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a student publication

# The Montgazette

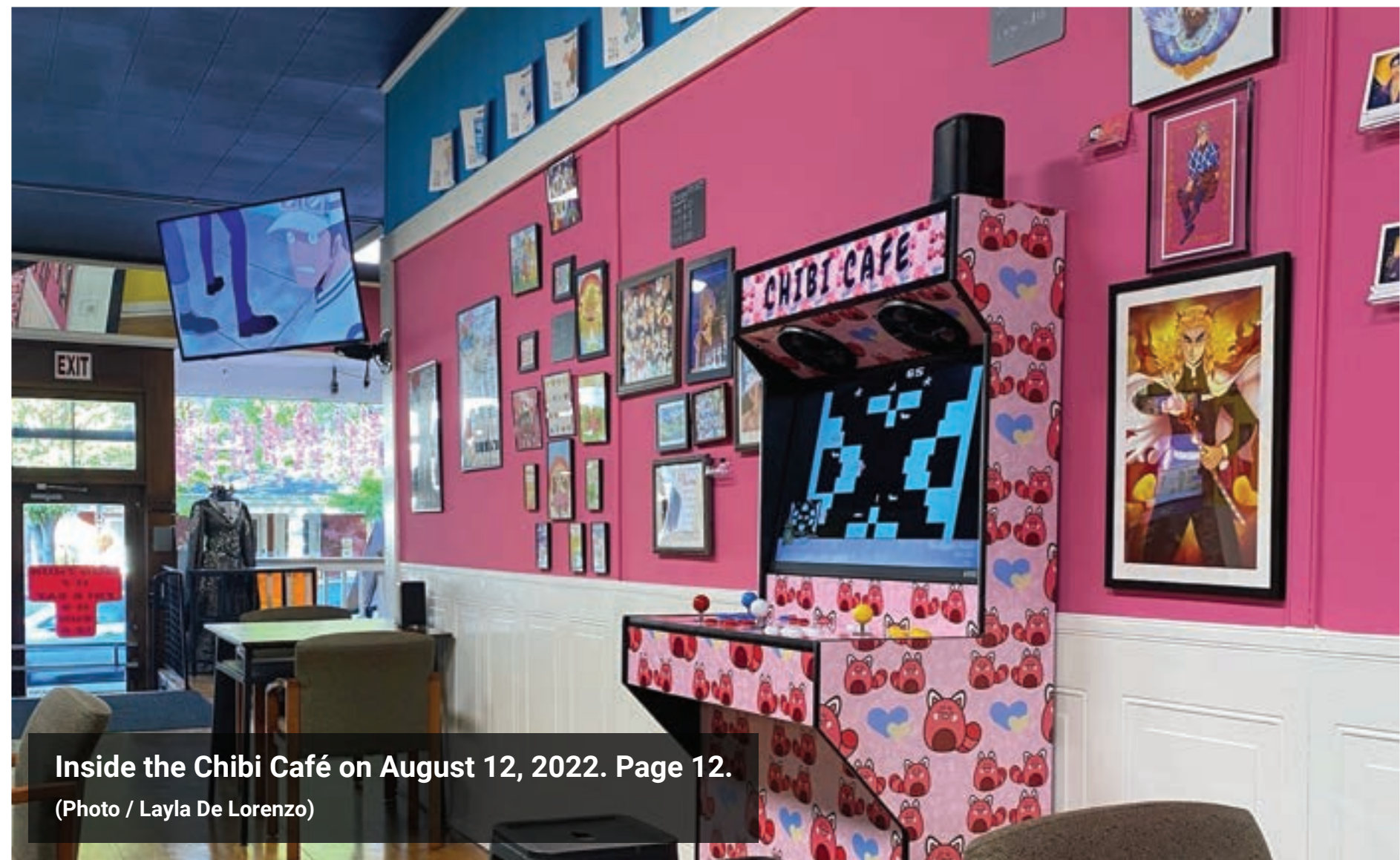
FREE

The Students' Voice

Issue 92

Serving Montgomery County Community College and the Surrounding Community

December 2022



Inside the Chibi Café on August 12, 2022. Page 12.

(Photo / Layla De Lorenzo)

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# from the Editor

## Break free of fear in 2023

Steven Wicher Jr.  
The Montgazette Editor-in-Chief

Throughout history, there has been one feeling that has benefitted humanity more than any other. The built-in instinct of fear is what kept our ancestors from becoming prey to Earth's most dangerous predators. However, in the modern era of security systems and cell phones, fear does not serve the same evolutionary purpose. Instead, fear seems to be holding students back in their life, rather than advancing them in it.

Many students fail to take risks because they fear the consequences. They fear that these risks will cause them to be judged by their peers or create more problems than solutions. They remain in their self-built cage of conformity, as fear holds them back from entering the unknown. I have experienced this dilemma myself, but I knew I could not live with this fear. I could not make my dreams happen inside my cage, as I watched my friends live life outside it.

Thanks to the College, I was

able to break free of my fear and make my dreams real. During the last weekend of October, the College held the Five-Day Film Festival for aspiring filmmakers. At the kickoff event, each team was randomly assigned a movie genre, such as horror, action, romance, and so on. Each team was also required to use a random prop and line of dialogue, in addition to a strict five-day window for writing, shooting, and editing.

This was an event in which I knew I wanted to participate. Yet, the fear of asking a stranger, or even my friends, to put their faith in me for this contest was too much to bear. What if I let them down? What if I was not good enough? What would happen at the screening when everyone has made these incredible projects and my video was disappointing? These questions ran through my mind long enough to convince me not to enter.

Luckily, I met a fellow filmmaker who felt the same amount of enthusiasm as I did.

Even though we had spoken just a few times before, I decided it was time to take a risk. After class, I approached him and asked if he was looking for some help with his project. The next thing I knew, we were at a Chick-fil-A planning out the script for the five-minute movie.

Over the next five days, we got together at his house to film, star in, and edit a cinematic masterpiece about a retired superhero who fights a group of incompetent robbers. It was submitted to the judges, with promise of the Best Film winning \$500 and forever bragging rights. On November 9, all the competitors and their families gathered at the Ambler Theater to view these five-day movies.

Fear almost kept me from going to the theater. I was making myself sick with all the nervous energy pulsing through my body. When it came time for our film, however, a curious sensation overtook the fear. Instead, I was inspired and amazed to see a project that I

contributed to shown on the big screen, in a theater built almost a century ago.

Although our masterpiece did not win the judges' prizes, I was honored to have had the opportunity. This was an experience that I could not have had if fear controlled my decisions. I let myself out of my cage of conformity, and my phenomenal partner was kind enough to lead me through the unknown. It is the sensation of breaking free of fear that I want every student to feel. So, I challenge every student, as a New Year's resolution, to put yourself out on the line and put your faith in humanity rather than in fear.

To all Montgomery County Community College students and staff, enjoy your winter break. I hope you make the best of it. As soon as the clock chimes midnight on New Year's Eve, and 2023 is upon us, the hard work officially begins for those who try. Best of luck to everyone and keep an eye out for the next issue of The Montgazette!

# Opinion:

## Why 43 missing students still matter

John Goggin

MSP 111 The Montgazette Contributor

In a speech on September 26, 2018, Mexican President Lopez Obrador told his people, “We shall not fear the truth.” This was a bold statement, considering the Mexican government had been implicated in the alleged murders and disappearances of 43 students, with some officials directly tied to drug traffickers. South of the border, cartel penetration into government agencies is a genuine problem.

Americans have blood on their hands, too. The lack of legal regulation of drugs coming into the U.S. has a direct impact on the horrific violence, death, and corruption in both the United States and Mexico.

According to a 2022 CNN report on drug trafficking, Mexican cartels are estimated to make between \$19 billion and \$29 billion per year from drug sales in the U.S. Since it is dark money, no one knows with certainty how much money there is, or where it is, or how it is spent.

This problem stems from the idea that “illegal” means “unregulated.” When something is illegal, most expect it will just go away. That did not happen with alcohol during Prohibition. It did not happen with marijuana in the 70s. Newsflash: It is not happening with narcotics now.

The fox is watching the henhouse. A 1986 investigation by then-senator John Kerry uncovered illegal ties between the CIA and the Nicaraguan Contras, a known drug-trafficking organization. President Ronald Reagan admitted this in his

1987 State of the Union address. In 2019, former Mexican Secretary of Public Security Genaro Garcia Luna was arrested by the U.S. District Attorney in New York. She was found guilty of receiving millions of dollars in bribes from a Mexican drug cartel.

According to The Sentencing Project, more than half the people in the U.S. federal prison system are incarcerated for drug-related crimes. Their report also shows that minorities are exponentially more likely to be incarcerated than the general population, which exacerbates racial disparities in the justice system.

The CDC reports that in the last five years, more than 50,000 Americans per year have died from drug overdoses. In 2022, this number has sadly surpassed over 100,000 deaths.

On September 26, 2014, college students got onto buses in Guerrero, Mexico, headed for a nearby town. According to survivors, the buses were stopped by municipal police. The police proceeded to shoot and kill the passengers. It is alleged by Mexican courts that the deceased bodies were given to a local drug cartel for disposal.

The bodies of the 43 students have never been found, and this crime allegedly has been covered up by the Mexican government. No one was arrested for these horrific, inhumane acts.

Many Americans feel that the U.S. should just build a wall along its border with Mexico, and this problem will go away. This red

herring makes for great political football. However, doing more of the same and expecting different results is rarely a successful strategy.

Humanity demands that Americans look at the problem objectively. The solution lies in a real look at the legalization and regulation of drugs. The problem needs be brought out into the light to be dissected by transparency, in this case revised drug classifications.

Yet, there is still a massive

amount of denial about the scope and scale of the problem. Perhaps the best society can do right now is support the families of the 43 missing students, along with the thousands of protestors across Mexico demanding reform.

The public can also raise awareness. Every time someone writes 43 in a paper or an internet search or a social media post as an act of protest, society learns more about these issues and the world becomes a better place.



43 photo supporting Mexican protesters.

(Photo / John Goggin)

# Meet the members of SGA

**Marc Regen**  
The Montgazette Contributor

Have you ever felt that you needed to tell the College administration something to help better your experience but did not know where to start? The Student Government Association is the perfect organization to voice your concerns. Students can find all eight officers walking on campus or sitting beside them in a class. The SGA is here for students and can help make the College experience better and more successful.

**President:** My name is Julia Gallo, and I am 19 years old. I learned about SGA when I received an email (on my birthday) about student elections. I ran for this position because I always considered myself a leader. I wanted to get involved with my school and meet new people with similar interests. As President of SGA, I organize and run each weekly meeting, as well as listen to students' opinions about their experience. My favorite part about SGA is our retreats because I feel like they are a time to disconnect from everything else and bond with each other.

**Vice President:** My name is Katelyn Durst, and I am 29 years old. I am a mom, a baker, and a future lawyer. I am a mom to my amazing bonus-son, Kingston, and my daughter, Arya. When I am not reading, you can find me watching a baking show, especially if Gordon Ramsey is in it. I love baking so much and

I could never do it for a living, so I pulled an "Elle Woods" and decided to be a lawyer. I am really excited to see where this journey takes me, especially if it leads to retirement on a private island. As VP, my core duties include heading the Inter-Club Council, as well as carrying out voting privileges. These ICC meetings are really a key component in unifying the different groups and clubs around campus. Being a part of SGA has been such a vital part of many student journeys here at the College. We are a key component in the connection between the students and administration.

**Treasurer:** My name is Onycha Gallimore-Jones and I am 27 years old. I am an introverted person who loves learning, the arts, and video games. Initially, I applied to SGA to appease the person who brought it to me, but I found myself becoming more invested in the organization. I had no intention of sticking with it, but now I could not imagine my college experience without it. As Treasurer, my main job is to coordinate the Student Activity Fee meetings. Student clubs submit funding requests, which we then discuss, ask questions about, and vote to approve. SGA is important because we show students that they have an avenue to get opinions off their chests and into the ears of

people who can help. Hearing about how grateful students are to be on campus just makes me smile.

**Secretary:** My name is Griffin Whalen, and I am a 20-year-old free spirit. SGA taught me a lot about college activities, and it allows us to make decisions from the optics of a student. I decided to run because I would like to make a

positive impact on student life. Some duties I fulfill as secretary is to take minutes for all our meetings. I also secure all files electronically to keep a record of them. Our meetings are amazing collaborative processes where students from many backgrounds come together for a common vision for the College.

**Continued on Page 5.**



Members of the Montgomery County Community College SGA. Bottom row left-to-right: Ryan Oakes, My Ly, Katelyn Durst. Top row left-to-right: Emma McGrath, Julia Gallo, Griffin Whalen, Marc Regen, Onycha Gallimore-Jones.

(Photos / SGA)

## SGA members

Continued from Page 4.

Senator #1: My name is My Ly. After immigrating to the United States about 11 years ago, I am now a first-generation college student pursuing an engineering degree. I believe that representation truly matters. With intersecting identities and experiences as a minority, I felt a due diligence to join SGA. I work to not only provide a diverse perspective in conversations, but to also amplify the voices of different minority groups. A few duties that I have as a senator are bringing attention to student concerns, working to propose a solution to those concerns and voting for SAF requests. SGA is critical to our students here at the College. We are their voice, after all.

Senator #2: My name is Ryan Oakes, and I am 32 years old. After a decade of adventures, I am pursuing a nursing degree with plans to transfer to Drexel University next fall. When I am not focused on my

studies, I am passionate about fitness and the outdoors. I enjoy activities such as mountain biking, hunting, backpacking, and camping. I chose to run for the position of an SGA Senator to give back to the community and students. I have been afforded so many great opportunities, it is important for me to give back in a meaningful way. My primary duty is to serve as a liaison between students and the College's leadership. I also vote on funding allocations for student clubs. Finally, I serve on a Student Support Committee comprising students, faculty, administrators and support staff. It plays an integral role in students' overall experience here.

Senator #3: People may think I am crazy, but I believe the more you say something, the more likely it is to become reality. With that in mind, I am describing who I want to become. My name is Emma McGrath. I am 18

years old, and this is my first semester. I believe that I am ambitious, open-minded, calm, and observant. In high school, I was very involved in student affairs, so I wanted to get involved at the College as well. As an SGA Senator, it is our duty to listen to our fellow students and advocate for their needs, address areas of concern, and propose solutions to these problems. Students are paying to attend this institution and they should have the best experience possible.

Senator #4: My name is Marc Regen. I am a 45-year-old who takes on many roles in life. I am not only a contributor to The Montgazette, but I have the honor of serving as an SGA Senator. I wanted to find an organization that not only allowed me to socialize, but one that also can make a difference. I knew I could be an asset, since I am an older student who is part of the LGBTQ+ community. I

can help students who connect with me by being their voice. I will help bring their ideas and suggestions to the discussion. I have a vote on funding allocations for student clubs. I also serve on two student support committees that include both students and faculty and work to improve students' college experience. SGA is urgently important to all students, no matter whether they are in virtual or on-campus courses. I want everyone to not only succeed but to also enjoy their experience here.

Now that you know what SGA is, be sure to approach its officers to make improvements that will help future students. During the fall semester, SGA meets every Monday from 2 to 3 p.m. in the President's Office in College Hall.

For additional questions about SGA, please reach out to [getinvolved@mc3.edu](mailto:getinvolved@mc3.edu).

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## Opinion:

# Attendance grades are unfair to students

Dillon Diorio

MSP 111 The Montgazette Contributor

I remember reading through the syllabi of my first courses at the College and being crushed. This feeling came from the prospect that some teachers were threatening to take letters off my grades in the case of three or more unexcused absences. Plus, an additional half letter grade for each absence after that. I came in expecting freedom, and the ability to take liberty in my education. What I got instead were more drastic consequences than I would have faced in high school. All in the name of what?

Grades and scores based strictly on attendance are unfair to students. Students' grades should be focused on their understanding of the material and ability to demonstrate using this knowledge, not their ability to sit in a chair for a couple of hours.

When students pay thousands of dollars for their own education, they should have the right to decide whether or not a lecture is necessary for them.

Plenty of students at the College have other responsibilities in addition to classwork. If visiting their family, caring for their child, taking a mental health day, or

working to make ends meet is more important to them than attending a class, then they should be able to make that choice. Students should have the freedom to prioritize their life without being severely punished and penalized.

It should be stated that not all teachers grade attendance in this way. Most teachers at the College are more than willing to work with students and their schedules, to make sure they do not unnecessarily lose points.

There are some classes for which attendance seems critically necessary, whether it be labs in science classes, or "hands-on" classes, like acting and public speaking. These classes could be exceptions to the attendance rule. However, for core courses like Math and English, it seems harsh that students get penalized for tardiness or lack of attendance.

Some would argue that having attendance as a necessary grade is important. It motivates students to show up where they can and absorb information. While this idea may be true, it does not mean leaving attendance grades to each professor's whim is a good idea.

Some ground rules

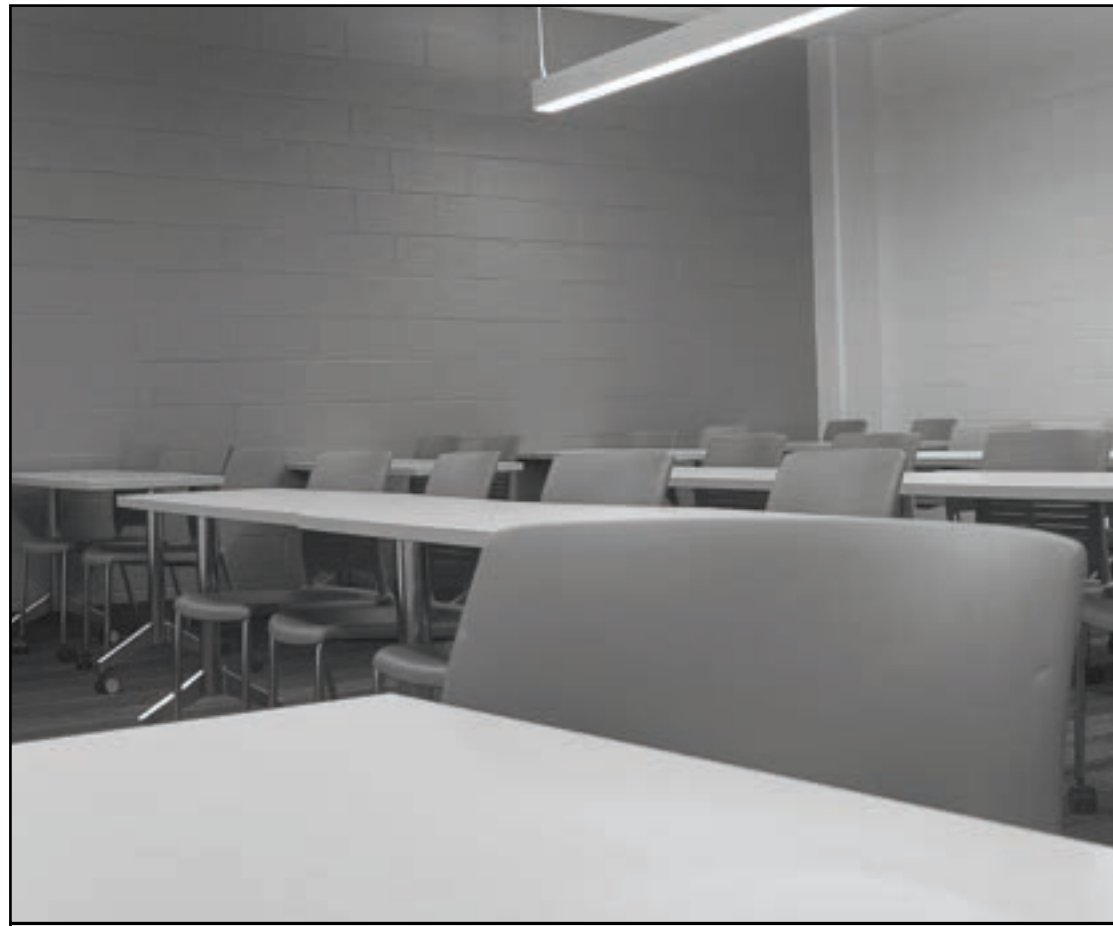
are necessary. A good compromise would be to put limitations on how much attendance grades can be worth and a college-wide policy on what penalties are allowed for missing a certain number of classes.

Another alternative solution would be to award

students with small amounts of extra credit for attending class, while not penalizing them for missing it. This would give incentive for students to attend class, and consequently, will probably increase attendance through a carrot instead of a stick.

I want to make it clear

that I love the College. I love the opportunities it has offered me and many other students here. I want it to be as good of a place as possible. I know and have faith that the College can grow in the right direction, so that all of us, students and faculty, have the best possible learning experience.



An empty classroom at Montgomery County Community College.

(Photo / Dillon Diorio)

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# Meet Karen Bruno: A Montgomery County preschool teacher

Nicholas Bruno

MSP 170 The Montgazette Contributor

The teachings of early education serve as the building blocks of a successful future. No matter where one chooses to go in life, the lessons learned in the earliest days of education are essential to arriving at any destination. Montgomery County's preschool teachers are aware of this fact, and they take great pleasure in the responsibility of guiding the future citizens of the world. Karen Bruno, a teacher at the Malvern School in Oaks, Pa., and a former student of Montgomery County Community College, makes it her life's work to shape the youth there into bright and intelligent scholars.

Bruno's profession comes naturally to her, thanks to 20 years of teaching experience. With three children of her own, she translates her motherhood skills into the love, care and attention that children need to succeed in life. To be a teacher of any age group, one needs to be attentive, supportive, understanding, and informative. However, when it comes to preschool, having fun is just as important as learning something new. Bruno makes it her daily mission to fuse hours of fun with crucial teachings. These early lessons help to solidify a well-rounded educational foundation.

"I love what I do. I don't look at teaching like it's a job," Bruno explains, "It's a lot of hard work, but it's also a lot of fun and it makes me feel like I'm doing something that matters." Bruno obtained her associate degree from Montgomery County Community College and her bachelor's degree from Temple University. She has been applying her studies for quite some time, but in her own words, "I feel like I've only just begun my career in teaching. The time flies when you're enjoying what you do and having fun."

Bruno has spent her career primarily with preschool students. She teaches a young age group instead of elementary or high school students because "older students have to suffer the pressures of due dates and exams, which, while necessary, are not nearly as fun as being a preschool student."

As a mother, Bruno knows what it is like to have students of all ages. Some of her fondest memories are of "teaching my boys new things that they had never heard of

before, taking them on field trips, and doing fun and creative activities. I like reliving those memories with my students, so that they have the time to 'just be a kid' while they still can."

Bruno finds both purpose and enjoyment in her career path. To her, there is no better feeling than the smiles of her students. She knows that young children are the future of the nation, and she wants to ensure that they have the most instructive and enjoyable early education experience as possible.



Karen Bruno with her camera.

(Photo / Nicholas Bruno)

LOCAL



The Montgazette  
The Students' Voice



# Local flea market unites punk music enthusiasts

Layla De Lorenzo  
MSP 170 The Montgazette Contributor

In the heart of Phoenixville lies a monthly punk rock flea market located within Root Down Brewing Company. This gathering has been bringing together music fans for the last seven years. It takes place on the final Sunday of every month. Record store owners and vendors, both local and from out of town, come here to showcase their inventory.

“What I like most is getting a different crowd,” said Adam Matone, owner of Matone’s Music in Collegeville. Matone, who has been vending at the flea market for the past six years, has watched this gathering flourish in popularity.

“It definitely helps to keep the spirit of punk alive locally. Besides going to shows, it’s the only time everyone gets together,” he said.

Upon entering the flea market, customers are welcomed by the sounds of hardcore beats blaring from speakers. Many spend hours thumbing through crates of music. Tables are

stretched out, overflowing with vinyl, CDs, and cassettes that are ready to be rummaged through.

Vendors are not limited to selling physical music. A few exhibit and sell their own art and handmade items as well. With so many unique vendors available, there is quite the selection of music-related goods for sale. All purchases directly support independent record store owners and artists.

The flea market is not just about buying goods. There is an evident sense of community at this gathering. The attendees engage each other, whether it be through talking to old friends, or getting to know new people. Everyone here seems united by a shared interest in punk music.

The sense of community that punk brings can arguably be more important than the music, according to Jim McMonagle, founding member of the band Flag of Democracy. He says, “The style of the music isn’t as important

as the spirit of the music. The music keeps reinventing itself. However, the attitude remains constant, and it creates a home for the outcasts.”

In the age of the internet, buying vinyl has become more convenient

and easier. However, for many, the sense of community that a local gathering like this flea market brings is irreplaceable. Please visit [www.rootdownbrewing.com](http://www.rootdownbrewing.com) for more information about this event.



Outside the punk rock flea market.

(Photo / Layla De Lorenzo)

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# Visit the Mustang Lounge for open mic night

**Nicholas Bruno**  
MSP 170 The Montgazette Contributor

Performing music for a crowd of people is no easy task. Local artist and College graduate Anthony Cheney (known artistically as Anthony C) is no stranger to making bold and empowering statements through his music. At the first Mustang Lounge open mic night of the year, on September 15, 2022, Anthony performed three tracks from his studio album “Therapy in My Expression.”

Anthony C staged the empowering and hard-hitting “We Outside” and the somber and reflective “Good Enough,” along with the bold and in-your-face “Mindset,” featuring Summer Ashley.

“Therapy in My Expression” is the third studio album by Anthony C. It serves as a defining moment for the artist’s talent when it comes to writing, producing, and expressing emotion.

“It’s good to have everybody back,” said event organizer and College professor Gerald Collom. As one of the College’s Mass Media and Production professors, he was happy to see the Mustang Lounge’s open mic night make a return. This event was unable to be held during the pandemic. The return of Mustang Lounge allows students to showcase their talents and form bonds within the College community.

When preparing for a performance, Anthony C says, “I want to make sure I give the people in the

crowd a good show, especially with the topics I speak on.” Anthony C’s music touches on a variety of crucial topics, including racial injustice in America, battling depression, and much more. “I usually make sure I say my name as soon as I step on stage [and over and over again] until I leave, so that the crowd won’t forget who I am and so that it feels like we’re having a conversation.”

The Mustang Lounge’s September open mic night marked a new chapter for the College. With

the end of the pandemic, students and music fans alike are finally able to participate in extracurriculars that the College has to offer, after a couple long years of social distancing. September’s open mic night event was the first of many to come, with artists like Anthony C lined up and ready to showcase their talents.

The Mustang Lounge occurs every third Thursday of the month in the Blue Bell Campus’s College cafeteria, in College Hall.



Anthony C, performing.  
(Photo / Nicholas Bruno)



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# Visit the Chibi Café for an anime haven

Layla De Lorenzo

MSP 170 The Montgazette Contributor

A storefront teeming with cute plushies and window decals welcomes customers. Inside, the eccentric colors, unique décor, and arcade games make it a haven for anyone with an interest in anime. From the menu items to the manga library, the influence of anime culture is seen in all aspects of the establishment. With its grand opening earlier this year, on Memorial Day weekend, Chibi Café has quickly become a hot spot for many.

East Greenville, Pa., recently welcomed its newest locally owned business, the Chibi Café. Located on Main Street, The Chibi Café is the first of its kind in the area. It is a place designed for anime fans, by anime fans.

Chibi Café owner Raven Leech has been an anime fan almost all her life. However, the idea for this business has been a dream in the making for the last 14 years. During that period, Leech spent time researching and

learning skills from previous jobs in preparation to realize her dream. “My driving reason for making an anime café was a strong passion for it. I wanted to provide a place for fellow fans to come and hang out and indulge in their interests,” Leech says.

Leech cites her restrictive upbringing as an inspiration for creating a safe space for others through the Chibi Café. “I wanted to make a place that others felt safe to go to and to be themselves, open up about their interest, find a support group, and just make a home away from home for any who needed it,” she said.

The Chibi Café became a reality in December of 2021, when construction first began. As a small business, the café faced challenges that it has steadily been overcoming. The staff has had many successes and strong word of mouth has attracted customers from near and far. “That

has been our biggest advertising, which in my opinion I couldn’t ask for a better means,” said Leech.

Supporting other small businesses and artists is important to Leech. Thanks to the Chibi Café, many artists now have a physical outlet to exhibit their work. The walls, bookshelves, and countertops display different pieces of artwork that customers can purchase. Leech says, “the artwork being displayed means a chance for so many amazing artists. It is so amazing for them to be seen publicly in a way that they typically wouldn’t be able to before.”

One of the most notable aspects of the Chibi Café is the sense of community it has created. Leech reveals, “I have a lot of younger individuals come in and say that this place is helping them come out of their shell and helps them feel like they have a place to go, and they have

made friends from coming here.”

This community is further strengthened by the frequent events hosted at the Chibi Café, such as open mic nights and micro-convention days. The micro-convention days bring the spirit of an anime convention to the Chibi Café at the end of every month. There are cosplay contests, trivia games and performances.

Leech is excited for the future of the business. She hopes to bring the café to a bigger group. “We really would love a space to provide more food and to be able to sell figures, manga and merchandise that is hard to find, and make it more accessible to feed the passion of local anime fans,” Leech says.

No matter what the future brings, the spirit and community of the Chibi Café will remain. For more information about hours or events, please visit their website, [chibicafeco.com](http://chibicafeco.com).

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The  
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# Holiday foods from around the world

**Rose Padva**  
The Montgazette Contributor

Holiday cheer fills the air with anticipation to celebrate with loved ones. Carried through the cold winter breeze is the scent of hot chocolate and cookies. Radio stations across the United States blast classic Christmas tunes. Televisions play lovable hits, like “The Santa Clause” or the many varieties of Hallmark movies. Stores advertise the latest sales on gifts. Just as Andy Williams sang, December truly is the most wonderful time of the year!

There are a variety of different ways that families celebrate during this season. Food and drink are often used to express one’s own culture. Here are some interesting foods from around the world to try this holiday season:

Starting off in France, the *Bûche de Noël* is a chocolate cake that is rolled up with a layer of cream inside. Powdered sugar is sprinkled on top, to resemble a yule log with snow on it. This is a very creamy dessert that would do well with children who love chocolate.

Next is *Banh Chung*, from Vietnam, which is a popular food specifically for the Lunar New Year. It is made of sticky rice, pork, and mung beans, and is flavored with several spices. It is wrapped with banana leaves to form a delicious square-shaped sandwich.

Hot chocolate is a well-known drink that is devoured during cold winter nights. However, Peru takes this favorite drink a step further: The Peruvian spiced hot chocolate is a wonderful drink to consume for anyone looking for that extra kick. Ingredients include chocolate, cinnamon, chili powder, cloves, nutmeg, and evaporated milk.

*Latkes* are a staple food eaten during the eight nights of Hanukkah. The food’s official origin is in dispute but can be roughly traced to countries around the Mediterranean. *Latkes* are famously made from shredded potatoes, onion, eggs, and breadcrumbs. The final product is flattened and thrown into oil, until crispy.

Lastly, *Jollof rice* is a dish from West African countries, such as Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Ghana, and

Senegal. The dish is fried with plantains, chicken, goat meat, turkey, or beef with a variety of special spices and vegetables. What makes this food special is that the ingredients can vary, depending on the family and specific country where they are made.

There are many ways to observe the holidays in

different cultures. Yet, by the end of the night, what is most important is that everyone joins together to eat a meal that fills them with holiday cheer. The holiday season is a time for celebrating with loved ones as we all fill our stomachs with delicious homecooked food.



Plate of homemade *Bûche de Noël*.

(Photo / Rose Padva)

# Opinion:

## “The Whale” is Moby Dick in scope, but Nemo in substance

Gabriel Gibboni  
The Montgazette Contributor

Brendan Fraser, star of the box office hit “The Mummy” franchise, has returned to the bright lights after decades in the shadows. Comeback stories are rare in Hollywood, especially for a guy like Fraser, whom one might describe as wholesome and uncontroversial rather than as a sexy, attention-grabbing superstar. Yet Darren Aronofsky, acclaimed director of “Black Swan” and “Requiem for a Dream,” saw a spark in the twilight of Fraser’s career, and he attempts to cultivate a flame in his new drama, “The Whale.”

“The Whale” is based on Samuel D. Hunter’s play of the same name. The film takes place almost entirely in one room. It revolves around Fraser’s character Charlie, a middle-aged gay man suffering from major health issues due to his severe obesity. In Charlie’s final days, he seeks to bond with his estranged daughter, while his best friend pushes for him to take measures to save his own life.

The film centers around themes of self-hatred and the effect it has on others, as well as how a lack of self-love leads us to idealize the people we love

most. Charlie is on the verge of death and has the financial means to get medical help to end his suffering. However, he thinks that he deserves the pain, and that his life is not worth living.

His best friend Liz and his daughter Ellie play massive roles in his life. He loves them deeply, yet his death wish is due in large part to feeling like he weighs them down. As a result, they have complex and conflicting feelings of love and hatred, and the audience witnesses the pain that he causes them through his own self-loathing.

This story seems like it is set up for success, with an important topic, complex characters, and a revitalized star, all under a beloved director’s fingertips. However, initial reactions have garnered varied feelings and reviews. David Rooney of The Hollywood Reporter called the film “grounded and credible.” However, that statement was, sadly, quite the opposite of my takeaway.

The film fails severely in three vital categories: performance, dialogue, and conclusion. While Fraser’s performance as Charlie is nothing short of spectacular, he is the lone standout. The entirety

of the supporting cast overacts to the maximum with their gestures, volume and movement. Although the film is based on a play, the actors should still attempt believability.

The dialogue does not help the weak performances. At its best, the writing feels based on shock value. At its worst, it is inauthentic political pandering. We get a tiny glimpse below the desolate surface in the final scene, but it is ruined by one of the most unearned endings of the year.

Charlie sees the best in everyone but himself. The people in his life desperately want him to save himself, and in the process, they give him something to love about himself. By the time we reach the end, though, he has hit a climax of self-hate and seeks redemption by trying to get his daughter to see the good in herself, instead.

Charlie’s only strength is in his daughter. Even in her most wicked moments, he idealizes her to a point of no return. I do not see this as a positive development, but rather sad and desperate. Charlie is throwing his life in the trash and hurting others by doing so. He has good intentions, yet as the saying goes,

“The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

As Charlie transcends in his final moments, the question needs to be asked: Should he really be rewarded for throwing his life away? Does the best of intentions deserve the best of rewards? Rather, I think a golden opportunity is missed. Aronofsky could have shown how the path of self-hatred and idealization leads to self-destruction, which would have provided an invaluable lesson to all viewers.

Aronofsky has undoubtedly made incredible cinema in the past, and the Brendan Fraser hype is real. Yet, this film feels mainly like an artistic failure to find truth and amounts to a dishonest attempt to draw tears from audiences. It is desperate for undeserved redemption rather being than the precautionary tale of self-destruction it could have been.

### About The Montgazette

The Montgazette is published twice a semester from October to May by the students and advisory staff of Montgomery County Community College.

# Opinion:

## Why has “It’s a Wonderful Life” aged so well?

Dalaya Richardson  
The Montgazette Contributor

With each passing holiday season, the popularity of the classic 1946 film, “It’s a Wonderful Life,” seems to increase. Through reruns on TV, younger generations are being introduced to its important messages about life. From my perspective, this is the movie that made holiday features mainstream.

One reason that this film continues to resonate with audiences is its realistic depiction of mental health. The holiday season is a stressful time of year for families. “It’s a Wonderful Life” depicts how pressures can build up in unhealthy ways and how family can help individuals through it.

The film follows the life story of George Bailey (James Stewart) through the eyes of Clarence Odbody (Henry Travers), Bailey’s guardian angel. For Clarence to get his wings, he must help Bailey realize how meaningful his life is before Bailey commits suicide. The audience sees the many highs and lows of Bailey’s life, such as dancing at school with his future wife Mary, and his father’s unexpected passing.

It culminates on Christmas Eve night, when Clarence uses magic to show him what his hometown of Bedford Falls would be like if he had never been born. After learning the true meaning of life, Bailey reunites with his family and friends. They

break out singing a beautiful rendition of “Auld Lang Syne” as a bell rings on the tree, in one of cinema’s greatest conclusions.

Whether due to the main plot, a controversial scene, or a certain character, most older films do not age well. Fortunately, “It’s a Wonderful Life” has not fallen into this category, even after 76 years. Its characters, such as George Bailey and Mr. Martini, remain true in their depictions of hard-working American families trying to make the best life possible. The film’s villain is Mr. Potter, who represents an unforgiving society that puts stress and pressure on them to either succeed or fail.

What makes the film stand out among other holiday films is its discussion about mental health. The audience relates to George Bailey so well because they connect with his struggles. He is a dreamer who wants to travel the world. However, one situation after another forces him to stay in Bedford Falls, where he eventually settles down and has a family. After his business accidentally loses \$8,000, all the pressures and dreams that have been building throughout his life come crashing down.

Bailey is unable to handle this stress, and snaps at his family and friends. This is a situation with

which many viewers, both young and old, can connect. One bad day can wreak havoc on the mind, causing individuals to do or say regrettable things to loved ones. Bailey does not have a healthy way to release his anxiety. He believes that with nowhere to go or anyone who can help, suicide may be his best option.

Clarence appears and acts like a surrogate for the audience. Through Clarence, we experience George’s life and realize how much he has to live for. In a clever way, it is the viewer who saves George in the end, as Clarence asks, “You see George, you really had a wonderful life. Don’t you see what a mistake it would be to throw it away?”

The film lets the audience know that while the holiday season can be difficult, tossing it all away is an even bigger mistake. The theme of standing by loved ones during difficult times is one that resonates more today than ever before. Showing each other that help is available can save lives like George Bailey’s.

The chemistry between the cast, the black-and-white winter visuals, and important life lessons are many reasons why families continue watching this Christmas classic. The film made its debut in 1946 to underwhelming reviews and a small box office profit. However, due to a

lapse in copyright, television stations were able to play the film without fees. It gained new life as it aired every holiday season and is now looked upon as a Hollywood classic.

Fathom Events, which is partnered with both AMC and Regal Cinemas, is celebrating the film’s 75th anniversary by screening it in movie theaters across America this December. Fathom Events is known for showcasing iconic films with fun facts and behind-the-scenes footage not seen anywhere else.

Everyone should go to the theater to experience the magic and lessons of “It’s a Wonderful Life” on the big screen. Bring a friend too, because as Clarence says, “No man is a failure who has friends.”

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