

# The Mount Observer

"Voices of the students of Mount Wachusett Community College"

2005

15 YEARS

2020

## PREVIEWS



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### Calm in the Face of the Storm

As we inch closer to the end of the fall semester, we get closer to the dreaded finals week. With the majority of students taking classes online, finals this year may be more stress inducing than years past.

For the full article, see page 8

## COVID Complications

### MWCC postpones its new LPN program one year

By Jordan Paskell

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

As the fall semester at MWCC comes to an end, and everyone gears up for spring semester 2021, the Mount continues to face changes due to Covid-19. Newly announced, the LPN (Licensed Practical Nursing) program, which was set to begin January 2021, has now been deferred until January 2022.

President James Vander Hooven said he had to make the difficult decision to postpone the program a year, in the best interest of the students.

"Since the middle of March, we have been confronted with having to make very difficult decisions about so many aspects of our operations at MWCC, from moving significant portions of our academic program to remote to closing down the Theatre at the Mount to all productions," Vander Hooven said.

When asked what factors led to the deferral of the LPN program, Vander Hooven said, "The decision to defer the LPN program was yet another example of an incredibly



Photo courtesy of MWCC

The LPN Program has been delayed to January 2022.

difficult decision because we know the impact that it has and will have on many students and organizations. But simply put, the decision was based on

the overwhelming number of clinical sites throughout our region that have closed their doors. **continued on page 3**  
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## Cases on Campus

### President Vander Hooven describes the measures taken in wake of recent COVID reports



Photo courtesy of MWCC

President James Vander Hooven

By Alexander Ruehlicke

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The Baker administration has released a series of new measures aimed at reducing the up-tick in new COVID-19 cases that have occurred over the last several weeks. With these new regulations, Mount Wachusett Community College has set

forward its own regulations in an effort to combat recent cases on campus.

James Vander Hooven is the president of Mount Wachusett Community College and has held this position through the duration of the pandemic. As recent COVID-19 cases have sprung up across the Gardner, Leominster, and the Devens campuses, President Vander Hooven has implemented a series of his own precautions to prevent the spread of further cases.

Last month, Vander Hooven sent out a memo to all students, faculty, and staff detailing his plans to reduce the spread of the virus on campus, announcing that all classes were to be held remotely until December 6.

Vander Hooven described the steps taken once cases on campus were discovered, saying, "through contact tracing we discovered that most of the contact with these individuals occurred outside of campus" and that "if it was on campus, we reached out to those affected and asked that they self-quarantine and undergo a COVID test."

"Ever since this began on March 12, safety has been my number one priority," Vander Hooven explained, emphasizing his devotion to his students and staff, "but the last two weeks have been very different." Referring to the Thanksgiving break, he said, "I'm hoping people aren't travelling, but it's human nature."

"I don't have a magic answer," Vander Hooven said when asked about his plans to mitigate spread of the virus. "But we've followed the guidance from the CDC and it all comes down to wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, and staying home when we're not feeling well".

Vander Hooven discussed the impacts of Baker's measures that relate to higher education, describing them as "focused towards residential colleges" and "geared more toward dorm inhabitants—we don't have the same guidelines."

"I have a lot of sympathy for those putting together efforts and protocols because so much is still unknown at this point," he added.

# Real Estate Woes

The pandemic could hit real estate in MA hard according to industry worker

By Seth Farley

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

While a global pandemic takes its toll on American livelihood, many industries have struggled to recover from the economic shutdown that began in March. While some have managed to bounce back, some have yet to see the worst from this pandemic. The housing market could be one of them.

When the pandemic first struck America back in March, millions of Americans received financial relief from the government in order to pay their rent and mortgage payments. For some Americans, the pandemic relief funds were not enough to cover the increasingly high cost of living.

Recently in San Francisco, tenant groups have begun striking against high rent prices in a response to the lack of

government aid they've received. One tenant group has reportedly held out on over \$150,000 in rent payments according to *millionacres.com*. Protections for San Francisco tenants expire in January of 2021, giving

**“My best advice for first time buyers would be to always have money saved away...The amount of money you can put down on an apartment or house matters a lot more than it used to.”**

– Niles Busler

landlords the ability to start evicting tenants if they withhold rent. San Francisco is currently the second most expensive city to live in the United States, with a median home value of \$1.3M.

With a very uncertain market, it's easy to draw similarities to central Massachusetts, and their housing market. Although it may not be nearly as expensive as

San Francisco, Massachusetts is still ranked in the top 10 most expensive states to live in and is having its own sorts of housing issues.

Niles Busler has been a real estate agent in Townsend for

over 30 years. Busler has done a lot of work in the central Massachusetts area as a broker-owner. Despite having little to no effect on the local market at first, Busler believes the pandemic will have many future implications on the housing market in the area.

“We were already heading towards a bit of crisis before

COVID,” Busler stated. The Central MA area has seen a shortage of new developments over the past few years, which in turn saw an uptick in sale prices.

“As for the affect from COVID, you'll start to see a lot

of people favor more rural areas around here,” Busler said. He added that the pandemic will likely cause homebuyers to look to less densely populated areas and large cities. Busler said he believes a lot of this has to do with the amount of people who are now working from home and will continue to in the future.

This trend Busler mentioned

has already been happening in places just outside San Francisco. Many buyers have resorted to cheaper housing options in more rural parts of the Bay area, rather than putting up with the incredibly high rent cost in the city.

For young adults trying to move out, the chances of affording rent or a mortgage seem bleak.

“My best advice for first time buyers would be to always have money saved away,” said Busler. “The amount of money you can put down on an apartment or house matters a lot more than it used to.”

Despite negative signs, Busler said he is optimistic that the demand for new housing will be met, making it more affordable for buyers in the Central Massachusetts area.



# Convenient or Problematic?

The 2020 election process may become standard

By Alexander Ruehlicke

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

As the 2020 election draws to a close after a hair-raising ballot counting conundrum, the American public now wonders whether this year has been a preview as to what the 'new normal' of voting will be like. Local experts think COVID will be one of the key factors in how future elections are run.

Mary de Alderete is the City Clerk in Fitchburg and her office handled the ballots. “The difference between early voting in 2016 and 2020 was the addition of an additional week of in-person early voting,” she said.

She furthermore said, regarding the tallies for mail-in ballots this year, “for a comparison of mailed ballots, 6,932 ballots were sent—versus 4,123 in 2016.” This represents a 40% increase from 2016.

When asked how this year's increase in absentee ballots affected her and her staff's work, Alderete replied, “The volume of requested ballots definitely impacted our day-to-day operations” and that “much of our time was devoted to either mailing out the ballots or checking them in once they were received”.

“The added health and safety

requirements for social distancing and PPE recommendations made things challenging,” Alderete said regarding the challenges faced. “I am fortunate to work with a staff that was able to perform exceptionally and while still meeting all challenges that mailing and receiving so many mail-in ballots presented.”

While each voting district must wait for state guidelines before planning future elections, Alderete commented on how elections might be affected. “The future of elections will be greatly impacted by how quickly the COVID-19 virus can be mitigated,” she said. “The safety

and health of our workers and voters alike will be a part of our decision-making process for all elections going forward.”

In regard to the differences in the voting process this year compared to previous years, Maureen Kenny, a resident of Fitchburg, said, “For the first time I did early voting, which is essentially mail in voting which was facilitated by the city.” She also stated, “it went very well. She followed it up by saying that she “will probably vote early in the future to avoid the lines.”

“The only change this year was the state mailing a postcard to everyone so they could request

a mail-in ballot,” Kenny said, referring to the differences in this year's election.

“Mail-in is probably more accurate because the ballot has to be mailed to you, which is proof of residence since the state of Massachusetts does not require an ID to vote,” Kenny said, giving her stance on the issue of voter fraud.

When asked whether this year's election is a sign of the new normal, Kenny said, “There is no normal in voting; it is always changing and evolving as our world changes. The hard part is making sure everyone has equal opportunities to vote.”

# A Helping Hand with Housing

## MA residents fearing eviction have numerous options for assistance

By Cheryl Locksley-Grant

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Are you, a relative, or friend at risk of becoming homeless?

Many Massachusetts residents are having trouble paying their rent or mortgage due to the loss of employment caused by COVID-19. If you are a MWCC student residing in Leominster, Fitchburg, Gardner, or other central Massachusetts towns and are facing these troubles, there are several programs to assist you during the pandemic.

One of the funding programs available is Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) which funds

a homeless prevention program. RAFT offers emergency housing, assistance with food deficiencies, and legal assistance for tenants and homeowners.

"It's really crazy how COVID-19 has made people see that we're more alike than different," said Joenette Catchings, a RAFT case representative. This agency is a joint effort between state, federal, and privately funded programs. All kinds of resources are coming together to help people in their time of need."

Despite RAFT being an emergency housing program, applicants have recently sought

information about Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets and assistance with toys for their children and gifts for relatives. People are also seeking information about food pantries.

"Believe it or not, a few times people have asked if we have furniture to furnish a home because they don't have any beds, tables, chairs, and most of them want a plasma television!" Catchings said. "Others need help getting diapers and baby formula. Elderly residents want help with home repairs and yard work."

The expected time to obtain emergency shelter can span

from one to several weeks. The primary requirement to moving into emergency housing is being tested for COVID-19 and receiving a negative result. Housing can then be obtained within one to several weeks.

"Even though I caution applicants to wait at least 5 business days before calling to check on their applications, most are impatient and sometimes call back the next day for a status update," Catchings said. "Others have been denied the chance to move-in because they failed to be tested for COVID-19."

The types of housing acquired correspond to the resident

seeking shelter. Family shelters accommodate mothers and children; single men reside in housing solely for males; and single women reside in residences solely for females.

"I really love my job because when so many callers are crying and overwhelmed that their lives are falling apart, I tell them things will really get better," Catchings said. "Then I confess that I was once unemployed, homeless, and lived out of my car with four kids. Eventually, things turned in my favor, all my kids graduated from high school, and now, I have a home and this great job!"

# COVID Complications

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doors to students pursuing their degrees due to the Covid-19 related issues they are facing."

In more detail, Vander Hooven shared why exactly deferring the program was the best option for Nursing students.

"Achieving a set number of clinical hours as dictated by accreditation standards is not something we can alter or amend in any way," Vander Hooven said. "Students must have

those clinical hours in order to successfully complete their degrees and enter the workforce.

Those clinical settings begin for the students during their first month of the program."

He added: "I would liken it to blatant false advertising if I were to bring a student class into the program without the guarantee that they would begin their clinical rotations. A very difficult decision but there was no other

way because of the clinical setting issues around Covid... Deferring the program until we can guarantee the clinical sites will benefit the students because they will be able to complete the program."

When asked about hopes for the future, Vander Hooven stated, "Frankly, my hopes for the future is that we continue to grow more optimistic about the potential vaccines in development and

that, by the summer of 2021, we might be back to a level of new normalcy."

When asked if the upcoming RN program could potentially face the same decision, Vander Hooven said, "Clearly, North Central Massachusetts is experiencing a significant increase in the number of Covid-19 positivity rates. We are always concerned that this might lead to further complications in

clinical settings. This is why, when I made the decision to have the college go remote for the week following Thanksgiving, I allowed for an exemption for medical-related programs. This way, those students can continue to meet their clinical rotation expectations as long as they are open. My growing fear is that those sites will temporarily close their doors as well."

# COVID's Sink-or-Swim Economy

## Local businesses are branching out online this holiday season

By Suzanne Eglinton

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Many stores have turned to social media for the holiday shopping season in light of the pandemic. With the new COVID rules adjusting daily, the fight for customer bucks is competitive. With the threat of new outbreaks still front and center, how are people going to shop this season?

Chris Wasif, a local loan risk manager, has been working from home since March of 2020. Wasif said that she has done all of her recent shopping online.

Wasif said, "this year will end up saving me money because those in store impulses won't be there."

Consumers have Amazon for online shopping, alongside the vast majority of major retailers, but many smaller local stores are struggling to stay afloat even during their busiest season.

Jeanne Gauthier, owner of The Owl's Nest Upholstery and Antiques in Bennington, Vermont, has faced these struggles with her own store. "I own an antique store and I rely

on foot traffic. It's those people browsing that sell my products."

Gauthier has come up with creative ways on social media to drum up business, mostly by decorating a furnished room to display what her items will look like if they were in a home.

"It's been challenging to display some things, but I actually had someone rent an entire room display for home staging and that has gotten me into a new direction I never even thought about," said Gauthier.



Image from owlsnestshop.com

The Owl's Nest Upholstery and Antiques in Bennington, VT.

# Troubled Waters Ahead

## One MWCC official has concerns with the futures of international students



By Alexander Ruehlicke  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

International students across the world have had a lot to worry about since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March of this year. Since then, there have been many challenges and doubts regarding the future of their studies. Those students have many questions as to their ability to earn their degree—questions which are ultimately brought to the Designated School Official.

Eric Johnson is one such Designated School Official, or DSO, authorized to work

with the Student Exchange and Visitor Information System (SEVIS), at Mount Wachusett Community College. He and the college's Primary Designated Official, or PDSO, manage all the international student applications, and the federal documentation requirements needed for SEVIS to acquire an F-1 student visa in order to attend MWCC as an international student.

Having experienced firsthand the impacts the pandemic has had on the international student application process, Mr.

Johnson explained the change in atmosphere, saying, "the admission process is completely different". He described the lack of face-to-face meetings, the increase in electronic documents as opposed to physical copies, and the noticeable difference in having to discuss the application process with students via phone call or email.

These unprecedented changes in his department came to a head in the summer, when the Department of Homeland Security announced that they had plans to rescind a previously made exception that allowed international students to attend online classes full-time while maintaining their F-1 visa status. This meant that any international student who could not attend at least four in-person classes in the fall semester would have their visa status revoked and would be required to leave the country.

Eventually, after push back from the public and colleges alike, the DHS decided not to rescind the exception, and international students were able to pursue their degrees through

online classes while maintaining their visa status.

While this was undoubtedly a bullet dodged, future international students will have to brace themselves for the impact COVID will have on immigration, regardless of what country they may be coming from or going to.

"I think we will be feeling the effects of COVID for a very long time," Mr. Johnson said in regard to the long-term effects of the pandemic. "We may have a vaccine here in the US in a couple months, but if a different country has another outbreak and fails to manage it properly then we are unable to assist them".

Mr. Johnson handles the Department of Homeland Security immigration forms like the I-20, authorizes international students to travel while studying, and assists students, faculty and staff to help F1 students maintain appropriate compliance during their time at MWCC.

Mr. Johnson, who began his career at the college six years ago, was initially given the task of data entry regarding

international students. Some time later, having gained knowledge and experience with the SEVIS program, he was certified as a DSO and has held this position for four years now.

The most rewarding part of his job, Mr. Johnson said, is the fact that the international students he encounters are "incredibly diverse" and that "everyone has their own story and everyone's coming from such different places". He went on to describe the college as being the "crossroads of the community at large".

"I'm happy to do it," Mr. Johnson said, explaining that this is his first higher education position.

Despite all these difficult changes, Mr. Johnson continues to assist the students of the "crossroad of the community". Describing the students at MWCC as "genuine", "honest" and "incredibly diverse", Mr. Johnson makes clear his passion for his job and his desire to continue helping people every day.

## PROFILE

# The Virus on the Bus (Doesn't) Go 'Round

## School bus drivers have gained prominent role as a first defense



By Cheryl Locksley-Grant  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Building feelings of safety, monitoring students, and making sure no bullying or unsafe behavior happens on a school bus

— students and parents recognize the vital role school bus drivers play in the students' wellness.

Since students have returned back to school in Fall 2020, have these school bus drivers also become the key workforce to identify the youngest sufferers of COVID-19? The school districts of Leominster, Fitchburg, and Gardner have implemented state guidelines to lessen the spread of the virus.

"I wear a face mask and shield for additional protection because every driver must have their nose

and mouth covered at all times," said Michael Stanford, a school bus driver for First Student, Inc.

Bus drivers are burdened with the decision of whether to let a symptomatic child board the school bus or deny him or her a ride. "Luckily for me, the couple of times kids seemed sick, I mentioned this to their Mom, and she took them home," Stanford said.

Within Massachusetts guidelines is a section entitled, "Symptom Screening." It states that family members are

required to screen their children prior to attending school. "But sometimes, I'm the one who says something about sniffles, sneezing, and coughing," says Stanford.

To lessen the dilemma of bus drivers denying students a ride, the guidelines state if a parent or guardian is unable to take the sick child home, the student can board the bus but must be isolated from the other students. Afterwards, the bench where that student sat, and the surrounding areas, must be thoroughly sanitized.

State regulations also require school bus windows be kept open to maintain air circulation unless extreme weather conditions occur. Days have gotten colder and students in central Massachusetts have had several chilly bus rides in the last couple of weeks. "I was really worried about my granddaughter, Kayla, because it was cold and rainy and I knew there wasn't a dry seat on the bus," said Mimi Braxton of Fitchburg.

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## PROFILE

# Profile: Cheryl Locksley-Grant

## A student who adores music and has a love of writing



Photo courtesy of Cheryl Locksley-Grant

By Megan O'Dell

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Cheryl Locksley-Grant is a student enrolled at Mount Wachusett Community College and who takes additional classes at Fitchburg State University, all with a goal of attending law

school someday.

At MWCC, Locksley-Grant has two majors, Audio Engineering and Professional Writing. “I picked these two majors because Music and English were two of the courses I excelled in while in the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades,” she said.

Audio Engineering was her first major and she was inspired to take it because of her passion for music. Locksley-Grant also had a history with writing. “In the past, I was a copywriter for two radio shows on National Public Radio (WUMB Radio) at the University of Massachusetts,

Boston,” she said. “I also wrote artist profiles for my weekly broadcast, ‘Night Moods.’ Both of these jobs represented my passion for writing.”

“During the late 80’s through 90’s, when I hosted weekly radio shows, I actually operated the audio (sound) boards for my own programs and took some audio production courses while attending the Boston Conservatory,” Locksley-Grant said. “By majoring in audio engineering at MWCC, I had hoped to learn similar audio skills in depth.”

When it comes to her major in

Professional Writing, Locksley-Grant does have a passion for writing but said, “having completed ninety percent of my degree requirements (for audio engineering), my declaration of a ‘second major’ was the only way to continue classes at MWCC.”

Although she may have chosen Professional Writing to continue classes at the Mount, her passion for writing is still very much there. She has noticed, however, how much more time she has to spend on her English/writing work than on her other work.

“This curriculum necessitates that I read substantial writings

and write weekly papers, essays, news articles, short stories, and various kinds of poetry,” Locksley-Grant said. “Sunday through Thursday, I’m pulling at least a 1 to 2 all-nighters in order to meet my assignment deadlines.”

“Eventually, becoming an attorney was always a goal of mine. Besides, most of my favorite jobs have been in settings with attorneys,” Locksley-Grant said. By getting her Bachelor of Science degree, she has plans to attend law school when she graduates.

## A Lethal Pastime

### A local man describes his tribulations in the art of snake catching

By Megan Bergeron

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Anders Sarenpa catches snakes in his spare time. It has given him knowledge on wildlife, an unusual hobby and most significantly a very frightening experience.

The 20-year-old Lunenburg resident has lived in 6 different states. His unusual hobby started when he was just 5 years old and living in Bismarck, North Dakota. Fifteen years later, he still finds joy in learning new things about the wildlife around his area.

Snake hunting is not a very popular hobby to many, and many people don’t know where

to begin when looking for them.

When living in North Dakota, he began his snake catching hobby with garter snakes in the hilly, grassy area of his backyard, where he always releases them, unharmed.

When Sarenpa moved to Missouri in 2006, he began to catch more than just snakes. He became obsessed with learning as much as he could at his local library. Lizards, turtles, frogs and salamanders all became things to look out for in his large backyard as well as snakes.

His odd hobby became risky on June 24, 2007 when he was

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Photo by Andy Reago & Chrissy McClarren, from Wikimedia Commons

Sarenpa was bitten by a copperhead snake while searching for wildlife in 2007.

## School Bus Drivers

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Adapted in July 2020, “The School Bus Guidelines of the Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education [DESE]” were established for the transition from remote learning during

the shutdown back to in-class education. The DESE mandates Massachusetts school bus drivers adhere to several new guidelines.

A face mask must be worn by all drivers, students, teachers, or parents on the bus, regardless of age. If a passenger does not

have a mask, the driver can provide one. They do will allow exemptions for students with specific medical and/or behavioral accommodations.

Only one student may sit on each bench and they should alternate sides in each row as

needed. Exemptions are made for siblings or children from the same household to sit together in closer proximity. Seating is also assigned for each regular student passenger.

Windows should be left open at all times for additional

ventilation, with exemptions made for when the temperatures are extremely cold.

Finally, much like everywhere else, all seating and common surfaces students touch must be wiped down and disinfected between each trip.

# Profile: Dakota Ribeiro

## A nursing student with high aspirations shares his experience

By Jordan Paskell

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

MWCC student Dakota Ribeiro, age 25, a practicing LPN, describes himself as a compassionate direct care worker.

Working for Thrive, a group home for adults with special needs, Ribeiro started as a direct care worker in 2013 and is now a supervising house nurse.

Ribeiro said that his compassion, reliability, and consistency has provided his residents with care the company can depend on.

He believes in top quality care for children, adults, and elderly alike. "I have very high morals," Ribeiro said. "I treat my residents how I would want my family treated,"

Reflecting on his part-time second job while practicing as an LPN in a pediatric unit, he shares some insight into the moral challenges faced in the

**"People need advocates, people need someone who will speak up, someone who will come to work every day and give their honest best."**

– Dakota Ribeiro

healthcare field. For example, other LPNs performed careless mistakes, such as missing medication doses, and after informing the managing Nurse who tried to cover it up and not take action, Ribeiro had a choice to make.

"Not only did I have to report them, but I also had to quit,"

Ribeiro said. "Knowing that I couldn't look the families in the eyes and say we are providing your children with the best care possible, and be telling the truth,

isn't something I could ever be okay with."

Although it was a negative experience, Ribeiro knew this is why he was needed in the healthcare field.

"People need advocates, people need someone who will speak up, someone who will come to work every day and give their honest

best," Ribeiro said. "This isn't just a job or a paycheck for me. I really feel a sense of purpose in the healthcare setting. I do my paperwork properly, I check things twice, I listen, everything matters, simple mistakes are made when healthcare workers don't pay attention or are overly confident."

After leaving the Pediatric unit, Ribeiro spoke with his director at Thrive and she offered him a promotion from a direct care worker to a house nurse. Given he has been there so long and has established great rapport with his residents and management, he said that she was happy to move him up. It was also a great way for him to gain experience and meet the RN bridge program

criteria requirements of being a practicing LPN for 1.5 years before entry.

Ribeiro has been accepted into the Lawrence Memorial/ Regis College Nursing Program and plans to start the RN program next Fall.

"I'm excited," Ribeiro said. "I'm looking forward to learning everything I need to know to be a better nurse and give my all when I am hired as an RN."

Ribeiro added, "I feel very limited in what I can say or do as an LPN, given my credentials, but I know I am smart enough and I have my head and heart in the right place to be a supervising RN someday."

# Remote Fun for a Good Cause

## Winterfest 2020 and their efforts to fundraise with distancing

By Dylan Quigley

ASSISTANT EDITOR

The Emergency Student Loan Fund at MWCC is issued by the college when a student is in a financial emergency and they need support with things like food, health care, housing needs,

etc. MWCC holds a yearly fundraiser called Winterfest for the Emergency Student Loan Fund. It is usually a multi-day event held on the Gardner Campus with raffles, prizes, activities and bake sales. Thanks to COVID-19 restrictions Winterfest 2020 has

to be virtual.

Therefore, instead of a few days event on campus the Student Life Office, the SGA, STEM Club, and Alpha Beta Gamma have planned fundraisers that will span from December 1<sup>st</sup>- 16<sup>th</sup>. This includes

the Trivia Night on December 1<sup>st</sup> being held on Kahoot, thanks to the STEM Club and Alpha Beta Gamma.

Aidan Lane and the others in the SGA have set up two Papa Gino's fundraisers for the Emergency Student Loan Fund. If you go to the Leominster Papa Gino's Dec. 7<sup>th</sup> from 4:00pm-9:00pm, and the Gardner Papa Gino's on Dec. 8<sup>th</sup> from 4:00pm-9:00pm and mention MWCC SGA with your purchase a portion of the purchase will go to the Emergency Student Loan Fund. If you are ordering online just type MWCC SGA on instructions at checkout.

On December 16<sup>th</sup> is the Winterfest fundraiser that will be held on Zoom. The Student Life Office describes it as a virtual holiday party with singing, chanting, networking, and winning prizes. To just attended the party is free just RSVP on InvolveMount and join the online event via Zoom, but to get tickets for the door prize entry one does have to pay. One door prize entry is \$10 but there are also bundle packages you can purchase one for \$25, \$50, \$75,

and \$100 and gets you 3, 7, 12, 18 door prize entries.

Prizes for the raffle will include a \$100 Visa gift card, \$100 Amazon Gift card, \$100 worth of scratch tickets, an autographed Bruins sweatshirt, and more. All proceeds will go to the Emergency Student Loan Fund, there will be multiple times they draw for the door prizes throughout the event and one does not need to be present to win.

Winterfest will be hosted by Jason Levasseur, the creator of the Rock Star Project. The Rock Star Project is Levasseur's way of helping a group of people work together and develop better communication and leadership as a group.

Levasseur offers customized retreats with team building workshops and evening activities. During COVID-19 restrictions he holds virtual events and workshops for team building activities and he hosts workshops series for schools all over the country. Levasseur is a very charismatic and powerful speaker and will do Winterfest 2020 justice on December 16<sup>th</sup>.

# Lethal Pastime

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bit by a copperhead snake. Sarenpa was out looking for turtles when he stumbled across a copperhead. Knowing they were venomous, he strategically picked it up by the back of its neck. Unfortunately, the snake quickly twisted its head and bit Sarenpa's middle finger on his left hand.

With venom trapped in his tendon and luckily not his bloodstream, he was rushed to a local emergency room on a military base and given antivenom. He ended up requiring surgery and he was airlifted to a hospital in Missouri and rushed into surgery.

Sarenpa woke up from his

emergency procedure without painkillers and in extreme levels of pain. With lots of swelling, and a long road of physical therapy ahead, Sarenpa still continues to enjoy his hobby, even with the consequences.

"It was scary at the time but it was an unforgettable experience so I wouldn't change things even if I could. I like my zig-zag scar," Sarenpa said.

Since living in Massachusetts, Sarenpa has found the most variety of snakes compared to every other state he has lived in. Black rat snakes, copperhead snakes, red belly snakes, garter snakes, milk snakes, ring-necked snakes, a hognose snake, ribbon snakes, and northern water

snakes are the current snakes he has found here.

Sarenpa said he looks a few times each month or, when the weather is nice, he will go even more. He looks under rocks or in wood piles. Occasionally he has seen them laying out on rock piles sunning.

"It's exciting to catch snakes, both the search and the act itself of physically holding them," Sarenpa said. "They are interesting creatures."

Sarenpa continues to enjoy his unusual hobby and hopes to spread knowledge of these creatures to others while making sure everyone remains safe.

# Kids Are Not for Me

## One Student's Opinion on Birth Control Options

By Stephanie Pope

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

From birth control to abortions, more and more women are choosing ways to avoid getting pregnant or having babies. I am one of those women.

My name is Stephanie Pope, and I am 33 years young. I live a kid-free life and I like it that way. I knew I did not want children early on but never really considered my options, especially having gotten into a long-term same-sex relationship.

As time progressed and my relationship floundered, I got back into the dating scene. I realized, as I naturally gravitated towards men, that I would need to seek out some form of birth control before even thinking about getting physically involved with someone.

I contacted my primary care doctor, (PCP), and spoke to her about options. There were plenty, and she even included, believe it or not, the pull-out method, (which is roughly 75-80% effective, if I remember

correctly). As I read through and researched all my options to try and find the best fit for me, it occurred to me that nearly all but one option made for women caused weight gain because of the hormones associated with the selected options, including the

**“I realized...that I would need to seek out some form of birth control before even thinking about getting physically involved with someone.”**

– Stephanie Pope

pill, an injection, or a traditional IUD.

Unfortunately for me, this posed a problem as I am also borderline anorexic and the idea of gaining weight terrifies me. So, with the help of my doctor, I discovered that the copper IUD was a non-hormonal option that would allow me to avoid gaining weight and not have to also worry about the potential accidents that may cause a female to become pregnant, such as a condom slipping off during intercourse.

Getting the IUD was incredibly uncomfortable and excruciatingly painful, but worth it for someone who is not against kids, but against having children of my own. However, it wasn't enough. Even with an IUD, the risk of getting pregnant is 1%.

One percent may not seem like a big deal. A 99% success rate for a birth control option is pretty good, right? But what they must tell you is that if you are that rare 1% who does happen to get pregnant, there is a chance, albeit not a large one, but a chance nonetheless, that a woman could have an ectopic pregnancy.

An ectopic pregnancy is a pregnancy where the sperm and the egg typically meet in the fallopian tube vs the uterus because the IUD is creating a

lack of habitation. This means that the baby grows outside of the uterus which may look like a woman who is growing a twin from her abdomen. That. Is. Terrifying. So, I investigated one other option: tubal ligation.

Tubal ligation is the most permanent form of birth control out there. It has a 100% success rate of not getting pregnant. There are two options in which a female can undergo this procedure, the old way and the new way.

The old way of tubal ligation is an option that can be reversed. They make very small, incisions in which they are able to surgically go in and snip the fallopian tubes so that the sperm cannot connect with the egg. This option *is* reversable and has a 30-80% success rate. So, this is if a woman changes her mind some time down the line and wants to reverse the procedure.

As someone who is turning thirty-four a week from writing this article, I know with every molecule in my body that I do

not want children invading my inner space, so the old way is not something I am aiming for. Although the new way is similar, it is an even more permanent outcome with no means of reversal.

Still referred to as tubal ligation, the surgeon makes the same small cuts needed to enter with surgical tools, but instead of just snipping the tubes, the doctor will remove both fallopian tubes from the body entirely. This means that there is no possible way for sperm to reach the egg *at all*. With this procedure, I will happily not worry about becoming pregnant whatsoever.

It should be noted, however, that this procedure does not protect against STIs. Using condoms is still advised even if one or both parties involved have gone through a surgical procedure to eradicate the creation of children, and safe sex should always be practiced.

# This was *Jeopardy!*

## Alex Trebek's impact on one MWCC student



Photo from Peabody Awards

Alex Trebek in 2012

By Nicholas Papini

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Alex Trebek has been a personal hero of mine for as long as I can remember, and with his passing on November 8 the

world has become less bright.

Trebek and *Jeopardy* have long been a staple of my nightly ritual, to the point where it feels like I've seen him more often than my family.

I have fond memories of my mother and I competing to see who could get the most answers correct. Not that I ever won. She was insanely skilled at the wordplay categories and swept them up consistently.

Just recently, I can vividly remember the shock that I was overcome by as I witnessed the legendary run of James Holzhauer, as he broke record after record, week after week. But more than his unbelievable skills at the game, I felt touched

by the camaraderie that formed between Holzhauer and Trebek seemingly before my eyes. I don't think I missed a single episode of his run.

Alex Trebek had a charm that I've always aspired to. It's not a traditionally masculine attitude, but he never came across as conceited or arrogant. He was a role model that I worked hard to emulate, in attitude and in style.

Trebek released a memoir in July titled *The Answer Is...: Reflections on My Life* and reading it has put many things in my life into perspective. My mother died from ovarian cancer in 2017, and I've always had trouble handling the fact that, in those last few months, it

seemed as if she had given up on everything.

In his memoir, Trebek had something to say that completely changed my view on the situation, though. "I don't like to use the terms 'battling' or 'fighting' when talking about cancer. It suggests that there are only two outcomes: 'winning' and 'losing.' That's nonsense. I understand why we human beings choose to see cancer in these terms. It's easier to comprehend and less scary if we see the experience as a boxing match and the disease as an opponent who might be subdued by sheer force of will and determination."

I believe that, no matter who

a person is, they have to admire Trebek's attitude towards the end. Maybe to a fault he took his declining health with a level of grace that defies common sense. *Jeopardy* producers have said that he filmed his last episode just 2 weeks before his passing and, seeing the episodes that have aired in the wake of his death, I can believe it. It's at once depressing and inspiring to view his health decline with each consecutive episode.

In the end, no matter who replaces Alex Trebek in his position as host of *Jeopardy*, they will have some monstrously large shoes to fill. There likely won't ever be another game show host as beloved as him.

# Calm in the Face of the Storm

## MWCC is running programs this month that may help relieve stress for finals

By **Seth Farley**  
Observer Contributor

As we inch closer to the end of the fall semester, we get closer to the dreaded finals week. With the majority of students taking classes online, finals this year may be more stress inducing than years past. This month, there will be several virtual events offered by Mount Wachusett to help students relieve stress, relax, and focus as finals approach. These events are free and open to all MWCC students.

One event is a gentle yoga class with Mount Fitness instructor

Lorie Pucko, who has been in the fitness industry for over 20 years. Pucko is offering a beginner level course for students who are looking to get an exercise in, while also relieving some stress.

“The goal is to help students learn to breathe,” Pucko stated. “If they learn to be in the presence of themselves, and not worry about the future, then I think they will benefit mentally from this class.” Pucko advised all who sign up for this class to have a yoga mat and to wear comfortable clothes. The class will be held on December 9

from 2-3 p.m. It will be the first yoga class the college has done virtually.

Another event taking place on zoom is a stress relief course with Melissa Manzi, the mental health counselor at MWCC. The class will be held on December 15 from 2-3 p.m. The course is geared towards informing students about certain disorders, such as depression and anxiety, as well as giving tips to help students battle stress. Manzi recommends the class to any student looking to de-stress. “

You do not have to be in a

crisis to sign up,” Manzi stated. “This is not going to challenge students. This is for anyone looking for tips to manage their stress and keep a positive mindset.”

Manzi believes that online learning has had an impact on student’s stress levels. “There are students who learn well online, and there’s those who don’t,” Manzi stated. “Some students don’t succeed as much with online classes and a lot of that comes from the lack of communication with professors.”

Manzi also encouraged

students to check out her Mental Health Minute series on the MWCC YouTube channel. Each week she posts a 2-minute clip giving students information about certain mental disorders and tips to better mental health.

Manzi said that she also hopes students look into the Mental Well-Being course that is optional for students. The course is broken into two parts, and anyone who completes both will be entered into a raffle to win a \$100 Amazon gift card.

### 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](mailto:m_manzi@mwcc.mass.edu) or check out her Mental Health Minute videos at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwifl9nIWUs&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwifl9nIWUs&feature=emb_logo)

## SPORTS

# A Not so Ice Surprise

## Mandated ice rinks closings in MA may ruin opportunities



By **Kyle Eaves**  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Ice hockey rinks across Massachusetts have been mandated to shut down for at least two weeks as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. Many adults will lose a great form of exercise and fun due to this, but this could also affect

student athletes in a major way. Aaron Corcoran, a local player from Ashburnham and father to a hockey player, gives his thoughts and views on the recent shutdown.

Corcoran, who himself has played hockey for over 20 years and has a child still playing hockey, fears that this shut down

so early in the hockey season leaves the rest of the season unclear.

Corcoran stated that “Overall hockey is a great way to get out, have fun, while staying in shape, but with the rinks shut down the future of our league looks bleak. I’m not concerned about the outcome of my league, as much as I’m concerned about my son’s league. I am all about the safety of the kids and their health conditions, but this being one of my son’s last year’s playing, this season is the perfect showcase to scouts and opportunities for him going forward.”

Corcoran emphasized finding a solution to the problem because it can alter the future path his son takes. Will he look to continue his education? Will he want to go right into the workforce? Or does he want to continue

playing the game he loves and try to make something out of that? He said that he knows his son only wants to keep playing the game he loves, but he’s not ready to face the conversation if his opportunities are taken away.

Corcoran believes that if the rinks were better staffed and equipped to clean and sanitize all of the locker room, showers, and benches, then possibly the COVID-19 outbreaks would be contained and not pose as much of a serious threat, but he doesn’t think it can be achieved. He stated, “There’s usually one Zamboni driver and someone at the front and that’s it; they don’t have the time or resources to clean every surface.”

Overall, the future of the ice rinks opening and the possibility of seasons starting, and finishing are very slim. Just in the first

couple of weeks being open, across the state COVID-19 cases have gone up considerably.

According to CBS Boston and The Department of Public Health, there are 108 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in over 60 states and cities across the state that have been directly traced back to hockey practices and tournaments. The number of cases represent the time before the majority of events and games were even held during the normal season, and they are already quickly on the rise.

Furthermore, CBS Boston also stated that one town in Massachusetts, Dedham, a week before the closing of the rinks experienced 25 positive confirmed cases in children and teens alone.



## REVIEW

THE MOUNT OBSERVER  
VOLUME 15, ISSUE 4  
December 2, 2020

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# Review: *Among Us*

The newest internet sensation is an excellent party game

By **Kris Madden**

ASSISTANT EDITOR

If you've been on the internet in the past few months, you might have heard of a game called *Among Us*. If you're looking for a fun game to play over the holidays, before bed, on the bus or just about anywhere else you've got nine friends or an internet connection, *Among Us* is the game for you.

*Among Us* takes whodunit mysteries to a whole new level. A multiplayer game for four to ten people, it's a delightfully adorable game of suspicion and murder in deep space. Of the ten people on board my ship, I was the only one that I could be sure was not the imposter. Despite its fun, quirky art style I found myself reminded of John Carpenter's 1982 film, *The Thing*. Any one of your crewmates could secretly be an inhuman monster, waiting to strike when you least expect it. It could be any one of you. It could even be you.

I initially spent several rounds

of the game trying to stay with at least one other player so that we could confirm that we were 'safe', but inevitably that plan was not always a reliable one. Several times I found myself trusting the wrong crewmember, only to be literally stabbed in the back or disemboweled.

The few times that I had the opportunity to play as the imposter myself, I found myself taking advantage of similar tactics, using seemingly innocuous behavior to lure in potential prey. The fear and anxiety that are experienced as a crewmember are a stark contrast to the predatory feeling of being an imposter and slowly picking off the crew.

While playing as the imposter is the most fun part of the game, there's a lot to be said about the paranoia and distrust that a short round as a crewmember will instill in players. The game isn't complete without both, as it's like playing two different games to fulfill the distinct roles.



*Among Us* copyright Innersloth Games

It's a game that uses minimal graphics for maximum output. The players all look like jellybeans with feet and a visor for a face. It's endearing to look at the simplistic, cute avatars, identical in every way except color and the player's choice of hat and sidekick. This soft aesthetic was juxtaposed by the animation of the imposter revealing its hidden form to execute an unsuspecting

crewmember, making it much more terrifying and unsettling to fall victim to the lurking monster.

The easy to learn controls made playing this game for the first time a breeze. I played the Mobile version, finding the touch controls intuitive and the level easy to navigate. If I ever found myself turned around, there was a very helpful map

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"Among Us" >>>

# Review: *Girl, Wash Your Face*

A refreshingly honest novel about female empowerment

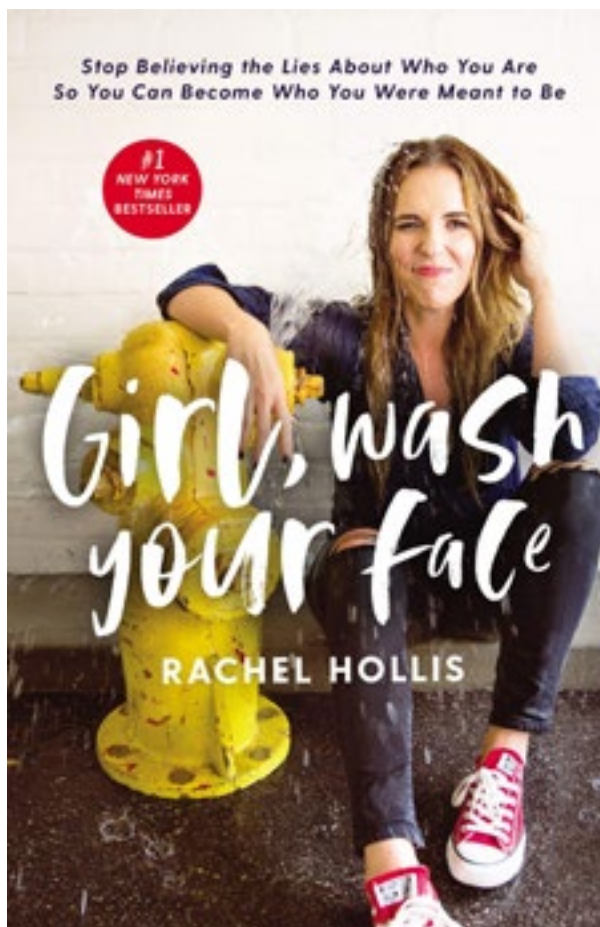


Image from Amazon.com

By **Yamari David**  
Observer Contributor

The autobiography, *Girl, Wash Your Face*, is a transparent self-care book that dives into the real and whole truths. It gets readers thinking about their own lives and some of the things they once thought were true.

Written by Rachel Hollis, the book is a #1 *New York Times* bestseller. Hollis is the founder of the website that was formerly known as *The Chic Site* but has now been changed to the name of *Rachel Hollis*. Apart from being an author, she is also a motivational speaker and a blogger. Hollis gives lifestyle tips on family and fashion to self-care tips, and more. The autobiography entails common lies women tend to think of

themselves along with real truths.

The transparency in the book is phenomenal because of how open Hollis is with her readers. Topics like sexual relations and body image are talked about in a way that makes readers feel less alone, such as "Then I'd try and do sexy things or act in a sexy way, but I rarely enjoyed it as much as he did. Did I pretend to enjoy it? Heck yes! That's what you're supposed to do right?"

Hollis discusses her sex life with her husband and how it flopped after having her two kids. A common myth for women to think is normal when it comes to activities in the bedroom is faking pleasure, but she is here

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"Girl, Wash Your Face" >>>

# Among Us

>>> continued from page 9

button that would show me the way. Beware though, as looking at the map will take your eyes off of the game screen and you may find yourself victim to the imposter.

The tasks required to maintain the ship are very simple and serve to distract you from constantly looking over your shoulder. More than once I became lunch for the imposter while splicing wires or trying for the third time to swipe a stubborn keycard. Once dead, you can navigate the map and even continue in your tasks to help your crewmates that have not been yeeted off their mortal coil (i.e. brutally murdered). Dead crew members can also chat freely with one another, discussing who the imposter is without alerting the survivors to

the secret identity.

Developed in 2018 by the three-person team in Redmond, WA known as InnerSloth, *Among Us* didn't achieve popularity until 2020, due in part to COVID-19 and a need to socialize while remaining socially distant. While not new, the game has surged in more recent popularity due to *Twitch* and *YouTube* streamers bringing it to a wider audience.

A \$4.99 price tag on *Steam* and a Free-to-Play option on Mobile gives even the thriftiest gamers a chance to experience the tension and fun, and even allows Mobile and PC players to play together with cross-play. Home console systems, such as the Xbox and PlayStation, will welcome *Among Us* to their libraries as well at a later date.

# Girl, Wash Your Face

>>> continued from page 9

to say otherwise. Hollis states that women shouldn't have to put their partners' needs before yours—it goes both ways. This kind of topic is not something women openly talk about, so Hollis' ability to share her own experiences as well as dish out the truths behind it is refreshing.

In chapter seventeen of Hollis' book, she talks about the subject women most commonly think about, "I am defined by my weight." Hollis can be real with her readers and doesn't just feed them with whatever they want to hear.

"This isn't the book where I tell you that the answer to your struggle with weight loss is to love and accept yourself as you are," Hollis writes. "This is the book where I tell you that if you truly want to practice self-love, you'll start with your physical body and do the work to figure out why this is an issue in the

first place."

Many writers talk about self-care like a happy ending to a story. Just "love yourself" or "you are beautiful just the way you are" are common phrases preached when speaking about this topic. These statements hold truth, but this is not the whole truth. Hollis shares the real truth by telling her readers that they need to start taking a look back on the problem to fix it, rather than staying comfortable in the mess at hand. Women need to know this so that people can learn from their choices. Loving yourself throughout the process is good but accepting it and staying put is not. Many writers miss this point and it shouldn't be left out.

There are potential points where a loss of interest can be found within the book, due to certain topics that do not apply to everyone. In Hollis' book,

twenty topics are discussed. Three of these topics only apply to a specific group, which are moms. These topics can be useful if the reader is a mother, but what do women who are not moms do with this information? These chapters create a lack of interest as there is no way for readers who aren't mothers to connect with these truths as they do not know the lies in the first place.

This autobiography connects to women who are constantly exposed to lies. In these terms, this is essentially almost every single woman. There is a reason why this book is a #1 bestseller. Luckily Hollis does a good job at debunking these lies as she is fearless with her words and can provide a safe space for her readers. Walking through an airport looking for a good read never felt so rewarding in the end.



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