

# MUFSD Tiger Tracks – Special Graduation Edition

## CONGRATULATIONS, MAMARONECK HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2015!!

*In this special edition of Tiger Tracks, we give you a glimpse into our graduating class by featuring a sampling of the 322 students who graduated last month from Mamaroneck High School. You may recall that this is a tradition. (Formerly, this newsletter was published in printed form, but it is now electronic only.) From year to year, we choose to feature a handful of students -- including our valedictorian and salutatorian -- who have had diverse experiences and accomplishments at the high school. From the many academic successes to the performing arts and musical accomplishments, to the four State championships in athletics (tennis, wrestling, field hockey and baseball), this year's Class of 2015 was an extraordinary one!.... We hope you enjoy reading about each of the students highlighted here and ask that you join us in saluting the entire Mamaroneck High School Class of 2015!*



### **Max Schechter-Valedictorian**

Mamaroneck High School's 2015 Valedictorian Max Schechter has a passion for science and music...and tea!. Through his work with the Original Science Research (OSR) program at MHS, Max discovered what it's like to do science research professionally; as a result, he is looking forward to pursuing a major in Biochemistry when he attends the University of Pennsylvania this fall.

Max devoted a couple summers and much of his time after school doing biomedical research at Rockefeller University, where he was the first MHS student ever to be accepted to the prestigious Rockefeller Summer Science Research Program and one of only a few to be accepted after sophomore year. He served as the Science Outreach Student Advisor for the Rockefeller Outreach Neuroscience Consortium and attended and critiqued presentations by participating teachers who are developing online modules for neuroscience instruction. In addition, Max participated in Rockefeller's science outreach program for elementary and middle school students and was asked to help organize social activities for the high school research program last summer. Based on his research at Rockefeller, Max was recently awarded 1<sup>st</sup> Place in the Medicine and Health Category at the Westchester Science and Engineering Fair (WESEF).

“Working in the lab at the Rockefeller University throughout high school has left a large impression on me,” said Max, who just this year at MHS founded the Mamaroneck High School [STEM Journal](#), where he served as its first Editor-in-Chief. Max prepared a detailed proposal setting forth the rationale for a STEM Journal, which he presented to Administrators, and he

received their support for establishing the Journal as an official school publication. OSR Teacher Guido Garbarino – who Max praised for being so “incredibly devoted” to his students -- served as Faculty Advisor to the STEM Journal.

Max says one of his favorite moments of his high school career was performing “Rhapsody in Blue” with the chamber orchestra in the finale of PACE’s dance show, *Kinesthesia*. He is particularly grateful to Ms. Elyse Gellert (his orchestra teacher) for making his experiences in music so special and recalls fondly the “Breakfast with Bernstein” event that Ms. Gellert put together, where they had breakfast while watching and learning about Leonard Bernstein.

Beyond OSR, some of the other rigorous courses Max took during high school included English 11H, Symphony Orchestra, AP Chemistry, and AP Physics B. He served as a Transfer Orientation Program (TOP) Advisor, helping new students from grades 10-12 get acclimated to the high school, and was Vice-President of the Youth Group at Larchmont Temple. In connection with his work at the Temple, Max lobbied U.S .Congress (made presentations to Senator Kristen Gillibrand and Congressman Eliot Engel) to support permanent federal funding of stem cell research.

When he wasn’t busy studying or playing the violin, there was one other place you could expect to find Max: sampling and enjoying exotic teas during Tea Club at lunch with friends in Mr. Derby’s room. Max is sure to miss tea time in Mamaroneck, but will hopefully build in time from his busy college schedule to relax ach day.

[Click here](#) to read Max’s remarks at graduation.



### **Cara Bendich - Salutatorian**

Cara Bendich, MHS’s Class of 2015 Salutatorian, says she’s so grateful for the opportunities she was given at MHS. “I think this school encourages creativity and self-expression. In my time here, I was lucky enough to have teachers and classmates who played a vital role in my intellectual and artistic development,” she said.

Cara developed a passion for dance choreography through her involvement with MHS’s PACE (Performing Arts Curriculum Experience) program and her work with PACE Dance Teacher Allison Parsley. She plans to pursue dance and choreography along with her academic interests when she attends Wesleyan University this fall. “Mrs. Parsley’s guidance was a vital part of my high school experience,” Cara said. “I’m so grateful for the encouragement and support she provided me.”

At the June 16<sup>th</sup> Board of Education meeting, Cara was awarded one of PACE’s highest honors, the 2015 Rockefeller Award for the Performing Arts. In honor of Cara and her tremendous choreography, several PACE students performed one of her original dances. In introducing the piece, Ms. Parsley said, “Cara has really taken advantage of all that she could in the dance program here at PACE. She has been the ultimate team player and her work ethic is unmatched

by most students. She is warm, caring, friendly, and everyone wants to work with her. She never disappoints in her choreography. When you hear that you are seeing a Cara Bendich dance, you



know that it's going to be something that is wonderfully beautiful and special.”

[Click here](#) for Ms. Parlsey’s full remarks.

*Cara received the Rockefeller Award for the Performing Arts at the June 16<sup>th</sup> Board of Education meeting.*

Throughout her four years at MHS, Cara took the most rigorous courses and enjoyed them all. She says she felt fortunate to have Social Studies Teacher Craig Goldberg for two years – first in grade 10 for Global and then for AP U.S. History. “His approach to teaching history gave me a much stronger appreciation for the subject. He constantly challenged me with difficult questions and made both Global and American History enjoyable, thought-provoking, and deeply interesting to learn,” she said.

AP Physics B Teacher Dr. Filippova and AP Physics C Teacher Dr. Nunes both left a major impact on Cara and helped instill a love of physics. “Dr. Filippova encouraged me to pursue physics despite the challenges that come from being a woman in a male-dominated field,” Cara said. “And Dr. Nunes also was an incredible teacher, extremely supportive and always willing to offer advice.”

One of the most memorable high school experiences for Cara was her trip to China with her fellow classmates in the Mandarin program. “I had never traveled outside of the continent before, so this trip was especially exciting for me. We participated in an exchange with students in Shanghai, with each of us being assigned a student to stay with for five nights. It was an eye-opening cultural experience, and I left China with a much deeper appreciation for Chinese culture and language,” Cara said.

Cara says her role as Peer Leader for Hommocks Middle School’s 7<sup>th</sup> graders was one that she would not have traded for anything. “I learned a great deal about patience and leadership,” she said.

She offers this advice to incoming freshmen: “Find what you’re truly passionate about and work for it. What’s important is doing your best and enjoying the process.”

[Click here](#) to read Cara’s remarks at graduation.



## **Jose Lemus**

José Arturo Lemus Ortiz, a first generation college student who was born in Guatemala and will attend Tufts University this fall on a full academic scholarship, moved to Mamaroneck when he was four years old. His parents spoke only Spanish at home and had received no formal education past the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level.

“Since my parents weren’t proficient in English, they’ve never been able to help me with any school work,” José said. “But they have always emphasized the value of education, and were very involved in my life by meeting with teachers and checking that all my work had been completed,”

During his time at MHS, José discovered his passion for computer science and plans to major in that area of study in college. As president of the Computer Science club, he has enjoyed working with other students with similar interests and collaborating on projects, such as a building a 3D printer.

“I like computer science because of the mindset you have to approach the field with. You’re able to plan out your actions and tackle problems in ways that make sense to you. Your solution may be entirely different to someone else’s,” José said.

“In addition, it is a subject that is relatively easy to learn on your own. For example, I learned the Java language in school as part of the Computer Science program. I was then able to apply this knowledge and teach myself objectivec, a completely different programming language used to create apps for Apple products. I then used objectivec to begin developing a mobile game for the iPhone as my Original Science Research project.”

José points out that being able to communicate and send directions to a machine opens a lot of new doors, ranging from app development to customizing existing software. He feels empowered to be able to understand the concepts behind programs instead of just using the end product.

Despite not having help from his parents or tutors, José said he has always tried to challenge himself, and as a result, took a relatively heavy course loads comprised almost entirely of AP and honors classes. In addition to Computer Science, some of José’s favorite classes have been AP American Government and Politics, AP Physics C, OSR and AP English Literature. And, he was appreciative of how “Maria Michelsson made math interesting and more dynamic.”

José is forever grateful to his guidance counselor Mr. Cuddy for the support he provided over the past four years and attributes his success at MHS and in the college process “in no small part due to him”.

“Attending college had always been a dream for me and my twin brother,” José said. “We had no idea about how to approach the college application process, however, and tuition costs were always looming over us. Mr. Cuddy guided us through it by proposing some colleges and

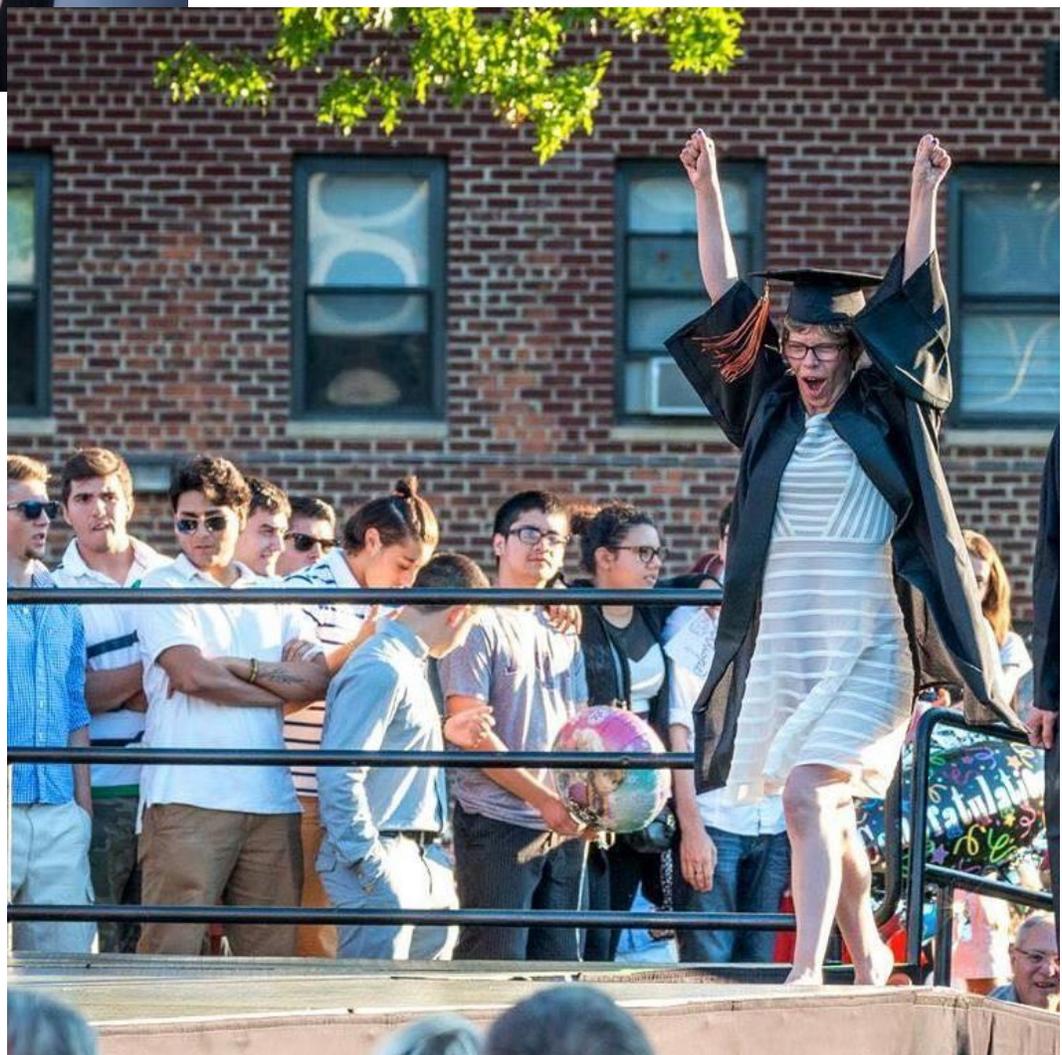
showing us what to look for. He also introduced us to the different forms of financial aid, such as grants, and even gave us a couple scholarship programs to apply to. Questbridge, the program through which I got my full scholarship to Tufts, was one of these. Although I doubted my chances at being a recipient, he motivated me to apply anyways.”

José gives this advice to incoming freshmen: “My advice to freshmen would be to branch out and begin exploring their interests. The school allowed me to do that. Even though I was limited at home, I was still able to strengthen my interest and knowledge in modern technology at school.”

### **Cara McEvily**



She heard the cheers as she walked across the stage and was overcome with emotion. “I had no idea I was this awesome,” smiled Cara McEvily as she recalled her experience graduating from Mamaroneck High School last week. She talked about the tears that streamed down her face when she picked out from the crowd the individual voices of those who had worked with her for the past four years. “Then I looked around and saw the faces of all these people who have supported me and thought how wonderful it was. I will never forget that feeling,” she said.



For Cara, high school didn't come easily, but she worked hard...really, really hard. How did she succeed? By being ultra-focused, she said. And getting kind, loving support from many around her.

Among the things she enjoys most is reading. *Water for Elephants* is one of her favorites "Reading takes me to another place – my happy zone. I feel like I'm a part of the book," she explained. She said *The Hobbit*. was a lot harder to get through.

Another place Cara always enjoyed being at MHS, like Max, was at Tea Club, where she got to sample different teas and spend time with new people. And then there was Ms. Hersh in her Transition Academy classroom. "That felt like paradise," Cara said. "Everything felt wonderful there, so nice and peaceful. Ms. Hersh taught us different ways to learn."

Cara spent much of her classroom time with the Transition Academy class, but then participated in the regular classroom setting each day for non-academics such as gym, art, etc.

The Transition Academy helped Cara with job training and building her resume. She worked at both the Larchmont Music Academy and Everything's Hair throughout the school year and will continue working at the hair salon this summer, as well as at Flint Park Day Camp.

"I am an Assistant Helper," Cara says of her work at the salon. "I take drink orders for staff and customers, wash and dry towels and gowns, help the stylists with cutting the tin foil, and do laundry. Everyone is so nice."

While Cara will miss MHS (and already talks about her first visit back in the fall), she is ready for her next venture – the Riverview School in Cape Cod. As she moves on, she will always remember the advice of Ms. Ramos-Dries: "You can do this". Cara also believes that after her experiences of always meeting new people at MHS, she won't be so shy to meet new people in the future.



### **Jimmy Bernstein**

"Every day I enjoyed the laughter, smiles, and spirit that fill the halls of Mamaroneck High School," said Jimmy Bernstein of his four years at MHS. "I have had some spectacular teachers and have learned that the best teachers are the ones who truly love their job and cannot wait to get to school every morning. It's refreshing to see people so enthused by their profession. I can only hope that I will enjoy my job one day as much as many faculty members at MHS do!!!"

During his time at MHS, Jimmy was president of numerous clubs, including Model Congress, ACE tutoring (a tutoring club at Hommocks), and the Investment Club. He also was a Peer Leader, played on the soccer team for four years and was captain of the golf team.

In the four years that Jimmy was a member of Varsity Golf, the team became a top team in one of New York's toughest leagues. Jimmy talked about how his experience on the team helped

improve his mental stamina. “While it’s terrible to start off a round with a double bogey on the first hole, you have to be able to compose yourself and move on to the next hole because you’re stuck out there for eight more no matter what. There are no substitutes in golf to give you a break on a bad day, no teammates that can physically improve your performance like in other sports. For the most part it’s just you out there,” Jimmy said. “As Bobby Jones once said, ‘Golf is a game played on a five-inch course--- the distance between your ears.’ This is a lesson that I learned early on in my high school golf career, and has at times been my biggest enemy, but also my best friend.”

Jimmy’s favorite classes at MHS were AP United States History with Ms. Scudder (whom he said he was lucky enough to be able to work with for his entire four years at MHS in her role as Model Congress advisor) and AP Government and Politics with Mr. Liberti. “AP Government and Politics has really sparked my interest in Political Science. Whether it was our class project to volunteer for local candidates’ campaigns in the fall, or our trip to Washington D.C. in February, AP Government and Politics has been one of the main highlights of my senior year. This class has taught me and my classmates so much about how our government works, I think it is vital that every student takes this class before turning 18 and registering to vote,” Jimmy said.

Jimmy said the clubs at MHS provided him with different groups of friends with completely different interests. “Participating in the clubs taught me different ways to be a leader,” he said. “One highlight of this year was when the co-president of the Investment Club, Josh Girsky, and I were given the opportunity to appear on the WPIX-TV Channel 11 morning news to talk about how our club works. It was an awesome experience for both of us!!!”

And, speaking of friends, Jimmy said he feels fortunate to have had such a great group of friends at MHS; while he will definitely miss them, he plans to stay in close touch. In the fall, Jimmy will head off to University of Richmond, where he will consider doing something with Political Science or being a part of the Jepson School of Leadership Studies.

## **Ana Mazariegos**



Ana Mazariegos has dealt with her share of adversity these past four years...and undoubtedly her experiences have made her into the amazing young woman she is today.

When Ana’s little sister passed away of Leukemia her sophomore year, Ana’s counselors Mr. Adams and Ms. Fremder were right there by her side to help.

“Mr. Adams and Ms. Fremder taught me that everything will be okay. For every time I was stressed, overwhelmed or dealing with grief, they always provided love and support and helped me get through any low point,” Ana said. “In the future, I’ll always remember the moments I felt the world was falling apart and reflect on how I triumphed during those trying times. I could not have realized this without their

help and motivation. They helped me believe in myself and move forward. They are some of the biggest influences in my life, and they reassured me that I can overcome anything.”

Ana spent much of her high school years working. She worked for the Village of Mamaroneck for the past two years and also participated in the Her Honor Mentoring program, where she interned as a Sales Associate at a local printing company. “I attended monthly life skills workshops that taught me crucial skills to benefit my professional and personal lives. All of my work experiences have provided with a unique approach to learning and growth,” she said.

Ana felt that being a part of the Caprice Program at MHS was one of her most valuable high school experiences. “Being able to help a few freshmen feel more comfortable with the transition to high school meant a lot to me,” she said. “When I was a freshman it was comforting to receive advice from my Caprice Advisor and also have a friendly face to say hi to in the halls. Being able to give back made my senior year more valuable.”

A class that will always stand out in Ana’s mind is Mr. Liberti’s AP Government and Politics class. “I currently work in local government so it was amazing to go to work and see the curriculum come alive everyday. This class helped me become an effective and informed citizen. The knowledge I gained from this course will carry on with me for years to come,” Ana said.

Ana feels particularly competent and excited by her ability to learn different languages. She plans to double major in French, as well as a second language (specific one TBD) when she attends Hobart and William Smith Colleges this fall. She also would like to minor in International Affairs.

“Ana has so much to give and is naturally bright and inquisitive,” Mr. Adams says. “She is a young woman who will make a difference in other people’s lives, and it all starts with her college journey.”



### **Kieren Rudge**

Of all the classes Kieren Rudge took at MHS, he was especially enamored with AP Physics B – which he says taught him complex ideas in science and engineering in a fun and simple way -- and AP Government, allowing him to delve into a deeper understanding of Politics and our system of government while providing real world applications and inspiring him to “watch the news for fun”.

Kieren is an outstanding student who was accepted to both West Point and the U.S. Naval Academy! He will be attending the Naval Academy and is planning on majoring in either Political Science or Civil Engineering or Mechanical Engineering.

During his time at MHS, Kieren was an active member of the Force drum corps and Model Congress and participated in Track. He said participating on these teams throughout high school was very important to him and that he appreciated being surrounded by so many other students who, like him, were driven to do well.

“Model Congress gave me many great opportunities to grow as a debater and public speaker. The students in this club all love to discuss politics and voice their opinions -- a great environment to be a part of. I learned to think from other perspectives and to be open to many ideas. And, playing percussion in The Force and the school band has been amazing. I have so much fun when playing in any of the ensembles, and I’m always excited to learn a new piece of music,” he said. Kieren attributes his growth as a musician and leader to MHS Band Teacher Mr. Hooker. “From the start, Mr. Hooker always gave me a lot of responsibility and pushed me to excel. Without the inspiration that he gave me I wouldn’t have practiced so much and been so committed to music.”

As captain of the cross country and track teams, Kieren ran all three seasons and said Track became like family to him. “I love training and competing with the friends I have made. Track taught me to persevere through anything no matter how difficult it may be. Being a runner definitely molded me into who I am today,” he said. “Year after year, Track helped me to push myself to become better.”

Participating in Track, Kieren said, forced him to be self-disciplined, put in work and improve...all qualities he believes will come in handy in the Naval Academy. Kieren departs this week, and we wish him all the best in his upcoming journey.



### **Kathleen Harwood**

Kathleen Harwood is one of those students who admirably seems to do it all! From being a member of the varsity tennis team, serving as managing editor of the student newspaper *The Globe*, participating in the Original Science Research (OSR) program, and playing the flute to being a member of the National Honor Society, Kathleen feels lucky to have gone to MHS. “I have been given opportunities that have truly expanded my horizons,” she says.

Last summer, her research through the OSR program involved fruit flies and autism, which required her to spend the entire summer in the lab. “My science research experience has left a huge impression on me,” Kathleen said. “OSR challenged me, but also allowed me to develop undeniably useful research and professional skills.”

As a result of her positive experiences with the sciences, Kathleen has chosen the pre-med track at the University of Pennsylvania. She’ll be a part of the interdisciplinary "Biological Basis of Behavior" program focusing on Biology, Psychology, and Neurology.

Kathleen has been playing flute and piccolo her entire life. As a member of the MHS band and two ensemble groups outside of school, Kathleen uses her music as a way to take her mind off her busy life. She also volunteers at the New Rochelle Humane Society and has taught both tennis and at her local parish.

“I’ll miss MHS’s supportive community of teachers and advisors, which fosters creativity and exploration in students,” Kathleen said. “I have had so many unique opportunities as an MHS student, and I recommend that incoming freshmen take advantage of these opportunities-- because they just may discover a new passion or interest.”



### **Ben Steinberger**

When Ben Steinberger thinks about his past four years at Mamaroneck High School, he thinks about the many teachers who had an immense impact on him both personally and academically. From math with Mrs. Rinaldi, to AP Government with Mr. Liberti, Physics with Mr. Victoria, and Science Fiction with Mr. Queen, Ben says he could not have been happier with the teachers he has come to know and love.

“For instance, who would have thought that science fiction would be a serious interest of mine, but thanks to Mr. Queen and his passion for the subject, it is now something that I want to continue to study and pursue,” Ben said. “When choosing my freshman writing seminar for next fall, I immediately selected a class entitled ‘Why Dystopias?’ because I thoroughly enjoyed and was intrigued by that topic in Mr. Queen’s course.”

He adds, “My education at MHS would not have reached the level that it did without the help and support of my amazing teachers over the last four years. The drive, motivation, and passion for the subjects they taught left such an impression on me and really made the difference in the effort I put into the class.”

In addition to taking a rigorous course load, challenging himself with numerous honors and Advanced Placement courses, Ben found the time to be a Caprice Advisor, a member of the varsity baseball team, as well as co-president of the Students for Senegal club. Students for Senegal aims to build a learning center in Lambaye, Senegal (home village of MHS Chemistry Teacher and the Club’s Faculty Adviser Amary Seck) through various fundraising initiatives. Ben joined the club as a freshman and was an active member ever since. “Being part of this club has helped me develop important life skills such as working and collaborating with other people. It taught me to be appreciate of what I have and to always give back to those who are less fortunate,” he said. Ben also anchored a weekly television segment on MHS Info (the student-produced TV show, which broadcasts school news into the classrooms) called “Science with Steinberger” and worked as a cameraman and in the control room.

“Playing varsity baseball for two years was an unbelievable experience. I will never forget the time I spent on the baseball diamond at MHS,” Ben said. “This year, we achieved something as a team that made my senior year complete: we won the State championship! Sacrificing end of the year activities and warm weather, we practiced day after day to prepare for the playoffs, and ultimately, the State championship. Going to Binghamton and winning was truly one of the greatest moments of my life.”

MHS Guidance Counselor Laura Kearon sums it up this way: “Ben as extremely personable, poised, well-spoken, and insightful. These qualities define him to the point that he is admired by both adults and peers who know him,” she says.. “He also has a great moral compass. Ben does what he believes is right, doesn’t succumb to peer pressure, has great instincts, and remains true to himself. He is a great leader and role model.”

Ben will attend Bucknell University in the fall. He plans to major in Political Science and Economics.

## **Shirli Samara**



Perseverance, commitment and adventure are just a few of the words one could use to define Shirli Samara.

Shirli and her family moved from Albania to the Mamaroneck School District when she was beginning Hommocks Middle School as a 6<sup>th</sup> grader. Initially quiet and shy, she began to acclimate to life here in America. By the time she reached high school, she had made some connections, including one with her guidance counselor Rob Adams, who was new to MHS as well that year. “Because we were both new together at the same time, I think Mr. Adams understood me and the adjustments I was making,” Shirli said. “He was so supportive and helped me in so many ways, from having weekly meetings to participating in lunch games of Uno so I could get to know other students...and then being right by my side with the whole college process, which my parents didn’t know anything about. He would always list out everything I’ve accomplished here and make me understand that I was worth something.”

Shirli says her work in the fashion design class she took freshman and sophomore year, in addition to her fencing (“Who would have thought that I’d be in America fencing?” she laughs) and volleyball, played significant roles in helping to shape her into who she is today. With her newfound interest in sewing and fashion, Shirli began working on a senior prom dress years before she would actually be invited to attend the prom. The dress was made of soda can tabs and ribbon on the skirt and a white paper mache bodice that she had all of the seniors sign at prom last month.



At left, Shirli shows off the prom dress she made from soda can tabs, ribbon and white paper mache.

When it came down to the wire, Shirli was not sure if the dress would be fully completed in time for prom, she had to make a decision on whether or not to purchase a dress, which she ultimately did. But in her typical manner of never giving up on anything, Shirli made certain that the dress was ready to be displayed on a mannequin at prom, alongside a bowl filled with sharpies so the students could sign. She also talks fondly of a different skirt that she made out of recycled bicycle tires, and says she just hasn't found the right occasion in which to wear this one.

Shirli liked Biology freshman year, but then loved Chemistry the next year (Physics wasn't her favorite). She speculates as to why she adores Chemistry so much and says it's probably because she has a fondness for creating things and looking at why something is created. She plans to major in Biochemistry when she attends Binghamton University in the fall.

Another budding interest of Shirli's is in the area of business. This past spring MHS set her up with an internship for a small start-up company called Cisse that sells baking mixes. She wanted to learn the basics of running a small business, which is exactly what she had the chance to do as an intern. She helped with the marketing and financial aspects of the company and now feels adapt at creating a business plan. In fact, in just a couple of weeks, Shirli will join her TIE New York business team and travel with them to Atlanta to present a business plan against several global teams in front of the judges.

In essence, Shirli feels one of the most important things she has learned at Mamaroneck High School is to create your own path. Don't just look at a label such as Gucci or Coach and think this is how it has to be. Make your own label. Think outside the box. Pursue your interests (even if they are completely unrelated to one another – such as, in her case, fashion, chemistry and business!) and be thankful for the huge amount of opportunities that MHS provides.

***We wish of all of these students and the rest of the  
Class of 2015 all the best in their next life chapter!!  
Enjoy your summer.***