Meet Pebbles:
Montclair State's New Pupscot

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To report an error of fact or a Letter to the Editor, email the Editor-in-Chief at montclarionchief@gmail.com.

Editor-in-Chief
Emma Caughlan
montclarionchief@gmail.com

Managing Editor
Jenna Sundel
montclarionmanaging@gmail.com

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News
Erin Lawlor
montclarionnews@gmail.com

Social Media Manager
Emma Barber
montclarionsocialmedia@gmail.com

Chief Copy Editor
Kim Lamparello
montclarioncopy@gmail.com

Feature
Sal DiMaggio
montclarionfeature@gmail.com

Opinion
Avery Nixon
montclarionopinion@gmail.com

Entertainment
Katie Lawrence
montclarionvideo@gmail.com

Sports
Matt Orth
montclarionsports@gmail.com

Photography
Lynise Olivacce
montclarionphotography@gmail.com

Feature
Sal DiMaggio
montclarionfeature@gmail.com

Opinion
Avery Nixon
montclarionopinion@gmail.com

Entertainment
Katie Lawrence
montclarionvideo@gmail.com

Sports
Matt Orth
montclarionsports@gmail.com

Photography
Lynise Olivacce
montclarionphotography@gmail.com

Feature
Sal DiMaggio
montclarionfeature@gmail.com

Opinion
Avery Nixon
montclarionopinion@gmail.com

Entertainment
Katie Lawrence
montclarionvideo@gmail.com

Sports
Matt Orth
montclarionsports@gmail.com

Photography
Lynise Olivacce
montclarionphotography@gmail.com

Assistant Writers & Contributors

Photography
Karsten Englander
Dani Mazariegos

Opinion
Sofia Acevedo Valencia
Colin Luderitz

Sports
Ryan White

Production
Nicky Vidal

Spanish Translator
Darian Mozo
Victor Mutiz Rosa

Writers & Contributors

Ariana Ortiz
Scott Ackerson
Rosemary Rodriguez
Claudia Martillo
Esmeralda Tamayo
Aiden Ivers
Victoria Ribarich
Gabrielle Miller
Olivia Yayla
Danielle Linggar
Orion Osa
Kiara Oelkers
Emily Christian
Becca Kaufman
Catherine Khitiri

Business Team

Business Manager
Cam Wade
montclarionbusinessmanager@gmail.com

Ad Sales Manager
Ashleigh Corby
montclarionsadsales@gmail.com

Business Manager
Cam Wade
montclarionbusinessmanager@gmail.com

Ad Sales Manager
Ashleigh Corby
montclarionsadsales@gmail.com

Faculty Advisor
Tara George

Want to see yourself here?
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Contact any of the Editors above for more information!

Email montclarionchief@gmail.com with any questions!
Is Montclair State University Prepared For A Mass Shooting?

Victoria Ribarich  
Guest Writer

Just over two weeks ago, a mass shooting at Michigan State University occurred on the campus, killing three and injuring five. It is about to be the third month of 2023, and over 29 incidents of gunfire have occurred on school grounds, according to Everytown Research & Policy.

Students of all ages worry that a shooting will occur on their campus, including those at Montclair State University. This recent incident raises questions about preparedness for an active shooter and the action plans the university and police have in place to keep students, faculty and staff safe.

Kieran Barrett, chief of the Montclair State Police Department, said he understands these concerns.

“For me to say it could never happen here or anywhere would be a disservice to the community,” Barrett said. “We remain steadfast in our commitment to mitigating the likelihood of any act of violence on our campus. The university is prepared and has comprehensive plans for a multitude of crisis situations, including incidents of an active shooter on campus.”

Barrett also said that the university and police department provide consistent care for community members, hold training and drills for area responders, work with the state and federal partners on any incidents that can challenge the university and educate the community on what they can do to report, prevent and counteract situations of violence if they were to arise.

According to the “What If?” section of Emergency Information on the Montclair State website, “The University will send emergency alerts via the RAVE text system when a confirmed or suspected active shooter situation is imminent. The alert will include the location and sometimes where to avoid if it is known."

There are multiple subsections in the University’s Emergency Operations plan for Active Shooters/Active Violence on campus, located on pages 78-87 titled Active Shooter/Active Violence Annex.

Under III Purpose: 4. Law Enforcement Agency, 2. “The Montclair State University Police Department will be the first responders to an actual event of an active shooter or an active threat event.”

Also located in the III Purpose section, “Three. If there is a corroborated, confirmed shooting or active violence on campus, the Montclair State University Police Department will be responsible to request additional law enforcement resources from the region.”

On pages 261-265, there are also steps on what to do during an active shooting, which include: evacuate/run if there is an accessible path, hide out if evacuation is not possible and find a place to hide where the active shooter is less likely to find you. Lastly, fight back as a last resort.

To read more about what to do during an active shooting, go to the Montclair State website and the University Police tab. You can also find more information in their 286-page University’s Emergency Operations Plan on the website.

Although Barrett said the university has comprehensive plans for crises including active shooters, many students are not sure if the university is prepared.

Ilona Soltys, a senior communication and media arts major, is one of those students.

“We are not ready,” Soltys said. “We never had that conversation before. Nobody has talked to us about it. The biggest issue is that our campus is public so anyone can come on. Security doesn’t check for IDs and who comes onto the campus.”

Visitors who come to Montclair State do not need IDs to get onto campus, but cannot access certain doors or buildings if they do not have a Montclair State ID. During school hours, though, buildings are accessible for students to go into for their classes. Many other areas are accessible to the public, including the Panera Bread inside of Susan A. Cole Hall.

Miriam Aguirre, a junior social media and public relations major, feels a bit safer because of that, but would they help us? Like what happened in [Uvalde, Texas]; would they help us? Do we trust the police?"

Priya Doddipalli, a freshman computer science major, thinks that the university is prepared in case there ever was an active shooter.

“I think we are ready,” Doddipalli said. “We have security guards and the police department, which are highly trained. I also think that we should have mental health seminars because they would be very useful and help students with their issues.”

If you see or hear anything that causes suspicion on campus do not be afraid to contact the university police department.

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The Montclair Police Department located on campus.
Students Enjoy First Snow Day of the Year

Aidan Ivers
Staff Writer

The night of Monday, Feb. 27 into Tuesday, Feb. 28 brought snowfall to Montclair State University’s campus for the first time this semester. While some classes chose to meet regularly, others were virtual or canceled altogether. According to northjersey.com, Montclair accumulated around 5 inches of snow.

The university sent e-mails the night before explaining they planned to keep classes and offices operational during the snowfall and students were urged to move their cars into Car Parc Diem or Red Hawk Parking Deck with complimentary parking for the night.

This affected the schedules of some students on campus. Maryem Mirza, a junior business administration major, explained some of her struggles during the snow day.

“I got to school around 10 to do research and I’m here from 10 to eight because I have that and research from two to four and then a five-thirty class,” Mirza said. “I could have done my research at home, but I came to campus to do lab but once I came here I got an e-mail saying my lab was online too so I technically could have stayed home until five-thirty.”

Neel Patel, a senior molecular biology major, also explained how the snowfall impacted his work schedule and the benefit of the university remaining open.

“It’s been easy, my physics lab got canceled and I only had one class today,” Patel said. “It’s not that bad of a snow day and I think it’s good they kept campus open today because if it did get canceled, a lot of people would have missed their classes which remained regularly scheduled.”

Outside of the realm of academics, other students gathered to make the most out of what they could with the snowfall on campus. Luke Studer, a freshman animation and visual effects major, explained how he and his friends built the snowman at midnight.

“It was really great, I would say this is a second snow day because a while back we also had another night where we got a decent bit of snow and I also went outside until one in the morning playing in the snow and that’s exactly what we did this week,” Ong said. “I went out there and I was trying to build the biggest snowballs as I could.”

Along with Studer and Ong, Adele Sadowski, a freshman chemistry major, was also a part of the snowman building and she explained it wasn’t intended to begin with.

“It was really fun as this wasn’t the original plan because I got out of my in-person chemistry class at 12:30 Tuesday and my friends and I made a little snowman and then I see them building a bigger snowman out at the [Student Center] Quad and I just had to join them,” Sadowski said.

Ren Krieger, a freshman design, technology and management major, emphasized how they were grateful for the opportunity to make the most of the snow day.

“All my classes were over pretty early and my last one got canceled so my friends and I decided to get food and have fun in the snow,” Krieger said. “The night prior, we started making giant snowballs and the next day we see other people trying to make something out of it so we offered to help and six of us were lifting one snowball onto the other and we were sculpting it together. For the time being it is immortalized as a snowman.”
Montclair State University has a new furry friend joining Team Rocky. Her name is Pebbles and she is a 19-month old mini labradoodle. Pebbles is officially Rocky the Red Hawk’s puppy pal but she will live with Assistant Director of Residence Life Thea Dyer on campus.

“Caring for a dog requires a great deal of patience, time and commitment which is something I felt confident I could provide for Pebbles for many years to come which ultimately led me to volunteer for this role,” Dyer said. “I feel very honored to have been chosen to care for Pebbles and am very excited to be a part of the joy and happiness she brings to campus.”

As well as being a Pupscot, Pebbles will also be trained as a therapy dog once she turns one, according to Director of Student Communications, Student Development and Campus Life Cindy Meneghin.

“The main reason we wanted to bring a pupscot to campus was because of the joy our students feel when visiting care dogs come to campus during de-stress weeks,” Meneghin said. “We see the happiness that Rocky brings to our students and we wanted to expand on that feeling, as well as the Red Hawk pride our Pebbles will spread along with Rocky!” Rocky and his team shared similar sentiments.

“Pebbles makes a new friend.

When asked if he was excited about his new friend, Rocky gave a big nod and a thumbs up. Jessica Santa, a sophomore business marketing major, was one of the first to meet Pebbles.

“It was so cute,” Santa said. “She was nice, she was adorable. I love puppies and that just made my whole day.”

Some are not as excited about the addition to Team Rocky. Shaena Kate, a senior dance major, isn’t convinced.

“I just think it’s so stupid,” Kate said. “I would rather another person get hired at [Counseling and Psychological Services.]” Meneghin is confident that Pebbles will be a positive presence on campus.

“Her Gotcha Day was on February 17, but already the joy she has brought to the campus is so easy to see and feel,” Meneghin said. “And just like Rocky, she looks really good in red. Team Rocky is thrilled to be supporting our newest member and we know Pebbles will be the greatest little Red Hawk of all time.”
Everyone wants a place they go to decompress. To feel free. To be liberated in a society where one often feels confined. On the night of Feb. 26, the Red Hawk Community Ball at Montclair State University was an embodiment of that.

It was an infectious feeling of exhilaration. An environment that is an apt assessment of acceptance, inclusivity and vulnerability. Just the way you feel when you listen to Beyoncé’s latest album ‘Renaissance.’ The Red Hawk Community Ball worked with the North Jersey Community Research Initiative (NJCRE), one of New Jersey’s largest and most comprehensive HIV/AIDS community-based organizations based in Newark, to help spread awareness.

The participants that night, Daughta Speaks, the first Black LGBTQIA+ organization on the Montclair State campus and second in New Jersey, and the Office of Social Justice and Diversity, were one of one, unique, and exceptional. It was too much Black excellence for one to handle. But if you missed it, I hate that for you.

The ball was a place to be accepted by someone and share this experience with someone who is like family. People who found each other in a hopeless place in a society that did not accept them were able to come together at this event. For others, it was a place where they began to see a different side of themselves to fully embrace.

The Ballroom Scene is a Latino and African-American LGBTQIA+ subculture that derives from New York City. It includes multiple categories where predominantly the LGBTQIA+ community competes to win trophies and prizes. But it’s all love because the competitors hug after they go against each other in different “houses.”

Along with a system of “houses,” which are chosen families, are the ‘fathers’ and ‘mothers.’ This community rejected Black homophobia and white supremacy, and its power was irresistible. It challenged systems of oppression and demanded freedom on the runway. People shouted “Mulan,” “Dior,” "Versace" and the names of the “Houses” each person was part of.

The other attendees of this event were the legendary “mothers,” “fathers” and ‘children,’ from ‘houses’ in New Jersey, in addition to the Queen of New Jersey, the Legendary Icon Hall of Famer and a Ballroom Scene liaison of New Jersey, Tyra Old Navy.

Each Ballroom category presented that night was “best dressed” led by Fame Dior, “runway” led by Killa Breads, “realness” led by Shawn Bryant, “face” led by Yoncé Scott and “performance” led by Gia Versace and Delilah Gabbana. The Ballroom Scene was created by transgender and queer people as a means of expression while being in a place of bondage, and also curated as a source of entertainment.

“My purpose in coming here was to get the college kids in tune in Ballroom and explain what Ballroom is and get people to go out and expand their activities and talents,” Old Navy said. “So a lot of people have hidden talents that they are scared to come out. So we came to put on a show for them so they can get out of their comfort zone.”

It was a gratifying and hands-on educational experience for people to recognize the Ballroom Scene for what it is.

To be in a world where you are...
Evette Brown-Toney, a junior history major, competes in the “performance” category.

Lynise Olivacce | The Montclarion

Jade Denton, a sophomore psychology major, walks down the runway during the “face” category.

Karsten Englander | The Montclarion

The judges judge the contestants.

Lynise Olivacce | The Montclarion

A’Lysai Robinson, a junior acting major, participates in the face category.

Lynise Olivacce | The Montclarion

Delilah Gabbana, New Jersey mother of House of Gabbana, struts down the runway before judging the performance category.

Karsten Englander | The Montclarion

judged by the color of your skin, and how to express yourself through your sexuality, gender, and for gender non-conforming people, is something the Black LGBTQIA+ community had to go through and continuously do so in different aspects.

The LGBTQIA+ community undoubtedly was historically unaccepted. It was a crime to come out, to a point where people were marginalized by immeasurable violence and prejudice. Therefore, it was something that took a toll on people and the community both mentally and physically.

Even though this was a public event that was made for people to express themselves freely, it was acknowledged that people of this community were in clubs underground to escape from this harsh reality, and for some in their own households. This stigmatization led to the founders of special networks and cultural groups such as movements, creative collectives and the Ballroom Scene.

The pioneers of the Ballroom Scene walked so the attendees can run the runway. The judges that night were Tomiana, a junior fashion studies major, and the “fathers” and “mothers” of the “Houses.”

The symmetrical features were serving looks as the judges were determining who will win “face.” Nonetheless, A’Lysai Robinson, a junior acting major, and Jade Denton, a sophomore psychology major, intensified the black girl magic on the runway as they were giving face, skin and structure.

“It was actually pretty liberating to participate in this event because even though I’m an actor, I’m not really a big person when it comes to Ballroom,” Robinson said. “Like I love watching it but having the opportunity to just participate in a space where I knew that I’d be accepted for who I am, as a beginner, with no experience. It feels liberating being able to just get up and have a good time.”

Denton said Ballroom is a safe space. “It felt like home to me just because, I grew up being queer all my life,” Denton said. “But it’s a queer space for us. It’s a safe space. This is what I’m supposed to be doing, I’m alright.”

[Ballroom Scene] is core level. It’s an art form. It is for everyone to come and show their true self.”

(Read more at themontclarion.org)
Dancing on Axes and Spears'
Allows Viewers to Interact with Art

Scott Ackerson
Guest Writer

People always say that "art is in the eye of the beholder." But what if, instead, it could be in the palm of your hand? With the University Galleries’ latest exhibition, it truly can be. Featured at the George Segal Gallery until April 21 as the sole exhibition, "Dancing on Axes and Spears" is the latest in a series of installations by Filipino artist Caroline Garcia. A multimedia experience, the exhibition combines physical works of 2D and 3D art, virtual reality and multiple forms of choreographed dance.

When the viewer first enters this vast world of small pieces, they are quickly greeted with a piece titled "Trigger Finger." Using repurposed materials from Garcia’s own photographs back in 2016, Trigger Finger consists of three robotic metal ‘fingernails’, styled in the traditional Filipino style of ‘pangalay’ nails. The fingers are equipped with pan and tilt functions that seem choppy at first, but this glitch is meant to represent the pitfalls that come when translating such customs from one culture to another.

Following up ‘Trigger Finger’ is a series of four photographs titled ‘The Good Neighbor.” All four photos feature the artist performing traditional dance moves, caught in still imagery. The pictures have a calming yet assertive presence, inspiring viewers to think critically about the movement behind the image.

The exhibit’s centerpiece is an interactive martial arts gym titled ‘I Woke Up and Chose Violence.’ decked out with fake swords and other weaponry. Patrons pick a weapon off of the wall and try their hand at fighting a couple of sculptures made of rubber tires. Though this part of the exhibition, visitors become a part of the exhibit themselves.

"[My piece is] intended to create a more immersive engagement with the work," Garcia said. Guests are actually encouraged to touch and move with the art. This allows them to have a more unique and physical connection to the art than with most exhibits.

Though the exhibition is open to any and all patrons, Garcia is particularly excited at the opportunity to present it to the students here at Montclair State University and share the piece’s themes of identity and of “alterity,” or the feeling of otherness.

"Alterity is something that can be embraced," Garcia said. "If this gives [students] some sort of language, whether that be visual, verbal or emotional, to be able to express or accept their position in the world, then I definitely hope it is a helpful tool."

Garcia is a multifaceted artist, having grown up involved in dance classes and video production before studying for her bachelor’s degree in photography. In 2016, Garcia began her journey into the world of martial arts as well, she even included her own belt certifications on the walls of the exhibit. Garcia’s love and skill level in several mediums led to her unique blends of styles, which is shown prominently in ‘Dancing on Axes and Spears.’

"Whatever form I see or envision to best communicate the work, I will learn a new skill in order to do so," Garcia said. This diligence in the arts and her own crafts caught the eye of the gallery’s engagement and outreach coordinator Alyssa Leslie Villasenor.

"We’re not here to sell art [and] we’re not here to make profits," Villasenor said. "We’re here to make a space for everyone where they feel comfortable and seen.”

The University Galleries held a forum on Feb. 20, featuring Garcia and art curator Jesse Bandler Firestone. Students and other members of the campus community were invited to attend, learning various insights behind Firestone and Garcia’s involvement in the exhibit.

"It was about seeing this connective thread, there’s this idea of resilience [and] grief," Firestone said.

So far, the exhibit has proven to be a win for many students. Justin Roman, a senior visual arts major at Montclair State, enjoyed the interactive nature of the martial arts gym.

"Normally we don’t just touch artwork at these exhibits, but now you’re allowed to touch these certain weapons," Roman said.

Christian Loureiro, also a senior visual arts major, was particularly impressed by the exhibit’s messages and themes.

"Exploring identity and learning new things is really helpful for a person to know, so that way they can understand what it’s like to be in another person’s shoes," Loureiro said.

Garcia’s work, "Dancing on Axes and Spears" will be open for viewing at the University Galleries until April 21.
Black Student Union: Bringing Black Students Together

Ariana Ortiz
Guest Writer

From the outside looking in, Montclair State University’s Black Student Union meeting is buzzing. There is a large assembly of a few dozen Montclair State students, gathered tightly in the Red Hawk Nest. The meeting takes a couple of minutes to begin, with all of the members laughing and talking in the meantime.

The meeting then kicks off with a friendly Guess the Song game, featuring hits like “Love on the Brain” by Rihanna. There is a closeness among the members that is felt immediately and that maintains during their planned debate discussing Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.

The energy of the meeting feels new, even though the organization itself is rather old. The Black Student Union was founded at Montclair State in 1965. Their mission both then and now is to create a place that is a safe haven for Black students who are attending a predominantly white institution. The overarching goal is for Black students to feel connected and united among each other.

At this meeting in particular, the debate was led by Kayla Ogoti, a junior biology major, and vice president of the organization. She asked the members questions related to Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, regarding who they felt had a stronger impact on the Black community and whose philosophies they resonated with most. Microphones were passed along the room as members offered their input.

“Last week, we did have a Valentine’s Day mixer and that was fun,” Umebuani said. “We had a game called ‘The Spicy Seat’ where we were asking members little spicy questions, and we had a couple of speed dating rounds.”

Beyond these meetings, the organization also hosts many events, such as “Welcome to the Blocc,” which is an outdoor barbeque, and the Harvest Ball, which is a more formal end-of-semester celebration. The events serve as a means to celebrate the accomplishments of Black students at Montclair State, as well as provide settings for Black students to come together and enjoy themselves. The Black Student Union also partners with other organizations on campus for events such as “Don’t Touch My Hair 4,” happening on March 4, and “Harlem Renaissance,” happening on April 25.

Eyv Matthews, a sophomore psychology major and president of the organization, expressed how much she enjoys the special events the club holds.

“As the semester continues, the main goal of the Black Student Union is to continue reaching more students. There are plans to collaborate with more organizations and to overall build more visibility on campus. "Sometimes people don’t come out," Ogoti said. "We just want people to come out."

Meetings for the Black Student Union take place weekly on Tuesdays in the Student Center, in the Red Hawk Nest at 4 p.m. To learn more, you can follow them on Instagram at @montclairbsu.
What are your red flags for people?
By Lynise Olivacce
Photo Editor

“Lying. That’s the main thing. That’s a big red flag for me. I like faithful people.”

Vaughn Simmons
Junior
Exercise Science

“People who get too caught up in their own world to understand outer experiences. People who cannot understand what life may be like for another just because they lived a different experience.”

Eddie Cuba
Junior
Film and Television

“Boys who have one pillow and then multiple like mini pillows. Girls [who] wear fake glasses just to say they have glasses. Like I get the UV glasses. All Honda Civic drivers. Boys who wear a hoodie under their flannel, like it’s been going on for too long. Pick me girls. Boys who cry for no reason. People who try to one-up others, when someone is having their moment and like they’re really excited about it.”

Zoe Boyle
Junior
Justice Studies
“When people don’t say thank you when you hold the door or literally say ‘Have a good day’ or like anything. And then pick me boys. The ones that are like, ‘No one’s gonna love me.’ The little crying emoji. [Or] girls who make everything about themselves. Or [when] you can never be unique because that one person already did it. Or they switch the conversation to their experience. [Also,] taking too long to respond. You know like when they text you and then you’ll text right back and they’ll just ignore you.”

Skye Ramsey
Junior
Psychology

“If you only talk about yourself. It’s not only talking about their interests, it’s just talking with us about themselves, and their looks and they don’t really ask you. Or they’re like, ‘Oh you should come with me so you can fix this,’ and it's like I wasn’t even looking to fix that.”

Dana Hernández-Hernández
Freshman
Business Administration

“When someone is being overly positive all the time. It just feels artificial to a point. It’s someone coming up to you and saying, ‘Hey, look how nice I am to everyone.’ They’re constantly driving home the point that how someone is such a good person, but if you have to consistently emphasize that you’re a good person, I’m getting the feeling that you’re not. Are you trying to prove to me that you’re a good person or are you trying to prove to yourself that?”

Zach Monteiro
Sophomore
English
Horoscopes

**Capricorn**
Dec. 22 – Jan. 19
You’re radiant, Capricorn, and I love what you’ve done with your hair. If you haven’t done anything yet, get down to the salon ASAP or go get box dye from Sally’s and a roommate with 45 minutes to kill. And yes, you should dye it red.

**Cancer**
Jun. 21 – Jul. 22
Cancer, I know you took a snowball to the head during that snowball fight on Tuesday — so please make sure you’re checking for concussion symptoms. Additionally, if you threw a snowball at someone, there’s still time to have them sign a waiver confirming that you didn’t know there was a rock inside that snowball. Be careful out there.

**Aquarius**
Jan. 20 – Feb. 18
Did you know that you’re supposed to review movies on Letterboxd as you watch them? No one wants to read your foggy memory of the plot of Lemonade Mouth or that you’ve watched The Fault in Our Stars fifteen times. I know you want to be a Letterboxd influencer, but maybe that’s not a realistic goal.

**Leo**
Jul. 23 – Aug. 22
Whatever happened to that Harry Styles serial story I was doing? I don’t know, but I think next week I’m gonna start on my Zayn Malik one.

**Pisces**
Feb. 19 – Mar. 20
I think it’s time to take a trip abroad, Pisces. You’re getting old, you know, and you only live once. The United Kingdom is a great option… or France… or Germany… or even Africa! You should take your family too, by the way, they would love you forever. PS. Tell your dog you love them, their life is so hard.

**Virgo**
Aug. 23 – Sep. 22
Virgo, have you suffered from the recent campus food poisonings? Have you fallen victim to a chicken sandwich and need compensation? Well, we’re a paper, we just report. But I hope you find a lawyer.

**Aries**
Mar. 21 – Apr. 19
Hey Aries, how much do you listen to this week? I know you’re a proud munchkin, but please, listen how loud you play her EP “Like,7?” on school nights. I’m sure your roommates love Bikini Bottom as much as you do, but it’s not exactly a lifestyle when they have to wake up at 8am the next day.

**Libra**
Sep. 23 – Oct. 22
Things are getting better for you, Libra, so stop telling all of your friends that you’re in your “flop era.” Honestly, it’s all going to be okay. Just get some boba, watch New Girl, and chill out.

**Taurus**
Apr. 20 – May 20
Don’t tell anyone but you’re my favorite. Wink. Wink.

**Scorpio**
Oct. 23 – Nov. 21
Do you guys think I should get another tattoo soon? I’m asking you because all my best friends are Scorpions and have never let me down.

**Gemini**
May 21 – Jun. 20
Please, for the love of all things, stop overthinking literally every aspect of your life. It’s not good for you and your sibling is getting tired of being stressed for you. Speaking of siblings, it’s time to move on from their former relationship. I know you liked them but their partner might have been a little too much like you. Red Flag…

**Sagittarius**
Nov. 22 – Dec. 21
Hope you had a good week, Sagitarius, because it’s only up from here! Maybe your crush will make you dinner this week, and maybe it won’t be poisoned this time! Who knows? Just be open to anything!
The Montclarion Crossword Puzzle and More!

Lizzo Edition

By Jenna Sundel

Across
4. Lizzo’s real name.
5. Lizzo is professionally trained in this instrument.
7. The name of Lizzo’s debut album.
8. Lizzo collaborated with Cardi B on this song.

Down
1. Lizzo released this album in 2022.
2. Lizzo will be a headliner at this 2023 music festival.
3. This song won Record of the Year at the 2023 Grammys.
6. Lizzo recently collaborated with this artist.

Sudoku

Word Search

Tempo
Truth Hurts
Cuz I Love You
Grrrls

Boys
Soulmate
The Sign
Birthday Girl

Juice
Good as Hell
Like a Girl
Worship
We Can Never Be Prepared

Sophia Caparros | The Montclarion

Opinion

It’s reassuring to know that plans are put into place in case of an event like this. But what are we supposed to do for the couple of minutes it takes for police to assemble and get to where the crisis is? We cannot and will not be safe until our country’s leaders do something about the mass shooting epidemic we are facing.

Nobody wants to take your pistols, shotguns or hunting rifles from you. However, we as a country cannot be selling AR-15s to regular citizens. These are weapons of war, not a trip to the supermarket.

Students are petrified that their school could be next. At this rate, it’s almost a matter of time until someone is subjected to being in a mass shooting. It’s time to make a change and pass stricter gun laws so we can live in peace.

This needs to be changed, now.

I n recent light of events at Michigan State University, students across the country are scared for their safety. On Feb. 13, 43-year-old gunman Anthony Dwayne McRae opened fire on Michigan State University students across the country.

On Feb. 13, 43-year-old gunman Anthony Dwayne McRae opened fire on Michigan State University. McRae opened fire on Michigan State University, the campus is completely open to the community and anyone else who wants a taste of the college experience.

Montclair State University students have had their fair share of encounters with non-students. Whether it’s religious protestors, people walking their adorable dogs or someone spreading their agenda with pamphlets, it is clear anyone could be here at any time.

Most school shooters are students themselves who target their peers. But the latest tragedy at Michigan State shows that anyone could be a threat. How are students supposed to feel safe on such an open campus? How are students supposed to go about their lives when at any given moment a catastrophe can occur?

Montclair State Police Chief Kieran Barrett offered some insight into the safety measures and crisis response plans put into place in case of an emergency.

“ar-15s have a higher muzzle velocity than some other rifles and bullets leaving them at such a fast speed — nearly three times the speed of sound — cause more damage to bones and organs." In most states in the United States of America, citizens are legally allowed to own an AR-15-style semi-automatic rifle when they turn eighteen. Teenagers who aren’t legally allowed to drink, rent a car, book a hotel room or gamble at casinos are legally allowed to own semi-automatic rifles. The same semi-automatic rifles that have claimed countless lives.

Michigan State University, the campus is completely open to the community and anyone else who wants a taste of the college experience. Montclair State Police Chief Kieran Barrett offered some insight into the safety measures and crisis response plans put into place in case of an emergency.

“The university is prepared and has comprehensive plans for a multitude of crisis situations, including incidents of an active shooter on campus,” Barrett said. “Our plans include, among many other aspects, rapid response from police both on and off campus, family reunification, counseling, and additional services to students and the community.”

Barrett continued to explain the police department’s threat analysis and training drills that the police department do to ensure our safety. While it’s reassuring to know that the police are on top of things when it comes to a threat to campus, it doesn’t resolve all of our fear completely.

According to Business Insider, the AR-15 is described to be “designed to inflict what one of its designers called ‘maximum wound effect.’ AR-15s have a higher muzzle velocity than some other rifles and bullets leaving them at such a fast speed — nearly three times the speed of sound — cause more damage to bones and organs.”

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While it’s reassuring to know that plans are put into place in case of an event like this. But what are we supposed to do for the couple of minutes it takes for police to assemble and get to where the crisis is? We cannot and will not be safe until our country’s leaders do something about the mass shooting epidemic we are facing.

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Campus Voices

Do you fear for your safety attending a university with a public campus?

By Katie Lawrence & Paige Ryans

Check out the full video on YouTube @MontclarionVideo

“Yeah definitely because anyone can come here and no one really checks ID or they can’t really verify who is actually a Montclair [State] student. Like the library, anyone can just walk in and they don’t really check anything unless you’re checking a book out or something like that. So it definitely makes you question if you’re safe.”

-Lizbeth Gomez-Pinacho
Freshman
Journalism and Digital Media

“A little bit because anybody could just come onto campus and you know, do some major harm. I mean you hear it all over the news. There was one in Michigan where somebody came onto campus and shot up a bunch of places. So I kind of do fear it in a way.”

-Aliyaa Hernandez
Freshman
Visual Arts

“I don’t really fear my safety until I see things happening at other public campuses and then I start to think about the potential of those events happening here.”

-Noor Aalabaw
Sophomore
Psychology

The Montclarion

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themontclarion.org
Why Are All the Pipes Bursting?

Hannah Effinger
Production Editor

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all know that college dorm buildings are not the most sophisticated pieces of architecture in the slightest, but when they are built for and available to students to live in — it is expected that they have some degree of safety against the elements, and are able to keep the belongings of their students as safe as possible. Especially if students are shelling out thousands of dollars per semester in housing costs.

Sadly, this is not a problem exclusive to Montclair State University. With the severity of global warming increasing rapidly — sporadic, intense cold fronts are becoming more and more common, and though they are happening during normal cold seasons, it becomes difficult to prepare for these events.

According to a Stanford University study, widespread changes in weather patterns and increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events are well-documented consequences of global climate change. These departures from old norms can bring storms, droughts, heatwaves and wildfire conditions beyond the normal occurrence, and Montclair State residents are no exception.

The movement to censor book content has harmful implications and infringes on the rights of students. The attempt to suppress and censor LGBTQ+ content is not only focused on cultivating a conservative and Western-based education, but also further instigating hate and fear of the LGBTQ+ community.

The agenda is geared toward erasing LGBTQ+ existence and downplaying American history concerning subjects like race, slavery and genocide. It's easy to believe that this issue is only affecting red states, but it has made its way as close as Glen Ridge, New Jersey. A group of Glen Ridge residents tried to have six books with LGBTQ+ themes banned from their local library as reported by Patch.

The push to ban LGBTQ+ content is not only focused on cultivating a conservative and Western-based education, but also further instigating hate and fear of the LGBTQ+ community. It's a sad thing when people have decided that the banning of books, which have not killed a single student, is more important than the banning of guns," Johnson said.

Ultimately, the Glen Ridge Library voted to ban the books, and will keep all six books. However, the proposal sends a clear and hateful message to the LGBTQ+ community. As a queer-identifying person, I would have given anything to find a book that reassured and supported my struggle of coming to terms with my sexuality. The journey to self-identity can be intimidating and scary to approach by yourself, especially at a young age.

Though I grew up in the modern digital age, many of the books I read had characters that were always described as white with blonde hair with a crush on a tall, white and brunette guy. This kind of insular mindset had a negative impact on the way I viewed my lives.

The movement to censor book content has harmful implications and infringes on the rights of students. Students should be able to access a diverse variety of books to learn more about any given topic. This specifically impacts students of marginalized backgrounds who have only begun to see themselves reflected in media and books in recent years. A large portion of people in the U.S. oppose book bans, according to a CBS News poll. Regardless of their affiliation on the political spectrum, they overwhelmingly agree that books related to race and U.S. history should not be banned from schools.

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The Danger of Book Bans

Claudia Martillo
Staff Writer

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ere and more efforts are being made to censor the literature that children are reading. Organized groups and individuals are demanding the banning of certain books that contain ideas that go against their values, which often have homophobic and racist undertones.

According to PEN America, in the span of one year, “bans occurred in 138 school districts in 32 states.” This affects nearly four million students throughout the U.S. The data revealed that the two leading subject matters that have been seen in bans pertain to LGBTQ+ themes and conversations around characters of color.

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Prominent figures like Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis are leading the action. DeSantis has made several efforts to limit the discussion of race and LGBTQ+ representation in the classroom as seen in the “Don’t Say Gay” bill and the “Stop W.O.K.E. Act.”

The push to ban LGBTQ+ content is not only focused on cultivating a conservative and Western-based education, but also further instigating hate and fear of the LGBTQ+ community. The agenda is geared toward erasing LGBTQ+ existence and downplaying American history concerning subjects like race, slavery and genocide.

It’s easy to believe that this issue is only affecting red states, but it has made its way as close as Glen Ridge, New Jersey. A group of Glen Ridge residents tried to have six books with LGBTQ+ themes banned from their local library as reported by Patch.

Many of these books aim to normalize the queer experience and provide comfort for any kids struggling to come to terms with their identity. The attempt to suppress and censor the books was thankfully met with backlash from the community.

The meeting for the library board of trustees included local organizations, Out Montclair, Glen Ridge United Against Book Bans, clergy members, parents and students.

The author of the book "All Boys Aren’t Blue,” which was a part of the six books for the ban, George Johnson, was in attendance with a prepared statement that was delivered by his mother and aunt.

"It’s a sad thing when people have decided that the banning of books, which have not killed a single student, is more important than the banning of guns,” Johnson said.

Ultimately, the Glen Ridge Library voted to ban the books and will keep all six books. However, the proposal sends a clear and hateful message to the LGBTQ+ community of Glen Ridge.

As a queer-identifying person, I would have given anything to find a book that reassured and supported my struggle of coming to terms with my sexuality. The journey to self-identity can be intimidating and scary to approach by yourself, especially at a young age.

Though I grew up in the modern digital age, many of the books I read had characters that were always described as white with blonde hair with a crush on a tall, white and brunette guy. This kind of insular mindset had a negative impact on the way I viewed my identity as queer and a woman of color.

Books provide people with an opportunity to explore anything and everything. It is essential that this right is protected and we do not let the agenda of others dictate the way we lead our lives.

People of color and the LGBTQ+ community deserve to be felt appreciated and represented in this country.

Christian Vera | The Montclarion

Claudia Martillo, a senior journalism and digital media major, is in her first year as a staff writer for The Montclarion.

Hannah Effinger, a senior visual communication design major, is in her first year as the production editor for The Montclarion.
Drag Queens Aren’t Grooming Children, Republicans Are

Avery Nixon
Opinion Editor

Whether it’s teaching them about the existence of gay people, showing LGBTQ+ characters in movies or simply being in the presence of a gay person, the Republican Party is riled up.

One of the most prominent issues that the Republican Party is deathly afraid of is that the LGBTQ+ community is grooming children.

You have to understand, growing up in a very conservative town in a very conservative county, I have been fed up with Republicans for a long time.

I was first introduced to politics in June 2015. I had just turned 12 years old the month before.

I saw a tweet saying that Donald Trump was running for President and I was quite confused about why everyone hated Donald Trump?

And his very long answer was the start of a long-lasting disdain I have for the Republican Party.

Now, as a member of the LGBTQ+ community myself, I have to say that I do believe everyone has the right to believe what they want to believe.

I understand that close-minded people didn’t have the same upbringing as me and it’s harder for them to open their minds and hearts to acceptance and equality. I understand that there are people who are genuinely scared of LGBTQ+ people. But I also understand that the Republican Party is using that to scare voters into voting for them.

Fear is a common theme in the Republican political agenda. They will tell you the left is trying to take your guns, force your kids to be transgender or that they’re trying to oppress white people. Republicans use hate and fear to scare conservative voters into voting for them.

Republicans have been perpetrating these lies and conspiracies because they know that the Republican Party is dying and they have to become more extreme if they want to compete with the Democrats and win elections.

So, they targeted the LGBTQ+ community.

In 2022, Republican New York City Council Member representing District 19 of Queens Vickie Paladino tweeted, “Progressives may have no problem with child grooming and sexualization, but I do. This will not happen on my watch. Kids deserve a quality education free from political manipulation and sexual content.”

This is a common belief amongst the Republican Party.

Florida congressman Matt Gaetz celebrated Pride Month by liking tweets accusing drag queens of “grooming” innocent children.

Pretty hot take from a man being investigated for paying a 17-year-old girl for sex and traveling with her across state lines.

As someone who has seen children march through my development on Halloween with no costumes and just giant “Trump 2020” signs, it is insane to me that they believe the left is the one indoctrinating children.

Grooming, as defined by Oxford languages, is “the practice of preparing or training someone for a particular purpose or activity.”

Republicans are stripping knowledge away from our children so they can groom them into the next generation of Republicans as they lost that chance with Generation Z.

Esquire writes, “Freedom means the government bans something new every day. Just ask the newest rising Republicans as they lost that chance with Generation Z.”

Republicans are stripping knowledge away from our children so they can groom them into the next generation of Republicans as they lost that chance with Generation Z.

Esquire writes, “Freedom means the government bans something new every day. Just ask the newest rising Republicans as they lost that chance with Generation Z.”

Other outspoken Republicans have shown their hypocrisy as well. Popular FOX News host Tucker Carlson had his true colors shown in court.

This is a man who almost burst into tears over M&M’s just to keep his viewers angry at progressives. However, behind the scenes, Carlson doesn’t seem to agree with his fan base.

Independent reports, “Mr. Carlson called the election fraud claims and the people promoting them ‘judicious’ and totally off the rails.” Sean Hannity called them “F’ing lunatics.”

Are these really the kind of people who should be lecturing us on who’s grooming who?

I mean after all, these are the same hypocrites who went after Democratic congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez for attending the Met Gala and rubbing elbows with the rich but are totally okay with former President Donald Trump living in a golden New York City penthouse and being friendly with convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein.

They perpetuate lies and conspiracy theories to remain in power and are trying to groom a new generation of Republicans to hate anything remotely progressive.

Republicans know that if they don’t keep up the fear that drives their party to be so dedicated, they will one day fall apart.

Liz Seidemann | The Montclarion
The Five Stages of Learning a Second Language

Esmeralda Tamayo
Staff Writer

Language is an important feature that identifies us, and it’s fundamental to acknowledge it. International Mother Language Day was Feb. 21. The purpose of this day is to promote multiculturalism and first-language appreciation. In New Jersey, the most dominant languages spoken besides English are Spanish, Filipino or Tagalog and Chinese, among many others. We all come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

As an ESL teacher and English language learner, I’ve witnessed the challenges of acquiring a second language from scratch with my students. Many ask me frequent questions like “Do you think I can learn how to speak English in a year?” or “What can I do to accelerate this process?”

The truth? There is no definitive time to learn a language or to speed up this process. We must understand that acquiring a language at the level of proficiency takes time.

Subsequently, many language learners who are in the process of becoming bilingual or multilingual are facing the stages of second language acquisition. There are some stages that we need to face as learners, which may involve some emotional factors as well. According to Jane D. Hill and Cynthia L. Bjork, when it comes to second language acquisition, the learner faces five stages.

To begin, the first stage is the Pre-Production stage, where the student has minimal comprehension of the language.

The second is the Early Production stage, in which the student has limited comprehension of the language. The student is in the early stages of understanding the language.

The third stage, speech emergence, is when a student has a good understanding and can produce simple sentences.

In the fourth and fifth stages, the student has excellent comprehension of the language, but still with some grammatical errors. This stage takes between three to five years.

In the advanced fluency stage, the student has a near-native level of speech. This also may take five to seven years in mastering.

To acquire a second language, there are additional factors that we all should take into consideration. For example, the age when we start learning a second language can influence our proficiency in the language. According to Dr. Leonard A. Levi, when a language is acquired before puberty, the process will be more effortless. But when a second language is acquired after puberty, the process becomes more complex.

This is due to brain plasticity. The younger we are, the easier it becomes for us to learn a language.

Most of my students are adults. The process becomes systematic, meaning they learn the four modalities of English by lesson and like math formulas—if you follow the grammar rules, you are more likely to understand faster.

Compared to children, they will learn the language through exposure and their environment. According to Eric Lenneberg, the environment plays an important role in acquiring a language. In my case, I grew up in Union City, where most of my community of practice only speaks Spanish.

Acquiring a second language was of the critical period, I was supposed to learn the language at a level of full proficiency. I was more exposed to my first language, instead of my second language. Someone’s learning experience can contain barriers depending on how often they practice and how exposed they are to a new language.

If you can relate and are in the process of learning a new language, you should remember that everything takes time and that’s okay.

Learning a different language is a daily struggle and some days could be more difficult than others. Don’t forget to enjoy all the stages and opportunities this new challenge will bring you. Remember that you are not alone in this process.

Esmeralda Tamayo, a graduate student teaching English as a second language major, is in her first year as a staff writer for The Montclarion.

Classifieds

Family is looking for a driver and companion for a young man with ASD in West Caldwell. He would need to be picked up in East Hanover at 2:30 and driven home to West Caldwell. He is fairly independent at home he just needs someone to be in the home with him. There would be plenty of time to get homework done until a family member gets home by 5:30. Flexible on days and rate is negotiable. Please call or text Colette Perrothers 973-610-9489 or email cperrothers@gmail.com
“A Simple Drink”
by Gabrielle Miller | Staff Writer

I pour myself a simple drink. I’m happy as it goes down. I take the drink... it instantly makes my whole body relax and brings a small smile to my face. Isn’t it great? How can something so simple make me feel so good?

After a few drinks, my drink takes a drink. My drinks beforehand tell me to drink more. I know I’ll feel bad tomorrow, but all that matters is right now. I’m feeling good, and God forbid I let that feeling diminish.

I don’t want to drink. The feeling in my stomach tells me I’m done for the night. The drowsiness permeating my body tells me I’m done for the night. Without wanting to, my hands move toward the bottle. I pour it into my mouth and down my throat, excited about how great this is going to feel and kicking myself for how I’m going to feel tomorrow.

I have taken a drink. The drink has taken a drink. The drink has taken me.

“A Love Letter To Montclair State University”
by Emily Christian | Staff Writer

There are days when the wind whips between Dinallo and Machuga. Within the dorms, it sounds like someone is singing a lonely tune. On the outside, your cheeks are on fire from the lashing the cold gives. One short fifteen minute breakfast run could give you red cheeks for hours.

On your walk to class, Blanton Hall comes into view. Other buildings hide behind Blanton like it is the eldest sister in the family and everyone wants a treat from their mother. Bohn Hall peaks from her sister’s left shoulder, and University Hall peaks from her right.

Climbing the hill to University Hall will suck the breath out of your lungs if you are not particularly fit. But you will get to see students, shuttles, and cars bustling underneath her as you take the plunge on a cold February day. The shuttles, cars, and students will still be there when you open the door, ready for your first class.

Have you ever noticed that when you first enter University Hall, the lighting fixture looks like a piece of the moon, glowing bright?

“A Vanilla”
by Orion Oss | Guest Writer

I used to smell like vanilla until you came along.
A simple sheet of blank paper...
You filled my life with scribbled verses.
And now I smell like summer sun evenings,
A sweet blanket warmed by golden hour,
The plush white air when it snows,
A flickering spiced candle in late afternoon Octobers,
The sparks and embers of a caramelized bonfire,
The midmorning rush at a sugary coffee shop,
Whiffs of sunblock dancing on suntanned skin,
A soft blue puff of a sleepy cloud,
And the clover of fresh dew.

Now you drift through vanilla,
And I through the splendor of a lover’s dream.

“Down, Down, Down”
by Danielle Linggar | Guest Writer

At first its perpetual ticking
Caught my attention
Ticktock, ticktock, ticktock
A straight line pulses with every click
Dark brown-eyed, incessantly curious
I proceeded to test Newton’s law
In the most classic, one-year-old fashion—
Grab then release
So out the second-floor window
Mama’s ticktock machine plunged
To the ground like a Boeing 777
Vintage, expensive now in smithereens
I looked out the window to see
The aftermath of when you let a
Clock get caught by an invisible force.

Illustrations
by Alex Pavljuk
“What a Man Wants”  
by Olivia Yayla | Staff Writer

A man wants a book, a new edition to his vast library
An exciting conversation starter for his nightly dinner parties
A man wants a book, one with a red hardcover and a simple plot
Bound tightly at the spine—unopened—unread
One he can skim when he finds the time, glossing over the title page
Silencing the narrator when the words become difficult
So he can summarize its intestines, its beating heart, its breathing message
Only ever based on its first page, never greeting the lively characters
To listen to what they have to say
Never feeling the world within

A man wants a book, for his friends to drool over
To pat him on the back for finding this specific edition,
Lord knows it was hard to find— a hardcover beneath stacks of paperbacks
One that doesn’t surprise him, one with no conflict between the lines
A man wants a book, one decoratively placed beneath candle sticks and coasters
Trapped upon a white marble side table.
Next to all the others he never bothered to read.

“Hell of a Life”  
by Rosemary Rodriguez | Staff Writer

I prefer you with the lights off
With your moral compass leading you
Straight to hell
It just makes more sense
Perhaps I don’t get nostalgia yet
Perhaps I’m scared of the karma
Nonetheless, beauty and tar end up the same
And perpendicular lines will grow
On me
Eventually.

“I Heartless”  
by Rosemary Rodriguez | Staff Writer

I don’t care for those eternal flames anymore
So take your unripe figs and hit
The ground running
Your weak pulsed excuses
Won’t save you from those bitter tales
You know so well
So keep twisting those words
And blades dear
It’s what you do best.

“Dazzle Dance”  
by Kiara Oelkers | Guest Writer

The blazing rays escaped through the tight blinds,
Pouring radiantly on the victim’s eyes.
She did not fuss, but rather,
Invited the slivered ribbons to sparkle on her features.

Distant robins are mildly cucking soft greetings,
Harmonizing within the green cotton and red silk.
Gentle taps against glass ricocheted alike to the cease of rain,
Decorating transparent mirrors with yellow pixie dust.

As her senses switch from matter to space,
She became one with the everflowing cycle.
Her silk body floating from room to room,
Swimming among molecules, now clothed for the naked eye.

Lavender swirls with cream puff clouds,
Tornadoing the delicate air into her nostrils.
Entranced, she glides to the laced windowsill,
Expecting candied pleasantries waiting for presence.

Instead, she is greeted by thoughts and manifestation,
Welcoming her curiosity with a mysterious dazzle.
Her face contorts, reaching her hand through the dance,
But with her fatal action came her consequence.

She springs up in bed, met by colorless normalcy.
Off-white chipped paint flutters toward the dull wood floor,
As her body has just witnessed. Her heart descends,
Clinging onto attachments once again.
ONE FAMILY, ONE SECRET, 
AND DESTINIES THAT CHANGE FOREVER.

U.S. PREMIERE
Ombres Portées

CIE L’OBLIÉ(E)

DIRECTION AND CHOREOGRAPHY BY
RAPHAËLLE BOITEL

ARTISTIC COLLABORATION, LIGHT, SCENOGRAPHY,
SPIDER DESIGN BY
TRISTAN BAUDOIN

ORIGINAL MUSIC BY
ARTHUR BISON

March 23 | 24 | 25 | 26
A HYBRID OF CIRCUS, DANCE, AND THEATRE

A visually cinematic exploration of one’s construction of identity against the backdrop of family secrets that evoke questions of culpability and collateral damage. Raphaëlle Boitel’s latest choreographic and acrobatic work plunges into the heart of the unsaid. At the crossroads of circus, dance, and theatre, Ombres Portées takes inspiration from the bodies of work of Fritz Lang, David Lynch, and Alfred Hitchcock.

E-Mail: montclarionsports@gmail.com

Room 2035, School of Communication and Media in Upper Montclair, NJ, 07043
A'Lysai Robinson is centered as she plays the lead, "Everybody," with Andrew Linden and Caitlyn Care as "Love" and "Understanding."

Photo courtesy of John LaRosa

Becca Kaufman
Guest Writer

Following months of sweat and tears, Montclair State University’s Department of Theatre and Dance put on an existentially thought-provoking show of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins’ play, “Everybody,” from Feb. 16 to 25.

As part of the “Studio Series,” the Life Hall Studio Theatre allowed student artists to take the audience on an emotional roller coaster with their intimate performance of a mortality medieval play, leaving the people thinking about all the ways they interact with the world around them.

Nothing could have prepared the audience for the talent and vulnerability shown in the performance of this philosophical piece. Even more impressively, many of the students involved in this show had their role for the night decided by none other than a lottery on stage, meaning that each person had almost the entire script completely memorized to be prepared for anything. With only minutes of preparation following the cast finding out their role for the night, each student performed as if it was made for them.

The leads of the show were no exceptions to this randomization. In playing the role of Everybody, sophomore Emery Myers and junior A'Lysai Robinson, both acting majors, also found out each night just moments before the show whether or not they would be the ones to lay the foundation for the entire performance.

It’s no surprise each of these actors was able to connect so deeply to their audience, as the show presented concepts that affect each and every one of us. As Myers and Robinson began their performances of “Everybody,” it became apparent to each of them how their individuality shined through. “We realized that the main differences between our performances were the same differences we already see between ourselves outside of it,” Myers said. “[Robinson] has always been more expressive and emotional while I’ve been more logical, and I think you can really see it when we’re on stage.”

This show of personality was apparent in Friday’s performance as the lottery left Robinson the lead for the night. In having the audience oscillate between roaring laughter and intense anticipatory moments of silence, Robinson had the audience simultaneously questioning every moment of their lives, all within only 90 minutes.

Not only did Robinson’s performance have the audience looking inward, but in looking around at the crowd, it was clear that her passion was enough to move some to tears. It was as if she was a friend experiencing all of the most intense parts of life in front of your eyes.

Robinson explained just how special the performance was. “The show represents things that truly affect everybody,” Robinson said. “I just find myself quoting the script on a daily basis just because of how real it all is. It’s everywhere.”

Outside of the role of Everybody, the other members of the cast represented so many things that make up our everyday life. With roles like God, Understanding, Death, Strength, Beauty, Brain, Love and Time, we were able to see the ways in which Everybody interacted with these things, and what seemed to matter at the end of it all. The audience got something of a look in the mirror as the role of Everybody was truly able to reflect the ways that every single person does these things in their own lives.

In addition to the intellectual and existential concepts explored in the show, the Department of Theatre and Dance did an impeccable job of bringing different art forms together for the whole. With actors that had the audience forgetting they were even acting in the first place, the outstanding dance scene performed by sophomore acting major Alex Fontes caught the audience off guard in the best way possible.

Sol Lecour, a junior theatre studies major, was especially impressed with Fontes’ intense dance scene. “I just really admire the level of confidence that takes to do a solo performance like that, and he did it so well,” Lecour said. “I just found that really impressive.”

This intersection of performance art and philosophical concepts could not have been carried out in a more impressive fashion. Despite the majority of the audience leaving in something of an existential crisis, this performance was nothing short of objectively remarkable.

‘Everybody’ Leaves the Audience Lost for Words
‘Cocaine Bear’ Walks A Fine (White) Line Between Comedy and Thriller

The Cocaine Bear experiences the high of a lifetime.

Colin Luderitz
Assistant Entertainment Editor

In 1985, drug smuggler Andrew C. Thornton died in a parachuting accident after jettisoning several million dollars worth of cocaine from an airplane into Georgia’s Chattahoochee National Forest. A 175-pound black bear discovered a stash of the drugs and consumed about 35 pounds worth before overdosing and dying. That bear was found by officials, stuffed and has been on display in the Kentucky for Kentucky Fun Mall in Lexington, Kentucky ever since.

This simple yet stranger-than-life story serves as the basis for Elizabeth Banks’ high-riding “Cocaine Bear,” which reimagines the bear as a blood-thirsty speed addict that will maul anything that comes between her and her next high.

Make no mistake, the film is a total slock. It’s a B-movie through and through, but “Cocaine Bear” benefits greatly from everyone involved knowing exactly what movie they’re making. The beauty of a title like “Cocaine Bear” is that the film knows exactly what it’s selling you: a freebasing Pablo Escobar, whose antics become more and more absurd as the film runs its course.

Actor-turned-director Banks, whose prior credits are “Pitch Perfect 2” and “Fist Fight,” turns out her best work yet here, putting a lot of faith in the delivery of her premise. The film’s premise is, the best jokes come in understated moments of dialogue where characters make simple yet absurd statements about the film’s events. One particular moment involving a taxidermied beaver left the theater in stitches. The film benefits from its brevity as well. At a lean 95 minutes, there is rarely a wasted frame; whenever a joke doesn’t land, the film has already moved on to the next three. But there are moments where the film does have a tendency to drag, mainly when the Cocaine Bear isn’t onscreen for a long stretch of time. The film can come to a bit of a halt when the bear isn’t doing her thing (that “thing” being copious amounts of drugs and violence).

Unfortunately, the film’s weakest aspect is the core storyline of Russell’s Sari looking for her daughter. It’s just simply not engrossing or funny enough to warrant the amount of screen time it gets, especially when compared to the story of the drug smugglers, who are consistently funnier and more compelling, along with Ehrenreich’s Eddie, who is mourning the loss of his wife and lamenting being brought back into the drug game, being a much more interesting diversion.

But all in all, “Cocaine Bear” is still a high that’s hard to come down from. The thrills are thrilling, the jokes are funny, and the gore takes full advantage of its R-rating and decent budget, making for a polished, fun night out that’s worth the price of admission.

‘SOS’ on Spotify

On Dec. 15, 2023, SZA released her newest album, “SOS,” and I’ve had it on repeat ever since. Her second studio album is a mix of hip-hop, contemporary R&B and pop with 23 tracks featuring Travis Scott, Don Toliver, Phoebe Bridgers and the late O daylight Run. The album also includes some of her old songs like “Good Days,” “Shirt” and “I Hate U.”

The main reason I look forward to driving down south on the Garden State Parkway for an hour with bumper-to-bumper traffic and drivers who won’t let me switch lanes is getting to scream the lyrics to “Kill Bill,” “F2F” and “Nobody Gets Me.” If someone passed me when driving, they probably think I’m going through it, but that’s how much emotion SZA brings out to her audience. “SOS” simply makes the journey of driving past 64 exits all worth it. I can’t express enough how much this album blessed my eardrums, and I’m so jealous of whoever is seeing her on tour.

‘Impractical Jokers’ on Hulu

On Dec. 9, 2022, SZA released her newest album, “SOS,” and I’ve had it on repeat ever since. Her second studio album is a mix of hip-hop, contemporary R&B and pop with 23 tracks featuring Travis Scott, Don Toliver, Phoebe Bridgers and the late O daylight Run. The album also includes some of her old songs like “Good Days,” “Shirt” and “I Hate U.”

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‘Impractical Jokers’ is a TV show about four lifelong friends, Joe Gatto, Brian Q’ Quinn, James ‘Murr’ Murray and Sal Vulcano, whose mission is to embarrass each other. The show is based on the Jokers doing ridiculous challenges in public, and whichever Joker has the most losses is forced to do outrageous punishments like skydiving or wrestling a four-time champion sumo-wrestler. Unfortunately, Gatto left the show in the middle of season nine, but it’s still worth the watch to see how the three of them carry out the dares. What makes this show so funny is seeing the public’s reaction to the pranks.

With 10 seasons and counting, the Jokers have never failed to make me laugh. One of my favorite episodes is “Turning the Tables” in season seven where Gatto’s punishment was to act as a restaurant manager and find out which tables are breakable and which ones aren’t by slamming his body onto them while people are having dinner. Tears were coming from my eyes from laughing so hard. You can watch new episodes of the Jokers disrupting the public every Thursday on truTV and TBS at 10 p.m.

— Kim Lamparello
Copy Editor
‘Hogwarts Legacy’ Is Gaming’s Most Beautiful Fan Service

How does one manage to keep a fantasy novel series relevant after over two decades since its first release? Milk it for all its worth, that’s how.

The “Harry Potter” series was a hit when it first came out, and it remained a household name for decades to come. From eight full-length movies, theme parks in Universal Studios, three full-length movies based on the spin-off “Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them,” countless merchandise, fan clubs and college Quidditch teams, “Harry Potter” is arguably the most popular book series of all time.

Released on Feb. 10, the game “Hogwarts Legacy” was originally announced at a PlayStation 5 event in September 2020 as a “full-fledged, open-world RPG.” Set in the 1890s, the events take place a century before the events in the “Harry Potter” novels. You play as your own character, a fifth-year new student at Hogwarts who explores the secrets of ancient magic as well as attends class and explores the school grounds.

The plot consists of your character traveling to Hogwarts on their first day via flying coach with their mentor, Professor Fig. Suddenly, a dragon attacks them, and they fly out. As they’re falling, Fig uses a spell to reach a key that was inside of an artifact. The key turns out to be a Portkey, which teleports them to Gringotts. The key leads to an old vault filled with ancient magic, and the protagonist soon learns they have a rare ability to see ancient magic (yes, a hero arc where the protagonist can see and do things others cannot and eventually saves the day). The protagonist and Professor Fig spend the rest of the game uncovering the secrets of ancient magic, which conveniently are hidden in a chamber underneath the school.

The main story takes around 30 hours to complete, but after taking your time with side-quests and attending all classes, the entire game actually takes around 70 hours. That means more than half of the game is spent on fun activities and Easter eggs dedicated to the fans. At times it seems there is too much to do that isn’t part of the main story.

Originally, I was skeptical over the mechanics of the “open-world RPG.” Hogwarts is a huge and intricate area to explore. It’s essentially a giant regal castle. I thought the “open-world” would only be open to certain areas such as the common rooms, the Great Hall, the library and specific class-rooms and halls.

To say I was surprised is an understatement. The entire castle is open to exploration down to the bathrooms. It is gorgeously rendered and incredibly detailed. It makes players feel like royalty while exploring such a beautiful castle. In fact, Hogwarts isn’t the only area to explore; other areas in the magical world are also completely open-world, such as Hogsmeade, the Forbidden Forest, Azkaban and various nearby valleys and coastlines.

I would find myself exploring the game rather than completing the quests. I was blown away by how beautiful everything was. No detail was left behind. Each area looked identical to the movies and how they are described in the books. There’s a sense of real life when playing as a Hogwarts student. You get to walk around the school, make friends, duel others, fight monsters, attend class with fellow students, uncover new secrets behind every door and end the day in your common room.

Even the seasons change as the game progresses. You unlock new spells, potions and gear by attending class; it is not just handed to you at the start of the game. It is everything a “Harry Potter” fan can ask for. To be placed directly in the story’s setting while creating your own is a fan’s dream.

Beyond the game’s setting and gorgeous graphics, “Hogwarts Legacy” is undeniably fan service. You can ride a broom, buy a wand at Ollivander’s, drink butterbeer at the Three Broomsticks and ride a Hippogriff. While these are fun activities, they add nothing to the actual plot of the game, which is a bit lackluster. The game fulfills every fan’s dream of wanting to visit the fantastical world of “Harry Potter,” but to a casual gamer, there’s not much.

While “Hogwarts Legacy” is a fun addition to the “Harry Potter” franchise, it adds very little to the lore of the magical world. The game is mostly about transporting fans into a fantastical world they no-doubt dreamed about. There is little to add to the story because J.K. Rowling finished it back in 2007.

To a “Harry Potter” nerd, this game is a masterpiece, but to a casual gamer, it’s very okay. Once the hype for “Hogwarts Legacy” dies, it will be very difficult to create better fan service. At this point, J.K. Rowling and Warner Bros. try their hardest to make the most out of their biggest franchise, even if it means shooting it while it is dead. “Hogwarts Legacy” may be the last of mainstream media hype for “Harry Potter” for a while. The series has ended, and it may be in its best interest to let it die. The game is a good addition to the “Harry Potter” universe, but I can’t imagine what else can be added to satisfy the fans.
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Softball Is Striving To Play In May For The 2023 Season

Wyatt Lardieri  
Staff Writer

The Montclair State University softball team is only two weeks away from opening day. The Red Hawks will travel to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina to participate in the Fastpitch Dreams Spring Classic, where they will play their first eight games of the season.

Last season the Red Hawks finished with a 23-18 record and the sixth seed in the New Jersey Athletic Conference (NJAC) playoffs. Montclair State would ultimately lose to Rowan University in the first round.

Head coach Anita Kubicka returns to coach the team for her 33rd season. Kubicka is top 10 in both all-time wins and winning percentages for active Division III coaches. Kubicka spoke on what it’s been like to coach for so long.

“The goal is always the same, the goal is to play into tournament time and get to the national championship,” Kubicka said. “In my career, we’ve been there multiple times and had a second-place finish and a third-place finish. That’s what the goal is and it’s not been easy to get there. We play in a very competitive conference and region. That’s what you have to do, win the conference, win the region, and win a super region in order to get to the final eight in the country. Through the years I’ve been able to bring in some very good student-athletes, were a two-time award winner for GPA so we do very well in the classroom along with on the field. It’s about time we make some noise in the conference again.”

Montclair State is certainly equipped to make noise this season. The roster has a unique blend of veteran leadership and youthful energy, and is the largest that Kubicka has ever worked with. Kubicka spoke on the potential advantages that a large roster can bring.

“I think you are able to do intra-squad scrimmages with more competition than just nine people out on a field. I think pitchers work harder. I think hitters are working harder to master their craft.”

One reason for the over-sized roster numbers is the large influx of freshmen. With such a large group of underclassmen, the importance of a leader is amplified. Kubicka referenced multiple returning players that have stepped up as team leaders.

“I have a player, [senior infielder] Jenna Meluso who graduated in three years and can still play another three years due to NCAA covid regulations. She’s a leader is amplified. Kubicka referenced multiple returning players that have stepped up as team leaders.

“[The team’s mantra is “Play into May”], Kubicka said. “You want to be able to be a contender in the conference. You have games that are going to be played that are learning experiences for our youth and opportunity for our true leaders, whether you’re a freshman, senior, or super senior to stand up and be the best you can be to help this team move forward. I think you have to actually do the work on the field and I think we’ve been putting some solid work in. I’m a competitor, I want to be in the conference tournament, I want to be in the conference finals, I want to win.”

According to head coach Anita Kubicka, the goal is always the same: play into May. Photo courtesy of MSU Athletics
Club Baseball Is With The Elite Teams of Division II

Ranked in the Top 20 in the country, the team is still hungry for more

Matteo Macolino  
Staff Writer

Plying above the rest, The Montclair State University club baseball team has made a name for itself after appearing on the National Club Baseball Association (NCBA) Division II Rawlings Top 20 Poll.

The Red Hawks finished the first half of the season at the top of the Chesapeake North conference with a 12-4 record and an undefeated 6-0 against their conference. Before the start of the second half of the season, the Red Hawks received a ranking of 12th in the country in the NCBA poll.

Other notable schools in the top 20 include Syracuse University, Penn State University, Ohio State University and the University of Wisconsin. They currently sit 15th due to other teams already starting their spring season. Montclair State plays its first game of the season on March 4 against Hofstra University.

Senior captain Eli Slonim, has been a big advocate in getting recognition for the team. With how good they were in the fall and the potential they bring this spring, this should be an exciting team to go and see play.

“With the spring season approaching, the Red Hawks are confident in their ability to make a push for the playoffs. Last year, Montclair State made the regional playoffs as the first seed but they were quickly eliminated in the first round. They have the talent as Scott was named first-team all-region and senior pitcher Sal Barraco was named first-team all-American. A push in the playoffs and a chance at the NCBA World Series is always a goal for the Red Hawks.”

“Our utmost goal is to make sure that we actually win the regional playoffs this year,” Scott said. “Obviously our biggest goal is to try and win [the NCBA] World Series but we would say right now regional playoffs and winning those is our biggest goal.”

Captain of the team, senior Eli Slonim, has been a big advocate in getting recognition for the team. With how good they were in the fall and the potential they bring this spring, this should be an exciting team to go and see play.

“Bunch of the guys on the team had to reach out to people to come to games,” Slonim said. “We never really got the recognition I think we deserved, especially for the e-board. All of us on the e-board try our best to do what we can. It’s hard because we’re a club team, but I think we deserve a little bit of recognition and I think this is a start.”

Slonim has impressed the team as well as Baltisso with his athletic ability and quick adjustment to the team. His ability to make plays and the relationship he has with his teammates is how he earned the title of captain.

“When we first got him, he hadn’t played baseball in a couple of years,” Baltisso said. “We never really got the recognition I think we deserved, especially for the e-board. All of us on the e-board try our best to do what we can. It’s hard because we’re a club team, but I think we deserve a little bit of recognition and I think this is a start.”

While a lot of time and energy is spent on the game and improving, the club makes sure to focus some of its time on bonding and relationships off the field. The Red Hawks like to hang out with each other whether it’s grabbing dinner somewhere or even having a movie night. This is something that players and coaches look forward to and a great way to strengthen the team.

“I love it,” Slonim said. “I love being with the boys. I wish we’d do even more of it. We’re a tight-knit group. We have our ups and downs but overall we’ve got great chemistry and we love hanging out and being around each other.”

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Players like (from left to right) James Graham, Eli Slonim, Billy Pinckney and David Kasoff are some of the reasons why this team is so elite.  
Photo courtesy of Eli Slonim

Senior captain Eli Slonim stands at the plate ready for the upcoming pitch.  
Photo courtesy of Eli Slonim
Kieran Flanagan Does Whatever It Takes For Men's Basketball

Matt Bruchez
Guest Writer

The Montclair State University men’s basketball team had a heroic season. And one player, in particular, is a true iron man. Junior guard Kieran Flanagan has started every game for the team this year, as well as every game dating back to his freshman year. In high school, Flanagan thrived with his scoring capabilities and his playmaking, but what drew interest from Montclair State was something else, according to associate head coach Sean Rossi.

“It wasn’t even the scoring and the passing at the time that I was drawn to. He looked like he was playing [with] a chip on his shoulder,” Rossi said. “A bigger chip than in comparison to anyone else on the floor. I called his head coach right away, and said, ‘I love him. When is he playing next?’ He gave me the schedule and I was there at the next game.”

It was not just Rossi who thought Flanagan was the real deal, but head coach Justin Potts saw a player that he needed for his fast-paced style of basketball.

“He played with such a high motor in high school that you knew that would translate right away,” Potts said.

As a freshman, Flanagan entered the starting lineup immediately, as he started all nine games of his freshman year due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) season. Come his sophomore year, a full season was played of 24 games in which Flanagan was the only player to start all 24. As his junior year came to a close, Flanagan continued the trend and started all 27 games.

“I've done this for a long time,” Potts said. “I've told you guys that and a lot of different scenarios have been in the 23 years I've been doing it. I don't know if there's a guy that plays harder.”

Rossi talked about Flanagan's dedication on the court.

“He's the hardest playing person on the floor at all times, both teams combined,” Rossi said. “He came in right away and his energy was so contagious, how could you keep them off the floor?”

This year, Flanagan is averaging 5.8 rebounds a game, as well as a team-high 112 assists, over a steal a game and 6.2 points per game. Flanagan does everything he is asked and it’s no secret that his hustle sets him apart. In addition to his play on the court, as a captain, his voice on and off the court is another place where he makes an impact.

“As he's going through his career, he's really matured, he's really developed into a really, really good leader in several areas,” Potts said. “And he's challenged us as coaches to be better. Because when you have a guy that can lead like that, then obviously as the leaders of the program and the coaching staff, we have to raise our level as well.”

Flanagan knows what is asked of him and his voice.

“It means a lot,” Flanagan said. “I appreciate it, like from all my teammates. They have the same voice that I have at the end of the day. I like to use it a little more than others. Because I think we need it, we need an energy guy to keep the team together, to get the team going.”

Sophomore guard Mike Jackson compared Flanagan to Batman, while assistant coach Will Bishop said Captain America, Potts and Rossi had thoughts of their own.

“I would say he moves like Superman because he flies around all over the place,” Potts said.

Rossi described Flanagan differently.

“I kind of feel like Iron Man, he’s a warrior himself, but he’s also a funny dude,” Rossi stated. “So I’m going to go with Iron Man.”

Flanagan cannot fly, but with the mentality he brings every day, the sky’s the limit for him and the Red Hawks.

“Mean, when it’s all said and done, I all nine games of his freshman year due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) season. Come his sophomore year, a full season was played of 24 games in which Flanagan was the only player to start all 24. As his junior year came to a close, Flanagan continued the trend and started all 27 games.

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