

# The Mount Observer

“Voices of the students of Mount Wachusett Community College”

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11 PAGES

## If You Can't Stand the Heat...

### Aging HVAC System Disrupts Budget As Well As Student Focus

by Kevin Hayes

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

With an HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) system that has sections more than fifty years old, facilities management and students are both quick to acknowledge the daily in-classroom consequences that the current HVAC infrastructure at the Mount presents. In terms of dollars, the financial implications could be staggering. However, there is also a cost for students, inhibiting their potential ability to focus in the classroom, which could put pressure on the college to move sooner rather than later.

According to some students and staff, the inconsistent and uneven temperatures within the Gardner campus result in

discomfort. Maddison David, a student at the Mount, said one of her classrooms is very cold. When asked if the temperature

difference is distracting, David said, “Not so much distracting, but it makes it harder to focus.” Robert Koch, Assistant Dean

of the Collaborative Learning Commons, said it can get so hot that he gets “... very warm very quickly. I would start sweating

profusely, and I don't like to do that, so I dress like it's summer all the time.”

These temperature distractions pose unique challenges to our facilities management team. Glen Fox, Executive Director of Facilities Management at MWCC, explained that the univents along the perimeter of the building are among the oldest parts of the system. They cost around ten thousand dollars each, and can fail full heat. “Right now, it's repair over replace.” said Fox, but explained

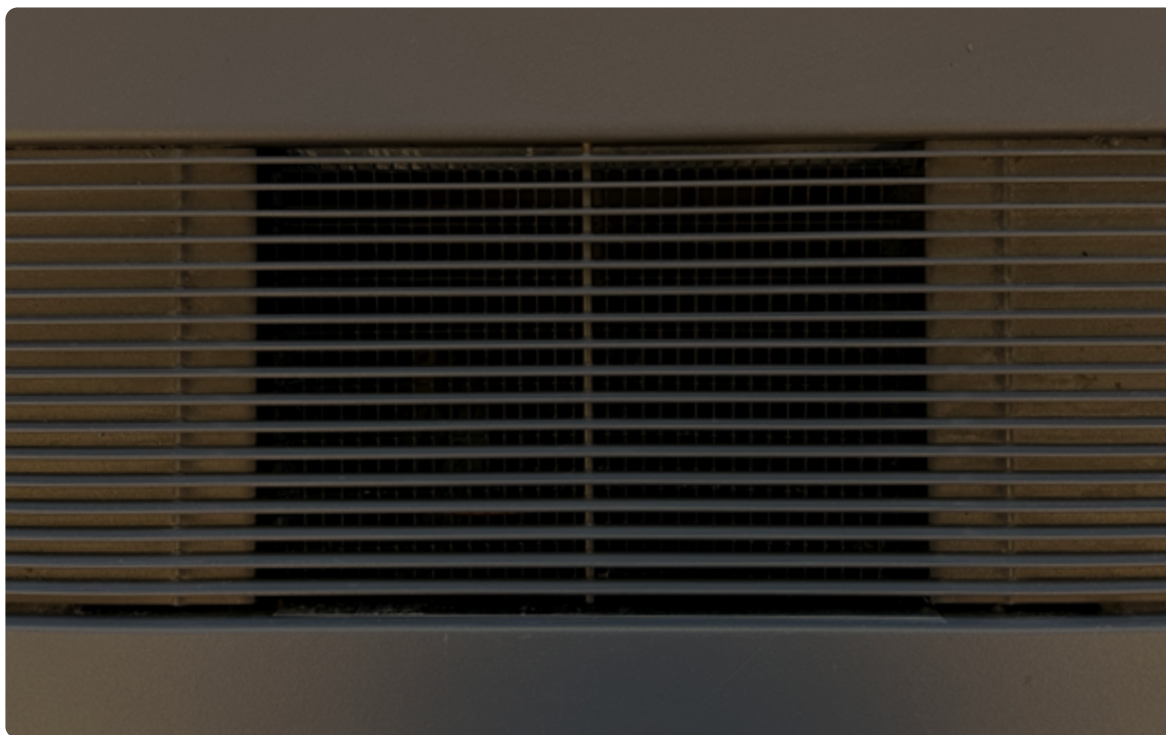


Photo by Tom Hill Jr.

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## PFAS Pollution

### Forever Chemicals Threaten Westminster

by Elysian Alder

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In February of 2022, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) found that private drinking water wells in homes along Bean Porridge Hill Road in Westminster had PFAS levels 50 times what state regulations consider safe to drink. “PFAS have been found in at least 169 public water systems in 95 cities and towns, and most of them have exceeded the state's legal limit,” explained Madison Latiolais, a community organizer working for Community Action Works, an environmental nonprofit based in Boston that provides training and resources to communities and individuals

with environmental concerns. “Westminster has some of the highest levels of PFAS in Massachusetts,” she added. The contamination concerns in Westminster prompt the question: How does Mount Wachusett Community College address water safety?

Sarah Bolden, an administrative assistant for the facilities management department at the Mount said, “We have city water, so the testing is handled by Gardner Water. We do use filters in our water bottle fillers across campus.”

According to the 2022 annual water quality report released by the Gardner Water / Sewer department, drinking water in



Photo by Matt C. from Unsplash

#### Firefighting gear can contain PFAS chemicals

Gardner comes from Cowee Pond, Crystal Lake, and Perley Brook and is then pumped to the Crystal Lake Water Treatment Facility where it undergoes filtration to produce finished

water for the City of Gardner. Joseph Zadrozny, a project manager at the Veolia-operated

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# Aging HVAC System



Photo by Tom Hill Jr.

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that even repairs can be very labor-intensive. Nonetheless, with the univents nearing their end of life, it's a project that will have to be done eventually.

Fox notes the desire for facilities to try and make the system as environmentally friendly as possible. It may surprise students to learn that the MWCC Gardner facility uses wood chips in a biomass boiler to assist with heating during the winter months. The project, originally mothballed due to numerous safety concerns, was revived in 2002 when Fox started at MWCC. This year, the boiler will burn around 1,000 tons of wood chips alone. "It's a lot cheaper than burning oil," Fox said, adding, "We also have two wind turbines out there that produce so much electricity that some months we're sending it back."

According to Energy Star (a public-private partnership dedicated to energy efficiency), colleges and universities typically spend around \$1.10 per square foot on electricity and \$0.18

per square foot on natural gas. MWCC's Gardner campus has a square footage of 450,000 feet. If we consider the Mount to be a typical college, that would mean spending a whopping \$576,000 per year on energy. Although MWCC doesn't use natural gas, the Gardner facility spent \$620,204 on energy in 2023—a bit more than the 2021 study estimates, but given the increase in energy costs over the past two years it's safe to say they're in the ballpark.

When considering the manpower and the expense of replacing parts in the current system, it becomes evident that this may not be cost effective either. Maybe the question is: How long will it take for a new, efficient HVAC system to be in use before it pays for itself with efficiency?

According to Fox, the deferred maintenance budget is \$5,000,000 every 5 years. But that includes all maintenance, not just HVAC fixes. Fox said, "The cost to replace the system

would be a staggering number. It's very expensive to replace, and I'm not sure where else we would have to go to get the money. Maybe the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance." DCAMM is a State agency responsible for capital planning, public building construction, facilities management, and real estate services for the Commonwealth.

When asked if he thought a new system could pay for itself over time, Fox acknowledged that the changes wouldn't have an immediately beneficial financial impact, but still feels they may be worth the cost.

Although it's unclear how it could be paid for, one thing is clear: the financial impact is going to leave a scar. Getting it done ASAP may avoid a second scar—the one a student might get when they are concerning themselves over the temperature instead of focusing on what's being taught in the classroom.

# PFAS Pollution

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water and wastewater facility in Gardner, said, "We test the water twice a day at the plant, and then once a week, we go out around to different parts of the city and test for bacteria. We test for PFAS here at the treatment plant." Zadrozny also advised that the annual water quality report lists the data and results for everything that is tested for. This report is public knowledge and is available on the [gardner-ma.gov](http://gardner-ma.gov) website.

PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are toxic, human-made chemicals often found in some consumer products that are waterproof, fireproof, non-stick, and stain resistant. Some common products that may contain PFAS include coatings on food packaging, outdoor clothing, carpets, leather goods, ski and snowboard waxes, and more. These are just a few examples corroborated by MassDEP, as PFAS can be found in many varied consumer products due to their useful properties like water and oil resistance. There are over ten thousand PFAS chemicals, but Perfluorooctanoic Acid (PFOA) and Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS) are the two most widely used PFAS chemicals.

"There must be millions of people who use PFAS products but don't know it," commented Kent Yang, a Computer Information Systems student at the Mount. "Does the convenience of PFAS outweigh the health concerns? That's debatable, but I'm also open to more environmentally-friendly alternatives that do the same job with similar durability. The tough thing about chemical bans is that it's basically a game of chemical whack-a-mole, where one chemical is banned, then it's replaced with a cousin chemical that has similar characteristics and a similar chemical structure."

Due to their environmental persistence, PFAS are sometimes referred to as "forever chemicals." Once they are released into the environment, they do not break down and can remain there for a long time. "The longer we produce

them, the longer they will linger," said Latiolais. "They end up contaminating our groundwater and our soil which ends up getting into our bodies as we drink water, as we eat things from our gardens...things like that." Latiolais's concerns about PFAS contamination are supported by the water solubility of the chemicals, allowing them to seep into groundwater and soil from sources like firefighting foam, factories, landfills, and spills.

"Once a nearby composting facility in Westminster began taking in contaminated paper sludge to put through their organic facility, unknowingly, they were processing PFAS chemicals and contaminating the local water supply. As people were taking the fertilizer from this facility and spreading it in their flowerbeds, it spread these chemicals everywhere into people's gardens," said Latiolais. "The community only found out because people started to get sick with kidney problems, and no one could understand what was going on. It started to get more and more severe, and a resident decided to test their well."

Exposure to PFAS can lead to higher cholesterol levels, compromised immune systems, liver and kidney damage, as well as an increased risk of thyroid and kidney cancers. It can also cause developmental impairments in unborn children.

Latiolais explained that Community Action Works is working to propose a ban on PFAS chemicals in Massachusetts. "It starts with awareness," she said. "I genuinely think a lot of people don't know what these chemicals are. And that's okay. But we're trying to change that."

Have your own opinions on current events, hot-button issues, or events on campus?

Write an opinion piece and send it to [mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu](mailto:mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu)

It may just end up in our next issue!

Sign Community Action Works' petition to ban PFAS chemicals in Massachusetts





# From Pain to Page

## Profile: Alessandro DiVito

by *Kevin Hayes*

OBSERVER CONTRIBUTOR

Alessandro DiVito, a 20-year-old student at MWCC majoring in English with a concentration in professional writing, shows promising talent as a writer. DiVito, who works as a youth mentor over the summer, is already well on his way, having three books currently in progress. Centered on sci-fi and time travel, their titles are: *The Adventures of Jerry Rodger*, *Tyrone's Multiversal Adventures* and *Mabel's Uncharted Adventures*.

During DiVito's first year at the college, he struggled while majoring in Engineering and was directed to the THRIVE Center to help get him back on track. THRIVE, an acronym for Together, Harnessing the Resources that Inspire a Valuable Education, not only supported him in pursuing his genuine passion for writing but also introduced him to Thriveworks, a program connecting him with a counselor to help him overcome his demons. DiVito continues his weekly appointments with his counselor

(Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). "I would use writing as an outlet," said DiVito. "You know, I make a story where I'm the hero, and stuff goes wrong, but it works out in the end. And then my love for writing just blossomed from there. It started out as a coping mechanism, and then became my passion." And it looks like his passion is working for him.

DiVito worked as a Summer Camp Counselor at the YMCA in Winchendon last year. He recalled the joy he got telling stories to the four and five-year-old kids as they



Photo courtesy of Alessandro DiVito

Alessandro DiVito

**"I would use writing as an outlet."**

**- Alessandro DiVito**

But DiVito didn't just wake up one day and say, 'I think I'll be a writer or mentor young people someday.' His passion stemmed from his experiences with adversity. DiVito persevered through childhood bullying and a horrific stalking-like encounter with an older student when he was in the seventh grade, DiVito was in search of some way to deal with this trauma. Fortunately for DiVito, he has a close, supportive family. He also stumbled into a program called Thriveworks, which he found out about through the THRIVE Center at the Mount.

to this day. He said, "My counselor helps me become a better me."

DiVito started experiencing mental health issues at an early age. By the time he was 15, he had endured ADHD, anxiety, and depression. After the age of 15 he battled with PTSD and panic attacks. He was not looking to go on any medications to deal with it, so he sought counseling instead. Although DiVito is grateful to have the resources for counseling, he expressed it can be a long and difficult process.

DiVito started writing in junior high as a coping mechanism for his ADHD and CPTSD (Complex

were waiting to be picked up. He said, "The kids loved it." Although the ability to make a good living from writing is important to him, DiVito considers the delight people experience reading his work an equal success.

Having grown up right down the street from MWCC, DiVito appreciates having easy access to both its resources and the ability to stay close to his family while completing his studies. He's also not a big fan of having to travel far in traffic. But the proximity to college is only one of two conveniences he benefits from living in Gardner.

DiVito loves his family and enjoys family gatherings. On his mother's side they congregate almost every Sunday, since none of them need to travel more than 45 minutes. "I see my family a lot. I'm very family oriented," explained DiVito. Although he doesn't have as many family gatherings on his father's side, maybe once a month, DiVito says when they do get together, they are fed well. "For six or seven people we start out with a big bowl of salad, two boxes of rigatoni, burgers, chicken, steak, and a special meat sauce. Of course there's coffee, cookies

and fruit afterwards," he said. DiVito was gleeful while talking about regular family visits to both sides of his family.

DiVito is considering transferring to a four-year college like Fitchburg State or Plymouth State as one of two paths. The other, not surprisingly, is to "dive headfirst into self-publishing."

Given his appreciation for the written word, keeping an eye out for *The Adventures of Jerry Rodger* in a book store near you might be a pretty good idea.

**Join the *Mount Observer* crew and get your writing, photography, artwork, or reviews out into the world! Or maybe take on a behind-the-scenes role and help run the *Observer's* website or social media. Whatever your interests, you can find a place on our team!**



# E-Waste Disposal Made Easy

## Properly Disposing of Electronics

by **Kent Yang**  
STAFF WRITER

Since the early twentieth century, electronic waste has existed alongside technologies such as telephones and radios, which utilized vacuum tubes. However, at the time, there wasn't much concern for the environment regarding electronic waste. It wasn't until 1976, when the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) went into effect, that the disposal of e-waste into landfills became illegal. The purpose of the RCRA was to protect the environment and human health from the toxicity and hazards of waste disposal.

Improperly disposed e-waste can have severe consequences, including contamination of

water, soil, and even the air. According to the World Health Organization, e-waste contains neurotoxicants that can impact neonatal outcomes among pregnant women, as well as affect the central nervous and respiratory systems, leading to increased asthma incidences.

To properly dispose of e-waste, visit <https://recyclesmartma.org/beyond-the-bin-search/> and follow these steps:

- Enter your item.
- Enter your Zip Code.
- Drag the distance slider.
- Click "Search," and it will populate numerous locations where you can drop off your item.

Listed below are some other locations for e-waste drop offs. Please note that not all drop-

offs are free of charge. It is recommended to call ahead before visiting:

- 1. AKS Recycling**  
15 Cobbler Drive, Fitchburg, MA 01420  
Phone: (978) 345-9425
- 2. All American Recycling**  
15 Oak Hill Lane, Fitchburg, MA 01420  
Phone: (978) 772-2854
- 3. Best Buy**  
33 Orchard Hill Park Drive, Leominster, MA 01453  
Phone: (978) 537-9042
- 4. Goodwill**  
25 Park Ave, Worcester, MA 01605  
Phone: (508) 752-4042
- 5. D&D Waste Removal**  
72 Jackson Ave, Fitchburg, MA 01420  
Phone: (978) 342-6893
- 6. East Coast Electronics**  
68 Walker Road, Shirley, MA  
Phone: (978) 537-9940
- 7. Harvey Recycling**  
50 Arbor Way, Fitchburg, MA 01420  
Phone: (978) 342-2200
- 8. PC Survivors of Massachusetts**  
342 Circuit St Ste. 4, Hanover, MA 02339  
Phone: (781) 924-3071
- 9. Raw Material Recovery**  
461 West Broadway, Gardner, MA 01440  
Phone: (978) 730-8266
- 10. Staples**  
60 Pearson Blvd, Gardner, MA 01440  
Phone: (978) 632-4285
- 11. Wachusett Watershed Regional Recycling Center**  
131 Raymond Huntington Hwy, West Boylston, MA 01583  
Phone: (978) 464-2854



Photo by John Cameron from Unsplash

Above: Electronic waste; Right: Use the Recycle Smart website to locate e-waste disposal locations near you.

The Beyond the Bin search tool is next level recycle searching. Use it to find out how and where to donate or recycle items that can't go in your home recycling bin and are too good to trash. Choose from the material categories listed or enter a keyword and your location, then choose an option for drop-off, pick-up, mail-in and hit search!

Select a material category OR Computer

Drop-off, Mail-in, or Pick-up Fitchburg, MA 01420, USA 20 mi radius

Search

Add a Listing Contact Us

Are we missing an outlet? Share our URL; ask them to join!

18 Results Found (Showing 1-18). Want closer results? Sort by Distance

Sort by name: Sort A > Z | Sort Z > A

Sorting by distance will show listings closest to your location. Select a listing below to view more details.

## GET INVOLVED!

Want to join a club or participate in a community event? Then visit InvolveMOUNT at <https://mwcc.campuslabs.com/engage/> and get started today!

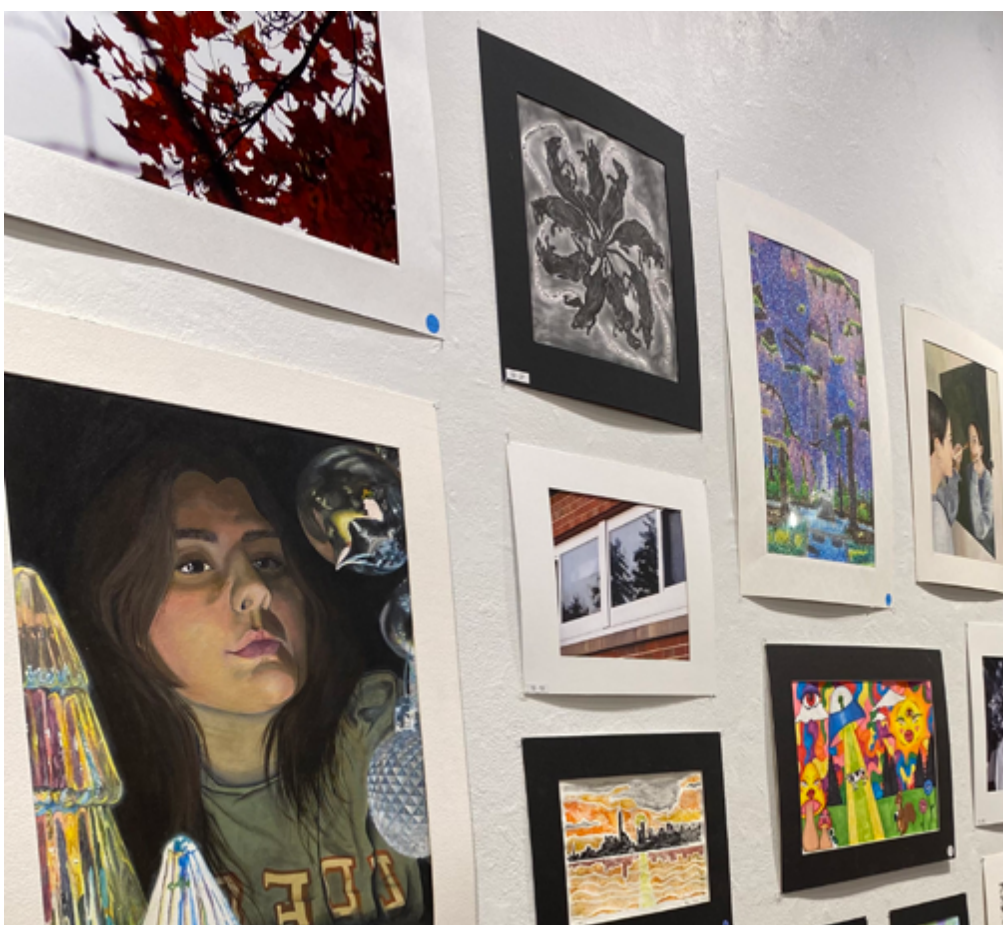
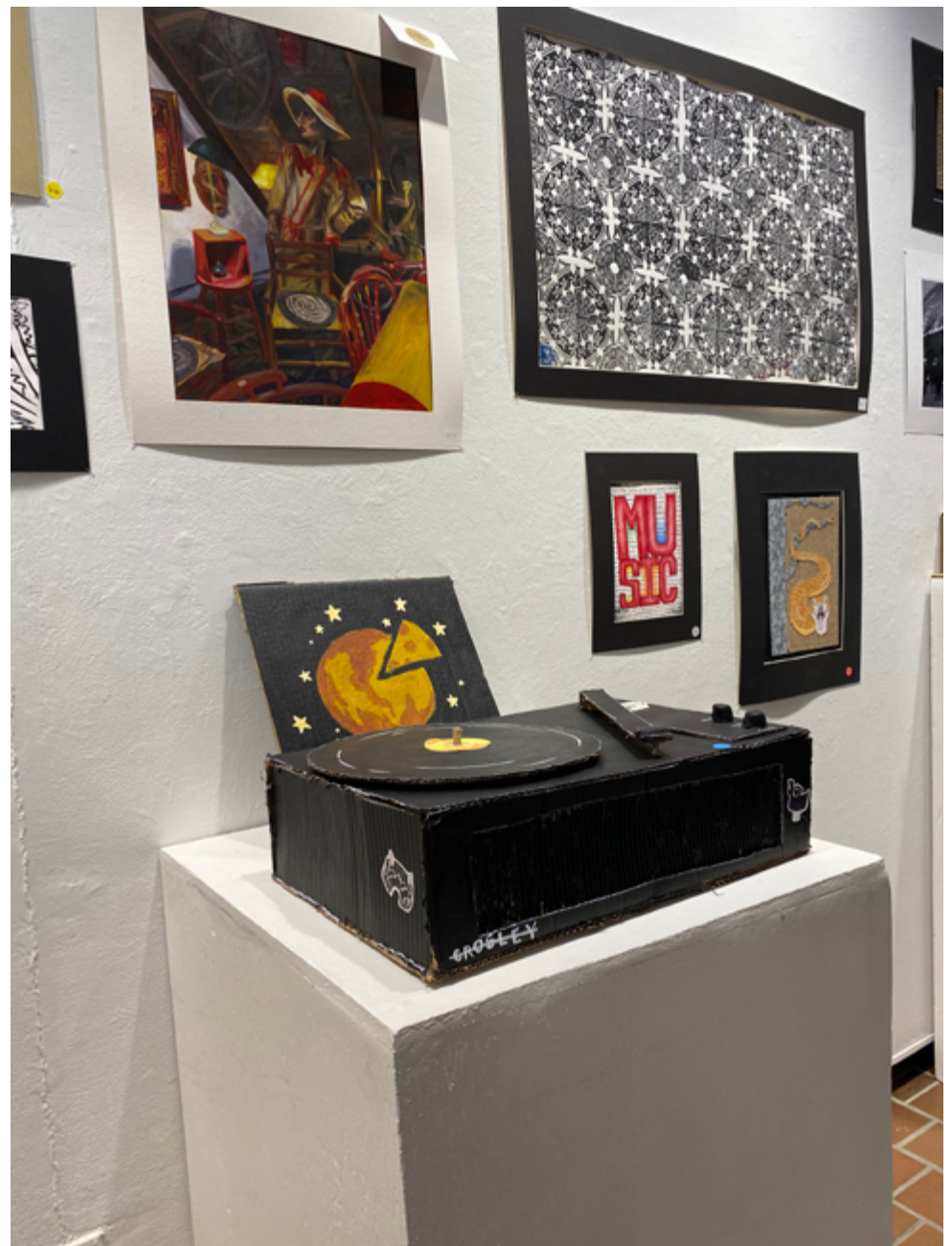


## 38th Annual Regional High School Art Exhibition

Each spring the Art Department invites all area high schools to participate in our Annual Regional High School Art Exhibition and competition. It provides an opportunity to celebrate the work of high school art students and the dedicated art teachers who make this exhibit possible.

The exhibition includes student work from:

- Athol High School**
- Contoocook Valley Regional High School**
- Fitchburg High School**
- Leominster High School**
- Lunenburg High School**
- Ralph C. Mahar Regional High School**
- Oakmont Regional High School**
- Shepherd Hill Regional High School**
- Wachusett Regional High School**



Photos by Elysian Alder



# From the Mount to Manhattan

## Student Life Offers Mount Wachusett Community College a Trip to NYC

by Elysian Alder  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

On Saturday, April 13th, students and staff from the Mount boarded a bus bound for New York City, courtesy of the Student Life department. According to Kathy Matson, Director of Student Life, 44 tickets were sold for the trip. These tickets went on sale on March 19th, approximately 25 days before the trip. The bus departed promptly at 6:00 AM, reaching its destination in the Big Apple around 10:30 AM.

Matson estimated that the first trip was done in 2002, long before she began working at the Mount, and the COVID-19 pandemic put a halt on offering the trip from 2020-2023. Staff chaperones who attended the trip this year included Jason Zelesky, Dean of Students; Melissa Croteau, Chief of Campus Police; Kayla Coates, an administrator in Student Services; Jesse Connor, advisor of the Art Club; and Kathy Matson.

Upon arrival, everyone was free to explore the city independently, and excitement filled the air with students and chaperones chatting eagerly about their plans for the day. The bus eventually stopped at 8th Ave and West 50th Street in Times Square.

From there, attendees enjoyed a variety of activities, including navigating the NYC subway system to travel around the city and taking rideshares to destinations like Coney Island. Some attended Broadway shows such as *Moulin Rouge* and *Sweeney Todd*, while others focused on sampling the city's infamous culinary delights.

"I am a pizza adventurer, and definitely judge a city by the quality of its pizza. NYC does not disappoint," enthused Jill Vescovi, a Business Administration & Accounting major who attended. "We tried slices from 5 different spots, and the best slice of the day was the 'Hotboi' from Scarr's Pizza in the Lower East Side."

With the trip taking place just a month before the 2024 graduation, some saw it as an opportunity

to create lasting memories with their peers. "My favorite part was the opportunity to travel with my friends before graduation," said Kaleigh Raskett, a student who attended the trip. "We ended up going to the National History Museum and Japan Village! It's a bit far, but totally worth it."

Oren Cohen, another student in attendance, said, "I went to the 9/11 museum and the Intrepid Museum. The highlight of the trip was definitely the space shuttle pavilion aboard the Intrepid, where the Enterprise is currently housed."

These experiences are what make it worthwhile for Matson and the Student Life department, and according to Matson, the feasibility of NYC makes the trip annually doable so long as the budget allows for it. She emphasized that the best part of organizing trips like this is "being able to offer this opportunity to students... To provide a cultural experience that they might not be able to afford on their own."





Photos by Elysian Alder, Austin Legers, Jill Vescovi, Justina Johns, and Kaleigh Raskett

Opposite page, clockwise from top-left: The New York Times Building; food from the Times Square Cafe & Diner; the Times Square Nintendo Store; Scarr's Pizza from the Lower East Side; monkeys at the Central Park Zoo.

Right page, clockwise from top-left: Times Square; The Lunt-Fontaine Theatre, Broadway; Times Square Midtown Comics; The Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation



## Creatures of

# EARTH

Celebrating Earth Day with  
Student Photos of Wildlife







Photos by Gary Brayboy (left page) and Kent Yang (right page)

Left page, clockwise from top-left: Candy-striped Leafhopper (*Graphocephala coccinea*); American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*); Common Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*); Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*); Mexican Water Lilies (*Nymphaea mexicana*)

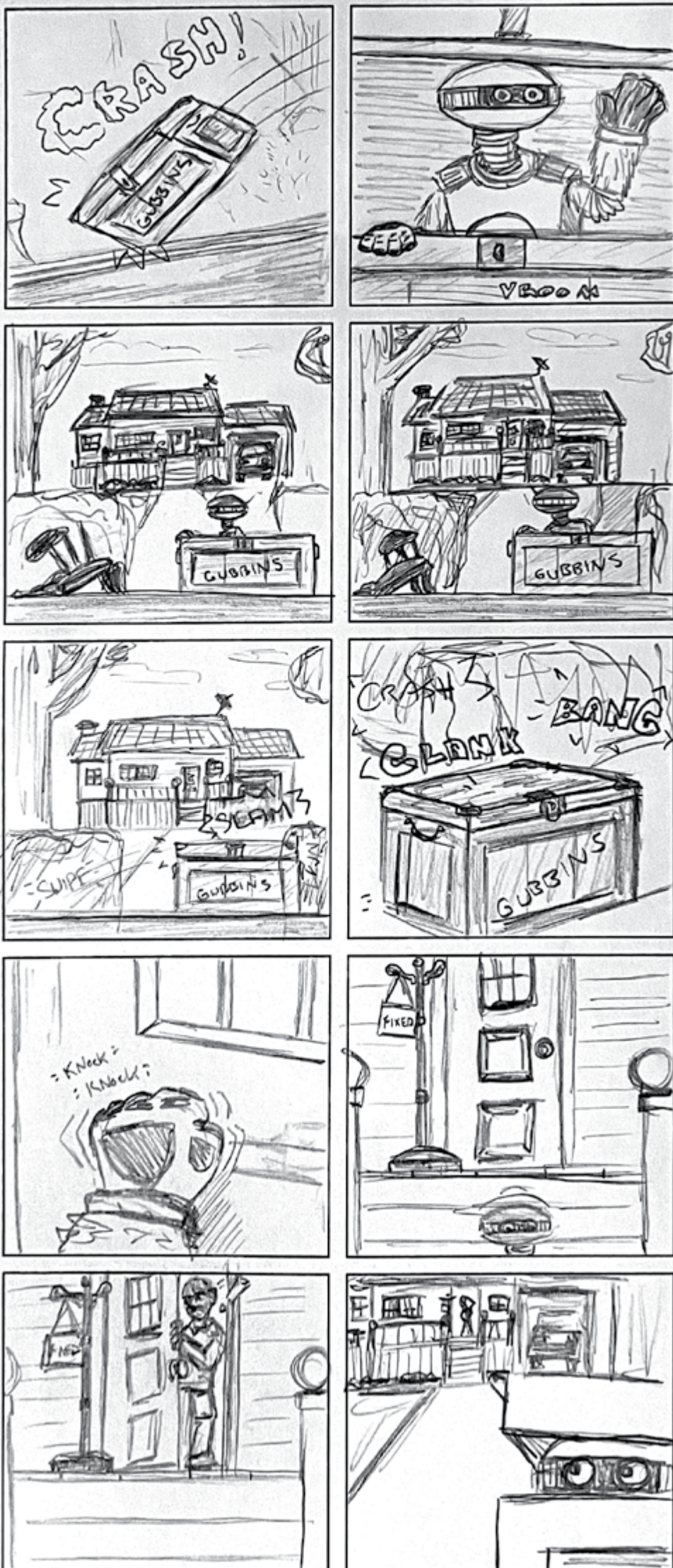
Right page, clockwise from top-left: Tufted Globetail (*Sphaerophoria contigua*); Jaguar (*Panthera onca*); Mountain Zebra (*Equus zebra*); the eye of a Bactrian Camel (*Camelus bactrianus*); American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*); Eastern Cottontail Rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)



## COMICS

"While we wait for Gubbins' new adventure to unfold, here is a behind-the-scenes look at the storyboard for Gubbins' first story from last month. Enjoy!"

- Tom



Copyright Tom Hill Jr.

# Collagist Colleen Freeman



Photos by Colleen Freeman

by Elysian Alder  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Looking for new décor? How about a personalized vision board for inspiration? Look no further—Colleen Freeman, an early childhood education major at MWCC, is eager to share her talent for collages.

"Currently I do my artwork for fun, but eventually I would like to sell it," she said. However, she emphasized that her true aspiration is to inspire others, just as she was inspired by fellow artists. "I would like my artwork to make a difference in someone's life."

Freeman first remembers making collages in preschool. "I made a macaroni art piece and the macaroni was painted gold," she shared. "There were different types of macaroni on the canvas."

Now she's traded macaroni for magazine clippings, using magazines that she gets from friends and from companies offering subscriptions. Freeman has taken art classes throughout her educational career, even taking graphic arts in high school. "What I love most is the whole entire process," she explained, "from thinking about my vision to following through on the canvas."

Freeman grew up in Quincy but is currently located in Leominster. She attends her classes virtually and can be reached at [freeman2@mwcc.edu](mailto:freeman2@mwcc.edu) for inquiries. "If anyone wants me to make them a collage for any occasion, please let me know," she said.



# Creative Writing

## What Have You Done?

by Desiree Leader

What have you done?

her eyes pool  
with the depths of the ocean,  
petroleum clinging to the outer rim.

She buries her dreams  
in single use plastics  
discarded by the roadside...  
still half-full with the only water left  
that's clean enough to drink.

What have they done?

She turns to look at her  
ungrateful children.  
She has given them her all -  
and they have taken it...

Polluted the oceans.  
Depleted the forests.  
Killed the animals for their meat and  
sport, hunted to near-extinction.

What have we done?

Her face burns  
with the fever of  
global warming.  
She rests her weary head upon  
a pillow of trash  
so deep  
it cannot be burned.

Volcanic tears turn to ash...  
there will be no one left  
to mourn  
when Mother Earth has gone...

What have I done?

What have I done?

Send your finished works of 1,000 words or less to [mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu](mailto:mountobserver@mwcc.mass.edu).

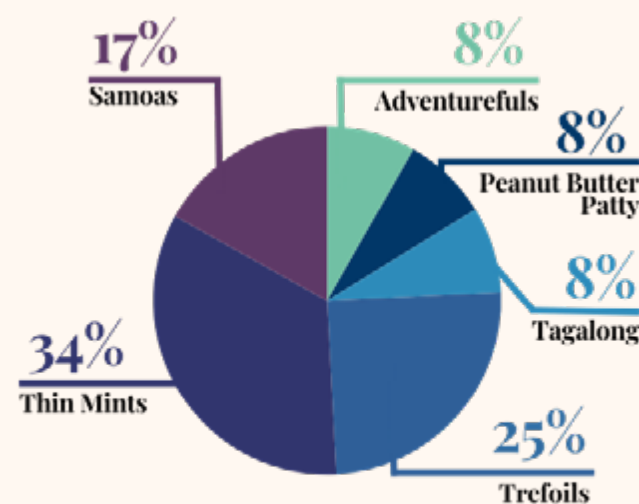
Want to join in on the fun yourself? Check out the MWCC Mobile App at

<https://mwcc.edu/campus-life/mwcc-icconnect-mobile-application/> and get started!

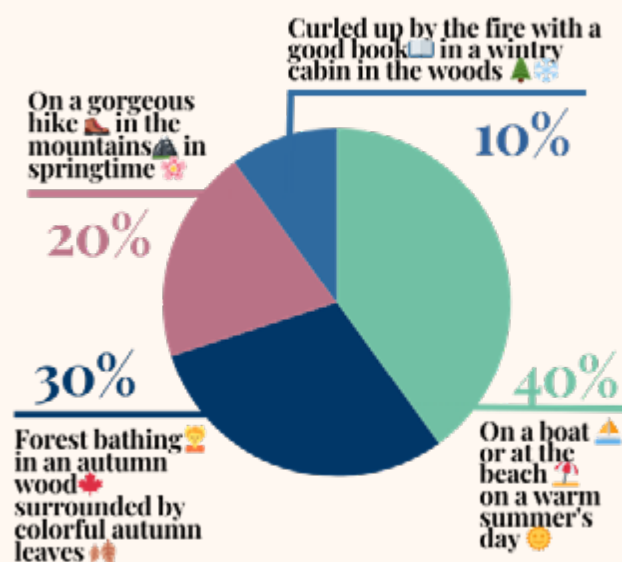
The Mount Observer Polls presents

## Your Thoughts

What is your favorite Girl Scout cookie?



Where would you most like to be?



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