

A SPIRITED YEAR

ELIAS FELDMAN

Multimedia Communications Director

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The sun is setting over Golden Gate Park. It's almost time for the Homecoming football game, which, along with the Convent High School volleyball match the night before, has generated more excitement throughout the Convent & Stuart Hall community than any athletic event in recent memory.

On this Saturday night in late September 2019, the hallowed grounds of Kezar Stadium, former home of the San Francisco 49ers, are alive with excitement. Walking in from the parking lot, fans pass an alumni gathering, a Parents Association tent selling pizza and soft drinks and a giveaway table lined with hats. The stands on the south side of the sprawling stadium are packed with elementary and high school students, parents, faculty and alumni waving white rally towels emblazoned with the school logo. When it's time for Stuart Hall to take the field, the team emerges from the old tunnel and runs through a giant banner, music playing as the public address announcer introduces the team.

As Stuart Hall and its opponent, Upper Lake High School, jog out to begin the game, the student section starts singing the familiar rhythmic refrain heard at all big games: "I believe that we will win." Standing on the sideline, Dana Kuwahara turns and looks up at the crowd, the sun low enough now that it casts a shadow across the grandstand. At that moment, she was thinking, "I want this to happen at all of our games."



When Dana was hired in spring 2019 as the new Head of Athletics & Physical Education, promoting unified school spirit was high on her list of priorities. After six years as an Associate Athletic Director at Santa Clara University, Dana was well positioned to help strengthen the school's K–12 identity through athletics. But how do you actually build that elusive thing called school spirit? For Dana, school spirit is synonymous with athletics. "As an athletic director, all I want is for students to come out and cheer," she says. "Having love for your school is what it's all about." It's been quite a year for Dana — possibly the busiest of her professional life. She's spent much of it learning the ins and outs of the school's culture while running a robust department that she says operates much like a small college athletic department. Dana smiles broadly as she recalls attending high school

in Los Angeles, where she says, "People took school spirit very seriously. As kids, we just wanted some kind of identity, and my school helped define that for us." Before joining Santa Clara, Dana worked for the UCLA athletic department and earned her doctorate degree from USC. The decades-old Southern California rivalry between the two universities evokes strong school spirit and unity from both sides. While Dana is quick to point out that her ambitions for growing school spirit at Convent & Stuart Hall exist on a much smaller scale, she says the overarching goal is the same: develop a sense of belonging and school pride for every student and family. Steeped in Sacred Heart tradition dating back more than 130 years, Convent & Stuart Hall students enjoy an array of beloved customs and spirit days throughout the school year. For Dana, athletics is a natural outgrowth of that



LEFT TO RIGHT: Fueled by an energetic student section, Kezar Stadium was filled with excitement for the Homecoming football game. Elementary students stopped by the concession stand before kickoff. Freshmen showed their class spirit during the Homecoming game halftime competition. The student section came alive during the NCS Division V championship game in 2019.

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experience. To help get fans excited, she handed out branded gear at select games this fall and winter. "The giveaways not only get people to come," she says, "but they spark conversations after the event that continue to build spirit."

On one particularly cold and rainy night at the Beach Chalet soccer complex, both high school varsity soccer teams played simultaneously on adjacent fields. With the wind kicking up off Ocean Beach, the athletic department gave away 100 rally scarves with Convent printed on one side and Stuart Hall on the other. "When you can visually see it," Dana says, referring to the feeling of unity that is enhanced by fans wearing the same colors, "we witness school spirit growing before our eyes."

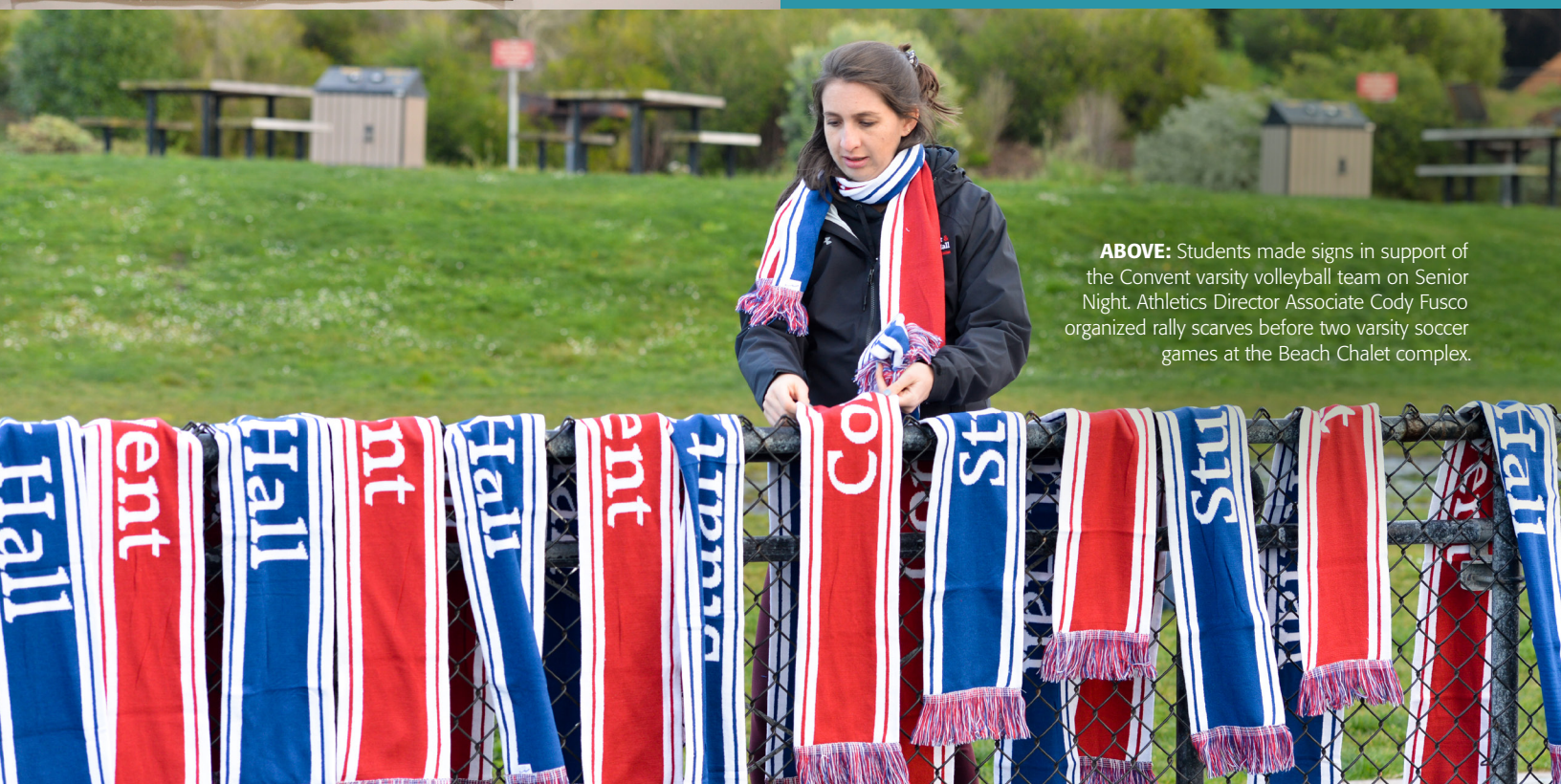
A few months later, a broad cross-section of the community formed a mighty cheering section at Kezar Pavilion to watch Stuart Hall's exciting run to a North

Coast Section basketball title followed by two games in the NorCal Championships. "I think it's so cool when you see our younger students cheering with their pom-poms," Dana says. "Exposing them to the opportunities they will have when they get older is part of what school spirit is all about."

This past fall, senior Kati Walter and junior Zeke Noveshen were elected as spirit leaders. They meet weekly with Dana, their adviser, and other spirit committee members to plan activities that boost school pride. The committee has already launched a high school competition to build spirit among classes. Students earn points for their class by participating in fun activities, and the class with the most points at the end of the year will win a special chance to celebrate together.

Inspired by the school's burgeoning culture of spirit and with a desire to strengthen it further, Board Chair Holden Spaht and his wife, Claire Spaht, have donated a gift toward establishing an endowed fund to nurture and sustain initiatives that promote spirit and unity. The interest earned from this fund will support pep rallies, fan transportation to big games, school plays and art shows, and beginning and end-of-year festivities.

At the Homecoming football game, the crowd was an energizing force for the team on the field. But the final score, 48-34 in favor of Stuart Hall, was almost an afterthought. "Having a community, across grades, boys and girls, that unifies around these types of events is such a gift," Dana says. "We will continue to build on this." ❤️



ABOVE: Students made signs in support of the Convent varsity volleyball team on Senior Night. Athletics Director Associate Cody Fusco organized rally scarves before two varsity soccer games at the Beach Chalet complex.