

RORY LUSTBERG

NSPA WRITER OF THE YEAR 2023

My car is embarrassingly full. Already small, the backseat is stockpiled with Ziploc bags stuffed with living essentials. Depending on the season, the bags can hold anything from sunscreen to gloves, but always include basic necessities and a handwritten note. I have carried these bags in my car for six years. When I come across someone experiencing homelessness, I stop and hand them a bag.

I've met a variety of people on my detours to the corner of a parking lot or the shoulder of a highway, each with a unique story. As our conversations continued, I learned about their lives. The more I learned, the more I wanted other people to hear their stories. With this idea lingering in my head, I began to write for my school newsmagazine, the Panorama.

After a few months of pitching an in-depth addressing homelessness, it was approved. I researched local homeless shelters and was directed to Stepping into the Light Ministry. During my six-hour interview with the house manager, James, he talked about his relationships with family, crime, drugs and childhood trauma. The interview ended with hugs (from him) and promises to visit (from me). As one of the most incredible souls I've met, James transformed my idea of what it means to tell someone's story. He kept saying, "Tell my whole story," regardless of the difficulties he had sharing it himself. This approach to journalism stuck with me. I felt like I finally understood the role of a journalist: to show the raw, unadulterated truth how people experience it.

Through my work on the Panorama, I've had the privilege to tell people's authentic stories and hold their trust, something I do not take for granted. From covering gender identity in an article that increased staff's understanding of their students, to an in-depth on censorship and echo chambers that gave librarians a voice to speak out against book banning, this year has been full of heavy topics. I like that. I believe that the most pressing topics are the ones that student journalists should get involved in, which is why I pushed for our final in-depth of the year to cover gun violence in schools. Through an ungodly amount of interviews and late-night phone calls, my co-writer and I produced an article that I believe encapsulates the fear that students and teachers feel walking through the high school doors each day, as well as the strides being taken by our administration to minimize that fear. I also had the honor of covering lighter stories, like a beloved teacher's return to Ladue after a retirement break.

As an incoming editor in chief next year, I am so excited to continue to hold the privilege of people's trust in telling their stories. My writing this year has connected me with people I never imagined, and I can't wait to see what next year brings. And now, when I hand out Ziploc bags, I listen more. I ask more questions. Sometimes I tell my friends what I learn. My car has more bags in it now than ever. I make sure I'll never run out.

follow the journey

1979 James Beardsley is born in Ladue, Virginia. He grows up in a family that values education and hard work.

1986 James Beardsley graduates from Ladue High School. He is a member of the National Honor Society and the Future Teachers of America.

1988 James Beardsley is accepted into the University of Virginia. He is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and the Phi Kappa Phi Chapter at the University of Virginia.

1990's-2010's James Beardsley works for the University of Virginia. He is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and the Phi Kappa Phi Chapter at the University of Virginia.

1997 James Beardsley is accepted into the University of Virginia. He is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and the Phi Kappa Phi Chapter at the University of Virginia.

2010's James Beardsley is accepted into the University of Virginia. He is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and the Phi Kappa Phi Chapter at the University of Virginia.

2017 James Beardsley is accepted into the University of Virginia. He is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and the Phi Kappa Phi Chapter at the University of Virginia.

2018 James Beardsley is accepted into the University of Virginia. He is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and the Phi Kappa Phi Chapter at the University of Virginia.

2019 James Beardsley is accepted into the University of Virginia. He is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and the Phi Kappa Phi Chapter at the University of Virginia.

2020 James Beardsley is accepted into the University of Virginia. He is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society and the Phi Kappa Phi Chapter at the University of Virginia.

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more than a house

People recover from homelessness and addiction by stepping into The Light Ministry

by Rory Kaufberg

Ladue is on the edge of a bubble. It's a bubble of privilege and Range Rovers. Stepping outside of that bubble to write "More than a House" was truly life changing. Through the writing process, I learned about the importance of story structure. My co-writer and I had to comb through 6 hours of interview footage to find important details, and then build the story in a way that kept the audience engaged while also not revealing our main points right away. Through a lot of ordering and reordering, we were able to strike a balance that I believe achieved those two goals.

Raise the Kurt-ains

Knodelseder returns to Ladue's theater program after 17 years

by Rory Kaufberg

James Beardsley returned to Ladue High School after 17 years to teach theater. He was the first teacher to lead the program since its founding in 1979. He was the first teacher to lead the program since its founding in 1979. He was the first teacher to lead the program since its founding in 1979.

Thomas Leary, teacher

Thomas Leary is a teacher at Ladue High School. He has been teaching theater for many years. He has been teaching theater for many years. He has been teaching theater for many years.

Gender

27%

30,000

89%

24%

Emily Shaw

Alex Schepker

Gender

When writing about gender, I learned more about people than I did about writing. However, through that, I found that writing starts with people, and that how you think a story will unfold is often not the case. Any perceptions of people I had going into the eight emotional interviews I did for this story were quickly redirected as I heard about their lives and began to understand them more as people than as subjects in a story. Of course, learning to use people's names as subheadings was a big advancement as well.

Seeing is believing

The difficulty of exposing a lie is to meet the chamber and the conspiracy of lies

by Rory Kaufberg

OPINION

PERSPECTIVE

CENSORSHIP

Seeing is believing

The difficulty of exposing a lie is to meet the chamber and the conspiracy of lies. The difficulty of exposing a lie is to meet the chamber and the conspiracy of lies. The difficulty of exposing a lie is to meet the chamber and the conspiracy of lies.

Under fire: the search for escape

Community and schools cope with gun violence in American schools

by Rory Kaufberg

377 school shootings

345,000 gun violence

35% shooter drills

\$3.1 billion spent annually on school safety

8% each year

\$100 million spent on school safety

SEARCH FOR ESCAPE

This year, a few Ladue students tragically lost members of their families to school gun violence. Upon learning about this, I suggested a story covering student experiences. I had the privilege to interview Emily Dieckhaus, a junior who lost her cousin in the Nashville Covenant shooting. During an emotional interview, Emily's strength was evident. Through the process of examining our school's safety regulations and hearing students' perspectives on them, I learned about the importance of delicacy when covering controversial issues. As a writer, story structure and lede were again important. It was my longest story, so making sure that the structure and lede kept the reader engaged was mandatory, and contributed to the overall understanding of the article.

MORE THAN A HOUSE: Ladue is a bubble of privilege and Range Rovers. Stepping outside of that bubble to write "More than a House" was truly life changing. Through the writing process, I learned about the importance of story structure. My co-writer and I had to comb through 6 hours of interview footage to find important details, and then build the story in a way that kept the audience engaged while also not revealing our main points right away. Through a lot of ordering and reordering, we were able to strike a balance that I believe achieved those two goals.

RAISE THE KURT-AINS: Raise the Kurt-ains was the first story I wrote for the Panorama. I am a self-identifying theater kid (brave to admit, I know), so covering the re-arrival of the new theater teacher was a treat. In writing this story, I learned about ledes. Building a setting has always been my favorite type of lede, so when Knodelseder described his first encounter with theater during our interview, I knew it had to be the lede. The rest of the story fell into place after my subsequent interviews, but the lede stuck with me. I never forgot the importance of gaining specific details during an interview to build a setting later.

GENDER: When writing about gender, I learned more about people than I did about writing. However, through that, I found that writing starts with people, and that how you think a story will unfold is often not the case. Any perceptions of people I had going into the eight emotional interviews I did for this story were quickly redirected as I heard about their lives and began to understand them more as people than as subjects in a story. Of course, learning to use people's names as subheadings was a big advancement as well.

SEEING IS BELIEVING: Seeing is Believing was the first in-depth piece I ever wrote. Previously only working on features, I now had to learn how to synthesize many interviews and topics under one article. Through painstaking edits, I learned about the importance of subheadings in dividing up subjects, and of taking multiple views into consideration in order to create a well-rounded perspective for the reader.

SEARCH FOR ESCAPE: This year, a few Ladue students tragically lost members of their families to school gun violence. Upon learning about this, I suggested a story covering student experiences. I had the privilege to interview Emily Dieckhaus, a junior who lost her cousin in the Nashville Covenant shooting. During an emotional interview, Emily's strength was evident. Through the process of examining our school's safety regulations and hearing students' perspectives on them, I learned about the importance of delicacy when covering controversial issues. As a writer, story structure and lede were again important. It was my longest story, so making sure that the structure and lede kept the reader engaged was mandatory, and contributed to the overall understanding of the article.

follow the journey

How James Davis became James Davis

1979 At 13 Davis was sexually assaulted by his priest, Rev. Norman Christian. He didn't tell anyone because of Christians' power over him and the fear of being blamed.

"I was smart, always an honor roll student, but that doesn't mean nothing when you got something going on in yourself."

James Davis

"First you start doing the drug and then the drug does you."

James Davis

1966 James Davis was born in St. Louis. Davis was raised going to church and eventually he became an altar boy.

"[Secrets] destroyed me. If I had let it go a long time ago, then I wouldn't have taken [the road I took]. Tell your story; don't be shy."

James Davis

1980's To cope with being sexually assaulted, Davis turned to drugs. First weed, later PCP because it's stronger.

"I started doing crime because that was [my] outlet of dealing with [the sexual assault] but in doing crime, I ended up killing some people."

James Davis

1990's-2010's Eventually, the law caught up to Davis. He served 25 years in prison for murder and robbery. While in prison, he was stabbed for standing up for someone.

more than a house

People recover from homelessness and addiction at Stepping Into The Light Ministry

Content warning: Death, drug use and sexual assault

by mac huffman
associate editor

by rory lustberg
web editor in chief

Light floats in through the open door. The office is scattered degrees and religious proverbs populating the walls. Men come in and out, making small talk with each other; the door remaining open. Every inch of the space is filled, from the coffee station by the door to the crosses that almost touch the ceiling. House manager James Davis stands in the center of it all. This is Stepping Into the Light Ministry, a rehabilitation center for men struggling with addiction and homelessness. As men walk through, Davis chimes in, "Leave the door open."

"When I came through that door, I stepped into the light," Davis said. "From that moment on, my life has been consistently changed to the point that I've found my calling. This is my calling: helping save

souls."

To minimize triggers, men staying at SITLM don't have access to phones or the outside world for 30 days. Additionally, everyone who comes to SITLM has to be vetted by Davis.

"It's my duty and responsibility," Davis said. "I'm the caretaker; I'm the gatekeeper. You don't get through the [front door] unless you come through me."

SITLM was founded by Bishop Jerome Bracely as a way to combat drug use and gang violence within his own neighborhood. Under six months of Davis' leadership, 20 people have graduated and gotten stable housing. Davis has the highest graduation rate since SITLM's creation in 1995.

"Many lives have been changed and most of them are men that came through [the program] or were homeless," Bracely said. "I get them from the courts, different organizations, churches, word of mouth, family, jails [and] just all over. From [1995] up to now, I've

See page **8**
To read about additional non-traditional housing



Scan to see the full photo gallery

See page **15**
For Stepping Into The Light Ministry's donation list

helped over 10,000 men."

When Davis met Bracely, he was struggling with drug usage, and soon entered SITLM's 90-day sobriety program.

"I came through the door broken and confused, and when I got here there was nothing but love shown to me," Davis said. "That's the key to it all. In healing is love. If you [have] love, you can definitely change the world, and there's a lot of love here."

SITLM's secretary, Xavier Mosely, 30, meets with people when they first arrive at the house to provide any resource they need, whether that's physical, social or emotional. Mosely was kicked out of his house at 17 by his mother because he allowed people experiencing homelessness to come inside his house and get food or a hot shower.

"I got a relationship with everyone," Mosley said. "I know everybody's story, I help everybody. A dude came [to me] and wanted some laundry soap, I told him to go



TOP LEFT: House manager James Davis rests against his desk in the front room of Stepping Into The Light Ministry. His diabetes medications often make him exhausted throughout the day. "I work so hard around here that when I go sleep, everybody says, 'don't wake James up,'" Davis said.

TOP RIGHT: A pile of donated clothes sit outside of SITLM. They then distribute donations to residents. "[When you're homeless], no doors will open up for you," Davis said. "Nobody will feed you [or] give you clothes."



BOTTOM LEFT: Bishop Jerome Bracely leads residents in prayer. Bracely founded SITLM to reduce homelessness through addiction treatment. "There was a lot of drug-infested activities going on right there on my doorstep," Bracely said.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Davis stands over his graduation certificate. Residents graduate the program after 90 days. "Since [Davis] has been here in September, over 20 people graduated," Xavier Mosely said. (Photos by Mac Huffman)

"Drugs lead to homelessness, but before you get to homeless you have to break the family up. [That's] how you have nowhere to go."

James Davis

19? After getting out of prison, Davis started smoking crack to cope with the blood on his hands. He left his family and moved to a "crack house."

"I came through the door broken and confused, and nothing but love [was] shown to me."

James Davis

to my room, grab mine."

Davis, with the help of his community at SITLM, committed to sobriety and is now over five years sober. In his sobriety, he's been able to realize one of Bracely's original goals, connecting with family, especially his grandchildren.

"I want the sons of the men that come into the program to look at their father — [at] God first — [but] I want them to look at their father and say, 'This is my hero,'" Bracely said.

Throughout his stay at SITLM, Davis quickly adopted Bracely's motivational way of thinking.

"I'm here because I love these men," Davis said. "I love to be that driving force in their life, to show them what God done for me. Yesterday, I was a monster, but today, I'm a God man."

Though Davis can now confidently refer to himself as a "God man," he struggled with his religious identity well into his adulthood. He grew up Christian, but lost faith when he was molested at

age 13 by Rev. Norman Christian. At least eight other boys came forward with similar experiences in a lawsuit years later, but Davis didn't tell anyone besides his brother until 2022.

"I love my mother a lot; [she's] passed away now, and I never told her," Davis said. "I was wrong [for not telling her] because she thought he was Father Christian. I trusted him with all my life, and that's what he did to me. That was his gift to me, but it wasn't a gift; it was destruction. You have to deal with that every day of your life. Every day of your life, it's there. It never goes away."

In the aftermath of his assault, Davis found something to distract himself from Christian's "gift," but it only brought more destruction.

"I started doing crime because that was my outlet [to deal] with it," Davis said. "But in doing crime I ended up killing some people. From killing people, I started using drugs, because I can't cope. You can't cope with wrongdoing in a

process of the program

day 1

People come to Stepping Into The Light Ministry from hospitals, jails and the streets. SITLM gives them housing and helps them get sober.

day 30

People regain access to the outside world and their phones. They're encouraged to look for a job.

continued on page 18

conscious state of mind."

Davis served 25 years in the Missouri State Penitentiary for homicide and robbery. He continued to use drugs after he got out of prison.

"[When] I got out, you would have thought that it would've taught me something," Davis said. "But it didn't because I wasn't informed about [the] root of the problem. I just knew I had a problem and I used drugs to cope with it, which created an even [worse] problem, to the point that I became overwhelmed with life."

To protect his family from his drug use, Davis decided to move out of the family home.

"I said [to my family], 'It's gonna hurt you, [but] I love you,'" Davis said. "I know it seems like I chose drugs over you, and in a way I did, but if I'm destroying myself, what right do I have to destroy you? What right do I have to destroy my children?"

After leaving, Davis became homeless. He floated between

multiple “crack houses” within West St. Louis. After his journey with homelessness, Davis can’t walk by someone on the street without stopping to help.

“Whether you’re living in a state of poverty or the maximum state of luxury, we’re all human,” Davis said. “How could you look down on somebody [who’s homeless]? When you look down that means you can’t look [inward] because that could be you. You don’t ever know [where] life may take [you]. [The people here] didn’t think it was going to be them. I didn’t think it was going to be me.”

SITLM accepts anyone who needs help, no matter their past. Additionally, SITLM offers food, clothes and other necessities to anyone who asks, even if they’re not part of the 90-day program.

“A home is where love is at, where people take care of each other,” Davis said. “Love is an action; it’s something you put forth all the time.”

Davis’s love for SITLM’s residents isn’t always sweet, though.

“He is hard on us but that’s what we need,” SITLM resident Dylan Martinek, 30, said. “The one thing

process of the program

day 90

After 90 days, people can **graduate or stay longer**. A **ceremony with friends and family** is held for graduates.

beyond

Alumni run SITLM and have the opportunity to **visit every Sunday** for group meetings and prayer. House manager **James Davis stays in contact** with graduates.

that we were lacking [before coming to SITLM] was structure.”

When he was 13 years old, Martinek’s dad died, so he had to live with his mom and her addiction.

“Me and my mom actually got high together, so it was not the best spot for me,” Martinek said. “I used to go by [her house] and make sure she was still alive, but now since I’m trying to get clean, I try not to be around anything like that.”

Martinek used drugs for 15 years before he got sober six months ago with the help of SITLM. He’s striving for at least a year in programs to rebuild his life after the destruction drug use caused.

“There’s something about this building, this ministry, that really is different,” Martinek said. “I don’t know how to describe it or put it in words but it’s helped me tremendously.”

SITLM helps people get back on their feet by getting them IDs, Social Security numbers and jobs. But recovering from addiction and homelessness is far more than pa-

perwork. Everyone who comes to SITLM has a past to unpack. Braceley leads religious classes throughout the day to facilitate healing.

“I am going to do what I’m doing because I’ve been set free,” Braceley said. “So I’m committed to helping men to be set free like me. I’m committed to see men in their rightful position.”

This level of care doesn’t stop when men graduate from the program. Some come back as to visit, while others, like Davis and Moseley, continue to build the program from the inside out.

“I stay in touch with all the men that [are] willing to stay in touch with me,” Davis said. “I tell them, ‘If you need me, call me and I will come.’ It doesn’t stop here; gift it’s a lifetime. How can I stop touching your life once I touch it? How can I stop? Then, I wouldn’t be the friend and brother that I say I am. Brothers in faith; brothers in love.”

beyond

James Davis’s story doesn’t end here. He continues to help men rebuild their lives through sobriety as well as his own.

2022 After **graduating** the program, Davis became **house manager** of SITLM.

2022 After **decades of using drugs**, Davis committed to his **sobriety** and entered Stepping Into The Light Ministry’s 90-day sobriety program.

“I couldn’t stop [the sexual assault] then, but I can stop it now. I don’t have to be homeless anymore. I don’t have to be on drugs, I’m 5 years 7 months clean.”

James Davis



BOTTOM RIGHT: A SITLM graduate leads prayer. The group meets every Sunday to pray and reconnect. “This is a self-help program,” Davis said. “All we do is provide, you have to do the rest.”

TOP RIGHT: SITLM resident Dylan Martinek signs a check-in sheet. Martinek started studying to take his realtor license exam after joining SITLM. “I noticed a huge change in myself,” Martinek said. “[I have] more peace of mind [than I’ve] had in my whole life.”

LEFT: SITLM’s secretary, Xavier Mosely, sits at the front desk. Mosely has been at the house since Dec. 5, 2022. “My mom kicked me out [because] I kept letting homeless people in the house, giving them showers and food,” Mosely said. (Photos by Mac Huffman)



ABOVE: Knoedelseder sorts papers during class. He teaches and directs, so keeping everything sorted is important. "He's incredibly organized," teacher Thomas Lowery said. (Photo by Jay Heintz)



RIGHT: Knoedelseder shows off his headshot from 1988. He also directed at De Smet from 2005-2011. "Faculty and staff didn't miss the musical," Knoedelseder said. (Photo by Sydney Collinger)



TOP RIGHT: Knoedelseder gives direction during a rehearsal. This is his fifth play directed at Ladue. "[The arts are] not an afterthought here," Knoedelseder said. (Photo by Sydney Collinger)

TOP MIDDLE: Knoedelseder observes a scene from his acting class. He splits up his classes to help each one. "He's constantly cracking jokes and telling stories," junior Ella Hamlin said. (Photo by Jay Heintz)



Raise the Kurt-ains

Knoedelseder returns to Ladue's theater program after 17 years

by Rory Lustberg
features staff

Junior Kurt Knoedelseder trudged down the hallway. Kicked out of choir, he had nowhere to go. Class was still in progress, and he had time to kill until his next period. After trailing the hallways, he stumbled upon the only unlocked elective room, the theater class. As Knoedelseder pulled the door open, the theater enveloped his senses. Stu-

dents recited monologues, practiced jazz squares and plunked out notes on the piano. Standing in the doorway, Knoedelseder felt an inexplicable attraction to an art he had never experienced. He knew that this was what he wanted to do.

A mere two years later, he was majoring in theater at MacMurray College and on his way to becoming an educator for the next 41 years. Knoedelseder worked as Ladue's theater director and teacher from 1989-2005, and is back this year to take on the job again. Thomas Low-

ery, Ladue's choir director, taught with Knoedelseder for four years during his first stint at Ladue, and they've remained friends since.

"He's a gregarious person anywhere he goes," Lowery said. "He's loud. People recognize him. He remembers your name. And then he is an actor. Legit actor. So he brings that kind of knowledge and understanding when he's working with an actor. He knows how an actor's mind thinks and how he can reach that person."

In addition to directing the fall play and spring musical, Knoedelseder also teaches a theater class. Due to low enrollment, all acting, technical theater and directing courses have been combined into one class this year. The balancing of different areas of study can be daunting, but for a seasoned teacher like Knoedelseder, it is a welcome challenge.

"I'm going to have fun when I'm teaching class, and we're going to have fun when I'm directing," Knoedelseder said. "But we're going to get everything done that we need to get done. I want the kids to have fun in class because if they have fun in class, they'll take the next one. And inside all that fun, they're actually learning stuff that they're going to be able to use which is really good."

Junior Ella Hamlin takes a technical theatre independent study with Knoedelseder. Hamlin has been involved in school tech theatre since she was in seventh grade. Going into this year, she was apprehensive about the conjoined subjects, but was pleasantly surprised at Knoedelseder's class.

"It is so interactive, energetic and positive," Hamlin said. "Even if you make a mistake, you never really feel like you've messed up because [Knoedelseder is] so quick to help you with it and correct it. He just makes it into a funny scenario that isn't really stressful whatsoever."

Alongside class, Knoedelseder is making other efforts to increase enrollment in the theatre program, including the spring musical. Auditions for "Matilda," the musical based on Roald Dahl's children's story, will be open to both middle and high schoolers. Knoedelseder decided on this as a way to build the high school theater program in coming years.

"The idea behind doing 'Matilda' was we need to do a show that involves younger kids," Knoedelseder said. "Get them involved in all that we do at a younger age so they know what's available."

Having directed four spring musicals and four plays at his first stint at Ladue, Knoedelseder has his favorites. One of

note to him was a play, "The Laramie Project," that told the true story of anti-gay violence towards a teen in Wyoming. Knoedelseder noticed a change after the play was seen by students, both at Ladue and other schools.

"He's a gregarious person anywhere he goes. He's loud. People recognize him. He remembers your name."

Thomas Lowery, teacher

"It was a time when a kid would say in the cafeteria, 'Oh, you're gay,'" Knoedelseder said. "And people after that show started calling people out on it."

Along with working closely with students, Knoedelseder also collaborates with Lowery, mostly for the spring musical. The two have been friends since Knoedelseder originally started working at Ladue in 1989. And while they've had a significant break since Knoedelseder left in 2011, the transition back to co-workers was seamless.

"Kurt and I are best friends," Lowery said. "We were talking about the show we're going to do as soon as he found out he was on the job. So we always have a little line of communication."

Directing shows is one of the major appeals of teaching for Knoedelseder. Working with students is his favorite part of the job, which is evident by his enthusiasm and positive attitude towards his casts. Their passion fuels his own, making his 41 years of teaching fly by.

"With directing, you're working with a bunch of kids who absolutely want to be there," Knoedelseder said. They want to have fun. They want to be together. They want to make something, be a part of something that they can be proud of. And that that just makes it worth it coming to work every day." □

Illustration by RILEY COATES

Gender

by Rory Lustberg
identity staff

Step into Target. Walk to the so-called “girl’s” section, and you’re sure to be met with glitter, sequins and plenty of pink. The “boy’s” section is quite a different sight, with toy guns and footballs populating every corner of each blue-tinted aisle. Gender has long been seen as a binary, a two-tone of blue and pink. Now, the definition is changing. For many teens, high school is the pinnacle of self-discovery, and gender plays a large role. Understanding and respecting a multitude of gender identities is incredibly important in forging connections as we all grow up together.

Skylar Lucas

Skylar Lucas constantly feels manipulated. Though her relationship has changed throughout the years, she’s always felt a sense of separation between herself and her gender assigned at birth.

“I feel like my relationship with gender is the same as a relationship with someone you’ve known all your life,” Lucas said. “It’s as if I was two people that were best friends their entire life and now I don’t want to be best friends with

that person anymore. But they keep coming up, and you see them all the time. You hear them, and they’re mean sometimes. So I try to break it off.”

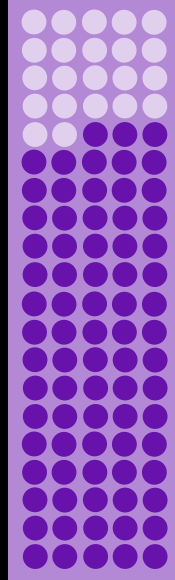
Lucas began questioning their gender in fifth grade, when they first felt the friendship start to splinter. Now, Lucas uses she/they pronouns. She often felt manipulated by gender, like their friendship turned sour quickly.

“Now it’s not a friendship anymore,” Lucas said. “Now they’re there. They’re stalking you. They’re persistent. They won’t leave you alone. At first, I was happy realizing this, but over time, it starts to get sadder and sadder. You don’t get angry, you get lonely. You get a feeling of, ‘Maybe I made the wrong decision.’”

Though Lucas has her moments of self doubt, she sticks by her gender evolution and her journey to who she is today. She encounters the opinions of others often, but Lucas wants to take her development on her own time.

“It’s my pace and it’s how I want to move forward,” Lucas said. “I appreciate [people] wanting to help me move forward faster by making me wear new clothes, maybe going to therapy, hormone treatment, all that kind of stuff. I want to do that. But it’s going to take a while for me to truly be able to look past what people perceive me as because that’s what we’ve been taught our entire lives and that’s what human

WOMEN ARE
27%
OF THE STEM
WORKFORCE



WOMEN EARN
30,500
LESS THAN MEN
IN STEM

WOMEN ARE
80% OF
HEALTHCARE
WORKERS
YET THEY’RE

21% OF
HEALTH
EXECUTIVES
AND BOARD
MEMBERS

Source: AAUW

nature is: that we strive to get people’s acceptance.”

Lucas has many friends who are in the midst of their own gender development and discovery. She tries to give her friends advice, but mostly focuses on making sure they’re well-informed before embarking on any sort of permanent procedure. Most advice she gives stems from the idea of advocating for yourself.

“The biggest thing I want to say to people is that you need to stand up for yourself because [teachers are] going to perceive you as the person they see on your Infinite Campus, [what] they see on your transcript,” Lucas said. “You see all of this, and it has the M or the F that you fear all the time. You want to scratch it out and write the one that you like, but it’s not going to happen until you change it yourself.”



Emily Shaw

Science and math classes have always populated senior Emily Shaw’s schedule. Starting with AP computer science in her sophomore year, Shaw continued to

advance and is currently taking calculus 3, AP statistics and AP chemistry. In her calculus 3 class, she is one of two female students out of a class of 15. She feels that there is a preference for males in math and science, most often within her family.

“I have a younger brother, and [my parents] pushed him way harder to do well in math and gave him more math classes and resources,” Shaw said. “That’s something I just had to do on my own. He skipped three grades in math, and I skipped one.”

Since Shaw is in the minority of women in her calculus class, she faces different struggles than the men. Though she may struggle more with speaking up in class, they can face their own issues in planning for the future, something Shaw has seen firsthand.

“I feel more pressure trying to fit in within a classroom and stand out there, but I think guys feel a lot more pressure standing out within a pool of applicants for college,” Shaw said. “I definitely have an advantage over them in that and that’s where I think they feel more stressed.”

While Shaw empathizes with the difficulties of the men in her class, she feels a weight that she doesn’t imagine they carry. She wants to encourage other women to take calculus 3, but feels that she’s representing all the girls in higher math classes.

GENDER IDENTITY BREAKDOWN

GENDER

A social construct of norms, behaviors and roles that varies between societies and over time

TRANSGENDER

Someone whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth

CISGENDER

Someone whose gender identity is their sex assigned at birth

NONBINARY

Someone whose gender identity doesn’t fit in the gender binary of men and women

AGENDER

Someone who does not identify as any gender

INTERSEX

Someone with differences in reproductive anatomy, chromosomes or hormones that don’t fit typical definitions of male and female
Source: NPR

“Sometimes I feel like I look bad,” Shaw said. “If I don’t do well, I’m one of two girls. If I fail the class, that’s 50% of girls who take this class and do not do well.”

While the pressure can get to her sometimes, Shaw finds comfort in her teacher. This is Rachel Garavaglia’s second year teaching calculus 3, and her positive attitude motivates Shaw.

“[Garavaglia] is really [passionate about] women in STEM,” Shaw said. “That’s made it way more enjoyable for me, the fact that she wants more girls there and she wants me there. She’s willing to help in everything and that makes it a lot better.”



Alex Schepker

Senior Alex Schepker sees his gender development most through his physical changes. He came out as transgender in fifth grade and immediately saw a change in the way he dresses.

“When I first came out, I was really shy, and so I wore a lot of baggy clothes,” Schepker said. “I’d [wear] sweatshirts and that’s it. But I became more confident over time,

and because of that, I’ve been able to express myself in different ways, which has been a lot through art but also through my makeup and the way that I dress.”

Schepker has found a cathartic and creative outlet within his art and makeup. While he loves to experiment with different styles.

“People stereotype [makeup] as a very feminine thing, but it doesn’t have to be,” Schepker said. “I think about that in terms of art. I love to paint and that’s just how I get my emotions out or stress, and I love to do my makeup.”

Since Schepker initially came out as transgender in fifth grade, he felt that he missed out on some of both the traditional male and female childhood experiences. He finds this catching up with him in the pressure to look or act a certain way, impeding that movie-esque, quintessential teen experience.

“Yes, I’m proud that I’m trans but I’d rather not be [trans],” Schepker said. “It would be so nice to have that ideal, stereotypical teenage life. I’m happy where I am, but it would be a lot easier if I wasn’t where I am.”

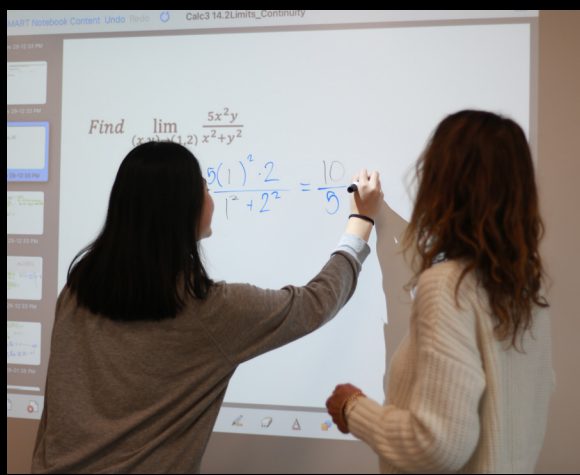
Schepker emphasizes the importance of treating people who don’t identify with their gender at birth the same as one would treat anyone else.

“Just treat them like a human being, and it works out.” Schepker said. “At the end of the day that’s what we’re trying to be.”

LEFT: Senior Emily Shaw works on a math problem on the whiteboard of her calculus 3 class. She has taken many S.T.E.M. classes, and notices that girls often feel hesitancy toward taking calculus 3. “It feels like you have to show other girls that you can take this [class],” Shaw said.



RIGHT: Shaw talks with calculus 3 teacher Rachel Garavaglia as they solve a math problem together. She noticed the gender disparity between the number of girls and boys in the class, and that can add pressure to Shaw in her performance in the class. “I can see how some people would be afraid to speak up, especially in a male dominated class,” Shaw said. (photo by Mac Huffman)



LEFT: Senior Alex Schepker shows off his eye makeup. He doesn’t see makeup as something only for women, but others often do. “[Wearing makeup] leads to me getting misgendered a lot, which is not a fun time, but I feel like I look good,” Schepker said. “So that’s the way that I want to put myself out in the world. That works for me, even if it doesn’t work for

RIGHT: Schepker smiles as he discusses his evolving style. When Schepker first came out, he dressed in a hypermasculine way, but since then his clothing has evolved. “Over time, [my style] went from feminine to hypermasculine, and now I am androgynous in the way that I dress,” Schepker said. (Photos by Mac Huffman)

Seeing is believing

The downfalls of staying immersed in one's own echo chamber and the censorship of books

by **Rory Lustberg**

in-depth staff

For You page has never been so true. You open TikTok, your eyes anxiously scanning the screen. Suddenly, a cute dog pops up. You watch it. You like it. You scroll. Next, it's a hair tutorial. Swipe. An ad for a toothbrush? Pass. As you watch more and more, variety between the videos gets smaller. There are no more dogs or toothbrush ads, but there are a large number of videos convincing you that Donald Trump was the real winner of the 2020 presidential election.

The more you see, the more the ideas start to make sense. Soon, every time you open the app, someone is waiting with a new perspective for you to take in. As you become convinced, you believe everyone thinks like you. Because how could they not? Everyone has the same app, and when you talk to your friends they all agree with you. So, why would you listen to anything else?

Social Media and Algorithms

An environment that perpetuates one's own ideas, also known as an echo chamber, is something that almost everyone encounters. This thinking especially affects younger audiences, mainly through social media, as sophomore Adam Ye expresses.

"If you're starting to click on some things you agree on, because obviously you agree with them, and you want to see more about what they say, then the algorithm starts recommending you more and more of that stuff," Ye said. "And eventually, you only see what you like, right? You don't see the opposite viewpoints. And you don't get to form a well rounded viewpoint, a cohesive viewpoint."

History teacher Mike Hill understands how difficult it can be to challenge long-held beliefs. At Ladue for 24 years, Hill sees the effects of echo chambers.

"It is so hard [to change one's ideas]," Hill said. "I can understand how people will fall into a comfortable ideology and will not want to hear any other perspectives because at the very least it's inconvenient to look at other people's perspectives. At the very most, it's exhausting."

While being inundated with other's views can be exhausting on its own, when people begin to take those ideals to heart, they can start to block out other people's positions. Sophomore Grace Agnew experiences this most through social media, especially stories on Instagram.

"When [people] are pretending like what you're saying doesn't have any importance at all it hurts," Agnew said. "And it's hard not to let it get to me."

As social media echo chambers intensify, they can start to jump off the screen and into real life. This notably occurred on Jan. 6, 2021, during the insurrection of the Capitol by rioters believing conspiracy theories from social media. Ye sees this process as directly perpetuated by the media algorithms that feed people more and more of their own ideas.

"Maybe it just starts out as a statement, right?" Ye said. "And then someone reviews that statement, and it turns into an argument, and then it turns into a massive debate, and then people will start actually going out into the real world and doing physical harm."

To prevent falling further into one's personal echo chamber, many advise fact-checking what you see on social media or seeking out perspectives from the other side. This ensures that opinions aren't based on biased information. And though the swirl of information can be hard to get out of, Hill says that information-based opinions are best.

"You have to have a rationale for [your opinion], and as long as you do, it doesn't matter if I agree with you or not," Hill said. "You're critically consuming and you're analyzing information. And that's all we want you to do."

Government

The silencing of others' perspectives is not a new fad. In Missouri, the Senate Bill 775, which allows librarians and teachers to be criminally prosecuted if they provide books with visually "sexually explicit" material to children, is newly in effect. This widespread push to ban books with controversial topics disproportionately affects LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC community members, something Ladue librarian Mary Kate Mortland has seen firsthand.

"It minimizes individuals' feeling of worth within a community because they're not reflected," Mortland said. "They don't see themselves, or they recognize the fact that all of the content and the books that are being banned connect with them and their identity markers."

From July 2021 to June 2022, 81% of books banned in the United States either had LGBTQIA+ themes/protagonists, or protagonists of color. Many minority students read to see themselves represented, so pulling these books off the shelves can make those students feel isolated and suppressed. Ye, who immigrated to the United States from Shenzhen, China in 2017, uses books to progress his understanding of different perspectives.

"I've been pretty into Asian authors because of my ethnicity, since I immigrated here and it's a whole new culture," Ye said. "I guess I'm using books as a way to see how people of my ethnicity here in the U.S. see our own culture."

Missouri Senate Bill 775 has impacted many school districts, including Rockwood, Parkway and Mehlville. These schools have all had the affected books removed from their libraries. Ladue has not been impacted yet, and Ladue librarian Jennifer Tuttle intends to keep it that way.

"Our job in a library is to provide free access to everything inside of the library," Tuttle said. "It is in a person's purview whether or not they choose to check it out and read it." □

CENSORSHIP

OPINION

PERSPECTIVE

illustration by | ANNIE ZHAO & OLIVIA HU

Under fire: the search for

escape

Community and schools cope with gun violence in American schools

by **Arti Jain**
in-depth staff

by **Rory Lustberg**
web editor in chief

Tourniquets shoved in drawers. Bandages placed on shelves. Ladders propped up in cabinets. Teachers trained to treat bullet wounds. Stocked like a medical facility, this is what Ladue High School looks like in 2023. With an increasing emphasis on safety comes new procedures and materials, a stark difference from just a few years ago. School safety impacts everyone: students, staff and the entire community, and their voices must be heard.

Since 1999, there have been **377 school shootings** and **349,000 students** have faced **in-school gun violence**

Sources: Office of Justice Programs, CNN, Foundation for Economic Education, Education Week, Washington Post

The Dieckhaus family
March 27, six lives were taken at The Covenant School in Nashville, Tenn. That day, six families and countless communities were changed forever. The aftershocks traveled 397 miles, where junior Emily Dieckhaus faced the unthinkable — the loss of her 9-year-old cousin, Evelyn Dieckhaus. After this tragic event, Emily grappled with anxiety.

“There’s always that background in your head like, ‘What can happen today?’” Emily said. “You see so much [gun violence] on social media and it seems to be almost growing at this point. The gun violence just keeps getting worse and worse. And it’s crazy

how you never know if it’ll affect you, and then, it does.”

Emily first found out about the Covenant shooting on social media. She didn’t know about Evelyn’s death at the time, and initially saw the post as yet another routinely tragic event.

“All these shootings happen all the time and you see the names and you kind of scroll over them,” Emily said. “But now that name is standing out to you; my last name is on this social media post.”

After learning of Evelyn’s death, Emily and her family drove to Nashville. There, the community rallied around them — offering transportation, food and even medical assistance for the family dog. She saw this as a double-edged sword,

as it provided comfort, but it also carried the weight of appearances in public.

“This was the one thing that really hit close to home,” Emily said. “You really never ever think it’ll happen to you until it does. Especially her being so young and then the whole school shooting aspect of it and then it being on social media. [We got] approached in grocery stores [by people saying,] ‘Are you the Dieckhaus family? We saw your name on the news.’”

Emily was very close with Evelyn, who was a beloved member of the family.

“Evelyn had her own little connection with everyone, her own little thing with everyone, and her being the youngest, she was just everyone’s little baby,” Emily said.

The Dieckhaus family traveled together often with all of the cousins, so Emily and Evelyn spent a lot of time together. Evelyn was only 9 years old when she died — but even so, her vibrant personality was apparent. To honor that, the family wore pink to her funeral.

“We said in her eulogy that she liked the color pink and she liked the color black,” Emily said. “She would wear combat boots, but she would also wear skirts and it was like she had these two sides to her.”

After Evelyn’s death, Emily couldn’t help but notice the vulnerability of school safety, no matter the precautions taken.

“There’s talk about how the

shooter was able to shoot down the door and just walk right in and it makes you wonder, ‘How did no one see this on camera?’” Emily said. “It’s just kind of weird. It makes me wonder, ‘It’s really that easy?’ I don’t understand how it could be that easy. It makes me wonder if only someone had spotted the person first or they had bulletproof glass or something and then all this would not have happened.”

The grieving process has been tumultuous for Emily and her family. Evelyn’s death left an enormous hole in their lives, one that can never be repaired.

“At one moment we can all be laughing and having fun together, and then the next minute it all hits us and then we’re sitting there talking about her [saying], ‘How could this have happened?’” Dieckhaus said. “Every single day, it gets a little bit better, but deep down I know that I’ll always be changed by this.”

Government

School safety starts at the top — the government and their regulations. However, some feel that not enough is being done by the government; especially when considering that there are no standardized requirements for school safety procedures. This idea concerns student and Community Services Assistant Superintendent Derrick Wallace.

“At this point in time, there are no national or state standards regarding school safety,” Wallace said. “[It] would be helpful if we

95% of public schools practice active **shooter drills** and lockdowns

Annually, U.S. schools spend **\$3.1 billion** on security features

This number rises around **8%** each year

Oct. 14, 2022, the Department of Justice awarded **\$190 million** in grants to support **school safety**

had national or state standards on safety. Think about it. We have standards for driving a vehicle: you have to have a driver’s license, you have to drive on the right [and] the steering wheel is on one side. So it would help with consistency.”

Governor Mike Parson of Missouri signed a bill Feb. 27 to allocate \$20 million to school safety. Standardizing procedures would allocate additional funds to aid in the implementation of more extensive security measures.

“[I wish we had national or state standards for safety] because then I think [that] would free up funding,” Ramirez said.

Governmental policies regarding mental health have also played a large role in the national gun violence debate. Jessica Meyers, director of the St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission, feels a holistic approach should be taken. She believes that the availability of mental health resources, or lack thereof, is a root cause of gun violence incidents.

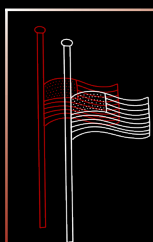
“We have way too few mental health services in the country, especially for youth, whether it’s counselors, peer support or psychiatrists,” Meyers said. “Not everybody needs medication, but some people do and the fact that it can take months or years to get someone under 18 in to see a psychiatrist is disgraceful. How are we putting them, their families and their communities at risk by not being able to appropriately treat that person?”

Administration

Another entity responsible for school safety is that of administration. Student and community services assistant superintendent Derrick Wallace has his own goal of safety for Ladue.

An epidemic

Gun violence has become increasingly prevalent



In 2023, there have been **more mass shootings than days.**

2 out of 5 U.S. adults live in a household with a gun

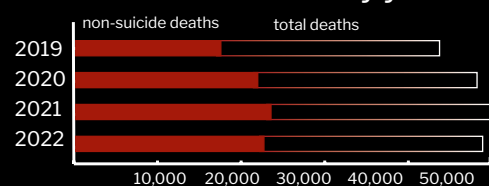


As of April 19, the U.S. has faced

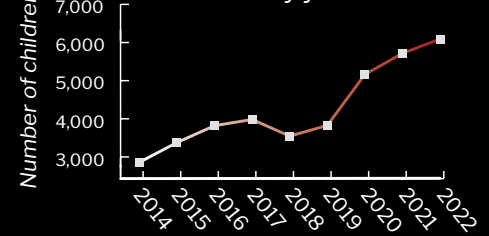
167 mass shootings this year

921 people have been **injured or killed**

Total firearm deaths by year



Number of children killed or injured by firearms by year



Lives and legislation

Gun-related statistics by state

Missouri's **2007 repeal** of the permit-to-purchase law, requiring **background checks**, was associated with a **47% increase in gun homicide rates.**

The number of firearm deaths per 100,000 people

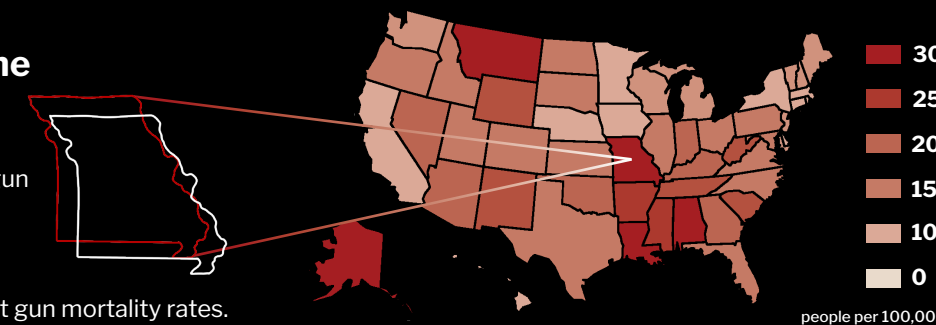
Missouri is the

#10

state for weakest gun laws and the

#6

state for the highest gun mortality rates.



Sources: CDC, Center for American Progress, Everytown for Gun Safety, Gun Violence Archive, Pew Research Center and World Population Review

“Safety means you all as students can come and thrive and achieve at high levels, our staff can come to work and function at a high capacity, working with you all as students,” Wallace said. “So that really is the hope.”

The increasing prevalence of active shooter situations in schools has caused schools to implement new and creative safety measures. During the 2022-2023 school year, Ladue High School students experienced their first active shooter drill, practicing the 4 E’s procedure: Educate, Evade, Escape and Engage.

“Kids have to feel safe to be able to learn. The safer they feel, the better off they are in a learning environment.”

Richard Ramirez, school resident officer

“Before, there was no training for an incident like this, and now we’re really pushing for the change,” Ramirez said. “It’s a public outcry or we’ve seen

it on TV and I think there’s a need for it. So it evolves. We’re gonna evolve with it.”

In order to stay vigilant, Ladue continuously updates security measures. In the future, Ramirez anticipates additional measures that will help to better protect schools.

“There are several systems that we’re putting in schools,” Ramirez said. “By [this] time next school year, they should be up and running. We

stay on top of that, and I think Ladue really does an excellent job compared to the Missouri area.”

Response

Regardless of the strides made by Ladue administration, active shooter situations are often on the forefront of people’s mind. As shootings have become commonplace and schools are especially targeted, many have felt an increase of anxiety.

“This issue of gun violence is [an issue] that directly affects our lives as students,” eighth-grader Calvino Hammerman said. “[It’s] one of the biggest because we are in school, we have to be there and we should not be subjected to the dangers.”

As a student, it is impossible to fully escape the threat of gun violence, but many overlook its effect on staff. As a former Marine and current teacher, Hank Harrison questions why the idea of school shootings are even present in society.

“First thing I think of [when hearing ‘school shooting’] is ‘why?’” Harrison said. “Why has society devalued life so quickly in the 23 years that I’ve been [at Ladue]?”

This concern is also felt by Reed Elementary second grade teacher Lindsey Anderson. She has been teaching for 23 years and has consistently felt like Ladue should do more.

“[I don’t think Ladue is doing enough to prepare], but I think that that’s universal,” Anderson said.

“Schools in general are not prepared. I think there should be bulletproof glass in all schools. We have a lot of security measures as far as our doors; our exterior doors are all locked, [and] there’s a little vestibule before you can actually enter the building. So we have put things in place, but I don’t think that it’s necessarily a Ladue issue, I think it’s a universal issue. It needs to be taken a little more seriously.”

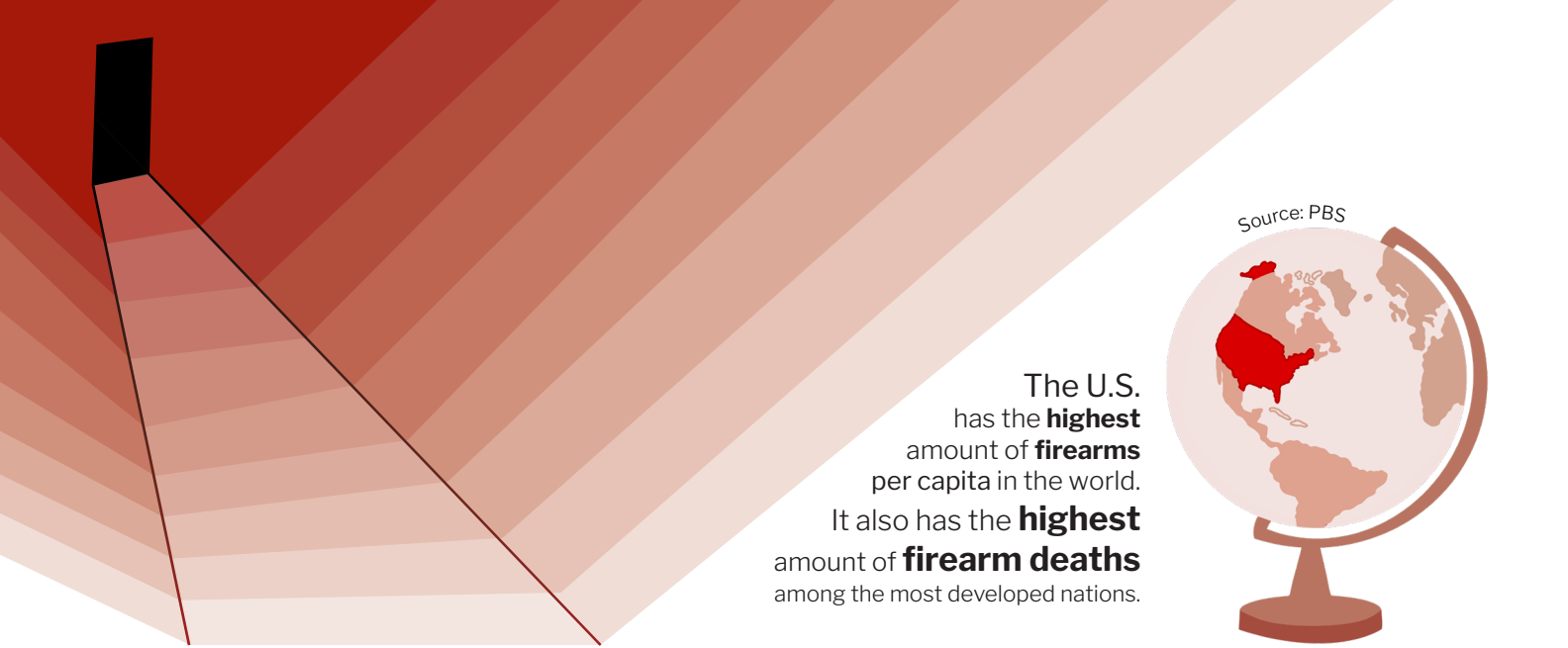
Lindsey Anderson, teacher

After asking for safety supplies to keep in her classroom, Anderson was

turned down due to budgetary reasons. She feels that additional funding is needed to be adequately prepared.

“I would love to see all possible measures considered, and not considered from a financial standpoint, but from the mental, emotional [and] physical well-being of students and staff,” Anderson said.

Though the cause may seem helpless, students and staff can take actions. Wallace hopes that students will tell an adult when they hear anything regarding safety concerns, even comments perceived in a joking manner.



Source: PBS



The U.S. has the **highest** amount of **firearms** per capita in the world. It also has the **highest** amount of **firearm deaths** among the most developed nations.

“That adage ‘if you see something, say something’ seems so simple, but the more that we can remind everyone to do that, the better off we will be,” Wallace said. “There are times where, as students, you might see something, and then we look into the situation and find out [that] someone didn't say something earlier. And as early as we can share whatever in-

formation we have on the topic, the better it is going to be. We can provide some additional support to someone; we can get an evaluation for someone.”

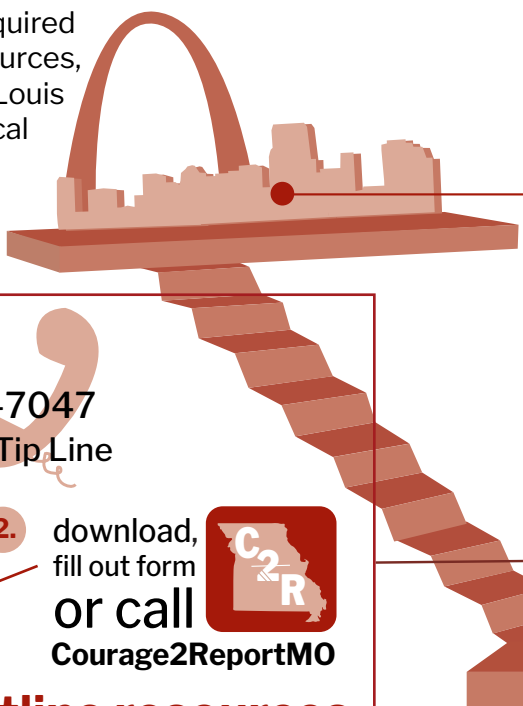
In order to advocate against school shootings and for gun reform, Hammerman organized a walkout at Ladue Middle School April 5. A total of 350 students participated, leaving their classes to send

a message and spread awareness. Hammerman believes that events such as these serve as a platform for students to engage with the world around them.

“[The walkout participation] proves that [students] do have a voice and we do care about what's happening,” Hammerman said. “We are not disengaged from what's happening in the world.”

Violence prevention resources

Gun violence prevention and education can be acquired through various resources, from the greater St. Louis community to our local Ladue community.



Community resources
Scan these QR codes to learn more

Missouri Foundation For Health




St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission

1. call
1-866-748-7047
Anonymous TipLine



2. download, fill out form or call
Courage2ReportMO




Ladue's hotline resources

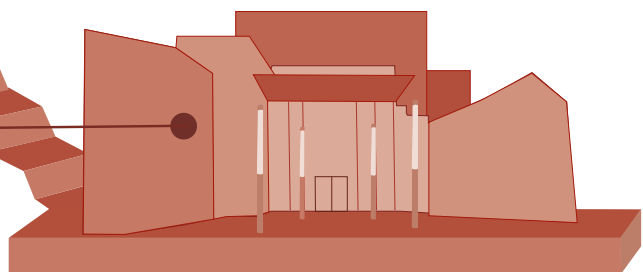


illustration by | ANNIE ZHAO & MIMI ZHOU