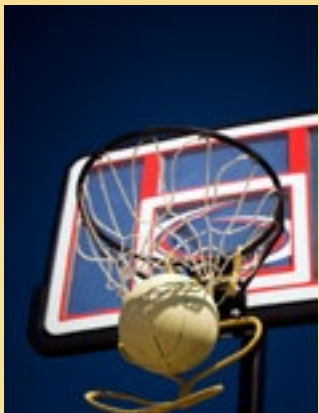


The Mount Observer

“Voices of the students of Mount Wachusett Community College”

PREVIEWS



Courts Are In Session

As Massachusetts residents enter their first days of Spring and the days get warmer and longer, the Massachusetts government has sweetened the season with the decision to reopen our previously locked and dismantled basketball courts.

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Benevolent Brownies

The Corner Café located on South Main Street in Orange has recently won \$5,000 for their local food bank by winning the “Neighborhood to National Recipe Contest” hosted by General Mills.

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Community at Our College

The landfall and aftermath of COVID-19 has left the students of Mount Wachusett Community College worlds apart from each other. Yet, Kathy Matson and the Student Life Department at MWCC have created many ways to rise up and re-unite the community of this college.

For the full article, see page 5

Review: BugSnax

For the full article, see page 8

Frustrations Come to a Head

The SGA Takes a Stand on Book Store Issues

By Daniel Dow
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The Student Government Association (SGA) unanimously voted to send a letter to President James L. Vander Hooven and the Mount Wachusett Community leaders to demand that the MWCC bookstores at the Leominster and Gardner campuses be opened to students and for the stores to increase communication and establish a tracking method for orders.

The stores, operated by Follet Corporation, have a long-standing track record of issues.

The SGA began working to address Follett’s issues over a year ago, prior to the start of the pandemic. In a meeting with President Vander Hooven in early 2020, the SGA outlined ongoing issues students faced with the Follett bookstore at



Photo by Cassie Roy

For now, the MWCC bookstores are closed on campus.

MWCC.

The MWCC Bookstores at the Gardner, Devens, and Leominster campuses have been closed to the public since

the start of the pandemic. All ordering of class materials must be done on the campus bookstore website, while surrounding colleges that use

Follet services have re-opened their locations for in-person activity.

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“SGA vs. Bookstore” >>>

Controversial Clearance

MA DCR Makes Plans to Demolish Rutland Prison Camps

By Shaye McKeen
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The Rutland Historical Commission in conjunction with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation has made the decision to demolish the Rutland Prison Camps due to various health and safety concerns. These concerns include the presence of hate speech vandalism, caved sections of ground into an underground tunnel, and attraction of illicit behavior.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation owns and patrols the land which

the 1934 Prison Camps sit on, frequently making rounds in order to ensure their upkeep and deter any illicit activity which may occur. Observed illicit activities by DCR Rangers were included in the demolition project’s summary, provided by the Rutland Historical Commission: “...fires, drugs (e.g., needles), etc. In addition, because of the popularity of the site for graffiti, there has been spill over vandalism to other equipment located near the site.”

The equipment which the named vandalism has spilled

over too has not been specified by DCR, which is odd since the site lies in the middle of the forest. However, according to several town residents on the Historical Commission’s public Facebook, fire pits have been erected especially in the Cold Storage which lies inside of a caved out hilltop, and teenagers have been spotted smoking pot from time to time in the camps.

The decision has not been received well amongst the townspeople nor the surrounding town’s citizens either, with both the Historical Commission as well as DCR receiving a lot of

backlash from the Central MA communities. The townspeople, in large number, instead look to preserve their town’s history and request refurbishing of the camps as opposed to demolition, using the funds which the town receives annually from the PILOT (Payment In Lieu of Taxes) program.

Upon visiting the Prison Camps in order to observe the concerns of the DCR firsthand, this reporter looked for some of the aforementioned hazards and nuisances to public health

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“Controversial Clearance” >>>

SGA vs. Bookstore

>>> continued from page 1

Cody Nathanson, an SGA member, has been gathering feedback from students to fully understand the extent of the problems. Nathanson outlined the key issues as delayed orders, a lack of communication, and technology issues with online ordering. He explained that the students felt a lack of support from the school, saying, “students either feeling they were left alone, they’re confused, and they had nobody to turn to.”

Nathanson described the experiences of students who rely on grant funding to purchase their books and are now forced

to buy their books out of pocket because of concern of not receiving the books on time. He reported that when he attended a meeting with the bookstore four weeks ago, students were still awaiting refunds from cancelled orders at the beginning of the semester.

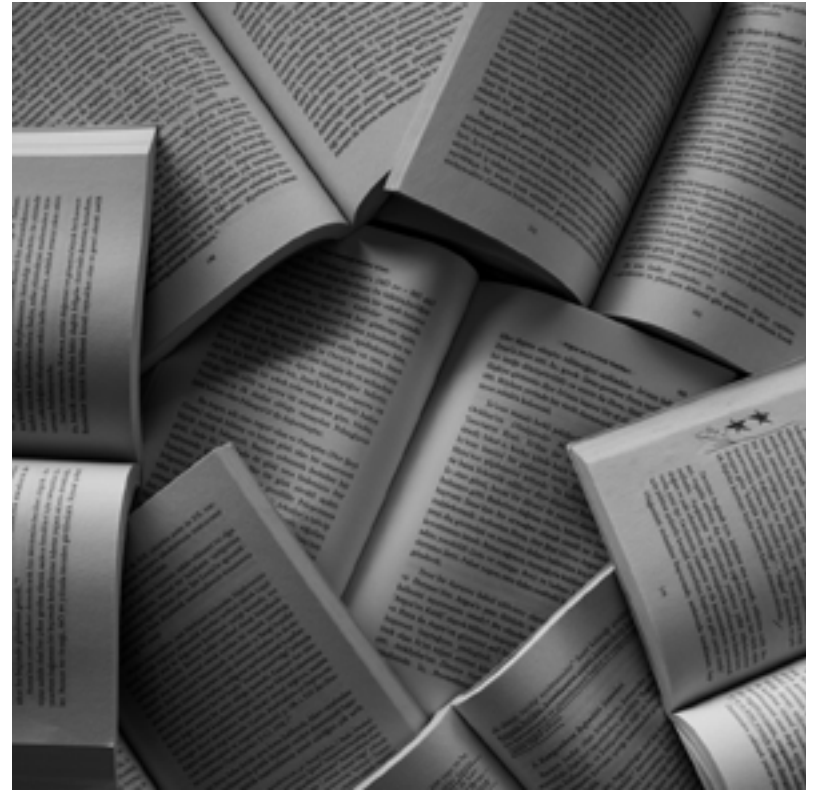
One student told Nathanson that they drove 2 to 3 hours to pick up books that the bookstore assured were ready, only to arrive and be told they were not ready.

President of the SGA, Aidan Lane, spoke about his own issues while attending Professor Soucy’s class. “Last year, for one of his (professor Soucy’s) classes

- we all ordered that book, and no one had it for the first half of the entire semester,” Lane said.

Lane stressed that if issues were not addressed by Follet Corporation, the SGA would vote to demand that Mount Wachusett Community College cut ties with Follet once their contract has expired.

Professor Nicholas Cochrane attended the SGA meeting to discuss the bookstore issues. Cochrane, who is serving on a committee recently formed by President Vander Hooven that is charged with resolving the issues with Follett, informed the SGA that the committee’s “biggest challenge, right now, as a group



of people is finding problems with the bookstore to actually fix.”

Cochrane was invited to the

meeting by Nathanson to hear the comments and concerns of the SGA to bring back to the committee.

Stressed? Overwhelmed? Feeling Down?

If current events are leaving you feeling hopeless, or you just feel you need to talk, for any reason, feel free to contact Melissa Manzi at m_manzi@mwcc.mass.edu or check out her Mental Health Minute videos at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwifl9n1WUs&feature=emb_logo

Up the River Without a Paddle (or a Rat)

The Athol Orange River Rat Race is Cancelled for the Second Year



Photo by Sergey Yeliseev from flickr

By **Ellie Burton**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The 2021 Athol to Orange River Rat Race has officially been cancelled for the second year in a row due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is the first time in the race’s history that this has ever happened.

Even with all the positive effects that the race has on the town, Mike Flint (the race’s

chairman) and the rest of the planning committee had to choose to cancel the River Rat Race again this year due to Covid being an ongoing crisis across the globe. Flint said that the “race has participants from all over, even a team from Ireland” and therefore it would not be safe to hold the race this year.

Flint said that in the meantime the Lions Clubs have been

running raffles, a virtual 5K footrace which is being organized by Karen Perkins, and more so that they are still able to give back to the local community.

Flint said that they are unable to simply postpone the race due to negative effects that raising the water levels could have on the environment once spring and summer are in full swing. Flint is anticipating there being a 2022 River Rat Race now that the Covid vaccine is available but added that “only time will tell.”

Each year the River Rat Race draws in an average of over 600 canoe racers and giant crowds of spectators. Flint said that the reason the race is so popular is “because of its wackiness.” It has become a whole event that includes a parade down Main Street, Athol, a 5K footrace, the original canoe race, a carnival, and an abundance of vendors at the finish line.

Even with all of the new additions to the race, Flint said that the start of the canoe race is his favorite part of the festivities. When asked if he has ever participated in the race himself, he answered, “Absolutely! You’re not a really local until you’ve done it!”

The event is possible thanks to the Race’s organizers, the Athol and Orange Lions Clubs, and the Race’s sponsors which includes Girardi Distributors LLC, Athol Savings Bank, and many more. The cost of the event is covered by the sponsors’ donations and the entry fee paid by the racers. All the money that is left over is used by the Lions Clubs to give back to the community directly by building wheelchair ramps, getting glasses for children in need, and much more.

The first River Rat Race was held on the Millers River from Athol to Orange on March 21st,

1964 when a couple friends made a wager over who would win a race down the river in a canoe. The first race consisted of two teams put together by the friends’ bars of choice which came to a grand total of twelve canoes. In the end the winning team received a case of beer provided by the losing team and the River Rat Spectacular was born.

Ted Crumb of Athol originally took head responsibility in planning the race for its first 27 consecutive years. Over the years the name changed to the Athol to Orange River Rat Race and the crowds grew larger and larger. Once Crumb was ready to retire from the position in 1991 the Athol and Orange Lions Clubs took on the responsibility of continuing the tradition and Mike Flint of Athol is now the chairman for the race.

Controversial Clearance



Photos by Shaye McKeen

The Rutland Prison Camps in question in their current state.

>>> continued from page 1

amongst the ruins. The collapsed sections of the underground tunnel dropped about 6 feet into the tunnel, with the holes measuring around 3 x 2 feet at the largest.

The graffiti as a major rule was more artistic and design based in nature; however, there were some pockets which featured different words and numbers, such as "161" and "161 zone" which appeared in several places. With some research, these tags apparently are tied to the AFA, or Anti-Fascist Action group. Similar messages which denounced anti-Semitic groups and messages were found in the area, spelling out things like "f*** Nazis" and "Nazis Get Out."

While explicit in nature, with close inspection of the area there were not any signs of hate speech noted by the DCR. Residents of Rutland and the surrounding towns in the online forum expressed that they have no problem with the graffiti, and that it is a common occurrence especially in cities like Boston, where the DCR board made the decision to demolish the camps. Townspeople expressed a desire to be included in the decision-making process, as their town is home to the land and history involved.



Benevolent Brownies

Orange Café Wins \$5,000 for Local Food Bank



Photo by Kendra Mahoney

By Ellie Burton

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The Corner Café located on South Main Street in Orange has recently won \$5,000 for their local food bank by winning the "Neighborhood to National Recipe Contest" hosted by General Mills. The Corner Café was awarded the prize after a total of over 1,400 people commented on their submission: stacked maple brownie cakes with candied bacon.

The Corner Café started out as The Millers River Café, but

a few years ago it was handed over to its current owner; Terry Bouchard. When this change of hands occurred, Bouchard not only decided to change the Café's name, but to also add a bakery, which turned out to be a successful decision. Bouchard's daughter, Stephanie Cook, said that she has had "a lot of fun" working in the bakery when she's not busy running her own business, Scrafty Custom Signs in Athol.

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"Benevolent Brownies" >>>

Lifestyle Flipping

One MWCC Student Discusses His Pandemic Ambitions



Photo by Tiny Toes & Little Bows Photography

Daniel Dow and family

By Ellie Burton

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Just like everyone else at Mount Wachusett Community College in these wild times, student Daniel Dow has had his fair share of challenges as a result of Covid-19. During this pandemic, Dow has decided to make the best of the situation and has used this time to become

a stay-at-home dad, return to college full-time, and pursue his passion of writing.

For most of Dow's adult life he had worked at Wachusett Brewing Co. as their Central MA Account Manager. This was originally his passion, but as craft beers became more and more popular, the demand grew. As the demand grew, it ate away

at the parts of the job he enjoyed, causing Dow to want to move on to something new.

Once Covid hit, Dow decided it was time to jump ship and pursue his love of writing. Dow said he felt "incomplete never finishing the degree [he] started years ago," which is now a very different experience compared to when he first attended college.

Since making this decision, he has become a stay-at-home dad for his 18-month-old daughter, and will soon be adding a son to the mix, while also becoming a full-time student at Mount Wachusett Community College. Dow said that becoming a stay-at-home dad "has been the best gift [he] ever could have asked for" and that as of right now his "family is [his] priority and [he] looks forward to growing as a person and as a family as time goes on."

In the future Dow plans on transferring to Fitchburg State University after graduating from MWCC to pursue a degree in writing. Once he finishes at FSU he plans on giving back to the community, pursuing a job at a local library working their circulation desk, and possibly even writing and publishing his own works.

Dow currently writes short stories with themes such as horror, love, adventure, and redemption, but has not chosen to publish anything quite yet. Before publishing any pieces, he would like to refine his skills first so that he can create works that people will be able to draw

"an emotional connection to" including a trilogy he hopes to publish one day.

This passion has been fueled by his love for reading. Dow said that author Stephen King has had a large impact on his love of reading because of King's "advanced character development" in his stories like *IT*. He said that King's characters, main and supportive, are "relatable" and "dynamic" which is why his favorite book is one by King himself, *The Stand*.

This choice is also influenced by his father, since it is also one of his favorites. King continues to influence Dow's writing with his book *On Writing*, which Dow keeps referring back to in an attempt to keep from getting discouraged or losing sight of his goals.

Dow has also been inspired by *The New Sun* series, *The Dark Tower* series, and *The Kingsbridge* series. Dow said, "there are characters and themes in these books that I have drawn an emotional connection to, and I hope to be able to do that for others." He plans on one day publishing his own work, once he feels that he's ready.

NEWS

Benevolent Brownies

>>> continued from page 3

The Café has a wide selection of foods available, from sandwiches and soups to their vast array of bakery items, which are all made fresh daily. Their top items are their Reuben sandwiches, their Tully Turkey Sandwich, and, of course, their award-winning Maple Brownie Cakes. With this huge selection, and sandwiches flying off the shelves, Cook said her favorite items to make are "the cakes and cupcakes because [she] loves the decorating aspect of it."

Of course, just like every small business during this time, the Covid pandemic has taken its toll on The Corner Café. Cook said that because the café is "so small inside, the CDC says they can't have any indoor seating," but luckily "the bakery has carried everything." Right now, the Café is content with where they are, but remain hopeful about getting back their indoor seating back soon.

The "Neighborhood to National Recipe Contest" has given the Café an extra surge of

business lately. Cook said that "customers have been coming in constantly for updates" and everyone has been "very anxious to find out who won." Cook added that they have had to "make double batches every day" of their Maple Brownie Cakes because "they are flying off the shelves and people are grabbing lunch at the same time," effectively tripling the amount they would normally sell.

Cook is "totally shocked" by the Café winning the contest, especially since she alone created

the recipe that was entered into the contest. Cook said they were inspired and urged to enter the contest by Diane (Didi) Johnson, a retired baker and cook that occasionally helps in the Café and has contributed recipes of her own to the menu.

Johnson herself won the same contest a few years back with her Chocolate Chip Coffee Cake recipe. The "Neighborhood to National Recipe Contest" is the first contest that The Corner Café has entered, and after these first winning results, Cook said,

"there is a good chance [they] will do it again" as well as enter other competitions.

With the win under their belts, The Café has been awarded \$5,000 to donate to a local food bank. Cook said they are "doing a lot of research to make sure they choose the right [food] bank" to ensure that "the money stays in our town for the people that need it."

PROFILE

Finding Inspiration

One MWCC student's experiences with Travel and Art

By Angel Marcano

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Jessica Jablonski, a student at Mount Wachusett Community College, is an avid traveler, and she has spent time in three continents—North America, Europe and northern Africa—which she feels has fostered her creativity and inspired her paintings.

Her trips abroad have helped unravel one of her favorite pastimes: visiting museums. The Louvre Museum, France's biggest art and historic monument museum, is her favorite (so far). "To be able to see the Mona Lisa and glass pyramid was surreal," she said. Jablonski also draws creative inspiration from her travels. In this Covid-19 era, travel has been widely restricted to many destinations, with many countries temporarily banning travel from the United States

in particular, due to its high number of cases. The challenge, then, was to find new source of inspiration.

"Traveling does light a creative spark in me, and although Covid-19 did dim it for me a little bit, it also taught me to revisit finding creativity in the little things," Jablonski said. Her paintings, for now, are at times inspired from just that. "I've made some amazing pieces. Sometimes the best work comes from everyday things," she said.

Jablonski has visited France, Italy, Morocco, and Spain. She professed that Spain was her favorite destination thus far.

When asked about her major, Jablonski proudly said that she was focusing on Criminal Investigation. She said that she has profound interest in the subject matter and that one day she hopes to be a detective or to

work for the FBI.

She said, "I've always been so interested in it [criminal investigation]. I read about it, watch documentaries about it, and listen to podcasts about it all the time...your career is supposed to be something you're passionate about, so the fact that I've always been so intrigued about it made it a no-brainer."

She said that being a Journalist is also within the realm of possibilities. Ultimately, Jablonski said that she desires a career that will allow her to help people.

Currently, Jablonski is taking up Journalism 1, with Professor Goldstein. However, she is no newbie in tackling a Journalism course. In fact, this is her third course in the subject. The others were taken during her high school years.

When asked how a collegiate



Photo and painting by Jessica Jablonski

Journalism course compares to the ones in high school, she stated that the pacing was much faster and more independent in college, whereas in high school her articles were more constricted and were always in unison with the entire class.

"It's definitely faster paced and more independent...During my high school Journalism classes we had certain types of articles

we had to write for each section of the class, and before we could even pitch our stories, we had to run them by the teacher," she said.

Jablonski plans to transfer to a four-year university when she graduates and then go to an academy to train for the work she decides on.

Community at our College

Student Life's Kathy Matson is trying to keep MWCC connected through online events



Photo courtesy of MWCC

By Justin Tralongo

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The landfall and aftermath of COVID-19 has left the students of Mount Wachusett Community College worlds apart from each

other. Yet, Kathy Matson and the Student Life Department at MWCC have created many ways to rise up and re-unite the community of this college.

Assistant director of Student Life Kathy Matson explained that the program has resurfaced on the software Involvement, Zoom, and Discord. On Involvement, Student Life now schedules 2-4 virtual events a week, available for all students to view and sign up with a click of a button.

Emails go out every week to registered students' email inviting them to join this community experience. In these events, students can interact, have fun, expand their societal knowledge, and win gift card prizes.

Looking back to times before

COVID-19 Matson said, "Student Life was pretty vibrant, we had a lot going on. Obviously, everything was on campus in person...we had the opportunity to offer food, which was huge."

Instead of trying to keep old events alive amid restrictions, Student Life decided to explore the new possibilities of virtual events. Although some events of the past have survived the virtual switch, Matson and her team have developed new events made specifically to maximize the strengths and opportunities of the virtual world. Many of these new events have been created for the purpose of bringing students together virtually for interaction and a good time.

A new monthly event called College Trivia allows students

to compete against other community colleges over Zoom while periodically going into breakout rooms to connect with people from both MWCC and abroad. Switchboard Games invites only students from MWCC to laugh, chat, and compete against each other in a variety of games designed in style of popular game shows. One of the most interesting is the new EXPO or Esports Club, which meets on Discord twice a month casually and once a month in tournament format, to play games such as *Among Us* or *Jackbox Party Packs*.

Many other interactive events take place each month, but Student Life also brings in speakers to help students grow as a community. The inexpensive

and instantaneous global reach of Zoom has allowed Matson to bring in powerful speakers that never would have been accessible in the past. Topics of these educational events have included: alcohol/drug abuse and mental health, sex trafficking, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Participation for these events has greatly varied with an average attendance between 30 and 40, but a range of less than 10 to over 150. The majority of students who have joined these events have claimed to love them and have returned to participate in more, and according to Matson, no student to this date has voiced dislike of any event.

Cancel Cancel Culture

An MWCC Student Offers Their Opinion on Cancel Culture

By Maddison Willigar
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Something that has become increasingly popular in our society is the concept of Cancel Culture. This is the act of societal shunning or shaming resulting from public mistakes, controversial dialogue, or disagreements in views and beliefs. I believe that Cancel Culture is a highly toxic environment that disregards subjectivity, growth and only fuels more hate.

Recently, the author J.K. Rowling has been “canceled” due to multiple Twitter posts voicing her views on transgender rights. Because of this Rowling has lost respect and support from a large majority of the population, and to most she is no longer welcomed.

Though many people disagree with Cancel Culture, others see it as effective to a certain degree.

For example, in a Nov. 19 article from *The New York Times*, student contributor Clara Almeida wrote, “Cancelling is right when we try and make people acknowledge what they’ve done wrong, but

everything has a limit.”

Canceling someone with the hope that they will see what you view as a fault is a losing battle. Even though you may disagree

According to an Aug. 17 article from *The New York Times*, activist and author Loretta Ross wrote, “Call-outs make people fearful of being targeted. People avoid

allows us to believe that if someone doesn’t see the world the way we do, they are wrong. But why do we assume that our view of the world is the only

one another’s interpretations.”

“If no one ever argues, you’re not likely to give up on old ways of doing things, let alone try new ones. Disagreement is the antidote to groupthink,” Doyne said.

As we can see, disagreement is not the issue. The issue with Cancel Culture is that we overlook the beauty of learning and growing through these disagreements. We can respectfully challenge those around us, viewing disagreements as an opportunity for perspective rather than automatic hatred or cancellation.

Social media has conditioned us to assume that if someone is being canceled, we should join in instead of questioning what they did that justifies thousands of people telling them why they are worthless.

Instead, I encourage you to consider the crucial part of life we are missing by allowing or contributing to Cancel Culture: learning from our mistakes, learning from views different than our own, and allowing others to do the same.

with Rowling’s views, canceling doesn’t guarantee that her views will change or that she will see her beliefs as wrong. That’s the thing about Cancel Culture: even if you view something someone has said or done as wrong, there are just as many people saying it’s right. That’s where subjectivity comes in.

However, disregarding subjectivity is not the only concern of Cancel Culture.

meaningful conversations when hypervigilant perfectionists point out apparent mistakes, feeding the cannibalistic maw of the cancel culture.”

The lingering fear of cancellation convinces people that it is better to stay silent than to make a mistake worthy of being canceled.

We have all grown up with different perspectives and values, but Cancel Culture

correct view? Our world is built on diversity and differing views, and without the freedom to learn from mistakes, there would be no developments in our society.

In a Nov. 6 article from *The New York Times*, writer and contributor Shannon Doyne wrote: “Breakthrough labs in microbiology aren’t full of enthusiastic collaborators cheering one another on but of skeptical scientists challenging



To Vaccinate or Not to Vaccinate

An MWCC Student Weighs in on Both Sides of the Vaccine Debate



Photo by Marco Verch, Professional Photographer from flickr

By Ellie Burton
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The Covid-19 vaccine has been available in the United States since December 2020 and is becoming more widely available

every day. Some citizens have chosen to receive the vaccine as soon as possible, while others have decided to wait a bit longer or not receive it at all.

According to the Massachusetts

Department of Public Health, as of March 28, 2021, there are 1,252,133 Massachusetts citizens that are fully vaccinated against Covid-19, but not everyone wants to receive the vaccine.

Curtis Ames of Orange has chosen to wait some time before receiving the vaccine because he believes: “one: they rushed it through so quickly that there could be unknown side effects; two: if I get it, but my girlfriend cannot it causes a false sense of security; and three: there are people that are higher risk than I am that need it more than I do.”

Though Ames has chosen not to receive the vaccine yet, Henry Oertel of Orange has. Oertel has received both doses of the Pfizer

vaccine thanks to the Orange Board of Health’s drive-through clinic that was held at Ralph C. Mahar Regional High School in Orange. Oertel said he received the Pfizer vaccine because “you don’t have a choice; you get whatever one they give you” at that location.

For many the decision lies in whether they trust the vaccine or not due to multiple different reasons and influences. Ames said not yet when asked if he trusts the vaccine, but Oertel said yes, he does trust the vaccine. Both answered no when asked if politics and religion played a role in their decisions.

Before receiving the vaccine, Ames said he would like to see “more how people’s reactions

are to [the vaccine] because I’m already hearing that some people are having bad reactions.” Oertel, on the other hand, said that he has experienced no reactions from the vaccine though “it’s only been a month.”

Trust and the possibility of reactions are not the only factors driving people toward or away from the vaccine. Many have received the vaccine due to a family member or friend having caught Covid therefore seeing how it directly effects the body. Ironically, though, with Ames and Oertel, Ames said, “the people I know who have had it said that it was like the worst flu

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“Vaccinate or Not” >>>

Honorable Mention

MWCC's Honors Program is a Frequently Overlooked Service

By Justin Tralongo
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Mount Wachusett Community College has many wonderful aspects and the Massachusetts Commonwealth Honors Program stands out as one of the most valuable assets to students. It is achievable and provides those who join with a great many benefits, but it is overlooked by many.

Daniel Soucy, Coordinator of the Mount Wachusett Community College Chapter in the Massachusetts Commonwealth Honors Program, believes that many more students could graduate from the honors program each year. This year, Soucy claims, around 15-20 students will graduate from the honors program. However, he sees hundreds of students graduate each year whose GPA's indicate they could have certainly graduated the honors program, but sadly never joined.

Soucy explained that the biggest thing holding students back from joining this program is not a lack of information, but an overloaded schedule: "Our students are busy. They

through a minimum of one semester at Mount Wachusett Community College. The second is to receive a recommendation from two faculty members at Mount Wachusett Community

often ask me if the Honors ENG 102 is harder or more work, and the quick answer is no. The big difference is that our class discussions can go at a quicker pace and with the freedom to

receive a minimum grade of a B in the class.

The final requirement is that honors students take the Honors Research Seminar class. This class is taught right now by Daniel Soucy and Heather Conn, who work individually with students on developing a research presentation project. Once again students must achieve a minimum of a B for this class to count as an honors requirement.

Participating in the honors program is both a valuable opportunity and an exciting experience. Soucy explained that the most compelling reasons can be divided into the intrinsic and extrinsic values of the program.

The extrinsic values, while still at the Mount, include help with tuition and the use of a special study room for honors students. However, graduating

"Our students are busy. They have work, family...it is hard sometimes for students to realize that there are all these opportunities and take some of the steps necessary to join."

- Daniel Soucy, Coordinator, MWCC Honors Program

have work, family...it is hard sometimes for students to realize that there are all these opportunities and take some of the steps necessary to join." Yet despite the daunting sound of the name "honors program", the requirements and responsibilities are actually quite manageable for many students.

To join the program students must fill out an application and meet two requirements. The first is to achieve a cumulative college GPA of at least 3.3

College. After being accepted into the program, students must then maintain their GPA and meet four additional requirements over throughout their time at Mount Wachusett Community College. The first of these requirements is met by taking the Honors ENG 102 class, right now taught by Professor Jessica Kuskey, and achieving at least a B.

Kuskey believes this class is not only a great experience, but very manageable, "People

pursue your interests and chase your curiosity. We also replace a couple basic review tasks with some fun, creative assignments."

The next two requirements are met by adding honors components to two Mount Wachusett Community College classes that students are already enrolled in. To do this, students work one on one with their professor, with an added special project to the class. In order for this to count as an honors component, the student must

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"Honorable Mention" >>>**

SPORTS

Courts are in Session

Basketball Courts are Reopening With MA Phase IV

By Shaye McKeen
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

As Massachusetts residents enter their first days of Spring and the days get warmer and longer, the Massachusetts government has sweetened the season with the decision to reopen our previously locked and dismantled basketball courts. In the early stages of quarantine, the state government made a joint decision with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to pass this article of legislature.

Most major sports were considered by the state to be unnecessary risks for transmission of COVID at a time when both case numbers and deaths were on a drastic

rise, but now that both the state of Massachusetts as well as the country are displaying downward trends of COVID activity and infection, both basketball courts, soccer fields, and many other previously shut down parts of citizens' once normal daily lives are being reopened by both DCR and the school systems, according to the Phase 4 reopening statement from the MA state government.

Ethan Brunelle, a previous high school Varsity starter on the Tantasqua basketball team, as well as New England Recruiting Report featured player, Super 16 All Tournament Team MVP, and member of several elite and exclusive basketball camps for many years, discussed the effects



that COVID-19 shutdown of basketball courts has had on his playing and mental health.

On the effects that closure of basketball courts has had on

him, Brunelle said, "Thankfully I have a hoop at my house, so I still have access to a court. However, as someone who often goes to the park to play

basketball with his friends, it was certainly a difficult thing, especially in such an unknown

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"Courts Reopen" >>>**

How to Survive a Bug-Eat-Bug World

A Review of the Sleeper Hit Video Game *BugSnax*



BugSnax copyright Young Horses, Image from Epic Games

By **Cody Nathanson**
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Have you ever imagined what would happen if the Muppets

didn't end up taking Manhattan, and instead, crash landed on an abandoned island filled with mysterious creatures that are

part-bug and part-snack, all while maneuvering through the emotional drama of a Jerry Springer episode? Well, then not only would you have had an incredibly specific daydream, but you also would have also had a partial description of the game *BugSnax*.

BugSnax is a dangerously sweet and cutesy game about an island of tic-tac shaped puppet-esque characters called Grumpuses. When Grumpuses are not trying to make Snacktooth Island feel a little less abandoned, they are busy trying to catch and eat the islands even cuter googly-eyed food and bug-inspired inhabitants called, well, bugsnax. Just like the games titled food-inspired creatures, *BugSnax* has an interesting combination of gameplay, featuring light puzzle-like creature catching mechanics combined with a heavy emphasis on a character-driven story.

It's in that story-emphasized gameplay where the game blends into a unique flavor of experience not seen in many other games. *BugSnax*'s mix of colorfully colored grumpuses

and gameplay not only stands out as one of the best games of last year, but it also stands as a towering experience that you should definitely go out of your way to catch for yourself.

But why should you trap yourself in the eight or so hours it would take to chew through the game? Why should you take the time to play as your own trash-lid mouthed grampus? Even if you see food puns as a negative, you're still left with an incredibly well-written, well-characterized, and overall super enjoyable creature-catching game with a massive island to explore.

BugSnax is also one of the few games that feel like a complete package; its gameplay, story, and themes all culminate into the game's fantastic finale. Oh, and with the puns, *BugSnax* becomes an irresistibly fun and joyful experience that should be sowed into the minds of everyone you meet.

While in *BugSnax*, your grampus is initially tasked with investigating the mysteries surrounding Snacktooth Island, catching bugsnax, and getting an

interview with the island's boss, Lizbert MegaFig. The juiciest aspect of the game is how well thematically connected all these elements are. Whether you're catching a charging hamburger or a flying olive, nothing feels out of place or outside the game's own logic.

The game and its characters play off the goofy premise entirely straight. This direct approach to the idea of "what if food were bugs" oddly makes the game incredibly immersive, especially as you come to learn about the feelings and lives of the island's other grumpuses alongside your own scooby-doo-styled journey.

While playing as an emotional mediator to a bunch of walking sock puppets is a lot of fun, it's also supported by an equally fantastic and varied island to explore, packed with 100 unique bugsnax to catch. Although Snacktooth Island is, well, an island, there are many different zones to explore. From sandy deserts and beaches, to frost-

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Have a Crack at Anime

Suggestions on Where and What to Start Watching

By **Angel Marcano**
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Admit it. You've been staring at your T.V., scrolling down Netflix or Hulu, looking for something—anything—to watch. This past year has been brutal to you, so you deserve it.

Just a little escape from all the madness is all you want. The problem is: you've already watched the entire show offerings, so there is nothing left for you to enjoy.

You can re-watch *Riverdale* or *Bojack Horseman*, but who really wants to? Once is enough. So, you're thinking, *how will I survive this pandemic with nothing to watch?*

Fortunately, there's a remedy for this. It's called anime.

Wildly famous in its country of origin, Japan, this cartoony genre has seeped into the hearts of millions of viewers worldwide. Often adapted from manga (Japanese graphic novels and comic books), anime has become a phenomenal genre in animation. The stories are bountiful, and each are as equally riveting as they are whimsical. Each one fulfilling in their own right. Below are two of the most highly viewed and recommended anime for a novice and seasoned viewer alike.

Naruto: This anime, adapted from Masashi Kishimoto's manga of the same name, follows the life of Naruto, an orphaned boy who aspires to become his village's greatest ninja, the

hokage.

Naruto lacks natural talent and is considered by many a lowly nuisance; and yet, he never relents. Not even the malevolent fox spirit within him can deter him from his dreams.

"The way of the shinobi," as *Naruto* says, is one "who never goes back on his word." Unwavering and optimistic to a fault, *Naruto*'s journey goes from zero to one hundred over the course of its episodes.

Kishimoto's work is sure to make you giggle and will undoubtedly tug at your heart strings (if you have any to spare, that is).

The show can be streamed on Hulu and Netflix.

Black Clover: Yuki Tabata's

masterpiece, *Black Clover*, follows the journey of magicless Asta, as he becomes a magic knight for the Clover Kingdom. The anime is often lighthearted and hilarious, but its thematic undertones of discrimination, classism, racism and trauma is truly what makes this anime resonant.

Asta is a short, very exuberant fifteen-year-old boy who joins the Black Bulls, the magic knight squad notorious for its misfits, misbehavior and underperformance. As a child, Asta had a dreamt of a life as a magic knight, so when Yami, who is captain of the Black Bulls, single-handedly picked him out of a crowd (literally), Asta was blissful mess.

However, for a boy with no magic, Asta must now confront a world where magic is everything. Add the fact that his grimoire (book of spells) houses a devil, and it becomes clear that *Black Clover* has all the right elements for a night in.

The anime can be streamed on Hulu and crunchyroll.com.

These two anime shows are undoubtedly one of the most popular to date. All it takes is a single scroll and click, and you're off on a splendid journey with *Naruto* or *Asta*—or both.

Yet, these are just a couple of many great masterpieces. The ninja and the magicless magic knight are here to save you from your pandemic nightmares. So let them.

BugSnax Review

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nipped alpenes and the tippy top of frosted mountains, all these areas are accessible through the town's main hub of Snaxburg.

Snaxburg, the game's main hub area, is where you'll set off to either convince any lost Grumpuses to return home, or set out to catch the local flying Cheetos, or walking crab apples. This mashup of different biomes and seeing what types of bugsnax would live in them made the game incredibly fun to play as you were always wondering what's around the corner.

But, before you can turn that corner to catch the well-stitched

together masterpiece that is *BugSnax*, you have to know where to find it. *BugSnax* was released in mid-November of 2020 by the developer Young Horses, a studio known for its prior work on the incredibly popular game *Octo Dad*. *BugSnax* is available for both PlayStation and PC, and will set you back about \$30.

BugSnax's tagline of "you are what eat" is not just fitting for a game about eating sentient pickles, but it's also a message to everyone in the universe; if you care about meaningful and engaging experiences, you must consume *BugSnax*.

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Editor in Chief:
Nicholas Papini

Assistant Editors:
Alexander Ruelicke

Graphic Designer:
Thomas Hill Jr.

Contributors:
Daniel Dow
Shaye McKeen
Ellie Burton
Justin Tralongo
Maddison Willigar
Cody Nathanson
Angel Marcano

Adviser:
Susan Goldstein

Address:
Room 344, MWCC,
444 Green St.,
Gardner, MA 01440

Telephone/E-Mail
978.630.9260
mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu

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OPINION

Vaccinate or Not

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imaginable and even now once they're not sick anymore, they're still being affected by it." Oertel said he has not known anyone who has caught Covid.

Ames does debate getting the vaccine in the future though he does not know yet if he will. "Eventually, I most likely will, unless [Covid] were to go away, but it doesn't seem like it's going

to happen anytime soon," Ames said. "I haven't done too much research into [each different vaccine] yet since I won't be getting it anytime soon."

Oertel is hopeful that others will follow his lead and receive the vaccine when it is available to them. Oertel has convinced "anyone [he] could possibly talk into getting the vaccine" because he "want[s] to feel safe and comfortable again."

Honorable Mention

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allows students to transfer into the Commonwealth Chapter of any state school. Having this recognition on a transcript can also help when attempting to further educational goals or build careers.

The intrinsic value, he said, lays in the value of the education received by working one on one with professors. Soucy described

his own experience working individually with honors students: "It's really as education should be...professors can't really work with students the way they should in my opinion because we have so many students...the best education is really the one in which you can pay special attention to your student...and the honors program allows you to do that."

SPORTS

Courts Reopen

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and quite frightening time."

When asked about the effects of basketball as an outlet for mental health and expending energy, Brunelle responded, "I would most definitely consider basketball an outlet for me. Basketball is a great way for me to clear my mind as well as stay active. For me, it is a very therapeutic way to stay healthy and have fun."

For many in the community, outdoor sports are utilized as a valuable method of dealing with stress and expending energy and the reopening of courts will once again allow the courts and fields to serve their therapeutic purposes for those who seek to utilize them.

Many sports were initially deemed to be "high risk activities" for COVID-19 transmission, with a lot of contact between persons being included in games.

This led to the state mandating, with cooperation from DCR and some school systems, the locking of all DCR and some private courts as well as the removal of each court's hoop if deemed necessary according to Mass. gov's COVID-19 guidelines.

According to the CDC, the extremely simple and quick transmission of COVID-19 is achieved through respiratory droplets, which includes things like saliva and moisture produced from the body. The most common and voluminous production of these droplets occur from sneezes, coughs, or speech. Other methods of transmission include any scenario where people share saliva or mucus, for instance sharing a water bottle or food item. This collection of risks led Governor Baker, with advisement from the CDC, to shut down most recreational sports areas.