



COLLEGIATE MAGAZINE

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COLLEGIATE MAGAZINE

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

We're living in chaotic times where things change around us daily. However, in the midst of all the constant changes, here at 'The Collegiate', we've been able to compile stories that share new beginnings, calls to action, belonging, and a sense of pride in our communities. Welcome to the 2025-26 edition of 'The Collegiate' magazine. Throughout your reading, we hope that even though the world around us seems to be on fire, you can get temporarily lost in the stories from student reporters. With this edition, we hope to leave readers inspired, informed, and united to keep moving forward.

Sincerely,

Jakhari Carroll

Editor-In-Chief

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Alumni Reflect on Six Decades of Change at GRCC

By Karalynn Davis



On a crisp autumn morning in 2009, academic advisor Kaelee Steffens, then Kaelee Macklin, walked across the campus of Grand Rapids Community College with her trusty MP3 player, earbuds singing, “I’m so 3008, you’re so 2000 and late, I got that boom boom boom, that future boom boom boom,” as she headed to her student employee shift at the Enrollment Center.

“Zombieland,” starring Jesse Eisenberg and Emma Stone, just hit theaters. Lady Gaga, Beyoncé, and the Black Eyed Peas dominated the pop charts. “Glee” was taking the world by storm. For Macklin, it was another ordinary day as a GRCC student, which she was until her graduation in 2012.

Nearly two decades later, Steffens is married to a fellow GRCC alumnus, Travis Steffens, and together they are raising two young children. Though life has moved quickly post graduation, she still recalls the professors who challenged her, the friends who turned into lifelong connections, and the small campus she continues to call home. As GRCC evolves, alumni reflections like Steffens’s reveal not only how the college has changed, but what has remained at its core all along.

By speaking with five alumni, spanning from 1965 to 2023, a mosaic of memories pieces together a portrait of how GRCC has transformed, through the music students listened to and the buildings they studied in, and what has remained unchanged over the decades.

Campus Culture, Then v. Now

Mary James, my grandmother, attended Grand Rapids Community College when it was known as “Grand Rapids Junior College” from 1963 to 1965, before transferring to Hope College in Holland. James remembers her excitement to start college, saying, “Just like kids today, I was happy to have graduated from high school and ready to take the first big step toward reaching my goal of becoming a teacher,” she said. “I didn’t know anyone at GRJC and made a lot of new friends. Some of them stand out in my memory, but I am no longer in touch with



any of them. Mostly, I remember being excited about being a college student and enjoying the people and the classes.”

James’s transistor radio held a mirror up to the culture at the time. “I was not into what was called ‘rock and roll’ in the ‘60s. I was not a fan of the Beatles, but liked Ricky Nelson, Pat Boone and Neil Diamond.” Because James is my grandmother, I can confirm that to this day the only artist I’ve witnessed her listen to firsthand is Neil Diamond— she has never been about the Beatles noise.

James’s favorite thing to get for lunch on campus was a daily chocolate chip cookie from the cafeteria located at what is now Raleigh J. Finkelstein Hall, “There was a cafeteria on the top floor of the building at 143 Bostwick, and the food was very good,” James stated.

Andy Schultz, Executive Chef of Four Chefs, a business local to Grand Rapids, graduated from GRCC in 2008, getting his Associate of Applied Arts and Sciences in Culinary Arts at the Secchia School for Culinary Education. His campus dining experience was night and day to James’s, “I do not go out for lunch, I make my own food. Being in the industry, I do not feel like the caliber is up to par as it was 20 years ago. I make lobster tail, crab cakes, filet, etc,” Schultz explained.

Kaelee Steffens shared her love for Art and Bev’s— which is now Foodology— in the Applied Technology Center, when asked what her favorite thing to get there was, she said, “everything.” Steffens also enjoyed Patatas, where she would frequently get nachos or a baked potato.

Though Schultz graduated only four years before Steffens, their college music taste couldn’t be more varied. Schultz remarked how he was (and still is) into country music, with his favorite band being Old Dominion who got their start in 2007. Steffens was more into the Billboard Top 100, with some notable favorites being Beyonce, Black Eyed Peas, Kanye West, 3OH!3, The Fray, and Miley Cyrus. Steffens said, “Everyone knows ‘Party in the USA,’ I don’t care who you are. If you Google Billboard Hot 100 Pop songs, I probably listened to it.”

Tanisha Williams is an alumna from 2025, getting her associate’s degree in social science. Williams, having graduated only last year, explained that her music taste hasn’t shifted much. “I still listen to Reggae music,” Williams started, “I always have, and I always will listen to roots, reggae and culture music from the Caribbean.”

As for Williams’ campus dining experience, she shared, “I lived in the Raider Grill and in the Café and I can recite the menu at both places! I usually got soup and a sandwich, sometimes all I could afford was the soup.”

Professors who changed everything

Any college student, regardless of the time or place, knows one thing to be true: Professors make or break the class. GRCC is fortunate to have many amazing professors, and this has been a constant across each decade.

James recalled enjoying most of her classes at GRJC equally, having a good time making friends and challenging herself in every class. Williams had a similar sentiment, saying, “My favorite professor and my favorite class vary for many reasons. I can’t just give flowers to one class or one professor because I have a handful of amazing professors.”

Schultz recalls his favorite professor being Chef Bob Schultz, and his favorite class was his field experience for The Heritage, which remains GRCC’s fine dining establishment on campus.

Steffens remembers her time in the education program fondly, “My favorite professor was probably Leigh Kleinert, everyone was great, but she changed the way I felt about myself as a learner,” Steffens started, “My favorite class was probably ED 200, because I was certain I was going to be a K-12 educator. That changed for personal reasons, but I am still a firm believer that education is our most powerful tool and resource for change,” Steffens stated.

Getting involved on campus

Arguably, just as important as the time spent on campus is what students do after their homework is done. From work to extracurricular activities, the alumni all shared what they did while they were juggling classes.

James didn’t have as many extracurricular opportunities as students have nowadays, but her schedule remained full during her time at GRJC, “I had a part-time job at Steketee’s, one of the large department stores that populated Monroe Avenue at that time. There were Steketee’s, Wurzburg’s, Herpolsheimer’s, and Houseman’s (Houseman and Jones Clothing Company), along with many other smaller dress shops and shoe stores,”

James recounted, “During my second year at JC, I also worked at Bishop’s Furniture store on Ionia. All of these businesses are only distant memories -- none of them exist today,” James said.

Schultz worked as well, getting involved in working for the culinary department both in their storerooms and banquets.

Steffens was a student employee working in the Enrollment Center, so she was heavily involved in the campus community. She helped with open houses and Raider Rally, but also frequently walked the hallways in search of a good time.

Extracurricular activities didn’t take up much of Williams’s time, instead she spent her time with the TRIO office, “My favorite moments always began and ended at the student center with TRIO staff and the amazing team who provided guidance, support, tools for success, a quiet place to study and always had fun activities for us to keep us motivated.”

Williams also remembers the Center for Student Success, which closed shortly after she graduated, “I went to my success coach frequently, and he was always encouraging, helpful and full of resources.... I always walked away empowered.” Though time at a community college is crucial, where the

Preparing for life after GRCC

alumni went afterwards is just as important. Whether through extracurriculars or classes, GRCC acted as a launch pad for all the alumni interviewed.

“Upon graduating from GRJC, I transferred to Hope College and was well prepared to continue my education and complete my bachelor’s degree,” James said, “... I never felt as though I had missed anything or was lacking in any way in my preparation for my classes there. After Hope College, I later earned two master’s degrees from Western Michigan University and had a successful career in classroom instruction, school libraries, and school administration.”

Schultz finished the culinary program at GRCC with the skills to take him all around America.

“I gained the knowledge from my professors to take with me in each place I worked,” he said. “If that was in Hawaii, Colorado, Aquinas College, Pinterest, and my own business.” Schultz

is the Executive Chef for Four Chefs, based in Grand Rapids, which offers services for privately catered events, custom meal delivery, and individual cooking lessons

“I grew up inside of these walls,” Steffens said, “I left for a while and went to GVSU, but my heart stayed here and that’s why I came back. Starting as a student employee, I immediately felt supported in completing my education, but also encouraged to explore the campus and student activities. It was also in that position that I learned a lot about collaboration, teamwork, respect, and leadership.”

Williams remembers how GRCC helped her build important skills for transferring, “GRCC prepared me for life beyond community college by giving me a strong academic and personal foundation. It helped me develop effective study habits, improve my time management, and become confident using computers and online learning platforms, which has been essential now that I am attending a university.”

What they hope hasn’t changed

Through changing buildings, new mascots, and an ever-changing student body, the alumni have a few things they hope every GRCC student can experience.

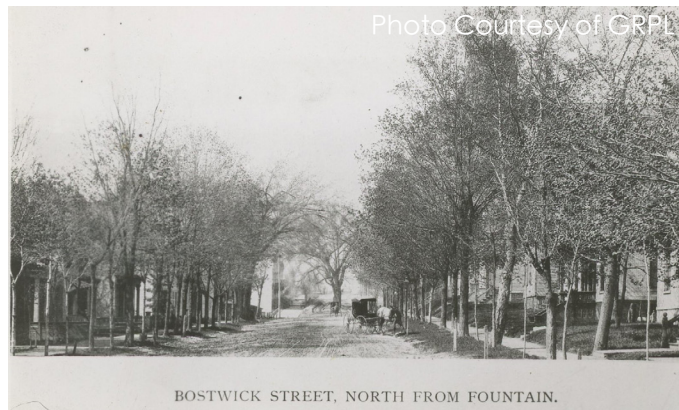
James talked about her family enjoying the value of an education, “I have a daughter who works there and, via my knowledge about her job, I know how hard the college works to insure the success of their students,” she started, “In addition, I have three granddaughters who are students there today and am impressed with how much they value it, how they appear to be impressed with their instructors, and how much they enjoy the activities in which they participate such as music, drama, and publications. ... I see my granddaughters experiencing and appreciating the same things I did 63 years ago: new friends, challenging classes, and a variety of activities.”

In a similar vein, Schultz hopes the culinary students are still getting the level of education he had the opportunity to get, “There are different classes being offered, but are those classes to the full potential the students can use? Have the banquet class catered to the offices on campus. Give the students real life experience that way. My business I have 10 different corporate businesses that I cater to throughout the year. I gained that experience at GRCC when I was a student working in the banquets.”

For Williams, she shared what changed that she hopes will go back to how it was, “I am told that the program that made my student life a thousand times better had changed drastically and I don’t know if it changed for the better. I just pray the students that attend have the success coaches as well as TRIO services because I honestly can’t imagine myself graduating without them, always ready to assist.”

And for Steffens, while she accepts that the Black Eyed Peas aren’t on the Billboard Top 100, and her kids are using her old iPod as a “pretend phone,” she has a few hopes of her own.

“I hope current students get to experience finding a community at GRCC,” Steffens shared. “Being a student employee on campus really set me up for success, and I found a group of people who made me feel cared for, and I think it changed my entire trajectory.”



This photograph is identified on a label as “Homes at left replaced by present Junior College and which originally was Davis Technical High School, erected about 1922. Further up are the famous elms in center of street and remained there until 1960s when they were estimated to be more than 200 years old. Solid brick wall at left of elm is south wall of apartment house still there, although condemned, in 1980 and which was built in 1890s.”



This is a black and white exterior photograph of the gymnasium at the corner, with the East building to the south of it on the campus of Grand Rapids Junior College, located on the southeast corner of Lyon and Ransom.

Should *Celebrities* Speak Out

About **POLITICS?**

By Grace Holmes

Those who keep up with current events may often feel emotionally drained as headlines that feel far too outlandish and devastating continue to flood publications across the nation. Unfortunately, this is just the reality of the current world. In response to the fast-paced environment, many media consumers may feel quick to anger. People may even want to assign blame to celebrities who choose not to speak about the political environment.

While everyone is entitled to their own opinion, Grand Rapids Community College students did not stay silent about their thoughts. When asked if celebrities should be involved with politics, the response was surprisingly more united than polar.

"I think it's good that they do, but I feel like it shouldn't be required," said Dylan Cotecki, 19, of Grandville.

Traclinh Christensen, 18, of Grand Rapids, shared a similar view, "Yeah, I think it's perfectly fine to not say anything."



Joshua Salgado, 19, of Grand Rapids, bluntly stated, “I don’t like it.”

While some students said they do believe celebrities should stay out of politics, their reasoning was more varied.

“I watch a lot of YouTubers and streamers. I feel like with them, if their content, or what they do, isn’t very political, they shouldn’t be forced to give out their opinions,” Cotecki shared. “I see a lot of people kind of get upset and, like, hate on different celebrities for not speaking up... when I don’t think it should be required of them.”

Salgado and Christensen were more concerned with celebrities’ vast fan base.

“I feel like they have too much influence in certain areas, so it can sway the public”

“You know how people are, like, super fans and stuff like that? Like, basically sometimes even cults and stuff,” Salgado said.

Christensen said, “They have a lot of sway... like they have a lot of influence.”

“I feel like those people are easily manipulated to like either vote for somebody or vote for a policy because they like the celebrity that much,” Salgado further explained.

Cotecki was under a slightly different impression. He said, “... For example, if, like, Jack Black speaks out against something, that’s not gonna change a whole lot, you know?”

As students continued to share their thoughts, some did reveal it was refreshing when celebrities speak out.

“I feel like personally it comes down to morality at this point, and humanity,” said Rissa Hellem, 33, of Grand Rapids.

Christensen agreed that it is important for celebrities to speak up about politics, but only if they have relevant and credible information to share.

“I feel like they should be able to voice their opinion, but give, like, references and be like, ‘oh, this is what they’re doing,’

not be like, ‘hey, you should support this, or I just support this side,’” Christensen said. “I feel like they should say specific things about what they believe in if they’re going to voice their opinions.”

Hellem elaborated more on her thinking and said, “It’d be nice to kind of hear what they really, truly feel about the whole thing going on... with the current events. I feel like it’s more important for them. So we can kind of judge their personal character a little bit more.”

Despite many people who feel compelled to critique celebrities who do not share their thoughts about certain issues, Cotecki does not think it is appropriate to judge those who choose to keep their political beliefs private.

“I do feel like it’s good when people do speak out about the issues. I just don’t feel comfortable yelling at people and forcing them to give their opinions when they don’t want to,” Cotecki shared.

Regardless of belief, students seem to understand the unique circumstances of today’s ability to always stay tuned in, whether about politics or celebrities.

“It’s kind of a weird situation, ‘cause, like, if they (do speak up about politics), that’s good, and that’s important,” Cotecki said. “But if they don’t, it shouldn’t be a big deal that they don’t.”



My Unorthodox Journey to Becoming a College Basketball Player



By Charlie Commeret

Being a college athlete of any kind is an impressive achievement, no matter the level, as only about 7% of all high school athletes go on to play in college. The process for most student athletes who go on to play in college involves going through the recruiting process in high school and ultimately making a decision about which school to continue their academic and athletic career. The decision is based on a multitude of factors, including financial aid package, the fit in terms of the sport you are playing, and the distance from home, just to name a few. For the majority of people, their college career starts the fall after high school graduation, and can last

for up to four years.

Initially, it was looking like that was going to be the case for me. Toward the end of my senior year at Comstock Park High School, I decided to commit to Grace Christian University in Wyoming, Michigan, to play basketball at the next level. I was extremely excited to get to work in the summer and prepare for the upcoming season after taking a much-needed break after my long senior season.

But as I started to prepare for the season, things just didn't

quite feel right, as I was struggling with the pressure of being a college basketball player, and overall, I just didn't experience the same enjoyment playing the game as I did before. From getting nervous before every open gym and putting unnecessary pressure on myself to prove that I belonged, to the stress of making the transition from high school to college academically, I just did not feel like myself.

I decided to make the tough decision to quit the team and give up basketball. I also dropped out of school before the first semester first-semester began. It was really hard to say goodbye to the sport that I played for the majority of my childhood and teenage years, but I knew that it was the right one, at least for the time being.

The next few months were the toughest months of my entire life, as I struggled with losing my identity, which had just been being a basketball player my whole life. Working 40 hours a week at a job I didn't like defeated me as I fell into a depression like nothing I had experienced before. From the panic attacks every morning and not being able to eat, as well as struggling to get out of bed every morning, I knew I needed help, but I just needed to ask for it. I sat down one day with my mom and dad and just told them what I was feeling, and that I felt like giving up. Together, we decided that going into counseling was necessary.

As difficult as it was to ask for help and to open up to my counselor about my experiences, it was the best decision of my life.

Later that year, I decided to enroll at Grand Rapids Community College for the winter semester and pick up school again. Things started to get back to normal as the school year started to get rolling, and I started to feel a sense of purpose once again. As I was in a better mental state, I started to pick up a basketball again and just casually shoot around or go play with my friends on Thursday nights.

As time went by and I started getting back into basketball shape and playing again, I wondered if it was too late to try playing in college. At this point, I had made up my mind that I was going to go all in and try out for the basketball team at GRCC. I felt like I had regained the joy of playing basketball again, and overall was determined to make a comeback to the sport I had previously dedicated my time to.

Going into the spring and summer, I had played in a few open gyms at the Ford Fieldhouse and got a feel for playing with college-level players. However, at this point, I wasn't dwelling on every missed shot, every mistake, and wondering if I was good enough. I just went out and had fun playing the game I love. As I felt more and more comfortable getting up and down the court, which took a while as I hadn't really played much basketball in my time off, I knew I could compete against high-level players.

As I went all in on my training, from getting shooting reps in as well as conditioning my body in the weight room, and continued to progress physically, there was still the uncertainty that I wouldn't make the team. Thoughts roamed through my head all the time, and doubt was circling, but I kept telling myself to keep working, and everything would take care of itself.

As the tryout day came around, I felt a huge pit in my stomach—this was do or die for my basketball career. However, as the day went on, my nerves eased up, knowing that I had gone all in and that I had done everything in my power to accomplish my goals. As I walked into the gym, I felt ready to go, and I was prepared to leave it all on the court. As the two hours of conditioning, skill work, and scrimmaging came to a close I was still having thoughts go through my head if I had done enough to make the team, but as I sat in my bed at night reflecting about the tryout I was able to put myself at ease, as I knew I had left it all on the court and whatever happens, happens.

As a few days passed by and I had assumed I didn't make the team, I was caught off guard as GRCC Men's Basketball Coach Joe Fox had reached out to me to schedule a meeting the next day. The next afternoon, before the meeting, I wondered if he was calling me in his office to tell me I didn't make the team. As I walked into his office, he let me know that I had been offered a roster spot. Hearing this news, I felt a sense of relief knowing that all my hard work and dedication had paid off, and also a great sense of joy knowing that I was going to fulfill my dream of being a college basketball player. Overall, I reflected on how far I had come from the previous year and how much better things were now.

My journey to becoming a college athlete was very different from most people, but I do know that it brought out the best in me.

OPINION:



Podcasts are in, but they're not the news, and it's important to remember the difference. By Gabriel Solis

On Jan. 16, 2026, the Wall Street Journal published an article entitled, “Is Trump Losing Joe Rogan, America’s Most Important Swing Voter?” Its opening paragraphs compare Rogan’s recent criticism of the President to Walter Cronkite’s unwillingness to take Lyndon B. Johnson at his word concerning the Vietnam War. It goes on to call each “an essential barometer of national sentiment in a fractured and suspicious age.” How could a legitimate and influential news organization confuse the power of a podcaster with that of a revered icon of the news industry?

Well...we’ll get to that.

First, though, let’s address what that comparison gets right: Rogan’s podcast, and others in the same format, are big. Really big. Everybody and their mother has one. “The Joe Rogan Experience” has been cultivating an audience in the tens of millions for the better part of two decades, and in recent years, many shows from Rogan’s contemporaries in the comedy and entertainment world have caught up to those numbers. And these are just the notable ones; anybody with a microphone and an internet connection can start up a podcast, and many do. For every “Joe Rogan Experience,” there are hundreds of amateur copycats that fly under the radar of success.

What’s even greater than the scale of their audience is the sphere of their influence. In the lead-up to the 2024 election, both Donald Trump and JD Vance appeared on Joe Rogan’s podcast. They also both appeared on comedian Theo Von’s “This Past Weekend” podcast, as did Sen. Bernie Sanders. Then-candidate Kamala Harris appeared on “Call Her Daddy,” hosted by Alex Cooper. In the 2020s, this is what it means to campaign. Sure, there were still platform debates, moderated by journalists and aired on major networks. There were rallies, attended by tens of thousands. There were television advertisements that played on repeat for months. But all of these politicians deduced, quite correctly, that the best means of reaching an entire key demographic was not through these traditional campaign tactics, but through podcasting. All else aside, the power that the medium holds in this moment cannot be overstated.

Now, let’s address the elephant.

Walter Cronkite was a journalist, a trusted newsman whose steady cadence and rock-solid credibility guided America through the assassinations of King and Kennedy, the horrors of the conflict in Vietnam, and the tumultuous climate of the 1960s and ‘70s. Joe Rogan is a comedian, former reality TV host, and UFC commentator. He is not required to adhere strictly to fact, and rarely does. By his own admission, he is often unaware of the scope of misinformation that is spread on his show. Neither man is or was “an essential barometer of national sentiment,” and to compare the two is to compare a single person’s opinion with the gold standard of objective truth. In an era virtually infested with misinformation, it is a costly mistake to make.

Podcasts are not the devil. They can be funny, entertaining, enlightening, and even informative. “The Collegiate” should know, we make one ourselves. But the fact that they hold the level of influence that they do is, frankly, alarming, and it speaks to a broader problem.

According to a Pew Research Center study, 38% of US adults regularly get their news from Facebook, 35% from YouTube, and 20% each from Instagram and TikTok. Over half of respondents said they at least sometimes got their news from social media. It is impossible to consume news this way without it becoming at least a little bit tinted by the lens of the person posting it. As a culture, we are becoming so saturated with subjective responses to objective facts, non-newspeople talking about the news, that we are collectively blurring the line between the two. This allows for reality to be distorted and for facts to be manipulated, which is, in a word, dangerous.

There is nothing inherently wrong with liking “The Joe Rogan Experience.” Or “Call Her Daddy.” Or any other podcast, internet show, or social media page. But there is a distinction between what these shows provide and the dedicated journalism that, to date, has kept our leaders (mostly) accountable and our people (mostly) informed. Perhaps it’s time we re-establish that distinction.



Cherishing Childhood Memories through Books

By Alexandria Webb

Most of us know the iconic books that built our childhood, from “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” by Eric Carle to “Green Eggs and Ham” by Dr. Seuss. There are books that build our character or have special memories or moments tied to them. Grand Rapids Community College students recall their favorite childhood books and the significance of them.

Gabrielle Lauer, 26, of Saranac, said one of her favorite childhood books is “The Giving Tree” by Shel Silverstein.

“My mom used to read it to us, and it has more of a deeper meaning, especially now. It relates to children and adults as well,” said Lauer.

Lauer offered insight into what the book means to her and how the lessons from this book shaped her into the adult she is today.

“The biggest lesson in that book was don’t give away too much of yourself to please others. Do what makes you happy, instead of what makes others happy, and that’s guided me throughout my life,” Lauer said.

While some may learn life lessons from these childhood books, others have core memories tied to them. Richard Contreras, 19, of Rockford, said his favorite book was “The Runaway Bunny” by Margaret Wise Brown, although his mother would read the Spanish version titled, “El Conejito Andarín”.

“It was funny because she would always read it, and she doesn’t know Spanish. My dad is Spanish and she would really accentuate all the pronunciations, so it was really fun,” Contreras said.

When asked why that book was so special to him, Contreras responded.

“Because my mom would pretty much make fun of it, that’s what it was,” said Contreras, “My mom, she is very silly, so that’s why. It brought that out in her.”



One thing many students can recall from middle school or elementary school experience was an event called The Scholastic Book Fair, where students could purchase a multitude of books or book-related items.

Students remember some of their memories of the book fair.

“I remember making a wish list a couple of times, then all I would really get were the fun erasers. That would be fun,” said Contreras with a laugh.

Not only did this event offer books for students but also a time to connect with others through reading.

“Going with all my friends and seeing all the cool stuff that was there, and kind of bonding with my friends with it,” Laurer recalled. “...Reading is super important. Books are super important, and for kids to go there and see that there are other people that read, that’s super awesome.”

Even though every student grows up in a different environment or culture, students can look back and relate to each other by remembering those iconic childhood books.

“I would say it makes it more relatable for people who grew up in a similar way, but even then, you don’t have to grow up

in a similar way to know those books because those... are iconic,” said Contreras, when asked how these books have shaped our generation and culture.

With how fast the world moves and how it is constantly changing, information is being altered and can oftentimes be confusing or hard to understand. Yet, Contreras highlights how



reading can help one decipher mixed information disguised as truth.

“I would say a lot of information online that information’s more accessible than ever right now. So being able to read and discern which is true, and which might not be true, is probably the most important part right now when it comes to information,” said Contreras.

Reading opens up horizons and perspectives that might not have ever been thought of. Books, whether the classics read in high school or children’s books read in Pre-K, can offer insight.

“When you read, you learn. Any book that you ever have read helps you learn and helps you gain perspective throughout your whole life,” said Lauer. “Whether it’s a kids’ book or a chapter book, or an adult book, it shows you a lens into the future and helps you grow as a person.” Books hold more than just words that touch each person’s

heart. They hold memories or a life-altering lesson. Cherishing the childhood memories through these books can remind people that at the end of the day, each person can relate to one another. They can do this by remembering that at one point, everyone was a child just wanting to read their favorite book.



My Favorite By Alexandria Webb Childhood Book

Growing up in a military household where everything seemed to constantly change, books stayed consistent. I knew how they ended, and they were relatable to me as a kid.

One book that was significant in my life was “Who Stole the Cookie from the Cookie Jar?” by Margaret Wang. This book had many good memories attached to it. As I mentioned before, I came from a military household. My dad was gone most of the time at work, school, or on deployments growing up. Yet, he would still make time to read this book to my brother and me.

He would sing it aloud in the funniest of voices, making sure each character had a different voice. Spoiler alert: at the end of the book, it was the dad eating the cookies, and I found that absolutely hilarious. This book ended up being a comfort to me while he was away on deployments.

I loved this book so much that in first grade, I was allowed to have an adult of my choice come in and read a book. My dad came in his military uniform, straight from work, to read to my class and would sing, “Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar?” Although my classmates didn’t find it nearly as funny or amusing, I couldn’t help but have the biggest smile on my face.

Another book that was a part of my childhood was “I Love You Stinky Face” by Lisa McCourt. It has an absolutely beautiful message about a mother’s love for her child, that no matter what, her love is unconditional.

The little kid in the book would go into so many silly and goofy situations of ‘what if,’ and the mother found a reason to help while expressing why she would love them no matter what. As my mom would read the book, it made me realize that no matter what situation I find myself in, she would still love me and do her best to help.

These books still pop up in my mind every so often, and the memories comfort me when times are tough. It is amazing to be able to read these books now and have all of these memories and lessons with me today. It makes me so excited to share some of these stories with my future kids and discover new ones.

According to Goodreads, these are the top
10 Childrens Books of all time:

- 1. Where the Wild Things Are** by Maurice Sendak
- 2. The Very Hungry Caterpillar** by Eric Carle
- 3. The Giving Tree** by Shel Silverstein
- 4. Green Eggs and Hams** by Dr. Seuss
- 5. Goodnight Moon** by Margaret Wise Brown
- 6. Charlotte’s Web** by E.B White
- 7. The Cat in the Hat** by Dr. Seuss
- 8. Where the Sidewalk Ends** by Shel Silverstein
- 9. If You Give a Mouse a Cookie** by Laura Joffe Numeroff
- 10. Love You Forever** by Robert Munsch

**How many of these books
have you read growing up?**

You Need a Bike: Here's Why

By Gabe Amy

My personal journey with bike riding started last summer. I was depressed, feeling the weight of the world and its legion of injustices. Paralyzed. Lumping by treating my body like a cesspool, it was honestly gross. The only laundry I was doing was the bare minimum required for work: bleached jeans and whatever new t-shirt I got from the beer rep that week. Working at a dive downtown GR, I would wake up at 8:15 p.m., giving myself 45 minutes to shower and get to my 9 p.m.-4 a.m. shift. Then I'd go home, play video games until 6 a.m., go to bed, rinse and repeat.

I was miserable and lacking direction. I had a terrific network of friends and family, but felt so disconnected from them and almost resented them for giving a shit about me when I wouldn't even advocate for myself. That was when a friend asked me late on a Sunday night if I wanted to go on a bike ride.

I had ridden bikes growing up, taking trips with family on the Kal-Haven trail in South Haven and on Mackinac Island, and I had always enjoyed the activity. But one day, as most people do, I put my bike in the garage and never picked it back up.

My friend had recently stopped drinking and started biking as a hobby, proud of his growth and wanting to be supportive of his health kick, I agreed to the ride. Meeting at the bar we both worked at, we rode five miles to another friend's house. It was the most physical activity I had done in months. It wasn't until we arrived at the house that I realized there was more than 30 miles left on our journey.

Though this distance sounded daunting, my willing-

ness to push myself and the combined fear of missing out on the group adventure told me to carry on.

Getting home that night, I was ecstatic! My legs ached, my rear hurt from the seat, but I was so happy that finally I had a reason to be tired. I had pushed myself harder than I had ever thought possible in my depression-fogged state. Within a week and with some help from my friend, I had purchased and fixed up a black, steel-framed, single-speed bicycle from Facebook Marketplace and have been riding as often as possible since.

Bike riding helped me refine my confidence and also regulate my emotions. Every hill is an outlet, every final kick, I can let go of frustration. Being out in nature on the Millennium Park Trail or White Pine Trail is tranquil and calming. The fresh air and sunshine feed my soul.

The health benefits of bike riding are incalculable. Both mentally and physically. Tracking the progress on the free app Strava allows you to see your personal fitness growth, in addition to providing you with local routes that other people take their bikes on. You can compare, share, and compete against strangers or friends on the app. Strava also reinforces mental health in a positive way with app users being able to look back at their route and miles covered, also tracking the biggest climbs, and fastest miles. It really gives you immediate feedback on your progress.

Biking is also just extremely practical as a mode of transportation. You will never struggle to find a place to park. Bicycles have zero emissions, and you don't have to worry about refilling your tank. Sometimes

riding a bicycle can be faster than driving, and there is nothing more satisfying than blowing by cars gridlocked in traffic.

The price tag of a brand-new bicycle and helmet may be daunting. However, there are many great local shops with affordable options for your first bicycle.

I highly recommend Freewheeler, located at 915 Leonard St NW, Grand Rapids, or Grand Rapids Bicycle Company with locations at 1311 Fulton St E, in Grand Rapids and at 597 Ada Drive, in Ada. Both shops are operated by local enthusiasts who are not only kind, but knowledgeable and helpful, as well. Facebook Marketplace is also a great resource for finding a new home for a used bicycle and is often the most affordable option.

Should financial strains stop you from riding, know that Grand Rapids is home to a great organization called Upcycle. Upcycle refurbishes used bicycles and provides them to those in need of transportation. Upcycle provides riders with not only a bike but also a helmet, lock, and handbook to keep riders pedaling safely. Should you have a bicycle that you can't find a use for, consider donating that bike to Upcycle. More information can be found at www.upcyclebikes.org.

However, it is known among cyclists that the best bike for you is one you already own.

Bikes are most enjoyable when they are functioning correctly. Flat tires, unadjusted saddle height, poorly applied brakes, all can lead to an uncomfortable and potentially unsafe ride!

All the maintenance you may need can be affordably done by the shops listed above but if you plan on riding your bike consistently or are just curious about the hobby and want to learn how to service your own bike (which I highly recommend) the youtube channels Global Cycling Network and their sister channel GCN Tech have great videos for beginners on how to service your bike.

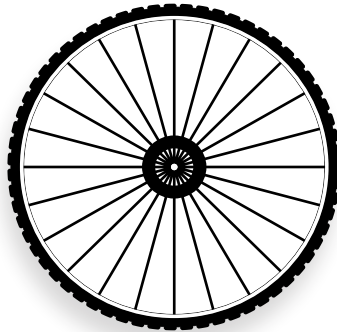
As far as tools go for basic Bicycle maintenance, you will need

- A set of metric allen keys (2-8mm)
- A floor bike pump with a working gauge
- 6-inch adjustable wrench
- 12-inch adjustable wrench

You also may want to invest in a multitool, a spare inner tube and a patch kit for on-the-road repairs.

Further pliers and tools may be needed for brake maintenance or installation but these operations should be done by a professional and can result in danger if not properly applied.

Bike riding has done a lot for me. I've connected with new communities I didn't know previously existed, I have a new discipline towards my health and overall fitness, and I've covered ground, boring highway views have become dense forest trail adventures! If reading this prompts one new person to pick up a bike, I will have succeeded. I really hope that this hobby can do for you what it has for me and so many others.



Photos By Kole Meschke



Who Is Kathryn Rogalski?

Inside the Story of GRCC's New President

By Jakhari Carroll

There was a time when becoming president of a college never crossed the mind of Kathryn Rogalski, the new Grand Rapids Community College president. Once upon a time she was just a young girl living on the north side of Chicago with her parents, thriving in athletics, with education not being at the top of her priority list like most young people.

Playing basketball, softball, tennis, and volleyball, athletics was what Rogalski loved. It was at the foundation of her heart and treasured greatly. Meanwhile, education stood on the sidelines, waiting for its turn to make an impact on her life. Even though Rogalski's love for athletics was apparent, getting an education was still something that both her parents highly wanted for her.

Rogalski's parents didn't go to college, and in fact, her dad didn't even attend high school, as he went off to the Army at age 16. He married her mother right after returning home. With her dad going on to work full-time and her mom staying home with her, Rogalski was able to benefit from having present and supportive parents at a young age.

"I had parents who were very interested in making sure I was successful," Rogalski said. "For them, it was really important for me to get my education."

After high school, and her time in athletics being over, college was next. But with education still not being high on her priority list, that decision came with some bumps in the road. "I wasn't so successful my first time around in college," Rogalski said. After two years in school, Rogalski decided to leave college and return home. Giving herself some time to think about what's next for her life.

But during the hiatus, a life-changing event occurred. Rogalski and her then boyfriend, now husband, Christopher, found out they were pregnant with their first child. A moment in someone's life that can sometimes cause them to put their big future plans on hold, but this, in fact, drove Rogalski to consider the possibilities that higher education could offer her and the newest addition to her family.

"That's what really motivated me to go back to college and get my degree," Rogalski said. She went on to attend Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. Returning to school as a new mom, Rogalski had a new reason and mission this time around. Despite the change in mindset, support from others in the journey was paramount to her success, and Rogalski mentions those people who helped her often. One of them is a faculty member at her school, Ruth Breckenridge Church.

"She really changed the trajectory of my life," Rogalski said. "I had never really thought about going after anything beyond a bachelor's degree; a bachelor's degree was always the goal, but I didn't know there were any goals beyond that."

Ruth instilled belief and provided opportunities to Rogalski that catapulted her academic career to heights that Rogalski herself could've never predicted. Moments that Rogalski believes changed her life forever.

"She allowed me to do undergraduate research, which allowed me to do things that not every student gets to do," Rogalski said. "I got to do research, and

I published a journal article when I was an undergraduate in college and I got to co-author, and go and present at National Associations with my faculty members, and I got to do that because she gave me opportunities and she believed in me."

Rogalski goes on to reflect on her husband, Chris Rogalski, who also provided encouragement outside of the classroom.

"He was, always is, and still is, so supportive," Rogalski said. "When I say 'this is what I got to do,' he's always like 'alright, what do we need to do to make it happen?' So I'm very fortunate to have him in my life. When I went back to get my master's after we got married, I told him, 'I'm going to quit my job, because I need to go into the master's program and it's a full-time program,' and he was like, 'Okay, we'll figure it out.' And I don't know that everybody's partner would be that understanding."

Love and support also came from the people who desired for her to get her education from the very beginning, her parents. "They were there the whole time, they supported me through childcare, and watched my daughter. Sometimes when I was out of school, and my husband was off work, they would cook us dinner," Rogalski said. "I was very fortunate to have the support system that I had around me when I went back to school."

Rogalski was officially announced as the 12th president of GRCC back in December of 2025. From that time to now, a lot of transition has taken place for Rogalski. She formerly served as Vice President of Academic Affairs and Workforce Development at

Northeast Technical College in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Relocating, learning her way around campus and a new city, getting to know new people and departments, it can all be overwhelming for most. But for Rogalski, the constant learning has been enjoyable thus far.

“I am having a lot of fun as the incoming president, sometimes I think maybe too much fun”

“It doesn’t feel like work, I really like it,” Rogalski said. Even though Rogalski has found joy in the early stages of her new role, it likely doesn’t compare to the bliss she feels while riding on her horse named Hilde.

“I like to horseback ride, and I’m learning new riding styles, and I have a coach,” Rogalski said. “Hilde is a really pretty horse, really fun, 12 years old right now, and I’ve had her for a little over a year. I started horseback riding when I was little, and then my daughter started riding also.”

As Rogalski is well into her role as president, the work behind the scenes to find her was a detailed and careful process. An approach that GRCC Board Chairperson, Salvador Lopez, believes they got right. “Dr. Rogalski brings the experience, skillset, and leadership to be an outstanding GRCC president,” Lopez said. “Even in the short time she has been in the role, I can already see the positive impact she is having on our campus, and that speaks for itself.”

For the college, having a permanent leader to usher us into a new chapter was the utmost importance for



Photo by Kole Meschke

the board. Now with Rogalski as president, Lopez hopes the students and campus community sees a person that is genuinely excited and cares about their success.

“Dr. Rogalski joins GRCC at the right moment for her and for us,” Lopez said. “She is dedicated, genuinely excited, and deeply motivated to make a meaningful difference, both on campus and in our broader community. I hope students see that and feel it.”

GRCC Provost and Executive Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs Sheila Jones has also been around to see Rogalski in action early on in her new role. Jones saw right away that Rogalski's level of care for GRCC was where it needed to be for the college to move forward.

"Dr. Rogalski showed great respect for and understanding of the GRCC community as she first stepped into the role," Jones said. "During her first week, we had the pleasure to join faculty and staff members at the Achieving the Dream (ATD) annual conference, where GRCC was named an ATD "Leader College." This recognition highlights GRCC's commitment to teaching and learning excellence."

"I can't think of a better way to welcome a new college president than by celebrating on a national stage," Jones continued. "The dedication of our faculty, staff, and administrators who provide thoughtful care and leadership in every area of this college, from teaching courses, providing student service support, researching how we can do better, and ensuring that our entire campus is a welcoming learning community. In spending time with Dr. Rogalski that week, it was evident that she understands the support our students, faculty, and staff need in order to continue to be the best choice for students in West Michigan."

With this being Rogalski's first time ever assuming a presidential role, the title alone can bring some

nerves, especially since anyone in her position would want to do a great job at leading an institution. Despite this, the nerves are something that Rogalski welcomes, knowing that it means she's continuing to grow in new ways.

"I'm not just going out and doing things that I'm comfortable with," Rogalski said. "I'm always pushing myself to be better, to learn new things. I was nervous during the process of coming into this role, but I'm not uncomfortable in nervous spaces. When I'm nervous, I'm okay with being nervous because I know that means that I'm pursuing something I care about."

It's been a long road from the little girl in Chicago who never thought she would be here. When athletics was king, and her educational goals and future had yet to be realized, having no idea that one day people will be calling her 'President Rogalski.'

With her now knowing how she'd end up, she emotionally reflects on what she would go back and tell her younger self as the new president of GRCC.

"Keep working hard, and keep believing in yourself," Rogalski said. "You don't have to do it alone. I think for many years I didn't allow myself to ask for help because I took it upon myself to make sure I was successful, and I didn't want to burden anyone else."

"As president, I'm here to really support students' educational journeys beyond even where they know they're going right now. But how can we help them to get to places that are going to transform their lives?"



Photo by Kole Meschke

Rogalski continued.

“But what I’m learning coming to GRCC and in my past roles is that it’s better when you do it together.” Rogalski goes on to leave a final note for GRCC students and the campus community as she embarks on her journey as president of GRCC.

“For me, being a president of a college is all about making sure that our students can have the outcomes that are going to support their futures,” Rogalski said.

“I believe in the power of education, so right now I get to be in a role where I have an influence over how do we remove barriers for students, how do we support students, and how do we make sure that we have pathways that they don’t even see right now? Like I had that opportunity with the faculty member who saw a future for me that I didn’t see.”



By Karalynn Davis

Paper Jam Volume 1: The Bridge Between

Oasis, The Beach Boys, and two long-haired teens from Grayling. What do they have in common? Brothers who make musical masterpieces when they stop arguing long enough to write a song.

The Bridge Between is a band based out of Grayling, Michigan, self-described as a blend of folk, rock, and

alternative genres featuring brothers Gabe and Graham Solis.

Gabe, 19, is one of the Collegiate's own as a staff reporter. In addition to the Collegiate, Gabe is a full-time student at GRCC. Graham, 17, is a junior at Grayling High School.

The Solis brothers have moved all over the United States for their parents' work. Both of the brothers were born in Battle Creek and began moving around the country in 2014. The family moved to Utah, Texas, Illinois, and ended up settling back in Michigan in the small town of Grayling.

"We're kind of roadrunners, but my formative years and his (Graham's) formative years, we spent in Grayling, where we were learning to play music and write songs together."

The Bridge Between got its name in a brainstorming session between Gabe and his old friends and bandmates. One of them suggested that the band should be called "The Bridge Between Worlds," which eventually got shortened. Gabe also explained how the name (which originally just sounded cool) stuck.

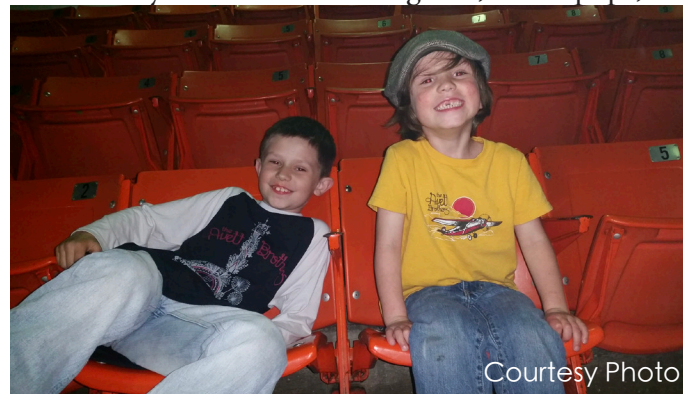
"When we were kids, before we lived up north, going up north was a huge thing. A big part of that was the Mackinac Bridge, and so that was a little bit a part of it, because it was transfixing, like you're being taken off to another world, even though we know it's just the UP. But it was a big thing as kids," Gabe said. "I don't think it would have stuck except my grandma told me she really liked it, and she thought it represented our cultural identity as a state. So I was like, 'I can't argue with Grandma!'"

The Bridge Between got its start in 2021 when Graham joined. Previously, the band was Gabe and his friends. Over the years, friends came and went, but there was one thing the band could rely on: Brotherhood.

Growing up, the Solis household was filled with noise. Their dad is a musician, inspiring the brothers to create sound, even if it wasn't always Bridge Between quality. "Music has been part of us since we were kids. If I don't have an instrument in my hands, it feels like someone cut my arm off," Gabe said.

Graham recounts growing up as the younger brother to Gabe, "From when I was little, there was always someone musical around who was better than me, and I didn't like that. I don't want to say I looked up to him (Gabe) because he'll hold it over my head forever—but I did. I learned piano because I'd see him doing it. He always claims he 'taught' me piano, but he kind of just pointed at the keys and was like 'This is an A.'" Graham said.

The Solis dynamic is one of long hair, short quips,



Courtesy Photo

and synergetic performing. Upon looking at the brothers, one would never guess that behind their dynamic lies something anyone with siblings could relate to: rivalry. "People don't know this, but we didn't get along until I was like 12. We were angry at each other constantly," Graham said.

“We’ve been fighting since he was born. But unlike normal bandmates, you don’t break up because of it,” Gabe said, “On Grand Valley’s campus, there’s that quote: ‘People who make music together cannot be enemies, at least while the music lasts.’ Every time I see it, it reminds me of him. We’re incredibly close, and like any close relationship, sometimes we click in a way nobody else understands, and sometimes we hate each other. But when we’re on stage, and I look at him, and he looks at me, you can’t hate each other in that moment. This thing unites us. He is the music.” Gabe said.

“When we play, I just know what he’s going to do. We grew up together—we can read each other instantly. He gives me a look, and I’m like, ‘Okay, he’s about to do that stupid thing I hate,’” Graham said.

The brothers write their own songs, and normally, the process is anything but linear. For the most part, Gabe takes the lead writing the songs, but collaboration is a crucial part of the band’s process.

“I do the words, the structure, and the instrumentation. I would say equally as important as that is the arrangement and the composition of it, which we collaborate very equally on,” Gabe started. “When we’re recording, it’s very nice to have someone that you can bounce ideas off of. There are things that would improve my compositions a thousandfold that I would never have thought of on my own. I do write

all the songs, but it’s a very collaborative process.”

In the process of writing the band’s favorite song to play, “Avalene,” Gabe kept introducing new moving parts to make the song better and better. “He always was like, ‘That was great, that was great. Let’s just do one more take.’ Then he’d be like, ‘So I thought of something new. That’s what we’re going to do instead of what I just said,’” Graham shared.



Courtesy Photo

“I was like, yeah, that sounded pretty good... maybe we could just tweak this little thing. I did that about 100 times for every little thing. It’s just such a complex thing. But I think we’re both really proud of the result. I always said it was more like watching a movie than listening to a song, and I liked that a lot,” Gabe added.

The brothers want Collegiate readers to know this: “We’re out there, and we’d love to connect with you. So you know where to look for us, we’re on Spotify, we’re on Apple Music, we’re out there playing,” Gabe said. “We’re also on Instagram @thebridgebetweenband. We’re out there if you want to head over and drop a follow. If we’re not your thing, stay tuned for more at the Paper Jam. They have a lot of cool stuff going on there.”



**Watch the first episode of
“Paper Jam” Here!**

Our Lives Online:

Photo by Kole Meschke

The Impacts of Social Media on Physical Health and Habits

By Kyle Jackson

Social media allows anyone to have a platform to share content and information with a large audience of anonymous users. As a result, information about lifestyle and physical movement travels to others at a rapid pace. However, not all of the information is credible.

Aiden Speigl, 19, is a freshman at Grand Rapids Community College and a current member of the baseball team.

“As of recently, there’s a lot more (misinformation), especially with AI,” said Spiegel when talking about his experience online. “It just seems like there’s been a lot, obviously, with the algorithms, there’s a lot for me, like health-based stuff. And then I like to look into it, so I’ll look into it sometimes, and a lot of the time, it’s actually completely, scientifically not backed, fake, which is ... is kinda taking advantage of people that don’t do that. Like ... online, they say it works, and they just trust them. They just take advantage of that.”

Other students have reported similar experiences with social media's depictions. Some students even reported that they have been seeing more doctored photos and misleading videos rather than written posts.

Media algorithms within apps such as Instagram or Facebook curate user feeds in order to keep consumers engaged.

With the large amount of misinformation and product bias being created in place of accurate information, these apps are pushing these posts toward accounts that have an interest in fitness and lifestyle. This creates confusion among people who are trying to create a better lifestyle for themselves and could result in extreme changes.

According to an article from ScienceInsites posted on Nov. 27 of last year, "Constant exposure to highly curated and often digitally altered images of "ideal" bodies drives negative social comparison and body dissatisfaction. This comparison can lead vulnerable individuals to adopt unhealthy and extreme behavioral responses in an attempt to conform to unrealistic standards."

"The pressure to achieve these unattainable aesthetics fuels the development of disordered eating patterns"

"Content promoting restrictive dieting, excessive exercise, or trends like "thinspiration" normalizes behaviors that pose a risk for clinical eating disorders.

Individuals who engage with appearance-related content are susceptible to these negative effects, correlating time spent on platforms with a negative self-image."

Other extreme changes can range from other mental health ailments to suicidal tendencies.

Kelly Dillon, age 34, is a licensed counselor at Grand Rapids Community College.

"I think one bit of research that comes to mind," said Dillon, "is talking about how people will often compare themselves to, you know, other folks on social media. And so what that means is your looking at stuff, your seeing what people that are portraying as, kind of often, the best sides of themselves, the best aspects of their lives, and you might experience, like, FOMO (fear of missing out), like, 'oh, I wish I was there, I wish I was doing that,' but also you might feel like, 'oh, I'm not, you know, I don't look as good' or 'I'm not doing all this stuff,' so you might just comparatively think that your not as good or as cool or whatever it may be."

According to Dillon, limiting exposure to social media can help restrict ideas of FOMO and negative self-worth.

The credibility of creators is the most important part of finding real information.

"The doctor that I follow, that I really like, he always cites his sources with clinical studies," said Spiegel. "Other guys that I follow fitness-wise show their progress over the years so it's kinda, like, self-credi-

bility almost. Because they are not trying to use what other people have done, they take pride in themselves.”

Progress photos and posts create a catalog of change over time and is a way for people to share their accomplishments as well as gain feedback. However, not all feedback is positive.

Depending on the app, both helpful and hurtful comments can be found under progress posts.

For apps like Reddit, the only posts with any notable comments were posts made by women. These comments ranged from users complimenting the poster’s newfound figure to outright threatening, degenerate comments. Meanwhile, posts depicting men on the same app had little to no traction.

Other apps like Instagram and Snapchat had a mixed reception with both photos and comments. Commenters often questioned the images or videos in question, while some sent simple compliments. As for the posts, a fair portion of them were doctored or edited. It took a good length of time to find genuine photos.

Even TikTok has its own problems with creator-made topics like Skinny-Tok where people attempt to be as thin as possible despite the risk.

“I think that (finding credible resources) can be tough to filter through in this age of misinformation”

”But I think looking at the source and thinking...is it to this person or this source’s advantage to kind of sell me on something, or are they just trying to give me information, right? So, do they have a kind of vested interest in me buying into, kind of, whatever they’re selling or pitching? I think that would be one critical way of thinking or looking at it.”

Dillon also stated that finding the original source of information that posters use is a viable method for verifying credibility.



JAMIE WANTS
YOU TO DO THE
RIGHT
THING



Make us **United States** again

By Jamie Miller

The subject of politics has inserted itself into every facet of life and has turned everything into a metaphorical battlefield. It seems that nowadays, you can't even tune into a YouTube music video without someone initiating an argument about Trump in the comments or something to that effect. Democrats vs. Republicans and conservatives vs. liberals seems to be the current battle of our generation... But it shouldn't be.

The United States of America was founded 249 years

ago on the concept that all men are created equal, and since then, we have struggled to fulfill this declaration. We fought an entire war to remove the practice of slavery, women had to march and even break the law to gain their own rights and Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and many other Civil Rights leaders led the struggle through the Civil Rights Movement to make America live by our own creed, to uphold the promises made so long ago, a promise many seem determined to keep fighting against.

To paraphrase a quote from the TV show "The 100"

which says, “Humanity is the only creature that acts against its own self-interest,” and that couldn’t be more true today. Americans elected Donald Trump as president for a second time, even after knowing the cost it would have, believing every lie, supporting every sin, and turning on one another. From putting fingers in our ears and ignoring his misdeeds and the horrible things he has said, to cheering and clapping as masked members of Immigration and Customs Enforcement dragged our fellow human beings off and murdered those who protested in cold blood. All of us have allowed this regime, these sick swindlers who masquerade as pious patriots, to erode the very fabric of our country. We have allowed people like so-called Fox News journalists Jesse Watters and Greg Gutfeld to pit us against each other. We have allowed them to make it a question of right vs. left rather than a question of what is and isn’t right. We have become puppets, fighting amongst ourselves.

But here’s the thing, we’re only puppets as long as we tolerate our strings. We all have the power to end this, to cut our strings and stop this. If we were to all stop fighting ourselves for five seconds and recognize that our discontent isn’t with each other but with the administration as a whole, we could end this madness in a week.

Those on the right talk about children being abused and our country becoming lawless and divided. This raises the question, which president’s name appeared in over 5,000 files related to Jeffrey Epstein? Which president has pardoned people who laid siege to the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to overturn a lawful election? Which president never misses an opportunity to initiate conflict, be it with reporters, lawmakers on

the other side of the aisle, or our own allies?

Trump and his subordinates have pitted us against each other because they know that if we were to wake up and unite together in protest, it would all fall apart. The protests in Minnesota have proven this. We have the power to stop this. There’s an old saying about the requirements for evil to triumph, but I prefer to look at it a different way. All that it takes for evil to fail is for good people to do something. If we were to unite arm in arm in protest, call, and picket, not giving them a moment’s peace, we could stop this. It’s never been a question of liberal vs. conservative, rather a question of what’s right vs. what’s wrong. So to every single conservative, I beg you, if you are really patriots, if you truly care about children, or the law, or God, then prove it, do the right thing. Trump is not a man of God. He doesn’t care about children or the law. He doesn’t even care about you. You’re little more than pawns on his unhinged chessboard, and he wouldn’t hesitate to sacrifice every one of you to enrich himself. And to those on the left, please focus on the real enemy here. The enemy isn’t your mom who rants about Joe Biden, the enemy isn’t your uncle who talks about the Democrats sacrificing babies, and the enemy isn’t your neighbor flying a Trump flag. The enemy is the people who are destroying our country one misdeed at a time. If we could all just band together and take a stand for what’s right, then we can save democracy.



Social Justice

A Year in Review





By The Collegiate Staff

‘No Kings’ Protesters Rally in Grand Rapids Against Trump Administration

By Jakhari Carroll

Protestors all over the country gathered yesterday for the “No Kings” protest against President Donald Trump’s administration. In Grand Rapids, there were two separate demonstrations, with one being at Riverside Park and the other at Rosa Parks Circle.

The “No Kings” protest, also known as the No Dictators or No Tyrants protest, is a series of demonstrations against what organizers describe as “a single-day protest against President Trump’s authoritarianism,” stated in a press release.

At Riverside Park, people of all ages and races, gathered together to express their dismay with the Trump administration. With many feeling that this is a pivotal time to make their voices heard, protestors attended so the opportunity wouldn’t pass them by.

Katherine Kennedy, 58, of Ada, didn’t hold back with just how important it is for people to speak up about the current state of our country.

“Our democracy is on the verge of collapse with what’s happening between the three branches of government and I fear for my children,” Kennedy said.

Having the right to peacefully protest and express opinions and views is one of the hallmark rights in America. It’s something that those who demonstrated Saturday want all people to take advantage of, especially those in the current and future generations.



‘Melt the ICE’ concert at Fountain Street Church unites the community

By Gabriel Solis February 19, 2026

On Sunday, Feb. 15, hundreds of people from the greater Grand Rapids area gathered at Fountain Street Church for “Melt the ICE,” a benefit concert for families affected by the recent actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Donations collected at the door and inside the event benefitted three local human rights organizations: Kent County Indivisible, Movimiento Cosecha GR, and SECOM Community Resource Center.

Attendees were present from every conceivable demographic, united in their opposition to ICE’s ongoing activity in Grand Rapids and beyond.

“You look around and it’s people of all generations,” said Neal Vantil, 17, of Grand Rapids, who attended the event. “It’s not just the youth, it’s the people who support the youth, and it’s the generations that came before us. We’re all coming together.”

‘Everyone Needs to Eat’: GRCC Food Pantry is actively working to help students in need

By Kyle Jackson November 4, 2025

Grand Rapids Community College is host to students of all ages and backgrounds. However, some students struggle to find their way with basic needs such as food. That is why GRCC has set up its very own food pantry, run by people dedicated to helping GRCC students.

Ocrea Collier has been a lifelong resident of Grand Rapids for 38 years and serves as the Student Resource Coordinator at GRCC. Having helped students for the past two years, Collier has seen and assisted with a variety of things. Namely, the on-campus food pantry.

“From what I know, I used to go to school here in 2010 and we did not have anything then...” said Collier, “What I got from my supervisor is that we pretty much had the closet, a small closet, back in 2016-2017, like right before COVID, where they had pre-packed bags and a student could request it.”

2025-26 Diversity Lecture Series, held by the Bob and Alecia Woodrick Center for Diversity & Multicultural Affairs

By Kole Meschke

Grand Rapids Community College's Bob and Alecia Woodrick Center for Inclusion & Multicultural Affairs hosted the 31st annual Diversity Lecture Series to promote social justice and a "culture of care." These events were designed to help the campus community connect historical civil rights milestones with today's social challenges. This series of lectures focused on shared humanity and resilience.

The individual lectures featured speakers who provided specific strategies for leadership and advocacy. Calvetta Watlington discussed the overlooked legacy of Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray, emphasizing how intersectionality helps people bring their full identities to social justice work. During MLK Legacy Week, Dar Mayweather taught that effective leadership requires a concrete plan and clear "impact statements" to ensure equity work continues for future generations. Finally, Dr. Rob Shorty spoke on "Radical Hope," defining it as a verb that involves taking small, consistent actions rather than waiting for a feeling of optimism to strike.

Ultimately, the series showed that systemic change relies on individual commitment and connection. Every speaker urged the audience to seek mentorship and recognize their own self-worth as a foundation for helping others thrive. By providing these educational opportunities, the Woodrick Center continues to equip the GRCC community with the tools needed to turn hope into measurable progress.

Read full coverage of these events at thecollegiatelive.com



Calvetta Watlington



Rob Shorty



Dar Mayweather

Beyond the Mound

Kalani Stowe's rise to pitching for GRCC Softball

By Alexandria Webb



At one point in her life, Kalani Stowe didn't think she would end up as a pitcher for any college team. Yet, with the support of her mentors, determination, and a love of softball, Kalani ended up throwing strikes for Grand Rapids Community College as one of the most outstanding pitchers to ever take the mound in GRCC history.

In her first year at GRCC, Kalani racked up an astounding list of accolades: All-Region, All-MC-CAA, First Team All-Conference, All-Freshman Team, Academic All-Conference, MCCA North-ern Conference Pitcher of the Week, Conference Player and Freshman of the Year.

She played in 41 games, starting in all 41. Stowe garnered an 18-1 pitching record, 1.02 ERA (1st in MCCA, 3rd in nation), seven shutouts (1st in MCCA), two no-hitters, 10.84 strikeouts/game (1st in MCCA, top-10 nationally), .142 batting average against (1st in MCCA, top-10 nationally), 159 strikeouts (3rd in MCCA).

At the plate, Stowe batted .441 with 12 doubles, four triples, two home runs, and 51 stolen bases (2nd in MCCA), scoring 58 runs (3rd in MCCA). Pitching, and she struck out 10+ batters in nine games, including a span of five-straight games. Stowe had an eight-game hitting streak from 4/1 to 4/12, batting .500 during that span. She had a season high of four hits vs. Delta College on 4/26.

Stowe helped the Raiders to a 39-6 record, a conference championship, and a runner-up finish in regionals.

Kalani, a GRCC sophomore, grew up as a multi-sport athlete, eventually settling into softball as her main sport. For her, it was a place to build friendships.



Courtesy Photo

"I kind of just tried everything, and then softball was the one I stuck with the most," Kalani said.

"I just loved the environment that I was in, on all of my teams, and just the friendships that I could build throughout the years."

Once she found her sport, Kalani dedicated her time to studying softball. She was practicing constantly and continually looking for opportunities to grow her skills. Her father, Matt Stowe, recalled her interest in softball even when she was young.

"She also spent a couple of summers at a young age watching college softball on YouTube because it wasn't on ESPN back then. ... Just learning the game, she had such a desire to gain knowledge of the game that she would just study softball," Matt said. "Just to learn more about strategies and different play opportunities, and at one point she had aspirations to be an Olympic softball player, which is probably the pinnacle of softball."

Softball became Kalani's passion, but little did she know of the challenges that lay ahead. The summer of her junior year, Kalani experienced an injury that would drastically alter her course.

"...I had a muscle spasm on my hip, which is really weird. It's not like a usual injury. I didn't know if I was going to ever be able to pitch again, because it happened when I was pitching. I was on my landing leg, it was like a really bad mound that I was pitching on, and my leg spasmed up, and I fell to the ground in the middle of the pitch. I had to get carried off the field," Kalani said.

"The recovery was really rocky, I did physical therapy and then had to see a chiropractor. The chiropractor eventually helped the most of anything, but the movement of it, I didn't think I was ever going to be able to fully pitch again, because when I came back (to pitch), then it wasn't tensing up on my hip anymore, I started hitting my elbow to my hip on the other side. It was kind of just problem after problem after that."

At that time, Kalani believed she wouldn't even be able to play again, let alone pitch for a college team.

"After that injury happened, I kind of stopped reaching out to college coaches, and because I wanted to go to a four-year college and...play softball at a

bigger college, but I thought that I wasn't even able to play again, I stopped reaching out to coaches," Stowe said.

Throughout this time, Kalani, with the help of Wyoming High School Varsity Assistant and Pitching Coach Kristen Kooienga, started to rework her form as a pitcher.

"There were a few times during the off-season when we were working through what her body would let her do. I would say well if you can't jump and pitch, I guess we will have to just step and pitch, and we will play better defense behind you," Kooienga wrote in a text message to "The Collegiate."

"Even when Kalani couldn't do full pitching, she was still putting in the work at lessons. There were days where we only worked on spinning the ball and arm circles. I think it helped Kalani mentally to have somewhere to go and work on whatever she could that day. The barn was a safe place to vent and work out her frustrations and fears. Kalani's junior/senior year, she worked through another injury as well. She was hitting her hip with her elbow, causing a lot of pain and bruising.

Kooienga continued, "This injury, she pushed through and pitched through the pain until we finally figured out how to fully correct it. In the back of her head, even after both injuries healed, there were a lot of 'what if' it happens again. So we had to work through those thoughts and how to move beyond them. There was a time where Kalani didn't want to play in college due to injuries (and) the fear of them returning or not getting better."

Kalani credits her progress in softball to Kooienga and other coaches whose mentorship and guidance helped her through some of the toughest moments.

"(With) the help of my pitching coach and the coaches that I had in high school. They saw the greatness and potential in me, and so they pushed me through it. There were so many times I was (with) my pitching coach, and I just wanted to give up, and she encouraged me every single time, and got me back out there. She knew that she didn't want to see wasted potential in me," Kalani said.

Cindy Stowe, Kalani's stepmother, offered insight as a parent watching the recovery process.

"She's had a few injuries, and you know your first thought is, is she going to be able to continue? Is she going to lose her aggressiveness? Is she going to lose her confidence? And I feel like every time she has an issue, she comes back a better and stronger athlete," Cindy said.

Matt explained that the best thing they could do during this time is be emotionally available for Kalani, as she navigates where to go from there.

"Mainly just making sure she had a space to deal with it emotionally, but also continue to... push forward and overcome whatever adversity those injuries were bringing her emotionally and mentally, and physically, too," Matt said.

Kalani notes that her parents have always been there for her, "My parents have always been my number one supporters, coming to every game and everything. They just want what's best for me, and they can see that I was a lot happier in softball."

Overcoming those obstacles, Kalani continued to play softball, though she wasn't looking to continue on to college. Until GRCC softball Head Coach, Chuck White entered the picture.

“The summer of my senior year of high school, the summer after my injury happened, I hadn’t been in contact with Coach White at all. Then he was actually looking at another pitcher on my travel team, and he asked if I could, because I was catching at the time...I was still not fully recovered from my injury. This pitcher asked me to come catch for her so she could throw a couple of pitches for him to see,” Kalani said.

Coach White was initially not looking at Kalani as a recruit, let alone a pitcher for GRCC.

“...Actually was looking at a pitcher on her team that was asking me how to throw a certain pitch, and Kalani jumped right up and volunteered to catch for her while she did it. So she took time out of her own break to go help a teammate,” White said. “I recruited her as a catcher, I didn’t even know she pitched.”

Kalani’s hard work ethic was unmistakable, noted by both college and high school coaches.

“She pushed everyone on the team to be their best. She wanted to be the pitcher no one wanted to face and then also to help the team with her speed and versatility on the field,” Kooeinga said.

Her pleasant, friendly, and hardworking attitude fit right in with GRCC’s softball team.

“Very personable kid, works hard in practice, smiles during practice, jokes around. She has a good personality,” Coach White said. “She has helped carry on the culture that we try to build.”

Kalani now plans to continue her education and softball career at Davenport University and earn a degree in sports management. Kalani credits this to her continuous hard work and her mindset.

“I always kept the mindset of you’re never at your best. You can always get better. All of these awards last year, I want to keep adding on to them. I can take even more of my accomplishments to Davenport with me. I feel like it’s just about work ethic,” Kalani said.

Coach White acknowledges Kalani’s grit and dedication to accomplish anything.

“Kalani will go as far as Kalani wants to go, she’s capable of doing whatever she wants and if she decides to do that, she will do it,” White said. “I’m excited for all the girls... any time they are getting what they worked for, and she definitely put in the work for that.”

As she takes everything that she has learned from these experiences to teach others, Kalani volunteers to give lessons to younger softball players for catching and hitting, but mainly pitching lessons. She also reinvests in the same softball program that she played in for 10 years, as she umpires for the Little League at Pinery Park.

“...I give lessons to younger girls, too. I always preach to them, “You’re never at your best, you can always do better,” and just always wanting to improve a skill keeps me focused on certain things I’m doing, too,” Kalani said.

Overcoming all she did was impactful, even for those who supported her through it all.

“I can’t wait to catch some of their games, to see Kalani go from a tiny little fourth grader to now playing DII softball is nothing short of amazing,” Kooeinga said.

“There was a moment that she didn’t know if she

wanted to play college softball, and then she signed for a season and fell in love with the program, her teammates, her coaches, and decided to stay a full two years. Then she started talking about continuing to go on, it was extremely exciting,” Cindy said. “She’s a leader...whether she’s out on the field or in the dug-out, or helping with the youth, she is about making sure that the program grows in the right along with her and that’s huge.”

GRCC softball teammate, freshman Kellsie Dieterle, has known Kalani since middle school, but they became close as she played softball during her freshman year of high school. Dieterle noted that Kalani’s leadership skills were reflective from their early days.

“She’s always been a leader and someone I can look up to. There’s never a moment where she isn’t cheering her teammates on,” Dieterle wrote in a text message to The Collegiate. “Personally, having her as my teammate has given me so much more confidence just by how positive and uplifting she is.”

What started out as a love for the sport quickly grew into a friendship, as Dieterle now plays on the same college team as her friend. Kalani and Kellsie serve as a pitcher and catcher duo for GRCC. Kellsie recalls how Kalani always made her feel welcome.

“I was always super shy, especially with the upper-classmen on the team, but Kalani was the first one to interact with me and get me out of my shell a little,” Dieterle wrote. “She would invite me to do things outside of softball, like get food, go to the gym, or even just pick me up for practice, so that’s definitely what brought us closer together.”

Softball has impacted Kalani in more ways than one, from the friendships that she has built with her teammates to the constant learning from her coaches.

“It really helped me build a character for myself, and just my teammates and being in that environment with all of them kind of really prepared me for certain situations in the future. Being able to be so close with so many people throughout the years, because I’ve been on so many teams, travel teams, school teams, club teams, little league, I’m still friends with people that I’ve been teammates with since little league.” Kalani said.

As Kalani prepares to leave GRCC for the Davenport Panthers, she gives the Raiders one piece of advice that has kept her motivated.

“My biggest advice is what I said before: ‘You’re never at your best. You can always get better,’ and that’s what kept me going. That’s what kept me on a good path to become a college athlete.”



Indigenous Basket Weaving: student preserves a cultural tradition

By Dylan Loonsfoot

As an eighth-generation black ash basket weaver and a member of the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish band of Potawatomi, black ash basket weaving is more than a skill to me. It is a connection to my identity, my family and culture. Basket weaving has been passed down

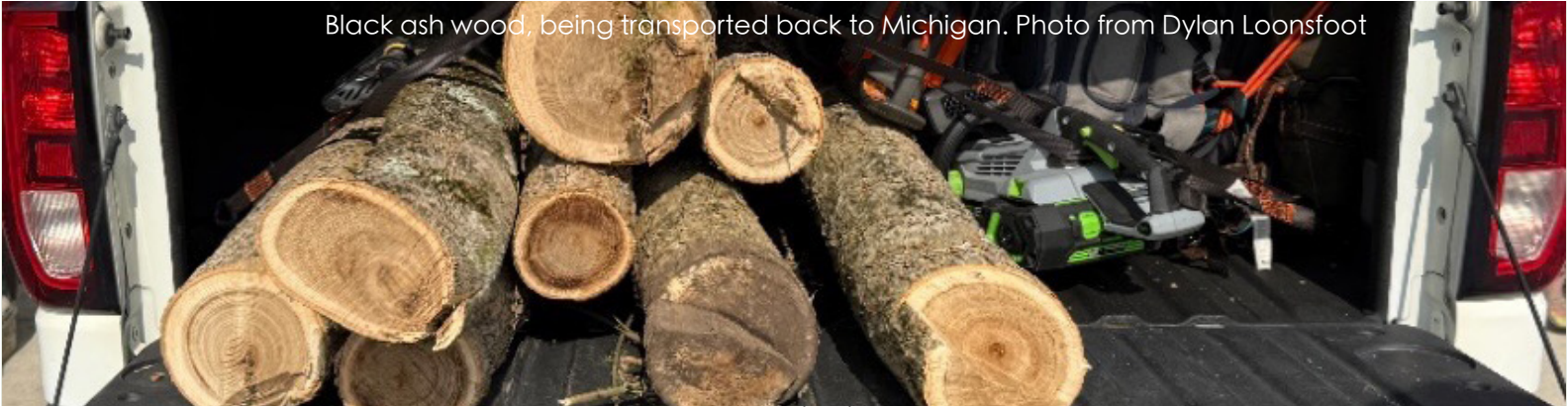
through generations in my family, and I am one of eight grandchildren who continue that tradition to this very day.

A big reason I continue weaving is because of my grandfather, Steve Pigeon, who unfortunately passed away in 2018. He played an important role in keeping this tradition alive in our family. Learning this craft is one way I stay connected to him. Every time I work with black ash, I think about the knowledge he passed down and the importance of continuing what he started. Any time I work with black ash, I can still feel his presence.

In my family, basket weaving is not just an individual activity but something that brings us together. It is common for us to share techniques, help each other improve and spend time working with each other. The time together is just as important as the baskets we make. It creates a space where stories are told, lessons can be passed down and the tradition can stay alive in a hands-on way.

Being one of eight grandchildren who weave also shows how connected our family is to this tradition. Each of us may have our own style or pace, but we are all connected through the same





basket.

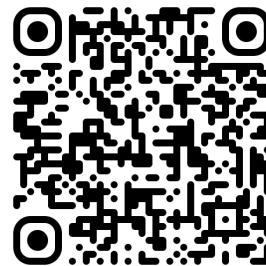
process with the same teachings we were taught. It is something we take pride in, knowing that we are continuing what our family has worked to preserve for generations.

The process of making a black ash basket begins long before the weaving. It starts with harvesting a black ash tree, a step that requires respect for the land. However, the process has become much more difficult in recent years due to the impact of the emerald ash borer. The emerald ash borer is an invasive insect that kills the tree, which has consequently left no healthy black ash trees available in our area. My family now has to travel 13 hours one way just to find and harvest a serviceable tree. This distance that was added to get the tree just goes to show how much of the environment has been affected. The scarcity of black ash also restricts the work of other basket makers who might not be able to travel far to continue their craft.

After harvesting the tree, the log is then taken and pounded to separate the growth rings into thin and workable strips. These strips are then split into two pieces with a smooth and rough side. The rough sides are then shaved and smoothed to help prepare it to be woven into a

The weaving itself takes patience, precision and of course practice. Each strip must be placed carefully, following patterns that have been used for generations. While the designs may vary, the techniques remain rooted in tradition. For me, weaving is not just about creating something beautiful and useful, but also it is about preserving a cultural practice.

As a young basket maker, I recognize the responsibility that comes with being part of this lineage. Black ash basket making is not as common as it once was. It's a dying part of the culture. However, my family and I will do our best to keep this tradition alive. Through this work, I am not only creating baskets, but also continuing a story that was my ancestors', but is now mine.



**Follow along with Dylan
in this **Black Ash Basket**
tutorial**





Black Africana Student Union debuts first fashion show at GRCC

By Jakhari Carroll

It was an evening of firsts, as the Black Africana Student Union held its first-ever fashion show in the Applied Technology Center at Grand Rapids Community College.

In front of a packed crowd, GRCC students strutted their stuff in select styles from crochet sets, and purses, to silky long dresses with eye-popping designs and colorways that caught the attention of the audience immediately.

Chiquital Clay, who has been the advisor of BASU for 10 years, marveled at the amount of effort the student leaders put into bringing the event to life.

“It was superb, I was so surprised, so excited,” Clay said. “To see the models, from where they were when they first started, being nervous, to seeing them be like professionals on the stage, it was a blessing to see that.”

The show consisted of models of different races and ethnic backgrounds, making this an opportunity to be in a space where they can express their creativity confidently. Each model was met with loud applause, cheers, and emphatic support from the crowd.

All the models wore pieces created by local Grand Rapids designers. Designer Gabrielle Fisher, owner

of GFunk Threads, shared her perspective of the event, and collaborating with the GRCC models. “I think it was really cool to just see the collaborative work between everybody,” Fisher said. “I’ve been in many fashion shows before, and none of them were this organized. It’s nice to see somebody else have an organized fashion show.”

Fisher continued, “It makes it a lot easier for us as designers, but also for the models as well, and BASU really had everything we needed. They had room for this, they had food and drinks, and this was the first fashion show I was able to sit back and watch, so that was nice. We’re always running around and we always have to keep backstage stuff up and running, making sure the models are okay, all of that. It was really nice to not have to worry about that.”

Local designer Ajiana Wilson, owner of Nitrice, agreed and reflected on all the hard work the models put into executing the show. “You can tell the models have been working really hard on this for a while, and their poses were absolutely killer,” Wilson said. “Every time they came out the crowd went wild. They all looked so good in their outfits, and it helps when they actually love the things they’re wearing. It’s one of the best things as a designer, to see that your model also loves the outfit, because we always want them to feel confident and beautiful.”

This was an experience that GRCC student and model, Barry Coffman, will never forget, especially since this was his modeling debut. “This was my first modeling experience ever so I thought it went smoothly, and I loved the hype from the audience, the audience was so amazing,” he said.

For Coffman, this fashion show was more than just trying something new, it was an opportunity to be a part of a foundation that he hopes will become a staple at GRCC for years to come. “I think it brings attention, which is great, and the reason why I loved this is because it just builds the community up,” Coffman said. “It gets you interacting with so many students, and helps you make great and lasting connections.”

For designers, it can be nerve-wrecking watching a first-time model showcase your designs in front of an audience, but designer Mckenna Wohlf, owner of Wohlf, was impressed with the poise of the first-time models. “It was really great seeing all the models, because for some of them it was their first time walking and they came with confidence,” Wolf said. “I felt like my design process was a bit more chaotic since I was switching from the winter months over to the warmer season, but I pulled out some older designs and made it work.”

To pull off an event of this magnitude, it took a lot of work from the leaders at BASU. From casting calls, booking the venue, contacting local designers and make-up artists, it was an arduous process to say the least. But for the Vice President of BASU, Darean ‘Chef’ Freeman, it was all worth it to bring people together.

“I think it’s more of not just specifically the lane of fashion, but anything involving creativity that brings people together,” Freeman said. “Most of these people tonight who are models, photographers, or make-up artists, they all also do other things. So I think that creative energy brings other creative people together,

and from there they just love to see other people's art."

Kiah Anderson, student at Kendall College of Art and Design, who partnered with BASU as a make-up artist for the show, agreed with that notion.

"It brings people together in the community because there aren't a lot of spaces for young adults to do things like this," Anderson said. "It helps build connections and that's what college is all about."

In addition to creating spaces for creativity and connection, uplifting how students see themselves was also a pivotal component to the festivities. Something model and Freshman GRCC student Natalie Rojas, resonated with after walking the runway.

"It made me feel beautiful, confident, and I believe this is something that should always be a part of BASU," Rojas said. "Everything was amazing, the people were amazing, the designers were amazing, it was such an amazing opportunity that I'm so grateful that I was able to be a part of."

For many of the models, this was their first exposure to walking the runway. However, for Ariel Wood, Media Representative for BASU, this wasn't her first rodeo. Leaning on her past experiences within the modeling industry helped guide student models, which for her was one of many favorite moments of the evening.

"I'm a regular model in the state of Michigan, I've done Michigan Fashion Week, and things in Chicago, and Detroit," Wood said. "My experiences

brought the idea to bring this event to GRCC, and I knew it was going to be a unique opportunity for the students involved and the audience members."

The fashion show didn't just provide unique experiences and opportunities for GRCC students, it reached other colleges as well. Wood sees it as an opportunity to expand upon in the future. "I think it gives a lot of opportunities for not only students with a specific major, for example we had GRCC photography majors here who were able to come and take photos to buff their portfolios. People who major in art and design or fashion here at GRCC are all welcome to give us ideas and incorporate their own thoughts on the production."

Wood continued, "We had brought designers from Kendall College and from Kalamazoo, and they have their own experiences in running shows across the state. This was an opportunity for everyone."

As the night went on, models and the audience filled the auditorium. The room filled with hugs and smiles, the exchange of flowers, and flashing camera lights. Time seemed to stand still, a feeling that is hoped to be replicated more often on the campus of GRCC.

"I want more events like this on campus," Clay said. "So students can have a wonderful experience while they're here at GRCC. So these types of events I would like to see more of, not just from BASU, but from other student organizations as well."

Collegiate reporter Madisyn Dennison contributed to this story.

Grand Rapids:

Photos by Kole Meschke

An Outsider's Perspective

By Gabriel Solis

The offices of the Collegiate are located on the third floor of Raleigh J. Finkelstein Hall on GRCC's Grand Rapids campus. We are in the heart of the city's downtown area. Like so many of those who live, work, or study here, the constant vibrancy and movement of the city are so much a part of our daily routine that we don't even tend to think about it.

I do not include myself in this category. At the time of writing, I have lived in the greater Grand Rapids area for all of a month and a half. Most of my life was spent in the one-stoplight town of Grayling, Michigan.

About 1,800 people resided within the city limits, the majority of whom were dispersed among the woods and the back country. The complexity, culture, and scale of this city, larger than the one I came from by a literal hundredfold, create an environment that, while alluring, is altogether foreign to me.

This is true in the most complex and in the simplest of ways. For example: sheer convenience.

The accessibility of this area is unparalleled by anything

I've ever experienced. Some aspects of this are simple and novel.

My very first night in my apartment, I took immense pleasure in ordering DoorDash. It sounds incredibly trivial, and in fact it is, but the act of pressing a button on my phone and finding food to have magically appeared on my doorstep brought me an almost child-like sense of enjoyment. And on the topic of novelty, the existence of Lime scooters continues to baffle me. They're convenient and efficient, but so conceptually strange that I can't help but scratch my head at the fact that they were ever successfully implemented.

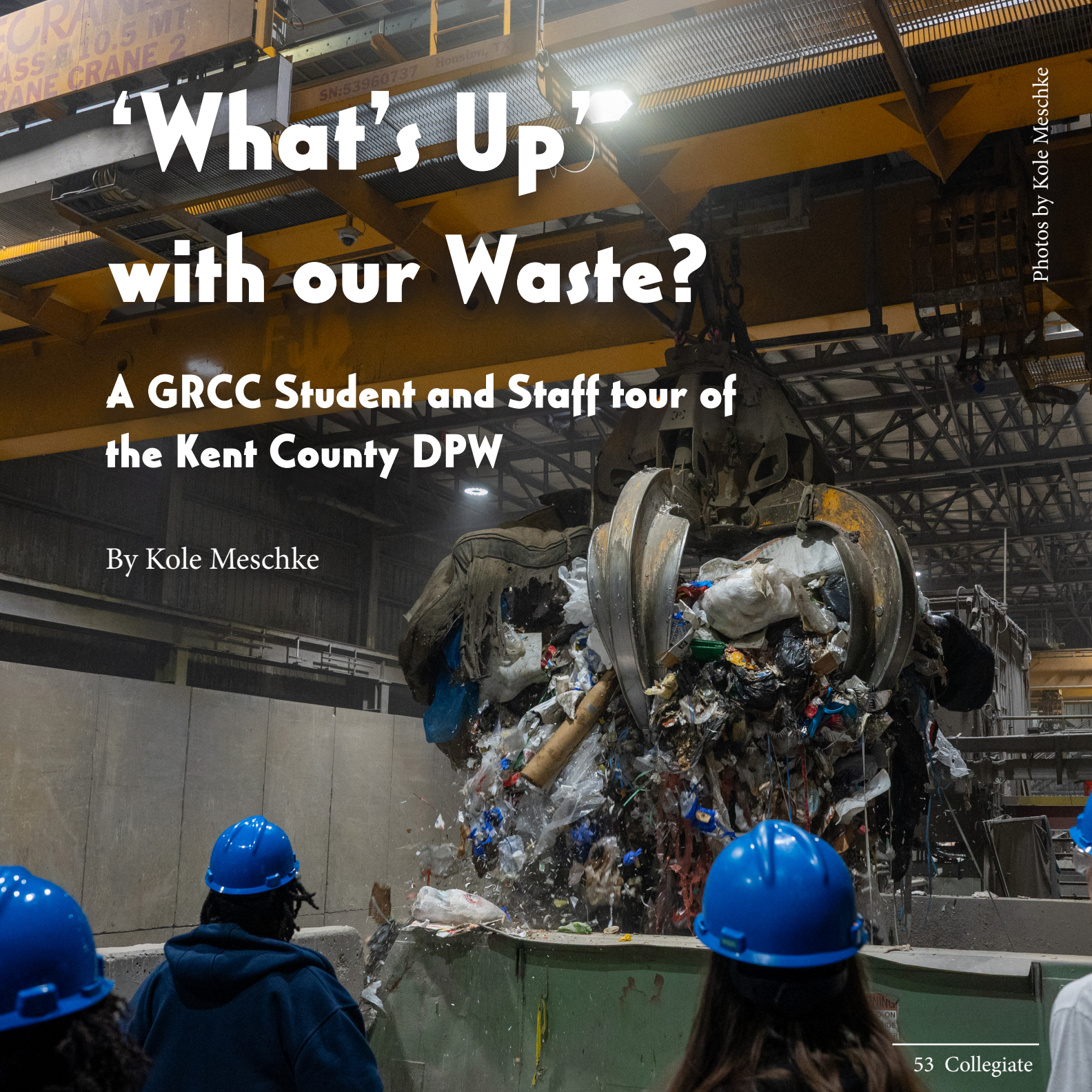
A lot of the culture shock comes from silly things like that. In all seriousness, however, the infrastructure that has allowed those things to thrive is also incredibly beneficial to the city and its residents. For a slightly less trivial example of this, take the bus system. According to MDOT, the Rapid transit system was used by over 6.4 million people in 2024. This number includes over a quarter million passengers who are living with a disability. People rely on the buses to get to and from work, school, the grocery store, etc, every single day. This enables those who may not have access to other modes of transportation an easier time earning their paychecks, keeping their pantries stocked, and living their lives. The fact that this level of accessibility to basic needs is facilitated by the city is a truly remarkable thing, and one that would be considered unthinkable where I come from.

This constant accessibility also lends itself to a sense of shared culture and community. Personally, I'm used to several-mile-long stretches of road between any hint of civilization. This city could not be further on the other end of the spectrum. Access to the entire area means constant opportunities for exploration and discovery. In my hometown, every establishment is a fixture of the community, and every time a new one opens up,

it's considered a major event. They all have their regulars, and inevitably, they all tend to scoff at those who don't fit the type of their usual clientele. Here, you can stumble into a hole in the wall and be served the best food you've ever tasted, or happen into a used book store and find a worn-out volume you've always wanted to own, and be welcomed into a community you never knew existed. You can become part of these places and make them part of you.

Our streets are lined with restaurants and shops of every conceivable variety, modeled in every conceivable form of architecture. Our museums house art from all over the world. But when we interact with one another, when we converse together, laugh together, exist together, our cultures and experiences bleed into one: the human experience.

These communities are rarely hurting for membership, so to speak. The presence of others is a given in any situation. This was another shock factor for me. There are always, always, always people, no matter where you go. You can walk into a coffee shop at three in the morning (a fact that in itself is a bizarre concept to me) and you will never be the only one there. Some might find this to be intrusive - I find the opposite. When I stop in at 3 a.m., armed with a book or a notepad or a laptop, and the room is filled with people doing the same, I am immensely comforted by the knowledge that I am in similar company. One person may have grown up down the street, another somewhere around the world, but in that moment, we are all living the same experience. This, my favorite thing about our city, is a distillation of my favorite thing about our world: that you are never alone. Grand Rapids is Michigan's second-largest city, and as such is a cacophonic blend of backgrounds, identities, ideas, and cultures. I pass people on the sidewalk speaking different languages. In this place, you can be anything you want to be, live any life you want to live. And humanity is never in short supply.



‘What’s Up’ with our Waste?

**A GRCC Student and Staff tour of
the Kent County DPW**

By Kole Meschke

Photos by Kole Meschke

Every single year over 625,000 tons of trash are processed by the Kent County Department of Public Works, which includes the everyday trash you and I throw away on Grand Rapids Community College's campus. That's enough trash to fill the 107,601-person capacity University of Michigan football stadium, twice. So, at the end of the day, where does all of this trash go?

As a part of GRCC's campus initiative, "Race to Zero Waste," the Kent County DPW offered a tour for students and staff to learn about the full lifecycle of waste and recycling to help reduce landfill use. Along this tour, we visited the Kent County Waste to Energy Facility, the South Kent Recycling & Waste Facility, and the Kent County Recycling & Education Center.

Beginning at the Waste to Energy facility, this space is designed for commercial hauling vehicles that deposit waste and, through an extensive process, repurpose waste into steam power used by the facility. Once trucks arrive at the Waste to Energy facility, they are weighed and sent to the tipping floor, where waste is visually inspected for unacceptable items, such as scrap tires and mattresses. The rest of the waste is then pushed into storage pits and thoroughly mixed before being loaded into hoppers, which transfer the waste the rest of the way to the almost entirely self-sustaining combustion chamber. The chamber burns at over 2,000 degrees and can finish a hopper load in 1-2 hours.

"Do you guys smell trash right now?" asked Rachael Underwood, Environmental Manager of the Waste to Energy facility.

The answer was no, we couldn't smell any trash.

In response, Underwood explained why this was.

"See that building right there (next door)? There's almost 8 million pounds of trash in there right now," Underwood said. "We pull the oxygen directly over the trash pit, so what that means is that there is no smell here, there's no smell outside, and there's no smell in the neighborhoods."

As the waste burns, heat converts water into steam, which is superheated to produce power for their turbine-driven generator. The energy produced by this process goes back into the building.

Underwood added, "So our power here, all the lights you see, are generated with trash. We do not buy electricity off of the grid. We can make up to 18 megawatt hours, three that we use internally, and the rest we can sell to Consumers (Energy)... and we can power about 11,000 homes a year."

After combustion, the volume of the waste is reduced by 90%, and all that's left behind is ash and metal. Ferrous metals, such as iron and steel, are recovered using rotating drum magnets. Non-ferrous metals, like aluminum and copper, are separated by an eddy current system. Metal collected through this process is then sold for the purpose of making new products. In the last year alone, over 5,300 tons of ferrous metals and 610 tons of non-ferrous metals have been collected.

“So, for the metal recovery system, since this facility opened, we’ve had enough metal to build two Mackinac Bridges. Now we have, at the end of 2024, put in a new metal recovery system, and we’re able to recover even more metal than that. Again, that’s all stuff that would have gone to the landfill,” added Underwood.

Since beginning operations at the 150-acre Kent Landfill in 1989-1990, the Waste to Energy facility has yet to fill its own 18-acre monofill.

So, why aren’t there more facilities like this?

“There’s a lot of people that aren’t fans of waste-to-energy facilities,” Underwood said. “We are the last one in the state of Michigan, and there’s not a great public perception of them, even though we do fantastic work here. They use a lot of these (facilities) in Europe; there’s a standard over there.”



Waste trucks leaving the landfill.

Next, our group was off to the South Kent Recycling & Waste Facility. Here is where you’ll find the county’s main landfill, as well as the Waste to Energy facility’s monofill.

“It’s not just a big hole in the ground, it is cell by cell,” said Micah Herrboldt, Waste Reduction Educator for the Kent County DPW. “Those blocks allow for a systematic way of putting the trash into the landfill, and then making sure that it has stability so that it doesn’t fall apart, and it will be able to stay there over a long period of time.”

Most of the time, when you and I drive past a landfill, all we can see are the “closed” cells covered in dirt and grass, but the active cell is where trash is currently being dumped. Unfortunately for Kent County, this landfill is currently filling cell 47 out of 47.

Landfills are made up of layers consisting of synthetic vinyl, fabric, and minerals. As you move to the outer rings, you’ll find groundwater containment and trash fencing. The synthetic vinyl layer, placed beneath every sheet of trash, plays a vital role in preventing contamination. Leachate and methane are two complications that arise from landfill trash disposal.

“Landfills have been shown to be super producers of methane,” Herrboldt said. “It’s a very dangerous way that more methane than can be handled goes into the environment. It is a very highly potent greenhouse gas.”

In order to circumvent this damage, the landfill uses a giant flame, burning off the methane and instead letting off carbon dioxide.

Herrboldt then explained how leachate forms, “the non-permeable layer of that vinyl, what that does is it captures all the juice that’s in the trash. So all the wa-

ter, all the liquids, that are formed after things start breaking down and decompose, goes to the bottom in the form of leachate. We have to make sure that it doesn't just sit in the landfill because as it builds up there's more opportunity for it to leak out and then get into the groundwater or the soil."

This build-up of toxic chemicals accumulates in one area, where harmful PFAS chemicals can become huge issues.

"Those cement manhole covers are the wells that are capturing the leachate, then we're able to direct it to a water treatment facility so that all the nasty stuff can get pulled out before the water is then reintroduced into the environment," Herrboldt added.

Michigan is one of 18 states that does not allow landfill disposal of yard waste, so for Kent County residents, "Wormies" may be your best bet. Wormies is a local composting operation that primarily takes vegetable food scraps and turns them into usable compost, providing an alternative to landfills.

Our final stop on the garbage tour brought us to the Kent County Recycling & Education Center, where

recyclable materials are broken down and sorted for repurposing.

"Refuse, reuse, reduce, those are the top three," said Herrboldt. "Meaning that those are the best options, and it's important for me to point out as a waste reduction educator, that those top three really don't

have anything to do with anything that we saw today. Except for the fact that if you do them, you don't have to do any of the things you saw today."

Basically, if you are able to make decisions or lifestyle changes that allow you to do more refusing, meaning that you're not purchasing as much or not purchasing single-use items, then you never get to the steps of waste disposal.

Items like scrap metals, electronics, and batteries should never go in your recycling. If you find yourself needing to dispose of any of these items, more information is available here.



Micah Herrboldt displays an example of leachate.

"So what can we accept here? Paper, plastic, glass, and metal. So paper is anything that's really fiber material, whether that's newsprint or paperboard, school and office paper, magazines, junk mail, all that stuff. (Paper) is highly recyclable, it's a very circular material," Herrboldt said.

About 75% of the materials that come into this facility are paper or cardboard. When it comes to glass, they're looking for bottles and jars, and for metal, only cans and aluminum foil.

The process at the recycling plant begins similarly to the waste-to-energy facility, trash is unloaded onto the tipping floor and loaded into a hopper.

From there, a litany of machines sort out the paper, glass, plastic, and metal through ingenious mechanical operations. Light paper objects are manipulated by air to direct them on another path. Magnets are used to collect ferrous metals, while non-ferrous metals like cans are collected using an eddy current. The eddy current works by sending out an electric signal and conducting with the aluminum to "pop" off the edge of the conveyor belt into a separate area.

Plastic, however, is a far more complicated material in the recycling process. This facility has implemented three AI-powered sorting devices for clear type 2 plastic, colored type 2 plastic, and one machine that sorts for all type 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 plastics. Examples of these materials are jugs (clear type 2), and detergent bottles (colored type 2). Types 3-7 include cellophane

food wrap, shopping bags, and materials like acrylic and fiberglass.

"So, this whole facility is meant to get (waste) ready to bail, and that's what some of you were seeing outside this window," Herrboldt explained. "The bales are our product. That's what we're trying to make, so if we sell it to a company, then they can make their product."

Every single year these facilities take in over one hundred thousand tons of our trash and work to repurpose the waste into energy or new materials. But as Herrboldt emphasized during the tour, the most effective waste solutions happen long before anything reaches a landfill, incinerator, or recycling line. Refusing unnecessary items, reducing single-use products, and reusing what we already have can dramatically reduce the amount of waste that facilities like these must handle. Initiatives like GRCC's "Race to Zero Waste" aim to encourage those habits across campus, but their success ultimately depends on the everyday choices students and staff make. The next time you throw something away on campus or at home, it's worth asking a simple question: did this item ever have to become trash in the first place?

A KCREC worker sorts large pieces of cardboard out of the conveyor belt.





Bales of recyclable materials are stored before transporting.



Multiple conveyer belts transport different sized trash for further sorting.



On the left, an AI plastics-sorting machine. On the right a KCREC worker.



A giant flame burns off methane released from the landfill.



