

Meet the Principal!

By Vera Caldwell

Could you introduce yourself?

Well, hi! I'm Dr. Rivas. I'm Colombian-American and raised by a single mom, which has shaped my outlook on life. I was led to the arts through Houston's Colombian Folkloric Ballet (CFB), which was started in the '80s to promote Colombian culture. In the '80s and 90's Colombia was often portrayed negatively in the media, and the CFB countered that through music and dance. I was very shy as a kid, but when I got involved in the CFB as a teenager it helped me break out of my shell.

What drew you to PVA?

I knew about PVA from growing up in Katy and dancing there. My friend's neighbor was a dancer at PVA, and I got excited about the school when I met her. When I was working with the CFB later, we recruited a lot of dancers from PVA. When I was going to U of H, I'd give the PVA dancers rides to rehearsals at the CFB. When I joined HISD as a teacher, I just followed PVA closely; I eventually became principal of Crockett, which is an arts-focused elementary school. I loved it there. I turned down other jobs, including some with higher pay, to stay at Crockett. The only school that could ever get me to leave Crockett Elementary was PVA. I was nervous about applying for the job because most of my education experience has been with elementary schools, though I also have a fine arts background and a Ph.D. The entire hiring

process happened very quickly and intensely. At the time I was applying to PVA, my husband ordered a plaque with my name on it for my office at Crockett. I told him I would save it for my PVA office, and lo and behold, I got to bring it here.

What art area would you be in if you went to PVA?

People may be surprised to hear that I would have probably come to PVA for visual arts and not dance, only because when I was thirteen or fourteen, I was still incredibly shy, and I was not ready to be on stage for dance. I did, however, love drawing and painting. Maybe as an older student, it would have been for dance.

What changes do you want to see in PVA in the coming years?

As a new principal, I want to observe the school first and get to know PVA's culture. I want to protect PVA's traditions and fifty-year history. However, I also want to make sure we're staying relevant to the political, environmental, and art worlds. My dissertation was on technology and creativity in the 21st century, so I've been focused on this topic for a while. This looks different from department to department. The students here have a broad perspective and want to be relevant, so I want the school to reflect that.

Anything new/any plans we should be looking forward to this year?

With Delta, there's a lot we don't know, so we're moving more cautiously than anticipated. We want to keep PVA as interactive as we can safely.

Aside from COVID, I want to see as many performances and Happenings as I can and get to know each department well. I want to showcase our students' creative process as much as their final products because the process is where the inspiration happens.

Just so the students who haven't visited the office yet know, you have two pet snakes. Could you talk about them?

I've always been an animal and nature lover. I've had a lot of pets over the years, and I organized a Canine Angels partnership at Crockett—the kids wrote fun, creative bios for the rescue dogs. I've always been drawn to reptiles and amphibians, even as a child (which Mom wasn't always happy about). I got into snakes after a friend asked me to take care of theirs. Snakes have such a simple design but are so well adapted. I also had both of

my snakes at Crockett, and kids got to sit with the snakes and read to them as a special reward. People find snakes interesting.

Favorite writer?

I really love Isabel Allende, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Victor Hugo. But my favorite book of all time is the Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

Favorite musician?

I'm really into Radiohead and Thom Yorke.

Favorite actor?

I love Meryl Streep—she can play so many different types of roles.

Favorite visual artist?

Jacob Lawrence, Frida Kahlo.

Favorite type of dance?

That depends on the type of dance. I've always been drawn to folkloric and world dance, both as a dancer and observer.

This article has been edited and condensed.



Honoring Ms. McNeil

By Adelaide Fairbanks



On June 13, 2021, we lost beloved teacher and alumnus Ms. Mekeva McNeil, to cancer. We knew her as a member of the Theatre faculty and spring all-schools FELA! and The Color Purple, as an educator, theatre artist, confidant, and role model. She constantly asked questions and pushed her students to find the truth of human behavior. She changed the way I view my art and introduced me to a new form of creative expression. Her work has stuck with me, and I often observed that her passion could bring out the best in others. Ms. McNeil always seemed genuinely interested in what you had to say and encouraged honesty and openness in her classes, while maintaining an air of acceptance. She profoundly changed every person she interacted with.

I wish to honor her impact on all of us. The best representation of her effect on our school wouldn't be my own, singular perspective but that of those she taught.

"She presented a nonjudgmental environment [that gave] me insight and [filled] me with hope and purpose. She taught so many of us to be kind to our bodies and how to listen to them. She taught me how to flush out my nerves and become one with myself...I started using methods that we learned in class at home to stay positive during the time of her passing."

- Haylie

"Ms. McNeil was the person who most impacted my view of what the theatre community could be and even who I could be as a person.....She helped me realize I didn't have to shape myself to exist in the world, but rather my world was shaped around myself...Her existence in the theatre industry allowed me to feel welcome."

- Anonymous

"Ms. McNeil believed in me when I didn't even believe in myself. No matter how many times I failed or fumbled, her trust in me never wavered...When we were doing our online shows, I submitted design auditions for McNeil's show The Bat, soon to be changed to Lysistrata. My design was just a 3x5 drawing of an old woman in a chair. She loved it. She asked if she could keep it, and I said yes. She wanted me as a costume designer for the show. Even though I struggled a lot with that show, she would tell me how much she loved what I created and how much she wanted my designs to represent her show. I was told that she kept that little 3x5 drawing on her desk all year, up until her passing when that stuff was sent to her family. It makes me happy to know that that silly little design she loved so much got sent to her family. I don't really know why."

- A Level 4

"My freshman year, our class was doing a challenging group exercise. I was having a hard time, and when Ms. McNeil

noticed this, she singled me out and made me redo the exercise until I did it with confidence. When I finally made it to that point, she looked me in the eye and said, "Don't underestimate yourself," Those words stuck with me the whole year. McNeil believed in me when I didn't believe in myself, and I never got to thank her for it."

- Scout

"Ms. McNeil [was] so humble and sweet and had a wonderful perspective that was crucial to her directing and teaching work[I] got to work with her on this performance for the anniversary of Apollo 11. It was one of the only times I got to work with her on something, which I regret. She was nice enough to drive a few of us to the event. She was encouraging and humorous when the night didn't go as planned and kept the feeling fun and light."

- A Level 4

"She made me feel seen whenever I was around her. At first it made me uncomfortable; however, over time I was able to find comfort in the fact that I mattered enough to someone to feel seen....She reminds me of waking up naturally and enjoying a nice warm cup of coffee. She always seemed content and "living in the moment." Once, a level one came up to me and told me that Ms.McNeil told them that they reminded her of me. Honestly, I never thought I ever inhabited a place in her mind out of class, but this changed my view on the matter. I realized that even though I wasn't always around her and very close to her, I still existed in her mind."

- Robin

Lunch Talk With The Dynamic Duo: Perez & Tellez

By Kate-Yeonjae Jeong

This school year, Kinder HSPVA welcomed Mr. Perez and Mr. Tellez as the Assistant Principals. To better get to know the APs, I had a lunch talk with the dynamic duo.*

1. KYJ: How did you come to be at PVA?

Perez: In 2010, I was working for the district when Dr. Allen approached me about coming to PVA. I fell in love with the school and started with teaching French. Then in 2015, I became an AP but went back to the

classroom two years later to teach Spanish for four years. And now, I'm back as an AP again!

Tellez: This is the start of my 5th year. It's kind of an irony- I actually took what used to be Mr. Perez's position. I was previously a teacher at a magnet school, but after my AP certification, I came to PVA. I had heard many great things about the school, and I myself love the arts... and things got lucky.

1. KYJ: What is your favorite part about being the Assistant Principal at PVA?

Perez: I enjoy being able to assist all students and teachers. Being able to interact with everyone is amazing. I can also have a system of providing guidance and support, which is very important to me.

Tellez: That's a tough one- there's a lot. The biggest thing is that the PVA students have strong ambitions, which allows me to really get involved and support them with their goals. Everyone is here because they want to be here, and because they are passionate- which is the common starting point.

1. KYJ: This is PVA's 50th year, so there'll be a lot of events going on. What is one thing you're most looking forward to?

Perez: I am looking forward to attending many events- maybe even participating in some. I'm also excited to simply have fun with faculty and students!

Tellez: Balancing the new and old traditions. For example, I oversee the Diversity Series, which I'm proud of. I feel it is part of the PVA culture despite being new. The Happening is a very old PVA tradition, which is also a huge part of PVA.

1. KYJ: What is your educational philosophy? Or your motto?

Perez: It's actually on my office wall: All our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them. I read it somewhere.

Tellez: If you're not happy doing what you're doing at least 51% of the time, you need to look for a change. The key is to pursue what makes you happy. For education, you have to be passionate. I want to challenge students and teachers and hook them.

1. KYJ: If you were in a department at PVA, which department would you be in?

Perez: Disclaimer- I love all arts, but I would be in the dance department, or maybe theatre. I love folkloric dance.

Tellez: Easiest question! Vocal for sure; I am a singer and have a vocal background. I actually had a vocal scholarship for college- although I majored in the history background instead.

1. KYJ: What is one super cool fun fact about you?

Perez: I have visited 40 countries (France is my favorite), and I speak three languages: Spanish, English, French. I also know the basics of German.

Tellez: I have coached two different sports- football and soccer.

1. KYJ: Favorite piece of advice, favorite book, and hobby?

Perez: My advice- be a better person every day. My hobbies are working out and collecting miniature monuments from the places I visit. My favorite book is *Doce Cuentos Peregrinos* (Strange Pilgrims).

Tellez: My advice- anything you choose to do in life, do what makes you joyful. Don't be stagnant and don't be afraid of change. My hobbies are watching sports, especially soccer. My favorite book is a biography by Trevor Noah titled *Born a Crime*.

1. KYJ: Where is your dream vacation destination?

Perez: I want to explore Southeast Asia- Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia.

Tellez: I'd say Italy- Rome.

*This interview has been edited and condensed.

Some Mid-year Freshman Advice

If you're looking for some advice on how to go about navigating this new world, you're in the right place. As a fresh ex-9th-grader myself, here are 8 tips to thrive during your first year at PVA:

1. **Get close with fellow artists.** You'll be spending 4 hours every single day of the school year with the people in your department, so get to know them! You can branch out as well. Be open to finding new friends outside of your department, or even outside of your grade!
2. **Try something new.** Whether it be in your focused arts study or exploring a new interest within a club, high school is a great time to get outside your comfort zone!
3. **The teachers are here for you.** They truly care about you and your well-being. If you ever need help or need to be heard, don't hesitate to reach out to them!
4. **Work hard, play hard.** Pretty much self-explanatory, but give it your all and find that balance- and get in those hours of sleep.
5. **Participate.** From Happenings to school-wide events, there's a variety of things you can do! There are so many clubs you can get involved in here at our school, and they serve as the perfect opportunity to delve further into your interests and meet new people. (Even paper* is a club that you can join!)
6. **Place priorities.** Know what's of most significance to you and stick to your priorities. Don't forget that your personal wellness is important too.
7. **Know your studying style.** Find out what method(s) work best for you and what doesn't- and keep an organized personal schedule to get everything in check.

Enjoy the ride! Everyone says it but it's true: time flies, especially when you're having fun. Your four years at PVA will be magical- enjoy it!



A Note From the Editor In Chief

First of all, I owe everyone an apology. paper* had a bit of a rough start this year. Between technical issues and time issues, we are finally releasing the first edition. I can only hope that our team can lead the paper into a great future this next semester. If you have any interest in submitting to paper*, make sure to submit your ideas to hspvapaper@gmail.com, and follow us on instagram @hspvapaper.

Thank you for your patience.

Best,
Anna Grace Hethcox
Editor-In-Chief

Overheards

"You would be a cute little rodent."
- Elena Oliveira

"Why does everyone look so sad in the Great Depression?"
- Jasmine Lin

"I'm going to activate my inner gremlin."
- Mr. Davis

"Everyone dies sometimes."
- Evian Butler

"I am in a perpetual state of God."
- Frida Berman

"It definitely was a bruh moment."
- Ms. Hall

"Don't you dare tell me what's an OSHA violation."
- Robert Wise

"Pain is great when it's not yours."
- Frida Berman

"I feel like all cats are anarchists."
- Ahron Lewis

I feel like Stage Management ages you. Nic Lam used to be like seventeen and now he's eight-four.
- Hannah Maltbie

They're free tickets if you buy them.
- Erick Arakelian

I'm pretty much famous now.
- Matthew Garza

Just, like, cancel me.
- Matt Hune