

2019
Class A
State
Journalism
Champions



Newspaper News Writing Champion: Ainsley Nichols, North Platte

Ainsley Nichols

They say that if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life. Public Safety Director Shane Weidner is a beaming example of this. Though he holds a high position of power and responsibility in Norfolk, he loves his city and he loves his job. "The atmosphere in Norfolk is solid in all aspects. Everyone helps everyone here, that's why I've been here for 29 years," he said.

His career began as an infantryman in the United States Army, which involved a lot of small unit tactics. From there, he became a firefighter in April 1990 and the fire chief in 1996. Weidner credits his time in the Army for his current role in society. "[The Army] had a major impact on my leadership style," he said, "your ability to work as a team is honed pretty tightly. It was a great transition for firefighting." From there, he was appointed by the mayor of the city of Norfolk to become the public safety director.

Weidner carries a lot of weight on his shoulders in his position. From merging the police and fire department to the construction of a natural gas pipeline, he is in charge of managing essentially all issues that are public safety-related: the police department, the fire department, and risk management. "As city administrator, you are the top executive officer. You've got a lot of great folks who work with you to manage the city, but you've got to manage the whole pie," Weidner said.

The most recent issue Weidner faced was the historic Nebraska flooding about a month ago that wreaked havoc in the eastern part of Nebraska, including Norfolk. Both the north part of the Elkhorn River and the Elkhorn proper flooded, causing proactive evacuations for about a third of the city. "Our forefathers decided to build a levee which protected Norfolk from a vast majority of the flooding concerns. We were very fortunate because of the forethought," he said. Having never been at capacity, Weidner feared a potential breach in the levee, which could have caused significant flooding. However, that never happened.

Though his own home and family weren't affected by the floods this year, Weidner has felt the impact of floods before. "There was another flood on the main Elkhorn River in 2010," he said, "we saw historic flooding of the Elkhorn that year." His own home was flooded by groundwater, totaling about two feet of water in his basement. "I understood pretty firsthand during this flood what people were dealing with. It's a real pain in the backside when you have water in your house," he said.

Weidner's empathy extends to all aspects of his job. The amount of power that he has could be dangerous to some, but not him, because he understands the level of pressure that is attached to the job. "It's humbling. I'm thankful for it in a lot of ways because of the people I get to work with," he said. However, when it comes down to the wire, his position can be tough, and that's why he tries to remain grounded. "You have to sometimes make challenging and difficult decisions," he said, "sometimes the call you make is the difference between life and death."



Advertising Champion
Ashley Hedrick, Millard West

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Winning Streak

The Cornhusker High School Softball team takes home the Class J Trophy and to their surprise, a new state record

Hungry for the feeling of victory, the Cornhusker High School softball team put everything they had into the 2018 NSAA Class J State Championship game. Finishing last season with a record of 36-2 and a 2017 NSAA Class J State Championship title, the girls were determined to maintain their status. Little did they know that all of the determination would consequently drive home a new state record.

Class D Prairie High School set the previous state record of winning 50 consecutive games from 2003-2005. Despite having appeared at State 27 times, the Cornhusker team had never surpassed that 50 game winning streak. With the help of Head Coach Susie Baker though, the team broke slowly crept up to that mark.

“I didn’t tell the girls we were closing in on the state record,” Baker said. “To be honest, I don’t think they knew. We were so focused on this season and winning the state tournament.”

Baker had been the coach for the Cornhusker team for 15 years, and aided in last year’s championship title. Her dedication to the team played a huge role in the success of the team this season.

“Coach Baker has done an outstanding job of building a program that focuses on developing a complete student athlete,” Cornhusker High School Athletic Director Jerry Ryan said. “Her expectations of the girls are very high, but I’m so proud of how the girls handle themselves on and off the field. They worked really hard to represent the core values of the Cornhusker High School Community, and they finished the season as true winners!”

Even though the girls had the support from their coach, how they performed at state was ultimately up to them. Each girl had to have their head in the game if they wanted to come home triumphant. This last game for senior center fielder Graci Kolber was a significant one. It was her last chance to contribute to the legacy of the softball team.

“Our main goal all season was to win back-to-back state championships and we were not focused on the streak,” Kolber said. “Coach told us all season to trust our teammates and to remember to smile, have fun and enjoy it.”

Putting trust in their teammates and remembering to have fun, the girls got what they came for and a little more: a Class J trophy and a new state record of a 51 game winning streak. The legacy of the Cornhusker High School softball team lived on.

**Yearbook Theme Copy Writing Champion:
Brooklyn Armstrong, Omaha Westside**

Brooklyn Armstrong - Yearbook Theme Copy

Theme:

Glad You Were Here

Opening:

As we study all school year for what seems like eternity, we sometimes forget what high school is all about. These torturous but amazing four years of our lives are about finding who we are and how to interact with others. This year, we have taken risks, studied hard, and interacted with people who come from many different backgrounds.

Each of us were a part of making Far Away an outstanding and inclusive school where each of us were excited to come to school and to be a Proud Rebel. In our school's tenth year, we have achieved great strides toward the improvement of the future. Our administration worked hard to get new staff eager to teach us and new technology to make us strive toward the future.

Individually, we learn and have fun with our friends but together as Rebels we are so much greater. Together we cheered on our basketball team, gave a standing ovation to our classmates in each musical and watched in awe as the engineering students made functioning robots. Together, we supported everyone and grew as people because of it.

We are proud to be Rebels and Glad You Were Here!

Student Life:

Whether we were athletes or drama queens, this year we came together for so many different and exciting events. Each of these events helped to transform our high school experience into more than studying, but into part of our lives that we will never forget.

This year we started getting to know each other at the Back to School Car Bash where we ate food off of Principal Solo's grill and danced like nobody was watching.

We got the courage to ask our special someone to Homecoming and spent the night laughing with friends and doing what our parents say are "silly teenager things."

Each of us gave back to our community by donating to the Blood Drive sponsored by the Medical Club or bringing in food to donate to the local food pantry.

Some of us competed in many Marching Band Competitions and brought home some trophies to make the Rebels proud.

A lot of us cheered on our football team in our game against the Emporia High Destroyers, and did not get destroyed.

Every one of us learned that we are better together and that our lives will never be the same. We know that our lives will be full of laughter, excitement and support. This year is a celebration of not only ten years of teaching and learning, but ten years of smiling and cheering!

Closing:

When we were little, we asked our parents to tell us stories and sometimes they would be about a princess in a castle or a pirate looking for gold, other times they would be about when they were young and making memories with their friends. This year we made memories of our own so one day, we can tell our stories.

This year we have had so many new experiences and have learned from our “silly teenage mistakes.” We will always remember when our student section leaders painted each other and rolled down the hill at our homecoming game and that our sweet Prom Queen broke a heel on the way to get crowned.

These, among many, will be funny stories that we tell because they have left a fondness in our hearts. We may not remember our entire high school experience, but the memories we have will last a lifetime.

This year has been a big step and an exciting ride. Whether you have been here for four months or four years, we are all so Glad You Were Here.

**Headline Writing Champion:
Casey Downing, Gretna**

Headline Writing – Casey Downing, Gretna, Class A

Article #1:

Headline –

Boosting Confidence Boosts Attendance

Schools aim to wash away absences

Article #2:

Headline –

Moving in the Right Direction

Teen takes steps to ensure his health

Lawmakers draft action to curb an epidemic

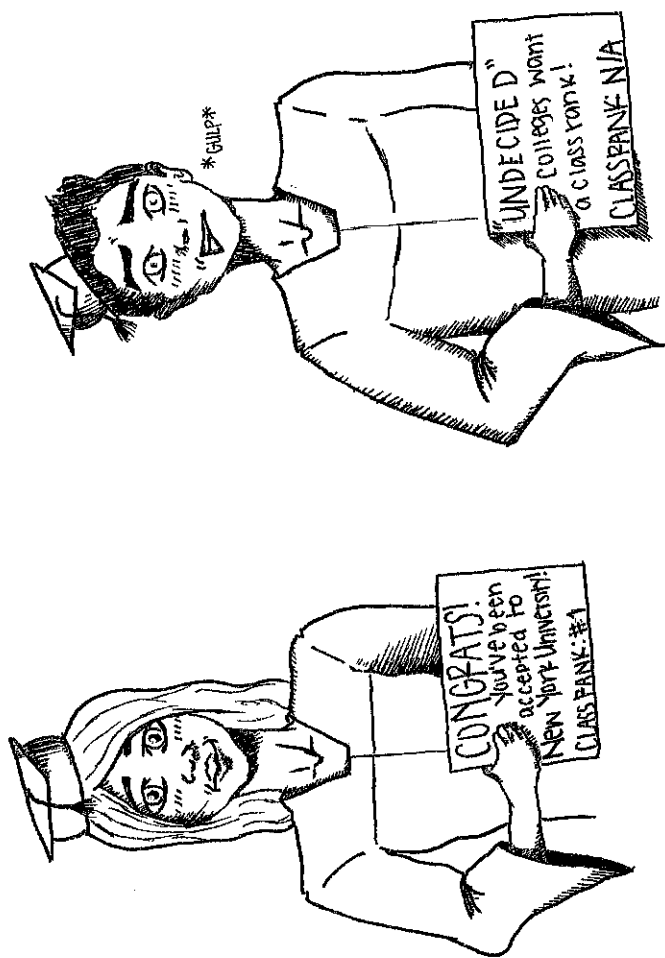
Article #5:

Headline –

Social Media Leads to Donut Shop Success

Son's internet plea invigorates father's business

Editorial Cartooning Champion:
Victoria Barkus, Millard South



Newspaper Column Writing Champion:

Jessica McKee, Gretna

Public Schools Can Create a Better Tomorrow

Encourage Students to Pursue Their Goals

The first day of school is filled with the voices of students, fresh off summer break and eager to catch up with their peers. Schedules are handed out, syllabuses exchanged and fall sports spring into action. Some students opt to enroll in classes that fuel their creativity, while others pursue Advanced Placement (AP) courses, believing these will give them an academic edge.

Sitting at the counselor's desk, year after year, I remember flipping through class catalogs, as my eyes gravitated towards electives I thought I could never take. The aromas of spices filled my nose at the thought of taking a culinary class, and shaping clay with my bare hands offered an opportunity to craft a new skill for myself. However, as the prospect of college loomed closer, the pressure to take harder classes hovered over me. I feared that if I did not challenge myself academically I would suffer after graduation. The world of creative electives became a distant dream, always out of reach. In my mind, those classes were only schedule fillers because they would not allow me to explore a pre-med major.

However, I have looked back on my high school career with regret. While I participated in music and journalism classes that allowed me to develop my individuality, I missed the opportunity to explore a variety of electives. I allowed myself to become too focused on developing my college resume with dual credit courses to explore a variety of electives.

While pursuing dual credit courses does challenge an individual to think critically and develop intellectually, it limits their ability to build a creative outlet within themselves. Their

ability to develop a student intellectually should not take precedence over an individual's need to develop artistically or vocationally.

The world is full of individuals who graduate and pursue education at a trade school or a career in the fine arts. Without their influence on our daily lives, music would not be a universal language. Without vocational jobs, our cities would crumble, structurally unstable and electrically unsound. The world needs its doctors, lawyers and teachers to heal, defend and teach its citizens. However, it also needs its fire fighters and police officers to keep us safe, and maintain order in every city.

Advanced Placement is a two-word phrase, but its purpose serves more than one meaning. To some, advanced placement means being top of the class, and serving as CEO of a popular company. To others, advanced placement means being in the line of duty, receiving a rank of honor because of their strong desire to serve their country. The public-school system has become so focused on creating the doctors of tomorrow that they forget to support the builders of today.

Students will imitate the standards that society places upon them. If they are told that the only way to be successful is to pursue a college career, many will lose sight of their interests to pursue this ideal. While encouraging college success is important, it should not be allowed to swallow the desires of students who want to serve in other capacities. In order to build a better tomorrow, students should feel encouraged to pursue what makes them happy. It is okay to have future goals, and everyone's career journey will look different. Each individual deserves a chance to shape their life and pursue their interests. Whether they choose to become a neuroscientist or a construction worker, each student's future creates the world of tomorrow.

**Sports News Writing Champion:
Jonathan Snover, Omaha Westside**

On a cold and rainy day in Plainville in early May, Victoria seniors Shelby Schister and Betty Bonker, who have been primary scorers for the Victoria High School girls track and field team in the 2012 season, were set to take on their final East-North-West-South Conference Girls Track Championship meet.

But, with crunch time fast approaching and a close team race on hand, neither were healthy enough to run the 400 and 1600 relay races due to injuries earlier in the meet.

That's when freshmen Ally Williams and Bonnie Blue stepped in. Williams, who had never run in a varsity meet until the championships, said that running in front of roughly 1,000 fans was nerve-wracking.

"I was so scared for those two relays that I almost forgot to take my earrings out," Williams said.

The races were run in the latter portion of the meet, and Victoria had earned a total of 98.5 team points leading into, placing them in contention for their seventh straight conference title. Head coach Doug Moeckel, who has been coaching the program for 25 years and is set to retire after the 2012 season, said that he was in doubt heading into the final races.

"Once Shelby and Betty became injured, I did not think we could win the championship," Moeckel said. "Those two freshmen had not run in a varsity meet before and I didn't know how they would respond."

The two newcomers did not slow the Knights' relay teams down. They earned ten team points when they won the 400 relay in a time of 50.8 seconds after Blue anchored out the hard-fought win. Victoria sprint coach Chris Fontaine stated that the relay took extra preparation, but the freshmen's junior varsity experience paid off in the race.

"Since the two freshmen hadn't worked handoffs very often with the other girls, we practiced quite a few during the 800 and 1600 meter runs," Fontaine said. "You could tell they've run that 400 relay several times because they both did a nice job."

But the 1600 relay, unlike the earlier race, took more work from the Victoria girls. After three runners, Stockton High School, who was also in contention for the team title, led the race. Freshman Ally Williams was set to anchor, and she did just that to come back and win it for the Knights, who finished with a time of 4:03.8. Williams said that the final leg was tough, but she felt as though she had to persevere.

"In that 1600 relay, I just ran as hard as I could," Williams said. "My legs got tired, especially since I had just run the 400 relay, but I didn't want to let my teammates down, especially the seniors."

The win in the 1600 relay sealed a half point victory for Victoria, who finished the day with 118.5 points to conference rival Plainville's 118. The championship is good for Coach Moeckel's 18th of his career. He said this one is special for him and his team.

"This title is definitely a team title," Moeckel said. "I'll always remember my last ENWSC championship for the way we won it."

The championship win is good for the team's seventh straight title, and it is their 10th and in the last 11 years.

Spiking for Schultz

For many, volleyball is a challenging sport, not only on the players' end, but also the coaches'. However, for Northeast Head Women's Volleyball Coach Amanda Schultze, the sport is just another part of her life.

Playing volleyball for as long as she can remember, Schultze considers it to be one of her greatest passions. The enjoyment of the game combined with her involvement makes it quite easy for her to remain excited for each season.

"[I love] Just being part of a volleyball program," Schultze said. "Growing up, always being part of a volleyball program. Just my love for the sport drives my motivation."

The volleyball program at Northeast was reinstated in 2013, leaving the athletic director at the school searching for a coach to lead this rising sport. The school decided to go with Schultze, who was a former player at Central Community College and went on to Morningside College in Sioux City. The move proved to be a smart one, as Schultze has experienced tremendous success since the hiring.

Schultze is embarking on her seventh season for the Hawks, with each season bringing more accomplishments than the last. This past season, Schultze coached an extremely successful team here at Northeast, going 21-15 on the season and finishing ninth at the national tournament. This great run earned Schultze the District 'C' Coach of the Year honor after the season concluded.

When asked about who she points the success towards, Schultze mentions her “new-school” method of coaching and recruiting.

“I really try to connect with the players as I am recruiting them,” Schultze said. “Some coaches try to connect with the parents first but I like to go with the players.”

It is always tough to build a strong sports program at any community college, as the athletes can only play for two years. However, Schultze has always searched for players that will definitely be worth the short two years that they spend at Northeast.

Getting more specific, Schultze remarks that she looks for the players who are willing to put in the most work and effort, not those who have been given everything that they have in their young career.

“As long as I am recruiting the kind of kids I want to be on my volleyball team we will be successful,” Schultze said. “There are kids that haven’t always had to work hard to earn something in their life. I try to get the kids that have had to work hard to get where they are.”

As Schultze has grown her coaching abilities throughout the past six years, she is starting to notice that she is more attracted to recruiting players that remind her of herself. Coming from Wakefield, Nebraska, Schultze considers herself to be a hometown, hard working person. This background combined with her abstract recruiting style has resulted in quite a few players coming to Northeast Community College.

“In the past, I have gotten a lot of girls that have grown up on a farm,” Schultze said. “They all played a lot of sports and had to work hard to be the best in their town.”

Competing in basketball, track, and volleyball during high school herself, Schultze remarks on her days as a three-sport athlete using characteristics that she looks for in her players now. She says that while she wasn’t always the best at basketball and track, she worked hard enough to be the “star” of her town. Today, Schultze expects the same out of her athletes.

“I never promise anybody a starting position,” Schultze said. “They have to work for it all season long. One thing that I have warned my college athletes about is that it’s tough. It will take a lot of work. I am not going to put in the time for them. It’s their choice to be successful.”

Not only is this mindset expected on the court from Schultze, but it is also required in the classroom. Schultze always makes sure that her athletes know what the priority is when they come to play for her.

“Just having everybody on board with the academic side is huge,” Schultze said. “That’s the number one reason that they come to college. To get an education. We really strive to get good grades in the classroom.”

This expectation has been drilling into the heads of all of Schultze’s players and is quickly showing results both on and off of the court. This past year, the team finished the season with a 3.76 team GPA, the highest out of any sport here

at Northeast. Along with that, Schultze has coached a combined 49 First Team and 16 Second Team Academic All-Region players.

Although the team has taken massive strides in terms of its improvement since 2013, Schultze is sure to never look back at past accomplishments and to only focus on the goals for next year. More specifically, Schultze is aiming to finish higher than the team's ninth-place finish at nationals that they achieved last year.

While this may seem like a tough goal for any person to reach, Schultze just thinks about it as another stepping stone on her path to making Northeast a powerhouse volleyball college. And with a mindset about coaching as great as hers, it would be no surprise if the Hawks one-day reach their highest goals.

"I just love the sport," Schultze said. "It doesn't feel like work and I really enjoy doing it."

**Yearbook Feature Writing Champion:
Kinsli Auman, Gretna**

Change is uncertain. It either leads to a joyous conclusion, or results in disaster. For the current seniors, they watched their high school be born, and eventually played their own hand in its development. Although school shapes its students tremendously, it is also true that the students form the school as well, an idea that is equally important. Although the students sporting their red, white and yellow with pride remained a constant throughout the years, both the school and Tomorrowton grew over time, leaving room for change just waiting to happen.

The seniors watched as third graders as Far Away High was first opened, and it was their spirit that helped to continue to develop the school. A school's atmosphere cannot be determined by a single student, and it took the combined enthusiasm and determination of the students to create a place they could be proud of. Having a united student body speaks volumes about the success of a school, and as the number of students grew to 1,000, an increase of 250 students, it created the opportunity for growth and new connections.

"My favorite part of Far Away High is the people here," senior Laya Orgona said. "Most of us have been here since day one, so we all know each other pretty well. Even the students that came later and have been here for nine years, four years, or even one year, feel like they have been a part of our classes since day one. We aren't a tiny school, but we aren't huge either, so we all get along well and can respect each other without a problem."

Orgona was one of the seniors who had been there for the past ten years, and she watched the high school slowly transform into one of the town's greatest prides. She loved seeing where they had come with everything, and her thought was not alone. When the elementary school, middle-school, and high school all joined together in the same town, its residents and students adjusted to the change. Embracing the new perspective, the Rioters mascot was replaced with the

Rebels, signaling a time of rebel against the past way of life. Aiming to keep the interactions between a teacher and its students a priority, 13 new teachers were also hired to combat the climbing student enrollment.

“The biggest change I noticed in my time here, other than all the schools moving to one location, would have to be the number of students here,” Orgona said. “We have had a large number of students come in since opening. This also made it so we have gotten more teachers to try and combat that, but the class sizes have slowly started to get larger, and the ratio for teachers to students has started to change, and one-on-one interaction with students has begun to down a little, but not a ton.”

Despite the adaptations, many traditions remained constant. The school colors, red, white and yellow continued to bleed through the halls of the schools and into students’ never-ending spirit. Additionally, the Back to School Car Bash was originally used to kickstart the year and ignite excitement among the students, and that tradition remained a highlight of the year. Along with showing support for the school, the marching band continued to compete in the state marching band completion for the past ten years, showcasing student spirit.

“Three things I have noticed to stay consistent in the ten years of Far Away High’s existence would have to be the Back to School Car Bash, that’s always exciting,” Orgona said. “Second, the colors, even though the mascot changed, that’s an obvious one. And Third, Mystery Meat Monday. This is something we students have come up with over the years. There is this meat that is served breaded, but no one knows what it is for sure. Some people claim it is Salisbury steak of some sort, but it’s never been confirmed.”

During the span of a decade, the high school grew in tremendous ways. However, despite the changes, several ideas remained the same, including the students' pride in their school. From the five smaller schools that combined to form one, it was not without its challenges. However, it created an atmosphere for students to come together and show their rebel colors proudly. Brick by brick, they built their school into a legacy that would stand for years after they had left. Although the student body would continue to expand, the students would adapt alongside it, continuing to shape their school into one that stands loud and proud. After all, a rebel will never stop fighting for something that it is passionate about.

**Editorial Writing Champion:
Mollee Swift, Papillion-La Vista**

The norm of our school has become the whispering you hear in the hallways, the suggestive rumors, and the acknowledgement of drugs and alcohol intoxicating the school, but never any action.

We hear the administrative warnings, sit in on the presentations over the truth about drugs, and are told time and time again about the dangers of these intoxicants, but never see any action or repercussions.

Due to the recent increase in local drug busts, Principal John Kim is here to change the inaction to a tangible policy at Cupcake High School.

This “NO TOLERANCE policy” is meant to clarify, inform, and communicate the standards of expectations to students along with allowing a random drug test in the school.

It is the right time to implement a factor that could deter kids from using drugs and alcohol with the belief that they will never get caught; a policy that as long as it maintains randomized, could fulfill Kim’s initial objectives.

“The overall goal of this policy is to promote a safe, drug-free environment, not to serve as a witch hunt or a way to legally profile our students,” Kim said.

Junior Oliver Taylor exposes the possibly problematic sources affecting the policy: “I think this policy is a good idea, but I think the administration already knows who’s using drugs and will just test those kids, making the process a lot less random than advertised.”

The policy directly mentions that the tests must be randomized, preventing any profiling that could be a hindrance to the student’s safety and rights. Instead it has been introduced to enable a healthier environment and make the students think twice about bringing illegal substances onto school grounds.

Teenage years are loaded with new introductions to the world of drugs and alcohol and even if those attempts are outside of school and in their free time, it still can cause issues inside the learning environment.

“A lot of students don’t fully comprehend the long-term consequences of drug and alcohol use,” freshman English teacher Mr. Will Williams said. “Anything that the school can do to discourage drug and alcohol use and promote a healthy environment is a good idea.”

Although this policy will not stop the consumption of drugs and alcohol to the fullest effect, it will make a school wide difference by discouraging even the smallest uses of such drugs.

Parent Damon Baumert struggles with this new policy’s zero tolerance, noting that “[he doesn’t] think the school realizes what impact this can have on certain sporting programs.”

This is what is so vital to the policy, it implements a wall that certain individuals are unable to slide under. Everyone is treated the same and must represent our high school in the right way. There are known consequences set in stone if they do not abide by the rules and it is the student’s responsibility to follow them, no one else’s.

Kim has made it clear what Cupcake High School stands for and this policy is meant for the bettering of all 1,300 students.

We are a learning community that will stand for no more drug or alcohol use.

We are a building that aims to keep our hallways clean and uncontaminated from such intoxicants that can threaten the teenager’s school experience.

We are a school that is now implementing action against drugs and alcohol.

**Entertainment Review Writing Champion:
Molly Ashford, Omaha Central**

Lighthearted primetime television is a long-running staple of American popular culture. *The Carol Burnett Show*, a variety sketch and comedy show running from late 1967 to early 1978, is an impeccable example of the humble beginnings of female roles in sketch comedy.

The show, while cheesy at times, immersed women into the world of comedic entertainment while captivating viewers of primetime television around the nation. The show ran on a platform of relatability, touching on everyday issues and turning them into skits. While the comedic value inevitably becomes somewhat lost in translation over time, *The Carol Burnett Show* is timelessly witty, occasionally exaggerated and a truly funny program.

To begin with one of the greatest bits, the six-minute skit titled “Riddles” follows the quest of employees in an office building who desperately try to uncover the answer to the following riddle—“If a bear walks by a room with all southern exposure, what color is the bear?”. When one character fails to figure out the answer, she begins to rage and eventually ends up punching a man who brings up the riddle.

This skit shows some of the best that *The Carol Burnett Show* has to offer, as the amalgamation of a typical and well-mannered office setting and the immense rage from the character of Marge at her friend for bringing up riddles adds to the comedic value. While the acting is not overly realistic, it is relatable enough to the audience that the entertainment factor is not brought down by the slightly cheesy expressions.

“A New Leash on Life”, a similarly funny bit, follows the trials of a dog trainer, three misfit dogs as well as their owners through a very basic obedience class. The twist? There are no real dogs present on the scene, and actors instead stumble around with their pretend dogs on invisible leashes who cannot seem to stop knocking things over.

The acting in this piece is much less focused on dialogue and more on ‘body comedy’, as the actors flail around as their invisible dogs throw them to the ground. It is traditionally funny but lacks the wit and relatability that makes the show unique.

However, *The Carol Burnett Show* is specifically a variety show. Having different sub-genres of comedy within a variety show can appeal to a broader audience and lead to a much more successful program—and successful it was. The variety show went on to win 25 primetime Emmy awards, be ranked on *Time Magazine*’s 100 best shows of all time, as well as place #17 on the *TV Guide* rankings of all-time greatest shows. Many of these awards were given decades after the show stopped running.

What makes *The Carol Burnett Show* special is Burnett’s personal persistence as a woman in the entertainment industry back when men dominated the market of comedy and variety shows. It is even noted that the director of CBS told Burnett that variety was a “man’s genre”, offering her a sitcom instead.

Instead of accepting this offer, Burnett used her contract to her advantage and paved her own way to success without conforming to what female entertainers were expected to do at that time.

Burnett’s wit, charm and humor led her to be highly regarded as an extremely talented comedian and actor. As she continues her endeavors in entertainment in the present day, it is important to remember her roots as a truly revolutionary woman in the comedy genre before it was saturated by a myriad of powerful, funny women. *The Carol Burnett Show* both paved the way for future women in comedy and made many laugh in hysteria around the nation.

Newspaper Feature Writing Champion: Sarah Altman, Papillion-La Vista

It's a lazy Saturday morning in Smithtown, and Julie Jorgensen is sprawled haphazardly across the couch in her living room. The area around her is markedly absent of the Barbie's and pink accessories which typically alert an observer to the presence of a bodacious 4-year-old girl. In remarkably stark contrast, the soft hum of the television receiver has captured her attention.

The TV today broadcasts Speed Racer cartoons to Jorgensen's house. In the bustle of the weekend, she has found her sacred time, her safe haven. You can see it in her elementary eyes as she clings to every sharp turn and gasps at every near-crash. In this early-set domestic scene, it's hard to imagine the young Julie as anything but the daring amateur driver she has become.

From her childhood, not much has changed. One can barely conceive the passage of time since those lazy Saturdays by looking at Jorgensen's 100-pound frame. Standing at 5 feet 2 inches, she appears unimposing to any casual passerby. To anyone who knows her, however, Jorgensen is the definition of daring.

Since year nine, her life has been filled with the heart-pumping prospects of professional racing.

"My first go-cart race was when I was 9 years old," Jorgensen said. "My brother and I built the fiery red single seater. Unfortunately, it looked better than it ran."

Halfway through the rough-and-tumble turns of the course, Jorgensen's race quite literally went up in smoke. Bugged down by the capricious failings of her engine, her go-cart broke down. The grey smoke from her cart, however, could not cloud Jorgensen's vision for the future.

"That's when I got serious about racing," Jorgensen said. "I told my family I didn't want to race in anything without a real engine, a good engine."

Jorgensen's persistence and adoration for racing present at nine years old has persisted throughout her life. Now, nearly seven years later and just four days shy of her 16th birthday, her racing prowess is on full display.

It started only a year ago. Jorgensen won three hotly contested amateur races in Missouri. In February, her astounding ability was chronicled nationally in *Race*, a magazine whose readers love racing almost as ardently as Jorgensen.

While mind-bogglingly impressive, Jorgensen's list of past accolades pales in comparison to her newfound prospects for the future. This month, she was notified of her acceptance in to NASCAR's legendary training camp.

As she prepares to venture to Daytona Beach in June, her driving isn't the only thing garnering attention. As she travels to Florida, all eyes will be on the path that she takes into camp. Remarkably, this is the first time the path has been trod.

As the first female driver accepted and a 16-year-old surrounded by drivers of an average age of 23, Jorgensen truly is the first of her kind.

"The camp directors usually select male drivers who have started their professional careers but are not performing to their potential," Jorgensen said. "When I received my acceptance letter, I had to read it twice to make sure it was true."

As sophomore Molly Carlos can attest, Jorgensen receiving her acceptance letter was a sight to behold.

"I was with Julie when she received the acceptance letter for the camp," Carlos said. "She went a little crazy and almost hyperventilated."

While Jorgensen's initial reaction to the news merits nothing less than a description of utter pandemonium, her driving is in stark contrast.

"She's incredibly focused and fast," Carlos said. "She's often the only girl on the course, but you would never know it."

The only thing that distinguishes Jorgensen's racing on the course from that of her male peers is that her racing is undoubtedly better. Always the competitor, Jorgensen is invigorated by the prospects of dominating on the track, regardless of her gender.

"People ask me all the time why a girl would want to race cars," Jorgensen said. "I say, why not? The speed helps me to forget about everything stressful in life."

Admittedly, Jorgensen's attempts at stress relief are possibly the most conducive sources of stress for those around her.

"It's scary every time she gets behind the wheel for a race, but this is her dream," Julie's mom Missy Jorgensen said. "I wouldn't be a very good parent if I didn't support her."

The unconditional support is felt by Jorgensen every time she steps into her racecar and securely fastens the belt. Even though the path ahead of her is uncharted, she is flooded with the assurances that her daring spirit can handle anything the course might throw at her.

"I've been waiting for this moment most of my life," Jorgensen said. "I want to set the records like Danica and continue to open the field to women."

The field will undoubtedly be opened as Jorgensen cuts swaths through the United States on her journey to Florida. With each turn she hugs and finish line she crosses, she will be breaking ground for women everywhere. While she no longer races in the fiery red single seater, her fighting nine-year-old spirit is alive in her. As you look into her eyes, you can still see the wonder that sat there 12 years ago on that lazy Saturday morning.