

VP Eagle Eye



Variety Show

Creativity Takes the Stage



Performers and emcees rehearse for the 2026 VP Variety Show.

By Hopie Guglielmo '26

The Variety Show is coming soon. The VP Variety Show is where kids can show off their talents. It will happen on March 26, 2026, in the school auditorium.

There will be two shows — one during the day for students, and one at night (in full costume) for family and friends. The people involved include

third, fourth and fifth graders. Stage crew is only for fifth grade classes. Wait! We can't forget about the emcees — fifth graders who had to try out and write their own scripts.

The VP Variety Show has been around for 20 years, according to Principal Dr. Prendergast, and is important to our school and community.

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VP Nurse Comes Full Circle



By Elowyn Blair '27

Did you know that our school nurse, Nurse Dave, has a special connection to VP? While it's true this is his first full year working at Veterans Park Elementary School, it's not his first time walking these halls.

From 1971 to 1975, Nurse Dave attended VP until he was reassigned to Branchville Elementary School when the school zoning was changed. "I

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VP DEBATES

Should Schools Have Class Pets?

By Serena Braccia '26

Students and teachers at VP shared their thoughts about class pets. A few think it's a good idea, but some have concerns.

Third grade teacher Mrs. Craig said, "I love the idea of class pets because it builds responsibility, empathy and requires cooperation."

Emerson Piacente, a VP fifth grader, said, "I think schools should have a class pet because they are fun — just don't make them boring, like ants. Something like a hypoallergenic, fun — not boring — cute dog."

Patrick Gernert, also a fifth grader, said, "I think fish can be in classrooms, but only if it's a good environment."

Third grader Caroline Liberti thinks that schools should not have class

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VP 'Survives' Author Visit

By Nora Conlon '28

Lauren Tarshis, the author of the *I Survived* book series, visited Veterans Park on February 9, 2026. She came to speak with students and inspire them to write books.

During the assembly, the author talked about her childhood and how she became a writer. Many students liked when she talked about how she did not read a book until she was fourteen!

Dr. Sheri Prendergast, the principal of Veterans Park, said it was her favorite author visit and how author visits inspire children to want to write books.

Each student was given an *I Survived* book signed by the author. Serena Braccia, a fifth grader, said, "It was really cool getting a book signed by the author."

Many students said the author visit helped them feel excited about becoming an author themselves one day. Third graders Adelyn Groarke, William Ramos, and Leighton Grusauskas came up with an idea to write an *I Survived* book together called "We Survived" because they were inspired by the author's book series. The first book will be about surviving the COVID pandemic.

Students also learned that Tarshis is writing a new book, and many can't wait to read it!

Creature Comforts Therapy Dogs Lend a Paw in Town

By Caitlyn O'Connor '27

Therapy dogs visit schools, hospitals and elder care facilities. They help people feel calm or supported. Holly is a Golden Retriever who got a special certification to be a therapy dog from the Ridgefield Operation for Animal Rescue (ROAR) because she's very calm and friendly and loves people. Holly loves children and visiting schools in Ridgefield.

One time at Barlow Mountain, "there was a kid with a lot of anxiety. He had a hard time reading aloud and he started reading to Holly and lost his fear of reading to people," said Holly's handler, Cristina Rideiro.

Recently, Holly also went to a Special Education room where there was a kid doing math. He was doing something that was usually very difficult for him, but with Holly



ROAR therapy dog Holly and her handler, Cristina Rideiro, comfort and support local residents.

he was happy and eager to do problem after problem.

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VP Renovations

No More Creaking Seats!

By Demetri Efremides '28

Renovations that began in the summer of 2025 are still taking place at Veterans Park Elementary School. Originally designed by Willis Mills in the modernist style, some of the renovations include brand new auditorium curtains, a new lighting system, and finally, the replacement of the creaking seats! Students can now enjoy a more safe and fun experience with more comfort as the splinters will now be gone. Many students hope that the seats will also have cushions.

Thanks to the installation of a theatre-style curtain and better lighting system, students can now

have the variety show and plays in the auditorium with greater confidence.

Additionally, a new mural has been added to VP's cafeteria adorned with the school colors, boosting school spirit at lunchtime. (See photo on Page 6)

If you're wondering how all this was started and paid for, the town of Ridgefield approved the project and funded the renovations. Outside contractors were hired to complete the two-year project that will cost around \$395,000, per various internet outlets such as the *Darien Times* and *CT Insider*.

VP students look forward to the next variety show with this newly improved experience!

Freebie Fridays Change Things Up

By Caroline Liberti '28

Did you know that fifth graders can now sit with whoever they want on Fridays at lunch? This is known as Freebie Friday.

For most grades, students have to sit with their own class at lunch. This is how lunch has been for a long time. Freebie Fridays are new and only apply to fifth graders on Fridays. On Monday through Thursday, they sit with their own class.

"I like the idea of Freebie Fridays because it builds relationships and it allows kids to practice conversation," said third grade teacher Mrs. Craig.

Fifth grader Serena Braccia agrees. "I think that Freebie Fridays are a great idea," she said, "because it teaches kids to socialize with the kids in the other class, and because it's just fun!"

However, fourth grader Elowyn Blair has a different opinion. "I think it is very fun," she said, "but it can also cause drama if the wrong kid sits with another kid."

At the school where fifth grade teacher Mrs. JP used to teach, there were some problems with students sitting with other classes. To be proactive, she and her students

talked about how to make sure everyone is included and other ways to make sure it was successful. She said it seems to be going well so far. "This group of fifth graders is very respectful and leads with kindness and consideration," she said. "They have shown that they are definitely ready for the privilege."

While there are pros and cons to Freebie Fridays, one thing is sure: Freebie Fridays prepare fifth graders for middle school because when they get there, they will sit with anyone in their grade every day.

Fourth Graders Help Keep VP 'Green'

By Edward Cockerill '27

Illustration by Ian Xu '27

The recycling helpers are fourth graders. They help recycle every Thursday and Friday. Students volunteer to be recycling helpers and their teacher assigns them some classrooms to help recycle. This program started three years ago.

The volunteers go to the classrooms they are assigned to and take their recycling from their small bins. They bring them to one of the three big recycling bins. These are near the playground door/Mr. Lovelace's room, the exit door near the music room, and the door to the kindergarten playground. The reason they do this is so the small bins don't overflow, and to check that there is no garbage in the recycling bins that doesn't belong.

Mr. Faloon is one of the fourth grade teachers whose class participates. He said, "Recycling is important because we are trying to reduce waste here at VP." He also said that Connecticut doesn't have enough landfills for all of the garbage. Too much garbage in



landfills pollutes the earth. By recycling, some items can be reused in new products instead of being thrown away. Mr. Faloon also shares that we can help the environment by

composting and eating your whole lunch.

Many custodians are happy that students are helping out.

Variety:

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Before the graduating fifth graders perform an act all together for their last year at VP, the audience is treated to an original performance by the teachers and other staff. These acts make the show extra special. The audience is in for a fun treat! They will see the results of everyone's hard work and may clap, laugh, and even shed a few tears as students show off their skills and talents.

Fourth grader Elowyn Blair shared that she joined the show last year because she thought it would be fun. Further, she said that she used to have stage fright and now she doesn't. Blair is back for her second year, dancing with her good friend Emery Messina.

Producer Sandy Griffin has been doing the Variety Show for five years. Mrs. Griffin shared that "kids develop confidence and become comfortable speaking or performing in front of a large audience." She added, "I believe it's a valuable skill to start from a young age. It's also wonderful to see them support each other."

This is Mrs. Griffin's last year because her youngest child, Reese, is graduating and a new parent will take over.

Some of the acts include: dancing, singing, music, comedy, gymnastics and more.

A lot also goes on behind the scenes, with stage crew and parent volunteers. There are props to move on and off the stage, curtains to open and close, and stage lights and a spotlight to support the acts and give the audience an event to remember.

Now remember to save the date for March 26th at 7pm to see all of the acts. The kids and teachers have worked hard to prepare a beautiful show. See you there!

Young Inventors Shine



Participants in the 2026 VP Invention Convention presented their projects on Thursday, March 5. Fifth grade students Reese Griffin and Madeleine Elliott will present their winning invention, the SaniShear, at the State Finals at UCONN in early May. The next VP Invention Convention, open to third, fourth, and fifth graders, will begin meeting in December 2026.



Clockwise from above: Third graders perform a hoverboard act; fifth graders rehearse their group act; Sandy Griffin, producer, helps a student host before rehearsal.



Nurse:

Continued from Page 1

remember the feelings I had as a new student, walking the long hallways to the auditorium, library, art room and cafeteria," he said. "My kindergarten classroom was where the art room is today. Unfortunately, I never got to graduate to the upper class hallway of fourth and fifth grade."

Before becoming a school nurse, Nurse Dave worked as a firefighter and paramedic, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), and an ER nurse. He has been a nurse for 12 years.

When asked about the best part of being the school nurse, he said, "I really like to help people. My VP student friends

are no exception. I get satisfaction when I can help a friend feel better, whether from sustaining an injury, helping them to feel better from minor ailments or identifying when a student may not be feeling well enough to stay in school."

He added that he really likes the size of VP. "The smaller population has provided me the opportunity to focus my care to the individual needs of my student friends," he said.

From student to school nurse, it is clear that Nurse Dave really enjoys being part of the VP community.

"The culture at VP is different from any other school that I have worked at," he said. "The students and staff are amazing people, always friendly, polite and supportive. For these reasons, I feel like I have found a home at VP Elementary.



Third grade class pets Mooska (left) and Samantha spend their weekdays at VP and go on adventures every weekend.

(Photo by Caroline Liberti)

Therapy:

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Vlad Myrutskyi, VP graduate who is at Scotts Ridge this year, said, "With a therapy dog, they make me feel good and lift my spirits up." He also said, "They help in many ways and they are a great addition to academics."

Although therapy dogs can be helpful, some students are allergic to dogs or are afraid of them. Rideiro said that at the schools where Holly works, parents are told ahead of time that she will be coming and can let the school know if their child

would like to participate. When Holly comes, she usually sees one kid at a time in the hallway so classroom activities can continue and so that each child can get some special one-on-one time with her.

VP Principal Dr. Prendergast said that Lisa Frese from Scotts Ridge told her it's a great program and that "it's helpful for going through tough times."

A good therapy dog program can help students overcome their fears because dogs don't care if it's hard for you to read certain words or if you get every math problem right. They just like you for you (and maybe a good belly rub).

Pets:

Continued from Page 1

pets because of allergies and because they can be distracting. Kids have allergies and if they are allergic to any pets inside the classroom then they are not in a healthy, safe environment.

Class pets also can be a lot of responsibility that the school can't take on.

VP Principal Dr. Prendergast said there are safety concerns and school rules that don't allow class pets.

Third grade teachers, however, found a creative loophole.

Instead of having a real animal inside the classroom, VP's third graders have stuffed animal cows named Samantha and Mooska.

The real cows live at a dairy farm in Connecticut, but students bring the stuffed animals home on weekends and record what they did with them in a notebook.

"We are learning about caring for a cow and having fun watching her grow up in pictures," Mrs. Craig explained.

What people think about class pets may be different, but classrooms can find ways to make everyone feel safe and welcome.

Budding Journalists



The founding reporters of the *VP Eagle Eye* display their press passes in front of VP's new mural. Designed by Ridgefield High School students and commissioned by the PTA, the mural is one of several recent changes to the school. See article on Page 2.

Pictured, left to right, front row: Serena Braccia, Caitlyn O'Connor, Hopie Guglielmo, Demetri Efremides; back row: Elowyn Blair, Caroline Liberti, Nora Conlon, Edward Cockerill, Ian Xu. Not pictured: Assistant Editor Allison Liberti, VP alumna.

VP Calendar

March 18: Cultural Night

March 26: Variety Show

March 30-April 1: Scholastic Book Fair

March 31 - Walking Bus

March 31 - Wear Your Favorite Color
(National Crayon Day)

March 31 - The Great Ellen Tucker Reading Challenge Entries Due

April 1 & 2: Early Dismissal

April 3-12: Spring Break

April 13-17: Spring School Spirit Week

April 13 - Spring Enrichment Classes Begin (Including Eagle Reporters!)

FIND IT *IN THE NEWS!*

Search the newspaper to answer these questions:

What new feature was added to the VP cafeteria that shows the school colors?

What organization certified Holly as a therapy dog?

What day of the week do fifth graders get to sit with whoever they want at lunch?

What book series does author Lauren Tarshis write?

Which grade performs a special act together during the Variety Show?

What are the names of the stuffed class cows that third graders bring home?

What makes VP extra special to Nurse Dave?

What career did Nurse Dave have before becoming a school nurse?

What improvements were made to the VP auditorium during the renovations?

What important job do fourth graders volunteer for to help the school?

