

The Future of the Department of Education

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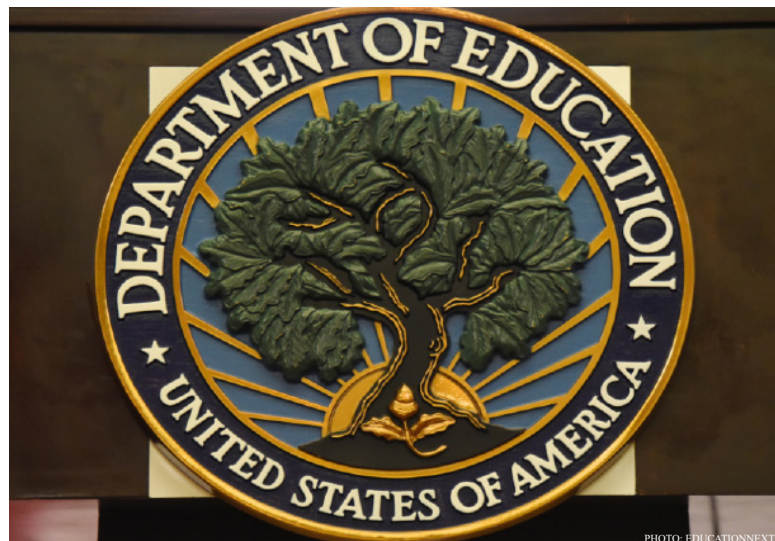
Recent executive orders being issued from the Trump administration have impacted the operations at the Department of Education (DOE). Their plans aim to close the department in order to reduce federal spending towards programs that aren't deemed effective enough as well as strengthen those in need of strengthening. "Closing the Department of Education would provide children and their families the opportunity to escape a system that is failing them.... [and] drastically improve program implementation in higher education," said President Trump in Executive Order 14242. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) says that "The Education Department (ED) has historically played a critical role in protecting civil rights, promoting equity, and providing opportunities for all students, including those in marginalized communities, students with disabilities, LG-BTQ students, and multilingual learners." The ED's congressionally mandated duty ensures that all academic institutions in America can be held accountable for not ensuring equal access to quality education for all individuals. This list includes granting education to individuals regardless of factors such as their race, place of birth, sex, disability status, or age. "Without [the oversight of the Education Department], school districts won't be held accountable for unjustified racial and disability disparities in discipline, academic performance, and access to resources," the ACLU said.

Programs for individuals, such as immigrants, non-English speakers, and exceptional education students, who rely on these databases, could now be underfunded. President Trump hopes to transfer the responsibilities of the ED to local and state governments. This switch can mean an increased amount of community voice in political decisions or more flexibility within the state. "The Secretary of Education shall... return authority over education to the States and local communities while ensuring the effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programs, and benefits on which Americans rely," said President Trump later in his order. This possible shift in authority raises the question about how students, teachers, and families will be affected by these changes. Donna Bailey, a faculty member who works as an exceptional-education teacher for integrated services, explains that federal funding is what allows these teachers to support their students. By giving her students multiple means of engaging themselves in class, Mrs. Bailey is able to meet their diverse learning requirements. "[Everybody] has a different way of learning. It doesn't matter if [it's] integrated services, collaborative AP or college prep; everybody accesses that curriculum in a different way," she said. However, without proper funding, she may have limited access to the resources needed for these different approaches. Mrs. Bailey added that government-funded work experience programs for exceptional-ed students could also be affected. For example, St. Mary's PROJECT SEARCH is a one-year high

school transition program that provides skills, training, and work experience for young adults with significant disabilities. Mrs. Bailey says that several of her students' parents have already called her to ask if the defunding of these programs will significantly impact the opportunities their children are able to receive. "[I] think this is a wake-up call for how things are done," said Mrs. Bailey. [I'm] working hard, but [it's] just a lot of the human factor that [I] think has been missing from the education system," she said. Mr. Gromling, the material processing/manufacturing teacher and co-sponsor of the Young Republicans club at Freeman, also expressed how the impacts of the order remain uncertain but can be proven to be beneficial in the future. "There's going to be a lot more questions than answers... A lot of people are nervous about how [the executive orders] went down, [so they are] going to be skeptical of it at first. I do think in another year or so, [when] all those questions have been answered, people might see a benefit to it being in the state's control where they can tailor their education system to help benefit the state." Mr. Gromling noted that in the past, significant reforms to education in the states have faced delays due to the many complexities involved in politics. "Do I think the education system needs a little reforming? Without a doubt. I think that we've definitely been on the low side of the [educational] spectrum in the world... There's too many [students, who] after school, fall into a dead end job [when] the education system could help fix that," he said. His emphasis on the

need for change in order to better prepare students for the "real world" supports the possibility that President Trump's executive order could address the needs of different regions across America. For Freeman, it is still uncertain how the actions being taken by the Trump administration will impact our community.

As the future of the Department of Education hangs in the balance, we wait to see how these transfers of responsibilities and cuts to funding will shape the classroom experience moving forward. The full effects of these changes have yet to be seen, with discussions and evaluations currently ongoing nationwide.



Department of Education



Virginia Department of Education

A New Era of Access: Harvard Announces Major Financial Aid Expansion

Emerson Post
Sports Editor

Harvard College announced an expansion of its financial aid program that will begin in the 2025-26 school year, allowing most students to attend the university with little to no cost. Students from families earning \$100,000 or less will pay nothing for their education at Harvard College, while those from families earning up to \$200,000 will receive free tuition and additional aid based on need. The change was revealed on April 8, 2025, by University President Alan M. Garber and Edgley Family Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Hopi Hoekstra. It is expected to make Harvard more accessible to middle-income families, who may not have been able to afford these costs in past years. "Putting Harvard within financial reach for more individuals widens the array of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives that all of [our] students encounter," said Garber in the College's official release. "By bringing people of outstanding promise together to learn with and from one another, [we] truly realize the tremendous potential of the College." Under the new financial aid guidelines, Harvard will cover not just the tuition, but also food,

travel, housing costs, and even health insurance for students from families earning \$100,000 or less. These students will also receive a \$2,000 grant during their first year to cover some initial expenses and another \$2,000 in their junior year to assist with their transition beyond college. This policy change follows nearly two decades of increasing aid access. In 2004, Harvard launched the Harvard Financial Aid Initiative to provide full coverage to students from families earning less than \$40,000. That threshold has increased to accommodate changing economic conditions and the cost of living. In 2007, Harvard eliminated loans from financial aid packages and shifted to grant-only support. These steps, Harvard officials say, are part of a long-term goal to ensure that a family's income does not prevent students from attending the university. "Harvard has long sought to open [our] doors to the most talented students, no matter [their] financial circumstances," said Hoekstra. "This investment in financial aid aims to make a Harvard College education possible for every admitted student." The change will alter the cost of attendance for many current and future students. Harvard currently commits \$275 million



PHOTO: WIKI-

PEDIA COMMONS

The 372nd Commencement at Harvard University

annually to financial aid. The university estimates that 86% of U.S. families will now qualify for assistance under the new plan. For the 2023-24 academic year, 55% of undergraduate students received some form of financial aid, and the average cost for those families was \$15,700. Harvard's Director of Admissions and Financial Aid, William R. Fitzsimmons, emphasized the importance of reaching students from all backgrounds. "[We] know the most talented students come from different socioeconomic backgrounds and experiences, from every state and around the globe," said Fitzsimmons. "[Our] financial aid is critical to ensuring that these students know Har-

vard College is a place where they can be part of a vibrant learning community strengthened by their presence and participation." While the new policy has been met with interest from a plethora of applicants, it also raises questions about broader trends in college affordability. Over the past decade, tuition at many private universities has continued to rise, leading to a growing demand for financial reform. Some analysts believe Harvard's changes could put pressure on peer institutions to expand their own financial aid programs or rethink their financial models altogether. In addition to affordability, college access often depends on transparency and outreach. As universities adjust their messaging to make aid availability stand out, some high school students may feel more encouraged to apply to schools they had previously ruled out. Others may use tools like net price calculators to better understand what they would actually pay, which can vary depending on familial circumstances. Harvard has stated that part of its financial aid effort includes ensuring full inclusion in student life. Jake Kaufmann, Griffin Director of Financial Aid, said, "The financial aid program is designed so that Harvard students can study, train, research, create, and fully engage in the Harvard experience with minimal constraints." As other universities have decisions to make over tuition costs and long-term student

debt, Harvard's policy change may serve as a model for other colleges. Whether similar steps are taken elsewhere remains to be seen, but the new guidelines are already shaping how families across the country approach the college decision process. Some higher education experts note that while colleges like Harvard may have the resources to implement financial aid changes, other institutions may struggle to follow suit. Public universities and smaller private colleges, many of which rely on tuition revenue, may need additional state or donor support to offer comparable aid packages. Still, the announcement has created conversation among educators, students, and policymakers about what college affordability should look like. As affordability becomes a factor in students' college decisions, schools that can communicate the net cost of attendance may have an advantage in attracting applicants from a wide range of backgrounds. Ultimately, Harvard's expanded aid initiative represents a recognition that college cost remains a common barrier to overcome. As the 2025-26 academic year approaches, the long-term impact of the change—on both Harvard and the wider landscape of higher education—will become clearer. For now, families are staying on the lookout, waiting to see if institutions will take steps to make higher education a possibility rather than a privilege.



PHOTO: BOSTON GLOBE

"Harvard Hall" on the campus of the University



Freeman's Annual Non-Profit Organization Fair

Maria McGill
Opinions Editor

Connecting students to bigger causes, Freeman's non-profit fair was held on April 11th, 2025. This year's fair had almost 20 different volunteer organizations from across RVA's community informing students about possible volunteer opportunities.

The idea of creating a non-profit fair was sparked in 2019 by Freeman librarian, Mrs. Kaplan. It serves as an opportunity to get students more involved outside of school-run clubs. "[We] invite different nonprofit organizations to come in and talk about volunteering opportunities with their organization so students can learn work skills, make connections, and help the community," said Mrs. Kaplan.

The fair was initially set up by Mrs. Kaplan. "[I] heard about it during a Virginia American Association for School Librarians (VAASL) conference," said Mrs. Kaplan. At first, she worked on it within the library but chose to extend collaboration further, to the students. "For the first couple of years, [I] did it myself with my library assistant, but [I've] tried to get students involved in the last couple of years," she said. In the future, she plans to keep the fair an ongoing event.

The Chick-fil-A Leadership Academy, run by Mrs. Kaplan, has taken over the organization of the non-profit fair. This club is a nationwide leadership program that focuses on "Impact Through Action". Now that students have

become involved, they are tasked with contacting and inviting various non-profit organizations to participate in the fair. "[I] reached out to an organization and helped other people reach out as well," said Evie Whipple, a freshman and member of the Chick-fil-A Leadership Academy. "I spread the word by posting on the class of 2028 Instagram and spoke to [my] Freeman Focus about it." Students work to create strong working relationships with local partners and provide their peers with volunteer opportunities and connections.

Various organizations were in attendance this year. Ranging from End Hunger RVA, Henrico Humane Society, River City Inclusive Gym, Virginia Hispanic Foundation, and more. The Chick-fil-A Leadership Academy incorporates all types of organizations to fit students' different interests.

Over the years, the most challenging part about organizing this event has been having enough organizations to participate. "Trying to get people to respond and visit has been difficult," said Mrs. Kaplan. In the past, student turnout was also difficult to organize. "[We] don't want the organizations standing there doing nothing," said Mrs. Kaplan. Club members were asked to inform friends and classmates of the event, which led to many Freeman Focus classes attending.

This year, the non-profit fair featured many new organizations, such as the River City Inclusive Gym. The gym provides those with disabilities a chance to build and strengthen their fitness and confidence through encourage-



ment, opportunity, and time. Joanna Wylie, the community relations director and head coach at The River City Inclusive Gym, volunteered to attend the fair and provided students with the organization's mission, along with possible opportunities to participate in their gym and help others.

Another new non-profit that took part in the event was the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (VAHCC). Their mission is to create economic opportunities around the Richmond community for their members and the Hispanic business community. Michel Zajur, the CEO and founder of VAHCC, informed students of their impact and how Freeman can contribute.

Freeman's non-profit fair provides students with the opportunity to become more involved outside-of-school, along with building leadership skills and connections. As the event continues in the future, the Chick-fil-A Leadership Academy and Mrs. Kaplan plan to have more and more organizations in attendance.

4th Annual Food Drive Honoring Lucia Bremer

Ava Harrison

Arts & Entertainment Editor
Graphics Editor

The 4th annual food drive honoring Lucia Bremer occurred on March 21, 2025, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Canterbury Recreation Association, a 450-acre family swim and racquet club. The drive is organized by Canterbury manager Angie Hutchinson and is associated with FeedMore, a hunger-relief non-profit organization.

Lucia Bremer, a member of the Tuckahoe community and a student of Henrico County Schools, was killed on March 26, 2021. "As the first anniversary of her death approached in 2022, her family encouraged people to perform 'Acts of Service' in her memory," said Hutchinson. "Since we have a large community presence, and Lucia was a beloved member of our pool, [we] wanted to do something on a larger scale, so [we] reached out to FeedMore who could easily handle a large drive."

Over the past three years, Lucia's drive has "raised enough food and funds to enable over 75,000 meals for families, individuals, kids and seniors right here in Central Virginia," said Hutchinson. This year, the drive raised \$5,000 and 1,700 pounds of donated food. The food and funds collected comes from the community. "[We] have many repeat participants anxious to keep Lucia's memory alive," said Hutchinson.

Advertisement for this drive is generated through local stations, social media, and verbal communication. Canterbury also has a sign-

up sheet of volunteer spots that is circulated internally through our members. Canterbury encourages people to donate or drop off FeedMore's most wanted items: nut butters, canned or bagged goods, tomato products, boxed goods, healthy snacks, and dried fruits.

People who volunteer are given a specific position to assist with the food drive. Some common jobs include setting up, making signs, controlling traffic, receiving and sorting the food, and cleaning up after the food drive is over.

Thomas Namorato, a Freeman freshman, volunteered for Lucia's food drive this year and last year. Thomas decided to volunteer after he heard about the drive from his parents and the Bremer family. "[I] was really good friends with the Bremers and wanted to support the community," he said. Thomas's job was to stand by the road with a sign and have people visit the drive. He also helped with unloading cars that came to donate food. "[Helping out with the drive] made me feel [like I] was helping other people [and] the community," said Thomas. He plans to volunteer for Lucia's food drive again in the future.

Furthermore, there are many other ways that people remember and honor Lucia Bremer. Senior Anna Hargrove knew Lucia from attending Quioccasin middle school. "[Lucia] was one of the sweetest people [I've] ever met," said Anna. "[She] was so genuine [and] so willing to help other people." Anna believes that doing acts of service in Lucia's name is a good way to honor her.

One of the many ways people



Food donation from the drive
honor Lucia is by visiting the spot she was killed and cleaning it up when it gets overgrown and dirty. In addition to cleaning up the area, people will bring and set flowers.

Senior Paisley Allan became friends with Lucia in Kindergarten at Pemberton Elementary School. She remembers Lucia as the brightest soul. "[She] was giving, welcoming, and always had a beaming smile," said Paisley. Lucia was committed to helping people with whatever they needed whenever they needed. "Whether that was support or encouragement, [Lucia] was always there," said Paisley. She feels that doing acts of service is a way for people to keep Lucia's memory alive.

People are continually taking action to honor Lucia. During the senior walk, all the Freeman seniors that visited Pemberton Elementary wore green ribbons with the saying 'Long Live Lucia' on it as a way to remember her. "Little things, along with big things, like community events, fundraisers, and renaming the field at Quioccasin Middle [to Lucia Bremer Memorial Field] are all amazing ways to honor her," said Paisley. She believes that it was a gift to know Lucia. "She was unlike any other person [I] have ever met," she said "[Lucia] would be proud to see everything that has been started since her passing. [I] know she is smiling down on us."

Lucia Bremer's family keeps her memory alive by asking people to give back to the community in her name and strive to "be the light." This food drive is one of the many ways people are able to honor her. "The name [Lucia] means light. [She] certainly was one," said Hutchinson. "A delightful, kind young lady with a bright smile and a cheerful disposition. We all miss [her] presence terribly."

Tesla Takedown

Nikki Rajan
Editor-in-Chief

President Trump's advisor and leader of the new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), Elon Musk, is also a business owner. Along with his role in government, Musk is known as the CEO of an automotive company built on its battery-powered cars and new electricity systems called Tesla. Tesla became popular in the past few years because of its different design and focus. The company was focused on being environmentally friendly and futuristic, and its sales revenue had been steadily increasing since 2014. Eventually, Tesla was speculated to be valued at 970 billion dollars according to Reuters.

While Tesla's revenue has been on the rise, Musk's recent involvement in government has caused some changes in the company's stock value. Fortune, a business magazine, recently announced that Elon Musk's net worth had dropped in February 2025 from 433 billion to 330 billion. They tied this loss to DOGE and the backlash it received from some Americans. A good example of this is the frequent protests outside of Tesla stores. Orchestrated by people wanting to exercise their First Amendment rights, these protests are often filled with large posters and anti-Musk slogans.



Protests in front of Tesla stores

In fact, there have been so many protests that a team, led by online activist Alex Winter, coined the phrase "#TeslaTakedown" in hopes of making it a trend. Valerie Costa is another driving force behind the protests. As an activist focused on using her voice to spread her views, Costa started the first protests against Musk and will continue being a key player in the Tesla Takedown movement. Now, as hundreds of people have protested outside of stores and the movement has spread internationally, the "TeslaTakedown" is becoming real.

Many other Americans have reported that these protests have led to their Teslas being vandalized or destroyed, saying that a more peaceful method needs to be used according to GBI News. This has been taking a toll on personal security and public safety as the protests have led to too much of an invasion on people's personal property. For example, one of the largest protests occurred on February 15th in front of a New York City Tesla Showroom. People were chanting "Elon Musk has got to go" and holding huge posters.

Later, protests spread across the nation from San Francisco to Kansas City. Using social media, Democratic politicians and other figures, like John Cusack, spread news of a selected day when thousands of people would protest across 250 cities internationally. On March 29th, this was carried out as people showed up with chants and anti-Musk signs.

Famous taglines like "I bought this after Elon went crazy" have been used. Many people added them to bumper stickers on Tesla cars and started social media trends about their disagreements with Musk's political beliefs. As this movement continued,

people innovated even more new slogans and catchphrases.

After seeing Musk's work in DOGE, many Tesla owners made other considerations. In fact, 31% of polled Tesla drivers said that they were considering selling or had already sold their cars in mid-February 2025. This led to a fall in the company's production; the Tesla stock price has been constantly dropping since the beginning of March 2025.

On the other hand, other owners want to stay separated from politics. According to Business Insider, Tesla owners faced backlash and were told to sell their cars. However, most of them decided to keep them because they enjoyed driving them. For example, a Cybertruck owner said that "[he] wasn't buying it for other people....but because [he] wanted to drive the future." Another owner stated on Business Insider that "people should have the right to protest — but they should have the right to protest without destruction. That's where the lines have been crossed."

On March 9th 2025, Musk went to X (formerly Twitter) to comment on these protests and the backlash against Tesla. He called out leaders like Valerie Costa, a prominent activist, of committing crimes, which led many of his supporters to attack these activists online. A few days later, on March 11th 2025, President Trump joined in and declared that anyone who

vandalized Tesla cars or trucks would be categorized as domestic terrorists according to The Independent. Going one step further, the president hosted a bunch of Teslas at the White House, vowing to buy one for himself and having already bought a Cybertruck for his granddaughter, Kai Trump.

Among the explanations for why these protests are becoming so popular, Musk stated that these protesters were being paid to participate on X. Costa responded to these comments by saying that she is "not encouraging any vandalism." She further states that showing opposition to the government and political leaders is allowed based on her rights of free speech and peaceful protest, and that all she is doing is providing people with the tools to move forward in an interview with The Guardian.

This campaign is not only national; it extends to countries beyond the United States. In over 200 cities across the globe, people gathered to boycott and protest against Elon Musk. This brought more attention to their cause, and Democratic politicians who opposed Trump decided to weigh in. Jasmine Crockett, a representative from Texas, and Pramila Jayapal, a representative from Seattle, participated in and uplifted protesters at their respective cities.

While this movement is occurring, Musk reassures his supporters and the world that he is not worried about Tesla. "There are times when there are rocky moments, where there is stormy weather, but what I am here to tell you is that the future is incredibly bright and exciting," Musk said in an interview with PBS.

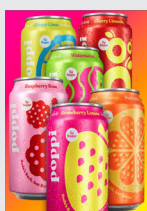
Now, Costa indicates that there is no sign of stopping the Tesla Takedown. "[I'm] not backing down — and even if [I]



Tesla bumper stickers against Musk's involvement in government

The Poppi Problem

Page 4



Freeman's Chicago Musical

Page 5



March Madness 2025

Page 9



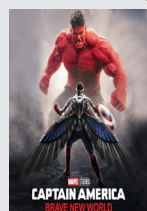
Hunger Games Review

Page 10



Brave New World

Page 11



St. Patricks Day: “Shamrock the Block” vs. “Irish Festival”

Olive Schreher
Features Editor

March 17th is a day filled with leprechauns, pots of gold, and all things green. St. Patrick’s Day marks the arrival of Christianity in Ireland, and although it is a seemingly irrelevant holiday unless you are Irish, there are many fun things to do around Richmond during this time of the year. It may be surprising to some that Richmond is known for its St. Patrick’s Day celebrations. There are many attractions including block parties, Irish pubs, and a 5k race. Another event bringing many visitors are the festivals. Two of the more prominent ones are the famous “Shamrock the Block” and the “Irish Festival.” “Shamrock the Block,” the bigger of the two, kicks off the outdoor festival season in Richmond: it is one of the biggest festivals held here throughout the year! Previously on Arthur Ashe Boulevard in Scott’s Addition, but recently moved to Leigh Street, the festival offers many things to do. Not to mention, it has free entry so there’s no harm done in spending an afternoon exploring. The festival is fun for all ages,

but I would say it has more of a young adult presence. The street is swarming with high school and college-age students, many of whom are from Freeman. It would be unlikely to attend and not see a familiar face. While walking around you’ll find many different food trucks, with a variety of foods so anyone can find just what they are craving without the excessively long lines. The one downside to this, as I’m sure many have experienced, is that festival food can be extremely pricey. The good news is, if you’re looking for an alternate option, there are plenty of great restaurants downtown! A fan favorite is “En Su Boca,” a popular Mexican restaurant. My favorite dish is the chicken quesadillas! Once you’re done eating, you can just enter again, free of charge, which takes the stress off of having to stay at the festival for the whole time. Another fun thing to do is browse what people are selling. There are many different tents with little shops set up. If you’re less of a shopper, there’s still fun to be had there! Each year there is live music playing. Crowds of people gather around to listen to upbeat music ranging from all decades. Overall, the different aspects of the festival create a fun and live-

ly atmosphere for visitors! From food to shopping to music, everyone can find something they like! The Irish Festival is quite similar in this manner. This festival, located in Church Hill, contains many of the same elements, consisting of things like a parade, dancing, and various food options. Although this festival is pretty much the same, it is supposedly more kid friendly. It offers activities such as face painting, children’s games, and Irish-themed crafts, which can make it more appealing for children and families. In contrast, this festival does require a five dollar donation to be made, but all proceeds go to St. Baldrick’s Society and their fight against childhood cancer, the Church Hill Association, the Church Hill Crime Watch, Richmond Hill, Child Saver’s Clinic of Richmond, St. John’s Church, the St. Peter’s Meals Program, Stone’s Circle of Friends and many other neighborhood causes. Proceeds also benefit the historic preservation of St. Patrick’s Church, a “little church with a big heart” built in the 1850’s by Irish Immigrants, and its outreach programs. So, this is just an opportunity to support the community at a small price. All in all, “Shamrock the Block” and the Church Hill “Irish Fes-

tival” both bring their own energy to the table. They’re different, but that’s what makes them each worth checking out. If you’re looking for something big, loud, and packed with people, “Shamrock the Block” might be

more your scene. It’s lively and open to everyone, but it definitely draws a younger crowd, and the vibe is more like a block party than a cultural celebration. It’s a fun place to meet up with friends, grab a bite to eat, and maybe dis-



PHOTO: IRISH FESTIVAL

The Irish Festival

cover a new band or two. Additionally, since it’s free to enter, you can come and go as you please. On the other hand, if you’re more into a laid-back and friendly scene, the “Irish Festival” in Church Hill is a great option. It’s especially good for families or anyone with younger kids. The activities are more geared toward all ages, and the neighborhood setting gives it a welcoming, community feel. Even though there’s a small donation to get in, it supports a bunch of local causes, so it feels like money well spent. Some people pick one over the other, but there’s no reason you can’t do both. Even though

they take place around the same time, it’s definitely doable. If you have the time and want to see different sides of what Richmond has to offer, it’s definitely worth it. Not to mention, next year “Shamrock the Block” will be celebrating its 20th anniversary, so that won’t be one to miss! Both festivals have their own kind of charm, and whether you’re there for the music, the food, or just the atmosphere, you’ll find something to enjoy. Richmond pulls through for St. Patrick’s Day, and whether you’re Irish or just celebrating for the fun, you’re bound to make a few memories and maybe even start a new tradition of your own.



Photo: Shamrock the Block Website

Shamrock the Blockwww

Spring Bites: A Taste of 2025’s Fast Food Freshness

Nina Henley
Online Editor-in-Chief

On March 7, 2025, Chipotle released a new protein option: Honey Chicken. It started with digital orders and quickly made its way to in-person sales. Not long after on March 17, 2025, Chick-fil-A introduced four new drinks: Pineapple Dragon Fruit Lemonade, Iced Tea, Sunjoy, and Frosted Lemonade. With new menu items popping up at some of Freeman’s favorite fast food spots, I took it upon myself to taste-test the hype and give my honest thoughts. Starting off, I decided to try Chipotle’s new honey chicken. I practically flew to the Chipotle located in Regency Square the day the new item came out. Despite it being a school night, I felt that I needed to try it. Once I arrived, I ordered online and waited impatiently for my order to be ready. I have always been a sucker for sweet and spicy things—I think that must be why I absolutely loved the new honey chicken. When I took my first bite, I was pleasantly surprised by a combination of a sweet, savory sauce balanced with just the right amount of spice to back it up. It added a completely new version of Chipotle, and I was a huge fan. It felt somewhat similar to another fan favorite, the Chicken Al Pastor, which comes out every once in a while. The Chicken Al Pastor used to be my first pick,

however the new Honey Chicken takes first place for me. After a careful evaluation, I give the new honey chicken a whopping 9.6/10. Of course, this may just be the best fit for my taste buds, but if you enjoy something a little sweet yet spicy, the new chipotle honey chicken may be for you. Next up on my list I was dying to try the new Chick-fil-A drinks. So after school, my sister and I raced down to the Chick-fil-A on Parham and ordered one of every drink. They all sounded so enticing, so I was very excited to try them. Since the mango dragon fruit is my favorite drink at Starbucks and pineapple happens to be my favorite fruit, this made the new drinks feel as if they were destined for me to try. The drive-through line was extremely long, which only heightened my curiosity as it felt like everyone was there for the new drinks. After what felt like hours of waiting, I made it to the person taking orders. Finally we got the drinks, and I quickly pulled into a nearby parking spot to start the tasting process. Don’t worry, we also got water to ensure that we had cleansed palettes in between tasting the drinks. We decided on the order of the tasting: we would start with the Pineapple Dragon Fruit Lemonade, then Iced Tea, and then Sunjoy. We felt this made the most sense because the Sunjoy drink was a mix between the lemonade and the iced tea. Overall, our choices meant that we would

be saving the Pineapple Dragon Fruit Frosted Lemonade for last. The Pineapple Dragon Fruit lemonade was by far the most appealing to the eyes. It was a pretty pink, yet almost magenta color. I was practically dying to try it first. When I tried it, what I tasted was the famous lemonade that Chick-fil-A has, and soon after I tasted both the pineapple and the dragon fruit. To me, it tasted like a refresher you would get from starbucks. I thought that all the flavors mixed well together and altogether it was a sweet yet tart drink. I loved the color and the flavor of this drink and it was definitely a treat. After careful consideration, I decided to give this drink a 9/10 rating. Next up was the Pineapple Dragon Fruit iced tea drink. The drink was a dark red, almost brownish color so I could tell immediately that it was an iced tea drink. When I first sipped this drink, I tasted the flatness of the iced tea. Immediately after I tasted the pineapple and the dragon fruit. At first, I wasn’t sure how to feel about the drink. I am a complete sweet tea fanatic so I typically love anything that has sweet tea in its name. However, I wasn’t sure that the flavors complement each other well. For me, the after taste felt off and it wasn’t as appetizing as the lemonade drink was. The drink does have caffeine in it, which is a plus for me because I was exhausted before drinking it, but taste-wise, it wasn’t my favorite. This

THIS OR THAT

CLASSICS

SPRING MENU

ICED MATCHA LATTE

ICED BROWN SUGAR SHAKEN ESPRESSO

ICED CHAI LATTE

SPINACH FETA EGG WHITE WRAP

LAVENDER MATCHA

LAVENDER OATMILK LATTE

ICED CHERRY CHAI

JALEPEÑO CHICKEN WRAP

OR

STARBUCKS EDITION

BY THE WAY: NIKKI RAJAN

drink received a 6.5/10 from me. After tasting both the lemonade and the sweet tea drinks, I knew I had to follow it up with the Pineapple Dragon Fruit Sunjoy drink. The color of this drink was a crimson bright red and was definitely a close second to the lemonade drink in appearance. After cleansing with some water, I took my first taste of the drink. The Sunjoy drink was very nice. I tasted the smoothness of the sweet tea, yet the tartness of the lemonade blended well with the pineapple and the dragon fruit. I liked the balance between the sweetness and the tartness of this drink and it would have earned a perfect score from me if it wasn’t for the aftertaste. The aftertaste was unpleasant, it tasted like all the flavors mixed terribly together and it left a bitter taste in my mouth. I was really disappointed because overall, I liked the drink but the aftertaste almost ruined it for me. In my opinion, this drink is rated 7.3/10. Lastly, the Pineapple Dragon Fruit Frosty was left and my, was it pretty. It was a light pink color and I was definitely intrigued to try it so it was hard leaving it for last. When I first tried it, I loved it. It

was creamy, and a perfect consistency. Despite typically not liking fruity ice cream, this one was different for me. I tasted a hint of the pineapple and the dragon fruit, but the flavors weren’t overpowering which can be a good thing and a bad thing. For me, I felt that the name was a bit misleading as the taste was more underwhelming than I personally would have liked. Overall it worked for me and I ended up really liking it, but the flavors in this drink felt more hidden than the other drinks. The frost ended up with a solid 8/10. All in all, I had so much fun trying out these new spring items. Chipotle’s Honey Chicken was hands down my favorite—I seriously can’t stop thinking about it. The Chick-fil-A drinks were a bit of a rollercoaster, with some clear standouts and a couple that didn’t quite hit the mark. Still, it was exciting to try something new and different from my usual go-to orders, especially since I always get nervous when paying to try new things. If you’re someone who loves sweet, fruity flavors or just wants to switch it up this season, I’d definitely recommend giving these a shot.



Photo: Chick-Fil-A Website

New Chick-Fil-A drinks.

The Poppi Problem: Pop or Flop?

Nikki Rajan
Editor-in-Chief

In the span of just the first few months of the year, the renowned “healthy” soda company Poppi has faced scandal, consumer backlash, and a billion-dollar sellout. Poppi went from loved by all to hated by most. It takes a lot for a company to lose so much consumer support. Let me walk you through it:

The company was first marketed on Shark Tank in 2018 by founders Allison and Stephen Ellsworth. However, at the time, it was not Poppi, but Mother Beverage. Mother Beverage was unique because it used apple cider vinegar in its products. Many health and fitness “gurus” liked to advertise it as a wellness product, so Mother Beverage seemed like a revolutionary way to change the stigma around soda. Rohan Oza, a shark, decided to invest 400,000 dollars in the company.

Mother Beverage was marketed towards a more middle-aged audience such as people who were obsessed with soda like Coca-Cola or Sprite, but wanted a healthier option. As a part of Poppi’s rebranding process, they decided to rename the brand to “Poppi” because they wanted to influence a younger generation. Here is where I think the soda really turned around: Hundreds of teen-

agers and young-adults turned to Poppi as an alternative because they marketed it as “gut-healthy” and “low-sugar.” What truly pushed everyone to buy Poppi in the end was all of their flavors. Poppi has a flavor that mocks each of the “big name” sodas, including Fanta and Sprite. Just the names of their new flavors entice customers because they promote such a fun and bubbly brand presence.

With their newfound popularity, Poppi really started to embrace the younger healthy lifestyle. Though their flavors aren’t that great in my opinion, I think their branding was amazing at first. They constantly marketed themselves as prebiotic and as a “better” option compared to other mainstream sodas. They also created multiple ad campaigns using celebrity endorsements to convince people. I loved their collaboration with Hailey Bieber and Kylie Jenner because it showed they were a new generation of soda for the new generation. They even partnered with sports companies like the Lakers to keep their “healthy” status. People would also post thousands of social media pictures with Poppi hashtags and mentions, enough that the brand became so popular and surpassed a \$100 million revenue in 2023.

Social media really started to work against Poppi when they started sending their PR (public

relations) packages to social media influencers. The small company for youth ideals started looking a whole lot different than what they were doing. Sending out huge packages of Poppi to celebrities and the rich looked “out-of-touch” and honestly, a little naive. In January 2025, Poppi decided to do their biggest PR campaign yet and pull out huge fully stocked vending machines to big influencers for the Superbowl. Thinking it would work as an excitement factor, Poppi was trying to get more people talking about them. It worked, just not in the way they had hoped. Regular people, the primary consumers of Poppi, complained all over the Internet about how Poppi became a big brand that was out of touch with the real world. With many people struggling financially, people felt annoyed and frustrated with the way brands were handling their marketing strategies. Poppi was not the only company that did these extravagant things, but they did choose the absolute worst time. People were so overwhelmed by the Tarte Cosmetics brand trips and the egg crisis that they were shocked that a brand thought vending machines were a good idea.

After doing some research, many people online speculated that each vending machine costs upwards of \$20,000. Honestly, I felt outraged that a company would spend so much money on these machines to just send them for a weekend to influencers. While influencers tried to turn it around by offering to give the machines to hospitals or public service workplaces, I was more upset with the brand. Olipop is another rival soda company, focused on giving a healthier alternative. They also took advantage of the opportunity: With hundreds of new TikTok videos and their very own calculation of the expensive vending machines, Olipop became a new favorite. Though their flavors are very similar to Poppi, I thought they did it better without needing more fiber or vitamins. After the weird apology video from Poppi, I felt like buying even more



Olipop. To me, apology videos need to take accountability, not just say the word, but Poppi focused more on how they were already planning to give it to regular customers...strange, right?

In this backlash, people like me started second-guessing Poppi. I realized their healthy outlook on soda wasn’t all that healthy. They still had alternate forms of sugar and nothing extremely beneficial for you. Turns out I wasn’t the only one who thought that. Poppi also got hit with a class-action lawsuit in California about their marketing technique. Attorney Kristen Cobbs claimed that Poppi was making false claims about being a probiotic soda. With only two grams of fiber, a vitamin meant to promote gut health, the soda actually does nothing beneficial for the body.

I think Poppi finally lost their cause with this drama when their

revenue kept plummeting. By the end of March 2025, they sold out to PepsiCo for \$1.95 billion. The small company, meant for normal people, was sold to one of the biggest enterprises in the world and honestly, I’m confused. Companies like Poppi are meant to be “fun” and unique. Selling out to PepsiCo, which created Pepsi, the exact opposite of what Poppi stood for, seems really strange and shows that money truly changes everything. In just a week, Poppi was able to move on from their struggles and pass them on to PepsiCo... How convenient!

Now, you can find Poppi’s videos with comments full of newfound Olipop buyers and I can’t even imagine how PepsiCo will switch their narrative. I highly recommend going to the grocery store to buy a can of Olipop Peaches and Cream: it is definitely worth it!



New Poppi mini line

Snow White: A Bad Apple?

Maryam Vohra
Editor-in-Chief

Snow White, a classic Disney fairytale, has recently hit the movie theaters as a live-action movie, bringing a storm of controversy. Some say the new movie is an inaccurate remake of the Disney version that strips away the charm that made the original so beloved. Others argue the movie is a modern adaptation that pays tribute to the past while updating it for today’s audience.

Despite seeing TikToks, some praising the film and others ripping it to shreds, it is important to note I tried to walk into the movie with an open mind. I quickly found that the movie was not a faithful remake, but a reimagining.

“Snow White” (2025) reinterprets the original 1937 Walt Disney cartoon, where a princess flees her cruel stepmother, the Evil Queen, and finds refuge with seven dwarfs living in the forest. In this version, when the palace guards set off to find her, a group of woodland bandits step in to protect her.

Some viewers took issue with the casting of Rachel Zegler, pointing out that her skin was “not as fair as snow.” However, people cannot expect an adaptation

(key word: adaptation) to meet every single detail, especially in a rapidly evolving world. Personally, I thought the color of her skin was of little importance, and she delivered as the lead. I felt the movie was lacking in other aspects, but I genuinely enjoyed her singing, especially for someone who is not the biggest fan of musicals. Her acting was expressive and emotional, though at times, like the forest scene with the animals, it came across as aggressive and too intense, taking away from the cozy, sweet feeling I associate with Snow White.

Costumes are a big part of my movie-watching experience, and in “Snow White,” it just did not hit the mark. Snow White’s signature yellow skirt looked like something straight off a Party rack and the Evil Queen’s sequined dress during her “All is Fair” number did not evolve a dark, scheming villain, but reminded me of a sparkly prom dress fiasco. I expected a little more, considering the film’s budget was nearing \$270 million.

The Evil Queen’s character, played by Gal Gadot, did not land in my eyes either. A villain’s job is to instill some fear or unease into the audience, but that was simply not clear from her mannerisms or musical performances. In her rendition of “All is Fair,”

the musical composition, dancing, and rhythm felt too upbeat and cheerful for a character who is meant to curse entire kingdoms. Everything just felt too happy. Even as a kid, the original Evil Queen scared me. Here, I couldn’t take her seriously—especially not with that oversized jewel brooch trying to do all the heavy lifting.

I also expected the iconic line “Who’s the fairest of them all?” to be modernized a little, as many well-known sayings do get tweaked in film adaptations. However, I was surprised to see it had made the cut since people are always changing things from the original. It was a nice touch of nostalgia, but did not make up for everything else the movie changed.

An aspect of the movie I couldn’t move past was the portrayal of the Seven Dwarfs. For a movie with a \$270 million budget, I expected the dwarves to look more humanlike and not like a Computer-generated imagery (CGI) attempt gone wrong. Beyond the aesthetics, many in the dwarfism community voiced concerns about the decision to animate the characters, pointing out that it actively erased acting opportunities for people with dwarfism. The studio could have easily made inclusive, respectful casting decisions without compromising the story.



Snow White official movie poster.

Notably, a bold change features the new “Snow White” movie removing Prince Charming’s character entirely, replacing him with a new character named Jonathan, a bandit from the forest. I think this twist was intended to create a more feminist retelling, one where the princess writes her own destiny. The classic “damsel in distress” may be outdated, but it would have been interesting to see in the adaptation. While I am all for this message (and I enjoyed Jonathan’s character), the change felt like it belonged in an entirely different story. This isn’t Robin Hood.

Disney has produced many excellent live-action adaptations such as “Mufasa,” and “The Little Mermaid,” the latter of which incorporated modern elements, but stayed true to the original cartoons. Classics are classics for

a reason. Part of the magic is to see your old favorites come to life with your favorite details. It’s hard to love an adaptation when your favorite details are missing.

When I think of Snow White, I think of a sickly sweetness and soft magic, like the original 1937 cartoon. While it was ambitious, this version felt like biting into a shiny apple, only to find that it was rotten on the inside.

Overall, I would recommend “Snow White” to people who enjoy bold reinterpretations and don’t mind when a story strays away from the original. If you are looking for nostalgia or hoping to relive the magic of the 1937 classic, this probably is not the movie for you. But if you are open to a modern take with new characters and perspectives, it might just surprise you.



Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

“Chicago: The Musical:” Rehearsal Journey

Sannvi Gourishetty
Head of News

This year, the Freeman High School theater program is taking a turn with its spring production of “Chicago,” one of Broadway’s longest-running musicals. The Call Sign Players are taking on the production with a focus on choreography, well-known songs, and a central theme. Music plays a significant role in shaping the performance. From day one, the cast came into rehearsals excited and ready to sing. When asked about the preparation process, director Claire Gardner highlighted one particular aspect she enjoyed. “The most exciting part of preparation for me has been getting to work with classic musical theatre songs,” Claire Gardner, the director, said. “When [we] began our rehearsal process, almost everyone already knew all the lyrics to all the songs before [we] started teaching them.” That familiarity helped the entire team hit the ground running. With less time needed to teach the music, rehearsals moved faster and created an environment focused on collaboration and positivity, “Making our rehearsal process much faster and much more fun,” she said. But “Chicago” isn’t just about

catchy tunes and high kicks; it’s also different in how Freeman productions are staged. Past shows have often focused on large, detailed sets that transport the audience to different worlds: this time, the approach is different. “I think this production will be an interesting shift for Freeman Productions,” she said. “Typically, a priority of ours is intricate and spectacular sets.” This year’s set is still visually engaging, but the team has decided to simplify the design in favor of something more immersive and direct. “There are three main colors and minimal furniture pieces for the actors to work with,” she said. “So the audience will be receiving a much more ‘in your face’ and ‘up close and personal’ performance.” That more intimate connection with the audience is intentional. In fact, the team wanted to blur the lines between performers and viewers, something that sets “Chicago” apart from previous productions. “The fourth wall is thin for this production,” she said, “which will be unique to this show.” Choosing “Chicago” wasn’t just about shaking things up. It was also about passion for the story, the style, and the students’ abilities. “Chicago is one of my all-time favorite musicals,” she said. “And [we] had the talent pool to pull it off this year.”

She described the musical as “larger than life, funny, melodramatic, and full of classic and difficult songs.” According to her, that’s what makes it so thrilling — not just for the audience, but for the cast and crew as well. “It’s a show that enthralls an audience from beginning to end,” she said. Despite all the enthusiasm and excitement, the production team did face some major challenges. One of the biggest obstacles came early in the rehearsal process, when a delay in receiving materials forced the team to adapt quickly. “The largest challenge [we] have faced has been timing,” she said. Due to mailing issues, the team received their scripts on a delayed schedule. “[We] did not receive our materials until three weeks after [we] were meant to,” she said. The delay threw off the whole schedule, so everyone had to hustle in order to catch up. “This has put our entire process into overdrive,” the director said. “And with such a well-known show, [it] requires lots of attention to detail and commitment.” The team knew that audiences would come in with high expectations, especially since “Chicago” is a famous musical. That meant the students had to give even more of themselves to the show. “We have to work twice as hard to produce a coherent, spectacular, iconic performance,” she said. “One that pays homage to one of the longest-running Broadway musicals of all time.” So why should people come to see “Chicago?” According to Claire Gardner, the director, there are plenty of reasons, but two stand out the most. “First, the cast and crews are all incredibly



Lucie Urquhart preforming in “Chicago.”

talented members of [your] peer group,” she said. “The work, time, and focus that the students have put into this production cannot be overstated.” She emphasized that it’s not just a show; it’s a showcase of hard work, teamwork, and passion from the people students see in the hallways every day. “Because of their commitment to the production, anyone is guaranteed to have an incredible time enjoying their performances,” she said. The second reason is about the musical itself. With its sharp humor, jazzy flair, and unexpected depth, “Chicago” is a spectacle for the senses. “Chicago is sensational,” she said. “The fast-paced, humorous yet shockingly poignant message in a show steeped in jazz and flash and flair is a feast for the eyes, the ears, and the brain.” Casting the show was no easy task either. Since “Chicago” features a very specific dance style, created by choreographer Bob Fosse, the director had to consider not only vocal ability and acting chops, but also how students moved. “When casting this show, the most impor-

tant thing was finding actors who would be comfortable with the movement style,” she said. Fosse’s choreography is known for its unusual, sharp, and isolated movements, which can be difficult to master. “Chicago is a Fosse musical,” she said. “Meaning its original choreography was done by Bob Fosse, well known for his strange isolations and fluid movements during dance.” Not everyone is used to dancing that way, so the auditions focused on students who showed potential and willingness to adapt. “This is not in everyone’s wheelhouse,” she said. “But through auditions, [we] watched for those who could adapt to it, were suited to it, or were willing to try.” When asked to describe the cast and crew in just one word, Claire Gardner’s answer was simple: “Top-notch,” she said. With opening night approaching, the actors are preparing to bring the 1920s stage they have been setting up for to life. Overall, “Chicago” presents an engaging performance, featuring dynamic action and strong storytelling.



DSF students preforming.

Harmony In Motion: 2025 Season Recap

Nina Henley
Online/Centerspread EIC

As the 2025 school year comes to a close, Freeman’s show choir group, Harmony in Motion, is also wrapping up its season. The group has spent months preparing their routines in order to perform at various competitions. Their journey for getting ready began in the early days of August and thanks to the amount of practice they were able to achieve titles during the competitions—such as winning Grand Champion, the highest reward they can receive as a group. The group’s preparation involved many hours of practice, often beginning early in the morning and continuing late into the day. While their competitive performances mainly took place in the winter and early spring months, much of the hard work was laid down be-

forehand to ensure they were at their best when competing. With constant rehearsals, competitions, and other responsibilities, in order to be equally successful in school while participating in show choir, “you have to really be good at time management,” said Sofia Moore, sophomore assistant dance coach. Sofia demonstrates this skill by making an effort to “get more work done in school, so [I] have more free time to be able to have those rehearsals.” Throughout the competition season, Harmony in Motion participated in four events: Cosby’s Titan Tournament of Choirs, Thomas Dale’s Commonwealth Choral Invitational, Mechanicsville/Hanover’s Festival of Choirs, and Manchester’s Koste Classic Competition. At each event, the group earned the top spot in their division. “Divisions are the size ranges... so in competitions there are usually about three divisions just to split up

the giant schools from the smaller schools,” said Sofia. This year, not only did Harmony in Motion win the ‘Grand Champion’ title twice, but they also took home awards for ‘Best Choreography,’ ‘Best Show Design,’ ‘Best Vocal Quality,’ and ‘Best Costumes.’ “We kind of swept the table,” Sofia said. Choir competitions require a great deal of preparation, not just for the routines, but also for stage elements and technical set-up. Performing in front of a large audience can raise the stakes and cause anxiety for the members of the show choir team. Flexibility is something used to handle nerves and unexpected obstacles. “You have to be able to be comfortable with anything that could happen,” said Katherine Herzog, senior dance captain. She recalled the Manchester Winter Seasonal Show last year, where everything went wrong. “We had a sleigh that came on stage, the ropes were missing, Santa wasn’t there, my shoes got lost... everything that could go wrong went wrong,” she said. Despite the possible chaos, maintaining the right mindset is something that Kat and others practice. “You have to be like, ‘Okay, we’re just gonna keep going,’” Katherine said. Working together day in and day out, the bond between the girls who participate in Show Choir is strong.

“Sometimes it can get tense because you’re around each other so much, but [they’re] my sisters. [I] love, love, love these girls,” Katherine said. This year specifically, has had a significant decrease in the amount of girls in the show choir compared to last year. “Last year we were really big...[we had] 28 girls and this year [we have] 19,” she said. While a smaller group of girls can seem like a disadvantage, the benefit is being able to get to know each other better. “[I] can have a personal conversation with every single person in this room this year, and that’s something that makes me really happy,” Katherine said. Sofia’s favorite part of show choir is “when [we] start learning choreography, because [I] can start to see the show come together,” she said. Choreography is the preparation for their routine, but that doesn’t cover the process of getting ready on competition day. To do hair, makeup, and costumes, the girls take about an hour and a half to two hours getting ready. “This year, [we] had a slick back bun, so [we] had to use a bunch of gel, put [our] hair in a ponytail, wrap it with a donut, and then pin it all in. Not to mention the whole makeup process; primer, foundation, all of it,” Sofia said. The oddest part of the process for Sofia is the fake eyelashes she and the rest of the girls have to put

on. “The weirdest part is when you have to put on your fake eyelashes, because [before putting them on] I can pretend I’m getting ready for something [normal], and then suddenly [I’m] putting on eyelash glue, and [I’m] like... this is definitely not me getting ready to go somewhere anymore,” she said. Something special about Harmony in Motion is that it has a welcoming atmosphere. While sports have a lot of school rivalries, show choir is different; it is supportive of everyone competing. “Once you perform, [you’re] supporting every single group [you] see performing at competitions,” Sofia said. After months of preparation and practice for competitions, your emotions swell up and hit you all at once after performing. Seeing all the hard work being put into a single performance can be overwhelming. “[After a performance] I want to pass out, throw up, and cry, but then two minutes after that, [you’re] bouncing,” said Katherine. Despite the late nights, early mornings, and long days that the show choir has, the experience itself is rewarding. “[It’s] a lot, but [we’re] all in it together,” Katherine said. “[It was] the best decision of my life. [I’ve] met the best people, and [it’s] given me something to do,” she said.



DSF Harmony in Motion at a Competition.

Shedding Light on Local Issues: Aser’s Early Morning Show

Tylerson Twerdy
A & E Editor/Graphics Editor

Aser Moltashy, a senior at Freeman High School, has launched The Early Morning Show, a student-driven production that spotlights local issues affecting the Freeman community. “I kind of play on The Late Night Show. I came up with that talking to Marcie Shea—came up with it on the spot,” he said. This only makes sense because of high school hours, as a “late night show” wouldn’t necessarily be accessible. But Aser’s show is more than just clever branding. His goal is to inform students about local government matters that often go unnoticed. “A lot of students don’t know what’s happening in their local government,” he said. “Everyone talks about federal stuff, but that’s not what’s actually affecting us. These so-called smaller issues matter a lot more than people realize, especially in our own schools and communities.” He was motivated to create the show after constantly hearing students complain about things they didn’t fully understand. “I got tired of it,” he said. “I want people to hear something on the



Aser Moltashy interviewing School Board member Marcie Shea.

show and then go ask questions. Do something about it. Talk to someone, get involved.” He’s aiming to encourage a shift in how students engage with the world around them, starting with the hallways they walk in. Aser runs the entire production himself, using borrowed items and school resources. “I try not to spend money,” he said. “I just ask around. The library’s been a big help, and Mrs. Buchbinder helps me with the equipment.” The show was originally meant to be filmed on the stage, but due to scheduling conflicts, it now takes place in the library. “The first episode is already out,” he said, frustrated that it hasn’t been played in classrooms. “All the teachers need to put on the

morning announcements. All the teachers. All the teachers,” he repeated, making sure it would be emphasized. To him, that lack of visibility is a serious barrier. His target audience is, without question, the students. “It’s 100% for you guys,” he said. “I want it to be funny, entertaining, so you pay attention.” He uses bold visuals, strange props, and creative intros to grab attention. “I’m wearing a green suit with a fork in one scene. That’s how I get people to watch,” Aser said. He admitted the content might seem boring to some, but adding humor and style helps keep it engaging and fresh for viewers, especially those high-school-aged. Aser wants the show to be something students talk about in the halls—not because it’s silly,

but because it makes them curious. Aser wants the show to become a lasting part of Freeman’s culture. His goal is for someone else to take it over next year and make it their own, as he hopes to spark actual conversations and actions from his peers that continue even after he graduates. “I want it to be passed down. I don’t want it to be part of the media class curriculum, though. I want someone to do it because they care about it, not for a grade,” he said. Aser even said he’d be happy to help future hosts after he graduates, since he’s planning to stay in the area and attend Reynolds. “I’ll still be around, and I’d love to support whoever takes it over next. I just want the energy to keep going.” One of the biggest challenges has been managing time. “I’m really behind. I’m trying to schedule at least one interview a week, but with everything else, like writing a 14-page paper for Mr. Pruet, it’s a lot, but he’s a great guy,” Aser said. Still, he’s enjoyed the creative process, especially filming the intro. “That’s where I get the most freedom. No script, just having fun with it. That’s where I feel like I can be fully myself.” Interviewing others has been another highlight. “My favorite part is connecting with people. People like

Marcie Shea and Jody Rogish are just cool. When I talk to them, I realize these are just regular people. If I can talk to them, anyone can,” he said. Aser wants students to see that they can reach out to leaders and have a voice that matters. It’s about showing that important conversations don’t require a title—just a willingness to speak up. In the end, Aser hopes people not only enjoy the show but feel more connected to their community. “I hope they laugh, but I really hope they feel like, ‘I can do that too,’” he said. That’s what matters. That’s the whole point.” He believes every student has a role to play in shaping what happens in their school and in Henrico, and that starts by simply paying attention. And again, as he said more than once, “Teachers—put the show on the announcements. That’s my hard work, and it deserves to be seen.”





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Online Editor In Chief & Centerspread



Maryam Vohra
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Editor In Chief



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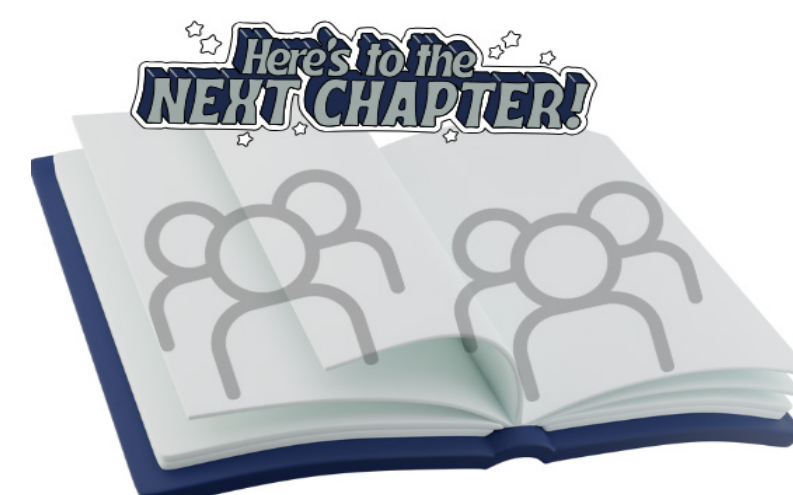
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John Fawzy's Life Through the Camera Lens

Vrusha Pramod

Online/Centerspread EIC



Action shots from the baseball game.

From photographing our school's annual sports events or designing the yearbook, photography plays a role in crafting media publications at Freeman. Senior John Farzy works with his camera to provide our publications with media and pictures to showcase Freeman's community.

John's interest in photography started in the middle of his sophomore year when he saw his friend Tyler Alston on the field taking pictures during a Freeman football game. "[I] approached him and asked if [I] could take a photo," said John. "From that point, [I] fell in love with it." After borrowing a school camera, he started winging the pictures as he went. After eventually realizing that with proper training and help he could start to post his creations, John enrolled in Photography II. It was in this class that he learned about lighting backgrounds, and was able to practice his creativity through his photography.

Every aspiring student needs an experienced mentor to guide them, and in John's case, his mentor was none other than his physics teacher, Mr. Gallo. John said that Mr. Gallo gave him a different perspective on his work by telling him that "These photos

will mean so much more in the future than [they do] now." John knows that the players he is photographing now will be able to look back at his photos of them and remember the times of their highschool sports. "These photos] will one day be a way for [these athletes] to remember their coaches, teammates, and anyone else who helped them along the way," said John. "That thought alone makes it worth it. Even though they might not remember me, they will still know [my work]."

Another Freeman teacher that made an impact on John's life was Mrs. Buchbinder. "[She] helped me through the whole process and helped me strive to become a better photographer, always pushing me to think outside the box." said John.

John has since become a time capsule for Freeman's community. Since he started, John has been focusing on sports photography. He has photographed for the Freeman's boys baseball, basketball,



DSF football players prepare for the game.

and football teams, but he does want to learn more about event and street photography sometime in the future. As a senior himself, John knows all about Freeman's enthusiasm behind senior portraits. As seniors approach their graduation, John says that he is open to taking both senior portraits or any other type of photography for our Mavs. "I am always open to taking photos for people when time permits. [I] would love to take senior portraits or any other type of photography," he said.

Outside of school, John has gained further experience by taking pictures for both a baby shower and an engagement party, which "challenged [me] to learn different styles of photography," he said.

After each of his photo sessions, John organizes the photos he took into specific folders in his hard drive in order to keep them from getting mixed up. He then sorts through the pictures and selects any that were requested or ones he believes are his best work from that particular session. The final step to this process is to upload the pictures into Lightroom. This application is designed specifically to edit images and fix details. John said that he tries not to use Photoshop too often, so most of the time Lightroom is his to-go program.

Editing or touching up your pictures is typically seen as the final step in the picture taking process. John said that rather than focusing mainly on editing techniques, beginner photographers should instead focus on their personal mission. "The gear [you] start on doesn't matter. Everyone starts somewhere. Just focus on the key concepts and develop your style," said John. He suggests newer photographers start by taking pictures on their phones or the DSLR



Freeman player dunks at a home game.

cameras. "[The cameras] help you enter the world of photography. [You] can apply professional methods and [they] give you an idea of what having a [professional] camera might look like," said John.

With the growth of Artificial Intelligence in our modern world, many artists have raised concerns about this type of technology taking over artistic fields. AI-generated images and software are becoming increasingly advanced, which can lead us to wonder what kind of impact it will have on the future of photography. "AI is making waves not only in photography and art, but in every field. However, with new technology will also come new

rules and regulations which will [hopefully] help control the upcoming advancements," said John.

As for his career in photography, John looks to continue forward, but use it as a side hustle. "Photography has been such a meaningful part of my high school career...[I] will always have a love for it," he said. Although John does not plan on making photography his main career, he said that he "still intends to take photos for college on the side and would like to keep it as a hobby."

For now, John continues to focus his lens on Freeman's athletics and on what is left of his last few moments of his high school career.

The Henrico County Teacher Placement System: A Breakdown

Tylerson Tweardy

A & E Editor/Graphics Editor

Henrico County Schools carefully assigns teachers to classes to create a safe and nurturing learning environment for students. These placements ensure that experience is respected while providing opportunities for educators to grow in their careers. When new additions join a department, adjustments may be made to ensure balanced workloads and continued excellence in instruction. Teacher assignments are determined by department heads and administrators, taking into account licensing, expertise, education, and individual strengths. Dr. Marshall, principal of Freeman, broke down the process in simpler terms. "Some folks can teach calculus and like to teach calculus," he said, while others prefer to focus on lower-level courses. Matching teachers to the right courses is essential for student success.

Vacancies also play a crucial role in assignments. "If we know that our calculus teacher is going to retire in two years, we might have someone teaching a level close to calculus so that they can step into that role," said Dr. Marshall.

This type of long-term planning helps ensure continuity in instruction and preparation in educators for future transitions. These decisions are not made solely in response to immediate needs but rather as a strategy to maintain stability in faculty assignments over time.

New teachers typically begin with foundational courses, such as English 9 or Algebra 1, which allow them to build their instructional skills while adjusting to the classroom environment. Henrico prioritizes support for first-year teachers, ensuring they receive mentorship and guidance from more experienced educators. Administrators aim to minimize the number of different course preps each teacher has, recognizing that "more to prepare is less time they can devote to each class," said Dr. Marshall. This approach allows teachers to focus on delivering high-quality instruction rather than managing too many lesson plans at once. A veteran instructor who enjoys teaching 11th-grade honors English may also be encouraged to teach 9th-grade English classes to help develop younger students while still engaging with more advanced learners.

The scheduling process requires collaboration between

department leaders, assistant principals, and teachers to align skills with student needs. While some educators thrive in ninth-grade classrooms, others excel in upper-level courses. "It's part science, part art," Dr. Marshall said, referring to the many factors involved in placement decisions. Administrators distribute honors, AP (Advanced Placement), and college prep courses strategically so teachers "teach multiple levels of students," he said. This approach enables educators to polish up their teaching methods while exposing them to students with different learning needs.

Henrico's placement process also considers the unique skills of teachers and how they interact with students. Some educators naturally connect with younger students, while others have a stronger impact on upperclassmen. Dr. Marshall noted that administrators take this into account when making assignments: "Maybe some work better with ninth graders, some work better with twelfth graders." By thoughtfully balancing these placements, schools create an environment where students receive instruction tailored to their needs. Additionally, the district encourages teachers to share their expertise with one another to ensure all

students receive high-quality instruction. Teachers who are skilled in AP subjects are sometimes asked to teach lower-level courses, providing students with the benefit of advanced instructional techniques, while newer teachers may collaborate with experienced mentors to strengthen their knowledge and classroom management skills.

Henrico educators are also adjusting to changes in curriculum and assessment methods. The district has transitioned from traditional standardized testing to performance-based assessments, such as writing portfolios. This shift allows students to demonstrate their understanding in more authentic ways. As instructional models evolve, teachers continuously refine their approaches to ensure students receive meaningful learning experiences. These changes require ongoing support for educators, particularly those adapting to new methods. "We might observe more. We might get them into another classroom to observe," said Dr. Marshall. These strategies allow struggling teachers to learn from colleagues and improve their effectiveness in the classroom.

If a teacher is struggling with a particular course, administrators intervene by providing

additional support. This may include direct mentoring, curriculum planning assistance, or even observational opportunities in other classrooms. "We always want to put people in a position to succeed," Dr. Marshall said, stressing that faculty assignments are made with the goal of ensuring both teacher and student success. In cases where a teacher continues to struggle despite additional support, adjustments may be made for the following year. This process involves discussions between administrators and teachers to determine whether a different placement would be more beneficial. Decisions are made thoughtfully to ensure instructional quality remains strong while supporting teacher growth and development.

By fostering mentorship and collaboration, Henrico County ensures teachers and students thrive. As educational strategies keep evolving and student populations continue growing, faculty members remain committed to finding innovative solutions that support learning. Through teamwork, strategic planning, and thoughtful teacher placement, Henrico educators continue to shape a strong future, no matter how the puzzle pieces shift.

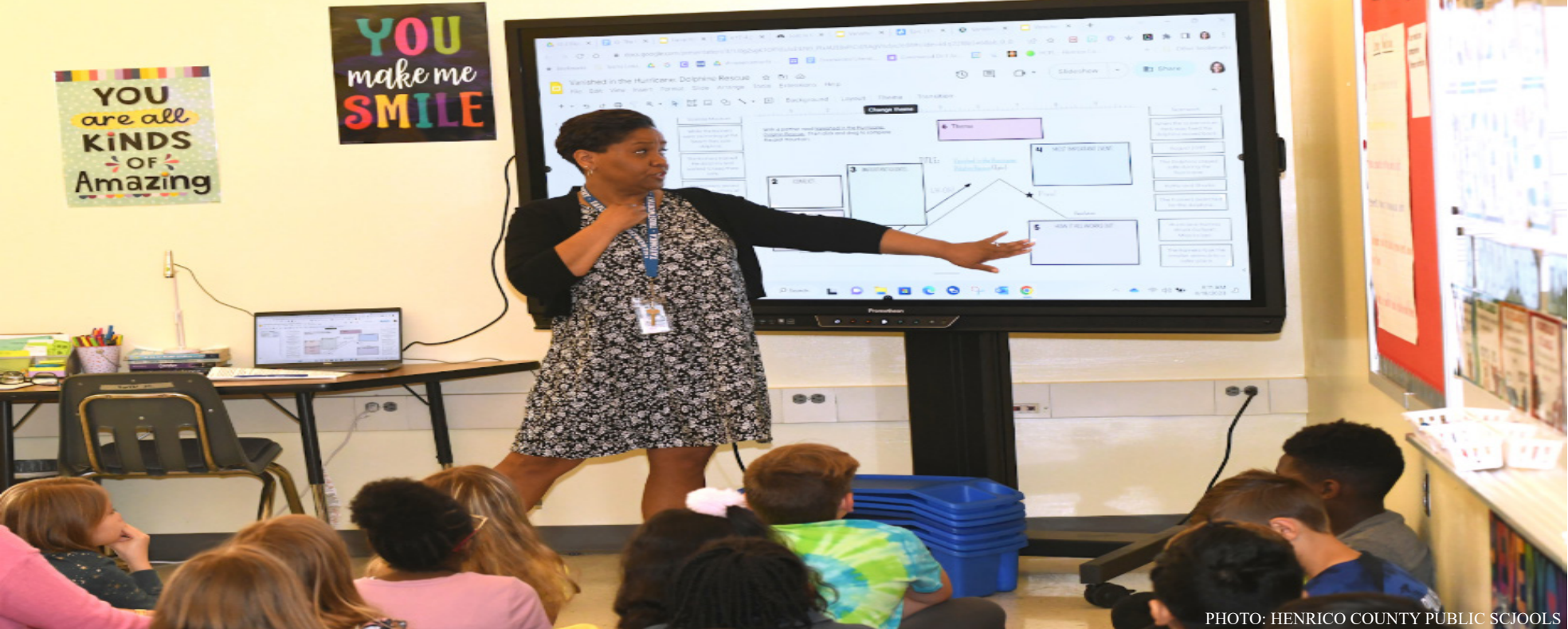


PHOTO: HENRICO COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Henrico county teacher instructing students.

Baton-Hitting Incident Sparks Injury and Inquiry

Saanvi Gourishetty
Head of News

An unusual incident occurred at the Virginia State High School Track and Field League Championships. Recently, high schoolers Alaila Everett and Kaelen Tucker, running in a 4×200-meter relay were involved in a media-breaking moment. The two were running side-by-side as they came out of a curve, competing to merge into lane one. In the footage, Everett’s arm and baton appear to swing forward, making contact with Tucker’s head. Tucker stumbles off the track, clutching her head in pain, while Everett continues running. Tucker ended up being diagnosed with a concussion, and her parents publicly reported that Everett never checked in on her after being diagnosed or once the race ended. Her parents told WSLs-TV that Everett never approached them or Kaelen to ask if she was okay, which increased public reaction. Everett was later charged with a misdemeanor assault and battery by Lynchburg Commonwealth’s Attorney. Both runners involved made public statements. Tucker told news outlets that the incident happened as she began to pass Everett. “That’s when [she] hit me with the baton, and [I] fell off the track,” she said. In her interviews reported to Fox News, however, Everett continuously states that it was an accident. When referring to the incident, she recounts that they were extremely close to-

gether during the exchange and that her baton just kept tapping Tucker’s back. “Eventually, after a couple times of hitting her, [my] baton got stuck behind her back... [I] lost my balance. When [I] pumped my arms again, [she] got hit,” she said. Everett added that she tried to look for Tucker after the race, but by then she was surrounded by coaches and teammates. She also claimed she tried to apologize over social media but discovered she had been blocked. The video of the incident quickly gained traction online and sparked reactions as well as people taking sides. A majority argues that it clearly appeared as intentional and supported dictionary action as a punishment. But others questioned whether criminal charges were really necessary. They question if the charges placed were appropriate given Everett’s reputation and the fact that she was an honor student. “[She] has carried herself with integrity both on and off the field. Any narrative that adjudicates [her] guilty of any criminal activity is a violation of [her] due process rights,” said Portsmouth National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Further adding to the emotion that this incident stirred, track students and coaches tried to imagine what could have happened in this scenario. “[It’s] a difficult situation,” said a track coach from a nearby school. “At that speed, in that tight of a curve, things happen. But intent matters, and [it’s] hard to know what really happened in [her] mind.”



Mile Split from Alaila Everett and Kaelen Tucker

The track meet director stated that the correct action in this situation would be to disqualify Everett from the race. This was confirmed by the Virginia High School League (VHSL). The VHSL investigation is ongoing, and Portsmouth Public Schools states that they are cooperating with the league and will support whatever the ruling outcome is. Reportedly, since the incident, coaches and school officials have spoken with teams about the importance of safety, sportsmanship, and appropriate behavior during a competition. Coaches are trying to ensure that athletes stay alert in certain situations and have been instructed to speak up if they feel unsafe in a competition environment. Specifically in the track and field world, many have said they’ve started practicing tighter handoffs and arm mechanics to avoid anything that could be misinterpreted or cause harm. This incident has also raised the question of whether or not anything could have been done to prevent this from happening. Some state that there should be stricter enforcement of lane merging rules, and others say that athletes should be trained on body awareness and relay etiquette. “[There’s] always bumping in track, especially when merging in relays,” a local track official said. “But a baton isn’t supposed to be part of that contact. Maybe more officiating around curves would help de-escalate stuff like this.” Overall, the incident will be followed by long-term effects. In particular, Everett will face lasting impacts in terms of the charge and the emotional toll of having a changed image online. “[I’m] just a person by myself,” she said. “[Nobody’s] going to believe [me].” All across Virginia, and even the world, this moment in sports history will change the culture of competition. Some athletes say it has made them more aware of how even small mistakes can have serious consequences both on and off the track. While opinions vary on whether the incident was intentional, the outcome has influenced the atmosphere for student track and field athletes.

Maverick to Bobcat: Molly Sleman Makes a Splash

Maria McGuill
Opinions Editor

Senior Molly Sleman has swam for many years, which led to her Division III commitment. Through her years growing up in the pool and swimming on Freeman’s swim team, she has not only learned to “push herself, but also her teammates,” said Mr. Densley, Freeman’s assistant swim coach. Molly will attend New York University (NYU) in the fall of 2025, as she is committed to their swimming program. Before high school, she did not see this as a possibility. Her decision to jump into this pathway started when she and her coaches saw progressive potential. “As [I] started to improve and reach my goals, [I] realized [I] would have a chance to swim in college”, said Molly. When deciding which college to attend, NYU was not where she expected to end up. “[I] was definitely shocked, because [I] did not think [I] would get in,” said Molly. Growing up, Molly was surrounded by swimming. For example, her mother had swam at Boston University. Her brother swam as well, who first sparked her interest in the sport, and she looked up to him as she grew up swimming. She had her first swim lessons when she was six years old at the YMCA, followed by swimming for NOVA once she turned seven. While swimming on the Ridge Top summer swim team, she built relationships. “[We] swam on our swim team [together] and [I] met her on the bus,” said Anne Claire Hart, Molly’s teammate and friend. “[She] was [my] first friend in Virginia when [I] moved back here.” As Molly grew up swimming, her mom had a lasting influence on her. “[My] mom has inspired me,” she said. “Because she [swam] in college, [I] got to see her early accomplishments and the goals she set,” said Molly. Molly deeply cherishes her teammates. “[My] teammates always inspire me, [they] are the reason [I] come to practice everyday. At Freeman, [I] don’t think we would have been able to win the [Regional] championships and relays without being there to support [each other],” she said. From day to day, Molly spends

many hours practicing. She swims six days a week, waking up at 5 a.m. and practicing for two hours for the Freeman team. On Tuesdays, she goes to club swimming at NOVA for two-and-a-half hours after school. As her schedule has becomes more flexible, Molly now attends only two Freeman practices since her coach, Mr. Gromling, has requested she focus more on her club swimming. During the COVID pandemic, Molly was set back for six weeks due to a hip injury. Since the world was shut down, her injury did not affect her success as much as she thought it would. “[It] was tough, but [we] were not practicing as much because of COVID,” she said. In 2024, she was hit with another injury where she broke her wrist. After being out for four weeks, she was worried she wouldn’t be prepared for Freeman regionals and states. “[It] was definitely hard because [I] did not think [I] would be able to improve since [it happened] in the main part of our season,” said Molly. Once she was cleared to get back in the water, she began slow movements; for example, kicking every day, which helped her resume her normal practices. Molly believes in having a positive attitude and an uplifting team for success. “[I] want to be my best because [I] know they are working just as hard as [me],” she said. Molly encourages herself to put a smile on her face everyday on the pool deck. “[I] want to motivate my teammates as much as [they] motivate me,” she said. Over the years, Molly has received various accomplishments. At the 2025 State Championships, Freeman’s team won, and Molly won the 50-free race. “[I] have been working since freshman year, and winning with [our] team was a big goal that [we’ve] all had,” she said. Ever since her first years on the team, she has looked up to the upperclassmen in hopes of competing like them in the future. Molly believes Freeman and NOVA have prepared her to swim at a college level. With the help of coaches, teammates, and family, she stayed resilient in and out of the water. “[I] can have bad days, but [you] always recover from them. And [your] bad days aren’t [your] worst,” said Molly.

March Madness 2025: Upsets and Highlights

Emerson Post
Sports Editor
Copy Editor

The 2025 March Madness tournament wrapped up in early April 2025, concluding another season of buzzer-beaters, upsets, and bracket-breaking games across both the men’s and women’s brackets. With all four No. 1 seeds making it to the men’s Final Four, the tournament leaned more toward predictability this year yet still delivered many moments to remember. On the women’s side, the University of Connecticut (UConn) had performances of back to back 25-plus point wins in the National Semifinal and National Championship game. Their showing capped off a postseason run that many fans had anticipated, given UConn’s performances throughout the regular season. “Paige [Bueckers] and the Huskies have been dominant all season,” said Addie Morton, a junior at Freeman. “[I] knew [they] would achieve a strong win because [it] was

Paige’s last season and their hot streak after the Final Four game.” In the men’s tournament, Duke University emerged as an early favorite to win it all, especially following a 20-point victory over Alabama, where they held Alabama’s leading scorer Mark Sears to just 6 points for the game. “[That] was the most dominant performance during the tournament,” said Grady Brookshier, also a junior at Freeman. “[It] set the tone for what looked like a title run.” However, Duke’s title chances came to an end in the Final Four when they gave up a late-game lead to Houston in a comeback win. “Duke had the lead the whole game and choked,” said Addie. “[It] was such a big game and such a huge shift,” Grady agreed, calling it his most unforgettable moment of the tournament. “[They] had a solid lead throughout most of the game, and [it] slipped away. [It] was tough to watch,” he said. While the higher seeded teams continued to win throughout much of the tournament, several early-round matchups came with some upset wins. One of

the biggest upsets was McNeese State, a No. 14 seed knocking off No. 3 seed Clemson in the first round of the tournament. “When McNeese State knocked out Clemson, [it] blew up everyone’s predictions,” said Addie. Another upset that changed bracket expectations was No. 10 Arkansas defeating No. 2 St. Johns in the second round. “That was a huge [upset],” said Addie. “A lot of people [had] St. John’s going really far, and [that] game ruined so many brackets.” However, the coaching may have helped Arkansas secure the win. Grady said, “John Calipari did a very good job coaching that game. Arkansas had the energy, and [they] really showed up when [it] counted.” Some fans noted that the overall lack of underdog runs made the tournament feel more predictable than usual. “[I] also enjoy rooting for the underdog teams,” said Addie. “But with the NIL [Name, Image, and Likeness] deals, it’s much harder for Cinderella stories to happen now. [It] makes March Madness less enjoyable.”

★ **March Madness** ★

March Madness first started in 1939.

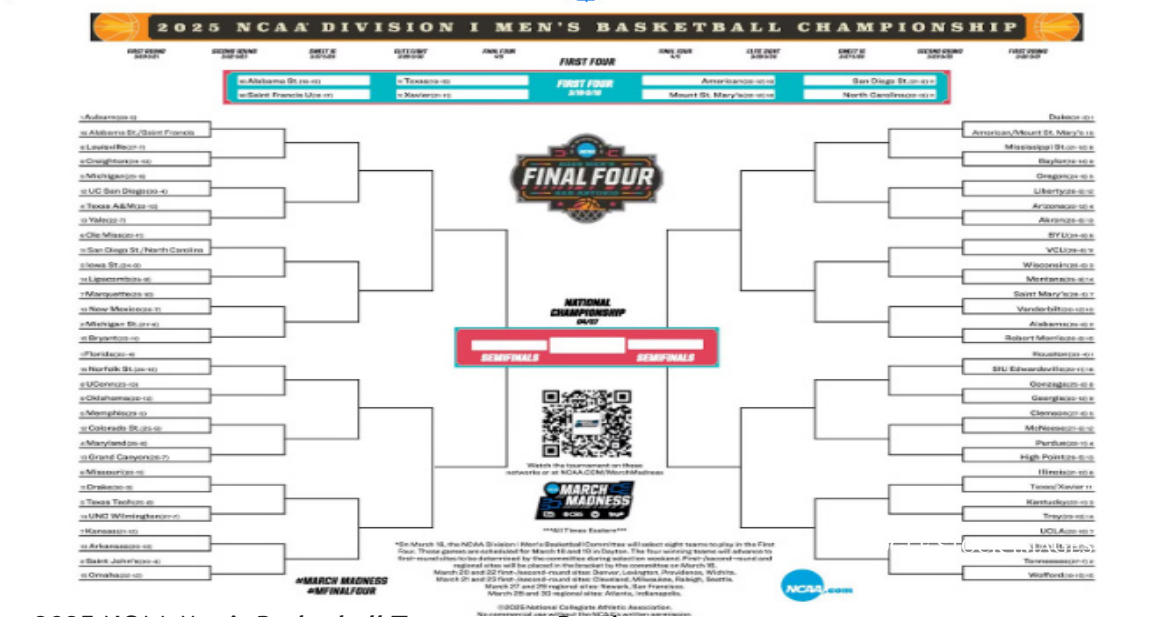
68 teams compete in this basketball tournament.

Florida Gators win against Houston Cougars in final game in 2025.

Score of final game 2025: 65-63

Brookshier had a slightly dissimilar view, suggesting that the level of competition in the later rounds made up for the lack of chaos. “This year’s tournament was more predictable because all four 1-seeds made the Final Four, but [I] think that actually led to more competitive and better games,” he said. In terms of individual performances, both students pointed to players who delivered for their teams throughout the whole tournament. “Cooper Flagg and Paige Bueckers definitely had the most impressive runs,” said Addie. “Walter Calton Jr. had a great tournament, scoring over 30 points in both the Elite Eight and the Final Four. That level of consistency is rare,” said Brookshier. A game that stood out to both students and many fans was the men’s national championship game between the Florida Gators and the Houston Cougars. “[It] was a rollercoaster from start to finish,” said Morton. “Even though [I] didn’t watch the men’s final live, [I] heard [it] lived up to the hype.” Grady enjoyed Florida’s comeback efforts. “[They] played a sloppy first half but managed to turn [it] around and win,” he said. “[It] made for a great finish to the tournament.” Looking back, there were dif-

ferent moments that stood out for fans—not just for the outcomes, but for the emotions that came along. For Grady, it was seeing a championship favorite fall just short. “How the 2025 Duke team is the best team ever to not win the National Championship, [that’s] what will stick with me,” he said. Beyond the games themselves, the culture surrounding March Madness played a role in maintaining the typical feeling of the tournament. “Even if [you’re] not a die-hard basketball fan, the intensity of the games, the buzzer-beaters, and the last-second upsets are insane,” said Addie. Social media played a role in engagement during the tournament. “[It’s] like watching a movie, but [it’s] real life,” said Grady. “[It] helped keep people interested and made the tournament successful for the NCAA,” he said. From highlight reels to bracket memes, online coverage created an experience for fans around the country that was different from past years. As the dust settles on the 2025 tournament(s), fans are already looking ahead to what’s next. For some, it’s the return of favorite teams. For others, it’s a chance to reset their brackets and wait to see if next year holds a little more madness than this year.



2025 NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament Bracket

‘Sunrise on the Reaping’ Review: Back In the Arena Again

Saanvi Gourishetty
Head of News

“Sunrise on the Reaping” is a novel set in the years following the first rebellion, focusing on Haymitch Abernathy’s reaping and the Quarter Quell. Beyond its narrative, the story explores themes of power, propaganda, and inequality. It highlights how authority can evolve into control through manipulation, showing how the Capitol gradually strengthens its hold on the districts.

In discussing her return to “The Hunger Games” universe, Suzanne Collins noted that the new book explores themes related to how easily societies can be controlled by a small group. She also delves into the influence of propaganda and the power held by those who shape public perception. Collins referenced the ongoing relevance of questioning what is real and what is not. The novel centers around

a unique version of the Quarter Quell, where the children of former rebels are forced into “The Hunger Games.” This element introduces the concept of institutional guilt, where punishment stretches across generations. The governmental control in the novel has been noted by readers to resemble that of authoritarian systems, which often use fear and spectacle to maintain influence. “The Hunger Games” functions as both entertainment and a means of diversion. The Capitol shifts focus away from deeper social issues through the use of the Games.

Haymitch Abernathy’s character adds emotional complexity. His sarcasm and humor are portrayed as coping mechanisms that protect him in a system designed to break individuals. He faces a repeated moral conflict between survival and resistance. This internal tension reflects the real-world experiences of people navigating unjust systems such as economic hardship, restrictive immigration laws, or institutional racism.

Other characters, including May-silee Donner, and some stylists, perform subtle acts of resistance. These small gestures show that rebellion does not always come in loud or dramatic ways. “Sunrise on the Reaping” reveals that it can often be the quiet actions that slowly build momentum.

Themes such as surveillance, state violence, and propaganda are present throughout the novel. The Capitol manipulates public perception through the Games, similar to how modern media can shape narratives. Acts of defiance, both large and small, are significant to the story. For example, Haymitch’s use of the arena’s force field can be seen as more than a survival tactic. It symbolizes how knowledge and strategy can be used to resist the control that comes straight from the Capitol. Real-world events like the global climate protests demonstrate how individuals can challenge powerful systems with limited resources. The novel also examines economic inequality. The growing wealth gap between

the Capitol and the districts reflects disparities in healthcare, education, and access to resources. Those in power control what others need to survive, while the unfortunate are left with little support.

“Sunrise on the Reaping” also explores how propaganda can be more powerful than physical force. The Capitol justifies the Games as a method of preserving peace, though in reality, they function as a tool for control. This mirrors how modern misinformation can spread through media channels and social platforms, shaping public perception in misleading ways. “Misinformation isn’t spread through a deficit of users. [It’s] really a function of the structure of the social media sites themselves,” said Wendy Wood, USC expert on habits.

Upon its release, “Sunrise on the Reaping” proved to be a success. According to the Associated Press, “the book sold over one million copies across print, e-book, and audiobook formats in its first week.” Upon intense

anticipation, it debuted on March 18, 2025 and received highly positive reviews from its readers. “The Hunger Games” franchise as a whole has sold more than 100 million copies globally since its beginning, and this addition to the series adds to its popularity. The publisher, Scholastic, announced that this was one of their most successful launches in recent years. The series has also been adapted into a successful film franchise that has generated over a billion dollars. A film adaptation of “Sunrise on the Reaping” is scheduled to be released on Nov. 20, 2026.

“Sunrise on the Reaping” is not only a dystopian story but also a reflection of present-day society. Readers may ask questions about who controls the narrative, how injustice becomes normalized, and what role each person plays in shaping their world. As a prequel, “Sunrise on the Reaping” adds new content to “The Hunger Games” franchise, through its written form, and an upcoming film.

The Hunger Games Series



GRAPHIC:AVA HARRISON

17 Artists Added to the Virginia Arts Roster

Tylerson Tweardy
Arts & Entertainment Editor
Graphics Editor

The Virginia Commission for the Arts (VCA) has added 17 new artists from all across Virginia, Washington D.C., and Maryland to their roster. The teachers each have their own special branch of interest, including Dance, Theatre, Music, Literature, Visual Arts, and Multidisciplinary.

VCA’s programs benefit many across the Richmond area, including schools, developing artists, agencies looking for artists, and nonprofit organizations. These teaching artists are part of an initiative to bring high-quality, accessible arts programming to all Virginians. The selected artists work with schools, community centers, and other educational spaces to integrate the arts into academic and personal development.

Among the new roster members is Deidra Johnson, a visual artist and children’s book author whose journey into the arts began in her childhood. Johnson recalls how her father used comics to teach her how to read, sparking her love for storytelling and illustration. “[I]

think [I’ve] always been an artist in some capacity,” she said. In 2019, Johnson took a leap of faith and began illustrating children’s books for other authors, eventually writing and illustrating four of her own. Her works—“Peanut Butter Smelly,” “Dandelion Wishes,” “Under the Bed?,” and “Bright”—are characterized by their relatable characters and uplifting themes.

Johnson’s workshops focus on storytelling, illustration, and visual arts, with an emphasis on self-expression and creativity. She believes that everyone has an artist within them, regardless of skill level. “[You] don’t have to be a good artist to create something amazing,” Johnson said. Her teaching philosophy encourages students to explore different mediums and embrace their unique perspectives.

Another inspiring addition to the roster is Dr. Casey Catherine Moore, a poet, advocate for neurodivergent individuals, and host of her own open mic event called Electric Euphoria. Moore’s passion for mythology and poetry began in her childhood, providing her with a means to process her experiences and connect with the world. As a neurodivergent person, Moore is committed to creating in-

clusive and accessible learning environments. She designs her workshops to accommodate diverse learning styles, offering options for visual, musical, and non-traditional forms of poetic expression.

Hosting Electric Euphoria in a D.C. cafe has been a transformative experience for Moore. The event essentially provides a safe and supportive space for individuals to share their talents, whether it be through music, poetry, or other forms of self-expression. Moore describes the atmosphere as “euphoric,” with participants and audience members alike celebrating each other’s contributions. “[It’s] the most beautiful space,” she said. “[Everyone feels] welcome and safe to be themselves.”

For aspiring writers, Moore offers practical advice for overcoming writer’s block and finding their voice. She encourages young writers to use tools such as prompts, song lyrics, or images to spark creativity. “The hardest thing about writing is staring at a blank page,” she said. “Starting with something—anything—makes the process feel less daunting and more enjoyable.” Moore emphasizes the power of storytelling and poetry to address real-world issues, which can help both communities and individuals to engage with writing in a fun way.

By providing resources, guidance, and creative opportunities, these teaching artists are helping to bridge gaps in access to artistic education. The diversity in their expertise—ranging from dance and theatre to literature and visual arts—ensures that individuals from varied backgrounds and skill levels can find meaningful ways to connect with art. This initiative also fosters collaboration between schools, nonprofits, and community centers in Virginia.

The broader impact of the Teaching Artist Roster can be seen in the stories and projects of its members. These artists are educators and advocates for inclusivity, creativity, and personal growth. Their efforts contribute to opportunities for expression and community engagement with the arts.

‘Moulin Rouge!’ at the Altria Theater

Olive Schreher
Features Editor

A Broadway production has made its way to the Altria Theater from March 4, 2025 to March 16, 2025. “Moulin Rouge! The Musical,” based on Baz Luhrmann’s 2001 film, is now being performed as part of the Broadway in Richmond series. The show is open to large crowds and is attracting people who enjoy the arts from all over RVA.

According to the “Moulin Rouge!” The Musical’s official website, the musical tells the story of Christian, a young composer from Ohio who moves to Paris to try and perform his songs. While in the city, he meets other artists and musicians, and together, they try to convince a popular club, the Moulin Rouge, to use their work in a new show. Along the way, Christian falls in love with Satine, the star of the club. Satine is dealing with a serious illness that she hides from others, add-

Altria Theater still includes colorful costumes and set pieces, as well as choreographed dance scenes.

The story stays true to the original film, combining romance and drama with musical numbers. What makes the show different is its use of popular pop songs. Music from artists like Elton John, Beyoncé, and others is featured throughout the production in various mash-ups.

The acting and singing in “Moulin Rouge!” stood out to Merit. “The singing was very good, as was the acting,” she said. One actor in particular made an impression. “The actor who played Christian... the way [he] portrayed the character was entertaining,” she said.

Merit found a few scenes that stood out visually. Her favorite part of the musical was “[when] the female lead [came] down from the ceiling and [sang]. [It] was really different,” she said.

The show is part of the Broadway in Richmond lineup, and some residents have access to these plays through season passes.

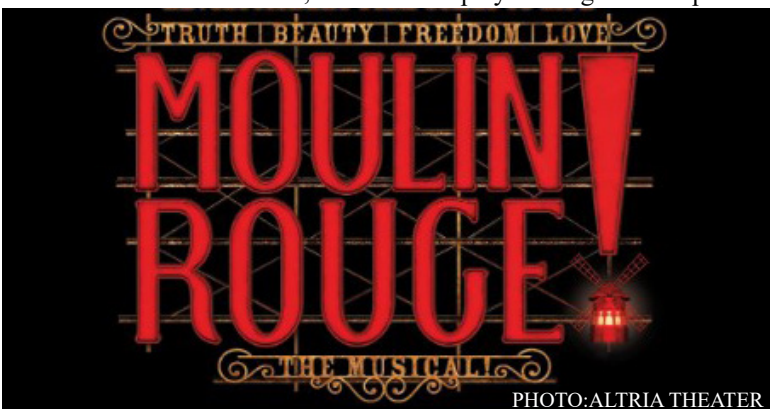


PHOTO:ALTRIA THEATER

‘Moulin Rouge!’ The Musical poster

ing emotional weight to the story.

“Moulin Rouge!” is “about this guy who’s from Ohio, and [he] moves to France to try to get [his] songs into a show,” said sophomore Merit Labelle. “[He] meets these two guys who have written a musical, and they go to this club... and [he] meets a girl, and they fall in love. But [she] is really sick and hiding it from everyone.”

The musical runs for approximately two hours and 38 minutes, including an intermission, but for Merit, the musical did not feel dragged out. “[It] went by really fast,” said Merit.

The show first gained attention as a film more than twenty years ago. Its Broadway adaptation opened in 2019 and went on to win ten Tony Awards, including Best Musical. Since then, the musical has been brought to cities across the country, including Richmond.

For people who have seen both the Broadway version and the touring show, they are both different in some ways, but similar in others. “[I] watched [it] in New York a few years ago on Broadway,” said Merit. “[It] was much brighter and louder [in Richmond], and the set was less extravagant than [the one] in New York. But, what [they] had [here] with the screen was really good.”

The stage design in Richmond uses screens and lighting to create some of the same visual effects seen in larger productions. Although it may be on the same scale as the original Broadway version, the performance at the Al-

“[My mom] and [I] have season passes,” said Merit. “When the season began, [we] bought the passes and once [they] mentioned [‘Moulin Rouge!’] was coming soon, [we] were very excited.”

With touring shows like “Moulin Rouge!,” the goal is to bring a Broadway-style experience to local theaters without requiring people to travel to New York. While not every detail of the original production can be replicated, touring versions give more people the opportunity to see popular shows live.

“Moulin Rouge! The Musical” combines theater, music, and visual effects to tell a story set in Paris during the 20th century. It focuses on themes of love and sacrifice, using popular music to keep the energy high throughout.

When asked if she would recommend the musical to others, Merit said, “100 percent yes.” While it may not be everyone’s favorite performance of the year, “Moulin Rouge!” has become one of the more talked-about shows in the area. “[I] wouldn’t say it was my most favorite, but [it’s] in [my] top three,” she said.

For people who enjoy live theater or want to see a well-known musical without traveling far, “Moulin Rouge!” The Musical is one of the larger productions to visit Richmond this season. It brings music, dance, and a detailed set together in a performance that has drawn interest from both longtime fans of the original movie and people new to the film.



PHOTO:VA COMMISSION FOR ARTS

A Review of “Captain America: Brave New World”

Ava Harrison

Arts & Entertainment Editor
Graphics Editor

Marvel’s “Captain America: Brave New World” released in theaters on Feb. 14, 2025. It is the fourth Captain America film and one of many movies released after “Avengers: Endgame” which concluded the Infinity Saga. In this movie, “Captain America must unravel a nefarious global plot before the mastermind has the world seeing red,” said the official description on Disney Plus. Freeman students have varying opinions on Captain America: Brave New World and new Marvel movies overall. Based on a Freeman poll, 63.6 percent of students said they enjoyed watching the movie while 36.4 percent said they did not. Additionally, 72.7 percent of students said they will continue to watch new Marvel movies in the future, while 27.3 percent said they would not. Students have a mix of positive and negative things to say about the film, like junior Electra Ciminno, who enjoyed watching Captain America: Brave New World. “[I] thought it was a good movie,” said Electra. “But it felt super rushed in terms of how late [the villain] turned evil and how quickly things were solved.” Electra enjoyed how it was produced as a movie instead of a series. “[It’s] opening up an

opportunity for a lot [of different] characters to grow,” she said. She feels like “[they] did a good job connecting everything that happened [in the movie] and introducing Joaquin Torres,” she said. Prior to watching the movie, Electra expected to see more of the Winter Soldier because “[we] got Falcon and the Winter Soldier,” she said. But, “after that [he] was kind of [forgotten].” She also thought that there would be a bigger antagonist. “[I thought] there would be more of an [evil] organization [instead of a single villain],” she said. The film is described as more straightforward than the previous Marvel movies. “[I] thought it was shorter than a lot of the other films,” she said. “By the end, [it] was all [resolved].” Electra’s favorite part of the film was the bond between Sam and Joaquin. “[I] look forward to seeing them working together [in the future] because [I] liked their dynamic and [how comfortable they are] with each other,” she said. Captain America, previously Steve Rogers, is now Sam Wilson, marking a change in the Marvel franchise. “[Sam Wilson needs] to be something bigger than [he was],” said Electra. “Filling the shoes Steve left for him [gives him] the opportunity to grow as a person.” Similarly, sophomore Leigh Stuart enjoys Sam Wilson as the new Captain America.

“[They needed] to fill the character spot, and [I] thought it was a nice transition,” she said. Similar to Electra, sophomore Carrie Nelson thought “[the movie] was good,” but did not like how the entire plot was based on a villain introduced in another movie. “Since [I] didn’t remember who [the villain] was, [I] was confused for a while,” said Carrie. Compared to other Marvel movies, Captain America: Brave New World fell short. “[I] approached [it] with a certain mindset of what it was going to be [like] and [it wasn’t] as good,” Carrie said. The movie did not have a final battle scene, but instead included random battles throughout and ended abruptly. “[I] feel like other Marvel movies tend to include build-up throughout the movie and a big battle at the end. This [movie] was different,” she said. Carrie believes that this movie deserves a follow-up strictly because “it’s Marvel,” she said. “[I] think they need a chance for redemption.” Although Carrie enjoyed watching Captain America: Brave New World, she “won’t watch it again,” but will continue to watch new Marvel movies in the future. “[I’ve] been watching the movies for a while, so it’s weird to stop,” she said. On the other hand, senior Patrick Hernandez Blasco enjoyed watching the new film and thought “the most epic part [of the mov-

ie] arrived at the end,” they said. “The villain’s plot was good, but [I] didn’t like how forced the entry of Red Hulk was,” said Patrick. “I would have preferred [for them] to give the villain more potential.” Sophomore Leigh Stuart thought too much of the movie was revealed too early. “Almost everything [was] spoiled in the trailer, she said. “However, all Marvel movies [have been like this] recently,” she said. Jaylon Smith, a senior, found the new film to be a great watch and “refreshing” for the Marvel

Cinematic Universe (MCU). “[It] didn’t feel like there was an excessive amount of stuff going on,” he said. “Movies like Infinity War and Endgame were cool but felt more serious than the prequels.” There are many diverse opinions at Freeman revolving around the new film Captain America: Brave New World and other new Marvel movies. What do you think about Marvel’s new productions? Will you continue to watch these movies now that the storyline has shifted?



Marvel’s poster of Captain America: Brave New World

Freeman Races Through the Ukrop’s Monument Avenue 10K

Maryam Vohra

Editor-in-Chief

The Ukrop’s Monument Avenue 10K has been a popular spring event in Richmond since 2000. Thousands of people from the Richmond region and beyond have shown up to run the course along Monument Avenue. The streets are lined with volunteers handing out water and electrolytes, live music on every other block, and people cheering from the sidelines every step of the way. Presented by Kroger, the race has been described as “RVA’s favorite spring tradition.” Ukrop’s Monument Avenue 10K has been a place for seasoned runners to set a new personal record, cross the finish line in costume, or just stroll along Monument Avenue. This year, several Freeman students and teachers showed out at the 10K, with juniors Eva Brown, Parker McMahon, and Caroline Grubbs all running the race for the first time. DSF math teacher Ms. Pike also ran the 10K. Ukrop’s 10K provides accommodations for multiple types of runners. Runners are released

in waves, the first twelve waves running the 6.2 miles under 63 minutes, and the following waves remain un-seeded. Caroline Grubbs, set a new personal record. “My goal was to run [it] in 48 minutes, but [I] actually ran [it] in 45:37,” she said. For Eva, this was her first time running the 10K, “[It] was my New Year’s resolution,” she said. “[I] wanted to get more into running because I haven’t been able to run track because of an injury, so I still wanted to get some exercise.” Eva adopted a training schedule of running three or four times a week, progressively increasing in mileage. Parker, a cross-country and track athlete, also ran her first 10K this year, “[The race] was on my birthday, so [I] wanted something fun to do. [I] thought starting off being 17 by doing something active would be cool,” she said. Eva and Parker agreed that having friends to run with made a big difference. “It was nice to have someone there,” Parker said. “[We] just listened to music and stayed in the zone, [we] didn’t let ourselves slow down.” Similarly, Eva said, “Run with

[your] friends, with people. They help keep you accountable.” Running races in costume is a common tradition, and the Ukrop’s 10K is no exception. Notably, runners saw some standout costumes along the route, from superheroes and Minecraft characters to a group of spectators dressed as the cast of “Shrek.” “[I] remember seeing someone wearing ‘ugly rainbow leopard print leggings,’ she said. [I] don’t know if that was a costume, but [it] definitely caught my attention.” Throughout the race, it was clear that Ukrop’s wanted to keep runners energized and upbeat. Live music lined the blocks and people cheered loudly and with cowbells along the sidelines. “[I] loved the live music down the blocks, [it] was nice to hear,” said Parker. The 10K course is set on Monument Avenue, which is characterized by architecturally significant houses, churches, and apartment buildings. “[It] wasn’t too hilly and not too steep, which was really beginner-friendly,” said Caroline. “The course had a great layout. At the end, [you] could see the finish line, which was motivat-

ing.” bring o you can see the finish line, which gave [me] energy for the last half-mile,” said Caroline. Running any race requires motivation, especially a 10K. Eva and Parker found motivation through each other’s company, “[We] just kept pushing, [we] didn’t want ourselves to slow down,” Eva said. “Once [I] hit the last two miles, [I] wanted to start walking, but [I] kept going,” she said. While the first few miles feels smooth for runners, the last stretch is more difficult. “The hardest part was the last 100 meters,” said Parker, “I thought, ‘I could just stop right now.’” Upon crossing the finish line, runners received post-race snacks, a commemorative t-shirt, and a finisher’s medal. Eva made a beeline for White House Rolls, while Parker jokes “they told me to go get my banana, and I was like, ‘Okay.’” The Ukrop’s Monument Avenue is an event meant to bring the RVA community together, the atmosphere, crowd, and organization makes it successful and fun. Parker said, “[It’s] the biggest event [I’ve] seen in Richmond. The supporters, especially families with [their] kids watching, is a great

way to bring everyone together.” Following the race, all participants are invited to the Sheehy Post Race Festival, where they can find a live DJ, post-race food and beverages, photo opps, and vendor and sponsor booths. The event is a great tool for small businesses and people trying to build support in the Richmond area; “there were so many volunteers, organizations, and small businesses out [there], and lots of singers and comedians trying to grow within the Richmond community, which was cool to see,” said Caroline. Running any race is daunting, so it is important to be prepared. “Definitely enjoy [it]. Make sure [you’re] trained, make sure [you’re] rested, make sure [you’re] fueled, focus on yourself so you can crush [it],” said Caroline. Every runner takes away something different from the Ukrop’s 10K, whether it is a personal best, a new experience, or a sense of accomplishment. “[I] would recommend running this race to anyone. [I] learned I’m stronger than my mind, can push through the pain. [I’m] proud that I did it,” said Eva.

#JusticeForBlake or #StandWithJustin?

Emerson Post

Sports Editor
Copy Editor

Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni are engaged in an ongoing legal battle stemming from the filming of the movie “It Ends with Us,” released on August 9, 2024. Lively is accusing Baldoni of unwanted advances and orchestrating a smear campaign, while Baldoni is countering this argument with claims of defamation. Lively is also attempting to dismiss Baldoni’s lawsuit. This case has not only drawn interest because of the celebrity names involved, but also due to its potential implications of power dynamics and workplace behavior in the film industry. The controversy first gained attention in Dec. 2024 when

Lively first filed a complaint against Baldoni with the California Civil Rights Department. According to court documents and statements from both parties, “the conflict allegedly began during the later stages of production, though tensions escalated post-release as the film garnered both media attention and fan scrutiny,” said the Good Morning America team of ABC News. In the months since, the case has unfolded in both the courtroom and the public eye, with fans and media outlets tracking each other through every step. The release of private text messages—some published by the New York Times—led to a rapid development in the storyline, leading to debates over authenticity and media responsibility. Baldoni claimed that the texts were manipulated, while Lively’s team stood by their beliefs. The con-



People walking the Ukrop’s Monument 10K in costume apart of celebration

troversy raised broader concerns about how digital evidence is presented and interpreted in high-profile cases like this one. Legal experts have noted that the back-and-forth lawsuits occurring point to a larger shift in how image management and legal accountability intersect in Hollywood. Amid the media frenzy, students and young people have taken a particular interest in the case’s cultural implications. Kate Post, a junior at Freeman, is someone who falls under that category. “[It’s] hard to say [right now] because they have different perspectives on the events that occurred,” said Kate. “[I] think that once all the evidence is reviewed in court, [it] will help [us] get a clearer picture.” Public perception can sometimes be influential as well. Old interviews and online rumors have come to the surface, portraying both stars in contrasting ways. “[It] seems as though they are taking Baldoni’s side,” said Kate. “After learning about the alleged social media manipulation, [my] opinion shifted.” The idea that a planned effort may have been made to create online conversations about Lively has contributed to conversations about the role of PR in creating narratives be-

fore legal outcomes are reached. The entertainment industry is watching this case as it continues to develop. If either party is found liable, it could create a new example for how misconduct allegations are handled during and after production. “Reputation and public opinion mean everything in Hollywood. Neither of them may be hired again with this still ongoing,” said Kate. The party that is found not guilty may face problems in the future as well, due to the controversy surrounding the case. The release of a New York Times article titled “Blake Lively Adds Claims From 2 Other Women to Justin Baldoni Lawsuit,” included some of the private messages between the two actors. Proof of these private messages could possibly determine the outcome of the court case if used in the right fashion. “[We’re] in an age where a screenshot can become the centerpiece of a lawsuit,” said a media law expert in the NYT article. “But proving authenticity is more complicated than most people think.” Some believe that this case could affect how film contracts are handled. Studios may now consider laying down different guidelines when it comes to workplace conduct, privacy, and digital commu-

nication. “No one wants a scandal like this overshadowing their movie,” said an anonymous producer in The Hollywood Reporter. “It’s bad for business, plain and simple.” Meanwhile, Lively and Baldoni’s legal teams took some different approaches. While Baldoni has made brief public statements denying all allegations thrown at him and warning against misinformation, Lively has remained mostly silent since her initial actions. “These techniques could be very strategic if used correctly,” said PR consultant Danielle Rhodes. It also reflects a saying that many lawyers now give celebrities facing public issues: say less, document more. Fans, however, have to decide whether they want to wait or not. Some have chosen sides and even launched online campaigns supporting or criticizing the actors, using hashtags like #JusticeForBlake and #StandWithJustin. These fan reactions reflect the different trends that come to part in celebrity culture, where public support or backlash are things that affect how people treat high-profile individuals. With more fans, media outlets, and industry insiders watching closely, some issues could arise and extend beyond the courtroom.



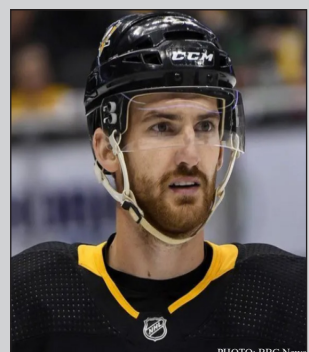
Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni

Rest In Peace



Pope Francis

Pope Francis, head of the Roman Catholic Church, died on April 21, 2025, at the Domus Sanctus Marthae in Vatican City. His death was announced early Monday morning by Cardinal Kevin Farrell. After struggling with type 2 diabetes and hypertension during his life, Pope Francis died of a stroke and irreversible cardiac arrest. His funeral was held on April 26, 2025, with over 250,000 people in attendance.



Adam Johnson

Adam Johnson, a hockey player for the Nottingham Panthers, died after suffering a neck injury during a collision with Matt Petgrave of the Sheffield Steelers on October 28, 2023. Petgrave spent 17 months on bail after his arrest in November 2023. The Crown Protection Service worked with South Yorkshire Police to determine whether any criminal charges should be brought. Petgrave will not be charged for what was described as a “deeply shocking and upsetting incident.”



Police investigate the scene

Kai-Ji Adam Lo, a 30-year-old Vancouver resident, rammed his SUV through a crowd, killing at least 11 people aged between 5 to 65 during a Filipino community festival. Prosecutors in British Columbia charged Lo with eight counts of second-degree murder. Lo was described as having interactions with authorities involving mental health in the past. Police report that in addition to the deaths, around two dozen people were injured, possibly increasing the death toll in the coming weeks.

Content by Maryam Vohra

The United States Strikes on Yemen Oil Terminal

Olive Schreher
Features Editor

Recently, the United States carried out major air strikes on an oil terminal called Ras Isa, located on Yemen’s Red Sea coast. This terminal was under the control of the Houthis, a rebel group that holds large parts of northwestern Yemen. According to Houthi health officials, at least 74 people were killed and 171 more were injured in the attacks. Many of the victims were said to be workers at the site. The U.S. government stated that the purpose of the strike was to destroy a key fuel supply used by the Houthis, with the goal of weakening the group economically and militarily. They argue that the Houthis were using the oil terminal to fund their operations, including attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea and missile launches toward Israel.

The Houthis, however, insist that Ras Isa was a civilian facility, not a military one, and have accused the US of committing a war crime by targeting it. This conflict is part of a larger, ongoing crisis in Yemen that has been devastating the country for over a decade. The Houthis seized control of much of Yemen’s north-west after a civil war broke out. A Saudi-led coalition, with support from the United States, tried to restore Yemen’s official government, leading to years of fighting that have killed more than 150,000 people and displaced millions.



Damage from the Strikes

Trump’s tariffs leave China’s neighbours with an impossible choice



Factory Workplace in South East Asia

Nina Henley
Online Editor in Chief
Centerspread Editor

On April 2nd, 2025, President Donald Trump declared a national emergency to address the U.S. trade deficit and announced a 10% universal tariff on all imports, excluding Canada and Mexico, effective April 5. Additionally, Trump implemented country-specific tariffs, ranging from 11% to 50%, on 57 nations, which were set to begin on April 9. However, once April 9th arrived, Trump decided to have a 90-day suspension for all countries, excluding China. Trump’s tariffs began in his first term when he put tariffs on China and pushed Chinese goods into Southeast Asia. By doing this, Southeast Asian businesses like Vietnam’s SHDC Electronics grew by supplying the U.S. market while local industries suffered.

Now, the countries surrounding China are left with an impossible decision: Choosing between the U.S. and China in the escalating trade war. The decision is seemingly impossible because if they side with the U.S., they risk losing access to China, their largest trading partner and a huge source of investment. However, if they lean toward China, they would face U.S. tariffs and could

lose vital access to the American consumer market. Either way the options the country’s economy would suffer tremendously. After Trump’s new tariff announcement, Southeast Asian countries quickly started negotiating terms with both the US and China.

In Trump’s first term, Vietnam Companies like Samsung, Intel, and Foxconn shifted a lot of their production to Vietnam, and the electronics sector exploded. With this early victory, Vietnam offered to scrap all tariffs on U.S. goods to avoid getting penalized. Additionally, Vietnam leader To Lam had a “very productive call” with Trump. On the other hand, Thailand benefited less dramatically than Vietnam in Trump’s first term yet still gained U.S. trade when businesses shifted from China.

Thailand fears that Trump’s tariffs could seriously hurt its exports. Instead of relying on trade talk, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra states that “We [Thailand] will tell the US government that Thailand is not only an exporter but also an ally and economic partner that the US can rely on in the long term.” Overall, ASEAN, a regional group that includes Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, etc, plans not to retaliate against Trump’s tariffs but instead, try to persuade the U.S.

that Southeast Asia is important politically and economically. They believe that this is the best option because they don’t wish to side with either China or the US to avoid conflict. ASEAN leaders are walking a tightrope by staying close to the U.S. to protect their exports, yet attempting to stay on good terms with China for investments and regional security.

While this is happening, China is not sitting still. China is trying hard to pull Southeast Asia closer by offering: Increased investment promises, bigger trade deals through things like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and more political support.

At the same time, China is hinting that if the Southeast Asian countries choose to side with the US, there is a chance that China could cut off deals, investment, tourism, or imports. By offering all of these new opportunities, the Southeast Asian countries are faced with a harder decision. Southeast Asian countries are caught in a challenging bind. Aligning with the U.S. risks offending China, their largest trading partner, while siding with China could lead to U.S. tariffs that harm their exports and economy. As they are attempting to keep a neutral stance, the tensions keep rising as neither the US nor China will back down.

Maryland Senator Meets With Deported Abrego Garcia

Vrusha Pramod
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Maryland Senator since 2017, Chris Van Hollen, met on April 17 with Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a legal Maryland resident who was wrongfully deported to El Salvador back in March.

Van Hollen, currently visiting El Salvador, met and checked on the status of Garcia’s health and well-being after being separated from his loved ones and country. Van Hollen shared a picture of the two meeting on social media, saying, “I said my main goal of this trip was to meet with Kilmar. Tonight, we were able to do that.” Van Hollen also said that he spoke to Abrego Garcia’s wife, Jennifer Vasquez Sura, to deliver her a message from her husband.

Abrego Garcia still remains in custody in El Salvador after the meeting. According to President Nayib Bukele, in a post on X, Abrego Garcia would maintain Salvadoran custody after being determined healthy.

El Salvador’s president, Nayib Bukele, shared photos of the meeting that included Van Hollen and Abrego Garcia together. To get back at Democratic critics speaking on Garcia’s incarceration in the Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo (CECOT), in a post on X he said “Kilmar Abrego Garcia, miraculously risen from the ‘death camps’ & ‘torture’, now sipping margaritas with Senator Van Hollen in the tropical paradise of El Salvador!”

Earlier on the 17th, Van Hollen reported he was denied access to the CECOT prison where Abrego

Garcia is currently being held.

Van Hollen indicated that soldiers at a checkpoint three kilometers from the prison denied him and Chris Newman, a lawyer for Abrego Garcia’s family, access to the prison. Van Hollen argued that denying legal access is a breach of international law and mentioned El Salvador’s obligation under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

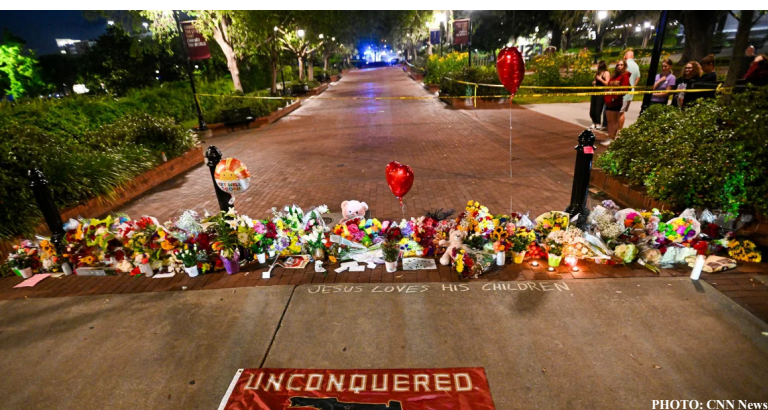
In early April, the Trump administration admitted that the deportation of Garcia to El Salvador, which is currently a “state of exception,” was an error on their part.

However, more recently, former Trump administration officials have come forth to state that the deportation was not, in fact, a mistake, which guarantees individuals the right to due process,” he said.



Demonstrators hold up signs in protest

The Sound No One Should Hear on a College Campus



Vigil near the Florida State University student center

Maria McGuill
Opinions Editor

At Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee, Florida, on April 17th, 2025, a mass shooting occurred. With two deaths and seven gunned down, 20-year-old Phoenix Ikner was found as the suspect.

On Thursday, just before noon, students were walking to and from class when many heard gunshots.

After pushing chairs and trash cans against the door and turning the lights off, Senior Sam Swartz hid with the other people in the student union. “The best thing to do is to try and deter the shooter,” said Sam.

Students were overcome with the reality of the situation, that it was almost impossible for them to believe that it was happening to them. “I saw this police officer with an assault rifle, and I was like, ‘Oh my gosh, this is real,’” said another student, Holden Mamula.

The shooter was assumed to be firing without a target in mind, “it was just anybody he could see,” said Heeter. Ikner was found to have had a history of white supremacist ideology, a belief that white people serve as a dominant race and are superior to other races.

The suspect was hospitalized with a gunshot wound after his offenses. He had accompanied one of the weapons he used by his step-mom, a Leon County Deputy Sheriff. After many hours in lockdown,

the police had taken control of the situation. Students were able to leave their safe zones, and families visiting were cleared to return home. Kylie Byun, a high school student on a school tour, admired the school’s attentiveness. “This is definitely scary, but I think the way the school handled it made me feel pretty safe,” she said.

In the state of Florida, individuals are allowed to carry a firearm without a permit. Legislatures are also taking action to lower the eligibility age from 21

to 18. Since the shooting, students at FSU have taken a stand and went to the Westcott Building and demanded that FSU administrators take action to prevent this event from occurring in the future.

The FSU shooting is the 18th shooting on a college/university campus in 2025, and the 81st mass shooting of this year. Schools have enacted regulations and new laws, “because no matter where you go, there’s a possibility of (a) shooting. And that’s the sad truth of the world that we live in,” said Byun.



Law enforcement responds to the shooting