Alex Pallen: The Lone Star of Men’s Diving

Jess Liptzin
Staff Writer

“There is no I in team,” but for Montclair State University men’s diver Alex Pallen, that saying doesn’t apply. Currently a junior, Pallen is the only member of the men’s diving team for the 2021-2022 season.

While being the only member of the team can be lonely, even difficult at times, Pallen has overcome these obstacles and is looking to etch his name in the Montclair State Athletics history books at the end of this season.

So far, Pallen has dominated on the diving board, with a personal record in the 1-meter dive on Friday, Jan. 21. He only started his diving career as a freshman.

“I had absolutely no experience diving,” Pallen said. “I’d say the most background I had that related to diving was gymnastics that I did from ages five to 12. So really no experience at all, and I just kind of went for it to learn everything from scratch, but I think that made it fun.”

During his freshman year, Pallen’s roommate, former Montclair State swimmer Samuel Golovin, told him that there were no members on the diving team. Pallen had a background in sports and wanted to keep busy. He approached the coach and inquired about a spot.

After a quick practice run to see if he could grasp the sport, diving coach Jennifer Ullman saw potential and immediately went to work. In just one year, he made major improvements in his technique. By his sophomore season, he was getting a hold of the sport.

According to Ullman, while some of his dives took time to develop, he was a quick learner and made a smooth transition into the sport.

Now a junior and much more familiar with it, Pallen has greater hopes for what he can accomplish individually and for the team. Since Pallen is the only diver, he is the lone scorer contribution for the combined swim and diving team score.

The top two place winners at each meet are awarded the team points. This in turn puts a massive amount of pressure on Pallen. As Montclair State’s lone diver, he has to at least take one of these top spots in order to secure some points for the team. Most impressively, this is something he has managed to do in all of the swimming & diving meets this season.

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Montclair State Announces New Provost

Dr. Junius Gonzales will be taking over as provost and senior vice president for academic affairs beginning March 7.

Jenna Sundel, News Editor

Montclair State University announced that Dr. Junius Gonzales will be taking over as provost and senior vice president for academic affairs beginning March 7. As provost, Gonzales will become the second-highest-ranking officer of the university and lead the university’s 10 colleges and schools.

Gonzales will be taking over for Dr. Kim Heldring. Hollister, acting provost and vice president for academic affairs, Hollister took over the position in July when Dr. William Gerich stepped down from his administrative role.

“His broad-ranging experience, track record of innovation and his commitment to working collaboratively to support students and faculty will positively impact the entire university community, and I am looking forward to working closely with him as we elevate Montclair [State] to become a national model of an innovative 21st-century public university,” Koppell said.

Koppell also disclosed some details about the search committee, which was chaired by Emily Douglas, professor and chair of the department of social work and child advocacy.

“A committee reflective of our diverse campus community evaluated a highly qualified, diverse pool of candidates and presented an outstanding set of finalists,” Koppell said. Hollister said she started working with Gonzales to ensure a smooth transition.

“As part of our efforts to ensure a smooth transition, Dr. Gonzales and I have started a dialogue on issues and initiatives that are important to the university and office of the provost,” Hollister said. “Along with the entire team in the provost’s office, I am committed to supporting Dr. Gonzales during the transition and in the years to come. I look forward to working with Dr. Gonzales to elevate the profile of the university and support our students and faculty.”

Red Hawk Rap Sheet

Sunday, January 2
Lot 21: Officers responded to Lot 21 in regards to a report of criminal mischief to a vehicle. This case is under investigation.

Monday, January 3
Lot 47: A student reported an act of criminal mischief to their vehicle, while parked in Lot 47. This case is under investigation.

Monday, January 10
Chapin Hall: Officers responded to Chapin Hall in regards to report of a theft. This incident is under investigation.

Monday, January 10
Life Hall: Officers responded to Life Hall in regards to report of an attempted burglary. This incident is under investigation.

Anyone who has information regarding these incidents is urged to call the police station at TIP-S (8477).
Booster
(continued from page 1)

“I’m excited to be moved in and I’m super excited to be back on campus,” Shafer said. “I think mandating the booster shot was smart to keep everyone safe, and as much as I love the idea of winning some money for getting the booster, I don’t think it will change anyone’s mind who wasn’t [already] vaccinated to now get the booster. But, I’m hoping for the best this semester. Hopefully, classes stay in person.”

Jason Sequera, a junior theatre studies major and a commuter at Montclair State, feels the raffling was more of a bribe than anything else to get students boosted.

“With the booster mandate, I feel there [are] good intentions,” Sequera said. “I can see why they want [students] to get the booster since obviously we live in a time where getting boosted does technically help you against [COVID-19], but the way they’re going at it — it seems like they’re trying to bribe students. This whole raffle of $8,500 is great and all but I don’t want a bribe. I got the booster already because I chose to do it.”

Taylor King, a senior exercise science major, believes Montclair State should’ve given students more time to get the booster shot due to their schedules.

“I don’t think the booster mandate should really be a thing,” King said. “It’s good if a student has it, [but] if a student doesn’t have it, I don’t think they should be reprimanded for it. [Due to] scheduling conflicts, a lot of people can’t get a booster shot when [Montclair State] is requiring it and such.”

King further emphasized that the raffle isn’t going to motivate students to get the booster shot any earlier.

“Personally, I don’t feel the raffle is going to do much either,” King said. “I’m getting the booster because I need it for other things, but I’m not getting it for the raffle.”

Andrew Mees, the university’s spokesperson, says the faster students get the booster, the safer the campus would be. He further stated that Dr. Dawn Soufleris, the vice president for student development and campus life, and several of the vice presidents came up with the idea of the raffle.

“We also want to acknowledge all of the efforts our students have undertaken to help keep our community as safe as possible and allow the campus to remain open,” Mees said. “The incentive was implemented to not only help students get boosted as soon as possible but also to show our appreciation for all they have done in helping to secure the public good that is our collective health.”

Montclair State will be giving out COVID-19 vaccines, including booster shots, on campus in the Student Center ballrooms on Thursday, Jan. 20.
Montclair State University raked in over $1 million in parking tickets within the last three years, according to statistics obtained by The Montclarion.

The university collected $574,608 in parking tickets in the fiscal year from 2018 to 2019. Jalil Philemon, a senior theatre studies major, received approximately 30 parking citations in that year. As a freshman, Philemon did not have enough credits to park on campus and paid for daily parking in the NJ Transit parking deck. He said he was exhausted from work and wanted to avoid the long walk back to his dorm in the brutally cold weather, so he parked in Lot 19.

“I would get home during the time it was really cold, and I had to park my car in NJ Transit. I lived in Blanton [Hall],” Philemon said.

Philemon paid all of his tickets — each one $50 — except for two he successfully appealed. He couldn’t afford to pay all of them within the 21-day time limit, however, so he faced an extra $10 fine per ticket. Since then, Philemon accumulated approximately 20 additional tickets, paying over $2,300 in fines.

“I tried to be cautious, but not everything works in [my] favor,” Philemon said.

Following the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the dollar amount of fines from students, staff and faculty decreased. This reduction was due to fewer students being on campus because of COVID-19. From 2019 to 2020, $483,603 was collected. From 2020 to 2021, $136,150 was collected.

All of the money raised by the university through parking tickets gets put back into the Parking Services budget, according to the university’s spokesperson, Andrew Mees.

Approximately 45% of the tickets issued in the last three fiscal years were distributed at the lots closest to the main campus. Parking violations at Car Parc Diem were responsible for 24% of tickets. Lot 19, right in front of the Recreation Center, was the location of 11% of tickets. Lot 17, behind the Student Center and next to Blanton Hall, accounted for 10%.

Roughly 80% of the fines were given out to people who paid for a permit but were not following the rules. The next most common types of parking penalties came down to expired meters at 5% and overtime parking at 3%, according to the university.

Blerina Pushkule, a senior public health major, is a commuter who said she has gotten approximately 25 tickets since her freshman year, most of them accumulating in Lot 19.

Pushkule explained why sometimes students have no choice but to park somewhere that may get them a ticket afterward.

“It’s because of the inconvenience of finding parking and you won’t be late for class,” Pushkule said.

Pushkule says she often takes this risk and hopes parking services will bypass her vehicle.

“I’m just hoping I’ll make it out in time before someone drives by,” Pushkule said.

Ben Omuya, director of parking services, said there is a misconception that there are not enough parking spots on campus. In reality, drivers are trying to get close to campus and take the risk to park illegally, rather than parking legally in the empty spots at the further ends of campus that require a shuttle ride to class.

“I want to reiterate that we currently have enough spaces on campus to accommodate all permit holders and visitors,” Omuya said.

“However, given the geography of the campus and the number of parkers we must accommodate, it is impossible to provide next-to-building parking for everyone,” Omuya said parking services issues warnings.

“Montclair State University Made Over $1 Million in Parking Tickets in the Last Three Years”
Montclair State University Made Over $1 Million in the Last Three Years

The director works with students but also reinforces the guidelines written in the parking policies when a person purchases a parking permit. “Students agree to the terms when they purchase a parking permit, and [these terms] break down the rules, guidelines and consequences if permit holders violate the rules,” Omuya said.

William Fitzpatrick, assistant vice president of facilities logistics and support services, said this isn’t about collecting money on their end. “It’s about educating to control the inventory of spaces we have,” Fitzpatrick said.

During November, students can donate canned goods to the Red Hawk Pantry instead of paying for one parking ticket. Each good is worth $10 toward the cost of the citation.

Parking Services continues to conduct studies to improve the fluency of parking, according to Omuya. One way is through technology.

The NextBus app shows shuttle arrival times at specific stops, the ParkingCloud Mobile app shows space availability and cameras have been added throughout campus to monitor spaces and shuttle stops to adjust to commuter needs on campus.

“[It’s because of] the inconvenience of finding parking and [having to] settle for something so you won’t be late for class.”

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Givonna Boggans | The Montclarion

Ben Omuya is the director of parking services at Montclair State University.

Blirina Pushkina received over a dozen parking tickets. Photo courtesy of Blirina Pushkina

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PARKING TICKET REVENUE

- $600,000
- $400,000
- $200,000
- $0

- 2018-2019
- 2019-2020
- 2020-2021
Cortese said. “I sent the proposals suggested creating the course,” about mine, and Dr. Restaino faculty members and students. approval for the course by both There was a clear show of of fatphobia and other marginal focused on the intersectionality course catalog. My presentation presented on a topic to add onto the ture roundtable where we pre semester, we held a queer cul idea,” Cortese said. “Last and Dr. [Jessica] Restaino loved studies course is taught by pro montclair State’s fat studies course is long overdue based on personal and general experiences of fatphobia on campus. “There was one incident where our [fat studies] class was waiting outside our classroom and eating chocolate [when] a sports science professor saw us eating,” Crines said. “He commented on how dark chocolate is the healthiest type of chocolate and we entertained him by listening, but internally we all didn’t care.” The Office of Social Justice and Diversity (OSJD) recently created a discussion group called Fear-less And Big (FAB). Cristian Morillo, a senior psychology major and peer facilitator of the OSJD, leads the discussion group. “FAB focuses on the fat acceptance and body positivity movement, and we mostly talk about current events involving those topics,” Morillo said. “We provide this for students who have an ex-aggerated sense of body image so that they are able to discuss their struggles and know that their body is perfectly OK, no matter how they perceive themselves.” Morillo has never personally experienced fatphobia on campus but has noticed subtleties in classroom structures. “For example, the desks in Dickson Hall are very small and constraining to someone who has a larger stomach, whether they are plus-sized, pregnant or simply bigger than the average person,” Morillo said. “It almost says that a certain type of person is not welcome in that space.” As for the course, Fat Studies: Race, Class, Gender, Queerness, Cortese isn’t exactly sure where it is headed but feels optimistic. “When discussing the future of Fat Studies: Race, Class, Gender, Queerness, it seems unclear,” Cortese said. “I believe it will be a process. Think of how queer studies were introduced in the ’80s: there was one course, and then it became multiple, and now people can major in queer studies.” Cortese shared that she feels hopeful about the impact the course will have on people. “In fact, I believe there are only a dozen colleges in the country offering fat studies courses, and only one textbook called ‘The Fat Studies Reader’ with one edition,” Cortese said. “I am hopeful though that this becomes a permanent course and more are created because of it.” If the course becomes permanent, Cortese encourages all sizes to register for the class. “Fatphobia affects us all through physical and mental health,” Cortese said. “And, it is essential for everyone to accept our bodies and love ourselves. This will help people of all siz es, but our conversations will be centered around fat people.” Cortese also emphasized that by learning more about fat studies and topics relating to fatphobia, people can better relate to fatphobia, people can better understand those around them. “We all have fat people in our lives and I think it’s up to us to learn about fatphobia to have the most loving and non-harm ful relationships with them,” Cortese said.
Montclair State Prepares to Deal with Omicron in the Spring Semester

Throughout the past few weeks, the omicron variant and the spike in coronavirus (COVID-19) cases have made many wary about returning in person. The university is taking steps to address the current situation, but students have expressed mixed feelings in response to these measures.

In a press briefing hosted by the Center for Cooperative Media on Jan. 5, David Adinaro, New Jersey’s deputy commissioner for public health services, told reporters about the effects omicron was having on the state.

“If you look at the CDC predictions based upon that likely growth pattern, we are probably at a point where about 95% of the cases that are occurring in New Jersey are omicron,” Adinaro said.

This is significant because the omicron variant is much more transmissible, even if the symptoms are less serious. It also raises concerns because 79% of those infected with the omicron variant are fully vaccinated. According to Adinaro, however, those who received their booster shot have high levels of protection.

Dr. Patricia Ruiz, the director of the University Health Center, emphasizes the importance of booster shots.

“Boosters are our best tool, followed by well-fitting and consistently used masks, avoiding crowds [and] staying home if sick,” Ruiz said.

That is only part of how the University Health Center plans to combat the omicron variant. Additionally, they want to spread knowledge about COVID-19 so that infections can be better managed.

“The most important initial thing we tell students to do is to stay home if they are sick (or in their room), complete Hawk Check and answer their phone when the health center calls,” Ruiz said. “When we interview students, we encourage the booster vaccine, we ask about employment off campus and we initiate contact tracing immediately, seven days a week.”

Ruiz is also a member of the Campus Health Advisory Team (CHAT), a new group on campus to help mitigate the effects of COVID-19. Margaree Coleman-Carter, dean of students and the chair of CHAT, explained its function as a tool that campus leaders can rely on.

“We follow the trends and the situations and we advise the president,” Carter said. “There are a number of experts on that group, and we advise the president as to what we think should happen on campus, as it relates to the president’s response.”

The omicron variant is affecting all age groups, but Adinaro said there is a greater increase in younger individuals.

“We’re seeing all age categories are showing a large increase in infections and younger individuals are showing larger increases,” Adinaro said.

Many students have their concerns about the omicron variant and would like the university to be more cautious, while others are happy going back in person.

Holley Petrie, a junior English major, is one of those who have their worries.

“I am at high risk, and I feel as though going back to [Montclair State] will become a hot spot for [COVID-19],” Petrie said. “I’m not willing to sacrifice my health to get [COVID-19],” Ruiz said.

Guzman is also satisfied with how the university is handling the return to campus, although she noted that it’s not perfect.

“I do think that Montclair State is trying their best to consider everyone’s needs and also doing a good job at considering safety during a very confusing time,” Guzman said. “Considering that people were very hesitant on getting their first one or two doses [of the vaccine], I do think that the new booster mandate could have been presented differently.”

Petrie, though, was disappointed when she learned the university’s plans.

“I feel as though going virtual until the end of the month is the safest way to handle this situation and less stressful,” Petrie said. “Where I live, in the suburbs, it is honestly hard to find a [place to] get a booster and/or get tested at the moment. Numbers and anxiety are through the roof. I believe we need to let things cool down and not rush into picking classes back up.”
Laura Paulino  
(continued from page 1)  
Despite having doubts about going into the program, Paulino proved victorious when she completed her autonomous vehicle with the help of her group members Iris Li, Victor Robila and Mihir Rao, who were all high school interns and produced most of the codes.  
Paulino, the project lead, overlooked the coding and integration aspects of the project. She was also responsible for debugging and testing the autonomous vehicle.  
The vehicle Paulino oversaw featured three different functions that autonomous vehicles actually have. It featured a lane-tracking system, an obstruction detection system and a rearview camera to assist the vehicle in parking.  
“Most difficult part was definitely the integration and testing,” Paulino said. “You can write the code but once you actually test how the code is working, that’s when all the problems arise.”  
Paulino’s advisor, Dr. Weitian Wang, was the architect of the project, providing the tools needed for the physical build of the vehicle. Wang, an assistant professor of computer science, opened up the project to undergraduate and graduate students to have various ideas and perspectives included in the research.  
“Our lab members, including under- and graduate students, were very engaged and excellent,” Wang said. “Their efforts always kept our team energetic and innovative.”  
The collaboration with passionate students brought creative problem-solving to the project due to so many different perspectives working on it.  
“In our research projects, a lot of novel solutions are inspired and generated from brainstorming ideas and discussions of our lab members,” Wang said.  
While Paulino focused on leading the autonomous vehicle project, she was also busy juggling three internships at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).  
In her first internship with NASA, Paulino researched diversity and inclusion in the STEM field. Her following internship allowed her to work with the National Aeronautics Research Institute (NARI) and conduct research on utilizing drones in the events of environmental emergencies, and more specifically forest fires.  
Paulino’s last internship is where she now works as a contractor since graduating in January. Paulino now interprets, analyzes and studies data in the ionosphere collected by sub-satellites at NASA.  
Since Paulino has been exposed to computer science for some time now, she has also been exposed to what it means to be both a woman and a woman of color in the STEM field. Being an advocate for better representation, Paulino hopes there will be changes in the STEM field moving forward, but knows that the work has to start from inside each person.  
“I really do think that every individual needs to have the curiosity and desire to work on themselves and tackle their biases,” Paulino said. “People really need to decide to look inward and identify some of the biases they might unknowingly act on.”  
Despite being a head-turner in the STEM field, Paulino doesn’t limit herself or work any harder than her male colleagues who have pursued the same area of study. Paulino chooses to be comfortable and open with the uncomfortable, especially in her workplace.  
“I personally decided not to feel like I had to work harder,” Paulino said. “To feel that way, there’s an initial step of you making yourself feel small and I just decided that I wasn’t going to make myself small. I am never not going to advocate for me.”  
Paulino’s advocacy for better representation in the STEM field goes beyond the workplace as well. Paulino pushed students to become involved in Wang’s Robotics Club which was founded in fall 2021.  
The club encourages students of any major to participate and explore possible interests in the field of robotics and artificial intelligence. The club received support from the Student Government Association (SGA), the Computer Science Department, the College of Science and Mathematics (CSAM) Dean’s Office and the National Science Foundation.  
In an effort to involve younger students in STEM, the club wants to hold events for young scientists to follow their passions.  
“In the upcoming years, we will organize a series of robotics academic events such as hands-on robotics competitions, robotics workshops and robotics open days for both [Montclair State] students and local K-12 students,” Wang said.  
While Paulino is not working on any independent projects at the moment, she is focusing on finding her true footing in the autonomous vehicle sector in real life someday,” Paulino said.
Montclair Deer Caught In The Spotlight And Headlights

Cathryn Pace
Guest Writer

Montclair, New Jersey is an area that woodland creatures of all sorts call home, and when walking on the campus of Montclair State University, it’s not unusual to run into squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks and even more so lately, deer.

Deer have always been a part of the university’s campus life, but as of recent-ly, they’re taking over the campus not just physically, but also digitally.

@msu.deer on Instagram is the paparazzi page for campus deer. Light-hearted pages like this have been taking the campus by storm with new accounts popping up almost weekly, but @msu.deer is a bit different than most.

The page invites followers to submit their pictures and videos to be posted for the rest of the community to see. The account has almost 700 followers, which is increasing daily from its start in October 2021.

The creator behind @msu.deer, Leach, a junior animation and illustration major, agrees with that statement.

“I think it’s cool that they’re kind of appetizing the wildlife and everything here, too,” Hill said. “They’re always very respectful about the deer.”

Cameron Hill, a freshman animation and illustration major, agrees with that testament.

“I think it’s a fun way for us to connect,” Leach said. “I give props to whoever made the account because it brought a lot of [Montclair State] students together over our love of animals.”

The creators have grown up around Montclair State’s community of animal lovers truly enjoys this account.

“Although the animal itself might not seem dangerous and accustomed to people, it’s not as violent, there’s still massive deer ticks on them,” they said.

Montclair State’s community of animal lovers just as concerned about the deer’s safety as the rest of the community.

“Respect for these animals is fundamental to @msu.deer. As much as everyone wants to see and share pictures of these cute creatures, it’s important to the creators that students and anyone else taking pictures or videos take safety precautions,” the creators said.

The creators have grown up around deer and know the first-hand dangers of getting close to these animals.

“Although the animal itself might not seem dangerous and accustomed to people, it’s not as violent, there’s still massive deer ticks on them,” they said.

The creators went on to stress the importance of not only one’s safety but also the deer’s when encountering one of these animals.

“I mean, we completely understand that someone [deer] do approach you at the amphitheater,” they said. “Somebody sent in a picture of a deer walking up to them, and that’s totally [a situation where] you can’t do anything about it, but just don’t try to grab the deer.”

Many of the account’s followers are just as concerned about the deer’s safety and worry about the consequences one’s careless actions can have on the animal.

Daniel Nasca, a junior psychology major and follower of the account, submitted a video of a deer to the Instagram page in hopes others would take note of his respect toward the creature and do the same.

“I’m just hoping that students are responsible,” Nasca said. “I was pretty close to one [deer], but it was almost by accident. I just turned and saw one of them sitting under a tree. However, I don’t know if other students are going to have that consideration.”

The account creators think the university can help with keeping these animals out of harm’s way.

“There should be some sort of responsibility the university takes on because there’s such an abundance and a literal family of these deer living on campus,” they said. “I mean, we promote a lot of stuff [about the coronavirus], like ‘wash your hands, do this, do that,’ but you have to be careful with the wildlife on campus, too.”

One way to promote safety precautions, @msu.deer suggested, could be via flyers or signs, an idea Nasca agrees with.

“I think it would be nice to have street signs so that drivers know to go slow for deer,” Nasca said. “[Or] maybe stuff on campus so students don’t interact with the deer directly.”

While these animals are cute and fun to see around campus, it’s important to keep both parties safe. Don’t let these precautions turn you away, though. Submissions to @msu.deer are still highly encouraged and very cute.
Visitors ambled around the gallery in Finley Hall at Montclair State University, waiting for the exhibition to start. As they gazed upon the numerous pieces of art on the walls, the main attraction lay in the center of the room: a collection of bottles with paper boats inside, all on top of a pile of black mulch.

Dr. Ritwij Bhowmik, associate professor for the department of art and design and a visiting Fulbright Fellow, had spent 36 weeks traveling to different landmarks to leave one of those bottles in a different location each week. Those locations included Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty, the Lincoln Memorial, the Sept. 11 memorial and even one at Montclair State.

On Dec. 1, 2021, Bhowmik explained what the pile of bottles in the center of the room meant. He designed this experiment to give art to random strangers, to reach a broader audience than ones who actively seek out art.

“This is a way of connecting with the local audience and giving back... This is getting the art out of the conventional boundaries, like [the] gallery space or museum, and then sharing it with the audience who are reluctant to visit the museum and gallery,” Bhowmik said.

However, Bhowmik’s project was hindered by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Because of health concerns, he could only travel so far. Bhowmik’s colleague and deputy chair for the department of art and design, Andrew Atkinson, described the impact the pandemic had on Bhowmik’s project.

“I felt the sort of tragedy in this project, which is based on travel and movement, [is that it] happened dead in the middle of COVID-19,” Atkinson said. “[This] obviously restricted his movements and left him unable to do a lot of things, which he’s here to do. So, I think it added another layer to it.”

Still, Bhowmik traveled to many iconic places for his project. But, his last one was by far the most meaningful: the Sept. 11 memorial in New York City, New York. This was no accident: Bhowmik wanted to make a statement on how brown-skinned people have been viewed since the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

“This thing was put into our mind that as being a brown-skinned person going into [the] U.S. and then placing something, people will look towards you with a lot of suspicions, that you are maybe carrying a bomb,” Bhowmik said. “So, I wanted to know more about that, whether it is something which you are thinking, which is not there, [but] probably is a creation or is propaganda by the media.”

Another one of Bhowmik’s colleagues, Christopher Kaczmarek, the program coordinator for visual arts, said realizing what Bhowmik was doing made him concerned for the Fulbright Fellow’s safety.

“It’s odd how as a middle-aged white male, I don’t even think about this until I’m observing,” Kaczmarek said. “It was a really powerful moment and it’s not something that’s necessarily embedded in the work itself and accessible through the work itself. But it’s something that, through being adjacent to him as it was, as he was enacting these actions really drove something home.”

Bhowmik’s time as an associate professor at Montclair State ended on Dec. 31, 2021. He plans to go back to India, where he is an associate professor at the Indian Institute of Technology in Kanpur, and continue his exploration of art.
STRANGE FRUIT
by Donald Byrd
Spectrum Dance Theater
Dance/Theatre, USA

FEBRUARY 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 2022

TICKETS: 973-655-5112 | PEAKPERFS.ORG
ALEXANDER KASSEr THEATER

PHOTO: COURTESY OF SPECTRUM DANCE THEATER
What was the last nice thing you did for someone?

By John LaRosa, Photo Editor

“One of my friends needed help at the gym, so I helped them find out how to use some of the equipment.”

Rida Waqar
Freshman
Marketing major

“I held the door open, that’s about it.”

Patrick Baldwin
Junior
Business Analytics and Management major

“Someone dropped their car keys and I chased them down to give them back.”

John Gallo
Freshman
Biology major
“I have a neighbor in my building, she was moving out, so I made her some cookies. She recently found out she had cancer right when she was moving. I didn’t know what else to do so I made her chocolate chip cookies and she really loved it.”

Brittany Lugo
Junior
Public Relations major

“I covered someone’s shift at work.”

Anastasia Ristova
Freshman
Psychology major

“Told someone a water bottle, free of charge.”

Bruce Karimpour
Senior
Finance major
#FOCUS DISRUPTION

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BACKGROUND IMAGE BY SVSTUDIOART
The Montclarion Crossword Puzzle and More!
College Edition
By Kayla Carlamere

Across
2. Taking place before they were best friends and coworkers at the largest scare factory, the two protagonists must first learn to work together despite their differences.
4. A mother goes back to college alongside her daughter, attending the same school and fully immersing herself in the college campus experience.
5. This comedy stars Adam Sandler as Bobby Boucher.
6. A young private eye, played by Miley Cyrus, is hired by the FBI, requiring her to go undercover as a sorority sister.
8. A fraternity, led by Zac Efron, moves next-door to new suburban parents.

Down
1. This musical comedy focuses on The Bellas, an a cappella group at Barden University, as they prepare to face their rivals - The Treblemakers - and others in a national competition.
3. Based on a true story, this film chronicles the journey of a Harvard-going computer genius as he develops a groundbreaking social media platform, though controversy surrounding the start-up led to multiple lawsuits years later.

Sudoku

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 2 4 5
 8 6 7
 5 2 7
 4 2 5
 6 7 9
 4 5 1
 2 8 4
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Word Search

*For answers to the puzzles, please check The Montclarion Facebook page every Thursday.*
Do What’s Best for Us, Not What You Think is

After a largely successful in-person fall semester, Montclair State University seemed to be navigating the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic with relative ease. But as the chill of winter closed in, so did the omicron variant, and it is impossible to pretend everything is still going quite as smoothly.

Until recently, many people thought they were on safer ground than in the fall of 2020, and in many ways, this was true. Montclair State saw a smooth return to in-person learning thanks to a community-wide effort to keep others safe and healthy, and cases remained low throughout the fall.

Now, after yet another holiday season marred by COVID-19 infections, a shortage of tests and canceled New Year’s plans, that stability is waning. On Jan. 11, New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy declared a state of emergency due to the rapid spread of the omicron variant. At Montclair State, cases amongst students had been increasing since December 2021; there are currently 79 student cases and 96 total that have been reported, which follows a week in which 165 total cases were reported.

Despite this alarming spread, the university seems to be confident in its ability to run the same smooth operation it did over the last semester. Like other universities, Montclair State has mandated all students receive a COVID-19 booster shot or complete weekly testing. Aside from this measure and stating they are carefully monitoring the situation, which should be a given, little is being done differently.

Many students are anxiously wondering if at least a brief return to virtual learning might be for the best given the current situation. But Montclair State, after providing no updates over winter break regarding plans for the spring semester until the week before the start of classes, is insisting on in-person modalities for most courses. Additionally, residential students were told they needed a negative PCR test to return to campus, and with tests in short supply nationwide once again, this may prove difficult.

The omicron variant has destabilized an already fragile semblance of recovery. On one hand, it is milder than other strains of COVID-19 and usually doesn’t require hospitalization. On the other, even vaccinated people are being infected with the variant, and certain members of the population, like the elderly, children and immunocompromised people, are no less vulnerable than they were before.

Plus, the long-term effects of any COVID-19 infection seem to be manifold, even in mild cases like those caused by the omicron variant. In other words, there is still a need for precaution. The insistence on solely in-person instruction is not a better or more preferable absolute than solely virtual, especially not when one option is inherently safer. This is not about absolutes at all, but about flexibility and providing options. There are pros and cons to each modality, and ideally, students should be able to choose which is best for them.

Is there a good reason Montclair State can’t resort to virtual learning for even a couple of weeks? Surely there’s no downside to giving everyone time to get tested and recover from any potential illness if need be, not if students are truly the priority.

Any short-term gratification from “keeping things moving” is simply not worth the potential risk of even more COVID-19 infections on campus. Avoiding a downward slide is much easier than getting out of one, and now is not the time to take chances for the sake of maintaining a semblance of normalcy.

The health and safety of Montclair State’s community should not be at the mercy of decisions made on their behalf and without their input. The Montclarion will continue to hold the university accountable for its actions, especially when it comes to the well-being of the student body.
How Conspiracy Theories Are Destroying Us

AVERY NIXON
ASSISTANT OPINION EDITOR

It never made much sense to me when I overheard these sentiments or had them said to me, but it did make me quite angry.

Not only do some equate mask mandates with oppression, but they also claim the vaccine has a microchip in it so the government can track citizens. I have watched those same people use their iPhones with a GPS installed.

Clearly, conspiracy theories and outrage against the safety measures in place to combat COVID-19 make virtually no sense.

I was in eighth grade when former President Donald Trump was elected. Before him, Barack Obama was in office but I never really heard critiques or criticisms of him because I was only a child. I went from knowing almost nothing to witnessing fury from the political right as they indoctrinated themselves to illogical conspiracies, like QAnon. Now, they can’t bring themselves to fear a ravaging virus.

The rise of QAnon has even left families broken apart as its followers are too far gone from reality to function normally anymore.

While I do not think I can pinpoint the exact cause of the ignorance and denial from some citizens, I think I can finally understand what contributed to it: fear. When you don’t have access to correct and reliable information to begin with, it makes you more likely to believe the lies are true.

When people are afraid, they are most susceptible to lies and deceit. People are already fearful of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. But believing vaccines are evil and the disease isn’t that bad would make the whole situation more comforting to them.

These are people who have feared the famous and those in government for years due to conspiracy movements like QAnon. Now, they can’t bring themselves to fear a ravaging virus. After all, ignorance is bliss.

What can we do to pull people out of the conspiracy rabbit hole?

Surely, attacking them and fighting them will only enforce their beliefs. What we need to do is sympathize a bit and help them understand. Shoving data and facts down people’s throats won’t do any good if the person is completely in the dark.

Instead, we must address people’s concerns and fears, simply explain the virus and vaccine and combat misinformation by promoting credible resources to those who haven’t found access to them.

I understand I am very lucky to have a father who is very intelligent, a mother with a law degree, and a brother. I have a father who is very intelligent, a mother with a law degree, and a brother. One of those lessons is that some adults believe opposition is wearing a thin piece of fabric over your mouth and nose to prevent spreading a deadly virus.

For the future of humanity, remember this one thing: Joe Rogan did not attend a day of medical school, but the doctors telling you to get the vaccine did.

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As a college freshman, I don’t know how to solve a worldwide pandemic. I do believe that we can at least fight back by helping those who believe their freedom is being demolished by a piece of fabric or that vaccines are harmful.

If the people in charge tried new tactics to spread the truth and reverse the effects of the cult mentality that led to their hysteria, we might have a chance.

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It’s Good to Have My College Experience Back

Last week, Montclair State University became one of the few institutions in the state to announce a fully in-person start to the semester, with additional precautions set in place to protect students against the raging coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

In addition to the controversy caused by this decision, in order to return to campus as a resident, you must be tested for the virus on Jan. 12 or after, and the results must be negative or you cannot move in. The egregious part of the policy was the late notice—students weren’t notified about this mandate until Jan. 9.

While I agree that the university’s communication in terms of their move-in policy for residents was nothing short of inappropriate considering the nationwide shortage of tests, I stand by their decision to continue to offer an in-person learning experience.

Some may prefer virtual classes, but I know many of my friends struggled to adjust to Zoom classes last school year, especially in courses that are reliant on in-person learning. Even if your classes are primarily hands-off and more lecture-based, it can be tough to stay entirely focused on a three-hour lecture course when it’s on a computer screen.

Students tend to have their cameras off and are hesitant to participate in class discussions, and conversations with other students and professors feel less genuine with the barrier of a laptop between everyone.

Virtual learning also took away from my college experience as a resident. With most classes being online, many of my friends opted to live at home, particularly in the fall. There were restrictions on how many guests you could have in your dorm or apartment. Meeting up with friends to grab food wasn’t as accessible, with many dining hall locations either being closed or only having limited hours last year. Many of the university’s flagship events were virtual, including homecoming.

While I do understand these restrictions were necessary, sometimes they became overbearing. There was a time where you couldn’t even leave campus without a waiver, something I believe was a major overstep by the university.

In the fall 2021 semester, seeing the way campus roared back to life was nothing short of amazing. On most days the quad was packed, with people hanging out or studying. My friends and I were able to grab a bite to eat at our favorite dining locations again.

I hung out with friends that I hadn’t seen in nearly two years. Homecoming was back, organizations were hosting in-person events on campus more frequently and classes were back in-person.

Dare I say, it seemed like campus life was normal again.

Remarkably, despite the fall semester being a mostly normal experience, Montclair State’s COVID-19 cases remained fairly low during this time, except for a spike in cases during finals season. It’s proof that not only does the vaccine work (94% of the university population is vaccinated), but we can still have the college experience that we all yearn for if we follow state and local health guidelines.

I do realize the omicron variant is more contagious, although reportedly less severe than previous variants. The fears of many students are valid, considering how high the cases are right now. However, the key difference this time around is that we have more weapons at our disposal to fight this variant. From vaccine boosters to masks and social distancing, we are at a much different stage in the COVID-19 pandemic than before.

If you’re boosted, wearing your mask on campus and social distancing when necessary, your chances of getting severely sick or hospitalized from COVID-19 aren’t completely eliminated but are significantly reduced.

To be honest, the coronavirus pandemic isn’t going away anytime soon. This doesn’t mean we should let our guard down and ignore local health guidelines, however. It means we need to come to a compromise and adjust to a “new normal.”

It would be a shame if we had to be online for a few weeks and transition back to in-person right away, which was a big challenge for some underclassmen students in the fall who have never experienced a normal college semester.

While Montclair State’s decisions regarding COVID-19 have been extremely questionable at times, I think they made the right call on this one. We pay tens of thousands of dollars to attend this institution, so let’s at least get our money’s worth and experience college as it’s meant to be.
Have a thought about on campus or off campus matters?
Write for Opinion!
Email: montclarionopinion@gmail.com

Room 2035, School of Communication and Media in Upper Montclair, NJ, 07043
Since its opening on Sept. 26, 1957, “West Side Story” has earned three Broadway revivals, thousands of international productions, global tours and two movies. The second of the film adaptations, directed by Steven Spielberg, premiered on Dec. 10, 2021. It included some of the best talent New Jersey has to offer with Montclair State University alumni in its ensemble.

The movie garnered intense critical acclaim, but tanked financially. Reporting only about $10.6 million its opening weekend and about $53 million worldwide, this is a loss of millions of dollars against the movie’s estimated $100 million budget.

A flop, financially perhaps, but for me, it was a resounding success, especially with the exuberant talents of alumni Melody Marti and Annelise Cepero. Marti, who graduated in 2018, stars as Shark girl, Piò, and is mesmerizing to look at as she practically dances her feet off. Cepero, who graduated in 2017, stars as Maria's friend proyi and does so with charm and grace, showcasing her extreme vocal talent and ability.

These two have added to why the film can only be described as a triumphant return to what the movie musical once was. It is extravagant, joyous, emotional and current, though it does fumble in one or two ways.

The aesthetics of “West Side Story” are as beautiful as ever as the film begins with an overview of the 1950s New York slums in which the story takes place. We see signs marking the destruction of their home as the slums are being gentrified and replaced unifies them.

This is a brilliant tactic on the part of screenwriter Tony Kushner. Perhaps what truly makes the visual storytelling work throughout the film, a constant battle of cool tones against warm. The Jets are always in blues and grays while the Sharks are in reds and blacks.

As our characters' relationship evolves, their colors follow until eventually “One Hand, One Heart,” a pseudo-marriage song, is performed with the characters bathed in the light of stained glass. Rainbow dots paint their faces and clothes as the pair finally blends together as one. It is a beautiful and effervescent color story done to perfection.

Performances ranged from stellar to mediocre. Rachel Zegler as Maria is something to be studied. Zegler not only has the vocal talent of a theatrical professional but also the acting prowess of a veteran Hollywood star. To know this is her screen debut is preposterous, as she is the leading lady for a new generation.

As for costar Ansel Elgort as Tony, it is an underwhelming performance if ever there was one. Elgort plays Tony as an aloof, cold, mature character, making his scenes with Maria extremely uncomfortable.

At one point, he delivers a monologue to Maria about beating another kid to the brink of death. He does this all with a straight face. Elgort’s Tony is an odd, pompous, psychopathic man. His voice is fine but nowhere near the professionalism found within Zegler’s voice. Their duets are difficult to watch with Zegler doing most of the heavy lifting.

The soul of the film, Ariana DeBose is a tour de force as Anita. Spielberg’s Anita is a strong, independent and intelligent woman. She is quippy and hilarious as DeBose brings Anita to a whole new level.

DeBose is a theatre veteran, and as such her voice and dance skills are truly astounding. She delivers some of the most intense choreography within the catalog of musical theatre with a smile on her face. Within my theater, there was not a dry eye in the room during “A Boy Like That/ I Have a Love.”

Mike Faist and David Alvarez bring a fresh breath of air to the rivalry of the Jets and Sharks. Faist, another Broadway veteran, completely killed all choreography and vocal requirements, keeping Riff as charismatic as he should be.

Alvarez is also a Broadway veteran and meets the same level of professionalism. Bernardo does not have many vocal moments within the film, but when he does, there is always a beautiful baritone voice to hear from Alvarez. He is a fantastic match to DeBose’s fierce energy. Their relationship is a jewel of the film.

An alteration made to the original story is the addition of the character Valentina. Played by Rita Moreno, Valentina is the mirror image of the character Doc with a few differences. The main one is Valentina is a Latina woman who owns and operates “Doc’s Drugs” by herself.

“Somewhere” is also now sung by Valentina in the film, which is a confusing narrative switch but works nonetheless. Moreno brings a brilliant performance and it up the screen with the same ferocity and care as she did in ’61 in the original film adaptation as Anita.

Commendations also need to be given to several of the supporting cast members, specifically Josh Andrés Rivera, Paloma Garcia-Lee and the entirety of the Shark/Jet ensemble.

Rivera as Chino is such a wonderful watch. Instead of the 2D character portrayed in the original film, Chino is now a nerdy and charismatic character due to the charm of Rivera.

Garcia-Lee as Graziella was astounding. She nails every piece of choreography and gives a heartbreaking performance during one of the most difficult scenes within the film. She is an undeniable star on the rise.

As for the Shark/Jet ensemble, a bravura is needed. The choreography, acting, vocal ability and complete devotion to their characters are amazing. Never have I seen a musical ensemble steal the show in such a deserving way.

If you are going to see a short amount of movies this year, let “West Side Story” be one of them. Beautiful, poignant and a creative triumph, it will rekindle one's love for the movie musical, making me hopeful that perhaps the genre may make a comeback for this generation.
‘Hype House’ Is Not So Hype Anymore

Sekhena Sembenu
Assistant Entertainment Editor

Warning: This article mentions topics that could potentially be triggering or uncomfortable for some readers.

Over the years, many content houses have been created, including notable ones like Team 10, The Clout House, Chbhhouse and The Vlog Squad. However, there’s one thing they all have in common: they no longer exist.

There is one lonely content house currently left standing, The Hype House.

Released on Jan. 7, the eight-episode Netflix series, “Hype House” follows a collective of young content creators who live together to collaborate on videos for TikTok and their other personal platforms in an effort to grow their social media careers.

The Hype House was first established in December 2019 by Thomas Petrou, a young entrepreneur known for his YouTube videos, as well as Chase Hudson aka Lil Huddy and Alex Warren. It is filled with several other social media personalities that have millions of followers including Vinnie Hacker, Larri Merritt aka Larray, Nikita Dragun, Mia Hayward, Kouvr Annon and Jack Wright.

Sienna Mae Gomez, a content creator known for her messages about body positivity, also filmed for the show but was edited out due to legal issues with another castmate and is no longer a part of The Hype House. Right from the start, audience members are taken into the luxuriousness of what it is to be a content creator in California. From $5 million houses that are paid for by brand deals to expensive cars and designer clothing, it’s certainly a life many would love to live. However, it’s not as fun and pretty as one may think it is. While the series highlights and gives insight into content creators’ daily routines, it focuses more on the struggles of this high life.

In each episode, the cameras switch between the main Hype House occupied by most of its members based in Moorpark, California and another house located in Encino, California occupied by Hudson. Chase Hudson moved out to focus on his music career but promised Petrou and the other members he would still help create content to keep the house running.

Without much being said, audience members can see this dynamic is creating a divide between the members and is specifically putting a huge burden on Petrou who struggles to keep the house going. Petrou strongly believes the house is worth saving as former Hype House stars like Charli D’Amelio and Addison Rae have made very successful careers for themselves.

While this aspect informs the audience, some may find themselves in utter boredom as each episode only films between both houses. Through-out the whole series, no other locations are really displayed except a gym and a local shop.

Along with the uncertainty of where the actual brand of The Hype House stands, the creators also dive into their struggle with fake friends and cancel culture.

When uploading a 30-second video to social media, nothing much is expected unless you’re one of these stars, every little thing is scrutinized, and one can get canceled for anything.

One minute someone is your friend, but the next they are seen talking behind your back in the tabloids. It’s a constant feeling of having to step on eggshells for these creators.

With cancel culture, the series also calls attention to and encapsulates how the creators face thousands, if not millions, of death threats and horrid comments like “you should kill yourself.” Just seeing what these individuals go through on a daily basis generates a sad, almost depressing feeling for the audience. Society paints this glorious picture of them but in reality, has no idea who they truly are and where they came from.

From unwanted fame and abusive households to homelessness and family deaths, these creators have endured real life struggles and have worked extremely hard to be in their current position.

While we don’t exactly know what the future holds for “Hype House,” there are many lessons one can take away from this series. It may be cliché to say, but never judge a book by its cover. Most importantly, simply be kind to others.

There is one thing they all have in common: they no longer exist. Ever, there’s one thing they all have in common: they no longer exist.

The Montclarion • January 20, 2022 • PAGE 21
The beloved American actress and comedian Betty White would have turned 100 years old on Jan. 17, a day many fans and fellow entertainers were looking forward to celebrating. Now, almost a month since she has passed, people far and wide can take a look back on all the amazing works she has provided us with, thanking her for being a friend for so many years.

In particular, fans can look to May 8, 2010, the day White hosted Season 35, Episode 21 of “Saturday Night Live.” Viewers can expect to see White play a variety of characters in different sketches, including “Scared Straight,” “Census Taker vs. Old Lady,” “Bronx Beat,” “The Lawrence Welk Show” and much more. This also includes a five minute monologue of White discussing the confusion she has for Facebook, sprinkled in with bits of gratitude for her fans for supporting and loving her through the years.

This episode of “Saturday Night Live” showcases the reason White gained fame as an actress and comedian, but even more than that, why people have come to love her simply for being herself.

- Megan Lim
  Entertainment Editor

“The Golden Girls” on Hulu


Based in Miami, “The Golden Girls” follows the journey of four divorced/widowed women, Rose, Dorothy Zbornak, portrayed by Bea Arthur, Blanche Devereaux, played by Rue McClanahan, and Sophia Petrillo, played by Estelle Getty, after they become roommates. They are truly living in their golden years.

From wise Dorothy and spacy Rose to social Blanche and funny Sophia, they all bring different aspects to the table. While they may face conflicts and hardships, they always find a way to come together to support each other.

“The Golden Girls” is a heartwarming show that will keep you in constant laughter.

- Sekhena Sembenu
  Assistant Entertainment Editor

How To with John Wilson
Season 2: Finding Humanity in Strange Times

Filmed and narrated entirely by one person, documentary filmmaker John Wilson, “How To with John Wilson” is comprised of footage he records every day of the random insanity and mundanity of the streets of New York City, leaving it unlike anything else on television.

In every episode, Wilson sets out to learn how to do something. Some examples from the latest season include “How To Invest in Real Estate,” “How to Appreciate Wine” and “How to Member Your Dreams.”

What always begins as a simple topic expands into something much more interesting. An episode that starts with figuring out how to find a parking spot spins out into a discussion about how the same is true for grave plots.

This is where the magic of this show comes in. In observing the world from a third-person view, Wilson’s perspective, we can take a step back and see just how strange we are as a species. It is almost like “Planet Earth” but for humans, and it is beautiful. The calm, serene tone of his footage and the score underneath settles the viewer in for a strange odyssey each week.

New York City is a strange place, and this is the best portrayal of that in any form of media. Wilson’s depiction of The Big Apple is chaotic yet has a strange charm to it. A lovely shot of a couple on their wedding day will be followed by paramedics accidentally dropping a dead body off a stretcher.

This show is indeed very funny. Some of the things Wilson can find and capture are simply wild, but it’s also his deadpan delivery and social awkwardness that adds a whole other layer to it.

But the center of the show, and the reason why it is so remarkable, is its beating heart as well as its compassion and honesty that Wilson infuses into every frame. He follows the popular new documentary technique of just observing things as they are, in the same vein as YouTube documentarian Andrew Callaghan.

The recurring figure who best represents this is Wilson’s landlord. She appears in a handful of episodes and is purely kind and loving to Wilson, insisting on washing his clothes, even though he is a grown man, and watching television with him every night.

In a world as starkly divided and polarizing as ours, it’s a breath of fresh air to see a show that’s as positive and wholesome as this one while also being an honest documentary. Wilson’s struggle with understanding himself and how he fits in with those around him and how that outwardly relates to everyone else in the process is remarkable, and ultimately shows how connected we all are.

“How To with John Wilson” is a simple yet complex show and it’s unlike anything else out there. While most television is either escapism or a reflection of our world, this show manages to be both, and in the process, becomes the best portrayal of this strange time we are all living in.

Aidan Callari
Guest Writer

Wilson films the owner of a car-themed casket company.  
Photo courtesy of HBO
For a decade now, the artists and animators at Sony Pictures Animation have invited audiences to “Hotel Transylvania.” It tells the saga of a luxury hotel for monsters run by Count Dracula and the misadventures that ensue when a human stumbles across it.

Audiences and animation fans have been enthralled by the zippy slapstick humor and fun set of characters for three theatrical films, some shorts and a prequel television series. The final film in the series, “Hotel Transylvania: Transformania,” jumps to Amazon Prime Video in light of the effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It takes the opportunity to expand on the relationship between the aforementioned vampire and his human son-in-law, Johnny. The duo switch species due to the use of a transformation ray, and they must travel to South America to find a jewel to transform back into themselves.

The appeal of these films has always been the ensemble of movie monsters and humans who frequent the hotel. Dracula and Johnny’s relationship has been a focal point of the franchise as far back as when the latter stumbled upon the hotel in the first film. Seeing Johnny transformed into a monster and a human Dracula bond over their respective outlooks on life is a particularly nice scene, as well as one that helps the two truly get to understand each other.

The other monsters, including the Invisible Man, the Mummy, the Wolfman and the Frankenstein monster, get transformed as well, and they provide plenty of humorous moments. One thing that draws people to this franchise is the animation, which is wonderfully cartoony, à la the classic Chuck Jones and Tex Avery shorts. Genndy Tartakovsky, the creator of shows like “Samurai Jack” and “Frim,” imbued the limitlessness of the medium into directing the first three films.

This go-around, Tartakovsky executive produced and was among the screenwriters, but directing duties were handed off to industry veterans Derek Drymon (“SpongeBob SquarePants”) and Jennifer Kluska (“Bee Movie”). They manage to maintain the fast energy the first three films had while giving this film its own unique aesthetic.

Head of character animation Alan Hawkins and character designer Craig Kellman also deserve credit for their work in bringing the new human versions of the monsters to life.

Most of the original cast returns, among them Andy Samberg as Johnny and Selena Gomez as Dracula’s daughter, Mavis. Having voiced the characters for a decade now, they know them inside and out and fit within the world. However, two of the biggest cast members from the first three films, Adam Sandler and Kevin James, opted to sit this entry out. Taking over for their respective roles as Dracula and Frankenstein are Brian Hull and Brad Abrell. Both do solid work, with Abrell in particular sounding practically identical to James’ performance.

It should be noted that the “Hotel Transylvania” movies are family comedies first. The stories follow a formula that primarily consists of Dracula screwing up and learning a lesson about acceptance and family. Only the third film deviated from this. Because of this, certain aspects of the story have a “been there, done that” feeling to them.

Some characters from previous entries end up getting sidelined in this film after playing major roles in the past, including Johnny and Mavis’ son Dennis and his werewolf best friend Winnie. The character Vlad, played by Mel Brooks in the second and third movies, is completely absent and is missed.

Despite these issues, “Hotel Transylvania: Transformania” does a fine job serving as a finale to the franchise. The animation is still excellent and boundary-breaking. Seeing these characters one last time is nice, as they explore new territory and their journeys feel naturally completed. It has been a nice 10-year stay at the Hotel Transylvania, but it is time to check out.
Justin Potts Has Transformed The Men’s Basketball Team Culture

Potts has made a lasting impact on his players on and off the court

To some people, change feels wrong and uncomfortable. However, change can be an opportunity for a new beginning, allowing you to push yourself to heights you couldn’t even imagine.

Head coach of the Montclair State University men’s basketball team Justin Potts started his Red Hawk journey in August 2019, where he was named the 18th coach in program history. Potts chose to leave his alma mater Moravian College, where he also competed as a player, in search of a new opportunity.

Although it may have been tough to walk away from his alma mater and face the new challenges that would arise with the Red Hawks, he was ready for anything that came his way.

“I think anytime you take a new job as a coach you know there will be some challenges,” Potts said. “I think the biggest challenge that we faced coming into the situation was that we were going to play differently than they were playing. The system and the style was completely different so getting comfortable with that was a little bit of a challenge.”

Changing the culture at Montclair State is one of Potts’ goals to give the team an edge over their opponents. The Red Hawks played a more conservative slow-paced style of basketball under former head coach Marlon Sears.

Their style of play was more focused on slowing the game down, utilizing their big as much as possible and not relying on the three-ball as much. Since then, the Red Hawks have become a more fast-paced team, defense centric and more reliant on the three-ball.

Senior guard Devin Cooper feels that the team is finally starting to catch on in this style of play.

“I think it’s changed pretty significantly,” Cooper said. “Considering that he’s been here for a couple of years now and it’s very hard for a coach to come in here and [adjust] our style of play, I think we’re starting to pick it up.”

A player who has played under Potts for all his four years of college is senior forward Steve Breeman, who was recruited by the coach to play at Montclair State. Breeman played two seasons at Moravian and was part of a historically successful season where they got their first NCAA tournament win. He knows Potts’ system to a T but believes that although Potts’ goal was to change the culture on the court, he’s made an even bigger impact off the court.

“I know coming in we didn’t really have a good [team] GPA when I first got here, but this semester we were .07 points away from a 3.0,” Breeman said. “That’s never been done in history here, so I think the culture in the classroom is definitely changing [as well].”

It’s not every day where you see a head coach who cares more about players and their well-being than the game itself. Potts likes to think that the game of basketball is a training ground for life, something he and his coaching staff instills into the players.

Graduate student guard and forward Irving Callender IV has played under Potts for three years and has seen many changes within the basketball team. However, he too agrees with Breeman that Potts has made an even bigger impact off the court.

“Off the court, he’s always there for me and I’m pretty sure my teammates can say the same,” Callender IV said. “Obviously, a lot of players go through situations and he’s right there to help us and guide us through the situations even though it’s not dealing with basketball.”

While winning basketball games may be one of the biggest priorities for Potts as a head coach, it doesn’t surpass helping these young men grow as people. He maintains that he and the coaching staff will continue to put their foot on the gas to help accelerate the culture at Montclair State positively in any way they can.

“I think the culture we’re creating at Montclair State is focused on the right things,” Potts said. “I think they’re developing the right habits on and off the court and they’re really committed to representing Montclair State basketball on and off the court in the right way. And we’re recruiting people, we’re just not recruiting players and I think our guys understand how much we value growing and developing in the academic world and as a young person.”
Montclair State Women’s Basketball
Hoping To Overcome Slow Start to Season

After a revenge victory over NJCU, the Red Hawks are hopeful for more wins

Jonathan Edmond
Staff Writer

In a season where Montclair State University’s women’s basketball team is looking to rewrite their ending from last season, they’ve been hit with adversity. However, they are hopeful the second half of the season will land them right where they want to be.

The Red Hawks have been off to a slow start, ending the first half of the season with a 5-6 record, which includes losses to conference opponents such as Kean University, Ramapo College, William Paterson University and Stockton University. Currently, the Red Hawks sit at a 7-7 record. With the graduation of All-American Taylor Brown and a mix of returning players and new additions on the team, they’ve struggled early on to mesh on the court, according to junior guard Nickie Carter.

“I think the first half of the season didn’t go exactly how we wanted it to go, but we definitely learned a lot from it,” Carter said. “There was a lot of adversity, and I think through that, we came together more as a team than we ever have.”

One of the factors that keyed into the Red Hawks’ slow start was the NCAA deciding to move the women’s three-point line back from 20’ 9” to 22’ 1.75” for the 2021-2022 season for all divisions. This adjustment made their percentage of three-point shots drop to 34% — 10% lower than last year’s 44%.

While this change has affected almost everyone on the team, one of the players that reported seeing a struggle in their shooting was senior guard Julia Sutton. The sharpshooter has taken a significant drop to 22%. She believes shooting was by far the biggest challenge for her but sees improvement heading into the second half of the season.

“They moved the three-point line back, so that was one of our biggest struggles and [even] our best shooters were struggling,” Sutton said. “It took a while, but I think we’re back to our rhythm of shooting well and I think we’re doing pretty good right now.”

Although they are defeating teams by a 4.9 scoring margin, Sutton also believes they could improve on defense. The team has made that a priority in recent weeks and believes their defense will be a major factor going into the second half of the season.

Head coach Karin Harvey agrees. “I think a lot of it is confidence,” Harvey said. “But, I think that we’re starting going and find our rhythm,” Harvey said. “But, I think that we’re starting going and find our rhythm.”

Harvey loves that Carter has found her spark and feels that the rest of the team feeds off of it. However, it’s going to take more than Carter to get them where they want to be.

The Red Hawks currently rank fifth in the New Jersey Athletic Conference (NJAC) and have a long road ahead of them until the end of the season. All of their last remaining games are NJAC competition. After a series of game cancellations due to coronavirus (COVID-19) protocols, they started the second half of the season against Ramapo College in a non-conference matchup and defeated them 55-45.

After a 65-47 loss to Rowan University, the Red Hawks were put to the test again as they faced off against the team they lost to in the NJAC finals last season: New Jersey City University (NJCU). The Red Hawks tremendously defeated NJCU with Carter catching fire with 28 points and four Red Hawks finishing the game in double digits.

In that last game, it gave the team a glimpse of how powerful they can be in the NJAC when everything starts to come together. They believe that even though they aren’t where they would want to be right now, according to Harvey, it’s not too late for them to turn the tide.

“I think this is where we’re going to have to turn the corner,” Harvey said. “I think for not playing as well as we wanted to [last] semester, we’re in a good spot, and we’re in control of what we can do.”

Hoping To Overcome Slow Start to Season

Junior guard Nickie Carter owns the record for the most points scored in a two-game span.

Photo courtesy of Ashley Petrosine

The Red Hawks currently sit at 7-7 as of Jan. 18, good for fifth in the conference.

Photo courtesy of Ashley Petrosine
Soaring When It Matters: The Men’s Basketball Team Is on the Rise

Montclair State is finding their stride with NJAC playoffs getting closer

Senior guard Devin Cooper is averaging 11.7 points per game this season as of Jan. 19, good for third on the team.

Matt Orth
Assistant Sports Editor

After dominating non-conference opponents at the beginning of the season, like Brooklyn College and the University of Valley Forge, the Montclair State University men’s basketball team went to face New Jersey Athletic Conference (NJAC) opponents in five straight games. The Red Hawks could only find a victory in one of those games and went into a three-game losing streak.

With a losing record going into the winter break, things looked a little rocky for a team that got robbed of a championship opportunity last season due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. But after a phenomenal game against Misericordia University a month ago, with senior forward Steve Breeman scoring over 20 points, Montclair State seems to be finding their footing in the second half of the season.

Senior guard Devin Cooper talks about what has been going right recently for the Red Hawks, and to him, it all starts with one’s work ethic at practice in the Panzer Athletic Center.

“One thing we all have been harping on as a team and as a coaching staff is going hard at practice,” Cooper said. “Whether it is a live segment or any drill we do at practice, we go a lot harder and treat it as a team and as a coaching staff. The Red Hawks are still fighting for another chance to give some damage in the NJAC playoffs. Last season, they were ready to face New Jersey City University (NJCU) in the semifinals, but due to COVID-19 protocols, the game was called off and NJCU advanced to the championship where they would inevitably beat Stockton University and win the conference.

However, Montclair State got their chance to finally face the Gothic Knights on Saturday afternoon, and it was yet another close game for the Red Hawks, with sophomore guard Amari Mills shining once again with 17 points, and with Breeman not playing, the winning streak ended with a three-point loss. Callender IV spoke on a couple of things the Red Hawks wanted to accomplish in the conference matchup.

“Our main thing is to rebound the ball since NJCU is a great rebounding team,” Callender IV said. “I feel control the backboard and hit our open shots, the game should come right to us.”

While the result was not what Montclair State wanted (66-69), they did accomplish what Callender IV wanted: the team notched 44 rebounds over the Gothic Knights’ 36 rebounds.

With the team now at a winning record (7-6) and heading into all-conference matchups for the rest of the season, they have a clear vision of what they need to do to succeed, according to Potts: the Red Hawks are still fighting for another chance to give some damage in the NJAC playoffs. Last season, they were ready to face New Jersey City University (NJCU) in the semifinals, but due to COVID-19 protocols, the game was called off and NJCU advanced to the championship where they would inevitably beat Stockton University and win the conference.

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Ryan Nussbaum  
Staff Writer

With three games left in the regular season, the Montclair State University men’s ice hockey team is looking to secure their spot in the Super East Collegiate Hockey League (SECHL) playoffs. But to get in, Montclair State must play their absolute best.

The road to postseason play has not been easy for the Red Hawks, who currently hold a 3-15 record. Head coach Robert Martinez says many of the team's troubles have stemmed from puck possession and the high rate of turnovers.

“We have a difficult time breaking the puck out of the [defensive] zone, which affects several aspects of the game,” coach Martinez said. “Turnovers create opposing scoring opportunities, shots and sustained pressure in our end. It also prohibits us from getting many offensive chances.”

Montclair State also struggled with penalties, allowing opposing teams to have many power-play opportunities. This further limited their offensive capability.

However, there has been a bright side for this team.

A strong core of seniors have led the Red Hawks on both sides of the ice: senior forward Shawn Meneghin as well as captain and senior forward Ryan Martinez. Meneghin’s two goals against The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) were the deciding factor in a 4-2 victory on Oct. 3. Junior forward Anthony Oliveri has stepped up as well, often facilitating scoring opportunities in addition to scoring goals for the team.

Defensively, captain and senior goaltender Ondrej Smalec III has been credited with keeping the Red Hawks competitive in tight games. In a critical conference matchup against Clarkson University on Nov. 13, he saved 44 out of 45 shots to help carry his team to a 4-1 victory.

Ryan Martinez spoke about how essential the upperclassman has been to this squad developmentally.

“[Smalec III and I] being veterans, we’re both leaders on the team,” he said. “We really try to guide the younger guys in the right direction and hope they hop on board.”

The 2021-22 season has presented a set of unique challenges for Montclair State. Although the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic did not stop the Red Hawks from taking to the ice in the 2020-21 season for several exhibition games, the uncertainty of the situation, as well as the return to league play, has taken a toll on the team this year, according to coach Martinez.

“This season, the team seems distracted by things going back to normal,” coach Martinez said. “That coupled with our first and second-year players getting their first, real test of the normal schedule balancing with hockey, school, work and family obligations. It’s tough.”

In addition, the season is split between the fall and spring semesters, and multiple players such as Meneghin have graduated after the first half of the season, forcing younger players to step up.

In the second semester opening weekend, Montclair State dropped games to William Paterson University and TCNJ, failing to score a goal in either contest.

Although the Red Hawks have faced many challenges throughout the year, both players and coaching staff are optimistic that they can put together a run into the playoffs.

“It’s been a challenging first semester,” Smalec III said. “We knew with the players that we were, unfortunately, losing after the first semester, [that] it was going to be a greater challenge, but despite that and the results from last weekend, I think there’s still plenty of reason to be optimistic going forward [and] leading into the final weekend of games.”

In order to qualify, the Red Hawks must defeat Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) and Marist College in one weekend. Both sit just above them in the SECHL standings.

In the season finale, they travel to Sacred Heart University. That string of victories would mean that they leapfrog both CCSU and Marist in the standings, putting Montclair State in the playoffs. Fortunately for them, two of the next three games will be played at home.

Smalec III says the team needs a strong week of practice going into the second weekend, where the Red Hawks as well. Much of the potential to be an upset team, we just need to bear down and focus these last three games.”

Seniors like Ryan Martinez are hungry to compete in one last playoff run before graduating. To him, it means everything.

“I’ve been playing this game for 19 years,” he said. “It just means everything to get that one extra ice slot, one extra practice and one extra game.”

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Smalec III says the team needs a strong week of practice going into the season’s most critical stretch.

“I think [my teammates] just need to relax,” Smalec III said. “Too many people are trying to do too much, and the second we simplify what we do, the better we are as a team.”

History and experience may favor the Red Hawks as well. Much of the roster played in a similar situation during the last weekend of the 2019-20 season, where the team rallied to secure their spot in the playoffs.

Coach Martinez says this year’s team has a very strong chance of doing the same.

“Headed into the last three games, I anticipate that we will get to the postseason and be more competitive,” coach Martinez said. “We do have the potential to be an upset team, we just need to bear down and focus these last three games.”

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“I’ve been playing this game for 19 years,” he said. “It just means everything to get that one extra ice slot, one extra practice and one extra game.”
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“The diving portion is just on me, there’s no one else if I don’t get first or second,” Pallen said. “I don’t have a teammate that can help me get those points up which is challenging. So it makes me nervous knowing I want to place the highest to get the most points for my team cause it really is all up to me.”

While not having anyone on the board alongside him, the swim team has played a huge part in supporting Pallen. Fortunately, four female divers are practicing alongside Pallen and have been supporting him throughout his training.

“This year especially the whole team has been really supportive. I think this year it really showed how much the swimmers supported the rest of the divers,” Pallen said. “Being by myself is intimidating, it’s nerve-racking being up on that board and it’s just dead silence during a meet and everyone is just watching you. I don’t want to mess up. That’s the only thing going through my head. Do not mess up and perform well. The swimmers realize this and they have really been there to support me.”

Pallen started by himself and will likely end his career as the lone male diver. He was for a short time joined by one teammate, Montclair State’s former three-sport athlete Ian Johnson, who joined a month after Pallen first got into diving.

Johnson has played with many teammates, winning titles and championships alongside some exceptional athletes. However, Johnson notes that there is something uniquely special about Pallen compared to his other sports teammates.

“Alex is such a great asset to the men’s swimming and diving team,” Johnson said. “He came in when there was a need for male divers and has worked every single day improving on his dive difficulty and execution. I can guarantee his name will be up on the wall with a couple of records under his belt by the time he takes his last dive for [Montclair State].”

Pallen attributes his success so far to his consistency in the standards he holds himself to each time he competes.

“My biggest expectation and goal is to do my best and really just get the highest possible score for myself,” Pallen said.

The second half of the season is just getting started which will soon come to an end at the Metropolitan Championships in New Brunswick. The talented diver will be alone in the air but he will have a huge team and support system by his side.