

# The Mount Observer

“Voices of the students of Mount Wachusett Community College”

## PREVIEWS



### MWCC Farmer's Market Planned for Thanksgiving

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, Mount Wachusett Community College will be hosting a Fall Farmers Market to provide affordable fresh produce to the local community just in time for the impending holiday.

For the full article, see pages 5-6

### International Show 'N' Tell

Students of the Dual Language Business Administration Certificate program celebrated National Hispanic Heritage Month with a Homeland Show and Tell event at the Leominster Campus in October.

For the full article, see page 4

### Art on Campus

Photographs from the Ceramics class's outdoor firing on the Gardner Campus.

For the full spread, see pages 8-9



## Climate Crisis: A Call to Action

### MWCC Professors Make a Call to Action to Fight Climate Change

By Daniel Dow  
ASSISTANT EDITOR

The United Nations has stated that “Climate change is the defining crisis of our time,” Professors Heather Conn and George LoCascio of the Science department echoed this thinking as they discussed the Climate crisis and the need for students and faculty to act.

Conn and LoCascio spoke with passion, and at times contempt as they described the need for individuals to make small changes in their lives, so that a collaborative effort can be made to save the planet and its inhabitants.

LoCascio stated that if we decide not to act “It’s quite literally the extinction of the human race.”

Conn shared “we are already seeing it here in the United States, as we see droughts in Lake Mead, the water of the Colorado not making it to the ocean, and farmers ripping up almond trees because of water use.”

Both professors elaborated on how the impacts of climate change have already begun to affect the food supply, both globally and within the country.

Speaking to one of these effects, LoCascio said, “with some food more c02 actually reduces the nutritional value” and that “our food is less nutritional now than it was 50 years ago,” adding it “is just

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“Climate Change” >>>

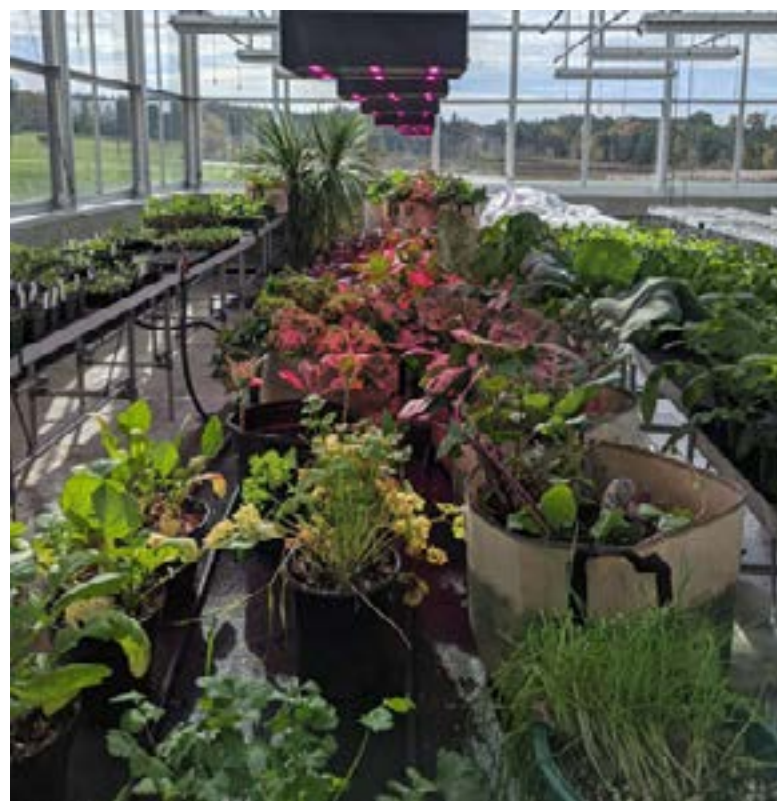


Photo by Daniel Dow

Fresh produce grown by MWCC's Green Society.

## In The Trenches of Academia

By Gabriel Drouin  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

The difficulties of a student have only increased during the pandemic, and some students have found new ways to persist, even thrive, on the battlefield of modern academia.

Brittany Day, a photography major who attends school entirely online and Marissa Roberts, a Liberal Arts Theater major attending both online and on-campus classes share their experiences.

When asked how they felt about their current methods of attending school, Day and Roberts had similar stances. Roberts shared that attending classes on-campus for two of her three courses has inconveniences and has made her change jobs to fit her busy schedule; however, those same on-campus courses



Photo courtesy of Marissa Roberts

Marissa Roberts, Liberal Arts Theater major

have strengthened her sense of creativity and accomplishment in her academic career.

She also added that this heightened sense of positivity has aided her personal life as well. She found the primary drawback to her online course was the lack of personal connections and called discussion boards a

poor replacement for student interactions.

Not everything Roberts had to say about online courses was bad. She stated that the flexibility of an online course made it much easier to adjust her schedule, something essential when also planning a wedding.

Despite being an entirely online student, Day shares Robert's preference for a hybrid approach to schooling. As a mother and a full-time student with a work study program on top of it all, she shared that taking all of her courses online is just the more practical choice for her.

She discussed how the photo-shoots for her work study are not on a set schedule and she often takes advantage of ideal weather to photograph her children. Things she says would be much more difficult if her classes were not online. Day shared the same

complaint about online courses as Roberts, having a distaste for how difficult it can be to connect with peers and professors.

School comes with no short amount of stress, and it would seem both Roberts and Day agree that knowing exactly how school life causes you stress is the first step.

Roberts describes herself as a “Yes Man,” feeling unable to say no to people and their requests outside of school. As a result, she can overload herself with responsibilities and school becomes a source of stress when it clashes with this immense “to-do” list she has made for herself.

Day also feels that school's stress comes from its clash with her personal life and responsibilities, but feels there

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# Trenches of Academia



Photo courtesy of Brittany Day

Brittany Day, Photography major.

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is more that could be done, and should be done, on the professor's side of things. She said that she understands the level of work expected of a full-time student but feels that many professors are dismissive of the level of extra work involved in online courses and simply assigns as much work as they would if it were an on-campus class.

Day acknowledges that the school is doing well despite the pandemic, but wishes that professors had been better prepared to utilize blackboard to teach students.

Neither Roberts nor Day have just sat back and let the difficult parts of being a student wash over them. They have jumped into the trenches and fought back with their own coping strategies.

For Roberts, it's a matter of maintaining habits, "I've had to revert back to elementary school, almost, like get home, do homework, and then anything

else... as kids we would have to do our work and have a snack before we could play" She added that having to mix going to work and wedding planning makes maintaining this habit a little more challenging, but it is still worth the effort.

Day laughed at the question saying, "A boat load of coffee!" Then said, that taking time to decompress is her coping mechanism. Being a full-time student means she does not have the time to reduce stress in her usual ways such as puzzles and coloring. To compensate for this, she makes sure that every night she takes at least an hour to herself to either play a video game or watch television; an activity that lets her brain turn-off for a little while.

When it came to giving advice to students who are experiencing the same workloads and class arrangements as them, Roberts and Day agreed yet again. Both emphatically exclaimed to get a planner, agenda, or any other

scheduling device that is not computerized. The two agreed that directly interacting with their agendas, by hand-writing their schedule, causes the events to stick in their mind more strongly than if they just typed them into a phone calendar.

When asked if they are doing as well in school as they would like, despite all of its challenges, Roberts and Day said they were doing well, but wished they could do better. Hilariously enough, they both admitted that this was simply due to their stubborn and perfectionist attitudes and that by anyone else's standards they would be doing exceptionally well.

Day said that she often needs to remind herself that she is doing her best. When asked if she thought that was important for students to remember she said, "Absolutely, I think students need to take a step back and take a beat to not get overwhelmed and remember that doing their best is enough."

# Climate Change

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because there is more CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere."

Dunn elaborated that "The food is the big thing that's going to be affected because of the water issues, the changing of climates, the droughts, the fires, these crazy storms that are coming more frequently."

As for the science community stance on climate change Dunn stated that, "The discussion of 'is it happening?' is so gone, and now we are way past that." LoCascio added "That conversation ended twenty years ago."

This statement has been shared by world leaders as they plan to meet in Glasgow to discuss the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report. In regard to this report and climate change, Scotland's Net Zero Secretary Michael Matheson, said "it could be the last chance to save the planet from a climate catastrophe."

When reflecting on the ideas of combating climate change as individuals Dunn says everybody always feels "what can one

person do? There is a power of one that collectively a lot of ones make a lot." LoCascio added by sharing a quote from Mahatma Gandhi, "Whatever you do may seem insignificant, but it is most important that you do it."

Although at times the situation may seem hopeless and the

power of one may seem minimal, LoCascio and Conn both shared that as a department their goal is to reflect on these ideas. Sharing their goal is to move away from news stories and media that promote a doomsday narrative and have constructive and thoughtful conversations with students that promote positive changes.

LoCascio shared a story from his own journey, a journey that began with him reducing his intake of meat by following Bunker Hill Community College's practice

of meatless Monday. From there on he altered his diet slowly to reduce his intake of meat and not really have it with every meal.

According to a study by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, meat production and meat

consumption accounts for "about one-fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions and is the key land user and source of water pollution by nutrient overabundance. It also competes with biodiversity and promotes species extinctions."

Conn shared that "We're not asking people to totally overturn their existence, but to be mindful."

Both professors discussed that many think recycling is not enough, and stated it is not very effective in preventing climate

change, that additional steps need to be taken. According to the Environmental Protection Agency "of all the waste produced in 2017, only 8.4% of it eventually got recycled."

The professors shared that one of the most impactful steps you can take is to support local farms.

**"We're not asking people to totally overturn their existence, but to be mindful."**

– Professor Heather Conn

They explain that as the food supply becomes more impacted by climate change, local farms will become more important in supplying its community with food.

According to the professors, joining a CSA's is a great step for students and faculty to promote access to local fresh food and farms. They both shared how equitable programs are as well, that many farms provide prices on a sliding scale, accepting EBT and, in some cases, banks offer a CSA loan.

Professor LoCascio shared that purchasing a CSA or a Community-supported agriculture allows members to invest in a local farm, making it easier for farms to be profitable.

LoCascio and Conn also co-advise the Green Society, which meets every Thursday at the greenhouse at 12 p.m. The club members have been working on growing food, planting native plants, and coordinating with local farmers to host a campus farmers market.

Further efforts by the Green Society have been to donate food they have grown to the school food pantry, so students in need are provided with fresh produce. As of now the club has donated "20 pounds of produce" to the food pantry.

The upcoming farmers market that will feature fresh produce grown by the Green Society and local farms will be held November 17 and 18; there are additional plans to hold a Spring market sometime in mid-April.

# A Year of Turmoil Leads to Insights

## MWCC Leaders Share Their Experience Navigating COVID-19

By Daniel Dow  
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Mount Wachusett President James Vander Hooven and Student Trustee Cody Nathanson speak about The Covid-19 epidemic, the halt of campus in-person services, the traumas of the past year and a half, and life moving forward.

Vander Hooven, who joined Mount Wachusett College in 2017, discussed how previous and current strategic planning enabled MWCC to withstand the financial strains from the pandemic, as well as rapid transitions to on-line learning.

The priority of the school over the past four years has been working “towards a real firm fiscal foundation that enabled us to weather this unforeseen pandemic and enabled us to get through without layoffs,” Vander Hooven said.

The biggest challenge shared by Vander Hooven, other than the health crisis, has been “not being with students.” He stressed that “to automatically go to where you don’t have that same level of interaction” has been a big struggle for him, faculty, and staff.

One of the events that have been most notable for him is orientation day and graduation he said the energy “pump(s) him up” and is one of his favorite parts of his job.

The president noted that although these events are a crucial experience, he is also an introvert, and finds time for himself after such events.

He stated that although it was “a very tough year” and it has been difficult to “relearn how to do our jobs on the fly” that he finds “Where we have succeeded the most is where we kept our focus on the students and what we can do for the students.”

These statements could not be emphasized enough, as Vander Hooven shared how the campus



Photos courtesy of MWCC and Cody Nathanson, respectively

**President James Vander Hooven (left) and Student Trustee/Student Council Member Cody Nathanson (right)**

shifted to online learning in eleven days. He shared that the situation at first seemed short term, but after three weeks “we started to think of this as more of a long-term issue.”

As events unfolded, Vander Hooven spoke about the creation of a leadership group that

MWCC has seen “strong levels of enrollment for this academic year” and there has been “good student energy,” Vander Hooven said.

The issue that Vander Hooven has been trying to confront is the lack of student connection, that “students who are engaged in

hard to recall projects or life before the pandemic.

Vander Hooven took a moment to recall post COVID-19 projects. After taking a few moments he discussed plans for summer of 2022, “we were going to relocate a lot of the student services offices.” This project is meant to give students a better idea of where to go and create a better flow.

He added that the biggest goal for the school moving forward is “keeping a really close eye on the central Mass job market” he added “what employers are looking for today is different than what they were looking for two years ago.”

To meet these needs, he stated that MWCC “needs to make sure that our academic programs, our certificate programs and our direct workforce training opportunity are designed with those world changing events in mind to ensure future careers.”

Student trustee and student council member, Cody Nathanson, shared many of the same sentiments of President Vander Hooven, as he learned

to navigate and adapt through COVID-19.

Nathanson spoke about how his own learning style has altered, and how he adapted to distance learning, stating “shifting to online showed me how I appreciate those things [interactions] way more.”

In a further description of his adaptation to new learning methods and efforts of the school, he said “they (MWCC) did a fantastic job” as he recalled his visits to campus during the Summer. He shared he was able to utilize space provided by the campus for students who needed access to computers and study space.

As for his role as student trustee, he reflected on the board’s oversight and the moment it faced a decline of enrollment. Nathanson stated that although the school did see a drop in enrollment, strategic planning enabled the school to operate on a surplus and to operate better than expected, given the circumstances.

He elaborated that MWCC has also been awarded nearly \$2 million in grant money.

These funds come from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and from the US Department of Education with the purpose of assisting disadvantaged citizens, improving training/skills, and locating and assisting low-income high school students with higher-ed.

Nathanson stated that the overall experiences from the last year and a half has allowed him to learn “who I am as a student and what I need to do for myself to succeed,” that he truly looks forward to returning to in-person class and the connections built on campus. He added that the experience enabled him to learn what he needs from himself to be successful in the future.

**“I don’t want to normalize all of this; I want to bring back what makes us a community college.”**

– President James Vander Hooven

represents all sides of campus to “come up with immediate solutions;” they strategized to solve issues such as laptop shortages and coordinated to find solutions for students who lacked reliable internet.

Vander Hooven shared that as the pandemic progressed, he had to “look at it (problems) not as a decision with impacts just for today I am making decisions that have an impact for perhaps months or years ahead.”

Fortunately, as students enrolled for the Fall semester,

their college experience graduate at a higher rate.” He shared that the culture of the schools’ clubs and programs is what enables students to succeed. He added that “I don’t want to normalize all of this; I want to bring back what makes us a community college.”

When asked about projects that have been halted because of the pandemic, Vander Hooven jokingly replied, “I don’t have a single memory of anything before Covid,” elaborating that there was a time where it was

# International Show ‘N’ Tell

## Dual Language Business Students Share Info on their Home Countries

By Pamela Day

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Students of the Dual Language Business Administration Certificate program celebrated National Hispanic Heritage Month with a Homeland Show and Tell event at the Leominster Campus in October.

Students showcased their homeland using garments, dance, art, displays and presentations on food and culture. Homelands included Costa Rica, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Peru and Uruguay. Melissa Sargent, Dean of Academic Affairs, said, “It is an opportunity for them to use their English skills to present about their home country to the rest of the group.”

Sargent elaborated, “Even though they are all Spanish speakers they are all from different areas and there are differences within those cultures and so this was a way for them to get to know each other a little better and it was a way for them to kind of brag about their home countries.”

Otto Bolaños-Vargas, ESOL Division Chair, added, “There are other situations in which Hispanic students honor their culture as well and that is by motivating their kids to speak the language at home. They continue to watch programs from their country of origin... that promotes the practice of language, understanding of the language and the culture as well.”

Bolaños-Vargas pointed out that the Spanish language is part of the students’ identity. Sargent said, “The more you get away from your native language, the more disconnected you get from your culture.”

Students enrolled in the program primarily speak

Spanish. The program is structured to teach content classes, such as marketing and management courses, in Spanish while simultaneous learning the same material in English. Bolaños-Vargas said, “It enables them to actually cover more in their areas of study.”

Sargent noted, “The whole purpose of this program is for them to celebrate being bilingual and to use their bilingualism as an asset as they go into the workplace. Being bilingual has been treated so poorly in the past, and it’s about time we realize it is an asset to be bilingual in the United States.”

Sargent and Bolaños-Vargas agreed they benefited from the experience as well. Bolaños-Vargas said, “They all learned a little vocabulary.” He was impressed to learn words he didn’t know about in Spanish.

This is the first year the event was held. Most students made appearances in person while



Photos by Melissa Sargent

**Clockwise from top: Natalia Oliver shows off the flag of Uruguay; Carolina Montero Gomez; Lucio Valencia**

others attend remotely. “We’re just celebrating language, and this was an opportunity to celebrate their homeland as

well,” Sargent said.

It has not been determined if this event will happen next year. Sargent believes there will most

likely be some type of an event. National Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated between September 15 - October 15.



### Have a Story to Tell?

If you’ve got the scoop on the latest community news, feel free to contact our editors about adding your voice to the *Observer* crew! To reach out, send an email to:

[mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu](mailto:mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu)

# Local Views On The Heated Texas Abortion Ban

## Two MWCC Students Refelct On Their Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Stances

By *Jailene Lopez*  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

In recent discussions of pregnancy, a controversial issue has been whether abortion is ethical or unethical; Emma Nelsen and Viridiana Serratos, two Mount Wachusett students give their views and opinions on the topic.

On May 19, Texas governor Gregory Wayne Abbott signed a law to forbid abortion as early as six weeks, and on September 1 it came into effect. This new law is the Texas Heartbeat Act, and along with limiting the access to abortion it also enables the prosecution of anyone or any provider who attempts to help or assist a patient in acquiring the abortion after 6 weeks.

According to Jay W. Marks, MD, “an abortion is a loss of pregnancy due to the premature exit of the products of conception (the fetus, fetal membranes, and placenta) from the uterus due to any cause. An abortion may occur spontaneously (terms a miscarriage) or may be medically induced.”

Pro-choice advocate, Emma Nelsen, a Fitchburg State

University business major stated “I believe that pregnancy should not be forced, that is unfair, and introduces many risks. If this law continues to come into effect, then there should be mandates that follow it. Like China’s two child policy, and if a family should want more children than they should be influenced to adopt. So many people are pro-life, but where is the advocation once the child is born?”.

In making this statement, Nelsen urges that everyone do more research in attempt to comprehend the pro-choice movement, and brought up the circumstance’s women could be in, like addiction, abusive relationships, homelessness, health care, income, etc. In sum, Nelsen believes that preventing abortion is wrong, and that the new Texas law proposes several great risks.

Monty Tech business graduate, Viridiana Serratos, is a Jehovah’s Witness who has two daughters. Serratos does not believe that abortion is ethical. According to Serratos, “First and foremost, there are several options that can and should be considered. There

is adoption or having someone in the family take over as the guardian. I believe that the baby is not at fault and was created for a reason. If the parents cannot afford the baby, there are lots of different programs that can assist. There are options like section-8 housing, fuel assistance, Department of Transitional Assistance, Women, Infants, & Children Nutrition Program, rental assistance programs, shelters, etc. The baby has the right to live a full, happy, and healthy life. The mother always has alternative resources and benefits”.

Serratos mentioned those programs and introduced the idea of researching the design for struggling expecting parents. The GoFundMe Organization states, “The most well-known programs for women who are pregnant and need help with money. Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid Health Insurance.” Along with those programs,



Image by AnonMoos from Wikimedia Commons

there are support groups and advisers.

According to the American Pregnancy Association “Weeks four through seven are when most women discover they are pregnant”. Neighboring states to Texas are seeing aftereffects of the abortion ban and enacting on it. Other states with similar abortion-restrictive enacted as recently as of September are Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas,

Louisiana, Tennessee. States like Oklahoma, Kansas and Kentucky are going as far as taking away medical licenses for those who provide abortions or any abortion related medical assistance.

In the opinions of both Nelsen and Serratos, the children are of the highest priority and they both believe the expecting mother is of great importance.

# MWCC Farmer’s Market Planned For Thanksgiving

## Students and Faculty Plan Market to Feature Campus-Grown Produce



Photos courtesy of Tarra Kruse

Produce being grown in the MWCC greenhouse

By *Tarra Kruse*  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

With Thanksgiving just around the corner, Mount Wachusett Community College will be hosting a Fall Farmers Market to provide affordable fresh produce to the local community just in time for the impending holiday.

The Horticulture students, led by Professor George LoCascio, has been working towards making this event possible. Along with the help of Kathy Matson, who has had a helping hand in organizing local vendors.

The Farmers Market will be held on November 17 and 18 from 11:30 a.m.- 2 p.m. and

will be located in the Common Area, entrance C, on the Gardner Campus.

Professor LoCascio wanted to introduce a different variety of food to this year’s Farmers Market. He said, “Another thing we’re trying to do is not just grow everything that everybody is used to. We want to add variety to people’s diets.”

He shared that Radishes and mustard greens don’t always make the cut on the Thanksgiving holiday table, but maybe after trying them it may become a new tradition.

Professor George LoCascio says you can expect to see a

variety of radishes, some carrots, kale, mustard greens, spinach, turnip, chard, and bunching onions. A bounty of fresh herbs such as sage, oregano, rosemary, and thyme will also be available. Many of these crops have been grown here on campus in the artificial greenhouse, making it possible to grow some produce year-round.

Professor LoCascio joined MWCC this fall, taking over for Professor Marsha Pomeroy. He said, “I’m trying to continue the Legacy of Professor Marsha,

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# Fall Farmer's Market



to offer potatoes, squash, and a Thanksgiving fixings bag with everything you might need for your holiday menu.

Growing Places has also contributed produce to our Food for Thought Food Bank that has helped many students at MWCC. Along with shopping at this

no proof of income is required. The pantry is located on the Gardner Campus-Rm. 192, and the Leominster Campus Rm.100 by appointment only. More information can be found on the Mount Wachusett Community College website (<https://mwcc.edu/campus-life/brewer-center/>)

Although Professor LoCascio and Horticulture students have had great luck with the crop this season, they have also had their share of challenges.

The club discovered that one of the raised beds that grow daikon radishes had a pest problem, killing much of the

**“The only thing I’m trying to do is focus more on food rather than more flowers. The goal is to provide our community with food right in time for Thanksgiving.”**

**– PROFESSOR GEORGE LOCASIO**

year’s Farmers Market, the Student Government Association will be there taking donations of non-perishable foods, cash, or check for the Food for Thought Food Bank. Kathy says, “Their goal is to double the twenty items given to the students who need it, to forty items each month.”

The food pantry is available to all students enrolled in at least one credit course at MWCC;

pantry/).

If you cannot attend the Farmers Market, those interested will have an opportunity to donate to the MWCC Food Drive beginning Nov. 15 thru 18. Donations will be accepted in the Common Area, entrance C.

Unfortunately, not everything will make it to the event due to a pest problem that affected some of the outdoor crops.

crop. All efforts were made to contain the problem using small traps, but it was too late, making them unsellable.

Plenty of products will still be showcased for this year’s event and Professor LoCascio and Horticulture students plan for future farmers markets to showcase their freshly grown produce.

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He shared that the approaching holiday was this year’s inspiration for the Farmer’s Market.

To add more of a selection, Growing Places, a local non-profit organization based in Leominster was invited to join the Farmers Market. They plan

who was here before-- they have done amazing work. The only thing I’m trying to do is focus more on food rather than more flowers. The goal is to provide our community with food right in time for Thanksgiving.”

## PROFILE

# Fundraising, Music, and Backpacking

## An Inspirational Interview with Ms. Kelly Johnson



Photo courtesy of Kelly Johnson

Johnson (right) with her son (left).

By Tarra Kruse  
OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Kelly Johnson is currently a resident in Gardner, where she lives with her 17-year-old son. Although she loves living in Gardner, she grew up in

Fitchburg. She is a single mother who has taken the opportunity to go back to school and continue her education as many people did during the Covid shutdown. She is currently enrolled at the Mount Wachusett Community

College, working towards a certificate in Public Relations, a one year program.

Johnson is currently employed at Digital Federal Credit Union, better known as DCU. She first started there as a bank teller and decided to change her career path. Staying with DCU, she changed job titles to the Human Resource department, then changed again to Public Relations.

In her new role, she is able to work with nonprofits within the marketing department, where she helps raise money for local fundraising charities.

“(This is) such a rewarding job!” Johnson said.

One of Johnsons’ future goals is to get an accreditation from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) when her certificate is complete. The accreditation in Public Relations will help her develop a

foundation for work and consult with nonprofit organizations that need her help. She also said, “The accreditation would provide better knowledge and experience in my field.”

When she’s not hard at work helping others, you can find her at many local venues enjoying live music. Johnson admits she can see up to six bands in one weekend. Her favorite artist is *Sean Daley*, a local acoustic guitarist. Her favorite music is 90’s cover bands, but she genuinely enjoys all types of music, ranging from 90s rap to metal. She has many friends in the music industry and tries to support them by watching as many shows as possible.

Johnson also enjoys traveling with her 17-year-old son. She looks forward to her next big adventure, visiting Europe in 2021, where she has friends.

She and her son plan to backpack through Europe, staying in hotels and trying many different foods. This trip was initially scheduled for 2020, but due to Covid-19, like many things, the trip had to be postponed until it was safe to travel outside the United States.

Johnson’s favorite place she has visited in Utah, “We love Utah. We travel there any chance we get.” Johnson said they enjoy the canyons in Utah, the hot springs, and hiking up mountains; they even drove from Utah to Yellowstone to explore the Grand Tetons while camping out under the stars.

She hopes to continue traveling in her old age, moving across the countryside. Although traveling to the Mid-West is something she loves to do, she doesn’t wish to stay in one spot when she retires.

“I want to retire on a set of wheels,” Johnson said.

# Teaching in the Pandemic

## Sharing the Perspective of Both Student and Teacher During COVID

By **Nathan Cobiski**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

During the pandemic, school became very challenging. With everyone finding their own ways to hurdle this unexpected obstacle, one individual found herself on both ends of the spectrum. Meet Nichole Camelo, a realtor, a student, a tutor, a wife, and a mother. During this pandemic, she got to witness and experience both sides of the teaching world, she taught her students and guided her family along as well.

Camelo now works with third to fifth grade students,

helping those who fall below the Massachusetts standard for education. She takes much pride in her work, as her face lights up with joy when discussing her tutoring work. She was most proud of her hard work and dedication to her school district when a student she worked with, who had struggled with simple words, was now reading *Harry Potter* books.

As COVID-19 began to grow worse, schools began to close and shift to online learning. Camelo found that patience was the best way to combat this new change and offered this advice, “Take a

step back and breathe. Nobody was prepared for this, and we’re all doing this for the first time, and don’t get frustrated, because the more frustrated you get, the more frustrated your child will be.”

Back in high school, Camelo traveled to Costa Rica for a Spanish class, which was a life changing experience, even though it was 21 years ago. She described the location as being stunning and she was mesmerized by the simplicity of how the people there lived and how she never forgot it. A take-away she had from this

experience was to “take a step back and enjoy the little things.”

Along with this, Camelo is taking English 290 as a course in her studies this semester. In this class, they discussed the topic of simplicity, and she learned a lot more about the topic. This brought her back to the simplicity of the lifestyle in Costa Rica.

“You learn about that a lot, like the simplicity and the beauty of just the little things in life, like you don’t need all this stuff,” Camelo said. “It was explained to me, ‘if we have money, we just spend it, even if we don’t need it we just do it because we

can.”

Now that life has begun to return to normal, schools have finally started to open up. With this, Camelo can do what she does best, tutoring her students in person, being a mother to her 5 year old and 10 year old, and making those person-to-person connections with her students, as well as clients. Along with this, she has also returned to school to continue her studies in elementary education, with the goal to one day get a classroom of her own.

# Interview With a Paragon

## Pamela Day Discusses Printing, Writing, Travelling, and Mentoring



Photo courtesy of Pamela Day

**Pamela Day**

By **Gabriel Drouin**

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Pamela Day, or Pam as she prefers, is a student pursuing a Liberal Arts degree with a focus on Professional Writing at the Mount. At the age of 52 she proves that it is never too late

to take steps toward improving your life. Day is a paragon of perseverance and optimism.

A veteran of the printing industry, Day’s career, like many others, was negatively impacted by the current pandemic. With the career she planned to stick

with until retirement dead in the water, she made the bold decision to return to school. After much deliberation, Day sealed her choice with Professional Writing as it carried a similar skillset to the one that she utilized in the printing industry.

Day talked about the nightmare that is online classes and how the lack of a shared learning environment or immediate interaction with the professors are the most prominent issues this format presents. When asked if she had any advice for other students who may be struggling with these same issues, she recommended that you always speak to your professors. She said it’s clear that professors want to see their students succeed and cited their tendency for compassion and understanding during these challenging times.

When asked what her favorite thing about being a student was,

Day said that it was granting her the opportunity to improve her life. After being asked if going back to school is her silver lining to the cloud over our lives that is Covid-19 she replied with “Yes, because I’m gaining something that I have not gained before.”

Day also spoke about her personal life and hobbies which carry that same glass-is-half-full attitude. This fascinating woman has done quite a bit of traveling including all of New England, New York, Canada, Mexico, and many different states. Her favorite by far was Sedona, Arizona where she went on a yogi guided hike through the Vortex Mountains which are well known for their spiritual power.

When not traveling, Day has many outdoor hobbies that she enjoys. Her favorite of which is letterboxing, a stamp-based scavenger hunt that could potentially take you around the

world if you wanted it to as it is focused around finding hidden boxes. After being asked what advice she could give to those looking to get into letterboxing she explained that there is a website called atlasquest.com which contains all of the needed information.

Day is not only a source of positivity in her academic and personal life but in her community as well. She is an active member of Let Us Know, or LUK for short, and as a member of LUK Day is paired with a young person in need of a positive influence to act as a mentor for a year. She is required to spend at least an hour a week with her mentee over this year but by the sounds of it she dedicated a lot more time than that as she shared her favorite hobby of letterboxing with her last companion.

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# Life is a Zoo

## Aspiring Zoologist and Dad-to-Be Discusses his Dream Job and Future

By Nichole Proctor

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Nathan Cobiski, also known as Biscuit, is a 20-year-old Biology major. Cobiski is nervous about his future as he is expecting a daughter in December. He currently is the general manager of a dog breeder ship, which is a small step to achieve his dream of becoming a zoologist or zookeeper.

Cobiski said that several things make him nervous about the future. "First off, Covid and will it ever go away, but what if it mutates and we aren't able to catch it fast enough, and it spreads?" He worries about its effect on his family directly, especially his niece.

"My niece, who lives with my family and me at our house,

gets colds easily, and when she was coughing and sneezing, the school would make her get tested, what seemed like every week, and that was hard for me," Cobiski said. "But, once it started getting closer to people, I was like, wow, this is a thing, it's happening."

Cobiski, who considers himself a good listener, said friends often come to him to vent. He gives his opinion, if they ask; if not, he is just there for them. If people come to him for dating advice, he said, "this is what worked for me and my girlfriend" and he hopes it can work for them as well.

Cobiski and his girlfriend of four years are expecting their first daughter in December. He chuckled as he said, "I was

planning on proposing this year, but then she was like, well, I'm pregnant," so he put off the engagement as this became more important. However, he said that nothing would change the fact he

planned, even though he knows that is not always the case.

As Cobiski continues at MWCC, he hopes to eventually transfer to a more direct animal care college as his dream is to

living made me want to do the same," he said. He has always loved animals and their care and just knew this is what he was destined for. "I am going for this dream, as I feel this is my passion and this is what I have worked so hard for."

His dream is to become a zookeeper, making rounds in food prep, checking on animals, but most importantly, sharing his knowledge with park goers, "even just making someone smile with the beautiful creatures we share our world with." But, to him, a zoo is more than just animals. The zoo is the impending plan to protect areas worldwide to ensure the survival of endangered species, assisting in the repopulations.

**"I am going for this dream, as I feel this is my passion and this is what I have worked so hard for."**

— Nathan Cobiski

was going to marry her.

Cobiski talked about the birthing process and mentioned his fear of the entire process in not being able to do anything for his girlfriend, with the pain and with wanting everything to go as

become a zoologist or even a zookeeper. Cobiski said that he always watched animal programs growing up, played zoo games on the computer, and took family trips to the zoo.

"Seeing people do this sort of

## OPINION

# A Bullet Dodged

## The Minefield That is "Below-the-Belt Interests" for Single Parents

By Isabelle Mascary

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

To those who have a "below the belt interest" in single parents, unless it's stated that they want a good time for a short time, stay in your lane. Date within you means, and I hope you land your dream partner off whatever app you use as a hunting ground. Expressing the wants for a "high value" partner but mingling with "low value" partners is the epitome of Russian roulette but in the dating field.

Children have been referred to as baggage in previous conversations from different people. I understand that dating a person who has children is not everyone's cup of tea and I am not here to change anyone's point of view. What about the baggage of mental health? The baggage of gambling and scandals? The baggage of financial irresponsibility? The baggage

of drug abuse? Oftentimes, it's the same individuals who cry children are baggage that don't mind and will be in hot pursuit to hook up with a single parent.

My advice to the parents that want to date again, do your due diligence and heal from past traumas. Recognize the red flags that you once missed from your previous relationship and don't rush in. Every possible suitor is not an Emperor or Empress. Don't share too much and most importantly don't involve the children just yet.

Single parents and dating is a challenge. To share my own experience, I was sitting at home, doing my assignments for class when my cell phone rang. Roberto returned my phone call. I called him to inquire about retaking a firearms safety class. To add a bit of context, we have known each other for a few years now, since 2015.

Excitement ran through my veins when we reconnected. A simple conversation was like an early Christmas gift because we had lost contact with each other. "Hey, long time no speak. How are you and the children doing?" he asked. Of course, my response was the usual, "Everyone is good. Thank you for asking." We spent a few minutes playing catch up. I went through my trials and errors, and he went through his as well.

I expected the conversation to be directed towards gun courses and class schedules, but to my surprise, Roberto asked me, "Do you want a long-lasting relationship, a marriage perhaps?" I replied, "Yes, I do want that". He then asked, "Do you want more children?" The question caught me off guard, but I replied, "In the future I would like more children. Even if I have to adopt." Despite

being attracted to each other, the conversation took an interesting twist, like Houdini pulled a brick of shit out of bag when he said, "Well, you're not appealing to a man that wants a long-term relationship. Your status as a mother makes you less appealing."

As a single mother of 5 children, it's almost as if he wanted to make me feel low about my decisions in life and the things I had no control over. In fact, I am a single mother who also adopted two children. Taken aback by his aggressive unsolicited responses, I couldn't understand where the aggression was coming from because I didn't say I wanted to date him; we were supposed to be scheduling a class at some point during the conversation. Yes, he's appealing to the eyes but not my heart.

A man with such views still

proceeded to show sexual interest in single mothers despite them being "too fertile" and "unappealing" to a high value man. These are the "red flag" individuals with the below the belt interest in single parents with no long-term interest. Some of these individuals are the product of a broken home as well, albeit being raised by a single parent. Their only purpose is to show up for a good time but for a short time.

A person that doesn't mind being with a single parent who lost custody of his or her children because that means more time to spend with their partner, while swiping profiles on tinder during a phone conversation, is a person to avoid. A bullet has been dodged not just for myself, but my children as well.



## PROFILE

# Learning to Believe in One's Self

## A Student Shares Her Inspirational Story of Personal Growth

By Nichole Proctor

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

To achieve something in life, first, you have to believe in yourself. This took many years and many experiences to realize that I indeed needed to believe in myself.

Let me introduce myself. My name is Nichole Camelo, a mom, a wife, a daughter, a realtor, a tutor, and now a student. I returned to school to earn a degree and continue in my work as a teacher. School, education, and earning a degree have always been important to me. Given that my career requires a bachelor's degree to be considered a teacher, it was the best excuse I could think of to enroll in college

finally and earn the degree I had always desired.

First, let's step back in time a bit to a couple of decades ago. Yes, decades. I graduated high school in 2000, far from the "scholarship child." Let's face it, I struggled, barely passing;

it in the workforce.

So fast forward decades later, here I am back at school, in college. Married, working, kids, and now schoolwork. As an adult student, I place a great deal of pressure on myself to perform to the best of my abilities, to set

**"I needed to let go of my doubts and believe in myself...This class has opened my eyes and allowed me to apply myself totally, but in a way that I had not before done."**

— Nichole Proctor

however, I graduated. I never attended college after high school, nor did I believe that an education was essential to make

the bar high, and to go above and beyond what I expect of myself, frequently overextending and taking on too much.

This semester I took ENG 290, LAS - Liberal Arts and Science, and WEB-Advanced Writing and Research. I had two options: I could either go through the motions or use it as a chance to increase my learning. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. To top it off, the class was filled with students twenty years younger than myself. When reading through the mostly discussion-board centered course work, I started to think "what could I possibly get out of this class, and what could I possibly relate to?"

On the second discussion board, I realized I can actually "learn" from my professors and the other students in my class who are half my age. It was at

this moment I realized why I was here. I needed to let go of my doubts and believe in myself. It doesn't matter if you are 20, 40, 60, no matter your age. This class has opened my eyes and allowed me to apply myself totally, but in a way that I had not before done.

I waste far too much time worrying about things I can't alter, don't have control over, or already know, rather than opening up and focusing on what I can control and what genuinely matters. As a student, I now have a new goal: not simply to complete my degree and pass my next exam, but to learn how to live a balanced life, to relax and trust more, to be more.

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started." - Mark Twain.

# Facebook: An Unconscionable Threat

## Facebook Puts "Profits Before People" and Allows "Grossly Unethical Experiments"



By Daniel Dow

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Facebook has made headlines again--media outlets discuss the company's new facelift as CEO Mark Zuckerberg announces a company name change from Facebook to Meta; in an attempt to disguise its aging façade that has time and again left the brand

sagging with scandal.

Facebook can not be allowed to disguise itself, to disregard its past scandals. We must listen to the whistleblowers speaking out on the dangers of Facebook and action must be taken.

Frances Haugen, Facebook whistleblower, data scientist and former production manager of

"democracy and misinformation issues" for Facebook stated before Congress that "Facebook, over and over again, has shown it chooses profit over safety."

Haugen testified that "The result has been more division, more harm, more lies, more threats and more combat. In some cases, this dangerous online talk has led to actual violence that harms and even kills people."

Haugen does not only come before Congress as a witness of unscrupulous events, but according to The New York Times, also with "tens of thousands of pages of internal documents."

Some of these documents have been shared by The Wall Street Journal, one report stated that a Facebook study indicated "About 32% of teen girls said that when they felt bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse."

This is the company that attracts 6.239 billion monthly users, that is around 79% of the global population. To put things into perspective on the

influential power of Facebook, the social media platform that ranks second in terms of monthly access is Google's YouTube, with an active monthly usage of 2,291 billion.

The wakeup call for Facebook regulation should have come in 2016, when Cambridge Analytica whistleblower, Christopher Wylie, described Analytics exploitation of Facebook as a "Grossly unethical experiment."

Wylie explained how "We exploited Facebook to harvest millions of people's profiles. And built models to exploit what we knew about them and target their inner demons. That was the basis the entire company was built on." Wylie shared how Analytica's "cultural weapon" identified what Facebook users would become "susceptible to;" content would then be created to influence the 2016 election.

In a statement reported by the New York Times and The Observer, Facebook stated, "it learned of the misuse in 2015 but failed to notify the public." As of 2018 the Federal Trade

Commission reported that Analytica accessed "250,000-270,000 U.S. users plus 50-65 million of their Facebook friends without their consent."

This resulted in the fining of Facebook and CEO Mark Zuckerberg testifying before Congress, but no regulations have been placed on the company.

The trend of Facebook shredding itself of all accountability began earlier this year when The New York Times reported in August that Zuckerberg personally approved Project Amplify; a program that would use Facebook's platform to show "positive stories about the social network" to "reshape its image."

According to current and former employees, this strategy is said to have taken hold because "Facebook executives have chafed at how their company appeared to receive more scrutiny than Google and

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"Facebook Threat" >>>

# Coming Out

## Reflecting on the Trials and Achievements of the LGBTQ+ Community

By *Andi Cunningham*

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

It is always hard to admit something you have been trying to hide for many years. Coming out is never easy, but one cannot deny a sense of relief after that. National coming out is October 11, and in honor of that day, I wanted to give some gay history.

According to the History channel, on June 28, 1969, mourning the death of beloved gay icon Judy Garland, the patrons of the Stonewall Inn had enough with police raids on the club. Led by Marsha P. Johnson, a self-identified drag queen, the Stonewall riots began with throwing one brick.

Also known as the Stonewall uprising, this was to counteract the stigma that “something was wrong with people in the gay community.” In

1962 homosexuality was decriminalized in all 50 states. Just because homosexuality was decriminalized does not mean that the stigma had left. Before 1962 engaging in homosexual acts was deemed illegal and punishable by prison time. These acts were what led to our pride parades and pride months today.

In the 52 years since the Stonewall uprising Pride parades and ‘coming out’ has changed so much. What started as a protest has grown into a culture of acceptance and love for people of all ages. When a queer person comes out it should be a time of celebration, rather back in the 70s and 80s it was a time of non-acceptance.

Still in parts of the world the acceptance is not there. Being disowned and the fear of being disowned is why we still must



Photo by Lynn Friedman on flickr

come out. The pride parades of the 70s and 80s were a pivotal moment to show that a gay person could have a political career, could be in corporate America, could be accepted into society. One of the leaders of this movement being a black trans

drag queen. Spreading political messages through a subculture of grace, beauty, and acceptance.

When we celebrate pride, we are celebrating the leaders who paved the way for us to be our most authentic selves. Coming out is hard and one of the scariest things in the world. I know I have had to come out twice, once as gay, and once as transgender. As it says in the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” Our life and purpose in life is to find happiness, it is through equality and celebrations of equality that we have the opportunity to find happiness and find acceptance.

## Facebook Threat



Image from Anthony Quintano from Wikimedia Commons

**Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder and CEO of Meta Platforms, Inc (formerly Facebook, Inc.)**

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Twitter.”

New reports shared by Haugen are showing the utilization of Facebook by the insurrectionist that attacked the nation’s capital on January 9. One of these reports, shared by the Washington Post, states that “10% of all US views of political content were of posts that falsely claimed the vote was fraudulent.”

Facebook COO Sherly Sandberg states ““I think these events were largely organized on platforms that don’t have our abilities to stop hate.”

Facebook is already living in its new Meta Universe, not in reality. We can no longer blindly accept the companies’ terms and conditions; these actions have consequences.

While Haugen testified, she recommended that Facebook should be regulated, this should be the starting point.

The company has demonstrated an inability to act responsibly, and the misrepresentation by Facebook executives needs to end. Checks and balances need to be put into place. It is a system of checks and balances that has allowed our nations to flourish and a company that wields the influence of near 79% of the global population, effecting democracies throughout the world, should be held to these same standards.

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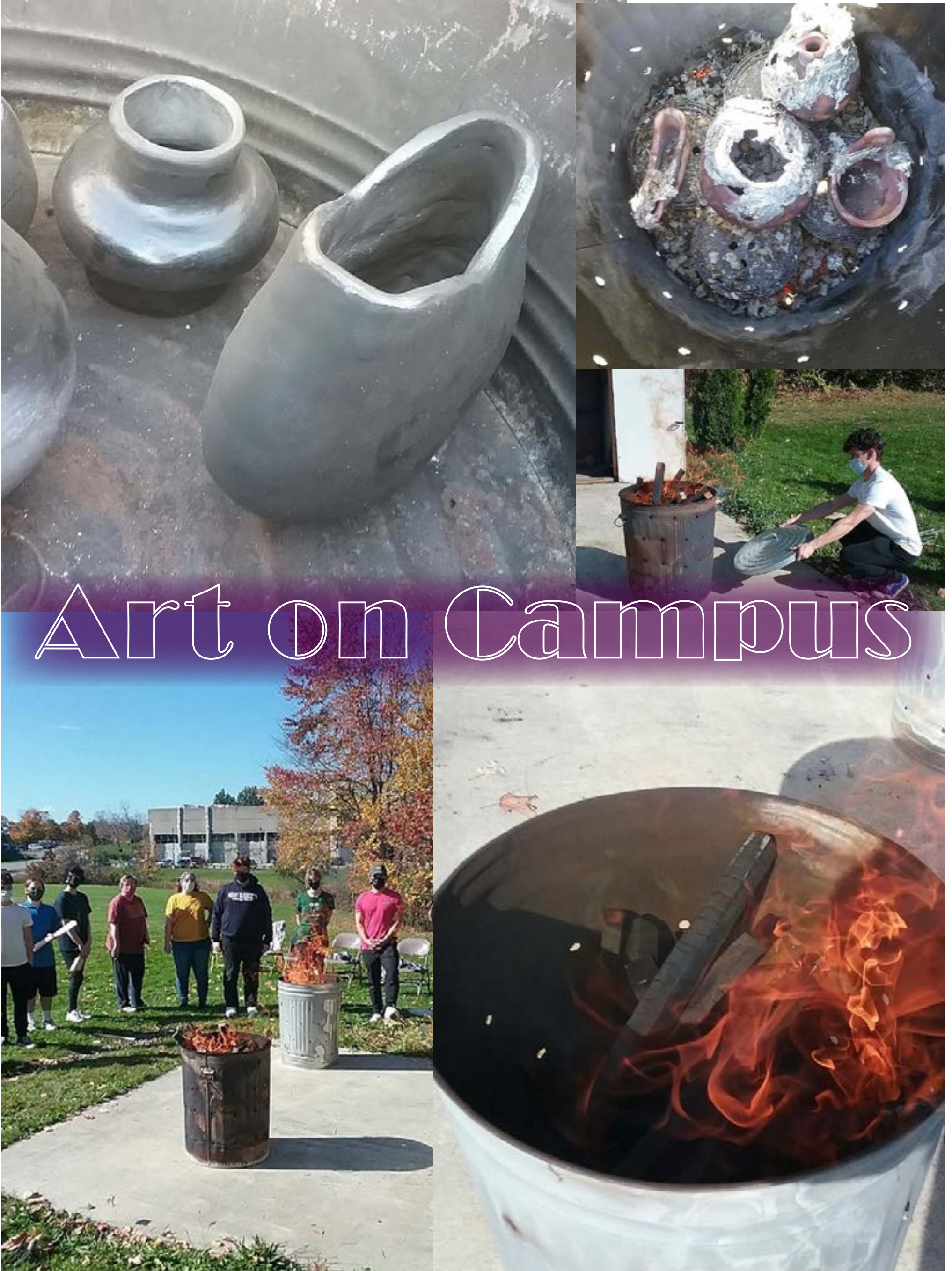
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# Art on Campus

*Photos courtesy of MWCC Art Department*

Ceramics students take their clay pots and sculptures to be fired in trash can firepits, where the glazes on the pots react with the heat and produce interesting, often stunning, colors and finishes.

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# Hiking for Your Mind and Body

## A Student's Thoughts on Traversing Wachusett Mountain



Photo courtesy of Kelly Johnson

**Wachusett Mountain**

*By Kelly Johnson*

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Ever have a day where you need to clear your mind, breathe fresh air, and get in some steps? Wachusett Mountain, just 20 minutes from the MWCC Gardner campus, has 18 trails of which many intersect and cross another making the hiking possibilities feel never ending. And the view from the top? The Boston skyline to the east is a great setting for a moonrise after viewing a sunset over the Berkshires to the west. Just make sure to bring a headlamp if you plan to hike after dark. Some of the hiking trails are open throughout the year, even during ski season.

If you are new to hiking and looking for an easy trail, I recommend the loop which includes Echo Lake and Jack Frost trails. This is a 3-mile hike with the least amount of elevation gain to the top. The Echo Lake trail passes a small body of water which houses a bench to enjoy the scenery. You might even see a porcupine hanging by the water! The elevation gain on this loop is gradual, but be aware that there will be rocks and tree roots to navigate, so take your time and enjoy the surroundings. This loop should take you just under two hours to complete.

If you are looking for a more moderate climb that is quick and direct, The Mountain House trail

is under 2-miles, which should take you a little over an hour to complete. Parking is free on the side of Mountain Road, so plan accordingly, as this trail can be busy with hikers. If you like this trail there are several trails you can take on your way up or down to lengthen your hike and mix up your scenery. The Bicentennial, Loop, and Jack Frost trails all intersect with Mountain House, and depending on the time of year, all have their own perks to explore.

The many trails of Wachusett Mountain have free parking access on the north, south, east and west sides of the mountain. If you plan to park in the visitor center lot, the fee per car is \$5 for

MA residents. You can also park for free in the ski parking lot to access hiking, except during ski season, which typically runs November into April.

It's recommended that whenever you head out for a hike you should have at least 1-liter of water with you and proper footwear, such as hiking boots or sneakers, with soles that will grip the rocks. Wearing layers that can be removed or added as you get warm hiking up or begin to cool down while enjoying the summit is a best practice. Sunscreen and bug spray are always a good idea, and pack yourself a snack to keep up your energy level. Hiking with a companion, having a trail map, and knowing when the sun will set are ways to keep yourself safe.

Hiking at Wachusett Mountain is a 4-season sport, so be prepared for wet trails in the spring, bugs, heat in the summer, fallen acorns in the fall, and ice in the winter (micro-spikes are necessary for winter hikes). Paper maps are located at the beginning of some of the trails and are the best way to ensure a safe hike in case your phone can not be accessed while on the trails. Until you are well familiarized with the trail system at Wachusett I strongly encourage you to have access to a map.

Trust me when I say, the possibilities to hike Wachusett Mountain are near endless!

<https://www.mass.gov/doc/wachusett-mountain-state-reservation-trail-map/download>



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