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## BACK TO CLASS

Education Reform  
in Fairfield

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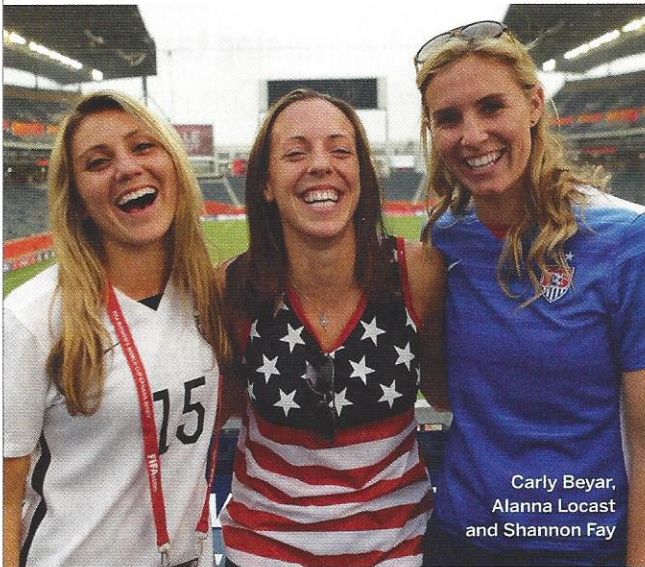
# BUZZ

status report

SOCCEGRRLPROBS • HAIR BANGLEZ • WHAT IF GE LEAVES? • BREAST CANCER UPDATE

## Goal Oriented

How three student-athletes became lifestyle-brand moguls and role models



Carly Beyar, Alanna Locast and Shannon Fay

Amid a fearsome Fairfield University Women's Soccer preseason, in August 2011, teammates Carly Beyar, Alanna Locast and Shannon Fay took to Twitter to relieve stress. They playfully ribbed themselves with the hashtag "SoccerGrlProbs" before dedicating an account to the subject. Mere months later, they started making YouTube videos and their content was soon shared globally.

The trio wasn't sure what to make of it. Recalling the first video, Beyar says, "Only when we hit a million views in three days did we realize our impact."

Merchandise was next. "We ordered thirty-six shirts in different sizes the first time," Locast says. They sold out overnight, with pre-orders for 300 more. Their clothing revenue is now in the hundreds of thousands.

This summer, the women were recruited for Chelsea Piers' Leadership Camp, appeared at Mia Hamm and Brandi Chastain's camp in the Berkshires and KICKTV hired them to cover the U.S. Women's National Team's 2015 World Cup run in Canada.

"It's incredible that we get to meet so many people who we wouldn't without this," Fay says.

In October SoccerGrlProbs sponsors its first Girl Power tournament in New Jersey.

Through all of the changes, they stay focused on their original mission: "We want to empower young female athletes," Beyar says.

Head to [fairfieldlivingmag.com](http://fairfieldlivingmag.com) for more on Beyar, Locast and Fay; go to [soccegrlprobs.com](http://soccegrlprobs.com) to check out their irresistible, high-energy world. —Dan Hajducky

### SOCCEGRRLPROBS STATS

200,000 TWITTER FOLLOWERS, INCLUDING MIA HAMM AND BRANDI CHASTAIN | 10 MILLION TOTAL YOUTUBE VIEWS | 84,000 INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS | \$8,000 GRANT FOR WINNING DAVIDSON COLLEGE'S NEXT PLAY VENTURE PRIZE

## DOUBLE DUTY

Hair elastics get a chic upgrade



**CLEVER!** The next time you place a hair elastic on your wrist, you could discretely fit it into a groove in a new bangle designed by Fairfielder Karin Zannella. Called **Hairbanglez**, the stackable accessory comes in black, tortoise, gold and silver (\$10 each), with more colors in fall. "It is an inexpensive and chic way to mesh style with function," she says. Made of plastic, they will soon be available in silicone and metal. [hairbanglez.com](http://hairbanglez.com) —Diane Sembrot

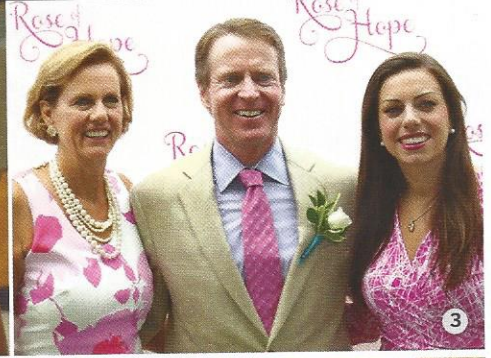




BY DAN HAJDUCKY

# PEOPLE & Places

NORMA F. PFRIEM BREAST CARE CENTER • JAMIE COLLINS PHOTOGRAPHY



## Hold on Hope

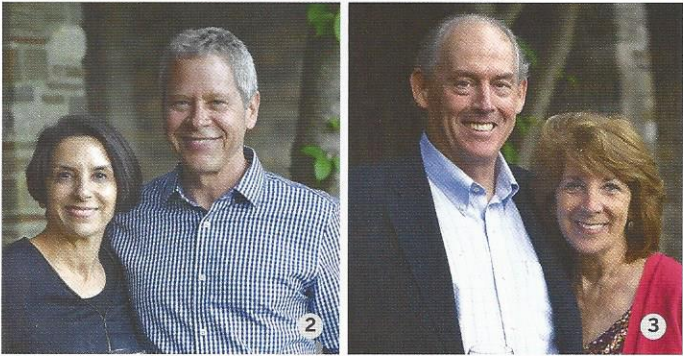
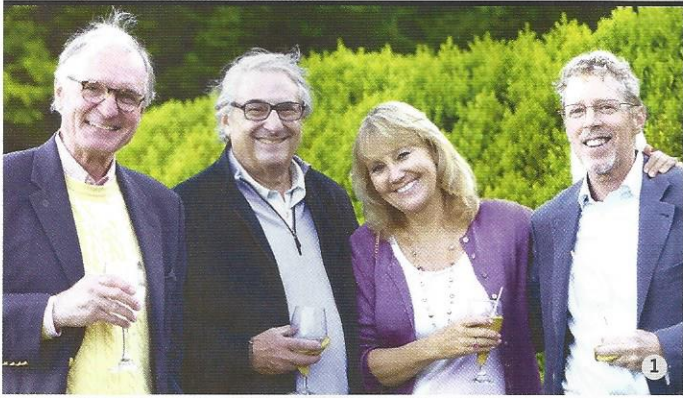
**B**reast cancer survivor and longtime *Good Morning America* cohost Joan Lunden spoke at the 2015 Rose of Hope Luncheon. This year marked the fourteenth year of the benefit and the fifteenth anniversary of the Norma F. Pfriem Breast Care Center. Guest speaker Loryne Atoui-Laham of Lebanon, managing director of breast cancer care organization One Wig Stand, recalled how war in Lebanon forced her family to flee to the United States for her mother's medical care. WPLR DJ Mike Lapitano was given the Rose of Hope Award for his yearly golf fundraiser, which has raised \$200,000 for women in need of medical care.



1 Lauren DeMattia, Connie DeMattia, Joan Lunden, Nikki DeMattia  
 2 Loryne Atoui-Laham 3 Patti, Tom and Courtney Keegan 4 Under the tent  
 5 Tri-chairs Daneen Grabe, Donna Twist and Linda Blackwell  
 6 Keynote speaker Joan Lunden 7 Doug Grabe 8 Cathy Porter, Mary-Jo McAvey 9 Cindy Citrone and Donna Twist



## PEOPLE & Places



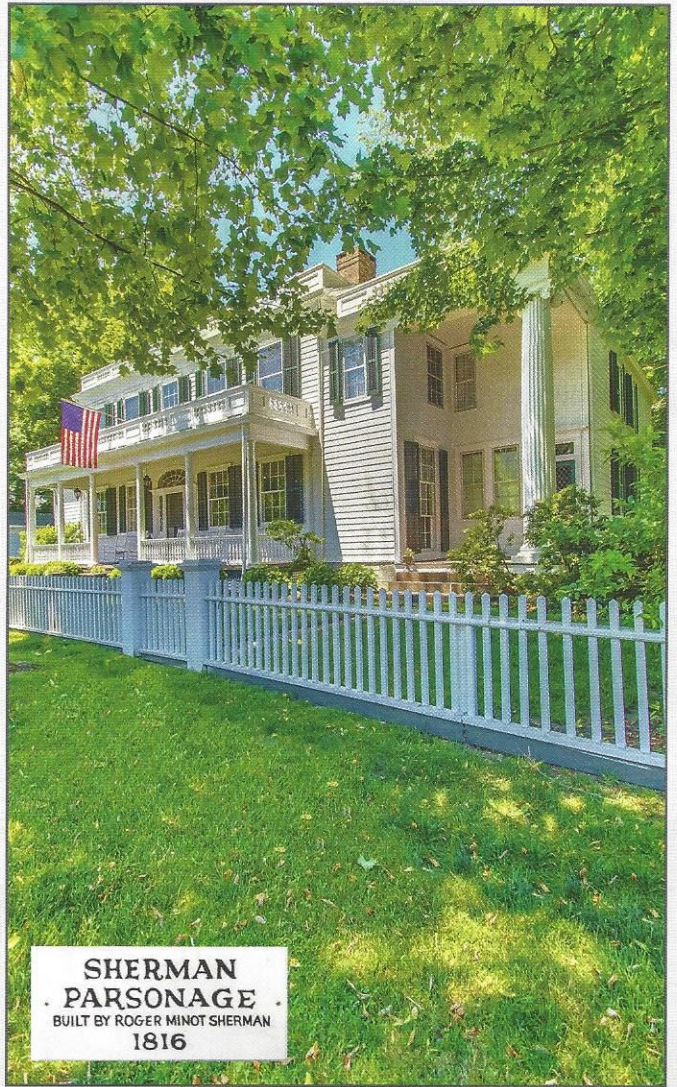
**1** David Squires, Bill Felton, Arlene Scanlan and David Scanlan  
**2** Terry McGuiness and Lance Lundberg **3** Steve and Karen Bauman  
**4** State Senator Bob Duff, Elisabeth Morten and James Naughton



### || CULTURAL ALLIANCE OF FAIRFIELD COUNTY ||

## All That Jazz

The Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County gathered to celebrate the over 300 artists and organizations that comprise its membership, and to honor Fairfield County resident and two-time Tony Award-winner James Naughton and arts patron Elisabeth Morten. State Senator Bob Duff honored Naughton and Morton with a legislative citation for their service to local arts and culture. Liz Fox hosted and cochaired the event with Ann Sheffer. The gypsy-swing jazz ensemble Caravan of Thieves performed. At the silent auction, the winning bidder won a Maserati for the weekend, while another received a free meal at the celebrated Community Tables in Washington, CT. »



Founders of the Fairfield Historical Society immortalized this Federal antique-style landmark titled the Sherman Parsonage house. The iconic traditional details of this historic 1816 home are infused with expansive rooms, lofty 9+ ceilings, hardwood floors, graceful archways and oval windows. This home is best known for being the largest, most impressive house in Fairfield and made into a 1899 publication "The House with Sixty Closets." It encompasses nine fireplaces and a grand front porch, sunroom, wood deck, and bluestone patio. **Fairfield | \$1.495M**



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## PEOPLE & Places



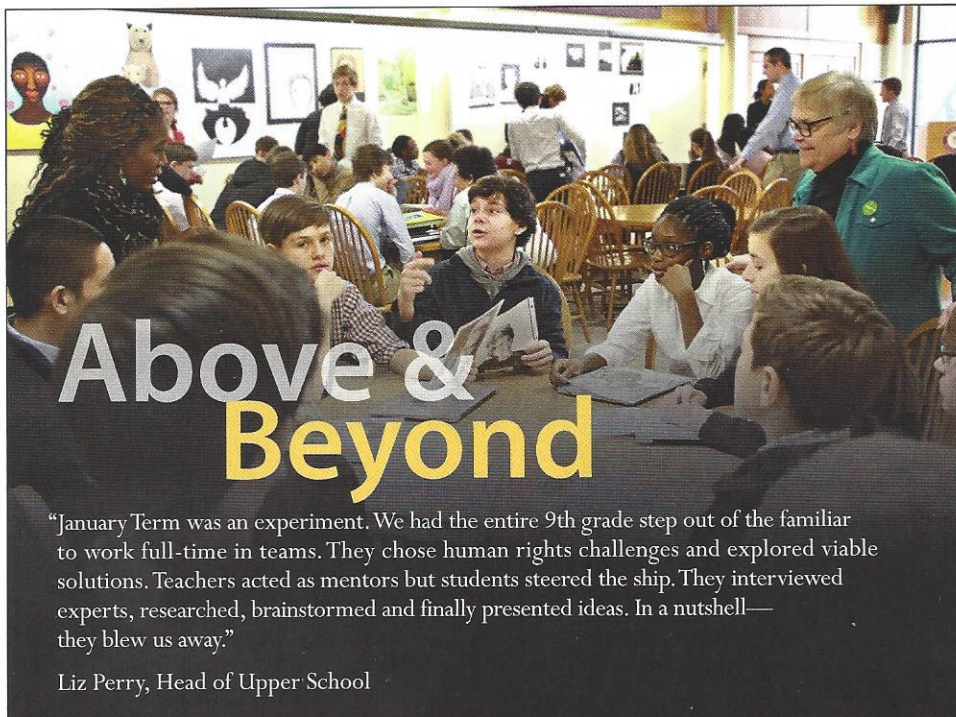
**1** Selectman Kevin Kiley, Ashlynn Finnegan, Selectman Shiela Marmion **2** Evie Johnston, Lexi Rodriguez and First Selectman Mike Tetreau

### || ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION, CONNECTICUT CHAPTER ||

## Toward a Cure

**A**long with her interns, Lexi Rodriguez, special events director of the Alzheimer's Association's Connecticut Chapter, met with Fairfield First Selectman Mike Tetreau, Selectman Kevin Kiley and Selectman Sheila Marmion to receive a proclamation that June will henceforth be known as Alzheimer's Awareness Month in Fairfield. Rodriguez spoke about the illness, the Alzheimer's Association, and all that is being done in the area to raise awareness and funds toward fighting the disease.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION, CT CHAPTER



## Above & Beyond

"January Term was an experiment. We had the entire 9th grade step out of the familiar to work full-time in teams. They chose human rights challenges and explored viable solutions. Teachers acted as mentors but students steered the ship. They interviewed experts, researched, brainstormed and finally presented ideas. In a nutshell—they blew us away."

Liz Perry, Head of Upper School

st Luke's  
SCHOOL

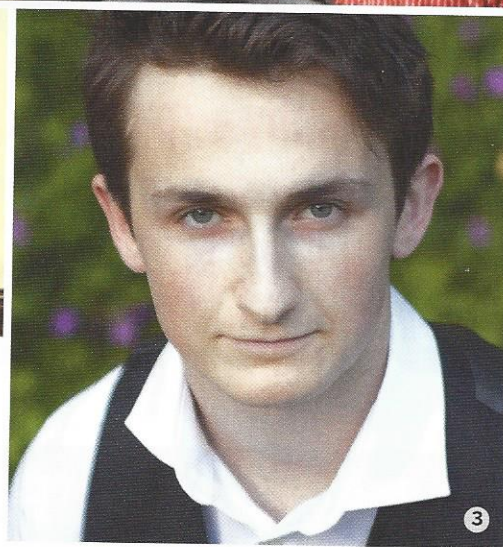
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St. Luke's is a secular, college-preparatory day school for grades 5-12.



## PEOPLE & Places



1 Alex Beyer and Darwin Shen perform together  
2 Darwin Shen 3 Alex Beyer

|| PEQUOT LIBRARY ||

# Prodigious Production

Alex Beyer, the Stamford Symphony's 2011 Jeniam Foundation Scholarship recipient—who was a *Fairfield Living* Magazine Teen to Watch in 2012—recently put on the second show of his summer series. All proceeds from the series benefit the Pequot Library. Beyer played Chopin, Prokofiev, Bach and Ravel and was joined onstage by special guest violinist Darwin Chen, founder of the Violin Audition Prep Program. Beyer has been a guest soloist with the Milwaukee, Charlotte, Hartford, New Haven, Waterbury and Bridgeport Symphony Orchestras. He won the NEC Piano Honors Competition in 2014 and was a 2012 U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts. **F**

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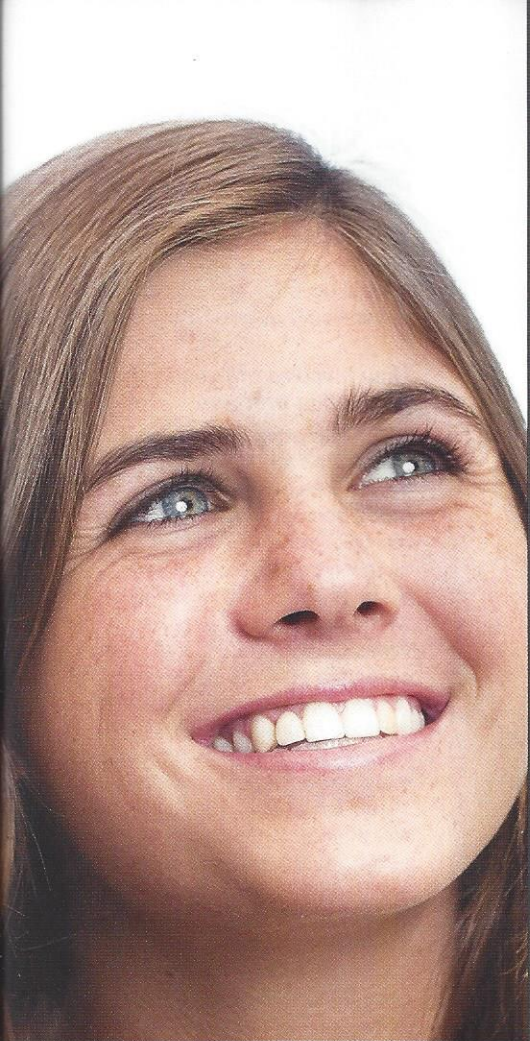


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BACK TO  
CLASS



# A PRIMER TO THE NEXT CHAPTER OF CHANGES IN EDUCATION IN FAIRFIELD

PLUS, MEET TEENS WHO HAVE  
MASTERED THE SYSTEM

BY JILL JOHNSON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JULIE BIDWELL | TEEN PROFILES BY DAN HAJDUCKY







**"I BALANCE MY  
FOCUS AMONG  
MY STUDIES,  
SPORTS, SOCIAL  
LIFE AND FAMILY."**

If you are a parent of a school-age child, no doubt you've heard of the new Common Core State Standards. Rolled out across the country in the past two years, along the new computerized Common Core-aligned SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) tests, it was piloted in our public schools in 2014 and administered again last year. Part of the argument for new standards and new standardized tests is that public schools are failing. You need only read the bios of Fairfield students Ingrid Backe and Jackson Gallati to know that it's unlikely this statement applies to our town—one chosen by many as home not only for its beautiful beaches and quaint, shop-lined streets, but also for its stellar public schools. Still, it's worth reviewing what makes our schools special, what pros and cons may come with the education reform movement and how we can protect the best of what our schools offer the next generation.

#### EXCEPTIONAL SCHOOLS

"The best thing about Fairfield public schools is the diversity of programs offered, both as far as classes and extracurricular activities," says Jean Gallati, Fairfield mom of five, including

## INGRID BACKE

Western New England Prep School All-Star (twice); Fairchester Athletic Association All-League (three times); and U.S. Lacrosse Women's National Tournament, Schoolgirls Division—**INGRID BACKE** makes things happen.

"It's a shame that people are defined by how deeply they study a single subject or sport," says the Greens Farms Academy (GFA) senior. "I strive to be well-rounded, I'm driven to be my best self."

Colgate University-bound, she contributes to GFA's literary magazine *Penumbra*, won a

UVA Jefferson Book Award in 2014 and attended Model UN at Georgetown University. Her "best self" also includes trips with Builders Beyond Borders to Guyana, Dominican Republic and Guatemala; she helped construct water tanks with filtering systems and rebuild a home destroyed by a mudslide. "I've had success thus far because I always keep busy."

She does give credit to sports. "When the adrenaline kicks in, your reactions must be sharp. This intensity carries over to my studies, teaching me motivation and intelligent decision making."



# JACKSON GALLATI

"I sometimes feel like Andy Kaufman; I don't have a 'real me,' says **JACKSON GALLATI**, a senior at Fairfield Warde High School. "I'm always finding new parts of myself."

This constant self-discovery bolsters his acting skills. He's netted roles in nearly a dozen productions at both Downtown Cabaret Theatre and Bridgeport Theater Company and has done commercial and voiceover work with Hertz Rent-A-Car, Sprite and AmEx. He has also done modeling work for Walmart and ZeroXposur.

In college he plans to double major in film and literature. "That way I can explore many different ways of storytelling," he says. "Film is the highest art form: it's literature, it's photography, it's costume making, acting, everything. It lets me tap into all of my creative abilities."

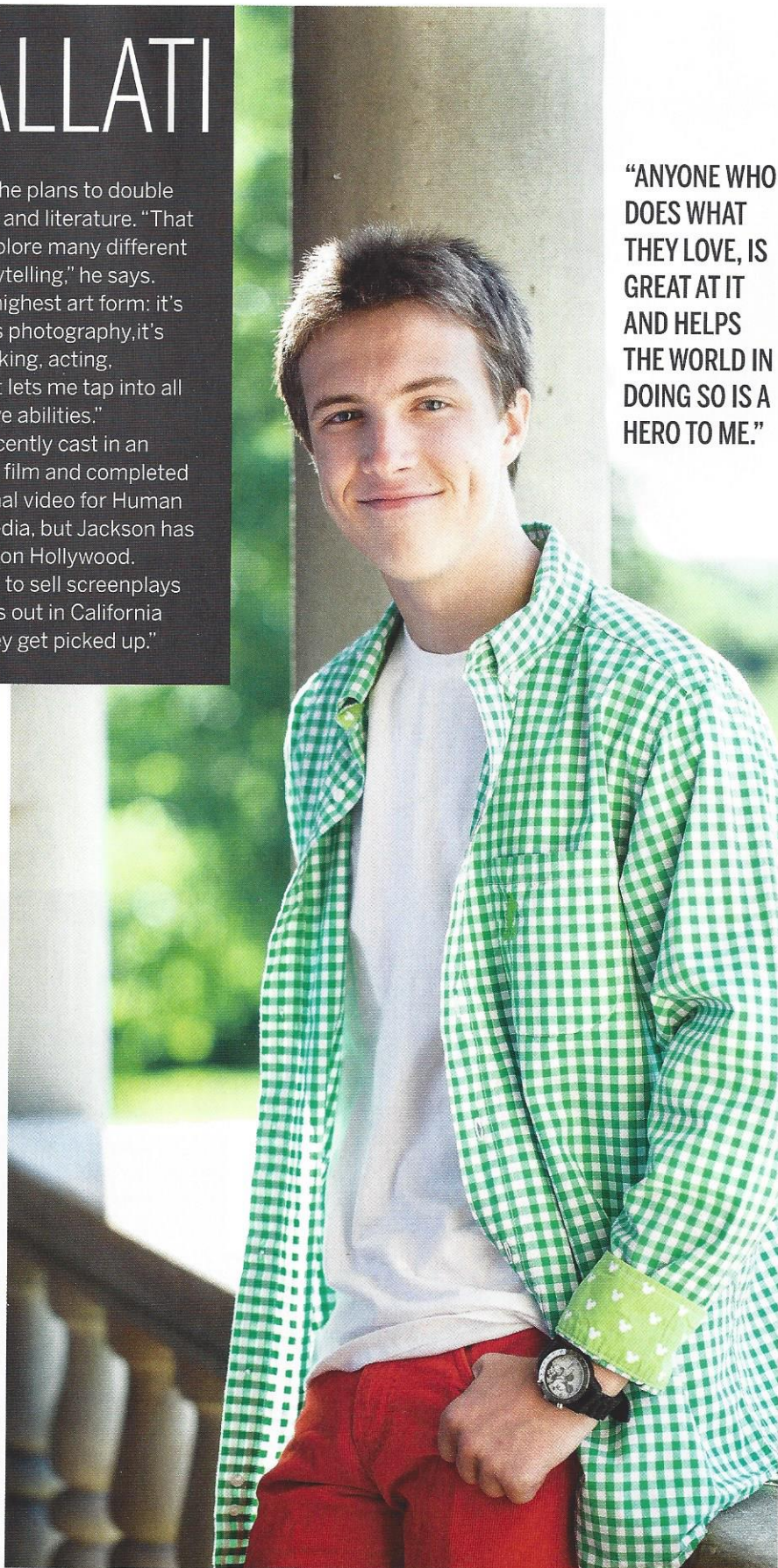
He was recently cast in an independent film and completed an educational video for Human Relations Media, but Jackson has his heart set on Hollywood. "I want to try to sell screenplays to companies out in California and hope they get picked up."

"ANYONE WHO DOES WHAT THEY LOVE, IS GREAT AT IT AND HELPS THE WORLD IN DOING SO IS A HERO TO ME."

teen-to-watch Jackson (*right*). Jean has been an active member of the PTA for years, was PTA president at Woods Middle School last year and is an adjunct professor of child development at UConn. In other words, she is the education interview jackpot. "My son Jackson is most well known for his acting, but he is also an artist, a photographer, a songwriter and a poet. In our school system, those electives are all there. The downside is that kids can pick only one or two."

When Jean spotted Jackson's star quality at a talent show, she helped launch an after-school drama program at North Stratfield Elementary. "It stills exists," she notes, "with an amazing director. Other schools heard about it and have dabbled in drama as well. There are so many lessons in a drama class that are applicable in the business world: eye contact, articulation, projecting and nonverbal communication." The lesson: If a school lacks a valuable program, an enthusiastic parent, student or teacher can effect change.

"When he got to Woods, my oldest son wanted an opportunity to do improv," continues Jean. "One of his teachers was very receptive. He said, 'If you can get eight kids interested, I'll lead it.' He brought in props that were just incredible." She adds that there are lots of opportunities for writing and submitting books; that the PTA







Reflections program has six arts categories in which all the schools participate; and that the kids in the gifted program “do lots of things that are interesting to *them*.”

“The fact that there is a gifted program still is exceptional, never mind one that is as researched and well thought out as ours,” comments Molly Farrell, a Fairfield High graduate who worked in the district for fourteen years, most recently as an instructional improvement and gifted resource teacher at Roger Sherman Elementary. “A lot of towns around us don’t have one at all. The state of Connecticut requires every district to identify who is gifted but law doesn’t mandate that there is programming for those kids.”

Board of Education Chairman Phillip Dwyer says, “Fairfield has been recognized on the AP Honor Roll for the past two years. The number of students who take AP courses has increased and the average scores went up also. We also have an alternative high school campus, offering a specialized program for those students who don’t seem to be using traditional high school to the best of their advantage. We serve students whatever their needs.”

A teacher at Roger Ludlowe Middle School, Jim Ford (note that some names have been changed) says, “Our students get to go on amazing trips.

## EMILY JI

Patience may be a virtue but **EMILY JI** has wasted no time, academically or athletically, at Fairfield Ludlowe High School. The junior has been on her school’s math, debate and varsity swimming teams since she was a freshman. She also attends a Chinese-language school, participated in a summer debate camp at Harvard and took a business and entrepreneur program at Yale. “If you follow your dreams and never give up, anything is possible,” Ji says.

She started her path to success as a freshman. “[In middle

**“MY HOPE IS TO ACCOMPLISH AS MUCH AS I CAN EACH DAY SO THAT I WILL HAVE A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE.”**

school], I was disappointed with the impression, or lack thereof, that I left on my fellow classmates,” she says. Therefore, in high school, she ran for class treasurer. “Running for treasurer was a golden opportunity to face and overcome my social and public speaking fears.” She won.

“Since that day, I have grown more and more comfortable talking to, and in front of, others, taking risks and trying new things.”



They go to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands on a trip that combines a little culture/tourism with work in a local community in the rain forest, where they have helped build schools and install water filters. The music department took the kids to Europe last year, and they played in a music festival in Spain. A lot of our students are excused from academic classes for private music lessons in school. It's great that Fairfield still values that."

### COMMON CORE & EDUCATIONAL TRENDS

"The Common Core is this vast document of skills and standards that most teachers and administrators feel are critical for college readiness, but having the statewide teacher evaluation system tied to it makes it complicated," says Ford. "That's where we get a lot of the bureaucracy, paperwork and data collection, and it's definitely affecting the amount of time students are being screened and taking tests."

The controversial new SBAC (see more at [smarterbalanced.org](http://smarterbalanced.org)) tests have led some parents to refuse that their kids take them—either due to concerns with the tests themselves or with the education reform movement in general. Yet Ford says, "I think they are a better screen than the CMTs." Regarding the opt-out movement, he adds, "I totally understand it; I see it as a bigger



"I PLAN ON DUAL MAJORING IN COMMUNICATIONS AND BUSINESS IN COLLEGE AND I'D REALLY LIKE TO HAVE A WAGS 4 HOPE CLUB, ALSO."

Flashback to first grade: "My teacher had us write down our [yearly] goals for parents' night," recalls **ANNIE BLUMENFELD**, a senior at Fairfield Warde. Young Annie planned to memorize every state's sales tax to get the best deal on a pair of shoes. "My parents came home in tears, laughing. "My peers [wanted] to make new friends or read more. I've always been passionate about business."

Fast-forward to 2012, when her family rescued a shaggy dog named Teddy. He had heartworm disease but fully recovered.

Blumenfeld started Wags 4 Hope, a nonprofit that raises awareness about the condition, supports the medical supply needs of animal shelters and educates about responsible pet ownership. It has raised nearly \$37,000.

She also sold or donated 225 of her dog paintings to the Mayo Clinic, Danbury Animal Welfare Society and Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital, among others. She's also the president of Warde's Autism Speaks, a student representative for Connecticut's PTA Board of Directors and a Yale-New Haven Hospital volunteer.

# ANNIE BLUMENFELD



# DAYTON KIEL

“WITH ALL OF THE CHANGE IN MY LIFE, DANCING HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR ME. IT’S ALWAYS PROVIDED ME WITH STABILITY AND CONSISTENCY. I’M A FLEXIBLE PERSON WHO CAN ADAPT TO WHATEVER COMES MY WAY.”

issue than that test alone. A lot of the teachers appreciated and respected that parents are taking a stand. If legislators aren’t listening, it’s a way to make people pay attention.”

Although Ford applauds the great trips offered to Fairfield students, he notes, “A few years ago, there was a change in policy so now a maximum of two school days can be missed. We have to use more school vacation, and the trips to South America or Africa have become harder to do. The South America trip didn’t happen last year. They are basically telling us, “This isn’t important, so do it on your own time.” Whether tied to the Common Core or not, this is an example of a trend in maximizing classroom time and instructional minutes. A new high school schedule, with eighty-five-minute class blocks and a shorter lunch, will increase the number of instructional minutes in the day this year.

“My oldest son went to a nature classroom for a week and spent four days in D.C.,” comments Jean Gallati. “My youngest won’t do any of that. They changed the eighth-grade trip to Philadelphia, as there wasn’t enough time for D.C. It’s our nation’s capital; there is so much history and so many opportunities for learning there! Anyone who thinks learning can only take place with a textbook or computer in a classroom is crazy.”

While classroom time is prioritized, Molly Farrell is positive about the changes happening there. “The teaching and instructional practices in Fairfield are really cutting edge,” she says.

A senior at Lauralton Hall, **PAYTON KIEL** finished sixteenth in the U17 age group at the most recent World Irish Dancing Championships. She qualified for the World Championships each of the past seven years and qualified for the 2016 competition in Glasgow, Scotland.

“I was seven the first time I visited London,” Kiel recalls. “When we arrived at the hotel, my mom let me order an apple juice. Despite traveling to more than forty countries, the sights and smells of England still always come back with one sip of apple juice.”

She started dancing at four years old, moved to London at eight and returned to Southport at thirteen. A peripatetic life isn’t for all, but this dancer has always been able to dig roots to steady herself. She makes time for the Lauralton’s Latin Club and varsity golf. She is a National Honors Society student, received the Excellence in English award in 2014 and volunteers at the Fairfield Food Pantry.

She also dances to give back—performing in hospitals, rehab facilities and nursing homes, and fundraising for Boston Marathon Bombing victims.



# EMIL FRIIS

Emil Aarestrup Friis lives in a world of music. A graduate of Fairfield Prep and now a Tufts freshman, the violinist has toured Germany, China and Austria with the Greater Bridgeport Youth Orchestra. He was the concertmaster in the principal orchestra as a high school senior and a member of the Connecticut Music Educators Association's regional and state orchestras.

"I can easily spend six hours a day playing music," Friis says.

Fluent in Danish and English and proficient in Spanish and Japanese, he took a mission trip to El Salvador and taught piano to local youths.

"My entire family lives in Denmark so I don't see them very often," he admits. "Nevertheless, I have a strong connection with them. They've shaped me into a person able to easily love others."

Finding his identity wasn't always easy. "I struggled with being happy with myself. I was that nerdy kid who was never able to be cool," he says. "But I decided that I would do what I do for me and not for the satisfaction of my peers. I embraced my passions." Now, he shines in the spotlight.

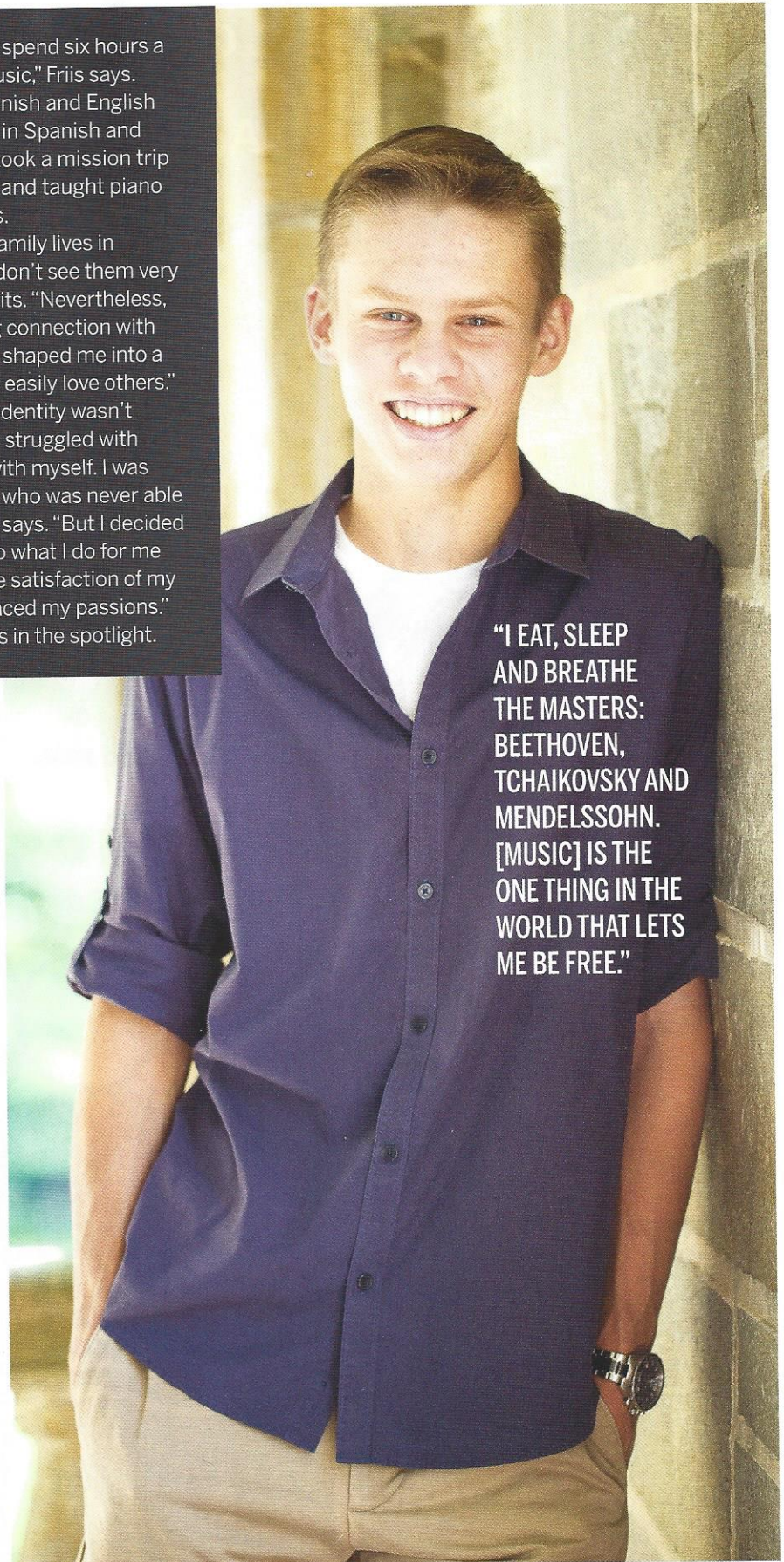
"The people designing the curriculum are keeping us at the top of the game as far as the new initiatives for education. Because the Common Core is so inquiry based, you walk into a classroom and the kids are actively working together on a problem, not working in workbooks."

Farrell helped administer the SBAC tests. "The testing is not so great," she admits. "The process of creating the tests was a little rushed. It was not as vetted and researched as it should have been. We figured the glitches that were there last year would be sorted out this year, but they weren't. It's a work in progress. But I thought there was a lot of hysteria about the tests. It wasn't painful for the kids to go through. I don't think opting out was necessary."

A new law in Connecticut will alleviate pressure on the most disgruntled group: juniors. Dwyer explains, "The state legislature took action to substitute the SAT for the SBACs. I personally hoped this would happen."

While her kids have thrived, Gallati warns, "I feel our education system is on a decline. I look at the whole child. We are failing our kids in terms of out-of-the-box thinking and creativity."

Dwyer reminds us, "Massachusetts and Connecticut led the way on public education over 100 years ago." By watching top-down trends and protecting what makes our schools great and our graduates exceptional, Fairfield can keep on leading. **F**



"I EAT, SLEEP AND BREATHE THE MASTERS: BEETHOVEN, TCHAIKOVSKY AND MENDELSSOHN. [MUSIC] IS THE ONE THING IN THE WORLD THAT LETS ME BE FREE."





# Show Time

The stage is being set—get ready to rock these fall events

**T**he Fairfield Theatre Company raised over \$1 million in donations from more than 500 donors to help build The Warehouse at FTC, a 640-capacity, 8,000-square-foot theater next to StageOne on Sanford Street. In addition to music, it will host fundraising galas, business expos, theater, film and more. The Weight will perform on opening night, **Sept. 24**. Other big names set to take the new stage this season include Blue Oyster Cult (Oct. 15), Average White Band (Oct. 17) and Melvin Seals & JGB (Oct. 22). 70 Sanford St. More at [fairfieldtheatre.org](http://fairfieldtheatre.org).

## ROAD RACE

The **Bigelow Tea Community Challenge** is a must this year, as it's Bigelow Tea's seventieth anniversary. There will be a 5K road race through scenic Southport, a noncompetitive fitness walk, as well as kid fun runs, food and t-shirts. Sun. **Sept. 27**. Wakeman's Club, 385 Center St.; [bigelowtea.com](http://bigelowtea.com)

## GOLF

**Near & Far Aid's 2015 Golf Classic** fills Fairfield for a day of golf that puts the "fun" in fundraising. Check-in is 10 a.m. with a BBQ lunch at 11 a.m., a shotgun start at 12:30 p.m., and a cocktail reception and awards ceremony at 5:30 p.m. Mon. **Sept. 28**. The Country Club of Fairfield, 936 Sasco Hill Rd.; for more info, contact [golfclassic@nearandfaraid.org](mailto:golfclassic@nearandfaraid.org).

## GALA

**Fairfield Museum & History Center's** fall gala coincides with the opening night of its "Handcrafted: Artisans Past & Present" exhibition. Support the museum and learn about Fairfield's handcrafted decorative arts history, from antique furniture to modern rugs. Sat., **Oct. 24**. 370 Beach Rd.; [fairfieldhistory.org](http://fairfieldhistory.org)

## LECTURE

**The Quick Center's** 25th Anniversary Gala dovetails with "An Evening with Charlie Rose," the PBS and *CBS This Morning* host, on Sat., **Sept. 19**. A private dinner with Rose starts at 5 p.m. A 6:30 p.m. cocktail reception precedes the 8 p.m. program. Tickets run from \$75 (access to the program) to \$500 for access to all events, including dinner, cocktails and after-party. 1073 North Benson Rd.; [quickcenter.com](http://quickcenter.com)

## NORMA'S PLEDGE: A MONTH-LONG CELEBRATION OF PINK

**PINK PLEDGE** is a town-wide celebration of the **Norma F. Pfriem Breast Center's** fifteenth anniversary and National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. It kicks off on **Oct. 1** with a Survivors' Stroll, a walk of about a quarter mile, beginning at the Center at

111 Beach Road and finishing at the Sherman Green Gazebo. Survivors will sign the Fairfield Police chief's pink cruiser, which he will drive throughout October. The month will include a number of events; see more at [bridgeporthospital.org/breastcarecenter](http://bridgeporthospital.org/breastcarecenter).

