



Alumni Newsletter

by Dave Burdett, Director of Alumni Relations

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No adjective adequately describes this past year. The effects of the COVID pandemic, from the nearly 4,000,000 deaths worldwide to the total disruption of society, stretch the limits of our ability to comprehend. Even so, we might borrow a line from Dickens [“It was the best of times; it was the worst of times”] because we still saw God actively involved in our experience. After finishing the 2019-2020 school year at home using Google Meet, the faculty met early to start the 2020-21 year, doubling down on their use of technology for remote learning. Even after delaying the start of school two weeks in hopes that infection rates would diminish enough to start in person, we had to begin the year online. (The Day School did get a waiver to open school on campus, however.) Then in mid-October, the numbers fell to the point that we were able to have a plan approved to

meet in person, and masks and social distancing became the order of the day. When the pandemic grew again through the winter months, several students were infected and had to stay at home. We also had to quarantine those who sat around them in classes. As a result, teachers ended up conducting class in person and online at the same time! With contact tracing we discovered that none of those who came down with the virus had picked it up at school, nor did any of those quarantined get it. In fact, only about 20 students contracted COVID systemwide: God was so good to us. The word has gotten around about how well we were able to do through this difficult time, and the enrollment system-wide is up 100 students next fall!

Through it all, the faculty were amazing, but many changes have occurred. Health issues prevented our art teacher, Mrs. Rhonda Thomale, from being on campus, so our front office receptionist, Mrs. Gfeller—who just happened to have an art degree—jumped in to handle the visual arts classes. Then, Mr. Justin White ('14) was hired to assist our Director of Communications, Mrs. Khara [Betz] Dizmon ('96). Having already retired from the military, Mr. Greg Walker [father of Brittany ('13)] retired as our bus supervisor. Late in the spring, the health of our Network

Administrator and resident computer guru, Mr. Martin Gauss, forced him to retire for earlier than planned. Replacing him will be Mr. Austin Hulen ('11) who most recently has been the IT director for the nursing program at CBU. Another one to leave early was Miss Mia Chandler ('15) who had been heading up our yearbook and assisting in the library. But when the end of the year arrived, it became apparent that God had new plans for many of our staffers. Ending their careers and transitioning into retirement were Mrs. Beth Pounders, Mr. Glenn Prater, Mrs. Julie Sullivan, and Mr. David Contreras. After 36 years of teaching mainly social science (al-



To make wearing masks a little more bearable, some students got very creative.



Mrs. Pounders stands with her copy of the faculty “thank you” signs that were distributed this year.

though Bible, biology, art, and even typing snuck in, along with Mock Trial, Student Council, and most recently mission trips to Alaska), our resident “Zookeeper,” **Mrs. Pounders**, will be moving to Prescott, AZ when her new home there is completed. A coach extraordinaire, **Mr. Prater** joined us in 1999, and even taught English early in his career at WCS. He will be leaving full-time responsibilities, but don’t fret all you baseball fans: this master of the epithet will be returning to coach baseball. It was in 1997 that **Mrs. Sullivan** joined us, originally teaching second grade at the Day School. But she will be remembered for really giving our high school science program real depth. Over the years she (created and) taught Biology, Chemistry, Anatomy & Physiology and Environmental Science. This diligent master teacher also oversaw the Pep Club and more recently our Big Sister/Little Sister program and Thrift Cycle, a clothing exchange club. The

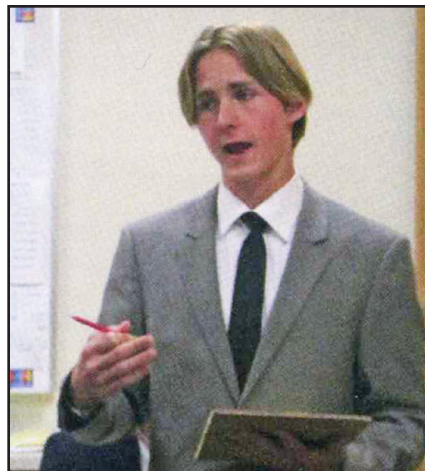


Jamie ('07), Janelle ('09), and Joi ('11) honored their mom with a bouquet at the end of the year.

last of the long-timers to retire is **Mr. Contreras**, who began by teaching geometry in 2000 before he took over the leadership of our facilities department. Along with his wife Norma, who has been driving buses for us for 13 years, he will be moving to North

Carolina to be near two of his sons. Replacing Mr. Contreras will be our Vocal Music Director, **Mr. Ben Halsne** ('07), so we’re seeking a new choir director. Although she officially departed last year, our Counselor, **Mrs. Katie Funderburk** filled in part-time this year because we were not successful in filling her position. In the spring, however, **Miss Angie Solimon** was hired as our new Counselor, and Mrs. Funderburk will be able to spend her full time caring for her little girl and a baby boy due this summer.

Other faculty members have felt God leading them elsewhere, too. After four years as our Vice-Principal of Discipleship, **Mr. Brandon Imbriale** will be taking his family to northern California to be closer to his wife’s family. Besides his administrative role, Mr. Imbriale coached baseball and created a new course called “Biblical Faith in the Modern World” which students have nick-named “Imbriology.” Our English department is taking two hits with the departure of Mr. Jacob Meiser and Mr. Austin Wright. **Mr. Meiser**, a veteran of five years, has been doing adjunct work at the college level, and is leaving to test the waters on that level. This well-respected teacher will also be remembered by students for sponsoring our Coffee and Tea Club. **Mr. Wright** joined us in part to pursue his relationship with middle school English teacher, Miss Gabi Gehringer. She is now Mrs. Wright, and the two are moving to North Carolina. During his four years with us, Mr. Wright created a very successful speech and debate program. Then, we will need to replace our librarian, **Mrs. Krystle Strange** who departs after three years on campus. Finally, in a late announcement, the head of our instrumental music program, **Mr. Ken Rasner**, who developed some amazing musicians, announced that he would be taking the



Junior Ethan Salley has to think quickly on his feet and express himself effectively on our successful Speech and Debate team.

position of Associate Professor and Director of Bands at Arizona Christian University. If you haven’t been able to witness a “Rasner spectacular,” you’ve really missed out.

Even though this Alumni newsletter is directed at high school graduates, there are a number of faculty news items at the middle school level that might be of interest. With rising enrollment at the beginning of the second semester, we were able to hire two full-time Bible teachers, one for each of the grades. **Mrs. Andrea Burns** (wife of WCS alum Brandon Burns, '04) took over seventh grade Bible and **Mr. Rufus Singleton** stepped in to cover the eighth-grade level. Even before the year ended, our eighth grade English teacher, **Mrs. Kayla [Baker] Hults** ('12) left early to have her baby. With the growth of the middle school, veteran teacher **Mrs. Jamie Firetag**, will be assuming the position of middle school Vice-Principal next year. Finally, it was 39 years ago that **Mr. David Doerksen** joined the middle school staff, and he announced that this year would be his last. Through all of that time he has taught American History to eighth graders, and recently has been very involved in leading the eighth-grade



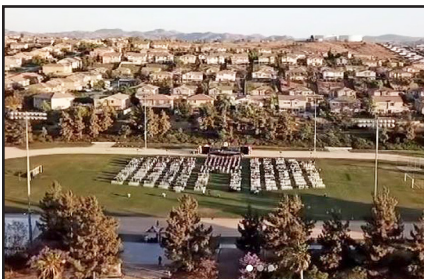
Jacob and Kayla Hults celebrate the arrival of little Jace who shares his birthday with his mom!



It didn't take Mr. Doerksen long to get a retirement perspective on life down pat.

trip to Washington, DC. He plans to stay in town for another year while his wife wraps up her career before they join their kids in Texas, San Antonio to be exact.

Like last year, graduation took place on the soccer/track field on campus. In contrast to last year, how-



At graduation, the sun set on the high school careers of the class of 2021.



After marching in to "Pomp and Circumstance," Jaylee Dixon just enjoys the moment.

ever, it was at its normal time, not in late July. Social distancing was still the name of the game as graduates were spread apart and families settled in 10 person pods set away from others, but many felt no need for masks in this outdoor setting. While the big screen video was missing from a normal graduation, those attending could stream the ceremony to their phones to get a closer view of things: our Choir Director, Mr. Ben Halsne, used six cameras to provide the best views possible. While wind made it a bit chilly that evening, the excitement of this major milestone brought its own warmth. Olivia McKee, Bailey Berzansky, and Garrett Haun represented their class in sharing their experiences at Woodcrest Christian, and Gwyneth Valerio and Tristan Walters played ukuleles as they sang "The God Who Stays." With no chance to do an in-person awards ceremony, many more awards were given out than normal, and the top awards were presented to Grace Newman (UC Irvine) and Joey San-

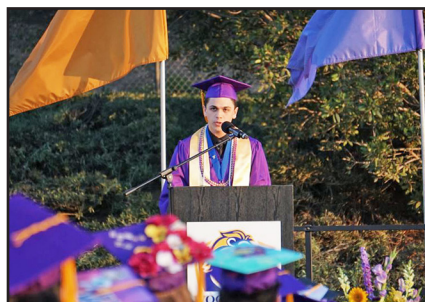
tos (UC Davis) for academics, Jaylee Dixon (Grand Canyon University) for athletics, Zuriah Rust (The Master's University) for leadership, and Justin Noche (UC Los Angeles) for service. Seventy-five graduates received their diplomas that night, and even Juan Infante was able to walk across the stage just a couple weeks after knee surgery.



Nestled between the J & K building, this canopy provided the "classroom" for the choir. The one for the band was up on soccer field level.

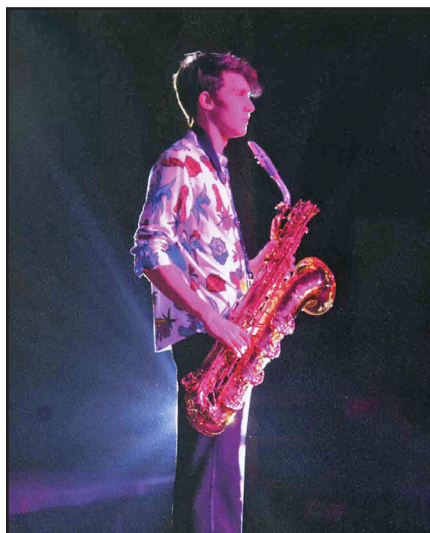
The Arts

The academics at Woodcrest Christian seemed to prevail in the midst of all the confusion, but other things—like the arts and athletics—were more significantly affected. For example, WCS artists have been amassing quite a few awards over the past few years, but the competitions were cancelled this year. And the pandemic brought major restrictions on choir and band. COVID guidelines prohibited them from practicing indoors, so the school purchased two huge canopies so that they work on their music. That meant that during cold and wet times they huddled (yet kept their distance) under the white covers. It also meant that equipment—chairs, music stands, instruments—had to be moved to their practice areas and returned to the classroom each day. That made it a physically grueling year for our musicians, but they still gave standout performances—literally, as they stood



Senior speaker Garrett Haun appropriately shaped his comments around the idea of masks.

out on risers under the lunch shelter for their performances while the audience huddled under blankets in socially distant seating. Mr. Halsne's choirs gave their traditional Christmas concert on December 15, but of course not at their usual venue, Calvary Presbyterian Church. Then on May 21, they performed their *At the Pops* concert with lots of special solos, like Daniel Cendejas sounding very Sinatra-esque as he sang "That's Life." The band also got a Christmas program in, and were able to do a Masters Concert in April where senior Dante Albanese conducted the Wind Symphony in "Joyce's 71st NY Regiment March." They wrapped up their year by "Puttin' on the Hitz" with some fine solo performances and



Mark Cleary added some bottom-end punch on bari sax for the driving rhythms of "Royals Sound."

an impressive rendition of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" with Johnathan Ma featured on piano. When it came time for drama, Mrs. Bickett had to do both her plays in 2021. The first, a comedic mystery called "The Trouble with Summer People" was staged under the lunch shelter, but the musical, pushed all the way to the week before graduation, was able to be performed in the gym with limited seating. That

production gave the female vocalists a chance to shine as they put on "Little Women," an adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's classic novel. While not wanting to diminish the male contributions, the ladies were astounding with Audrey Kell (Jo), Grace Newman (Meg), Elyse Abad (Beth), Bella Gianatassio-Piña (Amy), and seventh grader Julia Cleary (Marmee) giving stellar performances.



The Puckle sisters (seniors Ashley Habchi and Alison Glantz) perfected a geriatric waddle in the production of "The Trouble with Summer People."

Athletics

Athletics also had a rough go of it this year. As Athletic Director Ryan Anderson ('95) took over the reins of the athletic program, he experienced a baptism of fire as he tried to cope with CIF's on-again/off-again planning and a bus fleet with too few drivers. Obviously, no athletics were even considered for the fall, so the hope was to reschedule all the sports for the winter and spring. When the infection rate didn't let that happen, CIF opted to run *every* sport in a brief spring season. What a nightmare! For a small school like WCS it meant that a number of sports had to be cancelled because there were just not enough athletes to go around. (In a typical year,

many of our students would compete in two or perhaps even three sports.) So, both boys' and girls' volleyball had to be cancelled, even though the girls had begun practices in hopes of competing. Flag football was scratched along with girls' tennis. Girls' soccer never got going, and typical spring sports golf and mountain biking never got off the ground, either. What a Gordian knot of scheduling and re-scheduling for our rookie AD!

Cross country and **track & field** both ran in shortened seasons in the spring, and their races had to be restricted to dual meets where only two teams compete against one another. League "finals" were restricted to a few top athletes from each school. **Basketball** seemed somewhat normal except for the lack of any preseason or tournament games. The boys struggled through their season, finishing 6th in Ambassador League play with a 4-11 mark overall. Jackson Flye (Sr.) led the way and was selected team MVP, but a mid-season add of freshman Jack Wheaton really bolstered the squad. With the additions of Elijah Pastorelli (Jr.) who will be eligible for varsity next year, and new coach Scott Reynolds ('92) prospects are looking up. On the girls side, Coach Musich ('01) led a veteran squad to a second place finish in league before losing to Immaculate Heart's stifling defense in CIF in a game played in CBU's Van Dyne Fieldhouse. Seniors Zuriah Rust and Brennae Sawyer, assisted by juniors Heaven Stoudenmire and Abby Wheaton set the pace, taking the team to a 10-5 season. In another "winter" sport, our boys' **soccer** team, notched an 8-6-3 record and finished fourth in the Ambassador League. What should have been their strongest player, Isaiah Pichon—who is headed to Westmont—was sidelined by injuries, so fellow senior Tony Cardenas aided by Luca Atencio

(Jr.) and Marcus Coombs (So.) picked up the slack. With Nichole Gates as the new coach, the girls' **softball** team finished the season 7-7. Although they took fifth in league, standout Angelina Allen (Sr.) won Player of the Year honors! She will be playing for Iowa next year. In **baseball**, an injury was a key factor in their season, too. Junior Alex Pinal damaged his hamstring and had to sit out most of the games. Behind team MVP Ryan Seymour, also a junior, the squad finished 14-8 and in third place in league. On the mound, Seymour, had an outstanding 1.48 era. In CIF, the team scored 4 runs on two homers in the first and then hung on to beat Xavier Prep 4-3 before falling to Murrieta Mesa, the number one seed, in the second round. One encouraging note is that Pinal was able to pitch the last inning in that game and struck out the side. Finally in **swimming**, coach Victoria Clemens ('16) had mixed results. The girls, led by League MVP Jaylee Dixon, captured the league crown, while the boys ended up in fifth on their side. So, it was a really mixed-up sports year. The hope for next fall, however, is that things will be more normal, but we'll just have to wait and see on that one. By the way, we're planning to resume the annual golf tournament to raise funds for our athletic program. It's scheduled for October 25th at the Victoria Club. Keep your eyes out for further information.

With sports in such disarray, Homecoming took a different look this year and wasn't connected with any athletic events. During April, a dress-up dinner (Italian) was held in the Pavilion, during which a professional team of entertainers led the students in a murder mystery. Then, in this unusual arrangement, two seniors, Garrett Haun and Hana Sheridan, were crowned as the 2021 King and Queen.

And the Rest

Chapel has been a key part of the Woodcrest Christian experience, but with the restrictions enacted to help control the pandemic, it took a different form. Chapels were fewer and most were recorded and viewed in class. Whether it was a message from Sean McDowell or student testimonies or the Bible faculty answering student questions, most sessions were on-screen in individual classrooms. There were several occasions when high school students sat on little dots painted on the soccer field and had a pretty normal worship session and then a speaker, but they were the exception rather than the rule. We really appreciated the faithfulness of the chapel band, led by vocalist Audrey Kell (Jr.), who led us to the throne of God in worship.

Mission trips also looked very different this year. After losing out on the trips in 2020 and not being able to travel on spring break this year, it was almost a miracle that they could take place at all. But the week after school was out, two groups left blistering Southern California. One headed south to continue our ministry in the country of Belize, and the other flew north to renew shared ministry with Ron & Jean Paull, but in a new location, Copper Center, Alaska. Though each groups' size might have been a little larger than normal, we pray next spring break will again see over 100 Woodcrest Christian students being able to share in these different locales.

So, we really have to admit that it was a strange year. The seniors especially missed out on many aspects of a typical senior year (like retreat). Yet even though it was far from normal, learning still occurred. And so did the arts and athletics in one form or another. Maybe it wasn't what we were used to, but the ability to meet in

person, even with masks on was huge. And God's blessing was not absent. So maybe we can learn something from what we have experienced: things will never happen exactly as we might wish, but our faith is not in vain, and God's blessing is not absent. For all the good times we normally have, the tougher times might be reminding us that we are aliens and exiles, and our hope is not based on what we experience right now. The losses this year were real, and if you lost a family member to the pandemic you get that more than most; but the in-your-face reminder that we are looking for something above and beyond our present circumstances should be a welcome lesson. We pray that you have come through this difficult time with your hope in our faithful Savior strengthened by these unusual circumstances.