

WINTER IN MOTION

De Soto High School
De Soto, Kansas
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THE Green Pride

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PHOTO BY JANELLA GREEN

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cover art || designed by maddie hellerich

MAN OF THE TOWN

brooke mermis
editor-in-chief

DE SOTO MAYOR RICK WALKER SHARES HIS IDEAS AND POLICIES FOR THE GROWING COMMUNITY

Every town needs a leader. Regardless of what they do or how they do it, their ability to step up to the challenge and guide the citizens at all costs is imperative in running a united society. This is no different for the town of De Soto, Kansas. With rapidly growing infrastructure, retail, and public safety, De Soto thrives under the direction and guidance of Mayor Rick Walker, who has served since 2017.



Right off of K-10, drivers get their first glimpse at the town of De Soto and who is in charge. *Photo by Brooke Mermis*

The town of De Soto has held meaning in Rick Walker's life, as his two sons attended and graduated from

De Soto High School. In this regard, Mayor Walker believes this influenced his outlook on his position.

"[I] always wanted to make sure De Soto was the kind of community that I wanted my kids to be raised in...so it's been top of mind to me to make De Soto a great place to live," Walker said.

Mayor Walker's efforts to build and enhance opportunities throughout De Soto have proven essential to the influx of families and businesses as a result of the Panasonic Plant. In Mayor Walker's youth, this technological center was entirely different.

"When I was growing up, that was a job center," Walker said. "The focus [of the plant] was to return that property, that productive use, to create jobs in the community again."

With the addition of new jobs, De Soto has grown into a much larger, more popular community. Despite his appreciation for the town's latest spotlight, Mayor Walker still wants to ensure that De Soto holds onto its small-town vibe.

"I think the way we maintain that small-town feel or that sense of community is by holding events and promoting events that create the community bond...making sure that we have community events and then having the quality of life enhancements," Walker said.

A major aspect of the "quality of life enhancements" Mayor Walker speaks of is enforcing and maintaining public safety. After serving two terms on the De Soto School Board, beginning in 1999, Mayor Walker gained a newfound

sense of initiative for more protection in schools.



Rick Walker completes his mayoral duties at city hall. *Photo by Brooke Mermis*

"A lot of that whole school safety picture changed kind of during my tenure on the board with some events that took place," Walker said. "I think the way we support it is by making sure we maintain a strong connection and a strong partnership with the Johnson County Sheriff's Office...we'll do our part to make sure that we have an adequate public safety and police presence in De Soto to support our growing population of workers and school kids and citizens."

For the past few years, De Soto has been evolving into an expansive, more diverse community that maintains the values of inclusion, growth, and quality of life. With the help of Mayor Rick Walker and his plans to strengthen the unity of De Soto, the town has ultimately become a better place to live. At the end of the day, the man of the town can truly change it all.



SHAPING THE STU

laurel zarda
staff reporter

FROM NEW ACADEMIC POLICIES TO GROWING STUDENT LEADERSHIP, CHANGES ACROSS

Over the years, students at De Soto High School have been wishing for a saving grace during finals week. For the past few years, the skip-a-final policy has allowed students this sense of comfort.

Skip-a-final is gone. This policy allowed students to opt out of two final exams if they met a certain grade and attendance requirement. Many students feel as if this decision was unfair. Now, without the incentive, students are asking what went wrong and why the policy was removed.

DHS will no longer offer students the option to skip final exams, a change administration says was driven by equity. Due to the implications of grades and attendance, students were unable to skip their finals, giving some an advantage over others.

As students voice their disappointment, district leaders, such as Sam Ruff, our district's Director of Post-Secondary Success, emphasize that the old system created problems that many students were unaware of.

"The primary factor in discontinuing the Skip-a-Final program was fairness and equity among students," Mr. Ruff said. "Any factors beyond students' control [such as illness, family obligations, or other circumstances] affected eligibility, which created an uneven playing field."

Students who relied on the incentive for motivation may feel the change the most. Still, administrators said the data didn't support

the main reason Skip-a-Final was created: improving attendance. Principal Kevin Thomas said attendance data didn't show the impact they hoped for.

"Attendance outcomes weren't affected as intended," said Mr. Thomas. "It was difficult to justify from a teaching/learning/equity perspective."

Although the policy was created to boost attendance, administrators found no clear link between the incentive and actual attendance numbers. Regarding students who are upset about the removal, administrators understand the frustration.

Some of them, like Assistant Principal Abby Huggins, also mention that the old system intentionally punished students for things they couldn't control.

"We appreciated the enthusiasm for students who were excited about it," Ms Huggins said. "But, like, not everyone could achieve those expectations... that's not what we wanted. We wanted to engage students."

A single person did not make the decision. Multiple groups, including the administrative team, staff committee, and district leadership, were involved in reviewing the data. Principal Thomas emphasized this cooperation.

"Many voices collaborated," Mr. Thomas said. "More importantly in my eyes, though, I'm here now, and I was aware of the decision as the year began, and I upheld it when students asked early on, so it's on me and the admin team here."

Mr. Ruff also pointed to the conversations that happened before the

change.

"Discussions with students, staff, and parents. These conversations highlighted a broad understanding of the fairness concerns associated with the policy," Mr. Ruff said.

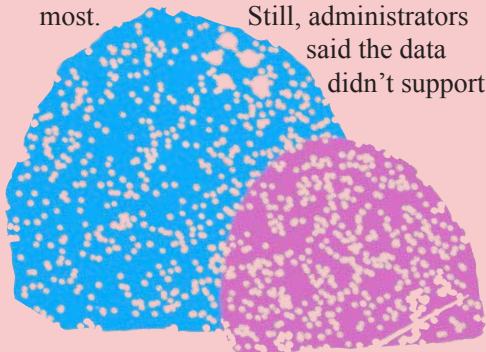
Looking ahead, Principal Thomas said Skip-a-final could return in some form, but not this year.

"It will not be reinstated this year," Thomas said. "It'd require collaboration across various departments and with many stakeholders in the school, district leadership, and community before changing back."

Huggins added that the school has discussed grade-based incentives.

"The academic part has definitely been talked about. I think, if it were to ever come back, it would be different. We would have some differences," Huggins said.

Administrators have continued to monitor attendance patterns and student engagement. For now, final exams are required for everyone, but the conversation isn't over.



DISTRICT EXPERIENCE

sarah follmer
staff reporter

THE DISTRICT ARE RESHAPING HOW STUDENTS LEARN, LEAD, AND COLLABORATE

The district has a student leadership committee known as the Student Advisory Board. This is where selected students collaborate with the district administrators and create ideas that will improve the school district. Since students have been given this opportunity, it has proven to be a great way for them to learn how to be better leaders and share their opinions.

Regarding the selection process, students are chosen for the board through a process that involves multiple steps, including teacher recommendations and student applications. Both De Soto High School and Mill Valley High School have students who make up a part of this advisory board.

According to junior Kennadi Fuhrman, the ideas that the advisory board generates for the district, could potentially be seen in action. “We came up with the idea of an orchestra in school,” Fuhrman said. Besides bringing the

opportunity to play stringed instruments in school, the board has also discussed aviation classes and upgrading facilities, including adding a swimming pool. Junior Honoree Goncalves says that the board works to make a positive impact and bring about changes.

“We’ve expanded on pathways to make sure students join classes that’ll help them for their future career,” Goncalves said.

Additionally, students not only see what they would like to do in the future, but also prepare themselves for what to expect beyond high school, whether this is attending college, joining the armed forces, or entering the workforce, because of what is presented during Advisory Board meetings.

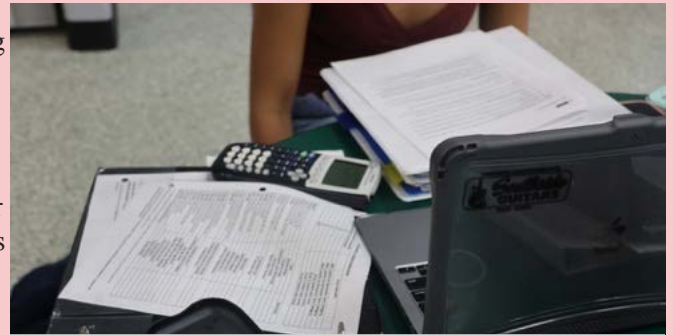
Not only is the advisory board able to help students, but Goncalves highlights how it is also able to help connect the students of USD232.

“They’re working together more to give out better ideas,” Goncalves said.

Advisory Board is beneficial for students, as it allows them to interact with peers from other buildings. Board members improve their leadership skills through team-building activities, and in the process, they also use their voices to improve the district. Fuhrman

recognizes how important it is to keep connections across the district.

“It’s really cool also to come together and put our ideas together and compare and contrast what is good and what can



Students collaborate on math assignments to prepare for the final exam. Photo by Laurel Zarda

wait,” Fuhrman said.

With the help of the district and the opportunity they have provided, which allows students to address issues within their respective schools, a more inclusive, collaborative environment has been created. By allowing students to work together and set standards that they want the district to hold itself to through the advisory board, the school district can ultimately transform to better accommodate the growing community of USD232.



DHS students prepare for finals at Cocoa and Cram, hosted by NHS. Photo by Laurel Zarda



KSHSAA IN SPORTS

KSHSAA SPARKS CONTROVERSEY WITH 2026 STATE SOFTBALL FIELD CHANGES

maddie hellerich
assistant editor-in-chief

Softball has surged in popularity over the past five years and has had several young girls fall in love with the game. For players in high school, athletes participate in a three-month season while balancing school and other extracurricular activities with everyday practices and more than 25 regular-season games. Each year, teams collectively put out their best efforts to make their way to the state championship with the intention of bringing home the gold.

In early November, The Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA) made unfortunate changes for the 2026 state softball games. KSHSAA directors originally decided to move the state games to the Blue Valley Recreation fields, with only championship games played at the Division 1 collegiate fields. This decision immediately sparked controversies and hot debate amongst athletes and other lovers of the game.

In regards to equal participation in sports, the U.S. Department of education defines the implications of Title IX.

“Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance.” Many parents are concerned that KSHSAA violated this law ensuring gender equality.

This change meant that teams competing in 6A could no longer play at Kansas University’s Arrocha Ball Park, and 5A teams could not play at

Wichita State University’s softball field. Although this change has been reversed, several individuals, like Junior Charlotte Daniels, are still trying to figure out what motivated this modification.

“It is unclear and unfortunate that they have directed this change at softball. I think it is because softball, like many other girls’ sports, is put underneath boys’ sports and often is not prioritized or supported at the same frequency,” Daniels said. “They may have applied this policy to softball in order to save money or because it is easier to host softball at smaller facilities. It sends a message to players, coaches, and parents of the girls on the teams that our sports are not being valued equally.”

The initial plan by KSHSAA of moving the games to Blue Valley Rec aimed to provide a more equal playing field for teams while encouraging squads to compete for the championship on a collegiate field.

Regarding baseball, the boys have a pitch count rule to prevent injuries. In addition to this, pitchers have rest days to preserve their arms. In an interview with KCTV5, Jerme Holoday, Assistant Executive Director of KSHSAA, shared the reasoning for the change.

“With pitch counts, we have to be a little bit more evaluative as far as the calendar goes, because they have a rule that softball does not have,” Holoday said.

However, this comment is not relevant. It does not hold strong validity since baseball teams typically carry at least seven pitchers to efficiently keep a fresh pitching roster and compete

effectively in games.

Furthermore, senior Abby Wagoner expresses how this change made players feel less valued.

“It feels as though they are taking away the recognition for all of our hard work. No one wants this downgrade. It feels like we are insignificant compared to baseball,” Wagoner said.

Also, sophomore Emmie Wible mentions how changing the fields would have completely altered the experience.

“I feel like it would take some of the fun out of going to state. It would not feel as big of an honor because we play at Blue Valley Rec during the summer. It would be amazing to have a chance to play on a Division 1 collegiate field,” Wible said.

In addition to this, another concern of parents and athletes was the condition of the Blue Valley Rec fields. The condition and overall quality of the facilities compared to Arocha and Wichita State diminished the atmosphere of championship play.

Because this downgrade was so controversial, nobody stayed silent. Within less than a month of the original change, protestors successfully pushed KSHSAA to move the games back to the original collegiate fields on November 21. The reversal by KSHSAA is a win for girls’ high school sports in Kansas which has athletes hopeful for a brighter season.

Wichita State University's Softball field. Photo by Wichita State University Athletics



Blue Valley Recreation field conditions. Photo by KC Pride Fastpitch Softball Organization



Kansas University's Softball stadium. Photo by Kansas University Athletics





carrie wallace
sports editor

DECA START IN SIGHT AFTER LONG AWAITING OFFERING NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND EXPERIENCES

The new school year offers many new, exciting opportunities, and this year, a new club, DECA, is finally making its way to De Soto. DECA is known as the Distributive Education Clubs of America.

According to their official website, DECA has certain implications about their mission as an organization: “to prepare emerging leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management in high schools and colleges around the globe.”

Besides giving students chances to navigate their interests and future careers, DECA also offers competitions that can be helpful for students wanting to showcase their skills. The DECA competitions are incredibly diverse. They offer a variety of events that allow any kind of student to find their best fit, totaling up to 60 events possible to compete in. Just a few of these include: Apparel and Accessories Marketing Series, Business Finance Series, Business Law and Ethics Team Decision Making, Community Awareness Project, Entrepreneurship Series, and Hospitality and Tourism Professional Selling.

Having a club like this gives everyone a chance to compete in something. Even if a student may not want to pursue a career in business or finance, DECA offers a host of opportunities. Mrs. Riley, one of the teacher sponsors for

DECA this year, thinks anyone can find something in DECA.

“DECA really gives you an idea of all the different avenues that you could potentially go down. And you might find something you didn’t even know existed and that could end up being your thing,” Riley said.

More than just a club for meeting people with similar interests, DECA offers opportunities to acquire lifelong skills. Mrs. Riley shares why DECA is a good option for students.

“[It] gives them [students] a potential real-world experience they could be in, and they get feedback from people who are in the business community. And I think that’s really valuable,” Riley said.

Beyond De Soto, Mill Valley’s DECA club has been around for a while and has achieved great success. They have competed in state competitions and even attended national competitions. There is no doubt that De Soto cannot make the same mark.

Senior Sienna McCracken is one of the many students who have been awaiting DECA’s arrival and is excited for the future.

“I wanted DECA to come to De Soto because I had heard very positive things about it from other students involved in DECA at other schools. I also saw many benefits that DECA offered and how it looks good on resumes,” McCracken said.

The skills DECA offers can be greatly valuable for every student. A lot of new

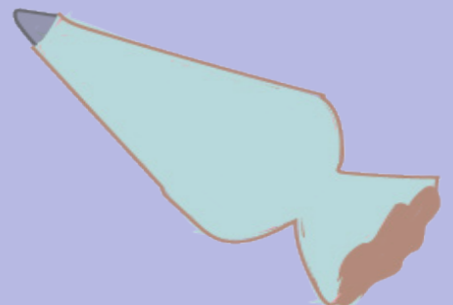
skills and experience can be gained from participating in DECA.

“Students should get involved to get experience with public speaking and competitions. They should also get involved if they are interested in business and things like that,” said McCracken.

One of the best parts about DECA is the accessibility and variability. A student can look at the many events and find the one just right for them. Additionally, DECA’s smooth operation makes it so that there are no daily practices. Preparing to compete can look very different; some students use personal time to work and master their personal event. As a school club, there would only be monthly meetings.

Competitions do not begin until the spring. This leaves students ample time to adapt and prepare for DECA. This new club brings excitement to everyone.

The flexibility and variety DECA provides make it a popular choice for choosing clubs. All students could find a path and be successful in this new club. Adding DECA to De Soto brings a new community and life-preparing opportunities.



DHS Theatre Department Presents:

Into the Woods

March 5th, 6th, & 7th
in the P.A.C.

Students: \$5.00
Seniors: \$5.00
Adults: \$10.00



WILDCAT WIRE

If you are interested in video production, broadcast, or podcasting, consider joining the staff! See Mrs. Riley in 200B for more information.

Catch what you missed!



Sip the Season at Cats Corner



Hot chocolate with peppermint



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norah kelly
staff reporter

WINTER SPORTS PREPARATION



Junior Emma Major faces off against junior Sloan Carpenter. *Photo by Norah Kelly*



Two juniors go head to head during wrestling practice. *Photo by Norah Kelly*



Seniors Carson Patterson, Brian Salas, and Christian Dickinson look up at the ball with junior Jace Newton. *Photo by Norah Kelly*



Seniors Xavier Woodruff and Dominic Irwin face off. *Photo by Norah Kelly*



Junior Brody DeArmond looks ahead during practice. *Photo by Norah Kelly*



Senior Isaac Schroeder takes the ball as senior Dylan Narayan pushes forward. *Photo by Norah Kelly*



Tangled up, the boys wrestling team practices technique. *Photo by Norah Kelly*



Coach Robie walks through warmups during girls basketball tryouts. *Photo by Norah Kelly*



Freshmen girls line up during basketball tryouts. *Photo by Norah Kelly*



Head to head, the girls team works hard at practice. *Photo by Norah Kelly*

BOWLING. BOCCÉ. AND BONDING

UNIFIED SPORTS BRING STUDENTS TOGETHER AT DHS

Unified Sports is a club that brings peers and athletes together to play, make friends, and feel supported. It is all about teamwork, friendship, and fun.

The two Unified Sports offered at De Soto are bowling and bocce ball. History teacher Mike Murphy coaches bowling, while history and weights teacher Lynn Hoffman coaches bocce ball. Both sports are competitive, but also a fun way for students to be included and play together.



Peer bowler Lainee Heigle competes at a Unified Bowling meet. *Photo by Amy Riley*

This year, Unified Bowling has three teams: each team consists of two athletes, students with special needs, and two peers who play with them in a group called a “quad.” Coach Murphy, a first-year bowling coach, emphasizes the importance of a strong team bond.

“We’ve tried to group the players by personality,” Murphy said. “That chemistry you see between the partners and the athletes, it really matters. We figured out early on who gravitated to who, and we built our teams based on that.”

Murphy, who is retiring at the end of the school year, cherishes this season

and what he has learned from it.

“I’ve always wanted to work with [people with special needs],” Murphy said. “It’s been really rewarding getting to know the kids and seeing their excitement, not just about bowling, but about being part of an activity. It’s been really fun for them.”

Through bowling, Murphy sees that a strong bond has also formed outside of the classroom.

“It’s just a different setting for them than being in an academic environment,” Murphy said. “You just encourage them and smile, and I hope what they feel is that this has been a good experience for them. From what I can tell, they’re really enjoying it.”

In the future, Murphy wants to leave the team with something a little stylish.

“I’d like to leave them with better uniforms,” Murphy said. “Something with that cool retro bowling look. I think that would be my legacy to get them something new that they’re proud to wear.”

Students on the team enjoy it just as much as Murphy does. Lily Sphar, a peer bowler and senior on the team, reflects on what she loved most about this Unified Bowling season.

“I really enjoyed all the side quests after our tournaments with all the seniors and athletes,” Sphar said.

Besides Sphar’s fun activities with the team, she also feels that Unified Bowling is very inclusive.

“I joined Unified because I wanted to get involved with the school, and I thought this would be a really fun way to do that,” Sphar said.

The other Unified sport DHS offers is Unified Bocce Ball, it shares many of the same characteristics that Unified Bowling does. Coach Hoffman sees it as a sport where everyone can feel comfortable participating, regardless of

their athletic ability or experience.

“Bocce is a really low-key sport, so it’s accessible to anybody, whether you’re really athletic or not,” Hoffman said. “Our teams have two students with special needs and two peers, so there’s built-in teamwork right from the start.”

Coach Hoffman also notes that the teamwork at meets and practices often develops into friendships.



Peer bowler Sydney Whiteley and athlete April Wills make a plan at the start of the meet.

Photo by Amy Riley

“The coolest part about it is seeing their personalities come through,” Hoffman said. “At meets, or even just in the hallways, you can see them purposefully interacting and making connections. There are more smiles all around; it’s really cool.”

Hoffman wants bocce ball to grow, and hopefully, more and more people will join over the next seasons.

“But my goal is to have enough teams so that everyone who wants to play gets the chance. The more students that get connected, the better,” Hoffman said.

Unified Sports continues to grow as a program that offers inclusion, teamwork, and enjoyment. Both bowling and bocce ball provide students with the opportunities to meet new people, learn new things, and be part of De Soto athletics.

CRAFTING SCHOOL SPIRIT

EVENT PLANNING CLUBS TRANSFORM DE SOTO HIGH SCHOOL'S COMMUNITY

hailey smith & ethan dobson
staff reporters

At De Soto, the Leadership program allows students to use class time to plan events and come up with ideas for community improvement. The Leadership class, led by Mrs. Hothan and Mr. Robie has made a huge impact on De Soto High School by teaching students the fundamentals of leadership. Events leadership have been a part of the first semester are Green Team, trunk or treat, Mission to admission, wellness seminars, and veterans day recognitions.

This year's leadership class played a significant role in celebrating Veterans Day. In years past, De Soto has hosted an assembly to honor our veterans, but this year, Leadership class held a veterans Q&A seminar, which drew over 150 students. Students got to hear veterans' stories, ask questions, and get to know our veterans on a personal level. Leadership also hosted a reception for Veterans and their families, before the fall musical, White Christmas, where veterans could enjoy snacks and have the opportunity to share their stories. This student lead event was overall a success and supplied a great opportunity for students to have a deeper understanding over leadership.

Leadership class is a classroom filled with involved and dedicated students learning to become better leaders day by day. Leadership class time is used to teach leadership skills that apply to real events. Leadership advisor Lindsay Hothan discusses how she wants to ensure that leadership is advocating for students to the best of their abilities.



With the opportunity for students to be introduced to guest speakers with a passion for leadership, creates an inspired environment full of growing leaders. Leadership class is taking charge to prepare and help involved students understand how to become the best leaders they can be, not just in high school but throughout their lives.

Desoto's Student Council is an organization where student leaders are selected to be a part of important event planning throughout DHS. Lindsay Hothan, a student council advisor, shares her purpose in De Soto's student council

"Student Council is designed to be the bridge between students, staff, and our school community. We organize spirit weeks, assemblies, service projects, and activities that bring people together. Beyond planning events, our purpose is to give students a voice, build leadership skills, and create a school environment where everyone feels included and supported," Hothan said.

One major event STUCO has had success putting on, is Homecoming. The attendance this year was significantly larger than in past years, and was full of energy and dancing. At the homecoming dance this year, STUCO started a new trend by handing out different awards for those most involved throughout the event. The Student Council has done a great job involving all grade levels in De Soto's events. Another big impact STUCO has made on DHS is influencing all of its freshmen. Due to the numerous events and service projects STUCO hosts, underclassmen have been more involved in DeSoto's community. The freshmen have been striving to be involved and have increased school spirit due to their large class.

Mr. Riley, a sponsor for the student council, explains the benefits students gain from having such a significant role in event planning at DHS.

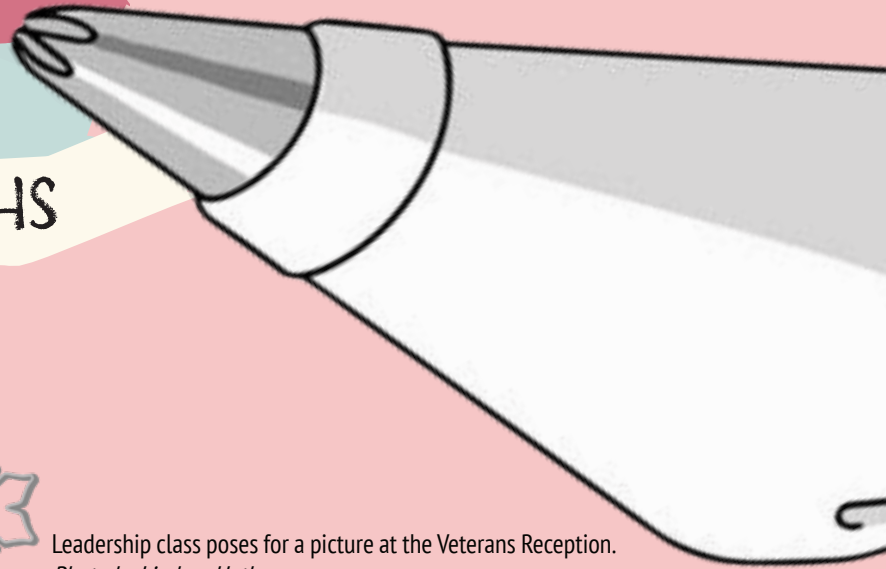
Overall, Student Council is a successful organization that connects leaders and prepares students for future events. This first semester at De Soto has been the start of great connections, and thanks to

STUCO and their hard work, De Soto's school involvement is thriving.

LEADERSHIP

STUCO

NHS



National Honors Society is an organization of high-performing scholars led by Mrs. Coffee and Mrs. Lauxman. NHS is responsible for Cocoa and Cram Ice Cream and Cram, which are opportunities for students to get help studying for the finals and eat a tasty snack. Members of NHS are focus on giving back to the community, with chances for community service being given from the sponsors.



Leadership class poses for a picture at the Veterans Reception.
Photo by Lindsay Hothan



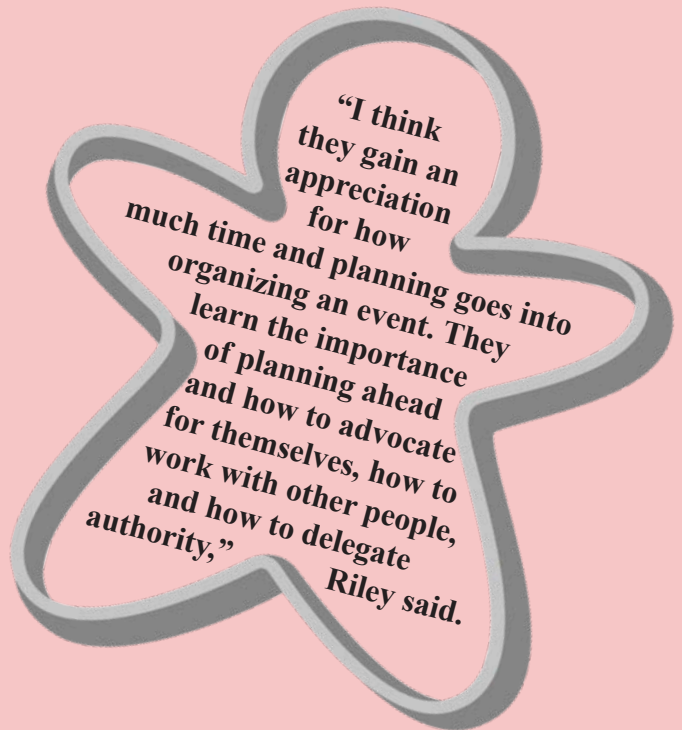
“It really is our goal to put the students in that leadership position to create opportunities for and with them ... and let them run with the ball and see what they can create,”
Lauxman said.

Recently, the organization held a Thanksgiving basket drive where members could buy food items for baskets that complete Thanksgiving meals for families in need.

Ultimately, the NHS organization is a group of high-achieving students who give back to their community, as they ensure that the school is given opportunities to improve and expand.



STUCO recognizes students who donated blood at the blood drive on November 12th, 2025. *Photo by DHS STUCO*



“I think they gain an appreciation for how much time and planning goes into organizing an event. They learn the importance of planning ahead and how to advocate for themselves, how to work with other people, and how to delegate authority,”
Riley said.

CUSTODIAN CRAZE: MARTIN JUAREZ

FROM CLEANING FLOORS TO WORKING ON LUNCH DUTY,

jaliyah parker
staff reporter

MARTIN JUAREZ PROVES TO BE THE MAN WHO KEEPS

DHS RUNNING

Most students walk through De Soto High School every day without thinking about all the work that goes into keeping the building clean and running. But head custodian Martin Juarez has been doing exactly that for almost 20 years, making him one of the longest-serving staff members in the building.

Juarez has worked in the De Soto School District for two decades, and he says he still enjoys coming to work each day.

“I love my job,” he said. “Really, everything is my favorite.”

His positive attitude shows in the way he talks and in how he greets people around the school.

Even though he enjoys his work, some parts can be harder than people realize. One of the biggest challenges he mentioned is the amount of tables the custodial team has to clean and take care

of every day. With hundreds of students using the cafeteria and classrooms, the tables often need constant attention to stay clean. Juarez says it’s a lot of work, but it’s simply part of what the job requires.

There are also things students might not know he handles. One example is lunch duty, which can get pretty messy

at times.

“Lunch duty... it’s always a little messy sometimes,” he said. “But that’s our job.”

Whether it’s cleaning up spills or keeping the cafeteria safe and organized, Juarez is always there making sure everything gets taken care of.

Outside of the daily challenges, Juarez says one of the best parts of his job is

plays in keeping DHS looking good every day. It’s clear that he cares about the school and the people in it, and students see the results of his hard work every time they walk in the building.

In addition to cleaning and lunch duty, Juarez also helps make sure the school is ready for events and activities. Whether it’s setting up for assemblies, sporting events, or school programs, custodians play a big

role behind the scenes. A lot of this work happens after school hours or early in the morning, so students don’t always see it, but it helps keep everything running smoothly.

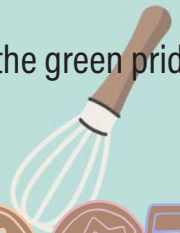
Juarez also mentioned that being a custodian requires teamwork and responsibility. Working with other custodians means relying on each other to get everything done on time. If one area falls behind, it affects the rest of the building. Even on busy days, Juarez stays focused and does his best to make sure the school is clean and welcoming for everyone.



the people he works with. Custodians often arrive before most students wake up and leave long after activities end, so they get a unique view of school life. Juarez explained that seeing students and staff every day makes the work feel more meaningful.

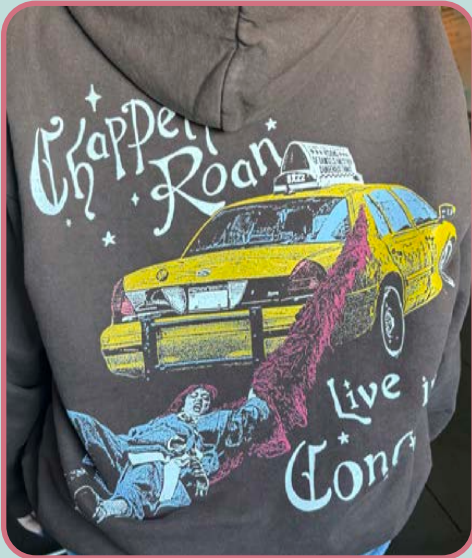
Even with the tougher tasks, Juarez is proud of what he does and the role he



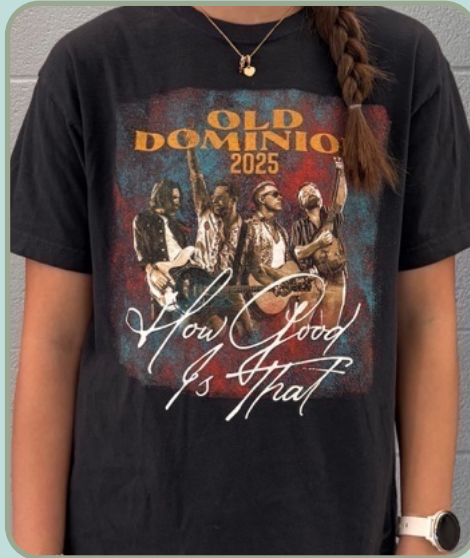


SHIRTS THAT ROCK

THE MUSIC WE WEAR



Senior Ava Waller wears a Chappell Roan hoodie. *Photo by Kayla Tolly*



Senior Addison Gillespie wears an Old Dominion shirt. *Photo by Kayla Tolly*



Junior Reagan Doyle wearing a Megan Maroney hoodie. *Photo by Kayla Tolly*



Sophomores Melanie Morrison and Laura Stenberg matching with Riley Green concert t-shirts. *Photo by Kayla Tolly*



Junior Molly Ranch wears a Barns Courtney shirt. *Photo by Kayla Tolly*



Freshman Abigail Grant wearing a Brandon Lake concert t-shirt. *Photo by Kayla Tolly*

madilyn mitchell
staff reporter

SNOWY

Students at De Soto High School have eaten lunch inside for years. However many have expressed a want to eat outside and at other places. Despite their interests, administration raises the unseen concerns that would prevent them from allowing them to do so.

Many students, including senior Leta Davis, respond positively to the idea of eating outside.

"I'd like to be able to sit outside during lunch on nicer days. It'd be a lot more enjoyable to enjoy the good weather and sunlight during the day," Davis said.

Eating outside would allow students to have some fresh air and use it as a reset of sorts, though senior Abby Wagoner believes that it could also show how the administration has faith in the students.

.....
"I THINK IT SHOWS TRUST FROM THE FACULTY. IT ALSO GIVES PEOPLE A FEELING OF RESPONSIBILITY," WAGONER SAID.

.....
When asked if the Environmental Club also loved the idea of eating outside in a courtyard, Kylee Moran, the teacher sponsor for the Environmental Club said they did.

"I think it's a great idea, I think a courtyard would be lovely. And I would love to see native plants be used to help promote pollinators and monarch

migration and bird populations, so native plants are hugely important in the landscape," Moran said.

While eating outside is a possibility for students in the future, the same cannot be said about students being able to leave campus to eat food elsewhere, even though many students want to. Sophomore April Wills is one of those students.

"If I don't like the lunch we have or it's Chick-fil-A day and I'm allergic to it I would love to have other fast food," Wills said.

Though Wills and many other students would like to eat off school campus. DHS principal, Kevin Thomas says there's more to it than asking him.

"It's also like a district-level decision, where in my opinion it's something we would have to partner with our administrative office and Mill Valley, and if everybody wasn't on the same page, there's no way," Thomas said.

Thomas elaborated that the reason we need approval from higher ups is simply because of liability.

"There's been a lot of cases in other states and in other districts where students left campus, for lunch, for example and then maybe got in a car accident," Thomas said, "Well who's liable for those students' safety at that time? They're [students] an individual with a car but we as a school have to look out for students safety, or if students have a conflict off campus, well is that a school issue or is that a McDonalds issue?," Thomas said.

One place students said they would like to eat is the reflection pond.

Given the pond's current condition, Kylee Moran gave us an inside of what renovation would look like.

"Mr. Sharp and I are working on ideas for that pond, we just have to have the time and the equipment to do that. There's a particular plant called pickerel that is growing in that pond, that's beautiful, but it's taken over almost the entire surface of that pond and we need actually probably heavy machinery in order to remove part of it because it has such a thick dense root mass, and it's so heavy that we're trying to figure out how we can actually start on removing some of that," Moran said.

You-Ha Kim and Madelyn Neeland, the president and vice president of the Environmental Club also shared their ideas for the reflection pond.

.....
"OUR MAIN GOAL WITH THAT RIGHT NOW IS TO REDO THE FENCE AROUND THE POND, AND WE CAN WORK WITH THE WOODWORKING CLASS THROUGH THE SCHOOL, BUT WE DO NEED THE FUNDS TO PAY FOR THAT," NEELAND SAID.

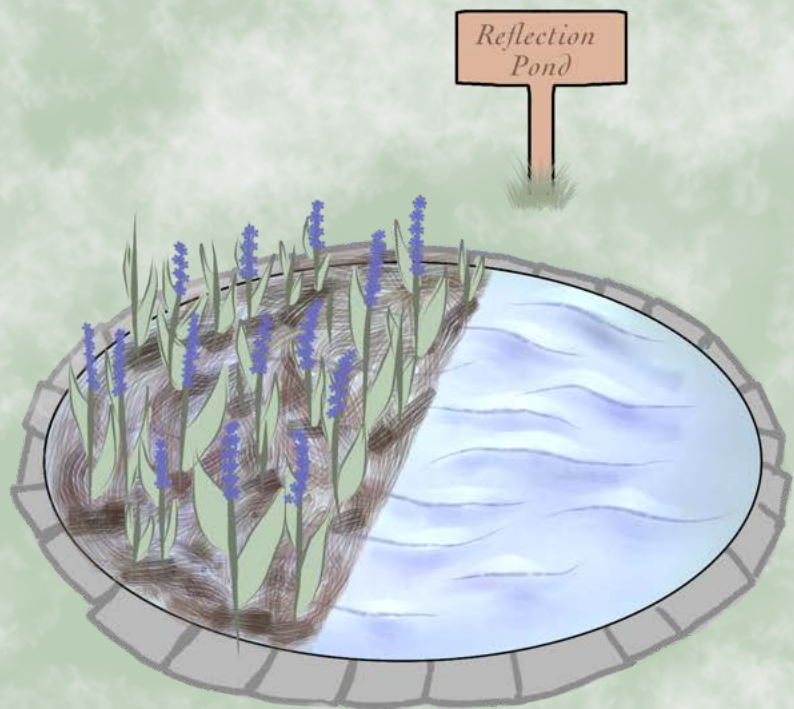
SUNSHINE

REVAMPING CAMPUS FACILITIES FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE STUDENT USE

Though Neeland explains why the Environmental Club needs wood, Kim shared how they would go about getting the funds for the wood.

“Yes, but we will have to find donations for the wood,” Kim said.

Several students want the reflection pond to be renovated but for that to happen we need funds, time and effort to get it back to normal.





THE MAGIC OF HOLIDAYS

Traditions that bring us together



Tree & Crown at Zona Rosa in Kansas City.
Photo by Lyndsey Thompson



Glass gingerbread houses at Zona Rosa.
Photo by Bailey Burns

Holidays always feel special, but something is different about feeling it with friends and family. Even with all the stress from school and finals, little things like holiday traditions such as; driving around to look at lights with friends, decorating, baking, and playing in snow can make the season feel calmer and more fun. A lot of people say that some of their favorite memories come from those simple moments with the ones they are closest to; this is proof that the holiday season is not only about presents or decorated trees, but the people who make the season memorable and meaningful.

According to The Mental Wellness Center, "Christmas Lights are linked to well-being, happiness, and connection." With winter having the stigma around seasonal depression, Christmas lights can actually boost the feel good chemicals in the brain. Various colors can influence our emotions in different ways; red can feel energizing or anger, yellow can feel bright and lively,

green brings a sense of calm, and purple can create feelings of peace or nostalgia. When all these colors come together, they create a warm, nostalgic atmosphere that helps lift spirits and bring back positive memories during the holiday season.

For many students, like junior Kenzie Laster, the magic of the holidays begins with the glow of lights. "I enjoy taking drives with my friends to look at Christmas lights, it's fun to see how different neighborhoods decorate," Laster said.

Decorating for the holidays is another tradition that instantly makes the season feel real for students. Junior Liesel Cedarholm especially loves hanging lights outside. She enjoys turning her home into something bright and cheerful.

"I love seeing it glow when I pull onto my street," Cedarholm said. For her, the decorations make the season more fun and give her family something to laugh, plan, and work on together.

Holiday baking is a favorite for many DHS students. Sophomores Jayce Henning and Peyton Buhrman said it is one of their traditions they look forward to most. They both enjoy the family time both enjoy the family time they get out of holiday baking.

"When my family starts making them, I can't wait for the whole house to smell of cookies," Henning said.

Something else that is enjoyable to students is getting outside and spending time in the snow like junior Reagan Doyle. Snowy days create the perfect chance for friends and families to try out their favorite winter activities.

"I look forward to sledding every year," Doyle said.

In the end, it is not the presents or the decorations that make the holidays meaningful. It is the moments spent with the people we care about; whether students are driving around to look at lights, decorating their homes, baking with family or spending time in the snow, these traditions create memories.

THE UNSUNG HEROES OF THEATER

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE STUDENTS BEHIND EVERYTHING IN THEATER

claire thompson
design editor

When De Soto High

School students hear the word theater, they usually think of the fall and winter musicals. While these activities are each important in their own aspects, they often overshadow another branch of the DHS drama department: The Thespian Troupe.

Thespian Troupe 1979 is a drama honors society that meets at least once a month and competes in acting and drama competitions at the end of the second semester.

Club sponsor and drama teacher,

Sara Bryant, has insight into the group's various activities.

"At those meetings, we do all sorts of things; it could be just general theater activities; trying to develop the skills and the craft for these

thespians that are really serious about their involvement in theater," Bryant

said.

In addition to being a separate activity from the DHS theater department at large, the Thespian Troupe often communicates with outside activities to support the department as a whole.

"We just finished up doing a fundraiser that is in collaboration with the fall musical, *White Christmas*," Bryant said. "We're going to sell those at each of the performances to make a little bit of pocket money for the troupe."

Being a member of the Thespian Troupe is not only about acting. Students in the troupe acquire various skills from the activity. Junior Mailee Nguyen has noticed firsthand how being a part of the club positively impacts her life.

"Some benefits of being a part of Troupe 1979 as a thespian are improvement on your speech, especially in social areas," Nguyen said. "It really helps your confidence... a lot of people do struggle with public speaking in general. It really helps you put yourself out there."

Moreover, Thespian member Junior Lily McDougall has similar views on the impact of the troupe on her life, specifically in terms of how it has helped her socially.

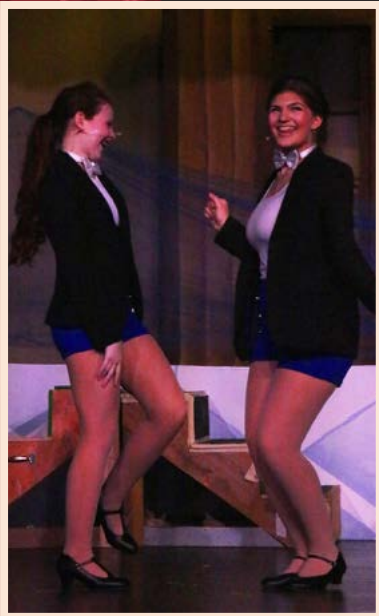
"I would also say the community. The community there, finding your people and finding that confidence through your community," McDougall said.

With competitions and showcases approaching, the Thespian Troupe is preparing performances to showcase and

compete with.

"A lot of the students in Thespian Troupe attending Thescon, the Kansas State Thespian Festival in January," Bryant said. "So those performances they will also use to compete at Thescon. So we're just preparing all of their individual events."

As the Thespian Troupe prepares for their upcoming performances for the community and competitions, they will continue to be a vital part of the theater department, supporting one another and developing their own skills over time.



Kaylee Rutschman and Lucie Showalter in *White Christmas*. Photo by Grayson Speck



Thespian troupe members Carson Hanley, Sloan Carpenter, and Savannah Hendry in *White Christmas* performing "Blue Skies." Photo by Grayson Speck

AN ENSEMBLE AS

FROM DAZZLING CHOREOGRAPHY TO HEARTWARMING HARMONIES,

libby meyer
opinion/news editor

This year, *White Christmas* is the chosen musical for De Soto High School's fall production. One of the largest appeals to this play is its smaller main cast, offering the perfect opportunity to highlight and celebrate the unsung heroes of the stage: the ensemble.

Mindy Fry, choir teacher and head director of the production, finds that the ensemble adds more than just background; they make up many of the visuals and audio. With an ensemble of around 30 participants, this musical has some of the most mesmerizing dancing and singing the De Soto stage has seen.

"There's so many fun song and dance numbers, which is what usually is a draw for the audience. That's what they [the audience] like about a musical versus a plays - the big song and dance numbers," Fry said.

This current cast is a smaller ensemble than in past years; however, that does not mean they cannot shimmy and jive just as well as the rest. This ensemble possesses wonderful performance skills, but Sara Bryant, theater teacher and assistant director of *White Christmas*, also finds that this ensemble boasts a talented group of performers who give it their all.

"It's all the different ways that they get to perform throughout the show as an ensemble member - you often get to be multiple different people at different times," Bryant said, "and it's really fun to see all the different ways that those students are able to perform and bring different energies depending on what that scene calls for."

Any ensemble, not just the current one, is essential to every production DHS has

ever put on. Bryant highlights the fun of participating in an ensemble in any production.

"The ensemble is a wonderful, wonderful place to be in any show. Every time that I do a show myself, I love casting the ensemble. It's my favorite place to be. They get to do all the fun choreography and dance numbers. They get to be in all of the big music and songs," Bryant said.

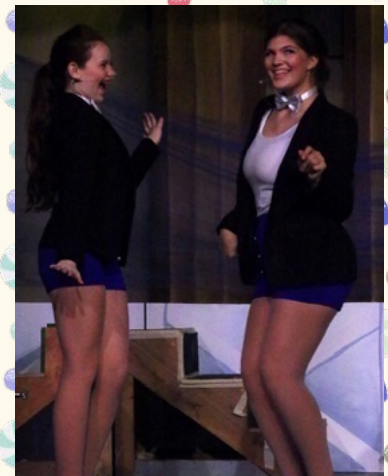
Several people, in addition to Mrs. Bryant, share this state of mind; junior Addison Easter knows that the ensemble is one of the best places to be on the stage.

"They think we're not talented, and that's not true. Some of the best theater people I know, and some of the most talented people I know, myself included, are in the ensemble," Easter said.

Overall, not only is the ensemble a wonderful place to be, but it is also an essential part of any production. The ensemble as a group adds something that no single person could add alone. The ensemble of *White Christmas* specifically adds wonderful elements of fun and whimsy that would not be present without them. Without an ensemble a production lacks the magic needed to make it amazing.



Senior, Arabella Flanagan, and sophomore, Lucie Showalter, talk. Photo by Gracyn Speck



Sophomore, Lucie Showalter, and sophomore, Kaylee Rutschman dance. Photo by Gracyn Speck



The ensemble jumps together. Photo by Gracyn Speck



BRIGHT AS SNOW

THE SHOW'S ENSEMBLE HELPS SPREAD HOLIDAY JOY ACROSS THE STAGE



Junior, Declan Coleman and freshman, Natalie Ester name sing on the train to Vermont. *Photo by Gracyn Speck*



The soldiers of the ensemble stand at attention for their general. *Photo by Gracyn Speck*



Junior, Sydney Mater, dances with the ensemble. *Photo by Gracyn Speck*



The ensemble dances in Jimmy's Backrooms. *Photo by Gracyn Speck*



The ensemble anticipates snow during their travels to Vermont. *Photo by Gracyn Speck*



The ensemble gathers around to hear junior Lily MacDougall tell her story as as Martha Watson. *Photo by Gracyn Speck*



The ensemble dances around senior Carson as Bob Wallis. *Photo by Gracyn Speck*



METALS & GLASS ENTERS

THE ART WING

NEW PROGRAM INTRODUCES UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES TO THE ART CURRICULUM

gracyn speck
feature editor

De Soto High School has added many new classes to the course catalog this year, and one of the most unique ones is Metals and Glass. The class's main premise is to guide students through the techniques and skills required to work with metal and glass by completing small skill-builder assignments and then applying those skills to larger, more complex creations.

New to teaching this material, but no stranger to the process and art style in her personal creative life, the selected teacher for this course, Celine Sengvilay Oliveria, teaches a curriculum that allows students to learn the various types of metal and glass abilities.

To gain a full understanding of the many skills needed for these materials, students work on several projects throughout the school year. When asked about her favorite project she has worked on so far, senior Chloe Weber states that she enjoys working hands-on with metal.

"I really enjoyed our wire wrapping project. I got to make a circlet, and it was really neat all the ways you can manipulate wire," Weber said.

The metal-related projects assigned to students primarily consist of wire wrapping and metal embossing. Many students, such as Weber, used the wire-wrapping technique to create jewelry they can wear. In contrast, metal embossing is a technique that allows you to press designs into metal sheets to create a textured, three-dimensional illustration.

While those are just some of the skills

taught in this class, another student enrolled in the course, Katelyn Deibert, claims a different project as her favorite.

"My favorite project has been the stained glass project. I enjoy learning the different techniques it takes to create a stained glass piece," Deibert said.

Creating a stained glass piece requires a lot of skill and patience because there are a variety of steps that require meticulous attention to detail. For example, to get all of the pieces to align correctly, one must grind each individual piece to smooth the sides and ensure a seamless connection. Despite this tedious process, the end result is often well worth the effort.

The hands-on tasks that this course entails are enticing to many students, such as senior Gabe Hilker.

"I just like how it's different than other classes," Hilker said. "It's not like we're just sitting in a classroom learning, it's [that] we actually get to do stuff, and it's more three-dimensional, which is kind of fun to me."

On the other hand, Oliveria gives some insight into what she loves about teaching Metals and Glass.

"I do like the creativity," Oliveria said. "Being able to work with glass and seeing how kids get really creative and how to make shapes out of the glass is what I really do enjoy about it."

Although she encourages people to take the class to learn these new skills and reinforce creativity, she also offers some advice on how to be more prepared for this style of art.

"Definitely take sculpture first, purely because you get a little bit more of that three-dimensional understanding," Oliveria said. "So that way, when you move into this class, it feels like a breeze."

Metals and Glass is a challenging but rewarding experience that students

should consider enrolling in if they enjoy more detail-oriented and hands-on projects. The skills acquired in the class are very unique from any other art class offered at De Soto High School, allowing students to build a broader set of skills.



McKinley Hartshorn



Emelie English



You-Ha Kim



Matthew Vetter



Cadence Shrout



Shay Christian



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NEW DIRTY SODAS



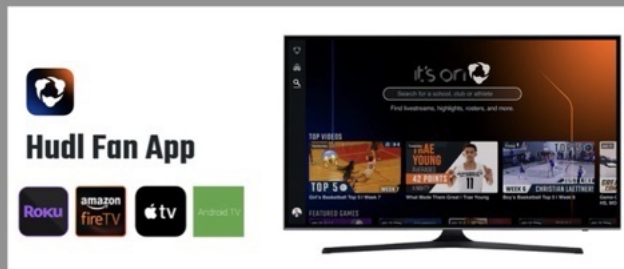
DR. PEPPER (ZERO)
SPRITE (ZERO)
DIET COKE
DIET MOUNTAIN DEW



Hudl Fan is the new location for DHS Sports!

<https://fan.hudl.com/dhswildcatnation>

Subscription proceeds
go to the DHS Activities
fund. This is a benefit to
ALL student activities at
DHS!



FAVORITE HOLIDAY SONGS

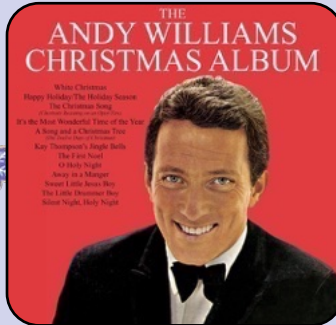
ria hudson
arts & entertainment editor

STUDENTS GIVE THEIR OPINIONS ON
VARIOUS POPULAR FESTIVE TUNES

In an online poll, students were asked to rate the following holiday songs out of 5 stars. The following results were recieved...



“All I Want For Christmas Is You” by Mariah Carey



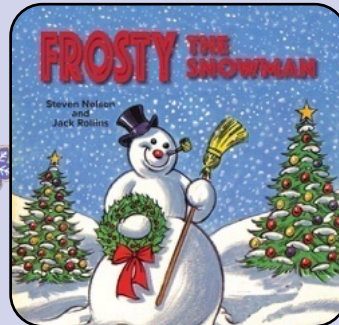
“It’s The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year” by Andy Williams



“Jingle Bells” by the James Pierpont



“Santa Baby” by Eartha Kitt with Henri René and His Orchestra



“Frosty the Snowman” by Steve Nelson and Jack Rollins



“Let it Snow” by Sammy Cahn and Jule Styne

The holidays bring beloved traditions, and for many DHS students, music tops the list. In addition to these classic-rated songs, according to DHS senior, Leta Davis, alternative holiday songs are the way to go.

Other students favor the classics. Student April Wills chose “Last Christmas” by Wham!, calling it “nostalgic, tacky Christmas, and iconic.”

Moreover, meaningful emotions are associated with these songs, as stated by student Riyah Fischer-Keelin.

“Holiday song[s] make me feel happy because it reminds me of the fun things my family and I do around the holiday season!” Fischer-Keelin said.

Beyond general memories, Morena DeKeijzer notes that listening to this festive music evokes fond memories.

“Anytime I listen to a holiday song, I think of driving down with my mom to my great-grandma’s house and spending Christmas Day with her and always having a fantastic meal with her and my mom,” DeKeijzer said.

Although it may seem just like a funny little tune, holiday songs can bring people together and inspire lasting memories. Be sure to listen to your favorite jingle this season!