



The Commonwealth Times

State Fair of Virginia breaks records



The 10th annual State Fair of Virginia ended Oct. 7. Photo by Michel Maulding

Ram in Action: Mario Sequeira



Sophomore keeper Mario Sequeira made SportsCenter's Top 10 Plays Oct. 3. Photo by Shayla Bailey

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Pelosi, McEachin lead discussion on local, national infrastructure reform



Rep. Nancy Pelosi, Rep. Donald McEachin and Sec. Matthew Strickler. Photo by Nia Tariq

ZACH JOACHIM
Executive Editor

National and local environmental protection advocates gathered in Richmond Friday to discuss climate change, improving infrastructure, waste management and other pivotal environmental topics.

Rep. Donald McEachin (D-Va., 4th District) hosted the event. Participants included Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Ca., 12th District), Michael Town, executive director of the Virginia League of Conservation Voters, Gilbert Campbell, co-founder and managing partner

of Volt Energy, Roxanne Brown, assistant legislative director of United Steelworkers and Sen. Jennifer McClellan (D-Va., 9th District).

McEachin stressed the connection between infrastructure and environmental protection, saying American infrastructure is in “dire need of modernization.”

“Every day, our land, air and water are threatened by aging systems that can no longer provide the necessary life-saving services like safe drinking water or proper waste management,” McEachin said. “We may need to expand how we think about [infrastructure] in terms of,

not only roads, bridges and waterways, but also schools, broadband — things of that nature.”

Pelosi voiced a broad conception of how infrastructure is interwoven in the fabric of American life and environmental health. The former House speaker said improving infrastructure and the environment is a matter of national security, economics, health and morality and that Americans need to be “good stewards of God’s creation” for future generations.

See **ROUNDTABLE** on page 2

Stories of the week

NATIONAL: Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court Brett Kavanaugh took the bench in his new position Tuesday.

INTERNATIONAL: Jamal Khashoggi, Saudi journalist and The Washington Post columnist, remains missing as of Oct. 10 after disappearing inside a Turkish consulate Oct. 2.

ROUNDTABLE

Congressman hosts roundtable discussing environment, infrastructure improvements

Continued from front page

“When we build this infrastructure across America in a green way, we will not only be creating jobs, we will be doing so in a way that is safe for our children,” Pelosi said.

Pelosi spoke about the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, established in 2007, but discontinued in 2011 after Republicans regained control of Congress.

“When I was speaker, my flagship issue was climate and energy and the environment,” Pelosi said. “When we lost the majority, our colleagues eliminated that particular select committee, which — when we win — I hope to reinstate and I will do so with the guidance and leadership of Congressman McEachin.”

Pelosi suggested that openness — letting the public “know what the debate is [and] find common ground” — would be the solution to obstacles blocking a smooth transition to cleaner, more efficient communities. She cited the need for a green infrastructure bill, otherwise the nation “might as well go back to the ‘50s.”

“Children know that they should be careful about overusing resources and children in school know more than the president of the United States or [U.S.] Congress on this issue,” Pelosi said. “We’re in a transition



Organizations represented in the discussion included Volt Energy, BlueGreen Alliance and United Steelworkers. Photo by Nia Tariq

period right now where the public knows, but they have to see a path. And that’s what we have to provide.”

Town stressed that this path is different for every state. For instance, in Virginia, wind and solar power are still burgeoning industries, and a reliance on coal continues to hamper environmental protection in

the Commonwealth — not all states can be California, he said. But in transitioning to cleaner energy sources, Town cautioned that statewide economic fallout must be carefully considered.

“There is a responsibility that all of us have to coal miners that, when we change our economy to where we’re no longer go-

ing to be coal-based, we aren’t leaving people behind,” Town said. “Just like having to take into account the impacts on communities in east Richmond, we have to take into account the impact on communities in southwestern Virginia.”

STEM program receives nearly \$1.5 million grant to improve diversity

JESSICA CRUZ
Contributing Writer

Bridges to the Baccalaureate, a VCU program that helps community college students interested in biomedical and behavioral sciences transition to a four-year institution, received a five-year, \$1.48 million grant from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences.

This grant will improve diversity in biomedical and behavioral sciences in the VCU community. Prior to the grant, Bridges to Baccalaureate already worked to improve how minority students are encouraged to participate in STEM fields. One element of the program addresses students’ educations prior to transferring to a four-year institution.

Additionally, the grant will allow the program to expand and offer more support for students after they transfer to a university.

“Having a diverse group of people on your team is extremely beneficial for many reasons,” said freshman biomedical engineering major Sana Natividad. “Different cultural backgrounds allow you to see projects through a different lens to promote new ideas. The world of science is bound to have new discoveries with the collaboration of all cultures, not just one.”

Through the program — which was



Bridges to the Baccalaureate works to ease the transition for community college students. Photo by Jon Mirador

created in 2013 and directed by associate professor of biology Karen Kester — VCU works with Thomas Nelson and John Tyler community colleges to educate students about potential STEM-related careers. Bridges to the Baccalaureate also places a special emphasis on encouraging community college students from underrepresented

groups to participate in biomedical research.

VCU biology professor Santiago Lima, who has mentored a student in the program, said he recognizes the significance of such an inclusive organization.

“The more [minority groups] that there are in biomedical research is better because students that are thinking about it see peers

that in a way they have a connection to,” Lima said. “It might give them that little bit of push to say ‘I can do this.’”

Bridges to the Baccalaureate’s summer research program, Dream-to-Goal, accepts applicants from underrepresented groups, disadvantaged backgrounds and those with a disability who have completed basic math and science classes at the college level with a 2.5 GPA.

“It allows them to come in contact with science in a way that’s hands-on that — especially if they are from a disadvantaged background — they might not have the opportunity otherwise,” Lima said.

Some VCU students in STEM fields said they fear not enough students know about programs like Bridges to the Baccalaureate, and therefore cannot experience the advantages that come along with them.

“I think that if underrepresented groups knew more about this, then it would benefit them immensely,” said sophomore chemistry major Madeline Escobar-Velasquez. “This creates opportunities that people did not have before, and that have caused many people to feel discouraged and turn away from pursuing their true dreams.”



Illustration by Sammy Newman

Lavender Summit attendees demand inclusion amid controversy

ANYA SCZERZENIE
Contributing Writer

A recent conference meant to empower LGBTQIA students was marked by student disruptions and direct action protests against what many perceived to be a lack of diversity and inclusion.

The Lavender Empowerment Summit — a three-day conference hosted by the VCU Office of Multicultural Student Affairs at the Jamestown 4-H Educational Center Sept. 28-30 — was criticized for its apparent exclusion of events focused on LGBTQIA people of color. According to the event's website, one of the six workshop slots, titled "Racial Justice," was dedicated specifically to race-related issues, and at least one other individual session was geared toward queer and trans people of color.

Khudai Tanveer, a student on the Lavender Summit planning committee and organizer of the protests, said students protested by way of a rogue workshop and panel, in which they expressed their frustrations with the Lavender House — one of VCU's living learning communities.

"We insisted it was needed and decided to do it ourselves," Tanveer said.

Tanveer also included vacant time slots in the conference's schedule — which she described as "decoy workshops" — out of

concern that OMSA did not provide adequate space or time for race-focused discussion groups, which she used to hold the extra workshop. Tanveer said the Lavender Summit organizers were "unsupporting" of the "guerrilla workshop."

“

We are trying to find a way to make sure everyone's concerns are addressed and everyone feels included.”

Camilla Hill, assistant director of OMSA

"At the 'rogue panel' we called out Lee Biggs, the [resident assistant] of Lavender House," Tanveer said. "He didn't come to the racial justice workshops, even though as an RA you have to go."

Biggs, who is white, was accused of racism by some attendees of the summit for skipping those sessions — and for an incident last semester when he designed a sticker, featuring a transgender person of color, and sold it online.

"He made a sticker featuring black and brown bodies and sold it for a profit," Tanveer said. "He was asked by a black person to take it down, and he didn't."

Biggs declined to comment due to a Residential Life and Housing office rule instructing RAs not to speak to media outlets about their position.

"I worked closely with Lee Biggs, and he is not a racist," said a student who wished to remain anonymous. "The whole situation has kind of gotten out of hand."

The student also described the sticker incident in detail.

"For an assignment last semester, he decided to display trans bodies on a sticker. He made a whole range of skin tones. He asked his professor, who is an indigenous person, which of the stickers he should print," the student said. "The professor, recognizing that indigenous people don't get a lot of representation, said, 'Make it look like me.'"

They said Biggs sold the extra stickers online to offset the printing cost. According to the student, attending every session at the Lavender Summit is not always required.

"If you want time for self-care and need to skip a session, you can," the source said.

The event's schedule allotted several blocks of time for wellness in afternoons and evenings, according to its website. Director of Communications and Marketing

for the Division of Student Affairs Matthew Lovisa said RAs are generally expected to come to programs with their residents, though he could not comment on the Lavender Summit policy.

OMSA is currently working with students to find ways to make future summits more inclusive, according to Camilla Hill, assistant director at OMSA. Hill said she spent the week after the summit meeting with concerned attendees and Lavender House residents.

"I really love [Lavender] Summit because it gives students a chance to be away and be themselves," Hill said. "We are trying to find a way to make sure everyone's concerns are addressed and everyone feels included."

Hill said she holds out hope for the future of the summit, and says that this year, many things were still done right, such as discussing mental health, an issue affecting the LGBTQIA community.

The problem — according to some Lavender Summit attendees — goes beyond the summit, and is symbolic of gatekeeping and lack of diversity within the LGBTQIA community as a whole.

"This is bigger than [Lavender] Summit and OMSA," Tanveer said. "[Lavender] Summit was a wreck this year, but it was a necessary wreck for people who feel like they are not being heard."

VCU and JCPenney partner to bring deals to students and alumni

LOGAN REARDON
Staff Writer

VCU Career Services and the National Association of Black Accountants partnered with JCPenney for a "Suit Up" event, a night of exclusive deals for VCU students and alumni.

The event, which took place Sunday at the JCPenney off Laburnum Avenue, offered 40 percent off select men's and women's career dress apparel, accessories and shoes, including clearance items.

This was the second "Suit Up" event held by VCU and JCPenney — the first took place in March. VCU Career Services also provided free transportation to and from the event by bus Sunday.

Hundreds of students showed up to the event to try to score some deals. JCPenney was closed to the public, requiring students to show their VCU ID card and alumni to display their VCU

Alumni smartphone app before entering the store.

VCU School of Business graduate student Carol Dcunha said she heard about the event through VCU Career Services. She said the event helped her get attire she needs for future jobs.

"[I'm looking for] mostly professional attire, specifically for interviews," Dcunha said.

Justin West, a senior in the School of Business, and Carley Sadler, a second-year School of Pharmacy graduate student, attended the event to buy attire not only for interviews in their fields, but also for their classes at VCU.

Apart from deals on clothing items, there were also raffle prizes given away throughout Sunday's event. Sephora provided mini-makeovers, and the JCP salon offered free consultations and discount coupons for future visits.



Clothing sales, giveaways and free makeovers were among the deals at JCPenney's "Suit Up" event, exclusive to VCU students. Photo by Shayla Bailey

After a string of drinking-related deaths, fraternities ban hard liquor

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After a string of high-profile incidents at fraternity houses around the country, the North-American Interfraternity Conference — the nation’s governing body for fraternities — is clamping down on hard alcohol at fraternity houses and social events. At its Aug. 27 annual meeting, the conference voted to ban the presence of alcohol products above 15 percent alcohol by volume “in any chapter facility or at any chapter event, except when served by a licensed third-party vendor,” according to a Sept. 4 press release.

“

None of our organizations were founded so we can sit in the house and drink alcohol. All of us were founded on and believe in brotherhood, so alcohol is just not always necessary.”

Jordan Glisan, VCU Phi Beta Sigma president

The NIC has more than 6,100 chapters on 800 campuses, representing more than 80 percent of fraternities in the country, according to its website. The hard liquor ban will begin Sept. 1, 2019 in an effort to reduce alcohol-induced health issues among the Greek community.



The NIC announced an upcoming ban on its fraternities possessing alcohol over 15 percent ABV. Photo by Myles Francisco

“At their core, fraternities are about brotherhood, personal development and providing a community of support,” Judson Horras, NIC president and CEO, said in the press release. “Alcohol abuse and its serious consequences endanger this very purpose.” The change comes after numerous hazing-related deaths in recent years at university campuses around the country, including the 2017 death of 19-year-old Timothy Piazza from Beta Theta Pi fraternity at Penn State University. At least 16 VCU social fraternities are members of the NIC and will be affected by the ban, according to the list of Greek organizations from the University Student Commons and Activities Sorority and Fraternity Life website:

- Alpha Kappa Lambda
- Alpha Phi Alpha
- Zeta Beta Tau

- Theta Chi
- Theta Delta Chi
- Kappa Alpha Psi
- Kappa Delta Rho
- Lambda Phi Epsilon
- Pi Kappa Alpha
- Sigma Beta Rho
- Sigma Phi Epsilon
- Sigma Chi
- Phi Gamma Delta
- Phi Kappa Psi
- Phi Beta Sigma
- Triangle

Horras said changes like this one — and the implementation of good Samaritan policies — show fraternities have a “clear commitment and leadership to further their focus on the safety of members and all in our communities.” “It’s pretty reasonable to have a limit at 15 percent,” said Kevin Norizadeh, president of

the VCU chapter of Kappa Delta Rho. However, Norizadeh said he thinks people who have gotten in trouble for drinking before will likely find ways around the prohibition. “It’s kind of unnecessary,” he said. “I don’t think it’ll really change anything for the better and people will still find a way to keep doing what they were doing.” Jordan Glisan, VCU chapter president of Phi Beta Sigma, said although a ban on alcohol is not completely necessary, it does take into account the people affected by alcohol abuse. “When people are losing their lives or getting very sick because alcohol is involved, then certain actions like a ban on alcohol isn’t a bad thing,” Glisan said. “None of our organizations were founded so we can sit in the house and drink alcohol. All of us were founded on and believe in brotherhood, so alcohol is just not always necessary.”

School of Nursing researchers receive \$2.1 million grant for gene study



Photo courtesy of Theresa Swift-Scanlan

WALTER ANYANWU
Contributing Writer

Researchers at the VCU School of Nursing have recently been supported by a \$2.1 million grant from the National Institute of Nursing Research for the study of catechol-O-methyltransferase — a gene also known as COMT — that helps regulate hormones in the brain. The primary focus of the research supported by the grant will be how COMT is linked to the cognitive decline of female patients undergoing chemotherapy. This cognitive decline commonly results in patients being in a confused state — a phenomenon known as “chemo brain.” Lead researcher, Director of Behavioral Laboratory Services in the School of Nursing Theresa Swift-Scanlan, will also look into how the COMT gene is expressed in nervous tissues and other parts of the body.

“From a nursing perspective, learning more about how this gene is expressed at the molecular level could be transformative — not just for the conditions we are interested in, such as hormonally-related cancers, but also distantly related neurodegenerative disorders,” Swift-Scanlan said. The study’s co-researchers are VCU biostatistics professor R.K. Elswick and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill psychology and neuroscience professor Charlotte Boettiger. Previous studies have shown that COMT is not only involved in cognitive decline but also Alzheimer’s disease, depression and other disorders due to its regulation of estrogen levels and neurotransmitters — or brain chemicals — like dopamine and norepinephrine. One key issue stemming from the abnormality of the COMT gene during chemotherapy is when its hormone-pro-

ducing function becomes irregular. This can lead to hormone-related cancers. Further study of COMT could provide insight into the causes of several other diseases on a molecular level. What is known about COMT and its influence over neurotransmitter regulation and estrogen production might allow researchers to learn more about several other cognitive disorders and hormone-related cancers. It could also allow researchers to develop a treatment that prevents the dysregulation of the gene. Swift-Scanlan said there has not been an efficient way until recently to better understand how COMT is involved in both cancer and neurodegenerative and behavior disorders. “We hope this work can lead to interventions that reverse disruptions in healthy gene expression,” Swift-Scanlan said.

Wilder symposium addresses obstacles faced by urban communities



Former Virginia Governor and distinguished professor L. Douglas Wilder.
Photo by Teresa Bricker

CHIP LAUTERBACH
Contributing Writer

Professionals from across Virginia discussed the roles of urban communities in improving housing opportunities, public policy and education at the 2018 Wilder Symposium Oct. 3.
Held at the W.E. Singleton Center for

Performing Arts, the symposium was organized by the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs. Panelists included former Virginia Gov. L. Douglas Wilder and U.S. Rep. Robert Scott. Topics varied from what VCU students can do for the local Richmond community to discussions of the upcoming midterm elections at the national level.

“No, the world is not coming to an end. Nor are we on the precipice of the abyss,” Wilder said. “But we are in a position where we need to demand what is right and criticize what is wrong.”
Wilder said people must vote to make positive changes in their communities. He also urged those in attendance to be mindful of the challenges faced by all Americans today.

“

We are in a position where we need to demand what is right, and criticize what is wrong.”

L. Douglas Wilder, distinguished professor

Scott (D-Va., 3rd District) who represents the state’s 3rd District, said many Americans face hardships related to working minimum wage jobs and cannot afford basic housing anywhere in the U.S. He also pointed to the rise of homelessness and offered his take on a solution.
“We know of studies that have been done that show — for \$200 billion spent

over ten years — that [with] \$20 billion a year we can effectively eliminate homelessness in the United States,” Scott said. “It sounds like a lot of money, but compare that to the \$2 trillion that this last tax cut is going to cost us. That 10 percent of \$2 trillion could make it so that every American has a home.”
Throughout the night, numerous guest speakers and VCU professors discussed housing discrimination — how inner cities and urban communities are affected by selective segregation. Many local government workers and Wilder School students attended the symposium.
Additional panelists included Wilder School Interim Dean Susan Gooden, former director of the U.S. Domestic Policy Council Melody Barnes and VCU School of Education associate professor Genevieve Siegel-Hawley.
“I was happy to hear from Gov. Wilder and Congressman Scott because they really spoke well of the challenges faced in the legislature,” said VCU student Lorena Turriate-Gil. “You get the feeling that politicians never do anything, yet they made me aware of just how hard it is to get a bill passed and how they really do care about the public good.”

Libraries, universities come together to educate students about archives

NAOMI GHAIHRAI
Contributing Writer

VCU Libraries hosted Archives Fest Oct. 5 to celebrate American Archives Month at James Branch Cabell Library.
In 2006, the Society of American Archivists designated October as American Archives Month to commemorate the vital role of archives — primary source first-hand accounts of people, places, objects or events.
“Each archive, for the most part, has a substantial role in the preservation of history and in the illumination of the history of our culture,” said Mary Ann Mason, project archivist with the Virginia Museum of History & Culture.

Many students learn history from sets of facts, events and dates packed into a textbook. Primary sources, however, humanize history and provide a direct link to the lives of the past.
According to the National Archives and Records Administration, students develop critical thinking and deductive reasoning skills through the use of archives and primary sources. Archives force students to realize any account of an event is subjective, since history exists through interpretation.
“We decided to celebrate [American Archives Month] by bringing together lots of different repositories, so students can see what is available,” said Jessica Johnson,

VCU Libraries processing archivist and one of the Archives Fest organizers.
At the event, archivists and librarians from several Virginia universities and organizations — including VCU, the University of Richmond, the Virginia Museum of History & Culture and the Library of Virginia — discussed their archive collections.
“Primary sources are pretty rare for students — especially undergraduates — because they don’t know they exist,” said Molly Lentz-Meyer, digital and archival collections librarian at UR’s Muse Law Library. “So this fair allows undergraduates to see the archives available for them in the town they live in.”
The Archives Fest had a contest in which students were asked to create an interpretation — such as a craft, poem, creative writing piece, GIF or even a meme — of a particular archive for a chance to win a \$100 Amazon gift card.
“[Archives Fest] definitely broadened my mind about the resources in Richmond,” said VCU sophomore Roushini Manjunath. “We tend to get stuck in the routine of campus life and forget about the vast information available at arm’s reach.”
Students can search the archives at Cabell Library and Tompkins-McCaw Library for the Health Sciences at <https://www.library.vcu.edu/research/special-collections/> or by asking a librarian.

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CT Sports

Stat of the week

Women's Soccer earned the All-Academic Team Award from United Soccer Coaches for earning a compiled 3.59 GPA during the 2017-18 academic year.

Rams stay perfect in A-10 play

RODNEY ROBINSON
Contributing Writer

Men's Soccer won its third straight conference game Oct. 6 against Duquesne University, as the program celebrated its 40th anniversary. At halftime, members of the Inaugural Team and All-Time Team were honored at center field for the celebration.

DUQUESNE

The Rams' hot start in A-10 play continued against the Dukes Oct. 6 with a 2-0 victory.

Sophomore goalkeeper Mario Sequeira continued his outstanding play, tallying three saves against the Dukes as well as leading the Rams to their seventh clean sheet of the season.

The Rams were powered offensively by junior defender Ryo Shimazaki and redshirt-senior midfielder Peter Pearson. Shimazaki pushed the Rams to a 1-0 lead in the first half after a goal — his first of the season — in the 22nd minute of the match with an assist from junior midfielder Siad Haji during a classic give-and-go.

Pearson sealed the game for the Rams in the 88th minute, scoring on a counter attack with an assist from Haji, pushing the Rams lead to 2-0.

MASSACHUSETTS

The Rams moved to 2-0 in the A-10 Oct. 3 behind two second-half goals from Haji.

UMass had the first five shots of the contest. However, the Rams had two opportunities to break the tie. Haji nearly broke the tie in the 18th minute, but his shot was blocked



Junior midfielder Siad Haji earned A-10 Offensive Player of the Week and sophomore goalkeeper Mario Sequeira earned A-10 Defensive Player of the Week. Photo by Shayla Bailey

by a Minutemen defender. Junior midfielder Fotia Munts nearly broke the deadlock in the first half, but the shot was slightly too far to the right. Both teams flexed their muscles on defense in the hard-fought match.

In the second half, Haji managed to break free in the 63rd minute, receiving a

pass from sophomore forward Jared Greene. Greene set up Haji for a shot 25 yards out. Five minutes later, Pearson dished out an assist as he played the ball to Haji, who then dribbled down the pitch and rocketed a shot past the UMass goalkeeper.

The highlight of the match was VCU's

back line and Sequeira — the keeper's four saves anchored the Rams on defense.

Next up, the Rams put their perfect A-10 record on the line as they travel to Saint Louis University Oct. 10 and George Washington University Oct. 13.



Sophomore midfielder Samantha Jerabek. Photo by Teresa Bricker

Streak snapped: Rams fall in Philly

NOAH FLEISCHMAN
Contributing Writer

Women's Soccer's win streak ended at seven games this past weekend after the Rams fell to St. Joseph's University Sunday

afternoon. The Black and Gold defeated Davidson College earlier in the week to extend the streak to seven games.

ST. JOSEPH'S

VCU (10-3, 5-1) fell into an early two-goal deficit in Philadelphia and could not dig its way out, as the Hawks snapped the Rams' seven game winning streak Oct. 7, 2-0. The defeat also marked the Rams' first Atlantic 10 loss of the season.

The Hawks took an early lead as Dakota Mills found the back of the net in the fourth minute on the first shot of the game for St. Joseph's. The goal was only the fifth allowed by the Rams in their last eight games, as they outscored opponents 18-5.

St. Joseph's struck again in the 13th minute as Michaela Finneyrock beat senior goalkeeper Audrey Sanderson for the Hawks' second goal of the match.

The Rams only recorded three shots in the first half, two of which were from sophomore midfielder Samantha Jerabek with one on frame. Redshirt junior Amanda Tredway added the third shot, but it was saved by the Hawks.

Tredway was issued a yellow card in the 69th minute for a dangerous play in the air. The caution is Tredway's first in the past two seasons, but sixth in her career.

The Hawks outshot VCU 12-8. Jerabek led the Rams in shots with three. Sanderson recorded two saves on four shots on goal from St. Joseph's.

DAVIDSON

The Black and Gold defeated Davidson 3-1 Oct. 4 at Sports Backers Stadium, as three different Rams scored in the win.

"I think we are in a really good place in the A-10 at 5-0 and we just want to keep the momentum going," said VCU head coach Lindsey Martin after her squad's fifth straight A-10 win. "You want to stay undefeated. That's the ultimate goal, a perfect season."

VCU came out firing in the first 10 minutes of the match, recording three shots, including a shot by Jerabek that rang the post in the ninth minute.

Senior forward Kelly Graves put the Rams on the scoreboard first in the 12th minute as she rocketed a shot into the back of the net from just outside the 18-yard box. The goal marked Graves' fifth of the season, the second highest total on the team behind Jerabek's eight.

Davidson's Michele Manceaux used her head to score for the Wildcats in the 31st minute, tying the game at one apiece. That tally was the only time a Davidson shot got past senior goalkeeper Audrey Sanderson in the match, as she recorded one save on two shots on goal.

The Rams went to the halftime break tied at one on the scoreboard but outshot the Wildcats 14-2 in the period. VCU only recorded two shots on goal in the first half.

Junior midfielder Alyssa Tallent put the Rams ahead in the 53rd minute on a blast from 30 yards out off a pass from junior defender Susanna Friedrichs.

Tredway put the nail in the coffin as she recorded her first goal of the season as she headed the ball into the net off a cross from Friedrichs. The two assists on the night gave Friedrichs four on the season to go with her two goals.

"We didn't make any tactical adjustments [at halftime], we just talked about being ourselves," Martin said after the match. "I think that when we are ourselves and we do things characteristic to VCU soccer that's when we are ourselves."

The Rams committed 11 fouls to Davidson's five, but the Wildcats' Alexa Landsberger was issued a yellow card in the 81st minute.

The Black and Gold will be back in action Oct. 11 at Sports Backers Stadium hosting the University of Richmond at 7 p.m. They will then travel to faceoff against the University of Massachusetts at Amherst at 1 p.m.



VCU won 3-1 against Davidson College. Photo by Teresa Bricker

Ram in Action: *Mario Sequeira*

JESSICA WETZLER
Sports Editor

Sophomore goalkeeper Mario Sequeira started making his mark at VCU last year by picking up four Atlantic 10 honors, collecting 53 saves and eight shutouts and earning the second best goal-against average in the A-10 at 0.96.

Last year, Sequeira was named to the A-10 All-Rookie Team and dubbed Defensive Player of the Week twice and Rookie of the Week once. With his first year under his cleats, Sequeira has started in 10 of 11 games this season and was recently featured on SportsCenter's Top 10 plays for a penalty save against the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The print journalism major hopes to be remembered not as a good player, but as a good person.

What made you want to get into playing soccer?

I was around six-years-old and I saw my dad playing goalie for his job's team. They would play what they called Sunday league which is informal soccer games between friends. I would go every Sunday to just watch him. I got intrigued that he's a really huge fan of soccer. I started playing around seven years old.

Did you always play as a keeper?

Yeah. I always felt that my dad was a goalkeeper so I just tried to give it a try and I didn't do good in the other positions.

How was your experience playing for Costa Rica's U-20 national team?

It was amazing in different areas, I think I learned a lot. I played the qualifiers for the World Cup, but I didn't get to play the World Cup. I had ups and downs during the qualifiers that after that I just took the lows, and my confidence came down by a lot. A couple months prior to the World Cup, I was super uncertain of what to do, and I wasn't playing at my best. Someone else did, and he did a great job. I learned a lot from it, but it was tough at some moments, but definitely one of the best feelings in my life.

What are the differences between that and playing at VCU like?

I think the type of play is different. It would be hard for you to understand that this U.S. [there are] so much more facilities, and advantages than a national team. In Costa Rica, we're still struggling with some stuff. We're still trying to find our best environment. And here, we just have everything. Right? We have a great training center with great training personnel. And then great training, just in general, practice and good teammates. I think the environment is nice too. It's different. It's has more advantages for the player. And then the type of play is just different too, it's faster here, it's more intense, I would say. In Costa Rica, I learned a lot about tactics, which is pretty much how everyone plays. So I think it combines the best of both worlds.

With last year being your first year, were there things you noticed you had to work on for this season?

Definitely, definitely. One of my weaknesses is the air game. Trying to fight for the



Sophomore goalkeeper Mario Sequeira was featured on SportsCenter's Top 10 Plays for his save against the University of Massachusetts at Amherst on Oct. 3. Photo by Shayla Bailey

ball in the air and stuff. So I knew I had to work on that. Probably hit the gym a little bit, get bigger muscle ... in order to fight and challenge those goals. I think I did a pretty good job. I still have to work on that, but I think we made an improvement in that area.

Last season, you recorded 53 saves and right now you're almost halfway there. Are you hoping to beat that, or is it even in your head?

It's not really in my head. I feel like sometimes my parents are the ones trying to see the stats and they tell me like, "Oh, you're halfway there." And you're still only probably like eight or 10 games, you'll probably get better than last season. I think my main goal as the team's goalkeeper is to record a clean sheet, I mean other teams are gonna take shots. If we take a clean sheet, I think I'm not gonna make enough saves to improve the stats. But usually that's not something that's on the top of my head.

Last season, you earned four A-10 honors and so far you've earned one this year. How does it feel to be recognized from VCU and through the conference?

It's really nice, I think sometimes you don't expect those things to happen. It feels like you're doing things the right way. It gives you more responsibility, too, because after earning an award, you can't come the next day and do worse than you were doing before. It brings happiness of being rewarded, but also the challenge of getting better and not going back to the worst scenario.

The rest of the season is against conference opponents. Do you think it's going to be tougher, or are you just going to play as usual?

Usually, conference games are a little bit tougher, I think. Some of the teams have a really tough style of play. They challenge you for the ball, they usually have more narrow fields, or shorter fields. So that can challenge us, we are a team that likes to have the ball and stuff. Sometimes we can't do that, right? We have to challenge the balls in the air and try to get second balls and try to build up from there. So it's different from non-conference games because usually our coach and our schedule is meant [for us] to play against teams that are simi-

lar to us, so we get to play a little bit better soccer I would say. But the mentality is the same — winning every game, trying to shut out every game and do better.

“

To be honest, I don't want to be remembered as a good player, I would like to be remembered as a good person, someone that people could reach out to in order to get advice or just a good moment with.”

Mario Sequeira, sophomore goalkeeper

How does it feel to be part of a team that's been here for 40 years?

It's actually really nice. I got to meet some of the alumni that played for the team. You feel that responsibility, they set a really high standard before. So, coming here and seeing the legacy they left behind is tough, because you want to achieve as much as they did, or even better to improve the program itself and leave your own legacy.



Sequeira recorded a season-high seven saves to bring home a win against UNCW last season. Photo by Shayla Bailey

You were featured on SportsCenter's Top Ten plays for your save against UMass. How does it feel to see you were on SportsCenter?

It's funny, because to be honest, I wasn't expecting that at all. It's nice, it's a nice feeling, but same as the awards that I mentioned before, it gives you the responsibility of coming the next day and doing better. The team itself and other players from other sports here at VCU or other people here at VCU, they look up for you to do better every game. They expect good stuff from you, so you cannot go back and do worse. So it's challenging, but definitely an amazing recognition and it makes me really proud, to be honest, to be in something like that.

What made you decide to come play for VCU?

I got to meet Coach Gifford. He went to Costa Rica to recruit me and I just fell in love with the program. The coaching staff was just amazing, they were treating me really well. Even though I came here without knowing campus, or knowing the environment, as soon as I came [to campus] I loved the place. Once I chose VCU, I just fell in love with the whole program and I'm really happy that I'm here.

What is your favorite thing to do on campus?

That's a tough one. I like a lot of things. I like going to the gym and to the pool, that's nice. I like just walking around or using Bird scooters. I go for walks with my girlfriend usually, and that's nice. VCU just opened Monroe Park. It's really nice ... to take a walk and see people and get to meet new people too.

If there is anything you would want VCU or fans to know about you, what would it be?

To be honest, I don't want to be remembered as a good player, I would like to be remembered as a good person ... someone that people could reach out to in order to get advice or just a good moment with. I know I'm not the funniest guy, but I know I can listen to people and I know I can just keep them company in tough moments. I'd like to be remembered as the guy that was always there for everyone. That was a good person and a good fit for the program and the University itself.

PRESS BOX



Illustration by Ashlyn Rudolph

The Game Changer

SAM HOOPER
Contributing Writer

New rules implemented in the 2018 NFL season have been a game-changer — but not in a good way.

One of the new controversial rules states there is a 15-yard penalty for lowering one's head to initiate, and make, contact with another player's head. Supposedly, offensive players such as running backs and linemen will be called for this as well, not just defensive players. Although this penalty is designed to protect the long-term health of players and the NFL, it has proved difficult for officials to call in a consistent manner. Let's face it, everyone on both sides of the ball lowers their head in anticipation of contact. It's a natural reaction.

More stringent roughing the passer regulations have also prompted ridicule from fans and, primarily, defensive players. These calls are designed to protect the highest profile position in the sport — the quarterback. But many proponents assert the league is getting soft in protecting its big-money signal-callers.

Although this effort to protect the shared interests of players and the NFL as a whole is needed given the current climate around football, the league has overcorrected. Officials are having trouble adjusting to the rule changes and are facing backlash from players and fans as a result.

On Aug. 22, after the first two weeks of the preseason, the NFL competition committee met to discuss the helmet-to-helmet rule. The committee declined to change it, but they did make clear "that inadvertent or incidental contact with the helmet and/or facemask is not a foul," according to ESPN's Kevin Seifert. This was an important clarification because in some instances a player would make a tackle with his head lowered, but he would initiate contact with another part of his body, such as his shoulder or arm. Inadvertent head-to-head contact would follow the initial, legal hit.

The reason the officials called so many of these penalties in the first two weeks of the preseason was because the official would see a player's head lowered, but the player would initiate contact with a different part of their

body. Still adjusting to the rule changes, officials assumed that was a foul. The clarification from the committee on Aug. 22 allowed officials to ignore those ambiguous instances. The officials also overcalled it during those weeks just to put the league on notice that they were serious about enforcing it.

“

Although this effort to protect the shared interests of players and the NFL as a whole is needed given the current climate around football, the league has overcorrected.”

Sam Hooper, Contributing Writer

During week three of the preseason, the first week after the competition committee met, penalties for lowering the helmet to initiate contact dropped 60 percent from the previous two weeks, according to ESPN Stats and Information Tracking. During the 16 games of week three, there were only nine penalties called, an average of 0.56 per game. In the first 33 preseason games combined, the officials threw a flag for helmet-to-helmet hits 51 times, in the final 32 preseason games they only threw a flag 20 times. We now know that this rule is not going to hinder competition as much as fans and players initially thought.

But there is another rule that is a much larger deal than anticipated.

A new addition to the roughing the passer rule is that a defensive player is no longer allowed to put their body weight on the quarterback while they are going to the ground. The rule is very controversial because while defenders are going full speed trying to get the quarterback to the ground, they are sometimes going so fast that they can't stop on a dime and keep their body weight from landing on top of the quarterback.

William Hayes, a defensive end for the Miami Dolphins, tore his ACL on Sept. 23 while attempting to avoid putting his body weight on Oakland Raiders quarterback Derek Carr.

While the rule will protect quarterbacks even more, they already have the most protection, rule-wise, out of all positions in the sport. Granted, quarterbacks make more money than any other position and they are typically the ones who draw in the fans. But there should be a limit on how many rules there are to protect them if it starts to come at the expense of other player's health, and Hayes's injury is a perfect example of that.

To make matters even worse, the NFL is not consistent with calling these fouls. There have been multiple instances, such as in the Patriots and Colts game last Thursday night, when they threw the flag for the foul on a certain play, then didn't throw it on a different play in which the hit looks exactly the same. The flag was thrown for a hit on Tom Brady of the Patriots, but not on a hit — by two defenders at the same time — on Andrew Luck of the Colts.

Clay Matthews, the Green Bay Packers linebacker, was called for roughing the passer in each of his team's first three games. After his third time being called, the last instance against Washington quarterback Alex Smith Sept. 23, he said the NFL is getting "soft". Matthews broke free into the backfield, grabbed Smith with both arms and took him to the ground but fell right on top of him.

"That's a football play. I hit him from the front, got my head across, wrapped up ... when he gives himself up as soon as you hit him, your body weight is going to go on top of him," Matthews said. "Unfortunately, this league is going in a direction that I think a lot of people don't like. I think they are getting soft and the only thing hard about this league is the fines they levy down on guys like me, who play the game hard."

Protecting the quarterback and having certain rules in place to try and keep them healthy should be one of many priorities for the league. Another one of those priorities should be maximizing protection for all players, not just a certain position, without dras-

tically changing the way the game is played. The new helmet-to-helmet rule is needed, because head injuries are one of the most serious types of injuries, and this is a good way to try and get them out of the game.

As the season goes on, NFL officials should become more and more comfortable in regard to when they should throw the flag for helmet-to-helmet contact. But the league is starting to get overprotective of quarterbacks when it comes to roughing the passer calls, and in the long term that is not in the league's best interest.

“

Unfortunately, this league is going in a direction that I think a lot of people don't like. I think they are getting soft and the only thing hard about this league is the fines they levy down on guys like me, who play the game hard.”

Clay Matthews, Green Bay Packers Linebacker

Old school football back in the 20th century was full of viscous and dirty hits on the quarterback, and that was terrible for the players and the league. But the league has overcorrected. The officials just need to use common sense when it comes to calling the roughing the passer penalty, just like most fans who are actually invested in the game who can tell when there is an obvious roughing the passer foul, and when there isn't one.

There will surely be a vote on these rules during next offseason, but until then they will continue to drastically affect the way the game is played.



Freshman defender Janne Wetzel has started in every game this season and has made a total of 18 shots on goal. Photo by Teresa Bricker

Field hockey splits at home with Broncs, Minutewomen

ADAM CHEEK
Staff Writer

Field hockey added a win and a loss to its record last week in two home games against the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Rider University, respectively. The Black and Gold improved to 7-5 on the season and reached 40 total goals. Their victory against the Minutewomen continued their 4-0 winning streak in A-10 play.

UMASS

The Rams took on the University of Massachusetts Oct. 7, their final home match before a two-game road trip. VCU

shut out the Minutewomen — freshman goalkeeper Sasha Elliott only needed to save one shot. Senior forward Emily McNamara scored both of VCU’s goals, recording eight total shots, half of those on goal. The opening half was relatively calm as VCU attempted four shots to Massachusetts’ two. That stalemate quickly concluded once the second half began, as McNamara scored halfway into the 55th minute. Assisted by sophomore midfielder Maite Sturm, McNamara arced a shot into the net from the penalty corner. McNamara struck again about ten minutes later, as she stole the ball from a UMass defender and took a wide-open shot into the empty net. These two goals were just a

pair of the nine total shots racked up by the Black and Gold in the second half, cementing the win for the Rams and keeping the team undefeated in conference play.

RIDER

The Oct. 3 matchup against Rider University saw the Rams strike early but fall in overtime. The Rams outshot the Broncs 33-9 overall, a staggering offensive advantage for the Black and Gold, but a pair of shots got past Elliott. VCU claimed 14 first-period shots to Rider’s lone attempt, with Maite Sturm scoring the Rams’ only goal of the night in the 27th minute. McNamara totaled 11 shots, with five

of those on goal. One of McNamara’s shots was deflected right to Sturm, who sailed it past the Rider goalkeeper on VCU’s sole scoring possession. Rider freshman midfielder Gianna Morganti deflected a shot attempt past Elliott to tie the match and send it to overtime. About eight minutes into extra time, Rider freshman forward Carly Brosious scored the walk-off goal, with the game-winner sealing a victory for the Broncs. The Rams will meet up with two opponents on the road, playing No. 16 Saint Joseph’s University at 3 p.m. Oct. 12, then traveling to face off against La Salle University Oct. 14 at 1 p.m.

Balanced offensive attack sees Volleyball down Davidson

KAYLEIGH FITZPATRICK
Online Editor

After nearly a week off, Volleyball extended its’ season-high winning streak to six games after cruising to a 3-0 victory over Davidson on Saturday in North Carolina. The victory extended the Rams’ conference winning streak to 21 consecutive matches — 19 in the regular season. “We had such a strong pre-conference schedule and that is what is showing up right now,” said head coach Jody Rogers. “We are playing great and we need to continue that. The girls are very hungry and are working very hard everyday.” Led by junior outside hitter Vicky Giommarini’s 14 kills, VCU (10-7, 5-0 A-10) hit a season-high .379 in kills and never trailed Davidson (7-8, 1-4 A-10) in any set by more than three points. Giommarini hit .500 for the match, and committed just one error in 24 swing attempts. Additionally, she added two aces and two blocks. VCU started the match fast, taking a 7-3 lead in the opening set enroute to a 25-13 score while hitting .407 as a team. The second set saw VCU trailing 14-17 before going on a 5-1 run to take a 19-18 lead. Sophomore outside hitter Paula Neciporuka sparked the run — scoring three of the

five points — with a kill and two straight service aces to give VCU the set lead and eventually a 25-21 win. In the final set, VCU hit a match-best .571 as a team with 18 kills to only two errors. “That was huge and it was awesome,” Rogers said of Neciporuka’s mini-run. “It was something we needed and that was the spark that buried [Davidson] and and put an end to the little bit of confidence [Davidson] had been building for themselves.” The Rams dominated the match in nearly every aspect, as they outhit the Wildcats .379 to .132, out-blocked them 11-4 and out-dug them 36-27. VCU also added six service aces while surrendering none. Setters Dajah Ard and Tyler Sroufe added 22 and 15 assists respectively, and freshman libero Alyna Draper paced the defense with 16 digs. Fresh off her A-10 Defensive Player of the Week award last week, junior middle blocker Jasmin Sneed scored seven kills and four blocks while hitting .583. Three other Rams added at least seven kills — junior opposite hitter Gina Tuzzolo (8), Neciporuka (7) and senior middle blocker Tori Baldwin (7). “We prepare for each team like they are a team that could hurt our feelings and the girls do a great job in not taking anyone for



Junior outside hitter Vicky Giommarini earned Atlantic 10 Co-Player of the Week for her performance against Davidson College Oct. 6. Photo by Elizabeth Humphreys

granted,” Rogers said. “As a staff we let the girls know every day that we can’t look past anyone and that we have to play each match like it is our last.” VCU returns home to the Siegel Center for the first time in three weeks this weekend with matches on Oct. 12 and 14 against conference foes George Mason University and George Washington University, respectively. The weekend holds some added significance as three-time Olympic gold medalist and volleyball legend Misty May-Treanor

will speak to the team individually on Saturday and attend the match on Sunday. “They are psyched to have another woman that has been there, done that at such a high level and has been so successful,” Rogers said of May-Treanor’s impending visit. “A lot of women don’t get to see other women in such a highlight - it’s always men coaching or something. It’s great for the the team and the community to have someone like her come in and speak.”

On this day

James Dean's last film, "Giant," co-starring Elizabeth Taylor, premiered in New York City on Oct. 10, 1956.

Drawn to the occult: Spirituality is evolving



Garrett Piersa's altar includes a statue of the witch's devil he commissioned from artist and author Chris Orapello. Photo by Erin Edgerton

GEORGIA GEEN
Managing Editor

The deepest fear of everyone's conservative grandparents might have been realized — witchcraft and other non-traditional spiritual practices are becoming more common among young people.

While the term itself encompasses a diverse range of practices, witchcraft falls under the umbrella of paganism, a label ancient Romans granted to "country-dwellers" who practiced Earth-based religions. But most modern witches consider their practices spiritual, not religious. Witchcraft is different from Wicca — which was founded in 1954 with similar pre-Christian roots — but, for some, has a very different connotation.

"Traditional witchcraft is more raw," said Garrett Piersa, a practicing witch and VCU graduate. "We should be able to say, 'I'm a witch. I practice witchcraft, it's not evil.'"

Despite the negative connotation, witchcraft is inherently neutral, Piersa said. It depends on the intention of the person conducting the rituals, which range from "the full theatrics" of a thoroughly-planned ritual to the mundane.

"Witchcraft can be something as simple as literally praying over your coffee every day," Piersa said. "It just really depends on how involved you want to be."

That involvement often encompasses practices such as meditation, prayer and trance work, in addition to more involved measures like binding or hexing when the occasion calls for it. Piersa, with about 3,600 others, is a member of the "Bind Trump (Official)" Facebook group. Its purpose is evident in its nomenclature: to limit President Donald Trump's harm through binding ceremonies conducted on the new moon. The process involves burning a candle, reading an incantation and setting a picture of the president on fire.

"You can do [the binding] with a group,

but you also have that wider network through social media, so you know all these other people are doing this with you around the world," Piersa said. "You might be alone in your own space, but you're not spiritually alone."

“

We're all supposed to be able to come together in harmony. Even though that can sound very idealistic, it's realistic in a way because [spirituality] is supposed to be something that brings us together."

Khadija Green, VCU Student

Through collective work, Piersa said he and other witches draw upon a larger source of power. A sigil — a deconstructed word or phrase turned into a symbol — designed by Baltimore-based writer and member of the Facebook group Michael Hughes has been distributed across social media channels. Doing so, according to a post by Hughes in the group, increases its power.

A number of witches, including Piersa, feel empowered by using their craft for political purposes.

"I feel like it's very easy in the current climate to feel powerless," Piersa said. "So having folk magic — especially if you have an ancestral connection to it — can make you feel like you have some power to change things, or to at least protect your own."

Following the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, Piersa hexed the National Rifle Association. The process, which involved writing "NRA Blood Money" on a

one dollar bill and mailing it to the group, culminated in burying a black candle and sowing a flowering plant on top. While Piersa doesn't believe in the "rule of three" — which dictates whatever one does will come back to them three times — he said touches like that help establish intention.

"I know in my heart what my intention is. I think it would be different if I was just an evil person that was doing bad things to hurt people," Piersa said. "This might hurt someone, but it's hurting someone who is hurting a lot of other people."

For Piersa, witchcraft is a way to take power back from politically-oppressive systems, including the Trump presidency, which might have — directly or indirectly — drummed up interest in the practice.

According to Google Trends data, interest in witchcraft goes through seasonal shifts, increasing sharply in September and plummeting after Halloween as the winter holidays approach. While the entire arc started to shift slightly upward in 2013, a celebrity event coincided with a dramatic, uncharacteristic spike in February 2017. Singer Lana Del Rey, in a now-removed

tweet, subtly encouraged her followers to participate in the aforementioned monthly binding ritual.

Owner of Aquarian Bookshop in Carytown John Oliver has seen similar responses to the media broadcasting of other spiritual and metaphysical practices. He said the 2009 film "2012," which inaccurately recounted what some thought was the end of the Mayan calendar, resulted in an increased interest in Mayan shamanism. The recent mindfulness trend means the shop — which specializes in products, learning materials and classes for a range of spiritual and metaphysical topics — has seen an increased interest in meditation.

The shop's most popular products, which are featured widely on social media, are used by a diverse range of groups. Crystals and gems are used by all magical traditions around the world, Oliver said.

"They speak to the people that use them for magic, from the root workers, to those who identify as witches, to shamans," Oliver said. "The stones also appeal to people who just like to wear them, who think, 'Oh my God, that's a really pretty stone, I want



Crystals are Aquarian Bookshop's most popular product. Photo by Erin Edgerton

to wear that.’ Many little kids are attracted to shiny things, so the stones appeal to the children, too.”

But not all magical practices are as widely-accepted, despite the fact that rituals — like saying vows at a wedding — are commonplace in all cultures.

“Because it’s called a ‘wedding,’ no one looks and sees, ‘Oh my gosh, this has all the components of magic,’” Oliver said. “But the moment you call it that, it freaks certain people out.”

Witches are stigmatized even within the metaphysical community, Oliver said. Once, when a witch traveled to conduct readings — similar to those of a psychic — a client decided against the appointment after learning how the practitioner identified.

“There’s a lot more people that do magical practices who don’t necessarily talk about it because there’s a big prejudice against it,” Oliver said. “Even within the community of metaphysics, there is still a prejudice against those who practice as witches.”

Putting magical and spiritual value into objects isn’t that atypical — Oliver said most people do the same thing by surrounding themselves with photos of loved ones that spurr positive emotions.

Khadija Green, a junior psychology student, uses crystals and wearable beaded items in a similar way.

“I wear them around my neck. I use sage — you can use it to cleanse your home [and] you cleanse your crystals with it if other people are handling them,” Green said. “It makes me feel invigorated. I feel like I’m waking up on the inside.”

Though she doesn’t assign a label to herself, the spiritual practices — which also include tarot card readings — make her feel like she’s “waking up on the inside.” Green said. She learned much of what she knows from the internet, starting with Tumblr in high school.

Green recently began making African waist beads, a West-African celebratory tradition dating back to the 15th century. As part of her process, it was important to educate people on the tradition’s origins, something she considers an important part of adopting another culture’s religious or spiritual practice.



Above: Aquarian Bookshop is one of the only Richmond stores offering products for magical practices. Photo by Erin Edgerton
Below: Khadija Green sold beaded products and tarot card readings at October’s First Friday. Photo by Michael Maulding

“If you’re going to use it, be educated about it and you can appreciate it,” Green said. “I feel like people can definitely pull from different stuff, but be educated about what you’re doing and be aware of the people that started it.”

Some people, Green said, participate in spiritual practices that are sacred to others, even if they don’t believe in them, to participate in a trend.

“We’re all constantly learning from each other and teaching each other, so why not just educate the next person and still be educated,” Green said. “We’re all supposed to be able to come together in harmony. Even though that can sound very idealistic, it’s realistic in a way because [spirituality] is supposed to be something that brings us together.”



Beers, beats, banh mi: Mekong Xpress is Richmond’s newest funk band

QUENTIN RICE
Contributing Writer

What started as a weekly meeting of musicians at an unassuming Vietnamese restaurant on Broad Street has evolved into Mekong Xpress, an eight-piece funk band whose first album, “Common Knowledge,” comes out Oct. 19.

An Mekong, owner of Mekong restaurant who could be deemed the band’s godfather, spent months educating the musicians on food and beer before he suggested they play together.

“

[An Mekong] just set up the back room and we just started playing. Eventually we whittled it down to this eight-piece unit that has been playing since 2014 or 2015.”

Todd Herrington, vocalist & bassist, Mekong Xpress

“He just set up the back room and we just started playing,” said vocalist and bassist



Mekong Xpress formed from a love of 70’s soul music. Photo courtesy of Travis Morgan

Todd Herrington. “Eventually we whittled it down to this eight-piece unit that has been playing since 2014 or 2015.”

The band members found a common love for soul music from the 1970s — that affinity is clear both in terms of songwriting and in recording philosophy. The music harkens back to soul groups like Steely Dan and the Commodores with creamy guitar solos over tight drums, smooth Hammond organs and funky bass grooves. They even took notes from their favorite ‘70s groups by recording the drums with closely-positioned microphones to create dry, isolated sounds.

Every member of Mekong Xpress is heavily involved with other projects such as collaborations with Bon Iver, Shakira and No BS! Brass, which makes it difficult for the members to be in the same place. That might be why this album has been in the works for about four years and why a tour has not yet been planned to promote the record.

“We don’t have a tour in the works right now, but we might be able to do a mini-run in the spring if we can make it work for our personal schedules,” Herrington said.

The album plays like a love letter to the ‘70s, pulling inspiration from James Brown,

George Clinton and The Beatles, all while maintaining a crisp originality. The track “Life is a Dream” sounds like it could be the b-side to “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Heart’s Club Band” with its sunshiny vocal harmonies and glowing horn licks. The falsetto harmonies paired with the unstoppable guitar riff and bongo grooves on the band’s “Can’t Keep Foolin’” would sound right at home on an Earth, Wind & Fire record. The title track — which is the band’s favorite according to Herrington — is centered on a fuzzy, sometimes slapped-bass groove and an unflinching disco drum beat as Herrington croons,

“All that I want / is for you to see / that it’s common knowledge / what you mean to me.”

As a conglomerate of musicians steeped in so many different projects, Mekong Xpress has found themselves in a very unique place at the center of a plethora of different scenes in Richmond.

Mekong Xpress debuted some of their new music at a Sept. 28 show at The Camel.

“The vibe was awesome,” Herrington said. “It was really cool to see all the musicians and audiophiles there. That’s when we realized that our audience was music lovers of all genres and platforms.”

“Common Knowledge” will drop Oct. 19, and the titular single became available Oct. 9.



The 10th annual State Fair of Virginia was held at the Meadow Event Park in Doswell, Virginia from Sept. 28-Oct. 7. Photo by Michel Maulding

Virginia state fair draws big crowds for tenth year in a row

ADA ROMANO
Contributing Writer

Featuring rides, competitions, food vendors and shows put together by people from all over the state, the annual State Fair of Virginia was held at the Meadow Event Park in Doswell, Virginia for its tenth consecutive year.

Every year, contributors bring new attractions and break records. This year, Hank Houston of Thornburg broke records with his 254-pound watermelon.

With a culture that revolves around food, it is natural that the highlight of the fair was the variety of food vendors that participated this year. Lines circled around the food trucks as attendees waited to get their hands on anything and everything fried.

“You name it, they fry it,” said attendee Dan Trimm.

One item Trimm was excited to see on

the menu was pretzel-wrapped hot dogs.

“I had never seen them before but they were a nice treat,” Trimm said.

People stood in line ready to order fair-favorite desserts including fried Oreo cookies and red velvet funnel cake from Wensil’s Concessions, which has been popular in years past and seemed to be in even more demand this year.

Arts and crafts competitions — a staple of the state fair for many years now — also made an appearance at the fair. Cheryl English, a director of arts and crafts for the fair, put together competitions and organized demonstrations this year, as she has for the past five years she has held the position. The event featured crafts such as knitting, painting and pottery, which is one of English’s favorite crafts. She also gathers judges for each competition.

“I’m dealing with over 100 judges and the demonstrations have increased a lot in the

last five years so we always have something going on,” English said.

“

Quilting is very near and dear to my heart. There are some beautiful quilts hanging up and that part for us is growing so it’ll be even bigger next year.”

Cheryl English, director of arts and crafts for the fair

English has been crafting all her life so when asked to take the job as an arts and crafts director, she was more than happy to

contribute to the event. Another art form English enjoyed seeing the fair — quilting.

“Quilting is very near and dear to my heart,” English said. “There are some beautiful quilts hanging up and that part for us is growing so it’ll be even bigger next year.”

English said young people really stood out this year because in the past, it was not something they heavily participated in. Their presence grew as more schools and youth were involved in submitting entries compared to previous years.

The entries for arts and crafts competitions start as early as June 1 every year, but English is aiming to have entries submitted further in advance because of the amount of time it takes to get some of the entries together for competition.

For more information about the State Fair of Virginia as well as how to participate, visit statefairva.org.



Baby ducks drew attention from crowds. Photo by Michel Maulding



The petting zoo was one of the fair’s main attractions. Photo by Michel Maulding

RVA MakerFest engages “do-it-yourself” community

ANDREW RINGLE
Contributing Writer

Members of the “do-it-yourself” community seized an opportunity to educate the public on how science, technology, engineering and math are used to translate ideas into reality at the fifth annual RVA MakerFest Saturday.

Held at the Science Museum of Virginia, the event showcased more than 90 creators — including glassblowers, flag-makers, blacksmiths and dollmakers. Each booth had hands-on demonstrations and volunteers could bring home anything they helped create.

“The main goal of MakerFest is to help people learn how to use their brain[s] instead of their phones and their computers,” said Mary Arritt, RVA MakerFest co-founder and producer. “It’s a day where we connect people, not only by teaching them how things are made, but by giving them real information about STEM and its implications in the real world.”

Arritt added that attending MakerFest in the past has increased the grades of some students, according to their parents.

To attend MakerFest as a vendor, groups submitted proposals between April and May. Out of 120 applicants, a non-profit board of directors selected those who best exemplified the educational goals of the festival.

Two groups from VCU were among those selected for the showcase. Students from the university’s Formula SAE (FSAE) and Hyperloop presented their work to MakerFest audiences for the first time in the festival’s history.

FSAE at VCU is a chapter of the inter-



MakerFest is an opportunity for members of the DIY community to learn from each other. Photo by Jon Mirador

national student design competition of the Society of Automotive Engineers. The club’s officers presented at the event.

“One thing we really like to do is show kids that engineering isn’t always sitting behind a desk and pushing papers,” said Ben Loren, FSAE at VCU president. “It’s an opportunity to get out there and use your hands to design real things.”

The organization designs and builds formula-style race cars which are then used to compete against other schools internationally. At the FSAE display, younger guests were especially entertained by climbing into the seat of a recent competitive project.

In a neighboring booth, VCU’s Hyperloop gave its presentation to MakerFest guests. The multidisciplinary student organization was founded last year and its members are devoted to building a transportation pod

for SpaceX’s Hyperloop Pod Competition.

The team talked to visitors about their experiences, including competing in front of 2,000 guests at the last competition — which was also attended by Elon Musk, SpaceX founder, CEO and lead designer.

Harrison Powers, a VCU junior and the organization’s fundraising lead, explained how Hyperloop at VCU plans to expand recruitment and use experience to greatly improve pod design. He was joined by VCU junior and the group’s president, Arthur Chadwick.

“With this event, we get an opportunity to show people who we are,” Chadwick said. “And we can reach out to young talent in this area to show them that Richmond, especially VCU, is the best place to work on making exciting ideas a reality.”

SAM’S TAKE

The magnificent awfulness of “Venom”

SAMUEL GOODRICH
Staff Writer

Tom Hardy walks into a fancy restaurant. He’s drenched in sweat, his slimy face is unshaven, his words fumble out of his moist mouth. He tries to talk to someone, but he keeps eating food off people’s plates, complaining about the heat while yelling at other patrons to stay away. He ends his performance by sitting in a fish tank, biting the heads off lobsters.

This is not a scene from a new horror movie, or a goofy comedy Hardy was somehow roped into. This is an actual scene in the new super-villain film “Venom.” The film itself is just as bafflingly awful — either missing clear opportunities to make an interesting movie or going too far to make a comically bizarre mess.

Hardy plays Eddie Brock, a hot-headed journalist who loses everything when he asks too many questions of Carlton Drake, the head of a bioengineering corporation called Life Foundation. Drake has acquired alien symbiotes that meld with humans — one of these symbiotes finds its way to Brock when he tries to investigate Life Foundation. The symbiote takes over Brock’s body as Venom, an alien that transforms Brock and gives him supernatural characteristics.

“Venom” is a mess of a film. Spending years in development hell, the finished product is an amalgamation of undercooked ideas, dated blockbuster filmmaking and a shocking lack of style or substance.

The plot is nonsensical at times — it feels flimsy and inconsequential. It is standard at best and confusing at worst, often times ignoring the previously-established rules or character motivations.

The performances range between boring and hilariously poor. Riz Ahmed tries his best to be a villainous Drake, but comes off as purely comical. The great Michelle

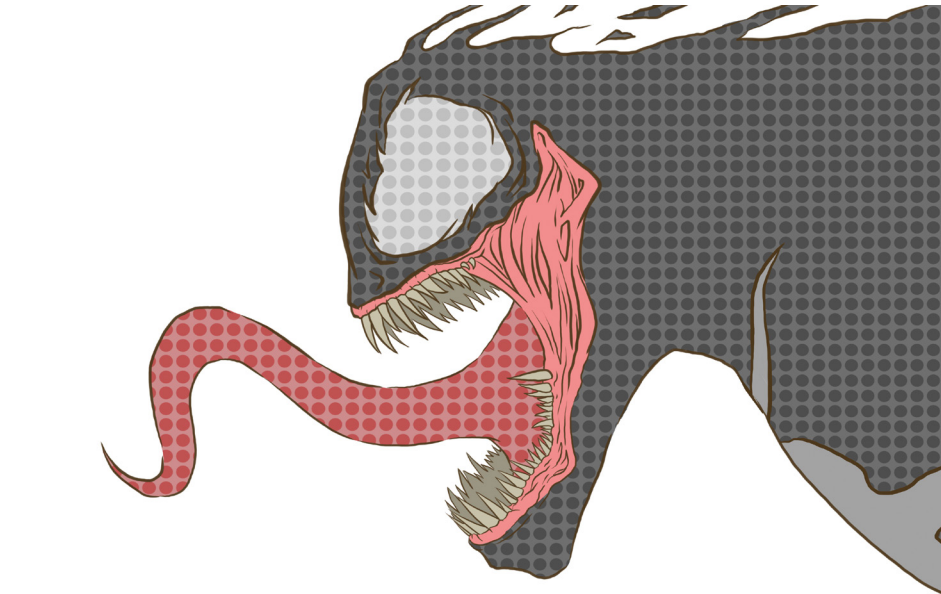


Illustration by Steck Von

Williams can be sincere and sympathetic, but as Brock’s ex-fiancée, she is woefully underdeveloped.

Hardy is the most difficult to pin down in terms of performance. He tries to maintain an accent, but sounds drunk more often than not. He can play a smug jerk fairly well, but not a likable one. His jokester dialogue falls flat, and he’s too cartoonish during the slapstick moments.

Another misstep is the film’s use of comedy. Instead of treating the symbiote like a parasite infecting Brock, he quickly befriends Venom and they soon build rapport. The film becomes a buddy comedy, where the two bond over being “losers” — it’s a misguided and truly baffling decision that counters the very origins of the characters and the marketing.

There are also scenes similar to the one described at the beginning of this review — where Venom begins to merge with Brock — in which Hardy simply mugs for the camera as he eats trash or yells at people in awkward scenes.

I’ve reached a point where it’s become difficult to fully describe the depths to which “Venom” sinks. It would require an explanation of multiple scenes and specific aspects that would make this review longer than it already is. The main thing this film lacks is a clear identity.

Instead of making a violent, R-rated villain movie, the creators made a comic-book-style comedy. Instead of committing to the comedy, they try to be serious or dark at odd moments, injecting some horror elements here and there.

There is no clear point or reason for this film to exist — nothing makes it stand out. It’s a relic from the 1990s and 2000s era of superhero movies which failed to understand that comic book tactics don’t translate to film. It’s obvious the creators knew they had an abysmal experience on their hands, so they made it as brief as possible, making it all the more incomprehensible.

UPCOMING EVENTS

See something

WED. 10/10

"Scream" (1996)

Attend a screening of this classic Halloween film by Wes Craven starring Drew Barrymore, Roger Jackson, Matthew Lillard and Rose McGowan.

7:15-9 p.m., The Byrd (2908 W. Cary St.)

SAT. 10/13

"Dark Girls: The Story of Color, Gender and Race"v

Attend the screening of this 2011 documentary that explores the intersection of gender, race and color and the impact of colorism on dark-skinned women. The screening will be followed by a panel discussion with one of the directors and producers of the film, D. Channsin Berry and Empire actress Serayah Rane McNeill.

7-9 p.m., Singleton Center for the Performing Arts (922 Park Ave.)

Do something

WED. 10/10

VCU Grad Fair

Wednesday is the last day of the VCU Grad Fair for seniors graduating at the end of the year. It is an opportunity to purchase a cap and gown, class rings and diploma frames. Students can also have graduation portraits taken, RSVP for commencement and purchase graduation invitations to send to friends and family.

10 a.m.-6 p.m., Barnes & Noble @ VCU, (1111 W. Broad St.)

THURS. 10/11

VCUarts Blood Drive for Virginia Blood Services

The VCUarts Sculpture department is hosting a blood drive with Virginia Blood Services. Snacks and T-shirts will be provided to all donors. Walk-ins are welcome, but appointments can also be made at donateblood.vablood.org.

12-4 p.m., Fine Arts Building (1000 W. Broad St.)

FRI.-SUN. 10/12-14

Richmond Folk Festival

One of Virginia's largest events of the year has returned, featuring music, dance, food, storytelling and crafting all centered around the folk genre. There will be seven stages with live music and several vendors. Free admission. Hours vary each day:

Friday: 6-10 p.m.

Saturday: Noon-9:30 p.m.

Brown's Island

Learn something

THURS. 10/11

For the Love of Art: Valerie Cassel Oliver

Join curator Valerie Cassel Oliver and Chioke l'Anson for a discussion on artist Howardena Pindell. They will explore how Pindell's art has evolved and how she has claimed her place as a black woman in contemporary art.

6:30-7:30 p.m., Institute for Contemporary Arts at VCU (601 W. Broad St.)

CT Opinions

Quote of the week

“So that’s the dissenter’s hope: that they are writing not for today but for tomorrow.”

— RUTH BADER GINSBURG



Illustration by Sammy Newman

Richmond freeze stuns social scene

BRIANNA SCOTT
Contributing Writer

Making friends is not the easiest task. Yes, even in a world with more than 7 billion people, some still manage to feel like they are on their own — and it’s not for lack of trying.

When I think about Richmond — a vibrant city with hundreds of thousands of people — I wonder why it is so hard to pin down a solid group of friends.

I tend to do my own thing most of the time. I’ve always found myself floating around in social groups and never anchored to a specific set of people. These aren’t bad traits, but I find myself feeling alone in the city I’ve called home for the past four years.

The Seattle Freeze is a social phenomenon where the city’s newcomers typically find it difficult to make friends. Possible causes include the fact that Seattle has become an in-between space, many already have their own cliques or the cold, rainy weather makes people distant.

A city “freeze-out” isn’t exclusive to Seat-

tle — Richmond could be experiencing one, too. As you grow older, your circle of friends tends to shrink. However, the aging process doesn’t signify the end of your social life.

That’s a vulnerable statement for me to make, but I took to RVA’s Reddit page to see what folks thought about the potential phenomena of a “Richmond Freeze.”

“

I think the reason it’s so difficult to make friends nowadays is that people don’t have time or energy for new companions.”

Brianna Scott, Contributing Writer

There seemed to be this consensus on my Reddit post that there isn’t a freeze — but I believe there is a frost.

One user’s comment stuck out to me among the fifty or so others.

“I don’t feel like I easily click into any set scene so I’m kinda floating around. The city seems more judgmental or superficial. People size each other up on appearance, and if you’re not an easy fit, people are less likely to be open to you.”

It felt as if I had written this comment myself.

I think the reason it’s so difficult to make friends nowadays is that people don’t have time or energy for new companions. People are set in their ways and comfortable with the friends they have made in the past which makes them closed off to newcomers. If you are a newcomer to a group, it’s like you have to bring something fresh to the table that makes you interesting enough to be friends with. Making friends is like an auction show to me — how can I show the best parts of myself to convince people we should be friends?

None of this is easy because life is fast-paced. We don’t pause to consider taking more time to make a conscious decision

to seek out life-long friends versus casual friends to party with. Trying to find that type of authenticity is challenging because it requires people to put in time with others, and we all believe our time is too valuable to waste — and it is. But we need to look up from our phones, pull ourselves away from the comfort of what we know and notice the person standing across from you in the room could be a new friend.

It isn’t that people in Richmond are these anti-social beings freezing others out. It’s just that they come off a little frosty and it’s up to all of us to not let it be a deterrent.

Now, I might just suck at making friends. While I joke, on a real note, we shouldn’t turn up our noses at people who don’t instantly make friends or aren’t extroverted. We shouldn’t judge those who find it difficult to be vulnerable. We should be more considerate of the fact that people have things going on in their own lives — but it doesn’t mean they don’t want to be friends with us. You can’t expect to be a friendship magnet but you also can’t rock the vibe of “no new friends” forever.

The lasting legacy of “Catcher in the Rye”

HAYDEN TAYLOR
Contributing Writer

I found J.D. Salinger’s “The Catcher in the Rye” while looking through my sister’s old high school book collection. “I heard there’s a prostitute in this,” I thought, “This should be good.” Little did I know, I would be forever changed by the book.

As I read in class, I was terrified and awestruck by the events depicted in the novel which almost perfectly mirrored situations I’ve found myself in. From drunk-calling former love interests to mourning a lost relative, I seemed to connect on personal levels with the main character, Holden Caulfield. It was almost like Salinger wrote the book exclusively for me. I don’t share Caulfield’s mental health issues, but there’s a lot I can relate to in his character. When I was finished, I couldn’t believe what I just read. To this day, I’m still processing how much it means to me. Reading “The Catcher in the Rye” proved to be an important phase in my senior year and even, my life.

The book tackles many aspects of the teenage mind — including angst, boredom and rebellion — which take form

in Caulfield. Caulfield finds himself in surreal scenarios traveling around New York City waiting for the next step in his life, which he’s unsure of. From paying for the service of a sex worker, underage drinking and smoking, Caulfield is pretty much the average teen. My favorite part of the book is the constant stream of insulting thoughts Caulfield has about the society around him. For example, he often calls people phony which is a great way of presenting how many teens think about the world surrounding them. Of course, these intensely provocative thoughts have sparked much controversy around “The Catcher in the Rye.”

There are many schools across the country, and world, that have tried to ban this book because of its vulgar language and mature themes, like drinking and sex. If these schools’ administrations think teens don’t drink and have sex, they must be crazier than Caulfield is. He is an amalgamation of the extreme characteristics of young people. Yes, he uses vulgar language, but so does every teenager. He drinks and smokes — so does about a third of teens in the country according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Illustration by Adam Goodman

In 1987, a school in North Dakota banned the book because of Caulfield’s sexual thoughts throughout the novel — this was followed by a ban in a Florida school. Despite these bans, the novel was later reinstated because of its importance to literary history. I think banning this book is impressively idiotic. No book has touched as many teenage souls as “The Catcher in the Rye” has. There must be a reason millions of copies are sold every year.

Controversy rose again when “The Catcher in the Rye” was found with Mark David Chapman after he murdered John Lennon. The novel is cited as one of the inspirations for Chapman to commit the crime. Strange how my favorite book helped lead to the murder of my favorite artist — I guess that’s tragically poetic. However, despite all these controversies, I strongly believe “The Catcher in the Rye” should be taught in all high schools across the nation because it gives teens something to relate to and can even act as a cautionary tale. Perhaps if Caulfield had this book to read, he wouldn’t have felt as angst or alone.

Abortion demonstration: questioning method and morality

MOIRA SNYDER
Contributing Writer

Anti-abortion group Center for Bio-Ethical Reform (CBR) set up its “Genocide Awareness Project” last week, presenting photographs of mutilated infants and fetuses in protest of the “lives” lost to abortion.

Although the group proved to be peaceful in its demonstration for anti-abortion laws, showcasing such explicit pictures on a reasonably sensitive subject could be emotionally triggering not only for students, but for faculty and staff as well. The U.S. Constitution gives CBR the right to express its opinions in a public setting. Since VCU is not only an urban community but a public institution, the organization was well-within its rights to set up its “Genocide Awareness Project.”

By presenting photographs of mutilated infants and fetuses on such a large scale, viewers could be triggered and affected by a past traumatic experience. It is immoral and unethical to force someone to re-live such an incident.

There are different ways to grab attention besides setting up a large wall of posters with dead fetuses.

CBR’s demonstration could have been done in a different manner that did not involve gruesome images displayed so prominently in a public setting where a large population could possibly be emotionally affected. Instead of using this type of display, the organization could have set up a smaller booth or table with less shocking pictures on it, or with their cause or mission statement presented in front. The group’s members could walk around the area with



The Center for Bio-Ethical Reform held an anti-abortion demonstration that was met with a peaceful retaliation from Planned Parenthood supporters. Photo by Raelyn Fines

pamphlets containing information and less gruesome images to control reactions.

However, students reacted reasonably well to the display. Planned Parenthood Generation Action at VCU counter-protested CBR by rallying its members and other student organizations on campus. Both demonstrations were peaceful with the exception of a few emotional verbal exchanges.

Planned Parenthood at VCU responded maturely, carrying posters that read, “I Stand With Planned Parenthood,” “Get Your Rosaries Off My Ovaries” and “Republicans Care About Fetuses Until They Become Women.”

The group also handed out condoms and

pamphlets and helped keep the peace when people became emotionally agitated. This situation proved how maturely students react when faced with political opposition and how to properly, and peacefully, counteract it.

CBR’s display intended to raise awareness to the harm brought to lives that cannot yet make a choice for themselves. However, the group actively turns a blind eye to its damaging effects on people who have had abortions — pushing them back into their experiences and opening emotional wounds which could reverse any progress made in healing and grieving. Choosing life is not always the life of

the fetus, but the life of the mother. It is not always a choice — sometimes a person is forced to do so because of health problems, financial issues and mental or emotional reasons.

Planned Parenthood at VCU had the right to counter-protest CBR’s display. Showcasing horrific and heartbreaking images of mutilated infants and fetuses should not be the proper form of demonstration in a public and academic setting, especially when there are other mature ways to do so.

An ode to self care



Recommended listening while reading:
“CAN’T HOLD US DOWN”
Christina Aguilera

SHAUN JACKSON
Staff Columnist

How can we address living in a world that allows for men in high positions of power to get away with taking advantage of women?

We address it as did Christine Blasey Ford and countless other women and femmes before her: by calling it out. Our culture tends to curtail the experiences of women and other minorities. This creates a narrative that not only reads as victimless but also makes survivors look as though they’ve baselessly accused someone — simply in an effort to tarnish their

reputation — as part of some covert agenda. No one should ever be made to feel like such a heinous act was brought upon them because of their choice of dress, actions or profession.

What are your feelings about having yet another public movement centered around victims opening up about their past traumas, only to be subject to various attacks and character assassination?

As with any movement abetted by social media — whether it be hashtagging #MeToo or #WhyIDidntReport — the ever-infamous “internet trolls” always come out to play. Trolling aside, I think it is abhorrent that anyone thinks someone would willingly go back to a dark place to relive those traumas purely for attention. We’ve seen this recently with all this Brett Kavanaugh ridiculousness — if you want to throw up in your mouth a little bit, read an article about the whole ordeal and then go to the comment section. This woman took a monumental stand to call out Kavanaugh which could have cost her everything. Hell, Ford received numerous death threats to the point that she had to move. People refuse to acknowledge the problem here, and the responses Ford has received proves that precisely.

How do you feel about a man like Kavanaugh being a nominee for the Supreme Court?

It’s ugly and despicable given the recent light shed on him. Of course, my feelings don’t matter. The feelings of Ford and other survivors are what really matter, and I think the timing here is everything. While many have voiced suspicions about the authenticity of the survivors’ accounts for waiting this long to come forward, I believe it’s quite the opposite. If I saw my assailant rise to a position of power, I’d like to think I would have Ford’s courage to come forward.



Illustration by Alex Hwee

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the editor,

Millions of sexual assault survivors across the country had to relive trauma this week while watching Brett Kavanaugh vie for a seat on the highest court in the land. I am one of them — and I believe Christine Blasey Ford.

Earlier this year, I experienced something similar to the testimony Ford gave before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary — someone I knew and trusted held me down, ignoring my repeated pleas to stop as he raped me. When Ford talked about the trauma she’s faced for decades after the attack, I thought of my own struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder. When asked why she is just now coming forward, I thought about how I kept the details of my assault hidden from everyone — even close friends and family — for months. When she gave her reasoning, that she could not bear to see her attacker rise to such a prestigious position, I thought of my own attacker one day telling me he’d seek political office. I cannot bear the thought of that.

While watching Ford’s credibility publicly questioned has made the past week difficult for me, I am inspired by her bravery and thankful that the work I do as a fellow for NextGen Virginia allows me to mobilize young voters and advocate for legislators who represent and value us as women. We have a lot of progress to make—and we’ll start with the midterms.

— Julia Salavantis
Junior, Political Science

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CT Comics

The Struggle by Ellie Erhart



Sweater Weather by Erin Joo



Cryptids of VCU by Elizabeth McCown

