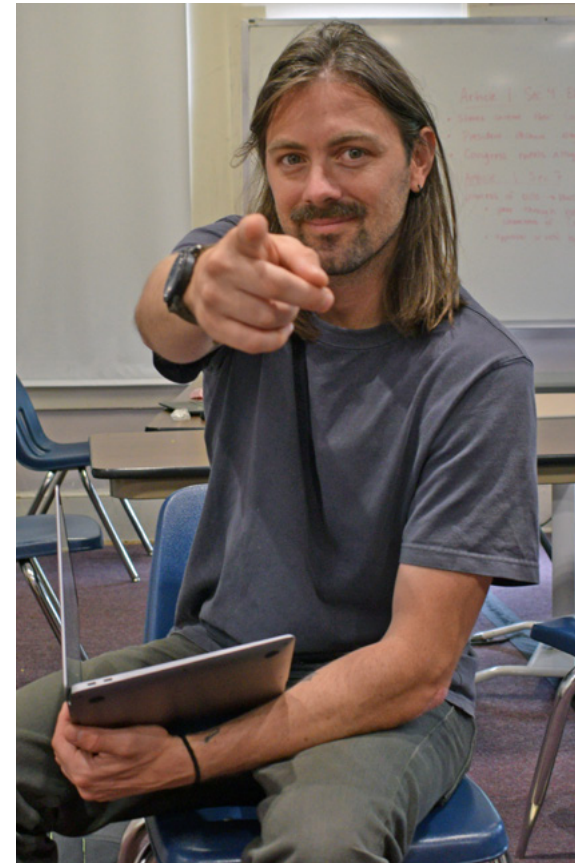
an effort to take positive action. A survey of the teachers showed that some of the most common reasons are:

- ▶ Enthusiasm
- ▶ Resilience
- ▶ Grit
- ▶ Positivity
- ▶ Stepping out of your comfort zone

Everybody is different, though. Some people are naturally more resilient than others, for example, so how can you compare among students? The answer is that you don't.

"Growth is different for every student," says Nijole, Parkmont's Dean of Students. To understand how much someone has improved, you compare them to themselves. "We're looking for people who did something above and beyond *their* ordinary action," says Bridget, a Parkmont teacher. "Whether it's academically, socially, or their work ethic, everyone has their own baseline." An example is when a student who generally isn't interested in their English class starts to get more involved and ask questions. PPOP nominations are a way teachers can tell students, "Hey, I respect that, and I'm proud of you," Bridget says.

Think about how you felt last week and compare that to how you feel right now.



Ethan says you have what it takes to be the next PPOP.

There's a noticeable difference, right? Teachers here understand that you might not be the same person you were last week. Every day, you decide in what direction you want to move your life. "Consistency shouldn't mean that your actions should

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be taken for granted,” says Anthony, who teaches math and science. The goal is to encourage those who are trying to move themselves in the right direction.

PPOP is “completely tailored to each kid and their experience,” says Matt, a teacher and Middle School Coordinator. Parkmont is a school where each kid is

recognized and appreciated for who they are, and PPOP reflects that.

But, like the dress code at Parkmont, PPOP is still pretty casual. Some teachers suggest nominations off the top of their head, while others keep a running list to make sure an achievement doesn’t go unnoticed. Occasionally, we can’t meet for Thursday Announcements because of field trips or other activities. At one Announcements meeting this spring, we celebrated four weeks worth of PPOP nominees!

From a student’s perspective, sometimes nominations can feel embarrassing because it’s in front of the entire school, but overall it feels nice to be appreciated, especially when you’re not looking for it. So, Shoutout to Parkmont for making everyone feel welcome and appreciated! ■

Shoutouts: The Cousin of PPOP

On the last Thursday of each Session, Parkmont does Shoutouts instead of PPOP. Any teacher or student can give a Shoutout to anybody for any positive reason. The most common examples are a student giving a shout out to a teacher, or a teacher giving a shout out to their entire class. It’s like a school-wide version of PPOP where everyone gets a chance to be a Parkmont Pupil of Prestige. The positive energy gets pretty high, and people tend to go overboard, so when we reach the last few minutes of Announcements, a teacher picks the final three people to wrap it up. And just as with PPOP, we all leave feeling uplifted. (P.S. Shoutout to Ethan for making sure both PPOP and Shoutouts run smoothly!)



Positive energy abounds at the last Shoutouts of the school year.



PARKMONT POETRY FESTIVAL

42nd Time is a Charm!

Kim Schraf, Teacher and Poetry Festival Coordinator

According to Maryland's own Lucille Clifton, the Parkmont Poetry Festival's first judge in 1982, "I don't write out of what I know; I write out of what I wonder." There was indeed some powerful wondering going on in the Zion Baptist Church sanctuary on Saturday, April 27th, when the 2024 Festival winners gathered to read their poems. Poets tall and petite, tinkling sopranos and basso profundos, some breathless and tentative, others in full spoken-word performance mode, each freed their words from the page and filled the room with wonder.

Parkmont School launched its District-wide Poetry Festival 42 years ago to showcase the literary gifts of public, private and charter school students in grades 6 through 12. We collect submissions from October through February, when

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Parkmont School winners Jacob, Miles, Mikiyas, and Leyu



Halleluiah, a 10th grader at The Field School, reads her poem.



Poet and beloved former Parkmont teacher Sharan Strange's return to D.C. each year to emcee the Festival is always a highlight.



Poet Teri Ellen Cross Davis was our esteemed finalist judge this year and chose the 40 winning poems.

semi-finalist judges (this year Shenandoah Sowash and María Fernanda) select 90 poems from over 300 submissions. Then finalist judge Teri Ellen Cross Davis chooses 20 middle school and 20 upper school winners whose voices reflect the diversity and range of experiences that distinguish our community.

Students represented their schools with distinction. Poets hailed from Alice Deal, Jackson Reed, Charles Hart, Center City PCS, and Paul International; from The Lab School, Sidwell Friends, British International School, Maret, Field, Washington International, Gonzaga, and Parkmont. Here's Miles Paul, one of our own 12th graders, in an excerpt from his moving poem "Hope":

....

"Everyone has their own troubles,
why are mine so important?"
you think to yourself
But people care about you,
love is too strong for you to think
that you aren't deserving of it.
There will be dark days
There will be lonely moments
But that is what hope is for.

Do put next year's Festival on your calendar so you won't miss out on more wonder: Saturday, April 26, 2025! ■



Class Trip to the Great Smoky Mountains

Ethan Kuhnhenh, Teacher

Every Spring, one academic class of Parkmont Upper Schoolers sets out to explore the world beyond the confines of the classroom. This year, students in my Mountain Ecology class headed south to Great Smoky Mountains National Park where we spent a week traversing one of the most ecologically diverse ecosystems in the world. Located on the border of Tennessee and North Carolina, the old growth forests of the sprawling park and surrounding national forest offered prime opportunities

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The trip featured new experiences for many of the students, including rappelling and horseback riding.



1) This rock staircase was even steeper than it looks!

for exploration and adventure.

Students participated in a host of activities, from rafting to horseback riding, hiking and ziplining. Drawing on the skills they practiced in class, the students

demonstrated their wilderness expertise during three nights of camping. We slept in tents, started fires, and cooked over open flames. During the days, we hiked to 5,000

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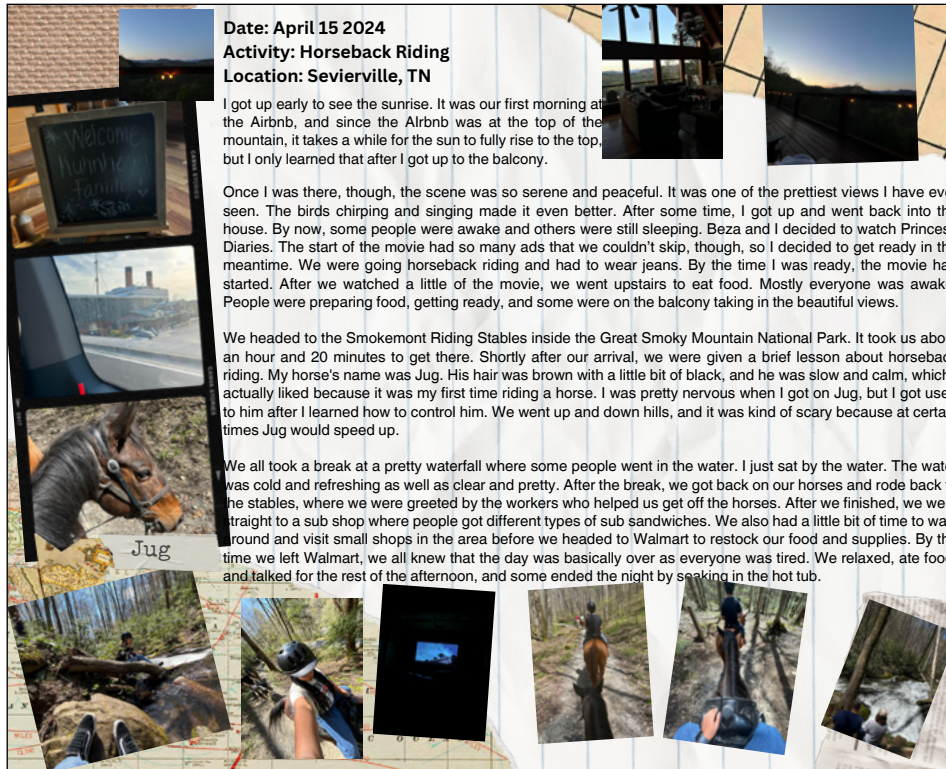
2) The class explored the Smokies by horseback one day.

3) Graham and Noa consider Mak's bagel-toasting method.



4) Mikiyas, Abe, and Mak on the trail





Date: April 15 2024
Activity: Horseback Riding
Location: Sevierville, TN

I got up early to see the sunrise. It was our first morning at the Airbnb, and since the Airbnb was at the top of the mountain, it takes a while for the sun to fully rise to the top, but I only learned that after I got up to the balcony.

Once I was there, though, the scene was so serene and peaceful. It was one of the prettiest views I have ever seen. The birds chirping and singing made it even better. After some time, I got up and went back into the house. By now, some people were awake and others were still sleeping. Beza and I decided to watch Princess Diaries. The start of the movie had so many ads that we couldn't skip, though, so I decided to get ready in the meantime. We were going horseback riding and had to wear jeans. By the time I was ready, the movie had started. After we watched a little of the movie, we went upstairs to eat food. Mostly everyone was awake. People were preparing food, getting ready, and some were on the balcony taking in the beautiful views.

We headed to the Smokemont Riding Stables inside the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. It took us about an hour and 20 minutes to get there. Shortly after our arrival, we were given a brief lesson about horseback riding. My horse's name was Jug. His hair was brown with a little bit of black, and he was slow and calm, which I actually liked because it was my first time riding a horse. I was pretty nervous when I got on Jug, but I got used to him after I learned how to control him. We went up and down hills, and it was kind of scary because at certain times Jug would speed up.

We all took a break at a pretty waterfall where some people went in the water. I just sat by the water. The water was cold and refreshing as well as clear and pretty. After the break, we got back on our horses and rode back to the stables, where we were greeted by the workers who helped us get off the horses. After we finished, we went straight to a sub shop where people got different types of sub sandwiches. We also had a little bit of time to walk around and visit small shops in the area before we headed to Walmart to restock our food and supplies. By the time we left Walmart, we all knew that the day was basically over as everyone was tired. We relaxed, ate food, and talked for the rest of the afternoon, and some ended the night by soaking in the hot tub.

Students Ameen and Mariam kindly volunteered to share excerpts of their trip journals with Passing Notes. Ameen's is above, Mariam's is at right. Enjoy!

feet, swam in icy cold rivers, and saw rare Eastern Elk. We ate well, laughed hard, and made some awesome memories. The trip was over in a flash. Before we knew

it, we were headed back to D.C., eager to sleep in our own beds but excited to share stories and experiences with our friends and families. ■



Day in the Trip

April 7, 2024

The night before our whitewater rafting trip, we stayed at Deep Creek Campground, in Bryson City, North Carolina. We had come from an Airbnb from Sevierville, Tennessee to stay at the campground for two nights. On the second day at the campground, I woke up around 5:30-6 A.M. (like I have been every night of the trip to pray and get ready for the day).

Everyone else eventually woke up by 7 AM. The best part of waking up and preparing early is getting to the food before everyone else. Matt and Ethan put the food on the table, and I got the first serving of bagels, specifically the Thomas 'everything Bagel' (my fav out of all the options). Then I grabbed some Philadelphia Cream Cheese to spread on my bagel. I also drank the ensure that I packed because I usually drink milk with breakfast. After eating, everyone was told to get ready by 10 to get to our whitewater rafting adventure on time. We drove for an hour to get to our destination.

Everyone put on wetsuits and water shoes, and we met our guide. He walked us through the process, and then we got seated in the rafts. We had so much fun. I was worried I was going to fall off and hit my head on a rock or something, but that didn't happen. We went through different levels of water. The 4th one was the scariest. Our rafts got stuck multiple times, but our guide got us out every time. Some of us ended up drenched from all the water getting splashed on us.

After the whitewater rafting experience, we went to get lunch. Ethan and Matt stopped at this small truck called Gills Bar-B-Q. They ordered a sandwich and then took us to The Beantrees cafe. The food there was a life-changing experience. I ordered a Turkey Bacon melt, without the Bacon, and a side of fries. My friend Mikiyas also ordered the Turkey Bacon, and Abe ordered a bowl of chili soup. Once we finished lunch, Matt and Ethan took us to the Oconaluftee visitor center in the Great Smoky Mountains. We browsed around. They had loads of things to do and buy like keychains, books, cards, gifts, and history to read about. We then headed back to Deep Creek Campground, where most of us spent our evening splashing around in the creek near our campsite. The creek was right under the Tom Branch Road Bridge. Eventually, we headed back to where our tents were set up for some dinner. We had Tacos that night. Around 10, I got ready for bed and went into my tent for the night.

Upper School Internships

Lizzie Sampson, Internship Coordinator, and Mel Kates, Programs Coordinator

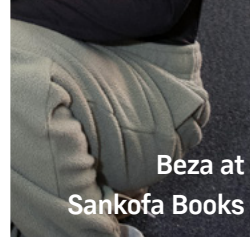
This year's internship program was an exciting success as we transitioned back to fully in-person placements at almost 50 sites across the DMV. Parkmont interns took on roles at coffee shops, horse centers, educational institutions, and an array of other settings. Each student found a place to flourish while contributing meaningfully to their communities.

Throughout their internships, our students honed valuable skills in interpersonal communication, time management, and independent problem-solving. For some, this experience led to job opportunities, while for others, their internships marked just the initial steps toward their futures beyond the school's walls.

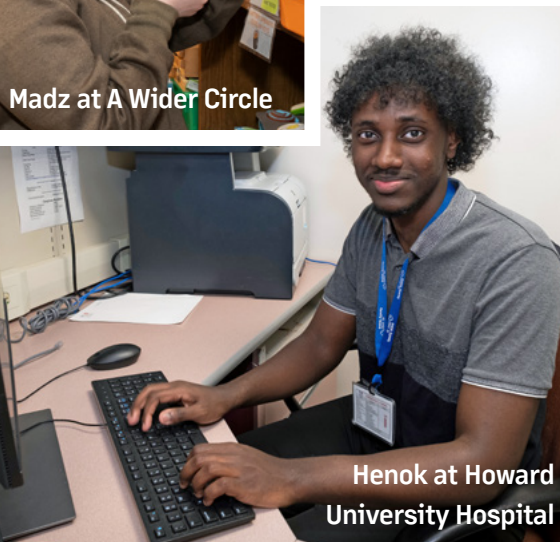
We're immensely proud of each intern's achievements and are excited to see where their paths lead them next! ■



Nick at Joe's Record Paradise



Beza at Sankofa Books



Henok at Howard University Hospital



Jimena at the Mount Pleasant Library

*We welcome new internship partners!
If your organization is interested in hosting a Parkmont intern, please send a note to internships@parkmont.org.*

Hiking Class

What better way to enjoy springtime in Washington D.C. than by exploring the many hiking trails of Rock Creek Park, a.k.a. Pakmont's Backyard? In Zulma's Session 5 Hiking class, students trekked three afternoons a week, covering about 27 miles of the park. The wildlife they encountered on the trail frequently provided mini biology lessons. "We saw pileated woodpeckers, blue jays, cardinals, a giant ground wasp



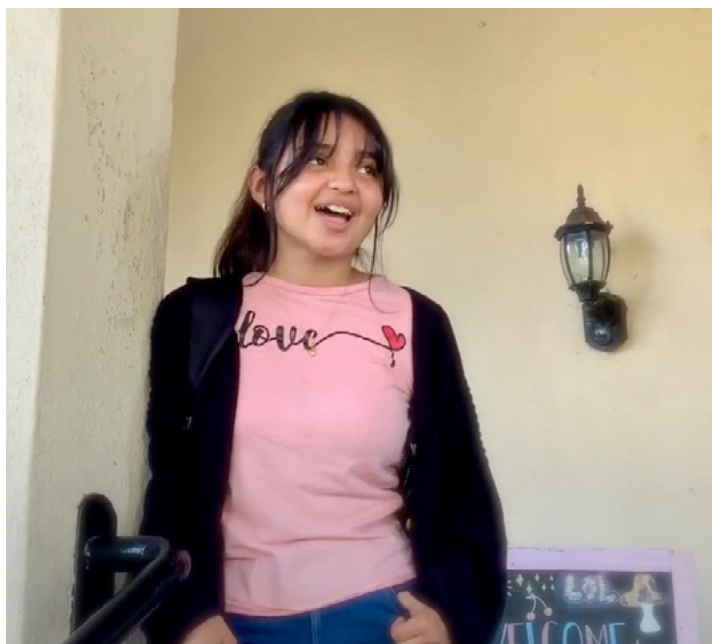
Zulma's hiking class on the trail

nest, a black rat snake sunbathing on Boulder Bridge, and a northern water snake slithering through some leaves," Zulma reports. "The kids loved it," she adds. "They often said it was their favorite part of the day because they got to be outside, in nature, away from their screens, and with their friends." Everyone also loved the final hike of the session, a walk to Lulabelle's for ice cream! ■



Musical Theater Class

Parkmont students didn't just put on a theatrical production this spring, they produced a MOVIE MUSICAL! Led by teachers Bridget Mullins and Regan Wind, students in the Musical Theater class wrote, directed, performed, filmed, and edited *Teen Tales, Life in 2024*. Their script plumbed the complexities of teen life with humor and compassion – occasionally in iambic pentameter. And the music showed off some incredible singing talent. They did a fantastic job, and we are so proud of them! Here are a few stills from the show. ■



Calleva, a Favorite Parkmont Classroom

Zulma Dunn, teacher

Is a school year really complete without a field trip to Calleva? The Middle School and Upper School each enjoyed a full day at Calleva's vast outdoor adventure and education facility this spring, a long-standing tradition at Parkmont. Students worked together to conquer a

variety of challenge courses — including the rage cage and a zipline! While climbing, ziplining, building, and finding their way through the woods, the students learned how to trust each other, give constructive feedback, and truly support one

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A tricky transition on the Calleva ropes courses



Nico waves from the zipline.



Bridget and students practice teamwork on the slack line.



Isla and Leo find the right balance.

another. Calleva's programs provide a safe but challenging environment where students overcome fears, step outside their comfort zones, and build new friendships. They experienced what it's like to lead their peers and problem solve when the group was stuck. No wonder Calleva is one of our favorite Parkmont Classrooms! ■



Javonne, Zoey, and Miyah pause on the C&O Canal towpath to adventure.



Encouraging your classmates and doing what you doubted you could do (like scaling a rope wall!) are key parts of a Calleva day.

Winter and Spring Sports

In addition to Afternoon Class PE, Parkmont also offers one extracurricular team sport each season. Playing on the team is open to every Parkmont student. In addition to the fun of the game, participating helps students develop their teamwork skills and a positive approach to competition. This winter and spring, our co-ed basketball and ultimate frisbee teams enjoyed games against other small schools in the D.C. area. We won a few, we lost a few, and no matter what, we had a great time! ■



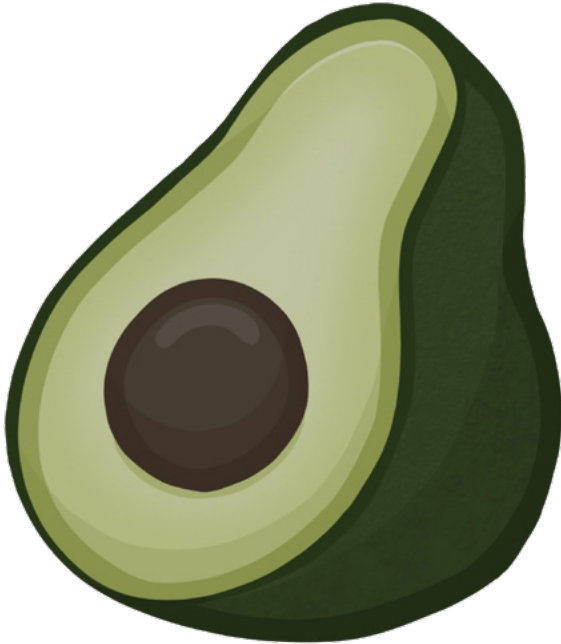
Peter (above left) reaches for the ball and Miles (above) runs the court in Parkmont basketball games.

Left: The Ultimate Frisbee team after a win against Edmund Burke School this spring.



The Parkmont Dish

Welcome to the second installment of The Parkmont Dish, featuring recipes by members of the Parkmont community. We think you'll like this simple, delicious, and healthful recipe shared by 8th grader Marake.



Digital illustration by Leo, 11th grade

Avocado Wrap

1 avocado
1 Tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. black pepper
1 Tbsp. olive oil
1 tortilla

- 1) Warm or toast your tortilla
- 2) While it's toasting, scoop out the flesh of the avocado and put it in a bowl.
- 3) Add the other ingredients to the bowl and mix them all together with a fork or spoon. The more you mix, the smoother it will be, so mix lightly if you like more texture.
- 4) Lay your tortilla flat and put the mixture in a line along one side of the tortilla, about a quarter of the way in from the tortilla's side edge. Fold the lower edge of the tortilla up so that it covers the bottom of the filling. (Tucking that bottom edge over the avocado mixture will keep it from squeezing out of the bottom of the wrap when you eat it.) Fold the side of the tortilla that is closest to the filling over the filling and then roll toward the other side. Enjoy!

— Marake, 8th grade



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