

The Mount Observer

“A voice for the students of Mount Wachusett Community College”

Inside This Issue:

Summer Pell Grants Return:
Want to take a summer class? Check in with the Financial Aid office to see if you qualify.
Page 3

Student Pursues Glass Blowing Career:
Miles Roache explains what drove him to start getting interested in glass blowing.
Page 5

Dating & Technology:
How has technology affected modern-day romance? One student weighs in on this topic.
Pages 7

MWCC’s Fitness and Wellness Center Ready for Rennovating

By Iheb Klai

Open to the public since 1995, the Mount Wachusett Community College Fitness and Wellness Center’s main purpose is to promote healthy lifestyles by providing knowledge on exercising. In the last few years, some of the students, faculty, and staff have complained about the current state of the Fitness Center, and many members decided to move to other centers around the area.

Jared Swerzenski, former Director of the Fitness and Wellness center said, “We are in a very competitive market with seven other gyms within a 15 miles radius, including Planet Fitness that just came in three years ago. Even though there is such a tough market we have pushed to create our own identity at the Fitness Center. As for membership, we are moving in a positive direction, with an increase of 23 percent of new memberships in just 24 months.”

Swerzenski said, “I think we have made some unbelievable strides the last couple of years to make sure we are keeping up with all of the current

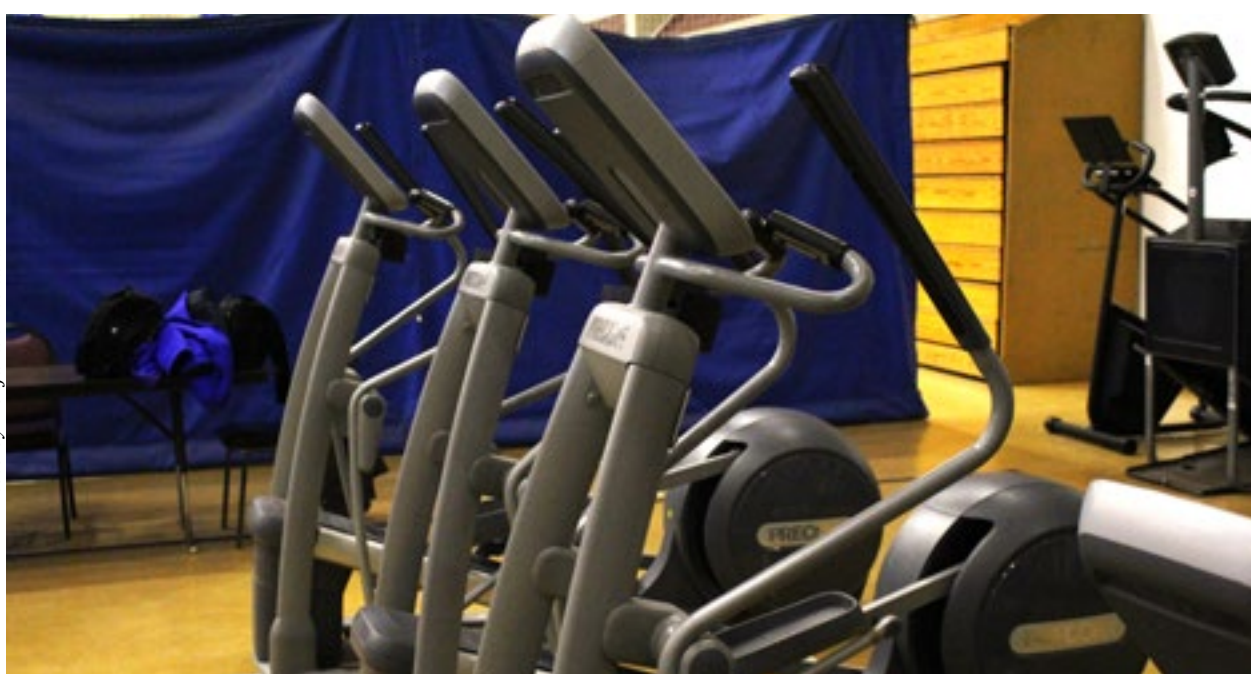


Photo by Benjamin Richard

trends in the fitness industry.”

The Gym Center Staff has been working hard to make renovations and changes. Swerzenski said, “Over the last two plus years we have put significant resources and funds into upgrading the facilities equipment. We have purchased over 20 new pieces of Cardio and Weight Equipment. We have also totally renovated our Kid Care area and Core Room.”

The Fitness and Wellness building offers a lot more than just graduation each year, such

as Student Orientation, NACAC College Fair, MIAA Cross Country Awards Banquets, Massachusetts Pinewood Derby Event, and Relay for Life, as stated by the director. It also hosts Gardner Youth Basketball practices, Naragansett Youth Baseball Youth Clinics, AED Fundraiser, Pickleball fundraiser for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Hannaford’s Volleyball night to help raise money for the Relay for Life, and many other sports events to encourage the community.

Summer 2018 will bring many changes around the Gym area. There will be huge parking lot project, according to Swerzenski. This should improve both parking and safety.

The budget is the main issue in renovating the Fitness Center. Currently the college is facing a difficult period choosing to make major renovations rather than general maintenance. According to James Vander Hoooven, President of MWCC, “The budget is not enough. We are currently

in a difficult stretch for finding the significant funds that are required for major renovations on the campus overall. We have a couple of projects that are just ahead of the fitness center which we hope to be able to do soon given the very limited funds made available by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.”

The Fitness and Wellness center offers a wide variety of services to the community and host many events during the year “I feel the community knows that the Fitness and Wellness Center is always here to help support in any way we can” stated by Swerzenski

MWCC’s “The Link”: Helping Recovering Addicts Pursue their Dreams

By Timothy Whalen Jr.

As you approach room 193, across from the Life Long Learning Center, you’ll notice a sign that reads “Stigma Free Zone,” as well as the name of the co-founders, Jonathan Marshall and Ramsey Clayter or the newest MWCC program called The Link.

Mr. Marshall and Mr. Clayter, are helping students in recovery from substance abuse either enroll or re-enroll at Mount Wachusett Community College. In doing so, helping to finally fill the void of, for lack of a better word, the “black hole” of programs, not only at MWCC, but in the entire nation, geared at the growing community of individuals in recovery.

The Link was officially founded in August of 2017, and even being in its adolescence, has already helped approximately 60 students return to their academics to pursue their degrees and future goals.

When speaking with Sue Cullinane, a financial aid clerk at MWCC who works directly with Mr. Marshall and Mr. Clayter,



Photo by Timothy Whalen

she said, “...without The Link, most, if not all these students that they’ve helped would not be currently enrolled and pursuing their degree programs and goals again.” She went on and said, “...

what they’re doing is not only beneficial for the individuals that they help, but for the community.”

The pair met in the Intro to Sociology course in the Fall Semester of 2016. They were able

to confide in each other about the stress, feelings, and concerns of not only school, but their personal recovery as well. Mr. Clayter and Mr. Marshall identified how much they mutually benefited from

each other and acknowledged that others in recovery could benefit the same way from having peers in recovery. Thus, sparking the idea to create The Link, to share the therapeutic value of one person helping another that they had found in one another.

Both Mr. Clayter and Mr. Marshall are in long-term recovery and stated that their re-enrollment process was not only a lengthy process, but a difficult one. Since their returns to MWCC, they both possess GPA’s above 3.7, and are proof that people recovering from substance abuse are more than capable of succeeding and excelling in academics.

When I raised the question to Mr. Clayter of the validity of addiction as a “disease,” he provided an educated answer; “The Center for Disease Control states that there are two requirements to be considered a disease. The first; ‘Is it chronic?’ and yes, substance abuse is chronic. The

continued on page 2 “The Link” >>>

The Link

>>> continued from page 1

second requirement; 'If left untreated, will it lead to death?' and absolutely, it will lead to death."

Not only is it defined as a disease, but the CDC as well as President Trump has issued it an epidemic, a term that is not often or lightly used. Currently, in New England alone, 6 to 7 people are dying every day from drug overdoses.

In Massachusetts alone, over 9,000 people died due to drug-related incidents in 2017. The question was then asked, "Do you think the government is doing enough to address the ongoing epidemic," to which they responded, "Certain steps are being made, with more resources being allocated to treatment facilities and sober living programs,



but more can always be done."

Although these programs exist to help in recovery, but what is next? That is where The Link comes in, as Mr. Marshall put it best, "...people in recovery

shouldn't have to settle on working minimum wage jobs. They're just as capable as any other member of society." Returning to school or starting a college career is just one part of the reintegration to society aspect of the recovery process. The most admirable part of The Link is that it's strictly a volunteer service. These two individuals are offering the services that were not available to themselves, as well as other students like them.

Recently, in recognition of their services, they were awarded the Community Health Improvement Plan award, or CHIP, for behavioral health and substance abuse. Not only have they been recognized by the communi-

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AA/EEO Institution

ty, but they stated that MWCC has been extremely supportive in their efforts and have granted them access to all the resources on campus that they need.

Mr. Clayter is now a licensed substance abuse counselor, and is pursuing his Human Services Degree, which will be completed at the end of the Spring '18 semester. Mr. Marshall will be pursuing a similar career path, but is completing his Liberal Arts degree at the end of the Spring '18 semester and will be pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, also with career goals of helping members of the substance abuse community.

These two individuals have had a tremendous impact on MWCC, the community, and are well de-

serving of any, and all praise that they have received. They encourage all current students who either are related to or have close relations to someone in recovery to utilize their services, again, free of cost. The opiate epidemic is specifically a huge problem in current society, which most would find to be exponentially higher than they think.

The Link program encourages any student to reach out to them if they know of any family member, relative, or friend in need of their services to contact them via email or to just stop by their office.

MWCC Uses Grant to Improve Humanities Curriculum

By Kayla Blackwell

For the past four years, a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities has been used by MWCC in order to improve our school's humanities curriculum. The mission statement of the Humanities Project includes, "[examining] the intersection between the humanities and other disciplines."

According to Michelle Valois, an MWCC teacher who wrote the grant, "humanities needed a boost here. By humanities I mean art, literature, philosophy...etc." Valois said, "These disciplines are often seen as unpractical and so receive less support than technical or ca-

reer majors. I'm talking the traditional liberal arts, which is steeped in critical thinking, writing, and reading- all important skills, no matter what field of study."

The Humanities Project incorporates humanities into the core curriculum classes. This is done through one single theme used by all teachers throughout the year. The theme changes every year, and no two have been the same. The themes have been chosen in a number of ways; the faculty has been asked to choose, surveys were taken by students, and they've been chosen depend-

ing on possible guest speakers in the area. This is important because of the small operating budget-speakers from Massachusetts save the school more money.

Maureen Provost, a professor of early childhood education, believes that, "there's not enough time to explore all curricular areas, and we want people to think bigger and broader." Professor Provost has found many ways to incorporate the themes into her lesson plans each year. Since Professor Provost is a firm believer in children spending

time outdoors, this was a major part of the discussion when Walden was the theme. She also used this theme to connect it to the art show she was hosting, where viewers could find a quote by Henry David Thoreau.

The NEH Grant is a matching grant, which means that MWCC raised money to pay for the grant, and the National Endowment for the Humanities matched our earnings 2:1. The school was able to raise approximately \$300,000, therefore the NEH has given them around \$150,000.

Professor Valois said that, "the

beauty is that the grant built an endowment that lasts as long as the college lasts. Future faculty might do something different with the themes, and I hope new faculty will do just that, but the endowment, the money, will always be there to support programming; pay for speakers, films, books, events, etc." With many arts programs having been eliminated or at risk of being downsized, this grant is important to our school in order to keep the humanities alive in the core curriculum.

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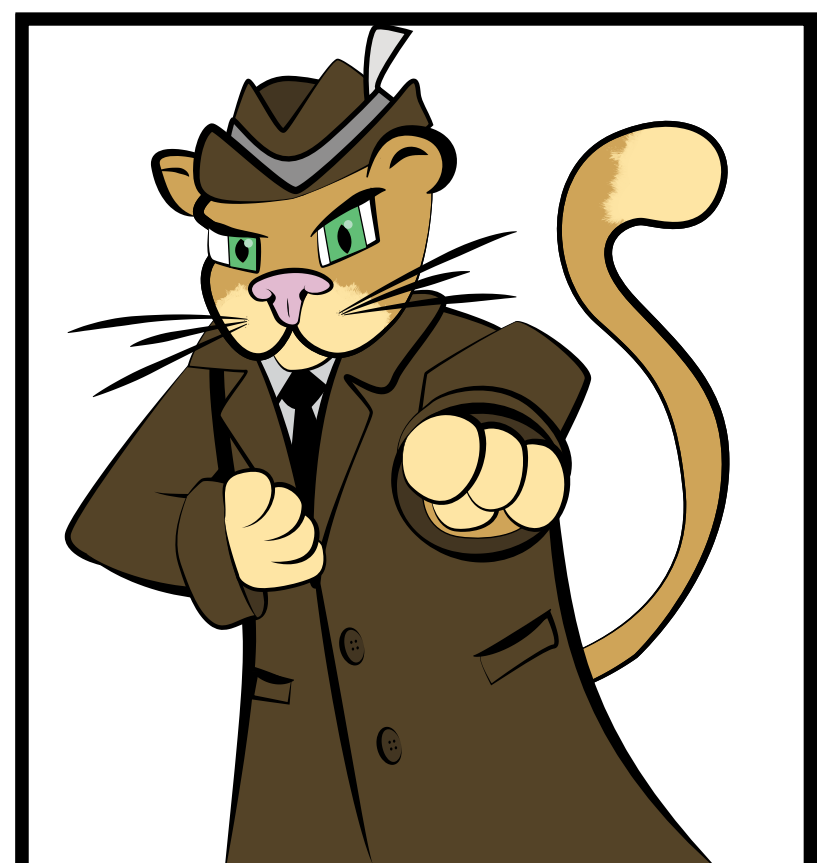
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**We Want You for
The Mount Observer!**

Summer Session Pell Grants Return



Photo by Jennifer Lamontagne

Check the Financial Aid office to see if you qualify for a summer session pell grant.

By Jennifer Lamontagne

Pell grants are Federally funded to people who qualify for financial aid. They can be cut or added back based on federal funding. The Pell grants for summer classes are back.

According to Kelly Morris, Director of Financial Aid, “students need to have FAFSAs done for the 2018/2019 school year.” FAFSA is through the state and file times can change but for this year, FAFSA applications run from October – May 1st. Morris could not stress enough to pay attention to deadlines.

“It’s proven that students who attend full year have a higher chance of graduating faster and on time.”

This Pell grant was around in 2010 and 2011 before the funding for it was cut. Colleges spent time advocating for the students and how important that funding was to education.

Morris states, through research that “it’s proven that students who attend full year have a higher chance of graduating faster and on time.” Now that the summer Pell grant is back, it will make that easier for some students.

Pell grant funding is just part of students financial aid packages. How much funding a student can get is based on the need and enrollment status. The sooner a student files their FAFSA, the more funding will be available to them. Financial Aid is based on a first come first serve basis.

Morris hopes that students will take advantage of the new funding for summer classes. The financial aid office is always open for students to go in, ask about their financial aid packages, and get help with any financial aid questions.

A Welcome Back Message from President James Vander Hooven

Welcome to spring semester! For those of you who are returning for another semester toward your graduation goal, welcome back! For those of you who are just starting out at the Mount, welcome! While a little down time or quiet around the campuses is nice over the break, it is much better to see the students and faculty return

to the campuses to begin again.

There are lots of big things happening at MWCC this year. I am excited to announce that the College received a significant gift that will help us, over a couple of years to design and implement a new career/advising approach that will build upon the regional business and industry partnerships we have established

and hope to establish soon. This will mean more opportunities for students to receive state-of-the-art career advising from day-one. I’m also excited to announce that the College will be hosting my inauguration as president of MWCC on Wednesday, March 28th at 2pm. I hope that you will all consider attending this event to hear about the

future directions of the College. Finally, immediately following the Commencement exercises in the spring, we will begin a massive reconstruction of our parking lots and roadway around the College. This desperately needed work will undoubtedly cause some disruptions during the summer but we will do our best to minimize the

obstacles for the greater good (as I think you’ll agree).

I join the faculty and staff in wishing you the very best semester!

Jim Vander Hooven, President

Dental Hygiene Program Offers Cleanings and X-rays

By Michele Walsky

Mouth feeling fuzzy? The Mount Wachusett Community College’s dental clinic in Fitchburg offers free dental cleanings and x-rays.

First year hygiene student, Renee Tenney, was on Gardner campus recently collecting a check for their Crest fundraiser and was kind enough to demystify the dental program, which is often an unseen entity. According to Tenney, sophomore hygiene students thoroughly clean teeth and gums while performing an overall health assessment as part of their clinical lab.

“It takes about three hours,” Tenney admitted. “But it will be the best cleaning you’ll ever

have.” Her friend enjoys the extensive cleaning and advocates the experience on social media.

To reserve a spot, call Zulma in the dental hygiene office at 978-630-9413.

Tenney also said anyone with insurance could make a regular appointment with a dentist or hygienist at the Community Health Connections Family Health Center located in the same building. They take most major insurances. Interested parties can call 978- 878-8550 for more information.

There’s more than just flossing and polishing going on in the Dental Hygiene degree program.

Hygienists are training to take National Board exams and Competency Assessments for licensing to scale under the gum line, apply dental sealants, nutrition counseling, preventative care and educating patients.

Students are also part of the Dental Hygiene Club and the American Dental Association. The club runs various fundraisers which earn money to help community service projects and cover program expenses.

A bake sale raked in \$500, enough for one surgery with Smile Train, an organization that repairs cleft lips and palates on children in underdeveloped

countries. The group has also donated to local food pantries, dental education programs and the MWCC emergency fund.

Proceeds from the Crest campaign, which offers a discount on a variety of oral hygiene products each fall will go toward the pinning ceremony for graduating hygiene and dental assistants as well as fund their annual trip to the Yankee Dental Congress in Boston in January 2018. The multi-day convention is a display of exhibits, continuing education seminars, speakers and food tasting.

As per the college catalogue, the Dental Hygiene Associate’s

degree is a selective program. Applicants must complete specific prerequisites and maintain high grades before applying. For a list of the requirements, go to the MWCC website, meet with an advisor or attend a health careers information session. The college also offers a dental assisting program in the evenings, training students to work chairside with dentists and prepare for the National Certification exam.

The dental clinic is located on the second floor of the Community Health Connections building, 326 Nichols Drive in Fitchburg.

Study Abroad and Travel for Students at MWCC

By Rachel Aster

Mount Wachusett Community College has a surprising amount of travel options for the adventurous students who attend. Two of the biggest options our school offers are the Study Abroad program and the Service Travel program. The Study Abroad program is a 3-week to a full semester program, while the Service Travel is one week in May after classes end for the year.

Dr. Laurie Occhipinti, the Dean of Liberal Arts, Humanities and Communications, is the contact person for the Study Abroad program. Occhipinti said, "MWCC currently has (and has had) a study abroad program that works through partner universities. This is available now for our students." This is a shared partner program involving other colleges which allows students the opportunity to visit one of 40-60 different countries while earning credits. Occhipinti said, "Study abroad does cost extra for students, but financial aid can be applied to study abroad (this always depends on an individual's situation with aid). Information is available in my office (the Division for liberal Arts, Education, Humanities, and Communications)."

While the Study Abroad program has more options for country visitation and allows students to earn credits, the Service Travel program is based more on travel and cultural experience. Only 8-9 students get accepted after participating in a rigorous application process involving an interview and essay.

Shelley Nicholson, Director of the Brewer Center, started the Service Travel Program in 2015 with a grant. In the past 2 years, Nicholson chaperoned 8 students on a trip to Costa Rica, where students provided a service to the locals, while enjoying the culture.

While talking about why she started this program, Nicholson said, "I get to see students grow and challenge themselves and each other."

Some of the services that have been provided by students in the past have been organic farm work, beach clean-up and house painting. Students can spend the rest of their time with fun activities such as exploring, ziplining and snorkeling.

Jana Murphy is a current student who attended the 2 previous Costa Rican Service Travel trips. She enjoys providing services

to those in need and is currently getting her Nonprofit Management Certificate and working with the Food Pantry at MWCC. The program allowed her to do something she loves without being away from home for too long.

"It wasn't just a normal tourist experience," Murphy said.

This program is focused on students being submerged into a new culture and providing a service to locals, rather than being a tourist. This year, students will be going to Peru and ending the trip by visiting Machu Picchu.

While spending a whole semester abroad sounds nice, it is not doable for a lot of students. The Study Abroad program is for those who have more time and freedom while the Service Travel is a week long and offers travel options for those who cannot be away as long.

Both programs are run by very knowledgeable and well-traveled staff. Each has benefits and are tailored to the needs of MWCC students. If interested in either program, prepare at least 6 months in advance as it takes time to work out the fine details and remember that acceptance is limited for the Service Travel program.



Photo by Thomas Hill Jr.

Dean Laurie Occhipinti

Students Support Gender Inclusive Bathrooms on Campus



Photo by Thomas Hill Jr.

A sign designating one of the new All Gender Restrooms.

By Ashley McHugh

Gender neutral bathrooms are popping up on campuses across the country, including here at Mount Wachusett Community College. The move for the gender neutral bathrooms on campus began last year with the transgender population petitioning for the change.

According to *The New York Times*, the movement initially began in 2013 when a transgender athlete in Illinois pushed for her right to gender inclusive bathrooms. Last fall, the Department of Education's Civil Rights sector ruled in favor of the student's need for gender inclusive bathrooms. It was arranged for the student to use the locker room and the school would install private changing areas. Some in the community

denounced the decision while others joined the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois, which represented the girl, in declaring a victory for civil rights.

Last year, the Obama Administration ordered all public schools to allow students to use the bathroom of their choice.

Students at MWCC seem to be thrilled about the gender neutral bathrooms and what it meant for the transgender generation. MWCC Freshman Riya Patel said, "It is amazing for the students, they get to be themselves and feel comfortable in their environment."

Some students feel that other students are taking advantage of the situation. Sophomore Sharie Melendez said, "Some students say that they use the

gender neutral bathrooms because they are private and they can do whatever they want, but it is for students who need the gender inclusivity. The bathrooms are being abused, but it is still a huge deal for the Trans community."

The case is simple, gender inclusive bathrooms are a huge win for the transgender community not just here on campus, but nationwide. Students in the Trans community are starting to have a sense of acceptance and safety.

"It is amazing for the students, they get to be themselves and feel comfortable in their environment."

Come Work for Us!

Interested in becoming a member of the *Mount Observer* team?

Contact us at mountobsercer@mwcc.mass.edu.

Work Study positions are available to those who qualify! See Scott Farris in Admissions for details.

Student Pursues Glass Blowing Career

By Kayla Blackwell

Miles Roache is a student at MWCC who hopes to pursue a career involving glassblowing. Currently in his second year, he plans to earn a business certificate so he can open a shop to sell his work.

Roache began blowing glass in the seventh grade after his father took him to meet a torch worker at an art studio. "I realized this was my passion when I was left alone at the torch to make my own art and realized that my only limits were my imagination," Roache said.

Roache takes classes when he has time in order to strengthen his skills. He has even spent a week in the woods of Western Massachusetts for daily glassblowing classes. He is currently trying to contact a local glassblower named Kevin Engelmann in order to begin an apprenticeship. "It's only difficult to learn if you're unimaginative," said Roache about learning this skill. "You can't do it if you don't have steady hands, and you need to be patient."

Roache said that in order to complete this work, he requires

several types of tools, including a table-mounted torch, forceps, tweezers, jacks, and safety glasses. The safety glasses used normally have didymium, which eliminates sodium flares caused from glass hitting the propane torch.

Roache explained that "everything is subject to change when it comes to the process," but all basic pieces begin with a base gather. A gather is a mound of glass that gets shaped into different parts of the work, such as a leg or a decorative piece, which get attached to each other to form a whole piece. Once all the gathers are shaped and attached to each other, the tweezers and other aforementioned tools are used to further shape it.

Once the piece is completely formed, it gets knocked off the punty (the rod used) and flame polished at its break point so as to avoid having sharp edges or unappealing appearances. Finally, the work is placed in an enealer, which brings the temperature down slowly enough to avoid temperature-shock.

Roache said, "The hardest

parts are not burning yourself and working within a small amount of time as to not temperature shock the glass and ruin everything you have just worked on." Roache's favorite part of the job is making

paperweights because of their abstractness and his freedom to do whatever he wants with them.

In a few years, Roache said he plans to open up an art studio, retail store, and restaurant, "as

a fun location where you can watch the glassworking process, purchase various forms of glass art, and grab a delicious bite to eat all at the same time."



Photos by Jennifer Lamontagne



"I realized this was my passion when I was left alone at the torch to make my own art and realized that my only limits were my imagination."

— Miles Roache

Club Spotlight

Otaku Club Donates and Educates

By Julissa Marte Mendez

Otaku United Club at Mount Wachusett Community College is opening the door for children's education by holding a charity to give books to children in local schools. A "book for every child" allows a child to have a quality book for free.

The club gets together collecting donations to hold a silent auction. In April, participants put their bids on a piece of paper. Cohen said it is similar to eBay, but on paper, where the highest bidder is allowed to take the item home.

The profits gained from sales is used to purchase the children's books at Scholastic. Their goal is to give two books per child starting from preschool up to second grade. The books are distributed in local elementary schools, for example, Waterford Elementary School and Hobomock Elementary School, according to Cohen.

The Otaku United Club also helps the students learn the Japanese culture. They learned about anime, a short-term for animation. They learn Japanese by sharing a word of the day each meeting and given each members the word to study until the next meeting and a member is able to win a prize, said Cohen.

The club has about 35 mem-



The Otaku Club made an appearance at the annual Winter Welcome Back Fair.

bers, according to Cohen. Many different students attend this club with different majors. Some have a business major, early education, or film study, said Cohen, who is a business major. Some students, for example, MWCC

student Sarah Payson, has a popular YouTube page making anime videos with about 66k followers.

The club has been raising funds to attend a Boston Anime convention by selling baked good in the South Café, according to

Cohen. This convention is the largest northeastern anime convention held once a year. It has over 35 thousand attendees where they often dress in costumes.

Cohen said they have different panels, such as teaching about

the history and culture of Japan, their traditions, and even their clothing. They teach the history of anime and where it originated. Some panels display art shows and others play video games.

Former student turned local star

By Joshua Medero

Once a student, now a local star, Christopher "Nano" Villot also known as "Nano La Diferencia" is a 25 year old rapper from Fitchburg, Massachusetts who is quickly ascending in popularity on the Reggaeton music scene. With over a million views collectively on his music video "No Me Wua Dejar" featuring Tali Goya and Bad Bunny, Nano has grown to be a local star. Doing shows throughout Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York.

When an opportunity presented itself for him to do a song with Worcester's own rapper, Joyner Lucas, Villot quickly decided to do so. There became a problem when Villot had to choose between studio and music video time or school. He had to decide which was more important school or his dreams.

Villot said, "It was an opportunity you don't pass up. I had saw that he (Joyner) had millions of views on his video on Facebook and de-

cidated it was the right decision."

That decision turned out to be the right one for him. Nano's song with Joyner Lucas now has over 500,000 plays on Facebook, 100,000 views on WorldStarHipHop and, over 200,000 views on YouTube. Since then, Villot has worked with various artist and has made his own lane in the Latin music world.

While being compared to a Latin version of Bryson Tiller, who is a popular rap and R&B artist,

Villot has repeatedly shown his versatility as an artist. From his songs in English with Joyner Lucas, Izzy G and Mark Battles to songs in Spanish with Bad Bunny, Lito Kirino and Tali Goya, this local grown talent has worked with his fair share of big names. Recently writing a Song for Faruko, who is one of Reggaetones biggest artist is also a very big accomplishment in its own right.

Villot describes his decision to drop out of school as one of the

best decisions he has ever made, he said, "Dropping out wasn't the best idea but it was the right decision at the moment." He also describes his desire to go back to school when the time is right

Villot is currently working on his EP with Lito Kirino called "Henny Vibes." His music can be found on any music streaming service.

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Tuesday, February 20, 8:00 am - 2:30 pm

Wednesday, April 18, 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Wednesday, May 9, 5:00 pm - 8:00 pm

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Dating in a World Consumed by Technology

By Meghan Doyle

With technology changing the way we go about our daily lives, it seems only natural that it would affect our relationships, and how we form them as well. Dating websites and apps have become increasingly popular over the years, with over one third of marriages starting online, according to an article by “Emerging Technology.” But is swiping right for love changing the way that our society feels and acts in relationships? If so, is it for better, or for worse?

Kerrie Griffin, professor of psychology and sociology at MWCC, stated that the future sociological impacts of online-dating could be, “...anything from increasing single parenting/co-parenting (due to lack of commitment) to decreasing marriage rates, increasing rates of STDs etc. But, on the positive side, maybe the exploration will result in making a more informed choice about marriage, and therefore, decrease divorce rates.”

Various sources agree with what Griffin suggested. In fact, research into the strength of marriage found that young couples who meet online may have a lower rate of divorce than couples who’ve met in traditional manners.

Griffin brings up an important point when it comes to the vast options you have when pick-

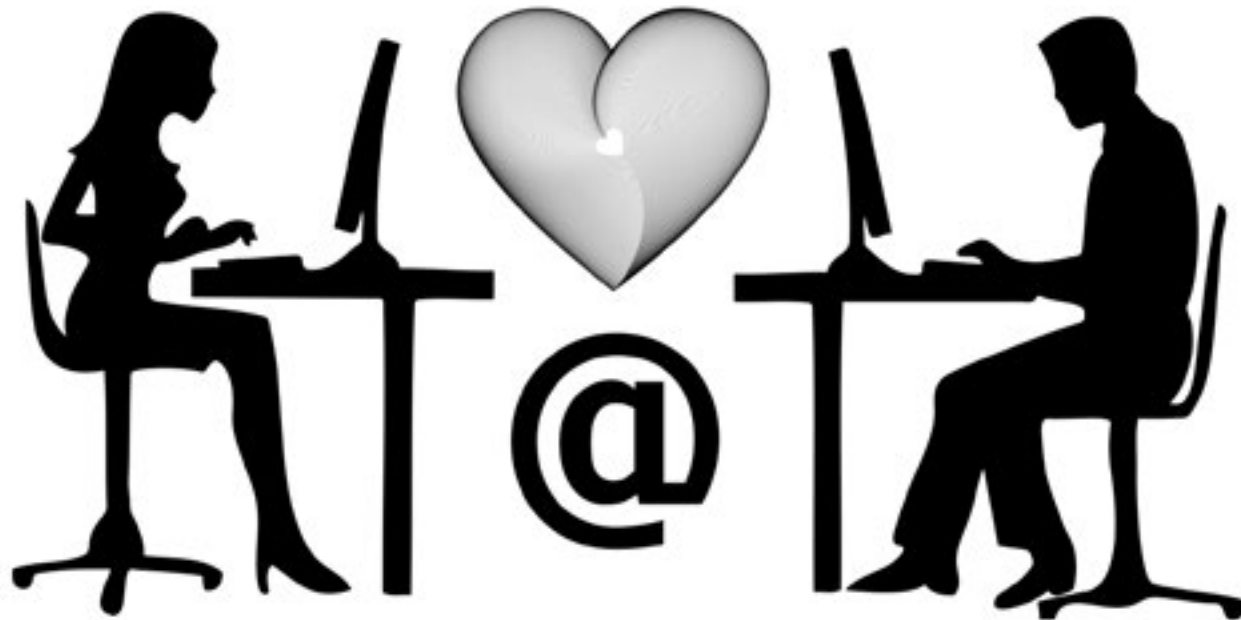


Image from Pixabay <https://pixabay.com/en/man-woman-love-dating-email-949058/>

Online dating is only one of the many ways technology has changed the way we view and form romantic relationships.

ing a dating site. “From what I have seen, read, and heard, sites like ‘Tinder’ are more for flings, while sites like ‘Match.com’ are more for people interested in long-term relationships. Essentially, different sites seem to ‘offer’ different opportunities.” Therefore, the intentions of your online-dating experience can depend on what kind of site you’re using and what you’re seeking.

“Overall, I think dating sites can be as helpful in determining what you don’t want in a rela-

tionship and what’s not important about a potential mate, just as much as they can make you realize what you do want. So, they may provide a starting point for someone who is trying to figure out love!” Griffin concluded.

MWCC student Catherine Castagnaro has used various dating and online platforms in the past to meet new people, such as OkCupid. On top of the normal problems that you may encounter in a traditional relationship, Castagnaro stresses that meeting

someone online can come with its own unique issues, especially if the person you’re seeing online doesn’t live in your area. Things like communication, making the time for each other, and interpreting each other’s messages can be even more difficult when talking to someone online.

“Most relationships will have communication issues at some point,” Castagnaro stated from her experience, “but with online-dating you’re communicating via emails, Skype chat, text,

and I suppose old fashion people write letters. The key issue with most of these is when reading we don’t necessarily know how they were supposed to be said.” These misunderstandings can cause confusion and emotional turmoil for couples until, if ever, resolved.

And while Castagnaro has run into the occasional person online who only wanted a hookup/casual relationship, she explained that these people are typically very easily dealt with just by explaining that it’s not what you’re looking for, and in the worst cases there’s always a block button. Even after running into a few individuals like this, Castagnaro believes that there are many online who are sincerely looking for love.

“Though my faith in humanity sways to the lesser side most of the time and on the given day...I think there’s more people that want an actual relationship. The problem I find is a good amount of our generation has anxiety about being themselves, and I believe that keeps us from finding ‘the one.’”

And while she said she wouldn’t go as far as recommending it to a friend, she remains optimistic about her last serious online-dating experience. “I’d still consider the overall experience positive; I grew a lot as a person in that time.”

Do Pitbulls Make Good Family Pets?

By Jennifer Lamontagne

Just saying the word Pitbull can send a shiver down one’s spine, never mind saying it along with kids in the mix. The reaction of most people is that pitbulls would never make a good pet for anyone, especially a family.

One family has proven this wrong; the Currier family, from Barre, MA, with kids, ages 2, 11, and 13, found a new member of the family in Deacon. A pitbull adopted just over a year ago from Second Chance Shelter in East Brookfield. They fell in love with Deacon the moment they got to play with him and started the adoption process right away, despite not knowing Deacon’s past or the abuse he went through. They fell in love with him as he fell in love with them.

Second Chance Shelter wants to ensure the dogs they adopt out go to their forever homes, so their adoption process works to make certain dogs and families are a good fit.

Sarah Parrot, Adoption Manager at Second Chance Shelter stated, “We receive most of our dogs from the South coming from over-crowded kill shelters, and the rest of the dogs are owner surrenders.” At the shelter, potential adopters fill out a survey,

all family members must meet the dog, and other pets in the house must meet the dog as well.

Parrot states that dogs that come from the south have gone through temperament tests and that dogs that come in from owner surrender will be temperament tested onsite. First, they are quarantined, examined by a Veterinarian, and spayed or neutered. Once all the medical procedures are handled, they are moved and go through temperament testing. That includes food aggression, and tug-and-pull tests where they have their ears, tail, and feet tugged and pulled.

Mrs. Currier said, “He’s such a big love bug. Deacon is an amazing dog and wonderful new member of the family.”

The Curriers have a Rottweiler mix, Bella, and when the two met, they became friends immediately. They frolic and play together, share snuggles with the family, and Bella even lets Deacon win in play fights, *sometimes*. Mrs. Currier is not concerned about dog aggression with Deacon, and in fact states, “Bella is the dominant one, and Deacon is the submissive one. Deacon is even afraid of the cat!”

The Currier family adopted Deacon with loving hearts, wel-

comed him into their family despite being a pitbull, not knowing his past, and Deacon repays his gratitude of being saved by always snuggling, being loving, and always having a smile on his face. An article in *The Huffington Post* said it best, “There’s one stereotype about pitbulls that we can get behind. It is indisputably true that when they’re happy and loved, these dogs have the very best smiles.” The Currier family agrees that when Deacon smiles it melts their hearts.



Photos by Jennifer Lamontagne

Facts about Pit Bulls

- Every breed of dog has its own personality just like people. Not every dog is right for every person.
- Pit Bulls, as well as all breeds of dogs, thrive in loving, nurturing environments.
- A common misconception about Pit Bulls is that their jaws lock when they bite. This is not true; their jaws do not lock when they bite. They do have powerful jaws, just not ones with special powers.
- Pit Bulls get a bad rap as being aggressive. Any dog can be aggressive but Pit Bull Terriers get the brunt of the heat.
- Out of all the breeds of dogs, Pit Bulls have the highest number of dog bites according to Dogbite.org; however, in an article from *Huffington Post*, there is a big debate on the stats of those numbers as so many dogs resemble Pit Bulls but are not actually Pit Bulls.
- The American Veterinarian Medical Association states “that animal shelter staff-and even some vets-consistently misidentify dogs classified as Pit Bull types”.
- There are several dogs that are misidentified as Pit Bulls, such as Bull Terrier, Staffordshire Terrier, and Pogo Argentino. The only sure way to be sure it is a Pit Bull is genetic testing.



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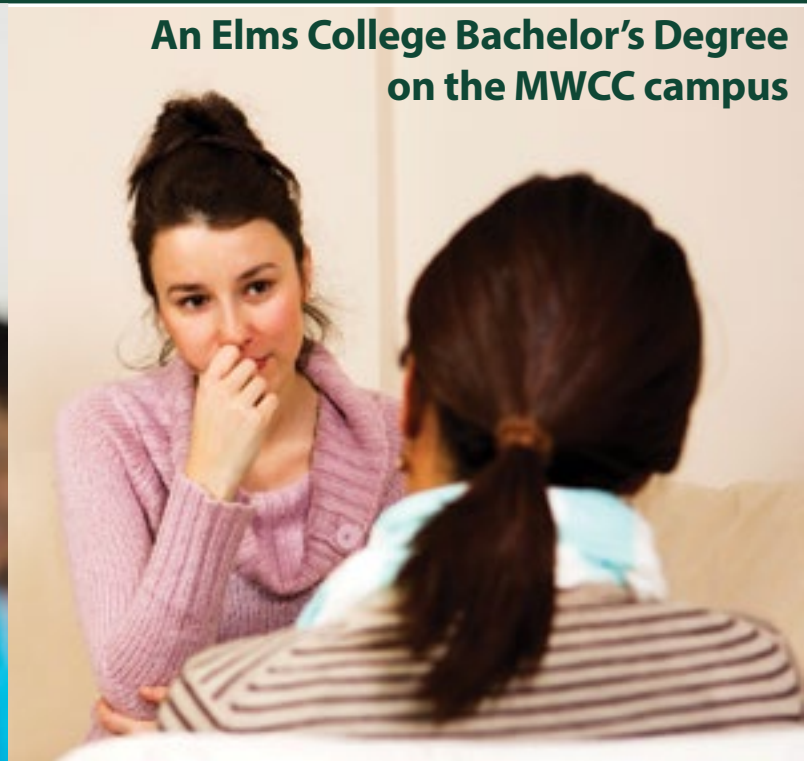
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