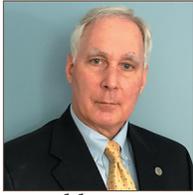


# Yellow Jacket

SUMMER 2021

ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF THE GILBERT SCHOOL





### **Charles Seaback, Class of 1972, President, The W. L. Gilbert Trust**

It's been over a year since the novel coronavirus, commonly known as COVID-19, impacted nearly every aspect of our lives. At that time, no one fully understood what the future had in store. Lives were forever altered, but as the world paused, our dedicated and creative Gilbert community stepped up and created a plan to ensure that every student was able to continue learning. This hybrid learning module went beyond the classroom and included our international students, many of whom were forced into distance learning due to travel restrictions. When schools were closed, our caring community opened the dormitory to nine international students who opted to stay in the United States throughout the pandemic. They needed to feel safe and Gilbert was able to provide that safe nurturing learning environment.

We have come a long way from March, 2020. Recently, our seniors enjoyed the privilege of walking the stage, "in person" to receive their well-earned diplomas in the shadow of the original Gilbert School, now the site of Northwestern Connecticut Community College. As President of the Trust, I am very proud of the dedicated board members, administration, staff, students, and parents who rallied together to provide an enriching experience for our students during this unprecedented challenge.

This past year has not come without some costs. The Gilbert School is entering a new era of administration. Our Principal, Susan Sojka, is retiring after serving as the first female Principal in the history of The Gilbert School. She was instrumental in coordinating the establishment of our middle school consisting of 7th and 8th students. Greg P. Shugrue was hired as the new Head of School after serving as Principal of New Milford High School for the past 16 years. We are excited about the leadership skills he brings to our community. It is bittersweet that we accept the retirement of our faithful Superintendent, Dr. Anthony Serio. Dr. Serio was indispensable in creating and implementing our International Residency Program, which is fully operational with a modern dormitory. This residency program is one of the largest investments the Trust has undertaken in its 126 year history with the primary goal of increasing diversity among the Gilbert community, while stabilizing the school's enrollment as sending communities struggle with declines in their respective student populations. This innovative global program has included students from Asia, Europe, and South America. The Trust owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Dr. Serio and his highly skilled team. His capable, compassionate, and positive approach to work has made him a strong and empathetic leader. His outstanding commitment to Gilbert, wise counsel and high moral character will be missed.

Dr. Serio leaves us in good hands and with a solid foundation. I am pleased to announce the promotion of Timothy Cronin as our new Trust Chief Executive Officer. Mr. Cronin is well prepared and excited to assume the role of Trust CEO and is anxious to place his stamp on the future of this fine organization.

With the release of several COVID-19 vaccines, optimism abounds. However, as we turn our focus towards the fall semester many challenges still remain. We know the needs will be great. We do not yet realize

*Continued*

### ***On the cover:***

*The 126th Commencement of The Gilbert School took place on Friday, June 11, 2021. Andrea Schindewolf celebrates this special day!*





*Charles Seaback, continued*

the profound psychological impact the pandemic has had on our students. The Gilbert Trust will endeavor to continue our long history of providing enhancement grants to the school to ensure an exceptional education experience for every student, and will continue to award student scholarships as they move on to universities and colleges. The Gilbert Trust awarded over \$147,330 in scholarships in 2021 to graduating seniors and alumni. Some examples of past enhancement grants included new drums and microphones for the Music Department, funding for the Veterans Project, new equipment for the Science Labs, the Gilbert Banners that adorn the school lamp posts, new security cameras, 3-D printing machines, new laptops, the Holiday Books given out annually to young children at the Gilbert Holiday event, adaptive classroom furniture, a drone with a camera for the media program, and robotics. These enhancements are made possible by the donors to our annual appeal.

In order to continue these time-honored traditions of The Gilbert School, we need your support. To attract and retain promising students, Gilbert must have the financial resources to compete with other similar institutions. We live in unprecedented and uncertain times, an era of school choice and I urge you to generously support our annual appeal by making a gift. Tax deductible donations may be made on the Gilbert Website, [www.thegilbertschool.org](http://www.thegilbertschool.org) and as a qualified donor, you can also become member of the Gilbert Legacy program. Please reflect on the truly important elements of life. If your Gilbert experience was important to your life journey or if you want to make a difference in another student's journey, consider paying it forward to the students who are just starting to forge their future while here at Gilbert. Be a partner in making Mr. William L. Gilbert's vision of "affording such assistance and means of educating the young as will help them to become good citizens" a reality.



**Dr. Anthony Serio, Head of School**

Until We Meet Again! When you have had the opportunity to save your best job for last in a fifty-year professional career, it is truly something special. With that in mind, this is not a goodbye because I will hold The Gilbert School Community in my heart as I travel into the next phase of my life. I know education will remain a part of my life because it has been that way in various capacities since I was twenty-two years of age. I will keep in touch with our "Gilbert Family" and I ask you all to advocate for our school.

I want you to know that our future is in good hands and I mean our students' hands. Let me tell you, that old song from Bye Bye Birdie, "Kids, What's The Matter with Kids Today" does not apply to Gilbert. I have been working and observing TGS students and I know the talent, creativity and dedication of our young people, and I have full confidence that they will serve us all well in the future.

The intergenerational compact anticipated from the beginning of our society is more than theory or philosophy, it is a reality. We raise our children well and they are there for us in our latter days. I believe that our Founder, Mr. William L. Gilbert understood and believed in this principle.

I leave you with this last thought, "Protect This House!" In this case, the house I speak of is The Gilbert School. Get involved with the politics that govern our existence, for if you truly love this school, it will need your desire and passion for the Blue and Gold for generations to come.

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**Timothy Cronin MBA, Director of the International Program**

Greetings from the office of The W. L. Gilbert Trust. It is an honor to share that on Thursday, July 1, I will be moving from Director of the International Program with The Trust, to a more inclusive position as CEO. Working under the direction of Dr. Anthony Serio, Head of School and Superintendent since joining in 2013, has allowed me to work side by side with his leadership to begin an international program that is successful to this day. I have been fortunate to travel to France, England, Italy, Germany, Hong Kong and China resulting in recruitment of amazing students from these countries.

I bring to this new role my high level of personal accountability and integrity in working with the added areas of advancement and development to my position. Receiving my MBA in 2011, along with twelve years of experience in all aspects of administration in academia including undergraduate and graduate admissions, student recruitment and enrollment both internationally and college level, operations, marketing, communications, staff development, I look to hit the ground running in July.

The Gilbert School, since its inception in 1895, carries a wonderful family legacy of years of amazing graduates. The town of Winsted is still home to many of the proud graduates. In my new role, I will work closely with our Alumni Department to reach out to our hundreds of graduates to make sure they know that they are still valuable to the history of this great school. To all of you and those who hold a diploma from The Gilbert School, we wish you a healthy, happy summer.



**PLEASE SUPPORT THE GILBERT SCHOOL! THANK YOU!**

# School News

## The Gilbert School will *Always* be in my Heart

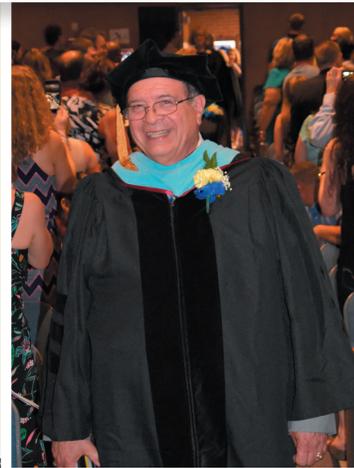
By Anthony Serio, Ed.D.

It was with mixed emotions when I submitted my letter of retirement to The W. L. Gilbert Trust Corporation on April 14, 2021. Actually, I had informed both the Trustees and members of the W. L. Gilbert School Corporation that I was not seeking to renew the third year of my contract in May 2019 so that I could retire on June 30, 2021. This allowed for the search for a new head of School to go forward and I recommended the splitting of the duties from the Trust. I feel confident that the two entities will progress under new leadership as Mr. Timothy Cronin takes the role of Chief Executive Officer of the Trust and Mr. Greg Shugrue takes the helm of The Gilbert School as Head of School.

It is hard to believe that nine years have passed since my interview for the unique position as Head of School/ Superintendent. The position allowed me to be creative and use many of my talents through the years. I have always appreciated the support the trustees, staff, students and alumni demonstrated toward me. It has been a great honor to serve the two entities through these historic times. We have experienced geopolitical economical disruptions, civil unrest and a pandemic but we have weathered each of these situations and we keep striving forward with our international residency and academic programs.

I will always remember my early days at The Gilbert School and the opportunity to grow the international program with assistance from Tim Cronin as its director. Our international program has contributed greatly to the educational program that we were able to offer all of our students. We increased our teacher roster and offered many electives to our students. The academic program was enhanced by our move to project-based learning using the teaching methods of High Tech High in San Diego, California. I regret that many of the courses and staffing that we gained have been lost due to budgetary constraints, geopolitical conditions, and pandemic health concerns that all caused a decrease in our international enrollment. Despite those constraints we continued to persevere.

Thank you for the privilege to serve The Gilbert School and The W. L. Gilbert Trust Corporation. I will cherish this last chapter of my nearly fifty-year career in education I cannot express enough my appreciation for the kindness demonstrated to my family and me when my wife passed away. The Trust and TGS will always be in my heart.



# A Yellowjacket Forever

By Susan O. Sojka, Principal, The Gilbert School

*“If you’re brave enough to say goodbye, life will reward you with a new hello”. ~ Paulo Coelho*

Today I cleaned my office at The Gilbert School for the last time. I packed boxes with family photos, student work and yellowjacket memorabilia. The feeling was odd to say the least. Reality hit me that soon the space I created so many memories in would never be occupied by me again. In the past ten years I have been in numerous offices within the building, so cleaning one out at the end of the school year was not foreign to me, BUT, today, all the emotions came to the forefront. I became teary-eyed when faculty members stopped in to say goodbye or chat and I began to understand the phrase “Fake it till you make it”.

For a year and a half I have put a smile on my face and answered “Yes, it’s true I am retiring in 2021”. So much has changed since I made the pre-pandemic decision to retire. I could never have imagined my last year and a half working as Principal of The Gilbert School would have been filled with so much uncertainty. Who would have thought that we would be distance learning and when finally returning to school we would all be wearing masks and separated from each other with plexiglass barriers? Many have asked me if I wished I had retired pre-pandemic. My answer is always the same...an emphatic NO! I would have envied anyone else in my position with our faculty, staff and students during this difficult time. Personally, it was an honor to go through this time with them.

I am thankful and appreciative of the experiences and growth opportunities I have gained from my ten years working at The Gilbert School, first as the Middle School Administrator and then as the school’s first female Principal 7-12. Both of these roles I will forever be humbled and honored to have held. I have gained life-long friendships and will miss being a part of a student’s middle school and high school journey.



This past month was a perfect ending as students packed in as many celebrations as they could. Seniors danced under the stars at Prom, caught some rays of sunshine at Squam during an unofficial extended long weekend, played games, and were honored for their academic and athletic achievements during Senior Night. Our 8th grade students took the leap as they were promoted from 8th grade to high school students, we held a rock/pop concert and our thespians entertained us on our stage performing *Snoopy*.

On June 11, 2021 we held our 126th Commencement Ceremony in East End Park instead of our auditorium as we traditionally do which brought us back to our beginning. On September 10, 1895, the doors of The Gilbert School opened for the first time in what is now the Northwestern Connecticut Community College. Having our students process from W. L. Gilbert’s gravesite on Grove Street and walk the stage in the shadows of where The Gilbert School began gave our students a sense of our rich heritage during these historic times. Being at East End Park, surrounded by family, friends, faculty and staff allowed everyone to feel a sense of community and belonging as we celebrated and honored our graduates.

I am excited for the next chapter in my life. I plan to first take some time to reflect, rest, rejuvenate and restore my creative juices. I hope to travel and spend more time with my husband, children and grandchildren.

I hope when people look back at the time I spent at The Gilbert School they will remember that I was kind and led with an Open Heart and an Open Mind, and know that no matter where I am, I will always be part of The Gilbert School family and a yellowjacket forever.



# Rebecca Dowling, Valedictorian, *Class of 2021*

*The Gilbert School Graduation Speech, June 11, 2021*

*Welcome Administration, Faculty and Staff, Trustees, Members of the Board, distinguished guests, fellow classmates, family and friends.*

It is hard to believe that just six short years ago, many of us sat in our 7th Grade English Class with a question written in bold black ink on a white board: Who are you? It was the framework of our entrance into the big world of middle school and the basis of nearly every part of our curriculum. Believing it to be this seemingly easy task, we were all under the assumption, whether it had been promised or not, that by the end of the year we would know exactly what we were made of. Exactly who we were.

Looking back, it seems ridiculous for me to have thought that I would know exactly who I was going to be in 6 short months, but I did. And when I didn't know, the weight of "Who I was," "Who I was going to be," "Where I saw myself in 5 years"... and "What I would be doing in 10 years," shook me to my core, making my palms sweat and my mind race. These questions weighed heavily on my chest like an unavoidable and increasing burden, tainting every decision I have ever made and following me through every aspect of life. Determining who I was became this endless and unanswerable quest that left me feeling overwhelmingly guilty and abandoned by my own



sense of self. Everyone seemed like they had it figured out. They knew life. They knew who they wanted to be and all they would do. But did they really? Could any of us really know exactly who we were?

Who we are is a generation born with the burdens of the past and a set of expectations for the future. When we were young, and even now, we were expected to know everything we wanted before we even knew ourselves. We were expected to conform to society's needs and wants. We were expected to find solutions to problems we had not even begun

to understand yet. We were expected to carry the burden of responsibility while maintaining our child-like innocence. An innocence that quickly vanished under the scrutinizing eye of society and social media. We grew up in the age of unimaginable and inescapable technology, with a constant flow of information and society's standard of perfection bombarding us with every Instagram like and scroll. We became a generation surrounded by unthinkable and needless violence. In many ways, we were born optimistic in a persistently pessimistic and expecting world. Still, despite all that we have

seen in our short lifetime, no one could have known that on March 13, 2020, the life that we knew would come to a stand-still. Unprepared and looking out at an

*Continued...*

*Rebecca Dowling, Valedictorian, Class of 2021, continued...*

even more unknown future, we all froze. We quarantined. We escaped into ourselves and did what we could, hoping that in a few months it would all be over. Instead, it wasn't, and 2020 became a year that would spark outrage and bring attention to the wronged and oppressed of our world. It would bring to light the need for progressive changes to secure a fairer, more equitable future. 2020 was our call to action. When the stars finally aligned and our destiny began to run parallel to the expectations and responsibilities that had been set for us.

We are the generation raised by the "What if," events of our time allowing us to change the future from a "what it can be" to a "what it will be." While the pandemic lost us irreplaceable memories and at some moments made us feel like we lost ourselves, it has shown me everything that our generation is capable of. All that you are capable of. Each of you is resourceful. Adaptable. Resilient. Talented. Beautiful. Intelligent. And more than that, ready to take on the world that has been presented to us. We will change the world because each of us has the will to set our desires into action. A need to succeed. The power to create a better and fairer world for the next generation. We have the power to right the wrongs.

To this day, I still don't know who I am. I have nothing figured out. I don't know where I'll be in 5 or 10 years. I don't know where our world will be. Life is so uncertain and nothing will ever be a guarantee. Time will keep moving despite everything that happens and all that we may miss. So, I ask of you to live each day to the best of your ability and to give the best of yourself every day. Be proud of who you are in this moment because this year set challenges and traumas into motion that no one should have ever had to see or conquer. Be proud of everything you have accomplished. Be proud for overcoming the triumphs and defeats of high school. But most of all, be proud of the person each and every one of you have grown to become. I am so proud to be a part of our generation and our class

and to have gotten the privilege to watch all of you grow into some of the most beautiful and strongest people I have ever met. Your voice and your will are truly inspiring and only one of a kind, so remember to speak out and use that one of a kind voice to bring your dreams to life. The world deserves to hear you and you deserve to be heard by the world.

Hold yourself accountable for the future you want and reach out and grab it. Pursue not only your own happiness but a more equitable, just, and forgiving world. Create the difference that the world so desperately needs and show the world all that we were truly meant to be. We are the change of tomorrow and we are a force to be reckoned with.



*Rebecca Dowling, Valedictorian, 2021*

# Miranda Brennan, Salutatorian, *Class of 2021*

*The Gilbert School Graduation Speech, June 11, 2021*

*Good afternoon Administration, Faculty and Staff, Trustees, Members of the Board, distinguished guests, fellow classmates, family and friends..... and welcome to this year's Class of 2021 Graduation. A special thank you to those who made today possible. I think I can speak for the rest of my class in saying that we are grateful to get as many 'normal' moments as we can.*

I would like to introduce myself as this year's salutatorian, a title I never really expected to receive. I believe I really do have to thank my parents and my older sister for teaching me hard work and dedication from a very young age. My parents taught me the importance of academics when I was very young, and my sister taught me how to balance school with a social life. I remember watching her come home late from a concert with her best friend, and then taking the time to study for an AP exam for the next 3 hours. She was able to experience seeing her favorite singer perform live, and still achieve a 5 on her exam. This mentality is something I strived to achieve.

I'm sure many of you who know me personally know that although I worked hard to get here, I didn't let a single high school memory or adventure pass me by. It wouldn't be a graduation speech if I didn't include at least one cliché, and I have decided that mine is 'work hard, play hard.' I mean this with all seriousness though. You can have as many accomplishments as you want, as much



money as you want, the best grades, be the captain of all of your sports teams, and still feel like the least accomplished person in the room. While school based achievements have their merit, it's possible you could miss out on experiences, memories, and relationships that you can't find in a textbook, or within the school walls.

Before writing this speech, I spent a long time thinking about what makes this class special. Now the obvious answer would be the worldwide pandemic that took almost every senior memory possible, but we'll get to that resentment in a second. I feel the saying 'work hard, play hard' really does apply to the class of 2021.

Although sometimes we may focus on the 'play' part of that saying just a little too much, we still all managed to put in the hard work to make it to our high school graduation.

Our class has had our fair share of fun in our time at Gilbert, whether it be roller skating in chicken suits, hanging off of the basketball hoops in order to put up a few kind of sad looking balloons, getting a little too caught up in winning tug of war, breaking a few too many stands during basketball games, playing Pop Smoke tribute songs in class, bringing a toboggan sled

to Gilbert for the first snow storm, a few failed attempts at having a 'senior sunset', or buying our first cars, and our second cars, and even our third, and some of us will probably be on our fourth car soon enough.

*Continued...*

*Miranda Brennan, Salutatorian, Class of 2021, continued...*

Along with all of the play, though, there are definitely many dedicated students, athletes, writers, musicians, and well-rounded young adults sitting behind me today. We have scholar athletes and talented actors. We have several students who have managed to balance academics and working everyday afterschool, which is no easy task. We have accomplished a few milestone projects throughout the years, whether it be the family tree project in English, or that roller coaster project we did, which for some reason took up an entire 3 months of our freshman science classes. We all have spent our high school careers working one way or another, whether it be in the classroom, on the field, or at our minimum wage jobs.

Now onto that obvious choice of what makes the Class of 2021 so unique. Early in March of last year, Mrs. Sojka sent out an email to all students informing us that we would be taking a 2 week break due to a global pandemic reaching its way into the US, COVID-19. Now I remember hearing that news, and I remember some of us playing a little too hard when we found out we were getting an extra 'spring break'. Little did we know that our junior year would be cut short, and our senior year would be different than we ever imagined. I say 'different', because while I know we're all upset that we didn't get to win spirit week 2 years in a row, all apologies to the class of 2020, this year wasn't all bad. This year, although I haven't actually seen half of your faces since March of 2020, I feel we somehow got closer than ever. Some classes turned into group facetime calls, others turned into our daily nap time only to wake up and realize you're the only one left in the class-- apologies to all the teachers that had to consistently call our names until finally giving up and just leaving the call. I never thought I would be able to join English class while simultaneously grabbing coffee, but I think our multitasking skills, and also procrastination skills, have drastically improved from this year.

Somehow, without seeing my classmates in person, I met more of your pets, siblings, moms, and dads than ever this year through my Chromebook screen. While the senioritis may have been stronger than ever, we still kept our school spirit alive. Sports and other activities continued on as normally as possible, and despite the crowds being a little smaller than usual, I'm sure we still all imagined full stands participating in endless chants, especially at our rivalry games. We even got to design our senior shirts, better late than never.

As I will be continuing my academics at the University of Miami, I know all of you also have incredible futures to look forward to. Somewhere in the back of our minds, we will always be small town kids who went to Gilbert. We will remember our first school dance, our life-long friends we met in class, building walls together for spirit week, and meeting teachers who have helped us transform into the people we are today. Some of the memories made within the TGS brick walls will stick with us for life, but it doesn't end here. We will continue making memories, meeting new people, and creating our stories day by day. If there is anything I want my classmates to remember while pursuing their journeys beyond high school, it is to work to the best of your ability but don't let any moments or opportunities pass you by in the process.



*Miranda with her sister Riley Brennan, Class of 2016*

# ~ TEACHER OF THE YEAR ~

## Patrick Cooke, *Class of 1989*

By Shaw Israel Izikson

Science teacher Patrick Cooke has been named The Gilbert School's Teacher of the Year.

Cooke graduated from Gilbert in 1989 and has been a teacher at Gilbert since 2003. "Patrick inspires the students and faculty and colleagues constantly," Middle School Social Studies teacher and Assistant Athletic Director Charles Harbach said at a ceremony held at the school on June 9. "Patrick always has creative classroom lessons and constantly communicates with students and parents. He also holds his students and himself to high standards and encourages the students to be their best selves both in and outside of the classroom." At the ceremony was Cooke's wife, Meghan, their two children Brady and Rileigh, and Cooke's mother Dina.

"It's extremely difficult to articulate how important this award is," Cooke said at the ceremony. "Being a Gilbert graduate and having grown up in this community, to be recognized as the Teacher of the Year, I'm speechless." In his speech, Cooke touched upon the hardships that teachers, staff members, and students all dealt with during the Covid-19 pandemic.



"I do want to say that I look at myself as a representative of the teacher of the year award," Cooke said. "Because in a year like this, there's no way, and it is completely not fair, that any single teacher is singled out for the efforts that were required of them throughout this year. Instead of a

recipient, I would like to be referred to as an honored representative of the Gilbert staff. From the teachers to the paraprofessionals, to everyone in-between, what we were asked to do needs to be honored."

Cooke thanked Principal Susan Sojka and his own family for their support. "[Principal Sojka] asked me a question when I returned to the classroom three to four years ago," Cooke said. "It is a question that has resonated very loudly and has had a major impact on what

I have done in the classroom. During a convocation, she asked the question 'Do you have a classroom that you would want your children in?' And as you can see, my two biggest fans, Rileigh and Brady are here today. They are my life and they are the reasons why I do things the way I do. I come to school every day and I treat every student that comes into my classroom the same way."



Cooke along with his children Brady and Rileigh, and his wife Meghan—Cooke said at the ceremony that his children are my biggest fans



Middle School Social Studies teacher and Assistant Athletic Director Charles Harbach presenting Patrick Cooke with The Gilbert School's Teacher of the Year award

# Senior Night Brings Fun and Appreciation

By Shaw Israel Izikson



On the day before graduation, Thursday, June 10, The Gilbert School held its first ever Senior Night on campus at the school. Graduating seniors got to enjoy brick oven style pizza, along with various lawn games including soccer and cornhole, and a fire pit where they made their own s'mores. The event also included an award ceremony where both academic and athletic achievements were recognized. At this very special event, seniors and their families could gather together one last time as a class before graduation.

Principal Susan Sojka said that Senior Night was held in place of the typical end of school year Project Graduation and



awards ceremonies that were traditionally held throughout the end of senior year. These events were all cancelled due to the pandemic. "This was one of the best nights of the year because this was a night where everyone could gather together and have fun," Principal Susan Sojka said. "It is great seeing kids being kids again, laughing, and enjoying themselves. In the past year, these kids have lost a lot due to the pandemic. However, they have always continued to stay positive, and appreciative of any event that we have been able to hold." And indeed, the seniors seemed to be very appreciative of the night.

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Senior Night, continued...



## ~ PHYLLIS C. LOCASCIO SCHOLARSHIP ~ Evan James Blass, *Class of 2021*

Most people know me as the confident but slightly awkward kid whose wardrobe primarily consists of button-up shirts, bow ties, and enamel pins. Others know me for my love of baseball and passion for history. Either way, everyone knows me for the smile I constantly wear. My childhood and early teenage years were as normal and predictable as one could wish for -- until they weren't. Being diagnosed with a disease at a young age, I had no other choice but to grow up faster than my peers, which consequently made me realize what is truly important in life: the impact we have on others. I believe that the gifts of time and attention that have been given to me by my parents and teachers is directly correlated to who I am today and my academic success. Their dedication has inspired me to want to become a teacher. It is my intention to attend The University of Hartford to obtain a bachelor's degree in Education. I have thoroughly investigated the cost associated with attending this university and I realized that I am going to need support in order to make my dream of attending UHart

possible. Specifically, I would like to teach at the high school level as I know it will be both rewarding and challenging all at once.

I used to think that the mark of a successful teacher was dependent on whether their students scored well on



tests, but through my years in high school, I've realized that it is so much more than that. I am aware that not all students come into school on a level playing field. It is up to the teacher to recognize where and why a student may be falling short because in most cases, poor academic achievement usually has nothing to do with academic ability. Students may come to school without their basic needs having been met, making it incredibly hard to focus on school. Their home life, good, bad, or otherwise, can and will affect their achievement.

Teachers have the unique opportunity to build trust and give guidance to the students who may not receive it at home. My teachers have always acted as additional role models for me, and I would love to one day offer that for my students. It is my belief that the experiences that students have in high school play a pivotal role in their growth and development. Becoming a teacher means that I will be able to meet students at their level and bring them to new heights, as my teachers have done for me. Even more, I will have the ability to ignite a passion for history in my students, as it has made an indelible impact on me. Learning the

events and values that civilizations were built upon enables us to gather an understanding that the actions we choose have consequences, and create lasting effects. In this way, growing a love for history holds us more accountable for our own actions. I hope to adopt similar styles of the teachers who have had the biggest impression on me. Those teachers were the ones that would ask how we were doing, and actually wait in anticipation for the answer, because they cared.

*Continued*

*Phyllis C. Locascio Scholarship, Evan James Blass, Class of 2021 continued...*

In the beginning of this essay, I shared the fact that I was diagnosed with a disease. At the age of fifteen, I was faced with the scariest news of my life. After several weeks of experiencing abdominal pain, bleeding and other symptoms, I was admitted to Connecticut Children's Medical Center. Following extensive diagnostics, it was soon determined that I have Ulcerative Colitis. UC is a life-long autoimmune disease involving the large intestine. Upon diagnosis, I initially hoped oral medication would help my symptoms; however, I soon learned I would need infusion therapy. Since then, I have received infusions every seven weeks and have been cared for by the incredible and compassionate doctors, nurses, and staff at CCMC.

Fast forward two years from being diagnosed and I am in clinical remission! Although I will still need to continue my treatments for the rest of my life, or until a cure is found, I am encouraged by how quickly I have healed. I attribute my remission not only to my medication, diet, and exercise, but also to the amazing care that I have received during my time at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. My mom has always said that a piece of her heart broke when she first found out I was diagnosed, but it was the caregivers at CCMC that helped her put it back together.

I know that my future is bright but I cannot deny that I will have huge medical expenses as my treatments are thousands of dollars and are needed frequently. My parents would love to help me financially

with college, but they do not have the means to do so. My father is disabled and my mother is the only one that is capable of working. College was not in the cards for my parents but together, they have given me the best life that they could have provided. I know in my heart that it would make them incredibly proud to see me go to



college. My biggest fear in assuming large college debt is that I would not be able to meet my loan payments if I had a flare that caused me to be out of work. One day, I hope to start a scholarship fund to help students with chronic illnesses pay for college. I have worked very hard, and poured myself into everything that I do in order to secure a successful future. If I were to be chosen to receive the Phyllis C. Locascio Scholarship I will be able to focus on my education and remove one of my financial burdens. To be considered for this scholarship is a blessing, as it has the potential to change the course of my life.

This was the essay that I submitted as a part of my application for the Phyllis C. Locascio Scholarship. Although I have had some time to process the fact that I

was chosen as the recipient of this scholarship, I still do not think that there are enough words to express how grateful and thankful I am to have been chosen. This honor has changed my life in so many ways and is the reason that I will be able to attend The University of Hartford. I am truly blessed to have been raised in a community that truly cares about the well-being and success of its youth. I remember being younger and anxiously awaiting the time that I would be able to attend The Gilbert School, and now that I have had the honor of walking its halls and being surrounded by the amazing teachers, administration, faculty and staff, I couldn't be more thankful. The various clubs and organizations that I have been surrounded by have allowed me to have so

many supportive and caring leaders who along with my parents have helped me thrive and grow into who I am today. Without a doubt, the lessons of teamwork, compassion, and responsibility will serve me well during my college journey and throughout my entire life. I will never underestimate the value of higher education and how I was helped along the way. For this, I will forever be grateful and will work my hardest to give back to the community that believed, and invested in me.

*Note: Evan Blass was awarded the 2021 Phyllis J. Locascio Scholarship. This generous award provides a scholarship to a graduating senior of The Gilbert School who plans to pursue postsecondary education. Established in 2009 by the late Phyllis Locascio in memory of her parents, Salvatore and Maria Locascio, this scholarship is renewable for four years and dependent upon continued academic excellence.*

# Graduates stay “Gilbert Strong” after a Tough Pandemic Year

By Shaw Israel Izikson



No matter how you cut it, the 2020-2021 school year was difficult for everybody at The Gilbert School. For days on end, teachers, staff members, and students had to endure the ins and outs of virtual learning, dealing with the elimination of sports including a whole football season, masks, social distancing, and the cancellations of many Gilbert traditions. After surviving a year of learning amidst a pandemic, the accomplishments and endurance of 75 Gilbert School graduates were celebrated at East End Park at the school’s 126th commencement on Friday, June 11.

Sixty-eight graduates participated in the ceremony. Several graduates in China, having met TGS credits in order to earn their diplomas, were unable to participate in person due to travel restrictions. The commencement was held



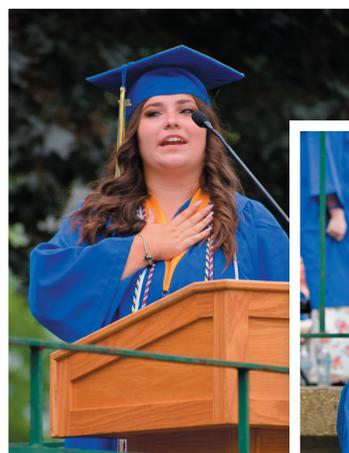
across the street from the Park Place address that was the original location of The Gilbert School from 1895 to 1959. It is now a building used by Northwestern Connecticut Community College. The common theme in the speeches at the ceremony was perseverance through hard times because, despite the challenges and stressors of the pandemic, students, teachers, and staff members all completed a successful year at Gilbert.

“I want to thank our students, our future, who sit in front of you today for their patience, persistence, and perseverance, for what has been the most historic year-and-a-half of their young lives: the Covid-19 pandemic,” Principal Susan Sojka said. “These students have been nothing but patient during the last year-and-a-half. They have accepted virtual learning, hybrid learning, no

Graduates stay "Gilbert Strong", continued

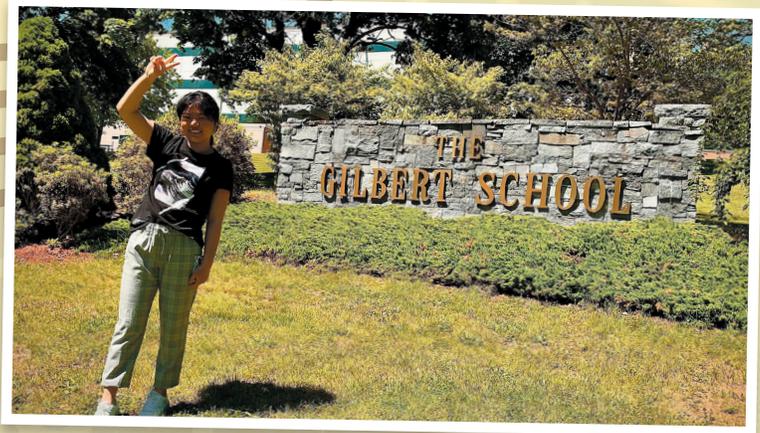
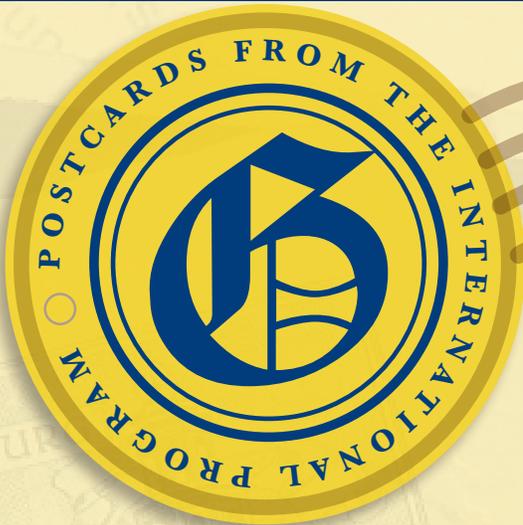
sports, sports without spectators, masks, social distancing, and conversing with teachers and classmates behind plexiglass barriers. They persevered and continued to learn and grow. Whether from the classroom or home. They are persistent. Although there were restrictions, they took advantage of every opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments and future endeavors. All while being respectful, responsible, and kind." This was the last commencement ceremony for Principal Sojka and Superintendent Anthony Serio, who both retired at the end of this school year.

"I leave you with this last thought, 'Protect This House!'" Dr. Serio said in his speech. "In this case, the house I speak of is The Gilbert School. Get involved with politics that govern our existence for if you truly love this school, it will need your desire and

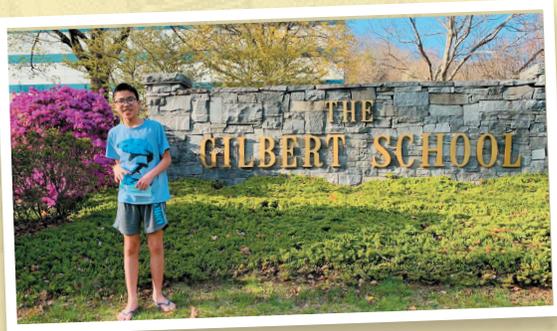


passion for the Blue and Gold for generations to come. There are those who will speak against it and might try to dismantle it but stand in the gap and protect TGS now and forever."

In her speech, Principal Sojka challenged graduates to go outside of their comfort zones and meet new people. "Take the opportunity to find out what you have in common with those around you, rather than focusing on what separates you," Principal Sojka said. "Find your voice and learn to use it. Speak and let yourself be heard. But also listen and hear what other people are saying. I hope you, like me, will take the lessons that you have learned during your time at Gilbert and let them guide you, inspire you, and remind you that you are Gilbert strong."



Elsa Ni from Shanghai, will be the only international student who will graduate at Gilbert's 126th Commencement Ceremony on Friday, June 11, 2021. Elsa joined the international program her sophomore year after attending her freshman year at a school in California. Elsa has been living in a homestay provided by Anita and Bill Panagakos in Winsted. Elsa shares that it is the best homestay she could have asked for. The Panagakos family has provided a loving home environment for several of the international students since the program began in 2013. Elsa will travel back to Shanghai for the summer and then return this fall to attend University of Massachusetts, Amherst to study Accounting. Elsa participated in the girls tennis team, guitar class and other clubs and activities while at Gilbert. We wish her the very best as she continues her American educational journey.



Ben Nguyen, from Vietnam, just completed his freshman year at The Gilbert School. For all quarters, Ben was on High Honors. He has added laughter and joy to his classes and with his international friends in the Residency Hall. Sadly, Ben will be moving on to Northwest Catholic High School in Hartford for the fall and will be living with his loving Aunt and Uncle while attending his new school. The Gilbert community and international program wish him well as he goes on to accomplish more amazing achievements. We will miss you, Ben! Best wishes!



Freshman, Andrew Park, who joined the international program from South Korea, made the Honors list for his second consecutive quarter. This is quite an amazing accomplishment for a new student to achieve. We are proud of Andrew and are joyful that he found The Gilbert School and will be returning in the fall as a sophomore. While at Gilbert, he enjoys his science class with Mr. Cooke and after-school hiking trips with Mr. Rutherford. Andrew can also be seen at the Winsted YMCA gym working out daily.



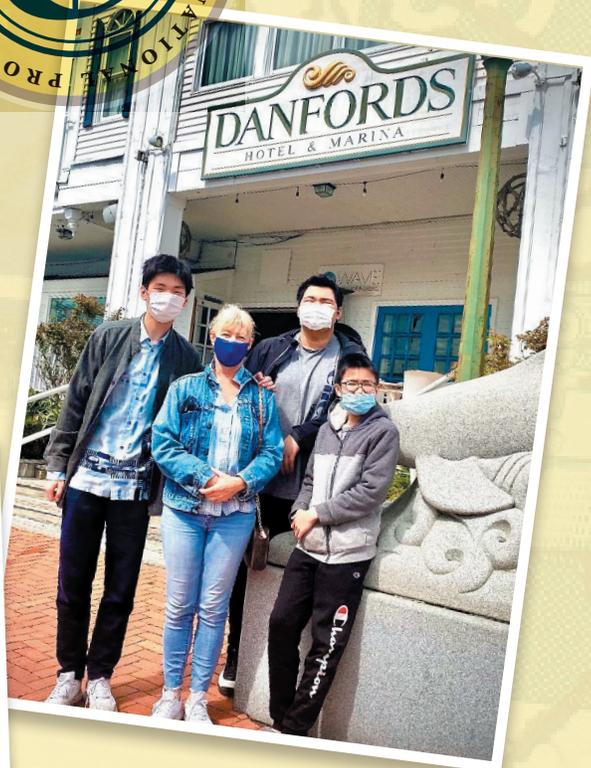
Every Wednesday is Game Night at the residency hall. Alan Wan, Ben Nguyen, Cristina Rutherford and Debra LaRoche Walls play a variety of card and board games and finish with an ice cream social. Here is Ben and Cristina with Ben winning the final card game of the night as the big winner!



Andrew Park, from South Korea, has found a new hobby in addition to a daily visit to our local YMCA -- it's hiking. He and Residential Coordinator, Mr. David Rutherford, can often be found on the hiking trails around the school campus, at Peoples State Park in Barkhamsted with its eleven miles of hiking trails or in Simsbury at Talcott Mountain State Park. We look forward to Andrew returning in August as a sophomore after heading home to South Korea to see his family and friends for the summer.



Alan Wan enjoyed his Saturday afternoon with fellow student Ben Nguyen and Residential Coordinator, Shayne Deschamps at the Brass City Raceway in Waterbury at a go-karting event in May. The boys had a great time and ended the afternoon with lunch at a specialty Vietnamese restaurant in Cheshire.



On May 2, 2021, Dean of Admissions, Debra LaRoche Walls and her husband, Stuart, chaperoned Ben Nguyen, Alan Wan and Frank Guan from the Bridgeport Ferry to Port Jefferson, New York. The ferry trip was fifty minutes in length and was enjoyed by all. While walking around the quaint town of Port Jefferson, the group decided on lunch at Danford's, a well-known restaurant at the ferry dock. They enjoyed ice cream cones before heading back for a sushi dinner in Stratford to complete the day.



When Ben Nguyen stepped off the ferry onto Port Jefferson, NY for the first time, he shared, "this is the first time my foot has touched the state of New York." In this photo, Ben is on the top deck of the Bridgeport Ferry heading back to Connecticut after a beautiful afternoon of lunch, shopping, ice cream and lots of laughs shared with the other students enjoying the day's event.



During the ferry trip to Port Jefferson, New York in May, international student Frank Guan, from China, treated himself to a gourmet luncheon of raw oysters, soft shell crab and filet mignon. Frank did leave room for ice cream as the group gathered to choose their favorite selection at a nearby creamery before boarding the ferry to head back to Connecticut.

# SPORTS *Scrapbook*

By Buckley W. Morgan, II, Athletic Director

The 2020-2021 school year has been one for the record books. The Gilbert School Winter and Spring Sports Seasons experienced the challenges of the Covid pandemic first hand. The student-athletes were very happy to have the opportunity to participate in sports at all during this challenging year.

With all of our teams, our focus is usually about good sportsmanship, esprit de corps, building citizenship, and athletic skills. This year we added to our focus: just be able to have organized sports! We did well with that new goal. We played all of our sports in both the winter and spring seasons. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic did prevent us from playing football in the fall and wrestling during the winter season and caused us to cut the seasons short in some of our other sports.

Overall, our winter and spring sports suffered with low turnout of players but that did not stop our talented and dedicated athletes. Dylan Crowley scored 1127 career points for the boys basketball team. He scored his 1000th point while playing against the Northwestern Highlanders in their gymnasium. Gilbert Flores made the All-State Academic Team in Boys Soccer. CAS/CIAC Recognized Felicity Flores and Connor Marchand as 2021 Scholar Athletes and we had numerous Berkshire League Scholar Athletes here at Gilbert. Although the season may have been a challenge, we still had many success stories at the individual student-athlete level.

Looking to the future, beginning with the 2021-2022 athletic season, all of our home football, basketball, volleyball and wrestling competitions will be live-streamed through the NFHS Network. This is a subscription service that offers the opportunity for our alumni, parents, relatives, and friends to see these games live or on demand in the event that they may not be able to come to the games in person. The NFHS Network is a nation-wide livecaster of high school sports. With a subscription you will be able to watch any of the games on their network, from anywhere in the country, live or on demand.

For more information or to subscribe, visit: [www.nfhsnetwork.com](http://www.nfhsnetwork.com)



Continued...

SPORTS *Scrapbook*  *Continued*



*Dylan Crowley, 1127 Career Points*



*Felicity Flores, CAS/CIAC 2021 Scholar Athlete*



*Gilbert Flores, All State Academic Team*



*Connor Marchand, CAS/CIAC Scholar Athlete*



# SHEILA DINGS SEDLACK, 1963

*For nearly 30 years, Shelia Sedlack has served her hometown of Winsted*

By Shaw Israel Izikson

Sheila Sedlack started working as an Assistant town clerk back in 1992, becoming town clerk in 2000. Now after 30 years of serving her hometown, Sheila will be retiring at the end of her term on December 31, 2021.

Sheila said that she served for so long out of her love for her hometown of Winsted. “I wanted to give back to it because I always thought Winsted had so much potential,” Sedlack said. “I always believed that if we could work together, we could move forward.”

Sedlack said that The Gilbert School instilled in both her and her husband, Selectman Steven Sedlack (Class of 1960), a love of both volunteering and giving back to the community.

“I loved my history class at Gilbert and serving on several committees, because I enjoy working with people,” she said. “The history class instilled in me the love of the history of Winsted. While serving in Town Hall, I have felt a need to protect the history that we have here in Winsted. This is why I pushed forward projects in the town clerk’s office to digitize and preserve our records. I have always taken pleasure in that.”

While serving in Town Hall, both Shelia and her husband Steven have found ways to give back to Winsted, The Gilbert School, and stay connected to the Gilbert community. Steven



Sheila Dings Sedlack

has been on The W. L. Gilbert School Corporation and The W. L. Gilbert Trust for several years. Meanwhile, Shelia has helped to organize many reunions for her graduating class. “I have almost 40 friends from Gilbert that I still stay in touch with,” Shelia said. “Some are now in other states. It’s not like we write to each other all of the time, but we have all stayed connected. To

me, Gilbert is a community. It’s not just a high school that you graduate from and then walk away. There is also something special when it comes to my family’s relationship with Gilbert. Me, my husband, my children, my sister, and so many of my relatives, we all have that same relationship because we all graduated from Gilbert.”

Shelia added that not only was The Gilbert School a great influence on both her and her husband Steven, but so was the influence of President John F. Kennedy.

“He had a huge impact on both Steven and myself,” she said. “Steven would attend the Board of Education meetings or other commission meetings in town, and I would stay home with the children. Other times it would be vice-versa. I would attend meetings and Steven would stay home. Both Gilbert and President Kennedy influenced us to feel the need to participate, that we were needed for the betterment of Winsted.”



Winsted Mayor Candy Perez, Lieutenant Governor, Susan Bysiewicz, Town Clerk Sheila Sedlack, state Democratic Party Secretary Audrey Blondin, and Congressman John Larson (D-1) at the Winchester Democratic Town Committee’s Community Awards on Sunday, May 23, 2021

# BARBARA (CUATT) DEBELLIS NAUGLE, 1978

*Gilbert Alumna does Life Changing Work with Animals*

By Shaw Israel Izikson

For 1978 Gilbert graduate Barbara DeBellis Naugle, working in the field of animal welfare started with a dog that her family adopted. “My family had a dog that changed my life,” Naugle said. “She was a little cocker spaniel who was my heartbeat. We adopted her when she was five years old and we had her for about five years. She was instantly my buddy. She was great to me and followed me around whenever I was home. She was quite a wonderful dog when I was going through a difficult time in my life. You know how pets are -- they find what’s broken and they fix it.”

Naugle’s love for her dog led her to her position at the Connecticut Humane Society, where she has been working for the past eight years as Director of Development. “I wanted to work at the Humane Society because I thought if I could help other people make the same connection to a pet that I did, that would be pretty wonderful,” Naugle said. “And now I am making those connections for others!”

Naugle said that learning how to make and maintain connections was one of the many things she learned at The Gilbert School. “To me, Gilbert instilled a sense of community, and I always looked for that community with my relationships in the places where I have worked and lived,”



*Barb with Connecticut Humane Society rescue pups*



*Class of 1978 Reunion - Lynne Kittredge Hegan, Barb Cuatt Naugle, Meg Brown McGinn, and Marilyn McGregor Gagner*



*Classmates Karen Latina and Barb Cuatt Naugle*

Naugle said. “When you are living in Winsted, everyone is connected. It’s a real positive thing. I still keep in touch with the people I grew up with in Winsted and the people I went to school with at Gilbert. There is so much value to the fact that I can still connect the dots with the people that I grew up with.”

Naugle lived in Pennsylvania for several years after she graduated from Gilbert. “I would see people in the street and I would think, ‘Oh! That looks like one of my teachers or one of my friends from Gilbert!’” she said. “I would see people constantly that would remind me of the friends that I have. I still keep in touch with many of them.”

Naugle said that, when it came to making and maintaining connections with people, she learned a lot from Gilbert. “Gilbert taught me a lot about how to maintain friendships,” she said. “The lessons at school taught me to show respect for people. That friendship and respect start by learning people’s names. It doesn’t matter if it’s a janitor or a CEO. Always find ways to get to know who people are. The lessons at school also taught me that you should be a good neighbor. You don’t have to be best friends with everyone, but you should be neighborly. Always be kind and keep in touch.”

# SARAH LAURETTI TOOMEY, 2000

*Gilbert Alumnus Wins Award for her Tireless Service*

By Shaw Israel Izikson

Sarah Lauretti Toomey, Class of 2000, said she learned about the value of volunteerism by being a student at The Gilbert School. She feels that she had volunteer opportunities at Gilbert that she would not have gotten at any other school. “When I was a student at Gilbert, I started working with at-risk youth,” Toomey said. “I also took an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) class when I was at Gilbert, which is how I got involved in emergency services. Gilbert helped me to explore many different things which led me to a career in helping people. My career fulfills a need within me to help others.”

Toomey was a volunteer firefighter for the Winsted Fire Department for 19 years. She has also served for many years as the Community Outreach and Recovery Navigator at Greenwoods Counseling Referrals. This nonprofit organization is a mental health referral service that ensures access to quality and affordable mental healthcare.

Last year, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Toomey started the Little Food Pantry in Winsted. The pantry, which is located in front of Northwest CT Realty, offered food and toiletry items to those in need during the pandemic.



*Receiving the Special Friend to The Community Award from Steven Sedlack (Class of 1960) Sheila Sedlack (Class of 1963), Sarah Toomey, and Winsted Mayor Candy Perez*



*Sarah and her husband Peter Toomey. The couple met while the fire department was fighting a brush fire*



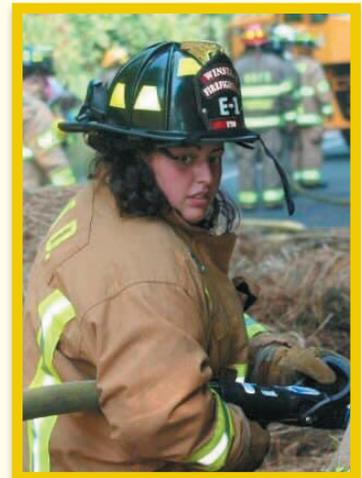
*Sarah and the free food pantry that she started in 2020*



*Sarah and her father, Joseph Lauretti, who joined the Winsted Fire Department shortly after she did*



*Toomey volunteered her time in front of Winsted Town Hall for National Prescription Drug Take Back Day on April 24, 2021. From left: Winchester Police Department officer Greg Lopardo, Winchester Youth Services Bureau Executive Director Cathy Ohm, State Representative Jay Case and Toomey*



*Sarah fights a hay fire on Route 44 in Winsted*

Recently in recognition of her hard work and volunteerism, the Winchester Democratic Town Committee awarded Toomey the Special Friend of the Community Award. The award was given to her for “her tireless work for those with food insecurity in our community by founding the Little Pantry and coordinating meals and volunteers every day for the needy during the Covid pandemic. She is someone people in the community turn to for help when needed.”

“I recommend to anyone to volunteer their time to their community,” Toomey said. “Volunteering has helped me meet so many new people and, personally, it has opened up so many doors to me.” Toomey credits The Gilbert School in learning about how to be engaged with her community.

“Playing sports at Gilbert also helped me to become who I am today,” Toomey said. “I was a wrestler on the school’s wrestling team. I was the only girl on the team, and I was also the second girl ever to have placed in the Berkshire League’s wrestling tournament. Those things helped me to gain the confidence that I have today. When someone told me that I couldn’t do something, it only made me work harder.”

# THOMAS MATTHEWS, 1998

## A Proud Elk

By Shaw Israel Izikson

When Tom Matthews graduated from Gilbert in 1998, he wanted to find ways to give back to his community. “Growing up in Winsted, I realized that the town needed a lot of help in many areas,” Matthews said. “I used to take part in the Special Olympics’ Penguin Plunge up at Highland Lake. It was great, but then I thought that I needed to get involved with more than just that.”

Matthews spoke to his grandfather who was a long-time member of Elks Lodge #844. The Elks is a Fraternal Order and a national organization and was formed in 1868 in order “to promote and practice the four cardinal virtues of Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love and Fidelity.”

“I decided to become a member of the Elks because they give so much back to the community,” Matthews said. “I’ve taken part in many activities that the Elks has sponsored to help our community over the years, including putting up a new scoreboard at the Little League baseball field.”

Matthews has moved up the ranks at the Elks Lodge, from serving as Loyal Knight to Leading Knight. This year he is serving as the Winsted Lodge’s Exalted Ruler.

Matthews directly credits his time at Gilbert, including playing for the school’s football team, for instilling a sense of



Matthews and local Winsted children at The Elks Regional Soccer Shoot back in November 2019

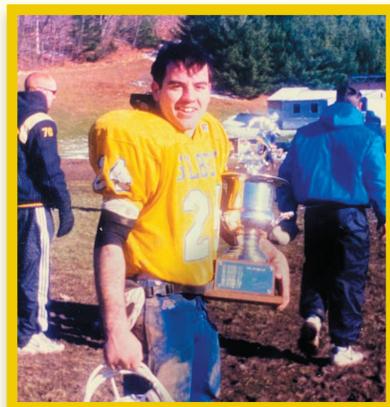


The Matthews brothers at the Elks Lodge in Winsted in June 2017. From left: Daniel Matthews, Jim Matthews, Tom Matthews, and Patrick Matthews. The brothers were at an event where Tom became Exalted Ruler for the lodge for the first time, while Daniel and Pat became officers, and Jimmy won Citation of the year

discipline that he has carried over with him into the real world. “I played for the Yellowjackets football team for all four years of my time at Gilbert, and I was captain in 1998,” he said. “Playing for the football team taught me that it’s important to be on time, when playing sports and especially when working. When you play on a football team, it’s important to be on time and to encourage others to do the same. Playing football at Gilbert set me up in life when it came to important lessons for working. For all the jobs I have ever held, I have always been early. It’s a structure that Gilbert instilled in me.”

When he is volunteering for the Elks youth programs, Matthews said that he always tries to instill in children this importance of discipline and being on time. “I try to tell children that while you may not ever become a superstar, you need to learn about teamwork and how to work with people,” he said. “You need to know how to set goals and how to achieve them.”

Matthews added that he has remained friends with quite a few members of his class. “Anytime I see someone I went to Gilbert with, even if I am not friends with them, I always make a point to talk with them,” Matthews said. “But I am still friends with a lot of people from Gilbert. I truly made a lifetime of friends at Gilbert.”



Tom Matthews after the Yellowjackets won the Berkshire Bowl in 1998. Matthews was the captain of the team



The Gilbert School prom in 1998

# GINA LAURETTI SARTIRANA, 1998

*Volunteering and Serving in her Hometown*

By Shaw Israel Izikson

When it comes to serving in a time of need, Gilbert School graduates have frequently been known to be the ones who step in when it's necessary. One great example is 1998 graduate Gina Sartirana, who has volunteered for multiple organizations since she left The Gilbert School.

Sartirana served for many years with the Winsted Fire Department's Fire Police Unit. Then when her son Evan was six years old, she became involved with local Cub Scouts Pack 1027. "I eventually became a Cubmaster for the pack when they needed someone to step up and fill the role because the original Cubmaster was leaving," Sartirana said. "At that point, Evan was a year into scouts and it was something that he really liked. I didn't want him not to be involved with it anymore. So that's when I felt that if no one else was going to do it, I would step up to the plate." For the past 10 years, Sartirana has been involved with Cub Scouts in several different roles, including her current role as a committee chairman.

Her volunteerism has not stopped with the fire department and local Cub Scouts. Since 2019, Sartirana has been a volunteer with the Civil Air Patrol. The Civil Air Patrol is an Auxiliary of the United States Air Force and includes several youth programs that teach students about



*Gina and her husband, Steve Sartirana (Class of 1981)*



*Gina and her son Justin in the Cub Scouts*

leadership, fitness, and aerospace. She also recently became a member of the Winsted Lions Club, which offers several community-based volunteer programs.

Sartirana said she learned about the value of working hard from her time at Gilbert. "To me, hard work always pays off," she said. "It seems that every step of the way I have run into hurdles in my life. But through hard work and perseverance, I have overcome these hurdles, even though I haven't always known what the lesson was to be learned at the time." She said that many of these lessons about overcoming difficulties came through many of the classes she took at Gilbert, especially the business classes. "I was very much a student who stuck to academics at Gilbert," she said. "I didn't participate in a lot of clubs and activities there. My favorite memories all have to do with my classes and my teachers."

Sartirana said that she also still carries with her the lessons that she learned at Gilbert about perseverance. "It's great to have goals and visions, but when they don't work out it's okay because if you keep going, something better will come in the future," she said. "I learned from Gilbert that you always need to keep your head up and always keep working hard."

*Gina and the Civil Air Patrol during Winsted's Memorial Day ceremonies*



*Gina with the Winsted Lions Club, serving to-go breakfasts during the Lions' annual Palm Sunday breakfast this year*



# RUTH URSONE NAPOLEONE, 1992

*Gilbert Alumna AMP'd Up About Mural*

By Shaw Israel Izikson

Gilbert School alumna Ruthie Ursone Napoleone, who graduated in 1992, has worked as the development manager of the [American Mural Project \(AMP\)](#) since 2019. The mural, which is being constructed in a former factory building in Winsted, is described on the American Mural Project's website as "the largest indoor collaborative artwork in the world—a mural 120 feet long, 48 feet high, and up to ten feet deep." The mural itself, which has been built over the past 20 years by artist Ellen Griesedieck, is a tribute to American workers.

AMP also organizes various educational programs for children and schools, including after-school programs, summer camps, and internship programs. "I believe that AMP can be a catalyst for really great things in Winsted," Napoleone said. "I have lived in Winsted off and on my whole life, and I believe in AMP."

Napoleone said that being a student at Gilbert instilled in her a strong sense of community.

"Gilbert taught me ways to give back to the community,"



*Gilbert alumna Ruthie Ursone Napoleone with the mural at the American Mural Project. Photo by Marco Napoleone*

Napoleone said. "But I also had a lot of fun when I was at Gilbert." Napoleone said that having fun, and having a sense of humor, is also something that Gilbert taught her. "Because there are a lot of adversities in life, using your sense of humor to manage

them can often be healthy and it can diffuse situations when appropriate," she said. "It makes things more fun when you value a sense of humor."

She said that she still remains in contact with many of the classmates she went to school with. "When I think about the time I spent with my friends in high school, it makes me smile and laugh," she said. "I am still in touch with a lot of people that I built strong relationships with at Gilbert." She added that her favorite memory from Gilbert is her time on the soccer team.

"I played all four years and I was the team captain during my senior year," she said. We had a great time together. We all learned how to overcome tough losses and celebrate the wins. To me, soccer is a perfect analogy for life."



*The Napoleone Family at Gilbert's 8th Grade Promotion Ceremony. Ruthie's husband, Tony, son Marco who completed 8th grade at The Gilbert School, son Riker who will be in 7th grade at Gilbert in the fall, and Ruthie*

# Class Notes ~ *Where are they now?*

Items included in the *Class Notes* Section of the *YellowJacket* are submitted directly to us by alumni or are gathered from public sources such as local newspapers. The purpose of alumni news is to pass on good news, good wishes, and to recognize your accomplishments. The more information we receive from you, the more fun and informative we can make this section, so **PLEASE keep us up to date on your latest news!**

## 49th Annual TT Open

### Patrick Cooke, Class of 1989 writes:

On June 10th, 18 Gilbert teachers, staff, alumni, coaches, and retirees



participated in the 49th TT Open to mark the closing of another Gilbert school year! In a time-honored tradition, a great time was had as the competition was tough but friendly. Is there a better way to spend a beautiful day at the end of the school year than on a golf course with friends and family?

### Here are the results:

#### Long Drive Female:

Cindy Fixer (Class of 1978)

#### Long Drive Male:

Patrick Cooke (Class of 1989) — That's right, all you young bucks!

#### Closest to the pin on the 3rd Hole:

Mike Gamari – 6'

#### Closest to the pin on the 8th Hole:

Patrick Cooke – 15' 6"



And the 2021 TT Open champion, in a tiebreaker, goes to the Team of:

Mark Douglass

Don Crossman (Class of 1999)

Jeoff Langill (Class of 2006)

Patrick Cooke (Class of 1989)

Tied with the team of Mike Gamari, Dick McKie, and Frank McCann, it came down to the best score on the toughest handicap, the Par 4 5th, which was birdied by the winning team!



The best stat of all was the fact that over \$300 was raised for the [Terry Tirrell Scholarship](#), thanks to the generosity of the participating golfers. If you would like to contribute to the scholarship, we welcome all gifts.

Thanks again to everyone who has supported this fantastic Gilbert tradition. **Next year is the 50th! We hope to see you there!**



## CALLING ALL ALUMNI!

Send us your news for the next issue!

Whether you've recently married, celebrated an anniversary or an addition to your family, received a promotion, changed occupations, started a business, written a book, won an award, went on an adventure, or just want to send greetings to your classmates, – we want to know!

Photos for publication are always welcome!

Send your news to the Alumni Department at:

[gilbertalumni@gilbertschool.org](mailto:gilbertalumni@gilbertschool.org)

Let us hear from you!

## REUNIONS!

Due to the pandemic, many of you have not been able to celebrate your class reunions. When you are ready, please let us know, we can help!

Contact us at :

[gilbertalumni@gilbertschool.org](mailto:gilbertalumni@gilbertschool.org)

*Continued*

Class Notes, continued



**2021  
Gavin Z. Langston  
writes:**

To whoever may read this, I've spent 6 years at Gilbert. And throughout those years, I never felt like I fit in. I always felt invisible. I had a group of friends and I tried to hang out with really everyone, but I was always a third wheel, and never belonged. I never did any clubs or sports, and honestly it was fine. Eventually that gets to you. But tonight, on my 18th birthday, at the Senior Night Celebration, I felt different. I felt like I belonged. I can't describe what that feeling is like. But to just be myself, and be with everyone, that's what it means to be a Yellowjacket. Over these past years, I made fun of my school. I wouldn't participate in any of the spirit weeks, and would wear regional colors to the pep rally. It was how I would act. I wanted to stand out, to not be invisible any longer, but I assumed it never worked. But last year, when the juniors, my junior class, won for spirit week at homecoming, that was the best. That feeling sticks with you, and I didn't think at the time I would ever feel it again. But that's how tonight felt. Hanging out with all my friends and the faculty, I felt like I was part of a family. I'm writing this down, because someone has to hear it. I kind of wanted to make a speech, and give it tomorrow [at graduation], but this will have to do. I'm writing for the dreamers, those stuck in their own world, and those who don't fit in. I'm writing this for anyone who feels the same way I do, and can't express it. Do not ever, and I mean ever, forget this place. It may feel like high school was where you peaked, but you still

have a long way to go. This was just the beginning. If you can do one thing that you are proud of, just one, then nothing else really matters. As my last act as a Gilbert student, I figured I would share my story. Farewell.

**2003  
David Hugel writes:**



Hello, just wanted to send in an update on my family. My wife Melissa and I welcomed our second child, a son, Jackson on January 11th, 2021. Mom and dad, as well as big sister Ava, are all enjoying being a family of four. *Congratulations, David!*

**1975  
Grace (Patch) Kelly** obtained a Masters of Human Services from Concordia University On-Line on March 9, 2021. *Congratulations, Grace!*



**1955  
Jim Foster writes:  
Why Do Gilbert Graduates  
Continue to Have Reunions?**

In just about every issue of the *YellowJacket*, there are pictures and articles of our class reunions. Interesting stories of former students getting together to reminiscence about their past or rekindle relationships with old friends. They say high school is the greatest time of our formative years and while at Gilbert we had lots of fun activities like dances, sports, learning to drive, and dating. But our years at Gilbert were over so quickly and we then entered the world

of responsibilities. Having a class reunion is a great way to relive parts of our teenage years and reconnect with old friends.

If it's been 20 years since you graduated you probably have lost touch with a lot of your former classmates. A reunion is a perfect way to renew those old friendships and find out how your friends' lives have been progressing. You can learn whether they got married, obtained a great job, had children, and share other exciting life events.

What might be some of the other reasons that prompt one to consider



Class of 1955, 2017 Reunion Luncheon

attending a class reunion? It's a nice way to learn that the class president is living an ordinary life, like maybe running a local hardware store. The homecoming queen might work for the telephone company and maybe the class athletic star is a physical therapist somewhere in the South. Or, maybe the class clown flew to the reunion in a private jet. For those still single, divorced, or looking, suddenly the frumpy girl from math class might look cute and the clown from English class has learned to dress without white socks. If it's your 30th reunion, you might get to see who has lost most of their hair or who has gained a beer belly. No matter where we find ourselves after graduation, we all have a lot in common – our

Continued

Class Notes, continued

youth. As we age, it seems one of the most frequent conversation topics is what medical ailments we have, which then prompts us to share what our medical problems are! It's also a time to pull out our reading glasses and see photos of our classmates' children and grandchildren.

Of course, there are those who would never attend their class reunion and a review of the literature shows there are some reasons for not going.

Going to a reunion can present financial, psychological, and logistical problems. That is clearly not the intent of a reunion. Yet these issues often exist. People may be reluctant to go because they feel embarrassed about their physical appearance or they are insecure about their lack of achievements since graduation. On the other hand, reunions can be eye-opening. With age we usually develop wisdom and maturity. Meeting former classmate and recalling old memories, both good and bad, may help us gain a better insight into who we are and how got here. In fact, renewing old friendships and reliving the fun times and feelings we had at Gilbert are two of the most common reasons people attend their high school reunion.

If you receive an invitation to attend your next Gilbert class reunion, don't automatically throw it into the trash can! Consider it to be a nostalgic visit back in time when an important part of your life was formed.

**1951 Virginia (Sesko) Hotchkiss, Class of 1958 sent a tribute to her brother, William C. Sesko, Class of 1951. Virginia writes:** My brother's classmates may be interested in reading about his life and his volunteer work. Bill passed peacefully on July 30, 2020 after a battle with lung disease. Bill served in the Air Force

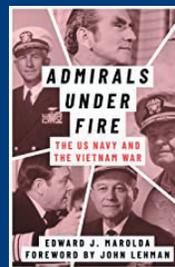
as a ground radio operator in Korea. Professionally, Bill began at American Lava Corp as a Failure Analysis Lab Manager, operating a then state of the art electron microscope. As American Lava became 3M Corporation, then GE and finally Coors Ceramics, he served four companies for 40 years, but never changed offices. Upon retirement, Bill devoted himself to golf, volunteer opportunities and his family.



An avid golfer and longtime member of Creeks Bend Golf Club, he recorded multiple holes-in-one. He loved to cook and made excellent soups and spaghetti sauce and served the best breakfast in town. He was a docent at the Tennessee River Aquarium. Bill, "The Butterfly Man" was awarded "A Day of Recognition," by the Governor for his contribution to Tennessee Tourism and his devotion to visitors in the butterfly garden. For many years, he also volunteered in the imaging department for CHI Memorial in Hixson, TN. As a charter member of St. Jude Catholic Church, Bill served as a long-time usher. Bill was also a member of the Knights of Columbus. Bill was described as a "genuine, gentleman" by many and will be truly missed.

## BOOK SPOTLIGHT!

Edward Marolda, Class of 1963 has published *Admirals Under Fire: The U.S. Navy and the Vietnam War (Peace and Conflict)*.



## Four Generations of Proud Gilbert Graduates!

From left to right: A photo of Morgan Beach, Class of 1933, with his daughter, Rebecca Lynn Beach-Schrock, Class of 1963, with her son, Scott Goodell, Class of 1985, with his children, Shelby Goodell, Class of 2014, Caleb Goodell, Class of 2021, and Mason Goodell, Class of 2021.

**Keep the Buzzzzz Coming!**



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**THE FOLLOWING DONATIONS WERE RECEIVED BETWEEN MARCH 1, 2021 AND JUNE 15, 2021.**

Every effort to ensure accuracy has been made. However, if you locate an error or omission, please accept our apologies and notify the Alumni Office at [gilbertalumni@gilbertschool.org](mailto:gilbertalumni@gilbertschool.org)

### ENRICHMENT DONATIONS

#### Gilbert Circle (\$1000 +)

Dr. Joan Centrella, 1971 & Dwight Allen  
JoAnn (Young) Leifert, 1980  
S. Peter Manchester, 1958  
Paul B. Manchester, 1960  
Tony, Tanya & Tia, 2021, Mongitore  
Charles & Ellen (Vaccari) Seaback, 1972

#### Blue & Gold Club (\$500 - \$999)

Attorney Ellen C. Marino, 1983

#### Patrons (\$200 - \$499)

Christine (Wiarda) Hurley, 1987

#### Yellow Jackets (\$100 - \$199)

Gregory J. Hughes, 1968  
Heather (Case) Dzielak, 1986

#### Boosters (\$50 - \$99)

Ellen (Barrett) Cunha, 1962  
Jeffrey Morton, 1987

#### Laurel Court (\$1 - \$49)

Emily Griswold, 2008  
Eric Jones, 1982  
Sally (Passini) Wabrek, 1963

### SCHOLARSHIP DONATIONS

#### Jason T. Boutin Endowment Fund

Kathleen (Brady) Boutin, 1975

#### Timothy M. Casey Scholarship Fund

Joanne Aliano, 1974

#### The Gilbert Faculty Scholarship Fund

Peter & Deborah DiMartino, Former Faculty

#### Terrence Hastings Tirrell 1973

#### Memorial Scholarship

Kathleen R. Tirrell

#### Ingmanson Family Scholarships

Brian A. Ingmanson, Former Faculty  
Christine A. Ingmanson

#### Irving S. Milano Scholarship Fund

William & Gayle (Milano) Gemetro, 1964

### FUND DONORS

#### Donations to The Draper Foundation Fund, a fund of the Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation

Jim & Shirley Draper

#### Edward Keeley Memorial Fund

Anonymous  
Susan (Moore) Belle-Isle, 1975  
JoAnn & Harry Briggs  
Rita DiGiovanni, 1968  
David Dombrowski, 1977  
Marcia Drenzyk, 1969  
Jo-Ellen (Yadach) Eckel, 1977  
Jack Fracasso, 1975  
John & Beverly (Simons) Fratini, 1961/1963  
Jessica Gagliano  
Michele (Walter) Glass, 1977  
Brian & Sandra (Soucy) Griswold, 1970/1974  
Jill (Sullivan) Healey, 1986  
Peter Hohmeister, 1975  
Gail Hoxie, 1962  
Brian Keeley-DeBonis  
Victoria (Bordonaro) Larson, 1973  
Karen (Kammermeyer) Lutz, 1973  
Laura Maas  
Law Office of Ellen C. Marino  
Willard & Patricia Minton, Former Faculty  
Shirley (Kolega) Moore, 1943  
Dorothy (Wetmore) Robbins, 1954  
Ray, Astrid (Haskins) & Molly Robitaille,  
1989/1989/2015  
Charles & Ellen (Vaccari) Seaback, 1972  
Nadene Stein, 1980  
Matthew Watson, 1977  
Sharen Wheeler  
Richard S. Yadach, 1976

### DONATIONS

#### The Gilbert Garden Project

Law Office of Ellen C. Marino  
Joseph Sweet, 2003

### MEMORIAL GIFTS

Robert Maley

*In Memory of Arleen (Jacobs) Fecto, 1947*

### 2021 SENIOR NIGHT DONORS

Altek Electronics, Inc.  
Georgie Andrews  
Lori (Hague) 1982 & Scott Beecher  
Mr. & Mrs. John Bourque  
Holly (Marchand) Cassaday, 1990  
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King & King Associates, CPA's  
Attorney Ellen C. Marino, 1983  
Joanne (Cannavo) 1970 & Frank Marzullo  
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Anthony & Tanya Mongitore  
McKenna Orthodontics  
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Northwest Hills Credit Union  
Northwest Hill Prevention Connection  
R & M Insulation, LLC  
Mayor Candy Perez  
Astrid (Haskins) Robitaille, 1989  
Charles & Ellen (Vaccari) Seaback, 1972  
Steve & Sheila (Dings) Sedlack, 1960/1963  
Ski Sundown  
Anthony Serio  
Susan Sojka  
Jennifer Tanner, 1989  
The Gilbert School  
Winchester Volunteer Fire Dept. Inc.  
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The W. L. Gilbert School Corporation  
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# In Memoriam

## THE GILBERT SCHOOL

**1945**  
Gloria (Spranzo) Delaney  
June 14, 2021

**1947**  
Arleen (Jacobs) Fecto  
April 5, 2021

**1952**  
Fouad "Fred" G. Ferris  
March 28, 2021

**1952**  
Mary (Darling) Ransom  
May 27, 2021

**1953**  
Joan (Hoxie) Diemel  
February 20, 2021

**1954**  
Walter Farnham  
April 5, 2021

**1955**  
Jane (Moseley) Bronk  
March 21, 2021

**1956**  
Jacqueline (Carter) DeSantis  
June 2, 2021

**1958**  
Dr. James Guglielmino  
April 10, 2021

**1960**  
Roger Lee Atkins  
April 17, 2021

**1960**  
Janice (Turgeon) Keleman  
June 6, 2021

**1960**  
Patricia (DiVita) O'Brien  
May 15, 2021

**1962**  
Gerard "Jerry" L. Lemelin  
June 5, 2021

**1965**  
Barry Kingsley Beecher  
April 21, 2021

**1969**  
Joseph Anthony Guiliano  
June 15, 2021

**1973**  
Raymond Wayne Winn  
May 22, 2021

**1982**  
Jennie (Donaldson) Batista  
April 4, 2021

**1987**  
Wendy Ann (Wills) Reynolds  
May 22, 2021

**1995**  
Chris Kamens  
April 2, 2021

### FORMER STAFF



**Joan A. Campi, April 6, 2021:** Mrs. Campi worked in The Gilbert School cafeteria from 1973 to 2007. Her care and attention in feeding our students and staff for 36 years, as well as her delicious cooking and baking made lunch time one of the best times of the school day!

### FORMER FACULTY



**Maryann Reynolds, March 2020:** Mrs. Maryann Reynolds taught art at The Gilbert School from 1972 to 1994. She was a beloved faculty member, enthusiastic and devoted teacher, and influential mentor to countless students.

**From the Family of Maryann Reynolds:** *"With great sadness we report the death of Gilbert's much admired and respected Art Teacher, Maryann Reynolds. She left the Gilbert Family unexpectedly due to undetected pancreatic cancer. Interestingly, prior to her untimely death Maryann had been receiving letters from ex-students from around the country remembering not only the solid background in art fundamentals that she provided students but also her compassionate, nurturing, and sincere disposition in and out of the classroom. Many will remember the outstanding projects she and her students created that decorated the halls and rooms of Gilbert School for Homecoming, Graduation, and school concerts and events. Together with her husband Jack, a former member of the Gilbert English Department, Maryann took students on many cultural adventures which included major museums and Broadway plays in New York City, music concerts, as well as schooner sailing adventures off the coast of Maine. During retirement Maryann became an accomplished baker selling her goods regionally in Maine, whose quality was praised by baking instructors at King Arthur Flour. She is survived by husband Jack, daughter Maria, son Alex, four grandchildren - William, Max, Dominic, Una, and sister Rose. She is missed and will be remembered."*



**To reach out to Jack and family: 189 Meeting House Rd., Solon, ME 04979**

**Upon the occasion of her retirement, Dr. Robert F. Gazda, Former Headmaster of The Gilbert School had this to say about her:** *"Mrs. Reynolds taught at The Gilbert School for twenty-two years. I had the pleasure of working with her the two years prior to her retirement in June, 1994, and during that time, she accented herself as a dedicated, committed, and extremely capable educator. Her ability to establish and maintain a positive rapport with the wide variety of students she served helped create a classroom environment which was productive and fun! Mrs. Reynolds' projection of a sincere and infectious enthusiasm for both art and for education in general was key to her success. Outside of class, she was always willing to extend herself to young people. Mrs. Reynolds was always first to volunteer for any duty and assignment. She interacted extremely well with the faculty and staff and often shared her astute and valuable perspectives with the administration."*

**Gerri Griswold, Class of 1975 perhaps said it best:** *"Sad news from Maine where our beloved Gilbert School art teacher, Maryann Reynolds passed away from cancer. She was the most gentle creature, a whisper of a woman, an inspiration, a cheering squad, and a den mother to the humble, brilliant, and talented misfits that made up my posse - Steve Gauthier, Bill Heath, David Lasko and David Cuatt. She made the torture of high school less painful and a hell of a lot of fun. RIP . . . you may now spread your special kindness to those in another dimension . . . Those lucky souls."*

**Thank you for your love and dedication to your colleagues and students.  
Rest in Peace, Mrs. Reynolds.**



# THE GILBERT SCHOOL

HERITAGE. INNOVATION. OPPORTUNITY.



*Sue Sojka - Principal, Anthony Serio - Superintendent/Head of School - both retiring on June 30, 2021. Best Wishes!*

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## Keep the Buzzzzzz Coming! Alumni! We want to hear from you!

Did you get a new job? Earn a degree? Write a book?  
Welcome a child or grandchild? Win an award? Retire?  
We will share the good news with our alumni and friends!

Interested in writing an article for the *YellowJacket*? Send in your first-person story for consideration. Let your fellow alumni know where your path has led you since graduation and how your time at The Gilbert School has influenced your decisions.

**This is YOUR magazine. Make YOUR voices heard!**

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