

LASA LIBERATOR

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Businesses Fight On



graphic by Megan Gerold

ABBEY WU | staff writer

As Austin continues to grow and evolve, the city, once known for its thriving local businesses, is becoming a hotspot for corporate acquisitions. In this rapidly changing environment, local businesses are now faced with the pressure of competing with larger companies.

One such business is the Strait Music Company, a family-owned business in Austin since 1963. Initially rooted in traditional instruments, Strait Music began selling guitars and amplifiers as rock and roll music became popular. Over the years, the store adapted to the changing demands and trends of Austin musicians and diversified to include band and orchestral instruments. Clint Strait, the current owner and grandson of founder Dan Strait, reflected on the company's evolution over the past 60 years.

"As the business kind of grew, we expanded into different areas, primarily as the Beatles became popular," Strait said.

However, throughout its 60 years in Austin, the Strait Music Company has gone through multiple obstacles and changes. For example, a severe flood in 1981 almost put an end to the company, and there were multiple changes in leadership as Clint's father, Robert Strait, took over in 1982, and Clint took

over about 18 years ago. Further change occurred when in May of 2023, Strait Music had to relocate after their previous location was closed down for further development, an increasing trend as Austin becomes a larger city, according to Downtown Austin Alliance.

"We're like a full-line music retailer, pianos, guitars, pro audio, band, orchestra, everything," Strait said.

Due to their success, Strait noted that the company had received offers from other companies to buy Strait Music. However, none of these offers have ever been seriously considered. He added that high occupancy rates and competition from online retailers complicate the situation for independent businesses, emphasizing that adapting to your new market is key.

"I think every individual business has to make their own decision," Strait said. "A lot of times selling your business could be your retirement plan."

Officially established in 2008, Austin Pets Alive! (APA) began as an effort to save animals from the euthanasia list. They have grown considerably over time, helping about 11,000 pets a year and keeping Austin a no-kill city.

APA's mission expanded after Hurricane Harvey in 2017, allowing the organization to become a leading rescue operation in Central and South Texas. Luis Sanchez, director of public relations at APA, noted that as a nonprofit, APA does not consider offers from other organizations for acquisition in the same way for-profit businesses do.

"We do get big grants and funding from other organizations," Sanchez explained.

Sanchez acknowledged the importance of maintaining partnerships with larger organizations. As a nonprofit, APA has partnered with Best Friends Animal Society, PetSmart, Chewy, Purina, and more to sponsor specific programs they have in place.

"Best Friends Animal Society provide[s] a lot of funding to our programs," Sanchez said. "We have a lot of partnerships that are part of our mission, but we haven't necessarily had that conversation, at least to my knowledge, of being essentially brought out by another organization."

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what's news



photo courtesy of Sadie Russell

Alley Cat Players travel through time to Hadestown

see **TRAVELING** page 12

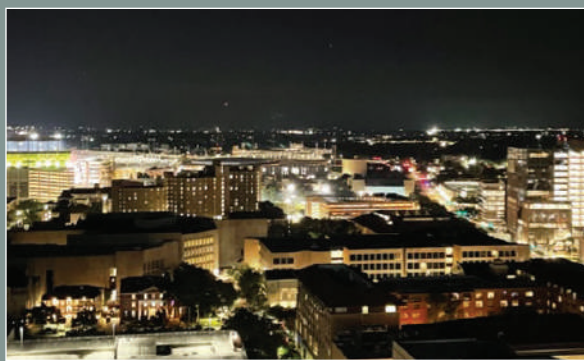


photo courtesy of Sadie Henderson

Bright lights shine throughout Austin

see **FROM COLLEGE** page 8



photo by Ellington Tough

LASA Water Polo shows Liberator Staff Writer the ropes

see **RAPTOR** page 8 to 9

Moody Center Makes Music Capital Take on New Tune

ARIANA RODRIGUEZ | staff writer

Throughout the past 20 years, Austin has seen an influx of residents and visitors with a growth of more than 1 million residents since 2000, according to USA Today Network. In 2022, one of Austin's most well-known arenas used to host artists was created, and it was dubbed the Moody Center. The influx of visitors has supported local businesses, hotels, restaurants, and retail stores, opening doors for increased revenue for these businesses.

The Moody Center is a multi-

million dollar complex designed specifically for concerts. However, other events such as basketball games and comedy shows also take place at the center throughout the year.

Ronnie Hughes, senior account executive at the Moody Center, reflected on Austin's local music scene before the venue and the level of its impact on the success and popularity of Austin. He recalled ways that the Moody Center has positively impacted the city of Austin, such as connecting and discovering new artists and growing the music scene in Austin.

"I remember us missing out on all the big artists and big shows that were coming and going around," Hughes said. "I did take note of that. It did seem like it was a lot, so Austin must be the live music capital for small artists."

Hughes explained the significance the Moody Center has had in allowing larger artists to come to a city known for its small venues and tight-knit shows. The arrival of the over 15,000-seat venue has allowed Austin to host high-profile artists and further solidify its reputation.

"I think it allows [the artists] to come into a great city that they didn't have a venue to come to before," Hughes said. "Not only does Austin deserve to be bringing these artists in, but I think the artists do want to come to Austin and see what it's about and to enjoy it."

Deric Lewis, the choir teacher at LASA and former Moody Center performer, went into more detail about why artists are coming to Austin. According to Lewis, the effect of the Moody Center and mainstream artists on Austin has led to the growth of the music scene.

see **MOODY CENTER** page 14



photos by Apollo Dahmus
graphic by Amelia Coleman

RIDE FOR A CAUSE

MEGAN GEROLD | editor-in-chief

After grueling hours and long miles, cyclists in Austin drag their tired legs over the finish line. Instead of roaring fans and wreaths of laurels, they're surrounded by a community united for the same cause: to make the world a better place.

While Austin is a city filled with people dedicated to a life of health and wellness, it's also a city that has been a melting pot of cultures, communities, and causes for decades. Together, these two attributes create a complex network of charitable bike rides for causes that span from funding research for multiple sclerosis (MS) to supporting schools built for students with disabilities and special needs. For the executive director of the Rosedale Ride, Brian Henry, this

combination of a charitable cause and a passion for cycling creates such a big reach for bike rides as a fundraiser.

"Austin's an active place, and there are a lot of rides, there's a lot of runs, there's a lot of triathlons," Henry said. "There's a lot that can be done in Austin on your bike. Everyone looks forward to the Rosedale ride as the first ride to kick off the season, and we're known more as the community ride... We're trying to evolve that a little and be a little more encouraging for our riders to fundraise, but we still have that aura where we're the community ride, and we start off the season good or bad, bad weather or not, we kind of lead the way."

see **RIDE** page 14



graphics by Megan Gerold

editorial Trust in CollegeBoard's Credibility Cracks

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.

SADIE SARRAT
WINTYR RICE | commentary editors

Ever since the SAT was first created, the College Board has had a veritable monopoly on the United States (U.S.) standardized testing industry. Administering both the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the Advanced Placement exams (APs), the College Board's tests aim to assess the potential of college applicants and provide them with class credits which can be used in place of expensive university lessons. For over a century, the value they brought to students was considered undeniable. However, from concerns regarding the content and quality of AP classes to alleged racism in the SAT, the unshakeable image of the College Board is slowly beginning to crumble, leading many to ask—did they ever deserve the power that they were given? While we do not deny the benefit that the College Board's classes can have, considering the irrefutable bias in their exams and the diminishing rewards from taking them, the answer is clearly "no".

Initially founded in 1900, the College Board—then known as the College Entrance Examination Board—commissioned Carl Brigham to create the first SAT in the early 1920s. According to PBS, Brigham's test was based on the U.S. Army's IQ test, which was used during World War I to choose the best candidates for higher-ranking positions. What this history neglects to mention is that Brigham, like most other proponents of the IQ test at the time, was an avid eugenicist—a fact revealed in both in recent articles written on test's history by the National Education Association and in his own writings, such as "A Study of American Intelligence", which he published in 1923. These supposed psychologists hoped to prove, using supposedly unbiased evidence, the existence of a racial hierarchy that placed Northwestern Europeans, and their descendants at the top, and African Americans at the bottom. This perspective was baked into the SAT's very structure and directly influenced decades of college admissions.

It's no surprise, then, that this bias is reflected in the test results, even today. A 2001 study by Saul Geiser and Roger Studly found that the composite SAT scores of African American, American Indian, and Latino test-takers fell below the mean (average) for the test as a whole. It is worth noting that after starting university, these students displayed minimal differences in GPA. If the SAT were truly unbiased, then such a discrepancy should not exist. Despite the best efforts of the test makers to minimize racial bias, it is clear that one still exists. For a test pedaled as an accurate and equitable measure of a student's aptitude, which can make or break applications to selective universities, this is deeply concerning.

Bias within the SAT is but one of the many systemic flaws ingrained into the College Board. Those who live in more financially well-off households automatically have the upper hand in the

American education system, with better access to tutors, higher-quality schools, and family connections. The business practices of the College Board only exacerbate this problem. As of the 2024-25 school year, AP exams cost \$99 per test for students in the U.S., an increase of 19% in the last 16 years. With the standard LASA schedule of 8-12+ AP classes, most students will have spent close to a thousand dollars on AP exams by the time they graduate, not accounting for future price increases, which are extremely likely.

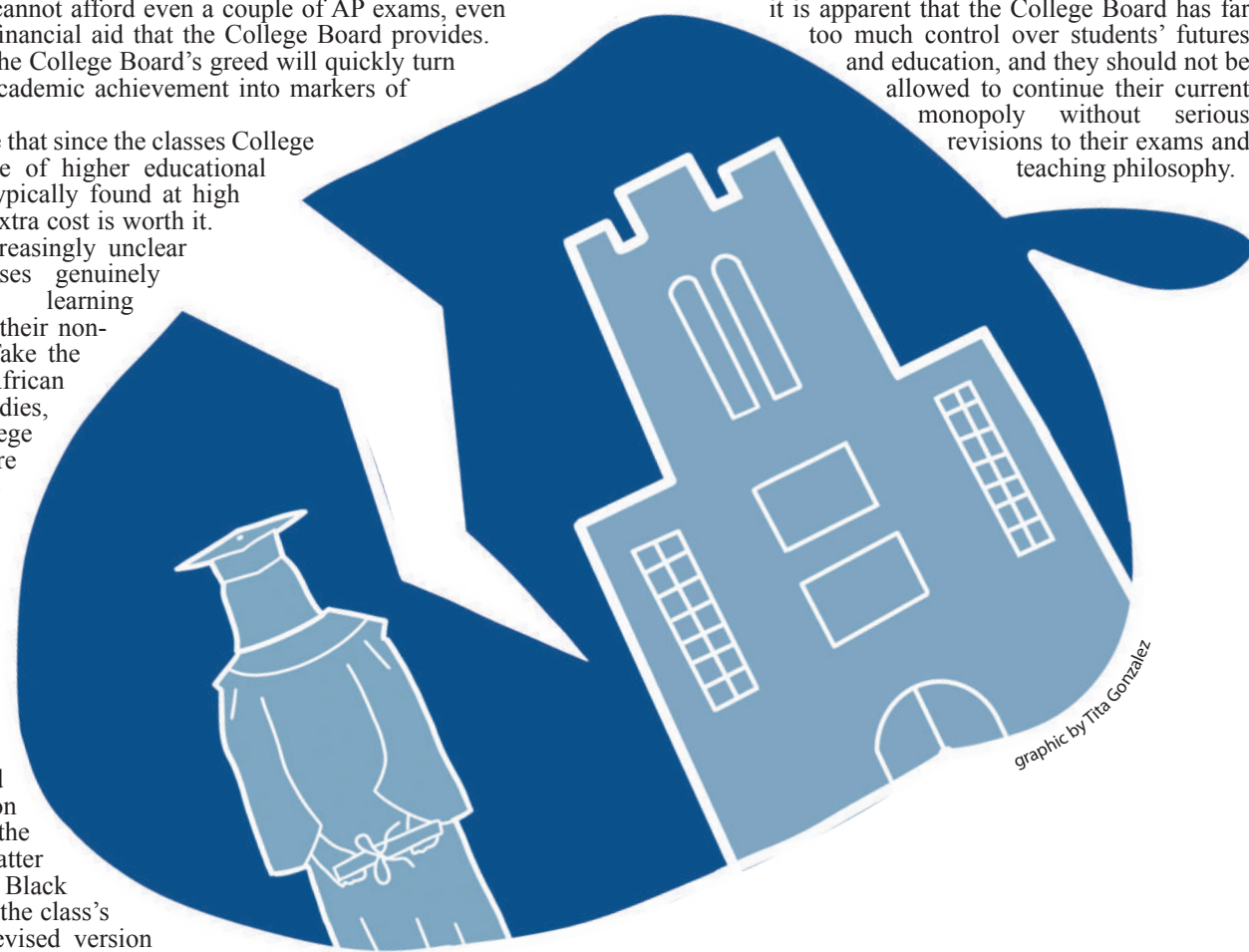
The College Board's profits are higher than ever. There is no good reason for the already exorbitant price of AP exams to increase further, especially considering that, despite being valued at over \$1.5 billion and paying their CEO nearly \$2 million a year, the organization is supposedly a nonprofit. Many families struggle with finances and cannot afford even a couple of AP exams, even with the minimal financial aid that the College Board provides. If left unchecked, the College Board's greed will quickly turn these markers of academic achievement into markers of wealth instead.

Some may argue that since the classes College Board provides are of higher educational value than those typically found at high schools, then this extra cost is worth it.

However, it is increasingly unclear whether AP classes genuinely provide better learning opportunities than their non-AP counterparts. Take the example of AP African American Studies, where the College Board was more than willing to sacrifice lesson quality for the sake of placating far-right critics. Sacrificing their integrity, they bent the knee to Florida Governor Ron DeSantis in early 2023 and removed entire sections on intersectionality, the Black Lives Matter movement, and Black queer studies from the class's curriculum. The revised version

also omits important Black scholars like Angela Davis and bell hooks. Having shown their unwillingness to fight for their students and with the increasing influence that politicians like DeSantis have over state and national legislatures, it is more a question of when rather than if the College Board will make similar decisions in the future.

The College Board was not created with malicious intent. At its core, the organization seeks to accelerate students' learning and better prepare them for college. However, in the pursuit of increasing profits, they have failed to consider the myriad biases in their tests, and they have begun to sideline learning to avoid the slightest criticism. This is not to say that all AP classes are useless, or that no one should ever take an SAT again. However, it is apparent that the College Board has far too much control over students' futures and education, and they should not be allowed to continue their current monopoly without serious revisions to their exams and teaching philosophy.



Raptor Chatter

Does CollegeBoard deserve the right to influence high school students?



photo by Sadie Sarrat

Anika Mehta
Freshman

"It's really helpful if you study beforehand, otherwise, sometimes the way it's taught doesn't sink in."

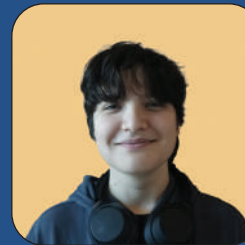


photo by Sadie Sarrat

Montse Casati
Sophomore

"AP exams give a very good opportunity for students to learn and understand what college will be like."



photo by Sadie Sarrat

Amelie Spadaccini
Junior

"AP tests are really challenging; they prepare students well for opportunities in the future."

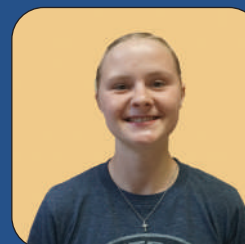


photo by Sadie Sarrat

Abby Aardema
Senior

"No, because most of my colleges don't accept my credits, which is crazy because I probably paid hundreds of dollars last year just to take the tests."

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LASA LIBERATOR

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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.

Enjoy a Spooky Joke!

Q. Why is a cemetery the best place to write a story?

A. It's filled with plots!



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 or DM us @lasaliberator.

Commentary Disclaimer: Commentary is committed to sharing a variety of views through journalistic expression. The articles we publish may put forth ideas and arguments that are not representative of everyone that is a part of the newspaper, or The LASA Liberator as a whole.

Radicalization Reduces American Into Fractions

ELLINGTON TOUGH | sports editor

This election season, political division and polarization have upended the American traditions of getting past our differences at the ballot box, not the battlefield. After grappling with multiple assassination attempts, fiery rhetoric from high-ranking politicians, and a low number of undecided voters, citizens and politicians alike must come together to realize that the answer is often somewhere in the middle.

According to an August 2024 survey by Franklin & Marshall College, only three percent of voters are undecided. This is no surprise. Since the 2016 election, major politicians from both parties have been emphasizing vitriol towards the opposing side in their campaigns. According to the New York Times, Donald Trump claimed that Hillary Clinton didn't have "a presidential look", while Clinton called half of Trump's supporters "a basket of deplorables." Just four years earlier, during the 2012 presidential election, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney used their platforms to criticize each others' budget and healthcare plans, rather than their character or voter base. This had been the norm for the entirety of the United States' history for a reason: political division causes instability and strife.

As representatives of our voices who are supposed to serve the people, our politicians should use their positions to improve the lives of their constituents. Recently, they've been more focused on advancing their own agendas, primarily by defeating the other side. According to The Guardian, a bipartisan bill introduced by Democratic members of Congress to increase border security was blocked by negative votes from 44 out of 49 Republican senators

because Trump wanted an issue to run on in November.

Gregorio (Greg) Casar represents Texas' 35th Congressional District, one of two that cover the Austin area. According to Justice Democrats, he is a progressive member of the House of Representatives. He also supports the Democratic Socialists of America and defunding the police. Upon Trump's surprise victory in 2016, he wrote in an official statement, "I won't call for healing. I'm calling for resistance."

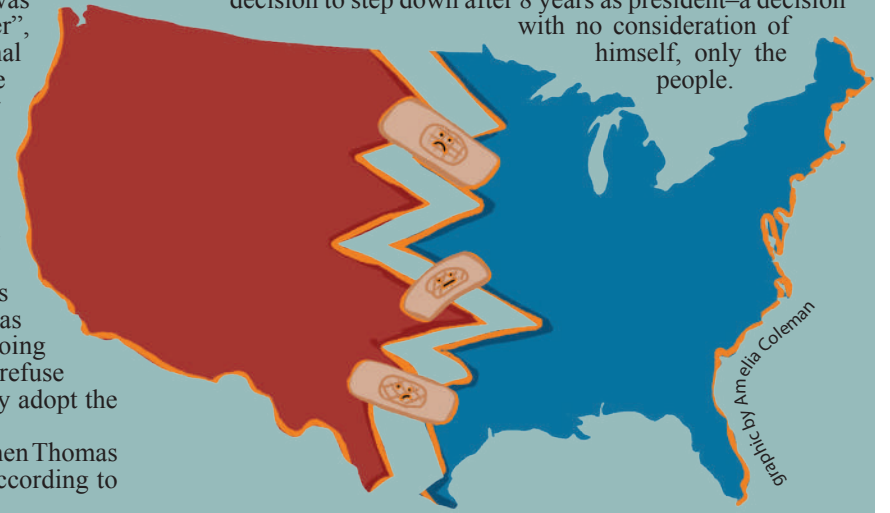
Marjorie Taylor Greene represents Georgia's 14th Congressional District. She recently suggested that Hurricane Helene, which badly hit her own state, was created by Democrats who "control the weather", according to NBC. She has advocated for a "national divorce" between red and blue states, where people originally from blue states would have to pay higher taxes and be forbidden from voting in red states.

This rhetoric means that voters who would otherwise consider both candidates are being pushed to one side and are made to see the other as fundamentally wrong and immoral. During this presidential election, political division in the United States has reached a new high. Republicans and Democrats see members of the other party as irreconcilably wrong people who don't care about doing the best they can for our country and the world. They refuse to take the other side's perspective on issues, and they adopt the exact same set of values as their party.

The most visible effects of this division were seen when Thomas Matthew Crooks shot Trump at a rally on July 14. According to

The Independent, Crooks was a registered Republican but he had donated to a Democratic political action committee in 2020. Although likely mentally unwell, he did once support different parties, and might not have been pushed to political violence without the divisive messages coming from official campaigns.

During trying times, we must come together to choose leaders who we believe will put the sake of the people before the sake of themselves. This includes focusing on helping others before trying to get themselves elected. As politicians seek personal greatness, they should look back to George Washington's pivotal decision to step down after 8 years as president—a decision with no consideration of himself, only the people.



Youtube Farms Frauds : Abuse or Harmless Vlogs?

ASHER ZVI-NOVA | staff writer

Like it or not, being a YouTube creator has become a lucrative career, with the app giving creators over \$17 billion of ad revenue, according to YouTube, 55% of its earnings go to creators, and advertisers rake in YouTube \$31.51 billion. Many are gambling their fortunes on the app, but to succeed, some are resorting to immoral methods. YouTube's content is becoming more controversial every year, and neither its moderation nor algorithm stops this trend.

From vlogs to conspiracy videos, YouTube's content captures ideas from all over the world. Because of YouTube's vast and expanding reach, it's difficult to quantify what the trends are based on singular incidents and examples. However, this content is seen by millions of people, provoking the opportunity to get a small glimpse into the countless amounts of debauchery and mischief that are apparent on YouTube. While many small-time YouTubers have robbed stores, snuck into homes, or made bomb threats, this might not reflect broader trends.

According to Forbes, the content creator MrBeast is valued at \$500 million, and he holds the title of YouTube's biggest creator. For his videos, MrBeast, or Jimmy Donaldson, commonly puts people into dangerous physical and mental situations that operate under the guise of challenges and competitions. In MrBeast's constant desire for the biggest and best content, he has hurt a vast amount of people. For one video, he trapped a contestant in solitary confinement. In another, contestants participated in a real-life version of the Netflix drama, "Squid Games." After some of these barbaric challenges, many contestants faced serious health issues and one even had to be escorted on a stretcher.

While some argued that MrBeast's contestants volunteered to participate in these activities, some other popular content creators have harmed people who weren't voluntarily part of the video. In the summer of 2020, Jake Paul, an ex-Disney channel childhood star turned professional boxer,

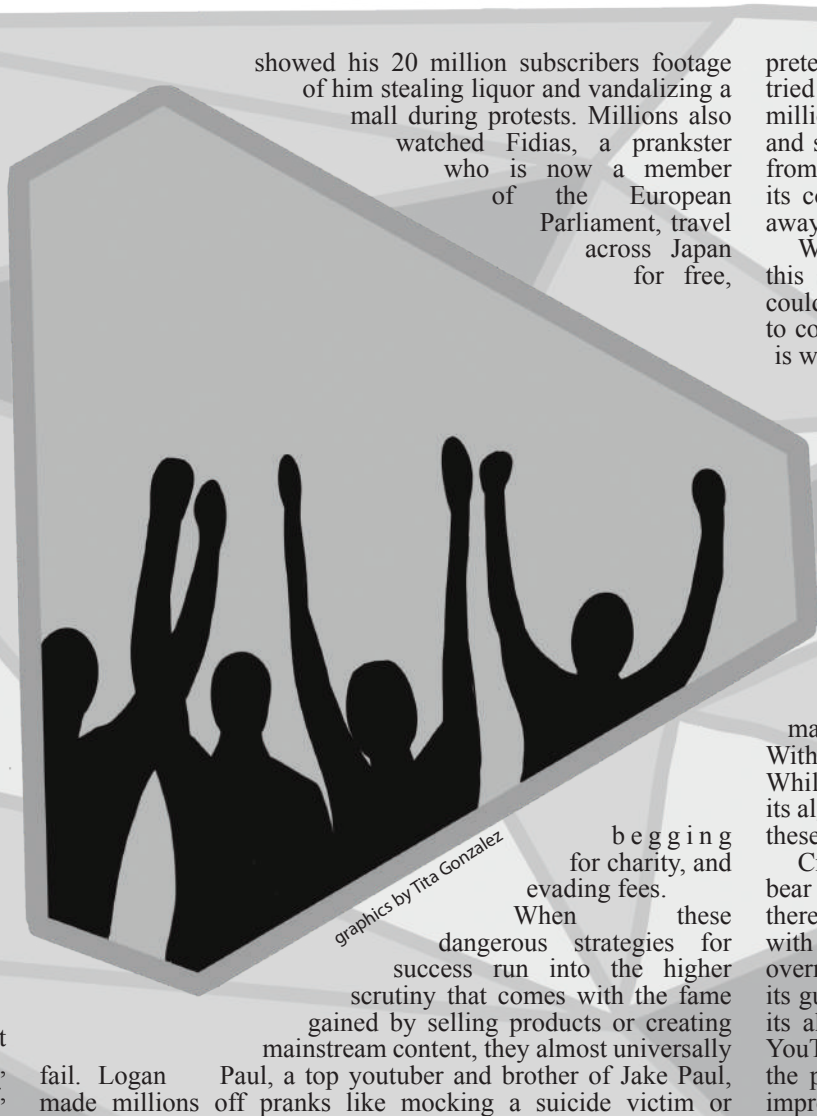
showed his 20 million subscribers footage of him stealing liquor and vandalizing a mall during protests. Millions also watched Fidiias, a prankster who is now a member of the European Parliament, travel across Japan for free,

pretending to be gay for a month as a dare. However, when he tried to create a drink brand, he was charged with nine multi-million dollar lawsuits including charges of deceiving consumers and stealing copyrighted work. The best example of this comes from MrBeast, whose new Amazon show "Beast Games" treated its contestants inhumanly by feeding them once a day, taking away medication, and not letting contestants change clothes.

While YouTube definitively has a dark side, one could argue this side is disconnected from the platform as a whole. They could even try to argue that the moderators are trying their best to control the platform. It's possible every individual moderator is working hard to make the platform better, however, according to the US Supreme Court, 500 hours of content are uploaded every minute. This streaming platform lacks the resources to properly moderate. This leaves YouTube's digital recommendation system as the only tool that ensures safe content is being shown to viewers. This algorithm displays to viewers what is popular, even when it encourages dangerous behaviors.

Since many YouTube viewers make their decisions based on the thumbnail alone, users will naturally gravitate toward what seems surprising and extravagant, putting constant pressure on creators to make their ideas seem bigger and their headlines catchier. It leads to an increasingly regressive mindset that the creators have to make their content do everything in one day and in one video. With low budgets, many people cut corners to pull this off. While I can't lay the blame for all YouTube content's flaws on its algorithm, I think it's clear that they aren't doing enough to fix these problems.

Critics would argue that the viewers choose what to watch and bear responsibility for supporting dangerous behavior. However, there will always be someone there to watch any video, especially with YouTube's massive audience. If YouTube doesn't want to be overrun by these pranks, it needs to make large-scale changes to its guidelines, make examples of the bigger creators, and recode its algorithm to care more about ethics and less about views. YouTube leaves lots of room for improvement even though the profit-driven developers actively choose not to make such improvements.



The Danger of Posting Kids on Social Media

PAXTON TIDRICK | staff writer
WINTYR RICE | commentary editor

Imagine a small child having photos of him being innocently posted to Facebook by his mother. What she doesn't know is that a seemingly meaningless post meant for friends and family spirals into anything from a stranger being able to track her child's location to her becoming entrenched in the power grab that is social media.

Many young lives are harmed when they're posted, dooming them to exist in the endless space that is the internet. The internet could negatively impact their future by introducing them to toxic aspects of internet culture early on, exposing them to potential predators, and removing their right to privacy. These many dangers make it clear that photos of children should not be posted on social media in the first place.

Many parents overlook the fact that these posts are public. This is mainly attributed to unawareness of privacy settings, which could be used to private the page, or because they do not think about how this content could be used for malicious purposes.

Many adults on social media use it to share photos of their young children, but these photos can easily reveal a child's name, location, and other sensitive information. The rise of AI-generated deepfakes, otherwise known as artificially generated photos, videos, or audio, allows the image of children to be used to create false information as leverage or blackmail. If parents give away a child's name and date of birth, malicious scammers can discover their social security number or credit card information without the original poster knowing.

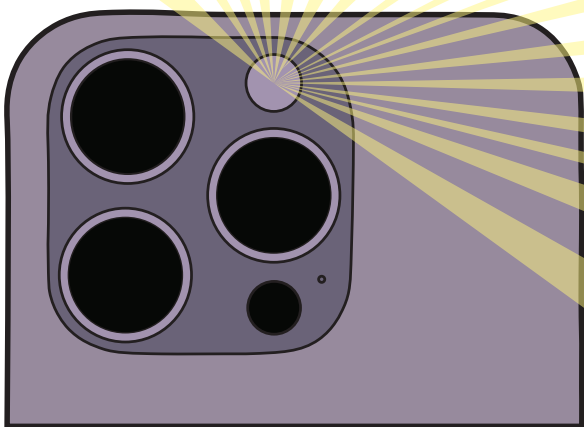
Similar to being posted by their parents, children themselves often do not understand the consequences of their information being leaked to social media. This leads to them often not having problems with posting themselves on sites like TikTok or Instagram. It is imperative that parents discuss the consequences of online behavior with their children, so they do not reveal precious information.

Even if posting one's child online does not have illegal or dangerous consequences, it can still lead to unwanted outcomes.

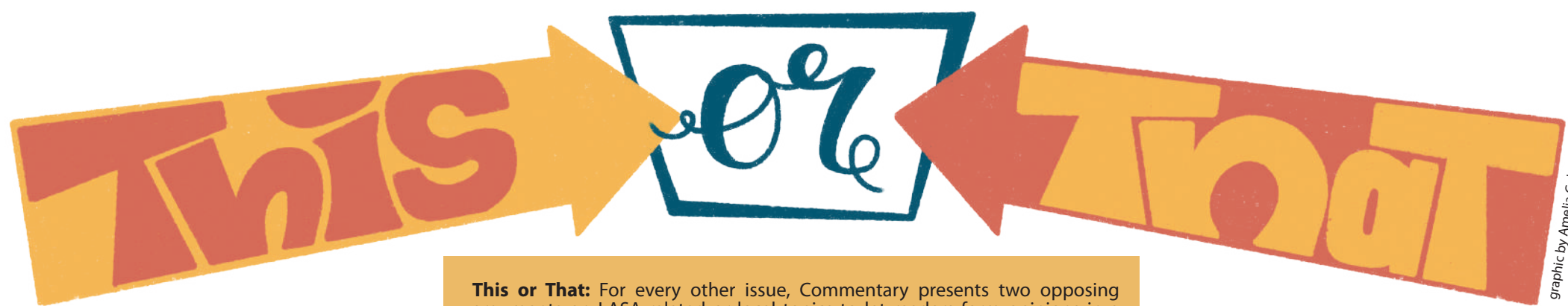
For example, Nora McNerny wrote an article for TIME magazine about how she used to post her young son on Instagram. The page was initially created by her and her husband, who later died after a long struggle with stage IV brain cancer. A mere three months after his passing, McNerny found a BuzzFeed listicle titled "10 Pranks All Dads Need to Try Once" with a photo of her son attached. Still grieving her husband's passing, McNerny tried to get the photo taken down, only to find out that they legally did not need her consent to use the image. When her sister took the photo, it was automatically uploaded to Flickr—a website created for storing and sharing images. Many years ago, when creating the account, her sister had unknowingly agreed to list all photos under "creative commons," meaning that anyone can reuse and build upon the original work with or without permission.

Those who think it's fine for parents to post their young children online and say there isn't any harm in it commonly argue that interacting with others through social media fosters connections and enriches parents' lives. While social media is beneficial in some way, it ignores the risk of exposing information about one's family to the world, which greatly outweighs the reward of feeling temporary gratification.

Parents and guardians need to be much more careful with how they present their kids online. In order to safeguard the next generation, they must stop posting pinpointable faces and locations or they will inevitably be exploited and their privacy violated.



graphic by Alexandra Valencia-Serrano



This or That: For every other issue, Commentary presents two opposing arguments on LASA-related or local topics to let readers form opinions in a would-you-rather fashion.

graphic by Amella Coleman

Lunch Break Shortened to 50 Minutes

ANITA SOSA | staff writer

THIS: Lunch periods, especially in a high-stakes, challenging school like LASA, are essential for students to talk with teachers, host club meetings, and refuel for the rest of the day. In addition to eating and relaxing, just 10 extra minutes provide students with the time and breathing room needed to complete the work they need to.

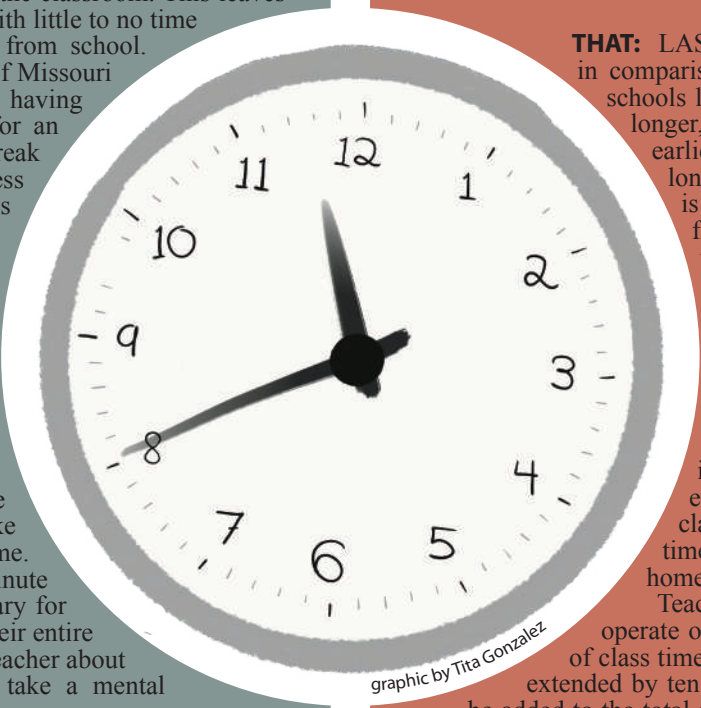
The University of Illinois has researched that longer lunch periods encourage students to eat more nutritious meals, while rushed students reach for easy-to-access processed snacks over fruits and vegetables. Additionally, Contemporary Pediatrics, a medical journal focusing on children & their development, conducted a study on the effect of lunch period length on a child's health. Their research shows there is an increase in food waste during shorter lunch periods compared to longer ones. An hour of lunch allows students to comfortably eat their entire lunch, even as they balance other lunch commitments.

Most LASA students don't have a regular study period, which means that lunch is some students' only time to communicate with

teachers outside the classroom. This leaves many students with little to no time to take a break from school.

The University of Missouri reported that having sufficient time for an effective lunch break decreases stress and improves productivity.

50 minutes may seem as if it's enough, but after waiting in long cafeteria lines or driving to and from campus to get food, many students still have to rush to make it to class on time. A full 60-minute period is necessary for students to eat their entire lunch, talk to a teacher about assignments, or take a mental health break.



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

APOLLO DAHMUS | photo editor

THAT: LASA's school day, in comparison to other high schools like McCallum, is longer, despite starting earlier. A 50-minute long lunch period is a vital time for students to unwind and relax in the middle of their work day. However, extending the lunch break by another 10 minutes would interfere with extracurriculars, class time, and the time students get home.

Teachers already operate on a small amount of class time, so if lunch were extended by ten minutes, it could be added to the total amount of time at

school. Many LASA students who participate in extracurricular activities, such as sports and student clubs, are already required to stay late most days. An additional 10 minutes each day would result in a complete overthrow of their schedules, resulting in wasted time each week when a student could be working on their homework, studying, or even having valuable time unwinding from the school day.

This time students spend doing extracurriculars is critical for many, and it can help students discover and develop their passions. From marching band to sports, many students stay after school for hours a day. This price is worth it for the community and skill development it brings, but with a longer school day, many students would no longer be able to factor them into their schedule.

While increasing the length of lunch is not likely to increase the entire school day, it would still eat up valuable class time. 90-minute class periods, especially on test days, may not be sufficient for some students to get all of their work done.

Overall, due to LASA's intense workload, the few hours students get at home for relaxation, hobbies, or studying are necessary and worth more than 10 minutes of extra lunch.



graphic by Amella Coleman

Should Breaking Be in the Olympics?

LUCA SIMS | staff writer

At its core, breaking is an art form: it is fluid, incredibly diverse, and can be very subjective. Breaking shouldn't be a part of the Olympics for the same reason competitive painting shouldn't. To judge or try to quantify the intricacies of breaking is to take away some of the aspects that make breaking what it is.

The question of why breaking, sometimes incorrectly referred to as breakdancing, was included in the 2024 Olympics, and whether it should continue to be part of the Olympics in the future, was asked around the world after a video clip of Australian breaker Racheal Gunn went viral for her, to put it lightly, unique and creative style. It's worth noting that she received a 0 for her performance and has since apologized according to BBC News. While I vehemently disagree with the public shaming of any athlete, breaking should not be a part of the Olympics.

Most sports enter the Olympics with little to no changes to their scoring or points systems. Sports like the pole vault or soccer have always had simple metrics to tell which team won. Even gymnastics, which is considered by many to be arbitrary, has a rulebook and established scores for each individual move a gymnast competes. According to Wired,

breaking has no official rulebook or scorecard; the Paris games were judged by a slider that could go towards one of the b-boys/b-girls (the terms for the men and women who compete). Because of this, it's not hard to see how subjective judging could be. With nothing to base judgments on but broad categories, such as "originality," judges cannot help but give drastically varying scores to competitors.

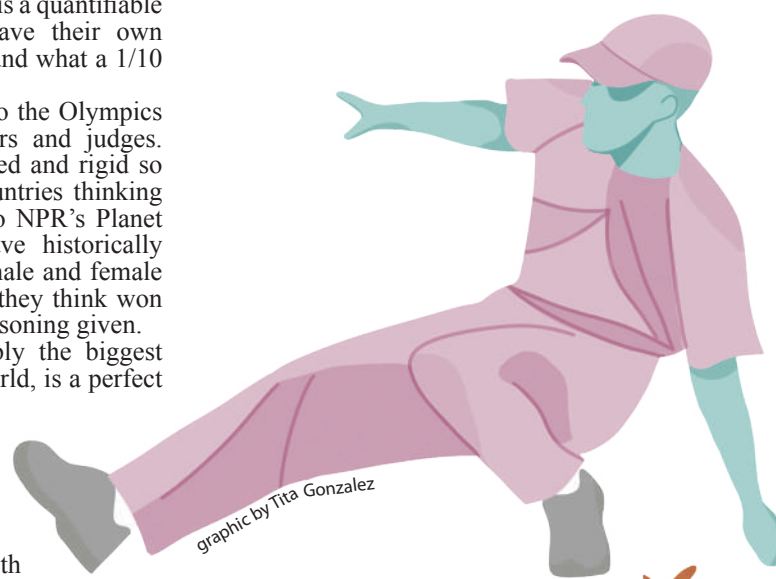
The inconsistent nature of breaking judging can be seen in daily life. If two people are asked to rate how good a movie was on a scale of 1-10, even if they agree on how good it is, numbered ratings are still lacking in objectivity. Even if it is a quantifiable ranking, each person will still have their own criteria for what 'good' or 'bad' is and what a 1/10 or a 10/10 movie is.

Adding a sport like breaking into the Olympics puts constraints on the competitors and judges. Olympic sports must be standardized and rigid so that disputes do not arise from countries thinking the judges are biased. According to NPR's Planet Money, breaking competitions have historically been judged by a panel of fellow male and female breakers who simply point at who they think won the battle with no explanation or reasoning given.

The Red Bull BC One, arguably the biggest breakdancing competition in the world, is a perfect example of breaking's arbitrary judging. The annual competition, which pits 16 b-boys and 16 b-girls against each other to crown a world champion, is judged by a panel of 5 who, one after the other, stand up and display a card with

one of the b-boy/girls' names on it.

No, breaking should not be a part of the Olympics; instead, we should try to recognize places where breaking shines. Breaking involves talent and creativity and incredible feats of athletics, and it just can't be summed up in a single number or score. Breaking, and all other sports like it that have emerged outside of the traditional culture of larger international competitions, should be given all of the attention that the Olympics get, but on their own competition and global stages.



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

Jordan Chiles Robbed of Medal

SAMRAWIT WAELEBROECK | staff writer

Jordan Chiles' bronze medal victory at the Paris Olympics should have been a proud occasion. Instead, when the International Olympic Committee ordered her to return the medal, it developed into a controversy that contrasted Chiles' effort and performance. The decision to remove it after the fact was not only unfair, but it also exposed how technicalities and time issues overshadow an athlete's talent in the gymnastics world. Jordan Chiles deserves her medal back.

In gymnastics, scores are often determined by small details, making them subjective and specific. According to The New York Times, USA Gymnastics filed an appeal, claiming that judging flaws influenced the final score. However, the appeal was rejected because it was filed just four seconds past the deadline. This caused Jordan Chiles to be stripped of her bronze medal. The Olympic officials' decision to remove her medal was a hasty decision based on insignificant technicalities that should not overpower a fairly made evaluation of Chiles' performance.

According to The Guardian, the ruling sparked doubts that the timing of the appeal was a main factor in the judges' overall ruling. Punishing an athlete over

a minor procedural delay rather than a substantial fault in their performance is blatantly unfair.

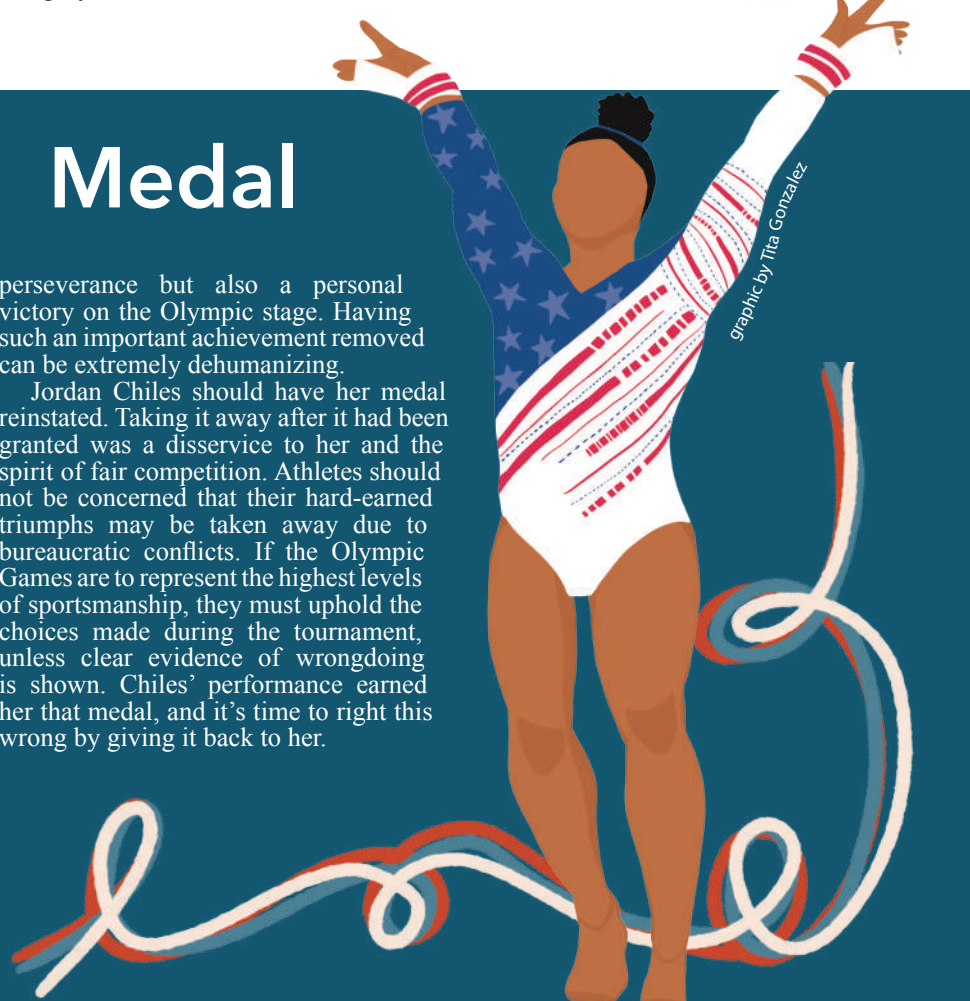
Chiles should not have had to return her medal due to operational difficulties beyond her control. She followed the same rules as every other athlete, while her coaches were the ones in the wrong. The appeals procedure in this instance was defective. However, punishing Chiles for it tells athletes that their successes can be overturned at any time due to internal disagreements, which is both unjust and discouraging. Instead of taking Chiles' medal away, the focus should be on refining the judging and appeals process to assure future fairness.

Her medal was later awarded to the bronze medalist, Romanian Ana Barbosuan, resulting in an outcome that completely diminished the significance of Chiles' performance. Not only did this decision take away from her achievement, but it also made Barbosuan's success less impressive due to the judges questioning if the Romanian athlete even deserved the medal in the first place.

After the appeal was denied, Chiles took to Instagram, expressing her frustration: "I'm speechless. This decision feels deeply unfair and is a huge disappointment, not just for me but for everyone who has supported me along the way." That medal symbolized not only her dedication and

perseverance but also a personal victory on the Olympic stage. Having such an important achievement removed can be extremely dehumanizing.

Jordan Chiles should have her medal reinstated. Taking it away after it had been granted was a disservice to her and the spirit of fair competition. Athletes should not be concerned that their hard-earned triumphs may be taken away due to bureaucratic conflicts. If the Olympic Games are to represent the highest levels of sportsmanship, they must uphold the choices made during the tournament, unless clear evidence of wrongdoing is shown. Chiles' performance earned her that medal, and it's time to right this wrong by giving it back to her.



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

Businesses

from page 1



Sanchez highlighted challenges such as inflation, the rising cost of supplies, and the need to attract and retain qualified staff, especially in Austin where, according to the Austin City Chamber of Commerce, inflation is worsening. These factors have made keeping a local business open more difficult and require more adaptation.

“You have to be quick on your feet,” Sanchez said. “We’re downtown, right on Town Lake, so for us, we have to fight to keep that spot downtown, because that, to us, is so symbolic of what Austin is.”

BookPeople, Texas’s largest independent bookstore, has been a staple in Austin culture for almost 54 years. Gregory Day, a long-term employee, shared insights about the store’s journey.

“We’ve been in our location here, which is at Sixth and North Lamar, for about 30 years,” Day said. “We do a lot of outreach and donation programs with donating books [to] prisons and other organizations.”

While BookPeople remains independent, it is not immune to the pressures that many other local Austin businesses face due to corporate growth. The store has not received any serious offers for acquisition, but Day expressed concerns shared by many who work at the store regarding the impact of large corporations on the local economy.

“It doesn’t do well for your local economy,” Day said. “We’re trying to spend money on the local economy. You’re putting money into your neighborhood and into your community.”

Day noted that large corporations often prioritize profit over community investment.

This is a stark contrast to the values of businesses like BookPeople which focus on creating spaces that are culturally diverse for the local community. While BookPeople has managed to maintain its independence, the landscape around it is shifting as more corporate businesses enter the Austin market. In addition to the pressure brought on by corporate expansion, BookPeople is also navigating legal challenges surrounding House Bill (HB) 900.

“Our CEO is in the legal battle with the state of Texas over HB 900,” Day said. “It’s the bill that’s effectively trying to ban books from carriers here.”

Book bans are affecting business due to increased interference from the state, and they also reflect challenges local businesses face from economic forces and political and legislative shifts that actively impact their operations. Despite the difficulties small businesses face from the pandemic to expenses and political shifts, Day highlighted the joy it brings him and many other Austin locals to see local businesses flourishing.

“I know that it’s hard, but it’s great to see that so many businesses are still thriving,” Day said. “It just makes you want to try harder to preserve what you have.”

Regardless, Day remains hopeful about BookPeople’s future and its ability to maintain its community-driven mission. He believes that the store’s focus on community, culture, and its independent spirit will help it weather the pressures of a changing city.

“It is rewarding to come in and have a mission,” Day said. “It’s a passion. It’s passion first in running a business like this.”

A Booster Breakthrough New COVID-19 Vaccine Released

LAUREN VANDERVEEN | staff writer

In August of 2024, both Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, two of the largest biopharmaceutical companies in America, as well as Novavax, released a new COVID-19 booster vaccine that was recently approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The vaccines utilize messenger RNA (mRNA) technology which instructs the immune system to make antibodies for the COVID-19 disease without introducing the live virus into the body.

According to the CDC, the new COVID-19 vaccine came shortly after a summer wave that caused a spike in case numbers. The CDC guidelines recommend that everyone aged six months and older get one of the updated vaccines. Pfizer and Moderna’s updated mRNA vaccines were approved for ages 12 and older. However, the FDA has issued an emergency use authorization (EUA) for infants and children between the ages of 6 months and 11 years. This is when the FDA authorizes a medical treatment that is not usually recommended but needed as there are no present alternatives in times of need, the FDA explained. The Novavax vaccine remains to be for ages 12 and older. According to Yale Medicine, the mRNA vaccines target new SARS-CoV-2 FLiRT strains, which refers to the recent strains that develop similar mutations. Julie Bennet, a pharmacist at Tarrytown Pharmacy in Austin, explained that the vaccines are recommended to fend off the risk of hospitalization and other dangers from the sickness.

“Typically your immunity to [COVID-19] wears off six months to a year on average,” Bennet said. “So you get a booster shot, like getting a flu shot every year, to protect yourself and others from COVID-19.”

According to the FDA, the use of mRNA in the COVID-19 vaccine helps the body stay up to date with the continuous variations. Viruses mutate as they spread from person to person, creating variations to improve their effect, as specified by Tulane University. Devon Montoya, a graduate student at the University of New Mexico working towards a Doctor of Pharmacy Doctorate, mentioned that this characteristic of viruses creates a need for frequent vaccinations.

“This [mRNA] leads to quicker development of vaccines for future outbreaks and potentially more effective vaccines,” Montoya said.

Vaccines using mRNA are significantly easier to mass produce considering it does not require cell cultures like in the case of the traditional vaccine. However, there are some challenges during the distribution process. As mRNA must be stored at minus 58 degrees to minus 55 degrees Fahrenheit, the vaccine manufacturers needed to adapt their shipping methods. Pfizer uses the “cold chain” technique to ship their vaccines.

“We have developed plans and tools to support effective vaccine transport, storage, and continuous temperature monitoring,” Pfizer said in a public statement. “Our distribution is built on a flexible just-in-

time system which will ship the frozen vials to the point of vaccination.”

According to NPR, roughly 22 percent of eligible adults received the last COVID-19 booster shot. While those who have been recently vaccinated and are not immunocompromised usually do not return to get their boosters, the updated vaccines are useful for the new waves and variants of COVID-19, as mentioned by the CDC.

“There may be a decrease in the number of people getting vaccinated now that COVID-19 has slowed down, as some individuals may feel less urgency to get vaccinated,” Montoya said. “Vaccination is still important to prevent future outbreaks and protect vulnerable populations.”

The vaccines have been sent out nationwide after approval from the FDA. The vaccinations can be found at local pharmacies, medical offices, and regional clinics. However, the demand for these vaccines varies at each pharmacy.

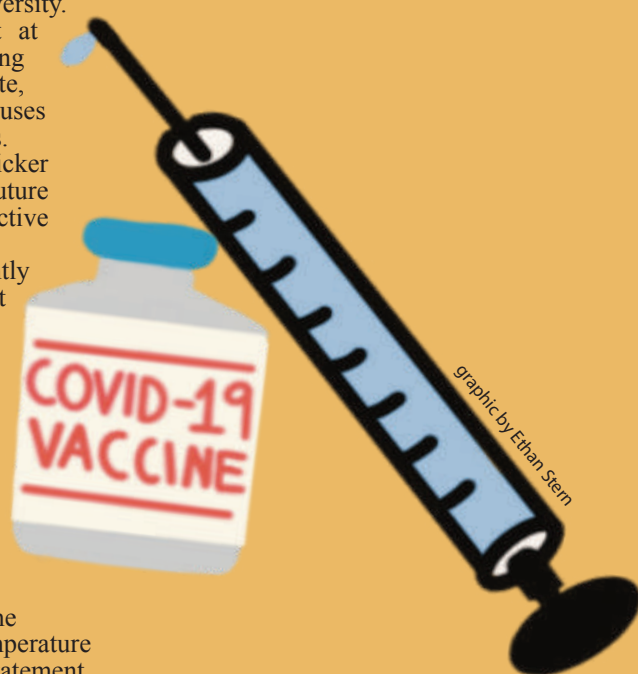
“We have a huge demand for it here at Tarrytown,” Bennet said. “But I know that is not the case all over the nation.”

COVID-19 boosters have always lagged in popularity in comparison to flu shots, as reported by CNN. Alicia Murphey, a school nurse at LASA, explained her thoughts on the matter.

“The flu shot is tried and true, it’s just a routine every fall and winter,” Murphey said. “The COVID-19 vaccine is newer and there’s more skepticism about its efficacy of whether or not it’s truly preventing people from getting COVID-19.”

Throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, many vaccines were created to combat the disease, however, the new mRNA technology allowed companies like Pfizer, BioNTech, and Moderna to develop and release vaccines in record time. This mRNA use will continue to advance the world of vaccines starting with this new COVID-19 booster.

Ethan Stern contributed to this article



Texas Puts AI Into Law Bill Creates Advisory Council

LUCA SIMS | staff writer

Over the past few years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been gradually implemented more and more in education, medicine, and even transportation. Now, AI may be stepping into the Texas capital.

The Texas State Artificial Intelligence Advisory Council, born out of Texas State House Bill (HB) 2060, was created in June 2023 to study how AI will affect the future of legal duties, jobs, and privileges of Texans. Tableau statistics reported that AI was first created between 1950 to 1956 to replicate human intelligence in machines. However, Forbes mentioned that in recent years, big steps have been made in the integration of AI into our everyday lives with tools such as language translation, virtual assistants, and personalized recommendations. Caroline Pinkston, an Advanced Placement English Language and Composition teacher at LASA, is learning how to get accustomed to the ways AI is becoming a normal part of our lives.

“Generative AI shows up in all of our lives, in ways that we don’t even recognize,” Pinkston said. “I’m interacting to some degree with AI anytime that I use Siri or Alexa or whatever else.”

Medium reported that while many functions of AI can be helpful, especially as a teacher with lesson planning, it can also be a dangerous weapon that limits our natural imagination. Junior Josie Bednar, president of LASA’s National English Honor Society chapter, is firmly against AI integration in schools.

“School is a place where you come to expand your mind,” Bednar said. “But if you use AI, it’s not your mind that’s being expanded. It could probably be useful for making lesson plans for teachers provided it was 100 percent true all the time, which it is not.”

According to the Center for an Informed Public, AI is taking over the classrooms, especially when it is a part of most search engines and websites. Despite its prevalence, only 23% of school districts are getting trained on how to use AI in a classroom environment. The lack of urgency to embrace AI may be because people are doubtful, a reaction that reminds some, like Pinkston, of previous times when new technology was met with skepticism.

“It’s comparable to asking someone in 1999 if personal laptops and the internet had a place in the classroom,” Pinkston said. “Even if you wanted to fight it, it was inevitable.”

According to the Advisory Council’s website, the possibility and danger of AI taking business opportunities sparked opinions among the community. Spencer Ward, a staff member for Rep. Giovanni Capriglione, sits on the Advisory Council. He said these concerns prompted the Texas House of Representatives to call for the creation of the AI Advisory Council.

“[The council] exists primarily to

facilitate proper change in growth within tech and AI,” Ward said. “Ultimately, it’s an end-all-be-all way for the state government to coordinate with industry and figure out what is going on in the tech and AI realm.”

So far, five meetings have been held, as reported by the council’s website, which primarily focused on the Automated Decision Systems Inventory Report, a report of all of the systems or departments within the state government that don’t necessarily require humans. However, this raised questions about how the Texas government’s decision to regulate AI should play a role in schools.

“The goal of legislation would be to protect and provide safeguards for all consumers,” Ward said. “We want to make sure that we know what’s being taken of us and of our data.”

On the national level, consumer protection is at the core of many actions taken recently against AI, which was demonstrated by the Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights published by the Biden administration that was created in an effort to create guidelines about the extent to which automated systems can impact the public. At the state level, the hope is that the Texas AI Advisory Council is a step towards AI legislation in Texas. While the council itself cannot pass or make laws, Ward hopes that its presence would continue to assist Texas legislators as AI develops.

“This is going to be a year where we’re going to be providing recommendations constantly because technology is constant, and [making] changes every year, not every two years,” Ward said.

While people like Ward think Texas AI councils are imperative for our growing landscape, some believe AI management is more than a state issue. Pinkston explained that some believe the subject should be handled at multiple levels, including the national one.

“At the federal level, the government should be trying to regulate generative AI,” Pinkston said. “I don’t know that that’s the place for a state government.”

Because the Council is run by the Texas state government, all of the past meetings can be watched at the council’s website, aiadvisorycouncil.texas.gov, and members of the public can comment on the council’s work. For those wishing to watch the next meeting, or testify in front of the committee, the date of the next meeting can be found on the website above.

“There’s always room for public input and comment. A lot of [committee meetings] are invited testimony because we’re trying to structure the conversation for certain levels of industry,” Ward said. “So we don’t want to get a diluted conversation, but we do have, oftentimes, public testimony that is available to the public of their general concerns.”

Leah Lashus contributed to this article

AISSD Board to Boost School Funding Proposition A To Be Added to the Ballot in November

ANITA SOSA | staff writer

On the November 5th ballot, a proposition will be put to vote to either raise school funding and provide additional resources, or let teachers work with a shrinking amount of money and prep time with no salary increase. This depends on whether Austin residents vote in support of the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) Proposition A (Prop A) to increase funding for public schools.

Prop A is a funding proposal approved by the AISD Board of Trustees that would raise property tax rates and provide AISD with an additional 41 million dollars annually. Austin residents will vote in the tax rate election to determine if the proposal will go into effect. This would help cover public school budgets, specifically, personal and staff salary costs. Kathryn Whitley, AISD Board Member, has been working on this proposal to help increase funding for AISD schools. She explained that Prop A is a necessity to remedy a lack of state funding.

"Austin ISD has had to continually make cuts because of underfunding from the state taxes," Whitley said. "Texas is 49th out of 50 states in per-person funding. During the previous legislative session, the schools needed \$1,000 per student in increased per-pupil funding just to keep up with inflation."

Per-pupil funding is a crucial aspect of district budgeting as that determines how much a school gets for each student in

attendance. As a former teacher in Round Rock ISD, a smaller school district, she stressed the importance of having adequate resources for educators to do their jobs.

"I taught in high school, middle school, and in elementary school, and there's just so much that our educators want to do for our students," Whitley said. "They do an amazing job with so few resources."

Furthermore, Whitley added that the lack of adequate resources can be exacerbated by inflation, which causes higher prices. This means the same budget from one year might not be enough for the next.

"Inflation has an impact on school cost, and it should have an impact on school funding," Whitley said. "But the state is not required to increase funding to us."

Echoing this, Marc Karch, an economics teacher at LASA, added that inflation has large effects on budgets. Specifically, he explained that it can hurt an institution's ability to pay back debt. Karch also mentioned that financing school debt may become an issue. He noted that as the deficit increases, it costs more to pay it back.

"We have to remember that each year AISD spends about a quarter of a billion dollars in just interest payments on its debt," Karch said. "To put it another way, that is about one billion dollars over four years."

LASA principal Stacia Crescenzi expressed that new funding is vital for many Austin schools to continue their operations.

According to Crescenzi, this money is important to pay for teachers, librarians, and counselors, as well as other resources such as books or equipment.

"I don't think there is a school in Texas, definitely no school within the Austin Independent School District, that doesn't desperately need more revenue to use in its both staffing and non-staffing budgets," Crescenzi said.

According to Crescenzi, without more funding, LASA teachers may have to teach seven out of eight class periods instead of only six. This could overburden them when grading assessments by cutting into planning periods, and it increases the number of tests each teacher has to grade.

"You are forcing teachers to do more at home," Crescenzi said. "In districts that have done this, you see a lot more scantrons, assessments that are very shallow in nature, as opposed to short answers or essays."

Ultimately, Whitley stressed that she sees this funding of public schools and education as an investment in the future. Providing resources for our schools can help children learn and grow into better citizens.

"This is an investment in our students, and we have to do it to keep our teachers in the classroom," Whitley said. "Absolutely it is unacceptable to be 49th out of 50 states in funding for public education."

graphic by Amelia Coleman

Candidates Use Social Media to Reach Gen-Z

LEAH LASHUS | news editor

From the clipped Kamala Harris "You think you just fell out of a coconut tree?" TikTok audios to videos mocking Trump's rally turnouts, social media has been a key player in this year's election. All of the viral trends and online commotion have been centered around one specific age group: Generation Z, more commonly known as Gen-Z.

For the months preceding elections, candidates and their teams will spend the majority of their time campaigning. Common campaigning strategies include canvassing and sending postal brochures across the country, but as politics across the country have changed, so have the marketing tactics. Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic candidate for this year's presidential election, has taken on the newfound approach of social media, hoping to target the newest generation of voters, better known as Gen Z.

According to a recent Time Magazine article, Vice President Harris's main campaign account, Kamala HQ, has over one million followers on Instagram and over four million on TikTok. Pew Research found that 84% of people between the ages of 19-29 have a social media account, the most of any age group, making the majority of Harris's audience younger generations.

Allie Sears, the sophomore Student Council Treasurer at LASA, has been following the election. She explained that social media as a news source appeals to Gen-Z for a multitude of reasons—a key one being accessibility.

"It's easy, it's fast, and people have access to it," Sears said. "If you think of the New York Times or the Washington Post, you can get some articles for free, but you have to pay for a subscription to see their news. But it's free to have Instagram, so why not get your information there? Also, it takes like thirty seconds to learn something; no one's gonna read a whole article, that takes too long."

Harris' campaign team has been one of the first to use

social media in this way, using viral trends and memes as a way to spread her policies, according to Time Magazine. For Sears, this contributes to her understanding of younger generations in a way other candidates don't.

"Social media is a young person thing, and those old people don't get it," Sears said. "And I feel like a lot of old people discredit the value of using social media, but it spreads the message."

Time Magazine also reported that using viral trends to promote Harris' platform is an easy way of connecting with votes that might otherwise be hard to reach. Along with Kamala HQ, celebrities like Taylor Swift, Billie Eilish, and Charlie XCX have been endorsing Harris online, and their combined total of 408.3 million Instagram followers allows their reach beyond typical campaign advertisements.

"They influence [us] because they're popular and people trust them," Sears said. "I feel like what's more problematic is that people don't trust politicians so much that they are turning to singers and influencers. That's how little respect people have for politicians."

Other LASA students like Senior Lola Buitron highlighted social media's tendency to become a compulsive habit. This can be harmful in other areas like time management, but it becomes advantageous for campaign accounts trying to pull new voters in.

"So many people are on it, so many people get the exposure to it," Buitron said. "Plus, it's addictive, it's hard not to be on it."

The new movement for young voters has been beneficial for pre-existing youth politics associations. Nate Whipple is the Chair of the Georgia High School Democrats, an organization that gets young people involved in politics. He discussed the ways Harris' team utilizes social media that has made more personal connections to young voters.

"Kamala has been able to energize and engage young people in a way we have never seen, especially in a presidential election," Whipple said. "There wasn't really an emphasis on reaching out to people [in this way] until 2016."

Trump was infamous for his use, and misuse, of socials like Twitter and Truth Social, according to CNN, as he commonly spread lies about other candidates or events that people would take

seriously. This has made some people skeptical of using social media as their news source and its credibility, but according to Whipple, Harris has already proven she is different from other candidates.

"It sounds so bare minimum, but just the fact that Kamala hasn't been banned or taken down from anything makes her inherently trustworthy versus the alternative," Whipple said. "Trump has been lying for 8 years, and he's not going to stop whether he wins or loses. It's the contrast that makes her trustworthy."

The successes of Harris' new campaign strategy have been widespread, including creating more conversation, registered voters, and desire to show up at the polls in the first place, according to The Washington Post. Whipple stated that with all this influence, youth votes and turnout are gaining more significance to politicians.

"I think this campaign is the first of its size to really relate to young people, especially high schoolers, college students, recent grads," Whipple said. "You see the Taylor Swift endorsement. That was the highest traffic Vote.org has ever had. Three hundred thousand people clicked on her link and registered. That's a ridiculous amount of people. In 2020, she did the same thing, and 40,000 people registered. That's about 7 times [as much]. The tide is shifting, and we'll have a good youth turnout this year, hopefully."

Whipple explained that social media works well because it is something other campaigning strategies are not—targeted and personal. It cares about its audience in a way a friend would, with inside jokes and commonalities. In future elections, the winning candidates will be those who notice the power of the young vote.

"Every day 1000 more Gen Z members can vote," Whipple said. "We're already seeing it. I think as we go on it's only going to get more and more mainstream and widespread across pretty much every race."

To register to vote, go to Vote.org.

graphic by Amelia Coleman



Local Election Updates

ETHAN STERN | news editor



Local elections provide residents of an area with the opportunity to get representation on the issues that are closer and more relevant to them rather than the issues that affect the United States as a whole. According to the Journal of Democracy, while presidential candidates can receive more media attention from national newspapers, local elections usually aren't recognized to a similar extent, which can cause low voter turnout. FairVote stated that, compared to other countries, the U.S. has significantly lower voter turnout than other countries, as turnout typically ranges from around 60% during presidential elections to 40% during midterm elections.

Senatorial Election



COLIN ALLRED

Colin Allred is currently a representative for the 32nd District of Texas and has been a representative since 2019. Before public service, Allred played in the NFL as a linebacker. After getting an injury, he chose to pursue a job in public service. Prior to running for a representative position for his district in Texas, Allred served in the General Counsel's office in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Allred is the Democratic nominee for Senator and has gotten notice from many U.S. Senators, attracting multi-millions of funds, as reported

by the Texas Tribune. Allred's focus in Congress includes lowering health care costs, protecting Medicare and Social Security, and improving the economy. Immigration, which has been a common issue for both candidates, has been the subject of many attack ads between the two candidates. Allred has been vocal about his views on following proper procedures when handling immigration cases.

graphic by Amelia Coleman



TED CRUZ

Rafael Edward "Ted" Cruz has served as a Republican senator for the state of Texas after being sworn into office in 2013. In March 2015, Cruz announced his presidential bid for the Republican nomination but dropped out of the race after losing the Indiana primary to frontrunner Donald Trump. Currently, he is running for reelection for his third term as senator. Cruz's political views generally align with those of conservative policies, according to the Texas Tribune. Cruz's immigration views are represented in his strong support for securing the Texas-Mexico border and working on the asylum-granting system. Education has also been an important topic for Ted Cruz. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Cruz was a vocal advocate for in-person learning, and later, he worked on a bill helping school tuition for public, private, and religious schools. In addition, Cruz has popularly been outspoken against the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), better known as Obamacare.

graphic by Amelia Coleman

KIRK WATSON

Kirk Watson, the current Mayor of Austin, has been working in the government for the past three decades. Watson was appointed in 1991 by Governor Ann Richards as Chair of the Texas Air Control Board. Later, he won his first term as mayor in 1997 and was reelected with 84% of the vote. Then, in 2023, Watson returned for his third term as mayor after more than 13 years in the Texas Senate.

KATHIE TOVO

Before working as a professor at the University of Texas at Austin, Kathie Tovo worked in Austin City Hall for over a decade. In 2011, Tovo was first elected to the City Council, and focused her work on representing women, workers, immigrants, and the LGBTQ+ community. Tovo mentioned in a statement. From 2015 to 2019, Tovo served as Mayor Pro Tem, which is a temporary mayor in the absence of the mayor, for Austin before being elected in 2018 for a third term in the City Council which ended in January of 2023.

DOUG GRECO

Before entering the Mayoral election bid, Doug Greco was an organizer for the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which involved 12 years as Lead Organizer with Central Texas Interfaith. In addition, Greco served as Chief of Staff to State Rep. Gina Hinojosa and Director of Programs with Equality California. He was also a teacher for five years at the former Johnston High School, which is now Eastside Early College High School.

CARMEN LLANES PULIDO

Carmen Llanes Pulido has worked in Austin for 20 years starting as a community organizer for People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her Resources (PODER). Later, Pulido took a job at Marathon Kids creating initiatives involving nutrition planning and fitness to help kids and their parents. In 2013, she took part in a grassroots campaign to achieve 10 single-member city council districts. Pulido's focus lies in issues affecting the cost of living, natural disasters, and other local issues affecting Austin.

Mayoral Election

Painting the Picture of Austin

Muralists Behind the City's Most Iconic Art

TESSA WHITNEY | staff writer

Plastered onto coffee shops, painted across skyscrapers, and hidden in front of Chuy's are tributes to beloved figures, bold social statements, and declarations of love. The murals and graffiti in Austin are an important part of the city's culture of art and expression that also grants opportunities to aspiring artists.

Austin's first public mural was displayed in 1950 by artist and UT professor Seymour Fogel. Painted on the Drag on a doorway of University Baptist Church, it displays praying hands along with colorful orbs and designs around the side. Since then, there have been many more iconic installations in Austin's street art scene, including the famous "Hi, How Are You?" and "You're My Butter-Half" murals pictured around East Austin.

Luis Angulo, known in the art world as "Uloang", joined the muralist community after noticing a high demand for wall art in Austin businesses. His vibrant, large-scale murals gained popularity rapidly and now can be seen scattered throughout central Austin.

"I've been in Austin since 2007, and I've been able to grow with the city," Angulo said. "I feel that the city has a huge demand for muralists, and when I got started there were only a handful of us, so [my time here has] influenced me in that it's given me a career. It's a city that has opportunities for muralists, so it helps me make a living out of it."

Angulo's work includes the salamander mural just outside Barton Creek Trail, along with various portraits of artists like Post Malone, Kurt Cobain, Travis Barker, and Janis Joplin. Angulo fuels his art by reminding himself of his reasons for creating and sharing his unique perspective with the world.

"I went to a private Catholic high school that had a very small art program," Angulo said. "It wasn't common for any students to pursue art, but one day I realized that's what I wanted to study, and I was excited to tell my art teacher. His reaction was, 'why?' It wasn't what I was expecting or looking for at that moment, but it inspired me to really ask myself, 'Why?' and be sure that this is what I wanted to do."

One of the city's oldest muralists, Mike Johnston, or "The Truth," creates work for a variety of sites including Austin FC, the City of Pflugerville, and many more. He's been a full-time artist for over a decade and works all over the city. His creative process is shaped by his time in Asia and the Middle East as an art teacher which he draws from through bright pastel colors contrasting with a black and white subject and his family.

"If a certain movie or hero sticks with me, I can build inspiration from that," Johnston said. "My daughter and song

lyrics [inspire me]. Also, if I'm out of ideas, my wife usually has a fresh perspective."

Johnston currently works with Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, creating large-scale wall art to promote newly released movies, along with several other commissioned and independent projects. His recent works for the Slaughter Lane Alamo location include an eerie cityscape for "A Quiet Place: Day One," and a colorful portrait of Optimus Prime for "Transformers One."

"Right now I'm working on a big collage, I'm trying to include as many forms [of art] as I can think of," Johnston said. "I really think my style and technique has grown by just becoming more free with my creations."

Many other muralists also take inspiration from personal relationships. Amy Cook's minimal "I Love You so Much" lettering on the wall of Jo's Coffee's South Congress location was originally written as an apology to Amy's girlfriend, the owner of the coffee shop. Over time, however, it has become a part of something much bigger within Austin. Both locals and tourists stand in front of the red letters to take a photo that symbolizes love, pride, and forgiveness, and caption it with their own personal stories.

Greta Vale is a freshman at LASA and has lived in Austin her whole life. She agreed that personal connections such as Cook's are what makes Austin's wall art so special. For many, these pieces reflect their own struggles and experiences in a public space, making them feel less alone and more understood by their community, a goal of many artists.

"I think wall art is very important because it gives cities a sense of identity," Vale said. "It's personal to each city individually."

The wall art in Austin expresses the personal stories of city residents, helping them feel connected. Each mural creates a canvas out of the walls and surrounds the city with acts of expression and character.

"I want my murals to send a message or highlight something about the region or where it's located," Angulo said. "To sum it up really, if I can put a smile on someone's face then, I think my job is done."

I think wall art is very important because it gives cities a sense of identity. It's personal to each city individually.

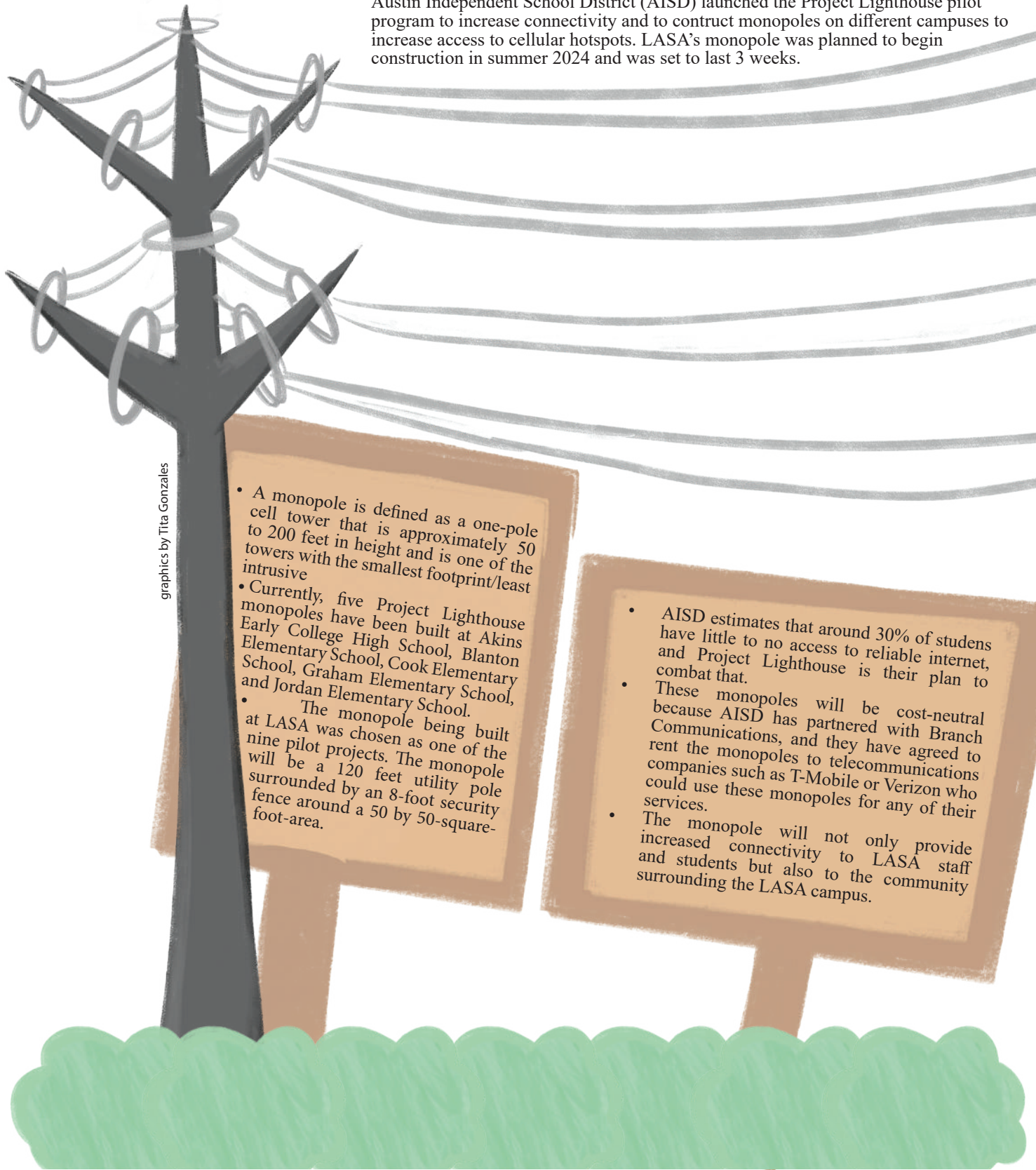
- GRETA VALE, LASA FRESHMAN



Monopole Being Built at LASA

ZOE TOCHILOVSKY | staff writer

Austin Independent School District (AISD) launched the Project Lighthouse pilot program to increase connectivity and to contract monopoles on different campuses to increase access to cellular hotspots. LASA's monopole was planned to begin construction in summer 2024 and was set to last 3 weeks.



graphics by Tita Gonzales

- A monopole is defined as a one-pole cell tower that is approximately 50 to 200 feet in height and is one of the towers with the smallest footprint/least intrusive
- Currently, five Project Lighthouse monopoles have been built at Akins Early College High School, Blanton Elementary School, Cook Elementary School, Graham Elementary School, and Jordan Elementary School.
- The monopole being built at LASA was chosen as one of the nine pilot projects. The monopole will be a 120 feet utility pole surrounded by an 8-foot security fence around a 50 by 50-square-foot-area.

- AISD estimates that around 30% of students have little to no access to reliable internet, and Project Lighthouse is their plan to combat that.
- These monopoles will be cost-neutral because AISD has partnered with Branch Communications, and they have agreed to rent the monopoles to telecommunications companies such as T-Mobile or Verizon who could use these monopoles for any of their services.
- The monopole will not only provide increased connectivity to LASA staff and students but also to the community surrounding the LASA campus.

THE LINE

Global News

Mexico Makes Milestones

On Oct. 1, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo took the oath of office and was sworn in as the President of Mexico, starting her six-year term. Before becoming president, she served as mayor of Mexico City since 2018. Sheinbaum is the first female president of Mexico and the first of predominantly Jewish heritage. Sheinbaum follows into the same leftist Morena political party as her predecessor (Andrés Manuel López Obrador) was, and plans on continuing similar pledges, according to NBC news.

Airport Bomb Explodes

On Oct. 2nd at Miyazaki Airport in southwestern Japan, a dormant United States (U.S.) bomb from World War II that had been previously buried exploded, disrupting more than 80 flights and leaving no casualties, according to the Associated Press (AP). Asphalt explosions disrupted a large part of the taxiway. Flights resumed the following morning, according to Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi. Miyazaki Airport, built in 1943, was used by the former Imperial Japanese Navy as a flight training field.

National News

Hurricane Helene Horror

On Sep. 26th, Hurricane Helene made its mark on land when it hit Florida as a Category 4 hurricane. According to AP news, Hurricane Helene is the deadliest hurricane in the mainland U.S. since Katrina hit in 2005. North Carolinians have received more than \$27 million in individual assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Gov. Roy Cooper's office has reported that over 83,000 people have signed up for individual assistance.

Google Gets Served

On Oct. 7th, Google was ordered by a federal court in San Francisco to allow competition apps into their Android app store in an antitrust case, allowing more app options to be available to users. This verdict will hurt the illegal monopoly Google has held, according to AP news. The Department of Justice also proposed sanctions to end the monopoly on the search engine and laid out ideas for ending exclusive agreements Google has with companies such as Apple and Samsung.

Harris Reaches New Heights

As of Oct. 9th, Kamala Harris reached over one billion dollars for her campaign since her start as the Democratic candidate in July. Harris raised \$25 million on the day she was named the candidate and had amassed \$500 million in about a month. According to the New York Times (NYT), Harris is one of the only candidates to raise such a quantity in such a time. Harris has also surpassed the amount Donald Trump, the Republican candidate, has raised so far in the election. This announcement comes during a tough part of the race where election day is coming up, the NYT reported.

State News

Paxton Prosecutes TikTok

On Oct. 3rd, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton filed a lawsuit against the social media platform TikTok for allegedly sharing and selling minors' personal information. This violates a new state law that aims to protect children on social media, according to the Texas Tribune. TikTok, which has been previously brought under fire for their Chinese parent company, denied these allegations.

H-E-B Taps Into Online Pay

On Oct. 7th, H-E-B Grocery Company announced that it will now feature tap-to-pay programs in all of its stores around Texas, including its Central Market stores, restaurants, and pharmacies. This will allow customers to use Samsung, Google, and Apple Pay. H-E-B announced their pilot program for tap-to-pay at a Central Market location in Dallas. This program comes after numerous requests according to Ashwin Nathan, a vice president of marketing and payment at H-E-B.

Local News

Music of the Economy

On Oct. 4th, Austin City Limits kicked off its first weekend with three days of performances Friday to Sunday before picking up again the following weekend. According to KXAN, the annual Austin music festival dates back to 2002, with an economic impact beginning in 2006. It is estimated that the festival has brought in more than \$3.5 billion to the greater Austin area. Roughly hundreds of thousands of people were expected to be in attendance at the festival over its first and second weekend, KVUE reported.

Austin FC Hands Wolff a Red Card

As of Oct. 6th, Austin FC announced they are looking for a new head coach after Josh Wolff was fired, according to a statement put out by club officials Anthony Precourt and Rodolfo Borrell. They met with Wolff to discuss options concerning next season as the decision comes after a major loss for the club when they lost to LA Galaxy. This eliminated the team from the 2024 MLS Cup Playoffs, according to the Austin Chronicle. With only one match left in the 2024 season, an interim manager will be found for the final match on Oct. 19.

graphic by Megan Gerold

FROM COLLEGE TOWN TO BIG CITY

REBECA GONZALEZ | student life
ISABEL KRAMER | editors

Austin is growing up: data on the City of Austin website shows that it's no longer the year 2000, and Austin is no longer a town of 650,000 people walking along Barton Springs and exploring the costumes inside Lucy in Disguise with Diamonds. Its ever-changing skyline has grown increasingly clustered, with a growing number of new buildings constructed each year, yet it still maintains an unobstructed view of the capital. The streets that used to be filled with familiar faces have lost their local touch. The Frank Erwin Center has been brought down to make way for the Moody Center and South Congress Bookstore on Kerbey Lane. According to Macro Trends, the transforming city now has over two million citizens and high-end luxury stores where local small businesses had previously. Austin has grown up, and this generation of Austinites has grown alongside it.

Austin is the second fastest-growing city in the United States, and according to World Population Review, the town has experienced a 2.06% population increase since 2023, with over 2.2 million citizens living in the city today. Today, population-wise, Austin is the 12th largest city in the country. The growth outpacing the city is evinced by increasingly congested streets and house prices reaching record highs. Neighborhoodscout reported that since 2014, home values have increased by 123%, averaging an 8.36% increase annually.

The fast-paced growth of the city has significantly affected South Congress. According to Allison Faust, co-owner of South Congress Books, the street's rent has increased as buildings are sold to developers, leading her to witness firsthand the long-term tenants leaving the street and moving to affordable locations. However, the street was quite the opposite at the beginning of the business.

"It was a cool place to be and drew some tourists, but there was a vacant lot next door and another across the street," Faust said. "We had plenty of slow days, and people seemed surprised to find us there."

The business was created by Sheri Tornatore, who began working with selling reused books 30 years ago online. Under the username "Tornatore," she built a five-star rating online, leading her to open the bookstore.

"As Austin steadily grew in population and popularity as a tourist destination between 2011 and 2020, lots of new businesses and buildings filled in, and we grew busier every year until the pandemic hit," Faust said. "That's when Austin exploded in growth, and our building was sold to a developer who wanted to quadruple our rent."

South Congress Books isn't the only business to deal

with rent increases in the area. Long-time businesses, Mi Casa Gallery, Good Company, and Sunroom, are all facing similar problems and will either relocate to affordable locations or will have to simply close their stores. This has left small shops struggling to make their overhead—the amount it takes to run their business at a manageable level.

"We moved almost two years ago to our current location on Kerbey Lane, and it's been hard to stay on people's radar," Faust said. "Small niche businesses like ours are struggling with high overhead and are getting pushed into less desirable locations or closing altogether."

Junior Niamh Catterall has lived in Austin her whole life. Growing up between South 1st Street and South Congress, she's seen the change in the neighborhood through business, food, and culture.

"My favorite restaurant, up until it closed a couple years ago, was Enoeca," Catterall said. "It was on South Congress, maybe like two blocks from my house and it was an Italian restaurant. It was affordable, it was very Austin, an original kind of restaurant."

Enoeca closed in the summer of 2022 after operating for 17 years. In its place, the owners opened Chapulín Cantina, a traditional Mexican restaurant drawing heavily from Oaxaqueño cuisine.

"All of the affordable restaurants on South Congress are going away, but that's not what Austin needs. Austin needs good trashy Tex Mex 'cause that's what we are."

- NIAMH CATERALL, LASA JUNIOR

"All of the affordable restaurants on South Congress are going away," Catterall said. "But that's not what Austin needs. Austin needs good trashy Tex-Mex because that's what we are."

One historical departure from South Congress was the closing of Lucy in Disguise with Diamonds. The store opened in 1986 and was a large costume shopping site for many Austinites. According to the Austin American-Statesman,



HI HOW ARE YOU? The mural was created by Daniel Johnston in 1993 and is considered an iconic symbol of Austin. The surrounding building was demolished in 2018, leaving the mural standing alone. photo by Apollo Dahmus

graphic by Isabel Kramer



UNION SAN ANTONIO ST The balcony of the Union San Antonio Street Student Housing while under construction at night. The building is now complete. photo by Sadie Henderson



UT FROM ABOVE A view of downtown Austin through the metal scaffolding of the Union San Antonio Street Student Housing photo by Sadie Henderson

Students Grow with Austin

graphic by Megan Gerold

graphic by Alexandra Valencia-Serrano

even Bob Dylan once spent \$7,000 at the store.

"I got my first non-homemade Halloween costume from there," Catterall said. "I got red sparkly high heels, which I took off by the end of the night. I was ten years old and I was Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz. Yeah, it was cute."

Notwithstanding its impact, the store closed at the end of 2022. In a statement given to the Austin American-Statesman, the owner and founder, Jenna Radtke, explained she chose to sell the building for 1.2 million dollars after 38 years of business left a mark on the fabric of Austin. For customers like Catterall, this closure deeply impacted them.

"I knew the workers in there," Catterall said. "I knew where my shoe size was on that rack in the back room. I could find anything in that store because it was so fun to go into."

According to the business manager, Jerry Durhman, the decision to sell was ultimately made due to the new plans for South Congress and the loss of local vendors following the pandemic. The store announced its closing through a social media post and a large closing banner that hung above the store.

"I drove by the banner that announced its closing every time I went home," Catterall said. "It just wasn't real."

Down the road, Tesoros Trading Company also closed its doors in the summer of 2022 after 15 years of business. Both of its locations will be replaced by Tecovas, a cowboy boot store with 35 locations nationwide.

"As a longtime Austinite, I feel sad," Faust said. "To see so much generic development that could be in any city in the USA replacing unique neighborhood businesses that struggle to relocate."

South Congress now holds many high-end stores like Hermes, Alice & Olivia, and Reformation. Each store has at least 30 locations worldwide, with Hermes having over 200.

"I think Austin's bubble has burst while retail landlords are holding firm to high prices that aren't sustainable or realistic," Faust said. "It's bound to change. Change is inevitable. But in the meantime, it's a tough environment for small local businesses until things reset."

Chloe Cardinale is a LASA Advanced Placement (AP) Seminar teacher, an elective AP class focused on research. This year, the class's focus is on Austin. Cardinale has seen firsthand the substantial changes Austin has undergone over the years, pointing out the city's growth in both population and industry. She remarked on how these changes have reshaped the city's identity.

"The population size would be one of the biggest indicators that has changed," Cardinale said. "The amount of business and industry here has substantially changed and grown. Also the culture of Austin, which would be very tangible, but maybe less like data points, [has changed]."

Cardinale explained that the city's expansion is still going strong. According to her, the influx of businesses is specifically from the state's low-income taxes.

"I don't see [the change] stopping, for sure, especially

not because of all the businesses with California and all over," Cardinale said. "Lots of businesses are coming here from states that have a state income tax. So, Austin, Texas specifically, is trying to promote that growth."

From I-35 expansion to racial segregation, AP Seminar covers a wide range of changes that are affecting Austin. Students are researching and discussing the effects businesses and population demographics have had on the city throughout its history.

"There hasn't really been a way in which Austin hasn't changed," Cardinale said. "[Now] we're in the top 10 biggest cities in the country. So just that alone has made us an international city that it did not used to be, or at least not as well known."

The growth in Austin has affected more than just one neighborhood. Senior Adele Tversky has lived in Mueller for as long as she can remember. However, after leaving the city for a few months due to the pandemic, she observed new developments throughout the neighborhood after her return.

"Mueller is crazy and growing all the time," Tversky said. "Over COVID-19, we were gone and we were in Colorado and coming back and just over the course of a year the neighborhood had already doubled in size and all these new buildings had been built."

After decades of construction, Mueller finally saw an end to its construction, having built 1,700 affordable housing units over the past few years. However, according to Community Impact, the city plans to replicate the neighborhood's success by creating 60,000 affordable housing units by the end of 2028.

"It was actually insane," Tversky said. "We moved to a different place in Mueller around 2010. So that new place has a lot of development around it. We were around the lake park and Albridge Street that has a lot of new apartments going up."

Tversky believed live music has also become a significant change factor in Austin. She has explicitly seen changes throughout venues. For example, in September of this year, the Frank Erwin Center was officially demolished and replaced by the new Moody Center. Throughout its history, the music center had performances from famous musicians such as David Bowie and Bob Dylan.

"It's not so great how some of my favorite smaller venues' prices keep on going up and up," Tversky said. "Which makes sense because they can't pay their rent."

For both the music scene and businesses, Tversky and Catterall stated that Austin has lost some of its culture. The city has adapted to its growth and become mainstream in multiple ways.

"Sometimes it feels like, like a different city driving through downtown where all the places I used to know," Tversky said. "Or going down South Congress and there's all these stores, like Hermes is there. What are they doing there, where there used to be all these local shops?"

Catterall felt that the growth has affected her

familiarity with the city— not just the buildings and the stores, but the people as well. Throughout her neighborhood, many new tenants moved in over the past decades.

"It was small and I just knew it as my home and I recognized every part of it," Catterall said. "I knew the people in it. It's not really the same like that now."

Austin has also become the new home for many major corporations, with large companies like Tesla, Google, and Apple moving into Austin in recent years. Tversky believed growth could provide opportunities for the city.

"There's people who have the opportunity to improve those issues," Tversky said. "And I hope they do."

One major issue in Austin continues to be transportation. According to KXAN news, I-35 construction, which has been a big factor in ongoing traffic, will continue until 2032 after starting this year. Cardinale commented that many of her AP seminar students strongly believe that public transport should be improved to respond to the increase in traffic after looking at a variety of sources and discussing it with each other.

"It's really expensive," Cardinale said. "Everything's really expensive. There's a lot of positives and negatives, but I wish more than anything. We would invest in public transportation so that we could take more cars off the road. That would be my biggest wish as we continue to grow."

Although throughout all the change, some businesses adapt and still find success. South Congress Books remains open in its new location on Kerbey Lane. The business recently had success on Austin's Book Trail Day in the spring, which Faust said built a strong sense of community.

"We are doing our best to stay flexible in a changing city, like so many other businesses," Faust said. "Whatever the future holds."



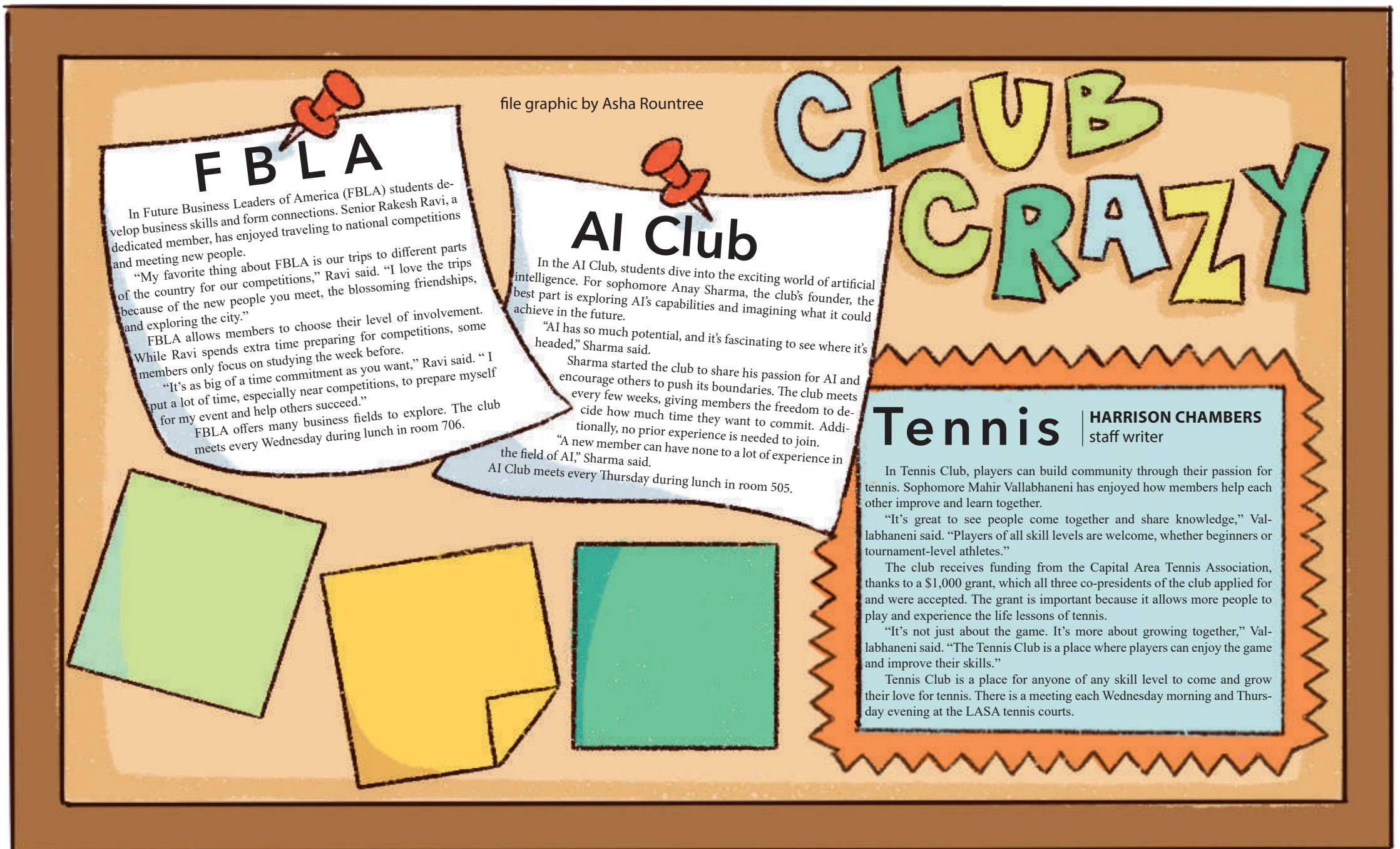
AUSTIN 1887 MAP Made by Augustus Koch on his return to Austin noting the growth in the past fourteen years. The population was around 11,000. photo courtesy of Austin History Center at Austin Public Library.



CRESTVIEW TACO VIEW New construction can be seen across the parking lot of the Austin chain Tacodeli. The location originally opened as the fifth location in the Crestview neighborhood in 2014. photo by Isabel Kramer



CONSTRUCTING A NEW SKYLINE The Austin skyline continues to change on a rainy day. Cranes can be seen in the distance furthering construction. photo by Isabel Kramer



Cell Phone Policy Introduced at LASA

TINGYU CAO | staff writer

This school year, LASA introduced a new policy that controls students' cell phone usage. The cell phone policy was made school-wide and required students to put their cell phones in a designated location to restrict usage.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Austin Independent School District (AISD) schools have increased their usage of BLEND, and students have become more dependent on technology for learning. However, according to National School Safety and Security Services, technologies can serve as distractions or cause more innovative cheating methods. Moreover, following the aftermath of the pandemic, teachers had a rough time returning to teach students who are wrapped up in their phones rather than the lesson. Jessica Fisher, an art teacher at LASA, has witnessed this firsthand.

"I noticed this a couple of years ago, especially when we came back from COVID," Fisher said. "Students would be watching movies and talking to their friends on their phones instead of connections between people that were around them."

According to Neno December, the LASA freshman assistant principal and behavior coordinator, if all students are increasingly attached to their screens, social interactions between students will diminish. Therefore, December believes the phone policy is the solution.

"Teachers have been saying this for a while now, especially in the past two to three years, that they're noticing a lot more students in the cafeteria, for example, glued to their phones instead of interacting with one another," December said. "Instead of hanging out outside and playing something for 10 to 15 minutes or doing something together, it's more like sitting and just playing games or doing social media."

According to December, both administration and teachers felt like there are less physical interactions between students after the pandemic. He explained that they attribute this to many students wanting to be on their phone rather than talking with their friends.

"With smartphones and access to social media in particular, there's so many studies over this showing that even with adults," December said. "So it's not just with students,

that it does become not only a primary distraction tool, but also all the things that you come across in social media start having an impact on your overall well being. If you're paying too much attention to politics and you're on X or Facebook... you might be getting a lot of information that you don't necessarily like and then that is just driving you crazy."

People are unable to control what they see on social media and not everything on social media is the truth. According to Yale Medicine, it could be harmful to one's mental health if they were to believe everything in social media posts.

"If you can't control yourself, you start assessing yourself in relation to other people that you don't know that you may come across like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or you name it," December said. "And then that ends up affecting people's self perception of themselves in relation to these other people, but it's like you don't even know who these people are. They could be using filters, and now you're looking at their physical level of beauty, and then you're comparing it to yourself [and saying,] 'Oh, I don't look like that,' and now you start feeling bad for whatever reason."

December believes that social media is a large contributor to the damage of phone usage. However, AISD does not directly restrict social media, only physical access to students' phones. As a result, December explained that though phone usage is more complex than just taking away physical access, the hope is that by further adjusting the phone policy based on student responses to it, they are taking a step towards increased student interaction rather than being on their phones.

"We can further tweak [the cell phone policy] to see what needs to be done because the whole purpose of it is really multifold or multifaceted," December said. "One, we want students to be more attentive in the classroom... Two, we want to further develop their social skills, how to communicate and interact with one another."

According to December, the cell phone policy intends to nurture an environment where more meaningful interactions between students can happen on top of reducing sources of distraction from the classroom. Fisher added that, so far, the cell phone policy has been successful in creating a less screen-reliant environment.

"I definitely think [the cell phone policy] has made a noticeable impact, there are more students working in the classroom,

they are more on task," Fisher said. "They are having conversations with the people at their table instead of putting their head down and watching a movie."

According to December, many teachers and staff have seen the positive effects of the cell phone policy. He added that they believe cell phone policy reduced distractions during class and encouraged more social interactions.

"There's a more social level of activities taking place between students," December said. "Even in the cafeteria, I don't think I'm seeing as many students on their phones as I probably did last year. Because even in the lunch line, you would often see a lot of students just glued to their phones, and I'm not really seeing that as much."

According to junior Hanxiang Mu, although there's initial success, the cell phone policy could be even more harshly enforced. He explained that he still sees people with their cell phones during class, which he believes can lead to potential distractions the student's own learning environment.

"[The cell phone policy] is only effective to those who actually listen to the teachers and actually put their phone away," Mu said. "I have classmates who don't really listen to the teacher and they just have their phones chilling in their pockets just like the old days."

For now, December states the cell phone policy will stay as is. Noting a difference between the LASA policy and the policy of other AISD schools, December points out the more relaxed policy of LASA.

"...Other schools have gone as far as to [the policy being] you come in, you put your phone in a little bag, you put it in a locker or something, and then you do not touch it that entire day," December said. "Whereas here, you still have that level of freedom where you can use your phone as you're walking in the hallways from class to class. You can still use it during lunch. As of now it doesn't look like we're gonna go to that point because there is no need yet to go to that point, just because the current policy seems to be fairly effective."

The cell phone policy is still new, and data is still being collected to analyze its effectiveness. For now, according to December, the policy won't be going anywhere anytime soon.

graphic by Tita Gonzalez

New Chickens In the Coop

SAMRAWIT WAELBROECK | staff writer

LASA High School has welcomed new chickens to the Raptor family that are a unique breed named silkies originating from East Asia. The flock now lives in a pen in the LASA courtyard, offering a mix of education and enjoyment for the school community.

Junior Josie Bednar is the co-vice president of the Chicken Club, hosted by chicken caretaker and LASA chemistry teacher Shontel Willie. Bednar described how her love for the club grew from her friends' passion for chickens. With time, she herself eventually also became deeply involved in the care of the flock.

"I think it's wonderful that our school can have these pets," Bednar said. "Plus, we are the Raptors, and chickens are basically dinosaurs."

Junior co-president Lyra Siano started the initial discussion of bringing Silkies to campus. Siano has been raising Silkies as pets for years. Even though they are delicate and more prone to heat stroke compared to other breeds, she believes their docile nature and soft feathers make them the ideal addition to the school's flock.

"Silkies are my favorite chickens," Siano said. "They are originally from China, and their fluffy, feathered appearance makes them look like teddy bears."

Junior Rebecca Van Bavel, another co-president, shared that her experience raising chickens began during the pandemic. To her, the Silkies' appearance make them unique and she noted

that their feathers lack the barbs other chickens typically have, giving them their fluffy look.

"They can't see very well because they're so fluffy," Van Bavel said. "But they've figured out how to navigate their coop now."

While the chickens may seem like simple creatures, according to Bednar, they take a lot of effort. Regardless of the challenge it takes to teach the chickens new skills, Bednar explained that she enjoys watching them struggle and preserve past their agility-related skills.

"They are so dumb," Bednar said. "I love them, but they are just stupid. It was very difficult to teach them to walk up and down the stepladder into and out of their hutch, but they're doing it now."

According to Bednar, caring for the Silkies has come with new structural challenges. The most difficult part has been building a new coop to keep the chickens safe from raccoons, a problem that led to the loss of previous chickens.

"The most challenging part was building the new coop," Bednar said. "Seeing as it took a lot of authorization and money and man hours to create it."

Siano stated that the Chicken Club hopes to expand the flock even further. She explained that the Chicken Club is enthusiastic about adding more chickens, perhaps even different breeds. However, the Silkies have now settled in their new home at LASA. Bednar mentioned the chickens can now offer joy and interest to the students who pass by the courtyard.

"It's been really rewarding seeing them thrive and their new environment," Van Bavel said



graphic by Megan Gerold

Q&A: Flowers Takes On The World LASA Teacher's USA Geo Team Goes To National

ARIANA RODRIGUEZ | staff writer

Jason Flowers has been an Advanced Placement (AP) United States History teacher at LASA for decades. This summer, he traveled to Ireland as the United States (U.S.) Geographic Champion team coach. The exam-taking championship was first held in 1993, which included two exams involving geographic skill testing activities.

LASA Liberator: Explain what National Geographic is. What do you do?

Flowers: National Geographic used to sponsor a geography competition for kids. I'm one of the people that runs the U.S. Geography Championships. We pick the four best geography students in the U.S. I've been coaching the U.S. team for 10 years. I've been to Russia, China twice, and Indonesia. This summer, we were in Ireland. We take the kids to the competition; it's over a week. They take three big exams. They have to go into the community and do mapping. Then, they solve problems using the observations they made.

LASA Liberator: What made you want to join the National Geographic Team?

Flowers: It really kind of happened by accident. In 2014, LASA won the National History Bowl. The person [who] runs the National History Bowl also sponsors the U.S. geography team. He doesn't like Russia, and the International

Geography Olympiad (IGO) that year was in Russia; he asked for someone to go. He emailed quiz bowl coaches and asked for someone to go with the team to Russia. So, I just went, and then after the competition, I thought, "this is just super cool." Then I told him, "I really want to be the coach and run this team." [I] was very lucky, but it's been pretty amazing.

LASA Liberator: How has National Geographic Olympiad impacted your life?

Flowers: I've worked with kids from all over the country. This year, we had two kids from New York, one kid from Virginia, and then one was down the road in College Station. I've learned a lot about geography. I've gotten to travel all over the world. It's been an incredible opportunity to travel and just see the world, in addition to doing this really cool competition.

LASA Liberator: What is your favorite part of being on the National Geographic Team?

Flowers: You go to these competitions, and you get to meet these teachers and professors. Some of them are the ministry of education in their country! You just meet all of these interesting people that have all these interesting connections. A lady from the U.K. [United Kingdom], who was the head of the competition, is actually a knight. She got knighted by the queen for geography education.

LASA Liberator: What is the most challenging part about being on the team?

Flowers: Eastern European countries and Southeast Asian

countries are very good at geography; Americans are not. Training the U.S. team to the point where we were able to win this year has been incredibly challenging, but it's been a lot of fun.

LASA Liberator: What events have your team participated in recently?

Flowers: We won this year in Ireland. This summer, I worked at another international geography competition that was in Vienna. Last summer, I did IGO [International Geography Olympiad] and then worked at a history competition in Rome. I did another history competition in London this past summer. For Christmas break this year I'm going to Puerto Rico to help run an environmental science competition.

LASA Liberator: What is the greatest memory you have had being a part of the team so far?

Flowers: One of our kids got third place in the overall competition, [and] all four of the kids placed in the top 30. That's how we won as a team. We didn't find out that we won until hours and hours after the award ceremony. We were just all hanging out at an Airbnb, that moment when I got the spreadsheet and saw that we had won, it was incredible. We were all together and got to celebrate together.

graphic by Amelia Coleman

Teachers Adapt to Larger Classes

JAMES CONSTANT | staff writer

As acceptance rates increase, LASA hallways have become congested, school commute traffic has increased, and classes sizes have become bigger. For some teachers, this has led to higher workloads and an even more demanding responsibility with some teachers having entire days without free periods.

As a result of the new campus, classes have increased greatly compared to previous years. The class of 2024, which spent their freshman year on the LBJ campus, for instance, had around 20 students per class. Now, classes have around 30 students in each class period. The new class sizes have affected the teachers' daily execution and grading, especially Jon Croston's Physics Right classes, which spend A-days in the theater because of large class sizes.

"It's still early in the year," Croston said. "It's the first time I've done this. Right now I'm more

used to the small classes, so I prefer the small classes."

Inside Croston's physics classes in the theater are more than 50 students per period. Junior Henry Strandwitz is one of these students who expands on the idea of distractions in class being able to be managed personally. According to Strandwitz, a large part of distraction depends on your neighbors, therefore choosing who you sit next to is vital to success.



file graphic by Asha Rountree

"I think that being able to choose where you sit makes the experience more enjoyable for you and your friends, if you really want to sit next to them," Strandwitz said. "But I think it also gives you the responsibility to make good decisions on who you sit next to and [that matters] in a tough class like physics.

Much like his student, Croston feels some of the same sentiment about his classes in the theater. They both agree the theater can be more distracting for students than a regular classroom.

"[Bigger class sizes] makes more of a responsibility to the students to stay engaged rather than teachers keeping them engaged," Croston said.

Not only do the new class sizes call for a greater commitment to academic honesty, but according to AP U.S. History teacher Kimberely Pettigrew, they also put more pressure and migraine-inducing situations on faculty.

"I already feel behind in terms of grading and we are only four weeks into the school year," Pettigrew said. "It makes it harder for me to give students the help they need in class when I have 30 in a class, and it takes longer for me to learn everyone's name. It might not seem like much, but a few students more in each class adds up over 6 classes."

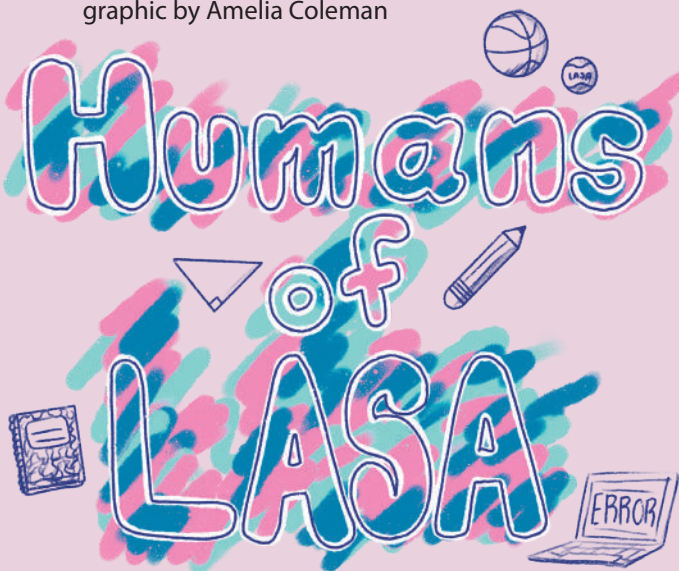
According to Pettigrew, as well as larger class sizes making grading difficult, it also makes it harder for students to focus. She noticed that recently there has been a rise in side conversations resulting in the students to be more distracted.

"I honestly cannot think of any benefit to having a larger class," Pettigrew said. "It all seems to be downsides to me. I have more students to grade for, document accommodations and progress on skills, and it's harder for students to receive individual attention."

Overall, Pettigrew emphasized that the new class size is a resoundingly negative addition to the new school year. However, although she believes small classes create a better overall learning experience, Pettigrew thinks that this is a change staff and students are going to need to get used to.

"I do think a smaller class is better for most students in terms of focus and engagement," Pettigrew said. "Sadly I don't think we will be returning to smaller class sizes anytime soon."

graphic by Amelia Coleman



PAXTON TIDRICK | staff writer

James Ockleberry is the security monitor at LASA and knows the halls of LASA like the back of his hand. His role on campus is to ensure that students are going about their proper activities and help people out if they are having trouble with anything in their life. Because of his caring attitude, he's a beloved person on campus by many students. Outside of school, he is involved with nonprofit organizations and devotes himself to encouraging and teaching young people.

LASA Liberator: Where did you go to school and what did you study? When did you start working at LASA?

Ockleberry: I went to ACC, and I studied child development. I had envisioned owning a daycare, so I took courses into that, and then I went into corporate America. I worked at State Farm for 25 years. I started at LASA six years ago.

LASA Liberator: Why did you choose to work here?

Ockleberry: I love working with young people. I also do a men's and boy's conference every year. It entails some of the things that we lack as men; understanding the transition from being a boy to a man, some [of us], we don't really [get] that. And so even when we [grow up], we lack the responsibility of leadership of getting simple things like insurance. We focus on mental health, and...things in that nature that we don't really take care of.

LASA Liberator: Are there any clubs or organizations you're involved with here at LASA?

Ockleberry: We used to feed the homeless, [we] adopted a shelter not too far from here, along with Mr. Snyder.

What we may do is pass judgment on people that are out on the streets that sometimes we look at as less[er]. But then to hear the story of why they're there, it's not just dependent on chemicals or alcohol, it's having a rough child life, or [being] mentally ill. And so to give back something as simple as a breakfast taco, or sandwich, or laundry detergent, it really makes a difference.

It really makes it easy because being in this environment where I would say 98% of the kiddos here are focused on academics. [They] can have a purpose and then not have a plan. Some of the people at LASA will wait until their junior year to decide a major. Sometimes you can declare a major and not go into it, so spend time thinking about your purpose while you're

here. What's in you that needs to get out? Because your gift is not for you, it's for someone else.

Once you create that oneness of where you want to go, then you plan. And nothing gets in your way. But if you just wake up and wing it every day, then you get off track... because a lot of times when you finish school, you have no job experience.

So this is my mission, I look at you guys as my kids. Because being a young person, parents don't always understand. You may struggle with something and share with your parents and they may ground you for it. But you can come and tell me the same thing and I'll look at it from a different lens and give you a [new] perspective.

LASA Liberator: So young people have a hard time really processing what their parents tell them. And your goal is you want to help people understand that.

Ockleberry: When people see me coming or if they approach me, I want them to feel comfortable... I want to give them a different lens on life. One of the things that I've learned is to maximize the moment. Sometimes we look so far in the future, we don't maximize the very moment that we're living [in].

The point I want to make is that when you are kind to somebody, you can teach people to love you by [the] steps that you take. So even if somebody is bullying you or they're being mean to you, kill them with kindness and eventually, eventually, you'll win them over. Because before they come in to the school, you don't know if they've been abused; you don't know if they had a rough morning; you don't even know if they have a terminal illness, and sometimes they'll take it out on you. And so by you being kind, you will be touched threefold; it'll come back to you, trust me, again threefold. So that's what I'd like to deposit in you.

Traveling Way Down with the Alley Cat Players

A Look Behind the Scenes of LASA's Hadestown Production

LILY ANTONY | staff writer

Starting in ancient Greece and traveling through time in many different adaptations, the story of Orpheus and Eurydice comes to LASA through "Hadestown: Teen Edition" for the Alley Cat Player's fall production. The Alley Cat Players are one of the first school production groups in Central Texas to perform the newly adapted teen version of Hadestown since the licensing for the teen edition was released.

Senior Piper Chen, president of the Alley Cat Players, is a part of the ensemble and is an understudy for one of the Fates in "Hadestown". She organizes official events the Alley Cat Players put on as well as unofficial events to gather the theater community outside of preparing for their shows.



UNDER THE LIGHTS Senior Natalie Choi performs "Livin' it Up on Top" with a smile. Choi's role in "Hadestown" was Persephone, the Greek goddess of grain and agriculture and the wife of Hades. photo by Sadie Russell

"Hadestown" is a musical about the mythological legend of Orpheus and Eurydice and how Eurydice goes to the underworld," Chen said. "Orpheus, who's a muse, sings songs, and he goes down into the underworld to get her back."

After their production of "Clue" in the 2023-2024 school year finished, the Alley Cat Players began work on "Hadestown" as it would be their first show of the school and one of the larger ones. Junior Audrey Murdock, who has previously played Fantine in Les Misérables, plays the leading role of Eurydice in the show.

"They announced what the musical was going to be at the theater banquet in March or May of last school year," Murdock said. "You could either audition on one of the last days of finals or send in a video audition over the summer."

The Alley Cat Players coordinate with many different departments that collaborate to put their productions together. According to junior Juliet Auby, the assistant stage manager, each department deals with a different and important aspect of the musical's performance.

"We have the costume crew, and they end up working the hardest," Auby said. "They deal with both the before scene of picking out costumes for everyone to wear, and then they also deal with the quick changes and changing into costumes the day of."

Auby explained that the crews all have their parts, and the management team helps join them together before and during the production. According to Auby, the job of the management team is to provide the entire team with a wide variety of support.

"I help out the actors try to figure out where they're supposed to be and to keep track of things," Auby said. "I just kind of hop from room to room being like, 'What do you guys need?'"

According to Chen, the build crew has been working hard since summer break for Hadestown, and hours have been put into putting set pieces together which resulted in a larger build crew than usual. One of the most major pieces is present in all Hadestown adaptations, and they have been working on it for months.

"We're building two turntables for Hadestown, which is a very impressive feat from a technical perspective," Auby said. "You have to make all these gears work in the line and all the casters. It's been about a two-month process to make these things work."

One special part of Hadestown is that many different groups,

like actors and build crew, are working together in different ways. For example, junior Morgan Flickinger, a trombone player in the orchestra, explained the music is being done jointly by the sound crew and the live orchestra.

"So far it's been pretty fun," Flickinger said. "It's kind of stressful though. The music is pretty tough. All of us are putting in the work."

"Hadestown" is unique as the orchestra plays on stage, so they're also an intricate and necessary part of the musical's setting and atmosphere. The ensemble also adds to the setting by filling up the space to feel more natural.

"I just have to learn all of the songs that the ensemble is a part of," Chen said. "So for all of the songs, I have to learn my specific part, which is the soprano part. And if I'm on the stage, then any choreography that we have to do."

Chen explained that the ensemble has worked hard and quickly to get all their various performances practiced and ready for opening night. To her, the production's fast timeline has been a large difference which has affected how they prepare.

"We are performing the show at the beginning of October, but usually the show is in February," Chen said. "So we've had to kind of accelerate rehearsal speed and time."

According to Murdock, the ensemble for Hadestown is a key part of bringing the musical together and understanding the different parts of it makes it a very powerful aspect. She explained how the leading actors have a similar rehearsal process of going through their songs and choreography.

"There's been a learning curve, but it's been really fun overall, and I feel so lucky that I've gotten to be a part of it," Murdock said. "We start with show circle and then warm-ups, and then we break off into different groups to rehearse whatever we're working on that day."

Even with the chaos and fast-paced production, all of the reviews from students who are a part of the production have been positive. According to Murdock, it is a very close and supportive community that all work together to put together amazing performances for the school.

"It's a cool environment," Murdock said, "and I'm really lucky to get to be part of it."

Hadestown was performed from October 3, 2024, through October 6, 2024, at 7:00 p.m. every night, with an additional understudy show at 2:00 p.m. on October 6, 2024.

Film Fest Hits the Alamo

ABBEY WU | staff writer

Since its beginning in 2005, the annual Fantastic Film Fest hosted by Alamo Drafthouse has become a haven for lovers of horror, indie, and genre films: providing a space where audiences can enjoy films that often escape mainstream attention. With a focus on experimental, niche, and international filmmaking, Fantastic Film Fest has continuously created a passionate community of film lovers and creators, promoting a space where creativity thrives and diverse cinematic experiences are celebrated.

For Heidi, a dedicated fan from Toronto, this year marks her fourth visit to the festival. Attracted by the festival's diverse lineup and vibrant community, she has found herself returning each year for a unique experience.

"It's the kind of film festival where you can see films that you wouldn't really normally see in, like, a normal like Cineplex or AMC," Heidi said.

Heidi emphasized that Fantastic Film Fest offers more than just horror as it spotlights unique and experimental films from various genres and filmmakers around the world. This variety and the opportunity to meet and connect with other fans she loves most is a major draw to the festival for Heidi.

"You can change your schedule as you go, based on what other people are talking about," Heidi said. "Talking to people in line about what they've seen helps me figure out what to watch next."

Mike Mayer, a film enthusiast from Brooklyn, New York, came to the festival for the first time this year on a friend's recommendation. During his first year in attendance, Mayer discovered new films that he was surprised that he thoroughly enjoyed.

"My friend Billy texted me in January and was like, 'Do you want to go to Fantastic Fest?'" Mayer said. "It's a bit of an expenditure. Hotels are kind of expensive, flights are kind of expensive, but I love the movies."

He particularly enjoyed the fact that the festival provides a space for films of all kinds, whether they're critically acclaimed masterpieces or films that cater to niche audiences. Each year, the diversity of films creates an exciting and interesting atmosphere around the festival.

"At heart, I love a bad movie. I love a good movie," Mayer said. "This is a great space for all sorts of things to exist."

Filmmaker Ben Hanson from Fargo, North Dakota, attended the festival this year to showcase a micro-budget comedy "AJ Goes to the Dog Park". Toby Jones, a writer of OK K.O! asked him to be the producer of the film, and Hanson found himself involved in the production despite never having produced a movie before.

"He asked me to be the producer on it, which is funny because we're very good friends," Hanson said. "He knows I'm a movie nerd, but I've never produced

anything. It's surreal, not knowing how to do something did not stop me from jumping in with enthusiasm."

Hanson believed that the festival's intimate atmosphere and high energy added to the appeal. He also mentioned that being surrounded by both fans and fellow filmmakers enhances the experience, making the festival that much more exciting.

"It is all right in one place," Hanson said. "And you can talk to and feed off the energy of everybody that's there."

For Austin native, Seth Haley, attending Fantastic Film Fest is more than just an annual event. It has become a tradition, loved by the whole family.

"This is my second year here," Haley said. "My dad and my brother have been for years and years and years."

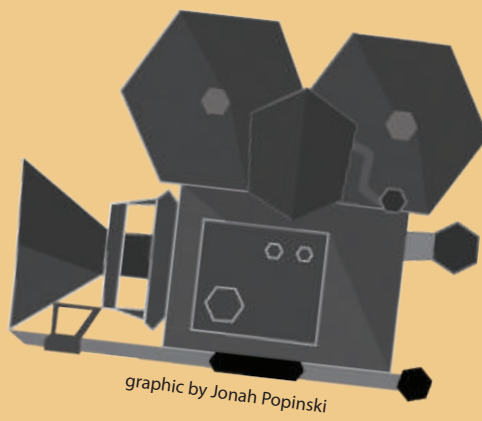
Haley attended nearly every screening he could fit into his schedule, with "Escape from the 21st Century" being a stand-out film he viewed at the festival. He praised the festival's diverse and extensive film lineup.

"I just like the diversity of movie programming," Haley said. "There's so many options."

The team behind the scenes works tirelessly to make sure the festival runs smoothly, especially for filmmakers attempting to showcase their work. Bex Feldbin, the Film Directors Services Director, has been working at the festival for six years now and finds her role incredibly rewarding.

"I help the filmmakers, schedule their hotels, and advise them on their flights and other things," Feldbin said. "That's just my favorite part, is just getting to support these filmmakers who have put a lot of time into a film and are finally getting to see it play somewhere and to an audience."

Fantastic Film Fest continues to grow in popularity, attracting both seasoned and emerging filmmakers who see it as a vital opportunity to showcase their work. Fantastic Film Fest's mix of varied genres and its inclusive, energetic vibe create an enjoyable cinematic experience for attendees, according to Heidi and Haley. Whether it's a micro-budget comedy, an avant-garde indie flick, or a thrilling horror film, Fantastic Film Fest continues to offer something for everyone, ensuring that it remains a staple of Austin's vibrant film scene.



graphic by Jonah Popinski

Heart, Art, and History

Blanton Displays Native Stories

ELLINGTON TOUGH | sports editor

Lining the halls of the Blanton Museum of Art is an exhibition showcasing art by Indigenous artists from the Americas that paints a picture of Native American history, allowing one to step into a world of Native American culture, emotion, and complexity.

Native America: In Translation has been traveling around the United States since 2022, and it will remain open in Austin until Jan. 5, 2025. The Aperture Foundation originally organized it with the help of curator Wendy Red Star after The Aperture Foundation partnered with Red Star to edit an issue of their magazine titled Native America.

The dozens of pieces in the collection were created over the past several decades. Nine different artists are represented, showcasing their past and present relationship to the representation of Native Americans through photography. Koyoltzintli, an interdisciplinary artist from Ecuador, has several of her photographs appear in the exhibition, which features Native American women in natural landscapes in New Mexico.

"I do photography, drawing, sculpture," Koyoltzintli said. "I'm a mainly analog photographer, using medium format and large format."

For her work featured at the exhibition, Koyoltzintli invited local women and let them choose where to go to be photographed based on what spoke to them. One of these photographs can be seen at the Blanton Museum as a black-and-white photo showing one woman posing within rock formations.

"The whole premise of the images is that I asked them, 'How do you think your oldest woman ancestor would be if they were here today? Would they run if they just wake up [there]?' Koyoltzintli said. "It's also related to how, when babies come out of the womb, they're seeing the world for the first time. And what they do is cry. But if you're an adult, and you come into the world, and you open your eyes and you're in New Mexico, how do you respond to that?"

Koyoltzintli recently became a mother herself, which allowed her to think of the world through the same lens as a newborn child. Newborns can only see blurry, black-and-white shapes, but at the same time, they are heavily influenced by this perception. She uses this as inspiration for her photos and models pictured in them.

"Children are just fascinating; how they take in information for the first time when they're born, how they see the world for the first time because their vision is blurry when they're born," Koyoltzintli said. "It's not like they can immediately recognize something. I was thinking about all of that in relation to our personhood, and when we go through experiences in life, that change, we get to see the world differently."

Tomas Gunz, a frequent visitor of the Blanton Museum and an avid art collector, came to see the new exhibition with his family. He was



SNAPSHOT IN TIME Pehin Hanska Ktepi is a piece of art by Alan Michelson, with a video of Native American soldiers being projected on a red blanket. The soldiers fought in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, which was part of the Great Sioux War of 1876. photo by Ellington Tough

struck by the distribution of art from both North and South America by being able to learn more about the cultures shown in the artwork.

"There are patterns which are common, the tradition, their culture, and the mixture with new technology," Gunz said. "But if the new technology isn't together with their land, where they would be completely out of mind and not fit into the new culture."

Gunz explained that the message of the exhibition is that you have to conserve, respect, and not forget the traditions of a culture, even if you don't belong to it. Gunz's personal collection consists exclusively of contemporary Venezuelan art, with a cutoff year of 1950.

"I have no piece, so far, which I have seen which I would have picked for my collection," Gunz said. "But that is also because this type of art doesn't fit in the subject I collect. You cannot have everything."

The many photographs in the exhibition were a large draw for the Blanton Museum curators, whose photography collection is less thorough than other collections within the museum. Katie Bruton is the public relations and media manager at the Blanton, where the exhibition has been attracting visitors since Aug. 4.

"Wendy was thinking about Indigenous in different ways," Bruton said. "So there are several artists who have tribal affiliations from the First Nations, and there are also artists that have indigenous heritage. So she's thinking about it broadly."

According to Bruton, Red Star chose artwork that reflected the broadness with which was thinking about both Indigenous representation and photography. Red Star included lens-based media, such as projections of video and light on different surfaces, and multimedia works that were first based on a photograph.

"I'm not gonna speak for Wendy Red Star, but we have a great quote from her where she says, 'I was thinking about young native artists and what would be inspirational and important for them as a roadmap,'" Bruton said. "I love group shows like this, where I can imagine most people aren't familiar with most, if any of the shows in the exhibition. So I hope they walk away excited to learn more about them."

The Long Center Builds a Community

MRIDHULA KUMARAVEL | staff writer

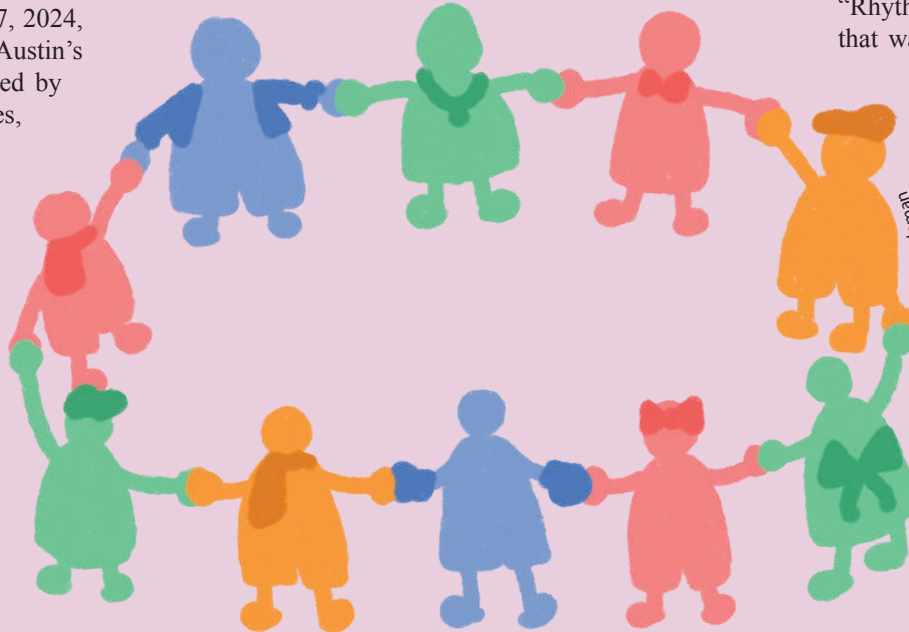
The Long Center for the Performing Arts hosted its Second Annual Teresa Lozano Long Community Day on Sept. 7, 2024, transforming the venue into a vibrant celebration of Austin's diverse arts and culture scene. This free event, presented by AT&T Inc., was organized to be a day filled with activities, performances, and community engagement to honor the legacy of the center's visionary co-founder, Teresa Lozano.

Bobby Garza, the chief program officer of the Long Center, organizes and executes the blueprint of the event. This ensures that each aspect is up to par, providing a backbone for Community Day's success. He stressed the importance of this day as an event that increases connection in Austin.

"This day is all about bringing our community together," Garza said. "This place is in such an amazing part of the town with incredible views and should be approachable and accessible to as many people as possible."

The day's lineup included live music performances, interactive art installations, and family-friendly activities, so children and adults alike enjoyed being exposed to many different genres of music and instruments. According to Dr. Matthew Hinsley, the executive director of Austin Classical Guitar, one highlight was Joseph Palmer's performance with Austin Guitar, where Palmer serves as an ambassador and inspiring figure for young audiences.

"Joseph Palmer is a fabulous guitar player, when he plays people light up," said Dr. Hinsley. "At Austin Classical



Guitar, we like to use music as much as an open door to invite people to engage with us. Coming to concerts is a wonderful way to do that, and we've been doing that for the Long Center since 2008 when it opened."

Vicki Parsons, director of the Butler Center for Dance, Fitness, and Pilates, emphasized the positive impact of dance on mental health within the Ballet Austin Community. Ballet Austin's "Rhythm on Stage" featured a lively Bollywood dance class that was celebrated for its energetic choreography and aerobic benefits, making it a highlight of Community Day.

"While Ballet Austin is a non-profit professional ballet company. The area I oversee is beyond ballet," Parsons said. "Using dance as a form of movement aligns with research that shows how dance positively impacts lives, affects health and wellbeing, and brings joy. [Our] mission is to involve and strengthen our community through the creation and experience of dance and the encouragement and health of our well-being."

According to Garza, Community Day demonstrates the Long Center's pivotal role in Austin because it expresses the center's commitment to fostering a vibrant and inclusive arts community in Austin. As Austin grows, the Long Center will strive to remain dedicated to providing a space where creativity flourishes and community bonds strengthen, according to Hinsley.

"I think us just getting a chance to be in this space with as many people as possible for as long as possible is a good thing for us," Garza said. "I think that at the end of the day, we want people to leave feeling like they've been a part of an experience that is wholly Austin."

Marching to the Tune of LASA's Teachers

HARRISON CHAMBERS | staff writer

While many teachers head off to grade papers after the school day is over, some rush off to band practice, production meetings, or even concerts because their love for music extends past the walls of their classrooms. Luis Ramirez, Corey Snyder, and Deric Lewis are all passionate teachers at LASA, but despite their busy schedules, the music never stops. Even though they each love music for different reasons, for all of them, it is a deep passion they live for.

Ramirez, a Spanish teacher at LASA, has been in the music scene since 2010. He began his career in a band called Son De Rey, which toured across Texas and earned nominations for the Austin Music Award. Ramirez continued to find his voice through his solo project, and in April of 2024, he released his first solo album, "Entre Luces". The music videos created for the album also won multiple awards at the Texas Road Film Festival and the Latin Film Market Festival in New York.

"I like creating music because it's a way to express myself and make sense of life," Ramirez said. "Music helps me understand personal experiences, just like therapy might for some people."

Ramirez's passion for his music is also tied to his heritage. This is seen through the presence of his traditional Latin music with unconventional messages that reflect his Mexican-American childhood. He hopes audiences see the two cultures in his music. Ramirez also uses LGBTQ+ messages and stories in his work, which are emphasized in his large solo pride show performance at the Moody Amphitheater.

"There are a lot of LGBTQ+ messages in my music and

sometimes you are dancing to the song, and then you are like, "Wait, what?" because of the hidden stories and messages," Ramirez said. "I'm hoping people will come to appreciate them and listen to my music."

Snyder, an English teacher at LASA, teaches songwriting and hosts the LASA Coffeehouse music festival to give his students a place to explore and express their creativity. He enjoys the freedom that Coffeehouse creates for students to express themselves through music.

"If we can just provide them with a stage, it is always surprising to see what some of them come up with," Snyder said. "One of my favorite performances is from one slightly shy student named Ewan McInerney, who stepped up to shred a metal guitar, which was completely unexpected and left everyone in awe."

For Snyder, it's not only about the performance but the entire creative process. He likes to see students go through the process of forming a band, writing a song, and completing the course by playing in front of their friends and peers.

"They begin to understand that the whole process, where they create and perform their music, is not that hard, and they can do it," Snyder said. "If that catches on, they can do that for the rest of their lives."

Lewis, LASA's piano teacher, has a love for performing due to growing up in an entirely musical household where playing instruments was second nature. Because of this, Lewis developed his love for piano early in life, following in the footsteps of his grandfather, who directed his high school band. Lewis went to Huston-Tillotson University, an experience he says is one of his best, not only for his classical piano education but also for learning about life.

"I was not just a student at my college. I was a superstar. Everyone knew me, and I was able to play on stages that I would have never been on," Lewis said. "I got all these amazing things like being an ambassador for HBCU [Historically Black College or University] and BCF [Black College Fund]. I was also awarded the Michael Jackson scholarship. I would have never achieved all these things if I had gone anywhere else."

Their love for creating and performing music outside the classroom is what got Ramirez, Snyder, and Lewis to where they are today. Whether onstage, in the studio, or directing choirs, they have stayed very committed to their alleys of music.



BELTING TO THE BEAT Deric Lewis sings during a performance of "Deric Lewis and the Church Choir LIVE". Lewis is the LASA piano teacher, and he has a love for music. photo courtesy of Deric Lewis

THE HISTORIC PARAMOUNT THEATRE THIS PLACE MATTERS

TINGYU CAO | staff writer

Located on 713 Congress Avenue, the Paramount Theater building has been a landmark in Austin, Texas for over a century. The Paramount Theater has movie festivals that run from Memorial Day to Labor Day, playing classics like "Top Hat", "Casablanca", and "Strangers on a Train" with the occasional live plays. Nowadays, the Paramount Theater may be viewed as a staple of Austin. However, at one point, the theater was on the brink of collapse. During the 1970s people increasingly started to purchase televisions and move to the suburbs. Despite their struggle, The Paramount Theater was able to pull through the difficult times with classical movies and their place in the Austin community.

1915 opening night 10/11/1915 25 cents per seat 1000 seats sold Called the Majestic Theatre	1916 • Houdini performed at the theatre.	1920s • Silent films start to be sold at the theatre.	1930s • Performance sales starts to decline. • New ownership leading to remodeling of theatre. • Renamed to Paramount.	1940s • Made the favorite Austin premiere movie house by the Fabulous Texan. • Movies shown at the theatre like Citizen Kane, Casablanca, and It's a Wonderful Life.	1950s • Paramount Theater still had to remodel and devote itself completely to film. • Audiences left for the suburbs and bought TVs.	1960s • Struggling to stay afloat. • Paramount blade sign was taken for repair and never seen again.	1970s • Paramount slated to become a Holiday Inn. • Summer Classic Film Series created to save the theatre. • Federal Funds given to theatre.	1980s • Live Performances come back in 1976. • Theatre became popular again, with multiple shows including well known people taking place throughout the years.	1990-2000s • Theatre merged with the neighboring State Theatre. • New sign put up that hasn't been seen since the 60s
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The Man Behind the Camera

ASHER ZVI-NOVA | staff writer

With 15 Grammys and a permanent place in the Hall of Fame, Willie Nelson is regaled by many as one of the most iconic country singers, but his latest chart-topper is unique for one major reason: the music video had LASA alumni, Jacob Voss, working as the first assistant cameraman.

The song, "Cowboys are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other", featuring Orville Peck, was released on April 5. Since graduation in 2015, Jacob Voss has gained experience through various jobs while getting a degree at UT. Voss also used his role in the video to increase his experience in the workforce.

Initially, Voss explored his interest in film during middle school where practiced different lighting and editing techniques on his Sony camera. In his time at LASA, Voss became increasingly involved in the film department by taking Intro and Advanced Audio Video Production (AVP), where he got to explore different film techniques and media taught by Vanessa Mokry, the AVP teacher at LASA.

"Ms. Mokry was a huge influence," Voss said. "She not only gave us the freedom to explore the art form, but she also encouraged and guided us to new pieces of media that would inspire us. The most important takeaway from LASA was the importance of hard work [and to] find your strengths and lean into them."

Mokry has been teaching AVP at LASA for the last 18 years, and throughout this time, she has helped students process the world through movie-making. She teaches students how to operate cameras, set up lighting, and use editing software so her students can tell a story that means something to them.

"Film school is a choice, and it's not a necessity," Mokry said. "Some schools could benefit you if you can get into those schools. ... They will help you make friends in your cohort. [Film students] may be able to access more resources and have more people to work with that also want to work in film."

After high school Voss mostly applied to engineering schools; however, he also wanted to apply to film school. His passion drove him to apply to the University of Texas at Austin's (UT) highly-ranked film program.

"I took a leap of faith," Voss said. "I decided if I didn't pursue filmmaking then, I never would. I had some very lucky connections at UT, who graciously advised me and helped me get into the film program."

Voss explained that his college experience and the people he met during college influenced him and his filmmaking career. Building on the foundation built during his college years, Voss emphasized how important his professors and networking opportunities were in changing his professional journey.

"Once I graduated and made it into UT the grind began," Voss said. "My professors were massive in my growth - truly, I recommend making friends with or at least being friendly with your professors in college. I joined a professional

fraternity in college for filmmaking ... which helped me grow professionally with mock interviews, presentations, and many friends."

Both Mokry and Voss explained that knowing people is necessary for success in the film industry and establishing a good reputation can make it much easier to get jobs. According to Voss, getting connections is vital to grow as a filmmaker.

"It's all about networking. It's definitely about proving yourself and being reliable," Mokry said. "Prove that you're a hard worker, and if you get your door, [put] your foot in the door."

Voss emphasized that to build your reputation and get rewarding jobs, there are some expectations that you should have for yourself. For Voss, acting with respect is as important as being confident and knowing what you're talking about.

"The film industry is funny [getting jobs] is mostly by word of mouth. If you have a decent reputation you'll end up in cool places," Voss said. "While building your reputation, be kind and be confident in yourself."

Before the music video, he worked on a short film with Ivy Chui, a Texas-raised Director of Photography (DP). While the job was low-paying, he wanted to be able to learn from Chui. Who he described as insanely talented.

"Next thing I knew a production manager was calling me and asking if I was available for a music video that Ivy would be DPing," Voss said. "I was just excited to work more with them, but once I found out who the artist was, I was even more excited about it."

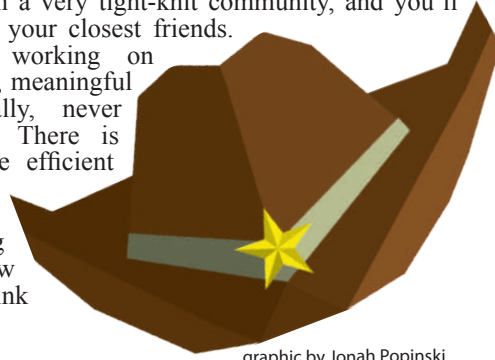
Voss was responsible for being the first camera assistant for the music video. The first camera assistant works under the director of photography and is in charge of setting up the camera and making sure it works.

"The first assistant camera's main job is to keep the film in focus," Mokry said. "They usually do it remotely and they're watching it, and they're adjusting focus as the camera moves or as the actor moves. They are also in charge of the rest of the camera department, managing people, and making sure they're doing their job."

Voss plans to DP for more passion projects in the future. He also thinks that most people can find the same success.

"Learning quickly and listening will get you far," Voss said. "Also, don't be an asshole. You get to meet so many people and join a very tight-knit community, and you'll make some of your closest friends."

Plus, you're working on some beautiful, meaningful projects. Finally, never stop learning. There is always a more efficient way to do something. Keep learning no matter how much you think you know."



graphic by Jonah Popinski

Moody

from page 1

Throughout the past 20 years, Austin has seen an influx of residents and visitors with a growth of more than 1 million residents since 2000, according to USA Today Network. In 2022, one of Austin's most well-known arenas used to host artists was created, and it was dubbed the Moody Center. The influx of visitors supports local businesses, hotels, restaurants, and retail stores, opening doors for increased revenue for these businesses.

The Moody Center is a multi-million dollar complex designed specifically for concerts. However, other events such as basketball games and comedy shows also take place at the center throughout the year.

Ronnie Hughes, senior account executive at the Moody Center, reflected on Austin's local music scene before the venue and the level of its impact on the success and popularity of Austin. He recalled ways that the Moody Center has positively impacted the city of Austin, such as being able to connect and discover new artists and grow the music scene in Austin.

"I remember us missing out on all the big artists and big shows that were coming and going around," Hughes said. "I did take note of that. It did seem like it was a lot, so Austin must be the live music capital for small artists."

Hughes explained the significance the Moody Center has had in allowing larger shows to happen in the local music landscape. The arrival of the over 15,000-seat venue has allowed Austin to host high-profile artists and further solidify its reputation.

"I think it allows [the artists] to come into a great city that they didn't have a venue to come to before," Hughes said. "Not only does Austin deserve to be bringing these artists in, but I think the artists do want to come to Austin and see what it's about and to enjoy it."

Deric Lewis, the choir teacher at LASA and former Moody Center performer, goes into more detail about what artists are coming into Austin to do. According to Lewis, the effect of the Moody Center and mainstream artists on Austin has led to growth of the music scene.

"The Moody Center is pretty cool in that it has brought mainstream artists," Lewis said. "It's not a mom-and-pop kind of thing. People are sending their music to Austin to be mixed and mastered by people here. That's just Austin's music business overall. Austin is home to a lot of musicians."

Amye Bueno, senior event manager at the Moody Center, describes a shift in venue dynamics that allows smaller venues to gain popularity due to the Moody Center. Causing what she believes is smaller venues having the upper hand to larger venues like the Moody Center.

"Smaller local shows are more cost-effective," Bueno said. "They cost people less money to attend than a large show at the Moody Center. These bigger venues are doing a lot to get large shows in Austin, especially with our market. It's pretty competitive, but I think smaller venues in Austin are learning how to embrace it and find advantages to having large shows here."

According to Bueno, attendees are more likely to save their money to purchase one major, Moody Center concert ticket rather than distributing it amongst multiple smaller venues. This competition has prompted smaller venues to capitalize on trends, such as hosting themed nights or cover bands that resonate with nostalgic audiences.

"When your favorite band goes on tour and announces they're going to your city, many people prefer to save for one show rather than going to several smaller shows," Bueno said. "I think that's where the competition comes in; deciding how they want to use their money and time."

Hughes explained the perspective of collaboration rather than competition, and she believed the idea that the Moody Center doesn't particularly compete with smaller venues. Instead, it attracts attention to the city as a whole.

"While people might be coming from out of town to watch a big artist, they may fulfill their other time by going to some of these smaller venues," Hughes said.



ALL LINED UP Concert attendees wait in line outside of the Moody Center. The Moody Center is a multi-purpose arena located on the University of Texas campus. Photos by Apollo Dahmus.



Editor's Picks

Best Halloween Costumes

Ursula

MARGOT MORGAN | entertainment editor

Back in 2019, 10-year-old me was struggling to find the perfect Halloween costume for my 5th-grade Halloween party. I had no idea what I wanted to be for Halloween. My mom and sister came with me to Party City to find the best costume that fit my personality perfectly. We walked down the endless aisles of Party City, and my sister found her costume almost immediately, while I was still not sure what I wanted to be. Finally, we got to the back aisle in Party City and I found it, a costume of Ursula from The Little Mermaid. I frantically grabbed the purple sparkly skirt that had tentacles popping out of the sides of it, but then I realized that it was in adult sizes only. I ran around the store trying to find a kid's version of the costume, but the only one in the store was my adult costume. I grabbed the adult small costume (they didn't even have an adult extra small!) for me and when we got home. I crossed my fingers and hoped that the costume would fit, and when I finally put the costume on, I was shocked to discover that the costume fit perfectly! I was so proud of myself for finding the beautiful purple skirt and the seashell necklace that I jumped for joy. We bought a black sparkly shirt and a black pair of leggings to complete the ensemble. When I went to my class's Halloween party on Halloween Day, I twirled around my tentacles and cast spells with my magic necklace to my friends in class. And when we went trick or treating that night, I was so proud to be the evil villain from The Little Mermaid causing chaos in my neighborhood.



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

Inflatable Costumes

GEORGIA FINK | entertainment editor

Throughout the years, one costume has become more and more popular - especially among younger kids and lazier people. These are the inflatable Halloween costumes that tower over others as the people wearing them walk around the streets going Trick-Or-Treating. From inflatable dinosaurs to among us characters, these costumes are always really funny to stumble across. Seeing people waddling around and not being able to see because the peep hole in the front of the costumes are so small. I love how they can take the form of virtually anything. A few more of my favorite blow up Halloween costumes include the alien abducting people and shark. Years ago, my brother dressed up as one of the person being abducted by an alien inflatable costume and it was really funny to see him walk around the house with an alien flopping behind him. Another reason why these costumes are so great is because they are consistently used for funny pranks, like people running through streets like they are being abducted or YouTubers invading places with multiple people dressed up as things like dinosaurs. Although they can be slightly annoying to the people around them, it is very funny to see how the prank plays out.

Car Dealership Tube Man Costume

SADIE SARRAT | commentary editor

Superheroes, princesses, pirates, and the quintessential fall pumpkins are Halloween costume classics. However, there is one ensemble that will always outshine the rest. That, my friends, is the giant inflatable wiggler costume (yes, like the ones at the car dealerships). It all started when I was in the 5th grade with my mom, strolling the excessively long aisles of the Halloween costume holy grail: Party City. After looking at over 20 different options, I was starting to lose hope. Suddenly, an electric blue tube caught my eye. Ferociously digging past layer upon layer of creepy clown masks and itchy princess wigs, I finally found what I was looking for: something so over-the-top (literally, the costume inflated to almost twice my height) and so outstanding that it made everyone stop and think wow. "This is it!" I shout, parading around the corner with the shiny package. I couldn't wait for Halloween. A couple of weeks had passed, and it was finally time to debut my costume. I took it out of the wrapping, put in 4 fresh double-A batteries, watched myself transform into the giant blue tube with long arms and a big cartoon smile, and hit the cul-de-sac. With the fresh breeze from the tiny fan keeping my spirit and costume alive, I wobbled and waved to everyone I saw. This must be what the legends felt like, I remember thinking after a little trick-or-treater asked to take a picture with me. I will never forget that Halloween or that extraordinary costume.

Hamburger

ETHAN STERN | news editor

What is one thing every human needs to survive: hamburgers. Whether veggie, turkey, chicken, vegan, good 'ol beef, or whatever tastes good to you, hamburgers are the epitome of classic American food. When 3rd grade Ethan strolled the hallowed halls of Target for Halloween costumes one October, only one thing jumped out: a hamburger costume. The costume was very big at first, but nothing a few bobby pins could not fix. With two overall felt sleeves, the costume could fit me for years to come. The hamburger consisted of a puffed-out bun in the front, a lettuce ruffle below with a red bright tomato underneath contrasted by a pale, pink onion and ruffled pickle underneath. Then, of course, the cheese and meat below. While walking around my neighborhood, I felt like a symbol connecting everyone. I can walk up to a house and they will ask me what company I am (P. Terry's of course), maybe make a few jokes, flash a few smiles, get my candy, and keep walking. For many years I have worn this costume with pride, a treasure I found hidden amongst the back of the shelves behind the popular fad costumes thrown askew from all the people grabbing them to try them on. This sad, overlooked costume was a beacon of brightness on dark, Halloween nights. When wearing the costume, I feel like a representation of the excellence hamburgers have. Most people do not know this, but hamburgers are estimated to have been popularized in the late 1800s by Charlie Nagreen. Little did that man know that he would inspire generations to come. Halloween costumes come and go just as a burger flips up and down on a grill, but hamburgers will always be a constant presence in life.



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

THE RAPTOR RUNDOWN

TESSA WHITNEY | staff writer

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

Admittedly, I had no idea what water polo was before practicing with LASA's water polo team. The words stitched together created an image of flailing arms and chlorine-soaked eyes, an image I think still holds partly true. However, as soon as I got into the water I was greeted with smiles, splashes, and a prompt introduction to the team's fondness of "dunking"—a playful tradition where one player sneaks up behind another and plunges them into the water.

Practice kicked off with lap swimming, and I thrashed my arms through about six lengths of the pool before I quickly realized just how much stamina swimming requires. Out of breath and honestly out of shape, I took to interviewing the girls who had already finished their sets about their experience with water polo, something that was definitely for the sake of the article and not just an excuse to rest. I found that the team ranges from complete beginners, to swimmers wanting to try something with a little more strategy, to people who have been playing for years.

The next workout we treaded water, alternating between no hands in the water and no elbows. My summer lifeguard training gave me enough conditioning to hold my own as I swirled my legs in opposite directions in a movement called "egg beating", but as the minutes began ticking by and tightness crept up my calves, I looked around to see if anyone else felt like they were about to drown. Thankfully, an upperclassman handed me a ball to float on, and I took the time to learn about the rules of the sport.

Essentially, water polo is played in two teams of seven, with six field players and one goalie. The positions are similar to soccer, and the objective is to score by getting the ball into the opposing team's goal by using any part of your body to pass, catch, or shoot. You have to tread water the entire time, and you cannot hold the ball for longer than three seconds.

Passing drills followed, and the coach, Sophie Pressler,

showed how to extend a single hand to catch the ball in the center of your palm with your thumb and pinkie, then throw by flicking your wrist. I was doing this with two other freshmen, whose passes landed either close or into the hands of another. Mine hit the head of one of the boys practicing on the other side of the pool, resulting in echoing giggles through the whole natatorium, but by the end we created a steady flow between the three of us. I felt a sense of progress, which quickly dissipated when the next exercise required us to actually get it into the goal.

Everyone swam into two lines and threw a quick pass at the person adjacent to you before receiving the ball again and trying to score, except for goalie Amelia McRogers who readied herself to launch out of the water and catch any balls coming her way. While my shots did not come her way at first, after some coaching, I managed to stop using both hands to clutch the ball and gained some power behind my throw.

With thirty minutes left of practice, the sound of a whistle rang out and all the girls quickly huddled at the corner of the pool. The captains drew on a whiteboard and explained the mechanics of a setup they were about to replicate, all of which went over my head, but it seemed to be very clear to the rest of the team as they confidently positioned themselves and began flinging the ball at each other. I did not have the expertise to participate, but I watched in awe of the coordination and sportsmanship.

We cooled down with another passing drill; two girls threw the ball between the lanes while another two acted as blockers. I lagged sorely behind my passer but was praised for my swimming speed regardless.

What stood out to me the most in the practice was the absolute positivity that seemed to drench the Westlake Aquatic center. For a sport as physically demanding as water polo, it was refreshing to see the focus shift from rivalry to support. The atmosphere is energizing, something that is needed considering the practice goes from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., and I found myself not even noticing the time going by. Without any water sport experience, I still managed to feel accommodated by both my friends and girls that I would never have talked to before that night.



CATCH! Whitney prepares to receive a pass the ball in a passing drill. Because the ball is in the air and not the water, this is called a dry pass. photo by Ellington Tough



JUST KEEP SWIMMING Whitney and members of LASA water polo swim from one end of the pool to the other. The drill is the opening exercise for water polo practice and trains swimming stamina. photo by Ellington Tough

Infographic: Team USA Olympians Bring Home Gold

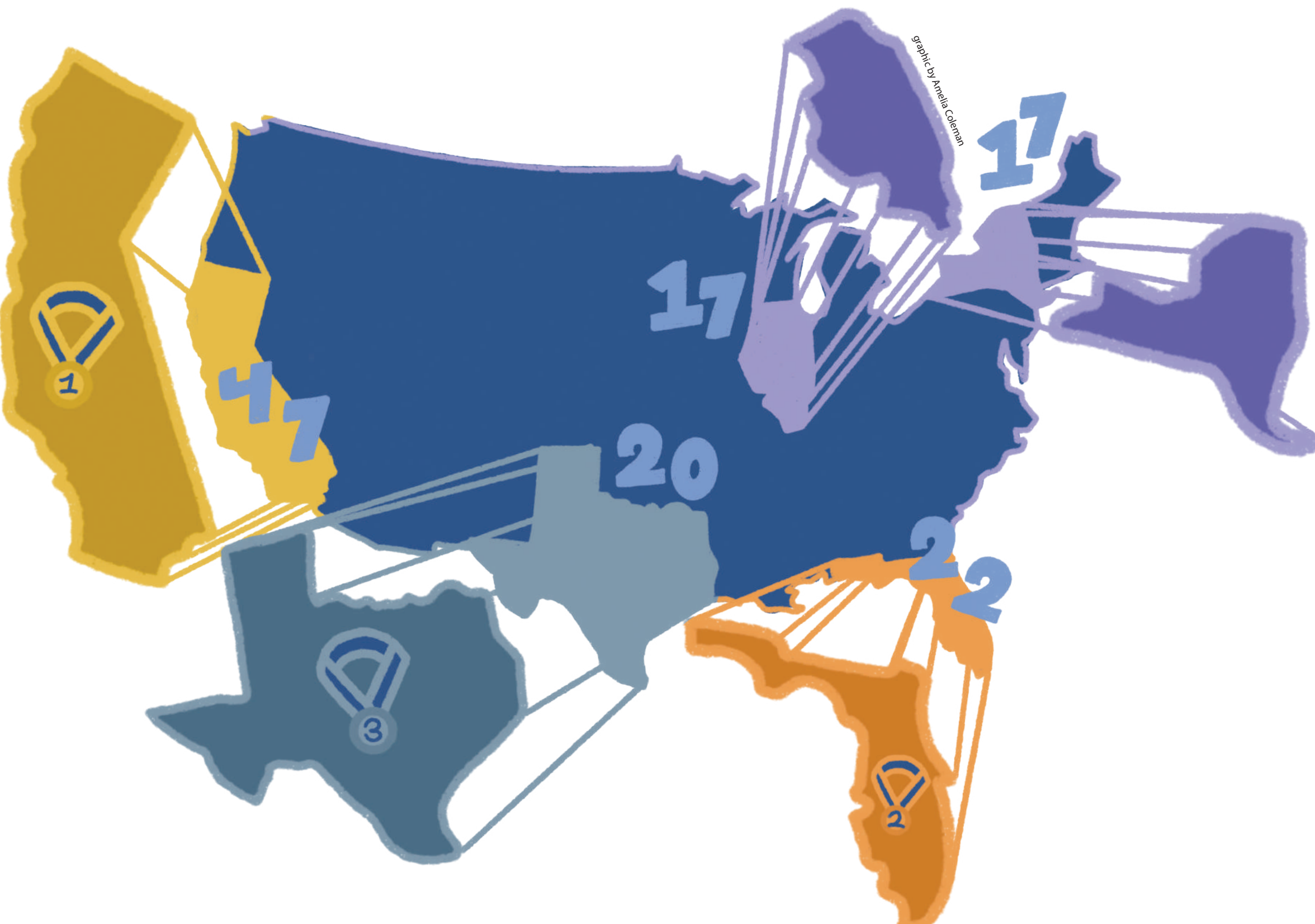
Ranking Which States Earned Most Medals for USA at 2024 Paris Olympics

VICTOR MARTINEZ | copy editor

These past 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, Team USA topped the Olympic medal rankings for the fourth Olympic Games in a row. While tying with second place Team China for most gold medals at 40 each and the nations being in tense deadlock with each other throughout the course of the summer, the American athletes' additional totals of 44 silver and 42 bronze medals put them at 126 medals won overall, 35 more than China's combined total of 91.

While the athletes competed on behalf of their entire nation, three states stand above the rest in their sheer representation on Team USA. Of the 50 states, only three—California, Florida, and Texas—boasted at least 20 Olympic medals and 10 Olympic medal winners each, with Illinois and New York tying for fourth for the most Olympic medals at 17 each and sending totals of eight and seven medal-winning athletes respectively.

With Florida's Noah Lyles and Texas' Sha'Carri Richardson being among the stars hailing from these five states, the success of these athletes reflects a broader commitment to achieving world-class glory across the country. As the games concluded, the spirit of competition and patriotism among the states showcased the very best of American sportsmanship, leaving a lasting legacy and becoming inspiration for the American Olympians to come.



LASA Drill, Cheer Clear up Confusion

LILY ANTONY | staff writer

Cheer and drill teams have become a big part of Texas football culture through their role as the highlights of football games who heighten spirits and engagement. However, cheer and drill are often confused with one another, as their defining features can be unclear to those outside the teams.

Olga Alvarado has been LASA's cheer coach since LASA and LBJ athletics split in 2021. Alvarado explained that she became the head coach because of her passion for performance and love for teamwork that coincides with cheer.

"Cheer is a sport that combines dance and gymnastics with the primary goal of supporting and encouraging sports teams, as well as entertaining crowds at games and events," Alvarado said. "Cheerleaders perform routines that include cheers, chants, stunts, jumps, and tumbling."

Paige Edwards-Gomez, the director of the LASA drill team, has been dancing since she was five years old. She believes being on the drill team in high school allowed her love of drill and dance to stay with her and make her want to continue teaching others the same skills.

"Drill is a form of dance and mostly an entertainment style of dance," Edwards-Gomez said. "We do a lot of the traditional drill team style of dance, which is precision style dancing."

Precision style dancing focuses on all members of the team being perfectly in sync as they perform simple moves as the whole group moves together. According to senior Delphia Vo, captain of the cheer team, this difference separates them from cheer at pep rallies.

"For games the cheer team's obviously on the sidelines and we're cheering on the teams, and we don't usually get halftime performance time," Vo said. "And then for pep rallies, the cheer team plans the whole entire pep rally."

When preparing for pep rallies, Vo puts together the script and gives different teams time slots in which to present. The drill team is one of these groups.

"Dance originally started during halftime for games in Texas," Edwards-Gomez said. "It originated to help the football games because they wanted people to stay past halftime."

Junior Janethza Ortega, a member of the LASA Velocity drill team, believes the biggest difference lies in the fact they do two completely different movements and produce vastly different results. According to Ortega, cheer focuses more on flashy jumps and tricks, while drill is more focused on dance.

"It's two different things, and it's sort of frustrating when people say that cheer and drill team is the same thing because it's not," Ortega said. "[Cheer] has flyers and their stunts and their tumbling, and that's what they focus on, and we focus more on the basics of dance."

According to Ortega, cheer teams are meant to intentionally encourage the crowd at rallies and games by bringing up spirits to support teams while drill teams are meant to keep the crowd entertained during halftime when the game can't provide entertainment. Cheer has a similar element of being there for the games and supporting the team through their entertainment; however, according to Vo, cheer's role is to focus on the student section.

"The games are so much fun because the student section's cheering on the football team," Vo said. "They're also doing the student section cheers."

According to Vo, while drill and cheer share similarities, drill is characterized by a more fluid style. It allows for greater freedom, especially when it comes to incorporating more jumps and dynamic movements.

"My definition of drill would be that it's more of fluid dance things," Vo said. "They do a lot more leaps and pirouettes."

Throughout the school year, LASA drill engages in a diverse selection of types of dance, including hip-hop, jazz, contemporary, and novelty. Auditions take place after spring break, and selected members then prepare themselves for the fall football season at summer practices.

Edwards-Gomez emphasized that the traditions surrounding drill is what make

it special for the dancers. Additionally, the support from the students and the fans of LASA football enhances this experience, creating a unique environment for participants.

"I think there's something really special about Friday night games, that adrenaline you get right before that very first performance where you have your teammates surrounding you," Edwards-Gomez said. "We all do this tradition where we lift our foot up... all around the circle one at a time. I think that's really special to get ready for the performance."

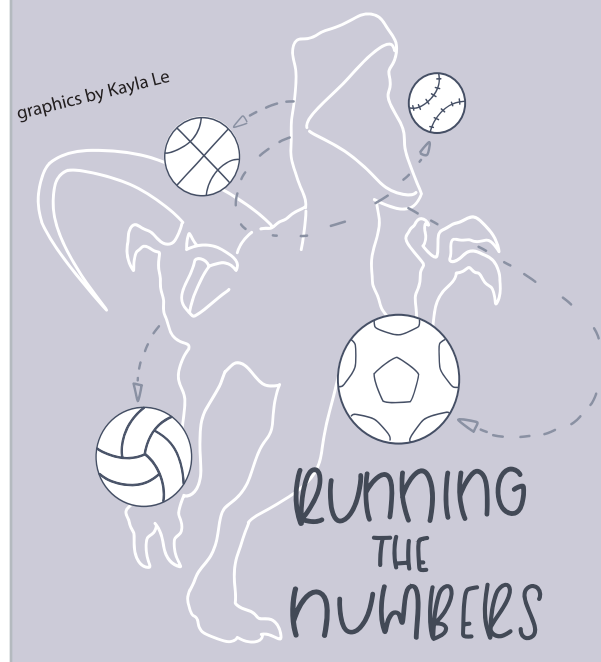
The LASA cheer and drill teams perform at football games throughout the season and at their competitions. There will also be a spring show on May 3, 2025, a presentation of their dances from throughout the year.



graphic by Amelia Coleman



graphic by Amelia Coleman



graphics by Kayla Le

RUNNING THE NUMBERS

LASA'S WINS AND LOSSES



home	visitor
2	3
football	



home	visitor
14	14
volleyball	



home	visitor
16	0
boys Waterpole	

Ride for a Cause

from page 1

MEGAN GEROLD | editor in chief

The Rosedale Ride is a charitable bike ride that directly supports the Rosedale School, a school in West Austin for children with special needs. For the past two years, Stacy Mann has been a rider for the MS 150, a two-day 150 mile ride where people start from multiple locations.

"When you see the people living with MS at the start or finish lines, or even riding with people who live with MS is motivation to fundraise," Mann said. "There are many opportunities to hear people's stories and how the research has led to the development of new medications which help manage symptoms and allow people to live their lives. Listening to people living with MS and how the development of treatment continues to grow with the funds raised through events like these is motivation to continue fundraising."

Lee Gresham, owner of East Side Pedal Pushers, a bike shop in East Austin, views charitable bike races as a contrast to how many cycling communities tend to not be as accepting. According to Gresham, charitable bike races are more inviting because they want as many people to join as possible, and more so in Austin communities because they accept new cyclists more than in other cities.

"I grew up in Dallas, and I feel like its road races tend to be a little bit, how do I put this, a little bit snobbish," Gresham said. "But overall, in Austin, I would say it's

pretty open. People tend to want to offer helpful advice to newbies, to new cyclists, and not be too unfriendly."

This acceptance and the atmosphere of Austin creates a unique opportunity for bike races to be able to raise money for their cause. The Rosedale School stands alone in Austin as the only school that supports students with significant disabilities that require caretakers, and the Dell Children's Comprehensive Care Clinic makes the school the only one to include a clinic in the country. According to Henry, the community that comes out to support The Rosedale Ride is what makes the atmosphere so lively and supportive, and the money they raise is what truly propels the school and the community forward.

"You can't raise money without community," said Henry, "and you can't have community without spending some money. It works because it's charitable. People want to give that money. They are invested in the mission, and they see the benefits of what that money is doing for these families. It's a win for everybody at the end of it."

According to Tribeza, Austin's continuous promotion of health and wellness is a defining characteristic. Austin continues to grow at a rate of 2.1%, as reported by The United States Census Bureau, and this characteristic continues to evolve as the city grows.

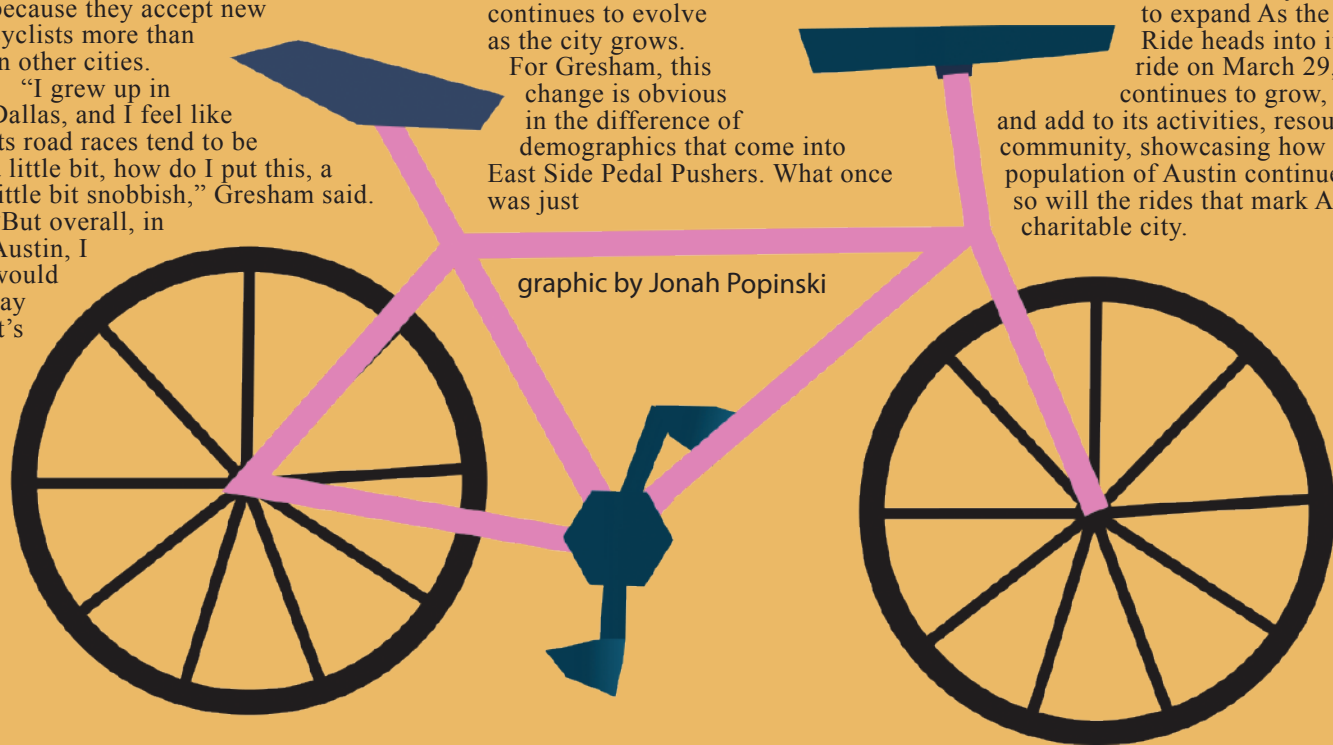
For Gresham, this change is obvious in the difference of demographics that come into East Side Pedal Pushers. What once was just

commuters has turned into a variety of people looking for a recreational hobby.

Austin is filled with many different programs based around cycling that all support a variety of causes such as the Hill Country Ride for AIDS, Tour De Bourne, and the Yellow Bike Project which all represent both the accessibility of cycling in Austin and the vast impact that cycling has in Austin. The Texas 4000 is one of these charitable bike rides, and in a statement, they described this impact as reaching beyond just the limits of Austin.

"The ride not only impacts people in Austin but also touches communities along the entire route. As the riders travel through diverse landscapes, they foster unique interactions with communities, cancer advocates, hospitals, and research institutions," Texas 4000 said. "Fundraising is a key component, with each rider raising a minimum of \$5,000 to support cancer research and patient support services. The journey culminates in Anchorage, where riders reflect on their experiences and celebrate their collective achievement."

Charitable bike races go above and beyond regular fundraisers, according to Henry, as the biggest factor in their success is the community that comes with it, and this community allows them to expand. As the Rosedale Ride heads into its 31st ride on March 29, 2025, it continues to grow, change, and add to its activities, resources, and community, showcasing how as the population of Austin continues to grow so will the rides that mark Austin as a charitable city.



graphic by Jonah Popinski

New LASA Basketball Coach on the Raptor Block

MILES ANDREW | staff writer

LASA boys basketball's new varsity coach John Nelson has his eyes set on making a successful playoff run for LASA's team, with the help of new coaching and a team with more than 10 seniors. Nelson plans to create a culture and environment built to enhance team performance. Curtis Galvin, the returning JV coach, and freshman coach Breonn Watson will be accompanying him. Last year the team went 11-3 in the district, but they lost in the first round of playoffs.

Nelson is the former Navarro girls' varsity basketball coach and is replacing the former coach Joseph Pendell. After playing football at Westlake High School, Nelson played basketball at Warren Wilson College. Despite originally going to Navarro only to teach, he realized from his love for playing that he wanted to be a coach and help players grow.

"The biggest thing in terms of values and traits that I emphasize with all my players is having a continual growth mindset," Nelson said. "And I think oftentimes players, they get pretty good and then they can be pretty fixed in what they think they're capable of doing in their sport. Keeping an open framework and an open idea of their skill set is really important to me."

According to Nelson, even while coaching at other schools, it was evident to him that LASA basketball's sportsmanship and maturity was beyond any other school he knew. He believes that these qualities are fundamental to the program's success and foster a positive environment for both players and coaches alike.

"I've been coaching against LASA for the last five years and it just always stuck out to me," Nelson said. "A lot of



WATCH AND LEARN Coach Nelson mentors boys basketball during a practice match. Nelson hopes to inspire his players and continue building up a sense of unity in the team. photo by Ellington Tough

the players seem to have the social and emotional skills and prerequisites required to be engaged team members."

Galvin highlighted team mindset and maturity as important parts of this team. According to him, the team's unity and selflessness both on and off the court has been a key driver to

their success.

"Everybody's still friends off the court and leaves it on the court, and [they are] pretty unselfish overall," Galvin said. "I don't see a lot of negativity."

Galvin also emphasized that another important aspect of LASA basketball is teamwork and being able to work together as one unit. He explained that effective communication on and off the court is crucial for building trust and enhancing player performance.

"Basketball is a cool sport where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts," Galvin said. "So if guys are playing together and playing with chemistry, they're capable of a lot more than five different guy's stats on a piece of paper."

Senior Vince Williams, who has been a varsity player for four years, values inspiring younger players who are yet to move up the ranks. Williams likes to lead by example through his hard work and dedication.

"You're not going to get better without hard work," Williams said. "It starts with the work you put in during the offseason and in practice."

For a team that has only existed for five years, Williams sees this season as a chance to establish a strong program. He hopes to win more than 20 games as his time on LASA's team comes to an end.

"My goal is to leave behind an image of what this class was and how we built something that's a very good basketball program, not only in AISD but in Austin in general," Williams said. "I plan on being a leader by leading by example for the kids not only on varsity, but on [the] JV and freshman teams."

LASA Alumnus sets National Record at 2024 Olympics

Class of 2019 Yaseen Abdalla Reaches Milestone for Sudan in Men's Marathon

VICTOR MARTINEZ | copy editor

At the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics, LASA Class of 2019 alumnus Yaseen Abdalla made history by breaking the national record in the marathon for Team Sudan with a time of 2:11:41, placing him 33rd overall and just over five minutes shy of the first place time. It was both his Olympic debut and the first ever marathon of his career. But before he was among the best in the world, he was a JV runner on the LASA cross-country team.

"I didn't really take anything seriously my sophomore year of high school, just because I didn't really believe I could be good at much," Abdalla said.

When he transferred to LASA his sophomore year, Abdalla had only taken up running to fulfill a physical education credit requirement. His personal record (PR) that season was 24:42 in the 5K. It was not until the next track season, when Abdalla set a goal of running a mile in under five minutes, that he began to take running seriously.

"My PR was 5:10," Abdalla said. "I went 4:53, so I ended up getting it. Finally, I was able to work hard at something that isn't video games and have improvement, and that was a big deal for me."

Because of his feat, Abdalla was invited by some of the experienced runners on the team to join the BornToRun Track Club. Being among some of the best in Texas, Abdalla continued to push himself alongside his new teammates to reach new heights he never could have imagined before.

"It was very much a small fish, big pond experience, and I enjoyed it," Abdalla said. "Some people get shocked when they realize they are not as good as they think they are, but it made me feel there was so much room to grow, like I could actually get this good."

Jon Croston, the ex-LBJ cross-country head coach, coached Abdalla while he was at LASA. According to Croston, Abdalla had made massive improvements in large part because he had developed one of the best work ethics on the team.

"There were people who worked hard, and then there was Yaseen, for whom it was like his life," Croston said. "Usually it takes a few several years. You can get good in a couple years, you don't get great in a couple of years."

By his senior year, Abdalla led LASA to qualify for state and placed 3rd overall at the state meet. At the 2022 NCAA Indoor Championship, he anchored for the Distance Medley Relay team that won UT Austin's first men's indoor championship.



FAREWELL SEASON Abdalla stands with his LBJ cross-country teammates at the UIL State Meet. The team placed second overall at the meet and Abdalla finished third in the 5K race. photo courtesy of Yaseen Abdalla

In the lead up to this breakout junior year of college, Abdalla began organizing with Sudan to represent them at the 2022 Worlds Athletics Championships. However, a sinus impingement forced him not to run the two months right before. He swiftly began cross-training in hopes of a full recovery in time for Worlds.

"I was out of a job," Abdalla said. "An hour into the morning, I'd put up anime, Netflix, or something at a pool and just swim in circles, and I trained myself, because I think I got in the [application] portal. I was transferring right before that and I ended up going 14:15 [in the 5K at Worlds], which is a pretty bad time, but a really good experience."

Abdalla's Worlds performance was more than a mere shortcoming to him, no matter how bitter. It was an experience to take with him into the University of Tennessee

and the Olympics. It was only one more reason for Abdalla to keep going when others would have conceded.

"It's easy to think, 'Wow, he's improved so much,' but it's just an absurd amount of failure I've had to go through," Abdalla said. "The number of huge, career-ending losses I've had, it's definitely in the double digits, but it amounts to one or two for most people to quit right after."



LET THE GAMES BEGIN Abdalla stands in front of the entrance to the Paris Olympic Village. He was one of the four athletes competing for Team Sudan at the 2024 Olympics. photo courtesy of Yaseen Abdalla

According to Abdalla, because of a three year clock for runners representing their nations, he was expected to once again run for Sudan, this time at the 2024 Olympics. However, because of World Athletics regulation, as a distance runner, Abdalla could only choose to run either the 800 meter or the marathon. He chose the latter after encouragement from his coaches and because of his competitive nature, even if he had no experience with the marathon whatsoever.

"Usually people don't run the marathon so young," Abdalla said. "At high levels of track, you wait until later, but I've been told I can do it."

Still, in sharp contrast to previous championships, at the Olympic marathon, Abdalla remembers being remarkably calm and collected. Compared to his previous national championships, he approached the Olympics with much more confidence in himself.

"I just knew I was ready for it, versus how I've been very panicked, like a month before, or two months before [nationals]," Abdalla said. "I was terrified right before, terrified for regionals, terrified for nationals, just because I know I'm not ready, and I ended up not being ready."



NATIONALS BOUND Abdalla runs the NCAA East Preliminary Round and qualifies for the 2024 NCAA Nationals for the University of Tennessee. He also competed at the 2024 Outdoor SEC Championships that same season. photo courtesy of Yaseen Abdalla

At such a pivotal moment in his career, Abdalla felt that he could not afford to even worry about his shot at Olympic glory, though easier said than done. For him, in order to overcome his recurrent fear borne out of pure dedication to his sport, he first had to overcome himself.

"I wanted to train too hard, so I've been insecure about training too easy," Abdalla said. "I basically approached the marathon with that same insecurity for the first week or first two weeks, and then I got buried, over-trained. Then I was like, 'You're gonna ruin your chance if you don't just do the smart thing, which is two workouts a week, nothing crazy. Don't try to do anything magic.' And it worked so well, realizing I've just been my own worst enemy for the last four years just trying to do too much."

Abdalla, now dead set on placing in the top half of

competing Olympians, put all his efforts into planning and ensuring as painless a race as possible. Extrapolating his go-to 5K strategy to the marathon, he trained specifically to run at a maintainable, but competitive speed.



RACE PACE Abdalla runs at the 2024 Olympic Men's Marathon alongside Bolivia's Héctor Garibay and Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge. The marathon route took runners through both Paris and Versailles over a total of 26 miles, or 42 kilometers. photo courtesy of Yaseen Abdalla

"If I'm running 26 miles, that first 10 miles has to be painless so I was a little bit nervous, because I knew we were going to go around five flat [mile] pace," Abdalla said. "...It felt like an easy run, except I'm literally with the best runners of all time. Kipchoge, Bekele, Haile Gebrselassie were there at the start line. Super cool."

After an easy first 10 miles averaging close to a five minute mile pace, Abdalla stopped to use the bathroom at mile 15 and then sprinted out to make up for lost time, only to be almost immediately faced with what would prove to be the hardest part of the marathon.

"I was already a little bit gassed from [mile] 15, but then at [mile] 17, [I saw] just the worst hill I've ever seen in my life. 'Requiem: Lacrimosa,' by Mozart started playing in my head once I saw that hill. I thought, 'This is over.'"

The uphill lasted over one mile. Abdalla was forced to jog in order to not waste immense amounts of energy and let people pass him to maintain his racing strategy.

"I used to rock climb, and it felt closer to rock climbing than running, I'm not gonna lie," Abdalla said. "Jesus, we were crawling up this thing."

Fortunately, Abdalla's patience paid off, however, and he was able to use a two-mile-long downhill to reset his aerobic system. He subsequently ran the fastest mile splits of the race to catch up to and drop the runners in front of him.

"I caught one of the three people who dropped us immediately and then I think I caught one more after that, just from that pack," Abdalla said. "The downhill, it felt like a free fall. It didn't feel like running, it felt like just trying to stay on your feet, like crazy, crazy, big downhills. I think that allowed me to stay alive."

Abdalla closed out the last six miles of the marathon at a hard, but normal pace to eventually set a national record for Sudan. While he did not achieve the goals he set for himself going into the Olympics, given where he was in rankings before the marathon, Abdalla estimates that he advanced well over 30 places when excluding bathroom breaks.

"I'd never run a marathon before, so technically, I was 90th out of 90 guys," Abdalla said. "I think my goal was top 20. I got 33rd and I stopped to use the bathroom. Without that, I would have been like 28th or 27th."

Junior James Rindfuss is a varsity captain of the LASA cross-country team. According to Rindfuss, watching Abdalla perform so well on the global stage and seeing where he is now has been an amazing experience for the team. Knowing his career began at LASA, he not only serves as a success story, but as motivation for LASA's runners.

"It's really inspiring because he did so well for LASA, and I want to do that, too," Rindfuss said. "I'm sure a lot of people are inspired by him, especially everybody who runs cross-country for LASA."

Abdalla will run his upcoming senior season with the University of Arizona Razorbacks after announcing his commitment in July. His social media and video content can be viewed on his eponymous YouTube channel, where he posts regularly.

COVER

TO

COVER

graphic by Tita Gonzalez

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The door opens and the ring of a bell sounds across the store to greet customers, welcoming them into a space filled with books bound in covers of various colors and sizes. They line the shelves and lay stacked on well-loved couches and tables, filled with stories and tales waiting for someone to open them. The sign in the front of the store has remained bolted to the building for many years, and the Austinites fill the room to support the locally owned bookstore as they have for many years.

Beyond the typical sale of books to customers and the spread of stories across the city, many local bookstores have features that set them apart, and one of these is the Black Pearl bookstore. The store makes a point of spreading the voices of marginalized groups according to the bookstore's owner, Eric Brooks. Brooks spoke of his store being the first of its kind in the Austin area, and how its uniqueness has motivated the store to give back to the community in a way that reinforces the bookstore's message of sharing everyone's story as Brooks described.

"Black Pearl Books is the only black-owned bookstore in Austin," Brooks said. "Our in-store inventory is curated to focus on diversity, inclusion, and representation. [Additionally], our store has an affiliated nonprofit, Put It In a Book, which is our charitable arm. The nonprofit shares the same mission as the bookstore, 'To Promote Diversity, Inclusion, and Representation through literature'."

Similar to Brook's description of how Black Pearl Books gives back to the Austin area, First Light Bookseller Eliza Pillsbury described how the First Light bookstore and its relationship with its enriches those around it. On top of offering a space where readers and writers alike can enjoy the store, Pillsbury spoke about how the First Light customers and employees come together to create a beautiful and diverse community.

"I'm really grateful as both a customer here and an employee for the space First Light has fostered for the Austin literary community," Pillsbury said. "I think the people are the best and most unique thing about the store [because] everyone comes from different backgrounds and has niche interests, so we all add something special to the environment. I've gotten to know several of our regulars well, and those relationships make our jobs and the responsibility of the store in the community even richer."

The community's relationships with these local bookstores can be observed by hearing the opinions of their customers, such as Book People shoppers Brooke

Alexander and Kelly Alexander. As described by Kelly, the sisters' love of the store can be seen in how often they enter its doors.

"I come a little bit to Book People, and [Brooke] comes a lot," said Kelly. "What's funny is I live here, she's in Houston. It's just one of those places where it's obvious that the people who run it deeply care about it, but it's also crafted beyond."

In addition to the impact in the local community made by these bookstores, they also have other features that make them distinct. According to Brooke, her favorite memories of Book People include these particular characteristics.

"I love all of the quantity of the recommendation cards [and] the shelf-talkers," Brooke said, referring to the authors who would come inside the store and pitch their books to the store's customers. "I just walked in and got to start a conversation with an author who is also a funeral director, and that's my special niche of interest - not funeral directing, but death and its trappings."

Due to all of these described features of the bookstores and more, those impacted by them such as Pillsbury speak so highly of them. According to Pillsbury, the community of First Light and those who visit it make it such an enjoyable place for her to get to experience.

"I would just emphasize how invaluable the community has been to me as both a customer and employee," Pillsbury said. "My favorite people in the world congregate at [this shop], and it is the privilege of a lifetime to work for and with them."

This same appreciation for the bookstore is reflected in the words of Brooke, who comes to Book People as often as she can after company meetings at her workplace's home office. According to Brooke. This local bookstore has a certain charm that makes it stand out proudly.

"Here's a meta answer for you," Brooke said. "It's lovely because it's a place where a young writer might come interview you and ask you why you're here. I guess you don't find that a lot of other places."

BookPeople



UP THE STAIRS A staircase at BookPeople shows off recent books, games, and pictures of the store. photo by Miller Williams

First Light



STACKED SHELVES First Light bookstore shows off its racks of books. The store is in Hyde Park and is a popular study spot for many Austin readers. photo by Apollo Dahmus



COFFEE BREAK Shoppers enjoy a coffee at First Light's cafe. photo by Apollo Dahmus