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a student publication

The **Montgazette** **FREE**

The Students' Voice

Issue 96

Serving Montgomery County Community College and the Surrounding Community

December 2023



**The Short Rib and Pappardelle entrees at Pietro's Pizzeria | Birreria in Radnor, PA.
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(Photo / Lauren Staffa)

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The Montgazette
The Students' Voice

from the Editor

Goodbye, The Montgazette!

Steven Wicher Jr.
The Montgazette Editor-in-Chief

For my final Letter to the Editor, I wish to leave you with the most important lesson I learned so far in my life. My journey to become editor-in-chief of the The Montgazette student newspaper did not start at the College. Instead, I credit an experience that happened just five weeks before I graduated high school in May 2021.

With an entire summer ahead, I had to find some sort of employment to pay for tuition at the College. Up until this point, I babysat my neighbor's son for a quick buck to spend on a Friday night. Now, however, the pounding footsteps of the future sent me scouring Souderton to find a job. Yet, I did not want to spend my summer days miserable, trapped inside a corporate shell, like Wawa or Walmart, which seemed to be the only places looking to hire.

With senior year came senior privileges, including the ability to head home after my third class of the day. Since I did not drive or even have a vehicle, this seemed more like a curse. I had to stay in

school, waiting for the buses to arrive each day. I spent the fourth block in my favorite classroom: Mr. Curtis's television studio. His fourth-block class was Television Production I. This was the class where I became interested in journalism and filmmaking.

I soon began to assist students with their projects and guided them on how to operate Adobe Premiere Pro, a professional-level video editing program. One student, named Jana, encouraged me to look into applying at a local business, where she was a manager: the Broad Theater.

As May rolled into June, I graduated from Souderton Area High School. Then, on July 18, 2021, I worked my first shift at the theater, as an attendant. I have remained with the company ever since, eventually also working my way up to manager. Jana left the business in August 2022 to continue her education at Temple University.

So how did the Broad help me become editor-in-chief of The Montgazette? In February 2022,

during my second semester, I took Professor Aronson's "Mass Media and Society" (MSP 111) course. He asked his students to write an article about either a good or bad aspect of their own communities. I took this opportunity to write about the Broad Theater and got quotes from my bosses, Kyle Hoff and Charlie Crown. When I submitted the homework, I did not give it a second thought and continued my studies.

Unbeknownst to me, Professor Aronson took the piece and submitted on my behalf to The Montgazette, where the editor even used the photo I took as the front-page image. I was ecstatic to have my own writing printed in more than 1,000 copies spread across both campuses!

At the end of the course, Professor Aronson approached me with an offer. He asked for me to meet him and the co-advisor of The Montgazette, Senior English Lecturer Robin Bonner, for a coffee. They extended an invitation to me to become the next editor-in-chief

of the student newspaper, which I humbly accepted. For the past six issues, I have worked with these amazing advisors to print high-quality writing that expresses the voice of students at the College.

My employment at the Broad Theater also continues. They help me work toward my future goals. Recently, I was commissioned by my bosses to create a short promo for the theater to play before Blumhouse's new film, "Five Nights at Freddy's." Every day, with each showing of the film, my work in video production is displayed before audiences. This is my first real opportunity to showcase my skills and gather potential clients who may want me to create a promo or commercial for their businesses as well.

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Meet Dr. Tim Brown: MCCC Dean of Liberal Arts

**Safia, Obayda, John, Rokšana, Arnab, Laaeticia, Vanessa, Fernanda, Kevin, Nomar, Sonia, Md Haque, Samia, Dev, Deya, Md Abrar, Mena and Amir
ESL 005 The Montgazette Contributors**

Dr. Tim Brown is the dean of Liberal Arts at the College and is a very interesting person. He grew up in a working-class family in Coatesville, Pa. He attended both West Chester University and Ohio University. During his first year as a student, he did not do well in English class, but he worked hard and found ways to be successful.

After Brown graduated from Ohio University with his Ph.D., he worked at several different schools, including Buffalo State College and Queens University in North Carolina, which he remembers having very hot weather. Then, for 16 years, he worked as a faculty member and chair at West Chester University, the place where he obtained his B.A. and M.A.

Although he is dean of the Liberal Arts Division now, Dr. Brown did not always have high-level jobs. In high school, he worked as a janitor for \$4.25 an hour and at Pepperidge Farm in the frozen food section. In addition, he was a newspaper reporter for six months.

When Dean Brown has free time, he enjoys yardwork because he can witness the results of his labor immediately. He also likes to walk in the park with his wife and listen to sports programs. His goal for the future is to become a college president. A few years ago, Brown wrote about his personal journey in a book titled “No One Cheers for Goliath.” In this book, he wanted to highlight the lessons taught to him by mentors.

At the College, Dean Brown’s main job is to help people by overseeing educational programs. Since he is an early riser, he likes to start his daily work by 7 a.m. Throughout the week, he regularly attends meetings, including special meetings to deal with particular issues. He enjoys working with the team around him but greatly dislikes when he has to say “no” to their ideas.

According to Brown, to be successful means one must be approachable as well as a good listener. These are important characteristics, so that people feel comfortable in their interactions. His best advice to a college student is to work hard and to get involved with campus events and clubs.

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LOCAL



The Montgazette
The Students' Voice

Review: Pietro's Pizzeria | Birreria

Lauren Staffa

MSP111 The Montgazette Contributor

Pietro's is a well-known Italian restaurant in Radnor, Pa., which opened seven years ago. The founders are Greek, opening their first restaurant in New Jersey a few years prior.

Pietro's falls on the classy side, yet formal attire is not required. Imagine walking into a gorgeous restaurant featuring classical Italian music, while wearing your jeans and a tee. Their dishes are exquisite to taste, and the relaxed vibe invites customers to come any day of the week, for any occasion.

The outdoor setup is eye catching and exudes a casual elegance: Two thoughtfully themed areas show pergolas entwined with hanging roses. One leans more romantic, the other more clean and family oriented.

Inside, the atmosphere is classic Italian design. The checkered floors are of Northern

Italian origin. The warm lighting is also familiar to Italian culture.

The first round of food was originally a French dish, mozzarella sticks, only in squares. Paired with a rich, house-made marinara sauce, these mozzarella bites were better than I have ever experienced, with more cheese than anywhere else.

Next, how could I pass up the short rib? It was fall-off-the-fork satisfying and glazed to perfection. My first time trying pappardelle also did not disappoint. Homemade pasta is always the best! To pair with the entrée, I chose a Super Tuscan wine. It was perfect alongside the deep, tasteful sauce, itself also possessing depth and body.

The highlight of the whole night was the chocolate mousse, made fresh in house. With

a chocolate crusty bottom and fruity syrup on the rim of the plate for dipping, it did everything it needed to. All those elements together made for a great dessert experience that fulfilled all of my taste buds.

The reviews on Google say it all. With 4.3 out of 5 stars, and 449 total reviews, statistically this restaurant is at a good standing. "Incredible experience!" says Delia, who attended her daughter's sweet 16 there. "Everything about this restaurant was fantastic," says Kerriane. "Everyone had a great time — I will definitely be coming back."

It's a great place to enjoy a sophisticated and elegant meal without having to dress up for the occasion. You haven't tried Italian until you experience Pietro's cuisine.

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The final chapter of Upper Merion's dark secret

Alex Welde

MSP 171 The Montgazette Contributor

The story of Susan Reinert's death was investigated in the 1984 book "Echoes in the Darkness" by Joseph Wambaugh. This book was later turned into a 1987 mini-series on CBS of the same name.

Upper Merion High School's doors closed in the summer of 2022, with the district's new state-of-the-art school set to open the following school year. While most staff members took their possessions from their classrooms, some items remained while the building waited to be torn down. These include hallway signs, art projects, awards, dead bodies, and more.

Well, the dead bodies in the school are just a rumor rather than pure fact. Yet, the destruction of the old building put an end to any speculation of where they could be located (if they even existed at all).

The rumor started in the 1970s when Jay Smith became principal. While Smith was working at the school, he employed English teachers William Bradfield and Susan Reinert. Speculation states that Bradfield and Reinert may have been having an affair. Then, in 1979, when Reinert and her two children went to the beach for a weekend, they never returned home. Around this time, Bradfield mysteriously became the sole beneficiary of Reinert's life insurance.

It is unclear what happened to the Reinerts or their bodies. One rumor suggests that either Smith or

Bradfield drove the bodies to central Pennsylvania and buried them there. Another has it that the children's bodies were concealed underneath the school's pool, since Susan's body was eventually found wrapped in chains in the trunk of a car. Either way, the children's bodies have yet to be located. With the district opening a new school in fall 2022, the old building, after standing for a half century, was destroyed, and no evidence of dead bodies surfaced.

Upper Merion Physics teacher Dave Montalvo was able to give a great perspective on this story. Montalvo has been teaching at Upper Merion since the 1980s, so his timeline does not line up with Smith, Bradfield or Reinert's tenure at the school. While he did not work with them or know them personally, though, he was able to learn about the three from their former co-workers.

According to Montalvo, Bradfield and Reinert both lived pretty normal lives. They each had families with children. Once they allegedly began their affair, however, Bradfield's behavior dramatically changed. Bradfield was eventually convicted of conspiring to murder Reinert and her children. He died in 1998 after being sentenced to life in prison.

Principal Smith is another unique thread to this story. Former co-workers described him as a pretty strange man. He would go on the loudspeaker

for morning announcements, often mumbling random phrases into the mic. While he may have had odd tendencies, he was generally seen by students to be a nice principal. No one expected him to be able to carry out a triple homicide. However, Smith was convicted for murdering Reinert and her children and was originally put on death row.

The Supreme Court later changed that ruling. Not only was the death penalty taken out of play, but the charges on Smith were dropped altogether. He became a free man in 1992, married a decade later, and died in 2009 of natural causes.

Montalvo would later find out more surprising evidence related to the story. Principal Smith's daughter and her husband vanished as well, never to be seen again. Smith also had charges of firearm violations and robbery brought upon him in his lifetime.

Montalvo tells the stories of Smith, Bradfield, and Reinert every year to his students. The true story of these murders may never be properly resolved, even with the demolition of the old school, but that is what makes urban legends so intriguing. Who knew there was one right here in Montgomery County?



Upper Merion's new high school, which opened in the fall of 2022.

(Photo / Mandy Welde)

Visit the history still alive in small-town Souderton

Rose Padva

MSP 171 The Montgazette Contributor

The year is 1852 and a man by the name of Henry O. Souder is looking to expand his lumber business. He hears about railroads being built in Philadelphia and proposes that the tracks be constructed across his land on the edge of Franconia Township.

Five years later, the railroad opens, and Henry's lumber business skyrockets. In honor of the success that Souder brought, the townspeople name the area Souderton. Until the 1980s, the railroad was used for public transportation and to transport raw materials to processing plants in the Philadelphia.

Without the railroad, Souderton would have been a lot different. The businesses around the station supported the town in its growth. According to the book "Images of America – Souderton," train passengers frequented Hotel Souderton and shopped at the old general store when they stopped in town.

Although many of the original shops are no longer standing, modern businesses have thrived in the town's location. In response, the town council decided to refurbish the historical section, including the train station. According to Phillyburbs, a federal grant for \$500,000 was awarded in 2017 to renew the buildings. At the time, Mike Coll, the borough manager, and Pam Coleman, manager of the volunteer group Souderton-Telford

Main Streets, led efforts to keep this rich history alive.

A restaurant called Northbound now occupies the old train station and is a staple eatery for many locals. Across from the station stands the Waite Station Nails & Spa. Its owner, Thuy, a first-generation immigrant from Vietnam, loves the community for allowing her business to flourish. Across the street from the station is the old Hotel Souderton, now renamed Olde Indian Valley Inn, which no longer functions as a hotel.

Down the street from the train station is another historical landmark. In 1922, the Broad Theater opened as a one-screen projection theater. The original business continued until its closure in 2004. After a failed restoration attempt by previous owners, current owners Kyle Hoff and Charlie Crown bought the building in 2018. On November 28, 2020, they reopened it as a state-of-the-art three-screen movie theater that has brought newcomers to town.

The establishments that stand today in Souderton are thriving businesses with the bonus of also being historical landmarks. History still brings locals and tourists together to bond in the beauty of suburbia. Thanks to Henry O. Souder and many other locals, Souderton continues to grow in popularity.



Souderton's train station and local businesses on May 2, 2023.

(Photo / Rose Padva)



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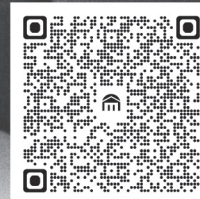
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A real poo done it: Droppings raise concerns

TJ Grumm

MSP 111 The Montgazette Contributor

Nothing ruins a productive walk around the block more than finding flattened pet feces in the grooves of one's shoes. For Lincoln Woods (Whitemarsh Township) resident Katie Murt, this has been happening more and more often.

Murt had gone for a walk around her apartment complex when she noticed she stepped in something she wished she had not. Said Murt, "I work from home, so I try to take a walk every day to get some sun and be active. It was a real bummer on an otherwise gorgeous day."

The cooling temperatures of late summer brought many of her neighbors outside as well, some with their pets. "People are generally good at picking up after their dogs, so you don't see too much of it, but you can certainly smell it, especially in the heat," Murt added.

For people like Murt, the worst part of droppings is the smell and how it lingers long after cleaning a shoe. However, the real threat is the number of disease-causing organisms, such as round worms, E. coli, Salmonella, and others that can be found in dog waste.

That is why it is important to Karley Bradford, a member of the Lincoln Woods property management team, that residents manage this waste. "We ask our residents to pick up after their pets and to enroll them in the complex's PooPrints program," said Bradford. She added, "There are penalties for not doing your part as the pet's owner by cleaning up after they finish their business."

PooPrints is a commercial company that tracks a pet's DNA through its feces.

Founded in 2008, PooPrints is the first company to help residential communities with pet fecal removal. Lincoln Woods began implementing the PooPrints program in 2021 to address the problem of unscooped waste.

For Bradford and the rest of the Lincoln Woods management team, PooPrints allows both management and residents to know that there is a way to track which pet left a gift for someone other than their owner. Said Bradford, "Our residents' pets are an important and loved part of our Lincoln Woods community, and they are just as much

at risk of stepping in dog poop." Bradford added, "Dog poop can be very nasty and carry diseases that put both our residents and pets at risk of serious illness."

The sentiment was echoed by Murt: "I love my neighbors' dogs. It's a highlight of my day when I see them out and about. They're so happy to be outside, just like me. I hate thinking about how poop can get between their paws."

For the residents of Lincoln Woods, whether human or dog, stepping in waste stinks — for everybody involved.



A pet waste disposal unit in Whitemarsh Township on September 8, 2023.

(Photo / TJ Grumm)

OPINION



The Montgazette
The Students' Voice

Opinion:

The price of safety

Trevor Wambold & Mason Smith
MSP 111 The Montgazette Contributors

As of 2020, more than 50% of American schools have law enforcement guards, according to The Trace, a non-profit journalism outlet devoted to covering the national gun crisis. Every year, more school districts have made the controversial decision to hire armed guards. The need for this security derives from the extremely unfortunate, but consistent, rise in school shootings. Ensuring the safety of students and staff members should be of the utmost importance. With increased threats of shootings, there comes an inherent need for more intense forms of protection.

The notion of posting armed guards on school grounds may be valid from the standpoint of deterrence, as the sight of a trained officer would hopefully bring a sense of fear, or at least hesitation, to any possible shooter. In an emergency, an armed guard would justify the phrase “better safe than sorry.” College student Aubrey Wolfe says, “Armed guards are necessary in protecting the students.” One can see this view as having some substance, as violent incidents in schools rose in the years post pandemic.

Although there would seem to be no downside if the guard is highly trained, the converse of this argument is that armed guards could possibly make a situation worse or frighten students. In fact, college student Jonah is opposed to having armed guards, saying, “It only raises tension. If we need armed guards,

we aren’t safe. Why do we need them in the first place?”

A majority of the public still do not support armed guards in schools as a solution. According to a poll by EdWeek, 55% of adults do not support having armed guards at schools. This statistic is concerning when the timeline of a school shooting is factored in. At the same time, college student Chasity said, “We’re for armed guards, as long as they are not overly excessive.”

When a shooting happens, most schools do not receive police assistance for many crucial minutes. Amber Box, a security alarm company employee, says 12.5 minutes is the average length of an active shooter incident. Five minutes is the average response time for the police following a call about gunshots. These five minutes could determine whether someone takes their last breath. Having an armed guard on standby could possibly help in detaining a shooter or ending the violence prior to the police’s arrival.

To ensure safety in our schools, administrators should consider positioning an armed guard on school grounds. Should disaster strike, a guard could offer an added layer of protection for students. Children and loved ones need to feel safe and comfortable in a learning environment without worrying about their lives being in jeopardy.



Cairn College, in Langhorne, Pa.
 is an example of a school that has armed security.

(Photo / Mason Smith)

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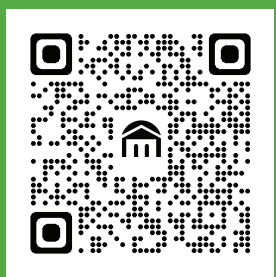
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Life is meant for living: Evade a sole purpose of working

Sasha Yudin

The Montgazette Contributor

The stages of life are as so: We are born, we go to school, and we enter the workforce, until our mental states and bodies are tarnished. Yes, beyond school is the workforce. The world, especially the West, thinks highly of folks who overwork.

Additionally, accruing vacation time often requires more than three years of working in an organization. The daily motto “We value mental health” is simply organizations putting the phrase on fancy email banners. Please. Any sort of vacation or mental health rejuvenation is simply time away from the workplace. It is a pity that goals involving financial gain exist as a top priority in both for-profit and nonprofit organizations. No good can come from any one person existing solely for the purpose of work. Of course, there can be legacies made through work and positive impact toward stakeholders and communities, but these come at a cost.

Life is meant for living! And, living requires a balanced level of mental and physical stability, with little stress, and with joy. A person who has a day off from work may say, “This day is my time to live,” but one key component that holds them back is a lack of work-life balance. The extended hours and workload put forth for this person by their workplace deprives them of being able to truly live.

The day off from work finally arrives, but this person does not know why tension still stirs within, why he/she/they is already thinking of what the workload will be the following day. The gleaming energy from work inherently and negatively influences the day off, whereas this time ought to be spent in joy and self-care. As energy is continuously being drained from employees, organizations focus on replacing their workforce with newly able bodies and brains. Thus continues the cycle of decreasing wellness among employees by smothering their lives with work.

What difference are we from able bodies deteriorating into carcasses and sent to the mortuary? Whether immigrants arrive in the U.S. and break free from their latitudes of hardship, or babies are born in this country with assortments of privileges, the plot of individual existence soon destines the same for all: work and overwork until death. Could there possibly be a certain tide that could overcome the continuous, decaying matter found within everyone’s purpose of existence toward work and overwork?

Fortunately, one gift to mankind that no one can take away, not even oneself, is willingness. Willpower is the singular compass to make decisions and choices, and to regulate how time is spent! Alas, this can yield a relief unlike any other: a person bearing willingness to experience their heart’s desire for joy.

Now that the compass has set forth a direction for a person’s sought-after joy, the sail toward reaching their joy is exclusively up to them. Still, overbearing awareness may rip through a person’s passion by overshadowing them with the importance of work and overwork. This dreary encounter can happen in small scenarios, including a gnat of a supervisor texting an employee on an off day about what is expected on the morrow, along with redundant reminders.

This coalesces into ongoing ruffled communication between the supervisor and employee, all while augmenting the waves of tension stirring within the employee. What may follow is a conduit of stressful emotions, giving no bounds to time and place for the mental state of the employee. Whereas a home ought to welcome the employee’s livelihood for peace of mind, it soon corrodes into a reality of unsound surges of dispirited mental health.

The employee’s willpower is fueled by tense combustions derived from the workplace, which begets undirected behavior at home, either aimed at occupying household chores or vocalizing complaints to relatives. No spare ion found within the employee’s willpower gets aligned with an inner sought-after joy. As humans with limited, precious time on this earth, the greater importance should be to truly live life and not overwork oneself to death. Be steadfast with the gift to mankind. Harness your willpower for the sought-after joy that provides peace. You must not be distorted with a continuous whirling of work and overwork.

In this world, willingness remains as the unwavering vivacity towards conquering the faces and sounds of one’s supposedly mandated purpose to work and overwork. Recall what your off day from the workplace is about: living and relishing your livelihood through joy, peace and comfort.

Ignore redundant correspondences from the workplace and expose their ridiculous dare to drain your precious energy, which is already steering toward your sought-after joy. However, do make aware through intelligent deciphering (and logic) as to whether messages or energies from the workplace on your off day is worth ignoring. Be sure not to compromise the whole portion of your mandated purpose in this world by overwork.

After all, experiencing joy is met because of some kind of labor, hence the old adage “fruits of labor.” However, workers should be steadfast in not allowing anyone to drain their soul into a dwelling state of work and overwork. To fortune’s favor, many jobs get created day by day. Do not heed what you are reading now in feeling thwarted to quit your current job. Rather, take insistence upon yourself to pave the course for willpower in setting a dauntless sail toward truly living life!

Goodbye

Continued from Page 2.

It is atypical of me to write so much about myself. However, I wanted to share with the readers my story because I believe there is an important message at the center.

No one knows in what direction life will take them. We may stay up late at night entertaining ideas for the future, but there is no guarantee they will come true. If we try to force life to take us one way, we could potentially be missing out on other opportunities presented to us. It does no one any good to have tunnel vision. We must keep our eyes open, and not be afraid to talk to other people and accept new challenges. One problem I see within my own generation is a lack of communication. Students have their heads down in their phones, with earbuds in, when life is truly all around them, outside their technology.

Who knows what could have been if I learned to drive sooner, and did not stick around Mr. Curtis's fourth-block class? I would not have met Jana, who would not have put a good word in for me with her bosses at the Broad. If I did not work at the theater, I would not have written the article that landed me in the sights of the newspaper.

We do not know the future, and I do not wish to try to force it one way or the other. It is best to be a boat at the mercy of the ocean waves. Let it take you with the current or against it.

It has been my pleasure serving as The Montgazette's editor-in-chief for the past six issues. To all Montgomery County Community College students and staff, enjoy your winter break. I hope you make the best of it. Best of luck to everyone — and keep an eye out for the next issue of The Montgazette in the spring semester!



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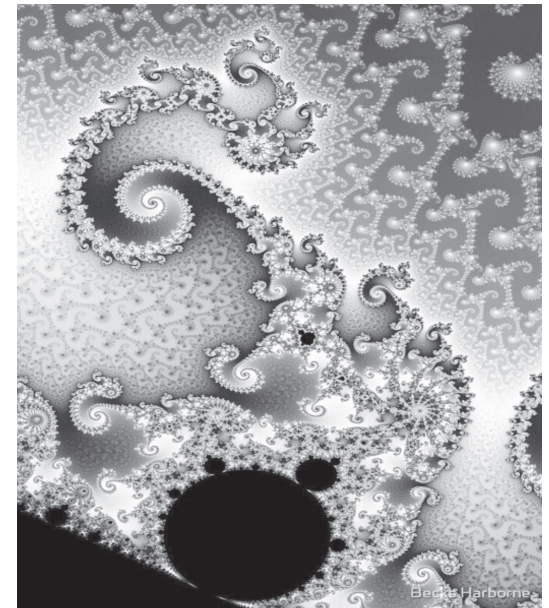
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Review:

“Ahsoka” series brings back the “Star Wars” magic

Liam Vandenburg

MSP 111 The Montgazette Contributor

Ever since Disney bought Lucasfilm in 2012, “Star Wars” fans seem to be more divided than ever. With J.J. Abrams’ sequel trilogy in theaters and Disney+ shows such as “The Mandalorian” released in recent years, viewers have shown a steady decrease in “Star Wars” excitement.

One reason for this downturn is that the quality of the recent Disney+ shows have been subpar. “The Book of Boba Fett” and the third season of “The Mandalorian” were both poorly written, with no real direction in which to take the characters. While this is a major problem for any long-running series, another common criticism of these two series is known to fans and critics as “nostalgia bait.”

Nostalgia bait has infected Hollywood. This practice occurs when large franchises bring back old characters for no logical plot purpose. It is just to make viewers say, “Hey, I remember that!” This kind of lazy filmmaking has been seen in series like “Scream,” “Jurassic Park,” and “The Fast and the Furious.”

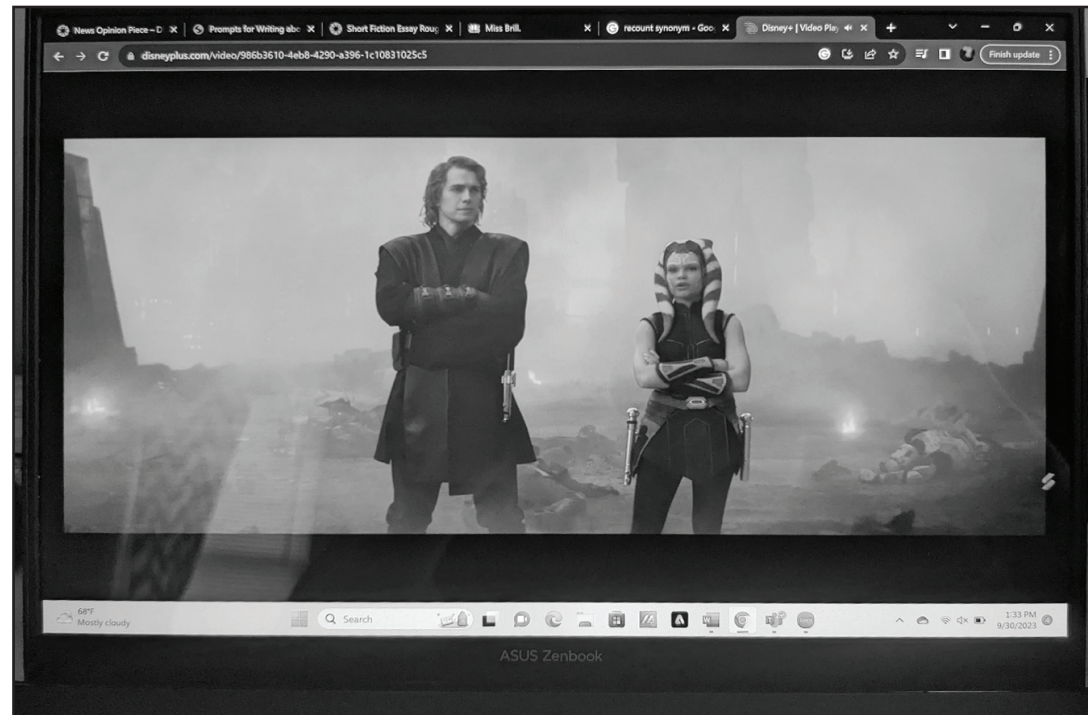
What makes it devastating for “Star Wars” fans is knowing that this series jumpstarted the high-stakes, big-budget film franchises when it first released in the 70s. Now, the series has fallen back on cheap parlor tricks to drive viewership.

That was until the latest Disney+ series, “Ahsoka,” broke the recent curse of mediocrity. The eight-episode show follows former Jedi Ahsoka Tano as she reunites

with old friends to prevent the rise of a new Empire. The series serves as an indirect follow-up to animated shows “Star Wars: The Clone Wars” and “Star Wars Rebels.” Alongside Ahsoka are characters like Sabine Wren and Ezra Bridger, returning to live action. In addition, marking his live-action debut is Grand Admiral Thrawn, who first appeared in his own novel trilogy, published in the 1990s.

The first major change in quality from the other shows is the writing and plot development. Dave Filoni, the original creator of “Clone Wars” and “Rebels,” pulls the franchise into unknown territory as he builds a story that captivates audiences in each episode.

Continued on Page 15.



Disney+ series “Ahsoka.”

(Photo / Liam Vandenburg)

“Ahsoka”

Continued from Page 14.

All of that said, the plot has been criticized for relying too much on previous events set up in the animated shows. Casual audiences may not recognize these characters, so “Ahsoka” takes time to explain the past through dialogue. Filoni does it in an organic way that updates viewers while also moving the action forward.

Although “Ahsoka” brings back many pre-established characters, they are in this new adventure for an actual reason, in contrast to the other Disney+ shows. The fifth episode features Ahsoka’s former master, Hayden Christensen’s Anakin Skywalker. While this sequence does have a nostalgic undertone, it is crucial to Ahsoka’s character development, as Skywalker motivates her to accomplish the mission.

The cast members do an incredible job of bringing the characters to life. Rosario Dawson as Ahsoka and Eman Esfandi as Ezra perfectly encapsulate what made their animated counterparts iconic. Details such as fighting styles down to micro-expressions are replicated incredibly accurately. Lars Mikkelsen succeeds in making Grand Admiral Thrawn just as terrifying a villain as he is in the novels by nailing his cold and strategic demeanor.

“Ahsoka” is a breath of fresh air after the repetitive mistakes of the Disney+ “Star Wars” universe. This series, along with 2022’s “Andor,” is hopefully a sign that the franchise will return to a quality that has not been seen since the departure of “Star Wars” franchise creator George Lucas.

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Review: “Goosebumps” delivers the scares on Disney+

Marc Regen
The Montgazette Contributor

The series “Goosebumps,” currently streaming on HULU and Disney+, is another adaptation stemming from the “Goosebumps” book series written by R.L. Stine. “Goosebumps” is a kids’ horror series, and, in the past, it has been known to be more geared toward the younger set. This version comes off as darker and seems to be a bit more adult in nature.

This show is a modern update featuring 10 episodes that interconnect the lives of a group of teens who must pay for a terrible secret harbored by their parents. The show is darkly funny, and just as spooky as past versions, and, what’s more: It arrived on the streamers just in time for Halloween.

The opening scene of the new “Goosebumps” series sets up the backstory for the rest of the episode and season. After school, Harold Biddle heads to his basement, where he settles in for the afternoon to draw in a sketchbook and take creepy Polaroids of a mask he has on display. The afternoon turns to dusk and when Harold goes to answer a knock at the door, no one is physically there, but a spirit enters the house, and soon the place is enveloped in a fire with the teen inside.

The series’ setting is the small town of Port Lawrence, and it features students who attend the same high school as their parents did. As is usual in many teenage romps, the story follows an eclectic group of high schoolers from across the stratified social hierarchy of suburbia. There’s Isaiah (Zack Morris), a star quarterback whose parents have a lot

riding on his sports career; his whip-smart childhood friend Margot (Isa Briones); Isaiah’s best buddy James (Miles McKenna), who is one of the few queer people in town; daredevil Lucas (Will Price), who is still reeling from the loss of his father; and social outcast Isabella (Ana Yi Puig), who secretly hates her peers.

After a party at the abandoned home where Biddle died in the ‘90s, all five find themselves tormented by strange objects from the house that tie into a greater mystery from their parents’ pasts.

“Goosebumps” comes across as too tame to match the bone-chilling qualities of adult-oriented stabs at the genre and a tad too gnarly for young kids, so the target audience is a bit unclear. I warmed up to its cast and its teen drama plots, however, and I was entertained by the spooks the show gave me.

The character of James is interesting to watch, with McKenna a scene stealer. McKenna is a trans man in real life, as well. To some, that can make his character even more interesting to watch, though it probably shouldn’t matter anymore whether the character is played by a straight guy, a gay guy or a trans guy. The fact that his character is a cliché, being the one-of-a-few gay people living in this small town, does not take away from the characterization McKenna builds.

It is important to note that the show stays relevant to 2023 as far as how comfortable some gay teens have become with who they are, which is something that was not visible 30 years ago. During one of the episodes, James has the confidence to hit on a guy at the party, not knowing if the guy is straight or not. The dialogue is worded so that it is more about the guy

being interested in James or not, not at all about whether the guy is straight or gay. This is another thing to note and a step forward for popular media.

This scene shows viewers how the series would like the world to be viewed. A young gay teen should be able to hit on another guy, with the worse that can happen being the guy says that he is not interested.

This episode shows the strength of being queer and open while being confident in one’s skin. It also shows how the teen who is being hit on can react in a way that is real and believable. This episode has alternate realities of how the scene happened, but I do not want to completely spoil it.

I will say that in one alternate reality — or the true reality — James and the guy hit it off and the guy is interested, while the dialogue does not say whether he is gay or not. The viewer will need to stream it to find out.

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Review: “Talk to Me” is too great not to be talked about

Desdemona Guerra
MSP 111 The Montgazette Contributor

The debut film from directing duo Danny and Michael Philippou, “Talk to Me,” has led to their mainstream success after a triumphant theater and streaming run. The Philippou Brothers are known on YouTube for videos engaging in dangerous pranks, made-up fights, and run-ins with authorities. What makes their videos entertaining are the amazing sound effects and realistic props that engaged viewers and make for must-watch streaming.

While these aspects may have launched their careers, much of it was left behind to explore a decidedly darker narrative. The Philippou Brothers looked to focus on themes of dealing with loss and grief, and struggling with addiction in “Talk to Me.”

The film follows Mia, portrayed by Australian actress Sophie Wilde, and her group of friends, who find a way to connect with the dead. In true horror-movie fashion, they have turned it into a social game, which consists of letting each participant get possessed by touching an embalmed hand rumored to belong to a powerful medium. They must say the words “talk to me,” followed by “I let you in.” However, if they continue the interaction for more than 90 seconds, the spirit can take full control of their body.

Two years after her mother’s passing, Mia is still dealing with

grief, and she struggles to connect with her father. She feels he is not being truthful about the circumstances around her mother’s death. To distract herself, Mia spends as much time as possible at the home of her best friend, Jade (Alexandra Jensen).

When Mia finally builds the courage to try the game, the spirit takes a particular interest in Jade’s little brother, Riley, portrayed by newcomer Joe Bird. Afterward, Mia takes the hand home with her to contact her mother on her own. Mia’s isolation is what the spirit truly wants, and Mia comforts herself with the idea of being with her “mother” again. What follows is a terrifying new take on the horror movie formula, done particularly well by the Philippou Brothers.

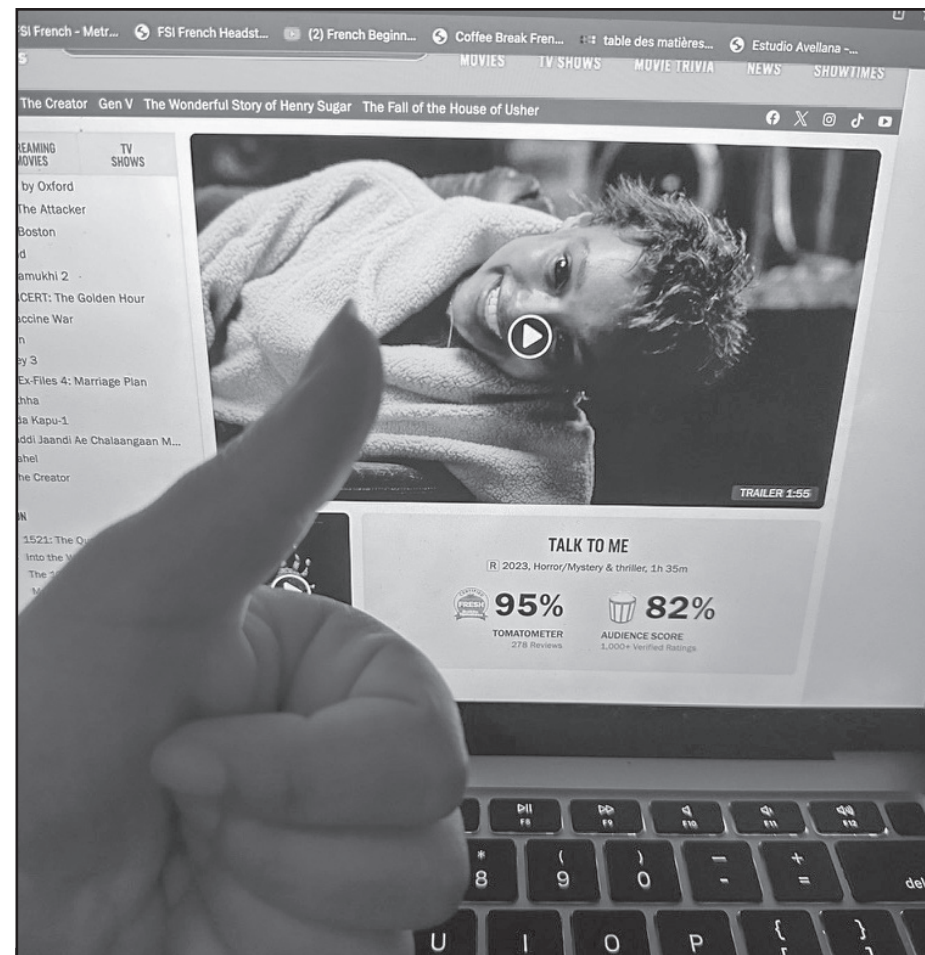
The movie is a must-watch for horror fanatics and general audiences, since both will endure a sleepless night after viewing. The originality of the cursed object also stands out because it makes talking to the dead more personal for Mia. The consequence of interactions going over 90 seconds, and the embalmed hand replacing the usual Ouija board, offer neat twists on the Ouija formula.

According to Box Office Mojo, “Talk to Me” made over \$90.5 million at the box office since its release on July 28, 2023. Rotten Tomatoes rated it at 94% on the “Tomatometer,”

with an 82% “Audience Score.” It is currently available on streaming services such as Amazon Prime Video, YouTube, and Apple TV.

Horror fanatics and moviegoers should be excited about what the

Philippou Brothers might deliver next. “Talk to Me” shows that they can combine unique sound design, jump scares, and creative storytelling into a perfect film — welcome growth from their YouTube days.



My thumbs up to “Talk to Me” on Rotten Tomatoes, September 2023.

(Photo / Desdemona Guerra)

Opinion: K-pop steals the spotlight

Mercedes Rivera
MSP 111 The Montgazette Contributor

The world of K-pop still confuses many people. With limited knowledge on this subject, outsiders often jump to the conclusion that people who enjoy K-pop are stereotypical nerds. Some K-pop listeners have even been accused of trying to be a “koreaboo,” a trend of non-Koreans presenting themselves as such. However, there is a simple, yet controversial, explanation for the sudden rise in listeners: K-pop, the term for South Korean pop music, is better than today’s Western music.

Typically, a person’s musical preference is a journey taken alone: no judgment, no stares, no questions. Why, when it comes to K-pop, however, does none of that apply? Many fail to hear how great this genre has become compared to what is usually played in their headphones.

There is no doubt that there are a few good modern Western artists. Yet, why would people want to listen to mediocre melodies when K-pop has that foreign “wow” factor? K-pop groups put effort into their careers and performances that their fans deeply appreciate. On the other hand, care given to craft a musical experience has been lacking in many Western artists.

K-pop bands proudly keep such a high entertainment standard that many Western artists cannot keep up. They provide such explosive performances, fun choreographed numbers, and remarkable fan service, so that, according to Rolling Stone, “K-pop

is conquering the West, setting high expectations for today’s pop.”

K-pop upholds musical standards that cannot be replicated in America. Groups sell physical albums containing posters, stickers, photobooks, and photocards that fans like to trade. This practice makes the genre more fun for fans to participate in. Light sticks are also a staple in K-pop, with groups designing their own unique versions. Then, at concerts, they connect to the setlist by Bluetooth and their light sticks change colors as the night progresses.

Of course, music is a personal preference. Not everyone likes the idea of a light stick when a phone flashlight will do just fine. Why buy a physical album that will just sit on a bookshelf when streaming is available? Not every performance has to have a choreographed number, and not everyone has to like K-pop. I get it.

People can get the same satisfaction from their favorites like Taylor Swift or Harry Styles, who are the biggest artists in America right now. But that does not take away from K-pop’s continued growth throughout the nation. According to Billboard, “K-pop’s listening percentage is up 65% annually on Spotify since 2015, and 86% annually since 2017 on Apple Music.”

Listening and participating in K-pop events is a unique experience that needs to be tried. The love of the fans, the love of the groups,

and the love of the music is an aspect missing from many Western artists, which explains the explosive popularity of K-pop.



K-pop albums on a shelf.

(Photo / Mercedes Rivera)



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