



The High School View

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Sustainable gifting requires creativity

BY SARA CREATO

With Christmas just days away, many people are purchasing and wrapping presents. Although this heightened consumption can make living sustainably more challenging, students at Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) are exploring simple ways to mitigate the environmental impacts associated with holiday shopping.

In Corinne Kurtz' "Intro to Women's Studies" course, students made plant-based holiday gifts, including lotions, lip balms, facial mists, candles, and dream pillows (cloth bundles of dried herbs used for sleep aromatherapy) with help from Island Grown Initiative school educator Nia Dubon-Robinson.



Students use herbs and recycled cloth to create "dream pillows."

JULIA SAYRE

These activities weren't only motivated by sustainability, they were also a way to celebrate the agricultural aspects of Yule and the history of women and plants.

For Josey Kirkland, Felix Neck Wildlife Sanctuary's education manager for the Islands, her move to Martha's

Vineyard from Boston nine years ago led her to consume less, which she says is in part due to the community of thrifters she found here and the emphasis on buying local. "I was finding myself in the Boston area just shopping as something to do," she said. "I've definitely pared down

my life living here on the Vineyard. I've stopped a lot of my mindless consumerism, and that's something I've seen with a lot of folks here."

Protect Your Environment (PYE) club leader and senior Alison Custer consistently shops secondhand.

"I'm super-passionate about human rights, especially in the clothing industry. So I shop only secondhand now. I try my best not to shop at any industries that treat their workers poorly," she said.

Although Alison focuses primarily on the treatment of workers, she also takes a company's environmental impact into account when deciding whether to shop from them. "I try to do my research on the brands that I'm getting my gifts from, because I want to make sure they come from an ethical company and the

impact doesn't [harm] the environment," she said.

Senior Ed Cherry believes that shopping secondhand should be normalized for holiday gifting. "One man's garbage is another man's treasure," he said. "If my grandmother wanted a vase and that vase was secondhand, I don't see why that would be any different from buying it brand-new."

For environmentally friendly Christmas presents, Kirkland had some DIY suggestions. "[My partner and I] are giving out fresh herbs this year for Christmas. There's a whole thread of sustainability that goes along there, because of growing food in our backyard, where we know where these herbs came from," she said.

She also recommends fire cider: apple cider vinegar steeped with ingredients such as oranges, lemons, herbs, peppers, onion, garlic, and spices. "It's supposed to be a

potent elixir for immunity, which feels like a good gift to be giving out amidst the pandemic that we're in," she said. Kirkland is also packaging the fire cider in recycled glass jars.

Ed feels that sustainability is especially important during the Christmas season. To incorporate more sustainable practices into their holiday, his family decided to reuse their gift bags. "The plastic gift wrap is really harmful. It's unfortunate that so much of it is wasted for 10 seconds of happiness when you're opening it," he said.

Ultimately, Alison feels that sustainability shouldn't be about perfection. "For me, [sustainability] is about learning and everybody doing a little bit. If everybody was trying to be perfect, that wouldn't be sustainable, and a lot of people would get burned out. It's about learning and trying your best." **HSV**

Hut, hut, checkmate!

BY HARDY EVILLE

It's lunchtime at Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS), and nearly 200 students stream from their classrooms to the cafeteria before hitting an obstacle: P.E. teacher T.J. Reap occupies a table in the middle of the hallway, staring intently at the chessboard in front of him. He is deep in thought, oblivious to the traffic jam forming around him. Then he's up, apologizing as the flow of students bustles past. But a few students stop to join him.

"There's a simple field of dreams concept," he said. "You put the chess boards out there, and you get people playing."

His strategy appears to be working. This year Coach Reap is the new chess coach, and in the few months he's been at MVRHS, he has re-

vitalized the Chess Club. The club meets four days a week, and regularly has almost 30 students in attendance, many of whom look a lot more muscular than your average chess player.

Coach Reap is also an assistant varsity football coach.

"It's the same game, football and chess. You've got to put body on body, and account for the point of attack," he said. "Here's the difference between chess and football. As far as coaching in football, you can make your bishop better than the other bishop by developing them in the weight room."

Coach Reap arrived on the Island this summer to teach at MVRHS and work as a coach for the high school football team. He has previously coached football at schools across the U.S. and in Italy, Norway, and Austria.

In August, he was visiting

the Vineyard Haven library when he ran into retired MVRHS English teacher Bill McCarthy. Mr. McCarthy previously oversaw the Chess Club, and encouraged Coach Reap to bring it back.

To kick-start the club, he issued a challenge. "I offered a financial incentive for kids who can play to come out of the woodwork," he said. "A \$100 gift card to the first person who could beat me."

Many tried, many failed. Eventually, Coach Reap was beaten by junior Nikola Nikolav, who now holds the No. 1 rank on the chess team. "Then for a few weeks, I offered a Nikola challenge: if anyone could beat him, I would give them a \$25 gift card to somewhere on the Island. But nobody did."

Coach Reap feels it is a crucial time to revive Chess Club. "It's a perfect storm," he said. "You've got the [Netflix show] 'The Queen's Gambit,' which has made chess popular for a lot of people, especially girls, and chess.com, which

allows students to play remotely all the time."

He also cited movies like "Queen of Katwe," "Critical Thinking," and "Pawn Sacrifice" for helping to popularize chess.

Coach Reap used the football season as an opportunity to introduce players to the game. "I set up chess boards on the ferry rides over, and next thing you know, all the kids on the football team are taking turns sitting at the board," he said. "Now they have chess.com on their phones and computers."

Once some students began to attend club gatherings, others became interested. The club's numbers swelled. In Room 322, where Chess Club meets, Coach Reap puts on music, which today is a mix of Billy Squier, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, and Mariah Carey Christmas songs. The overall mood is serious, however. "We are making sure Room 322 has not turned into just a place to socialize. Everybody down here is playing



Coach Reap has ignited a chess movement at MVRHS.

HARDY EVILLE

chess, either on a board or on a computer," he says.

Coach Reap stops talking and focuses on the match in front of him. He explains that though his opponent has more pieces, he has the advantage because he has more pawns, and those are valuable in the endgame.

"I think chess should be a mandatory part of the curriculum," Coach Reap says. "It teaches critical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving. There's so much strategy to it.

I think it can transform kids' lives. We've got some students here who may be really intelligent, but they, for whatever reason, don't thrive in school."

In Chess Club, however, they do thrive. According to Coach Reap, chess doesn't discriminate. "Chess is an equalizer," he says. "This pawn is as good as any other. Nobody can get an advantage over you."

And with that he moves his bishop across the board. Checkmate. **HSV**

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