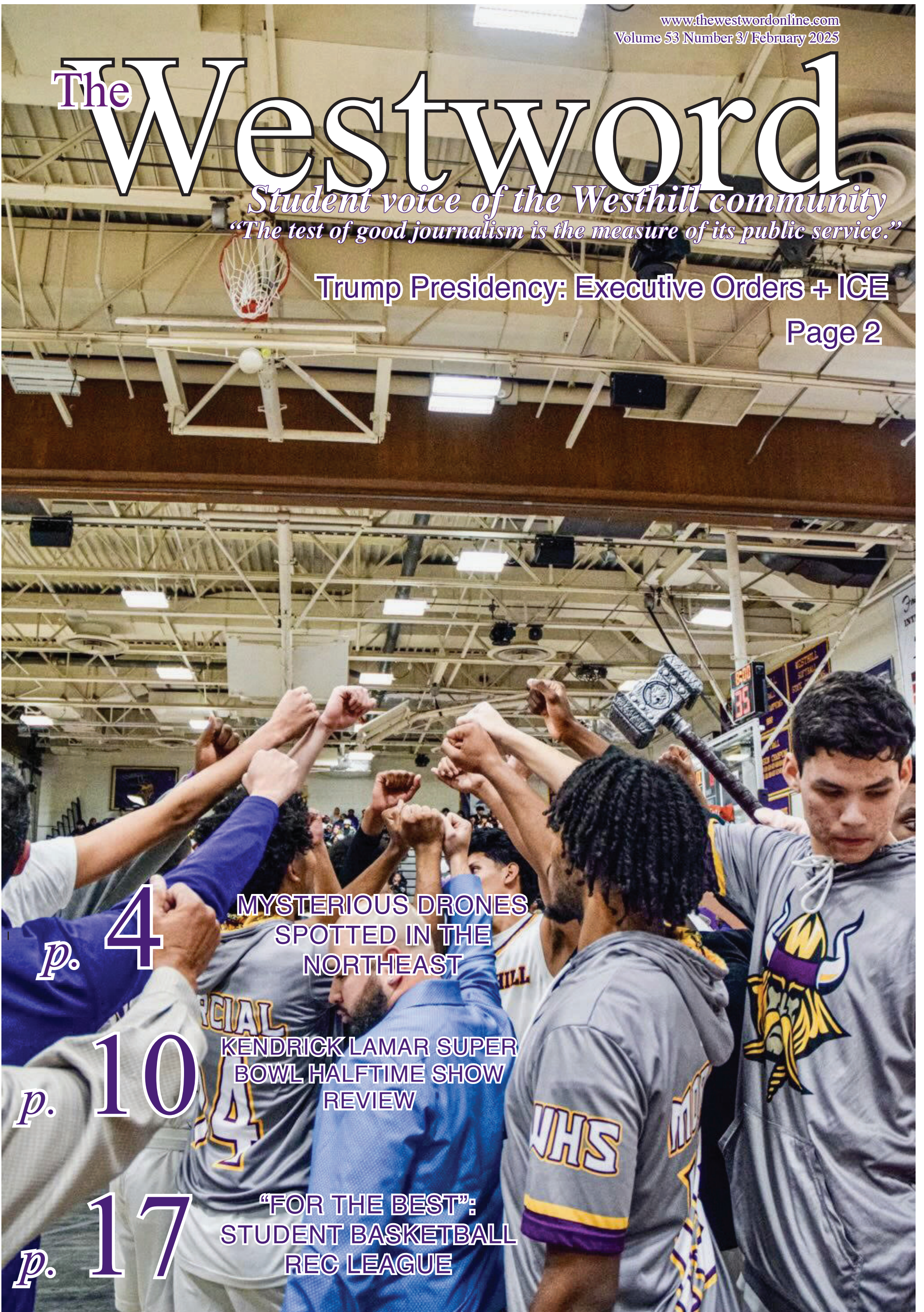


# The Westword

*Student voice of the Westhill community*  
*"The test of good journalism is the measure of its public service."*

Trump Presidency: Executive Orders + ICE

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# The Westword

2024-2025 Staff

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## Note from the editors February 2025

Dear Readers,

Thank you for your continued interest in and support of *The Westword*. We're honored to be a prominent voice in the Westhill community.

In light of the actions of the Trump administration, we believe it is important for students to remain informed. So, in our Special Report section, we have listed every executive order signed by President Trump.

Paired with the list of Trump's Executive Actions is an article on ICE's recent crackdowns and arrests. It covers the effect ICE's actions have had on the Westhill community, along with the measures being taken by the school district to deal with these crackdowns. Our News section also

covers mysterious drones that flew over the area in January.

Following our News section, our Feature section includes a profile of the newly-founded Psychology club, along with an article on Westhill students that have gone on to attend Ivy League institutions.

Our Limelight section covers Kendrick Lamar's Halftime Performance at the Super Bowl, along with an article on Oscar Picks decided by students.

Our Viewpoint section tackles two interesting topics. The first article speaks about the benefits of having an HMart in Stamford, a supermarket with foods from the Asian diaspora. The second article covers the recent threat of banning TikTok in the US,

along with the thoughts of many students regarding the issue.

The Sports section focuses on the incredible season of Westhill Boys Basketball, along with a popular community Basketball Rec League.

We encourage any readers with comments, questions, or concerns to contact us by emailing us at [westwordwhs@gmail.com](mailto:westwordwhs@gmail.com). We hope you enjoy this edition of *The Westword*.

Sincerely,  
The Editorial Board

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### Editorial Policy

*The Westword* will be guided in the publication of material by a concern for truth, human decency, and human benefit. It is published during the school year by The Westword staff, along with the Communications and Journalism classes. Letters to the Editor, advertising requests, comments, criticism, or suggestions are always welcome. The views expressed in Viewpoint do not necessarily represent the opinions of *The Westword*.

### Announcements

*The Westword* has no announcements.

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If you have an announcement or an advertisement you would like published in the next issue, please DM on Instagram at [@thewestword](https://www.instagram.com/thewestword)

Front cover contributed by **Ava Homicki** / Photographer.  
Back cover photos by **Scion Estrella** / Scatterbrain Editor



## Trump's Most Notable Executive Orders

**Chidube Kalu**  
Online Executive Editor

It is important to remain informed on what is occurring in the United States, especially for high school students, who are affected by policies that are being implemented. So, in light of the executive actions of the second administration of President Trump, the Westword has decided to list some of the President's more notable Executive Orders.

To maintain the newspaper's largely neutral stance, there will be no commentary attached. However, we understand that the labeling of Executive Orders as "notable" can be indicative of bias in and of itself. What is notable to some may be completely insignificant to others.

To create this list, we considered the amount of discussion or reporting on the executive order, along with the effect the executive order will have on the lives of Americans:

### **Executive Order 14147**

Directs Attorney General and Director of National Intelligence to investigate instances where government agencies engaged in politically motivated actions during Biden Presidency.

### **Executive Order 14148**

Rescinds numerous executive orders from the Biden Presidency, eliminating DEI policies, along with environmental and workplace regulations.

### **Executive Order 14151**

Eliminates all Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs within federal agencies and the military.

### **Executive Order 14154**

Eliminates regulations that limit American energy, including Electric Vehicle credit program.

### **Executive Order 14155**

Withdraws the United States from the World Health Organization, citing mishandling of Covid-19 Pandemic.

### **Executive Order 14156**

Declares National Energy Emergency, and expedites energy projects.

### **Executive Order 14158**

Replaces the US Digital Service with the US Department of Government Efficiency, headed by Billionaire and SpaceX founder Elon Musk.

### **Executive Order 14159**

Restricts immigration through deportation

without court hearings, denies federal funding to sanctuary cities, increases hiring of ICE agents, and increases federal prosecution for immigration-related offenses.

### **Executive Order 14160**

Ends birthright citizenship in the United States.

### **Executive Order 14163**

Temporarily pauses acceptance of refugees into the United States for 90 days, until Secretary of Homeland Security confirms that continuing program is in the best interest of the United States.

### **Executive Order 14164**

Reinstates death penalty for crimes committed on the federal level.

### **Executive Order 14165**

Secures southern border and limits illegal immigration through construction of wall, hiring additional border patrol agents, and upgrading surveillance.

### **Executive Order 14166**

Temporarily pauses Tiktok ban, asking Department of Justice to refrain from enforcing ban until agreement is made with Bytedance, Tiktok's parent company.

### **Executive Order 14168**

Establishes policy at federal agencies recognizing only two genders at birth, male, and female.

### **Executive Order 14172**

Renames Gulf of Mexico to "Gulf of America" and reverts "Mount Denali" back to old name "Mount McKinley."

### **Executive Order 14176**

Declassifies records on assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert F. Kennedy, and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

### **Executive Order 14182**

Enforces Hyde Amendment, thus prohibiting use of federal funds for abortions.

### **Executive Order 14187**

Bans gender transitions for minors.

### **Executive Order 14190**

Orders Department of Education to review and eliminate educational materials that promote racial ideologies or indoctrination.



**PRESIDENT TRUMP** taking the oath of office on January 20th. CC Photo from Associated Press.

### **Executive Order 14191**

Promotes school choice initiatives, such as vouchers and charter schools.

### **Executive Order 14193**

Imposes 25% tariff on Canadian products (except for Canadian energy, which has a 10% tariff).

### **Executive Order 14195**

Imposes 10% tariff on products from China that will only be removed if China takes steps to tackle opioid crisis.

### **Executive Order 14197**

Imposes 25% tariff on products from Mexico. Will only be removed if Mexico works to reduce illegal immigration on southern border.

### **Executive Order 14199**

Withdraws United States and its funding from certain United Nations Organizations (Human Rights Council, UNESCO, and UNRWA).

### **Executive Order 14201**

Bans Transgender individuals from the sports of the identity they identify with. Penalizes programs that categorize athletes based on identity than biological sex.

\* Please be aware that Executive Orders signed by the President do not override the powers of the Legislative or Judicial Branch. Many of these executive orders have either been paused or overturned by a federal judge.



## Despite ICE arrests in Stamford, Lucero assures judicial approval for school immigration raids remains “very low”

Eugene Caibal  
Editor-in-chief



**STUDENTS BOARD** the 3:30 p.m. late bus to the West Side on Tuesday, December 10, 2024. Photo by Scion Estrella ('25)

*Editor's note: This is an updated version of an article published on thewestwordonline.com website on January 29.*

The likelihood that immigration officials, including ICE agents, will produce a valid judicial warrant that allows them entry into private Stamford Public Schools property is “very low,” district Superintendent Dr. Tamu Lucero said.

Lucero, who spoke on a group call to Stamford Public Schools administrators and students on January 28, repeatedly emphasized the legal guidance she and other district administrators have received from both the State Attorney General, William Tong, and Governor Ned Lamont.

Lucero said the guidance indicates that the likelihood of a federal judge approving a warrant of such a manner is unlikely.

However, she acknowledges that this does little to ease the fears of a community like Westhill, whose English Learner population comprises more than 25 percent of the student body, accord-

ing to Connecticut Department of Education data collected by *The Westword*.

“I wish I could tell you that everything was going to be okay, and I just can’t in this situation,” Lucero said.

According to statements from both Mayor’s Office Press Secretary Lauren Meyers and a joint statement from Stamford Mayor Caroline Simmons, Board of Education President Michael Hyman, and Lucero, U.S. Immigration officials have been active in Stamford since at least the morning of January 28.

Additionally, ICE officials told the Stamford Police Department that they would continue to conduct “surveillance” operations in the city, according to reporting by the Connecticut Mirror in late January. Since then, several arrests have been made by immigration officials.

Though they are not allowed inside school buildings without a valid judicial warrant, immigration officials can station outside school grounds in places such as sidewalks and even lobbies, which are deemed to be public

areas according to the National Immigration Law Center, though this does not give them the authority to stop or detain any individual without probable cause.

Despite this, Lucero told the group that she and her legal counsel contest the notion that lobbies, especially those in schools, are public areas, and will defend their stance should it be tested by immigration officials.

The fears surrounding immigration stoked by the current Trump administration has left the community on edge. According to Lucero and other sources familiar with the matter, there has been a drop in attendance among sheltered and English Language Learner populations across both Westhill and Stamford High.

For students who do not show up in fear of immigration raids on school grounds, Lucero assured the group that training will be had with the attendance committees at all three high schools, who review absences on an individual student basis, regarding policy changes catered to these students who refuse to attend out of fear for

their own safety.

In the event that federal immigration officials do produce a valid warrant signed by a federal judge allowing them inside school property, city officials said they cannot intervene.

“Our [state] Attorney General, William Tong, is working really hard to make sure we are able to keep these activities out of our school buildings and off of our campuses,” Lucero said. “But we also know that there are certain legal rules that need to be followed.”

Lucero said only when a Stamford Public Schools Compliance officer arrives on site and personally assures the validity and scope of the warrant, which specifically outlines the areas that officials are allowed to operate in, can immigration officials be allowed inside.

“As an adult who runs the school system,” Lucero said to the group that she has a “scary feeling” about the incoming climate of immigration brought by the new presidential administration, but she hopes that the community building brought forth by these fears will

ultimately strengthen the collective Stamford community and mitigate any potential harm.

Across the district, in both Westhill and Stamford High, local organizations such as Building One and the Mayor’s Youth Leadership Council are providing guidance to students and their families regarding the civil liberties they are entitled to, as well as how to communicate with ICE officials should they arrive on an undocumented community member’s property.

“We are committed to ensuring that our schools remain safe spaces for all students, and we appreciate your continued support,” Mayor Simmons said in her statement Tuesday.

“Stamford Public Schools is committed to providing all children with an education that cultivates productive habits of mind, body and heart, and our goal is to do so in a warm and welcoming environment where every child is seen, heard, and valued.”



January-February  
**GOOD MONTH/BAD MONTH**

by Marybel Aguirre ('25), Staff Writer  
 &  
 Lawrence Barrett ('25), Staff Writer

**Good Month For... Bad Month For...**

**LA Wildfire Relief Funds**

Over 30 artists performed at the FireAid concert on January 30, raising an estimated \$100 million to support communities affected by the devastating Palisades, Eaton, and Hughes fires. These fires scorched a combined total of 13,000 acres, according to Cal Fire. While the flames are extinguished, the financial toll continues to rise. FireAid is accepting online donations to help support affected communities.

**Deochii**

Rising rap superstar Deochii won a Grammy for Best Rap Album with *Alligator Bites Never Heal*—but she's no stranger to the charts. Over the years, her songs including "What It Is," and "DENIAL IS A RIVER," have dominated TikTok. She has been praised for both her work and humility. During her acceptance speech, she said: "This category was introduced in 1989 and three women have won, Lauren Hill, Cardi B, and Deochii."

**Costco**

is increasing wages to \$30 per hour for a select group of employees. This applies exclusively to non-unionized hourly workers at the top of the company's pay scale. These employees will receive an extra week of vacation if they've worked at Costco for over 30 years. Those at the lower end of the pay scale will receive a 50 cent increase to \$20 per hour. New hires will also receive vacation days in their first year.

**Trans Athletes**

President Donald Trump signed an executive order restricting athletes to competing only with others of the same biological sex. This ban applies to all federally funded sports, including schools and universities, and threatens to pull funding from educational programs that allow trans athletes to compete in alignment with their gender identity. This move follows a wave of policies aimed at limiting trans rights.

**Imports & Exports**

President Donald Trump imposed tariffs on Mexico, Canada, and China. In response, Mexico and Canada entered negotiations with the U.S., securing a 30-day pause on the tariffs while they attempt to reach a deal. China retaliated, placing tariffs on U.S. coal, natural gas, crude oil, agricultural equipment, and certain cars. These new tariffs are expected to affect \$20 billion worth of U.S. goods.

**Aviation Accidents**

have been on the rise. Among them are the DC plane crash, the Philadelphia plane crash, and a United Airlines flight that began smoking before takeoff in Texas. According to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), there have been 15 recent plane crashes. While technical failures appear to be the leading cause, the DC and Philadelphia crashes remain under investigation. Experts are calling for a closer look at aviation regulations.

# Mysterious Drones Spotted in the Northeast



A photo of a drone. Photo by Rawpixel. Creative Commons.

**Leah O'Meara**  
 Reporter

On November 19th, 2024, strange, excessive drone activity was spotted all over New Jersey. Since then, there have been an estimated 650 drone sightings nationally, the majority of which were in the Northeast. From the first sighting in early January, drones were being spotted constantly, but never in daylight. Some of these sightings occurred in Connecticut. In Stamford, the drones were spotted along parts of High Ridge Road.

A lot of concern and speculation was caused by these drones, including in the Westhill community.

"I looked up and saw a really bright light, just above the trees, and it flew straight over my car really slowly. It was very concerning because I didn't know why they were here because no one knew," Elayna Dec ('26) said.

These drones were a complete mystery. There was no explanation as to what these drones were for, and whether or not they were operated by the U.S. On January 28th, President Trump provided an answer, saying, "the drones that were flying over New Jersey in large numbers were authorized

to be flown by FAA for research and various other reasons ... this was not the enemy." The FBI and local police were not informed of this until this statement. The Westword reached out to Sergeant Derisme, the leader of the drone program of the Stamford Police department, to speak about this issue.

"They don't have to tell us what's authorized or not, but I'm actually surprised because the FAA is very security-conscious," Derisme said. "If people are concerned, I would think that they would have come out and said 'Hey, no worries, it is us.'"

One of the many unanswered questions about these drones is why the FAA banned certain areas from drones.

"The types of payloads that you can add on to drones, payloads being things that you can attach... it 100% makes sense that there are sensitive areas, anywhere where the President would be, any high-valued buildings, and also military bases. They can't have drones around," Derisme said.

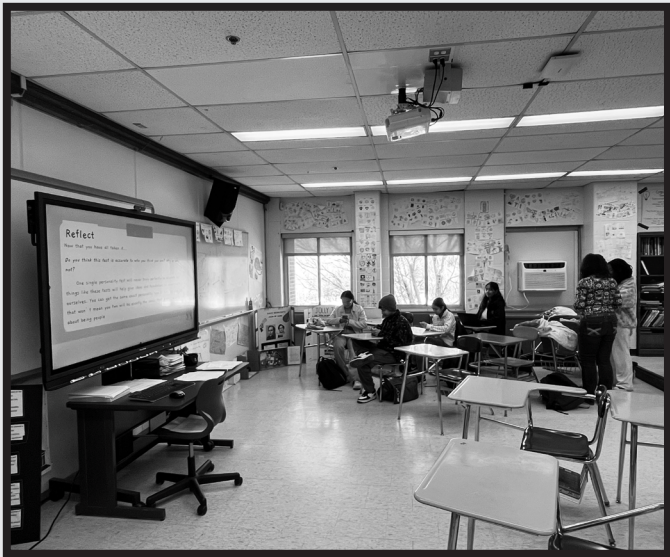
When people aren't properly informed about drones, a lot of panic can

form in the community. However, when used correctly, drones can be very beneficial to help improve the world. For example, they can assist first responders and monitor locations. Derisme points out that drones are an integral part of our future. They are being used more and more, especially in police departments.

"In fact, we're heavily leaning on drones ourselves. Drones are a very helpful tool, but it will cause alarm because of the payload capability and it could be very scary," Derisme said. "They always say, the technology that we know is usually 10 years plus behind the technology that's actually out there."

The mysterious drone situation still has no definite answer. The FAA could have been researching the extent to which they could utilize drones, possibly running tests on them, or they could have been doing totally unrelated research. Or, it could have not been the FAA at all. For now, all we have are many questions and a scarce explanation for an even more concerning situation.





## Club Profile: Psych Club

**Namratha Kamath**  
Managing Editor

Location: Room 405  
Meeting days: Every Wednesday  
Meeting Time: 2:15pm  
Key words: Educational, healthcare

Psychology is the study of the mind: how it works and how it affects behavior. Learning about the way our mind works is essential to our success.

This is the goal of Westhill's own Psychology club. Psychology club promotes mental wellness, teaches introductory psychology principles, and introduces members to basic criminology. It's led by a passionate team of psychology enthusiasts. Each meeting includes an interactive group activity that is centered around the day's topic, and a presentation.

For example, in one of the meetings, members played a learning game that simulated the effects of paranoia. After this, they learned about paranoia through a presentation that explained what the disorder actually does to the brain. It clarified that feeling paranoid is not the same as having a paranoid disorder. In another activity, members completed a personality test and discussed how each person is unique due to their personalities.

"I feel really happy whenever I finish up the meeting and I actually have tons of slides saved for the future because I just love working on psychology and just studying it in general," co-president Erin Reyes ('26) said.

"It's a really fun experience, and I enjoyed winning UNO during the last meeting," Summer Cheung ('28), a member of the club, said.

"I feel very educated and it's a really fun club to be in," Emily Acevedo ('27) another member of the club said.

"We like to make it informative, but also have fun at the same time," Reyes said.

Psychology club serves a very important purpose: to spread awareness about the way our minds work. Through engaging activities and thorough group discussions, students grasp these concepts. No matter what the future lies in store for them, students can improve their personal well-being through this knowledge.

## Behind the Scenes at Pippin

**Lina Coppola**  
Reporter

The NorthStar Playmakers' next musical, *Pippin*, is well into production. The Westword spoke to students from around the school about the work needed to make a musical a reality.

The biggest part that goes into making the production successful is the actors' ability to show up to rehearsal on time and have determination. "It's like commitment being here and caring about [the show]," Paul Ferris ('26) said.

It tends to slow the process down when people don't show up on time or at all. It's recommended not to miss any more than three rehearsals, as it is tricky to catch up after doing so. Therefore, making sure everyone is on time ensures that choreography and timing are more accurate and efficient.

Preparing for the show consists of "learning lines, choreography, and blocking rehearsals," according to Niko Rinaldi ('25). Rehearsals start at 2:40 p.m. and end around 4:30-5:00 p.m.

Their rehearsal days change weekly. To warm up, students start by doing stretches and then jumping right into the agenda.

Many strip off extra layers when doing stage blocking and choreography, due to the intensity and level of passion that they put into every movement.

Izabella Nastasi ('28), the stage manager of *Pippin*, said that everyone handles acting and performing differently. "For some people [stage fright is] harder to get used to, for some it is easy and for others they never get used to it," said Izabella. Dancing and singing can be a vulnerability for some, especially when it comes to being in front of a crowd.

Sophia Chu ('28) and Sophie Barwinski ('28) believe that they have plenty of time to relax their minds after school and get ready for rehearsal before it starts. They feel the trickiest part is memorizing the choreography.

Thankfully, it is repeated numerous times. To make sure it resonates with them, they go over the material as suggested by their advisors, making sure it stays fresh in their minds at home. This is done to minimize the chance of performers forgetting the choreography during showtime.

Even if a student

wants to be involved but don't want to perform, The Northstar Administration tries to include everyone who wants to be a part of the production. An involved mother of the production said that whether it's helping create the set, the costumes, control the lighting, or produce the sound, they appreciate any helping hand they could receive, as you can never have too much help. Every person can make a difference in helping *Pippin* become an astonishing production.

But despite how nerve-racking the pre-show jitters can be, everyone has something about the show that they love and drives their motivation to do it. But for Sophia Calorossi ('28), an actress going onto her fourth scholastic production, said she believes that there are many great things about being a part of the show, but the best part is seeing all the different interpretations, as it could be performed in a more circus or fosse style.

And being along for the ride is something that her and all the other actors enjoy, as the energy is ecstatic.

Northstar Playmakers Present

Sat April 26 at 7:30pm    Sun April 27 at 2:00pm  
Fri May 2 at 7:30pm    Sat May 3 at 7:30pm  
Westhill High School Auditorium



# Purple Pack Goes Green: A look at Westhill's Ivy League Data

*The Westword* takes a look at Ivy League matriculation data and what the community has to say

**Rohan Arun**  
News Editor

The Ivy League, composed of schools such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, is the country's premier academic traditions.

The colleges, combined, receive well over 200,000 applicants annually. Despite the immense application interest, only about 21,000 people receive admission.

In the past seven years, 118 of these students are graduates from our very own Westhill.

These universities did not start off this selective however. In the past 20 years, Ivy League

acceptance rates have dropped substantially, with the largest drop being Cornell, from 30% to 7.5%.

*The Westword* talked to senior class advisor Mrs. Carley Grant to see if she thought the amount of her kids going to Ivy Leagues has been trending downward in recent years.

"I have a few [Ivy League kids]. I feel like every year I have a handful that go off to Ivies, so I feel like no, I think it's been pretty steady," Mrs. Grant said.

According to *ivyscholars.com*, the main

reason for these substantial drops is due to a massive increase in applicants. Now, while there are universities with lower acceptance rates, the "Ivies" have a lot of prestige due to their reputation as selective institutions, lengthy history and a wide variety of programs.

For example, Harvard University was established in 1636 according to *oldest.org*. To give some perspective, that is over 140 years before American Independence. This lengthy history allowed them to showcase their

academics and prove that their alumni go on to lead successful careers.

Focusing now on Westhill, as mentioned previously 118 graduates have joined these prestigious institutions in the past seven years, according to the career readiness platform Naviance. The majority - 31 percent of the graduates went to Cornell, while only 3.4 percent—four graduates—went to Princeton. These numbers parallel the actual acceptance rates, as Cornell has the highest relative to the other Ivies, while Princeton is more selective.

"It's a little hard to tell, with the sample sizes being so small, but it seems to be fairly random. I don't think there's any particularly discernible pattern as far as I can tell. I think I have to say, the last couple of years it's probably been a little less than normal," Mr. Chandan Sarkar, a Computer Science teacher at Westhill, said.

This was seen between the class of 2024 and 2022. The class of 2022 had four graduates go to Ivy Leagues, while the class of 2024 had three graduates. While not a drastic decrease, it does show that the trend seems to be decreasing slowly.

Dr. Lisa Forbes, Social Studies Department head, said: "It's kind

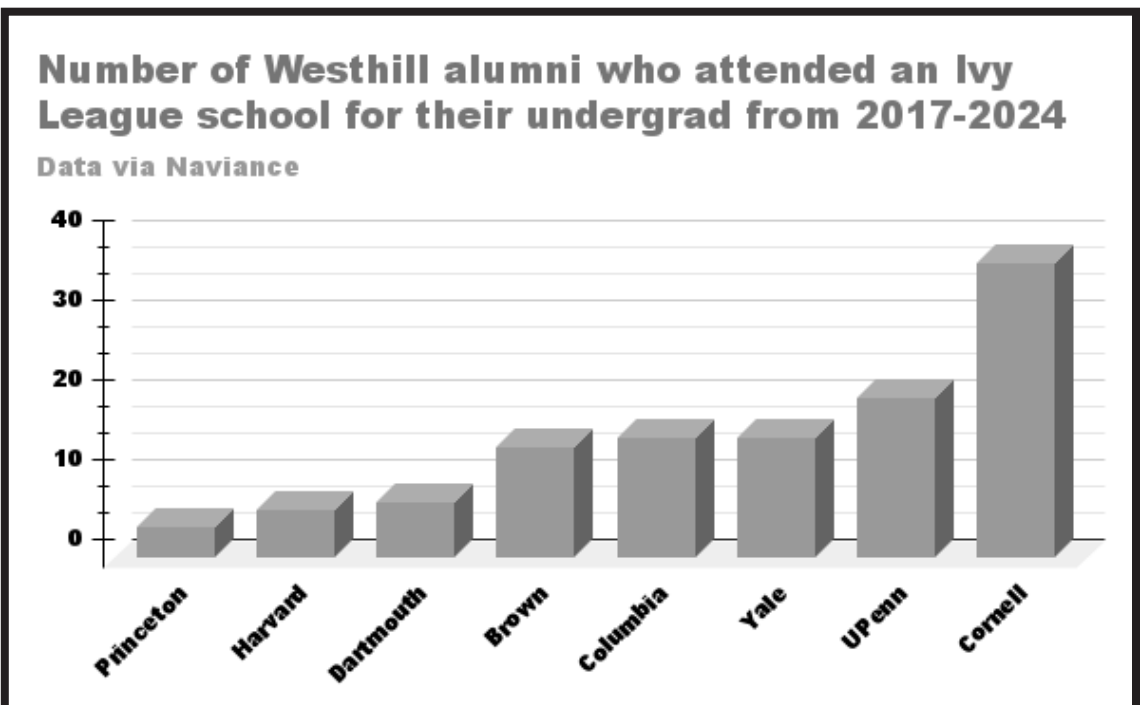
of hard to say, but I think that if the student is really interested in going to a particular school, the student has to exhibit [to the university] extreme interest in the school"

Dr. Forbes argues that a student has to be proactive with "having the school know who they are, and that they really wanna go there."

*The Westword* also talked with students such as Sahil Salihnur ('25), who has committed to MIT, on his tips to get into a top 25 college such as an Ivy League.

"To get into a top 25 college, you have to not only take advantage of the opportunities you have at school, whether it be clubs or classes, but find and make your opportunities outside of school. You can have a 4.0 and rigorous classes, but so will half the applicants at these top schools; you have to differentiate yourself by finding opportunities outside of school like summer programs and research," Salihnur said.

Overall, Westhill has had a fairly successful alumni group with several people going to Ivy League institutions in the past few years. Key tips that no one should forget is to: be yourself, highlight your strengths, and never forget to work hard.



Graph by Eugene Caibal ('25)



Blair Arch at Princeton University. Photo via Creative Commons



## Restaurant Review: DIG

*The Westword* sent its top food reviewer to Stamford's newest American style restaurants. The consensus: We seriously aren't digging DIG

**Case Clapps**  
Staff Writer



**SPICY CHICKEN SANDWICH** Photo by Case Clapps ('25)

When it comes to fast-casual dining, DIG is a place that prides itself on fresh, seasonal ingredients and a focus on wholesome meals.

Their menu offers a variety of protein, vegetable, and grain-based options, catering to a health-conscious crowd while still providing healthier choices for those craving something more indulgent.

I visited DIG twice to get a full sense of their offerings, and my experiences were a mixed bag: some hits, some misses, and one outright disaster.

On my first visit, I decided to try the spicy chicken sandwich combo, as it seemed like a solid option for a first impression.

The sandwich itself was decent, with a nice balance of spice and texture. The chicken had a good crust, and the

sauce was the real stand-out: creamy, flavorful, and packing just the right amount of heat. It was enough to make me think I'd found a reliable go-to meal. The side that came with it was forgettable, but overall, I left feeling like DIG was a decent spot for a quick, well-prepared meal.

Feeling confident after my first experience, I returned to DIG and ordered the spicy chicken sandwich combo again, expecting another solid meal.

Unfortunately, what I received was far from acceptable. Upon biting into the sandwich, I immediately noticed that the chicken was raw in the center. It wasn't just undercooked; it was raw; a serious food safety issue that could have led to illness if I hadn't checked it.

I immediately sent it back, and while the

staff was apologetic and replaced my order, the damage was done. Serving undercooked chicken is a major red flag for any restaurant, and it completely changed my perception of DIG's food quality control.

Beyond the sandwich, I also tried their mac and cheese on both visits. Unfortunately, it was consistently disappointing.

The biggest issue with the mac and cheese was the saltiness. It was overwhelming to the point of being inedible at times. Mac and cheese should be comforting, creamy, and well-balanced, but DIG's version was almost unpleasant due to the excessive salt.

Even after giving it a second chance, it was clear this wasn't a one-time issue, but a flaw in their preparation.

Next, I gave the Classic DIG Plate a try,

hoping for a simple, well-executed meal. The plate came with a mix of protein and sides, and while everything was cooked properly, the overall flavor was lacking. It wasn't bad, but it was undeniably bland.

The seasonings were mild to the point of being forgettable, and nothing on the plate really stood out. For a place that markets itself as a fresh and flavorful dining option, this was a letdown.

To DIG's credit, their service was generally good. The staff was friendly and efficient, and when I had to send my sandwich back, they handled the situation professionally.

The restaurant itself had a clean and modern design, with a welcoming atmosphere that made it a comfortable place to eat. However, good service and ambiance can't make up for serious food quality

inconsistencies.

DIG had potential, but my experiences showed a restaurant struggling with consistency. My first visit gave me hope with a solid spicy chicken sandwich, but the second visit's raw chicken incident was unacceptable.

The mac and cheese was excessively salty, and the Classic DIG Plate, while fine in execution, was too bland to be memorable.

Would I return? It's hard to say. If they can address their kitchen inconsistencies, particularly ensuring that all proteins are fully cooked, then DIG could be a decent choice for a quick meal. However, as it stands, I'd hesitate to recommend it without serious improvements.

I ended up giving DIG a rating of 1.5 out of 5 stars, as there is a lot the restaurant has to improve.





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# 9 | SCATTERBRAIN

Take a crack at this Westhill-themed Wordle!

Scion Estrella  
Scatterbrain Editor

*The answer is printed on the back cover. No peeking!*

S	C	I	O	N
J	O	C	K	S
A	D	O	R	E
D	R	O	W	N
G	R	O	U	T





KENDRICK LAMAR Oil on Canvas. Image by Tamara Hill ('26)

## An Honest Review of Kendrick's Superbowl Halftime Show

Jasmine Joseph  
Reporter

On February 9th, 2025, the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles had their Superbowl game in which the famous rapper Kendrick Lamar and his special guests; SZA, Serena Williams, and Samuel L. Jackson made their performance in the halftime show.

Roc Nation reported that Kendrick's Superbowl performance is the most watched Super Bowl Halftime show in NFL history with over 133.5 million viewers. Kendrick's performance consisted of songs from his most recent album GNX, while also playing some of his classic songs like "HUMBLE", "DNA", and "All The Stars."

In addition, he included his 2024 hit single; "Not Like Us", which quickly became one of his own signature hits, winning him both awards at the Grammys for song of the year, and record of the year. Surrounded by the backup dancers that choreographed to represent the American flag, Kendrick was sending a clear message in his performance against Anti-black hate and violence.

Actor Samuel L. Jackson opened the performance dressed as "Uncle Sam" who had

spent the whole show analyzing Kendrick's every move, to not do anything "too loud" or "too reckless." His comments symbolize how black people are treated in society when they don't "behave" properly.

As a result of this, Kendrick stands in the middle of his backup dancers dressed in red, white, and blue and went into a stars and stripes formation, while Kendrick performed "Squabble Up" leading up to his singles "HUMBLE" and "DNA."

Kendrick and his dancers went into formation on a bigger stage in a matter that represented the appearance of a prison yard. At one point, the set was even arranged as the square on a PlayStation controller button, which represented how Americans are playing a game of "Surviving America", hence Jackson's introduction to the performance as "the Great American Game."

Before the start of "Not like us, Kendrick had a grin plastered across his face while staring into the camera during the "Hey Drake" lyric before performing the diss track. Rumored ex girlfriend of Drake, Serena Williams,

walked onto the stage near the backup dancers, which was a reference of the rivalry between the two rappers.

All in all, I personally think that Kendrick Lamar's halftime performance was a fun watch, and admire how Kendrick speaks through his music.

His use of symbolism during the performance was used to engage with his viewers, specifically his black audience, promoting real social issues, and historical struggles.

The costumes and the choreography tied in together with the theme performances overall theme of cultural identity, while also signifying American unity. The red, white, and blue costumes were an explicit reference to the American aspiration justice and equality, which Lamar is critiquing.

Overall, by putting together powerful visuals, and cultural references, Kendrick's performance was a great serve of realities that happened in history, and with engaging his viewers on a profound level, while also inspiring them to consider the deeper meanings behind his work.



# The Westword's Oscar Picks

With The Oscar's right around the corner, *The Westword* has revealed our Oscar hopefuls.

**Alexa Pineda**  
Reporter

The Oscars are awards given out to honor the best films and the work behind the scenes that went into creating them. The voting isn't done by the public, but by 13,000 film critics in The Academy.

The 97th Oscars Awards are taking place on March 2nd, 2025, and everyone is buzzing with excitement at The Academy's highly-anticipated slate of nominees for every category. 2024 was a huge year for films, with standouts like *Wicked* and *Inside Out 2* making waves.

Though, as it is with every year of the Oscars, there will be people fighting over which film truly deserves which award. This year is no different, with big names like Ariana Grande and Demi Moore being up for awards.

The most important category of the night is undoubtedly Best Picture. The films competing for Best Picture are *Anora*, *The Brutalist*, *A Complete Unknown*, *Conclave*, *Dune: Part Two*, *Emilia Pérez*, *I'm Still Here*, *Nickel Boys*, *The Substance*, and *Wicked*.

All of these movies are great in their own ways, and it's hard to guess who could win this category.

*The Substance* is a unique film, but it probably won't win best picture. Horror movies are rarely appreciated at the Oscars, so a movie like *The Substance* being nominated is big already.

*The Brutalist* is an important story about a Holocaust survivor who starts over in America, but it greatly disappoints by using artificial intelligence

for buildings in a movie about architecture.

Another movie that got into controversy over artificial intelligence usage to adapt vocals in *Emilia Pérez*, which is a musical.

This leaves only a few films, with *Conclave*, *Anora*, and *Wicked* being the most probable winners. *Conclave* is an impactful film about the process of picking a new Pope. *Anora* tells a sort of 'Cinderella story' while also exposing the true power the upper class has.

Overall, the movie most expected to win is none other than *Wicked*. It was a cultural phenomenon of its own- you couldn't scroll TikTok or Instagram without seeing another meme or advertisement of the cast.

Without a doubt, it's the one movie from this list that students have most likely watched or heard of. "*Wicked* was such a big deal. I feel like it has to win." Elizabeth Luini ('26) said.

2024 was a great year for animation, with *Flow*, *Inside Out 2*, *Memoir of a Snail*, *Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl*, and *The Wild Robot* being nominated for Animated Feature Film. *Flow* is an independent film about a flood leading to different animals surviving together on a boat. *Inside Out 2* is about a teenager's mind, and the new emotions that come with growing up.

"It was so cute and it was actually, like a good sequel." Eunia Antoine ('26) said. *Memoir of a Snail* is about a snail collector who learns to find herself after tragedy. *The Wild Robot*, on the other





hand, is about a robot living in the wilderness and being cared for and 'raised' by animals. *Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Foul* is the second movie made about the two loveable claymation characters.

The first *Wallace and Gromit* movie won a Best Animated Feature Film Oscar in 2005- which already gives the sequel a fighting chance. It is most likely to win, due to the work that went into the movie as it took five years to release.

Music plays an integral role in why movies are so special. *The Brutalist*, *Conclave*, *Emilia Pérez*, *Wicked*, and *The Wild Robot* are all up for an Oscar in Best Original Score. While the other films had good scores, it's most likely that this award will go to one of the two musicals, *Emilia Pérez* or *Wicked*, as these movies were made with the intention of making good music.

Many actors got their shining moments this year. For men in leading roles the nominees are: Adrien Brody, Timothée

Chalamet, Colman Domingo, Ralph Fiennes, and Sebastian Stan. For women in leading roles, the nominees are: Cynthia Erivo, Karla Sofia Gascon, Mikey Madison, Demi Moore, and Fernanda Torres. These are the categories where fighting over who deserves an award and who doesn't are more prominent.

All of these actors brought something to their own film, which is what makes it so hard to narrow it down. Ralph Fiennes and Adrien Brody are most likely to win, with Fiennes still not winning one despite his long career. All of the women did an amazing job, but a lot of people think Erivo will take it home. "Nobody's bringing the acting and the vocals like Cynthia did," Geovanna Ortiz (25") said.

With so many incredible nominees this year, it's anyone's guess who will actually take home the Oscars. No matter the results, it'll be a great night to see all these deserving films and actors getting honored for what they've put so much work into.



**TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET** pictured on the set for his Oscar-nominated film, *A Complete Unknown*. Photo via Creative Commons



**ARIANA GRANDE** poses in her role as Glinda in the Oscar-nominated film, *Wicked*. Photo via Warner Brothers/Creative Commons.



The views shared in this section are opinions and not the views held by The Westword as a whole

## Stamford needs a grocery store. Why not an H-Mart?

One of the nation's oldests Asian-centric grocery store chains can find a real market in one of the fastest growing cities in Connecticut.

**Jinu Jung**  
Reporter

Stamford has still yet to welcome H-Mart, which is one of the largest supermarket chains in the United States. H-Mart is a grocery store that sells Asian food products, as well as a couple of restaurants, too.

But with over a dozen locations in New York City and Long Island, why hasn't it moved to Stamford yet?

While there are a few places to get groceries like Costco, Whole Foods,

and Trader Joe's, they all lack the special Asian foods that only H-Mart and a select few stores have.

A freshman at Westhill thinks alike. "Some of the benefits of H-Mart would be readily available ingredients that couldn't be found at other competitor stores, like Jackfruit.

In my family, those are one of our favorites. Also with the other items that would be more convenient to pick up, such as chili crisp." Neil Nair ('28) said.

He also says that the addition of H-Mart would add on to the East Asian



The site of the now-abandoned Burlington, where a future H-Mart could call home. Photo via Google Street View.

culture here.

"I feel that the Asian presence in Stamford is limited to just restaurants, and those who enjoy cooking or find pleasure in just learning the culture of other people's nations," Nair said.

AITE students have also commented on the problems of the distance of Stamford to other H-Mart locations.

"People have to drive 30+ minutes just to get Korean ingredients and snacks. I have friends who often ask me to buy things from there since I go to NY every week, (a lot of

H-Marts there). Having an H-Mart nearby would make it easier for people to cook Korean meals and eat Korean snacks without the inconvenience of a long commute," said Abigail Jung ('25).

Besides the unique food and the long drives, Mr. Colin Ng, a social studies teacher at Westhill, believes that H-Mart would be able to be beneficial to the younger population of Stamford as well.

"Typically H-Marts have a food court, and they have very affordable food with large portions and would benefit a lot

of young people in Stamford. We have the UConn campus, we have students that go and eat in the town, and also a young professional working population that would all benefit from these food courts," Ng said.

In order to get some opinions from the H-Mart headquarters itself, The Westword tried to reach out, but has yet to receive a reply. Nevertheless, whether H-Mart will come to Stamford or not, it will always be one of the best places to eat and shop Asian food even if it isn't right here.

## To Ban or Not to Ban: A look at Westhill's reactions to the recent federal TikTok ban

**Amy Albitres & Scarlett Palma**  
Reporters

TikTok is a global social media platform that has close to 2 billion users and is known for its relatable content with teenagers, ideas, and small businesses. Scrolling on TikTok has become a nightly routine for many across the world.

However, US federal officials have argued that the app is a potential national security threat because it is owned by a Chinese company, a country that the US is currently at odds with.

As TikTok increased in popularity

within the states, the US government became concerned that the Chinese government constantly monitored its users and gathered information from Americans.

Over the years, there have been many discussions over the possible ban of the app. The potential banning of the beloved app was a topic of discussion all throughout the internet. Some believed it was fake and others were too scared to believe it was really going to happen. Citizens took this as a threat against their rights.

On April 24, 2024, former President Joe Biden signed legislation requiring TikTok's owners, Bytedance, to sell the app to a U.S. owner within a year. Otherwise, the app would be shut down in the U.S. This law concerned TikTok users who felt that this violated their own freedom of expression. They claimed that the ban went against the first amendment.

However, TikTok failed to sell their app to a U.S. owner. The former President's ban became effective in January 2025.

On the long anticipated day of January 12, 2025, individuals found TikTok to be unavailable when they opened the app. Millions of American users of the app were absolutely devastated. The government confirmed that TikTok would be temporarily banned.

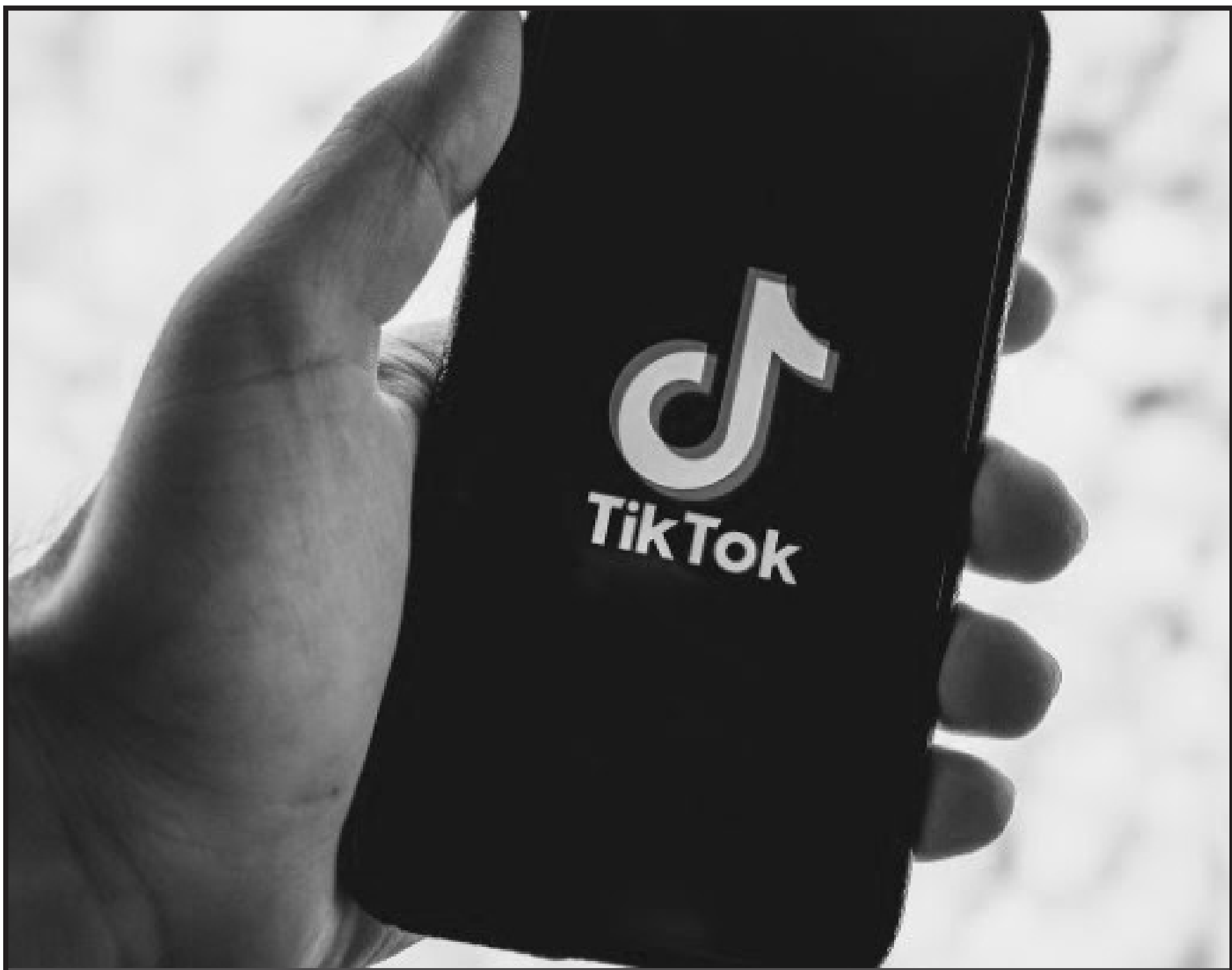
This shocked users worldwide, including influencers who had committed to a life of social media and could lose their job.

"Honestly, I saw my account literally collapse," Emilie Jacinto

('27) said. "I went on TikTok at like ten forty something at night and I saw that the comments wouldn't work. I was trying to switch accounts, trying to go to my favorites and likes and it wouldn't work. I was scared to refresh it," Like Emilie, a variety of TikTok users were shocked to see such a famous app being taken away from them.

"I went to sleep that night, literally scrolled on Instagram reels for 5 minutes and decided I was done. When I woke up the next morning, the ban an-





THE TIKTOK APP logo on an iPhone. Photo via Creative Commons

nouncement was there and hours later I was shocked to see it came back,” Jacinto said.

*“When I woke up the next morning, the ban [...] was there and hours later I was shocked to see it came back”*

This initial ban lasted a total of 12 hours. President Donald Trump stated that he will fix the situation.

Because of the agreement between the government and ByteDance, TikTok began to function once again for a total of 90 days. But,

this agreement is merely delaying the effects of the permanent ban.

TikTok’s community creates a platform where one can explore various trending topics and learn new things. It creates a space for people who relate to certain topics. More than half of TikTok’s users are teenagers. The potentially permanent ban leads to the question: How will teens adapt to this TikTok ban once it’s enforced?

The TikTok ban can be argued for both sides, as it has its negative and positive effects. “I feel like the whole reason is stupid, TikTok is a place where small businesses are based to gain all their customers and help promote them,” Lily Mejia, (‘28) said.

Mejia is a frequent

user and considers herself into the BookTok community (a community on TikTok where users discuss books) and it comes with benefits but concerns, “BookTok inspires me to read but some people romanticize toxic behaviors that are not okay,” Mejia said.

Briana Kastrati, an artist with a following of 7.5K during the time of the ban shows a great example of her adaptment, “I was honestly pretty upset about it [the ban] because it was the most enjoyable platform to share art on, and I think a big portion of artists including myself find great inspiration on the app.”

“If the ban becomes permanent, I would try to find other platforms to

share art on, but in my experience so far, none of them that I have looked into have many users,” Kastrati said.

Kastrati is one of many young artists and influencers on TikTok who potentially could be impacted from the ban. These influencers will lose the community they’ve built and the support they’ve gained from their followers. With TikTok collapsing, many creators crumble down with them too.

Despite this, opinions highly differ when it comes to the benefits of the ban. TikTok can inspire teens and boost small businesses, but it can also be a major problem for teens and their education.

“I feel like in the

12 hours of the ban, it was probably the most productive time for [my classes],” Mr. Francisco Ahumada, a history teacher at Westhill, said. “TikTok is a major distraction, that’s why I think the ban is important.”

The looming TikTok ban has both its pros and cons. In addition to American citizens getting privacy and gaining national security, teens will not feel inclined to waste their time on TikTok. But, influencers and creators will lose their source of income, and communities for different interests will dissipate.

The TikTok ban raises concerns for regular users regarding how they will adapt, once the ban becomes permanent.



# “We Never Look Back”

Scarlett Palma  
Reporter



Boys Varsity Basketball line the hallway before their Senior Night game against Bridgeport Central on Tuesday, February 11.  
Photo by Eugene Caibal ('25)





Players and staff of Boys Varsity Basketball watch the JV match against Bridgeport Central from a hallway. (Left to right) Abdoulaye Konate ('25), Joey Homicki ('25) Omar Martinez ('25) Gavin Daniels ('25) Derrick Fenyo ('25) Juan Rangel ('25), Alex Whang, and Coach Roberto Nieves. Photo by Eugene Caibal ('25)

Boys Varsity Basketball lost all but two games during last season, ending with 2-17 overall and failing to qualify for a state championship run.

This year, though, things have been different: for the first time in three years, the Boys Varsity team made it back to States, and hopes are high at the Hill for something akin to a March Madness miracle. All 18 of them want to make one thing clear: this did not come easy.

"We've been working hard since the summer. We've been setting goals since [our] sophomore year to hopefully make it to States and go somewhere with it," Taha Ismaili ('25) said.

A mindset of resilience, Ismaili said, has been key in the team's return, echoing a saying shared by the team.

"We wanna know everyday. We stay wanna know everyday, and every game we win, we never look back."

Despite the losing record the team had garnered in the years prior, Ismaili said the team brought forth a new "chin-up" culture into the picture. The team has put a recent emphasis on keeping an eye out for "the bigger picture down the road," senior captain Abdoulaye Konate ('25) said.

This season, even after a tough loss, Ismaili said the team never stopped to dwell on it for too long. "We just keep

going ahead, every single time."

This mindset has been with the team since day one, as despite the harsh losses, everyone who didn't graduate from the team last season came back for another.

"After last year, [even though] we had a pretty rough season, I wanted to come in and try to have the best season we possibly could," Zikkari Ecan ('25) said. "Try to win some games."

This fresh start came with a chance to change their playstyle and tactics in order to succeed. "We started playing more team basketball. Team basketball won games," Ecan said.

Bouncing back for the basketball season also meant a lot of personal growth. "You just really just had to maintain discipline even if games [were] tough, even if the last two seasons weren't necessarily the best. You just gotta keep on working hard and keep that mindset so that everyday is a learning experience," Juan Rangel ('25) said.

Coach Roberto Nieves, Varsity Basketball's coach, has also grappled with the struggles of last season, saying the team reflected on "a lot of learning curves" in order to achieve the goals that they have reached so far.

"[The team went through] a lot of maturing, and a lot of growth that we had to do as players and

coaches," Coach Nieves said.

Much like his players, Coach Nieves ended last season with a goal of pushing through the challenges they've faced, and he said he accomplished this goal during the offseason. The team identified and implemented corrections to ensure their weaknesses aren't too prominent, Coach Nieves said.

Reaching States made Nieves believe that the hardship and lessons learned from past seasons had paid off, both individually and as a team.

Reaching States was "one of our goals," Coach Nieves said.

"I think our kids are excited. We haven't been to the states in three years, so it's a big accomplishment."

For him, the comeback to States has kept him motivated for the long term. The team wants to "continue to have the same success and hopefully have higher success as the years come along," Coach Nieves said.

Despite the loss of nearly a dozen graduating seniors this season, senior captain Abdoulaye Konate said he believes the foundations that he and his fellow seniors have laid this season will sustain for future players to come.

"I want to impact them in a great way, and I want to put them in a position that makes Westhill basketball a great program," Konate said.



JOEY HOMICKI lays one against Bridgeport Central in the Senior Night Game. Photo by Ava Homicki ('26)



THE BOYS break their huddle before their game on Tuesday, February 11. Photo by Eugene Caibal ('25)



## “For the Best”

*The Westword* takes a look at the history and impact of Stamford’s Basketball Rec League.

**Eugene Caibal and Scion Estrella**  
Editor-in-Chief and Scatterbrain Editor

Walking inside the Stamford Boys and Girls Club on a Monday or Thursday night past six o’clock, take a left past the row of children waiting for their rides home beside the front desk and head into the blue basketball gym. Inside, about fifty teens are either watching or playing in the hottest recreational basketball league in Stamford right now.

The Stamford Rec Basketball League is the only basketball league in the city that specifically caters to teens. For only \$55 dollars and five minutes on a Google Form, kids from around Stamford are able to play 5v5 basketball games after school with their friends.

The League offers an aspect of freedom that players, like Mohammed Shaik (‘25), say make it a more attractive option for students like himself over the school basketball team. Students are able to go home, work jobs, or do other household chores before the start of the 6 o’clock playtime window that the Rec League operates in, making it a more flexible schedule for students who simply want to play “for the love of the game,” as Shaik said.

“The League, I think, is for the best,” Shaik said, referring both to the cultural impact the League has had on the city’s teen population and the skill level needed to compete in it.

The League also blurs the line of school rivalry traditionally found in Stamford Public Schools athletics, with students of both Westhill and Stamford High playing with and against

each other.

Depending on the team, students like Alistair Allen (‘25) believe the League caters more to individual than team-centric basketball, making it a better option for those who want to hoop competitively but who don’t want to worry about team cohesion and coordination.

The Stamford Rec Basketball League was the brainchild of two Westhill alums, one of whom graduated from the Hill at the same time that the other had just been born. Steve Basquiat (‘07), a counselor at the Boys and Girls Club, and Jake Davidson (‘24), a then-Junior, used to play in the same recreational basketball league — one which Basquiat said was “pretty expensive and kind of falling apart.”

After that league shut down in 2022, Basquiat and Davidson each branched off to form their own separate leagues, so they could continue to ball with their friends. But, after overhearing Davidson speaking to a friend about the struggles with running his own league, Basquiat told Davidson that he might have a plan.

“I saw Jake and some of his friends outside while my games were going on,” Basquiat said. “I told him, ‘Hey, you can bring your team in and play some games,’” and the rest, he said, was history.

The League quickly went from two teams to 12, and this year, Basquiat said they plan on having up to 19 teams by the end of the season.



**ARMANDO QUITO (‘25)** dribbles the basketball on Monday, January 23. Photo by Elmer Parades (‘25).





**KENELM RIDDICK ('25)** attempts a layup on Thursday, January 27. Photo by Elmer Parades ('25).



**SANTIAGO VILCHEZ MONCADA ('25)** shoots a 3-pointer on Monday, January 23. Photo by Elmer Parades ('25).

Basquiat said that the goal of the Club's partnership with the Rec League is to make it a permanent fixture as one of the Club's primary teen programs — one that will not only last, but hopefully expand — allowing the Club to adapt to the ever-changing needs of its teen members.

"We want to make sure we always offer something for the kids to be doing," Basquiat said, "and if basketball is the activity that a lot [of them] want to be involved with, then that's something we want to focus on and get the word out to as many kids as possible."

Basquiat's interest in continuing partnership with the League proves to be beneficial to kids around the Boys and Girls Club.

"That's exactly the reason why we thought it would be the perfect collaboration," Basquiat said. "There's a bunch of other programs that we offer that we were able to get out to a bunch of kids."

According to Basquiat and Keenan Hardy, fellow Club counselor and Rec League referee, teen attendance has increased at the Club even during non-Rec League hours, which is a metric the Club had been struggling to

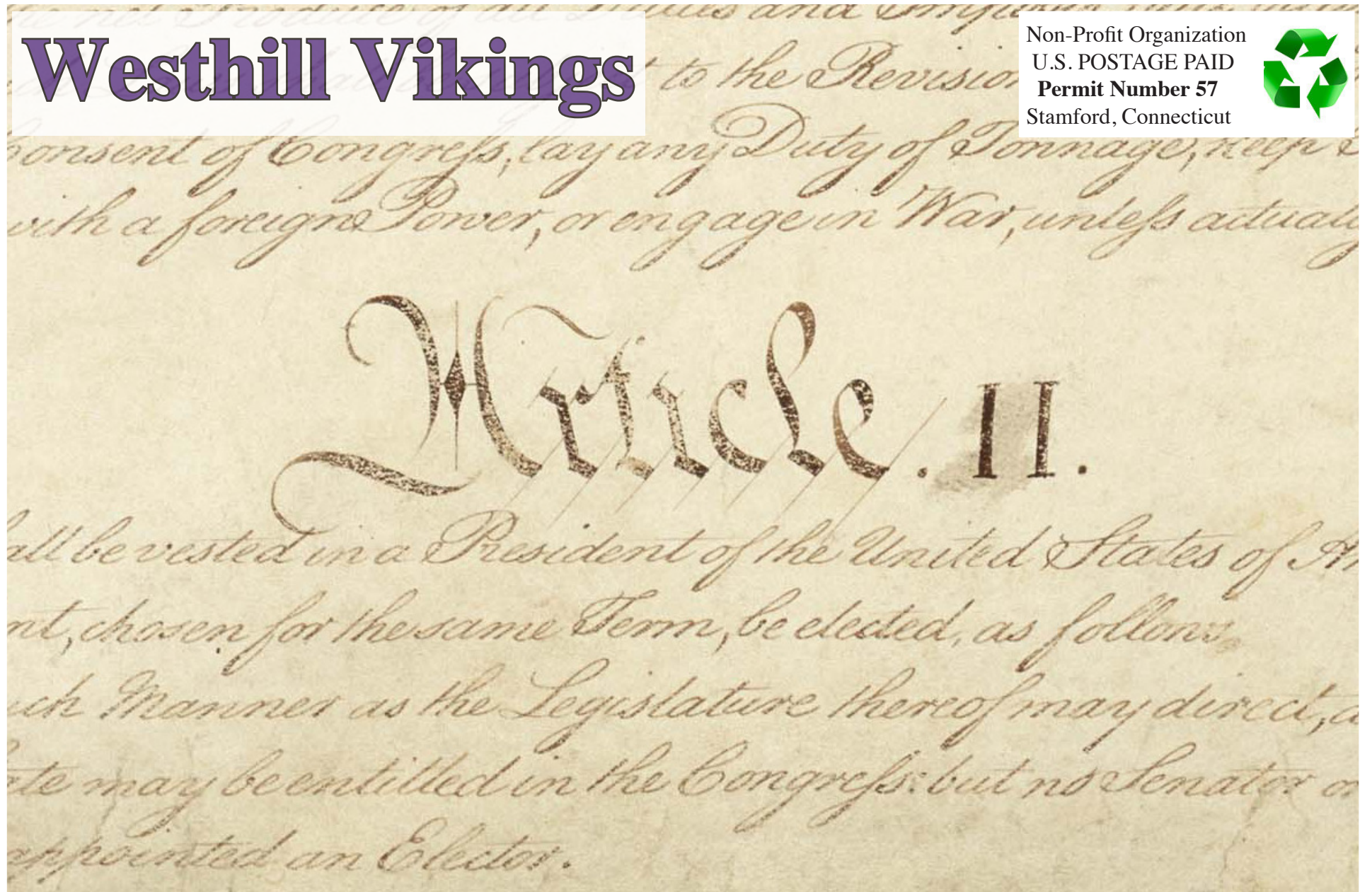
increase for some time. Hardy said the Club had difficulty "getting more of the older kids in here instead of on the street just doing nothing, especially around this time," — referring to the 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. window that the League operates in — but that the Club's partnership with the Rec League had "benefited the club tremendously."

"Most kids would probably be in the house playing games or something," Hardy said. "Now they're out exercising and having some fun."



# Westhill Vikings

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