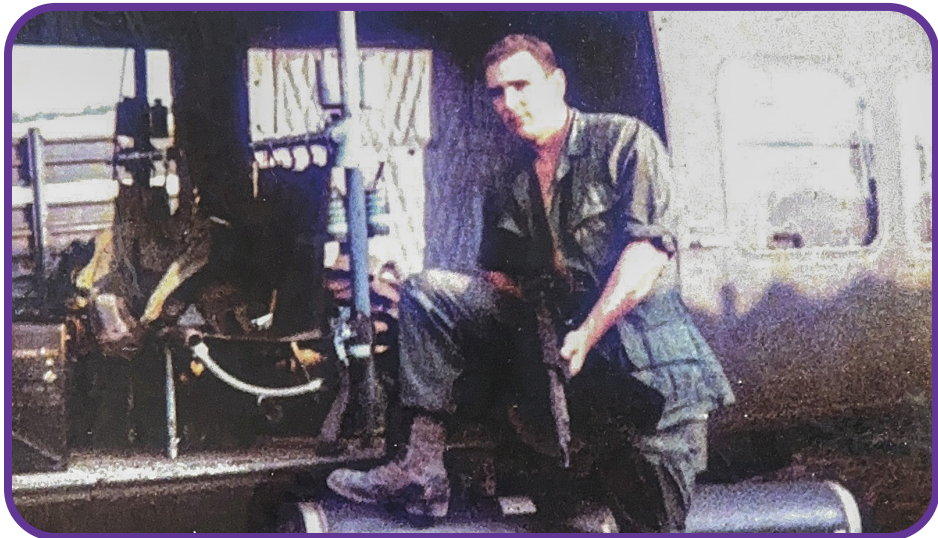


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Thursday Dec. 14, 2023 Vol. 03, Ed. 04 • FREE



WCU veteran community speaks on unseen scars

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By Mackenzie Atkinson



There are many holidays set aside to honor, remember and celebrate the courage of military members active, retired and reserves.

From the civilian perspective these holidays are three-day weekends off of work, cookouts with family and days to party.

For the military community, these

holidays have deeper meaning.

Memorial Day, mostly known as a celebration, is actually meant to remember those lost in the line of duty and those lost as a result of their service.

The Fourth of July, a day to celebrate the independence of the United States, can be triggering to service members struggling with the aftermath of their service.

Veteran's Day is a day for the military community to reflect on their service and to celebrate and honor those who have sacrificed everything for their country.

These holidays only span three days of the year, yet the struggle with PTSD and other service-related traumas never cease.

Austin Summers is an Afghanistan combat veteran.

Tom Baker is a Vietnam combat veteran.

Marsha Lee Baker is the daughter of a Vietnam veteran and wife of Tom Baker.

Each carry with them memories of their past but have slowly found ways to heal their unseen scars.



Austin Summers

Austin Summers is a 25-year-old combat veteran. He served in Afghanistan for roughly 6 months and lost three of his friends.

Austin enlisted in October 2016 and shipped out January 2017. He worked as a 91B wheeled vehicle mechanic during his time in the Army.

During his deployment to Afghanistan, he was part of a ground unit ODA, operational detachment alpha, of Green Berets.

Austin witnessed his first losses while in a village fighting the Taliban.

Sergeant First Class Will Lindsay and Sgt. Joseph Collette had sprinted around a corner while taking fire and both received fatal wounds. They died next to each other in Kunduz, Afghanistan.

Austin witnessed their deaths through surveillance footage.

Later, on a mission traveling between Maymana to Mazar-I-Sharif the convoy Austin was a part of, encountered three IEDs. The first two hit Afghan vehicles that were accompanying them and the third hit two vehicles in front of the vehicle Austin was in.

Austin maneuvered his vehicle into a recovery position to aid other members that had been hit by the third IED while the Taliban ambushed the convoy. They waited until nightfall before they were able to move the convoy back to the base.

“After we hit that third IED I was like yeah, we’re not making it home,” Austin said.

Austin was recognized for his boldness

and bravery when he got back to base.

For Austin, the war didn’t end there.

During the preparation for his last mission, Austin mounted an M134 minigun on one of the vehicles in his convoy. The armor shield that is normally mounted over the gun was left off.

On the last mission in Afghanistan, Austin and his unit traveled along the same route they hit the three IEDs. Sgt. Major James “Ryan” Sartor opted to man the minigun in the convoy during this mission.

Sgt. M. Ryan was in the Army for 19 years and was on his last deployment before rejoining his wife and four kids.

That was the last mission he ever went on.

He took a round roughly the size of a .50 caliber bullet to the head and was dead before he knew what happened.

Austin started spiraling once he got back state-side. He turned to alcohol to cope with the traumas he endured while serving with the Green Beret unit in Afghanistan.

“I got to the point where I was drinking till I was blacking out pretty much every time for about three months,” Austin said.

He realized that he needed to slow down when he began waking up in the morning with pain in his liver.

“I didn’t realize I was drinking to cover up a lot of the thoughts I had and trauma that I had went through and not really processed,” he said.

It took one of his buddies, Noah, who had also served in Afghanistan, to tell him that he had a problem and that he needed to seek help.

“I didn’t want to admit that I needed



help,” Austin said, “I wasn’t a Green Beret I didn’t think I had it as bad as they did.”

Noah and his mom convinced him to seek help through the VA.

He would go off and on for about two to three months and would think he was better and stop going. Two or three months would pass before he would start having issues again.

It was an endless cycle.

In the fall of 2021, the reactions to the unprocessed trauma started to manifest even more. While attending the funeral of his girlfriend’s grandmother, bagpipes started playing and triggered a panic attack.

“I started hyperventilating I wasn’t able to breathe, I didn’t know what was going on,” Austin said, “I just kept on saying ‘I’m scared, I’m scared, I’m scared.’ I didn’t know what to say, that is all I could say.”

Two months after this incident Austin was walking on campus when someone started playing bagpipes near the fountain.

“I got to where Hillside Grind is and I just paused,” Austin said, “I covered my ears and started humming.”

He broke down to his professor the same way he did at the funeral. The professor escorted him to CAPS, and Austin realized he needed more help.

He started attending therapy through the VA consistently and was diagnosed with panic disorder, generalized anxiety and depression. He was not able to find a medication regiment that helped.

Instead, he went to the trauma center in Asheville as a last resort. He went

through the process of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, which is a psychotherapy treatment meant to help trauma.

He sat in the office with a physician moving their fingers in front of his face and was told to recount what he went through while following the physician’s hand with his eyes.

“Each session I would go through a different experience from Afghanistan, and I would have full mental breakdowns. I would be able to smell the way things smelled over there. I would remember little things that normally people wouldn’t remember,” he said.

These sessions helped him process his entire deployment and come to terms with his trauma and not compare it to other people. It is his trauma, and it is his to bear.

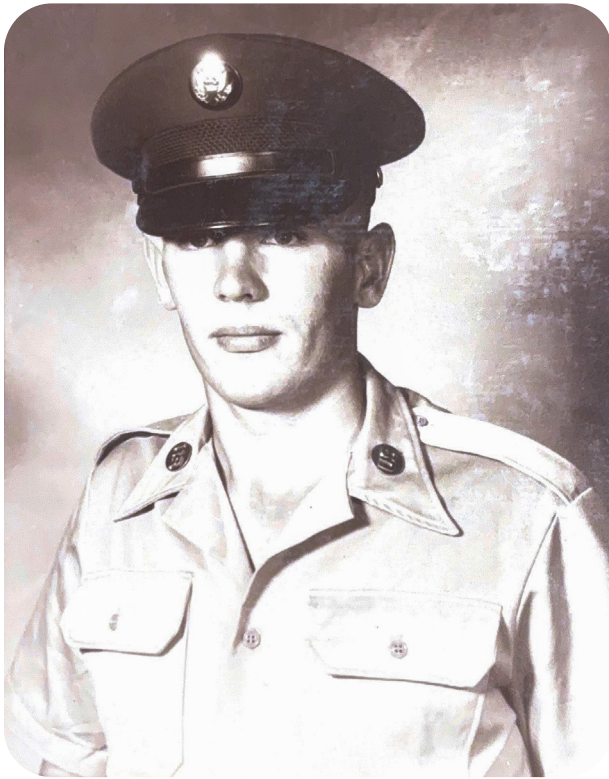
He manages the side effects of his trauma through smaller things that he is able to control. He always sits at the back of the classroom, he always insists on driving and he is always hyper aware of trash bags on the side of the road.

These are things that will stay with him. For veterans like Austin, there is a community on campus that he bonded with that has also helped.

“There is this understanding between all of us of what the military is. There is a language that is shared between us. There is this itch that my other friends at college don’t understand that these guys do,” he said.

The brotherhood on campus created by Austin and the Student Veteran Association reflects that of the military. There is a community that supports one another, that shares similar experiences.





Tom Baker

Tom Baker is a Vietnam veteran that has suffered from PTSD for over 50 years. He enlisted in the Army at 19 years old.

“Nineteen years old and you think you’re God’s gift to the war,” Tom said, “I wanted to jump out of airplanes. I wanted to get the bad guys.”

The civilian world did not take well to the Vietnam war. There are countless stories of veterans coming home from being overseas for so many months only to be greeted with harsh words and being spit on by passersby.

“They called us pot smoking, baby killing losers,” he said.

Those on the outside may not have agreed with the government’s decision to go to war in Vietnam, but they did not know what those service members endured while serving in the jungles of Southeast Asia.

“You’re exposed to sudden loss, which is something that not many people experience at a young age. I had to go from this gung-ho guy to somebody that pretty well knew that he wasn’t going to make it and wanted to take as many of them with him as he could. You get hard. You have to stay alive, you’ll kill, and you don’t think about it,” he said.

Tom was in his last firefight in Vietnam three days before he was back stateside. There was no transition period between fighting for your life in a war zone to the calm city streets back home.

“I killed my first human being when I was 19, got shot down out of the sky when I was 19, put my first American soldier in a

body bag when I was 19,” Tom said. “When I came back from ‘Nam I was much older than 20.”

He was silently battling his PTSD for 40 years before he came to terms with the diagnosis, before he started working to cope with the trauma he endured.

“It stays in the back of your head, it’s kind of like a bird in the attic,” Tom said. “Every once in a while they come out – a certain sound or certain smell. The demons are screaming that I didn’t do enough.”

In 2007, Tom and other veterans formed the Jackson County Veterans’ Organization so that veterans like him coming back got a better reception and





have a community around them, so they are not alone.

Tom deals with survivors' guilt after losing his best friend in the war. He tells his story to help cope with what he has gone through with the hopes that it also may help others who are struggling, who need a lifeline.

"I owed my friends that," he said.

There is an endless battle that veterans will face. Tom was not welcomed when he came home from the battlefield, but it was the veterans who came before him that welcomed him back into the civilian world and encouraged him to keep going.

With the changing attitude toward veterans, there are more avenues than ever for veterans and their families to be compensated and aided in their endless

fight with the trauma they have endured.

"If you keep it all inside it will eat you alive and it'll eat your family alive," Tom said.

There are still those that are in denial that there is an unseen burden weighing down on them. The Veteran Association (VA) reported 6,392 veterans committed suicide in 2021.

No matter the era, service members have always had a tough exterior and belief that they are invincible. Many do not want to admit that they are suffering and need help.

"Talk to some veterans and at least listen to them," Tom said. "You may not understand, and you may not have been in long enough or been in a firefight or whatever. But listen to them."

Marsha Lee Baker

Marsha Lee Baker's story reflects the side of the military community that supports from behind the scenes. The families of service members endure alongside the service members and have unseen scars just as the service member does.

When service members are battling their demons, their families battle along beside them.

Marsha Lee grew up as, what the military community calls, an "Air Force brat", which is the child of a member of the Air Force.

Her father was a career man, serving about 20 years flying cargo planes for the Air Force during the Vietnam War.

She moved around most of her childhood, going wherever the Air Force said to go. This is a timeless and common story that

all military families are familiar with.

Marsha Lee grew up in a time when talking about military service was taboo.

“[My father] never told us anything. I remember one time when he was already retired, he had a video taken of him in the cockpit that my mom wanted to show my brother and I. We never talked about that together,” she said.

Marsha Lee was able to see her mother’s life through open eyes. The conversations with her mom about what to do and what not to do on a military base made sense to Marsha Lee once she was able to have deep conversations with her mother after her father left the service.

Marsha Lee and Tom got married on May 17, 2003. At the time, she was an English and composition professor at WCU.

“Tom, from the beginning, helped me gain a perspective that has helped me understand more about why life was what it was with my parents,” she said.

She was not aware of the alcoholism and abuse that ran rampant in her childhood home. Her father did not know, nor was he told how to cope with his PTSD, which led to him taking it out on her mother behind closed doors.

Tom was able to relate to Marsha Lee’s father and he helped explain what her father was going through.

“My dad could go off and sit over [in a corner] and talk with Tom. He was able to tell me things about what my dad actually did and what he experienced. I’d never know. It started opening up a whole new way of me to think about my mother – I started to see what it was like being an Air



Force wife,” Marsha Lee said.

During the early times of Marsha Lee and Tom’s marriage, his trauma would make an appearance through angry outbursts at other drivers and nightmares causing sleepless nights.

“How can you be this angry at human beings just on the same road with you,” Marsha Lee said.

“I learned about things, I guess kind of connected to the PTSD. I remember one time at a Western football game when fireworks were going off, and that move put him in a freaked-out position. I’ve

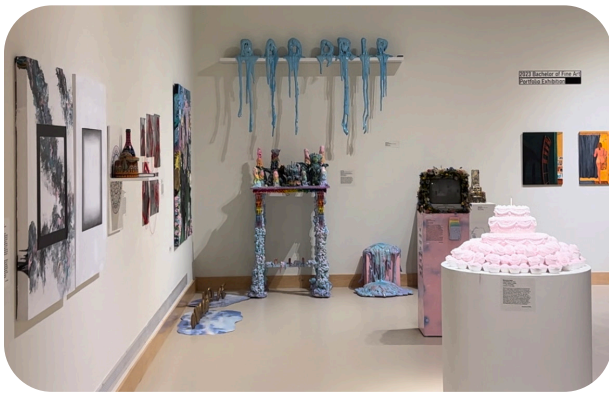
learned, as the woman who loves him, to pay attention to those kinds of things and understand more about what war really is through his telling me stuff,” she said.

Marsha Lee’s English background aided in Tom’s healing process allowing him another avenue of dealing with his trauma – writing. As Tom wrote about the traumatic things he endured in Vietnam, Marsha Lee would read and edit the memoir. These writings would turn into Tom’s book “Warrior Wannabe: A Memoir”.

Together, they have learned how to manage PTSD.

Student artwork and new perspectives at WCU's Fine Art Museum

By Cora Haste



The BFA Portfolio Exhibition is an exciting feast for the eyes. Photo by Cora Haste.

The Western Carolina University Fine Art Museum featured the Bachelor of Fine Arts Portfolio Exhibition from Nov. 7 until Dec. 8. The exhibit is curated in the Fine Art Museum annually in the fall. The exhibition is made up entirely of student-created works, making it a unique collection.

Students pursuing their bachelor's in fine arts were given the opportunity to create work that would be displayed to the public. This gave students a unique opportunity to create something meaningful and share it with audiences beyond their peers and professors. The exhibition was a feast for the eyes, offering new and diverse perspectives on many different subjects. There were pieces about the inner workings of the mind, living with disabilities, the corruption of the economy and the invasion of private spaces.

This year, the exhibition featured 12 student artists. The artists worked with a variety of mediums, making the

exhibition come to life with colors and textures. There were installation pieces, interactive pieces, sculptures and a variety of paintings.

The work for this portfolio is completed over the course of a semester by seniors pursuing a BFA in art with a studio art emphasis.

Josh Masters is a senior in the studio art program. He credits the portfolio class and others like it for familiarizing him with working in a studio. Masters' piece, "Divisive Perceptions" features floor to ceiling canvases depicting members of queer and disabled communities depicted in intimate settings.

"These pieces are a little bit more personal to me because I am part of both of these communities and I find that making art about myself can be a little bit harder, so instead I've widened the scope a bit and made it more about the community," Masters said.

The display also features an extensive collection of ceramic works. The studio art program at WCU has given Masters a chance to experience different art forms. Through his time at WCU he has gained a new appreciation for ceramic art.

"It's one of our really big strengths in the area for the arts," Masters said, "it's so much fun to play with clay, it's like you're a kid again."

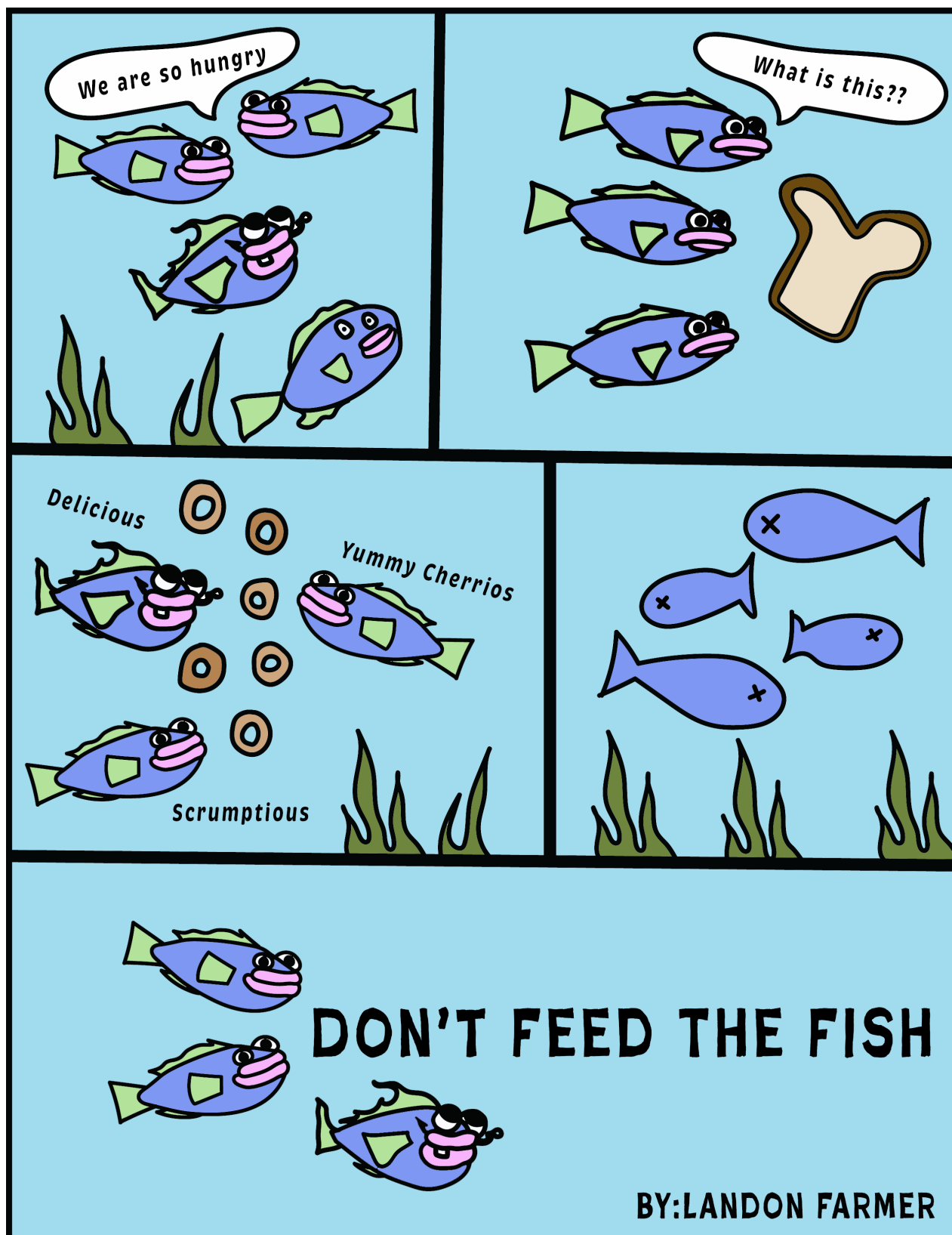
Working with many different mediums is an exciting part of the BFA Studio Art program curriculum. Senior Linzy Rainess also had a piece on display in the exhibition. Her piece, "Invasion of Privacy" features five painted canvases that provide an interesting perspective into the bathroom. Rainess is double majoring in fine arts and forensic anthropology. She brings a new perspective to her art through her studies in forensics.

"Life drawing proportions are super important and that's actually something that I am very happy to have learned because combining my interest with forensic anthropology and studio art, one of the things I was interested in was facial reconstruction," Rainess said.

The BFA Portfolio Exhibition is on display through Dec. 8 in the WCU Fine Art Museum. The museum is free and open to the public Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and on Thursday until 7 p.m.



Linzy Rainess working on her piece Invasion of Privacy, photo courtesy of @bardartscenter on Instagram.



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Student activists bring awareness to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

By Abigail Quinn

Originally published by the Smoky Mountain News

As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict rages on, students across the world and across Western North Carolina are organizing to bring awareness to their cause and express their feelings about the ongoing hostilities.

“Our protests aren’t as big as those in New York or other big cities, but being in a rural area like Jackson County doesn’t make our voices any less important or powerful,” said Sarah DeArmon, a WCU student and organizer for ANSWER Coalition. “Each one of us is being called to take a stand against injustice and fight on the right side of history, and we believe in doing our part.”

ANSWER Great Smoky Mountains is a local chapter of the national Act Now to Stop War and End Racism Coalition. They describe their purpose as a responsibility “to connect the fight for social justice here at home to the fight against imperialism and occupation abroad.”

On Nov. 9 and 29 ANSWER organized a “Shut it Down for Palestine” rally. About 50 people attended including students, activist groups, professors and passersbys.

The Gaza Strip is home to what some call the largest open-air prison in the world. Over 2 million Palestinians live in the area, making it one of the most densely populated places on earth. How it was created and how the Palestine-Israeli

conflict began is a long story.

Initial conflict began in 1947 with the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine. This plan divided the British-governed Palestine into Arab and Jewish states with the intention to promote self-governance and independence.

The State of Israel was created in May of 1948, sparking the first Arab-Israeli War. Though the war ended in 1949 with

Israel’s victory, 750,000 Palestinians were displaced. The territory was divided into three parts: the State of Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. That was only the beginning of the violence between the Palestinian and Israeli people.

Israel preemptively attacked Egyptian and Syrian air forces in June of 1967. This began the Six-Day War which, at its end, resulted in Israel gaining territorial control over the Gaza Strip and other



territories from Egypt.

Six years later, the October War saw Egypt and Syria launch a surprise two-front attack on Israel to regain their lost territory. The conflict did not result in significant gains for anyone involved, however in 1979, representatives from Egypt and Israel signed the Camp David Accords which ended their 30-year conflict.

Though the Camp David Accords improved some of the relations in the Middle East, the issues at large of the Palestinian people remained unresolved. In the late 1980s, Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip revolted against the Israeli government.

The 1993 Oslo Accords assisted in resolving the conflict and was a pivotal milestone in Israeli-Palestinian relations. The accords aimed to propel Palestinians toward self-rule and set up a framework for Palestinian self-governance in the West Bank and Gaza.

Conflict began again in 2000 when Palestinians launched an attack on Israel over the remaining control the Israelis held on the Gaza strip. Palestine launched the second “intifada,” or uprising, which would last until 2005. In response, the Israeli government began construction of a barrier wall around the West Bank in 2002.

Not only did the wall create separation of Palestinians from what they consider to be their sacred homeland, but it also created grounds for separation within the Palestinian people. When Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006, it dethroned the longtime majority party Fatah and created factionalism within the Gaza strip.

Violence within Palestinian territories

set the stage for a military confrontation between the Israeli military and Hamas in 2014. Israel retaliated against Palestine in Gaza and the fight ended in late 2014 with a cease-fire deal. However, the cease fire came after 73 Israelis and 2,251 Palestinians had already been killed.

In response to an additional wave of violence between Israelis and Palestinians in 2015, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced that Palestinians would no longer follow the Oslo Accords.

In 2018, Palestinians stormed the wall surrounding the Gaza strip. Israeli troops killed 183 Palestinians and wounded 6,000 others in response to what was an otherwise peaceful demonstration by Palestinians. To add salt to the wound, former President Donald J. Trump’s administration reversed the U.N. Relief and Works Agency that same year. This effectively cut off U.S. aid to Palestinian refugees.

War between Israel and Hamas reignited on Oct. 7, 2023, and continues to be the most significant escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in several decades. One day after the Oct. 7 attack, the Israeli cabinet formally declared war against Hamas and ordered a complete siege of Gaza. Since October, the two sides have traded rocket fire daily.

According to Gazan health officials, in the first month of fighting about 1,300 Israelis and 10,000 Palestinians were killed. More than 4,000 of those casualties were children. Israeli forces have encircled Gaza City, cutting it off from southern Gaza, meanwhile hundreds of thousands of civilians remain in the city unable to escape.

Gaza regularly runs low on water and fuel

as Israel has limited the amount of aid that can enter. About 1.5 million displaced Gazans, nearly 70 percent of the territory’s population, are unable to leave and unable to continue to live in Gaza.

Given the history of violence and civilian casualties when Israel and Palestine have fought in the past, international groups such as the United Nations expressed concern for the safety of civilians in Israel. President Joe Biden made a strong statement of support for Israel.

The United States government has not changed its stance on the issue even as the death toll continues to climb. On Oct. 9, 2023, two days after the conflict reignited, the White House released a statement regarding the issue. “Our countries will support Israel in its efforts to defend itself and its people against such atrocities. We further emphasize that this is not a moment for any party hostile to Israel to exploit these attacks to seek advantage.”

The opinion of the U.S. government sparked controversy as well as support for Palestine from Americans.

Students play a particularly impactful role in raising awareness of the conflict. Local activist groups such as ANSWER and Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) are utilizing student involvement to spread the message of the issues Palestine is facing.

“There is a lot of arrogance even here in this country. We have to set that arrogance aside and humble ourselves. The Palestinian people... they are teaching us lessons of our own liberation. While things may not seem as bad for us, we are bound in chains right here. There is no liberation for some without liberation for all,” Claire Clark, a PSL organizer since



2020 said.

Historically, students have played a significant role in the anti-war movement. During the Vietnam War students marched in massive demonstrations from coast to coast. However, unlike the past, students are pressured now more than ever to professionalize and build their careers while still in school. Despite the challenges faced by modern youth, university campuses remain a place that gives space to dynamic youth leaders to learn and build a brighter future through leadership.

ANSWER and PSL spend their time mobilizing and hosting events that promote equality and activism. They organize and participate in demonstrations at universities like WCU, rallies and marches in Asheville like those in Pack Square Park and the march on the Pratt & Whitney plant with Reject Raytheon on Nov. 17. They also participate in educational events like teach-ins, film screenings and de-escalation training.

DeArmon started with ANSWER as a WCU student in 2020 and has been standing up for the rights of the oppressed since. Though western North Carolina is geographically removed from the fight, she argues that there are still many reasons to organize on behalf of Palestinians.

“Solidarity means that we understand our liberation is entwined with the liberation of the Palestinians, and all oppressed people around the world,” DeArmon said. She argues that it all comes back home at some point, and each of us are complicit in some way or another, whether we like it or not.

DeArmon also recognizes the monetary conflict in having a war involving Israel and Palestine. According to BBC news, in 2020 alone, the US gave \$3.8 billion in aid to Israel as part of a long-term commitment created under the Obama Administration. Almost all of the aid went toward military assistance. Israel is and continues to be the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign assistance since

World War II as of March 2023.

A common theme of the rallies taking place around Western North Carolina is the importance of the working class in the conflict. DeArmon believes that the people of the working class have a responsibility to make their voices heard.

“We demand an end to U.S. backing of Israel, which is the primary reason the apartheid regime exists and is able to carry out the brutal slaughter of Palestinian people,” she said.

Others, however, hold a different view. During the Nov. 9 rally hosted by WCU student groups like the ANSWER Coalition, Palestinian Youth Movement and National Students for Justice in Palestine, there were several Israel supporters who presented counter arguments.

Though it was peaceful, a few shouted phrases from the sidelines like, “Some of you wouldn’t even have rights,” and “They would slaughter all of you.” Organizers did not directly respond to the comments.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict rages on and all the while students work to bring awareness to the public. Their goal is an end to the conflict and peace for Palestine and Israel.

Beyond the divisiveness, one student who spoke at the rally believes that it isn’t about the ethnic, religious or national differences between Palestine and Israel at all.

“I am not Palestinian. I am not American,” he said. “I am rather a human being.”

Representatives from Digali’i, whose members appeared at the rally in support of Israel, did not respond to requests for comment on this story.



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Investigation continues in Shining Rock arson case

By Stewart Butler



Photo by Liam Bridgeman.

The North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation has joined WCU Police in the Nov. 14 Shining Rock arson investigation.

The WCU Police Department received reports of a fire in Shining Rock Residence Hall Tuesday Nov. 14. Smoke was traced to two trash cans burning in a communal bathroom.

This marks the third case of suspected arson within three weeks. All three cases were reported in Shining Rock.

The WCU Police Department also received

reports of arson in Shining Rock Oct. 25 and Nov. 6. The perpetrator in the Nov. 6 investigation remains free after the search concluded due to exhausted leads.

“WCU is a close-knit community,” WCU Chief of Police Steve Lillard said, “with that being said, any incidents that impact our students in a negative way should be taken seriously by all members of our campus. Everyone associated with WCU should have a desire to see these incidents end so that our students can continue to work toward their academic goals without interruption.”

WCU currently offers a \$1000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the person or persons responsible for the incident. The reward will be added to the student’s account balance and must be used for educational purposes. WCU reserves the right to publicize the informant’s name as permitted by North Carolina law.

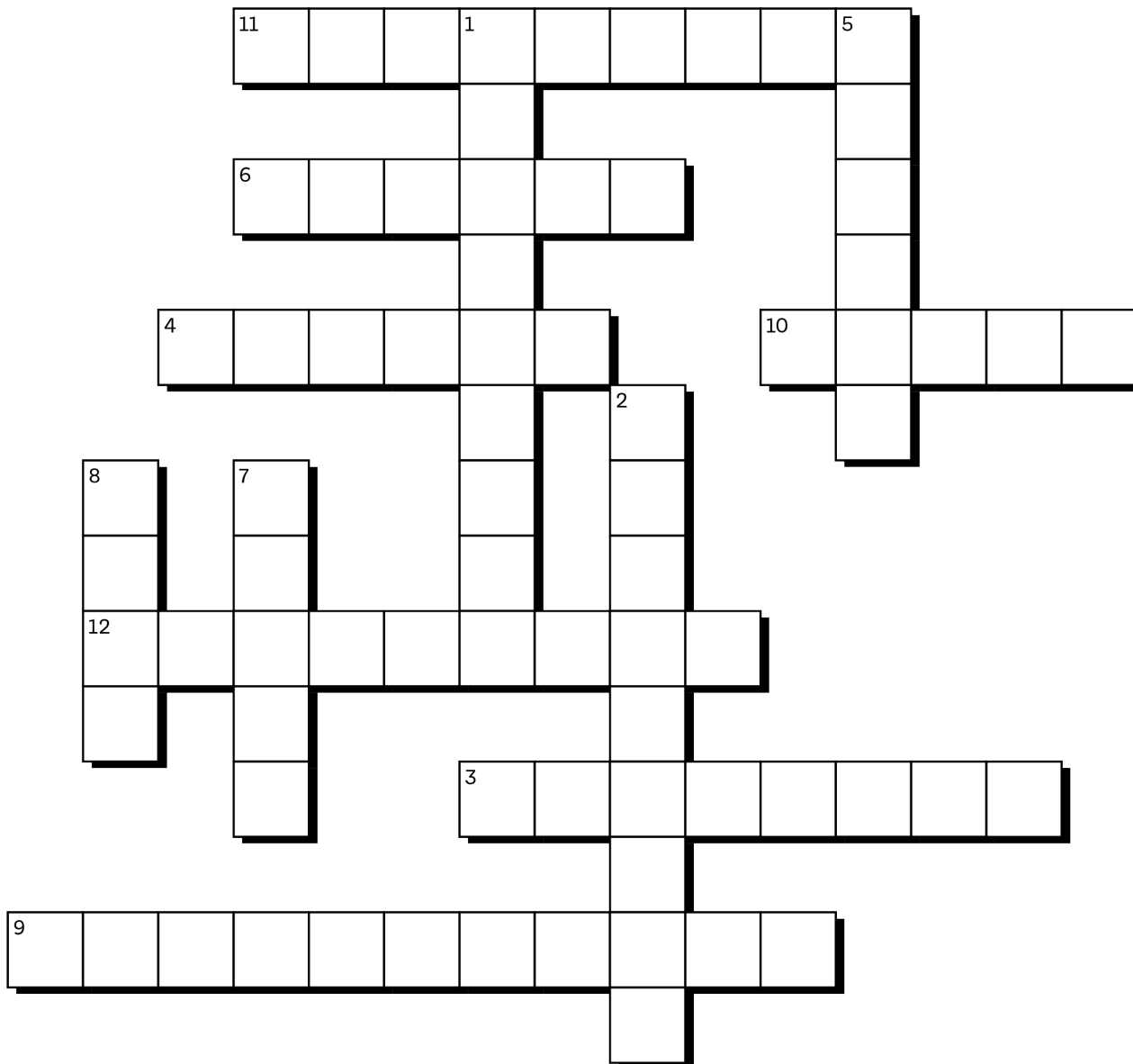
“We have been in constant contact with members of our community developing awareness messaging as well as soliciting information that may help with the investigation. These events are a priority to WCU Police, and we continue to encourage anyone with any information to come forward so that we can prevent future incidents,” Lillard said.

Jeb Nelson is a student that lives in Shining Rock. He believes the arson is a bad reflection of the freshman class.

“I believe the arson was very irresponsible and childish. It reflects poorly on the freshman class and makes it look bad as a whole,” Nelson said. “We need to start acting like mature college students and start focusing on other things like our education.”

No suspects have been identified in the Oct. 25 or Nov. 14 cases. WCU Police urge anyone with information to step forward. Reports can be made to the WCU Police Department non-emergency number, (828) 227-7301.

December Crossword



Across

3. a bad snow storm
4. _____ bells
6. he hates Christmas
9. most recorded Christmas song
10. a plant with red berries
11. can catch this on your tongue
12. brick centerpiece of the home

Down

1. the most _____ time of the year
2. these are hung on the mantle
5. dairy drink with warm spices
7. a Christmas song
8. another word for present

“We are still here”: Western Carolina University remains a Cherokee place

By Mattilynn Sneed & Sarah Pruitt

Originally published by The Western Carolina Journalist



The Rock Your Mocs Walk on the WCU campus lead by Jarret Wildcatt (left) and Jimmy Harlan Nov. 14, 2023. Photo by Mattilynn Sneed.

November is Native American Heritage Month, but it's not just a heritage for the Cherokee people of Western North Carolina. It's a living, vibrant culture.

There are 547 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Native Americans were not automatically afforded U.S. citizenship until 1924. November was not declared Native American Heritage Month until 1990. It is estimated that there were as many as 15 million indigenous people in the U.S. in 1492. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were less than 238,000.

Despite genocide, stolen lands, death marches, and forced assimilation through boarding schools, Indigenous Americans

refused to let their culture be lost. Cherokee people, who originally called themselves Aniyvwiya or, “the principal people,” have resided in the mountains of North Carolina as far back as 11,000 years ago. The story of the Cherokee people is not one of defeat, but of resilience and perseverance.

Rainy Brake, who teaches Cherokee language at Western Carolina University, commented that while the Cherokee people have suffered tragedy in their past, that is only a very small part of Cherokee's identity.

“A lot of us are taught Trail of Tears, terrible story, really sad, really awful...and I hate that perspective. It's a story of resilience and integrity, and survivorship, and going to the Supreme Court and fighting diplomatically, and resisting violence. I wish people would see that more during Heritage Month. I think that people need to tell the story from a Cherokee perspective, and a Cherokee perspective on their own story is not a ‘woe is me’ story. It's a story about looking forward and making things better continuously,” Brake said.

Brake obtained a Cherokee Language graduate certificate and became the first certified teacher at the New Kituwah Academy Immersion Program in 2009. She taught at the academy from 2009 to 2019, then began teaching Cherokee language courses at WCU in 2019.

Native American Heritage Month is about recognizing the many contributions that indigenous people have made to the U.S. It doesn't undo the many wrongs done, but many who we spoke to think it's an important start.



Mary Long making a dipper. She said her father-in-law always kept a dipper by the spring on their land, so that travelers could get water. She said her father-in-law passed, and the spring needs a new dipper. Photo by Mattilynn Sneed.

Louise “Yogsi” Brown is a fluent Cherokee speaker and member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and began teaching Cherokee language classes alongside Rainy Brake at WCU in 2019. The two have been long time partners in the language revitalization initiatives, working together since Brake began teaching at Kituwah. Cherokee is an endangered language, with only about 2,000 of the 380,000 Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma members and 152 of the 16,800 EBCI members speaking Cherokee fluently.

Yogsi is one of the few remaining whose first language was Cherokee.

“I think Native American Heritage Month and Western Carolina go hand in hand, because it is our homeland. It is who we are, and we are still here. When I walk with my skins on, and I walk on that earth, I am so proud,” Yogsi said.

The land where Western Carolina University now sits was once known as Tali Tsisgwayahi, or Two Sparrows Town. It was the first Cherokee town in the Tuckasegee River Valley. This name had been lost for many years.

In 2015, WCU’s Sequoyah Distinguished Professor Brett Riggs and Tom Belt began a project going through the collections of ethnographer James Mooney. Mooney studied the Cherokee people and kept extensive records in the form of maps, fieldnotes, letters, and interviews. Riggs rediscovered the name in a letter from Assistant Chief Charles Hicks to John Ross. Riggs knew it was essential that the name was not lost again. With the approval of EBCI Tribal Council, he saw to it that WCU’s archeological curation facility was named for the town. On Dec 6, 2019, the facility located on the ground floor of the McKee Building was dedicated as the Two Sparrows Town Archeological Collections Curation Facility.

“What that did was put that name on campus permanently, so it won’t be forgotten. I would love to get it on the entry to the university,” said Riggs.

He said that the last Cherokee families to live on the land where WCU now sits were forced off the land in 1820’s.

“Like what happened on almost all these reserves, they were pushed out by

whites who came and took over the land,” Riggs said.

While the university’s relationship to the Cherokee heritage of the land has not always been so diligent, Riggs said the university has taken an initiative to incorporate more Cherokee elements around campus. This would include signage on Cherokee history and culture, QR codes that would allow people to hear Cherokee language, using the rooftop terrace on Apodaca to examine the Cherokee astronomy of WCU’s location, providing more accessible material on current indigenous relations, and

installations by Cherokee students about their experiences.

“My goal is to make this a much more Cherokee place. There’s all these different ways that Western can embrace the Cherokee heritage of this place, but also reinforce the idea that it remains a Cherokee place. Richie Sneed (28th principal chief of EBCI) when they did the dedication for the Wi statue, his speech he gave was crafted. What he said is, ‘We are happy to be here, and we are happy that we can share our place with you,’” Riggs said. For full disclosure, one of the reporters for this story is Sneed’s daughter.



The “wi” sculpture by Todd Martin located in the courtyard between Killian Education Building and Killian Annex. Installed in Sept. 2018. Photo by Mattilynn Sneed.



Seth Penn at the gourd workshop Nov 14, holding a bear mask and rattle he made from gourds. Photo by Mattilynn Sneed.

Many efforts are being made to recognize and preserve the inherent Cherokee identity of WCU.

Digali'i, WCU's Native American student organization has more than 10 tribes represented in their ranks. Seth Penn is a student at WCU since August 2022, and chairman of Digali'i since August 2023. He is a member of the Cherokee Tribe of Northeast Alabama, which is a state recognized tribe. Penn is double majoring in natural resource conservation and management and anthropology with a cultural concentration. He is also minoring in Cherokee studies. He chose WCU because of the Cherokee culture and language resources available at the university. He was impressed with the university's efforts to have a relationship with the tribe that originally inhabited the land.

"To me, it's an amazing opportunity to acknowledge and honor our past while embracing the future through pursuing a college education that I will use to help

indigenous people across this state, back home, and beyond," he said.

Penn said Digali'i is all about promoting an environment that's inclusive, diverse, and respecting of all indigenous people. He said Digali'i also recognizes and honors the non-indigenous allies to the community. Penn specifically mentioned the invaluable contributions from faculty in the linguistics and anthropology department, including Dr. Riggs, Dr. Eastman, Dr. Hopkins, Dr. Steere and Rainy Brake. However, he thinks there is room for improvement in university relations with indigenous students.

"There is some racism on campus that is very much alive and well. I've had derogatory remarks made to me and heard of them made to other people as well. I almost feel like what is done for us is almost token like. I would like to see a more genuine approach and more relationship building. I'm proud of what we have done, and I'm proud that they [WCU] acknowledge what they do acknowledge, but there's always room for improvement. I hope while I'm chairman of Digali'i I can do everything in my power to help make those improvements; not just point out those problems but be part of the solutions as well."

Penn said the university could improve its relationship with its Cherokee identity by changing the tone around the discussion of Cherokee people on campus from past tense to present tense. He said people tend to think of Cherokees as existing here in the past, but there are many indigenous people who are part of the Catamount community today. He would like to see the stories of those who are still here better represented.

"We're still here. We remain. Our

languages are still here, our stories are still here. While our ancestors may no longer be here, they very much live on in our hearts, and we honor them every day. I'd like nonindigenous people to understand that yes, there's a rich history, but that history is still alive, it's not dead," Penn said.

Throughout Native American Heritage Month, the university hosted several events to showcase Cherokee Culture.



Bryanna Weaver of the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska asking Jimmy Harlan's advice on what to make with the gourds she chose. Photo by Mattilynn Sneed.

On Nov. 14, Jimmy Harlan and Elias Husky hosted a Cherokee Gourd workshop on campus. Harlan, who instructed the workshop, is a mask maker by trade and cultural specialist with the EBCI. He has been working with gourds for 26 years. He said that gourds have been used to make utilitarian items such as dippers and water bottles, as well as more culturally significant items like masks and rattles. Harlan is knowledgeable in many Cherokee crafts such as basket making, woodcarving, and flint knapping.

"I want to do things that preserve what I do, preserve the heritage in my blood," Harlan said. He went on to say that being Cherokee comes with a responsibility to carry on traditions, and that there is a big difference between claiming indigenous heritage and living the culture.



Participants of the Rock your Mocs Walk, including Teen Miss Cherokee Kyndra Postoak, Junior Miss Cherokee Kennedy Talissa Moore, and Little Miss Cherokee Rhiannon Postoak. Photo by Mattilynn Sneed.

At the center of campus on Nov. 15 a group of 20 students, faculty, community members and WCU staff gathered to participate in the Rock Your Mocs Walk that was planned as part of WCU's celebration of national Native American Heritage Month. They surrounded the fountain area, some wearing traditional regalia, ribbon skirts, and various styles of moccasins. The group was led by Jimmy Harlan and Jarrett Wildcatt, both members of the EBCI. The group walked from the fountain down to the H.F Robinson Administration Building and back. Harlan, with his beaded moccasins and feathers in his hair, guided the group while beating a drum. Wildcatt, sporting Cherokee pucker-toe moccasins, shook a rattle and sang traditional songs in Cherokee. The event demonstrated the living indigenous culture on WCU's campus.



Masks in the "A Century of Cherokee Mask Making" exhibit by (left to right) John Wilnoty Jr., Davy Arch, Davy Arch. Photo by Mattilynn Sneed.

Among the events was an exhibit in the

mountain heritage center "A Century of Cherokee Mask Making". It is on display from Nov. 10 to March 1, 2024. This exhibit shows the role masks have played in the effort to keep Native American culture alive. The Cherokee wore masks during ceremonies and dances. They would use natural materials and various tools to craft the mask. To add color, they used natural dyes. These worked together to create lively representations of animals or humans. Mask making was almost lost in the early 20th century. But with the Native American rights movement, there was a renaissance of indigenous culture. By the 1970s Cherokee artists were able to bring back the tradition of mask making for future generations. To celebrate the exhibit there was a reception on Nov. 16 with Davy Arch, an artist with nearly 50 years of Cherokee mask carving experience. Arch was able to do a mask carving demonstration to showcase some of the artistry passed down through generations. Each Mask tells its own story. These works of art keep the Cherokee culture alive and present.

Cherokee people have fought to keep their culture alive despite many obstacles. The need for cultural revitalization is part of WCU's past, present and future. The university has a responsibility to help Cherokee culture thrive on its campus. During Native American Heritage Month, WCU demonstrated their commitment to maintaining a positive relationship with EBCI by hosting events, ceremonies, and exhibits that showcased the rich Cherokee culture. History cannot be rewritten, but it can be learned from. Without the use of the Cherokee's land, WCU would not be here. The phrase that was repeated among the Cherokee people that we interviewed perfectly captured the theme of Native American Heritage Month - "We are still here."

Support for Kevin Mabus

By Stewart Butler



Kevin Mabus is the Cat-Tran student-shift supervisor and is a friend to all who know him. Through this role he has created meaningful relationships and shared his wisdom with countless students and staff all while maintaining a safe and welcoming working environment.

Unfortunately, last December, Mabus began to notice issues with his left eye. After speaking with doctors at Duke University, he learned that multiple

operations may be necessary to maintain his health.

Mabus will soon undergo surgeries to his left eye and upper sinus and hopes to make a swift return to the job. While many miss Mabus and want to see him back, it comes at quite an expense.

Daria Mendez is a student and close friend of Mabus. Like many others, she developed a connection with Mabus while

working under his supervision. After hearing of Mabus' condition, Mendez created a GoFundMe page to gain support for Mabus' future surgeries.

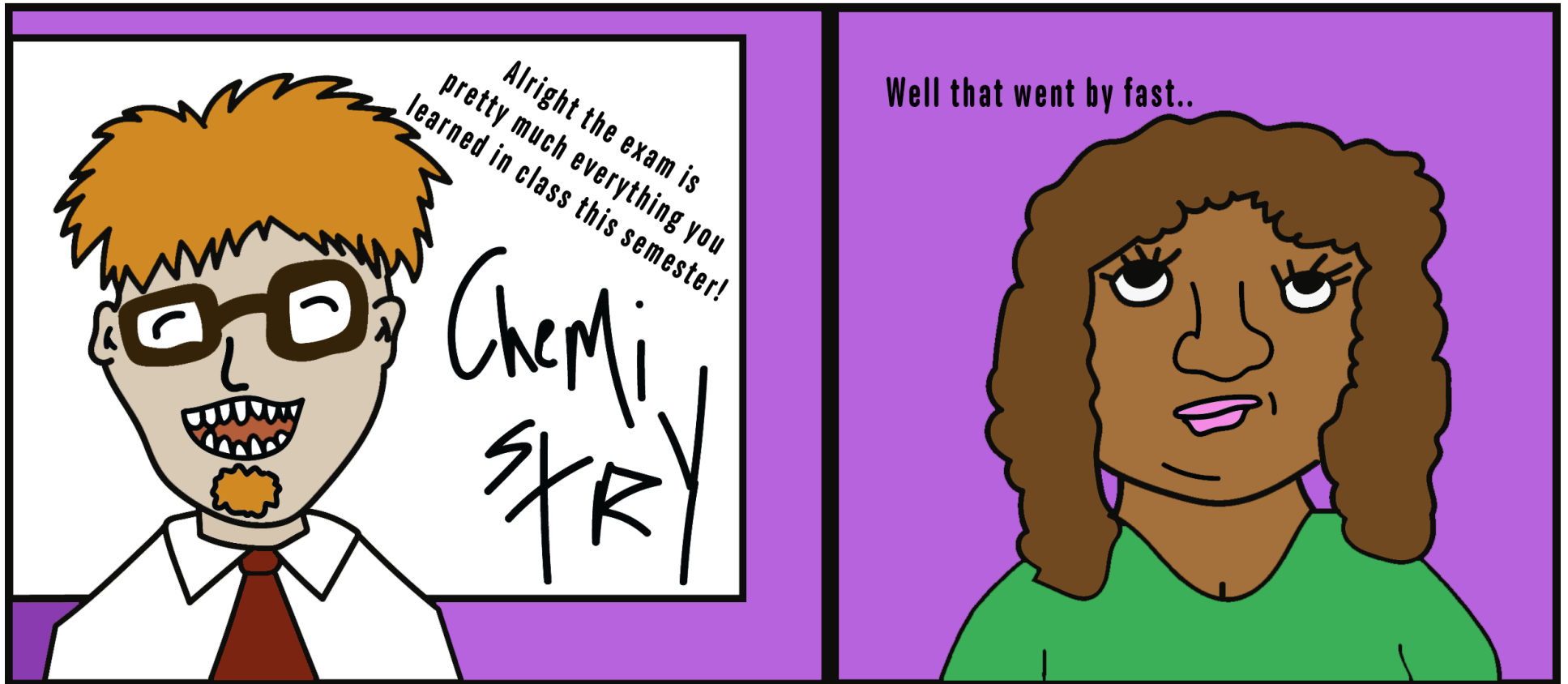
To Mendez, Mabus is more than just a supervisor.

“From having conversations about music to having conversations about heartbreak and spirituality, he has seen many young adults become great humans because of his advice and patient mentorship,” Mendez said.

Mabus began working with Cat-Tran in 2016 and was promoted to his current role in 2017. He has not missed a day since.

Mendez says Mabus is known for his gracious attitude and genuine care for those around him. He has a passion for his work that shines on the entire community. Mendez says his leadership has seen many students come and go and has inspired countless more.





Letter from the Editor

By Liam Bridgeman

First, I want to thank you for another great fall semester of The Western Carolinian. Without you, we would not be able to celebrate our accomplishments. Thank you for remaining by our side all semester!

Second, I want to highlight our hard-working staff. It is truly incredible to see everything they've been able to accomplish so far this year. For a staff of eight students to run an entire newspaper is truly remarkable. Many student newspapers reap the benefits of having a staff of 20 or more with a group of advisors to hold them up. We are not so fortunate BUT

we are fortunate to have a team of hard-working students that are dedicated to providing you with the best information possible, so you remain informed.

I'd also like to take this time to reiterate why we do what we do. We don't just write these stories to say that we have, we write these stories to keep you educated, informed and protected. Our team isn't here to simply write stories – we are here to help you and promote accountability for those that need to be held to a high standard. I implore you to reach out to us. If you have an issue, on or off campus, we

are here to help. Our tipline is 828-227-2694 and if you aren't comfortable leaving a message, email us at westerncarolinian@email.wcu.edu. We want to help you, but we can't know how unless we are told. It is a privilege to help our community and it is a responsibility we do not take lightly.

Next semester we hope to continue to build upon our success, with your help. From all of us at The Western Carolinian, we hope you all have a happy and healthy winter break. Relax, rewind and we'll see you back in January. Until then, thank you for reading!

Athlete Spotlight



David Miles

What do you like most about track?

There are two things that I really enjoy about running track, one being the adrenaline rush that I get when I'm running my fastest and competing against others who are doing the same. During the moment I feel like I'm in a zone where it's just me and the seven other runners on the track alone, trying to prove who's the best and there's no one else in the stadium. The other is the bond and relationships that are built, not only between me and my teammates, but runners from other schools as well. Most people think that track is an individual sport, but some of my strongest friendships and bonds were formed on the track.

What are you studying and what do you hope to do after you graduate?

Currently I'm majoring in graphic design. I plan to work in my field at Bullseye Graphics, which is a company that I interned at and ultimately was hired to over the summer.

How did your passion for track begin?

I started running track my freshman year in high school, but I didn't really take it seriously until my junior year. Growing up I always wanted to play basketball and see how far I could get with the sport, but once I got to high school, I realized that I was much more successful on the track. Once I started receiving

offers from schools on a daily and winning county, conference, and state championships my passion for track increased tremendously. Not only because I was winning and getting recognition for it, but because I was following in my mother's footsteps who was a track athlete as well.

What events do you run, and which is your favorite?

I run the 60, 100, 200, 300 and 400 meter dash as well as the 4x100-meter relay and the 4x400-meter relay. I have top 5 all time marks here at Western Carolina in the 100, 200, and 300 meter dashes as well as top 10 all time marks in the 200 and 400, and I believe that the 200 is my best event. But my favorite event is the 400, as I mention my mother ran track and she specialized in the 400 throughout high school and college, so being able to run that event just like her makes it my favorite.

What do you hope to accomplish this season?

This season I would like to run a personal best in every event I run in as well as become a 7-time conference champion over the course of the indoor and outdoor season. I've come close to achieving this goal over the years as I've medaled in every conference championship I've competed in, but to win every event at conference that I compete in would be a great accomplishment. Also, I'd like to make it to regionals this outdoor season and potentially advance on to nationals.

How did you get into teaching?

I caught the teaching bug when I was in industry. More than a little teaching goes into Sales Engineering, and it's really satisfying when someone learns and uses those new ideas to make things happen in their own work. Later, as a graduate student, I had a chance to work with some outstanding educators, role models who greatly influenced my approach to the classroom now that I am an Assistant Professor of Marketing.

I also learned some very exciting new ideas. Often, I would hear something in class and immediately see how I could use it when I got back to my office. It wasn't a big leap to realize how rewarding it would be to help other people learn as I had.

What kind of research do you do?

My scientific work studies businesses which sell to other businesses, and especially the salespeople who bridge these relationships. I'm especially interested in technical sales. This is a job where, depending on the situation, they need to be diplomats, problem-solvers, investigators, educators, and persuaders. It's at the boundaries and frontiers where companies come together that the most exciting things often happen.

What subjects do you enjoy most?

My favorite classes to teach are sales-related (such as Advanced Sales, MKT 493). There are many jobs in this field, and most students are surprised by how much fun the work can be (as I was). I also enjoy teaching strategy. Both classes give me a chance to show people just how diverse and dynamic the business world can be, and to engage in problem-solving that can make a real difference in people's lives.

How do you spend your time outside of the classroom?

Well, my other job is being a dad to three wonderful young children, and they're a constant source of joy for me. I've always been a book worm; I love reading and learning new things. Finally, I have started developing my skills with hand-tool woodworking.

What advice do you have for students?

Be thinking about your life after graduation. WCU has so much to offer, so have a plan and focus on it. Good grades are important, but don't lose sight of the fact that you are here to learn things that you will use in your life after WCU. So don't just learn something to pass a test, strive for understanding.

Staff Spotlight



Robert Mayberry

Student Spotlight



Cielo Vera

What campus organizations are you involved in and how have they impacted you?

As the treasurer for the Psychology Club, Psi Chi, Spanish Club, and the First Gen Club, my journey at Western has been a transformative experience in leadership and community building. Beyond acquiring essential leadership skills, the profound impact lies in the sense of community that has woven its way into every facet of my college life.

In the Psychology Club, I've found a space to not only enhance my knowledge in the field but also to forge meaningful connections with like-minded peers. This community has been pivotal in my professional growth and has provided a platform for collaborative learning and exploration.

The Spanish Club has allowed me to proudly represent my culture and language, fostering a supportive environment for fellow enthusiasts eager to continue their learning journey. This rich community not only celebrates our shared heritage but also extends a welcoming hand to those who share a passion for continual education.

Being part of the First Gen Club has instilled in me a profound sense of responsibility as a representative and guide for other first-generation college students. It recognizes and reinforces the idea that we belong here at Western, creating a supportive network that goes beyond academics to ensure our success and belonging.

Through these clubs, I've not only honed leadership

skills but have also been deeply impacted by the sense of belonging and purpose they provide. They have become more than organizations; they are the threads weaving together my unique and compelling narrative at Western.

What advice do you have for incoming freshman?

For incoming freshmen, my sincere recommendation is to take the leap and join clubs and organizations at Western. While it might feel intimidating initially, this step is crucial for discovering a welcoming community and flourishing in your journey here. Embrace the initial discomfort, because beyond it lies a network of support and growth.

Additionally, don't hesitate to seek assistance when needed. Western offers a plethora of resources that are readily available. Remember, you don't have to navigate this experience alone. Tap into the abundance of support and opportunities that Western provides. This will ensure a fulfilling and well-supported college experience.

What is next for you after WCU?

My desire is to delve deeper into my field, my post-undergraduate goal is to enter the Clinical Psychology Graduate Program. This is not just a step in my academic journey; it's a commitment to pushing boundaries, gaining expertise, and ultimately contributing meaningfully to the field of psychology. The path at Western is just the beginning of a broader expedition toward professional growth and academic excellence.

Answers provided by Tess Candow, the president of the Swim Club.

How did you become interested in the Swim Club?

I became interested in the swim team my freshman year. I was looking for a good group of people to be friends with while also getting a good physical workout in. I have made such good friends on the swim team. I am happy to say, our friendship extends outside of the swim team and we hang out pretty regularly. We also have a phenomenal coaching staff that kicks our butts during practice, with the goal of bettering us for our swim meets. We have already had swimmers make national times!

How long does your season last?

Our season is the entire time school is in session. We have a fall and spring session. The fall semester we are in the pool on Monday-Thursday from 8:30-9:45. On Fridays we are in the CRC for dry land practice from 7:30-9:00. Our spring schedule has not been determined yet, but look out on our social media because we will post the times there!

What events can we look forward to in the future?

We have some very exciting events to look forward to. We are having a holiday party before the end of the fall semester. During the spring semester, we are having a hike on the Blue Ridge Parkway, white water rafting trip, bowling, and a team dinner. At the end of the year, we have a swim club ball. It's a great time to dress up, eat good food, dance, and give awards to our lovely swimmers. We have a fantastic social chair that works to make sure we have fun events throughout the semester, some on campus and some off campus.

How can someone get involved with the Swim Club?

You can get involved with the Swim Club at any time. We have Facebook (@wкусwimclub), Instagram (@swim_club_wcu), and Tik Tok (@wкусwimclub) to show off our team. Our recruitment director is always monitoring these pages to make sure we have quick responses to all new members. We have events throughout the year on campus that swimmers and non-swimmers can participate in. If they are interested in the team we highly encourage people to come and check us out.

Club Spotlight



Swim Club

Timeline for rollout of new FAFSA announced, WCU to host FAFSA Day

By **Julia Duvall**, senior media relations coordinator

CULLOWHEE – In November, the U.S. Department of Education announced the timeline for rollout of the new Free Application for Federal Student Aid form and provided dates and timelines for schools as to when to expect applicant information.

The new FAFSA rollout comes as a result of the FAFSA Simplification Act, which implemented a significant overhaul of the processes and systems used to award federal student aid. The law will also affect every state that uses FAFSA data to award state grant aid and every school that participates in the federal student aid programs.

FAFSA for 2024-25 will be available for students to complete by Dec. 31. While the actual go live date is not specified,

students should not expect to be able to complete a FAFSA until that date.

“We strongly encourage every student to complete the new redesigned 2024-2025 FAFSA, even if a student has completed the FAFSA in the past and did not qualify,” said Trina Orr, director of the Office of Financial Aid at WCU. “While the 2024-2025 FAFSA does not account for multiple family members in college, the new FAFSA does bring expanded aid eligibility, fewer questions, and direct IRS data exchange.”

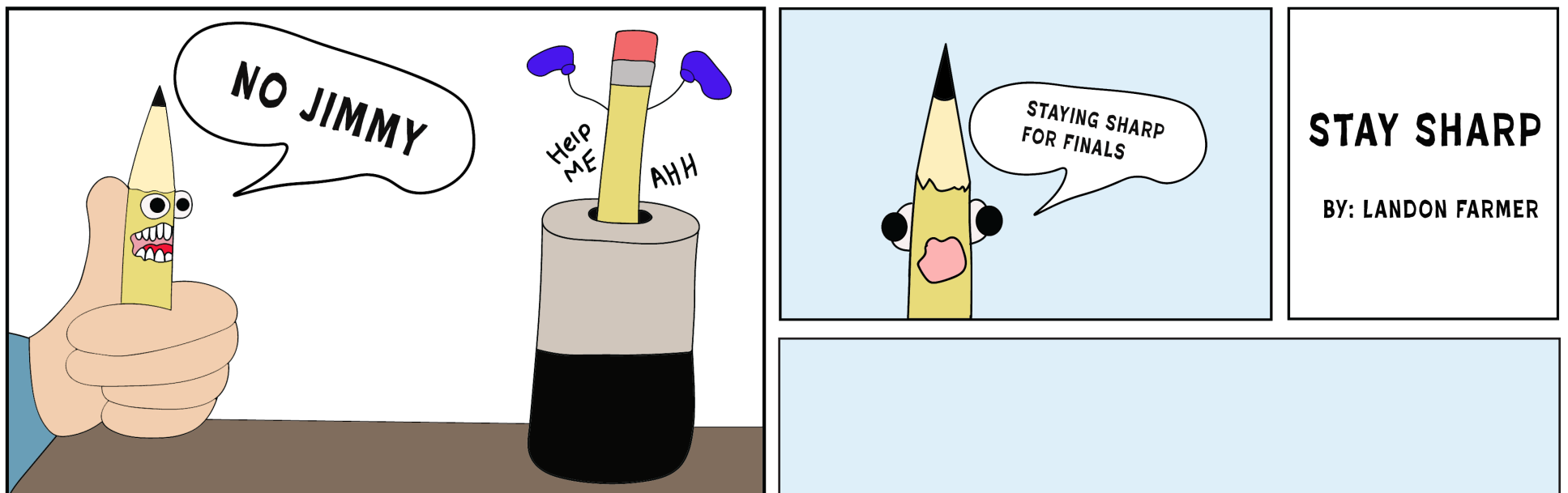
According to the announcement, the new FAFSA will make it easier than ever for students to get financial aid for college and help 610,000 more students from low-income backgrounds receive Pell Grants. The new FAFSA form will also significantly improve, streamline and

redesign how students and their families use the form. For the first time, applicants will be able to securely transfer their federal tax information necessary for the eligibility calculation, directly from the IRS.

Schools will begin receiving aid eligibility information, including Institutional Student Information Records, by the end of Jan. 2024, with information on paper forms to follow.

WCU will be hosting a FAFSA Day on Jan. 27, 2024, from 9 a.m. to noon in the WCU Financial Aid Office, located in room 105 of the Cordelia Camp Building.

“All students are welcome to come and let us help them complete their 2024-2025 FAFSA,” Orr said.



Opinion: Itty Bitty Uniform Committee: Why female athletes need better uniforms

By Madison Coup

If I had to count on my fingers how many women's sports uniforms were appropriate, comfortable, and modest, I'd be making a fist, because I haven't seen one yet. I speak from personal experience because I have played several sports throughout my life that had a drastic difference between uniforms worn by men and women.

The typical female athlete is subjected to unnecessarily short shorts or even skirts and revealing racerback jerseys. In contrast, traditionally, male athletes are expected to wear long, baggy shorts and baggy short sleeve jersey tops. Why? Well, the biggest argument is that "sex sells."

Women's sports uniforms tend to be "skimpier" for the male gaze. In an interview with the Indianapolis Star, Heather Grigsby, a mother of three daughters said, "Guys are visual, and they tend to be the majority population that watches sports."

According to a study conducted by Michael Ricciardelli, men's interest in every women's sport, with the exception of figure skating and gymnastics, exceeds that of women. It is my hope to spread the word and change the narrative surrounding women's sports in order to promote more appropriate uniforms for all sports based on the gameplay rather than a curvy body.

Due to the prevalence of tiny uniforms,

female athletes are often stereotyped and subjected to inappropriate attention surrounding the seriousness and legitimacy of their sports. For example, in June 2015, Stephen A. Smith, a popular sports television commentator, was covering the Germany versus Norway women's World Cup when he made an inappropriate comment regarding a goal scored by Norway to tie the game. Smith insinuated that the goal went in because the German defenders "might not have wanted to mess their hair," which is essentially calling these players lazy. Instead of emphasizing the profound skill of the player making the penalty kick, Smith chose to attack the defenders and insult their athletic ability.

Not only does this exacerbate gender inequality, it also shows the underlying ideology that men's sports require more skill or athleticism, which is blatantly false. How many times do we have to revisit this argument?

I am not alone in this opinion. In an article published in The Oracle in April 2022, Jessica Zhang interviewed female high-school athletes about their uniforms. One interviewee, Sophia Howell, stated, "I think shorts are easier to run in, so I'd prefer wearing shorts over a skirt; but because the skirt is part of our uniform, we have to wear them."

As a senior in high school, I conducted a similar study on this topic for my AP

Research class. I sent out surveys to both male and female athletes from several different sports regarding their personal feelings and opinions about their required uniforms. The female athletes gave answers similar to Howell's comment above and showed a genuine disinterest and discomfort in their uniforms; however, they tolerated them because it was a requirement. Tolerance is a big part of life in some respects, but it shouldn't dominate your recreational activities.

The most common counterargument is, without a doubt, cost. Typically, men's uniforms cost more than women's uniforms with the addition of several inches on both the shorts and jersey top sleeves. Women's uniforms are cheaper; however, women are sacrificing their comfort to save a couple extra dollars. After examining the BSN Sports Catalog, when comparing a basic Nike women's uniform consisting of a racerback top and kilt bottoms with a men's short sleeve jersey and 8.5-inch inseam shorts, there is a slight price difference. The men's jersey tops are \$72 per unit, and the shorts are \$62 per unit, while the women's tops are \$77 per unit, and the kilts are \$57 per unit. So yes, there is a price difference, but I know a lot of people that would pay five more dollars for a couple extra inches of coverage. The reality is female athletes aren't objects. They're talented, motivated individuals who deserve to participate in sports without feeling like their only purpose is sex appeal.

The Catamounts incredible football season

By Cody Cresmen, Nicole Azar & Thalia Richardson

Originally published by The Western Carolina Journalist

The 2023 season of football has come to a close at Western. After beating East Tennessee State University, Western Carolina was heading off to play their final game against VMI, looking to end the season on a good note. However, the season did not end how they wanted it to, coming up short against VMI in a loss of 27-24. Despite recent losses, WCU fans are still enthusiastic about the Catamounts and all they have accomplished this season.

Taylor Wells, a WCU football fan, had some positive feedback on the season.

“I think they had a really good season, they seemed to work well together this year over past years, and I’m excited for next year,” Wells said.

Catamount football fan, Reagan Trumm is excited for next season as well, after following along for the entire 2023 season.



Branson Adams celebrates with teammates after scoring a touchdown against ETSU in WCU's big conference win Nov. 11. Photo by Nicole Azar.

“This team had so much potential. They had a great season and I hate to see it come to an end.”

Overall, the Catamounts had 7 wins and 4 losses this season, 3-2 at home and 4-2 away. It was an improvement from previous years of 6-5 and 4-7.

The Catamounts didn't finish the season the way they wanted to, but they are proud of all that was accomplished and intend to use it as fuel for next season.

“We know how it feels to be so close to

what we wanted, and we know what it's like now. We're going to come back better than ever with the guys that want it more than ever. We have high standards now and know what we want to achieve,” sophomore quarterback Cole Gonzales said.

Gonzales had an incredible year, finishing the season as a finalist for the Walter Payton Award.

Other star players with big roles in the team's success were senior kicker, Richard McCollum and senior linebacker, Va



Catamounts celebrate a touchdown in front of the visiting ETSU fans on Nov. 11, 2023. Photo by Nicole Azar.

Lealaimatafao playing their last season before graduation.

Fans had especially great things to say about Coach Kerwin Bell, as he has coached the Catamounts through a winning season this year.

“The team has definitely gotten better since last year, and I hope to see them prosper next season,” WCU student and fan, Rachel Wiles said.

Coach Kerwin Bell has changed the Western Carolina football program around. Bell is going into his third season coaching the Catamounts, and the future is looking bright for him. He was hired during the Covid outbreak, winning only four games that season. However, the following year, the Catamounts defeated a ranked opponent, The Chattanooga Mocs. It was clear he was turning the program around quickly. He has made a tremendous impact thus far, and WCU fans expect him to keep building off of the incredible season that they had this year.

“This year was different because we knew what type of team we would be, and sky was the limit for us. I feel like a lot of previous years before, Western didn’t expect to be good at football, but we brought in a new expectation and an even better mindset,” senior linebacker Va Lealaimatafao said.

Lealaimatafao transferred to WCU from Cisco College for Coach Kerwin’s second year leading the team.

Lealaimatafao commented on his experiences these past two seasons, saying that it was much more than just football in this program.

“The football program at Western didn’t

only give me great teammates, but it gave me friends that I now have for life,” he said.

Kyle Pifer, deputy athletics director for WCU Athletics, says this season has brought in a lot of attention from donors, as they are excited about the future and the plans to build a new facility.

The biggest challenge the athletic department has faced this season was the \$14 million budget. It is a small increase from last year’s budget but still doesn’t meet the many needs of the department. Pifer explained that it is hard to give athletes the experience they want. He hopes to improve the food for the next season by providing full nutritional meals on and away from campus.

When asked about next year and the future, Pifer said he hopes the team makes it into the playoffs. WCU was only one win short this year from the FCS



Photo by Elijah Lautzenheiser.

playoffs, which would be their first return in 41 years. As for the future, the athletic department plans to raise \$30 million in student fees and donors to build a new facility, weight room, and new tracks.

The future is bright for Western Carolina University Athletics. With the uprise of the football program, along came WCU women’s soccer with a 2023 Southern Conference Championship, and men’s basketball productive 2023-2024 season so far.



Photo by Elijah Lautzenheiser.

Renter beware: Students share their apartment horror stories

By Marrah Ste. Marie



For many students, the transition from a residence hall to an apartment feels like a dream. No parents, no RAs and, for most, living in an apartment is their first opportunity to be on their own. However, for many students that dream can turn into a nightmare when flooding, pest infestations, broken amenities and poor, unresponsive, and even disrespectful management become commonplace.

Cara Lawson and her three roommates moved into The Husk when it first opened in 2019.

“Upon moving in we could tell everything was rushed,” Lawson shared in a message. The first thing they noticed was their door couldn’t shut all the way.

“With four girls in an apartment, it’s not ideal for your protection to come from a bar stool,” Lawson said.

Despite reporting the door immediately, it took The Husk’s maintenance team three weeks to fix.

To add to her apartment disfunction, Lawson and her roommates immediately noticed mold growing in their apartment despite the water not being hooked up yet. The girls reported the mold at the same time as the door, but it took months for maintenance to respond to the request.

When maintenance arrived at the apartment, their ‘fix’ was to wipe the mold from the ceiling, instead of finding the source. To Lawson, the source was clear.

“The roof was causing mold! There was moisture within the walls...it quite literally looked like an upside-down mountain on our [ceiling].” Lawson shared that she used to have photos, but recently switched phones and lost them in the process.

Lawson and her roommates were not the only students with safety concerns in their apartment, and The Husk is not the only complex around WCU with issues.

The Husk declined to interview due to company policy.

Makenzie Atkinson, who lived in Bellamy apartments, was concerned about her and her roommates’ safety when the entry gate broke.

According to leasing manager Lindsay Ferg, Bellamy immediately notifies all residents when the entry gate is broken via property-wide email. Atkinson and her roommates did not receive any such notification.

“The gate was apparently broken for a while, but it took us reaching out to them for them to admit that it was broken and that they are trying to remedy the issue,” Atkinson shared.

According to Atkinson the clubhouse security was also compromised. “When I moved in over the summer, the clubhouse was never locked because [the door was] apparently broken but there were no efforts to fix them.”

According to Ferg, the clubhouse remains unlocked from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. while employees are working. When employees are out, the clubhouse is locked. If



residents want to access the clubhouse while it's locked, they have a key fob that can unlock the door.

Atkinson also shared an instance where the clubhouse was broken into, and residents' packages were stolen. Atkinson's roommate was among the victims.

According to Ferg, the Jackson County Police Department was notified after residents' mail was noticed missing. "Jackson County had let us know if we made a police report on behalf of our residents then typically, they [could] get reimbursed, refunded or [get] replaced packages for anything that was misplaced or taken."

Atkinson's roommate was never contacted by Bellamy. When she reached out to management about the mailroom being broken into, she was informed that a list of names was given to the sheriff. She was able to get a refund for her package from Amazon.

Atkinson's issues did not stop here. In November, she was told by management she would be evicted for her "attitude" when she was reporting issues. She and everyone in her unit were told they would not be allowed to renew their lease.

Emma Baker and three roommates were living at University Suites when they noticed their dishwasher starting to deteriorate.

According to Baker, when she and her roommates moved in, the dishwasher was broken, and the garbage disposal was filled with glass and cat hair from past residents.

"They came out and fixed it but not before gaslighting me about repairs made before

any of us lived there," Baker wrote in a message. "When the guy came to fix the dishwasher/disposal he ended up breaking it more because he failed to attach one of the pieces in the bottom properly, so it melted as soon as we used it." The dishwasher has since been fixed, however her kitchen is still not safe. "Currently only one eye on our stove works without catching fire."

According to property manager Ginger Wade, if a resident is not satisfied with the repairs made by a maintenance team, they should submit another maintenance request.



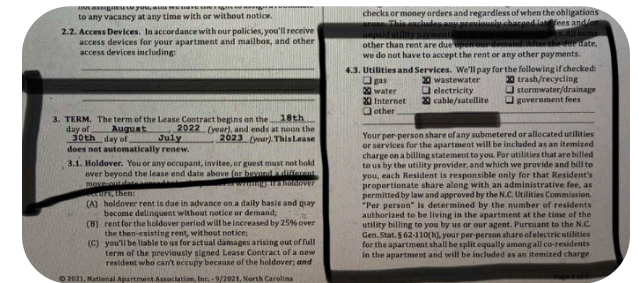
Baker's nightmare didn't end in the kitchen. According to Baker, the property manager stole nearly \$200 by moving bills between accounts. When confronted by Baker, the property manager denied this.

At The Everson, formerly known as Catamount Peaks, Jordan Petruk was almost evicted from her apartment of over three years due to an unexplained fee.

"They charged some random fee to our account a few days after rent was due," Petruk shared, "We did not receive a notification about the posted charge... they almost evicted us over \$20."

The Everson would later violate its own

lease by removing cable as an amenity, a month after Petruk had renewed. Petruk's lease states The Everson would pay for cable/satellite.



"I reached out many many many times and they always said they 'couldn't reimburse my rent' for it but they would 'talk to higher ups about a supplement replacement for it.' They never provided anything and never reimbursed rent."

Petruk shared that because of the lease being broken by The Everson, then Catamount Peaks, she planned to take them to small claims court. However, after Catamount Peaks rebranded to The Everson, she was no longer able to go through with the case.

"I also think [the rebranding] was an intentional, strategic move on their part," she said.

The Everson did not respond to an interview request.

Makayla Deel, resident of 4214 West (which is owned and managed by The Summit) was told her apartment would offer communal laundry units since apartments did not have individual units.

"These were considered an amenity that we were paying for (and we had to pay per load), yet my entire time there, every single one was broken," they wrote in a message.



The onsite laundry facility is an amenity offered on 4214's website yet Deel's only options were to purchase their own washer or use the laundromat in Cullowhee.

The laundry was the least of Deel's concerns upon moving in.

"4214 had roaches on day one," Deel shared. "When I contacted them, they suggested I clean up after myself better. I had just moved in that day," they wrote.

Management was not any better for residents at The Summit. Office staff would often unexpectedly leave during posted hours with no indication of when they would return. This was frustrating for residents who ordered large packages because the only way they could receive them was through office staff.

"I have had to leave packages in the office for almost a week because they were never there when I could pick [them] up," a resident wishes to remain anonymous in fear management would target them shared. "Some people have medications and pet food delivered in the packages and need to access them during posted hours."

The Summit did not respond to an interview request.

Marissa C. – who did not want her last name published for fear of being evicted – and her three roommates at University Suites came back from Christmas break 2022 only to find their apartment flooded after a pipe burst. Personal items were ruined in the aftermath.

"Our belongings sat in water for over a week, and they did not replace the carpeting," shared Marissa. They were not allowed back in the unit until the repairs were complete, but they still had to pay rent for that month.

According to Ginger Wade, University Suites property manager, the apartment does not require renters' insurance but highly recommend it for situations like the flooding in Marissa and her roommates' apartment.

"Our insurance covers our buildings, our contents inside the apartment. Any personal belongings of the tenant would be covered under their insurance," Wade shared.

"If they need a hotel – they have the choice of if they want to stay with a friend or get a hotel – they do still pay their rent. Again, their renter's insurance ultimately would be the policy that would cover, if they're displaced, that would cover their hotel," Wade said.

Marissa and her roommates also had issues with University Suites' maintenance team.

"I've dealt with maintenance gaslighting us into thinking my roommates and I were the cause of a flood in our apartment," Marissa shared in a message.

When a resident moves into an apartment they must sign a lease: an agreement between the resident and apartment

managers that states what the apartment will provide and what is expected of the resident. When signing a lease, it is important to pay attention to what is against the rules of the apartment and the punishments for it, how much rent is, when it's due and what forms of payment are acceptable, whether maintenance is provided and how to put in requests and subleasing policies in case you cannot complete your lease for any reason.

Residents are advised if they ever experience mistreatment to immediately report it to their apartment's office when the issue arose and when it was reported and to keep documentation of issues and how or if they were resolved.

"We can't fix issues that aren't reported," said an apartment office staff who wished to remain unnamed because he did not want to represent the apartment.

If you or someone you know feels taken advantage of or ignored in regard to apartments or any issue around campus, you are encouraged to reach out to The Western Carolinian by emailing westerncarolinian@wcu.edu or by calling our tip line; (828)227-2694.



December Word Search

I P K Z T L H C Y V V Z J I T Q W W M K	Hanukkah
D E B F P N N Y E C E Z W Q A G I U M T	Christmas
F S R A L R G U A C Q V O H N C D Y C F	Kwanzaa
E P N I Z G R F D J N A O I H G B T N E	Winter
B X G E F G R N D F K T D R W W I W J K	Snow
V F P O B N R F N L E R I I I N U E O V	New Year
J A R Y B K O Y X G A S V A C A T I O N	Toboggan
R V E X N Z N B G O T I Y C D H Z B Y W	Bonfire
W F T I L D L N B M F A K D A V A T D R	Snowboarding
P K N Y W K O W A R A E Y W E N O E C K	Parka
Z K I A B G O S M E O A S H T U C Y B G	Eggnog
P K W M P N Q E I J Q G Y A O H O A K N	Hot Cocoa
N O W V S P H U S L R C C K C S C T B S	Mistletoe
A T Y A W P Z J T K N B W K W V T V K A	Ice Skating
G F M L N U S O L K E A X U T D O V K X	Vacation
G C B V C Z V E E Q A Y E N S F H R A J	
O P D G S N A V T G H D O A N F A T J S	
B L U P E N J A O B U L O H O P Q Y V E	
O O G B G N Z O E U Z L H X W W L D A P	
T Z F Z R G N I T A K S E C I V M O V H	

Marrah's quiz corner

Plan your winter day and get an iconic winter character!

You wake up and there's snow outside! You decide to...

- A. Stay inside and watch movies
- B. Frolic in the snow with your friends
- C. Throw snowballs at passing people and cars

You decide to warm up with a hot drink. You choose...

- A. Hot chocolate
- B. Apple cider
- C. Just coffee

Now it's time for breakfast. You grab...

- A. Pancakes with sprinkles
- B. Christmas cookies
- C. Still just the coffee

Your friends get together to watch some winter movies. You choose...

- A. A Christmas Carol
- B. Polar Express
- C. Home Alone

Movies are done! You and your friends decide to...

- A. Build gingerbread houses
- B. Start a snowball fight
- C. Play some games

Your friends leave so you get dinner. Tonight, you're eating...

- A. A nice, homemade meal
- B. Heating up some leftovers or ramen
- C. Grabbing food from the caf

Time to wind down. You change into...

- A. Christmas matching set pajamas
- B. Sweatshirt and sweats
- C. Wear the clothes from the day

You can't go to bed without...

- A. Your favorite pet or stuffed animal
- B. An ice-cold glass of water
- C. I just want to sleep

Classes tomorrow are cancelled! Tomorrow you'll celebrate by...

- A. Staying warm inside with a few friends
- B. Playing in the snow all day
- C. Hosting a huge party

Mostly A's
Santa Claus

You embody the holiday spirit. To you, as soon as Thanksgiving ends the only thing that matters is the winter holidays. Celebration to you looks like staying comfy, warm and being with your loved ones.

Mostly B's
Jack Frost

You're as cool as can be. To you, the best part of winter is the ice and snow that sparkle during the day. Celebration to you looks like embracing everything about winter that makes it different than the other seasons.

Mostly C's
The Grinch

All you can think about during winter is the return of summer. Maybe you don't hate the holidays, but you dislike the cheesiness of winter consumerism combined with the stinging cold. Don't forget the best way to stay warm is to be near the ones you love!