

Making History: Virginia Set to Elect First Female Governor

Tylerson Tweardy
A&E Editor
Graphics Editor

For the first time in Virginia’s history, voters are guaranteed to elect a female governor. The 2025 race is between two candidates: Democratic Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger and Republican Lieutenant Governor Winsome Earle-Sears. While they represent different political parties and visions for the Commonwealth’s future, their candidacies mark a historic milestone in Virginia politics.

Abigail Spanberger, who has represented Virginia’s 7th District in Congress since 2019, built her reputation as a centrist Democrat focused on bipartisan cooperation. A former CIA officer and federal law enforcement officer, Spanberger has emphasized pragmatic solutions over partisanship. She has been outspoken on issues like education, affordable healthcare, and protecting reproductive rights. In a recent speech in Woodbridge, Virginia, she said, “[I] want Virginia to be a place where every child, no matter their ZIP code, gets a great education and a real shot at success.”

Winsome Earle-Sears, currently serving as Virginia’s lieutenant governor, has also made history throughout her career. She was the first Black Republican woman elected to the Virginia House of Delegates and the first woman of color elected to statewide office in the Commonwealth. A Marine Corps veteran, Earle-Sears has been a strong advocate for conservative values,

with priorities including parental rights in education, tax cuts, and expanding school choice. In her announcement for running, she said, “[We] need a leader who doesn’t run from our values, but stands firmly in them.”

Both candidates have put education at the center of their campaigns, though they offer contrasting visions. Spanberger has prioritized raising teacher pay, increasing funding for public schools, and ensuring that schools are equipped with modern technology and resources. She has criticized attempts to ban books or restrict curricula, arguing that students should have the freedom to explore challenging topics and perspectives. Earle-Sears has focused on strengthening parental involvement in schools. She has been a vocal supporter of expanding charter schools and providing more school choice options, framing her approach as a way to give families greater control over their children’s education.

The teacher shortage across Virginia has also drawn attention from both sides. Spanberger has proposed increasing state funding to retain experienced educators, while Earle-Sears has suggested reducing administrative burdens and allowing more flexibility in teacher licensing to bring more teachers into classrooms.

Public safety has become another dividing line. Spanberger has supported a balanced approach, investing in law enforcement while also funding community-based solutions and mental health services. She’s emphasized the

need to ensure students feel safe in schools without feeling “over-policed.” Earle-Sears has taken a tougher stance, calling for additional funding for police departments and stricter penalties for crime. She often ties public safety to economic stability, arguing that safer communities will encourage more business growth.

Additionally, mental health resources have emerged as a priority for both candidates, though they frame the issue differently. Spanberger has called for greater investment in school counselors and statewide support systems, while Earle-Sears has emphasized partnerships with churches and local nonprofits to provide accessible community care.

Economic development has also been a central theme of the campaign. Spanberger’s platform includes investments in rural broadband, renewable energy jobs, and infrastructure projects that she argues will modernize Virginia’s economy. She often presents herself as someone who can bridge the needs of both rural and suburban communities. Earle-Sears has adopted a different plan, focusing on tax relief, deregulation, and workforce training. She has argued that reducing the cost of doing business in Virginia will help small businesses thrive and provide more opportunities for working families. She has also

highlighted her support for vocational training programs that she believes will better prepare young Virginians for high-demand jobs.

With both Spanberger and Earle-Sears on the ballot, Virginia voters are presented with two historic choices. Spanberger frames her campaign around expanding opportunity and protecting rights, while Earle-Sears highlights her personal story of breaking barriers and overcoming challenges. Both women are seeking to inspire young voters who may be casting their ballots for the first time, and both campaigns are expected to shape the next generation of leadership in Virginia.

Virginia Governor Candidates



The Shootings at Villanova University and University of SC

Kaylee Bendheim
Staff Writer

In the span of a couple of days in August 2025, students at the University of South Carolina and Villanova University were alerted to reports of an active shooter on campus. Both incidents led to lockdowns and students going into hiding. The police investigated both campuses, finding no evidence of an active shooter and eventually clearing the issue.

University officials, including President Rev. Peter M. Donohue of Villanova University, told ABC6 Philadelphia that the incident was a “cruel hoax” and wrote in a student letter, “There was no active shooter, no injuries, and no evidence of firearms on campus.”

This is not the first occurrence for both schools. In 2023, a University of South Carolina student was shot and killed by a homeowner after the student mistakenly tried entering the wrong house off campus while intoxi-

cated. Villanova has had a similar school safety issue previously; threats that were falsely reported prompted a SWAT response.

School shootings have been on the rise and have increased post-pandemic. “There were more school shootings in 2022--46-- than in any year since Columbine,” said an article by The Washington Post. The article also said, “This mirrored America’s broader rise in gun violence as it emerged from the pandemic.”

These school shooting incidents have added to the nationwide panic that students and families have, even reaching students at Freeman. “I saw something recently about a shooting at a private school close by. I think it’s definitely a large issue going on,” said Layla Ballance, a senior at Freeman High School.

Layla can relate to the worries of school violence as the college application season approaches. William and Mary, the University of South Carolina, and Virginia Tech are Layla’s top choices for col-

lege. She is aware that the schools she’s looking at have past reports of school shootings, “I know Virginia Tech had a large school shooting, but that doesn’t make me feel like it would be unsafe for me to attend there,” she said.

School shooting records at a school don’t affect her, as she said, “I don’t think it ever affected me personally, but if I were to send my kids to higher education, it would be something I look out for.”

Layla has experienced school violence herself when she was attending Open High School. “My freshman year, we had to go into lockdown because there was a group of people with guns walking in the area. [I’ve] never had anything that was inside the school,” she said. That experience hasn’t impacted her perspective on safety at Freeman. “School shootings are something that we should try to get a handle on in the next couple of years, because it’s not getting any better.”

Junior Jacob Katz from Free-



The University of South Carolina Campus.



The Villanova University Campus.



People gathering outside University St.Mary’s hall for shelter after given clear by Police.

man High School also worries about the danger of school shootings. “Anything involving school violence should be taken seriously. It’s a threat to not only the people involved but everybody else at the school,” he said.

School shootings can deteriorate a school’s reputation. “Whenever something [like that] is going on, it detracts from the school, it detracts from the school’s reputation, and it detracts from the school’s safety,” said Jacob.

Jacob is considering the University of Virginia (UVA) for college, and is aware of UVA having past reports of a school shooting, but that won’t affect his final decision. “[It’s] definitely something I keep in mind when I’m thinking about a school,” he said. “As a general proposition, after that

kind of thing happens, overall security is beefed up a lot,” he said.

Although he may be anxious about safety in his future college life on a campus, Jacob feels pretty confident here at Freeman. “School violence hasn’t affected me tremendously, but for the most part, I don’t really get involved,” he said.

In the last 10 or 20 years, there has been an uptick in the number of school shootings that have occurred. “If that trend continues, then future generations might have some issues with that, and it will be increasingly more prevalent than it is now,” said Jacob.

These recent shooting incidents across the country are a reminder of the impact of school violence. What may be a safe campus sometimes is transformed into one where students are living in fear.



Richmond Folk Festival Returns for Its 21st Year

Caitlyn Kennedy
Staff Writer

Down in the city of Richmond, right beside the James, is home to a traditional and populous event, the Richmond Folk Festival. In just over a month, Brown's Island will welcome its 21st annual celebration. The Richmond Folk Festival is a spin-off of the National Folk Festival, which aims to achieve its goals of bringing the community together through inclusivity. Spanning from October 10th to 12th, 2025, this three-day festival welcomes anyone who wants to celebrate their roots and others' roots through music, food, dance, and crafts. This event partners with multiple other groups. The first one is Richmond Venture, which is a governmental booster agency engaged with downtown Richmond. The second group is the National Counter for Traditional Arts (NCTA), a multicultural arts presenting organization. Joining right before its second year of running, Todd Ranson, a member of the programming committee, has worked on the board of the Richmond Folk Festival for 20 years. His job includes working with the rest of the committee to choose the bands. "[It's] 25 different people from all walks of life around Richmond, [of] different races and different backgrounds," said Mr. Ranson. "It's a multicultural committee." The programming committee starts meeting as early as December, and

it takes them four meetings to get the bands booked. "[We will] listen to three or four songs, watch a couple videos of the bands, and then vote," said Mr. Ranson. Some of Freeman's faculty thinks that the folk festival does an outstanding job of including a variety of music. "The music comes from all around the world, [and] seeing different types of Indian dance, seeing musicians from the Pacific Islands [is my favorite part]," said Ms. Hunnicutt, an English teacher at Freeman who has been visiting the Richmond Folk Festival for the past couple of years. "[I] would never have been exposed to [those types of music]," she said. The festival also adheres to people's schedules. Each band performs more than once, so if a time doesn't work to see a band play, there will be another opportunity. "Most, if not all, the bands play multiple sets," said Mr. Ranson. "Every band plays at least two sets, and many play three or four." This allows those who go to make time for everything the festival has to offer. "[You] can pinpoint what you want to see and show up," said Ms. Hunnicutt.

River Bates, a junior at Freeman, has attended the Richmond Folk Festival with his family in previous years. He believes the festival is a great opportunity to be introduced to the heritage of other people. "[You] can eat food, listen to music, and really just understand the traditions and other aspects of different cultures here in Richmond," said River. Although his experience went mostly as expected, River was also surprised by the festi-

val. "[I] wasn't expecting such a diverse and musically inclined atmosphere," he said. Richmond's Folk Festival is enjoyable because of its pleasant atmosphere which draws people in. "The atmosphere is laid back, welcoming, and entertaining," said Ms. Hunnicutt. The event shows the importance of bringing the community together. The Richmond Folk Festival is a chance for people to step out of their comfort zone and expand their horizons. "[It] was a great opportunity to try new things," said River. With its 30 performers and six stages, fans can come to enjoy a variety of performers' music. "[You] can really listen to different types of music," said River. The festival also includes 28 different food vendors. Plates can be filled with a variety of foods, whether it's barbecue, fish, empanadas, ice cream, pies, or more. River said, "I loved all the different foods I ate; [I] thought that was the best part." Ms. Hunnicutt was also drawn in by all the different food options available. "There's always good food," said Ms. Hunnicutt. Each tent is set up with foods from diverse cultures, including Caribbean, Greek, Mexican, and more. In addition to the dining options, visitors can also spend their time shopping through the markets, purchasing different handmade creations, such as jewelry, artwork, or other unique trinkets. Ms. Hunnicutt thinks the Richmond Folk Festival is a great event for us to have nearby. "I think it's fantastic that Richmond hosts something [like this]," she said.



Richmond Folk Festival 2016 Poster

"It brings different cultures right to our backyard and allows people to have a greater sense of appreciation for [various] things," she said. Those who are interested can also volunteer as a bucket brigade. During the festival, bucket brigades walk around collecting donations for the event. A few Freeman students also volunteer. "[I'm] always pleasantly surprised when I see my students there," said Ms. Hunnicutt. Having volunteers is a vital piece to allow the festival to continue running each year. The Richmond Folk Festival is free of cost, so donations help support the event. "[We] have corporate sponsors,

but we also try to collect as much money as we can from festival-goers," said Mr. Ranson. Even if someone is to volunteer, they can still enjoy and experience the festival. "[It's] really fun, because you don't really have to work. You just walk around and ask people for donations," he said.

The Richmond Folk Festival is open to everyone and showcases diverse groups, so people can be exposed to different cultures and music that they may not normally see. "It's the premier cultural event in Richmond every year," said Mr. Ranson. Invite a friend or family member and stop by anytime from October 10th to 12th, 2025.

Future of Freedom: Free Speech on Trial

Emerson Post
Copy/Sports Editor

Washington — In a political climate already defined by deep-seated division, a new battle is coming to part—one that puts free speech against the power of the press and political influence. The indefinite suspension of late-night host Jimmy Kimmel's show by ABC following his comments regarding the assassination of activist Charlie Kirk has started a firestorm, throwing free speech, censorship, and the role of major media networks under a powerful new microscope. The controversy began when Kimmel, during a monologue, made comments that some interpreted as celebrating the death of Kirk. The backlash was immediate, and there was a lot of it. Conservative commenters and activists accused Kimmel of stating hate speech and contributing to a toxic political environment. Within days, ABC announced the indefinite suspension of Kimmel's show, a move that only stirred the debate even more. The fallout has been quick and severe, extending beyond the world of late-night television. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Nathan Simington hinted at potential regulatory action against broadcasters that give biased coverage to political candidates, which brought up some concerns that this incident could be used as an example to stifle dissent. This has led to accusations of censorship from critics on both sides of the argument. The ACLU and other civil rights organizations have expressed alarm, warning that government officials are using the incident to scare and control the media,

"Maga cancel culture has now become government cancel culture," remarked one commentator. Yet, while some see this as an unprecedented attack on the First Amendment, others argue that corporations, like ABC, have the right to protect their image and brand. Their decision, they argue, is a reflection of the network's internal values and market pressures, not a government directive. The situation is even more complicated by the influence of powerful figures. For example, one network owner, a major Trump supporter, is rumored to have significant influence over the direction of the news, raising questions about impartiality. The Kimmel controversy is not an incident that is alone. In recent months, tech companies like TikTok have come under fire for their role in spreading disinformation and hate speech. With President Trump and President Xi Jinping of China reportedly nearing a deal that would allow Trump to have greater influence over the platform, free speech advocates fear that the government's ability to control the narrative could be expanded even further. This political control over media and technology, combined with the ongoing culture wars, creates a very uncertain future for free speech.

Corporations, governments, and activists all eager for control of the public square. The debate over the Kimmel incident is a clear reminder of the broken state of free speech and the growing risk of censorship in an era of heightened political tension. As one legal expert noted, "The stakes have never been higher. What happens next will define the future of free speech for a generation".



PHOTO: JIMMY KIMMEL LIVE

Jimmy Kimmel, host of "Jimmy Kimmel Live"

No Evidence Behind Viral Virginia Kidnapping Claims

Annie Ainsworth
Staff Writer

In recent weeks, viral TikTok claims of mass kidnappings in Virginia have been debunked by the Virginia State Police, who have found no evidence to support them. The theory of a mass abduction, or possible kidnapping ring, has spread on the social media app. These claims have been fervently denied by law enforcement statements. On TikTok, countless videos of people warning others about these false mass abductions have garnered millions of views, said WTKR3 News, a local station here in Virginia. State officials said, "Virginia state police is not investigating any reports of mass abductions in Virginia, nor is there evidence of mass abductions occurring in Virginia."

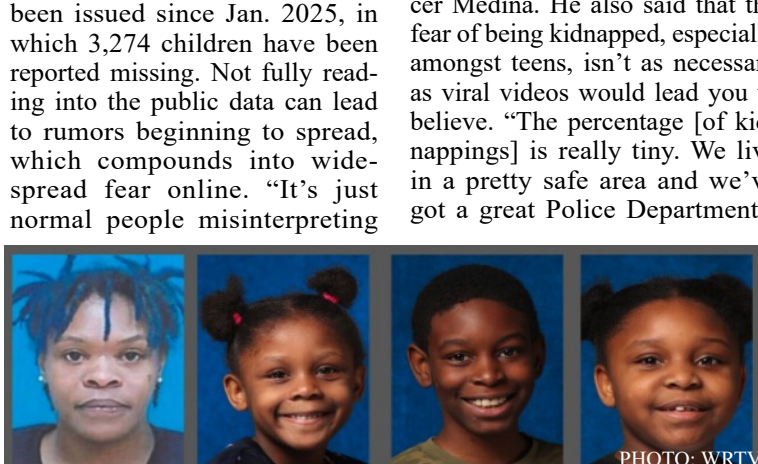
On a local level, Freeman's School resource officer, Officer Medina, a police officer of 20 years with experience in the Special Victims Unit, agrees with State Officials debunking rumors about mass abductions. When asked if there was any truth behind the viral gossip, he said, "No, from what [I've] learned and witnessed... [I] don't think there's an abduction ring here." With millions of views on multiple online videos, a rumor dealing with harm to missing children spreads rapidly, dispensing fear and anxiety amongst the people.

Social media apps, including TikTok, are entertainment-based, and creators on such platforms earn money through content views or interactions. This can lead to unsupported claims being advertised to generate views, which could be potentially dangerous. "[There's] no research behind it. You're [creators] just saying something to get the likes or followers. Some people are susceptible, and it scares them, [which] causes issues for law enforcement," said Officer Medina. "[I] learned that if it bleeds, it reads. People want to see that shock factor." Virginia's reporting system of kidnappings also plays a part in the widespread idea that there is an ongoing mass abduction. As a commonwealth, Virginia reports more missing children on average compared to other states, leading to upwards of thousands reported missing a year. Virginia State po-

lice said, "[they] forward EVERY missing child case to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Kids (NCMEC). According to NCMEC, Virginia is the most proactive in sending cases to their website." This is the reason behind the high weekly numbers of missing children, which were used as evidence in social media claims. Virginia does this in order to centralize missing children's cases for easier access for all departments. A concern in many social media videos was also the lack of America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) alerts; however, specific requirements must be met, and don't apply to runaways, many of which make up the total number of missing children, according to the Virginia State Police's statement. Virginia State Police lists five specific criteria for the activation of the AMBER Alert plan, all of which must be met for an alert to be broadcast, which is uncommon in VA. The first criterion is that the child must be 17 years of age or under and actively enrolled in a secondary school in the state. The second and third criteria refer to the police's actions and beliefs. The police must believe the child is in danger of serious harm or death, and have investigated and confirmed an abduction to have taken place, or have ruled out other explanations. The condition is that sufficient information is available to spread to the public that could assist in locating the child or suspect. Finally, the last requirement is that the child must be entered into the Virginia Criminal Information Network (VCIN) and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) missing person files quickly. With strict guidelines to activate an AMBER alert, only two have been issued since Jan. 2025, in which 3,274 children have been reported missing. Not fully reading into the public data can lead to rumors beginning to spread, which compounds into widespread fear online. "It's just normal people misinterpreting

good data," said Officer Medina. Another type of alert for missing children, called the Critical Operation for a Disappeared Child Initiative (CODI), can be issued when a child goes missing. Its four criteria include: the missing person being 17 years or younger and enrolled in school, their whereabouts being unknown, the child disappearing under suspicious circumstances or posing a threat as determined by law enforcement, and, based on other circumstances, that the Virginia State Police deem appropriate. This alert acts similarly to AMBER alerts, since their purpose is to help locate the child. At the time of the State Police's statement, there had been 25 CODI Alerts issued. Furthermore, most of the children reported missing are eventually found and labeled as such in the appropriate systems and files, like in the VCIN and NCIC. By the time the State Police's statement was put out, exactly 3,274 children were reported missing, and only 141 remained missing, with correct information is something that remains vital to keeping the public safe and unafraid. According to the Virginia State Police, keeping children informed of simple safety tips is a good preventative measure to keep them out of harm's way. These practices include having them practice calling 911, and ensuring they know not to accept rides from strangers or to trust adults in certain situations. They also said children should never be left alone in the car, even briefly, and that children know not to keep secrets from their parents that other adults might instruct them to keep.

In the end, it is important to do research yourself to avoid being led down a false path. "[You] need to dive deeper," said Officer Medina. He also said that the fear of being kidnapped, especially amongst teens, isn't as necessary as viral videos would lead you to believe. "The percentage [of kidnappings] is really tiny. We live in a pretty safe area and we've got a great Police Department."



Amber Alert Issued for Children in VA

Scenic
fall foliage
spots



Page 3

Labubus:
Yay or
Nay?



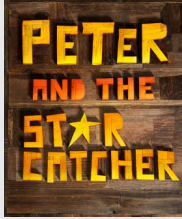
Page 4

New RVA
cat cafe
opens



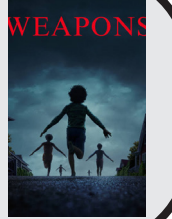
Page 8

DSF Theatre
begins fall
play



Page 10

"Weapons"
new
movie



Page X

Fall Fun: Places To Visit

Ava Harrison
A&E Editor
Graphics Editor

Fall is finally here, and that means school is back in full swing. While managing your school work, don't forget to have a little fun. September through December are great times to do numerous activities. From fall festivities to Halloween and Thanksgiving, there are many things you can choose from. When I think of fall, I think of colorful leaves, a chilly breeze, and pumpkins (lots and lots of pumpkins.) Pumpkin-flavored food, pumpkin-flavored drinks, and pumpkin picking. The best place to go pumpkin picking is Ashland Berry Farm. While you are there, you can also take a hayride, conquer a corn maze, or visit Terror on the Farm, a thrilling haunted experience. Another great place to get pumpkins is Chiles Peach Orchard. In addition, they have apple picking and a variety of fall-flavored foods and drinks to choose from. I visit the orchard every year with my family, and I always get their apple butter, apple cider slushie, and apple cider donuts. Carter Mountain is another place people visit for fall activities, but it tends to get very busy, so I usually avoid it. If you don't want to go to a pumpkin patch, you can simply

pick a pumpkin from Strange's Florists, Greenhouses, and Garden Centers. They have a diverse selection of pumpkins and squashes. I have never been disappointed when looking for a pumpkin there. Now, the question is: What to do with these pumpkins? There are so many different things pumpkins are good for. For example, you can make pumpkin pies out of the guts and roast the pumpkin seeds. You can also paint the pumpkins with acrylic paints or carve them. What you paint or carve does not matter, but I usually create scary faces and creatures that remind me of Halloween. Fall is a great time to have fun with different scary activities in honor of Halloween. If you want to go somewhere for a good scare, I recommend visiting Howl-O-Scream at Busch Gardens, Halloween Haunt at Kings Dominion, or Scream Forest. Of these options, Scream Forest is my all-time favorite. I am not extremely into scary things, but Scream Forest was entertaining and I had a good time walking through the woods with my friends. Ghost tours are also an exciting thing to do if you want a historical scare. I have not gone on any ghost tours around Richmond, but I have taken one in Savannah, Georgia. During the ghost tour, I was intrigued by the stories that were being told. The history around the town was both eerie and entertaining. There are

many places to go on ghost tours in Richmond, but the most popular are likely Haunts of Richmond and Richmond Ghost Tours. Another place to find historical eeriness is the Poe Museum in Richmond. Every time I think of Edgar Allen Poe, I think of fall. His history is chilling, and the atmosphere of the museum reflects that. You also get to meet the black cats that usually wander around the garden. Whether you believe they are bad luck or not, you cannot deny that they are one of the best things at the Poe Museum. If you are more of a stay-at-home person, but you still want a good scare, you can always watch a horror movie or two. I recommend the "Scream" movies, the "Halloween" movies, and anything by Tim Burton. To me, these movies are the best to watch around Halloween time. I also recommend "The Babadook" as a horror movie to watch at any time during the year. Horror movies that I absolutely do not recommend are the "Terrifier" movies. They are so excessively gory that I could barely enjoy the plot. Maybe that was the whole point, but it was definitely not my style. Say you want to watch more comforting Halloween movies: If so, I suggest watching the original "Hocus Pocus," "Coraline," and "The Addams Family." I have been watching these movies for a long time, and they always get me into the spirit of Halloween and fall. Camping is another wonderful thing to do in the fall. I recommend camping in the mountains. It's always so relaxing and beautiful once the leaves start to change color. The best places for camping are Shenandoah River State Park,



Shenandoah National Park in the fall.

Pocahontas State Park, and Shenando Lake State Park. When I am at Pocahontas State Park, I love to go mountain biking. They have a variety of trails, from beginner, to intermediate, to difficult. I also go to Sherando Lake State Park every year in October with my family. We fish, hike, and make only fall-themed goods, like cinnamon buns and caramel apples. Another relaxing activity I do while I'm there is reading a book in my hammock. The weather and the atmosphere in the park make for a very peaceful reading spot. Although we do lots of activi-

ties during the day, my favorite part of camping is relaxing by the bonfire. We roast marshmallows, make s'mores, and tell each other scary stories. Sometimes we just talk about what is going on in our lives, too. Bonfires are a great way to become closer with people. My main point is that the fall season is filled with many fun and spooky activities, ultimately making it the best season. You can travel, stay local, or even stay at home. What you do during the fall is completely up to you, but I definitely recommend trying out some of these ideas. You will not regret it!

Spooky places to visit for Halloween

- Terror on the Farm at Ashland Berry Farm (Thursday-Sunday)
- Howl-O-Scream at Busch Gardens (Days of the week vary)
- Halloween Haunt at Kings Dominion (Friday-Saturday)
- Scream Forest in Glen Allen (Friday-Sunday)

GRAPHIC: AVA HARRISON

Commentator Staff

Editors-in-Chief:
Maryam Vohra
Nikki Rajan

Online Editors-in-Chief:
Nina Henley
Vrusha Pramod

A&E Editors:
Ava Harrison
TylerSON Tweardy

Centerspread Editors:
Nina Henley
Vrusha Pramod

Copy Editors:
Maryam Vohra
Emerson Post

Features Editor:
Olive Schreher

Graphics Editors:
Ava Harrison
TylerSON Tweardy

News Editor:
Saarvi Gourishetty

Opinions Editor:
Maria McGuill

Sports Editor:
Emerson Post

Staff Writers:

Juliette Lawrence, Sophia Tluchak, Ingrid Jones, Colleen Conway, Caitlyn Kennedy, Kaylee Bendheim, Annie Ainsworth, Rowan Kelley, Ellie Brooks, Annalise Minkler, Charlotte White, Sophia Bove, Maggie Walton

Staff Advisor:
Mr. Pruett
AP Lit & DE English Instructor
jbpruett@henrico.k12.va.us

So We 'Meat' Again

Vrusha Pramod
Online Editor-in-Chief
Centerspread Editor

"Oh, I wish I were an Oscar Mayer Wiener, That is what I'd truly like to be-ee-ee. 'Cause if I were an Oscar Mayer Wiener, Everyone would be in love with me." This jingle has been stirred into American culture ever since its release in the 1960s, and in Richmond, it "literally" has a special way of rolling back into our lives every year with the one and only Oscar Mayer Wiernermobile. Originally hitting the road in 1936, the Wiernermobile did not start as an advertisement for hot dogs. What many people may not know is that it was actually created to "bring joy to people" during the Great Depression. Spending time at big events in the RVA area, like the Ukrop's Monument Avenue 10k, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, or even a Richmond Flying Squirrels Game, has presented me with the opportunity to see it with my own eyes. A massive hot dog on wheels cruising around downtown like it owns the place. And honestly, in terms of grabbing attention, it pretty much does. Personally, whenever I see the Wiernermobile around RVA, I find myself delighted. This vehicle

brings outlandish amusement to our state, but also represents how something so unusual can become loved by thousands across the country. Some may see it as just a publicity stunt, but it is a historical American institution that has continued to thrive in an era where such things are underappreciated or go completely unnoticed. There's something strangely charming about a gigantic hot dog truck that shows up at races, parades, and town fairs. It doesn't just ask for your money like the typical food trucks found during such events, but rather allows anybody to take a selfie, tour the inside, and, of course, advertise Oscar Mayer products. Spotting the Wiernermobile today is like running into a celebrity. Six Wiernermobiles are active today throughout the U.S., and they give out Wiener Whistles—a tiny plastic trinket that has been handed out since the 1950s—if they are spotted on the road. Even though I have seen my fair share around RVA, I have yet to see one in its natural habitat: The road. Finding the Wiernermobile is not an impossible feat either. I've logged into the Oscar Mayer online tracker in the past, and it's fun to scroll through both their present and planned stops since I never really know where they will turn up. Sometimes it's an

event, sometimes it's a wedding or birthday party, and sometimes it's even a grocery store parking lot. I guess they have to restock their ingredients somehow! I also think it's fascinating how the Wiernermobile keeps popping up in mainstream media over the years. I've seen it recreated as an animation on TV shows like "The Simpsons," and actual news coverage, like when a real Wiernermobile crashed into a Wisconsin home in 2009. "Giant Hot Dog Crashes into Family Home" is the kind of headline that catches my attention. Even when catastrophe strikes, the Wiernermobile won't stop being funny. Recently, Oscar Mayer tried to permanently rename it the "Frankmobile" in 2023. I feel content to know that it never happened. Personally speaking, I despised that attempt at renaming, and so did many others, as the name Wiernermobile was brought back due to public demand. I believe that honoring the Wiernermobile's legacy doesn't just mean putting it in a museum. It means keeping it on the road for future generations to let it surprise them the same way it did with ours. For nearly a century, the Wiernermobile has played a part in American culture. Holding onto that tradition is nostalgic, and brings people together.

Homecoming Dress Shopping

- Dillard's
 - Short Pump
 - Stony Point
- Windsor
 - Short Pump
- Thrifting
 - Uptown Cheapskate
 - Carytown
- Macy's
 - Short Pump
 - Chesterfield

GRAPHIC: AVA HARRISON

The Rise of Labubus

Nikki Rajan
Editor-in-Chief

By now, I'm sure that everyone has seen a rise in the popularity of a new collectible item called the Labubu. From celebrities to teenagers, everybody wants one. Modeled after Hong Kong artist Kasing Lung's drawings, Labubus are a popular collectible plush toy that can best be described as creepy yet oddly appealing. Just as we used to collect Shopkins, desk pets, or Beanie Boos when we were little, the Labubus have become a popular collectible series, consisting of hundreds of different versions, colors, styles, and patterns. Although Labubus originated as a drawing, they soon became popular when a few celebrities showcased their Labubus online. They were completely unknown until just this past year, and that's when I first found out about Labubus through Lizzo's song "Whim Whamiee," which became extremely popular in May. The famous line "she can't even outdress my Labubu" became a

recurring meme everywhere as people were posting about it on social media and buying their own plush toys to prove her point. I honestly found this extremely funny, and many people watching online also enjoy seeing people's obsessions with these plushies.

Though its features in pop culture references helped with its popularity, I think that Labubu really gained traction because of its "blind box" model. Since each box hides the identity of the Labubu inside, buying a Labubu and opening it is meant to be an exciting activity in itself. As I've seen on social media, once people buy one, they get trapped in a cycle of searching for other unique models. I think this marketing design is extremely smart because it successfully gets customers more intrigued with each new Labubu.

The Labubu strikes me as interesting because it really isn't that cute. They have weirdly shaped teeth and eyes that honestly make me feel a little confused about why the artist chose to draw something like this. However, Looking at current pop culture trends,

there has been a rise in self-expression and embracing offbeat and imperfect styles, too. This is really interesting because it shows how Labubus have become a way to embrace individuality and add to someone's fashion sense.

Recently, other celebrities have tried showing off their Labubus in some creative ways. As a tennis fan, seeing Naomi Osaka, a four-time grand slam winner, carrying around Labubus to each match was fun at first. She would coordinate outfits and color schemes with her Labubu for every match. I thought this was a cute and exciting way to bring a lighthearted aspect to stressful game days, but sometimes I feel that she is doing this for another reason. Labubus, like any other collectible, have raised their own worldwide community. By connecting people and becoming a common symbol, Labubus have trapped people in their scheme. I definitely think that not just Osaka, but the majority of the people chasing after these expensive toys are doing so to gain recognition and feel more involved in another community of people,



PHOTO: NEW YORK TIMES

which isn't necessarily bad either.

Following suit, some of my other favorite celebrities, including Rihanna and Kim Kardashian, have posted rare Labubus as fashion trends, generating unnecessary excitement and starting a new craze. Now, people like to hook Labubus to their designer bags, jeans, or as accessories to "elevate" their outfits. Personally, this is where I feel a little weird about the Labubu obsession. While it may be fun to tap into a youthful trend and look for these rare collectibles, it's also meant to be just that. Labubus are meant for fun and excitement, not as much for high-end use. In my opinion, these trends portray Labubus as something unique and unattainable to regular people.

Another recognizable video on social media is a lady who often shows herself off as the only owner of the "24-carat gold" Labubu. Honestly, influencers like her who show off their Labubus constantly seem a little bit too obsessed. That's where I draw the line. As a viewer, these videos are ironically hilarious, but they are also a bit awkward to watch. When I see crazed collectors, I genuinely feel confused and worried because their obsession with collecting these

toys has gotten a little out of hand. With all of the chaos surrounding Labubus, the price has also been affected. Now, Labubus sell for around \$20-\$40, but rare ones can be sold for hundreds. I can't justify spending that much on multiple versions of the same keychain plush toy brand. This brand has gone one step further, as the creation of knock-off plushies has also been skyrocketing. One other brand I've heard of is the Lafufus, which are mock toys of real Labubus. Truthfully, it seems insane that companies have been able to make such large profits off both real and fake Labubus. I can definitely see how this idea of overconsumption and consumerism is convincing influencers to buy them to build their collections.

Though the Labubu can be a cute and fun trend, their recent rise to high fashion and extreme popularity has gone slightly overboard. I always felt that Labubus were just a regular, passing trend for everyday people, but as their prices rise and they stay in style for longer, I don't know what is going to happen to them. All I can say is: I probably won't be buying a Labubu anytime soon.



PHOTO: FIGPALACE.COM

Let's Settle This: Are Flip-Flops Acceptable to Wear to School?

Maria McGuill
Opinions Editor

The question, "Are flip-flops ok to wear at school?," brings controversy to Freeman's halls each year, especially as the weather gets warmer. Students are conflicted with the decision to wear flip-flops and be comfortable, or face breaking the societal norm of "keeping the dogs away."

Flip-flops bring ease and comfort to a long day at school. "Honestly, when the weather gets warmer, [I] like to occasionally wear flip-flops. [I] feel like it makes me more relaxed at school," said senior Imogene McBrayer. "[It] makes school feel more like summer and less like school." They remind students of summer and are practical when temperatures increase, but at what cost? Is the so-called "embarrassment" that comes with wearing

flip-flops at school really that profound? Some students say they couldn't care less, and that it's just another shoe, but some say that flip-flops are too taboo to wear.

In my freshman year of high school, the sight of someone wearing flip-flops was rare. Even my brother, a senior at the time, did not partake in such an activity. He believed that it was strange to wear such a "revealing" shoe to school with his peers. I followed his lead with this mentality up until the end of my junior year, when I wore them to school for the first time. In my opinion, wearing them was anticlimactic. Maybe it's because more people had started wearing them, or maybe it was simply because I didn't care.

Rainbows are one of Freeman's most popular flip-flop brands that students wear. A student at Freeman shares her love for her Rainbows because of the casual, but cute aspect they bring to her outfits. "They are stylish. The

brown ones go with quite literally anything, and mine have the little braided straps on them, so that adds extra fun and pizzazz," said senior Millie McCabe. She also explains the ease they bring to a rushed morning before school. "[I] can go from casual to stylish in a matter of milliseconds," said Millie. "[I] don't have to rush back upstairs because [I] forgot socks, [I] can just put them on and call it a day."

Many students also commented on certain "regulations" regarding flip flops. Some believe that only upperclassmen should have the privilege. "[It] depends on what grade you're in, seniors should be allowed to wear them and freshmen shouldn't," said senior Kokeb Miller. Others also think that it depends on the time of year when these shoes should be brought out of the closet. "[I] think [it's] more of an end-of-the-year thing when everything becomes more relaxed," said Kokeb.

Flip-flops are also a controversial topic related to the dress code. Before the early 2000s, there was a county-wide ban on them. Not only students, but employees from different schools and districts began to re-evaluate the idea of wearing flip-flops to school.

In 2005, the Northwestern University lacrosse team wore flip-flops to meet the president. A question arose: "Do flip-flops illustrate



PHOTO: NBC NEWS

Northwestern team in flip-flops at the White House.

someone's age by how casual they may come across to older generations?" While many people were conflicted about the athletes' decision to wear flip-flops to meet the president, some wanted to focus on the fact that these women had just won the National Championship. In my opinion, I could never imagine going to the White House, first of all, but wearing flip-flops there as well. Though I do enjoy a fresh new pair of Rainbows, I'll pass. The casual, but cute and simple idea surrounding these shoes has increasingly become more popular. People have recognized that they are just another pair of shoes. Heads don't turn when people wear tennis shoes around; why should they for flip-flops?

The stigma around flip-flops at school should be stopped. While I agree that they are an end-of-the-year shoe to gear up for summer, I think everyone should be able to wear them without shame. "Forget the talk of seniority issues; flip-flops should not be a concern."

It's crazy how trends and fashion change over just a few years. Just three years ago, during my freshman year, it would have been surprising to see students walking around in flip-flops. Today, it's uncommon to turn a corner of Freeman's hallways and not see a pair of flip-flops. It will be interesting to see if wearing these shoes becomes more popular down the road, or if it returns to being frowned upon.



PHOTO: TECHNOLOGYINFO.COM

"TELL ME ABOUT IT"

HOW DO I PICK THE RIGHT HOCO DRESS FOR ME?

When picking the right dress for you, I feel like there are many factors that go into it and it gets confusing; so, I always start with a color. Usually, dress sites will have an option to filter out dress options by color, so you can easily choose which one you feel like wearing this year. Even if you want a pattern, the dresses with multiple colors will still show up if you put down one color. I recommend scrolling through your options on more popular websites first like "Hello Molly," "Lucy in The Sky," or "Beginning Boutique." After checking your options, make sure you pick a dress style that feels comfortable for you. There are endless different types of dresses, so you can really take this opportunity to express your style and what you like. For example, something that I've seen a lot this year are sparkly ruched bodycon dresses. I would also make sure to order early if you are buying online! Many stores take a week or more to ship out and homecoming dresses sell fast; make sure that you order it early so you can decide on another dress if you end up not liking it. Trying it on before is as important as finding one, so it's important that you feel confident in your choice. Once you get your dress, don't forget your other accessories including shoes and jewelry. I recommend if you have a more bright, patterned dress to use more dainty jewelry and more vivid jewelry for a more staple dress. Last but not least; have fun with the process! We don't get to dress up often for dances, so make the best of it and don't overthink it!

HOW DO I STOP PROCRASTINATING?

The hardest part of being back in school is getting used to the workload again! My best tip is to write a to-do list and start small. Once you do a tiny assignment, you will start to feel more motivated to do the rest of your work. I know it can be difficult to get home from school especially after extracurricular activities and do more work, but once you get into the momentum, you'll feel encouraged to keep going!



GRAPHIC: NIKKI RAJAN

RVA Duck Race Returns to Brown’s Island

Saanvi Gourishetty
Head of News

Richmond’s riverfront was alive with music, food, and thousands of rubber ducks as the RVA Duck Race & Festival of Inclusion returned to Brown’s Island on Saturday, September 6, 2025, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. The event combined the spectacle of thousands of ducks floating down the James River with a day-long festival designed to be welcoming to everyone in the community. At the center of the event was the duck race itself. Participants could “adopt” rubber ducks in advance, each numbered to correspond to an entry. On race day, the ducks were released into the James River at once, drifting downstream toward a finish line. The first duck to cross earned its adopter the grand prize of \$10,000. According to organizers, more than 19,000 ducks were adopted for this year’s race. Additional prizes were available for other top-finishing ducks, many donated by local businesses.

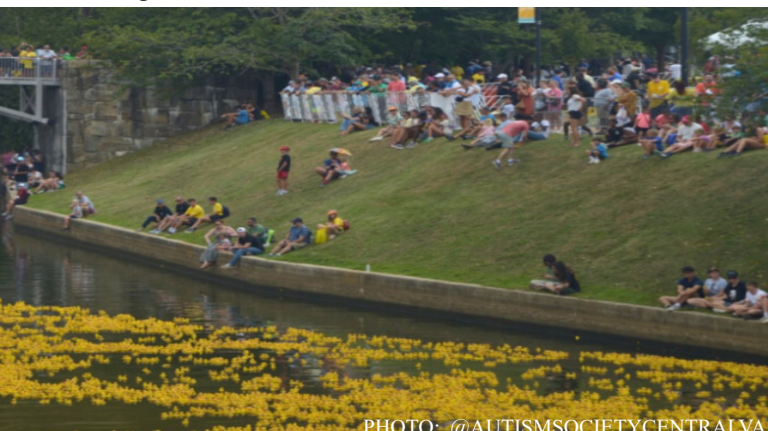
While the cash prize drew plenty of attention, the event was also about community support. Hosted by the Autism Society of Central Virginia (ASCV), proceeds from duck adoptions benefited local programs and services for individuals with autism and their families. The festival was structured to be sensory-friendly, with zones tailored to different levels of stimulation, ensuring accessibility for attendees with autism and developmental disabilities while remaining open and inviting for all ages. Beyond the race, Brown’s Island transformed into a festival space with live entertainment and activities. A lineup of local and regional performers, including Indira & Guppy Jo, Susan Greenbaum, Desirée Roots, and Brooks Billings, took the stage. Additional attractions included Jonathan the Juggler, characters like Nutzy and Nutasha, visits from princesses Elsa, Moana, and Tinkerbell, and appearances by the Star Wars 501st Legion. Music and performances ran throughout the afternoon,



The ducks being released.

giving families plenty to enjoy before and after the main event. Food was another major draw for the community. Trucks that appeared included Momma’s BBQ, Goatocado, Boka Tako, JiJi Frozen Custard, Happy Mobile Pizza Kitchen, Kona Ice, and The Local Cup. Beverages were provided through Center of the Universe Brewing and Richmond Water. To make the festival engaging for all visitors, the grounds were divided into themed zones. The Connection Zone highlighted inclusive community programs, while the Creation Zone featured art and crafts. The Exploration Zone offered interactive exhibits, and the Expression Zone provided opportunities for performance and improv. For those who wanted to be active, the Movement Zone offered physical play, while the Quiet Zone was available as a calm retreat for anyone needing a sensory break. A new feature this year was Pop-Up Rafting, hosted by RVA Paddlesports. For \$15 per person, participants could take a short guided rafting trip through a stretch of the Lower James, including the Fishladders and Pipeline rapids. As spots for this new addition were limited, organizers

recommended preregistration. Mascots and souvenirs also added to the atmosphere. This year introduced Waddles, the festival’s new duck mascot, who appeared on Brown’s Island for photo opportunities with attendees. Visitors could stop by Duck Central, the festival’s main information booth, to pick up maps, stamps, or merchandise. Families who collected stamps at 10 different booths qualified for a prize drawing. The event was made possible through support from numerous sponsors. The CoStar Group served as the presenting sponsor, while FasMart provided the \$10,000 grand prize sponsorship. Companies like Genworth, NewMarket, Northstar, and Sentara Therapy Centers also contributed as part of the “Lucky Duck” sponsorship group. Volunteers played a crucial role as well. From helping set up and take down the event to assisting with crowd guidance and managing the duck race finish line, community members signed up for shifts to keep the festival running smoothly. For Richmond, the RVA Duck Race was both a quirky tradition and a charitable cause. The sight of thousands of ducks floating down the James River has become one of the city’s signature late-summer spectacles, while the festival around it has grown into a celebration of inclusion, music, food, and community spirit. Whether families came for the entertainment, the food, or the chance at a \$10,000 prize, organizers said the event was designed to have something for everyone. As the James River filled with ducks on September 6, Brown’s Island served as the stage for one of Richmond’s unique and inclusive traditions.



People watching the duck race.

Can this Mav ‘Man’ the Student Section?

Ingrid Jones
Staff Writer

Freeman senior, Vann Wyatt, has been selected as the 2025-26 Mav Man, a student who leads the student section at football and basketball games. The role includes writing cheers on a whiteboard and starting chants for the students. To be selected as the Mav-Man, the student must show a lot of school spirit, be friendly, and demonstrate leadership. Senior SCA representative, Addie Morton, said, “[I] think a good Mav-Man is someone well-known and friends with a lot of people at school.” Colin Issak, a junior on the football team, said, “It takes a lot of school spirit to want to do that.” The role of Mav-Man brings energy to both the student body and the players on the field. “When we’re down, we need that extra bit of energy, and the student section can definitely help bring our morale up,” said Colin Issak. There are eleven players on a football field, but the twelfth one is in the stands. The Mav-Man is also someone who can help students become more spirited about their school and build a stronger community. “Sometimes school spirit can be an issue, but having someone who loves their school helps the school to have a strong community,” said Addie. “We’re lucky to have someone like Vann.” Being the Mav-Man isn’t taken lightly and is a role that is held with high esteem. “[It’s] an immense honor, [I’m] so proud,” said Vann. Every new Mav-Man is chosen by the one from the previous year, who, in this case, is Aidan Cassidy. For Vann, this role came as a surprise, “[I] was very surprised when Aiden texted me,

I was like, ‘no way!’,” he said. To get ready for a game, Vann brings Home Depot buckets, drumsticks, and the whiteboard. The whiteboard is used for chants, cheers, and even games. For example, when a touchdown is scored, the player’s name is written on the whiteboard, prompting the student section to chant it three times. One game that is played is Hangman. Vann and some friends choose a word, and the student section yells out letters to try to guess the mystery phrase. Another way the whiteboard is used is during halftime, when the band plays. The Mav-Man writes “respect the band” to remind the student section to sit quietly and listen to the band’s music. The Home Depot buckets and drumsticks are used to get loud with the music. The Mav-Man also works closely with the cheerleading captains to coordinate things like decorations, themes, and supplies. “All of the small details that no one really sees, behind the scenes, are the cheer captains and the Mav-Man collaborating,” said Emma Crone, a former Freeman cheer captain. One of the reasons Vann was chosen as the Mav-Man is because of

his love for Freeman sports and encouraging attitude towards others. “[He’s] always been big about our football team [and] sports teams...and he’s always very encouraging,” said Addie Morton. Vann shows a lot of passion for the school and sports teams, which are important traits for a Mav-Man to possess. “To have someone like that, to have that energy and that passion for our sports teams, [we’re] very grateful,” Addie said. Part of the role also includes encouraging students to attend games. “[It’s nice to] have someone that will come out, support our teams, and encourage other people to come to the games,” said Addie Morton. This makes games more fun because of the amount of school spirit it garners. “Because more people are there, there is more spirit there, and the games will be more fun,” said Addie Morton. Having a Mav-Man has been a Freeman tradition for many years and plays a role in school spirit and the community aspect of sports games. As Vann takes on the position, students will be watching to see how he carries on the legacy.



Vann Wyatt as the Mav Man at a football game.

Hobby to Hustle

Ellie Brooks
Staff Writer

Kaija Lee, or as she’s known to her clients on Instagram, @kajaklaws, runs a small nail business at her house. She first started doing her own nails because going to the salon was “too expensive,” she said, although she admired the aesthetic. “[I’ve] always liked the look of long nails, so I [decided] to learn how to do them myself,” Kaija said. A junior at Freeman, Kaija has been operating her own nail business for almost a year. It started in the fall of 2024 when she and her friend, Carrie Nelson, were talking about homecoming nails. When Kaija told Carrie she did her own nails, Carrie asked her to do hers, “She did my nails a couple times and I was like, ‘these are pretty good,’” she said. Kaija had never done anyone’s nails before, but she did Carrie’s and offered to pay. Afterwards, Carrie convinced a couple of their friends to have their nails done by Kaija. “[I realized I] could start a business from it instead of just friends,” she said. From there, she expanded to people “outside of [her] friend group and other schools” and started an Instagram account. A big difference between Kaija and a neighborhood nail salon is the pricing. Typically, it costs around \$45 to get your nails done by Kaija. “[It’s] a really good price,” Carrie said. “Mine stayed on for months.” Kaija said that “private nail techs are around \$100 to \$120.” Comparatively, she runs a pretty good bargain. Freshman Lauren Miller, who is a frequent flyer at the nail salon, said that she pays “\$60 to \$70 most of the time.” The most popular method of payment is cash. “Not a lot of people have Zelle, [which is what I use], and I don’t have Venmo, [which is what most people use], so [they’ll] pay in cash,” said Kaija. She is very organized with her income, using a “little booklet [to] keep track [of everything].” During an appointment with Kaija, she will remove previous polish, clean, and trim cuticles. “[Kaija] is very gentle,” Carrie said. “Sometimes, the people at the salon are kind of rough with my nails.” Kaija uses Gel X nail extensions that are cured under a UV lamp, so after preparation and application, she paints the nail and adds designs. Her favorite nail art to do is flowers with moldable gel, “[They] look really impressive, but they’re actually pretty easy,” she said. Carrie’s favorite nails by Kaija were a Christmas set she did last year. “[They were] red French tips, with a white bow in the middle. I thought they were really cute,” said Carrie. When Lauren goes to the nail salon, she usually gets a variation of the same thing. “I normally get full acrylics with either white French tips or just fully pink,” she said.

Both Lauren and Carrie agree that sometimes it can be hard to speak up at the nail salon. “[It’s] hard to actually say, ‘I want this shape, [or] maybe a little bit shorter.’ I feel like [they’re] judging me,” said Lauren. Carrie finds that Kaija is genuinely concerned about whether or not you like the finished product. “[She’s] completely taken the nail off and redone it if [I’ve] asked her,” Carrie said, “It just seems more personal than a nail salon.” Kaija is very accommodating and wants what’s best for her clients. Carrie said that she would “send [Kaija] inspiration, but then sometimes [she’d] change her mind.” In person, “[Kaija would] be like, ‘I think we should do this [instead].’” Kaija had a similar remark, she said, “[Clients] will ask to change a few things, and I [will say], ‘Yes, I can do that. No, I can’t do that.’”

Kaija’s next installation for her business is a collection of inspirational photos for her clients. “[I’m] working on a nail portfolio, so I can offer designs to them, but usually it’s from their inspiration,” she said. To book an appointment with Kaija, you can DM her on Instagram (@kajaklaws), or her friends can give out her number to prospective clients. “We just set a date and time, and then I usually ask for their inspiration pictures so I can gauge how long it takes,” Kaija said. Arguably, one of the most crucial parts of running a successful business as a student is keeping a healthy balance between school and work. As juniors, Kaija and her friends are juggling homework and assignments. Saturday and Sunday are typically when Kaija tries to get on top of her assignments and studying. “I try to get all of my work done for the entire week on the weekend. So [I’m] free during the week and I have [extra] time on the weekends too,” she said. Kaija is aware that she is a student first and a businesswoman second, “She doesn’t choose nails over homework so she balances [her life] pretty well,” Carrie said. As small businesses are usually local and don’t have as big a reach as large corporations, some people worry about their quality and reliability, needing to find confidence in peer reviews of the product, service, etc. “[I] would need to see some positive reviews,” said Lauren, when asked about what some deciding factors would be for her to choose to switch to a small business.

Like many others, Carrie regards supporting student-run and local small businesses, “[It’s] nice to see someone our age who’s really passionate about something,” she said, “If you support it when it’s [smaller], it could grow into something big.” Kaija’s biggest piece of advice for students looking to start their own businesses is to see how it affects your peers, “Test on your friends, and if they enjoy it, then they will definitely spread the word,” said Kaija.

NAIL PRICE BREAKDOWN	
NAIL ART	
TEIR 1 ART/CHARMS	+\$3
TEIR 2 ART/CHARMS	+\$5
TEIR 3 ART/CHARMS	+\$7
GELX TIPS	
Long/medium	\$35
SHORT	\$30
PRESET STYLES	
FRENCH TIP	\$5 + LENGTH
SINGLE COLOR	\$1 + LENGTH
INSTAGRAM ART DESIGNS	
DESIGNS	RANGE
PRESS ONS	
Long/medium	\$20
SHORT	\$18
OTHER SERVICES	
PLAIN GEL (NO TIPS)	\$25-\$35
REMOVAL	\$8



PHOTO: @KAJAKLAWS

Kaija’s pricing breakdown and nail sets.

Senior Sunrise

Nina Henley
Online Editor-in-Chief
Centerspread Editor

The beginning of the 2025-2026 school year has arrived, and as the 2026 class is getting excited to graduate, there is still a long school year ahead of them. While having to deal with senioritis, suffering through college applications, and planning for their futures after high school, the last year of high school can become very overwhelming. In order for senior year to be a little more fun than the prior years, certain special events have become traditions at Freeman. One of these events being Senior Sunrise, which this year happened the Friday before the school year began. The breakfast included donuts, muffins, bagels, fruit, and orange juice. It was gone in minutes after we got our food we waited and watched the sunrise. The entire football

field was covered with students on blankets, chairs, tents, and towels while others were participating in games like cornhole, spikeball, and cards. The field had a great view of the sky and overall, the event was a huge hit for the Freeman community. The second the sun was high in the sky, the next part of the morning began. Another senior-specific tradition that Freeman participates in is after the actual sunrise. Everyone goes to the parking lot and starts a collage of car-decorating. Lots of colorful paint, glitter, and writing things like "Senior 2026" and "Bow down to your elders". Afterwards, some people sat on top of their cars and took pictures with their newly decorated car and friends. The whole experience was special for everyone and was a time that was dedicated to beginning to the end for seniors.



PHOTO CREDIT: NINA HENLEY



PHOTO CREDIT: NINA HENLEY



PHOTO CREDIT: NINA HENLEY



PHOTO CREDIT: NINA HENLEY

Lunch Listeners!

Nina Henley
Online Editor-in-Chief
Centerspread Editor

Lunch time, also known as the time where students are supposed to enjoy their food and are encouraged to socialize and talk to each other. The lunch room at Douglas Freeman High School is notorious for being loud, crowded, and full of lots of conversations. With the whole student community that has a range of topics, opinions, and observations, the lunch room is where all of these thoughts, emotions, and chatter is discussed. The beginning of the school year has a lot going on and the students at Freeman High School have multiple exciting topics to talk about during the Fall season. "Homecoming [and] football games right now, but it can change. During Winter, [we talk about] Christmas, and stuff like that. It definitely depends on the time of the year," Senior Alexa

Orengo said. Other students talk about more student-specific things during lunch. "[We talk about] other people's lives, our own lives, fun activities, school assignments," said Sahasra Khan. Despite the timely activities and current events being the hot topic for many tables during lunch times, others participate in different pastimes. "[During lunch time] We use the time to catch up on social media. So we're on our phones a lot more than we were last year, because this is our only time to be on it," Senior Cleo Massey said. While some students agree that lunch time is a time when lots of people are on their phones, others disagree. "No one [is on their phone]. Everyone's in the environment. We like to live in nature and to have conversations. We like to live in the moment during lunch," 10th

grader, Caitlyn Call, said. Additionally, Caitlyn thinks that the phone ban has had more positive effects on lunch time: "I think [not having phones during school day] creates less dependency on your phone and it helps you stay more focused," Caitlyn said. Others agree with Caitlyn about phones not being a big focus during lunch. "Looking around the lunchroom right now, I don't think a lot of people are on their phones," Junior Sahasra Khan said. Sahasra does see the importance of being able to have their phones during lunch. "I think people enjoy being able to check on things like text people during lunch and I think it's a valuable time, especially if you need to get in contact with your parents," Junior Sahasra Khan said. With the only times that phones are allowed

has been limited to lunch time, talk about how long Freeman's lunch is and should be has become a controversial topic. "Lunch should definitely be longer. 25 minutes is not enough to eat, converse, check your phone, have a brain break, relax. I think it should have been at least 30, to 35 [minutes]," said Cleo Massey. Some students have an idea of what they think lunch should be. "I think we should mix Freeman focus and lunch. I think that would benefit everyone a lot more. You can take however much time you need to eat and then the rest of the time you can talk to teachers and stuff," Sahasra said. With the new phone rule, talks about lunch length, and a lot going on around Freeman High School, the lunch room is never quiet and is always filled with

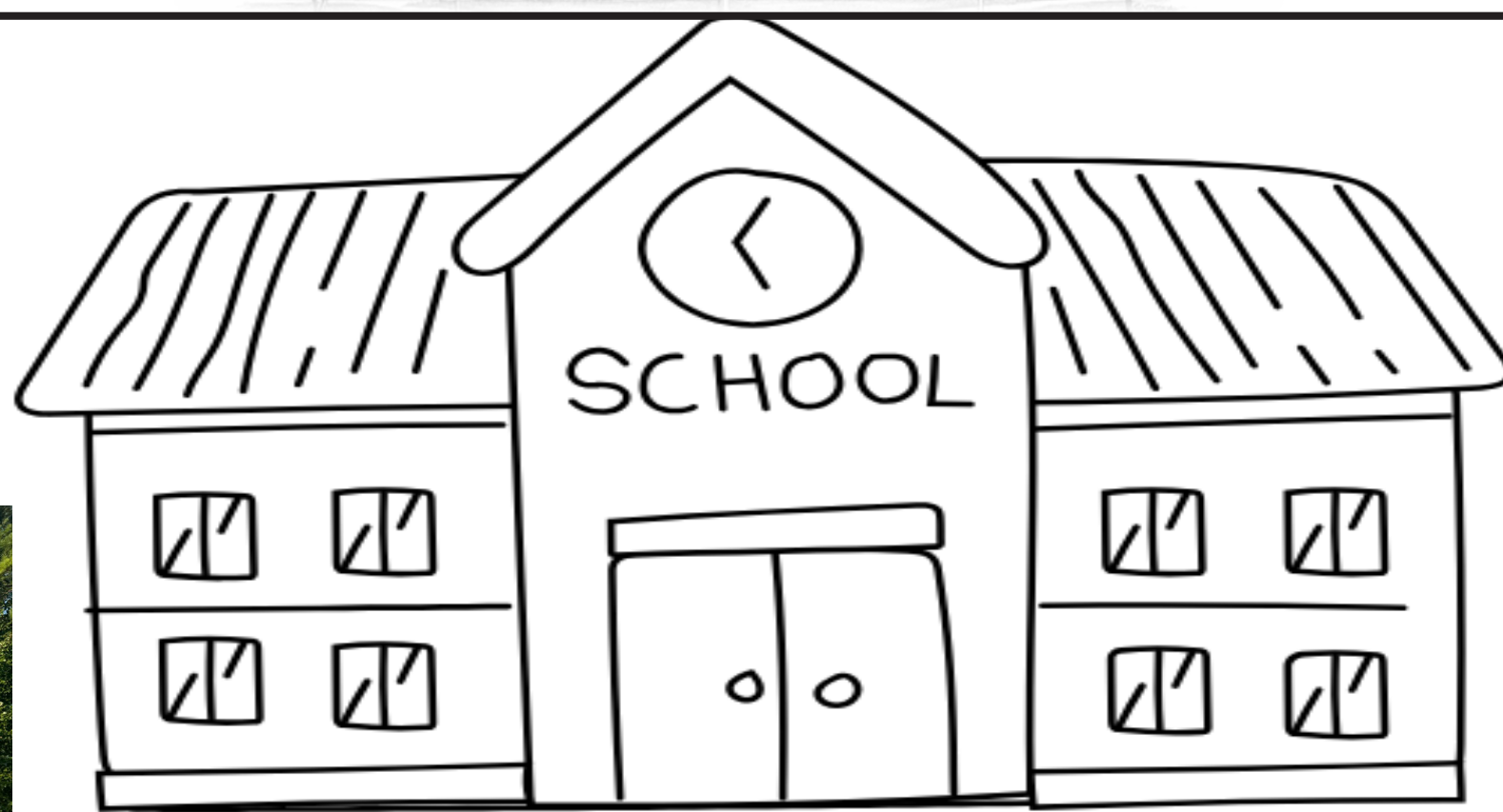


PHOTO CREDIT: NINA HENLEY

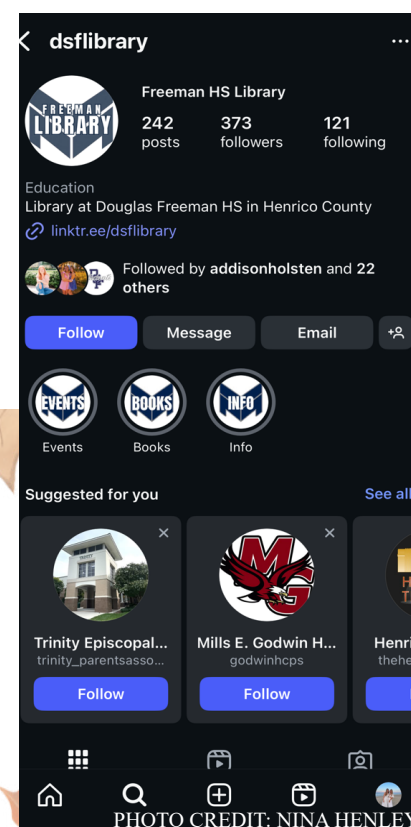


PHOTO CREDIT: NINA HENLEY

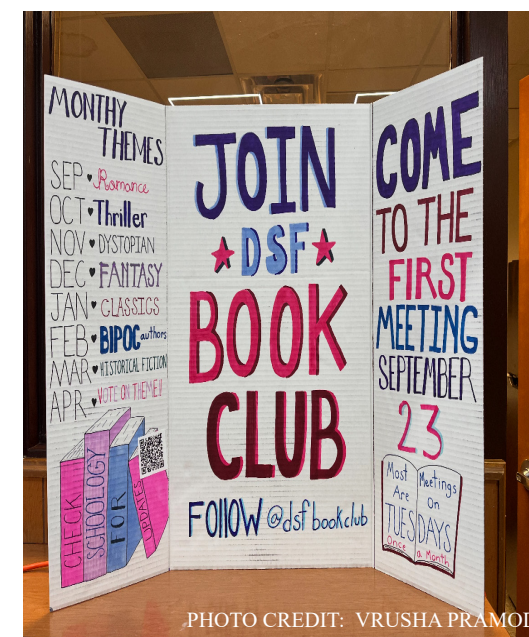


PHOTO CREDIT: VRUSHA PRAMOD



PHOTO CREDIT: DSF LIBRARY

Check It Out! Freeman's Library

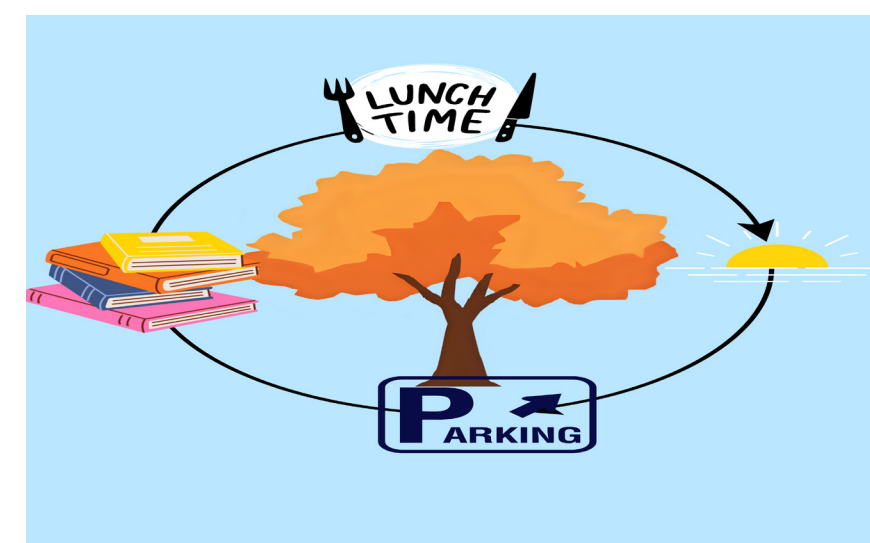
Vrusha Pramod
Online Editor-in-Chief
Centerspread Editor

Freeman's library is not only a place where MAVS can check out books, but is also a multifaceted resource center, study space, and club meetup location for many students. Kathleen Northrop, one of the librarians here at Freeman, makes sure to work with her fellow librarians to make the library as useful a tool as it could possibly be. "I'm usually here at 7:45 so I can have the library up and ready for students who have early bird classes, just in case they need to run in and print or something," she said. The library remains open from 7:45 AM up until the final bell at 3:55, with lunch periods and mornings being the busiest. The library's resources extend far beyond just rows of books, however. "We have a digital e-book/audiobook library and online research databases. We also make sure to always have [most] school supplies available for students. Pens, pencils, markers, colored pencils, construction paper, printer paper. Whatever you need for projects!" she said. MAVS also have the opportunity to assist the library as library aides! From just simple tasks like assisting other students with printing or

locating books, students can earn volunteer hours. The library also collaborates with out-of-school programs that help students add to their service hours as well. "The library funds [programs] like Read Across America, where high school students organize games, read aloud, and mentor the younger kids. We offer volunteer hours for really any type of involvement," she said. In terms of activities that the Library hosts, each few months presents a different theme. "We try to do a different theme every month based on holidays or like the monthly themes that are set by the United States," she said. From September 15 to October 15, the Library plans to recognize Hispanic Heritage Month by providing students with Latino-American written books displays, school-wide scavenger hunts, and information-based bulletin boards. To find updates about these upcoming events, students can look at posters hung up by the library, the library's Schoology page, as well as on Freeman's social media accounts. The various rooms in the library also serve many different purposes. For example, the largest room located behind

the check-out desk is where the Freeman faculty can laminate, shred, and store papers. Another room, which serves multiple purposes, is the reference room, which is located on the opposite side of the room. This room, which houses all of Freeman's "old school" reference books, such as encyclopedias, atlases, and dictionaries, is also a room that both students and teachers can book. Located upstairs is the library balcony, which stores all of Freeman's free pictures and children's books. "Henrico County Public Schools has an agreement with Goodwill of Virginia, where the librarians can go to the Goodwills before the books are sent out to put them on shelves. They're in these huge boxes [in] warehouses, and we can go pick [up] whatever we want, basically to use for free!" said Ms. Northrop. This way, students are able to obtain books, free of cost, rather than having to let them gather dust on some shelf.

Whether it's last-minute printouts, earning volunteer hours, or simply just joining in during book discussions hosted by Freeman's Book Club, our library definitely offers something for everyone.



Welcoming New Faces to Freeman

Maryam Vohra
Editor-in-Chief

A new school year at Freeman means new classes, new friends, and new teachers. Every year, the Freeman family welcomes new staff members who will be joining the Freeman community. For the 25-26 school year, DSF is welcoming Nick Haltom, an economics teacher; Chelsea Amanecer, a school counselor; and Ms. Salerno, a chemistry teacher.

Prior to starting his job at Freeman, Mr. Haltom worked at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond. One of his jobs included leading the economic education group, where he worked with teachers and students to teach economics and personal finance. “Getting to work alongside people who believe in the public service mission of the [Federal Reserve] every day was awesome,” said Mr. Haltom.

Mr. Haltom attended North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina, and started his college career studying engineering, but switched his major to economics once he fell in love with it. He found enjoyment in helping other people as he continued to be a supplemental instructor for students in physics. “[I] got to enjoy the process of helping other people in their learning,” said Mr. Haltom. “[It] has always been a part of something I really enjoy doing.”

At Freeman, Mr. Haltom teaches three periods of AP Macroeconomics, and two periods of

Economics and Personal Finance. Most of his AP Macroeconomics classes contain seniors and juniors, while his Personal Finance classes contain mostly sophomores. “[I] don’t have a preference. [It’s] nice to teach people at different stages of [their] life, experience, and decision-making processes,” he said.

Mr. Haltom’s favorite part of teaching economics at Freeman thus far has been the culture at the school. “[I love] being around so many people that are dedicated to building leaders; [they’re] going to make such a difference in our future,” said Mr. Haltom. During his AP Macroeconomics class, he took his students through a visioning exercise, finding “inspiration through how [they] want to make [their] communities better.”

Mr. Haltom is looking forward to learning from other teachers and seeing his students succeed. “[I’m] excited to learn from [other teachers] that are good at their craft,” he said. “[I] love when I see students grow in ways [they want to], and being part of their transition to adulthood is [exciting].”

Chelsea Amanecer, a new addition to the school counseling department, is the new Students with Limited or Formal Education (SLIFE) counselor. Mrs. Amanecer works at both Douglas Freeman High School and Hermitage High School, alternating her days between the two schools.

A school counselor’s job changes seasonally, and currently, Mrs. Amanecer primarily handles scheduling changes and supports

students who are struggling in their classes. She recently started going into a class called Success, which is a class of all Level One English language learners who need extra support, either because they had gaps in their education before coming to the US, or for another reason. “[We] talk about a lot of things, but it is a basic introduction to [United States] education, [we get into] what the high school graduation requirements are, what a credit is, and what the habits of a successful student are,” she said.

After growing up in Washington State, and attending Seattle Pacific University and the University of Washington, Mrs. Amanecer worked in higher education at Whitworth University. Once she moved to Virginia, she worked as a counselor at Dumbarton Elementary School for two years. After hearing good opinions of Freeman’s environment, Mrs. Amanecer is working in the high school setting for the first time. “[Everyone said] [Freeman is] the best place to work. [It has] definitely lived up to it,” she said. “The Freeman staff and faculty are really good, so [we’re] able to provide a good education, good programs, and have a well-oiled machine. [It is] very impressive.”

Mrs. Amanecer’s favorite part of being a school counselor is sharing information with her students that will help them in the future. “[It] feels great to be able to provide a student with information or insight that gives them a big ‘aha’ moment and makes a differ-

ence,” she said. “Those are the moments that make the job worth it.”

Finally, Freeman’s science department is welcoming a new chemistry teacher, Ariel Salerno. She was raised in Suffolk, Virginia, and attended Randolph-Macon College on a field hockey scholarship, majoring in chemistry with a minor in secondary education. Before teaching at Freeman, Ms. Salerno taught chemistry at Chesterfield High School. Initially, Ms. Salerno did not want to become a teacher, but after working as a teaching aide for a French class in her senior year of high school, she fell in love with it. “[I] really liked chemistry, [but] I had my heart all set to be a chemist, and I was not going to do teaching at all,” she said. “Begrudgingly, after [helping students learn French], I [wanted] to teach.”

Since Ms. Salerno teaches both AP and Honors Chemistry, she finds her biggest challenge to be adjusting to the new county procedure and balancing her two classes. “[I have] two separate



Mr. Haltom

preps, [and] I’m trying out something new, which is [having] a daily calendar/agendas,” she said. She sees herself teaching long-term at Freeman, and having the extra preparation will help her in the future. “It is a lot of work up front, but it [will] make life so much easier [later],” she said.

Ms. Salerno finds that the students are her favorite part of the job, and they keep her motivated. “The students are what make it for sure. There is such a wonderful culture [at Freeman], and the students want to do well, they want to learn,” she said.

As we look into the remainder of the school year, Ms. Salerno is excited to see how her children thrive and what they learn. Beyond chemistry, Ms. Salerno strives to teach important life skills, not necessarily just chemistry. “[I want them to learn] those life skills, deadlines, how to be a good student, how to be [a] good worker in whatever workplace they [end up at],” she said. “That’s what I hope they get out of my class, more than anything.”



Mrs. Amanecer

“Your Next Yoga Partner Might Have Four Legs!”

Rowan Kelley
Staff Writer

Yoga, what some would call the basis of serenity... that is, until a tiny goat climbs onto your back and mini furballs are caught trotting between your legs. Nowadays, this occurrence is making its rounds around Freeman, as Richmond is being overtaken by puppy and goat yoga sessions. Locals from all across RVA are lining up to get a chance to see these darling little animals be the distraction they needed to survive a full-out pilates course.

While The Loft will allow you to get Instagram-worthy photos, do not neglect the aesthetics of Pactamere Farm! If the more hard-working yoga course the puppies offer isn’t up your alley, you’re guaranteed a relaxed session with

these goats. “This playful and peaceful class combines beginner-friendly yoga with the joy of spending time with our friendly goats,” said Pactamere Farm. With 45 minutes of an all-flow yoga course, and the other 15 minutes allowing for full cuddle time with these affectionate creatures. The whole experience ranges from \$35 to \$40, with the goats’ ages differing across the board. The course includes an all-level yoga flow, with the goats being able to wander around the whole time. But it’s not just yoga available at Pactamere Farm. There are options such as pumpkin carving, painting, wreath making, candle making, felting, and even more when it comes to the seasonal changes.

All of these factors seem to make Freeman students elated when returning from attending

a class. Some students mention how they discovered puppy yoga specifically through social media apps such as TikTok and Instagram. Junior student Elianna Cuce went to The Loft with her friend for the class. “The puppies were asleep most of the time we did the yoga, but there was one that was active and enthusiastic,” she said. The puppies were quite happy with their downtime in a corner of the room and were only really awake for the cuddle session. Elianna, having past yoga experience, said, “They were just kind of a distraction,” when comparing it to normal yoga.

But their presence did help reinforce the idea of animals being a positive mental influence. “[I] felt really good. We did a 10-minute meditation [at the end]. That was really nice, and then we played with the puppies,” said Elianna. Not only do you get a wind-down period, but the class included some rigor; it was not laid-back the entire time. “The yoga class wasn’t super easy; we did some strength stuff that was a nice change,” she said. The puppy that was full of energy earlier ended up curled on her friend’s lap, closing their yoga experience on a lovely note.

Sophomore Kaitlyn Harris said that her time at Puppy Yoga RVA was a wonderful experience. “[They] calmed me down and [I] was able to breathe through

my yoga,” she said. With Kaitlyn being a full-time dancer, she is no stranger to the feats of exercise, but the dogs made this yoga course enjoyable, slightly changing her perspective on fitness. “Normally, you wouldn’t think that puppy with yoga would help you focus, but if you really put your mind to it, you can.” She recounts how the dogs in her class were more alert and enjoyed weaving through people’s legs. While she did feel the building was far out, the aesthetics inside were nowhere close to matching those of the exterior. “[I] thought that the building itself was in the middle of [nowhere], but the inside was very nice and clean,” she said.

Another sophomore, Lily Adair, attended a goat yoga class with her older brother, who had brought the course to Lily’s attention. Yoga itself is something that Lily had not been well-acquainted with, but she said, “The goats weren’t very good at yoga.” These critters had more freedom to move about during the class, giving people the opportunity to pet and cuddle with them even while stretching was occurring. “We just did yoga and pet the goats, and the goats didn’t really jump on you, but if they did, they were full-sized goats, and it was kind of painful.” Even with that fact being there, Lily still believed that the animals helped with the

overall situation, “Petting the goats was the [only fun part].”

Lily would recommend it to anyone and everyone, but “if you’re in it for the actual yoga, then it’s not for you,” she said. “If you really just want a fun experience and you like goats, then it’s your thing.” Compared to puppy yoga, there wasn’t as much pressure to participate in the class; you could just sit there and hang out with the cute animals, which is exactly what she did.

A little tip she gave to people going for their first time is to get there early, so that you can be near the gate where the goats are held. Lily did describe the farm environment as a little dirty, but it was “part of the vibes.” At the end of the day, it seems Freeman students needed these yoga classes as a way to decompress from stress. All of them commented on feeling mentally better after the course and didn’t have anything negative to say about the overall experience. “[I] felt happy after the puppies were there,” Elianna said. If you are someone who does not like exercise but loves the idea of getting to cuddle with a few furry friends, then this might be the thing for you. You can find out more information about the delightful yoga courses on either of these businesses’ websites, and sign up to have your next yoga class with a four-legged comrade!



Halloween Goat Yoga and Costume Contest

New “Purrfect Bean” Cat Cafe Takes Over

Sophia Bove
Staff Writer

Nestled in a small street corner in the Fan, Richmond’s brand new “Purrfect Bean” Cat Cafe is open for business and ready for new customers. “The cafe has many perks,” said the Coffee Manager of the business, Camille Proctor. “We take great pride in [our] variety of specialty drinks, including matcha, chai, and hojicha, sourced from a local grocer called Afterglow,” she said. “The unique combination of a coffee shop and a cat lounge has been well-received by the community.” She noted how many people understand and support the cafe’s mission to rescue cats and find them a stable home.

Amongst the many minds working together to create the Cafe, the owner behind the organization is Michelle Langham. The idea of starting the Cafe came from Langham, who has “always had a passion for helping animals,” said Claire Sylvain, the Cat Manager. She has previous job experience with business management, which assisted with getting the business started. Langham has rescued a wide variety of animals in the past few years, including donkeys, chickens, dogs, and cats. The cafe itself has already facilitated 33 adoptions in a short period of time, highlighting the commu-

nity’s support for animal rescue.

New customers have often visited and been surprised that the cafe has real cats to play with. “It’s been nice to see people come in just because they thought we were a coffee shop with a cat theme. We see people then make reservations, grab their Russian blue matcha, and check out the cats.” She explained that although the cat aspect of the business is separate from the cafe, they complement each other well and would not function without the other.

The coffee shop opens at 9 a.m., and reservations start at 10 a.m., with guests arriving between 10 and 15 minutes before their reservation. Food is not allowed in the cat area, so guests either eat before or save their food for after their visit. In order to make a private reservation with the cats, customers are required to sign up on the Purrfect Bean website or call the cafe. The last reservation for cat play starts at 6 p.m. and ends at 6:50 p.m., with volunteers from the rescue organization, Purring Hearts, helping with the cat room. Reservations are typically \$20 during the weekdays and \$25 on the weekends. The cafe is often lenient with cancellations, allowing them up to 48 hours in advance.

Camille also explained something that often perplexes people: “Some people are confused by the

need for a reservation and the separate nature of the coffee shop and cat lounge. Despite this, the cafe has received a positive welcome from the community, especially from animal lovers,” she said.

If anyone feels as though they are ready to adopt then and there, they can stay for an additional 30 minutes to discuss the adoption process. “The cats are from a foster-based rescue. The director typically gets the cats into a placement, then they need to be in foster care for a minimum of two weeks before they’re con-

sidered for the cafe,” said Claire.

Camille mentioned the need to stay at the current location for a few years, but expressed a desire for the building to be more accessible when asked about the future of the cafe. “Accessibility is important to us, so it would be nice to be able to look at spaces that can [do] that for us,” she said. Although the cafe has been extremely successful since its opening in August 2025, expanding won’t happen for at least 10 years.

Regardless of the Cat Cafe’s somewhat “hidden” location, word

Richmond’s New Cat Cafe: Purrfect Bean

Menu features classic coffee items, while offering seasonal teas

All drink/food items are locally sourced

Cat lounge is reservation based

GRAPHIC: TYLERSON TWEARDY



PHOTO: @THEPURRPERCTBEAN
Image from the Cat Cafe

The Return of Fantasy Football

Emerson Post
Sports/Copy Editor

As fall comes around, National Football League (NFL) fans around the world start to gather around their TVs each week to watch the most popular sport in America, according to a 2024 Gallup poll. While they typically root for their favorite teams to win, there comes a time when they may have to root against them. This change is due to the “Fantasy Football” app found on all app stores, where fans build their own teams using real NFL players. It turns watching football games into a different type of experience, because now individual players’ personal performance can sometimes outweigh how the team does overall. Fantasy football leagues are typically made up of about 8-12 different teams, each consisting of 16 NFL players, and they can be from any team, division, or conference throughout the league. Depending on the rules you play with, this can vary, but usually each fantasy team has one quarterback, two running backs, two wide receivers, one tight end, one kicker, and you can pick from any team in the league to put as your defense. In order to obtain all of these players, there is a collective draft where each player in the league must pick which players they would like to be on their team. If someone decides to choose the player you want before it is your turn to pick, you are not able to have them on your team. The scoring is based on player performance. Rushing and receiving touchdowns are worth six

points each, while passing touchdowns are worth four. Each rushing and receiving yard is worth 0.1 points, and each passing yard is worth 0.04 points. Two teams match up 1-on-1 against each other, and whoever’s team scores the most points is the winner for that week. Whichever team has the best overall record at the end of the season is declared the winner. Senior at Freeman High School (DSF), Tyler Stnons, mentioned how there is a strategy in order to draft the best overall team. “[I] tend to draft the running backs and wide receivers first, since there’s more depth [at the] quarterback position,” said Stnons. “[I] just try to get the best team overall, a pretty organized [team with] a few running backs, a quarterback, a couple wide receivers, and then tend to draft my defense or kicker towards the end.” With all of these different players and positions on the board, you can either rely on your gut feeling to predict what players will perform and which ones won’t, or you can spend time analyzing all the statistics and projections to determine who will perform at the highest level. “[It] definitely takes a little bit of both,” said Stnons. “Based on past years, I know that Derrick Henry is gonna be one of [the] top running backs, Jayden Daniels will probably [be] a top quarterback, and then Mike Evans is usually a pretty consistent player, so he’ll probably rack up some good points.” Fantasy football not only has expanded into countries like Germany and England, but it has also spread into local areas, too. It can be a different way to make new friends in your area. “[I] think

fantasy football is a super fun way to [help] make new friends,” said Hudson Reppard, a junior at DSF and a varsity football player. “[You] can talk about how your team did, how your team [is] doing, and who you should pick up.” It can also increase fan engagement with the sport beyond their favorite teams. “It makes you want to watch more football, and if you’re not super familiar with the game, you’ll definitely learn more about it as you keep watching,” said Tyler. While Fantasy football can help bring students together and help them form new relationships, it can also turn friendly relationships into competitive ones. In Tyler’s league, everyone pitched in a certain amount of money to create a grand prize for the winner in the end. “[It’s] definitely more fun [with] a prize on the line, and it’s usually a lot of cash,” said Stnons. “This year we chipped in \$20 each, and we have eight people, so the winners will get a lot at the end.” This initiative raises the stakes for fantasy football, and depending on how much money is on the line, the prize could be a way to pull people into the game. “[I] play football, so I already love watching it, but it definitely gets me more invested because of the money prize.” Fantasy football leagues in the future can be a different experience for anyone who wants to get more invested in the realm of football. “[I] would encourage people to join one just to have fun,” said Tyler. “[It’s] super competitive, not really stressful, and it makes you want to watch more football. But if you’re not super familiar with the game, [you’ll] definitely learn more as you keep watching.”

Freeman Mavericks Football

MATCH SCHEDULE

The Long Stadium (Home) - October 10th

DOUGLAS FREEMAN vs THOMAS JEFFERSON

The Long Stadium (Home) - October 17th

DOUGLAS FREEMAN vs DEEP RUN

Godwin-Perkins Stadium (Away) - October 24th

DOUGLAS FREEMAN vs MILLS E. GODWIN

The Long Stadium (Home) - October 30th

DOUGLAS FREEMAN vs HERMITAGE

Glen Allen Stadium (Away) - November 7th

DOUGLAS FREEMAN vs GLEN ALLEN

GRAPHIC: TYLERSON TWEARDY

Upper Field Renovation Now Underway

Annalise Minker
Staff Writer

For many years, Freeman’s lacrosse and soccer teams have trudged to the upper field at 4:15 p.m. for practice and encountered the unexpected pot holes that made them trip, or uneven grass that sent them flying. Soon, these anecdotes will be memories of the past. Freeman High School has decided to renovate the upper practice field, and replace it with a turf field for the upcoming Spring 2025-2026 season. The upper practice field is home to many sports at Freeman; the boys’ and girls’ soccer and lacrosse teams use that field daily in the spring to hold practices. Despite its use, players say that the quality of the grass has been less than ideal. “[There will] be tufts of grass and [it’ll] be muddy, or just [have] a lot of dirt, [and] when it rains, it can be dangerous,” said Millie McCabe, a senior girls’ lacrosse player. Another player noted their concern about the field’s past conditions, and their hopes that it will be solved with turf renovation. Antonio Tripodi, a boys’ soccer player, said that the grass, especially when grown out or rainy, can also prove to be a hazard when playing. Long grass or muddy fields can impede practice. He said, “Sometimes they let it grow really long, and it’s really bad. Even when it rains, it gets really muddy”. Coaches also say that the grass field needs major renovations to ensure better safety and gameplay. Coach Lobos, the Junior Varsity (JV) Girls’ soccer coach, said, “ The grass needs a lot of work in the spring [season]. Too many holes and dips are risks to player injuries that, [as a coach], we try to avoid at all costs.” In past years, coaches have had to go out of their way to account for any obstructions the grass might bring.

“[I] like to get there before the team does to do a scan of the field and have the team practice on the less damaged parts of the field,” said Coach Lobos. With the addition of turf, coaches will no longer have to worry about frequent potholes or other hazardous obstructions that the grass creates. With the addition of turf, coaches will no longer have to worry about frequent potholes or other hazardous obstructions that the grass creates. Additionally, players were asked about the accommodations they had to make in the past, and the responses varied from altering running routes, to setting up cones to avoid obstacles, to whether the hindrances that the grass field brings, such as holes, mud, and puddles, have disrupted practices and affected players’ performances. “[We’ve] had to run differently to avoid big puddles,” said McCabe. The grass brings not just physical but mental obstructions too. “There has always been a negative connotation with that, because [you] know it’s not going to be as good as practice on the turf,” said Millie. Turf brings dangers, including higher temperatures, turf burns, rubber inhalation, and other hazards. When Tripodi was asked if potential health risks posed a concern, he said, “Turf burns. [Injuries] hurt, but [they’re] bound to happen, and the heat is also a problem, but players have an easier time hurting themselves,” said Tripodi. “[For example], there have been more ACL tears on turf than on grass.” A turf renovation would affect the efficiency and quality of players performance during practices, and the teams are excited about the prospect of a new playing field. Millie McCabe said, “[The whole team was] super excited about [the renovation], because we play on that field a lot.” In the months to come, Freeman will see new changes in the upper field.



PHOTO CREDIT: @MEGHAN_PATTEN_

Meghan Patten visits the University of Tennessee.

Patten’s Path to the Vols

Olive Schreher
Features Editor

The University of Tennessee womens’ soccer team has added another name to its future roster: Meghan Patten. Being a junior, Meghan still has two seasons to play for Freeman, and then her Division 1 path begins. Meghan started her soccer journey when she was four years old, playing for a recreational team known as the “Richmond Strikers.” Following her older sister Maggie’s lead influenced Meghan to start playing, so much so that she never played another sport. “My parents got me into [soccer] because of [Maggie], and I never did any other sport,” she said. Fast forward to her sophomore year, Meghan started to reach out to different colleges. Although they were not allowed to physically talk to her, due to the regulations surrounding age requirements, she still sent emails to show interest and get in touch with coaches. “For games, I had to send out around 100 emails every single time before I played,” said Meghan. The coaches would then come and watch Meghan and her teammates play. “There would be coaches lined up all across the field for showcases,” she said. On June 15th, 2025, coaches started to contact Meghan. She started having calls with different coaches, explaining to them what she specifically wanted. “[I] communicated the three main things I wanted to each of the different coaches... the first was that I want to be on a team that’s super possession-based, another big thing is the team culture, and lastly, I wanted coaches that don’t only consider us players,” said Meghan. She found these things at the University of Tennessee. “After the [Tennessee]

visit, [I] didn’t want to go on any of my other visits,” said Meghan. “ I knew where I wanted to go.” What stood out to Meghan the most were the coaches and the team overall. “What really separated Tennessee from the other schools was the coaches, they really cared about building a relationship with the players first, before soccer,” said Meghan. As for the team, “They’re all really close and I got along with them super well,” she said. However, it was not an easy decision. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), as of September 2, 2025, the University of Tennessee is ranked second nationally in the polls. With a 5-0-0 record, they are also ranked first in the Southeast region by United Soccer Coaches. One hesitancy Meghan stated about Tennessee was that the Southeastern Conference (SEC) is one of the most competitive conferences in the country. “[I] was choosing between the [Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC)] or SEC; maybe not playing my first and second year, or going somewhere where I could probably step on the field my first year,” said Meghan. Although this was initially her biggest doubt, she learned that this is something she likes about Tennessee. “[I] like the challenge and the idea of not ever being comfortable,” said Meghan. This mindset has led her teammates to look up to Meghan and her work ethic. “[She is very hard working and never gives less than 100 percent effort,” said senior Lydia Ellen, another player on Freeman’s Varsity soccer team. “I admire how Meghan is always trying to make the team better... her determination rubs off on everyone else,” said Lydia. Sophomore Lee Lee Holloway was a freshman on Varsity this

past season, and has gotten to learn how Meghan brings her team up to the highest level. “The thing that stands out the most to me is her ability to give other people opportunities. Although she is very good, she still passes the ball and does not keep [it] to herself.” Meghan made Lee Lee and the seven other freshmen feel very welcome. “She always talked to us, and if we didn’t understand something, [she] made sure to help us out and explain what [we] were doing.” As for the actual games, Meghan is planning to play center-back at Tennessee. “[I] always used to play center-mid, but two years ago my coach moved me to center-back, and that’s what I’ll be playing in college.” A center-back’s main responsibility is to lead the defensive line. Their objective is to protect their goal from the opposing team’s forwards, blocking shots and intercepting passes. Meghan’s biggest challenge she had to overcome was her confidence. “My first few years after joining my club team, Richmond United, my confidence was super low, [and] it was something I struggled a lot with,” she said. “But, I knew if I wanted to play in college, I had to overcome this because [you’re] playing with people who could be ten times your size or could be beyond the National team talent-wise.” Meghan soon realized that her desire for perfection was only holding her back. “[You] have to get over that fear of making mistakes,” she said. Although Meghan is excited to start college, she is working for a strong season with the Freeman team this year. “[We] have a lot of younger girls on the team, so I am excited to become a leader and a role model for others,” she said. “We have so much potential to have a strong season this year and next year.”

“Peter and The Starcatcher:” Freeman’s Fall Play Debuts Nov. 13

Maggie Walton
Staff Writer

The theater season here at Freeman has already begun as the Freeman ‘Call Sign Players,’ the name of the production team here at DSF, takes the stage for their production of “Peter and the Starcatcher.” Leading up to that, however, is three months of work from the actors and crew. From table reads to curtain calls, the actors are working late. Junior and cast member Merit Lavelle said “[We] have rehearsals at 5:30 [PM] until tech [week]. We’re going until 9 [PM].” This production, like many, has a lengthy list of moving parts and detailed scheduling before opening night.

The experience of “Peter and the Starcatcher” will offer them a different type of experience; more on a personal level. Lucille Robinson, a sophomore and cast member, said, “[I] have always loved being on stage and have enjoyed the theater community I made freshman year. Acting is a passion of mine that [I] wanted to continue into sophomore year.” Merit Lavelle, a junior at Freeman, is also getting some familiar experience. “[I] saw ‘Peter and the Starcatcher’ last year at a smaller company called Firehouse Theater down-

town, and [I] loved it,” she said. Theatre department head and director, Ms. Gardner is a huge fan of the play as well. “[I] think the overall humor of this show is phenomenal,” she said. “So when I saw it the first time... [I] fell in love with it.”

This year’s theater season genre completely parallels the previous one. “[Our] theme for the theater last year was death. I was very dark, very grisly,” said Ms. Gardner. This change allowed the actors to take a different approach, doing things they aren’t used to. “I wanted to go far in the opposite direction, to give the students a chance to branch out and try new things.”

Once the cast list is posted, Ms. Gardner takes a ‘step back.’ There is a lot of focus placed on the theater arts at Freeman belonging to the students. Gabby Betz, senior and head stage manager, said “[I] think [Ms.] Gardner gives us the basics. Here are the props, here is what I want, here is what I expect. Once we understand and process it, we just do it.” Almost the entirety of this production will be student-led: “Building the set is done primarily by the students, with the guidance of [Ms.] Gardner and [head costume designer] Ms. White.” said Jack. “Costuming is all done by the students with the help of [Ms. White].”

This year, crew members have to take on the technical chal-

lenges this play provides them. “[There] is this specific part with the ocean, which is going to be crazy because the crew has to hold up pieces so the actors can swim in it, which I think will be a fun challenge,” said Gabby Betz. Another aspect that is being discussed is making things fly. “Because it is TPeter Pan, we have to make things fly, and [we don’t] have a way to do that,” said Ms. Gardner. But, there is already a plan in the works; it’ll likely be a lift, similar to that in the musical from the previous season, Chicago.

The process from auditions to opening night is typical of previous years. “Once the cast has been selected, the first thing we always do is start with the first read,” said Ms. Gardner. After that, they work on the off-stage chemistry between actors. “Once we get through table reading, we play some games to get comfortable with one another, especially the cast members who will be pairs,” she said. From that point, the ball starts rolling. “We start blocking rehearsal, it will be scene by scene,” said Ms. Gardner. Once the basics are completed, they dive into the details to make everything look professional. “In October, the rehearsal process becomes about review and perfection,” she said. The ‘final act’ of this process is solely for the adults at Freeman; “The dress rehearsal, only staff members are in-



PHOTO: MAGGIE WALTON

Ms. Gardner holding the Peter and the Starcatcher script.

vited. Finally, we open,” she said. This is the first of two shows this year, and like in previous years, the drama department will make this a ‘Call Sign Players production,’ where they take what’s unique about Freeman’s stage and theater program to make this play their own. “One of the things that I think always makes it a Call Sign Players version is accommodating our space,” said Ms. Gardner. “Creating as much magic as we possibly can with [our] limitations is something that pushes creativity.”

Gabby offered another perspective on what is going to make this play Freeman’s; “[We’ve] definitely got a lot of new faces, which [I] think is going to make it much better, having all of these new people you’ve never met before, [I think] they will bring some originality that,” she said. Each actor has something different to offer the Freeman Theater.

The revolving cast lists throughout the years have given students, older and younger, new experiences and friendships.

The Magic of the Ballroom: Who and What Dancing With the Stars is All About

Colleen Conway
Staff Writer

The hit reality TV show, “Dancing With the Stars,” is back once again. The show incorporates picking celebrities of all kinds to be paired with ballroom dance professionals who teach them how to dance in multiple different styles. The celebrities will then compete



Dancing With The Stars Season 34 Cast.

in dances they learned each week in hopes of winning the highest scores from judges, and potentially winning the glitzy, glamorous, Mirrorball trophy. However, to do that, couples must also acquire votes from viewers across the nation to stay in each week, making it so that even if a couple has the best scores from judges, the viewers hold the final say on who goes home every episode. Going on its 34th season, “Dancing With the Stars” has been around since 2005. As a result, generations of people switch on their TV every Tuesday to tune in. “[I] used to watch it when [I] was little, my sister and I used to try to replicate the dance moves in our kitchen,” said Freeman’s math teacher, Mrs. McMahon. In fact, over the decades, the popularity of the show has only increased. This is primarily because recently, the stars and pros are engaging with their viewers via social media platforms, including Instagram and TikTok.

“[It’s] fun because after you watch the show, you can go online. [I] love seeing all of them be silly and learn more about their relationships,” said Mrs. McMahon. Social media presence is crucial, especially when it comes to attracting the younger crowd. “It’s getting a younger audience involved in it as well, so I think it’s really cool,” said Mrs. McMahon, when referencing social media impact. This season’s cast has already

started the buzz surrounding the show, as it was first released on September 3rd, 2025, on Good Morning America. The 12 celebrity-pro couples include Jen Affleck, “The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives” reality star, with Jan Ravnik; Hilaria Baldwin with Gleb Savchenko, Jordan Chiles, Olympic gymnast with Ezra Sosa; Baron Davis, former NBA player, with Britt Stewart; Alix Earle, social media influencer, with Val

said junior Anna Estes. “Also, I think she is going to get really into the costumes and the themes.”

There are some longtime favorite pros on “Dancing With the Stars” that have been on the show since its earliest years. One of them retired and returned this year, and one is now even a judge. These two are Mark Ballas and Derek Hough, respectively. “Derek and Mark. Yes, [they’re] the OGs,” said Mrs. McMahon. Mark’s return was quite exciting, as people did not think he would dance in this capacity again. This is because when he had previously retired, he stated the physical demands of the show were too much for him. “[I’m] most excited to see Mark because I miss him... [Mark] always has really good choreography, and it’s always really sharp,” said Mrs. McMahon.

The overall predictions of which couple will win vary from the movie stars to the social media influencers, and everything in between. During lunch, students were asked which couple they thought would win. 5% of the students said Whitney Leavitt and Mark Ballas, 10% said Jen Affleck and Jan Ravnik, 15% said Danielle Fishel and Pasha Pashkov, 20% said Alix Earle and Val Chmerkovsk-



Dancing with the Stars Season 34 Poster.

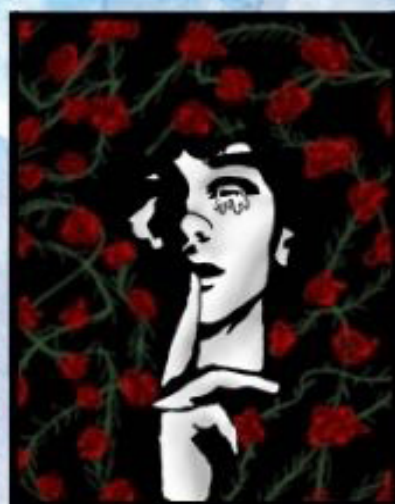
kiy, 20% said Roben Irwin and Whitney Carson, and finally, 30% said Jordan Chiles and Ezra Sosa. Dancing with the Stars, and especially this upcoming season, is absolutely not a thing to miss.

“This season is going to be great,” said Mrs. McMahon. Wondering how it will all turn out? Tune in on September 16th for the 34th season premiere of “Dancing With The Stars.”

Student Artist of the Issue



Freshman Eryn Sam’s inspiration for art comes from “getting [his] thoughts out on paper and seeing a lot of artists around [him],” he said.



Graphic: Ava Harrison

“Weapons:” Zach Cregger’s Latest Success

Sophie Thlachak
Staff Writer

The new horror movie, “Weapons,” was released on Aug. 8, 2025, and as of Sept. 2025, it has made over \$200 million in global ticket sales. The official description states, “When all but one child from the same class mysteriously vanish on the same night at exactly the same time, a community is left questioning who or what is behind their disappearance” (IMDb). The audience experiences six different perspectives from characters in the movie, including Justine, the teacher of the class, blamed by many for the disaster; Archer, a father of one of the missing children; Paul, a cop studying the case; James, a drug addict; Marcus, the principal of the school; and Alex, the only boy that did not disappear that night. The director, Zach Cregger, also known for “Barbarian,” received great reviews for the creativity of the plot. Mr. Abril, an English teacher at Freeman, was able to go on opening night. “The premise [was] an urban legend quality that I really liked,” he said. “[It] brought back my love of movie-going, because it was a real communal experience.” Junior Frances Holmes was questioning what genre “Weapons” fits into. “In the beginning, [I] was confused. It did not seem like horror at all,” she said. However, this mindset did not persist for the entirety of the movie. “Towards the end, it was more gory and disturbing. At some points, I didn’t want to be there because it was so scary,” she said.

The scenes in “Weapons” that implemented horror had the audience on the edge of their seats. A scene that involved the heroine, Justine, being snuck up on while peacefully sleeping, “caused the entire theater to freak out,” said Mr. Abril. “It was just so cool to be enjoying this real cinematic moment.” In the midst of all the suspense and fear, the movie intertwines bits of comedy to lighten the mood. The “comedic relief” of the film, James, played by Austin Abrams, quickly became popular. “[I] thought his part of the movie brought some needed humor into it,” said Mrs. Grimesey, an English teacher and fan of the movie. Beyond humor, James also played a vital role in providing his perspective during scenes with the cop, Paul. “[I] liked that you got both the cops’ side of the story and then James’ perspective. If [you] watch the scenes where they interact, [they’re] slightly different depending on whose perspective is shown,” said Mrs. Grimesey. On the other side of the comedic spectrum, there is Gladys. Gladys, played by Amy Madigan, is another key figure in the story. She is introduced as Alex’s aunt, “taking care of him” while his parents are ill. To match her eerie vibe, Gladys’ appearance included a bright red wig, clown-like makeup, and colorful outfits. “[I] did like Gladys’ outfits she did slay,” said Mrs. Grimesey. Once the audience explores Alex’s perspective, the truth behind the vanishing of the children is revealed. They explore how the villain can take control of people’s bodies and showcase their ability to “weapon-

ize” a person of their choosing. The motives behind the villain are never explicitly mentioned; however, numerous theories exist. “[I] think they were using other people’s life forces to try and heal, but then also were able to control them,” said Mrs. Grimesey. As the audience follows Alex in his very depressing storyline, they start to share his grief within his character. “I see [this] idea of loss and trauma play out in [the] story,” said Mr. Abril. The actor who played Alex, Cary Christopher, was just 8 years old when the movie was being produced. “I thought that child actor did a really good job, which is hard for him to do, especially in a scary movie,” said Mrs. Grimesey. Many of the characters fail in their attempts to discover the truth, but it is finally done. It takes two characters, who are drawn together by a mutual hatred for each other, to finally find the culprit. Having observed the villain’s efforts to control people, one of the characters redirects it towards the villain, making it an amusing and relieving scene for the audience. “[I] thought it was funny how [they were] getting chased around by the kids,” said sophomore Carson Kahl. The ending of the movie was not entirely happy. After such a disastrous event, it is difficult to simply move on. “[I] thought it was sad; it had a haunting quality to it. [It’s] about loss and tragedy and how we endure from that or not,” said Mr. Abril. The not-so-happy ending may have included a dual meaning. The tragedy of the plot, while not entirely realistic, can still be seen in disastrous events that continue to

occur in society today. “It served as an allegory for towns that experience violence like that. It makes sense for it not to feel pretty and wrapped up with the bow at the end,” said Mrs. Grimesey. Overall, “Weapons” has rapidly gained success from being “a different type of horror movie,” said Carson. It has already surpassed many other movies to reach spot

number 13 on the list of 2025’s top-rated movies, and well-known horror enthusiast, Stephen King, said, “[It was] confidently told, and very scary. I loved it.” It has also sparked considerable interest in viewers about whether a Part Two will come out next. Like many other watchers, Frances was “left with so many questions,” she said. “Well, what happens next?”



“Weapons” movie poster.

“Life of a Showgirl” Has a Ring to It

Juliette Lawrence
Staff Writer

On Aug. 13, 2025, Taylor Swift made an appearance on the “New Heights Show” podcast, run by brothers Travis and Jason Kelce. The brothers are star football players on the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles. Taylor announced that this fall, she would be embarking on a new journey. She will be releasing her twelfth studio album, “The Life of a Showgirl.” This was an unexpected announcement to many of her fans, like Freeman’s own Spanish teacher, Ms. Bailey. “[It] was kind of random. [I] wasn’t expecting it, and it kind of came out of nowhere,” she said. “[I] remember my friends and [I] texting about it.” Ms. Bailey and a few of her colleagues have a Taylor Swift group chat, where they discuss all things Taylor Swift. “We all got matching shirts for

her first album released as an engaged woman,” said Ms. Bailey. Kelce and Swift’s engagement was also a recent tabloid announcement this past month. On Aug. 26, 2025, the couple announced their engagement on social media and news platforms. The new engagement was exciting to a multitude of fans who support Taylor Swift and her music. “[That is] really exciting for her,” said Margot Wise, a junior at Freeman. The couple announced on Instagram, “Your English teacher and your gym teacher are getting married.” Alongside the announcement came the unveiling of her ring. Valued at \$250,000, the engagement ring was designed specifically for Swift. With the help of New York Jewelers Artifex Fine Jewelry, Kelce made a custom, giant cushion-cut diamond piece for their engagement. The engagement has left many fans excited for Taylor Swift. “[I] know it’s gonna be a happier album because she is engaged to

she said. Ms. Bailey now runs the Taylor Swift club at Freeman. Taylor Swift’s new album release coincides with another recent development for Swift: She now owns and has the rights to all of her previous albums. Swift’s first six albums were released when she was young and owned by Big Machine Records, an American record label that specializes in country music and was founded by Scott Borchetta in 2005. After many years of miscommunication about who rightfully deserved ownership of Swift’s records, she decided to take the initiative. Swift began rerecording her first six studio albums, titling them “Taylor’s Version.” This fight has inspired girls around the world who listen to Taylor Swift and support her. “[I] think that it is a testament to being a woman, and [to] what it’s like to have things taken from you or other people [taking] credit for things you have created,” said Ms. Bailey. Taylor Swift’s music inspires young teen girls to fight for their credit when they deserve it. “[She] is setting the tone and being a role model for other girls,” said Ms. Bailey. “In the way of going after what you worked for, following through with it, and getting credit where the credit is deserved.” Taylor’s viewership sweeps the nation, as she is viewed by thousands of people around the world. According to TheHarrisPoll, “1,059 Women and 984 Men, including 204 Gen Z (ages 18-26) are Taylor Swift fans.” Best friends will come together, even from different schools, to listen to “Life of a Showgirl.” “[I’ll] be listening, hopefully, with my best friend, Macy Duncan,” said Reed. “[Macy] goes to Tucker High School, and [she] is a big Swiftie.” Reed Hart has used Taylor Swift’s music as a support system that he can connect to while listening. “I started listening to her in seventh grade [and] I became a full fan in eighth grade,” he said. Reed feels that he has a connection to Taylor Swift’s music because he “was going through such a hard [and] emotional time [in my life],” said Reed. With a new album arriving in the upcoming months, fans are waiting to reconnect with Swift and her storytelling capabilities. “[She’s] such a good storyteller,” said Reed. “[Her songs] explain how [she] feels and what [she] went through.”



PHOTO:VARIETY.COM

Taylor Swift’s ablum cover for her new album,” said Ms. Bailey. This new album prompts many possibilities for Swift and the genre she will choose for this new “era” in her career. Throughout her career, Swift calls her albums “eras.” These eras vary in genre from country to pop to indie folk songs. Every album connects to fans differently, for different situations and times. “[I] think there is an album for every situation, which is something that I really value,” said Ms. Bailey. “[Taylor Swift’s] albums are ones that, no matter what [you’re] feeling, no matter what emotions [you] have, you can relate to in some way.” This new album leaves some fans questioning: Will this be a love-only-based album? “[I’m] interested to see what this album holds, because [it] won’t be a breakup album. [It’ll] be

“The Life of a Showgirl.” Travis, which is really exciting for [her],” said Reed Hart, a junior at Freeman. Some think the couple are very comfortable with each other and that Kelce challenges Swift in a good way. “[It] just seems very pure, and [they] seem comfortable with each other,” said Ms. Bailey. “[They] challenge each other in a good way. Before, she was not as willing to be herself, [and] not willing to put things out there; but she seems to be very happy right now.” Ms. Bailey has been a Taylor Swift fan since she was a teenager, living in Pennsylvania. “[I] was in middle school when [I] became a fan,” she said. She connected with her friends over Taylor Swift in her teenage years. “A lot of my friends liked to listen to [her] songs and go to concerts. [They] thought her music was fun and energetic,”

“KPop Demon Hunters” Movie Takes the Stage

Charlotte White
Staff Writer

Netflix’s new “KPop Demon Hunters” movie has been gaining popularity since its release on June 20, 2025, and continues to gain new followers. It has become a global trending conversation, garnering attention from people of all ages. As



PHOTO:NETFLIX

“KPop Demon Hunters” main characters.

of late August 2025, “KPop Demon Hunters” hit 236 million views, making it Netflix’s most-watched animated film of all time. The movie, directed by Maggie Kang, is centered around a group of three K-pop girls: Rumi, Mira, and Zoey. These girls steal the show on the stage, but also spend their time fighting for their home against the secret demon hunters. The girls use their talents, such as their music, to gain magical abilities that allow them to obtain power. They continue throughout the movie, facing many challenges that force them to work and grow together. In Netflix’s movie summary, they said, “A K-pop supergroup uses their secret powers to shield their fans from otherworldly threats.” One of the aspects that has gained popularity has been the energy that comes from the soundtrack. Many songs from the film have been circulating on many social media platforms, specifically TikTok. Viral dances have been made and quickly spread around the app. The most trending dance to arise from the movie has been the song “Soda Pop” with around 1.1 million videos under the sound. Another popular song, also titled “Golden,” has 60.8k videos. “[I] found [the movie] so intriguing and so fun to watch, and visually motivating,” said junior Beatrix Sharrar. “[It] made me feel happy. My favorite song [is] ‘What It Sounds Like.’” This was another song that received lots of attention from the viewers. Since the movie’s release,

Yoo, is the lyricist for the band. The movie not only attracted a younger audience, but also reached some adults and parents whose kids have grown to love the movie. As their kids watched the movie on repeat, many of them ended up joining the fan club as well. Recently, Novak Djokovic, a Serbian professional tennis player, celebrated his daughter’s birthday and his US Open win by dancing to the K-pop Demons dance. Freeman Coordinator of Assessment and Remediation teacher, Mrs. Reilly said, “Yes, [I would recommend this movie to others]. [It] was appropriate for kids and [I] would recommend it to other parents. The songs are catchy.” She has two kids, ages five and eight, who have watched the movie multiple times. The culture behind this movie has been a large part of the attention it is receiving. K-pop is one of the most popular cultural themes in South Korea, and the spread of the popularity of this movie suggests the importance. The spread does not just focus on the music, but also on the fashion and language that the movie showcases, including the hairstyles and makeup of each character that reflect K-pop music culture. The diverse culture of this film has spread across the movie world. The dances, music, and characters have made a noticeable impact and continue to gain popularity. It has made its mark as it continues to rise as the most watched animated movie on Netflix.

Violence

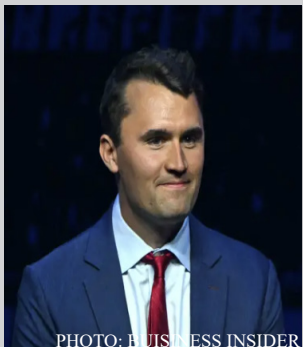


PHOTO: BUSINESS INSIDER

Charlie Kirk

On September 10, conservative activist Charlie Kirk was shot and killed while speaking at Utah Valley University. 22-year-old suspect, Tyler Robinson, was charged with aggravated murder during his trial on September 16. Many investigators have spoken with friends and family to understand potential factors that prompted Robinson's actions. From the information gathered, they believe his actions are linked to gaming and "dark internet" culture. The state is seeking the death penalty for Robinson during his next trial on September 29.



PHOTO: BUSINESS INSIDER

Melissa Hortman

On June 14, democratic Minnesota state representative Melissa Hortman and her husband were shot at their Brooklyn Park home. Authorities have classified their deaths as a "politically motivated assassination." Their assassination followed the shootings of Minnesota state Senate member John Hoffman and his wife at their home in Champlin. The Hoffmans were not killed, but they needed surgery after suffering multiple gunshot wounds. after the annual democratic Humphrey-Mondale dinner.



PHOTO: MNMILK.ORG

Iryna Zarutka

On August 22, Ukrainian Iryna Zarutka was stabbed to death on a light rail train in Charlotte, North Carolina during an unprovoked attack. This case "has turned into a political lightning rod in the country where she had come to seek safety," said CNN. The suspect, 34-year-old Decarlos Brown, has a long criminal history and is now being charged with first-degree murder and causing death on a mass transportation system. The death penalty is a possible consequence for Brown.

Content by Ava Harrison

Ancient Pharaoh's Bracelet Missing



Annalise Minkler Staff Writer

On September 9th, a golden bracelet that belonged to the Egyptian King Amenemope 3,000 years ago had mysteriously disappeared from a conservation lab, severing the modern world from a rare ancient piece of cultural history.

The Egyptian Tourism and Antiquities Minister, Sherif Fathy, told the public on September 16th that the bracelet was stolen during preparation for the artifacts to be transported to a new exhibit. The minister blamed the disappearance on "laxity", the restoration lab's lack of security cameras, and began efforts to prevent any further smuggling.

According to the Egyptian Museum, King Amenemope ruled in the 21st Egyptian dynasty from Tanis, the former capital in the Nile Delta, about 3,000 years ago. Later, in 1940, French ar-

chaeologist Pierre Montent uncovered the Tanis necropolis, which housed the royal tombs of 7 rulers and had since been lost to time. The bracelet, found within these tombs, was made of pure gold and adorned with lapis lazuli beads and was a part of the necropolis's 2,500-piece collection of ancient artifacts, which was restored in 2021 in collaboration with the Louvre Museum.

In response to the theft, a specialized committee was established with the intent of further examination, and photos were circulated throughout Egypt's airports, seaports, and borders to further efforts to stop any smuggling abroad. But the Interior Ministry was successful in tracking down their suspect, a museum restoration specialist who confessed to giving the bracelet away. Initially, 4 suspects were taken in, but the restoration specialist working on the bracelet admitted they gave the artifact to an acquaintance who owned a metal shop in



PHOTO CREDIT: BBCNEWS

The Pharaoh and the missing bracelet.

the Sayyeda Zainab district of Cairo. The bracelet was then, allegedly, sold to another metal shop for around \$4,000 and melted down into gold. The Ministry said they seized any profits made from the sale of the bracelet and released security camera footage of a shop owner receiving, weighing, and paying for the bracelet. Moreover, a judge ordered the specialist and their acquaintance to stay in detention for 15 more days and released the 2 remaining suspects on bail.

Alternatively, this theft has sent ripples through Egyptian society and the future economy. The purloining came just weeks before a planned opening of a new exhibit. In November, the museum had big plans to reveal the Grand Egyptian Museum, located near the Great Pyramids of Giza. This new addition was set to showcase the best of the country's cultural heritage and boost tourism, which is a large part of the Egyptian economy. Societally, Egyptians have expressed outrage and concern over

the bracelets' absence. Egypt has been known to express great pride over their ancient beginnings, so naturally, many citizens are angered by the disappearance of a treasured piece of their heritage. For example, Monica Hanna, an Egyptian archaeologist, demanded the suspension of overseas exhibits until better protocol is implemented for the safety of the artifacts. Furthermore, Malek Adly, an Egyptian lawyer, called the robbery an "alarm bell" to the government. Adly argued for stronger security around prized antiquities, both in storage and on display.

In summation, the vanishing of the ancient Egyptian gold bracelet, once belonging to King Amenemope, was likely committed by an Egyptian restoration specialist working on restoring the bracelet, amongst other artifacts, for an upcoming exhibition. The theft is set to affect the future Egyptian economy and spark new debates about museums' handling of precious artifacts.

Co-founder of Ben & Jerry's Quits

Caitlyn Kennedy Staff Writer

Jerry Greenfield, co-founder of the popular ice cream brand "Ben & Jerry's," has suddenly quit. According to the other co-founder, Ben Cohen, this stand down from Jerry is due to a disagreement between them and their British owner, Unilever, the company that markets the brand.

Starting their partnership and building the company in 1978, Jerry says that this is "one of the hardest and most painful decisions." Reflecting on his 47 years of working, Jerry shares in his message on Instagram that he is thankful for everyone who worked for the brand and all the customers who made it into what it is today. "The folks who show up every day in our factories, scoop shops, and offices are some of the most passionate, caring, and values-driven people you'll ever meet," said Jerry.

Jerry's resignation arose from his annoyance with Unilever not allowing them to share their opinions on politics and other social causes. Despite this being the main cause, tensions have been slowly sprouting between them since the company was sold to Unilever in 2000.

Greenfield feels that Unilever has gone against its word of giving him and Cohen freedom. In the beginning, Unilever had granted them "independence to

pursue [their] values," said Jerry.

In 2021, Ben & Jerry's and Unilever had a dispute when Ben & Jerry's made the decision to end sales in the occupied Palestinian territories. They did this because they felt it didn't align with the brand's values. This choice led to backlash from Israel towards the company and caused Unilever to decrease the brand's independence.

"For more than twenty years... Ben & Jerry's stood up and spoke out in support of peace, justice, and human rights." Jerry was extremely dismayed to see the company's freedom to speak out be taken away. "It's profoundly disappointing to come to the conclusion that that independence, the very basis of our sale to Unilever, is gone."

Just last week, Cohen and Greenfield asked Unilever and the Magnum Ice Cream Company to allow Ben & Jerry's to become independent to share their views on political disputes over the years. Unilever permitted this, saying that they are a "proud part" of the Magnum Company.

Unable to refrain from speaking out, Jerry decided to no longer be a part of Ben & Jerry's. "Standing up for the values of justice, equity, and our shared humanity has never been more important," said Greenfield.

Jerry Greenfield will be extremely missed by the company. "We will forever be grateful to

Jerry for his role in co-founding such an amazing ice cream company," said a spokesperson for the Magnum

Ice Cream Company. "We thank him for his service and support over many decades and wish him well in his next chapter."



PHOTO CREDIT: CCNEWS

Co-founders of Ben & Jerry's



Ben & Jerry's ice cream.

Criminal Syndicate Infiltration in South Africa

Sophia Bove Staff Writer

An extensive and ongoing trial is taking place regarding an alleged justice system infiltration within South Africa. The claims being made within the case are not being taken lightly. Top politicians and police officials are being accused of collaborating with drug cartels and involving themselves with criminal syndicates. The claims "caused a public outcry and led to the commission of inquiry being appointed by President Cyril Ramaphosa", meaning that this case was a considerable concern within the country.

Although this news caused a shock throughout South Africa, this wouldn't be the first time corruption within the government and police had happened. Within the past year, the country has had "an average of 75 killings" and "400 robberies with aggravating circumstances" every day. South Africa knowingly contains one

of the highest crime rates in the world, but it typically isn't a common thing for police officers to out each other on such offenses. This being said, Police Commissioner Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi was the whistleblower regarding this case.

Mkhwanazi claimed that two of his colleagues, Deputy National Police Commissioner Shadrack Sibiyi and Police Minister Senzo Mchunu, were both involved in criminal syndicates. His claim was that they were both a part of a killing located in KwaZulu-Natal province. There were four people who were killed in Dundee, and both Officers were the most probable suspects. He expressed his vast concerns to the public. "It has been my aim that I want to demonstrate that the criminal justice system has been subject to a continuous threat, as well as sabotage, which has been with us over an extended period," he said. "To a point where we believe it is at real risk of total collapse if nothing is done." Louise Edwards, a crime expert,

expressed his hopes for the outcome of the case, causing a lasting impression on the country. "We have to remain optimistic, but the only way I see real change happening is if the findings and recommendations of the commission lead to real consequences, systemic reforms, and sustained oversight, particularly by permanent oversight structures," said Edwards. Although the trial is still happening, many hope that justice will be brought to the two alleged suspects, and the overall state of South Africa will be changed for the better, leaving the country with more awareness of crime and hopefully slowing down the actively increasing corruption within the police.



PHOTO: PBSNEWS

Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi

United Nations Denounces Israel's War Actions as Genocide

Tylerson Tweardy A&E Editor Graphics Editor

The United Nations announced this September that Israel's actions in Gaza amount to genocide. In a 72-page report, the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry accused Israel of committing four of the five acts that define genocide under international law. These include killing Palestinians, causing physical and mental harm, creating life conditions that threaten survival, and imposing measures to prevent births. Investigators argued that bombings and the destruction of hospitals and housing show a deliberate effort to break down civilian life in Gaza.

The commission based its conclusions on interviews with survivors, medical workers, and aid staff, as well as satellite evidence and statements by Israeli leaders.

The report also accused Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant of incitement, citing public comments that dehumanized Palestinians and encouraged violence. South Africa is pursuing a genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, and the International Criminal Court has issued warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Scholars remain divided. Many say proving intent is extremely difficult, and that even catastrophic civilian losses do not automatically meet the legal standard of genocide. But the UN commission insists that both actions and words by Israeli leaders leave little doubt about intent. The outcome will affect not only Palestinians and Israelis but also the credibility of the systems designed to prevent atrocities.