VILLA VICTORIA ACADEMY

Alumnae E-News
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An interview with Villa Girl Gabriella Leverence '14

What are your degrees and from where?

I earned my Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice from Florida Gulf Coast University and my Master of Science in Homeland Security and Terrorism from Fairleigh Dickinson University. I also earned a Graduate Certificate in Leadership Development from Fairleigh Dickinson University and have pursued doctoral studies in Law and Policy at Northeastern University.

What classes do you teach and where?

I am a Professor at Kean University, where I teach courses in Psychology and Criminal Justice. My courses include Criminal Psychology, Forensic Psychology, Psychology of Criminal Behavior, and specialized courses focused on mass violence. I have also previously taught Criminal Justice and Criminology courses at Fairleigh Dickinson University, including Responses to Mass Violence and Terrorism and Political Violence.

Tell us about your recently published book. Why did you pick this topic for this book?

Mass violence has been a major focus of my teaching, research, and professional interests for several years. I became especially interested in understanding mass

shootings, hate crimes, terrorism, radicalization, and other forms of targeted violence through an interdisciplinary lens. When teaching these subjects, I found that students often had to rely on materials scattered across psychology, criminology, sociology, law, and public policy. I wanted to create a textbook that brought those perspectives together while encouraging students to think critically about not only why mass violence occurs, but also prevention, intervention, response, and recovery. That ultimately became ***Mass Violence in Modern Society: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding, Prevention, and Response,*** published by Kendall Hunt.

What are your hobbies?

Outside of teaching, research, and writing, I enjoy spending time with my family and friends, traveling, reading, and taking on new creative projects. Writing has become an especially important part of my life. I am currently working on my second college textbook, ***Criminal Behavior: A Psychological and Investigative Approach***, which is being developed to compete within a market currently led by the country's top criminal behavior textbook.

What are your career highlights/awards?

One of the most meaningful highlights of my career has been choosing education and mentorship as my professional path. Earlier in my career, I received employment opportunities from federal agencies including the FBI, Homeland Security, and NCIS. Ultimately, I made the decision to turn down those opportunities to pursue teaching, where I felt I could make a different kind of long-term impact through education, research, and student mentorship.

Before entering academia full-time, I served as a State Field Investigator, which gave me professional investigative experience that continues to shape the way I teach criminal and forensic psychology. I also previously served as a Senior Vice President for a military nonprofit organization, where I gained extensive leadership and organizational experience.

Publishing my first textbook with Kendall Hunt has been another major career milestone, particularly because it allowed me to bring together my professional experience, research interests, and teaching into a resource specifically designed for students studying mass violence.

Being able to develop specialized courses in areas such as mass violence, criminal psychology, forensic psychology, terrorism, and criminal behavior—and mentor students interested in these areas—has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career.

I was recently named an **Influential Woman of 2026** by Influential Women, a national media and recognition platform dedicated to celebrating the achievements, leadership, and contributions of women across various industries.

The organization highlights women who are making meaningful impacts in their professions and communities, providing opportunities to share their stories, experiences, and accomplishments with a broader audience.

Who are your favorite Villa teachers?

It is incredibly hard to choose just one favorite teacher because three women at Villa had such a lasting impact on my life: Ms. Barrett, Mrs. Reith, and Mrs. Abrams.

Each of them inspired me in a different way and encouraged me to work harder, believe in myself, and recognize potential in myself that I did not always see. Mrs. Abrams encouraged me to join JSA, Junior State of America, and that experience single-handedly changed the course of my life. It helped shape my confidence, my interests, and ultimately the path I would take academically and professionally.

Mrs. Reith was an especially important mentor to me. Her guidance, patience, and willingness to invest in me made a lasting impression, and I always felt that she genuinely cared about who I was becoming, not just what I was accomplishing academically. She pushed me to take myself seriously, to keep growing, and to trust that I was capable of more than I sometimes believed. That kind of mentorship stays with you long after you leave the classroom, and I am incredibly grateful for the support, encouragement, and example she gave me.

Ms. Barrett also had a profound impact on my life. Her constant encouragement and support helped me see potential in myself that I did not realize I had. Her support throughout the college process meant more to me than I can put into words, and I will always be grateful for the role she played in helping me believe that I belonged in college and that I was capable of building a meaningful future for myself.

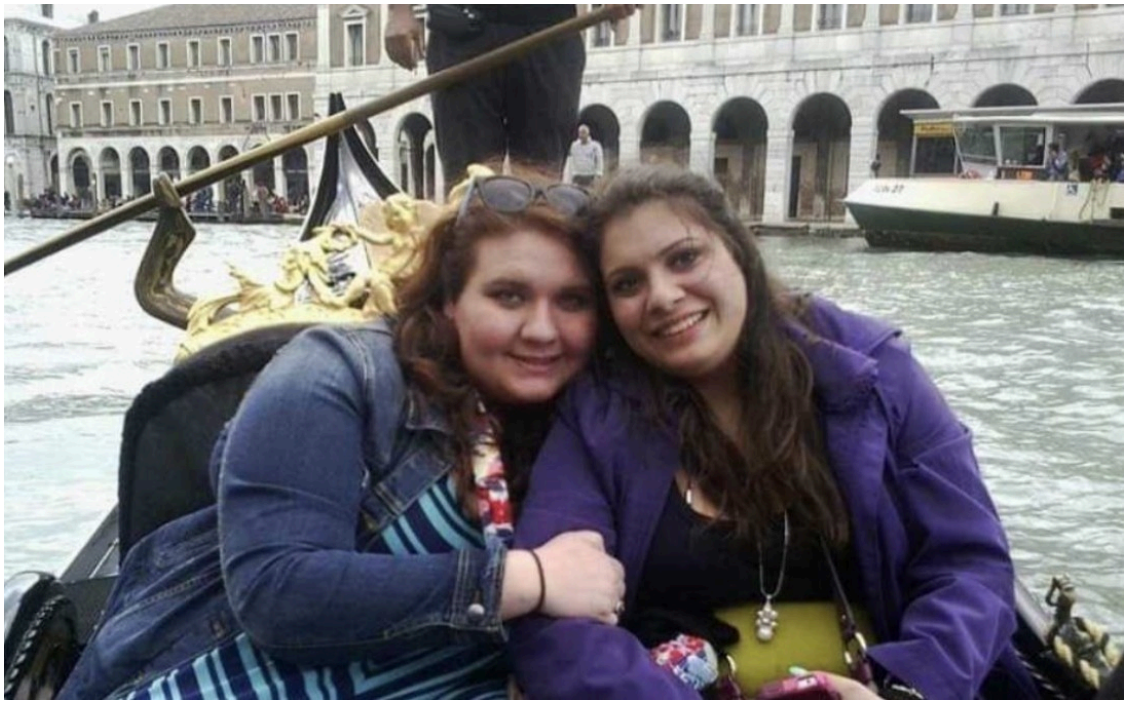
These three women truly helped shape the person I became, and I carry the lessons, confidence, and encouragement they gave me into my own work with students today.

What is your favorite Villa memory?

My favorite Villa memory would have to be the senior trip to Italy. It was one of the most beautiful and rewarding experiences of my time at Villa, and being able to share it with one of my best friends made it even more special. It is a memory I will always cherish.

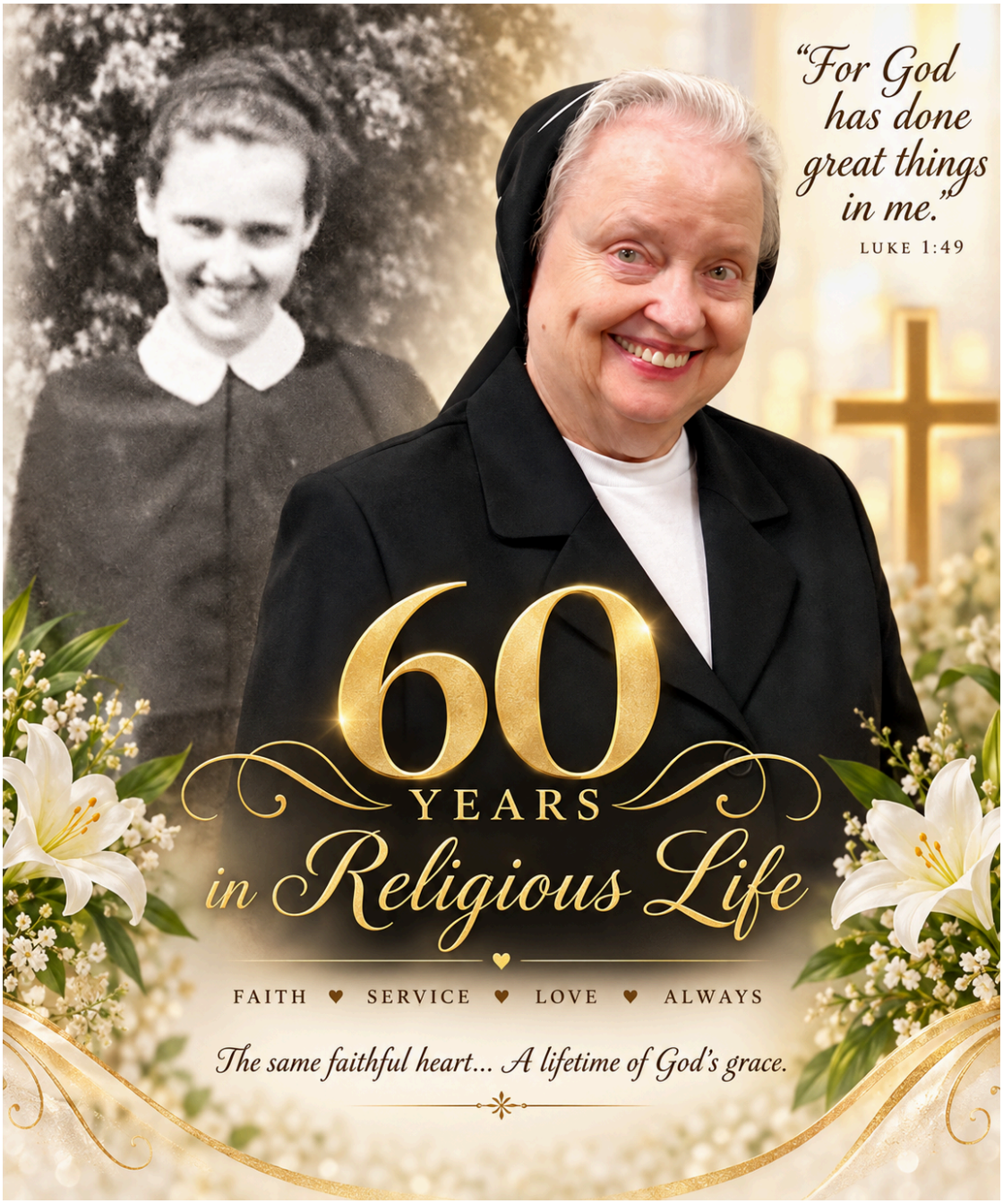
Top photo: A photo from Gabriella's Senior Villa Trip to Italy.

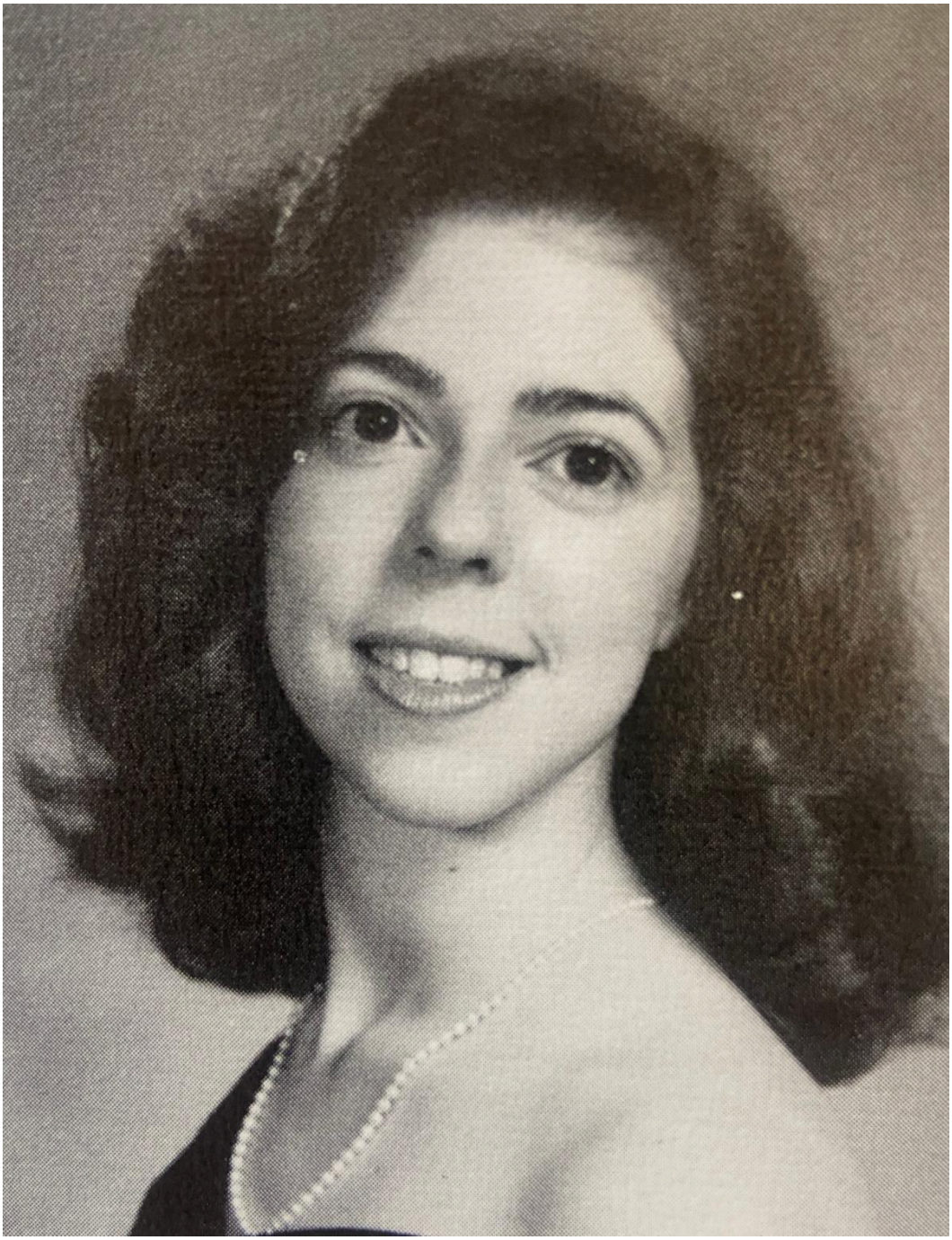
Bottom photo: A photo of Gabriella with her husband Michael Buonpane.





Congratulations to Villa grad
Sr. Margaret Mary Hanlon
VVA Class of 1966
on your anniversary with the Religious Teachers Filippini


"For God has done great things in me."
LUKE 1:49
60
YEARS
in Religious Life
FAITH ♥ SERVICE ♥ LOVE ♥ ALWAYS
The same faithful heart... A lifetime of God's grace.



Rest in Peace Villa Girl

Lora Amoroso '82

After the unexpected death of classmate Lora Amoroso,
members of the VVA Class of 1982 (photo below)
gathered to share photos and stories
of their dear classmate and friend.

In addition, the following members of the class
made a gift to the
Sponsor a Villa Girl Fund
in Lora's memory.

Alena Baldwin-Brown
Margaret Ballone Pontoriero

Danielle Barber
Nancy Burke Harvey
Joanne Dietrich
Bernadette Gur
Carolyn Hagan Stubbs
Christine Longmuir
Holly Marotte Hayward
Maria Maurio
Meghan McCallum Schoennagel
Debbie Mehler
Mary Rose Muccie
Michele Okun
Amy Pratico
Dana Ridgway
Emilia Rubino
Christa Salamandra

In addition, Danielle Barber, Lora's Villa classmate, wrote a story about the time these girls shared while students at Villa. (Link below).

Lora's Villa Yearbook Quote:

I shall pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do,
or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now.
Let me not defer nor neglect it. For I shall not pass this way again.
Anonymous

You left us too soon our dear friend!



Read Danielle's Story Here

VVA Grad Emilia Siracusa '18 Selected as Director/Choreographer of the Villa Musical

Villa is excited to announce that our very own Emilia Siracusa will be directing this year's Musical-*Grease: School Version.* The show will be performed the weekend of March 12-14, 2027 in the Villa theatre.

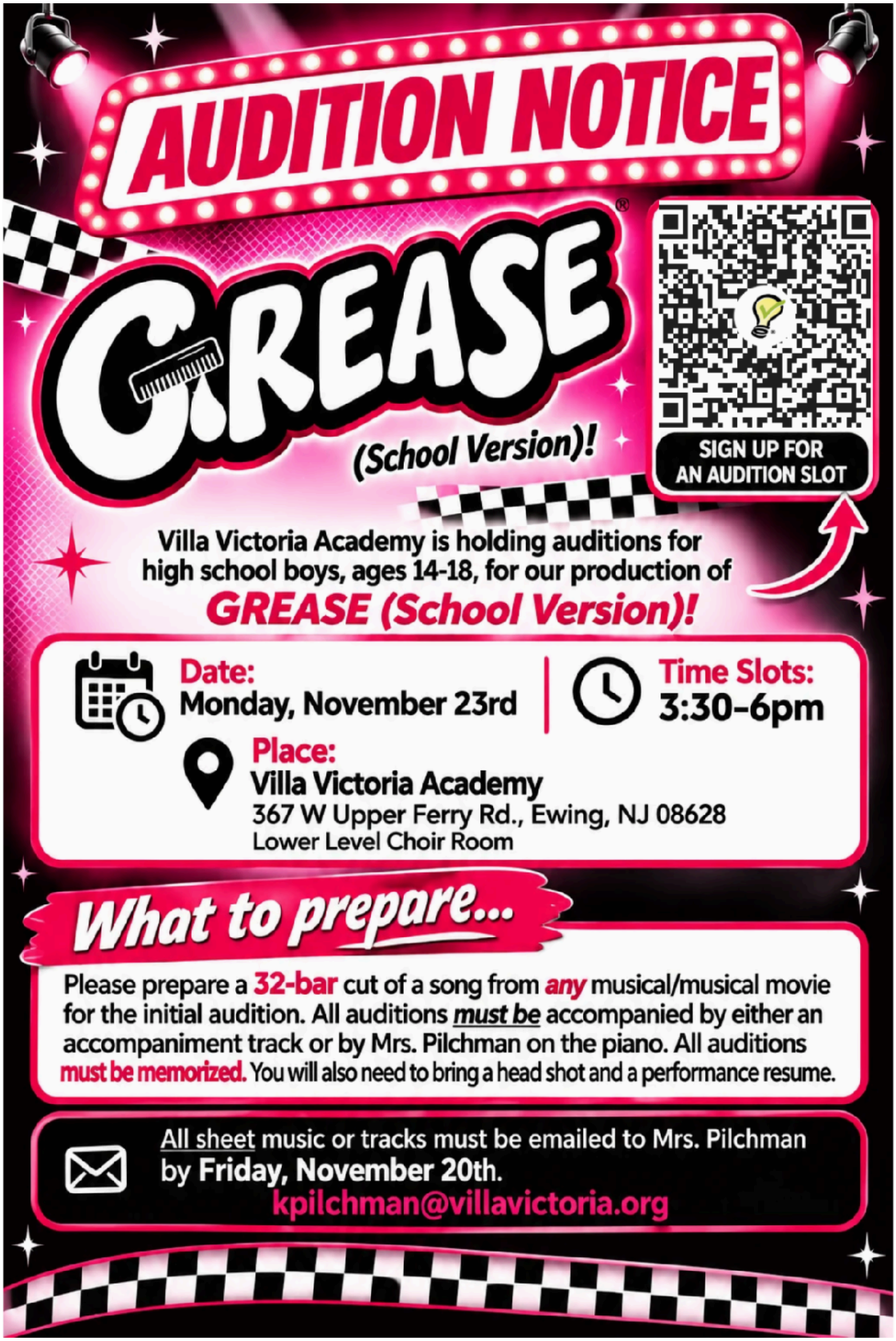
Emilia is thrilled to return to Villa Victoria Academy where her theatrical journey began!

Since her time at VVA, Emilia graduated summa cum laude from Montclair State University in 2022 with a BA in Theatre Studies, earning herself the Citizen Artist Award from the Department of Theatre and Dance. Shortly after, she graduated from Montclair State in 2023 with her MA in Theatre.

During her time at MSU, Emilia has served as the Production Dramaturg for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Artistic Director of the 2021 Student New Play Fest, and Dramaturg for *Paterson Echoes Thru Time*—a devised site-specific performance.

Emilia currently serves as an Adjunct Professor at Montclair State University in the Theatre and Dance Department and as Director of Ballet at the The Ballet Studio in Bordentown, NJ. When she is not teaching, Emilia devotes her time to freelance dramaturgy. She has been a sample reader for many play festivals in the tri-state area and facilitated new play development workshops.




AUDITION NOTICE
GREASE®
(School Version)!
SIGN UP FOR AN AUDITION SLOT
Villa Victoria Academy is holding auditions for high school boys, ages 14-18, for our production of
GREASE (School Version)!
Date:
Monday, November 23rd
Time Slots:
3:30-6pm
Place:
Villa Victoria Academy
367 W Upper Ferry Rd., Ewing, NJ 08628
Lower Level Choir Room
What to prepare...
Please prepare a 32-bar cut of a song from any musical/musical movie for the initial audition. All auditions must be accompanied by either an accompaniment track or by Mrs. Pilchman on the piano. All auditions must be memorized. You will also need to bring a head shot and a performance resume.
All sheet music or tracks must be emailed to Mrs. Pilchman by Friday, November 20th.
kpilchman@villavictoria.org



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The Villa Alumnae E-newsletter is produced monthly for Villa alumnae, alumnae parents, current students, and other friends of Villa Victoria Academy.

Any corrections, questions or news should be sent to cwhite@villavictoria.org.

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