



Foreign exchange students reflect on a year in the U.S.

By Anna Gillette and Ibby Sadeh

Every year, Housatonic Valley Regional High School welcomes foreign exchange students to attend classes through the AFS Intercultural Programs. This school year, two students traveled to Northwest Connecticut to immerse themselves in American life and culture. Allegra Ferri, a 17-year-old from Italy, and 16-year-old Charlie Castellanos from Colombia sat down to reflect on their experience at HVRHS. As the academic year is coming to an end, they shared a few highlights of their time in the U.S. and offered advice to prospective exchange students.

What has been your favorite part of your exchange experience?

Allegra: “My favorite part of this exchange year was coming here and experiencing an American high school.”

Charlie: “My favorite part is coming to high school and living the American dream and probably going to ski [for the first time].”

What extracurricular activities have you been involved with?

Allegra: “I played volleyball in the fall and I really liked it because everyone was so nice. Then during the winter, I was part of the crew for the musical and now I’m doing tennis. I really enjoy it because it’s a good team. I love how American high school has sports and activities after school.”



Charlie Castellanos, left, and Allegra Ferri, right, sitting in the HVRHS library to talk about their experiences in the U.S.

Charlie: “I did soccer in the fall, which was my favorite. I did the play in the winter and right now I’m doing track and field. We don’t have school sports in Colombia. This is one of the things I’m going to miss the most.”

What would you say to someone considering doing an exchange year?

Allegra: “I would say do it because living in another country is a great experience to grow and improve another language. It improves your skills of being by yourself.”

“I would say if you are thinking about doing the program, do it because you get out of your comfort zone and learn so many things...”

Charlie Castellanos, HVRHS student

Charlie: “I would say if you are thinking about doing the program, do it because you get out of your comfort zone and learn so many things like culture, language and it’s just a completely new experience. It will stay with you your entire life.”

BERT members look forward to second year of fighting bias

By Ibby Sadeh and Mia DiRocco

As the 2025 school year concludes, so does the first full year of the Bias Education and Response Team being utilized at Housatonic Valley Regional High School.

This team, or BERT for short, is a team made primarily of students, with staff to supervise, that respond to incidents of bias in the school. This program was presented as an opportunity to combat and respond to incidents of bias and educate the students and faculty on what bias is.

BERT was introduced with a presentation from two counselors and educators outside of the HVRHS community, Carolyn Corrado and Karen Garrity. They taught the school about the Bias Incident Reporting System, or BIRS, which is a google form that anyone from the school community can fill out, reporting bias that they have seen or heard. Then, students on the team respond to these incidents. This system aims to create a positive school environment through addressing bias.

Students and faculty involved with the program traveled to

Shepaug in October for the Youth Climate Summit, an event where high schools all over Connecticut came together to discuss ways to improve their schools. The entire team gave a presentation on BERT, the work they’ve been doing, and how to utilize the system. “By seeing and potentially utilizing programs that other schools have implemented and found successful in ours could make the schools climate far better for all students and faculty members,” said Silas Tripp, a member of BERT who attended this summit.

On April 3, three of the team members — Maddy Johnson, Silas Tripp and Ayden Wheeler — and the principal, Ian Strever, made their way to Nashua, New Hampshire, to give a presentation at the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Conference. This was a huge success for the team, Wheeler said, “the presentation seemed to be received well with some school representatives coming up to us and wanting to integrate it into their schools.”

“The goal is to make our school a safe environment for all and to make the students feel at home at our school and I truly believe our attendance to these gatherings are helping us reach this goal,” Tripp said. The team also has plans for reaching out to the regional middle schools and making a presentation in the fall to promote lessons of kindness and equality in grade K-8, said Johnson, the subcommittee lead for this objective.

Richie Crane, Carmela Egan, and Georgie Clayton, the members of the “Who We Are” subcommittee, created an instagram account where they post educational information and videos to spread the word about BIRS and what bias is, which you can follow @hvrhs.bert on Instagram.



PHOTOS BY SIMON MARKOW

High tension after the winners of the corrupt pageant were announced. Pictured left to right, Niya Borst, Sara Huber, Richie Crane, Ella Karcheski, Sara Ireland, and Victoria Brooks.

Unwritten Show marks third original student staging

By Anna Gillette

Across two nights of performances, Unwritten Show drew a crowd of over 250 people to the Housatonic auditorium for “The 37th Annual Holbrook Pageant.”

The original production was full of drama, humor and heart, showcasing what happens when students at Housatonic Valley Regional High School take the stage. From writing to directing, set design, costumes and acting, students handled every aspect of the show.

The performance used the setting of a beauty pageant to explore deeper societal issues through satire. “We wanted to speak to the stereotypes and issues that are often faced in the performance world,” co-director and production manager Alex Wilbur said. These matters included inequalities such as nepotism, gender roles and ulterior motives. The students intended to use satire as a tool for reflection, not accusation, and to push performers toward inclusivity. “We need to create a community and support each other in our endeavors, because that’s what it’s all about,” Wilbur said.

Sara Huber, the writer and co-director, said the writing process for this show was different than anything she had written before because it didn’t involve extensive planning. “I knew automatically what I wanted to write,” she said. “The message is that even when faced with something that’s corrupt, you can still find community in that and still find a way to come out of it stronger.” Wilbur noted that the creative process was rooted in personal experience. “The best ideas come from self-exploration and the themes of your own life or things happening around you,” he said.

The cast and crew were pleased with the turnout. All



Top, Richie Crane performing as Nick Grain and Victoria Brooks as Reese Glimmer.

donations made will benefit the program in years to come. The success of this student-led initiative was meaningful to everyone involved. “It is a perfect example of our school community’s ability to create,” Wilbur said.

Actor Richie Crane, who played Nick Grain — the only male pageant contestant — was thrilled with how the production helped prepare students for the future. Passionate about dance and aiming to become a chore-

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Playwright and actress Sara Huber as Claire Voyant chokes on stage, interrupting an important rehearsal.

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Nathan Miller, Lakeville Journal Program Lead
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The HVRHS Journalism Program

This spring, The Lakeville Journal launched a journalism initiative at Housatonic Valley Regional High School. Through this program, students work with Lakeville Journal editors throughout the school year to report on what’s important and interesting to them and their community. The news on these pages is the culmination of work during the 2025 Spring semester.

For more information about the program, please contact Lakeville Journal Publisher, James Clark, at publisher@lakevillejournal.com.

The Lakeville Journal

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Reporter’s Notebook: preceded by reputation

By **Ibby Sadeh**

Residents of other countries outside of the United States often have preconceived notions of Americans — especially teenagers.

A group of 39 HVRHS students and chaperones from Northwest Connecticut traveled to Germany, Austria, and Italy in the span of nine days in April. As spectacular and enriching as the experience was, I couldn’t help but notice that we were judged as American tourists.

In Florence, Italy, when passing a group of European teenagers, I overheard, “oh never mind they are Americans.” I found it interesting how just by a glance in our direction it was clear we were foreigners. Some comments, however, had more negative connotations. A biker trying to weave through a crowd muttered, “annoying Americans.” This is how we are seen, as bothersome foreigners even though tourism is a big source of income for places like this. According to The Florentine, in 2015, international tourism brought 2.5 billion euros to Florence, Italy, the place that we were in for the longest time during this trip. That was a 5.2% increase from the previous year.

“Although Americans can be seen as pushy overall as a group, I have never had a problem individually, people have been very kind,” said Deron Bayer, history teacher at HVRHS, and chaperone for the recent trip.

Despite the muttered com-



PHOTO BY IBBY SADEH

Above, the group visiting the Colosseum in Rome on the spring break trip. Right, students in San Gimignano, Italy, from left to right, Mia Dodge, Ibby Sadeh, Olivia Peterson, Mia DiRocco, and Danny Lesch.



PHOTO BY CELESTE TRABUCCO

ments, I had other experiences where we had interesting conversations with foreigners. In Germany, we talked to local teenagers in Munich. They were very interested to hear about America, New York City, if we owned a house, and if we were rich. These questions about us and our lives back in America show how we are viewed.

No matter how our group was seen or reacted to, the experience of traveling internationally was incredibly influential for the stu-

dents and chaperones that had the opportunity to go.

“When I grow up I want to travel and this was a good introduction to traveling internationally,” said Maddy Johnson, a junior at HVRHS who went on this trip.

The travel program EF tours packs so much into so little time — art, history, education and more. We went straight from the airport onto our coach bus with our tour guide, and to our first location in Munich.

Bayer explained why he thinks these trips are so important — “what students got to do by going on that trip was to go to a classroom that was outside of our country ... you are learning about yourself and learning how to interact with different people.” Especially because our school

“This experience allowed me to gain new friendships with people that I had not normally hung out with in my day to day activities,”

Maddy Johnson, HVRHS student

and community is small in size, these types of activities and opportunities have impacts on students’ school experience.

“This experience allowed me to gain new friendships with people that I had not normally hung out with in my day to day activities,” Johnson said.

Traveling brings education to

the next level, offering new perspectives, although sometimes judgmental ones, and forging new connections.

“In this part of Connecticut we are very secluded, there is not much to do or see so traveling allows students to see a much broader perspective of the world,” Johnson said.



PHOTO BY ELLA KARCHESKI

Niya Borst as Penelope Pennywise, left, performing alongside Richie Crane as Old Man Strong, right, in the Housatonic Musical Theater Society production of “Urintetown” on March 18.

Richie Crane celebrates Sondheim Award win for ‘Urintetown’ performance

By **Maddy Johnson**

Starting at the age of 2, Richie Crane has been on a stage. From dancing to acting, Crane has always been a part of the theater, acting in productions for the Sharon Playhouse, his middle school and now Housatonic Valley Regional High School. He got his moment to shine in the spotlight on March 18 when he won the Sondheim award for best supporting actor as Old Man Strong in HVRHS’s production of “Urintetown.”

Crane has been in a multitude of productions throughout his life. “I’ve been acting since I was seven,” Crane said, “but three years ago I started acting in the Sharon Playhouse, which is when I started taking it seriously.” Crane has been in the ensemble of “Prom!,” the lead actor of “Rumplestiltskin” in his middle school play, and involved in five different productions in the HVRHS theater program from the time he was in fourth grade.

Crane dances at Blue Studio in Lakeville, Connecticut.

“I have been dancing for almost two and a half years there,” Crane said, “and I’ve been looking into dance and theater as a

career.” Dance is something that Crane has been involved with his whole life and continues to enjoy as time goes on. He said that “performing and dancing overall, like learning the choreography,” is his favorite part of theater.

“Presenting a story to an audience and hoping that we can demonstrate it the way it’s supposed to be while moving the audience” is Crane’s main goal when performing. Through his dance and acting, he connects himself to the audience and brings his performances to life. Earning the Sondheim meant so much, Crane said, because he feels such a close connection to theater.

“The award reminds me that all this extra work, all these dance classes are all paying off and it’s a reminder to me that I can do whatever I put my heart to,” Crane said.

The award is validation for Crane — validation for his future plans in the theater and validation that all he has done is being seen by others. Crane said he “had been working his way up to a more appreciative role” and the award makes him hopeful and fuels his passion for the next show and the achievements he can reach at the next level.

By **Mia DiRocco**

One short year ago, the Housatonic girl’s tennis team forfeited multiple matches a week. With just seven girls, they couldn’t fill a full roster of 10 players. As two of those players graduated, it left the team wondering what the next season would look like, if girl’s tennis would have another season at all.

But this season the girls have taken on full sweep victories, without forfeiting a single match. What happened? Thanks to the school’s investment in the team and an onslaught of freshman players, the Housatonic girl’s team was able to go from the brink of extinction to an accomplished and close-knit group of 17 players.

This year, HVRHS installed brand new courts after taxpayers approved improvements to the school in January 2024. That upgrade brought renewed interest in the team.

While the girls only had a few wins in their Berkshire League competition, this was a huge building year for the team, captain and first-singles player Victoria Brooks said.

But Girl’s Tennis isn’t the only sport making a comeback this year. Cheerleading has returned to Housatonic for the first time since 2005, and that’s just the beginning. The 2025 spring season has been filled with major wins for Housatonic athletics. Boy’s tennis had two players become Berkshire League all-stars, and the track team has been breaking records set decades before. Boy’s Baseball and Girl’s lacrosse are on their way to states after a great season.

“It has been student driven



PHOTOS PROVIDED

The HVRHS girls tennis team consists of 17 players this year. Teammates credit the brand new tennis courts built in Summer 2024 with renewed interest in the sport.



100%. The kids do the leg work and I just do what I can as an athletic director to support that,” said Housatonic’s athletic director Anne MacNeil. “Education-based athletics is not just about wins and losses. We are an extension of the classroom, so we base ourselves on life lessons.”

With the resurgence of so many Housatonic sports this year, it begs the question of what’s next?

Could Boy’s Lacrosse or a Field Hockey team make a comeback? Or maybe something new is on the way. With a small school like HVRHS, it can be difficult to fill new teams, according to MacNeil. “If they come to me with enough numbers that make sense, then let’s go for it.”

However, it’s unlikely we’ll be seeing anything new upcoming. “Unfortunately our numbers do not really allow for new sports,” MacNeil said. “We struggled to fill JV spots – if we’re going to add sports, it takes students away from teams already established.” Despite its size, HVRHS has managed to excel athletically, largely thanks to its dedicated and determined student athletes.

Local fund sets HVRHS students up for success

By Shanaya Duprey

Students at Housatonic Valley Regional High School face an issue shared by many students across the country: the cost of education and academic opportunities.

To combat this issue, HVRHS students such as Silas Tripp have worked with an organization known as the 21st Century Fund. Silas received two grants, allowing him to attend Engineering programs at Brown University and the University of Pennsylvania. The fund's awards of over \$3,000 covered more than half of each program.

"The 21st Century Fund offers students economic aid to extend their education beyond what is offered in regular education classes," said Mike DeMazza, a 21st Century Fund board member and educator at HVRHS. The fund awards grants to students ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars. "This allows students the opportunity to dream and to find direction for their future."

"My experience with the 21st Century Fund has been far easier than I first expected," Silas Tripp said. "Once I applied for grants, I realized how easy this fund made it for students to apply for grants and scholarships. This also makes students more likely to apply for these financial opportunities, which is vital for helping develop students." This local support is unique in Region One, as many other regions do not have the same grant system.

"The goal of opening doors

"Once I applied for grants, I realized how easy this fund made it for students to apply for grants and scholarships. This also makes students more likely to apply for these financial opportunities, which is vital for helping develop students."

Silas Tripp, HVRHS student

and making things so accessible to our students is very unique," said Letitia Garcia-Tripp, a HVRHS educator and Silas's mother.

This unique community support is especially important today, as the cost of a higher education continues to rise. "It has gotten completely out of hand," Letitia said. "The costs are set so only a small minority can afford higher education. Gone are the days where if a student did their job to be successful in high school, then they didn't have to worry about the cost of college the way they do today. Full scholarships are few and far between."

"I think every student should familiarize themselves with the 21st Century Fund website at 21stcenturyfund.net — this is part of the Region 1 community unknown by many," DeMazza said. You will never know if funding is available unless you apply."



PHOTOS BY SIMON MARKOW

"The Sassy Seven" contenders performing the closing dance. "Next Top Mountaineer" returned to the stage at HVRHS on Friday, May 16, after a two year absence.

Matsudaira crowned 'Next Top Mountaineer' after competition's two-year absence

By Anna Gillette

This spring, members of the Student Government Association worked hard to bring back Housatonic's Next Top Mountaineer after two years without a competition.

SGA Vice President Tessa Dekker organized the event. "As the last class to have witnessed the Next Top Mountaineer, we felt that if we didn't do it this year, the tradition would be lost," said Dekker, whose efforts helped transform the vision into a full-scale production.

The show displayed the unique



characteristics of seven students at HVRHS. "The Sassy Seven" contestants — Henry Berry, Charlie Castellanos, Andy Delgado, Justin Diaz, Manny Matsudaira, Jassim Mohyidin and Joseph Villa — competed in multiple categories: personality, Q&A, lip syncing, formal wear and talent.

After careful consideration from the judges, Manny Matsudaira took home the crown and title of "Housatonic's Next Top Mountaineer 2025."

Matsudaira, familiar with the event through his older siblings, was eager to participate. "I grew to understand it as a really exciting and fun opportunity for seniors," he said. For him and the others, the show became a chance to grow and have fun while doing something bold and new.

Rehearsals began about three weeks prior to the event, following school and sports. Initially focused on choreography and structure, practices eventually shifted to refining each contestant's individual performance.

Dekker noted the difficulties behind the scenes. "While it was challenging to coordinate seven boys with little to no experience on the stage, they all put in the work to make an amazingly successful production."

The preparation wasn't strictly physical. "Of course there was a level of mental preparation that we all had to do a few nights before the show," Matsudaira said. "The most rewarding part of the competition was the confidence I gained from stepping very, very

Katelin Lopes and Joseph Villa during the interview portion of the competition.

far out of my comfort zone." The competitors didn't just simply dance and showcase their talents, they intentionally performed in a ridiculous manner.

Classmate Katelin Lopes hosted the event. "I was kept on my toes by all of the contestants," she said. "It was a very fun-filled night." Matsudaira agreed, praising the crowd. He said, "The fun atmosphere of the night was a good reflection of the quality of the production and the work we put into it."

Winning meant more than just a title for Matsudaira. "Being Housatonic's Next Top Mountaineer has its greatest meaning in terms of tradition and that I'm joining a list of other Housatonic graduates," he said. "It's fun to win any sort of competition but this one is special in that there's a legacy among Housatonic and that this is the first year that we're bringing it back."

Matsudaira's talents don't end on stage, he's also this year's valedictorian and will be attending Harvard University in the fall. He says the key to academic and extracurricular achievement is developing a passion for each activity. "When you're looking forward to the events you participate in and the ways that you are academically challenged at school, finding success is much easier."



PHOTO PROVIDED

Kyle McCarron carrying the baton.

HVRHS Track seniors running off to collegiate competition

By Maddy Johnson

Harper Howe, graduating class of 2025 from Housatonic, will be returning home to Chicago in the fall as a walk-on in DePaul University's track team. She and three of her classmates on the HVRHS track and field team are attending college through the track and field program at their designated schools.

Kyle McCarron — attending Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut — and Gabi Titone — attending Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia — will attend their designated colleges as Division I cross-country and track athletes. "I am excited to be a part of the Marymount cross country and track team," Gabi Titone said. "I just know that it is a community I will thrive within." These schools offer new opportunities for the runners and new challenges on a whole new level.

Mia Dodge, who is attending Western New England, located in Springfield, Massachusetts, will be attending her university for both soccer and track. She will have to "get herself to the point of switching" from 300 meters to 400 meters in the hurdles.

The athletes already spend much of their time dedicated to their sports. Titone goes on runs six days a week, and she can also commonly be found at her local gym. Similarly, all four athletes attend track practices five times a week, which consist of a two-hour-long practice, while also making time for their personal workouts and runs, which adds about an extra six to ten hours to their athletic schedule each week.

The students know that the work they originally put in is only half the battle. As a walk-on, Harper Howe — attending DePaul University in Chicago — must fight for her spot in the Division I meets. While she is on

the team and will attend their practices, she has to push herself to participate in the competition. Howe says that she needs to cut off "two and some change seconds for the 400 and one and some change for the 600" — the six hundred is an indoor competition. Without cutting those seconds, Howe will only be able to attend the practices and watch the meets.

Even though it is an uphill battle for Howe, she will be closer to her distant family members and reunited with her old hometown, which is only "a short hour away," says Howe, compared to the 12 hours she faces now. Through her grit and determination, Howe will make her way in the Windy City of Chicago.

All four athletes have worked hard to achieve their goals. As their teammate Hannah Johnson says, "They put their heart and soul into every race that they run."



The contestants and host bowing after Matsudaira — far right — was named the winner.

The Unwritten Show
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ographer, Richie not only performed in the show but helped choreograph the cast alongside Elizabeth Forbes and Ella Karcheski. Crane got to experience firsthand what the profession might look like alongside his supportive peers. “Dancing is one of the things I love to do most,” he said. “I wouldn’t get this opportunity anywhere else.”

Another element that made the production stand out was the absence of a traditional lead role, allowing every cast member to contribute to the story equally. This was intentional. Huber said she purposely wrote an ensemble based production. “That to me is so important to the spirit of Unwritten Show because it’s really about the students coming together and making something.” The decision to avoid a lead role mirrored the show’s message of equality, a theme displayed in both the storyline and developmental process. “Everyone had their own moment to shine in the spotlight and no one person was standing out, you don’t get to see that in every musical,” Crane said.

“The 37th Annual Holbrook Pageant” was HVRHS’s third student-led production. The co-directors agreed that the Unwritten Show is more than just a production, it’s an incredible opportunity for students to explore their creativity and collaborate in meaningful ways. “It shows students that they can pursue their dreams,” Wilbur said. “It also shows teachers and professionals how hard we are working.” Ultimately, the show served as a reflection of the students’ dedication and collective effort.



Above, all pageant contestants dancing together as the competition begins. Right, Elizabeth Forbes as Holbrook Pageant CEO Baron Dollars and Madison Melino.



PHOTOS BY SIMON MARKOW
Elizabeth Forbes doubling as the CEO of the Holbrook Pageant, Baron Dollars, and pageant choreographer Svetlana Yurakova.

Hear from the Mountaineers
What do you think of lunch?



John DeDonato
Class of 2027

“Some I prefer are the grilled cheese. Pizza’s okay with some sauce. Hamburger too, I guess. The least favorite that I’ve tried is probably the hot ham and cheese. I don’t like that. I’ve started to see that they’re doing French fries, which I kind of like. They should probably start doing more of that.”



Georgie Clayton
Class of 2027

“My favorite is beef nacho grande. My least favorite is probably the fajitas. I wish we had chicken nuggets and mashed potatoes more often.”



Abram Kirshner
Class of 2026

“My favorite lunch is probably the mac and cheese and popcorn chicken. I’d like to see it more frequently. Grilled cheese, cheese quesadilla, french toasts sticks, and chicken fajita can all go.”



Celeste Trabucco
Class of 2026

“General Tso’s chicken is my favorite lunch. Also, the popcorn chicken and mac and cheese. I really don’t like the French toast sticks or that we have pizza every Friday. We need some more variation.”

PHOTOS BY IBBY SADEH AND MIA DIROCCO

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Graduates!

Best wishes
into the future
from your friends at
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