



The student press of Mercer County Community College since 1968

Creating a community garden

Horticulture and Upward Bound join to fight food insecurity and teach agriculture skills

By Julia Meriney
Editor in Chief

Stacy Denton the director of MCCC's Upward Bound, a program that prepares Trenton high school students for college, says, "Our goal is to get our students into college, but we have to realize that sometimes they have things that affect them outside of the classroom, and food insecurity is one of them."

Indeed, many students do not have reliable access to food. According to the Trenton Health Team, an organization that works to address public health concerns in our area, "gaps in food security are not experienced equally across the State, but are higher in places like Trenton where a 2023 food needs survey conducted by THT found that 74% percent of respondents screened as food insecure."

While she was volunteering to provide food to patients at Trenton's Capital Health Bellevue Hospital an idea came to Denton for how to tackle the food insecurity problem: a community garden that could supplement MCCC's food pantry on campus.

Denton reached out to Amy Ricco, Professor and Program Coordinator of Horticulture, Plant Science, and Sustainability at Mercer to discuss her idea and Prof. Ricco saw the potential. The two came up with a plan they thought could work then looked for a way to

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PHOTO | JULIA MERINEY

At JKC campus Trenton Hall on April 13, Professor and Program Coordinator of Horticulture, Plant Science and Sustainability Amy Ricco (center) shows Stacy Denton students from Upward Bound how to plant seeds in new raised beds as part of Denton and Ricco's community garden collaboration.

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GOT A NEWS TIP?

Social anxiety worsened after COVID lockdown

Some students are overcoming it, for others it isn't getting easier

By Felicia Polanco Da Silva
Reporter

Recognizing the impact anxiety had on his life both internally and externally, this year Gabriel Lopez, who is currently a Radio major at MCCC, embarked on a journey to rebuild his social skills, starting with therapy.

He says, "I decided I needed a therapist again. I've kinda been rebuilding that framework to socialization." He adds, "I was like maybe ten or eleven years old when I first got diagnosed with anxiety issues. I believe I was diagnosed with generalized anxiety so I kind of knew while growing up kind of what anxiety is."

Lopez, already facing challenges with making friends in high school, found his social life was worsened by the COVID pandemic.

He says, "[COVID] kind

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION | FELICIA POLANCO DA SILVAVULIA MERINEY

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Students seeking change in Trenton start new club

Goals of Creative Change club include getting more classes offered at JKC

By Nickiesha Lewis
Reporter

"JKC Creative Change," a new club at the James Kerney Campus (JKC), held its first meeting on February 29 with 24 students in attendance. According to its leaders, the goal of the club is to bring awareness to the needs of the student body in MCCC's Trenton location.

According to Melissa Santiago, adjunct Professor of English at JKC and faculty adviser to the club, some students reached out to her for support this past fall semester and expressed a desire for changes at the JKC campus.

One of the students who initiated the club's creation was Catina Hartsfield, a first-year major in Funeral Service and now one of the Presidents of JKC Creative Change.

According to Hartsfield, when she started her fall semester at JKC, she noticed that students didn't speak to one another. She says, "You would just walk past these people all day long and they would not know your name. I was just like, that is not me. I got a bubbly personality. So, that is when I told Professor Santiago we must do something because it looks like a prison here."

Her co-leader, Diesel Barnes, a first-year Business major, had the same impression. He says that he visited various colleges campuses and believes that the James Kerney Campus is not how a college should be.

Barnes says, "Every day I would come to class and feel like I was in a jail cell. I wondered where all the students were. Everyone just seemed to come and go, and the campus didn't feel exciting."

Barnes and Hartsfield saw an opportunity to be of service.

Hartsfield's says of her goals, "If any of the students had a problem, I would like for them to open up to me or any of the other board members so that we can get that problem solved."

For his part, Barnes says,



Keyanni Brown and Iyasia Hawkins at the JKC Creative Change club meeting on April 16.

PHOTO | MELISSA SANTIAGO

"I want everyone to feel safe and comfortable while they spend time together, make new friends and connect with professors and staff."

Prof. Santiago says, "The [club leaders] are incredible, dynamic individuals. They have a lot of ideas of what they would like to do to bring change down here. I am thrilled with what they are planning."

As they formulated their plans, the students reached out to Marvin Carter, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) at MCCC to seek his advice about starting a club at JKC.

Carter says, "They were interested in having their voice represented amongst the rest of the College. They took the option to start something that was unique by

bringing recognition and representation of any issues and perspective to the JKC students."

There is one area in particular that students want to focus on. Barnes says, "I would like to see more classes available at JKC."

Currently JKC offers core undergraduate courses so to complete their degrees, most students must attend the West Windsor Campus at some point.

This year, according to Mercer's Spring 2024 course catalog, JKC offered 26 courses while West Windsor had 306 available.

Latonya Ashford Ligon, Director of JKC Student Experience & Community Outreach, says JKC used to be a more active campus.

Ashford Ligon says, "There were always more bodies [on campus] because there were more students."

In addition, Ligon says more faculty was present on JKC but now they're mostly on the West Windsor Campus.

She continues, "They had office hours here in addition to office hours at West Windsor. So you had more access to the faculty because there were more staff."

Keyanni Brown, a second-year Liberal Arts major, and co-president of the club says, "I want to spread the awareness of education in my community. I

The [club leaders] are incredible, dynamic individuals. They have a lot of ideas of what they would like to do to bring change down here. I am thrilled with what they are planning."

- Prof. Melissa Santiago

SOCIAL ANXIETY

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of affected me heavily because around that time I was trying to meet new friends. At the time when you are making those new friends and you don't have that in-person connection it's kind of weird"

While Lopez spent most of his childhood struggling with anxiety, some individuals experience symptoms later on in life.

For Kaitlyn Angellucci, a second-year Mathematics major, making friends and keeping up with school clubs in high school came easily. Surrounded by a big group of friends she met in field hockey, Kaitlyn says she enjoyed an active social life. After practice, she and her friends would often go out to eat or watch a movie.

But when COVID happened, during her sophomore year of high school, things changed.

Angellucci says, "I remember [the school was] like 'OK so we're not going to have class for two weeks but after these two weeks we should be back.' But they kept extending the date and then it was the last day of school."

While big group text chains became Angellucci's "new

normal" during the pandemic, she says she missed the deeper in-person connections.

According to the Center for Collegiate Mental Health Annual Report (Collegiate Mental Health) more than 22 percent of college students regularly experience social anxiety and it is the top concern for 4 percent of the students tested.

Alvyn Haywood, Professor of Communications at Mercer who teaches public speaking, spends his days helping students open up in front of others. He says people were always anxious in his classes, but he has seen a change.

"Post COVID I first came back and people said you know 'I have social anxiety...what struck me was that more students came with medical documentation that they'd been diagnosed with social anxiety,'" Professor Haywood says.

Heather Jennings, Mercer Psychology Professor, says it's important to understand the difference between general social anxiety and an actual social anxiety disorder.

Professor Jennings says, "Everybody experiences anxiety and there is a dividing point between, even somebody who's like, 'oh my God I'm a nervous kind of person, I am always worried about

something,' versus a person who has a clinical disorder. It's really necessary to put those two groups in different places."

She continues, "Social anxiety is real, but it doesn't mean that it's clinical. It doesn't mean that you need to go into therapy. It doesn't mean that you have a disorder."

A VOICE survey of 46 MCCC students found that more than 36 percent of students feel anxious in social situations such as meeting new people or attending their professor's office hours for help. These students fall into the generally anxious but not clinically diagnosed group that Dr. Jennings mentioned. The same study found that almost 40 percent of students felt their anxiety in social situations increased after COVID.

According to Professor Jennings, the increased anxiety post COVID may just mean that students in college lost some skills along the way because "COVID put everybody in a little bubble for three years."

While COVID may have caused social anxiety to increase, people are finding ways to rebuild the skills by attending clubs and organizations at Mercer.

Lopez says, "Whether I am working on [controlling anxi-

ety] down at the doctor's office or just making an effort to reach out to classmates, I want to kind of this year make an effort to, you could say, make an impact on school, in a positive fashion, of course. I started with Journalism. And that's kind of been my whole bridge, my gateway to socializing."

While clubs and organizations can help some to rebuild social skills, other students found that having a mentor helps them push past their anxiety.

Alexis Oliva, a second year Business major, says Terry Smith, a Peer Student Academic Success Coach, who runs the "Outreach Table" and the "One Day at a Time" support group at Mercer had a great impact on his academic life.

Oliva says "If [Terry] wasn't there at all, I would have a very hard time at Mercer. I go back to the table because [Terry] helped me connect to other students."

Although talking to mentors and becoming engaged in activities can offer a path to overcoming social anxieties, some students aren't ready to take that step.

Angellucci says, "I don't do clubs [at MCCC]. I just kind of go to class and I go home and do the work. I don't really talk to anyone here, unless it's about the class, but then we don't talk outside of it. I

want people to know that with financial aid their college education can be free. That is what I appreciate the most about Mercer," says Brown.

When asked what changes she would like to see, Brown says, "I want to see JKC treated better. The campus is not getting a lot of attention. I want to entice people to enroll at Mercer. I want the people in Trenton to see that this is a college. There is so much potential at this campus."

The administrator who directly oversees the JKC campus is Dr. Gonzalo Perez, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs, Workforce Education and Innovation.

He says, "I think Creative Change club will help have our pulse on the finger of what's happening in the students' minds and what their goals are, which would help us then to better communicate that creativity into our innovation plans."

Dr. Perez says the school is working in the right direction adding, "I hope and trust and know that we're going to continue to see improvement in the future, I would say in about a year."

Marvin Carter says, "We want to make sure that whatever we offer at WWC (West Windsor Campus) is also being offered at JKC." He adds, "There is support from the administration to provide more and to have more students on the campus."

One of the events that JKC Creative Change is looking forward to helping plan is the Student First Festival, formerly known as Spring Day.

Brown says, "I want people to go to JKC and be proud. I want the JKC campus to be a part of Mercer. I want to feel that Mercer spirit when I walk in there."

JKC Creative Change club meetings are held every Tuesday at 12:30 pm in the Peace room on the third floor of the James Kerney Campus.

don't have the same dynamic I had in high school."

Prof. Jennings explains, "[Scientists] belief right now is that this is where willpower, grit, and persistence all come from, which is fascinating. But if you're really, really anxious, you're not going to do those things because of the discomfort. They believe the only way to do those things is to push through the discomfort, and then things become easier."

Lopez is one of Mercer's students who made the decision to go outside of his comfort zone. In an effort to rebuild his social skills and gain control of his anxiety, he continues to attend club meetings and spark up conversations with new friends.

"Maybe journalism is not your thing, maybe you're not into writing and maybe you don't want to join the clubs. That's fine. I would just say make an effort. You don't have to be the one to engage. Maybe someone will engage with you," Lopez says.

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Horticulture students win gold at Philadelphia Flower Show



PHOTO | DAPHNE SOLIS GONZALEZ



PHOTO | JULIA MERINEY

By Julia Meriney
Editor in Chief

Mercer's Horticulture program took home a gold medal for their exhibit in the 2024 Philadelphia Flower Show. Led by Amy Ricco, Professor and program coordinator for Horticulture, Plant Science and Sustainability, this marked their 11th year participating in the event. Mercer selected urban community gardens as their exhibit to tie into the show's overall theme, "United By Flowers."

Ricco was originally asked by the Pennsylvania Horticulture Society (PHS) to base the garden around Philadelphia but says, "We didn't want to do just Philadelphia because we're from Trenton. We came to a common ground that we would do a section of Philadelphia and Trenton and do a sister city concept."

Though the show ran from March 2-10, volunteers joined

Ricco in early December to start preparing for the event. To plan the design for the community garden, Ricco collaborated with Dave DeFrango, adjunct Professor of Landscape Construction and Design.

DeFrango says, "Amy really looks at the education side. My focus is really on the construction, making sure that we can build out and create [the garden]. That's where my specialty comes in."

Students from the horticulture program joined Ricco and DeFrango throughout the winter to start the planting process. In the earlier months, they spent their days growing vegetables from seed, inspecting for insects, and watering and repotting the plants.

Matthew Shteynberg, a second-year Ornamental Horticulture major says there were some challenges in the beginning. He continues, "The first batches that we planted, a good part of them turned out to be pest damage. It was mainly the later batches that we decided we could take to the

LEFT: MCCC Horticulture program brings home the gold at 2024 Philadelphia Flower Show. ABOVE: MCCC's exhibit "Two Cities One Garden" inspired by Trenton and Philadelphia urban gardens.

flower show."

While the plants were maturing in the greenhouse, Graphic Design Club advisors, Professor Zamora and Professor LaPlaca along with student volunteers worked on the signage for the exhibit which included the educational displays, the 26-foot by 10-foot backdrop for the garden, and the logo for "Two Cities, One Garden."

In addition to the graphic design displays, the final exhibit featured a tool shed, washing station, and greenhouse that visitors could walk through, and beehives placed among the gardens.

Jeff Burd, a local beekeeper and returning student at Mercer,

provided the beehives for the display. Burd says this was an important feature in the exhibit because beehives are beneficial for community gardens.

Burd continues, "Honeybees are very important when it comes to pollination. They make the quality and quantity of the plants increase for the benefit of all when it comes to harvest time."

Including these elements in the final design earned Mercer's team a gold in the education department. Ricco says, "Only two golds were awarded, us and Temple."

They also earned the Chicago Horticulture Society Award for their demonstration of knowl-

edge and technical skills at a nationally recognized flower show, and the Pennsylvania Garden Federation Award for "Unusual Excellence".

In addition, they were recognized by the Herb Society for their usage and quality of herbs throughout the display.

Shteynberg says he learned a lot during the four months of preparation and plans on starting a vegetable garden of his own modeled after the exhibit. When asked about his reaction to the awards, Shteynberg says, "I had high hopes. I expected to win gold. I would not have put all that effort just for a silver."

Students get a sunny day for this year's Spring Fling

By Ryan Johnson
Reporter

Student Life & Leadership held this semester's Spring Fling in the Quad of the West Windsor Campus on April 24 from 11:00 am to 2:00 am. The event featured a large rock climbing pillar, a surfboard rider challenge, a bouncy castle obstacle course, and multiple games hosted by Student Government, such as a three-legged race and musical chairs.

When asked about the activities, Dana Dillard, a second-year Liberal Arts Major, said "I got the chance to watch some of my friends race up the rock climbing wall."

Kari Forwood, Coordinator of New Student Orientation says, "We are thrilled with the turnout. We think it's because of the good weather and overall we've seen a lot more involvement on campus this semester and last semester. People are more interested in coming out and doing activities and meeting people."

The Spring Fling also offered three food trucks to pick from, D&D Catering, Five Sisters food truck, and Beach Shack food truck, as well as three ice cream trucks, the Lexylicious Ice Cream, Good Humor, and Mister Softy.

While the event continued, the walkways were lined with multiple tables that featured many of the clubs available at Mercer from the Viking Radio, to the Rainbow Alliance, and the Mycology Club.

Lou Hollar, President of



PHOTO | JULIA MERINEY

Students spend time in the sun on the MCCC quad, eating and chatting with friends during Spring Fling on April 24, 2024.

Mycology Club said, "We're just really, really lucky to have, like on campus support, student support." He added, "We have tons of people involved with Mycology Club, even though they may not be biology majors or affiliated with STEM in any sort of way."

Some student club representatives said that while they were glad to be there, they had faced challenges with funding and space for club events this year.

Alex Schmitt, President of the Rainbow Alliance, said after two semesters, the Rainbow Alliance still doesn't have their usual club room for everyday meetings as they did in the past.

"There's a lot of miscommunications in terms of why we don't have our club space anymore and things like that, things that we're still trying to figure out. So I think that especially it's a mixture between Student Life and Adminis-

tration and a lot of just miscommunication and misinformation going around," said Schmitt.

When asked about the Rainbow Alliance's concerns Danielle Garruba, Director of Student Life and Leadership, declined to comment.

While the Rainbow Alliance struggles with finding a place to meet, Lou Hollar expressed a different experience with Student Life. "The people who work in

"It was actually really nice. I wasn't expecting to see so many people, but everybody looked like they were having fun."

- Heidy Garcia

student life are professionals. They are experts at event organizing, at budget management, about making sure that the people who run the Foundation and the school have enough oversight so that they feel comfortable and at the end of the day all of the stuff that we enjoy as students has to do with that."

The Spring Fling is one of the events that students say they enjoy most each year. Heidy Garcia, a second-year Nursing major attended the event with some friends. She says they especially liked the food trucks.

Garcia says, "I really like the shrimp tacos, they were so good. It was nice that the school provided the food."

This was the first Spring Fling Garcia attended. She says she was impressed with all the activities Mercer had for students to enjoy.

"It was actually really nice. I wasn't expecting to see so many people, but everybody looked like they were having fun," Garcia said.

The Hummingbird Restaurant: a big taste of the small island of Jamaica



PHOTO | NICKIESHA LEWIS

The Hummingbird Restaurant, located at 29 South Warren Street in downtown Trenton.

By Nickiesha Lewis
Reporter

The Hummingbird Restaurant, located at 29 South Warren Street in downtown Trenton, is known for its colorful decor, welcoming atmosphere, and authentic Jamaican food.

As you approach the restaurant, you are greeted by the delightful aroma of Jamaican spices. Inside, the comfortable dining area is lit with warm lighting, and reggae music plays. A painting of Jamaican icon Bob Marley, a picture of Jamaican athletes, and a map of the country adorn the walls.

Hummingbird's menu features a variety of dishes ranging from \$10 to \$20 dollars. Their selections include curry and brown stew chicken, jerk chicken, jerk salmon, and curry shrimp.

The jerk chicken is grilled to perfection and topped with a sweet and spicy authentic taste that will leave you wanting more. The curry shrimp features pungent onion and silky coconut milk. The Hummingbird Restaurant is also known for its beautifully plated food. They take great care in presenting their dishes.

Hummingbird's owner is Marjorie Barclay who is originally from Kingston, Jamaica. She says, "At age 12 I knew that I loved to cook. The first meal I cooked was

curry chicken and white rice."

Barclay immigrated to the United States in 1989 but didn't get to pursue her restaurant dreams for many years. Instead, she worked as a home health aide for 18 years, but in 2008 she began cooking and selling outside of her home on weekends while still working full-time.

Barclay says, "My main goal when coming to America was to provide a better life for myself and my children."

June Henry, a Trenton resident and a longtime customer who witnessed Barclay's humble beginnings says, "I became aware of Majorie's cooking through a friend of mine. He told me that the lady around the corner's cooking is nice—it's really good."

Henry continues, "I was not surprised when she opened a restaurant because she is a good cook. I have to call and pre-order my food, that's how quickly it sells. I knew that one day she would have to open her own business."

In 2010, Barclay was finally able to open her own restaurant.

"It was like a dream come true. Cooking is something that I have always been passionate about," Barclay says.

Marjorie Barclay's son, Bryon Barclay, who is co-owner, says, "I appreciate spending more time being around my mom, growing as an adult, and growing the business itself."

In fact, Hummingbird is solely operated by family members. Marjorie's cousin, Omar Barclay, is responsible for preparing, assisting with the cooking, and cleaning the restaurant.

He says, "I wouldn't say that I am working. We are having fun and doing what we know how to do best."

Bryon says, "My mom is customer orientated first as far as trying to get the orders out. If we are packed and the orders need to be going out, ain't no breaks...She puts the customers first."

In fact, customers seem to love everything about Hummingbird.

Wardor Sarnoe, a Trenton resident who goes to the restaurant twice a week, says, "You know that someone's heart and soul was put into something to make it taste good, versus just making money."

Jazmine Brown, of Cherry Hill says, "A colleague of mine recommended me to come here. He said the food was nice, great customer service. He did an event for another colleague about a month ago, and that's when I first tasted their food." When asked about her first experience at the restaurant, she said, "Nice, warm, friendly, special...I will definitely come back again. I rate it 20 out of 10."

Otis Palmer, a Trenton



PHOTO | NICKIESHA LEWIS

Hummingbird's owner, Marjorie Barclay, preparing food in the kitchen.

resident, says that his favorite dish is the BBQ jerk wings. "I come here at least once a week, I don't know any other Jamaican restaurants that is doing the BBQ jerk wings. It's different and the flavor is really good."

Hummingbird has lots of traditional meat dishes but also has vegan options.

Customer Leslie Taylor, a Mercer alumna from Bordentown, says, "They cater to my vegan needs. My favorite dish to get is the Hummingbird's salad."

Tarek Kennedy, a Morrisville resident, also appreciates the meat and dairy free options saying, "The food is always good. [There are] not too many places out here where you can find vegan dishes at. They cater to my appetite."

Not only does Marjorie Barclay extend her warmth to paying customers, but she also has a desire to help the less fortunate.

She often gives food to people who are suffering from homelessness.

She says, "Whether they come in or on the outside I feed them. No one knows what tomorrow holds. It is my passion to feed them."

The Hummingbird Restaurant is open six days a week. They are open 10 AM to 7 PM on Monday through Thursday, 10 AM to 6 PM on Fridays, and 10 AM to 5 PM on Saturdays. They offer dine in and pick up and can be delivered through Doordash and Grubhub.

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The Spanish translation below is part of The VOICE's collaboration with MCCC's Hispanic and Latino Club.

El Restaurante Hummingbird: un gran sabor de la pequeña isla de Jamaica

TRADUCCIÓN AL ESPAÑOL

Traducido por Aria Asevedo

El restaurante Hummingbird, situado en el número 29 de South Warren Street, en el centro de Trenton, es conocido por su colorida decoración, su ambiente acogedor y su auténtica comida jamaicana.

Al acercarse al restaurante, le recibe el delicioso aroma de las especias jamaicanas. Dentro, el cómodo comedor está iluminado con una luz cálida mientras suena música reggae. Un cuadro del ícono jamaicano Bob Marley, una foto de atletas jamaicanos y un mapa del país adornan las paredes.

El menú de Hummingbird ofrece una variedad de platos que oscilan entre los 10 y los 20 dólares. Sus selecciones incluyen pollo al curry y estofado marrón, pollo jerk, salmón jerk y gambas al curry.

El pollo jerk está asado a la perfección y cubierto con un auténtico sabor dulce y picante que te dejará con ganas de más. Las gambas al curry llevan cebolla picante y una sedosa leche de coco. El res-

taurante Hummingbird también es conocido por sus platos bellamente decorados. Cuidan mucho de su presentación.

La propietaria de Hummingbird es Marjorie Barclay, originaria de Kingston (Jamaica). Dice: "A los 12 años supe que me encantaba cocinar. La primera comida que preparé fue pollo al curry y arroz blanco."

Barclay emigró a Estados Unidos en 1989, pero no pudo perseguir sus sueños de tener su propio restaurante durante muchos años. En su lugar, trabajó como auxiliar sanitaria a domicilio durante 18 años, pero en 2008 empezó a cocinar y vender su comida fuera de casa los fines de semana mientras seguía trabajando jornadas completas.

Barclay dice: "Mi principal objetivo al venir a Estados Unidos era proporcionar una vida mejor a mí y a mis hijos."

June Henry, residente en Trenton y clienta desde hace mucho tiempo que fue testigo de los humildes comienzos de Barclay, dice: "Conocí la cocina de Majorie a través de un amigo mío. Me dijo que la cocina de la señora

de la esquina es muy buena". Henry continúa: "No me sorprendió que abriera un restaurante porque es una buena cocinera. Tengo que llamar y encargar la comida por adelantado, así de rápido se vende. Sabía que algún día tendría que abrir su propio negocio."

En 2010, Barclay pudo por fin abrir su propio restaurante. "Fue como un sueño hecho realidad. Cocinar es algo que siempre me ha apasionado", dice Barclay. El hijo de Marjorie Barclay, Bryon Barclay, que es copropietario, dice: "Agradezco pasar más tiempo cerca de mi madre, crecer como adulto y crecer el negocio."

De hecho, Hummingbird está gestionado únicamente por miembros de la familia. El primo de Marjorie, Omar Barclay, se encarga de preparar y ayudar a cocinar así como limpiar el restaurante.

Dice: "Yo no diría que estoy trabajando. Nos estamos divirtiendo y haciendo lo que mejor sabemos hacer". Bryon dice: "En primer lugar, mi madre pone a los clientes primeros, específicamente cuando se trata de cocinar los pedidos. Si estamos llenos y los pedidos tienen que salir, no hay

descanso... Ella pone a los clientes primero". De hecho, a los clientes parece encantarles todo lo relacionado con Hummingbird.

Wardor Sarnoe, un residente de Trenton que va al restaurante dos veces por semana, dice: "Sabes que el corazón y el alma de alguien se pusieron en algo para que supiera bien, en lugar de sólo hacer dinero."

Jazmine Brown, de Cherry Hill, dice: "Un colega me recomendó venir aquí. Dijo que la comida era buena y el servicio al cliente estupendo. Hizo un evento para otro colega hace un mes, y fue entonces cuando probé su comida por primera vez". Cuando le preguntamos por su primera experiencia en el restaurante, dijo: "Agradable, cálido, amable, especial... Volveré sin duda. En la escala del 1 al 10, yo le pongo un 20".

Otis Palmer, residente en Trenton, dice que su plato favorito son las alitas BBQ jerk. "Vengo aquí al menos una vez a la semana, no conozco ningún otro restaurante jamaicano que haga alitas BBQ jerk. Es diferente y el sabor es realmente bueno". Hummingbird tiene un montón de platos tradicionales

hechos con carne, pero también tiene opciones veganas.

La clienta Leslie Taylor, ex alumna de Mercer que vive en Bordentown, dice: "Atienden mis necesidades veganas. Mi plato favorito es la ensalada Hummingbird". Tarek Kennedy, residente en Morrisville, también aprecia las opciones sin carne ni lácteos: "La comida siempre es buena. [No hay] muchos sitios donde se puedan encontrar platos veganos. Se adaptan a mi apetito".

Marjorie Barclay no sólo ofrece su calidez a los clientes, sino que también desea ayudar a los menos afortunados. A menudo da comida a personas sin hogar. Dice: "Tanto si entran como si están fuera, les doy de comer. Nadie sabe lo que les deparará el mañana. Mi pasión es darles de comer".

El restaurante Hummingbird abre seis días a la semana. Abren de lunes a jueves de 10 de la mañana a 7 de la tarde, los viernes de 10 de la mañana a 6 de la tarde y los sábados de 10 de la mañana a 5 de la tarde. Ofrecen servicio de comida a domicilio y a domicilio a través de Doordash y Grubhub. Puedes encontrar más información en su página de Facebook.

Grounds for Sculpture presented immersive lights show

By Valerie Mulrine
Reporter

Night Forms, presented by Grounds for Sculpture (GFS), in Hamilton Township, collaborated with Klip Collective founder, Ricardo Rivera, to bring the sculpture park to life for the third and final year from November 2023 to April 2024. Admission fees were \$30 per person.

The sculpture park, popular for its variety of contemporary sculptures, was transformed into an immersive experience of 13 site-specific installations full of vibrant lights and various custom sounds.

Rivera produces these optical illusions incorporating sound design, lighting, and projection mapping which uses projectors and specialized software to warp images to fit specific objects perfectly all with the specific location in mind.

In an interview with the VOICE, he said, "I started focusing on doing these large-scale outdoor art experiences like 8 years ago we were just making it up, now it's like a whole industry which is kind of cool."

According to Rivera, he prefers not to assign too many words to his work because he wants viewers to interpret his art for what it is, not what someone else dictates.

He said, "It's kinda like a dream that you wake up from that was really cool, but you can't really remember anything. That's the kind of art I want to make, I love that."

Upon arrival, the line of cars waiting to continue through the toll booth was pouring into the street backed up in both directions on Sculptors Way.

"cheat.code," one of the 13 installations, enabled viewers to actively contribute to the installation.

Participants could press buttons and move a joystick to set off slight changes. However, if viewers understand the hint provided within the interactive map accessed by scanning a QR code at the entrance, and enter the Konami Cheat Code, popular in old school 80's videogames, into the controller atop a nearby obelisk, a serendipitous audiovisual show otherwise



PHOTO | VALERIE MULRINE

Night Forms at Ground for Sculpture showcased work of Ricardo Rivera.

unseen begins.

The obelisk is opposite the path connecting the installations, so if viewers do not take the time to thoroughly examine the sculpture and space entirely, it could be overlooked.

The sculpture, "Dorion," a large three-pointed, stainless steel, 3D apparatus which appears to be floating is breathtaking, but the reflection into the water and colorful simulation adds an otherworldly element making it even more so.

Rivera said, "It's like a movie where you're the main character instead of watching a main character on a screen."

Ron and Robin Gordon, who had also been to the first year of the Night Forms trilogy, were left in such awe they decided to come back before it was gone.

Ron said, "This adds a sort of movement to [the sculptures], it's amazing. I think I saw the word immersive. Yeah, it's definitely immersive."

Robin said, "It's just so unusual, you wonder how they do all the different lighting."

She continued, "The one with the joystick thing that controlled the lights, that was really cool."

Though Froghead Rain-

bow, in the GFS amphitheater, with the Oligarchs, consisting of 10 individual humanlike sculptures overlooking the space, was not interactive, it was the most playful installation, with rainbows flowing from the statue's mouths, and even incorporated frog sounds found in GFS field recordings.

Viewers, especially children, ran across the rows of rectangular stones aligned in a slight curve that would light up in unison with the audio beat like a piano.

After the upbeat music concludes an error message appears along with an hourglass that flashes to a construction zoning sign accompanied by a telemarketer message often heard when placed on hold.

Rivera said, "I always say like, I want people to be driving back from this thing just like what did I just see? Yeah. Just kind of thinking about it. To me, that's good."

The variety and randomness was attained in each installation, from soothing calm oasis like features to more adventurous and collectively added to the nonsensical essence of the exhibition.

Cheyenne Starr, second year Liberal Arts major at MCCC, also attended Night Forms, but

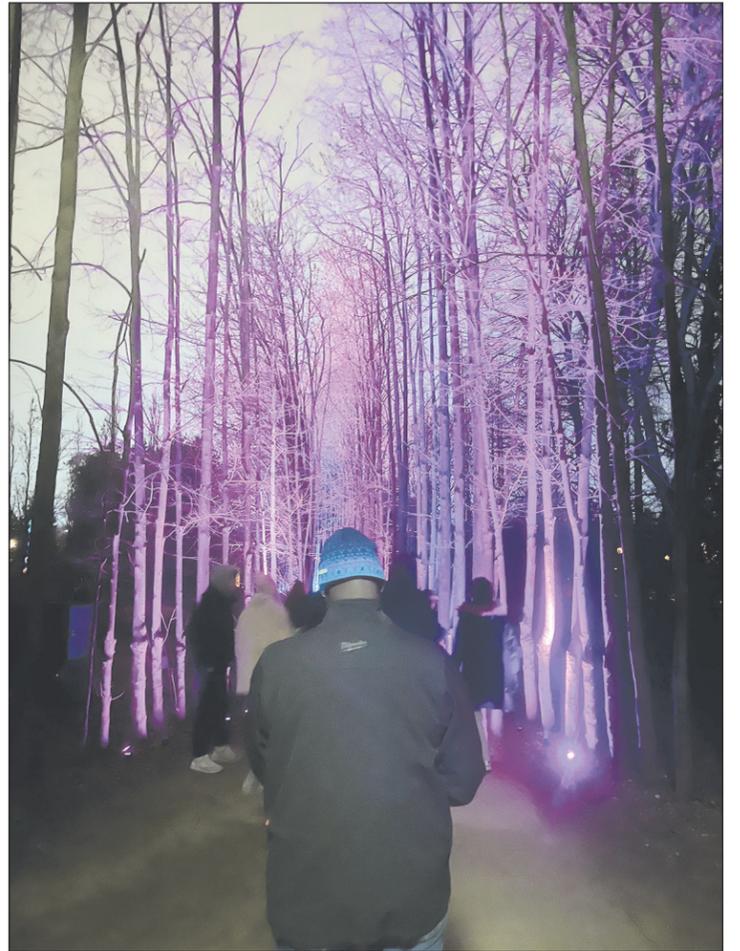


PHOTO | VALERIE MULRINE

Night Forms at Ground for Sculpture included visual works "restart" and "Maple Alee."

with her mother, Kristin Reitz a couple of months prior. Though it was raining, Starr enjoyed her experience.

Starr said, "I've obviously seen projectors before, but I've never seen it mapped onto like, physical objects with those physical objects in mind, you know. I really liked that they added the ambience with the music and everything."

Reitz, however, was much less impressed. She said, "I feel that they charge too much for just a bunch of lights going on statues and monuments."

Reitz did feel if there were more interactive installations like "cheat.code," she would have had a better experience.

Rivera had a similar in-

clination and attempted to make Froghead Rainbow interactive the second year of Night Forms.

He said, "I took 'frog head rainbow' out and I made it an interactive thing with xylophones, and it failed miserably in my opinion. It just sounded like shit."

According to GFS press materials, 3 years was the right time to take a pause to consider other ways to highlight the grounds.

Rivera says he plans to continue producing site-specific art.

He said, "Hopefully we'll keep getting closer and closer to that impressionable fucked up crazy dream you just can't stop thinking about, but yet can't really remember what actually happened."

Magic the Gathering draws diverse groups together

By Ryan Johnson
Reporter

Mia Finnigan has been playing Magic: The Gathering with her father since she was 8 years old. Finnigan says, "I always play Magic with my dad, when I moved out we would play Magic every Sunday and just hang out and get lunch."

First created in 1993 by Richard Garfield, Magic has grown to 50 million players world-wide according to Hasbro, the toy company that owns the brand. Players, who often gather in hobby shops, are drawn in with its "easy to learn, hard to master" rules. Magic is a collectible card game with a few different formats of games.

The most popular format, Commander, lets players choose a single *Legendary* creature card to act as their commander. Players then use a 100 card deck to fight against three other players and their commanders.

With a new expansion that came out on April 19, "Outlaws of Thunder Junction," the card game continues to gain popularity. With the introduction of Play Boosters, a 14 card pack that always contains a rare holographic card, Magic has grown to new popularity. This growth



IMAGE COURTESY OF HASBRO PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

also comes from numerous collaborations that Magic has done with other companies. These collaborations have included "Doctor Who," "Assassin's Creed," and "Lord of The Rings."

Part of what makes Magic popular is its social nature.

Finnigan was 14 when she recognized her transgender identity. She says, "I just didn't feel comfortable with anything. Nothing I wore was right for me."

When she turned 22, Finnigan came out to her father as trans and the revelation had an immediate impact on their relationship.

"He wouldn't talk to me and he told me that he couldn't accept that I wasn't his son anymore," she says.

But the game of Magic played a part in reconciling their

differences. Finnigan says, "I didn't think I would ever talk to him again until I got a text that said like, 'I miss Sunday Magic with you' and that just, it broke my heart."

She continues, "After he said that I sort of buckled and went over to his house. We just played a game of Magic. But after the game he looked up and said, 'This is going to be hard, but I want to get to know my daughter.' And cue the waterfalls out of my eyes...We talked till it got dark and we were just talking. It was just really nice to have that sitdown with him."

Finnigan is one of many who have found a community and a home in Magic. She says, "I met most of my friends through Magic, and when I came out to them they didn't really care. They

all had to get used to using Mia, but everyone loved me like nothing happened."

While the Magic community can be accepting of others joining their space, like other tabletops, it is still a male-dominated game.

When asked about the diversity in the community, Dennis Bradford, a Magic tournament judge, said, "The competitive level events are very male-dominated. I could count on one hand the number of women or female presenting players, which is unfortunate. I do think there are a lot of places where female Magic players don't feel fully comfortable going, so they tend to avoid it."

Although Bradford recognized that women can face opposition in these communities, whether it be Magic, Star Wars, or Video Games, he says he sees positive changes to the representation of women and the LGBTQ+ community in Magic.

Bradford says, "You'll see greater diversity in the characters that are represented in the game and a pull away from overtly sexualized female characters represented in the cards especially, which I'm glad for." This is true, as prominent female and LGBTQ+ characters appear more frequently in Magic. Chandra Nalaar, a pansexual woman, has the most printed cards in

the game, making her one of the most popular characters.

Additionally, another popular female character in Magic, Alesha, is the first transgender character in the universe of Magic.

Robert Placer, owner of Family Fun Hobbies in Hamilton, NJ, holds Magic game nights every Thursday in his store.

When asked how the inclusion of female and LGBTQ+ characters has changed over the years, Placer says, "It's more common, it's more accepted. I mean, heck, you can walk into Target and Walmart and Barnes and Noble and find all of these games on the shelves. So, I don't think it's as big an issue as when I was 15 years old."

Whether coming to play Magic or browsing the numerous games and toys in his hobby shop, Placer says he is happy with the diversity and the acceptance that he has been able to foster in his store.

He says, "I'm happy to tell people that come in for the first time that [we welcome] all of our communities. We have every age, color, creed, sex, religion, ethnicity, and gender, including probably some genders that mankind has yet to hear of. They don't care and I don't care. They're just here to have fun and play together."

Diana Samchuk, Ukrainian refugee, shares her struggle from uncertainty to success

By Kelly Ann Long
Senior Reporter

When Russia invaded Ukraine in the winter of 2022, Diana Samchuk was just entering the world of higher education. She had been a standout student in her early education, but suddenly her path forward became less clear.

"As tensions escalated and lives were at stake, I began to question if continuing my education in the Ukrainian system was feasible," Samchuk says.

Ultimately, Samchuk, who is now a second-year Honors student majoring in Graphic Design at Mercer, had to leave Ukraine due to severe attacks in her hometown, Kyiv. She and her mother left everything behind and fled to the United States.

Uncertain about her future, Samchuk enrolled at Mercer County Community College and, with help from her uncle Oleksiy Godovanyy, who hosted her upon her arrival, she applied for two part-time jobs to cover living expenses. After only a year at Mercer, she achieved a 4.0 GPA, earning her a spot on the President's List in fall of 2023.

When asked how she was able to stay focused on academics amidst such big changes, Samchuk says, "Consistency and time management became my routine. This kept me motivated even during challenging times." She adds, "From day to day, I make a conscientious effort to attend every class, complete assignments on time, and actively participate in discussions because I want my future to be in the best possible shape and I know that my academics will have an impact on that."

Samchuk's hard work was also noticed by her professors. Advertising and Graphic Design professor Tina LaPlaca says, "Diana is definitely one of my top students. She is an incredibly hard worker who goes above and beyond for assignments."

"She is also a friendly, delightful young lady who participates regularly in class," she added.

Although her dedication as a student remained consistent, Diana had to adjust to a new lifestyle in America that was very different from her previous one.



Diana Samchuk with self portrait.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANA SAMCHUK

Samchuk says, "Adapting to a different country has been challenging, but my studies have provided a much-needed distraction and have helped me settle into this new environment."

Samchuk's uncle, Godovanyy, says he witnessed her adaptation to her new environment.

Godovanyy says, "When Diana got to the U.S., she was already independent, smart, and a quick thinker with good English." Godovanyy continues, "In her mind, adjusting might have been challenging, but during my 20 years in the U.S., I have dealt with a lot of new immigrants, and she did well compared to the others."

As an Honors student known for her positive attitude, she attributes her academic success to her optimistic view of life.

Samchuk says, "Balancing academics and work can be challenging. However, it has taught me time management skills and instilled a strong work ethic in me."

Samchuk continues, "Instead of viewing setbacks as failures, I saw them as opportunities for growth

and improvement. This perspective allowed me to learn from my mistakes rather than dwell on them."

Samchuk's mom, Svitlana Samchuk, says her daughter, who attended Financial Lyceum, a secondary school in Ukraine, has always been an exceptional student.

"She took her education seriously from the kindergarten level and was among the top students in her class. She finished Financial Lyceum having the best grades and received a gold medal," Svitlana says.

In addition to her academic accomplishments, Samchuk's mother says that Diana has a passion for painting that she has pursued since she was four years old. She recalls her making 5 to 10 paintings a day from the time she learned to hold a pencil. This passion hasn't left her, as she continues to create art here at Mercer.

Professor LaPlaca says, "She surprised me in typography class by designing a contemporary Jazz album cover influenced by Paul Rand."

Professor LaPlaca continues, "The piece was stunning. Even more surprising to me was how much background information she knew about the history of Jazz music."

Similarly inspired by Samchuk's works is Camila Villavizar-Gomez, a sophomore majoring in Liberal Arts, who emigrated from Lima, Peru at the same time Samchuk left Ukraine.

Villavizar-Gomez says, "She doesn't work hard for reward or recognition but simply for her own satisfaction, and I admire her for that."

Villavizar-Gomez continues, "A lot of people hope or expect something in return, but not her. She has inspired me to do stuff for the sake of doing it."

Juan Carlitos Gonzalez, Samchuk's close friend and coworker at her part-time job as an ice cream store manager, says, "Diana is a hardworking woman. It surprises me that she never complains about life or work. She is very valuable to the company and always leads her team to victory on

a slow or busy season."

When asked if the term refugee applies to her, Samchuk says, "Yes, I am a refugee. Everyone who left the war-torn country in search of safety is a refugee."

Even though she embraces her experiences, the dire circumstances that brought Samchuk to America are still very much a part of her life.

She continues, "But regardless of how my mother and I - as well as thousands of Ukrainians who came to the United States - are labeled and categorized, what matters most is our shared experience as individuals seeking that second most essential need in Maslow's hierarchy of needs: Safety and security."

When asked if she feels things are shifting in Ukraine with more focus now on Israel and Gaza, Samchuk says, "While some might argue that the focus on the Israel-Hamas war is diverting attention away from Ukraine, I believe it is merely a reflection of people's general indifference and willingness to shift their focus elsewhere."

She says she is disturbed by the tragedy but takes comfort in knowing that Americans still support Ukraine.

Samchuk says, "I often catch glimpses of the vibrant blue and yellow colors of the Ukrainian flag tied to trees, bumper stickers displayed on cars, or the flags close to someone's home."

She continues, "They serve as a reminder that those who truly care will continue to monitor news from both Ukraine and Gaza because they acknowledge that every war requires attention and support."

Samchuk envisions a bright future for herself and hopes to be among the small group of students who have managed to transfer from MCCC to Princeton University to further her education.

But she doesn't see transfer to a top university as the most significant marker of success.

She says, "Success should not be solely measured by personal achievements but by one's ability to contribute positively to the world around them."

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on February 23, 2024.]

Terry Smith shows students the value of taking it one day at a time

By Victoria Delgado
Reporter

Terry Smith was a Mercer athlete playing soccer for the Vikings. In 1975, he quit the team and took up the habit of drinking. Smith, who is now a Mercer alumni and Peer Recovery Support Specialist, dropped out of Mercer in the 70s as his addiction to alcohol progressed.

Smith says, "At first, I blamed the coach, but in reality it was me. I had a bad attitude coming here and had some anger issues."

After Smith left the team, he said he felt lost without the structure soccer provided. He says, "I was always used to playing soccer all the time. I didn't have that anymore so I started getting a little bit more into alcohol abuse."

After he left Mercer, Smith tried to maintain jobs but says his addiction continued to progress and by the time he reached his 30s things were at their worst.

Smith says, "I was basically homeless and in and out of incarceration institutions, crisis centers, detox facilities, rehabs, places like that."

He says, "I tried to stop. I just didn't understand why I couldn't. When I was here, I'd walk down the halls and I'd be like, I knew I had a problem, but...it was always tomorrow. I'll quit tomorrow, but tomorrow never came, you know. Twenty years I spent with alcoholism and drug addictions."

While Smith was struggling to beat his addiction, he met his wife and together they raised their son. Realizing his alcohol and drug dependence was affecting his health and taking time away from his family, Smith tried rehab again.

Smith says, "I knew that I had to. This was no longer a choice. Basically, I was dying. I went to a detox facility at a hospital in Camden then went to rehab in Williamstown, NJ."

Smith continues, "My son was 14 and he was going to be a freshman in Hammond High West. I didn't think it was fair that he wouldn't have a father. I thought he should deserve to have somebody better than I was. So I got sober, basically for him."

Finally, after years of treatment and support from his family, Smith was able to stay so-

See TERRY SMITH page 19



Terry Smith in Student Center at MCCC presenting information on counseling and addiction recovery support at the college.

PHOTO | VICTORIA DELGADO

From Peru to Princeton, Mercer Student Camila Villavizar Gomez fights for her future

By Valerie Mulrine
Reporter

Putting aside all feelings of apprehension, 19-year-old Camila Villavizar Gomez decided she had to do the unthinkable. She had to leave her home country of Peru and contact her father, a man she had never met, to ask if she could stay with him in the United States while attending college.

"I reached out to him and then after so many tries, he said ok, let's do it." Villavizar Gomez says, "Everything started moving, but then it will be kind of like, 'Oh, you can come this month. But no, don't come this month because it's not gonna work out.' And come the other month and, you know, then it would just be a lot of like, let's do it. But then you can't do it."

Eventually a date was set. Unfortunately, when she arrived her relationship with her father did not improve.

"There was a reason why I never met him," Villavizar Gomez says. "[He's] just a very abusive, very narcissistic sort of guy. We were never able to advance our relationship like father and daughter."

Villavizar Gomez says she turned her attention to her education instead and enrolled at Mercer.

While taking English 101, she met Diana Samchuk, a second year Advertising and Graphic Design major. Samchuk had moved here from Ukraine around the same time as Villavizar Gomez's move from Peru, which sparked a bond between them.

Samchuk says, "She feels like my mother and friend at the same time. Whatever obstacle gets in the way, [Camila] will find a way to fight it right away." Samchuk continues, "Every conversation that we have is really meaningful and I feel

like together we could make some meaningful change in this world."

In addition to creating friendships, Villavizar Gomez excelled at her school work. She was recruited into the Honors program and maintained a GPA high enough to qualify for the Phi Theta Kappa academic honors society. She also found a job working at Student Life and Leadership. She became president of the Latin American Club and the Student Government Public Relations Officer.

In addition to balancing her many other responsibilities, Villavizar Gomez is working on a manuscript. She says the skills she uses in her creative writing aren't ones that she was taught in her school in Peru. She says her Catholic high school "was very much focused on math," so she built stronger reading and writing skills on her own.

She says, "It was actually out of high school that I learned how to properly read something you know, like reading comprehension sort of stuff."

Once she started at Mercer, a person who spotted her skills was English Professor Dr. Barbara Hamilton who says "Camila is eternally curious and she's willing to work far beyond the norm." She adds, "she's more of a graduate student in her approach to learning than a second-year community college student. I think she's someone who could transfer to Princeton and immediately do great."

Dr. Hamilton also nominated Villavizar Gomez for the Summer Princeton Transfer Scholars Initiative Program (TSI) in 2023, which was the first year it ran. She was accepted and enrolled in two for-credit Princeton courses: Humanistic Approaches to Media and Data, and Research and Argument in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

She describes her time at Princeton as, "Intense. They had a lot of expectations of us which was nice. There was also a lot of support psychologically, and academically. I bonded with a lot of the people there and I felt like the faculty actually cared about what they were doing. That was really nice."

One of Villavizar Gomez's TSI professors was Dr. Keith Shaw, Director of Transfer and Outreach at the Emma Bloomberg Center for Access and Opportunity where the TSI program is housed at Princeton, and also taught Research and Argument in the Humanities and Social Sciences for the semester.

Dr. Shaw's favorite part of working with Villavizar Gomez was a paper she wrote investigating an anime series. Dr. Shaw says, "Camila did this amazing job working with Kimberly Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality to make an argument about how best to interpret this literary work. And it was amazing"

He continues, "It was a paper that I could see not just a Princeton student doing, but being like the springboard for graduate level work. I mean, she's an amazingly bright student and I think she was going to do well for herself, whether she participated in TSI or not."

TSI provided Villavizar Gomez a sense of direction. She says, "I finished my first year at Mercer not knowing what I was going to do, where I was going to transfer, just knowing that I have to get out of my house and I have to find a place that I can transfer to." She continues, "At the time that I applied to TSI, I was basically at my breaking point."

But the program provided a stipend and Villavizar Gomez met her current partner there. Soon she was able to move into Mercer's Rider University housing program.



PHOTO | VALERIE MULRINE

Camila Villavizar-Gomez, a second year Liberal Arts major at MCCC.

"It all lined up perfectly" she says.

After Villavizar Gomez moved to the Rider campus, she says she was free to continue on her collegiate journey in peace. She is now enrolled in another Princeton Program, the Teaching Transfer Initiative Program (TTI), taking Race and Labor, and is applying to a range of competitive colleges for transfer. She says she now has the opportunity to decide which path she wants to take next and how to

go about it. "I'm incredibly stubborn," she says. "I don't like to quit."

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on February 23, 2024.]

The Spanish translation below is part of The VOICE's collaboration with MCCC's Hispanic and Latino Club.

De Perú a Princeton, la estudiante de Mercer, Camila Villavizar Gómez lucha por su futuro

TRADUCCIÓN AL ESPAÑOL

Traducido por Aria Asevedo

Dejando a un lado todos los sentimientos de aprensión, Camila Villavizar Gómez, de 19 años, decidió que tenía que hacer lo impensable. Tuvo que dejar su país de origen, Perú, y contactar a su padre, un hombre al que nunca había conocido, para preguntarle si podía quedarse con él en los Estados Unidos mientras asistía a la universidad.

"Me acerqué a él y luego de tantos intentos, dijo: 'Está bien, hagámoslo'." Villavizar Gómez dice: "Todo empezó a moverse, pero luego fue como, 'Oh, puedes venir este mes'. Pero no, no vengas este mes porque no va a funcionar.' Entonces decía ven el otro mes y, sería como, hagámoslo. Pero entonces no puedes hacerlo."

Finalmente se fijó una fecha. Lamentablemente, cuando llegó, su relación con su padre no mejoró.

"Había una razón por la que nunca lo conocí", dice Villavizar Gómez. "[Él] es simplemente un tipo de persona muy abusiva y muy narcisista. Nunca pudimos avanzar en nuestra relación como padre e hija."

Villavizar Gómez dice que, en cambio, centró su atención en su educación y se matriculó en Mercer.

Mientras tomaba Inglés 101, conoció a Diana Samchuk, estudiante de segundo año de Publicidad y Diseño Gráfico. Samchuk se había mudado aquí desde Ucrania casi al mismo tiempo que Villavizar Gómez se mudó de Perú, lo que generó un vínculo entre ellas.

Samchuk dice: "Se siente como mi madre y mi amiga al mismo tiempo. Cualquier obstáculo que se interponga en el camino, [Camila] encontrará una manera de combatirlo de inmediato". Samchuk continúa: "Cada conversación que tenemos es realmente significativa y siento que juntos podemos lograr un cambio significativo en este mundo."

Además de crear amistades, Villavizar Gómez se destacó en su trabajo escolar. Fue reclutada en el programa de Honores y mantuvo un GPA lo suficientemente alto como para calificar para la sociedad de honores académicos Phi Theta Kappa. También encontró un trabajo en Student Life and Leadership. Se convirtió en presidenta del Club Latinoamericano y asumió el cargo de Relaciones Públicas del Gobierno Estudiantil.

Además de balancear muchas otras responsabilidades, Villavizar Gómez está trabajando en un manuscrito. Ella dice que las habilidades que utiliza en su escritura creativa no son las que le

enseñaron en su escuela en Perú. Ella dice que su escuela secundaria católica "estaba muy centrada en las matemáticas", por lo que desarrolló sus propias habilidades de lectura y escritura.

Ella dice: "En realidad, fue afuera de la secundaria cuando aprendí a leer correctamente, sabiendo hacer cosas como de comprensión lectora."

Una vez que comenzó en Mercer, una persona que notó sus habilidades fue la profesora de inglés, Dra. Barbara Hamilton, quien dice: "Camila es eternamente curiosa y está dispuesta a trabajar mucho más allá de lo normal". Agrega que "es más una estudiante de posgrado en su enfoque del aprendizaje que una estudiante de segundo año de un colegio comunitario. Creo que es alguien que podría transferirse a Princeton e inmediatamente hacerlo muy bien."

La Dra. Hamilton también nominó a Villavizar Gómez a el programa de verano llamado "Iniciativa de Transferencia de Becarios" (TSI) ejecutado por primera vez por Princeton en 2023. Fue aceptada y matriculada en dos cursos de Princeton: Enfoques humanísticos de para los medios de comunicación y los datos, e Investigación y argumentación en humanidades y ciencias sociales.

Ella describe su estancia en Princeton como "intensa.

Tenían muchas expectativas puestas en nosotros, lo cual fue agradable. También hubo mucho apoyo psicológico y académico. Me sentí unida a mucha gente allí y pensé que a los profesores realmente les importaba lo que estaban haciendo. Eso fue totalmente lindo."

Uno de los profesores de TSI de Villavizar Gómez fue el Dr. Keith Shaw, Director de Transferencia y Divulgación en el Centro Emma Bloomberg para Acceso y Oportunidades donde se encuentra el programa TSI en Princeton. También enseñó Investigación y Argumentación en Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales durante el semestre.

La parte favorita de el Dr. Shaw al trabajar con Villavizar Gómez fue un artículo que escribió investigando una serie de anime. El Dr. Shaw dice: "Camila hizo un trabajo increíble al trabajar con la teoría de la interseccionalidad de Kimberly Crenshaw para argumentar sobre la mejor manera de interpretar esta obra literaria. Y fue increíble"

Y continúa: "Era un trabajo que pude ver no sólo como un estudiante de Princeton haciendo, sino como un trampolín para empezar a desarrollar un trabajo a nivel de posgrado. Quiero decir, es una estudiante increíblemente brillante y creo que le hubiera ido bien así participara o no en TSI."

TSI le dio a Villavizar Gómez un sentido de dirección. Ella dice: "Terminé mi primer año en Mercer sin saber qué iba a hacer, a dónde me iba a transferir, simplemente sabiendo que tenía que salir de mi casa y encontrar un lugar al que pudiera transferirme." Ella continúa: "En el momento en que apliqué a TSI, básicamente estaba pasando por mis peores momentos."

Pero el programa proporcionó un estipendio y Villavizar Gómez conoció allí a su actual pareja. Pronto pudo mudarse al programa de vivienda de Mercer, donde estudiantes de la institución viven en Rider University.

"Todo encajaba perfectamente", afirma.

Después de que Villavizar Gómez se mudó al campus de Rider, ella dice que fue libre de continuar su viaje universitario en paz. Ahora está inscrita en otro programa de Princeton, el Programa de Iniciativa de Transferencia de Enseñanza (TTI), cursando un programa llamado Raza y Trabajo, y está aplicando para transferirse a una variedad de universidades competitivas. Ella dice que ahora tiene la oportunidad de decidir qué camino quiere tomar a continuación y cómo hacerlo. "Soy increíblemente terca", dice. "No me gusta rendirme."

Princeton protestors hold pro-Palestinian rally in solidarity with 100+ arrested Columbia University students

By Oluwakemi Olaleye
Managing Editor

Approximately 200 Princeton University students and supporters held a rally on Friday, April 19 to stand in solidarity with the more than 100 pro-Palestinian protestors at Columbia University who were arrested by the NYPD the day before.

The rally, held in front of the iconic, ivy-covered Nassau Hall at Princeton, was organized by multiple local coalitions including the Princeton Palestine Liberation Coalition (PPLC), Princeton Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), and Princeton Alumni for Palestine, the Princeton chapter of the National Alumni for Justice in Palestine.

As protesters gathered around the steps of the building multiple speakers expressed their views on Princeton University's response to student and community outcry and their solidarity with the Pro-Palestinian cause.

The protestors' demands included the university's divestment from companies associated with Israel's ongoing military campaign, complete financial transparency, divestment from fossil fuels, and full acknowledgment of the college's role in the military industrial complex, according to multiple students.

In between speakers, the crowd chanted "Free Palestine," "We Demand Equality," and "From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free."

At one point during the rally, the speakers were told by campus police not to use a megaphone and had it taken away. When asked about the situation, the campus police declined to comment.

Angela Malavega, a third-

"You know, I do have sympathy for the people in the [Middle] East. I understand what they're going through. And I do think that they should have the right to protest. Even on a day like today. I just think they should have chosen another day."

- Bob, Princeton Student

year Theological Seminary student, said she was at the rally representing a collective of students called the Seminarians for Peace and Justice.

To the crowd, she said, "The least we can do is show up and show out in large numbers to say, with one united voice, that this genocide must end, that our schools must divest from funding Israel, and that our silence is complicity with their violence."

As speakers took turns addressing the crowd, Dr. Jarrett Fisher, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Students and Director of Student Agencies, stood alongside the campus police. When asked his thoughts on the rally, Dr. Fisher declined to comment.

According to an article by the Daily Princetonian, President of the Council of the Princeton University Committee (CPUC) Christopher Eisgruber said the University would not take action on a student petition calling for divestment from companies associated with "Israel's



Approximately 200 protestors joined a pro-Palestinian rally at Princeton University on April 19, 2024 outside Nassau Hall. PHOTO | JULIA MERINEY

ongoing military campaign, occupation, and apartheid policies" until campus consensus on the issue has been reached.

While many showed up for the Pro-Palestinian cause, a group of approximately 10 protestors came in support of Israel.

Jared Stone, a junior at Princeton who displayed an Israeli flag, said in an interview, "[This protest] is frankly ridiculous and an absurd demonstration. What happened yesterday [at] Columbia was completely insane. Students [were] trespassing and accusing the response that occurred as being due to a violation of free speech, which is absolutely not the case."

Stone continued, "They never acknowledged the atrocities, the genocide that was committed against Israel, and Jewish people

on October 7. So we're here to show our support for the free world for the Jewish people and for the United States."

Speakers finished addressing the crowd around 4 PM and then the protestors marched toward the center of campus where students were holding an annual Major Declaration Day festivity where they indicate their intended academic area of study.

As the rally participants continued chanting, a pro-Israeli student ran in front of the group with the Israeli flag draped across his back. This drew sounds of disapproval from the rally participants. However, everyone at the event remained peaceful and those students gathered for Major Declaration event continued with their celebration.

Princeton University student, Bob, who would only give his first name, was celebrating his major declaration. He said, "Well, I think today is a wonderful day to celebrate each of us declaring our majors. So I think that that should be the focus for today."

Bob continued, "You know, I do have sympathy for the people in the [Middle] East. I understand what they're going through. And I do think that they should have the right to protest. Even on a day like today. I just think they should have chosen another day."

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on April 19, 2024.]

Hamilton firefighters quell three-alarm fire at Public Storage

By Valerie Mulrine
Reporter

A three-alarm fire erupted at a Public Storage facility on Quakerbridge Road around 11:30 AM Tuesday April 9. Multiple crews including The Hamilton Fire Department contained the fire without any injuries.

Less than a mile from the MCCC campus, Quakerbridge Road, between Youngs Road and Hughes Drive, was closed while firefighters worked to extinguish the blaze.

Hamilton Fire Chief, Chris Tozzi, addressed the situation saying, "We got dispatched for a rubbish fire, which turned out to be a storage unit fire."

According to Chief Tozzi, storage unit fires can be especially dangerous as there are few restrictions on what can be stored.

Chief Tozzi continued, "Whatever's behind every door is a mystery to the firefighter, so it becomes a little more precarious and a little more tough, too. There's vehicles in there, there's clothes. So this is a great stop. I'm really happy with the guys."

Chief Tozzi guessed that approximately 20 storage units had



PHOTO | VALERIE MULRINE

Multiple fire crews responding to a three-alarm fire at Hamilton Public Storage Unit Tuesday April, 9.

been damaged by the fire.

Jeff Martin, the Mayor of Hamilton was also among the emergency responders and said he usually shows up to the big fires in the area.

Mayor Martin said, "If I were to show up for the small ones

I'd be running around just as much as these guys, [I'm] just here to make sure everybody's ok and to show support. I can't do anything else. I'd just get in the way."

While Chief Tozzi was unable to comment on whether or not anyone was inside at the time of the

fire, concerned citizens Joe and Jill Mooney, who arrived less than ten minutes after the blaze began, said, "Ambulances have been here but they haven't taken anyone out, just that gurney."

Joe Mooney continued, "When we first got here it sounded

like there were fireworks in there. It was going pop, pop, pop, pop and then nothing, and most of it was in this first [storage] unit or the one right next to it. It was a weird sound. It sounded like firecrackers."

With thick black smoke in the air, the sound of helicopters flying above, and the smell of burnt plastic, the fire was noticed by many and led to crowds forming at a safe distance.

Nicole Dunn, a former Mercer student, was among the many people observing from afar. She said, "[I] got here about 15 minutes ago. It was just all up in flames."

Ken Brightbill, who was at the storage unit getting his fishing poles said "I feel bad for the owners that never had nothing in their unit flammable, but it spreads when the roof collapses on everything, everything goes up."

Brightbill continued, "Well, time for me to change units!"

While the cause of the fire is still under investigation, the fire was contained with no injuries reported.

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on April 9, 2024.]

Decision to move to a 55+ community can be complicated

By Karen Oltarzewski
Community Reporter

Alice, a 56-year-old woman who asked to go by an alternate name so she could speak candidly about her living situation, says her grandmother appeared to her in a dream one night and told her to “Get a newspaper.” Heeding the wisdom from beyond the grave, she got one, opened it up, and turned to a random page. It was for homes for sale in age 55+ active adult communities.

At the time, Alice was living with her soon-to-be ex in a single-family home in Mercerville. After 28 years of marriage, with her home neglected with overgrown grass and repairs that were needed, she says she was open to a change in her lifestyle. She began taking the possibility of a move to an adult community more seriously.

Some benefits were obvious. She says, “[In active adult communities] there is very little maintenance and upkeep, no grass cutting, no snow shoveling. There’s a clubhouse with many activities, parties, clubs, a fitness center, a game room, a library, and an outdoor pool overlooking a manmade lake.”

She was also interested in the opportunities for volunteering on boards or committees and was enticed by the walking paths, pickleball court and bocci.

“[Those are] all pluses if that’s the kind of lifestyle you prefer,” she says.

On the other hand, she adds, “Arguably, some elderly people prefer to keep to themselves and prefer not to be bothered by every neighbor in the community every time they [step] outside to get their mail.”

Alice wasn’t sure where she fell on the spectrum and continued to weigh her options. There were other compromises to consider.

She says, “The properties are much smaller..and landscaping is somewhat cookie-cutter with personalization only with approval of the HOA.”

Indeed, the costs associated with the Homeowners’ Association (HOA) gave her pause as did her overall privacy. She wondered, “What if I get a nosey neighbor?”

Alice is far from alone in trying to decide whether or not to move to a 55+ community.

Sheri Schwartz, a senior living in Cherry Hill, NJ with her husband Barry, who is 74, decided against it.

She says, “There are definitely two distinct lifestyles. Not everyone needs to be surrounded by older people in a 55+ community to have a quality of life.”

Schwartz, who works full-time as a preschool teacher adds, “I like my home with Barry.”

On the weekends they either visit their daughter and grandchildren in Bethlehem, PA or their son in Delaware.

“We keep busy and keep up with the kids snowboarding and skateboarding, attending recitals and sports competitions,” Schwartz says, adding, “Most older people today aren’t like our parents’ generation. That generation was different. They weren’t as physically involved.”

Indeed, research suggests that older adults are more engaged and active than those of previous generations.

Dr. Bianca Saunet lead author of the article “Loneliness Declines Across Birth Cohorts: The Impact of Mastery and Self-Efficacy,” from the journal *Psychology and Aging* gathered a vast amount



Seniors embracing a healthy lifestyle at a Mixed Martial Arts class at Robert Wood Johnson Fitness Center. From left: Gerri Fardin, Arther Co, and Nancy Regan.

PHOTO | KAREN OLTARZEWSKI

of data on aging from the Longitudinal Aging Study Amsterdam, a long-term study of 4,880 people born between 1908 and 1957. Her team found that “older adults who felt more in control and therefore managed certain aspects of their lives well, such as maintaining a positive attitude, and set[ting] goals, such as going to the gym, were less lonely.”

Dr. Saunet concluded, “People must manage their social lives better today than ever before because traditional communities, which provided social outlets, such as neighborhoods, churches and extended families, have lost strength in recent decades.”

For some people, like

Sheri and Bob Schwartz, active 55+ communities don’t hold a strong appeal. For others, they may be serving as substitutes for the institutions of the past. Moreover, they offer autonomy as they provide creative outlets for seniors.

Dr. Gene Cohen, neuropsychologist and author of *The Creative Age, Awakening the Human Potential in the Second Half of Life* is among a growing group of researchers advocating for seniors to participate in social and creative activities.

He states that “Creative aging is like chocolate for the brain,” and continues “Engaging in visual art related activities or attending performing arts venues

have been shown to impact brain longevity.”

In the end, Alice did decide to move to Traditions at Hamilton Crossing. Her concerns about the HOA fees and nosey neighbors are gone. She has expanded her social network and begun participating in a wide range of creative activities.

She says, “I love my community. It feels like a family! Best decision I ever made!”

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on March 3, 2024. It was also produced as part of MCCC’s J Lab program.]



Arts Council of Princeton’s open mic elevates creative voices

By Gabriela Vanegas
Reporter

“Story & Verse: A Storytelling, Poetic, and Spoken Word Open Mic” is a free event held on the third Thursday of each month at the Arts Council of Princeton’s Solley Theater. Anyone can sign up to perform if they show up by 6:45 PM and the event runs from 7:00-8:30 PM.

Each month, the Arts Council of Princeton posts a new theme on their website for the participants to base their five-minute performances on. They can perform anything from rap to poems, personal stories to songs. This past February’s theme was, “It’s Not That Kind of Party.”

As the artists were called up to present their pieces, they were asked to share as much as they wanted within the allotted time. Some chose to explain their inspiration while others immediately started their act.

People from diverse backgrounds came to share their creativity.

Abisola Kusimo, who lives in Jackson Township, shared a poem about the experience of immigrants and new Americans experiencing the difficulties of having an uncommon name, while still being proud of its root and meaning.

Kusimo said, “It’s such a shared experience that our names get butchered when we come to this country. Even for some of us

“So, I just think [my poem] is a funny way to both introduce people to Yoruba names, language, culture and to kind of bring the audience together in a way that they also feel validated and seen.”

- ABISOLA KUSIMO

born and bred [here], our names are still mispronounced and invalidated in different ways.”

Kusimo continued, “So, I just think [my poem] is a funny way to both introduce people to Yoruba names, language, culture and to kind of bring the audience together in a way that they also feel validated and seen.”

Athira Jacob, another participant, from Plainsboro Township, said one of her inspirations for her poems was dealing with the feelings of grief about her grandmother, who recently passed away.

Jacob said, “[I experience] guilt of being here, in this country, while she was somewhere else. Also a bit of isolation, you know, you don’t have family here who can support you through that.”

Jacob added, “Where does that leave me and my story now? Because she was a huge part of my story, and now she’s not there. So what does that say about my life now?”

As performers neared the end of their pieces, a volunteer pianist played the piano to let them

know that their time was up. Although a few of them passed their time limit, the pianist let them finish.

In between acts, the host came up and read responses from people who signed up but were not confident to speak in public and preferred to have their work presented anonymously.

At the February event, so many people signed up that the event ran over by a little over an hour. But Melissa Kuscin, the event’s organizer and the Programming and Marketing Manager at the Arts Council, was prepared.

She said, “The beauty of an open mic is you have a room and a microphone. And we’re very blessed to have community members that volunteer.” She added, “You do not have to be an artist to come here. If you want to be the most creative version of yourself, there’s something for you to do here.”

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on April 21, 2024.]



PHOTO | GABRIELA VANEGAS

Abisola Kusimo performs a poem about how people pronounce names at “Story & Verse” open mic hosted by Arts Council of Princeton.

Lawrence Township's new dog park honors four-legged heroes

By Janet Rush
Community Reporter

While flipping through a stack of old newspapers, Nancy Bergen, Superintendent of the Recreation Department in Lawrence Township, stumbled upon an old article that caught her attention. The article, written by the late James Hewitt, a WWII veteran and a retired Lawrence Township police officer, was in the July 1995 issue of the Lawrence Ledger.

While stationed in the South Pacific, Hewitt was given an abandoned German Shepherd. The dog, previously trained by the Japanese to fight and protect soldiers in war, was named "Kiska" after the island he was found on.

At first, Kiska was hostile, but over time befriended Hewitt and his unit. They gave him a new name, Moose, and made him an honorary private, assigning him a serial number. Not only did Moose stand at all formations and go on night beach patrols as part of his duties, he also served as a morale booster for the troops.

After Hewitt's unit left the South Pacific, Moose was sent to a new master and sent to fight in a forward combat zone. Although it was difficult parting with him, Hewitt was assured the dog would be returned to him when the war was over.

Shortly after Hewitt was discharged from the Army in June 1945, he received a letter from Major General H.T. Burgin that began with those dreaded words:

"It is with a deep sense of regret that I must inform you of the death of your dog Moose, who was killed on the 20th day of June 1945, in action against the enemy. While scouting an enemy-held village with his handler, Moose located and surprised two Japanese soldiers concealed in the grass, one of whom threw a grenade landing within two feet of his handler. Moose, knowing it to be a weapon, leaped on the grenade as it exploded, fatally wounding him, but saving the life of his master."

After reading this article, Bergen, knew what she needed to



PHOTO | JANET RUSH

ABOVE: Bailey waiting patiently for Hero Dog Park to open in the Spring of 2024. Hero Dog Park is located in the Colonial Heights section of Lawrence Township. RIGHT TOP: A plaque honoring Moose is located at the head of the large dog park.



PHOTO | JANET RUSH



Kiska, decked out in uniform, with his new owner, Jim Hewitt, of Butantan Island in the Pacific, June, 1944. He was later re-named Moose and his status changed from prisoner of war to a member of the U.S. Armed Services.

ABOVE: Picture of Jim Hewitt with Kiska published in the July 1995 issue of the Lawrence Ledger.

PHOTO courtesy of Kevin Nerwinski Esq., Lawrence Township Municipal Manager

do to honor Kiska/Moose's sacrifice. The Hero Dog Park, located within Hamnett Memorial Park in Lawrence Township, will open to the public in spring 2024.

Kevin Nerwinski Esq., Lawrence Township Municipal Manager, says, "Nancy thought, wow, this would be a great idea to honor [Moose's] story, but also all the hero dogs that help. You know, fire dogs, therapy dogs, any type of dog."

Nerwinski continues, "We thought it was a great opportunity to put a dog park in the southern part of Lawrence Township. The field itself was already leveled, so it was almost...barking at us."

With approximately 2,200 licensed dogs in the township, Lawrence currently has only one dog park located in the northern section of Village Park.

According to Nerwinski, beginning in June 2021, he and the township officials applied for vari-

ous grants to fund the dog park, including the "2021 Bark for Your Park Contest," but they were unsuccessful in securing outside funding.

However, the Recreation Department was ultimately able to use the township capital improvement budget to fund the park.

Nerwinski says, "We try to do these new capital improvements over time. Nancy and I, we want to make sure that we give attention to all the areas of the town and all the different cool little neighborhood parks like Colonial Lake Park, Eldridge Park and Veterans Park."

With Hero Park opening in the Spring of 2024, local residents are ready to put it to use.

Siblings, Teresa and Thomas Bower, who were walking along Hamnett Memorial Park say, "We love it and are very excited for it to be in the neighborhood. We can't wait to bring our dog Stella Marie here."

Not everyone is excited

about Hero Park though.

Alex Gorski, a Lawrence resident who lives near the park, has a different perspective. He doesn't feel that the money spent on the park was a good investment.

"Use the money to fill the many potholes in our streets or something other than a dog park," Gorski says.

For those who do plan on using the park, they will find two separate dog areas. The section for large dogs is approximately 100 ft x 200 ft and the small dog area is approximately 65 ft x 200 ft. Both have 5-foot-high fencing surrounding the perimeter.

New water lines were run for a water fountain and there is a pathway that makes it ADA accessible. There is also a pathway that surrounds both dog areas for people who would like to get exercise running, jogging or walking, while watching the dogs.

In addition, there is a

basketball court, as well as a picnic area and a new children's play area.

There are two final pieces that were added to memorialize the Hero Dogs. At the center of the two fenced sections for the dogs to play, there is a landscaped pathway leading to the paved circle with a flag pole, which will hold the U.S. Flag.

And, at the head of the large dog park is a plaque honoring Moose.

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on March 5, 2024. It was also produced as part of MCCC's J Lab program.]



Trenton Planetarium's Assistant Curator reaches for the stars

By Janet Rush
Community Reporter

Dr. Jacob Hamer, who has a doctorate in Astronomy and Astrophysics from Johns Hopkins University, shares a connection with the field he specializes in: exoplanets.

"It wasn't until a couple months into graduate school that I learned that the very first exoplanet orbiting a star like the Sun was discovered the day I was born," he says.

As part of his graduate research, he worked with a team of astronomers on finding ways to determine the relative age of Hot Jupiters, a type of gas giant exoplanet, that includes Dimidium, the planet found on Dr. Hamer's birthday.

He says, "Questions that came up the day I was born were questions that I got to help answer when I was an active researcher."

These days Dr. Hamer can be found at the NJ State Museum's Planetarium where he is the Assistant Curator.

The Planetarium, located at 205 W State Street in Trenton, is

open to the public offering events for people of all ages.

According to the NJ State Museum website, the current museum structure was built in 1964 and accredited by the American Alliance of Museums in 1974. The museum itself was established in 1895 by the State Legislature.

With stadium seating for up to 145 people, visitors can watch a variety of shows from the Planetarium's 8-K resolution, six projector system.

Dr. Hamer says, "Our state-of-the-art projectors allow us to show our films and view the sky with more detail."

One of the first things Dr. Hamer did when he took the job of assistant curator was to get the film "Arora" for showing at the planetarium. It utilizes all 6 projectors and is shown in 8K resolution.

He also recently redecorated the hallway leading from the museum down to the planetarium selecting posters that reflect up to date scientific features such as the 30th anniversary of the Hubble Telescope.

On a recent day, father

and daughter, Chris and Zoey Mader of Manalapan, were visiting the Planetarium.

Mader says, "I'm happy that there is a fun and educational activity to keep Zoey engrossed, entertained and away from games on her smartphone."

Zoey, who received a telescope for Christmas, says "I am looking forward to seeing the show and getting tips on using [my telescope]."

In addition to being open to the public, the planetarium hosts field trips throughout the year. Students are able to watch a film and staff members are available for questions immediately before and after the shows.

Dr. Hamer recalls one day in particular, saying "I just took rapid-fire questions from the planetarium full of kids. It was question after question and it was one of the most fun days I've had on the job."

Dr. Hamer says he enjoys seeing children's reactions to the shows.

He says, "There is a moment where first we show them how the sky looks with the light pol-



PHOTO | JANET RUSH

Dr. Jacob Hamer is the Assistant Curator at the NJ State Museum's Planetarium.

lution. Then, when we turned off the light pollution, all the kids gasp and clap. And I teared up because it's so beautiful to know that people really appreciate it."

For additional information about the Planetarium, visit their website <https://nj.gov/state/>

[museum/explore-planetarium.shtml](https://nj.gov/state/museum/explore-planetarium.shtml)

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Founding father of American environmental movement, left a legacy in Lawrenceville, NJ



PHOTO | ANNETTE LOVELESS

ABOVE and RIGHT: Research assistant Therese Apuzzo (left) checking seedling growth in Lawrenceville woods with Rider University Professor Kerrie Sendall (right).

By Annette Loveless
Reporter

Dr. Daniel Druckenbrod, professor of Environmental Sciences at Rider University, can predict the future. He also loves to take long walks in the woods.

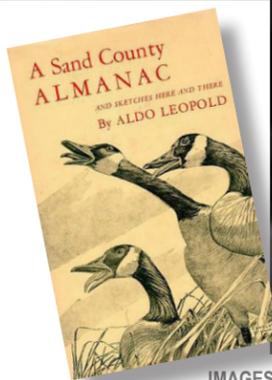
“When I’m walking in the woods, I’m reading a story written in the forest. I notice the size of the trees, the species, and how those sizes and species are distributed. The structure of the forest tells me the story of how it started a century or more ago,” he says.

Dr. Druckenbrod, who did postdoctoral work at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and left a tenured track position in Virginia to teach at Rider, can predict the future. He uses tree rings, computer models, historical documents, and geographic information systems (GIS) to study how forests and their environments change over decades to centuries.

“The understory (the lower layer of the forest) tells me the current conditions and the stressors on the forest that influence the future forest. The future forests of Lawrence are experiencing the same stressors that are a concern up and down the East Coast—invasive species, an overabundance of deer, urbanization. The saplings that survive tell me what the future of the forest will look like,” he says.

“Our environment has always gone through natural changes before, but not at the rate and extent that we are seeing now because of human impact,” says Dr. Druckenbrod, adding, “My primary responsibility as a professor is to give my students the skills and knowledge to be aware of nature, to be informed citizens who can become part of land management and sustainable ecology across the globe.”

One source Dr. Druckenbrod leans on is the work of Aldo



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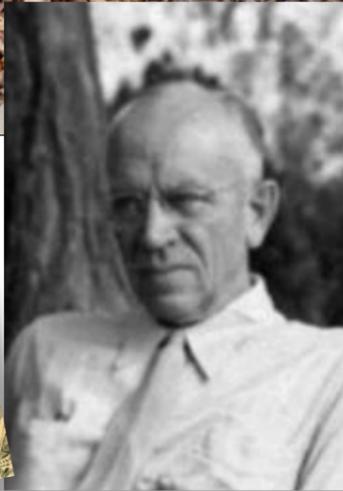


PHOTO | ANNETTE LOVELESS

LEFT: Aldo Leopold American conservationist and founding father of the environmental movement. A Sand County Almanac (above), Leopold’s seminal essay collection first published in 1949.

Leopold.

“I incorporate Leopold into the curriculum to give students a historical and ecological connection to our community,” he says.

Aldo Leopold was an influential leader in environmental stewardship and the “Land Ethics” philosophy and lived in Lawrence Township while attending the Lawrenceville School from 1904 through 1905.

According to Dr. Steven Laubach, the Aldo Leopold Distinguished Teaching Chair and Director of Sustainability at the Lawrenceville School, “Leopold’s time in Lawrence Township was formative in developing his philosophy of land stewardship and wildlife management.”

A prolific writer, Leopold’s book *A Sand County Almanac*, published in 1949, is still read and discussed today in high schools, such as the Lawrenceville School, and universities, such as Rider.

“Every student at the Lawrenceville School reads Leopold,” says Dr. Laubach.

A Sand County Almanac is a collection of essays, with the capstone essay “The Land Ethic,” expanding ethics to include soils, plants, animals, water, and humans.

Dr. Laubach explains, “This is a revolutionary shift in understanding the natural world, from a commodity to be exploited to an interconnected ecosystem where each part has inherent value on its own and each contributes

to a sustainable ‘biotic’ whole...a community to which we belong.”

Leopold’s path to becoming a fundamental figure in American environmentalism started at an early age. To understand what inspired Leopold’s writing and conservation efforts, it helps to travel back to the time when his interests were formed.

Dr. Druckenbrod says, “We are lucky that the Leopold family archived all of his letters from when he was a student at Lawrenceville.”

There are 175 known letters he wrote to his family during this time. “His letters home are replete with observations of the ecological community, the plants he saw, the animals, and their interactions,” adds Dr. Druckenbrod.

The letters tell us how “Leopold would spend hours in the woods of Lawrence after class and on days off, including property on and just west of Rider University which Leopold called the Big Woods,” says Dr. Laubach.

The “Big Woods” is now preserved parkland that includes Lawrenceville’s Central Park, the Johnson Trolley Line, and the Loveless Nature Preserve. (Note: This preserve is named after the author’s family who once lived and farmed here and in the Big Woods.)

“In my class,” says Dr. Druckenbrod, “I match my readings of Leopold, whether it be from *A Sand County Almanac* or his family letters, with the season if not the month when students and I are in the same woods. We’ll soon read

““This is a revolutionary shift in understanding the natural world, from a commodity to be exploited to an interconnected ecosystem where each part has inherent value on its own and each contributes to a sustainable ‘biotic’ whole...a community to which we belong.””

- Dr. Steven Laubach

his letter where he recognizes the ephemeral Spring relationship between flies attracted to blooming skunk cabbages and the migrating phoebes that feed on those flies.”

“I’m from North Jersey,” says Rider University research assistant Therese Apuzzo, “I didn’t know who Aldo Leopold was until I got here. It’s incredible to me that I’m standing in the footsteps of such an important ecologist!”

Dr. Druckenbrod explains, “Leopold is clear in his later writings that one’s education should extend outside the classroom to the surrounding environment. This connection to the preserved historic and ecological community is motivation for the students of today to protect and restore the environment for the next century.”

“I like to think,” says Apuzzo, “that I’m continuing to monitor the forest for Leopold. I have technology that he didn’t have at the time, like a gas exchange instrument that can help to measure the health and functioning of the forest. If he was monitoring these woods now, I think he would be looking at climate change impacts just like I am.”

Around the turn of the century when Leopold was taking his tramps in the area, Mercer

County was mostly agricultural land. According to an 1899 Report on Forests, only 11% of the county was forested, already illustrating the impact humans had on the “biota” with deforestation and soil tillage.

Today agricultural land is largely replaced by urban development.

“We sometimes overlook the services forests provide us for free, especially as we confront climate change, such as storing carbon and protecting biodiversity and the species that are adapted to inhabit these forests,” says Dr. Druckenbrod. He adds, “These older forests are particularly important because they can’t easily be replaced. There’s research saying these forests are more resilient.”

“I’m a big hiker, I’m no stranger to forests,” says Apuzzo, “but spending all this time in this forest, monitoring what’s happening like Leopold did before me, it’s different now. I feel more deeply connected to any forest that I’m in.”

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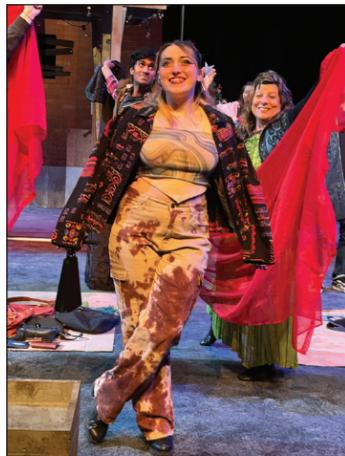
In MCCC's production of *Rent*, Mimi Márquez (Lisbeth Burgos) and Roger Davis (Shawn Simmons) sing about their longing for one other at a dress rehearsal in the Kelsey Theatre, April 3, 2024.



Rent's Mark Cohen (Jermaine Terry) and Roger Davis (Shawn Simmons) (middle), and the residents of Avenue B shiver after their heat is turned off.



ABOVE: Reba Dell'Angelo, a deaf actress, signs "One Song Glory" in MCCC's production of *Rent*. RIGHT: Maureen Johnson (Rachel Ash) eagerly makes her entrance.



RENT at Kelsey Theatre with life on



Photography and Reporting
By Mary-Simone Collazo, News Editor

ABOVE: In a scene from the musical, a character shares his dreams and aspirations.

MCCC's rock musical *Rent* captured the hearts and attention of its audience on the stage of Kelsey Theatre during the weekends of April 5 and 12. This masterpiece by Broadway playwright and composer Jonathan Larson, who died of a heart attack before its first production, is based on the 1896 opera *La bohème* by Giacomo Puccini.

The musical highlights a year in the life of a group of young impoverished artists struggling to survive in the early 1990s East Village of Lower Manhattan, all while trying to make each day count as they live under the shadow of the AIDS epidemic. It is a story that mixes grief and passion with a powerful soundtrack including the familiar classic "Seasons of Love."

Tyann Sells, director and MCCC alumni said, "This place is very close to my heart and I've always wanted to direct something at Kelsey, so when Jody offered me the opportunity, I was very very excited!"

Jody Gazeenbeek-Person, MCCC's Theatre Professor and Dance Coordinator, and choreographer and producer of the show said the choice to do *Rent* for the spring musical was an easy one. Gazeenbeek-Person said they are celebrating 10 years with their husband this year, and they met because of *Rent*.

Gazeenbeek-Person said, "I met him because of the show, so why not do *Rent* again? So there's a little bit of a romantic reason to the choice, but we also get something fresh and modern!"

"Fresh and modern" was delivered with this interpretation of *Rent*. Reba Dell'Angelo, a deaf actress with two cochlear implants, auditioned in American Sign Language (ASL). Gazeenbeek-Person adored the idea, and the two collaborated to incorporate it into the show.

Dell'Angelo said, "I presented it to [the directors and choreographer], and they were on board. I was really amazed at that open-mindedness to showing ASL

in *Rent*. It makes sense with the diversity in the show."

She continued, "I'm really grateful for that opportunity to be able to show people how songs are presented in ASL."

In addition, the April 7 matinee had a fully ASL-interpreted performance, with interpreters Alwyn Baskin, a Mercer ASL professor, Lisette Ortiz, and Beth Applebaum working together to each sign specific characters for the audience while Amy Snyder-Dietz stood in the audience giving cues to the interpreters.

Rent tells the story of Mark Cohen, an aspiring filmmaker, Roger Davis, a tortured songwriter, and their fellow starving artist friends in the 90s attempting to survive the freezing winter after Benjamin "Benny" Coffin III, their newly rich landlord and former roommate, turns off their heat and lights after they did not pay rent. As if that was not bad enough, Benny's cruel father-in-law wants to kick out all the inhabitants of Tent City, the homeless population on Avenue B on the street below.

The permanent set was like little kisses of New York blown onto a stage. The fire escapes, inner-city apartments, graffiti art, and subway signs let the audience know they had stepped into a story taking place in the big city.

Surrounding the border of the stage were what looked like ticket strips, displaying relevant images such as the red AIDS awareness ribbon and skyscrapers. As a fun attention-grabber, whenever one of the main characters' parents called them and left a humorous voicemail, the lights in the theater house would turn off, and a red traffic light would come down.

During the matinee show on April 7, at the beginning of Act I, a 16-year-old boy and brother of one of the cast members had a seizure in the audience. The performance was immediately halted and the lights turned up.

A nurse was seated a few rows ahead of the boy and his fam-

Theatre filled the show its 20 year anniversary



Dress rehearsal for MCCC's production of Rent, a nurse (Jordan Shutz) shares news and fears during an HIV/AIDS support group meeting.

ily, and was able to render immediate care until an ambulance arrived soon after, and the boy was taken to the hospital.

After the show, Gazenbeek-Person provided an update to say the boy was in stable condition and would be going home shortly. The directors and crew reacted quickly to the situation, keeping the audience still while making sure the medical emergency was tended to.

Once the area was clear, the cast went on with the show without any faltering in their performance.

Rent is a sung-through musical, so anyone cast must have a strong set of lungs and solid acting chops to keep up with the demands, and this team met this task with help from Vocal Director Matthew Johnson.

For Jermaine Terry, a resident of Bordentown, this was his first show since coming home from the military. Terry was radiant as Mark Cohen, with astounding vocals and a jovial presence.

Terry said, "My favorite thing about Mark is that he is a storyteller, so he's kind of the eyes behind what's going on. He sees everything. He understands what's going on. Even though he might not necessarily say it, he's still the joy of the friend group."

Shawn Simmons was a marvel as Roger Davis, switching facets between a heartbroken ballad writer and a man who finally starts to see the light at the end of the tunnel again, staying in perfect pitch the entire time.

Zlatin Ivanov, a second-year Theater major, embodied Benny Coffin III, reminding the audience through his unique voice and quick wit that he is not the villain he seems.

Ivanov said, "It always brings the freshness into the stage, always brings the audience like, puts them on their toes. Like, 'Whoa, look, Benny is there, something is going to happen,' because

every time Benny is on stage something important happens."

Lisbeth Burgos as Mimi Márquez was delightful, with a combination of bubbly and grit that is comparable to actress and singer Rachel Zegler.

The character Maureen is a cheater, a liar, and a drama queen, but everyone in the story falls in love with her. This makes sense with Rachel Ash in her role, as her swoon-worthy stage presence and sweet tone command the room.

Trinity Miller as Joanne Jefferson was a powerhouse, reflected in her soulful vocals and radiating confidence.

Daniel Montero was charming as Tom Collins, with his unique, raspy tone shining in Act II's "I'll Cover You (Reprise)."

But it was Nicholas LaRussa who stole the show as Angel Dumott Schunard—the singing, the dance moves, and the acting made for a captivating trifecta in every song sung.

The ensemble pulled all the pieces together, with a variety of voices and talents adding flavor to each scene. There was clear collaboration between all the cast members, both on stage and backstage.

When asked her opinion about the show, MCCC student and audience member Vanessa Quijano said, "Since I did not really know what the play was about in the first place, I was a little bit confused following the dialogue in the songs. Maybe that was just an issue of vocal projection. But after a while, it was pretty straightforward and everything fell where it needed to be."

She continued, "It was both beautiful and chaotic, and just eye-opening. You get to peel back a layer in society that's normally overlooked."

Rent at the Kelsey Theatre was a phenomenal piece that breathed new life into the show decades after its premiere.



TOP LEFT: Joanne Jefferson (Trinity Miller) discusses plans for a protest with her girlfriend. TOP RIGHT: Angel Dumott Schunard (Nicholas LaRussa) and Tom Collins (Daniel Montero) declare their love.



*Benjamin Coffin III (Zlatin Ivanov), the landlord, gets on the last nerves of the residents of Avenue B in dress rehearsal for MCCC's *Rent*.*



Angel Dumott Schunard (Nicholas LaRussa) prepares to perform a routine of the day's escapades in full drag with her backup dancer (Jordan Shutz)

Short on players, women's soccer faced tough season

Coach and players say their focus is on strong recruitment to expand next year's line up

By Teddy Nkamanyi
Reporter

Beset by loss of players, schedule conflicts and injuries, Mercer's women's soccer team ended the fall 2023 season with four wins, six losses and two ties. The team lost their Region 19 championship match against Essex 1-2 missing the chance to go to the National Championship in Arizona.

This was a setback after the previous year under former coach Elyse Diamond, when the team went a record-setting 14 wins and zero losses in the regular season. However, the 2022 Team had 20 players, the 2023 squad had a maximum of 15 many of whom fell to injury.

Head Coach Ron Stinson says, "We played the first four, five games with nine to 10 players and one of those players was a backup goalkeeper who had to play in a field position...we also didn't have a natural striker and struggled to score goals."

Freshman Business major Laura Kucharz, who was a leader in defense and one of the team captains said of the season says, "I think at the start it was really hard for all of us, because we didn't have the numbers to play due to injuries...But with more practice and games we got better as a team."

According to Rachelle Liechti, a former Mercer player who graduated with an associate's degree in Business Administration in 2023, having fewer players in the spring is common.

Liechti says, "We had less people in the spring than in fall, because it wasn't really a priority for everyone, because there is nothing to play for in the spring season...We had a lot of sophomores who were about to graduate so they focused



MCCC women's soccer freshman Luana Nascimento in action. Nascimento, who is originally from Brazil worked as part of a limited roster to keep the fall 2023 team moving forward.

PHOTO | TEDDY NKAMANYI

on class more and on work more."

Computer Science major Annika Maringer was Mercer women's top goal scorer last season with seven goals and received a Player of the Week award. She is actively recruiting for next year.

Maringer says, "Coach Ron gives great exercises and, in the gym. And the location is also great. There is a lot you can do here like going to New York or Philadel-

"We played the first four, five games with nine to 10 players and one of those players was a backup goalkeeper who had to play in a field position"
-Head Coach Ron Stinson

phia."

Karissa Estelle, who is the assistant coach for the Women's soccer team, is involved in recruitment. She says, "The app we use is called Alliance Athletes and there

we have multiple agencies sending us players that fit the Mercer budget and then we get in contact with them."

Estelle continues, "We have seven International players who are committed for Fall 2024 coming from The United Kingdom, Germany and Switzerland and then three local players coming from high school."

Both Maringer and Kucharz are coming back to Mercer after the spring semester and

will play in the fall season of 2024. They are expecting Mercer to recruit a higher number of players, so as to not have a repeat of 2023's obstacles.

Coach Stinson has laid out his goals for next year. He says, "We are looking to have a Roster of about 21 to 22 players...We want to build a stronger team that can compete at a higher level while scoring goals and being great in defense... Going to the National Championship is always the ultimate goal and I think with the roster we are putting together we have a good shot."

Muay Thai offered at Hamilton YMCA for health and self defense

By Diane Rodriguez
Reporter

Hamilton YMCA offers Muay Thai, also known as Thai Boxing, just a 12-minute drive from Mercer's West Windsor campus.

Muay Thai, also known as Thai boxing, is a martial art from Thailand that involves a variety of kicking, sweeping and clinching maneuvers. Practitioners typically wear shinguards and boxing gloves.

The YMCA classes are offered Wednesdays and Fridays and led by Coach Anthony Camacho who has been practicing Muay Thai for the last 25 years, and teaching for the past 7 years. He has had Muay Thai studio in New York where he taught women self-defense.

His class starts with the punching bags that are set up for each student. Camacho demonstrates a routine of moves such as the roundhouse kick, left hook, and front kick.

To make sure students of different skill levels can follow along, Camacho takes a slow and deliberate pace, showcasing the moves several times. After the demonstration, he makes sure to

"I really like Muay Thai. Personally, I think it's the most effective martial art... It's important to know some basics, to know how to protect yourself."

-Anthony Perez,
YMCA Student

visit every student at their post fixing their form and offering tips on how to improve.

When asked about newcomers attending his class, Camacho says it is important to "Leave your ego at the door. We're a family here. Like I tell all my pupils, slow and steady. There's no rush to master your technique."

One of Camacho's students, Angelia Mei Zen Liao, says of the class, "I like that it's just like a way for me to kind of like [relieve] stress and it's just a way for me to be active in my adult life."

In addition to offering stress relief, students also learn self-defense. Anthony Perez, a student in Camacho's class says, "I really

like Muay Thai. Personally, I think it's the most effective martial art... It's important to know some basics, to know how to protect yourself."

The class is an hour long, and for the first half, the class learns the routines. The other half is spent lightly sparring with one another, incorporating the new moves.

During the last 10 minutes of class, Camacho selects a student volunteer to demonstrate how to correctly spar with a partner. The students then try this technique during the next scheduled class.

Camacho is informative and thorough when demonstrating how to correctly strike with these moves.

Rebecca Liu, another of Camacho's students, says she appreciates his guidance. "I like that there's a lot of set instructions for me to follow...I like that there's a social aspect to it," she says.

The atmosphere in the studio is light-hearted. The sport can be challenging to learn but participants say it is rewarding and it is a great way to burn some calories while building a skill.

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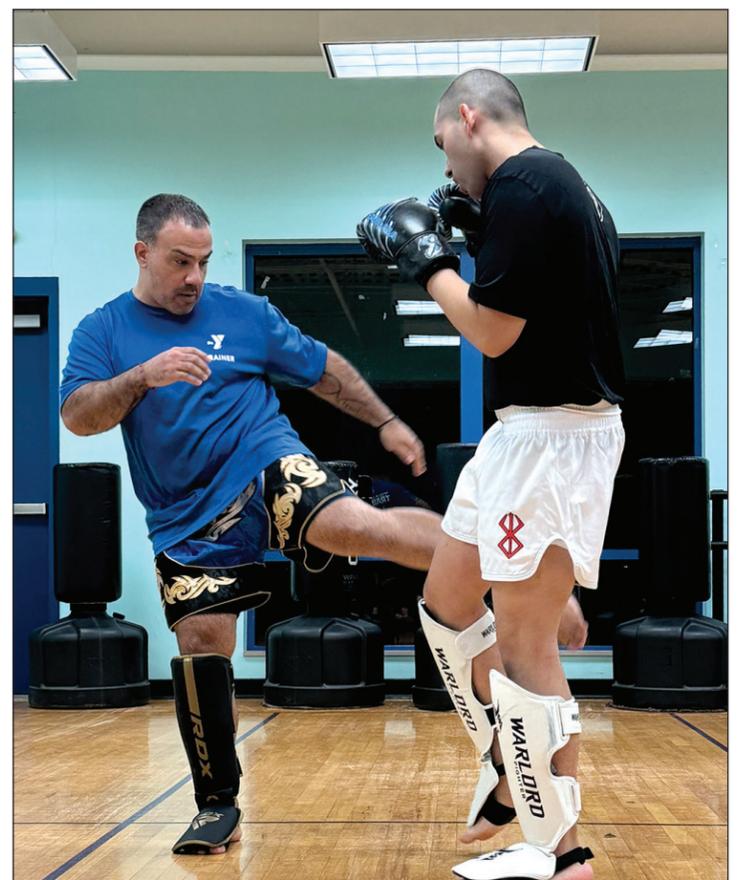


PHOTO | DIANE RODRIGUEZ

Anthony Camacho teaching Muay Thai boxing at Hamilton NY YMCA.

Women's tennis going strong and headed to Nationals

By Zlatin Ivanov
Senior Reporter

Division 1 of MCCC Women's Tennis has experienced seven wins and three losses this season. The team started with a 7-2 win against Harford CC, Maryland, and since then they never committed a loss on a local ground. The only losses they received were when they went down to South Carolina to compete against three of the top 10 teams in the country, receiving 3 losses out of 3 games.

Makenna Swasey, a first-year biology student and number five on the roster says that the games in South Carolina were not an easy wipeout.

Swasey says, "We definitely fought our hardest and all those scores might not show it, but it definitely showed when we were playing."

Last year the team was two players short, which caused them to automatically lose points. This year, they have a full roster of six players, which is enough for a line-up. Since MCCC's Women's Tennis is in Division 1, they can recruit players from all over the world.

Despite this, head coach Marc Vecchiolla says that since we are a community college, he likes to look into the community first when recruiting players.

That is how MCCC recruited the number one player on the team, first year Business Administration student Leticia Kitio, who has a concentration on sports management.

Being the first to ever win a Mercer County Tournament in Lawrence High School's history, sheKitio



PHOTO | ZLATIN IVANOV

Women's tennis players Leticia Kitio and Valeria Vargas take the win against Ocean County College at Mercer County Park on April 17.

says that she has improved a lot since she joined Mercer's team last semester.

Kitio says, "In South Carolina we were on the court for almost three or four hours. Before, I could not do this, especially in the burning hot sun."

Coach Vecchiolla has been in charge of MCCC's Women's Tennis since 1997.

Vecchiolla says, "[Kitio is] really probably one of the best players we've had in the history of the college."

Kitio has been undefeated all season, aside from the games at South Carolina, "It was not what I expected but I am glad that I played. We got a little taste of what we are gonna get in Texas, and I am really excited to dominate there," she added.

The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA),

has selected Tyler Junior College to host the 2024 NJCAA Division I Women's Tennis Championship, where the Mercer Vikings will compete. They will be flying to Texas on May 2, and stay there until May 8.

The team's captain, Valeria Vargas, a business administration student in her third semester, says that nationals is their main goal right now. She added that she expects her teammates to keep working hard and improve in these last three weeks.

Vargas says, "We'll play against one of the best teams in the nation."

Barb Pleva, a former player, and an assistant coach for more than 20 years of Women's Tennis, said that she expects them to do well at the nationals.

Pleva says, "This team is definitely the strongest team we've ever had."



PHOTO | ZLATIN IVANOV

MCCC's top women's tennis player Leticia Kitio serves in match against Ocean County College.

Vecchiolla says, "I don't look at wins and losses in a season to measure its success. If you work hard and your attitude is good, the wins will take care of themselves. We just want to be better tennis players and

better people at the end of the season."

Makenna says, "My favorite part of being on the team is to have people who lift you up when you're beating yourself down,"

Women's hoops coming back with new coach and new energy

By Nickiesha Lewis
Reporter

After a two-year hiatus, Mercer Vikings Women's Basketball is set to return for the 2024-2025 season with new head coach, Bob Fusik.

The Vikings, which started in 1975-1976 as a club team, are now nationally recognized, competing in the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Division II. Under their previous coach, Mike Tenaglia, who was with the Vikings from 1990-2020, the program had 14 consecutive winning seasons and won seven Region 19 titles.

Despite the Vikings success over the years, Eric Grundman, Athletic Director of MCCC, states that the pandemic made it difficult to keep the team going. During the height of COVID-19, all MCCC sports for the remainder of the 2019-2020 season were canceled.

Grundman says, "[After sports resumed] we had some issues in terms of not having enough interest and enough players in the program."

As a result, the women's team dissolved after the 2021-2022 season.

Now, Grundman says, the athletic committee decided to restart the program. The first step was hiring Bob Fusik, who will be head coach.

Grundman says Fusik's record of success at Trenton Catholic stood out to the search committee which felt "he could not only build the program, but bring it back to a high level of success of national prominence which is what it has been and what we would hope for it to be going forward."

With the head coach position in place, the focus shifted to rebuilding a team. Coach Fusik says he is actively recruiting and wants to have at least 14 girls on the team.

After hearing about the Viking's return, Jhava Wilson, a second-year Business Administration Sports Management major, who played for Mercer during their 2016-2017 season, expressed interest in rejoining the team.

Wilson says she continued to practice after she left Mercer and is ready to bring her skills back to the court.

She says, "I'm still working out. Of course, you know, staying active, staying productive, staying focused. I'm staying goal oriented and you know, never giving up."

According to Coach Fusik, Wilson's return comes at an opportune time as her experience playing for the Vikings will help the team grow.

"We're very fortunate to have somebody that's played here several years ago and was a star back then. So I'm looking for her leadership and everything else to help the other young ladies out as they become acclimated with college basketball," Fusik says.

Another student eager to join the team is Hattie Lewis, a first year Nursing major, who played basketball at her high school in Oklahoma.

Lewis says, "With a new team it's going to be a learning curve for sure. I think we are all in a position to grow. Essentially, we are starting from the ground up and it's going to take a lot of time."

Coach Fusik is aware of the challenges saying, "Unfortunately I got the job a little late so most division 3 kids were already



PHOTO | JULIA MERINEY

Coach Fusik with several players who are joining the 2024-2025 Women's Basketball team. From left to right - Hattie Lewis, Nursing major, Kalinka Menges, ESL student, Coach Bob Fusik, Jhava Wilson, Business Administration Sports Management major, and Shania Jean-Pierre, Nursing major.

signed, so we know this year might be tough."

Grundman has faith in another aspect of Fusik's coaching, saying he is confident Fusik can teach the players about "being good citizens, being good students, being good stewards of the program and of the college."

Coach Fusik's abilities to lead the Vikings to success is also recognized by the new players.

Gabrillette Loftin, first-year Cybersecurity major will also be playing for the 2024-2025 season. When asked about playing for Coach Fusik, Loftin says "He seems well rounded, like he actu-

ally knows what he is doing because there are a lot of coaches that are not rational and like emotional, but he doesn't seem like that kind of coach." Loftin says she cannot wait to start playing and compete against the other teams.

As far as building the rest of the team, Coach Fusik will hold tryouts. He says more than likely whoever is interested and wants to try out will make the team.

The first official practice will happen in September after they get together in August for pre-season.

When asked what were his coaching goals Fusik says, "Be-

ing national champs, we do know it's going to take a lot of time here, but that will be our long-term goal. Also to get a bunch of girls to come in here to play and to also push them on to division 1, division 2, and scholarships afterward."

Fusik continues, "I am always trying to learn. I don't think I know everything, I know I don't know everything. I go and support kids...I'm a student of the game. I just absolutely love the game."

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COVID leaves lasting impact on nurses and ongoing staffing shortages, as nation moves on

By Oluwakemi Olaley
Managing Editor

In the early stages of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, Kelly Reddington found herself and her staff on the frontlines enduring high levels of emotional and physical stress caring for their patients in a long-term care facility, during a novel and unprecedented period of time.

"This was in the beginning of COVID when we were very unsure too because we were not sure how protected we were...So we were going in with everything on, you know the gown, the shield, the N95, gloves, and we had to do [a PCR test], which initiates this cough. Of course, we did what we had to do but knowing that this virus was really so unknown, we were in there and hoping that what we were wearing was protecting us, because nobody wanted COVID, nobody wanted to spread COVID. Nobody wanted to bring COVID to their family," Reddington recalls.

Reddington is a Registered Nurse and the Assistant Director of Nursing at Hamilton Grove Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center in Hamilton, NJ, which was hit hard with staffing issues due to the uncertainty of the situation.

She says, "When COVID came, a lot of our staff left because they either decided they were going to leave the field or they had family they were worried about their safety."

Of those who stayed, Reddington says, "We managed by, well, I think we kind of all congregated together. We were closed as a building. We had no visitors coming or going for fifteen months, so we were each other's support."

According to the American Healthcare Association (AHCA), currently "77 percent of nursing homes [face] moderate to high levels of staffing shortages." Moreover, 95 percent of nursing homes are experiencing difficulty hiring new staff.

Steve Lampert, the Licensed Nursing Home Administrator at Hamilton Grove, credits the shortage in part to burnout saying, "I think people just left because they were burnt out from working

so hard. Probably seeing a lot of what they worked hard for falling apart, so they just left the scene."

In 2020, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy signed bills S2712 and S2785, which "requires minimum direct care staff-to-resident ratios in New Jersey long-term care facilities," and "requires long-term care facilities to institute policies that prevent social isolation of residents, addressing issues experienced by LTC residents and their families as a result of prohibitions and limitations on visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic."

This response, aimed at improving conditions for patients, has put nurses and nursing administrators in a tough position. Finding new recruits is more difficult than it was in the pre-pandemic world and the demand for additional aid has increased the stress put on existing staff.

Lampert says nursing facilities like Hamilton Grove typically work with outside companies to fill positions, but by itself, that strategy doesn't fill the gap. He says "We got more creative with advertising in general, we had to bring up our [pay] rates. We had to because the overall cost of living went up tremendously."

Like Hamilton Grove, over 85 percent of nursing homes are offering additional compensation to draw in new talent, according to the AHCA.

Those who are thinking of joining the nursing profession are forced to consider the balance of risk to reward.

Anna Krzos, a third-year nursing student at Mercer says, "To get a job wouldn't be that hard because we have shortages everywhere," but adds that she is worried about "finding a spot that isn't too short-staffed because then I would burn out."

Elizabeth Mizerek, the Director of Nursing Education and Interim Dean of Health Professions at MCCC, says programs like ours are struggling to fill the need.

She says, "Almost every nursing school is turning away qualified applicants. We just don't have the capacity. We don't have enough faculty. Just as there is a nursing shortage there is a nursing faculty shortage. We need to expand the capacity of nursing edu-



Registered Nurse Tina Fulmore at Hamilton Grove Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center in Hamilton, NJ with Joe Dubell.

PHOTO | JULIA MERINEY

cation programs."

Mizerek says some help may come from Senate bill A4325, which allocated \$26.7 million to nursing initiatives but that the short-term issues remain.

For those nurses who didn't leave the field, COVID left a lasting psychological impact.

Reddington says, "There

was a lot of fear." One indelible memory she has was of a patient who was at the end of life whose family had to stand behind a window to see them.

"That's how they saw their loved one," she says. "There was no hugging, no touching, no talking. Yes, you could hear through the window, but you couldn't really be

there in that moment when you feel the love, you see the love. It's human nature to want to hold someone and to be there with them and there was that separation. It was one of the most emotional times."

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on December 28, 2024]

Municipal leader works to demystify local government

By Allyson Nichols
Community Reporter

Michael Ferrante, two-term Township Committee member and former Mayor of Cranbury, announced on the All About Cranbury Facebook group that this will be his final term. He invited residents to attend the Cranbury Township Committee Meeting on Monday, February 26 to find out how the town government operates and how community members can "engage" in local government.

As a way to help the community understand the roles and responsibilities of community organization, Ferrante gave a presentation during the February 26 committee meeting, titled "De-Mystifying Cranbury Municipal Government."

The committee meeting, held in the Town Hall, was packed

with townspeople in attendance for different reasons. The meeting began at 7 PM with a roll call of members and a rundown of the agenda.

After some announcements and follow-up items, Ferrante began his 20-minute overview of Cranbury's local governing body.

According to Mayor Eman El-Bedawi's update published on CranburyTownship.org, "TC member, Michael Ferrante led us in a presentation entitled 'De-Mystifying Local Government,' where he talked about how our local government runs. In attendance were Boy Scouts and their leaders who utilized this tutorial as part of their civic education."

When asked why Ferrante felt the "overview" was needed, he says, "Early on in my role as a Committee member, I noticed some quirky things about local government and how it functioned so I created this overview to clarify and simplify the TC and attempted to offer answers to common ques-

tions such as 'Why do we structure the government as we do?' I wanted to show that anyone could do it and how to engage easily."

One example of how local government works with the community members can be seen during open forums where members get to ask questions to the committee.

There was an open forum after Ferrante's presentation.

One individual asked, "Why are our taxes so high in New Jersey?" Ferrante then replied, "Part of it is because [New Jersey] has over 500 municipalities and we have a three tier tax system with state, county and local."

Ferrante continued, "Actually [Cranbury has] the lowest tax rate in Middlesex County."

Another person asked if the community's All About Cranbury page on Facebook influenced the Township Committee with topics or ordinances.

Ferrante said, "We have

some community pages up on Facebook and several of the members may read them but they are not official channels to get input on things." He continued, "Most often we would encourage people to come to this forum to state their comments."

Mayor El-Bedawi said, "I think we actually try not to respond to those comments [on Facebook] because it creates another layer of communication that we are not in control of and it's unofficial and becomes a bit of hearsay, so we may watch it but we don't respond to it."

Another example of the Township Committee and its supporting commissions working together to accomplish the goals of the town for its community members came about later in the evening with a presentation from the town's Shade Tree Commission Chairperson, Kathy Easton. According to Mayor El-Bedawi's meeting minutes, there are new State guidelines that affect the tree

removal/replacement ordinance.

As a result, the committee spent time working on an ordinance, which is still pending, for the town that will set guidelines on the removal of trees.

Although it is not clear yet who will be running for office in November to replace Ferrante, he says he hopes that community members will continue to come to Cranbury's bi-monthly committee meetings to learn more about their town.

"If you've ever thought about getting more involved in your local government, it's a great way to give back to our community," Ferrante says.

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on March 5, 2024. It was also produced as part of MCCC's J Lab program.]



Opportunities for talking about death are expanding

By Ellen Lichtig
Community Reporter

Reverend Karen Johnston, a Unitarian Universalist minister, has a passion for encouraging conversation about death, so much so that she hosts a “Date with Death Club” and has a “death deck” of conversation cards aimed at prompting discussions about death. Johnston has recently moved to Vermont from New Jersey but before she left she spent time at a Rutgers University bus stop offering chocolates to students in exchange for them sharing their views on death.

“After all, mortality is not restricted to just those aging, so to explore this context at Rutgers with young people was a good one for us and then the idea of an enticement like free chocolate set in,” says Johnston.

The stigma around talking about death presents a challenge.

Johnston says “We think we’re separate and so we cut ourselves off from talking about [death] in the [broader] community. I want to change that.”

Johnston isn’t the only one interested in talking about death and grief. The Date with Death Club joins other models of death education and death discussion projects like “Death Cafes” as well as services such as end-of-life companionship and transition support provided by “death doulas.”

“Community is the reason I started the Date with Death Club,” says Johnston, adding, “I provide structure for my congregations through a free, online cur-



A tray of Dia de Los Muertos cookies and tea, perfect for a serious conversation.

COLLEGE VOICE FILE PHOTO

riculum, downloadable after filling out a form. They pick from the curriculum options the topics they prefer, like eco-death, the afterlife or medical aid for the dying, and the co-learners decide how they’ll meet.”

While Date with Death Club is structured, dogma-free, and geared for anyone, other death education and discussion groups differ in terms of target audience and the amount of structure.

For example, “Death Cafes” provide very little structure. According to the Death Cafe website “A Death Cafe is a group-directed discussion of death with no agenda, objectives or themes. It is a

discussion group rather than a grief support or counselling session.” Typically hosted at a local restaurant or coffee shop, Death Cafes, specifically have “no intention of leading people to any conclusion, product or course of action.” Death Cafe, which originated in the UK, bills itself as a “social franchise.” According to their website, at a Death Cafe “people, often strangers, gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss death.”

Death Cafes have been hosted at places like The Treehouse Coffee Shop in Audobon, NJ and Cafe360 in Freehold.

For people who want more than tea and cake, there is

also Death Over Dinner.

Another component of death discussion is the more in-depth work of “death doulas” who provide friends and families with support during the death of a loved one. They are not medical professionals, but they work alongside healthcare workers.

Lee, a woman from Princeton who asked that her last name be omitted so she could talk about her experiences openly, worked with a death doula. She says that after the death of her mother, the death doula was essential to her ability to process the experience.

“Here I was, feeling I had landed on this other planet, totally

grief-stricken and isolated and yet she got me and drew me out. It was a level of attention I never anticipated, one given and also required from myself. She was my safe space.”

As people become aware of things like “Death Cafes” and the services death companions offer more spaces for conversations about death are being created. Johnston’s Date with Death Club took place in the local East Brunswick library, making it easy for people to attend.

Communities can also learn about death resources through member directories organized by city and state, through private doula websites and through learning conferences and talks on death and grief.

Although it will take time to set up in her new home in Vermont, Johnston says she is very likely to do more “chocolate for your thoughts” pop-ups to enhance death awareness. It is part of her commitment to mortality to facilitate inspiring death conversations.

Johnston continues, “To provide a welcoming space for people of all ages to contemplate their mortality, to normalize the topic of death, especially for those who think that they are alone and wondering or worrying about their mortality, and to still have fun doing it so conversations are much less arduous and taboo, that’s my aim!”

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on March 5, 2024. It was also produced as part of MCCC’s J Lab program.]



Death doulas provide support during end-of-life transitions: their numbers are on the rise

By Ellen Lichtig
Community Reporter

Ingrid Ollquist had multiple experiences with grief before she knew she would make it her career.

“It started when I was 15, and had a life-altering confrontation with death,” she says.

After leaving the funeral of a friend who had suffered a tragic death, the driver of the car Ollquist was in ran a red light and t-boned a van, knocking her unconscious.

“I was put in the ambulance, and it was soon after that I heard my friend, the one we all had just buried, talk to me. He told me it was not my time. A wave of warmth and peace then came over me in the midst of the pain and glass,” she says.

Two years after her “near death” experience, Ollquist’s mother was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

Ollquist says, “I cared for her until she died. I was a birth doula at the time.”

A birth doula offers emotional and physical support before, during and after pregnancy.

Ollquist says, “Birth and death roles are quite similar. Both roles focus on asking the right questions to know what’s needed and advocating.”

Because of her experience caring for her mother, Ollquist says she realized working with people at the end of life was the path she was

on. During COVID, Ollquist started an online grief support group which lasted an entire year. Ollquist recognized that people heal in listening spaces where sitting with losses is encouraged and grief is seen as part of life.

Now, at age 31, Ollquist is a grief counselor, community leader, and death doula.

As people become more aware of the need to understand and process grief, more are learning about death doulas and their numbers are growing.

According to the National End of Life Association (NEDA), their national membership in 2019 came to 260. In January 2024, this number rose to over 1600.

Since death doulas can work remotely, people seeking death doula support in New Jersey and Mercer County can take advantage of this increase too.

Therese Marchitelli, a long-time practicing Buddhist, grief counselor and death doula from Mercer County says, “If you think you can work through grief



COLLEGE VOICE A.I. GENERATED PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

alone, it’s a mistake. Grief affects every area of your life and without intentional guided support, you can make some very bad decisions.”

In her work, Marchitelli helps explain to her clients how the brain processes grief. “And I am there to listen to whatever comes up,” she says.

Nicole Bruno, a marketing analyst from New Jersey, needed assistance when trying to manage a difficult long-distance end-of-life situation. Unfamiliar with death doulas at the time, a friend referred her to Ollquist for support.

Bruno says, “My grandmother was not yet terminal, yet needed lots of care. Every day

changes with her health would arise, each time different. I wanted to contribute but New Jersey wasn’t close to Florida. It became exhausting not knowing what arrangements could be made for this in-between situation.”

In addition to making arrangements for her sick grandmother, Bruno had other challenges that left her struggling, she says, “Three weeks before my wedding, my dog also got very sick, and I had to put him down.”

Bruno continues, “Ollquist was always ready with suggestions, very proactive. She helped me talk through my grief. It made a huge difference.”

With a growing number of people like Bruno relying on death doulas to guide them through the grief process, the practice is becoming more recognized.

Kasey March, an end-of-life doula at Doula Care for the Dying, who offers virtual services, recognizes the growing value of death doulas and talks about the role.

March says, “We help families restore sacredness to dy-

ing, give respite to exhausted caregivers, offer comfort and affirming space and help with those grieving after death. But what’s missing is their awareness of their own agency, that they can determine strategies within the medical system, that can work for them. So it’s a need for death literacy.”

In addition to her virtual services, March runs Doula Care for Dying, a death doula network in the State of Vermont where there has been an uptick in interest particularly from smaller towns within their network. March says the recognition of the value of death doulas comes when some live nearby and people become familiar with them.

“Absolutely, things [in the death doula field] now are promising,” Ollquist says, adding, “When people feel they are helped in facing their grief, and get what they need when they need it, this makes our times hopeful. I didn’t have that as a teenager when my own world imploded. It’s a communal village mentality coming back around and an important organic resurgence popping up around care. So, I’m very encouraged about the future.”

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on March 5, 2024. It was also produced as part of MCCC’s J Lab program.]



Paying attention to students with ADHD

By Oluwakemi Olaleye
Managing Editor

When Jared Lavarra, a second-year Engineering Science major at Mercer, decided to leave the Navy Reserves, he found it difficult to focus on getting the necessary work done to return to civilian life.

Lavarra says, "There were a lot of external controls in the Navy, which helped me function a little bit better, especially when I was deployed...I was able to have no distractions. I mean it was like a prison because you were just locked away doing this job."

Lavarra struggles with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) which, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, is characterized by an ongoing and disruptive pattern of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

In addition, signs of ADHD in adults can include losing things, forgetfulness, having trouble organizing, and difficulty managing time.

Lavarra struggled with these difficulties after he left the structure and routine of the Navy. He says, "There was also another host of issues, like from post-deployment, stuff that I didn't realize at the time, but it exacerbated the ADHD. It sure made it a lot harder to have any kind of forward trajectory. It was just like you were stuck."

For those like Lavarra who are living with this disorder, there are support services available. Licensed professional counselors Shannon Campbell and Tiffany Papp of Guide to GrowTherapy, LLC in Hamilton, NJ, specialize in treating individuals with ADHD.

Medical doctors as well

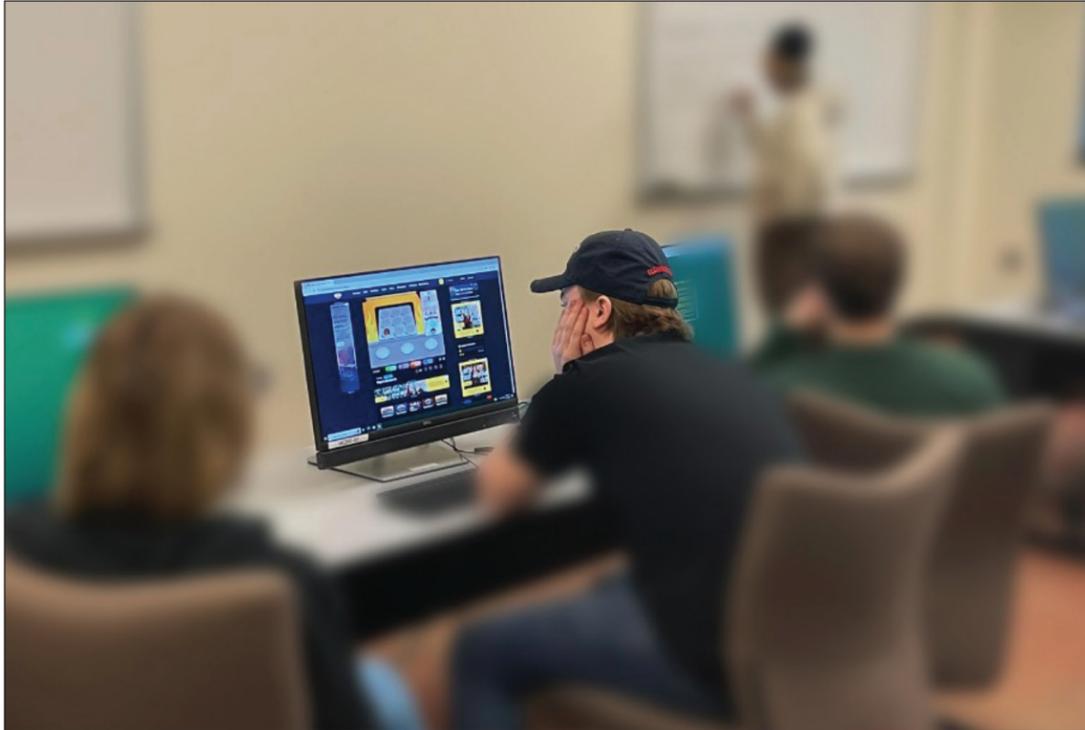


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION | OLUWAKEMI OLALEYE and JULIA MERINEY

Students with ADHD may struggle with concentration during class, leaving peers and faculty struggling to understand.

as mental health professionals use different data to diagnose individuals with ADHD. Campbell says gathering insights from individuals experiencing symptoms and those in their immediate environment is important.

Campbell says, "We want to find out from other people who are either caregivers or in a relationship with that person, or in that household with that person, what they are seeing as well."

According to Campbell, ADHD symptoms have to be present in multiple settings so all of the data collected is used to make a formal diagnosis.

While ADHD can cause difficulties for adults, it is often diagnosed at a much younger age. According to the CDC (The Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention), an estimated 9.8% of children in the US have been diagnosed with ADHD from 2016 to 2019.

When Gabbi Forbes, a Career-Prep high school senior studying Photography at Mercer, was five years old, she was diagnosed with ADHD.

Forbes says, "It's gotten better over time, but I would always just space out the whole time when the teacher was talking. Up until like middle school, I was not really good in math or science. I wouldn't pay attention because I was very uninterested."

After the diagnosis, Forbes was prescribed medication to combat her symptoms.

Whether an individual with ADHD is medicated or not,

students, teachers and parents can help those experiencing symptoms of the disorder.

When trying to complete tasks, Papp says, "Be mindful of what environment works best for you. Maybe you are someone who does better...in a quiet and direct space. Or maybe that's too distracting because it's too quiet and you're a student that does better with a little more volume around you."

In addition, Papp says it's important for students to advocate for themselves. She continues, "If you know that sitting in the back of the room is not going to be great for you, ask your professor if you possibly could move your seat [to the front]."

Along with making their

needs known, students can receive support at Mercer's Center for Accessibility Resources (CAR). Arlene Stinson, director of CAR, says communication between students and faculty is important.

Stinson says, "It really doesn't have as much to do with having a disability as it has to do with having an understanding of yourself as a learner. Be willing to share that [understanding] with your faculty and welcome them into that conversation."

Though there are many strategies and resources to help with ADHD, researchers are still working towards figuring out the cause. According to NIMH, studies show that genetics play a large role.

Behind each ADHD diagnosis, there is a story of resilience and determination. Some of the benefits of ADHD include the ability to hyperfocus, high energy, creativity, and courage.

For example, Medical News Today says "Those with ADHD are often highly creative, especially when given a goal-oriented task. Living with ADHD also requires people to approach tasks differently, which means they can become great problem solvers."

While there are positive traits associated with ADHD, daily activities are still a challenge. Lavarra continues to adjust to life after the Navy and is working to understand himself.

Lavarra says, "You struggle with things and you have friction in your life that you don't necessarily realize comes from ADHD, you just are. It's just normal to be rushing everywhere five minutes late."

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on February 29, 2024]

Students seek change for menu options in MCCC cafeteria

By Teddy Nkamanyi
Reporter

Torin Mitchell Mehta, a first-year Sports Management major and international student from Scotland, explains his feelings towards Mercer's cafeteria food and prices at the school saying, "I believe the price and quality of food is generally quite appalling. Considering how many student athletes are in this school, I am quite shocked on how scarce the options are for a healthy meal."

Mehta continues, "If you are lucky enough to find a healthy option, get ready to sell your kidney for it. The prices are quite outstanding and embarrassing to expect students to pay for it."

Mehta isn't the only one who is concerned with the cost of food at Mercer. In a VOICE survey of 30 MCCC students, when asked about the food prices in the cafeteria, more than 86% said they thought the prices were not fair.

When looking at the cafeteria prices at MCCC, a protein salad costs \$6.99, a breakfast sandwich costs \$4.29 and a deli sandwich costs \$6.49.

Mehta says, "Six dollars to buy a sandwich, while Doritos are two dollars? No wonder people choose the unhealthy option."

When asked if she felt the prices at the college cafe were fair, college President Dr. Deborah Preston responds, "I honestly do



Students get food from vending machines in the MCCC cafeteria.

PHOTO | OLUWAKEMI OLALEYE

not know what the going market rate is. I think I know that we are using different companies for the cafeteria and for the vending machines."

Dr. Preston adds, "Working with a vendor is about the constant balance of what they can afford to provide and what we can subsidize. We could lower the prices but then the food would not be as good, which therefore means if they were to get higher quality food, the prices would get higher too."

Dr. Preston says that since the COVID-19 lockdown ended, there have been more students on campus and more people using the

"If you are lucky enough to find a healthy option, get ready to sell your kidney for it."

- Torin Mitchell Mehta,
Sports Management Major

cafeteria. She hopes the increase in purchases will give the school flexibility on price and options in the future.

The cost of cafeteria food isn't the only complaint by Mercer students according to the survey. Sixty percent of MCCC students said that they don't like the cafe-

teria food while 90% of students said they want either a Dunkin Donuts, Starbucks, or Wawa on campus.

Elias Ruano, an international student from Spain and goalkeeper for the Mercer Men's soccer team, was one of the students surveyed who was unsatisfied with the food. He says, "As athletes we need good food to perform as best as possible. There is too much fatty food."

The wish for new food options at Mercer is also shared by MCCC President Deborah Preston.

Dr. Preston says, "I have been talking to the people who oversee the food service at the school and when I first came here,

I told them I wanted a coffee shop. That option was not available, because the school volume was not big enough."

As far as fast food franchises like Wawa, Dr. Preston says a certain volume of people need to be on campus long enough in a single day buying food in order for the franchise to be profitable.

Dr. Preston continues, "Therefore, you will never get it at a non-residential community college, because students are not on campus long enough."

Although having a fast-food franchise on campus is unlikely, Dr. Preston sees another possible option. Her idea, which she based on The College of New Jersey, is to have a franchise right off campus, so that the customer base is not just limited to students. This would increase the likelihood of profit.

Preston says, "But for that we need to check the zoning law to see if we would be allowed to do that and I already have someone looking into that."

Now, with a growing student population, there is more talk about necessary changes. Dr. Preston says, "I have a meeting with the food service people [the week of February 12th] to speak about what is going well and what needs to be improved."

In the meantime, the student's at MCCC will have to continue buying from the cafeteria if they wish to eat on campus.

Survey shows 23 percent of MCCC students have attended class high

By Ryan Johnson
Reporter

Fourth-year Fine Arts student, Stuart, who asked to use a pseudonym so he could talk about drug use candidly, once asked his Painting 101 professor if he could grab something from his car, then walked to the shed outside the ET building and lit a joint that he bought from a legal dispensary on Route 1.

He says, "When I'm under the influence, my imagination, and honestly my perception, becomes a little funky-wucky and makes me more creative. It kinda helps me but I wouldn't do it on the daily."

Stuart adds "And when I say make me more creative, I mean, whenever I'm stressed, I feel less creative...So having that calm of getting to smoke some weed, it helps a little bit to relieve stress so that I can paint better."

While Stuart was only one of a few who would talk directly with the VOICE, he isn't the only one getting high on campus according to a VOICE survey of 39 students. It revealed that 23 percent had attended class while on drugs of some kind. The reasons given for the drug use varied, with 44 percent answering that they felt it helped with taking the class they attended and 56 percent wanting to do it for fun or for no particular reason.

Bianca, a fourth year Criminal Justice major, who also asked to go by a pseudonym said of the moment when she smoked from another student's cartridge for the first time. She said, "It was just 'cuz. It was there. She offered and I was like 'Hmm why not?' It was like right after the class ended, like just before my next one."

Referring to another occurrence where she took an edible before coming to school she said, "I don't remember why I took it. I think I just... was bored and it would be entertaining to take."

When asked why she took drugs during this specific class, she responded with "I definitely didn't think those classes were the most fun and like, mentally stimulating I guess you can say." She said she would come to class high in required classes that were not related to her major.

Tatiana Dodge, Director of Development and Alumni Relations at MCCC says was surprised to learn of the drug use statistics revealed by the survey. She said, "I've never smelled or seen anybody and been like 'wow that person seems really out of it' or like 'wow I just walked through a cloud of smoke.'"

By contrast, Biology Professor Rachael Klaus told The VOICE, "I see students come in who reek of marijuana, and sometimes it's really distracting. As a teacher, it's distracting to me...to the point where I've been nauseated."

Klaus continued, "I'm concerned about having all these students in the lab, especially in a dangerous situation. I'm working with scalpels and sharp objects."

Dave Dimarchi, a Fine Arts adjunct Professor, tries to understand the students' motivations.

He says, "I think college students right now are facing drastically different things, and if the coping mechanism is through the use of microdosing shrooms or alcohol or marijuana, then I'm not really super shocked about that. The use on campus? I think that shocks me a little bit more."

mccc.edu has lots and lots of cookies

Site visitors may not know they are being tracked and analyzed

By Rikhil Sharma
Senior Reporter

MCCC's website serves as a gateway for students, faculty, and visitors to learn about academic programs, campus life, and to use various resources. It provides resources for students to access their email, student portal, and advising information. However, beneath the surface of the website is a complex web of trackers and cookies that quietly collect data on visitors.

We are all familiar with the popups we get on a new site asking if we accept all cookies, but even though people usually click "yes" they may not know what they are agreeing to.

Cookies are small pieces of data stored on a browser by websites someone visits. The cookies and trackers that MCCC deploys on its websites can gather different data such as browsing behavior, device information, location data, personal information, and cross-site tracking.

MCCC Professor of Television, Digital Film, & New Media, Dr. Steve Voorhees stated that cookies have 2 main purposes: website functionality and advertising. He said, "It's a data set and a text file essentially that's stored on the computer."

He adds, "The cookie business is typically there's a data supplier. The data supplier is the tracker creator...They collect data from numerous sites. They then sell that data to a data broker."

Timothy Fitzpatrick, Web Developer and Designer for MCCC, says of the college's site, "We have essential cookies that are basically used for analytics."

Third-party trackers, like those commonly seen on MCCC, are placed by websites without the consent of the visitor to share information. Most third-party trackers are marketing-driven, such as the Google Analytics tracker or the Yahoo Analytics tracker.

When asked about the use of third-party trackers on the MCCC website, Erica Oliver, Vice President of Marketing, stated, "We work with cookies on the website for digital advertising." She added, "The college contracts Imbue Creative to handle digital marketing for the college."

Imbue Creative, an agency located in Lambertville, New Jer-



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION | RIKHIL SHARMA WITH A.I.

sey, helps businesses and organizations with marketing and branding solutions with services like graphic design, website development, and digital marketing.

The VOICE Staff conducted a test to determine which trackers were being used on the MCCC website. After going to the MCCC website and waiting 20 seconds, the Safari browser had blocked 35 different trackers from being loaded. By contrast, that same test on the William Paterson, Rutgers New Brunswick, Middlesex College, and TCNJ websites shows they had 15, 14, 9, and 7 trackers respectively.

The VOICE staff confirmed the results on two additional computers.

When asked about the results of the test, Inder Singh, Vice President of Information Technology Services, stated, "I can't answer since [the department of Information Technology Services] don't manage [website tracking]. The marketing team manages it."

Evelyn Sandoya, a second-year Liberal Arts major, said, "I feel like you kind of have to at least have some sort of trust in the institution that you're attending, right?...Like why do you need 35 trackers on me when I go visit your website?"

Upon looking at the list of trackers she said, "Yeah, I have no idea what those are and Facebook makes sense, but like what the hell is bluekai.com?"

While some websites have a cookie consent pop-up, the MCCC website does not, because that kind of pop-up is only required by the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

mates were very supportive and made the transition a little easier. He says, "[the] amazing thing was not only did they help, [but] they didn't make me feel ashamed. They didn't laugh at me and make fun of my situation. They accepted me and they helped me. I'll never forget that."

Smith also enrolled himself in Sociology of Drug Use and Behavior, taught by Michael Prohaska, Professor of Sociology. Professor Prohaska and Smith got to know each other during the class and realized they had very similar pasts, as they were both 70s teens who went through very similar experiences.

Professor Prohaska says he noticed Smith's interest in learning and that things seemed to click. Prohaska continues, "He told me flat out that this kind of filled in some gaps for him, you know, talking about what addiction is and what causes addiction."

Prohaska says that when students need help, "They're not going to accept that what they're being told is worth anything because they don't care. They don't

The footer of the MCCC website has a Privacy Statement located within the "Student Consumer Information" section. The "Third-Party Tracking Technology" section of the Privacy Statement clarifies Mercer's policies and use of analytics.

Fitzpatrick stated, "Our privacy statement and our non-discriminatory statement have both been, I think reviewed and updated within the past six months to a year at most...That's always on our radar and we're keeping on top of that."

However, according to the MCCC website, the privacy statement was last updated in June 2021.

Sandoya stated, "I did not know that we [MCCC] had a privacy statement in the first place."

When asked if Imbue Creative is the source of non-Google third-party trackers, Fitzpatrick stated "Correct."

However, Erin Klebaur, owner of Imbue Creative says, "We only placed like one or two to track our stuff and what's supposed to happen is when a campaign is done or a vendor is gone or whatever it is, they're supposed to come off, so that's task management."

As to why MCCC would have 35 trackers listed on their site, Klebaur says, "I think it's just an old site and needs some clean up which [the marketing] team is working on so, soon to come, I guess."

The Federal Trade Commission recommends adjusting your web browser privacy settings and enabling an ad-blocker for personal safety.

In terms of what users can do to protect their data, Dr. Voorhees says, "I think media literacy is just the biggest part."

The full list of trackers found on mccc.edu as of April 23, 2024 include:

1rx.io
3lift.com
adnxs.com
adsrvr.org
agkn.com
bfmio.com
bluekai.com
crwdcntrl.net
demdex.net
doubleclick.net
exelator.com
facebook.com
facebook.net
google-analytics.com
google.com
googleadservices.com
googletagmanager.com
intentiq.com
krxd.net
lijit.com
openx.net
pippio.com
pro-market.net
pubmatic.com
rlcdn.com
rubiconproject.com
simplifi
smaato.net
stickyadstv.com
tapad.com
tealiumiq.com
tiqcdn.com
tremorhub.com
yahoo.com
youtube.com

TERRY SMITH

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ber. Smith says, "I got sober when I was 38 years old. September 8th, 1994 was the last drink I had."

His next step was to get a job so he decided to work for a trucking company. Smith says, "I started local stuff with truck driving, and I knew if I did that I wouldn't drink."

But 21 years later Smith was laid off.

He says, "Losing that job, I thought was probably the most devastating thing that could've happened to me."

He continues, "[But it] was the best thing that happened because it opened the door and provided me an opportunity to come back to college."

During the spring of 2016, Smith went back to Mercer to complete his criminal justice studies. Smith says he had to adapt to the technological evolution of the classroom, especially when he enrolled in Computer Concepts & Applications.

Smith says that his class-

care about somebody's PhD or they don't care if somebody has a license. Terry was the same way and understands that."

As Smith continued coming to Mercer, more students started to talk to him about their lives and struggles. Smith says, "When I was here almost 50 years before, there was nobody to talk about [challenges] for me either. So I wanted to be the guy that I needed when I was like that."

Nichol Killian, Assistant to the Dean of Health Sciences, was Smith's Success Coach in 2016 and says she saw Smith mentoring other students. Killian says, "We really thought it would be great to build this out more. He was doing a little bit of peer support, but we thought it would be wonderful to have this be more institutionalized."

Smith and Killian formed the outreach table and One Day At a Time (O.D.A.T.), a recovery/support group for anyone struggling with addiction. A year later, New Jersey was pushing for better access to support systems and groups.

Killian says, "We already had this

great idea and it's been very successful ever since."

After Smith graduated, he was officially granted the title "Peer Recovery Support Specialist." Now, he is running the outreach table and O.D.A.T. in both the West Windsor and James Kerney Campuses. He continues to talk to students and give them advice.

One student that Smith has impacted is Gabrielle Zsenak, a first-year Business Entrepreneurship major. Zsenak says, "If I'm struggling, he is really encouraging. He motivates me to graduate Mercer."

Sophia Gomes, a first-year Nursing major finds comfort from Smith's support. She says, "He introduced me to a lot of people and definitely made this space more like a safe space."

Smith has been sober for almost 30 years and working at Mercer for 8 years. He says, "Being around students is tremendous for my recovery, for my sobriety, because if I help a student, seeing them succeed makes me feel as if I can contribute to something in some way. That gives me a reason to believe maybe I didn't waste my life." ■

CREATIVE CORNER

IMAGINARY RECIPES

The Clouds

By Valerie Mulrine

Though the texture is comparable to cotton candy, it is much lighter than that. This airy treat lets off a smell like imminent rain. When you reach into the bucket to grab it, you need to swirl your finger around like you would a fork while eating spaghetti. Failing to do so will result in the cloud slipping through your fingers like smoke.

The intense flavor hits you like a bolt of lightning; not very sugary but savory, like a smoky flaming hot beef jerky, leaving your mouth watering and providing this earth-like element bringing you closer to nature than ever as it evokes all the elements; the fiery flavor, the wind like texture, the mouth-watering craving for more, and memories evoked such as camping and sitting around the campfire where you are one with nature.

Hoo-Hoo Stew

By Mary-Simone Collazo

Hoo-hoo stew is a thick, lamb stew served in a cauldron, by a witch doctor. It is impossible to pick with a spoon or a ladle, for the sentient liquid will run in the other direction. One can only drink it straight from the pot, speaking a blessing over themselves before they sip, as it is a healing food.

It has the taste of savory lamb and sweet jalapeno peppers, thickened with a drop of soy sauce, and the first tear ever cried by a baby unicorn. It burns the throat for a millisecond, before filling the consumer with warmth. Hoo-hoo stew should only be eaten during a rainstorm, and only if you have been sick for several weeks. As it was made by a witch doctor, failing to abide by the rules will whisk you to the Underworld, to have a tango dance duel with the devil himself.

Dire Spider Stew

By Ryan Johnson

Dire Spider, an invasive species of spider from Quuta Ka, has become a favorite meal for adventurers who are short on rations, with many ways to prepare it. Ranging in size from a small dog to a war horse, this creature has become a staple not only in musty and damp dungeons, but also in taverns and restaurants all across Dalavastin. The comparison to crab legs has been made by many, but others see it as more reminiscent of scallops, as you need an especially flexible knife to pry the meat from the exoskeleton.

Dire Spider Stew is an especially popular mode of preparation for the beast. This soup has the flavors of yellow onion, garlic, dwarven potatoes, chili, ginger, lemon grass, and bone broth, and of course, dire spider legs.

To begin preparing the spider legs, brush and cut off any hairs, if they have not already been taken off. When you buy these in markets, they will usually be free of these hairs, if not, simply check. The hairs are not dangerous to eat. If you prefer hair in your stew, by all means shave some hair off and throw it in the pot!

After par-cooking the legs, begin to crack the legs apart gently on a cutting board. Carefully take a spatula and begin to separate the meat from the exoskeleton. After the meat is all separated from the exoskeleton, cut the meat up into small chunks. If the meat becomes loose and stringy, do not worry as this is how the meat will come out when cooked in the stew. Now, your spider legs are ready for stewing!



PHOTO | JULIA MERINEY

Walter Roberts head farmer at Capital City Farm in Trenton watering vegetables and fruit to be planted in the gardens later this spring.

COMMUNITY GARDEN

Continued from page 1

fund it.

Professor Ricco says, "I kind of put a twist on it when I went to write the grant that we wanted to also introduce the students to careers and agriculture. I pushed it as an urban agriculture grant and said, 'Let's do all of what Stacey wants to do, but also let's see what's out there.'"

Prof. Ricco was able to secure \$18,600 through the New Jersey Department of Agriculture and the project was able to move forward.

They selected Martin Luther King Day in January to begin working with Upward Bound students on the project. That morning they built the four raised garden beds that would be placed in the courtyard behind Mercer's Trenton Hall.

Participant Jonathon Pyle, a sophomore at STEM Civics High School in Ewing, NJ, said, "Gardening has always been a kind of passion for me and my mom so it was fun for me, helping out with the carpentry and the digging." He continued, "I did end up taking a lot of this information that I learned giving some of this to my mom to help her when she does her gardening."

In addition to building the garden beds, the Upward Bound students were introduced to urban agriculture with Professor Ricco as part of their weekend science classes. They learned about vegetable gardens, planted tomato seeds, and participated in preparing the raised beds for their spring garden.

Hadjah Sylla and Giana Hernandez, both juniors at Trenton Central High and members of Upward Bound joined around 40 students on Saturday, April 13, to prepare the beds with landscaping fabric and soil and planted kale, arugula, peas, and spinach seeds.

Sylla and Hernandez said they were both inspired to take what they've learned and apply their new skills off campus.

Sylla says she would like to start planting vegetables at home. She adds, "I've recently been looking into compost bins and how people have compost bins in their homes. Like, I love the idea of that."

Hernandez says, "Me and my grandma plant a lot of flowers and we're trying to get some vegetables as well, but like, since we are starting to do gardening lectures here, I want to take that knowledge home as well so we can have fresh vegetables, too."



PHOTO | DANIELLA PAGLIONE

Professor Ricco showing students from Upward Bound how to space seeds so they don't overcrowd one another.

Spreading awareness and teaching others what they learned through the agriculture lessons is one of the objectives of the urban agriculture program.

Dr. Kimyata Valere, academic advisor for Upward Bound, says "We're hoping that we can also get the families of our students involved. We do have a parent association, so that's one way to get the community together on a smaller scale, but as far as the large area of Trenton, I think that will be a big task."

One organization helping the citizens of Trenton on a larger scale is Capital City Farms, located on North Clinton Avenue in Trenton. Serving as Trenton's first urban farm, Capital City is managed by the Mercer County Park Commission.

Walter Roberts, head urban farmer, says they grow more than 14 tons of produce per year. The farm donates to local food pantries and has hours available for residents to pick free produce to take home.

With the rising cost of living, Roberts says there is an even greater need for community gardens. He says, "People don't have to go to grocery stores where they can't really afford produce that's out there. It's expensive, so they come here and can get it for free."

In terms of the community garden's impact on the city of Trenton, Roberts says, "I've seen a

change not just with healthier eating, but people being able to have an outlet to come and get something for free. We have plenty of people that come here that have families to feed."

In addition to helping with food insecurities, Roberts says that the garden highlights the positive sense of community in the town.

Roberts says, "You know, there's like a small aspect of Trenton where everybody is like 'oh, it's bad,' but it's a small aspect compared to the big picture."

Roberts continues, "When they feel like part of the community, people are a whole lot more friendly, a whole lot more happier."

Building a sense of community is another objective for Upward Bound's new garden. After the students harvest the produce, they will showcase the results of the urban agriculture program to the residents of Trenton and provide the fresh produce to Mercer's food pantry.

Denton says, "We want to show that we are invested in the Trenton community. We didn't know that we would be where we are today. The garden started as this big idea but look at it now. If we have enough people supporting the program, I guarantee you that it's going to end up being something amazing."

Moms, veterans, scholars: two students face the challenges of college after military service

By Gabriela Vanegas
Reporter

Before enrolling at Mercer, Vivian Thern and Jessica Moffitt served in the U.S. Navy. Thern chose to follow in the footsteps of her uncle who served for 22 years and Moffitt chose the US Navy as an opportunity to travel.

Thern says, "It was a mental game every single day. I had to learn to pace my mind in many ways to get through my job and deployments."

Similarly, Moffitt says, "I think the mental health aspect was the hardest for me. My commands I served at, during my four years were very corrupt and change took place too late. There were a lot of injustices and abuse, and it took its toll."

After serving in the Navy, Thern and Moffitt decided to continue their education, although balancing academics, raising their children, and working to support their family has proven challenging.

Thern, a first-year Digital Media Arts student, says her first semester was not easy. Being a full-time student, Thern's days are filled with schoolwork, and she says she struggles to find time away from her children to complete her assignments.

For Moffitt, a third-



PHOTO COURTESY OF VIVIAN THERN AND JESSICA MOFFITT

Mercer students Vivian Thern (left) a first-year Digital Media Arts major and Jessica Moffitt (right) a third-year Digital Media Arts major. Both are moms and veterans.

year Digital Media Arts student, the most difficult aspect of being a student is finding a balance between home life and class schedules.

Moffitt chose her major because she loves designing and has always wanted to hone her skills in content creation. She says, "Mercer has some really good courses and awesome teachers." In addition to her studies, Moffitt is a licensed

esthetician, cosmetologist, professional nanny, chef, and content creator.

Moffitt and Thern both say that the pressures of life come from many different angles. When asked which was more difficult, being in the Navy, continuing their education, or being a mother, they both answered the same - motherhood is the hardest of the three.

Thern says, "Even in struggling days, no one

notices that you have to show up and come through for your children every single day no matter how you feel or what you're dealing with personally."

Thern continues, "I deal with being a mother first but you would never know that every single day I am battling with my mental health and my grief and trying to manage that with therapy once a week."

Thern adds,

"School is also a pressure but I know I have to push myself to graduate and be my best for myself and my family."

Moffitt also explains her own pressures. She says, "Being the best mom I can be is a constant pressure. Making enough money. Making enough time for my home life. Keeping my house nice and clean and organized, because I have OCD, but also making time for myself."

As a very young mother with no support, Moffitt struggled. Having childhood trauma and regret that took time to heal, Moffitt says she has grown to be an active, loving and present mother to her son. Moffitt says, "At the end of the day, my child has never doubted my love, and I am proud of that."

Moffitt and Thern's hard work doesn't go unnoticed. Ryan Springsteen, a Communications Major in his last semester at Mercer and classmate of theirs says, "I'm lucky to have people like them. I can see they're working hard so I work hard as well."

Support from Mercer's professors has also played a role in Moffitt and Thern's success. Dr. Steve Voorhees, a professor of theirs says, "Recognising that people are coming from different backgrounds and they need support in different areas, I think that is our

job. It's not a one-size-fits-all educational model."

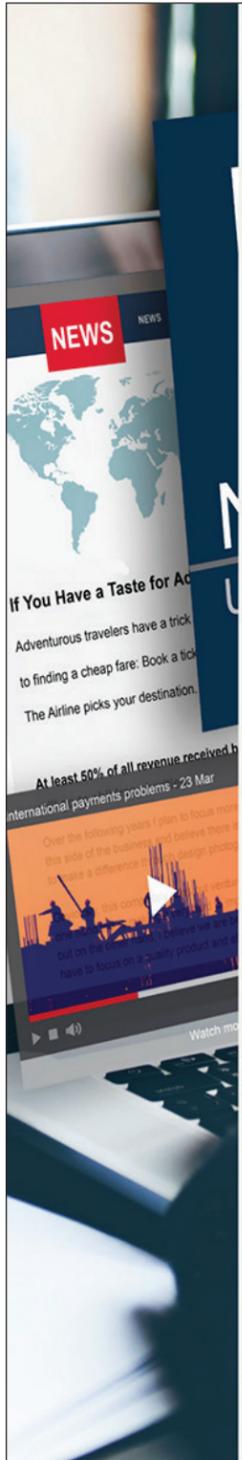
In addition to support on campus, Thern and Moffitt recognize the importance of staying organized and on schedule.

An online article, 8 Time Management Tips for Students, Harvard University offers eight tips for better handling time management. Their list mentions creating a calendar, setting reminders, a personalized schedule, using tools that work for you, prioritizing, time for fun and yourself, finding support, and being realistic and flexible.

Both Thern and Moffitt use many of these strategies in their daily routines. Thern says she has, "Calendars all over my walls and notebooks with endless lists."

Moffitt schedules her responsibilities during the week, to keep order, but also says, "Building a support system is absolutely necessary and most importantly, to celebrate the successes, especially the small ones."

Whether serving in the military, taking care of family, or continuing your education, Moffitt says, "Just be gentle with yourself. It's impossible to have your shit together one hundred percent of the time."



Location: Mercer County Community College
1200 Edinburg Rd, West Windsor, NJ
Conference Center Rm. 208
Fall 2024 program starts Thurs. Sept. 5, 2024
Time: 6:00-8:30 pm

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM "J LAB"

at Mercer County Community College

Mercer County Community College offers a Community Journalism "J Lab" certificate program twice a year. This eight-evening class teaches participants the basic newswriting and reporting skills needed to cover issues of concern to their community. The program is **free** and all materials are provided. Sessions are led by a journalism professor and include guest presentations from writers and editors from several community publications and national media outlets.

For more information contact
Prof. Holly Johnson at johnsonh@mccc.edu

The "J Lab" is funded by generous grant support from the [New Jersey Council for the Humanities](#) and [The New School: Journalism + Design](#)

JOIN THE STUDENT NEWSPAPER!

FIND YOUR VOICE!

MEETINGS: THURS. 12-1 Conference Center Room 208

Students in any Communication, Photography, Advertising, or Digital Media track and all Honors students regardless of major are eligible to participate! Others may apply.

The road from the slums of São Paulo to middle-class stability ran straight through Mercer County Community College

By Jaqueline Fuccillo
Community Reporter

I was born and raised in the slums of Bauru, in São Paulo, Brazil in the 1980s. I was one of over 10 million people living in poverty. My parents had only elementary school level education, but they worked hard and they managed to give us—my older sister and me—a roof over our heads and food to eat.

Because my parents were always working, my sister and I were on our own to get to and from school and feed ourselves, but my mother made sure there were always enough leftovers in the fridge and fresh bread in the mornings.

On some weekends, my mother bought sliced ham and cheese for us to make *misto quente* and to this day, I make it for myself when I feel nostalgic. The weekend breakfast gatherings of my childhood are some of my favorite memories.

My world was turned upside down when I was 9 years old and my father died of pneumonia. His condition would have been treatable if we had had money to pay for private healthcare. Instead, he died at age 41 because we were poor.

Because my father was my role model and best friend, after his death, I felt disconnected. I wasn't close with my mother and my sister soon left Brazil to live in Japan with her husband.

After high school, I started a relationship with a guy who was in law school. When I expressed interest in law he told me how hard it was and that I should try a different career. My sister told me how expensive it was and how I could not afford it. My mother told me it wasn't a job for women.

Although I was discouraged, I committed to investing my entire monthly paycheck to attend law school because I wanted to prove them wrong.

To get a degree, I needed a second language. I decided to



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

enroll in English classes and that's where I learned about the Au Pair program—which places young women with host families in other countries to do housework and child care in exchange for room and board, usually for a year. I decided to take a break from law school and from my disintegrating relationship.

I moved to the United States of America as an Au Pair in 2008. I was different from many newcomers because I did not have an American dream. In fact, I knew very little about the United States. I joined the Au Pair program mainly to get out of Brazil.

Because the Au Pair program requires participants to get six college credits per year while in their host country I had to figure out how the American college system worked. I didn't know where to start.

I needed to take classes to learn English as a Second Language so that's where I started. I found classes at Mercer County Community College.

While my host family helped with \$500 per year toward the six college credits, I had to pay out of pocket for the remaining costs associated with this program requirement and tuition was much higher for international students than those from in-county or in-state. My weekly stipend of \$195.75 wasn't going to cut it.

I considered moving back to Brazil, but a friend of mine, who was studying in the US at the time, advised me to stay and pursue higher education here.

I said, "It will take me another five years to get my bachelor's degree!"

He said, "Five years will pass by whether you study here or not."

He knew about my life back home and asked "What do you have to go back home to?"

His question hit me in the gut like life was saying "Are you seriously considering leaving this opportunity behind?"

I pondered the experiences that had shaped me up to



ABOVE: The author currently works in corporate wellness in NJ. LEFT: The author with teammates from MCCC's fist women's cross-country team in 2011.

that moment: losing my father, trying to get an education, and leaving my abusive boyfriend. Becoming an Au Pair. I realized I had grown too much to go back home.

Ultimately, to earn a much-needed scholarship, I joined the women's cross-country team at MCCC in 2011 as one of the team's first runners. Being on the team helped me develop discipline and leadership skills.

In the classroom, my professors challenged me to do my best work and encouraged me into the Honors program where I was able to work on actual academic research. To this day, I fact check information I hear or read on the internet looking for scientific evidence to confirm accuracy.

In 2012, I decided to try something new and joined The College VOICE student newspaper. I didn't think of myself as creative or as a writer, but one of my friends who wrote for the paper convinced me to join.

This new endeavor ignited my passion for communication, prepared me to receive feedback without taking it personally, and

gave me a taste of what working in the real world is like, which many 4-year universities fail to do.

The opportunities I created at MCCC opened doors I never thought I would be able to walk through. When I was applying to transfer to a 4-year university, I had plenty of recommendation letters from my professors and coaches. Although unsure of what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, I felt prepared to enter the workforce after graduating from MCCC in the Spring of 2013, and that is exactly what I did!

I found my passion in the corporate world and landed my dream job in corporate wellness.

Over the years I've learned how people look down on community colleges. People assume community college is a place for individuals who were not accepted into a traditional four-year university, had a bad academic record, or no ambition.

That's not what I found. For me, community college was opportunity. From lower tuition costs to more friends to transferable credits, community college can be life-changing if you make the most of it.

For me attending MCCC was the best financial decision I ever made.

I now have my dream career and it allows me to give my son more than I ever imagined as a child. There are trips to Disney, swimming and piano lessons, gifts under the Christmas tree. He can pick whatever he wants from the grocery store.

Sometimes I get us sliced ham and cheese and make him *misto quente* and tell him about Brazil and my mother, and the path I made for myself to get here.

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on March 5, 2024. It was also produced as part of MCCC's J Lab program.]



Handling the pressure of being a first generation college student

By Diane Rodriguez
Reporter

My father, who had a rough upbringing in foster homes, did not get the chance to attend school, as he had to start earning money at the age of eight. He is one of the smartest people I know, and yet he lacks a degree which in turn makes his job pool small. This is a reason he always encouraged us to do well in school and get a degree.

College for any student is hard, but being the first in your family to attend college, and being born to immigrant parents, who cannot guide and aid you in your college experience, adds another level of pressure. Coming to the United States was a huge sacrifice for them. They came to achieve the American dream, to be able to give their children the tools to be successful, in a way they would not have been able to if they were born in their countries. It's impossible not to feel like you need to make their sacrifice worthwhile.

Being a first-generation student has been a struggle for me, I have struggled not to burn out trying to reach someone else's expectations. I have been attending Mercer County Community college on and off since I was 19, and I am 26 now, a fact I used to be ashamed of, but I have started to make peace

"I definitely felt pressure to attend college from my parents as they weren't able to, so they always wanted a better education for their kids."

- Mariana Molina,
Graphic Design Major

with it.

Immigrant families can have it rough, having to assimilate into this society, while not knowing the customs, and not knowing the language.

My parents who were born on opposite sides of Guatemala, met in the United States and raised my brother and me in Trenton, NJ. They were always working. I recall my father coming home at 5 am from his sugar factory job on weekdays and then doing mechanic work on cars on the weekends. I would complain that he worked too much but he always said that this is so we could have the best future.

My mother was a housekeeper and I remember she would take me with her in the summer, and I would help her clean. I asked her once if I also would be a housekeeper when I grew up, and she told me that I had the opportunity she didn't have to attend college,

and that I would be able to be better than a housekeeper. I looked forward to that opportunity, but I didn't know what kind of challenges I would face and how much motivation I would need to keep moving forward.

I interviewed my classmate Gabriela Vanegas, another first gen student, who is a Television major, about the pressures she has faced. She said that while her parents didn't pressure her directly, but observing their lives has motivated her.

"I [wanted] to have a better opportunity. I've seen [my parents'] growth and development in this nation, but it has not been much. I want to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that this country has," she said.

Mariana Molina, a Graphic Design and Advertising major who graduated from Mercer told me, "I definitely felt pressure to attend college from my parents as they weren't able to, so they always wanted a better education for their kids."

For children of immigrants, you are often tasked with being a translator at a young age, Vanegas explains, "My parents don't speak English ... I was kind of on my own, in elementary, middle, and high school, I had no one to help me out." This puts children in difficult positions at times, since

there are important moments where you would need to communicate effectively in English, Molina states, "I've had to translate for my mom, at school with grades, at appointments, whether it was medical, dental, or vision, mail occasionally..."

Translating for your parents is usually very prevalent in an immigrant household. For the first 12 years of my life, I didn't have this burden, as my father spoke English well enough, but unfortunately, he was deported and soon enough I was translating everywhere we went. The places ranging from lawyer's offices to parent teacher conferences at school.

Due to my father's deportation, my objective was no longer focused on my collegiate future but instead on my present and how soon I could start working in order to help my mother out. Fortunately my older brother stepped in and, right after high school, he got a job at an Amazon warehouse working the overnight shift because it paid the most. This allowed me to start attending college, but with financial expenses and dealing with mental health struggles, I've had lots of speed bumps on this road.

In a Google survey I sent out to first generation college students/graduates, 89 percent had immigrant parents, and 100% had dealt with either depression or anxiety. Although they may have bat-

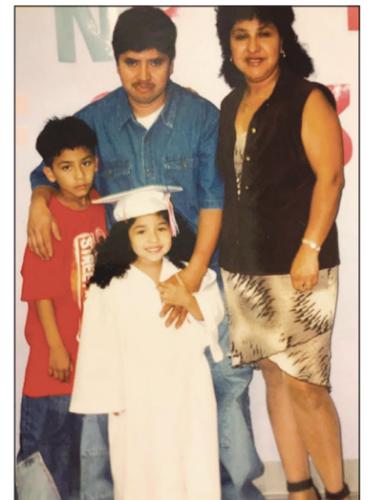


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

The author with her parents and older brother at her first childhood graduation.

tled mental illness, the survey had many success stories, bachelor's degrees from Rutgers University, University of Richmond and Franklin and Marshall College.

Seeing that data and talking to other students like me helps me keep motivated. First generation students from immigrant families may have had difficult obstacles to overcome but they can also help each other and their other family members out.



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YouTube Kids is a weird cesspool

AS I SEE IT



Tiernan Stover

“Gen Z! Gen Z! What is Gen Z gonna do when they grow up? What’s gonna happen to Gen Z??” While we appreciate your concern, what you really need to look out for is Gen Alpha. Adults, if you thought Gen Z was a handful, I give you a sincere warning. You’re going to have your work cut out for you with these new kids in town.

I see all sorts of people come through The Cheesecake Factory where I work, people in suits and ties, people dressed in pizza costumes, people who clearly saved up everything for that once a month visit. The common denominator? Every child has their face in a tablet.

Me? I didn’t get a phone with internet access until I was thirteen. If I wanted to go on the internet, I needed to sit at the noisy thirty pound monolith that was the family PC. So why on earth are children getting more internet access when they’re

even younger?

Why would they look around at their surroundings, make friends and get dirt under their nails when they have 24/7 access to “Skibidi Toilet”? For those unfamiliar, you don’t need to concern yourself with such troubling-toilet-y things.

When us Gen-Zers were growing up with access to the internet, I don’t think anyone really knew how harmful it was. Because of the profit-driven nature of social media platforms, extreme, upsetting and polarizing content naturally floats to the top.

YouTube Kids is a bizarre place. Back in 2017 there was Elsagate. This odd brand of content on YouTube Kids included fictional children’s characters (such as Spiderman and Elsa) being portrayed in bizarre, depraved and sometimes violent situations. It slipped right through YouTube Kids’ protective filters and straight to kids’ screens because of its seemingly innocent nature.

While the Spiderman and Elsa debacle is old news, the root problem has not gone away. With the advent of short-form video apps like TikTok, Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, the problem is only going to get worse.

According to Mercer Professor of Television and Digital Film Dr. Steve Voorhees, “The platform wants the user to stay on it as long as possible. With

short-form, it’s really about undating the user, always giving them something new to look at.

If there’s a video that doesn’t capture their attention, they know there’s something right beneath it.”

Dr. Voorhees says an excess of social media has been linked to various mental health issues including depression and anxiety.

“What are [users] seeing? What are they learning? What are they getting from this? And a lot of it is a double-edged sword, when you’re on it you’re being overwhelmed. When you’re not on it, you feel like you’re missing out,” says Voorhees.

Some children don’t even want to watch television anymore, instead begging for short, highly edited YouTube videos. Some more cautious parents allow them supervised use, but it requires constant vigilance.

Christina Davies, mother of three and elementary school teacher in Hopewell Valley, says “If [my three-year-old] ends up on YouTube, he can be watching something weird in a matter of seconds... We could be watching something that seems okay and then all of a sudden they drop an F-bomb,” says Davies.

Juliana Joy Davies, twelve-year-old daughter of Christina Davies says, “A lot of [kids] have their phones out at recess. I would say at least fifty percent.”

When these Gen-Alpha kids grow up and file into the halls of Mercer, we are going to need even more mental health resources, and professors will be even more hard-pressed to keep their attention.

It’s crucial to lead by example and be mindful of the escapist tendencies made easier than ever by social media. Scrolling sprees are a maladaptive coping mechanism to avoid the challenges of daily life that algorithmically skew our perception of the world and destroy our attention spans. If today’s children don’t learn healthier habits, read reliable sources, and learn to cope with boredom without doomscrolling, we could have serious problems in the not-so-distant future when they’re set to inherit our world.

“[When I was a kid] we went outside and our parents had to scream our names to come home. There’s definitely times that I make my kids go outside, and I will lock the door, because they’ll come right back in. Once they’re out there, they’re having a great time. It’s just [hard] getting them off of the thing they think they have to be on” says Davies.

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on February 29, 2024]

The Spanish translation below is part of The VOICE’s collaboration with MCCC’s Hispanic and Latino Club.

¡YouTube Kids es un pozo negro extraño!

TRADUCCIÓN AL ESPAÑOL

Traducido por Aria Asevedo

“¡Generación Z! ¡Generación Z! ¿Qué hará la Generación Z cuando sea mayor? ¿Qué pasará con la Generación Z? Si bien apreciamos la preocupación, lo que realmente se debe tener en cuenta es la Generación Alfa. Para todos los adultos que pensaban que la Generación Z era difícil, les doy una advertencia. Tendrás mucho trabajo por delante con estos nuevos niños de la Generación Alfa.

Veo todo tipo de personas pasar por The Cheesecake Factory donde trabajo: personas con traje y corbata, personas vestidas con disfraces de pizza, personas que claramente guardaron todo para esa visita una vez al mes. ¿El denominador común? Cada niño tiene su cara en una tableta.

¿Yo? No conseguí un teléfono con acceso a Internet hasta los trece años. Si quería conectarme a Internet, necesitaba sentarme frente al ruidoso monolito de treinta libras que

era la PC familiar. Entonces, ¿por qué los niños tienen más acceso a Internet cuando son aún más pequeños? ¿Por qué mirarían a su alrededor, harían amigos y se ensuciarían las uñas cuando tienen acceso las 24 horas del día, los 7 días de la semana al “Retrete Skibidi”? Para aquellos que no están familiarizados con la referencia, no es necesario que se preocupen por cosas tan preocupantes como las que tienen que ver con el baño.

Cuando nosotros, la Generación Z, crecimos con acceso a Internet, dudo que alguien supiera lo dañino que era. Debido a la naturaleza de las plataformas de redes sociales con fines de lucro, el contenido extremo, perturbador y polarizador flota naturalmente hacia la cima.

YouTube Kids es un lugar extraño. En 2017 sucedió el Elsagate. Este extraño tipo de contenido en YouTube Kids incluía personajes infantiles ficticios (como Spiderman y Elsa) retratados en situaciones extrañas, depravadas y, a veces, violentas. Pasó a través de los filtros protectores de YouTube

Kids y llegó directamente a las pantallas de los niños debido a su naturaleza aparentemente inocente.

Si bien la debacle de Spiderman y Elsa es una noticia vieja, la raíz del problema no ha desaparecido. Con la llegada de aplicaciones de videos de formato corto como TikTok, Instagram Reels y YouTube Shorts, el problema sólo empeorará.

Según el Dr. Steve Voorhees, Profesor Mercer de Televisión y Cine Digital, “La plataforma quiere que el usuario permanezca en ella el mayor tiempo posible. Se promueve el formato corto para inundar al usuario, brindándole siempre algo nuevo que mirar. Si hay un video que no capta su atención, saben que el siguiente video lo hará.”

El Dr. Voorhees dice que un exceso de redes sociales se ha relacionado con diversos problemas de salud mental, incluidas la depresión y la ansiedad.

“¿Qué están viendo [los usuarios]? ¿Qué están aprendiendo? ¿Qué obtienen de esto? Y mucho de esto es un arma de doble filo, cuando es-

tás viendo los videos te sientes abrumado. Cuando no los estás viendo, sientes que te estás perdiendo de una experiencia”, dice Voorhees.

Algunos niños ya ni siquiera quieren ver televisión y piden videos cortos y muy editados de YouTube. Algunos padres más cautelosos les permiten el uso supervisado, pero requiere una vigilancia constante.

Christina Davies, madre de tres hijos y maestra de escuela primaria en Hopewell Valley, dice: “Si [mi hijo de tres años] termina en YouTube, puede estar viendo algo extraño en cuestión de segundos... Podríamos estar viendo algo que parezca correcto. y de repente lanzan una lisura”, dice Davies.

Juliana Joy Davies, hija de Christina Davies, de doce años, dice: “Muchos [niños] sacan sus teléfonos durante el recreo. Yo diría que al menos el cincuenta por ciento.”

Cuando estos niños Gen-Alfa crezcan y lleguen a los pasillos de Mercer, necesitaremos aún más recursos de salud mental, y los profesores tendrán aún más dificultades

para mantener su atención.

Es fundamental predicar con el ejemplo y ser conscientes de las tendencias escapistas que las redes sociales facilitan más que nunca. Ver videos sin parar es un mecanismo de afrontamiento desadaptativo para evitar los desafíos de la vida diaria. A través de algoritmos, se distorsiona nuestra percepción del mundo y se destruye nuestra capacidad de atención. Si los niños de hoy no aprenden hábitos más saludables, leen fuentes confiables y aprenden a lidiar con el aburrimiento sin ver cosas fatales, podríamos tener serios problemas en un futuro no muy lejano cuando sea el turno de ellos de heredar el mundo.

“[Cuando era niño] salíamos y nuestros padres tenían que gritar nuestros nombres para volver a casa. Definitivamente hay ocasiones en las que hago que mis hijos salgan y cierro la puerta con llave, porque volverán a entrar. Una vez que están ahí, se lo están pasando genial. Simplemente es [difícil] sacarlos de lo que creen que deben hacer,” dice Davies.

Editorial Policy:

The College VOICE is written and edited by students of Mercer County Community College and published every 3-4 weeks under the guidance of faculty advisers. The material printed in The College VOICE, be it articles, advertisements or opinion pieces, does not necessarily represent the views of the editors, the faculty, staff, administration or the Board of Trustees of Mercer County Community College.

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e-mail: johnsonh@mccc.edu
phone: (609) 586-4800 ext. 3594
write to: **The College VOICE**
c/o Prof. Holly Johnson
Mercer County College
1200 Old Trenton Rd.
West Windsor, NJ 08690

ADVICE - ASK THE VOICE

HELP IS HERE!



I highlighted my entire textbook in a panic last night. Now everything looks important. Am I doomed?
- Highlighter Hoarder

Dear Highlighter Hoarder, Next time, just ask ChatGPT to summarize the textbook for you!
- The VOICE

Dear VOICE, I've been practicing my interpretive dance moves in the library, and people keep giving me weird looks. Should I switch to a quieter form of expression?
- Dancing Dynamo

Dear Dancing Dynamo, Dance your heart out. In fact, you should start a petition to get a Dance Dance Revolution machine installed in the ET building. At least those engineering students will finally get some exercise.
- The VOICE

Dear VOICE, I think the campus squirrels

are plotting against me. Every time I try to enjoy a peaceful moment in the quad, they stare at me with those judgmental eyes. How do I maintain my dignity in the face of rodent rebellion?
- Squirrely Situations

Dear Squirrely Situations, Stare back. Show them who's the king of the animal kingdom.
- The VOICE

Dear VOICE, My professor has a habit of ending lectures with obscure riddles instead of actual conclusions. How do I decode these cryptic clues before my grade vanishes like a wizard in the night?
- Riddle Me This

Dear Riddle Me This, Start turning in your homework and tests with your answers written as riddles instead of normal sentences. Give him a taste of his own medicine.
- The VOICE

Dear VOICE, My roommate has decided to turn our Rider dorm into a one-person tuba symphony at the crack of dawn. I'm starting to think I'm living with the next Beethoven, except he's composing his masterpieces at 3 AM. How can I convince him that quiet hours were invented for a reason?
- Desperate for Decibels

Dear Desperate for Decibels, You can hire a mariachi band to come and wake him up at 7 am. That'll teach him what loud music is!
-The VOICE

Dear VOICE,

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WILL DANCE FOR COOKIES

HOROSCOPES

By Sierra Azara
Senior Astrologist



Capricorn

Dec. 22 - Jan. 19

Make sure you're in control of your finances and keeping up with acting on what's necessary to reach your goals. Make sure you're setting your future self-up for success!



Aquarius

Jan. 20 - Feb. 18

Do some deep introspection on what you want to create. The universe will be blessing you with an abundance of energy and appreciation from loved ones!



Pisces

Feb. 19 - Mar. 20

May will show you just how innovative you can be with emotional matters. With heightened intuition and boundaries; success will come. It's time to become your own hero!



Aries

Mar. 21 - Apr. 19

With this month's ruling planet in its home sign, it will be pivotal in all areas that require action. Now is the time to put more effort into your passions, which will increase your income potential!



Taurus

Apr. 20 - May 20

If you aren't stuck in a cycle of enabling bad behaviors in the people around you, this month will be incredibly rewarding. However, if you're stuck in a cycle; that will be forced to change by the events of the month.



Gemini

May 21 - Jun. 20

Likely you have recently experienced a wakeup call that forced you to reevaluate how much you are valued by people you care about the most. Over the next year, you will enter a new period of growth, and glow up.



Cancer

Jun. 21 - Jul. 22

With Vesta in conjunction with your Sun sign, this is going to be a huge month for getting a serious refresher on a forgotten skill, or previously undiscovered ability; especially when it comes to family matters.



Leo

Jul. 23 - Aug. 22

With the month starting off with the transit Moon in opposition to your Sun sign - causing a possible avoidance to deal with emotional matters, or for those that fight off the avoidance will discover new feelings.



Virgo

Aug. 23 - Sept. 22

Time to refrain from bad habits, or pessimism. Any hardships you've been given since the eclipse are happening so you can finally fight for your freedom. It's time to stop doubting and go for what you want!



Libra

Sept. 23 - Oct. 22

Keep momentum towards what really matters, and the universe will identify your dedication, blessing you with abundance, and opportunities for transformation. Get ready to come into your power!



Scorpio

Oct. 23 - Nov. 21

Your words will feel magical this month especially when tied together by strong emotional attachment. Time to be of service to those who aren't finding this stability. Heal others by being yourself!



Sagittarius

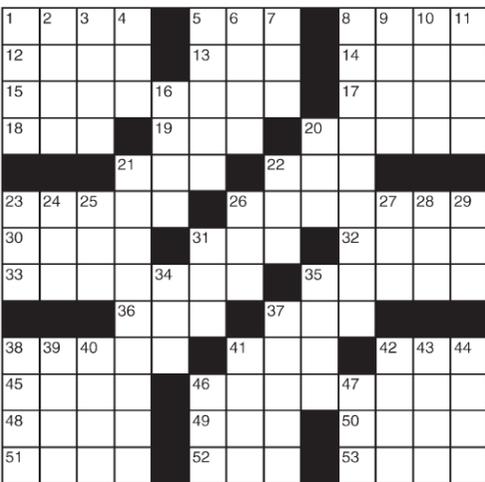
Nov. 22 - Dec. 21

Use the energy of the full moon on the 23rd to make the drastic changes necessary to feel comfortable with what you see. Don't question the lens of reality.

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Nasty insect
- 5 Badly lit
- 8 Error
- 12 Chills and fever
- 13 Kreskin's claim
- 14 Docket entry
- 15 In reverie
- 17 Anger
- 18 Dine
- 19 Sternward
- 20 Dissuade
- 21 Firmament
- 22 Stop — dime
- 23 Augment
- 26 Firm
- 30 Needy
- 31 Hockey milieu
- 32 Concept
- 33 Get
- 35 Pry
- 36 Singer
- 37 Droop
- 38 Cut corners
- 41 Huge
- 42 Greek cross
- 45 Actress Gilpin
- 46 "... twilight's last —"
- 48 Privy to
- 49 Boxer
- 50 Pedestal occupant
- 51 Chinatown gang
- 52 Witness



DOWN

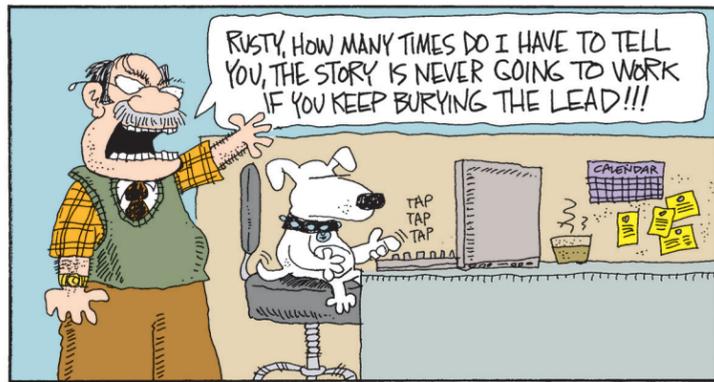
- 1 Test the waters
- 2 City of India
- 3 Fat
- 4 Pod denizen
- 5 Treat as a god
- 6 "— It Romantic?"
- 7 Gasoline stat
- 8 Very conspicuous
- 9 Cafe au —
- 10 Capri, e.g.
- 11 Equal
- 16 Shark variety
- 20 Modern-day evidence
- 21 Like some video on the Web
- 22 Praise in verse
- 23 Spring mo.
- 24 Buck's mate
- 25 One of the Seven Dwarfs
- 26 High card
- 27 Commotion
- 28 Modern (Pref.)
- 29 Spigot
- 31 Wall climber
- 34 Mischievous one
- 35 Long story
- 37 Prolonged attack
- 38 Skewer
- 39 Gambling game
- 40 Press agent?
- 41 Sad
- 42 Ocean motion
- 43 In due time
- 44 Homely
- 46 Navig. aid
- 47 Central



FLASH GORDON



Out on a Limb



by Gary Kopervas

