



TILDEN PREPARATORY SCHOOL  
ALBANY & WALNUT CREEK

# TildenPrep

MAY 2021 | SPRING NEWSLETTER



Photography by Nathan Padgett from Albany

## Thriving and Blooming

It takes a village and then some to raise a child yet alone a teen. Parenting a teen with a learning difference/disability can add one additional layer to the adventures of parenting through different stages of rapidly changing development during the adolescent, teen, and young adult years. Having a dedicated place to discuss the trials, tribulations, and WINS of parenting a student with a learning disability is paramount.

In response to this need, Tilden piloted its first parent support group during the 2020-2021 school year facilitated by Dr. Rebecca Hawley, the Director of Special Education and Admissions and former Tilden parent of a student with dyslexia and auditory processing disorder. The group meets remotely two times a month and is based on a peer-to-peer model of sharing and exploring available resources within Tilden and the Bay Area community at large. As one participant stated, "these groups are so helpful. It is a place to just discuss what has been going on and connect with other parents who get it, live it, and can feel it." As another parent stated, "To have a dedicated space

just to talk about how the week has gone, what is working, what we are still struggling with and hear other people's input is really helpful." The takeaways from the group have been positive and many "Ah Ha" moments on an individual and group level have stemmed from our active discussions.

We are committed to providing the support groups and will continue the series through the summer. The group is free of charge and meets the first and the third Wednesday of each month at 6:30pm. For more information about participation email Dr. Rebecca Hawley [rebeccahawley@tildenprep.com](mailto:rebeccahawley@tildenprep.com)

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## Continue reading to find out more about Tilden!

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## Teacher Feature:

### Megan Church



With a smile and a love of learning she attributes to her mom, Megan Church made her way back to teaching

at Tilden. As a young kid, Megan would see her mother, a science teacher, changing young minds as she spread a love of overcoming challenges and taking in new information. Megan would construct small lesson plans for her babysitters as she saw herself as one day occupying the role of a teacher. Anyone who has met Megan can easily agree that her infectious kindness and genuine positivity are attributes that allow her to thrive in this role as an educator. After a brief time away from Tilden as Megan worked teaching young Marines while serving our country in the Marine Corps, Megan has returned to Tilden but this time to the Albany campus. Not only is the campus different than when she left Tilden, but the entire realm

of education feels different as we navigate this online learning environment. Megan tackles the barriers and challenges of online learning by maintaining her enthusiasm and encouragement with reminders to her students that they are capable and awesome. She strives to connect with them on their interests and use their world to find meaning in the learning they are doing together. In this time of remote instruction, we feel fortunate to have such a bright and warm light that is Megan Church.

***"Her infectious kindness and genuine positivity are attributes that allow her to thrive in this role as an educator."***

**-Devon Combe, Albany  
Associate Head of School**

## Student Spotlight:

### Nina Wolf



She will be the last person to tell you just how hard of a worker she is or how kind her heart is, but her humility

and her graciousness are what makes Nina Wolf such a joy to teach. Surrounded by walls filled with sketches of her own artwork, Nina will laugh and tell you stories of her friends and their adventures before the times of COVID and quarantining. As a young kid, Nina spent a lot of time outdoors as a junior ranger at Tilden Park exploring nature and backpacking all over the East Bay Area. This love of nature has fueled her passion for Marine Biology and her goal to study marine mammals in Hawaii. Having a conversation with Nina will remind any adult about the passion and possibilities that our students are capable of having. Nina is multifaceted with an interest in anime, a passion in ma-

rine biology, a delight in cooking and baking, an eager eye for art, and an overall keen aptitude for taking on new challenges. As a Tilden student, Nina has been able to explore new interests with her teachers in ways that allow her to be stimulated without being stressed. Her passions, work ethic, and infectious kindness are qualities that we are all proud are part of the Tilden Community.

***"Nina is multifaceted with an interest in anime, a passion in marine biology, a delight in cooking and baking, an eager eye for art, and an overall keen aptitude for taking on new challenges."***

**-Devon Combe, Albany  
Associate Head of School**



## Teacher Feature:

### Nelius Gathondu



"I don't assume anything. If I don't know something, I don't know it--and that's okay." Nelius was drawn to science

because she has always been full of questions. And for her, answers have always led to more questions. To Nelius, science makes sense; it is logical and it helps her to find answers... and inevitably, more questions. Nelius Gathondu grew up in Kenya. When she was in the 3rd or 4th grade, she was asked to write an essay in English based on the prompt, "Imagine your life in America". She remembers having a really hard time writing it because she had nothing to base it on and the idea was completely abstract to her. She never would have imagined she would be living in America later on in her life. When she moved to the U.S., the transition was difficult. She attended high school and lived with two younger siblings. Her brother was in middle

school and her sister was in kindergarten. Everything was very different. She started out at Oakland Tech and later transferred to Berkeley High. She found a great community at Berkeley High and spent much of her time in the Student Learning Center, acquiring information on how to navigate the U.S. educational system. As a first-generation non-native college student, she had to figure most things out on her own. She received help from teachers who supported her and encouraged her questions. Nelius earned a Bachelors of Science degree in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology from Mills College. Throughout college she taught, tutored, and worked in labs.

*(continue reading on pg. 7)*

## Student Spotlight:

### Paloma Shelton



As high school comes to a close for senior Paloma Shelton, she can be proud of all that she has accomplished.

After struggling with injuries, Paloma came to Tilden for her senior year with a goal in mind. Paloma's goal after missing most of 10th grade and part of 11th grade was not only to graduate with her class, but to be NCAA Division I eligible so she could ski in college. Being an elite athlete, Paloma has learned how to organize her time and get her work done around her intensive training schedule. When she came to us this fall, she had a plan and a back-up plan. She was realistic yet determined and arrived with a list of all the courses she thought were needed to complete her goals. Her parents were in the initial meeting, but it was clear that she was holding the reins on this and her planning was hers alone. It is this

inner strength that has helped her to realign herself with her goals. Growing up, Paloma spent her summers with her family doing home exchanges so they could experience other cultures and travel. She spent a month in Barcelona and a lot of time in France. She struggled in school when she was young due to bullying which has made her particularly emotionally intelligent. She goes out of her way to make sure that everyone feels included which led her to work as a camp counselor for children on the autism spectrum where she used her tenacious spirit and positive attitude to have a positive impact on others.

*(continue reading on pg. 7)*

# Events | Spirit Week

## Albany

With some inspiration and help from Albany Leadership Club, we decided to mix it up with some fun and spirit! That's right, from February 8th-11th we celebrated Spirit Week and we had a blast! Each day featured a different theme and everyone, students and staff alike, dressed up for classes and had a laugh. Monday was Slip Into The Week, wearing slippers with your favorite pajamas. Tuesday was "Pawfect" Pet Tuesday, you and your favorite animal in action. Wednesday was "Here Comes the Sun", wearing bright colors or tie-dye. Also getting outside, doing something that reminds you of the outdoors was a plus. Thursday was "School Spirit", which meant wearing school colors or Tilden apparel! To commemorate all the fun, check out in the collage of how many screenshots and other silly photos we collected of all of us dressed up and full of spirit!

Here's a sneak peak of our new Tilden Prep apparel, follow this QR code to check out our website for a perfect gift or accessory for our students, faculty, and family!

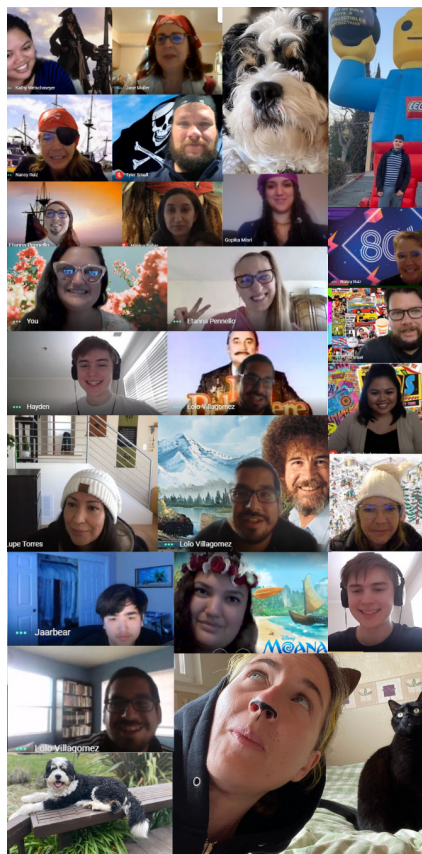


**GET YOUR TILDEN GEAR HERE!**

SCAN THE QR CODE TO CHECK OUT OUR OFFICIAL APPAREL WEBSITE



Albany Spirit Week Collage



Walnut Creek Spirit Week Collage

## Walnut Creek

Walnut Creek Leadership Club hosted Spirit Week from February 8th-11th this year having Meme Monday, Twin Tuesday, Character Wednesday and 80's Thursday that week. They also hosted fun lunchtime games of Kahoot, Tetris, and Skribbl in which students and teachers participated and lots of fun was had by all that came! The lunch time games of Kahoot and Skribbl were especially fun, as students and staff got a chance to virtually interact and compete with each other for prizes and accolades, and show off their artistic skills and knowledge of trivia.

*"Getting together, laughing, and playing games was really a highlight."* - Hayden Pozzi

Leadership is looking forward to having more fun events like this in the months to come so stay tuned!



Heather Feeny dressed up for Character Wednesday at Walnut Creek.



# Events | Winter Showcase

In days of yore, people gathered by the fireside on cold winter nights to exchange stories, music, or poetry, and share their experiences. Some listened, some spoke, but being present and gathering together was the important, warming element. On Wednesday December 16th, 2021 Tilden hosted a Winter Showcase to preserve this ancient tradition of human heritage through a modern interpretation.

Thirteen performers and over thirty spectators gathered together via Zoom to share their warmth and light as human beings and members of a community. With an aim to make each other stronger, happier, and healthier by sharing experiences and skills, Tilden's Winter Showcase was a platform for teachers, students, and staff to entertain and be entertained, to dream and play and participate in the way that was most authentic and comfortable to each participant.

With Walnut Creek's Associate Head of School, Tyler Small acting as host, the Albany & Walnut Creek Tilden Campuses joined together for this unique event where everyone was welcomed for a mix of live and pre-recorded contributions. Proud parents, students, staff, and teachers

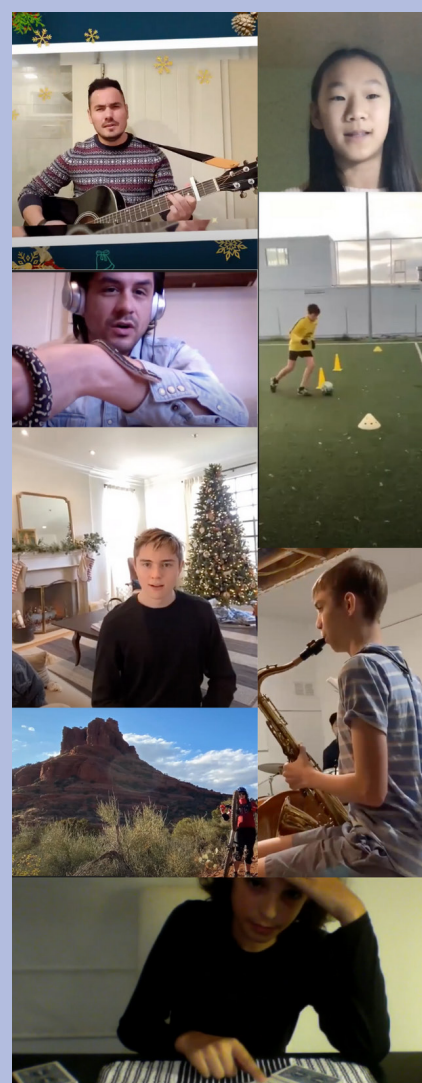
contributed the warm glow of their attention and rejoiced at seeing faces and hearing voices that they had been missing since the transition to remote learning went into effect.

Creativity and humor were in abundant supply as Jane Muller & Etanna Pennello kicked things off with a comedic sketch told through the lens of Google Meet. Musical performances peppered the entire showcase with contributions from Hayden Pozzi, Brandon Beck, Cris Vera, Yoshi Fenton, and Walter Serwin's Jazz band. Plato said, "Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything." It certainly served this purpose during Tilden's Winter Showcase as people bobbed, grooved, and even wept with music leading the way.

Athletic demonstrations from Keegan Ruiz and Brian Mandle proved that getting out and moving about is the best medicine with an exposition of soccer skills and a Sedona mountain biking excursion respectively. Abigail Kim shared a heart wrenching original poem and Joan Rickard's work of art, "Beaded Diamond" added enticing variety. Michael Mendoza's beautiful pet snake threatened to steal the show with her brilliant scales

and hypnotic eyes while Darien Ruiz astounded the audience with his magic illusions.

Utilizing slides, videos, and Zoom a virtual stage was set, a community hearth kindled. A school is not a building. The people are the school and the spirit in which they gather is the foundation of their community. In the heart of a rather dark winter, the Tilden family kept the fires of creativity, kinship, and community strong and bright.



# Tilden at Home

## Tilden at Home

Tilden at home is a project to bring us together as a community by sharing a snapshot of our school lives at home. What we're eating for our lunches, which pet watches over us, where we're learning, and what we're working on. In other words, we are sharing a peek into everything special and unique about each of our Tilden's at Home. Here is a brief look into our recent submissions!



Darien Ruiz, Walnut Creek student



Jeff Mitchell, Albany teacher

## Anti-Asian Hate is a Virus

(Essay By: Aebby Lee and Painting By: Abigail Kim)



January 28, 2021, you step out of your home like any other day for your morning walk. Even through a pandemic, you are adamant about exercising to maintain your health, even recently getting vaccinated for the virus. Suddenly a man approaches you. He shoves you to the ground, and you are knocked unconscious, unable to get up. You are alone and terrified, never to wake up and see your family again, and die soon thereafter. Your daughter weeps for you, lamenting that her father has been stolen from her. Meanwhile, the man who murdered you pleads "not guilty" in court. This nightmare was the reality for Vicha Ratanapakdee, an 84-year-old Thai immigrant. But why do so many not know his name? Why have people chosen to forget this blatant and fatal act of racism? Why is there no justice for Vicha? Over the past few years in the United States, hate crimes targeting Asians have skyrocketed, more than doubling from 2015 to 2018 alone (National Crime Victimization Survey). Recently, the exponential increase in these numbers is due to the coronavirus in addition to the regular racism Asians in America face on a daily basis. Asians, and more specifically Chinese individuals, are used as a scapegoat and blamed for all of the death and suffering the virus has caused all over the world. Use of the terms

"Kung flu" and "Chinese Virus" only worsen the racism- especially when some of the most important political figures in the country use them regularly and try to normalize them. Being Asian during the pandemic, even if one is Asian-American and has never even been to their home country, draws a target on one's back. Sadly, Vicha represents only one of the thousands of attacks Asians are experiencing all across the world. An anonymous person in Thousand Oaks, California reported to Stop AAPI Hate that: "A white woman in an SUV mounted the curb to try and run over one of my family members, who was just out taking a walk for exercise." Asians have experienced racism, xenophobia, and discrimination for centuries like many other minority groups, however the introduction of a global pandemic has only worsened the suffering. Being Asian has caused many to be subject to being shouted at, called racial slurs, robbed, slashed, spit on, and harassed. It has even been a death sentence for some. This cannot be swept under the rug or invalidated any longer! Asians are not a threat nor will they be defenseless, silent, and alone when faced with racial injustices. Anti-Asian hatred and violence is a vicious pandemic. Asians are not a virus.



# Tilden Thrives Together

## Seymour Student Award



Congratulations to Walnut Creek senior, Brandon Beck! Brandon was one of the 2021 Central Coast Region finalists for the prestigious Seymour Award. As such, Brandon received \$2,000 scholarship from the California Scholarship Federation. The Seymour Award is regarded as one of the highest scholastic honors given to high school students in the state of California. To qualify for this award, not only did Brandon have to have outstanding grades, he had to show he was a leader in community service.

## Discussions in Education

During Covid-19 the ability to bring people together in creative ways has been extremely valuable. Through our Zoom Conversations in Education series, we have been able to do this by inviting educational expert to speak on topics such as: supporting executive functioning skills during COVID-19, navigating the IEP/504 process, best practices for assessing dyslexia, parental burnout, communication with teens, and more. The presentations and the discussions that have followed have been both enriching and informative. Moreover, it has allowed Tilden to maintain and create new community partnerships of great value. We will continue this series through summer and the 2021-2022 academic school year.

## Fun Fact: Tilden & Sports



In late 2017, Tilden's Director of Operations and Curriculum, Laura Schreck, along with former teacher Eric Sickles went on the record with their article "Offensive Explosion: Trends in Hitting Production in Major League Baseball." It was ultimately published by the Society for American Baseball Research in 2018 and was one of the earliest works on the topic of the changes players were noticing in the baseball. It showed the statistically significant difference supporting what players had felt and experienced starting in late 2015; they found more home runs and hits than could be explained by chance alone. Though the Commissioner denied making any alteration to the ball, prior to this season, MLB conducted its own investigation and found that their data confirmed the suggestions that the ball had changed. In consequence, for the 2021 season, measures have been taken to soften the baseball to restore it; we applaud the research contributions of Tilden staff to this process. Both Laura and Eric graduated from the University of San Francisco Sport Management Masters Program and interned with the San Francisco Giants; they won a World Series while Laura was there.

## Nelius Gathondu

*(continued from on pg. 3)*

One of the things Neli enjoys most about teaching at Tilden is how she meets with a different student each class period. She enjoys adjusting and alternating her teaching style for each student, much like finding answers to questions. Outside of Tilden, Nelius enjoys yoga and meditation. She discovered yoga a few years ago and it gave her a whole new perspective on herself and how she can be in charge of her emotions and mind. She is learning to see the trajectory of how such awareness can increase happiness and stop negative thinking. Nelius still plans to move into the medical field and pursue a career in nursing. Whatever her future holds, Nelius has made a difference in so many students' lives and is a wonderful part of the Tilden teaching staff.

## Paloma Shelton

*(continued from on pg. 3)*

Paloma's favorite subject in school has always been math because it came easily, but this year she has developed an interest in writing due to her connection with her English teacher. Always an avid reader, she has discovered a newfound love for writing. Apart from ski racing, school, and one of the 50 flavors of Spindrift that she is usually sipping, Paloma enjoys doing art, painting, embroidering, and being outside with her dogs. When asked about future plans, Paloma says that's a big question mark! She is leaving it open ended so she can discover what she loves in college. Next year Paloma will attend the Honors college at the University of Maine at Farmington with a scholarship to ski for their USCSA ski team and major in English. Way to go Paloma!

# TildenPrep | Alumni

## Alumnus Feature: Ma'ayan Godner-Abravanel



Ma'ayan Godner-Abravanel is a 2015 graduate from Tilden's Albany campus where he particularly enjoyed his classes in history and English. Ma'ayan pursued his passion and talent for theatre by attending California Institute of the Arts for two years. During his first year, as all beginning theater students do, Ma'ayan participated in the technical and production components. His studies in class included workshopping *Brick* from Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In his second year, he was able to expand his performance experience through studies in Shakespeare where he was most enthusiastic about his work as Bottom and Marc

Antony; additionally, he was cast in several roles in a production of *Peer Gynt*. He found the complete approach to how to prepare for your craft to be invaluable in building his skill sets as well contributing to his personal growth.

After his time at CalArts, Ma'ayan got to experience outdoors education through participating in a course through the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). He canoed, hiked, and climbed his way through the wilderness of Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming. He even got certified as a Wilderness First Responder. More importantly for Ma'ayan, this gave him the opportunity to self-reflect and grow personally. He followed this up with volunteering to support the Winter Program of Camp It Up, the first LGBTQ+ families and allies camp which he had attended with his family as a child.

Ma'ayan began to work as a fundraiser and community organizer for Forests Forever where he is proud to have worked for more than three years. Founded in 1989, Forests Forever is the only organization to focus exclusively on preserving California forests, including sponsoring federal legislation efforts to further this cause. Ma'ayan's passion for the California environment and

preservation is clear; he can speak eloquently about their campaigns to continue to prevent logging in Jackson Forest and recently having saved 430 acres of oak forest in the Richmond Hills. He is most proud of their current efforts with a campaign for the Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act which would create a vast, continent-spanning network of wild-ways connecting pre-existing wild spaces in order to once again allow for the natural migration patterns of myriad species whose gene pools are steadily weakening due to the human-caused fragmentation of wilderness. He brings his talents as a skilled and empathetic communicator to supporting these initiatives and his knowledge is impressive.

Though it has been a challenge with the pandemic, he has continued to pursue acting through participation with an improvisation group. He lives not far from Tilden with his girlfriend and their dog; he has remained connected to other Tilden graduates. We could not be more proud of Ma'ayan not only for his contributions of his talents to bettering his community, but also his exceptional personal growth and are excited to learn what he will do next.

## Upcoming Events:



Scan this QR code to  
access the latest about  
our Tilden events!

**Social Justice Week:** Monday-Thursday, February 8-11, 2021  
**World Creativity & Innovation Day:** Wednesday, April 21, 2021  
**Teacher Appreciation Day:** Tuesday, May 4, 2021  
**Graduation Ceremony:** Thursday, June 3, 2021  
**Summer School:** June 7-August 6, 2021  
**First Day of Fall 2021:** Wednesday, August 11, 2021



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Scan our QR code to  
learn more and register  
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