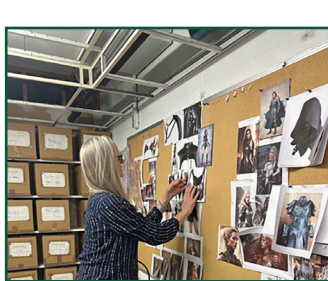




NEWS

The second installment of Letter from London (and Amsterdam this week!)

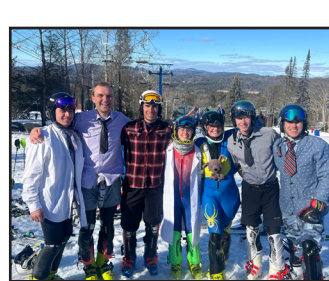
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NEWS

Learn how the theater costumes come to life behind the scenes.

PAGE 4



SPORTS

Alpine skiers celebrate senior race, gear up for postseason.

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Castleton, Vermont

Thursday, February 22, 2024

SCASTLETON SPARTAN

STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF VTSU CASTLETON

Teaching English at Castleton for 28 years



CARLY CENTENO

Professor Burnham Holmes poses with a collection of his books.

By Carly Centeno
Castleton Spartan

English professor Burnham Holmes has been teaching and writing all his life, but he has never stayed in the same place longer than he has been working at Vermont State University Castleton.

He comes originally from Poultney and has been an English professor at Castleton University since 1996.

But he has taught all around the world.

Holmes said he knew he was a writer ever since the fourth grade, when his teacher told him “Why Burnham, I think you are a writer.”

“In 8th grade, I wrote a book report on “Run Silent, Run Deep” by Edward Beach, because I enjoyed that book a lot and my father told me you are a real writer, which meant everything to me,” Holmes said with a smile.

He continued with writing throughout his life, and has written over a dozen books and has been featured in many others. The favorite book he has written and published is “One Shining Moment,” a book about relatively normal people who have done amazing things.

“I was taking care of my son and writing at the same time. I wanted to write about normal people who have a big shining moment,” Holmes said.

But he doesn't only write books. Holmes has also produced two different plays that have been performed! One was supposed to be put on at Castleton University, by due to COVID they had to cancel. Another is running currently in Poultney.

“Three plays around 10 minutes, see them on stage, seeing actors saying your words, it was emotional. I cried through all three

shows while watching them,” Holmes said.

Along with his amazing writing career, he has been all over Europe teaching everywhere. He has taught in Stockholm, London, Paris, Germany. It seems anywhere you can think of, Holmes has probably been there.

By far his favorite place in Europe was London, he said. He enjoyed teaching in all the countries saying there's a different type of respect shown to teachers there than there is in America.

“London was always a surprise; you could walk down the street and you would see these blue signs that represented a famous place or something of significance happened there. Another moment was when I was in the British Library and I sat under a noble prize that belonged to Tony Morrison. I ended up working with her for four years,” Holmes said.

Holmes said he has never shown much care for a luxury lifestyle knowing that being a writer and teaching comes with its own set of struggles, but that never changed his mind on what he wanted to do.

“You only write for a few people. Everything I've written has always been for someone. Currently I am writing a memoir on my life for my son. You learn so much about yourself when thinking back on your life trying to put this together and remembering everything,” Holmes said.

He continues to show passion in the classroom and loves to help his students thrive, even when he isn't himself, because of the joy teaching brings him.

See 'Burnham' on page 6

NAACP events mark Black History Month

By Kianna Giroux
Spartan Contributor

The 1787 room was filled with vibrant color and stories as the VTSU Castleton branch of the NAACP held its annual Black History Fair held on Feb. 8.

With the sound of soulful music in the background members of the NAACP were spewing knowledge and information about African Americans in the Arts in one of their many events happening during Black History Month.

They held a previous event on Feb. 4 in the Hoff Hall conference room filled with red, yellow, and green streamers and balloons where people gathered around the tables ready to eat soul food. On the menu was crunchy fried chicken, creamy mac and cheese and more from Harmony's Kitchen.

At the Black History Fair, members spoke about musical pioneers, from Whitney Houston and Beyonce, to athletes such as Jesse Owens and Serena Williams to influential poets like Audre Lorde and Lucille Clifton.

The room was filled with knowledge of amazing black artists.

“If you're unfamiliar with black culture, art is one of the things black people do best,” said Kayon Morgan, president of the chapter said.

Members of the chapter gathered around posters they had made for the event wearing black NAACP shirts making it easier to spot them for any questions.

The posters were filled with information about African American musicians in history, athletes, The Underground Railroad and different African Americans in poetry and more!

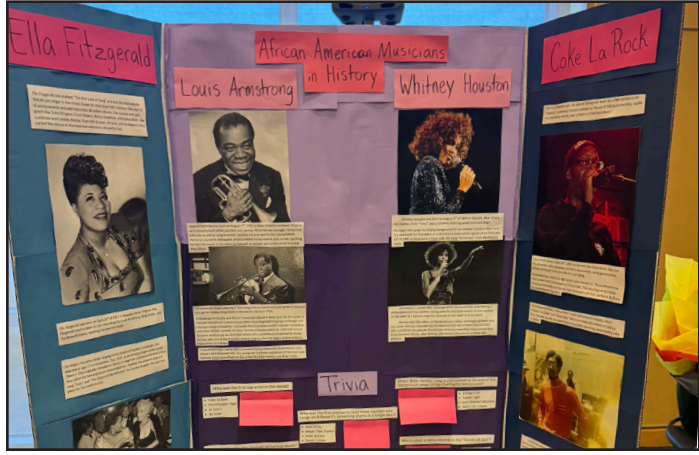
With a welcoming presence, they were ready to spread more information to people in attendance.

“It's important to be open-minded and less ignorant about certain things and topics within the black community and being informed about black problems and topics especially at a predominantly white place like Castleton,” said Tiara Robinson, a current member of the chapter.

Robinson stood in front of a poster of Audre Lorde who identified as lesbian, a civil rights activist, a poet, an intersectional feminist and an advocate for the LGBTQ plus community.

Morgan said the NAACP branch is strong but always needs help.

“We're always looking for new people to join our organization. We're hoping to spark leadership and build community, come join us!” Morgan said with a warm smile on her face. “Join us, work still needs to be done.”



KIANNA GIROUX

Members of the NAACP present posters about amazing Black artists at the Black History Fair.

College Steps opening opportunities at Castleton since 2012

By Adam Shard
Spartan Contributor

In Leavenworth Hall in room 59 resides Patty Moore, the head of the College Steps program on the VTSU Castleton campus.

Started in the fall of 2012, the College Steps program is designed to help adults with learning and social differences learn how to succeed in independence and try out the college environment.

“The College Steps program is a non-profit for students of varying abilities to work towards academics, social, independence, and work readiness,” Moore said during an interview. “The program consists of different paths that the student can take. For most, there is the two-year higher education certificate for students who have goals towards the four Steps pillars. They normally start as non-matric and they get a certificate of higher education, which is endorsed by the Steps program and VTSU Castleton.”

Matthew Kennedy, a first-year Steps student, was asked what he has learned so far through the program.

“Taking the community class

has helped me to learn to respond to emails, and how to check out the new emergency system, during the early October incident,” he said of the off-campus shooting of a former dean.

Alongside him was his mentor, Jenee McGee, who was asked if anything she had learned as a steps mentor would help her with her degree.

“I think I'll be sharing my experiences with the students, and also using my degree to help me figure out situations,” she said.

In recent years, the College Steps program has expanded to support degree-seeking students who are pursuing their four-year bachelor's degrees.

Moore said one of the key ways that College Steps is different from many other support systems on the VTSU Castleton campus is that they use peer-mentor-based learning, and this means that all mentors are full-time degree-seeking students, she said. They are paid and trained through Steps.

“What I think it brings to this campus is the true meaning of integration,” Moore said.

Alongside Moore, the newest addition to the staff of College

Steps is Jasmin Tirado, the Steps support specialist.

“It means a lot to these students to have the opportunity to have a great experience to be a college student, to get a taste of college life,” Tirado said during an interview.

Many professors have said wonderful things about the Steps program too. David Blow, one of the media and communications professors here on the Castleton Campus, has had great experiences with Steps students.

“The Steps students bring a different viewpoint to the classroom. I have had good experiences with the Steps students, and despite their challenges, they have excelled and it's great to see them go from the Steps program to full-time students in some cases.”

Blow mentioned a former Intro to Journalism student who he said was one of the best students in the fall of 2023 class, and he didn't even know she was a former Steps student until later in the semester.

“I wouldn't have known that she was a former steps student without Patty telling me,” Blow said.

Blow has also said that he has

had mostly positive experiences with Steps students in his courses.

“I've had five to six students and some have been more challenging, but mostly positive experiences,” he said.

Along with supporting students in their academic and independent living skills, the Steps program hosts community events for the VTSU Castleton campus and the Steps students to come together, like their unified basketball event that happens twice a semester where Steps students play alongside other full-time students who are their partners during the game.

College Steps is also on the Lyndon and Johnson campuses, and CCV has a branch of the Steps program, but it's in Montpelier and is mainly for vocational support and learning.

For the future of the Steps program, Moore said they are going to be hiring future mentors for the 2024-2025 school year.

“If you are interested in learning about College Steps, we have a website, but if you are on the Castleton Campus, you can pop into Leavenworth, room 59, and you can introduce yourself,” said Moore.



AVERY BOUCHARD

Students in the College Steps program compete in a basketball game.

Short-staffed Facilities Dept. is working hard, so help them out

I am a part-time student here at Vermont State University. I went to the Community College of Vermont in Rutland, where I graduated with an associate's degree in Multimedia Communications.

After some time away from school, I took several jobs and eventually wound up here. I am not only a student, but a full-time employee here at the Castleton Campus, and while the job does have its benefits, such as funded schooling, allowing me to go back to school and pursue a bachelor's in Communications, it also has its setbacks.

All of us here at VTSU, the students, the faculty, and the staff have been impacted by the sudden changes taking place among all VTSU campuses. However, we sometimes forget the challenges each one of us faces on a day-to-day basis.

Over the course of my job here at Castleton, I have noticed a tremendous change in the Facilities Department. There are a number of reasons for this. In the current economy, no one wants to work for minimum wage, and many places are paying employees well, desperate just for the help.

And while the benefits of working for VTSU are nothing to complain about, the hourly pay isn't exactly one to write home about. To drive home my main point, I would like to shed some light on the working conditions of some of our hardest working employees, the Facilities crew.

This crew includes custodians, like myself, along with others who keep our campus and our property running as smoothly as possible. However, pressure rises as employees have stepped up to take on multiple roles, with new employment dwindling.

With the changes and need for more feet on the ground, it has been a bit of a struggle, to put it lightly. My hope is to bring some awareness to these hard workers and try to be understanding of each other as we work through these changes.

We need to be patient and remember we are all experiencing the changes, but also think about the hard work that goes into keeping our school up and running.

I happen to know these people very well, and while most here are very appreciative and understanding, the hit our facilities department has taken has gone largely unnoticed. There have been a number of complaints about conditions on campus, and I feel, as someone who is in the midst of it all, as though this should be addressed from a Facilities' employee's perspective.

One thing I would like to make very clear is that we are very few. That means we are very few feet on the ground, actually working to maintain a clean, functioning campus. And while we work very hard to keep up, there is only so much a few people can do. Much of this goes unnoticed as many of the employees making up other departments do not always witness what we do as Facilities.

So, when making a complaint or addressing an issue to Facilities, I only respectfully ask that you do so with this knowledge. Try to address hard-pressing issues that impact the entire campus and try to do your part as well.

As we transition into this "better together" mentality, we really should all be working together to address these issues. If possible, try to get out there and talk to people, put your feet on the ground and ask what you can do to help. Avoid putting small, selfish tasks first. This greatly helps out our Facilities crew and helps us all keep the important things in perspective.

We've received a lot of complaints over very small things that keep us from tackling bigger issues that impact the school as a whole.

I ask that you do your part, help make us truly better together.

- Amanda Johnson



JOE VYVIAL

Spartan is staying!

A couple weeks ago, it was announced that the "Castleton Spartan," Johnson's "Basement Medicine," and Lyndon's "The Critic" would have to unite as a singular Vermont State University newspaper at the end of this semester.

It came as a shock to us all. Speaking for our team, we were sad and disappointed to have to say goodbye to what we have all worked so hard on.

Additionally, we had logistical concerns, such as how we would be able to coordinate with the other campuses, design together, and distribute physical copies to create something that represented each of us.

But then we learned late last week that we will not have to unify, after all.

There apparently was enough push back to call it off.

Spartan advisor Dave Blow and I are certainly relieved, since he was chosen to advise the new publication, and I would have represented Castleton's end of it.

We were hesitant, but willing. I admired the team's open-mindedness to the operation, something I didn't have much of.

I didn't want the papers to merge. It was personal, sure. I've been a reporter since my freshman year. It was more than that, though.

Mostly, I thought it was unnecessary. A lot of hassle for something that works perfectly fine already.

But this whole loop-de-loop has made me wonder how I can

improve as an editor; how I can manage my team better, expand the types of news we cover, even tie in other campuses when it's relevant.

We should learn about other campuses. It doesn't have to be forced, though.

Naturally, if we begin to open lines of communication, we will inevitably meet new people and see what other campuses have to offer.

It was amazing to see the shared participation at the Montpelier State House press conference in November.

Although I had not personally met Dayne Bell, editor of "Basement Medicine," prior to him reaching out to me about the potential merger, I recognized him.

He spoke at the press conference, expressing his concerns and disappointment over staff and faculty cuts from Optimization 2.0.

Isn't that already a connection? Having a shared interest and experience with someone from another campus?

Stress of the situation aside, collaboration like that is what we need to become more unified, as VTSU aspires.

I'm excited to pay attention to "Basement Medicine" and "The Critic" more.

I still believe in campus pride, though. It's what makes a community thrive.

- Pearl Bellomo

Check us out online at castletonspartan.com



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*The Spartan is the official student newspaper of VTSU Castleton. It functions to inform, educate and entertain readers accurately and responsibly. The University, its administration, faculty, student body and staff are not responsible for the content of the newspaper.

Ever see a Five-Lined Skink?

Unless you study Vermont Herpetology (the study of reptiles and amphibians), it is very hard to memorize and remember all the reptile species native to the Green Mountain State. This beautiful state has 41 confirmed species of reptiles and amphibians.

The Green Mountain State houses seven species of turtles, 11 snakes, 11 salamanders, 11 frogs, and a staggering one species of Lizard; the Five-Lined Skink (also known as the *Plestiodon fasciatus*).

This lizard usually resides by cliffs, specifically rockslides, and areas near ledges, open woods, and territories near water.

According to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, the only recorded sightings of five-lined skinks in Vermont have been in West Haven, a town west of Rutland in Rutland County.

Their limited residence may spark curiosity about this species' survival.

Five-lined skinks consume a steady diet of grasshoppers, crickets, cockroaches, leafhoppers, beetles, beetle larvae, flies,



A rare five-lined skink.

ants, spiders, caterpillars, and many other bugs. These predation patterns contribute positively to their ecosystems by keeping insect populations in check, many of which become bothersome to humans.

When Common Five Lined Skinks are juveniles, they usually have five stripes that run down their back with a black background.

The males always have a bright blue tail, while the females lose

the blue on their tail and their patterns of stripes are less visible.

The adult males tend to be brown all over and develop a red throat and even a red head when breeding, making them hard to miss to the females.

Adult males typically weigh between 5 to 9 grams and reach lengths of 13 to 21 centimeters, while the females weigh 3 to 6 grams and measure 12 to 20 centimeters.

In Vermont, The Common

Five-Lined Skink has a state rank of S1. This means they are endangered. They have also been designated as a species of greatest conservation need in Vermont's Wildlife Action Plan.

We don't have a lot of information on Five Lined Skink populations in the state of Vermont, especially if we compare our research with other reptile and amphibian species.

As everything else has come in nature, we have risen to the top of our ecological chains. Therefore, our actions affect the wildlife around us; whether that be positively or negatively.

I hope this amazing species of lizard stays in Vermont and their numbers can bounce back. The Common Five Lined Skink is a very impressive reptile, and it should continue to have a home in the beautiful green mountains of Vermont.

If you are lucky enough to see this species or want to learn more, contact our state herpetologist, James Andrews (802) 352-4734.

- Gavin Bradley

Is it cheaper to live off-campus?

By Carly Centeno
Castleton Spartan

Many students going into junior year try to move off campus because they believe it is a lot cheaper than the dorms, but will they save that much money?

Living in a house or an apartment can be a bit pricey, students say, with some having to pay rent every month and utilities such as WIFI, oil, gas and electricity.

Living in the dorms, you don't have to worry about those issues. But there are other issues, students say, like no hot water, heating being too hot, no air-conditioning and random roommates.

Another thing to consider when thinking about living off-campus is groceries. In the dorms, you have meal plans but with that, you can only eat at certain times in the dining hall.

On the Vermont State University Website, it states that the standard meal plan costs \$2,622 per semester.

Looking at billing statements from many students, they have all been charged \$2,534 for an unlimited meal plan per semester, up from \$2,437 last year. So, for both semesters last year, it was \$4,874 compared to \$5,068 this year.

On the website, it includes how much it is estimated to cost for food off-campus, which was \$3,998, a \$1,516 difference.

"I enjoy not relying on Huden for my meals, it is so much better being able to know exactly what I am eating," VTSU Castleton student Walter Lundström said.

The cost of living in the dorm, according to the VTSU website, it is about \$4,052 per semester, or \$8,104 for the year. Yet looking at students' billing statements it says that for this semester it costs, \$3,915, or \$7,830 for the year.

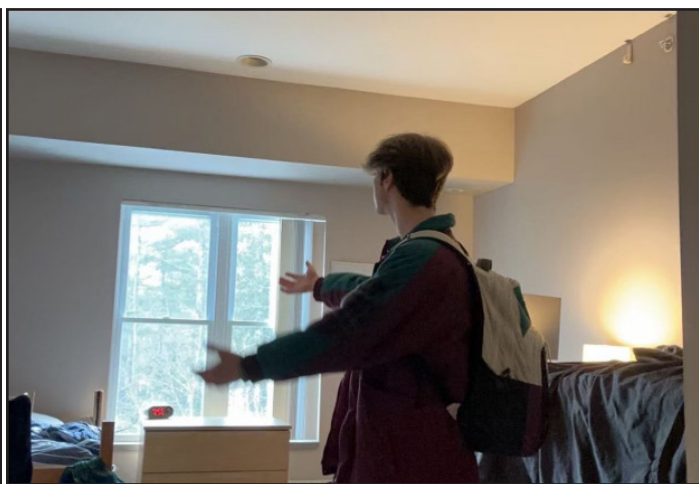
That fee is up about \$300 per year from last year. The website also has an estimate of what living off-campus would cost, which is an estimate of \$9,328 for the entire year.

VTSU Castleton students Andrew Keeler and Walter Lundström live off campus in a house with their other friends. With four people in the house, they each pay \$475 per month for rent. They also must pay for oil, gas, WIFI, and electricity, which is about \$400 altogether every month.

They pay around \$875 per month and their lease is for 12 months, so they do have access to the house all year around unlike a dorm where you only have access



Andrew Keeler, Mithell Guunther, Jason Comeau and Walter Lundstrom pose in their apartment while Tyler Serrani, who formerly lived in an apartment, shows off his dorm room.



CARLEY CENTENO

during a specific amount of time.

"I spend around \$400 a month on groceries as well, but I do take advantage of a friend's guest swipe for Huden here and there," Keeler said.

They pay an estimate of \$10,500 each for the entire year in the house.

Another student, Tyler Serrani, lived off-campus last year and returned to dorms this year. His rent was \$825 per person and about \$40 for each for electricity per month. There were three people in

the house, but they added a fourth roommate at one point, bringing the rent down to \$650. By himself, he had to pay about \$10,380 for the entire year, which is honestly not that big of a difference from living in the dorms.

"I moved back to the dorms because I prefer living closer to my classes, and not having to drive my car as much is nice," Serrani said.

Castleton Hockey player, Jeremy Laplante, has never lived in the dorms due to his coaches suggesting and helping him get hous-

ing off-campus.

"As a men's team hockey player, living off campus was a major factor in committing here," Laplante said.

He lives in a house owned by a previous student who transferred, Dylan Miller. He has a nine-month lease, which is \$400 a month but, has access to the house year-round. He pays about \$3,600 for nine months, which is just about as much as one semester in a dorm.

So, looking over the data, it does seem like living off-campus

for some people does cost more than living in the dorms, but it all depends on many different variables. The prices vary from different landlords and food costs differ. For some students, it is a little cheaper but for others, it's only a little bit more expensive.

"It may not be cheaper by much or at all, but having my own place is very nice. It gives you a different sense of freedom and independence than you would have in the dorms," Lundström said.

VT's mild winter is both loved and hated

By Royal Wood
Spartan contributor

Everyone knows that this winter has been mild. Some have been loving it and others have been hating it.

Like members of the ski team. Camille Jackson, an Alpine ski team member who loves winter, said that "winter sports are under threat."

Jackson said the ski team is having trouble with training due to the lack of snow in the mountains.

But she said this isn't the first winter they had to deal with this kind of weather.

Fellow racer Ines Robres also talked about why this winter has been a downer for ski racing.

"At the beginning of the season, we had some problems because there was not a lot of snow," she said.

Robres likes winter and doesn't mind the warmer temperatures, it's just the lack of snow that is the issue.

"I think the weather is, in general, is pretty good," she said.

On the other side of the coin, history professor Taylor Tobias, a native of South Florida, is pleased with the mild, relatively snowless winter.

"Contrary to most people, I think I have been enjoying this winter compared to most others," he said.

Tobias does enjoy some parts of winter, though.

"I find the snow to be pretty, I like to be able to watch it fall out my window," he said

He also mentioned the savings he had on fuel for heating.

Another student, Dew Barrington, has also enjoyed this mild winter.

"I don't like snow, which is weird, because I lived in Vermont my entire life, and it snows a lot here. Just not a big fan of it," he said.

He too said fresh snow is "pretty."

"But when it goes to mush, that's the part I really don't like," he said.

And some students don't really seem to care either way.

Davin McIrrer said that he doesn't mind the cold, but he does miss the snow too.

Another student, Mim Hussnane, enjoys the milder temperature but said, "When I think winter, I picture snow and not having snow is a little weird feeling."

Letters from London

From London to Amsterdam

Excursion filled with wrong turns, crazy bicycling and memories forever

By Jess Emery
Castleton Spartan

This past weekend I took my first journey outside of England.

Me and five of my friends booked at last minute trip to Amsterdam for my friend Lucy's 20th birthday.

By last minute, I mean my friend Savannah planned the whole thing two days before we left.

Arriving in Amsterdam and getting through customs was a breeze. When the customs officer asked what I planned to do in Amsterdam, I told him I planned on riding a bike and walking past the Anne Frank house, because tickets were sold out for the actual tour.

His only response was, "ah, it's okay. She's not there anyway."

Immediately things went south, however, when we somehow managed to sneak onto an international train to Belgium.

By the time we realized we were headed for Brussels, we were about two hours away from the airport.

My friends and I were standing shoulder to shoulder with about 20 other people and they all were trying to help us figure out where we needed to go.

After much discussion, and the locals picking fun at our American stupidity, we got headed in the right direction.

Home sweet home for the next two nights was a hostel located right in the center of Amsterdam. There were three bunk beds in a tiny room painted a bright green. It was going to be a cozy couple of nights.

Amsterdam is known as the City of Bikes, which makes sense considering the majority of our near-death experiences were from nearly being taken out by people on the two wheels.

Although the city was packed and busy, there was a certain calmness that you don't ever see in America.

No one was rushing anywhere.

People spent a lot of their times chatting outside of pubs or gathered in the coffee shops.

Everywhere you turned, you'd be walking across a canal. I didn't realize just how much water there was.

Our first day was pretty leisurely; we got brunch, went to the Rijks Museum and stumbled our way into Little Italy.

We couldn't decide which restaurant we wanted to try out for



COURTESY OF JESS EMERY

VTSU Castleton student Jess Emery, top center, traveled from her study abroad school in London to Amsterdam to celebrate a new friend's birthday.

lunch and finally a waiter in one place came out and said we'd each get a free shot if we had lunch there.

We didn't need any more convincing.

We visited one of the infamous Amsterdam coffee shops and tried some of their brownies and then made our way back to the hostel to rest for a few hours.

The biggest culture shock by far was the language barrier. For dinner I thought I was ordering some sort of fried white fish, but when the waiter brought out fish that looked like little sardines I

was horrified.

Mostly because you could see the outline of their fins and eyeballs.

For our second and final day we had a lot to squeeze in.

We went to a giant market with a ton of food and vintage clothing and collectables being sold.

My friend and I both picked up hand-made leather-bound notebooks for nine euros each.

We walked by the Anne Frank house, which was insane. It really struck me how lucky I am to be able to travel to all of these places and see all of these glimpses of

history.

We made our way to a bike rental spot to ride around in a nearby park.

Mind you, I am not a very good cyclist and the way they ride here is very intense.

Bikers get their own lane on the road and follow the same rules the cars do.

I ended up renting a children's bike because all the adult ones were too tall, and I was not willing to risk my safety.

At least I saved a little money.

We took a canal cruise that was beautiful and learned a bit about

the history of Amsterdam.

After that, it was time to start our night.

I think it's important to note that since we had a 7 a.m. flight the next morning, we decided instead of paying for the hostel another night we would just stay out until 3:30 a.m. and then make our way to the airport.

We went to a small pub and then to a place called Winkel, that's known for their world famous Apple Pie.

See 'Amsterdam' on Page 6

Opinion:

Library job is so fun and just what I needed

By Ian Haskins
Castleton Spartan

During my third year in Castleton, I was worried about how I was going to adapt to a small-time job to keep myself afloat. Growing up, I've seen how people always get excited about their first job and how much they expect it to be fun or enjoyable, but I never understood it. My reason as to why I never understood it was because

I found jobs to be a necessary tool in order to put food on the table and not acquiring the right kind of fun I would like. I saw an opening position in Calvin Coolidge Library for circulation at the front desk and I figured it would be the right place to start.

I made sure to keep my expectations low about it because I didn't want to disappoint myself. My reasons for why I took the library circulation job is because I wanted the experience and to help

myself understand what it's like working; though it may only be work-study, I figured it would be a good start to whatever I may be looking forward to. Though my expectations were low, my time doing circulation incredibly enjoyable in its own way, the first thing I was taught to do was to stock books into the shelves in the right order according to the Dewey Decimal System where I have to pay attention to the right numbers and letter associated to

the number; if there was ever a mistake I made, I'm supposed to leave an orange slip with my initials so they know who placed what book in the wrong place. When restocking books has already been taken care of, I'm given tasks to deliver whatever books need to be removed from the library. I don't specifically know what happens if there's not a specific book in the library I'm supposed to recover, but if it's not there then it's no big deal.

Once restocking the books and receiving specific ones for the staff is finished, the only thing left to do while working is stick to the front desk where you help students and teachers check in and/or out any books they might need; the front desk helped me with my social skills personally because I've always had trouble interacting with people, but interacting with people

checking in and out of books allowed me to be more interactive

and show my best self. Sometimes taking a first job can be scary, but if you give it enough thought and think about the set of skills you have, you'll be able to find the right one and have fun of your own with it; there's nothing wrong with doing your job and having fun with it, and I found working circulation at the library was the most fun I've ever had.

Maddie on the street

By Maddie Lindgren
Castleton Spartan



How was your Valentines day and why?



Masson Billert
Sophomore

Mine was just ok, it was just another day for me.



Andy Sotoburgos
Senior

Good, I went to the basketball game with the boys and it was exciting. No Valentine for me this year.



Natalie Simecek
Senior

Mine was good, I didn't do much but I found out I got an honorable mention for the Rugby team.



Madison Hanna
Senior

It was good I spent time with the people I love.



Corey Lacz
AT

It was ok, I had a busy day. I went to a funeral and then I had to work till 11 so you know.

Devised theater piece kicks off Soundings season

By Sarah Calvin
Castleton Spartan

On Thursday, Feb. 1, the Casella Theater was filled with the mournful melodies of the Kurdish people as Castleton welcomed CP4P International's "I will dance with those oak trees as long as," the first performance of the Spring Soundings program.

Set in the Kurdish homeland (which includes parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria) in a carpet store, the two-person performance utilized masks, props, and music to tell the stories of three women.

The props included a suitcase, since the Kurdish people have often been forced to flee their homeland to escape war and genocide, a ball of red yarn that, sometimes literally, tied the women together, and carpets, which were maneuvered to create a bridge, a forest, and a hiding place.

There were masked monsters hiding between carpet trees and a whispering tension underscored by the incorporation of Kurdish melodies. Despite moments of joy, the audience was left with a feeling of uneasiness and many questions.

CP4P International is the brainchild of Audrey Dégez, a Pittsburgh, PA and Paris, France-based artist and director.

In the Spring of 2022, Dégez was scheduled to write a new play through a residency in Ukraine, a dream that was cut short when Russian forces invaded the country. Not wanting to give up, Dégez founded CP4P International, and hired five Ukrainian actresses to help bring her production to life. Their creation, *Mother, Motherland*, was a critical success, and when the production closed,

Dégez began looking for a new project.

"There were major earthquakes in Kurdistan, and I had received messages from people I knew asking for support for people in Turkey and Syria," said Dégez. "I couldn't give money, but I thought, well, what can I do? I can produce a piece of theater inspired by Kurdish culture and hopefully it will make people curious about where Kurdistan is and who Kurdish people are."

Dégez asked one of the actresses, Daria Holovchanska, to stay on and take part in her new creation. Noting the similarities between Kurdish culture and her own, both of which have experienced violence and oppression, Holovchanska readily agreed.

"We can't, in the theater, speak about something which doesn't matter for us," said Holovchanska. "[Joining this production] became for me a way to speak about important topics which are bothering me and connect with my culture."

CP4P International's mission is to bring these marginalized cultures to a wider audience through storytelling. Perhaps, the company hopes, audiences will walk away with questions, and continue learning long after the curtains have fallen.

"Theater is a dialogue, first of all, between the artists/creators and audience," said Holovchanska. "I do not see the sense in theatre when artists come onstage and tell [the] audience the answers. But when the audience go out from the performance asking themselves questions about their life, about what is going on, or they ask themselves questions which they had never asked before, I think that's incredible."



CP4P International performed, *I will dance with oak trees* at the first soundings event of the semester.

How the costumes come to life

By Carissa Challinor
Castleton Spartan

Walking into the VTSU Castleton campus' costume shop, you're transported into a chaotic, colorful atmosphere.

At one of the middle tables, you can see one to two student workers pulling leather gloves out of a box. From elbow length to wrist length, the students continue to layer glove over glove on their arms. Masks lay across multiple different tables and on two walls hang multiple pictures of orcs, paladins — and Monica from "Friends."

Angela Brande, a VTSU theater professor, is the lead designer for Castleton's spring semester main-stage show "She Kills Monsters." Along with her five student workers, she has been planning and preparing the costumes for the Dungeons and Dragons-based play since November.

"It's been so exciting. People are thrilled about costumes specifically," said Brande with a giant smile. "There is a lot of pressure to honor that excitement, but there are a lot of people coming in with a lot of energy and happiness and plans already."

The costume crew is in the first step of their process. This step is called the "inspiration stage." Student workers including senior Jaqueline Nash and junior Emerson Jolliffe, have been helping to pull iconic characters and Dungeons and Dragons cosplayers for the inspiration wall.

This wall includes multiple photos collaged together to create a vision for what color scheme, outfit and make-up look each character is likely to wear. They are paired with the character's names strung by the photos so the designers, director and fight choreographer can add their own opinions to a specific character as well.

"It's a lot of Pinterest and a lot of trying to accurately show what's on the inside of my brain on the outside," Jolliffe said.

The costume crew have been on the "inspiration stage" since last November when members



CARISSA CHALLINOR

Angela Brande, costume designer, sorting out pictures on her costume inspiration board.

found out who got cast for what character. This part of the costume process is one of the most important because it is where everyone finds out who needs what costume, what each costume is supposed to look like, the expectations for each outfit and the limitations they must work under.

Therefore, a lot of the early work for Brande and her student workers is creating these online and physical boards everyone can view and add their opinion to.

"I spent two hours on the computer printing images, searching and printing images just for all the characters in the show. That part of the process is really important

to the end result. Because without the inspiration you're kind of flying blind," Nash said.

However, it is not only the costume shop workers who are helping to create the inspiration for the costumes. The director of the show, Hannah Hammond, and the fight choreographer for the show, Marisa Valent-Altlund, matter in making decisions for the costumes as well. All costume and make-up designs must be approved by Hammond since her vision matters the most.

See "Costumes" on Page 6



Grammys reveals many surprises

Malachi Smalls
Castleton Spartan

Killer Mike, Sza and the unforgettable Taylor Swift stole the show in different fashions at this year's Grammys.

In the 66th edition of the all-genre music award show held in the Crypto.com Arena, host Trevor Noah brought to us the 2024 Grammys.

Artists from country to afrobeats crossed paths for the awaited award show where 91 awards were given out. The four major awards, or the "big four," consist of Album of the Year, Record of the Year, Song of the Year and Best new artist.

Sza held the top spot for nominations this year with nine, taking home three after giving a spectacular live performance, but Phoebe Bridgers edged her out by one award to be the big winner of the night. A surprise winner from the night, Killer Mike, tied Sza with three awards.

Killer Mike has made a career comeback as the once half of the

Brooklyn rap duo 'Run The Jewels' released a gem of an album titled "Michael." The album won Rap Album of the Year over Drake and 21 Savage's 'Her loss,' 'Utopia' by Travis Scott and Metro Boomin's 'Heroes and Villains.'

Tyler Littleton, a student of VTSU Castleton, wasn't a fan of Killer Mike's win.

"Killer Mike's album shouldn't have beaten out Travis Scott's 'Utopia,'" he said.

Killer Mike also went onto win Best Rap Performance and best rap song with 'Scientist and Engineers' featuring Andre 3000, Future and Eryn Allen Kane. These would be his first wins in almost two decades.

In a bizarre turn, however, Mike was later arrested by Los Angeles Police and taken away. Killer Mike claims he was dealing with an "overzealous" security guard, which led to the physical altercation. In an interview a day after his arrest, he said "As you can imagine, there was a lot going and there was some confusion around which door my team and I should enter.

We experienced an overzealous security guard but my team and I have the utmost confidence that I will ultimately be cleared of all wrongdoing."

Two other winners of the night would be Victoria Monet, the winner of the "best new artist" category and Miley Cyrus. Cyrus won "best record" and "best pop solo performance" with her song 'Flowers.' These would be her first two Grammy wins of her career.

Now, onto one of the brightest stars in pop culture: Taylor Swift.

She's been a pop music icon for years. With her large fan base, the 'Swifties' there's almost no way she could become irrelevant. Throughout her career she's been nominated for 52 Grammy awards. She has won 14 awards sitting in a very large trophy case. Swift's recent album 'Midnight' took home Album of the Year, getting mixed reactions from the crowd and pop fanbases. Many pop fans believe Lana Del Rey's "Did you Know That There's a Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd" should have won.

While claiming her Album of

the Year award, Swift announced her next album that would come out sometime this year. Castleton sophomore Carly Centeno slammed Swift saying "Taylor Swift is a childish narcissist."

Another Castleton student was also disgusted with her act at the Grammys.

"I'm not really happy about Taylor using the Grammys as a platform to announce her new album" said senior Justin Gitto.

But Student Government President Perry Ragouzis felt the opposite.

"It's good for her. An award is an award, a win is a win," he said when asked about Swift's success.

If you're wondering why you head nothing about the rock or heavy metal segments of the show, it's because it wasn't broadcast. The group boygenious took home two awards on the night for their song 'Strong Enough' and album best alternate album with 'The record.' Fan favorites Paramore and Metallica conined for two awards on the night.

Even knowing who won, rock

and metal fans were not pleased. Gitto said he was "heated" and that it felt like a "slap in the face of the fans" when asked about show.

Rock & roll bands still sell out arenas and stadiums but apparently the producers of Grammys don't see it as an important category of music anymore, Gitto surmised.

"Pop, country, and rap is where the most money is, so it makes sense for them to lean on it," he said. "There's been a shift in what majority of people value in music."

The Grammys got a large viewership spike this year. With the help of Paramount+ streaming the awards, Viewership was up 173% from last year. It peaked at 18.5 million people tuned in live during the 'memorial' segment, which featured performances from Stevie Wonder, Fantasia and Annie Lennox.

Castleton Student Nick Crum believes award shows are for the older generation.

"I don't feel like many people my age watch them," he said.

Students react to Black Box production “Hate Mail”

By Rosa Kehoe
Castleton Spartan

A comical love story that all started with a broken snow globe and a letter from an upset customer. This lovely play is a parody based on the play “Love Letters,” a play that took place in 1989. It was about two people who wrote letters to each other, but never met but fell in love. Regretting their decision to never meet.

“Hate Mail” starts with a snow-globe, this man Preston gets it for his fiancé. It shatters to pieces in shipping, making him rather upset. Sending him to send a letter to the place of establishment where he got it from demanding a refund.

The worker Dahlia would respond by saying no refunds. Which ended up in them fighting through letters, and getting Dahlia fired. As the play goes on they continue to write letters about what is going on in life, still fighting, but as they go along they fall in love.

The actors Laura Belmont as Dahlia, and Anthony Jones as Preston executed a well-thought-out play. Making the whole audience laugh, and gasp. You can tell that they put their whole hearts and efforts into this play.

The tones they used, you could

feel when the character was sad, upset, or happy. The facial and body expressions were all spot on, making the audience able to understand how they felt.

While many students found the play funny, some students like Alan Baird felt a little uncomfortable when they talked about body parts and sexual acts.

“I got uncomfortable from the play, particularly the second half.” He said. Baird is a sounding student and quite frankly did not want to come to this play. “I did not want to go to the play, I went because I wanted the event out of the way, I am glad I went.” Even though in the second half he got uncomfortable he “did enjoy the play, it was not something I had seen before.” He said.

Other students enjoyed the show very much, many went to go see their friends. As they were either in the play or in the production of making it. Maddi Ashe, being one of those students, came to support their friend Montgomery Crane. Crane was the assistant stage manager for this play. Ashe is also a sounding student but was happy to come either way.

“I loved the play, I loved all the twists and the great display of emotions from both leads. From

the play, I gathered that even smaller productions have a lot put into them. It was a really enjoyable experience,” they said.

Mackenzie Sturgill also enjoyed the play, loving the setup of the Black Box Theater.

“I enjoyed the play. The intimate and close-up seating adds emotion and connection to the characters mentally. I’m not a soundings student, but many of my friends work on and we’re in this show. We came to support their work, and I just love theater. It’s always awesome to go and see the hard work our students put on display, so yes I enjoyed this show,” she said.

Sturges said she could not pick a favorite part, as she enjoyed the play so much. But a moment she enjoyed a lot was “Prestens character when he was a part of the cult and talking about how religion gives him such a new ‘healthier perspective,’” she said.

Another student who is not in soundings, but just wants to help support their school was River Capell.

“I thought the play was well done, and the two actors did incredibly well. I had wanted to come to this play since I had friends who worked on the pro-

duction, but I also always wanted to support the arts in my school,” they said.

Capell, like others, thought the set up of the show was quite intriguing. “The setup of the show was intriguing, as the actors technically never spoke - but their interactions were full of emotion and energy,” they said.

“I think my favorite part of the show was near the end of the first act when both characters were going through interesting points in their life. I especially liked the photos of the luminous one. I took notice as well of the small details of the play and enjoyed things such as the small costume changes or sound effects. They helped to bring the show together as a whole,” Capell went on to say. The play had many small details which made the play so much better.

At one point the character Dahlia even eats a piece of paper! Both characters did little acts that made the play come together so well. You can tell that they thought of every little thing, between the actual water they drank, the paper being eaten, the pictures shown, and the props being used.

The light is shown and placed on only one of them at a time, making it seem like we were in

that room with that one person while they read the letter. Like Capell said they were not actually talking, but just reading the letters that they would write to the other.

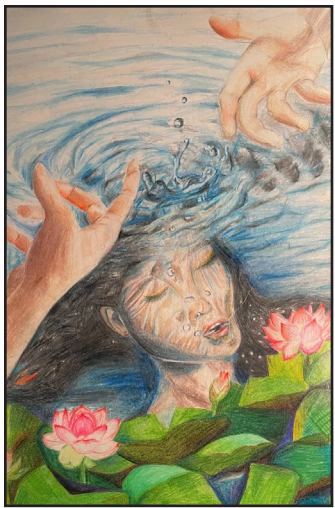
But while doing so you would

be able to see the person reading what they write reaction, while seeing the person receiving the letters reaction at the same time. In all, it was a great play!



MARISA VALENT-ALTLAND

Laura Belmont plays Dahlia in the 1989 inspired work, “Hate Mail.”



“Her Breath is a Lotus”

By Azur Wood
Spartan Contributor

I made this piece depicting the rise of Asian hate crimes in the United States.

Within my piece, there is a woman submerged under the depths in which she has been condemned.

Under the surface, because our society would not see past her own. Within this whirlpool, she drowns in prejudice and violence. Her breath leaves her. Yet her strength, her heritage, her blood, her identity does not die.

Her blood becomes the veins within the lotus flower. Her breath in each petal. The lotus flower symbolizes peace, harmony, rebirth and anew. Because even when its roots are in the dirtiest of water, it will still produce and bloom a thing of beauty.

Hate will never erase. As her roots reach, as other hands reach out, to touch, to hold, to comfort, to help, in strength, and solidarity. The flower made out of the ugliest of hate, blood, ignorance, only ignites reaction, action and justice.

The muddiness nourishes the roots for the blossom of liberation.

Her daggers of petals, innate.

This was made with colored pencils on 20 x 16 paper.

Artist Q&A with Julie Griffith

By Pearl Bellomo
Castleton Spartan

Julie Griffith is a nontraditional student and senior Studio Art major, with a concentration in Painting. She sat down recently to discuss her passion for art.

Q. How long have you been doing art, and what mediums do you gravitate towards?

A. I’ve been making art since high school, but I never really started painting until 18 years ago, when I was 22. I tend to draw more and enjoy the initial pencil sketch. I used to draw a lot and use markers when I was younger, and never painted, so when I started painting, that was a new ball game. Now that I’m a painting major, I find that I want to draw more.

Q. Describe your favorite piece you’ve done to date. Why is it your favorite?

A. I made a 4-by-3-foot painting in Oliver Schemm’s Open Studio class based on reflection and refraction. It started with this trippy sketch; I was trying to make this mermaid character shaking her head, coming out of the water and drying off. I used paint to capture the blurriness of her in motion, but also her torso is reflected in the water, and droplets of water are reflecting the light. It was really fun to make and aesthetically pleasing to me.

Q. What piece has taken you the most time? What made it so intricate?

A. I did a large mural of the periodic table of elements. It was 6-by-9-feet, took me six months and I donated it to the science wing of CCV [in Rutland]. It’s a readable table, but it has a stylized, crazy, colorful background.

Q. Do you have any subjects that inspire you?

A. I’m inspired by anything dynamic. When I make paintings from my head, or even when it’s a representational drawing, it’s usually a portrait of someone doing an action. There’s always movement, color, intensity and tension. Anything that’s dynamic that way.

Q. What artist or artists inspire you?

A. Leon Bates inspires me. Leon makes art all the time.

They’re a very hardworking artist, in many different forms. Music is also a huge piece of art for me. Right now, I’m in a drum and bass, electronic music phase.

Q. What are you currently working on?

A. I’m taking Painting III, so I’m constantly painting. I just learned how to oil paint, which is fun but also foreign and awesome. I’m also taking Pro Studio, and we’re doing geology prompts. I have a painting on metamorphosis, convection, and mass wasting in my car right now. I’ve never made this much art in such a short amount of time.

Q. What’s your favorite step in the artistic process?

A. My favorite thing is watching people’s reactions. I’m big on the reveal. I get really excited on presentation day when it’s time to critique.

Q. What has been the key to your artistic development?

A. Sobriety. That’s a critical piece. People say you need drugs or alcohol to be creative, and that’s bullshit. I’m back to my childhood-self with creativity.



CURTISY OF JULIE GRIFFITH

Studio Art major Julie Griffith paints (top right), and poses next to “Surfer No. 6” (bottom left). Finished work depicted.

Book of the Fortnight

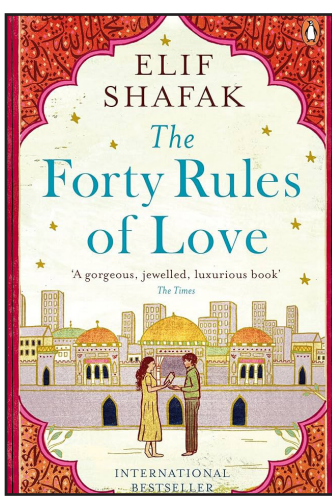
By Camille Jackson
Castleton Spartan

“40 Rules to Love”

Recommended by VTSU Castleton exchange student, 40 Rules of Love follows Ella, a middle-aged protagonist. Ella, after reading a manuscript regarding thirteenth century Sufi poet, Rumi and the Shams of Tabraiz and his forty rules of love, begins her journey.

With central themes of love and spirituality, the novel outlines the key rules of love in tandem with a compelling story. Mishkat categorizes this novel as highly recommended, as the story truly connected to her soul.

Indeed, the timelessness of love is explored in this novel, as thirteenth century rules transcend centuries to be applicable today.

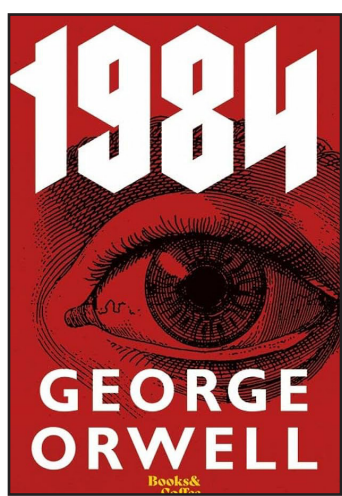


“1984”

A classic novel and compelling critique of society, Orwell’s 1984 comes highly recommended by VTSU Randolph Freshman, Daniel Sprano.

The book “encapsulates the growing threat of technology and totalitarianism in the modern world,” noted Sprano. The dystopian story line certainly draws parallels to current crisis facing the world.

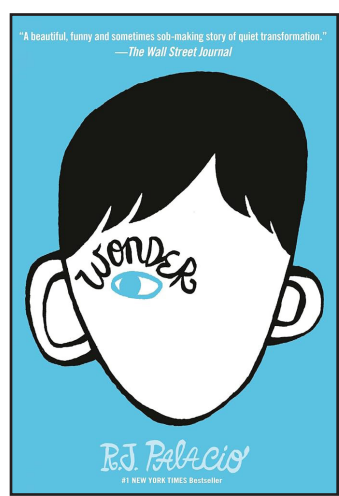
The fascinating narrative is supplemented with curious characters, “you don’t know if you like them or not, these are realistic characters with human flaws rather than blatant protagonist.”



“Wonder”

This book, transformed into a motion picture in 2017, follows a young boy born with facial differences. “It gives a perspective on someone who struggles with a disability,” explained Cheromiah, Sophomore at VTSU Johnson.

The book is uniquely structured, with various perspectives driving the narrative. Cheromiah enjoyed this aspect, as “the book switches points of view” to provide a wholistic reading that underlines the experience of those with disabilities, as well as their family and friends.



Karaoke a cure for cabin fever at the Taproom!



COURTESY SEANNA BRENNAN

Ethan Cameron-Vaupel stealing the show with his Sinatra voice.

Seanna Brennan
Spartan Contributor

On a recent Friday, Lake Boscawen Taproom bartender Ethan Cameron-Vaupel stole the karaoke mic – and the show – revealing his Sinatra-esque voice and shocking the entire establishment.

With the sun setting at 4 p.m. in the winter and most businesses closing at 9, Castleton students and locals don't have too many options for a night out on the town.

As a way to help with that, the Taproom has begun hosting 'Late Night Karaoke' from 8:30-11:00 p.m.

The event features not only karaoke but cornhole, darts, and other bar games. And, in order to ensure everyone gets home safe, the designated driver in every group is offered a free meal!

"I've missed seeing that life," said front of house manager Michelle Adler. "Just to have people in the bar and having fun and making noise and cutting up, it just makes it feel alive."

Creating a fun, energetic, and safe environment at the Taproom has been Adler's vision for quite some time now, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic hit restaurants hard. The establishment switches from traditional service

to a specialized "late-night" menu, transforming from a sit-down restaurant to lively bar.

"Since COVID, I feel like that sort of changed the climate for going out... Now we are obviously past that, but it has remained a ghost town at the end of the night," Adler said.

She hopes to continue evolving and expanding the late-night activities, with ideas of an upstairs dance club in the loft and Mario Kart tournaments on the TVs.

Daniel Herwood, the host of karaoke, often sings four to five songs per night himself.

"Anytime there's an awkward stage I just sing a song," said Herwood.

His favorite to sing is "My Heart Will Go On," by Celine Dion at the very end of the night.

"It's a slow love ballad, a great way to wind everything down," he said.

Late-Night Karaoke has become an evolving way to beat the winter blues, not just for customers but for restaurant staff as well. Bartenders like Vaupel, servers and even line cooks have been featured on the mic.

Vaupel first got into singing in 5th grade after his mom asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, and he replied, "a rockstar!"

He hasn't stopped since, join-

ing choir, taking voice lessons, and even dabbling in opera. Today he sings in a church chorus on top of his other two jobs; kindergarten teacher and part-time bartender.

This Friday he sang "I Can't Help Falling in Love With You," by Elvis Presley, and the entire bar was enamored by his voice.

"It literally sounded like Elvis," said Adler. "I had a couple at the bar ask if it was really him (singing)."

It isn't just staff stealing the spotlight, as many regulars, locals, and college students grab the mic as well. Universal classic's such as "Stacy's Mom" and "I Should've Been a Cowboy" get the entire establishment to sing along together, filling the Taproom with music and laughter, a sign of life in the bleak winter.

Castleton student Rachel Medina and her friend group have even begun to make karaoke a Friday-night tradition for themselves.

The crowd is diverse, with no limits to who can participate or how. Mothers and daughters sang Sheryl Crow together, and one trio had the entire restaurant in shambles over Toby Keith's "I Love This Bar."

"I just love the people... the atmosphere is great," Medina said.

Amsterdam:



COURTESY JESS EMERY

VTSU Castleton student Jess Emery - far right - poses with friends in Amsterdam while on a bike ride.

Continued from page 3

The pie was delicious, but it was time for the next pub.

After the fourth pub or so, we found ourselves entering the Red Light District.

This was the most packed area we had been in since we arrived.

There were streets and streets of burlesque shows and window brothels.

Hundreds of people were lined up outside of each.

It hit midnight and we made our way into one of the bars to celebrate Lucy's birthday. She kindly bought us each a shot for coming with her on this very hectic weekend.

Earlier that day, we had taken our luggage to the train station to hold it there until it was time to leave for our flight. So, we decided it was time to go retrieve it, then take the hour-long trek to the airport.

By the time we stumbled into the station, they told us that the lockers don't open until 5 a.m.

That was not going to work considering we needed to get to the airport at 5:30 at the latest and

it takes at least an hour to get there.

After much begging, they were finally able to unlock our lockers for us and we got our luggage.

But, of course nothing can ever be easy with our group and we found the trains only leave every hour and the trams are also not in service at this time of night.

After discussing it with a Dutchman, he told us our best course of action would be to order an Uber.

We planned on meeting our Uber at the nearest McDonald's, but of course, we went to the wrong McDonald's and our half-drunk crew had to sprint through the streets of Amsterdam in the pouring rain at 4:30 a.m., dodging bikers left and right to catch our Uber.

After the most stressful 36 hours of my life, we made it to the airport and back home somewhat safely.

Although everything about the weekend felt extremely high stakes and we thought we were going to die more times than I care to admit, Amsterdam was everything and more and will always hold a very special place in my heart.

Burnham 'I can do this for the rest of my life'

Continued from page 1

"I love students. We've gone through a lot of turmoil together. The sense of possibility young people have is thrilling. I've enjoyed the privilege of having this job, day in and day out trying to leave a little piece of myself to my students," he said.

And the students love him back. "He is awesome, a super understanding guy, and really shows how much he cares for his student's work. He truly wants all his students to succeed," Castleton Student Gretel Seman said.

He leads his lectures by having students share their work and hoping they will be proud of their creations, like he is of them.

"He is a great teacher. If you really focus and listen to his lectures you'll understand and see how much effort he puts into his classroom environment," former Student Gavin Hartford said.

Students say his classroom energy is incomparable to anyone else's because he truly makes every student feel extremely special and heard. He wants students to embrace the joy of writing and be proud of their work.

"He really cares about his student's writing and loves to hear them share their writing. He is a great teacher," Castleton Student Brian Demoya said.

From his writing to his teaching, Burnham Holmes has left a mark on this world, and his books will be forever treasured by many. And he plans to keep writing, forever.

"I love writing because it is something I can do up until the end. I can do this for the rest of my life, and I love it," Holmes said.

Costumes:

Continued from page 4

"Angela and I have talked a lot about the vibe. Are these high fantasy costumes or are they like the homespun costume? Also, because it is set in the '90s, looks that are inspired by '90s characters. Agnes, the main character, has the looks of Monica from "Friends." We're giving style icons for these characters from the '90s," said Hammond with a laugh.

Hammond helped to direct Brande and her crew on what icons they should look at and pull for the inspiration boards. Cher from "Clueless" and Rodrick Heffley from "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" hang on the wall for the make-up look for the Succubi and Chuck's characters. On their Pinterest boards, Monica and Rachel from "Friends" fill up the pinned boards for the characters Agnes Evans and Vera.

Yet, it is not only the '90s look they're going for. "She Kills Monsters" is a show that involves a lot of Dungeons and Dragons. Therefore, some of the characters need to look accurate to their class and race. Elves, Orcs and Paladins have specific looks that Hammond and Brande want to capture as well.

But the two don't have a lot of experience with Dungeons and Dragons. Thus, they have called upon the expertise of Valent-Altland to aid in describing what she needs for the fight choreography, but also what an accurate representation of third-edition Dungeons and Dragons characters would look like, Brande said.

"It's this really intricate balance of what Angela has the time and resources to create versus what is going to make sense within the story," Valent-Altland said.

Hammond, Brande, Valent-Altland and the student workers will continue working on costumes for the next month. As time keeps moving forward, Brande will continue through her process including pulling pieces for the



CARISSA CHALLINOR

Emerson Jolliffe and Salem Singh coordinate costuming plans.

costumes, doing costume fittings with the actors and doing any last-minute alterations.

The costumes will make their

first public appearance opening night on Thursday March 21 at 7 p.m.

"I know they'll be great. My

artistic self also always knows you can do better," Brande said. "But, I will also say that we'll do a great job. Then we will see them on

bodies that are moving and actors that are saying things and that just brings them to life."

Pro sports gone soft

By Justin Gitto
Castleton Spartan

Why are sports so popular? Why do millions of people around the world play sports? Why do even more people watch sports?

The idea of people giving their all in a competition to see who is better at that particular competition has captivated people for centuries. Nowadays, sports are a multibillion-dollar industry, and that comes with a lot of changes and sacrifices – not all of which are for the best.

I love watching clips of routine tackles and normal hits from old football games and trying to see which ones would be allowed today. With each clip I try to guess what kind of suspension or fine the player would get if he did that today.

The NFL is so soft these days. Pass rushers have to gently lay the quarterback to the ground in order to sack them without getting flagged for ‘roughing’ the passer. If a defender so much as grazes the wide receiver, you bet they’re gonna call pass interference on it.

I get that you wanna protect the players and football is very dangerous, but they signed up for it. Now we have all these divas begging for penalties the moment something doesn’t quite go their way.

Also, let it be known I don’t buy into the whole ‘NFL is rigged’ talk, but you can’t tell me that the refs don’t have too much control over the game. I mean if they have money on one team, they can just throw a flag and make something up.

I’m not gonna get into the whole Taylor Swift discussion, but it frustrates me how much the NFL leaned in on it, and it wasn’t just during the games either. They were clearly using that situation as a way to make money and gain views.

Speaking of penalties, how about the NBA? I get that you can’t exactly wrestle each other in basketball, but I don’t wanna watch people demanding a foul because of slight contact. Just accept that you missed the shot and get on defense.

Wait, you can’t play proper defense because once you play slightly aggressive now all of a sudden you’re the one fouling. All it takes is a little bit of acting and you’ve got two free-throws.

And don’t even get me started on my precious baseball. MLB sold out big time.

Since baseball came into existence, it has had points in my book for being the only sport without any time constraints. There was never a game-clock, a shot-clock or a play-clock, and I thought that was cool.

Then they saw ratings start to slip and decided to throw all of that away by adding the pitch-clock. Keep in mind they did this right after they banned pitchers from using ‘sticky stuff,’ which has been used for decades, in addition to the rumors of ‘juiced balls.’

All of this has put the pitchers in such a lopsided position where they’re more likely to get pummeled, so teams can score more.

I don’t care if a pitcher’s duel is boring, if the pitcher is better than the other team, he deserves to carve them up. And don’t get me wrong, I love watching my team crush an opposing pitcher, but I hate watching my pitchers get rocked.

All around the various sports, there’s evidence that the leagues and the people in charge have lost sight of what sports are supposed to be about. It’s about competition, they are competitors. What they’ve done is they’ve put some of the competitors at disadvantages so they can make more money, and I seriously don’t like the way they’re trending.

Men’s hockey falls to No. 1 Hobart to end season



PHOTO FROM CASTLETON SPORTS

Balint Mesterhazy skates up the ice with the puck looking to create some offense.



PHOTO FROM CASTLETON SPORTS

Romeo Torain celebrates the Spartans lone goal Saturday.

By Maddie Lindgren
Castleton Spartan

In a season that saw its fair share of ups and downs, the Castleton men’s hockey team concluded its campaign on Feb. 18, with an 8-1 defeat against number one seed, Hobart College. After a four-hour haul to Hobart, the Spartans ultimately fell short in the quarter-finals.

Head coach Kyle Richards, reflecting on the season, acknowledged the challenges they faced but also highlighted some positive aspects.

“This season has been different than our previous two,” Richards remarked before the game. “We had a fairly strong start but have not played our best hockey in the last half of the season. Whereas last year was kind of the opposite, slow start, strong finish.”

The team struggled to find consistency throughout the season, experiencing both highs and lows. Despite the challenging journey, there were notable moments that showcased the team’s potential.

Richards pointed out, “We were still able to accomplish sweeping a home conference weekend for the first time since 2017, I think. I did like the way we played last weekend against Hobart and Elmira, despite not getting the results we wanted.”

When asked before the game on Saturday what Richards thought about this upcoming weekend, he expressed confidence and optimism.

“We feel confident heading into Saturday. Despite the way the season has finished, we pushed them to the brink last weekend and are going into this game playing with house money. No pressure on us, it’s all on them, and if we play to our potential, I like our chances against anyone.”

Unfortunately, the game did not unfold as Castleton had hoped, with an 8-1 defeat marking the end of their season.

Romeo Torain’s goal, assisted by Zach Trepner, provided a momentary spark, but it wasn’t enough to overcome Hobart’s performance.

With Dominic Rodrigue in

goal, he turned away 43 shots, which resulted in his third-highest save mark of the year. Castleton had totaled six blocked shots on defense, which was led by Andrew Stefura with two.

Coach Richards’ pre-game statements hinted at the team’s struggles in maintaining a consistent level of play.

“When we have been successful this season, we have kept things simple and played together. Seems cliché, but when this group is going as a connected unit and plays to our strengths, they have shown they can compete with any one in the country,” he said.

The season’s final record of 7-19 may not reflect the team’s potential, but Richards remains optimistic about the future.

Despite the challenges faced and the season’s outcome, the Castleton men’s hockey team can take pride in moments of triumph and learn from the setbacks. As they regroup and set their sights on the future, the team will use these experiences to fuel their determination for a stronger performance in the seasons to come.



PHOTO FROM CASTLETON SPORTS

Jackson Kobelka lines up at the dot to faceoff against a Statesmen player.

Spartans finish season against the Herons

By Stone Stelz
Castleton Spartan

Kirsten DiCicco made a plethora of saves to keep the VTSU Castleton women’s hockey team tied with the Herons early in the opening period, but in the end the Herons proved too much and the Spartans couldn’t find the net.

The team battled William Smith Feb. 17 at The Cooler in Geneva, New York for the first round match-up in the New England Hockey Conference playoffs.

While the Spartans hammered the Herons with 38 shots, they fell 4-0, ending their 2023-2024 campaign. DiCicco fought off 35 of William Smiths 38 shots with the Spartans conceding an empty net goal trying to make one last push to battle back late in the third period.

“Obviously not the end of our year that we wanted, especially riding the high of winning five in a row coming into playoffs, including finishing the regular season with the historic first win over Elmira. Sometimes you wish you could just roll into the playoffs and take no days off, but you have to find a way to keep that energy and momentum throughout the next week of practice and heading into the tournament,” said head coach Tim McAuliffe. “I thought we did a pretty good job of that, but this year it’s no secret that scoring for us has been feast or famine, and unfortunately Saturday at William Smith was the latter. I thought the effort was excellent and our team played until the final buzzer, but it always stings when the season ends so abruptly.”

The game started off tame as Castleton and William Smith found themselves at a deadlock after 17 minutes. Then after a flurry of saves from DiCicco, the Herons put in the fourth rebound shot and the Spartans found themselves down 1-0 with two minutes remaining in the opening period then went into intermission with a one



PHOTO BY CASTLETON SPORTS

Moa Carlsson handling the puck in the slot trying to get a scoring chance for the Spartans.

goal deficit.

Coming out in the second, Castleton seemed like they had come alive and were dominating the play after the Herons scored a quick one merely two minutes into the second frame. The Spartans began to put on an onslaught of shots on the William Smith netminder.

Although down by two going into the third, it seemed like Castleton had all of the momentum they needed to make a comeback against the team they beat 4-1 just a week prior. The Spartans continued to pepper the Herons goalie with shots, but nothing was getting through.

Castleton continued to battle to get back into the game until Wil-

liam Smith potted its third goal with just under three minutes remaining. The Spartans final push came when they got on the power play shortly after the Herons third goal and in the final effort to get within reach, they gave up an empty net goal on a clear from William Smiths own defensive zone.

Although Castleton’s season ended, the Spartans had a handful of bright spots for the year.

Three members of the team were recognized on the NEHC all-conference teams.

Moa Carlsson landed on Second Team All-NEHC after posting 13 goals with 19 points. Katie Campoli earned Third Team honors in her graduate year with

two goals and six assists with 23 blocked shots, and DiCicco earned herself another All-Conference honor landing on Third Team while also cementing herself in the program history books becoming the leader in shutouts with 12.

“Seeing this program evolve during my time here has been unreal and having it all culminate in back-to-back sweeps and our first ever win against Elmira on Senior Day to end the season was like the cherry on top. I am excited to see what the future holds for this program! Being named to the third all-conference team is such an honor. I pushed through adversity, injuries, and self-doubt throughout this season and battled to leave my mark

in my final year, so it is always special to receive an honor like this that rewards all of that hard work and dedication,” DiCicco said.

Both DiCicco and Campoli finished their final season as a Spartan leaving a mark that can be remembered.

“I felt honored to be able to be named to one of the all-conference teams along with my teammate Kirsten and several other talented players in the NEHC. I am proud of what we both have achieved in our college careers, and I personally feel like I can end my college career knowing that I made my mark,” Campoli said.

Spartans mens basketball season comes to a finish



PHOTOS BY AVERY BOUCHARD

The Castleton men’s basketball team ended off their 2023-2024 season but before they traveled to Southern Maine to close out the season, it tipped off against University of Massachechets Boston and handled their business for the final home game of the season winning 73-63 to close out at Glennbrook Gym on a good note.



AVERY BOUCHARD

Castleton #12 Maggie McKearin looks for a pass (left); #23 Stasia Epler moves the ball up the court (right).

Women's basketball optimistic after Payne's first season

By Stone Stelzl
Castleton Spartan

Up and down the court the Spartans women's basketball team went as they battled to end the season on good note, but unfortunately fell short 69-53 when they took on Southern Maine Saturday Feb. 17 at Southern Maine.

This final matchup wrapped up the Castleton women's basketball team's 2023-2024 season and

their first season under head coach Kathleen Payne.

The Spartans finished their season with a 10-15 record. They didn't make the LEC playoffs this season, ending with a 4-12 in-conference record after being 9-7 in conference play just a season ago.

Although Castleton still finished with a double-digit win total for the 22nd consecutive season, the team had to battle with adversity throughout the season with

growing pains as a younger team.

"I think this year was definitely a learning year for everyone. With new coaches, we all had to adapt to changes. Trial and error definitely occurred throughout the season as well. Low numbers was also rough for us, having less players this year and battling injuries on top of that really hurt us throughout the course of the season," said sophomore Kathryn Moore.

With the early end to the season

being disappointing and the team facing some growing pains in their first year under Payne, the team is only graduating Elise Magro, who found herself in the Castleton record books this season.

Magro cemented herself in Spartan history putting herself in second all-time on the leading scorers list with 1,660 points over her five-season career. She also finished second all-time in made field goals, free throws and steals,

and third all-time in assists.

Magro understood that there was adversity the team had to face in the season due to being young and also not having as many players as prior seasons.

"I think the biggest difference was numbers and experience at the college level. That was definitely the biggest difference," Magro said.

With the Spartans returning eight players next season and add-

ing more through the offseason, the team seems to understand what this season came to be.

"It hasn't been as successful this year. There have been a lot new additions to the team, so it has been an adjustment. Overall, we had a good season as a team and we were able to make the most of it," said sophomore Emily Adams.

Ski teams cruise through senior race

By Camille Jackson
Castleton Spartan

Castleton's Alpine Ski Team landed a successful season, with both the men's and women's teams finishing first within the McConnell Division as they head into the USCSA Eastern Regional Championships.

Hosted by Pat's Peak in New Hampshire, the final weekend of the regular season last week saw a battle of teams, a plethora of celebratory costumes, and cries of joy as the scorching winter temperatures provided an ideal environment for felicitations.

Certainly, the warm temperatures have more of an impact than simply snow conditions. Burying ski boots in snow to cool the plastic shell demonstrates the multifaceted influence of climate change.

Ski racing operates within a structure that gives skiers two runs, wherein the combination of the two runs constitutes the athlete's time - the fastest time winning the race. Within the sphere of college ski racing, a team aspect is introduced. Three athletes' times are added to establish a combined time that is compared to other teams.

Following the first run on the Sunday's second day of racing, the Castleton Women's team sat four hundredths behind the Babson women's team. Notably, Sunday's race was the deciding factor to determine the women's division champions; the final chapter to a season-long tension between Babson and Castleton's women's teams.

Heading into the second run, Emilie Stene, Ginevra Trevisan, and Petra Veljkovic spearheaded



Seniors on the Alpine skiing teams pose in their senior-race costumes (left); Christopher Kerven and Camille Jackson celebrate with a Swedish flag (right).



COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER KERVEN

the women's side, requiring perfect runs to overtake Babson.

Finishing her first race of the season, delayed due to injuries, Veljkovic clocked the fastest second run to move her from 7th into 3rd. Supported by Stene and topped by Trevisan, who both skied solid, fast runs, the Castleton women swept the podium, and earned the race and season victory.

Juxtaposing the intensity of competition was the comedic relief of the senior race. Largely

unique to college ski racing, it is the tradition of dressing up in celebration of collegiate retirement.

Past years have featured minions flying down the hill, wizards of Hogwarts cross blocking slalom gates, and the simplicity of budgie smugglers covering only what was necessary. This year, costumes on the Castleton men's team harkened to their future careers, as each knotted short ties over button down shirts, tucked into dress pants, all over their race suits.

While the men's side entered the final day of racing with an assured season victory, they maintained their dominance. Freshman and Rookie of the Year, Raphael Fischer, landed on the podium and was flanked by Castleton men who filled the next four position rankings.

Sacrificing hundredths of seconds to the pleasure of wearing casual business attire down a racecourse was well worth it, as the men took first place on Sunday's

senior race aided by seniors Christian Meyer, Christopher Kerven, Lorenzo Mencaccini, Jackson Frazier and Evan Toman.

On the Castleton women's side, the two seniors, Petra Veljkovic and Camille Jackson, both embodied their home countries, sporting costumes with hints of Serbia and Australia.

The kangaroo peeking out of the race bib of Jackson's costume matched the twin Australian flags flapping off her helmet. Veljkov-

ic's Serbian race suit reflects her trajectory to the winter Olympic games and accompanying lab coat her academic endeavors.

Indeed, this final race weekend of the regular season places both the men's and women's side in ideal positions leading into the regional competition.

Students seeking fitness center upgrades



By Julian Chiemingo-Rivera
Spartan Contributor

The Castleton Fitness Center has long been a local workout hotspot for students and Castleton residents, bringing in an average of 150-200 students every day.

However, few truly understand what it takes to maintain the center. For the past six years, that job has fallen to VTSU Castleton softball coach, Eric Ramey.

"For me, it's about making sure I've got work-study students... my employees are here to supervise and sign in and go around and do the minor things that need to be done to keep it representable," Ramey said. "For the most part, the people that use the Fitness Center wipe down the equipment."

Ramey puts most of the equipment management up to the employees and users of the gym.

However, Wes Landon, VTSU Strength and Conditioning coach, runs his gym for athletes a little differently. He is funded through the Athletics Department and coaches all of the athletes exclu-

sively in his gym.

"I do everything. I take care of all my equipment," said Landon. "You can have newer, shinier things, but if it was a car, my engine's still working very well. It's just an older version of a car. Everything works very well in here."

Landon maintains his equipment as best as possible to save the Athletics Department money. The equipment may not be in perfect shape, but it gets the job done, he said.

"Some of them have bolts that come out but, we just pop them back in and it works good again," said Masson Billert, a work-study student for the center.

Despite Ramey's efforts to maintain the public fitness center, however, some students complain that it is "small," "old" and "crowded."

Ramey said he has always been aware of people complaining but, said he has never received complaints himself.

"There's a difference between, I get receiving complaints and people complaining and so what people are complaining about

hasn't come to me," Ramey said.

However, Ramey said he realizes a need for change in the center.

"Like anything, you can always update equipment, right?" Ramey said. "To list priorities is update some of the equipment that's older, that's been here since long before I was supervising here."

When asked about the funding to do this, he replied, "I have zero funding for the Fitness Center."

Fortunately, Ramey has been working with Zack Durr, Student Government Association treasurer, to make some improvements. Durr originally talked to Ramey in 2022 about using SGA funds to buy new equipment for the center.

"I had emailed Eric, set up a meeting with him, and he and I talked and got some things ironed out for what the equipment we were gonna order," Ramey said.

Durr was able to get a \$10,000 grant from the SGA to buy new barbells, bike seats, dumbbell stickers, and a few other major equipment machines.

"Right now, we're looking into, with one of our delegates, possibly

doing the ellipticals," Durr said.

The SGA has been unofficially fostering the Fitness Center in funding over recent years, Durr said. Every year, SGA members are encouraged to collaborate with Ramey about future developments.

"It's not necessarily a set amount, but it's usually somewhere around \$5,000 to \$10,000," said Durr. "We've taken on the brunt of funding because nobody else really will. So, the student government spends money on it now."

Ramey suggested another possible solution to this funding issue.

"There's a lot of fees that get collected on every student right," Ramey said.

He suggests that a portion of these fees should be redirected towards the Fitness Center. This could help him update equipment and get necessary improvements done, he said.

In addition, Ramey said he hopes to get rid of the big desk in the center to free up space and add an ID scanner at the entrance of the Fitness Center.

Some students think the equipment in the Fitness Center is in need of improvement.

JULIAN CHIEMINGO-RIVERA