



The student press of Mercer County Community College since 1968

Students face ongoing issues with disability access

By Mary-Simone Collazo
Co-Managing Editor

Genesis Vargas was taking a bathroom break during her pottery class in the ES building in October. Because she has cerebral palsy and uses an electric wheelchair, she went to use the handicapped stall as usual. However, a problem arose when the ES 112 stall door would not close properly. She had difficulty keeping the door closed on her own while navigating the space needed for her wheelchair with the width of the stall.

"I need my wheelchair on an everyday basis. It allows me to move around. It's my companion, as I like to call it. So whenever I can't move around with my chair, it's like I can't live. It's part of my identity. It's part of who I am," says Vargas, a 4th-year Communications major.

Ashena Gamboa Mora, a third-year Nursing and Public Health major and a mentor for MCCC's disability mentorship program DREAM, heard Vargas in the stall and offered to hold the door for her. Afterward, the



PHOTO | MARY-SIMONE COLLAZO

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MCCC students, Genesis Vargas (center), Keren Tapía, Carlitz Rodney, and Patrick J. McCarthy, spend time connecting in the Student Center, on November 26, 2024.

Student survey reveals divides over Trump's leadership and policies

By Valerie Mulrine
News Editor

In the wake of Donald Trump winning the 2024 Presidential Election, The VOICE surveyed 50 Mercer County Community College Students to gain insight into how they felt about the results. Of the students surveyed, 46% voted for Kamala Harris, 14% voted for Donald Trump, and 2% voted for an alternative candidate. The rest either couldn't vote due to age, immigration status, or other reason or opted not to.

Of the students surveyed who voted for Trump, almost all said that they voted for him because they genuinely liked him and his policies whereas the Harris supporters preferred her policies but were less enthusiastic about her as a

leader.

According to the Associated Press, in 2024 voters as a whole—compared to the 2020 election—showed a 39% increase in economic concerns, a 20% increase in immigration concerns, and an 11% increase in concerns about abortion. Similarly, the collective top concerns of Mercer students were immigration, women's rights, and the economy, each at approximately 30%.

While many people, including the Mercer students who voted for him, said they preferred Trump based on his economic policy priorities, many of the survey respondents were worried they would have a negative impact on the economy.

For example, Anthony Pace, a second-year Education

major, who believes what will impact him the most is Trump's economic and labor policies, says, "The use of tariffs and the deportation of illegal immigrants, I think it's going to make things more expensive."

Pace continues, "I really hope that's not true. Despite the fact that I don't necessarily think Donald Trump should be President, I really hope that he does a good job for this country because I want things to be cheaper and I want my life to get better no matter who's president."

Tariffs are a particularly heated issue.

Dr. Edward Avery-Natale, Associate Professor of Sociology at MCCC, says that tariffs are often misunderstood. He explains that it is true that they can increase profit for

American businesses but only when an alternative American-made product is comparable in price to the items being imported and taxed. Otherwise, they just don't work.

Avery-Natale says, "Tariffs are effectively a tax paid on imported goods that is paid by the company that imports those goods. People who think [Trump] is going to drive down prices, I think just misunderstand what a tariff is, in part because Donald Trump has willfully misrepresented what tariffs are."

In addition to financial concerns, social issues are a focus for Mercer students.

One VOICE survey respondent who is particularly enthusiastic about Donald Trump's victory, wrote, "Excited about the deportation of illegals, trans

care banned, no trans youths, more religious freedom, even for Christians, Israel will get help in succoding [sic] in defeating Palestine! I voted for a REAL president, God bless America!"

Other respondents were less up-beat. For example, in response to the same question, one 19-year-old first-generation student wrote, "I'm just worried about my parents."

Reproductive health and women's issues were another central area of concern for survey respondents.

For instance, Gianna Schember, a second-year Liberal Arts major, says that while she believes the overturn of Roe v. Wade is justified through the view that abortion

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girls bonded over both being in the DREAM program—Gamboa Mora as a mentor and Vargas as a mentee—and their passions for advocating for better accessibility on campus.

“You would think this handicapped bathroom stall would be, you know, handicap-accessible,” Gamboa said.

MCCC’s West Windsor Campus (WCC) opened in 1971, while the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law in 1990. The ADA was the first comprehensive civil rights law in the nation for people with disabilities. The law required that public institutions, including community colleges, must ensure classrooms and other campus facilities are physically accessible.

In the 34 years since the ADA, MCCC has updated some disability access on campus, including during renovations. However, buildings constructed before ADA were not required to be renovated under the law and certain parts of campus still are not fully compliant.

The last major accessibility problem arose in the spring of 2019 when the elevator in the BS building broke down. Alex Gonzalez, a then-Computer Science student with spina bifida who walks with crutches, had to be carried by his mother up and down the stairs to one of his classes on the third floor. Gonzalez presented his case to the Board of Trustees, and the elevator issue was fixed during the summer of 2019.

A former reporter for *The VOICE* and currently a Criminal Justice major, Gonzalez says the next steps are fixing the automatic door openers commonly referred to as handicap buttons.

He says, “For the BS building, there is no automatic door opener. Sometimes when I’m by myself, I would literally have to open both doors [which are] way too heavy. In the process of me opening it, sometimes my crutch falls to the ground, and I would have to pick it up after.”

The *VOICE* checked disability access throughout the West Windsor campus and, as of Tuesday, November 26, 2024, found that 16 automatic door openers on the WWC are not working properly, and 34 doors (including bathrooms) do not have them at all. The HS 2-2 elevator does not open and CM does not currently have a working elevator, although one is being built that connects with the quad. It is still under construction.

Vargas says she would like to go down into the grassy area in the quad but noted, “There’s a drop at the bottom and it’s not safe for wheelchair access. It’s unfortunate that there is a mud hole in the grass that needs to be fixed.”

The college has made some efforts to address a variety



PHOTO | MARY-SIMONE COLLAZO

Genesis Vargas (center), Patrick J. McCarthy, Carlitz Rodney, and Keren Tapia walking down the Student Life & Leadership hallway of the MCCC Student Center, on November 26, 2024

of access issues, however.

Josh Johnson, Head of Maintenance and Facilities says, “We’re trying to make sure that any entrances that would be used by students with accessibility issues have door-openers on them, wave-to-open switches, or are the proper width so that they can get their wheelchairs or anything that they use for access into those spaces. We’re also looking at our indoor spaces, including bathrooms...to see what we can do to make those spaces more accessible, including making the stalls larger...we have some building constraints because of the way these buildings were constructed; they were built before any ADA laws existed.”

Students with disabilities are not the only ones on campus advocating for better accessibility resources. Johnson says that Mercer’s Student Government Association (SGA) and the Center for Accessibility Resources (CAR) appeal to him and Dr. Deborah Preston, President of MCCC, when they notice what needs to be fixed.

Patrick J. McCarthy, a Senator of the SGA, says the organization “has been trying to advocate for increased funding to replace the handicapped buttons all across campus, with mixed results.”

The SGA has used its Instagram to make multiple posts reassuring students that they are advocating for strong disability access on both campuses.

In one post they wrote: “We advocated for urgent elevator repairs at the James Kerney

Campus when they were out of service, ensuring accessibility and convenience for all students.”

In an interview with Dr. Preston she encouraged students to continue speaking up about accessibility needs on campus saying, “A lot of people at this college care about disability access, I think there have been projects for access on lists since way before I got here...It’s okay to point out if they see a problem. People should know it’s okay to reach out to someone and report that something needs to be more accessible.”

Alessia Morgan, a third-year Liberal Arts student who asked to use a pseudonym so she could openly discuss her experiences, lives with several chronic illnesses that affect her mobility and fatigue levels. She rotates between using crutches, a walker, and a manual wheelchair for mobility aid. She believes accommodations should go beyond the physical campus, specifically with testing.

Honorlock is an online partial-AI proctoring service conducted via Blackboard that several Mercer classes require. It is designed to monitor students during exams to make sure they do not cheat. When taking an exam with Honorlock, a student cannot move out of the way of the camera or talk too much, or else they will get flagged for review.

Morgan says, “I can’t use Honorlock. If you move or anything like that, you can get marked off. I have to use the bathroom a bunch of times... if I need something like water or

an ice pack, if I feel I’m going to pass out, I need that. I can’t say anything to my partner to help get me anything.”

She also brings up how the Testing Center at MCCC, a space where students with CAR accommodations can receive extra time on tests in a quiet space, has its faults saying, “The Testing Center making you lock up all of your stuff (besides a pencil and a calculator, in a locker before you take a test) is totally unaccommodating. I can’t have my water, I can’t have my medications. I’m so sorry, I can’t have a fidget toy. What, am I gonna cheat with a freaking rubber band?”

Accommodations for tests and other academic support are done through MCCC’s Center for Accessibility Resources (CAR), formerly CITA (Center for Inclusion, Transition, and Accessibility).

One of the coordinators of CAR, Susan Onaitis, told *The VOICE* via email that: “All student needs are regarded as significant. Students who request academic accommodations participate in a comprehensive intake appointment. At the appointment, students are encouraged to share their unique learning needs.”

Gamboa Mora said, “[Students with disabilities are] a part of the Mercer community...I hope someday there can just be more inclusivity for those with accessibility needs.”

Vargas agrees, saying, “If you want to advocate for the disabled community, you need to get into our world.”

DISABILITY ACCESS BUTTONS EVALUATION

(automatic door openers) on WWC as of November 26, 2024.

BUTTONS DON’T WORK

- Men’s bathroom HS 147
- ES 5-7 entrance
- LA 1-2 and behind
- LA 1-5
- LA 122
- HS 122 (doors across)
- HS 2-1 (and behind)
- CM 160 exit (by)
- CM 158 exit (by)
- CM 157 (double doors)
- Welcome Center 6-1 (right side doors) (have to stretch arm over air vent to access it)
- Welcome Center 6-2 (left side door is slow/only opens halfway)
- BS 124
- UC 18-5 (second set opens slowly/halfway)
- PE 8-2

NO BUTTONS EXIST

- ES 5-2 Entrance (across from Conference Center) (and behind)
- ES 4-3 (and behind)
- ES 5-1
- LA 200 bathroom
- LA 209 bathroom
- LA 223 bathroom
- LA 1-4
- LA 152 bathroom
- LA 1-6
- LA 1-1
- HS 147 Men AND Women’s bathrooms
- HS 101 Men AND Women’s bathrooms
- HS 2-1 Men AND Women’s bathrooms upstairs
- HS 223 Men’s bathroom
- CM 165 Men AND Women’s bathrooms
- CM 140-156 Music Department doors
- CM 138 Blackbox Theatre hallway doors
- CM 136 Women’s and Men’s bathrooms
- CM Black Box Theatre (inside or outside)
- SC 6-12
- ET 4-4
- ET 102 Men’s bathroom
- BS 214 Women’s bathrooms
- BS 127 Faculty’s women’s bathroom
- BS 100 Faculty’s men bathroom
- AD 132 Women’s bathrooms
- PE 8-1 (right side door is also always locked)
- PE 108 Men’s bathrooms
- PE 109 Women’s bathroom
- PE 101 Men’s bathrooms
- PE 102 Women’s bathroom
- PE Basketball gym doors
- Kelsey Theatre TH 110 Women’s and TH 111 Men’s bathrooms (no door at all, but the entrance is narrow — unsuitable for some wheelchairs)

PARA LA TRADUCCIÓN COMPLETA DEL ARTÍCULO AL ESPAÑOL, VAYA A LA PÁGINA 17

Trump beats Harris in decisive win, gets to work on campaign promises

By Ryan Johnson
Arts & Entertainment Editor

Donald J. Trump was elected 47th President of the United States of America on November 5, 2024. The former business tycoon and reality TV star beat out Democratic nominee and current Vice President Kamala Harris, 312-226 in electoral votes.

As the election night went on, swing states' news outlets identified winners and swing states like Pennsylvania, Georgia, North Carolina, Michigan, Wisconsin, all went red. Likewise, Nevada and Arizona cast their electoral votes for Trump.

In each of these states, the margin was narrow both in percentages and raw votes. However, he decisively won both the Electoral College and the popular vote.

In the run-up to inauguration day, Trump has named multiple picks for various cabinet seats and with a Republican majority in the Senate (and Congress) these are likely to be confirmed.

Among Trump's top picks are: Pete Hegseth for Defence Secretary, a military veteran and Fox News host, who has never held political office; Robert F. Kennedy Jr. for Department of Health and Human Service Secretary, though some have expressed concern since he has previously denied the effectiveness of vaccines and falsely stated there is a link between vaccines and autism; and Linda McMahon co-founder of the World Wrestling Entertainment, for Secretary of Education.

Trump's top campaign promises included: ending the war in Ukraine before Inauguration Day, applying tariffs to goods from China, carrying out mass deportations, cutting federal funding for education, rolling back EV incentives, "replacing" Obamacare, and ending taxes on tips.

Moo brings emotional support to stressed students

By Mary-Simone Collazo & Demetrius Davis
Co-Managing Editor and Reporter

A steer greeted MCCC students on the Quad as part of a Student Activities effort to provide stress relief on Monday, September 30. The Jersey steer, a neutered 7-year-old male named Moo, was with the students from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on September 30.

Mary Campbell, Moo's handler, answered questions about Moo while a crowd gathered around for pictures, pets, and cuddles. Campbell, the owner of Knowhere Farm, takes Moo around for cuddling sessions to support mental wellness, similar to how people see therapy dogs.

Campbell says "Life is just stressful and it keeps getting more so, and our space at Knowhere Farm is a non-judgmental place...We don't discuss the news, we discuss dreams, we discuss aspirations, we discuss peace and quiet, [and] family. So that's where visitors can come and escape from the stresses of everyday life."

Knowhere Farm, a 6-acre family-owned farm in Chesterfield, is home to Moo's mother, a retired dairy cow named Munchie. Events are hosted on the farm, as advertised by their website—the most popular being the cuddling sessions with Moo.

Moo, who is gentle and calm in the presence of people, has been invited to travel to different colleges in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, and more. His next stop will be at Chatham University in October.

However, it is not just the mental health of students that is important to Campbell.



PHOTO | AVOCADO PITT

ABOVE: Sharley Charon, a 2nd-year Biology major at MCCC, gently pets Moo the steer. BELOW: Moo sports his Mercer Vikings ballcap.

The safety of Moo is paramount to her business.

Campbell says "[Moo] has a camera in [the trailer] so that when we're traveling I can see him the entire time, what he's doing and how he's handling traveling...He also has a temperature monitor in his trailer so that we can make sure it's not getting too hot or cold for him...We're in the process of putting in air conditioners in the trailer for the warmer days."

Word quickly spread about a farm animal on campus, drawing students to the Quad as they spotted it from windows, received texts from friends, or saw it on social media—all gathering for their moment with Moo.

Keanu Lamar, a Culinary major, says he found out about Moo through his friends. Lamar said,

"Someone posted on their [Instagram] Story! And I called, and I was like, where is [Moo]? And I found out he was here. That's so awesome. I love animals!"

Mathew Prower, a Mercer student who was excited to see Moo and learn from Campbell, said, "This is the best thing you've ever seen."

Word spread off campus as well. Christina Bellino, a Graphic Design major at Mercer, said "We jumped over the stairs [to get to Moo]! I woke up everyone in my family. I'm like 'Guys, there's a cow at school!'"

The event, arranged by Danielle Garruba, director of Student Life and Leadership, allowed Mercer students to just exist, laugh, and enjoy the presence of Moo.

Bellino said: "I was feeling all down today, but then



PHOTO | MARY-SIMONE COLLAZO

I came and saw Moo, and suddenly the clouds cleared and the sun was shining again!"

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[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on Sept. 30, 2024.]

POLITICAL SURVEY

Continued from page 1

is killing a life, she also believes, "[Republicans] want to make sure women are forced to have children and that's a scary belief in and of itself because we're boiled down to just our perceived reproductive capacity, and it opens up the door for this widening of rape culture."

She continues, "Arguably the most powerful person in the country is a rapist and that's the part that really, deeply concerns me."

The day after the election, Rebecca Biebel, Assistant Professor of Political Science at MCCC, explained she wanted to prepare students for the possibilities going forward and showed them highlights of Project 2025. The document is a blueprint for a conservative reformation of the US government and policies, that was released by



FILE PHOTO

the conservative think tank, The Heritage Foundation in April of 2024. It contains a variety of right-wing agenda items including consolidating executive power. She asked her students to identify something they wanted to pay attention to. Biebel says, "I feel like if we're not paying attention, if we're not staying aware, that's how things get through the cracks. That's how bad things happen."

Of the students

surveyed 58% said they felt the outcome of the election was negative, 26% positive, and 16% were undecided.

If things do go badly in the next four years it seems most Mercer students will not be surprised. While 16% are optimistic and 10% believe nothing drastic will happen, 74% are fearful or concerned about America's future.

More Survey Data: Survey of 50 MCCC students after presidential election.

14% Students unable to vote
(Typical reasons for not being able to vote include immigration status, age, or incarceration)

Best thing about being American

1. Freedom
2. Opportunities
3. Diversity
4. Free Speech
5. Safety

One word to describe election reaction

1. Shocked/surprised
2. Disappointed
3. Foreseen
4. Excited

Rainbow Alliance and SGA host colorful pride parade

MCCC students raise awareness, celebrate National Coming Out Day

By Ashena Gamboa Mora
Community Reporter

The Rainbow Alliance, MCCC's LGBTQ+ club, in partnership with the Student Government Association (SGA) held a pride walk on the West Windsor campus early afternoon on October 10 to honor National Coming Out Day by parading throughout campus and the cafeteria with rainbow flags, colorful clothing and banners.

Coming Out Day was co-founded by Jean O'Leary and Dr. Robert Eichberg and first celebrated on October 11, 1988. This LGBTQ+ annual observation is a well-recognized day to celebrate the courage to come out, raise awareness and provide support to community members.

Almost 20 students of diverse ethnicities, ages, genders and sexual orientations met at MCCC's West parking lot making their way to the quad. Four students, including SGA's President Mirian Lopez, held a long pastel rainbow ombre banner that included the club's logo and the words "Love is Love."

President of the Rainbow Alliance, Icys Bracewell, who is transgender, developed the idea to honor Coming Out Day and sought support from SGA.

Bracewell said at the event, "I think the old Rainbow Alliance president was scared to do a lot of things, but me being here for a long time, I was like, we need to be out, and show people who we are."

This was the first time the club has done a walk on cam-



PHOTOS | ASHENA GAMBOA MORA

ABOVE: Students from MCCC's Rainbow Alliance celebrated National Coming Out Day with a pride parade across the West Windsor campus and through the Student center on October 10, 2024. LEFT: Jassy Queen leads the way.

Some students cheered on or waved at the group, while others neutrally observed and a few appeared unsettled but declined to share their thoughts.

A traditional part of Coming Out Day is acknowledging the hardships that the LGBTQ+ community faces by being their authentic selves.

Bracewell said, "As long as [the other students] respect us, and we respect them, we don't have any problems here. We're here, and we're queer."

Among those in the Student Center was Aloud Gamby, a second-year Computer Science major who said of the event, "It's good. It's normal. I wasn't really scared or anything. Just another day at Mercer basically."

Another student present, Valkyrie Eger, a queer second-year Liberal Arts major said, "I didn't know there was some sort of event going on because I know pride month is June, but I

thought it was nice, I thought it was cute."

Rey Lopez, another transgender second-year Liberal Arts major and friend of Eger's said, "It was kinda silly how they just bursted in and [Eger and I] didn't know what was happening, so we were like yes, let's go!"

Participants' outfits included all manner of flashy, queer-inspired apparel including a rainbow glitter cowboy hat, a black spiked cropped leather jacket with red heart patterns, and a long purple sequined dress.

Many of the parade participants held mini rainbow flags. One student waved a pansexual flag and four students held protest signs such as one that read "TENNESSEE GODDAMN," "Hate is the Issue, and Love is the Power." The Tennessee sign referred to both Nina Simone's song "Mississippi Goddam"—widely considered to be her first civil rights song—and the unfavorable conditions for LGBTQ+ people in

the state which are explained in the Out Leadership Business Climate Index for 2024.

As the Rainbow Alliance students walked through campus they played music including, "I'm Coming Out" by Diana Ross and some students shouted phrases such as "Free the gays!" and "Let's go, lesbians!"

SGA's President Lopez said, "We thought it was a wonderful idea just to support our fellow club. We saw the opportunity to celebrate our diversity and contribute to the exclusivity of the campus."

Rainbow Alliance meets biweekly every Wednesday from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. in SC 116 on the West Windsor Campus. Their Instagram is @mcccrainbow.

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on Oct. 23, 2024. It was also produced as part of MCCC's J Lab program.]



Texting and driving a serious problem for MCCC students

By Bella Timbie
Reporter

Texting and driving have been a rising issue for a long time, and as technology continues to advance, the number of distractions available to drivers has only increased. On the Mercer Campus, many students struggle to stay focused on the road.

This is due to the temptation of their devices. Despite the known dangers, this behavior is still common among young drivers, particularly those who feel a constant need to stay connected.

In a survey of 38 students at Mercer, 84 percent say they text and drive at some point, with 17 percent saying they do it almost all the time.

Twenty-five percent say they only text at red lights.

Sergeant Kevin Lorettucci from the Windsor police department says, "Everyone goes to the red light and looks down at their phone for whatever reason,

even though they looked at it 20 seconds earlier."

Chief Robert Garofalo adds, "The next thing you know, someone's beeping the horn behind you because you're sitting at a green light and not paying attention. You've lost track of time and what you're doing."

As mentioned, many students attempt to justify their behavior by limiting their phone use to moments when they have stopped at a light. However, even this can lead to mistakes.

MCCC's Assistant to Dean of Math, Science and Health Professions Nicole Killian says, "Anything that's distracting you from the road in that millisecond that you're looking away, a kid can run out in front of your car with a ball or the driver in front of you can slam on their brakes and you don't see this."

Of the surveyed students who said they text and drive 66 percent said they do it for personal connection, feeling the need to respond to friends or family members right away. Thirty-seven percent of students



COLLEGE VOICE | FILE PHOTO

who say they text while driving because it feels urgent, have the feeling of pressure to constantly be available for those reach them over text

An anonymous student says, "I know it's dangerous, but I often feel like I have to respond right away. If I don't, I feel like they'll wonder why I'm taking so long to reply."

Other reasons students give for texting and driving include distracting from boredom,

or for work or school purposes.

Even with hands-free options, Chief Garofalo says, "It is extremely helpful to not be holding a cell phone in your hand and put it up to your ear, but the fact that you're sitting out there and you're having a conversation, you can see when people talk, they just forget what they're doing."

Using devices while driving comes with more consequences, on top of accidents, there are penalties involved.

Sergeant Lorettucci says "For the first offense, the fine ranges from \$200 to \$400. A second offense can range from \$400 to \$600, and by the third offense, it's \$600 to \$800, plus three motor vehicle penalty points."

Despite the dangers and the penalties, the habit still continues. The New Jersey Office of Attorney General article says "In 2022, 49 percent of drivers involved in crashes in New Jersey were engaged in a distracted behavior, resulting in 180 fatalities and over 1,500 serious injuries. In 2023, the distracted driving mobilization yielded 7,130 citations for cell phone use or texting and almost 4,001 for careless driving."

There are efforts in place to raise awareness, such as the "You Text, You Pay" campaign run by the Division of Highway Traffic Safety and awarded over 1.2 million grants to 157 law enforcement agencies. The fundings are used to hire more officers during the time of the campaign to enforce the law on distracted driving and reduce these dangerous behaviors.

What it takes to get from MCCC to Princeton University

Honors student Amelia Melendez went from a warehouse to Mercer to the Ivy League

By Demetrius Davis
Reporter

It took six years before Amelia Melendez and her family got their immigration paperwork approved so they could move from the Dominican Republic to the U.S. Despite all the challenges, however, she was excited about the move.

"My passion is to study, and I thought I would be able to enroll in a school as soon as possible," Melendez says, adding, "The only school I had access to [back in Copeyito de Nagua] didn't have a lot of resources. I never knew about a microscope or anything like that."

But things didn't go to plan. Two days after they arrived, then 21-year-old Melendez had to go to work. She started at a perfume warehouse, then at H&M, working for two years to help stabilize the finances of her household.

So how did she get from a warehouse to Princeton University? She started at Mercer.

Melendez says, "I remember this day on my way to my job, and I was on public transportation and I saw this guy with a book. My sister was like 'I'm pretty sure he goes to college' and we went up and asked. [It turned out he] was going to Mercer."

Melendez began using her hour commute to and from work to improve her English. She says, "On my way to my job I was watching YouTube videos of people teaching English."

But despite her personal efforts, when she arrived at MCCC wanting to start her studies, she was told she had to start by taking a sequence of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

Her first class was with Professor Michael Beihl. Now retired after more than 35 years, he was the college's ESL program coordinator at the time.

Prof. Beihl says, "Amelia was quick to link up with people in the class. She was a person willing to be with others and she didn't show off her abilities."

After spending several semesters learning English, Melendez



PHOTO | DEMETRIUS DAVIS

Amelia Melendez graduated from MCCC in May 2024 and transferred to Princeton University where she is continuing to study Physics and interning at the Plasma Physics laboratory.

dez got a job in the college's work-study program.

She says, "I didn't really know what it was but it sounded like what I wanted to do, so I checked 'yes.'"

She ended up working in the Testing Center under Whitney Braxton-Werts, a Testing Specialist, who Melendez says served as not only a mentor and supervisor but became her friend.

Braxton-Werts says, "Amelia understood her job well and she was always able to ask for help. She was always supportive and kind."

Melendez's next steps on her path to Princeton were more typical for an Ivy League student. She earned her way into the college's Honors program and found an area of interest she was passionate about with professors who could mentor and inspire her.

The major was Physics. Dr. Jing Huang, Professor and Co-

ordinator of the Physics program at Mercer guided her in her next steps.

She says, "As Physics students you need to ask. Ask for clarification. Ask for help. Ask for someone to help you. And I think [Amelia] is exceptional in doing that."

Melendez used her increasing skills and capabilities to tackle new challenges.

The first was the Transfer Scholars Initiative (TSI), a summer program for "a small and talented cohort of students considering transfer to selective four-year colleges," according to their webpage. Students take two for-credit courses at Princeton University over the summer. The program is free, the students receive a stipend for expenses, and they have access to faculty and campus resources just like other undergraduates.

Theresa Melendez (no relation), Mercer's Honors Coor-

dinator, was Melendez's mentor through not only classes but also understanding the programs Melendez was taking on.

She says, "Amelia was always pursuing the next level, especially when she did the TSI program at Princeton."

According to Melendez, the TSI Program was like a flashback to her beginnings as a student.

She says, "I remember that the whole month. I think it was June. I spent every day studying how to write an essay and type on the computer. I saw people typing really fast and I saw it as a superpower. I wanted that superpower."

Melendez worked to get both the superpower and an A in the class.

Reflecting back, she says, "[TSI] showed me what Princeton was looking for, and they wanted leaders. I realized I hadn't done any of that."

Aiming to develop herself more as a leader, Melendez

took on more challenges back at MCCC. She added more courses to her schedule, became a physics and math tutor, and participated in NASA - National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Community College Aerospace Scholars program.

Next, she got into a second Princeton program. In the spring of 2024 she was selected for the Princeton Teaching Transfer Initiative (TTI) where students take a Princeton-accredited class at MCCC taught by visiting faculty.

When Melendez walked into the TTI classroom she says she made an instant connection with Dalia Cancel-Batista, a second-year engineering student at Mercer.

Cancel-Batista says, "From the moment we met I saw her as a big sister to me."

She adds, "It was nice to see her, we both related on being the older sibling and she was a woman in the class, and she was from my country."

When it came time to write her application essays for Princeton, Melendez says, "It seemed impossible." But Cancel-Batista was one of the friends there to help her overcome the intimidation and in the end, Melendez's efforts paid off.

When she received the acceptance letter from Princeton, Melendez says, "I couldn't believe it was real. I kept looking at the screen thinking it was fake. But I was so happy."

At MCCC's 2024 graduation, Melendez was invited to be the student speaker. She received numerous honors for her work and associate degrees in physics, math, and engineering.

Melendez's world of saying "yes" and consistent work has ultimately brought her to Princeton as a full-time student where she is already embracing new challenges working as an intern in the Plasma Physics laboratory.

Melendez not only showed herself, but showed her friends and classmates, that what seems impossible can be possible.

Cancel-Batista says, "It gave me hope. If she can do it, I can do it."

Faculty union agrees to new contract after tense negotiations

By Avacado Pitt & Ryan Johnson
Reporter and Arts & Entertainment Editor

After months of contentious negotiations, MCCC's administration negotiators and representatives of the college's full-time faculty union finalized the terms of a new five-year contract, resulting in a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in a sit-down meeting on November 19, 2024.

Full-time faculty had been working without a contract since July 1.

At the beginning of the fall semester, MCCC's President Dr. Deborah Preston said the negotiations hadn't been on the timeline she had hoped for. She said, "We started negotiations a little bit later in the academic year than I wish we had."

First-year Art History major, Vincent Montoya, remarked, "I think that's great for [faculty] to come here even without a contract. That's dedication."

According to Dr. Mat-

thew Kochis, English Professor and lead negotiator for the Association, "Over 91% of the union voted on the MOU. Of those who voted, 100% voted in favor of the new contract."

The MOU guarantees immediate retroactive raises, additional raises spread over the 5-year contract, longevity bonuses, and the option for faculty to either receive compensation for teaching extra "overload" classes or save those credits to reduce their teaching load in a future term.

From the student perspective, many were concerned if an increase in faculty salary could affect student tuition.

Kyle Anderson, Professor of Mathematics and a member of the faculty union negotiation team was asked by The VOICE about this potential increase.

He said, "I believe what we put forth in our very first initial proposal was an increase for faculty that the college could currently afford without having to increase student tuition. I believe we came into

that initial phase feeling like 'all right, the college has the money. It's not going to cause student tuition to go up, so why not?'"

However, yearly enrollment, state funding from the school, and future investments by the college can all cause tuition to increase, regardless of a raise for the professors.

According to Kochis, "Tuition has risen every single year since I've been here, so it's always gone up."

Erica M. Oliver, Interim Vice President for Advancement and Executive Director for Marketing and Communications, who was authorized to speak on behalf of the administration said, "I think it's exciting that they all came to an agreement amicably and that we'll be able to move forward."

When asked how she feels about the new contract, Dr. Charlene Sharkey, Math Professor and Treasurer of the Union's Executive Board, replied, "I feel like we are being valued. I feel valued because of this contract, and I know our ne-



PHOTO | RYAN JOHNSON

At beginning of fall 2024 semester activities, MCCC's faculty union members wearing red shirts to symbolize solidarity during the prolonged contract fight.

gotiators worked really, really hard to get an excellent contract for us. So I feel valued."

Now that the faculty has ratified the MOU, it must be ap-

proved by the MCCC Board of Trustees at an emergency meeting on December 18 before it can take effect.

Black women's church hat tradition given the spotlight at Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum



PHOTO | BARBARA MACGUGAN



PHOTO | BARBARA MACGUGAN

LEFT: On Saturday, October 12, Leslie Bramlett, professional historical interpreter, modeled her take on the church-going fashion of Corinda True: the matriarch who held Skillman's annual Camp Meetings over a century ago. ABOVE: Museum visitor takes in the exhibit materials for "The Head that Wears the Crown." BELOW: Information about the history of church hats was on display to provide context.

By Barbara Macguigan
Community Reporter

The Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum's (SSAAM) exhibit showcasing the story of African American women's headwear kicked off its fall programming on Friday, September 20.

Celebrating the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the Mount Zion AME church, the program, followed by a reception for the attendees, featured "The Head that Wears the Crown," part of a series made possible through the "Preserving Black Churches" grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Dr. Rosetta D. Treece, superintendent of the Hopewell Valley Regional School District and volunteer model for the exhibit, said she was excited to see all of the portraits on opening night, an event to which all the models were invited.

Dr. Treece says, "I [wanted] to see all the diversity in the ages and how they brought themselves to the hat they were wearing. That's what I enjoyed most of all, and I enjoyed everyone coming together for the reception. Everybody was dressed up that night. I thought it was a powerful moment."

The excitement of the evening was also evident in the impressive turnout. Dr. Isabela Morales, the Exhibition and Education Manager at SSAAM says, "Our opening drew 65 visitors on that Friday Night, and that is about as many people as we can pack into that tiny church. One more person and we might have burst through the walls."

Dr. Morales continues, "There was so much excitement that we were sold out, and we had to unfortunately tell people 'I'm sorry, come tomorrow, you can't come to the [reception], we're packed.'"

Dr. Treece and others described the power they felt the exhibit and reception embodied as coming from the formative history of church hats: a tradition that has

"It doesn't just begin with church hats, but headwear in general is a way for Black women to express not just style but also a spiritual commitment."

- Kyra March, Guest Curator for
"The Head that Wears the Crown"

its roots in the early days of American slavery.

Kyra March, guest curator for "The Head That Wears the Crown," through studying firsthand accounts in journals, diaries, and art from the time period, made the connection of church hats to tignons, a style of headwrap legally mandated for enslaved Black women.

March says, "It doesn't just begin with church hats, but headwear in general is a way for Black women to express not just style but also a spiritual commitment."

The next morning, Saturday, September 21, Kyra March welcomed visitors into the museum sanctuary to tour the new exhibit. Along one and a half walls of the church, framed portraits of local models were flanked by the mounted church hats themselves.

The hats were a mix of colors including tan, black, and gray. Two in particular stood out in pastel pink and bright, satiny fuschia, and all were adorned with ribbons, fabric flowers, or other flourishes.

Some hats were woven, some shone in the light, some sported wide brims, and one particularly memorable black hat was dramatically upturned: resembling a more grand, woven tricorne.

Although all of the mounted hats were from the museum's own collection, some of the models brought their own to the shoot. One hat was even donated from "Hats Galore and More" in Peddler's Village, Lahaska Pennsylvania, when the owner heard about

the exhibit from a model.

This collaboration not only highlighted the museum's diverse collection but also enriched the exhibit with personal stories and community contributions. Evelyn Dunn Brooks, a local matriarch, as well as museum co-founders Beverly Mills and Elaine Buck, contributed oral histories that Kyra March compiled for the voiced-over slideshow of exhibit materials.

A reverence filled the space as visitors read the display panels and watched the video for the new exhibit. Many guests also took in the permanent exhibits that chronicle the story of the Black community in the Sourland Mountains from slavery to the present day.

Reflective, and with room for visitors to walk around at their leisure, these open hours welcomed not only New Jerseyans but a family from as far away as Virginia.

Dr. Morales says, "They had heard about [the exhibit] from family members and friends in New Jersey. The fact that they were willing to take that drive to come here to see what we in this little museum had done is really encouraging, and it shows a level of reach that the museum has that we haven't necessarily had in the past."

Anita Williams Galiano, interim executive director of SSAAM, volunteered as a model alongside Dr. Treece and other members of the community. Both women say they eagerly joined the project as a way to honor their

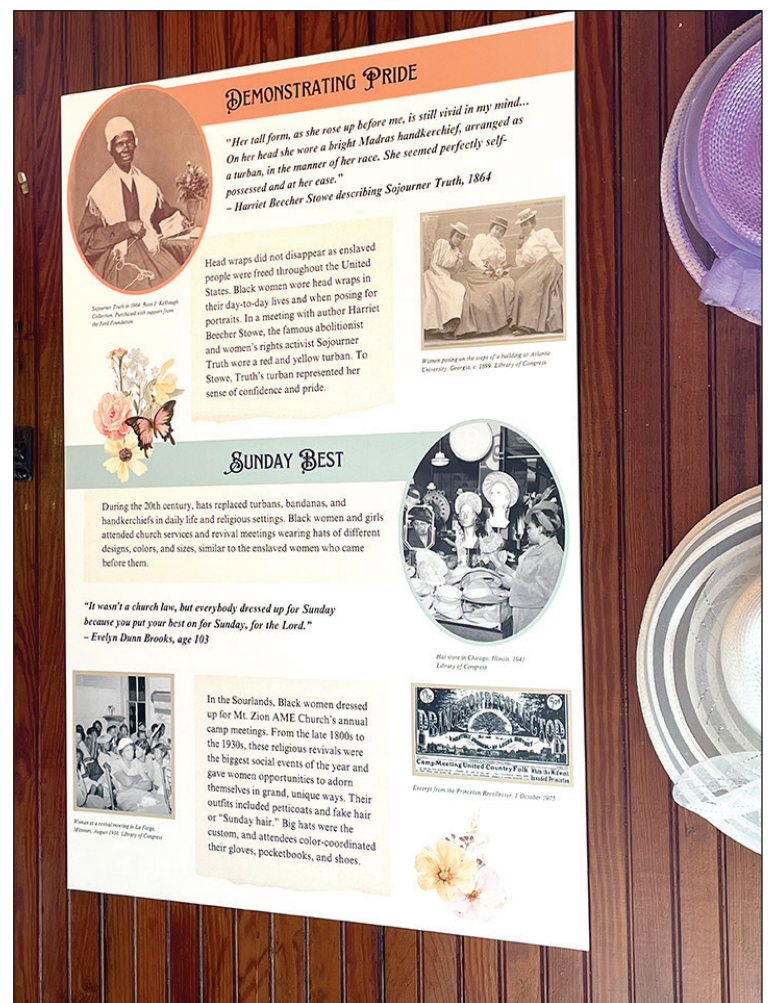


PHOTO | BARBARA MACGUGAN

mothers and grandmothers who had been at least partially involved in the church hat tradition.

In addition, they worked with SSAAM's social media and marketing manager, Tokz Gabriel Jr, who served as photographer for the shoots.

Williams Galiano, who was photographed by Tokz, says "It was magical. It was like having dress-up time. You know it was fun to see the energy and also the ideas coming from Tokz [on] how to capture the moment."

Williams Galiano adds, "There was a sense of shared joy and playfulness about it but also sobriety to it."

Similarly, Dr. Treece connected this sentiment of sobriety and reverence for the church hat tradition to her grandmother's and mother's experiences living in the

Jim Crow South.

Dr. Treece says, "[I'm] just thinking of the limited freedoms that they had. A lot of the women [my mother] descended from were domestics."

Dr. Treece continues, "They cleaned other people's houses, they put that [work] uniform on every day, but Sunday was your time to do you, and to shine, and you put on whatever you could scrape together, or create, to express yourself."

SSAAM is located at 189 Hollow Rd. -Skillman, NJ 08558. Event and open-hour information can be found at: www.ssaamuseum.org

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After years in a gas station, local eatery heads to a new home

Where's The Food's charismatic owner, Tim McRae uses social media to propel business forward

By Tiernan Stover
Co-Managing Editor

The first iteration of Tim McRae's restaurant, "Where's the Food," better known as WTF, was a food truck for years. From there, he was able to move to his first brick-and-mortar location. But after sharing a building with two different gas stations, McRae is now aiming for more.

He says "You know, being here at a gas station, people are coming in, they're buying vapes, buying this, buying that...I want, when people come through that door, that they're [only here for] WTF."

McRae is not only a former food truck owner and restaurateur, but also an indie filmmaker, writer, and actor, involved in projects like *Cooking In Yesterday's Grease*, the *ReAction* YouTube series, *Traffic Lane*, and *Jesus Christ Rapstar*, which is coming soon to Tubi. In addition to various films and web series, he also advertises his business through skits with his active social media presence.

WTF is still based in a Citgo gas station at 102 Washington Crossing- Pennington Rd. where it will remain until November 23rd. Afterward, it will move to an as-of-yet undisclosed location in Ewing.

The restaurant journey hasn't always been an easy one, according to McRae. His main struggle is not the business itself, but the series of different locations.

He explains "We try and work with landlords, we try and work with people to make everything [go smoothly], but you always run into snags and it's always the landlords trying to squeeze the restaurateur."

While he's currently under a non-disclosure agreement concerning the new location, McRae explains that it comes with a liquor license, which has benefits but requires time-consuming paperwork and other processes.

TRADUCCIÓN AL ESPAÑOL
Traducido por
Doménica L. Gamero Pacheco

La primera versión del restaurante de Tim McRae, "Where's the Food" (¿Dónde está la comida?), más conocido como WTF, comenzó como un food truck durante años. A partir de ahí, logró mudarse a su primer local fijo. Pero después de compartir edificio con dos gasolineras diferentes, McRae ahora apunta más alto.

Él dice: "Sabes, estar aquí en una gasolinera, la gente entra, compra vapes, compra esto, compra aquello... Yo quiero que, cuando entren por esa puerta, sea solo por WTF."

McRae no solo es dueño de un food truck y restaurantero, sino también cineasta independiente, escritor y actor, participando en proyectos como *Cooking in Yesterday's Grease*, la serie de YouTube *ReAction*, *Traffic Lane* y *Jesus Christ Rapstar*, que próximamente estará en Tubi. Además de varias películas y series web, también promociona su negocio con sketches a través de sus redes sociales activas.

WTF sigue ubicado en una gasolinera Citgo en el 102 Washington Crossing-Pennington Rd., donde permanecerá hasta el 23 de noviembre. Después, se

In the meantime, WTF is still doing steady business at the Pennington gas station. The restaurant offers comfort foods such as cheesesteaks, burgers, fries, pork roll sandwiches, and specialty items like the fish sandwich and shrimp po'boy, a New Orleans favorite of meat, vegetables and sauce served on French bread, which is McRae's personal favorite.

McRae explains that the po'boy wasn't always on the menu. He made it on request for a customer who then returned with five of her friends the next day. From then on, McRae's take on the sandwich became a bestseller at WTF.

Of the recipe he says, "[It has] remoulade sauce...The taste of it comes together because we got pickles on there, we got lettuce, we got tomatoes, then you have the gulf shrimp. When they're fried just right, those combinations of flavors are like a Mardi Gras party in your mouth."

Cook Moises Williams, like McRae, is a Ewing native and the two knew each other before he began working at WTF. First he was a repeat customer; then he joined the team.

Asking about his favorite WTF wing sauce, Williams says "is like asking a parent to pick a favorite child."

Longtime customer and food author Patrick Lombardi visited WTF when he was writing a food truck series for *bestofnj.com* in 2018. He says, "At first, you don't know what to expect, seeing the 'WTF?' Not knowing, initially, that it's 'Where's the Food' and you don't really know what kinda food...Tim and Lisa describe it as eclectic comfort food, which I think hits it right on the head."

Lombardi says, "The staff and everybody are really hospitable, it's a super friendly, engaging atmosphere, even just placing orders you sense the camaraderie and just the enjoyment from Tim and from Lisa and from their staff."

Después de años en una gasolinera, este popular restaurante local tiene un futuro brillante gracias a su carismático propietario

trasladará a una ubicación aún no revelada en Ewing.

El recorrido del restaurante no siempre ha sido fácil, según McRae. Su principal desafío no es el negocio en sí, sino los diversos lugares en los que ha estado.

Explica: "Tratamos de trabajar con los dueños de los locales, intentamos que todo [funcione bien], pero siempre surgen problemas y siempre son los dueños tratando de exprimir al restaurantero."

Aunque actualmente está bajo un acuerdo de confidencialidad sobre la nueva ubicación, McRae explica que esta incluye una licencia de licor, lo cual tiene beneficios, pero también implica papeleo y otros procesos que consumen tiempo.

Mientras tanto, WTF sigue teniendo un negocio constante en la gasolinera de Pennington. El restaurante ofrece comida reconfortante como cheesesteaks, hamburguesas, papas fritas, sándwiches de pork roll y opciones especiales como el sándwich de pescado y el shrimp po'boy, un platillo típico de Nueva Orleans que lleva carne, vegetales y salsa en pan



PHOTO | TIERNAN STOVER

Tim McRae shows off an order of buffalo wings with fries at his gas station restaurant WTF - Where's the Food?

Lisa McRae joined WTF to support her husband after leaving her job as a payroll manager for a nonprofit organization in 2015.

She says "I was stressing at my corporate job and it was like, you know what? I'm done stressing for someone else, let me go stress for us."

She continues "We have enough choices for someone to find something on the menu...I usually always say you gotta come and meet Tim because he's the crazy one."

She, like Williams, says that other than the food, the staff

and customers are the best part of working at WTF.

McRae's personality and involvement in the entertainment industry are key components in his ambitions for the new location, which he believes could one day be a franchise.

He says, "I want to change the bar scene from you just sitting there looking at each other across the bar to actually being engaged with entertainment, having fun. I even want to do karaoke nights where I pepper the crowd with some of the entertainers that I know...because I have those kinda

connections in my briefcase, so to speak."

He continues "I've been patiently waiting for ten years, I've been in small spaces...I'm looking for a space that I can bring all of my entertainment talents together and let them flourish."

Lombardi says "It's their personalities, it doesn't matter where they are. Where Tim is, he's going to be successful."

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escribiendo una serie sobre food trucks para *bestofnj.com* en 2018. Dice: "Al principio, no sabes qué esperar, viendo el 'WTF'. Sin saber, inicialmente, que significa 'Where's the Food', y no sabes realmente qué tipo de comida... Tim y Lisa lo describen como comida reconfortante ecléctica, y creo que eso lo define perfectamente."

Lombardi comenta: "El personal y todos son muy hospitalarios, es un ambiente súper amigable y acogedor. Incluso al hacer un pedido, sientes la camaradería y simplemente la alegría de Tim, de Lisa y de su personal."

Lisa McRae se unió a WTF para apoyar a su esposo después de dejar su trabajo como gerente de nóminas en una organización sin fines de lucro en 2015.

Ella dice: "Estaba estresada en mi trabajo corporativo y fue como, ¿sabes qué? Ya no quiero estresarme para alguien más, mejor me estreso para nosotros."

Continúa: "Tenemos suficientes opciones para que alguien encuentre algo en el menú... Siempre digo que tienes que venir y conocer a Tim porque él es el loco."

Al igual que Williams,

Pork roll eating contest draws eating champs to Trenton

By Daniel Coughlin
Community Reporter

The ninth annual Trenton Thunder World Famous Case's Pork Roll Eating Championship took place on Saturday, September 21. Approximately 1000 people gathered at Trenton Thunder Ball Park in Trenton, NJ to watch members of Major League Eating (MLE) eat as many sandwiches as possible in ten minutes.

The contest was led by nattily dressed and straw-hatted co-founder of MLE George Shea. Shea gave each titan of tucker a rousing introduction as the competitors walked out of the Thunder's dugout, across the third base line, and into place in a line behind long banquet tables.

Sandwich-laden Thunder employees darted about in a baseball stadium converted to a colosseum of consumption. As the crowd grew quiet, a last-minute drink substitution was made for one of the competitors, who wanted to dip his sandwiches in Hawaiian Punch over water.

The eaters, some trembling with excitement, took up their first victim and the contest began.

James Webb, an Australian and fourth-ranked competitive eater according to MLE, sprinted to an early lead, eating 24 sandwiches in less than 3 minutes. But Geoff Esper, the third-ranked competitive eater in the world from Massachusetts according to MLE, was close behind.

The sandwiches consumed by Webb, Esper, and the other competitors were made of one slice of fried Case's Pork Roll and one slice of American cheese on a hamburger bun.



Members of Major League Eating, including Geoff Esper (1st place), James Webb (2nd place) and Nick Wehry (3rd place), competing in the ninth annual Trenton Thunder World Famous Case's Pork Roll Eating Championship on Saturday, September 21. PHOTO | DANIEL COUGHLIN

Webb says, "Pork roll is one of the most difficult competitions (in Major League Eating). American bread is weirdly flavorless compared to bread in other parts of the world."

Webb continues, "We don't have anything like it in Australia. You have to get used to it."

The reason Webb is unfamiliar with pork roll is because it's native to New Jersey. Pork roll was invented in Trenton in 1856 by John Taylor of "Taylor Ham" fame. The recipe for Case's Pork Roll is almost as old as pork roll itself, being invented by Taylor's contemporary George Washington Case in 1870.

As Webb and the other competitors continued to eat sandwich after sandwich, they not only had placing in this year's event in mind but also had the goal of eating more than last year's winner.

The 2023 total of 43.5 was won by Esper who just barely squeaked by illustrious eaters like hotdog-eating champion Joey Chestnut.

Esper took the \$2000 grand prize and his third straight title home with calculated 1-2-3 bites, ultimately finishing 44.5 sandwiches and defeating Webb by just a quarter of a sandwich.

Amid foaming beers

pouring out of a rollicking concession stand and into the bellies of a crowd of mostly young professionals, long-time seasonal employee of Trenton Thunder Ballpark Robert Rhodes, said, "We missed [attending] two of these because of Covid, but we're back in action now."

Like Rhodes, Jason Kane, a Lawrenceville resident and Major League Eating fan, is glad Trenton Thunder is hosting the contest. Kane says, "I wish they would do events like this every weekend. There's something special about being close to the players like this."

While Geoff and Webb

took first and second place, Nick Wehry, sixth-ranked in Major League Eating's system, won third place after eating 42 of the sandwiches.

Wehry says from under his orange-dyed Mohawk, "I feel like a ninja turtle." Wehry continues, now notably bulging about the stomach, "Only three more next year and I'll win."

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You didn't imagine it: there weren't as many tomatoes this year

By Eva Reynolds
Community Reporter

If there is one crop that farmers in the Garden State of New Jersey and neighboring Pennsylvania are known for it's the summer tomato. This year, however, patrons visiting local farm stands were greeted with near-empty produce bins and high prices for the few tomatoes that were available.

The typical growing season for tomatoes in the region begins in early July and peaks toward the end of July through August. However, due to extreme heat waves and droughts this summer, peak tomato season did not come until the final weeks of October.

Ella Coscia, the Assistant to the Director of Farming at Snipes Farm in Morrisville, PA says, "We had a shortage of field tomatoes, pretty bad until about two weeks ago."

Coscia continues, "[The tomato shortage] really messed us up...Based on our crop plan, we planned to have a certain amount, a certain yield coming from our field to fulfill these contracts that we have. And with the heat waves and different issues

with irrigation and just the plants just in general not liking the heat, it throws off that whole estimated crop yield."

According to Coscia and Rhonda Yerkes, General Manager at None Such Farm in Buckingham, PA, who was also left scrambling to deal with crops' unusual schedules, one of the only ways to deal with droughts is irrigation.

Yerkes says, "We did have to definitely irrigate. So we irrigated. We actually started in June to irrigate, which is not normal. Usually, we're irrigating like July, August."

Longer periods of irrigation come at a higher cost.

Coscia says, "There's definitely a higher cost when you have to irrigate that much...Overall there's also more labor involved when you have to irrigate because there's whole rigs that you have to move and whatnot. So it definitely affects your labor budget...And then, do you have to change your pricing to offset that increase in labor cost?"

Laboring on a farm in extreme temperatures adds to the problems.

Coscia says, "When it gets that hot, it's like it's physically unsafe to work," she added, "I had to shift my schedule to be



PHOTO | EVA REYNOLDS

With a late and limited harvest this year, farm stands in NJ offered few tomatoes.

able to come in in the evening sometimes after the heat broke."

The costs associated with unpredictable yields, labor demands, and unsafe working conditions are passed on to the consumer.

Snipes says, "We're definitely seeing an increase in pricing, and that's directly because of increasing costs."

Tomatoes weren't the only items in short supply at farm stands.

Corn and leafy plants such as salad greens and bok choy faced similar problems. The

summer's first heat waves coincided with their core growing season, too, leaving disastrous results for many farmers.

According to the US Department of Agriculture Research Service, plant hardiness zones are shifting upwards, meaning that New Jersey and Pennsylvania could begin to see growing seasons akin to those in the southern part of the United States. Instead of a growing season that starts in March, soon it may regularly begin in February.

This is good news for heat-adapted crops such as kiwis

and peaches, but also benefits invasive species like Japanese Knotweed, raising further concerns.

As Jeff Burd, a Mercer County NJ beekeeper, explains Knotweed is a nectar-rich invasive species, that is starting to emerge earlier.

He says, "You know it's kind of a 'what would Jesus do?' question. You have invasive species that are taking over fields that are not good for anybody, except for the bees. But the bees really enjoy [it]. The bees feed off that, the nectar of the pollen. So it's, how do you try to negotiate that?"

While the farmers grapple with these complex issues, there may be at least one silver lining for the fall.

Yerkes says, "This [weather] has been a good thing for pumpkins. They like dry weather. It has been one of the best pumpkin harvests we've seen."

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Catch a Rising Star brings laughter to Princeton for 20+ years

By **Kate Frangos**
Community Reporter

Tucked away inside the Hyatt Hotel in Princeton, behind an unassuming bar and a set of black doors, is a hidden gem for comedy lovers: the Catch a Rising Star Comedy Club (CRS). The intimate venue, bathed in the glow of bright stage lights and framed by thick curtains, has hosted some of the biggest names in comedy for over 20 years.

Suzu Yengo, the current President of Catch Rising Star, owns the club, which has played a pivotal role in shaping Princeton's comedy scene.

While the club had to close its doors for two years due to pandemic-related renovations, it has reopened to enthusiastic crowds. Its proximity to New York City makes it a go-to spot for comedians testing new material.

Ryan Maher, a comedian who first performed at the club in 2008, says it's a place where performers feel free to experiment.

Maher says, "It's got an old-school vibe. You can get away with [different material] here because it's a club with history and a name."

Similarly, RoRo Antonuccio, radio host and comedian from NJ 101.5, says, "You'll see comedians who could fill Madison Square Garden, but they still come here and give 100%. It's a place with a legacy, and we have to keep it alive," says RoRo.

The club's appeal is broadening alongside the evolving demographics of Princeton.

Jim Wright, the club's National Director from 2012 to the present, says, "We've seen a shift. We're doing more Indian shows now because of the community around us, including sold-out performances in Hindi."

Although this willingness to adapt has kept CRS rel-



PHOTOS | KATE FRANGOS

ABOVE: RoRo Antonuccio from NJ 101.5 station pictured above in Princeton's Catch a Rising Star. BELOW: Ryan Maher performing at Catch a Rising Star.

evant, ensuring it continues to reflect the tastes of its diverse audience, navigating the current cultural landscape has presented new challenges for comedians.

Wright says, "Comedy is more important than ever, but comedians have to be careful. Everything can be a triggering subject."

Maher notes that the rise of viral crowd work videos has changed the way audiences behave at live shows.

Maher says, "People come to shows thinking heckling is part of it now because they see it online. But that's not what a comedy club is about. You're there to listen."

He also mentions the rise of social media influencers trying to transition into stand-up



comedy.

Maher says, "They might be great online, but stand-up is a different game. Some of them bomb because they don't have the experience to handle a live crowd."

However, Antonuccio views comedy as vital for one's mental health during these challenging times.

Antonuccio says "Comedy is a lifeline. I've been through

a divorce and two abusive relationships. I took a writing class, joined a community, and turned my pain into laughter."

He continues, "That's what people need - to tap into that. The second you laugh, it's literally endorphins and dopamine. Laughter is good medicine."

Catch Rising Star comedy club was originally founded in New York City in 1972 before opening a branch in the Princeton location. The club has helped launch the careers of comedic legends including Robin Williams, Jerry Seinfeld, and Chris Rock, with a brand name still widely known in comedy.

What sets CRS apart is the loyalty of its comedians over the years. Rob Bartlett, Bobby Collins, and the late Gilbert Gottfried have all made repeat ap-

pearances on its stage.

Wright beams with pride when he says, "They treat Catch like their home club. Even after they've outgrown smaller venues, they keep coming back."

Antonuccio has witnessed firsthand the dedication of New York comedians willing to make the trip to Princeton.

Listing names like Eric Potts, Vince August, Mary Capone, and Jill Myra among the frequent performers, Antonuccio says, "They'll drive two hours through traffic just to perform here."

CRS also remains deeply connected to its community, offering special promotions like free tickets for military personnel and first responders through Vet Tix. Additionally, during birthday weeks, guests can attend a show for free, adding a personal touch to the club's offerings.

As it emerges from the pandemic, CRS is poised for a new chapter of growth, the opening of a new club in Somerset, MA, and plans for continued expansion into theaters across the U.S. signal a bright future.

Wright says, "We're picking up where we left off pre-pandemic."

In addition to brick-and-mortar clubs, Catch A Rising Star is partnering up with different venues and theaters to host and produce shows across the country.

With a legacy rooted in laughter, Catch a Rising Star remains a vital part of the comedy landscape offering a stage for rising stars and a much-needed escape for audiences seeking humor in an ever-changing world.

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Review: Lilla Vanilla Cake Shoppe in Hamilton offers sumptuous treats

By **Demetrius Davis**
Reporter

Lilla Vanilla Cake Shoppe started off as a hobby for Lily Voronina, pastry chef and owner. What started in her home kitchen is now an inviting spot on Nottingham Way in Hamilton, New Jersey, tucked within The Shoppes shopping center.

Lilla Vanilla is a French-style patisserie. Upon entering you are met with the aroma steaming off of each tray of temptations from chocolate and almond croissants to cupcakes. The menu also includes macarons, cakes, sundaes, Lavazza coffee, and more.

Voronina says the bakery offers a way for her to embrace her Eastern European roots while helping her overcome personal challenges.

She says, "About eight and a half years ago, my older brother died in an accident and I didn't want to take antidepressants and stuff to get over [it]. I



PHOTO | DEMETRIUS DAVIS

Lily Voronina, owner and pastry chef of Lilla Vanilla, tops Biscoff Cupcakes with a drizzle of cookie butter

was thinking, I needed to figure out a different way, so I was cooking every single day." She continues, "I was cooking and cooking at home and then I started getting orders from my friends and then from their friends. They spread the word and I was cooking from home for about four years."

She worked on recipes for creamy macarons, cupcakes oozing with fudge, or topped with sweet vanilla mousse and icing. Her evolving ideas are shown in the store's rotating menu.

Voronina says, "I don't like to stick to the same recipes. We don't have a menu; we

change the recipes every day because I don't want to get bored. If I get bored I will lose my interest."

The ever-changing line up includes croissant flavors like the lemon poppy seed add a lemon tang and a muted nuttiness to a crisp Autumn morning. The mango peach is fruity sweet, and the tiramisu with Bailey's Irish Cream almost feels too indulgent for a morning snack. Displayed like precious gems, customers rush in and try to snatch these fresh out of the oven.

On a recent weekend in November, the Nutella croissant, which Lilla Vanilla has become known for, was a special. These croissant rolls are thick, round, flakey, and baked to a golden brown, filled with the decadent chocolate spread.

Marcia Calle, a long-time customer and resident of Hamilton says, "My favorite [pastries] are the Nutella croissants that they have here."

But they aren't the only thing she likes. She says, "I've ordered three cakes from [Lilla Va-

nilla] before, a Valentine's cake, and two birthday cakes for my kids." She says the passionfruit with vanilla sponge cake is a particular favorite.

Other customers also have praise for Veronina's offerings.

Kenisha Pilla says, "You can tell she's passionate about it. Everything looks so perfect and tastes even better."

When asked about the attention Lilla Vanilla has gotten since it opened, Voronina says, "I'm flattered, you know. I mean I love it. The more people coming, the happier I am, because I feel like I'm doing the right thing. If people keep coming for something I make, it makes me excited. It means I'm doing something great. I don't know, it gives me wings."

Voronina's gratitude extends to more than just the customers who support her bakery. She says, "My brother was always telling me, you must do what you like to do and then you will never work a day in your life."

BEAUTY AND

Fall production of Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*

Photography by
By Tiernan Stover, C



Cogsworth (Michael Hall) and Madame De La Grande Bouche (Natalie Megules) celebrate the breaking of the curse.



Belle (Sally Bethmann) and the Beast (Ian Bethmann) share a dance during the breaking of the curse that keeps him in his unhuman form.

Disney's *Beauty And The Beast*: The Broadway Musical presented by Maurer Productions OnStage opened at the Kelsey Theatre on Friday, November 8. A timeless and magical display, the musical ran to November 24.

The classic romance takes audiences to 18th-century France, where the bright and clever Belle is imprisoned in a magical castle by the Beast, a former prince cursed by an enchantress to live as a hideous creature. His entire castle of staff is comprised of anthropomorphized household objects. Unless he can find true love, the Beast and all his staff are doomed to remain in their cursed forms forever. Back in town, the egotistical and self-

ish scoundrel Gaston wants Belle's hand in marriage. With the help of his bumbling sidekick, LeFou, he'll stop at nothing to have her.

Those who saw it can count themselves lucky, as Disney plans to 'vault' *Beauty & The Beast*, barring theaters from performing it for the foreseeable future. It was directed and choreographed by Haley Schmalbach with music direction by Sue den Outer, and produced by John M. Maurer and Diana Gilman Maurer.

Schmalbach and Maurer had a lot to live up to when designing the set. Both the original Disney animated feature and the Broadway production had dramatic setpieces of epic proportions. In the case of MPOnStage, the set was divided into two main settings, the village square and the castle.

The design of the double-sided panels imitating quaint French storefronts featured warm yellows, bright pinks and reds, and a smokey, rough-and-tumble

tavern, adorned with an excess of deer antlers. When turned around, some panels became the castle.

Where the set and lighting really excelled was in the Beast's foreboding castle. It featured a large split staircase with a central landing all painted stone gray, furniture, even a glowing fireplace with two mantle-mounted swords. Combined with a projection backdrop of various rooms and their nighttime counterparts, the result was a deep sense of scale and immersion.

The costumes and object design displayed an abundance of color, character, and creativity. For example, Madame de la Grande Bouche, the human wardrobe, acted by Natalie Megules, was, from the waist-down, a cumbersome, rectangular bright-red wardrobe, complete with moving drawers with clothes inside.

The sentient dinner plates looked shiny enough to eat off, and how impressive to dance on a busy stage with a massive dinner plate



From left: LeFou (Casey Okamoto), Belle (Sally Graham Bethmann) and Gaston (Pat Rounds) converse about the egotistical Gaston's marriage proposal as the village looks on.



The full cast of Maurer Productions OnStage's production of *Beauty & The Beast*

THE BEAST

musical brought Broadway magic to Kelsey Theatre

and Reporting
Co-Managing Editor



As the characters' connection grows, leading to the potential



Babette the feather duster (Kim Pearson) at center, and the other castle objects, including Mrs. Potts the teapot (Jenny Weiner), Cogsworth the clock (Michael Hall), Chip the chipped teacup (Eddie Pfender) and Lumiere the candelabra (Michael Zweig) fantasize about being restored to human form.

strapped to your back! There were even little salt and pepper shakers, portrayed by adorable young cast members.

The cast added their own personal magic to their roles. For example, Lumiere, portrayed by Michael Zweig, illuminated the stage with more than just his candle-capped extremities.

Michael Hall, who played the Beast's uptight and anxious butler-turned-pendulum clock, Cogsworth, possessed a distinct knack for awkward physical comedy.

Belle, portrayed by Sally Bethmann, had a show-stopping voice that gripped me in all her numbers. Both her vocal and acting ranges were more than wide enough to nail the intelligent, witty and heartfelt character of Belle.

Belle's beastly counterpart was portrayed by her real-life husband, Ian Bethmann, whose deep, powerful voice, menacing stage presence and skillful physi-

cal acting did the Beast justice. His costume was transformative, the mask and hair making Bethmann unrecognizable. His spoken lines were delivered with a monstrous gravel and a scowl, but he had his softer moments as well.

Sally Bethmann said, "I already had instant trust with the person who I'm interacting with and especially as a romantic lead, that's one of the most important things, to know you can trust the other person."

I loved to hate Gaston, portrayed excellently by Pat Rounds. His performance was crass, humorous and frustrating in all the best ways. This is not to overlook his right-hand-man, LeFou, who was played by Casey Okamoto. His physical comedy, timing, vocal performance and facial expressions were hilarious.

Stage Manager Melissa Gaynor said, "[MPOnStage] decided about a year ago that we were going to do Beauty & The Beast. It

was a bucket-list show...It's Disney, it's been a fantastic experience."

The show more than lived up to its grand film and Broadway counterparts, and reflected that director Schmalbach knew how to adapt the Broadway source material. For example, other versions of the number "Human Again" only feature the main cast of objects, whereas MPOnStage's performance featured the ensemble as well.

The show earned a standing ovation from the packed theater. The ear-to-ear smiles from the cast during the bows were contagious. The production was a shining example of the fact that small-budget community theater and outstanding performances are anything but mutually exclusive.



Cast takes a bow at the end of the show.



From left: Madame De La Grande Bouche (Natalie Megules), Lumiere (Michael Zweig), Cogsworth (Michael Hall), Chip (Eddie Pfender) and Mrs. Potts (Jenny Weiner) sing and dance with the castle staff-turned objects as they long for the curse to be lifted.

Women's soccer wins the Region 19 Championships



PHOTO | STEVE SCHREIBER

Eva Sturm, freshman from Berlin and Region 19 Player of the Year, going for the ball in home game vs. Brookdale Community College on September 10, 2024. Mercer won 9-0.

By Bella Timbie and

The Staff of *The College VOICE*

MCCC's women's soccer won the Region 19 Championships for the NJCAA Division II. After a 2-1 loss in the previous year's regional championship game, MCCC took a 10-0 win against the same opponent, Essex County College.

Coach Ron Stinson says "It was a big accomplishment for the girls to come back and win."

The team then went on to the Eastern Division Champi-

onship for the NJCAA and lost 4-3 against Anne Arundel County College in a home game on November 8.

The game started with two goals from Vikings players Linnea Ramiel and Annika Maringer. Then Anne Arundel answered with four goals of their own. Ramiel managed a third goal at the end of the second half.

Ramiel said of the game, "Of course, the loss in the district final was sad for all of us but we were so proud we made it that far.

The loss to Anne Arundel prevented the team from going to Nationals, but their success gained attention as Coach Stinson received the Region 19 Coach of the Year award and freshman Eva Sturm was awarded Regional Player of the Year. Sturm had 9 goals and four assists in the regional tournament alone.

Sturm, who, like Ramiel, is from Germany, joined players representing seven different countries on this year's team.

In regards to team co-



PHOTO | ANNIKA MARINGER

Women's soccer team after Region 19 win against Essex County College at home on November 2, 2024.

hesion, Ramiel said, "I feel like our season went amazing overall, we had a great record and a great team!... The sophomores from last year are very experienced and definitely made us as successful as we were in the end. We did a lot

of team bonding activities as well which was really nice and I think really helped the chemistry on the pitch to evolve!"

Coach Stinson said, "The girls did a great job of coming together in just a few short months."

Men's soccer goes to Nationals after winning Region 19

By Valerie Mulrine

News Editor

After a 14-game winning streak and taking the Region 19 Championships, Mercer's men's soccer team ended their second Nationals game in Huntsville, Alabama losing 2-1 to Northeast Community College on November 18.

The college's new Athletic Director, Eric Grundman, says, "Northeastern was the number one team in the country and the eventual National Champion. We led them and lost [the final] game in overtime."

Mercer lost the game due to two free penalty kicks, one that sent the game into overtime, and another that won the game.

Vikings fans said the penalty-kick calls from the referees were questionable, especially the second call as it was made in the middle of the field when the ball was on the sideline near the linesman.

Head Coach of fifteen years, Widmarc Dalce says, "It's gonna stay in me for a long time. [Northeast] had to earn it on a set piece otherwise they had nothing else because their game plan wasn't working. Just two questionable calls by the referees."

One person who got to see the team on its way to the Championships is MCCC World Languages Professor Daniel D'Arpa. He said several of his students who are on the soccer team invited him to a game against Schoolcraft College on November 8.

He says, "They invited me.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MCCC

ABOVE: Alou Gamby, sophomore forward from Lansdale, PA in home game vs. Cecil College on October 4, 2024. MCCC won 5-1. TOP RIGHT: Women's soccer team after Region 19 win against Essex County College at home on November 9, 2024.

I thought I can't say no to that. You know? If a student asks me to come watch, I'm going to support them. And especially for my international students, I feel that they don't have their family support...And so if I can, if I can be a face out there, yeah, I'm happy to go. So was, I was honored and glad to be invited."

The Vikings beat Schoolcraft in the District Championship with a score of 4-1 which qualified them for the nationals.

But after a season of wins, the Vikings found themselves in a challenging new position up

against tough odds.

Dalce says, "They call our bracket the bracket of death."

Mercer, which was ranked sixteenth in the NJCAA DII Men's National Soccer Rankings, was paired up against third-ranked Phoenix College and the number-one-ranked Northeast Community College.

Joao Lourenco, a sophomore offensive striker from Brazil says, "[We were in] one of the hardest groups. All our players starting are fast and strong and that's important for soccer, but also very

technical and I think we were more technical than the other teams." He continues, "I think if we [had been able to] rest for one day [between games] we would beat them and probably be champions."

Including Lourenco from Brazil approximately 18 nations are represented on the team this season, including Coach Dalce, who came to play for Mercer himself in 1996 from Haiti, and the assistant coaches, all of whom are former Mercer players Dalce coached.

Dylan Maher, Midfielder Winger from Wicklow, Ireland, says



PHOTO COURTESY OF MCCC

"I feel like we all gelled very quick together and we kind of became more like a family than friends."

Goalkeeper captain Ignacio Pocheco of Argentina says of the team, "Being here we are all in Mercer. We are all the same and we are here for a reason. I try to give my best and give what I learned back home to just put it in the field and help my teammates to get better and help them in the field as well."

The team's success has not gone overlooked as Coach Dalce was voted Region 19 Coach of the year for the seventh time in his career according to the NJCAA Region 19 Website.

Mahe says of his coach's honor, "It was a good year all around and I think he deserved it." Coach Dalce says, "All this work was just collective effort from the players and the coaching staff just work with me and believe in my leadership to just make this happen, it's one of the special seasons I can say I've had at Mercer for 15 years. This is a special team. I'm proud of them."

Campus bottle filling stations save money, reduce waste

By Avocado Pitt
Reporter

When Linnea Rameil, a freshman Journalism & New Media major, is thirsty, she skips the vending machines and fills her personal water bottle at one of the water bottle filling stations on MCCC's West Windsor campus.

Rameil, who is from Germany, says her mother gave her the bottle years ago along with some motherly advice. She said, "It's quicker. It [will save me] money because I [won't] have to buy you plastic bottles anymore," she added, "She was like, this is going to save a lot of plastic. She kind of changed my mind on that."

Data supports that idea. A 20-ounce bottle of water sells for \$2.50 on campus. Purchasing one \$2.50 bottle a day, Monday through Friday would cost \$175 over the course of a typical 14-week semester.

Rameil says, "In comparison to my friends who do buy bottles, I see the difference in expenses. They spend so much money on this. And they also have a trash problem. It sounds funny, but it's the truth. They make so much plastic waste."

The plastic waste from the college's cafe and vending

machines includes 4,400 single-use water bottles per week according to Mercer's Chef Ricky Jones who provided the sales data for a sample week in October. That is 61,600 bottles discarded in a 14-week term that could be avoided using reusable water bottles and the water filling stations.

Stephen Tryba, a campus plumber, says that 67 filling stations were installed from 2018-2022 on the Windsor campus.











Josh Johnson, Director of Facilities & Operations, says that in addition to those 67 there are "10 on the Trenton campus."

According to Johnson, the new stations were initially installed to replace the old-style water fountains.

He says, "It wasn't an initiative where we said 'We're getting rid of the old units.' They were problematic. The pressures would fail."

Tryba adds, "Parts were more and more difficult to get for [the old fountains]."

Each filling station tracks how many single-use

bottles/week 20-oz @ \$2.50/bottle	\$ spent over 14-wk term	bottles wasted over term
	\$35	
	\$70	
	\$105	
	\$140	
	\$175	

INFOGRAPHIC | AVOCADO PITT

plastic water bottles it has saved based on 20 ounces per bottle. The VOICE examined 55 of the 67 Windsor campus filling stations and found that, according to their trackers, 417,992 bottles have been saved since their installation.

The stations also have filter status lights. Of the 55 stations visited, two displayed red lights indicating that the filters should be changed.

Johnson explains that the water is safe to drink even if the status light is red. He says, "The water coming into the campus is regulated by Hamilton and the Water Works, and then we do our own internal



PHOTO | AVOCADO PITT

Linnea Rameil, a freshman Journalism & New Media major uses one of the 67 water filling stations on MCCC's campus.

testing for things like lead, Legionella, prior to it being filtered. We've never had an issue where they've been outside of what the requirements are supposed to be."

Johnson adds, "The water fountains that were replaced

never had any type of filtering."

Rameil emphasizes her mother's advice saying, "You don't have to spend a fortune on the Stanley Cup or something like that. You can just have a really cheap one that works just as well."

Student athletes seek better nutritional options on campus

By Demetrius Davis
Reporter

Ignacio Pacheco, a 20-year old goalie on the Mercer Men's soccer team, is tasked with diverting the ball from the net. While in a practice game, his stomach starts to rumble.

He usually has his breakfast before getting on the bus, taking his classes, and working out before his training. But today, his morning meal-prepping time was limited. He's looking at the clock wondering when training will be over and he can grab a meal, but stops himself considering his options for nutrition.

When asked how he nourishes himself at school Pacheco says, "There's not as many options."

He says that's part of why his diet consists primarily of food from the grocery store that he cooks at home.

It is not an uncommon thing for athletes and the student body to say they have difficulty finding nutritious food options on campus.

Maria Eduarda Olindino, a former women's soccer player and Architecture major still prefers food from home, especially after explaining that sometimes, the food in the Mercer cafeteria has caused her to feel sick afterwards.

Olindino adds, "Sometimes I can find things, but I usually eat from home."

Dartmouth Sports, Dartmouth College's Athletics



PHOTO | DEMETRIUS DAVIS

Students wait in check out line in the MCCC Cafeteria located in the Student Center

program, says that the typical college athlete needs to consume 20-30 percent of their diet in protein, 45-65 percent of their diet in carbs, 15-25 percent in lipid fats, and maintain 2-3 Liters of water.

Out of the 67 students surveyed at Mercer, 64 percent answered that their dietary needs were met at an average or below-average level.

Survey participants said they felt they would benefit from more low-carb, keto friendly, and halal meat for Muslim students, meaning that the meat has been produced with a method known as dhabiha, when the blood is completely drained from the meat. Some students expressed a desire for house made salads and sandwiches that they did not appear to know were already available.

Chef Ricky Martinez Jones, the MCCC Cafeteria chef since December of 2022, says, "As long as we're open the Deli's open, we have salads that you can

create yourself, sometimes we even have fruit in there."

The results of the aforementioned survey imply that not all students are unaware of the fresh deli food options.

Pacheco says, "Sometimes there are little salads available, but I think that for the guys that do sports, I think in general it's not enough. You have to buy two or three."

Although these options present the ability for students to nourish their bodies, surveys indicated that students who have dietary restrictions would benefit from calorie counts. In the MCCC cafeteria, the only menu that does provide calorie counts is the "Breakfast your way."

Some student athletes mentioned that not only was the MCCC cafeteria not a place where they could find food that benefited them, or a place where they could keep track of their macronutrients and caloric in-



PHOTO | DEMETRIUS DAVIS

Student athlete Maria Eduarda Olindino does her homework while snacking on a protein shake.

take, but that the food available was also too expensive for them.

Joao Lourenco, a 2nd year Exercise Science student and MCCC Men's Soccer defense player, says he wants to see lower prices in the MCCC Cafeteria.

Many items such as the Meat, Egg & Cheese Bagel sandwich cost around \$4.50, slightly more than Wawa's similar item the Bacon, Egg & Cheese Sizzli Bagel which costs around \$4.00.

However, Jones says that the MCCC Cafeteria works to restore protein to the student body's diets. He says, "We grill chicken by hand everyday as a replacement for the protein [from deli meat]."

While the Mercer Cafeteria says they are doing their part, there is still a feeling amongst the athlete popula-

tion and their coaches that they aren't.

Widmarc Dalce, the current Men's Soccer coach since 2012 and former MCCC athlete in the 96' and 97' seasons, has a different outlook on the Mercer Cafeteria.

He says, "On campus, I don't think we have that, [a place for athletes to find nutritious food] available yet, but we always preach to them to just try to eat healthy."

Jones adds, "We try our hardest to make sure that there's an option that can be customizable for everybody so that you can just kinda create whatever salad, whatever sandwich you want, to be as healthy as you possibly can make it."

He says, "We can't be the Whole Foods of the school."

The Barden at Herrontown Woods hosts wildflower seed collection

By Jill Weiner
Community Reporter

The Friends of Herrontown Woods (FOHW) hosted a wildflower seed collection event at the botanical art garden (Barden) on Sunday, October 6. The Barden is located in Herrontown Woods Arboretum (HW), a 142-acre wooded enclave gifted to Princeton by Mercer County in 2018.

This seed collection event had the unique ambiance of a bustling marketplace in the center of a forest. The warm bright sun shone through green, yellow, red, orange and brown leaves, and the attendees were wearing light summer clothes.

Mathilde Burlion, the facilitator for the event and instructor of children's classes at HW, helped attendees collect seeds from wildflowers such as Frost Asters, Goldenrods, Wild Sennas, Clustered Mountain Mints, Bee Balms, Milkweed, Purple Coneflowers and New England Asters. Burlion says, "Beyond the distraction of modern life, I think there is a disconnection for many kids. It's a disconnection from the land."

Burlion continues, "They don't have an idea about... what it takes to get a vegetable. When you get this kind of disconnection, you don't get a sense of how to care for the land and how it is important."

As a way to educate children and adults alike, Burlion



PHOTO | JILL WEINER

During October's seed collection event at The Barden at Herrontown Woods Arboretum, participants of all ages learned about germination and the skills needed to support natural processes.

explained to the group where seeds come from. She showed the participants how to gather seeds from the pistils of dried flowers which they then collected and sorted in corresponding envelopes marked with the flower names.

The flowers used for seed collection were planted around a large social space enveloping a gazebo in the center in a partially shaded clearing of the forest. Each flower had a protective fence around it with a photo of their appearance in full bloom and their name.

Also using this shared social space was HW's monthly

coffee social, May's Cafe. While people drank coffee and ate baked goods, donated by FOHW volunteers, they joined in to hear about collecting, storing and planting seeds.

Included in the discussions was an explanation of how seeds need a cold winter dormancy period to germinate in the spring. Burlion says people can replicate this by refrigerating seeds stored in a dry envelope until March.

Burlion hopes that people will use their new knowledge of collecting, storing and planting native seeds to help the environment.

Burlion says, "Native plants were living here, it was a thriving ecosystem. [Then] all this land is replaced by lawns, that don't bring any life to the system, that kill [the native plants]."

Similar to Burlion, Steve Hiltner, a botanist and FOHW's founder and President, hosts educational and social events at HW that demonstrate to the community such topics as biodiversity.

Hiltner says, "Nature is complex, not very tidy, and I think these traits can be off-putting for people. How else to explain the rows of houses in suburbia that subdue and simplify nature into lawns and manicured shrubs?"

Hiltner continues, "At HW, we nurture and work with nature's diversity and complexity, and seek to add some creative, cultural touches of our own. The effort we give back, and do some healing of what has been harmed, is also healing and rewarding for us."

The spirit of informal camaraderie, cooperation, learning, and unstructured socialization was alive in a small preserved forest, visible in the participants' easygoing smiles and relaxed demeanor.

Mary Joan Gaynor, one of the attendees says, "I think it is a very nice community event to have, to make people aware of what they can plant and to provide for people."

At the end of the seed collection, many little envelopes



PHOTO | JILL WEINER

filled with seeds were taken by their new owners to be stored, and then to be planted and grown in the springtime on not so manicured lawns.

FOHW plans a November hike to observe the fall foliage, and a seed planting session before the winter sets in. For more information and a complete list of events at HW, visit www.herrontownwoods.org

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on October 23, 2024. It was also produced as part of MCCC's J Lab program.]



NJ's Affordable Housing Program update: changes coming in July

By Warren Mittlak
Community Reporter

The New Jersey Affordable Housing Program's initial housing numbers for the fourth ten-year round were released by the NJ Department of Community Affairs (DCA) on October 18. The updated numbers will take effect on July 1, 2025, as required by the Fair Housing Act.

The DCA calculated the number of affordable housing units that West Windsor needs to build in the fourth round to be 661 units. The DCA also calculated West Windsor's present need to be 61 units.

The purpose of the Fair Housing Act as explained by Fair Share Housing Center in a press release on March 18, 2024, is "to set a course for future enforcement of the Mount Laurel Doctrine, the state's constitutional requirement for every town to provide its fair share of affordable housing."

Jag Davies, a spokesperson for the Fair Share Housing Center says, "The Mt. Laurel doctrine is really special. It's the envy of housing advocates in states across the country. It declared exclusionary zoning unconstitutional and that each municipality has an obligation to allow for its fair share of affordable housing."

NJ's Affordable Housing program was created by the Fair Housing Act which was signed

into law on July 2, 1985. It was most recently amended by the NJ Legislature and signed into law by Governor Phil Murphy on March 20, 2024.

The third round of the program was run by the NJ Judiciary because the State agency that was formed to administer the program, the Council of Affordable Housing (COAH) was declared inoperative by the NJ Supreme Court in 2015.

Mr. Davies says, "Essentially what [the new law] tried to do is make it much easier for towns to develop housing. It provides more clarity on what a town has to do to get across the finish line to meet their affordable housing obligations. It provides a lot more transparency around the process and reduces the amount of bureaucracy involved."

Dan Weiss, a West Windsor Council member says the change in the amended law means if there is a dispute between a developer and a municipality it doesn't happen in the courts.

Weiss says, "That is the real main difference between this and what has preceded in the previous round. In the previous round, this was all court driven at the Superior Court level."

Weiss continues "If there are challenges, the challenges are within the DCA administration view. They are partnering with the Court but it's not like going to court. It is through the program."

According to the NJ Government, affordable housing means "a person should pay no more than 30% of their income towards housing."

In 2024, the upper bound for a low income 2 person family and the upper bound for a moderate income family is \$52,002 and \$83,234 respectively in Mercer County's region (Region 4) according to data prepared by the Affordable Housing Professionals of New Jersey.

Mr. Weiss says affordable housing is for people like "teachers, EMTs, police officers, and business owners." He continues, "I think there is a lot of prejudice regarding how we look at these environments"

The fourth round is set to begin on July 1, 2025, and will last until June 30, 2035. During that time, each town that has an affordable housing obligation is required to provide the number of affordable housing units that they have agreed to build. The units can be built by for-profit developers or not-for-profit organizations in locations identified in each town's plan.

The program gives credits to incentivize developers to build certain types of housing. For example for seniors or for special needs citizens. This means that the actual number of units built will be most likely less than the amount calculated by the DCA.



A rough outline of the steps in the process as described in the Fair Housing Act is as follows:

The now completed first step for the fourth round is for the DCA to give their calculations to municipalities by October 20, 2024.

The next step for the fourth round numbers as defined in the law is for the municipalities to adopt a binding resolution of the number of units the town will build by January 31, 2025. For this step, the municipalities can either use the DCA provided number or their own number calculated using the same formula used by the DCA.

Interested parties, like developers, have until February 28, 2025 to challenge the number and provide their own calculation of what the municipality should have to build.

The DCA will give their decision on any challenges by March 31, 2025.

Municipalities then have until June 30 to adopt their housing element and fair share plan (HEFSP). A housing element is the actual lot where housing will be built.

Interested parties have until August 31, 2025 to challenge the HESFP. The municipality and party challenging the HESFP have until December 31, 2025 to work with a mediator to resolve the challenge.

The final step due by March 15, 2026 is that all zoning ordinances and resolutions required to implement the plan must be adopted.

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on October 23, 2024. It was also produced as part of MCCC's J Lab program.]



New Jersey's teacher shortage is intensifying

Educators look for solutions to address the multi-layered problem



PHOTO | LAURA GELTCH

Factors such as an overall lack of respect for the teaching profession, and compensation concerns combine to reduce the number of students pursuing education as a career.

By Laura Geltch
Community Reporter

News of the national teacher shortage, which worsened during COVID, is widely known, but the extent of the problem in New Jersey and the efforts being made to address it have received less media attention.

Liz Scott, who is Director of Human Resources and Communication, at Burlington Township High School and has worked there for 36 years, has seen the crisis intensifying year over year.

Scott says, "In the past, prior to COVID, I would post an elementary school position and receive 100-200 applicants. Now, when posting a similar job opening, we receive no more than five applicants. In some cases, we receive zero applications over many months of posting job openings."

Dr. Kristen Turner, Drew University, Chair of the Education Department says, "It is a challenge right now to recruit people into this profession and to retain them." Dr. Turner continues, "The shortage now is compounding."

She cites the "Cliff of 2025" as a culprit. Educators have described the "Cliff" as a two-fold problem combining the recent end of emergency funding from the federal government that was a response to COVID, with an impending dip in student enrollment as high schools feel the effect of the birthrate reduction that followed the recession of 2008.

The anxiety is echoed by Dr. Scott Rocco, the Superintendent of the Hamilton,

NJ school district, who says "This is a state and national issue. Superintendents talk about this issue every day in our monthly meetings and professional organizations. We have discussed this issue with elected officials and the Department of Education."

Educators and administrators in New Jersey are engaging a variety of tools and strategies to help reduce the impact on the state's students.

One controversial approach is the use of virtual instruction.

Dr. Rocco says, "For our middle and high school students, we can no longer guarantee [there will be a teacher in every room]. Certain subjects such as math, sciences, and world languages, we are using online services to provide instruction until a teacher is hired."

While schools traditionally relied on substitute teachers, Liz Scott from Burlington says, "The teacher shortage expands into substitute teachers as well, oftentimes requiring schools to hire online/virtual teachers who teach to an entire classroom of students."

Another approach focuses on accelerating teacher training.

Dr. Dennis Copeland, Director of Human Resources, Hamilton Township School District, says there is something that is already working which is allowing people to work as educators while achieving the



PHOTO | LAURA GELTCH

Second-grade students, Chrisbel Tavarez and Jolene Werts with Mrs. Tracy Lombardi at McGalliard Elementary School (Hamilton Township School District).

"In the past, prior to COVID, I would post an elementary school position and receive 100-200 applicants. Now, when posting a similar job opening, we receive no more than five applicants. In some cases, we receive zero applications over many months of posting job openings."

-Liz Scott,

*Director of Human Resources and Communication,
Burlington Township High School*



PHOTO | LAURA GELTCH

Student Amanda Bozarth of Hamilton West is planning for a career in Education.

certification(s).

He says, "We are seeing more and more candidates choosing the alternate route, which is a positive."

Providing financial incentives is another strategy.

Thomas Parmalee, Manager of Communications and Publications at NJ School Boards Association (NJSBA), says, "West Windsor Plainsboro school district now offers an incentive program with sign-on bonuses for the hard-to-fill positions. Select candidates are under con-

tract to receive payouts over a period of time, once hired. NJSBA has also seen salary increases throughout the state."

Teachers' colleges are working on a similar effort according to Dr. Turner, from Drew, who

says, "Colleges are considering moving more towards an apprenticeship model, paying a student while they are in training rather than expecting free labor, which is their current standard practice."

The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) is providing current student teachers with a \$4,500 stipend funneled through the universities, paid by the state government.

Dr. Eileen Heddy, TCNJ Director of Support for Teacher Education Programs and Global Student Teaching says, "We hope this will entice students to choose a career in education. However, it is not clear if the state will continue to fund this program in the future."

She also notes that statistics show retaining educators is as much of an issue as recruiting them to the field.

She says, "That is because of the way teachers are being viewed and treated. We need to shift the narrative back to the importance of teaching as a noble and rewarding profession."

Indeed, when Mercer County, NJ students were

asked about the prospect of a career in teaching, many say they are not enthusiastic.

Hamilton West student Mia Bartholomew says, "Education was never a choice for me as I witness how students act in school and treat their teachers... Truthfully, I do not want to be put in that position."

Nevertheless, the most straightforward approach may still be the one that educators have relied on for centuries: inspiring learners by example.

This has been a successful strategy for Addison Bozarth a 15-year-old student from Hamilton West who says she is heading for a career in education.

One of the first teachers who stood out to Bozarth was Mrs. Krista Zimmerman, a third-grade teacher, at Robinson Elementary School who not only helped her but, she says, "[She helped] my brother who needed extra time when learning new topics. Her tutoring helped [him] and inspired me."

More recently, she says, Mr. Andrew Patterson, her ninth-grade Honors and Language Arts Teacher has fostered her interest.

"He helped guide me to the realization that I want to educate," Bozarth says.

[The VOICE is a digital first publication. This article first appeared online on March 3, 2024. It was also produced as part of MCCC's J Lab program.]

December's Hearth

By Mary-Simone Collazo

My December,
See where love lays her head to rest,
Nestled against solace's chest
Prometheus's fire burning bright,
while the amber flames cast shadows,
new trust burning bright between us.

My December, chills and whimpers.
"I am frightened," I whisper to the night, my dread telling
me they will turn to smoke in an instant.
A tender hand calmly caresses my hair, curls twirling in
between fingers and fondness.
I am not going anywhere.

I have gazed into fire before,
Felt its embers scar my skin,
But this—this is tender,
A warmth that doesn't bite.
You're safe here.
Whatever trepidations await me in the winter night—
They cannot touch me here,
not near the hearth.

My December,
I beg, do not whisk them away in your winds—not yet.
Let the fire burn just a little longer,
Until dawn scatters the frost.

Untitled

By Kemi Olaleye

Although life seems dull like a grey sky, the air teems
thick with an unsettling resistance. One that helps
you put your foot down and breathe fire. A breath that
echoes freedom which rides the winds and carries
that chill across cities. A strong sense of community
growing, within it people find strength to bring justice.
While grey skies may cover the sun, we bring it alive
through our bodies.

Thank you Mother Earth

By Kemi Olaleye

Thank you Mother Earth
For giving so selflessly
Or maybe I just take selfishly

Thank you Mother earth
For the songs sang by the birds in the trees
I heard they were made just for me

Thank you Mother Earth
For the spices, oils, and lotions
I hope you don't mind what I did to the oceans

Thank you Mother Earth
For the bounty of food to eat
I never knew I liked so much meat

Thank you Mother Earth
For the warmth from the fire
You have fulfilled my every desire

Thank you Mother Earth
For the light by the moon
One step for man, a step too soon



PAINTING | VALERIE MULRINE

Planet #447

By Sky Juno

"Captain!" screeches the Lieutenant before being trampled by the creature. Teeth the size of our rifles pierce his back, piercing his spine before he was thrown aside like a food wrapper.

Me and my company have been on this planet for less than 14 hours and have already lost 3 soldiers. First, it was the Scientist when he was attacked by a group of laughing creatures that dragged him away into the golden grass. Then it was our Navigator after something disguised itself to look like a fuel pump hose bit him and injected enough poison to kill everyone on my ship, and now the Lieutenant, whose body is now drifting down the brown river.

As we ran through the golden grass, we had to stay vigilant of any more of the Hose-like creatures, praying that we didn't have the same fate as the Navigator. We run as fast as we can, shooting blindly behind us, hoping the plasma shot would slow it down. It only made it angry. We were warned of this sector of Planet #447. The trees here were scattered around, which gave little cover as we camped out. Water was scarce and barely available except for the rivers, which we stayed away from after seeing a black and white creature be pulled under by what looked like the serrated claws of a massive crustation. The land was always so hot, forcing my company to protect ourselves by using reflective blankets. I never thought such a harsh place could sustain

intelligent life, not until we met the Natives of this planet. We had taken a captive when we first landed, who looked like a farmer of some kind.

As our boots tracked through the mud, my stomach lurched in fear as we slowed down. It was like walking through a field of the blood this creature spilled. Its victims pull me down, desperate to have more join their excruciating existence as this creature's food. The fear grew to pure and horrible panic as I fell face-first into the mud, being pulled down even more into the realm of death that this Monster had created. My arms tried to push off the ground, but only sank deeper into the ground. As I desperately flailed in the mud, I finally gave up the struggle for my life. I prayed for a quick death as I waited, longer and longer for the monster to end my fear. I waited, and waited, and waited for what felt like years before a muffled voice spoke to me.

"Captain? Are you ok?" Asked the voice. I managed to turn my body over, my uniform coated in mud. I looked up to see my engineer offering a hand.

"W-w-what happened?" I sputtered out, my mandibles dripping with mud. "Did you kill the Monster?" I looked back and almost died of fright. The Monster was maybe 25-30 feet away from us, simply looking at us from where it stood. It looked at me, not like food, or a threat, but like a bug it could squash right here and now. The only reason it didn't was because it was bored of us.

It grew tired of its game, and left us to return to our ship. So we did. We made the trek to our ship where we could finally be taken up into the gravity well. My crew headed to the med bay as I went to the brig. Our prisoner, a native of this planet, was still sitting on the ground, seemingly unbothered by his imprisonment. I deactivated the plasma doors and walked in, sitting on the bed across from him. The natives were strange-looking people, with only parts of their bodies covered with hair, mostly the face, with claws that looked too short to do anything with.

"We encountered a creature. Four-legged, purplish skin that we could not burn or pierce with our weapons. It killed my lieutenant and chased us for almost a mile." I knew I would be reprimanded for talking to a prisoner of conquest. "I will make a deal with you. If you tell me how to kill these things, I will set you free." The native looked into my eyes, scanning me for any deception. Hopefully, the translator I was using worked.

"I can tell you all I know about this planet's animals, but the mammal you describe doesn't have some secret to kill it. It's a walking tank of muscle that kills anything it doesn't like." The native looked at me, exposing the multiple bones protruding from its mouth as it chucked out, "You met a hippopotamus, and it gave you a warm welcome to Earth. Wait until you see the Elephants, those are MUCH bigger."

Haiku in Three Languages

By Barbara Brown

Las hojas coloridas
En el otoño
Las hojas coloridas
Me hacen feliz

Colorful Leaves
The leaves of autumn
Are so very colorful
They make me happy

Buntaj folioj
Nun estas aŭtun'
Kaj la buntaj folioj
Min feliĉigas



Los estudiantes enfrentan problemas continuos con el acceso para personas con discapacidad

TRADUCCIÓN AL ESPAÑOL

Por **Mary-Simone Collazo**

Coeditor Gerente

Traducido por

Aria Acevedo

Continúa de la página 2

Genesis Vargas estaba tomando un descanso para ir al baño durante su clase de cerámica en el edificio ES en octubre. Debido a que tiene parálisis cerebral y usa una silla de ruedas eléctrica, fue a usar el cubículo para personas con discapacidad como de costumbre. Sin embargo, surgió un problema cuando la puerta del cubículo ES 112 no cerraba correctamente. Tuvo dificultades para mantener la puerta cerrada por sí sola mientras manio-braba el espacio necesario para su silla de ruedas debido al ancho del cubículo.

“Necesito mi silla de ruedas a diario. Me permite moverme. Es mi compañera, como me gusta llamarla. Así que cuando no puedo moverme con mi silla, es como si no pudiera vivir. Es parte de mi identidad. Es parte de lo que soy”, dice Vargas, estudiante de cuarto año de la carrera de Comunicación.

Ashena Gamboa Mora, estudiante de tercer año de Enfermería y Salud Pública y mentora del programa de mentoría para discapacitados DREAM de MCCC, escuchó a Vargas en el cubículo y se ofreció a sostener la puerta por ella. Después, las chicas se unieron al descubrir que ambas participaban en el programa DREAM — Gamboa como mentora y Vargas como aprendiz — y compartían su pasión por abogar por una mejor accesibilidad en el campus.

“Uno pensaría que este cubículo para personas con discapacidad sería, ya sabes, accesible para discapacitados”, comentó Gamboa.

El campus de West Windsor de MCCC (WCC) se inauguró en 1971, mientras que la Ley de Estadounidenses con Discapacidades (ADA) fue promulgada en 1990. La ADA fue la primera ley integral de derechos civiles para personas con discapacidades en el país. La ley exige que las instituciones públicas, incluidas las universidades comunitarias, aseguren que las aulas y otras instalaciones del campus sean físicamente accesibles.

En los 34 años desde la promulgación de la ADA, MCCC ha actualizado algunas áreas de accesibilidad en el campus, especialmente durante renovaciones. Sin embargo, los edificios construidos antes de la ADA no estaban obligados a renovarse según la ley, y ciertas partes del campus aún no cumplen completamente con los requisitos.

El último gran problema de accesibilidad ocurrió en la primavera de 2019, cuando se descompuso el ascensor del edificio BS. Alex González, un estudiante de Ciencias de la Computación con espina bífida que camina con muletas, tuvo que ser cargado por su madre arriba y abajo de las escaleras para asistir a una de sus clases en el tercer piso. González presentó su caso a la Junta de Síndicos, y el problema del ascensor se solucionó durante el verano de 2019.

González, exreportero de The VOICE y actualmente es-



FOTO | MARY-SIMONE COLLAZO

Estudiante, Génesis Vargas ha descubierto que no todas las partes del campus de MCCC son accesibles para ella en su silla de ruedas, a la que llama su ‘compañera’ y parte de sí misma.”

tudiante de Justicia Criminal, dice que el próximo paso es reparar los abridores automáticos de puertas comúnmente conocidos como botones para discapacitados.

Él dice:

“En el edificio BS, no hay un abridor automático de puertas.

A veces, cuando estoy solo, literalmente tengo que abrir ambas puertas [que son] demasiado pesadas. En el proceso de abrirlas, a veces mi muleta se cae al suelo y tengo que recogerla después.”

The VOICE revisó el acceso para discapacitados en todo el campus de West Windsor y, hasta el martes 26 de noviembre de 2024, encontró que 16 abridores automáticos de puertas no funcionan correctamente y 34 puertas (incluyendo baños) no tienen estos dispositivos. El ascensor HS 2-2 no abre y el edificio CM actualmente no tiene un ascensor en funcionamiento, aunque se está construyendo uno que conecta con la plaza central. Todavía está en construcción.

Vargas dice que le gustaría bajar al área de césped en la plaza central, pero señaló: “Hay

“Necesito mi silla de ruedas a diario. Me permite moverme. Es mi compañera, como me gusta llamarla. Así que cuando no puedo moverme con mi silla, es como si no pudiera vivir. Es parte de mi identidad. Es parte de quien soy.”

-Genesis Vargas. MCCC Student

una pendiente al final y no es segura para el acceso con silla de ruedas. Es una lástima que haya un hoyo de barro en el césped que necesita ser reparado.”

Sin embargo, la universidad ha hecho algunos esfuerzos para abordar varios problemas de accesibilidad.

Josh Johnson, Jefe de Mantenimiento e Instalaciones, dice: “Estamos tratando de asegurarnos de que todas las entradas que usarían los estudiantes con problemas de accesibilidad tengan abridores de puertas, interruptores de ‘agitar para abrir’ o tengan el ancho adecuado para que puedan ingresar con sus sillas de ruedas o cualquier otro dispositivo de movilidad. También estamos revisando nuestros espacios interiores, incluidos los baños... para ver qué podemos hacer para hacer esos espacios más accesibles, incluyendo

agrandar los cubículos... tenemos algunas limitaciones estructurales debido a la forma en que se construyeron estos edificios; se construyeron antes de que existieran las leyes ADA.”

Los estudiantes con discapacidades no son los únicos en el campus que abogan por más recursos de accesibilidad. Johnson dice que la Asociación de Gobierno Estudiantil (SGA) de Mercer y el Centro de Recursos de Accesibilidad (CAR) acuden a él y a la Dra. Deborah Preston, presidenta de MCCC, cuando notan lo que necesita ser reparado.

Patrick McCarthy, senador de la SGA, comentó: “La Asociación de Gobierno Estudiantil ha estado tratando de abogar por aumentar el financiamiento para reemplazar los botones de accesibilidad en todo el campus, con resultados mixtos.”

La SGA ha usado su Instagram para hacer múltiples publicaciones asegurando a los estudiantes que están abogando por una fuerte accesibilidad en ambos campus.

En una publicación escribieron: “Abogamos por reparaciones urgentes del ascensor en

el campus James Kerney cuando dejaron de funcionar, asegurando accesibilidad y conveniencia para todos los estudiantes”.

En una entrevista, la Dra. Preston alentó a los estudiantes a seguir hablando sobre las necesidades de accesibilidad en el campus, diciendo: “Mucha gente en esta universidad se preocupa por el acceso para discapacitados. Creo que ha habido proyectos de accesibilidad en listas desde mucho antes de que yo llegara aquí... Está bien señalar si ven un problema. La gente debe saber que está bien comunicarse con alguien y reportar que algo necesita ser más accesible”.

Alessia Morgan, una estudiante de tercer año de Artes Liberales que pidió usar un seudónimo para hablar abiertamente sobre sus experiencias, vive con varias enfermedades crónicas que afectan su movilidad y niveles de fatiga. Ella alterna entre usar muletas, un andador y una silla de ruedas manual como ayuda para la movilidad. Cree que las adaptaciones deben ir más allá del campus físico, especialmente en las pruebas.

Honorlock es un servicio parcial de vigilancia en línea con IA utilizado a través de Blackboard que se requiere en varias clases de Mercer. Está diseñado para supervisar a los estudiantes durante los exámenes y asegurarse de que no hagan trampa. Durante un examen con Honorlock, un estudiante no puede moverse fuera del alcance de la cámara o hablar mucho, de lo contrario, será marcado para revisión.

Morgan dice: “No puedo usar Honorlock. Si te mueves o algo así, te pueden penalizar. Tengo que ir al baño muchas veces... si necesito agua o una bolsa de hielo, si siento que me voy a desmayar, necesito eso. No puedo decirle a mi pareja que me traiga algo”.

También menciona que el Centro de Pruebas de MCCC, un espacio donde los estudiantes con adaptaciones del CAR pueden recibir tiempo extra para los exámenes en un lugar silencioso, tiene sus fallas diciendo: “Que el Centro de Pruebas te haga guardar todas tus cosas (excepto un lápiz y una calculadora) en un casillero antes de tomar una prueba es totalmente inapropiado. No puedo tener mi agua, mis medicamentos. Lo siento mucho, ¿no puedo tener un juguete antiestrés? ¿Qué, voy a hacer trampa con una maldita goma elástica?”

Las adaptaciones para exámenes y otros apoyos académicos se gestionan a través del Centro de Recursos de Accesibilidad (CAR) de MCCC, anteriormente CITA (Centro de Inclusión, Transición y Accesibilidad).

Una de las coordinadoras de CAR, Susan Onaitis, dijo a The VOICE por correo electrónico: “Todas las necesidades de los estudiantes se consideran importantes. Los estudiantes que solicitan adaptaciones académicas participan en una cita de evaluación integral. En esta cita, se les anima a compartir sus necesidades únicas de aprendizaje”.

Gamboa Mora dijo: “[Los estudiantes con discapacidades son] parte de la comunidad de Mercer... Espero que algún día haya más inclusión para quienes tienen necesidades de accesibilidad”.

Vargas está de acuerdo, diciendo: “Si quieres abogar por la comunidad discapacitada, necesitas entrar en nuestro mundo”.

Mercer's administration unveils underwhelming rebrand: They should have saved the money

By The Editorial Board of The College VOICE

MCCC's Administrators have yet again spent money on something unnecessary, this time with the unveiling of a new rebrand of the school's logo that looks almost identical to the old one. It features two new fonts and the tagline "Above All Else." We're not saying a massive change would have been good, but skipping a rebrand altogether would have been preferable, particularly for the pocketbook.

Let's talk about the M.

Mercer's signature M with three C-shaped arcs across it for the three Cs of "County Community College"—which we call the "wifi bars"—has seen those lines increase in size by a whole three millimeters to now go all the way across. Why this of all things got so much attention instead of putting the rebranding funds into something like faculty wages or lowering tuition rates, no one at The VOICE has the foggiest notion.

Then there are the exciting "new" fonts, Gotham and Rockwell.

We're fond of fonts

at The VOICE. So here's some history. Gotham was popularized 16 years ago when Barack Obama used it in his "Hope" campaign. The choice of this font does not inspire any more hope than the new political landscape. It signals nostalgia rather than progress. Again, at The VOICE we would hope Mercer would save the rebrand funds for things like better disability access buttons in bathrooms.

Then there's Rockwell. The slab serif font was created in 1934, a year older than radar technology and five years older than the start of World War II. That "update" honestly speaks for itself.

Speaking of updates, we have a new slogan: "Above All Else." In a recent official MCCC Instagram post that introduces the new tagline the voice-over narrator says that Mercer was "Forged upon an idea: What was is not as good as what will be." Not only is that a mouthful, but didn't we just update the slogan with "Your place to be!" Now it's not as good as what will be?

If Mercer is going above all else at the moment, it's with pointless spending. Are we trying to paper over our dis-

mal three-year (first-time full-time student) graduation rate of just 17% (according to the most recent institutional data posted to the state's Department of Education)?

Without a clear motive as to why the school chose to do a rebrand now, Sophia Paz, a fourth-year Fine Arts major, questions the decision, saying "Why did they spend money on changing the logo in the first place when they could've been doing something else like paying professors and giving [adjuncts] full-time jobs?"

Alex Bazanka, a third-year Criminal Justice major, comments "Yeah, [the new design] looks 'sleeker' or whatever, but at the end of the day it's just another minimalist logo redesign that didn't need to happen. They're actively trying to assign meaning to the font for how it's 'assertive but not imposing, friendly but not folksy.' Why are you putting so much emphasis on the 'feel' of a font when it literally doesn't matter."

Mercer may not be perfect, and it may not be the best school in the country or even the county (thanks, Princeton), but it's a place we're proud of. The VOICE is one of the top two-year newspapers in the nation. The soccer teams both just won



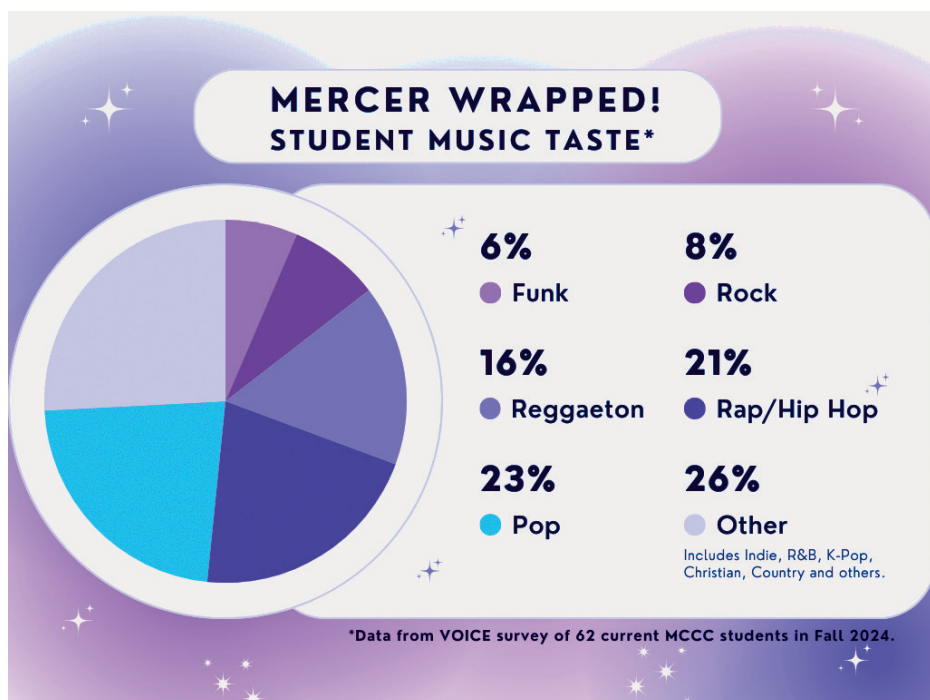
Regionals and the men's team went all the way to Nationals. Students from our Honors program are getting into Princeton (see page 5). The shape of our M didn't get us there. The quality of teaching and the connections we make with our peers and mentors did. That's where the money needs to go, fostering those opportunities above all else.

The decision to rebrand at a time of low attendance, low graduation rates, and economic turmoil in this country is a heartbreaking waste of money.

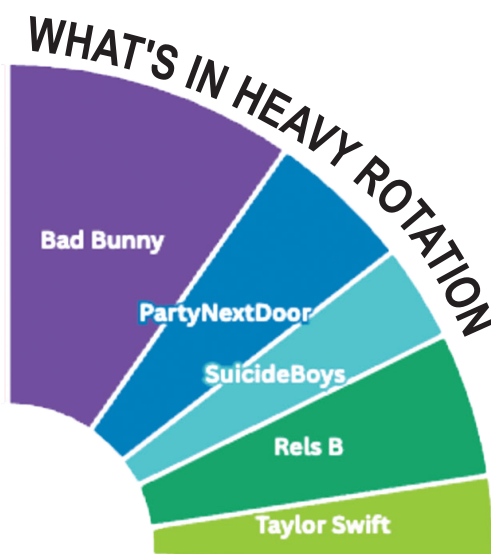
While attending the rebrand rollout ceremony on December 4 with members of the VOICE, one professor's words summed up our thoughts on the choices Mercer has made: "I'm underwhelmed."

PS - We hear there's a new mascot to be announced soon. We hope that The VOICE's large-scale student survey of mascot preferences, conducted in 2022 was reviewed as part of this effort. We're keeping our fingers crossed for the Mercer Dragons.

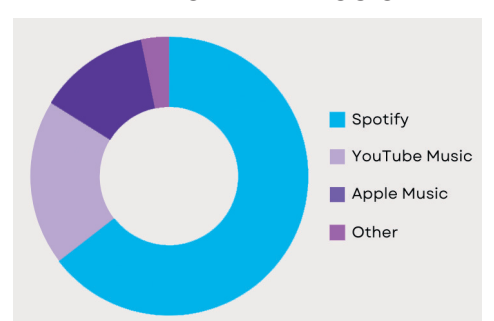
Editorial Cartoon by Katrina Shvets



MCCC STUDENT MUSIC SURVEY*



WHAT PLATFORM ARE YOU ON?



*The VOICE surveyed 62 students about their musical taste

By Aria Asevedo Culture Reporter



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Lack of civics education is a crisis!

AS I SEE IT



Kemi Olaleye

As the child of immigrants from Nigeria and Dominica, I've witnessed firsthand the profound meaning of U.S. citizenship for those who must fight for it. For my parents and much of my family, it wasn't just a legal status, it was a lifeline, a chance to build better lives. Their livelihoods—and mine, in turn—have been built on understanding this country's history and the workings of its government.

Yet, despite the significance of civic knowledge to immigrants seeking naturalization, most Americans lack it.

We are really bad at civics. Overwhelmingly, frustratingly bad.

While it is not our fault the American education system has failed to provide us civics education, it is our responsibility to do it ourselves, just like many of our ancestors. If you are a person of color or a woman, remember that many people fought

tirelessly, often risking or losing their lives, to ensure your right to be represented in government. In some countries, citizens don't have a voice like we do, and are dying to be seen and heard, something we often take for granted in America.

According to a study from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "...70% of Americans fail a basic civic literacy quiz on topics like the three branches of government, the number of Supreme Court justices, and other basic functions of our democracy."

Similarly, MCCC students fit the statistics. The VOICE conducted a survey of 30 students, taking ten random questions from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Naturalization test. The average score was a 4.8 out of 10, missing the mark for the passing requirement of 6 out of 10.

This lack of knowledge is also accompanied with a lack of trust in government, with only 22% of people saying they trust the government to do "what is right," says a Pew Research Center study.

American civics is the basis for understanding how our government operates. Without citizens understanding its systems and processes, we risk having a government that only serves its own interests.

Politicians thrive off of our ignorance. They take advantage of people's ability to be easily influenced by the media they consume, luring the uneducated

into their grasp to build their following.

For example, Donald Trump blamed Kamala Harris for inflation, saying she "broke the economy, broke the border and broke the world, frankly," leading his supporters to believe she had a direct impact on Biden's economic policies.

However, the Vice President has virtually no power in terms of operating any branches of our government or economic system, and mainly serves as an advisor to the President. The spread of this misinformation thrives on the lack of knowledge of our government systems, and leads to a community disconnected from each other and its governance.

As college students, we take on the responsibility of learning about our selective majors, preparing ourselves to enter the workforce. While we are sharpening our minds, we must also remind ourselves that we are part of a local and national community. How are we using what we've learned to improve the lives of people around us?

In an interview with Arlene Gardner, President of the New Jersey Center for Civics Education, she explains the difficulty in getting people to care about civics, and addresses the social paradox that people who are likely to sign up for a civics course, are not the ones who need it the most.

She adds, "You know, part of being a citizen is appre-

ciating that you're connected to your community, and you know, you can try to tear it down, or you could try to improve it. You know, we want to get to the improving part."

Gardner mentions Project Citizen, a project-based civic education program for grades 3-12 that involves students in understanding public policy and emphasizes responsible participation in local and state government. While this project aims to engage younger local perspectives, there is a need for young adults and adults to also participate.

Similarly, MCCC Political Science Professor Rebecca Biebel recounts how students who come into her American government classes often do not understand the basics of how the government works, which leads to misguided political beliefs.

She says, "I think people feel so far away from the government and it stems from lack of education...we need to meet students where they're at."

If all of us cared about uplifting our communities, we would be in a much different position as a society.

Given the uncertainty of our current political landscape, it is more crucial now than ever to have an informed and engaged public to uphold our democracy. Civics education is the first brick in the bridge that connects people with the heart of the community and the spirit of its government.

TRADUCCIÓN AL ESPAÑOL

Como hijo de inmigrantes de Nigeria y Dominica, he presenciado de primera mano el profundo significado de la ciudadanía estadounidense para aquellos que deben luchar por ella. Para mis padres y gran parte de mi familia, no era solo un estatus legal, era una tabla de salvación, una oportunidad para construir una vida mejor. Sus medios de subsistencia —y los míos, a su vez— se han construido entendiendo la historia de este país y el funcionamiento de su gobierno.

Sin embargo, a pesar de la importancia del conocimiento cívico para los inmigrantes que buscan la naturalización, la mayoría de los estadounidenses carecen de él.

Somos realmente malos en civismo. Extremadamente y frustrantemente malos.

Aunque no es culpa nuestra que el sistema educativo estadounidense haya fallado en proporcionarnos una educación cívica, es nuestra responsabilidad aprenderlo por nosotros mismos, como hicieron muchos de nuestros antepasados. Si eres una persona de color o una mujer, recuerda

que muchas personas lucharon incansablemente, a menudo arriesgando o perdiendo sus vidas, para garantizar tu derecho a estar representado en el gobierno. En algunos países, los ciudadanos no tienen una voz como nosotros y mueren por ser vistos y escuchados, algo que a menudo damos por sentado en Estados Unidos.

Según un estudio de la Cámara de Comercio de EE.UU, "...el 70% de los estadounidenses reprobaba un examen básico de conocimientos cívicos sobre temas como las tres ramas del gobierno, el número de jueces de la Corte Suprema y otras funciones básicas de nuestra democracia."

De manera similar, los estudiantes de MCCC reflejan estas estadísticas. The VOICE realizó una encuesta a 30 estudiantes, con diez preguntas aleatorias del examen de naturalización del Servicio de Ciudadanía e Inmigración de los EE. UU. La puntuación promedio fue de 4,8 de 10, por debajo del requisito de aprobación de 6 de 10.

Esta falta de conocimiento también está acompañada por una falta de confianza en el gobierno, ya que solo el 22% de las personas dicen confiar en que el gobierno hará "lo correc-

to", según un estudio del Centro de Investigación Pew.

El civismo estadounidense es la base para entender cómo opera nuestro gobierno. Sin que los ciudadanos comprendan sus sistemas y procesos, corremos el riesgo de tener un gobierno que solo sirva a sus propios intereses.

Los políticos prosperan gracias a nuestra ignorancia. Se aprovechan de la facilidad con la que la gente puede ser influenciada por los medios que consumen, atrayendo a los no educados para aumentar su base de apoyo.

Por ejemplo, Donald Trump culpó a Kamala Harris de la inflación, diciendo que ella "rompió la economía, rompió la frontera y rompió el mundo, francamente", haciendo que sus seguidores creyeran que ella tuvo un impacto directo en las políticas económicas de Biden.

Sin embargo, la Vicepresidenta tiene prácticamente ningún poder para operar en las ramas del gobierno o el sistema económico, y principalmente actúa como asesora del Presidente. La propagación de esta desinformación prospera en la falta de conocimiento sobre los sistemas de gobierno, lo que conduce a una comunidad desconectada

entre sí y de su gobierno.

Como estudiantes universitarios, asumimos la responsabilidad de aprender sobre nuestras áreas de especialización, preparándonos para entrar en el mercado laboral. Mientras afinamos nuestras mentes, también debemos recordarnos que somos parte de una comunidad local y nacional. ¿Cómo estamos usando lo que hemos aprendido para mejorar las vidas de quienes nos rodean?

En una entrevista con Arlene Gardner, presidenta del Centro de Educación Cívica de Nueva Jersey, ella explica la dificultad de lograr que las personas se interesen por el civismo y aborda la paradoja social de que aquellos que probablemente se inscriban en un curso de civismo no son los que más lo necesitan. Añade: "Parte de ser un ciudadano es apreciar que estás conectado con tu comunidad, y puedes intentar destruirla, o puedes intentar mejorarla. Queremos llegar a la parte de mejorarla."

Gardner menciona Project Citizen, un programa de educación cívica basado en proyectos para estudiantes de tercer a duodécimo grado que los involucra en la comprensión de políticas públicas y enfatiza la

participación responsable en el gobierno local y estatal. Aunque este proyecto busca involucrar a los más jóvenes, también hay una necesidad de que los adultos jóvenes y adultos participen.

De manera similar, la profesora de ciencias políticas de MCCC, Rebecca Biebel, señala cómo los estudiantes que llegan a sus clases de gobierno estadounidense a menudo no comprenden los conceptos básicos del funcionamiento del gobierno, lo que lleva a creencias políticas erróneas.

Ella dice: "Creo que la gente se siente muy alejada del gobierno, y eso proviene de la falta de educación... necesitamos encontrarnos con los estudiantes donde están".

Si todos nos preocupáramos por mejorar nuestras comunidades, estaríamos en una posición muy diferente como sociedad.

Dada la incertidumbre del panorama político actual, es más crucial que nunca tener un público informado y comprometido para defender nuestra democracia. La educación cívica es el primer ladrillo en el puente que conecta a las personas con el corazón de la comunidad y el espíritu de su gobierno.

Editorial Policy:

The College VOICE is written and edited by students of Mercer County Community College and published every 3-4 weeks under the guidance of faculty advisers. The material printed in The College VOICE, be it articles, advertisements or opinion pieces, does not necessarily represent the views of the editors, the faculty, staff, administration or the Board of Trustees of Mercer County Community College.

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The College VOICE accepts letters to the editor. Submissions should be no more than 400 words. Send materials by email to an editor or a media adviser, and include your name and status at Mercer (major and year, faculty or staff position or alumnx) or local address. Letters to the editor are posted online and run in print. For more information see our policy manual at: www.mcccvoice.org/tools/policy-manual/

e-mail: johnsonh@mccc.edu
phone: (609) 586-4800 ext. 3594
write to: **The College VOICE**
c/o Prof. Holly Johnson
Mercer County College
1200 Old Trenton Rd.
West Windsor, NJ 08690

ADVICE - ASK THE VOICE

HELP IS HERE!



yet as I roll through campus with the wind in my hair. I'm never late to class. I've named her Golfy and I don't want to return it. How can I keep getting away with it borrowing her until I graduate?
- Going for Golfy

Dear VOICE Staff, I was vaping in the bathroom and the alarm went off. After the fire department left it went off again! I'm scared I'm going to get caught. What should I do? - Needing Nicotine

Dear VOICE, I saw someone wearing what appeared to be a parrot costume at the college's big rebrand unveiling. Is that our new mascot? Will we be the Mercer Parrots? - Just Curious

Dear Golfy, Community college has taught you to be resourceful. Don't change a thing.
-The VOICE

Dear Needing Nicotine, switch to stealthier bad habits, like chewing gum aggressively. Or maybe Google "how to quit vaping before you get kicked out of college." - The VOICE

Dear Curious, We could do worse. - The VOICE

Dear VOICE Staff, What made you join such an amazing group of people? -Interested Investigator

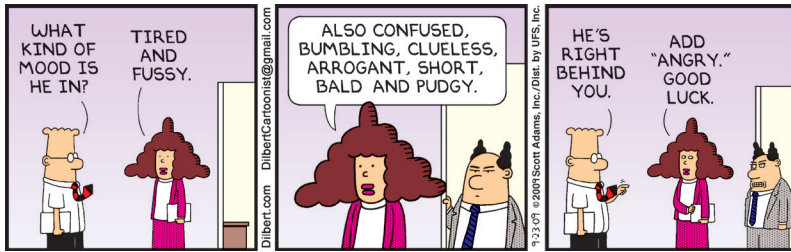
Dear VOICE Staff, I have to sing for my final presentation for my Music Class, but my vocals haven't improved all semester. Do you think yodeling might get me an A? - Pitchy Pipes

Dear VOICE, My car got totaled and I won't pay to ride the bus, so I stole borrowed one of the golf carts that Security uses. I have been riding it to and from campus for weeks. Nobody has suspected me

Dear Interested Investigator, We joined because we were free on Thursday, wanted extra credit, and now we're all editors.
- The VOICE

Dear Pitchy Pipes, if you yodel, you will most certainly get an "A" - A professor running the hell away.
- The VOICE

2X DILBERT



SUDOKU

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

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦
 ♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging
 ♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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

Answer

HOROSCOPES

By Sierra Azara
Senior Astrologist



Capricorn
Dec. 22 - Jan. 19

Anyone unwilling to give you the slower pace you've desired is abusing your kindness. 2025 will bring some much-needed vacation time and the slower pace at work you've always deserved, so enjoy!



Taurus
Apr. 20 - May 20

Expect epiphanies! With Uranus still in conjunction with your Sun sign and starting off in the intuitive 24°, this will bring forth a knowing so accurate that it will rival any intuition you've had prior.



Virgo
Aug. 23 - Sept. 22

The changes happening this month are both karmic and something you will have been able to see coming. Nothing will come by surprise. You're stronger than you give yourself credit for!



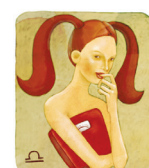
Aquarius
Jan. 20 - Feb. 18

December is going to increase your sense of urgency for repairing what is wrong with the world! Any work that involves giving back, will only help amplify your level of self worth.



Gemini
May 21 - Jun. 20

Your luck is going to change with a month of emotional shifts, Jupiter's expansive energy is going to change everything especially when it comes to what you are expected to feel and attain moving forward.



Libra
Sept. 23 - Oct. 22

This month is going to help rebalance lost harmony in your life! By the end you will have fully embraced this new balancing act of finding a middle ground between being cold and people pleasing.



Pisces
Feb. 19 - Mar. 20

In 2025, you can expect changes in residence and travel while maintaining your strong intuitive ability to guide you to exactly where you're meant to be now.



Cancer
Jun. 21 - Jul. 22

Time to push boundaries to get the life you've always wanted! You may feel like the world around you is changing so quickly and drastically, leaving you feeling left behind. Prioritize what matters now!



Scorpio
Oct. 23 - Nov. 21

This month is going to switch up what you thought you knew, which may have you feeling nostalgic about the past. Keep your head clear, and your eyes peeled as we move into the new year!



Aries
Mar. 21 - Apr. 19

Time for transformation! Expect 4 phases: redefining family values, communicating these changes, implementing them, and finally bringing them to the surface.



Leo
Jul. 23 - Aug. 22

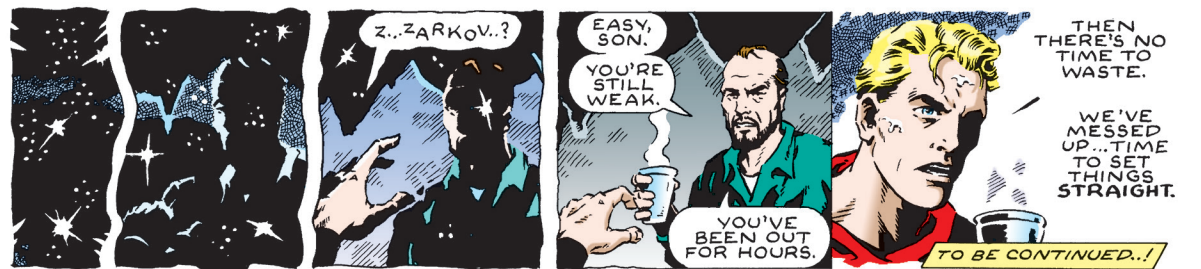
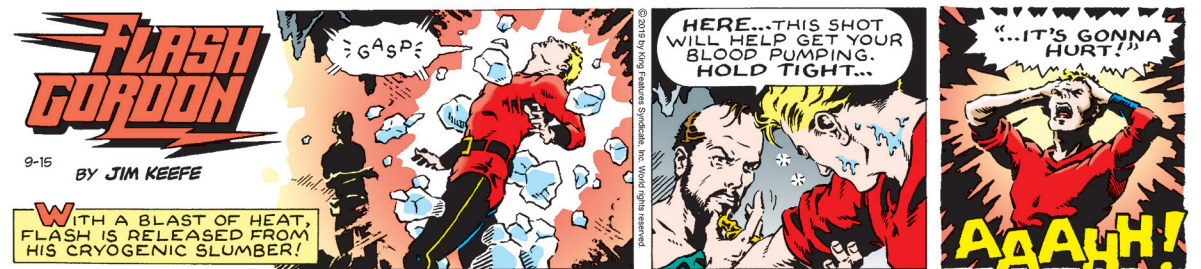
With Pluto's opposition to your Sun sign, tempers will be running high, and you may have a few financial oversights that come back to bite you. Don't worry. It's only temporary!



Sagittarius
Nov. 22 - Dec. 21

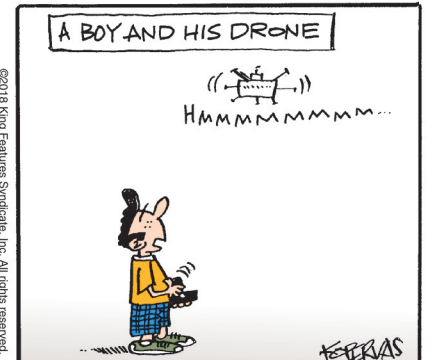
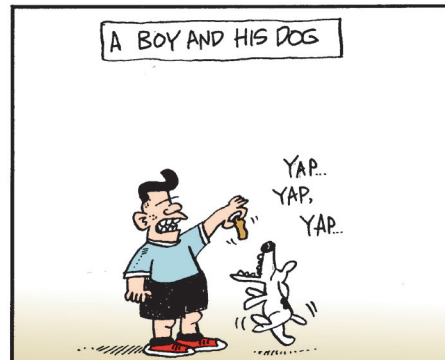
With the month starting off with a new moon in Sagittarius, then the month ending on the 31st with a new moon in Capricorn; this month is going to be the eye opener you've needed all year!

FLASH GORDON



Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



Answer