

From the outside in

By Cora Haste

America is home to over 600 million acres of public lands including national parks, conservation areas and national forests. These spaces and other green spaces like state and city parks offer major health benefits, a place of escape and opportunity for adventure.

Brandon MacCallum is the Director of Campus Recreation and Wellness. He emphasizes the importance of time spent outdoors.

“I think it can be just a matter of physical release of getting out and exercising, being in the outdoors and being away from our screens and away from people, just that mental reset,” MacCallum said.

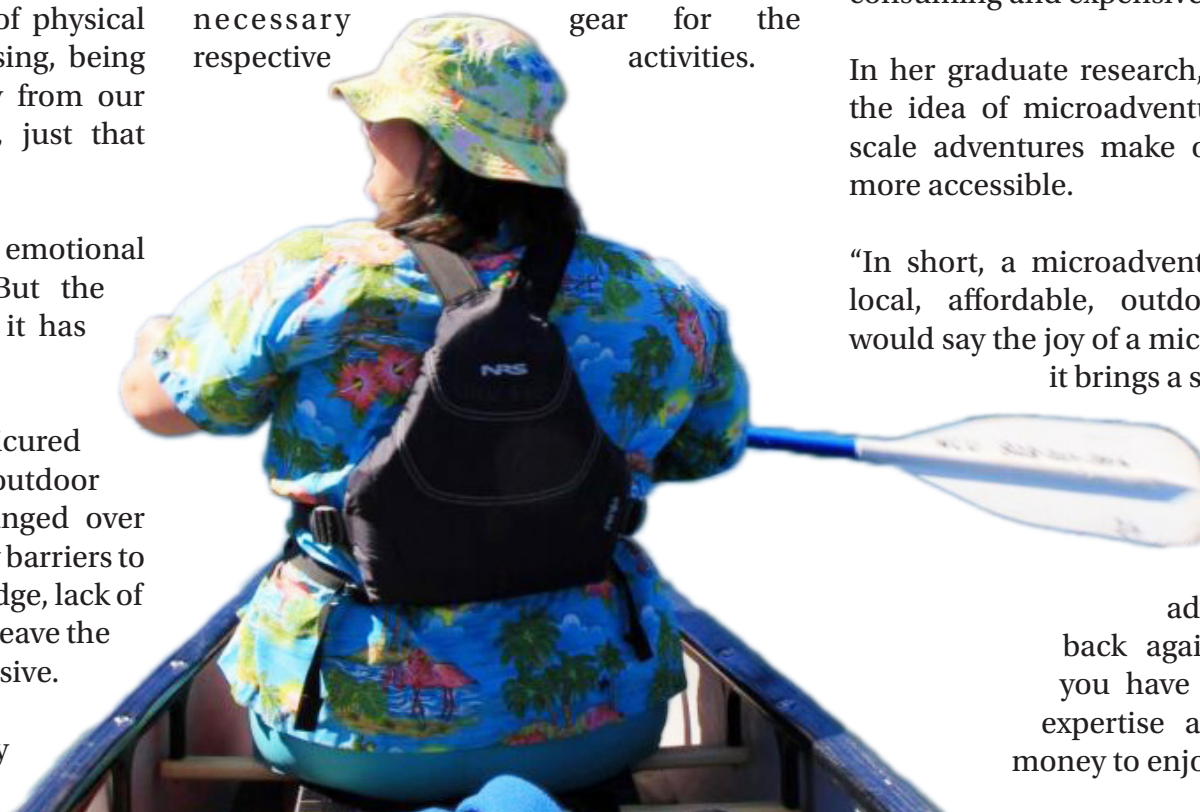
Nature provides mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health benefits. But the culture and history surrounding it has been tumultuous.

From history books to manicured Instagram feeds the image of outdoor exploration has shifted and changed over time. It can feel like there are many barriers to getting outdoors. A lack of knowledge, lack of funds, and generational fears can leave the great outdoors feeling pretty exclusive.

Terms like granola girl, crunchy culture and gorpcore are

all phrases circulating on the internet to encapsulate outdoorsy aesthetics. The effortless looks of these titles often come with a hefty price tag. Patagonia, Chaco, Eno, Columbia are popular brands that have created a look synonymous with adventure and exploration.

Beyond looking the part, outdoor hobbies often require extensive gear collections in order to play the part. Mountain bikes and snowboards are not cheap purchases but are necessary gear for the respective activities.



Kayler DeBrew is an adjunct professor in WCU's Parks and Recreation Department. She recognizes the push and pull a materialistic society has on outdoor adventure.

“People want to make [the brands] a big part of their image as an outdoorsy person,” DeBrew said.

DeBrew says that people define themselves as outdoorsy through social media and clothing choices.

There can also be pressure to travel far to enjoy outdoor adventure. A trip to Yosemite or the Rio Grande can feel more significant than a hike in your nearest state park. Large trips, however, are time-consuming and expensive.

In her graduate research, DeBrew explored the idea of microadventures. These small-scale adventures make outdoor recreation more accessible.

“In short, a microadventure is short-term, local, affordable, outdoor exploration. I would say the joy of a microadventure is that it brings a sense of escape and excitement into your day to day,” DeBrew said.

These everyday adventures push back against the idea that you have to travel far, gain expertise and spend lots of money to enjoy the outdoors.



WCU students from Base Camp took to Joyce Kilmer Forest for a small hike. Photo by Savannah Lewis.

The ability to go great distances and explore untouched wilderness is an idea that dates back to 19th century Europe. Industrialization gave rise to growing cities. Those with the ability and social prowess, predominately wealthy white men, could escape from city life into the wilderness.

That ability was not afforded to all.

“It set up this culture that adventure is really great and exploring the outdoors is really awesome, but it’s something that doesn’t happen at home, and you kind of have to have some social, financial, physical privilege and ability to be able to get out and do those things,” DeBrew said.

These romantic ideologies of the outdoors were brought over to a growing America. Rugged individualism and a desire to

maintain pristine wilderness areas led to the designation of Yosemite as “a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people” in 1872. The turn of the 20th Century brought the creation of the National Parks Service.

But these spaces were not for the enjoyment of all. In a Jim Crow America, even public lands were segregated.

The effects of this exclusivity are still felt today.

Earl B. Hunter Jr. is the founder and president of Black Folks Camp Too, a company whose mission is to increase diversity in the outdoor industry. Hunter spent years as a top executive in the RV and camping industry. During that time something stood out - there were very few Black campers and very few people of color working in the industry.

“I know how amazing camps are, and I know how amazing the outdoors is. And so, because of that our company was created to change the momentum in which the outdoor industry is going,” Hunter said.

Hunter’s business model focuses on partnering with businesses in the outdoor industry and helping them understand Black history and outdoor recreation.

“When you think about state parks and national parks, you never really see us in those spaces. Mainly because we were really told not to go in those spaces,” Hunter said. “I could tell the story of my great grandmother, telling my grandmother, telling my mother, telling me, don’t go in those woods. You don’t belong in the woods.”

Historically, acts of violence were committed against Black people often in the woods. Hunter believes that educating people on this history allows space for change.

Black Folks Camp Too partners with business through their Unity Blaze Program. Organizations participate in a course that explains the troubled history and points towards a more united future.

“The Unity Blaze Way is to find somebody that doesn’t look like you or may look like you, befriend them and introduce them to the outdoors and show them how incredible the outdoors is and do it over and over and over again to the point where they say to you, ‘I think I want to introduce some of my friends to the outdoors.’ And then that person says, ‘I want to introduce my friends to the outdoors.’” Hunter said. “Because we believe that’s the greatest way that we’re going to get folks in the outdoors and the greatest way we’re going to create more unity in the outdoor community and beyond.”

Hunter cites a lack of knowledge and a lack of invitation as other barriers to diversifying participation in outdoor recreation.

A more welcoming outdoor industry can start at the individual level.

“If you feel like you are comfortable and confident in the outdoors, the next time you’re going on an adventure, invite someone. Invite someone who you might think maybe isn’t comfortable doing it on their own,” DeBrew said.



Base Camp provides students with more affordable opportunities to try outdoor hobbies like backpacking, canoeing and hiking. Photo by Alyssa Pershad.

Western North Carolina provides the perfect backdrop for a more accepting outdoor community. With trails, campsites, rivers and national parks less than an hour away there are ample opportunities to embark on an adventure and to invite others along too.

Base Camp Cullowhee provides students with an affordable way to explore the outdoors in multiple ways. MacCallum encourages people to explore Base Camp's offerings, even if it feels intimidating.

"I think part of going to college is trying new things and putting yourself out there. It may not be our six-day spring break trip, but it could be coming to the climbing wall or coming to Tuck River Cleanup or events

that we have that you might want to dip your toes into and see if you like it or not. And, just like everything else on campus, it's not for everyone, and that's okay. But at least folks can try it and see if they like it." MacCallum said.

Base Camp works to lower cost barriers for students by providing trips at a reduced cost. These trips are guided which allow participants to safely explore outdoor hobbies. For a full list of upcoming trips visit myrec.wcu.edu.

Green spaces are all around and the benefits of utilizing these spaces are endless. Whether it's a walk in a local park or a weekend caving trip, nature is for all to enjoy on an individual level and together.



Photo by Savannah Lewis.

Hunter believes that a more united society can start when we gather together and invite others in.

"When you get around this campfire literally and figuratively, we're all going to find out we've got more sames and differences, and that's where I stand," Hunter said.

Press release: Your place in space

Free Evening Telescope Viewing at the Boys & Girls Club of the Plateau in Cashiers on April 4th.

The Boys & Girls Club of the Plateau, in partnership with Western Carolina University's Department of Chemistry and Physics, will host a free evening telescope viewing party on the campus of the Boys & Girls Club of the Plateau located at 558 Frank Allen Road, Cashiers, NC, beginning at 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 4th, for stargazers of all ages! Astronomy faculty from WCU will be on hand with telescopes to show the Moon, Mars, star clusters and galaxies. They will also teach how to identify spring constellations and lead activities for children. This event welcomes everyone, regardless of age, and will be held outdoors. Please make sure to dress warmly!

This event is part of the North Carolina Science Festival Statewide Star Party. The

theme of the 2025 NCSciFest is "Your Place in Space." The 2025 season aims to encourage audiences to see that science is in their daily lives, extends far beyond the confines of laboratory settings, and is accessible for all. The goal is to bring together students, families, researchers, and science enthusiasts from all walks of life to celebrate the wonders of discovery.

Founded in 2010, the North Carolina Science Festival is the first statewide science festival in the United States. Through a series of community-based events each April (hosted by schools, colleges, libraries, museums, parks, businesses, and other local organizations), NCSciFest celebrates the economic, educational, and cultural impacts of science in North Carolina. It is an initiative of the Morehead Planetarium and Science Center at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For more information, please visit ncscifest.org.

About the Boys & Girls Club of the Plateau

The Boys & Girls Club of the Plateau (BGCP) serves youth from kindergarten through 12th grade in the Cashiers and Highlands communities. BGCP is nationally recognized by Boys & Girls Clubs of America as one of the top 20 Clubs out of 5,200 in the country. The Club offers a wide range of programs focusing on academic success, character development, and healthy lifestyles. BGCP is committed to ensuring that all children, especially those who need it most, have access to a safe and supportive environment after school and during the summer months.

For more information, please contact Carmen Waite at (828) 743-2775 or via email at carmen@bgcplateau.org. Visit our website at www.bgcplateau.org.

Letter from the Editor

By Marrah Ste. Marie

Catamounts! We are halfway through the spring semester and the end is in sight! There is something about spring semester that makes it feel so much more intense, perhaps it's because the urge to go outside grows as our workload becomes heavier, unlike fall which makes it easier to stay inside as things get crazier. Or maybe it's the feeling that summer is just a reach away and then the academic year will be complete and for many either they or their close friends will graduate.

It's hard to believe we are nearly approaching the 6-month mark for Hurricane Helene. It feels as though it happened just a few weeks ago but also years ago. We are forever so lucky that our beautiful campus was spared from the worst of the storm, however we don't have to go far to see that there is still evidence of the devastation and destruction our area faced. When I look back at Hurricane Helene, I try to focus on the beauty of how Western North Carolina was able to come together as a community. Neighbors that were previously strangers came together to lift each other up and repair what they could. Our own Western Carolina University students and staff gave their time and their abilities to help those who needed it. Although we are recovering and things are healing, we can't forget that the work is not over. Our community still needs volunteers, donations and, most of all,

support. If you can't volunteer, remember Asheville is a tourism-based economy and just shopping at local businesses in the area can do a lot.

Spring always offers a sense of hope that we can capitalize on this year. When you can, spend even a few minutes outside to enjoy the sun whether it be talking to friends at the fountain, sunbathing on the hill or studying at Courtyard's outside area. Just a few minutes of being outside a day can make all the difference for your health. A great way to pass time outside is reading about campus or playing some games in The Western Carolinian. If you're reading this right now and thinking, "hey, that's what I'm doing right now," post it on your Instagram story and tag us @thewesterncarolinian and we'll share how cool you are with everyone else.

As always, thank you for your support. As an entirely student-run publication, the support of our peers and community means the world to us. We hope that you enjoy this and every edition of The Western Carolinian. We encourage you to keep up with us on our social media or our website and, as always, if you have a tip, a story idea, an opinion or would like to purchase an advertisement do not hesitate to email us at westerncarolinian@wcu.edu or call us at (828)227-2694.

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Cherokee Language Program expands

By Marie Spencer

Last fall, WCU's Cherokee Language Program received a significant grant from Cherokee Preservation Foundation, a local nonprofit that supports Cherokee language preservation efforts.

The \$223,014 grant, among other support from WCU and outside organizations, has allowed the program to develop into an official minor and certification program.

"We've gotten a lot more ambitious with what we are trying to do, on the activities," said Cherokee Language Program director Sara Synder Hopkins.

Prior to fall of 2024, Cherokee courses were offered solely as electives, making it difficult for interested students to take the courses as they were not tied to a program. The beginning Cherokee courses fit into WCU Liberal Studies program, required of all degree-seeking students.

The 18-credit hour minor allows students to explore a variety of Cherokee-related courses, from the language and literature to the culture. The minor expanded on the previously available Cherokee courses to include hands-on work in applicable fields, such as translating old Cherokee texts.

"We added a transcription and

translation class that I taught for the first time last semester. The students worked with us on several research projects," Hopkins said. "Students were working and learning to read the handwritten documents."

The work goes beyond the classroom as well. Projects such as the Eastern Cherokee Histories in Translation give students a chance to practice skills learned in translation classes in with diary entries from Will West Long.

"We do a lot of things other than just teach these language classes," Hopkins said. "I like to have the students involved in what's happening. They're not just coming to class, they are seeing that there is a lot of things to be done with language other than just coming to class."

The first student graduated with a Cherokee minor the semester it became official, as they already had taken many of the required courses. More students are expected to graduate with a Cherokee minor this semester.

Hopkins said that only a handful of universities offer Cherokee studies programs and even fewer offer Cherokee language as a minor.

"It's something you can pretty much

only get at Western," Hopkins said. "The university has gone from 1948 bulldozing the sacred mound to spearheading all the Cherokee signage on campus to show where the mound was and where important places were."

The Cherokee Preservation Foundation grant has also helped create a non-credit Novice Cherokee Language Certificate. This program is run with support from WCU Education Outreach. The certification program is also catered towards EBCI members who wish to learn more about the language.

The first course, Beginning Cherokee Language, ran from August to December 2024. The course, taught by first language Cherokee speaker Gil Jackson and his protege Jack Cooper, was popular,

"It was filled in 24 hours with EBCI people," Hopkins said. "We've had pretty good retention and response."

Advanced Cherokee Language, the second course of the certificate, is also being taught.

The goal of the Novice Cherokee Language Certificate is to help teach and preserve the Cherokee language. Students who earn the certificate should be able to speak Cherokee at least at a novice level.

Fraternities push for stricter attendance lists

By Hannah Butler



Social event at Sigma Alpha Epsilon "The Bull Pen." Photo by Hannah Butler.

Greek organizations on campus are cracking down on who can enter social events, aiming to keep the list of attendees to members of Greek life, female students and invited friends.

The goal of the restrictions is to create a safe atmosphere for students to have fun, without having to worry about any altercations or liabilities that may cause issues.

The North American Interfraternity Conference, which oversees each campuses' Interfraternity Council, created a list of best practices and operating procedures for social events. According to WCU IFC president Ryan Williamson, this list was how WCU's Greek organizations created their new restrictions.

"That includes closed guest lists, checking IDs at doors, making sure that everybody that we're letting in we can vouch for," Williamson said.

Each fraternity can use its own judgement as far as social event attendance rules.

Lambda Chi Alpha is one fraternity that intends to keep track of who is allowed to enter social events.

"Basically, only Greek males are allowed. Women are welcome because we never had any issues with women, and then each brother would invite five people," said Lambda Chi Alpha brother Simon Schrift. "I've heard it happen differently with different frats. I've heard with some frats each brother gets five or 10 buddies each to invite."

Another strategy fraternities are using to keep track of social event attendees is to keep lists on apps such as DoorList and WYA. An invite link is shared with friends of brothers and on social media. The idea is that anyone can request to join a list, then it is up to the fraternity whether or not to accept each student. The apps help brothers better keep track of who is at the social events and lower safety risks.

Another reason for concern for Greek life and attendees alike is needle spiking, a new roofie technique.

The technique likely originated in the United Kingdom, in settings such as bars and nightclubs. The extent of its spread is unclear.

According to Oxford University Hospitals, "Needle spiking is where someone injects a person with a substance using a hypodermic needle. Whilst drink spiking has existed for many years, needle spiking appears to be a relatively new phenomenon, which

started to attract press coverage in 2021."

One attendee, who asked to remain anonymous, was at a fraternity social event with her friends when she believes she was needle spiked.

She said she did not drink much and stopped drinking early in the night.

"I walked back in the party, and we were just dancing. It was just me and my friend, and it was shoulder to shoulder, very crowded. We're dancing, having a great time. All of a sudden, I just started to feel really, really sick. And not at any point during this time did I ever feel a prick in my arm," she said.

As the night went on, she lost consciousness. The next morning, she woke up and noticed a bruise.

"One of my friends on Facebook reposted this post from the UK talking about needle spiking," she said. "And so, I looked into it, and at that point, I started looking at my bruise, and it was the same exact picture."

The victim hopes the stricter restrictions at Greek socials will prevent needle spiking from spreading around Western Carolina University.

"We are trying to ensure that the people who are attending our parties are people who we're comfortable having in our parties and not just having an open-door policy," Williamson said.

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Jackson County plans first middle school

By Stewart Butler

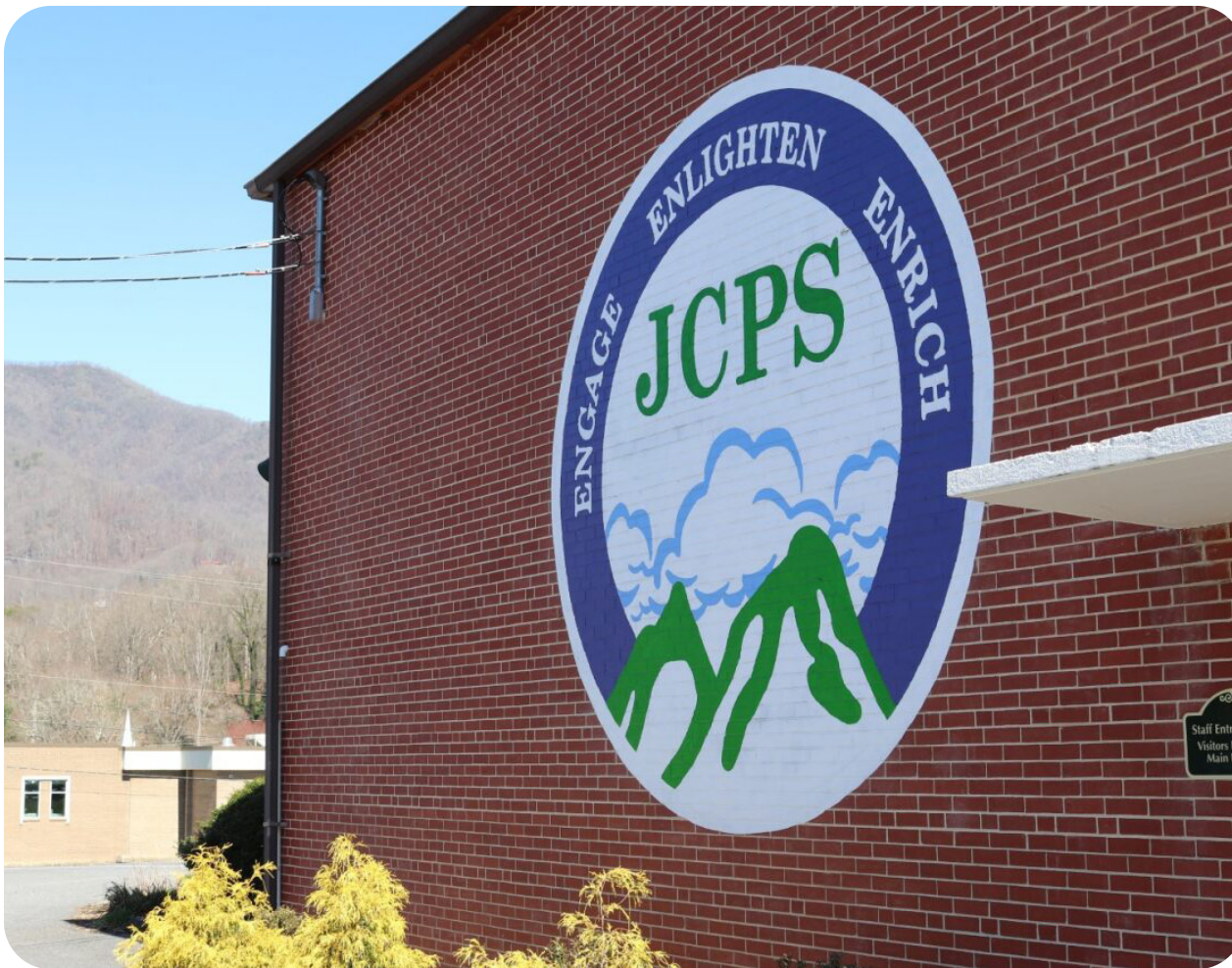


Photo by Stewart Butler.

Jackson County Public Schools is planning to build its first-ever middle school after receiving a \$52 million grant from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction last September.

Jackson County has long operated without a dedicated middle school, relying on K-8 schools to feed into the county's only high school, Smoky Mountain High. JCPS also operates a K-12 school, Jackson Community School.

"This is a huge undertaking," said JCPS

superintendent Dana Ayers. "We're one of only eleven counties in NC that doesn't have a middle-school model. I just want to catch up to what the rest of our state is already doing."

The introduction of a dedicated middle school will allow JCPS to offer new opportunities to students and teachers. Ayers said a large aspect of this change will be increased collaboration between teachers and age-specific programs for students.

Each school in Jackson County teaching

middle-grades has only one teacher per grade, per subject. The schools are spread throughout the county, making it difficult for teachers to come together.

"There are teachers who are doing really well, but we can't go visit them because we'd be neglecting our class. We're alone on our little islands right now," said Sydney Conley, a sixth grade math teacher at Cullowhee Valley.

Conley said the new school will help bring teachers together who currently must take extra time out of their days to meet. She said email and text messaging only go so far, and that in-person collaboration is a must.

"I have nobody to collaborate with unless it's a specific planning day, which comes about two or three times a year," Conley said.

She also points out logistical benefits of a centralized school: multiple staff members in one location can help in scheduling, planning, or simply helping out on an off day.

"If I'm out and can't get a substitute, my students won't get math that day. It's good to have people behind your back that can help you when life happens," Conley said.

A dedicated middle school will also offer students a choice in Career and Technical Education classes. JCPS offers middle grade CTE classes in business, agriculture, carpentry and more; but because middle-grade students are split between schools, not every CTE class is offered at each school.

"What we're missing is the opportunity to specialize in the needs of adolescent kiddos

in grades six through eight. And also offer them the opportunity to dabble a little bit in careers that they may enter after high school and beyond,” Ayers said.

A dedicated middle school will allow JCPS to offer every available class for each student in the same location.

Kristin Menickelli is a sixth grade science and social studies teacher at Cullowhee Valley School. She’s looking forward to a centralized middle school in Jackson County.

“It’s exciting for the community. Previously, most Jackson County Public Schools’ students attended a pre-K through eight setting before high school. Having a middle

school will allow teachers to collaborate in unique ways that will best serve the social, emotional, physical and developmental needs of adolescents,” Menickelli said.

The \$52 million comes from the NC DPI Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund grant. Counties with less than \$40 billion in taxable land are eligible to apply for funds, which come in part from the North Carolina Education Lottery. Jackson County received the maximum amount possible and committed to cover 15% of the grant, about \$8 million.

Jackson County has 24 months from the reception of the funds to break ground on its new facility. The grant was awarded

in Sep. 2024, meaning construction must begin by Sep. 2026. Finding flat land in WNC large enough for a middle school has proven challenging and Ayers hopes to find a location soon.

Ayers said JCPS is looking for 30 acres or more, a space ideally large enough for a baseball field, softball field, soccer field and a track. Because the facility will consolidate many existing programs from across the county, the location should be centrally located and easily accessible for most residents. Pinnacle Architecture and Vannoy Construction have been contracted to build the school.

A community input session was held at Southwestern Community College March 24.



Photo by Stewart Butler.

“There’s going to be consequences”: WCU students’ opinions on National Park Service layoffs

By Marie Spencer

With its proximity to the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, the Blue Ridge Parkway and multiple national forests, WCU attracts many students seeking careers in the National Park Service or related fields. However, with recent layoffs and federal funding cuts, these students are expressing concern, confusion and fear.

On Feb. 14, approximately 1,000 National Park Service employees were laid off as part of the Department of Government Efficiency attempt to reform the federal workforce. While some of these employees have since regained their positions, the Jan. 20 hiring freeze is still in effect.

WCU students shared many impacts that the NPS layoffs and funding cuts may have on them and society, like career prospects and Hurricane Helene recovery.

Career prospects

For most students, college is a path towards a career. Students pursuing degrees in parks and recreation management and other related majors often hope to seek careers with the NPS. With these layoffs and fundings cuts, many of these students are concerned about their future careers.

While parks and recreation management major Antonia Romano is only a freshman, she has already chosen to add a STEM minor

to her degree despite wanting a career in PRM from a young age.

“I’ve wanted to do parks and rec since I was six. Not that I knew what a PRM major was, but I wanted to be outside, and I wanted to work with kids in the natural world,” Romano said. “Having the government tell me ‘well I don’t know if you can have a job when you graduate’ is like well that’s great. Now I got to figure out something else and I don’t know if I’ll be as happy as I could have been in the new path that I have to take.”

Graduating senior and environmental health major Jake Steelmen hopes to work as an environmental health specialist in Haywood County. While his career plans have not been impacted currently, he still has concerns that they will.

“As of right now, I would still be fine to go there. I do worry about being a new hire, I’m afraid that they won’t want to take any new people on and that they are just going to eliminate the people they already do have,” Steelman said.

Environmental impacts

Another big concern for students is potential environmental impacts as the Trump administration prioritizes energy production over preserving natural resources like the national parks.

Mary Jones, junior natural resource conservation and management major, plans to continue her education in graduate school with a specialization in ecology. She worries about deforestation and its impact on humanity.

“I work a lot with forests, so I study trees and that’s a hot topic, especially with lumber and the forestry industry. That’s a little bit scary; a lot can happen in a very short amount of time when it comes to cutting down trees,” Jones said.

“I worry that as we understaff these parks, and as we put somebody who is completely over all the parks who has oil drilling interests in mind, rather than actually protecting our public lands for everyone, we are going to see problems arise,” Steelman said.

Students also express concern for the unique animals that live inside the national parks. Lizzie Hacker, junior PRM major, talked about the impact on NPS-protected biodiversity.

“We’re going to start seeing a loss of species diversity,” Hacker said. “Which is going to have impacts and it’s not just a fuzzy cute animal; it’s the different little insects and the salamanders and the plants.”

Public health concerns

Environmental health students shared their

concerns over public health issues that may emerge as an indirect effect of decreased prioritization of the NPS.

“I really think that the quality of our environment is interwoven in the quality of public health and those things can’t be separated. When we’re taking into account how we’re treating nature right now, we have to take into account that we’re also a part of nature and there’s going to be consequences,” said Rhys Luffman, second-year environmental health major.

“On every aspect of environmental health, it’s just not looking very good, but especially in disease control,” Luffman said. “I just don’t think people understand how much work goes into preventing disease.”

Steelman shared that disease prevention is an environmental concern that should be approached globally, a concern now that the U.S. has pulled out of multiple international organizations.

“Two of my top concerns right now are avian influenza and measles,” Steelman said. “Short term, I feel like there’s going to be more waves of various pandemics or epidemics coming up. Long term, I’m truly just hoping whatever the next administration is that they can revoke some of these policies and get back in the Paris Climate Agreement, the World Health Organization, stuff like that. But if we do continue down the path that we are down, I think American is quickly going to become a second or third world country.”

Economic concerns

Students also shared a concern for local rural economics dependent on ecotourism, a multi-million-dollar industry.

“With the Appalachian trail, you have trail towns that are solely dependent on tourism. Ecotourism is a huge industry that both



Photo by Marie Spencer.

helps local ecosystems and gives people a greater appreciation for their natural environment,” Jones said. “I think that it’s definitely going to affect at least the economic side of rural towns, especially in Southern Appalachia, which is a historically underrepresented area.”

Lou Mitchko, freshman PRM major, shared that national parks’ visitors may be deterred from visiting parks with less park rangers available to manage the land. Mitchko, and other students, foresee less-maintained parks and more closures to public bathrooms, welcome centers and trails.

“The parks get so many visitors each year, they get millions and millions of visitors each year. You are going to see a decline in the upkeep of the parks and what’s available. We’ve already started to see some of it like trash piling up, people not taking care of the resources and not knowing what to do or where to go,” Mitchko said.

Hurricane Helene recovery

Hurricane Helene devastated WNC in September and recovery efforts are still in progress. Beyond the tourism industry and

economic impacts, damage and debris are still a common issue in WNC. Many trails and segments of the Blue Ridge Parkway are still closed.

“We had this huge event in Western North Carolina where a lot of ecosystems were impacted by this hurricane. It’s already taking a lot more work than a normal year. The National Park Service was already understaffed and probably instead of laying off people, they needed to hire more people to deal with this debris, impacts on water quality and ecosystems and soil erosions and all these things,” Jones said.

Hacker explained that willing people are needed to clean up after the hurricane, but the NPS layoffs have made it harder to find these people.

“It takes people to do those things. It takes government contracts. It takes bodies that can do manual labor and fundamentally, the willingness that we have is lower and lower in the American society to do labor like that,” Hacker said. “We are currently reducing the population of people that is willing to do that.”

WCU students explain how to make all-gender bathrooms easier to access on campus

By Max Poku-Kankam

Bathrooms are an essential part of living for anyone on campus, but some people have problems with all-gender bathrooms' accessibility.

The biggest issue for junior Paige LeBlanc is the lack of general knowledge about where the all-gender bathrooms are on campus.

"Their centeredness on campus, their ease of access, and the general knowledge about where they are is not super prevalent," LeBlanc said.

LeBlanc is the president of the Trans Student Union. LeBlanc mainly wants the university to focus on spreading knowledge about the all-gender bathrooms on campus.

"There is no way to go on the school's website and find it on them," LeBlanc said. "There's no

way to search gender-neutral restrooms on the interactive map on the school's website."

The interactive map is found on the Southern Appalachian Digital Collections website. LeBlanc feels like the all-gender bathrooms need to be labeled on the map as they are "an essential element of accessibility for trans and gender diverse students."

According to a statement by Julia Duvall, the school is working on creating a list of all-gender bathrooms on campus. LeBlanc is also working on a list.

"I know some individuals have been working on compiling a list of all the accessible gender-neutral facilities around campus, and right now we do have a rough list that we're working on thanks to those individuals," LeBlanc said.

The general knowledge is not the only problem that LeBlanc has been trying to get WCU to address. LeBlanc also believes that all-gender bathrooms should be more widely available to the public.

"I would say that there could be more on campus, and that there should be more on campus," LeBlanc said.

Currently, all-gender bathrooms are in newer buildings such as the Rocks residence halls and Apodaca, but older buildings like



The unisex bathroom inside of Balsam residence hall. Photo by Max Poku-Kankam.

Reid and the Campus Recreation Center don't have any. LeBlanc has an idea for those buildings that will create more availability.

"I understand it's difficult to implement them into these older buildings," LeBlanc said. "However, the idea of retrograding some of the current bathrooms into gender-neutral facilities should be considered more seriously."

Although there are ways that WCU's campus could help create more availability and access to all-gender bathrooms, they have already taken multiple steps towards helping students.

"The most recent building on campus features gender-neutral facilities in Apodaca, which is a great start," LeBlanc said.



The Reid Building is one of the buildings on campus with no all-gender bathroom. Photo by Max Poku-Kankam.

Tracking The Cats: WCU alumni keep fans up to date with new podcast

By Stewart Butler



Bob Sabin, one-half of Tracking The Cats. Photo courtesy of Bob Sabin.

Whether in-season or out, there's always something happening with Catamount Athletics. Keeping up with WCU sports

can be tricky, that's why two WCU alumni decided to take it in their own hands.

Tracking The Cats is a new podcast that's bringing WCU athletics to students, alumni and sports fanatics alike. Hosted by WCU alumnus Bob Sabin and Steve White, former sports information director for WCU, the podcast covers all things Catamount Sports.

The podcast features exclusive interviews with coaching staff, spells out developing stories and offers some insider knowledge to its viewers. Sabin said he hopes the podcast will bring together WCU students and alumni who have any level of interest in Catamount Athletics.

"It's all things Catamounts," he said. "I want to have people who know Western, who are interested in Western, or who love Western to be able to keep in touch."

Sabin remained a die-hard Catamount far after graduation. As he approached retirement, he had the idea to create a podcast surrounding developments in WCU athletics.

"I knew that there wasn't a lot outside of the Catamount Club and Catamount Sports Forum," Sabin said.

So, he called up his old friend, Steve White, and asked whether he'd be interested in co-hosting the show.

"And he said, 'heck yeah!' So, we started planning about a year ago and did our first

cast in May," Sabin said.

White was WCU Sports Information Director from 1970 to 1998 and was inducted into the WCU Athletics Hall of Fame in 1999. He continued as a color commentator for Catamount Athletics until 2007.

Sabin and White both bleed purple and gold. Sabin and White use their experience to keep things hot with the latest news, announcements and stories coming out of Cullowhee.

"He's got the knowledge and I've got the curiosity," Sabin said. "I want people to know and care about it. We want to get alumni involved and to keep students informed as well."



For the latest in Catamount Athletics, the Tracking the Cats is available on YouTube, Apple Music, Spotify and BuzzSprout.

Celebrating trans joy and community: Trans+ Student Union hosts art showcase for Transgender Day of Visibility

By Sam Scroggins

“We are just as human as you are and we demand equal rights,” said Paige LeBlanc, founder of the Trans+ Student Union and creator of the upcoming Trans Art Now show.

The Trans Art Now art show will be the TSU’s first event and will feature art from people who identify as transgender, nonbinary, two spirit, agender or gender diverse. The art will be displayed at the Blue Ridge Conference Center on Monday, March 31, International Transgender Day of Visibility.

LeBlanc founded the TSU this semester after many negative experiences and harassment her and her friends faced due to their LGBTQ+ identities. After realizing something needed to change, LeBlanc first joined WCU’s Student Government Association before deciding there needed to be a separate body to advocate specifically for the transgender community.

LeBlanc’s experience with harassment went viral when another WCU student filmed video of her in the women’s bathroom on campus with the caption “A man using the girls’ bathroom at Western Carolina University. Unreal” on May 2, 2024. The video circulated quickly when a popular conservative account, Libs of TikTok, reposted it and Fox News picked up the story.

“About 14 million people saw that. I filed a Title IX complaint for that, which ended up

resulting in no punishment,” LeBlanc said.

Ivory Dozier, vice president of the TSU, has helped LeBlanc plan the event. Dozier’s role has included creating a slide show featuring all the works of art, as well as making sure all the submissions meet the criteria.

“It’s just super important to have that community aspect right now, especially with everything that’s kind of spooky and scary,” Dozier said.

To Dozier, the goal of the art show is to show a broad range of trans and gender-

nonconforming experiences. Dozier feels the best way to fight back is by celebrating trans joy and community in a time where that is being taken away.

“I think art is just such a cool way to express yourself in general,” Dozier said. “And again, it’s just a way to be like hey we’re here and we’re not going anywhere.”

Neil Wetmore, WCU student and liaison for Sexuality and Gender Alliance, submitted a collage that explores his Catholicism and trans identity. He hopes to push back against the idea he tends to see expressed that trans



Paige LeBlanc (left) and Kaz Brannon (right) tabling for the Trans+ Student Union at WCU CoreFest. Photo courtesy of Paige LeBlanc.

people are less worthy of being loved by God. Wetmore feels religious rhetoric is currently being used to put down trans people.

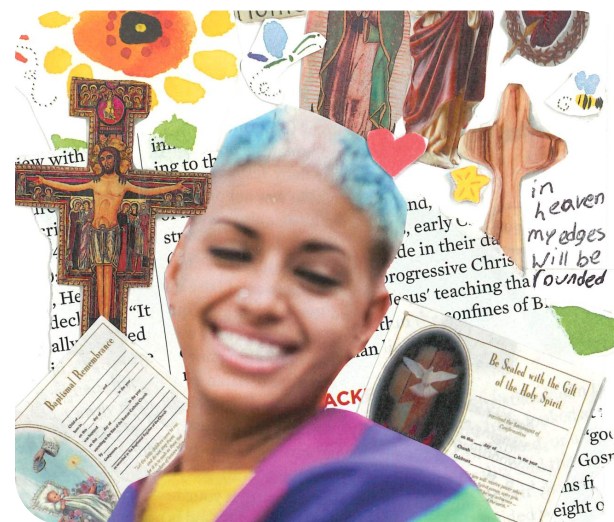
"I suppose what I am trying to get out of this is to be seen as who I am and have my lived experience shown in some way," Wetmore said.

LeBlanc said that the Trump administration has proposed many changes to healthcare, social and educational policies which are inherently targeted at the transgender and nonbinary community.

"I feel that now is the time more than ever for us to proudly use our voices to declare that we are here," LeBlanc said

LeBlanc hopes that the art show will be a reminder that trans people exist and are not going anywhere, as well as a proud celebration of the LGBTQ+ community on campus.

"Whether you're queer, trans, straight, cis, we want you there," LeBlanc said. "You might learn something, or you might appreciate a piece of art. Just come out and join, enjoy some art!"



Paige LeBlanc (left) and Kaz Brannon (right) tabling for the Trans+ Student Union at WCU CoreFest. Photo courtesy of Paige LeBlanc.

Looking back: Canton's annual potato roasting party

By Marie Spencer

The Snug Harbor Potato Roasting Club members gathered for their annual spring potato roasting feast on March 15, 1957.

This photograph captures the enjoyment of Snug Harbor Potato Roasting Club president S.C. Wood and club member Dan Brown as they held potatoes that were ready to be roasted.

The annual feast acted as an unofficial reunion for retired Champion Fiber Company employees, as it was open to any. Over 100 people attended the 1957 feast. The club members were known to be particular about the quality of the Irish potatoes selected for the roasting party, wanting only "grade A potatoes."

Honorary Snug Harbor club member and Sylva author John Parris also attended

this feast to tell local history stories for entertainment.

Snug Harbor was a renovated house that served as a club for retired Champion Fiber Company mill employees in Canton, NC. The club was founded in 1953 by Reuben Robertson, a top executive and board member at Champion Fiber Company. Snug Harbor was a place for these retirees to reminisce about their shared past and build friendships.

Canton's Champion Fiber Company mill closed its doors in 2019. Snug Harbor has also closed, leaving behind a vacant lot.

Source: The Log Vol. 40 No. 5 and Vol. 41 No. 6, accessed from Southern Appalachian Digital Collections

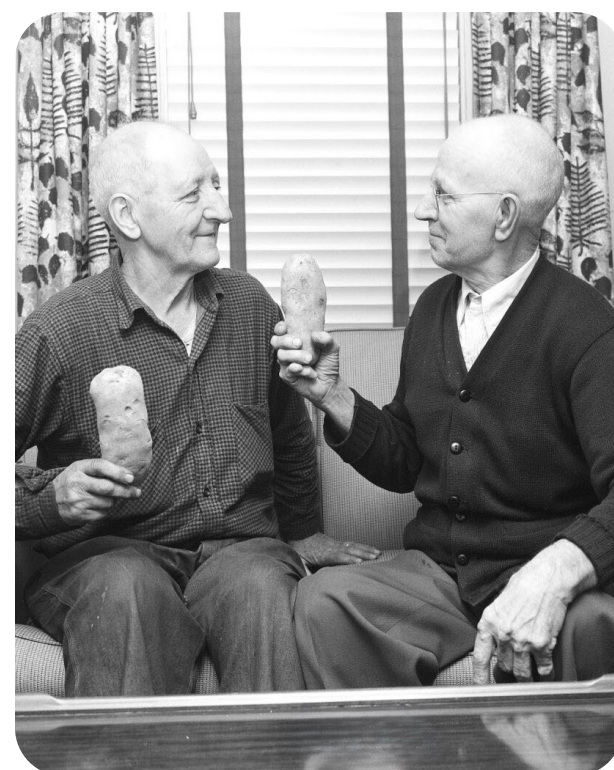


Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Hunter Library.

Strands: Living Green

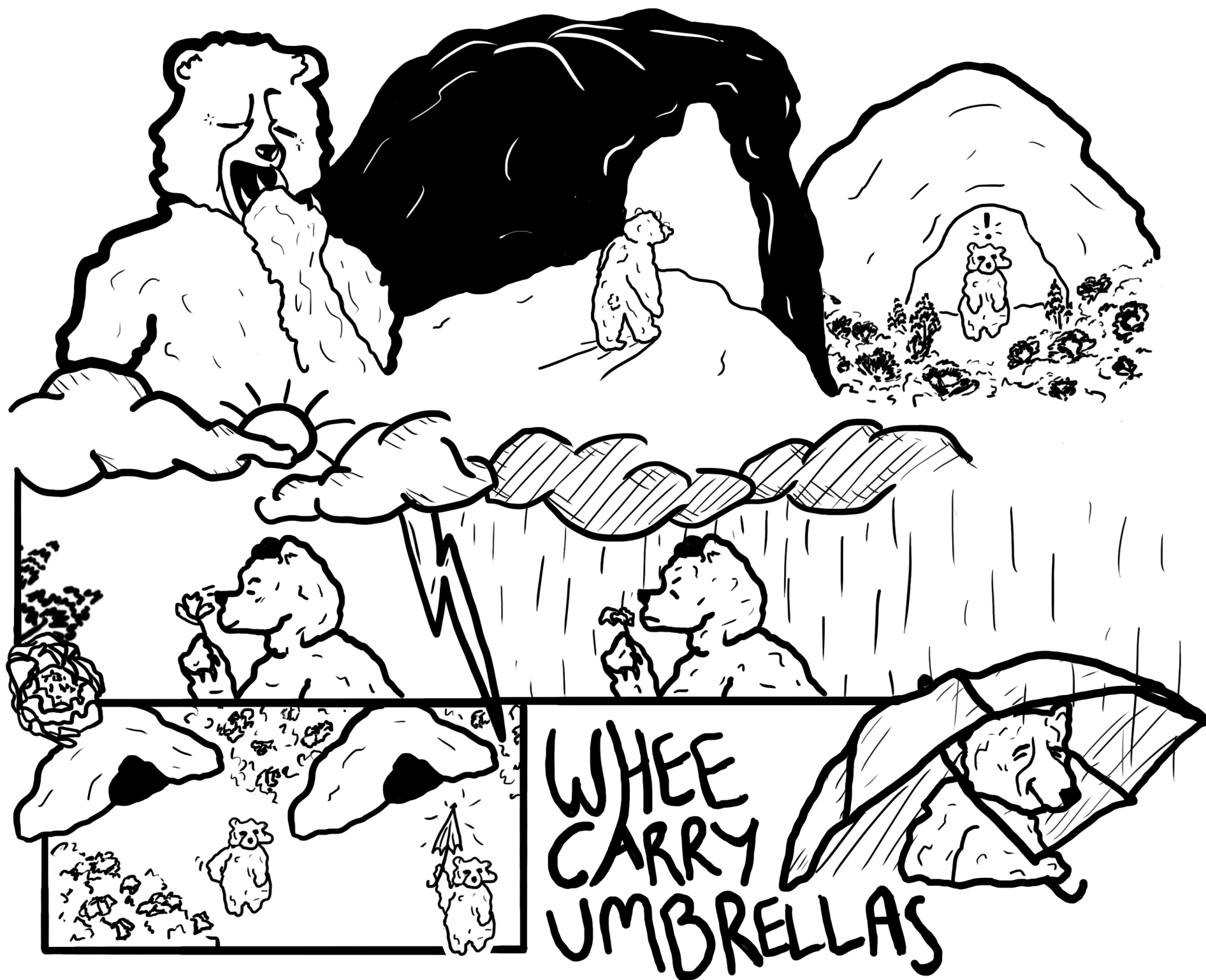
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- Songbird
- Spring
- Sprout
- Sunshine
- Tulip
- Umbrella
- Warmth
- Wildflower



Athlete Spotlight



Sofia Goclawski

What do you like most about soccer?

I love the competitiveness, aggression, and intensity of soccer. It makes the sport super fun and provides an outlet to give 100% percent effort without holding back. Due to this aspect of soccer, it makes it easy to be in the moment and only be focusing on the sport, taking my mind off stressors.

I also love the creativity of the sport. As an attacking player, I am always looking for ways to beat defenders. I watch soccer and learn from my teammates and coaches, as well as from my mistakes. The cohesiveness of a team through movement off the ball also adds another layer to the creativity of the sport.

How did your passion for soccer begin?

I started playing soccer at 5 years old and I loved it. I had tried dance and gymnastics, and soccer was by far my favorite. I began playing soccer since my older sister also played soccer and I used to copy everything she did. I played town soccer for a while, and as I got older, in middle school, I joined a club team. Club soccer raised the intensity of the sport, which made my love for soccer continue to grow. My parents' passion for the sport as I continued to develop as a player and the sacrifices they made also encouraged my passion for soccer.

What is unique about your sport?

First, soccer is a team sport, which makes it more complex. You can't control others, and you don't know how others are thinking or if you're on the same page about plays or ideas, so communication is key. Soccer

is also different because so many different types of fitness are necessary. Running for 90 minutes takes endurance, but you also need to be able to sprint past defenders for a through ball or use agility to fake a defender. Then, especially in college soccer, strength is super important and can give you the upper hand. Tactics and formations in soccer are also different. Eleven players on the field and various options for formations give lots of room for creativity.

What do you hope your team accomplishes this year?

Next season, I hope my team wins the Southern Conference regular season and the tournament. I hope that we go on to win at least 2 or 3 games at the NCAA to make progress on our last appearance at the NCAA. This would be absolutely incredible and bring lots of attention to WCU. I think we accomplish this by continuing to raise the bar and expectations for our performance and continue to challenge our mindsets to not get comfortable and continue pushing ourselves to get better. I hope that as a team we see our potential and challenge any beliefs that we can't achieve these goals.

What is your plan after WCU?

After WCU, I plan to play professionally either overseas or in the US. I am super excited, and this goal motivates me to work harder every day. The opportunity to play professionally would mean everything to me. It still amazes me that I can choose a career that is my passion. I plan on continuing to work hard and build discipline in order to give it my all to become the best player I can be. I hope to bring intensity, work ethic, and creativity to the game. I am looking forward to embracing challenges and making the most of every day.

What is the Rotaract club?

The Rotaract Club is a student-run service organization. We are the college student version of Rotary!

What does the Rotaract aim to do?

Our goal is to provide tangible service opportunities to WCU students that promote community, leadership, and collaboration. Some recent events have included a blood drive and a care kit collection assembly event.

How did you get interested in your club?

I led the re-establishment effort of the club through WCU's Center of Community Engagement and Service Learning. The club was officially re-launched this past August. The original Rotaract club sadly ended after the COVID pandemic. However, with a new start came

new opportunities to work with local and student organizations including Sylva Rotary, Gr828 (Franklin), Chancellor's Ambassadors and the Brinson Honors College, on different projects.

How can someone get involved with your club?

We are active on Engage and our Instagram, @wcu.rotaractclub. We meet bi-weekly and push to do one event a month!

What events can we look forward to in the future?

We are currently in the process of changing leadership for the 25-26 school year. We are currently only working with other local organizations who need volunteers for projects. However, the officers running have great ideas to raise money for community partners, advocacy, and creating events to make an impact on our community!

Club Spotlight



Kenna Albert

Staff Spotlight



Susan Martin

What is your job, and how do you do it?

I work at two different campus jobs. As the Building Manager for Campus Activities, I help with event management and guest services desk support. My responsibilities during school events include dealing with visitors, responding to questions, providing directions, and ensuring everything in the University Center runs smoothly. I also work in the Athletics department as an Academic Support Student Worker, which involves working at the front desk. I get student-athletes' school IDs to check them into the study hall and ensure they continue to complete their curricular responsibilities. My position also involves keeping the study hall atmosphere calm and concentrated and assisting students in remaining productive throughout my shifts.

Why did you choose WCU? What is your favorite part?

WCU's strong academic offerings and active campus life are the main reasons I chose it. The university provides a well-rounded education that helps students grow personally and prepares them for their jobs. I also enjoy the community's diversity, which has broadened my perspective and allowed me to meet people from all backgrounds. My favorite aspect of the school is the encouraging atmosphere at WCU that

How did you get into teaching?

I started teaching when I was in grad school. I honestly didn't think I was going to like it. I thought it was just temporary. Then I realized how much I liked helping students turn their unique ideas and perspectives into visual forms. I think photography is an amazing art form and it makes me happy to see students come to understand and appreciate that.

What are you planning to do after you retire next semester? Any projects?

MAKE. ART. I love teaching but it leaves very little time for doing my own work. Now I get the chance to turn my attention to all the projects that have been put on the back burner. My piece in the faculty show on campus right now is the first in what I hope will be a big series of sculptural forms made of photos.

What is one piece of advice you would give students?

The same piece of advice a mentor gave me: "show up." First and foremost that means you should go to those art openings and gallery talks and artist lectures. That is where you see artwork, you meet other artists,

promotes academic and personal development. The relationships I've formed here have been crucial to my growth as a person and student.

What are your personal interests?

Accounting and the business world interest me, but I enjoy being in nature outside of school, especially with the beautiful Blue Ridge Parkway nearby. I also enjoy making the most of my college experience and spending time with my friends.

What do you plan to do after graduation?

After I graduate, I want to work in accounting, specializing in taxes. My ultimate goal is to own a real estate company that provides tax services. I want to help people and businesses with the tax aspects of buying a property and offer clients all-inclusive services that cover their tax and real estate requirements.

What advice do you have for other students?

I suggest maintaining your focus and using WCU's resources. Connect with your instructors and fellow students, and don't hesitate to ask questions. Whether professional, extracurricular, or academic, taking advantage of all available possibilities is crucial because they can and will impact your future.

you build community. There is a mythical image of the lone artist channeling their muse in the studio when in fact art is really made in community. Find, support, and nourish your art community. "Showing up" can also mean that you go experience things a bit out of your comfort zone. To be a successful artist you have to be curious. Go do all the things that are out there to do.

What inspires you?

Good conversation, Phyllida Barlow's sculptural installations, the flow of a world class downhill mountain biker, the way moss seems to glow in the winter sun, the fact that the 100+ year-old apple tree in our front yard has been feeding generations of deer who return faithfully every summer, anything that makes me stop and think about the world a little differently.

What do you do in your free time?

Make art, hike, garden, make art, go see live music with my partner, share food with people in my art community and talk about whatever they find interesting, make more art.

Student Worker Spotlight



Landon Enzor

Explicit furry zines spread around campus

Marrah Ste. Marie

For years, handmade art pamphlets known as fanzines, or zines, have been used as a way to spread social messages. Often their contents are controversial, but, like most artwork, the purpose is to make the viewer think deeper about the message. The self-described queer, furry zine, Pawboy, has the same goals.

Zines began as a storytelling method as early as the 1940s but grew in popularity as a form of protest and social commentary in the 1970s punk and the 1990s riot grrrl movement. They're usually made by folding one piece of paper to create a four-page booklet.

Pawboy is a zine spreading around

Western Carolina University's campus. The zine depicts queer anthropomorphic characters wearing sexual outfits or engaging in sexual activities with other anthropomorphic characters.

An anthropomorphic character is an animal with human characteristics, the most common example being the characters from Disney's Zootopia. Furrries are a fandom that create their own characters and cosplay as them. The characters they create and embody are known as fursonas

The author of Pawboy chose to be addressed by his pen name, Slush Puppy, to protect his

identity due to the negative backlash the zine has received online.

Slush Puppy began creating and distributing Pawboy around campus at the end of January. He pinned them on bulletin boards, placed them on tables in residence halls and academic buildings and hid them in the library. He also shared previews from each zine on his Instagram, @slus.hpuppy.

"Any time queer art is in the forefront, especially if it involves sex, it can be taboo and something people are uncomfortable speaking about. But that's a reason why I think it's important to put this kind of media out there. Those conversations do need to be had because ultimately when sex is not viewed as taboo and it's rather viewed as something normal, it makes it safer for a lot of people, especially people in the queer community," Slush Puppy said. "There's not a whole lot of information to be had out there, there's not a lot of queer media, especially sexual content, that's not fetish content. That was a big part of this project, giving a voice to that kind of queer sexuality because it does exist. Even if we don't talk about it, it's a part of our lives."

Slush Puppy hoped his zines could be the voice and representation that he felt media lacked. Before his most recent edition, Slush Puppy used his social media to ask followers what questions about sexual safety they had and incorporated it into the zine. He felt that depicting the subject matter plainly was a way to reclaim the sexualization of his identities.



Zine library in the Bardo Arts Center. Photo by Marrah Ste. Marie.

"I'm transgender and in the LGBTQ community. People in my community right now feel powerless. So, one of the first reasons I decided to undertake this project was because it gives me some of my power back," Slush Puppy said. "It reclaims the fact that queer people are going to be sexualized, furies are going to be sexualized whether they are in explicit content or not."

However, a large part of Pawboy's controversy is its sexual images. Many feel the zine is too inappropriate to be in a public space. However, Slush Puppy intentionally designed the cover as a way to give viewers the chance to consent before reading it.

"A big part of it for me was giving people the option to look at it. Going along with my choice to make the content what it is, part of that decision was making sure that even if it's placed in public spaces on campus, it has a cover that is not explicit and let's you know what it is when you look at it," Slush Puppy said. "People's choice is very important to me."

Lizzy, a furry at WCU, feels the cover is not sufficient for the nature of the content. Furies are a targeted group at WCU, therefore Lizzy chose to go by her fursona name to avoid harassment from her peers.

"I don't think we should be distributing pornographic images around campus willy nilly. Even though there's a warning, everyone has a different definition of what porn and 18+ entails," Lizzy said. "One person might say, '18+ the worst it can get is tasteful nudity,' while another person's definition of 18+ might be full-on Pornhub stuff."

Slush Puppy feels his work is art whether it's considered pornographic by its viewers or not.

"There's not a limit to art. People have struggled to put art in a box for centuries and



Covers of Pawboy. Photo by Marrah Ste. Marie.

that's the problem is trying to put art in a box in the first place. I think pornographic art exists and it is pornographic art, but it is still art," Slush Puppy said.

The zine is not associated with Furies at WCU, a registered student organization for WCU students that are a part of the furry fandom. According to Taiga, the president of Furies at WCU who also chose to go by his fursona name for the same reason as Lizzy, the response from the organization has been mixed.

"I did expect less pushback from the furry community at campus," Slush Puppy said. "I have in the past been involved with the furry club, but this magazine is not affiliated with them."

Lizzy's biggest problem with Pawboy is the fear that she or her organization will receive the blame and backlash for the zine. She has not worn her furry costume, or fursuit, since the zines have been released.

"The general public does not know that this person may or may not be in the club. They're just going to unfortunately automatically assume that it's one of us," Lizzy said. "I'm just really worried that somebody will act aggressive verbally or, even, physically against one of us just for going around in fursuit. I haven't touched my fursuit since I saw the zines because what if somebody sees me and tries to yell at me for this."

Slush Puppy said he never intended to cause any harm for his community and hopes people will remember the zine is not associated with the club or other WCU furies.

For many furies on campus, harassment from their peers was a fear long before the zines began. According to Lizzy, she and her friends would often be barked at when they wore their fursuits around campus.

"I've been called a slur before in my fursuit. I don't know the logic behind it but that is a thing that has happened," Lizzy said. "There's

also been name calling mostly just furry weirdo, creep, pedo[phile] is one that people get a lot.”

The use of anthropomorphic characters in the zines has also led to a lot of backlash of the zines. Anonymous social media app, YikYak, has been many people’s outlet to insult furries.

“When you join the fandom and you learn about the stigma around furries, you have to accept that’s part of what being a furry is,” Lizzy said.

Previously pictures have been posted of furries to mock them or call them disgusting and the zine has not stopped that.

One photo, which was since deleted, showed the Pawboy torn to pieces with the caption, “I fixed it.” The comments on the post varied in agreement that the zine was inappropriate and deserved to be ripped while others argued that it was still art someone put time into and that the user could have ignored it if they disagreed with it.

Other posts have been a host for debates in the comment section. The main concern is whether children will read the zines. Some argue there are constantly elementary and middle school children around campus that could easily find the zine and take it. Others argue that posting the zine online would lead to more children seeing it than a few physical copies around campus. Both agree children will not be deterred by an 18+ warning.

Slush Puppy has read the online discourse and agrees that posting the zine online would most likely lead to more children seeing it. He is considering finding a different distribution method to ensure children don’t see it while still protecting his anonymity.

Despite responses from some peers, Slush Puppy believes he is providing a voice for

his community and believes that is more important than responding to discomfort.

“I know that a lot of people are worried about how it will affect the reputation of the furry community on campus and while I do feel like that is a valid concern, I also think it’s important to protect members of our community and prioritize that over the comfort level of people who might oppose the community anyways,” Slush Puppy said. “I feel like because the furry community is viewed as kind of odd and sexual in nature by a lot of people there’s going to be opposition whether there’s sexual content or not.”

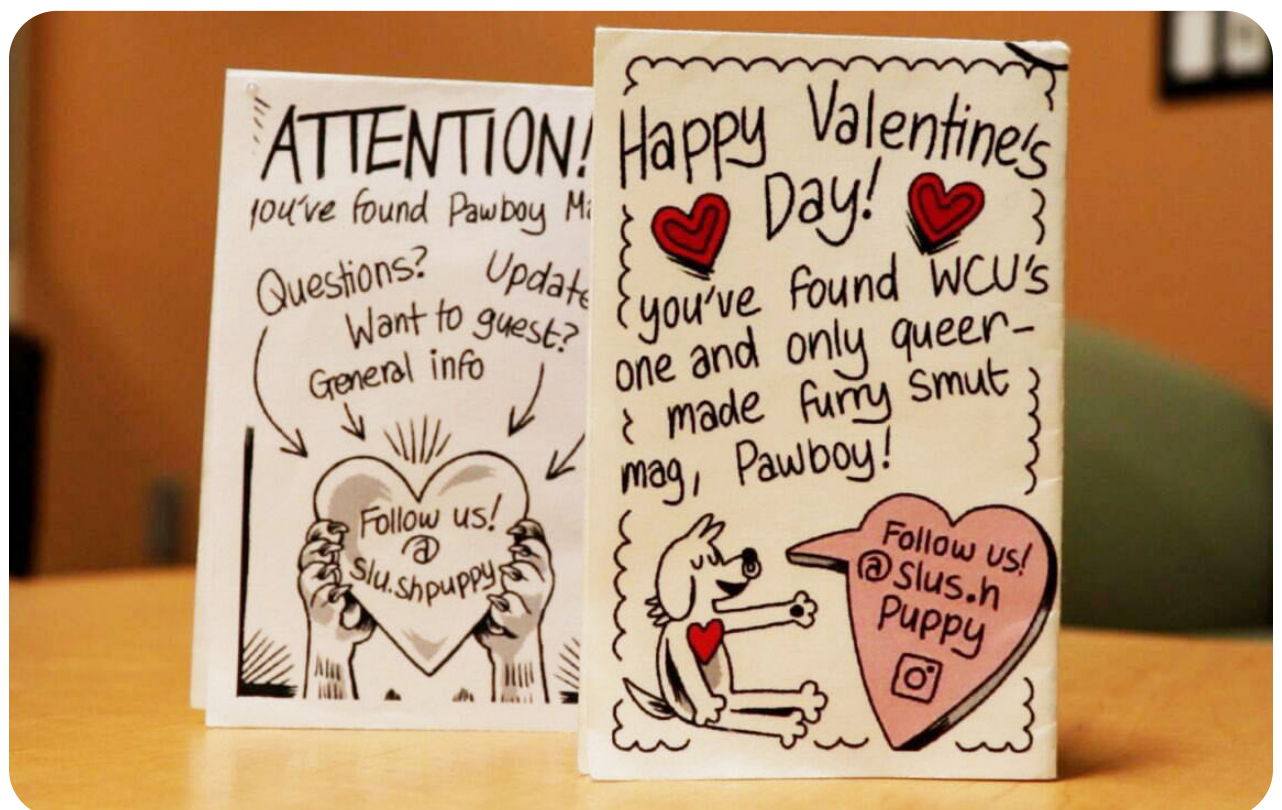
Being a furry is not always a sexual thing to every member. Some members, like Lizzy, simply see being a furry as a way to express their interest in a form of art and character design.

“You have to educate people whenever you can that not all furries are gross and it’s not a fetish for everybody,” Lizzy said. “For me, I

get to dress up as my favorite character. It’s the same thing as cosplay. Some people dress as their favorite anime characters, I get to dress up as my favorite animal character.”

The main goal of Pawboy is for readers to confront their ideas about sex, especially queer sex. Slush Puppy hopes those who feel uncomfortable with the zine will reflect on what about it could be causing discomfort.

“I think that discomfort could be taken as an opportunity to step back and think about why does this make me uncomfortable. Is it just because it portrays sex, does it have to do with the fact that it’s queer sex, does it have to do the fact that it involves characters that are anthropomorphic and how that community is viewed,” Slush Puppy said. “I think it’s important to think about where is that opposition coming from. It’s being encountered in an adult space by adults and so as adults it’s important to think about, ‘why do I respond to adult content the way that I do?’”



Back cover of Pawboy. Photo by Marrah Ste. Marie.

Medieval fighting skills taught in new Black Rock martial arts school

By Max Poku-Kankam



Photo courtesy of Warriors of Ash Instagram.

Some people learn taekwondo, some people learn karate, but the Warriors of Ash help people learn historical European martial arts.

Warriors of Ash is a nonprofit organization that helps teach people about historical European martial arts. According to the Historical European Martial Arts Alliance, or HEMA, historical European martial arts are the “study and practice of historical European fighting techniques.”

“We do medieval and Dark Ages European combat mostly,” said David Henderson, WCU Philosophy and Religion department chair.

Henderson is a part of The Council for the Warriors of Ash and teaches rapier, a style of sword fighting, on Tuesdays for the Warriors of Ash. Before joining, Henderson did martial arts from high school through grad school and didn’t feel fully connected.

“A lot of manuals that are well illustrated with both theory and techniques on how to use swords and axes and spears in armor and out of armor,” Henderson said. “Starting in the 1990s, people started getting these things online and clubs started growing.”

Many manuals were made during these periods, and people can interpret them and learn about how to fight with certain weapons. Some manuals were even recreated more recently.

“The vice president of the club, Mike Arbach – he published a book that’s called ‘The Art of Viking Combat,’ and it’s actually a really impressive little manuscript,” said Watson Harlan, a graduate student studying American History.

People participate in Warriors of Ash for many reasons. Lyndsey Tate, a creative writing major at WCU, goes because she finds it welcoming.

“One of the coolest things about it is even me as a female of shorter stature can start in the club,” Tate said. “I felt welcome, I felt safe, and I felt encouraged to be there.”

Some people join Warriors of Ash for competitive reasons, hoping to fight in tournaments around the country.

“We travel and do tournaments in Johnson City and in Charlotte and other places, and people come to do our tournaments,” Henderson said.

But Warriors of Ash are different than other HEMA schools around the country in how they host tournaments.

“A lot of HEMA schools around the country and tournaments bracket things off by weapons,” Henderson explained. “The Warriors of Ash has a unique role in that we almost always are doing mixed weapons combat.”

Though Tate and others go for different reasons, there is something common about a lot of people who are a part of Warriors of Ash.

“Swords are cool,” Harlan said. “It’s really hard to see a bunch of people swinging swords and wearing armor and not think ‘dang, that’s cool.’”



Photo courtesy of Warriors of Ash Instagram.

Creativity in the aftermath of a tragedy at the Annual Juried Art Exhibition

By Deanna Sipe



Julian Parker's handmade ceramic piece "Aftermath" displayed in a glass case drawing attention to the dramatic events that can change one's mental state. Photo by Deanna Sipe.

Excitement filled the hallway of the Bardo Arts Center, as Carolyn Grosch, curator of collections & exhibitions, stepped on stage to announce the award recipients.

The Annual Juried Art Exhibition provides students, no matter their major, the opportunity to be creative and showcase their work. It's not a small achievement to have your art selected for the exhibition.

"Every year I see non-art majors apply and be selected for the exhibition, which is a

testament to the creative spirit that exists in every discipline across our university community," Grosch said.

This year's juror was Marie Cochran, former WCU School of Art faculty member and curator of the Affrilachian project. Cochran's work centers around community and collaboration.

"My artwork has always been about social issues, groups of people. The history of different racial ethnic groups." Cochran said.

According to Cochran choosing pieces for the exhibition was extremely difficult.

"There was so much diversity in content, subject matter, media, whether it was an installation piece, a photograph or a ceramic mug that didn't have a statement but had beauty all by itself," Cochran said.

Each year jurors pick 26 pieces for the exhibition, Cochran struggled to narrow them down. Cochran chose 31 out of 182 pieces from the 55 artists that participated.

"Another element that came into the selection process is the present moment. There were some pieces that spoke to that, that were undeniable because they were powerful by themselves" Cochran said.

The pieces submitted into this year's exhibition spoke to the present moment of Hurricane Helene, one of those pieces was Valeria Ramos' "Helena".

Ramos' work is a series that connects through hurricanes. Originally from Puerto Rico, an area that experiences hurricanes frequently, Ramos said that Hurricane Helene reminded her of home.

Combining both the experience of living through hurricanes in Puerto Rico and living through Hurricane Helene, Ramos wanted to highlight how everyone felt in the aftermath of Helene.

"I wanted to show that anything's possible,

even in the darkest hour. When you come together, everything is possible.” Ramos said.

A few days prior to the exhibition, Ramos was in a car accident. Because of her injuries in the accident she almost did not attend. However, she chose to come and left with two awards, 2-D media and the Chancellor’s purchase award.

Ramos’ “Helena” will be displayed in the H.F. Robinson Administration Building in the Chancellor’s Suite.

“This piece resonated with me because the way it captured the emotions following Helene. This piece was a thought-provoking reflection of that time across our region,” said WCU Chancellor Keli Brown.

Julian Parker received one of the two awards in 3-D media for his ceramic piece, “Aftermath.”

Aftermath is a four-piece ceramic set in a

glass case that focuses on the psychological warfare individuals face in everyday life.

“I wanted to try my best to represent the display persona that we all do to live in society and how daily life and improper coping mechanisms can deteriorate it,” Parker said.

Of the four pieces in the set, Parker focused on one piece highlighting how traumas can have drastic effects when not coping properly.

“If you don’t learn how to cope with the traumas you’ve had in your past, you will drown and be lost,” said Parker. “The only way to recover is to find yourself and persevere and face those challenges wholeheartedly.”

Sally Drumheller’s piece, “Female Freak,” secured a spot in the exhibition.

Drumheller’s piece depicts a distorted naked woman lying on the floor of a room.



Sally Drumheller stands beside her displayed piece “Female Freak.”

“It goes back to this memory idea. When you have a memory so far back in your brain and trying to figure out whether that was a reality or if it was a dream,” Drumheller said.

“Female Freak” is part of a series called “The Freaks” that depicts human-like characters through a distorted lens.

In her speech, Cochran gave students a quote from Audre Lorde.

“Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you, put you down and suggest it’s personal.

And the world won’t end. And the speaking will get easier and easier.

And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had.

And you will lose some friends and lovers and realize you don’t miss them. And new ones will find you and cherish you.

And you will still flirt and paint your nails, dress up and party, because...at last you’ll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking.”



Marie T. Cochran hands Valeria Ramos her award as they pose for a picture. Photo by Deanna Sipe.

57th Annual Juried Art Exhibition Winners

Congratulations to all those who placed and participated in this year's art exhibition!

BEST IN SHOW

Kylie Chatham
"Duality"

CHANCELLOR'S AWARD 1

Carlen Davis
"So Close But We Don't See Eye to Eye"

CHANCELLOR'S AWARD 2

Jessica Rial
"Caution Wet Floor"

CHANCELLOR'S PURCHASE AWARD

Valeria Ramos
"Helena"

BCFPA DEAN'S AWARD

Daniel Velazquez Perez
"Mother Nature"

MUSEUM DIRECTOR'S AWARD

Zoila Carrasco
"Tell Me Who"

DIANE WITHROW COYLE AWARD IN DRAWING

Carlen Davis
"So Close But We Don't See Eye to Eye"

2-D MEDIA

Valeria Ramos
"Helena"

2-D MEDIA

Lily Tran
"Sticks & Glitter"

3-D MEDIA

Wren Petersen
"Sanctuary"

3-D MEDIA

Julian Parker
"Aftermath"

TIME-BASED MEDIA

James Wood Boone
"I'm outside, please"

DESIGN

Natalie Fletcher
"Community Club"

ART MATERIALS AWARD 1

Nancy Peneff
"Fragile," "Lady Justice" and "Red"

ART MATERIALS AWARD 2

Angel Volpe
"Obey/Disobey Verb Booklet"

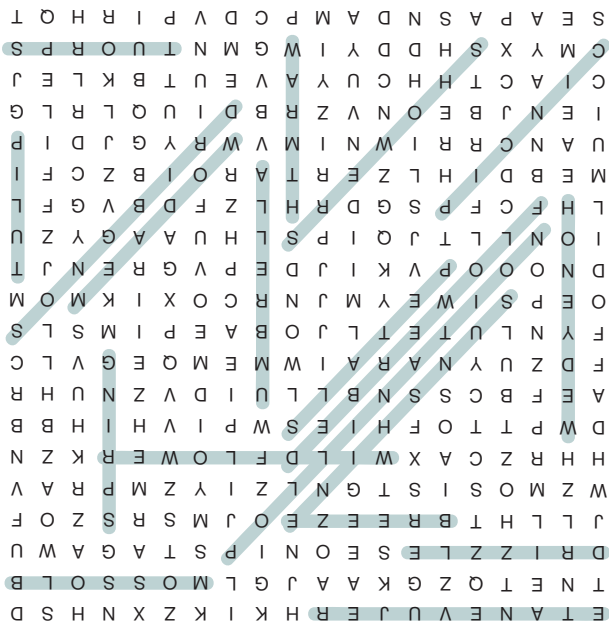
ART MATERIALS AWARD 3

Alexis Bumgardner
"Special Endeavor"

ART MATERIALS AWARD 4

Madison Haggard
"Que Será, Será"

Entertainment Answer Keys



4	1	7	6	3	9	2	8	5
6	5	8	2	1	7	9	3	4
9	3	2	4	8	5	7	1	6
5	6	3	8	4	2	1	7	9
8	4	9	1	7	6	3	5	2
7	2	1	5	9	3	4	6	8
1	9	4	3	6	8	5	2	7
2	7	6	9	5	1	8	4	3
3	8	5	7	2	4	6	9	1

City
Lights
Café

BREAKFAST, LUNCH, ESPRESSO
SYLVA, NC EST. 2011



Arts and Entertainment calendar

Uni-Tea – 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. April 1

WCU students, faculty and staff are invited to drop in to enjoy refreshments, conversation and community. The event is held in the ICA lounge on the first Tuesday of the month.

Artrageous – 4 p.m. April 1

Join the Jackson County Public Library to create a different fun project and learn new art skills every Tuesday. More information at <https://fontanalib.org/events>.

Trivia Night – 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. April 1

Challenge yourself in free trivia every Tuesday at Lazy Hiker Brewing in Sylva. Groups or solo participants welcome.

Hire Attire Fashion Show – 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. April 2

WCU's Center for Career and Professional Development is hosting a fashion show to highlight business casual and business professional clothing. More information at <https://wcu.campuslabs.com/engage/event/10161532>.

Jackson County Farmers Market – 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. April 5

Browse goods from local farmers and artisans every Saturday in Bridge Park. More information at <https://jacksoncountyfarmersmarket.org/>.

Boredom Busters – 10 a.m. April 5

All ages are welcome to stop by the Jackson County Public Library every Saturday for fun activities including art projects and games. More information at <https://fontanalib.org/events/boredom-busters-7>.

Literary Festival – April 7 to 10

Join WCU's English department for a week of guest lectures from poets, authors and publishers. More information and festival schedule at <https://www.wcu.edu/learn/departments-schools-colleges/cas/humanities/english/lit-fest/>.

SpringFest Concert: Yung Gravy – 7 p.m. to 11:45 p.m. April 8

This year's free annual SpringFest Concert at WCU will feature Yung Gravy. More information at <https://wcu.campuslabs.com/engage/event/11148715>.

LEGO Club – 4 to 5 p.m. April 10

Join the Jackson County Public Library at the LEGO Club, a club dedicated to

LEGO enthusiasts. Call 828-586-2016 for more information.

Civil Dialogue: Artificial Intelligence – 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. April 10

WCU students are invited to join the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning for a civil dialogue on Artificial Intelligence. More information at <https://wcu.campuslabs.com/engage/event/10853415>

Sylva Stitchers – 6 p.m. April 10

All are welcome to join fellow stitchers in working on your favorite needlecraft, learn new skills or teach beginners to improve. The event is held every second and fourth Thursday of the month in The Story Time Room at the Jackson County Public Library. More information at <https://fontanalib.org/events/sylva-stitchers-2>.

Sylva Naturalist Club: The Forest Unseen – 6:30 p.m. April 10

Join the Sylva Naturalist Club in reading The Forest Unseen this year. While reading the novel, club members will connect with nature and share personal nature observations. Meetings are every second Tuesday of the month at the Jackson County Public Library. Email aduggins@

bmtrust.org to sign up.

Pippin The Musical – 7:30 to 10 p.m. April 10-13

Watch WCU's School of Stage and Screen perform Pippin the Musical at the Bardo Arts Center Performance Hall. Get tickets at <https://wcuarts.universitytickets.com/w/event.aspx?id=1496>.

Empty Bowl – 4 to 8 p.m. April 11

Sylva's Community Table is hosting their annual Empty Bowl fundraiser with handmade bowls from local artisans. There is a \$30 fee at the door. More information at <https://business.mountainlovers.com/events/details/empty-bowl-fundraiser-community-table-70899?calendarMonth=2025-04-01>.

Tuck River Cleanup – 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 12

Volunteer for the 41st Tuck River Cleanup to help clean 15 miles of the Tuckasegee River. There is no pre-registration, but only the first 500 volunteers will be able to raft due to available gear. More information at <https://www.wcu.edu/experience/campus-recreation/base-camp-cullowhee/tuck-river-cleanup.aspx>.

The Easter Hat Parade – 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 19

Show off your fanciest Easter hats at

this annual parade. The parade will start at 2 p.m. at Dillsboro Town Hall. Before the parade, there will be an egg hunt. More information at <https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/event/the-easter-hat-parade/>.

The "Yosemite of the East": Recreating Responsibly in Panthertown Valley – 3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. April 22

Celebrate Earth Day with a presentation on Panthertown Valley and community partners. Register for the presentation at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfHxU8Sec99Q-gabbZXLmtjw8kvSZrmZTPQlhj6py60ihXm7Q/viewform>.

WCU's 44th Annual International Festival – 12 to 3 p.m. April 23

Celebrate a variety of cultures and countries at WCU's Annual International Festival. Contact global@wcu.edu to get involved with the festival.

Intercultural Dialogue Potluck Meal and Congolese Culture Presentation – 6:30 to 8 p.m. April 24

Listen to Esther Zihahirwa present about Congolese culture and enjoy a potluck dinner. More information at <https://wcu.campuslabs.com/engage/event/11008501>.

The Making of Our Planet with Dan Tapster – 7:30 p.m. April 24

Watch an immersive show based on the documentary series Our Planet Live. Get tickets at <https://wcuarts.universitytickets.com/w/event.aspx?id=1500>.

The Art of Nature Journaling – 1 to 5 p.m. April 25

Join Debby Singleton in learning how to create a nature journal at the WCU Picnic area. All journaling materials are provided with the \$60 registration fee. More information at <https://www.wcu.edu/engage/professional-enrichment/conferences-and-community-classes/the-cullowhee-native-plant-conference/native-plants-101.aspx>.

Greening Up the Mountains Festival – 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 26

The 27th Greening Up the Mountains Festival returns to downtown Sylva. Enjoy arts, food and drink vendors with live music. There is also a 5k run that participants can register for. More information at <https://www.mainstreetsylva.org/greening-up-the-mountains/>.

SAGA Pride – 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 26

Celebrate Pride early with an assortment of vendors, RSO and community members. More information at <https://wcu.campuslabs.com/engage/event/11139922>.

To search for joy in mundane moments

By Cora Haste

A lot of our lives are spent waiting for the next thing, waiting for the weekend, summer break or graduation. We wait for things to end, we wait for things to start. And this makes sense. There are so many moments of our lives spent doing mundane things and everyday acts.

But, if so much of our lives is spent wishing and waiting for the next exciting thing, what are we doing to enrich those moments of waiting?

If you only live for the next best thing or an exciting, upcoming event, then you miss out on the joy to be found in everyday life. To say that every day is a gift sounds cliché, but it is true. Beauty exists in mundane moments. Joy can be found in-between.

If you show up to your job just for the paycheck, you can save money to take a week off for vacation. You can work each day and care nothing at all about the work you are doing or the people you are doing it with. But work occupies more time than vacation each year so why not try to find joy in the job you do every day? It doesn't have to be your passion or your entire personality, but it also doesn't have to be void of joy.

It helps to slow down and think about the bigger picture every once in a while. Ask yourself often, what is the significance of this moment? What is the significance of this place and these people? Do not think of things as a means to an end. There is no destination, this is life, and you are living it.

"If you suddenly and unexpectedly feel joy, don't hesitate. Give in to it. There are plenty of lives and whole towns destroyed or about to be. We are not wise, and not very often kind. And much can never be redeemed. Still, life has some possibility left. Perhaps this is its way of fighting back, that sometimes something happens better than all the riches or power in the world. It could be anything, but very likely you notice it in the instant when love begins. Anyway, that's often the case. Anyway, whatever it is, don't be afraid of its plenty. Joy is not made to be a crumb."

Mary Oliver, "Don't Hesitate"



Photo by Cora Haste.