

Holidays on the plaza to light up campus

By Hannah Butler

Get ready to ring in the holiday season this December as WCU throws its annual Holidays on the Plaza celebration.

On Thursday, Dec. 5, will host its festive celebration from 4-7 p.m., lighting up the clock tower and providing lots of festivities for students, faculty and community members to take part in.

There will be 15 tents including pay-to-play games, ornament decorating, a cocoa and cookie buffet, photo booth and live student performed music.

Other activities at the event will be pictures with Santa Paws, painting, Legos, holiday mug making, Tubby's Kettle Corn and build-a-buddy.

The main event of this festival is the lighting of the Alumni Tower. The lighting ceremony will take place at 6:30 p.m., illuminating the entire plaza up with hundreds of twinkling Christmas lights.

"We'll have a countdown. Santa Claus will be there, the Grinch will be there and the chancellor and first gentleman will be there, walking around and greeting everyone. It'll be very festive. There'll be music throughout the whole thing, and we're very excited," said Christy Ashe, Director of Special Events.

The event has been long in the making. Planning began last year and has intensified with the past few months. The goal is to make the celebration as fun and festive as possible.

Students who can to are urged to come see the efforts of those who put this event together. Students are also welcome to experience another unique opportunity to tour Chancellor Brown's home in a walkthrough 3-6:30 p.m. Dec. 6.

The residence is located in upper-campus, past Reynold's Residence Hall and behind Judaculla Residence Hall. The event space, which is the whole main floor of the home, will be decorated and open for people to come up and do a walk through to see where the chancellor and the first gentleman live. There will be cookies and hot chocolate, as well as a tour of the event space.

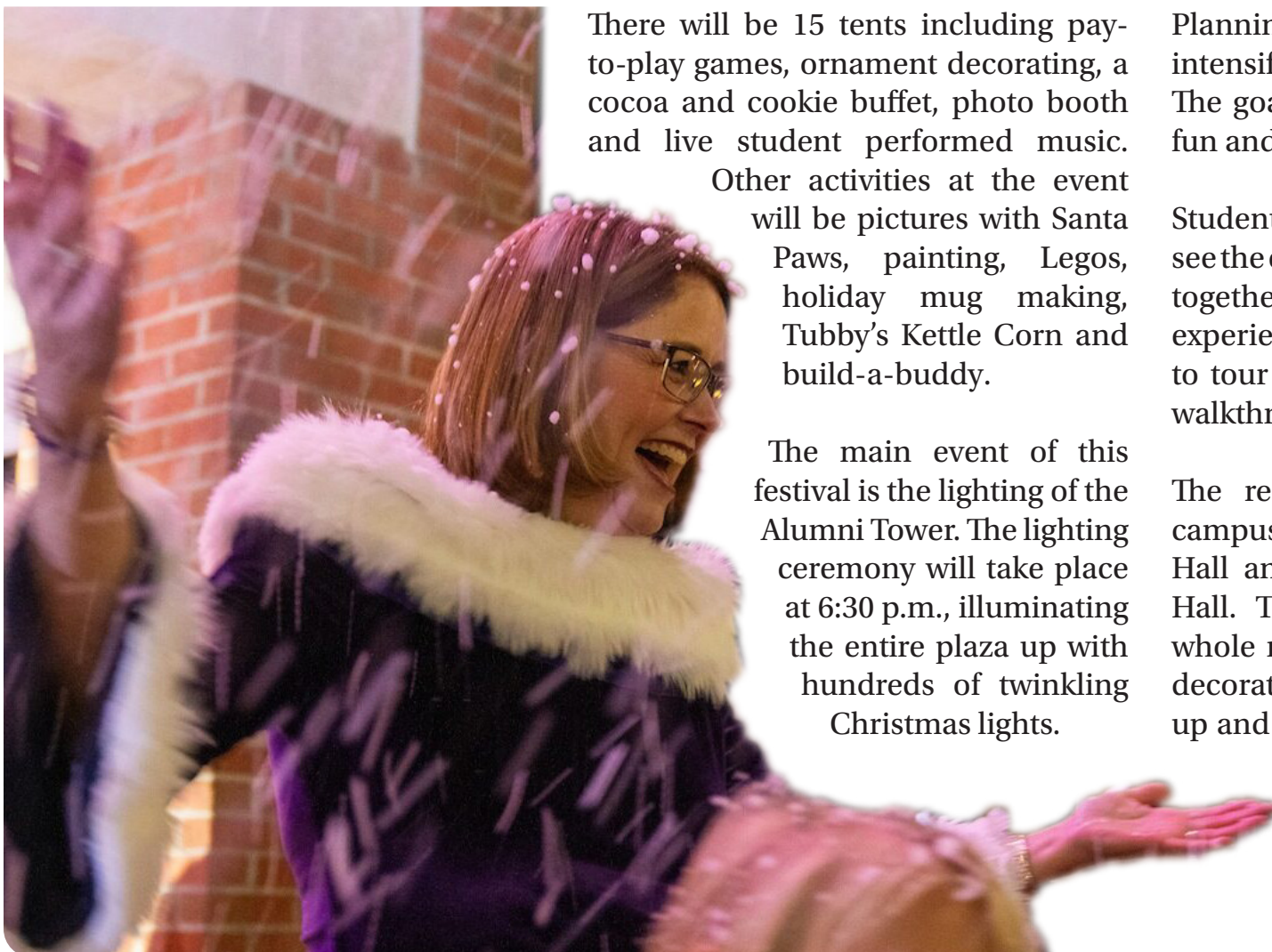


Photo courtesy of Western Carolina University.

Letter from the editor

By Marrah Ste. Marie

Happy holidays, Catamounts! What a wild semester this has been. As it ends, don't forget to pause and take a deep breath, a real deep breath, an in-through-the-nose-out-through-the-mouth deep breath. Make sure to prioritize yourself you've worked hard this semester.

The holidays are the best time to reflect on what, and who, you have in your life. Tell your loved ones you love them, make a list of what you're grateful for, but most importantly rest. Really rest, not mindlessly doomscroll rest.

In reflecting, I have to say how grateful I am for you, our reader, and for this amazing team that has continually improved and impressed this semester. Through power and internet outages, elections and an unprecedented academic schedule, the staff of The Western Carolinian has continued to deliver incredible stories every edition. But more importantly, you've continued to read. We are nothing without your support, so thank you.

As we enter the new semester, you may see a few changes in our staff column. As a student staff we are constantly changing as seniors graduate and new positions open. I am excited to see what future staff bring to the table and

watch the evolution of our current new staff. As a reminder, you can always read previous staff's work on our website westerncarolinian.com.

The new year will usher in many new opportunities. Every year The Western Carolinian attends the regional Society of Professional Journalists conference and submits editions as well as individual stories for Mark of Excellence awards. Last year, The Western Carolinian staff was a finalist for Best All-Around Student Newspaper. This year, we hope to change finalist into winner. We also hope to bring home individual story awards this year.

One thing that always makes us better is reader interaction. I encourage you to interact with us! Our social media is always being updated and has a 24/7 open and responsive inbox. You can also email us at westerncarolinian@wcu.edu or call us at (828)227-2694. We are always accepting thoughts, ideas, critiques, tips, letters to the editor or advertising, so please do not hesitate to reach out.

Again, thank you so much. Enjoy your holidays and as always go cats!

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Center for Career and Professional Development help students search for jobs

By Max Poku-Kankam

WCU's Center for Career and Professional Development hosted an event in the Career Studio Nov. 6 offering job-searching strategies for graduating students.

The CCPD focuses on supporting students during college and beyond. Services are available to students during their time at WCU and after graduation.

According to Statista, as of May 2024, 4.5% of college graduates were unemployed. The CCPD aims to help students avoid becoming part of that statistic. This event was organized to assist upcoming graduates in navigating the job market.

"We are trying to offer career development opportunities for students, mainly for them to learn about the current job market," said April McNiff, assistant director of student development at the CCPD.

McNiff, who helped plan the event, said the goal was to provide graduating students with insights into the economy and identify which jobs are in demand.

"As the economy changes, our department tries to stay on top of it," McNiff said. "We're trying to help them develop strategies they can use for finding and seeking those jobs."

The event explained the hiring process for both employers and job seekers.

The CCPD shared average application statistics to help students understand the job market. For online job postings, approximately 1,000 people view the ad, and 200 begin the application. Of those, about 100 complete the application, 75 are screened by an applicant tracking system, 25 make it to a hiring manager and four to six are invited for an interview. Ultimately, one job offer is made.

The CCPD advises job seekers to submit around 100 applications, which typically results in 25 first interviews, 12 second interviews and two or three job offers.

McNiff also discussed strategies for job seekers, such as networking and creating personalized resumes and cover letters.

For some, being selective about where they apply is crucial. The CCPD held another event focusing on job search strategies for LGBTQ+ people.

"The difference was primarily looking more into a company," McNiff said. "Looking at the employer and the company's mission, their vision and their values."

Job seekers can learn about a company by exploring its website or asking questions at interviews.

McNiff highlighted legal protections

that minimize discrimination during the application process. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits employers from discriminating based on gender, sexual orientation or transgender status.

The CCPD continues to host events like these to support students and alumni before, during and after graduation.

The CCPD offers a wide range of professional development services, including help with resumes, cover letters, internships, interview preparation and career exploration. It also provides a closet stocked with professional attire for students to borrow.

All CCPD services are free for WCU students and alumni. The office, located behind Reid Gymnasium, is open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.



The CCPD had a slideshow to accompany the informative session on job searching strategies. Photo courtesy of the Center for Career and Professional Development.

A new lease on LIFE: Furthering education for WNC seniors

By Marrah Ste. Marie

For 10 years, LIFE@WesternCarolina has provided people 50 years old and older a chance to further their education while staying connected to their community and strengthening friendships.

LIFE offers two-hour classes once a week and follows WCU's academic calendar. The lessons don't include any assignments or tests and topics change every class.

LIFE@WesternCarolina was co-founded by former provost Alison Morrison-Shetlar and Kay Wheeler.

"Alison was new to the university, and I asked her, 'what are you going to bring to the university that's new and exciting?'" Wheeler said. "Alison said, 'I'm thinking of a senior university,' and I said yes!"

Morrison-Shetlar gathered professors and other supporters to create a managing board and announced Wheeler would be the first president.

"That original board worked so hard for six months. We did mission, bylaws and really got things put in place," Wheeler said.

Wheeler and other board members marketed LIFE through rotary clubs, libraries and any other way they could think to reach senior citizens.

After gaining enough membership, the next step was to plan the classes. Like other WCU classes, LIFE schedules their classes for the semester before it starts.

Previous classes have covered WCU's body farm, history of NC railroads, traditional Japanese tea ceremonies, the relationship between NASCAR and moonshine, how to design homes for aging and much more.

"We've had some fun topics, and we've had some really good diversity in the topics. And that's the idea to have diversity," Kay Wheeler, co-founder of LIFE@WesternCarolina, said. "We try to have the diversity that members want to hear about."

Class topics at LIFE are participant driven. After every class, a form is given to participants to reflect on the lesson, the speaker and to see if there are any other topics they would like to learn about. The forms are given to a curriculum committee that plans each semester's lessons.

"The bottom of that form asks if you would like to speak about anything. Because we've had some of our membership speak," Wheeler said. "Just recently one of our members spoke on music of the '60s."

A typical class is about an hour and a half of a



Daniel Pierce talks about the lesson more with members. Photo by Marrah Ste. Marie.

lesson from the speaker and then a question and answer period, according to Wheeler.

Like many education programs, LIFE struggled during COVID. Classes were abruptly moved to Zoom making them less personal and interactive.

“We’ve still kept the Zoom option, but it doesn’t give the same flavor of being in the room,” Wheeler said.

One of the biggest goals of LIFE@WesternCarolina is to interact with current undergraduate students at WCU.

“We’re people from the ‘60s. We were a very complex generation of young people and social impacts meant a great deal to us,” Wheeler said. “What we see is that it’s happening again. We want to support, mentor and discuss with people of the younger generation.”

Participants of LIFE feel they have a lot to offer younger people. They also feel that younger people have a lot to offer them. Most importantly, members of LIFE offer a lot for each other.

“A part of LIFE is social interaction,” Wheeler said. “There’s this perception that seniors can get lonely. Well, we’re not getting lonely.”

According to Wheeler, there are about 50-75 members this year, the largest group since the program began at WCU.

“The makeup of our students ranges from dental hygienists to nurses to lawyers, past university professors, a couple doctors, a couple nurse practitioners, a couple high school teachers, a pharmacist,” Wheeler said. “We have a really diverse group.”

Classes begin at 10 a.m. but members show up as early as 9 a.m. to talk before the lesson. Upon entering, there are name tags for all



President Mike Gillen talks with other LIFE members after class. Photo by Marrah Ste. Marie.

the members, but they are not necessary as everyone greets each other by name with a smile.

Brittany Marshall, assistant director of educational outreach, is at every class. She’s helped with LIFE@WesternCarolina since 2016. She’s seen how important the weekly classes can be for members.

“Several join after their spouse passes or a tragedy. It gets them out of the house,” Marshall said. “One woman shared it got her out of a depression after her husband died.”

Members said lessons have never disappointed. Often the lessons you expect the least from are the ones that engage the most.

Mike Gillen is the current president at LIFE. He also served as president in 2020. He felt an obligation to give back to the program as it had done so much for him.

“When you think it might be easier to stay home, you miss the most interesting lessons,” Gillen said.

The question-and-answer sessions lead

to beneficial discussions about different topics. This is especially effective in the smaller program.

Joe Buranosky joined LIFE@WesternCarolina after moving from Florida where he was in a different LIFE program.

At the previous LIFE program, Buranosky said there was a waiting list for the large group. At WCU, the group is smaller and the discussions are more effective.

Buranosky had looked for a LIFE program when he moved in 2019. He served as president last year.

“I wanted to get involved and continue my education,” Buranosky said. “It’s important to continue learning.”

According to Wheeler, the biggest goal next year for LIFE@WesternCarolina is to increase engagement with undergraduate WCU students.

LIFE@WesternCarolina is always looking for new members. Anyone 50 years or older can join at wcu.edu/engage/professional-enrichment/LifeAtWesternCarolina.

WATR celebrates past and welcomes future

By Cora Haste

The Watershed Association of the Tuckasegee River will host a live music celebration and fundraiser party 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 8 at Innovation Station in Dillsboro.

WATR is a locally focused, grassroots organization founded in 1999 to restore and protect the water quality of the Tuckasegee River Basin.

For over two decades WATR has served the communities of Swain and Jackson County. Through routine water testing and

educational outreach, WATR continually works towards the betterment of the Tuckasegee watershed.

The upcoming Celebration and Fundraiser Party is a chance for the community to get involved in and connect with WATR's mission.

The event will kick off with an annual meeting and recognition of retired executive director Ken Brown. Brown played an important role in holding the organization together through challenging years. It will also welcome new executive director Katie Price as she takes over the role.

The meeting will be followed by a catered dinner, silent auction and live music by local band Positive Mental Attitude. Tickets to attend are available online and at the door.

All money raised will go toward funding water quality sampling, acquiring field equipment and purchasing educational materials. Money raised will also allow WATR to take on larger projects and expand its staff.

"We are there not only to serve an important goal of fundraising but also to enjoy each other's company and exchange ideas," Price said.

Price hopes that the event helps to increase WATR's paid memberships. Moreover, she is excited for a growing involvement with Swain and Jackson County.

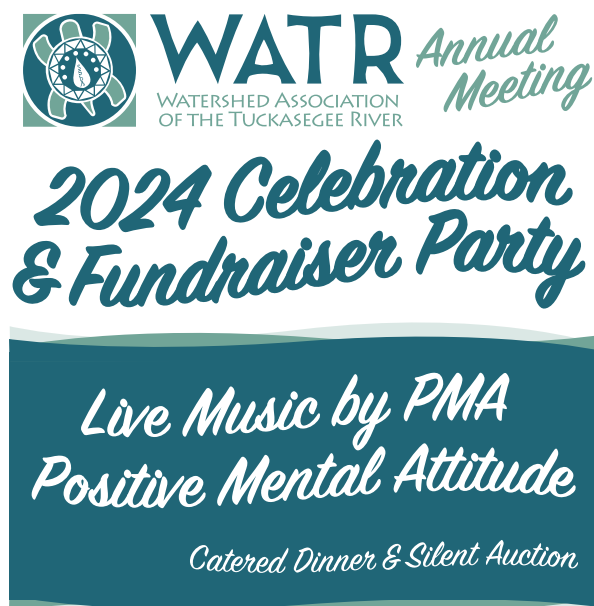
"That is another goal of the meeting – to encourage the visibility of our organization. There may be lots of people that want to be involved and don't even know we're here," Price said.

Following Hurricane Helene, rivers, creeks and streams in Western North Carolina caused massive amounts of destruction. Intense storm events like this deeply affect watersheds, decimating human infrastructure, causing major losses.

With the threat of more intense storms in WNC, Price wants to increase focus on preserving low lying areas and developing resiliency.

"For us it's a big wake up call," Price said. "There are some things we really need to be doing to make ourselves more resilient."

The fundraising event is a one-night celebration that aims to kick off a renewed excitement for preserving the Tuckasegee watershed and increased enjoyment of the river and its tributaries.



Get Tickets
Online and at the door
\$40 per person

Sunday, December 8
4:00pm-8:00pm
Innovation Station
40 Depot St, Dillsboro

WATR is a 501 C(3) Non-Profit INC EIN: 56-2254501

Transitioning to Grubhub: Employee and student reactions

By Sam Scroggins



Drink orders lined up from the Grubhub app. Photo courtesy of Courtyard Starbucks worker.

Aramark replaced the GET app with Grubhub as the new platform for preordering meals on Oct. 21.

“Our goal is to provide the best possible dining experience, and we believe that Grubhub will help us achieve that,” said Derick Christensen, marketing manager for Aramark.

Students and staff have expressed mixed feelings about the change.

Starbucks baristas agree that Grubhub is better because they can mark items as unavailable and cancel orders, which automatically refunds the customer.

One barista, Avery Moore, said that while she prefers Grubhub, there have been issues

with the app’s formatting, particularly with order modifications.

Moore said Grubhub lacks an order cap like the GET app had, which can overwhelm workers. Staff have identified another issue, the app charges customers extra for items that are already included in drinks. Many customers do not realize they are being charged more unnecessarily.

Another barista, who asked to remain anonymous to protect her job, said Starbucks employees have repeatedly pointed out these flaws to their manager, but no changes have been made.

Overall, baristas said they like Grubhub more than the GET app but wish managers would make a better effort to fix inaccuracies in the app’s menu.

Chick-fil-A has also been affected by the new system. Employees no longer take orders in person, instead customers place orders through kiosks.

Caroline Sullivan, a student worker at Chick-fil-A, said she prefers the new system.

“It makes it simpler for the workers and I think we get food out a lot quicker now that we’ve gotten the hang of it,” Sullivan said.

However, she noted one issue, the app sometimes tells customers their food is ready when it is not.

Many students also prefer Grubhub over the GET app, appreciating the ability to see how many orders are ahead of them and the estimated wait time. However, some students said the wait times Grubhub provides are not always accurate.

Naomi Foust, a student, said she likes Grubhub but wishes it included a virtual Cat Card feature like the GET app had.

A previous version of this story said Chili’s would be remodeled over winter break to install Grubhub point-of-sale systems. This was incorrect, Chili’s will remain open over winter break and Grub hub will not be installed.



Grubhub order tickets. Photo courtesy of Courtyard Starbucks worker.

American Museum of the House Cat

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Catman's legacy continues after death

By Marie Spencer

"One word to describe Harold is legend," said Kaleb Lynch, Catman2's shelter director and close friend of the late Harold "Catman" Sims Jr.

The legacy of Catman lives on in Western North Carolina through Catman2 and the American Museum of the House Cat.

"He was full of ideas. The man's brain never stopped. He would be constantly thinking of things and if he had an idea at like two in the morning, then he'd be up on his computer, typing a bunch of stuff about it and trying to figure out a way to make it happen tomorrow," Lynch said, "He was a very motivated individual, a free thinker, he was never one to go with the crowd."

His motivation and love of cats inspired Catman to open a cat shelter and museum after retiring from his job as a biology professor.

Catman built the shelter by hand with Jack Nowlin, a retired contractor and personal friend. Catman's vision for Catman2 was very different from a traditional shelter. Catman wanted to create a space for cats to roam free without being held in cages. The shelter contains multiple cat rooms with open access patios so the cats can enjoy the fresh air.

"He was very adamant about not jailing a cat, imprisoning a cat in a cage for longer than necessary for any unjust reason," said Lynch.

The shelter opened in 2002 as the first no-kill shelter in Jackson County. It is also the first cat-only shelter in Jackson County. While most cats at Catman2 are available for



Harold "Catman" Sims Jr. Photo courtesy of Kaleb Lynch.

adoption, there are some long-term resident cats who have made a home at the shelter.

"Cats did not have many options back when he first came on the scene and built this place. So now we have quite a community of cat lovers that support this place and just have fallen in love with cats in general," Lynch said. "I just don't think that enough people know the history of this place and how lucky we are to have it."

The American Museum of the House Cat was Catman's passion later in life. The museum contains over 30 years of Catman's personally curated cat-related memorabilia. The museum is the largest of just two cat-themed museums in North America.

The museum opened in 2017 in part of Sylva's Old School Antique Mall. When the antique mall shut down, Catman moved the museum to a larger standalone building. The new location opened in 2022 after facing delays from COVID-19.

"He loved the real cats, but that museum was his pride and joy because that was one

man's collection, and he never spent a dime of anybody else's money to buy that kind of stuff," Lynch said.

Lynch does not anticipate either Catman2 or the American Museum of the House Cat to experience disruptions in operations after Catman's passing.

"We have every intention of continuing his legacy of helping cats and of expanding the museum," Lynch said.

In addition to creating Catman2 and the American Museum of the House Cat, Catman authored multiple children's books and *Cats Without Cages*, a nonfiction book sharing the story of Catman2's creation.

Lynch and others have organized a tribute for Catman on April 5, 2025 at the American Museum of the House Cat. The date lines up with Catman's 90th birthday and two-year anniversary of the opening of the current American Museum of the House Cat. All are welcome at this tribute to celebrate Catman's life and work.

Students concerned as hostility grows online after presidential election

By Deanna Sipe

Election day is over. Former president Donald Trump is the 2025 president-elect. Many students at WCU are feeling a variety of emotions.

“Some people have really strong emotions, either one way or another about it and then other people are just totally fine,” said Ellie Little, a studio art major.

Max Poku-Kankam, a fellow reporter for The Western Carolinian and a communication major

said after Election Day you could tell who people voted for based on how they looked.

“I do find it sad that so many people have taken it so personally,” said Jacob Nottingham, a construction management major. “I don’t think an election loss for the candidate you vote for should be taken as a personal defeat.”

Feelings after the election were different for every student, but nearly all students’ main concern was the increase of sexist, homophobic and racist comments on social media.

Little posted a TikTok video on Nov. 6. Shortly after posting, she received objectifying and sexist comments. The comments were immediately deleted.

She noticed throughout the day other women receiving similar comments on their posts.

Grace Oliver, an anthropology major, said she’s seen physical threats and hateful comments spread on social media towards women as well as members of the Latinx and LGBTQ+ communities.

Nottingham said that while he had not seen these comments, he does believe it’s a childish thing to do.

“I do have some conservative policies that I favor but in no way do I think that anyone should be told to get back in the kitchen like they’re a servant,” Nottingham said. “I think that kind of behavior is beyond childish.”

Hateful messages extended beyond social media. On Nov. 6, Black voters across the U.S. that registered with the Democratic party received a racist text message. Poku-Kankam was one of the voters who received the text.

“I never expected to get a text like that ever in my life. I’ve never gotten a text like that before, and I didn’t think I would get one that day,” said Poku-Kankam.

Students on campus feel that behaviors like sending those texts are disrespectful

and lead society to take steps back instead of forward.

“It’s incredibly alarming that we have just gotten so bold with the amount of prejudice that we’re allowed to spew just because we have incredibly conservative people in our government and that this is almost becoming normalized in a way,” said Henry Andrade Fuentes, a commercial music and audio production major.

Despite growing hostility over social media, some WCU students still feel safe on campus.

“I still feel safe on campus—I don’t feel like I’ll ever be harmed here,” said Oliver.

Others said they no longer feel safe on campus.

“The way that we’ve seen students treated who are more radical, it makes me feel more unsafe on college campuses, especially this one that is more moderate. I feel unsafe as a queer person and as someone who comes from a family of immigrants as well,” said Fuentes.

If a student is ever in a situation where they are feeling unsafe on campus, call University Police at 828-227-7301 (non-emergency) or 828-227-8911 (emergency).

WCU welcomes two new professional societies

By Quill Sanders

Two new professional society chapters have been established at WCU for humanities students, Sigma Tau Delta and the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

The Sigma Theta chapter of Sigma Tau Delta has been revived this year by faculty adviser Emily Naser-Hall. The co-ed honor society is open to students pursuing a major, minor or graduate degree in English. Members have access to scholarships, publishing opportunities and networking events. Sigma Tau Delta membership requirements include:

- Completion of at least 45 credit hours
- Status as an English major, minor or graduate student
- Completion of at least six hours of English coursework (or nine hours of graduate work) at WCU
- A GPA of 3.0 in both English courses and cumulative coursework
- A one-time induction fee



Recent Sigma Tau Delta publications of student writing. Photo by Quill Sanders.



WCU Students participate in AIGA's "Make a Monster Night" at the October meeting. Photo courtesy of American Institute of Graphic Arts.

For more information about Sigma Tau Delta, visit english.org or to learn about the Sigma Theta chapter at WCU, email Emily Naser-Hall, enaserhall@email.wcu.edu.

The second new professional society on campus is AIGA, launched under the School of Art and Design by co-presidents Rhiannon Eason and Jack Kelly.

AIGA connects designers and creatives across the nation. WCU's chapter hosts biweekly meetings 6 p.m. Monday nights. Activities include maker nights, open critiques and workshops. The society also offers professional Zoom meetings,

access to an exclusive job portal and networking opportunities.

AIGA is open to students of all majors and class years. Membership requirements include:

- A \$50 annual membership fee
- An interest in connecting with other creatives on campus

For more information about AIGA, visit aigia.org. For WCU details, email Jack Kelly, jikelly1@catamount.wcu.edu, or Rhiannon Eason, reason1@catamount.wcu.edu or follow AIGA on social media.

History on the streets: The power of collecting oral histories in Appalachia

Marrah Ste. Marie

“It’s a testament to the power of storytelling and of connecting and having conversations with other people,” said Sarah Steiner, a subject specialist at Hunter Library.

Steiner began collecting oral histories for an LGBTQ+ archive in 2018. The oral history archive is a collection of different subjects being interviewed about their lives and experiences in Western North Carolina.

The project began as a fun way for Steiner to escape feelings of burnout. Her plan was to become trained in conducting oral histories and interview local drag queens.

“I’ve always felt like drag performers are pillars of the queer community. They almost bring a sort of spiritual community experience that has always been really inspirational for me,” Steiner said.

Steiner began by collecting seven interviews with local drag queens when Travis Rountree, an English assistant professor, began working at WCU.

“I’ve been called the Johnny Appleseed of queer archives,” Rountree joked.

While working on his masters, Rountree worked with the Appalachian State University’s oral history archives. He then worked with the LGBTQ+ archive while getting his PhD at University of Louisville. As a part of his teaching, he brought students to the archive.

“It was really fascinating because at that moment I was like, ‘oh, y’all are uncomfortable,’ welcome to the identity of being queer and uncomfortable,” Rountree said. “It was a great moment for all of us to learn together about what it feels like to be in a queer moment.”

Rountree worked for two years as a Writing Program Director at Indiana University East. There he got a grant to start an LGBTQ+ archive which included oral histories.

When Rountree came to WCU, he and Steiner connected and discussed how to continue the oral histories.

“We got a grant to hire a student worker to help us make a website and flush it out and get more oral histories,” Steiner said.

As the archive expanded, Rountree incorporated oral histories into his English 101 classes. As students prepared to conduct interviews, the COVID pandemic hit.

“All the interviews were done by Zoom,” Rountree said. “Some were better than others. That’s the nature of oral histories– some work and some don’t.”

Steiner continued to manage the archive through the pandemic. As people returned to campus, the archive continued to grow and gained notoriety among faculty.

“I remember hearing on Blue Ridge Public Radio a feature piece about the archive here,” said Katharine Mershon, a philosophy and

religion assistant professor. “We decided it would be really fun to bring the tools Sarah has learned from the archive into my class religion, gender and sexuality.”

Mershon was the first faculty to reach out to Steiner about discussing oral histories in class.

“I prepared a little slate of interviews and I talked about how things have changed over time,” Steiner said. “The students were so into it and said they wanted to do an interviewing assignment.”

Mershon saw that conducting interviews was really beneficial for students.

“Going through this process has been a confidence builder for students. They were really scared, they got training and then they were successful,” Mershon said. “There’s also the impact of getting to hear another person’s story.”

Mershon emphasizes to students participating in interviews that it is okay to disagree with subjects but to listen to and understand the different perspectives.

“This gives students the opportunity to approach these topics that are in the cultural conversation from an academic perspective,” Mershon said. “Which I think takes some of the charge away and gives them a chance to actually approach these materials without being afraid of saying the wrong thing.”

The benefits of the interviews are shared on both sides.

“[Those interviewed] say that it’s really meaningful to share their stories. It’s cathartic to share their stories,” Steiner said.

Oral histories have formed relationships in many ways. According to Steiner, many students stay after interviews to talk to the person they interviewed for hours.

For Rountree, a connection he saw was when he collected recordings of a ballad singer in Boone. Years later he used the recordings for a lesson at NC State.

“I had a student named Isaac,” Rountree said about using the ballad singer for one class, “He came up to me after class and he said, ‘that’s my great grandfather and I have never heard his voice before.’”

The LGBTQ+ archive also led to Sylva Pride. Rountree founded Sylva Pride in 2021 and invited Steiner to serve on the board.

According to Rountree, the relationship between oral histories and pride are mutually beneficial. There are signup sheets at Sylva Pride for people to be interviewed and older subjects that are interviewed are

told about Pride and encouraged to attend.

Items from every Pride have been kept in the LGBTQ+ archive with the oral histories.

“This is not history that lives on a shelf, this is history that’s in the streets,” Rountree said.

In showing how life has changed throughout the years, the oral histories have showed the evolution of LGBTQ+ tolerance.

“I’m a middle-aged bisexual woman and back when I was a teenager and coming out- my coming out experience was terrible,” Steiner said. “It just wasn’t really culturally accepted either by the straight community or the queer community. It really existed in this liminal space where it was hard to find acceptance. It’s been incredible for me and really validating to hear that a lot of other people in my age bracket had similar experiences. And it’s been amazing to see how that’s changed.”

The results of the 2024 election have raised concerns in the LGBTQ+ community. According to Rountree, this uncertain political climate makes projects like his even more important.

“This project saves lives, Sylva Pride saves lives, Blue Ridge Pride saves lives,” Rountree said. “We are showing folks that they are not alone, that they are worthy, that there’s people here who support them and will be there for them.”

Steiner plans to broaden the oral histories project, though she doesn’t want to lose sight of where it all started.

“I’m soon going to be expanding it to just be an oral history archive with locals who live here,” Steiner said. “Thinking about all the colors and flavors and types of different people who live here in this very interesting rural community that we have here.”

Steiner is always looking for new people to interview. Anyone interested should contact her email, sksteiner@wcu.edu.

“I would really love to hear from anybody in the region who would like to be interviewed. Young and old, any background, history, lifestyle. That would be great,” Steiner said.

Cherokee Mini Lesson

Western Carolina University sits on land that once belonged to the Cherokee people and was called Tali Tsisgwayahi, meaning Two Sparrows Town.

In 2019, the Cherokee people declared a state of emergency for the language, as the number of Cherokee speakers dwindled.

Efforts to reclaim and revitalize the language have become integrated into many parts of Cherokee society.

Since fall 2024, Western Carolina University offers a Cherokee language minor to aid in the preservation of the language. The written form of Cherokee language seen above was

created by Sequoyah from 1809 to 1821. It is referred to as syllabary, as each character represents a syllable in the language. Here are some Cherokee words you can use as we close out the fall semester and begin to celebrate the winter holidays!

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Vsgiyi (uh-shgi-yee) - December

ᎠᎦᎦᎦ

Gola (go-lah) - Winter

ᎠᎩᎦᎦᎦᎦ

Adahnehdi (ah-dah-hneh-dee) - Gift

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WCU graduates weather chaotic semester

By Mattilynn Sneed

Amid a chaotic semester, graduating seniors experience mixed emotions but are mostly feeling hopeful for the future.

The 2024 presidential election and Hurricane Helene have brought additional worries to graduating seniors during a time in life that already tends to be stressful.

According to the American College Health Association, 76% of college students experienced moderate or high levels of stress within 30 days of taking the survey. Adding to the baseline stress of college, a study by the National Library of Medicine found links between exposure to natural disaster and increased risk of developing mental health deterioration. As if that were not enough, 77% of U.S. adults reported the future of the nation bringing them significant stress according to a 2024 survey conducted by the American Psychology Association.

Madison Lohwasser, an environmental science major, said her semester started strong but that it was severely affected by the hurricane.

"It wrecked my hometown and pretty much every place that I've ever gone to. It made it hard to feel like school was important when I knew people that were actively without homes, food and water. It made it challenging to pay attention in class because it felt frivolous compared to the other things that I could be doing," Lohwasser said.

While WCU campus sustained minor damage during the hurricane, many of the towns in the surrounding area were severely damaged or destroyed.

Jinn Hilliard, an anthropology major, also reported experiences during the hurricane

making classes more difficult. They said this has been one of their most challenging semesters, but that they are handling things and working through it.

"I've been so out of it since the hurricane happened. We were out doing search and rescues, and that was very stressful. I've never been to a warzone before, but I think it probably felt like that," Hilliard said. "Frankly going back into classes and having to do, for example, my osteology class where I am handling the bones of dead people, after having to pull a dead kid out of a car, then you go and have to handle a child's scapula and act like it doesn't faze you, it's not a great experience."

Other students reported being less directly affected. Mary Grayson Day, a communication major, said that because she and her family were not directly affected by the hurricane, she experienced imposter syndrome, survivors' guilt and anxiety. Volunteering helped mitigate these feelings, but her academic strategy was still significantly disrupted.

"My self-pacing for assignments got all thrown off. That's the one thing that if I don't manage properly, it will impact other areas of my life, like sleep," Day said.

Both Hilliard and Lohwasser said they are concerned that their fields of study will be impacted by the new political administration. During his first term in office, President Trump shrank protection for land around Bears Ears monument in Utah from 547,000 hectares to 82,000. The land holds several significant Native American cultural sites for a variety of tribes. President Biden restored the protection during his presidency, but some are concerned that it, and other natural spaces, will be at risk again under the Trump Administration.

A New York Times analysis based on research from Harvard Law and Columbia Law from 2021 found almost 100 environmental laws reversed under President Trump.

In addition to concerns about policy, Day said that election season brought social rifts into the WCU community.

"There was a lot of peer induced stress. I think a lot of people around me consumed emotionally driven media around it. I think I managed pretty well, but I tried not to think about it too much. On top of school and the hurricane, it would have caused me executive disfunction. My strategy was to just look at the facts," Day said.

Despite all of this, students are still hopeful and excited for the future. Dakota Staiger, a sports management major, said that he is very excited for what his future holds.

"I'm not a big fan of school, so I'm ready to be out of here and done. I really like the work that I do, so it might be easier for me that some people because I'm not really scared, just excited," Staiger said.

Staiger said he is set to begin working with the Asheville City Soccer Club upon graduation. Day is exploring leads in her field, and Hilliard and Lohwasser will find gap employment between graduation and graduate school.

"We're in a very unprecedented space right now. I think it's going to get better. I think we need very drastic measurable change. I think that change is going to happen whether we want it to or not," Hilliard said.

Laundry thief terrorizes Judaculla Residence Hall

By Hannah Butler



Judaculla pants thief poster on YikYak. Poster by Kincaid Moore.

No shirt, no shoes, no...pants?

Students in Judaculla Residence Hall have complained that expensive clothing, mainly men's pants and jackets, is being stolen from the residence hall's laundry room when left unattended.

The issue is nothing new for residents of Judaculla, as thefts have been going on since September. WCU Snapchat stories were buzzing with complaints and warnings about the apparent "Judaculla Pants Thief," even going as far as to photoshop spirited "wanted" posters for the thief or thieves.

This problem did not die in September. In the laundry room, it's not uncommon to hear chatter about the thefts while washing your clothes.

The problem has sparked some unrest amongst Judaculla residents. Ryan Nadeau, a sophomore Judaculla resident, even claimed to have filed police reports on the issue, but to no avail.

"Me and a few others filed police reports, but there's not much they can do because of the absence of cameras in the laundry room," Nadeau said. "I'm assuming they're either selling them or keeping them in a little collection somewhere. To be honest, I think they get a kick out of it and since they've gotten away with it so many times, they're just going to keep doing it."

Nadeau joked, "consider me Liam Neesen in 'Taken' and call my stolen clothing Liam Neesen's daughter in 'Taken.'"

Elijah Carpenter, a freshman resident at Judaculla, after having two pairs of Wrangler pants gone missing as well as a pair of athletic shorts, began taking precautions to avoid any further thefts by staking out the laundry room.

"I did two lifts today just to try and escape from the thief," Carpenter said, "I schedule my times around when I have free time to just sit."

Some students have even begun to keep a watchful eye out for suspicious looking figures while in the laundry room. During stake outs to protect clothing, students have expressed that they have been taking note of who enters and leaves the room, as well as anyone who acts suspicious.

Tanner Ball, a sophomore resident at Judaculla, revealed that \$175 worth of his clothing has gone missing.

"A lot of it was my workout gear, which is Young LA. That's the brand I like. I had four or five shirts taken, probably four or five tank tops, my really nice sweatpants, my cargo pants, my shorts and all kinds of stuff. Like, barely anything left," Ball said.

Many students wonder why cameras have not been placed in the residence hall's laundry room after so many complaints have been made.

When asked about the incidents, Resident Assistants and Residential Living Directors were unable to provide a response.

Bryant Barnett, Executive Director of Residential Living, says that he was unaware of the issue and is willing to investigate.



Judaculla laundry room. Photo by Hannah Butler.

The 24/7 inspection machine: SPOT the Catabot

By Deanna Sipe

Over a year ago, on June 12, 2023, the College of Engineering added a new addition to the team that gained campus attention, SPOT, the robotic dog.

The Engineering Department received \$98.8 million from state legislators to help expand the program in 2023. From those funds, \$95.3 million was authorized for a new engineering building.

Every academic year, the College of Engineering and Technology will receive \$3.5 million to support robotics, energy, controls and automation.

The Construction Management Department

wanted to use some of the money on a project that would incorporate robotics and automation. Bruce Gehrig, director of the department, immediately knew the solution.

“I was actually aware of the SPOT robot. And I knew that it was used in construction, so I proposed it. Advanced technologies like SPOT is one of those things that our students get a chance to see and to work with and learn how to actually utilize it on construction sites,” said Gehrig.

SPOT is a robotic dog designed by Boston Dynamics; a company created by former MIT leg lab researcher, Marc Raibert, that focuses on robotics.

The robot is full of sensors and cameras along with software for the brain that allows it to identify the environment around it. Working autonomously, the robot dog can navigate its surroundings walking up and down stairs, walking over obstacles and around people or walls.

“SPOT can navigate a construction site. There are lots of things we have to inspect during construction to make sure it’s being built properly; SPOT can do that instead of a human,” said Gehrig.

SPOT also uses sensors to detect QR codes around the Belk building that give SPOT certain tasks around the building. One of the things SPOT can do with the QR codes is pick up a book from a professor’s office and bring it to them.

With all its sensors, SPOT can collect data used for construction and most importantly it can go into places that are unsafe for humans whether it be high areas, closed confined spaces or other hazardous areas.

“It’s really a 24/7 inspection machine that can go out and do all these things on its own,” Gehrig said.

SPOT is currently used in one special studies course, advanced construction technologies. In this class, students learn about different types of construction technologies. They also learn how to manipulate SPOT and utilize the data it collects to analyze and approve construction projects.



Photo by Deanna Sipe.

"A lot of people don't know exactly all the capabilities of SPOT so we want to go out and put it on construction sites and test it in various environments and determine exactly what it can do," Gehrig said.

Only students currently enrolled in the class are trained in how to use SPOT. There's a goal to develop a training program where all students in the program have a chance to train.

Alexander Borrelli, an engineering technology major, is currently the only student in construction management trained to use SPOT.

From June 25-26, 2023, Borrelli traveled to Boston Dynamics with a team of six faculty

and staff members in the engineering technology department where he received in-depth certification training on how to use SPOT and how to train other students.

Borrelli's area of study focuses on how things are made. Borrelli was able to see how the SPOT robot was designed, tested and manufactured.

"It's been interesting to see how SPOT was manufactured," said Borrelli.

The standard SPOT robot comes in yellow, when bringing the robot to campus, the engineering department went to the print shop and branded it to match WCU's colors. "We added the purple and the other designs on there to reflect WCU," said Dr. Gehrig

Students have been very interested in SPOT and learning all about the robot dog.

"Everyone wants to see the robot dog. There's even a few dogs on campus that have run up and been interested in SPOT. Some very happy to see him. Some very afraid to see him," said Borrelli.

On the College of Engineering and Technology's Facebook page, a contest was held on Aug. 26 to give SPOT a name. From this contest, the official name of SPOT became Catabot.

Next time you are on campus and see the Catabot the College of Engineering and Technology say do not hesitate to stop and say hello!

Looking back: Famous Cherokee basket maker Arizona Swaney Blankenship

Arizona Swaney Blankenship grew up in the Big Cove community on the Qualla Boundary in Western North Carolina. After completing the Cherokee Boarding School program in 1895, Blankenship left her home in Big Cove to attend Hampton. She graduated in 1899 and enrolled in Hampton's Normal School to train as a teacher. There, she was invited to become the school's first Indian arts instructor.

Arizona returned home in 1902 to learn basket weaving and pottery from Cherokee elders. At the time, there was little market demand for Native American craft. Between that factor and discouragement of traditional

arts by federal education programs, the number of people carrying on the traditions were few and elderly. Blankenship wrote that there were only one or two of each. Though her mission to learn the dying arts was initially met with confusion and teasing by the community, it wasn't long before she sparked appreciation and intrigue for the art of weaving.

She became a strong advocate for students returning to the reservation to learn the traditional arts. "Her commitment to Cherokee arts crosses generations, connecting her to those of the past and future."



Source: North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times, by Michele Gillespie and Sally G. McMillen

Undergraduate research changes: Funding, APG and NCUR

By Marie Spencer

Changes in Academic Proposal Grants have impacted the National Conference on Undergraduate Research funding and maximum grant awards.

The National Conference on Undergraduate Research is an annual interdisciplinary conference held to showcase undergraduate research. Any undergraduate student with an original research paper or project is able to submit an application for NCUR. The 2025 NCUR abstract submission deadline is Dec. 6.

“The National Conference on Undergraduate Research is the largest undergraduate research conference in the country, and it brings together students from all over the US and all disciplines. It’s a really good experience for students to go through the entire process of presenting,” said Brian Railsback, professor of English studies and founding dean of the Brinson Honors College.

WCU has funded students’ travel to NCUR for well over a decade. In previous years, the Brinson Honors College and Office of Research Administration handled the travel, lodging and funding for NCUR. As the founding dean of BHC, Railsback attended 16 NCURs with WCU students.

WCU will still fund a limited number of students attending the conference. Now, any group travel to the conference will be handled by the department involved. Individuals attending the conference with no affiliation with a department are

responsible for planning logistics themselves.

“By implementing this new process, we can improve efficiency and streamline operations,” said WCU’s NCUR website on these changes.

Despite these changes, NCUR funding is still available for interested students through Academic Proposal Grants. The Office of Research Administration now oversees all funding allocation and sets aside \$25,000 each year specifically for NCUR travel. The number of students ORA can support depends on multiple factors including the location of the conference.

“Last academic year we were able to fully support 11 students to disseminate their research at this national conference,” said Suzanne Melton, Research Programs Coordinator at ORA.

The 2024 NCUR was held in Long Beach, CA. With increased travel costs, less students were able to receive funding. The 2025 NCUR will be held in Pittsburg, PA, April 7-9. The closer location means more students are likely to receive funding.

NCUR travel funding is now handled as a subsection of the Academic Project Grants. Individual students can receive up to \$1,250 specifically for NCUR travel from an APG. Some departments may have additional funding support available for students, according to WCU’s NCUR website.

APGs are also available for students to travel to other conferences or conduct undergraduate research. The budget for these APGs is separated from the budget for NCUR, so more students have the opportunity to explore undergraduate research.

“The grant provides funding support that can be used to purchase equipment, materials and supplies to conduct research or travel to disseminate research at local, regional and national conferences,” Melton said.

This year, APGs have increased the maximum available funding support for individuals and groups. Individual students can now receive up to \$750, increasing from \$500. Groups can receive up to \$2,000.

“The only qualification for access is that the student/group of student applicants must be undergraduate student(s) working with a faculty sponsor/mentor on an undergraduate research project,” said Melton.

Students must apply for an APG and be accepted in order to use this funding. APGs are not limited to specific disciplines. The next APG proposal deadline is Jan. 23.

To apply for an APG, undergraduate students or faculty sponsors need to submit a proposal on the APG submission portal available on their website. Individual students need a faculty member to write a letter of support to accompany their proposal. More information about the submission process is available on the APG website.

Proposals are evaluated by the APG Review Committee.

“Each proposal is reviewed and considered by a faculty review committee that is made up of one representative from each college. Majority vote determines awarding. This committee aims to fund projects from across disciplines that meet the CUR definition of undergraduate research and creative inquiry,” said Melton.

CUR, the Council on Undergraduate Research, is the organization that creates many undergraduate research conferences including NCUR. The CUR definition of undergraduate research is “an inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline,” according to its website.

These changes are aimed at encouraging student participation in undergraduate research.

“Western Carolina University has established itself as a national leader in undergraduate research working annually to support students in kick starting, sustaining and disseminating research, scholarship and creative activities from across all disciplines,” said WCU’s undergraduate research website.

“If you’re thinking of graduate school or you’re looking ahead to a career, evidence of undergraduate research shows that you are willing to take the extra mile, that you aren’t just there for classes. It’s one of the few markers that shows academic achievement outside of just grades,” Railsback said.

Railsback was the founding director of WCU’s Office of National and International Awards. ONIA provides additional funding and support for students pursuing undergraduate research through various scholarships and fellowships. ONIA and APGs operate independently, though both are resources for students interested in completing undergraduate

research or attending conferences like NCUR.

When creating ONIA, Railsback spent time talking with Harvard’s Fellowship Office, one of the most successful fellowship offices in the nation.

“They have all these incredible awards that their students are getting. They’re very successful. And the reason why, the director told me, is because they have a very robust undergraduate research program, and I would say that Western does not,” said Railsback. “We were a little disappointed. There was going to be a task force to look into research at Western and I think some of us thought they would look at undergraduate research, but for reasons that I don’t know, that didn’t happen.”

While some think that WCU still needs improvement in support of undergraduate research, changes like the recent one to APGs and NCUR funding may show that WCU is heading in the right direction.



NCUR 2024 in Long Beach, CA. Photo courtesy of Council on Undergraduate Research

Western North Carolina tourism faces uncertainty in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene

By Stewart Butler

Hurricane Helene devastated parts of Western North Carolina and the Southeast, leaving cities and towns facing years of recovery.

Cullowhee, Sylva and Dillsboro, along with most of Jackson County, were spared the storm's worst physical damage. However, a drop in tourism and travel after the hurricane hit local businesses hard.

In the aftermath, Gov. Roy Cooper issued a travel ban for WNC, urging residents to minimize all nonessential travel. While the ban kept curious visitors off the roads and out of recovering towns, it significantly reduced revenue in areas unaffected by the storm.

Tourism is vital to WNC, generating more

than \$1 billion and attracting nearly 12 million visitors in 2022. The region sees its highest traffic in late summer and early fall as tourists flock to view the changing leaves.

After the ban was lifted, there was still a lack of travelers to WNC.

"October, retail-wise, was down tremendously," said Debbie Coffey, town clerk of Dillsboro. "November seems to have picked up some, but it's still not a normal level. All our businesses have reported a loss in sales and revenue."

Coffey said 15 Dillsboro businesses suffered physical damage, most from flooding, though this number is disputed. All affected businesses were able to reopen by Nov. 1, but financial losses remain significant.

"I had one business tell me they were down 50% compared to the prior year. Another told me they were down between \$35,000 and \$40,000 from their prior October," Coffey said.

In Sylva, which sits higher above the Tuckasegee River, physical damage was minimal, but businesses still suffered.

"Initially, it went week by week," said Bernadette Peters, Sylva's director of economic development. "That first week, a lot of people didn't have power, and some didn't have the ability to process credit cards."

Peters worked to help businesses adapt. "I tried to help merchants who didn't know how to do offline card processing, so that they could get up and running," she said. "I cataloged everyone that could process credit cards and put that on the internet."

City Lights Café on Jackson Street was a rare exception, retaining power, water and internet during the storm.

"We really became a little sanctuary for people to come in to," said owner Donna DiGiorgio. "People were actually staying all day—you kind of felt like you were helping out."

City Lights, which saw an uptick in sales, sent bottled water and growler jugs to assist recovery efforts in Asheville.

"We had a couple people call about the growlers. One guy thought his grandma was drinking beer. It was actually kind of funny," DiGiorgio said.

Most businesses were not as fortunate. Mountain Laurel Gift Shop was among those affected.

"The first few weeks of October, our sales were way, way down. There were days where we didn't have any sales at all," said owner Chuck Coleman.



Sign encouraging tourism. Photo courtesy of Smoky Mountain Host of NC.

Jackson County's lodging industry offered a bright spot, seeing higher accommodation rates than last October.

"A number of our hotels are housing both relief workers and those displaced from our neighboring counties," said Tiffany Henry, Jackson County's director of economic development. "While occupancy may be full, it's not the tourism occupancy that we typically see this time of year."

Some tourists who did visit sought ways to help.

"A lot of our tourists that come here on a regular basis wanted to help, and we sort of put that message out—that they could come here and do these sort of things as a part of their vacation," Peters said.

Despite the losses, businesses remain optimistic heading into the holiday season.

"We got a bit of a later tree season this year, so I think that helped bring tourism into November, which would usually die off sooner," Peters said.

"It's been great to see our town bustling with visitors again, and we have a full lineup of holiday events coming up, which we hope will bring in much-needed revenue for our small, family-owned businesses," said Nick Breedlove, Jackson County's tourism and development director.

Hurricane Helene posed a major challenge for some and a life-altering disaster for others. Whether the recovery effort was perfect or not, Jackson County businesses are resilient and hopeful for the future.

HOMEBASE set to expand

By Sam Scroggins

Eight years ago, Western Carolina University and Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina collaborated to create HOMEBASE. The program was originally designed for students who had aged out of foster care or were otherwise independent. Over time, it has evolved into a resource that strives to provide whatever the community needs. HOMEBASE now serves as a food pantry, a place to live or sleep, a space to do homework or simply a place to hang out.

According to HOMEBASE associate director Sydney Young, some residents live in the building year-round in exchange for volunteering at the front desk.

Young said that last year, due to WCU's Policy 96 and other housing challenges, many students came to HOMEBASE seeking accommodations. Some could not afford an apartment and others were waitlisted for residence halls. Unfortunately, HOMEBASE did not have enough space for everyone.

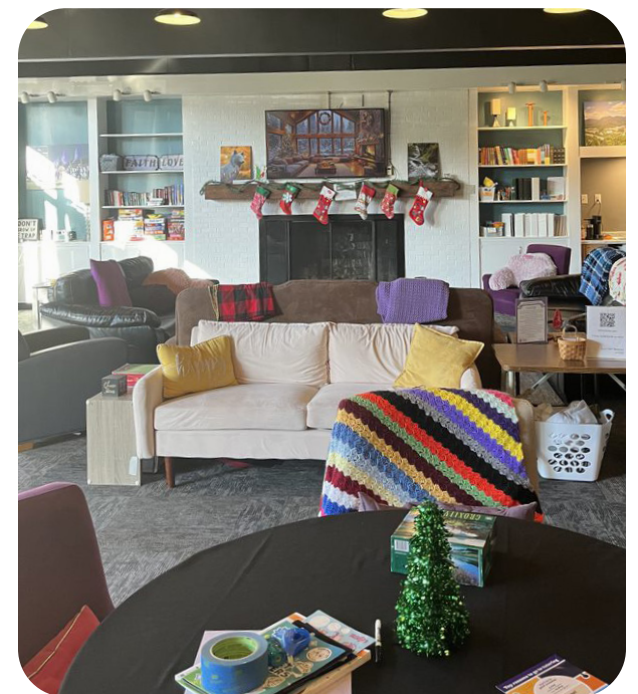
However, the problem is being solved. After receiving a grant from Dogwood Health Trust, HOMEBASE will partner with the construction management department to convert the house next to the building into year-round housing.

While the new house will primarily cater to students who have aged out of foster care and those from Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, it will be open to anyone in need.

Young is hopeful the project will be completed by August 2025.

In the meantime, HOMEBASE is preparing for winter break.

The downstairs dining room will be transformed into a sleeping area. Each student will receive a mattress, comforter, sheet set, pillow and room divider. They will set up mini rooms around the tables using the dividers.



Second floor of HOMEBASE decorated for the holidays. Photo by Sam Scroggins.

HOMEBASE also provides winter clothing, a necessity as the temperature drops. Those who need anything from HOMEBASE are encouraged to visit the building and talk to the front desk.

Putting money where your mouth is: Investing in the C3 Introduction to Communication requirement

By Mackenzie Atkinson

Every WCU student has to take an introductory communication course or have transfer credits equivalent to the course to graduate. The Introduction to Communication course, commonly known as COMM 201, is one of the most offered classes at the university, offering 40 sections of the course a semester.

The course aims to introduce students to fundamental forms of communication that they will use throughout college.

“We want students to be able to orally express their viewpoints,” Russell said. “Being able to argue rationally and deliver presentations competently. Being able to speak well with others is essential to thinking,” said Vincent Russell, the Communication Department Liberal Studies Program Coordinator and assistant professor.

The skills taught in the course also aim to teach students to communicate effectively once students graduate and enter the workforce.

“There is a broader, sort of, civic social purpose for that as well which is that those same skills that help student succeed in class are also ones that help for the workplace, managing conflict with team members, being able to give presentations in the workplace sometimes applies,” Russell said.

A common problem is the COMM 201 sections filling up very quickly. Currently there are six full time professors that teach the course in person and seven adjunct professors who teach the course online.

In fall 2023, WCU had 2,082 incoming freshmen compared to the previous semester of 1,913 for fall 2022 semester. Most of those 2,000 students are

required to take COMM 201 but there were only 875 seats offered during the 2023 fall semester.

A solution raised to solve the demand issue is to raise the course caps, number of students in the classes. Currently the cap for the course is 25 students which follows the upper limits of communication discipline guidelines.

The National Communication Association recommends that performance based communication classes should not have a student to teacher ratio more than 25:1 with the preferred being 15:1.

The introductory course, like every 100 or 200 level courses, serves as a gateway for students to be introduced to the communication discipline and potentially pick up a communication major or minor.

Grace Cheshire, a human communication instructor, has exclusively taught the introductory course up until this semester.

“We try to get to those students within the first year before they marry themselves to their degree in case a communication major would be a good benefit, or a communication minor,” Cheshire said.

Since the push for communication classes to go online, the department has seen a significant drop in communication majors declared. From fall of 2016 to fall of 2023, there was a 74.6% drop in number of majors declared.

Despite the drop in declared majors, the COMM 201 class remains in high demand every semester. For instructors that are hired to teach the course exclusively the workload cast becomes repetitive and demanding.

“There are both benefits and challenges [to teaching COMM 201],” Cheshire said. “The benefit is that you only have to prep for one class, you’re teaching the same thing ... One of the hard parts for us that teach 201 is that we know our students don’t necessarily choose to be there. It wears on you after a while to feel a lot of passion about the subject and to realize not everyone shares the same passion as I do.”

Russell believes, along with general communication discipline standards, that larger class limit the effectiveness of a class.

Full time instructors’ pay is based on how many classes they teach a semester, not the number of students. Meaning, when class limits are increased, work for instructors increases with no adjustment in compensation.

Ten students do not seem like much of an increase until the course curriculum is taken into consideration.

COMM 201 classes cover topics like perception, self and identity, gender and culture, mediated communication, public speaking, interpersonal communication and conflict management among others.

“I think the biggest challenge in teaching 201 is it is a lot to cover in one semester,” Cheshire said. “So, when you really try and sit down and look at that when you’re planning a semester it’s impossible.”

“It may seem small but when you look at full time instructors are teaching eight to 10 additional students which is eight to 10 additional speeches, eight to 10 additional papers to grade. It adds up,” Russell said.

The next solution would be to hire more instructors for the COMM 201 courses.

Scott Eldredge, the head of the Communication Department, has continuously advocated for the addition of new instructors.

"I am continually pestering the dean and the provost about how I need more faculty to do the things that I need to do to support our liberal studies program," Eldredge said. "We try to be consistent and anticipate what we can do from one year to the next. That makes it difficult to say 'oh, we want to take on another salaried position that I'm going to have to be paying for a long time.'"

The university has turned to hiring adjunct instructors to teach the courses. Adjuncts are contracted to teach no more than two credits a semester or 12 a year and are paid between \$1,200 to \$1,300 per class.

"Because the demand for courses continues to increase but we are not given permission to hire more people we have had to turn to hiring adjuncts, part time instructors," Russell said. "Part time instructors are certainly qualified. Where we run into problems though is because they are part time instructors

the turnover rate among them is much higher."

Most of the adjunct professors teach COMM 201 online. For the fall 2024 semester, 17 sections of COMM 201 were offered online. Over the summer, all courses are taught online.

"Communication skills, particularly interpersonal skills, being practiced in person are really important. To make COMM 201 better I think that lower class size is important as well as in person," Eldredge said. "I don't like these classes being online. I don't think they are as effective online. They can be taught online, but I think we lose something in doing that."

Dave Kinner, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, believes that courses should be taught in person but still values online courses as a time saver for students as well as a relief of workload for in person instructor.

"If students want to get through faster, we do have summer classes of COMM 201," Kinner said. "In general, I'm a pretty big believer in traditional students who are here taking those classes in person.

There is a lot of value to getting to see people on a regular basis."

Interpersonal communication skills took a hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people became accustomed to communicating through technology due to quarantines and social distancing thus impacting the way people interacted with each other in person.

"I think 201 is a vital class post pandemic," Cheshire said. "Something I've observed, and it's not just me but others in the department, students used to be really terrified of public speaking, and they're still not cool with it, but they are really terrified of interpersonal communication. If I was to ask my students to go and talk with a stranger, many of them would probably have a small panic attack over that."

Communication is the cumulation of centuries of work and research that COMM 201 aims to introduce students to.

"The professors in this department, we are the inheritors of a thousand-year legacy of teaching people how to speak well publicly, how to persuade others, how to listen well to others," Russell said.



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Indigenous fashion flourishes on Qualla Boundary

By Mattilynn Sneed

Last month the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indian held their sixth annual Kananesgi Fashion Show, providing a look into the blossoming Indigenous fashion scene.

Kananesgi is a fashion and art show focused on work by Cherokee people. Its namesake, meaning spider, was chosen for the spider's representation of creativity and dexterity in Cherokee culture.

The show started small, with the first renditions held at Cherokee Central Schools. By 2022, Harrah's Cherokee Casino reached out about hosting the event, where it has been held each year since.



Faith Long-Presley waves to the crowd as they applaud her new collection that was inspired by Cherokee basket weaving and 1990s Chanel. Photo by Mattilynn Sneed.

The show is organized by the volunteer Kananesgi Committee, consisting of Faith Long-Presley, Hope Husky, Tanya Carol and Tierra McCoy.

Long-Presley has been involved in the show in some capacity since its beginning when she was interning with Husky. She branched out from being behind the scenes to joining other designers on the runway.

Her brand, Ganvhida Designs, honors her family name, Long, a name known for its lineage of Cherokee crafts people. She said her grandmothers, Glenda Cunningham and Nancy Long, inspired her to learn how to sew.

"They were really good seamstresses because they had to be, not because they really wanted to. But I could see that they took pride in their work and that really inspired me," Long-Presley said.

This year, her collection combined elements from Cherokee basketry and a homage to 1990s Chanel collections. It featured pieces printed with traditional Cherokee basket weave designs and tweed fabrics meant to mimic the weave of a basket.

She considers herself a novice seamstress and says she and some of the other designers rely on the more expert sewists in the community to be able to execute their looks. That's part of what makes the show so important to uplifting the local community.

With grant funding from the Ray Kinsland

Leadership Institute and the Sequoyah Fund, Kananesgi provides training and resources for all designers whose applications to the show are accepted.

"The main goal for me is to see our Eastern Band designers uplifted, and to give them a platform that they wouldn't otherwise have," Long-Presley said. "Continuing with the community environment, it really makes our show special that you can see faces that you recognize in the show."

One of the community members to take advantage of the show was Alexandria Lane. In college, she studied consumer journalism and fashion merchandising but was encouraged to opt for a more stable career path than fashion. Lane's involvement with the fashion show was first as a makeup artist, but she decided this year she wanted to be a designer.

Her runway collection was inspired by Cherokee legends regarding stars. In Cherokee culture stars are described as living beings made of luminous balls of feathers. This led her to incorporate white feathers and a shade of blue that harkened to the color of the sky at dawn.

She said most of the sewing she'd done in recent years were small projects for herself or hemming pants for her husband, but her involvement with the show has reawakened her love for the art. Lane hopes to integrate fashion into her career, commenting on the importance

of Indigenous representation in the fashion industry.

“Indigenous people were left out of the conversation for so long. Being able to take up space after being forced to assimilate, after being forced to give up our culture and our dress and our language, coming back around to bring our traditional influences to modern fashion is so cool. I think it’s important for us to be part of that conversation, because we have influenced fashion for years but were never credited for it.” Long-Presley said.

There’s no denying that the Indigenous presence in the fashion world is growing. This movement is well demonstrated by Kananesgi, Indigenous Fashion Week in Vancouver, Native Fashion Week in Santa Fe, Native Fashion in the City in Denver, and other Indigenous focused fashion shows.

Though the focus is on Cherokee designers and models, the show also works with guest designers and models from other North American tribes. Peshawn Bread is a Comanche filmmaker, designer and model who launched her brand House of Sutai in 2023. She lends her expertise to Kananesgi by training the models in runway walking and posing as well as modeling in the show herself.

This year’s guest was Lesley Hampton, a Temagami First Nation Anishinaabe designer, who describes her work as contemporary fashion through an Indigenous worldview.

From a bomber jacket embroidered with the words “A LINEAGE OF BADASS MATRIARCHS” to scarlet evening gowns adorned with feathered flowers, her work seamlessly integrates modern style and Indigenous identity. She boasts appearances in VOGUE as the number one Canadian brand to keep an eye on and Forbes 30 under 30 Local: Toronto list.

It isn’t just big names like Hampton, Bethaney Yellowtail of the Northern Chyane Nation and Cree designer Jontay Kahm are taking off. Indigenous people are bringing their culture into the fashion world and creating looks that stitch tribal identity into wearable garments.

Luke Swimmer, an EBCI member from the Snowbird community takes on a more casual angle of Native fashion. While he has been in the fashion show before, he feels his brand is more subtle than that of the show.

Swimmer began Buffalotown Clothing in 2017 with \$500 he won from dancing at a powwow. With the prize money, he made 24 T-shirts with his designs on them. He and his wife did a popup sale with the shirts at a gym in Cherokee, where they quickly sold out. His brand only grew from there. He focuses on designing and says the business wouldn’t be possible without his wife and co-owner Tabatha Swimmer.

“I like to think of our brand as a lifestyle, it’s kind of a way to show people who we are, where we’re from and the connection to the community and the culture,” Swimmer said.

Swimmer talked about how, when he was growing up, there weren’t options for everyday wear fashion that identified with Indian identity.

“Nike did the N-7 thing, but it was more general to all native tribes. There wasn’t really clothing that was specific to certain tribes. Now there’s quite a few. Our clothing incorporates a lot of Cherokee culture into it, that’s why we’re popular here in and in Oklahoma,” Swimmer said.

He said he never expected his brand to grow as much as it has. In the beginning it was mostly just friends, family and other community members wearing his brand, now he says he sees his work on people he’s never met. Those 24 T-shirts he made with



Moon Mother by Haley Cooper. Photo by Mattilynn Sneed.

powwow money grew into a brand that sells in two REI locations, supplies uniform shorts for stickball teams on the Qualla Boundary and Cherokee Nation, and has a design deal in the works with Nantahala Outdoor Center.

Indigenous people continue to contribute their creativity in fashion, shattering stereotypes and overcoming the status quo of fashion. While many are inspired by their cultural roots, Alexandria Lane reminds us that they need not be boxed in by what others may expect of them in terms of what is considered Indigenous.

“Anything that comes from their brain is inherently a Native perspective. Even if it wasn’t a direct reference from the culture, it’s still an indigenous design,” Lane said.

Every year, the fashion show is accompanied by an art show. This year’s theme was “feminine roots.” It celebrated women as life-givers, nurturers, sustainers and connectors of the Cherokee people. Moon Mother by Haley Cooper took first place in the adult painting.

Student Worker Spotlight



Alexander Hoffman

What is club swim?

WCU Club Swim is an opportunity for students to exercise, meet new people, and become more active in the community through fundraising and social events. The club also offers numerous opportunities to compete throughout the year at schools like the University of Tennessee, Georgia Tech, Clemson, and more.

What does club swim aim to do?

The clubs aim to provide students with an outlet for relieving stress, traveling to other colleges, and staying healthy throughout the school year.

How did you get interested in your club?

I became interested in Club swim because I was looking for athletic, competitive, and with a great

What is your job and how do you do it?

I am a tour guide for the Office of Undergraduate Admissions! Basically, a few times a week (2-5 usually) I spend about two hours walking groups of prospective students, and sometimes groups of 50 5th graders, across campus, stopping at 12 stops across campus, to help students decide if they'd like to attend WCU!(we also tell lots of bad jokes). I also work two Saturdays a semester at Open House, usually from 3am-6pm, as another opportunity to help students decide if Western is their future home. During the afternoon of Open House, you can always find me and Ayden Davis dancing around like we have gotten way more sleep than we did!

How did you find your way to Western?

I'm from Canton, NC; I live about 30-40 minutes away, which means my school system came here quite a few times on field trips, which is something that kept WCU in my thoughts. When I was looking at colleges more seriously in mid-highschool (shoutout Haywood Early College) I was actually on an engineering track, and was planning on going to the Wolfpack in Raleigh for industrial engineering, a major that was only at two public universities. I eventually decided (in year 4 of 5 at my early college), to switch to business, broadening my horizons, and allowing me to apply to WCU, App, and a private college in Tennessee, and I decided, based on the student body, cost, and location, that the Whee would be my home.

community, which the swim team checks all of those boxes.

How can someone get involved with your club?

Anybody can become involved with the club by visiting Reid Pool any Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday at 7:30 or by contacting our Instagram page (swim_club_wcu). We welcome both experienced swimmers looking to compete again, and brand-new swimmers hoping to learn alike.

What events can we look forward to in the future?

The WCU Swim Club has and will continue to compete throughout the southeast and will be hosting various social events and fundraisers throughout the year. In the past we've done

What are your personal interests?

I absolutely LOVE watching WCU sports, especially basketball. The environment is incredibly fun and incredible, and you can usually spot me near the front on our team's side at every home game! I also spend a lot of time outside of work/class doing my interview series Chats With Cats, for our broadcasting club (shoutout Whee-TV). In the interviews, I have sat down with over 40 of our student athletes and talked to them about not only being an athlete, but also the facts of being a student as well.

What is your favorite aspect of WCU?

I have a few things that I absolutely love about WCU, but my favorite part has got to be the people. The friends I have made are basically a second family, and that comes with the territory of being a smaller school, but it allows for a greater sense of connection. Other than that, I also absolutely and almost equally love the location/view, and am amazed by different views from the same places on a pretty much daily basis. It is an amazing place with amazing people.

What advice do you have for students?

My advice to especially new students is to join something on campus. Whether it is a job with a big community (like enTOURage) or Greek life or a club, get involved in some way. It can seem difficult or scary sometimes to talk to people and make new friends, but I found it much easier and less scary when I got involved here at WCU.

Club Spotlight



Swim Club

percentage nights at Innovation Brewing, pumpkin patches at Darnell Farms, competed at meets on other college campuses, and attended or hosted a variety of other events.

Staff Spotlight



Dr. Chris Cooper

What sparked your interest in cheerleading?

I'm 21 now, and I've been cheering since I was 4, so it's always just been a natural thing to do! I've only taken one year off from cheering, and it was only because of injury. I just remember hating it and being so eager to be back.

What do you like most about cheerleading at WCU?

Flying and being able to learn and do so many skills and tricks in the air has always been the best part of cheerleading for me. I love the adrenaline rush I get when trying something new, being scared, and then actually doing it and perfecting it!

What makes your sport unique?

Cheerleading routines are known for their sharp, precise movements, often synchronized with a team. A lot of what we do is mental.

How did you get into teaching?

I long thought that I'd be interested in teaching, but after a stint as an education major in college I concluded that I'd rather teach at the college level. At that point, the path seemed pretty clear—get a PhD, research, get teaching experience and cross my fingers that it would all work out well and I'd end up in a place where I was happy. And somehow, it did.

What are your research interests?

I've written about a variety of topics within American politics, but the majority of my work focuses on state politics, elections, and southern politics.

What is your favorite aspect of WCU?

I love working at an institution that values and rewards quality teaching—the students

Sometimes, mental blocks can get in the way of what we want to do and know we can do. That can be hard on us mentally, and I feel like that makes us strong athletes. We learn to control our bodies and make them do what we want them to do. For example, we learn to “defy gravity” by teaching our bodies to flip over, spin, and float while making it look effortless!

What do you hope your team accomplishes this year?

I hope one of our competing teams is able to win a title at nationals in Daytona in April! We truly do work so hard, and the sport is so demanding of our bodies, time, and our minds!

What is next for you after WCU?

After I graduate, I will be going to dental hygiene school to be a dental hygienist, but my biggest dream is to be a pediatric dentist, so I do plan on going back to school at some point in my life.

are why I got into this profession, and why I stay. And the views of the mountains outside of my office window don't hurt.

What are your personal interests?

I enjoy spending with my family and spending time outdoors—often at the same time. I'm a fairly active mountain biker, a more infrequent than I'd like kayaker, and a reluctant runner.

What advice do you have for students?

Study abroad. I didn't study abroad in college and it's only regret from those four years. I always assumed I'd have time to spend abroad when I got older, but it turns out that getting older often comes with things like families, mortgages and jobs—all good things to be sure, but things that make it difficult to spend extended periods of time in another country.

Athlete Spotlight



Lindsey Imul-Mendoza

December arts and entertainment events

Deck the Stacks – 4-6 p.m. Dec. 5

Join the Jackson County Public Library, anytime between the hours of 4-6 p.m. for their annual Deck the Stacks event! There will be crafts available for patrons to complete to decorate their own homes or our Children's Department at Jackson County Public Library for the upcoming winter holidays! Get into the holiday spirit together with some festive decorating! More information at fontanalib.org/events.

Japanese calligraphy class with Ted Ohtani – 6 p.m. Dec. 5

Join the Jackson County Public Library for a Japanese calligraphy workshop. Ted Ohtani Sensei will go over the differences between the written Chinese and Japanese languages and how the Chinese characters were transformed into new Japanese letters: Katakana and Hiragana. He will also discuss the structures of Kanji to help with the calligraphy writing process. Next, people will practice writing with authentic calligraphic tools. Three traditional styles of Kanji (Kaisho, Gyōsho, and Sōsho) will be explained with practice writing some Katakana strokes and then applying them to write Kanji. Registration is required to attend this program. Please register by calling the Jackson County Public Library at 828-586-2016 or by emailing JCPL-Adults@fontanalib.org.

Sylva Shop and Stroll – 5 p.m. Dec. 5, 12 and 19

Thursday evenings leading up to Christmas Sylva will be open for late shopping. See Santa Paws and Smoky Mountain High School carolers roaming around downtown. Join the Sylva Art and Design Committee at the Undercut on Mill Street for kids Christmas

crafts from 5:30-6:30 p.m. Select Merchants Staying Open Late. Search event on Facebook for more information.

Open Mic – 7-8 p.m. Dec. 5

Every Thursday at The Junction Pub.

The Nutcracker featuring the Ballet Conservatory of Asheville – 7:30 p.m. Dec. 6 and 3 p.m. Dec. 7

Join Bardo Arts Center for a magically festive, full-length version of The Nutcracker featuring professional classical dancers and the Ballet Conservatory of Asheville's celebrated pre-professional company. Doors will open 30 minutes before the show begins. Get your tickets and more information at arts.wcu.edu/tickets.

Lights & Luminaries Celebration – 5-9 p.m. Dec. 6

Illuminate your Holiday Season in Dillsboro, NC. The Lights and Luminaries Celebration transforms Dillsboro into a classic winter wonderland! Experience the charm of historic town as it comes alive with thousands of glowing luminaries, creating a breathtaking backdrop for the holiday season.

Edyn Wellness Christmas Social, featuring Polar Express Theme – 5-7 p.m. Dec. 6

A Christmas Social featuring the Polar Express! Bring the kids, wear pajamas and enjoy hot cocoa, appetizers, Christmas games and old-fashioned fun! Bring your best pie for a pie tasting contest with a \$50 grand prize!

Holiday piano concert – 1 p.m. Dec. 7

A holiday-themed piano concert at the

Jackson County Library. The concert will be in the Community Room of the library. Pianist and WCU Music professor, Leonidas Lagrimas will lead the concert of classical holiday piano music with sing-along caroling encouraged. Free hot cocoa and cider will be available during the performance. The concert is free and open to the public. For more information, please call the library at 828-586-2016.

WATR 2024 Annual Celebration and Fundraiser Party – 4 p.m. Dec. 7

Celebrate WATR's past, present and future! The event kicks off at 4 p.m. with a WATR presentation "Looking Back & Moving Forward," silent auction and catered dinner. The live music starts at 6:30 p.m. from Positive Mental Attitude. Come support community stewardship and protection of the Tuckasegee River Watershed! Buy tickets online in advance to help plan the catered dinner. More information at <https://protectourwaters-wnc.org/watr-2024-fundraiser>.

Shane Meade: An acoustic brunch – 12:30-2:30 p.m. Dec. 8

Quirky Birds Treehouse presents an acoustic brunch with Shane Meade. Good food, good folks and good vibes. Spread the word and join the fun!

Basic Dungeons and Dragons with the Creative Writing Club – 6-8 p.m. Dec. 9

For everyone interested in learning Dungeons and Dragons, writing characters and other parts of playing. Meet in room 214 at the University Center.

Music bingo with Ambitious Entertainment – 7 p.m. Dec. 9

Test your bingo skills and music knowledge at Lazy Hiker Brewing with this fun, high energy take on a classic game! Always free to play and win house cash!

ARTrageous – 4 p.m. Dec. 10 and 17

Let's get creative together! Join the Jackson County Public Library as we learn, explore and get a little bit messy making art. More information at <https://fontanalib.org/events>.

Susan Pepper: Traditional Song from Appalachia – 6 p.m. Dec. 10

The Jackson County Public Library will host a free concert. Ballad singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist, Susan Pepper, will perform songs from her new album, *Where the Islands Overflow: Traditional Song from Appalachia*. Oxford American calls her “a seasoned singer” with a “celestial upper range.” She is featured in the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area's Traditional Artist Directory. More information at <https://fontanalib.org/events>.

Sylva Stitchers Group – 6 p.m. Dec. 12

Like to knit, crochet, or do other needle crafts? All are welcome to join this group to learn, work on your latest project or help a beginner develop their skills. At 6 p.m. every second and fourth Thursday of the month in The Story Time Room on the first floor of Jackson County Public Library. Stitchers 12 and under must be accompanied by an adult. Free and open to the public. All programs are co-sponsored by the Friends of the Jackson County Library.

Trivia Night at Lazy Hiker – 6:30-8:30 p.m. Dec. 10, 17 and 24

Gather your team or play by yourself! Test your knowledge every Tuesday at Lazy Hiker's Trivia Night! Free to play! Different categories every week!

Make a Joyful Noise: Drum circle – 12 p.m. Dec. 15

Join Mary Ferrick in a new ministry - with drums! Together, they will play percussion as a form of relaxation, mediation, connection and joy! All ages are welcome! No experience necessary! Drums will be provided! Located at 516 Parris Branch Road.

Adult Craft Corner: Make a keepsake book ornament – 10 a.m. Dec. 17

Back by popular demand, make a keepsake book ornament featuring your childhood favorites, your 2024 reading list, book club favorites and anything you'd like. Upon signing up, a link will be sent to a form to enter your 10 titles and authors. We will assemble the miniature books together and put them in our ornaments. Must be 16 years old or older to participate. The book ornament program will be in the conference room. Titles and authors must be sent by Thursday, Dec. 5. Registration required. Call the library at (828) 586-2016 or email JCPL-Adults@fontanalib.org to register.

Reindeer Games & Book Exchange Family Night – 5:30 p.m. Dec. 19

Start the season of giving by bringing a gently used book to trade and then be ready to rise to the challenge of our holiday-themed games! Before leaving, select a new-to-you book to bring home and enjoy! There will be fun family-friendly challenges along with yummy snacks! Event at Jackson County Public Library.

Yuletide Holiday Market – 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 21

Come out and shop locally for the holidays! Support small businesses and give unique, thoughtful gifts to loved ones during the holiday season in downtown Sylva at Bridge Park.

Paint and Take – 12-8 p.m. Dec. 28

Come in and paint a figurine! Feel free to bring a figurine of choice. Contact Tolgard Games for more information at (828) 226-9615.

Call for Entry: 57th Annual Juried Undergraduate Exhibition – Entry deadline Jan. 21

WCU's Annual Juried Undergraduate Exhibition is one of the longest-running Catamount art traditions. This exhibition is an extraordinary opportunity for WCU undergraduate students to share their artwork with a larger public and enhance their skills in presenting artwork in a professional gallery setting. Entries are reviewed by an outside art professional who selects the works for exhibition at the WCU Fine Art Museum. Selected works will be on display at the museum from Feb. 18 to March 21, 2025. An awards ceremony will be held at the WCU Fine Art Museum 5-7 p.m. Thursday, March 20, 2025. More information and application at <https://www.wcu.edu/bardo-arts-center/blog/posts/57th-annual-juried.aspx>.

Rockin' New Year's Noon – 10:30 a.m. Dec. 31

Ring in the new year by counting down to noon in the Jackson County Public Library with crafts, games and snacks! The whole family can experience the excitement of the countdown without staying up late.

NYE Throwback Prom at Lazy Hiker Brewing – 8:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Dec. 31

Come dressed in prom attire from the 1990s and 2000s and dance the night away to some throwback tunes brought to you by Ambitious Entertainment's DJ Mox! Enjoy a champagne toast at midnight and vote for your favorite royal couple!

Wintering for the college student

By Cora Haste

Days are getting shorter and although the calendar hasn't marked it yet, winter has begun. With it comes colder days and an often-stressful end to our semester.

The leaves have fallen, animals entered hibernation, it is almost as if the earth calls us to rest. Shorter days mean more time is spent inside, cuddled under blankets next to people you love. Maybe it means gloomier evenings marked by a sadness you can't quite place. This winter invitation disregards the piles of to-do lists and booked up calendars weighing college students down.

"Plants and animals don't fight the winter; they don't pretend it's not happening and attempt to carry on living the same lives that they lived in the summer. They prepare. They adapt. They perform extraordinary acts of metamorphosis to get them through. Winter is a time of withdrawing from the world, maximizing scant resources, carrying out acts of brutal efficiency and vanishing from sight; but that's where the transformation occurs. Winter is not the death of the life cycle, but its crucible." - Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times by Katherine May.

How do we cope with the pull of our fast-paced society when nature is beckoning us to rest, live slower and stay awhile?

It's no secret that this semester has brought unique challenges. From a devastating hurricane to a stressful election cycle, final projects and exams feel like the cherry on top of a cake no one ordered.

All this to say, your feelings are not isolated. A brief conversation with a peer reveals that

this sentiment is shared by most students during this time.

There is not much time left in our semester, so my best advice is to manage it well. Do your best at what you can but know that you can't do everything. Acknowledge that in these darker days you may need more rest. Find moments of stillness and listen to your body.

Finishing the semester out strong doesn't have to apply to your studies. Maybe for you finishing the semester strong looks like being present in each moment, maybe it looks like waking up each day and deciding to give it a

try even though the near ending feels bleak.

Winter is a season many dread and the final weeks of the semester may conjure a pit in your stomach but on the other side of this, winter offers you rest and reward.

"It's a time for reflection and recuperation, for slow replenishment, for putting your house in order. Doing those deeply unfashionable things—slowing down, letting your spare time expand, getting enough sleep, resting—is a radical act now, but it is essential." Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times by Katherine May.

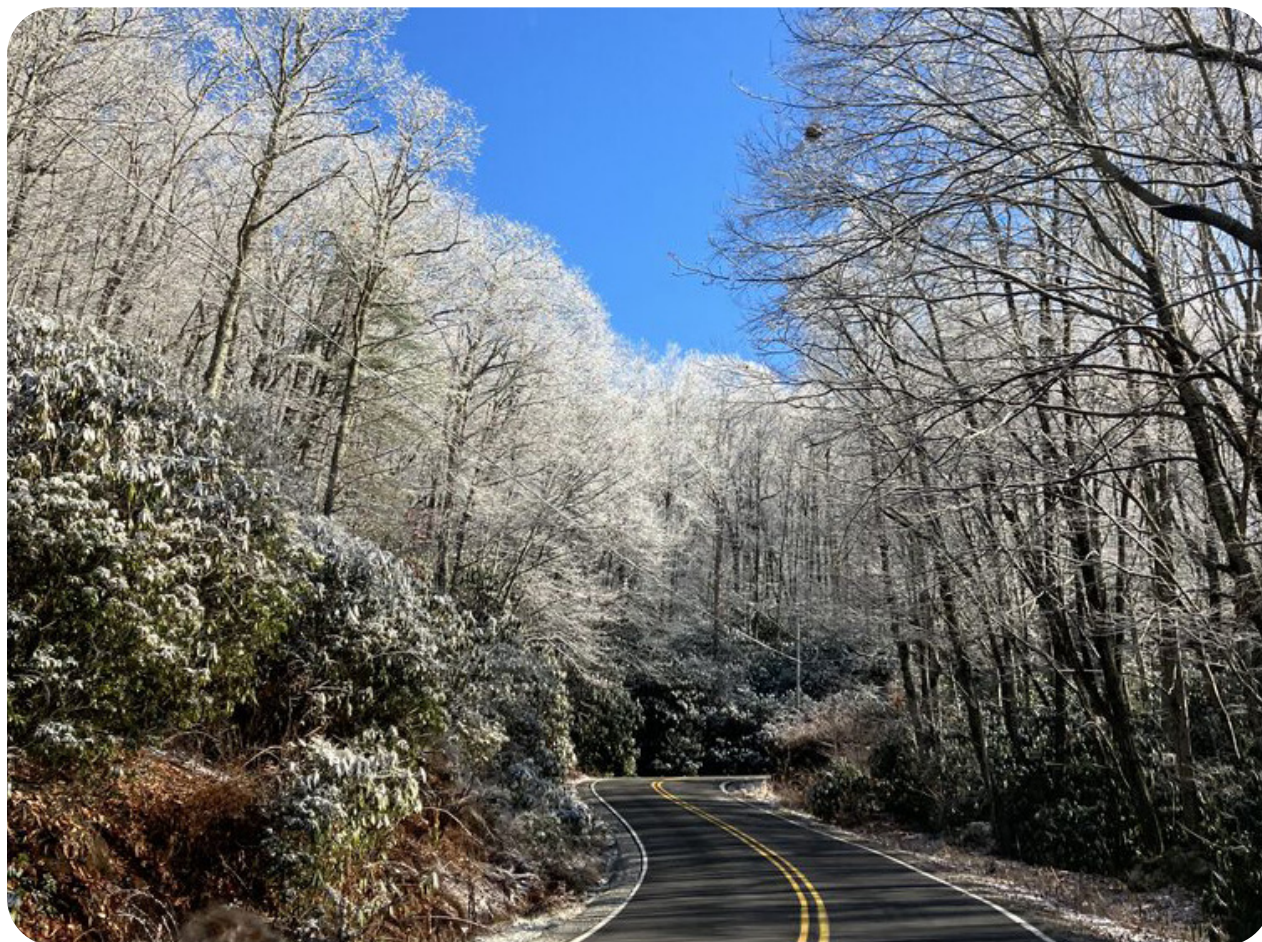


Photo by Cora Haste.