ON THE RUN
ROTC students find themselves in close proximity to blast
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AFTERMATH

LOOK AROUND
Harrisonburg residents recall Saturday natural gas explosion PAGE 4

Blue Sprocket's owner, Chris Jackson, has been able to focus on the positives with community support after his business was turned to rubble PAGE 5
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The explosion occurred at approximately 8:30 a.m. Saturday morning and locals gathered at Miller Circle to witness the aftermath. Matthew Young | The Breeze

Eyewitnesses recount Miller Circle explosion from their points of view

BY CONNOR MURPHY & CARLEY WELCH
The Breeze

The natural gas explosion that took place at Miller Circle on Oct. 17 resulted in confusion, fear and alarm among Harrisonburg residents when it shook the city Saturday morning. The disaster was witnessed by a variety of locals — all with different accounts of where they were and what they were doing when the deafening sound made its way from S. Main Street.

The view 10 miles in
Mike Fox, an adjunct instructor for a military independent study class, coached students for the 10-mile run Saturday morning. He was finishing up the race with two cadets about a mile away from the finish line near Newman Lake when he heard the explosion.

Fox said the two cadets were slightly injured from their run and didn’t think too much about the boom, but it “definitely did seem normal” to him.

About two minutes after the explosion, Fox said he saw smoke and debris floating in the air so he had an idea of where the explosion came from — the finish line.

Despite bearing the loud boom and seeing the rising smoke, he didn’t want to leave the cadets behind so he continued on with them to finish the race.

“I wasn’t going to leave these girls because, you know, we had a goal for the day,” Fox said. “We were trying to finish these 10 miles.”

“Right after we saw the smoke, my wife called me and I basically started running faster before I even answered the phone, like I knew she was calling because there was a problem,” Fox said.

“So, I just started running toward the smoke, answered the phone and talked to her while I was running and she’s like, ‘There’s been an explosion and people are injured.’ I asked her if she was OK and at this point, I’m sprinting. You know, I’m sprinting back through Pursell Park.”

With adrenaline coursing through his veins, Fox said he continued sprinting toward the explosion site. Even though he knew his wife was safe, he had to get to the scene as quickly as he could.

Once he got to the site, Fox said he saw people pulling debris away from the fire as he searched for his wife who he said always goes to ROTC’s running events as she’s a running coach herself.

“I really didn’t know what I was going to come back to,” Fox said. “I was happy that my wife was OK, but you know, I didn’t know if I was going to come back to people you know, unconscious and severely hurt. You think about the things you see in the movies, like ‘Is that what I’m getting ready to go in to?’

After the team completed “accountability,” which is essentially roll call, he said he was glad to see that besides three people, everyone was OK. He said those who were injured weren’t “losing their cool” and were in “good spirits.”

As a few days have passed since the explosion, Fox said there have been a few things that have come up such as combustions and other minor injuries that weren’t noticed at the time because of adrenaline.

“It was really surprising how well the cadets handled it,” Fox said.

From the window of a seamstress
Tatyana Kozhushko, owner of Tatyana’s Custom Tailoring, usually has her store closed Saturdays. However, she had a bridal appointment Oct. 17 that prompted her to be at her store shortly after 8 a.m., allowing her to witness the explosion. She said she wasn’t planning on staying at work for too long, but what followed kept her cleaning shards of glass and picking up hundreds of spoons of thread well into the afternoon.

The bride’s appointment wasn’t scheduled until around 9:30 to 10 a.m., missing the explosion by approximately an hour. Kozhushko was in the store alone but arrived just ten minutes prior to the explosion. When it occurred, Kozhushko was in a back corner of her building preparing her morning coffee.

Kozhushko said the sound of the explosion could be compared to a truck hitting her building. When she peeked out her window, she saw the fragments of the building being shot into the sky.

“That building was in the air,” Kozhushko said. “It was falling down, it was really like a Hollywood movie.”

She said that once she overcame the initial shock, she walked closer to the scene to take videos and photos of the aftermath. She noticed that the entire Wendy’s parking lot was filled with fragments of the exploded building. She also said she saw windows of surrounding buildings that were blown out.

She saw the fire grow in strength and intensity, as there wasn’t initially much fire but the small flames grew and the level of smoke that poured out of the scene skycricketed.

She said the gravity of the situation didn’t set in until she returned to her building and saw all of her wall decorations on the floor. After seeing the explosion’s effect, she began to clean and straighten out the area.

Kozhushko said that roughly 10 minutes after it took place, her customers began calling her to make sure she wasn’t injured in the explosion. She also noted that one of the buildings impacted by the explosion was her old shop. Her children also took notice.

“My children called me, they said ‘Mom, that was your old shop,’” Kozhushko said. “I was in that building for 12 years … It’s like my first house.”

Kozhushko said it took her a few hours to process the magnitude of the damage of dismantled boards and drywall and thick clouds of smoke she saw when she peered out her window.

As she stood and watched first responders at work, Kozhushko said she was impressed by the speed and impact of the emergency service workers that arrived at the scene.

“She was surprised,” Kozhushko said. “In less than three minutes they all came and they took water from that [fire hydrant].”

Through the eyes of a construction superintendent
Jeff Fisher, a construction superintendent, was working on turning the Vibe Bistro building into a Walgreens on S. Main Street when he found himself near the scene of the explosion and resulting fire. He explained the initial shock he felt when the explosion took him by surprise and compared its impact on his ears to the sensation of ascending a mountain.

“I was in awe,” Fisher said. “I’ve been close to bridges being imploded before … and I knew what was going to happen. This was unexpected. I had no idea what happened.”

Fisher said he was surprised the force of the blast didn’t cause the building he was working inside to collapse.

“When the explosion happened, it shook the whole building,” Fisher said. “I thought my building was coming down on top of me. It stirred up so much dust I couldn’t even see to get out of the door.”

When Fisher found his way out of the building and peered through the dust, he said he saw metal debris flying in the air moments before it landed nearby or got caught in the surrounding trees.

“I looked over there and that’s when I saw,” Fisher said. “All that metal that’s in the trees, it was still about 20 feet above the trees when I walked out the door.”

Fisher said when he was able to get his initial view of the scene, he quickly realized that the building was leveled with the exception of a two-story segment that remained standing. He also said he noticed a fire gaining traction.

In its initial assessment of the scene, he speculated that a gas leak may have been the cause of the explosion. At the time this was unconfirmed, but the city of Harrisonburg’s Fire Marshal’s Office proved Fisher’s theory correct Oct. 19 when it was found that a natural gas leak was the cause of the explosion and fire.

Fisher also saw a man who was injured by fragments in the explosion. He said numerous people went to help him until EMTs arrived at the scene. While this occurred, Fisher said some individuals were warning others of a potential secondary blast that, luckily, never came.

“I’m just glad to be alive,” Fisher said. “I’m glad it wasn’t any closer.”

Katelyn Waltemyer contributed to this report.

CONTACT Connor Murphy & Carley Welch at breezenews@gmail.com. For more coverage of JMU and Harrisonburg news, follow the news desk on Twitter @BreezeNewsJMU.
An effort to rebuild
City pours in support for businesses affected by explosion

By Ryann Sheehy
The Breeze

Kyle Coleman was at his home near CrossKeys Vineyards when he felt the explosion shake the doors of his garage. Coleman, the owner of Bluestone Bike & Run, said 10 minutes later when he was at the kitchen table with his children, his phone rang.

Around 8:30 a.m. Saturday, an explosion and subsequent fire in the Miller Circle shopping center sent the Friendly City into action.

While Coleman’s bike shop isn’t located in the building directly affected, he was notified that his store, which is directly across from the shopping center, had been damaged as well.

“All the windows are blown out, the door’s blown in, the van windshield is busted, windows blown out of that as well,” Coleman said. “So it was, it was bad, and we want to just cover up for safety.”

After the blast occurred, he said his phone was ringing “off the hook” and that the owners of two other bike shops in Harrisonburg called him to ask if he needed any help storing his merchandise.

“That shows something that we have a unique community,” Coleman said. “That’s not going to happen everywhere.”

H’burg music community devastated by loss of industry cornerstones

Just hours after the fire began, the Harrisonburg community rallied behind some of the local businesses impacted. Members of two local music groups, Prince Bellerose, a soul/rock power trio, and Paracosm, a five-piece psychedelic band, started a GoFundMe page for Blue Sprocket and Hometown Music, two of the businesses destroyed by the fire.

After just over a day, the relief fund had raised $12,595, surpassing its original goal of $10,000. Since then, the fund’s goal was increased to $20,000 and, as of Wednesday morning, $20,265 had been donated.

Ethan Morris, a member of Paracosm, said he also felt the rumble of the explosion from his home two miles away. It wasn’t until he began scrolling through Facebook that he realized a local music store that he frequented since he was a teenager and a small recording studio, where his band recorded its first EP, had been destroyed.

Morris said Val Prince, a member of Prince Bellerose, was the one to get the ball rolling on creating a GoFundMe. He said the two groups knew that Blue Sprocket and Hometown were cornerstones of the Harrisonburg music scene, providing gear and recording space to local artists for years, and wanted to immediately show their support and gratitude.

“I want to see these two businesses get back on their feet because you know, I love being able to walk into a guitar shop and, you know, pick up an instrument and mess around with the pedal, buy a pack strings, you know, just being able to walk downtown and do that, as opposed to having to buy it off of some website,” Morris said. “It’s so convenient, and it’s just a much warmer feeling when you’re helping out your neighbor, and your neighbor’s helping you out and getting you set up with equipment.”

Since the explosion, relief funds have also been started on GoFundMe for the Harrisonburg Halal Market, Naza Salon and Barber Shop, and Funky’s Skate Center.

Morris said his band Paracosm will join Rev. Bill’s Confessional in a livestream concert from the Golden Pony on Oct. 25 at which all the donations collected will go toward this GoFundMe to support Blue Sprocket and Hometown Music.

Owner opens up

For one of the owners and founders of Blue Sprocket, Chris Jackson, the outpouring of support has made him almost more emotional than the event itself. He said he’s still “baffled” that one second those businesses were there, and now they’re gone. The only word he could think of to describe it was “overwhelming.”

“It’s all a little crazy, so I don’t know that I have good words for all of it,” Jackson said. “It feels incredible to have been loved by a community so much that they’re willing to, you know, contribute towards a cause, not having any idea, you know, if these businesses can come back.”

Jackson said he’s focusing on the present and will likely have to undergo extensive insurance claims and other damage control before his business can begin to rebuild.

“These were businesses that were built over time, with lots of care and sort of the stereotypical blood, sweat and tears,” Jackson said.

Fortunately, Blue Sprocket’s younger sister company, Blue Sprocket Pressing, which manufactures vinyl records, wasn’t severely damaged by the blast. However, that doesn’t replace the recording studio where many local artists and JMU a capella groups have produced their albums for years.

“I get the impression that we’re going to be very looked after by everyone in our community, both individual and business alike, to the extent that people are able,” Jackson said. “There has just been an overwhelming outpouring of support and everything from kind words to obviously financial contributions and everything in between.”

While Jackson is still processing that his business has turned to rubble, he’s thankful everyone in and around the shopping center survived.

“I saw the gentleman that owns the Halal market [Saturday] while it was all going on, and we were just very happy to see each other were alive and well,” Jackson said.

As the Harrisonburg community was rocked by the explosion, the Miller Circle business owners like Jackson have lost not just their possessions in the fire, but also the stores they worked hard to create. Jackson said there really are no words to describe it.

“Right now it’s just, it’s a lot,” Jackson said.

Katelyn Waltemeyer contributed reporting.

CONTACT Ryann Sheehy at sheehyr@dukes.jmu.edu. For more coverage of JMU and Harrisonburg news, follow the news desk on Twitter @BreezeJMU.
BE
THE
CHANGE
JUST TREATS
JMU’s ‘Trick or Treat on the Row’ undergoes format changes as a result of COVID-19

By KAMRYN KOCH
The Breeze

At the end of every October, kids in Halloween costumes can be spotted collecting candy, doing crafts and playing games on JMU’s Greek Row. However, the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life’s Trick or Treat on the Row event looks different this year.

Because of COVID-19, members of the university’s Panhellenic Executive Council decided that their usual event wouldn’t be possible. Vice President of Community Service and senior interdisciplinary liberal studies major Callie Fowler said it wouldn’t be safe because of the number of people involved and the close interaction with children that the event demands.

“It can’t happen this year unfortunately, which is really sad because it’s one of my favorite events because you actually get to see the work that we’re doing,” Fowler said. “I think everybody’s disappointed a bit.”

This year, FSL is collecting Halloween baskets and candy from sororities to donate to its philanthropic partner First Step — a local nonprofit domestic violence shelter. Trick or Treat on the Row is usually open to the general public, but Fowler said this year Panhellenic wanted to focus on the children and families who utilize First Step services. In addition to operating a 24-hour hotline and providing confidential services to its clients, First Step serves as a shelter for survivors of domestic violence. Although she said she’s disappointed that the event can’t go on as normal, Fowler said she’s excited to help the nonprofit.

“We really wanted to focus our efforts on those kids that might not have such a great Halloween,” Fowler said. “I think our work is really impactful and actually making a difference.”

Community Engagement Coordinator Gabrielle Redcross said First Step has worked closely with JMU’s FSL in the past with holiday events like this, and she said First Step was “surprised” and “thankful” that Panhellenic reached out to help in the middle of the pandemic.

“Even though we provide services where we work hands-on and we help clients and survivors, there are certain things we’re not able to give,” Redcross said. “Stuff like this really makes our job easier to make sure that families are happy through these times.”

Fowler said the baskets — that will consist of candy and Halloween-themed items — will be turned in to the FSL office Oct. 29, and she’ll deliver them to First Step on Oct. 30. Rather than having clients pick up the baskets in the First Step office, Redcross said staff will drop them off at clients’ homes and offer a curbside pickup option to promote social distancing.

Olivia Hart, senior communication studies major and member of Sigma Kappa, said it’s important to figure out new ways to support families experiencing domestic violence during the pandemic. Having participated in Trick or Treat on the Row for the past two years, she said it’s one of her favorite events that FSL puts on and that she’s disappointed it can’t be the same this year. However, she said she’s happy that Panhellenic decided to continue to support First Step.

“We help them a lot during the regular year, and with COVID-19 happening and the world we live in right now, we haven’t been able to give as much help as we’ve done in the past,” Hart said. “I think being able to donate the candy is a step in helping more and trying to do as much as we can like we have in past years.”

Since the pandemic began, Redcross said, the nonprofit has experienced a “significant increase” in the number of people who use the hotline, conduct walk-in appointments and use the shelter. She also said the holidays are also projects that can bring in more clients.

According to an article from Nautilus, cases of domestic violence have risen in many countries since the pandemic started. Although the article says the U.S. hasn’t experienced this increase, it states that many victims may not be reporting incidents or seeking help. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, social distancing may increase the risk for abuse, including “child abuse and neglect, intimate partner violence and elder abuse.”

Fowler said helping First Step is important to her because she knows someone who’s been impacted by domestic violence.

Redcross said that even though stalking — which often leads to domestic violence — is common in young adult relationships, the topic can seem like a distant issue to college students. She said she loves projects like this because of the positive emotional impact it can have on clients and their families.

“Knowing that certain clubs, fraternities or sororities are prioritizing issues of domestic violence and helping domestic violence agencies,” Redcross said. “It really makes me hopeful that we’re beginning to make this issue more of a priority in our society.”

CONTACT Kamryn Koch at kochkr@dukes.jmu.edu. For more coverage of JMU and Harrisonburg news, follow the news desk on Twitter @BreezeNewsJMU.
It was the loudest noise I’ve ever heard’

ROTc cadets recall Miller Circle explosion

By KATELYN WALTEMYER
The Breeze

Jessica Dean had just finished the Army 10 Miler. She was stretching her quads and listening to alternative metal in her earbuds by the Bluestone Bike & Run sign. As she was leaning into the stretch with her head toward the ground, she paused her music — then there was a boom.

‘I had no idea I was hurt’

Without seeing what happened, Dean, an ROTC cadet and senior kinesiology major, said she knew it was an explosion. With her ears ringing, her first instinct was to place her hands over them to muffle the intolerable sound. That’s when the pain began.

“I felt this really terrible pain in my fingers,” Dean said. “I had no idea I was hurt or bleeding or anything … other than just my hand hurting.”

Everyone ran away from the explosion. Shouts filled the air instructing Dean to crawl under a vehicle — to take shelter in case of a secondary explosion — but the cars were too low to the ground. Dean followed a crowd running toward El Charro.

As she was running, another cadet shouted, “Dean, you’re hurt.” She had several abrasions on her back, right leg and both arms. But all she could focus on was getting her smartwatch off her left wrist, where the pressure was unbearable.

Meanwhile, Nelle Fox, a running ambassador for Bluestone Bike & Run who cheered on participants before the explosion, pulled out her phone to call 911. Her hands were shaking so much she couldn’t dial the numbers — she ended up using the iPhone shortcut to call 911 by pressing down on the buttons on the side of her phone.

“You would think it wouldn’t be that hard to dial 911,” Fox said. “But like, I could barely feel my fingers.”

Then Fox turned around and saw Dean. Blood was gushing from her arm. Fox, who has some basic first aid experience, approached Dean to help.

“How can you help me get my watch off?” Dean asked.

While taking Dean’s watch off, Fox’s hands were smeared with blood. Dean apologized while Fox was looking for someone to help address her wounds — she didn’t care about the blood in the moment.

“When you are in a situation like that,” Fox said. “If you don’t start doing something to make yourself useful, it’s not worth it.”
Then, James Giknavorian, a sophomore kinesiology major and ROTC cadet, approached Dean. He said the explosion was the “loudest noise” he’s ever heard and quickly began checking on others.

He said out of all the people he checked on after the explosion, his memory of Dean is most vivid. Giknavorian was practicing the triple C’s: tactical combat casualty care, which is when someone calmly checks another person for injuries after a traumatic event. Luckily, there weren’t any casualties from the explosion, but he said emotions were high and many weren’t aware of their injuries until after someone pointed them out.

When going over the three C’s with Dean, he noticed several bloody spots on her body. Despite the hectic atmosphere, Giknavorian was able to make Dean aware of her injuries.

"I wanted to make sure that she was aware of her injuries but also calm about them,” Giknavorian said. “I didn’t want her to freak out about them.”

Giknavorian — along with other cadets — checked on Dean. He said his top priority was to make sure everyone who was injured received the care they needed.

"Not only my thought process but the thought processes and feelings of the other cadets were ‘We need to take care of each other. We need to make sure that we’re OK,” Giknavorian said.

Dean was walked over to sit under a tree next to Wendy’s and waited for first responders to arrive.

Dean said all she could remember was things shaking and falling down from inside the vehicle because they were driving so fast. She said all she could think about once she arrived at the hospital was about her dachshund, Ozzy. The four-year-old dog hadn’t been taken to the bathroom all day and she was worried about him.

"He hadn’t gone to the bathroom since 9 p.m. the previous night," Dean said. "I was worried."

Looking back and moving forward

Within four hours of the explosion, Dean’s mom made it to Harrisonburg. Later, her sister Tess came up as well. Four days after the explosion Tess is still helping her sister with simple tasks like changing and typing.

Her left arm — the one the watch was on — has been the most affected by the explosion. Most of her fingers on her left hand were immobile.

"I get this wet feeling on my arm sometimes, like even though it’s not wet," Jessica said. “It feels like an electrical pulse going through my arm sometimes.”

Tess said she’s not good with words, and instead of being interviewed she decided to write a letter about her sister after the incident. In the letter, she said Jessica hasn’t let the explosion stop her from being herself.

"She is the meaning of spirit — always in an upbeat, goofy mood,” Tess said. “Her heart is so big and caring.”

The explosion affected Jessica immediately physically, but the emotional repercussions didn’t rise to the surface until about two days later. She said she was working on an assignment for class and was struggling typing on her laptop. She stared at the keyboard and the next thing she knew, tears welled up in her eyes.

“[I was] just thinking about like, man,” Jessica said. “Am I ever gonna be back to normal?”

As of Tuesday, Jessica gained some feeling and mobility back in two of her fingers. The only uncertainty is the condition of her fingers. Beyond that, she has several bruises, but she said everything’s healing properly.

Jessica said that she and her fellow cadets have planned a “celebration of life” for the weekend. Because of the explosion, she said she has a new appreciation for life.

“Living itself is a risk of your life,” Jessica said. “It’s so worth it, though.”

CONTACT Katelyn Waltemyer at breezeditor@gmail.com For more coverage of JMU and Harrisonburg news, follow the news desk on Twitter @BreezeNewsJMU.

The Harrisonburg Fire Department contained the fire by 10:40 a.m. on Saturday. Jake Conley | The Breeze

The Breeze @BreezeNewsJMU
Two Cadets noted, explosion
sounded like "boom"
Want to praise someone or get something off your chest? Darts & Pats is the place to do it. Submit your own at breezejmu.org.

An “are-you-kidding-me?” dart to JMU for allowing Mary Gayne to keep her job after the hateful tweet wishing Republicans dead when if I, as a conservative employee, tweeted the same about Democrats, I’d likely be in HR and fired.

From someone who is sick of liberal hypocrisy.

A “you-rock!” pat to the Harrisonburg first responders.

From someone who feels safer knowing how efficient you are.

A “bleh hh” dart to the somehow always offensive bumperstickers I see around Harrisonburg.

From someone who’s growing more inclined to rear end people on purpose.

A “you’re-back!!!” pat to JMU football for practicing again and making us excited for the season.

From someone who can’t wait for the return of sports.

Halloween is no excuse for cultural appropriation

JULIA CHENG | contributing writer

With Halloween coming up, I grow more wary to see the costumes I’ve never seen before come up with and the ones stores sell. There’ve been way too many times I’ve seen people dressed as Native Americans, sexy Geishas, using blackface or other offensive wear. There’s a fine line between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation, and it’s important for those planning on dressing up to understand what’s acceptable.

Cultural appropriation is defined as “the adoption or co-opting, usually without acknowledgment, of cultural identity markers associated with or originating in minority communities by people or communities with a relatively privileged status.” Examples of cultural appropriation are commonly seen during Halloween, where cultures are used as costumes. Despite the progress and resources provided, many people still don’t understand the consequences of their actions.

One reason why culturally appropriated costumes are still present is because of stores selling them. Spirit Halloween, for instance, contributed to the stereotyping of Native Americans.

One common example of cultural appropriation during Halloween is changing one’s skin tone. Blackface is especially common, and a survey done by Pew Research Center states that 34% of all U.S. adults believe it’s acceptable to wear blackface on Halloween. One significant instance of this is when the photo of Gov. Ralph Northam (D) wearing blackface surfaced, further commending its acceptance.

Cultural appropriation unfortunately plays a role more often than one day a year. One recent example was when the clothing store Shein sold Islamic prayer mats as decorative mats. Another recent example was at the Savage X Fenty Lingerie Fashion Show, where the music during the performance featured the Islamic Hadith, which contains sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Fortunately, both Shein and Rihanna apologized for their wrongdoings, yet it’s clear that cultural appropriation is still an existing problem.

One instance of cultural appropriation that hits close to home is the “fox eye” trend. Inspired by Bella Hadid and Kendall Jenner’s makeup, videos and pictures of girls doing the trend have flooded Instagram and TikTok. What bothers me most about this trend is the gesture that’s done after the completed look. Individuals who did the look would use their hands to pull their eyes back, mimicking slanted eyes. As someone who’s still insecure about their smaller eyes, I take offense to the trend. I felt that my own features that were undesirable became desirable when done by white girls.

A similar beauty trend is having fuller lips, which is credited to Kylie Jenner, when Black women have had these features since before they became popular. Again, bigger lips were undesirable until a white woman did it.

When one’s exposed for cultural appropriation and apologizes, it’s important to understand who can accept their apology. For example, if someone were to apologize for blackface, it’s up to the Black community to accept or deny their apology. I wouldn’t be able to take action on this apology because it’s not my culture that’s being appropriated.

Rather than lashing out against an individual that commits cultural appropriation, I feel that they should be educated on their wrongdoings. It’s easy to research by simply looking up and learning about different cultures and customs.

I encourage conversation with others about their culture, as it’s important to become more open-minded to prevent more Halloween catastrophes.

Julia Cheng is a freshman media arts and design major. Contact Julia at chengjm@dukes.jmu.edu.
Students should drink tea this fall and reap the surprising health benefits

Low in caffeine, high in antioxidants
White tea is high in antioxidants. This means it can be helpful in combating free radicals, the cells responsible for some cancer and heart disease. It’s the least processed kind of tea, and it holds a light, delicate flavor. It could also be good for strengthening teeth and fighting plaque because it has high levels of fluoride.

Low in caffeine, white tea may be the perfect beverage for those who want to avoid or limit their caffeine consumption. It could also be had at night to keep one slightly more alert while studying without inhibiting sleep.

Healthiest choice, not too caffeinated
The healthiest, most helpful choice for many may be green tea. Iced or hot, green tea is rich in flavonoids, which can benefit heart health by reducing blood clots and bad cholesterol. Green tea is also largely anti-inflammatory, meaning it fights damage done by inflammatory foods like meat and dairy and can help make one’s skin clear and radiant.

Green tea could be considered in the middle of the caffeine scale. With more caffeine than white tea, it can give one an energy boost, but it doesn’t contain as much as coffee. However, there’s a special amino acid found in green tea that makes the drinker feel milder and creates a less jittery buzz than coffee. For Dukes who struggle with anxiety, especially when they drink coffee, green tea might be a better choice.

According to NPR, one in four college students gets the flu each year. The latter end of the semester is often accompanied by coughing students and the sound of sniffles. However, cold weather and long hours of studying aren’t the only threat to students’ health this year. This winter, scientists expect another wave of coronavirus cases, which may already be underway.

Now more than ever, Dukes need to take caution and practice self-care. Surprisingly, one way to do this is by drinking tea. Various kinds of tea have different positive impacts on people’s health, but one thing is for sure — the health benefits that come from it are powerful, both during flu season and in the long haul.

Best for flu season, high in caffeine
The best tea for immune health, and therefore for flu season, is black tea. In addition to being anti-inflammatory, flavonoids also support the immune system. A strong immune system guards against the cold, flu and coronavirus germs that’ll soon plague campus once again.

Among the most popular black teas are English breakfast, earl grey and chai tea, all of which are delicious when augmented with a little bit of honey or milk. Black tea is highly caffeinated, almost to the point of a cup of coffee, so it may be the perfect drink to start an early morning or fuel a late-night study spree.

No caffeine, many benefits
All herbal teas are caffeine-free. Because of this, many are often used to calm anxiety, and different kinds hold various healing properties.

Rooibos tea improves circulation and blood pressure and benefits hair and skin, while peppermint tea is widely known for its ability to soothe an upset stomach and relieve headaches.

Chamomile tea is often utilized to ease muscle spasms, improve sleep and reduce stress. Meanwhile, ginger tea is a powerful, natural antibiotic and can aid those suffering with nausea, vertigo or indigestion.

One can drink a relaxing, hot cup of herbal tea to calm nerves, soothe a stomachache or help them fall asleep at night.

While the health benefits of tea are undeniably exceptional, there are a few exceptions. Bubble teas and tea lattes from places like Starbucks are often loaded with sugar and calories and have nearly zero nutritional value.

Similarly, detox and weight loss teas are often loaded with laxatives to help people shed a few pounds, but they don’t have the rich benefits of a regular cup of tea.

As the temperature gradually decreases and icy, biting winds are soon to breeze through Harrisonburg once again, it’s important to think of one’s health. Plus, a steaming hot tea can kill bacteria, viruses and other microorganisms living in one’s throat and could potentially fend off the various illnesses that’ll soon make their way through JMU.

Next time Dukes order from the Starbucks in the libraries or their favorite local coffee shop, they should consider ordering a healthy, calming cup of tea instead of a sugary beverage.

Charlotte Matherly is a junior media arts and design major. Contact Charlotte at mathercg@dukes.jmu.edu.
Let cheaters prosper

Professors should have open-note exams during the pandemic

ALEX DAVIS | contributing writer

Cheating is easier than ever thanks to online classes. Some students have always cheated and continue to do so. Some choose not to because of their moral objections. And now, those who refrained from cheating for fear of being caught have started, feeling more confident in their chances of getting off scot-free. Professors should recognize the reality of this situation and change the way they assess students accordingly.

Professors have made some creative efforts to keep students from cheating online. These efforts range from reading and signing the honor code before test taking to the use of Proctorio, which requires students to show a video of their surroundings prior to a test and then tracks eye movement and keystrokes for the duration of the test. There are clear issues with these cheating prevention methods. Many students see Proctorio as extreme and an infringement of privacy rights. Additionally, it heightens their stress and anxiety about test taking.

Instead of relying on tests, professors should assign projects. Breeze File Photo

On the flip side, most other preventative measures are futile. Many professors have saved themselves from this headache by embracing open-note exams.

Professor Michael Trocchia started giving open-note assignments to his classes for the first time this semester. Trocchia said that he’s always been of the mind that there’s going to be a certain amount of cheating, and when he teaches a section of 80 students, there’s only so much he can control.

“I feel like it’s a losing battle to try and prevent them from using their notes,” Trocchia said. He said he hopes open-note assignments will encourage his students to attend their online classes, take better notes and then learn them inside out.

“I thought it was more useful to pour my resources into making the class better and more interesting — giving the students a reason not to cheat because they want to do well,” Trocchia said.

As an additional measure, Trocchia sets time limits on his assessments so that students must be familiar with their material in order to finish on time — if they were dependent on their notes and referenced them for every question, they wouldn’t finish an exam on time.

With the serious risk of an honor code violation “virtually” off the table given the ease of online cheating, students who cheat online face very little risk of punishment. Not allowing the class to use resources like notes during exams will only make the exams harder for those who choose not to cheat, while those who do choose to cheat will have a very small chance of being found out and will be rewarded with better grades for their dishonesty and lesser efforts.

Now that students have returned to campus, some professors are offering a choice between in-person and online classes. In-person instruction yields many benefits: students are able to connect with their professors and classmates, the environment’s more active and engaging, and there’s no risk of suddenly being booted out of class because of a network failure. Still, given this choice, many students will opt for the online classes over in person so that they can cheat easier.

To encourage students to participate in person, professors should ensure that those who attend classes online don’t have an unfair advantage over their in-person counterparts. This can be accomplished by making all assignments open note and allowing for more collaboration among peers.

It’s a common argument against any student’s plea for something that they feel would benefit them — such as an extension for an assignment or a curve on an exam — that such a benefit would never fly in the “real world.” In this case, the changes which I urge professors to make would actually be a closer reflection of the type of work students will receive in the quote-untquote “real world.”

Realistically, every graduate who goes into the workforce will have at least one computer at their disposal at all times. Therefore, it doesn’t make sense to ask students to memorize equations they could find in seconds after a few taps on their phones. Furthermore, students could be expected to learn and do more if they weren’t made to memorize so many things, which will be forgotten as soon as their semester ends.

With COVID-19 pushing classes online comes the need for professors to evaluate the new reality and adjust their assignments accordingly. Students should be tasked with assignments that require them to do more than memorize terms or equations because assignments of this nature can and will be cheated on in an online forum. Beyond the issue of cheating, these assignments are a disservice to students since they encourage them to cram to remember pieces of information rather than teaching students how to apply information in more meaningful ways.

At a time when cheating has never been easier, it falls on the professors to change the way they assess students. Students will cheat if they can, so level the playing field with open notes and challenge students with application problems over those that rely only on memorization.

Alex Davis is a freshman business management major. Contact Alex at davis8aj@dukes.jmu.edu.
Truly the ‘Friendly City’

The Harrisonburg community should feel proud of its response to Saturday’s explosion

Evan Holden | careful consideration

On Oct. 17, the Harrisonburg and JMU communities were lucky. The massive explosion that wiped out a small shopping center could’ve been catastrophic. Not in damage to the architecture — those buildings got pretty bad — but in damage to human lives.

After the smoke was clear, the fire put out and the searches completed, there wasn’t a single death to be reported. As it currently stands, all victims are recovering from non-life-threatening injuries, which were both gas explosions, and both were in highly populated areas of Harrisonburg citizens and JMU students. This situation could’ve been so much worse than it was, and community members can’t be thankful enough this wasn’t anywhere near as horrific as the historic Harrisonburg blast.

Still, after learning of my misunderstanding, I thought it was possible that this explosion could claim a similar death count or perhaps even worse. That’s what I mean when I say we were lucky.

This is important because before there was even any news on the internet about this event, the student body was informed within minutes by each other and mobilized to find out if our friends and fellow students were all right and if there was anything we could do.

The first responders and officials did a great job. The victims were airlifted to the hospital to be treated immediately, JMU sent out community alerts within about 30 minutes and searches were completed in the next few hours.

Perhaps the explosion in 1947 helped Harrisonburg better prepare for something like this. Maybe those lives lost so long ago weren’t for nothing, and lessons learned then saved lives today.

The response was effective and efficient. We should be proud of our officials and the JMU community and thankful this situation wasn’t worse than it was. Should something worse happen, we can feel confident in our community’s ability to handle it well.

Evan Holden is a sophomore political science major. Contact Evan at holdened@dukes.jmu.edu.
Pomp and circumstance

Associate professor gains recognition for new collection of poems in virtual celebration

By SYDNEY DUDLEY
contribution writer

In a virtual, week-long celebration, Lauren Alleyne was recognized at the Library of Virginia Literary Awards as a finalist in the poetry category for “Honeyfish,” her latest published collection of poems.

The Library of Virginia Literary Awards are annually hosted and recognize outstanding works of fiction, nonfiction and poetry.

According to the Library of Virginia's website, "the Library of Virginia established its annual Literary Awards program to honor Virginia writers and celebrate their contributions to the literary landscape of our state and nation."

Alleyne, an associate professor of English and assistant director of the Furious Flower Poetry Center, was notified about her status as a finalist in the annual competition in August.

"It was [really exciting]," Alleyne said. "It was just before the semester started, and I got really excited and then dove into class planning."

Scott Dodson, executive director of the Library of Virginia Foundation, said the program is typically hosted in person but had to be held in an online format this year because of COVID-19.

"Usually the literary awards are a hosted dinner and awards ceremony with lots of pomp and circumstance in the best possible way," Dodson said. "Obviously, this year, because of the pandemic and the restrictions around it, we didn’t feel like it was appropriate to have an in-person gathering of that size."

To best use the virtual format, Dodson said the foundation added new elements to the week-long celebration of the finalists that hadn’t been possible in previous years, including livestreamed panels with each of the finalists throughout the week.

"It has been a great chance to get to know the finalists in a way we haven’t been able to before and to give them a platform to talk about their work with each other," Dodson said. "That's really been the most fascinating part."

Dodson said that another benefit of hosting both the panels and the ceremony virtually is that anyone can view them on the Library of Virginia's Facebook page or YouTube channel.

"Everything that's happened this week, including Lauren Alleyne's poetry panel participation, will live forever on our YouTube and Facebook channels, so people can go back and watch those panel discussions," Dodson said. "People can continue to participate even after the week is completed."

Dabney Bankert, head of the department of English, commented on Alleyne's writing talent.

"Her record of accomplishment is stunning," Bankert said. "Her poetry is beautiful [and] rich. There's just something about it that touches you in some way."

Alleyne offered insight into the driving force behind "Honeyfish." She said the book focuses on how people carry their own experiences as they travel and engage with new places.

"There's a moment of encounter when you go to a place, and the book is really thinking about those moments of encounter between a person and their history and a place and its history," Alleyne said.

In addition to writing, teaching and working with the Furious Flower Poetry Center, Alleyne is working on her Ph.D. at the University of Virginia. She’s studying Caribbean literature and its relationship to African American literature.

"My friends think my choice of hobbies is odd, but I really do enjoy working with some really brilliant minds and thinking about poetry from a completely different angle of world scholarship," Alleyne said.

Bankert said Alleyne has positively impacted the JMU community through her teaching and contributions to the poetry center.

"She works on programming [and] writes grant proposals [for the poetry center] and is also working on a Ph.D. at UVA," Bankert said. "I wish we had her [teaching a] little bit more, but her work with Furious Flower is important. We are really lucky to have her."

CONTACT Sydney Dudley at dudleys@dukes.jmu.edu. For more on the culture, arts and lifestyle of the JMU and Harrisonburg communities, follow the culture desk on Instagram Breeze_Culture and Twitter @ Breeze_Culture.
Breaking Free farm provides equine counseling for veterans

By AMY NEEDHAM
The Breeze

Fifty acres of open field is their office, grass their nourishment of choice. They graze here among their multicolored colleagues, awaiting their next clients as their winter coats begin to emerge. Who are these unusual therapists? Eighteen horses, two donkeys, one mule and a miniature horse.

At Breaking Free in Timberville, Virginia, Licensed Clinical Social Worker Trish Lynch uses these horses to help trauma survivors — primarily combat veterans — break free from obstacles that hinder their mental and physical recovery.

“Horses are incredibly sensitive, intuitive, smart, and, like other creatures — like dogs and cats — they pick up on things about humans very quickly,” Lynch said. “And they never lie.”

Equine specialists Paul Foltz and his wife, Jenny, purchased the farm in 1995 and became certified by the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association in equine therapy in 2009. When the stock market crashed in 2008, the Foltzes took in more horses and pursued equine therapy to give them a purpose.

Lynch said being connected to nature and the horses can make it easier for them to open up and overcome their obstacles.

“Instead of talking about their trauma, they can process it by projecting their story onto the horses,” Lynch said. “The horse requires them to step up and be the leader. They have to learn how to be assertive and in control of their emotions.”

In the early stages of therapy, clients are encouraged to find an animal on the farm that appeals to them. Over 10 to 12 sessions, they conduct training exercises to establish trust and mutual respect with their animal counterparts, which in turn creates a close bond.

A client’s typical one-hour session occurs once a week and involves Lynch, the animal and an equine specialist. Lynch and the specialist plan an activity with input from the client.

Groundwork allows clients to remain in the moment rather than relaying past trauma, which Lynch said makes it more effective than traditional therapy.

“If you are mindful in the moment, that’s where you get the most relief, and the most clarity,” Lynch said. “And there’s nothing like a 1,000-pound animal standing there next to you to keep you focused right here, right now.”

There’s also a physiological perk to using equine therapy.

“Their heart rate is so much slower than ours, and the electromagnetic field around them and their biochemistry can overpower ours,” Lynch said. “You start touching or standing close to them and petting them, grooming them, and you’ll feel yourself slow down.”

The hardest part for Lynch is taking a hands-off approach and letting the healing process happen naturally, as veterans tackle their obstacles by accomplishing tasks with their animals.

“T he P: Trust the Process,” Lynch said. “One of our veterans said that tattooed on his wrist.”

Horses aren’t the only animals on the farm that provide therapy.

Veteran Michelle Shipe has been involved with Breaking Free since 2013. Her therapy is working with the Jerusalem donkeys, Esther and her son Peanut, training them to pull carts and to accommodate riders.

Lynch was originally her therapist at the V.A. and encouraged her to visit the farm before she committed to therapy there. Seven years later, Shipe said she’s been able to open up at the farm like she never did in a traditional office setting because of her relationship with the donkeys.

“The animal takes your focus off the therapist, so you open up because of the animal,” Shipe said.

The donkeys’ unpredictable personalities are what initially appealed to Shipe.

“They challenge me,” Shipe said. “They may be small, but they are extremely strong. And if you don’t want to move, they will not move — and you can’t make them.”

Shipe said she’s used the donkeys’ stubbornness to advance her healing process by remaining calm when they don’t react the way she intends. They’ve also helped her become more comfortable in larger groups by learning how to be more assertive.

“They make you have patience, and that’s what I needed,” Shipe said. “And the animals have taught me to stand up for myself. If you don’t stand up to them, to a point, they’ll push you around.”

Now in Lynch’s eighth year on the farm, the Foltzes have given her more responsibility handling the day-to-day operations when they aren’t around. They even took their first vacation in over 10 years because of Lynch.

“I’ve been working less and less,” Paul said. “I’m getting good at doing nothing.”

Paul said he can’t imagine doing anything else.

“Horses and young people keep you young,” Paul said.

As Shipe continues her work on the farm, she said she’s thankful for not only the bonds she’s made with the donkeys but also the friendships she’s formed with Lynch and the Foltzes.

“These three people are people that I trust enough to say, ‘Hey, I need help. It’s life or death,’ where before, I didn’t have anybody,” Shipe said. “So, I know if I get to a point where it’s dangerous for me, I can come here and let them know I need help.”

For Lynch, that’s what makes the job worthwhile.

“I felt what it had done for me in two months,” Lynch said. “And so being able to share this with people and see that happen for them, too — that’s just amazing.”

CONTACT Amy Needham at needhaa@dukes.jmu.edu. For more on the culture, arts, and lifestyle of the JMU and Harrisonburg communities, follow the culture desk on Instagram and Twitter @Breeze_Culture.

Animals have the ability to physically calm humans in ways other therapy practices fail to do.
An ‘Among Us’- themed Halloween celebration is a must this year

**Dress up as an “Among Us” character**

The character designs are simple, so a costume idea would also be easy to replicate. For a budget version, one could get a hoodie the color of their “main,” — and make sure friends or family don’t steal their color — pull the strings and put a face mask on the rest of their face. Or, they could simply wear their hoodie backward and put a mask on top of the hood.

If one wants something even simpler, they could find a shirt and pants combination of their main color and wear an iconic “Among Us” hat to go with the outfit, such as a hockey mask or a toilet paper roll. If one’s looking to spend a little more, they can purchase a full-body morph suit, a backpack of the same color and paint the facial features on with fabric paint.

**Have an “Among Us” photoshoot with your roommates**

Once the costumes are ready, have an “Among Us”-style photoshoot with roommates or family members. Take photos holding wires or cables to represent the iconic wire-matching task. Have an imposter pose next to an air conditioning vent. Take photos of crewmates standing together like they do on the ending screen.

**Paint or carve “Among Us”-inspired pumpkins**

This is a fun, cost-friendly activity any “Among Us” fan can do to celebrate the fall season. Simply choose a base color and use shades of gray and white to recreate the helmet section of the character. Or, carve a pumpkin; the design shouldn’t be too difficult to cut out as they’re easily recognizable.

**Bake or create imposter-style treats**

Bake some stuffed cookies — with peanut butter, cream cheese or nutella — but with a twist. Add wasabi to two of them based on the two imposters — two people will get the shock of a lifetime. Or, if one’s not in the baking mood, open up some oreo cookies and spread some wasabi or other surprise filling of choice into two out of 10. Have friends or family close their eyes and choose a cookie. Of course, they have to eat it without looking inside.
Play "Among Us" in real life

With roommates or family members, put small pieces of paper in a hat with one or two labeled as imposters and the rest crewmates. All will pick a role at random and imposters will open their eyes to acknowledge who the other imposter is. Crewmate roles will include any number of preassigned tasks depending on the game’s difficulty. Then, players will turn off most lights and complete their tasks; no one can talk until a meeting occurs.

Tasks can be made with paper scattered around the house. For example, the Medbay Scan can be a player writing down their health information such as height on a piece of paper. Fixing wires could be connecting different lines with a colored pencil or dry erase marker. In one room, there could be a piece of paper where players check off tasks after completing them.

When an imposter “kills” someone, the victim will lay on the floor. All players can report bodies by playing a certain sound or song on their phone or yell, “Dead body!” There can be a designated room for “dead” players. If someone’s voted off, they can join that group and show their fellow “ghosts” their paper indicating whether or not they were the imposter. After one “dies,” they become a “ghost” and can put the crewmate/imposter paper on their head with tape, so everyone can see they’re dead, and continue completing their tasks.

The crewmates will win the game after successfully voting off the imposters or checking off all the tasks on the taskboard. Imposters, unable to check off any tasks for themselves, will simply have to pretend or lie. They’ll take home the win if they manage to “kill” enough crewmates, rendering them unable to vote out the remaining number of imposters.

Play the actual game on Halloween night

Stay safe this Halloween season and play “Among Us” at home instead of going out. Connect with friends online or play a few rounds with roommates or family members. Only talk during meetings and stay muted — if on a voice call — or silent during gameplay.

It’s hard to imagine why anyone wouldn’t want to have an “Among Us” Halloween celebration this year. It’s the perfect game to play to safely celebrate the holiday and doesn’t require anyone to leave the house. So, stay home this Halloween weekend, dress up as an “Among Us” character using whatever’s in the closet, and most importantly, don’t get killed in electrical.

CONTACT Kailey Cheng at thebreezeculture@gmail.com.

For more on the culture, arts, and lifestyle of the JMU and Harrisonburg communities, follow the culture desk on Instagram and Twitter @Breeze_Culture.

One can paint “Among Us” space suit pumpkins with their favorite colors. Christine Brady / The Breeze
The cost of COVID-19

Dukes Unite campaign launched after JMU Athletics loses $5.5 million

By NOAH ZIEGLER
The Breeze

As JMU Athletics stares at a deep loss, it’s one of many college athletic departments across the country that’s facing sizable financial burdens.

In a Zoom call with members of the media, Director of Athletics Jeff Bourne said JMU is looking at an estimated loss of $5.5 million due to factors caused by the coronavirus.

“We need a lot of money,” Bourne said. “We think as a result of revenue losses, reductions in gift revenue and the expenses that we not only are anticipating that we might have but any that we may have in the future, that figure’s gonna hover around the $5.5 million figure.”

Dukes sports were put on hold mid-March when the coronavirus reached the U.S. Since then, teams have resumed practices and other activities, with brief pauses following outbreaks of positive cases. Fall sports have been suspended and will likely play their respective seasons in the spring. Football will know its fate once the CAA releases its schedule in late October or early November.

The loss of football in the fall plays a major role in the $5.5 million shortfall. The lack of gate receipts from fans coming to Bridgeforth Stadium — which seats 24,877 — dents the normal revenue, but another reason is the loss of the Dukes’ game against UNC.

The Tar Heels were set to send JMU $500,000 as part of the guaranteed payment of COVID-19

Thursday, October 22, 2020

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JMU football is slated to kickoff its 2021 season in late February. Tristan Lorei / The Breeze

JMU basketball’s full schedule has yet to be released, leaving more uncertainty ahead of the 2020-21 season. Christine Brady / The Breeze

JMU’s 2019 Financial Report, the total expenses for Athletics was $33,145,528. Currently, JMU hasn’t had to make drastic changes to the makeup of its athletic department. Many schools have had to cut teams in order to cut costs, something Bourne has emphasized he wants to avoid. But with schools like William & Mary cutting multiple varsity sports — and now dealing with the fallout — show no university is immune to potential major changes to its sports.

“If things don’t change and we can’t raise money, the way you experience JMU Athletics is gonna change.”

Cliff Wood
Senior associate athletics director for development

With the majority of collegiate sports set to return in the spring, the pressure is high for JMU to attempt to steady the financial burden while continuing its prowess on the field. If goals aren’t met financially, Bourne said aspects of JMU sports could be altered away from that, but if it is the case, we’ll be a part of the university move in that direction.”

“We are operating on incredibly thin margins — our goal would be we will follow the university’s lead on whatever they do,” Bourne said. “There has not been an announcement yet [for] furloughs or salary reductions. We’re gonna do everything that we can on the expense side to hopefully stay away from that, but if it is the case, we’ll be a part of the university move in that direction.”

JMU also hasn’t announced salary reductions like other schools, some of which are major powers in college sports like Clemson and Ohio State. But, Bourne said JMU Athletics will follow what the university decides.

“If things don’t change and we can’t raise money, the way you experience JMU Athletics is gonna change,” Wood said. “We just don’t have the budget to pay for those things.”

CONTACT Noah Ziegler at breezesports@gmail.com. For more coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.

breezesports@gmail.com
breezesports@gmail.com
Field hockey players from Netherlands strive for success

By MADISON HRICIK
The Breeze

Sophomore forward Eveline Zwager and sophomore midfielder Diede Remijnse both grew up playing field hockey in the Netherlands, where the best players in the world train and compete. The girls gained years of experience playing for the Dutch, competing on travel and national squads.

Yet these two players decided to leave their native country and travel to the U.S. to play in Harrisonburg. Coming to JMU was a big decision for both girls, and the two said they’ve enjoyed their experience so far.

The Netherlands has been the best nation for field hockey for many years. Holding a record-breaking eight gold medals during the Olympics, seven World Cup championships, six Champion Trophies and nine European Cup championships, the women’s field hockey team has become a dynasty in the field hockey world. Being the most successful national team in the country, the sport is taken seriously. There are over 350,000 registered players across the country, which doesn’t include players like Zwager and Remijnse who are playing around the world.

“The coaching styles between the two countries were very different,” Zwager said. “The U.S. focuses a lot more on the mental aspect, and back home focuses a lot on the physical skills, so that was something new to get used to. And I loved the need for themselves and the community.”

The Dutch have the best technique and agility in their stick skills, and this comes from a strong focus on basics from a very young age. Most players in the Netherlands begin playing as young as four years old and will play through college and beyond. These young players are introduced to professionally made fields known as astroturf, which is what national, collegiate and international teams compete on. In contrast, the U.S. focuses more on being mentally engaged while playing, such as seeing a pass or play forming and keeping a positive mind.

However, the recruitment process was much different from how domestic athletes are recruited. Neither teammate met Morgan and the coaching staff in person until they arrived last fall. Instead, the use of websites, highlight videos and Skype chats became the reason Morgan was able to see what they could do. When the time came to choose which school the girls were going to, JMU was a standout choice.

“I made the decision fairly late,” Remijnse said. “But I knew I wanted to broaden my perspectives of the world and experience something new while continuing to play field hockey. That’s when I realized the U.S. and JMU were the perfect fit for me.”

Both joined the Dukes’ roster in 2019 and hit the ground running. Zwager became a statistical leader for the Dukes, scoring four goals and two assists on 14 shots on goal. Remijnse started every game last season for the Dukes as well. The two are paired together on the lineup, often passing the ball to each other up the field.

The two girls endured many changes even before stepping onto the field for the first time. Coaching styles are different, the ages are different and even the rules are different. However, the girls agreed that the hardest part was adapting to U.S. culture and college life all at once. Moving across the globe nearly a month before classes start as a freshman is as terrifying as it sounds, but the two were excited to join the JMU family.

“I think picturing how close everyone was here was something I hadn’t had the chance to experience before,” Remijnse said. “It made me really love JMU even more when I got here to play.”

Remijnse explained that there was uncertainty during the beginning of the pandemic, and she was unsure if they could return home and lost nearly all of the spring training she’d been looking forward to. However, once she returned home for the remainder of the semester, Remijnse focused her mindset on controlling what she could — something head coach Christy Morgan had been training the girls to do.

Remijnse’s leadership and knowledge to help guide the team to new levels.

"Both of them are elite level players, but more than that they have passion for the game," Morgan said. "There’s nothing better than coaching athletes who love to be coached, and I love that about them both."

see DUTCHESSES, page 21
Teams have had various plans for fans returning to stadiums. Tristan Lorei / The Breeze

Lock the gates?

Opinion | Sports stadiums weren’t ready to welcome fans back

By COURTNEY RYDER
The Breeze

The sports world has resumed a sense of normalcy. After a months-long pause because of COVID-19, sports leagues found ways to safely resume or start their seasons. When some sports leagues around the world resumed in May, the possibility of welcoming fans into stadiums seemed like an unlikely occurrence. However, the NFL and many colleges have experimented with allowing fans to attend games. Southern universities like Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina have allowed season ticket holders and students to attend at a limited capacity.

College football started relatively smoothly but has dealt with a spike of positive cases and many postponements in the past week. Nick Saban, the head coach at the University of Alabama, is one of many coaches, players and staff members who’s recently tested positive for the virus. Saban’s diagnosis almost resulted in the postponement of the Crimson Tide’s much-anticipated game against the University of Georgia; however, it happened as scheduled with Saban coaching from the sidelines.

“I found out earlier this afternoon that I had tested positive for COVID-19,” Saban said in a statement released on Oct. 14. “I immediately left work and isolated at home. At this time, I do not have any symptoms relative to COVID-19, and I have taken another PCR test to confirm my diagnosis.”

Some people have raised concerns over how seriously schools are handling safety precautions. Numerous images and videos were posted by students on social media showing a seeming lack of face masks and social distancing enforcement at games. Although fans probably weren’t the reason for many players and coaches testing positive, one could unknowingly come in contact with the virus while at the game, especially if one isn’t practicing safe social distancing.

Professional sports leagues are also seeing a rise in positive cases. The NFL had to postpone or relocate games after multiple team outbreaks. Despite the Indianapolis Colts having to shut down the team’s training facility after players received positive test results, up to 12,500 fans were allowed to attend the team’s game against the Cincinnati Bengals.

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said in a media call that the league must remain flexible in order to finish the season, according to NFL Network reporter Tom Pelissero.

“We cannot grow complacent — not the players, not of the coaches, not the rest of personnel,” Goodell said. “Ninety percent is not good enough in this environment.”

While fans attending games isn’t to blame for outbreaks amongst teams, it certainly raises some red flags about fan safety. Because specialists are still learning more information about the virus on a daily basis, how sure can one be about one’s safety in a stadium? Until more information about the virus — including transmission — is known, the health of fans should be prioritized and protected by not allowing them to attend games.

Despite fall sports being canceled, JMU still needs to remain flexible with training and practices. Jeff Bourne, JMU’s Director of Athletics, discussed setbacks teams have had to overcome while navigating through this offseason in a letter addressing the program’s financial losses due to COVID-19 and future fundraising.

“We paused all workouts for 15 of our 18 sport programs in September due to positive cases on our campus,” Bourne said. “The continued uncertainty on our student-athletes and staff have taken a mental and emotional toll as well.”

It’s not yet clear what Bridgeforth Stadium will look like on game days this season as the country is currently experiencing a second wave of the pandemic. Although the future for sports and public gatherings is the brightest it’s been since the onset of the pandemic in March, there’s still concern regarding the safety of allowing fans in stadiums while enforcing social distancing.

If COVID-19 guidelines are implemented and enforced properly, fans should be allowed to attend games. However, it seems like the NFL, NCAA and other leagues failed to achieve this.

It’s a great accomplishment that sports have been able to resume, but for now leagues should solely focus on maintaining the health of their teams and taking more time to make sure it’s safe for fans to return before allowing them to do so.

CONTACT Courtney Ryder at ryderce@dukes.jmu.edu. For more coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.
The NCAA has announced that fall athletes will receive an extra year of eligibility, though it’s all at the discretion of coaches and the athletes. Depending on what happens in the spring, it’s likely that a few members on the roster will take advantage of the extra year. However, the two players said they’re just happy to be back on the field practicing with their teammates and coaches.

Zwager has always had a close connection with her teammates prior to committing to JMU, but her friendships were different than in the U.S. She said that her field hockey friends were separate from school friends because the idea of playing for a school isn’t common. However, at JMU, her teammates are essentially her sisters, and she said it’s her favorite part of being a Duke.

“I love just being on the field with the team I love so much,” Zwager said. “My teammates and coaches get along so well, so it doesn’t feel like I’m far from home, but I feel like I am home, just in a different setting.”

JMU field hockey has resumed on-field practices; however, a spring schedule has yet to be revealed. Morgan’s known for challenging the Dukes with game schedules, so it’s likely that will feature some high ranked teams. However, Zwager and Remijnse are excited for the challenges and what a spring season could bring.

CONTACT Madison Hricik at hricikmn@dukes.jmu.edu. For more coverage, follow the sports desk on Twitter @TheBreezeSports.
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