

## Mayor Danny Avula: Steering Richmond's Ship into New Waters

Emerson Post  
Staff Writer

On Wednesday, Nov. 6, 2024, Dr. Danny Avula was elected as the next mayor of Richmond, Virginia, making history as the city's first immigrant and Indian-American to hold the position. Avula, who is a physician and public health leader, won the November 2024 election decisively, capturing six out of the city's nine districts. Avula's campaign focused on priorities such as affordable housing, public education, and government accountability, which appealed to a broad base of voters throughout the city.

Dr. Avula earned 44,832 votes (46 percent) and won in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 7th districts, according to the unofficial results from the Department of Elections. Avula is the former director of the Richmond and Henrico Health Districts, and once he assembles a transition team, he will start looking for new positions in the administration. "Almost everybody I've talked to in the last 24 hours have expressed such an amazing willingness to work together," said Dr. Avula in a post-election press conference at Richmond City Hall. "I'm very, very excited to work with those bodies moving forward for the good of our city," he said.

Some of Dr. Avula's areas of focus are thriving neighborhoods and affordable housing. He plans to increase the supply of affordable housing, promote public safety, expand Richmond's public transportation, and invest in climate durability throughout neighborhoods in the city. A central focus of his administration will be ensuring that long-term residents do not get displaced due to rising costs of housing, and to expand the avail-

ability of affordable housing for low-income and working families.

To prevent displacement, he has committed to addressing the cycle of evictions that many families face. He plans to focus on meeting the financial, social, accessible, and emotional needs of Richmond's residents. This includes development, the redevelopment of aging commercial areas, and the preservation and expansion of green spaces. These are intended to not only benefit recreation but also the community as a whole.

Public safety is a key focus for Avula as well. He looks to "strengthen the relationship between neighborhoods and the Richmond Police Department to ensure public safety meets community needs and builds trust," according to his mayor campaign website. Additionally, he has committed to investing in programs to prevent gun violence and address the root cause of crime that occurs in Richmond.

Dr. Avula also plans to expand access to equitable transportation options. Some of his proposed solutions include safe biking and walking infrastructure, increasing Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC) bus frequency, improving the reliability of the public transit system, and ensuring better conditions at the bus stops. Dr. Avula views these challenges as ways to improve public health, reduce environmental impact, and enhance mobility throughout the city. "We have to make sure every Richmonder can get around safely, efficiently, and sustainably," he said.

Education is a priority in Dr. Avula's administration. As a parent of five current and former Richmond Public Schools students, Avula has expressed a

commitment to prioritizing funding for these schools, ensuring that they all have modern infrastructure and up-to-date technology. "Every child in Richmond deserves the opportunity to succeed," said Dr. Avula. He plans to expand out-of-school programs and career development opportunities for students in the future.

Dr. Avula's leadership experience, particularly as the former director of the Richmond and Henrico Health Districts, informs his approach to improving City Hall. He plans to transform city government into an efficient, responsive, and accountable system. This includes objectives like launching a national search for a new Chief Administrative Officer and assessing leadership across all city departments. Avula strives to ensure that the city's operations are aligned with the needs of residents and will work on improving systems like finance, human resources, and information technology to enhance the city's functions. "We need to make City Hall work better for the people of Richmond," said Dr. Avula.

In addition, Dr. Avula plans to push for Richmond to be more inclusive. He said he would take action to protect the rights of marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ individuals and immigrant families. His administration will work to counter any efforts to reduce protections at the state or federal level, and will focus on inclusive policies within the City Hall. "Richmond is a city for everyone, and I will fight to protect the rights of all of our residents," he said.

Although there are many supporters of what Dr. Avula will be doing for the city, there are some critics of what his term will end up



PHOTO: VIRGINIA MERCURY

### New mayor Danny Avula speaks to the press

bringing. He has faced criticism for several quarters, one being abortion rights in the City of Richmond. Harrison Roday, a Richmond mayoral candidate, stepped up his attacks questioning Avula's stance on abortion rights by stirring the issue on live television and authorized an abortion-themed mailer that called mayor Avula a "senior member" of Republican Governor Glen Youngkin's administration, which sought to ban abortion. The critics then took a sharper turn, which made abortion a breaking point in the 5 person election.

Furthermore, there are concerns about his stance on gentrification, arguing that his policies potentially favor developers over long-time, lower-income residents. Critics have pointed out that his focus on economic development could exacerbate inequality in neighborhoods that are already struggling. His background in healthcare also leaves some wondering if he has enough experience to tackle the broader range of issues in urban areas, like infrastructure and affordable housing.

Additionally, his reliance on administrative processes has led to many frustrations among residents who feel that he is not engaged enough in the day-to-day needs of Richmond's communities. As the city begins to face both economic growth and social challenges, many residents are questioning whether his leadership style will be able to balance these competing priorities.

With the election results now finalized, Dr. Avula is preparing for his first term in office. He has expressed his commitment to working with a wide range of stakeholders, including elected officials, community groups, and city residents, to address the challenges that will arrive up ahead. "I'm ready to get started," said Dr. Avula, "We have a lot to do, but together, we can ensure that Richmond is a city where everyone has the opportunity to succeed." With a focus on collaboration and long-term solutions, Dr. Avula aims to create a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous future for the city of Richmond and all of its residents.

## Freeman Wins Virginia 2024–2025 Exemplar Award and Gains Forbes Recognition

Saanvi Gourishetty  
Staff Writer

Five Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS), including Douglas Southall Freeman High School, have been named recipients of the 2024–25 Exemplar Awards by the Virginia Board of Education. This recognition, announced on Oct. 24, 2024, celebrates excellence in graduation rates, student retention, and overall academic achievement. Adding to the district's accolades, HCPS has also been named one of America's Best-In-State Employers by Forbes.

Freeman was highlighted for its notable achievements: increased graduation rates and reduced dropout rates since the 2018–19 academic year. HCPS offers lessons for other districts looking to achieve similar success. Mr. Florez pointed to the district's emphasis on teacher support as a key factor in maintaining high educational standards. "HCPS invests in its educators, not just with salaries but also with programs that encourage professional growth," said

Mr. Florez. "This keeps teachers motivated and helps them stay in the profession," he said. These improvements reflect a broader district-wide effort to ensure all students graduate prepared for the future. Assistant Principal Jose Florez emphasized the importance of the recognition while noting that, "the work never stops, we have to continue facing tough challenges [and] offer all students the opportunity to graduate," he said. Teachers and administrators pointed to strong community engagement, a sense of belonging among students, and targeted support for at-risk students as key factors contributing to these achievements.

Both Mr. Florez and Mr. Gallo emphasized the importance of equity and inclusion in the HCPS approach. Mr. Gallo, a Freeman physics teacher who is involved in Freeman's Equity and Diversity Committee, expressed pride in the school's efforts to make every student feel welcome and capable. "I feel like Freeman does this better than any other school I've worked with," said Mr. Gallo. "It's about ensuring all groups

of students feel as motivated and as academically capable as any other group," he said. According to Mr. Gallo, administrators are receptive to teachers' needs and create an environment that fosters growth and collaboration. "The best school-level leadership I've ever worked for has been in Henrico County," he said.

One of the hallmarks of Freeman High School is its focus on inclusion. "Freeman is uniquely positioned to excel in this area because of its diverse student body and its commitment to inclusion," said Mr. Gallo. "We work hard to make every student feel as motivated and capable as their peers," he said.

The Exemplar Awards represent not only a moment of pride but also a reinforcement of the values that Henrico County Public Schools prioritize. These values, as echoed by educators, focus on rigor, inclusion, and an unwavering commitment to student success. Teachers play a pivotal role in sustaining these standards. Mr. Gallo described their dual responsibilities as both motivators and maintainers of academic rigor: "Teachers have to inspire because most learning is driven by intrinsic motivation, but they also serve as cheerleaders," he said. "It's about striking the right balance between encouragement and maintaining appropriate challenges for students."

By putting a strong emphasis on the "Freeman Family," Mr. Florez shared that fostering a sense of belonging among students has been instrumental in improving retention and graduation rates. "When students feel supported and welcomed, they're more likely to stay engaged and

succeed academically," he said.

HCPS supports its educators through initiatives like micro-credentialing programs and the Advanced Leadership Academy (ALA), which Mr. Florez credited for his transition from teacher to administrator. The balance between motivating and maintaining academic rigor is tailored to the diverse needs of HCPS students, from advanced learners to those needing additional support. "HCPS provides multiple opportunities for teachers to grow professionally," said Mr. Florez. "This includes programs that allow them to further their careers while staying focused on students' individual needs," he said. Freeman, in particular, has demonstrated how a supportive teaching environment can lead to tangible student outcomes. With graduation rates on the rise and dropout rates falling, the school is a model for how schools can foster academic success through collaborative effort and strategic investment in resources.

Both recognitions — the Exemplar Awards and Forbes honor — underscore the HCPS commitment to academic and personal growth. Educators believe these accolades enhance the district's reputation, potentially influencing families' decisions to join the Henrico community. "Freeman has long enjoyed a reputation for being a great school. This only serves as a strong reminder that their children are attending an awesome place to learn," said Mr. Florez.

While awards and accolades are not the ultimate goal of HCPS, they serve as a validation of the district's efforts. Mr. Gallo noted that these honors could influence families' perceptions of HCPS

schools, potentially drawing more families to the area. "Many families make decisions about where to live based on school quality," he said. "Recognition like this affirms that Henrico County is a place where their children can thrive."

Beyond the practical implications of school choice, these honors boost morale among educators and administrators. Mr. Florez believes that moments like these remind staff why they chose this profession. "It's fulfilling to know that our hard work is recognized at the state level," he said. "It reaffirms our mission to provide a world-class education to all students."

Mr. Gallo added that while awards may not resonate with every student, they have the potential to inspire a subset of learners to take pride in their education. "If even a small group of students is motivated by this recognition, then it's a success," said Mr. Gallo. "Education is about creating resilient, successful students, not just winning accolades," he said.

Another standout aspect of HCPS is its quantitative approach to improvement. According to Mr. Gallo, the district regularly seeks teacher input through surveys to measure engagement, workplace satisfaction, and student outcomes. "They consistently ask for our feedback, and it's always data-driven," said Mr. Gallo. "This helps ensure that decisions are informed by real insights rather than anecdotal evidence," he said.

The dual recognitions of the Exemplar Awards and Forbes honor showcase the best of HCPS: a commitment to student success, a supportive work environment for educators, and a forward-thinking approach to equity and inclusion.

*Congratulations*  
on being selected as a winner of a  
**2024 Virginia Exemplar Award**

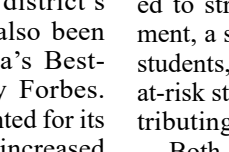


PHOTO: HCPS

Message from the Virginia Department of Education

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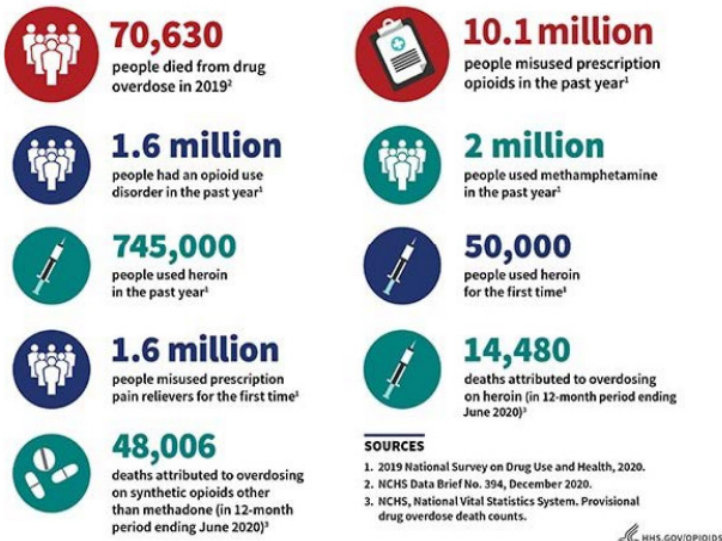


# The United States’ Opioid Epidemic and Virginia’s \$29 Million Settlement with Kroger

Sarah Chilton  
Editor-in-Chief

On Nov. 4, 2024, Kroger reached a settlement to pay the states \$1.34 billion after being sued by 30 attorneys general for their role in the United States’s opioid crisis. Virginia will receive up to \$29.4 million from Kroger, who has also agreed to monitor and report data from its pharmacies related to suspicious opioid prescriptions. These terms apply to the 123 stores that Kroger operates in the state, including their affiliates Kroger Marketplace and Harris Teeter. “This

## THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC BY THE NUMBERS



settlement provides the commonwealth with vital funds that will go towards preventing, reducing, and treating addiction in our communities,” said Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares, who was part of the coalition of attorneys general that sued Kroger. Over the past two decades, the United States has seen a rise in substance abuse and an increase in drug-related overdoses. Since 2000, the annual number of overdose deaths from any kind of drug “has multiplied almost six times, rising from 17,500 to over 106,000 people in 2021,” said the State Health Access Data Assistance Center (SHADAC). A vast

majority of these deaths from 2021 — 80,000 of the 106,000 — involved some form of opioids,” they said. Opioids are a broad category of drugs that can relieve pain and cause addiction and dependence. Some examples of common opioids are morphine, codeine, opium, heroin, oxycodone, oxymorphone, hydrocodone, Percocet, and fentanyl. At the beginning of the opioid epidemic, the concern was centered around addiction and abuse from prescription painkillers and medications that would accompany surgery and treatments. For some, “when they were unable to get any more of the prescribed medication for their addiction, they moved to stronger street drugs or they went to different physicians to get different narcotic prescriptions,” said Freeman nurse Margaret Lovgren. Opioids work by binding to proteins called opioid receptors, which stop pain signals sent by the body from reaching the brain. Opioids are so addictive because they “make you feel good [and] take away pain both physical and mental; the problem is the more you take, the more you need,” said Mrs. Lovgren. “You build up a tolerance so the same amount doesn’t work, you will need more and more to achieve the same results,” she said. In the medical field, the accessibility of opioids has decreased due to more communication be-

tween pharmacies. They can now alert each other if a patient has already had a narcotic prescription filled and may be drug-seeking. Additionally, changing medical standards of care, such as replacing Percocet with Ibuprofen or Tylenol for postoperative pain, “have decreased the level of opioids used in hospitals,” said Mrs. Lovgren. However, with the void of opioid availability and desire for stronger drugs, the illicit market for opioids has grown and harder drugs are becoming more prevalent. Heroin deaths began to surge in the United States in 2011, and in 2014, deaths from fentanyl began their rapid rise, according to a SHADAC infographic. The danger of this shift is that “it doesn’t take much for a person to overdose and die if Fentanyl is involved,” said Mrs. Lovgren. For Americans ages 18 to 45, the leading cause of death is fentanyl overdose. “The addictive drug is responsible for nearly 70 percent of the United States’ 107,000 + drug overdose deaths in the past year and is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine,” said Get Smart About Drugs. Between 1999 and 2022, nearly 727,000 people died from opioid overdoses, said the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This statistic isn’t far from home, and members of the Freeman community, in both

the law enforcement and medical field, have firsthand experience. Shiny Chandravel, a volunteer Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), graduated from Freeman in 2024 and is currently a freshman in the pre-med track at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). In her volunteer work, her very first shift was responding to someone who overdosed on opioids, and those cases are “something we see a lot, especially in the area that I volunteer at,” she said. In her time as a student volunteer over the last two years, she estimates that she’s responded to about ten overdose calls from people across the board. “The circles it runs in surprised me, it’s not always the stereotypical poor communities, it’s a widespread issue [and] even wealthier communities are passing this around,” said Shiny. When the EMTs respond to the scene of an overdose, they administer Narcan to the patient. “One of the most important scientific inventions that we have is Narcan,” said Shiny. “It’s really just a miracle drug at this point,” she said. “It looks like [patients are] dead — they will be blue, they won’t move — but the moment you put Narcan [in] then you wait a couple minutes, and then, boom, they’re back to life,” she said. “You can see firsthand, their blue lips, their blue face, and everything, just disappears immediately,” said Shiny.

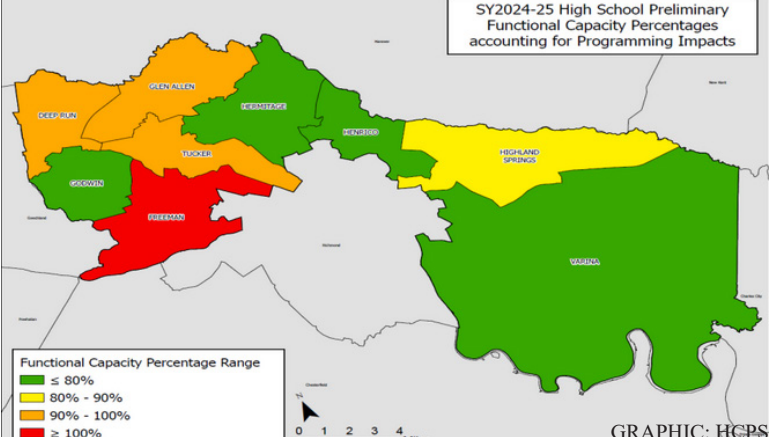
# Overcapacity Issues at Freeman High School

Ava Harrison  
Staff Writer

As of the 2024–2025 school year, Freeman is the only high school in Henrico County, Virginia that is over capacity. According to Henrico School Board Vice Chair, Marcie Shea, such a problem stemmed from an increase in development surrounding the Freeman area, resulting in more students being zoned to the school. 1,839 students are enrolled this year at Freeman, but its functional capacity — the number of students it can accommodate based on the building’s size — is 1,760. Freeman follows a day one and day two schedule, and some students leave to go to Aiding Communication in Education (ACE) Centers on certain days. The number of students that are on campus during day one is 1,763, and day two is 1,781, bringing the capacity to 100.17 percent and 101.19 percent, respectively. Freeman has found ways to adjust when faced with overcapacity consequences. “We have either added more teachers or been more creative with our spaces,” said Principal Dr. John Marshall. “[We have taken] what used to be [a] workbook for several teachers and [turned] it into a classroom,” he said. “[We have also taken] what used to be [a storage room] and [turned it] into an office.” Freeman has also taken precautions to split up the school’s population. “Our Winter concert this year [was] in two parts, because while we can fit everybody in the gym, it gets crowded,” said Dr. Marshall. These adjustments allow Freeman to compensate for overcapacity. Overcrowding due to overcapacity affects students as well as teachers. Teachers at Freeman have larger class sizes, which leads to less one-on-one time with students as well as more grading for teachers. Students have to deal with overcrowding in the halls, bathrooms, and stairs. “Whenever I’m in Green Acres, going around the corner, I always get trampled,” said senior Abby McGowan. “It’s really hard to cross the hallways too because [of] how many people there are. You have to shove your way through and [that’s] just really overwhelming,” she said. Since Freeman is over capacity, the Henrico School Board is

looking for solutions to solve this problem, and the main proposal is to move students to a nearby high school. Henrico School Board Vice Chair, Marcie Shea, represents the Tuckahoe District, which includes Freeman. “Freeman’s at about 104 percent capacity,” said Marcie Shea. “While Godwin [High School] is closer to 80 percent capacity [and Tucker High School is] close to 100 percent,” she said. While Tucker is full because of all the offered programs, Mrs. Shea believes that there is room to move certain communities to Godwin. “Godwin has space, to me, that seems like the most obvious solution,” she said. Junior Emily Stage thinks Freeman is overcrowded, but she does not agree with moving students to Godwin High School. “If you’re a junior and they are trying to move you [to a different school], I think [that’s] pretty unfair,” she said. Abby agrees due to the connections she has already made at Freeman. “I think they should start [with moving] the middle schoolers,” said Abby. This would hopefully lessen the amount of kids who filter into Freeman. “I don’t think they should [move students from Freeman] when [they] have already been here a few years,” she said. When redistricting happens, most of the time, students are not given the option on whether they want to move schools. The only people who can decide are fifth graders, eighth graders, juniors, and seniors. Mrs. Shea is trying to make it so students already enrolled in Freeman have a choice on whether they want to move to Godwin or stay where they are. “My hope, and I think we have the support for it, [is] to grandfather anyone who’s already started at Freeman, [meaning] they can finish at Freeman,” said Mrs. Shea.

She believes only a few communities will have to move so there will not be any domino effects. “Because of that, we would be able, hopefully, to provide grandfathering to anyone who’s already at Freeman,” she said. She also wants to keep communities together while providing relief to Freeman. “There are a couple of elementary schools right now that break when they go to middle school and then to high school,” said Mrs. Shea. “Those elementary schools divide between Godwin and Freeman,” she said. However, Mrs. Shea believes that the divided communities should be brought back together. “To me, it would make sense to bring those communities together,” she said. This proposal would not only keep students together through their school years but also help Freeman with its issues revolving around overcapacity. Mrs. Shea believes that having trailers on Freeman may be a possibility to expand the school’s capacity, but it would be difficult. “I don’t know where a trailer would be put.” The last time Freeman had trailers, “they took out all the tennis courts and they took out the teacher parking lot [all to be replaced with trailers],” said Mrs. Shea. Therefore, moving kids to Godwin would serve as a better solution. As of the Board meeting on Dec. 13, there are no specific recommendations or timeline for boundary adjustments to relieve Freeman. However, Mrs. Shea thinks change needs to be made. “I think Freeman is in desperate need of some relief sooner rather than later,” she said. “I know that moving school boundaries gives a lot of people anxiety, and I know people have a lot of feelings about it, [so] we’re trying to be as least disruptive as possible.”



# New Rides and Rebranding at VA Amusement Parks



Katelyn Morrow  
Centerspread Editor

Local amusement parks, Kings Dominion located in central Virginia, and Busch Gardens in Williamsburg are currently adding new roller coasters to their array of rides. Kings Dominion is renovating its park to be jungle-themed and introducing the new ride, Rapterra. Busch Gardens is also unveiling a new ride called The Big Bad Wolf: The Wolf’s Revenge. Kings Dominion, the 400-acre amusement park, is under renovation and currently retheming old rides and adding a new roller coaster that will launch in 2025, in honor of Kings Dominion’s 50th anniversary season. Rapterra is the world’s largest and tallest launched wing coaster. The roller coaster is 145 feet tall and is on 3,086 feet of track. “We are excited to unveil Rapterra, the must-do ride of 2025, at Kings Dominion,” said Bridgette Bywater, Vice President and General Manager at Kings Dominion in a video published by Kings Dominion. Busch Gardens’s The Wolf’s Revenge is the largest family inverted coaster, located in the Octoberfest park. The Coaster is on 2,500 feet of track and has a maximum speed of 40 mph. “We’ve created an experience that combines storytelling with family-friendly thrills,” said Kevin Lembke, Busch Gardens Williamsburg Park President in an interview with Williamsburg Daily. “Guests will feel completely immersed in the story of the Bavarian village, as the sound of screams and the echo of a howling wolf creates chaos in the familiar town,” he said. The coaster is set to be trekking through the German country-

side while the riders become the beast in this thrilling adventure. However, the Rapterra is all about speed and stomach-dropping moves. The start of the ride begins with the coaster cart, representing a “Jungle Hawk,” being launched at the speed of 65 mph in a total of four seconds. The design of the Rapterra puts riders on either side of the track, elevated and legs dangling in front of them, to simulate the experience of flying. This coaster has two 20-passenger trains with four people per row. Throughout the ride there is one dive loop, many aerial movements, and three inversions. There is a capacity of 1,140 guests per hour allowed on this ride. Freeman students are excited about the new ride at Kings Dominion. “I would love to go on the new rides, I think it will make Kings Dominion more interesting,” said senior Abigail Hoffhiemer. Junior Ryleigh Perks is also excited to see what Kings Dominion has to offer in 2025. “[The new ride] seems super fun and I can’t wait to see all the new renovations,” she said. There have been many new additions to the Kings Dominion park over the last few years. Including The Delirium in 2016, three new rides in Snoopy’s Planet in 2017, Twisted Timbers in 2018, and a new schedule of live entertainment in 2019–2021. Kings Dominion and Busch Gardens are showing significant similarities in their introduction of new rides, as both of their recent additions were manufactured by the same roller coaster company: Bolliger & Mabillard. With these new developments, the two amusement parks are continuing to grow by continuously refreshing their parks and increasing popularity.

Tipping Culture: Yes or no?



Freeman’s latest new clubs



Freeman Gymnastics season



A closer look at Wicked



Wildfires in Los Angeles





# A Fierce Return to the Arena: ‘Gladiator II’

**Kristen Carpenter**

Online Editor-in-Chief  
Opinions Editor

As someone who has always shied away from movies that are filled with blood and gore, I was a bit concerned when I discovered I would be writing a review on “Gladiator II.” While I can verify that the movie was just, as if not more, violent than I anticipated, I was also pleasantly surprised by the quality of acting, intensity, and thrill of the movie.

It is important to note that I went into this movie as someone who has yet to watch the first movie of the franchise, “Gladiator.” I only received a watered down summary of “Gladiator” from my dad in which I learned that the original movie focused on an army general who turned into a Gladiator and died in a battle against the emperor, so it’s safe to say I was pretty ill-informed. However, I found that this did not inhibit my ability to keep up with the plot of the film.

“Gladiator II” starts with opening credits while digitally drawn scenes from the first movie play in the background. We see classic symbols of the first “Gladiator” such as the corn field, Maximus in his gladiator mask, and Coliseum battle scenes. I found that this introduction really helped

set the tone for the movie as intense music played and the audience had a chance to settle in for the two and a half hour film.

The movie is rated R and I feel this rating is fitting. There are extremely graphic fight scenes including brutal decapitations, amputations of limbs, and gruesome deaths. The movie even features a scene in which the Coliseum is flooded with water and sharks as the gladiators are placed on ships to battle each other. As I said, I typically steer clear of films like this, but I did sense an element of thrill produced by these intense scenes. However, if you are someone who is scared of blood, this is most definitely NOT a film you should watch. The most exciting aspect of this movie by far is the violence.

The performances from all of the actors were great. The emotion and character build up was captivating to watch. Denzel Washington particularly stuck out to me as the most compelling character in the movie. His character, Maximus, had many layers to him that were peeled back throughout the movie. He was devious, humorous, and expressive which made him a lot of fun to watch, even if his decisions within the film made my blood boil (I’ll refrain from elaborating so that I don’t spoil the entire movie plot).

Paul Mescal, who played Lucius, was also fun to watch. His

emotions were super transparent through the screen and I found myself becoming invested in his journey as a gladiator. His performance felt extremely authentic and kept me engaged throughout the duration of the movie.

I personally enjoyed the movie throughout its entire length, but I will say it was a lot of the same general plot. Paul Mescal’s character, Lucius, would prepare for battle, enter and win, and then contemplate the twisted nature of the Roman Empire. While this is the basis of the plot for the “Gladiator” franchise, I can see how it may get repetitive for a viewer.

As for references back to the original “Gladiator,” the biggest “Gladiator II” connection is the connection between Lucius, Lucilla, and Maximus. Lucilla is the daughter of Marcus Aurelius, the original Roman Emperor. Maximus is the lead gladiator in the original film. Lucilla and Maximus are love interests in “Gladiator.” About a third of the way through the movie, it is revealed that Lucius is the son of Lucilla and Maximus, characters from the original film. While this revelation came as a shock to me, I didn’t have the emotional attachment to Maximus to truly experience the depth of this secret. Someone who has seen “Gladiator” would likely have been more impacted by this connection. Beyond fa-



PHOTO: DEADLINE

**Emperor Geta crowning General Acacius after battle.**

miliar ties, the only major allusions to “Gladiator” are seen in motifs such as the landscape of the film, scenes showing Maximus’ old gladiator uniform, and the similarities behavior of Lucius and his late father, as they both act with defiance and challenge the status quo of the Roman Empire.

Although I would like to see “Gladiator” now, I am glad I went into “Gladiator II” blind. From what I have heard via TikTok reviews and the opinions of my parents who have seen both movies, “Gladiator II” is very similar to “Gladiator” plot-wise. I also think some of the unexpected parts of the plot would have been less surprising if I had watched the original “Gladiator.” My lack

of film knowledge added to the amusement of the movie and kept me on the edge of my seat.

Overall, I would definitely recommend “Gladiator II” to any person who enjoys action movies. It was a fast-paced film with lots of excitement to keep audience members entertained. This historical-fiction aspect of it adds a layer of intellectual depth to history buffs as the movie contains scenes which are inspired by real things that happened during the time of the Roman Empire, (yes they really filled the Coliseum with water). As I have mentioned, I cannot give a fair comparison to the original “Gladiator,” but either way, it’s a thrilling film that is worth the watch!

# Freeman’s Favorite Study Spots



PHOTO: HENRICO COUNTY

**Outside of Tuckahoe Library.**

**Libby Mercer**

Editor-in-Chief

When the final bell rings at 3:55 p.m., signifying the end of the school day, most students still have more work to do. An endless pile of homework requires a productive place to complete it, but luckily for Freeman students, there are plenty of great places to finish your major papers or crank out a Check Your Understanding (CYU) for math. Some study spots are better than others, but here are mine as well as other Freeman student’s favorite places to get homework out of the way.

The most magical place to get work done for me is Panera. There

must be something other than the smell of bread bowls in the air because I have never got more work done than at Panera. Please understand that when I usually edit articles for The Commentator, I can crank out a good one and a half of them before going home. But at Panera, I can somehow get upwards of five full articles edited, and that is one of the greatest accomplishments I can think of. This is also the best place for me to collaboratively work with my friends. As a chronic yapper with ADHD, I find it hard to lock in around people or frankly anywhere, but at Panera, I can stay focused, and keep my yap outbreaks to the best minimum they can be. Meaning, I limit my conversations to how

my day went instead of the childhood trauma I remembered while taking the derivative of X. I think that being surrounded by happy people, AKA people who just had the best grilled cheese local to Freeman, helps me focus on the task at hand, making Panera the most productive study spot for me.

Another one of my favorite places to study has to be a good coffee shop due to its cute aesthetics and the atmosphere of other people working hard. Granted, I am only able to visit this study location when I have an extra five dollars for a latte, which presents a con, but I have found that coffee is one of my greatest motivators, keeping coffee shops at the top of my list. Starbucks is one of my most frequented spots since it’s so close to Freeman, making it a convenient option for all my after-school study sessions. If I’m already making the pit stop for a Sugar Cookie Latte this season, I might as well get some work done while I’m there!

While I love Starbucks, the best coffee shop to study at in Richmond has to be Perk! Located in Bon Air, Perk! is a hidden gem; they have it all. First, they have incredible food — try their “pimento cheese please” lunchbox with a lemon ricotta scone and sweet potato chips. I promise you will thank me later. In addition to their wonderful lattes and sandwiches, they have impeccable music taste. From Hoizer and Noah Kahan to Taylor Swift and Phoebe Bridgers, Perk! is always playing the best songs. Sometimes I will purposefully forget my AirPods just because their playlists are so elite. But, hands down the best part about Perk! is that you can pick up a copy of the newest issue of The Commentator there! It may be 15 minutes from school, but I promise you the charming vibes of Perk! and their Raspberry Rose matchas will keep you motivated for hours. However, they close early — some days at 3 p.m. and others at 5 p.m. — so make sure to get there early and get all your work out of the way!

While Perk! is my choice of coffee shop for locking in, students in the National Honor Society enjoy studying at Starbucks, Brick Road Coffee Shop, Stella’s Grocery on River Road, and Capital One Cafe on Cary Street. “[Capital One Cafe] is a great spot to study because it provides both quiet areas and group study spaces with lots of places to charge your laptop,” said senior Wren Carter. “The best spots are the ones by the window so that if you need a break you can look out over the busy Carytown street/shops and people watch,” she said. No matter which coffee shop you choose, I think they are great productive places to study and get a motivational treat.

Next on my list of favorites is the Library because I feel productive and enjoy the quiet. My favorite is the Tuckahoe Library since it is so close to school and has

lots of good seating options. Huge shoutout to the study rooms at Tuckahoe, and my favorite which is study room A, since they are great places to collaborate, and in my case, yap. They are also remarkably soundproof, which I can confirm since I submitted my first college application there and loudly screamed/cried while pressing the submit button. I also love the vibes at Libbie Mill Library (my namesake), but I only go there if I am up for a drive since I somehow always get lost on the way home, which frustrates me. Another major pro of both of these libraries is that they are also places where you can pick up an issue of The Commentator, woohoo! Overall, I think libraries are some of the best places to go if you are looking for a place to crank out your work for hours and be done with it.

Senior Krista Boyle is also a fan of the Tuckahoe study rooms: “Since you have to reserve the study rooms at the library, it forces me to get my work done in the allotted time,” she said. “I also like how it is quiet with no distractions.”

Hands down the greatest place to study is a place I have only been once, but frequently dream of: the English Department book room. While I have only been allowed in here once to take an interview, I wish everyone had access to this room all the time. To quote an email from Mr. Pruet last year: “It is a lovely kind of quiet.” Alas, it is just a resource room for the English Department, but if they ever choose to abandon it, please make it a study room.

While the English Department’s book room is not available to the student body, the rest of Freeman is, and there are many great places to study in our own homebase, like our very own library or the leadership center. Senior Natalie Murchie finds that “I am the most productive in school, so I study best when I am working in school, like during a study hall,” she said, proving that no matter where at Freeman you study, it’s a good place for getting work done.

While libraries and coffee shops are my go-to, I have a few

places I do not recommend. The first of which is a bed. I have to admit, this is usually where I end up completing most of my work because my desk is usually covered in my laundry, and I only tend to clear it off for my therapy sessions, but my bed is the least productive environment I work in. I am quick to get distracted by my phone or by thoughts that urge me to take a “quick 15-minute power nap” which ends with me waking up the next morning with my contacts still in. If you can avoid it, leave your bed for sleeping and not for getting homework done.

While studying in your bed is not always a good idea, some students prefer to work at other places in their homes. Junior Jacob Gross works best at his desk because “it is organized and the best place for me to get my work done quickly,” he said.

Some students also find it best to work at their kitchen tables. “Aside from my dogs, there aren’t many things that distract me from doing work or studying at the kitchen table,” said junior Gabriella Mazzeo. “There is also a good amount of natural light in that room, which I greatly prefer to turning on any kind of overhead light,” she said. No matter where in your house you choose to work, it is a good option for students who aren’t able to travel somewhere else to get work done.

My worst idea of a good place to “lock in” was my car. I have tried to work in my car twice in the dark parking lot outside of the place I work, so I could finish my mastery for Advanced Placement (AP) Calculus and do my “Ghost Wall” annotations for AP Literature. However, I can confirm that was the worst mastery grade I have ever gotten and I lost the highlighter I was using for my annotations. Studying in my car is a terrible idea and a true last resort reserved for senior burnout only.

From coffee shops to your car, study spots are everywhere; it is up to you as a student to pick what place works best for you. So grab your backpacks with your most important assignments and get to studying!

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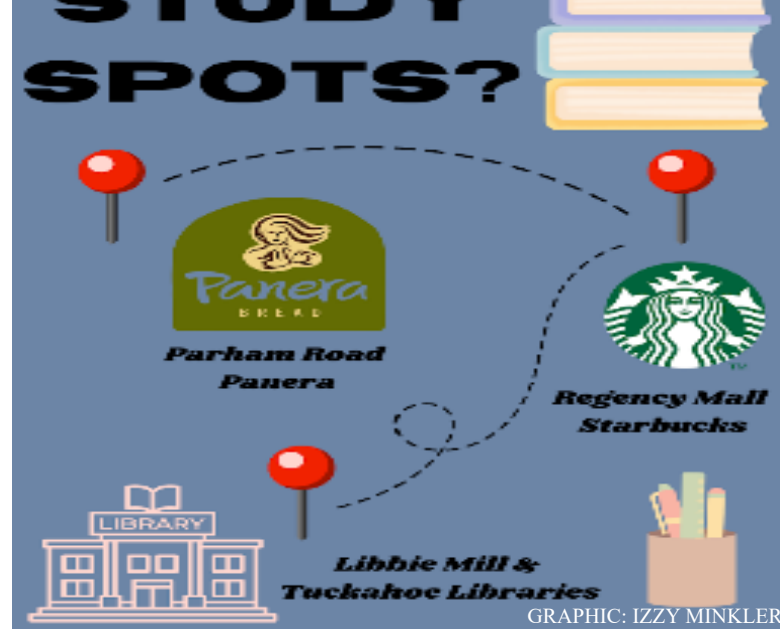
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GRAPHIC: IZZY MINKLER



# Out of Pocket: US Tipping Culture

**Scotty Gregory**

Online Editor-In-Chief  
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After a long day of schoolwork, it's finally time to get some ice cream! You head over to Sweet Frog, load up your cup, and head over to pay for it. Boom! Simple as can be. You tap your card and then that iPad swings around asking for a tip. Okay, I guess a \$1.50 tip is reasona — pause. This is Sweet Frog. I grabbed my own cup, I poured the frozen yogurt, I put the toppings on, I put it on the scale, so why in the world are they asking me for a tip? Tipping culture has gotten out of control. I know that's a pretty drastic statement, but just hear me out.

If someone is making at least minimum wage, it is not right for the standard practice to be to leave them a 20 percent tip. Let's be totally transparent here: when ordering from a fast food restaurant, you know that you are not getting the best quality food. Some of it will be frozen, processed, etc. and

that is ok! Fast food is still delicious and affordable, but if you pulled something out of a freezer and spent two minutes preparing it, I don't believe I should have to tip you for it. That is simply your job and you are making at least \$12 an hour to do it. Does that mean I am not going to tip you? No, I still will because I feel socially obligated to.

Restaurants are a totally different ball game. By restaurant, I mean any place where you sit down and food is brought to you or a service is provided for you. In some restaurants, servers can make as little as \$2 per hour so their livelihood solely relies on the tips they receive. This has been the norm for decades and is totally fair because these employees are spending time talking with their customers and making a connections. So why all of a sudden am I tipping a fast food worker 20 percent of my check to have spoken with them for less than 30 seconds?

Tipping as the sole income of wait staff also incentivizes them to give their customers the best service possible because they

know they will be tipped more if they do. This leads to employees being on their best behavior and customers receiving the best service, a win-win situation.

I'm not sure when, but at some point, institutions started to feel that it was socially acceptable to ask for tips when no actual customer service was provided. We all know the feeling: you are checking out somewhere when that screen swivels around asking for a tip. You stare at the options for a few seconds. 15 percent, 18 percent, 20 percent, custom tip, or no tip. You start to get nervous because you think to yourself, "Well you really didn't do much for me, so why should I leave you a tip?" But, this employee is staring you down waiting for you to hit the tip button. Out of guilt, you reluctantly hit 18 percent or maybe even 20 percent because, how can you look someone in the face and hit no tip? You can't! So instead you wait for your food or whatever you ordered and walk out of the store feeling scammed.

Do not get me wrong, even in



PHOTO: SAILING UMA

## A tip jar.

a fast food restaurant, if someone has been especially kind to me, I will leave them a tip! That is why I believe there should be an option to tip, but not a social norm.

If you made an impact on my day or my mood, I will 100 percent leave you a tip, but as soon as you ask for it, I feel obligated to do it. It is that same feeling of getting up to do the dishes all on your own, and when you're walking over to do them, your mom asks you to do them. Now you no longer want to because it feels like a chore instead of something nice to do.

One way to avoid this would be to stop asking for tips on those little spinnny iPads. The screen automatically comes up at the end of a transaction, so a cashier automatically has to ask even if they don't want to. Leaving a jar for tips has worked forever; let's go back to that!

If businesses were to get rid of the required step on the iPad and allow people to pay cash or some other mode of payment, I believe everyone would be a lot happier. Obviously, cash is not carried as often as it used to be, but I feel it is a pretty common thing for most people to carry a few bills around just in case of an emergency.

As someone who has had a job for three years now, I would never ask someone to tip me. I work at Supper Club, a food market in the Freeman neighborhood, as a cashier, and I would never even think to ask someone to tip me. I simply scan and bag your food and send you to the door, which is the job I am being paid to do!

Every once in a while, someone will try to tip me with cash. It absolutely makes my day, but it also feels rude to take the

money. As much as I appreciate the sentiment, I will humbly decline because it is not necessary.

Another thing that has become more common at restaurants is automatic gratuity. I understand when it is a party of 12 or more people because that is a lot to take care of, but automatic gratuity on take-out orders is another level. Why am I tipping you 20 percent when all you did was take down my order over the phone? I even drove all the way over here to pick it up!

If stores apply an automatic gratuity, it is essential that they at least let the customer know. I don't just mean having it at the very bottom of a menu or a receipt, there should be a face-to-face interaction where the customer is informed that it will automatically be accounted for. This is because some people do not take the time to read the whole receipt and/or menu to realize it is there and end up tipping twice. If the automatic gratuity is 20 percent and the customer provides another 20 percent tip, that means that this customer is tipping almost half of their order just because they were moving too quickly.

I know that not all employees feel that they should be asking for a tip, so it is fun to see when somebody says "I have to ask" or something of the sort in regards to receiving a tip. Doing this even makes me feel a little bit better about tipping because it lets me know that you don't feel entitled to it.

There is a time and place for everything, but tipping and fast food should not be mixed. I believe that dissolving the stigma around not tipping would lead us all to be happier and more genuine people.

## Does Teamwork Really Make the Dream Work?



PHOTO: LISA ROSSI

Mr. Peck's government class during the We the People competition.

**Matthew Wozniak**

News Editor

Group work is something that we've all participated in throughout our years in school. Progressing from doing arts and crafts in elementary school to the larger presentations and projects we do today, group work only gets more complex as we go through school. From working with the person next to you to the teacher counting numbers off around the room, group work comes in many forms.

The most basic form of group work is something that can be done by one person but in a group. This usually happens naturally, when a teacher hands something out and doesn't provide a lot of guidance other than just getting it done. Especially in classes where you don't have assigned seats, these are good times to do the work quickly together and spend the rest of the time chatting or doing other work. Sometimes this will even end up in the entire class working together, which can be very fun. In my Advanced Placement (AP) Statistics class, we have lots of classes where we get a packet of work to do and just have that to do in the class.

Sometimes, though in those situations, the class can get distracted from the assignment which often results in the work becoming homework, and therefore forgotten. This kind of thing happening is pretty bad for me especially, as I tend to get distracted very easily when working on anything at home.

When the group aspect of the work is more organized by a teacher, there might be a size limit on the group that you're working on the assignment with. This will inevitably lead to those awkward moments when there's a group size limit that doesn't match with the groups that have naturally formed in the class. As soon as the group size limit is one less than one of the friend groups in the class, someone is going to be unhappy about their placement.

Another common form of group work is the "short group project" that you might see span anywhere from one day to a week. These are common in science classes as some kind of a lab, and I remember. These assignments are where you have to pay the most attention to people not doing their work, especially if the groups are assigned.

Finally, the most involved form of group work comes in the form of long-term projects that end in some kind of culminating event.

like a presentation. For seniors in AP Government, the best example of this type of assignment is the annual "We The People" competition, where groups of three to five students prepare a presentation and learn about an aspect of government over multiple months.

This long-term project is what I think is the most relevant form of group work in real life. In a job, you will work on projects with people you don't know super well, and getting used to that in school is important. However, most real-life projects are going to last a lot longer than a few days. Giving groups time to get settled and figure out how to work efficiently together.

Especially in long-term projects like We the People, it's important to make sure that we get class time to get things done, as a lot of the time it's difficult to coordinate meetings outside of school. Students have a lot of extracurricular or extra responsibilities outside of school, including but not limited to sports practices, jobs, and internships. For example, in my We The People group, the only time that all of us were available was at 10 p.m., not allowing us to ever meet up in person outside of class. Having the allotted class time to work on the project allowed us to avoid procrastination and make sure we got everything done.

One of the biggest challenges when it comes to doing group work is making sure that everyone does the work they are supposed to do, and I'm not going to claim I'm never the one causing those problems. It might be easy to think about someone's lack of effort in group projects as only affecting whatever project they are in currently, but it can affect others in a bigger way than that. Being a consistently hard worker in numerous projects where the other group members might not be putting in the same effort is mentally taxing. According to the Carnegie Mellon University Eberly Center for Education, "Free riding — if not addressed proactively — tends to erode the long-term motivation of hard-working students," said the article.

Group projects require a lot of collaboration, and very often it's difficult for students to know how to collaborate effectively. There should be more education about how to be more effective working in a group in school. According to the CMU Education Center, "Many instructors are also reluctant to devote class time to reinforcing these skills and may be uncomfortable dealing with the interpersonal issues that can arise

in groups," said the article. A solution to this could be incorporating conflict resolution and group work strategies into health classes, and schools could invite guest speakers to talk about how to effectively work in a group and teach collaboration and project skills.

When done well, group work can be the most engaging thing done in a classroom. With multiple people working together, the kind of work being done can be more intellectually demanding, allowing students to tackle more complicated topics as a team.

# HE SAID

# SHE SAID

**Matthew Wozniak**  
News Editor



**Cate Woodrum**  
Features Editor

## New Year's Resolutions

**There's a reason that serious gym goers only dread the first few weeks of the year.**



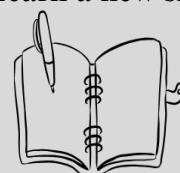
Going to the gym

**Time to start my 365 day running streak (this is lasting a whole 0 days).**



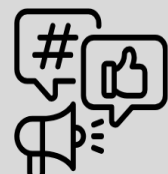
Learn a new skill

**I should be writing more things down... not a bad idea.**



Journaling

**I think we all need to do this. (Cate is literally on TikTok right now)**



Less time on social media

**Every day I tell myself this and I never have.**



Stop procrastinating

**Yeah my mom drags the whole family to the gym for about a week every year -- would not recommend.**

**I'm thinking this year it'll be constellations.**

**No Woz, you need to write your actual articles before you start journaling for fun.**

**Heavy on this one, I think it might actually be mine!**

**Not a chance (we wrote this the day it was due).**



# Erin Walters Does It All

Julia Connor

Arts & Entertainment Editor

From the field to the stage, senior Erin Walters performs across art forms. Erin has represented the Freeman Color Guard for two years, which performs tricks and dances both during halftime at home football games and at competitions. Additionally, she is a member of the Freeman Theater Department, where she has taken theater classes all four years of high school. Her experiences with these two programs have led to her work in six productions at Freeman, including the 2024 fall play, “Clue.” Theater has been Erin’s long-standing passion that she’s “been doing [for] basically [her] whole

life,” said Erin. Since her first class freshman year, Erin has participated in a multitude of shows, including seasonal plays, musicals, and senior one-acts. “The rehearsal process, to me, is the most fun part,” said Erin. “The experience you’ve gained with everyone over the course of the three months that you work on a show and the connections you make [create] a family,” she said.

In the recent 2024 fall play, “Clue,” Erin played Wadsworth — the butler. Ms. Gardner, the Freeman theater teacher, gave Erin creative freedom over the ending pages of dialog. “It took her a day to figure out what she wanted to do and play with it,” said Ms. Gardner. “We workshopped it, and she did a really beautiful job with it, her initia-

tive really is fantastic,” she said.

Erin’s theater experience led to her joining the Color Guard when a fellow castmate in the play told Erin she should join. “I went to spin sessions, met the people, [and] I found out that it was really cool and another way to perform,” she said.

Freeman’s Color Guard won Best Guard at the Hanover Marching Invitational and first place at the Mechanicsville Tournament of Champions in their class this year. “My favorite part of Color Guard is probably the competitions; [they] are always fun,” said Erin. Besides the color guard competitions and football game performances, “it’s just fun to be able to share that experience with a team and share your performance with the community,” she said.

Erin had a solo in the 2024 field show, “Echoes of Adventure.” The show “had higher level skills within the choreography,” said Minh Pham, Freeman Color Guard director. “[Erin] immediately taught herself her solo from the video I provided and had it down within a few days,” said Ms. Pham.

In both communities, Erin is known for her kindness, organization, and preparedness. “Erin always has it together. She is somebody that I can trust to know what they’re doing at all times,” said Ms. Gardner. Additionally,



PHOTO: DSF YEARBOOK

## Erin as Wadsworth in “Clue”

“Erin welcomes the younger students, helps them know what they’re doing,” she said. [It] can be a little tricky, but the outreach to newer students who are coming in is really spectacular.”

Erin’s helpfulness is apparent in color guard, too, as she has helped Ms. Pham. “Erin would support me during rehearsals whenever I or Ollie and Tylerson, our 2024 section leaders, needed an extra hand, whether it was running warm-ups and run-throughs of choreography, or helping new members during the learning process of choreography,” said Ms. Pham.

However, color guard and theater can be taxing due to the time and commitment required. “There are times when, especially when work is crazy, I’m here from seven in the morning till then at night,” said Erin. “To me, it makes it so worth it, because the people that you meet and the experience of doing it overall motivates me so much more to want to do it,” she said.

Coming into the theater department freshman year, Erin found her own inspirations to drive her motivation. Avery Ingram and Abby Kirkoff, seniors in Erin’s freshman year, served as role models for Erin during plays, “[I] [looked] up to [Avery and Abby], they inspired me to work on myself as a performer and as a team player,” said Erin. “Theater is about teamwork, and they really made me think about how important it is to work with others,” she said.

Color guard and theater have two different settings, especially for Erin, due to her being involved in theater for a longer time. “[Color guard] was definitely a growing experience,” said Erin.

Erin’s dedication to participate in both the arts of color guard and theater is recognized greatly by her peers, teachers, and coaches. “Thank you from the bottom of my heart, thank [her] for all the work that she does all the time,” said Ms. Gardner.



PHOTO: DSF YEARBOOK

Erin performing for Freeman Color Guard

## Yearbook and Mav Media Behind the Scenes

Maria McGill

Staff Writer

Freeman’s publications classes, such as Journalism, Photojournalism, and Video Media, allow Freeman Students to join a class where they can create media for their school. Those in the classes are tasked with the job of incorporating and publishing relevant and informative content throughout the school year into their projects.

In Photojournalism, students work throughout the year to create their final project: the school yearbook. Students are assigned spreadsheets based on an event or activity, then create a template about a certain theme for the spread of the yearbook. Students then determine the best people to interview for their topic. After the interviews, yearbook students gather pictures to add to the template alongside the information from the interview. To do so, students must attend events pertaining to their spread. “We have to go to at least three games each season if you’re doing a sport, or three events if you’re doing an event,” said junior Eva Brown, a member of Photojournalism.

Next is the body copy which “is under the big picture, called the module,” said Eva. “The big picture is a paragraph describing the team and describing the sport,” she said. Once all the information is gotten from outside sources the students begin their final spread.

When it comes time for deadlines students in the yearbook class follow a 25, 50, 75, and 100

person in the yearbook more than another. She tries to find new people to incorporate into each page.

To join Yearbook, students must fill out a Google form where they are asked about prior experience with yearbook classes or photography. They are also asked how you are as a person working in group settings, and what skills you have that will contribute to the class. Eva joined this class because she thought this class would be fun and memorable to look back at in the future. “I like to think about when I’m an adult with my kids looking back in the yearbook and showing them what it was,” she said.

Students in the class arrive at school between 8:45 and 9 a.m. to begin pre-recording the announcements for the next day. In the classroom, everyone has a different job. “There’s a person on sound, there’s a person on Wirecast, which is a computer that directs everything, a person on a teleprompter which scrolls, [and] you have one to two anchors in the actual studio [where we record],” said senior Anna Hargrove, a member of Maverick Media. Anchors were originally determined by groups, but now it is open to anyone in the class. The groups were divided into groups of five or six so there were enough people to do the different jobs that went into filming the announcements. “In the beginning of the year, each group had a week. The first week of school, group one did it. The second week, group two ... we just rotated, but all that got shifted around, now it’s really just who wants to do it,” said Anna.

Each quarter students come up with intro ideas like senior Marie Vaughn who came up with the “Full House” intro, and senior Krista Boyle who came up with the “Modern Family” intro. A future intro idea Anna had was one based on the sitcom “The Office.”

When filming the announcements the class makes sure to repeat important information for the Freeman Family. The students have a shared Google Drive where they keep track of ideas and information they need to share. Emails from teachers and clubs are sent to Mrs. Buchbinder and then displayed on the drive with input telling how many days the students need to air the information.

Students learn from each other and gain further knowledge on photography and creating a yearbook. The publications team at Freeman works to bring the community together through the collaborative nature of their classes.



PHOTO: MRS. BUCHBINDER

Mav Media class picture

PHOTO: JULIA CONNOR

Yearbook class picture

percent scale. “At 25 percent you have to have your template done, [at] 50 percent you have to have your body copy or your photography done,” said Eva. The last half “is when all your interviews are done, and tagging [assigning labels and names to images] [is] done,” she said. The class follows this system to be organized and have work done promptly. After all the work is complete, it’s time to celebrate! “I like our parties ... We all bring food and talk,” said Eva.

When coming up with the yearbook’s overall theme the head editor, editor-in-chief, junior editors, and co-editors all come up with the idea. Everyone has a specific job in these leadership positions. “My job is making sure everyone is in the yearbook,” said Eva. She makes sure there is not one

## Swap Meet RVA: Exchanging Clothes and Community

Cate Woodrum

Features Editor

Richmond’s outdoor Swap Meet is closed for the winter, but spring promises the return of this monthly outdoor thrift event! Swap Meet RVA brings together local restaurants, small businesses, and shoppers from all walks of life in a “reflection of Richmond’s eclectic spirit,” according to their mission statement. People come from all around to buy from booths organized by vendors and businesses and take part in building Richmond’s culture. Although the outdoor market has ended, their indoor market now opened its doors and other events have continued on with similar goals. Swap Meet celebrates “creativity, diversity, and sustainability,” as explained on their page, and the group aims “to provide a platform for small businesses, artisans, and food vendors to showcase their unique offerings in the heart of Richmond, Virginia.”

Founders Cameron Hadnot and Deja Hadnot began Swap Meet in the summer of 2020 hoping to accomplish this. “I wanted to get the folks to get their vintage game out there ... [I want them to have] a party, make it cool, live event, DJ music and all this kind of stuff,” said Cameron to The Commonwealth Times. With over 70 vendors, the group is growing to find a permanent place in Richmond’s cultural landscape, and participants from across the country attest to the Swap Meet’s impact.

Allison Elliot, for example, is the owner of Every Era Vintage, a vintage reselling brand offering knickknacks, prints, bracelets, and anything else she finds interesting. She also sells her own upcycled and created goods, including paintings and embroidered pieces. Allison began her thrifting at a young age with her whole family, and as her style developed, she began to own and operate her business. “It feels nice to get to see somebody wearing something that you found that came from so far away and then watch it go home with them,” said Allison, while working her booth at Swap Meet for the first time. Allison is currently based out of Orlando, Florida, but has been looking for contract work recently. Swap Meet RVA provides her with an outlet for her own creativity while contributing to the Richmond community. “There’s so much life in clothing still that we don’t just have to throw it all away,” said Allison. The Swap Meet allows her to give these vintage pieces a second wind.

Another vendor, Kara, the owner of Venus Flytrap Vintage, sells vintage clothing specializing

in 80s and 90s alternative, eclectic clothing. She first started in high school since “thrifting was an affordable way for me to find clothing at a good cost,” she said, “but then I really got into vintage, because the thrift store is such a good place for vintage clothing.” Kara found Swap Meet RVA through a friend, who encouraged her to bring some of her collection: “I found out it was the perfect place for me,” said Kara. Since then, she’s spent the last half a year coming to the meets and has

90s style, Joshua runs JP’s Fine Finds where he sells vintage and collectible items that he’s “collected for over 10 years now,” said Joshua. Although Joshua lives over an hour and a half away, he has been a vendor at Swap Meet ever since he found it on Instagram in 2021. “The vintage community is such a big community ... meeting and talking to people is the best part of these events,” he said. To aspiring thrifters, “You have to try and start, there’s nothing to it but to start,” said Joshua.



PHOTO: SWAPMEETRVA.COM

## Summer swap meet

no plans of leaving anytime soon. Kara sells at other meets in Richmond, as well as events in Charlottesville, Fredericksburg, and Norfolk, but Swap Meet is still her favorite. Kara hopes “that [Swap Meet RVA] continues to grow and attract more small businesses [because] this is such a crucial part of building community and supporting small business in Richmond.”

Alex Spangler resells clothes through his business Alex Thrifts and has been attending Swap Meet since July. Alex continues to come back to each meet not only to sell his clothes but also to connect with new people. “It just brings people together; introduces them to different walks of life,” said Alex. Swap Meet gives Alex “the chance to meet people and learn how to accelerate my business,” he said. He found Swap Meet through vendors at other events who encouraged him to join. “[Swap Meet] is the best event I’ve been to ... meeting people and getting to trade is great for the business,” said Alex. Stemming from his passion for

Swap Meet RVA is working to do more than just build a community, they are also working to preserve the environment. Their mission statement highlights efforts of “sustainability” when upcycling and thrifting what would have instead been wasted. “I feel like small business and secondhand shopping is so important right now, [and] with the rise of fast fashion, we need to start making more sustainable choices,” said Kara. An uptick in thrift culture has reduced the waste in landfills, wasted resources, and chemical pollution, according to studies done at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Swap Meet RVA offers not just a monthly activity for locals, but also an addition to the culture of Richmond, by promoting sustainability and community engagement. Freeman students can visit their social media platforms year-round to find out more about upcoming events and experience the environment Swap Meet is cultivating firsthand!



# A Guide to Fashion This Winter

Sadie Edlavitch  
A&E Editor

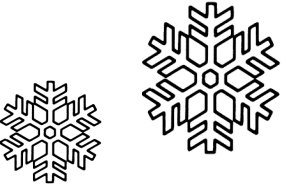
As the weather starts to get colder, fashion trends start to make a comeback. These newest looks are essentially a reset button for our wardrobes. When you see so many people wearing pieces and making them look good, it's hard to miss out on them. What is in and out for this chilly season? Well, let's find out.

Back in the early 2000s, low-rise jeans were worn by the one and only Paris Hilton and soon enough every teenage girl wanted or had a pair. As most trends do, low-rise jeans have started to make a comeback through social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Most people will pair these jeans with a tank top or shirt, almost going for a vintage vibe. Brands are starting to catch on to this trend and make more profit off of selling them. The notable clothing brand Abercrombie, for example, was ranked on the Glamour website as one of the most fashionable pairs of low-rise jeans in 2024. These jeans come in a wide range of sizes with little details like the faded black wash and raw hems. Another trend making its way into the winter season of 2024 is denim maxi

skirts. This new fashion statement started a couple of months back and began to spread across media platforms. Over the past couple of years, mini jeans skirts have always taken the lead over long skirts, so this trend has come as a shock to many. Going along with the low-rise jeans trend, denim maxi skirts were also very popular in the 90s. Many, however, have voiced their opinion about not

liking these skirts because they limit your ability to move your legs around freely. The last trend we will be covering is vests. Vests are a staple fashion piece for most people because you can pair them with almost any top. This past fall, they sold out fast in stores all over. Along with puffer vests for the chilly weather, sweater vests have also been going strong too. However, vests

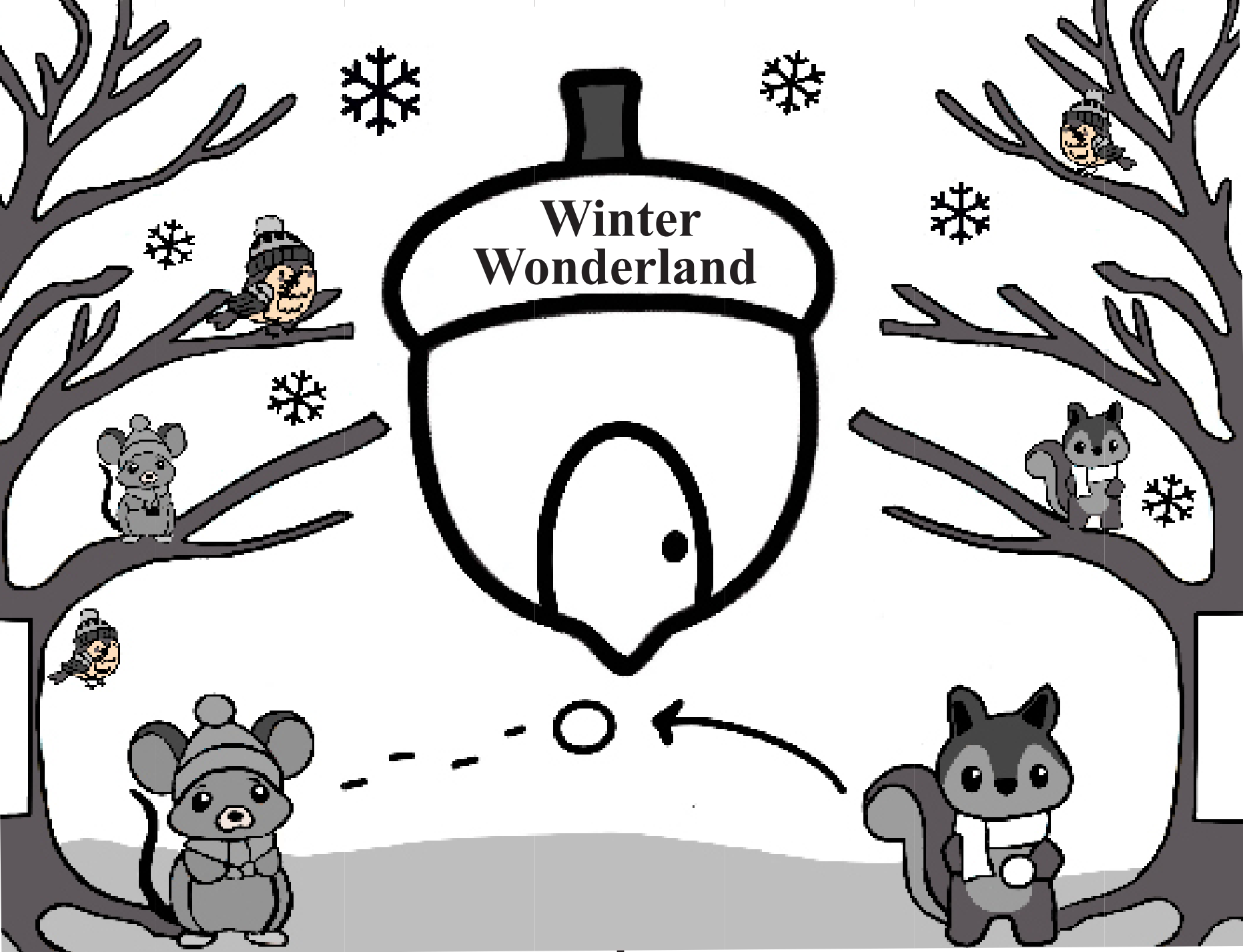
can come in all different styles, from wool or linen to an open-quilted version. These are just a few of the new styles we are expecting to see for this chilly season. I am expecting, however, to see a wide variety of styles including vintage and contemporary elements bring back nostalgia for many.



- Across**
- 1 Ice sport played with a puck
  - 4 Fun ride down a snowy hill
  - 5 Neck warmer
  - 6 Change habitat seasonally
  - 9 Sometimes has a carrot nose
  - 10 Snowstorm
  - 13 Hot sweet drink
  - 15 The color of snow
  - 16 Keeps your hands warm
  - 17 Sleep through the winter
  - 21 A unique crystal of ice
  - 22 Direction birds fly for the Winter



- Down**
- 2 African American holiday
  - 3 Jack
  - 4 Frozen rain
  - 7 House made of ice
  - 8 Time off from school or work
  - 11 Christmas month
  - 12 Gliding on ice
  - 13 Holiday of giving
  - 14 Opposite of hot
  - 15 The coldest season
  - 18 Frozen spikes
  - 19 Vehicle that clears snow from streets
  - 20 Mix of snow and rain

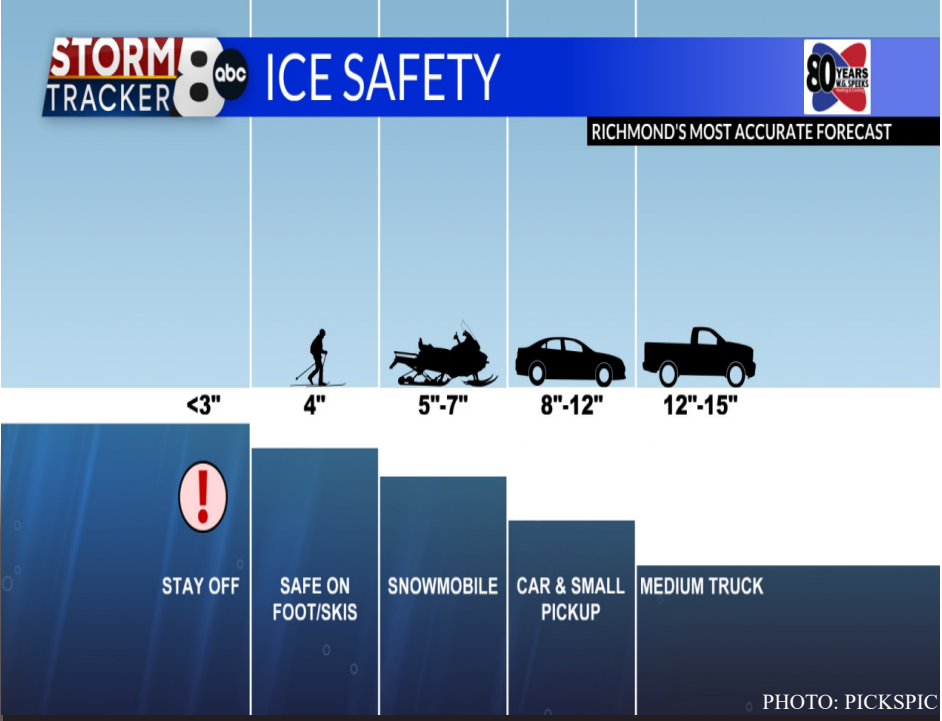


### Pros

- SNOW DAYS!
- Winter Activites!
- Winter Wadrobe!
- HOT CHOCOLATE!

### Cons

- It's Freezing..
- It's not summer..
- Heaters never work.
- Chapped lips (no explanation needed)



# Skiing: A Winter Adventure!

Maria McGill  
Staff Writer

Around Virginia, there are many ski clubs including Wintergreen Resort, Massanutten Ski Club, and the Homestead Ski slopes -- places I have yet to go. However, I have been to Bryce resort, a hidden gem in northern Virginia along the Shenandoah Valley. Just past James Madison University, it is in a small town called Bayse, Virginia.

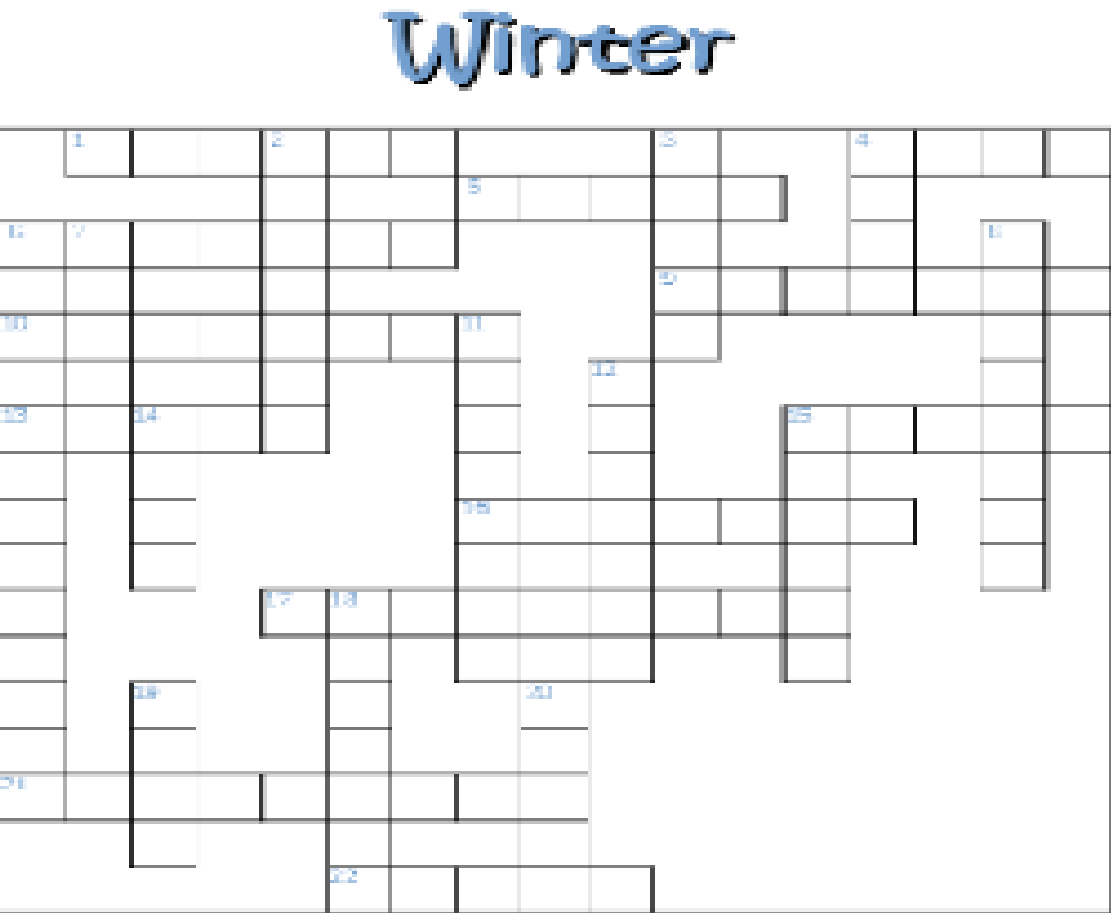
Bryce is a public 400-acre member-owned resort. The resort includes six ski slopes, a lake with a beach, a 18 hole golf course, and a mountain bike trail. There is a slope-adjacent restaurant with to-die-for sandwiches and fries. I had a great time skiing for the first time, but little did I know what an expensive and tedious sport it is. From buying a lift ticket to remembering which ways to orient my

feet to avoid hitting someone, I knew I was unprepared but I was excited. Last minute I got asked to join my friend and her family on a ski trip for a few days. All I knew was that pizza slows you down and french fries speeds you up. After a few runs on the bunny slope, we got serious and went down the green -- the easiest slope at the resort. I ended up staying here most of the day. To say getting

on the lift was difficult is an understatement. They even had to stop it because I had fallen off before I even made it on. We reached the top of the mountain and I felt confident until I started going down. No one prepares you for the first time you wipeout. There was a kid that I was about to run into, and if I didn't do something I would have taken him out. I turned my skis the best I could, and after I crashed into the

snow my skis popped off. After I learned how to properly turn and slow down, I got the hang of it. We did many more runs and spent a grand total of 6 hours skiing that day. Although I am still beginning, I am excited for the next trip that I have planned. I will be heading to Massanutten Ski Club with a few friends. I am looking forward to seeing my friends who have never skied before go through the same struggles I did.

"Life is like skiing. Just like skiing, the goal is not to get to the bottom of the hill. It's to have a bunch of good runs before the sun sets."  
- Seth Godin





# Return to the Pen: DSF Inkling's Recent Revival

**Connor Almstead**  
News Editor

After a year of inactivity, DSF Inklings, Freeman's creative writing club, has returned for the 2024–2025 school year. Backed by English teacher Mr. Spencer as the class sponsor, juniors Gabrielle Betz, and Electra Cimino have restarted the club as the new presidents..

Inklings brings Freeman an opportunity to share creative writing among a group of fellow writers. Members present their writing and discuss ideas for what to work on, getting a great deal of feedback from their peers. Students offer constructive criticism to each other, the club is a safe space where "you can share everything and know that there's not going to be any judgment," said Electra.

The club's inactivity during the 2023–2024 school year stems from the lack of leadership present. All of the club's previous leaders graduated the year before, and there was "nobody there to pick up the reins," said Electra. "Gabby [and I] decided to be the ones to get things going again."

The club and its members meet up on a Thursday of their choice. The reasoning for Thursday, specifically, is "because it's close to the weekend," said Electra. "It gives time for students to travel to [their] other classrooms during [the beginning] of the week."

A typical club meeting consists of circling in Mr. Spencer's room, with each person discussing what they have worked on. There's also a variety of food at each meeting provided by both presidents. "I like buying snacks for the meeting," said Gabby. "I have some for myself when they're leftovers."

Each meeting follows a theme, where the food and type of writ-



PHOTO : CONNOR ALMSTEAD

**Inklings' Presidents Electra Cimino and Gabriella Betz**

ing shared corresponds to some sort of event, usually a holiday, of their choice. For example, their meeting in October was during Halloween where "we shared ideas, like [spooky] poems and short stories," said Electra.

Since the start of the year, the club has slowly started gaining traction. Right now, "we have about six to seven people each time," said Electra. Electra is also hoping to expand the club's reach to more people, with plans to advertise future meetings by "putting more posters around the school," she said.

Both presidents also advertise meetings on social media, through their Instagram account: dsf\_inklins. The two make Instagram posts together which allows them to discuss the club. "We get together on weekends and get to be creative and use Canva [to make our posts,] it's really fun," said Gabby.

Both presidents have credited Mr. Spencer as a great help to the revival and redevelopment of the club. He is a source of inspiration for both presidents and always helps them out whenever they're struggling with running a meeting behind the scenes.

"If we are ever running out of ideas, and we're stuttering, he'll help us back up," said Gabby.

The club serves as an opportunity to improve communication skills, as writers present and talk to each other about their works, which are predominantly individual passion projects. "I have a fear of public speaking," said Gabby.

*"This club is a good challenge for me to stand and talk about things, and have fun with lectures."*

- Gabby Betz

The club also doubles as a means of collaboration between authors. According to Gabby, one of the biggest challenges has been trying to break the ice during team meetings, as everyone there can be socially awkward. "I know it may seem stereotypical, but that's how writers are," said Gabby. "It's always a little bit awkward because we'll write something, but then be too shy to share it," she said.

Gabriella first heard of Inklings through scrolling through the Club Hub on the "All Things DSF" website, after learning about the resources at Mav Camp freshman orientation. She had an immediate interest when she saw Inklings, because "it sounded right up my alley," she said.

While Gabby never attended any of the meetings during her freshman year, she and Electra felt inspired to "create our own version of the club," she said. "We have no idea if it was the same or similar [as the club was previously] because none of the people who are in it now were in it [during] my freshman year."

Gabby has always identified herself as a writer since she was little. According to her, she had many moments in her life that she wanted to immortalize by "writing down stories of the good things in my life," she said. This desire to memorialize her is what drove her to pursue creative writing as a hobby.

Electra has similarly been a long-time writer. She got into it at a young age, accrediting it to an influence from her mother. "[She is] what got me into the idea of creative writing," she said. To her, writing is a medium of expression and something she can look back on and track her progress.

Many studies have shown that

creative writing has a positive effect on one's mental health. According to Flourish Australia, creative writing can "help you explore why you're feeling what you're feeling, allowing a direct insight to your mindset." "With a tool as versatile as writing, it allows one to achieve a greater sense of control over their feelings."

The return of Inklings has brought students, who have a passion for writing, a chance to express themselves, with like-minded individuals. The two juniors, along with Mr. Spencer, are hopeful for the future of the club. "We're definitely brainstorming [for the future]," said Electra.

## New DSF Clubs!



**New York Times Games Club**  
Sponsor: Mr. George



**Ties for Tots**  
Sponsor: Mrs. Suhr



**Rocket Science Club**  
Student-Led

GRAPHIC: IZZY MINKLER

# Blasting Off, Blankets, and Spelling Bees: Freeman's Latest Club Additions

**Tylerson Tweardy**  
Staff Writer

The Freeman community includes a wide variety of clubs focused on service, exploration, and creativity, with three new additions to the lineup including Ties for Tots, Rocket Society, and the New York Times Games Club. These clubs, along with others, provide opportunities ranging from crosswords to rocket engineering, each with its own specific focus.

Ties for Tots, led by one of Freeman's Exceptional Education teachers, Mrs. Suhr, is a service-focused club dedicated to creating blankets from scratch for children in need within the Greater Richmond area.

*"We want every child who receives a blanket to feel loved and supported, even if we've never met them"*

- Mrs. Suhr

The club has had one meeting so far, with plans to expand. For those who have never worked with fabric, it may seem initially challenging, but the skills

of sewing are taught within the club. "So the president, [Shea Sullivan] is kind of leading it," said Mrs. Suhr. "She's instructing the other students and demonstrating how to make a tie blanket, which is when you cut the ends of the blanket all around the perimeter and tie two pieces of fabric together," said Mrs. Suhr.

Ties for Tots works to keep those in need warm this winter while fostering a sense of community and belonging at Freeman. The club allows students to create items they're passionate about, all in support of a meaningful cause. Ties for Tots aims to challenge the social stigma surrounding the need for assistance with essential items for colder months. "[My vision is] to foster a sense of inclusivity and understanding [to Freeman students] that there are people in situations where they need help, and it's okay to need help," said Mrs. Suhr.

With local funding, Ties for Tots has already begun crafting donatable blankets for those in need. "I reached out to our [Parent Teacher Student Association] (PTSA) and asked them if they would be willing to provide funds for us to purchase fabric which they did," said Mrs. Suhr. She has already donated multiple blankets crafted by the club to shelters across the Henrico community.

Although, due to county policies, the club members can't physically drop the blankets off, Mrs. Suhr believes "it would be really impactful for an opportunity for the students to help deliver resources and see who they're giving the things that they're making to," she said.

Hands-on activities and giving back are the core traits of this club, and those who enjoy both of those are encouraged to attend. "If you like making things with your hands, come and make a blanket with us," said Mrs. Suhr.

However, if you are not a crafty person, Freeman's Rocket Society is also giving back to the community by fostering innovation and curiosity in aerospace engineering. Junior Wilson Lucas, the president of Rocket Society, plans to lead the design of a rocket mission that includes constructing a make-shift rocket to calculate its airtime.

Wilson's recent experiences inspired him to start Rocket Society. He completed a summer internship with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) led by the Virginia Space Coast Scholars (VSCS), a program for high school sophomores to integrate STEM skills into current missions being led by NASA's Wallops Flight Facility in Accomack County, Virginia. The club focuses on calculating velocities and ensuring a safe and successful launch.



**Wilson Lucas at the Virginia Space Coast Scholars**

Rocket Society isn't only focused on math, there are both structural and design factors that play into it as well. "Designing a rocket sounds like a lot of just math, I make sure to let people know that there are a lot of other jobs and roles that we play in it, where you don't have to do math," said Wilson.

Wilson plans for collaboration and ambition to be one of the club's key takeaways this year. "I hope collaboration is a pretty big takeaway," said Wilson. Rocket Society is almost en-

more because I don't want to solely dictate the club," he said.

The club ultimately plans to have a launch day for the rocket they create as well as a possible field trip to NASA's headquarters. "It'd be cool to go to a NASA facility or talk to someone [who works at NASA]," said Wilson. Designing the rocket itself to showcase to the Freeman community is something they plan for. "I think just designing a really cool mission that we're able to bring to the whole Freeman community and having a launch day where everyone can come see that," said Wilson. The Rocket Society's launch day would feature a launch of a rocket, with both rods and motors to support its orbital flight.

Freeman's clubs are driven to enhance learning, however, STEM may not be for everyone. A new club focused on the popular New York Times (NYT) games, such as Wordle, Connections, Strands, and Spelling Bee, is getting more and more members throughout each meeting. The club, led by Mr. George, emphasizes the popular daily games created by the NYT. The members meet once a month in Mr. George's room, in which they compare scores following their completion of the games. "The vision is to spread awareness about quick, fun, and educational games," said Mr. George.

The vocabulary-focused game club has faced issues with overcrowding while trying to accommodate everyone interested during Freeman Focus. "The hardest part of starting the club was the space," said Mr. George. "There's just no space, there's not a lot of it for all of the club members," he said.

From creating comfort for those in need, reaching for the stars, or improving your vocabulary, Freeman has over 90 clubs for almost every interest available. Whether students learn through innovation, intellect, or creativity, these clubs have already left a lasting impact on the Freeman community and many others.

*"I think it'll be really valuable for people to see how all of these different parts of a project can come together into one thing"*

- Wilson Lucas

tirely student-led through collaboration, as Wilson usually allows the members to lead themselves, and only takes leadership when necessary. "I like to allow the group to direct itself

## The New York Times Games



PHOTO: THE NEW YORK TIMES

The New York Times Games photo cover



# DSF Gymnastics Leaps Into Season

Vrusha Pramod  
Staff Writer

Freeman’s gymnastics team consists of a group of athletes who thrive on determination and commitment. They practice each day for two hours after school to succeed in their competition season and to “create that team atmosphere,” said senior Abby Johnson, a four-year team member and the 2024–2025 season captain.

With nine victories and only five defeats in their last season, Freeman has continued to carry on their streak as they have already begun their season with multiple wins in December 2024. They have secured victories against notoriously rival high schools such as Deep Run where they won a tight match 138.85 - 135.65, along with a 138.85 - 132.55 defeat of Godwin, and 138.85 - 128.85 victory over Glen Allen.

This year, Freeman’s gymnastics team has seen an arrival of fresh talent, with six new freshmen joining them. Abby loves “to mentor the younger students,” she said. “[It’s] fun to see new teammates coming in,” said Abby.

Sophomore Pari Bhura recalls the team’s support and encouragement towards her when she joined it as a freshman. “Everyone’s really welcoming, supports you, and always motivates you,” said Pari “I think it’s really nice not [having] to be afraid to try something, because no one’s going to judge you,” she said.

When it comes time for competition, each gymnast works individually for the team by showcasing their best skills.

However, “you also want to have a lot that is based on difficulty,” said sophomore Ingrid Jones. “The higher your difficulty, then the higher your score will be, even if you’re not that good at them because you’ll still get [more] points for them,” she said.

Ingrid expands on how the team’s closeness helps gymnasts as they compete individually. “Everyone really cares about how the other one does, so to prepare we do pep talks and cheer for each other [before our meets],” she said. “Although the events are a solo activity, “it’s more [about] the team winning, rather than just yourself,” said Ingrid.

Although gymnastics can be a demanding sport, many students on the team juggle other extracurriculars as well. One of the most common sports that athletes participate in alongside gymnastics is cheerleading. Sophomore Pari Bhura is a member of both the gymnastics team and the cheerleading squad at Freeman. She explains their busy schedules, the gymnasts find ways to manage their time between cheer and gymnastics while also remaining focused on their academics. “During the football season, cheer practice is [every Monday], but gymnastics picks up after that practice [and for the rest of the week],” said Pari.

Whether they are on the floor competing at upcoming meets, or just cheering for their friends, the Freeman gymnastics team continues to prove that success is about more than just winning. Their collaboration towards the benefit of the overall team highlights the strength of their teamwork and provides Freeman with a gymnastics team to be proud of.



Freeman gymnast competing on beam

PHOTO: @DSFGYMNASTICS

## New Season, New Record: 2024–25 Freeman Girls’ Basketball

Nikita Rajan  
Staff Writer

A new season of Freeman winter sports has started this November, meaning it is time for the junior varsity and varsity girls’ basketball teams to start their season. Their season consists of 20 regular season games, coached by John Larkins.

Last year, the varsity team accomplished a winning record of 13-10. This was the first time in 20 years that the Girl’s Basketball team was able to sweep the court with such success. “A winning record was my ‘primary goal’ for last season,” said Coach Larkins. “My goal this year would be to improve that record,” he said. “If we had 13 last year, let’s try and get 14.” More importantly, Coach Larkins has worked to “build confidence [to] take basketball seriously,” he said.

Senior Carter Nesmith has been a member of the basketball team for the past three years. “It was really exciting to have a winning record last year,” said Carter. “We’re looking to not only have a winning record again this season but to win even more games,” she said.

In comparison to prior years, the team has “more girls who came out and are hopefully going to stick with basketball for several years,” said Coach Larkins. “We have a solid group of players right now,” he said. These committed athletes are expected to lead the team to more victories.

When preparing for a game, “there’s a lot of things to think about,” said Coach Larkins. Coach Larkins usually has to “fill out a starting card and prepare notes [he] wants to share with the team.” On game day, Coach Larkins “tries not to give [his] nervousness to the team, but is pretty serious,” he said. Coach Larkins refers to his coaching style as a “toolbox” where he has to “try to find the right combination of tools” to use in different situations. “During drills, we come together and just sort of talk about the plan,” he said.

The team prepares for upcoming matches by watching film recordings of past games. “Usually the computer will record [the game] and upload it to a company that [Freeman uses], who will break the footage down so that you can go back and analyze,” said Coach Larkins. This is one of the ways Coach Larkins and players can understand the details of the game and identify areas for improvement.

Coach Larkins said that he carries a lot of “pride for the team.” The girls’ team has done basketball camps and worked with young players at Ridge Elementary School as their way to give back to their basketball community. “Our first girls-only basketball camp for young students was a big success,” said Coach Larkins. Senior team members also volunteered with players from different sports backgrounds during their early release last fall which Henrico Sports Wire covered, as well. “Yes, [our] winning record [last season] was great,” said Coach Larkins. However, “I, being a longtime teacher, coach, and member of this community, want to try to build and

use the platform of sports and athletics to give back a little,” he said.

With frequent games, the girls’ basketball team also has regular practices. In past years, they “would start practice with a group session, doing some drills to keep cardio up,” said Carter. Usually, “[They] would learn new drills, learn new plays, and end the practice with some sort of scrimmaging and running,” she said. This year, “we are trying to really focus on being a fast team,” said Carter. A specific drill that targets quick skills is called “rebound, outlet, layup, which is just pushing the ball up the floor before the defense can get settled to try and score a quick point,” said Carter. A way that they are incorporating this into their game is by having “interchangeable positions” as “[they] adjust to whatever the other team puts out or whatever lineup [they] have,” she said.

The team also focuses on “a lot of team building,” said Carter. They do team-building in and out of the gym. They go to “team dinners once a week, and sometimes places like Kings Dominion or Top Golf,” said Carter. The team also bonds by having fundraisers through their free throw contests and basketball camps. “All our new uniforms, shirts, and trips are sponsored by our own fundraising,” said Carter. Coach Larkins really wants to “emphasize the community” and “even though we don’t have classes with all the same girls in our basketball team, we can all be friends still, both in and outside of the sport,” she said.

As the new season starts, Coach Larkins wants to emphasize confidence. “I want to have our young women realize that even though you may not win every basketball game, there’s a pride and a respect you can get from working with young people as a representative of something,” said Coach Larkins. As the girl’s basketball team moves towards bigger goals each year, we’ll be watching to see where they head this season!



Team victory at the 2024 regional competition

PHOTO: @DSFGYMNASTICS

# 2025 Women’s Professional Lacrosse League

Maya Tluchak  
Copy Editor

The Professional Lacrosse League (PLL) has announced the debut of the first-ever Women’s Lacrosse League (WLL). The league is meant to inspire young women lacrosse players and allow these athletes to compete at a premier level.

The four teams will make their first professional appearance at the PLL Championship Series in February 2025 where they will compete for the first WLL Championship Series trophy. The teams consist of some of the main faces of women’s lacrosse, which will help motivate the next generation of women’s lacrosse players to improve. “It is so important for the representation of women in lacrosse because it provides role models that inspire younger girls to start or continue playing the sport,” said junior Hannah Kantenan, a Freeman Lacrosse player committed to play at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Famous women’s lacrosse players such as Izzy Scane, Taylor Cummings, and Charlotte North are competing in the WLL serving as role models for young women athletes. “I love the way, [Cummings] does the draw, and I think she’s just a great player

who has a great attitude on the field,” said freshman Emma Hopgood, a Freeman Lacrosse player.

These players are known for their elite abilities, specifically, Taylor Cummings who is “very versatile,” said freshman Ursula Borgerson, a Freeman Lacrosse player. “She is great at shooting and dodging, and I feel like a lot [women lacrosse players] aspire to be like [her],” she said.

On the other hand, Charlotte North has altered women’s lacrosse by implementing the “side-arm shot,” said Emma, which is meant to be a quick shot to get around defenders. “She’s changed [the game] for sure,” she said.

These players are part of the reason that women’s lacrosse viewership has soared in the past couple of years. “There are so many different players that are changing the way the game is played today,” said Hannah. “[They] inspire me to push for more representation of women in sports and to continue playing the game,” she said. “I love knowing that there are women that are fighting for more viewership of women’s lacrosse.”

The implementation of the WLL has also created a goal for many young players beyond college lacrosse. Emma, who previously had her goals limited to Division I lacrosse, “[now,] want[s] to go professional,” she said.

Historically, critics have said that women’s lacrosse is not as fun to watch due to the rules that restrict aggressive actions such as hitting or checking. However, “It’s quicker and [more] fast-paced,” said Ursula. “It’s more strategic than men’s ... But that doesn’t mean women’s lacrosse

isn’t aggressive,” she said.

For example, a part of women’s lacrosse implemented more in the game is the concept of dodging. Dodging is the “power and finesse” of “getting past [a player] and getting it to goal,” said Emma.

Although the same sport by name, men’s and women’s lacrosse are “completely different game[s],” said Hannah. “The field set up, gear worn, rules, and sticks are all completely different,” she said. For example, women’s lacrosse players “just have a mouth guard and goggles,” said Ursula. On the other hand “men have helmets and chest pads, and a bunch of different padding that girls don’t have,” she said. However, the WLL is set on increasing representation and funding for women’s lacrosse due to the common difference where “women’s sports don’t get as much funding and sponsorship as men’s,” said Hannah.

The league is set to appear at the 2028 Olympics in “a version of lacrosse, called ‘World Lacrosse Sixes,’ featuring six players per team on a smaller field with a 30-second shot clock,” said Hannah.

Although the teams and coaching staff have not been announced yet for the league, its 2025 debut is expected to “create more viewership for women’s lacrosse and inspire the younger generation,” said Hannah.

The WLL is just the beginning of a new platform for women’s lacrosse players. “It’s important for all of the girls that play lacrosse around the world that [they] get to have those role model[s],” said Ursula. “It’s nice to be represented as [a] team.”



Women’s Lacrosse League

PHOTO: PREMIER LACROSSE LEAGUE

# GIRLS BASKETBALL

## 24-25 SCHEDULE

- 12/4 @ COLLEGIATE
- 12/5 VS. ATLEE
- 12/10 @ GLEN ALLEN
- 12/13 @ DEEP RUN
- 12/16 VS. VARINA
- 12/17 @ MLWGS
- 12/19 VS. PRINCE GEORGE
- 1/13 @ PRINCE GEORGE
- 1/14 VS. THOMAS JEFFERSON
- 1/17 VS. TUCKER
- 1/21 VS. JOHN MARSHALL
- 1/24 @ GODWIN
- 1/29 VS. GODWIN
- 1/31 VS. DEEP RUN
- 2/4 @ HERMITAGE
- 2/6 VS. CLOVER HILL
- 2/7 @ TUCKER
- 2/11 VS. GLEN ALLEN
- 2/18@ THOMAS JEFFERSON

GRAPHIC: IZZY MINKLE



# Rock and Roll Richmond

**Mayram Vohra**  
Staff Writer

Recently, Richmond was declared the “Underground Music City Everyone Needs to Visit” by Forbes Magazine. Whether you are looking for a country concert, a high-energy rapper, or a heavy metal band, Richmond has all three, and more. Additionally, Richmond has many venues to explore its music scene. Some popular venues include smaller places such as The Warehouse for rock and metal bands, the Altria Theatre for more classical tunes, and The Canal Club for a variety of music. The Broadberry Entertainment Group, an independent promoter company, is the leading factor behind Richmond’s underground music scene. The Broadbarry is in charge of curating unique concerts and events



Concert at Rock and Roll Richmond Music Festival

for venues in both Virginia and West Virginia. The Broadberry’s Richmond venues include the Capital Ale Hall, Lewis Ginter, The Camel, and Brown’s Island.

As a member of two bands; Parry Romberg and Claudia’s Symptoms, sophomore Quinn Archibald is highly involved in Richmond’s underground music scene, usually playing at house shows and underneath the Wharf Street Tunnel, located in downtown Richmond, near the James Riverfront.

Junior Thomas Kreutzer visits The Canal Club often, and “[they] have a diverse number of people that come through there, and a lot of genres, not just one,” he said, “They host good bands.”

There is a large amount of musical activity in the Richmond downtown area, specifically around Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Combined with the smaller concerts and bigger festivals such as the 2nd

Street Festival and the Iron Blossom Festival, there is music for people with varying tastes.

Despite being labeled “underground,” Richmond’s music is surprisingly easy to find. “There are posters everywhere advertising different shows, [and] if [you want] to join a band, there are a lot of opportunities,” said Thomas.

Quinn found Richmond to be a great place to get a footing in the music industry. He discovered that people were ready to listen to the music he started producing with his band. “Richmond’s bands are very supportive,” said Quinn. “I have been going to shows for a while, so everyone knew me and was ready to listen to the music I made,” he said. Specifically, the band Autumn Sonata, a 4-piece alternative indie band, served as a resource for Quinn as he started with music. “The drummer, Loki, was an amazing help, [he] helped me book so many shows,” said Quinn.

Many popular bands similarly started in the Richmond area and expanded. “Usually, people forget that most bands started here. It is important to the city’s lifestyle,” said Quinn.

Recently, in July 2023, the Ember Music Hall opened, which is a venue featuring electronic music and intimate concerts. The Ember Music Hall is located four blocks from The National, a slightly more expensive concert venue. In April 2024, The Ember hosted DJ Icey and Monsters of Metal, both electronic music troupes.

In addition, Rich-



PHOTO: THE ALTRIA THEATRE WEBSITE

## The inside of the Altria

mond concerts foster connections between bands and audiences, creating a tighter-knit community. At a show Thomas attended, “the lead singer came into the pit and on accident, I hit him in the face,” he said. “It was so much fun [and it’s] awesome how you can interact with people like that,” said Thomas.

Quinn finds it easier to interact with his band’s audience at shows because of the smaller venues. “[I] talk to them a lot at the merch table. When people come up and compliment us, it is fun to talk to people,” he said.

While Richmond has larger, busier venues, the city also has its hidden gems. For example, The Warehouse and the Wharf are two well-liked venues. “[The Warehouse] is hard to find, but has great underground shows,” said Thomas. In fact, Clau-

dia’s Symptoms is scheduled to play at the Warehouse soon.

Richmond’s underground music scene is supported by a community that cares and “is very loving, supporting, and intertwined with one another,” said Quinn. “For example, if someone gets hurt, [you] help them out,” he said.

Richmond’s abundant culture is a big part of the city’s identity, and a large part of that is the musical scene. Thomas believes most of Richmond’s culture comes from the music scene. “There is a lot of culture. It is super diverse and entertaining,” he said.

Freeman students believe the city should be recognized for its musical scene, beyond Forbes’s title. “I am not super involved with other cities’ music scenes, but I think Forbes gave an accurate title. Richmond has got a lot to offer,” said Thomas.

# Shaping Success: Preparing for a Ceramic and Art Exhibition

**Nina Henley**  
staff writer

Artists, ceramists, and other art enthusiasts work collaboratively to bring each and every art exhibit to life. This means showcasing a variety of art pieces, clay works, colorful pieces, dramatic compositions, and more. This year, at Freeman High School, the work has only just begun for the Art Department as they prepare for a series of upcoming events such as the scholastic competition, the March countywide competition, and the Freeman Art show held at the end of the year.

As they prepare for these major upcoming art shows that happen throughout the year, due to the sheer amount of art exhibits that Freeman participates in, there is “quite a bit of preparation that is needed,” said Mrs. Jones, Fine Arts Department co-chair and Freeman ceramics teacher. “It typically takes all year long,” she said.

Throughout the year, “any kind of exemplary [student] work, [is held] back so that we can [prepare it] for display,” said Mrs. Jones. However, for “the countywide show, we only get a small exhibition space, so we have to be selective about what goes into that show,” she said.

After working as a ceramics

teacher for 15 years, eight of those at Freeman, Mrs. Jones has participated in and witnessed several exhibits and has since learned from her experiences: “My first time doing an exhibit, I didn’t realize that I needed to set time aside in my classroom for preparation ... that was a wake-up call,” she said. “When you’re young, you don’t really understand the amount of time that goes into something.”

After getting into the groove of exhibitions, Mrs. Jones and the Art Department have come up with multiple ways to involve everyone and ensure a smooth system of production. She knows that she “can’t take it all on by [herself],” she said. Alongside the art and ceramics students, National Art Honor Society (NAHS) students play a huge role in the showcases. “We’re quite a team down here,” said Mrs. Jones.

The NAHS students help Mrs. Jones set up for the art show by “overseeing most of the process and just making sure everyone knows where they’re supposed to be and what they’re supposed to be doing,” said senior and NAHS co-president Hannah Kate Harrison. Having enjoyed art since elementary school, Hannah Kate has worked to become a leader of the NAHS. “The community is really fun and I love my art class. It’s great for community building,” she said.

Several different art shows are all simultaneously being prepared for. “This week [of December 2, 2024], there are scholastics entries,” said Mrs. Jones. The Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards is a national competition organized locally by the Visual Arts Department of Richmond. “We always think about the Scholastic Awards first” said Mrs. Jones. “Then, we introduce projects that might produce work that we think would be good for fulfilling [the awards],” she said. A selected few who scored well will participate and if they do well they will move forward into the competition. For instance, if they receive an honorable mention at the Visual Arts Center, or if they get a silver key award, then they’re work will be on display outside of the main gallery at the Visual Arts Center. If a student gets a gold key award, the artwork goes on display in the main gallery at the Visual Arts Center. Additionally, the student would be qualified to go onto the state-level competition.

Despite all the preparation and work, there are still obstacles that the art community has to face. “It’s challenging making sure that the entire school can come and see the art show because sometimes people try to take advantage of it and use it as a way to skip class,” said Hannah Kate. The art community is aware of issues like these and



PHOTO: NINA HENLEY

## Ceramics students at work

is persistently trying to straighten out a good system where they can still get as many people to view the art show without it getting taken advantage of. They are in the process of working out a more efficient way to ensure less skipping and are currently thinking of better ways to monitor the exhibits that take place during school hours.

There are also several small internal issues that the arts community must navigate when preparing for an exhibit. “It’s a lot of planning, organization, and communication, but we have a really solid team of leadership this year, which I’m excited for,” said Hannah Kate. The art department remains optimistic when it comes to possible obstacles and they are determined to grow from the issues they experienced in the past.

The art community as a whole has been anticipating all of the upcoming events and art shows with admiration for those who work to make it happen. “I have been admiring Mrs. Jones’s work at decorating and using all of her students’ art to make creative displays,” said junior Caroline Grubbs, a Ceramics I student. “It is a really great way to show off how hard everyone’s working,” she said. Since this is Caroline’s first year in an art class, she is adjusting to the art

community while learning more about the subject. “Everybody is super supportive of your ideas and is really good at giving feedback and constructive criticism on how to improve your art, which is really great,” said Caroline.

Despite being within the community for only a year, Caroline finds herself looking at things in a different way: “Before I took this class, I never really thought about art as an interpretive thing, but now I can understand there are different techniques that artists use to relay a message through their art pieces,” said Caroline. With students working on several different art pieces and projects, the opportunities that the students have when being able to display their artwork is great. “It really helps people feel proud of the work they’ve put into [their art],” said Caroline.

The work never ends in the art hallways of Freeman High School and thanks to the guidance of teachers like Mrs. Jones, every student works hard to refine their craft. The most rewarding part of being an artist and a member of the Freeman High School art community differs for each student, but “having your work on display is important and a reward on its own,” said Mrs. Jones.

# RVA IS ‘MUSIC CITY’



THE BROADBERRY  
THE CANAL CLUB  
THE WAREHOUSE  
THE ALTRIA THEATER

THE UNDERGROUND MUSIC  
CITY EVERYONE NEEDS TO  
VISIT  
- FORBES MAGAZINE



GRAPHIC: IZZY MINTZ



# VMFA’s ‘A Long Arc’: An Exhibition on the American South

Olive Schreher  
Staff Writer

The American South, with its rich history and strong conflicts, has consistently been celebrated and disputed by historians. From the beginning of the Civil War to the fight for civil rights, right in the heart, the South has shaped and been shaped by some of the most important events in American history as a whole. “A Long Arc: Photography and the American South since 1845”, an exhibition by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) that opened October 2024, digs into this story of the South through photography. This exhibition is the first major survey of Southern photography in more than 25 years and features over 180 pictures spanning from the Civil War to present day, spanning a time period that is more than a century and a half long.

For people visiting, “A Long Arc” is an opportunity to explore how photography has historically captured the changing identity of the South, with its cultural, political, and social shifts in the region. The exhibit is organized chronologically and shows the evolving photography in the South, starting with pictures defining the early years of photography, around the Civil War,

and ending with photos that represent the ongoing struggles the South still faces today, including race, identity, and environment.

The exhibit begins from the time period between 1845 to 1865, a time defined by the Civil War. Photography started to become more frequently used in the American South after it was introduced to Europe in 1839. Many portrait studios were spread throughout the region and were most known for how they projected racial and social identity during a time where the debate over slavery was. When the Civil War started in 1861 photography became crucial to Americans in order for them to understand the complexities of modern warfare and understand the significance to themselves.

Dr. Sarah Kennel, the Aaron Siskind Curator of Photography at VMFA, meaning she focuses on the Museum’s growing photography collection, “These early photographers didn’t just capture war and destruction. They created a new visual language that would forever influence how Americans viewed their collective history.” The ability of photography to convey such deep emotions would continue to evolve as the South experienced the process of Reconstruction.

After the Civil War, from 1865 to 1930, the South experienced the

task of rebuilding. While this period was marked by many new ideas, it also introduced new photographic studios. While some used the increasing spread of photography to spread an idealistic version of the South, others captured the harsh segregation and inequalities. The rise of the “penny picture” photography studios, snapshot cameras, and stereographs created greater accessibility to photos and a peek into the everyday life of ordinary people in the south.

By the 1930’s, documentary photography was starting to arise. The Great Depression brought a sense of national crisis to the American South, which was already poorer than the rest of the nation. Apart from the economic difficulties, poverty and racism were very big in the South. Photographers responded to this by traveling throughout the South to capture the conditions faced by poor farmers, sharecroppers, and migrant workers. In addition, from 1935-1942 around 24 photographers were hired by the government and produced 16 thousand photographs from the region, although none were from the South. Their images, part of the Farm Security Administration’s effort to address poverty, captured the South’s economic struggles in vivid images. The Great Depression changed



Photo in VMFA’s Exhibition on the American South

American photography by associating documentary photography as a way of social reform. This documentary style revolutionized how Americans viewed not just the South, but the nation as a whole. “These photographers did more than just document poverty,” says Gregory Harris, curator of photography at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta and co-curator of the exhibition. “They redefined how we saw ourselves as a nation, and how we understood the South within that context.” These images of rural America also captured the resilience of the people who lived there, evoking emotions in viewers by associating these wide spread problems with human faces.

In the 1960’s the South became the background for civil rights. The images taken during this time period were very shocking, depicting raw and violent images. Civil rights activists used the medium in order to spread events and document actions like marches and interactions with law enforcement, ensuring people were aware and motivated to challenge segregation.

For many, these photographs were not just images of people fighting for justice, they were a call to action. “These photographers helped the nation see the South not as a distant, romanticized place, but as a region struggling with its own demons,” Dr. Kennel said. The photos taken during the Civil Rights era had a give the public a blunt view of the violence and injustice that defined the fight for civil rights. These photographs not only documented history, but also helped make it.

As the exhibit moves into present day it continues to explore slavery, segregation, and inequality, but also show new challenges we face like environmental problems and cultural identities. These photographers use their work to comment on race, identity, and environment in the 21st century South.

For visitors to the VMFA, A Long Arc offers an opportunity to explore how history continues to shape the South. It’s a journey through time that captures the complex identity of this region, that is just as diverse as the photographs throughout its history.

# ‘Star-Studded Country:’ The Country Music Awards

Izzy Minkler  
Sports Editor

Country music’s biggest night commenced on Nov. 20, 2024, in Nashville, Tennessee. The Country Music Awards (CMAs) are similar to the Grammy Awards but only for country music and artists. The 58th annual CMAs — hosted by Luke Bryan, Peyton Manning, and Lainey Wilson — featured many high-profile performances. Luke Bryan, two-time CMA Entertainer of the Year, performed “Love You, Miss You, Mean It,” and Lainey

tainment. American bluegrass and country-pop continue to rise on the charts with artists like Zach Bryan, Morgan Wallen, and Luke Bryan most recently increasing country audiences. According to Billboard Music, country music is at an all-time high. Mainstream artists, like Beyonce, releasing country albums have also widened their audience. Zach Bryan’s “Quittin’ Time” tour did extremely well last year, and Forbes named it the third highest-grossing summer concert tour.

Now onto the winners of the evening. Morgan Wallen went home with one out of seven awards he was nominated for, Entertain-

ment. “It’s a really easy way to just see the most popular songs and musicians,” said Lauren. Often, the most popular country music is in fact popular for a reason, and it is the easiest for everyone to get into. “I really enjoy listening and I love getting new people into country. It’s always fun to see my friends enjoy something I love so much,” said Lauren. The CMAs provide easy beginner listens, without throwing people right into the deep end.

The CMAs have encountered the problem that all award shows have recently been facing: low viewership. This year’s awards got just over six million viewers, and according to Programming Insider, the 2024 CMA viewership was an eleven percent decrease from last year’s broadcast. Viewers could watch the award show broadcast live on ABC and Hulu the next day. However, the CMAs are always on a weeknight, sometimes making it difficult for viewers to watch the whole thing. “I really wish it were on a weekend at least, I think it would draw a lot more attention,” said Lauren.

Some critiques of the CMAs have been that they neglect their roots and founding artists. “I grew up with the older country, not just the new more pop kind of music,” said junior Millie McCabe. “I listened to it with my dad growing up, and I was hoping to see more of that style in the show. I was a little disappointed, but the performances were still entertaining,” she said. “I just wanted to hear less of what is always on the radio, mostly because sometimes I feel like it doesn’t represent all of country music. It felt a little like this year they picked a very specific style, and that [style] won everything,” said Millie. The CMAs do award a lifetime achievement award called the Willie Nelson Lifetime Achievement Award, which is given to “an artist who has achieved both national and international prominence and stature through concert performances, humanitarian efforts, philanthropy, record sales, streaming numbers, and public representation at the highest level,” according to the CMAs. This year’s winner was George Strait, one of the best-selling country artists of all time.

The CMAs are a show of country music coming together to celebrate the music they pour their heart into. As the genre changes, one thing remains constant: the Country Music Awards.



Country Music Award Show Poster

Wilson, a first-time CMA host, the reigning CMA Entertainer of the Year, and four-time nominee this year, performed “4x4xU,” a single she released this past July.

The CMAs have 12 awards and five nominees per category. Categories like Single of the Year, Album of the Year, and New Artist of the Year are presented at the CMAs. Morgan Wallen got seven nominations, the highest number of any nominee. Cody Johnson and Chris Stapleton closely followed Wallen with five nominations, and Post Malone and Lainey Wilson had four nominations each. This year’s lineup of the numerous performances throughout the night included Post Malone, Chris Stapleton, and Thomas Rhett.

The CMAs represent a long history of tradition and culture. Country music is special to many people not only because of its musicality but also because of the stories it tells. “I’ve been a country music fan for as long as I can remember. It means so much to me mostly because of the stories the artists tell in their songs,” said senior Lauren Winterhoff. “It represents a lot of people, and it’s nice to hear songs that I can relate to,” she said.

Around 150 million Americans listen to country music regularly, according to Texas Sounds Enter-

er of the Year. Megan Moroney won Best New Artist, and Chris Stapleton won Song of the Year with his single “White Horse.”

Zach Bryan and Kacey Musgraves’ “I Remember Everything” lost to Ella Langley’s “you look like you love me” for the Musical Event of the Year award to the surprise of many fans. “I totally thought [Zach Bryan] had it. ‘I Remember Everything’, was a really big hit and was way more popular than ‘you look like you love me’,” said Lauren.

“Cowboy Carter,” Beyonce’s most recent album release, was not recognized at the CMAs. Beyonce’s “Cowboy Carter” was a dramatic shift into the country genre, and despite its success on the charts, the album did not win any country awards. “Cowboy Carter” represents a larger trend as other genres and artists continue to collaborate and intersect with country music.

“I think [the CMAs] really bring music together, and it’s an easy way to introduce friends into country music,” said Lauren. “I also just love when my favorite artists work together on something they normally wouldn’t be able to do,” she said. The CMAs also present an opportunity for new fans to be introduced to country



“Wicked” Movie Poster

## From Stage to Screen: A Closer Look at “Wicked”

Sadie Edlavitch  
Arts & Entertainment Editor

The very anticipated adaptation of the beloved 2003 Broadway production “Wicked” has made its way to the theatres and has been transformed into a cinematic masterpiece. “Wicked” is based on “The Wizard of Oz,” a classic tale that explores the fusion between good and evil. It may be a lot to ask of an audience to sit through a 2 hour and 40 minute movie but this is only part one of the story, followed by part two coming out in November 2025. If you have yet to see this movie, beware of the spoilers in this review!

In the 2024 film “Wicked” (Part 1), the story begins in the magical land of Oz with Glinda (the good witch) slowly descending into munchkinland, which was previously introduced in earlier productions. We are then introduced to Elphaba, who is played by British actress, Cynthia Erivo. Erivo gained recognition for starring in a Broadway show, “The Color Purple,” from 2015 to 2017. Elphaba plays the misunderstood Wicked Witch of the West, while Glinda or “Galinda,” played by American singer and actress Ariana Grande, is seen as the “Good Witch.” Erivo and Grande both meet the physical and emotional challenge of embodying these roles and use their vocal talents to portray their characters.

Fiyero, who is a carefree prince played by British Actor, Jonathan Bailey, arrives at Shiz and becomes both Glinda and Elphaba’s romantic appeal. Elphaba’s connection with Fiyero is subtle at first but we tend to see more of it as the story goes on. One scene in the movie in which Elphaba and Fiyero grow a deeper bond is when they collaborate to save a lion cub from an unethical experiment. This particular moment shows Fiyero’s

compassionate side and deepens Elphaba’s feelings for him. On the other hand, Glinda and Fiyero also share a lighthearted romance. Glinda’s bubbly and charming personality attracts Fiyero and their chemistry is strong at the beginning of the story. However, Fiyero has a more deeper understanding of the issues in Oz and Glinda tends to care more about the pursuit of perfection and popularity.

Elphaba is later invited to meet the Wizard of Oz in Emerald City after her magical abilities are showcased at Shiz University. This is a huge moment for her because she views the wizard as an idol who she believes can help her achieve her dreams. Instead of making the journey by herself, she invites Glinda to join her. Despite their rivalries in the beginning, this trip makes their bond grow deeper. As they arrive at the Emerald City, they come across a lively celebration of the city. This scene shows everything the city has to offer such as things like green landscapes, bustling crowds, and intricate costumes. The two are in awe of the sights and their friendship grows as they share a sense of excitement and wonder.

When it is finally time for Elphaba and Glinda to meet the wizard, who is played by actor Jeff Goldblum, they are charmed by his character, especially Glinda. However, behind all of his charisma, Elphaba quickly realizes that he lacks true magical powers and uses his powers of manipulation to trick everyone. The Wizard offers Elphaba the chance to use her magical powers to help him and solidify her place in Oz, and tells Elphaba to use a spell from a book called The Grimmerie. However, Elphaba realizes that this spell would cause harm to the animals of Oz so she refuses his request. Glinda does not realize the severity of the wizard’s request and is eager to please the wizard, this causes them to go down different paths.



## Court Decisions



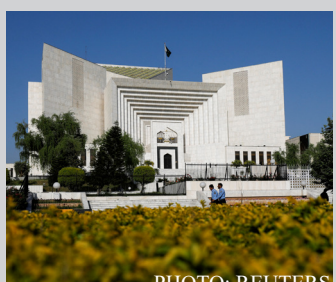
TikTok's logo

The popular app, TikTok, faces a ban in the US over national security concerns. If ByteDance, TikTok's parent company, refuses to sell its US operations, the law would take effect on January 19th. Some speculators say there is potential for another stay in the Court's decision, which could push the ban back to another date. The platform's data collection is under scrutiny, however, there are equal concerns over the potential violation of first amendment rights if the ban were to be implemented.



Patients at Nairobi psychiatric center

Kenya's Judge Lawrence Mugambi has ruled the criminalization of attempted suicide unconstitutional. Previously, the law stated that "any person who attempts to kill himself is guilty of a misdemeanor and is subject to imprisonment of up to two years, a fine, or both," with the minimum age for prosecution being eight. However, Kenya's constitution also states that a person has the right to "highest attainable standard of health" which directly contradicts the law regarding attempted suicide.



Supreme Court of Pakistan

A Pakistani court has intervened in the deportation of 150 Afghan musicians and singers. In 2023, Pakistan cracked down on undocumented migrants in the country. The musicians feel as though they won't be safe if forced to return to Afghanistan. Additionally, according to a government mandate last year, Afghan migrants are able to live in the country until June of 2025.

Content by Izzy Minkler

### Emerson Post

Staff Writer

On January 7, 2025, a fire broke out in the Palisades of Los Angeles, California. Fueled by strong gusts of wind and extremely dry conditions, these fires have roared across the Los Angeles area, destroying hundreds of homes and leading to the death of at least 24 people, including some who attempted to disrupt this fire from overwhelming their home.

An LA county official said many significant injuries were linked to two of the fires, and a city official in Los Angeles described these fires as "Some of the most devastating and terrifying" that she has ever seen in that area of her city. "This is looking worse and worse the more information we get," said climate scientist Daniel Swain.

The blaze in the Palisades has grown to over 23,000 acres, with only around 17-18% of total containment. In addition to this, there are multiple other fires that have erupted since the Palisades caught fire. The Eaton fire ignited just hours after the Palisades fire near the canyon in the national forest lands north of downtown LA. It exploded to 14,117 acres, and destroyed over 7,800 structures.

The Hurst Fire started on Jan. 7 as well in Sylmar, a suburban



PHOTO: AP

### The Palisades Fire ravages the Pacific Palisades neighborhood amid high winds

neighborhood north of San Fernando, as a brush fire. It then expanded to 800 acres and 97% was contained by January 14. Cal Fire said that two structures were likely damaged or demolished in this fire.

The Auto Fire erupted in Ventura County on Jan. 13, about a week after the first wave of Los Angeles fires ignited. It spanned across about 56 acres, and was contained 0%. As firefighters were battling the largest blazes of these fires, some additional fires broke out in the LA area. Crews were able to stop the forward

spread and contain these blazes.

At one point, there were almost 200,000 people under evacuation orders as crews attempted to fight back against these fires. By the morning of Jan. 14, the number dwindled down to around 88,000 with another 84,000 in evacuation warning zones throughout LA county. The fires have burned entire neighborhoods and blocks, leaving an unknown number of people homeless.

The cause of the fires are not yet determined, but the lack of rainfall and the extreme drought LA has

been experiencing, are a key element of the fire weather taking over the region. "It's not just that drier conditions are perpetually more likely in a warming climate," said Swain. "It's that this oscillation back and forth between states is something that is particularly consequential for wildfire risk in Southern California." As firefighters continue to battle against these blazes, the full extent of the damages lies uncertain, and residents are left dealing with the aftermath of one of the most deadly wildfire outbreaks in recent history.

## Venezuelan President Maduro Sworn In as US Raises Reward for Capture

### Libby Mercer

Editor-in-Chief

The United States (US) has raised the capture price of newly re-elected president of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro from 15 million to 25 million dollars. The US charged Maduro in the district

of Southern New York in 2020 for charges of Narcoterrorism, and conspiracies of transporting weapons and illegal substances that violate title 21 and 18 of the US's Code of Federal Regulations. The Biden Administration raised the reward to 25 million in hopes to capture and arrest Maduro on drug trafficking charges among his previous indictments in 2020.

Maduro has held Venezuelan

office since March 2013 after the death of former president Hugo Chavez. While Maduro has been re-elected and is about to serve his third consecutive term, the US among other countries has not recognized him as Venezuelan president since 2018, when the constant election re-scheduling caused the US and other nations to believe that the results were corrupted. In July 2024, Maduro was declared

the winner of the election, but the ballots that prove he won have not been released and are thought by Venezuelan opposition to "show a landslide win" for Maduros opponent Edmundo Gonzalez, said Reuters. Gonzalez is recognized as the president-elect by several countries including the US.

Venezuelans have been taking to the streets to protest Maduros inauguration and the results of the election. "Thousands of Venezuelans took to the streets [to protest Maduros inauguration] despite the fear of repression," said Tamara Taraciuk Broner, a human rights lawyer and Venezuela expert at the Inter American Dialogue, according to NPR.

Maria Corina Machado, ally of Gonzalez and leader of opposition to Maduro, is leading the protests in the capital city Caracas. "Maduro consolidated the coup and the violation of our constitution," Machado said in her plea for citizens to join the street protests according to Reuters "It's time to do whatever is necessary to restore it," she said. Machado had been in hiding before leading the recent street protests, due to threats from the Venezuelan government to arrest her. She also was banned from participating in the July 2024 election.

In addition to the increased reward for Maduro, the US is offering 15 million dollar rewards for information that will lead to the arrest and/or conviction of Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello and Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino.



PHOTO: NPR

### President Nicolas Maduro and his wife at the inauguration

## Genocide Declared in Sudan for The Second Time in 20 Years

### Nina Henley

Staff Writer

Almost two decades after the Darfur genocide, on January 7th, 2025, the United States has once again declared genocide in Sudan. With tens of thousands civilians killed, 11 million people forced to escape their homes, and over 24 million people experiencing extreme hunger, the Biden Administration has taken a firm stance. It has announced that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group engaged in war with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), is responsible for committing genocide against the civilians of Sudan.

Starting on April 15, 2023, the Sudanese Armed Forces has been fighting in a war for territory against the Rapid Support Forces. With the extent of the consistent bombings, the rising famine issue, and the cruel violence made against women and children because of their ethnic-

ity, the brutality of the war has only worsened over the past two years. "It's a horrific humanitarian situation compounded by these horrific atrocities," Tom Perriello, the U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan, said in an interview with Juana Summers. (npr)

One of the biggest issues that is going on in Sudan is the rising famine issue. This issue did not arise due to any natural reason, it instead was "created by men. It wasn't a famine that was created by a tsunami or a drought," said Tom Periello. The war in Sudan is currently being overshadowed by the war in Gaza and other global crises which have made it hard to focus on Sudan's dire situation. Despite this, the U.S. has been working persistently on helping fix this rising problem. "The U.S. has given more than the rest of the world combined, and we need more partners around the world to understand this famine exists," said Tom Periello.

The violence has escalated throughout countries that are in-

volved in the war, with increasing ethnic exclusion fueling global concern. The inhuman actions by the R.S.F. continue to deteriorate, getting more brutal as the war rages on. "The R.S.F. and allied militias have systematically murdered men and boys — even infants — on an ethnic basis, and deliberately targeted women and girls from certain ethnic groups for rape and other forms of brutal sexual violence," said Mr. Blinken in the New York Times.

The U.S. declaration of genocide in Sudan is an essential step in acknowledging the gravity of the situation, but much more must be done to resolve this humanitarian conflict. Both sides must "agree to a cessation of hostilities so that a civilian political transition can take place," said Tom Perriello in the New York Times. While the Biden Administration has made efforts to help the civilians who are suffering in Sudan, without a concerted global effort, the violence will only continue to worsen, with more people suffering.

## New Hottest Year Ever

### Nikki Rajan

Staff Writer

This past year is the first full calendar year where the Paris Accord's Global Warming limit, 1.5 degrees celsius above the pre-industrial record, has been surpassed.

The agreement states the Earth passing this amount is an early sign that it is nearing its long-term limit. With each additional increment of global temperatures, the risks become larger, according to the United Nations. They also state that the global temperatures met this year can lead to breakdowns of "major ocean circulation systems, thawing of permafrost, and collapse of tropical coral reef systems." These events can cause serious environmental changes that will be irreversible for humanity as seen by the fact that according to the UN, the death toll from climate change between the year 2000 and 2024 will surpass 4 million people.

This year wasn't abnormal: according to the BBC, the past ten years have been the hottest years on record, marking a trend in at-

mospheric change. In December 2023, the second hottest year right behind 2024, countries convened at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in order to set ambitious goals limiting global warming at a 1.5 degree celsius increase due in 2025. The committees were also required to release action plans, according to a statement released by the UN.

"In 2025, countries must put the world on a safer path by dramatically slashing emissions, and supporting the transition to a renewable future," said the United Nations (UN) Secretary General António Guterres in his annual New Year's speech. The UN website has posted that to "limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, emissions must already be decreasing and need to be cut by almost half by 2030, just seven years away." Now as the new year is starting, countries have already made new goals for 2025. By implementing the Climate Promise 2025, the UN has made a new objective to speed up the climate preservation goals before it is too late.