Bathroom upgrades address period poverty

BY SARA CREATO

The women’s bathrooms of the Martha’s Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) feature a new installation: menstrual product dispensers. These dispensers have been placed throughout the school in an effort to increase accessibility to menstrual products and reduce the impact of period poverty within the school community. Period poverty is defined as a lack of accessibility to feminine hygiene products, sanitation facilities, and information about menstrual health. Globally, approximately 500 million women lack access to feminine hygiene products.

At the beginning of the school year, special projects and pathways coordinator Sam Hart was approached by members of the school community about the idea of tampon dispensers. Over the holiday break, six dispensers were placed in bathrooms around the school. Essentially, we didn’t want to see students who are in class in the 300 wing have to walk all the way down to the nurse’s office to get a tampon when they could just go across the hall and get one,” he said. “We wanted to make accessibility a priority.”

However, keeping up with the demand proved to be challenging. “At first, I did my best to stock them, but [the dispensers] went empty. I had students come up to me and say ‘[the dispensers] aren’t full at all, and they’re never around anymore. I got ahold of the nurses, and they took the dispensers out. We had tampon dispensers, but they were never full. There aren’t a lot of schools that are constantly refilling dispensers,” and actually thinking about women’s reproductive systems and how to help,” she said. Ms. Kurtz’ students have also been very supportive of the increasing Access to Menstrual Products Bill. The bill, which is currently pending approval from the Massachusetts State House of Representatives, would provide all public schools, homeless shelters, and prisons with free hygiene products on a monthly basis. “[Women] shouldn’t have to pay money for something that they can’t control,” said Millie. Providing feminine hygiene products free of charge may seem like a small change, but it is a connected to a wider movement around supporting women’s health on-island. Friends of Family Planning, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide affordable reproductive health care to all members of the Vineyard Community, has been involved with educating students about sexual and reproductive health for years via intermittent tabling events. They also provide free tampons in their Family Planning Clinic as part of a partnership with Cronig’s Market.

Friends of Family Planning executive board president Terre Young once collaborated with a business class to create advertisements for the clinic. “There was one young woman and the rest [of the students] were all young men. I said something about how in some states, [feminine hygiene products] are taxed as a luxury. And she sat up and said, ‘It’s not a luxury.’”

Ms. Kurtz is supportive of the high school’s initiative. “I know what it’s like to not be able to get tampons. I remember being young and having to go home and miss school,” she said. “Any girl will tell you, [feminine hygiene products] aren’t cheap, and they’re never around when you need one.”

Sam Fetters maps the future

BY THEO FAIRCHILD-COPPOLIETTI AND HARDY EVILLE

I inside a spiral notebook with a dragon on the cover lies a complex and passionate college of geopolitics, futurism, and storytelling. Its working title is “Rising Dragon,” and Sam traces his interest in geopolitics, futurism, and his own knowledge of geopolitical and historical tics and his own knowledge of geopolitical and historical developments and making evidence-based predictions about the future of those nations. Last Wednesday was Alliance Day, where students were tasked with strategically forming the biggest alliance they could based on shared ideals between countries. Students also started working on their “artifacts” — projects encapsulating their vision for some aspect of the future, such as food or music. “I want people to have fun,” Sam said. “We’re seniors, we have three to four months left until we’re out the doors, and we should be able to have an experience that we can really enjoy, and also learn a little bit about history in the process.”

Sam is focused on finishing and digitizing “Rising Dragon” by the end of the school year. “There’s obviously the quote, ‘Those who don’t learn from the past are doomed to repeat it,’ but I think in the end, that’s not exactly true,” he said. Alluding to another quote, he added, “I don’t think history repeats. I think it rhymes.”