

# LASA LIBERATOR

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**SAM WAELBROECK** | staff writer

From neighborhood parks to swathes of forests, green spaces coat cities in color. According to the Shoal Creek Conservancy (SCC), they play a key role in a city's environmental and social health, even more so in urban areas like Austin. People are able to utilize green spaces in a variety of ways: whether it be to run a marathon on Mount Bonnell or have a picnic in Zilker, these pockets of nature are breaths of fresh air some would say are vital to city populations.

Austin stands out for its efforts in preserving green spaces, ranking among the most ecological cities in the U.S., with the SCC stating that around 15% of the city's land is dedicated to green spaces. Scenic America, a nonprofit that aims to protect America's scenic views, in cities such as Austin, reports that these areas provide escape from urban life. On top of this, they have a wide range of environmental benefits like improving ecological conditions. Texas as a state is also continually growing its park spaces. According to Texas Monthly, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recently bought land surrounding the state's popular park, Enchanted Rock, almost doubling the park's size.

David Walker, a Planet Earth teacher at LASA, is an avid outdoorsman and uses his class to teach his students about the

environment. Walker uses Austin's various parks to teach his students about nature and its benefits.

"Green spaces can provide hands-on learning experiences for students on a wide variety of topics," Walker said. "Some examples being ecosystem ecology, biodiversity, field geology, sustainability, conservation, and water quality."

The Austin-American Statesman reported that roughly 295,000 visitors attend Enchanted Rock park in 2023, making it the seventh-most visited state park. A study published by the National Institute of Aging shows that parks have been proven to boost cognitive health and have calming effects on people that reduce stress levels and improve concentration. According to Walker, people have utilized green spaces as a way to cope with the pandemic, a claim corroborated in a study by the Norwegian Institute for Nature Studies that showed that outdoor activity went up 300% during the pandemic.

"Austin's green spaces played an important role during the pandemic," Walker said. "Research shows that people living closer to green spaces had lower levels of depression and anxiety during the first six months."

Project EverGreen, an environmental nonprofit, reported that green spaces can also improve air quality, water quality, and reduce noise pollution.

see **GREEN** page 6

## what's news

photo by Ellington Tough



Fans flock to UT Austin Football Game

see **UT LONGHORNS** page 17

photo by Ellington Tough



Seniors chug milk in Gallon Challenge Tradition

see **LASALIBERATOR.COM**

photo by Ellington Tough



Austin's Capitol stands among Blanton Museum sculptures

see **PAST MEETS PRESENT** page 18

graphic by Megan Gerold

## Trail of Lights Sparkles Amid 60th Anniversary

**ABBEY WU** | staff writer

As the holiday season arrives in Austin, so does one of the city's most cherished events: the annual Trail of Lights at Zilker Park. Celebrating its 60th year, the Trail of Lights has long served as an Austin tradition, drawing people of all ages and backgrounds together to enjoy a shared holiday experience. With new attractions and treasured traditions this year, the Trail of Lights aims to offer Austin an unforgettable celebration.

Nicholas Miller, president of the Trail of Lights Foundation Board, reflected on what the event represents for Austin. He mentioned that his favorite part of the event mainly comes down to being able to be a part of something that puts a smile on people's faces and brings a sense of unity to the Austin community.

"The community aspect of it, I think, is kind of the most important part," Miller said. "Everybody can kind of come together at a certain time of year and enjoy the kind of holiday spirit as a community, despite differences in religion, politics, whatever."

Special festivities such as a '60s-themed Preview Party will mark the 60th year of the event. The party will have food from local Austin restaurants and live performances from Greyhounds, Money Chicha, and Collin Shook.

"We're gonna have some drone shows at the grand opening, and a couple of other nights," Miller said. "But that'll be a new kind of a new aspect to the trail as well."

James Russell, executive director of the Trail of Lights Foundation, elaborated on some of the new additions at the Trail in 2024. He emphasized the importance of making this year special and historic due to the anniversary.

"What we've done is we've spent six to eight months with the Austin History Center and speaking with folks that have been involved with the Trail of Lights long ago," Russell said. "Interviewing them and kind of building a story of how it started, the evolution of it, and now where we are today."

This year's event will feature screens around the park, displaying the recorded interviews that provide insights into how the Trail of Lights has become a memorable Austin tradition. Russell, along with many people that work on the Trail of Lights team, are excited for this experience to be shown to the public.

"I think it'll be a really kind of cool experience," Russell said.

see **TRAIL** page 15

## No Money, No Problems AISD's Budget Deficit Prompts Scarcity Across City

**LASYA SANGANA** | managing editor

Amid rising inflation, a new legislative session, and the conclusion of the election season, Austin Independent School District (AISD) is dealing with a local problem of its own: budget cuts.

The funding for AISD's budget comes from local funding via property taxes, state funding, and federal funding through programs like Title One and food services. According to Dr. Jacob Reach, the chief officer for governmental relations and board services for AISD, all three funding sources have stagnated for the last few years. Due to the pandemic and general inflation, the cost of resources that AISD provides has increased even if its revenue has not. Last year, AISD started making multiple cuts at headquarter levels to minimize the effect on schools as reported by KXAN. Although these cuts were a start at addressing the problem, AISD still needs to cut \$92 million over three years from its budget to solve its record-high budget deficit.

"They [Texas] set aside \$5.5 billion for education that they ended up not spending," Reach said. "And we've all just had to admit reality. We can't rely on the state. We need to make sure that we have an efficient budget and that we have what we need to serve our students and our schools, and if the state comes and

gives us money, then that's great, then we'll make sure that we can add on support. But we can't make decisions hoping the state is going to do something new."

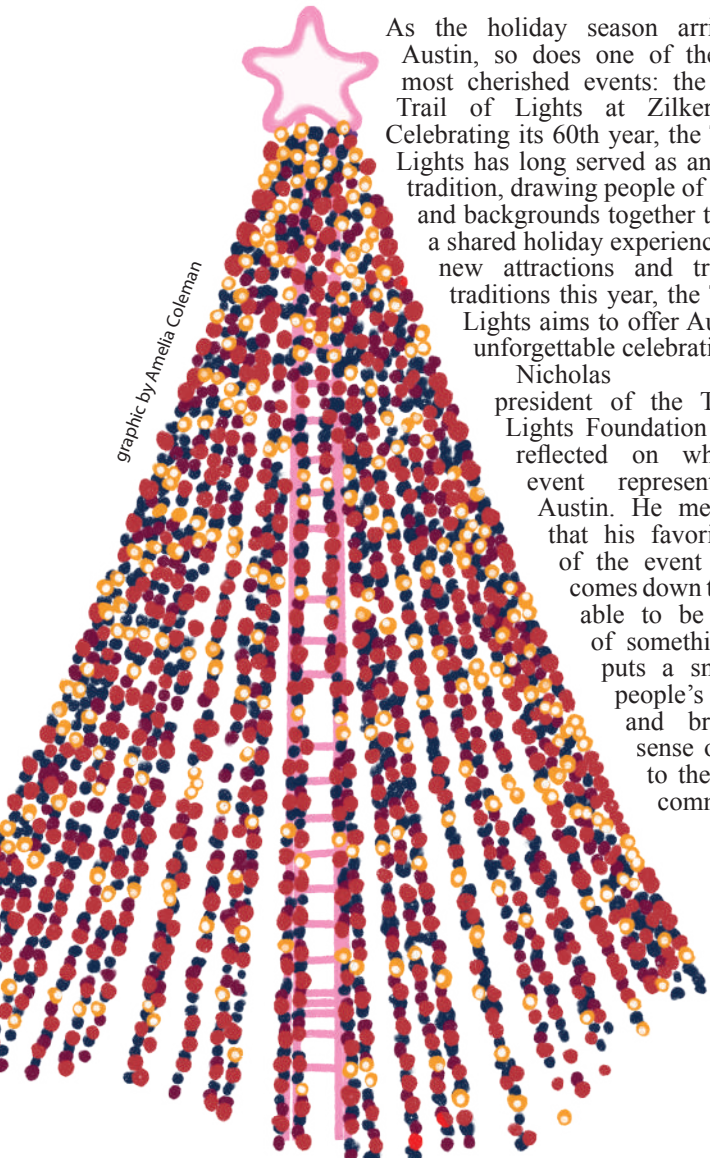
Reach added that a main method of figuring out the necessary actions to take to address the budget crisis is committee meetings attended by parents, administrators, staff, and Gibson Consulting, AISD's auditor. In these meetings, the main administrator of the meetings will take the ideas recorded by the communities and adapt the proposals based on what the community is voicing as the main priority.

"It's important that we listen to all of these ideas, take them all into consideration, and listen to those voices who are most affected by it," Reach said. "But at the end of the day, staff will make the recommendation to the board on what we need to prioritize and when we need to prioritize, because not only are we talking about what needs to change, but we're going to do this over a three year period."

Kimberly Pettigrew, an U.S. History teacher at LASA, attended these committee meetings and described that at every meeting they would be broken up into subcommittees, discuss a particular department, and then share their ideas with the larger committee, where it would be recorded and reviewed by an equity rubric.

see **NO MONEY** page 7

Graphic by Amelia Coleman



# editorial Social Media Shatters Teens' View of

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

**SADIE SARRAT** | commentary editor

Piles of schoolwork, never-ending after-school activities, parental pressures, and a desire to be the best can take a toll on one's overall well-being. Sometimes, at the end of a long and grueling day, it's nice to sit back in a cozy chair with a snack and scroll on Instagram or TikTok for a few minutes—or eventually hours—to escape. An alternate reality of ASMR “restocking the fridge” highlights, workout routines for abs in less than 3 minutes, or even the classic dog posing for a picture is all a person needs to ease the mind and not think about the stresses of daily life.

While social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Pinterest can provide what may appear as harmless and fun time fillers, the adverse effects of social media on teens' mental health can quickly distract from the potential benefits. According to the Child Mind Institute, 14 to 24-year-olds who use social media feel higher rates of social isolation and depression. These digital platforms can be linked to a lower sense of self-confidence, as many teens compare themselves or their lifestyles to those of influencers who dedicate their lives to videography and sponsorships, exaggerating how glamorous, expensive, and happy their lives are.

Additionally, social media has allowed spaces of chaos, negativity, and hostility to open up. This can lead to widespread political cynicism and a loss of faith in the democratic system of the U.S. government. According to multiple 2024 studies done by the University of California system, a trend amongst Generation Z voters shows that many individuals are concerned about the ability of a broken system to bring about real change in the country. Former president Donald Trump's original posts and reposts on X, formerly known as Twitter, include many attacks on Kamala Harris, including a remark on her personal life irrelevant to the election or his campaign. While this form of online violence and extreme expression seems unnecessary and potentially violent, social media was vital to voter decision-making in the 2020 election, as individuals were able to access different political viewpoints from a wide variety of

sources than from what their families use. How candidates conduct themselves on social media can be very telling of one's personality and values, which can be a valuable resource when it comes to voting.

Furthermore, social media and an increased regular smartphone usage in the last decade can be a seemingly easy

source to point fingers for a teenager's poor mental state. In the past few years, global events, such as a pandemic, have significantly impacted daily life, and many adolescents and teenagers are still experiencing the drawbacks of the event. More than three years of isolation from normality led to isolated teens, which can easily lead to many different forms of depression. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported that in 2021, 37% of high school students reported poor mental health during the COVID-19 global pandemic, proving that isolation was mainly attributed to the lockdown in general, not necessarily an increased use of social media. Moreover, scientists from the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health have concluded that increased social media use cannot be directly named as the sole cause of increased poor mental health among teens, although it does correlate.

“Technology: Where it Started and Where it's Going”, a book written by students in the Survey of Science & Technology in Society class at Clemson University, expresses how the sole purpose of social media platforms was for individuals to share pieces of their lives in a digital, creative form. It has developed over the years into a powerful, dominant business that has reached over 5.2 billion individual users across the globe, according to Statista. This is revolutionary, especially in a global society plagued by war and division, that online platforms can unite such a significant percentage of the world's people.

Overall, social media can be highly addictive and lead to increased depression; however, it has allowed communities to form and for people to find connections and share their ideas, as well as providing public spaces for expression. From a political angle, digital platforms are important for creating well-informed young voters who increase voter turnout. Social media will become even more dominant and popular in the years to come as society continues into the digital age.



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

## Raptor Chatter

How does social media influence teenagers' mental health?



photo by Apollo Dahmus

**Greta Vale**  
Freshman

“Kids stay inside all day on their phones, and there are unrealistic expectations as people can fake stuff online, which is negative.”



photo courtesy of Kate Wright

**Kate Wright**  
Sophomore

“If a teen spends more unchecked time on social media than healthy, it does have a negative effect. However, social media can be positive if used in the right ways.”



photo by Apollo Dahmus

**Theo Weston**  
Junior

“The expectations and societal norms outweigh the community that it brings.”

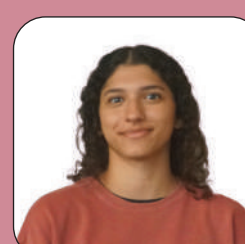


photo by Apollo Dahmus

**Lexie Manuel**  
Senior

“Social media can serve as a useful tool for people to find others, but you are presenting the perfect version of your life, which can be both positive and negative.”

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## LASA LIBERATOR

### Editorial Policy

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

#### Editorial Content:

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

#### The Editorial Boards and its Functions:

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

#### The Editorial board will:

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

#### Viewpoints:

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

Editorials: These will be determined by the staff consensus. The editorial will be unsigned and will represent the majority viewpoint of the staff.

Commentary: Commentary articles represent the viewpoint of one member of the staff, and are signed as such. These articles do not represent the opinions of the entire staff.

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

Non-Staff Contributors: Bylined contributions are welcome.

Correction of Errors: The staff makes every effort to print accurate information. In the case of substantial errors, a written correction will be made in the following issue of the newspaper.

Sources: In general, no anonymous sources will be used in reporting. Sources from within the school, as well as those not connected with the school, will be used. Under no circumstances will gifts, including coupons, etc., be accepted by the staff members from sources or advertisers.

Note: The Liberator will attempt to publish a range of opinions within reason.

Enjoy a Holiday Joke!

Wrap yourself in wrapping paper and tape on a bow: that's how you live in the present!



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

# Preserving the Written Word

**SADIE SARRAT** | commentary editor

I turn the rusting gold door knob, and a gentle jingle bell welcomes me into a room of dusty, splintery, old-furnished floors that creak as I enter the warm lighting. The comforting aroma of bibliosmia (also known as vintage book smell) washes over me, and my eyes flit across the rows upon rows of stories waiting to be discovered. I had no idea such a uniquely cozy and almost dream-like place was dedicated solely to books.

However cliché this typical bookstore experience may seem, it might not be commonplace in the coming years due to the rise of electronic, audio, and e-reader media. This is deeply upsetting because reading printed books has created sustainable communities. Libraries are known for being trusted institutions of information and entertainment, and also act as pillars of the community for all learners to feel welcome and heard. In addition, in schools, many book clubs and other social organizations and programs rely on these libraries as spaces to express and share ideas. If all books went digital, these physical havens of creativity, innovation, and various perspectives would ultimately cease to exist.

Without a place to express ideas and communicate with others effectively, people turn to the internet, which is notorious for being a place of hostility, as hateful comments, purposeful disinformation, and the overall sense of courage a person can find from hiding behind the screen create a negative environment.

Students, learners, and young curious minds are gradually losing the opportunity to experience these displays of documented literature, which is extremely unfortunate because the written word is a quintessential part of human existence. Since the creation of the Gutenberg Press in 1436, books have allowed ideas, languages, and stories to be expressed in a tangible, irreplaceable form. Physical texts and books have also drastically improved human critical thinking and function.

A 2023 study conducted by the Review of Educational Research shows that those who read physical books have six to eight times better comprehension than those who read digitally. This highlights that reading from paper helps improve how much information a student is able to retain on exam or test day. Additionally, according to Child Life Specialists from Psychology, today, page-turning and feeling the weight of the book in one's hand helps the brain map out what has been read. This process works because the mind assigns information to a page the reader has absorbed with the senses. This process is unique because any type of e-reader or electronic media cannot replace this ability. According to the Center for American Progress, students with access to fully-stocked libraries and qualified librarians have reached higher

standardized test scores and academic achievement.

Not only can reading physical books have mental benefits, but it also prevents physical damage to the reader. The Mitchell Refractive Surgery and Eye Center describes how the "retinal damage" attributed to long hours spent staring at a screen can have a significant detrimental effect on one's eyes.

The value of books has been proven time and time again by real experiences of people across history. During World War II in Nazi Germany, books were burned to keep citizens uneducated by preventing the spread of "non-Nazi" ideologies and beliefs such as pacifism and Judaism. These books were written by incredibly talented authors like Lion Feuchtwanger and Rosa Luxemburg, who expressed anti-Hitler sentiments. If these authors' work did not have great value and knowledge, the governing forces would not have tried to eliminate them, proving the power of the written word.

In modern-day society, where access to documented literature is again at risk, educators, librarians, and students find themselves fighting for the right to read. The very act of book banning suppresses a person's constitutionally protected right of free speech. Students have a right to the information and knowledge available in the books being banned, and to prevent them from accessing it goes against the value of an informed public our democracy is founded on. The written word should bind us together and keep us all on the same page, not tear us apart. However, right now, there is a sense of urgency and a scramble to read physical books while students and libraries still have access to them.

Not only do book bans threaten physical texts, but in today's times of screens, the push to create an eco-friendly society also endangers books. While the environment is also a critical issue that requires effort and funding from the global economy, there are more beneficial and effective ways to reduce our footprint and impact on forests rather than getting rid of books. This includes focusing on decreasing the amount of waste that comes from larger corporations instead of smaller consumers. Furthermore, so many tasks in daily life are now dominated by a screen: communication, payments, school assignments, and even permission slips. Maintaining an aspect of the real world in our everyday lives is as important as the ease and necessity of digital tools. Even though reading could quickly and easily become digital, there is still something valuable about reading and having access to physical books.

Ultimately, reading physical books is a privilege, not a given. Readers everywhere must band together to protect and exercise a right that should be constitutionally protected but is slowly fading out of existence. It might seem boring or a waste of time, but reading keeps the world spinning. So, go to the library and pick up an actual book.

graphic by Tita Gonzalez

## 4-Day Weeks 4-Ever

**ADEL WELLS** | club contributor

Everyone grins when the upcoming calendar presents a three-day weekend on the horizon. Days with friends and procrastination time are scheduled along with family time to allow for relaxation, and eventually, the majority of the assigned homework gets completed. Students go to bed Monday night feeling better prepared for the seemingly less grueling days ahead.

Three-day weekends are few and far between, but they shouldn't have to be. Schools all over the U.S. are moving towards four-day school weeks. According to research conducted by Baylor University educational leadership professor Bill Sterret, after the passage of House Bill 2610 in Texas, which changes the attendance requirement from 180 days in school to 75,600 minutes, or roughly 53 school days, some school districts in Texas have begun revising their school schedules to accommodate longer weekends. If Austin Independent School District (AISD) moves towards incorporating these extended weekends into our school lives, overall student and faculty body morale, motivation, and attendance will be significantly improved. With this in mind, AISD should seriously consider moving high schools to a three-day weekend.

In school districts around Texas that have implemented this change, student enrollment and attendance increased to 96%, according to a study by KXAN. It may seem like more time off will lead to more lethargic students, but shorter weeks are proven to motivate kids to show up.

A 2024 national EdWeek survey reports that 60% of teachers polled said 4-day weeks would have a favorable impact on whether or not they would take the job. Shortened weeks lead to greater opportunities to fuel the teaching market. Additionally, 73% of parents polled said they approved of the shortened week, and 85% of students surveyed said they love their three-day weekends and enjoyed how they were able to spend their extra time working on assignments, chores, or

hanging out with friends they couldn't during the week. With more time to plan better and more effective lessons on their off days that students appreciate more, 4-day weekends have the ability to make everyone, students and teachers alike, more likely to show up and more likely to enjoy the time they spend at school.

In addition to providing benefits to mental health and attendance, the study also stated that Mineral Wells, a district around 200 miles from AISD, reported increased savings in everything from utilities to substitute teachers by implementing a 4-day week. Every penny counts for AISD due to the \$92 million debt the district has incurred, and an extra day each week without the lights on will make a massive financial difference for AISD and other similarly affected school districts.

Although it has been argued that less time in class is detrimental for working parents with younger students who have no one to watch their children on that day off, this tactic would be most apt for high school students. In fact, the research demonstrates that high school principals have seen a positive response from their students being offered an extra day off to schedule medical appointments and quality time with family and friends. Although working parents with younger students might face difficulty with a four-day week and keeping their children safe at home alone, however, by implementing this plan in high schools that issue can be avoided altogether.

When time is short on the weekends, and there are only a few more hours left to crank out those last few assignments, one might be tempted, as I have been, to raise your fist to the sky in a fit of anger, calling out, "Why can't we simply have Monday off?" Although it may seem like a mere dream for every sleepy student and overworked teacher, districts across America are moving towards 4-day school weeks. Three-day weekends remain necessary breaks to re-energize the public high school system, and the entire AISD workforce and student population would greatly benefit from this well-researched and tested scheduling agenda.

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

graphic by Tita Gonzalez

## Sports Spending Rises

**ANYA GHIMIRE** | club contributor

Sprinting, I ran toward the end of the field. I look left, then right, and continue barreling forward. I quickly maneuver and swiftly slash my lacrosse stick, throwing the ball into the goal. My team wins another point, and an uproar of cheers hits me all at once. At this moment, I think back to myself two years before, when I didn't know how it felt to really play a sport.

Finally playing a sport I really loved made me realize something: not only are sports good for you and recommended for your health, but they are something that every able individual should have the opportunity to pursue.

Sports are the primary activity in which children receive their recommended 60 minutes of physical activity daily, and according to the National Council of Youth Sports, around 60 million children are registered to play youth sports across the United States. Even though many young children enroll in sports, the financial strain imposed when playing specialized sports makes it harder for them to continue playing as they grow up.

According to a national survey of parents by the Aspen Institute's Project Play initiative, low-income children ages 6-18 quit their sports at six times the rate of those from high-income families. Additionally, the average child quits a sport by age 11 after only playing it for three years due to the increasing prices, weekend tournaments, and overall demand for the sport. Finally, roughly 60 percent of families experience financial strain because of costs of their children's sports.

While quitting a sport isn't always due to financial instability or strain, it has become increasingly significant in parent's decisions. With this in mind, St. Paul, Minnesota, has decided to drop all sports fees for children ages 9-18 over the next three years. The St. Paul Parks and Rec. was able to cut fees through funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, which came into effect to restore and rebuild America's communities after the pandemic.

After dropping sports fees, St. Paul saw a 40% increase in the number of children who registered for soccer and basketball. Usually, fees range from \$25 to \$40, which can be financially taxing for some. In doing this, not only did they help parents who were struggling to pay for sports enrollment fees, they also ensured that children would be able to fulfill their recommended amount of daily physical activity.

The Translational Journal

of the American College of Sports Medicine reported policies requiring student-athletes in high school to pay sports fees are caused by various budget cuts and increased overall program costs implemented in schools across the country. This presents a conundrum; sports are said to be very important and essential for growing children but are then disregarded when budgeting, leading to a scramble when trying to sustain teams for students to play these highly important sports.

While fees often vary depending on the sport, they generally cover coach salaries, team meals, equipment costs, travel, and facility rental fees. Although some fees may be reasonable and would make sense when broken down, the National Alliance of Youth Sports in West Palm Beach, Florida, reported that many leagues pick and choose who can play in their tournaments by raising entry fees. This highlights how monetizing youth sports has led to a sense of elitism, as those families who can afford to have their child in a sport reap the rewards of teamwork and establishing a good work ethic.

In our society, sports should be easily accessible to youths and should be available without causing monetary strain on the players or their families. Sports allow individuals to exercise and help to teach discipline and dedication in a team environment. Due to excessive fees and overall demand for money, many children do not get to participate in this enriching environment. This cannot be accepted, and in order to combat this, local governments should take initiatives like St. Paul, Minnesota, and focus on building a healthy sports environment for active children.

graphic by Tita Gonzalez

# PRO vs CON

graphic by Leah Lashus

**Pro/Con:** For every other issue, Commentary presents two opposing arguments on current political or global issues to inform the community and facilitate open dialogue.

## Should the Supreme Court Implement Term Limits?

**ANITA SOSA** | staff writer

**PRO:** Today's Supreme Court is anti-democratic. A cascade of ethical scandals, decisions removed from democratic and judicial processes, political polarization, and overreach in its own power has culminated to break the once-just system. It is no wonder that, according to the Pew Research Center, more than half of Americans have lost trust in the Supreme Court and are pushing for reform.

Although a wide range of proposals exist, the most mainstream and transformative option is establishing 18-year term limits and legalizing re-appointments for the Supreme Court justices, allowing them to serve multiple terms. Under this system, vacancies would open every two years, and presidents would only have two appointments each term.

According to The U.S. Supreme Court Working Group, an academic organization, the proposal's rise in popularity could not have come at a better time. Several justices, such as Clarence Thomas and John Roberts, will likely hold terms longer than 30 or even 40 years, giving them unprecedented power that will survive presidential re-elections. Furthermore, what makes our democracy so powerful is that we have two opposing political parties each with differing ideologies, as well as new representatives every four years.

These long-lasting justices violate the core tenets of democracy by being able to shape the law in their interests. These changes last for generations without needing to adapt to changing political climates. It erases accountability and allows for anti-democratic decision-making, as presidents increasingly support younger candidates on the expectation that they sit on the court for longer and promote that president's political agenda for well after their term.

Polarization has created monumental stakes for each vacancy. Established laws mapped out in the Constitution, such as justices expected to be apolitical or unbiased, have been thrown out and replaced by exercises of power that upend, destroy, and outright ignore the sole purpose of having a Supreme Court, which is to deliver justice. Republican abuse of this power is evident with former President Donald Trump appointing three justices in four years, whereas previous presidents, such as George W. Bush, have only appointed two justices in eight years. We've seen former President Obama's nomination denied for being "too close to the election" just for Amy Coney Barrett to be appointed by Trump a month away from the 2020 election just four years later.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice,

18-year active terms and regularized re-appointments would shut down these unconstitutional, undemocratic actions. They ensure that each president will have the same control over the Supreme Court, softening the public's perception of the court and creating a closer tie between the Court and democratic voting processes.

The proposed policy would also encourage a more logical and fair court, as the stakes of each nomination would be lowered while simultaneously encouraging nominations based on merit instead of age. Additionally, unexpected, late-term vacancies due to death wouldn't be as destabilizing. Instead, the proposed system allows a retired justice to temporarily step in while re-appointments are being discussed.

The policy is not just a good idea, it is a popular one. The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research has found that a majority of Americans support instituting term limits, even if not the particular 18-year proposal discussed above. The support is bipartisan; across every group—Democrat, Republican, and Independents—at least half of those polled were in favor. However, Democrats and Independents displayed a vastly higher number of members in favor of term limits than that of the Republican party.

This popularity is also not just limited to public perception—scholars are also in favor of the proposed change. Recently, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences released a 2023 report titled "The Case for Supreme Court Term Limits," echoing the case for this proposal. In 2020, the National Constitution Center had swaths of both conservative and progressive scholars draft their own constitutions. Although it was not a direct question about the courts, the two groups nonetheless chose to include 18-year term limits in their widely varied drafts.

Polarization is dividing the country more than ever, and the Court is a centerpiece. Our democracy is at stake, and it is time to change the Supreme Court according to how our country has transformed since 1776.

**LUCA SIMS** | staff writer

**CON:** The Supreme Court of the United States is the most powerful group of 9 people in the country. It alone has the last word on federal laws and precedents. This has led to controversy, particularly after the Court released its decision in the *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision, which overturned *Roe v. Wade*, a pivotal case that protected abortion under the 14th Amendment and provided guidelines for abortion regulation. This dramatic change in policy occurred largely because former President Donald Trump appointed three justices to the Court, giving it a two-thirds conservative majority. While the bench was originally intended to be unbiased in order to balance out the other two branches of government, there has been an increased level of political imbalance. This has led to calls for the institution of term or age limits for Supreme Court justices.

Despite these calls, having term limits for Supreme Court justices would be a terrible idea and would only increase both the rate at which the Court overturns precedent and the politicization of an already overly political Court. According to a simulation conducted by two professors of the Vanderbilt Law School, if the 18-year term limit currently being most widely supported were to have been instituted right after *Roe v. Wade*—the decision that guaranteed the right to abortion—then *Roe* would have been overturned in 1987, reinstated in 2009, and then overturned again in 2017. Rather than 18-year term limits creating certainty, they would cause a rapid change in the dogma that governs America. This example demonstrates the volatility of the judicial branch if term limits were enacted, creating unnecessary turmoil and uncertainty for the American people, as newly appointed judges of different political standpoints would continually flip the decision on abortion rights.

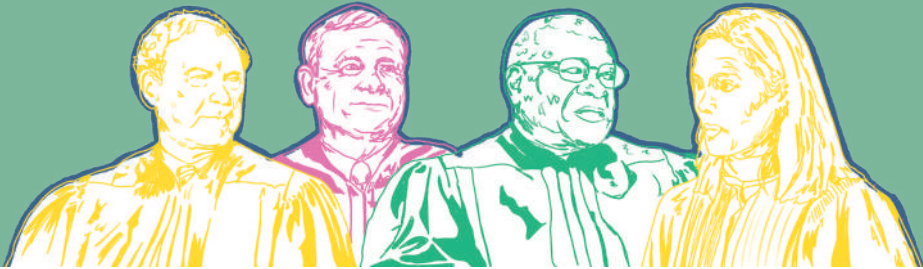
America has seen the havoc that the *Dobbs* decision created in the healthcare system, as medical providers struggled to determine what reproductive care was and was not legal under various states' laws after protections on abortion were removed. That kind of upheaval every 20 or so years by new justices would be disastrous, particularly for women attempting to navigate what would have

been a constantly changing landscape of care.

The issue of abortion illustrates a larger point about the effects of term limits. The *Federalist Papers*, written by founding fathers Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, contain a warning against appointing justices for only a temporary period, which is also mentioned in Article III of the Constitution: "The judges, both of the supreme and inferior courts, shall hold their offices during good behavior." From this, it is clear that "good behavior" refers to the fact that there should not be a limit on how long a justice can hold power because as long as the elect are actively working towards justice for the country, they shouldn't have to leave the Supreme Court due to an irritating expiration date. Simply put, term limits go against the Founding Fathers' intentions for the Supreme Court. Their reasoning is simple: a limited term means that justices are far more likely to become politicized and attempt only to pass as many laws that support their polarized political party in the shorter amount of time they are given and thus begin to ignore their critical role in determining whether a law is constitutional.

It is the opinion of many of those wishing to implement term limits that doing so would make the Court more responsive to changes in public opinion over time, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. Not only has it been demonstrated that such limits would profoundly destabilize the decision-making of the Court, but the Court was never intended to be fully responsive to the public in the first place. According to the Harvard Kennedy School, ultimately, the Court was supposed to be free from popular influence and only use the Constitution to determine legality.

Something that would stabilize the Supreme Court is, unsurprisingly, the reality America is facing for another four years of Trump's presidency. There has been significant talk in legal circles about the possibility of two justices, Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, retiring in favor of new, younger, Trump-appointed justices. If this happens, former President Trump will have appointed five members of the Supreme Court, giving him a majority that would likely last decades. Of course, although the Democrats are not looking forward to this prospect, it must be acknowledged that Trump's appointments would likely stabilize Court precedent for years to come. The instatement of term limits would not encourage the justice that the Supreme Court is meant to carry out. Rather, it would only harm the judicial process in the United States, erasing the values of democracy and stability that this country and the court were founded to uphold.



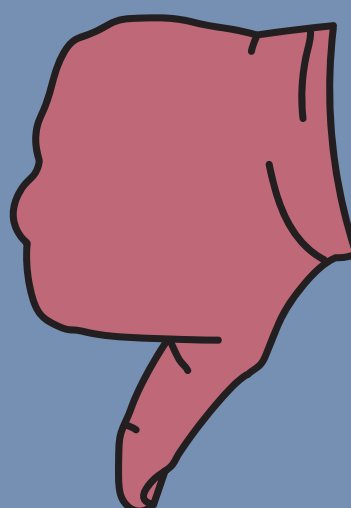
graphics by Amelia Coleman

### Thumbs Up



Uggs  
Projects for finals  
Block Blast  
Cafeteria coffee  
Michael Bubl 

### Thumbs Down



Dead rats  
Heavy backpacks  
The wait for "Wicked Part 2"  
Running  
Cold classrooms

**Thumbs Up Thumbs Down:** The Commentary editors will select a few objects, things, places, or current events that they are either liking or disliking at the moment. Likes are placed under Thumbs Up and the dislikes under Thumbs Down. These items are chosen randomly, meant to be taken in a lighthearted manner, and are not meant to offend anyone.

## Texas Legislature is Back

ARIANA RODRIGUEZ | staff writer

As Texas lawmakers prepare for the upcoming 2025 legislative session, a range of critical issues are expected to dominate the state's political discourse. With a projected budget surplus and major decisions on the table, many issues remain up in the air on how elected representatives will tackle long-standing concerns including education reform, healthcare access, and fiscal policy.

The Texas legislature is composed of the Texas House of Representatives and the Texas Senate. The Senate contains 31 members and the House has 150. At this time, the Republican party holds the majority in both the House and Senate. The legislature sessions only meet in odd-numbered years for roughly six months, unless a special session has been called. The upcoming session will start on Jan. 14 and run until June 2. It will be held at the Texas capitol in the heart of downtown Austin. One of the most important elements of any legislative session is the state budget, and Texas, like all states, is required by the Constitution to pass a two-year budget that controls the funding for all programs around the state. This process will be a focal point in the 2025 session.

Bobby Joe Dale is a policy adviser for the Comptroller's Office, the state's chief tax collector, accountant, revenue estimator, and treasurer. He noted that the amount of revenue available will greatly shape the process of the legislative session. In Dale's words, the more money is available, the greater the competition between offices on where the money should be given.

"When you have more money to spend, it can be a little more contentious because everybody is trying to get funding for their programs and their projects," Dale said. "And so that also sets the tone for the session."

According to Dale, because Texas is experiencing fiscal surpluses from oil and gas revenues, lawmakers will likely be debating how best to allocate these funds. This could mean increased investments in education, public safety, and healthcare but equally likely are disputes over tax cuts, particularly on property taxes, a long-lasting concern for Texans.

John Heleman, a former chief revenue estimator at the Comptroller's office, explained that, while fiscal issues will be the main focus during the session, predicting the exact topics and results of the session is challenging. He also mentioned that staying on topic can be a challenge in these sessions.

"You think you've seen it all, and then something different happens," Heleman said.

For Heleman, one of the key tasks in any legislative session is ensuring that the state does not overspend or get caught in a budget crisis. Fiscal notes can play a huge role in combating this as they are assessments of how a proposed bill will impact the state's budget,

helping lawmakers understand the financial consequences of their decisions and ensure that they do not pass legislation that would push the state beyond its means.

"I started off doing [fiscal notes] that were very small," Heleman said. "Then, big things happened. I became in charge of sales tax. I had to do the fiscal note for each and every single sales tax bill that was filed. I was very busy."

Heleman's duties are just one aspect of work done to combat sales tax concerns. However, the budget is only one part of this year's session. There is another issue at the focal point of the legislative meeting, the education system. Lucy Murphy, president of LASA's Youth and Government Club, emphasized the worries that youth have about the public education system, especially when it comes to the next Texas Legislative session.

"I think school choice is a big issue, specifically public school vouchers," Murphy said. "As people fight for school choice, there's a higher opportunity for money to be taken away from public schools and routed into private schools, even though that money was originally set aside for public schools."

Murphy stated that public schools, such as LASA, can be negatively affected by the diversion of funds to private schools. To remedy this, she believes that lawmakers should listen to students who are directly affected by these policies rather than primarily focusing on the views of parents and private school advocates.

"Right now, they're mostly listening to parents and people who want to send their kids to private schools," Murphy said. "The best perspective they can get is from the students who are directly affected by this funding. They should visit schools to hear those perspectives and make an effort to reach more of those voices."

In addition to the debate over school choice, Murphy raised concerns about the broader economic impacts of the growing tech industry in Austin. According to the Austin-American Statesman, while the tech boom has created new jobs, it has also put pressure on smaller businesses and local communities which led Murphy to believe that it is important for lawmakers to address any lingering concerns.

"As Austin continues to grow, I think we need to find new ways to handle that, particularly with the growing tech industry," Murphy notes. "While the tech boom is creating new jobs, it's also hurting smaller businesses and startups in the city, which creates a win-lose situation."

The 2025 legislative session will focus on critical issues, such as education, technological advancements, and economic proposals. With a reevaluation of Texas' budget, lawmakers have an opportunity to adjust spending to better fit the needs of Texans.

graphic by Jonah Popinski



## Natural Nightmares Scare Extreme Weather Strikes Southwest

TESSA WHITNEY | staff writer

Amid the politics of an election year, climate change has become a highly contentious topic. According to the World Meteorologists Organization, hurricanes that have consistently devastated the coasts of the American Southeast have gotten progressively stronger throughout the years. Tropical storms and hurricanes brought record-breaking winds and destructive storm surges, resulting in irregular storm behaviors, sparking concerns about the impact of climate change on weather patterns.

2024 began with a series of intense winter storms across the Northeastern U.S. Then, while the ice was still melting, tornadoes began to sweep through the American Midwest, setting up the fact that America has experienced the highest amount of tornadoes in 2024 than in the last 13 years, according to WSMV National. Following the tornadoes were wildfires caused by the dry vegetation. Soon after, hurricanes brought rampant flooding in the late summer and fall. University of Florida (UF) students witnessed catastrophe firsthand, waking up on an October day to see their campus flooded and without power. The days leading up to Hurricane Milton were filled with news reports describing recent downpours and winds at break-neck speeds. According to UF freshman Jackson Brasil, this was a challenge for students navigating their first few months of college.

"We were all watching the news, and hoping it would miss us," Brasil said. "The thing with storms like these is that they're just a waiting game. Sometimes they come and they wipe out a whole town, and sometimes it's just some rain."

Many students were urged by their families to come home and take refuge from Hurricane Milton. However, for Brasil, staying on campus was safer as his family lived closer to the Gulf of Mexico, where it formed according to NASA.

"You could hear the wind rattling the windows, and the rain was really heavy," Brasil said. "I was just hoping [it] would blow over like they usually do, but the news was making this such a big deal and saying the winds were like Katrina. I don't think it was that bad, but for a lot of people it was their first time dealing with a storm and they were definitely shaken up."

UF freshman Om Parbadia, a non-local to Florida, was one of those who hadn't experienced a storm like Milton before, but Parbadia was back with his family during the strongest part of it. Nevertheless, coming back to campus after the hurricane had passed was still a disturbing experience for Parbadia.

"A bunch of trees fell down that hit power lines making the power go out for a few days," Parbadia said. "People still don't have power. Everyone was trying to stock up on water and toilet paper like how it was during quarantine—just prepping for the unknown."

Over the years weather and hurricane-prediction technology has improved exponentially, according to PBS. However, meteorologists still don't have a full picture of a storm's damage before it hits. According to KVUE Meteorologist Jordan Darensbourg, one of the reasons that Hurricane Milton had caused such destruction was the unpredictable

strength it had while crossing the gulf, taking both forecasters and residents by surprise.

"When Milton struck the Florida Peninsula, it had actually formed in the Bay of Campeche near Mexico," Darensbourg said. "It tracked all the way across the gulf before making landfall. The reason Milton got so strong was because the gulf waters at that time of year were much hotter than they usually were. In that particular regard, what ended up happening was that a lot of hurricanes got a whole lot stronger and there wasn't a lot of inhibition that could stop them from strengthening the way they did."

The intensity a tropical storm reaches primarily depends on the temperature of the water it forms in. Most hurricanes begin in the Atlantic, where the ocean's average temperature is 68 degrees Fahrenheit. It must be at least 79 degrees for the right conditions to be extracted from the ocean, according to the Scripps Institute of Oceanography. The current rate of global warming, 0.36 degrees Fahrenheit per decade, will create a breeding ground for larger and deadlier hurricanes, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Many climatologists like John Nielsen-Gammon hold the opinion that although the annual quantity of hurricanes will decrease, their severity will rise.

"Some of the initial research back in the late 1990s indicated the number of hurricanes will go up, and that turned out to be mainly associated with what we have observed historically," Nielsen-Gammon said. "But, it turns out, that's when you have a warm Atlantic and other oceans that stay the same... The number of very strong Category 4 or 5 hurricanes is expected to go up."

Initiatives at both the local and national levels, such as those in Austin, can contribute to mitigating the effects of global warming. Programs like TreeFolks provide free trees for residents to plant; updated building codes now require insulation and reflective roofing that help the buildings keep cool and reduce energy usage; NOAA heat maps the city to prepare areas where extreme heating events may occur and where mitigating tools need to be utilized. Individually, environmentally conscious lifestyle changes such as conserving water, energy, and gas can collectively lessen environmental stressors. However, as Nielsen-Gammon explains, it can be difficult to feel like a difference is being made.

"Like recycling, individuals can't make much of a difference individually, but a lot of individuals can make a decision collectively," Nielsen-Gammon said. "That can come about with reducing carbon dioxide emissions by using fuel-efficient means of transportation or electric personal vehicles. It's also important to learn about possible climate change solutions so you can properly evaluate different candidates' proposals regarding climate change."

Having awareness about the state of the current global climate can be an important factor in preparing for the unknown. Organizations, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, help citizens in times of extreme events and there are some efforts being made to curb the impact climate events have on people. Small efforts, combined with community initiatives can help build resilience against these extreme weather events.

## Abortion Access Complexity Arises in Central Texas

LEAH LASHUS | news editor  
REBECA GONZALEZ | student life editor

Across the state a new pattern has emerged: women are being rejected from receiving critical medical care. Whether they have an ectopic pregnancy—a nonviable fetus that can cause infection and bleeding—a miscarriage, or just want to schedule a routine early pregnancy ultrasound, women all over Texas are being turned away. This is due to the state government enforcing a full abortion ban and restrictions for medical intervention unless the woman is close to death, according to NBC News.

In 2022, a landmark decision was made by the Supreme Court to overturn Roe v. Wade, the half-century-old court case legally protecting abortion care. Because of this, abortion access is now controlled on a state-by-state basis, usually through state legislatures, not through voting. Texas bans abortion care in almost every circumstance as soon as a fetal heartbeat can be detected; no matter how early the pregnancy is. There are narrow exceptions to these laws such as the patient having a life-threatening condition and being at risk of death or "substantial impairment of a major bodily function" if the abortion is not performed, according to the Texas State Law Library. While Austin is a progressive city, it cannot override the state's laws. Nonetheless, this doesn't mean the Austin and Central Texas community is sitting passively.

Dr. Laura Dixon is the communications director at Resound Research for Reproductive Health (Resound Research), an Austin-based nonprofit research collaborative focused on emerging issues in reproductive health and policy. Dr. Dixon explained how the past two years have been different in fields of study and leadership, as they moved away from state-funded University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin).

"We transitioned from UT Austin and established ourselves as a nonprofit fiscally sponsored by the Tides Center," Dr. Dixon said. "We are continuing to do the work we did as the Texas Policy Evaluation Project, including rapid response research that analyzes policy impacts. We have also expanded our portfolio to more national projects as well as vasectomy."

Resound Research was founded in 2011, but became an independent collaborative after the overturning of Roe v. Wade in

2023, to help deliver accurate, scientifically backed information to women seeking pregnancy-related care, according to their website. Their main goal is to try to help expand the future possibilities of abortion care in Texas and nationwide.

"Our projects at Resound Research remain rooted in Texas because the impacts of reproductive health policies passed in the state are large in scale and often forecast policy changes in other states," Resound Research stated on their website. "We are also attuned to the fact we need to work across state borders on a regional and national level to identify broad-reaching solutions that support comprehensive reproductive healthcare."

Roe v. Wade is a unique case on the battlegrounds of both healthcare and politics, according to LASA junior Maya Graziano. However, she believes the decision for an abortion has no place in the latter.

"I believe that any medical decision about someone's body should be up to their choice; it's the choice that a family should make and not politics," Graziano said. "Especially because most of the politicians making these decisions are white males, or just males in general, who don't actually understand the emotional and personal impact on the decisions that they're making."

Another part of the issue revolves around abortion as potentially life-saving healthcare. Since the overturning, the nation's maternal mortality rate has nearly doubled, from 17.4 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2018 to 32.9 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021, according to the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Many miscarriage treatments have been denied, as well, due to their similarity to abortion procedures, putting even more women with pregnancy complications at risk, according to the National Library of Medicine. These outlooks show clear double standards compared to other medical procedures.

"It's the same thing where if [a person] had cancer and they didn't get proper access to radiation or chemo treatments, they would die," Graziano said. "Several cancer patients choose not to receive chemo or radiation treatments. Nobody believes that we should force treatments on cancer patients. I don't believe that we should force abortion restrictions on women either."

Though nearly full abortion bans make the future of women's health seem like a dire and increasingly monitored one, Dr. Dixon

believes there is reason to believe communities in central Texas are finding hope. She mentioned how other cities have combated abortion bans, and how Austin can follow.

"A local movement against Prop A in Amarillo led by Amarillo Reproductive Freedom Alliance had a successful campaign this election day," Dr. Dixon said. "Donating to abortion funds can also help people who need care."

Prop A in the Amarillo local election is a proposition allowing anyone to bring a civil suit against someone who they think helped or intends to help an Amarillo citizen travel from Amarillo to another state where abortion is legal for the purpose of obtaining an abortion, according to the Amarillo Tribune. On November 5, it was rejected by voters; one-way citizens fought back.

Changes in abortion rights

affect all Americans, according to LASA senior Astrid Gothard, including young people. She believes it is imperative that youth inform themselves and fight for issues that they care about, especially when thinking about the future.

"The current administration won't be around forever," said Gothard. "I think being active in politics is definitely important. Some of us are going to go on and lead in the future, so learning as much as possible, being educated. I think the most important thing that we can do as young people is educate ourselves, know our beliefs, know the facts behind our beliefs, and be prepared to defend them and think for ourselves."



graphics by Tita Gonzalez

# Autonomous Vehicles Roam City Streets

## Waymo Partners with Uber in New Ride-hailing Service

**JAMES CONSTANT** | staff writer  
**ETHAN STERN** | news editor

While the race for fully autonomous cars rages on, Waymo, a company owned by Alphabet–YouTube and Google’s parent company– has made several large advances in many tech-centered cities, including Austin. Founded in 2009, Waymo is part of Google’s Self-Driving Car Project, which aims to develop both a rideshare service and an updated car, the Waymo One.

In an announcement made in August 2023, the California-based company stated that the Waymo One would be hitting streets in Austin as well as other large cities, such as Phoenix, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The cars are all-electric Jaguar I-PACE models with Waymo technology attached. Austin is reported by the United Nations Environmental Program to have been prioritizing sustainability, and, accordingly, Waymo One being electric allows both the company and Austin to further this shared goal. The cars are set to partner with Uber starting in early 2025 as a driverless rideshare service that Austinites can request via an app on their phone. Andy McCasland, the CEO of Spring INC, a production agency and management firm in Austin, explained the company’s support for Waymo.

“I trust a company like Google to own Waymo because it takes a company with very deep pockets to fund the kind of research that they’re doing,” McCasland said. “Waymo operates as an independent company, and I haven’t seen anything to make me concerned about the way they’re operating.”

According to Waymo’s website, Waymo cars have accumulated over 20 million miles of total driven through the trials the company has been running on streets across the U.S. Marc Davis, founder of Moment Motor Company, a car preservation company based in Austin, explained the potentially positive impacts that Waymo cars could bring to Austin streets.

“Long term, having our streets filled with more and more of

these vehicles could potentially reduce traffic injuries and fatalities as well as potentially alleviate traffic congestion,” Davis said. “The ability for these vehicles to communicate with one another and coordinate could allow for optimized operation in complicated situations.”

In September 2024, Waymo released new statistics of the number of miles driven through the end of June, showing the Waymo Driver had 84% fewer crashes with airbag deployment, 73% fewer injury-causing crashes, and 48% fewer police-reported crashes than a human driver. Although it is important to note the drastically larger amount of human-driven vehicles compared to Waymo cars, these safety features are a positive for many who are hesitant about autonomous driving.

“I feel that well-developed and managed software and hardware can now do a far better job of driving vehicles than many of the distracted and underskilled drivers on our roads today,” Davis said. “I believe that Austin’s reputation as an innovative city that embraces technology makes it a good fit for autonomous vehicle development and testing.”

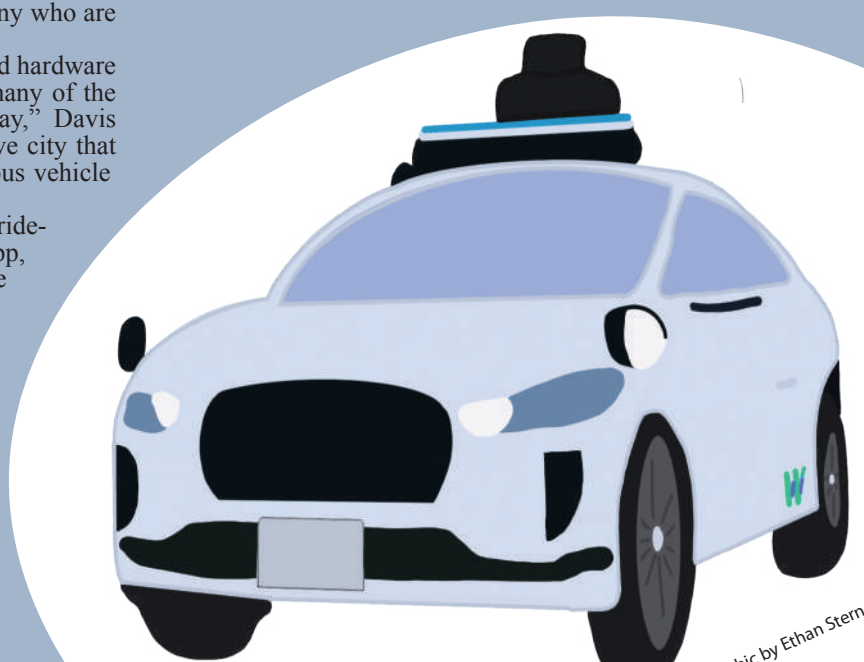
According to a statement from Waymo, Uber, a ride-hailing service that supplies cars with clients via an app, hopes to utilize the new driverless technology to provide a more personalized approach for each user. Partnering with an established company such as Uber makes these features available to everybody. Dara Khosrowshahi, the CEO of Uber, commented in a public statement on how Uber will build a partnership with Waymo.

“Soon, riders in Austin and Atlanta will be able to experience that same mobility magic, through a new fleet of dedicated autonomous Waymo vehicles, available only on Uber,” Khosrowshahi said.

To drive properly and avoid obstacles, engineers have designed the Waymo car to use powerful light sensors, cameras, and artificial intelligence to determine the best way to move forward, according to

Google. The cars also use a LiDAR system, a detection system which allows the car to perceive the area faster and farther ahead. Ben Livingston, an Austinite and local artist, described how the Waymo cars affect his neighborhood.

“It’s like driving with the Invisible Man because there’s [no one], and it’s turning and the gas pedal and brakes are [moving],” Livingston said. “It’s as if there’s somebody driving that car...it’s like the most careful driver in the world is driving you around.”



graphic by Ethan Stern

# Reduce Reuse Recycle

## Secondhand Shops Around Austin

**MEGAN GEROLD** | editor-in-chief

Austin has historically been a city of change and innovation, so Austinites have cultivated new ways to reclaim this innovation and elect to shop at one of the various stores within Austin. With 92 million tons of garments ending up in the landfill each year, according to Earth.org, secondhand shopping, also known as thrifting, arises as a creative way to participate in helping the environment.



graphics by Megan Gerold

**Austin Pets Alive! Thrift Store** is a secondhand store whose proceeds directly support Austin Pets Alive!, an animal shelter in Austin. It has five locations: 5801 Burnet, 1409 West Oltorf, 5102 Clarkson, 913 N IH-35, and 15803 Windermere.

**Austin Creative Reuse** is a store in East Austin that sells donated creative materials. The shop, located at 2005 Wheless Ln, also hosts workshops and community events.

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# Green

from page 1

They also enhance ecosystems by cooling down cities through lowering surface temperatures and providing shade. These spaces allow for a better recreational living experience for Nico Sims, a freshman at LASA who frequently hikes around Austin.

“There are so many different ways that green spaces help,” Sims said. “They bring a lot of life to the city. I feel a lot better whenever I’m in a green space or outside in general.”

The Austin Parks & Recreation Department FY21 Annual Report reported that the city of Austin has nearly 20,000 acres of green space across 330 parks, and added 33 new parks over the course of 2021. Freshman Amelie Senning enjoys visiting natural reserves and explained that she feels calm in the vast Austin outdoors, and believes it to be a beneficial asset to her mental health.

“I think green spaces are crucial, especially in a city like Austin, where people are always on the go,” Senning said.

“It’s nice to have a place where you can stop and just enjoy the environment, not worry about anything else.”

For Senning, while green spaces provide various benefits, maintaining and expanding them can be challenging in dense urban areas. Sennings emphasized that as cities grow, finding space for parks becomes more difficult.

“I think space is the biggest challenge,” Senning said. “People want to build more, but green spaces are really

important for the health of the city and the people.” Austin aims to expand its number of parks, with its goal being around 10 acres per 1,000 people, per the SCC. However, Austin

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- AMELIE SENNING, LASA FRESHMAN

is also trying to protect and preserve the natural areas that have already been created.

“There’s a balance we have to find,” Senning said. “We need to

create more green spaces, but we also need to protect the ones we already have.”

There have been many conflicts recently about what these parks should be used for. Some people argue that they should be recreational while others believe that they should be used for wildlife conservation, according to the National Park Foundation. Walker mentioned that this balance is a struggle for cities to discern and execute.

“[A challenge] would be balancing land use for recreation and wildlife, addressing maintenance costs, managing invasive species, and protecting native habitats while ensuring accessibility for urban communities,” Walker said. “Ecological health has always been prioritized over recreational use.”

According to the National Recreation and Park Association, through their significant contributions to ecological health and biodiversity, as well as the quality of life in urban areas such as Austin, parks provide a landscape of change in an area. As Austin continues to make an effort to grow and protect the land it has, green spaces prove to be a significant asset to cities by not only providing a peaceful place for individuals to decompress but also helping support a healthier, more sustainable environment.



graphics by Amelie Coleman

# Colleges Advance Access ACC Proposes Pilot Program for Free Tuition

MILES ANDREWS | staff writer

As acceptances roll in this year to LASA seniors, students must take a new aspect into consideration when choosing where to spend the next few years of college: the rising cost of tuition. Besides location, major, and student life, affordability is often an important consideration for making a college list as well as a key selling point for community colleges offering themselves as more affordable options to traditional four-year universities.

According to the Education Data Initiative, from 2010 to 2023, the average cost at public four-year institutions increased by 36.7%. The lack of affordable schools has caused students to consider more affordable options like public, in-state schools and community colleges. Moreover, since the early 2000s, tuition rates have risen due to reduced state funding, increasing administrative costs, and growing demand for specialized programs. LASA college counselor Vyasari Ganesan explained that over the past two decades, the cost of college has increased by 80% while scholarships and financial aid have only risen by 35%.

"The school I went to was Allegheny College, a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania," Ganesan said. "It cost around \$40,000 to go to. I had a scholarship that was about \$30,000, so that paid for three-fourths of my education, and I took out \$10,000 in loans. Now, the cost of going to Allegheny College is nearly \$80,000 a year, and the scholarship that I qualified for paid for three-fourths of my education at \$30,000 a year, and isn't even \$40,000 right now."

Many colleges are aware of the financial strain on families caused by increasing prices and have tried to adapt to different types of financial aid. Regardless, Ganesan believes the upward trend in tuition costs will continue into the near future.

"Colleges are not ignorant of how much they cost," Ganesan said. "They're very aware that there's an affordability crisis in this country. They're very aware that everyone's concerned about how expensive things are getting. That being said, I do think we're gonna see the cost of college go up."

The price of college pushes students to options like in-state public schools. The price of schools out of state is more expensive due to the residents not paying taxes to that state, causing colleges to make the prices higher for those students. When choosing out-of-state schools, Senior Leo De Los Santos noted the limited number of options available to students for

their budgets.

"I'm considering a few out-of-state schools, but the ones that I'm narrowing it down to are very similar to the in-state tuition," De Los Santos said. "For instance, San Diego State is one of the cheaper California schools, and that's the main reason I chose that over the other ones."

For LASA students worried about taking on large amounts of debt, Austin Community College (ACC) offers a more affordable alternative. ACC launched its free tuition program in April 2024 for people in the Austin area attending the school starting in 2024 and graduating in 2029. Immediately after the program's announcement, ACC reported a boost in enrollment. Ganesan discussed the benefits of choosing an option like ACC on top of the cost and namely mentioned the high transfer rate to the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin).

"ACC is probably the best community college in the South," Ganesan said. "It guarantees that all of your credits will transfer to any school in Texas and transfer acceptance rates are much higher. LASA's acceptance rate to UT Austin is around 30% if I'm looking at a 10-year average of data, but ACC has a 60% acceptance rate to UT Austin."

However, community colleges have been subject to stigma due to peer and parental pressure, according to High School Insider. This can lead to fewer students taking advantage of their opportunities. Journee Coleman, a LASA alumna currently attending Texas State University, reflected on the social aspect of attending a prestigious school.

"ACC was something that my mom brought up with me," Coleman said. "I regret it now, but I used to dismiss it because I didn't want my friends to think I was stupid...I feel like it was the culture of LASA that created that mindset for me. But now, not being in high school for so long, I feel like it's completely stupid. ACC's a really good option, and I wish I would have considered it."



graphic by Asher Zvi-Nova

# No Money

from page 1

However, Pettigrew explained that the meetings had only five people who worked on the school campuses out of the 35 others who were composed of parents and administration.

"The community input really lacked any sort of everyday staff input," Pettigrew said. "Honestly, I just don't think they want community that involved because they know it's going to impact the classroom, and they know that's going to push backlash, and I think they're trying to delay that backlash as long as they can."

According to Adriana Cedillo, the Executive Director of Financial Planning at AISD, another method of resolving the deficit is using monitoring strategies by reviewing contracts to see if AISD can get discounts while looking at vacant positions to see if the job could be absorbed by the staff at various AISD locations. Cedillo explained that an expected difficulty in resolving this issue has been creating a coherent idea of what is necessary to prioritize when it comes to budget cuts.

"I will say that people get pretty passionate about their one area," Cedillo said. "...When you get a lot of ideas in the kitchen, it's hard to come together as a group to make the best decision. People come with their ideas and opinions, and they want to safeguard their values, and they're great values, but how do you prioritize?"

Cedillo noted that a big topic when it came to discussing budget cuts is the recapture program headed by the state which takes a majority of AISD's money and sends it back to the state. She explained that the amount of revenue that is generated by AISD that is sent to the recapture program is enough to fund another district and provide valuable resources to the students.

"It's a big part because half of our tax collections go back to the state," Cedillo said. "Envision the dollar. Basically you rip that dollar in half and hand it off to someone else...people talk about, well, what happens if you just don't pay it? I mean,

I think when I first came in, I'm like, yeah, what happens if we don't pay it? Well, the state can come in and they can take over, they can take over the district, or they can start breaking apart the district."

Reach explained that the main idea of the recapture program is to facilitate wealth equalization through a funding formula created by the state of Texas which determines how much money each campus should have. In theory, the state uses that money to help support campuses to increase equity among the state.

"In practice the state uses that funding that comes in to help balance their own budget needs," Reach said. "If they sit there and determine that, okay, this year, it's going to cost us \$50 billion in state aid to give all the districts the money that we need, but we're getting 20 million in recapture. They say 'okay, so now I just need 30 million from the budget, and then that other 20 million that originally was budgeted for education, I can go spend that on something else now.'"

According to Cedillo, the main priority in resolving AISD's budget deficit is minimizing its effect on campuses and the students. She highlighted that a majority of the decisions that are happening right now are equity-driven and measure the long-term impact of these decisions on the students.

"We'll be doing several sessions with our staff and teachers to make sure that they are notified or can provide feedback on these reductions because although we're trying our best not to have those reductions impact them, their voices, their voices still matter," Cedillo said. "Aligning our values to student outcomes, and then also listening, not just the staff, but to the community about these reductions, because it's their students... So we do want to make sure that their voices are heard."

# THE LINE

## Global News

### 'Mini Moon' Moves Away

On Nov. 9, AP News reported that Earth will be moving on from an asteroid that has been tagging along with Earth's orbit for two months. The rock, which is expected to re-emerge briefly in January, is presumed to have been picked up by the gravity of the Sun, hence its departure from Earth's rotation. Even though it was never classified as a moon, NASA mentioned it as an object of interest after its discovery in August. In 2055, NASA predicts the object will once again begin a temporary, partial lap.

### South Korea Moots Marital Law

On Dec. 3, the president of South Korea, Yoon Suk Yeol, made an overnight decision to impose martial law by putting military forces in the streets of Seoul, according to AP News. The decision came in a television address and cited concerns over North Korean communist forces and anti-state threats, the Center for Strategic and International Studies announced. The action was heavily opposed by many lawmakers, with it eventually being recalled by the Korean parliament, CNN reported. Yeol now faces scrutiny for his decision with some now calling for his resignation or impeachment.

### Namibia Elects First Female President

On Dec. 3, according to AP News, Namibia announced Vice President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah will be its next president, making her the first female leader the country has had. The election, which has drawn concerns from many opposition parties, was extended three days due to glitches and ballot concerns. Nandi-Ndaitwah, from the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) party, won with 57% of the vote. She will now be the second female president in Africa currently.

## National News

### Trump Takes Term Two

On Nov. 6, Donald Trump, the Republican nominee, was named the 47th president after winning the popular vote, every swing state, and the electoral college with a total of 312 against Democratic nominee Harris with 226. Trump will be the second president in U.S. history to be elected in two non-consecutive terms following Grover Cleveland's win as the 22nd and 24th president. Trump lost to Joe Biden in the 2020 election after running for re-election after his win in 2016 over then-Democratic nominee Hilary Clinton. Trump has started the process of selecting his cabinet members and will take office after inauguration day on Monday, Jan. 20th.

### The Onion Owns Infowars

On Nov. 14, the Onion, a satirical news parody website, won the auction for the conspiracy company Infowars, founded by Alex Jones. Jones, a notorious conspiracist well-known for his denial views of Sandy Hook, was sued by the victims' families for his assets, AP news reported. The Onion aims to use the website as a medium to reach audiences disturbed by Jones' views, according to the New York Times (NYT). The bid, which the families sanctioned, agreed that the Onion owning the site would bring some relief.

### Macy's Giving Thanks

On Nov. 28, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade celebrated its 100-year anniversary as it marched down downtown New York City. The parade, which has been broadcasted on NBC, has been held 98 times, after taking a two-year intermission between 1942 and 1944 due to supply needs during World War II, according to Business Insider.

## State News

### Trump Uses Texas Land for Immigration

On Nov. 26, the Texas Tribune reported members of the Trump administration meeting with Texas officials in the Rio Grande Valley to discuss land use for mass deportation facilities. The 1,402-acre ranch named Starr County is now a construction site for the expanding border wall. Dawn Buckingham, the Texas Land Commissioner, offered the land to the Trump administration for the project dubbed "Jocelyn's Initiative" after Jocelyn Nungaray, a girl from Texas who was allegedly killed by illegal immigrants. According to NBC, the property would only be used in the case of a national emergency, thus diverting funds to help build the necessary infrastructure.

### Extreme Weather Irks ERCOT

On Dec. 3, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) warned of both a warmer winter and high chances of an extremely cold winter. Chief Meteorologist at ERCOT Chris Coleman warns of similar winter weather patterns to those in 2021, where winter storm Uri left millions of Texans around the state without power. However, ERCOT is still in a better place than it was during Uri as weatherization initiatives to protect the grid have been put into place, according to the

## Local News

### Turkey Trot Reaches Record Numbers

On Nov. 28, the ThunderCloud Turkey Trot, one of Austin's hallmark Thanksgiving traditions, reached record-high numbers with KXAN reporting over 21,000 runners. The tradition, which just reached its 34th year, has been growing steadily since its start in 1991, according to ThunderCloud. The trot starts at the Long Center and runs through downtown Austin. The run, held annually on Thanksgiving Thursday, benefits Caritas of Austin, a local nonprofit helping the homeless population in the Greater Austin area, according to KXAN.

# Update: Zero-Waste by 2040

In 2017, the Liberator published an article that discussed the 2040 initiative following its announcement 5 years later. This article will provide updated information on the topic, highlighting changes that have followed since its publication.

ETHAN STERN | news editor

Five years ago the Liberator covered the Resource Recovery Master Plan on Austin's Zero Waste goal. It has now been implemented for half a decade. So, where is it now?

Following new environmental studies pointing to landfill waste and greenhouse gas emissions as some of the main drivers of climate change, the sustainability of the planet has become a very pressing issue, as reported by the World Wildlife Fund. Austin is hoping to spark change with new environmental initiatives. On Dec. 15, 2011, the City of Austin adopted the Resource Recovery Master Plan detailing a zero waste goal by 2040. According to the Master Plan, the goal is to reduce 90% of the amount of trash sent to landfills by the year 2040. This plan, which has been in effect for over a decade, was updated and revised in 2023. Micheal Taylor, a public information specialist at Austin Resource Recovery (ARR) in Austin, explained the promise and end goal of this initiative.

"The department has reached many of the goals in the 2011 plan, and we expect fiscal year 2024's diversion rate to [reach] historical rates," Taylor said. "Our work revolves around meeting this goal while

providing necessary services to keep our community clean."

Environmental plans, like Austin's Master Plan, are just one of the many cultural initiatives proposed by various locations around the globe. In October 2023, the California Air Resources Board announced that it will mandate all vehicles made and sold starting in the year 2035 to be zero-emission, meaning they will not emit any pollutants from their car engines. Matthew McMillan, natural resources director at SWCA Environmental Consultants based in Austin, explained the positive side of these initiatives.

"Environmental initiatives improve the quality of life in a city and make cities sustainable further into the future," McMillan said. "Improving public transportation, minimizing waste, and lowering emissions are a few of the goals in the Austin Climate Equity Plan that will improve Austin's environmental footprint and improve the quality of life for residents."

Zero waste initiatives are important as they can help limit the need for increasing landfill space, which is harmful to the environment of cities, especially urban communities, according to the New York State Department of Health. In addition,

more landfills can lead to an increase in air pollution and harmful gasses in the air which is detrimental for both the environment and overall public health. Sophomore Carter Stanley, a student climate activist, described the effects that urban landfills can have on her local community.

"Landfills have a lot of emissions, specifically greenhouse gasses, and they pollute water and soil," Stanley said. "I think landfills make any place a bad place to live with the significant health hazard they pose on those who live near them."

McMillan stated that the City of Austin has worked on broader aspects of these environmental initiatives in recent years by adding safer and more accessible bike lanes, new composting programs, as well as recycling. The department stressed the work required of both citizens and the city to achieve these goals, and according to ARR, it is important to think about waste at home for the city to succeed.

"It is important that all Austinites do their part to help us reach our goal by reducing the trash they create, reusing items when possible, and recycling and composting correctly at home and at work," Taylor said.

# INDEPTH

# I heard a RUMOR

ISABEL KRAMER | student life  
REBECA GONZALEZ | editors

Animosity has taken hold of the LASA student body. Over the past year, rumor accounts have caught LASA students' attention over social media and become a mystery to many. These accounts allow students to post rumors anonymously for any followers in the form of confessions, jokes, and sometimes insults. Hurtful or kind, these messages are read by the accounts' hundreds of followers as a form of information and entertainment.

Cyberbullying has become central to many high schools around the country. According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, more than 1 in 4 middle and high school students have been cyberbullied in the past 30 days, and the epidemic is dangerous. According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, cyberbullying can lead "to emotional and physical harm, loss of self-esteem, feelings of shame and anxiety, concentration and learning difficulties." It is important to note that harmful social media accounts can have grave effects.

LASA Confessions is a private Instagram account with over 700 followers. It was formed from interest in the student body when the creators witnessed similar social media accounts created in neighboring schools. True to their platform, which allows people to direct-message (DM) the account with their opinions and then be posted without their names attached, the two students who currently run the account choose to remain anonymous.

"The accounts provide an outlet for students to express themselves," LASA Confessions said. "It isn't meant to be a rumor account. It was just supposed to be an open space to share opinions anonymously."

The account provides a way for students to publicize any and all opinions they have, whether negative or positive. The creators have attempted to solve this by curating the confessions as they are sent to the account.

"We try to make sure the posts are appropriate, but each moderator has different tolerances which can lead to different kinds of posts," LASA Confessions said.

Junior Sankrashan Balaji, who shared his opinions on the rumor accounts, has been mentioned on accounts many times for the past few years. He sees the animosity the accounts can generate as an opportunity for misinformation and rumors from students who can't be held accountable.

"I think it's really dangerous if you don't know who's writing it and they can't even be held accountable for their own actions," Balaji said.

Junior Laila Ross explained that animosity creates unimproved opinions, thus allowing students to say as they please without any true purpose. She finds social media to be a useless form of communication.

"I don't like them because they are just filled with people trying to get attention and who are just spreading things about other people that are not even constructive," Ross said.

Ross added that the rumor accounts can only be hurtful to the student body. She finds the account to make the social aspect of LASA less genuine.

"It's damaging to the school as a whole because we can't just be kind to each other face to face and then insulting each other online like Gossip Girl," Ross said.

Having been mentioned on rumor accounts, Balaji reflected on the effects these rumors have had on him. He found the biggest issue to be the misinformation that can be spread.

"The more people see them, the more people's perception on one's matter changes," Balaji said. "So, let's say there's something going on. And somebody who's uninformed posts about it. Then, now more people know about it, and everyone's talking about a different side of the story, maybe a wrong side of the story. So I do think it's personally affected me on how I view things."

However, Balaji still believes LASA Confessions has properly handled any negative rumors about students throughout the years. The account will openly remove any posts at a student's request. He finds this action a respectful way to respond to any false information.

"I can't give them all the blame because they're just posting what they get," Balaji said. "It's like any news in general. They're just getting what they see and posting what they have. So, if they didn't know when they posted it, it could have been a genuine accident."

He found the real culprits to be those who send the message because they utilize the public account as a way to say hurtful comments in a way that they can escape accountability.

Although rumor accounts are common in high schools across the nation, Balaji believes more efforts should be made to prevent them at LASA. Because of the school's rigorous academics, many students are already under much pressure, and rumors can be detrimental to a student's mental health. However, LASA Confessions attempts to prevent this to the best of its ability.

"We're not the ones confessing these things; any issues brought up should be resolved amongst the students who have the problems," LASA Confessions said. "We are simply a way for students to communicate their views, though we try not to let large negativity pass through, especially confessions that might negatively affect someone."

An ex-owner of the account elaborated on their opinions of the management and purpose. Unlike the other two members, the anonymous source no longer participates in the social media account.

"I personally feel very responsible for any posts I made that could have hurt people, and that's why I left," the source said.

They found some comments to be comedic and believed their intention was positive. However, they explained that even with proper account management, no post can ever be completely harmless.

Ivy Sernovitz, a LASA senior, reflected on one of the more positive and funny parts of the account. While rumors play a large role in cyberbullying, according to Sernovitz, there are fun and silly situations that anonymous Instagram accounts can create.

"During a hold on Bring Your Parent to School Day last year, my friend Corry said, 'There's a hold in place because there's a wild boar roaming the hallways,'" Sernovitz said. "Someone overheard him, and they found a photo, then the 'boar' was posted to the entire school. The rumor spread like wildfire."

"I think it's gone too far, and I don't blame the people running it for staying or for posting what they do," the source said. "I think they're providing a good outlet for students, but every other post now is a nasty rumor or comment about someone."

They believe it will always find its way back to being a damaging and unconstructive form of communication for the student body. The source mentioned that at its best, it was a safe space to share opinions that has quickly shifted



into what it is today. "The thing is, this account was always going to be a negative space because it's a good place for students to get their frustrations out about issues with teachers, staff, et cetera," the source said. "But it was supposed to feel safe. Instead that quickly turned to actually hurting other people."

LASA Confessions isn't the only anonymous rumor account that has found its way to students' social media feeds and school halls. LASA Gwapevine is an account that produced jokes about students and LASA written and posted by its anonymous creators. The account was created by senior students who would specifically target their class of 2025. The creators of the account have asked to remain anonymous.

"We would go through the yearbook and just write down a bunch of jokes about people," Gwapevine said. "And so that's how it started."

Sarah Moser is one such LASA senior who was mentioned in the account. Before this year, she hadn't seen many online rumor accounts, but she has found LASA to have an extraordinary number of them.

"Many accounts post funny things throughout the day that aren't derogatory towards students, and I don't think there's anything super wrong with those types of accounts," Moser said. "But I think there's a limit."

Gwapevine explained that the account originally began with harmless jokes about students. However, Moser believes there isn't any purpose for online accounts that talk about students anonymously whatsoever.

"I guess they can maybe be viewed as a sense of camaraderie, but I don't know," Moser said. "I don't really think they have any benefit to them. I think they're just a waste of time."

As Moser described, the account began with small jokes. In addition, Gwapevine acknowledged that they began straying away from playful, harmless humor as time went on.

"The goal was always to make it in good taste, and then I think it kind of morphed into we-can-post-whatever-we-want," Gwapevine said.

The account was created at the beginning of the school year, and as the fall semester continued, it began to fixate on specific individuals as more "drama" ensnared more and more of the senior class. Moser explained that this made it so that soon enough, the account went from being a funny joke to a rumor mill Moser explained.

"When I first followed it I thought it was pretty harmless," Moser said. "They were just making some pointless jokes. But it got to a point where one of my friends, who had been struggling and she hasn't been at school a lot, they targeted her, and that's just kind of pointless."

Moser isn't alone in her opinion. Gwapevine creators also found their focus on drama damaging and regretted the transition.

"Tasteful humor about the drama that was happening sort of turned into this drama that is hurting people, and it doesn't make sense to be talking about it," Gwapevine said. "Especially because it's drama, even if [meant as] a joke."

Once the account started to specifically target people, people became entranced in discovering who was behind the account's screen. Moser explained that the account created a lack of communication and caused a divide within the senior class.

"There's been a lot of drama between some people," Moser said. "It creates rifts, especially when you don't know who it is and everyone's speculating."

As speculation grew, Gwapevine became more focused on protecting their identity. At times, they would plan when to post to create an illusion of innocence for all the account contributors. Moser was one person who contacted the account after personal comments were posted about her.

"I'm not gonna lie, it didn't bother me that much until I reached out to them and they were rude when DM'ing me because I was never rude to them. I never attacked them," Moser said.

Many of Moser's friends also contacted the account to defend their friends who were being targeted. Moser added that the creators were responsible for any hurt the account caused and should take accountability.

"There were probably like four or five people who were just upset about it, and our view was that their complaints [to us] were usually starting drama," Gwapevine said. "And our view was like, 'Oh, well, you're starting drama by DMing the account,' but I think the reality is that we're sort of the ones making the flywheel in the first place."

Ultimately, Moser found the account to be unnecessary, and Gwapevine has now been deleted. Some people that the account targeted were her friends who were struggling outside of school. She saw the personal aspects as excessive and rude as advertised on the internet.

"There's no need to bring in bullying because people are impressionable. You never know what someone's going through," Moser said. "There's a limit between rumors and bullying."



HEART RUMOUR ACCOUNTS Sadie Henderson looking down at her phone. Rumour accounts have been increasing in prevalence and amount at LASA. Photo and graphic by Isabel Kramer.

# LASA Students Step in Line for Latest Club

LILY ANTONY | staff writer

Raptors have donned their cowboy boots and country to begin a new club at LASA: the LASA Line Dancing Club. Amid LASA's highly academic clubs, Line Dancing Club was created to bring a fun part of Texan culture to campus.

Line Dancing Club was founded by juniors Anna Ugarte and Daphne Hayes. The idea to form the club sprouted when the two visited a hangout spot with live music, food, and drinks in Buda, Texas.

"We went to this place in Buda called Buck's Backyard and tried line dancing," Ugarte said, "And it was really fun. We decided to start a club at LASA because we thought other people would enjoy it, too."

Ever since the club's co-captains brought line dancing to the dance room from Buck's Backyard, they continue to attend Buck's most Thursdays in order to learn new dances for the club. Ugarte and Hayes' goal was to create a club for people to enjoy and learn about line dancing.

"We just thought it was really fun and we knew our friends would have fun doing it," Ugarte said. "And we're like, well, maybe we should make it a club for everyone to have fun."

The club is a relaxed environment that aims to provide fun activities for people at LASA. To prepare, Ugarte and Hayes learn three different line dances for each meeting and practice them a couple of times before starting the group dances.

"We have three dances planned," Ugarte said. "And so we alternate teaching the dance step by step. And then we go into doing the dance throughout a full song, with everybody doing it

and then we do that three times."

The co-captains explained that they have different dances to explore all the positive aspects of line dancing. The dances are taught quickly so they can get to the actual dancing in the same meetings.

"It's pretty easy overall. There's different dances to different songs, and they kind of range in levels," Hayes said. "Most of the ones that we do are probably beginner or mild difficulty level, but there's some hard ones that are complicated and they're really fun to learn."

Junior Anya Sanchez, a club member, learned about line dancing through Buck's Backyard through attendance with Ugarte and Hayes. Her enjoyment of the experience led her to later join the club.

"They took me to Buck's backyard one time too, we did line dancing," Sanchez said. "It was really fun. And then they created their club. Then I joined too."

Sanchez explained that she attends the club because it's a fun activity, and Ugarte and Hayes provide a space to learn interesting dances.

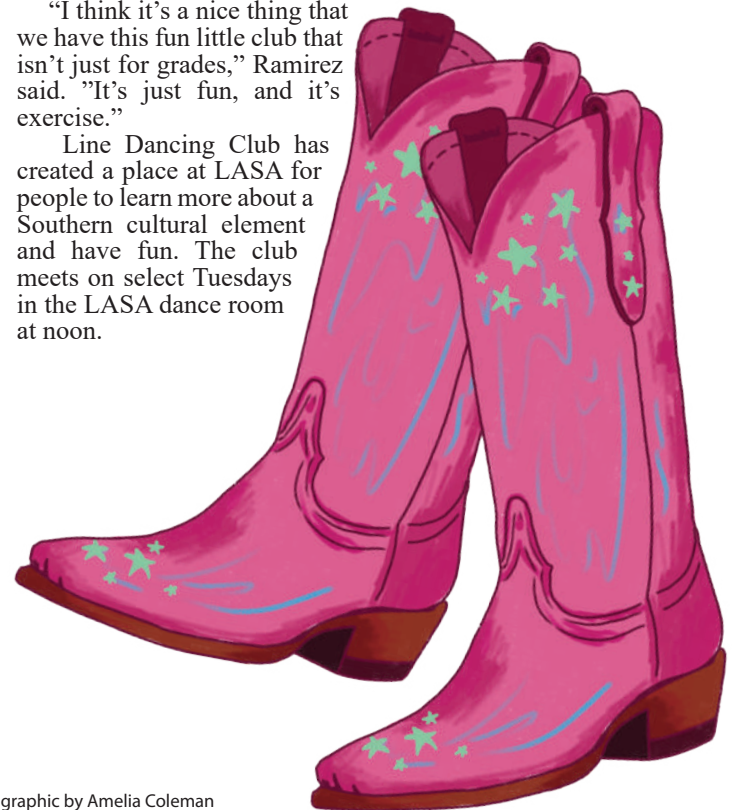
Another club member, junior Galilea Ramirez, explained that she joined the club because of her interest in dancing. However, she was also intrigued to learn more about this element of southern culture.

"I joined because, even though I don't have a whole lot of faith in this country, I thought it was cute and Lana Del Rey to be patriotic," Ramirez said.

Ramirez knew some line dances before, but the line dancing club taught her southern ones. She enjoys being in an environment that focuses on simply having fun during a stressful school day.

"I think it's a nice thing that we have this fun little club that isn't just for grades," Ramirez said. "It's just fun, and it's exercise."

Line Dancing Club has created a place at LASA for people to learn more about a Southern cultural element and have fun. The club meets on select Tuesdays in the LASA dance room at noon.



graphic by Amelia Coleman

graphic by Asher Zvi-Nova

## Advice Column

MRIDHULA KUMARAVEL | staff writer

**LASA Raptor:** Dear Stu,

I recently started a few sports, both fairly intense and a huge increase from what I was doing before. By the end of the first one, I was injured from overworking my legs, but it didn't seem too bad yet and started to fade. A few days later I started the second sport, which happens to be one of the activities listed as something you should never do with this injury, and it immediately got worse. I get that physical health is important, and I understand that with what I am doing now it can easily become a stress fracture, but I love this sport and don't know if this is worth being unable to do it for the next four years. What should I do?

**Stu:** Dear LASA Raptor,

The balance between healing and conditioning is a challenge athletes constantly battle. It's very similar to the school-life balance all students at LASA struggle with. And just like with classes, we constantly put ourselves second, even when damaging our health. But pushing through an injury now could lead to a much more serious issue—like a stress fracture—that might take you out for months or even years. However, it's important to note that you're starting a new sport. So whether it's shin splints or calluses, your lifestyle is going to change.

If you're worried about your spot, consider talking to your coach; explain that you're committed but need to avoid worsening your injury. Each sport has a unique and different stress on someone's body, and experienced coaches know what stretches, foods, or exercises can resolve the injuries. Coaches will respect athletes who are responsible for their recovery because it shows maturity and a long-term focus. Giving yourself a few weeks now could protect your ability to play for seasons to come. Remember, a little rest now is better than a lot of regret later. Good luck!

**LASA Raptor:** Dear Stu,

Help, I have a teacher who never grades! It can be very frustrating because they are a kind teacher so I feel bad repeatedly asking for something to be graded.

**Stu:** Dear LASA Raptor,

As an upperclassman, I've been there before, and honestly, your teachers only get tougher as the years go on. However, you also learn how devoted some teachers are to teaching. They get low salaries, have to deal with high schoolers all day, and also have to come to school everyday. So just remember that teachers are human, too. We don't know what goes on outside of the classroom so we should always maintain respectful interactions. When you ask them to grade something, never blame them or accuse them of anything. Remember: they have hundreds of students who require different attention, and you are not their priority. If it affects your grade after grades are finalized and after being asked at least twice, reach out to your academic counselors as a final resort. But honestly, the harder the classes get, the less you're going to want to see the grade.

**LASA Raptor:** Dear Stu,

Last year one of my best friends crossed a MAJOR boundary and broke all of my trust. They used things I'd said in confidence against me and became incredibly emotionally manipulative in an attempt to make me do things for them. They then fully twisted the story in an attempt to turn the school against me, lying about everything. I reported them and got a stay-away agreement that they fully disregarded after a few months, telling people I'd forgiven them when being in the same room still gave me a panic attack. This year we've had to work together on a few projects and have gotten a little closer because of the forced proximity, and they finally apologized after seven months, but it wasn't more than two minutes in the hallway that they twisted it to be all about them. I'm not comfortable as their friend but am stuck working with them on a lot of projects that I can't get out of and have no clue how to convey my discomfort when I've been hiding it this whole school year. What should I do?

**Stu:** Dear LASA Raptor,

It can be annoying working with people you don't get along with, especially when your grade is at stake. My best suggestion for you is to let your teacher know in private that you don't feel comfortable working with them anymore. Most teachers are understanding and will consider your situation. In the case that they don't—be as clear to your "friend" as possible about how you feel about what they've been doing. Communication is key.

# The Rise and Fall of Electives

MILES ANDREWS | staff writer

Each year in the spring semester, LASA students scroll through the course guide in search of their future electives, and each year, new electives emerge while old ones run their course and get dropped from the catalog. This trial and rollout period allows for many twists and turns to occur when creating a new elective.

San Czaplinski, a LASA administrator in charge of forming electives, explained that selecting electives is a long, complex process. Every elective has multiple steps to complete in order to make the course guide and onto the next year's schedule. Czaplinski summarized the proposal for a new elective in three steps.

"Teachers first have to discuss the idea with their department chair," Czaplinski said.

"Since we have limited staff, there needs to be agreement on how many core classes versus electives each teacher will handle."



graphics by Tita Gonzalez

This initial stage ensures that mandatory courses such as English 1-4 have sufficient staffing before non-essential classes are considered. After receiving department approval, teachers need to outline their course goals using the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

"The teachers have to follow TEKS that their

class is going to meet, what the goals are for the class, and they have to provide a syllabus," Czaplinski said.

After these steps, it's finally time for the teacher to submit their proposal for final review. Czaplinski emphasized that whether an elective forms or doesn't is ultimately determined by student interest.

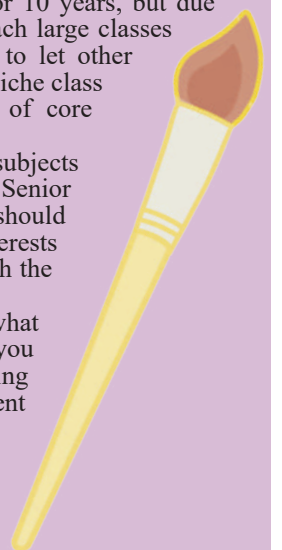
"If a new elective doesn't meet the minimum enrollment, we have to cancel it," Czaplinski said. "For example, we tried to introduce a Japanese animation course, but only 12 students signed up so we had to drop it."

This process, dubbed "course killing", has many rounds, starting with initial interest and ending right before the school year begins. According to Czaplinski, budget and staffing issues have caused courses like Robotics 2 and 3 to be discontinued. Chloe Cardinale, the former Hitchcock teacher, a class that covered Alfred Hitchcock's filmography, experienced a similar problem with her elective.

"I had a very good run with it for 10 years, but due to budget constraints, we have to teach large classes now," Cardinale said. "It was time to let other teachers enjoy the chance to teach a niche class and connect with students outside of core classes."

Electives allow the exploration of subjects that core classes cannot explore. Senior Rakesh Ravi believes that students should pick electives based on their interests which is an opportunity provided with the electives at LASA.

"Choose electives based on what you're interested in," Ravi said. "If you don't have a specific passion, try taking a variety of courses to explore different subjects."



# Raptors in the Wild: Zoe Klein

BEATRICE KLEIN | club contributor

Zoe Klein first stepped into the Liberator team as a staff writer in 2018. As the years continued, she came to be the Liberator's co-editor-in-chief her senior year. Throughout her time, she developed many skills, such as managing a team with contrasting opinions, learning to meet deadlines, and spending lots of time writing. Now, she revisits how those skills she learned from the Liberator helped her spread her wings after leaving the team two years ago.

To Klein, the newspaper team helped her forge a strong connection with the LASA community. One of her fondest memories was her reporting for the Raptor Rundown, a Liberator segment that involves playing a sport at LASA with no prior experience, in 2021. For two weeks, she spent her afternoons with the LASA cheer team as they practiced drills and routines and recounted her experience in the Liberator.

"My childhood dream of becoming a cheerleader and my somewhat uncharacteristic love of football were not mutually exclusive anymore," Klein said. "And I could do the splits."

The experience led her to make new friends and uncover new talents. Writing for the newspaper always seemed to grow her as a person, and not just through her gymnastics skills. For example, this year, Klein has begun writing her thesis on the topic of Russian election interference. She's begun to notice that her experience on the Liberator has allowed her to write her thesis more effectively than her classmates.

"I will be writing this for the next couple of years, so it's been a big undertaking," Klein said. "But there's no doubt that the newspaper has helped me be ready for something like this."

Klein explained that being a part of the Liberator also taught her to communicate with people who held opposing opinions from her. Her experience with the newspaper taught her to respect, appreciate, and learn from diverse perspectives and ideas.

"One of my editors, Nevin, had many different opinions from me," Klein said. "Working with him taught me so much, even if we did have many arguments over our differing opinions."

Now, Klein is a junior majoring in Political Science at the University of Michigan. According to her, the Liberator shaped a significant part of her identity and deepened her understanding of the importance of a free press and the responsibility that comes with it.

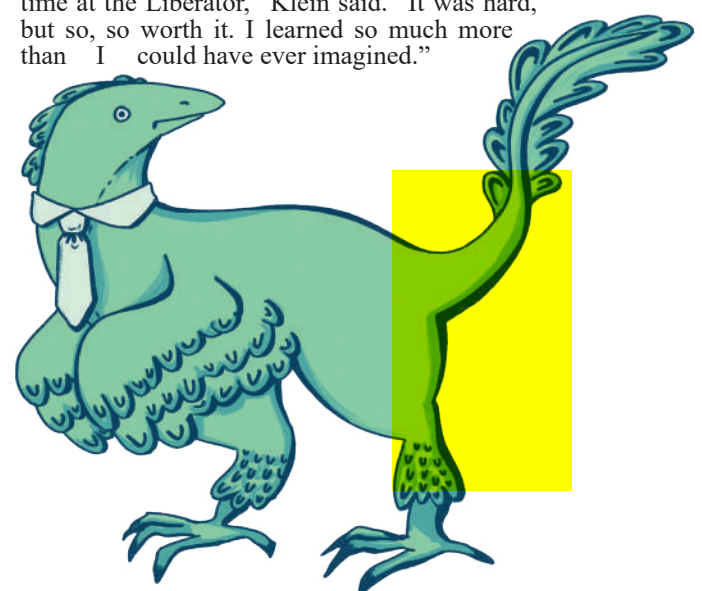
"The Liberator helped me figure out what kind of person I am," Klein said. "I know I can be a little bossy at times, but this role allowed me to embrace that part of myself, so I loved that."

In college, Klein has taken her leadership skills and begun exploring a career in public policy. The interest in press rights she gained from the Liberator helped her find the inspiration for this career path.

"I am looking for some internships in DC for this summer, hopefully, where I can learn more about public policy and get a glimpse of what my life looks like in just about two years, which is kind of crazy," Klein said.

Klein's journey with the LASA Liberator was more than just a high school experience. It was a transformative period that gave her skills and character she would not have otherwise.

"I don't know who high-school-me would have been without the Liberator, honestly...I loved my time at the Liberator," Klein said. "It was hard, but so, so worth it. I learned so much more than I could have ever imagined."



graphic by Amelia Coleman

# Ants of LASA: Insect Infestation on the Rise

PAXTON TIDRICK | staff writer

Aside from chickens and students, LASA has become home to a new group of critters: ants. Found in holes in the walls and scouring hallway floors for food, ants have established colonies throughout the entire campus. Now, teachers have had to take precautions in order to prevent the infestation in their classrooms.

Upon walking into his room one morning, LASA U.S. History and Government teacher John Goodell was shocked to see thousands upon thousands of ants crowded around a desk. Before this, students were allowed to eat food in his classroom as they pleased. However, the privileges have since been revoked as it led to an insect invasion.

"I don't like to name names, but [someone] brought Popeyes chicken wings into my classroom," Goodell said. "I did not ban food at this point."

Goodell is not alone in his insect concerns. Adela Sifuentes, LASA's building manager, also recognized the problem and explained that Goodell's plan of removing food from classrooms is the first step teachers can take.

"I think this year has been a little crazy," Sifuentes said. "I think what can help us from not having all these issues in classrooms is [not allowing] so much food. Students constantly eat food, leave their food behind, and don't pick up after themselves."

Chloe Cardinale, LASA girls varsity soccer coach and Great Ideas teacher, explained that keeping food out is more challenging than it seems. In addition to a growing ant infestation, she has also found roaches in her room.

"I've had an ant and

roach infestation since August, which I have not had in previous years," Cardinale said. "I have tried to curtail students eating in here, but that's a losing battle as well."

Goodell also has had limited success clearing his room of the ants and explained that the infestation always returns. This prompted the reinstatement of a no-food rule in his room during class time that had previously been lifted.

"I banned food in my class for the rest of the semester," Goodell said. "Ants went away. I brought food back the second semester, and it got so bad."

Because of the insect problem, teachers have complained to the administration in numbers. While faculty members do hear complaints about the critters and recognize the cause, many do not think it is as big an issue as some claim.

"To me, infested means they're just non-stop everywhere," Sifuentes said. "I haven't seen that anywhere, and nobody has reported that that's the issue."

The school is currently attempting to control the issues as they arise by requesting pest control companies, such as ABC Home & Commercial Services (ABC), to help resolve the issue. However, Sifuentes explained that the arrival of ants is inevitable.

"We're trying to control [it], but it's not something that we can get rid of," Sifuentes said. "We can contract ABC as we've done, we can put in work orders for the service center, but it's just something that is going to happen no matter what building you're in."

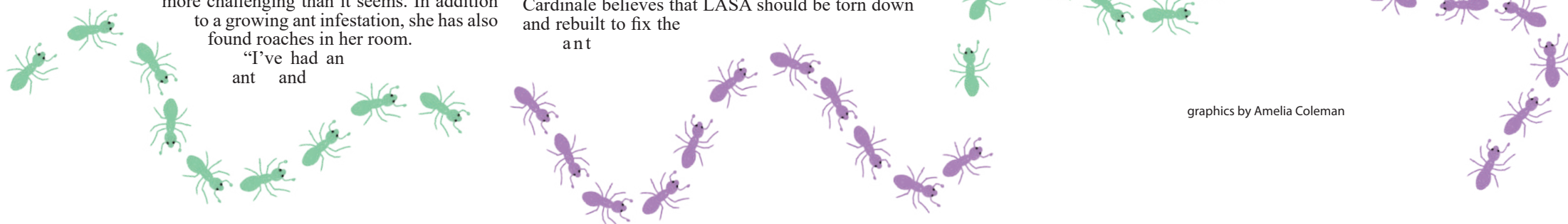
While these infestations might happen elsewhere, the school's condition also adds to their severity. Cardinale believes that LASA should be torn down and rebuilt to fix the ant

problem to provide students with a safe and clean environment.

"That's what they did at Ann Richards, that's what they're doing at Travis," Cardinale said. "The infrastructure of the building is falling apart. It's really hard to seal a building that hasn't been kept up for decades from anything, let alone tiny ants, so they're plugging holes as they're coming in through other holes."

Considering all the issues, Goodell explained that a new campus must be built. If not, he believes nature could reclaim LASA.

"Fundraise for a new building, this place is gone," Goodell said. "Eventually, it'll be like Jumanji where it's been subsumed by the forest."



graphics by Amelia Coleman

graphic by Amelia Coleman



TINGYU CAO | staff writer

**LASA Liberator:** How long have you been teaching?

**Ahmed:** I have been teaching for more than 10 years. If you count in Bangladesh and here, it is more than 10 years, but in LASA, it's my second year. I worked in private schools, and then also as a sub I did work in different schools. Also, I have one more certification: dyslexia interventionist. As a dyslexia interventionist, I also work in different schools.

**LASA Liberator:** Is teaching here different from teaching in Bangladesh?

**Ahmed:** There are a lot of differences. Usually, you have facilities here, you do hands-on activities a lot, but [in Bangladesh] we only depend on our theory, like theoretical education. We don't have any practical facilities. We just [use] whatever we watch on the website or any video. [The online resources are] the only thing we can visualize, but we cannot do hands-on, except for university. When I went to university, I did have exposure to all the experiments and everything, but in school, I didn't have as much exposure as [students] do here. We didn't have that exposure. Probably by now, like nowadays, I think they do have that exposure, but when I grew up, we didn't have that exposure.

**LASA Liberator:** How do you like LASA so far?

**Ahmed:** As I said: a lot, because of you kids. All the students I love here, because most of you, in fact, I would say all of you are so respectful to your teachers. And I love that part, and so far, I know we do have a good relationship, teacher-student relationship that I'm enjoying the most.

Farhana Ahmed began teaching chemistry at LASA last year. Originally from Bangladesh, Ahmed has been a teacher for 10 years at various schools. She first discovered her interest in chemistry through her study of organic chemistry during high school, then found her love for teaching through her relatives and her interactions with students.

**LASA Liberator:** Tell us about yourself.

**Ahmed:** I was born and brought up in Bangladesh. It's a small country beside India. I have all my education there except for my teaching certification that I did here.

**LASA Liberator:** What got you interested in chemistry?

**Ahmed:** My first interest was in physics. I really love physics and also math. When I was in high school, the time when I went over all the chemistry parts it really attracted me a lot. All the reactions and everything there, all the nomenclatures, especially organic chemistry. It was the most interesting part for me. I really love all the reactions and the products of organic chemistry. Organic chemistry was the most interesting part to me.

**LASA Liberator:** What was your inspiration for teaching?

**Ahmed:** I should be honest—first, I thought I would go to the corporate world, and I was working in a multinational telecommunication group, but there I felt like that place was not for me. And then I started my career as a teacher. There I was really doing so well, then when I went [back] to the corporate world, it seems like that's not a good fit. Then I came back to teaching again, and I feel like this is my place. I really like to connect with the kids like middle schoolers or high schoolers.



**CRAZY CHEMISTRY** Farhana Ahmed stands at her desk in her classroom. To the left is a chemistry student asking for assistance. photo by Jonah Popinski

# Robotics Cuts Team Size

SAM WAELBROECK | staff writer

Purple Haze, LASA's robotics club, reduced its team size this year due to a shortage of mentors. This decision, which both denied acceptance to new students and cut pre-existing team members, has sparked mixed reactions from many raising concerns about accessibility and resources.

A sophomore who wished to remain anonymous shared his thoughts on the decision to reduce the team size, having been denied himself. He explained that while cuts were necessary, how they were handled was unfair to students.

"It's understandable, cutting kids," the sophomore said. "But the way they did it wasn't super great, and it robbed a bunch of people the chance to even try out robotics."

The sophomore expressed that LASA lacks different opportunities to explore robotics. Because of the lack of alternatives available, they believe the decision revoked many new students' ventures into the club.

"It squashes their chances of even trying since it is almost impossible to find other ways at LASA to do robotics," the sophomore said.

Conversely, the sophomore suggested that creating a second team could have easily allowed more students to join. According to them, this would have made the teams closer and reduced the strain on mentors they saw having been on the team in past years.

"I think creating a second team would be a decent idea since it also made it so you needed fewer mentors and made the team more close-knit with each other," the sophomore said. "It could give more people the chance to do more things. Like last year, some people didn't even know my name, and I didn't get to do as much as I wanted."

Sophomore Alia Dube joined the robotics club over the summer and described the application process as straightforward. The students interested in joining filled out a form to express their interest and add any prior experience they had.

"You fill out a form describing why you want to be in robotics and maybe a little bit of previous experience, but it's not super detailed," Dube said.

The club received applications from around 115 students, but only 50 to 60 were accepted. Dube feels that the current team size is manageable and does not overcrowd the classroom, ensuring a more productive environment for everyone.

Team mentor Vincente Kaufhold explained that cuts were necessary to ensure safety and effective education for the team members. Kaufhold acknowledged that it was a difficult decision, given that many talented students applied, but emphasized the importance of having a controllable team size.

"In an ideal world, I would have loved to continue our long tradition of welcoming all students who want to participate," Kaufhold said. "Unfortunately, we only have a small mentor team to run the program at the moment."

He explained that running a large team with limited resources presented many challenges. As a result, Kaufhold emphasized that more mentors are the team's most crucial resource for succeeding and extending the opportunity to participate in robotics.

"Without having more mentors available, we simply can't run a safe or effective educational program with that many students," Kaufhold said.

Kaufhold highlighted that the robotics team could expand with additional funding, allowing for more student opportunities. The team as a whole could have multiple sub-teams, offering more students a chance to participate.

"Beyond mentors, having more funding would allow us to run more teams under the same roof, which means more hands-on opportunities for everyone," Kaufhold said.

According to Kaufhold, while sports teams deserve the resources they receive, other clubs like robotics should also be given similar support. He believes extracurricular activities like robotics offer invaluable education to students.

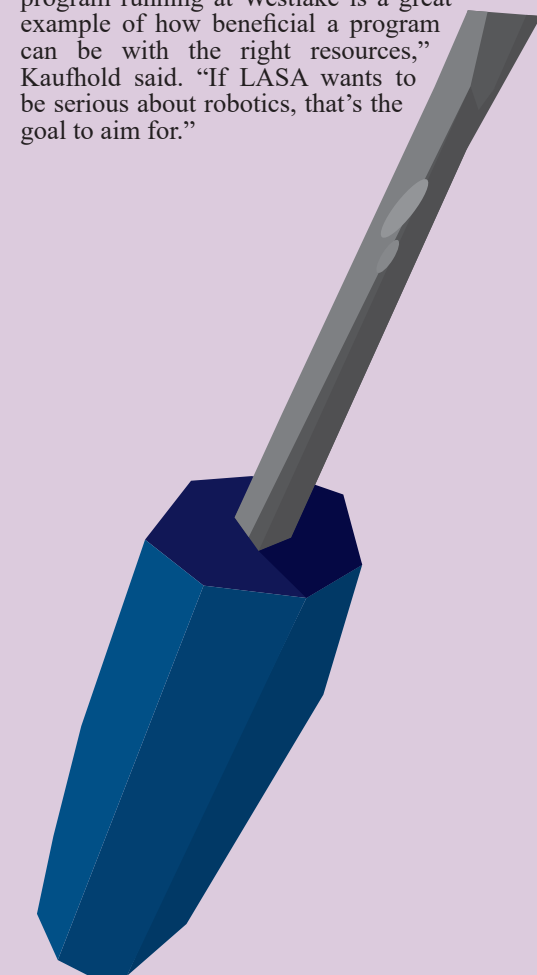
"Running a football team is hard work, and they deserve the resources they get," Kaufhold said. "But the same could be said for the marching band, robotics team, quiz bowl, or any other larger teams or clubs that offer education to students."

Kaufhold acknowledged that many of these resources depend on district funding, which has been hard to attain in recent years. He explained that Austin Independent School District's (AISD) lack of funding makes it harder for schools to provide adequate resources for all after-school programs.

"A lot of this lies out of the school's hands. AISD has been historically underfunded and hasn't exactly had a history of supporting LASA much even when they had the resources," Kaufhold said.

Kaufhold pointed to Westlake High School as an example of a program with more resources and the ability to accommodate more students. He believes that LASA could model its robotics program after Westlake's successful structure to grow its robotics program.

"Looking at robotics specifically, the program running at Westlake is a great example of how beneficial a program can be with the right resources," Kaufhold said. "If LASA wants to be serious about robotics, that's the goal to aim for."



graphic by Jonah Popinski

graphics by Amelia Coleman

# Fall Festival Fosters Community

LAUREN VANDERVEEN | staff writer

From girls softball to theatre, LASA's first fall festival welcomed clubs and teams to fund and support their groups in fun and creative ways. Its main goal, however, wasn't just to raise money, but also to increase involvement within the school community. Although it was the first Fall Festival at LASA, the Fall Festival was an old tradition at Johnston High School, and this year, it welcomed more participation than expected.

LASA clubs and teams set up booths with games, food, and other activities that were priced to a set amount of tickets. At the end, the booth could return the tickets they had received to earn an equivalent amount of money. Athletic Coordinator and organizer of the Fall Festival, Gary Howard, explained how the event will benefit the school programs and the overall student body.

"The fall festival is set up basically to build more involvement with the community and the school," Howard said. "It also doubles as an opportunity for all of the organizations that we have at the school to participate in fundraising for their organization."

The Fall Festival was attended by many LASA teachers and families who brought little siblings and friends to play the games

the festival offered and explore the benefits that LASA has to offer. The festival was used as an opportunity to raise funds for the athletic and academic programs as well as advertise the opportunities LASA provides for its students.

"Especially with the fact that we are inviting middle schoolers and elementary schoolers," Howard said. "So as they progress through their education and start talking about, 'Hey, I want to go to LASA,' they have an update or knowledge of what type of programs and things are available to them to participate in."

To attract students of all ages, the Fall Festival featured many different activities, such as a dunk tank with the school staff and seniors inside, a cakewalk, face painting, and other fun games for the students and their parents to play. Freshman Scarlet Harvey, a girls basketball member, attended the Fall Festival and mentioned the various activities she was looking forward to participating in.

"I'm really excited about the water tank," Harvey said. "I think that'll be really fun for everybody to see them get dunked and I'm excited for all the yummy and delicious food that everybody's been working so hard on."

Freshman Arden Smallwood, a member of the LASA's Dynasty dance team, explained how she hoped the Fall Festival would help support her team. According to her, she hopes it will both raise funds for her team as well and shine more light on her dance team.

"I hope that the Fall Festival can help spread awareness and joy to our team so that people can come to our games and help support us," Smallwood said. "I'm hoping that this event can help spread awareness of the different clubs and groups of LASA and that more people can mix and mingle and experience different opportunities."

Instead of games, some booths at the Fall Festival sold food to the people attending the event. Members of the women's basketball team made and served fresh tacos to those participating in the festival. People could also buy drinks courtesy of the boys' swim team.

The Fall Festival brought together students and parents of all different ages and schools, allowing elementary and middle school students to explore the opportunities LASA provides to its students. According to Harvey, the Fall Festival was also successful in bringing the school community together.

"I think this is really fun," Harvey said. "There's delicious food and I think everybody is just having a really good time, and being together which is awesome. I think everybody is just bonding, you know, playing games, buying food, just having fun

and I think it just brings us together."

Smallwood pointed out that activities such as pie in the face, led by the football club boosters, and the cupcake walk, led by the dance team, were two of the most popular games at the Fall Festival that excited the attendees. Students had the opportunity to throw pies of whipped cream into their classmate's faces at the pie in the face booth and also earn cupcakes if they were lucky enough to be standing on the correct cone during the cupcake walk. Other popular activities were the dunk tank, axe throwing, and sack racing.

"Well, I'm super excited about the cupcake walk, partially because I'm running it," Smallwood said. "I'm super excited about the pie someone in the face just because I think it's a really fun way to have fun and bond with others."

According to Howard, student participation was greater than expected. The event raised funds to support the school's academic and athletic programs and built involvement within the LASA community.

"I would like for this to become a traditional thing, something we do every year," Howard said. "We had a lot of success with, again, building a relationship with the community around us and hopefully creating a pipeline for the future, for kids that want to be a part of something from athletes to just academics. I'd like to see that be the norm, and I'd like to see it grow."



**RUNNING TO VICTORY** Students at the the Fall Festival participating in a relay race. Many activities took place at the Fall Festival, such as sack races, cakewalks, and axe throwing. photo by Lauren Vanderveen



**COOKING IT UP** LASA Girls Basketball Team making fresh tacos at the Fall Festival. photo by Lauren Vanderveen

## Authors Inspire Austin BookPeople Hosts Local Authors

LAUREN VANDERVEEN | staff writer

Since the '70s, Austin has become a flourishing community and home to thousands of local businesses. BookPeople, one such local Austin business, remains a pillar in the Austin community and has grown into the thriving bookstore the city knows and loves today.

The store frequently has local authors come to speak, allowing BookPeople to provide a tight-knit and supportive community between authors and their readers. Besides their guest talk program, there are many other programs that BookPeople has for their authors including the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, where local children's book authors can meet and learn from one another, allowing them to connect with their peers. This creates an even tighter community to form around the bookstore.

BookPeople goes out of their way to stock books written by local authors, providing them with a valuable opportunity to advertise and sell books directly to their audience. Poet and Children's Book Writer Todd Boss explained his experience with BookPeople promoting his new book, "The Boy Who Said Wow".

"I mean anything beyond stocking it is gravy, right? That's a rare opportunity for a children's book author," Boss said. "And then for them to shout it out in their holiday catalog is a real treat. And I didn't expect much attention at all from the book."

There are hundreds of bookstores in Austin, but BookPeople is Texas's largest independent bookstore. The BookKids Marketing and Events Logistics Manager at BookPeople Anthony Gaetjen explained how BookPeople became a staple in the community of Austin.

"BookPeople has been the destination bookstore in Texas for decades," Gaetjen said. "We're central to the Austin literary community, and this wonderful city is already a hub for all things weird and artistic. Beyond all else, though, what will always make BookPeople special is our staff and the level of time, care, and attention that staff is willing to dedicate to author events and our customers."

Boss explained that BookPeople strives to host events for all ages and appeal to all audiences. He described his experience attending BookPeople guest speaker events where the main goal is to provide a sense of

community and engage their customers.

"When you have a really active bookstore, it's almost like having an open think tank in your community that everyone can participate in," Boss said. "That happens every time I come to a reading here, there's a sense that our hearts and minds have been expanded, and our community has been engaged."

As BookPeople grows in popularity, more authors are reaching out to speak at guest speaker events. LASA freshman Marlo Stahl expressed the importance of attending these events after going to one herself. She explained that they are very eye-opening and educational.

"I think it is really important to make an effort to keep yourself educated, especially in a radically changing world," Stahl said. "Events like these are able to benefit and change the perspectives of many people. I am very glad that I was able to gain this opportunity, as it opened up new perspectives for me."

According to Gaetjen, BookPeople constantly works to acquire guest speakers tailored to their audience's interests. These events are not just for children as a result of BookPeople striving to appeal to all ages, and as the events coordinator at BookPeople, Gaetjen procures a list of authors for these events.

"Sometimes, we'll reach out to authors or their publicists, or they'll reach out to us," Gaetjen said. "Authors can request events with us over email or through a form on our website, and we meticulously review each of these requests to see how we can best serve them."

Guest speaker events draw the community together by providing opportunities for local Austin authors to promote their books and allow readers to discover new writers. Although being the largest independently run bookstore in Texas, BookPeople works hard to provide a personable community experience with things like providing books to local schools and events that, according to the Visit Austin website, allowed for the bookstore to succeed for the long amount of time that it has.

"We are so very fortunate to have been a pillar of the Austin community for so long," Gaetjen said. "And so, we have plenty of long-standing relationships with authors who we know and love."



graphic by Megan Gerold

## Riding Waves of Success A Look Into Local Band Rival Waves

MRIDHULA KUMARAVEL | staff writer

In a city that thrives on live music, Rival Waves is staking its claim as a fixture in Austin's eclectic rock scene. This dynamic band, combining the grit of classic rock with the urgency of punk and layers of alternative indie, has gained momentum with a series of high-energy shows, a soaring fan base, and a debut album that captures their signature sound.

Founded in 2018, Rival Waves consists of Austin locals who share a love for raw, artistic, and meaningful music.

Songwriter and lead vocalist Joel De La Garza, a Padre Island Latino Texan with roots in the city's music scene, serves as the band's frontman. The band formed after they worked together on De La Garza's studio project with E-Session, a then-new platform that allowed musicians to collaborate remotely with industry legends.

"I was in grad school at St. Edward's here in Austin, working on a digital media MBA, and one of my capstone projects was creating a marketing plan for this internet startup called E-Session," De La Garza said. "As payment, they let me choose one of my musical heroes, people in Hans Zimmer's orchestra, Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Pearl Jam to play on a few songs. I was going to keep it a studio project, but when I met some of these artists, I was blown away by how great it sounded, and it pushed me to kickstart this project into what it could be."

In 2018, Rival Waves solidified its lineup and launched its first EP, Transducer, which established them as a live act and helped them build a local following. Building on its initial success, Rival Waves began working on a full-length album in 2019 with Grammy-nominated producer Chris "Frenchie" Smith who is known for his work with Austin artists like Gary Clark Jr. and Jackie Venson. The recording process was intense with the band independently financing the album and being pushed to their physical limits while rehearsing.

"We're independent, so we fund everything ourselves," De La Garza said. "Every night of that weekend, our drummer had to sit in an ice bath because he was so sore from playing."

The release of Rival Waves' first album, "A Meaningless Chaos", was originally planned for early 2020. With the release of their first album, the band was set to perform at SXSW

and showcase their music for various record labels. However, the COVID-19 outbreak forced the band to delay its plans. During the pandemic, they continued to meet through Zoom, but the shutdown still jeopardized the release of the album, which was put on hold until things were back to normal. Nevertheless, Rival Waves persevered and released "A Meaningless Chaos" in 2023, which debuted at ACL Live at the venue 3TEN.

"We knew we had a really good record, we just didn't want it to disappear into the ether," De La Garza said. "We wanted it to matter. It felt amazing to be back. It was a magical night. We had two great opening bands, sold some albums, and about 200 people came."

While Rival Waves is still rooted in Austin, they have continued to grow globally, garnering over 400,000 streams on Spotify. Their track "100 M" gained unexpected attention in the U.K. when a local radio station began playing it heavily. Their fan base has a top streaming market in Brazil, Mexico, Finland, and Australia.

"I'm very data-driven; I keep dashboards on Spotify and other platforms to track our streams," De La Garza said. "When that radio station picked us up, we saw our popularity grow in the U.K. Around the New Year, we ended up as #20 on their end-of-year countdown."

As Rival Waves moves forward, De La Garza remains focused on releasing music that the band can be proud of and people can get behind. De La Garza feels that, in many ways, Rival Waves' story mirrors Austin's passionate, musical, and creative culture. As they continue to grow, the band's goal is to leave a lasting mark on the music scene globally while remaining rooted in the heart of Texas.

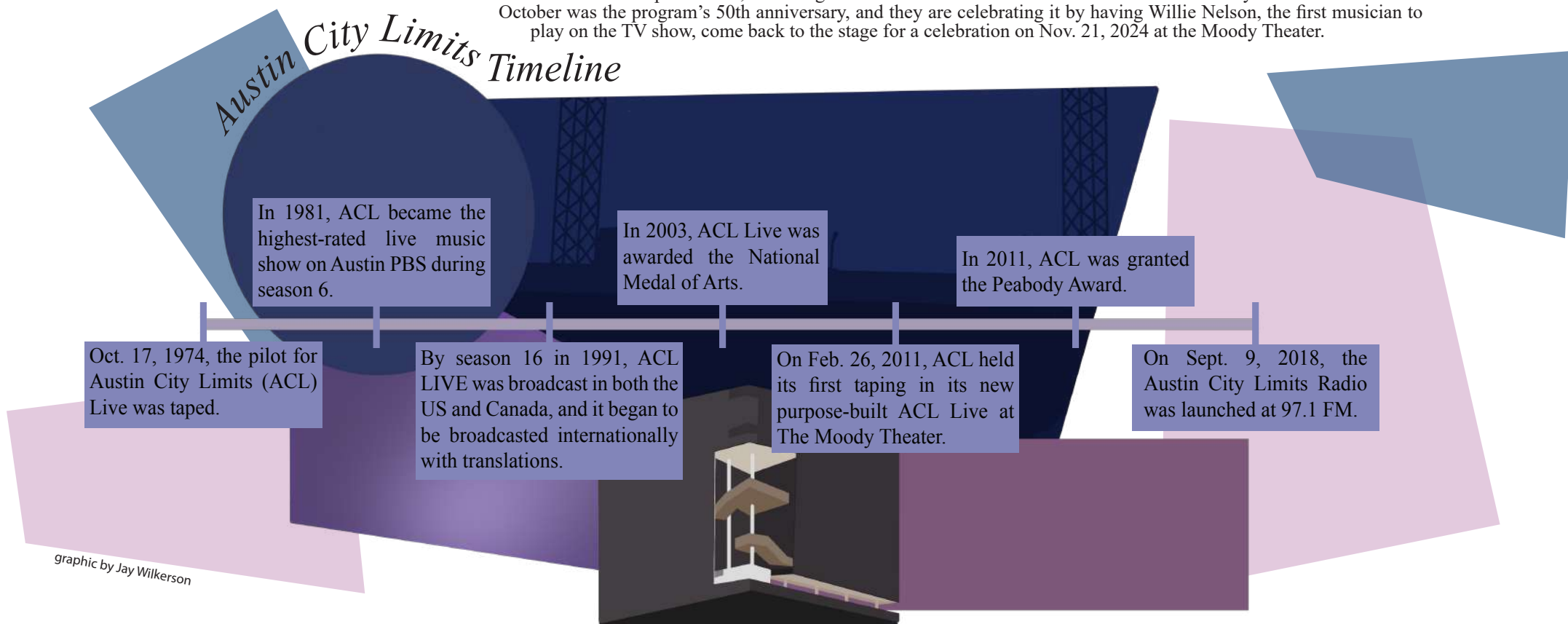


**FACING THE WORLD** Rival Waves being pictured. From right to left, Paul Pifon, Marc Schulz, Joel De La Garza, Dave McLeod, Erik Salinas. photo courtesy of Daniel Cavazos

# Austin City Limits Celebrates 50 Years of Music

JAY WILKERSON | staff writer

Founded in 1974, Austin City Limits (ACL) Live is the longest-running music program in television history. ACL Live has won multiple awards, including the National Medal of Arts in 2011 and the Peabody Award in 2012. This October was the program's 50th anniversary, and they are celebrating it by having Willie Nelson, the first musician to play on the TV show, come back to the stage for a celebration on Nov. 21, 2024 at the Moody Theater.



## opinion Streaming Snuffs Out Theaters

GEORGIA FINK | entertainment editor

From the theaters that our parents grew up with to derelict cinemas now, streaming services have changed a lot about movies and TV shows. This change is something that I have always talked about with my dad, with him explaining how he sees the differences of how we enjoy film today versus how he enjoyed film as a kid. One of the biggest things he noticed is that, instead of having to go all the way to the movie theaters to watch a movie or wait until the weekend for cartoons, we can just hop on any streaming service and watch whatever we want.

According to a business report by The Numbers, the number of people going to see movies in theaters in the U.S. peaked in the early 2000s, this is when Netflix began to start online streaming, and it eventually took a sudden drop in 2020 due to the pandemic. Movie theaters have not been able to recover since, and I think this is mainly due to the convenience of streaming services. If we know that a movie will eventually make its way to Netflix, Hulu, or Disney+, there is no incentive to go to the theater and watch it.

According to Stephen Follows, a film data researcher, there has also been a huge increase in the amount of movies released to cinemas within the U.S., but the amount of people actually going to the movie theaters to watch those movies has been gradually decreasing. This shows that there may be too many movies out there, and in my experience, the amount of movies makes the viewing of them much less enjoyable.

The creation of streaming services has not only had the effect of keeping people out of movie theaters but this has had a much larger impact on society. One thing is the lack of excitement that we see everywhere today. Every time I hear about when an adult in my life was a kid, they always talk about how everyone was so excited to go and see the newest "Star Wars" movie and talk about it with their friends on the next day at school. While there may be some nostalgia playing into their perception, it doesn't change the fact that no one gets as excited about films as they used to.

In my own life, I have seen this lack of excitement when it comes to film. Everyone I know watches TV and movies, and

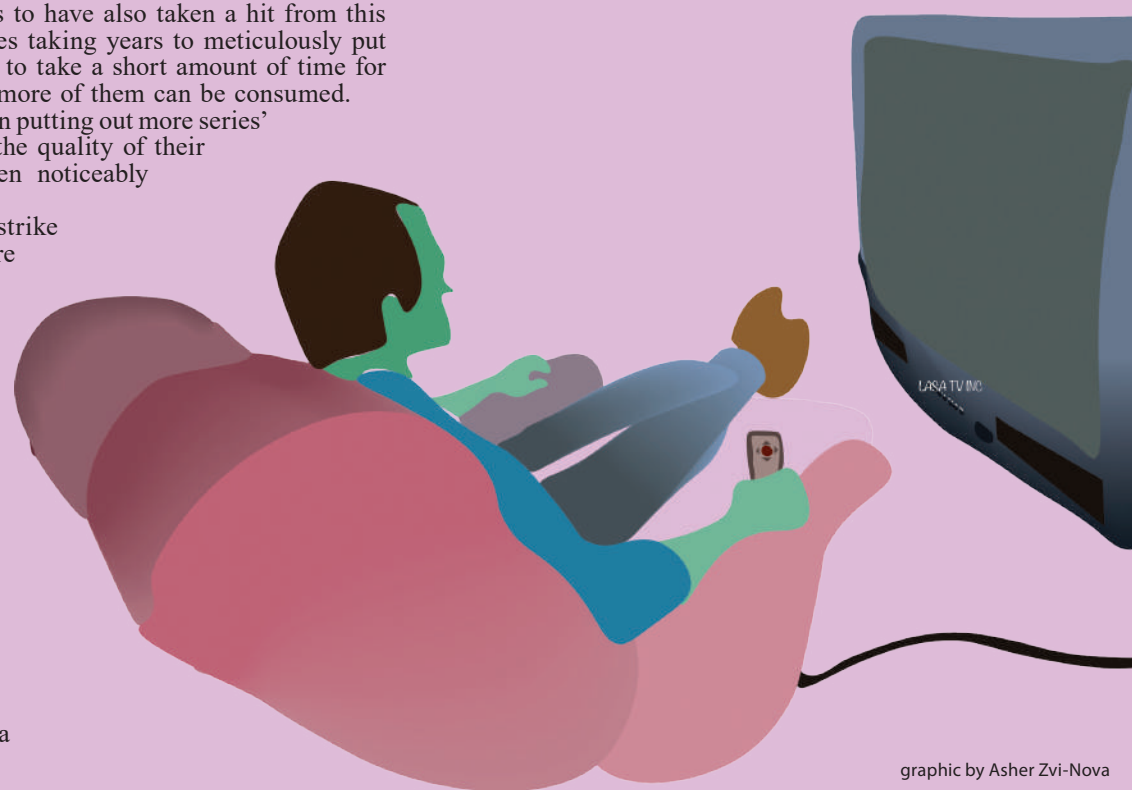
sometimes it is the same film, but none of us ever talk about them at school. The last time I talked about a movie with my friends was probably the "Five Nights at Freddy's" movie, and that is because we all saw it together. Since there are so many shows and movies at our disposal, there is a lot less excitement for films and it is much harder for me and my friends to talk about one movie.

Even with really popular shows like "Arcane" that everyone is talking about online, none of my friends have seemed to watch it or want to talk about it. It's almost like there is no more conversation over movies and TV, a conversation that seemed to be very prevalent throughout the '80s.

The industry itself seems to have also taken a hit from this great shift. Instead of movies taking years to meticulously put together, it is now expected to take a short amount of time for them to be put together, so more of them can be consumed. For example, Marvel has been putting out more series' straight onto Disney+, and the quality of their movies and shows has been noticeably worse.

Things like the writers' strike that happened last year were largely impacted by the increased usage of streaming services. According to AP Journal, because releases of shows and movies are more constant and not seasonal, the pay for writers went down, along with the number of writers on shows and the amount of time the writers had. This shows that this streaming phenomenon has sucked the creativity out of TV and has made it this thing to make a quick buck out of.

There are so many more impacts that I believe streaming has had on us, from our attention span to how we now spend our days watching shows on convenient streaming services. The next time a new movie comes out, try catching it in the theater instead of waiting for it to come out on streaming services. It may not change much, but I know whenever I go to a movie theater it makes my life less monotonous and adds so much more value to the movie that I go and watch.



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

## Trail

from page 1

"I think for people like me, that as a kid, we're going through the Trail of Lights, and now, as an adult, I get to be responsible for it."

While the milestone is significant, Miller clarified that it is not considered the 60th anniversary, rather it is the 60th year that the event has been hosted as it was canceled in 2010 and 2011 due to city budget cuts. The event then returned in 2012 with the help of business sponsorships and private donations. Russell expanded on the importance of sponsorships and local businesses to the Trail of Lights.

"They provide the funds for us to have this event, and a lot of local businesses also provide volunteers," Russell said. "It's a good look for them and they get recognized for their contribution, whether it's a monetary contribution or a volunteer contribution. Frankly, we could not do this event without that."

These partnerships keep the event accessible and affordable, providing free admission nights for thousands of attendees, and with the help of vendors, many of whom are small businesses, enhance the festive experience. Alex Cook, a representative of Happy Chicks, shared that this is the restaurant's second year as a vendor at the Trail of Lights.

"The goal is just getting close to the community," Cook said. "We always like to get involved with family events and stuff, and we try to be very family-oriented, so it's an event that we enjoy doing every year, for sure."

Cook appreciates the festival's support of small businesses instead of larger chain businesses. She reflected on how the Trail of Lights highlights the city's vibrant local economy and community spirit through its endorsement of small businesses.

"I think it's a good thing when you know, big events like that choose to have more small businesses and local businesses," Cook said. "I think that really shows what Austin is."

For Russell, one of the highlights of each year is watching families return to the Trail, often with multiple generations in tow. He mentioned that this adds to the surrealism of going to the Trail and eventually being a part of its production.

"Getting to see people, families, come through—grandma, dad, kid—and hearing grandma talk about when she was a kid and used to come to the Trail of Lights," Russell said. "The whole spectrum of, you know, childhood, adulthood, and now grandparents getting to experience it and getting to hear people talk about it as they go through is really one of my favorite parts."

To increase accessibility, the Trail of Lights Foundation hosts the STARS Program, which provides private viewing nights specifically for individuals with disabilities. The foundation partners with organizations such as the Down Syndrome Association, the Autism Association, and nearby assisted living homes to ensure that the Trail of Lights is accessible.

"It's our belief that the Trail of Lights is for everybody in Austin," Russell said. "It's really the opportunity we have to serve those that cannot come just during those 14 nights, and that's really special to me."

For Miller, the aspect of the Trail that he looks forward to seeing most each year is the unity it brings to its attendees. He enjoys seeing people happy, smiling, and together in a crowd enjoying the event.

"It provides an avenue for folks to come out in a centralized location and hopefully add some togetherness," Miller said. "I think it's unfortunate that people seem a lot more divided these days, but the fact that we could still gather together to celebrate just being in the holiday season."

According to Miller, the importance of the Trail of Lights is to be a space for all, regardless of their beliefs. He explained the importance of the non-judgemental atmosphere that the Trail offers.

"[To] have a place that's devoid of all politics and considerations of race and gender and those kinds of things," Miller said. "I like that it's all that aside and it seems like people of any background can have a good time. Everybody just wants to go out and have a good time with their kids or family or whoever it might be, and being able to be a part of that, and seeing the smiles on everybody's faces while we're out there, is definitely one of my favorite parts."

opinion T.V.'s Transformation

MEGAN GEROLD | editor-in-chief

As my sister and I sat on the floor, watching the TV blaze in front of us, we were completely encapsulated in the world playing out in the pixels. But as soon as our 30 minutes for television were up, we pulled our eyes away from the screen and went about whatever 8-year-olds and 6-year-olds do daily with the themes from what we were just watching playing in the back of our minds. Today, I watch children sit in public transfixed by their iPads, and TikTok showcasing parents pulling screaming children away from a TV screen with Australian dogs.

The society that exists today is filled with screens, but as these screens have gotten smaller and easier to carry around, the way society views life has transformed the same way. No longer is life an adventurous journey, rather it's short and bite-sized, and just like the pieces of entertainment we watch, it's there for us to chew on quickly and then spit out. To keep up with this increased expectation of instant gratification, shows have changed the way they're structured. I can watch an entire episode of a new show on social media in less than ten minutes. However, what truly finds me thinking at night are the slow-paced, familiar shows that coated my childhood and the years before I was born.

According to a study titled "The Immediate Impact of Different Types of Television on Young Children's Executive Function" by Angeline S. Lillard and Jennifer Peterson, fast-paced television has a significant impact on children's executive function. The fast-paced cartoon that they displayed to one of the groups of children caused them to be unable to complete tasks as well as the other group who watched an educational show. The fact that children were so impacted by just 9 minutes of television suggests that adults, who watch an average of 2 hours and 55 minutes of TV a day, according to Oberlo, could also be significantly altered by the television they view. The increased prevalence of social media also suggests that people are more dependent on entertainment they can grab

quickly, rather than shows they sit with for an extended period.

The TV shows I watched as a kid mainly consisted of whatever was on PBS Kids. The shows "Wild Kratts", "Martha Speaks", and "Pinky Dinky Doo" were constantly playing in my household, while Disney shows were limited to what my sister and I could watch in 30 minutes or less. Even though I still watch those children's shows sometimes, the early 2000s also contained gems that can't help but formulate the existence of every teenage girl. Shows like "Vampire Diaries" and "The OC" wrap me up in long episodes of teenager stupidity, but when I gaze at the long lists of new shows on the different streaming services, nothing draws my attention, nothing invites me to sit and find warmth.

TV shows from the early 2000s are just better than the TV shows that exist now. Sitting down to watch 4 seasons of "Outer Banks" sounds less appealing than doing my physics homework. While it may just be my tendency to watch shows that fill me with nostalgia, the fact is that people have turned away from shows of quality to ones that are easy to watch in between Instagram Reels. When I watch "The West Wing", which aired from 1999 to 2006, I'm forced to put down my phone and fully pay attention to what's happening on the screen. I don't find myself overwhelmed by the plot because the show portrays a sense of calm despite the fact it details the extreme, yet fictional, problems of the Oval Office.

With the increased use of social media, TV shows are just going to continue to get shorter and shorter, and eventually, Netflix might turn into short clips meant to extoll a laugh in less than 30 seconds. However, what will always stand the test of time are the comforting, long shows that aired in the early 2000s. Instead of electing to watch "Bluey" or scrolling through social media, dive into a TV show that follows a group of doctors around a hospital, or a mother and daughter navigating the sleepy town of Stars Hollow, and find yourself wrapped in a blanket watching a TV show where the scenes last longer than 11 seconds.

graphic by Megan Gerold

Cultivating Austin Celtic Culture

ELLINGTON TOUGH | sports editor

Hundreds of attendees strolled the grounds of Pioneer Farms on November 2 and 3 as Irish musicians sang and strummed in a celebration of Celtic culture. Since The Austin Celtic Festival (ACF) was first established 28 years ago, it has united thousands of people from the Celtic Culture together. This year, ACF continued its tradition as an annual event, taking place on November 2 and 3.

Celtic culture encompasses a group of languages and people with roots in Western Europe, including Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The United States now has a larger Celtic population than Europe thanks to a large amount of migration in the 1800s, allowing ACF to attract thousands of guests every year.

One Celtic language spoken in Scotland is Gaelic. Jen LeCompte, a Gaelic speaker who teaches at LASA, explained the cultural significance of the festival.

"We want people to appreciate culture, and it's such a valid way to do that," LeCompte said. "There are people that are like, 'this is the only place I get to see a representation of my identity.'"

Micaela Baab, the athletic director of ACF, took over the role from her father Mike Baab. Under his leadership, athletes at ACF participate in the Highland Games, a Scottish tradition involving throwing heavy objects as far as possible.

"When we have these big groups, it's equal parts a labor of love and pretty stressful, but when you see it all come together it's pretty great," Baab said. "There's been two world records today, so a pretty good group, and we actually have our first-ever professional class this year."

Competitions include the caber toss, the sheaf bag toss, the weight for height, and the weight for distance. For the caber toss, one must throw a 135-pound tree trunk end over end, and for the sheaf bag toss, participants try to hurl a bag of straw over a bar. The weight for height requires athletes to get a weight over a high bar, and in the weight for distance competition, the weight must be thrown as far as possible with one hand.

"The history of the games, essentially, is that each event translated to something that needed to be done,"



THROWING THE WEIGHT Elissa Van Vleck is competing in the weight over bar event where one tries to throw a heavy object over a tall bar while Mike Baab watches. She is one of the many competitors participating in the festival events. photo by Ellington Tough

Baab said. "For example, the caber, if you needed to cross the river, you would throw something end over end and then cross the river, or put a bale of hay up in the barn. Or the hammer, legend is that they used the hammer to knock people off their horses."

Mark Gilg is part of the South Central Irish Wolfhound Rescue and is a regular festival attendee. As a part of the South Central Irish Wolfhound Rescue, Gilg shows other attendees Irish Wolfhounds to help them understand the breed and how big they get to spread, so they can make an informed decision when adopting.

"By the time these guys are a year old, they're already over 100 pounds," Gilg said. "People don't realize the responsibility and the cost that it takes to take care of them."

Like many Celtic dogs, Irish wolfhounds evolved in agricultural settings in the British Isles. They were used by farmers to hunt wolves that posed a threat to their livestock and family.

"They did their job so well, there are no wolves in Ireland anymore," Gilg said. "The breed started to die out because people couldn't afford to feed them for a long time. But then there was a British army captain that brought the breed back, which is what we have now."

The festival only allows admittance for dogs that have registered for their Celtic Dog Parade, or that are part of rescue groups like Gilg's. Rhonda Treadaway, who has been the animal

director at ACF since 2012 when the festival's director offered her the position, manages these regulations.

"I've been here 12 years," Treadaway said. "There are areas of it that are hard work... You're doing it for months before because people start sending in the registrations in August. So you're keeping track of all that and making lists and checking it twice and answering people's questions."

According to Treadaway, the live music attracts many of ACF's guests. This year, eight different bands from around the U.S. and the British Isles traveled to Austin to perform at the festival, including Frankie Gavin, a self-taught fiddle player. The music is accompanied by local dance groups and musicians who offer lessons to festival attendees.

"We usually have one big name header that we sometimes bring in from Scotland or Ireland," Treadaway said. "Frankie Gavin is somebody that we had last year that's a big star in Ireland."

The Austin Celtic Festival takes place every November at Pioneer Farms in Northeast Austin. Tickets cost \$25 for people over 16 years old and \$12 for those 16 and younger.

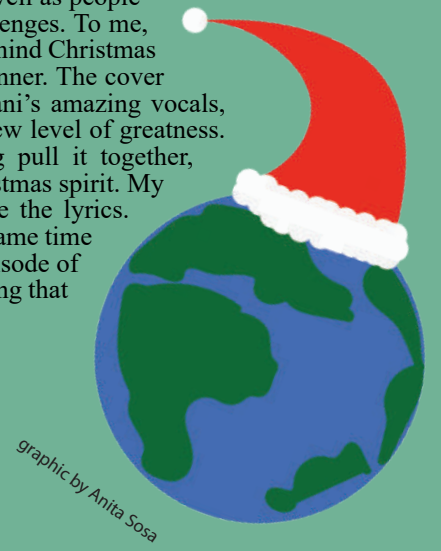
"There are so many people that have come here to try to start over again or to try to find a life or to try to find opportunity," LeCompte said. "And it's like, what is your identity in all of that? What happens when we come over here and what happens in terms of our identity? These are questions that we all face at some point in time."

Editor's Picks  
Favorite Holiday Song

Oi To The World

GEORGIA FINK | entertainment editor

One of my all-time favorite bands is No Doubt, who sang "Oi To The World", a ska-punk cover of a song by the Vandals. Although being rated terribly by professionals—I mean this is bound to happen, it is a punk song—"Oi To The World" is my number one favorite Holiday song of all time. It's a fast-paced, trumpet-filled, cheerful song. Brimming with Christmas spirit, "Oi To The World" is a song about unity and acceptance as well as people overcoming adversity and challenges. To me, this truly shows the meaning behind Christmas in this day and age in a fun manner. The cover is accompanied by Gwen Stefani's amazing vocals, pushing this song to a whole new level of greatness. The bells throughout the song pull it together, making you truly feel that Christmas spirit. My favorite part, though, has to be the lyrics. They mean so much but at the same time are silly. They sound like an episode of "Scooby-Doo" and make the song that much better to listen to.



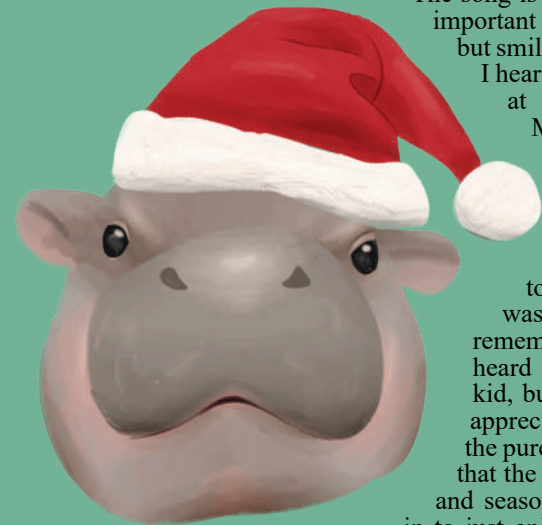
graphic by Anita Sosa

I Want A Hippopotamus for Christmas

MARGOT MORGAN | entertainment editor

The holiday season wouldn't be complete without some funny Christmas songs to round out the selection of holiday classics. I definitely value the funnier classic Christmas songs just as much as the emotional holiday classics. One of those funny holiday songs is "I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas," a staple in my holiday music catalog.

The song is so ridiculous and has no important message that I can't help but smile and dance around when I hear it playing on the radio or at a holiday party. Young Margot was attracted to the song because of the idea that a kid would have asked for a hippo for Christmas, which was such a crazy idea to me that my young mind was blown at the time. I can't remember the first time that I heard the song when I was a kid, but I am just beginning to appreciate it more because of the pure ridiculousness of it now that the weather is getting colder and seasonal depression is setting in to just enjoy how fun and special



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

Christmas Time is Here

TITA GONZALEZ | graphics editor

"A Charlie Brown Christmas" has been a television staple in my household for as long as I can remember. Although I adore all of the Peanuts holiday specials, the Christmas short film has always stuck out to me. The soundtrack is an experimental fusion of traditional Christmas music and jazz, making it one of the most memorable aspects of the special. The opening song, "Christmas Time Is Here," is by far my favorite song from the original score. The ethereal (and slightly off-key) children's choir, mellow piano, and soft percussion capture the essence of the holiday season. Each time I hear the song, I am reminded of the last day before holiday break in elementary school. Suddenly, I am sitting on the gymnasium floor and watching the TV special with my classmates. I can feel the itchiness of cotton-ball snowmen, smell the fresh pine wreath on the door, and taste the Abuelita brand hot chocolate in a styrofoam cup. Although the week leading up to holiday break is much more stressful now, I fully intend to curl up into a fuzzy blanket and watch "A Charlie Brown Christmas" after it's over.

Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)

REBECA GONZALEZ | student life editor

Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without any music. Besides the festival lights on Christmas trees and hot chocolate, holiday music might be the most essential way to have holiday cheer. The best way to do this is by listening to "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)," the Darlene Love version. Just like Santa Claus, this song is always with me. Last year, my friend recorded her own Christmas Album and featured all of my friends in "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)" in a thrilling performance performed during lunch that may have been heard throughout neighboring halls. However, this was only the beginning of my love for this song. As the weeks got colder and more mistletoe was hung, I boarded a cruise for the holidays. On the eve of Christmas, I attended a holiday performance that included essentials such as "Last Christmas" and "Little Saint Nick,"

but I knew one song was missing. I kept my holiday spirits high song after song until it was clear that the finale was coming. And, of course, it was "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)" because they saved the best for last.



graphic by Anita Sosa

## A New Generation for Sports Medicine

TESSA WHITNEY | staff writer

Sue Torres, the athletic trainer at LASA known to students as “Doc”, has acted as a catalyst for students’ medical careers since originally hired at LBJ-LASA in 2008. Her love of teaching encouraged her to branch out from athletics and create LASA’s Sports Med program, offering students a unique opportunity that combines traditional classroom learning with real world medical practice. Next year, Torres will be retiring and leaving Texas for Colorado, leaving behind a legacy of service and commitment to LASA athletics.

When LBJ and LASA split in 2021, she opted to stay with the LASA students instead of working with LBJ’s more acclaimed sports program. For Torres, the decision was not about which program was more established, but rather which student body was more enthusiastic about the Sports Med program.

“LBJ was a lot more competitive athletically—basketball made it all the way to the final championship game,” Torres said. “So it came down between going with the athletics or going with the students, and I chose the students because you all are so easy to teach. It’s fun, and I’m teaching future doctors, I’m teaching future physical trainers.”

Abby Aardema, a senior in Sports Med III, agreed that the spirit of the class does not have to leave with Torres. However, she emphasized that the spirit of the class set by Torres will stay even with a new teacher.

“I think Calvin is going to do a really great job of making sure everything is the same,” Aardema said. “Torres has always been good about going in depth and providing experiences. I think that will stay.”

After taking Torres’ class, Aardema solidified her choice to go into a career in physical therapy. The Sports Med class allows her to take her education outside the classroom by interning at a clinic and taking external courses.

“Right now I’m working through this online class for the shoulder and how to treat it,” Aardema said. “It’s very in-depth and honestly basically insane, and then on Wednesdays

I get to go off campus to a physical therapy clinic... Honestly, the community is just really awesome, and the athletic trainers are so willing to help us learn.”

Junior Aadhya Chagarlamudi is in Sports Med II and credits Torres with shaping her ambition to enter the medical field. Chagarlamudi’s first encounter with the class was during her brother’s football game in eighth grade, where she noticed Torres and her students on the sidelines. Interested, she started learning from Torres as a freshman during football practices. She progressed quickly from there, being cleared to



PASSING THE TORCH Sue Torres demonstrates how to check for a sprained knee ligament to her sports med students. The Sports Med class includes (tests and hands-on demonstrations). photo by Ellington Tough

wrap athlete’s bandages the next year, and is now on track for an internship.

“I think [Torres] definitely made me realize that medicine is for sure what I want to do, and that I want to help people in that way,” Chagarlamudi said. “She’s had so much medical experience herself. I hope that it’ll keep the same atmosphere

of being free and hands-on, and not just lecture based, that it is also clinical based, and we still get to do as much as we can helping the teams and clinical practices.”

Torres’ own journey into athletic training began in high school when one of her friends got injured during a practice. When she explained the situation to her dad, he suggested taking the friend to the school’s athletic trainer. She had no idea who that was, or what they did, but after sitting in on the checkup Torres began to take an interest in the career. Torres planned to enlist in the Army as a medic until a college recruiter suggested she go to college instead. She began pursuing a degree in zoology with a concentration in athletic training at Eastern Illinois. After, she ended up going back to the Army as a Medical Service Corps Major, then worked as a patient administrator for 24 years.

“I went to Eastern Illinois, and athletic training wasn’t a major, it was a concentration, you had to major in something else,” Torres said. “So everyone was doing PE with an athletic trainer concentration, and I got into that and I did not like the PE aspect. I had to take a modern dance class—it just wasn’t for me. So I chose zoology instead because it met a lot of the athletic trainer prerequisites. But, before I graduated, athletic training became a major, so I double majored in that and zoology.”

The Sports Med class is separated into three levels, beginning with Sports Med I which introduces the basics of athletic training, including how to identify common injuries and understanding the anatomy involved, along with some units focusing on the legal and psychological aspect. The second level builds off this knowledge, concentrating on the actual healing process as opposed to the diagnosis. By Sports Med III, the program is primarily self directed, allowing students to choose their own emphasis in medicine and giving opportunities based on that.

“The class is a win-win situation,” Torres said. “I can help these guys get started on their medical careers, but they also help me, they’re an extension of me.”

## MaxPreps Puts AI Into Play

ASHER ZVI-NOVA | staff writer

MaxPreps, part of CBS Sports and the largest database for high school sports in the U.S., attempts to cover every player, every school, and every game. According to the National Federation of State High School Association, with over 8 million students participating in high school sports, MaxPreps has turned to innovative new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) to keep up with the growth of high school athletics.

MaxPreps covers most LASA sports, and earlier this year, MaxPreps published an article in which they wrote that LASA had “taken an ‘L’”. MaxPreps’ Director of Programming and Outreach Steve Montoya takes responsibility for being the public face of the brand. Working there for 18 years, Montoya has watched it grow into the sixth most visited sports site in the U.S.

“MaxPreps originated because coaches and schools were reporting their schools in traditional ways like on the end of a newspaper and MaxPreps came in and created a digital platform, where interested fans could find information about programs,” Montoya said. “But since then, we expanded a lot more from that.”

According to Montoya, the largest thing driving MaxPreps’ expansion is their successful partnerships. This includes the 97 other databases and networks they have absorbed, such as the Texas Coaches Association, one of their top collaborators. Montoya explained that through working with other leagues like Texas’ University Interscholastic League (UIL), MaxPreps can get information on virtually every single competitive high school game played.

“In addition to a data engine, we’ve become a media outlet,” Montoya said. “We now have our writers that will then do their own research and compile stats and watch videos and go to games to actually create our national ranking.”

Montoya explained that because there are 27,000 high

schools in the U.S., each having between 10-20 teams, there are around 400,000 teams MaxPreps needs to cover. To accommodate this challenge, MaxPreps has established a partnership with infoSentience, an AI company that generates articles for their website to cover games almost immediately after they happen.

“There is no way, literally no way, for anyone to cover every team and every player,” Montoya said. “So at the end of the day, AI allows us to reward more coaches and players, because once any data is entered, we have it create automated articles.”

However, there are concerns about MaxPreps’ security and accuracy when it comes to its use of AI. Freshman Thomas Treurniet, a strong safety and center back for the LASA football team, in particular, wishes that MaxPreps took steps to verify accounts so that information was accurate.

“There’s a lot of problems,” Treurniet said. “Anyone can create an account, so anyone can record scores at a game. They could be people who have no connection, who maybe aren’t even at the game.”

MaxPreps also includes individual accounts for student athletes, which can be claimed and then edited. With his account, Treurniet has had problems with people attempting to steal accounts. While he acknowledges that it’s a great tool for outreach and recruiting, he hopes that MaxPreps will take certain steps to be more reliable.

“I remember one of our games previously this season, where MaxPreps provided inaccurate stats, and it was very confusing for us,” Treurniet said. “We started watching film, and trying to figure out the results. I think that there should be a verification process, including ID, age and verifying that your location is at the game before you should be able to record scores.”

Sophomore Parker Hill, who is the quarterback and defensive end on the LASA football team, still believes that, regardless of its flaws, MaxPreps’ work is nonetheless

appreciated by many athletes. For Hill, MaxPreps can be a tool that can help smaller programs receive opportunities that would otherwise be reserved for other, more established high school athletics teams, and he didn’t mind the article reporting their struggles.

“I think it was really well written,” Hill said. “It seemed accurate to the situation we were in. It means that schools that don’t get as much attention are going to get the equal opportunities as bigger schools.”

However, Hill believes that most people use MaxPreps for player statistics, and focusing on those statistics can be misleading. According to Hill, this makes it so that a handful of athletes can bring down and misrepresent the team in statistics and make players seem worse than they actually are.

“Certain positions are dependent on the rest of the team,” Hill said. “Linebackers can’t make plays without the defensive line, quarterbacks can’t make plays without wide receivers, and wide receivers can’t make plays without the ball passed to them.”

Although Treurniet and Hill worry about the problems MaxPreps could create, Montoya believes that by forming partnerships and using AI, MaxPreps has become a cornerstone of high school sports reporting, with articles on every game. MaxPreps is still expanding and reaching new goals, and according to Montoya, to support the students and coaches.

“There’s no better sports, in our opinion, than the hard working high schoolers and all those who make what they do possible,” Montoya said.

## New Stars Shine Light on Women’s Sports

JAMES CONSTANT | staff writer  
ELLINGTON TOUGH | sports editor

This year, women’s sports have been getting more attention than in the past, especially the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA). According to the Associated Press, stars like Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese have driven viewership up to the millions for WNBA games. This comes after a long period of men’s sports getting much higher viewership, which women’s sports were not able to compete with.

Senior Frances Sarrat has been on LASA’s varsity girls basketball team for four years. She enjoys watching Caitlin Clark of the Indiana Fever and other popular players, like Breanna “Stewie” Stewart and Sabrina Ionescu of the New York Liberty.

“Caitlin is in her moment right now, had her moment, but the attention she was getting also helped shed light on to the other players in the WNBA, like Stewie and Ionescu,” Sarrat said. “The last March Madness for women’s college basketball was huge... I was so excited to watch those games. I think that pushed me, especially this year, to continue following those players and seeing what happens next.”

The increased popularity of female athletes has not been entirely well received, however. Taigan Rivers plays women’s handball at Angelo State University in San Angelo, Texas. As a female athlete, she is glad that the unique qualities of women’s sports are getting more attention as Caitlin Clark enters the national spotlight, but also believes that the popularity of her WNBA rival Angel Reese and her reputed unsportsmanlike conduct on the court feeds into negative perceptions of WNBA players.

“[Clark’s style has] definitely gotten more people to watch, but at the same time we’ve had some negative people come up,” Rivers said. “In my opinion, Angel Reese, her aspect of the game, and how she plays, especially since joining the WNBA, I feel like it negatively affects women’s sports, because some of the things they say, she feeds into it. I

personally think that she wouldn’t be that way, but she feeds into what people say, and so it makes her play and act the way she does.”

Liv Mitchell is a freshman at the University of Texas at Austin (UT) who plays intramural volleyball. She hopes that, with the current momentum and media limelight the WNBA and UT women’s volleyball are receiving, women’s sports will reach the same level of popularity as men’s sports.

“Especially here, our volleyball team is so good,” Mitchell said. “Logan Eggleston, Asjia O’Neal, they’re all moving on to professional volleyball and playing professional sports teams, and I think people started watching them a lot more because we have really dynamic, advanced athletes who can do amazing things and people are more inclined to watch them now.”

Mitchell believes that the skill of female athletes and the effort they put into their sport often go unnoticed because men often have more physical strength and size and certain natural advantages, such as jumping high and running quickly. She hopes Clark will help people recognize what women can do as well.

“She’s definitely brought more attention to women’s sports and the WNBA,” Mitchell said. “I think people have been following her journey a lot. I honestly feel like people often highlight the athleticism of men’s sports just because a lot of times they can do more.”

According to Sarrat, increased attention can bring inspiration to many, as seeing a star of your dream career go big is a jumping off point for inspiration. Especially for young girls, Sarrat believes the hype building around women’s basketball has paved the way for the next generation of aspiring athletes to come.

“Seeing it get so much attention and recognition definitely gives a lot of young girls the feeling of, ‘oh, this is something I can do one day,’ and it’s never really happened before for girls’ basketball so it’s really awesome to see that,” Sarrat said. “[It’s good to see] the support that it’s gotten and

knowing that they can get to that point and that that’s an option.”

The 2024 WNBA Finals were played from October 10 to October 20, with the New York Liberty beating the Minnesota Lynx in a best-of-five series to win the 2024 WNBA Championships. The college women’s basketball season, however, started in November 2024 and will continue into March 2025. For Rivers, while many criticize women’s basketball for not being as entertaining as their male counterparts, she hopes women’s basketball’s continued media attention will nonetheless attract new, open-minded fans of the sport.

“Most people, they like the show stoppers, the dunks, the deep threes that win buzzer beaters,” Rivers said. “And that’s typically not what you find in a women’s game. And that’s not bad, we’re just different people... if people just learn more about the sport or take interest in how the sport is played rather than just watching it to watch it, then they’d see how good women’s sports are.”



graphic by Amelia Coleman

THE  
**RAPTOR**  
RUNDOWN

**HARRISON CHAMBERS** | staff writer

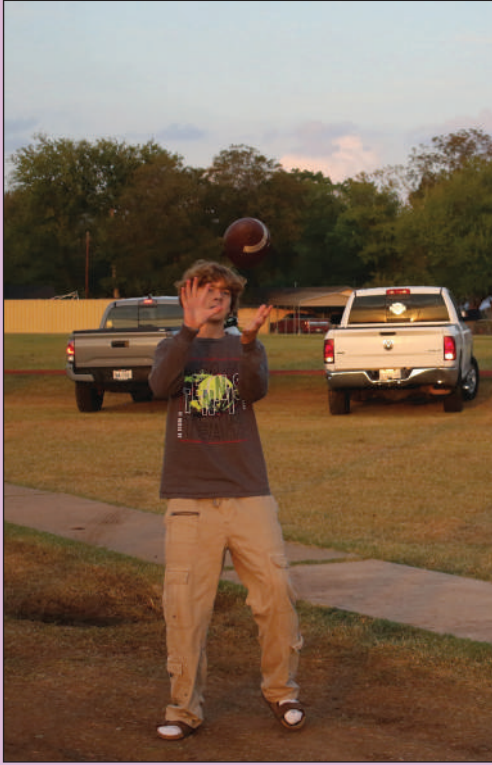
Every issue, The Liberator sends a reporter into the field to try a new sport and write about their experiences.

I come from a long line of devoted Dallas Cowboys football fans. Both sides of my family love football, and I have grown up watching it my whole life. My love of sports led me to tennis when I was only three years old, and I haven't stopped in the twelve years since. When I joined the LASA tennis team, I experienced playing a sport with a whole group of people for the first time, so joining the football team for one of their practices and seeing everyone work together was just as heartwarming. Even as such a young group, the football team's close bond astonished me. They introduced themselves to me and even nicknamed me "Paparazzi."

On the tennis court, I'm hyper-focused on where I am and where the ball is, blocking out everything else unless I am playing doubles with a teammate. Seeing how necessary teamwork was for the football team was a new and eye-opening experience. From the moment I arrived, I could tell this was more than a sport to these players; it was a tight community and a big part of their lives.

On the day I visited, they were not doing typical drills but a walkthrough, where the team goes through possible in-game situations to plan for the next game. Their ability to communicate and coordinate with each other impressed me, with each player knowing their role and executing it to the best of their abilities every time.

Watching the walkthrough was interesting because it was not just about the routes and throws but about how everything worked together, especially when facing another team. The coaches and players often have to alter otherwise perfectly sound plays because one aspect of timing, positioning, or reacting from their team didn't work well when put against the opposing team. One scenario involved preparing for a fourth-down play, where every player had to be fully aware of the offensive and defensive possibilities. The coaches frequently paused to fine-tune everyone's positioning, ensuring they knew precisely where to be and why. During each reset, I could see the players adjusting and communicating with



**READY-SET-HUT** Harrison Chambers prepares to catch a football as the sun sets. During the season, football practice goes from 4:15 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. photo by Ellington Tough

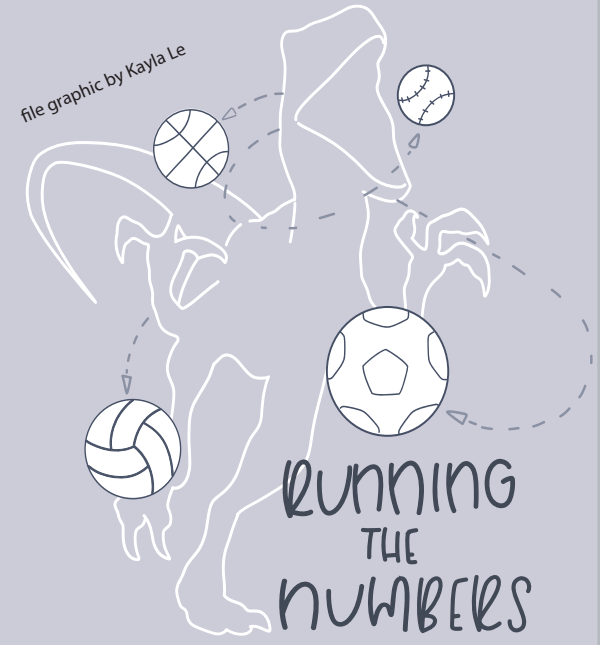
one another to make sure everyone was in sync. While I chose to retire after an exhausting practice, the other team members continued to spend hours every day going through each play, exercising in the weight room, and perfecting their positions. Watching them discuss each detail gave me a true sense of the intense coordination necessary for football. It made me see that football doesn't always highlight strength or speed but coordinating with everyone on your team to oppose the other team as effectively as possible is also an important factor.

One of the players gave me advice on improving my throw by offering tips on wrist movement and increasing accuracy. I learned that throwing distance and accuracy can improve when the arm follows through across the body after release, with the pointer finger finishing pointed at the target. This follow-through stabilizes the throw and directs it more accurately. Throwing the ball around gave me a good taste of the game and helped me appreciate the skills involved.

The team's culture was full of trust, constructive criticism, and a collective drive to get better. Whether someone made a good play or one that needed improvement, the coaches and teammates were there to offer honest feedback. This environment allowed everyone to improve together and create a stronger bond backed by trust. Football's team-based nature makes these connections possible, and they foster a sense of unity found in few other places. Even though most of my participation was from the sidelines, I felt that much of the work happened there. Even during practice, the players' support from the sideline lifted everyone on the team and was admirable.

I hope that other LASA students who are interested in football try it out, even if that just means practicing on their own until tryouts roll around in the spring.

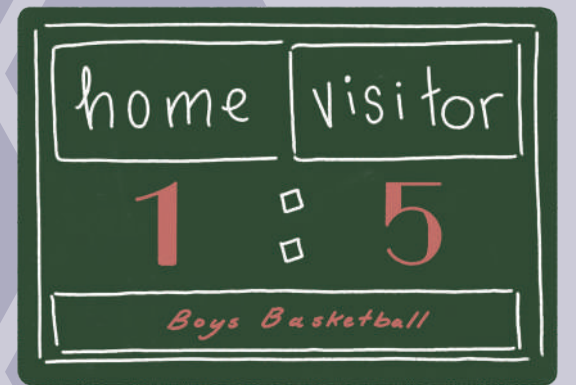
Football is a unique combination of discipline, friendship, and planning that is rare to find in sports. LASA's football team might be young, but they are resilient as they build a foundation based on trust and the desire to improve. Being part of the practice taught me that football is not only about tackles and touchdowns but also about the community and being part of such a close team. Whether you're an experienced athlete or a newcomer, LASA football has a place for anyone willing to step up and learn something new.



**RUNNING THE NUMBERS**

LASA'S WINS AND LOSSES

as of Dec. 3



**Fan Violence on the Rise in Sports**

**ZOE TOCHILOVSKY** | staff writer  
**ELLINGTON TOUGH** | sports editor

Sports stadiums, once considered safe spaces for friendly competition, are becoming increasingly violent. Incidents of physical altercations between opposing fans or between fans and players have surged in recent years, and some have even resulted in the avoidable deaths of spectators in physical clashes.

On September 20, 2023, ABC reported the death of a New England Patriot fan after an altercation at a game between the Patriots and the Philadelphia Eagles. In December 2023, two men were charged with assault and battery along with disorderly conduct for the incident. Joe Sampson, a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin), is against spectator violence and believes it is the spectators' responsibility to exercise self-control to avoid dangerous incidents.

"I think it's terrible, it's not good," Sampson said. "It can turn violent just because there's not very much control, as a sports fan, that you can have over the outcome of the game."

Sampson pointed out that some fans support their teams fervently, and they take the "us vs. them" mentality of sports too far, impassioned frustration can quickly turn into violence. This can lead to dangerous mob mentalities where aggression feels justified. This is especially prevalent between schools with historic rivalries, such as the one between UT Austin football and Texas A&M football. Aloysius Tasch, a LASA junior who attends sporting events regularly and is involved in a variety of outdoor sports, explained his observations on increased violence in sporting stands.

"I have not seen an increase in violence in sports stadiums, but I have not attended a large sporting event in a while," Tasch said. "I did hear about the UT game and how they were throwing trash on the field."

The actions that come from this anger are not always inherently violent, but they can put athletes on other teams in dangerous situations. On October 19, 2024, UT Austin fans took their anger out over a call during a game against Georgia by throwing trash onto the field and at the sidelines. This put the referees in a situation where they could overturn the call or continue to put the other team in danger with angry fans. The call was eventually overturned, and the ball was given to UT Austin. Jack, a UT Austin student who preferred to keep his last name anonymous, explained his perspective on the situation.

"We were new to the SEC," Jack said. "It's a little ridiculous that our first introduction was a messy one."

On October 20, the SEC released a statement saying that while the

original call of the play was not correct, the actions of the fans throwing debris were unacceptable. UT Austin was fined \$250,000 and will have to report back to the SEC with a review of alcohol availability policies.

"We got a pretty good email from our president disciplining us for that," Jack said. "You know, I wouldn't have done it, but I can see where he's coming from getting on everybody's case about it. That's expensive."

The trend of violence during the SEC continued with Tennessee fans storming onto the field after they won 24-17 against Alabama. The SEC fined Tennessee \$100,000 for this conduct.

"It's a little bit disgusting that because of poor behavior on the parts of the participants, the spectators, that the university had to pay such an egregiously high fee," Sampson said.

The New York Times reported that the last week of football play in November 2024 contained a large amount of rule-breaking and violence, including the refusal of handshakes and flags being planted by players. Stiffer penalties for fans who break the law have been proposed, according to an article by The Intelligencer.

"Unfortunately, I can't really think of a solution you could have, except maybe bringing in more police and more guards that are within the stands to be able to monitor that sort of thing," Sampson said.

Rise in aggression because of sports has been linked to an increase in violence outside of sporting events. According to a 2011 study by David Card and Gordon Dahl, unexpected losses have been shown to cause a 10% increase in police reports about at-home violence. A 2022 study by Kirsty Forsdike, Grant O'Sullivan, and Leesa Hooker also showed a clear connection between major sports events and violence against women. In these cases, the anger and frustration felt by fans during a game often don't stay within the stadium; they are taken home, where intimate partners or family members become the targets of that aggression.

"If your team is in the playoffs or the championship and they end up losing and they're out, I can sympathize with how frustrating that can feel, especially being a fan for many many years and seeing what seems like a once in a generation opportunity," Sampson said.

"But that still doesn't justify it whatsoever."

Reports from the 2016/2017 data years of the National Intimate Partner Violence Survey reported that "more than 16 million people in the U.S. suffer from intimate partner abuse per year."

Despite this statistic, help is always available through the National Domestic Violence Hotline; call 800.799.SAFE (7233) or text "START" to 88788.



graphic by Amelia Coleman

# UT Longhorns Bulldoze SEC, Dominate Sports Fields

LUCA SIMS | staff writer

The University of Texas at Austin (UT) made headlines this year for surging to the number one ranking for college football. Since that peak at the no. 1 spot, UT football is, as of Dec. 4, ranked no. 2 in the nation. UT's athletic success also extends outside of football, with an Associated Press October preseason poll showing UT women's basketball as ranked fourth. At the global level, moreover, UT athletes continued to impress, earning a total of 16 gold medals at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

LASA junior Wyatt Fenton competes for Longhorn Aquatics, a UT water sport program for competitive Austin residents for both swimming and water polo. He explained that after seeing UT's domination in athletics, many high school athletes are excited at having such talent close to home.

"We just did really well in NCAAs (National Collegiate Athletics Association competitions) recently," Fenton said.



**HOOK 'EM** UT Austin fans enter Darrell K. Royal Texas Memorial Stadium. Longhorn football had a season record of 11-2 in their first in the SEC, continuing a legacy of UT Austin dominance across sports and athletics. photo by Ellington Tough

Fenton credits a significant amount of UT swim's success to the coaching staff, particularly their ability to improve athletes without pushing too hard. A number of UT's head coaches have had previous experience coaching sports at other universities.

"From what I've seen of the coaching, and just knowing the coaches, they seem like they have a good level of intensity," Fenton said. "They're strict and try and get you to work hard, but they're also focused on getting you better, getting people better in their skills and their endurance."

Intramural sports at UT, which are played within recreational leagues organized by universities, have also found success. Sam Gonzalez is a UT student who played intramural sand volleyball at UT, which only holds competitions between teams within the university.

"Last year, our volleyball team was insanely good," Gonzalez said. "Our basketball team's two and one right now."

Gonzalez credited UT's success to talented students who come from all over the state and country. He also finds that the intramural sports at UT are also competitive, and he plans to enroll in intramural soccer through UT's RecSports program.

"Our receiver today, Golden, got two touchdowns, so he's getting some clout," Gonzalez said. "When [Arch Manning] goes in, the crowd goes wild."

Other sports at UT, such as tennis and cross country, have also performed well and reached the regional level of competition. According to LASA junior Rebecca Van Bavel, the quality of UT's athletics coaching staff extends far beyond the pool.

"I think a very important part of their success is their coaching... coaching is a huge part of your performance in any sport," Van Bavel said. "I've met the UT women's basketball coach and I know the players speak highly of him."

Van Bavel, along with the LASA varsity girls' basketball team, also got the opportunity to meet a basketball player for UT. The athlete credited the coaching to UT's identity as a flagship school for the UT system, being the largest and most enrolled in the state.

"I remember the player describing a certain strictness that also wasn't really mean," Van Bavel said. "She was talking about how she had coaches that would call someone fat because they didn't run fast enough or do whatever. She was describing that [Schaefer] was a very motivating coach, but not in a sexist or derogatory way."

A significant part of the funding received by UT women's sports comes from Title IX funding. Van Bavel believes that this piece of federal legislation is critical to promote equality among men and women's sports.

"Women's sports get so much money because they need to put equal money into men's and women's sports," Van Bavel said. "Title IX, [which passed] in the 70s, requires equal amounts of money to be spent on mens and womens sports. It means that women's rowing teams, women's soccer, and

womens basketball do great. Because football has such big budget requirements, lots of money gets spent for women's sports, too."

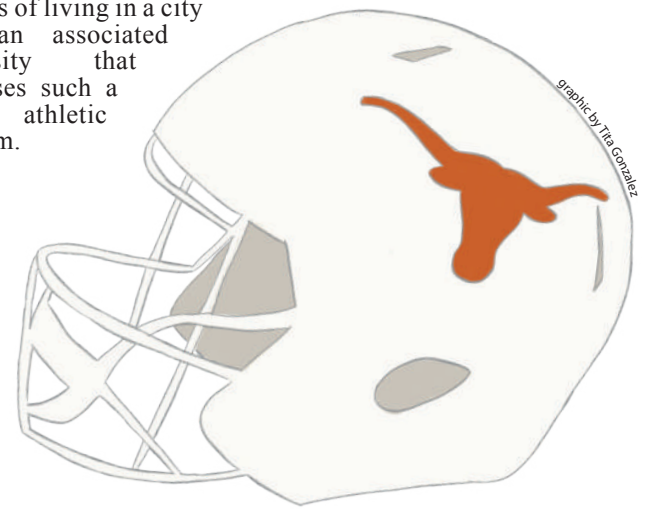
Fenton expressed his appreciation for the pools at UT which he believes contributes to a part of UT's success. Six of the 16 gold medals won by both former and current UT athletes in the 2024 Olympics were for swimmers.

"The facilities are really nice: they've got cool water and really deep pools which is really nice for water polo," Fenton said. "It's like the 7th best pool in the world, which is fantastic, and it's very distinctive because it's all orange and white and it's got all sorts of UT memorabilia with all of the national championships."

LASA junior Mia Lopez, a LASA swim team captain, has practiced in UT's swimming pools, which are available to youth under 18 years old for \$7 and adults 18 and older for \$14. She emphasized how the quality of the pools at UT make her a better athlete.

"I like the pool a lot at UT," Lopez said. "I think it's a very fast pool. A fast pool essentially means that when the temperature is right, when the chemical balance is right, you can just feel how the water moves when you're swimming."

As new winter and spring seasons start, it remains to be seen whether or not this winning streak will remain, but Gonzalez is hopeful about his school's athletic prospects. He believes students who compete at the high school level can look up to UT as a paragon of success in both academics and athletics, and enjoy the benefits of living in a city with an associated university that possesses such a strong athletic program.



## Pay NCAA Players to Play?

BEATRICE KLEIN | club contributor

The debate over whether college athletes should be treated as employees has gained traction over the past few years, with many advocates for athlete pay arguing that the demands placed on college athletes, in terms of time and effort, are equal to or greater than the demands placed on traditional employees. As a result, the idea that the athletes whose colleges make substantial revenues off of should receive compensation beyond their scholarships has become more prevalent.

In 2021, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the regulating body of athletics for hundreds of universities across the country, made a historic shift by allowing athletes to profit from their name, image, and likeness (NIL) that are used for different marketing endeavors such as product endorsement and autograph signings. However, the NIL policy did not address the fundamental question of whether athletes should be classified as employees, which has been the focal point of recent lawsuits and state legislation.

In November 2019, a federal court ruled that athletes at NCAA Division I schools may be considered employees under the Fair Labor Standards Act. Mary Metcalf, LASA's head cross-country coach whose son is a college athlete and LASA alumnus, explained the implications and effects of the ruling on students.

"If students are deemed employees, they'll be entitled to at least minimum wage and overtime pay, and it could have massive ramifications for college athletics," Metcalf said. "But with the new Name, Image and Likeness situation, it is the wild, wild west in college athletics."

Many college students work jobs to pay off their college costs, and college athletes are no exception. Metcalf added that with the amount of time and effort they put into their sport, it can be difficult for them to get a job without stretching themselves out too thin, highlighting the benefit the policy would have on these athletes.

"My grandfather, who was born in the early 1900s and who spent his working years working in steel mills, was a fierce union man and an advocate for workers' rights in general," Metcalf said. "I can remember as a little girl hearing him arguing that college football players were being exploited by universities because they weren't being paid for their honest day's work. It turns out he was 40 years ahead of his time."

Universities and the NCAA face a complex situation as they continue to navigate these challenges and questions against their current policies because many institutions worry about the financial implications and the possibility of inequality among the different sports programs. Smaller programs may struggle to provide competitive compensation, leading to a disparity between well-funded and poorly-funded athletic departments.

"The old idea of the amateur college athlete has been completely upended in schools with big athletic programs, and NIL has significantly magnified the huge

inequities among colleges and their athletic programs," Metcalf said.

Metcalf learned more about the system when her son Philip received preferential admission to Vanderbilt University, which participates in the Southeastern Conference (SEC), for running track and cross country, but not an athletic scholarship.

"Running competitively in the SEC had some real drawbacks for him," Metcalf said. "The recruitment process in his case actually involved a lot of effort on his part: emailing coaches and arranging interviews with coaches and team members. There are not a lot of D1 coaches pursuing athletes. Philip also got about \$6,000/semester in NIL money in addition to lots of perks, like shoes, lots of clothing, gear, and free meals in the athletes-only dining hall."

Paying college athletes could also have drawbacks. Zade Marwan plays volleyball at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) and explained his perspective on this debate.

"I don't really think we should get paid. It's college, later on we'll get paid, hopefully," Marwan said. "Other students don't get paid for doing a computer science degree."

Marwan also believes that athletes with a high viewership deserve some form of compensation because of the level of skill they've achieved. The new NIL policy allows for companies to pay athletes to sponsor their products or brand, sometimes through advertisements.

"They get sponsorships, that's their form of payment," Marwan said. "The companies will reach out to you, and then you'll have to sign a contract or deal with them to support their brand and they support you."

Competing at a high level is a dream for many high schoolers, many of which spend countless hours on their sport every week. Junior Bouna Sakho, a member of LASA's boys soccer team, hopes to continue to pursue the sport after high school.

Sakho believes that college athletes spend so much time playing their sport that it is more like a job. Due to this, Sakho believes that college athletes should earn money for their hard work.

"I think college athletes dedicate a lot of time and energy, similar to a full-time job, so they should have access to financial benefits, like a percentage of revenue, especially since they contribute to generating that revenue," Sakho said. "For me, it's also important to balance this idea to keep college sports from turning into a commercial enterprises."

While Sakho believes it would be a huge benefit for him to be treated as an employee, he is also concerned about colleges focusing less on the life and relationships of student athletes and more on revenue. As the NCAA and educational institutions grapple with these challenges, the future of college athletics remains uncertain. The decisions made in the coming years could redefine college athletics in the United States.

## Tennis Threpeats State

HARRISON CHAMBERS | staff writer

On October 23, the LASA tennis team made Austin Independent School District (AISD) history as the first Austin team of any sport to reach Texas' state tournament three years in a row. Despite high school tennis teams changing team members every four years making continued success hard to maintain, this achievement has solidified LASA tennis as one of the most competitive programs in the state.

LASA boys tennis team captain senior Rakesh Ravi explained that a significant factor behind the team's success is their shared desire and willingness to improve. He attributed the team's strength to this constant goal to succeed. He spent most of the school week in Houston with the rest of the varsity tennis team during state, where LASA came in third.

"The shared characteristics that each member of the team carries is what makes the team so skilled," Ravi said. "Specifically, the drive to improve and strong competition to rise throughout the roster keeps everyone constantly improving their individual skill sets."

According to senior Helena Donovan, the girls tennis captain, the diversity on the team also contributes to its success. She noted that the team includes players with many different personalities and playing styles, making them both versatile and talented.

"We're a collection of players from all over the city," Donovan said. "I think a lot of us play differently and have different skill sets, which is really good for the team tennis season. Teams always know who we are and honestly are starting to get scared of us when they hear who they have to play."

LASA tennis coach Vincent Vizcaino, who played tennis collegiately, has 28 years of coaching experience and added that the team's success is because of their resilience and commitment to growth. He noted that he sees the positive relationships between the new players and the experienced players and the growth that occurs as a result.

"The team has continued to get better because of an influx of young players fusing with our older players," Vizcaino said. "This blend of youthful energy and seasoned experience keeps the team strong and allows them to consistently compete at the state level."

Vizcaino emphasized that he takes pride in leading LASA to the state championship three

years consecutively. To him, the best part is seeing his players perform under pressure and build the life skills necessary to compete at the highest level in high school tennis.

"Tennis competitions bring out your resolve and challenge you to learn about yourself," Vizcaino said. "These experiences are invaluable not only on the court but also in life."

Ravi and Donovan both explained how team trips are a time for bonding and making memories, creating connections between the players that go beyond the court. Much like Ravi, Donovan appreciates the trips and the time spent bonding with teammates and the memories the team creates together.

"I love the Regionals trip the best because after the semis match we have a whole day to just hang out and bond," Donovan said. "We get to do things that we'd never usually have time to do as a team, like go swimming or buy surprise gifts for Coach's birthday."

According to Ravi, the journey to state did not end without its challenges. They were ultimately defeated by Frisco Centennial tennis, who have now won the state title two years in a row. For Ravi, this was a reminder of the hard work that still has to be done.

"State was fun, but losing in the [semifinals] and leaving early was disappointing," Ravi said. "Hopefully, we'll push past these limits next year."

With a different view, Donovan explained that it was impressive that the team was even able to make it back to the state tournament after losing seniors who were big parts of the team last year. According to Donovan, the important thing was that the team tried its utmost best.

"Third place in the entire state isn't bad at all," Donovan said. "Everyone played their heart out, had a lot of close matches, and did good with the absence of the seniors from last year."

Ravi, Donovan and Vizcaino hope to continue breaking records as the team prepares for its next season in spring. In the spring season, athletes will progress individually, whereas in the fall season the whole team had to compete at the same level and win as a whole to move on to state.

"Tennis competitions bring out your resolve and challenge you to learn about yourself," Vizcaino said. "My favorite part is having our team compete against the best teams in the state."



**RETURN TO SENDER** Sophomore Nash Baldrige serves a tennis ball mid-match. He is a player on the varsity tennis team that reached the 5A State Tennis Finals for a third year running. photo by Harrison Chambers

PAST MEETS PRESENT

A Deep Dive Into Austin's Museums

**APOLLO DAHMUS**  
**MILLER WILLIAMS** photo editors  
**AVANI GANNE**

The museums open their doors for another day. They let the waiting crowds file in and look around with wonder on their faces as they set their eyes on the establishments. From art museums, displaying classic and modern works of art that convey true emotion to their patrons, to cultural

museums full of bits and pieces of the past, there is emotion and a sense of whimsy that the crowd gets from immersing themselves in a museum.

According to Julia Ottenberg, the marketing and communications manager at Wonderspaces, an interactive art show and museum, the creativity and resourcefulness that these establishments and the artists whose works they display. As an artist herself, Ottenberg described Wonderspace's open communication lines with all of its artists as an aspect of the company that she is very proud of as its employee.

"I've worked in art spaces in the past, and so it was really interesting to me to be able to work in a space that is really artist-forward at Wonderspace," Ottenberg said. "It's really, really important to us, that the artists that we're partnering with are at the forefront of what we do. We work really closely with our artists. It's a constant, open communication relationship."

While the Neill-Cochran House Museum (NHCM) is a historical museum, not an art-based one like Wonderspace, Executive Director Rowena Dasch explained that a similar part of the museum's goal is to have an open line of communication with its surrounding community.

According to Dasch, the work the museum does to give back to the community and share the stories of the city is especially important due to Austin's long history of slavery and principal role in many historical events.

"The NCHM is the site of the last intact and visitable slave dwelling left in Austin," Dasch said. "We are a place where the past becomes real because you can walk in the footsteps of the people who helped to make our city what it is today. While you're here, you'll also have a chance to connect culturally to our broader community through our temporary exhibitions. Our next exhibition, opening in January, will be called "Threads of Her Story" and features contemporary work that reacts with objects in our collection."

In addition to the open lines of connection and communication that some museums like these have with their surrounding communities, other museums such as the Thinkery focus on their relationships with community members. They do this by helping enhance the connections that their guests have with each other, according to Thinkery's Marketing Coordinator Michael Malloy. As a result of this, the Thinkery focuses on its many workshops and play-focused exhibits as a way to strengthen the sense of community shared by their guests. Malloy described the effect on adults and kids alike to be incredibly positive.



**AI ARTISTRY** A person sits in the Human Study #1, 3RNP installation at Wonderspaces Austin. The installation contains a robot that draws humans visiting the installation. photo by Devon Hutchins, courtesy of Wonderspaces Austin.



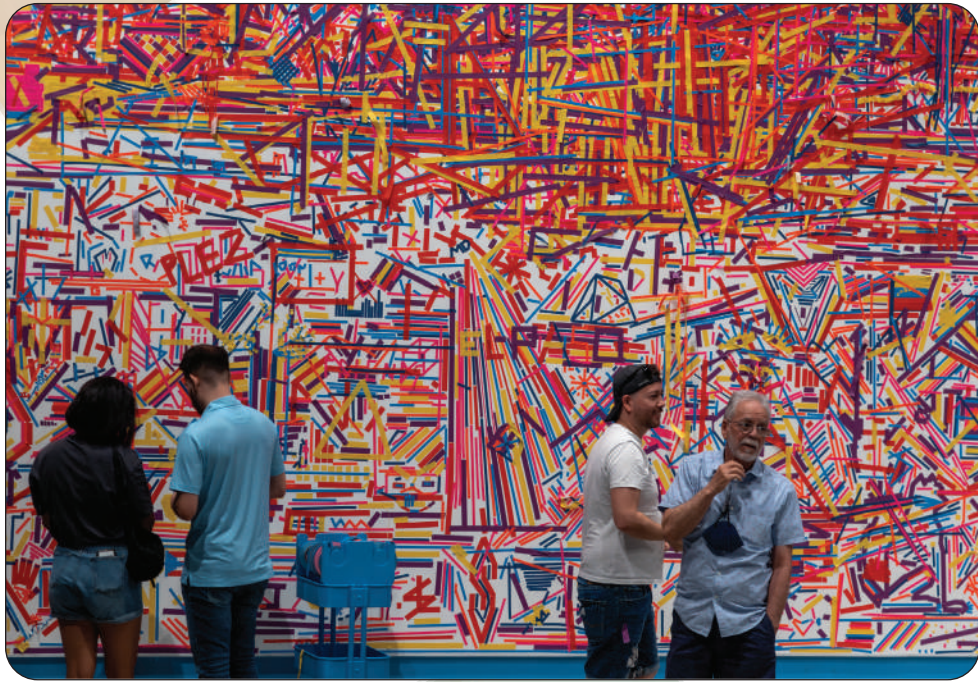
**SEEING RAINBOW** A woman walks through the Arc art installation by Ian Brill at Wonderspaces Austin. The installation contains a subversive audiovisual experience. photo by TJ Pate, courtesy of Wonderspaces Austin

Dasch, Malloy, and Ottenberg, the particular work displayed by a museum is also impactful, according to Ottenberg's description of Wonderspaces. Ottenberg explained that the work displayed by the museum is chosen based on how the observer can connect with it, no matter their particular background or position in life.

"It's really important to us in the selection and curation of the artworks that we're showing



**HISTORICAL HOUSING** Pictured are the slave quarters at the Neill-Cochran House Museum. These quarters are extremely historical and have been standing for over 150 years. courtesy of Neill-Cochran House Museum



**LEAVING A MARK** Visitors enjoy the RULES installation by Paola Ibarra Llano at Wonderspaces Austin. The installation is collaborative and explores the connections between strangers. photo by Devon Hutchins, courtesy of Wonderspaces Austin

"What truly sets [Thinkery] apart is our deep commitment to community engagement," Malloy said. "Through our Open Door Initiative, we ensure that every child has the opportunity to explore STEAM concepts and develop a lifelong love of learning, regardless of financial means. Whether it's a toddler experimenting with sensory play during Baby Bloomers, a parent rediscovering their creativity in Spark Shop, or adults laughing and learning at Thinkery21 workshops, every moment feels meaningful and fun."

Aside from the strong connection between a community and a museum described by

that we're partnering with artists who are creating work that's approachable for everyone," Ottenberg said. "We look for artwork that can connect with folks without a lot of explanation, something that they can walk up to and intuitively figure out, have their own experience and interaction with it. Seeing those people have that aha moment and really enjoy and connect with art for the first time, that's always been something that I've enjoyed seeing, and something that's made the work feel meaningful to me."



**AN AUSTIN CENTERPIECE** Pictured is Ellsworth Kelly's Austin building at the Blanton Museum of Art. The building is a cornerstone of the Austin area and is beloved by many Austinite art fans. photo by Ellington Tough

photos by Ellington Tough



graphic by Miller Williams