

“Blue Wave” Washes Over the Virginia General Assembly

Katie Hall
Editor-In-Chief

Across the state of Virginia on Nov. 7, 2023, voters cast their ballots to elect local district representatives, county-level officials, and all 140 members of the Virginia General Assembly. Prior to this intense off-year election, the two chambers had a partisan split between the Republican-led House of Delegates and the Democrat-controlled State Senate. As the results rolled in, it became clear that the Democrats would gain control of both chambers of the legislature in a decisive “blue wave” of victories.

Glen Allen High School social studies teacher and current House of Delegates member Schuyler VanValkenburg defeated GOP incumbent Siobhan Dunnivant, securing his seat in the Virginia State Senate. VanValkenburg will represent Senate District 16, encompassing most of Glen Allen, Short Pump, and Tuckahoe.

In House District 58, representing the greater Tuckahoe area, incumbent Rodney Willett emerged victorious from a com-



PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Willett and VanValkenburg celebrate their wins

petitive campaign against local fitness instructor Riley Shaia. Willett has served in the Virginia House of Delegates since 2020.

One of Virginia’s tightest races of the year played out in the suburbs of Western Henrico between Republican David Owen and Democrat Susanna Gibson. Despite an apparent “blue wave” of Democratic wins, this trend faltered in House District 57. Following a close contest, Owen narrowly defeated Gibson for the House of Delegates seat. Gibson’s loss was a noticeable outlier amidst a slew of Democratic victories, especially compared to the successful Van-

Valkenburg and Willett campaigns, also located in Western Henrico.

At the county level, Democratic incumbent Shannon Taylor secured her fifth term as Commonwealth’s Attorney. Taylor is the only woman to serve in this position in Henrico County’s history. Within the judicial system, voters also re-elected Heidi Sauter Barshinger as Henrico Clerk of Court in a narrow race against Gray Montrose.

Locally, Marcie Shea ran unopposed as an incumbent on the Henrico County School Board. She represents the Tuckahoe District, which includes Douglas S. Freeman and Mills E. Godwin

High Schools. Her term now extends through 2028. Also in the Tuckahoe District, Jody Rogish won his race against Greg Baka to serve as a Representative on the Henrico Board of Supervisors.

Unlike all other candidates on the 2023 ballots, voters were able to choose their top three candidates for the Henricopolis District Soil and Water Conservation Director — a division of local government tasked with natural resource management. Voters elected Claiborne Ewing Yarbrough, Brittany Rose, and Becky Lakin, all of whom were endorsed by the Henrico County Democratic Committee.

Governor Glenn Youngkin expressed his disappointment following the Democrats’ sweeping success on Election Day. With both chambers of the General Assembly under Democratic control, the momentum of his legislative agenda could easily stall for the remainder of his tenure.

Under Article V of the Virginia Constitution, Governors cannot serve consecutive terms. With Youngkin ineligible, certain Virginia Democrats have already set their eyes on the Gubernatorial election in 2025.

On Nov. 13, 2023, United

States Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger, announced her candidacy for Governor. If elected, Spanberger would make history as Virginia’s first female Governor.

Richmond City Mayor Levar Stoney followed, declaring his candidacy on Dec. 4, 2023. Currently, no Republicans have entered the race, but according to CBS6 News, “Attorney General Jason Miyares and Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears are seen as likely contenders.”

In 2019, Democrats gained control of both the State Senate and the House before President Biden’s 2020 victory in Virginia. However, voters elected Governor Youngkin in the 2021 Gubernatorial race, shifting power in favor of Republicans and solidifying the Commonwealth of Virginia as a true purple state.

According to CNN, “Election results for the Virginia Legislature over the past few cycles ... correlate with what happens in the following year’s national elections.” With the Democratic Party once again in full control of the Virginia General Assembly, political scientists have begun to wonder if this pattern will serve as an early prediction of the 2024 Presidential contest.

Richmond City Voters said ‘CasiNO’ in November Elections

Sarah Chilton
Staff Writer

Initially denied by a slim margin of 51 percent to 49 percent in 2021, Richmond’s Casino referendum failed for a second time when voters overwhelmingly blocked it 61 percent to 39 percent in the Nov. 2023 election. The proposed casino was a \$562 million project called the Richmond Grand Resort and Casino, set to be built on Richmond’s Southside, just off of I-95. If approved, it would have included 250 hotel rooms, a 55-acre park, a 3,000-seat concert venue, a gaming floor, and resort-style amenities. Its proposed position was intended to target tourists traveling up and down the East Coast, to generate new money in the Richmond economy.

In 2020, legislation was passed allowing casinos in five locations within Virginia. So far, three locations near the North Carolina border (Danville, Bristol, and Portsmouth) have opened casinos and a fourth project is moving forward in Norfolk. Richmond is the only city of the five approved locations where the people voted against it. The project, which was proposed to be led by media and racing companies, Urban One and Churchill Downs, was supported by Mayor Levar Stoney and other city officials. This team spent around \$10 million — an uncommonly large sum to spend on a referendum — to finance their campaign via ads, canvassers, free meals at polls, and more.

Supporters of the casino argued that the venue would create jobs and increase tax revenue to support public education. “We are proud to have run a community-centered campaign to create more opportunities for residents of this great city to rise into the middle class,” said developers in a statement after the election day loss. The project’s developers said it would bring 1,300 permanent jobs to local residents and half of the \$30 million projected tax revenue would have been dedicated to childcare efforts.



PHOTO: RICHMOND GRAND RESORT AND CASINO

An illustration of the proposed casino project

However, concerns that the projected tax revenue would come at the expense of the locals deterred many from voting for the casino. In an independent assessment by Convergence Strategy Group (CSG) in 2021, they determined that 64 percent of the proposed tax revenue would come from gaming. “About 22 percent [of that] would come from Richmond City residents” with the bulk from the core of downtown, said CSG. If every resident of legal gambling age is accounted for, this works out to 321,000 visits from the roughly 140,000 residents who meet the age requirement.

“City officials should be embarrassed that they didn’t listen to the voters first.”
- Victoria Cobb

Other reasons may factor into voter hesitance regarding the statements from city officials. “My parents are suspicious that this is just another promise by city government or city community leaders to build something new and this doesn’t have a great track record,” said Mr. Larkins, a social studies teacher at Freeman.

When voting, many had to balance the various positive and negative impacts of building a casino. “People say that the Southside needs grocery stores, and they need other amenities,” said Urban One CEO Alfred Liggins III in support of the casino. “Well, grocery stores come into communities where there’s income to be able to support the commerce.”

However, a Paulette J. O’Gilvie article titled “The effects of casino proximity and time on poverty levels in New York City,” found that those within a 30-mile proximity of casinos were more likely to develop gambling problems. The paper also reported that these issues could affect income and poverty levels.

According to data from the Virginia Department of Elections, support for the casino came most heavily from precincts closer to the proposed location and those that had more Black voters. The project got the most support from Gilpin Court and Mosby Court, where 88 and 83 percent of voters said yes to the development. Axios’ maps of this data breakdown showed a higher number of opposition voters living further North and generally having a larger share of white residents. The project saw the least support in the Fan and Museum districts where only 15 and 14 percent re-

spectively supported the casino.

There is some speculation about whether the referendum will be voted upon a third time based on the city’s history. “It feels like they’re going to keep doing this until they get the result they want,” said Rob Peck, a Freeman social studies teacher and resident of Richmond City. However, with the heavy blow of an over 15,000 vote gap, it is less likely.

Other Richmond residents have commented on the possible third attempt to pass the casino referendum. “City officials should be embarrassed that they didn’t listen to the voters the first time,” said Victoria Cobb, head of the Richmond Anti-Corruption League, a local anti-casino effort. “[I hope this result] will send the casino industry packing, never to return.”

Stirring up some buzz in the final days before the vote, Urban One, the company selected to build the casino, sparked controversy when a host on one of its Richmond radio stations used anti-Semitic slurs against an opponent of the project. The slurs were directed at Paul Goldman

— a political analyst and founder of the No Means No Casino group — and the host’s actions were widely condemned by both sides.

Goldman recently won a lawsuit against the state Board of Elections when they denied him his First Amendment right to voter registration lists typically available to candidates and committees. Voter registration lists provide information about who is registered to vote in an area so that organizations can approach likely voters to ensure their support on election day. The case was initially filed in a Richmond City Court and elevated to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District Court of Virginia where the judge sided with Goldman and ordered him to negotiate a resolution for access to the lists. This decision was expedited due to the looming deadline of elections. It came a few weeks before election day, which Goldman said drastically impacted his campaign and ability to reach voters.

Nonetheless, Goldman was victorious, and support for his anti-casino campaign has only grown in Richmond since the 2021 vote.

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GRAPHIC: AVA FLOURNOY



Henrico County Test Scores Fall Below Virginia State Average

Cate Woodrum
Staff Writer

According to the Virginia Department of Education, Henrico County Public School's (HCPS) 2022 Standard of Learning (SOL) scores fell lower than the state's average. The HCPS system saw SOL score improvements in writing, math, and science from the 2021-2022 school year, alongside a one percent decline in reading and an eight percent decline in history SOL pass rates. Despite low county-wide averages, Freeman received a Level One accreditation for standardized testing — the highest possible rating.

Freeman Mavericks scored higher than the county average in past years — something that students and faculty alike continu-

ally work to achieve. Even with Freeman's improved test scores, school and county averages still remain below those from pre-pandemic years. The Virginia Education Association cited that although scores are an "improvement from ... when schools were most disrupted by COVID-19 ... it's still 16 points lower than before the pandemic." Although the post-COVID education system, on average, has not fully recovered, HCPS students are still required to pass a certain number of SOLs in each subject to graduate.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many standardized tests were forced to adapt to the new academic climate. Advanced Placement (AP) Exams were taken as open notes tests nationwide and PSATs and SOLs became optional or were skipped in many counties across the country. The after-effects of

the pandemic present themselves in the large learning deficits that many schools are now contending with. Yet, lower test scores and decreased student engagement are only part of the problem.

Looking beyond the face-value statistics of Freeman's testing program, demographic disparities in test scores become apparent. "[Standardized tests] fail to take diversity and socioeconomic status into account," said Mrs. Reilly, Freeman's Coordinator of Assessment and Remediation. "Multi-Language Learners (MLL) are held to the same standards as students who have lived in America their entire life." This belief is not unfounded. The Richmond Times Dispatch found that the largest drops in SOL scores occurred among Black, Hispanic, and MLL students. The language barrier, then, is not the only cause of lower

standardized test score averages. "Students in the lower socio-economic bracket do not always have the means or parental support to afford extra help for the tests," said Mrs. Reilly. "[SOLs] exhibit what content knowledge the student may have but fail to show other skills."

Freeman students and staff are working to bridge these gaps. Freeman's National Honor Society is a student-led organization that dedicates time to tutoring students who are struggling with their academics. Tutoring sessions are held four days per week during Freeman Focus. Similarly, Mavs United is another student-led group that solely focuses on tutoring MLL students. "The Multi-Language Learners at Freeman are some of the smartest kids in the school, when you are able to translate the language, their work is far beyond the SOL standards," said junior Carter

Nesmith, a two-year member of Mavs United. "It makes no sense that there aren't language accommodations on standardized tests for these students as they adjust."

Although Freeman's standardized test scores are higher than average on both the county and state scales, the question remains as to why the standards are set up this way in the first place. In many schools, teachers are forced to shape their lesson plans and course structure around SOLs. Alongside this, students who might already struggle for socioeconomic or linguistic reasons, cannot advance academically without passing their SOLs.

Now, HCPS students and faculty turn to higher administration for the answer as to how these standardized tests may continue to evolve to provide equal opportunities to disadvantaged students.

Bright Fusions of Flavor at Gold Lion Community Cafe

Ava Flournoy
Graphics Editor

In Oct. 2023, Matthew and Nafis Narsinghani, new to the Richmond community, opened Gold Lion Community Cafe on Hull Street. The couple's coffee shop offers an Indian and American fusion of food — but with a twist. Gold Lion Community Cafe serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with drinks including coffee, chai, smoothies, and more.

The cafe offers a mix of Indian-American food, highlighting the importance of coming together with acceptance and love within the community. It is "not just food, but culture and ways that the British combined and exported those two cultures together and it's really interesting," said owner Matthew Narsinghani. He emphasized the importance of recognizing the hardships that led to the food he serves today.

Another big part of the Gold Lion Community Cafe is its entirely vegan menu. "My mom raised me [as a] vegetarian, so I grew up eating a lot of Indian foods," said Matthew. "Nafis grew up as a first-generation Indian-American, so he grew up eating a lot of Indian foods." For both of them, the vegan Indian fusion food served at Gold Lion brings a taste of home to RVA.

After leaving the less inclu-



PHOTO: AVA FLOURNOY

The festive interior of Gold Lion Community Cafe

sive environment of Tennessee, the couple came to Richmond to open their own coffee shop and event space centered on creating a safe place for LGBTQ+ individuals and the Richmond community. On certain days, Gold Lion Community Cafe opens its space to drag shows, transgender awareness events, and many more groups from throughout RVA.

Curating the menu can be seen as an art itself as bringing in good food is very important to both of the owners. "The first thing we thought about was the 10 things that we make ourselves all the time," said Matthew. "Aloo Gobi is number one since [it] was at our wedding and it's my favorite thing to eat so I wanted to emulate that."

Not only is the food's taste heav-

ily considered, but the aesthetics of colors are as well. "We wanted to ... balance out the color palette," said Matthew. "I knew I wanted Aloo Gobi and butter chicken ... and I [thought] samosa would look really good," said Matthew. The color palette ranges from muted tones, like those in the rice, to bright pops of flavor and color like the mango in the smoothies.

The combination of Matthew's and Nafis' experiences growing up played into the creation of Gold Lion. "[The] inspiration for the space [stems from] when Nafis took me back to [the University of Miami] to visit," said Matthew. "One of the things he loved to do was get an empanada and a coffee on the beach in Florida and we were trying to figure out a way to replicate that experience, but make it ours."

The actual coffee and tea portion of the cafe is a process in itself. On a normal day, "we make the chai and it starts with grinding down spices by hand in a mortar and pestle," said Matthew. "And we're muddling cinnamon and breaking up cardamom pods and making sure that the masala really seeps into the tea that we use."

Everything made at Gold Lion Community Cafe is "a labor of love, especially with [their] Chai and [their] samosas, especially the keema samosa," said Matthew. "[We're] a very tight-knit family so it's just great to have everybody involved even if his family is in Memphis, we still [communicate] every day and help tweak recipes with them."

Gold Lion Community Cafe has welcomed a new sense of community with its safe space and fusion food. The energy and labor that goes into the food is matched by the loving and bright atmosphere that also promotes the idea of being a study spot. To do this, Gold Lion offers 25 percent off to students so head on down to grab a bowl of (vegan) butter chicken and study up in the quiet and homey atmosphere of the cafe.

Próximos Pasos: Next Steps Into Your Future

Katelyn Morrow
Staff Writer

For many, a big question in high school is what a successful future looks like after graduation. According to the Pew Research Center, Hispanic and Latino students are known to have high dropout rates from the military and higher education after high school. On Oct. 11, 2023, Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS) held their first ever "Próximos Pasos" event at J.R. Tucker High School. "Próximos Pasos," which translates to "next steps" in English, gave students an opportunity to speak with military recruiters, college admissions officials, and nonprofit workers as they explored possible after-graduation paths.

The event was planned by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the HCPS Equity and Diversity Advisory Committee (EDAC) and provided transportation to the event to increase involvement. "This event shares resources for our Hispanic and Latino student population about employment, enrollment, or enlistment opportunities," said Freeman social studies teacher Mr. McCollum. "It was planned to help address the importance of finishing high school ... [and] required over three months of planning to secure venues, participants, transportation, [and] advertisements."

Ali Cervantes, a senior at Freeman, attended Próximos Pasos. "Both [Spanish and English] were fluently represented throughout the event," she said. "Próximo Pasos made me more aware of my options after graduation and made me understand my options," said Ali.

Even though this event targets students in high school, there was information provided for family members as well. GRASP — an organization that helps students and families with financial aid and scholarships, military officers, colleges, medical and dental health information, and programs for children and adults — had many advisors there for parents and

students alike to meet with. Additionally, the event featured job opportunities for adults in electrical studies and provided free SAT and Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Test (ASVAB) guides to guarantee equal access for students taking these tests.

Ms. Gonsalves, the community school resource coordinator at Freeman High School and Tuckahoe Middle School, focuses on providing support to families. Próximo Pasos is one step closer to that. "It was nice seeing community stakeholders who are involved with making sure our international students have equitable access to opportunities," said Ms. Gonsalves. "I think it's valuable for students because they get to see people who look like them and offer different opportunities for them."

Due to the success of the first Próximos Pasos, Ms. Gonsalves is looking forward to holding similar events in the future. "I would like to see an event representative of all cultures in the future," she said. "I feel like [having] more groups from different cultures can benefit many more people."

Throughout the night, panels held discussions with representatives from a variety of universities career paths present. "My favorite part of the event was watching our students learn about career paths that they didn't even know existed prior to the event," said Mr. McCollum. "Our goal was to empower our students to take their next steps toward a fruitful career."

Próximos Pasos hosted students from schools across the county. "Students at Freeman seemed very excited to be there, and kids at Tucker seem interested in Próximo Pasos," said Ms. Gonsalves.

The high level of student engagement indicates that Próximos Pasos could become a recurring event in HCPS. "If I wasn't a senior, I would attend this event again but I told all of my friends and my sisters to sign up," said Ali. Even though Próximo Pasos is relatively new, this event will continue to grow in participants and community support.

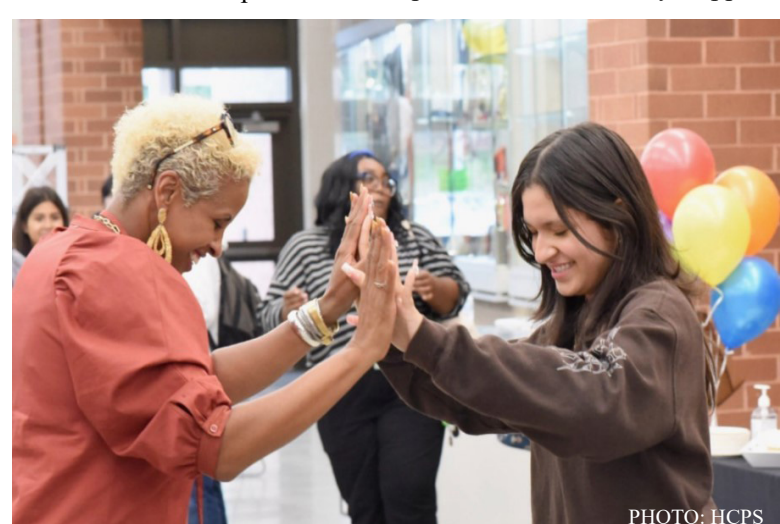


PHOTO: HCPS

Attendees enjoy the event

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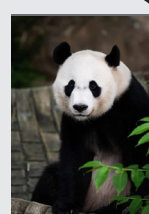
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You’ll Never Believe it’s Vegan

Ella Post

Online Editor-in-Chief
A&E Editor

In the heart of Carytown lies a special bakery: Minglewood Bake Shop. What sets this business apart is the fact that all of their food is vegan. The bakery’s specialized menu has no effect on the products’ taste, though. “Our mission is to provide delicious food that just so happens to be vegan,” said owner Shannon Sheehy. “Minglewood is the only 100 percent vegan bake shop in Richmond, so we’re known for being a safe place for folks with common food allergies.” Minglewood is where I have eaten some of the best pastries and desserts. Don’t be deterred by the fact that it is all vegan. When I first found out that Minglewood’s baked goods were vegan, I was blown away, as there was no difference compared to non-vegan desserts. The people of Richmond agree too. “It’s pretty rewarding for us when a customer asks if we have anything vegan and we get to say ‘Everything is vegan!’ That look on their face is priceless,” said Shannon. “Many of our customers are not vegan ... they just want good food.” The bakery also offers daily gluten-free options for cookies, Rice Krispie treats, coffee cake, and scones, along with occasional specialty gluten-free items, such as everything-seasoned biscuits. Their most popular items are scones, cookies, and biscuits. “Cookies and scones are always popular, especially the chocolate chip,” said Shannon. “Our Biscoff Tiramisu and Cheddar Bay Biscuits have also been popular for a long time.” I can confirm that these are some of their best items. My family eats mostly gluten-free, and so far our favorite bakery for



PHOTO: ELLA POST

The interior of Minglewood

specialty items in Richmond is Minglewood. They have a gluten-free coffee cake that is to die for, and it’s made with maple syrup, which adds a level of complex flavor that other coffee cakes lack. Their gluten-free scones are also incredible, as they are not crumbly or dry. Instead, they are soft and moist. Pro tip: they taste best when warmed up in the microwave or oven before being eaten. My favorite scones are the white chocolate pistachio, chocolate pistachio, and blueberry lemon lavender scones. The same goes for their cookies, with my favorite flavors being s’mores, pumpkin chocolate chip, and snickerdoodle. Just recently, I tried the Biscoff Tiramisu and brought some back for my classmates to try. It was so delicious! The Biscoff biscuits were a perfect pair for the light and fluffy whipped cream in between. When my friend tried it, she asked “Wait, this is vegan?” I replied with a smile and nodded my head. I always love taking Minglewood to my friends and

family to try and then revealing it is vegan because of the reaction I get. They are usually stunned. If you are looking for a more intricate dessert, check out Minglewood’s cakes and cupcakes. They are extremely elaborate and are always decorated with cute images or patterns. I tried the French Toast Cupcake, which has a sweet, cinnamon base with hints of maple and a vanilla, cinnamon, and maple buttercream that was absolutely divine. For me, this earned a five-star rating. Aside from pastries and baked goods, Minglewood has recently added vegan breakfast sandwiches to its menu. Customers can choose between egg and cheese or sausage, egg, and cheese, both served on an English muffin. I got to the shop early to try one before they sold out and it did not disappoint. It tasted very similar to a non-vegan sandwich and almost identical to the Starbucks breakfast sandwiches. My personal favorite savory breakfast item at Minglewood is their

breakfast burrito made with tofu, vegan cheese, and more, depending on which type of burrito is. Minglewood also sells grab-and-go food items, including chicken wings, General Tso’s chicken, chicken salad, deviled eggs, buffalo chicken sandwiches, BBQ sandwiches, BBQ chicken, mac and cheese, take-and-bake croissants, macarons, and more. In addition to these mouth-watering meals, the shop is always stocked with vegan snacks like chocolate bars, marshmallows, pretzels, and chips ... if you can name it, Minglewood probably has it! At the root of these delectable menu items is high-quality vegan baking products. Minglewood sources its ingredients from many different companies. “Milk is the easiest [to substitute] and we typically use oat milk, as it’s the most allergen-friendly; butter can be replaced with vegan butter, oil, or applesauce,” said Shannon. “Eggs can be tricky to replace, but some of the substitutes we use are flax meal, apple-

sauce, and garbanzo bean flour.” Minglewood is very thorough and ensures the highest quality, 100 percent vegan ingredients. Minglewood provides a safe haven for people with various food restrictions and allergies. “Our favorite thing is when folks come in with food allergies or limitations and get to indulge in treats they’ve been denied for years,” said Shannon. “We’ve had people cry because they were able to get a milkshake (with whipped cream, no less). Young kids who can’t eat eggs can choose anything they want because it’s all safe for them.” Vegan or not, Minglewood is a great place to grab a coffee and pastry that will satisfy any type of craving. The shop is very active on its social media and Instagram account: @minglewoodbakeshop. There, they post their monthly flavors of cookies, scones, drinks, and seasonal items. Make sure to visit the shop and follow them on Instagram so you do not miss out on trying their delicious vegan pastries or desserts



PHOTO: ELLA POST

A vegan breakfast sandwich from Minglewood

On Wednesdays We Are “Pretty In Pink”

Maggie Jacoby

Features Editor

High school: an awkward time in a teenager’s life where they’re trying to learn who they are, but still trying to fit in. For some people, high school is a miserable nightmare, while for others, these four years are when they hit their peak. Despite the abnormality surrounding this stage of life, it didn’t stop most of us from daydreaming about being in high school when we were younger. The feeling of wanting to grow up faster was

not uncommon, and many of us couldn’t wait until we got to say we were officially teenagers. Looking back now, I can confidently say that the reason behind this generational desire can be attributed to the unrealistic coming-of-age high school movies that entertained us throughout our childhoods. Comparing my favorite high school movie (“High School Musical”) to what my parents remember watching (“The Breakfast Club”) poses the question of which generation created the best coming-of-age film. Aspects such as relatability, emotional depth, and comedic relief are all



PHOTO: IMDB



PHOTO: IMDB

Movie posters for “High School Musical” and “The Breakfast Club”

important factors in this decision. Our first representation of the “new” high school movies is “High School Musical.” The movie takes place at a high school where the star athlete, Troy Bolton, falls for the nerdy scientist, Gabriella Montez. They both try out for the school play, land the lead roles, and end up falling in love with not just each other, but performing on stage as well. For me, “High School Musical” failed to earn the relatability point. I’d be shocked if I was the only one who was disappointed with my first day of high school after watching this movie. Who would have known that Freeman doesn’t break out in song every day in the cafeteria? However, by the end of the third movie, I would argue that there is definitely emotional depth found within the storyline, as it explores the complexity of relationships, friendships, and finding one’s passion. You didn’t think I would forget about “Mean Girls,” did you? Teenager, Cady Heron, moves from the African savanna to the suburbs of Illinois, where she is quickly accepted into the popular girls’ group, ‘The Plastics,’ led by queen bee Regina George. Throughout the movie, Cady contemplates her choices of following their guidance or following her gut as she experiences traditional American high school for the first time. “Mean Girls” is extremely popular, as the film represents a typical high school experience filled with classmate crushes, adolescent jokes, and most importantly,

mean girls. The movie uses heavy satire while exploring the complex relationships of teenage girls. While the plot of the movie is exaggerated, most of the points are true and relatable. This creates an emotional connection with the audience, as many girls have experienced the friendship growing pains expressed in the film. By the end of the movie, both Cady and Regina had undergone personal growth, even if it came at the cost of being hit by a bus. Okay, so maybe that part isn’t too relatable. Looking at our “old” high school movie contenders, next up we have “The Breakfast Club.” One Saturday, in detention, a group of five students are forced to spend the day together as punishment for their infractions. In the beginning, they are five polar opposites: “A brain, a beauty, a jock, a rebel, and a recluse.” However, throughout the day, the kids become close as they share stories of family life and personal challenges they have faced. “The Breakfast Club” is an iconic movie due to its portrayal of high school stereotypes. The film explores deep themes, such as identity and social expectations, which makes it a relatable film for teenagers of any generation. It openly discusses and touches on many complex subjects that are commonly associated with teenagers, such as suicide, depression, sex, and physical and emotional abuse. Finally, we get to our last ‘old’ film, “Sixteen Candles.” This movie is a comedy that follows Samantha Baker, a teenage girl, on her

sixteenth birthday. Throughout the day, Samantha’s birthday is repeatedly forgotten by numerous family members, due to her older sister’s wedding being the main attraction. The film also follows Samantha’s love life as she falls hard for her senior crush, Jake Ryan. However, instead of catching Jake’s attention, Samantha finds herself continuously declining the affections of Ted, the school’s biggest nerd. “Sixteen Candles” is a crowd favorite due to its relatability throughout the film. It accurately depicts and captures the awkwardness and humor of teenagers’ lives, while still keeping the audience’s attention and curiosity. The film is highly based on stereotypes and contains many of the scenes that are obligatory in teenage movies, while still having a unique plot. After spending my weekend watching four movies about teenagers coming of age, I have become an expert on the main differences between generational films. The biggest takeaway I have gathered thus far has been that “new” high school movies tend to explore more diverse issues, as they reflect on our evolving society. Oftentimes, they involve a ‘cringe factor’ and have a happy ending. In contrast, “old” high school movies focus more on high school stereotypes and emphasize teenage drama. They also include heavier topics, balanced with humor, that may not hold up in the modern day. While all of these movies were in some way entertaining, I ultimately believe you can’t beat the classics

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THE Mad  W

GRAPHIC: AVA FLOURNOY

Freeman offers an almost overwhelming amount of electives to choose from, spanning a variety of subjects. Possible courses include Oceanography, Nutrition and Wellness, Intro to Fashion, and Sports Marketing — all of which give a glimpse into the multitude of opportunities provided at Freeman. Electives help expose students to new people who perhaps have the same passions or cu-

Electives create opportunities

Based on what these students have to say about their elective classes, I think it is immensely important for schools to embed different subject matter into their course selection. It is vital for students to learn skills they otherwise would not have learned in the required core classes, and electives create an opportunity to do just that. By providing a place for creativity and passion to thrive, electives cultivate new interests and curiosity, build friendships, and enhance the overall school experience for students.

the same neo-traditional style, combining Mexican and Salvadorian dishes with American flavors based on regulars' requests.

- Linda Lauby

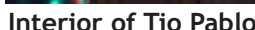
If you're looking for more Salvadorian-inspired dishes, take Linda's word and order the cheese pupusas. Described on the menu as "two traditional masa dough pockets filled with queso," these warm bites will satisfy every comfort food craving. Customers can choose to fill their pupusas with zucchini or pork, and, having indulged in the Tacos Legumbres, I would highly recommend the zucchini. Its bold smokiness pairs beautifully with the pupusas' fresh pickled slaw, creating an



Paul recommends the gorditas, similar to the pupusas, as they use the same soft masa dough to envelope every ingredient. He opts



for a pork and refried bean filling, accompanied by decadent queso fresco. One of the most appealing aspects of the menu is the opportunity to personalize each dish in accordance with customers' pref-



erences. While I have yet to try the legendary Gorditas, they've attained the owner's stamp of approval, which should be enough to convince you to head out or call in for a taste of Tio Pablo.



Exterior of Tio Pablo



Interior of Tio Pablo

Meet the Diabate Sisters: New DSF Students From Guinea

Ellie Grace Robinson
Opinions Editor

The transition from middle school to high school is, for many students, a major adjustment. You meet new teachers, find your way around a new place, and adapt to a higher level of material. Now, imagine having to learn the customs of a new school but with the additional hardship of speaking a different language. For the Diabate sisters, this is a reality.

The Diabate girls — Aischa, Salimatou, and Mariame — were born and raised in Guinea, a French-speaking country in Western Africa. When their family made the move from Guinea to the United States, the sisters attended Hermitage High School. This year, they transferred to Freeman, where they were enrolled together in tenth grade. The girls are actually all about a grade or two apart but were likely placed in the same grade because English is not their first language.

It is important to note that

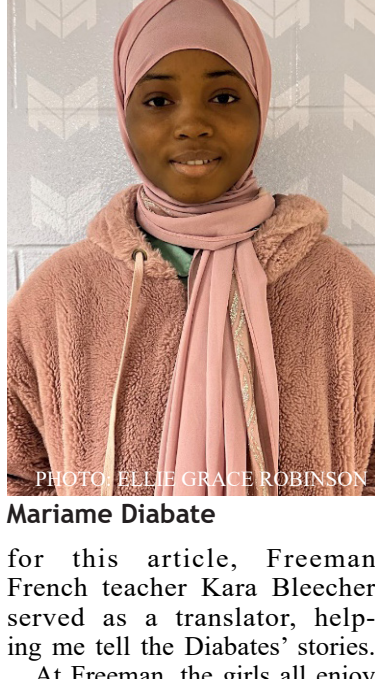


PHOTO: ELLIE GRACE ROBINSON

Mariame Diabate

for this article, Freeman

French teacher Kara Bleecher

served as a translator, helping

me tell the Diabates' stories.

At Freeman, the girls all enjoy

French class. Salimatou also likes

English, and Mariame prefers science.

In Guinea, the girls enjoyed

having the opportunity to go from

school to the market or boutiques

nearby. It was much easier to get



PHOTO: ELLIE GRACE ROBINSON

Aischa Diabate

around town there. In America,

they don't have access to a car

while their parents are at work,

so their commute is generally just

to and from school and home.

Nevertheless, they have a variety

of interests outside of school.

Mariame likes to knit. She crochets

women's clothing, specifically

headscarves, which are a popular

item in Guinea and



PHOTO: ELLIE GRACE ROBINSON

Salimatou Diabate

one that many students at Freeman

wear as well. Salimatou likes to

play with her younger brother

and watch television.

At Freeman, the girls said they

have struggled to make connections

with other students. Although they

have met new people and new friends

through DSF, it is hard to make close

friends because of the language barrier.

Aischa,

the youngest sister, touched specifically on her feelings coming into Freeman. She said the hardest thing was feeling like a new person all over again, since she dealt with this after enrolling at Hermitage, and is now reliving it.

All students at Freeman relate to the good ol' COVID pandemic. While for many of us, this was a mere inconvenience, for the Diabate sisters it meant three years of separation from their parents. The girls stayed in Guinea with their grandmother until the pandemic improved and the family could reunite in the United States.

The Diabates expressed that the students and staff here seemed welcoming. However, Madame Bleecher stated that English Language Learners face adversities such as, "difficulties understanding [and] navigating the curriculum based on their level of English ... not being familiar with cultural differences ... and making friends, and feeling accepted." To best combat this, "Try to put yourself in their shoes," said Madame Bleecher. Simply put, "Be inclusive. Be patient. Be kind," she said.

Freeman Alum Competes on "LEGO Masters"

Matthew Wozniak
Staff Writer

Being featured on national television is a rare experience for most people, but not for the Edlavitch family. Freeman alumnus Ben Edlavitch and his grandfather, David Levine, recently competed on the fourth season of the American adaptation of "Lego Masters," a spinoff based on a British reality competition show.

Appearing on the show is no easy task. Over the past few years, Ben had been running an Instagram page where he showed off his Lego creations. "One day I got an Instagram [Direct Message] from this kind of shady profile. [They had] no posts, only a few followers — not very official looking," Ben said. "I had actually been reached out to a few years before as a high school senior, but later found out that you needed to be over 18 to be on the show."

After accepting their offer, Ben then had to pick someone to be his partner on the show. "One

day I was talking to Poppy [Ben's grandfather] and I kind of jokingly asked if he wanted to do this Lego show with me," said Ben. "We have always made a pretty good team." After suggesting him to the casting staff, David was decided on as Ben's partner for the show. The two of them have done many projects together over the years, ranging from home improvement to working on antique cars. "He has a 1929 Ford Model A, this car that's almost 100 years old," said Ben. "Ever since I was big enough to hold a wrench in my hand, I've been under that car and fixing all the things that he can't get to anymore."

However, being picked to be on the show was only the first step. "We had to do these builds together on Zoom," said David. "We may have started with up to 30 [teams] in our room, then people got eliminated in that process until it got down to only a couple." This isn't an overnight process either. According to David, it took nearly a year from Ben first getting the invitation to actually start the filming process. Once you've passed

all those trials, though, it goes by quickly. Nearly immediately after being notified, your airplane tickets to Atlanta are booked and you don't have long to get ready to go.

The actual feeling of being on the set for the first time was overwhelming for them, but it didn't last long. They quickly got the feeling that they were working a job rather than building Legos. Being on set was a surreal experience for Ben and David. "It's like a casino," said David. "There are no clocks, and when you walk into the studio and cast room, you leave your phone and your watch. The only clock you knew was that 10 hours clicking down." Leaving the set after a whole day of filming would be a little disorientating for Ben and David as well. "It would be seven o'clock in the evening, and you have no clue," said David. The other contestants and the staff on the show definitely contributed to Ben and David's experience. According to Ben, they did a "really good job casting the show, and they get a lot of very cool people." The entire shooting time is nearly two months, so the competitors get to know each other well. "On set, we had a lot of fun, and we'd hang out after, which is kind of a testament to how close everybody was because we'd go through these 16-hour days and still want to hang out," he said. This made the end of each episode, when one of the contestants gets eliminated from the competition, even more emotional than the last, for David and Ben. "On TV, the moment you see them eliminated on the show is the last time that any of us see them because they get sent back to the hotel," said Ben. "We're not supposed to talk to them anymore ... and then the next day they get put on a flight home."

Spending nearly two months with unlimited Legos and twenty other Lego builders can uncover some new building strategies or ways to use a specific piece. "I



Watch a DSF alum compete in....

LEGO MASTERS

really liked to see how everybody else worked," said Ben. "A lot of other teams liked having ... every detail accounted for before beginning to build." This was nearly the opposite of Ben's approach, which conflicted a bit during the episodes where multiple teams had to work together. "I like to go in without a super strict plan or having everything formulated and just kind of let the idea develop as I'm creating," he said.

Even though they are not "supposed" to talk to one another anymore, that's not stopping this new group of friends from doing so. "We had this WhatsApp [group chat] going on. We were really close," said David. "Since the show ended, we've actually gotten together with some of the people." It just goes to show that mutual competition and shared experiences can build some of the strongest friendships.



PHOTO: FOX ENTERTAINMENT

Ben Edlavitch alongside his grandfather David Levine

Eight's A Crowd: AP French at Freeman

Izzy Minkler
Staff Writer

Freeman's language department is vibrant and fun, with three languages offered: Spanish, Latin, and French. Spanish is by far the most popular, Latin is second, and French is dead last.

Spanish is so popular mainly because it is offered in so many middle schools. Latin is widely believed to be the easiest language, as well as the most helpful for SATs. French, however, is an outlier. It isn't offered at some middle schools and very few people end up taking it in high school. Even fewer students make it all the way to the Advanced Placement (AP) level.

This year's AP French class has only eight students, a previously unheard-of number for a class. There are many pros and cons to having such a small class size. Having only eight people in an AP French class can offer several benefits such as personalized learning

and a more focused environment. However, smaller class sizes can pose challenges such as limited diversity in perspectives among students. Group discussions and peer-to-peer learning may be less rich with fewer participants. The financial viability of running such a small class could also be an issue for educational institutions. Smaller class sizes might also limit the range of teaching resources and activities available to students, potentially impacting the overall learning experience.

Some students may be hesitant to take French because they feel as though it won't have as much practical use as Spanish or, even occasionally, Latin. Some simply aren't pushed onto the French track. Since Spanish classes often start in middle or elementary school, some students feel as though they should simply finish what they've already started instead of completely switching languages.

"Spanish just seems like an easier option, so everyone took Spanish," said junior Josie McGlynn. Even though Spanish tends to dominate

the language department in middle and high school, a handful of students choose to take French despite the small class sizes. Freshman Reed Jones started French in middle school and is one of the few who have continued learning it in high school. "I started because my mom studied abroad for six months and she lived [in France]," said Reed. "I've always wanted to take it because ... it's

always been my dream to go to Paris." This is the most common reason for taking classes in French or any other language: practical use. While there aren't nearly as many opportunities to use the French language, when the opportunity arises, it is extremely useful.

The small size of the current AP French class isn't all downsides though. There are some highlights that have come from

this unique environment. Junior Lily Brooks has taken French for five years now. "I'm glad I got to have this experience of learning French," said Lily. "We all learn about France, French culture, and everything around the world that France has had an impact on."

Originally, Lily stated that she was a bit hesitant at the tiny size of the class. However, the past few months, have turned out to be a beneficial experience. "We're a lot closer because we all know each other from years and years of French together," said Lily.

Individualized instruction can allow students to flourish, especially in foreign language courses. "I think it benefits our learning because we get more attention from the teacher and more one-on-one time," said Lily. It is crucial for any student to get personalized learning, but as we all know sometimes this just isn't possible with class sizes becoming so large. This way of learning and teaching has provided better opportunities for the students in the Freeman French department.



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

The French flag flying near the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France

SPECIAL FEATURES

Addressing the White Elephant in the Room

It's about that time again — the songs on the radio have changed, lights have been put up, and people are making mile-long lists of all the things they want. This is nice! However, you notice something else as well ... it seems people love Christmas so much they forget about everything else. As someone who doesn't celebrate Christmas (but still welcomes gifts), the holiday season can sometimes feel a little isolating. I'm here to tell you that you are not alone.

Whether you celebrate a holiday during this season or not, FOMO is real, and I totally get it. The last thing you should feel is alone. I understand what it's like to see everyone with their extended family eating meals and taking pictures, all while you Google what stores are open on December 25th just for something to do. If you find yourself in that position, I recommend going to the movie theater and spending some quality time with the big screen — this year, Adam Driver's "Ferrari" comes out on Christmas Day!

Though society may tell you differently, Christmas is not the only holiday out there. If you celebrate it, great! Thanks for sharing your spirit. But if you don't? If you celebrate Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, or maybe nothing at all? That's also great! Ultimately, this season is about togetherness — no part of the world should make you feel like you aren't a part of something important. You are important regardless of what holiday colors you wear. Anyway, I wanted to let the fans know that Christmas or not, this season is for you, and no one can tell you otherwise.

Decompress to Beat the Stress

It's the second quarter and everything is starting to pick up. Classes no longer have that beginning-of-the-year awkwardness and we can't just go to school and come home with no homework. Schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and part-time jobs pile on top of each other as stress reaches its peak. However, there is a light at the end of the tunnel: the glorious winter break. Despite your personal beliefs, we can all agree that winter break is a blessing! The perfectly timed two weeks off at the end of the year relieve all of the anxiety that school has caused. But how do we relieve that stress? What is the best game plan for winter break? That's what I'm here for. Take a moment to discover the best ways to decompress during the holiday season.

One of the most popular ways to relax is holiday movies; films that are fun, festive, and heartwarming. Some of the best holiday classics include "Home Alone," "Elf," "The Polar Express," "Die Hard," and "Christmas Vacation." From action and adventure to timeless comedy, these movies are the perfect way to relax. Snuggle into the couch with some hot chocolate and snacks and unwind.

If holiday films, music is a great outlet to relieve the stress of schoolwork even before winter break. Whether you're driving, doing homework, cleaning, or simply just bored, you can throw on some tunes for the festive feeling. It could be anything from the holiday classic "All I Want For Christmas Is You" by Mariah Carey to "Let It Snow" by Frank Sinatra, perfectly encapsulating the cozy holiday spirit. If it's something you don't have, you can always go look them up enough. Baking is another great way to relax during the holiday season. Grab a friend, family member, or significant other, find a yummy recipe, and bake! It's perfect for blowing off steam and spending quality time with your loved ones. Some fun recipes are peppermint mocha cookies, chocolate chip oatmeal cookies, peanut butter blossom cookies, and Snickerdoodle cookies. Most of these can be found on websites like Sally's Baking Addiction, but the most delicious desserts come from family cookbooks; so, if you have one lying around the house, try looking through it for ideas. There is no limit to what you can whip up!

For those of you who prefer to spend your winter break at the mall, Head to the craft store to pick up supplies, and then make a day out of it! Possible creations are homemade wreaths, potpourri, garlands, centerpieces, and paper snowflakes. All great for DIY home decor.

No matter what traditions you celebrate, everybody deserves to relax during the holidays. It is very important that we take care of ourselves during times of stress, and winter break is the perfect opportunity to do that. Happy holidays!

In an exclusive interview between our *May Minute* Editor-in-Chief, Hannah Tittermary, and Commentator Editor-in-Chief, Poppy Friske, we delved into, arguably, the most important aspect of any winter festivity: the feast. Hannah:

Human:

When thinking of the holiday season, the special food cooked, baked, gifted, and devoured is often the first thing that comes to mind. The many holidays during this time of year represent a plethora of cultures, and the richness of these celebrations is seen in every meal. Now, not everyone is the most gifted chef, so we must find other ways to experience this aspect of the holidays without having to butcher family meals. Instead of scrolling through endless online recipes, why not look to the experts of food entertainment: TV chefs! Poppy, a seasoned (pun intended) Food Network fanatic, shared her top three holiday-themed culinary shows that are sure to hit the spot.

Poppy:

My all-time favorite Food Network holiday special has to be "Kids Holiday Baking Championship." The contestants are tasked with creating holiday-themed desserts that align with the challenges provided, but plot twist: they're all younger than 12 years old! This show blends pre-teen angst with all the nail-biting drama of any reality show, topped off with snowflake sprinkles to create an astronomical sugar high.

For a more high-energy competition show, I'd recommend "Guy's Grocery Games: Holiday Madness." Hosted by none other than the King of Flavor-tono himself, Guy Fieri, this Food Network special requires contestants to race through a grocery store for ingredients before whipping up three courses of holiday deliciousness. With the anticipation of trying to beat the clock and the chef's innovative creations, this show is sure to provide entertainment and culinary inspiration.

My final recommendation is "Holiday Wars," the ideal television extravaganza to make you feel even more insecure about your own skills in the kitchen. The teams of cake decorators and cookie sculptors engage in a brutal struggle for a \$25,000 prize and the glory of being a grown adult who frosts cutesy cupcakes for a living. Jokes aside, these contestants produce some truly jaw-dropping displays, blurring the line between something as methodical as baking and the loose elements of artistic expression.

No matter your level of culinary expertise, Food Network has something for everyone to enjoy during the holiday season!

RVA's Lights Are Quite a Sight

Now that the sugar highs and chaos of Halloween and Thanksgiving have passed, the winter season is upon us. During the holiday season, the city of Richmond offers a variety of festive activities including gingerbread house-building competitions, movie marathons at the Byrd, and tacky light tours. Richmonders can enjoy holiday lights ranging from wildly extravagant displays to more simplistic holiday decor. Many popular spots feature fast-motion lights, inflatable characters, and even their own radio stations. Tacky light decorations can span from one house to an entire neighborhood. If you're looking for a little cheer, the over-the-top, one-stop houses are my recommendation. However, if a night full of tacky lights is more your style, try Monument Avenue or the Lewis Grist Botanical Garden for their more expansive displays. Each year, Monument Avenue is filled with beautifully lit and decorated houses that you can walk or drive by. The houses are illuminated with an array of different colors and styles of lights alongside Christmas inflatables of the Grinch, Santa, and plenty of reindeer. These astonishing views are by far some of the best in the city. The Lewis Grist Botanical Garden's GardenFest of Lights is an annual holiday lights extravaganza that runs from Nov. 20 to Jan. 7. At GardenFest, nearly 50 acres of landscape are lit up to provide a two-and-a-half-hour-long holiday adventure. Alongside the typical greenery, light fixtures in the shape of animals, hearts, and other flora can be found throughout the garden. Unlike Monument Avenue, tickets are required to see GardenFest. Prices range from \$7 to \$20 depending on the night and the age of the guest, but it is still a must-see attraction! Aside from lights, model trains, themed holiday dinners, s'mores, and hot chocolate are staples of the GardenFest experience. With holiday cheer abounding throughout the city, Richmond has plenty to offer. Make sure to visit these displays during the most magical time of the year!

With holiday cheer abounding throughout the city, Richmond has plenty to offer. Make sure to visit these displays during the most magical time of the year!

Scotty Gregory
Staff Editor

Merrick Mock
News Editor

* take
me with!

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Shishir
Nakka

The Byrd Theatre's Organist: Instrumental in the RVA Community

Maya Thlachak

Staff Writer

Since 1928, the Byrd Theatre has hosted hundreds of film festivals and cinematic events for the Richmond community. It began as a “motion picture palace” and gradually evolved into a well-known Richmond attraction that offers affordable entertainment, paving the way for the development of the Carytown district. Over the years, entertainment at the Byrd has ranged from silent pictures to the flashy chorus line — known as the “Byrdettes” — to modern-day cinema, but one thing remains constant: its in-house organ.

The Byrd Theatre organ is an original installation designed to complement the theatre's structure and acoustics. It was custom-built by the Wurlitzer Organ Company in New York and has continued to “give the theatre a voice,” said Bob Gulledge, the current organ player at the Byrd Theatre. Bob Gulledge has been the house organ player since 1996 and was a student of the Byrd's original organ player, Eddie Weaver.

Gulledge became Weaver's apprentice at the age of 11. Weaver was instrumental in the beginning of Gulledge's journey with the theatre. In Gulledge's first performance at the Byrd, he accompanied Weaver in a production. “It was just a disaster,” said Gulledge. However, after the show, Weaver insisted Gulledge play for the following show that night. “I played the second show, and it was just fine, and I've never had any

fear of it since,” said Gulledge. Weaver left a strong legacy in the theatre, and Gulledge continues to preserve it. “[Weaver] was a real show; he kept these organs playing, and he is the reason this organ plays today,” he said.

In the theatre's 95 years of history, the organ has always been its most recognizable trademark and now stands as the last theatre organ in Virginia. As a captivating pre-show introduction, Gulledge and his organ rise to the stage on a platform. Gulledge leaves his audience with an exclusive memory of his grand entrance. “He rose from the stage and played different soundtracks from movies, which was cool. I had never seen an organ,” said freshman Carrie Nelson. The organ's intense sound creates a unique and immersive environment that connects the audience with the theatre.

Indeed, Gulledge believes that the organ is essential to a true Byrd Theatre experience. “They expect to hear it; they want to hear it,” said Gulledge. “That big sound is very distinctive ... there's no sound like it, there really isn't.” Gulledge generally plays six days a week, including a weekly performance on Saturdays at the start of each show. His ability to keep the spirit of the organ alive throughout the years is directly correlated with the theatre's success. “I'm going to keep playing as long as I can,” he said. “I enjoy it so much, and people seem to appreciate it. I don't have any plans to go anywhere.”

The theatre and Carytown rely on each other in terms of business and traffic. The Byrd Theatre's substantial following and rich his-



PHOTO: BYRD THEATRE

A look inside Richmond's Byrd Theatre

tory create “a symbiotic relationship between Carytown and this theatre,” said Gulledge. “There's a sense of community here.”

Currently, the theatre is owned by The Byrd Theatre Foundation, a non-profit organization that raises funds to maintain and improve the comfort of its audience. Throughout its history, little has changed in the theatre's facade. In order to uphold the theatre's reputation and lengthen its future, comfort, and service remain the top priorities for the foundation. As the surrounding community progresses and people's tastes be-

gin to change, the theatre has to maintain its ability to cater to its target audience. The theatre has adapted to its audience by showing more first-run movies, meaning movies that have just been released. The constantly evolving community of Richmond “requires everyone here to be in tune with the people that come in the door. You're going to have to know your audience,” said Gulledge.

The theatre's old-fashioned architecture, festivals, traditions, history, and classic films have a nostalgic hold on its surrounding community. “It doesn't just

show movies that just came out,” said Carrie. “It shows all movies, which is cool because then you can see them in a theatre.” The theatre immerses its patrons in a historical experience, in addition to its cinematic production. “The build ... was old-fashioned ... it was a lot cooler than a movie theater,” said Carrie.

The Byrd Theatre has become a communal treasure and a tradition in the Richmond community. “It has an audience; it has a following,” said Gulledge. “It's been here for 95 years, and [it's] looking forward to 95 more.”

Freeman Color Guard's Spirited Season

Julia Connor

Staff Writer

The DSF Color Guard transformed football fields into their very own stage this season with vibrant shows and high-flying flags. As a team of seven, they attended competitions and performed at halftime during home games. The team was led by section leader Charlotte Holloway and coach Minh Pham.

Color guard is one of the biggest visual aspects of marching band, with their colorful flags, sparkly uniforms, and synchronized moves. It provides added excitement on top of the band's impressive visuals. They work together, tossing their flags in sync, twirling their equipment perfectly to the beat and even changing flags while performing.

Ms. Pham is a Freeman alumnus and was a part of the color guard all four years. “[It was] always something that was really fun for me,” she said. When she was offered the job, she readily accepted the opportunity to come back. “It became something that was basically another job for me, but it was so much fun,” she said. “It didn't always feel like a job and it's different every single year and just keeps things exciting.” She helps with design, choreography, and teaching basic to advanced skills.

Charlotte Holloway, the section leader, also helped unite the color guard throughout this season. Charlotte described a section leader as “someone who keeps everybody in line, to help teach you your music or your performance, helps motivate you, and uplift everyone.” The entire color guard was brand new this year except Charlotte, a previous member. The team started training as early as January, doing spin classes to learn the basics. They not only learned how to dance with the flags but also to keep count of the drums' beat, which allowed them to stay in sync. “It's really been worth it and I think it's helped me as a

performer,” said junior Erin Walters, a member of the color guard and an active participant in the DSF theater community. The color guard worked both individually and in conjunction with the marching band, giving them friendships within the marching band too.

The whole marching band traveled to perform at the football halftime show at James Madison University. This was a new atmosphere for the DSF marching band as they performed alongside bands outside of Henrico.

The Godwin Invitational was their last competition of the season. The rainy weather created many challenges as it caused a major change in their routine. Instead of being outside on the football field as planned, they had to perform inside the gym at Godwin. This was a big shift from the football field they had practiced on. The night before, they were confined in the Freeman small gym figuring out their spacing in the new environment.

They placed first in the competition, adapting well to their new surroundings. Winning was rewarding in itself but Charlotte said the best part was, “proving ourselves to the band, that we can win.”

The team was very proud of how they succeeded at Godwin. “I feel like it was probably one of our best performances,” said junior June Luchsinger.

Section bonding became a highlight for them. “We often went to eat brunch together before competitions,” said Charlotte. These moments of bonding helped them grow as a team. One of the team's favorite aspects of the color guard is the family it provided. “Spending every single day with the same people you just kind of become a family,” said Charlotte.

The last time they performed together was at the Virginia Band and Orchestra Directors Association (VBODA), which is the marching band assessment. The Freeman marching band received a ‘Superior’ on these assessments from Virginia judges, which is the best score you can achieve.



PHOTO: DSF COLOR GUARD

Freeman's colorguard before the homecoming parade

Natalie Murchie: The Cakery Queen

Sadie Edlavitch

Staff Writer

When COVID was at its peak, most of us spent our time at home picking up new hobbies and learning different skills. With the extra free time on her hands, Natalie Murchie, a junior at Freeman, saw this as an opportunity to turn her love of baking into her very own business called “Cakery Queen, Cakes By Natalie.” Despite the limitations of quarantine, Natalie adapted and found ways to connect with her customers through social media and other online platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, etc. Natalie Murchie has made her cake business bloom since its beginning in 2020. “I started over COVID because I was super bored and I saw a bunch of cool-looking cakes on Pinterest, so I wanted to give it a try,” said Natalie. This passion for baking rapidly expanded into a self-owned business which she has been pouring her heart into for the past two years.

When Natalie started to notice an increase in her cake sales, she wanted to do something beneficial with the money she was making. “I donate about a third of the money I make each month to the Miracles in Motion dance troupe located in RVA,” said Natalie. Miracles in Motion, which was founded in 2007, is a non-profit organization that is designed to provide the full dance experience to people with disabilities or special needs while promoting awareness through the joy of dancing. “I have volunteered for them for around three years now and the pandemic has definitely had a negative impact on the kids, which is why I wanted to help,” said Natalie.

To help her along the way, her parents, friends, and teachers have continued to support the business she created. “My mom and my dad are my biggest supporters,” said Natalie. “They have always told me never to give up, even when I start to feel discouraged. They have also helped me buy so many ingredients and let me use their kitchen which I do not appreciate enough.”

Along with her parents supporting her business, Natalie has also sold some of her cakes to her teachers. “I made a cake for Ms. Hunnicutt last year as a thank you for teaching me and I also made one for Mr. Larkins.”

One of Natalie's friends in the specialty center with her at Freeman, Carter Nesmith, has purchased cakes from Natalie in the past. “Oh my gosh they were so good,” said Carter. “I ordered two cakes from Nata-



PHOTO: NATALIE MURCHIE

Natalie's chocolate Oreo cake



PHOTO: NATALIE MURCHIE

One of Natalie's chocolate-strawberry cakes

lie and both were chocolate, one had vanilla frosting and the other had chocolate frosting.”

Due to the amount of people who rave about her cakes and baking skills, Natalie has been flooded with orders. “Natalie is very independent and just a very nice person overall, which makes me want to buy more cakes from her,” said Carter. “Her cakes also taste amazing which is always a plus.” Of the two cakes Carter has received from Natalie, one was a cake Natalie made for free for Carter's birthday, and the other she purchased from Natalie for her brother's birthday. “For my birthday, Natalie made me a cake for free with my favorite flavors, it was amazing,” said Carter. “When she made a cake for my brother it fed 15 people and he enjoyed it so much.”

Natalie's mom, Missy Murchie, has helped Natalie through her journey of making cakes since the start. “My husband and I have helped provide Natalie with support by helping her buy the

correct supplies and ingredients, driving her to deliver or pick up orders, and of course letting her use our kitchen!” said Missy.

Although everything might seem like rainbows and sprinkles, Missy mentioned that Natalie has faced some troubles when it comes to running her own business as a high school student. “She tends to overschedule herself too much with school and basketball,” said Missy. “We have helped her say no to making too many cakes in the past when we know she has too much work.”

Overall, Natalie's cake business shows her determination and creativity for baking and as the word spreads about her treats, she continues to expand her business by the day. Natalie has a piece of advice she would like to share with anyone who plans to start their own business. “Do not expect a ton of orders at first and do not give up if you don't see an immediate improvement, it takes time,” said Natalie.

Allison Bischoff Swims to Success

Kristen Carpenter
Staff Writer

Freeman junior Allison Bischoff is making waves in the swimming world, one stroke at a time. Through her dedication and hard work, Allison has swum her way to a commitment at one of the most prestigious universities in the nation: the University of Virginia (UVA). In addition to her future collegiate swim career, Allison has also played an integral role both on the Freeman swim team as well as the Senior National Team at NOVA Aquatic Center. Allison began her swimming career at only seven years old when her parents signed her up for the Kanawha Recreation Association (KRA) summer swim team. Swimming at KRA made sense for Allison “since [they] were around the water all of the time,” said her mother, Mrs. Bischoff. All through the summer, Allison

proved to be a proficient swimmer.

After just one season of summer swim, Allison knew that she had a passion for the sport and wanted to take her skills to the next level. “She fell in love with swimming, and when she was eight years old, she asked if she could try out for NOVA at the end of the summer swim season,” said Mrs. Bischoff. Allison ended up making a travel team at NOVA Aquatics.

Allison’s decision to swim for NOVA meant an extremely busy and disciplined schedule. “[Everyday] I wake up at 4:30 in the morning and I head to the pool from 5:00-7:00 [for] practice,” said Allison. On Sundays and Mondays, Allison attends an additional practice where she will swim for an hour in the afternoon, followed by 45 minutes of lifting. “The hardest part of travel swim is balancing it all with the other aspects of my life and not letting it take over or stress me out too much,” said Allison. While Allison’s schedule is intense, she believes that “being

around people that share the same interest and are able to help push [her] to achieve [her] goals” has helped her to stay motivated when her life becomes overwhelming.

Swimming for the NOVA Senior National Team has allowed her “to compete at national level meets and experience a lot of things that [she] wouldn’t get to see in high school swimming,” said Allison. These opportunities have ultimately brought her to where she is today: securing a position on the UVA Women’s Swim Team.

Allison’s talent has also made her a valued member of the Freeman Swim Team. Swimming at Freeman has given Allison an opportunity to not only improve her own swimming skills, but to train alongside other aspiring swimmers as well. “She definitely pushes others who might not be as talented as her,” said DSF swim coach Steven Gromling. “She has a way of getting others to do the best they can, even when they, mentally, are in a tough spot.”



PHOTO: MRS. BISCHOFF

Allison poses after a race with fellow DSF swimmer Claire Stuhlmacher

Allison has proven herself to be well-rounded in all swim events, but she is particularly gifted in the freestyle event and currently holds the school record for the 200 freestyle. Throughout her time on the Freeman swim team, Allison has helped her fellow athletes significantly, especially in relay races. “There were a few times in relay races where [Freeman] was in second place and it came to the anchor leg and [Allison] was the anchor for the relay,” said Mr. Gromling. “She was able to outtouch [the opponents] for the win.” Allison has played a crucial role on Freeman’s swim team and continues to exceed the expectations of her coaches. There have been times when “[Allison] has swum faster than I could ever believe,” said Mr. Gromling.

Allison’s commitment to UVA was not made without thorough consideration. “UVA checked off all of the boxes. They had an amazing team and the team environment was great,” said Allison. “UVA swim will push me, while also providing great academics.” She looks forward to “meeting the whole

team and building great friendships that will last a lifetime.”

Allison has also proven herself to be a very driven student. “She is very dedicated, focused, and disciplined in the pool with her training and that carries over into her schoolwork and life,” said Mrs. Bischoff. Her commitment to UVA was a result of her talent in the swimming pool and her academic drive.

Since her early days as a seven-year-old Firefish for the Kanawha Summer Swim Team, Allison has come a long way. She has earned numerous medals, broken records, and displayed a tremendous amount of talent. Her journey to becoming a collegiate-level athlete for the University of Virginia is a culmination of a decade of hard work, diligence, and natural talent.

Yet, UVA might not be the end of Allison’s swim career. “The Olympics have been a lifelong dream, but realistically, I think I would stop after college,” said Allison. Whether Allison ends up at the Olympics or stops swimming after college, her career as a swimmer has been well decorated.



PHOTO: MRS. BISCHOFF

Allison getting into position before her race

Freeman Runs the Richmond Marathon

Connor Almstead
Staff Writer

The annual Richmond Marathon took place on Nov. 11, 2023. Hosted by Sports Backers, a non-profit organization, the course followed historic landmarks in Virginia’s capital city. The event consisted of a distribution of SWAG packets, food stops around the course, and a post-race party open to all.

2023 marks the 46th year since the marathon’s debut. Created in 1978, originally under the alias “Richmond Newspaper Marathon,” its purpose was to support efforts to make running more accessible around the city.

Starting in the downtown area, the marathon went around popular roads, such as bustling Broad Street and scenic Monument Avenue. Pony Pasture and Belle Island, popular destinations for locals and tourists, also got a close pass-by.

In addition to the marathon, Sports Backers also holds a half-marathon and an eight-kilometer race. All three contain a race packet, finisher’s medal, and access to on-course entertainment. They also host virtual races, where racers complete the run anytime and anywhere, still receiving the

same rewards as the in-person event. A special medal is awarded for people who sign up for all three, running one in-person and completing two events virtually within the month of November.

Kathryn Pike, a math teacher at Freeman, ran the Richmond Marathon in 2006. Her passion for running began in high school, where she followed in her sister’s footsteps by joining the Freeman Cross Country Team. After falling in love with the sport, she contin-

“*I never felt like I was alone on the course.*”

- Mrs. Pike

ued racing after graduating high school. “It became my outdoor hobby and a stress reliever, depending on the situations [in] my life,” said Mrs. Pike. She got into marathons for the challenge and signed up for the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington DC. After enduring a tough race, she was determined to improve and signed up for the Richmond Marathon

the following year. The experience went much better than at DC. “I never felt like I was alone on the course,” said Mrs. Pike. “Even when you’re tired, there are people cheering you on.”

Freeman science teacher, Rachel Keller, ran the marathon in 2002 and 2007. Originally sticking to half marathons, she wanted to challenge herself with the longer distance. “I just wanted to see if I could,” she said.

After completing her first race, she prepped for five years and reran the race with a much-improved time. She trained by herself and used a method called the Galloway. “I would set my watch on a ten-minute timer, and run until the timer stops. Then I would walk for about 45 seconds, then I would set the timer again and keep running,” she said. Using this method, she greatly improved her time and felt much better.

Katie Striker, an American History teacher at Freeman, has run the Richmond half-marathon three times. She started running when her daughter was born and has slowly ramped up the distance over the course of a decade. She has a soft spot for the experience. “It’s local, there’s a great training team, and it’s a lovely course,” she said.

Before each half-marathon, she

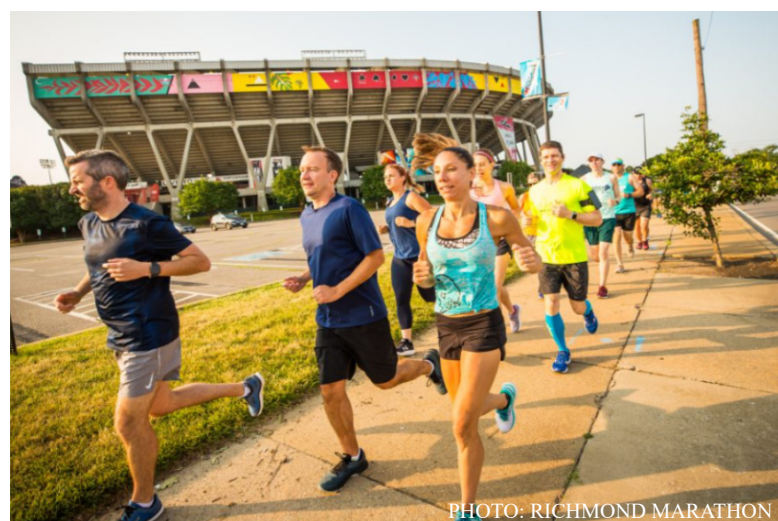


PHOTO: RICHMOND MARATHON

Marathon runners pass by The Diamond at mile 20

participated in Sports Backer’s official training team for the event. “I found a training team that really matched my style,” she said. Before her third marathon, however, she injured herself. She still decided to run, but later regretted that decision. “I had definitely made my injury worse,” she said. Still recovering, she hoped to return to running when fully healed.

The funds of the marathon go back into Sports Backer’s official charities. Their main target, “Kids on the Move,” is a program designed to give kids opportunities to run and play other

sports. From covering transportation costs to buying a pair of athletic shoes, the money raised for the youth organization aims to instill lifelong healthy habits.

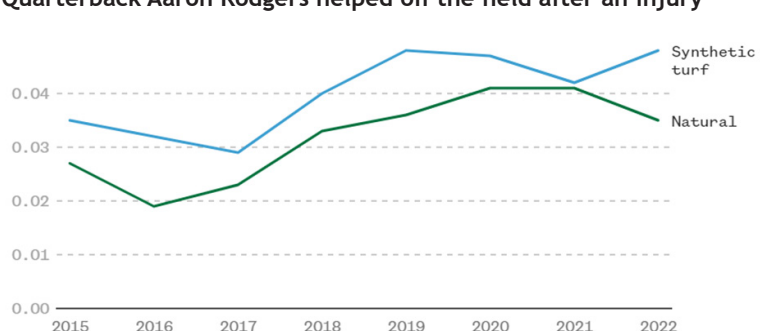
The marathon is considered to be one of central Virginia’s most distinct events of the year. Since its debut, it has become a staple of Richmond’s culture. Sports Backers refers to the event as “the friendliest marathon in America,” as spectators encourage competitors by cheering on the sidelines. After 46 years, the Richmond Marathon is expected to remain a community tradition.

Turf vs. Grass: The Greatest Rivalry in the NFL



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

Quarterback Aaron Rodgers helped off the field after an injury



Notes: Rate is per 100 player plays in regular season games. The injuries counted are those without direct contact that cause the player to miss time.
Source: IQVIA via the NFL Players Association

PHOTO: JOE MURPHY, NBC NEWS

Graph displaying injury data related to each field surface

Celia Acey
Sports Editor

In recent years, National Football League (NFL) players have called for grass fields in all NFL stadiums, as opposed to the artificial turf surface currently used by most major stadiums. The debate surrounding turf and grass fields resurfaced in 2022 when the NFL released data reporting that there had been a greater number of total injuries during games played on turf relative to grass over the last four years.

Currently, the 30 NFL stadiums are evenly split between artificial turf and natural grass fields. As of the season’s 20 major leg injuries thus far, 12 have occurred on a turf field. Freeman senior and football player, Willie Sellers, said that these injuries can be attributed to how turf fields affect movement. “[Turf] doesn’t absorb much impact,” said Willie. “With turf, player’s cleats just stay kind of on the

surface level, whereas with grass, cleats actually dig into the ground, allowing for more traction.”

Green Bay Packers Quarterback (QB) Aaron Rodgers tore his achilles during Week 1 of the NFL season at MetLife Stadium, which uses a turf field. Following the tear, Rodgers advocated for the league’s switch to grass fields. “It’s that wobble that can cause some of these non-contact knee injuries that we’ve seen,” he said. “I’m not sure if that’s the standard that’s set for that type of surface or it’s the installation of that surface, but a lot of that could be just done away with if we had grass in every stadium.”

The National Football League Players Association (NFLPA) has also supported players’ opinions on the turf vs. grass debate. “NFL clubs should proactively change all field surfaces to natural grass,” said President JC Tretter.

In response to the NFLPA, the NFL claimed that its goal is to lower injuries as a whole, not solely on artificial fields. “Our effort is

to try to drive down [injury] rates on both surfaces,” said Jeff Miller, NFL Executive Vice President of Communications, Public Affairs & Policy, and Health & Safety.

Many turf supporters say that certain stadiums are simply not able to grow grass due to harsh winter climates. The Tennessee Titans stated that they had to make the switch back to turf because the grass field was too difficult to maintain in their ‘transition climate zone.’ Their official website also referenced higher injuries on the grass field, saying that, “... during the 2018-2021 seasons, Nissan Stadium consistently had amongst the highest lower body injuries of any stadium across the league.”

Despite the pushback from the NFL, many fans believe that the league will make the comprehensive switch to grass. “Especially with indoor stadiums, where they can artificially grow grass by creating optimal conditions, I think teams will make the change,” said Willie. “And with that, it’s going to lead to fewer injuries.”

Freeman Alumnus Nile Price Finds Success in Filmmaking

Afton Hessian

News/World News Editor

Since exiting the hallowed halls of Freeman High School, alumnus Nile Price has found success in New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where he has written, produced, and edited five short films to date: "Bitter Earth," "Silent," "Home Again," "Wander," and "For the Moon." Price grew up in the East End of Henrico as one of three triplets. He had sickle cell anemia as a child, which left him unable to live a normal life. "I could hang out with kids every now and then, but most of the time my health prevented me from being outside, so I found solace in movies," said Price.

At the end of his junior year at Freeman, Price was pulled into his counselor's office. "She told me I was one elective credit shy of graduating on time," said Price. "The options were carpentry, home economics, and photography, and photography sounded like an easy A, so I said, 'Sure, sign me up.'"

Working with 35-millimeter cameras, he was taught to develop photos and built a portfolio that gained the attention and praise of his teacher. His photography teacher also started Freeman's morning announcements and convinced Price to join. Coincidentally, this was the year Freeman went 8-0, the first time since 1996, and Price was there to capture the games.

His journey with editing began around this time in an unconventional manner. "When the bell rang and everyone went home, I would stuff paper towels in the doors so that after I went to Cookout to edit the football game footage I could sneak back into school," said Price. "I would stay for two or three hours and teach myself how to edit."

After graduating from Freeman, Price went to Norfolk State Uni-

versity, where he intended to study film, but since there were no film classes at the college, Price decided to find other ways of pursuing his interests. "I purchased a camera with my refund check, and it was the best investment I ever made," said Price. "I took that camera around with me every day."

Realizing that he ardently wanted to pursue the arts, Price pursued his master's degree at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. It was there that he began writing and directing his first short films. "I remember having an image appear in my head of a guy sitting at a pier in front of a large body of water, but I didn't know what it was or what it meant," said Price. "I had this very deep feeling of melancholy, so I built the film around that feeling, and it ended up being an allegory for depression."

Price's involvement with film doesn't end when the work day does. "Film is a religion for me," said Price. "I grew up a preacher's kid and there's a moment in church, sitting in a pew, where I used to think 'This is for me, they are talking directly to me.'" In a similar sense, inspiration comes from all angles for Price. "I might hear somebody talking on a train and that sparks random dialogue that I'll put down in my notes, and I may not know what it is then, but then a month later, it expands on its own and becomes something greater," said Price. "There are stories everywhere, every day, and the more I started to become aware of them, the more I started finding different things I wanted to tell."

Price's second short film, "Silent," is pointedly and profoundly not silent. It follows a man consumed by technology trying to find sanity in a world with decreasing interpersonal interaction. "There is a phenomenon called phantom ringing," said Price. "There are computers, devices, everything buzzes and beeps and



PHOTO: RICHMOND FREE PRESS

Filmmaker and Freeman alumnus Nile Price

rings. Sometimes if your leg or foot shifts in a different way, it activates nerves and feels like your phone is buzzing." This phenomenon troubled Price, who began to experience it himself, which led him to make a short film out of it. "I had this obsession about a person in a small space being driven crazy by all the technological devices going off, but not knowing the cause," said Price.

Towards the end of the short, the man stares at the cause of the discordant sound, then looks at a picture of switchgrass as the camera pans in on the back of his head. When the camera pans out, the man is in a field, and for the first time in the film, there are no abrasive noises. "I think I called it "Silent" because I was longing for the South, which is very quiet," said Price. "When he jumps into the painting and into the switchgrass, everything dissipates, all the sounds fade away, and [he] gets this moment of solace."

Price's newest short film, "For the Moon" which was shown in multiple film festivals in 2023, follows future astronaut Ronald McNair in segregated South Carolina. Price's interest was piqued since he first heard about McNair's story, but the film was new terri-

tory for him. "It was a little different because ["For the Moon"] is based on a public figure and it is a period piece, all things that I had never done before," said Price. "However, I knew it was the only story that I wanted to tell."

Price was drawn to the story of Ronald McNair partially because of what he represented in the grand scheme of the civil rights movement. In the short film, Ronald McNair is eight in 1959, which was four years after the tragic

death of Emmett Till. "The civil rights movement that followed [Emmett Till's death] brought activists like Rosa Parks, Dr. King, and Malcolm X, but to have one single child do this very pivotal thing struck me," said Price.

Personal connections also contributed to Price's interest in McNair's story. "My great-grandfather was born in 1900 and passed away in 2006," said Price. "He was a sharecropper, which helped me sink my teeth into the story [of Robert McNair] because [my great-grandfather] and his brother picked in tobacco and cotton fields when they were nine." The effects of these circumstances were observed in other members of Price's family. "My grandmother still wakes up at four every morning because when she was a kid, she was woken up at four to start picking in the fields," said Price. "It's interesting to see how that is still etched and engraved into our bones, so I think McNair's story is a representation for me."

In the future, Price hopes to create full-length films. "The amount of financial responsibility and effort that goes into making a short is equivalent to the amount that you will put on a feature, but because you're working with a compressed amount of time on the set, you only get so many pages to try to tell a complete story," said Price. "[Short film] is not enough for me, I love to write too much."

Sailin' Through Freeman, One 'arrr!' at a Time

Anna Meiller

Mav Minute Editor in Chief

Upon entering the empty Douglas Freeman auditorium, one might not be conscious of the marvelous storytelling that transpires on the brightly lit stage. However, if you were fortunate enough to observe this year's drama production of the play "Twelfth Night" (or any DSF Thespian production for that matter), you would understand the magical elements of this theater.

This year's swashbuckling, pirate-themed play follows two separated twins, Viola and Sebastian, as they navigate through their own stories of love and betrayal until fate eventually brings them back to each other.

Freeman's theater department wanted to adapt their production into something never seen before through their unique theming. "The different directions all of the actors [had] taken has put on a unique version of 'Twelfth Night,'" said freshman Maggie Jones, "a version that's specific to Freeman." Through their set design, costumes, and behavior on stage, the students hoped to achieve a reclaimed production of 'Twelfth Night,' where "you'll still see the theme and the authenticity of the original show," said Maggie.

The show itself is 100 percent student-run. "Everything the actors [were] wearing was designed and sewn by the students," said Ms. Gardner. "[The students] wanted a nautical... pirate Elizabethan-era aesthetic, so they made it happen." However, no one from the audience would be able to tell that the costumes being showcased in the play were not manufactured in the tenth century B.C.E. A favorite outfit among the cast belonged to the character Maria, played by senior Jamie Han. "Maria, one of the pirate women, has a flowy white shirt, black corset, and a detailed skirt pulled up so you see the undershirt on the underside with tall black boots," said Ms. Gardner. The costumes worn by Olivia's

ladies were another favorite. Their outfits consisted of a long flowy skirt, a bodice, a white fluffy shirt on top, and character shoes.

Despite having two fewer weeks to rehearse than in previous years and a new director, all the actors and actresses were able to "embod[y] their characters," said Jamie. "[If] you see them on stage [you can see] that [their] role was made for them."

Maggie, the assistant stage manager and one of the handmaidens to the lead character Olivia said that her character "is feminine, fun, and very girly," and relished in expressing her character's emotions. Moreover, as the assistant stage manager, Maggie ensures that props are set, scene changes are getting done, and she double-checks every little element. "My role specifically is to listen to senior Eva Milby [stage manager] and listen to what she needs," said Maggie.

Other challenges arose alongside the shorter rehearsal timeframe. "A lot of the criticism we got with 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' (a past DSF production) was that it was hard to comprehend," said Jamie. However, with this year's production, the cast believed that this play's hilarious concepts allowed most students who came to watch the show to find the story entertaining, comical, and relatively easy to follow.

Ms. Gardner expressed that after this play, she hopes that Shakespeare will no longer be "feared anymore," she said. "Twelfth Night" is a "bold but relatable" show that has a modern twist. One such change that Ms. Gardner brought to the play was her attitude around blocking and giving directions. "My style is a little bit more freeform," said Ms. Gardner. "I like the students to make some decisions about what they want to do." This more laid-back approach did not hinder the department's production capabilities nor did viewers (myself included) notice any awkward pauses or hesitations. "Twelfth Night" was truly spectacular!



PHOTO: GRACIE HUNSICKER, DSF YEARBOOK

From left to right: Jamie Han, Ethan Park, Holly Jahn, and Riley Robinson

Golden Bachelor: Thinning Hair, Don't Care!

Shishira Nakka

Centerspread Editor

When we think of "The Bachelor," a few images come to mind: sexy six-packs nestled under a bed of roses, hot tub magic, and glasses of champagne clinking together by two equally tanned tens. However, in this season's latest release, audiences are exposed to hearing aids instead of hot bods. "The Golden Bachelor" is hotter than a menopausal heat flash, and I'm a total fan.

I know what you're thinking — something must be wrong with this girl. And while I'd usually agree, when it comes to this gem of a show, I must object. "The Golden Bachelor" is the world's first senior citizen-centered dating show — what you never knew you needed! The series surrounds Gerry (not short for geriatric), a 72-year-old silver fox with looks that just won't quit. The 22 female contestants are here to find love, and their hearts beat (irregularly) for Gerry.

The main difference between the original "Bachelor" and the "Golden Bachelor" is that our main man is not an amateur, but a seasoned professional when it comes to the throes of love. Gerry arrives at the villa as a widower, much like the other women there. He aims to find not the woman he sees himself living with, but "the woman [he] can't live without." His journey to seeking out "The One" is ... curious to say the least.

In every episode, there is one group date and at least one solo date. A highlight of the show is the episode where the ladies are invited to enjoy hours of raw, passionate, sweaty ... pickleball. They got all dolled up for the court, all while dreaming of taking Gerry to court to sign a marriage license. One sassy senior named April, while swinging her paddle around, took a tumble to the floor, clutching her ankle — where's Life Alert when you need it? Gerry rushed to her side and squatted down as far as his joints would let him, holding her in his veiny and bony arms — just what every woman dreams of. The other women glared with jealousy, but a few gasped in sympathy and fear. If you ever thought these women couldn't be a little



PHOTO: ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

"Golden Bachelor" official press release poster

feisty when necessary, then you, my friend, are wrong — turns out, April was never hurt! Who knew these oldies still had it in them?

Other than pickleball, Gerry's girls take part in all sorts of romantic endeavors — late-night car rides, dinner dates, and sizzling hot tub sessions. If you're the kind of person who loves watching old people make out in a jacuzzi, then I'd start watching this show immediately. The amount of action Gerry gets makes the original "Bachelor" look like child's play — talk about steamy!

My personal favorite part of the show all started at the beginning. The series opens with Gerry putting on his favorite accessory: his hearing aids (surprise, they were golden). As these girls went on their solo dates, a few of them would share something special about themselves. I can remember one of the women telling Gerry she had a secret, pushing her hair behind her ears, and revealing a special piece of jewelry — her own hearing aids! I loved seeing the joy in Gerry's eyes as he realized he wasn't alone

in his auditory processing journey.

This show is all about rediscovering love. Many of the contestants have either lost a partner or are divorced, and they all mention that, if this is to be the last chapter of their lives, it should be spent with a loved one. This series proves that you can get a second chance in love, and a second dose of vitamins for your slowly failing immune system — I hope I don't find any of these Golden Girls doing a meet and greet in Costco.

The "Golden Bachelor" is the dating show for the white-haired widows of the world, and is all about watching these 60 to 75-year-olds fall desperately in love ("Help! I've fallen and I can't get up!"). At the end of the day, love is something everyone deserves, regardless of if you need to put your glasses on to find it. These oldies have brittle joints, but their stamina is far from falling apart. I know not everyone is into reality TV, but if you'll take anything away from this article, let it be an inspiration for how to spend your days in gold — I mean, old age, and to please give this show a shot.

“All You Wanna Do” Is See “SIX” The Musical On Tour

Libby Mercer
Staff Writer

“Divorced, Beheaded, Died. Divorced, Beheaded, Survived.” You may have heard this phrase in a European history class or, if you are a theater kid like me, you’ve heard it sung in the pop-rock musical, “SIX.” This show tells the story of Henry VIII’s six wives, Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard, and Catherine Parr. The musical explores each wife’s unique story in relation to Henry through their portrayal as members of a pop girl group, reminiscent of the Spice Girls. “SIX” is currently on its second national tour, The Boleyn Tour, and is a perfectly feminist and uplifting retelling of the devastating true history or, more accurately phrased, “her-story,” of Henry’s six wives. The format of this show is extremely unique, as it is performed like a concert. Each queen sings a song that reflects her individual story. For instance, Anne Boleyn’s song is called “Don’t Lose Ur Head,” which is ironic since she was beheaded. The first wife of Henry VIII, Catherine of Aragon, gets a song called “No Way,” which most likely was her response to Henry VIII when he handed her the annulment papers. One song in the musical, “Haus of Holbein,” doesn’t necessarily correspond to any particular queen, but is more so about the unrealistic beauty standards that shaped society when these queens were alive. One of the coolest parts about this show is the many historical easter eggs that it contains. Since “SIX” is formatted like

a pop-rock concert, it makes the show unique from most traditional musicals. Kami Lujan, a drummer for “SIX,” is a Texas native who got her degree in music education from the University of North Texas. “[SIX] doesn’t share any of those attributes where there’s a jazz number or a slow ballad that stays quiet the whole time,” said Kami. “It’s straight up a pop-rock show the whole time.” This is Kami’s first national tour and first job outside of the Dallas area. For a band member to book the coveted job, it’s all about who you know. “In the musical theater world, [the number of] female and nonbinary drummers is very small, and so we all were aware of each other and when the time came for “SIX” to get a new drummer they both recommended me,” said Kami. There’s “No Way” that theater enthusiast and sophomore Syl Compton would miss the chance to see “SIX” when it came to the Altria Theater. The local Richmond theater hosted “SIX” from Nov. 7 through Nov. 12, 2023. “I love “SIX.” I’ve been a really big fan of it for a few years now. [The actresses’] vocals are just incredible,” said Syl. “They have so much power behind their voices and they use it so well.” Katherine Howard, the fifth wife of Henry VIII, who was beheaded on accounts of adultery, sings a song titled, “All You Wanna Do.” The song details how used and abused Katherine Howard was by men starting at a young age. Aline Mayagotitia, the actress playing Katherine Howard on the national tour, talks about how treacherous this song is to perform every night. “It’s the hardest dance number in the show. The [other actresses]



PHOTO: JOAN MARCUS

The cast of “SIX” on The Boleyn Tour

are whacking their backs out. It’s crazy,” said Aline. “I don’t think any of us enjoy doing that number, but I think all of us appreciate how important and brilliantly constructed [the song] is.” Katherine Howard’s story is not the most upbeat tune to sing, but Aline does a fantastic job transporting the audience to that tragic headspace. Aline has made the role of Howard her own. “I think my sense of humor is a lot more campy than Katherine Howard’s ... but that’s just because I’m Mexican. I’m really expressive,” said Aline. “The longer we go into the show, I think the closer [Katherine

Howard] gets to me.” Aline has been on the Boleyn leg of the tour for over a year, and the tour as a whole has performed 450 shows. One detail the show uses to further the story of Henry VIII’s wives is the costuming. The costume designer, Gabriella Slade, took care to make sure each queen’s story was represented to the fullest in each costume, while also alluding to well-known pop stars, like Britney Spears and Ariana Grande. Katherine Howard’s costume is purposefully more revealing than the other queens’ costumes to express her unfortunate history. Another detail in Kather-

ine Howard’s look is her “glorious pink ponytail,” as described by Aline. “The one hair design that stays very consistent through every single Katherine Howard look is the pink ponytail,” said Aline. “It affects everything about the way I carry myself to the way I like to swish my head during my choreography — it just feels really feminine and powerful.” The Altria will continue to host many more musicals during their current “Broadway in Richmond” season. Just like “SIX,” the musicals played during this season will continue to be “SIX” out of five stars!

“The Art of Advertising” at the VMFA

Lorelei Kelley
Copy Editor

From a catalog of Yves Saint Laurent’s designs to a collection of terracotta army figures, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) has hosted it all. Their newest exhibit, “The Art of Advertising,” is an exploration of printed works from the late 19th century. The exhibition consists of eight pieces, each representing a different artist from the Art Nouveau movement and a different part of the world. It is displayed in the Mary Ann Frable Gallery, which sits adjacent to the museum’s Ancient Greek collection on the second floor. Although it is a smaller exhibit, the pieces capture the viewer’s attention and portray interesting, usually forgotten parts of history. The exhibition is on display from July 22, 2023, to Jan. 21, 2024, and is included in the free general admission to the museum. Co-curated by VMFA Curatorial Assistant Madeleine Dugan and Curator of Decorative Arts After 1890 Barry Shifman, the exhibit is a work of labor and love. “This was my first experience curating an exhibition in a museum setting, so I took this as a learning opportunity from every angle,” said Madeleine Dugan. “I had an incredible amount of fun, especially working closely with my colleagues who have been great mentors and friends throughout this process.” In truth, curating the exhibit required working with almost every department of the museum. What started as Madeleine’s idea soon became the efforts of a large number of staff members. “It is a very collaborative process,” said Ms. Dugan. “We worked closely with our Conservation colleagues, our Exhibition Design team, our Education colleagues, and our Art Handling team to put it together.” Despite its smaller size, the project took almost a year and a half to complete. The exhibit itself focuses on the Art Nouveau style, which was “an artistic and stylistic reaction to the Industrial Revolution,” said Ms. Dugan. “The style pushed for modernity, so there is a lot of imagery of women’s rights as their roles began to change in society.” The piece “La Maison Moderne” by Italian artist Manuel Orazi serves as the poster image



PHOTO: LORELEI KELLEY

“La Maison Moderne” (The Modern House) by Manuel Orazi

for the exhibition and exemplifies this concept. The work portrays a wealthy woman wearing jewelry in the foreground and a collection of decorative objects in the background. It represents the greater role that women during the period played in society, especially as patrons of the arts. Aside from Orazi, works by Al-

“The style pushed for modernity, so there is a lot of imagery of women’s rights as their roles began to change in society.”
- Madeleine Dugan

phonse Mucha, Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, Henri De Toulouse-Lautrec, Josef Maria Auchentaller, and Paul Berthon also hang in the gallery. Each piece depicts female figures advertising either a product or a venue and provides a unique commentary on the social customs of the time. As a

co-curator of the exhibition, Ms. Dugan has studied each poster in great detail. “My favorite poster is the “Grosser Fest-Corso und Frühlingfest” (Great Celebration Parade and Spring Festival) by Josef Maria Auchentaller,” she said. “It first caught my eye when I was studying fine art in college and saw it online; I was awed by the design and even sketched it a couple of times. I had no clue that the VMFA was its home, so I was thrilled to see it here.” When I visited the exhibit, I was in awe of the beauty of all eight posters. All of the pieces worked together seamlessly while maintaining their stylistic individuality. My personal favorite was “Folies Bergère, Liane de Pougy,” a work by the French artist Paul Berthon. The vibrant colors and arresting nature of the image — that of a young woman entangled in a spiderweb as she dances amidst a field of yellow flowers — was especially haunting and I found myself returning to it multiple times during my visit. What was especially interesting to me was that it depicted a famous courtesan of the time, Liane de Pougy, which seemed to insinuate a greater level of sexual freedom for women than had previously been deemed permissible. As is the case for most exhibits, each piece had an individual tale to tell. “I find that I am drawn most to artworks that have a story behind them that I get to dig into,” said Ms. Dugan. The



PHOTO: LORELEI KELLEY

“Grosser Fest-Corso un Frühlingfest” (Great Celebration Parade and Spring Festival) by Josef Maria Auchentaller

Auchentaller lithograph, in particular, is the only known account of the festival depicted in it and is highly valued by curators. Other works like “Divan Japonais” by French artist Henri De Toulouse-Lautrec showcase popular forms of entertainment from the period, especially cabarets and operas. Both of these pieces featured prominent events and people from the late 19th century, which add to the intricate stories behind each of the works in the exhibit. Despite their beauty, the material used for these advertisements was not renowned for its longevity. Lithographs are much more fragile than other mediums and many of the works currently displayed had to undergo highly detailed conservation processes before they could be placed in the gallery for public enjoyment. “Paper is especially finicky and takes a lot of patience to preserve and restore, and our Conservation colleagues do a beautiful job,” said Ms. Dugan. “These posters, specifically, come with what conservationists describe as an ‘inherent vice,’ meaning that the paper has built-in problems that make it wear down over time.” Due to this, the posters can only be displayed for up to six months at a time as they are extremely sensitive to light. Afterward, the posters will be placed in dark storage for three times as long as they were on display, so make sure to see “The Art of Advertising” before it leaves!



PHOTO: LORELEI KELLEY

“Lait pur stérilisé de la Vingeanne” (Pasteurized Milk from the Vingeanne) by Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen



PHOTO: LORELEI KELLEY

“Folies Bergère, Liane de Pougy” by Paul Berthon

Influential Lives Lost



PHOTO: CNN

Rosalynn Carter

Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, passed away on Nov. 19, 2023, at the age of 96. A steadfast advocate for mental health awareness, she served as the Honorary Chairperson of the President's Commission on Mental Health from 1977 to 1978. She founded The Carter Center and spent decades advancing women's rights and promoting global health initiatives. In 1999, she received America's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, for her years of public service.



PHOTO: THE NEW YORKER

Henry Kissinger

Former Secretary of State and National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, passed away on Nov. 29, 2023, at the age of 100. Kissinger's passing illuminated his influential legacy, especially his role in controversial Cold War-era foreign policy. According to Reuters, "Kissinger was the architect of the U.S. diplomatic opening with China, landmark U.S.-Soviet arms control talks, expanded ties between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and the Paris Peace Accords with North Vietnam."



PHOTO: TAMMANY PARISH LIBRARY

Sandra Day O'Connor

Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman appointed to the Supreme Court, passed away on Dec. 1, 2023, at age 93. She served as an Associate Justice on the Supreme Court for 24 years and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009 for her service to the United States. Throughout her tenure, she made significant contributions to landmark cases, often acting as a vital swing vote among the nine justices.

Content by Merrick Mock, Kristen Carpenter, and Scotty Gregory

Israel-Hamas War: Conflict Rages in the Gaza Strip

Lorelei Kelley

Copy Editor

On Oct. 7, 2023, members of the Hamas terrorist organization launched an attack on Israeli towns, army bases, and a music festival. According to the New York Times, 1200 Israelis were killed in the original attack and 240 hostages were taken by Hamas. Since the attack, intense bombings from both sides have plagued Israel and the Gaza Strip — the primary target of Israeli military advances thus far.

Bombings in Gaza have displaced over one million Palestinians, according to the United Nations Population Fund, and sparked a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. A humanitarian pause began on Nov. 24, 2023, allowing food and fuel to enter the area, but the need for clean water sources remains pressing. This break in the attacks was partially a result of discussions surrounding the exchange of hostages — the Israeli government's stated focus for the war.

During the five-day hiatus, 105 hostages were released from captivity in Gaza including 81 Israeli citizens and 24 foreign nationals, according to the Washington Post. However, these numbers vary from 102 to 108 depending on the source. In return, 240 Palestinians of the possible 9,000 prisoners in Israel were released. Of these



PHOTO: CNN

A Palestinian man reacts to the destruction in Gaza.

9,000, 5,700 were imprisoned before the beginning of the war on Oct. 7 and 3,300 were taken during the war. Outside of this exchange, two American hostages were released: four-year-old Abigail Edan and 49-year-old Liat Beinon Atzili.

Prior to the agreed-upon end of the ceasefire, sirens went off in communities near Gaza and the Israel Defense Force (IDF) intercepted a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip. On Nov. 29, 2023, the ceasefire formally ended, and the IDF reported that fighting had resumed with IDF fighter jets attacking Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip. The renewed fighting delayed talks of hostage exchanges, leaving over 100 Israelis and nine Americans in Gaza, ac-



PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Two Israeli mourners embrace next to a gravesite.

cording to the Washington Post.

The remaining American hostages have not left the thoughts of American political leaders. "We will not stop until we get these hostages brought home and an answer to their whereabouts," said President Joe Biden. As a long-time ally of Israel, support from the United States has included both military and humanitarian aid.

Although President Biden formally announced the United States' support of Israel in the war, the American populace remains divided. This division has become most apparent on college campuses where "there have been hundreds of protests and counter-protests," according to CNN. Following their joint Congressional

testimony on Dec. 5, 2023, University of Pennsylvania President Liz Magill resigned and the presidents of both Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) are facing calls to step down.

A new report by the Anti-Defamation League found that 73 percent of Jewish students have experienced some form of antisemitism since the Israel-Hamas conflict began. Another study by the Pew Research Center reported that 48 percent of Muslims experience some form of discrimination based on their religion each year. Both groups are suffering increased religious discrimination due to the war between Israel and Hamas which continues to increase tensions in the United States and abroad.

House of Representatives Expels George Santos

Liah Chung

Staff Writer

Following an eight-month-long investigation conducted by the House Ethics Committee, Congressman George Santos was ousted on Dec. 1, 2023, in a 311-114 vote.

Two other unsuccessful attempts — one in May and one in November — to expel him preceded this vote. His support faced a significant decline in mid-November after a 56-page report found "substantial evidence" that Santos had orchestrated a "complex web" of illegal activity by filing false campaign statements and allegedly misusing campaign funds. According to the report, campaign funds were redirected towards Santos' personal expenditures, including luxury designer goods and vacations.

To unseat a member of Congress, two-thirds of the House of Representatives must vote in favor of the motion. In the most recent vote, Republicans were split

evenly, while almost all Democrats supported the expulsion. In United States history, Santos is only the sixth member of Congress to be removed from the House.

Santos and other Republicans, particularly from the far-right Freedom Caucus, argued that his removal sets a dangerous precedent for expulsions based on public opinion rather than true criminal convictions. The ousting of Santos marks the first time that the House of Representatives has removed a member who had not been convicted of treason.

Former Congressman Santos represented New York's Third Congressional District. He ran on a platform against the "Radical Left" and was elected in 2022 with 54 percent of the Long Island-based district's vote. A special election will take place in the coming months to fill the vacant seat. Both Republicans and Democrats are vying over the highly-contested seat while Santos is set to appear in court in Sept. 2024 on charges of identity theft, theft of public funds, and money laundering of campaign donations.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Former Congressman George Santos

Life in Captivity: The World's Saddest Elephant



PHOTO: USA TODAY

Mali, the "world's saddest elephant"

Maya Tluchak

Staff Writer

On Nov. 28, 2023, the "world's saddest elephant," Vishwa Ma'ali, commonly known as Mali, passed away at the age of 43 after being held in captivity for over four decades.

In 1981, the Sri Lankan government gave baby Mali to the city government of Manila, located in the Philippines. After her arrival, Mali was held completely isolated in a concrete pen, where she acquired the reputation of the "world's saddest elephant."

According to Honey Lacuna, the mayor of Manila, Mali passed away from pancreatic cancer and a blockage in her aorta. These conditions are speculated to be a result of her neglect. The week before her death, Mali began showing signs of discomfort, such as repeatedly rubbing her trunk against a wall, which is a common indicator of an elephant's pain. Due to a lack of professional medical care, Mali's health deteriorated rapidly, and she passed away alone in her pen.

As the only elephant in the vicinity, Mali was described as the face of the zoo, serving as their main attraction. While devastating to the zoo, her death enraged animal activists and global organizations. Institutions such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the WILD Foundation, and the Tusk Trust have created

projects in honor of Mali, dedicated to saving elephants subjected to confinement and imprisonment.

In 2012, celebrities Paul McCartney and Pamela Anderson showed their support for the "Free Mali" movement by protesting, writing letters, and using their platform to address the issue. Mali's life of injustice has shed light on the responsibilities zoos have to maintain proper conditions and provide adequate care for their animals. Similar to humans, elephants, especially females, tend to thrive in tight-knit social groups. Isolation and confinement are detrimental to elephants' brains and overall health. The stress of captivity can trigger repetitive habits such as pacing, head bobbing, rocking, or swaying, which can look similar to someone with Huntington's or Parkinson's disease. A lack of social interaction makes an elephant unstimulated and unmotivated. Elephants' brains thrive on stimulation and without it, they can suffer from extreme anxiety and depression. The proven negative effects of confinement on animals have brought up the question of whether these animals are entitled to freedom.

The future of captive elephants in the world is uncertain as the debate over whether the ethicality of holding animals in public captivity reignites. Despite the tragedy of Mali's passing, her legacy will continue to serve as a moral lesson and hopefully provide justice for other endangered elephants.

Panda Diplomacy Dwindles As Global Tensions Rise

Katie Hall

Editor-in-Chief

On Nov. 8, 2023, three giant pandas, Tian Tian, Mei Xiang, and Xiao Qi Ji, departed from Dulles International Airport, return-

ing home to China after years of residency in Washington D.C. at the Smithsonian's National Zoo. Currently, the only pandas remaining in the United States are located in Atlanta and are expected to leave some time in 2024.

These pandas serve a much greater purpose than simply be-

ing a fan-favorite zoo attraction. According to the Johns Hopkins University Magazine, "The Hub," "the pandas and their predecessors have pulled double duty as cuddly zoo mascots and symbols of goodwill between the U.S. and China." The decision not to renew the panda loan contract signaled a worsening in relations between the United States and China.

For decades, China has loaned its pandas to countries around the world in a practice known as panda diplomacy. According to Politico, "As the species became increasingly endangered, panda diplomacy evolved in order to better meet conservation goals and serve China's strategic interests." These pandas have promoted intercultural communication and multilateral cooperation even within some of the world's most tedious partnerships.

Their departure seems to symbolize the uncertainty surrounding China's relationships with a number of countries.



PHOTO: USA TODAY

Xiao Qi Ji (left) with his mother Mei Xiang (right)

held in San Francisco, California.

In a late-night press conference, President Biden promised to prioritize stability between the United States and the Chinese government. In hopeful news for panda fanatics, President Xi said, "We are ready to continue our cooperation with the United States on panda conservation, and do our best to meet the wishes of the Californians so as to deepen the friendly ties between our two peoples." He also hinted that the next pandas will likely be reinstated in San Diego, California.

The return of these furry ambassadors could spark cautious optimism for the future of this powerhouse relationship.