Swim team races towards states

BY SARA CREATO

It’s not often you see a coach smiling after jumping into a pool fully clothed, but that’s exactly what head coach Jen Passafiume did after the MVYHS boys swim team won the Cape and Islands Conference Championship last week. The victory was significant because many swimmers broke school records and because it was the first time the Vineyard team had beaten Nantucket since the inception of the program ten years ago.

The 13-member team lost to Nantucket in their dual meet earlier in the season, but since the inception of the team had beaten Nantucket the first time the Vineyard cords and because it was Conference Championship Passafiume did after the exactly what head coach Jenely clothed, but that’s exciting. The win was the highlight of his season. “To come back and smoke everyone for the first time ever was pretty awesome,” he said.

Junior co-captain Christian Flanders, who broke the school record for the 50-yard freestyle and competed on the 200-yard relay team, was happy yet exhausted. “[The relay] was right after I got the [record] for the 50-yard freestyle. I was very tired, and I got out of the water and wanted to throw up and take a shower.”

Following their victory in the conference championship, Ruairi and Christian competed in the South Sectional Championship, where Ruairi improved upon his previous 200-yard record and, in doing so, became the first MVYHS swimmer ever to place in the top eight. Ruairi and Christian will now join junior Nathan Cuthbert and sophomore Emmett Silva for the 200-yard relay in the state meet on February 27 at Boston University.

Head coach Jen Passafiume attributes the program’s success to more accessible practice opportunities for swimmers prior to high school. “The key to a really strong high school program is some sort of feeder program to get more kids swimming earlier,” she said, noting the growth of the Mako Swim Club, the YMCA’s year-round competitive swim team for kids ages 6-18.

Assistant and former MVYHS head swim coach Jonathan Chattinover has taken on the role as the team’s strategist in competition this year. “You want to give the kids a goal, something that really is achievable. I’m not one for laying out goals that just aren’t achievable.”

Unlike most MVYHS sports teams, the swim program recruits from the middle schools. Tisbury School eighth-grader Ronan Mullin won his heat in the 100-yard butterfly at states.

“The relay was right after an individual I was pretty awe smoke everyone for the first time ever was pretty awesome,” he said.

Swim team co-captain Ruairi Mullin dives makes a splash during practice for the State Championship.

BY HARDY EVILLE

Last week, the senior class gathered in the Performing Arts Center to hear local NAACP President Arthur Hardy-Doubleday speak about the importance of civic involvement, youth involvement in civil rights, and the ways that civil rights issues intersect with other environmental and social justice movements. During his visit, Mr. Doubleday also suggested that students could channel their interest in civil rights into action by helping to reestablish a local NAACP Youth Council.

Mr. Hardy-Doubleday’s visit falls during Black History Month, when the civics class is just wrapping up a unit on civil rights. History teacher Joel Gravers, a childhood friend of Mr. Hardy-Doubleday, invited him to speak about the significance of the NAACP and what its presence looks like on Martha’s Vineyard.

One of the biggest issues facing the organization, both nationally and locally, is age ming and a need to establish strong connections with younger generations. “In order for the NAACP to be relevant, we need to have younger people telling us what the problems are,” Mr. Hardy-Doubleday said.

To address that challenge, Mr. Hardy-Doubleday’s main goal since becoming president of the NAACP has been to reestablish a Youth Council, much like the one he was a part of as a kid. “I think I became a member when I was six or seven years old,” he said. Back then, the Youth Council consisted of around 25 members who would meet a couple of times each month at Senator Edward Brooke’s house in Oak Bluffs. The Youth Council is no longer as active, but as it once was and is currently consists mostly of parents rather than young people. “With everything that’s going on in our country, the only way that the NAACP is going to be able to continue working on civil rights issues is if we have younger members who take on leadership roles,” he said.

During the talk, students raised issues like police profiling outside of school, as well as examples of discrimination within the school. “What I’d really like to do is use the Youth Council as a means of executing a strategy on how to solve some of those issues,” he said, suggesting the Youth Council as a viable way to create lasting, policy-based changes that involve all stakeholders. “I want to go beyond protesting in the streets,” he said. “If students have a problem with the Tisbury policy, let’s invite the chief and sit down with him. Let’s talk about these issues and come up with a solution to how to avoid that.”

Mr. Hardy-Doubleday said it was important to him to include a call to action in his presentation to inspire students to join the council. “I want the adults to take a backseat when it comes to the students ad- dressing issues for themselves,” he said. “The older you get, the harder it is to stand up to the power structure because you become more and more a part of it.”

He said that starting a dialogue with students has been difficult, and he hopes to get beyond that by giving students autonomy to take on issues through the Youth Council. In order to reestablish the Youth Council, a core group of 25 students must submit an application to the national NAACP in order to be chartered as a local youth branch.

The students would have a functioning executive committee, be chartered by the national office, have their own officers, have their own budget, and really take on their own issues, he said.

The NAACP also works on environmental issues, women’s issues, and LGBTQ issues through various committees. “There’s a lot of people of all races that look at the world as a black-white paradigm. The only thing they see is that it’s a race issue. They don’t see gender. They don’t see sexuality. They don’t see class.”

Mr. Hardy-Doubleday said, “Any issue that affects our quality of life and that a member brings up, we’re going to work on.”

The NAACP is also hosting a writing contest for Black History Month. Details for the writing contest, which asks: “What does Black History mean to you?” are available on their Facebook and Instagram pages.