

# the liberator

— Celebrating 50 years of publication —

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## INTERSTATE 35 Expansion Nears the Starting Line

graphic by Asha Rountree

MARGOT MORGAN  
ELLINGTON TOUGH | staff writers

A 10-year, \$4.5 billion construction project to expand Austin's Interstate 35 (I-35) has been approved after years of debates, protests, and controversy. The majority of the highway hasn't changed since its construction in 1967 even though Austin's current population is an estimated 90% bigger than at the time. One suggested solution to the ever-increasing congestion is an expansion of the highway.

The planned expansion includes the addition of 10 lanes in some areas of downtown Austin, many more exits off the highway, and 54 acres of land to the original footprint of the interstate. In the process, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) will be tearing down the upper decks of a long stretch of highway that runs from Manor Road to Airport Boulevard. The interstate will also force out more than 100 homes and businesses to accommodate the big changes and their construction.

One of the businesses that will be forced to relocate due to the expansion is Stars Cafe, located at the corner of the highway and E. 31st St. Dietrich Armstrong is the owner-operator of this cafe and has to accomplish the task of finding a new location for the restaurant.

"We've looked at some places to move to nearby and everything is two to three times our normal rent right now," Armstrong said. "So, unfortunately, what's going to happen is we are either going to move to a place where we've priced out our normal customers [...] or we're going to have to move somewhere far away [...] where our employees are not going to be able to show up."

Elena Morales-Grahl volunteers at Rethink35, an organization that is currently fighting against this expansion. She elaborates on how she believes Rethink35 will benefit Austin in terms of the problems that arise because of this expansion.

"I was struck by knowing how much better and prettier the city could be," Morales-Grahl said. "I liked the mission of Rethink35. I think that the problem in Austin is not only transportation but also an environmental and racial equity problem. And so I appreciated the way Rethink 35 sort addresses all of those points and can combine a lot of issues into one and try to help."

Morales-Grahl explained the steps Rethink35 is taking to prevent the expansion to protect the rights of the community and preserve the environment. Their efforts include filing a lawsuit and a civil rights complaint to halt the project.

"The big thing Rethink35 has done is file a lawsuit against the Texas Department of Transportation and a civil rights complaint," Morales-Grahl said. "The lawsuit is a physical environmental lawsuit that claims that the Texas Department of Transportation did not adequately look at the air quality effects of increased cars... And then the civil rights complaint states that the highway was built with discrimination in mind and that the expansion is furthering that discrimination and marginalization."

see I-35 page 7

## what's news



photo by Wintyr Rice

Liberator editors take on BIPOC Pop

see BIPOC page 14



photo by LiLi Xiong

Sherwood Forest Faire brings medieval fun

see RENAISSANCE page 18



photo courtesy of Dave Nordstrom

AISD undergoes district reshuffle for UIL athletics

see NEW page 17

# SENIOR 30s

"I Guess I'm Old Now."



LATE PASS  
8:35 AM



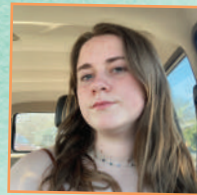
SANWI SARODE

"Sorry about my GroupMe Messages."

LATE PASS  
10:20 AM



ANNABEL ANDRE



"You Don't Read the Newspaper? I'm Okay With That."



LATE PASS  
2:40 PM



LILI XIONG

Graduating members of the Liberator reflect on their time with the paper, the lessons they've learned, and what they will carry with them.

see 30s page 3

## GEN-Z young musicians set the tone

KATIE BUSBY | entertainment editors  
MEGAN GEROLD | entertainment editors  
ASHA ROUNTREE | graphics editor

With bright eyes and fresh faces, the people born from 1997-2012 enter into the crowded streets and music venues of South by Southwest (SXSW). The draw of the music festival is far and wide, with more than 300,000 people piling into the borders of Austin, according to KVUE. Austin has proclaimed itself as a staple for live music, and SXSW is an event that allows for artists to gain publicity and experiences across a wide demographic. The music festival has a history of both large and small acts taking the stage, and as more of Generation Z is entering the music industry, these smaller artists are also a part of the generation commonly referred to as Gen-Z. While Generation Z only makes up about 20.66% of the U.S. population, according to data from Statista, the tools and resources in the modern day are drastically different from musicians decades ago. Young artists have the ability to use social media to promote themselves and disperse their music across the world, and they can relate to the upcoming generation.

see GEN page 13



photos by Annabel Andre, Katie Busby, Asha Rountree, Megan Gerold

*editorial* **Billionaires Fake Philanthropy**  
*How the Wealthy Dodge Taxes Without Giving*

**Staff Stance:** Every grading period the Liberator staff present their opinion on an important current issue in the form of an editorial written by the Commentary editors. The opinions in the piece below represent those of the staff as a collective, not of each individual member.

Billionaires like Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, and Elon Musk are often held up by the media as shining examples of philanthropists. By donating their immense wealth, these people are single-handedly changing the world for the better. Or, at least, that's what their public relations teams would like you to believe. While this philanthropy may seem generous from the outside, it is more often than not a ploy for the world's wealthiest to dodge taxes, boost their public image, and increase their net worth, all while rarely doing that much actual good along the way.

Mark Zuckerberg's 2015 promise to give away 99% of his Facebook shares actually just means giving his money to the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative—a limited liability company (LLC) that he and his wife, Dr. Priscilla Chan, own. Because of this arrangement, the so-called charity has no actual legal requirements to donate any of its monetary income. This allows the couple to maintain total control over every cent and reap many of the public image, tax, and legal benefits they'd see from a proper charity all without being beholden to doing any actual philanthropy.

The Chan Zuckerberg Initiative has given away \$3.4 billion since its founding, according to Forbes. Considering that the couple has a combined net worth of over \$200 billion, this amounts to roughly 1.5% of their total fortune—less than half the national average of 3.7%. Billionaires like Mark Zuckerberg count on the fact that a single hour's worth of their earnings is more money than any average person will see in their entire lifetime to convince us that their philanthropy is any kind of sacrifice on their part. In actuality, donations of millions of dollars are pennies to people like Zuckerberg.

This pattern holds true for other so-called philanthropists. Jeff Bezos's \$2.1 billion donations towards the Bezos Earth Fund and the Day One Families Fund, which respectively address climate change and homelessness, amount to barely over 1% of his net worth. Elon Musk's charity, the Musk Foundation, holds 3.6% of his net worth, but only a small fraction of

that is used to actually improve others' lives, according to the New York Times.

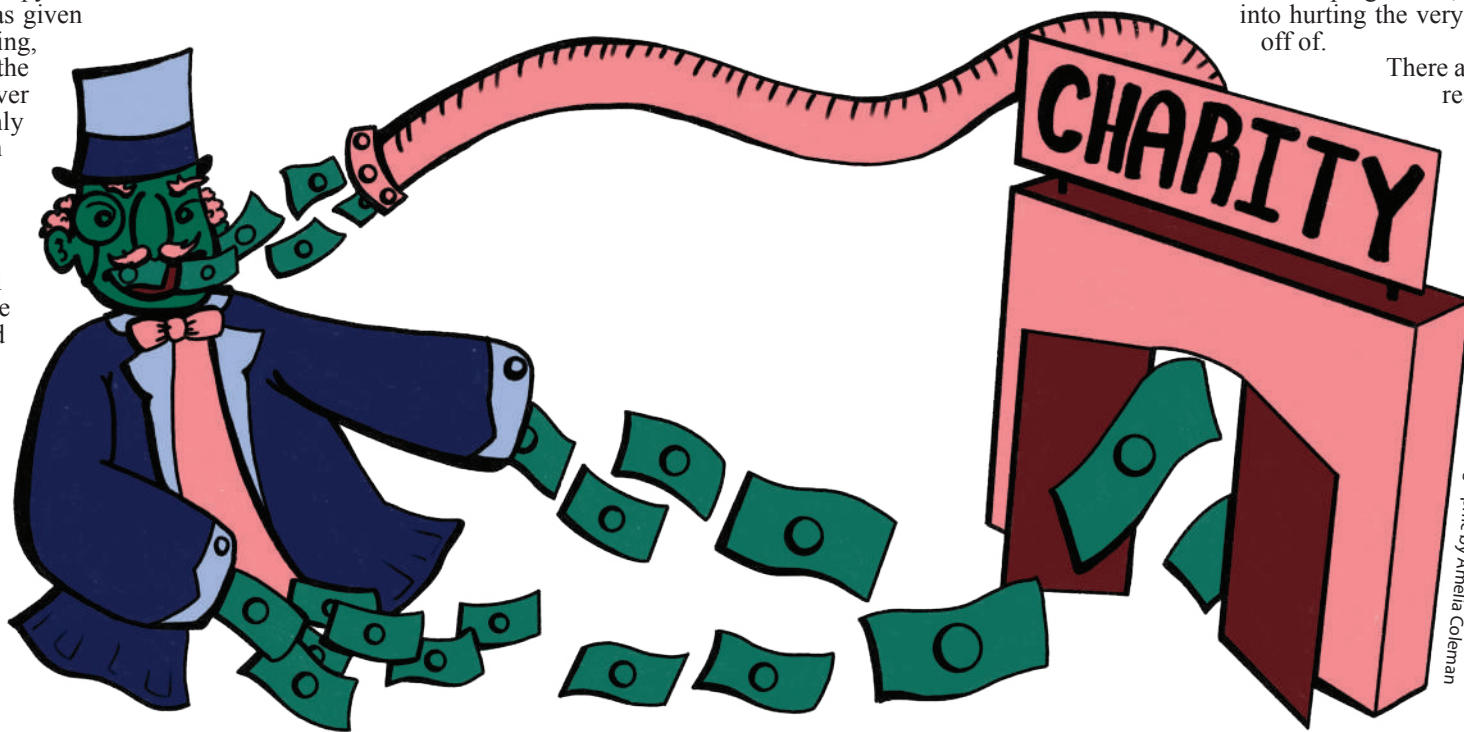
The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) requires a charity to donate just 5% of its income every year to count for tax breaks. By creating such charities, billionaires can dodge billions of dollars in taxes whilst maintaining total control of their money. The Musk Foundation regularly fails to pass even this absurdly low bar, though that doesn't keep Musk from using it as an excuse to avoid his taxes. A March 2024 article from the New York Times revealed that he shaved a couple of billion dollars of his taxes in 2021 thanks to the \$5.7 billion he supposedly donated.

Citing people like Zuckerberg, Bezos, or Musk as the pinnacle of human generosity simply feeds into the lie they have expertly crafted. These are not true philanthropists, but instead wealthy people with PR teams that will spin a tale of sacrifice even though their organizations don't even do the bare minimum to be considered charities.

Yes, some billionaires are actually doing good in this world. In its 24-year lifespan, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has made major strides in curbing poverty and child mortality. This achievement is due, in large part, to the donations of Bill Gates, Melinda French Gates, and Warren Buffett. However, billionaires like them are far from the average. Bernard Arnault is the current richest man in the world, with a net worth well over \$200 billion, but searches for any charitable efforts only return the same €10 million donation to a French food bank. This is the norm for billionaires—donating comparatively minuscule amounts when the fancy strikes them rather than actually dedicating real effort to alleviating suffering.

Ultimately, billionaires are the only ones in control of their money, and they decide what they want to do with it, whether that's for the benefit of society or not. J.K. Rowling recently donated £70,000 to a Scotland-based anti-trans group, which should serve as a reminder that whatever money billionaires can put towards helping others, they can also just as easily put into hurting the very people they made their money off of.

There are billionaires out there creating real change in the interest of bettering society, but they are few and far between. Rather than celebrating everyone who pledges a minuscule amount of their overall income to charity, it is important to take a step back and look at where that money is coming from, where it's going, and whether these 'charities' are just legal loopholes allowing billionaires to further hoard their excessive wealth.



graphic by Amelia Coleman

# Raptor Chatter

*Is billionaire philanthropy overall beneficial or harmful?*



photo by Annabel Andre

**Anthony Soliz**  
*Freshman*

"If it's going to a good cause, I think it's a good thing. I think they [billionaires] can share that wealth with other people. But I don't think they should use it as a way to cheat taxes or anything like that."



photo by Annabel Andre

**Josie Bednar**  
*Sophomore*

"I think it's unfortunate that it lets them control organizations because they donate so much, but I don't think that it's the worst thing that billionaires do. They shouldn't get tax write-offs for it because then they'll just donate to their friends and it'll not happen the way it was designed."



photo by Annabel Andre

**Jack Davidson**  
*Junior*

"Sometimes Bill Gates does good things, but it doesn't offset the bad that he does. You know, like you can make a vaccine or something or distribute something, but you're also contributing badly to the world and your business prospects."



photo by Annabel Andre

**Emily Polio**  
*Senior*

"I feel like if you're making that much money, you have the disposable income for philanthropy. If you're making that much off of people, you should give back just as much. And I think that that's something billionaires should work on and something that the government should encourage."

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# liberator

## Editorial Policy

Responsibilities of a free student press: Serving as the primary communication link within the Liberal Arts and Science Academy and between the school and the local community, this newspaper accepts the responsibilities inherent in being a free press. The Liberator staff strive to produce a professional-quality publication that follows the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists. The objective is to print the news in a fair and objective manner with the utmost regard for integrity.

- Editorial Content:
1. The students on The Liberator staff will print articles which have been researched to the best of their ability to obtain the most complete available information.
  2. The information will be presented in a truthful and fair manner.
  3. When personal commentary is given it will be in good taste on issues that have been researched, analyzed and where expert opinion has been sought.
  4. All commentary will be clearly labeled as such.
  5. No material which is obscene, libelous or that will cause an immaterial and substantial disruption of the school day, according to accepted legal definitions, will be printed.

The Editorial Boards and its Functions:  
The Liberator staff will be governed by an editorial board composed of the following individuals: lead editors and commentary editors.

- The Editorial board will:
1. Determine the content of the publication (with input from other staff members)
  2. Stress the editorial policy
  3. Ensure the accuracy of the publication
  4. Address inappropriate behavior on the part of the staff
  5. Dispense disciplinary action to staff members
  6. Change or add policy as necessary

Viewpoints:  
Printed material which contains the opinion of a staff member or a contributing writer will be labeled as such. These views are not intended to reflect the view of the administration of Liberal Arts and Science Academy nor the School Board of the Austin Independent School District. Viewpoints will be given in two areas in the newspaper.

Editorials: These will be determined by the staff consensus. The editorial will be unsigned and will represent the majority viewpoint of the staff.  
Commentary: Commentary articles represent the viewpoint of one member of the staff, and are signed as such. These articles do not represent the opinions of the entire staff.

Letters to the Editor: Letters to the Editor are accepted for topics of general interest to the readership of the newspaper. Letters must be submitted typed or neatly printed in ink and must have the signature of the writer and the writer's grade level. Editors reserve the right to determine which issue the letter will be published in, with every effort made to print the letter as soon as possible. The editors also reserve the right to edit the letter for grammar, length and repetition. No letters which are obscene or libelous will be published.

Non-Staff Contributors: Bylined contributions are welcome.  
Correction of Errors: The staff makes every effort to print accurate information. In the case of substantial errors, a written correction will be made in the following issue of the newspaper.  
Sources: In general, no anonymous sources will be used in reporting. Sources from within the school, as well as those not connected with the school, will be used. Under no circumstances will gifts, including coupons, etc., be accepted by the staff members from sources or advertisers.  
Note: The Liberator will attempt to publish a range of opinions within reason.

Have a great  
summer  
Raptors!



Have an opinion about a new school policy? Got an issue with this issue? Anything else on your mind? Email us at [lasaliberator@gmail.com](mailto:lasaliberator@gmail.com) or DM us @lasaliberator.

## The Tradition of -30s- at the Liberator

Here at the LASA Liberator, 30s are a tradition. The name comes from the journalistic practice of putting -30- at the end of an article that is ready to be set for print. Our graduating seniors are ending their stories with the Liberator, so they get the chance to write one last article, about themselves and their journey with the paper.

graphics by Asha Rountree, Kayla Le, Amelia Coleman

### LATE PASS



ANNABEL ANDRE | editor-in-chief



### I'm Sorry if My GroupMe Messages Scared You

I'm not sure exactly why, but 14-year-old me was adamant about joining The Liberator despite having zero journalistic experience and being a fearful introvert. So there I was, on the first day of school, listening, over Zoom, to Mr. Garcia and an editor heatedly discuss Marvel, and I thought, "What am I doing here?" But first impressions aren't everything. It turns out that joining newspaper was one of the best decisions I've ever made.

Even after I spent my freshman year getting my articles and ego torn to shreds by editors' harsh comments—one that stuck out was simply "this is bad"—I still applied to be an editor. I got my third choice, Sports, and was disappointed. But when my eyes drifted down to the other name listed under 'Sports Section' I sighed in relief. She was on the tennis team with me. Even though I had somehow never met her before, at least we had something in common. Three years later, Sanwi and I would still be working together, now as lead editors and with a friendship that extends far beyond the trauma bond formed during Late Nights. In fact, I have met some of my closest friends during my time on The Liberator and formed some core memories that will always stick with me—squealing with Asha about Tokyo Syoki Syodo during SXSW, getting to sit courtside at the ATX Open with Sanwi, falling into Late Night delusion with LiLi,

getting trapped in the cute-outfit-ruining rain with Katie, drinking H-E-B knock-off Dr. Pepper (Dr. B) with Sarah, arguing with Megan about pages, having outside time with B8, and generally complaining about the many tasks and stresses of our very time-consuming hobby.

How much I would miss The Liberator really came home to me when driving home recently after a Late Night. I drove in silence on the dark and empty roads and realized that soon I would never drive home from another Late Night. I would never complain about another missing article. I would never be greeted with another "whatever it is, I didn't do it" from Mr. Garcia. I would never send another stern (and scary, according to Sarah) GroupMe message. I would never co-write another article with Sanwi. And I would never eat another pizza bagel in room 701.

As sad as I am to leave The Liberator, I hope I will never lose touch with the amazing people I have met. After four years of laughter, copious amounts of stress, occasional tears, inky fingers, and way too much knowledge of InDesign shortcuts and tricks, I am ready to take my next steps. I don't know exactly where those steps will lead me. But if The Liberator has taught me one thing, it's to step out of my comfort zone. Wherever I go, I will keep stepping out there, because—who knows—it might be life-changing in the best way possible.

### LATE PASS



KATIE BUSBY | entertainment editor



### I Can't Leave

Whenever I am complaining about newspaper, if I am not talking to one of my friends in newspaper, I am confronted with the question "Why are you still doing it?" and my answer is always the same: "I can't leave." Over my four years I have done a lot of complaining, it's just part of my nature (though believe me I have had plenty of valid reasons to complain), but the truth of the matter is that even after all this time, I haven't left. I couldn't have left, I have an intense pull back to room 701 (and before then the portable behind LBJ) and the memories and people attached to it in the same way I am.

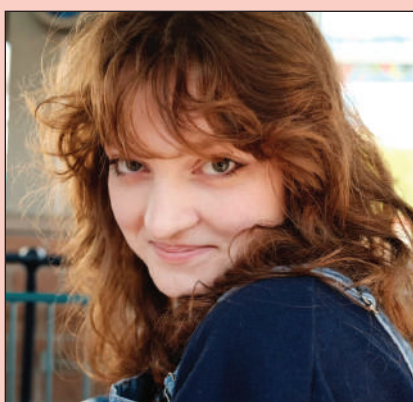
I couldn't leave because the poster wall behind the couch took multiple of my class periods. Mr. Garcia has a large collection of posters he's acquired from various conventions and such and for some reason it's our business to make sure they end up on the wall, one of the displays has multiple of them behind the couch. First, I put them up with my first co-editor Susan with the help of Max for the taller posters, and then again and again as the district made us strip the walls to paint or something. This year will be my last year wrestling with these posters, the last time Mr. Garcia tells me it's not a good idea to stand on furniture and I do it anyways, the last year agonizing over how everything looks together when he has a new poster he wants on the wall.

I couldn't leave because who would I talk about Flipturn to? So many of my favorite newspaper experiences have revolved around music in

some way. My favorite editors' picks are always the ones about music, my favorite stories to write about relate to the music scene in Austin, and one of my favorite parts of newspaper will forever be SXSW. It all started with Flipturn though, an indie rock band I found freshman year and shared first with LiLi and then everyone else who would listen. My first year LiLi and I got to see them at SXSW and it was an incredible experience crowding close to the intimate stage, and later getting to interview them gave me a new passion for newspaper and covering things like these. Flipturn has remained part of my newspaper experience and this year to tie it all off I got to see them again with LiLi and my co-editor this year, Megan.

Now that I am leaving, it's surreal to take in all the time I have spent in this metaphorical space, all the specific memories it elicits, and the things that have kept me tied here. It truly is unlike anything else and I couldn't have done high school without it. Some of my favorite people are here, from LiLi (one of my first close friends my freshman year), to Sarah (one of my favorite people ever who for some reason keeps putting up with me), to Annabel, Sanwi, Asha, and Amelia (amazing people and friends who make this class the positive experience it is), to Megan (my literal rock and the fact that if I didn't keep doing newspaper I wouldn't have met her is enough to make me disregard all of the people I've had to get mad at). This has been my community for so long, and I'm very sad to leave, but again I can't really leave (it will always be with me).

### LATE PASS



SARAH GARRETT | news editor



### I Am Not Rory Gilmore

I was inspired to join newspaper in my attempt to become Rory Gilmore. In case you are a fellow Gilmore Girls fan, my inspiration was pre-season 5 Rory. For all you non Gilmore Girls watchers, season 5 is when Rory decides to make some questionable decisions which do not align with high-school-Rory's core values, which I was drawn to as a freshman.

My freshman year, along with my fellow seniors', was marked by black boxes in zoom meetings, dalagona coffee, and extreme loneliness. In my "me-time", I read entire book series in three days, I binge watched television, and I learned how to knit. I bought roller skates and practiced in my driveway, I went on neighborhood bike rides, and I slowly developed a half-decent music taste. I also wrote. A lot.

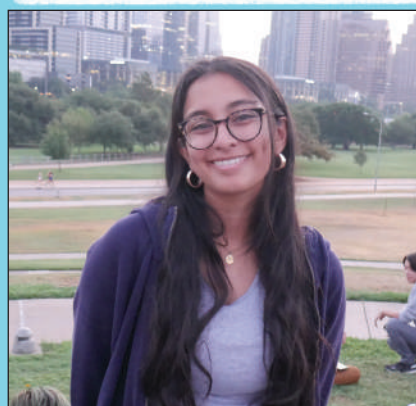
I suffered from middle-schooler-writing-superhero-stories syndrome, where my main characters had colorful hair and magic powers. Without anyone in high school to tell me to "get a life" or "this is so cringey", freshman/pandemic Sarah continued her quest to be a renowned fantasy author. To make this dream a reality, I planned on joining creative writing my sophomore year.

But as I binge-watched Gilmore Girls, a part of me was drawn to the newspaper life. In order to live out one's Rory Gilmore dreams, one must not take creative writing, one must write for a newspaper. To reconcile with the fact that I couldn't be the fantasy author I had originally planned on, I decided that in the newspaper, I would have plenty of time to write creatively, on top of taking photography and practicing graphic design. Therefore, the newspaper must be the place for me.

Regardless of the fact that after I joined and learned that I could not, in fact, write whatever I wanted, I stayed. Partly because I had made amazing friends, and partly because once you join you can't really leave.

Realistically, the likelihood of anyone outside the paper reading this is slim, so to my friends: thank you for the inside jokes, thank you for the joy of creating something meaningful, and thank you for making newspaper less stressful than Chilton's. To Mr. Garcia, please open the blinds more — natural light is nice. To everyone else, thank you for actually reading the newspaper. This assignment was quite stressful, and it's nice to be appreciated.

## LATE PASS



NORAH HUSSAINI | commentary editor



## LASA and Liberator Mush

When I received the news that this 30 could be used to simultaneously fulfill a newspaper requirement and an english requirement, I was, like any self-respecting LASA student, thanking my lucky stars that I could cross two things off my to-do list at once. However, I eventually became dissatisfied with the idea of mushing the LASA experience and the Liberator experience together in a half-wit sort of way. Like any self-respecting LASA student, I tried to separate the two assignments regardless of the fact that it created more work for me. In spite of that, as I started to write, I found that the two were so interlinked in my journey to magnet endorsement that I couldn't write about them independently.

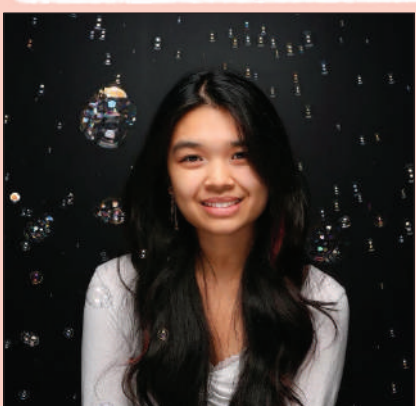
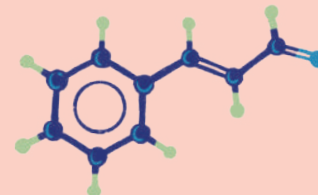
And that it was hard for me to sound like a half-wit. Thus (and sorry about that long-winded explanation), I present to you my mush of LASA and Liberator.

Procuring more and more work for myself is how much of my time at the paper went-- I was unsatisfied with my pages or my article and so I spent hours shifting things pica by pica on pages 2, 3, and 4. It's a natural

inclination for most students here to scrutinize until eyes are bloodshot and the hour hand has long abandoned its zenith. Newspaper brought a thirst for perfection out of me.

This thirst was complemented by academic validation in my classes. The writing skills that I picked up from the senior editors I idolized were stoked by analysis and commentary on Dante and Gatsby. A newfound love of pulling the knots and kinks from stories as an editor pushed me to apply to tutor at the writing center. Picking apart the mistakes in our paper inspired me to seek journalistic guidance at The School of the New York Times and I applied what I learned to papers in great ideas and history courses. The Liberator has so greatly shaped my LASA experience that my life without it would likely have been completely different. I am so grateful to each person that contributed to where I am now, whether they are on the Liberator, in my classes, or at the front of the room guiding instruction. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

## LATE PASS



KAYLA LE | editor-in-chief



## Rules Were Meant to Be Broken

My newspaper story begins with a vector graphic of a pizza. During COVID-19, I struggled to find what extracurricular activities stuck. I've lost track of the countless Zoom club calls where my cursor hovered over the "Leave Meeting" button. That is, until I took Ezine.

I remember being an anxious freshman, wanting to get teacher approval on EVERY assignment I turned in before submission. While it irritated my teachers, it comforted me. One of my first assignments in Ezine was to make a vector graphic of a pizza with the shape tool using polygons. I, not having paid attention to the guidelines, drew it by hand with a tablet. To soothe my perfectionistic anxiety, I asked Mr. Garcia to give me feedback on my pizza graphic during office hours. It was a slice of pizza (with some serious cheese pull) and beside it were the words "A slice my good sir?" written in gothic font.

The first thing he said was "You didn't follow the directions at all."

My stomach dropped.

"—but it looks great. You belong with The Liberator."

For the first time in my academic career, not listening to instructions had benefited me. I joined the newspaper club in search of what other rules could be broken and while my role at The Liberator has changed throughout the years, my tendency to not follow directions has remained constant. The

expectation to only use vector graphics was rendered obsolete by my junior year after I consistently submitted raster images from Procreate. (Some call it an act of defiance but I call it aesthetic advocacy). The rise of "Nitti Typewriter" as a common Liberator font followed suit. I got into photography which pushed me to break rules in an entirely different way. I dared to trespass over the white line on the football field, risking personal injury for the sake of a photo op.

Being on The Liberator these past four years has helped me break the perfectionistic barrier that once stopped me from exploring new things. It has not only inspired me creatively but it has given me a safe space. Whether it's letting the Late Night hysteria of walking through SXSW get to me or accidentally devouring Sarah's lettuce-wrapped burger (as a vegetarian), I've gotten to witness a bond so unlike any other that newspaper kids share. They inspire me everyday to push the boundaries of my work and support me when I inevitably fall short. With my whole heart, I cherish the words that only we read, the jokes that only we laugh at, and the comically unique frustrations only we share.

As I end my time with my Liberator, I'm leaving behind graphics and photos but carrying forward the courage to break the rules.

## LATE PASS



MALVIKA PRADHAN | news editor

EMORY



## The Best Decision I Made

I remember sitting on my bed in 8th grade filling out my choice sheet for LASA. My mouse hovering over "Yearbook", then "Newspaper", then "Yearbook" again, and so forth. I couldn't make up my mind which one to fill my sole elective spot with. I had just finished working on my middle school's yearbook as a copy editor, and I loved it. However, I had also just finished the episode of Gilmore Girls where Rory joins the Yale Daily News. Something told me I would love newspaper even more.

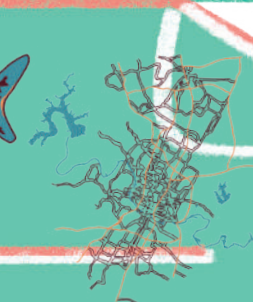
Thus began my journey with The Liberator, which turned out to be nothing like the one I had seen on my favorite show. I did not find myself getting yelled at by angry ballerinas who didn't like my reviews or by condescending editors-in-chief who thought my stories were bland. Instead, I found myself in a Zoom meeting room with 16 other kids (only three of whom were staffers like me). While the editors in my class discussed things like "AP style" and "pull quotes", I sat with stars in my eyes, wondering how this group of students would be able to produce a 16-page newspaper in six weeks. Nevertheless, our first issue came out at the end of the quarter. When I first laid eyes on it, I discovered that the story I had spent three weeks toiling over was only a fraction of what had been

published. There were several longer stories, as well as captions, photos, and some of the most amazing student artwork I had seen.

As the months went by I gained more of an understanding of how this mysterious machine worked. I got to report on interesting stories happening all around me—a human trafficking exhibit opening, a theater reopening after a global pandemic shut it down, and a football referee accused of racism at a state championship. By the end of the year, I knew, without a doubt, that I wanted to be a part of this team for the rest of my time at LASA.

In my time since, the fun has only continued, whether it was making pizza bagels with Norah, passing around my tightly closed thermos in vain, or playing Connections with Asha. Being on The Liberator taught me how to write clearly, how to design spreads, and how to be a leader. And while those are invaluable lessons, the most important thing it taught me was that a community can be found anywhere. When that freshman four years ago finally made up her mind and selected "Newspaper", she would've never anticipated that it would be the best decision she made.

## LATE PASS



LILY WILKERSON | web editor



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

## I Did Not Sign Up For This

But seriously, I didn't sign up for The Liberator when I was hunting for an elective to round out my junior year schedule. I was going to be a *yearbook kid*, of all things. Looking back, it seems hard to imagine. I think it's fair to say that I've embraced the paper since the administration's black-box scheduling algorithm flung me into Room 701; I've distributed thousands of Liberators throughout the halls of LASA and, bizarrely, Gorzycki Middle School. You've probably heard me ask, "Would you like a Liberator?" You've probably said no.

Regardless, my first year with the paper as a staffer was mostly uneventful. I dove head-first into the deep end with an Issue 1 article covering the 2022 Austin mayoral elections, where I ended up interviewing Kirk Watson's campaign manager. That was a bit too much for me, and I focused on comparatively simple articles after that. Not knocking the news section, but it turns out that Club Crazy is a very easy assignment! And in a year where I was taking six AP courses, easy assignments were right up my alley. At the end of the spring semester, I applied to replace JC Delgadillo as the Liberator's Web Editor because I thought I could handle it with a lighter

senior year workload.

If I regretted that decision, this would be the sarcastic sentence informing you, the reader, of that. But I haven't regretted becoming a web editor at all! It's a great time, but it's hard to put down in print. I fixed an error with the Expanded Menu in SNO Design Option's Site Designer... yeah. In the real world, I've learned that being in charge of staffers is an *entirely* different dynamic than being one yourself. I've learned that it's very rewarding to watch an article go from a pitch in your mind to a writer's assignment to text on a screen to words on a page. And I've learned that photo galleries are a tool of the devil. I published what was probably the first Liberator article ever written by a middle schooler. It's been a curious, fascinating year.

I will complain about one final thing, though. The process of uploading every article, graphic, and image to the website each issue is incredibly tedious. More than the editing process, more than the web design, more than the social media management, I Did Not Sign Up For That.

*Still worth it.*

## A Big Huge Thank You

The Liberator's seniors would like to thank Mr. Garcia, energy drinks, pizza bagels, those popsicles that come in plastic tubes, transcription websites, word count websites, people who submit their articles on time, parents who pick up their sophomore editors at 9PM after late nights, and all the editors that came before us.

### LATE PASS



SANWI SARODE | copy editor



### I Guess I'm Old Now

If I'm being honest, I never thought I would be writing this. Writing a 30 was for old people, and I wasn't old. Yet, here I am. I'm not sure what to do with the mix of pride, grief, and nervousness in the pit of my stomach right now as my time at The Liberator comes to an end. It's impossible to put everything I've experienced at The Liberator into words, but I will try.

When I first joined The Liberator, school was completely online. I was expecting the class to be a serious, writing-intensive class, and so I was surprised that when I first logged onto Zoom I was met with lively conversations about Marvel and desserts. Although this might be cliché to say, I was struck by how close everyone on the paper seemed to be, even online. I was even more impressed by the work ethic of all the editors I aspired to become.

My favorite part back then was when we reviewed all The Liberator issues that would come out. I still remember how easily the team gave each other compliments, and how efficiently constructive criticism was handed out and taken. And although initially embarrassed to do The Liberator counting tradition (3, 2, 1 ... PAAAAAGE !!!), I now say it with pride and giddiness at the present embarrassment on new staffer faces.

A pivotal change in my journey occurred the moment I was chosen to be a sports editor with someone who would one day become one of my best friends. I still remember meeting with the old sports editors at the time, Abigail and Helena, so that they could introduce me to Annabel and pass the

mantle to us. I was so nervous, and my only goal at the time, as the people-pleasing I'm-convinced-nobody-likes-me introvert I was at the time, was to not make a fool of myself. Luckily, from making fun of silly photos (KINDLY) of LASA sports players in interesting positions during Late Nights, to writing stories together, to bonding over the tennis team, Annabel and I became close.

When I became a Lead Editor with Annabel I was thrilled. To say that it was always enjoyable would be a lie. The grind for getting stories and pages finalized was real. Late Nights' stress was sometimes off the charts (but free food, so it was okay in hindsight). However, I had other amazing experiences, from going to South By Southwest and interviewing international movie directors, to watching the next generation of staffers grow into amazing writers, to admiring the final products of The Liberator that I now have shared charge of. Most of all, I will always remember and cherish the thousand moments I laughed and bonded with all the seniors at The Lib right now.

That, more than anything, is what I want to remember about The Liberator. Not the writing, or the interviews, or the work that came with being a Lead Editor, which I all loved, but the people I met through four years of continuous dedication (Annabel, Sarah, LiLi, Katie, and Asha ily!). Many of those people will be with me for the rest of my life, and I can't thank The Liberator enough for that. In that way, a part of The Liberator will always be with me no matter where I go or how old I get.

### LATE PASS



ASHA ROUNTREE | graphics editor



### It's Never Too Late...

Going into senior year, I was ready to take it easy and choose some classes I actually enjoyed after undertaking the exhausting AP course load characteristic of junior year. As a chronic doodler, I kept my eye out for some more creatively unrestricted classes, and after rifling through a copy of The Liberator and appreciating the graphics one afternoon, I began to form an idea. Sanwi, a close friend, was completely encouraging of my joining The Liberator team, and I probably owe it to her that I had the motivation to approach Mr. Garcia after school where I was met with his signature Dwayne-Johnson-esque eyebrow raise, which I would become well acquainted with in the following year. Throughout high school, I've done a lot of exploring by throwing myself into new activities ranging from band to track, but nothing has unexpectedly clicked into place quite like newspaper has. At the beginning of the year, I thought of newspaper as a class that I could just chill and draw in, but I really had no clue how many irreplaceable memories, fits of laughter, and lasting friends I would find within The Liberator clan.

Right from the start of the school year, where I got to draw Barbenheimer portraits, I knew I was in for a good time. Amelia, my beloved fellow graphics editor, where do I start? I've loved every second of being a power graphics duo, frantically searching for our Apple pencils (mostly mine to be honest), listening to you rant about drama and isopods, making beautiful illustrations (cough..hot prisoner.. cough), and praising the god of the Procreate Dry

Ink brush with you (even though I do remember my art being likened to a children's crayon drawing at one point). I'll miss drawing with Mr. Garcia's random mixes of music playing in the background, ranging from Bollywood to rock music. And Malvika, I loved attempting (and failing) to solve the NYT Connections with you and stealing your tasty pretzels every class.

When I learned The Liberator editor crew would be receiving passes to SXSW, I got hyped to see unreleased films and meet celebrities, but my favorite memories were the in-between moments, like being wheedled into eating disgusting-looking mealworms with Sanwi at the Creative Industry Expo and finding that they were pleasantly crunchy, and fangirling about Tokyo Syoki Syodo while eating the most delicious street plantains in the middle of the night with Annabel, and being in awe of Neptune's Core with Katie and Megan. Being in The Liberator has brought me so much closer to some incredible people, including my long-lost twin Lili, and it turns out I got a lot more out of this class than just drawing and chilling. I'll miss squeezing onto the tiny couch at the back of the classroom with 4 other people and entering maximum productivity, and I'll miss the frantic and delirious late nights putting the newspaper together. Even though this year was too short of a time to be part of this newspaper than I would've liked, I'm beyond glad I decided to be a latecomer and participate in The Liberator experience and I will miss everyone so much.

### LATE PASS



LILI XIONG | managing editor



### Live, Laugh, Liberator

When I was a freshman, I thought it was a good idea to hop into Garcia's little newspaper cart and let former web-editor-in-chief JC Ramirez drag me up a steep hill. If Garcia is reading this right now, I'm sure he's squawking "Don't drag my students up a steep hill in a cart!". Forgive me. I was a freshman (though I would do it again in a heartbeat).

Sophomore year, I made enemies with evil forces known to most as "Adobe InDesign". It was truly the bane of my existence. As former entertainment editor Susan Ballesteros would put it, "I can't live laugh love under these conditions!" I'd say that sums up sophomore year pretty well.

Junior year was, simply put, a hallucination. I have vague memories of copious amounts of Dr. Pepper consumed during late nights, galloping around the newspaper classroom ominously decreeing "The storm is coming!", and seeing Ted Cruz get booed at the Texas Tribune Festival. I also somehow saw Dolly Parton?

Now, as a senior, and as my time at The Liberator is coming to a close, I can't help but think that these shenanigans are what I will carry with me into the future, even more so than seeing my byline on the front page of the

paper. So to all you dear LASA students who scoff at the idea of reading the newspaper: I'm okay with that. You never witnessed the strange ways I would start commentary articles (ie. "As insignificant cogs in the wheels of capitalism..."). You never found the typos in every single outline of the in-depth two years ago. You never got to make fun of the often absurd alliteration in our headlines. You'll never even read these words, and that's okay because in the end, what matters to me is that The Liberator gives young journalists the chance to learn more about the world around them, and have an outlet where their ideas and points of views are valued. What matters to me is that The Liberator has helped shape me into a better writer, and a better person. And what matters most to me is that I've met some of my very best friends in room 701, the poster-covered, often disorganized space with loud AC that I've come to call home. So to Katie Busby, Sarah Garrett, Annabel Andre, Sanwi Sarode, and Asha Rountree—you have brought so much light into my life. Thanks for sticking by my side, no matter how many typos I make.

# I-35 Highway

from page 1

Armstrong supports Rethink35's mission to reduce the size of I-35 and divert traffic by promoting biking, buses, and other forms of transportation. They propose replacing it with an urban boulevard and letting the SH-130 tollway serve in its stead.

"We could see on KXAN when Rethink35 did their initial protests," Armstrong said. "Since then, they've done two more at Stars Cafe. And because of that, we've seen a substantial uptick in people supporting Rethink35. And Rethink35 is a great way to protest the expansion."



The existing roadway does not meet current or future traffic demand, resulting in longer travel times for commuters and emergency vehicles. High-occupancy vehicle lanes will help move more people in fewer vehicles and provide lanes for CapMetro buses.

- BRAD WHELIS, SOUTHWEST COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR FOR TXDOT

Brad Wheelis is the Southwest Communications Director for TxDOT. He argues that the expansion will have an overall positive impact by replacing outdated infrastructure with new, dynamic solutions that allow for more speed.

"The existing roadway does not meet current or future traffic demand, resulting in longer travel times for commuters and emergency vehicles," Wheelis wrote. "High-occupancy vehicle lanes will help move more people in fewer vehicles and provide lanes for CapMetro buses. The project also widens cross-street bridges to include bicycle and pedestrian paths with a safety buffer to protect our most vulnerable users of the transportation system."

Although many people, including members of Rethink35, are against the construction, some, such as Wheelis, say the positive impacts it could bring have been somewhat overshadowed. Many believe that it will not improve the constant headache of traffic and gridlock for many Austinites, and even make it worse during the construction by blocking more lanes and roads.

"TxDOT has since incorporated feedback from more than 18,000 community members into the design," Wheelis said. "The result is a project that will improve safety and enhance mobility throughout our region."

And this isn't the end of highway expansions. At this point, many highways are getting old and need to be reconstructed with new security measures in mind, so they will be expanded at the same time.



**DRIVING AROUND** Interstate-35 plays a major role in many Austinites' daily commutes, connecting San Antonio to Austin. A decade-long renovation plan has been approved by the city of Austin to expand the highway, adding 10 lanes, in some stretches of the road. photo by Lily Wilkerson

"[Highway] expansion is something happening all around the country right now," Morales-Grahl said. "We're sort of reaching the end of life of many highways. People either need to decide to get rid of them or sort of fix them through very intense multi-year-long processes. And this is something that's happening all around the country. And all over Texas, people are also fighting these expansions."

# CLUB CRAZY

## Aircraft

HARRISON CHAMBERS  
staff writer

In the Aircraft Club, flying creates a passionate community. To the members, the club is a way to express shared enthusiasm and grow academically. Junior Daniel Canache, club president, feels that the club is more than just playing with planes. He sees and studies all the complex aspects of the planes, noting that they are far more intricate than the average person may think. "You can just build a free-flight plane and throw it, like a fancy paper airplane," Canache said. "But at the same time, you can take that and make it super complex and study a bunch of aspects of the plane."

The club mainly focuses on new alterations or fixes for the planes, as Canache says they break a good amount. Freshman Seth Mueller, a member of the club, says that the process is very rewarding.

"My favorite thing I would say would be fixing the planes and all that," Mueller said. "I find it really rewarding to achieve a nicely working plane."

Aircraft Club meets every Thursday during lunch in room 704.

## Stitch Service

ETHAN STERN AND SARAH GARRETT  
staff writer and news editor

Stitch Service Club gives students with passions for knitting, crocheting, and sewing to donate their items to charity and collect sponsored NHS hours. Senior and Stitch Service president, Hadley Wright, loves that the club gives her a chance to review projects with friends and donate to good causes.

"I love Stitch Service because of how much of an impact it can have," Wright said. "I'm actually looking for a president to run things next year... I would hate it if such an amazing club went underground."

Wright enjoys the time spent with friends during lunch. Senior Jaynie Lee agrees with Wright, and enjoys the warm, creative atmosphere.

"It's like having a little community where we can all crochet and hang out," Lee said. The club meets Tuesdays during lunch in room 401, and welcomes people at all levels of fiber art.

## SHAFT

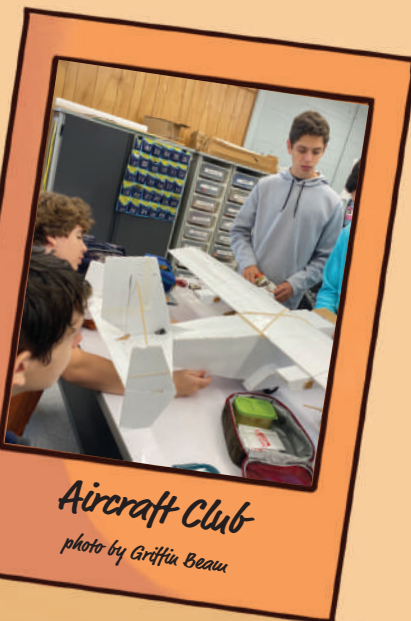
ESME KESSLER  
staff writer

Students Having A Fun Time Club (SHAFT) is a new club this year that is based around, as the name suggests, having a fun time. Students meet and host icebreakers and team-building activities. The club hosts many different events to help promote stronger bonds between students and allow them to get to know one another, according to freshman co-presidents Anne Bromm and Lily Wilcox.

"Every week we have different events," Bromm said. "We have a Kahoot about different people in SHAFT club, we had a candy salad day, we had capture the flag, and now we're planning a scavenger hunt."

Similar to Bromm, Wilcox enjoys joining the fun social events through the club. According to Wilcox, SHAFT is all about building a tight-knit community and creating a welcoming social environment.

"We really wanted to strengthen social bonds in the community," Wilcox said. "My dad did this at his old school, it's like a tradition. We wanted to carry it on." The club is sponsored by SciTech teacher Timothy Villanueva and students meet every Wednesday in various locations around the school. SHAFT welcomes new students year-round and posts updates on the club's Instagram @ lasashaftclub.



# 32nd NATO Member Official in March

## Sweden Becomes a NATO Ally Ending Long-Standing History of Neutrality

ETHAN STERN | staff writer

On March 7, 2024, Sweden became a full member of NATO after an application process that spanned 20 months. This signifies an end to Sweden's neutrality that has lasted centuries.

NATO, since its formation in 1949, has aimed to provide security and freedom for its members. It currently has 32 member countries, with Sweden being the most recent. In May 2022, only months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Sweden and Finland both applied to be NATO members due to fears that the Ukraine conflict may expand in their general northern direction. Finland was made NATO's 31st member in April 2023, making Finland and Sweden the first states to be made NATO members since North Macedonia joined 13 years ago. Despite applying in 2022, Sweden only recently became a member because of the membership process that requires that each country must agree to let said new country in. Türkiye and Hungary both had tribulations accepting Sweden into the organization due to Sweden's complicated history with Budapest, the capital of Hungary, and Türkiye's disapproval of Sweden's lack of action against Kurdish militant groups.

One reason Sweden decided to join NATO is because of the Article Five Collective Defense Clause, which provides support for any NATO Ally who becomes a victim of an armed attack.

Every NATO member of the Alliance must consider this attack an attack against all members and should act as necessary to assist the country, according to NATO. Micheal Mosser, an international relations professor at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) mentioned the types of issues that could arise in the event of an enactment of the clause.

"If [the Ukraine conflict] expands to somewhere like Poland, which is an actual NATO member, ... you end up with a NATO-Russia conflict," Mosser said. "It's a big question as to what Hungary will do. They are bound by treaty to defend the alliance, but we've never been, and NATO has never been tested that way. NATO and the Russians have never gone into combat against each other ... But it's [going to] be a big real-world test of alliance commitments if forces are required to go to combat against Russian troops."

While the idea of Sweden and Finland as possible NATO members is not new, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 caused many NATO members to believe it was a necessary step, according to Björn Lundberg, a professor of Swedish history at Lund University in Sweden. There have been opportunities in the past where political parties in Sweden wanted to make the advance, but there has never been a majority on the matter, according to Lundberg.

"When Finland decided to apply for membership, one of the major arguments against NATO membership fell," Lundberg said.

When Sweden and Finland applied to become NATO members, the end of their neutrality or non-alignment proved that Sweden was committed to building new relationships with other countries in similar situations, according to Helene Honeybone. Honeybone is an honorary consul of Sweden.

"Sweden's membership in NATO is also important because it shows who our allies are in the world ... together we are stronger and we realize that we want to invest in those relationships," Honeybone said. "We have a new world right now that's much more global, but we also have a lot of threats in the world. And so it becomes more important to have friends out there and close relationships with other countries."

According to Lundberg, when looking at why Sweden joined NATO, it is first important to look at how Russia has dealt with NATO states in the past. While Sweden's membership can potentially signal to Finland and neighboring Baltic States that they are committed to NATO and security, it also shows Russia that these countries now stand together against future issues.

"It's somewhat ironic that when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Vladimir Putin claimed it had to do with NATO expansion eastward," Lundberg said. "Instead, it's actually Russia's aggression that has triggered countries like Finland and Sweden to apply for NATO membership."

Politicians have been re-examining their outlook on NATO for the past two years, and with Sweden joining NATO, attention will turn to the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election and what will come of the U.S.'s involvement in NATO after the election.

"Swedish culture and politics are heavily influenced by the United States. This year's presidential election will get very detailed coverage in Swedish media," Lundberg said. "One major question of concern will definitely be NATO since Donald Trump and Joe Biden have voiced very different opinions about the organization and its future."



## Texas Panhandle Fires

### Q&A With Fire Academy Student

MILLER WILLIAMS | staff writer

Starting in late February, flames engulfed the Texas panhandle. The fires, caused by faulty electrical wires, quickly destroyed the livestock-friendly land, known as cattle country for being home to tens of thousands of cattle. Although the fire began to die down in March, the impact will last years, according to The Washington Post. The Panhandle Fires are the largest wildfires in Texas history and one of the largest wildfires in U.S. history.

Ramona Gonzalez is a LASA senior and fire academy student, a double-blocked two-year course training students in firefighting. Gonzalez shared her insight on the Panhandle Fires.

**The Liberator:** What inspired your interest in firefighting?

**Gonzalez:** I love helping people and I feel like there is no point to my job unless I am helping people, and I am very interested in the medical world. When the opportunity of Fire Academy came to me, I jumped on it and applied.

**The Liberator:** How does the fire academy prepare you mentally and physically for the stress you might face when firefighting?

**Gonzalez:** It is both really mentally and physically draining to respond to calls and to be under stress in a smoky, unknown environment. The academy taught us how to be okay extending past what we knew in a safe way, and slowly made it less and less controlled until we were fighting live fires.

**The Liberator:** Why might the terrain in the Texas panhandle be a challenge for firefighting?

**Gonzalez:** The panhandle is super open, so fire spreads like crazy. The only natural stopper for the flames would be the roads, and even then sometimes they can't. The terrain is different throughout, sometimes you have flat plains, sometimes you have rocky edges and cliffs. The weather conditions are also really hard on the emergency responders.

**The Liberator:** What are the most important qualities a firefighter should have when working in a place like the panhandle?

**Gonzalez:** Environmental awareness and communication. Telling people when you feel a hole in the ground or a fallen utility wire or any other environmental threat is how you can prevent losses and make the job easier. Proper gear is also important, you don't want to be in structure firefighting gear for a wildfire.

**The Liberator:** What might be common causes of fire in the Texas panhandle?

**Gonzalez:** Most are from human error. Campsite fires gone rogue, downed utility and electrical wires, and car accidents or other machinery are a big cause. The Texas panhandle also was the location of some of the most lightning strikes in all of Texas and around it, with mainly dry lightning, which is a huge danger with open grasses and areas, if a tree gets struck, everything goes down.

## Amplify Austin Brings Action

### Local Day of Donating Promotes Nonprofits

LEAH LASHUS | staff writer

Amplify Austin Day began in 2012 to get Texans involved in fundraising and philanthropy in their community. In its first year, it raised over \$200,000 for local causes—in its twelfth, in 2024, it raised over \$10 million.

Piper Nelson is the executive director at I Live Here, I Give Here, the nonprofit that hosts Amplify Austin Day, an annual event hosted in early March. This year the event spanned from March 6-7 and according to Nelson, the day serves as a simple way for Austinites to make a difference.

"What Amplify Austin does is provide a centralized place, and a community-wide event, to get people excited about giving," Nelson said. "It's online, it's easy, it's kind of like going shopping. And I think that's the excitement about it, it's a day where everyone's doing the same thing. You're part of something, you're part of this huge community-wide event to give back to nonprofits and I think that's what makes it work."

The day has been growing in popularity each year, and this year's was the largest yet, with 730 local nonprofits involved. According to Nelson, the nonprofits joining are all located in central Texas, making direct change in the neighborhoods many LASA students call home.

"There's amazing work being done in the state of Texas, in the U.S., [and] globally," Nelson said. "I give money to global women's organizations, too. But this is our community, and it's so important that we make sure that our community is taken care of. The people on the ground, in the community, know how to take care of their community."

Jessie Stewart is the Chief Development Officer at the Trail Conservancy, a local nonprofit organization protecting, enhancing, and connecting Austin's Roy and Ann Butler Hike-and-Bike trail. According to her, Amplify Austin Day serves as a time to raise funds for areas many overlook.

"A lot of donations that come in have to be used for a particular project," Stewart said. "Some of the hardest money to raise at a nonprofit is money to just pay for operations, whatever highest and best use that we have for that money. Amplify Austin helps us to do that and do it in a way that the community can really get behind."

There are over 12,000 nonprofit organizations in Central Texas, making it a unique realm of community service, according to Nelson. Adding to that, Stewart said that often, these important organizations are just the brainchildren of concerned citizens.

"What I think is cool about the Trail Conservancy is it just started with people, something that they wanted to make happen, and they made it happen," Stewart said. "So kind of growing out of that initiative [of beautification], the Trail Conservancy started."

Nelson shared this sentiment and discussed how many of the nonprofits Amplify Austin Day supports are small,

local organizations that mean a lot to the communities they involve. Nelson said these organizations save lives in Austin.

"Every time you give to a nonprofit you are supporting your community," Nelson said. "There's an organization called We Can Now. They are, on a daily basis, going out and working with people facing homelessness to help get them to housing, but in the meantime doing all the things that they need. What medicine do you need, how can we get you to a doctor's appointment, how do we fill out your resume, how do we just make sure that you have somewhere warm to sleep tonight?"

According to Nelson, these nonprofits are vital and imperative aspects of Austin. However, Nelson added that without Amplify Austin, they could cease to exist.

"That's a really small organization, and they don't have a lot of grant funding," Nelson said. "So it's things like Amplify Austin Day that ensure that they have the funds that they need to be able to help those people facing homelessness."

It's not all about monetary gifts — Amplify Austin also places emphasis on getting involved with your local community hands-on, according to Nelson. This can be in the form of volunteer work, utilizing your expertise and skills to benefit the organizations, or being on the board.

"We could not care for 300 acres of parkland and a 10-mile trail without all the volunteers that come out to help us with our trash pickup, help us plant plants, wildflower seeds, spread mulch," Stewart said. "Each year we have nearly 4,000 volunteers come out. That's huge. We're a pretty small organization, we're only 20 staff members. So we could not possibly do it without all those extra hands."

Nelson said the day changes the way Austinites view each other and creates a more uplifting, beneficial environment. Amplify Austin Day is a small way residents continue to protect and look after organizations making a difference, according to Nelson.

"Everything we can do to educate people in Central Texas, to encourage people in Central Texas, to give back, makes it a better place," Nelson said. "Not only does it support those nonprofits that are in turn supporting the cats and the dogs and the humans and the parks and everything, but it also just creates this ethos where we live in a community where people take care of each other."

Giving doesn't just end after one day, according to Nelson. Donations can always be made to these nonprofits and I Live Here, I Give Here.

"AmplifyATX.org, it's an online giving day, so you go on and you go shopping for the nonprofits you want to support, you list how much you want to give, and you use your credit card," Nelson said. "You can also give gifts offline if you want to write a check, or if you want to use a donor-advised fund. You can do all these things, but most people go online to AmplifyATX.org."



# Austin Air Pollution Escalates

City Out of Compliance with Environmental Protection Agency

LILAH O'DAIR | staff writer

Amidst the hustle and bustle of everyday city life lurks a silent danger: air pollution. The quality of the air breathed affects everyone, from people with top-notch health to at-risk individuals, and maintaining low pollutant numbers is an effort that takes work from all.

In 2023 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for ozone pollution were adjusted, which caused the city of Austin to fall out of compliance. This, along with a recent study conducted by the University of Texas at Austin (UT) Dell Medical School connecting serious cases of asthma to air pollutants, shows an increasing concern about the cleanness of the air Austinites breathe every day.

Ramon Zarate is an Air Quality Program Specialist at the Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG). He explained that the two main concerns in terms of air pollutants in the Austin area are ozone and PM2.5 pollution, which if left unregulated present large health risks to citizens.

"Regarding air quality, the two major concerns are ozone and PM2.5 pollution," Zarate said. "Ozone is a colorless gas made up of three oxygen atoms, while PM2.5 is particulate matter that is made up of fine inhalable particles with diameters that are generally 2.5 micrometers and smaller. PM2.5 can pose a great risk to health as these particles can get deep into your lungs and even into your bloodstream."

Orla Tower is a freshman at LASA who feels concerned about the condition of Austin's air quality. She has seen the negative effects of air pollution and recognizes how important studying this issue is to keep her community healthy.

"I feel really bad because some of my friends have asthma, and they definitely feel the air quality a lot more than me," Tower said. "And especially when doing sports. When they have asthma attacks it's really scary, and that just shows how pressing this air quality concern is."

Sarah Chamblis is a research associate at UT who studies asthma as a result of air pollutants. She and her team considered these new EPA standards while analyzing the correlation

between severe cases of asthma and air quality in certain Austin neighborhoods.

"Cities and states are going to have to make sure that they're cleaning up their air to an extent that they weren't before," Chamblis said. "It gets pretty complicated to figure out specifically how to remove sources of air pollution and we're trying to give them a place to start looking."

Similar to the research Chamblis and her team have conducted, Zarate's work with CAPCOG is aimed at protecting the welfare of citizens. His organization is keeping a close eye on the health of our air and the way the new EPA guidelines may affect us in the future.

"If the Austin area is designated nonattainment the federal government could withhold funding for transportation and other projects," Zarate said. "Or [the city can] refuse to issue permits for initiatives that would exacerbate the pollution."

Chamblis and her team of researchers hoped to find out more about the connection between asthma and air pollution through their study. They wanted to explore how certain areas are affected.

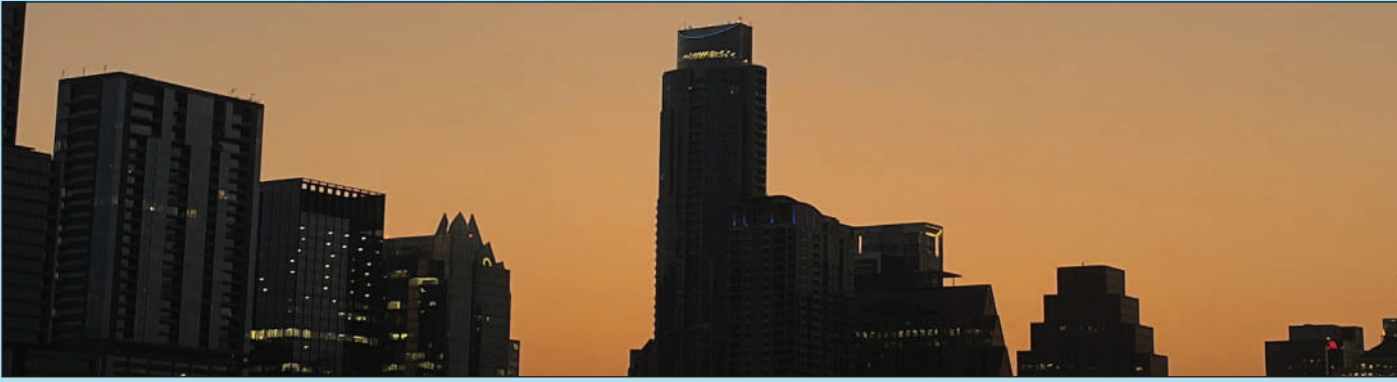
"There are these persistent patterns within Austin and within a lot of cities," Chamblis said. "There are some neighborhoods where people with asthma go to the emergency department a lot more."

From a pedestrian perspective, Tower has also experienced these patterns. She agrees that certain places feel more affected by air pollutants than others, especially dense urban areas.

"I guess downtown is pretty bad," Tower said. "That's where I notice it the most. There are less trees. It's kind of grimy and [there are] lots of buildings."

Zarate hopes more people will get involved in helping reverse some of the negative effects air pollution has inflicted on our city. He noted the major actions every citizen can do to help their community get back on track.

"Transportation and energy use are major sources of air pollution in our region," Zarate said, "and while cleaner technologies are being introduced, we can take individual actions to reduce transportation and energy use-related emissions, help protect lives, and get Austin back in compliance with the new standard more quickly."



**ILLUMINATED SKYLINE** Downtown Austin is lit by the early morning sunrise. In 2023, when the Environmental Protection Agency set the standards for ozone pollution levels, the city of Austin fell out of compliance, reflecting growing concerns over air pollution. photo by Sarah Garrett

# Dobbs Versus Jackson Decision

Supreme Court Case Restricts Medical Procedure

ISABEL KRAMER | staff writer

In 2021, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* was brought to the Supreme Court of the United States. The court's decision in the case has opened up the possibility for states to pass more restrictive abortion laws, and several states have already done so according to Oyez, an archive explaining Supreme Court decisions.

At the center of *Dobbs v. Jackson* is a Mississippi law that bans abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, with limited exceptions for medical emergencies or severe fetal abnormalities. The case challenged the constitutionality of the Mississippi law; however, *Dobbs* succeeded and has made laws, like those in Mississippi, legal. According to KFF, a healthcare information database, 22 states have abortion restrictions, 14 of which do not include exceptions for rape or incest. According to Vinson Ratcliffgardy, a LASA junior, restricting abortions as a whole is not the best way to approach the polarized issue.

"On moral grounds, I would say that *Dobbs v. Jackson* was a good idea, though I would not say that I support all of the state's abortion restrictions because some of them are illogical," Ratcliffgardy said. "The without exception rule is ... just ridiculous because the health of the mother should be prioritized."

Zack Gingrich-Gaylord is the communications director of Trust Women, an organization founded in 2009 that focuses on opening abortion clinics in underserved communities. According to the Trust Women mission statement, the organization seeks to allow everyone to make decisions about their own individual healthcare needs.

"Right now 80% of the patients that we're seeing in Wichita are coming from out of state, so what we're seeing is people traveling further, and people are often delayed in accessing their care because they don't have meaningful local access, meaning some of those people's experiences may be worse by the time that they get to that care," Gingrich-Gaylord said. "So the patients we're seeing are sicker on average. They're having more complicated health experiences because they weren't able to access timely abortion care in their communities."

According to Gingrich-Gaylord, there are complications with exceptions when it comes to passing abortion legislation. This is because often exceptions must be decided by doctors, which often puts them under undue pressure.

"Often time exceptions are a good way to get a total abortion ban passed because they make it seem as if people would be able to access those exceptions but, like we see in many of these states, the doctors are unclear on when they can invoke an exception," Gingrich-Gaylord said. "We don't believe that exceptions are any better than a total ban. They make what is an effective total ban more palatable to the people. People cannot

access them, they are essentially a myth."

Joe Pojman is the executive director of Texas Alliance for Life, a nonprofit that opposes abortions, except to preserve the mother's life. According to Pojman, the Texas Alliance for Life strongly supports the Texas Human Life Protection Act, which states under Section A170A.002 that an abortion may not be knowingly performed, induced, or attempted unless to save the life of the female or the fetus.

"[The Act] went into effect shortly after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in the *Dobbs* decision," Pojman said. "It also protects babies who are conceived in rape, and we agree with that policy because when a woman is raped or a victim of incest she is truly a victim, but if that act results in the conception of an unborn baby, that baby is a victim as well, and that baby is deserving of protection."

The Human Life Protection Act has a narrow health exception, which would restrict abortion outside of saving the woman's life, according to Pojman. LASA junior Renee Breaux strongly opposes the act and believes that limiting rights to abortion cuts off the opportunities for people to control their own healthcare.

"I think that everyone should have a right to their bodies and I think that people who don't like abortion don't realize how invasive and often traumatizing giving birth can be," Breaux said. "I think a lot of people have a skewed perception of the American healthcare system."

According to Breaux, abortion laws are extremely relevant to transgender individuals. Transgender individuals, such as Breaux, are impacted differently by pregnancy and birth, which can have negative effects on their mental health.

"I am a transgender man, and I think giving birth would fundamentally ruin me," said Breaux. "It would destroy my sense of self and wreck me as a person."

Depending on the state, there can be different exceptions made pertaining to health conditions, incest, or rape. According to Breaux, exceptions are especially important, since many children who are biologically able to get pregnant are not fit to bear children.

"I think that [outlawing abortion without exception] is horrible," Breaux said. "Some women and AFAB (assigned female at birth) people go through puberty very early, like I was able to get pregnant at the age of eight, and some people get their periods as early as seven or eight. A seven or eight-year-old body is not capable of bearing a child, and I think forcing a child to bear a child is immoral."

# THE SKINNY

## Global News

May 1

A protester part of the 2022 protests in Iran was assaulted and killed by the government's security forces, according to a leaked document. 16-year-old Nika Shakarami was a part of the protests going on in the country in 2022, sparked by the killing of Mahsa Amini by the morality police. Shakarami was a loud voice in the movement with a video circulating of her standing on a dumpster burning hijabs.

May 1

Floods have been ravaging the East African country of Kenya since March of this year. According to Reuters, as of May 1, 179 people have been killed in the floods, as well as several dozens in neighboring countries. Hundreds of thousands have also been forced to leave their homes in the aftermath of the destruction.

May 1

The Philippines accused China of increasing violence in the South China Sea after two Phillipino vessels were damaged by Chinese water cannons. On May 1, officials from the Philippines said one coast guard boat and one fishing vessel were harmed on their way to the Scarborough Shoal, a disputed territory. The shoal is one of the most important fishing spots in the sea, but falls within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone, which gives it jurisdiction over the area's natural resources. However, Chinese officials have also laid claim to the area, making it a tense region.

## National News

April 24

Former President Donald Trump has been fined for contempt of court in his ongoing criminal trial in Manhattan. Judge Juan Merchan has fined Trump \$9,000 for violating a gag order that prohibited him from speaking publicly about the case involving his alleged payments to an adult film star.

May 1

A bill signed into law by President Biden on April 24 could ban TikTok in the United States. The bill, which was also passed by both houses of Congress, gives the app's parent company, ByteDance, 9 months to find a buyer for TikTok. ByteDance's connections to the Chinese government have been a cause for concern for American lawmakers and the main reason for the creation of this bill, according to CBS. If the app does not get sold within this window, app stores would no longer be able to store it. This means those who have already downloaded TikTok will continue to have it, but the company won't be able to send updates or bug fixes to users.

May 1

In several universities across the country, students have begun protesting the ongoing conflict in Israel. Students in universities like Columbia, the University of Texas at Austin (UT) and the University of Southern California have all taken to protesting against Israeli forces in Palestine. At Columbia University, students seized a building during their protests but were later cleared out by police. At UT, administration called police to help manage student protests, which ended in 79 arrests, mostly for criminal trespassing.

## State News

April 29

Texas Governor Greg Abbott has ordered the state's education agency, TEA, to disregard a new federal government policy that expands Title IX. Title IX is meant to protect people from sex based discrimination in education. The policy would protect LGBTQ+ students from discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation. On April 29, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton announced he would be suing the Biden administration over the changes to Title IX.

May 1

The college football team, the Houston Cougars, has decided to move forward with plans to have their alternate jerseys be a light blue. This move comes after the NFL sent a cease-and-desist letter to the team, alleging they were copying the NFL team, the Houston Oilers, jersey's. The controversy started in early September when the Cougars started a campaign which they called "H-town pride", in which they debuted the jerseys.

## Local News

April 30

A bill before Austin City Council Members could allow them to vote to allocate \$1.3 million to the renovation of The Bungalows at Century Park. The Bungalows are used to house those who are facing chronic homelessness. A renovation for the building could mean fixing the roof, cracks along the exterior of the building, and money towards previous flood repairs. According to KXAN, the hotel was purchased by the city in 2021.

## Reflecting on the Benefits of High School Debate

IZZY CRAVOTTA | staff writer

The LASA debate team has had many successes and wins in the past couple of years. Last year, the team won the national tournament known as the Tournament of Champions, and had the number one spot on the coaches poll, a list decided every few months by coaches nationwide ranking different debate teams. This year, the team won the Texas Forensic Association State Tournament and has won other national-level tournaments such as the Emory and Michigan debate tournaments.

Freshman Eyal Rosenberg is a first-year member on the debate team. He explained that debate, contrary to what people initially think, requires more than simply using persuasive techniques like pathos or ethos in an argument.

"It's more a game of research and knowledge and learning instead of actually trying to convince someone," Rosenberg said. "We have to talk really fast, that's one of the things we learn to do. A lot of my friends will be like, 'that's dumb how do you convince anybody when you're talking really fast?' But, it's more about getting a lot of arguments in because the judges are used to people talking fast."

Senior Eleanor Barrett, the president of the debate team, believes that debate has many educational benefits such as improved research skills. According to Barrett, although debate can sometimes be a dozen hours of work a week, it can be enjoyable and very fulfilling in the long run.

"There's a lot of benefits," Barrett said. "For one, just competition is really enjoyable. It's kind of fun to compete and debate and argue. Secondly, you learn a lot. It teaches you about research, public speaking, critical thinking, and it teaches you a lot about media literacy. And thirdly, debate also is really big for college applications. I got a full ride for debate, for example."

Additionally, Barrett mentioned keeping up with both homework and schoolwork is often a problem that arises when preparing for debate. According to her, being good at debate requires a lot of work to be put into the activity and prioritizing debate preparation.

"You just have to be really disciplined about managing your time and not wasting time," Barrett said. "You have to be extremely motivated. The people that are going to be good at debate have to really want to."

On the other hand, senior Levi Rosenthal prioritizes school over the debate team. Although he appreciates how it is an engaging and interesting way to engage with current issues, he views it as a fun side activity and focuses on homework and studying.

"I view debate more casually than some people do," Rosenthal said. "Some people will debate over their schoolwork. That's fine, but I just personally find a nice balance by reminding myself that debate is just a game at the end of the day and that workload for debate should not be outpacing my schoolwork."

According to Rosenberg, in addition to the preparation aspect of debate, the competitions can also be very stressful. He explained that there are many necessary steps to stay prepared for debate like scouting other teams' arguments, updating your evidence, and doing practice debates.

"You have to go onto there and figure out what they are going to read and make answers to all that sort of stuff to make sure you are ready," Rosenberg said. "You also just have to get better at debate to prepare. You can do practice debates, you can do practice speeches where you simulate up to a certain speech. There's a bunch of other drills that you can do like case drills and panic drills to get better at debate."

According to Barrett, debate can be both a physically challenging activity to do and be equally challenging mentally. However, Barrett finds that even with all its difficulties, it's a fun activity to do.

"Debate can be emotionally difficult," Barrett said. "When you spend that much time on something, you're really invested in the results...but tournaments, like the actual debating, are really exciting. It's really adrenaline-inducing."



**STATE SUCCESS** Seniors Eleanor Barrett and Jack Dollinger and Juniors Anita Sosa and Christian Bohmer are state co-champions. This is the second time the LASA debate team won the state tournament. photo courtesy of Yao Yao Chen

## Raptors 8-Count the Steps to Success

### A Look Inside the LASA Velocity and Dynasty Dance Teams

LIVIA HALE | staff writer

The LASA dance team allows students to engage with the school community in different ways such as through performances, showcases, and attending competitions. In addition to giving students opportunities to perform, the dance team participates in community service projects that allow them to help staff and faculty in the school and raise awareness for issues they're passionate about.

Paige Edwards, the JV and varsity dance coach, explained that her main role is to help the dance team practice their routines for various school events and competitions. According to Edwards, she takes pride in the dance team showing their engagement with the school community through dance.

"We go to most football games and they support the football players, they work with the band on dancing to the halftime music," Edwards said. "So it's a really big communal event at the football games. We also work with cheer from time to time and make sure to come to all the pep rallies."

Edwards explained that in addition to performing, the dance team also helps out with volunteer work to help the students, school, and people outside the LASA community. She added that through volunteering the dance team can showcase their commitment to helping people outside the dance community.

"A lot of our dancers are very volunteer-focused and love to do things around the campus with the teachers and for the community," Edwards said. "They helped teachers set up their classrooms at the start of the year, they went to the 'MORE THAN PINK Walk' together, we also advocated for Autism Acceptance this year called LuvMicheal (a non-profit organization to empower autistic teens)."

Freshman Madelyn Greenspahn, a member of the junior varsity dance team, emphasized that dance is one of the best extracurriculars LASA offers due to the flexible nature of the activity. According to



**PERFORMANCE READY** Dynasty dance team performing during the Spring Showcase. This show featured both dance teams and concluded the end of the dance team's season. photo courtesy of Paige Edwards

Greenspahn, it's relatively easy to manage with school, and even when the season picks up, the people and experiences that come along with dance make it worth the extra time.

"Dance can get time-consuming at times, but overall it doesn't affect me academically that much," Greenspahn said. "It can get a little hard to balance it when we have a busy week with competitions and practices and stuff like that but overall not that bad...The best part is probably all the people I've met this year through dance and the places I get to go with them. During the 2023-2024 season, we

had multiple competitions and showcases which was exciting to be able to do with my friends."

According to freshman Maureen Vo, a member of the varsity dance team, the excitement that comes with the opportunity to perform the dance routine with her teammates, outweighs the challenges such as keeping up with school. She emphasized that it's worth it to manage her academic responsibilities along with dance because being involved in dance makes her feel fulfilled.

"I've never had too much of a problem balancing school and dance, sometimes it can get challenging, but it's never to a point where I end up super behind," Vo said. "My favorite part about dance is the events, especially pep rallies and football games. I really like performing at them and it gives me a sense of accomplishment... I think it's just the whole process of preparing and getting ready for competitions and showcases that is really fun."

Edwards mentioned that as well as being a great way to be involved in the school community, the dance team is a great place to hone a passion for dance even if you have no prior experience. Furthermore, Edwards also commented that being on the dance team is a great way to teach other dancers.

"Overall I'd say if you love to dance, and if you want to perform often and you want to be a part of a community, the dance teams are great," Edwards said. "We also have a dance class for those that maybe don't want to do all the bells and whistles but still want to be a part of a dance experience."

## CyberPatriots Compete to Crack the Code

### Raptors Have Recent Success in National Cybersecurity Competition

BEN GOODMAN | staff writer

From March 15-19, the LASA CyberPatriot club competed at the CyberPatriot XVI National Open Division Finals, a competition in which students compete to fix cybersecurity vulnerabilities. Some students went to Maryland to compete in the in-person event, and all members of the club learned cybersecurity skills that can be applied for future career paths.

According to junior Arhant Choudhary, a qualifier for the national competition, the activity feels like a game and is very enjoyable. He explained that in competitions, competitors have to work with Virtual Machines, also known as VMs or "images," that simulate a real computer.

"[The VMs] have various vulnerabilities in them, and you get together with a team and during the competition time, you go and try to fix those vulnerabilities," Choudhary said. "It's very fun, and although it's framed as a cybersecurity competition, it's more of a game. 50% is cybersecurity, 50% is CyberPatriot humor and fun. I think what made me stick to it is that nice balance."

Choudhary explained that out of 300 teams in the Platinum Semifinals, 12 teams qualified for the national competition, which his team regarded as a huge moment. Upon attending the actual competition, he noticed that it was a very high-energy environment.

"We were really shocked because of all the fanfare and stuff, but the competition was really cool, and they had a very nice area set up," Choudhary said. "The images (the challenge) were live images with a live 'Red Team' [hackers] trying to attack your computer as well."

Junior Maxim Rebguns, a member of the CyberPatriot club,

explained the specifics of some of the roles in a CyberPatriot team. With three different VMs to fix, plus other tasks that must be completed by each team, he conveyed that specialization was important for this competition.



"Some teams typically have a Windows person, a Linux person," Rebguns said. "Those are two different types of operating systems. We have a Cisco person. Cisco is the networking portion, which is highly specialized. There's also Windows Server."

James Shockey is the sponsor of the CyberPatriot club, as well as a computer science teacher at LASA. He is tasked with communicating with parents and the school administration and is responsible for bringing the food to competitions.

"I'm the faculty sponsor and my role really is just trying to be the interface between the national organization and the student organization," Shockey said. "Also we do our contests here in the labs, both these two rooms and then now it's 711. We essentially do the lab maintenance as well, setting up the computers for the virtual machines and the images that are going to be used for the competition."

After explaining his role in the CyberPatriots program, Shockey expressed the impact this club could have on a student's future career paths. According to their website, CyberPatriots was created to inspire K-12 students toward careers in cybersecurity, and Shockey believes that the program allows students to gain a lot of skills to aid towards that path.

"If you're going to go to college and major in STEM fields, there are some good things," Shockey said. "And it's really pretty cool because the competitions are these virtual images that reflect what you might see in an actual workplace. So you're getting a real-world engagement with this."

Additionally, Shockey mentioned that the importance of CyberPatriots has gone up due to the major computer database-related hacks that have become increasingly common and have made cybersecurity an essential field since these hacks disrupt many industries in the U.S.. Rebguns added that the nature of the club creates many opportunities, including the chance to have internships or scholarships relating to cybersecurity.

"It would look good on a college application," Rebguns said. "But I guess that's not really the goal. It's more of just a club that people who are interested in come to and it's grown to such a large thing."

According to Choudhary, the club is always looking for members. The CyberPatriots meet on Thursdays at lunch and anyone curious about the activity is welcome to join.

# Head in a book

## LASA Library Invites Students to Start a New Chapter

LASYA SANGANA | student life editor  
SADIE SARRAT | staff writer

The LASA library community has many different opportunities for students to engage in the books they read in different ways. The library hosts a variety of different book clubs and programs such as the Banned Books Club and Battle of the Books. While the library also has multiple smaller events and clubs, the LASA library community as a whole allows students to be a part of other programs outside of LASA such as Project Lit and the Texas Teen Book Festival.

Junior Eliana Koransky, who has been involved in the book clubs since her freshman year, explained that she originally got involved because of Elizabeth Switek, LASA's librarian. To Koransky, the book club is a great place to meet people with similar interests in an inviting and comfortable environment.

"I just wanted to find people at LASA who I could talk about books with," Koransky said. "Ms. Switek was incredibly nice and inviting and was always willing to talk to me and have a conversation about books. She was the one that [told me] we have these book clubs, and to come join. I loved talking to her about books, and I figured I'd meet other people who like talking also."

According to Koransky, the book clubs go beyond the lunch meetings and book-related discussions. She explained that they're a great way to be involved in the community through community service projects in programs like Project Lit, which is dedicated to increasing access to books, and the Texas Teen Book Festival as well as other smaller book-related competitions.

"It's a way to just be involved in the community, and not just involved, but also help and contribute towards the community," Koransky said. "In Project Lit, we do community service projects where we've done book drives and organized books for middle schoolers, stuff like that. In Battle of the Books, we've united [with] a lot of different schools, [and] we've made our little Battle of the Books competitive little community, and [it's] so much fun. And in the Texas Book Festival, we got to contribute to a citywide festival that impacted a lot of people."

Junior Francie Sarrat, a member of Project Lit and Banned Books club, mentioned that she felt that the community service projects that are done through Project Lit spark a positive change in the LASA community. She emphasized that, in particular, Little Free Libraries, a project that she is working on, gives her fulfillment while also simultaneously being helpful in a local community or neighborhood.

"Whenever I see a Little Free Library, I don't necessarily always take a book or even go look through it," Sarrat said. "But if I see one [when] I'm driving or something, I love it. It just makes me so happy, so I hope that it gets used and people actually use it for finding books, and leaving books. I think it's also just a symbol of community."

Sarrat explained that the project was originally started as a way to repurpose old COVID-19 plexiglass protective shields. While they were brainstorming, Sarrat got inspired by Switek's idea to start a Little Free Library and began working on the project with a team.

"She [Switek] gave us this option [to] use other materials, too, not just plexiglass. I [thought] this is kind of our chance," Sarrat said. "It works out: we'll get to use a shop and materials, we'll have time to actually do it, so Eloise [Embry] and I got put in a group and we were in there before school, during lunch, during class trying to put it together because we had one of the biggest and probably most detailed designs, I'd say. We had a lot of fun building it, and we're really excited to share it with the world."

Additionally, Koransky mentioned that the Battle of the Books competition was another unique way to engage with the book community. This year LASA beat both Ann Richards and Bowie in the competition, and according to Koransky, it was also a fun way to interact and meet new people from different schools.

"The Battle of the Books competitions are so much fun," Koransky said. "We've done it at Ann Richards every year. You go to Ann Richards [on] a little field trip, and they've got snacks and little toys and stuff, and they have guest authors who record a little video, a little tip for us, and we get to interact with a bunch of different schools. This year, we had a lot...10 to 12 [people] maybe, and we all compete, and we win some of the time, two-thirds

of the time, so, you know, that's pretty cool."

Koransky attributed most of the library's welcoming and inviting nature to Switek. According to her, the amount of work and personal touches that Switek puts into the library makes Koransky appreciate and enjoy the activities and clubs even more.

"Ms. Switek has put so much work into it...[she's] done a lot of painting, she made a little tea lounge area, a tea bar," Koransky said. "It's so much fun. It has all the books in it; you could spend forever just browsing through it, and it's just a really inviting place, especially during book club, when we're all sat around the little tables, and she has her little presentation up, and we're just there, chilling and snacking."

According to Switek, her inspiration in making the library a relaxing place to be in is from her mother who is a retired librarian. She explained that just seeing students make the active decision to put down their phone and open a book instead is what makes her passionate about making the library a place where you can enjoy reading.

"It [the library] is a relaxer," Switek said. "It's a place where you can grow, you can learn, you can think, you can meditate. Just to enjoy reading and to want to read or to enjoy being curious about the world is just if you're not [doing that], what are you doing? What are you going to do and what are you going to contribute to our society? So the fact that there are so many students here who are just so excited and making time and making that effort because y'all are busy."

Additionally, Switek mentioned that though being involved in books can be calming for students, it's important for students to also have an opportunity to be aware of what's going on in literature, especially with the recent book ban happening through House Bill (HB) 900. She explained that books have important information and experiences that students can learn from and relate to that can help them, and if students aren't involved in literature, they might not be able to find out where to get access to that information.

"From a book-banning standpoint, I would say [students should be aware] because it's a slippery slope," Switek said. "The really large percentage of books right now that are being banned are books that deal with assault and a particular sexual assault. The rates of youth assaults are really shockingly high. And so if you cannot have access to information through databases or books where you can see someone else's experience of that, their reaction to it, and their way that they dug themselves out of the depression that they were in or, you know, dealt with court cases or things like that, then your generation is doing itself a disservice."

Switek added that a library is like a marketplace of ideas for students, and they should be able to not lose access to that information. She mentioned that when purchasing sources for the library, she keeps book banning in mind and gets a variety of sources with different perspectives to try to overcome that barrier.

"You should be able to read anything," Switek said. "Now, with that being said, I am buying for people under 18. There's a whole lot of adult stuff that I obviously do not buy that would not come in here, but in terms of databases and having access to newspapers and having ideas that are on all 10 sides of the political spectrum... that should all be available so that you guys can read it and learn from it and make your own decision."

Sophomore Phoebe Herbert, a member of Banned Books Club, believes that the book-banning bill, or HB 900, is an important issue for students to be aware of because it directly affects what they read in school. According to her, the club at LASA is a good place to gain information about the issue, and through it she was able to participate in a Zoom interview with two people involved in the lawsuit in which she learned more information about the ban.

"I think it [HB 900] is bad because those books are interesting and are important," Herbert said. "They're historical almost, and I feel like they're important to read... I could see, I mean, she [Switek] is going to have to do the regulations if it passes, but I could definitely see some books being banned like Brave New World or maybe 1984 for English and just not being able to read those anymore."

In addition to being a great way to raise awareness about book banning, Herbert finds that the library is a great place to discuss books that she has enjoyed. She added that the library's inclusive environment and opportunities to volunteer make it an easy way to get more involved in the school community.





# Taking the World by Storm

## International Movies Find Center Stage

**ANNABEL ANDRE** | editor in chief  
**SANWI SARODE** | copy editor

International films can be found in theaters and across various major streaming platforms. However, the journey of sharing these diverse stories to a broader audience can be challenging, often commencing at film festivals such as South by Southwest (SXSW). According to some filmmakers premiering their films internationally at SXSW, the experience of showing a film in different countries comes with unique challenges and boundaries, but their stories are important to tell and need to be heard.

This year, the SXSW film festival took place from March 11 - March 16 and featured films from across the world. When foreign filmmakers approach showing their films abroad, they first start by submitting their work to as many film festivals as possible which, according to some filmmakers at SXSW, can be a laborious process often filled with rejection and disappointment. But if successful, these film festivals can be the introduction to international audiences that can help bring films popularity in order to get them shown in theaters and on streaming platforms.

Abid Aziz Merchant is one of the three producers who worked on "Wakhri", a Pakistani film inspired by the late social media celebrity and women's activist Qandeel Baloch. SXSW gave the film another opportunity to be featured internationally, which can be difficult for foreign films, according to Merchant.

"It's not easy, you know," Merchant said. "How many films from that part of the world, even India which has a big industry, how many films have actually made it to the A-list festivals? Not many, and getting this movie from the development stage to Locarno, then to Caan, then to Busan, and then getting a grant from CAPE USA, and then getting Abigail Disney's company to come on board for this script consultancy, and then an Indian producer... It was a slow and gradual process."

For Friedrich Moser, director of the Austrian documentary "How To Build a Truth Engine" that sheds light on disinformation, SXSW was also a special opportunity for the documentary to be featured. Moser described the festival as a versatile setting with an abundance of technology, which fits well with the documentary's focus on investigating the tech world.

"The technical quality of the SXSW theaters was outstanding," Moser said. "And the response from the audience was great. SXSW is one of the best film festivals in the U.S., and therefore in the world. What made South By the best festival for my film to have its world premiere is the fact that it is not only a film festival, but also a tech conference. As my film covers the use of technology to fight back against disinformation, this was a dream setting for me."

Similarly, "Audrey" producer Michael Wrenn described SXSW as a welcoming scene. This type of setting was especially important for "Audrey", an Australian film that blends a mixture of potentially controversial topics in film, according to Wrenn.

"SXSW celebrates the outlier, the weird, the risqué and thought-provoking - it's also a very future-looking festival blending a magic cauldron of the arts: music, stand-up, tech, psychedelics... sex-positive thinking - all of which feature heavily in 'Audrey'," Wrenn said. "SXSW also has grown to be an imprimatur for what is cool and groovy and as a 'foreign language' English film having that USDA Prime Choice comedy stamp of approval is so valuable and heartening."

Concerns about appealing to foreign audiences is something that comes with showing international films at U.S.-based film festivals. Moser believed that his documentary was a story that related to all audiences, as everyone is affected by disinformation and technology, and he tried to look for a human angle to appeal to audiences.

"To appeal more broadly to audiences, especially on complex subjects, I always look for a human angle," Moser said. "Because at the end of the day, I think that nobody wants to be lectured, but everybody wants to go on a journey with interesting people."

Lucy Lawless, director of "Never Look Away", held the Texas Premier of the documentary at SXSW. The documentary covers the life of Margaret Moth, a New Zealander CNN war camerawoman, and Lawless believes that now is a vital time to tell stories like Moth's to hold governments accountable without having to worry about appealing to a certain audience.

"I don't think you can think about that [appealing to an audience]," Lawless said. "You have to tell a story that is as particular and unique to your take as possible. If you're making a film or any piece of art for everybody else, you're just gonna get porridge, you might as well be throwing oatmeal on the screen."

Wrenn believed that connecting with foreign audiences could be difficult for "Audrey", which has cultural references and content that could be considered offensive to some audiences. However, he stated that comedy is a bridge between different types of people, and "Audrey" would be able to find its people.

"Cinema is a medium that transcends language and borders but comedy is very specific and a hard nut to crack even in its native environment being so subjective a medium," Wrenn said. "One person's funny is another's cry for cancellation. Then there's the cultural references and in-jokes you hope land or are understood - thankfully, 'Audrey', translated to American audiences and it was super exciting to hear the guffaws and gasps as we had worked so hard to make the jokes land."

Wrenn stated that this comedic element of "Audrey" is a reason that international films need to be shown to foreign audiences. He was encouraged by the film's warm welcome at SXSW.

"We collectively wanted 'Audrey' to be, in the words of SXSW, a film 'walking the line' of comedy and taking no prisoners in its satire," Wrenn said. "To see it play so well with audiences and hear the laughs and gasps is always the most satisfying aspect of the festival/theatrical experience and something SXSW delivered in spades throughout our four sold-out screenings."

Lawless similarly noted the importance of stories such as "Never Look Away" that shed light on what oppressive governments are doing so people can hold them accountable. According to her, the issues discussed in the documentary not only apply to New Zealand audiences, but to people across the world.

"It's never been more important [to tell these stories] because it shows the honor of those people who are putting their bodies on the line, to bring us the truth of what's going on in the world," Lawless said, "so that we can care and put pressure on our leaders to behave in the way that we think is most appropriate. That's our democratic duty."

Merchant also emphasized the importance of watching international films. He believed that "Wakhri" could be an inspiring film for women in any part of the world.

"Although it's been made in Pakistan and it's a very Pakistani story, I think it's relevant all over the world, especially in underdeveloped countries and in more conservative societies," Merchant said. "The message I would like to give to all the women out there is that whenever, wherever you find this film to watch, do watch it, and I'm sure you will find a change in yourself. I think this film will make you change, it will make you stronger."

Wrenn encouraged film enthusiasts to go out and explore international films. He believes that this will give them a broader experience and help mold their film taste.

"As Shia Le Boeuf said, just do it!" Wrenn said. "Wash, rinse, repeat often: that will help define your taste, give experience and help parse the good from the bad and the ugly - or, god forbid, the indifferent. And like all things, take risks as that's where you will find reward. Thank you, Austin."



photos by Annabel Andre and Lili Xiong, graphic by Megan Gerold

## Editor's Picks

### SXSW Favorite Memories

**VICTOR MARTINEZ** | sports editor

I would sum up my time at South by Southwest (SXSW) in one word: thrilling — though a lot of the thrill I felt was probably closer to panic and hurry. When I wasn't hearing from leading voices in film, journalism, and music, I was weaving through the Convention Center's crowds for seating at the next session, scouring whole blocks for the closest shuttle, or spending upwards of \$30 for a pedicab to cross the length of the city to catch another film premiere. But I was always eager to go through the festival's hustle and bustle all over again the next day. Save for the time I arrived just in time to hear staff announce the theater had already reached full capacity minutes before, attending the premieres always excited me for they were by far my most thrilling memories at the festival. Nothing can top the feeling of being among the first to experience the year's best movies yet, having an entire theater laughing, roaring with applause, and losing themselves in the story alongside you. From the gory, transfixing action of Dev Patel's "Monkey Man" that had me on the edge of my seat its entire runtime, to the all too real immigrant story of Sundance's award-winning "Didi", I never would have imagined movies would evoke from me the full range of emotion I felt at the screenings.

**MEGAN GEROLD** | entertainment editor

Throughout my life in Austin and my countless hours driving through its endless traffic, I thought I knew a lot about the city I grew up in. But until my experience at SXSW, I don't think I've ever truly explored the heart and soul of what makes up this city. Amidst the week of SXSW, I only spent time at home to sleep, shower, and eat. Every time my head hit my pillow, dead with exhaustion, the noise and vibrance of downtown begged me to head back out to the pounding and thrumming life of a city that doesn't exist in the suburbs. Moments of extremity that were punctuated by calm respites all combined to make the best memory I have of SXSW be the exploration of the booming and eccentric streets of downtown Austin. On every corner was a new experience to have, a new person to meet, and a brand to get free merchandise from. I spent my time learning a city I have walked over my entire life in a brand new way, and while it was slightly embarrassing to have to use Google Maps in my hometown, all of that was overshadowed by the discoveries I made while living and breathing Austin. Amongst clouded and crowded sidewalks I dodged cars, listened to live music, and made lasting memories with my senior friends that would leave my life in just a few short months. My air of self-confidence lasted just long enough to make me feel responsible and grown-up for finding my way to the nearest convenience store, and while the exact way to get to the Convention Center may be lost in my mind, when I walk it again, my feet just might remember their way.

**LILI XIONG** | managing editor

Watching the premier of a Harry Styles fanfiction movie was not on my 2024 bingo card. Neither was Anne Hathaway starring in and co-producing said Harry Styles fanfiction movie. But last March, I found myself waiting alongside copy editor Sanwi Sarode in a line sprawling several blocks down the Paramount, dubious that this fan fiction-turned-movie, as a headliner of the SXSW film festival, would live up to the other incredible films I watched throughout the week. But let me assure you that watching "The Idea of You" in the Paramount alongside the cast and a lively SXSW audience was nothing short of a serotonin-inducing, feet-kicking, whirlwind of an experience. "The Idea of You" follows the romance between a 40-year-old recently divorced mother Solène Marchand and "Summer Moon" boy-band pop sensation Hayes Campbell. The two met at Coachella, which Solène was forced to go to against her own will, as she'd much rather be curating art for her whimsical, sophisticated art store. The camp-ness was astounding. The level of unhinged was through the roof. And by the end of the movie, my heart was left fuller, and the void in the shape of a Harry Styles fanfiction movie within me was filled.

Read Katie Busby's pick  
at [lasaliberator.com](https://lasaliberator.com)



photos by Annabel Andre, Asha Rountree, Katie Busby, Lili Xiong, and Megan Gerold, graphic by Megan Gerold

## Venues Across Austin

MEGAN GEROLD | entertainment editor

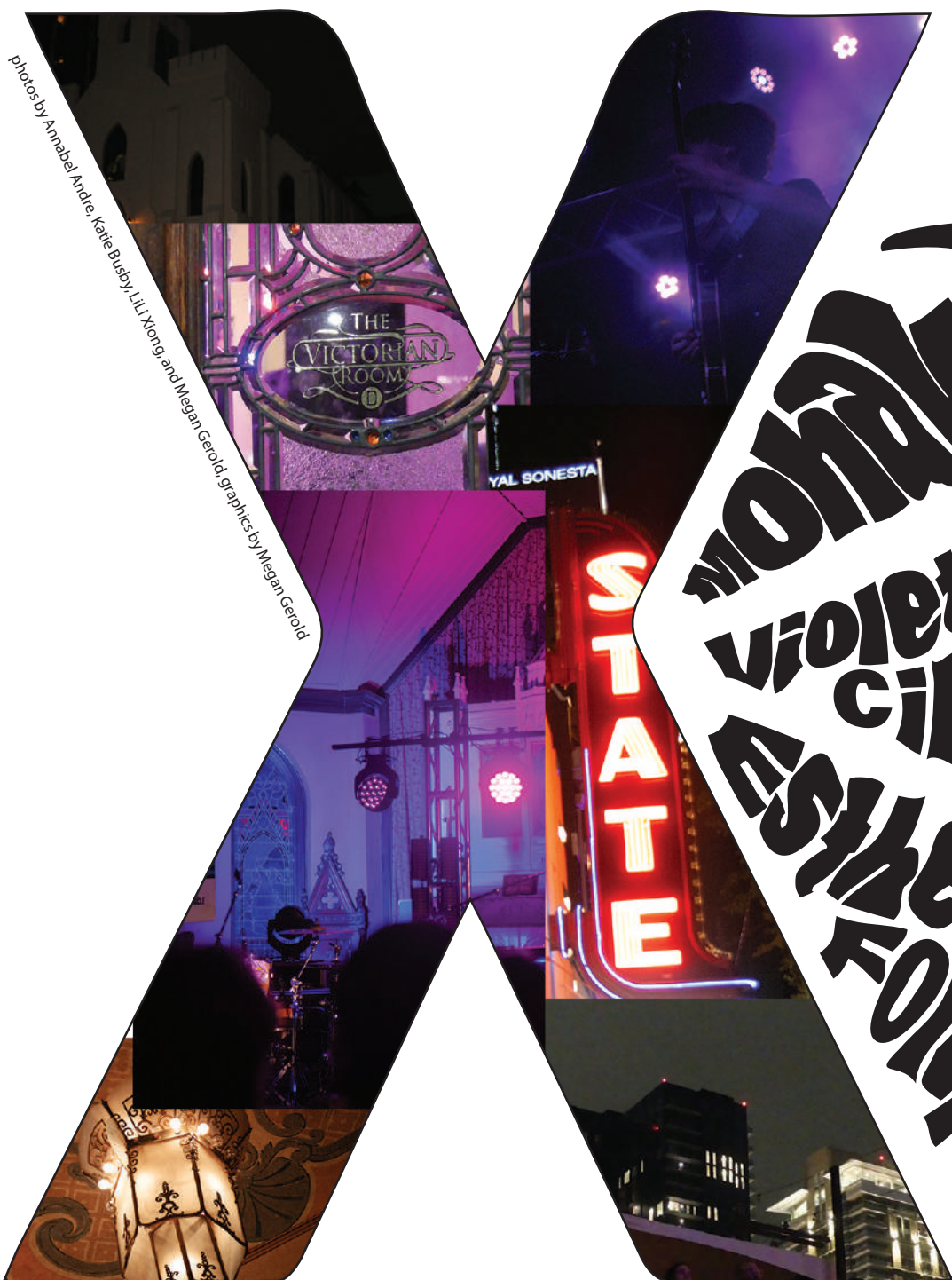
True to its name, Mohawk exemplifies a venue filled with a cacophony of sounds, experiences, and spiky electricity. Opening its doors in 2006, Mohawk took its place in the Austin music scene as an eclectic hub for artists to express their creativity. Nestled on the corner of Red River Street and East 10th Street, Mohawk is in the midst of Downtown Austin where it serves as a venue for both small and large artists to play. The usually crowded halls of Mohawk feature both an indoor and outdoor stage. The indoor stage consists of a small standing-room-only area where the space to stand is roughly 25 x 20 feet. The outdoor stage spans across the entire venue. The indoor area of the entrance and the bar is partially open to the outdoors, and throughout the outdoors are multi-level terraces that allow viewers to not have to elbow their way through the part of the venue directly in front of the stage. Mohawk was one of the many venues that showcased artists during South by Southwest (SXSW), and their status as an all-ages venue allowed for a multitude of viewers to come and attend the jam-packed space which, according to Mohawk's website, is a space built for the sharing of music across a variety of genres, experiences, and barriers.

ALEX VALENCIA-SERRANO | finance editor

Violet Crown Cinema is a movie theater on West 2nd Street and Guadalupe Street in Austin, Texas. They have locations around the country in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Charlottesville, Virginia, and Dallas, Texas. Violet Crown strives to be both a safe and enjoyable establishment for public entertainment and an active part of the community. They welcome partnerships with the Austin community to support local vendors, highlight a nonprofit's mission, and expose students to a cinematic experience. Staying true to their mission, this year Violet Crown was a proud host to multiple films for SXSW. It screened a variety of documentaries such as "Roleplay", "Adrienne & The Castle", and "How to Build a True Engine" alongside narrative films such as "Natorium", "Wakhri", and much more. Aiming to provide the best cinematic experience for the SXSW audience and honor each filmmaker's creation, they'd introduce the films and intermediate Q&A sessions between the crew, cast, and the audience as well as distribute souvenirs across each recliner as a token to remember the films by. When they're not hosting the great filmmakers of SXSW, they aim to provide the best cinematic experience to the Austin community through old-time classics, new releases, and a fabulous menu of snacks, drinks, and light foods.

LILI XIONG | managing editor

Since 1977, Esther's Follies has been home to a host of eclectic performances in Austin, including musical performances, political satire, comedy sketches, and magic acts. The venue is located on 6th Street, which their website describes as "the source of Esther's humor and unwitting backdrop for its stage," due to the windows at the back of the stage, which serve as a way for audiences to watch the crowds of people and revelers on 6th Street who are often unknowingly the subjects of performers' jokes. This peculiar blend between the stage and the street has been an iconic aspect of the venue since its inception, when in the middle of 6th Street's 500th block in 1977, Michael Shelton and Shannon Sedwick started an April Fool's Day party, which turned into an impromptu free-for-all, in which poets, singers, musicians, mimes, and comics from the street gathered to create magic. Today, Esther's Follies, decorated with a neon color scheme and aquatic motifs, is a popular comedy and music venue for locals and tourists alike.



photos by Annabel Andre, Kate Busby, Lili Xiong, and Megan Gerold, graphics by Megan Gerold

## SXSW EDU Exhibits Paths After High School

MILLER WILLIAMS  
REBECA GONZALEZ | staff writer

According to General Academics, the most common goal for students is to attend college. However, SXSW EDU introduced multiple opportunities besides only attending university. South by Southwest (SXSW) EDU is a conference that takes place a week before the rest of SXSW, and it presents solutions to educational issues, such as education past high school. From joining the military to finding the best college, SXSW EDU displayed a variety of options meant to help students find the best fit.

Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) is a university-based program that provides a pathway to becoming an officer in the United States military. The University of Texas at Austin (UT) program offers students scholarships and job opportunities for joining ROTC. Brett Cook is a spokesman for ROTC and discussed the benefits of joining the program at UT.

"With that comes a pathway to becoming an officer," Cook said. "If you know you want to fly airplanes, [ROTC] is a great pathway. If you know you want to be a leader, this is a great pathway. That is the main goal for ROTC."

Another place that provides options for students is Americorps, a government agency that offers multiple programs to get involved in volunteer work. All programs are open to students ages 18 and above. However, some programs allow 17-year-old students to participate in programs

ranging from 10 months to two years. Caleb Torres is a spokesman for Americorps and described the agency's multiple programs and his experience volunteering.

"We have our Americorps National programs, which are our network, and they are our most flexible program options," Torres said. "Those options include tutoring classrooms, working in public health, or working with veterans and military families and everything in between."

Along with the more broadly focused national programs are the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) programs, which have different concentrations and structures. The national program is less specialized, but the NCCC and VISTA have hands-on programs for specific purposes.

"Then we have our Americorps NCCC program, which is a residential team-based program that responds to disasters or works on the environment clearing national trails and things like that in nature," Torres said. "Then we have what's called Americorps VISTA which is more capacity building for nonprofit organizations. You're going to be working behind the scenes doing management, which is different from our other programs since this is more direct service."

However, if students are interested in the university path, the College Board has programs to help them make the best choice. The organization has the Big Future program, which includes a college test that allows students to explore college options and majors depending on their skill set. Spokeswoman Kelsey Lehtomaa Frouge spoke about the benefits the College Board's program can provide students.

"It takes time to think about what you want your future to look like," Frouge said. "And because we have tools, and other tools are out there, as well, but especially on the Big Future site, it allows you to get a great understanding of how to tailor a skill set into something you can monetize later in life, and do something that you have fulfillment around so it starts exploring early."

The College Board uses this program to help students find their passion in their major and understand the path they could take in college. Overall, these companies presented at SXSW EDU provided an understanding of options for the future that differ from those largely presented to students at LASA. Whether a student wants to consider working in the army or volunteering, that future is entirely possible. SXSW EDU 2025 will take place from March 3 - March 6.

## South By Generation Z

KATIE BUSBY  
MEGAN GEROLD | entertainment editors

SXSW is a resource for many to gain prominence and create connections. For young and small artists, it appears as a tool to broaden their fanbase. With the immense amount of people that come from all over, SXSW allows artists to expose themselves to an even wider demographic, creating a more expansive base of support and popularity. For some bands who have largely grown their following using the modern tool of social media, this allows them to connect with the people they may have reached in real life. Grace Kirchbaum from the indie band Shallow Alcove described how the industry has changed in her lifetime because of TikTok.

"I mean undoubtedly the most crazy thing that has happened to the music industry in our lifetime is TikTok whether that's a good thing or bad thing, like for me it's given me a lot of access and an ability to market myself," Kirchbaum said.

Some bands that play gigs at SXSW are almost brand new to touring, and SXSW provides them with experience and exposure to a different crowd. Chicago indie-rock band Neptune's Core played their first show outside of the Midwest at SXSW this year. The four-member band is made up of two sets of sisters, Jackie and Kaitlin Cywinski and Hannah and Sofie Richter, all currently in high school. The band hopes to accomplish much even though they are still fairly new to the industry and young, forming when the members were just in middle school.

"I think our parents were always like bringing us to

concerts playing music around the house, so it was kind of like, ingrained in us to love music," Kaitlin Cywinski said. "And then I think in middle school, we all kind of started playing music and just decided to start jamming together. And then the thing that really got us started and got us taking it seriously was the show that we played at the Empty Bottle (a venue in Chicago) in the new year of 2023. And that show was so fun. It was like, sold out. And I think that was the moment that we were like, 'Oh, we love playing music.'"

When talking about her influences in music Kirchbaum said that a lot of folk bands and singer-songwriter artists like Taylor Swift influenced her. She said that she felt like growing up in the 2000's people were starting to just be very specific and raw which shaped the way she writes.

"I wasn't afraid to write things that were sad, as we get older as there are more women in music that are describing their honest true experiences, I feel like people are just unabashedly writing sad stuff and that's fine," Kirchbaum said. "I feel like earlier people didn't want that, especially with women, they just wanted it to be fun and I feel like now I can be really unapologetic about my feelings and really honest."

Neptune's Core said that they sometimes struggle with being taken seriously as younger artists, but that they had a very positive experience at SXSW. They saw the festival as an important experience and an opportunity to prove themselves.

"Sometimes it feels like we have to prove ourselves because of our ages," Kaitlyn Cywinski said. "But we've been pretty fortunate in which we have proven ourselves, and it sucks to have to do that. But like, if you just keep working it'll happen."



photos by Annabel Andre, Asha Rountree, Katie Busby, Lili Xiong, and Megan Gerold, graphic by Megan Gerold

The power of BIPOC PoP is a symposium put on to bring many different creatives and intellectuals in different spaces that represent BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) working in multimedia arts. This event has taken place for three years, and it's hosted at the University of Texas at Austin. The event aims to strengthen the community by bringing these creatives together to share their knowledge and experiences with those who attend and encourage BIPOC.

Read the full text of this article at [lasaliberator.com](https://lasaliberator.com)



## DR. TERESA ROJAS

ALEXANDRA VALENCIA SERRANO | finance editor

Dr. Teresa Rojas is a professor of Ethnic Studies and English at Modesto Junior College in Modesto, California. She's also the director of the annual Latinx Comic Arts Festival that takes place in Modesto, California. As a comic artist and writer of color, she attended BIPOC Pop at the invitation of her previous mentor, Frederick Luis Aldama, better known as Professor Latin X, to expose herself and her work, make connections with other BIPOC artists, and talk at a panel about teaching comics in the classroom.

At the Modesto Junior College, Rojas is part of the Rising Scholars Network program that provides educational opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals. Besides teaching creative writing, Rojas also encourages student storytelling through different forms of media such as poetry. With comics as her specialty, she specifically teaches students how to tell their stories through comic form.

"What I love about teaching comics is being able to look at these different things and talk," Rojas said. "I do this little demonstration where we talk about font choices, like when I write 'horror' on the board, just in my normal handwriting, and then I take a red pen, and I write 'horror' it looks like blood is dripping and it's like, what is the difference?"

## OMAR BANUCHI

SARAH GARRETT | news editor  
LILI XIONG | managing editor

Omar Banuchi is a digital artist and illustrator. Along with Rosaura Rodríguez, he runs the *Días Cómico* Collective, a publishing house based in Puerto Rico. *Días Cómico* has published six books so far, on top of selling T-shirts and stickers.

"Every book of ours touches on Puerto Rico," Banuchi said. "We, through our art, ask for the liberation of Puerto Rico. We don't like the colonial status quo and we would like for us to be an independent country. And that is present in all of our books, whether directly or through symbolism."

Some of these books include "Otra Duelo", a collection of 10 poems about grief illustrated with vintage newspapers, and "Temporada", a memoir about Rodríguez's experiences with Hurricane Maria. The stickers, ranging from skeletons flying on airplanes to cats, highlight Puerto Rican culture and experiences as well.

"Most of the stickers deal with a certain kind of darkness, or freedom too," Banuchi said. "Cats are very important in our mythology, both because they are cute but also because they are a threat. They are dangerous animals. So even the stickers have a little bit of a storyline going on."

# BIPOC Pop

creator spotlights!

## VERONIQUE MEDRANO

VICTOR MARTINEZ | sports editor  
KAMRYN REYES | staff writer

Veronique Medrano is a Tex-Mex comic book writer and singer-songwriter currently releasing her work through Chispa Comics. Through her writing, Medrano highlights the often-overlooked beauty and true colors of Mexican-American culture to counteract the stereotypes and depictions of it that are pervasive in American media.

"There is this very clear yellow-brownish-ification of an area that completely removes the color and the vibrancy of where you're from," Medrano said. "Like that yellow-brownish filter [put on scenes set in Mexico] that looks dingy. That feeling is so ingrained in me. I don't like it. And so when we're talking about my works, I tried to go completely away from that and show the vibrant colors that come from these semi-warm, hot, tropical areas."

By articulating her culture as genuinely as possible, Medrano hopes to pioneer the way for Mexican-American stories to come and, subsequently, build a legacy that is synonymous with her work's authenticity, the soon-to-be stories she hopes to inspire, and her fresh voice and storytelling.

## AYDEN CASTELLANOS

MEGAN GEROLD | entertainment editors  
KATIE BUSBY

Ayden Castellanos crafts a podcast soaked in history that shares the deep tradition of narrative history and otherworldly stories of the Rio Grande Valley where he is from as well as gathering other perspectives and stories from his guests. Castellanos's podcast, *Susto*, which translates to "scares", shares the scary/spooky stories from his community and childhood. He created the show to fill a gap in the media and has been doing it for around five years now.

"When I started listening to podcasts, I wanted to hear a podcast about the stories I've heard growing up, and I had a very clear idea of what I wanted it to sound like and what I wanted the format to be, and I couldn't find anything that fit exactly what that vision was, so I decided I was just going to do it myself," Castellanos said.

When talking about events like these, Castellanos said that his presentations are almost like a live episode and getting to reach even more people and hear their stories is such a positive experience for him. People attending events like this and seeing these types of media he says is also so important because it shows them that there is a demand for what they create. They should push into these spaces even if it is hard because they can inspire people who may be looking for the type of content they want to make.

## opinion Heavy is The Crown

REBECA GONZALEZ | staff writer

From watching "The Crown" to obsessing over a royal's dress, admiration for the British Royal Family has been imbued in society for hundreds of years. According to a study by the College of Media and International Culture, humans are naturally driven to admire people, and the royals are a prime example of this phenomenon. They have been presented as perfect, flawless humans with abundant wealth and power for centuries. Society's most famous figures originate from the British royal family, such as Princess Diana, Queen Elizabeth, Princess Kate Middleton, and former Duchess Meghan Markle. However, in recent times, there has been a noticeable shift in the public's sentiment towards the family. Praise and love have given way to criticism and intrusion, but where did this obsession originate?

From a young age, we are inundated with stories of princesses and happily ever afters. Through characters like Cinderella, Aurora, Rapunzel, and countless other princesses in childhood films, the media has fostered a love for the royals that persists into adulthood. Much of society yearns for a perfect princess, and the royals fulfill this longing with their flawless image. They play the role of a fairy tale in our lives; in a way, it's their job to be flawless. However, in recent years, the media has begun to reveal the realities of their lives, and the public has started to judge them harshly for being anything but perfect.

A recent example is Kate Middleton's disappearance. In the media, Middleton's image is beautiful, kind, and non-problematic. She is the epitome of what a princess should be, or at least, what we are told a princess should be. In December of last year, the royal family announced she'd have an abdominal surgery. Despite the explanation, the press began to dig for flaws in Middleton's story. They realized

that the time Middleton was absent from royal duties wasn't realistic, and her family never visited her in the hospital. After this, the press and social media spiraled into a conspiracy with stories titled "Who is the British royal family willing to protect?" and "Kate Middleton Missing: PR Professionals Spill The Tea." Then, when the princess released a photoshopped picture of her and her family, people spiraled even more — eventually forcing her to announce her diagnosis of cancer.

However, the worst of the media and public have ever been to a royal is in the case of Megan Markle. Since Markle was one of the few women of color to be considered part of the British royal family, she was subjected to an extreme amount of hate from the world. When she first announced her pregnancy, headlines from the Daily Mail read "How Dark will the Baby's Skin Be?" and "Megan made Kate Cry." Stories highlighted every possible flaw she had and hundreds of falsified ones she didn't. The world tore her down for not being the perfect English princess, for not being Diana or Kate Middleton, and ultimately, for not being white.

Over the last century, the picture-perfect image of the royals has begun to be destroyed. Now that the world is changing, the British royal family will never be able to recover their image and the admiration of people. Rather than loving the royals like society used to, society has become enthralled in the drama. The rising popularity of Netflix's show "The Crown" and Oliver Hirschbiegel's film "Diana" are examples of the media romanticizing the drama. With their images of glamor and extravagance, the royals have a magnetic pull on people, even if society no longer worships the ground they walk on. Information on their lifestyles has gone from once coveted information to public tabloid royal life, which has become a source of fascination and a means of escape from the mundane realities of everyday life.

## East Austin Opens New Theater

BRIDGET DUNLEAVY | staff writer

Amongst the big screens and pounding speakers, movie theaters serve as a place for connection. Buried under the larger theater corporations in Austin, neighborhood cinema centers provide a smaller gathering place for members of the communities they serve. The size allows for increased engagement with the theater due to factors such as lower cost, more personalized decisions over movies, and alternative spaces for events.

One of these smaller theaters is Eastside Cinema within the Millennium Youth Entertainment Complex (Millennium). According to the Austin Chronicle, this theater is one of the only ones east of Interstate 35 (I-35) despite the surrounding area having a history of cinema. From 1935 to 1973, the Harlem Theater on 12th street and Salina street ran as a business catered towards Black families, until it burned down in a fire. The project of bringing a cinema back to East Austin began with the start of the Millennium in 1999. A theater was included, but eventually, it shut down due to costs and lack of renovations in 2011. With help from Josh Frank, owner of Blue Starlite Drive-Ins, the task of reopening the theater was completed, and today it operates as a community staple.

"I was always curious as I had heard there was a lost unused cinema on the East side but never saw it," Frank said. "Years later I was offered a chance to see it, and when I did I told Millennium that I'd love to relaunch with them because I believed it was a place Austin needed to have back."

In addition to adding mood lighting to the lobby in the lounge, the new theater stayed true to the vintage atmosphere from the origin of Eastside Cinema. The people living in East Austin remained the larger focus throughout the renovation process.

"Now there is a neighborhood cinema that anyone can use," Frank said. "So many clubs and organizations now have a real cinema that they can call their own for more events, and it does draw on an important tradition of locally run cinemas on the East side of Austin. We show art-house flicks and cult classics like a typical art-

house cinema, but our main thing is that 70% of the programming is curated by the community."

Frank's efforts combined with the efforts of those running the Millennium, such as the director Kim Wright, have expanded the complex's contributions. The theater is an addition to the other activities the Millennium has like roller skating, bowling, and birthday party venues. James Butler, the operations supervisor, remains in control of the day-to-day responsibilities and upkeep of the 55,000-square-foot building.

"Our rink is actually a full-size regulation NBA basketball court which we are now starting to get usage out of," Butler said. "We signed a couple of semi-pro teams that are going to come here and start practicing but the majority of it is skating throughout the day. There's our event area over on the other side that can have anywhere from 80 to 100 people at one time for parties. Then we have our movie theater that we just reopened with about 7,580 seats and one screen because we're doing a partnership with Blue Starlite. They're showing a bunch of cult classics right now. Those tend to be real hot, throwback movies from the early 70s and early 80s. A lot of people buy tickets for that."

One of the many people who enjoy the Millennium's amenities is Christel Massaad, who visits the Millennium often. What continues to bring her back is the community of people and the options it provides.

"The time that I am here, the roller skating rink is pretty open," Massaad said. "It's a super smooth rink and so when I'm out there I can just skate for hours. They already brought back the movies in the theater. I just like the atmosphere. And then when there are a bunch of people here, it's also pretty cool to see this place come to life. I was here once to skate and around the time they were about to show a movie, it was a horror film. I thought it was really cool that they brought the content back and it seemed like there was a good crowd."

For people of all occupations and relations to the Millennium, the building offers a special place to connect and have fun. The recent renovations in the theater make that goal more possible for residents in East Austin.

## THE RAPTOR RUN DOWN

VICTOR MARTINEZ | sports editor

Every issue, The Liberator sends a reporter into the field to try a new sport and write about their experiences.

During my freshman year, many of my lunch periods were spent outside on the tennis courts and the field playing soccer. Each day, there would be a new order of games and teams, with close-matched and tightly-fought games being played each day, leaving me excited to return every lunch. Though I was demonstrably outmatched at every game, from soccer and tennis to full-court play, I always had one or two good shots and passes every game or so. The times I was not among the spectators eating good grub along the fence or getting crossed up in-game and did have some good performances, however, were the matches I would put hard effort into each tackle, pushing

whoever I was locking up to the nets, and taking advantage of each chance for a decent through ball I saw. There was really no other feeling like leaving the tennis courts while finishing the last of my tex-mex bowls and entering seventh-period geometry immediately after, sweaty and red in the face after dropping a world-class performance like none other this world has seen.

One day, in the midst of a lively game of 7v7, play for the day would prematurely end after a LASA teacher came outside to inspect the commotion. Promptly ending the game and getting our attention, he announced that we would have to stop the tennis courts' games immediately as we were not cleaning up after finishing lunch. Calling attention to the overflowing trash cans and the benches full of backpacks and used trays, he warned us that future incidents and failures to properly clean up would result in referrals. From then on, I cannot remember returning as many times the rest of my freshman year to the courts. In fact, it was not until recently that I would see court play again.

One cloudy lunch, for old-time's sake, sophomores Diego Elizondo, Julian Quirk, Michael Scaramuzzi, and I went out to the tennis courts once again. As it was only us four, we started a game of 2v2 soccer tennis, with Diego and I pitted against Michael and Julian. We ended up losing count and point tallies, but I am mostly sure we won. With Diego covering the left wing and me the right, we would respond to Julian and Michael's 'serves' with chips and even a header each. Before we properly designated a zone for each other, however, our opponents had

made well-placed chips of their own down the middle of the court, leaving us confused about who to allow the ball to and winning the rally.

After Diego made an uncontrolled shot towards Julian's side of the court, the ball went flying out of the court and into nearby Arthur Stiles Road. As punishment, we made him go running to retrieve our ball. Shortly after successfully retrieving it and a couple more rounds of tennis soccer, we began a new game of 2v2 soccer, again with the same teams, with a space between two of the fence's poles on each side being marked as a goal. While I was out-skilled by JV-A warriors Jacob and Michael, not being able to defend against or stop their dribbling, Diego held his own against the two, scoring some goals off of a couple of solo runs as well as some assists of my own. We had lost track of scoring again, but this time it was harder to tell who the victor was.

With about seven minutes to go until the start of our next period, we had ended our game and made our way back to the main building via the athletic wing. While I was unable to replicate the feeling of being drenched in sweat after a world-class performance, it was nonetheless a fun experience that reminded me of older, simpler times.

## Changes to Upcoming 2024-2025 Football Season

PRATIK GURIJALA | staff writer

LASA football has recently left the University Interscholastic League (UIL), where the team will no longer play in UIL competitions but still play against the same schools for practice matches for at least the next two seasons. Discussions over safety, expansion, and the future of high school athletics at LASA informed the decision.

Freshman football player Parker Hill voiced his frustration with the choice, highlighting the negative effects on team spirit and player growth. The football team's efforts are met with support and optimism by the LASA community, despite these obstacles, as they begin on this new phase of their athletic career.

"The decision honestly won't have much change on other sports," Hill said. "The only thing it does is ruin the football team's reputation as a successful team coming off our first winning season where we finally had hope for recruiting, to now being pulled from UIL where there is no chance for bringing in new players."

Hill also mentioned how this will impact the upperclassmen football players. He stated that they will not be able to play another game of UIL football ever.

"Anybody who isn't a freshman on the football team will never get to play another snap of varsity football without transferring," Hill said. "We had multiple players this year get collegiate recognition and compensation for football."

Hill feels that the LASA football team should still compete in the UIL tournament. He stated that the freshman players gained important experience as backups to the starters, players who are the first to play in a game, and that none of the freshmen were starters this year.

"Notice how not one of the freshmen were starting players, giving them an opportunity to develop alongside a team who might I add had a winning season," Hill said. "The fact of the matter is that if a player isn't ready then he won't be put on the field."

Despite the disapproval of some players and supporters, the choice was vetted through multiple perspectives even though the news' communication was negatively affected by factors out of the football program's control. The LASA assistant football coach, Vincent Cruz, provided details about the decision-making process by stating that players, parents, and coaches were all involved.

"It was handled unusually due to timelines," Cruz said. "The UIL realignment and then doing an appeal it all had to happen within a certain timeline. [The] main reason for the change is safety, we are a small program meaning players will have to play both sides of the ball which will lead them prone to injuries. It's all about safety and rebuilding."

The move was driven by safety concerns, as Principal Stacia Crescenzi noted. She emphasized the difficulties that a smaller program like LASA faces because its athletes frequently have to play both offensive and defensive positions, which raises the possibility of injuries.

"For most schools, traditionally, younger players would come in and play on freshman or JV teams before moving up to varsity," Crescenzi said. "Since we don't have excessively large numbers, everybody that comes in, regardless of their grade level or experience, is playing varsity."

According to Crescenzi, aside from safety concerns, the decision affects the entire school community. Crescenzi explained that while participating in the UIL JV level was an option, it was ultimately rejected because of the potential effects on other football-related organizations, like cheerleading, band, and dance.

"We thought going back to being a non-UIL varsity team is the closest thing the football team gets and the closest thing everybody else who participates in that football experience gets [to a traditional high school football season]," Crescenzi said.

Looking ahead, LASA aims to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment for all interested in football, regardless of experience level. Crescenzi believes that continuing UIL play

for the football program would put new players at dangerous risk of injury and would contradict LASA's commitment to encouraging good sportsmanship and personal development among its athletes.

"I want to do that in a way where I can confidently say to parents any sport has the risk of injuries, but [I am] not sure I can say that a ninth grader who's never played is ready for varsity against some super tough opponents," Crescenzi said.

According to Crescenzi, there is hope for the future, as the primary goal is to rebuild the football program's strength. Once a strong JV and varsity team is developed, Crescenzi has confidence about restoring the program and eventually returning to the UIL tournament.

"I think we're ready to go back when we have a solid JV [team] and a solid varsity [team], because besides how hard-working our football team is, I think the other thing that has really impressed me is how welcoming they are to kids who have never played," Crescenzi said. "I don't want that to change. That's exciting and I think that's wonderful."

Hill added that, due to the lack of interest in football at LASA, the plans to rebuild will need to be spread out across multiple years and seasons. According to Hill, it will take more than two years of rebuilding and non-UIL play to return to the UIL tournament.

"And after speaking with various administrators it is likely that it will be more than two years because it's impossible to build a JV team if you don't even compete in UIL, there just isn't enough interest," Hill said.

For now, the LASA football team is gearing up for a different season ahead, filled with non-UIL games and new challenges. The new athletic director Coach Howard remains committed to ensuring the team's success.

## Fan's First Live Professional Tennis Experience

ANNABEL ANDRE | editor-in-chief

I have been a tennis fan since before I can remember. I love watching Federer's smooth strokes and movements that are more akin to dancing. I've held my breath countless times while watching Nadal slide through the bright red clay at the French Open. And I have paced and yelled as Medvedev lost yet another Grand Slam in the final. Despite this, I had never seen professional tennis in person. That all changed when the ATX Open, a women's professional tennis tournament, was created in Austin.

I had been lucky enough to be at the ATX Open in its first year with the rest of LASA's tennis team and even luckier to be able to come back this year. But this year felt different. As I stepped out of the bus that dropped me off at the Westwood Country Club to watch world-class tennis players in person, I



**ATX OPEN** Despite only being the second year of the tournament, the ATX Open has already become America's third-biggest women's tennis tournament. This exposure to professional tennis has allowed for a spike in interest in tennis within Austin. photo by Annabel Andre

holding its breath as the point went on for what felt like an eternity. Eventually, Wang approached the net, ending the point with a perfectly executed drop shot. I felt like screaming in support of the amazing athleticism I just witnessed like I would at home in front of my TV. Instead, I focused my energy on a reserved and refined clap, one that was replicated all around me.

Before I knew it, the first set was over with Yuan winning 6-4. While Sanwi and I waited for the second set to begin, we thought we would try to see if we could sit in the press section. Luckily enough, minutes later we found ourselves merely five feet away from world-class tennis players about to watch a set to remember.

Like the first set, the two players each won their service games pretty consistently, going to deuce multiple times within the set.

But, unlike the first, the second set made it to an exhilarating tiebreaker. At about the hour and a half point in the match, it looked like it was over. Yuan had a championship point, up 40-0 with a game score of 5-3. She needed just one point to win this match, but Wang was a force to be reckoned with. She made an incredible comeback, winning the next 4 points in a row. The game then went to deuce twice before Wang took the game, bringing the score to 5-4 (Yuan). After this game, I knew the rest of the match would be amazing.

The next three games flew by and suddenly, with the score at 6-6, the two were playing a second-set tiebreaker. Before I knew it, yet again, the game was at another championship point with Yuan ahead 6-1 in the tiebreaker. She just needed one more point, but Wang fought hard once again, winning the next three points, bringing the tie-breaker score to 6-4. I could feel the



**ATX ROCKS** Audience members in the bleachers watching the ATX Open final hold up signs reading 'ATX Rocks' and 'Women Rule'. The tournament is Austin's only professional, four-level tennis tournament and its largest professional women's sporting event. photo by Annabel Andre



**FINAL** Finalists Yuan Yue (left) and Wang Xiyu (right) pose with the Chinese flag after the ATX Open final. The match was the first all-Chinese final in the U.S. in Women's Tennis Association (WTA) history. photo by Annabel Andre

had an added spring in my step because this time I was arriving as an official member of the press.

After Sanwi Sarode (former sports co-editor and partner in crime) and I picked up our very official-looking press badges, we went to explore the many colorful and attractive options at the tournament. Upon entering the gates we were thrust into a crowd of fellow tennis fans. I couldn't decide where I wanted to go first. My mouth watered at the thought of taking a bite of the delicious Amy's Ice Cream being sold, my eyes caught the bright colors of the huge merch tent, but most of all, I couldn't ignore the oohing and ahing of the crowd and the loud distinctive sound of a tennis ball bouncing against concrete.

Sanwi and I wove in and out of the crowd until we eventually made it to the center court where I was immediately enraptured by the sight in front of me. Finalists Wang Xiyu and Yuan Yue battled it out on the court, whipping forehands back and forth at jaw-dropping speeds. The crowd seemed to collectively be



**AMY'S ICE CREAM** Besides exciting tennis matches, the ATX Open offered other amenities such as local Austin treat Amy's Ice Cream, a trailer from restaurant Savory Mesa, and a large tent filled with official ATX Open merch for sale. The tournament took place Feb. 24 - March 3 and hosted globally ranked tennis players from all over the world. photo by Annabel Andre

tension rising in the audience as the possibility of a third set loomed. The oohs and ahhs of the crowd grew in volume as the gap in score got smaller until Yuan finally pulled through and won the match, setting off the crowd into an eruption of cheers.

I loved every second of my time at the ATX Open—seeing the smile that broke out across Yuan's face after winning her first career title and the many hugs shared between Yuan and Wang, being able to watch an amazing match court side, and being able to share every exhilarating second with fellow tennis fans. I can't wait to keep going back, hopefully, for years to come.

For more information about the ATX Open, read "ATX Open Makes Quite a Racquet" at [lasaliberator.com](http://lasaliberator.com)



# LASA 2024 SPORTS RECAP

The sports section collected the best moments of every LASA sports team from coaches and team captains. This list is not ranked.

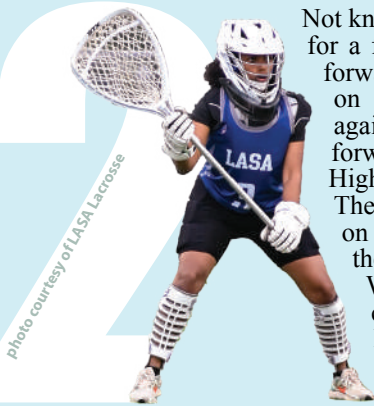
**BISHOP BRITT** | staff writer    **ANNABEL ANDRE** | editor-in-chief



The 2023 Fall season for LASA varsity tennis brought the team back to the State competition for the second consecutive year, but this year, to the finals, where they won second place, the highest award for the team. The team continued their successes into the Spring individual season where, as of April 29, the team swept Districts in all 10 categories. On the week of May 6, the team will bring 16 members to play in the Regional competition.



The girls soccer team had a record-breaking season, bringing home the bi-district championship title and placing second in the district. The team had an impressive record of scoring 87 goals and only being scored on 9 times. The team won against and tied their biggest competitor, McCallum and tied twice against their second biggest competitor, Ann Richards. After a win in the first round of the playoffs against East View, the team was unfortunately beaten by A&M Consolidated in the second round of the tournament after a strong season.



Not knowing if they'd have enough players for a full team, the lacrosse team pushed forward. The team started their season on Feb. 24 and ended on April 23 against Liberty Hill, making huge steps forward with a win against Regents High School on the team's Senior Night. The win inspired the players to push on and highlighted the hard work of the graduating seniors on the team. While not established for long, the completely student-run team worked hard to have a great season.



Boys soccer had an undefeated district season and won district for the second consecutive year. The team played several hard-fought games against the likes of McCallum, winning 2-1 and 1-0 in both games against them. The team made it to the playoffs but lost in the bi-district round against Pflugerville High School. Many LASA players received district awards such as senior Yohannes Heineman receiving the award of Overall MVP and senior Owen Roof being named Offensive MVP.

## UT Quidditch Flies in Popularity

**SADIE SARRAT** | staff writer

Quadball, formerly known as Quidditch, has gained massive popularity since its founding in 2005, with over 600 teams and numerous universities participating in national competitions across 40 countries, according to the US Quadball League. The University of Texas at Austin (UT) has adopted and promoted the club sport of Quadball. The Texas Quadball team currently holds five national titles. This season, they competed in the Division 1 bracket and emerged with two tournament wins. The finals were held in Round Rock, Texas.

This unique activity combines aspects of rugby, basketball, and dodgeball. Modern-day quadball brings life to the fictional sport from the "Harry Potter" series by including real-life seekers, dodgers, bludgers, quaffles, and the elusive golden snitch. Athletes run around with a pipe between their legs while trying to throw a deflated volleyball through hoops. In addition, players try to prevent their opponents from scoring.

Skye Dodson, a senior at UT, is wrapping up her first season with Varsity Quadball as a beater, or defensive player. She enjoys playing Quadball at UT because of the competitive yet tight-knit environment the school fosters.

"I just think that students are so dedicated to everything that they do, academics and extracurriculars, and I think it's been very apparent on the club team here that people don't really take it lazily," Dodson said. "Our UT team, they really do take it seriously as a sport, and I think it's so great to play with a team that has that mindset." Making do with available materials, the structure of each game and its rules are modeled after the fictional Quidditch match structures. As a self-proclaimed Potterhead, Dodson is particularly fascinated by the resemblance of the snitch in Quadball to the fictional sport created in J.K. Rowling's seven-novel series.

"The whole game is split into two halves," Dodson said. "The second half is called snitch on pitch. We have a person who has a waistband, and then we use a tennis ball that we put in a little sock.

It's like flag football. [The snitch] hangs from the back of their belt." UT senior Swathi Mannem is one of the two current team captains. As a captain, she is responsible for preparing her team and teaching the rules of Quadball to her teammates.

"Every year we get a new group of people, and this sport is also kind of unique in that nobody has played it before college," Mannem said. "Every time we get a new person, we have to teach them everything from scratch. So that's, I think, the biggest and most important part of being a captain, is being able to teach the sport and get results." While the rules may not come easy to first-time Quadball players, Mannem still finds magic in the process of finding a place in the team and the sport. For her, the Texas Quadball team has created a sense of magic by building closely connected communities.

"Our team is really close," Mannem said. "A lot of people find their closest friends and people they stay in contact with for the rest of their lives. A couple of our alumni are married [and] have kids together."

Zach Pickett, who graduated in the UT class of 2017, enjoyed playing Quadball because of the people he met outside his College of Chemical Engineering. Furthermore, Pickett found a sense of togetherness within this team sport of Quadball.

"When you're in college, in your classes, you [only] interact with the people in your college," Pickett said. "The people I saw every day were just engineering students. In Quidditch, I got to interact with so many different people in Liberal Arts or Natural Science, so that was really cool, getting exposed to different kinds of people and different perspectives."



## Soccer Teams Repeat Past Successes

**GEORGIA FINK** | staff writer

This season, both the LASA boys and girls soccer teams dominated their respective districts, and the varsity teams advanced to playoffs. Both went undefeated during their district seasons and had numerous players receive district awards.

During the 2024 soccer season, the girls varsity soccer team placed a narrow second in their district game, later winning their first game of playoffs and becoming bi-district champions. The boys varsity team would win district for the second running year, also advancing to playoffs but losing in the bi-district round. With this success, the coaches plan to make some changes to the teams that can be built into the next season.

Chloe Cardinale has coached LASA girls soccer for eight years. As the varsity girls coach, Cardinale says that the team made history, advancing further than ever before.

"It was the first time ever in program history we won bi-districts and went to the area game," Cardinale said. "[We] played a powerhouse in the area game. I was hoping that would go differently. But it is what it is. We've never gotten that close to being district champs, and so there were a lot of successes this season."

The boys varsity coach, Emmanuel

Gonzalez, says that their success this year was a pleasant surprise. Although understanding that they would have some form of success, he didn't anticipate that the team would go undefeated.

Saving that momentum in the fall and having that camaraderie, again just chemistry building, is going to make a world of difference in how competitive we can be moving forward."

**- VARSITY GIRLS COACH CHLOE CARDINALE**

"We lost a lot of the seniors last season," Gonzalez said. "But I knew that we were going to do well, just not go undefeated again."

Several factors contributed to the team's success and prolific run. However, Gonzalez attributes the undefeated season to the work that they put into the season practices.

"We were consistent with practice, even on rainy days we had an alternative plan," Gonzalez said. "I think that is what led to our success this season."

The consistent practice schedule is also true for the girls soccer team. Senior Megan McIntosh, the girls varsity captain and all-district Most Valuable Player (MVP) gave some context for their practice schedule.

"We have school practices every day that we don't have games during the week," McIntosh said. "Usually we have games Tuesday, Friday, sometimes it switches to Wednesday, Saturday, and then we'd have

practices the rest [of the week] from about 4-6 p.m."

According to McIntosh, the girls soccer team had many goals for the season, such as ending district play in the top three and making district playoffs. For McIntosh, the drive to achieve all of these goals would inevitably greatly help the team make it to the top.

"This year we really did want to double down, try and get those successes, reach those goals," McIntosh said. "I don't think it was a surprise per se, being able to do so well in district, and do well in playoffs as well."

To prepare for next season, the girls soccer program is considering having a girls soccer class that students can take as one of their school day periods. Because of the University Scholastic League (UIL) district reshuffle, their district opponents for the upcoming season have changed, making this soccer class potentially crucial to future LASA girls soccer.

"Our district is getting harder next year," Cardinale said. "We're going to drop a lot of the schools that are considered easy wins and they're gonna go down to 4A and we're replacing them with very hard schools. Saving that momentum in the fall and having that camaraderie, again just chemistry building, is going to make a world of difference in how competitive we can be moving forward."



**GOLAZO** The LASA girls soccer team celebrates a goal against Ann Richards. This season marked the first time the team advanced to the regional round. photo courtesy of LASA girls soccer

graphics by Kayla Le and Annabel Andre

**RUNNING THE NUMBERS**

LASA'S WINS AND LOSSES as of May

WINS	LOSSES
13	0
girls soccer	

WINS	LOSSES
14	0
boys soccer	

WINS	LOSSES
11	3
baseball	

WINS	LOSSES
5	7
lacrosse	

**Softball** put in hard work this year and that work paid off as the team had a nearly undefeated season, only losing one game. The team had many great moments this season, their victory against Crockett High School stuck out. The team was down 4-0 after five innings, and managed to turn the tide to get a massive win, finishing the game out 7-4. Sophomore Rose Harrelson was named district pitcher of the year and junior Abby Aardema was named district defensive player of the year. The team finished off the year ranked first in the district.

**Girls basketball** has had an eventful season with the addition of new Head Coach JaMetria Green who helped put in training and bring the team together to be the best possible squad. All of their work came together in the biggest game of the year against McCallum High School. On Jan. 23, the team beat McCallum in a hard-fought 40-37 win, giving McCallum their only loss of the season. With the many talented players on the team as well as the District Offensive MVP freshman Kyndall Johnson, they are sure to come back next year packing a punch.

**Boys basketball** faced tough competition this year but made great strides in their season. With the likes of McCallum, LBJ, and Crockett High School, the boys had to work hard to get a good spot in the district. The team managed a big win against LBJ in a close 48-43 game which helped them obtain 2nd place in the district and they are preparing to come back better than ever next year.

With a new coach and a lot of new freshmen, the LASA track team had a lot of work to do before the season. Head coaches Stephanie Pierson and Tricia Hughes worked the teams hard and made sure everyone was ready, and the new freshmen proved to be valuable recruits as the season wore on. All of the hard work paid off as the boys team came 1st in the district, the girls team was the runners-up, and the JV girls team came 1st in the district as well.

In the past few years, LASA's discus team has grown significantly. The team made a big impact in the district standings this year with junior Juyeop Lee winning 2nd place in the district and sophomore Colin Liu placing at 6th. With many new prospects, the team hopes to thrive in the future as discus gains popularity.

LASA's ultimate frisbee team, the Vertikills, has always dominated the scene, but this year has seen record-breaking success. While in previous years, the team won state competitions, this year, the Vertikills became the first-ever Texas team to be invited to the High School National Invite (HSNI). Their invite was secured after beating the 14th ranked high school team in the nation in the River Campus Classic, helping them secure a spot as the 15th best team in the nation. Nationals will take place June 7-8 in Rockford, Illinois.

# 5A District Realignment Shifts Competition

TITA GONZALEZ | staff writer

High school athletic subdivisions, specifically districts, are created by the University Interscholastic League (UIL), which re-evaluates its districts every two years. Rankings are based on student populations and re-evaluations are conducted to pair schools with similar populations together within their districts.

There are six classifications of sports districts, ranging from 1A at the smallest to 6A for the largest schools. LASA is currently a 5A school. Other schools included in LASA's district include Crockett, McCallum, Navarro, Bastrop, Elgin, Liberty Hill, Pflugerville, and Pflugerville Connally.

Vincent Cruz, the current Defensive Coordinator for the LASA football program, is working with his players to prepare for next season. He plans to employ different strategies to deal with the more competitive schools introduced into their district after realignment, and he believes that playing these teams will make LASA's football program stronger.

"We [will] have a new Head Coach and a new offensive scheme... we will definitely look and play differently," Cruz said. "I think it will make us grow, the season we have set for the next two years is a tough one, and it will make us a better football team."

Football is not the only sport affected by the district re-evaluation. Genesis Flores, a LASA sophomore on the JV girls basketball team, expressed concerns about how the realignment will make it more difficult to progress next year.

"Cedar Creek is really good, and a lot of the teams we play will be bigger than us next year," Flores said. "We're getting pushed harder, you know, [our coach] is pushing us really hard. For tryouts, she decided to make us run [laps] with medicine balls."



LASA has a very uneven district right now. It's either really hard games or not very competitive games, which doesn't do us any favors. SO to have the consistency of mostly competitive games throughout the regular season, I think it will definitely help us go further in the playoffs.

- CHLOE CARDINALE, LASA SOCCER COACH



According to Flores, one challenge that the girls basketball team faces is the fewer number of players compared to other 5A teams. Flores attributes this to LASA's unique athletic credit requirements.

"Other schools have required PE and more athletics classes ... they have at least an hour and a half extra when it comes to practice," Flores said. "In athletics [at LASA], there's not enough people joining sports."

According to the updated UIL districts, the LASA soccer teams will also be affected by the district reshuffle. Varsity girls soccer coach Chloe Cardinale still feels confident about next season after this year's season success.

"It was awesome," Cardinale said. "It was the best season we've ever had since I've been coaching. And that includes all the time I spent coaching soccer at LBJ."

The changing sports districts for the 2024-25 sports season will pit soccer teams against different schools, which Cardinale expects to be a unique challenge for the girls soccer teams. However, Cardinale believes that the district reshuffle will be beneficial to athletes.

"LASA has a very uneven district right now," Cardinale said. "It's either really hard games or not very competitive games, which doesn't do us any favors. So to have the consistency of mostly competitive games throughout the regular season, I think it will definitely help us go further in the playoffs."

LASA's athletics program is open to students of all different skill levels, and a half-to-one physical education credit can be obtained through playing a sport. More information is available on the AISD LASA athletics website.



graphic by Asha Bountree

# Young Athletes in Professional Sports

SANWI SARODE | copy editor

Professional athletic teams worldwide are offering high-paying contracts to teenagers as game-changing additions to their teams. In 2023, soccer team Sacramento Republic announced that it signed 13-year-old Da'vian Kimbrough to a professional contract. This made Kimbrough, according to CNN, the youngest professional athlete in U.S. team sports history. After joining the team's academy set-up, he scored 27 goals in 31 matches against a team made up of members older than himself, already proving his athleticism to the world.

Similarly, in 2023, Melanie Barcnas, a 15-year-old soccer player, made her professional soccer debut as the youngest player ever in the Nation Women's Soccer League (NWSL) for the San Diego Wave. Barcnas signed a contract with San Diego for about \$280,000, joining a growing league of teen players advancing their careers to professional levels.

This development is not unique to soccer. In 2021, 16-year-old Jalen Lewis signed a contract with the Overtime Elite League to become the youngest basketball player to turn pro in the U.S. According to The Athletic, Lewis signed a deal worth more than \$1 million after receiving interest from schools such as Duke and UCLA.

More examples can be found in the world of tennis. Most prominently, at 17 years old, men's tennis player Carlos Alcaraz


won his first Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) title and skyrocketed to fame after beating "Big Three" member Novak Djokovic to win the French Open, one of the four highly prestigious tournaments (Grand Slams) in the tennis world, in 2023. The "Big Three" refer to the tennis trio Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer, and Rafael Nadal, each considered to be one of the greatest tennis players of all time, so for a 19-year-old to take one of them down is significant. Now, at 20 years old, Alcaraz has been ranked as high as world No. 1 in men's singles by ATP.

Coco Gauff, a professional women's tennis player, experienced a similar path to fame. At just 15 years old, Gauff became the youngest player to reach the main draw at Wimbledon, another of the four tennis Grand Slams, and upset five-time Wimbledon champion Venus Williams in straight sets. After becoming an instant global tennis star, according to WTA Tennis, Gauff went on to win her first Grand Slam in the U.S. Open tournament by defeating former world No. 1 women's singles player Aryna Sabalenka.

Young athletes are not only showing up in professional sports teams but also at world-famous events such as the Olympics. In the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, Japanese skater Momiji Nishiyama won gold in the women's street event at 14 years old. And at 13 years old, Brazilian skater Rayssa Leal debuted at the Tokyo Olympics and won a silver medal, second only to Nishiyama, in the same event, solidifying her place in Olympics history by becoming

one of the youngest Olympians to ever medal according to Teen Vogue.

The visible trend of younger, teenage athletes competing at a professional level is not a coincidence. According to UCLA Health, in the past few decades, younger athletes have gone through remarkable transformations. They tend to be bigger, faster, and stronger than younger athletes of previous generations due to a variety of factors. With modern medicine, internet access, and resources, it has become easier for young athletes to have access to the best coaching and training techniques. Additionally, athletes are able to have a better grasp on nutrition and health and train their bodies more vigorously without getting injured, as a result. Altogether, this makes the younger generation of athletes something to behold, a trend and a sight that we will likely continue to witness well into the future.



# Renaissance Faire

LILI XIONG | managing editor

Teenagers with multiple furry tails dance on all fours in a patch of dusty earth. A man shouts insults at children, who pay money to hurl tomatoes at his face. Despite the hustle and bustle of faire-goers, a woman with a zen air about her sits calmly on a stool spinning wool with a spindle. Nothing is too eccentric for the Sherwood Forest Faire, a locally-owned medieval village located in the Lost Pines section of Central Texas.

Senior Gideon Witchel attended the Faire for the first time this year, and was particularly impressed by the skills vendors and artists were able to showcase. Vendors across the 25 acres of the Faire showcased and sold handmade masks, jewelry, pottery, weapons, and fabrics.

"I loved seeing people who are really good at crafts that are very old and maybe aren't super applicable, but are still fun," Witchel said. "Like there was a very skilled glassblower and lots of really skilled leather makers. And it's just cool that people are still doing fun random things."

Senior Liesl Geiger has been to the Texas Renaissance Festival in Todd Mission, Texas three times, but this was her first time attending the Sherwood Forest Faire. She found the glassblowing demonstration to be particularly interesting.

"I really liked seeing this guy who was blowing glass and had a glass-blowing tutorial and fielded a bunch of audience questions and talked about the scientific aspects of glassblowing," Geiger said. "It was really cool to see a finished product."

In addition to the demonstrations put on by the Faire itself, senior Miguel Lathrop finds that a lot of the magic is created by the faire-goers themselves. Attendees will often don a variety of elaborate clothing and accessories, including intricate face paint, mushroom hats, and fur skins.

"So many people have made the things that they're wearing, which is inspiring," Lathrop said. "It's nice to see that a lot of people are so involved. Whenever people are getting into character it's also nice because it shows that they're having fun. It's a thing they have a lot of passion for which is clear both in what they're wearing and the way they act. They're committing fully, and I like to see that."



**HORSING AROUND** A attendee of the Sherwood Forest Faire is atop a horse. The faire took place on many weekends throughout April and March. photo by Lili Xiong



**SUIT OF ARMOR** The photo above features a faire-goer dressed in a suit of armor. Many attendees of the faire wear costumes that they often make themselves according to senior Miguel Lathrop. photo by Lili Xiong



**FUN AND GAMES** Senior Saffron Liu plays a board game at the Renaissance Faire. photo by Lili Xiong



**FALCON** A performer at the Sherwood Forest Faire calls his falcon. The faire shows many talents ranging from vendors selling their hand-crafted art to glass-blowers. photo by Lili Xiong