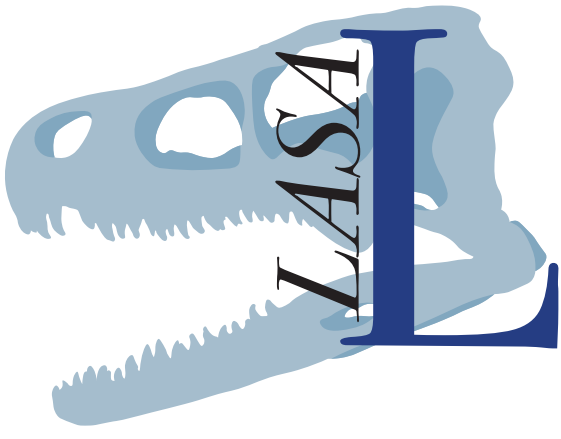


APRIL FOOLS' EDITION AVAILABLE BETWEEN PAGES 8 & 9



# LIBERATOR

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## Wealthy Elders Leave Youth Wailing

JACK ZIPFEL | staff writer



graphic by Megan Gerold

A century ago, old age in America was closely tied to poverty and financial insecurity. Today, wealth is concentrated among the nation's oldest generations, leaving Generation Z struggling to afford homes, start families, and build financial stability.

Over the past several decades, economic growth and public policy have shifted wealth toward older Americans. Baby boomers, the generation born between 1946 and 1964, benefited from affordable housing, rising wages, and long term asset appreciation. Generation Z, the generation born from 1997-2012 also known as "Gen Z" is entering adulthood during a period of high housing costs and limited wage growth. Government spending increasingly prioritizes retirees through Social Security and Medicare, which make up more than 30% of the federal budget per U.S. Treasury data. These benefits are limited to people 65 and older. Younger workers now support these systems while encountering fewer opportunities to

accumulate wealth themselves.

Nick Maggiulli is the author of "The Wealth Ladder" and chief operating officer at Ritholtz Wealth Management. His work explores long term wealth accumulation and general inequality in the United States.

"For every dollar the U.S. government takes in in taxes, it spends half of that dollar, 50 cents, just on Social Security and Medicare," Maggiulli said. "As long as half the budget is going to Social Security and Medicare, it's going to be difficult to reallocate wealth in any meaningful way."

This concentration of spending reflects how public resources favor older Americans, according to Maggiulli. It also limits the government's ability to invest in younger generations.

"I think we need economic policies that do more to invest in young people," Maggiulli said. "I don't think having them wait their whole life for this money is the right solution."

see **WEALTHY** on page 7

## what's news

photo by Lily Antony



see **RESTAURANTS** on page 18

photo by Georgia Fink



see **ICONIC** on page 12

photo by Nik Bayer



see **SOUNDS** on page 12

## Brushing off the Dust

### History Center Opens New Doors

**ETHAN STERN** | managing & copy editor  
**MEGAN GEROLD** | lead editor-in-chief

As the shelves of the Austin History Center groan with the weight of remembrance, archivists work to handle the responsibilities of ensuring that the past does not slip by unnoticed.

18 minutes walk away from the Austin Public Library's central location sits a building filled to the brim with neatly ordered history waiting patiently for Austinites to scour. When the Austin History Center moved to the Henry Faulk Building, it came after years of inhabiting Austin's original 1933 Central Library, which was stretched at the seams. After eight years and \$14.5 million of updates to the Henry Faulk Building, the Austin History Center reopened its doors to the public Dec. 7, 2025, according to KVUE. While Alex Suarez, the processing archivist at the Austin History Center, believed the move to be long and arduous, it was also extremely necessary.

"Our previous building ... had so many decades of serving as the archive," Suarez said. "And as you can see, it's not a huge building."

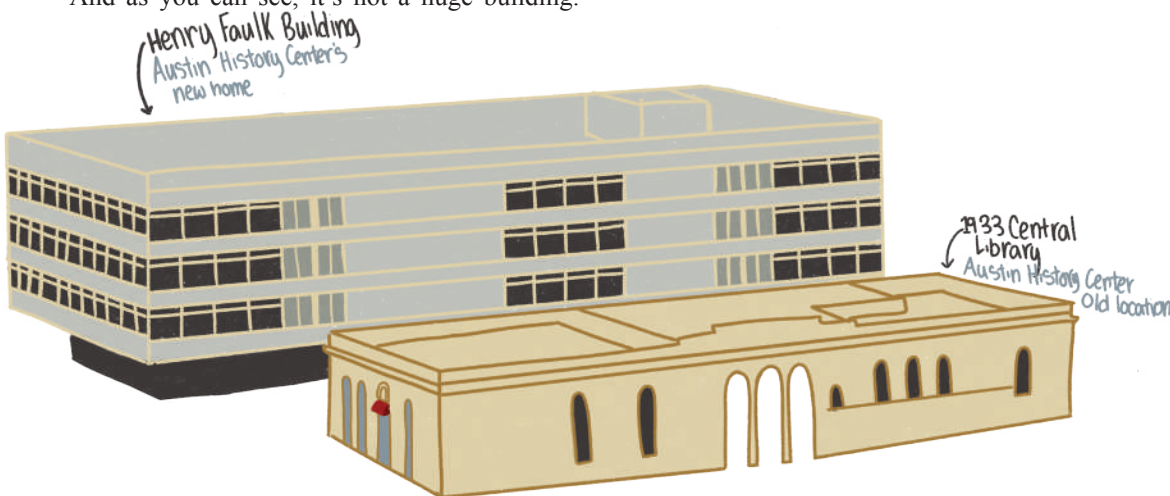
We were just completely out of space. We had things in storage, we had things in hallways. We were just so cramped for space, that we were so excited to get a bond from the city to move into this building."

The Faulk Building provides the History Center with opportunity to expand, whereas the old library constrained the ability of the center to operate. According to Jenna Cooper, the library manager at the Austin History Center, they were unable to accommodate everything that came their way.

"[Now], we have so much more space to collect materials," Cooper said. "We had to say no to things starting around 2020 ish, because we just didn't have space. We were bursting at the seam, so we had to tell people, 'okay, just gotta sit on it for a little bit.'"

To house the extensive record of the History Center, the Faulk Building had to be specifically and carefully prepared to hold up the weight of history.

see **BRUSHING** on page 12



graphic by Megan Gerold

## Screwworms Invade

**JONAH TRIMBLE** | staff writer

On the Southern border of the U.S., swarms of livestock face off against a tiny, silent, but vicious killer: the screwworm. After its reemergence in recent years, the small fly is currently posing a big threat to Texas agriculture.

Cochliomyia hominivorax, the New World Screwworm (NWS), is a species of parasitic fly. After it lays eggs inside of a mammal, its hundreds of offspring maggots erupt and consume the flesh of the host, pupating into full adults to begin the process again. In a state so dependent on ranching, Texas farmers fear what an outbreak of these insects could mean for their cattle herds. A few well-placed eggs could reintroduce the parasite, resulting in millions or billions of dollars in damages and rising beef and milk costs for consumers, per the

Texas Animal Health Commission. Monitors in Mexico have reported NWS increasingly close to the Texas border, prompting concerns that it may reach the United States.

This isn't the first time Texas has had to deal with these petite invaders. NWS was present in the U.S. for the first half of the 20th century until the government stepped in to exterminate it in the 1950s. Rick Machen was the executive director of the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management before retiring this February, and he has been working with cattle for decades, since before the screwworm was eliminated from Texas. He explained a key strategy the U.S. could turn to as it tries to prevent the bugs' potential return.

see **SCREWWORM** on page 7

## DEMOCRATS DEBRIEF

**VICTOR MARTINEZ** | editor-in-chief

The upcoming 2026 midterm elections are currently projected to offer the Democratic Party the chance to retake control of both the House and the Senate. At the 2025 Texas Tribune Festival in November, several Democratic Party leaders discussed strategy for realizing these aspirations, with many forwarding the concept of a big-tent party, which incorporates and unites a wide spectrum of voter factions into a unified party base.

The Texas Democratic nominee for Senate, James Talarico, popular for his positive campaigning and populist messaging, emphasized the need for Democratic unity going into the midterms. In a panel discussion

with The Texas Tribune Editor-in-Chief Matthew Watkins, Talarico maintained that he is not a Democratic Socialist like New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, but still reaffirmed his place alongside other rising Democrats like Talarico.

"I wouldn't [call myself a democratic socialist], but I do think that the Democratic Party has to become a big-tent party again," Talarico said. "...We need all kinds of Democrats in order to get this country back on track. We cannot be satisfied with a 51 percent coalition. We have to grow a majority that's a lot bigger than that if we're going to transform this political system, this economy so that it works for regular people again."

see **DEMOCRATS** on page 6

# editorial The Epidemic of Brainrot: Larp Larp Sahur?

**Staff Stance:** Every grading period the LASA 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.

**TIM CAO** | commentary editors  
**ARIANA RODRIGUEZ**

In 1854, the term “brain-rot” was first coined by Henry David Thoreau in his book *Walden*. Thoreau warned us about oversimplification, yet, by 2026, brain-rot has found a firm foothold in Generation Z and Generation Alpha culture. As members of this rotting generation, we are here to explain how brain-rot has permeated into our culture.

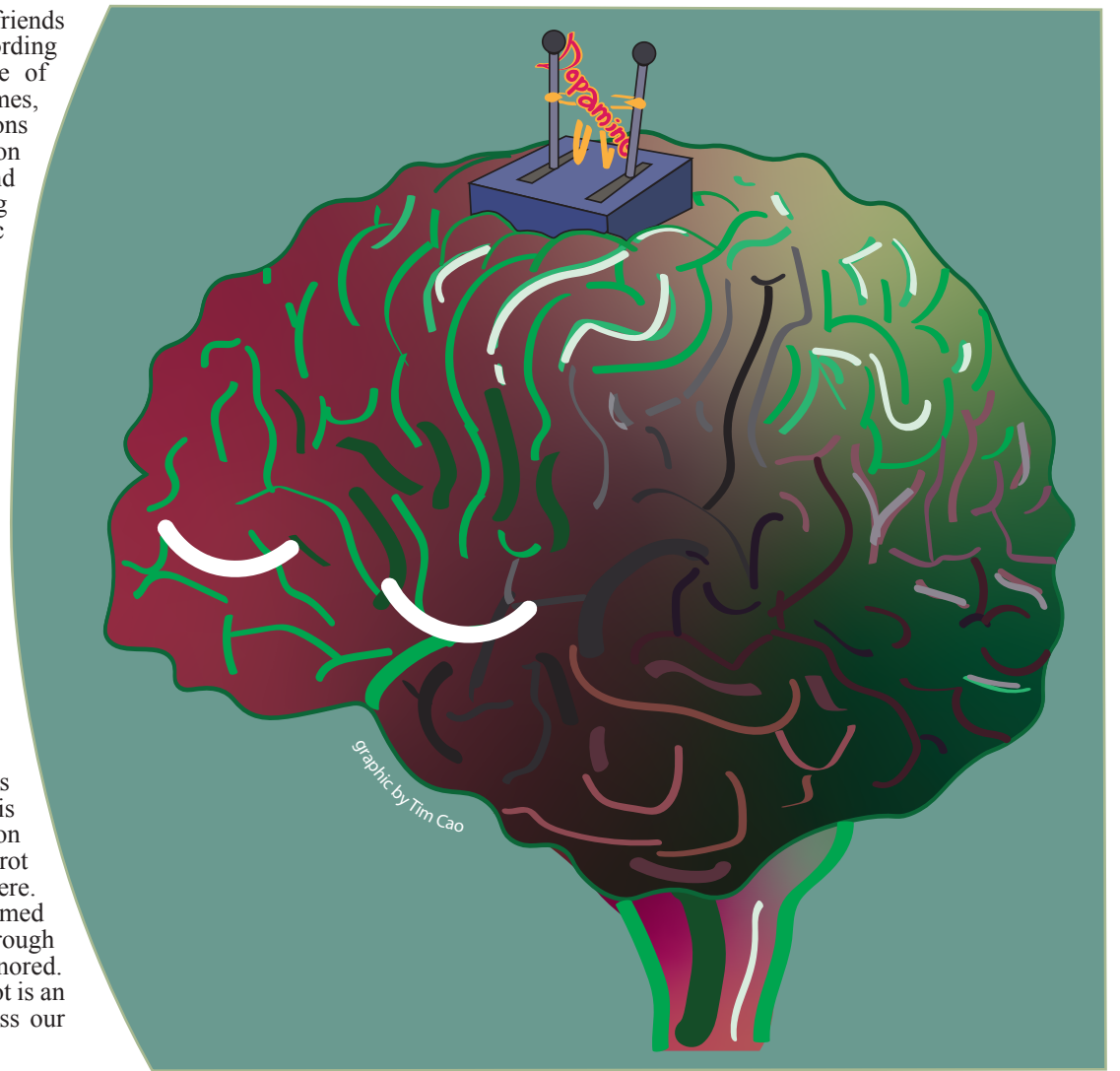
A survey sent to the LASA Liberator staff resulted with the majority answering either a 6 or 7 out of 10 to the question “How much has brain rot affected you?” Many respond that brain-rot is difficult to avoid. The respondents find themselves struggling with trends and references while others avoid those entirely just to have their friends use the same trends and references around them. Despite most of our staff admitting they have been more affected by brain-rot than not, most of them still say they avoid or ignore these trends. For the sampled group that noted brain-rot’s direct effect, filter bubbles attribute to this impact. According to Medium, these technologically-formed groups advertise content similar to our previous likes or shares, filtering out diversified information and media.

The effects of technology are clear among our generation. In the study reported by the New York Times and done by Professor Shiri Melumad of the University of Pennsylvania, it was shown that people were using AI to generate responses for very simple questions. Professor Melumad was concerned that the younger generation are beginning to have the simple ability to conduct a traditional Google search. The world has been oversimplified, we have gone from searching using books to the internet and now to using chatbots that can give us direct answers to our questions within a few sentences. Brain-rot is oversimplification and through accessible technology, it became widespread in the younger generation.

With the spread of oversimplification, our generation has created the most potent carrier for brain-rot, short term videos. From the same survey of our LASA Liberator staff, 86% responded with “Short Videos” to the question “Where do you intake the most brain rot?” Brain-rot is difficult to avoid on platforms. People love pumping out brain-rot for easy money and everyone who is on the internet ends up getting affected, whether it is through the short

videos directly or through friends who watched the videos. According to both the National Institute of Health and the New York Times, scrolling and internet addictions result in anxiety and depression as well as impair memory and planning and decision-making skills, leading to academic procrastination. The New York Times also reported a study where children who used low amounts of social media scored much higher than children who used more social media on a cognitive test. The study explains that social media takes away time from enhancing activities like reading and sleeping. Our staff’s reports also support these studies with many of them explaining that brain-rot serves as distractions that eat up time. With many of our staff saying that they are either fighting the impacts of brain-rot or have defeated these impacts in the past.

Despite the negative effects of brain-rot, its presence is widespread. It is attention grabbing and addictive. Brain-rot can be picked up from everywhere. Whether brain-rot is consumed from short videos or through friends, its effect cannot be ignored. According to The Cub, brain-rot is an epidemic that has spread across our generation.



## Raptor Chatter

### How has brainrot impacted you?



photo by Megan Gerold

#### Ruby Singhurst Freshman

“It has lowered my intelligence but has allowed me to make long lasting connections with friends.”



photo by Tim Cao

#### Luna Nuñez Sophomore

“It’s just distracting. 6-7 is really annoying.”



photo by Tim Cao

#### Jonah Brown Junior

“Brainrot to me is a wide term. It can be used to describe laziness and procrastination. I feel like that happens to everyone.”



photo by Luca Sims

#### Simon Nield Senior

“It has severely affected my memory, I’ve found in recent years, to a pretty bad extent.”

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**If you are interested in writing for the paper and becoming a club contributor then be sure to stop by Room 701 to find out more!**

## 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 LASA 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 LASA 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 Board and its Functions:

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

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**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.

# Should American Teens Have Access to Social Media?

CLEMENTINE DAVIS | staff writer

For better or for worse, social media is everywhere, especially in high school. Whether you are sharing funny TikToks, using Snapchat to communicate with your friends, or posting on Instagram, it's pretty much inescapable. But do its positives outweigh its negatives? And would it really be such a bad thing if younger teens couldn't access it?

A 2024 study from the Pew Research center found that 95% of American teens report using social media at least once a day. This includes apps like YouTube, SnapChat, TikTok, Instagram, and many more. But recently, countries have taken steps to decrease the use of social media by teens. Most notably, on December 10, 2025, Australia banned the use of social media by teens under the age of 16. This ban is the first of its kind, and, according to an article by BBC news, is being enforced through financial penalties to major social media companies for allowing under-16s onto their apps. This can be prevented through many different requirements, such as government IDs or facial/vocal recognition. The U.S. had considered an act preventing social media use in people under the age of 13 called the Kids off Social Media Act, but this was struck down due to privacy concerns and worries on its effectiveness.

I propose a ban similar to Australia's. As a 15 year old, while I enjoy the freedom that I have to browse YouTube and scroll Pinterest, I think that an age limit of 16 on most social media is a step that

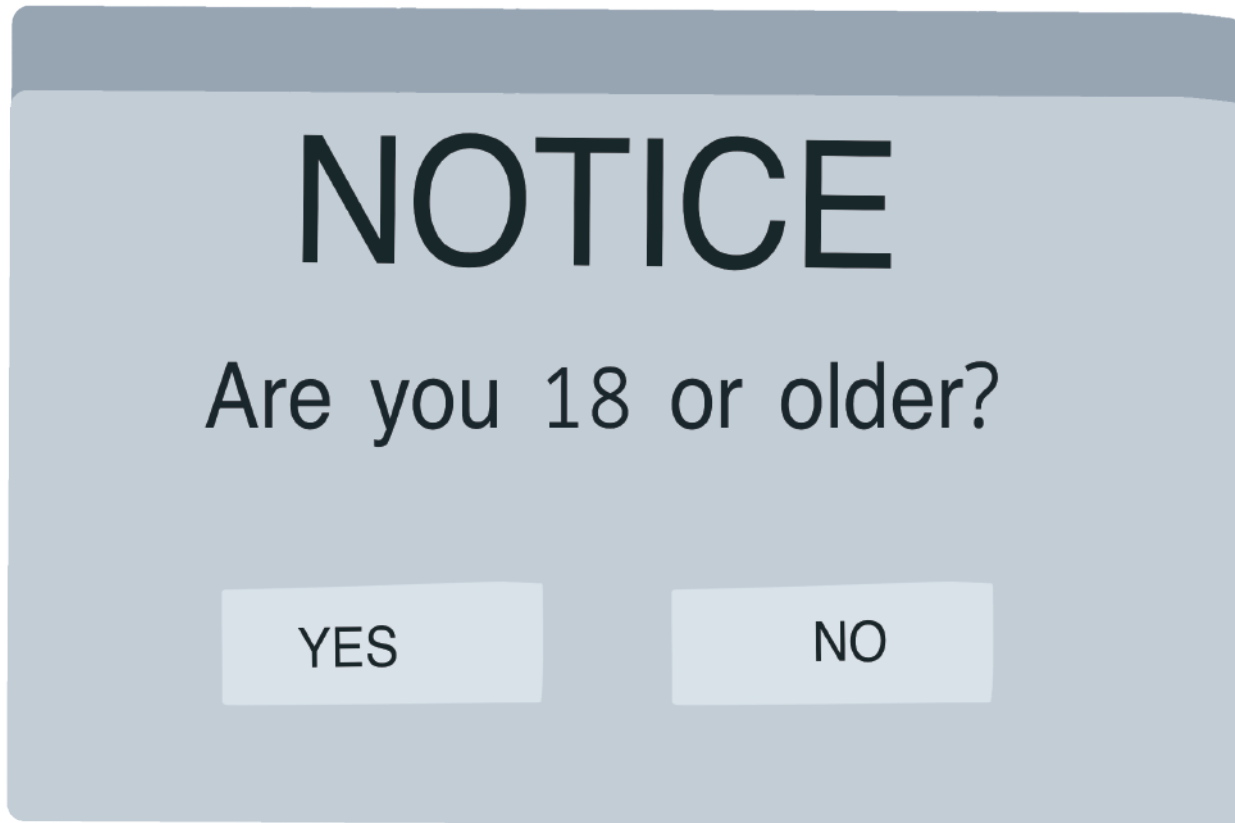
could improve the mental health and body images of teens my age. Excessive use of social media has long been correlated with depression and anxiety. Studies, including one by the American Psychology Association in 2023, have found a prominent connection between time spent on social media and negative body image. They discovered that when teens reduced their social media use by 50%, they became largely less insecure about their physical

appearance.

There are objections to a ban like this. A big concern is whether or not it would work. Because bans like these are so recent, there is no data proving one way or the other, but I believe that something is much better than nothing. Kids will always find a way around the law — it's impossible to entirely stamp out the usage of social media in teens. Let's compare it to the law against personal communication devices at LASA — is it perfect? No. However, it has made an extreme difference in how present students are in their studies, and it has decreased the use of phones by a large amount.

Another popular worry is that it would deprive teens without healthy or supported home lives from accessing vital resources, like mental health help, sexual education, and just general support. This is an incredibly important concern and should be considered. I do, however, believe that because of the limited scope of this potential act and how many apps it wouldn't be able to effect that this access to the outside world could still be maintained. For example, in Australia, alternative social apps like Lemon8 have seen a spike in downloads.

A ban preventing people under the age of 16 using social media could be an incredibly helpful tool used to decrease screen time and insecurity in adolescents. It isn't perfect and would involve some trial and error, but I believe that it is important for our country to protect ourselves and future generations.



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

## Electric Cars

from page 1

PHOENIX GEROME | staff writer

As emission rates rise, so does the production of electric vehicles (EV). However, many people question whether or not EV's actually help the environment. Research shows that electric cars reduce emissions significantly more than gas powered cars. According to Gexa Energy, a company offering renewable energy to the Houston Metro Area, electric cars are considered superior to gas powered cars in many ways due to less emission production, a lower operating cost, and they require less maintenance.

Electric cars are often considered a crucial component to helping reduce climate change for many reasons. For one, electric vehicles have a battery rather than a gas-powered engine and do not have tailpipe emissions, allowing for reduction of emissions across the globe.

In addition, electric cars are far more efficient at converting battery power to actual power, compared to gas cars. According to Recharged, a company that specializes in electric cars, electric cars are about 75-80% efficient, and gas cars are only about 25%. This means that gas cars release a lot of heat from their engines also contributing to climate change because of their low efficiency. They use regenerative braking to recapture the lost energy during deceleration, making their power source, a lot more efficient, and helpful to the environment.

Over time, these cars include many clean energy sources, such as solar power, wind, and hydropower making them a clean mode of transportation. Vital Signs said that the helpfulness for EVs is still great because a medium-sized EV produces 60-68% fewer greenhouse gas emissions in its lifetime than a gas-powered car.

Due to their electric power, they are a lot quieter than traditional gas powered cars, helping reduce numerous health problems such as migraines, anxiety, and hearing loss. Although electric cars are generally more expensive than gas powered vehicles, they have less operation costs and are cheaper to maintain. Owners of electric vehicles pay less for charging their battery, and receive tax incentives from the government, specifically the IRS. According to the Alternative Fuels Data Center, taxpayers who purchase an eligible vehicle may qualify for a tax credit of up to \$7,500.

Despite the multitude of benefits, the process of making EV's isn't as clean. One source of emissions coming from electric cars is the production

and manufacturing of their lithium-ion batteries. Climate Portal said that the use of minerals needed to make the battery requires fossil fuels to mine and to heat them to high temperatures. As a result, building a battery for the Tesla Model 3 produces around 2.5 - 16 metric tons of CO2. Although most of the emissions are from the production of the car, there still is carbon dioxide being produced from the charging of the car. Nevertheless, battery production is becoming greener through the use of renewable energy sources, the recycling of the battery, and the use of less natural materials such as cobalt and lithium.

Despite having amounts of CO2 produced from battery manufacturing, EV's are still efficient, and effective at reducing emissions globally. Once gas-powered cars start to fade out of the market, only then could we possibly help the environment by using electric cars and create a cleaner Earth.



graphic by Tim Cao

COLETTE KLIVANS | staff writer

This or That?

Which Coast is Best Coast?

From the bustling and history-rich nature of New York and Pennsylvania to the scenic nature of New England and Maryland, the East Coast is one of the country's most beloved vacation destinations. Even though both the East and West coasts offer unique cultures and attraction, the East Coast stands out to many due to its rich history, vibrant city life and landscapes, and variety.

The East Coast is home to some of the most famous landmarks that define American culture and history. These include iconic sites such as the Statue of Liberty, the White House, the Lincoln Memorial, Independence Hall, and the Liberty Bell.

Along with these landmarks, the East Coast is also complemented with food. Because of the importance of food to America's history, food exploration is a key part of the East Coast traveling experience. The East Coast has an especially diverse food scene due to its history of immigrants. Beloved foods include New York style pizza, hot dogs, Philly cheesesteaks, New England clam chowder, Maryland crab cakes, and lobster rolls. According to Eater, the east coast's cuisine exhibits proof of global influences.

Another one of the biggest comparisons people make between the coasts is city culture. On the East Coast, bustling cities like New York are very compact; you can take a subway and explore Manhattan, Brooklyn, or Queens in just a day, which is more efficient than waiting in hour-long traffic in Los Angeles or San Francisco.

In contrast to the compact cities, the East Coast also offers a wide range of natural landscapes and seasonal variety. Travelers are able to enjoy the East Coast all year long. The East Coast is made up of mild springs, warm summers, beautiful autumns and snowy winters perfectly suited for Christmas. Nature features like the Appalachian Mountains open doors to a variety of outdoor activities like hiking.

Although the West Coast is more known for their relaxed atmosphere and sceneries, the East Coast has a richer blend of history, culture, food, city life, and seasonal experiences. Travelers wanting to find variety and depth in their next vacation would most likely be recommended to travel to the East Coast, which still remains one of the most compelling vacation destinations in America.

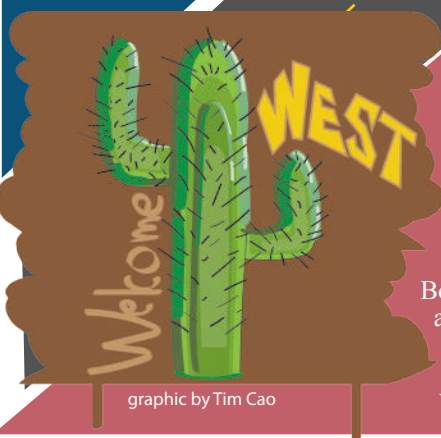
ELINA SARKAR | staff writer

The West has a diverse natural landscape, reports Earth@home: snowy mountains, arid deserts, sandy beaches. This variation offers an activity for everyone, from if you want to ski or take a trip to the Sierra Nevada mountains. If the beach is more your style, enjoy Santa Monica or Venice Beach. If hiking is your ultimate vacation, visit Redwood or Yosemite national parks. No matter what brings you joy, it is found on the West Coast.

The West Coast also has a unique food culture. It is the birthplace of farm-to-table dining. Time magazine described the exodus of New York chefs moving to L.A., Portland, or San Francisco because of the access to quality ingredients and emphasis on experimentation. The West Coast's focus on redefining cuisine will certainly make for an interesting culinary experience.

Lastly, the West Coast has an immense impact on film and popular culture. L.A. houses various iconic movie sets, production studios, and music labels. It is also home to countless celebrities, making it influential in style and fashion.

The East Coast may have bustling cities and historic hubs, but nothing beats the vibrant beauty of a West Coast sunset. To enjoy true nature, relaxation, and innovation, hit play on OneRepublic's "West Coast" and take a trip to the beautiful West.



graphic by Tim Cao

## Austin Rising Rent Narrative Needs a Reality Check

PILAR DETTMER | staff writer

Austin's rent prices have been on many people's minds. Despite notorious preconceptions of high rent prices in Austin, in recent years, Austin's rent prices have surprisingly been dropping.

According to the National Multifamily Housing Council, Austin saw the lowest rent growth in 2025 out of the 150 largest metros in the U.S. with a growth of -4.2%. This decrease of rent growth isn't new. Ever since Austin's rent prices peaked in August 2022, with the average price for a two bedroom apartment reaching a high of \$1,726, the average rent price in Austin has dropped to \$1,431 as of April 2025, representing a 17.1% drop from their peak, according to Team Price Real Estate. It is this steady decrease in rent prices that makes it evident that the high rent prices that Austin has been known for in recent years was an extraordinary event, and that prices are returning to pre-pandemic levels.

One of the major factors that led to Austin's skyrocketing rent in 2021-2022 was an issue with the supply vs. demand for housing. From 2020-2022, Austin was the fastest growing out of the 50 largest metro areas in the U.S. and had the highest percentage of net migrants, with a population increase of 121,121 (5.3%) and 64,764 net migrants (4.1%), according to the Austin Chamber of Commerce. This increase in population

went hand in hand with the drop in vacancy rates. According to Team Price Real Estate, vacancy rates in Austin reached a low of 3.96% in September 2021. It was this high demand for housing from Austin's booming population and the low availability of housing that contributed to Austin's spike in rent prices from roughly 2020-2022.

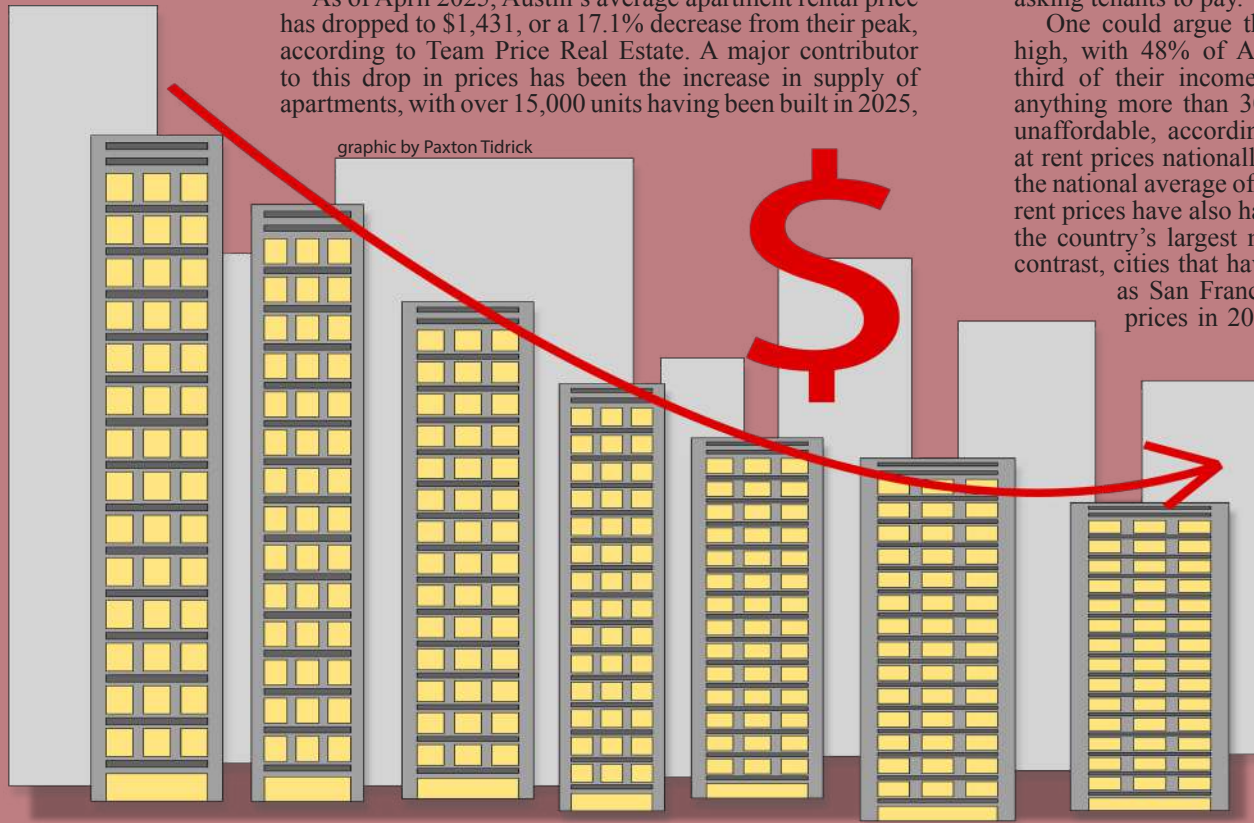
As of April 2025, Austin's average apartment rental price has dropped to \$1,431, or a 17.1% decrease from their peak, according to Team Price Real Estate. A major contributor to this drop in prices has been the increase in supply of apartments, with over 15,000 units having been built in 2025,

according to KVUE. With this increase in supply better matching the demand for housing, vacancy rates have increased, reaching 10.01% in 2025, according to Team Price Real Estate. It is this more proportionate housing supply and demand that has allowed for higher vacancy rates and for property owners to lower the prices they are asking tenants to pay.

One could argue that Austin's rent prices are still too high, with 48% of Austin renters spending more than a third of their income on rent in 2022, where spending anything more than 30% of income on rent is considered unaffordable, according to KUT. However, when looking at rent prices nationally, Austin's average rent is 5% below the national average of \$1,995, according to Zillow. Austin's rent prices have also had one of the steepest declines among the country's largest metros, according to Realtor.com. In contrast, cities that have become highly unaffordable, such as San Francisco, had an 11.5% increase in rent prices in 2025

resulting in an average rent price of \$3,040, according to Grow SF. Austin did not see this type of consistent, upward trend and is instead on track to return to its rent prices from before the boom in 2021-2022.

In order to help allow Austin's rent prices to keep dropping, continuing to have a housing supply that matches the demand is key. One main way to do this is by supporting an increase in density in Austin through the construction of apartment buildings that allow a large amount of people to live in a small area, which in turn will help to keep rent prices at a reasonable level.



## Curb Your Exam Curbing

ZACHARY EGLER | staff writer

There is one question that sits in my mind and the minds of my fellow students both before and after a major test: is there going to be a curve? They are not thinking about if they understood the material. They are not thinking about what they may have missed — just whether or not there will be a curve. It has become such a routine part of school life that many students expect their scores to dramatically change after the test is already over.

Exam curves are meant to fix unfair assessments and protect students from unusually difficult exams. In practice, however, they often blur the meaning of grades, create unnecessary competition between students, and, in some cases, punish strong performance. While the intention is good, exam curves are an unreliable way to measure learning and should be used far more cautiously if at all.

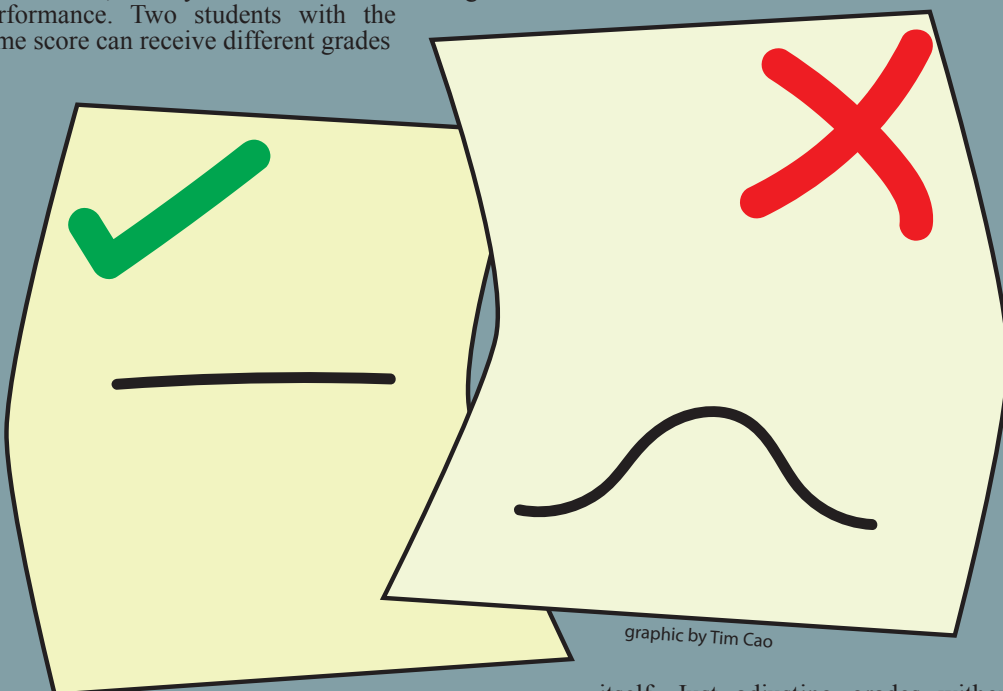
Most grading curves rely on norm-referenced grading, which evaluates students in relation to their peers rather than a fixed standard. Instead of asking whether a student understands the material, the system focuses on ranking performance. Two students with the same score can receive different grades

than actual learning, shifting the focus away from mastery and toward comparison.

Curving down highlights these issues most clearly. In forced grading systems, there is only a set percentage of students who can receive top grades. If more students meet the threshold than desired, some grades are lowered despite a strong performance. In a class where only 10% of students can earn an A, scores will be pushed down if too many succeed. Many critics argue this is unethical because it actively punishes success instead of rewarding it.

Curves also hurt motivation. When grades have fixed ceilings, additional effort may not lead to better outcomes. When a 15 point curve is guaranteed for everyone, there is no point to go above an 85. Students in the middle may feel that there is little to no reason to push themselves, leading to less effort and less meaningful learning. Instead of encouraging improvement, curves can create resignation.

Defenders of curving argue that it protects students' morale after difficult exams that could crush spirits. While low averages can be discouraging, they usually indicate a problem with the assessment



depending on how the rest of the class does, weakening the connection between grades and content mastery.

Curves have not always been the standard. Historically, unusually high class averages were viewed as signs of cheating and bad teaching, according to Education Week. This puts pressure on teachers to deduct points from tests. Over time, this mindset or regulating tests normalized curving especially in harder classes. As curves have become more common, students began to just expect them which changes how they approach exams and study habits.

This issue is that grades are already a poor measure of learning. Research from the National Institute of Health shows that grades are influenced by several factors including test design, grading practices, and stress, not just content knowledge. Just because a student scores 90% on an exam does not mean they understand 90 percent of the material. When curves are added, grades become even less accurate.

One of the clearest problems with curved grading is the competition it creates. Because student success depends on how others perform, collaboration feels discouraged. Sharing notes or studying with others seems like helping a competitor. The New York Times argued that grading on a curve measures class rank rather

itself. Just adjusting grades without reviewing questions and helping with confusion avoids solving the real issue. Boosting grades does not improve understanding; it only changes the final number.

Another defense of curving is that it compensates for flawed tests. While curves may correct outcomes on paper, they do not improve instruction. Alternatives such as revising exams, offering partial credit, or aligning assessments more closely with instruction addresses the problem more directly. Curving should be an exception, not the default.

Exam curves are often introduced to promote fairness, but they frequently undermine the goals they are meant to support. By weakening the link between grades and learning and encouraging unhealthy competition, curves distort how students experience school.

Grades should reflect what students know, not where they fall compared with others. If schools want to prioritize learning over ranking, they should move toward grading systems that emphasize master and growth rather than a curve.

## Everything is Political—Must Retirements Be Too?

This past month, The LASA Liberator hosted its first schoolwide op-ed writing competition. We are proud to announce Shaan Chatterjee-Kassam's argumentative piece as its inaugural winner.

SHAAN CHATTERJEE-KASSAM | award winner

Today, every realm of society is being more and more politicized. From gas stoves to plastic straws, it seems no corner of life is safe from the churn of political punditry. But some things should stay boring, and retirement is one of them.

In the United States today, public pension systems control almost \$9.5 trillion — more than the GDPs of the United Kingdom, France, and Canada combined. These funds aren't just massive pools of money; they underpin the American economy, throughout every sector and industry, and finance everything from single-family mortgages and student loans all the way to critical billion-dollar infrastructure projects like high-speed rail networks or bridges. Above all, they work to provide retirement security and futures for millions of teachers, first responders, and countless other state and local employees.

For the entirety of American history, these pension assets have been controlled by independent trustees, industry experts and labor representatives far-removed from the mud-slinging and finger-pointing of politics. Their decisions are governed by detailed — and often mind-numbingly boring — investment policy statements and constrained under strict fiduciary duties requiring them to act solely in the best interests of beneficiaries.

Over the last decade, that tradition has quietly unravelled. Just days into the new year, the House of Representatives passed HR 2988, legislation intended to restrict the consideration of so-called 'ESG' factors — environmental, social, and governance considerations — in pension investments. Its framers argue it protects against 'woke' pension trustees 'weaponising' pension assets to further their political agendas. In reality, pension trustees are already required to focus solely on financial returns by their fiduciary duty. But this legislation lays the groundwork for an already hyper-active Department of Justice to launch spurious lawsuits against pension trustees or intimidate them into violating their fiduciary duty.

Our own state of Texas serves as a clear example of pension politicisation run amok: sweeping legislation targeting pension independence shaped more by ideological narratives than responsible pension governance. HB 793, enacted in 2019, barred state-administered pension plans alongside the Permanent School Fund, from investing in companies that 'boycotted' Israel. The next session, the legislature passed SB 13 and SB 19 extending prohibitions to companies deemed by the Comptroller to 'boycott' energy companies or firearms manufacturers. These funds, alongside the PSF, hold a combined \$355 billion and represent more than three-quarters of a million retirees, namely teachers, firefighters, and almost every other state and local employee.

My point is not to argue in favour or against the firearms industry or to litigate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; there's a time and place for that. The problem is pension funds are a poor and costly venue for resolving them.

In Texas alone, our pension funds already face more than \$76 billion in unfunded liabilities. One study estimated that in the year after its passage, SB 13 alone cost our state pensions more than \$821 million in losses, and that number is estimated to rise to \$22 billion by 2050. These don't merely represent theoretical figures; they directly contribute to greater fiscal pressures on the state, higher contribution requirements from employees, and pressure on future benefits and cost-of-living adjustments for our most vulnerable retirees.

This issue is also by no means restricted to a single party either. Comptroller Brad Lander ordered New York City's almost \$300 billion pension fund divest from more than \$45 billion of BlackRock-managed funds, citing the manager's 'de-prioritisation of climate concerns.' Likewise, the legislatures of Maine and the District of Columbia, among others, have voted largely along party lines to mandate pension funds divest from fossil-fuel companies.

By unilaterally restricting pension investment opportunities for purely political purposes we risk letting the financial futures of our most vulnerable retirees become fodder for the twenty-four-hour news cycle and the ever more inane world of political punditry. For centuries, pensions have existed on the margin, a boring afterthought insulated from the chaos of politics and governed by rules and reason rather than rhetoric. That insulation is worth restoring.



# National Reading Crisis in Youth Hits Austin Students

AALIYAH AHAMED | staff writer

Students are reading less and less with the rise of online media and the development of artificial intelligence, both for enjoyment and as schoolwork. With sources such as the Nation's Report Card reporting a major decline in reading since the COVID-19 pandemic, most fourth and eighth graders in 2024 are performing below pre-pandemic levels in reading as well as math.

Reading can be beneficial for students, not only as a form of leisure, but as education. It equips them with literacy skills that can help them in the future. The National Institute of Health reported that qualitative and quantitative research studies have shown that children who engage in voluntary reading develop positive attitudes towards reading as an activity. This type of reading has also been shown to relate positively to growth in vocabulary, reading comprehension, verbal fluency, and general information. These attributes produce better workplace communication and enhance critical thinking skills, which are essential for applying for jobs in the future. Now, however, they are in jeopardy.

Teachers at LASA have noticed the decline in reading among students, especially after COVID-19. LASA English teacher Shannon Baley has observed changes in attention spans and literacy habits among students.

"I do feel like attention spans have decreased sharply since COVID," Baley said. "It's hard to say exactly because LASA kids are unusual, but I also taught at a small Catholic private school, and most kids were hardly reading at all. The main thing I see is issues with stamina. Kids have a hard time reading for more than like five minutes at a time before they start stopping, or getting distracted."

Literacy Texas, a statewide coalition for adult and family literacy in Texas, has identified obstacles that prevent students from reading for fun. Executive director Jenny Walker found that students dislike reading because they struggle to recognize what texts will entertain them.

"I believe the biggest barrier young people face when it comes to reading for pleasure is finding the right genre," Walker said. "Once someone finds something that sparks their interests, it's easy to find books they love. After that, the biggest barrier is being intentional about

making time to read."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people spent more time at home. Scrolling and using technology became a major habit, especially among younger generations. Elizabeth Switek, the librarian at LASA, believes that the main reason younger generations are reading less for pleasure is due to phones.

"I walk through H-E-B and I see toddlers on their parents' cell phones, rather than their parents actually having a conversation with them," Switek said. "The kids are being exposed to that quick, thirty-second format, and it's showing. Studies are starting to show that our actual brains are being changed by this, so attention spans are being lessened, diminished."

Technology has played a significant role in students' literacy and reading habits,

according to Baley. Parents often use online videos and games to distract their children at a young age, introducing them to consumable media early on.

"Kids are used to being fed things in small visual, auditory ways," Baley said. "If something is more than, I'd even say a minute, it tends to lose people's attention."

Despite this issue among students, LASA teachers find ways to make reading more enjoyable for students. Baley finds ways to manage teaching literature with attention spans.

"We try to chunk things, especially for freshmen," Baley said. "We try to create interesting assignments that get kids to think more deeply and think more carefully. I try to find the most entertaining bits to read together, to kind of encourage people to keep reading."

Outside of the classroom, Austin Public Library tries to incorporate literacy programs to encourage students to read more, as does LASA's library. To attract visitors, however, libraries are increasingly turning to other activities, such as the LASA library's alternatives.

"I try to have an open and welcoming library space," Switek said. "I have a lot of what's called passive programming out: puzzles, board games, coloring pages, crafty stuff, so you don't have to interact with the books or any of that media. You can just be in the library. Use it as a space. It's a third space. It's a safe space."

The continuing development of online technology and the COVID pandemic exacerbated usage of online media like audio and video, especially among teenagers. According to Switek, there are ways to mitigate consumption and spend less time on screens.

"Find a book that looks interesting to you," Switek said. "Check out five from the library. Read and take them home. Read them over the weekend. Read the first paragraph, read the first page of them. Find one that you like, ask a friend for a recommendation, ask a friend what they've read recently that they really enjoyed, and try it out. Claw back 10 minutes out of your day, and see whether you don't feel a little better, a little more motivated, a little happier after having read rather than scrolling on your phone."



graphic by Megan Gerold

# Sixth Street Safety Plan Faces Mixed Reactions

AVERY HERSH | staff writer

Cleaning up 'Dirty Sixth'? The City of Austin is embarking on an ambitious new project to remake their most active avenue. Sixth Street may be known for its music, bars, and nightlife, not yet mobility or safety, but that could change.

The Sixth Street Mobility and Revitalization Project will widen sidewalks and halve the number of car lanes to prioritize pedestrian traffic, and it anticipates beginning construction in 2027. The change only applies to East Sixth Street, the portion of the boulevard between Congress Avenue and I-35. Last December, Transportation and Public Works announced their recommendation for a design that prioritizes sidewalk paths over bike lanes, which other alternatives had proposed. Lalani Romani, a Capital Improvement Program Manager at the City of Austin, explained the importance of rebuilding Sixth Street.

"It's one of the most iconic places in Austin," Romani said. "It's a place that attracts tourists and something that locals want to visit. There's a need to see some revitalization, make it more of an 18-hour street."

The concept of an 18-hour street refers to a hub where visitors can find suitable activities from morning until after midnight. Currently, the portion of Sixth Street west of I-35 is dominated by bars, leading to the label of 'Dirty Sixth', which Museum of the Weird manager Lanaya Mandolesi suggested the city now wants to avoid.

"I think they're trying to push away from 'dirty' Sixth and look at 'historical' Sixth," Mandolesi said. " "

Paul Eighmey, the owner of Casino el Camino on Sixth Street who goes by the nickname Casino and has lived in Austin for 35 years, identified a different motivation behind the rebuilding. According to him, the city government's intentions are to make more money, regardless of input from the people their decision

will affect.

"I think the city government wants to gentrify everything," Casino said. "They want to make the most money and the most taxes out of an area... None of the city people come down here and get any input from anybody, they just look at it and want to fix it."

Casino suggested that the people who moved to Austin in recent years are pushing the minority business owners out as prices rise. The street has encountered problems with homelessness in the past, and the city may be looking to renew its reputation, recently dubbing it 'Old Sixth'.

"A lot of people, well intentioned liberals with a lot of money, don't realize they're pricing out people who are actually working class people and minorities," Casino said. "Austin has priced out, it used to be way more diverse."

Sixth Street has encountered problems with homelessness. Currently, Sixth Street's target demographics primarily consist of college students and tourists. Per its stated goals, Austin wants to be able to bring in varying types of people, including different age groups.

"It'll bring more diverse groups of people to the street," Romani said. "People of all ages that are able to use this street, people of different races, people from different places."

Romani shared an alternative explanation behind Sixth Street's being rebuilt. She stated that the city government wants Sixth Street to reflect Austin, and what it represents. That they want it to thrive not only at night but at the day too.

"I think we want to create a street that reflects what Austin is and what we want it to be," Romani said. "That's the idea behind the 18-hour street, that it's not just a street that thrives at night but thrives 18 hours of the day. Naturally, as a result of that, the hope is that it will encourage people of all types to come visit."

The rebuilding of Sixth Street is planned to start in 2027.

There have been mixed reactions to this plan. Casino indicated that many other business owners share his discontent with the plan.

"I don't think it needs to be torn down and rebuilt from the ground up," Casino said. "I know that most of the people who work here and spend time down here don't like the changes that are coming."



BUILD UP TO SHAKE DOWN The City of Austin sectioned off parking on Sixth Street to widen pedestrian zones. Businesses including the Museum of the Weird complained that it limited customers from stopping in front of their store. photo by Ellington Tough

# LASA Hosts House Candidates, Hears Politics in Action

ELLINGTON TOUGH | news editor

Seven people lined up to speak on the stage of the theater. Six of them were Democrats. One of them had graduated from LASA. All of them are running for the same seat.

On the evening of Feb. 19, the candidates for Texas House District 49, most of whom contended for the Democratic primary on March 3, presented their positions on public education in a forum organized by Raise Your Hand Texas (RYHT). Mario Piña, RYHT's senior regional advocacy director for Greater Austin, put together the event when he saw the opportunity to bring candidates to a school he was already familiar with.

"Last school year, I came in and did the advocacy cycle presentations for going to the Capitol," Piña said. "This is something I've been doing with LASA for two or three years now, so having a connection with them made it really easy to say, 'Hey, I'm hosting this candidate forum for House District 49.'"

Texas House District 49 came into play after its sitting Representative Gina Hinojosa launched a campaign for governor. The district covers the western portion of Austin, encompassing 200,000 people who, according to candidate and LASA alumnus Daniel Wang, distinguish it from other Texas districts.

"This is the urban core of Austin," Wang said. "In District 49, we have a very, very engaged electorate. If you look at the statistics, about 10% of the district is high school education or less. Of the remaining 90%, more people have a graduate degree than only an undergraduate degree."

Wang has served as a board member for the Travis County Appraisal District since 2024, when he won an election to the advisory body. He intended the position to be a gateway into higher offices. Wang did not anticipate one becoming available to him so soon.

"When Gina Hinojosa announced that she was running for governor, I decided, 'It really is now or never,'" Wang said. "I

thought, 'This is where I want to be. These are the fights I want to dedicate my life to.'"

Wang graduated from LASA in 2015. While preparing to finish his undergraduate degree in math at MIT, he realized he wanted a job where he could affect more change for his community and enrolled at Harvard Law School. He returned to Austin to continue his career in law and forge a new one in politics.

"I had identified the state legislature as where I thought I could make the most difference," Wang said. "Things that I want to do like fixing the grid, like Medicaid expansion, those are state-level decisions. And the state department also controls voter registration and drawing districts. There are a lot of ways in which state governments set the playing field."

For the benefits of Medicaid, a federal policy, to become fully available to people living in a state, their government must opt into it. Texas Republicans have repeatedly blocked this expansion, citing cost concerns. Wang is not the only candidate pushing for expansion of public healthcare: Kimmie Ellison is also a proponent of the policy, informed by her career as a nurse practitioner.

"Constituents are going to see how their lives are affected and sometimes even threatened by horrible healthcare policy," Ellison said. "I think now is the time to seriously talk about Medicaid expansion in the state, and there is no one better than me in this race to have those conversations. I have faces and names of women who have died burned on my heart, and beyond that I have data to back up why this is the sound thing to do."

Arshia Papari is the only candidate not running as a Democrat. The 21-year-old University of Texas at Austin junior is registered with the Green Party, an alternative to the two-party system that advocates for environmental and progressive social policies. Majoring in government, he is the youngest candidate for a state-level office in Texas. He was also the first to enter the race before Hinojosa withdrew.

"Everyone thinks you have to be 50 and above to get into

politics," Papari said. "As a youth candidate, you're much more in tune with your constituents. Being a university student, I'm with my community all the time."

In addition to Ellison and Wang, the six other candidates for the Democratic nomination are Montserrat Garibay, Robin Lerner, Gigs Hodges, Kathie Tovo, Josh Reyna, and Sam Slade. If no candidate gets more than 50% of the votes, the most successful two will enter a runoff decided on May 26. The winner of the runoff will vie with Papari in the general election on Nov. 3.

"I certainly do believe that there will be a runoff in this election," Wang said. "All of us deeply care about Austin and the communities that we're seeking to represent."



RAISING THE HOUSE From left to right, candidates Kimmie Ellison, Montserrat Garibay, Robin Lerner, Gigs Hodges, Kathie Tovo, and Daniel Wang line up to answer questions about their education positions. Candidates Josh Reyna and Slade were registered to participate but did not attend. photo by Ellington Tough

The Texas Tribune Festival, or TribFest, is an annual conference of dozens of political and social figures converging in Austin. It most recently took place Nov., 2025.

## Pete Buttigieg

ELLINGTON TOUGH | news editor

President, governor, state treasurer: all of these are titles which Pete Buttigieg has hoped to attain, but never reached. The former Secretary of Transportation spoke about his political career at the 2025 Texas Tribune Festival in a session with Jeff Goldberg, editor-in-chief of The Atlantic.

Having served as the mayor of South Bend, Indiana since 2012, Buttigieg ran to challenge Trump for the presidency in 2020, but gave up his bid for Democratic nominee to endorse Joe Biden, who triumphed in the primaries. After winning the general election, Biden appointed Buttigieg to his cabinet as Secretary of Transportation.

"I told Pete that in my mind, he's now an off-duty politician, so I'm not going to ask about national rail policy or the air traffic controller staffing issues," Goldberg joked. "We're going to do 40 minutes on the Newark air traffic controller situation."

Although Goldberg launched the conversation with quips about Buttigieg's time overseeing aviation, he soon transitioned to deeper social and political issues he described were plaguing the country. The 2024 reelection of Donald Trump featured heavily in the discussion.

"A guy like Donald Trump, a movement like a kind of protoauthoritarian nationalism, doesn't find fertile ground in places where things are working," Buttigieg said. "Our inheritance as a country isn't making it reasonable to get through everyday life, to get up in the morning and get in your car and get to work where you're going to be paid enough to live."

Goldberg also noted that the journalism world he worked in is now competing with online personalities and accounts. Media was a focus of the last three elections, and Buttigieg blamed algorithms for promoting false information that pushed many Americans deeper into their personal ideology and helped Trump rise to power.

"Southbend Tribune, even Fox News, if we actually caught them saying something wrong and we showed it, they would, as a matter of editorial integrity, adjust that," Buttigieg said. "That doesn't happen obviously in not just social, digital media, tweets and that sort of thing but in many of the podcasts that have replaced the traditional media that we have depended on... You instead have that editorial function being played by an algorithm. The algorithm's job is not to find things that you need to know. The algorithm's job is to find things that'll keep you staring at the screen."

## Colin Allred

CLEMENTINE DAVIS | staff writer

Despite the difficulty Democrats have met in modern statewide Texas elections, Colin Allred has continued to pursue statewide office. After a 2024 campaign for U.S. Senate, he briefly participated in the Democratic nomination process for Texas' other Senate seat. He dropped out of the race in 2025, pivoting to a Congressional race.

Allred is a moderate Democratic politician from Dallas who formerly represented Texas's 32nd district. In mid-November, he joined the Texas Tribune Festival for an interview by The Texas Tribune Editor-in-Chief Matthew Watkins on his campaign for the U.S. Senate. After losing a campaign for the U.S. Senate against Ted Cruz in 2024, he had hoped to run for Texas' other Senate seat, currently held by John Cornyn. He withdrew from the Democratic primary in December to run for the House seat in Texas' 33rd congressional district.

Allred stated his campaign centers around the people that he grew up with: ordinary, working-class Texans who are struggling to get by in the current economic and political climate. He enjoys meeting and listening to people and explained that in recent interactions with voters, he has been sensing a new feeling of hopelessness and fear in the air.

"They're doing everything right," Allred said in the session. "They're playing by the rules, and they're watching folks on TV, who are openly corrupt, who are openly cutting corners, and who are doing just fine. And they feel like they can't get ahead of it all."

Allred feels that some of this hopelessness is a product of the Democratic Party not showing up for its people. He believes that the 2025 government shutdown was an example of Democrats backing down when they shouldn't have. During the October and November shutdown, congressmembers from both parties reached an impasse over passing a funding bill that did not include extending medical subsidies.

"I think it was the right thing to say that if you want my vote ... it'll be contingent on saving people's healthcare from going through the roof," Allred said. "That was the right thing to say. It was the wrong thing to fold without getting that right."

Allred said that he is frustrated with the inefficiency of the current system of government and feels it is broken. He stated that voters keep pressing the button for change, and not getting anything in response.

"My concern isn't with AI, or the size of our problems," Allred said, "it's with the smallness of our ability to respond to things."

He feels that his biggest obstacle in reaching his goals is cynicism and distrust. He wants to be someone that citizens can trust and respect, not someone who 'bootlicks' and doesn't stand up for his beliefs.

"If you tell people you are going to fight for something," Allred said, "and then you fold without getting it, why should they believe you next time?"

## James Talarico

ELLINGTON TOUGH | news editor

Three months before Texas State Representative James Talarico took on Jasmine Crockett in the 2026 Democratic primary for the Senate nomination, he took on an interview with Matthew Watkins, the editor-in-chief of the Texas Tribune.

The 36-year-old legislator, who has represented the 50th District in the Texas House since 2023 and previously represented the 52nd District, will run in the general election for Senate against either Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton or Incumbent Senator John Cornyn. At the time of the TribFest session, he was set to run against U.S. Representative Jasmine Crockett and former U.S. Representative Colin Allred, the Democratic candidate in the 2024 Senate election who dropped out of the 2026 race in December.

"I was flattered that people were asking me to run for governor," Talarico said in the session. "The skills that I developed in the Texas legislature, working across the aisle to pass legislation, questioning witnesses to get to the truth, debating on the House floor with my colleagues, those skills in my mind are much more transferable to a U.S. Senate seat."

Talarico, who is Christian, frequently cites his religious beliefs as moral reasoning for the policies he favors. He also

cited Christianity as his motivation for his campaign.

"Our political system is broken, but even our relationships with each other feel broken," Talarico said. "I think that's because the most powerful people in the world want it that way. My faith teaches me to love my neighbor as myself. Not just my neighbor who looks like me, not just my neighbor who prays like me, not just my neighbor who votes like me."

No Democrat has won a statewide election in Texas since 1994. Talarico acknowledged that his campaign may be an uphill battle, which he is compensating for by focusing on general, moderate policies.

"As a Texas Democrat in a Republican-dominated legislature, I'm usually working with a losing hand," Talarico said. "Love for this state, love for this country, and most importantly, a love for our neighbors: that's what I'm trying to build in this campaign."

Talarico's Republican opponent will be decided in the runoff election on May 26 between Paxton and Cornyn, the latter of whom has occupied the seat since 2003.

"Neither John Cornyn nor Ken Paxton deserve the honor of representing this great state in our nation's capital," Talarico said.

## Democrats Debrief

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Talarico also emphasized the importance of Democratic candidates responding to the needs of their constituents before those of national Democratic leadership and elite donors. In addition to voicing his criticisms of Senate Democrats, Talarico expressed excitement towards Democratic victories during the 2025 November elections, adding that Democrats winning in different parts of the country again would be necessary for revitalizing the Democratic Party.

"If we're going to win in places like Texas, we have to have candidates who actually represent their communities," Talarico said. "I don't know much about New York City, about New York City politics, but I do know Texas, and I plan on running a Texas campaign to serve Texans."

In conversation with The LASA

Liberator, Former Democratic Representative Joe Kennedy III seconded Talarico's vision of a big-tent party. Kennedy III defined politics as meeting people where they are and trying to speak to their challenges, which he stated requires a big-tent coalition that could enact the Democratic party policies its base wants to see.

"Those folks that are driving the passion and engagement that we are seeing on the left: we need them and we need to be able to also have leaders that can speak to some of the challenges of communities through Texas in the Rio Grande Valley and large swaths of the United States," Kennedy III said. "We're better when we're bigger, and I think most of us would agree with that."

In a panel discussion with The Atlantic staff writer Mark Leibovich, Robert 'Beto' O'Rourke applauded various

Democrats from establishment-aligned California Governor Gavin Newsom to Democratic Socialist Mamdani as fighters fit for the political moment while also drawing clear distinctions between different factions of the Democratic Party. In response to a question on how Democrats should react to Republicans portraying Texas Democrats as a part of the 'Mamdani party', O'Rourke echoed calls for a big-tent party, advocating for tailoring Democratic policies to specific local needs while also unashamedly unifying the party in the face of electoral opposition.

"They want us to be afraid of ourselves and what we believe in," O'Rourke said. "They want us to deny the courage of our convictions, and you see some people giving into that ... The worst thing we can do politically is to signal weakness at this moment."

## THE LINE

### Global News

#### The Economy is Going... Where?

A topsy-turvy economic order is showing little indication of its direction. A.I. has initiated a boom in stock prices but a bust in hiring, confusing observers like the New York Times and Forbes. While the U.S. economy has largely withstood turmoil from tariffs and regional conflicts, the high cost of living that propelled Trump into office continues to trouble Americans, according to a Fox News poll. At the same time, growth in major Asian economies like India and China is unexpectedly small.

#### War in Iran

On Feb. 28, missile and bomb strikes hit over a dozen locations in Iran, killing hundreds of civilians and officials, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. President Donald Trump orchestrated the attacks in coordination with Israel. The war has since expanded as Iran has retaliated with strikes on Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar as aerial attacks on Iran continue. The Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah, a prominent force in Lebanon, has also bombed Israel, prompting the Jewish state to threaten invasion into the country's southern border.

### National News

#### AI is Calling

These customer service agents don't get tired, but Americans might get tired of them. At more than 20 major companies across the country, AI has replaced human assistants in call centers. Jobs that were previously outsourced to countries in Asia are now becoming obsolete, according to the South China Morning Post. Amazon, Google and AirBnB have all implemented AI customer service agents, which are able to make and change orders.

#### Supreme Court Strikes Down Tariffs

On Feb. 20, the Supreme Court issued a ruling on a case concerning the constitutionality of Donald Trump's far-reaching tariffs. Explaining that the president does not have the authority to set tariffs, the majority of justices determined they were unconstitutional in their 6-3 decision. According to the New York Times, this move set off a new debate about tariffs refunds and how they might be granted. A number of states and businesses have sued the Trump administration as they seek refunds from the government.

### State News

#### Primary Results

The Democratic and Republican parties are a step closer to the Nov. 3 election that will decide the balance of both the U.S. and Texas legislatures. The election for governor will pit incumbent Greg Abbott against State Representative Gina Hinojosa. The Senate seat is a challenge between James Talarico, who beat Jasmine Crockett in the Democratic primary, and either Ken Paxton or current Senator John Cornyn, who are entering a runoff for the GOP nomination. Runoffs will take place on May 26.

#### Ted Cruz Skips Second Storm

Democratic lawmakers criticized Texas Senator Ted Cruz for repeating his annual Texas exodus as a winter storm closed in on the state. He was widely mocked for his decision to vacation in Cancun, Mexico during a more brutal 2021 storm, which many criticized at the time and referred to in his more recent exit. In January, he again faced criticism for his decision to wait out the cold in Laguna Beach, California after being captured in a photograph that was posted online. However, his staff asserted that the trip was for a planned work event, and Cruz returned to Texas before the inclement weather set in.

### Local News

#### UT Puts Out New Initiatives, Cuts Others

After conservative leaders increased pressure on the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) to return their focus from the study of diversity to Western civilization, new institutions have suddenly arisen with the goal of doing exactly that. On Jan. 27, UT Austin announced the Ackerman Program, which centers on Jewish and Western thought. It is part of the larger School of Civic Leadership, an institution that has expanded over the past year. At the same time, several cultural and social majors in the College of Liberal Arts will be consolidated into two. Per a Feb. 12 announcement by President Jim Davis, the Departments of French and Italian, that of Germanic Studies, and that of Slavic and Eurasian Studies will become the Department of European and Eurasian Studies. The Department of African and African Diaspora Studies, Department of American Studies, Department of Mexican American and Latina/Latino Studies, and Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies will become the Department of Social and Cultural Analysis.

#### Everyone Gets a Piece of the Wishbone Bridge

The largest gap in the Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail on the Colorado River has been closed. The Wishbone Bridge provides pedestrians and cyclists with an alternative to the nearby Longhorn Dam, which has a narrow sidewalk along a busy roadway. Feb. 7 marked the end of four years of construction, propelled by \$25 million in voter-approved debt and \$4 million in federal funding secured by U.S. Representative Greg Casar. The plan included a new underpass beneath Pleasant Valley Road featuring a mosaic mural.

## Wealthy

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Critics argue the coming wealth transfer will resolve generational inequality as young people inherit their family's wealth. Maggiulli said the timing of that transfer limits its effectiveness.

"The average age of inheritance in the United States is 60," Maggiulli said. "Most of that money comes much later in life, when it's far less impactful."

Blair duQuesnay is an investment advisor and the owner of The Belle Curve, an online finance blog. She delves into long term investing and structural economic inequality.

"Taxing just their income isn't working if the goal is to redistribute the wealth," duQuesnay said. "Other than the inheritance tax, your only option is to try to tax investments instead of income."

Tax exemptions for retirement investments began in 1997 when Congress passed legislation establishing the Roth individual retirement account (IRA), named for Senator William Roth. Ben Carlson wrote about Roth IRAs in his book, "A Wealth of Common Sense," which covers markets, personal finance, and generational wealth trends.

"It would be cool to see some tax changes that would give tax breaks for baby boomers giving their kids money earlier," Carlson said. "You'd rather have it in your 20s or 30s when you can use it for a down payment or daycare."

According to Maggiulli, housing has become one of the clearest symbols of generational imbalance. For many Gen Z adults, homeownership feels increasingly unattainable.

"I still think supply is the answer for a lot of this," Maggiulli said. "Lower home prices are better for people just starting out trying to buy a home."

Housing policy plays a central role in concentrating wealth among older Americans. DuQuesnay explained that restrictive government regulations have limited supply and increased prices.

"The best thing that we could do is find a way to allow the building of more types of housing in more places," duQuesnay said. "Anything that can be done to incentivize the building of more housing stock is the answer."

Still, housing shortages remain the most visible barrier for younger generations. Carlson said the lack of supply has intensified frustration and financial instability.

"We just haven't built enough homes in the past 10, 15, 20 years," Carlson said. "For some reason, it doesn't seem that the government wants to make it easier to build homes."

Beyond housing, social welfare programs highlight how resources are distributed across age groups. DuQuesnay said demographic shifts are straining long term sustainability as birthrates fall and the elderly make up a greater portion of the population.

"Social Security will get to a point where it's sustainable again," duQuesnay said. "Medicare is a problem, and I do not think it's financially sustainable."

Older generations often have more influence in government. They tend to vote, donate and participate in political causes and movements at the highest rates.

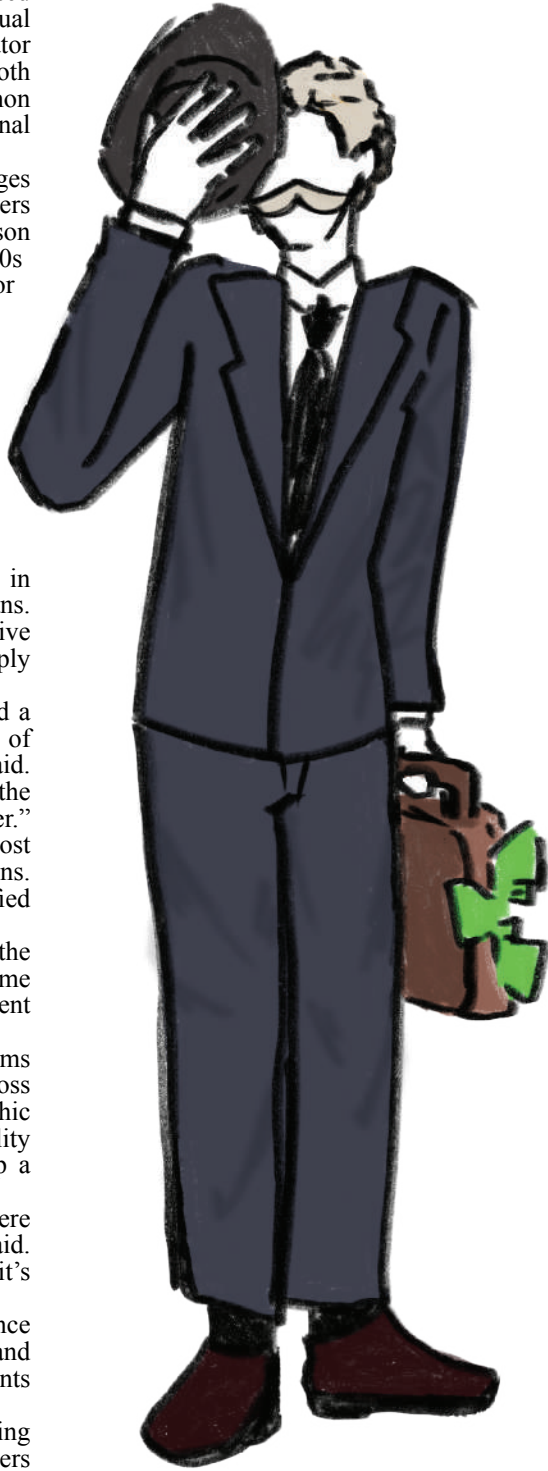
Generation Z is often criticized for spending habits and lifestyle choices. Carlson counters that the cost of living has fundamentally changed compared to previous generations, partly due to the explosion of commodities as part of daily life.

"I do think it's just more expensive to live these days," Carlson said. "A lot of things that were luxuries in the past are now seen as

necessities ... It's just more expensive to live these days, with the internet and iPhones and DoorDash and streamers and all these things that didn't really exist in the past."

Despite these challenges, Carlson added that Generation Z has advantages earlier generations lacked. Generation Z benefits from early access to economic participation, and expedited investment offers more long term opportunities than pre-internet generations could receive.

"If Gen Z just starts earlier than the baby boomers did, they're going to be all right," Carlson said. "You allow compounding [investment] to do a lot of heavy lifting for you."



graphic by Eloisa Espetia-Gorostieta

## Mac Student on the Ballot

VICTOR MARTINEZ | editor-in-chief

Reese Armstrong ran for Travis County Precinct 2 Commissioner against Brigid Shea in the Democratic primary on March 3. They came in fourth place with 2627 votes, representing more than 5% of all ballots cast. Armstrong is a senior at McCallum High School, and formerly attended LASA. Prior to the election, they sat down with editor-in-chief Victor Martinez for an interview about their campaign. To see more of this exclusive interview, visit our website lasaliberator.com.



RESETHE BEAST Reese Armstrong registers for the Democratic primary. They went up against three other candidates for the nomination, photo courtesy of Reese Armstrong

**LASA Liberator:** If you would like to give an introduction yourself, speak to what you're doing in your own words.

**RA:** I'm Reese Ricci Armstrong, a candidate for Travis County Commissioner Precinct 2. I'm running to build the student socialist movement. I was the former co-chair of Students United, the student union representing over 8 percent of the LASA student body. I was the former co-chair of LASA YDSA. Now I'm the co-chair of McCallum YDSA (Young Democratic Socialists of America). I'm running as part of an effort to build a citywide socialist movement, but more importantly, I'm running on very specific policies. I'm running to build social housing so that everybody can have a place to live to stop the takeover of Austin housing by BlackRock and Blackstone, but actually have a publicly owned option that can buoy the market. I'm running to expand our public healthcare, our Central Health and rebuild our county hospital ... I'm running to make ambulances free, because nobody should fear calling 9-1-1. A big part of the county [commissioner role] is managing emergency response, and people are scared to call 9-1-1 in an emergency. We really have problems. Those are my priorities. I come from a student organizing background.

**LL:** Students coming together. I think that's what a lot of people, at least, who are watching your campaign are thinking: what's bringing this student, high school senior about to enter college, to the democratic socialist cause? What caused them even to run for public office?

**RA:** In terms of running for public office, I called up the secretary of LASA YDSA after I initially had the idea of running. I think this might be the first time I told the story on the record, but I had initially followed the idea of running because I just wanted to challenge the current commissioner (Brigid Shea) from the left. I think she's done a really bad job. She's dedicated her career to opposing new housing for working class people. She's a preservationist, and then greenwashing that by saying it's good conservation. I think it's really problematic, so I wanted to run a left-wing challenge to her based on delivering for people ... It started as a LASA YDSA campaign in the very, very beginning, and then it became a McCallum campaign that was working, and so we started to have the two chapters working together and start holding events.

**LL:** In the debate against Cuomo, Mamdani said, "What I lack in experience, I can make up for in integrity, but what you have in experience, you can never make up for in integrity." What you were saying, talking to that ageism, reminded me of that.

**RA:** I think on paper, without looking at my age, I'm not the most qualified candidate, obviously, but I'm not an out-of-nowhere unqualified person. I am a union organizer. I've organized many unions. I've done lots of community organizing, I'm the co-chair of multiple political organizations. I've been doing this a long time. I have a real community organizer background that is not just out of

thin air, but it is exhausting to watch all of it be devalued based on how old you were when you do it.

**LL:** I wanted to ask what the qualities, what the job of a commissioner is for Travis County, and what drew you to running for commissioner specifically?

**RA:** Travis County Commissioners Court is the governing body of the county, so it handles all your property tax revenue, it handles the jails, it handles the health care districts, it handles all the state special districts ... It has this coordinator task role across the region, and then also does emergency response within that. We've made a lot of really good progress at the city level, but at the county level, there's a lot of potential for what we could be doing better. We have a lot of money at the county level that is not being spent in a way that is improving the lives of working class people. ... Funding education with our school district because it's in a massive budget crisis and trying to support our school district with additional property tax revenue from the county is, I think, crucial as schools are closing and TEA is always threatening [AISD] with a takeover. We've made a lot of progress at city level with the city council. We've seen code reforms that I fought for so long pretty much get past, but the county is still this almost vestigial institution that is run by a lot of the old elite and old interests of Austin that don't reflect the priorities of working class people today.

**LL:** Take us into what your tenure as commissioner would be like.

**RA:** I think it would be one of radical transparency and democratic engagement. This is something I've committed myself to. ... I really will work to stop evictions through my office, really work with the constables and the courts to try and stop as many evictions as we can. ... I think that's very important and I think having voices that are unafraid to challenge power is crucial and will always represent the people. I don't think that your ability to represent the people is dependent based on age, it's dependent on what you've done before, how you've gone about doing it, and what motivates you, what drives you, what is your core set of values, and whether those are aligned with the people you want to represent. I've grown up in this community the vast majority of my life, and I have a set of values that is very laser-focused on fighting for the issues that face ordinary people in Travis County. None of my opponents have that same vision ... As commissioner, I have my own ideas on what we should do, but I will have very regular, popular assemblies, town halls, and engagement to really respond quickly to constituent concerns. These aren't just things I'm saying. These are things that we've done as a team, as a union, as a socialist organization, and I think that same commitment to responsiveness and transparency and open government sets us apart from the rest of the field ... That will be the way I do policymaking, is by inviting working class people to co-govern through our office.

## Screwworm

from page 1

"The current technology that we have points to sterilization of the male flies," Machen said, "because of the unique phenomenon that the female will only breed once in her lifetime. If that mating is with a sterile fly, then, in fact, the eggs that she produces will be sterile. The process that we used to eradicate the screwworm about 60, 70 years ago, that technology is still viable."

One sterile male can eliminate thousands of unborn screwworms. This strategy has been used for decades, with United States Department of Agriculture officials in Panama managing to keep the screwworm below the Darien Gap, the jungle landbridge between Colombia and Panama, since 2006. Recent events briefly threw this procedure out of order, allowing some number of flies to pass the isthmus and enter North America.

"What happened was, during the COVID pandemic, all federal government employees were furloughed and couldn't go to work," Machen said. "So the facility, in effect, was closed for six weeks ... and during that time, obviously there were no sterile flies produced. There were no sterile flies being released."

Flies present in Colombia were able to cross the Darien Gap, taking advantage of the warm spring and summer weather, and have been progressing north over the last several years. Sightings of the screwworm have occurred only a few dozen miles from the U.S.-Mexico border. Dr. Bud Dinges, Texas State Veterinarian and executive director of the Texas Animal Health Commission, is in charge of handling the potential response to a possible appearance of the insect in the state.

"Production levels of meat and milk; veterinary, medication, and labor costs in livestock production; and the health status of wildlife populations are all impacted by a NWS outbreak," Dr. Dinges said. "During the 20th century, the presence of NWS cost the U.S. livestock industry more than \$100 million annually. Reintroduction of NWS into the U.S. could cause tremendous financial burden due to livestock losses, trade embargoes, and eradication effort costs."

There are few readily-available treatments for screwworm-affected animals, with only two commercial products available for livestock, and three for pets, Dr. Dinges explained. Screwworms are often lethal, and are impossible or very expensive to remove, meaning preventative efforts are the preferred way of mitigating the cost.

"Both internationally and domestically, animal health officials, including the Texas Animal Health Commission, are conducting extensive outreach campaigns to educate on NWS and how to prevent infestations," Dr. Dinges said. "U.S. border states, including Texas, are maintaining surveillance traps on the U.S.-Mexico border to promote early detection of NWS."

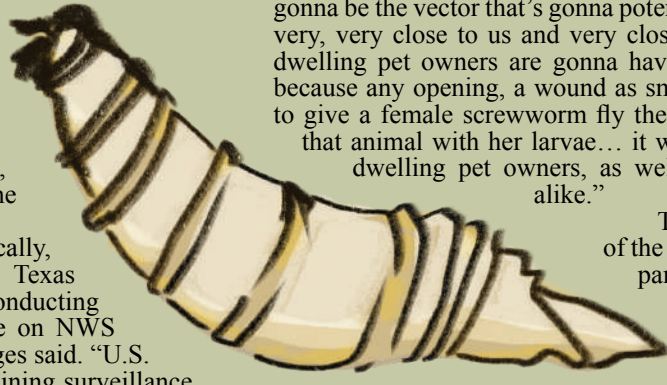
Still, the fast progress of the screwworm thus far has ranchers worried. Machen, for one, believes the idea of an outbreak to be a case not of if, but of when.

"The facility in Panama is running at what I understand to be maximum capacity. I think that their capacity is to produce 100 to 110 million flies per week," Machen said. "As I understand it, it's running at capacity ... I try to be optimistic and take the position that the flies won't make it to Texas. But I think the reality is that they probably will, given their progress."

An incursion of screwworms is not just a threat to ranchers. It could also pose a danger to humans in cities and towns throughout Texas. Screwworms aren't picky when it comes to their hosts, and mammals — including pets — that live in urban areas are ideal breeding grounds.

"If the screwworm gets here, it is no respecter of warm-blooded mammals. It will infect white-tailed deer, it will infect dogs, calves," Machen said. "And so the white-tailed deer are

gonna be the vector that's gonna potentially bring the screwworm very, very close to us and very close to our pets. We as urban dwelling pet owners are gonna have to be diligent and watch because any opening, a wound as small as a tick bite is enough to give a female screwworm fly the avenue by which to infect that animal with her larvae ... it will be a concern for urban-dwelling pet owners, as well as farmers and ranchers alike."



graphic by Eloisa Espetia-Gorostieta

The screwworm may be one of the most notable and dangerous parasites, but it's not the only one that could cause damage to Texas wildlife and people. Lamba Omar Sangare studies parasites at Texas A&M

University, focusing on a widespread but clandestine creature called *Toxoplasma gondii*.

"It's estimated one third of the human population is infected by *Toxoplasma*," Sangare said. "And people are infected, but they are not aware of the infection until they are immunocompromised ... this parasite can reactivate in the brain and then kill the individual."

When treatments exist for Texan parasites, they are often expensive, difficult to obtain, or have major side effects. Larger, corporate ranches like the King Ranch may be able to obtain these treatments, but they prefer to prevent infection rather than attempt to cure it after it happens.

"I would say parasites are what we call a time bomb," Sangare said. "And we have a tendency to underestimate this time bomb."

## INDEPTH

## Peering Behind the Curtain for a Peak at Past Proms

REBECA GONZALEZ | features editor

## Planning the Night

The prom has always been an important ritual or rite of passage, almost marked as essential to the stereotypical high school experience. Most students begin anticipating it during the spring semester by making dinner reservations or by scrolling through various dress and suit options. However, for the LASA Student Council (StuCo), their planning for the prom starts a whole semester prior.

According to Isabel Liu, the senior class president, she has assisted in planning prom all four years. However, this year being her final, she stepped into a leading role in the process — a process which started sooner than she had expected.

"We book the venue while working on the Homecoming dance," Liu said. "And the very first step is finding a prom venue that is in our prince range and has a dynamic layout that [StuCo] likes."

Liu explained that even though the prom typically happens at the end of the year, the search for a venue can begin before students even start classes. With a set and strict budget and only so many venues available, booking can start off competitively with other high school student councils similarly scouting for venues.

"If we want a good and affordable venue, we have to start searching and booking," Liu said. "Venues get booked fast, so we try to get on that as early as possible."

Esther Kwan, the senior class treasurer, described that beyond availability and beauty, there are multiple aspects the council has to consider before finalizing a decision on a location. In addition to staying within the budget, they must also consider vendor availability.

"After narrowing down our options, we schedule venue tours to make our final choice," Kwan said. "We have to consider date availability for caterers that the venue has contracted with in the past as well."

According to 2025 LASA graduate Cecelia Gay, the planning often compounds year to year. As the former council president, she emphasized how having a list of previous vendors helps the early planning process move smoothly.

"I began the prom planning process in August," Gay said. "We have a list of venues from previous years so we revised our list and started contacting potential venue spaces in August and September."

Gay

added that vendors play a huge role in the selection process. According to her, each venue has specific rules and regulations, and it can be a challenge to coordinate with everyone.

"We can't book any other vendors until we have the venue space booked," Gay said. "A lot of the time, venues will have vendors they prefer to work with which makes it easier for us as well."

In the end, the deciding factor in

venue selection isn't vendors, location, or even pricing. Rather, the timing of the event itself is the most crucial factor, and Gay shared that although StuCo is in charge of venue choice, date selection is almost completely out of their hands.

"Ms. Crescenzi advised us to look at athletic schedules as well as theater and choir performances," Gay said. "Because LASA has so many different clubs and organizations, we can't account for everyone's schedules."

StuCo still tries to take into account every club's schedule and importance of conflicting events on the possible dates. Liu spoke about how although this step inevitably ends up being an important factor throughout all StuCo planning, it can be especially difficult with the nature of the planning of the prom.

"When deciding the date, we truly put so much effort and time into mapping out what other events are when and deciding around that," Liu said. "For the activities, we constantly keep in

mind if they are equally fun and accessible to everyone."

Ultimately, the team must also prioritize their own schedules to ensure their presence for the planning process and event coordination. Liu explained that sponsor and underclassmen representative schedules are also similarly evaluated when coordinating the date.

"Our entire council is involved in prom planning, which is currently 17 students and our great sponsor, Mr. Breland," Liu said. "We coordinate with the venue director and vendors, as well as LASA admin, if those people count."

However, according to Gay, even though there is a lot of thought behind choosing a specific date, mishaps still can occur. As StuCo is unable to predict last minute events or advancements to major competitions that are planned following the venue's booking, unpredictability is a big challenge.

"What makes it even more difficult is that we're trying to book a venue for a specific date in September or October," Gay said. "A lot of organizations don't have dates that far in advance, so we use past data to try and figure out a date that can work for everyone."

In the past, choosing a date has clashed with major events such as conflicting with robotic competitions or major debate tournaments. To account for this, Kwan added that when selecting a time, previous events that coincided with the prom are prioritized to avoid frustration.

"We try to accommodate so that prom doesn't coincide with an extracurricular's larger competitions two years in a row," Kwan said. "Still, it's unavoidable that people have conflicts."

Yet, even once the venue is finally booked and the date is selected after the detailed process, the planning process has only just begun. Liu shared that the next steps are major decisions such as design, activities, and the theme of the whole event."

"When deciding the theme, and music as well, we often put out polls on social media to gauge the requests of students," Liu said. "When deciding the theme, we think about whether it will bode well with the entire upperclassmen body. And one of our most arduous challenges in the entirety of prom planning is the long process of deciding, mapping out, and designing the decor for the entire dance."

Aside from online feedback, StuCo tries to search for ideas and opinions throughout their entire classes. As such, Gay added that the council representative's friends and classmates ended up playing a crucial role in deciding the theme and more.

"I asked a lot of my friends for input and got a lot of feedback in my classes," Gay said. "I'm sure the other junior and senior StuCo members can attest to that as well, so we use that feedback also throughout the process."

## Building the Prom

"I think one thing that is often underestimated is that StuCo truly tries to do as much as we can with the resources given to us while keeping events accessible to all students," Liu said.

Even with limited resources, time, and money, Liu explained that the beauty and presentation of prom remains a priority. As such, StuCo puts in a lot of effort and care to even the most simple details.

"Unlike a lot of formal events that hire decor companies, we have to handle all the decor in-house and with our own minds and creativity, but we still want it to look professional grade," Liu said. "We spend so many hours, nights, and weeks brainstorming ideas and ensuring every decoration idea we have will turn out great."

As a member of LASA Science Olympiad, NHS, and founder of her own club Generations Together, Liu emphasized the difficulty of planning in lieu of busy schedules. According to her, other StuCo members similarly juggle multiple activities, so finding the time to plan this huge event in lieu of all of this is a challenge on its own.

"For many school events, we take care of things almost always in-house and with our own hands and minds and time, on top of classes and personal extracurriculars, in effort to keep the expenses as low as possible," Liu said. "Combining that with how demanding and intricate it is to plan a school dance as large as prom, it's quite the task."

To make sure everything is ready to go, Gay talked about how the timing and maintaining deadlines for when things need to get done is essential. According to her, in order to ensure the set up is completed before students start to walk in, members of StuCo have developed tactics to ensure a wide buffer.

"I would say timing is a small detail that can make the world of difference," Gay said. "We try to start setting up both homecoming and prom early because we'd rather have extra time than be rushing around. We tried to overestimate how long it's going to take to do things, meaning centerpiece set up, lighting set up, and other decor. If we're late, it would be a disaster."

Though planning for prom is mainly personal for upperclassmen on the council, Gay talked about how underclassmen also take on important responsibilities. For example, underclassmen volunteer and help set up under the direction of the older members.

"The biggest challenge is teaching the underclassman how to set up and run prom," Gay said. "Upperclassmen don't help with set up day-of or work the dance because this is an upper classmen only event."

Due to the nature of the event, Gay wanted to help make this part of the process smoother for future members. As such, she painstakingly made a detailed binder involving details of planning and set-up to hand off to the underclassmen students.

"My favorite planning memory was when I presented the binder of how everything is supposed to run to everyone in the student council," Gay said. "Former presidents have talked about making a binder, but they've never actually ended up printing out anything, so I was able to finish all of their work and add some of my own stuff and make a binder for everyone to have and keep for future years."

Liu shared how Gay's detailed binders impacted her own experience in planning prom. Following the tradition of Gay and previous presidents, Liu also spent a lot of time creating binders for underclassmen to follow.

"A semi-small detail that is also a tradition is the seniors create extremely comprehensive and meticulous binders for the underclassmen to use [on] day-of prom set-up," Liu said. "This year, with creating the binder being now part of my role, I, along with my other senior officers, took weeks ensuring the binders were precise and exhaustive of every detail possible."

After working behind the scenes for months on end, the upperclassmen help with the initial set-up of the venue in the morning. However, when prom starts, Liu explained that senior and junior StuCo members walk into the dance with the same surprise as the rest of the student body, along with the satisfaction of watching the enjoyment of all attending students.

"Seniors and juniors actually do set up the dance day-of in the morning and early afternoon, and then we are given time to actually freely enjoy our prom day experience," Liu said. "So, you can imagine the wow effect we feel when we come back in



**UHUAL FULL OF MAGIC** Student Council members prepare for prom. With only a day left until the day, students carried loads of boxes to fill up the venue with unique and themed decor. photo courtesy Isabel Liu

the evening as attendees, and everything's transformed to match the visions we had for months while planning."

## Prom Night

"I love planning prom," Liu said. "I love the creativity I can exercise when planning out the layout, the decor, the theme, and the overall vibe and aesthetics. And, of course, the satisfaction and sense of achievement when everything that's been sitting in my mind turns into real life on the day-of is amazing and irreplaceable."

2025 LASA graduate Eliana Koransky attested to the positive experience that StuCo planned. According to her, the event was everything she wanted it to be.

"Prom was super important to me in high school because it felt like a major event in my life," Koransky said. "I really loved the chance to dress up but I also thought it was so fun for all of my friends to be together in a non academic setting."

For StuCo members, even with the stress of planning the event, prom is still enjoyable. In fact, Gay believes that the reason she deeply enjoyed prom was partly the stress and responsibility that came with it.

"Being at the event makes me more proud because I was one of the lead individuals who planned this," Gay said. "It's so nice to see all the hard work you put in pay off."

Fellow 2025 LASA graduate Isabel Kramer spoke about a similar appreciation for her senior prom. According to her, she especially appreciated all the work the students put in to make it such a special night that she will look back fondly on when reminiscing about her high school experience.

"For me senior prom was super important," Kramer said. "I was really looking forward to it, especially after having a disappointing junior year prom. Senior prom felt like a celebration of all the hard work that went into high school and getting there felt so quintessential 'coming of age'... My favorite aspect was spending time with my friends, my date, and taking pictures beforehand. I think the pictures were so fun because I was with my best friends, family, and now have memories to look back on fondly."

Behind the students' planning and scheduling, Kwan recognized the unique help StuCo sponsor, ASL teacher Eric Breland, provides. As students, they can't be too involved in the legal aspects of event planning, so Breland fills that gap.

"I'm so incredibly proud of StuCo and especially thankful for Mr. Breland," Kwan said. "There are so many contracts and legal processes that Mr. Breland single-handedly takes care of."

Kwan also shared that being such an important part of planning the night makes it even more special to her. After months of coordinating, she explained that seeing the beautiful venue lit up and filled with decorations is exciting.

"Student Council is a lot of commitment and time, particularly setting up, operating, and cleaning up homecoming and prom," Kwan said. "I really appreciate all of our volunteers for helping us since there's so much that goes on behind the scenes. This will be our best prom yet!"

Ultimately for Liu, being a part of the planning was a major aspect of her experience. Beyond the logistics and long discussions, she appreciated the community and team that she got to work with on planning prom.

"Most importantly, I love the community we form when going through this common journey in StuCo," Liu said. "The people I work with are what make it amazing."



**SET UP FOR THE SPECIAL NIGHT** The detailed set up of every single aspect for the 2026 prom. The set up was drawn out by president Liu to properly communicate with venue workers. photo courtesy Isabel Liu



graphic by Megan Gerold

## Passion Powers Projects

MARGO MCALISTER | staff writer

Among the many busy clubs and varied lunchtime experiences at LASA lives a smaller group of organizations: nonprofits. These specialized groups within clubs raise money and awareness for the causes they stand for.

Some LASA students have discovered causes they care about through real world events and their own lived experience, turning them into nonprofit organizations. One of these students is Kundana Addala, a LASA junior as well as the founder and president of Educate 2 Empower.

"I became the president when, after freshman year, I went and visited the orphanage in India that we were helping out," Addala said. "I really got inspired when I saw all the girls be really passionate about their education, and I wanted a way to help support their education through resources and classes. I'm still continuing it today."

LASA junior Aanya Raghavan also began working with her nonprofit, the Safe Nest Project, after learning more about domestic violence. She was influenced towards this by one of LASA's enrichment events.

"It started last year at Culture Fest," Raghavan said. "They gave a talk about domestic violence, and I decided to do something about it. I reached out to a professor who works at the UT domestic

violence clinic and had a conversation with her about what goes in the kits and stuff, and then she partnered me with an organization and it kind of just expanded from there."

Another nonprofit founder and sophomore, Tasneem Ahmed, founded the organization Elder Ease after visiting a nursing home and seeing how older people live their lives. Ahmed and other students at LASA work on this project.

"Currently, we have 74 members who are signed up as members of our club at LASA," Ahmed said. "I am planning on expanding the student body by encouraging fun things like presentations, research, volunteering, and seminars with healthcare professionals. Students work to explore technological solutions for seniors and then connect with elders through the technology they discovered."

Being a part of a nonprofit organization can help students find purpose in causes they're passionate about. Raghavan explained how having the proper foundations for starting a nonprofit is crucial.

"I would recommend starting with something you truly love and care about, and taking time to understand how you can help develop a certain aspect of it," Raghavan said. "If you focus on the meaningful impact rather than just jumping into it, you can make valuable progress."

## Harmony in Belize

SADIE SARRAT | student life editor  
ARIANA RODRIGUEZ | commentary editor

Deric Lewis, the LASA Choir Director and AP Music Theory teacher, has attended the Missionary Baptist General Convention of Texas (MBGCT) in Belize since 2012. The organization specializes in providing support to struggling villages such as Ontario, Esperanza, and Blackman Eddy. The trips are bi-annual: one in December and one in July. The December trip focuses primarily on providing the villages with food, building roofs and infrastructure, and hosting nightly classes. Lewis notes that this unique aspect sets MBGCT apart from other organizations.

"We're not at a hotel in Belize City," Lewis said. "We don't get to go to the beach, as much as I want to. It's not a vacation at all; from day one, it's a lot of work."

In terms of the specific services provided by MBGCT in the December trip, the program partners with Feed the People. They provide around 500 boxes of food that include non-perishables like masa, black beans, rice, and perishables like eggs, fresh chicken, and water to Belizeans in need. In addition to providing food for those in need, Lewis and other representatives of MBGCT bring music to the villages through nightly classes, worship gatherings, and singing to individuals in the community.

"I'm there to teach music and to provide music for the overall thing," Lewis said. "There's also times where we go house to house and just visit with people. If they tell us somebody's been sick or they might have lost some family members, we might go in and encourage them, and I might go out there and sing to them."

The July trip, on the other hand, is an opportunity for the children of Belize to participate in day-long activities because school is out for summer. Lewis describes the summer program as the Belizean version of "Vacation Bible School," where kids take even more classes and practice for the program-wide youth concert. Lewis is in charge of teaching the youth music and preparing them for the concert, which can be overwhelming but rewarding.

"We're talking about 300 to 400 kids altogether, and I'm screaming in front of all these kids, but they get a lot of joy out of it because I try to bring a lot of energy," Lewis said. "It's just better to just demonstrate and get them active, have them singing, clapping, and following along."

Additionally, the summer MBGCT trip provides the villages with clothes and shoes, unlike the winter trip, which focuses on food. The goods are collected from Americans who donated to the cause.

"We took over thousands of pairs of shoes, flip flops, sneakers, for kids, all the way to adults, and brand new clothes," Lewis said. "When [the Belizeans] come to get the food, they're able to basically shop for free. All stuff is brand new that's been donated from people in America."

Lewis reflects on how impactful these donations are for the villagers. He shares how different this is from American society where people don't have to worry about their basic needs being met.

"They stretch [things]. They might only have one pair of shoes, but they're gonna wear those shoes as much as possible," Lewis said. "Whereas we have a whole closet full of shoes, we can just pick and choose; we don't care. We take it for granted. That's not the way it is [in Belize]; there is a lot of appreciation there."

Expanding on this idea, Lewis feels lucky to be an American where these worries are not present. Taking these trips has opened his eyes.

"It makes me appreciate being an American: having resources, having food, having clean water, access to clothing, or heat," Lewis said. "Because they don't have those things, they don't take anything for granted; they're very, very thankful for everything we give."



MAKING A DIFFERENCE Choir teacher Deric Lewis bring aid to rural communities. While he was there, he brought the people together through song.

## Women Rise in Business

ELINA SARKAR | staff writer

As the capital of Texas, Austin is known for its vibrant culture of growth, innovation, and uniqueness. The city is home to a multitude of small and large businesses that contribute to the foundation of this entrepreneurial attitude, creating a unique opening for women-owned companies.

In 2023, Yelp ranked Austin as the top city for female entrepreneurs. There are over 9,000 businesses owned by women throughout the area, amounting to 22.5% of all organizations in the city, according to the Austin Chamber of Commerce in 2021. Diana Skellenger — the CEO and Founder of Skelly Build, a construction and home renovation firm — described how Austin provided a unique environment to start her business.

"It's a city full of growth, creativity, and forward-thinking people who value quality and relationships," Skellenger said. "That mindset allowed us to build something intentional here and grow alongside a community that appreciates doing things the right way."

Skellenger's experience is not unique to just her business. Katrina Brooks, founder and co-owner of independent bookstore Black Pearl Books noted that Austin helped launch her business.

"The people in the community still have that vibrancy and whimsy for supporting small, independent, and local," Brooks said. "Austin provided a unique environment that helped Black Pearl Books succeed."

Although Austin nurtures small businesses, women still face challenges entering primarily male fields. Adelle Archer, the co-founder and co-CEO of Eterneva, a company that converts ashes, hair, or other treasured pieces of deceased loved ones into diamonds, described the gender bias in venture capital firms that provide funding to larger enterprises.

"It becomes a little bit more of a boys' club at that point," Archer said. "You're having to learn how to communicate and work with very heavily male-dominant investors that just are going to be thinking about things from a different lens than sometimes women do."

Skellenger expressed that this experience is similar in other male-dominated fields such as construction, and that she often had obstacles to recognition.

"Being a woman in construction meant I often had to prove myself before being taken seriously," Skellenger said. "There were moments when I felt underestimated or overlooked."

According to Gallagher, a global insurance firm, women-owned businesses often have a focus on inclusivity and employee welfare. Archer described how her perspective as a woman helps create a meaningful company culture.

"I think it's just really created a culture where people feel celebrated and seen ... and that we believe in them and will empower them and trust them," Archer said. "Those are probably all a lot of more feminine energies that get brought into our [company] culture because those things are important to me."

Skellenger emphasized her focus on respect and support through transparency and emotional intelligence. Brooks echoed this sentiment, and she described her focus on the people she employs at Black Pearl Books.

"The business is the business, but people make the business," Brooks said. "I manage my business with people in mind."

According to Skellenger, balancing compassion and drive is important in a business, not only to perform, but also to relate to clients. She previously stated that leadership needs to be dynamic, since creating company culture starts at the top.

"Trust yourself, surround yourself with people who challenge and support you," Skellenger said. "Remember that leadership doesn't require you to fit a mold — you get to define it."

Archer noted that women often second-guess their decisions. She often tells women to reach 80% confidence and then move forward.

"Just start," Archer said. "Don't overanalyze it all."

## Switching Tabs from Blend to Google Classroom

PILAR DETTMER | staff writer

BLEND has been at the center of the online learning experience for many years. However, beginning in 2026, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) will be switching to a new platform: Google Classroom.

AISD announced the switch from BLEND to Google Classroom in late 2024, with full implementation expected to begin in the 2026-2027 school year. This switch away from BLEND is an effort to improve AISD's budget issues. According to AISD, Google Classroom is intended to be more cost effective, as it is included in Google Workspace for Education, which the district is already paying for. BLEND, which is a Canvas Learning Management System, is not included in Google Workspace for Education and has been provided by the district, adding an extra strain to the budget.

BLEND is used as the online learning platform at LASA. All teachers, including LASA English and Great Ideas teacher Sophie Pressler, have made use of it.

"I use BLEND a lot. I use it to create weekly agendas where I put what we're doing in class and what we're doing for homework," Pressler said. "I also use it to post weekly slides, and my slides usually contain directions for everything that we're doing in the week, warmups, in-class activities."

One of the main concerns among some teachers and students is the anticipation of change. Pressler expressed concerns about problems that may come with the adjustment.

"I think it will be very, very interesting for students," Pressler said. "My main concern is that students have gotten very used

to BLEND and having access at all times to the schedule, to their homework, having reminders through BLEND about deadlines, and the to-do list function, so I'm a little concerned about the potential issues that could arise as far as students having to keep track of those things on their own."

This reliance on BLEND's communication features is most likely to be exacerbated by the change since Google Classroom doesn't have similar features, according to Prisma Shrestha, a LASA sophomore. Shrestha is concerned about the communication that comes with the switch and how these changes are going to be addressed.

"I think the only challenges I would expect are communication issues, and I feel like some teachers might not know how to use Google Classroom," Shrestha said. "There might be some miscommunication in terms of things like assignments and due dates."

LASA's familiarity with BLEND's features may cause the switch to Google Classroom to be a challenge. Shrestha provided reasons for why this might be.

"I'm really used to BLEND, so I feel like I'm really comfortable with it and really know how it works," Shrestha said. "I think it's very straightforward, and I'm hoping that I can get used to Google Classroom."

Like Pressler and Shrestha, switching away from BLEND may be a major change to many. However, this switch is not entirely anticipated to be negative, with some, such as LASA Algebra 2 teacher, Lane Cosper, looking forward to it.

"I do not enjoy using BLEND. I find it cumbersome and redundant and tedious to set up and go through," Cosper said "I also do not like the online grading system called speedgrader ...

I am looking forward to switching to Google Classroom. I find their platform is more approachable."

A preference for Google Classroom from some individuals can be seen as one benefit of the switch, as many may find Google Classroom to work better for them. This switch will both relieve the stress on AISD's budget while also offering new experiences to students and teachers alike. But, how exactly these changes will be received is still yet to be seen.



graphic by Eloisa Espelta-Gorostieta

# Inside the Student Page Picks

VIOLET ZTIKOVIC | staff writer

In this changing world of ever-advancing technology, many students may still find themselves going back to the basics of a good paper book. LASA is a school consisting of many diverse interests and hobbies, so reading habits and genres of students often vary across many different genres of books.

LASA librarian, Elizabeth Switek, has been keeping tabs on what kids have been checking out from the library all year. Switek explained the current book trends.

“This year, manga books have been super popular,” Switek said. “To be able to grab a manga that you know you can really dedicate yourself to and read it in a half hour, or just slowly go through and enjoy the art and still have it done in a couple days, I think that’s encouraging to a lot of students who want to get back into reading.”

A total of 190 graphic novels were reported as being checked out between the beginning of the year and the end of the Thanksgiving break. According to Switek, 173 additional ones were accessed from the online service ComicsPLUS.

Manga and comics may be the new trend, but much of the other data Switek has collected is still the same. Switek described the consistencies in the LASA students’ reading habits.

“In my mind, when you say, ‘what do LASA readers read?’ I’m always going to come back to fantasy,” Switek said. “And then sci-fi is kind of coming up there. There’s a lot more sci-fi readers as I’ve been building more and buying more books for sci-fi.”

It’s often not just students’ tastes that influence their reading

habits, however. LASA’s English includes a wide variety of books. However certain books may push students in one way or another when it comes to reading. Eyal Rosenberg, a junior at LASA, explained who his favorite author is and why.

“I love Casey McQuiston,” Rosenberg said. “I think their writing style is really good, I love their use of imagery and language, and it helps make the book really hard to put down. And then also they’re really good at pacing and storytelling, and I really like all of their characters.”



I do think that if they’re not reading a lot, it’s because they haven’t found books they like yet.

- ELENA MURGUIA, JUNIOR



Elena Murguia, a LASA junior, picked “Fake Skating” by Lynn Painter, a romance about hockey, as her favorite book. She spoke about how the writing style of the author can really influence the reading experience.

“I felt like the characters were really relatable,” Murguia said. “Lynn Painter always does a good job with the characters and with describing everything so that it doesn’t seem like it’d be super farfetched.”

Although Murguia and Rosenberg are avid book lovers, they are aware that this may not be a usual experience for LASA students. According to Rosenberg, school can impact reading habits.

“I know a lot of people who have said that, for them, reading for school has made it really hard for them to want to [read],” Rosenberg said.

Additionally, Switek added that recent book-banning laws have resulted in administrative struggles for the library and diminishing options for readers to get books. However, Murguia explained there are still options for students.

“You can have a New York Public Library card here,” Murguia said. “So many books are banned in Texas that the New York Public Library has this campaign where if you live in Texas you can have a library card there.”

Despite the increasingly digital world, people are still finding themselves attracted to books. Murguia explained how finding the right genre is crucial when reading.

“I do think that if they’re not reading a lot, it’s because they haven’t found books that they like yet,” Murguia said. “I think everyone could like reading if they find their niche.”

file graphic by Asher Zvi-Nova



COLETTE KLIVANS | staff writer

**LASA Raptor:** Dear Stu,

How do I stop comparing myself with others academically? All of my friends talk about how well they did on a test, or what extracurriculars they are a part of, and I just feel like I’m never doing enough. I always find that I compare myself to my friends when I don’t do well, and I never really acknowledge when I succeed.

**Stu:** Dear LASA Raptor,

Firstly, every student struggles with this, so don’t feel alone. The first thing to do is to remember that the idea of comparing yourself to anyone else is never productive because everyone has such different abilities and situations that they’re incomparable. Everyone has their own journey, and the best thing to do is to focus on your own progress and how you change and improve over time. Do not track other’s results or fixate on what others receive because what they show you are usually only the highlights of their academic performance.

**LASA Raptor:** Dear Stu,

How do I not feel neglected by friends in relationships? I feel like I’ve been growing apart from my two best friends for a couple of months now, and it feels like they’re getting closer and moving on without me. What should I do?

**Stu:** Dear LASA Raptor,

Communication is key. Whether you feel left out, hurt, or feeling like you’re simply losing them, tell them. Explain how you have been feeling, the situation you are in, and possible solutions or compromises. It will be relieving to get this weight off your shoulders, and remember that in any healthy friendship, good communication is so important so that each person feels seen and appreciated.

**LASA Raptor:** Dear Stu,

How can I force myself to change my bad habits? I have a terrible habit of procrastinating and sitting on my phone instead of doing my homework. This bad habit has caused me to stay up really late finishing assignments I had weeks to complete, which affects my sleeping schedule, so I’m often exhausted. How can I fix this?

**Stu:** Dear LASA Raptor,

First, identify what your bad habits are. Next, make the bad habit inconvenient. If you have a phone addiction, put the phone in another room. Then, replace this with an alternate habit. Instead of being on your phone, go outside and take a walk, or pick up a book. You can also track progress by journaling or using an app, and sharing your goals with others so they can keep yourself accountable. Don’t be guilty if you slip up, and instead focus on getting back on track. You got this!

**LASA Raptor:** Dear Stu,

How can I work really hard, but also have fun and enjoy being a kid? I feel like with the amount of homework LASA gives us, I’ve had less and less time to go out with my friends or spend time on my hobbies. I do hours of homework every day, and even more on the weekend. I just never have time for anything else. I want to have a life outside of schoolwork. I just want to feel like a teenager again.

**Stu:** Dear LASA Raptor,

Structure your time in the most efficient way for you. Block out time for the essential things, like homework and chores, but also leave time for what you want to do to relax and have fun. Work hard and complete everything on your to-do list before you reward yourself. And don’t forget to take comfort in the fact that you are a hardworking student that does care about work. No matter how much you care, everyone deserves a break.

**LASA Raptor:** Dear Stu,

How do I deal with burnout? For the last few months I’ve been feeling super burned out from school and from the sport I play and I don’t know what to do. I’ve always been a really motivated person but I feel really stuck right now.

**Stu:** Dear Lasa Raptor,

It’s totally normal to feel burned out and unmotivated. Burnout is a result of mental exhaustion, so it’s important to take a break. Although that might seem hard, taking a small break from what’s causing your burnout will help you feel more recovered. Prioritizing your sleep and mental health is key too. Making sure to get enough sleep during the week is crucial in your burnout recovery. You got this!

## Behind the Shadow Host

JACK ZIPFEL | staff writer

As LASA prepares to welcome prospective students for shadow season, current students are stepping into a defining role. Shadow hosts become the face of the school, shaping how newcomers see LASA’s culture, classes, and community.

Shadow hosts guide visiting students through classes, lunch, and daily routines while representing the school’s academic and social culture. They are encouraged to present an authentic version of LASA rather than a rehearsed one because that balance can influence whether a prospective student declines to attend.

Freshman, Chloe Uch, is a LASA shadow host who has both hosted students and once shadowed herself. She shared her perspective from both sides of the experience.

“I know it’s usually supposed to be showing [them] around,” Uch said. “I think making the shadow feel welcome is very important too because you don’t want to just be following around a stranger the whole entire time.”

Creating that welcoming environment begins early in the day. Uch explained that she starts out by helping shadows understand the campus layout.

“Well, I first kind of list out the pros and cons in my head,” Uch said. “Usually in the morning, I start by giving them a tour around the school.”

Shadows often have many pressing questions about the aspects of the LASA experience. Uch explained that honesty about things like homework expectations helps manage those concerns.

“I think the homework load is all [that’s] on the shadows mind, really,” Uch said. “I just tell them how much homework I usually have on a daily basis and how I manage.”

Freshman, Jack Kerr is also a LASA shadow host who described that the responsibility centers on representation. He added that hosts must show what a normal day looks like while modeling positive behavior.

“The main responsibility of a shadow host is to show what an average day at LASA looks like,” Kerr said. “and set a great example of what students at LASA are like.”

Social comfort can play a major role in how shadows experience the day. According to Kerr, he ensures introductions happen naturally.

“Luckily my shadows were all pretty chill, so they for the most part did not have any problems socially,” Kerr said. “But I would always make sure to introduce them to my friends.”

McHugh Schneider is a sophomore LASA shadow host who explained that these visits can often influence enrollment. He shared that the hosts are reminded that their example matters.

“I think that the main responsibility is the idea of getting them to want to come back,” Schneider said. “When they’re comfortable, you’ll find that that’s when they want to come back.”

Schneider emphasized authenticity is key to achieving that goal. Hosts should include shadows without disrupting their normal routines.

“Don’t make the shadow the world of your day,” Schneider said. “but integrate them into your day.”

## LASA Library Resources

DAVID PODBIELSKI | staff writer

The LASA Library can be more than just a place to study or find new reads, offering everything from tutoring to writing assistance to a creative workshop.

Students have access to a collection of around 6000 books, with a variety of many different genres and topics. The library also offers both color and black and white printing, an arts and crafts section — which is often used to put together school projects — and different rooms for tutoring and writing help.

The writing center is a place to go to receive direct feedback on any of your writing and has writing tutors there nearly every day during lunch. Xander Kercher, a tutor at the Writing Center, emphasized how the program can assist you in both improving your writing, while also helping you become a better writer for the future.

“The Writing Center is made so that people can get feedback on their writing but also improve as writers in general,” Kercher said. “Particularly when you have papers, but even when you don’t have papers due, coming in and asking ‘how would I structure an argument like this?’ or ‘how would I embed quotes or make some sort of body paragraph?’ can help you improve your writing.”

Another resource at students’ disposal is after-school tutoring. Physics, chemistry, and biology tutoring are all offered Tuesdays through Thursdays between 4:15 p.m. and 6:15 p.m., taught by upper classmen. Ava McGuire is an after-school tutor who comes from college to help students do better in their classes and helps students when they need more time spent on a topic than is available in class.

“I would recommend coming in if there’s something

that you’ve been working on that you can’t quite wrap your head around even after you try it multiple times, or if something just isn’t clicking in the way that your teacher is explaining it,” McGuire said.

While LASA’s academic journal database has been diminished in the past few years due to funding cuts, the Austin Public Library has the resources that the school has since lost. Elizabeth Switek, the LASA Librarian, encouraged students to take advantage of the Austin Public Library’s database of academic journals, newspapers, and research sources.

“AISD [Austin Independent School District] has a partnership with Austin Public Library to provide a youth account for you guys,” Switek said. “Austin Public Library is going to be your resource for all of your academic journals that you need for projects.”

Most students have an Austin Public Library account, even if they don’t know it. To access your account, you can go to the Austin Public Library website and enter your username as AISD, followed by your student ID without the S. The password for all students is aids4books.

When you are done with work and want to relax, the library offers many resources as well as book clubs, guest speakers, and other activities on select dates that can be found on the monthly calendar sent out by email and BLEND.

## The Supporting Strings

MARGOT MORGAN | club contributor

Behind many of the Alley Cat Players' theater production is a group of musicians the audience rarely sees but constantly hears. For *The Addams Family*, the pit orchestra played a role in creating the show's energy, timing, and emotion for the show.

The preparation for a pit orchestra begins well before opening night, needing hours of practice and coordination as a group. Pit orchestra conductor and band director, Jesus Torres, explained that the musicians need to be fully prepared before they ever rehearse with the cast.

"We rehearse for about 12 hours total before we ever get to play with the singers," Torres said. "That's just all the musicians. The kids practice a lot, and I study the score a lot because we have over 3,000 measures of music to get through."

Once the pit has worked through the music of this two and a half hour long musical with the full orchestra, the next step is combining their sound with the actors on stage. This process is often lengthy, especially when rehearsal time is limited.

"We had scheduled about six hours of total time with the cast just rehearsing the music," Torres said. "But we lost time because of the ice storm, and we only had one rehearsal with blocking, microphones, and all of that before performances started."

For senior violinist Benjamin Wilson, this compressed schedule made preparing for the show especially intense. As a smaller ensemble, the pit orchestra needed each musician to be confident with their parts before rehearsing and performing with the singers and actors in the show.

"We started rehearsals at the beginning of



LEAVING IT ALL ON THE STAGE Artist Susannah Joffree and bassist perform at Austin Mohawk for South by Southwest (SXSW). SXSW takes place every year all across downtown Austin during The University of Texas at Austin's spring break. photo by Katie Busby

January," Wilson said. "We only had a few rehearsals with the singers, so we were really pressed for time, but it still turned out well even after all that."

Junior Jude Bullock, the Keyboard One player, described the workload that is needed just to learn the music. Before rehearsals even start, most of the preparation happened individually at home.

"I counted every single measure and every single note," Bullock said. "I had over 3,000 measures of music and over 30,000 notes. It was about 170 pages, so the workload for practicing was crazy."

Beyond learning the notes, pit musicians have to constantly adjust their playing to support the singers. Unlike concert or marching band, the pit needs musicians to prioritize balance and timing over volume.

"You have to listen to the singers more," Wilson said. "[And] make sure you're staying with them and that the pit isn't rushing or drowning them out."

Bullock agreed with this sentiment, adding that one extra challenge is adapting to live changes. Since singers do not always perform songs exactly the same way each time, musicians have to stay alert throughout the show.

"The transitions into songs were the hardest part," Bullock said. "Sometimes the singers will do something slightly different, and that makes it harder because they're not always watching the conductor, but the pit is."

Because the pit ensemble is smaller, mistakes are more noticeable. According to Bullock, this creates a higher level of pressure during performances.

"Performing in the pit is a lot more exposed," Bullock said. "If you mess up, people will notice. It's a higher demand for performance than a lot of other ensembles."

Despite this pressure, Wilson explained that learning how to recover from mistakes is an essential skill for pit musicians. With a long and complex show, being perfect is not always possible.

"Because it's so long, you're going to make mistakes," Wilson said. "The best thing to do is just move past them, because the audience doesn't really notice small mistakes unless you let it affect the rest of the show."

For Torres, the most rewarding part of conducting the pit orchestra is watching students push through those challenges. Seeing musicians and singers finally work together makes the process worth it.

"My favorite part is watching the students get it," Torres said. "When it stops being a struggle and everything lines up, that's always the most

## Iconic ATX Through Film

MARCUS BALLYAKINA-HERRERA | staff writer



LEAVING IT ALL ON THE STAGE Artist Susannah Joffree and bassist perform at Austin Mohawk for South by Southwest (SXSW). SXSW takes place every year all across downtown Austin during The University of Texas at Austin's spring break. photo by Katie Busby

On all of the sides of Austin, you are bound to stumble across an iconic set of a local movie. Restaurants like Top Notch, streets like Congress, and many more places have been featured in some of the largest films to come out of Austin.

In 1969, *The Eggshells* was the first movie to be filmed in Austin. This would set the scene for *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in 1974, which would gain popularity in later years and set the stage for later movies like *Dazed and Confused* in 1993 — along with many more of Richard Linklater's movies. Brian Gannon, the senior director of the Austin Film Commission, talks a little about this history of film in Austin.

"*Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was probably the first big movie, but at the point it was released, it was not a big movie. It was a tiny, you know, movie that was made in Austin that caught on," said Gannon. "That was the first taste the world got of central Texas filmmaking



LEAVING IT ALL ON THE STAGE Artist Susannah Joffree and bassist perform at Austin Mohawk for South by Southwest (SXSW). SXSW takes place every year all across downtown Austin during The University of Texas at Austin's spring break. photo by Katie Busby

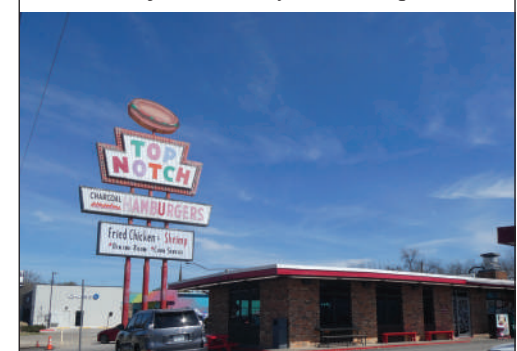
and, in the years since, the industry built up throughout the '80s with made for TV movies."

Gannon mentions that the location of Austin is very important for drawing the film industry to the city. The location allows for almost any type of scene to be filmed relatively close to the city center.

"A lot of what's made Austin a really special place and grown us as a hub over the years is that we have a lot of diverse locations within 30 minutes of downtown" Said Gannon. "So, you can get kind of your flat farmland and piny woods to the east, and then the hill country to the west"

Miguel Alvarez, an award winning filmmaker, professor at UT, and someone who has filmed at Robert Rodriguez's studio, agrees with this sentiment. He adds that the availability of these places in such a short distance allows for filmmakers' creativity to run endlessly.

"There's just so many different places that



LEAVING IT ALL ON THE STAGE Artist Susannah Joffree and bassist perform at Austin Mohawk for South by Southwest (SXSW). SXSW takes place every year all across downtown Austin during The University of Texas at Austin's spring break. photo by Katie Busby

you can film," Alvarez said, "so it makes the possibilities endless when it comes to stories and films that you want to make, because you have everything right here."

Top Notch is one of the most famous film locations in Austin, being one of the scenes for *Dazed and Confused* along with many other small films, TV shows, and advertisements. Kelly Chappell, the manager at Top Notch, talks about the story of the restaurant as a set and the impact the movie has had on their popularity.

"In the late 90s, it [*Dazed and Confused*] didn't really have much of an impact, they said they had a few people come in once in a while, but the movie was not nearly as popular back then," Chappell said. "But, come the early 2000s, the movie was seeing a real height

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## Keep Austin Entertained

ANDREW DRUMMOND | staff writer

Home to almost a million people, Austin is a bustling metropolis with a unique entertainment scene that can be experienced in its so-called 'entertainment districts,' hubs of businesses catered largely towards nightlife and shopping for the city's significant college-age population. Scattered around the city, Austin's busiest and most notable entertainment districts include areas such as 2nd Street, the Rainey Street Historic District, and 6th Street.

Located in downtown and just north of the river in central Austin, 2nd Street District is most famous for its trendy and diverse shopping opportunities, as its home to stores selling nearly every type of apparel. Caitlin Sheen, a frequent visitor of Austin and prolific shopper and self-proclaimed "number one fan" of 2nd Street, believes that it's the city's number one spot for shopping.

"It's my favorite place to shop in the entire city," Sheen said. "There are so many different shops with a variety of clothes and accessories that just can't be beat."

2nd Street isn't just for shopping, though. The district is also renowned for its dining and live entertainment.

"I love to wind down after a day of shopping with some drinks and live music," Sheen said. "On 2nd Street, I don't even have to travel far; I can just walk down the street and find the show of a lifetime."

2nd Street's live entertainment can be found in many venues, most notably ACL Live, which is home to a famous statue of Willie Nelson. This statue is the source of Sheen's favorite tradition when she visits the city.

"I love country music," Sheen said. "So, whenever I visit Austin, I spend a day with friends, shopping and drinking, on 2nd Street. And at the end of the night, with our new outfits on, we always take a picture with the Willie Nelson statue."

Conversely, the Rainey Street Historic District, is known for its cozy fusion of modernity and rusticness. Bordered by I-35 to the west, East Cesar Chavez St to the north, and the Colorado River to the south, the district has a vibrant nightlife centered around its many

bungalows, which have been renovated into hip bars with craft cocktails and live music. The Rainey Street Historic District also happens to be James Andrews', a graphic designer and Austin local, favorite place to go.

"It's got the best spots in the entire city," Andrews said. "The drinks are incredible, the people are awesome, and the atmosphere just can't be beat."

They don't just have great ambiance, though. Beyond their cozy, hip atmospheres, the bars of the Rainey Street Historic District are also famous for their food.

"Any bar can serve great drinks and any restaurant can serve great food," Andrews said. "But to be able to do both is something special, and the fact that I can enjoy both great food and great drinks at the same spot is one of my favorite parts about Rainey Street."

6th Street, on the other hand, is a mix between the two aforementioned districts, and could be considered three separate districts in its own right. This is because, traditionally, 6th Street is divided into three sections, each with its own vibes and appeal. 'Dirty Sixth,' or 'Old Sixth,' is the rowdy, energetic area of 6th Street stretching from I-35 to Congress Avenue known for its bustling nightlife, live entertainment, and dive bars, all of which cater to a crowd comprised largely of college students. Stretching from Congress Avenue to MoPAC is West 6th, with a trendy, upscale energy reminiscent of 2nd Street, and running east of I-35 is East 6th, which is known for its patio bars, food trucks, and laid-back hipster vibes.

"6th Street is great because it has something for everyone," said a local college student who preferred to remain anonymous. "If you want a craft cocktail, you can go to West 6th. And if you're having a bachelorette party, you can go to East 6th."

6th Street is also famous for its collection of sports bars, which are very popular amongst the city's significant population of college students. Favorites include establishments like Little Woodrows, Star Bar, and Buford's Backyard and Beer Garden.

"I love watching football with my friends," the anonymous student said. "And 6th Street is my favorite place to do that. It's got great bars with great drinks and great TVs."



graphic by Abbey Wu

## Sounds of Society's Joke

NIK BAYER | staff writer

Austin has a vibrant music scene, with dozens of music festivals and hundreds of venues. According to the University of Texas, in 1991, the City of Austin coined the term "Live Music Capitol of the World." Thousands of concerts are held here each year by musicians hailing from all across the globe, but many more are held by those that come from Austin. Hundreds of bands call Austin home, from tiny garage bands to world-famous musicians like Willie Nelson.

Society's Joke (SJ) is a punk rock band formed in Austin, Texas, formed in 2024. They play loud, fast, melodic hardcore music. Their music is inspired by 90's punk, such as the California band NOFX. They're a four-man band formed by Charlie, the frontman, who recruited Nate the drummer, Omar the guitarist, and Noah the bassist, the other members. Nate mentions that getting into music, for many, is the gateway to playing instruments.

"My dad just really took me out to watch shows and stuff," Nate recalls. "I just remember that one band that had a really good drummer that I really liked, and I was like, dude. I kinda want to do that."

However, there are many other reasons that people start playing music. Anything from video games to movies can introduce musicians to the scene.

"I played a video game called *Tony Hawk's Underground 2*, and it had a killer soundtrack,



LEAVING IT ALL ON THE STAGE Artist Susannah Joffree and bassist perform at Austin Mohawk for South by Southwest (SXSW). SXSW takes place every year all across downtown Austin during The University of Texas at Austin's spring break. photo by Katie Busby

so I started getting into punk, watching videos of bands and stuff" Charlie said, "I was like, man, I want to do that."



LEAVING IT ALL ON THE STAGE Artist Susannah Joffree and bassist perform at Austin Mohawk for South by Southwest (SXSW). photo by Katie Busby

Charlie speaks about what it was like for them to start performing. Mentioning that it was very difficult to start playing shows, as it took a lot of work to book them.

"At first, we were just kind of selling ourselves out, just being like, hey, you know, putting ourselves out there as much as possible, being like, hey, can we please put on this show?" Charlie said. "And then occasionally we'd book our own shows."

Society's Joke's debut show was a small start. Their first show was on Noah's music teacher's porch and, after that, slowly growing a following.

"And then after that, I'm already kind of pretty well known in the local scene. Some people heard I had a band," Charlie said. "They were kind of like, oh, okay, cool."

And then the offers just kind of started coming. Austin has an abundance of small bands. But being in a small band isn't ideal for many people, but, for some, it is.

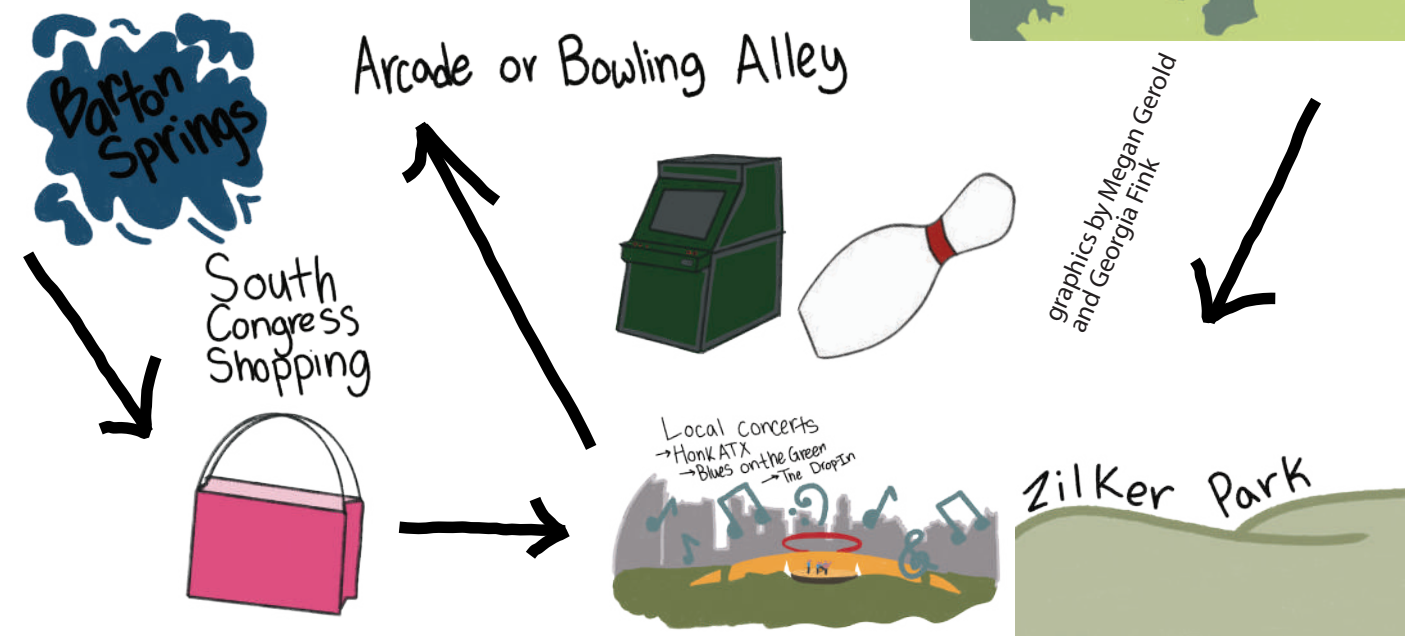
Many musicians enjoy the community that local music scenes bring. "The people who are there [at concerts], they like the music, and they think it's cool," said Charlie. "So that's probably what makes it the best."

Society's joke has a website at [www.societysjoke.com](http://www.societysjoke.com) where they have information about future performances along with booking requests. On streaming services such as Spotify or Apple music you can listen to their full album "Texas Hayride" along with their new EP "30 Feet from the Edge."

# Life Outside the Classroom

EMANI SCOTT-SMITH | staff writer

Even though Austin is known for music and nightlife, there are still plenty of fun and affordable things for high school students to do. Teens can hangout outdoors and walk, bike, or just relax with friends. There are several swimming areas that are popular, especially in the summer. For students who like music, Austin hosts several gatherings consisting of underground and moderately well-known bands. Additionally, there are tons of fun areas with stores, murals, and food trucks that don't cost too much. Students are able to hang out at arcades and bowling alleys, along with going to community events that happen around the city all the time. Overall, Austin gives teens many ways to have fun without needing adults or spending money.



## Editor's Picks

### Small things that make you happy Naps

ABBEY WU | entertainment editor

A nap is one of the smallest, yet most reliable joys in my life. They are like a quiet reset button set right in the middle of a busy day. Sometimes, life starts to get loud. With notifications buzzing constantly, schoolwork piling up, and a million conversations happening at the same time, a nap is my chosen escape from the bustle of the day.

When I choose my spot to lie down in, I can feel everything start to grow quiet, and time feels like it slows down just enough for me to breathe. Simple and often unplanned, the lack of expectations for accomplishment add to the appeal of a nap break.

For just a short portion of my day, my only goal is rest. When I wake up, it's like stepping back into the intensity of the day with a lighter mood. What seemed so overwhelming earlier starts to seem slightly more manageable, and tasks cease to appear so daunting.

A nap turns exhaustion and stress into peace and patience. In a life that often feels so fast and demanding, naps remind me that sometimes the best way to move forward is to pause, close my eyes, and allow myself to breathe.

### Spring Break

GEORGIA FINK | entertainment editor

One small, small thing that makes me happy is spring break — the break that I have been looking forward to since the start of the second semester. It's one of the shorter breaks that we get throughout the school year, but I would say that it's also one of the best ones. It occurs at just the right time, when students are coming towards the end of the year, starting to burn out, and gives us the push we need to make it to summer. This break makes me so very happy for many other reasons. Firstly, the weather is nice, which allows me to go swimming and be outside. Secondly, throughout the break, I have my birthday. This adds to the optimal timing as I am able to spend my birthday on vacation with my family. All of this, and much more, makes Spring Break one of the best breaks ever, making me very happy every time I think about it.

### Pencils

ELLINGTON TOUGH | news editor

Every school year, I buy a box of 72 pre-sharpened, #2 Dixon Ticonderoga pencils. I stick several of them into the side pocket of my backpack — easy access when it's time to take notes, or when someone inevitably misplaces their mechanical pencil.

Nothing brings me more joy than the simplicity of a wooden pencil. At the end of each week, I touch up the supply, sharpening dulled tips and replenishing others. Some of them will fill my notebooks, and others will disappear, giving me only the satisfaction that they may instead come to fill mugs on teacher's desks. Through this small gift (and I do mean gift, a frequent token of recognition for my classmates' birthdays), I am spread throughout the school, everywhere and anywhere.

I'm not alone in my love of the wooden pencil. There are those who still believe in the magic of a single pencil, yellow paint over an infinitude of possibilities, ideas to be born and LEQs to be written. Although we may be losing the magic of the old-fashioned pencil, blunt but trusty, its allure has not lost us.

# Student Creativity on Display

KEILA RODRIGUEZ | staff writer

The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, as well as The Visual Arts Scholastic Event (VASE), are Texas's UIL event for art and programs for creative students to participate in, compete and win awards from recognition to the National medalists who become eligible for scholarships or their art presented in exhibitions. The contestants are then judged by luminaries and qualified art professionals in the visual and literary arts.

Lizz Hewitt, an art teacher who has been at LASA for 17 years, has many students who have attended art competitions like VASE and Scholastic Art and Writing Awards have won the highest honor, which is the gold seal. Hewitt encourages her students to pursue these honors, mentioning that it is important to stand out.

"Submit larger pieces that are really original and capture people's attention," Hewitt said.

Freshman Jeremiah Patino, an Art 1 student, is planning to compete for the first time.

"I feel honored," Patino said, "This will be my first time, this will be a great experience, ...I hope I do great."

Freshman Jeremiah Patino motivates himself and hopes for the best. While taking part in moments like this, your classroom can also be an honor.

"I am a student who is in Art 1," Patino said, "and it has been

such a great experience being in her classroom."

But as a first-year student in high school and first time participating in an art competition, it can be difficult. Seeing others who are participating can bring you down.

"The most challenging part is seeing who your competitors are," Patino said, "and looking at the art designs from last year."

expressing how he feels about his competitors. Even though it can be intimidating, Jeremiah said that as a first-time competitor, something that keeps him going is his own quote, "Don't let people let you down," Patino said, "don't think your art is ugly because everyone is unique in different ways" representing confidence and positivity despite being nervous about the people he is competing against.

Competitions should not be seen as a state of worry, intimidation, or negativity, or something that brings you down. Learn and experience happiness and honor with and from others.

"The only thing that matters in the end," Patino said "is that you are happy with what you have created"

# Brushing

from page 1

One of the key variables in the move of the historical archival was the shelving. According to Laurie Limbacher who is an architect at small firm Limbacher & Godfrey Architects, the center decided to go with the heavy and expensive form of compact shelving, which required careful forethought.

"In this case, it's an existing building, and we had to make sure that the existing structural system could accommodate the added load of the more intensive compact shelving weight," Limbacher said.

"So, in the future, if they get more money, they'll fill up the rest of the 2nd floor, and I think most of the 3rd floor with compact shelving."

Beyond shelving, the Faulk Building had to prepare for a large shift. Similarly to the History Center's old building, in 1979 it operated as the town's central library. According to Suarez, this involved both the project managers reverting the building back to the original way the architect envisioned it and carefully planning out how they wanted to curate the archives.

"We had to be methodical about, 'okay, how do we want to use the space now? How do we see ourselves using the space 10, 20, 30 years from now?'" Suarez said. "Because this is our long-term home. It was kind of exciting because it was a really blank slate of like, 'okay, how, let's make the archive that we want to make.' It was a lot of physical lifting and hard work. And it took, probably from start to finish, about 4 or 5 months."

According to Cooper, a large part of the funding for the center came from the Austin Bond passed back in 2018. This long process sparked a hopeful, yet cautious excitement for Cooper.

"It was a long process of waiting, planning, and dealing with staffing changes," Cooper said. "We've had three division managers, in that time period, from 2017 to 2025. We had different facilities managers. So as far as the move goes, [I was] excited, but also tentatively."

According to Suarez, this trend of change from the center is not uncommon. During the move, Suarez noticed how the center was run

differently by staff in each decade.

"You can see the changeover between staff throughout the decades, so that was really interesting and just the change from seeing the history center managed and run by librarians then that changeover more into the archivist focus," Suarez said. "Those are 2 distinct roles. How we handle collections is very different. It started out as very much a library, so everything was catalogued. You could check books out. And it's really morphed more into special collections, more into things that you can only view in the building and more rare items that we just like to keep in-house because we don't want them to go missing."

According to Suarez, while there were challenges with the move, the ability to house more key aspects of history encourages people to see that the city values its history. Suarez emphasized that the history center is a space to house the history of all groups within Austin. Cooper shared this sentiment, and is grateful for the opportunities the new building provides.

"Honestly, I'm very thankful because it could be very difficult to fund archives," Cooper said. "Especially to the extent. And it is just such a boon to preserving, you know, the history of the city. Our situation was not viable. It wasn't tenable. And it is now. That's a huge, huge benefit to the city and to our researchers who come from all over the world."

# Music Without Limits

MAURICIO RODRIGUEZ | staff writer

Years ago, creating music digitally was expensive, difficult, and time consuming, but today, anyone with a phone or laptop is able to create. Music production no longer requires bulky equipment and costly software, making it more accessible than ever before.

More people than ever are able to access music making software and experiment with their own creations. Allowing everyone from professional musicians to hobbyists to create music. This has also changed the way people publish music. Kenny Segal, a music producer in Los Angeles, reminisced about a very different experience when starting to produce music.

"When I was starting out 25 years ago, making music with computers was pretty obscure. Hardware samplers and synths were really expensive," Segal said. "If you wanted to make music, especially beats and electronic music, you had to be committed to getting the equipment and learning how to use it."

In the 1990s, music production required expensive equipment and specialized technical knowledge. According to Segal, in today's world, those barriers do not exist.

"Now, with apps on your phone and sample libraries like Splice, you can make music on a much more casual level without committing as much time and effort," Segal said. "It makes it so almost anyone can try it out if they want to."

Miles Barker, a sophomore at LASA, enjoys making music and was introduced to it through inexpensive software like GarageBand. It gave him a pathway into digitally making music, while allowing him to not make it too big a commitment.

"I started on GarageBand because it was free and already on my MacBook. It allowed me to create music at all and really start developing my sound and gaining experience," Barker said. "I did not begin sharing my music publicly until I moved to Logic Pro, but without an accessible program like GarageBand, I never would have gotten to that point in the first place."

Barker explained that without the accessibility of software like GarageBand, he would not have been introduced to making music. The accessibility is not just a convenience for young artists; it's the reason they are able to create their own music at all.

"Overall, I would say I feel more empowered," Barker said. "I probably would not even be making music if it were not so accessible in the first place."

However, not everyone who uses these software aspires to be a musician. Kaius Carson-Powers, a freshman at LASA, only makes music recreationally.

"Being introduced to online platforms like Ableton Live gave me a wide range of options to make whatever type of music I wanted and easily sample songs," Carson-Powers said.

Although the barrier to entry has dropped for recreational music producers, creating still has costs. It's important for recreational music creators to be able to find a middle ground between professional software and an affordable price. For many, this is the most important part of finding a fitting software for them.

"Ableton is not cheap, but it is definitely accessible and reasonable. A lot of other software requires a significant financial burden," Carson-Powers said. "I think anyone can try. It is fun to do in your spare time and can just be an enjoyable pastime."

As technology advances, more people than ever have the ability to create and share their music. Although this makes it harder to stand out, it gives aspiring musicians a voice and an outlet to create their own music. Producing music is no longer limited to those with expensive gear and formal training. Instead, it is open to anyone to try.

THE RAPTOR RUN DOWN graphic by Tita Gonzalez

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

**MAYA SANCHEZ NAJERA** | club contributor

Take a breath, let it out, and... release!  
Sedentary. That is the word I would use to describe my lifestyle. However, life likes to be a stand-up comedian, so it decided to get me assigned to write the Raptor Rundown for this publication. When I saw my assignment I thought, "Not really my cup of tea... but sure, why not?" So now here I am.

I arrived on a Wednesday after school, dreading the social and sport-related event that awaited me after school at archery practice. But who could blame me? I was born lazy.

As soon as I saw Coach Davis and some teens entering the small gym I could feel the easy-going and non-judgmental feeling they gave me. Like I wouldn't be judged for the obvious lack of Hawkeye shooting skill level.

I walked towards the instructor, informing her the journalism-related reason for my random appearance to a practice. Her response was kind, and clear, and she seemed very excited for my visit.

After some warm ups, we joined around a whiteboard as the teacher started explaining what the other students would be working on that day. She explained how they would be working on their technique, rather than their shooting accuracy. I thought it was great — and I especially liked the non-competitive nature the practice was starting out with.

The coach continued explaining that this was personal work, emphasizing that this was a day to focus on the breathing, and posture, and the stance, in order to improve their abilities.

After assembling into different groups she assigned me with one of the team captains, David, who taught and kindly corrected me in the basics of a proper stance, hand position, arrow setting, shooting position, and whistle signaling.

After David's constant encouragement, and some newfound confidence, I set up my arrow, waited for the shooting whistle, set my stance, took a breath and... shot. The first one was, of course, missed. But that didn't discourage me. Instead, I decided to take the teacher's advice and focus on what I might be doing wrong, and fix it. After not much trial and error, and some help from David I finally managed to hear the muffled thump of the arrow hitting the target.

I high-fived David and smiled as I felt a strange sense of pride in me, feeling the urge to

shoot more arrows, completely forgetting my dread for sports and physical activity.

After shooting a couple more arrows I shot my last one, and a tsunami of claps surrounded me. I snapped my head and looked at everyone. Seeing my surprise, David explained to me that it was a tradition to always clap for the last arrow, and I could feel the support of the team.

As my time in the practice ended, I packed my things and observed all the people who were still shooting. They seemed calm and confident. I kept staring for a moment before leaving the small gym. I had a smile on my face and maybe a new after school activity.



**BULLSEYE** The LASA Archery team practices in the gym to prepare for tournaments. Usually this involves exercises that help improve skill and accuracy. photo courtesy of Maya Sanchez Najera

Austin Runs Half-Marathon

**MAURICIO RODRIGUEZ** | staff writer

Austin is widely recognized as a technology hub with a diverse food scene and vibrant music, according to the Trinity Concierge. Less frequently acknowledged, however, is its fitness culture, particularly, its thriving community of runners all around the city. An annual showcase of Austin's running culture are the marathon and half marathon events, hosted in February every year. The marathon, sponsored by Ascension Seton, took place on Feb. 15, taking runners from South Austin across the bridge, to the capital, and back.

The Austin marathon is a spectacle for both runners and observers. For Veda Chinapuvvula, a junior at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin), watching the marathon was a new and exciting experience.

"[It was] amazing," Chinapuvvula said. "Everyone was cheering everyone [on], and there was just such a great sense of community. The atmosphere just felt so, so good."

Marathons across Austin are more than just athletic competitions. Hosting events like the Austin Marathon, the Austin International Half Marathon, and the Turkey Trot bring together the community and reveal how deeply rooted running is in the city. For longtime runners, beginners, and spectators it shows the diversity and reach running has. Amber Liu, a senior at UT Austin, is a runner who just completed her third half-marathon.

"It was so inspiring to see a community of supporters and runners come together on Sunday," Liu said. "I love running this race because it's such good energy. Everyone genuinely wants to see each other succeed."

Liu has run since she was young, inheriting her passion from her father, but many don't begin running until much later in life. Jon Wiser, a longtime resident of Austin, is adamant that anyone, no matter the age, can be a runner.

"I have been a member of the Austin running scene since I ran the first Capitol 10K in 1978," Wiser said. "I used to run 30 races a year, though I now run only a half dozen. I have been a member of the Austin Running Club for about 40 years."

As a seasoned runner, Wiser sees events today as a central part of the city's image. He believes these events help shape how both residents and visitors view the city.

"I think running events such as the half marathons, Cap 10K, and Turkey Trot enhance Austin's reputation as a good place to live or visit for active people," Wiser said. "It helps project an image that Austin is a healthy and energetic city."

Even though she is new to Austin, Liu also acknowledged that Austin's events and infrastructure help shape its identity. She believes these experiences give the city a unique character that draws people in and leaves a lasting impression.

"Austin's identity as a city is incredibly active and running focused. This is reflected in their running infrastructure investments and the popular run club culture," Liu said. "I love this race every year because so many people come out to support, from volunteers to race day cheer squads, and it makes it so clear that the city prioritizes running!"

As a non-native Austinite, Chinapuvvula explained that the marathon changed how she saw Austin and its culture. What began as a day of spectating turned into a connection to the city.

"I think Austin is truly one of the best cities in Texas," Chinapuvvula said. "Seeing this beautiful show of camaraderie was so heartwarming, and I caught myself cheering for everyone and connecting with the people that were standing next to me and cheering for their families as well."

From experienced runners to novices, there is a place for everyone among Austin's running community. The next Austin marathon will be hosted on Feb. 14, 2027, with registration already open to the public.

FINISH graphic by Ethan Stern

The Journey to Join the Ranks, Make a Name  
Shifting the Narrative of LASA's Sports Teams

**ANDREW DRUMMOND** | staff writer

Austin is home to some of the state's most athletically competitive high schools. Titans such as Bowie, Lake Travis, and Westlake dominate in 6A sports, with the last having sent three quarterbacks to the NFL, two of whom won super bowl MVP. In 5A, LASA competes against programs that boast reputations of success making for tight games against rivals like Anderson and McCallum. Among these giants, however, schools like LASA have historically had lesser success competing against more sport-focused campuses. While this may once have been accurate, the growth of LASA's population and an increased focus on not only academic but also athletic success is seeing this shift.

Many athletes at LASA don't feel that academics are the only thing that LASA students excel at. Mauro Garza, a sophomore and member of boys soccer, a program that has boasted winning seasons in the past few years, supported this notion.

"Maybe a person that doesn't go to LASA thinks all we focus on is grades in school," Garza said. "People can still be good at sports while being good at other things too."

While Garza believes that it's too soon to tell if there's been a shift in the narrative, the opinions of athletes at other schools say otherwise. Cincy Sandel, a player on McCallum's varsity ultimate team, alleged that that view is indeed shifting.

"I think there is a narrative towards LASA being bad at sports because they excel in education, so other schools think they're worse," Sandel said. "[But] through LASA's performances in sports like basketball and ultimate frisbee, which are just the ones I've watched, they are definitely changing the narrative."

Sandel doesn't believe that this has been a small change, either. According to him, McCallum has begun to view LASA as a serious contender in many sports.

"Recently, I think [we've] changed to viewing them as good opponents in almost every sport," Sandel said. "It definitely has made me analyze and watch their sports more [for] when they play McCallum."

He also alleges that, in certain areas, LASA is the best in the city. As an ultimate frisbee player, Sandel noted the nerves that come around playing the LASA Vertikills, who placed second at State in 2025.

"In my sport, ultimate frisbee, LASA has always been really good, they're probably the best in Austin, so they're always pretty intimidating," Sandel said. "I always view them as a big game because of how good they are."

This shift isn't coincidental, though. According to Garza, this has occurred due to conscious action from the school's athletes.

"I mean, I feel like anybody in sports wants to do the best that they can," Garza said. "So, yeah, it's a deliberate [effort]."

More evidence for the change can be found in the preconceptions of the school's less informed nonathletes. This includes Shaoyu Wang, a LASA student who doesn't participate in any athletic extracurriculars.

"I don't think there is a narrative that LASA is necessarily bad at sports," Wang said. "I never got the impression that LASA is a sports school... yet [we] seem to be doing pretty well."

However, despite the school's growing reputation as a serious contender in sports spaces, the consensus of Austin's students still seems to be that LASA remains an academically oriented school, not sports focused one.

"I wouldn't describe LASA as a sports school," Garza said. "It focuses on Academics more than extracurricular activities."

This sentiment is shared with those who have an outside perspective of LASA. Sandel, through connections at LASA, has formed a similar opinion to Garza.

"I would view LASA as more of an academic school from the things I have heard, despite them having good sports teams," Sandel said. "They excel in education."

LASA's athletic success may be gaining recognition, but most observers within the school still see academics coming first. Despite following LASA's tennis team, which frequently places well at competitions, Wang's thoughts were much the same regarding LASA's reputation.

"I think there is a narrative towards LASA being bad at sports because they excel in education, so other schools think they're worse. [But] through LASA's performances in sports like basketball and ultimate frisbee, which are just the ones I've watched, they are definitely changing the narrative."  
- Cincy Sandel



photo courtesy LASA Volleyball

photos by Lilah O'Dair

# 'Sapere Aude' the Broomball

ELIOT DONMOYER | staff writer

Whether it be fact or fiction, brooms have the ability to play a role in many different sports. There is Quidditch, a fictional sport from J. K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" where people fly around on magic brooms and swat cannonballs at each other, which, when Muggles play, is called quiddball. There's curling, where competitors use brooms to propel stones down ice towards a target area. Then there's Broomball. Turns out "many different sports," is just three.

Broomball is a mostly casual sport played on ice where players split into two teams and use 'brooms,' which are really just the broom handle with a plastic wedge, to score goals with a small, soccer-ball-esque ball in hockey goals. The main gimmick is that players wear their regular shoes.

The LASA Latin Club does a yearly fundraiser hosting a school-wide game of Broomball. Senior Wyatt Fenton has played at that fundraiser for the past three years.

"It's really fun to play because you basically just have a bunch of people running around on ice with tennis shoes and smacking the ball with sticks," Fenton said. "It's a great LASA experience."

This annual tradition occurs after midterms at Chaparral Icel. Mila Hawkins is the Camps and Events Director for Chaparral Ice, a local rink that usually hosts ice skating or hockey events and opportunities.

"A lot of people just don't know about Broomball: they don't know it exists; they don't know exactly what it is," Hawkins said. "I honestly don't know how the kids at LASA know about it."

This tradition has been going on for decades, starting several years before former Latin teacher, Byron Browne, started teaching at LASA and LBJ in 1997. Though the event is only hosted by Latin these days, it used to be a joint fundraiser for all eight language programs.

"It was really just a way to get the disparate language students together at a singular event just to hang out and have fun," Browne said. "So, when I became the Latin teacher, I continued to do that. And, from what I could see, the event just grew and grew, more and more people, I guess word of mouth. You know, like it's fun, it's a nice thing to do on a Saturday night, and that was it."

Over time, the other language teachers gradually stopped attending, leaving the event under the care of Browne. As a result, Broomball became a signature event of the Latin Club.

"I delegated the task of calling Chaparral Ice to the Latin Club Officers, just to give them a responsibility,"

Browne said. "And then to print the fliers, and there's always permission slips involved with Chaparral Ice. And, collecting the money and paying Chaparral Ice."

Due to increasing prices, Broomball stopped being a fundraiser. It became just a get-together for LASA students, and only continued due to its popularity within the student community, despite challenges for Latin Club as Chaparral's prices rose.

"We stopped being a fundraiser. We were just covering our costs to pay Chaparral," Browne said. "They raised their price from one year to the next. I remember thinking that 'wow this is over.' But, the students were still so interested in doing the thing, that the increased price wasn't a problem."

Latin Club officers take on many responsibilities to allow this tradition to continue. Kayla Hays, the current Latin teacher and Latin Club sponsor, delegates to the officers.

"The kids are amazing, and they do so much work such as emailing and calling the ice rink to schedule Broomball, making the posters, making the flyers, raising awareness," Hays said. "I mostly just collect the money, and then get the check to bring the ice rink right before the event."

This year's match had around 30 participants, about the same number as last year, according to Hays. Prices for playing Broomball increased from \$15 to \$20 this year to allow Latin Club to raise essential funds, as Hays explained.

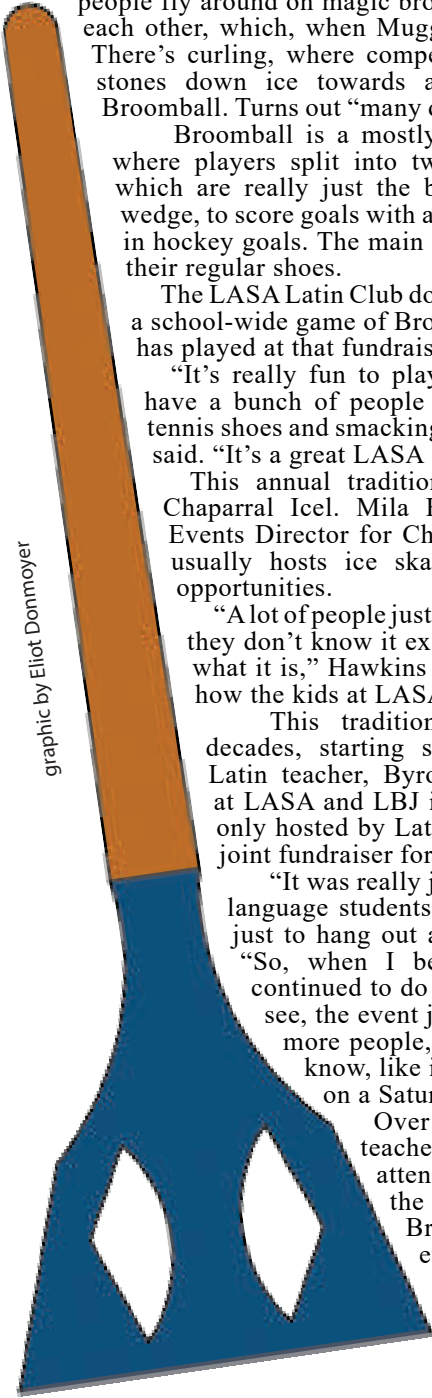
"We made back the money that it cost to rent the ice rink, and then we made that back again," Hays said. "I want to thank everyone who isn't a part of Latin club and isn't in Latin who comes out to Broomball and helps us fundraise, and raise money for us to go to our competitions."

Even as fundraising becomes more of a focus, the goal to provide a bonding experience among all LASA students, not just one language or organization, succeeds.

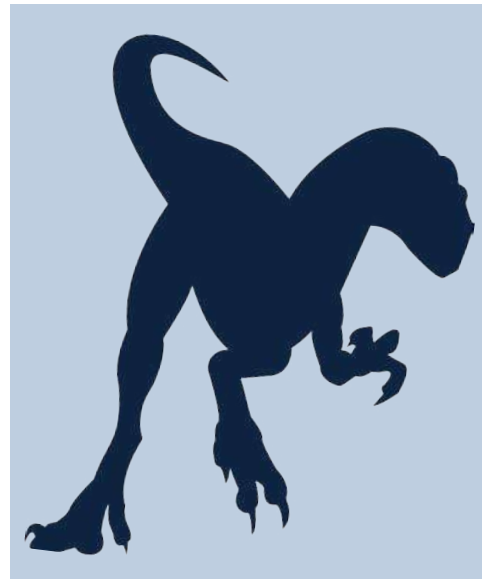
"I don't recognize so many of the students," Hays said. "And it's really great that we get such a reach into kids that I don't even know."

This tradition only has lasted this long because of the continued dedication and interest of Latin Club and LASA students alike, as Browne highlighted. Even as prices rose and teachers grew tired of staying up past midnight, LASA students still wanted to run around the ice on their sneakers every year.

"Through the fall semester of almost every year," Browne said. "I would have students from other language classes come to my room asking about Broomball ... I'd never seen them, I didn't know their names, but they would come and they would ask me 'are we doing Broomball this year?'" So the interest from the students never waned. It never decreased, it only increased."



graphic by Eliot Donmoyer



## RUNNING THE NUMBERS

Counting up LASA's wins and losses. Every victory is a point for the home team, every loss a point for the visitor.



graphics by Tita Gonzalez



graphic by Tita Gonzalez



graphic by Tita Gonzalez



graphic by Tita Gonzalez

# Q&A: Weston Reps USA Ultimate

DAVID PODBIELSKI | staff writer

LASA junior, Bodhi Weston, has been selected to play on the U.S. Under-20 Ultimate team. Starting only in middle school, Weston has climbed the ranks as an ultimate player and now joins the nation's best under-20 players to compete in the World Junior Ultimate Championships. While Weston prepares to represent the United States, he attributes his growth to the LASA Vertikills ultimate community.

**LASA Liberator:** When did you start playing ultimate?

**Bodhi Weston:** I picked it up in middle school. My English teacher was the coach. I went to this little private school named St. Francis. I started in seventh grade and kind of played throughout eighth grade and then into the summer, and then that summer I played with the U17 Texas team. That was what really kind of got me into the sport, because my coach was awesome. The people were awesome. It was fantastic.

**LL:** How did you go from playing with the school to trying out for the U-17 Team?

**Weston:** I got a push from this lady [Colleen Kepner] who runs the spring league around here for the high school people, and she was kind of just like, 'Hey, you should go try out. You might as well. It'll be fun.' And I had been enjoying it so much in middle school. I was like, 'I don't have anything to do this summer.' So I went, and I tried out. She was super helpful.

**LL:** How was the switch from soccer to ultimate?

**Weston:** I had been playing soccer for much longer, and I was super committed. But Frisbee had been so much more enjoyable. The actual kids on my team, I wanted to spend time around outside of practice, while in soccer, I wasn't the biggest fan of their personal lives. The decision was hard but definitely the right choice.

**LL:** Do you think being a relatively smaller sport makes ultimate have a better community?

**Weston:** Yeah, I think that's a part of it. Being niche is super helpful for having those nicer people. The U-20 team I'm playing on is co-ed. I'm playing with men and women, and they're very supportive of all gender neutral and non-binary people. Including those people makes it a much kinder and safer community.

**LL:** How did you feel getting invited to the trials for the USA World Junior Ultimate Championship?

**Weston:** I was super excited. Leading up to it was pretty nerve-wracking. It's almost like a college app. You fill out forms, you write like small essays, and you have to get recs from previous coaches. A bunch of my friends and I outside of LASA signed up together. Just kind of waiting for the email was nerve-racking, but once I got it, I was super excited and just ready to go play some high-level ultimate.

**LL:** Did you do anything differently when practicing leading up to the team tryouts?

**Weston:** I was nursing an injury, so I was doing a lot of PT [Physical Therapy], and then I was trying to build the base level a lot higher. I was in the gym twice a week. I was doing normal practices. And then about two weeks before, I tapered down,

which is pretty much just doing less and less. Then, the week straight before trials, I was off my feet, trying to eat healthy, trying to get a lot of good sleep, and hydrating.

**LL:** Did you expect to be invited to tryouts?

**Weston:** I was fairly confident I was going to get invited. I went to an ID camp in the summer that was pretty much just pay to go have some of the coaches, who are coaching that team, see you earlier in the season, get your name out there, and show off a little bit. I also performed fairly well at the youth club championship with the U-20 Texas team, and there were scouts there that I think saw me.

**LL:** Were the U-20 tryouts hard?

**Weston:** I had been playing adult club that entire summer, so I had just been constantly on the grind in the gym, playing high-level tournaments, cardio, all the things. When I got there, I felt great throughout all of day one, both technically and physically. And on day two, people started falling out, and I was still feeling strong. Then, at the end of the day, muscles were giving out, but it wasn't the hardest thing I've ever done. But definitely pushing my body to some limits there.

**LL:** After the tryouts, did you know what you were getting on?

**Weston:** No, I actually had no idea. There were two tryouts, East and West Coast, and I was at the West Coast tryout. And from what I heard from a friend who went to the East Coast tryout, the West Coast one was definitely more competitive. I know they pulled a bunch more people from the West Coast tryout to put on the team. I felt like I gave the best I could, but I was not sure if I was going to make the team because there were a lot of high-level players there.

**LL:** Do you think you could have gone there without Vertikills?

**Weston:** Oh, 100% not. My introduction to the high school scene was so important. I mean, it was the reason I dropped soccer. My freshman year, meeting all these people that I had looked up to in middle school and getting to play with them was such a big inspiration.

**LL:** How has being on the U.S. team changed your relationship with the Vertikills?

**Weston:** I guess personally, I feel like it puts more pressure on me. I feel like I have to outperform more than usual because 'this guy's on team U.S.A.' So I feel like I have to be doing more. And really I need to back off a little bit and let the team be a team and not try to do it all. It's kind of expected to perform higher while also letting the team be a team.

**LL:** What's your favorite part about ultimate?

**Weston:** The cliché answer, which is the answer I'm going to give, is the spirit of the game. It's a self-refuted sport if you didn't know. Calls are made on the field by the players. And they are talked out by the players. And so if a call is made, the two players involved in the call we'll talk about it and attempt to resolve it in a fair way. In the higher competitive games, there are people called observers who can give their opinion. But the way this sport kind of integrates integrity is amazing.

opinion College Transfer Portal Complicates Teams

PRATIK GURIJALA | sports editor

When I first heard about the college sports transfer portal, I thought it sounded like freedom: real freedom. The kind athletes rarely have, and at first, it felt empowering. If a school wasn't the right fit, you could move on. If you weren't getting playing time, you could find a place that believed in you. But as I paid more attention, I realized the portal isn't just a helpful door: it was the kind of freedom athletes needed.

The transfer portal was made by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) for the athletes. The portal allows athletes to change schools without having to sit out a year, which, in theory, is good for the athlete because they work very hard and deserve to be in a place where they feel wanted. My swim coach, Ben Sampson, once moved from Colorado Mesa swimming to Texas swimming. It was a huge opportunity for him as the transfer meant he had access to better facilities, higher competition, and more exposure. Seeing this made me understand something important: coaches have always been able to look for better situations. So, why shouldn't the athlete have the same opportunity?

This is why I don't think the portal is automatically bad. In fact, some of the biggest success stories in college sports have been due to the portal. Joe Burrow went from being unable to get playing time at Ohio State to becoming a legend at Louisiana State University, leading his team to a national championship.

In women's basketball, players like Haily Van Lith have used the portal to grow their careers and play at higher levels. These aren't just lucky stories — they show what can happen when athletes are finally placed in situations that fit their skills and confidence.

However, my feelings start to change because what looks like freedom also creates chaos. Teams don't feel like families anymore. They feel temporary. One year you develop chemistry, trust, and bonds, and the next year half of your team is gone. Iowa State, for example, just came off a winning season, and because of the transfer portal, they lost an astonishing 55 players according to Sports Illustrated. The players are always wondering who is going to leave next and if they should leave too. That constant uncertainty messes with team spirit and loyalty. College sports used to be about growing together over time. Now, it often feels like everyone is just passing through.

And the pressure doesn't stop at college athletes. High school players are feeling it, too. Now a transfer with experience is sought out by colleges instead of taking a chance on an inexperienced freshman. This leaves fewer scholarships available for a student coming in from high school who has worked hard their whole life in high school, dreaming of playing at the next level. The portal may help current college athletes, but it quietly shuts doors for younger ones, according to Sports Illustrated.

Another hard truth is that not everyone wins in the portal. For every Joe Burrow, dozens of athletes enter thinking life will improve and end up with no offers at all. Some lose their roster spot and never recover. Others transfer multiple times, fall behind in school, and lose stability. It becomes a gamble with their future, not just their playing time.

The academic side worries me too. At its core, college is supposed to be a place for education, but switching schools can mess up credits and delay graduation. When athletes bounce from school to school, it makes it seem as though school is not even part of the equation,

but rather an afterthought.

My primary concern, however, is how it seems as though college sports are becoming a form of professional free agency. The bigger schools, which have more resources and media attention, continue to take top recruits from smaller schools every year. It is becoming difficult for fans to relate to a player who may not have even been there for two years. School spirit and community is becoming a thing of the past.

So when people ask if the transfer portal is good for college sports, I can't give a simple yes or no. I believe athletes deserve freedom. I've seen how opportunity can change careers, like with my swim coach moving to a bigger program. I've seen how players finally get chances they never would have had before, but I've also seen how instability, pressure, and constant movement are slowly changing the heart of college sports.

The portal itself isn't the problem by itself; it's how quickly and freely it works without adequate protections for athletes, academics, and balance within teams. With improved regulations and smarter restrictions, it can be an actual boon for the growth of college sports. Without them, it has the potential to take something special and turn it into something that feels more like a business than a family. The current state of the transfer portal is of both hope and madness, and college sports are still trying to determine which one will prevail.



AUSTIN GYM SCENE

LILAH O'DAIR | sports editor

Some students at LASA chose to go above and beyond with their commitment to exercise. Though LASA offers a weight room, there is also an expanse of local and chain gyms that many chose to attend to build muscle, hit cardio, swim, or even play pickleball. With a diverse range of locations, amenities, and sizes, the Austin gym scene offers something for every exercise-seeking LASA student.



Football Fights Forward

PHOENIX GEROME | staff writer

For many years, American football has been deemed as a cultural institution and a modern version of "America's pastime". It is deeply rooted into American culture across the country. As such, there comes professional, college, and high school football teams all competing in their own leagues for victory.

LASA's football team has been around for about 6 years after separating from LBJ high school. In past years, the team has been losing games consecutively. In 2022, their record was 2-8, and in 2023, their record was 6-4, marking the Raptor's first winning record, and in 2024, they lost that streak, and ended up with a record of 2-4. The team is working on improvement, recruitment, and putting in more time to better the team. Gary Howard, LASA football's head coach, explained his strategy going into this season.

"We're looking at hiring a couple of new coaches," Howard said. "Things that we're looking at doing are kind of improving our communication with the athletes and the parents that are in the booster program."

The team is not only expecting improvements to the team and the coaches, but are also expecting changes to practices and fields. Howard expects the newly constructed field to be a significant help to the development of the team.

"We are expecting to have access to our turf, our new turf field, we'll have a little bit better structure with regard to the practices this year," Howard said. "We're eliminating the travel time that it was taking us to get from campus to the other field we were using and then back to campus. That is probably about 30-40 minutes of travel time both ways that we were losing on practices, so we'll be able to add that time back into our practices this year and help improve."

However, the team is still facing many challenges such as recruitment of players, as Howard noted. The team has players, but some are inexperienced, and others are smaller in size.

"I might have three or four athletes that played when they were younger, but the majority of the athletes that we have have just started playing football when they were in middle school," Howard said. "So there's still a lot to learn, still a lot of progress to make physically. You know, we have a lot of smaller players, which is one of the challenges we had this year."

Kirtan Amin, a LASA senior who has played on the football team for four years, explained what drills the team would commonly practice. Often they would split up by position, choosing exercises that train for the particular challenges of their role on the field.

"We work certain exercises for certain positions so skill positions do more lower body to be more explosive and lineman work more arms to be stronger to block opposing players," Amin said. "For drills we do a lot of cone drills to be more agile and lots of footwork."

Many players on the team strive to improve off the field as well. Kieran McDonald, a senior also on the football team, cultivates his own plans to improve while on off-season.

"As for improving I have done a lot of off-season lifting and running and sprints and that kind of thing," McDonald said. "Additionally, simply watching football has been a big help in developing game sense."

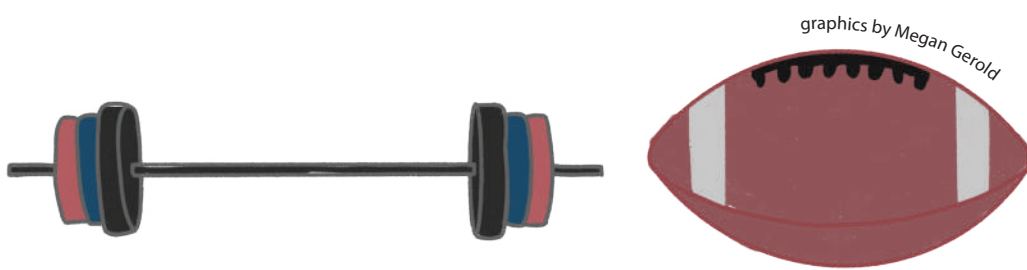
After games, the team would reflect on their play style, along with how individual players performed. This can be very beneficial to both the coaches, and the players as it can allow the players to individually improve off the field.

"As a team we try to reflect back on what went wrong and we go through that game film and individually try to improve," Amin said. "Then work on those improvements at the next practice so we can be ready for future games"

However, sometimes after games, players may become unmotivated, so leadership and motivation for the team is crucial. McDonald emphasized the importance of accountability and setting clear goals to keep the team focused moving forward.

"I think leadership from players is often positive, if overstated," McDonald said. "But it really requires unity from a team perspective and we tend to really struggle in that area. Because anyone can lead but if everyone leads in different directions then we go nowhere as a team."

The LASA team is set to rejoin the UIL program in the fall of the 2026-27 school year and is expecting to face challenging and significant opponents the upcoming season. With the new field and team changes, as McDonald and Howard highlighted, the team hopes to establish a new reputation.



## A Taste of Austin

APOLLO DAHMUS  
MILLER WILLIAMS  
LILY ANTONY | photo editors

Austinite culture is filled and intertwined with the city's restaurants. Many of these cultural icons come from Austin's local eatery scene. Austin's culture, history, and evolution can be seen through its local restaurants. From decades-old family establishments to newer concepts designed around community gathering, these places help define what it's like to dine in Austin, where tradition and change are always being balanced. On East 7th Street in Austin, Joe's Bakery and Coffee Shop has traditions that stretch back more than sixty years. Owner and general manager Regina Estrada described the dining establishments not just as a business but also as a generational legacy rooted in cultural pride. Over on South Congress Avenue, The Meteor, founded by Chris St. Peter and Doug Zell, who wanted to put all the things they love under one roof, represents a new chapter of the Austin restaurant scene as it ties innovation and community within one eatery. Together, all these restaurants represent the range of dining experiences that continue to shape Austin's culture.

Despite their differing beginnings, these dining places reflect

graphics by Nik Bayer



graphics by Eloisa Espetia-Gorostieta



**JOE'S BAKERY AND COFFEE SHOP** Outside the entrance of Joe's Bakery and Coffee Shop. Joe's serves homemade tortillas, baked goods, and tacos. photo by Lily Antony

intentional visions that mirror the culture of Austin. One focuses on cultural legacy, another focuses on innovative community building. Estrada emphasized that protecting Joe's bakery's cultural identity is very important. Even as things change around the eatery, Joe's maintains its original cultural aspects. "Everybody always wants to change it. They always want to make it bigger and better," Estrada said. "But bigger is not always better. Newer is not always better. And I think that's one of the beauties of Joe's Bakery." Estrada describes the diner as a form of cultural wealth. It's rooted in Mexican American culture that cannot be copied. "It's a place of comfort. And I think it's a place of community," Estrada said. "And it just provides a really safe place."

That sense of belonging and community is also very important at The Meteor. There is a different method of going about it at the Meteor, though.

"Community is the lifeblood of the business," said St. Peter. "We want people to use it as their front porch in a lot of ways."

The Meteor's layout and counter service model are purposely designed to feel more informal

graphic by Nik Bayer



**TEJANO AND PROUD** A jukebox features select songs inside of Joe's Bakery. A distinguishing feature of the bakery is its blend of both American and Mexican cultural identity and cuisine. photo by Lily Antony

and welcoming. Encouraging guests to stay and linger instead of rushing out the door. St. Peter also expressed wanting to ensure people feel welcomed. They want to make sure their industry doesn't make anyone feel blocked out.

"Those three industries standing alone have a reputation for being pretentious and standoffish," St. Peter said. "So we have to be very deliberate to be extra welcoming to everyone."

These owners describe their restaurants as being places where relationships are created. Whether through decades of regulars or visitors discovering a new space for the first time. Running an eatery requires constant problem solving, something these owners know very well.

"Running a business and owning a business is all about problem solving," said St. Peter. "There's always a challenge that pops up when you least expect it."

For the Meteor, one of its largest problems was dealing with COVID-19. Joe's Bakery faces different types of issues, trying to stick to their roots in a city where things are always changing, and many restaurants are shutting down.

"My main priority is what is happening at 2305 East 7th Street," Estrada said. "I work really, really hard and I dedicate a lot of my time on our little island, our little oasis on East 7th Street, you know, making sure that I am providing a safe environment, not only for my employees, but for my customers."

As Austin continues to grow, these owners both see the changing restaurant scene. Estrada describes seeing the city cherish



**THE METEOR** The outside area of The Meteor on South Congress. The Meteor serves pizza, coffee, and much more. photo by Lily Antony

its originality but struggle to protect it.

"Austin loves to celebrate being original, all the uniqueness of Austin, what it is to be in Austin," Estrada said. "But what they don't do a really good job of is sustaining it, you know, really do a good job of protecting it."

St. Peter has seen both improvements and losses in the changes. He describes many restaurants closing, but things are still positively changing.

"Some of the classics, some of the, you know, icons have unfortunately had to close up shop," St. Peter said. "But all in all, I have to think things are progressing in the right way. I have no choice but to be optimistic about it."

These eatery owners describe their greatest pride coming from the communities that form inside their restaurants. The spaces they've created and maintained bring about more than just food to the people they serve.

"Seeing the community is really rewarding," St. Peter said. "To see people enjoy the space and enjoy our offerings and enjoy each other at the Meteor."



**THE METEOR** The exterior of The Meteor on South Congress. St. Peter stated that design and layout of the restaurant was made specifically to create a welcoming environment for customers. photo by Lily Antony