

The Richmond Area Water Crisis: What Really Happened and Why?

Cate Woodrum
Features Editor

Just six days into 2025, the greater Richmond area faced a boil water advisory and even the complete shut off of water to homes and businesses. This was due to a severe winter storm, which caused Richmond City's water treatment plant to lose power, alongside the rest of the region.

The Virginia Department of Health believes that Richmond did not sufficiently staff the water treatment plant, which caused them to be underprepared when the power went out due to the snowfall on Jan. 6.

The city's infrastructure and those who operate it have been criticized, with citizens claiming they lacked emergency preparedness and planning. "[The city] did not adequately respond to the Jan. 6 power outage at the plant which triggered a series of equipment failures and halted water production," said CBS 6 News on Jan. 29. "Multiple backup and fail-safe systems that should've kept the plant operating did not work," they said.

Upon further investigation, electrical pieces at the Richmond Water Treatment Plant were already "obsolete" and potentially unreliable more than a decade ago, according to documentation found through a Freedom of Information Act. A study of the plant's main electrical service components done in 2012 showed the equipment at the time was already about 34 years old and had "reached the end of its useful life as reliable and safe equipment,"

said CBS 6 News. However, the city had not replaced or adjusted those pieces, creating an unsafe and unproductive environment.

This specific plant is responsible for providing clean drinking water to not only the city, but also a large band of residents in neighboring counties. This meant that when city officials confirmed that the plant had failed to meet standards after the storm, resulting in decreased water pressure, water was undrinkable across entire districts. The lack of water pressure had allowed harmful bacteria to enter the water supply, which posed a danger to any who consumed it. A boil water notice was announced for Hanover, Henrico, and Goochland counties as well as the greater Richmond City.

The city's emergency response team assessed the damage caused by the storm and the power failure at the water treatment plant, setting up water and food distribution centers at schools, libraries, and other community spaces. Mayor Danny Avula addressed seniors and individuals with mobility challenges in a press conference on Jan. 9: "If you need water delivered to your home, simply call 311 and provide your address. Our team at Richmond Police will ensure you get the water you need," he said. Many YMCAs in the surrounding area opened their doors to people in need of showers as long as they brought their photo ID, towel, and toiletries to one of the specific YMCA locations. Local officials worked to stabilize the water system by restoring power to the treatment plant and testing the water to monitor for bacteria



PHOTO: COTTON BURY FAR

Virginia National Guard provides water support to Richmond and other harmful contaminants.

The boil water advisory was lifted on Jan. 11. The water crisis affected nearly 230 thousand residents in Richmond and surrounding areas.

Throughout this crisis, Freeman's own faculty and students were affected. Mrs. Pollo, a Freeman World History and Advanced Placement U.S. History teacher, was placed under the advisory at her home right outside of Scott's Addition. "I am the only person that I know in the city who never lost water," she said. According to Mrs. Pollo, day one of the restrictions was the hardest for her and the rest of her area. "The only reason we found out was through a friend of a friend ... It was like a game of telephone;

the city didn't put anything out till much later in the day," she said. Another "problem that a lot of people were running into, at least early on, is that the grocery stores ran out of water," she said.

Although Mrs. Pollo was able to get drinking water outside of her area, she was still frustrated with how the situation was handled. "I felt like [the city] kept making promises and not keeping them, and then making excuses for the promises they didn't keep," said Mrs. Pollo. "I think [the city] could have done a much better job at accountability on day one," she said. "I hope this was a wake-up call for the city about prioritizing where funds go and progressively working towards prevention measures rather than

waiting for something to go wrong."

While every student within the Freeman school district was under the boil water advisory, some Freeman students faced Richmond City's more severe lack of water entirely. Sophomore Chloe Jones, for example, went without water for five days. "Before the city had talked to us about it, I realized we didn't have water," said Chloe. There were lots of challenges for Chloe's community, such as "having to boil it and shoveling snow to flush toilets, [which] was awkward and challenging," she said. She was frustrated with losing her water because "the city's information was spotty," said Chloe. "If they knew the snow could do this, why didn't they fix it beforehand? Get your life together, Richmond!"

The Start Of Donald Trump's Second Term

Nikki Rajan
Staff Writer

Joining President Cleveland, President Donald J. Trump became the second president to serve two non-consecutive terms on Jan. 20, 2025. Over just the first two weeks as the 47th President of the United States, Trump signed 54 executive orders after his inauguration in Washington, D.C.

Beginning by opening a new department, the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, Trump has assigned various people roles in his administration. Trump has also decided to add a "White House A.I. and Crypto Czar," dedicated to guiding the U.S. on how to successfully invest and become a global leader in the technological field. Trump appointed David O. Sacks, an entrepreneur and investor in Silicon Valley, to fill this role. Some other key positions that Trump submitted nominations for include the Secretary of State, Attorney General, and Director of National Intelligence. Trump nominated Marco Rubio as the Secretary of State, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. (RFK) Jr. as the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and Tulsi Gabbard as the Director of National Intelligence, to name a few. Some political leaders have expressed their encouragement of

Trump's recent picks. "President Trump spoke of his confidence in America," said Senate Majority Leader John Thune on the Senate floor. "I share the president's confidence and his optimism about what we can accomplish in the coming years," said Thune.

Within his executive orders, President Trump imposed tariffs on neighboring countries Canada and Mexico due to his concerns about subsidies and defense contributions. Therefore, on February 1, the government implemented an executive order imposing a 25 percent tariff on all Mexican and Canadian imports, except for Canadian energy resources. However, on February 3, the administration decided to pause this policy for a month after both countries pledged to enhance border rules. This order also included a 10 percent tariff on all Chinese imports starting on February 4. In response to some speculation on social media, Trump said, "very simply ... if they charge us, we charge them." "It'll be great for everybody, including other countries," he said.

Another new policy was an executive order called "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," which involved 90 days of stopping U.S. foreign assistance programs. This will include USAID, which assists third-world country members and other military programs in those countries.

Among these orders, Trump

signed actions to pardon those involved in the January 6 Capitol Event, declared a National Energy Emergency, and removed all federal Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs. When it comes to the National Energy Emergency, "our Nation's inadequate energy supply and infrastructure causes and worsens the high energy prices that devastate Americans, particularly those living on low- and fixed incomes," said Trump. Additionally, some top companies, including Target and Meta, have decided to follow suit and reduce their commitment to their DEI policies.

In this process, the President has his eye on Canada as well. He has repeatedly stated that he is "serious about wanting Canada to become the 51st state," said Trump. He believes that "Canada would be much better off being the 51st state because we lose \$200 billion a year with Canada, and I'm not going to let that happen," he said in an interview with AP News correspondents.

Another major executive order he wants to pass is to alter the Constitution and end birthright citizenship in America. Within this action, he ordered that children of migrants, illegal or on temporary visas, are not U.S. citizens even if they are born on U.S. soil. Trump has declared international gangs like the Salvadoran Gang MS-13 as foreign terrorist organizations, keeping lists to track them. For all these reasons, President Trump stated that the nation is in a "state of crisis."

The president has also mentioned that he can use extra funding to fix the border with Mexico. The border "Czar" further implied this by stating that they are "doing great work with the money [they] have...but need money from Congress." Lastly, Trump ordered the shutdown of physical legal routes on the southern border for immigrants, including some plans from the Biden Administration.

Something that could directly affect Freeman High School is Trump's efforts to eliminate the



PHOTO: ABC News

Protests against Trump's action to remove USAID

Department of Education. "There's a federal law that [was] passed many, many years ago called IDEA," said Mr. Fabian, which stands for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This act ensures that children with disabilities also receive a free, affordable, and helpful education program by giving grants and money to the cause. Removing the Department of Education could be a major change in this since "there's a lot of things that are handled by states but are done because of directives of the federal government or money grants that come from the federal government," said Mr. Fabian.

Classmates with 504 plans or extra financial help would also be affected by this because the money usually comes from the federal and state governments. For students planning to go to college, "a lot of the grants that go to universities and colleges throughout the United States come from the Department of Education," said Mr. Fabian. "If that funding goes away, you could see a lot of major tuition hikes, making it a lot harder for students to go to college," he said.

Mr. Fabian also provides feedback on Trump's executive order to end birthright citizenship. "We have well over 100 years of legal precedent that would indicate that that's completely and utterly unconstitutional," said Mr. Fabian. "Once you cross over onto America, onto American soil, you are subject to our jurisdiction," he said.

When it comes to teaching these topics in Advanced Placement Government, Mr. Fabian tries to emphasize the "law of unintended consequences," he said. Which "means that sometimes when you make a law, you're not fully aware of all of the consequences of that law," he said. Since we cannot go back in time, "each generation can use the words of the 14th Amendment in their search for greater freedom," said Mr. Fabian.

Though there have been multiple changes in the White House due to the recent inauguration, teachers like Mr. Fabian are working to ensure students are educated and aware of these topics related to government. As of February 14th, this is the most up-to-date information we have.



PHOTO: ACLU

Trump signs executive orders on the first day



Project ADAM: Saving Lives in the Community

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Opinions Editor
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Project ADAM is a non-profit organization started by the Children’s Hospital in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Adam Lemel, after whom the program was named, passed away due to sudden cardiac arrest while playing in a high school basketball game. Sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is the sudden loss of all heart activity due to an irregular heart rhythm. It differs from a heart attack in the fact that a heart attack is usually caused by a blood clot or calcifications in the arteries that break off and cause blockage. When a person is suffering from a heart attack, there are often signs beforehand, while a person suffering from SCA can experience no symptoms before the event. Project ADAM (Automated Defibrillators in Adams Memory) was adopted into Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS) as a partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Freeman was chosen as one of the schools that would be designated to start implementing the initiative this year to be considered ‘Heart Safe.’ To be considered a Heart Safe School, some requirements must be met. These include implementing a quality SCA program of awareness, training, effective emergency response, and a team of response-ready faculty. Freeman started putting together the team in August 2024 and is still in the process of obtaining the Project ADAM Heart Safe School Designation. Every Freeman staff member had to go through training

for emergency events this year. This training included reviewing emergency plans, where the Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) are located, training in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and first aid, and knowing what responsibilities lie on everyone in case of an emergency. An AED is a medical device that can detect an abnormal rhythm and deliver an electric shock to jump-start a stopped heart. As of now, there are six AEDs located around the school in case of an emergency. They are located in the main hall outside of the clinic, next to room 166 in Green Acres, next to room 210 on the second floor, in the main gym and field house, and the athletic trainer has a mobile AED to carry with them. There is also an AED out by the football field that is provided by Henrico Parks and Recreation. This AED requires a code to be used and the code can only be given by operators called at 911. This AED can be used outside of the school day as well. The use of an AED does not require any prior knowledge or training. “You turn it on, and it tells you what to do,” said Freeman Nurse Ms. Lovgren. “CPR can be a part of the resuscitation, but just using an AED can help shock the heart back into a normal rhythm,” she said. “[The AED] analyzes the person; tells you where to put the pads and gives step-by-step instructions. I think everyone should be aware of the uses for the AED even if they [are not] CPR certified,” said Ms. Lovgren. Project ADAM emphasizes the importance of a timely response to SCA. The best chance of sav-

ing a person from SCA is within the first four minutes of the event. According to Project ADAM, it takes an average of six minutes for first responders to be present at the scene in suburban areas. Survival rates decrease substantially with each minute after SCA, so immediate application is crucial for saving the person’s life. Adam Lepel was a young and healthy person when he suffered from SCA, which fueled the project’s initiative to educate and spread awareness to groups that think they may not be at risk. There is not always a risk factor present, but they can include heart diseases causing abnormal structure, a sudden blow to the chest directly over the heart (commotio cordis), electrical heart diseases, exposure to drugs, coronary artery disease, and family history of SCA. Although, commonly, no symptoms of SCA are present, it is important to note that there are some. These can be fainting or dizziness with exercise, excessive fatigue or shortness of breath with exercise, and chest pain/discomfort with exercise. By the time that first responders made it to the high school where Adam Lemels SCA took place, it was too late. Eight minutes had already passed, and his chances of survival were low because the vital measures that had to be carried out within the first two minutes of the event had not occurred, therefore, Adam was not able to be saved. His parents later learned more about the life-saving treatment an AED can provide and made it their mission to make sure that no life that can be saved isn’t. They partnered with their local hospital and since have made a

difference in so many families’ lives. “I can’t help my son, but I can help yours,” said Mr. Lemel. Damar Hamlin, a National Football League (NFL) player for the Buffalo Bills, suffered from SCA during a game in January 2023. After being resuscitated on the field, he was later diagnosed with commotio cordis. “Saving Hamlin’s life was possible thanks to a well-rehearsed plan and proper resources available in the form of athletic trainers and medical professionals. Preparation was vital,” said the NFL in a 2023 interview with ESPN. Henrico Parks and Recreation has established AEDs in most community centers and parks

and there has been an increase recently in businesses. “I would like to see AEDs in every business, park, and building,” said Ms. Lovgren. “People are becoming more aware of AED use, and this is what will save lives,” she said. Project ADAM is making communities all over the country heart safe and continues to inform people of the threats that SCA can impose on anyone’s life. Project ADAM has over 49 affiliates in 33 states and has saved over 200 lives due to the timely response of emergency care and usage of AEDs. To learn more about sudden cardiac arrest and AEDs, visit the Project ADAM website at projectadam.com.



Adam Lemel, the namesake of the project

The Virginia History Museum Celebrates America’s 250th Anniversary

Vrusha Pramod
Staff Writer

The Virginia Museum of History and Culture (VMHC) plans to commemorate the United States’ 250th anniversary with the grand opening of the Give Me Liberty exhibition. The display will stand from March 2025 to January 2026 and showcase civics and history education, special guest lecturers, and three new publications, bringing attention to different history museums across Virginia. Along with the exhibition, the museum plans to host similar events, such as a “We The People” display, which will explore the lives of the natives that built Virginia, as well as a parade in honor of George Washington. Our Commonwealth: People and Places of Virginia is the textbook publication for the museum’s new exhibition. It explains the state’s five geographical regions as well as the diversity that spans between them. The publication uses primary and secondary sources, including letters, diaries, and archival photographs from the founding of America. The museum also hosts educational activities about Virginia’s constitutional history. “We’ve got two major traveling shows, which are exhibitions that will be hosted at the museum, and then we’ll travel around Virginia,” said Caroline Legros, manager of the Civics Programs within the John Marshall Study Center of the VMHC. “We have an increased statewide investment in civics and history



PHOTO: VIRGINIA HISTORY AND CULTURE MUSEUM

“We The People” Exhibit Image

education,” she said. Their work includes hosting in-person field trips for ages K -12, lecture series, and even virtual programs for those who can’t make it to the museum. Specifically, the VMHC offers the Virginia & American Revolution Virtual Tour, which allows people to virtually walk around the Commonwealth and visit sites that played key roles in the American Revolution. This tour takes viewers to locations such as Colonial Williamsburg, St. John’s Church, and the Crossing of the Dun to help them understand certain historical stories. The museum also hosts a multi-seasonal podcast that offers an examination of the impacts of the revolution. The podcast highlights stories from the French and Indian War, the Sugar and Stamp Acts, and Patrick Henry’s infamous “Give Me Liberty” speech. They’ve also invited professionals to speak at the events. These podcasts can be streamed for free on services like Apple Podcasts or Spotify. To further the public’s engage-

ment, VMHC has partnered with Dominion Energy to promote the Commonwealth History Fund. The museum awards around \$400,000 in grants to applicants representing Virginia-based nonprofits focused on preservation, research, state/federally recognized American Indian tribes, and local government agencies. With these grants, the museum hopes to spark new projects centered around the nonprofits’ focuses. One recipient that previously received grants from this program is the Woodland Restoration Foundation, located in Henrico. This VMHC-funded project is, geographically, the closest to Freeman and is currently in the progress of restoring the Historical African American Cemetery, located in East Highland Park. Certain artifacts are not always on display but are brought out at specific times of the year for special events. These special exhibitions allow the artifacts to travel between museums around the area, increasing public access to all the different kinds of museums that can be found across Virginia. Other times, these same museums will work together to commemorate events with a larger significance to the country. According to Caroline, the organizations are hoping to reach their audiences by looking at their historical collections and archives and asking, “What would we want to pull out that tells the story in a really compelling way?” Caroline hopes that “[audiences will think about] the hours in the conservation lab that were spent making sure you could still read the words [found in historical documentations],” she said.



GRAPHIC: IZZY MINKLER

Waving Goodbye to Freeman Favorites

Maria McGuill
Staff Writer

On Dec. 22, 2024, Surrounding Counties, a coffee shop previously located right outside of Freeman High School, ended its journey as a part of the Freeman community and is soon moving on to another location. This closure was shortly followed by the chain Party City, another institution frequented by Freeman students, which decided to permanently close its doors on Feb. 24, 2024. Party City’s lifespan was not short-lived, as it was established nearly 40 years ago. In hopes of finding a solution to their financial challenges, they hired Barry Litwin as their new CEO four months before the closure. However, they quickly realized their company would not be able to withstand the rise of inflation and officially become bankrupt in January 2023. The store was competing with other large establishments, including Amazon and Walmart. They marked down sales of over 2,000 items to try and gain customer attraction and boost sales. When a helium shortage began during the Covid-19 pandemic, lowering balloon sales, the business was also put at a disadvantage, as balloons and party supplies were the main facets of their business. Freeman students are disappointed about the closing, as they recall Party City’s contribution to the different festive sporting event themes at Freeman over the years. “They have so much stuff, so you can go all out for the games,” said senior Abigail Hoffheimer. Alternatively, Abigail believes that there will be other options that will fill the void of Party City’s closure. “A good amount of people will definitely buy stuff from Amazon, Spirit Halloween, or something just from CVS,” said Abigail. On the other end of the Freeman community are the Freeman staples, such as the go-to coffee shops like Surrounding Counties. Surrounding Counties was an attempt to create a shop that would bring a city-style feel to a suburban area,” said Zach Archibald, Surrounding Counties owner, in a

Richmond Magazine article. The idea of the company sparked during Halloween of 2020 and kicked off about two months after that. Surrounding Counties opened during the pandemic, which caused the shop to be a quick pick-up-and-go system. As things settled down after COVID-19, they added indoor seating. “Luckily, the world opened up around then, and we were able to have more of a traditional coffee house experience,” said Mr. Archibald in a Richmond BizSense article. The shop was connected to many Freeman students, and many “would come in before school and after,” said Quinn Archibald, Mr. Archibald’s son, Surrounding Counties’ employee, and a student at Freeman. Quinn worked at the establishment for about a year and a half. “It was really fun, just kind of working with friends and [meeting] everyone,” said Quinn. Surrounding Counties announced its closure in November 2024. The decision to close was due to the lack of necessary resources needed to keep the business running and the financial burden it was bringing to Mr. Archibald. “There was too much space for what we were trying to do there,” said Quinn. “We [the Surrounding Counties staff] would rather size down and have a better operation overall,” he said. To solve financial issues, Mr. Archibald decided to find familiar faces to help run the business. He teamed up with Jeff Rock, a frequent customer of the coffee shop and CEO of a software development company, along with Vance Dunn, who had experience from working at Chewy’s Bagels and Baltik’s Bagels, to carry out his plan. Mr. Archibald’s mother, the artist of the pottery sold in the shop, was brought into the picture as another helping hand. Although the news of the closing is disappointing, new plans are coming for the future. “People seem to be a little sad about the closing, but the new shop is five minutes down the road,” said Quinn. Therefore, Surrounding Counties plans on staying a Freeman relic and can continue to serve the “fans in the Freeman community,” said Quinn.

Best Water Bottles?



Olivia Tyson Award



DSF Track Team



BTS of DSF Theatre



Pope’s Health Condition



Improving School Parking: Why Assigned Spots At Freeman Make A Lot of Sense

Nina Henley
Staff Writer

At Freeman High School, every student eagerly waits for their junior year, when they finally earn the opportunity to drive themselves to school and claim a spot in the student parking lot. For a lot of us, it's a big deal and a huge jump to the next level of independence.

However, as much as the students at Freeman adore their parking lot, there is a lot of debate on whether or not there should be designated spots for each student. The debate centers around whether or not it would be beneficial for the students and if it will promote or demote fairness. Some argue that assigned spots would create an equal and predictable system for everyone, while others believe it might favor certain students over others

based on factors like sign-up timing or seniority. Personally, I think that having assigned spots would be a lot easier and better overall.

Every student who drives to school, including me, knows that one of the most bothersome things to do at 8:30 a.m. is to find a parking spot. Imagine waking up late one morning and rushing to school, only to face the seemingly impossible task of finding a parking spot and getting to school on time. You have to drive through the parking lot, looking row after row for a space, only to find that you have wasted five minutes on finding a spot. Now you are officially late to first period.

This is where the idea of having assigned parking spots comes into play. Having a permanent parking spot would make things easier in the sense that there would be no stress spent on worrying about where you can park. To decide how to assign spots, I would propose having a first-come, first-serve policy by grade. So while seniors would have a chance over the juniors, they would still have to follow the first-come, first-serve rule next year when they are seniors. This ensures fairness, where students are rewarded based on their grade level while avoiding conflicts about equality.

When leaving school, students tend to rush out of their classrooms and aim to get to the parking lot

before the terrible traffic that takes place every day after school. With assigned spots, kids will have a better routine by knowing where their car is and what exit they need to leave through. I think this added structure would reduce the chaos during the afternoon, allowing students to exit smoothly.

Another plus is that it would help prevent accidents. In this year alone, I have witnessed multiple small accidents in the Freeman parking lot. From accidental run-ins to student drivers simply being inexperienced, a more organized parking style would promote a safer environment with fewer of these mistakes. While this wouldn't eliminate the chance of accidents, it would shorten the time students spend driving around the lot trying to find a spot or adjust to the new place they parked that morning, as they would have a set routine of knowing where to park and getting in and out of that spot.

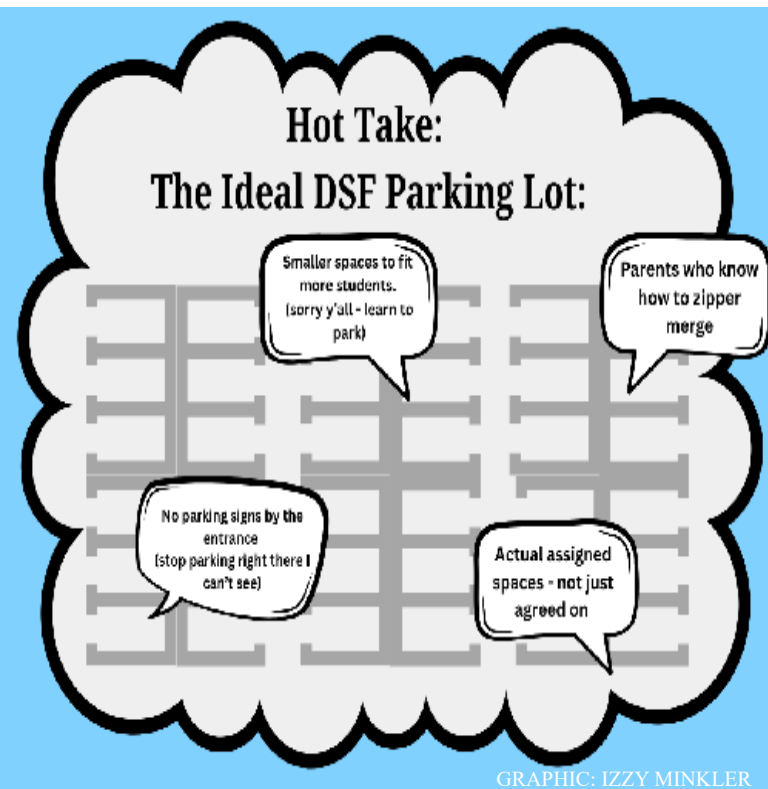
When I was a sophomore, I parked in the church parking lot and had to walk seven minutes to and from school every day. This year, however, many sophomores don't have parking passes but still park in the student lot. This takes up valuable space, leaving fewer spots for juniors and seniors who have been waiting for the opportunity to park in the lot. By having assigned spots, it would be easier to point out the students who don't

have a parking pass, thus ensuring that the ones who do have a parking pass are guaranteed a spot.

On a more artistic note, another positive of having assigned parking spots would be that seniors could have the opportunity to decorate their own spots. On social media apps like TikTok or Instagram, other schools showcase this type of tradition, and I think it would be a really fun idea for seniors. This could be a unique way for seniors to commemorate their final year and stay motivated while fighting off the effects of senioritis. Plus, it would also create a sense of school spirit, as students could showcase their creativity and pride in their school.

On the opposing hand, there are some concerns about how students react to this possible shift. For instance, students could be unhappy about where their parking spot is or have issues adjusting to the change. However, I believe that these concerns are minor compared to the broader benefits that would come from having assigned spots.

Overall, while there may be some initial resistance to the idea of having assigned parking spots, the long-term benefits would outweigh the negatives, making it a worthwhile change. From reducing stress to ensuring safety, assigned spots would greatly benefit the students at Freeman High School and promote the idea of seniority.



GRAPHIC: IZZY MINKLER

Is the College Dream A Scheme? The Big Deal With AP Classes

Izzy Minkler
Sports Editor

Many Freeman students will take an Advanced Placement (AP) class sometime in their high school career. Those of us who have know the looming dread of those two weeks in May and the mind-numbing experience of sitting in the big gym as the test packets are passed out, then picked up, then passed out again. I mean, there has got to be a better way to do it. The only scrap of joy to be found in the whole process is the stickers that seal your answer packets, and even then, the second one is always just slightly crooked no matter what you do. All in all, I feel confident in saying that no

one would consider this a 'fun' experience. So, why do we do it? Why would we subject ourselves to hours-long tests that do not affect our Grade Point Average? It all comes down to a boost in the college admissions race.

With college admission rates at rock bottom, oftentimes, these scores are the difference between acceptance and rejection. AP classes began as a way for students to save money before attending college. However, we've recently begun to see a trend of colleges requiring a perfect five or (almost perfect) four for the class to replace a college credit. Pay \$100 now, do well, and save \$1,500 down the line. Except, if you're saving money, colleges are losing money. So, colleges are mostly



PHOTO: COLLEGE BOARD

CollegeBoard Logo

split between two solutions: Solution A, requires perfect or near perfect scores — which, for many courses, is easier said than done — or Solution B, accept no AP credits at all. So, why in the world are we spending the money on a not guaranteed college credit?

So, how did it get this bad, and why are college admissions so cutthroat? It certainly wasn't always this bad. It used to be that if I got good grades and maybe played a sport or joined a few clubs, I could get into college, easy peasy. Now, I'm expected to cure cancer, get straight As, and if I play a sport, I better be just about an olympian. It's ridiculous!

Mr. Larkins, the History Department Chair at Freeman, teaches both AP and Dual Enrollment (DE) classes (and also attended college in the 19th century). Unlike today's world, Mr. Larkins was enrolled during a time when college didn't quite cost his weight in gold. "My college was much more affordable," said Mr. Larkins. "My parents were able to pay for most of it, and my federal loans that I took out for graduate school for two years, I was able to pay back," he said. So, not only do we have to deal with the low-

est acceptance rates ever, but we also have the highest student debt ever. Tuition freezes do exist, but with mounting student loans, the little differences in costs are not enough to cover the cost of living.

AP classes cost around \$100 to take the exam, with some outlying classes like AP Seminar or AP Research costing nearly \$150. This fee doesn't include the late fees for ordering an exam, or the fee for an unused exam, which is an extra \$40. CollegeBoard does offer fee waivers, however a large portion of students that don't meet the criteria to receive the waiver would still need one for the exam to be feasible. Not to mention the countless prep courses, help books, and college tutors that all add more to the cost and make the exam seem not so worth it for a not guaranteed college credit.

CollegeBoard has instituted itself as an integral part of the process of getting to higher education through the use of AP classes and the SAT/PSAT. The PSAT provides scholarships to students who score high enough, and the SAT provides scholarships as well as admissions offers. The SATs have essentially become the gatekeeper to higher education and the key to

CollegeBoard's continued dominance in college admissions. Of course, there is the ACT as well, but it's a less popular option. According to CollegeBoard, last year about 1.4 million students took the ACT, while nearly 2 million took the SAT. Now, yes, post-COVID colleges have been lenient on testing and often opt for test-optional policies. However, as current and rising seniors know, required testing is slowly creeping back.

So, you see all the cons of APs. Is there another option? The answer is yes! There's always the option to just not enroll in AP classes since no one is forced to take them. Another option is DE classes, which are courses taught through local community colleges. At Freeman, the credits are awarded through J. Sargent Reynolds Community College. The credits that are earned through passing the DE classes are automatically accepted in Virginia state institutions. "That's one of the things I like about teaching history now and the DE offers," said Mr. Larkins. "In DE ... the students are guaranteed college credit to a Virginia institution if they receive a C or better," he said.

The current landscape of college admissions has created a high-stakes environment where students face mounting pressure to not just do well but excel academically, financially, and with extra-curriculars just to remain competitive. The cost of AP exams, prep courses, and the uncertain return on college credits only adds to the stress. While institutions like CollegeBoard have positioned themselves as gatekeepers, the rise of dual-enrollment programs offers an alternative path that provides guaranteed credits and potentially lower costs. The system needs to be reevaluated with a focus on creating more equitable and less strenuous options for students. It's time to rethink the idea that success in higher education should come at the expense of a student's well-being or financial stability.

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PHOTO: THE NEW YORK TIMES

Students working in a classroom

Tylerson Tweardy
Staff Writer

Owalas are very easy to take a quick sip from, which is why I don't use any water bottle besides my own. With a simple button click and spout that elevates to your mouth, they are vastly con-

Another major thing I love about the Owala water bottle is the customizable colors. Typically, the water bottle comes in very vibrant colors, with a few laid-back tones as well, featuring names like “Shy Marshmallow,” “Down to

BPA is an industrial toxin formed in the 1950s and found in numerous plastics, especially many plastic water bottles, due to its leak resistance and durability. However, health concerns have simultaneously risen with its popularity. "Additional research suggests a possible link between BPA and increased blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease," said Mayo Clinic, highlighting the numerous consequences that drinking out of many brands' regular plastic water bottles may have. This has become a significant part of their

In regards to preventing health hazards for its drinkers, it's not something that Nalgene and Stanley have in common. Stanley Cups, known as the popular sophisticated "TikTok Cup," have achieved popularity from their designs as well as their handle and convenience. This may sound appealing, but the penetrability of the cup, as well as the lead poisoning within the cups, does not. Stanleys are known to leak very easily when knocked over, which is why Stanley users typically have to buy a straw cap. I strongly dislike having to buy accessories to better what I already bought, especially when it's sold by the company because they know it's an issue and are just profiting off of it. Stanley Cups have also had reports of lead poisoning in all of their units; each cup indeed has a certain amount of

Although Stanley Cups indicate sophistication and wealth, it's not worth it to risk your health over the ability to flaunt those traits that the tumbler embodies. The true value lies in your health, and having a Nalgene or Owala may just be the smarter choice with the precautions they took when it comes to durability and safety. At the end of the day, it's not about what brand you carry but more about how much you prioritize your well-being and if you will risk it for a new trend.

For couples, Valentine's Day is a chance to rekindle your romance and carve out time for one another amid their busy lives. For those who may not be engaged in romance, it is an excuse to show love and appreciation to your friends and family. You can do so by writing letters, giving small gifts, or even giving a long hug if that's not something you do often. Those who want to take this day to show themselves some self-love



Ultimately, Valentine's Day can only be what you make of it. If you see it as an expensive ploy designed to manipulate people into spending money, then that is exactly what it will be. However, if you embrace it as a day to spread love and kindness, then it becomes something more special.

Valentine's Day as a whole isn't about the chocolate or the roses; it's about the connection you form with someone. Whether you choose to support or ignore the holiday, what truly matters is showing love for yourself and others on that day and every day of the year.

Water Bottles

I could probably drop this off a cliff, run it over with my car and it would still be fine. I like the colors too.



**I appreciate the functionality
however I cannot stand how it
makes my water taste like
straight plastic.**

Freeman Celebrates Black History Month

Kristen Carpenter
Online Editor-in-Chief
Opinions Editor

Black History Month, celebrated each February, is a time for schools across the country to reflect on and honor the history, culture, and contributions of Black Americans. At Freeman, the celebration of Black History Month provides activities and events that not only serve to educate students about key historical figures and moments but also provide a platform for students to connect through mutual experiences and culture. This year, Freeman organized a variety of events to highlight Black history, each designed to educate and engage the student body in different ways. One of the key events is the Black History Month kickoff, “which this year [happened] in video format during Freeman focus,” said sophomore Nahyla Barakat, a member of the Black Student Union (BSU) at Freeman. BSU, which is dedicated to promoting awareness of Black culture, created a variety of videos aimed at educating students about African American culture. In addition to Freeman Focus videos, BSU “also [had] morning announcements where they [shared] fun facts about Black

history,” said Nahyla. These student-led activities pose a way to inform Freeman students about important aspects of Black history in a way that a standard textbook doesn’t. “Given our school’s history with race and culture, it’s important to highlight not just the national contributions of African Americans, but also those in our local community,” said Nahyla. “There’s so much history that goes underappreciated, and Black History Month is a time to acknowledge that,” she said. Another way in which Freeman’s BSU is celebrating Black History Month is through collaboration with the Asian Student Alliance (ASA). “ASA is collaborating with BSU to explore the intersection of Black and Asian American cultures,” said senior Lainey Peterson. “They’re creating posters, videos, and other materials that help educate students about the shared cultural experiences, especially when it comes to embracing both Black and Asian American identities,” she said. On Feb. 26, there was also a Black History Month Poetry Slam. This event, hosted by the Henrico County Public Schools Office of Equity, Diversity, and Opportunity, took place in the Highland Springs Area. It was free to attend or participate in, and any-

one was welcome to register. The theme was “Where do we go from here?” in an attempt to foster an atmosphere focused on ideas for social justice and improvement. “Sometimes, when I speak up in class or in certain spaces, I get weird looks,” said Nahyla. “It can feel like if I were a different race, I wouldn’t get those same looks,” she said. “I think it’s really important to make sure that all students, no matter their race, are treated equally and respected as human beings. We still have a lot of work to do in that area,” said Nahyla. With the recent cancellation of “identity months” by the Department of Defense, observations including Black History Month have been revoked national recognition. “This kind of rollback is demoralizing to communities who finally had a seat at the table [and] were finally acknowledged for their contributions,” said Andrea O’Neal, a former White House official who supported federal policies and observances behind Black History Month under Former President Joe Biden. In the Freeman community, Black History Month has played a critical role in representing African American culture. “Black History Month is so important because of the countless contributions Black Americans have made, socially,

Cultural Heritage Series
BLACK HISTORY MONTH

POETRY SLAM 2025


Theme: “Where Do We Go From Here?”

HOSTED BY HCPS OFFICE OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY & OPPORTUNITY

HENRICO THEATRE
305 E. NINE MILE RD,
HIGHLAND SPRINGS, VA 23705
FEBRUARY 26, 2025
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

FREE EVENT!
PRIZES FOR SLAM WINNERS!

To compete in the poetry slam competition, [register here!](#)
DEADLINE: MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2025


PHOTO: FREEMAN HIGH SCHOOL INSTAGRAM

Poetry Slam poster

politically, and economically,” said Lainey. “There’s so much influence from Black culture, but often we don’t learn enough about it in school. It’s essential that we push for more education about Black history and the movements Black Americans have made,” she said. The celebration of Black History Month at Freeman is dedicated to ensuring that Freeman is

truly inclusive and that all students are treated equally, regardless of their background. “It’s about being open-minded,” said Lainey. “When we talk about different perspectives or life experiences, it’s important to recognize that everyone has a different journey,” she said. “You can’t just think from your own viewpoint — everyone has a story that’s worth hearing.”

Making a Difference: Olivia Tyson’s Journey with Connor’s Heroes

Saanvi Gourishetty
Staff Writer

Senior Olivia Tyson, a volunteer and advocate for families affected by pediatric cancer, was recently awarded the Young Richmond History Makers Val-

entine Award by The Valentine Museum. This award recognizes young individuals who are making a meaningful impact in their communities. For Olivia Tyson, this recognition is more than just an award, it is a validation of the work she has put into helping others. “This served as a reminder to me that the time I put in is making a positive difference,” said Olivia. “I am spending my time there the right way, and I will continue to do so for as long as I can,” she said. Olivia’s journey in volunteering began at a young age when her younger brother, Callen, was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. He underwent treatment for three and a half years, during which Connor’s Heroes, a nonprofit supporting families facing childhood cancer, became an essential source of support. “Put simply, we would not have gotten through it without them,” said Olivia. Inspired by the help her family received, Olivia became involved with Connor’s Heroes, volunteering at monthly art therapy sessions, participating in fundraising events, and helping to foster a sense of community for families navigating pediatric cancer. She emphasized the importance of these sessions, noting that “there are several smaller arts and crafts that the kids can work on and bring home with them, which always allows for a lot of creativity and freedom.” Connor’s Heroes also collaborates with local artists who design larger projects, which the children work on together before the art is



PHOTO: CONNOR’S HEROES

Olivia volunteering at Connor’s Heroes

firsthand the wide-ranging impact of Connor’s Heroes. “Connor’s Heroes provides everything from financial support to family activities and really just creates an environment of support and a sense of community in a time that can feel really isolating,” said Olivia. “After they helped our family for three and a half long years, I immediately knew I wanted to give back,” she said. Among her volunteer experiences, one moment particularly stood out to Olivia. She recalled a pizza-making event at Mellow Mushroom where two families left a lasting impression in her mind: one celebrating a child who had just completed treatment and another grieving the recent loss of a loved one. “Seeing both of those families there really spoke to the impact that Connor’s Heroes has on the families it works with — that in both of those situations, they would still choose to be there,” said Olivia. She described how the event provided a moment of joy for both families, regardless of their circumstances. “It really speaks to the level of community that is achieved by Connor’s Heroes, and that is a sight that has really stuck with me,” she said. For young people looking to make a difference in their communities, Olivia hopes to convey that it is always important to take that first step. “Doing anything is so much better than doing nothing, so make a difference in any way that you can,” she said. “It doesn’t have to be big — any action, no matter how small, can change lives.”

A Deep Dive into the Freeman Dive Team

Ava Harrison
Staff Writer

Since the Freeman dive team was created, multiple members have qualified for states between the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 seasons. This year, Hank Beach, Henry Britt, Blaine Nelson, Eli Brookshire, Tyler Rossi, Grace Harbach, Eva Brown, Scotty Gregory, and Beth Stott all qualified for states. Last year, the dive team also had a “lot of divers qualify for states,” said junior Tyler Rossi, and “because of that, we were able to get more points for the swim team, which led us to win,” he said. The women and men’s swim and dive team won the Regional and State Class 5C Championship this year for the second time in a row. There are five different categories for diving: fronts, backs, inwards, reverses, and twisting. Fronts and backs are usually just frontflips or backflips; an inward dive is where the diver stands at the end of the board and flips forward; a reverse is where they backflip while walking off the front of the board; and a twist is a twist off the diving board. Every meet has about five judges to score the divers. Once each judge gives their score, the highest and lowest scores get cut, and the other three are kept. Senior Grace Harbach is a two-year member of the dive team and one of the state qualifiers. “My favorite part of the dive team is the community we have,” said Grace. “We’ve all become very close [and] I think it’s nice because we all trust each other and are able to talk freely,” she said. Grace decided to join the dive team because “I tore my ACL at the end of freshman year, so [I] was on the fence about doing gymnastics because of the

high impact,” she said. Her friends then suggested she should join the dive team. “I did dive when I was a kid [and] I thought it was something to pick up because I did gymnastics my whole life so [the dive team] was an extension of that with less impact,” said Grace. When she joined the dive team, “everyone was super welcoming and helpful,” she said. “We were guinea pigs last year,” said Grace. “[However], we have [a] good coaching staff [and my] teammates are great, so it’s been a really positive experience overall,” she said. Her favorite dive is a one-and-a-half: “[They are] easier than some of the other dives [and] don’t scare me quite as much,” said Grace. Grace believes that anyone who wants to join the dive team should “just do it.” “You don’t have to have much experience, as long as you’re willing to try new things and give it a shot,” she said. Tyler Rossi also qualified for states. He believes that starting and being on the dive team has been a positive experience: “I really like being able to do my sport with people that also like it, and the coaches are all really nice,” he said. “I’m just glad it’s happening and we’re able to have a dive team,” said Tyler. Freeman’s dive team was introduced last school year by Tyler, who wanted to represent the school while continuing to do a sport he previously participated in. Tyler and his mom started talking to Dr. Marshall about starting the team the summer before his sophomore year and “got it in motion that fall,” he said. Finally, “the swim team accepted us onto them,” said Tyler. Tyler does not think it is difficult to start diving because the team teaches you the basic material and skills. “You might not qualify for states the first year

[but] you [will] definitely get there next year,” he said. “You can walk on with no experience.” Mr. Gromling, the material processing teacher, is the coach for both the boys’ and girls’ swim and dive teams and won 2023-2024 Virginia Coach of The Year for boys’ swimming and diving. He believes all athletes must have coachability to be successful. “In diving, you have that fear of flipping through the air and smacking the water pretty hard,” said Mr. Gromling. “[We want someone who is willing to] get back up and try it again, someone who’s really eager to learn the sport,” he said. “If someone is coachable and willing and wants to do it, then we can make someone dive.” Since the dive team has started, they have had success qualifying for and placing in states. “Having been able to send four divers, [the] max allowed amount of athletes to states and regionals, in the second year, and last year having three boys [placing] in the top eight and the girls placing throughout the top 16 at states is a pretty cool achievement,” he said. Mr. Gromling “love[s] the memories” that come with coaching, he said. “At the end of the day, [Freeman’s swim and dive team is] a big family,” he said. Mr. Gromling also enjoys “watching [everyone] swim their best times, coaching them, and getting to know every kid.” Swimming and diving are winter sports, with their seasons starting in early November and ending in late February. The dive team practices every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and sometimes Fridays and Saturdays. They go to St. Catherine’s pool for water practice once or twice a week and to an indoor dryland gym in Richmond for other practices. “[The indoor gym] has diving boards into foam pits, trampolines, [and a] floor [for practice],” said Tyler. Land practice is about an hour and a half, while water practice is often two hours. Additionally, the dive and swim teams practice separately, but they participate in the St. Catherine’s School vs. Douglas S. Freeman meet together once a season. According to Grace, practice is “focused on perfecting form, especially dry land practice.” “They want us to get the basics down before [moving on] to more complicated stuff,” she said. “Water practice is just throwing dives and hoping for the best.” Though the dive team is only about two years old, it has grown and made multiple achievements since its first season at Freeman. In the future, the dive team plans to continue to expand the team and get as many people to participate as possible.



GRAPHIC: IZZY MINKLER



A Walk Into The Future

Would I redo high school?

Libby Mercer
Editor-In-Chief

As an eager Freshman, I entered high school at Trinity Episcopal school, a high school that was just a walk in the woods from my middle school St. Micheals. I was convinced Trinity was the perfect place for me since it was practically St. Michaels 2.0, down to the same people who endured my middle school Harry Potter phase, and the same basic gist of an “Episcopalian identity” that guided the school’s core values . But as my Freshman year unfolded, a pit in my stomach greeted

me every morning that I had to wake up for a Chapel I didn’t really care about or go to hour and half long geometry class with a teacher that cared more about robots than teaching me the pythagorean theorem. I had a gut feeling that Trinity just wasn’t the place for me, so I ultimately left at the end of my freshman year.

When it comes down to whether I would redo high school, I would tell you I already have by switching from Trinity to Freeman. My high school “re-do” at Freeman was different from the typical wishes of righting every wrong answer

on the many physics tests I failed freshman year, or crying less tears; it came with much more growth and discomfort. To be brutally honest, I cried buckets every morning I had to come to school sophomore year, I failed every AP Macroeconomics test I took junior year, and as a senior I still get confused when someone asks me to find room 158, but I wouldn’t ever try to erase the experiences Freeman gave me. Every uncomfortable and sometimes unbearable moment led me to where I am, and I couldn’t be prouder of the person those hardships helped shape me into.

While I’ve tried the re-do, I would encourage others to stick out every hard moment high school throws at them, instead of trying to make it perfect. The not-so perfect moments are the ones that will make you resilient and ready for change.



!! My entire highschool !! experience in one sentence...

Scotty Gregory
Online Editor- In- Chief
Opinions Editor

“If freshman year me saw the person I am today, she would have a heart attack”. Going into freshman year post COVID-19, I was a very different person. After spending almost two years alone at home, I became a very introverted person. I isolated myself from all my friends, family, and any sense of normalcy. I sat in my room all day and talked to a select few people -- which I assume most people can relate too -- and while that was great

at the time, it took an enormous toll on my mental health. Entering into freshman year not in the best mental state was difficult to say the least. To be completely transparent, my freshman year was a disaster – with my anxiety at an all time high and very questionable fashion choices

Sophomore year started to make up for it, not fully, but it was a start. I found a great group of friends and started doing things for myself rather than for other people. I finally started to see the light at the end of the tunnel after COVID. I started feeling like myself again, believ-

ing in myself, and putting my time and effort into making myself a better person and a better student. After having the worst social anxiety of my life during freshman year, I started putting myself back out there and it was such a rewarding feeling.

Both junior and senior year have been some of the most fun and stressful times of my life, but I wouldn’t change it for the world. These past two years have led me to some of the best friends I could ever ask for, opportunities I never thought possible, as well as stress that I never thought possible (when se-

niors tell you to get your college applications done over the summer, you really should listen to them).

Along the way, I learned how to handle anything that is thrown my way as well as how to make the most of the situation. Now, nearing the end of my senior year, I seriously cannot believe that my high school career is shortly coming to an end. It has flown by in the blink of an eye, and while some of the memories from my four years at Freeman have been quite challenging, they have truly shaped me into the person that I am today.

My Advice to Freshmen

Connor Almstead
News Editor

The biggest piece of advice I would give to freshmen is to get involved. I know you all have heard it at least a million times, but I cannot stress enough how big of a difference it makes in your high school experience. When you’re in your classes, especially your freshman year, you slowly circle in on the people you’ll be with for the rest of the year, whether you consciously choose to do this or not. Over time, this limits the amount of people you get to meet, as you focus on just getting by as the school year progresses. The best way to

fix this issue, in my opinion, is finding clubs that interest you. These social events allow you to both pursue your interest at school, making it more of a place you want to be rather than a place you have to be, as well as a place where you can expand the people you know and gain like-minded friends. Joining clubs allows you to have great experiences that you couldn’t find in the classroom. For example, I joined the science club during my sophomore year, and I was able to gain a new perspective of the subject, doing fun experiments instead of piles of notes. Getting involved is a very general phrase, and can mean many things, such as doing a sport or completing community service.

It’s all about what it means to you, and how you can find a balance between your academic life as a student and your extracurricular life as a person.

I was probably like you during my own freshman year, not in many clubs or much community service around the school. The only

thing I participated in was the cross country team. However, I used the people I knew on the team to make connections with other people in other clubs, and find opportunities at Freeman that I wouldn’t have known without them. I was able to find my niche, and if I was able to do it, I know you can too.



PHOTO: HANNAH ECKHEART



Surf's Up! 'Atlantic Park Surf' in Virginia Beach

Maryam Vohra
Staff Writer

Atlantic Park Surf is an upcoming surf project set to open in Virginia Beach during the early summer of 2025. This \$350 million project is being sponsored by Wavegarden, a wave technology enterprise, and Virginia Beach native Pharrell Williams. Williams is a Grammy-winning songwriter



PHOTO: ATLANTIC PARK

Artist's rendition of Atlantic Park Surf

and producer, and now, a wave pool developer “excited to move [his] city forward,” said Williams in a tweet. Atlantic Park Surf will feature the nation’s first 2.6-acre surf lagoon, along with a mixed-use entertainment complex, a live entertainment venue, modern offices, residences, and shopping and dining options.

Virginia currently only has two water parks, which include surf attractions, Surfer’s Bay in Williamsburg and FlowRider at Massanutten. Atlantic Park Surf will become the only surf park in Virginia and the only one in the United States to use a Wavegarden Cove, an electromechanical system that generates up to 1000 wave-like swells per hour.

“In this area, north of Virginia, there is not a ton of great surfing so I] think the park will attract lots of new tourists to Virginia,” said junior Jackson Mayfield, who enjoys surfing at Virginia Beach in the summer. “[It] will definitely become a hot spot for East Coast surfers,” he said.

Wavegarden has built coves in Europe, Australia, Brazil, and Asia through the use of artificial wave technology to build the wave pools. Natural waves and artificial waves are similar but not the same. Vann Wyatt, a junior who spends his summers in Nags Head surfing, finds that artificial waves “mostly have the same feel [as natural waves], except lack the unpredictability of natural waves,” he said.

Similarly, Jackson feels that artificial waves do not require the same reaction as natural waves: “Since [they] are artificial waves, [you] don’t really have to react the same way as real waves,” said Jackson. “[You] won’t have to use the same techniques, such as duck diving, to go under waves and around them,” he said.

Williams is expected to bring more attention to Virginia Beach’s surf scene, especially because of

his successful music career. “I think the surf park will attract a lot of attention because of [Pharrell’s] big following in Virginia Beach, along with his music and acting platform,” said Vann.

Although artificial waves can provide a similar experience to natural waves, some surfers feel they take away from the traditional surfing experience. Surfers tend to question what happens “if they drown or get swallowed by a rip tide,” said Jackson. “[I] think

the surf technology takes out that sense of danger, but part of the fun is when [you] get one really good wave, and that feeling of a rush,” he said. Jackson also worries about only surfing on artificial waves: “Surfing is all about picking the right wave, and learning how to go with the waves, and understanding how the water works around [you],” he said. “That is kind of lost in artificial, stationary waves.”

Atlantic Park Surf will be designed for all surf levels, beginner to advanced, and encourage new people to give surfing a try. Every summer, Virginia Beach receives around 13 to 14 million tourists. “Since Virginia Beach is a huge tourist destination, people will say ‘Yo, let’s try surfing,’” said Vann.

In addition to the Wavegarden surf lagoon, Atlantic Park Surf will feature The Dome, a new entertainment venue with the capacity to hold 5,000 guests. In 1958, the Shepard Convention Center was built and came to be known as The Dome, holding concerts till The Dome was demolished in 1994, and the land had remained empty since. However, the plan is to build a new dome in its place, mixing the indoor auditorium experience with the outdoor amphitheater experience. The Dome is currently in its final phases of construction and is set to open in the spring of 2025 before the surf park, with concert dates already set for May.

One of the challenges of surfing at Virginia Beach is the inconsistency and choppiness of the waves. “A surf park would be nice for beginners, but also for people working up to intermediate and advanced,” said Jackson. “[You’ll] be able to surf waves [you] aren’t able to surf at Virginia Beach,” he said.

The Atlantic Park Surf complex hopes to expand Virginia Beach’s attractions and be entertaining for tourists and inhabitants of all ages. Surf’s up!

Iron Blossom Returns to RVA

Matthew Wozniak
News Editor

Following up on the success of the previous two years’ iterations, the Iron Blossom music festival is returning to Richmond again in September 2025. The festival, which will take place Sept. 20 and 21 this fall, will feature acts such as The Lumineers, Vampire Weekend, and Khruangbin.

Along with its headliners, the festival will also feature Richmond artists, helping them gain exposure among the nationally recognized acts. “Local acts like Palmyra and Holy Roller are getting a ton of great press, so it’ll be exciting to see them on a huge Richmond stage [this year],” said Cara Dickens, president of Rocket Pop Media, the Richmond company that manages Iron Blossom’s marketing.



PHOTO: CYANE DE BORDANAVE

View of the main stage

Iron Blossom makes it clear that they care a lot about having a lot of local acts. For this year’s festival, they have “again built a stellar lineup of both national and regional acts over two days, and have increased our pool of local talent,” said Ms. Dickens.

In the spring of 2023, the first Iron Blossom event brought popular artists like Noah Kahan, Hozier, and Lord Huron to the Richmond area. The 2024 Iron Blossom was a successful event as well, bringing in acts like Mt. Joy, Caamp, and Turnpike Troubadours.

Iron Blossom is a festival that

focuses on folk and indie music. “It’s like mainly just folk music, whereas other music festivals, just since they’re bigger, have a wider variety,” said senior Cyane de Bordenave, who attended both the 2023 and 2024 festivals.

The smaller size of the festival comes with some other advantages too. “For how close it is and how convenient it is, it’s a good festival,” said Cyane. Taking place at Midtown Green near the Science Museum, “it’s easy to navigate,” she said. “It’s hard to get lost, it’s in an area that’s really accessible.”

The artists are a big part of Iron Blossom, but as a festival, it comes with a lot more. “They have a lot of food, a fair, and [in 2023] they had a Ferris wheel,” said Cyane.

The festival is also a place for local craftspeople to showcase their work and raise awareness for local painters. “The local vendors will have amazing food, drinks, and tons of local arts and crafts at the

exact thing that Iron Blossom focuses on. The fact that artists like Noah Kahan and Turnpike Troubadours were at this more prestigious event meant that they wouldn’t be prioritizing putting Iron Blossom on their schedule.

Thanks to fewer conflicts this year, the 2025 festival’s showing is a return to the caliber that was brought in during the first event. “The lineup is a lot better this year,” said Cyane.

The local artists get a lot out of performing at the same events as the national acts. “It’s definitely a great networking opportunity for local artists and national groups,” said Ms. Dickens. “We’ve seen song collabs between local/regional acts pop up six months after festivals and take pride that our festival may have helped these artists connect,” she said. The festival has resulted in collaboration between larger artists, too. For example, the Noah Kahan and Hozier collaboration on Northern Attitude was only made possible thanks to Iron Blossom.

Organizing a big event like this is a lot of work. “From securing a location and the permits to booking talent and gathering marketing ideas, it takes time,” said Ms. Dickens. “The team has been hard at work on 2025 since before 2024 even took place,” she said.

Since Iron Blossom is the first large music festival in the area, they “had to come up with solutions for every aspect from the food offerings, parking availability, the city’s capacity to host thousands of out-of-towners, and even where to place the main entrance,” said Ms. Dickens.

To run an event like this, you have to be able to react to unexpected things, too. In the first year, there was a heatwave, and the water stations they had weren’t enough to keep people hydrated. After giving out free water bottles, they have since upgraded the amenities and made sure that kind of thing doesn’t happen in the future. “We also learned a great deal from our fans last year, so improved fan amenities will make it an even more enjoyable experience for everyone,” said Ms. Dickens.

After the last two years, the festival organizers look forward to the future of the event. “We wanted this to become an annual event and really put Richmond’s music scene on the map,” said Ms. Dickens. “Last year far exceeded our expectations, and we simply want to continue attracting the best talent and putting on the best festival in the region this year and many years to come,” she said.

Nutrition and Wellness with Coach Charnes

Sarah Chilton
Editor-In-Chief

Have you ever wished that you knew more about nutrition, food, and the human body? Wanted to spend a class period learning how to make a new dish or dessert? Look no further than Freeman’s Nutrition and Wellness class in room 129, taught by Coach Matthew Charnes, who holds a Bachelor of Science in Health Fitness Specialist and a Master’s in Exercise Science from East Carolina University and Pennsylvania Western University, respectively. In his first official year teaching the course after substituting for nutrition and wellness all of last year, Coach Charnes teaches classes of all grades, and it has been “the highlight of my life so far,” he said.



PHOTO: SARAH CHILTON

Ingredients for a food lab in Charnes's kitchen

Nutrition and Wellness is a Career and Technical Education (CTE) course, where “we teach the fundamentals of nutrition, talk about wellness, taking care of ourselves, [and] get into the culinary part of the curriculum where we go into the food lab,” said Coach Charnes. “We cook foods for grades, we learn different strategies to increase the palate flavor for different food items, and we work through a really broad spectrum of information,” he said. However, the class isn’t just about food; it also includes workplace readiness preparations, such as learning how to navigate the dynamics of challenging bosses or customers.

The biggest misconception that people have about nutrition is what a person needs to eat, said Coach Charnes. “There’s all this negative pressure” on social media, but “you and your medical necessities are significantly different than everyone else,” he said. His class “provides you the information so you can make your own autonomous decisions about your health.”

Week to week in his class, students participate in food labs, mini labs, and content lectures. Food labs are test grades where students are “evaluated from the start, through the process of creating food, gathering ingredients, measuring the different ingredients, [and] producing the food,” said Coach Charnes. “Whether it’s a cake, cupcakes, cookies,

grilled cheese, spaghetti, or from scratch red sauce, [we evaluate] the final product, too,” he said.

If the food lab is internal, the students can eat the food they produce. However, sometimes, “Dr. Marshall, or some of the other departments, more or less commission me and my students to help them produce food items for whatever event they’re having,” said Coach Charnes. In November, for example, Coach Charnes’ classes produced dessert for all the faculty and staff. “I think we made nine different recipes, whether it’s cookies, fudge, or some other really neat desserts, and we made 1200 different units for the staff over the course of about a week,” said Coach Charnes.

Out of all the food labs they’ve done, “[that] was the most fun for me because we made more than one kind of cookie, and I knew that we were making them for our great teachers,” said freshman James Snow. “[The] labs are great,” said James. “I like working with people, and I like making food [and] having it when we’re done,” he said.

Other students “really enjoy [the food labs] because everybody gets to be in the kitchen [and] you get to choose your own groups,” said junior Kate Post. “It keeps all of us engaged and actually wanting to participate,” she said.

The mini-labs, on the other hand, are less formal and more about “bringing that practical side

where everyone’s trying to live off their money, balling on a budget,” said Coach Charnes. “How can you class up [noodles] into more of a bougie dinner that’s delectable? So, can you add carrots? Can you add celery?” he said.

The class also spends some time learning about the “scholarly, academic information,” said Coach Charnes, such as taking notes on the science behind nutrition. Additionally, they complete a food truck project at the end of the year that takes around two and a half months. However, “there are definitely many days where it doesn’t feel like school,” he said.

“For the information that I’m trying to teach, we’re fortunate to be able to teach in a very tangible way,” said Coach Charnes. “It’s one thing to see a PowerPoint of a Santoku knife and what it looks like and what it does, or how to make a Julienne cut, but then when we bring out 400 bucks worth of Play Doh, and we have plastic knives, and you’re able to see the cuts and make the cuts, it does seem to click a little bit better,” he said.

“I’m a big proponent for learning by doing,” said LaRhonda Mason, an educational specialist for Family and Consumer Sciences in Henrico County. “Whether it’s painting or sculpting or cooking or sewing or taking care of the baby simulator ... [doing it is] way different than just writing some kind of words about [it],” she said.

Coach Charnes took this class in high school at Godwin, and “it’s one of two classes that I use every single day,” he said. It helped “in college, helped me when I got out of here, [and] helped me in the military,” said



PHOTO: KATELYN MORROW

Charnes's students pose with their food lab

Coach Charnes. “It’s very practical and applies very well to the real world outside of school,” he said.

“Oftentimes, we are on an academic path where we’re looking [at] a pathway of science and math and English and everything, but I do think that these life skills are equally important,” said Sarah Hollenbeck, a teacher of Family and Consumer Sciences. Ms. Hollenbeck “would love to see every student take at least one family and consumer science elective, because I do think that it’s knowledge that will help people achieve success,” she said.

“The life that [Charnes] is, his energy, his just overall enthusiasm for the subject matter [shows],” said Mrs. Mason. “It’s been his passion, [so] being able to come and have [his] first teaching assignment, teaching nutrition, that’s been [his] joy, [his] love for pretty much all of [his] life, [he now gets] to pass that passion and that love for the subject matter on to students,” she said.

Celebrating Women's Sports Month

Nina Henley
Staff Writer

February is recognized as National Women's and Girls Sports Month, a designation made in 1987 by the National Women's Sports Foundation to honor the achievements of female athletes and advocate for equality in sports. This month also celebrates the progress made since the passage of Title IX in June 1972, a law that officially prohibited discrimination based on sex in federally funded education projects. "[The month is] a big deal because there's a lot of strong women athletes out there that work really hard and do their best to achieve their goals," said junior Addie Morton, Freeman's varsity girls' basketball captain.

At Freeman, various female student-athletes recognize the significance of this month. "It's nice to be recognized and appreciated because what we do is just as hard as what the guys are doing, and it's great to get a month of recognition," said junior Karina Blanco, a member of the Freeman swim and dive team.

Despite the month of recognition, many female athletes face the challenges of society's misconceptions and lower expectations. "People think women's sports are easier [than men's], but that's just not true," said junior Ryleigh Perks, a member of the varsity girls' softball team and the varsity girls' basketball team. "We put in just as much work as any male athlete," she said.

Ryleigh's twin sister, Kayleigh Perks, who also plays softball and basketball, sees the differences between male and female athletics. "Girls' sports don't get as much funding or recognition, which makes it harder to get scholarships for college and access to better facilities," said Kayleigh. "When people underestimate you, it's so rewarding

to prove them wrong and show them how good you are," she said.

Other than the physical hardships, many female athletes also have to face mental setbacks. "[Female athletes tend to] compare themselves to both male and other female athletes because of the limited opportunities women have access to," said Karina. "We can get down on ourselves a lot when you're not as fast or can't throw as hard as the next person," she said. These mental setbacks can be difficult to overcome for rising female athletes, but they also inspire many athletes to work even harder in their respective sports. "You have to outwork everyone around you and show that you're more than just a female athlete in sports," said Karina.

Comments made by classmates or fellow peers also reinforce the idea that girls are inferior to boys, especially in sports. "Growing up, there were situations where boys would be like, 'Oh, it's a girl, she can't do it as well.' But I think nowadays, I'm more used to it," said Addie. "I've learned to tune those comments out or use them as motivation. I can still be a good athlete and represent something really important to me," she said.

In helping women in sports succeed, leadership is a crucial factor that impacts growing athletes. Jane, a sophomore track captain, feels that positive coaching has been key in ensuring she is taken seriously as an athlete. "I feel like I haven't been taken lightly in track because of our great coaches, but I know it happens in other sports depending on leadership," she said. Jane credits the track coaches who have helped her grow and succeed in track. "My coaches know how to motivate me in a stern way but also encourage me for the effort I'm putting in," she said. "They help me get better while respecting me."

This month is also an opportunity to celebrate the milestones female athletes at Freeman have

achieved in their respective sports. Some are continuing their careers at the collegiate level, while others are reflecting on their high school accomplishments. For example, Ryleigh considers her biggest accomplishment to be "getting recruited by Virginia Tech [to play D1 softball]," she said.

For Kayleigh, her biggest accomplishment happened a lot earlier in her career: "[My biggest accomplishment was] making the USA All-American softball team when I was 12 years old," she said.

Additionally, Kayleigh is also looking into continuing her sport in college. She was inspired by her dad growing up. "My dad has inspired me and my sister just from throwing us into softball when we were three years old, and then allowing us to continue playing the sport to our full potential," Kayleigh said.

Other athletes from Freeman are proud of being successful on a national scale, as Karina's biggest achievement is "being a national qualifier [for swimming]." She plans to swim in college as well.

A role model is a person looked to by others as an example to be imitated. These individuals can range from family, famous people, and peers. Karina, for instance, grew up by the beach and was put into swimming lessons when she was just 8 months old by her grandmother. "[My grandma] really inspired my love for my sport," she said. As Karina got older, she enjoyed looking up to athletes in the Olympics. "Athletes like Katie Ledecky have made swimming really exciting and inspiring for me," she said.

For some, their biggest accomplishments are set right at Freeman High School. For instance, Jane is "proud to be a track captain as a sophomore, and being Freeman's [unofficial] number one hurdler right now," she said.

Addie's biggest achievement is that she set the high school record for 43 points in one basketball game as well as her 1000 points over her high school career. Addie's biggest inspiration for her love for her sport is her family. "My dad was always really passionate about basketball, and me and my brother and my dad would always be playing outside together working on things," she said.

As women continue to work to the best of their abilities to succeed, there are many hopes for the future of female athletes. "I hope that in the future, women are properly recognized for how much they work in their sport and how much they're accomplishing," said Addie. "Women athletes are amazing, and they're working really hard," she said. To make this a reality, it is important to support women's sports on local and national levels. "Whenever you have the opportunity to support a woman athlete or a women's sports team, go out there and do it," said Addie.

Freeman's Track Team Sprints to Success!

Libby Mercer
Editor-in-Chief

From pole vault to long distance and sprint events, Freeman's track and field team is running their way to consecutive victories. The team of athletes constantly has individuals who qualify for States and Adidas' National competition, along with acquiring individual accomplishments like personal records or achieving All-State titles as a team.

Senior Sydney Miller has been on the team for all her four years at Freeman and has been a captain since her sophomore year. She participated in eight seasons of winter and spring track as a pole vaulter and a sprinter, along with participating in pole vaulting at Xtreme Heights, a gym and pole vault club. "For four years, I went to track every day after school, and then I left to go pole vault," said Sydney. "I almost think of [pole vault] as a different sport," she said.

Another of the few pole vault-



PHOTO: SYDNEY MILLER

Sydney Miller races in a meeters on Freeman's team, junior Vival Weatherford, is approaching his fifth season on the track team. Vival "started running as a joke," he said, but stuck with pole vault because "it's something that not everyone does and [there's] more opportunities [to improve with a] longer season [than regular track]," said Vival.

While track and field can seem like an individualized sport, "it is very much a team sport," said Sydney. "Although you are racing and competing individually, you are still competing your best for your team," she said. "The better you do individually, the better your team does as a whole."

Coach Hiort has coached the team for the past two years, and she focuses on long-distance events from the 800 to 3200 meter run (about half a mile to 2 miles). Each event in track has a different approach that the athlete needs to train for and "something specific that it focuses on," said Coach Hiort. "For example, distance running weighs heavily on quality workouts, including heart rate, intervals, repetitions, and threshold work," she said. No matter the event, "every aspect of track and field is structured to meet each student-athlete where they are," she said.

The team had many individual accomplishments this season, and Coach Hiort noted the best

times and accomplishments of many of the athletes she coaches. She noted Sydney Miller's 10ft 6in and freshman Whitner Lily's 14ft 6in records in pole vault. She also recanted the 1000-meter, junior Juliet Gardner's time of 3:11, senior Connor Almstead's time of 2:38.56, and senior state qualifier Aidan Cassidy's time of 2:36.5. She also highlighted senior Hannah Kate Harrison's time of 12:14.90 and senior Wiley Mulholland's time of 10:13.30 in the 3200.

Sydney and Vival have both qualified for the Adidas Nationals competition. Sydney placed ninth at last year's competition and has placed in the top 20 in each previous year she has attended. Vival has qualified but not attended this competition, but he wants to go before he goes to college.

Coach Cisneros, or Coach C, is a Freeman alum of the Track team and is in his second year coaching for the team. Coach C's coaching style is more "detail oriented" and holds his athletes to a "high accountability," he said. "I'm go-

ing to make sure that the respect I have for you supersedes [the fact that the athlete might be] a top performer or a great captain or any of that stuff," said Coach C. "I'm going to respect you enough to hold you more accountable than you might hold yourself," he said.

The future of Freeman's track team shines bright as new athletes join the team with attitudes that are ready to improve. "We have a lot of new athletes entering who are really showing up for the team and being committed," said Coach C. "They have a desire to improve and grow, and having that kind of inflow of new athletes will set the tone for future years and create an atmosphere of people who are willing to push each other up," he said.

In the two years Coach Hiort has been with the team, she has seen her "student-athletes working together to improve and demonstrate school pride when hosting home meets," she said. She also notices the team's bond as they "cheer on one another at practice, meets, and share a camp while waiting for their specific event."

Sydney's time on Freeman's Track and Field team has helped her "learn how to balance my work and my athletics and [manage] how to be a student athlete," she said. "I have been able to grow as a person through perseverance, motivation, and through my many experiences of failing and succeeding."

chanicsville finals tournament. "I wasn't quite sure what was going to happen, and I was wrestling a pretty good athlete who was destroying my peers all weekend," he said. "I went in there and won, which led to me getting a cool bracket," said Jackson. When taking home a win in wrestling, "it has more glory and excitement compared to other sports," he said.

Most athletes tend to reflect and look back on their performances to see how they could improve or how they've gotten better over the four years. "[After] the one match I lost, I worked over things that I was lacking last season," said Jackson. "I have seen major improvements," he said.

Jackson, like all athletes, goes through challenges, and he reflects on how it has made him better. Jackson's most challenging experi-

in a lower weight class, which resulted in better competition for him at the time. "I remember leaving a little early from school to ride a bike and make weight," said Jackson. "It was hard but so worth it in the end," he said. This year wasn't as much of a struggle cutting weight compared to previous years, but wrestling is a "constant effort to be conscious of the work you are putting in" to get the results you want, he said.

After his last two matches, baseball season quickly began. Even though he loves all sports, Jackson can't wait to be a part of the Freeman baseball team for his senior year. "After that, I will definitely focus on baseball and hopefully get the state championship ring," said Jackson. "Mainly [I want to] be a leader for the young guys so they can



PHOTO: JACKSON ROGISH

Rogish Wrestles His Way To One Hundred Wins

Katelyn Morrow
Centerspread Editor

Senior Jackson Rogish successfully earned his 100th win on the varsity wrestling team, making him one of the few Freeman wrestlers to ever achieve this. This season, Jackson had 43 wins and 2 losses, won the 2025 Virginia High School League (VHSL) Class 5 Region tournament, and placed second in the VHSL State Championships.

Jackson got involved in wrestling in middle school and has not stopped since. His dad wrestled in high school, and his grandfather was a Division I wrestler and national qualifier. "[Wrestling is] in the family," said Jackson.

Achieving 100 wins over four years is an unspoken goal for most athletes. "Just knowing it hadn't been done very often and I had the chance to do something pretty special for the school, it pushed me to get to that threshold of winning," said Jackson.

Not only does Jackson participate in wrestling, where he earned The Richmond Times Dispatch "804 Varsity Athlete of the Week"

title, he played Freeman varsity football, where he won Third Team All-Region and Honorable Mention All-Metro for defensive back. Additionally, he is committed to playing baseball at Washington and Lee University in the fall. "I chose baseball because I like the team atmosphere, and I have been doing it a lot longer," said Jackson. "Wrestling would have been equally as fun, but baseball has more energy, and Washington and Lee felt like the perfect fit for me," he said.

Over the past four years, Jackson said that the most important things his coaches have taught him are "perseverance" and "hard work." This mindset helped him stay motivated throughout his difficult training sessions and matches. "Things are going to get in your way, but it's how you respond to them that makes you a better athlete," said Jackson. "Same thing with baseball, you will strike out, and you fail more than you succeed," he said. Even though his wrestling career will end in high school, he will continue to use the lessons he has learned at Freeman at Washington and Lee and beyond. Although wrestling is usually

seen as an individual sport, it utilizes a team scoring system that decides the winning team in that particular match. Wrestling practice consists of high-intensity, lots of conditioning, and drill work. One of the most important parts of practice is your training partner. Jackson's training partner is a fellow senior, Colton Jacoby. "I wrestle with him every day at practice, and I think that I've gotten him better, and he's definitely gotten me better," said Jackson. With the amount the team practices over the winter season, the support from his training partners, such as seniors Colton, Butter Stephenson, and Connor Carroll, seems to affect how Jackson does at his matches. "I know [fellow teammates] have really pushed me to be better than I have been in the past," said Jackson.

Jackson receives lots of support outside of the team as well. "My dad always misses his own events to come and watch my matches, including my brother, sister, mom, and even my grandparents," said Jackson. "I couldn't do it without everyone's support," he said.

Out of all of the matches and competitions this season, Jackson had a memorable one at the Me-

Honoring Black History Month Through Art: Galleries at Artspace

Julia Connor

Arts & Entertainment Editor

In honor of Black History Month, a Richmond nonprofit gallery, Artspace, is holding two exhibitions. The first, “It’s About the Hustle,” is a gallery juried by Franchell Mack Brown, a local artist, that “explores the stories of African Americans and their labors in the United States,” said Artspace. The second gallery, “From Sunup to Sundown, But the Work Never Stops,” is curated by The Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia (BHMVA) and features artifacts and artwork “representing various depictions of Labor in Virginia,” said Artspace.

“It’s About the Hustle” is a gallery of 30 pieces of visual artwork that features 15 Virginia

artists and 15 other artists from around the country. The gallery is centered around the worldwide 2025 Black History Month theme, labor. “Franchell [Brown] intentionally, aside from one piece, tried not to pick things about slavery. She wanted to focus on the positive, the hustle of labor,” said Artspace Exhibition Committee Chair Micheal Pierce. “Acknowledging that America was built from the facts of black folks was important to her,” he said. Art pieces in the gallery included the labor of beauticians, soldiers, dancers, fabrics, and markets.

Pieces were awarded honorable mentions, a “special juror award” given by Ms. Brown, and first to third place. The first place winner is “Personal Affects: Bloodroot Wedding Dance,” a mixed media piece by Sam Christian, a local artist. The art piece includes



PHOTO: ARTSPACE

First Prize Winner Personal Affects: Bloodroot Wedding Dance



PHOTO: ARTSPACE

“It’s About The Hustle” Gallery Poster

photographs of his family, quilts, flowers, and other media tied together with a red thread from one piece to the other. Each piece represented a part of Christian’s family. “His grandmother taught him how to sew and to quilt, so there’s a big patchwork quilt up there using mainly denim from blue jeans of his family,” said Mr. Pierce. The dried flowers “are pieces of plants from his grandmother’s garden,” he said. “There’s a rusted piece of metal over to the side with little holes through it and a photograph behind of his dad who left the family when he was a child.” Each artist featured in the gallery wrote about the meaning behind their piece about labor, which can be found on artspace-gallery.org under the exhibition “It’s About the Hustle,” page.

“From Sunup to Sundown, But the Work Never Stops,” features “artwork and artifacts representing various depictions of Labor in Virginia,” said Artspace. The gallery centers around Jackson Ward, a neighborhood in Richmond. “[Jackson Ward is] known as the birthplace of Black entrepreneurship and the ‘Harlem of the South,’” said Venture Richmond. “It is rich in history, culture, and community, forging a new wave of creative enterprises and the next generation’s creative class,” they said. One piece is a sewing machine

from the Loving’s Sewing School, a featured store in the gallery. Other pieces highlight the community and shops created within Jackson Ward. Mary Lauderdale, along with her volunteers, is the person from the museum who put the gallery together. “[They] made a lot of the quilts [in the gallery],” said Mr. Pierce. “There’s one little quilt over to the side [that has an] image of a black woman making a quilt, and she made it with antique quilting material,” he said.

Another piece in the gallery is a big quilt laid over an antique loom. “Back in the day, women sat around [the loom] and sewed together, and then you can twirl it when everybody’s finished,” said Artspace Vice President Susan Cary. “The back of that quilt has some feed bags from old farm stores they used,” she said.

Ms. Cary proposed the idea of the BHMVA gallery to Ms. Lauderdale: “The first thing [Ms. Lauderdale] said was she was so jealous about the title of this show, [‘It’s About the Hustle,’]” said Cary. “From Sunup to Sundown, But the Work Never Stops” was also based on the theme of labor. “Both galleries [are] just a really wonderful show, and it brought a different group of people into [Artspace],” said Cary.

Jurying and curating galleries are an art of their own. “Franchell [Brown] placed the hair washing

one beside the nail salon,” said Mr. Pierce. “She plays stuff around like a story in her mind ... She placed all women [then] guys down the back wall.” Ms. Brown was a Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fellow (2021-22). Brown’s first gallery with Artspace was in 2023. “She had a one-person show, ‘Flag Vibes,’ and it was these remakes of flags,” said Mr. Pierce. “[She used] macrame, a [flat] knot tying and she used really bright colored yarns, and reimagined American flags and other sorts of things,” he said.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts currently has a show of these flags at the Virginia Museum in 2025. Her work has also been displayed at Interlude Residency in Hudson, NY; Monson Arts Residency, Monson, ME; and The Visual Arts Center of Richmond, Richmond, VA.

Artspace opened in 1988 as an association of artists who wanted to exhibit their work and provide a space for other artists to reach a wider audience. According to Artspace, their mission is “to support the development of the arts and artists from all backgrounds, through exhibitions, education, and opportunities that create resilient and thoughtful communities through the arts.” “We believe that the arts give value to our lives, resilience to our communities, and purpose to our world,” they said.

2025 Grammy Recap: Country Albums, Diss Tracks, and Bare Skin

Connor Almstead

News Editor

The 67th annual Grammys aired on Feb. 2, 2025, in Los Angeles at the Crypto.com Arena. The event was aired on CBS and streamed on Paramount. However, this year’s ceremony only obtained a viewership of 15.4 million viewers, a nine percent decrease from the 2024 ceremony, which brought in almost 17 million viewers.

Once again, the night was full of celebrities. This year’s most nominated artist was Beyoncé, with a total of 11 award nominations. She now officially has been nominated 99 times over her career and officially holds the title of the most nominated person in Grammy history. She won three awards of the 11 she was nominated for: Album of the Year, Best Country Duo

Performance. The driving force behind her nominations this year was her album “Cowboy Carter” and the single “TEXAS HOLD ‘EM,” released in March and February of 2024, respectively.

Beyoncé became the first ever African American woman to win the Country Album award, and the fourth African American woman ever to win the Album award.

Another artist who made a showing was Kendrick Lamar, as he was nominated seven times and won five of them: Best Record of the Year, Best Song of the Year, Best Music Video, Best Rap Song, and Best Rap Performance.

All of these awards were from his hit-single diss-track, “Not Like Us,” targeted towards the Canadian rapper Drake. Released in May 2024, “Not Like Us,” along with a collection of other songs, featured Kendrick accusing Drake of misbehavior, such as being in relation with mi-

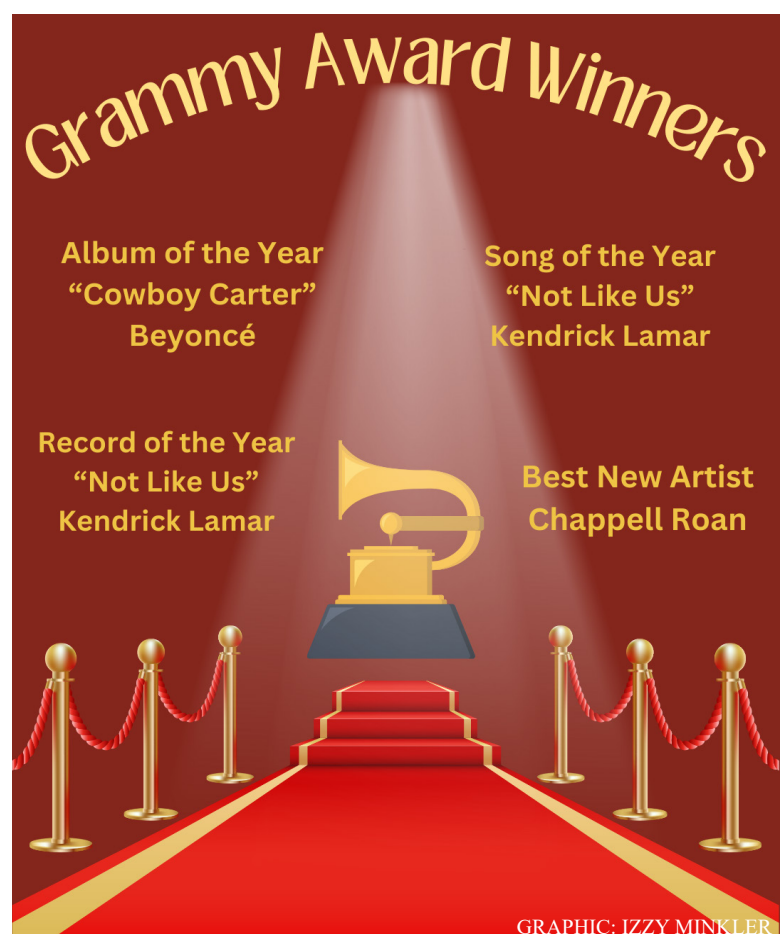
nors and withholding information about a secret daughter that he never informed the public about.

Despite the general opinion, many still think that the song was too popular and did not deserve the praise that it got, especially five awards at the Grammys. The decisions stirred some emotion in the viewers, as “I’m kind of mad about some of the results,” said freshman Logan Smith. “I think Espresso by Sabrina Carpenter should have won,” he said.

While not winning “Song of the Year,” Sabrina herself won two awards, one being for “Espresso.” The song won Best Solo Pop Performance, beating Beyoncé, Billie Eilish, Chappell Roan, and Charli XCX. Her other award was for Best Pop Vocal Album, which is defined as an “album containing greater than 75 percent playing time of new pop vocal recordings,” according to the Grammy’s official website. Sabrina’s album “Short n’ Sweet” won this award above Taylor Swift’s “THE TORTURED POET’S DEPARTMENT,” Ellish’s “HIT ME HARD AND SOFT,” Ariana Grande’s “Eternal Sunshine,” and Chappell Roan’s “The Rise And Fall Of A Midwest Princess.”

Post Malone also appeared at the Grammys with eight nominations, however, he did not secure a win in any of the categories he was nominated for. He had a variety of performances that resulted in eight nominations, including his album, “F-1 Trillion,” released in August 2024. He still made history, however, because he became the new Grammy “Bridesmaid,” a term for the performing artist with the most Grammy nominations without a single win. As of 2025, he has 18 nominations over his career, topping off the previous “Bridesmaid” of Snoop Dogg, who garnered 17 during his run in the 1990s and 2000s. Despite this new title, he does not officially hold the title for the overall person with the most nominations without an award. This title belongs to sound engineer Chris Gehringer, who received a nomination over 21 times over his career.

Chris has been influential in



GRAPHIC: IZZY MINKLER



PHOTO: KEVIN MAZUR

Sabrina Carpenter on Grammy Red-Carpet

musical culture since the 1980s, when he worked with artists such as Mobb Deep, Wu Tang Clan, and PM Dawn. However, all his Grammy nominations came from his work with popular artists’ albums and singles in the 2010s and 2020s, such as Lady Gaga, Rhianna, and others.

While he never won an award at the regular Grammys, he has been awarded at the Latin Grammys, with Best Engineered Album and Album of the Year, as well as five other nominations for his work on other albums in collaboration with Latin artists.

There was a key controversy centered around a famous artist attending the event. Rapper Kanye (now formally known as Ye) West, who holds 22 Grammy awards himself, was allegedly kicked out of the show after he arrived at the venue with his wife, Bianca Censori, who was wearing a see-through outfit. Kanye was nominated for Best Rap Song for his and fellow Rapper TY Dolla Sign’s hit single “Carnival,” re-

leased in April 2024. However, he lost to Kendrick’s “Not Like Us.”

Kanye responded that he never truly was kicked out of the event, but he posted no further evidence to back that claim up, leaving many unsure whether or not to believe his word. There is an official “wardrobe advisory,” which requires attendees to wear clothing in the waist and chest area. Censori violated the rulings of this advisory, leading the pair to both be allegedly kicked out.

Many people are criticizing it for how inappropriate it is for a setting like the Grammys, no matter how much of a pioneering outfit it is. “I was disappointed and shocked about the incident,” said sophomore Mellisa Adnell.

As the new year started, the Grammys once again highlighted and awarded the most popular songs, albums, and artists for their works in 2024. Going forward, it will also serve as an example of what lines celebrities can and cannot cross.

The Moonwalk to Fame: ‘MJ the Musical’

Maya Thlachak
Copy Editor

From Jan. 28 to Feb. 2, 2025, Richmond’s Altria Theater hosted the traveling Broadway cast of “MJ the Musical.” The musical delineates the life and career of Michael Jackson (MJ), along with the trials and tribulations of being known as the “King of Pop.” The musical is set in 1992, the year of MJ’s “Dangerous World Tour.” The musical takes place during the tour rehearsal process, during which MJ is filmed for an MTV documentary. The documentary attempts to embody MJ’s creative process while digging deeper into his history, which becomes the musical’s premise. MJ, played by Jordan Markus, was represented by his slicked-back ponytail, high-pitched voice, sparkling attire, and smooth yet crisp dance moves. The crowd’s energy shifted as if it were the “real” MJ when he appeared on stage. “He not only looked like him but did a good job of acting like him,” said senior Lauren Winterhoff, who saw the show on opening night. There were excited young kids with glittering fedoras and mothers anxiously attempting to stop them from singing along to MJ’s top hits such as “Thriller” and “Billie Jean.” However, the audience didn’t seem to mind, as we were all fighting the social etiquette that comes with watching a musical. The energy was high, the lights were bright, and the show had just begun. Throughout the musical, the au-

dience is taken through three stages of MJ’s life: his childhood career with the “Jackson 5,” his teenage years as an aspiring solo artist, and finally, his current presence in the music industry. This allows the viewer to understand his music and message on a personal level. The show portrays the “Jackson 5” as a group of hardworking brothers encouraged by their father, Joseph Jackson, played by Devin Bowles, to become the best. However, MJ was routinely beaten by his father when he was tired of rehearsing or performing. In the show, Joseph consistently pressures his boys, specifically Michael, in hopes of preparing them for the cutthroat music industry. Jackson’s relationship with his father is paralleled by a common theme throughout the musical: the struggles of being a black artist in a white-dominated industry. The musical highlights MJ’s difficulties when promoting his work on mediums such as the radio, which the show claimed “only put [him] on R&B stations” despite his pop-centered music. Another prevalent theme in the musical is the pros and cons of being in the public eye. At the time, MJ was facing allegations of bleaching his skin along with overuse of the pain medication prescribed to him when he received third-degree burns from an accidental fire at one of his concerts. The show uses dramatic music, flashing lights, and other production elements to walk the viewers through the mental and physical stress caused by the media. Additionally, the musical uses its platform to debunk media myths.

For example, in an off-camera moment during the documentary, interviewer Rachel, played by Mary Kate Moore, asks MJ about his “bleached skin.” MJ expresses that he has a condition called “vitiligo” that attacks the pigment in his skin. Despite the negative atmosphere created by the media, the musical seeks to portray MJ in a positive light. For example, the proceeds of MJ’s 1992 tour went to his established charity, the Heal the World Foundation. In the musical, MJ was insistent on supporting his charity despite having to give up his home and private amusement park, “Neverland,” to fund his tour. Although MJ consistently faced public criticism, his main mission was to inspire others by attributing his music to a mission. Additionally, MJ’s music was

embedded throughout the show to give the viewer insight into how his personal experiences played into his career. After MJ is bombarded with media and press attention, he breaks into the song “They Don’t Care About Us,” which is a chilling portrayal of the racism and prejudice MJ experienced as a black man in the music industry. However, some of the musical acts in the show had a primary purpose of entertainment. For example, the opening act after intermission was a group performance of “Smooth Criminal.” Markus successfully executed MJ’s famous moonwalk and tip-toe stand, and to say the crowd went wild is an understatement. Along with the rhythmic dancing and singing, the production played a huge role in the musi-

cal’s grasp on the audience. Firstly, the backdrops and props were extremely diverse, ranging from Hollywood letters to multiple mirrors for the song “Man in the Mirror.” “It had a lot of different pieces moving in and out throughout the whole show, which made it a lot cooler,” said Lauren. The lighting was also in sync with the music and enhanced many of the dance numbers. My only critique would be the absence of a trigger warning regarding the flashing lights. Overall, “[the production] did a really good job of telling Michael Jackson’s story,” said Lauren. For somebody who just knew his classics, “MJ the Musical” was an eye-opening production that offered a new perspective on MJ’s career in the music industry.



“MJ the Musical” cover photo

Lights, Camera, Nominations: A Review of Oscar-Worthy Films

Emerson Post
Staff Writer

The Academy Awards (Oscars) is an annual ceremony honoring outstanding achievements in the film industry. The awards recognize excellence in categories like Best Actor in a Leading Role, Best Picture, Best Director, and more. Nominations are made by industry professionals, and winners are determined through voting by the Academy members. Are the Academy members right in their selections? Here are my reviews of two Oscar-nominated films to see if they are truly worth taking time out of your day to watch. Starting with “The Apprentice:” I never heard about this movie until I was going through the Oscar nominations, and noticed that it had two nominations for Best Actor in a leading role (Sebastian Stan), and Best Supporting Actor (Jeremy Strong). It is about a young Donald Trump, who is eager to make a name for himself as the son of a wealthy family in the 1970s in New York City. I didn’t have too much interest in the political side of things



“Conclave” movie poster

going into this movie, but after watching it, it makes you question some of the things going on behind the scenes in the pursuit of power in America. I believe that the movie offers more than just political narratives; it digs deep into the psychological sacrifices of success. The performances by Sebastian Stan and Jeremy Strong were extremely impressive — Stan brings a magnificent portrayal of a young Donald Trump and Strong gives a chilling performance of Roy Cohn that keeps

the balance of the film intriguing. This movie is rated R, and I completely agree. There are not very many scenes that contain violence, but it does have some mature scenes that follow the themes of manipulation, power dynamics, and moral compromises that would not be fit for a younger audience. Some intense scenes contain very strong language that may not be adequate for a younger viewer. Overall, it’s not just about politics — it’s about the sacrifices you have to make to get to the top and the psychological burdens that this pursuit comes with. If you’re not a big fan of political dramas, this movie might not be for you. However, I thought it gave a unique perspective on how personal and political legacies are built. I consider myself to be on the borderline between engaging in politics and staying out of them, but I do highly recommend watching this film if you have not already seen it. The next film I am reviewing is “Conclave,” directed by Edward Berger. This movie has been generating a lot of buzz, considering it is nominated for an Oscar. I have to say, I was genuinely impressed with how entertaining this movie turned out to be. I found myself

hooked by the intensity of the plot — a high-stakes drama that is set within the walls of the Vatican. The tension between the Cardinals as they deliberate about the next Pope makes it feel like you’re in the movie, and it is almost palpable. I like how the film merges political interests with deeply personal stakes for each character. It was cool to see how these extremely powerful figures were, in some ways, just as vulnerable as we can be. The performances were stellar, especially the lead actor (Ralph Fiennes), who portrayed a Cardinal torn between loyalty and ambition. The cinematography in this movie was incredible — every shot felt deliberate and very well done. I thought the plethora of close-up shots worked great to intensify the situations occurring at those times. There’s a constant feeling of anticipation that something bad could happen at any point in the movie. I found the PG rating given to this movie a bit surprising. While there’s not necessarily explicit content, the film’s heavy political and moral themes might not suit a younger audience’s expectations. Overall, it’s a clean film, but the subject matter might be accustomed to more of an adult audience.

“The Apprentice” and “Conclave” are both exceptional films in their ways, but “The Apprentice” stands out to me as my favorite of the two, and I would highly recommend watching it if you have the chance. The psychological depth that this movie has is what makes it so fascinating to me. Rather than just focusing on the background and rise of a young Donald Trump, it changes your perspective on the price that must be paid to be successful. “Conclave” was also a great watch, with its atmosphere and great performances by the cast members, but it didn’t connect with me as much on a deeper level. While I loved the drama and tension within the Vatican, I found “The Apprentice” to be the only one that changed my perspective on success, ambition to make it to the top in life, and the lengths people go to achieve their goals. If you’re looking for a film that not only entertains you but makes you contemplate the true cost of power and if it’s worth it, “The Apprentice” is worth watching. It’s a movie that stays with you much longer than the film’s runtime, and that’s why it holds a place in my mind this awards season.

Behind the Scenes of Freeman Theater

Olive Schreher
Staff Writer

At Freeman, one musical and one play are presented a year in which students involved in theater participate. When the audience sees this production, they are viewing the final product of the actors and crew’s work. Although viewers watch the actors on stage, they don’t witness what goes on behind the curtain, where others work hard to ensure everything runs smoothly. The behind-the-scenes crew often puts in just as many hours and work into the production. Behind-the-scenes roles like lighting, sound, set construction, and stage management are all equally important to make the production come together. “A bunch of different things [contribute] to the production,” said senior Norah Pascual. Norah has been involved in theater for her four years at Freeman. Basil has focused on lighting: “I was in the stage tech class, and my teacher, Ms. Spears, asked me to take on lighting because the seniors were about to graduate,” said Norah. She has been on crew in every show during

her four years at Freeman, starting with “Midsommar.” “Since then, I’ve been designing the lights for all our productions,” she said. For Norah, her position goes beyond the lighting aspect, it’s about working with her peers to make a perfect scene. “I work with the sound designer, the costume crew, and even the actors to figure out how to make each scene feel,” said Norah. “Lighting is such an important visual tool in a production,” she said. Norah is currently training junior Kevin Nichols to take over her position in lights after she graduates. “It’s exciting to pass on my knowledge and help someone else grow in this role,” she said. Basil started working on sound in the booth as a spotlight operator during their freshman year. Starting with “Clue,” Basil is now the sound designer for all future productions, including Chicago in the spring. As a sound designer, “I handle the microphones for the shows, and I find all the sound effects to bring the scenes to life,” said Basil. This is Basil’s first year running the sound system independently; previously, learning under sound designer and Freeman class of 2024 graduate Annabelle

Nee. “I get to experiment with different sound effects and shape the auditory experience of the show,” said Basil. Basil enjoys being a big part of the show and bringing it to life. “It’s fun to be part of the team that makes the show feel complete,” they said. In this year’s production of “Chicago,” senior Abby McGowan will be the stage manager. She has worked her way up in the department, originally starting as a member of the running crew, then assistant stage manager in Footloose last year. As a stage manager, her responsibilities include managing the backstage environment, coordinating props, and ensuring that actors and crew are in sync. “I really enjoy being the stage manager because you get to be a part of everything,” said Abby. “You’re responsible for keeping

everything organized, whether it’s reminding actors to be quiet backstage or helping the running crew during scene transitions,” she said. A big part of Abby’s desire to be a stage manager comes from a mentor she had, Abby Kirchoff. “My first stage manager was someone I really looked up to,” said Abby. “She inspired me to pursue this role because of how well she managed everything,” she said. Norah, Basil, and Abby all emphasize how theater is more than just individual jobs, it’s about working together toward a common objective. “Theater is a great way to collaborate with others,” said Norah. “You’re under a lot of pressure, but you’re working with people who are in the same zone, so it feels like a rewarding challenge,” she said. A major part of theater at Free-



Freeman Theater booth members

PHOTO: THEATRE DEPARTMENT

man is the friendships and aspirations it fosters. “What I love about theater is the sense of community. Even though everyone involved is different, we all share the same passion for making a production come to life,” Abby said. For Basil, the people in the theatre are also what makes the experience more enjoyable. “It’s the people that make it fun. I’ve met so many friends through theater, and we all support each other,” they said. The hard work behind the curtains is what makes the production come together. “A bunch of different things [contribute] to the production,” said Norah. Whether it’s lighting, sound, stage management, or set design, each role plays a significant part in bringing the play to life. “Sound works on what you hear, costumes, lighting, and the actors work on the visual ... I think all those departments help to portray the director’s vision,” said Norah. The theater department at Freeman is welcoming to any newcomers and is sure to be a fulfilling experience. “If you’re thinking about getting involved in theater, go for it! It’s such a fun and rewarding experience,” said Abby.

Trains, Planes, and Automobiles



PHOTO: BBC

Protester's "I have no oxygen, justice to the end" shirts

Feb. 28, 2025, marks the two years since the Greek railway disaster that left 57 dead and dozens injured. To mark this tragic anniversary, 346 Greek cities hosted crowded protests demanding justice for the victims. In response to the uproar, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis promised an amendment to the constitution that protects politicians from prosecution along with a modernized railway system by 2027.



PHOTO: @BLUEORIGIN ON X

Origin's six women crew

Six women are scheduled to suit up for Blue Origin's NS-31 historic space mission, including American pop star Katy Perry. This tourism rocket will be the 11th New Shepard flight that takes humans past the Kármán line, recognized as the altitude where outer space begins. According to Blue Origin, there will be no pilot or other space crew on the flight, and it will be the first all-women mission since Valentina Tereshkova's solo spaceflight in 1963.



PHOTO: CONSTRUCTION WORLD

Pipeline's work in progress

India is set to finish the world's longest liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) pipeline by June 2025. This \$1.3 billion project is an attempt to reduce fuel transportation costs and prevent road accidents. The pipeline will stretch from Kandla on the west coast of India to Gorakhpur in northern India and transport an estimated amount of 8.3 million tons of LPG annually, which in turn, will prevent crashes and enhance the safety and efficiency of fuel transportation.

Content by Maya Tluchak

Trump, Zelenskyy, and Ukraine Aid Woes

Sadie Edlavich

Arts & Entertainment Editor

On March 3, 2025, President Trump elected a "pause" on all U.S. assistance to Ukraine as he spoke to Volodymyr Zelensky, a Ukrainian politician, to start speaking on negotiations to end the war with Russia. In February of 2022, Russia launched a full scale invasion of Ukraine in attempts to keep occupying more of their country. The Russians fired missiles at military targets as well as homes and cities throughout Ukraine. This has been the biggest conflict in Europe since World War II, and there has been a major refugee crisis with a record breaking number of deaths.

A White House official has said that Trump is focused on reaching a peace deal, wanting Zelensky to be fully "committed" to that goal. Officials are also saying that "pausing" aid will ensure that there will be a solution. The order will remain in effect until Trump has determined that Ukraine has demonstrated a commitment to having peace negotiations with Russia. On March 4, 2025, President Trump gave his address to congress and in his speech, he mentions the "important letter" he received from Zelensky while reading excerpts from it.

The letter reads, "Ukraine is ready to come to the negotiating table as soon as possible to bring lasting peace closer. No-



PHOTO: ROMAN CHOP

Ukrainian soldiers hold posters thanking the US for support on the front line

body wants peace more than the Ukrainians," said Trump. President Trump also mentions that there have been "serious discussions" with Russia and he is hopeful that there are strong signals that they are ready for peace. The Oval Office meeting between the U.S. officials and Zelensky last week was intended to conclude with the two parties signing off on a deal that would grant the US to rare earth minerals in Ukraine.

This did not end up being the case due to a clash between Trump and Zelensky where Trump accused him of "gambling with World War III." As a result of this, the Ukrainian delegation left the meeting without signing off

on the deal. Trump concluded by saying to them "Come back when you are ready for peace."

In addition to this meeting in the Oval Office, Russian President, Vladimir Putin, justifies the invasion of Ukraine with several key points. He claims that he is attempting to "denazify" Ukraine because it is controlled by "extremists" and "neo-nazis," despite the fact that Ukraine's president, Zelensky, is Jewish. Putin also makes the argument that Ukraine is not a legitimate independent nation, stating that it has always historically been a part of Russia's territory.

On March 12, Ukraine proposed a US-backed 30-day ceasefire after talks in Saudi Arabia. "The

ball is now in their court," said Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

However, this ceasefire proposal was rejected by the Kremlin.

The United States, United Kingdom, and other countries have attempted to persuade

Putin put an end to this war. These countries have also tried to aid Ukraine by sending weapons to Ukrainian forces and imposing sanctions on Russia, these are measures taken against countries to show that they do not condone actions that are at odds with international agreements. Although the aid to Ukraine has been restored for now, the effects to the relationship between the United States and Ukraine remain.

India's Celebration of Maha Kumbh Mela

Ava Harrison

Staff Writer

From January 13 to February 26, around 660 million people traveled from around the world to celebrate Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, India, making it the largest religious gathering on Earth. The word Maha means great and the word Kumbh Mela means the festival of the sacred pitcher. Maha Kumbh Mela is a Hindu pilgrimage and festival that happens once every 144 years when rare planetary alignment occurs.

Although this festival is centered around the Hindu religion, it is open for anyone to take part. During the time of this celebration, people dip themselves into the sacred rivers of India to cleanse themselves of their sins and free their souls from the cycle of reincarnation. A popular spot to bathe is in the Triveni Sangam, where the holy rivers Ganga and Yamuna connect. Though it is not visible, the mythical Saraswati river is believed to run underground and connect with this spot as well. The atmosphere around these rivers is filled with chanting, prayers, religious and cultural performances, spiritual talks, and ritual fires.

During the 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela, a stampede broke out when people were rushing to participate in the ritual bathing. At least



PHOTO: RICCARDO DE LUCA

People swimming during the 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela

30 people died and many more were injured during this crowd crush. Police were sent to manage entry into the city to try to control the crowds of this gathering.

The celebration of Maha Kumbh Mela comes from Hindu mythology. According to BBC, "Hindu scriptures recount the legend of the Samudra Mathan - the churning of the ocean of milk by gods and demons in search of the nectar of immortality." Based

on this mythology, four drops of nectar fell on four different locations in India, producing sacred areas. These areas are known today as Prayagraj, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain, all cities in India.

Although the Maha Kumbh Mela is rare, it is just one of many celebrations in Hinduism. Some similar celebrations are the Kumbh Mela which is celebrated every three years, the Ardh Kumbh Mela

that is celebrated every six years, and the Purna Kumbh Mela that is celebrated every 12 years at all four of the sacred locations as well.

This year's celebration of Maha Kumbh Mela marks the first time this event has been celebrated since 1881 during the British control of India, and the next one will occur in 2169. The Maha Kumbh Mela is a once in a lifetime experience, literally.

Vietnam to Support US Deportations after Tariffs



PHOTO: REUTERS

American and Vietnamese flags in Hanoi

Cate Woodrum

Features Editor

President Trump's latest threats of trade tariffs and visa sanctions have found purchase in Vietnam, who have now promised to receive deportees under the tightening American immigration policy.

Currently, over 8,600 Vietnamese nationals, many of whom came to the U.S. as refugees prior to 1995, are facing "orders of removal" under the new administra-

tion. Vietnam has agreed to process deportation requests within 30 days, a sharp decrease in the time normally given for countries.

Vietnam has also issued travel documents for up to 30 Vietnamese nationals currently detained in the US, shared Tin Thanh Nguyen, a US-based immigration lawyer. The action marks a departure from Vietnam's previous practice of obstructing deportations. "The move is part of a broader set of concessions the Communist-run country is considering to avoid du-

ties that could cripple its economy, which is the most reliant on exports to the United States among all top U.S. trade partners," said reporter Francesco Guarascio.

Vietnam is one of the most export dependent countries in the world. Its exports to the US totalled to \$109.46 Billion in the year 2022, and that number has only been rising in recent years. This reliance is forcing Vietnam to bend under Trump orders quicker than other nations facing similar threats, like Mexico and Canada.

Trump has already placed tariffs on Canada and Mexico, threatening a trade war with America's closest trading partners. This is projecting higher prices for Americans on thousands of consumer goods.

Whether or not Trump's tactics towards economic and social prosperity through strict regulations will be as fruitful as hoped is yet to be determined, but it is safe to say Vietnam has now fallen into line with the new administration's plans for American idealism.

Papal Health Crisis

Tylerson Tweardy

Staff Writer

Pope Francis, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, is pushing toward his four-week stay in Gemelli Hospital in Rome, Italy. Pope Francis recently encountered a health setback on February 14 with bilateral pneumonia as well as kidney failure. On February 21, he was reported as being in critical condition.

Despite these challenges, the Pope is committed to upholding his holy responsibility and continuing work despite his hospitalization.

The Pope recently skipped his Ash Wednesday mass, but it carried on at the Basilica of Saint Sabina. Pope Francis has been steadily recovering, reported by Vatican officials. He has begun active motor therapy to strengthen his breathing pattern as he recovers from the double pneumonia that sent him into the hospital bed.

The Vatican has provided regular updates on his health, stating that his clinical condition remains stable with no new respiratory episodes. He has been using supple-

mental oxygen and non-invasive ventilation while increasing his physiotherapy. Pope Francis has continued to participate in religious activities, such as receiving the Eucharist and the blessing of ashes for Ash Wednesday.

In addition to his medical treatments, Pope Francis has been actively engaging in work from his hospital room. He has made phone calls, prepared teaching texts, and even called the Catholic parish in Gaza to offer his support. The Pope's dedication to his duties and his resilience in the face of illness have been a source of inspiration for many.

Many Catholic followers have been praying for the Pope and his recovery efforts, with some even making pilgrimage to his hospital daily. The Vatican was unable to provide the exact prognosis of the Pope due to the "complexity" of his medical status.



PHOTO: VATICAN PRESS OFFICE

The Pope in hospital chapel