

GRASping for the Future with Financial Aid and Student Loans

Sadie Edlavitch
Arts & Entertainment Editor

Last year, students and faculty welcomed the Great Aspirations Scholarship Program (GRASP) and financial aid advisor, Ms. White, to the Freeman family. The organization GRASP is a nonprofit, charitable, college access organization that is available to graduating high school students in Henrico who need aid in reaching their educational goals after high school.

This year seniors have started applying for scholarships and other forms of financial aid for college. "Students, especially seniors, are going through such a stressful and overwhelming period of time right now," said Ms. White. "My goal is to help them through that," she said. Ms. White has been working with GRASP for over three years now. She started working at Goochland High School and now has been working at Freeman for two years. "When I'm not at Freeman, I am working at our main office in Henrico, supporting staff members, working with our speakers, and doing training," said Ms. White.

The GRASP association operates in about 115 Virginia high schools, sending advisors to talk to students and families about the financial aid process. "I would say I wear a lot of different hats," said Ms. White. "The best part is that I immediately fell in love with the aspect of being able to just speak one-on-one with students and parents." Ms. White primarily talks to families and students about organi-

zations that will help students with the financial aid process like The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the College Scholarship Service (CSS) profile along with the scholarship process.

The FAFSA is a form completed by current and prospective college students that determines a student's eligibility for financial aid. However, the CSS profile is different from this. The CSS profile is an online application created and maintained by the United States. This allows incoming or current college students to apply for non-federal financial aid.

"For GRASP, We try and make students aware of all of their options in terms of what they can do after high school," said Ms. White. "For example, looking at not just a four-year college, but a two-year college, career programs, apprenticeships, and then knowing what you need to do in order to get the money to help pay for that." Two-year colleges or community colleges can be beneficial to some students because they are cheaper than traditional four-year colleges. Two-year colleges also allow for more flexibility in scheduling if you have other commitments such as a job or other family responsibilities.

When looking forward to college, financial issues are some of the first to arise. "I think that college is way too expensive," said Ms. White. According to a study called "Why is college so expensive," Jessica Bryant said that student loan debt in the U.S. passed the \$1.75 trillion mark this year. For comparison purposes, the student loan debt in 2018 was

\$1.57 trillion. In addition to this, a study found by the National Center for Education Statistics stated that college costs increased by 136 percent due to inflation. One of Ms. White's main goals for helping students is to make these financial choices easier for students. "I believe that education should be equitable and accessible, having a resource like GRASP allows these students to know that there is someone there to hold their hand during this process," she said.

In addition to working with the students in the present, Ms. White aims to help students understand how financial aid decisions can impact their long-term goals. "It's fun because I get to keep in touch with some of the students I've worked with," said Ms. White. "[GRASP has] something called the college success program that is available to students that want to keep in touch with GRASP, as well as continue receiving scholarships." The College Success Program helps students re-file financial aid and scholarship forms each year while also providing valuable tips regarding internships and summer jobs.

Students at Freeman are allowed to speak with Ms. White on Tuesdays, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. She speaks to students about their wishes and worries for life after high school. Students can sign up using Signup Genius on the Freeman website. Senior Molly Levasseur spoke with Ms. White about her future plans to learn about the scholarship opportunities that were offered to her. "She told me to start looking for scholarships early because a lot of them have

deadlines that are approaching soon," said Molly. Ms. White has also helped students lay out a plan for their future so that they can take the steps to achieve that. "She helped me by telling me the steps I need to take in order to be successful after graduation," said Molly.

Senior Sophia Shaw also came to Ms. White to find a scholarship right for her as well as get more information on FAFSA. "Ms. White gave me a lot of good advice," said Sophia. "She mentioned that you should wait two weeks after the FAFSA comes out to fill it out because there may be some bugs with it." Ms. White also recom-

mends that students should come to see her with a parent or guardian. "She was really nice," said Sophia. Mrs. White makes sure to be available for students outside of the school day as well, "She gave me and my mom her card in case we need help with anything in the future," said Sophia.

As of now, more than 40 students have already signed up to speak with Ms. White about their plans after high school. "I hope that all students leave my office feeling a little less anxious about the entire process," said Ms. White. "That is my main goal for the Freeman students."



Ms. White, Freeman's GRASP coordinator

CREDIT: GRASP

Hurricanes Helene and Milton: Two Treacherous Typhoons



Destruction caused by Hurricane Milton in Florida

CREDIT: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tylerson Tweardy
Staff Writer

Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton have recently struck Southeastern Florida and parts of Virginia and North Carolina. Hurricane Helene began its path on Sept. 24 at a speed of 140 miles per hour (mph) in the Caribbean before impacting southern parts of Florida. It later spread to parts of Virginia, including the town of Damascus, with a population of roughly 820 people. Helene left Southwest Virginia with the lives of two people and hundreds of houses left damaged or entirely wiped out. The hurricane also hit Asheville, North Carolina, killing 95 people and leaving 10 missing.

The United Way of Southwest Virginia (UWSWVA) has allocated funding for recovery and humanitarian efforts with an initial donation of \$25,000. Hurricane Milton struck Central Florida as a category three hurricane on Oct. 9, affecting major areas such as Tampa and Orlando. More than 24 people have been confirmed

as dead or missing in the region, with over 4,000 rescue and assist operations completed and more ongoing as of late October. The typhoon had winds of up to 80 mph and rainfall close to five feet.

The hurricanes have not only affected the citizens in the areas hit but also their families all over. Junior Alexa Orengo has family that lives in parts of Florida affected by Milton. "My cousin and her son live in Tampa, and for both hurricanes, they had to evacuate to Orlando, where my sister lives," she said.

The two disasters caused damages of a combined \$50 billion in Central Florida and areas spread out across the east coast. Hurricane Helene caused \$6.5 billion in damages in Florida, yet Milton, which was centered toward Central Florida, caused \$2.5 billion in damages.

Sophomore Jones Lee has a relative who has been assisting with aid efforts throughout North Carolina. "My cousin Justin, after the first wave of the hurricane in North Carolina, he went down there with a bunch of supplies in his truck, and he saw firsthand

the destruction that had happened down there," said Jones.

Climate change has been a primary suspect in the strength of these disasters. According to "Vox," every 1.8-degree increase in air temperature can allow air to retain seven percent more water, which gives storms greater strength and increases the chances of floods when storms are able to deposit more water.

Environmental Science teacher Mrs. Walthall also expressed a concern on this issue. "We're seeing a trend in increased temperatures as far as our waters and atmospheres, which both lead to more destructive storms," said Mrs. Walthall.

Infrastructure issues have additionally come into play, such as in Damascus. Southwest Virginia generally has fewer resources and is overlooked when it comes to natural disaster recovery efforts. To compensate, the town recently set up the "Damascus Strong" fund due to the damages Hurricane Helene inflicted, which is centered towards recovery efforts for devastated areas.

The most prominent example of damage in Damascus would be the Virginia Creeper Trail, with 18 of the 34 miles of the trail being destroyed. The trail is known as one of Damascus' best economic drivers in their region due to the influx of hikers and campers throughout the area and its current state threatens the local economy.

The National Park Service (NPS) has issued a park closure for the Blue Ridge Parkway since Helene's landfall with dozens of land and mudslides encountered. The parkway is entirely closed off to vehicles and hikers across all 469 miles, with over 200 staff members working behind the scenes to clear debris and clean

up the park for guests. There has been one confirmed injury due to an unauthorized guest using the parkway whilst under construction. The cost of damages alone is estimated to be several billion dollars for the Blue Ridge Parkway and its surrounding areas.

Recovery efforts have already ramped up in western North Carolina, specifically in Green Mountain, a township vulnerable to such disasters. There have so far been 115 deaths across the state, the second highest compared to Florida with 235.

After the devastation of Hurricanes Milton and Helene, Florida is already seeing a reawakening in their tourism economy. Major airports like Orlando International Airport (MCO), Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW), and Sarasota Bradenton International Airport (SRQ) are already open and functioning with no restrictions or delays.

Visit Florida, the state's main tourist company, has said that

main areas of interest such as Tampa, Fort Myers, St. Pete, Sarasota, and Orlando are largely open for business and tourist attractions. Due to the impact of both Hurricanes Helene and Milton, as well as cancellations in vacations, reservations, etc., it's estimated that portions of the Floridian economy will plummet and then recover up until early spring of 2024, according to "Travel Weekly."

2024 was predicted to be an "above average" hurricane season, according to the Center for Disaster Philanthropy (CDP). As of October, there have been 13 storms throughout the United States this year. Overall, there has been \$92 billion worth of damages caused by all disasters. However, the hurricane season for 2024 isn't just over yet. The northern hemisphere hurricane season officially ends on Nov. 30, with a few weeks to spare. More hurricanes still have a chance of forming, as temperatures along the Gulf and east coast are continuously changing.



Flooding at Appalachian State University

CREDIT: WRAL



Freeman Project Works to Better the School



Freeman Project juniors work on painting the annex walls

Maryam Vohra
Staff Writer

Freeman Project, a community service class elective, is committed to bettering the Freeman community by making changes to the school. Largely student-run, Freeman Project is sponsored by Mr. Robjent, and run by President Scotty Gregory.

Currently, Freeman Project is working on the annex; installing foldable tables outside of room 180 so students can work on group activities. Spanish teacher Señora Snellings is excited about the addition of the tables: "In language classes, we do a lot of speaking practice, so it will be nice to be able to put two or three students in the hallway to work comfortably and not feel like they are in the spotlight," she said. "For our Leap and [English Second Language] (ESL) classes, being able to work with students in smaller groups will be great."

Their first step was to clear out the hallway and remove the

lockers from the wall. Following that, their idea was to paint the wall, and then install semi-circular tables with a mechanism that allows them to fold up and down. As of now, the tables are in the process of being ordered.

The 30 students have made Freeman Project a successful mission because "the whole group has this willingness to help and get involved, to get down into the work," said junior Jack Stoneman, a Freeman Project member. "That team spirit and collective willingness to do what is asked of us is crucial to good teamwork," he said.

The Freeman Project devotes its time to making the school more environmentally friendly by cleaning the dirt from the walkway from the school's parking lot and taking out the recycling every week. "Taking out the recycling for our teachers sends the message that we care about our faculty, and we want to help them in any way we can," said Jack.

Freeman Project has also taken on smaller projects around the school, for example, they

cleaned weeds out of Freeman's sidewalk, and have begun the process of packing up unused textbooks by the Language Department. "Freeman has a clutter problem, and there are a few areas where we are cleaning up and sending it to the countywide surplus to leave space for new potential projects," said Jack.

Started by sophomore Julia Pardon in 2016, Freeman Project has been around for almost a decade. After watching kids play on their phones in Mr. Robjent's study hall class, Julia came up with the idea to start a club to prevent students from overusing their screens and have them "engage in their surrounding community," said Mr. Robjent.

Mr. Robjent allows the students to take control. "I like to let kids do as much as they want, and [Julia] was a force of nature," he said. He believes that students in such a program should be leaders: "That is part of what this, at least in theory, should be about," he said.

A regular day in the Freeman Project is full of ideas and collaboration. "We have days where we brainstorm ideas and bounce them off of each other," said senior Reagan Weaver, a first-year member of Freeman Project. "It's not one person who comes up with it everyone comes up with one idea, and we put them all together," she said.

Jack was inspired to join Freeman Project after seeing his older sister, former student Meredith Stoneman, and her love for the club. "My sister [Meredith] was a member of [the elective], and I thought it was a really neat oppor-

tunity to make Freeman as great as we can make it, and I wanted to be a part of that," he said.

As a student-centered elective, the Freeman Project teaches students about the importance of teamwork. "Nothing worth doing can be accomplished alone, and nothing worth doing is easy. It needs a group, and it takes a village," said Jack.

Señora Snellings believes student-centered classes such as Freeman Project are unique

to Freeman: "On many levels, Freeman Project creates an awesome opportunity for us to have things done that we would not normally have," she said.

Organizations such as the Freeman Project are also important to the student body "because of the teamwork it builds," said Reagan. "[You] are actively doing something, instead of planning things and hoping the county will do it," she said. "We know the school the best"

The Freeman Project



Inspire Improve Connect

Old Flyer Removal

Annex Locker Painting

Textbook Boxing

Walkway Clean Up

GRAPHIC: IZZY MINKLER

Goat-scaping at U of R

Olive Schreher
Staff Writer

At the University of Richmond (U of R) students and faculty have become accustomed to goats on campus. The goats are an effort by the U of R to landscape, while also improving sustainability, thus the term, "goat-scaping". The first time the goats were brought in, was for part of a restoration project to create a part of campus called the Eco-Corridor. This recent herd of goats will be the fifth to walk and graze on grounds, especially the Eco-Corridor.

The idea of goat-scaping Richmond area is due to the many invasive species, plants, and animals that are not from the region that have no natural predators. This lack of population control leads to the rapid growth of these species. These plants, like English Ivy, Kudzu, Porcelain Berry, Japanese HoneySuckle, and Poison Ivy block sunlight and airflow, killing other plants surrounding them. "There are three main ways [to remove invasive species]," said Rob Andrejewski, the Director of Sustainability at U of R. "[First] there's mechanical, using equipment or hands to pull it, [second] there's chemical, with pesticides and herbicides, [third] there's biological, which are the goats." Goats, which have a large and diverse appetite, will eat all the unwanted plants in the area. They have become a project through the U of R's Sustainability Office because "the biological way of [removing invasive species] is the least environmentally harmful," said Mr. Andrejewski.

The past couple of years U of R has been working with a local business, RVA Goats, to fulfill this project. "The original time we brought the goats in, it was part of a big restoration project we were doing...to remove invasive species, since then it's my office's job to bring the goats back in," said Mr. Andrejewski. The ongoing partnership demonstrates U of R's commitment to sustainability through the control of the vegetation on campus.

U of R is just one of the many places to try this new landscaping technique. The owner of RVA Goats, Kristi Orcutt, displays the growing business and idea:

"Our first client was [the] Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden[s]... next, Bryan Park, and now we work from Washington D.C. all the way down to Chesapeake, Virginia," said Ms. Orcutt.

A drawback from the goats is that they can sometimes be difficult to manage. "The goats can be headstrong and are easily frightened, so yes, they can be difficult to manage," said Ms. Orcutt. However, "they are quite tame...and skilled herders are able to handle them," she said.

Many people also are under the impression that goats are not the superior alternative because they are noisy, however, "the goats and sheep are not noisy like gas powered weed eaters, blowers, and mowers, and emit no smoke or toxic fumes from the exhaust," said Ms. Orcutt.

The goats also have a significant impact on landscaping: "Their hooves lightly scrape the surface of the soil allowing improved rainwater penetration and they fertilize the area...with their droppings," said Ms. Orcutt.

Landscaping, however, is not the goats only role at U of R. "People love it...folks go every day to come see them and just hang out," said Mr. Andrejewski. "We want to make sure there's an inviting place for people [on campus], because there are so many health benefits to nature."

It is evident humans pose pressing concerns on the environment today due to certain "forces of hurricanes Helene and Milton, sea level rise..., garbage islands, and our sixth grade extinction," said Mr. Andrejewski. "We're emitting carbon into the atmosphere at a rate we've never seen. We have the highest incidence of carbon dioxide in two million years...and when it's emitted, it warms the planet," he said.

Through the goat project, awareness is brought upon these factors of environmental sustainability. In order for future generations to succeed, efforts like the goats must continue. "We need to not think of the world as our playground, but as our home", said Mr. Andrejewski. "It's critical for an institution of higher education... to lead the way and do everything we can to change how we operate, so we are not borrowing from your future in order to exist today," he said.



PHOTO: WILL MCCUE

Goat grazing on invasive plants at the University of Richmond

The Menendez Brothers: Monsters or Misunderstood?

Kristen Carpenter
Online Editor-in-Chief
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A controversial new show highlighting the case of the Menendez brothers, *Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story* was released on Netflix on Sept. 19, 2024. The show stars Nicholas Chavez as Lyle Menendez and Cooper Koch as Erik Menendez. Since its debut, the show has quickly gone viral across the internet.

On July 2, 1996, Lyle Menendez and Erik Menendez, the inspiration for the show, were sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for the murders of their parents, José and Mary (Kitty) Menendez. The sentence of the case was extremely controversial considering that both

media. "I saw [Monsters] on TikTok a lot and my friends were talking about it, so I was interested to see and understand why [the brothers] killed their parents," said senior Abby Sapon.

However, the nine-episode series has received backlash from the brothers and viewers for the negative way it portrays the brothers. Erik Menendez issued a statement referring to the show as "naïve and inaccurate," imploring believers of him and Lyle not to watch the show to show their support for the brothers.

Although their portrayal was controversial, the actors have received positive feedback regarding their performances. "I thought it was really entertaining and the acting was really good," said Abby. "The one episode where [Cooper Koch] did

porting the factuality of the film. "The documentary, based on extensive new interviews with Lyle and Erik Menendez, adds fresh nuance and details about their parents' murders and the aftermath," said the New York Times.

Although *Monsters* "was interesting to watch and entertaining, I think the documentary portrayed the brothers in a more accurate way," said senior Hartley Miller.

In 2023, the brothers' attorneys filed a petition arguing that Erik and Lyle should be granted relief from their prison sentences due to new evidence supporting their case. There have been new allegations of José Menendez's sexually abusive behavior and a letter that Erik wrote to his cousin was discovered. The letter hints at the abuse he faced at the hands of his father, further



PHOTO: AFP

The Menendez Brothers during a pretrial hearing in 1992

brothers claimed that they faced physical and sexual abuse from their parents throughout their upbringing. Although it has been decades since the trial ended, the case has resurfaced with the release of the new Netflix show, *Monsters* and the release of a Netflix documentary *The Menendez Brothers*.

To portray his role accurately, Koch visited Erik and Lyle Menendez in prison and got to know the brothers personally. "They're such upstanding individuals, they've done so much work in their prison," said Koch. "Erik teaches meditation and speech classes, and they're doing this Greenspace project to improve the prison grounds. It was just amazing," said Koch in an interview with *Variety*.

The show has experienced statistical success with over 12.3 million views in the first four days of its release and widespread coverage across social

a 34-minute scene in one take was really impressive," she said.

"Erik Menéndez was brought to life by Cooper Koch, who delivered a truly impressive, nuanced performance of this real person within the confines of the Netflix series," said "Out Magazine."

The family of the two has come out and said that *Monsters* is "a phobic, gross, anachronistic, serial episodic nightmare that is not only riddled with mistruths and outright falsehoods but ignores the most recent exculpatory revelations."

In contrast, the recent documentary, *The Menendez Brothers*, takes a less entertaining approach to the case. The documentary includes actual interviews with both Erik and Lyle, lawyers from the trial, jury members, and experts on the case. Since the majority of the information came from firsthand accounts of the trial, the show has received feedback sup-

strengthening the accusations made about José by his sons.

Lyle and Erik Menendez were due for a new court hearing on November 9, 2024, and people have mixed opinions on what justice the brothers deserve. Lyle and Erik's uncle and brother of Kitty Menendez, Milton Anderson, believes that the brothers should not be released. Kathy Cady is a victim rights attorney who represents him, and as a spokesperson for him to *Eyewitness News* said, "Mr. Andersen firmly believes that his nephews were not molested...He believes that is a fabrication and he believes that the motive was pure greed."

Both *Monsters: The Lyle and Erik Menendez Story* and *The Menendez Brothers* discuss the same topic but in different ways, "I would recommend watching them both because they're very different, so I think [that] can help you make an accurate opinion," said Hartley,

Thanksgiving upgrades



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Mr. Peck's Overseas Research



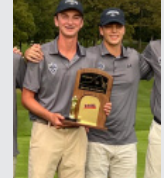
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Upgrade Thanksgiving: A Guide for the Sides

Connor Almstead
News Editor



PHOTO: WHAT'S GABY COOKING

Thanksgiving Fan Favorite: Mac and Cheese

the bird is known for. As for customization, it's certainly versatile. There are many spices you can use and it's really hard to mess it up. Most flavors will usually benefit the stuffing more than adding no flavor at all (not everything, contrasting flavors still exist).

While its ease of creation makes it easy to overlook, there are still many ways to make stuffing even better. The first thing is to diversify the texture. Good stuffing incorporates many different textures in order to enhance the turkey, making each flavor unique, as well as making itself a worthy stand-alone side. Another way to further stuffing is to turn the variety up to 11 and add exotic spices and consistencies to make it a road straight to Flavortown. The most common additions include simple ingredients found in daily cooking, such as butter, mushrooms, bacon, garlic, or anything else you can think of. It would be wise to at least try to

incorporate them and see how they turn the tables because stuffing's strength lies in its diversification

According to "Delish," the next most popular is a controversial pick: Cranberry sauce. This polarizing dish appears on half of America's love list and half of America's hate list, right up there with pineapple pizza. The main reason many people hate the very sight of this red bowl is the tartness of the sauce. Cranberries are a naturally tart fruit, turning off most people who don't like extreme sour, sweets, or other bold flavors. A popular way to appeal to mild palettes is the addition of other fruits to the sauce. The offset of chopped apples, oranges, and pears can save you from the previously acidic nightmare. The combination of tartness and sweetness can turn cranberry sauce from a demonic flavor into a pleasant pudding.

Speaking of pudding, the other major turnoff is the consistency of cranberry sauce. Many store-

brand sauces end up as a cold, jiggly mess of a bowl, making it unappealing to guests and incompatible with other dishes on the table. My recommendation is simple: fan the flames and cook the sauce. This releases proteins that toughen up the sauce and make it far more appetizing and compatible for combination with the turkey and other sides.

Another major staple of the Thanksgiving feast is the potato. It comes in many different forms: roasted, scalloped, and mashed, to name a few. Potatoes bring a nice, fluffy, starchy food to the table. They have a high variety of combinations as well, a big advantage to serving them over other carbs. Many forget this and leave potatoes in their base states, keeping them lackluster at the table. You can put so many spices on potatoes because of their blank-slate demeanor. Popular choices include thyme, parsley, rosemary, and sage; spices that are used in common cooking and work no different on Thanksgiving than they do in everyday meals. However, they're easy to mess up, with one wrong move ruining the whole dish. You have to be careful to measure the proportions out if you don't want to burn, dry out, or mush up your primary carbohydrate.

There are many tactics you can use to beef up the substance and flavor of potatoes, specifically mashed potatoes. Their existence as a pseudo-sauce allows them to hold different foods and soak in their contents, like a broth

you would make in a pot. Abusing this property, you can create an almost salad of flavor, mixing and diversifying them to a level near stuffing, but more creamy. For the majority of cases, these apply to other forms of potato, too, it's just that the mashed potato is the one-and-done food built for this level of customization.

Building off of cranberry sauce, another controversial pick on the table is the green bean casserole. Many young kids stay as far away from this dish as possible due to their inherent hatred of vegetables or any green food on their plate, and even in the adult population, this sprout-based lasagna has a limited audience. Like so many other vegetables, the texture is usually what can turn everyone away. With slimy bits going through your mouth when you eat it, even the healthiest eaters shudder. My recommendation to salvage this dish is to add something crunchy — like croutons or breadcrumbs — to vary the base and allow some of the sliminess to be absorbed by the bread-based supplements.

At this point, you may be thinking, "There's no way the rabbit hole goes this deep." But it may be surprising to hear that there's a branch of science for this kind of stuff. Brotamology, the study of food science, has research behind flavors and the chemistry behind it. With these new modern innovations, Thanksgiving doesn't just have to be a time of tradition. We can continue to improve Thanksgiving with tips like these.

DSF is Thankful for...



GRAPHIC: IZZY MINKLER

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Bring Back Breaks: A Pitch

Izzy Minkler
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Lunch is a time for rest, relaxation, and chatter, it is not a time to cut off all access to the outside world. The governor's executive order of a complete ban on cellular devices including the usage of electronics during transition and lunch periods will be carried out by individual counties, and decisions will be made accordingly. Once the witch hunt against technology is finalized, lunch will begin to feel more like prison yard time than a break. Especially for the seniors who eat in the courtyard, the monitors will become wardens, and we will be the criminals. In the quest to eradicate cell phones and their usage, we find ourselves at a bit of a crossroads. When do we, the students, get a break?

Our break used to come during Freeman Focus, and once that was taken away we were left with lunch, which is now snatched away too. It is important to note, that this is not an administrative decision, this comes from the very top — the governor. However, this still raises the issue of student wellbeing. During the pandemic, we had Wellness Wednesdays, a full day to destress and catch up on any outstanding work, and just a day of much-needed rest. Wellness Wednesday was an asynchronous day in the middle of the week. Once the pandemic was over, it was supposed to be a mental rest day where teachers were supposed to lighten up on the work and focus on students. Students are more stressed than ever, so why are the opportunities to lighten that load continually eliminated?

Other Henrico high schools have different solutions to this question. Many have their own version of Freeman Focus. Glen Allen High School's is called "Jaguar Student and Teacher Enrichment Period" or JSTEP; Godwin High School's is simply "Common Study." However, Deep Run High School mixes things up. They institute a sixty-minute lunch block. A whole hour for students and teachers to eat, catch up on work or talk to teachers. They don't have a block where Freeman Focus would be, it's included in the one hour. Everyone eats at the same time, and no classes are taught during this time block.

Now, how would Freeman go about implementing this idea? The short answer: we can't. Freeman's building is just too small. We are currently at 105 percent capacity, according to the Henrico County website. We would not be able to fit all the students in the cafeteria at the same time. Deep Run has the luxury of a building built in this century, something Freeman will unfor-

tunately lack for the foreseeable future. Our historic building is simply unable to handle two thousand Mavericks set loose on the building for an entire hour all at the same time. Ultimately, the hour lunch block won't work, we'll have to stick with Freeman Focus and staggered lunches.

So that leaves Wellness Wednesdays. I propose a day of leisure, a day of actual rest; we all know everyone needs it. I don't think a day off of school (like during the Pandemic) would be effective, but instead a true asynchronous day, or better yet, a day where we still see all of our teachers, but they aren't allowed to assign us work. By implementing a schedule where the students attend all seven classes, we would still be able to use the time for clarifying anything we need to with a teacher. The teachers would have a whole day to grade, relax, or answer questions. Whichever they so choose, everyone would just be a lot more pleasant to be around.

We would still have two days on either side of Wednesday for two even class days and two odd class days. For the weeks we only have four or three days of school, we simply would have to scratch the Wellness Wednesday in order to do the whole learning thing. Regarding the concerns about not having enough time during the week for actual instruction, it is my opinion that giving everyone a proper break would actually increase productivity for both students and teachers during the rest of the week. If students — and teachers — were given a break, it would make everything that much easier.

Teachers get their planning blocks, something that every teacher I've spoken with has said is crucial to their success in the classroom. It gives them time to plan, grade, and take a breather. Sometimes those blocks are the only breaks they get in the entire day. So, if we all agree that teachers desperately need this time during the day, why are we demanding that our students give up that very same break? Teachers have planning blocks, and students (used to) have Freeman Focus. Freeman Focus is supposed to be a time when students

can take forty-five minutes out of their eight-hour days, and choose what they want to do. Instead, it is functionally going to be another block to get through. No more chatting with your friends across the building, no more communicating with the outside world, and — perhaps the greatest offense — no more listening to music. Now, I can maybe tolerate the issues with texting, and sure, I understand that phones tend to be disruptive, but no music? Seems harsh. Seems like an unjust punishment. I can't count the number of times I put my earbuds in and relaxed or did my work, and now guess what? No more.

There are some legitimate reasons for the outlaw of phones. Teachers have been lamenting the use of phones since the dawn of the mobile. They have consistently reported increased usage in school and during class. Many have also noted the decrease in usage during school with the new policy, however, there is an important distinction to be made. Lunch, and Freeman Focus, are not classes. There is no instruction being interrupted or class being distracted. Lunch has always been students' time to do as they please. The banishment of phones is infringing upon the very foundation of students' independence. It is a true travesty that the debate around phones has devolved into a ban.

The school board and higher-ups have always raved about their ability to create college-ready students. However, this policy just shows how little they truly trust us. How are we expected to be ready to be adults, when we aren't even trusted with our own devices? Seniors are expected to graduate and enter the world as young adults in the very same year that we are also expected to lock our phones in plastic boxes. It is utterly ridiculous to ask students to act like adults, while simultaneously treating them like little kids.

The continued disregard for student wellbeing may have finally reached the point of no return. This is a direct attack on not only our free time, but our freedom as beneficiaries of public education.



PHOTO: HENRICO COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Henrico County Mental Health Services Logo

Terror on the Farm: Worth the Hype?



PHOTO: MEGHAN MARCHETTI

Actor at Ashland Berry Farms.

Sarah Chilton
Editor-in-Chief

When the month of October rolls around and fall air begins to chill the nights, a spooky season of tricks and treats takes over Richmond. Ashland Berry Farm's Terror on the Farm, one of many fall traditions in the area, started in 2000 and "has since become one of Virginia's premier haunted attractions," said Ticket Signup. The event usually runs during weekend nights through the month of October (this year Friday, October 4- Saturday, November 2, 2024).

The ticket, called a scream pass, is \$30 a person and includes a moonlit hayride and four haunted attractions: Booger Woods, Phobia Manor, Clown Rehab, and Reaper's Revenge 3D. I put these scares to the test to see if they lived up to the hype.

To commence my night of frights, I drove 40 minutes north of Freeman to Ashland Berry Farm, with a sunset over winding roads and fields that created a fall ambiance before I even arrived.

I got there early — around 6:30 p.m. for my 7:00 p.m. ticket — and there was no traffic getting into the parking lot thanks to staff members directing cars. Around 7:00 p.m., I got in line with my online voucher and was quickly given my paper tickets for the haunts.

In order to avoid lines, the first haunt I did was the hayride to Booger Woods. I waited in a line that moved speedily towards a smoky fire at the front where participants loaded into two straw-lined trailers attached to a truck. The ride out to Booger Woods was lit solely by the moon, and the trailer moved briskly across the fields toward the forest emitting an ominous red light. Upon arrival at the haunt the group learned some protocols and as I waited in line in the corn fields on the edge of the woods, I could hear the screams of groups that went in before me.

sons, knowing that the characters couldn't touch me in the back of my mind kept me from getting too scared, which was a downside for me but may be reassuring for others who are apprehensive to attend. My other critique is the backup that I experienced while in the haunt. More than a few times, I would have to stop because the people in front of me were at a standstill. I wish they spread the groups out more within the haunt so that I didn't know what was coming next because it wasn't as enjoyable to watch the people in front of me get scared instead of experiencing it myself. With lots of people, I lost the fear of uncertainty and isolation that usually accompanies a haunted house and it reminded me that it's just a simulation. I know that this was probably so that they could get people through the attractions faster, but it ended up tarnishing the experience and making it less scary as the night went on.

The next haunt that I went through after an extremely short wait was Phobia Manor. It was themed like an actual house with bedroom scenes and animal masks which gave it a storyline and sense of cohesion. There were many jump scares along with times of total and complete darkness, which gave it points in my book. It was shorter than Booger Woods, but the quality felt a little higher as the individual scares were more frightening due to their realistic elements like a bloody crib or demented woman. This haunt had the same issue of backing up within the house, so it definitely had the potential to be better, but the sporadic scares of the house gave me a good scream nonetheless. There was a positive atmosphere of loud upbeat music outside the house where people were milling around, but the house was somehow soundproofed and nearly silent inside, which was impressive and added to its off-putting, eerie nature.

My third haunt was Clown Rehab. It had some solid scares with total darkness and silence at times, and it got one good scream out of me. It didn't have as interesting visuals as the manor, but there was an element of fog which was neat. This haunt was a bit short and I still had the issue of going through with people both in front of and behind me close by. I would not recommend this one to anyone who experiences seizures because of the occasional flashing lights.

Though the haunts weren't as "spine-chilling" as the website said, it was still quite scary at times, and I would definitely recommend that anyone who attends

does not go alone. I noticed a lot of couples there, but also some friend groups, friends, and families.

Overall, I had a great time at the farm and consider it a good use of both my time and money. I spent two hours there plus an hour and a half of driving, and \$30 with no food purchases on the night. Treating the drive out like a mini road trip helped to make it more of a fun adventure as opposed to an obligation to drive farther than I normally would. I didn't even realize it had been two hours by the time I left, which shows how attending the event isn't just a thing to do, it's a whole experience within itself. I was so immersed in the atmosphere that I barely checked my phone or the time, which is a rare thing to find in this day and age, even if you're having a good time.

The price of \$30 was initially hard for me to stomach for a ticket, but reflecting on it now it

seems very fair. Considering the amount of staff working to keep the parking lot organized, lines moving fast, and haunts executed successfully as well as the attention to detail in the sets, costumes, and special effects, \$30 is a steal (less than eight dollars per haunt).

In its entirety, I would rate Terror on the Farm an 8/10 for fun and a 6/10 for scare factor. I can certainly see the appeal to families and friends who make it a tradition to come every year. I had a great time when I went and may even return next year, but I wouldn't come home from college just to go to the event.

The farm, founded in 1978 by Ken and Lynne Gustafson, operates year-round in addition to their special fall events to serve customer's landscaping and gardening needs. However, they seem to be known for their iconic spooks, scares, and squash.

Freeman Football Favs



PHOTO: CALEB MAYBERRY

Home Game: Mav Gear Theme

Katelyn Morrow
Centerspread Editor

It's Friday night, the beaming white lights are reflecting off the outrageous amount of glitter and eye black in the stands, and the smell of team spirit is overwhelming. Hundreds of students are packed into the stands cheering for our winning team. Half of the students are there to watch football. The other half is there to dress up, talk, and take pictures (the football game in the background is an added bonus). However, the theme is what makes or breaks a football game: it determines how much you dress up and it can increase or decrease excitement surrounding the game.

There are many themes chosen every football season, but now is the time to discuss the best ones to date. Some people like Maverick (Mav) gear or neon the best, but, in my opinion, the best themes are the 'USA,' 'Camouflage' (camo), and 'Pink Out.' You can't measure a theme's popularity by the amount of people that show up, but you can base it on the amount of spirit wear people put on. Over the four years I have been at Freeman, I have noticed and overheard some fan favorites, which trend similarly to mine.

The 'USA' theme has been a staple in many high school football games and even in many movies. 'USA' is a theme that unites everyone at Freeman, no matter their background, and idealizes the idea of being proud of our country. I have seen people paint their bodies red, white, and blue, or even show up as an inflatable eagle. People buy USA-themed shorts, leggings, skirts, ties and more. Not only do people deck out in spirit gear, but they also use this as an opportunity to show everyone their American pride.

Even though we repeat the 'Camo' theme every year and some people find traditions boring, this theme is important to recreate. Usually, the Mavericks wear this theme against one of our rivals, the Mills E. Godwin eagles, so we can dress in camo and go "eagle hunting." Dressing in camo is a sly way to tell the other team that we are hunting down a win. Everyone loves making funny TikToks and telling the most famous dad joke revolving around camo: "I can't see our student section." Additionally, I love the atmosphere and seeing everyone's cute outfits at the game.

Last but not least, 'Pink Out.' This theme is more than a mean girl's reference or a stigma from

the Barbie movie: it supports breast cancer awareness month. At Freeman, we take this month very seriously. We understand the difficulties and hardships of the millions of women who have or are suffering from breast cancer. Students decked out in all pink and stood together, cheering on our football team and keeping those affected by breast cancer in our hearts and minds.

We have many themes that people choose to try and be original, but in my opinion, it's overrated. I may get backlash for this, but two of the worst themes are 'Adam Sandler' and 'Jerseys.' Half of the time I dress like Adam Sandler, so I don't want to participate in a theme that represents my average Monday experience. 'Jersey' is a cute idea but kind of boring. You only have to throw on a jersey and a random pair of pants and you are done. Doesn't that get rid of the fun and effort of getting ready for the 'Friday Night Lights' experience?

Another theme that is basic, yet, for some reason a fan favorite, is 'Mav gear.' I understand that we are Mavericks, but why are we wearing the same thing we wear every day? We can't deck out in Mav gear because it consists of only three colors: blue, gray, and white. We do it for Spirit Week and on a daily basis. How can you look forward to this repetitive theme if it's the same old thing?

From asking my peers in my classes I have come to a consensus that the students want change. We want themes that are unique and aren't constantly the same thing (unless they are 'USA,' 'Pink Out,' and 'Camo'). Some theme ideas could include white lie t-shirts, Black Out, 'Construction,' and 'Jungle.'

Picking football themes for the entire student population to join is very difficult, but maybe instead it's time to pick the themes with a vote from the students. If people vote for a theme, they are more likely to come and cheer on Freeman. For example, this year for the games against Deep Run and Hermitage, it was exciting to vote on themes such as 'Black Out' and 'Neon' on Instagram. Voting is important to Freeman and society as a whole to incorporate everyone's ideas and make sure all voices are heard.

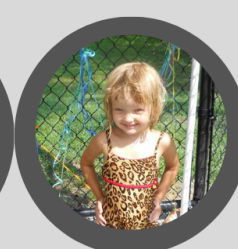
Freeman Football needs the Mav man, the students, obviously the football team, the cheerleaders, the band, and the theme. It's a small detail that connects everyone, gets them excited, and makes our school look united. When a small group of people match, it's cute, but when a large number of them match, it's powerful.

HE SAID SHE SAID

Matthew Wozniak
News Editor



Cate Woodrum
Features Editor



Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade Floats

Overrated honestly. I get the hype though.



The Rockettes

I love Snoopy! Astronaut snoopy in 2021 was amazing.



Snoopy

Reminds me of gnomes. I love little woodland creatures.



The Smurfs

Why?



Ronald McDonald

Nice closer and a good transition to the Christmas season.



Santa

My family used to see them every year, those girls are so amazing.

Snoopy is my absolute favorite, he's so timeless.

I think Smurfette is cute, but the others are a little annoying.

Gives me the creeps.

The classic, a big ticket float that everyone knows to look out for!

The Girls Gains Club: Freeman Females and Weightlifting

Maya Tluchak
Copy Editor

The Girls Gains Club is an all-girl organization that was established three years ago at Freeman. The club provides opportunities every other Friday during Freeman-focus for young women at Freeman to learn safe and healthy ways to engage in strength training. Girls Gains is a place for young women to weight lift without “having to worry about anyone judging them,” said junior Janelle Stallings, an active member of the club. The club works to “give girls [the] confidence to work out,” said Janelle. They want to push the message that if you “stay positive and believe, you can achieve anything,” she said. Mr. Clements, the club sponsor and a physical education teacher at Freeman, is a key resource for members learning to exercise

healthily. Seeing as weightlifting is “such a male-dominated thing,” the club “helps girls be in the gym [and teaches] them correct form on lots of different exercises, but also different types of training,” said Mr. Clements.

Mr. Clements’ extensive knowledge of health and exercise helps the girls learn about the “benefits of doing [certain exercises and their effects on] your body,” said sophomore Julianna Mantovani, the Girls Gains Club President. To conduct the club meetings, Mr. Clements “helps us do the exercise[s],” said Julianna.

A typical meeting for the club starts in the weight room where Mr. Clements begins by answering any questions written down from the previous meeting. Some members “want to target [a specific] area,” said Mr. Clements. As the club’s sponsor, “I’m the one that’s going to show them how to do the technique,” he said. Then, the girls are free to lift on their own agenda.

However, the club is not only about weightlifting, it is also about girl empowerment and friendship. “The group of girls that we have are supportive of each other. They like each other and want to see each other do well and I think that’s important,” said Mr. Clements. It is “just good camaraderie for the [girls],” he said. Girls Gains creates a positive atmosphere at Freeman for young women, as well. “We’re all super close-knit and very supportive of each other and cheer each other [on] to be the best we can be,” said Janelle.

The club helps to create an environment where “girls support other girl[s],” said Julianna. “It’s a fun way to get advice as well,” she said. For example, Janelle came into the Girls Gains because she “wanted to get help from her peers with weightlifting,” she said. Going into a new gym without knowing anyone can be an intimidating experience. However, the

Girls Gains Club works to create a familiar and comfortable environment for its members. “It makes me feel less nervous to go to the gym,” said Janelle. The Girls Gains Club also does not require any prior experience with weightlifting or exercise. “You can try out for fun” or come in wanting to target “arms [and] biceps,” said Julianna. However, establishing healthy exercise through guidance and training is necessary for the Girls Gains Club because “it’s so important, now, to [learn] good habit[s],” said Mr. Clements. This is important when taking “health issues like osteoporosis and bone density” into consideration, he said. Although the club is relatively small, Julianna and Mr. Clements are working to expand it by “putting up posters [and] putting [information] in the morning announcements,” said Julianna. Julianna is pushing for “a bigger club...to help bring out confidence” for the



PHOTO: JANELLE STALLINGS

Girls Gains training together
female community at Freeman. Overall, the Girls Gains Club is working to “get more females interested and involved [in healthy exercise,” said Mr. Clements. This Freeman club is helping push past the idea that weightlifting is a male-dominated activity by teaching young women “not [to] be afraid [and to] have confidence,” he said.

Mr. Peck’s Overseas Research

Libby Mercer
Editor-in-Chief

The Leadership Center’s Director, Mr. Peck has been given a grant by the Rudolph and Esther Bunzl (R.E.B.) Foundation to travel overseas to U.S. territories such as Guam and Puerto Rico to conduct research on what it is like to be a citizen in American territories. With the help of this grant, Mr. Peck’s research will span 18 weeks. He has already conducted research in Puerto Rico, The Blackfoot Reservation, and the Navajo Nation, and in November he traveled to Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. To win the grant, Mr. Peck proposed a research idea to conduct a deep dive into being an American citizen in an American territory where the culture might not reflect the stereotypical United States. “I was interested in the ideas of citizenship by people who are American citizens in the American

territories and on Native American reservations, but might not have all the same rights the way that [American Citizens] do,” said Mr. Peck. This research is relevant to the state of America today, which is something that guides Mr. Peck’s research. “At a time where our politicians seem to be arguing about who the real citizens are, [I want to know] how people who are citizens but don’t get treated like citizens feel about that,” said Mr. Peck.

Mr. Peck is not sure what the final product of his research will be, but he intends to offer professional training for teachers on what citizenship means. No matter the result, Mr. Peck hopes that “[the research] broadens the way that I think about what citizenship means,” he said. Mr. Peck has already brought home new knowledge from his research to help teach his students, especially in his Advanced Placement (AP) Government classes. For example, “[The Navajo Nation’s] vision of what Justice looked like looks dif-



A grave yard and colonial era fort in Puerto Rico

ferent from Anglo-American constitutional law, and I thought that was fascinating,” said Mr. Peck. History teacher Mr. Larkins relates Mr. Peck’s research to the History department and the Leadership Center at Freeman: “I think [Mr. Peck’s research] ties into the [projects] that our school has been pushing; things like the We the People competition, and Project Maverick,” said Mr. Larkins. “It is all about civic responsibility, citizenship, and what does it mean in 2024 to be an engaged young person in public life?,” said Mr. Larkins. With the multitude of opportunities at Freeman to engage in civics, Mr. Peck’s research will be relevant to Freeman’s history department and community as a whole. Senior Adie Fankhauser is a student in the Leadership program who had Mr. Peck as an Ethics teacher last year and again this year as her AP Government teacher. Adie believes research would benefit everybody,” she said. In addition, Adie believes that Mr. Peck’s

research will help “make everybody more engaged voters and citizens and promote a lot more civic participation,” said Adie.

This is not Mr. Peck’s first R.E.B. grant. He took his first one in 2007 where he conducted research along the Rhine River, studying the cultural differences between the French-speaking territory and the prevalent German culture, due to the territory being given back and forth between the two countries. “What I was interested in is how the people perceive their Frenchness or their Germanness,” said Mr. Peck, which is the same concept of identity that he’s studying in the American territories.

The R.E.B. Foundation gives teachers and school leaders grants and awards annually. In addition to providing Mr. Peck’s grant, last year they awarded Freeman’s Principle, Dr. Marshall, the “R.E.B. Award for Distinguished Educational Leadership,” an award that granted him \$20,000 for school projects. Furthermore, the R.E.B. Foundation

also selected English teacher Mr. Abril as a finalist for their R.E.B. Award for Teaching Excellence.

The R.E.B. Foundation’s grants are designed to help recognized teachers develop their teaching skills and deepen their knowledge in specialized areas. “Teachers are still interested in learning more to make them better at what they do, and not just better teachers, but better people,” said Mr. Peck. “[The R.E.B. Foundation donates a pool of] X millions of dollars to help make that a reality for 10 or 15 [teachers and leaders] every year, that’s an amazing gift,” said Mr. Peck.

Mr. Peck is ultimately interested in what it takes to bridge the gap between different cultures and between the United States and their territories. “The language of politics is exclusionary,” said Mr. Peck. “There’s ‘my team,’ and there’s ‘your team,’ and [that gets us] nowhere, that’s not healthy,” he said. “If we could learn to see each other differently, how much better off would we be?” Mr. Peck intends to do that by engaging in conversations with the people of the territories. “I think that’s a conversation that we can have,” said Mr. Peck. “The end goal of all of those conversations is that all of our hearts and minds and souls are a little more open to people who don’t look or talk or sound or even think the way that we do, but we still have more in common than not.”



PHOTO: MR. PECK

A traditional Navajo ceremony in Monument Valley, AZ

The British Embassy: Bringing British Culture to Richmond

Nina Henley
Staff Writer

The British Embassy, a new restaurant in downtown Richmond, opened its doors on Sept. 23, 2024, and has settled into the Richmond community. Located at the intersection of East Main Street and North 12th Street, the restaurant was established by owners Jon Niemiec and Joy Supanya. Mr. Niemiec and Mrs. Supanya are from Thailand and the United Kingdom (UK) respectively. They both are set on utilizing their cultural backgrounds to infuse a sense of their home into the menu. “We are bringing some of my home comfort food back to America,” said Mr. Niemiec.

Mr. Niemiec traveled all over the world before coming to America. “I grew up in the UK, then I moved to Canada for a while, then I moved to Bermuda for 10 years,” said Mr. Niemiec. His time in Bermuda influenced his move to America, allowing him to understand American culture. “I was familiar with American culture for a number of years because [while] I was living in Bermuda and I would visit the U.S. three or four times every month,” he said. Mr. Niemiec never expected that

he was going to be a restaurant owner. “I was an insurance underwriter for 40 years. I had no restaurant experience from a working perspective,” he said. Despite this, culinary talent “runs in the family,” said Mr. Niemiec. His grandfather was a chef and his son is currently one in the UK. Mr. Niemiec and Mrs. Supanya met just before Mr. Niemiec traveled to the US. “We met online when Joy was up in Washington,” said Mr. Niemiec.

From Thailand, Mrs. Supanya learned how to cook when she was very young. Her culture influenced this by having a large and tight-knit household. “You’re cooking even when you cannot cook,” said Ms. Supanya. “[When you are] three years old, you start helping,” she said. Mrs. Supanya moved to America in 2006 after she graduated from a college in Thailand. Before embarking on their restaurant journey, she worked as a licensed massage therapist. “The [restaurant] work is physically more exhausting, mentally more exhausting but we have been much happier,” said Mrs. Supanya.

The couple’s culinary journey began in a food truck selling Thai cuisine. Mrs. Supanya founded this idea when visiting a friend in Philadelphia. “She came back, raving about this friend with the food truck,” said Mr. Niemiec. “We

were both bored with our jobs, and so we bought a food truck.” After sales became consistent, they decided to open up a restaurant in Short Pump called “Thai Won on.”

After opening the Thai restaurant, the couple noticed that while dinner sales were thriving, lunch sales were lacking. After noticing the difference in sales, Mr. Niemiec decided to incorporate some of his home foods into their menu. With the help of his friend, who used to have a fish and chips restaurant, “[Mr. Niemiec] got the recipe, and then he started making his own batter,” said Mrs. Supanya.



PHOTO: NINA HENLEY

Joy posed at the front counter

After comparing the sales between the fish and chips that they sold during lunch and their main focus of Thai food, the two realized they were equivalent. This inspired Mr. Niemiec to create a new restaurant dedicated to fish and chips as well as other British foods. Mr. Niemiec makes a good portion of the food sold at the British Embassy. “I make the sticky toffee pudding. I make the onion gravy when we have Yorkshire pudding. I also make the batter for our fish and chips fresh every day,” said Mr. Niemiec.

The couple soon bought the 120-year-old building that they now reside in and spent time fixing it up before opening the restaurant. “My wife renovated most of it. She’s about three feet tall, and did all the painting right up to the ceiling,” said Mr. Niemiec. The renovations took about six months to complete and by the time they were finished “everything was completely different from the way it was before,” said Mr. Niemiec.

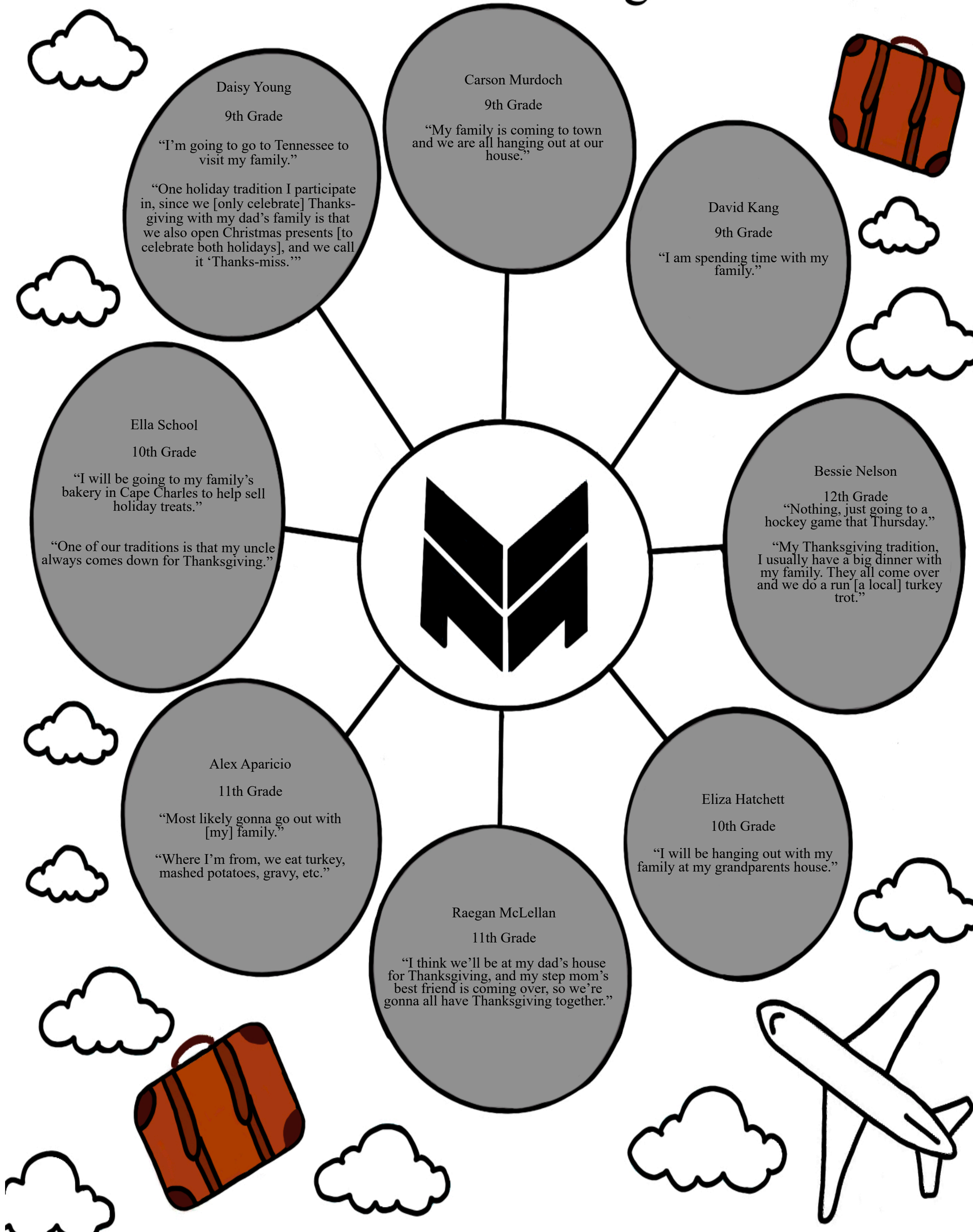
Despite the restaurant being new to the area, Mr. Niemiec and Mrs. Supanya have lots of plans for the future. “We will be putting on a full English breakfast at some stage as well as thinking about doing a British Sunday lunch roast lunch as well,” said Mr. Niemiec. “Eventually, we’ll have premier

games on big sports events and things on the TV,” he said. The British Embassy, being new, has not acquired their Alcoholic Beverage Control license yet but they hope to start a happy hour. “Once we have our license, we’ll have more details,” said Mr. Niemiec.

The unofficial manager and bartender, Kevin Zeithaml, who was born and raised in Charlottesville, Virginia has only good things to say about the working environment at the restaurant. “Jon and Joy are great,” said Mr. Zeithaml. “They’re fun to work with, they are both incredibly sweet and overall, we have a great team here,” he said. Mr. Zeithaml has lived in Richmond since 2018 and has recently devoted his time to the British Embassy. “Some days I’m here longer than I’m at my home,” said Mr. Zeithaml.

As the British Embassy establishes itself in downtown Richmond, Mr. Niemiec has high expectations of his staff and multiple improvements for the restaurant in mind. “Everybody’s familiar with what needs to be done within the restaurant,” said Mr. Niemiec. Although the culinary journey for the couple has had its challenges, “everybody’s been fantastically kind and generous, we’ve had so much help from some amazing people,” he said.

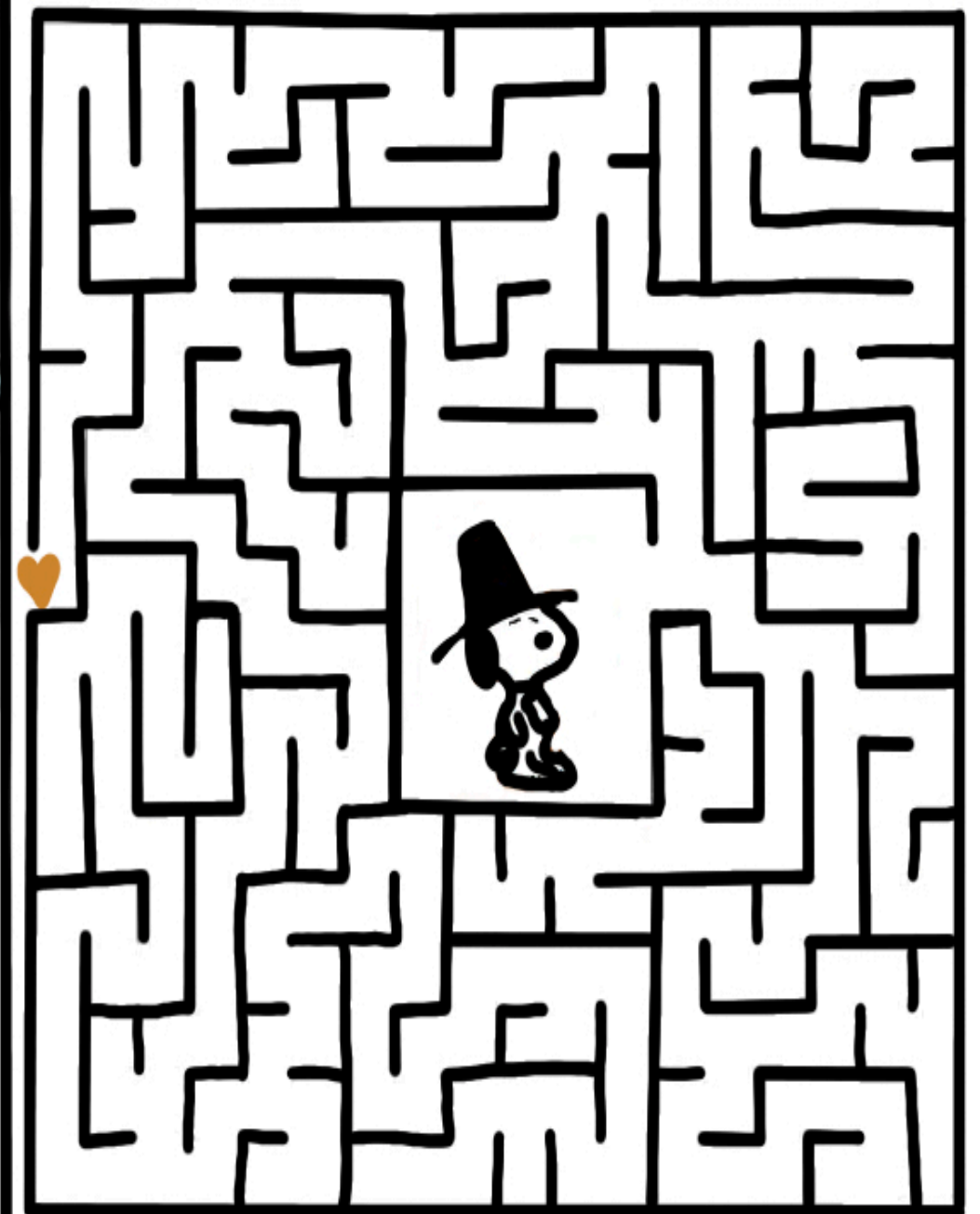
What are the Mavs doing over break?



Word Search

R U G Z L L G N I F F U T S F
 S U N P W U F R T G Q D E A S
 E B I L U M F U A F Z I L E R
 V A V S T M R K H T R L O J E
 S E I H W K P C N R I T D T H
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| PUMPKIN | GOBBLE | CRANBERRIES |
| CORN | GRATITUDE | POTATOES |
| FEAST | PIE | TRADITION |



Thanksgiving
Maze

Robotics Returns: Updates on Freeman's Robotics Team

Nikki Rajan
Staff Writer

It has been three years since the Freeman Robotics Team has competed, and now they're making a return. The robotics team at Freeman first met again at the beginning of this school year on Sept. 10. Since then, they have been meeting weekly to discuss and create projects and set goals for the team.

"It's been a really fun experience," said junior James Gray, the team founder. Now, "[the team] usually meets in Mr. Altman's room and works on building certain components of the robot," said James. The building process is "about designing everything and making sure you think everything through," he said. "We've gotten to work on everything from just getting student interest to doing administrative work."

The Robotics team has focused on getting more students involved and building the club up. The Robotics Club also has a separate team for fundraising and financially supporting the club. "It's a very real possibility that we get to go to Houston for Worlds, the only thing we really need is funding," said James. "I have learned to reach out to other corporations and get serious advice from them for funding. It's been very helpful," he said.

Club sponsor and physics teacher Mr. Altman has also contributed to the team and has his own set of goals for what the club

can achieve. "Freeman is fortunate to be a high achieving diverse school, and we want to use this wide range of perspectives and experiences to empower all students to become STEM leaders who will then go on and inspire younger students from similar backgrounds to explore STEM," said Mr. Altman.

The Robotics Club is also focusing on being sustainable this year: "We are encouraging the team members to repair, modify,

and repurposed materials to do everything right now," he said.

The four groups: the building team, coding team, finance team, and communications team all work on different parts of the club. As part of the initiative to become sustainable and save money for the team, "the build team has repurposed old tables, desks, and wood from the furniture salvage pile outside to build a kind of maker space on wheels," said Mr. Altman. The

new materials," said Mr. Altman.

To get to their goal of going to Worlds, the robotics team prepares by doing local competitions. In a robotics competition, organizers decide on a challenge for the robot to complete and assign two teams of three people to compete against each other. The team that makes the most points from the challenge wins. The games or challenges are announced six weeks before the competition date. After the challenge gets released, "you just [have] to build a robot as fast as possible to play it," said James.

With four different groups of students on the team, each specializing in a different category, various projects, and ideas are being tackled at every meeting. Robotics isn't only coding: "No matter if you're interested in STEM or business, there's something there for you," said James. The building team worked on a portable makerspace for coding creations and the coding team has been learning to script Java and C++. On the business side, the communications and finance teams have been making a case statement to convince sponsors to provide funding to contribute to team achievements.

Junior club member Sachin Vijay is involved in the club on the Coding team. "The Coding team is meant to program autonomous functions for the robot," said Sachin. These coding functions are part of the challenge sector of the competitions. The team is also responsible for coding in C++ coding script. "Most people

don't actually know C++ because it's an old language, so we're learning how to do it [as a team] at club meetings," said Sachin.

Along with learning new coding languages, the building team is "learning how to 3D print," said Sachin. 3D printing involves using a machine found in the library. This year, Sachin is most excited about "collaborating with other people and working with the team," he said. "Honestly, anyone can do it. If they're interested in coding, engineering, or business, it could be really good for you."

As the school year continues, the robotics team will continue to work on their main goals. "Meetings look a bit hectic right now, but we are in a growing period," Mr. Altman said. Different teams for the club come on different days to work each week, so the team constantly has members contributing to their projects and innovating. "Starting a For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) robotics team strongly resembles a small start-up business. Students will get a sense of the real-world applications for the skills they will learn," said Mr. Altman.

Robotics requires students to work on new challenges assigned every competition, to "think innovatively, and to gain funding and brainstorm," said James. Students in the Robotics Club participate in a range of activities. "Just get into it. It doesn't take any prior experience; it just takes a willingness to learn, and it's really fun," he said.



Freeman's Robotics Club members

and creatively reuse materials, and in the process, create a culture of sustainable innovation that prepares our team for long-term success while minimizing our environmental footprint" said Mr. Altman. "We firmly believe that innovation is at the heart of engineering, especially when working with limited resources, so our team is currently embracing the challenge of using recycled

team works with these materials and resources already provided by the school and Mr. Altman to create something they can use as a building space for their projects. This is where they work on their physical robots and construct any new parts needed. "[The team] rebuilt and calibrated old 3D printers from our school's 3D printer lab to 3D print any and all organizational materials instead of buying

From Hamburg to Hambura: Community Outreach through Coffee

Matthew Wozniak
News Editor

New Freeman multilingual learner (MLL) teacher, Mr. Whitt, aims to help disadvantaged people in the community through his company, Hambura Coffee Company. Selling drinks out of a trailer, the 'coffee food truck' caters for events and sets up at local markets, including espresso and cold drinks, like cold brew and iced lattes in a variety of flavors.

The business also sells coffee beans wholesale to small grocery stores, churches, and restaurants, including The Stables at Belmont and the Black Iris social club downtown.

Mr. Whitt's coffee journey started after moving to Germany in 2013, working with a company that bought coffee from overseas. "I taught English in a coffee importer in Hamburg, where we lived, and I got really connected with different cafes and roasters in the city," said Mr. Whitt. "I became inundated with coffee there," he said.

The first thing Mr. Whitt did during his coffee journey was roast beans. "I love making coffee and brewing coffee as well, but I really love roasting," he said. After starting to roast beans in his own home using a stovetop popcorn popper, he began to distribute small batches to his family and friends.

Mr. Whitt's coffee has been purchased by a few teachers here at Freeman, including French teacher Mrs. Bleecher. "He sent a text in the group chat for World Language teachers asking if anyone wanted to buy it," she said. As someone who's into coffee, Mrs. Bleecher has tried many different brews, and she has a high view of Mr. Whitt's. "It's not a cheap coffee," she said. "You can taste the difference be-

tween a cheap coffee and a well-thought-out coffee, by someone who knew what they were doing."

While on the surface it might look like just a coffee business, Mr. Whitt's goals with the company go beyond coffee. "My big dream with [Hambura Coffee Company] is that coffee is an avenue to provide options and pathways for people that may not otherwise have them," said Mr. Whitt.

Implementing programs created by the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA), the Hambura Coffee Company hopes to train underprivileged people in areas such as barista skills, brewing, and roasting. According to Mr. Whitt, the programs will also provide social-emotional learning, life skills, and financial literacy.

As a teacher of MLL students here at Freeman, helping people is a big part of Mr. Whitt's day-to-day life. "Partnering with people, working alongside people, helping them to be successful" is something that "always been on [his] mind," he said. According to Mr. Whitt, a big part of helping people to be successful is getting them "to that point where they can be proud of what they've accomplished" and not feel like something is a handout. Helping people "realize their potential," he said, "is something that I've built my life on."

Soon after beginning to roast beans, Mr. Whitt started thinking about how he could turn his new coffee-roasting hobby into a way to help others. Although still in the early stages, he is hoping to be able to bring this social work into prisons and jails to create opportunities for inmates to have jobs as soon as they get released. "I felt like it was crazy," he said, "doing social services, working with a prison."

However, when he came across a company doing exactly that,

he knew he was onto something. "I came across a company outside of London, where the UK Ministry of Justice had actually asked them to move their roastery into a prison and do a training program to help with recidivism," he said. "When I saw that, I was like, maybe I'm not crazy."

The name of the company, Hambura Coffee Company, is a Rwandan word meaning to untie. "I went to Rwanda in 2019 — one of my good friends is from there, and he wanted to take me," said Mr. Whitt.

When Mr. Whitt was on this trip, his business didn't leave his mind: he began meeting with exporters there and visiting their facilities. "I got to visit different washing stations," he said. "That's where farmers deliver their coffee cherries. It's actually a fruit that they deliver to these stations, and then it's processed and turned into the beans that we get here."

These connections allow Hambura Coffee Company to know exactly where their coffee beans come from and every step they take to get here. "It's a really cool connection that we have [in Rwanda]," said Mr. Whitt. "That's the place that the international coffee world is really moving toward, to sustainability, accountability, and relationships," he said.

Usually, only larger companies will have these sorts of connections with exporters. "The fact that a company that's really small like ours already has a direct partnership with growers and an exporter at the point of origin is really good," said Mr. Whitt.

Mr. Whitt's care for disadvantaged people comes from his personal experiences. Shortly after moving to Germany in 2013, he experienced the refugee crisis firsthand, moving him to do as much as he could to help. "My neighborhood took on eight refugee camps, and between five and six thousand refugees within just a matter of months," said Mr. Whitt. This large number of new immigrants meant that there was a lot that people needed to do to help. "Some of the projects I was working with in Germany took refugee outreach and engagement and acculturation really seriously," he said. "Being a part of that also really impacted my heart for people that were very, very different from me."

The company is very small but has big plans for the future. "There's still a lot of dreams right now," said Mr. Whitt. The time he spends working on his company is limited due to him and his business partner, Lee, both having families and full-time jobs. "I'm a dreamer. I very often have these big ideas, and I need people to tell me it's not crazy and come alongside me and help me do it. That's what's happening with [my coffee company]," said Mr. Whitt.



Mr. Whitt serving coffee from his trailer

The O-fish-al Freeman Fishing Club

Scotty Gregory
Online Editor-in-Chief
Opinions Editor

Freeman's Fishing Club experienced a temporary shutdown because of the pandemic. However, recently, the club has begun to reel students back in.

The Freeman Fishing Club allows students with similar interests to connect and share their experiences and insights about fishing. The club meets two times a month every other Friday to discuss topics such as types of fish, optimal fishing locations — both saltwater and freshwater — fishing regulations, and much more. The club hopes to form a scheduled outing in the future for many of the club members to go out and fish together.

This year, the club has been very active. They have designed T-shirts for their members, done giveaways, and met multiple times.

Before COVID-19 hit, the club was sponsored by Mr. Seagar, the AP Macroeconomics, and Microeconomics teacher before he left. This year, however, Juniors Tristan Sayed and Jack Yartz, hoped to restart the club and asked Swim and Dive coach and Woodshop teacher Mr. Gromling to be the sponsor. As an adamant fisher himself, he jumped at the opportunity.

The Fishing Club has some advice for all out there who are interested. According to the slideshows presented at the club, some spots to fish locally are Echo Lake, the James River Course at the Country Club of Virginia (CCV), Twin Lake, and so many more.

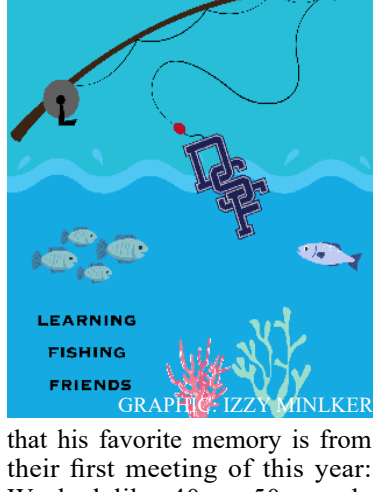
Where you are fishing also changes the type of fish you will catch. There are specific fish that you will find in freshwater versus saltwater and the Freeman Fishing Club can help you identify those.

requires a license at age 16 in Virginia, starting at \$23. Saltwater, on the other hand, has a lot more regulations because the ecosystem is much more diverse and has to be protected. If you want to learn more about saltwater regulations, Freeman Fishing Club can help you!

There are thousands of fish in the sea, and the Fishing Club goes over detailed information about local fish. Their presentations discuss their preferred bait, the best method of catching them, where they are commonly found, their acreage weight, and even the state record.

The club is a tight-knit community that the members can fall back on. Tristan Sayed says

DSF FISHING CLUB



that his favorite memory is from their first meeting of this year: We had like 40 or 50 people in [Mr. Gromling's] room. It was packed," said Tristan.

The club is an outlet to try something new, as well as hone old skills. If you are interested in learning to fish, the club is a great way to get acquainted without making any big commitments. The club encourages everyone to join, no matter your skill level. "All are welcome. New beginners, intermediate, advanced, experts, we're all in the same boat learning together," said Mr. Gromling.

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Freeman Golf Swings Their Way to Success in Regionals

Saanvi Gourishetty
Staff Writer

Since 1999, the Freeman High School golf team has had yet to secure a victory at the Virginia High School League regional tournament. However, this year the team took home first place in the Class 5, Region C tournament after riding on the momentum of the longest winning streak in Freeman golf history.

Ben Cowgill, a sophomore on the team, contributed a strong individual performance with the top score out of the Freeman team. "It is pretty special to be able to wear the Freeman logo and compete for a regional title," said Ben. "The fact that we won, and for the first time in a while, just goes to show how much we all appreciate and value the school we represent," he said.

A standout moment in the tournament appears to be "when Ben Cowgill came in with a [score of] 65, [and then] we knew we were going to be good," said senior Joe Winston, a member of the golf team.

According to Ben, while individual performances were important, it was the team's collective effort that led to their success. "We've had players win matches and tournaments throughout the season, but at regionals, we really played our best as a team," said Ben. "Winning individually was a great achievement, but the team win will always be the top priority," he said.

One key factor behind the team's victory was the camaraderie built over months of practice: "We played matches every practice and pushed each other to [the] limits," said Joe.

Ben also pointed to a moment that embodied the team's unity and brotherhood during the tournament. "During the round, I was talking with Grayden Thouron, one of my teammates," said Ben. "He was playing well and had good momentum, which helped all of us continue to play well. It really felt like we were all in it together," he said.

The team's success thus far has been attributed to its consistent performance and preparation. Head Coach Andrew Moore "always has us practice the way we play in matches and tournaments [which has] been key to how we've performed this season, especially in regionals," said Ben. The team's preparation and growth throughout the season also played a significant part in building up to their win. "[It's] helped us prepare us for the postseason," he said.

The team's success this season came after several years of losses. Coach Moore noted that this team signaled the potential for a championship run. "There were a few distinct moments when I knew this team might have what it takes to be exceptional in 2024," said Coach Moore. "Finishing second at the Curly Licklider Invitational, beating Deep Run at the Colonial District Tournament, and tying Monacan at their home course were key moments," he said. However, "the turning point was after we suffered our first loss in over two years." After their streak of 35 straight victories in the regular season the team "lost a close home match,"

said Coach Moore. "I was curious to see how we would respond to adversity, [but] the team bounced back, played its best round of the year, and gave me confidence heading into regionals," he said.

Coach Moore also accredits the team's success to the abundance of players that have stayed consistent members of the team since last season. "These [returning] golfers had experience in high-stakes tournaments and knew how to handle pressure," said Coach Moore. "Our senior leaders and overall strong senior class were critical to our success this season," he said.

Joe also shared his mindset during the final rounds, emphasizing the importance of staying calm under pressure. "I was trying to just play solid golf, not lose any balls, no three putts, and not get mad at small mistakes," he said. "It also felt solid to win not only for us but for the seniors before us," he said.

The team set ambitious goals at the beginning of the season: "We wanted to win regionals and states, and we accomplished one of those goals, but couldn't quite get states done," said senior Joe Winston.

Despite their second-place finish at states, "many of [the] team members have improved because they push one another every day," Coach Moore said. "I don't take credit for their growth—they are the ones [who took] ownership of that process," he said. With a regional championship secured and a season filled with resilience and standout performances, the team has set a strong foundation for future success, leaving fans eager to see what's next for this rising group of athletes.

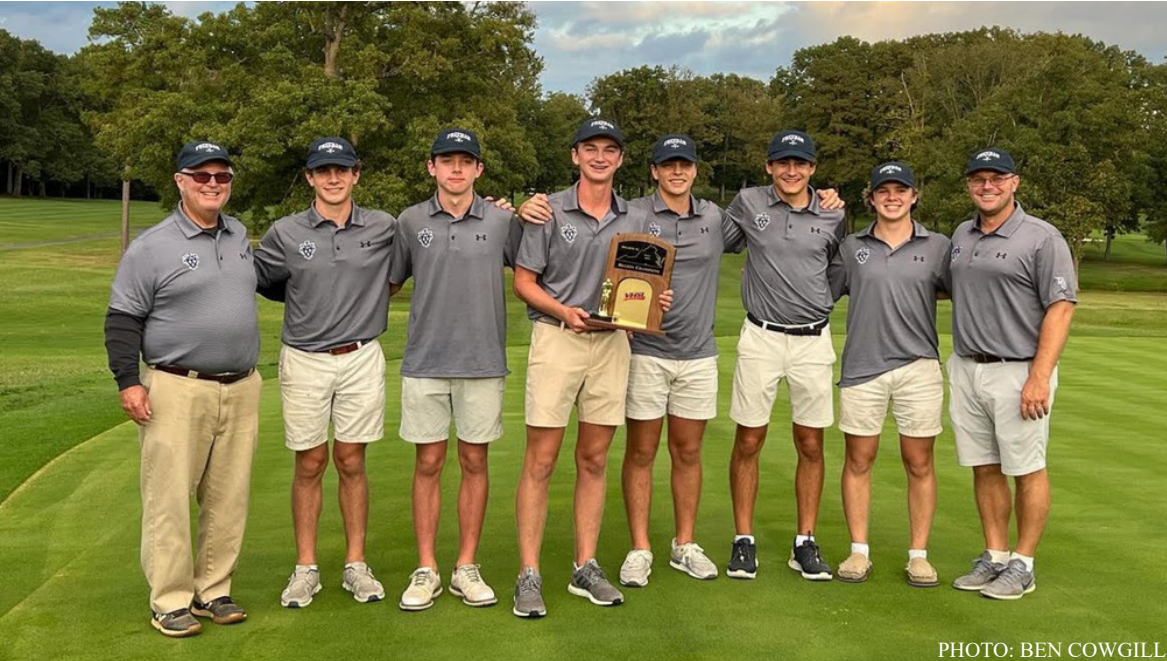


PHOTO: BEN COWGILL

The golf team poses with their regional championship trophy

Batter Up: Ryleigh Perks's Division I Commitment

Julia Connor
Arts & Entertainment Editor

Ryleigh Perks, a junior softball player, has hit a home run! Over the summer Ryleigh committed to the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) where she will continue her academic and athletic career. However, she still has two seasons left to support the Freeman softball team and the Starz Gold travel team, until she heads off to Blacksburg.

Ryleigh started playing softball at the age of four alongside her twin sister Kayleigh Perks. They have been practicing together since they first began playing and have continued their careers closely by doing "the same recruiting stuff [and softball] camps together," said Kayleigh.

Ryleigh has played softball for more than ten years and over those years "she has [accumulated] a lot of talent [and] she's put a lot of hard work in to get where she is," said Freeman Softball's head coach, Becky Milton.

Virginia Tech had been on Ryleigh's college radar for some time and "[before recruiting] Virginia Tech was probably my number one [choice]," said Ryleigh. During official visits, prospective student-athletes are taken around campus and to events. On Ryleigh's Virginia Tech visit, she attended a football game where she watched from the field and later bowled with freshmen on the softball team. She also watched how the softball team practiced,

which is something that "I didn't do at other schools," said Ryleigh.

Virginia Tech's softball program stood out to Ryleigh compared to other schools she visited "because the coaches were very personable," said Ryleigh. "[VT] was really family-oriented, [it] felt right compared to the other schools I visited," she said.

As of June 2024, Virginia Tech's softball team is ranked 20th of 307 Division I teams based on their 2024 season performance, according to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The Virginia Tech softball team won 40 games in their 2024 season and made its fifth straight NCAA postseason appearance.

The softball team has united and become a close-knit community over the years. As the players have grown together through their time playing on the team, they have worked towards a positive atmosphere of being, "very supportive, even if we don't win," said Ryleigh.

Coach Milton believes in the importance of relationship-building within the team structure. As the team leader to a "hard-working group of girls, kind of like a family, people take care of each other," she said. "[The team] has only lost one senior, so we [will] continue to build our young team, and our pitcher will have another year of experience, [which] will be good," she said.

Ryleigh's work off the field is seen by her teammates as a reflection of her performance on the field. "She's a leader on the team," said sophomore Annie Keating,

one of Ryleigh's teammates. "She throws hard and hits hard, and influences other people to want to work hard and be like her," she said. Ryleigh also offers support to her teammates and "picks us up after we make an error [in a game]," said Annie.

Softball recruiting opens Sept. 1 of an athlete's junior year of high school, according to Next College Student Athlete College Recruiting (NCSA). Some other athletes on the Freeman softball team have recently gone through a commitment or begun the recruitment process, too. "I know it is very stressful for them, and the competitiveness is there," said Coach Milton. "Just for them to go through the process, I know it's been quite an ordeal, and now they're finally getting their rewards out of it," she said.

The softball recruiting process opens for Annie, a member of the travel team Hanover Hornets, next year. "[I] will for sure go to Ryleigh with questions and help [during the process]," said Annie. "I'm excited to see what Ryleigh does in college, and I'm excited to follow [her journey]," she said.

As the season approaches and preseason workouts begin, "[the team will] continue to work hard together and be successful and look forward to the upcoming season," said Coach Milton. During the spring sports season, look out for softball team tryouts and game schedules to support the team and their players, and keep your eyes peeled for Ryleigh as she makes her way to Blacksburg for the 2026-2027 season.



Icy Slopes and Competitive Spirits: Winter Sports

Emerson Post
Staff Writer

As the temperature drops and we anticipate the first snowflakes will start to fall, Freeman High School's winter sports season is in full swing. Sports like diving, basketball, wrestling, and winter track will participate in high-level competitions this winter season.

The girls' basketball team had a 13-10 record last season and ended up making it to the first round of the playoffs. This playoff run was led by team captains Addie Morton and Meredith Stoneman. They put up a fight but fell in the first round to William Fleming High School. As these athletes transition into their season, they will have the task of managing their academic workloads alongside their respective sport. "[There are] definitely times that I'll get behind on things," said junior Addie Morton, captain of the girls varsity basketball team. "I definitely like [to] stick to a schedule," she said.

"[We] practice six to eight and I'll come home for about two hours, then get some homework done." Despite any challenges Addie may face, she finds that being part of a sports team fosters a strong sense of community at Freeman: "We all know each other really well," said Addie. "We hang out outside of school, and definitely during the school season." Freeman sports offer an open experience that allows athletes to meet new people and compete alongside them. "You'll meet some new people, and I think it's a good thing that high school has to offer...and [to be] involved in the school community," said Addie.

Sports at Freeman are also open to anyone willing to try out. "Even if you don't make the team, just go out and try," said Addie. Winter sports are a time of the year for the Freeman family that is very easy to be involved in, whether you are part of a team or not! Go out, stay warm, and support Addie and the rest of the girls' basketball team this winter season!

Around the same time the girls' and guys' basketball team begin their season, the Dive jumps into the water. Senior Blaine Nelson, captain of the dive team, has a different role than most during his sports season. As a captain, Blaine faces the responsibility of his teammates' well-being as members of the team. "I have to be accountable [while] also holding other people accountable," said Blaine. "[I have to] make sure they're doing well and

keep[ing] up with themselves and schoolwork, that way everybody can participate in all the events."

When it comes to balancing academics and sports, the teachers at Freeman have the same expectations for athletes as they do for students who do not participate in sports. "I feel like they treat you the same as any student," said Blaine. "They give you the same workload, and have the same expectations." This approach from teachers ensures that all students, regardless of their athletic commitments, are held to high academic standards. To ensure students prioritize their academics, student-athletes are required to maintain a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.5.

Similarly to Addie, Blaine believes that joining a winter sports team can be a rewarding experience for many people. "Never say no to an opportunity," said Blaine. "If you want to get involved with the [sports] community at Freeman, [that is something] you always can do."

Junior Ben Fendley, a member of the wrestling team, finds that participating in winter sports is a vital part of his high school experience: "There's a variety of people [on the team]," said Ben. "This helps create diversity in the program, and helps people of all grades build relationships with each other," he said. If you have some free time on your hands, go out and support the wrestling team on the mat this season!

If you're not rallying together in the student section at the women's and men's basketball games, going out to the poolside to support the dive team, or next to the mat watching the wrestling team, run on over to support the winter track team! Sophomore Noah Thoene also believes winter sports are important for building school spirit: "[Sports at Freeman] bring people together who are passionate about a single sport and create a good and hype atmosphere," he said. Thoene was able to participate in the community that is Freeman sports this past season, which has enhanced his experience at Freeman: Sports help you communicate and know more people and it [also] helped me find my main friend group freshman year," said Thoene.

Winter sports offer students different ways to stay active during the months lacking vitamin D. Whether participating in the pool, on the track, on the court, or on the mat, students have the opportunity to develop their team-building and physical skills and along with enjoying the season through these competitive activities.



PHOTO: RYLEIGH PERKS

Ryleigh poses in a Virginia Tech softball uniform

The Joker 2: Fail ‘à’ Dance

Libby Mercer
Editor-in-Chief

A painted red smile, neon green hair, or heartthrob Heath Ledger all might come to mind when thinking of Batman’s infamous villain, The Joker. While The Joker might have a classic look, in the sequel to the 2019 movie “Joker,” Joaquin Phoenix, who plays the title character, trades his regular loafers for tap shoes, and puts on his singing voice in this surprising, but unfortunately very true, musical.

This film and the first movie, purposefully do not follow the original DC comic book lore, and instead write their own. The ye old tale of “The Joker” goes that he falls into a tub of acid, bleaching his skin pale white, hair green, and his smile blood red. He has no crazy alien abilities like Thanos from Marvel, he is just a psychopath. Along the way, he meets Harley Quinn, his psychiatrist whom he manipulates into being his lover. The 2019 “Joker” is about a failed comedian named Arthur Fleck who slowly, after being repeatedly beaten up by the world, descends into maniacal and murderous ways. The most recent movie, “Joker: Folie à Deux,” focuses on not just the insanity of Arthur Fleck, nicknamed “The Joker,” but the insanity of Lee Quinzel, who is based on The DC Joker’s

canonical lover, Harley Quinn.

Instead of just being called “The Joker 2,” this installment of the Joker is titled: “Joker: Folie à Deux,” which translated from French means, “Joker: Insanity of Two,” referencing the descent into madness that both Arthur Fleck, also known as The Joker, and Lee Quinzel experience. After watching the movie, however, I think that it should be titled, “Joker: Folie à Trois,” meaning insanity of three, because not only do Arthur Fleck and Lee Quinzel lose their sanity, but so do the moviegoers who have to sit through the entirety of that movie. My reaction to the movie can be described by the reactions of the people who watched it around me: my friends with their mouths open and hands covering their faces in disgust, the person in the front row watching football instead, and the man sitting behind us loudly snoring.

After watching the 2019 Joker movie, I expected a similarly formatted movie that unveiled even more of Arthur Fleck’s troubled past and disastrous actions that led him to become “The Joker.” But only if you define “disastrous actions” with Joaquin Phoenix singing then you can say “Joker: Folie à Deux” accomplished that mission.

While I love a good musical, trust me the movie version of Newsies with Jeremy Jordan plays on repeat in my home and in my head, those two hours of

random musical numbers were the most excruciating hours I’ve ever spent inside a movie theater. Don’t ask me why in his court case about his accused murder of five people Arthur Fleck started signing and making out with Lady Gaga, who plays Lee Quinzel, because I cannot tell you other than the fact that I think this movie was meant to torture me. The worst part of sitting through those untimely musical numbers was that they didn’t do anything for the plot, which means that you can only vaguely consider that monstrosity a musical. After watching this movie, I thought, “Maybe I should take up musical hallucinations like Arthur Fleck” to cope with what I just watched.

The nature of having a series of movies that explain the backstory of Arthur Fleck leads a viewer to suspect that the movie is in tandem with the most recent Batman movie starring Robert Pattinson. And while all I want is for that to be true, the shocking ending of the movie proves otherwise. SPOILERS AHEAD: the movie ends with Arthur Fleck being stabbed to death, insinuating that he was not the Joker to Robert Pattinson’s Batman, but just a psychopath. This completely nullified and voided the hours I wasted watching the movie and ruined my sick hopes of this man finally falling into a vat of acid so he would stop singing.

The movie’s plot barely made any sense. Yes, it shows how he



Movie poster for “Joker: Folie à Deux”

fell in love with Lee Quinzel, and yes, it follows the trial for his crimes in the previous movie, but there were many moments that had nothing to do with the story and were barely brought up again. An example is when Arthur confronted Lee for lying to him and Lee deflects the accusations by blurring out the news that she is pregnant. She just casually drops that and then resumes singing. Never is it mentioned, sung, or danced about again. Given the nature of the first movie, where Arthur imagines a romantic relationship with himself and his neighbor, I was confused if Lee’s pregnancy announcement was real or imagined. I truly hope it’s not real because as Lee says the two small words, “I’m pregnant,” she says them with a cigarette between her lips. That cannot be healthy for the baby, but granted neither is the father she chose for the supposed child either.

I would be fine with plot moments like the pregnancy if they were used to further the plot, I would maybe even be fine with the musical numbers if they served that purpose as well. However, they did nothing for the movie except make it hard to sit through.

Surprisingly, a movie of this nature did have a couple of relatable moments. The first was when Lee turned to Arthur while watching a movie and said, “Can we please leave?” I too would have turned to my friends and asked them if we could leave if I was not committed to watching the full movie for this review. The second, was toward the end of the movie, after too many oddly timed musical break-outs, Lee starts singing to Arthur after breaking up with him, so he reasonably says to her, “Stop singing” while shushing her. Thank you for saying what we were all thinking, Mr. Fleck, we in the audience appreciate your efforts.

This isn’t the end of the line for DC villain spin-offs, however. “The Penguin,” another one of Batman’s foes, has his own TV show, which is currently airing. This show, thankfully, is a spin-off of the 2022 Batman movie that starred Robert Pattinson. All I can say is that I hope the penguin waddles his way to success and saves the DC universe from whatever the most recent Joker movie was. I believe in him as long as, for the love of God, he doesn’t start singing.



Lee Quinzel and Arthur Fleck in the movie

New “I Hope This Helps!” Documentary: “There is No Going Back”

Cate Woodrum
Features Editor

“I Hope This Helps!,” a recent documentary written and directed by Daniel Freed, a Freeman alum, works to understand and educate about the reality of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The documentary focuses on Bard AI, the predecessor of Google’s Gemini AI Chatbot, and the impacts of AI on the modern world. Currently, “I Hope This Helps!” is only being screened at film festivals, where critics have awarded it as it seeks to tackle AI’s growing role in society.

Daniel said he originally began his project by “talking to various people and various friends and playing around with AI after Chat GPT launched,” seeking to better understand AI for himself. However, once Daniel realized “a lot of people weren’t actually spending time to get to know what were the benefits and potentially, what were the risks of the rise in AI,” he said, he wanted to educate his audience

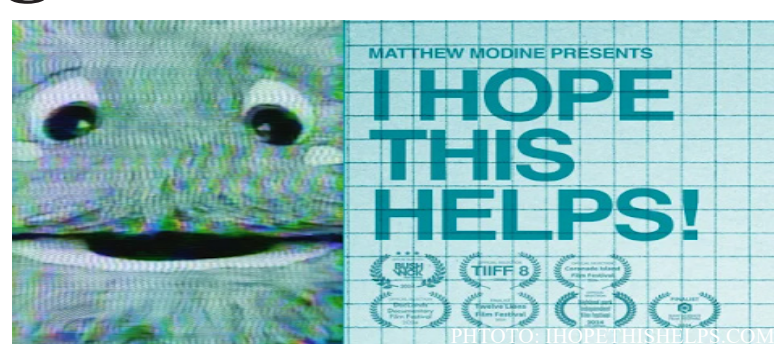
alongside himself. So, Daniel went right to the source when he started creating the documentary. Daniel asked Bard AI: “Do you want to help me make a documentary about artificial intelligence?” said Daniel. “[Bard, of course, said yes, and we went from there,” he said.

As the idea blossomed, a relationship between the human team and Bard began to develop. This relationship is shown when Daniel asked Bard how he wanted it to appear on screen: “A large, blue, furry creature with expressive eyes and the voice of a British woman,” said Bard. This manifested into a puppet that Daniel’s girlfriend made to ‘read’ Bard’s side of the conversation as Daniel puppeted it. Instances like these allowed Bard to establish its own character and its portrayal, something that gives “I Hope This Helps!” a perspective that gives AI a narrative.

As Bard and Daniel moved through their documentary, questions Daniel asked grossed from “asking it directly about AI being used to create autonomous weapons,” said Freed, to asking Bard to

“create propaganda or a message that would be used to talk about itself.” Daniel sought to tackle some of the “darker fears of AI’s development,” he said. In doing this “you see how a bad actor, if you will, would use these technologies to craft a message that it could spread to humans,” said Daniel, with the intention of creating a comedic light within the documentary while addressing concerns. Daniel had prior to this worked with one of the creators of The Daily Show on a separate piece, building a comedic background that made it important to “approach [I Hope This Helps!] with humor... so when people see it in the theater, they laugh,” said Daniel.

Even before his years in the film industry, Daniel wrote for Freeman’s The Commentator. Later, Daniel worked on the Consumer News and Business Channel’s (CNBC) “American Greed,” where he met many of the individuals who would come to make up his team for “I Hope This Helps!” This included his cinematographer, sound engineer, composer,



“I Hope This Helps” documentary trailer

and editor. Daniel’s team and the creation of the documentary was, very purposely, entirely human. This came down to their set design, props, and even drawings used within the film all being entirely handmade. Their reliance on human work even in the face of AI within entertainment was intended to juxtapose the rising use of AI in the film industry. “A lot of people in the industry are using [AI] to cut out people like me and the people who I worked with on this film out of work,” said Daniel. “It’s important to keep humans at the center of filmmaking,” he said.

AI is a topic that has made its way into the classroom as well as the film industry. Physics teacher, Mr. Altman has attested to AI’s usefulness as well as its drawbacks when it comes to education: “AI is going to shape pretty much every corner of our lives even more than it already has,” he said. Being a teacher, Mr. Altman is a part of the wave of the workforce who have had to adapt to AI’s emerging relevance. “The ignorance of AI is probably one of our biggest current dangers. We have been leveraging the use of AI for decades,” said Mr. Altman. “Rather than try to understand how AI works... people either ignore it or immediately demonize it.” However, Mr. Altman does not believe that AI is not without its dangers: “People were hoping that nuclear technology would hearken to a

time of infinite energy. We instead used that technology to make a bomb,” said Mr. Altman “Imagine the equivalent of an AI-bomb.”

I will break the fourth wall to let all you readers know that Mr. Altman used a blend of AI and his own writing to answer his interview. Mr. Altman is one of the many teachers who has decided to work alongside AI instead of resisting its rise. Mr. Altman put in what was asked of him and allowed AI to answer questions regarding its dangers and perception, giving AI who was mimicking his writing the platform to discuss its own possibilities. This is somewhat similar to how Daniel went about writing “I Hope This Helps!”. If you caught it, congratulations! If not, which most of you probably didn’t, welcome to the double-edged sword that is AI.

Seeing as the documentary intentions were to educate, the question Daniel hopes viewers are left with is what they will do with their new knowledge. “This is the most powerful technology that humans have ever invented, since language itself, and we owe it to ourselves to spend time on these systems, familiarize ourselves with what they’re capable of,” said Daniel. His stance aligns with AI’s alike, even Chat GPT claims that “collaboration with AI enhances human potential—stay informed and embrace lifelong learning!”

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Netflix's "Outer Banks": Has it Gone on Too Long?

Ava Harrison
Staff Writer

"Outer Banks" (OBX), a popular show on Netflix, released season four, part one on Oct. 10, 2024, and season four, part two on Nov. 7. "Outer Banks" made it to number one on Netflix's list of top 10 TV shows in the U.S. following the release of part one. OBX is based on "a North Carolina Island of haves and have-nots [where] John B and his tight-knit crew of friends find mystery and adventure while hunting for lost treasure," said Netflix in its official description of the show. Students have mixed opinions about the show and feel that those opinions should be heard. According to a Freeman-based poll on Schoology, 87.5 percent of students said they enjoyed watching "Outer Banks," while 12.5 percent said they did not. On another note, 29.2 percent of respondents said the show has gone on for too long, while 70.8 percent said that it has not. Based on the results, most respondents like "Outer Banks" and believe that the show has more to offer. Some students appreciate the show, such as Ella Maltby, a sophomore who "loves OBX," she said. Ella has "been watching [it] since it first came [out]," she

said. "It's so fun and entertaining," said Ella. "[I] hope it never ends." Sophomore Adriana Goodrich thinks "the [show] has enough plot twists to keep the watcher entertained, but not too many where it's excessive and doesn't make sense," she said. "Each of the main characters [has] different qualities about them that different watchers can relate to instead of having a bunch of copy-and-paste characters," said Adriana. Sophomore Rowan Kelley also shares the positive sentiments pertaining to the show. "I love all [the] characters, and I think they always deserve more [to their story]," said Rowan. She believes that "Outer Banks" has earned its fourth season, though she "liked [the episodes] when they were shorter, [around] thirty to forty minutes [instead of being] an hour long," she said. Rowan has started to watch season four, and thinks that they have made JJ's character "really stupid this season," she said. "[JJ is] the one who always messes up and I really wish they would change that because I love him so much," said Rowan. She also wants season four to reveal who Sarah's mom is "because [she knew] from the beginning that Rose was her stepmother, but there's been no connection to Sarah's [biological] mother," she said. Other students have a more critical point of view. Junior Sean

Retting also believes the show has continued on for too long, even though he did enjoy watching it. "It should have stopped after the second season because that is when it was good [and] all the [loose] ends were [wrapped] up," said Sean. Like Sean, Lucas Hawes, a senior, enjoys watching "Outer Banks," but "[the show] went off the rails after season one," said Lucas. Senior Riley Robinson enjoys "Outer Banks" but believes "it's going to get worse and worse the longer it goes on," he said. He thinks the show has gone on for too long because "[they] wrapped up the original plotline," said Riley. More students express positive opinions about OBX. "Outer Banks is a pretty good show," said sophomore Juliana Mantovani. "It's definitely very suspenseful and [has] amazing acting," she said. Julianna likes "how the characters have different backgrounds but they all like one common thing" and she enjoys "how each ending of the show [is] a cliffhanger." "[It] leaves you [waiting] for another season to come and finally know what happens next," she said. Sophomore Nabaeth Ibarra thinks "Outer Banks" has been going on for too long even though "it's interesting to see the group's adventure[s]," she said. "In some parts I find it boring, but then



"Outer Banks" season four official poster

it excites me," said Nabaeth. "I love Outer Banks," said Ellie Dixon, a junior. "While the show has been going on for a long time, it still pulls me in," she said. Senior Nayeli Trinidad is another student who believes the show has not gone on for too long. "It's an amazing show" and "when [watching], you get so into it, you feel like you are there yourself," she said. Nayeli is "always [on] the edge of [her] seat when watching" because she believes that "there's [never] been a boring episode," she said. Junior Gabrielle Betz believes that OBX has not been going on

for too long. "I like it, it's not the best piece of media I've seen but it also doesn't deserve all the hate it gets," she said. "The exciting treasure-hunting adventures throughout the show keep it interesting, even if it is unrealistic for teens to find millions of dollars worth of gold," she said. Contrastingly, junior Jack Stoneman believes "Outer Banks" is "a soap opera that we all pretend is good television," he said. While students' opinions may vary on OBX, it is up to the majority to decide if it should continue. Would you like to see the story of "Outer Banks" continue?

Freeman's Art Department: The Making of the 2024 HOCO Parade

Vrusha Pramod
Staff Writer

Every year, Freeman's homecoming parade transforms Three Chopt Road into a celebration of our school's spirit. The National Art Honor Society (NAHS) and Art Club have been teaming up to create this year's art float based on the theme: "Carnival." Although the homecoming parade is a show of all of Freeman's different communities where students dress up to represent the clubs and organizations at the school, the art community proves that elaborate costumes aren't the only way to represent our school. Junior Sarah Fuller posted ideas on the official NAHS Schoology page: "Interactive games that people watching the parade can play as people walk by them," she wrote. "The games can be, but are not limited to: bottle toss, ring toss, whack a mole, etc." By planning to include these parts of the show, the art community ensures that their audience can also feel as if they are a part of the parade. If participants would rather dress up in costumes instead, they may pick designs that most people would not think of immediately when they hear the word

"fair," said Sarah. From looking like ticket sellers to fairgoers, or playing the part of lion tamers all the way to contest winners, the art community presents a range of costumes that are open for interpretation by the audience. Throughout the years of creating homecoming floats, NAHS and the Art Club typically have trouble acquiring the right materials for their floats every year. Although students could go to the nearest arts and crafts store and purchase whatever they may need, these teams make efforts to find the materials they will use for the costumes in their own homes. "We need some more supplies so if you have any of the following and would like to donate them it would be greatly appreciated: Large zip ties, Spray paint (primary colors, pastels), Gold glitter, Spotlights/ flashlights," said Sarah in an Art Club Schoology post. Another Schoology post said, "Dress up like a farmer and bring a pumpkin or squash with a best-in-show ribbon... If anyone has a really friendly dog (that is well-behaved enough to walk in the parade safely and not get distracted) you could also dress them up as a lion." This has allowed students to realize that bringing in props such as your best pumpkin of the season or family pets that can portray



Club members creating pieces for the float

circus animals, will find a way to keep the audience entertained and engaged with every year's projects. When facing obstacles in their design processes, members of both clubs find quick fixes that will give them the results that they are looking for. "Tackling smaller issues is typically seen as an individual or dual task, however, bigger issues may at times, need to be addressed by the whole team," said Sarah. The club's final decision for their float was to go with the circus idea due to the limited time that they had for its creation. "We had two ideas to begin with," said Sarah. "One was to make a Freeman Family Circus-themed tent with a flag, a sign, and a ringmaster with lots of colors. The other was a Ferris wheel on top of the float with famous people and characters riding it." The Art Club is open to everyone. "Even if you don't take art as a class here at Freeman, you can help build the float," said senior Trey Richardson, one of the presidents of the club. "Personally, I haven't taken an art class since I was 11 years old. I just got voted in because of the leadership skills that I showed," said Trey when he was asked how long he had been involved in Freeman's art community. "The Freeman Art Club has a close-knit community...the [members] are very collaborative," said Trey. For this year's float "the chosen representatives based on the most popular vote, to be presented on their 2024 float were Madi Cain and Trey Richardson," said Sarah Fuller. Madi dressed as a lion tamer and Trey as the lion to fit this year's theme, "Freeman Fair." Both the Art Club and NAHS are already planning for next year's float, and they are certain they will carry on their annual tradition of celebrating Freeman's art community in the upcoming years.



DSF Art Club and NAHS homecoming float

Freeman Theater Treasure: Senior One-Acts

Maria McGill
Staff Writer

When it comes time, Freeman High School's advanced theater seniors, with the help of classmates, are tasked with creating and directing a one-act play. The production of senior one-acts brings the minds of students together to help selected seniors manage a stage play. "One Act is a great way to learn how to work as an ensemble with other actors, because it's not just about you, it's about how you interact with others and how they interact with you," said junior Jack Harris. Under the guidance of Freeman's Theater teacher, Ms. Gardner, seniors who have been taking theater classes all four years of high school are chosen by the class and Ms. Gardner to direct a play as a part of the final project for the class. The Theater Two and Theater Three class members and sophomores and juniors in the advanced theater classes are cast for the one-acts. The theater department holds two rounds of one-acts for the seniors, one in the fall and one in the spring. Riley Robinson and Ghost Moran are the directors of the fall productions, although the spring show's directors have not been announced. If they are

Before the show is put on, there is around a month and a half of rehearsing and directing during class and sometimes after school. During rehearsals, the cast develops their characters, finds out what will make the show funny and entertaining, and determines how to include them in the show. The members of the production also focus on what will engage and appease the audience. "Seniors find plays that obviously they like and want to direct and that fits the cast, amount of people, and not type casting, but what they could see the students in the class acting as," said senior Abby McGowan. "It has to do with the amount of characters and parts, and also who fits the roles the best," she said. This year the senior one-acts were put on during the third and seventh period on Friday, Oct. 11. The one-act "10 Ways to Survive the Zombie Apocalypse" was directed by Riley Robinsons. It is about "the end of the world [where] hordes of rampaging zombies are about to kill you," said Ms. Gardner. "Turn to this handy and hilarious guide to survive the apocalypse!" she said. The other fall senior one-act was brought to life by Ghost Moran. "Little Women," a novel originally written by Louisa May Alcott, was the basis of his one-act. "Under the guidance of their beloved mother, the four young March sisters — tempestuous Jo, motherly Meg, shy Beth, and spoiled Amy — struggle to keep their family going while their father is away in the Civil War. "In this beautifully dramatized adaptation of the classic novel, even as privation, illness, and sibling rivalry cast their shadows, each girl strives to find her true self," said Ms. Gardner. The fall round shows glimpses as to what the spring shows will be like. The advanced theater members encounter many challenges when it comes to putting on a play, especially in one-acts. An issue like having to share the auditorium with other classes and groups can take away from rehearsal time. Also, auditioning and getting a role requires actors to memorize various lines. "There are many ways that people claim that you can learn to memorize things, but for me, they just never seemed to work, so I just have to keep going at it again and again and again," said Jack. Separate being friends with someone from the Theater Department, there is a sense of camaraderie among the members. "Bonding with people I didn't know before [and] making friends with upperclassmen as an underclassman [has been] really fun," said Riley. The one-act plays in Freeman's Theater Department give seniors a creative outlet when establishing a production of their own, and allow the members to learn from each other.



PHOTO: MARIA MCGUILL

Riley Robinson (12) involved with the fall round, seniors start researching in the summer to find a good play idea will enough roles to include the Theater Two and Three classes. Once the senior-directed plays are chosen, the plays that have a bigger cast are held in the fall and the ones with a smaller cast are put on in the spring. The preparation for the fall senior one-acts officially starts in early Sept. where auditions are held to determine who will play which part. "We will get a synopsis of the show from all the directors, and then we will be given little parts of the script to read with others in front of the directors," said Jack. The next class period people are picked by the directors for certain roles to try out to see if they would be the right person for the character. Once everyone is cast, they start rehearsals. "We like to spend time for around a month and a half directing people," said Riley.

Burn, Burn, Burn



PHOTO: NEW YORK TIMES
Smog in Lahore

Over in the eastern hemisphere, countries like India and Pakistan are facing environmental troubles as winter approaches. In Lahore, the capital city of the province of Punjab, and Delhi, India's capital, smog has fallen onto their atmosphere. This smog, described as dark haze, has reached levels of toxicity never seen before. The air quality in Lahore has reached 700, a healthy amount being 50. The smog can be caused by a variety of factors, but a big contributor is the practice of farmers burning the stubble on their fields as a cheap way to clear their fields.



PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS
Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki

An eruption of Indonesia's Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki volcano has killed nine people and injured many more. The first eruption occurred on Monday, Nov. 4, but authorities had to expand the danger zone to a radius of five miles as the volcano erupted again on Thursday. Mount Lewotobi Laki Laki stands at 1,584 meters or 5,197 feet tall. The volcano's alert status is at the highest level after its two eruptions.



PHOTO: NBC NEWS
Fireman fighting wildfire

Devastating wildfires are blazing across Ventura County in southern California as officials are doing all they can to contain them. The fire is difficult to maintain because of the rugged terrain as it is in the mountains of Ventura. Officials have contained 36 percent of the fire at this point, the highest it has been. Governor Gavin Newsom has declared a state of emergency in Ventura County, urging citizens to evacuate. The cause of this fire is unknown at the time.

Content by Scotty Gregory

Netanyahu's Firing of Defense Minister Sparks Protests Across Israel



Police use water cannons to clear protestors

Vrusha Pramod
Staff Writer

On Nov. 5, 2024, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed former Israeli defense minister Yoav Gallant due to disagreements in international relations and the state of the country. According to BBC News, the decision was made due to a "crisis of trust" between the two. They added that Netanyahu referred to his trust in Gallant as having been "eroded" in recent months and that immediate steps were in place for current Foreign Minister, Israel Katz, to replace Gallant. In the past month, protests have arisen throughout Israel due to this action.

"In the midst of a war, more than ever, full trust is required between the prime minister and defense minister," Netanyahu said on X. "Unfortunately, although in the first months of

the campaign there was such trust and there was very fruitful work, during the last months this trust cracked between me and the defense minister," he said.

"Gallant said his removal was due to disagreement on three issues, including his belief that it is possible to get the remaining hostages back from Gaza if Israel makes 'painful concessions' which it can bear," said BBC News Channel.

The Hill added that Gallant believes his removal was also due to "his opposition to an exemption from military conscription for religious students and a dispute over a commission to investigate the Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel."

Gallant's opposition to exempting ultra-Orthodox students from military service separated him from the views of Netanyahu's government. Although the Israeli government has been reluctant to reform this action despite Gallant's

firm beliefs, Gallant has previously come out and said, before his removal, that "everyone must serve in the [Israel Defense Forces] (IDF) to participate together in the mission of defending the state of Israel," according to The Hill.

His repeated requests for a state commission to investigate the controversies following the Oct. 7, 2024, Hamas attacks, which killed over 1,200 Israelis and led to the abduction of 250 hostages, were also denied by the Israeli government. Gallant's view that a transparent but thorough investigation into the October attacks was necessary for Israel's defense agencies to learn from the prior mistakes was supported by many Israelis, who later also protested during his impeachment. According to The Jerusalem Post, 57 percent of Israelis opposed the firing of Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and 29 percent supported it. Regarding the hostages, the

article later has Gallant saying that "there was a moral obligation and responsibility to bring our kidnapped sons and daughters back home." In his addresses to the people of Israel, Gallant made sure to emphasize the need for military readiness and organization in the face of the ongoing wars.

Gallant's layoff sparked numerous protests across the country, with Gallant's supporters demanding the resignation of Netanyahu and changes made to current military plans. In Tel Aviv, protesters blocked major transportation routes and lit fire on the streets all while calling for the current Prime Minister to step down from his position and give Gallant his position back. "Netanyahu was endangering the entire country and called on him to 'step down from his office and let serious people lead Israel,'" said Protestor Yair Amit according to BBC News. They said that during his role as defense minister, Gallant had earned the support and respect of many Israelis and that firing him was seen as an ill-advised act that would come at the expense of the country.

Netanyahu's choice and the Israeli citizens' desire for Gallant to be reappointed show a conflict inside of a country surrounded by external wars. How Israel will navigate these challenges and the corresponding public response remains to be seen.

Free C-Sections in Nigeria

Olive Schreher
Staff Writer

Nigeria is now offering free emergency Caesarean sections to poor women to combat maternal deaths.

In Nigeria, the chance of surviving pregnancy is relatively low, with the fourth highest death rate in the world. In part, it is because most cannot afford C-sections. According to the data obtained in 2023 by the Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, more than 40 percent of people living in Nigeria earn around \$2.15 per day, under the international extreme poverty line.

With most C-sections ranging around 60,000 naira, or \$36, many

women can't remain safe during birth resulting in many deaths. Because of this cost factor, there's an increased chance women will turn to unsafe options as well.

This high death rate, primarily due to expenses, led to the launching of The Maternal Mortality Reduction Innovation Initiative, which will provide women with the option to access C-sections. Access to this does only come with emergencies though Tashikalmah Allah, a communication adviser to the health minister confirmed.

Emergencies include the many factors that contribute to unsafe childbirths including cases where a woman's pelvis is too small, the baby is in a breech position, or is too large to exit the birth canal. These complications can

result in the baby rupturing the uterus or cause tears that hemorrhage. A mother can die due to these complications, along with the baby, severe hemorrhage, high blood pressure (pre-eclampsia and eclampsia), unsafe abortions, and obstructed or prolonged labor are some of the direct causes of maternal deaths.

Aside from the necessity, there are a few other qualifications for eligibility. For the public hospitals that offer it, eligibility requires registration with Nigeria's public health insurance system, and from there social welfare units at these public hospitals will recognize the women who need this form of financial support.

"No woman should lose her life simply because she can't af-

ford a C-section," said Health Minister Muhammad Pate in an interview with BBC News Channel. It is unfair to women to deprive them of this safety, especially when the majority cannot meet the cost. With the new act comes the availability of safety.

Many continue to support the new policy. Local Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like HACEY, an organization that advocates for healthcare access for vulnerable populations in Nigeria, and the Women of Purpose Foundation embrace this initiative. The new policy will "improve maternal and child health outcomes in the country...Especially for women from low-income communities who might resort to alternative and often unsafe care options," said Rhoda Robinson, executive director of HACEY in an interview with BBC News.

Notre-Dame Bells Restored

Matthew Wozniak
News Editor

Five years after a historic fire, the bells in Paris's historic Notre-Dame cathedral have rung once again on Friday, Nov. 8 at 10:30 am. "It is a beautiful, important, and symbolic step," said Philippe Jost, head of the team responsible for the restoration of the cathedral, in an interview with the French newspaper La Croix.

In April 2019, the more than 860-year-old Notre-Dame suffered from a massive fire, destroying the 315-foot spire and spreading to various other parts of the building. Beginning at 6:30 p.m. local time on Monday,

April 15, hundreds of Parisians watched the world heritage landmark burn until the next morning.

Shortly after the fire, French President Emmanuel Macron promised to repair the historic church within five years, and with a projected reopening date of Dec. 8, that promise will be fulfilled. "Five years ago, a promise: to rebuild Notre-Dame Cathedral together," Macron said on X. "Today, its bells are finally ringing thanks to the extraordinary work of so many of you."

Although the bells have rung again, that doesn't mean that their work is complete. "It is a great achievement," said Alexandre Gougeon, project manager for the bells' re-installation, to Ra-



PHOTO: PBS
The three new bells recently installed in the cathedral

dio France Internationale. "Individual tests, bell by bell, were carried out yesterday, and further adjustments will be made in the coming days," he said. "Not everything is perfect yet. We're going to fine-tune it to perfection."

This project wasn't cheap. According to Rebuilding Notre-Dame de Paris, the government body responsible for overseeing the rebuild, the project was estimated to cost over 700 million euros and had been fully covered by more than 900 million euros in donations.

On Nov. 7, the Gothic cathedral received three new bells. One of these bells is the 2024 Olym-

pic bell, which was rang by every track and field gold medalist at the Paris Games last summer, and it bears the mark "Paris 2024." The other two new bells contain a sun-like image that combines Notre-Dame's famous rose window with a monstrose, a religious device used to display revered items.

These new bells will replace the three bells that were positioned near the spire, which originally collapsed during the fire five years ago. They join the eight bells in the north tower, which were recently reinstalled in September after being cleaned and the tower renovated.

2024 Election Rundown

Saanvi Gourishetti
Staff Writer

Donald Trump made history by becoming the oldest president ever elected, the first felon to win a presidency, and the first republican candidate to win the popular vote in 20 years. His running mate, J.D. Vance, brings a new perspective as the first millennial and the first Marine veteran to serve as Vice President. Vance, previ-

ously known for his bestselling memoir *Hillbilly Elegy*, where he voiced his criticism of Trump, addressed a personal shift during the 2024 vice presidential debate: "I have been extremely open about the fact that I was wrong about Donald Trump," he said.

History wasn't limited to the executive branch in this election. Sarah McBride, a 34-year-old Democrat from Delaware, became the first openly transgender person elected to Congress. Texas also broke new ground

with Julie Johnson, a Democrat, becoming the first openly LGBTQ person elected to Congress from the South. Other recent pioneering wins included Washington State Sen. Emily Randall as the first queer Latina in Congress and Angela Alsobrooks, who will be Maryland's first black female senator. Adding to the list of firsts, Andy Kim from New Jersey will be the first Korean American senator.

Election night followed a suspenseful agenda, beginning with Indiana called first for Trump, followed shortly by Vermont for Kamala Harris. Trump ultimately secured all seven key swing states: Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The final call came from Arizona, tipping the scales for Trump's victory.

At 2:30 a.m., Trump took the stage in his home state of Florida to declare victory. "We are going to help our country heal. It's time to put the divisions of the past four years behind us," he said. He celebrated the Republican wins across Senate and House races as

a "powerful mandate" and dedicated his victory to the "Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement." Vance hailed this election as "the greatest political comeback in American history," according to FOX News.

On Wednesday afternoon, Kamala Harris formally conceded the election in a speech at Howard University, her alma mater. "While I concede this election, I do not concede the fight that fueled this campaign," she said, urging Americans not to give up on the work toward a more democratic nation. "It is OK to feel sad and disappointed, but please know it's going to be OK... Sometimes the fight takes a while. That doesn't mean we won't win," she said.

President Joe Biden followed Harris's concession with a speech

from the Rose Garden on Thursday, calling for a peaceful transition and congratulating Trump. "We will work with his team to ensure a peaceful and orderly transition," he said. He also praised Harris for her "inspiring campaign" and referenced her as a "backbone like a ramrod."

Donald Trump reflected on his prior assassination attempts during his victory speech: "Many people have told me that God spared my life for a reason. And that reason was to save our country and to restore America to greatness," he said.

With the 2024 election concluded, the next four years hold the potential to be dynamic as the nation transitions under its new leaders, each set up to leave an undeniable mark in America's history.



PHOTO: SAULL LOEB/GETTY IMAGES
Kamala Harris delivers her concession speech at Howard