

## Broadway fire leaves students homeless

By Juan Hernandez

The fire that razed two buildings on Broadway on Nov. 13 is a sad challenge for PHS. The four alarm fire, which began after 9 p.m., spread to four buildings, destroying two.

It was tamed by the brave Passaic Fire Department. Some PHS students looked on in horror as their homes were destroyed. PSE&G arrived at the fire to shut off the flammable gas lines, feeding the fire.

As if there were a good time to be the victim of a fire, with the holidays just around the corner, this is the worst time of year to be without a home, all your belongings destroyed. Fifteen Passaic families were displaced. A hundred people are going to be without their homes for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Even though the Senior Center has been set up as a shelter for people who were impacted by this fire, there is no place like home for the holidays. These homes are in ash ruins.

At least there were no injuries and everyone got out of the fire. These troubling times bring our town community closer together. The PHS community has always come together to help those in need. This tragedy is no different. The Octagon Club immediately



Staff Photo

The fire department battles the four-alarm blaze that struck on Broadway on Nov. 13. As a result of the fire, some PHS students' homes were destroyed.

jumped into action and rallied student support to help those students who came to school on Thursday morning without their uniforms because all their belongings were burned up in the fire.

Mr. Sheridan, Octagon Club Ad-

visor, organized the support that was already forming within the student body, by collecting any donations that could help the families affected by the fire. "It is just amazing how the PHS family pulls together in times of strife," said

Mr. Sheridan. He added, "it is shocking to see just how generous the PHS community always is."

One thing is certain, that no matter how bad the situation is, the PHS students pull together and help each other. This time is no dif-

ferent. Students, faculty and other staff assembled a nice collection of donations for families who need them. To those affected by this fire, our prayers and support is with you and for the school as a community, good job PHS!

## Motivational speaker rallies PHS students

By Cindy Tineo

Famous actress turned motivational speaker, April Hernandez-Castillo, rallied the PHS student body on October 7. Naturally skeptical students were immediately brought to their feet, laughing and supporting the spirit of learning and success. Mrs. Hernandez-Castillo used humor and great energy to enliven students, even during period 1!

Humor and energy were not the message, just the vehicle for her message of creating a culture of education and success in the lives of each and every student. As a representative of the United States Hispanic Leadership Institute (USHLI), Hernandez-Castillo spoke of growing up as a minority in a poor neighborhood, in Queens, New York.

Playing in the streets with

drug vials set her up for failure, but she had a good home life. Her father taught her that she needed to work hard and focus her life on success or be caught in the trap of poverty that affects so many minorities.

Overcoming the personal adversities of poverty and then the abuse of her boyfriend, she found that through education, hard work and perseverance she was able to find success. Through financial and career success, especially after the film, Freedom Writers, April saved her parents from their poor neighborhood and changed their lives forever.

Her message to the students of PHS is that everyone has the ability to achieve success, regardless of their race, gender, or ethnicity, resounded with the students of PHS.

Students left the Shirelle's Au-



Staff Photo

April Hernandez-Castillo speaks to PHS students about success in life.

ditorium elated empowered to change their own lives for the better. They know now that they have the power to change their

own lives for the better. The power for change is in all of us.

This assembly was made possible by a program from USHLI, which is a Chicago-based national, nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization.

The USHLI has developed into one of the most powerful, nationally and internationally rec-

ognized Latino organizations in the country by organizing and conducting nonpartisan voter registration and leadership development programs in 40 states. This organization has been able to maintain a stable presence in hundreds of communities over the years by promoting empowerment and civic responsibility.



Art by Monasterio

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# Christmas in Passaic High School

The student body of PHS is diverse. Each culture is proud in its heritage and rightly so. During this season of brotherly love and understanding, the *Hilltop Star* staff has collected and edited some Christmas traditions from student contributions. By reading these glimpses of Christmas joy, we will all be brought closer together and realize that different as we all are, we are all more the same. We hope you enjoy this feature and hope you all have a Merry Christmas, a happy holiday and a great new year!

Special thanks to Mrs. Z for creative support on this feature.

## My Dominican Christmas

By Katherine Nunez

There are many traditions for Christmas from all around the world. I am Dominican and Puerto Rican, but because I live with my Dominican side of the family, I follow these traditions. In my family we gather on Christmas Eve, have a party, with all our family and friends, and food, lots of food.

Just like Thanksgiving, there is a table filled with food, just not turkey. Then there is eating and dancing and we talk about things, telling stories and basically have lots of fun together. Then (and this is my favorite part) at midnight we open presents and laugh, and then go on with the party.

This is my family Christmas tradition. I know it may sound like a lot of other families, but I would not change it for the world.



## The Best Time of the Year

By Sandra Coraballo

Without doubt the best time of the year is Christmas time with the family. My family always gets really excited about Christmas. Everyone gets happy and tries to make everything perfect. We cook all the traditional Christmas foods.

We even make tembleque. Tembleque is a coconut dessert pudding from Puerto Rico. Tembleque is made by cooking coconut milk or coconut cream with milk, salt, cornstarch, and sugar with spices such as cloves, cinnamon, vanilla, and nutmeg.

While we eat we decorate the tree and the rest of the house, making look just beautiful.

As Christmas day finally arrives, with the house looking beautiful, I open my window, just a bit, to smell the cold winter weather. Hopefully the snow has fallen, making my neighborhood look like someone just took a big white blanket and draped it all over.

Since I am the first one up, I wake up my cousin and get her to help me make a wonderful Christmas breakfast. When we go to the kitchen we notice that it is still full from all the foods from the night before, and there is nowhere to make a nice breakfast. So, what else could we do? Yes, we had cereal for Christmas breakfast!

Even with cereal for breakfast Christmas at my house is still my favorite time of year.

## Thanksgiving at My Place

By Julio Quiles

I like my family's Thanksgiving tradition the best because every year we gather at a different family member's house. This year they all



came over to my place. Everyone brings a dish and so my house was full of food! My mother is a great cook. She made some sweets and a cake. When all the people and food are gathered and ready, we all sit down, give thanks to the Lord, and eat.

## Posada

By Victor Barrales

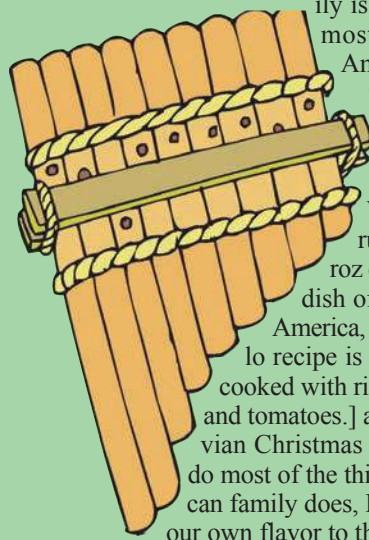
On Christmas day my family celebrates, I guess, just like other families. However, on Christmas Eve we do what is known as a Posada. [Las Posadas is a nine-day celebration with its origins in Spain, but now it is chiefly celebrated in Mexico and Guatemala. It begins on December 16 and ends on Christmas Eve. Posada is Spanish for "lodging." The nine days of celebration represents the nine months of Mary carrying Jesus.] This is a Mexican Catholic religious event that my family does every year. I love celebrating the birth of Jesus and on Christmas day getting presents.



## A Very Peruvian Christmas

By Valerie Beingolea

While I was born here in the United States, my family is Peruvian. We do most of the regular American Christmas traditions. But, around the holidays I love my Peruvian heritage. We eat a lot of Peruvian food like arroz con pollo [Classic dish of Spain and Latin America, this arroz con pollo recipe is browned chicken cooked with rice, onions, garlic, and tomatoes.] and listen to Peruvian Christmas music. While we do most of the things every American family does, I love that we add our own flavor to the mix.



## A Christmas Tradition

By Brian Chicchis

My Christmas traditions are not so different from other people. My family eats turkey or chicken together. Depending on the weather, I usually drink iced tea with dinner if it is warm, and if it is cold, I go to the store for milk, and have hot chocolate. We open presents from family and friends and talk and share stories.

The only thing I find hard to do is get gifts for my little cousins. They are really hard to shop for. I have a secret way of getting gift ideas though. I go to their parents amazon accounts and look for things their parents wouldn't get them and buy it. Then I am the favorite "big cuz." They always like what I buy them. For example, I have a little cousin, named Kevin, who just loves Yu-Gi-Oh cards. I try to



get him a few packs of rare cards, so that he can improve his deck. My cousin and I have our own tradition. We get all the Yu-Gi-Oh cards together, make a deck in less than thirty minutes and then duel. The funny part is that both decks are horrible.

Sometimes I let my little girl cousins dress me up and paint my face. We might go outside and make a snowman (if there is snow). Mostly everyone just has a great time.

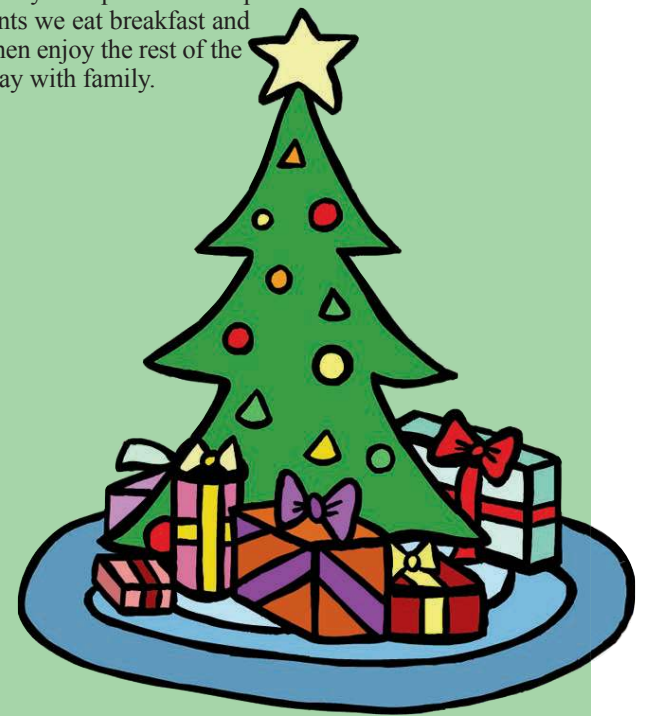
## Mexican Traditions

By Joana Morales

My family usually goes to me my aunt's house for Christmas Eve. When all of the aunts and uncles arrive, we eat as much Mexican food as we can get. Then, we all watch funny family videos in the living room.

When midnight finally arrives, Santa brings present for everyone. When he leaves we open them. My parents always get emotional when they open presents from my aunts and uncles. I like watching them exchange their gifts. It is pretty early in the morning when everyone leaves to go home.

The next day is Christmas Day! We go to the tree and see all the presents and start opening them. After everyone opens all their presents we eat breakfast and then enjoy the rest of the day with family.



Dear Aida,

I have a friend who has a problem at home with her mother. They are always fighting and arguing. She tells me she wishes that their relationship would change, so that she can talk to her about her problems in school and life. I wish there was something I was able to do so that she can feel good at home. Do you have any advice you can give?

Sincerely,  
Alma

Dear Alma,

Problems at home can be very stressful. Though you want to help your friend, you must understand your place in this situation. These home issues should be resolved by your friend and her mother. You can be supportive of your friend, and suggest that she have a serious talk with her mother to try to improve the situation. If they opened up more and communicated their feelings, they might just come to an understanding. Nonetheless, support your friend and be there for her whenever she needs you. Good luck to your and to your troubled friend.

Aida

Dear Aida,

My main concern about going to PHS is the infestation of bugs. I feel like this is a big concern for everyone because the bugs lay eggs and multiply, making the infestation worse. When I was at lunch the other day and I saw a big roach run across the floor of the cafeteria, I just lost my appetite. I know this is an issue that can be solved.

Sincerely, Concerned and grossed out

Dear Grossed out in the Caf:

We all know that PHS is not perfect, no school is, and there are many areas we can make improvements. I understand that this issue can seem to be out of hand sometimes, but I encourage you to look at the better sides of PHS. We are a school like no other. Every school has its ups and downs but having a good attitude makes all the difference. I think you should make

sure you follow all the directives from Mr. DeNaples and make sure you do not add to this problem by eating in class, taking food out of the cafeteria and making sure other students do not eat in class either. You should make sure you are part of the solution and not adding to the problem. Good Luck.

Aida

Dear Aida,

I am writing to you because my friend has a problem. He always slacks off in class. He never does his work and might not be eligible to graduate this year. He is even thinking about dropping out! How can I help him? What can I do?

Concerned,  
Dante

Dear Dante,

I know you are concerned about your friend, but you cannot pick up a pen or a book and do the work for him. In order for your friend to succeed in his life, he will have to find motivation from within. All you can do is encourage your friend and remind him of all the opportunities he is missing out on, if he does not get his act together. If you think your relationship can weather it, then maybe talk to his parents, or a teacher. Good Luck to you and your troubled friend. I hope he graduates!

Aida

Dear Aida,

I am a senior at PHS and it is my last year here. I am looking forward to col-



lege, but I am also scared about living on my own. Also, I am worried about the level of work at college. What advice can you give me?

Sincerely,  
Patel

Dear Patel,

College should be an exciting time in your life! You will be on your own and learning who you will be in life. Being out on your own will allow you to discover who you are. Do not stress about what college has to bring; embrace

all the opportunities that will come to you. If you succeeded at PHS then you will succeed in college. Just work hard and believe in yourself.

Aida

Dear Aida,

I am having some big problems. I have a terrible habit of developing a crush; and then when I don't act on this crush, I get hurt. For example, I liked a guy because I thought his personality rocked, but I didn't act on this. I didn't talk to him or tell him how I felt. Then he started dating somebody else! I hate this terrible habit of mine, and I need advice on what to do. I don't want to talk to a guy and then get hurt.

Not pushy girl

Dear not pushy,

Girl, you should let the guy know how you feel. How do you expect to know if he cares if you don't tell him or at least give him a signal. Also, you need to have some confidence in yourself. You have

potential just like everyone else. Remember the only one holding you back is yourself. Go for it!

Aida

Dear Aida,

Lately, my days have consisted of stress and anxiety. I walk around the halls, by myself, just thinking about this school year. I thought my senior year would be great, but even though I don't find my classes too hard, I stress about the events that come with being a senior. I don't have many friends, so I can't say I'm excited for homecoming or prom. My grades are poor so college is a huge question for me. Whether I go to a good school or not, either way I can't afford it. I know the SAT's are coming up and they are super important, but I am not confident about how I will do. I feel just so lost this year. I hate to think about it because I have so much work to do. It is just hard and I don't know how to deal with it all. Help!

Sincerely,  
Lost and confused

Dear Lost and confused,

You have a lot going on, so let me start off by saying calm down, stress is a mess. It is senior year and it is supposed to be fun. Don't worry about the things you can't control and take control of the things that you can. As for college and money, go talk to your guidance counselor. They will be able to offer guidance for how to get into college, how to pay for college and how to get out of high school successfully. As for homecoming and prom and all the other senior activities this year, it doesn't matter if you have a lot of friends or just one. You should still participate. Go with whomever and have fun. These are the times that you will look back on and remember as the most fun you ever had, or regret not going to anything. Also, by going you can and will make more friends. Good luck with your senior year and remember, we are all in this together!

Aida

## S.H.I.E.L.D. show now revealed... as being quite corny

By Sharief Masri

**Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** premiered this fall on ABC to the cheers of comic book and superhero movie fans everywhere.

This new show is in the action, drama, science fiction genre, and based on the success of the Marvel movies, and was highly anticipated. The show is about Agent Phil Coulson, played by Clark Gregg, who you might remember from other Marvel films, like **Iron Man**, **Thor**, and **Avengers**, who assembles and leads an elite team of agents to travel around the world, to find and intercept various individuals who gain or discover powers that make them a possible threat to others. S.H.I.E.L.D. (Strategic, Hazard, Intervention, Espionage, Logistics, Directorate), which means

that someone really wanted this agency to spell shield, is part of the Marvel universe, which means that it will tie in directly and indirectly with the very popular and profitable movie franchise.

The team is made up of agents who do not possess any special powers, hence the tag line, "not all heroes are super." Grant Ward (Brett Dalton) is a trained problem eliminator, assassin and spy. He has little time to waste on getting along with the other members of the team.

Melinda May (Ming-Na Wen) is "the Cavalry" who is driving the team "bus" (a modified for vertical takeoff and landings C-130 transport plane with all the comforts of home and technology to make Toni Stark jealous). Why she is called "the Cavalry" has not yet been revealed, but I'm sure it

will be in future episodes in traditional Marvel style. Leo Fitz and Jemma Simmons (Iain De Caestecker and Elizabeth Henstridge) are the technology experts. It is their job to figure things out, and they always do. The final member of the team is a new recruit named Skye (Chloe Bennet), a hacker who is being turned from nuisance to S.H.I.E.L.D. agent.

My biggest complaint about this show might also be its greatest asset. The show is corny, in a sort of fun way. The cast is stereotyped and clichéd and many of the plots are predictable, but for some reason it just works. Like the comic series or the film franchises, this show is, well, fun.

Unlike so many other shows on television today, this show has a plot, and characters (shallow as they may be) and is fun to watch.

So, I don't mind the snarky and corny remarks from the characters Skye or Grant Ward. I don't realize how clichéd the dialogue is from characters, Leo Fitz and Jemma Simmons.

The overall feel of the show is much like the old **X-files** show. Every week the team goes to some unexplained mysterious event and tries to explain it. This show however is in the Marvel universe and deals with superheroes and the government's attempt to control the proliferation



of individuals with super powers.

The show does have a corny feel but I find myself looking forward to seeing it every week. I will continue to watch this show every Tuesday at 8:00, on ABC. You should check it out too.

### THE HILLTOP STAR

Student Newspaper of  
Passaic High School

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## Club seeks gifts for unprivileged families

By Adrian Martinez

With the holidays rapidly approaching and students (and teachers) counting the days until our Christmas vacation, it is easy to get wrapped up in the things that people do this time of year. People get so busy doing the shopping and other preparations with family and friends.

Club Interact wants to remind the family of PHS to remember the reason for the season, that spending and giving is fine, but that we should not forget those who are less fortunate than ourselves.

Club Interact, a service organization associated with Rotary, is collecting gifts and donations for underprivileged families in Passaic. Needs for local families include (but are not limited to) clothes, toys, housewares, toiletries, books, jewelry, seasonal attire or any other appropriate gift item. Gifts must be new, unwrapped and can be for men, women and especially children.

The deadline for all donations was December 13, and every single donation is greatly appreciated. Times are tough in this town, as well many other towns. Many people have lost their jobs, and

many have had their hours cut. Christmas is a time of sharing out of love for our fellow man. This is a theme that can be used in class to demonstrate the notion of generosity and it is a big part of what Club Interact stands for.

Another initiative for Club Interact is the book drive to help teen moms get their children into reading. While children's books can be used, they must not be ripped or have any writing in them. They must be in good condition. Club Interact is using the teens at PHS to help the teens who have children.

Mr. Simon came up with the

idea for the book drive. He said, "the importance of reading early and often in the life of a child is well documented." So, let's get any books you may not need and donate them to Mr. Gilbert's office in the guidance office.

All donations should be brought to Mr. Gilbert's office in the school counseling department. "I am never disappointed in the continued generosity of the students and staff of PHS," said Mr. Gilbert. He added, "We truly are a family."

I am sure the Passaic family will pull together to help all those who really need it around town.



## Historic night game played

By Jose Gruillon

The football game versus Passaic County Technical Institute this season may, on its surface, not seem like an earth-shattering event. However, this year's game was quite different. For the first time in PHS history, this game was played at night.

The lights that allowed this game to be played at night, also motivated the fans and the players to do their best. Hundreds of fans were more enthusiastic than ever about the Indians on the field. High hopes were little dampened, because the game was lost. PCTI proved to be as good a team as they say. Senior, Pabel DeJesus, a fan at the game commented, "the team shouldn't give up. They just need to work harder and believe in themselves and they will have victories."

Senior, Scottie Rodriguez, starting defensive tackle, for the Indians, agreed with Pabel. He said, "We have the potential to have a winning record. We have had a few bad breaks, but I can assure you that this team will never give up." Other team members also believe that this sea-



Staff photo

New lights will allow PHS to play night games.

son has potential to be good. Every other team member questioned reiterates the same idea, that they, as a team, have the spirit and talent to win, and they will work hard at it until they do.

As for playing under the new lights in the recently renovated stadium, one thing is certain. The electric lights are not the only lights in the stadium. Our hard working and talented players are going to shine in that stadium, hopefully even brighter than the new lights. Let's make some real history in the stadium! Good luck.

## Volleyball's a great experience

By Yvette Rivera

Playing volleyball for PHS is a great experience. I enjoy the way the ball feels when you hit it with your arm. This game is so challenging because all the players are constantly moving and rotating to get into the best position to return the ball. So, there is a lot of strategy involved in building this skill of gaining the best position. I have learned a great life lesson from my commitment to volleyball.

I try to live my life by always doing my best. Volleyball has taught me that I must always be at my best to be where the opportunities will be. I strive to always do my best and look for the best position to hit the ball in the game and in my life. By always looking to be at my best and always looking to improve my position, I have definitely improved myself and my graduation prospects.

As a senior, I love that with every

passing game, every time I set foot on the court, I recall all the memories of all the past games and practices, failures and triumphs. I remember as an underclassman feeling so anxious and yet happy because I was representing PHS on the court. This feeling of pride has never gone away. My last game is just as exciting as my first.

Volleyball has become my life, not only my favorite sport, but a key part of the way I live my life. Coming from an athletic family, I asked my mom what her favorite sport is. She said, "Baseball. When I play baseball I feel like I am waiting to hit all the problems I face out of the park."

I was shocked to hear that she felt about baseball like I feel about volleyball. I guess I really do come from a long line of athletes. I feel thankful that I was able to play for PHS all these years. I am honored to represent PHS on the court, and hopefully, I can get the chance to return the ball.



Staff photo

Wide shot of Boverini Stadium

## PHS drill team commanders prepare for success

By Assata Alston

The PHS NJROTC program has as its goal the fostering of leadership skills. One of the best of many ways of developing these leadership skills is participation in the drill team. PHS has two teams that function as two halves of the same team. Both have success and victory as their goal.

Our drill team travels to other schools and even schools in other states to compete, in preparation for the national drill team competition in Daytona Beach Florida. For years cadets have been working, practicing and drilling to be-

come the best they can be. Senior Anthony Melicia, the head commander and the commander of armed basic regulation drill, has been working towards this year since he was a freshman. "My goal for the drill team is to become the elite drill team of New Jersey, and be at least, in the top three in the nation," said Anthony. After graduation Anthony plans on joining the Marine Corps. He will certainly make our country as proud of him as a marine, as PHS is of him as a commander.

The commander of the armed exhibition drill team is senior

Leonardo Martinez, who is also in his fourth year of ROTC. Of his goals for his command this year he said, "My goals for the drill team are simple. They are to be the best drill team in the United States." He added that this can be done and that the team is working hard to achieve this goal. After PHS (and leading the drill team to the top) Leonardo plans on trying to be a Navy Seal. PHS wishes him all the best.

Mia Galan is the unarmed basic regulation team. Even though she is a senior, she has only been on the team for two years. She will put her leadership skills to

work outside the various branches of the military, but she will definitely use them in leading her drill team "to known nationally as an elite team."

Finally, Senior Lizbeth Balthasar is commander of the unarmed exhibition team. She too has been on the drill team for two years. Drilling hard to make "unarmed first in the nation" will be tough, but Lizbeth will be working hard after graduation, when she joins the United States Army.

Advising the drill team for 18 years takes a lot of patience, and time, and drive, but Petty Officer is up to the task. Drill team is a la-

bor of love for him and his pride in his cadets shows, even when he is just talking about them. "I chose Mia Galan for the commander of unarmed because she is like a little bulldog. She has the attitude to get the job done," he said. As far as goals for the PHS drill team this year P.O. Nuyen said, "I want the drill team to beat Linden, Southold, Riverhead, P.C.T.I. and take the National Championship." With the right commanders in place and the hard working cadets practicing every day, these goals can be attained. Good luck to the PHS NJROTC drill teams!