

DATELINE

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UHD commends passionate champions against human trafficking



Social advocates Dr. Nissi Hamilton (left) and Eileene Dong (right) hold a certificate awarded by UHD for their stance against human trafficking on Jan. 11 in room A300. Credit: Diana Ambrosio



L-R: Dr. Nissi Hamilton, Student Life Director Eugene Bernard, and Eileene Dong pose with event t-shirts on Jan. 11. Credit: Diana Ambrosio

BY INDIRA ZALDIVAR

On National Human Trafficking Awareness Day, UHD honored alumna, Dr. Nissi Hamilton and Hope Pyx Global Spokesperson, Eileen Dong, for being vicious advocates against human trafficking.

Hamilton, a Navy veteran and UHD MBA graduate, narrated how she survived a multi-generational struggle with human trafficking in Houston, the nation's top human trafficking hotspot. The City of Houston recognized

her as survivor “poster child” of labor and human trafficking. She explained why it’s important to have more Black women be represented as survivors.

“When you don’t see yourself mentioned anywhere, you don’t think you deserve to be a survivor... to be a part of this mission,” Hamilton said.

Hamilton largely credited UHD for helping stay in school through scholarships and support.

“I can change my story because of what I have been equipped with from a powerful industrious giant like University of Houston-Downtown who I proudly stand with because they stand with me as a survivor of human trafficking.”

Her passion has led her to become the founder of A Survivor’s Voice of Victory and a fierce advocate for legislation. She led the nation’s first political campaign against human trafficking.

More recently, she was key in the new Texas law that now requires employees and patrons of sex-oriented businesses to be at least 21.

Eileen Dong, a petroleum engineer, survived sex trafficking far from her relatives in China. She is especially passionate about spreading compassion for immigrants who tend to be victimized by traffickers by promising to fulfill goals that led them to immigrate.

She credits Houston for being the place of her rebirth.

Dong now devotes her time with the local nonprofit, Hope Pyx, raising awareness and prevention of family violence, sex trafficking and sexual assault.

For more information on the signs of human trafficking, the power-control wheel, “adopt-a-survivor” program, and ways to volunteer or donate, visit hopepyxglobal.org.



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FIND US ONLINE!

Dateline writer lists favorite study areas on campus

BY DIANA AMBROSIO

There are many places on campus to study. While each building has tables and chairs throughout that one can choose from, some buildings are deemed as favorite places to study over others for comfort granted by designated study sections.

The W.I. Dykes Library, located on the north side of the fourth and fifth floor of the One Main Building, offers unlocked study rooms on a first-come, first-served basis. Other rooms such as Group Study rooms and Presentation rooms can be reserved through the library website.



One of the unlocked study room on the fourth floor of One Main Building North. Credit: Diana Ambrosio

Group Study rooms offer a whiteboard and a monitor that can be used to connect a laptop. Presentation rooms have podiums with built-in computers, projectors, video players, whiteboard, tracking

cameras and document cameras. They also have recording equipment for Zoom presentations.

The first floor of the library has computers and printers. All students get a \$25



These chairs on the fourth floor of One Main Building North offer nap-level comfort. Credit: Diana Ambrosio.

printing balance to print materials in black and white or color at the library. The second floor of the library is a zone reserved for quiet study that has various tables and individualized semi-cubicles. If this

quiet study is filled up, more desks are available near the library entrance on the fourth floor of the One Main Building North.

On the second floor of the One Main building, a study area

labeled Gator Study Zone is available. This room is across from the Student Government Association's office. On the same floor, there are tables and booths available for use.

UHD students Jose Guzman and Irvin Solano have many classes in UHD's newest building, the Sciences and Technology Building, so they take advantage of the STB's study rooms. On each floor of this modern building, there are tables and booths available, as well as whiteboards that can be used. Next to some of the tables and booths, there are outlets available.

UHD CUAS teaches students about sustainability in urban settings



Rhode Villarreal, gardener, plants brussel sprout. Credit: Diana Ambrosio

BY DIANA AMBROSIO

The Center for Urban Agriculture and Sustainability's mission is to develop sustainable solutions and raise student awareness. The center offers various programs which offer stipends to participating students. These programs aim to provide students with hands-on work and research for agriculture and sustainability. The CUAS also hooks students up with community partners in the field of sustainability and environmentalism.

The Eco-Reps program is a group of students that promote sustainable activities on campus and try to implement green initiatives. Their purpose is to reach out to fellow UHD members to collaborate on projects and spread sustainability awareness. The Eco-Reps are selected through an application process.

The SUSTAIN Scholars program focuses on current issues within food production and sustainable urban systems. Students

from all majors look at these issues and create solutions. This year-long program opens every fall semester. It offered the 2021-2022 students a \$500 stipend in the fall, another \$500 in the spring, and a \$2000 stipend linked to a summer internship.

Christina Sterna, environmental geoscience student, credits the SUSTAIN program with broadening her knowledge of sustainability and helping her closer to her career goals. She also earned an internship at the City of Houston Brownfield Redevelopment Program.

"Being a SUSTAIN scholar means that you're willing to make a campus wide impact with sustainability. It means that you are willing to keep educating yourself about sustainability and, furthermore, educate your community," Sterna said. "I was passionate about going into the field of geology with a sustainable path in mind. SUSTAIN gave me the knowledge

and tools to make that path realistic."

The UHD Garden Project works in conjunction with the UHD Garden and Compost Club to oversee the two food gardens. The newest garden is located on the southside of the STB. The UHD Sustainability Garden is located in front of the One Main Building's mailroom entrance. These gardens were created to engage students in food production in an urban setting and to teach

students the importance of composting.

UHD student, Rhode Villarreal, participated in the Garden Project of fall 2021 where she prepared the soil, planted and nurtured the plants in the gardens, and harvested delicious produce. All this work taught her how to create a sustainable garden.

Networking opportunities were also opened as she was invited to attend other events that related to

agriculture and sustainability. At these events, hosted by the Organic Horticulture Benefits Alliance, she met professionals from fields that are outside of her major. She found that being part of the project was a "meaningful hands-on experience."

For information on these programs, visit the UHD CUAS website, email the CUAS at cuas@uhd.edu, or contact the sustainability coordinator Juan Martinez at martinezju@uhd.edu.



Christina Sterna, SUSTAIN Scholar, presents at the Food Sustainability and Security conference on Nov. 13. Courtesy: Christina Sterna.

SGA swears in new president

BY ANITA GOOLCHARAN

The UHD Student Government Association has a new president. Michelle Duvall, the former vice president, was sworn in as president during a general assembly held on Dec. 13.

Duvall said she aims to implement a grassroots approach during her term to rebuild a team and highlight respect during her time in office.

Her presidency began after the previous president, Shamika Jefferson, resigned.

Students who attended the assembly were given a

chance to express their concerns and questions to the president.

The students suggested changing snacks in the vending machine and adding more student lounge areas and designating more parking areas for people with disabilities.

Laporsha Belle, a graduate student enrolled in the MBA program, expressed her concern for Gators to graduate despite financial issues.

“Can we have a financial aid event geared towards first-generation college

students?” she asked Duvall.

As vice president, Duvall helped run two financial aid events and acknowledged that this suggestion would be considered, during her term as president.

Duvall plans to implement panels during Black History month with speakers including family members of Rodney King and George Floyd. Other events include financial literacy workshops and the Spring Fest to encourage student networking.

Dateline writer explains scholarships

BY SAVANNAH MIMS

UHD offers several unique scholarships to its students including internal, departmental scholarships, foundational, and private and external scholarships.

Below are a few examples and definitions of the scholarships, starting with “scholarships offered by organizations.” UHD offers scholarships just for being a freshman or transfer student and for studying full-time or part-time.

More institutional scholarships include the Deans Scholarship and the Red Rose Leadership Scholarship. Endowments, for example, are used to fund these activities.

There are also “Scholarships offered by departments.” Departmental scholarships are chosen at the departmental level, but the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships is responsi-

ble for award processing and management. The University of Houston Foundation is also accepting applications. Across the board, there is the Dr. Karin and Leo Shipman Family Scholarship, Society of Iranian American Women for Education Endowed, Sandor Turanyi Scholarship for Hungarian Students, and Scholarships on behalf of Sharon K. Johnson.

Private and external scholarships are handled differently, according to UHD’s website. Scholarships from both the private and public sectors are available.

Outside programs processed via the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid are referred to as private and external scholarships.

External organizations launch these programs, but they are eventually included in the financial aid/scholarship process. Scholarships offered by external organizations are distributed accord-

ing to the donor organization’s requirements.

Following the disbursement of scholarship awards to students’ accounts, cash will be available for credit toward the students’ tuition and fee bill. Suppose the money given exceeds the student’s tuition and fee bill. In that case, a credit will be credited to the student’s account, and a refund through the university’s refunding vendor, BankMobile, may be provided. The Student Accounting Office oversees payment refunds for students.

Some external and private scholarship examples can be found on the university’s website under “Scholarship Search Engines,” along with a wealth of information under the university’s “Scholarships & Financial Aid” tab on the UHD Website. Go Gators!

THE DATELINE

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The Dateline is the official student newspaper of the University of Houston-Downtown. Since its first issue in 1982, The Dateline is proud to be “Student Run since Volume One.” We strive to meet the needs of a growing university as well as the growing metropolitan city that surrounds us.

Submission Policy

The Dateline staff consists of students from UHD who complete all tasks required to produce the newspaper, which serves all UHD campuses. The opinions and commentaries expressed within reflect the views of the contributing writers. No opinions expressed in The Dateline reflect the viewpoints of UHD, its administration, or students.

The Dateline reserves the right to edit or modify submissions for the sake of clarity, content, grammar, or space limitations. All submissions become property of The Dateline and may not be returned.

All paid writers must be currently enrolled students at UHD. All paid writers must also complete vendor registration with the University of Houston System prior to contributing.

Press releases, story ideas, news tips and suggestions are always welcomed. We encourage all students to contribute.

Credit: Edward Saenz

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Payment deferment plan continues to help students in emergencies

BY DIANA AMBROSIO

The Emergency Deferment Plan is a payment program available each semester at UHD for qualifying students. It is for students who may need additional time for financial aid, allowing a student to have a reduced feeling of financial burden.

There are three qualifications listed for emergency deferment. A student must be a Texas resident, pay resident tuition rates, and enroll in the current semester. There should be no financial holds or past balances due with the university.

According to The Dateline's Editor Indira Zaldivar, the enrollment process was simple and "easily done in minutes." Students sign up through UHD 2.0 and the program locks in

enrollment even if the funds are not available to the student at the beginning of the semester.

This plan is done in a four-installation schedule. A \$10 fee is added to the final bill total if a student misses a payment. Zaldivar considered the fee "minimal."

By using this plan, you will stay enrolled in your classes regardless of a missed payment.

This plan cannot be used to pay prior unpaid balances. A 5% interest is implemented each time a payment plan is created. The plan is offered once a semester. The tuition bill must be paid during the term it was acquired before a student can register for future semesters.

Determined to stay in school, Zaldivar entered graduate school

even with a rocky financial situation. She described the plan as a lifesaver that helped her stay afloat while looking for a way to pay her tuition.

Zaldivar's advice to Gators is to consider the number of classes taken each semester, especially when in financial turmoil.

"It is absolutely okay to delay graduation if that will bring you more peace," she added. "Count on Scholarships and Financial Aid to help you. Use the extra time you will spend in college to try new things because there are numerous opportunities that align with your career goals that are available only as an enrolled UHD student."

Payment Dates

- 1ST PAYMENT - FEBRUARY 1
- 2ND PAYMENT - MARCH 1
- 3RD PAYMENT - MARCH 15
- 4TH PAYMENT - MARCH 31

Qualifications

- **MUST BE CLASSIFIED AS A TEXAS RESIDENT AND PAY RESIDENT TUITION RATES.**
- **MUST BE ENROLLED FOR THE CURRENT SEMESTER.**
- **MUST NOT HAVE ANY FINANCIAL HOLDS WITH THE UNIVERSITY OR HAVE ANY PAST DUE BALANCES.**

Credit: Edward Saenz

UHD subsidizes METRO fare costs for students, faculty and staff

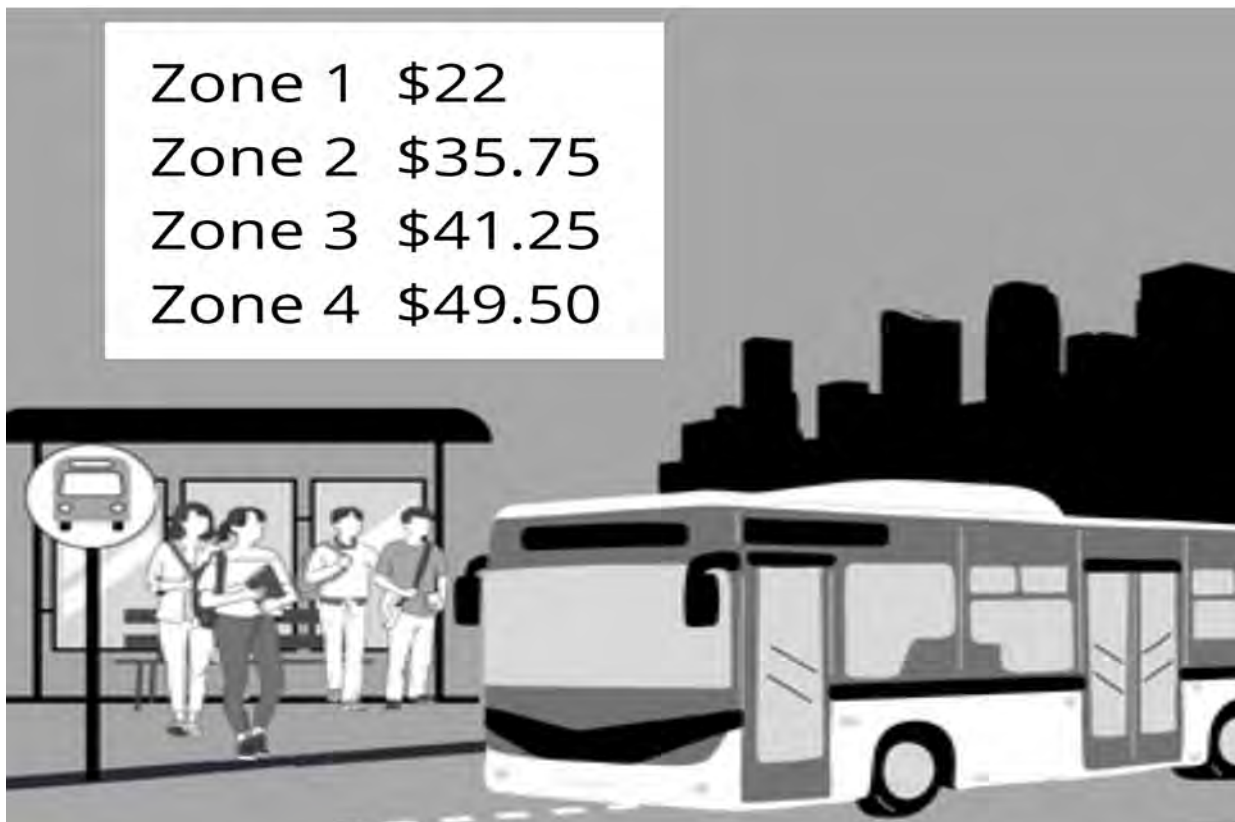
BY MADIHA HUSSAIN

UHD Parking & Transportation Services continues to partner up with METRO to provide an additional mode of transportation, dubbed RideSponsor.

This program is available for UHD students, faculty, and staff who rely on METRO to travel to the UHD campus. UHD will sponsor 25% of the monthly fare cost for participants of the RideSponsor program.

There are four zones across the Houston metropolitan area that have been predetermined by METRO. The cost of public transportation varies from zone to zone.

Participants will receive a METRO Q fare card with the subsidized 25% monthly fare depending on the zone they live in. University students will exclusively get extra savings via



Credit: Giselle Oviedo

a second Q card that grants a 50% discount to METRO's fares.

The RideSponsor program first rolled out in the fall of 2017. It has garnered support from the UHD community these past years

like Indira Zaldivar, The Dateline's editor.

"I love it because I get to commute by METRO for free with this program," Zaldivar said. "The stress-free bus ride is an advantage over having to drive for

20 to 40 minutes (with traffic) to school on the nation's second deadliest interstate! Riding the bus helps me feel safer than driving a car and helps the environment by cutting down on carbon emissions."

Participants of the RideSponsor will not be able to purchase a UHD parking permit. However, participants will have four parking validations per month to

allow for any extenuating circumstances that require them to drive to campus instead of public transportation. The METRO Q card will be reloaded once the card's balance is at \$5 or below. The card will be reloaded only once a month if needed.

Visit the UHD Parking & Transportation Services in room N117 to enroll in the program! A form must be filled out before you can become eligible. They are open from Monday to Friday, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, you can contact them by email at parking@uhd.edu or call them on 713-221-8127.

ExxonMobil Complex suffers explosion, injures four people

BY SERGIO PRESA JR

The ExxonMobil facility in Baytown burst into flames which caused an explosion on Dec. 23 around 1 a.m. The refinery is located in the 5000 block of Baytown Drive. Residents who live near the refinery reported hearing a loud “boom” when the incident occurred. Four people were injured from the blast and were transported to Memorial Hermann in stable condition, according to an ExxonMobil spokesperson. Although a shelter-in-place was

not imposed, particulate matter is known to pose a health concern after a fire. The refinery processes material with gasoline components. It has the capacity to process up to 584,000 barrels of oil each day and employs around 7,000 people.

In a press conference, an ExxonMobil spokesperson said there was no known impact to the air quality.

“We deeply regret any disruption or inconvenience that this incident may have caused the community,” ExxonMobil’s statement

read. This is not the first issue that the facility has had, including the death of a worker who suffered severe burns in 2003. In 2019, another fire at Exxon Mobil in Baytown injured 37 people.

Air Alliance Houston Executive Director Jennifer Hadayia said in a statement that chemical fires and explosions happen too often in the Space City because corporations are “allowed to operate in a way that endangers families and workers.”

US Justice Department sues Texas over voting maps

BY SERGIO PRESA JR

The lawsuit claimed Texas violated the Voting Rights Act by trying to abridge the rights of Latino and Black voters. Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta said the map drawing process was rushed and that some maps were drawn with discriminatory intent. The Justice Department asked the court to stop Texas from using the new maps.

This sums to be the fifth legal challenge against the maps based on claims that the districts drawn by the Texas Legislature are unconstitutional and violate the federal Voting Rights Act because they diminish the voting strength of voters of color.

Two more legislative seats were allocated to Texas after the 2020 Census. Texas has yet to draw a new district with a majority of minority voters, Gupta said.

“Our investigation determined that Texas’ redistricting plans will dilute the increased minority voting strength that should have developed from these significant demographics shifts,” Gupta stated.

The new seats in Texas both have white majorities. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton called the suit “absurd.” He also said it was the Biden administration’s “latest ploy to control Texas voters.” This lawsuit is the second filed against Texas this fall over voting rights.

Attorney General Merrick Garland called on Congress to pass voting legislation. Specifically, Garland wanted Congress to restore the parts of the Voting Rights Act that required jurisdictions with discriminatory histories to clear election changes with the Justice Department before they can enact them. In 2013, that part of the legislation was scrapped by the Supreme Court after a ruling that the formula used for determining which jurisdictions were included was unconstitutional.

“Were that Pre-clearance tool still in place, we would likely not be here today announcing this complaint,” Garland stated.

Biden administration imposes greener vehicle standards

BY SERGIO PRESA JR

In an effort to fight climate change, the Biden administration set the bar higher for vehicle mileage standards.

The action is a rollback of a Trump-era policy that lessened restrictions on fuel efficiency standards. The Biden administration’s new rule would begin affecting 2023 car models and would have a target of 40 miles per gallon by 2026. That new standard is 25% higher than the number finalized by the Trump administration and 5% higher than the number proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency.

EPA Administrator Michael Regan called the rule a “giant step forward” in terms of delivering on climate agenda for the Biden

administration.

“We are setting robust and rigorous standards that will aggressively reduce the pollution that is harming people and our planet and save money at the same time.” Regan stated.

This newest attempt at passing climate policy comes after Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin said he was against the president’s \$2 trillion social and environmental policy bill. Manchin opposed the bill because he believes it is

too expensive and could spark more inflation.

Market shares of zero emissions vehicles should also get help expanding under the new rule. The Biden administration has set a goal of battery powered and hybrid cars being 17%

of new vehicles sold by 2026. By 2023, these vehicles are expected to have about 7% of market share in 2023. According to the EPA, the new rule will help slow climate change’s effects, increase public health by reducing air

pollution levels and lead to lower costs for drivers due to improved fuel efficiency. Biden’s goal for the U.S. is to reduce emissions by at least half by 2030.



Credit: Edward Saenz

Texas teen develops program, gives the gift of speech to little sister



ability, limited or absent speech, autism or autistic traits and significant feeding difficulties at a young age.

In Della's early teen years, she was introduced to a variety of AAC devices and equipment. However, Della would not use one piece of equipment, and another brought Della and her family to spend thousands on said equipment.

For contextual clarity, the glasses I use every day, which some refer to as jordies, cost the state \$1,800. If my family had to buy me glasses at this price the way Della's parents buy her AAC equipment, they would go broke. Enter Archer and his web-based application called Freespeech.

This simple website lets users program buttons with images of

their choice to represent words. When clicked the word is sounded out loud. In addition, the buttons are easily editable.

This is important because it allows the words, and thus the language, to be reflective of Della's mood and personality. The biggest aspect of this application was its learning curve.

"It wasn't long before the Calder family noticed a change in how Della was communicating with them," according to CNN. Currently Freespeech is free and hosted on GitHub.

GitHub is an online free-to-use coding platform where Archer connected with other talented coders to help implement new features into the site. One such feature is password protection which was

needed because Della would try to go into the backend of the website and edit/remove various features.

Finally, this development comes as a boon to those who work in the medical field and see patients like Della. Children's National's Division Chief of Hear-

ing and Speech Tommie Robinson, Ph.D. told CNN that "additions to accessibility and individualization are greatly needed, and devices like an app can be an important part of enhancing the communication process."

As it is now. Freespeech is a work in

progress. The next goal is to make it available offline. However, in its current iteration, Freespeech is the gift that keeps on giving. Wheels in motion rolling on.

BY MICHAEL KOWIS

In early December, 17-year-old Archer Calder, used his knowledge of coding and app development to build an augmentative and alternative communication application for his 14-year-old sister, Della.

Della has a rare genetic condition called Bainbridge-Ropers syndrome. Children with BRPS have moderate to severe intellectual dis-



Archer Calder, age 17, (left) holds little sister Della, age 14, (middle). Courtesy: CNN

State appeals court rules Harris County's mask mandate can proceed

BY SERGIO PERSA JR

Harris County leaders are allowed to implement a mask mandate, a Texas third court of appeals in Austin ruled. The court's ruling challenged Gov. Greg Abbott's executive order that bans local government entities from

requiring the wearing of face masks. Local leaders in Texas called the ruling a victory.

"If you want to be responsible and require masks, continue wearing masks, unless the Texas Supreme Court rules against this," Harris County Judge Lina

Hidalgo said. "They won't make a ruling on this for quite a while. You're within your rights to continue with this requirement."

Ken Paxton, Texas Attorney General has planned to appeal the decision to the Texas Supreme Court.

Abbott's office was quick to address these new legal developments.

"The Governor's executive order remains in full effect until those appeals are resolved, which means local mask mandates are still illegal under Texas law," Abbott's office stated.

Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee argued that Abbott does not have the authority to ban mask mandates through executive orders.

"What we've seen the courts continue to say is that the governor's power is not unlimited," Menefee said.

Hidalgo said the ruling will help save lives. She raised Harris County's COVID-19 level to red on Jan. 10. She also strongly encouraged adults and children five and older to get vaccinated and boosted.

Gators! It's not too late to get your vaccine or booster! Clinics will be held monthly!

Next clinic is Jan 20 from 11am-1pm in the UHD Welcome Center

To sign up, scan the QR Code

Credit: Edward Saenz

Expansion of Cole's Flea Market increases its well-deserved popularity

BY CAROLINA VALDEZ

Sunday mornings at the intersection of Beltway 8 and Telephone Road are usually heavy in traffic. A long line of cars patiently waiting as they drive into the crowded parking lot of Cole's Flea Market, and it does not clear up for hours.

This flea market has been around since 1968 and has grown in popularity in recent years since expanding. They now sit on 44 acres of land with over 1,300 vendors. What makes this place special is its longevity and what it means to the surrounding community.

Latin culture flourishes here as a large majority of the vendors offer cuisine and a plethora of goods from Mexico and Central America. Spanish music of all kinds can be heard playing as one walks the entire flea



Vendor stand at Coles' Flea Market. Courtesy: Luisa Bermude Berrios

market. The loud music, aroma of food, and the vibrant colors of the products creates an enjoyable sensory overload for any first-timer.

"Growing up, my family would take me there every Sunday," Alondra Mora said.

"We would eat so much food, and it was real Mexican food – not Tex-Mex or fancy restaurant food."

Mora said one of the food vendors offers "the best gorditas," but does not have a sign or a name to identify the

place. One must know their way around the market in order to find them.

This outdoor market is open every weekend, year-round and even with Houston's unpredictable cold fronts and blazing hot summers, it

thrives. Towards the center of the property, there is a large building to protect attendees from the weather. In the summers, this building is a refuge with air conditioner. In the winter, it protects from the harsh cold.

This is where a lot of antique dealers reside, and a walk-through of the aisles will feel like traveling through time. In more recent years, newer and durable structures have been added surrounding the main building. These new structures offer a sturdier space for vendors than the tent space on the outskirts of the market.

The expansion will not stop there. Cole's announced on their website their plans for Comida Park. This addition will feature up to 40 spots for local food trucks and will be open seven days a week.

Cole's Flea Market has much to offer locals and tourists alike. If you have enough patience to sit in traffic as you wait for a parking spot, stop by and peek at the wonders this flea market boasts.

Magnus Carlsen defends World Chess Championship title for the fifth time

BY EDWARD SAENZ

After a 10-game long series, Carlsen defeated his opponent, and fellow Grand Master, Ian Nepomniachtchi, to win the FIDE World Chess Championship for the fifth time in a row.

The FIDE World Chess Championship is an event held every two years. The event is preceded by the Candidates Tournament, which is an eight-player tournament to decide the challenger for the World Chess Title. The first half of the 2020-2021 Candidates Tournament was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia in March 2020 and later postponed at the halfway point until April 2021.

The match between the Candidates Tour-



Magnus Carlsen (left) and Ian Nepomniachtchi (right) compete at the FIDE World Chess Championship 2021. Courtesy: Giuseppe Cacace / AFP / Getty.

namment winner and Carlsen was originally meant to be held in late 2020 but was delayed until 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The event took place in Dubai, the United

Arab Emirates from Nov. 24 to Dec. 12. The series began with five consecutive draws before Carlsen won a closely contested eight-hour struggle in Game 6. With 136 moves, this

was the longest ever game in a World Chess Championship and the third-longest in recorded history.

Following this loss, Nepomniachtchi started to feel the pressure and

would make a series of "surprise blunders" and go on to lose Games 8, 9, and 11. This gave Carlsen a convincing series victory with four wins, seven draws, and no losses.

"The things that happened to me here never happened to me basically at any event," Nepomniachtchi said. "In my career, I lost quite some stupid games, I should find out why it happened."

Carlsen, a chess prodigy, has held the number one position in the FIDE world chess rankings since July 2011. In 2013, Carlsen won his first world championship and has since defended the title five times.

In late 2019, chess saw a massive rise in popularity on the streaming site Twitch. This was largely due to GM Hikaru Nakamura. Who quickly became one of the most popular faces in the game, even surpassing Carlsen.

Reviews

Must-see film, 'Red Rocket,' channels pride in Texas culture

BY JAMES JUREWICZ

How is it that a smarmy and sarcastic rapper/actor like Simon Rex is now being talked about as a possible Oscar favorite? Prominent actors like Leonardo DiCaprio and Joaquin Phoenix were both praising Rex's performance in the Sean Baker produced "Red Rocket."

Released on Dec. 10, "Red Rocket" was filmed in Texas City, Texas, and the surrounding areas. Some scenes were shot in Beaumont.

"Red Rocket" is about Texas City native Mickey Saber (Simon Rex) who was once a successful adult film star in Los Angeles, California. Saber returned to rebuild his life after washing out in the adult film industry and claims to be the victim of a supposed "sabotage."

Returning to his mother-in-law's house where his estranged wife Lexi Davies (Bree

Elrod) resides, Rex gradually talks his way into the house from the street, ending up with a couch to surf for the reasonable monthly price of \$200.

Saber eventually starts an inappropriate relationship with a 17-year-old named Strawberry (Suzanna Son) in her film acting debut. Due to his inability to find work because of his unique past, Saber begins selling cannabis out of the donut shop where Strawberry works. His best customers are all mostly employed in the surrounding Texas City petroleum and chemical plants.

Those familiar with Simon Rex or his rap persona "Dirt Nasty" will be pleasantly surprised and entertained by "Red Rocket." Did Baker just take Rex to Texas City and follow him around with a camera? Are these lines of dialogue, or is it all his real life?

Rex is an actor whose main genre is comedy. Slapstick and satire are his forte. To see the man cast by an auteur filmmaker who is wildly popular at Cannes Film Festival is truly surreal. The idea that Rex has been mentioned as a possible 2021 Oscar nominee for acting is mind boggling.

Rex is a talented actor and his performance in "Red Rocket" is good. He embodies a character that is intensely vain and self-involved. Saber seems content freeloading from his estranged wife Lexi Davies (Bree Elrod), meanwhile starting an inappropriate ongoing relationship with the underage Strawberry.

What makes Rex such a glove-like fit for Saber is his history in the adult entertainment industry, which is how he got his start in Hollywood. When asked about compliments and praise, a continued and

lasting career is the outcome Rex hopes to achieve from the experience.

"There can be all the buzz, talk and all the compliments in the world, but really all I want out of this is to continue to work," Rex told ET Canada.

Director Sean Baker is known for his films "Tangerine" and "The Florida Project." A24 movies contain an outstanding realism that places the viewer within the story. Baker's films feature regular people and trained or established actors. This contributes to Baker's ability to truly capture an area and the local residents with authenticity.

What makes "Red Rocket" such a great film and superior performance is that the detestable Saber can generate audience sympathy regardless of his horrible behavior. Saber is charming and hilarious. He is handsome

and a smooth talker. The audience wants him to succeed even though he may not deserve to.

Adam Sandler is not known for his dramatic talent but accomplished a similar sensation with "Uncut Gems" in late '19 and early '20. Sandler was famously snubbed at the 2020 Oscars. A nomination is still yet to be determined for Rex.

Baker also manages to recreate the slang, tone, and feel of the local people. Anyone from the area can relate to the characters represented onscreen. The heat and humidity of the Texas Gulf Coast are apparent on screen. The characters glisten with sweat in the Texas sun.

The Kemah Boardwalk, the Mall of the Mainland and Highway 146 all appear in the film. For anyone from the surrounding area, they will instantly recognize familiar landmarks and the flat, humid, marshy land-

scape of Texas City. Saber and Strawberry both take a ride on the Boardwalk Bullet rollercoaster in Kemah and the Donut Hole is a popular and familiar donut chain in Texas.

Critics have awarded "Red Rocket" positive feedback worthy of the attention received at Cannes. The film is worth watching for multiple reasons: Baker's direction, the performance of Simon Rex and the authentic representation of the area's residents.

The film is not only entertaining but very well made and acted. It is also a must see for anyone from the Houston area. It would be fantastic if more films were produced in Southeast Texas.

"Red Rocket" has a runtime of 128 minutes (about 2 hours) and is now playing in movie theaters.

'The Power of the Dog' continues to mystify audiences



Courtesy: Netflix

BY YASMEEN AMMOURAH

"The Power of the Dog" is a Western psychodrama and a potential Oscar nominee. Jane Campion directs the movie after an almost ten-year hiatus and does the 1967 novel by Thomas Savage justice.

Set in 1925 Montana, the film opens with a sympathetic monologue from the main character, Peter Gordon (Kodi Smit-McPhee).

"For what kind of man would I be if I did not help my mother? If I did not save her?"

The following scene introduces a set of ranchers at a farm led by brothers, Phil (Benedict Cumberbatch) and George Burbank (Jesse Plemons) respectively. Cumberbatch adds to his wide range of characters played in his acting career with the mysterious Phil Burbank. Throughout the story's five parts, the audience observes Phil's cruel comments and emotional manipulation and must make assumptions about his character.

From beginning to the end, the film demands a lot of atten-

tion as every detail is extremely important. Through Ari Wegner's cinematography, multiple views of the characters are captured that would normally go unnoticed. For example, a larger focus is placed on Peter's beautiful facial features in his first appearance. The shot also depicts his artistic talents. This contrasts with Phil's first appearance. A far shot portrays him covered in dirt leaving livestock after work.

The first interaction Phil has with Pete is extremely tense from their differences but not

exactly for the reasons the audience suspects. The movie has twists that imply Phil's internal insecurities as well as the self-pity he feels when he is alone.

"The Power of the Dog" already well deservedly won the 2022 Golden Globe for best drama film, best supporting actor and best director. It is an anticipated nominee for best picture in the 2022 Academy Awards. Hopefully, the film will create an even larger name in the industry soon.



Reviews

‘American Underdog’ pays tribute to NFL player’s true-to-life story

BY JAMES JUREWICZ

“American Underdog” is a 2021 sports biopic about the meteoric rise of quarterback Kurt Warner. The film follows the NFL player’s fascinating story from stocking shelves at a local grocery store to winning the Super Bowl. Directed by Andrew and John Erwin, the film was delayed for a year due to the pandemic but was finally released last Christmas.

Warner’s first stint in professional football ends quickly though. After going undrafted by the NFL, he starts off as a member of the 1994 Green Bay Packers practice squad but does not make the team for the regular season.

Warner spent time as the Iowa Barnstormers starting quarterback from ‘95 to ‘97, slowly becoming the best player in Arena Football. His coach Jim Foster (Bruce McGill) offers him \$100 for every touchdown he makes during a game, eventually requiring a large pickle jar to hold all the touchdown cash.

Arena Football quickly becomes key in Warner’s football ascension. After three seasons, he finally attracts the attention of the NFL. Warner was a backup second-stringer with no regular season starting experience for the St. Louis Rams.

During the break between his pro stint and collegiate sporting

career, Warner stocked shelves at a grocery store in Iowa. The Los Angeles Rams were last in the Super Bowl after the 2019 NFL Season. They lost to the New England Patriots. The Rams last super bowl win was in 2000. Following the 1999 season, the team had the moniker “The Greatest Show on Turf.” Warner was the team’s starter during their Super Bowl win.

At times throughout the film, Zachary Levi looks just like Warner. This is especially true when he sports the Rams blue and yellow-gold uniform. Levi is well cast and imitates Warner’s slight Iowa accent with accuracy.

Oscar winner Anna Paquin portrays War-

ner’s loving spouse Brenda. Paquin also resembles a younger Brenda Warner with the familiar pixie haircut. Paquin replicated Brenda’s strong personality with personal thorough research.

The film is as much about their relationship as it is about Warner’s career. Brenda is selflessly patient and emotionally supportive of her husband. Levi and Paquin were both able to embody the Warners’ personality traits in the film’s big moments. The Warners were directly helpful for the actors’ research for the role. In an interview with Good Morning America, Levi calls the Warners an incredible resource.

“He and Brenda were on set about half the time we were making this movie,” Levi stated.

On the Kelly Clarkson Show, Brenda Warner talks about the film being more than a sports movie. She expressed that the movie had to be about life and how she wanted “the good, the bad, and the ugly.” “American Underdog” is the first wide-theatrical release from the Kingdom Story Company. The company specializes in Christian Films and “American Underdog” is their 3rd film released.

Without seeing any other film in their library, the Christianity portrayed onscreen was

notably subtle. Brenda speaks with Warner about how her Christian faith “defines her” and later, in a moment of utter tragedy, Warner prays, asking for strength.

True-to-life inspirational stories like Warner’s translated into a good film. “American Underdog” is enjoyable and entertaining. Warner has a likability that followed him to a television sports analyst career after pro football.

See “American Underdog” it is worth the watch. The film is about more than football, and the story is truly inspirational. “American Underdog” is now playing in theaters.

‘Don’t Look Up’ creates comedic parallel with current world struggles

BY JAMES JUREWICZ

“Don’t Look Up” is Netflix’s latest satirical comedy about a deadly earthbound comet and the ridiculous efforts made to stop Earth’s destruction. Directed by Adam McKay, the film’s all-star cast includes Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Lawrence, Meryl Streep and Jonah Hill

The film follows Kate Dibiasky (Jennifer Lawrence), a Ph.D. candidate, discovering an incoming comet with an earthbound trajectory. The comet’s path is confirmed by her professor, Dr. Mindy (Leonardo DiCaprio). If the comet is to strike the earth, no life is expected to survive the aftermath.

The two astronomers begin a media tour after their initial meeting when President

Orleans (Meryl Streep) and son and Chief of Staff Jason (Jonah Hill) fail to generate any real concern.

“You just can’t go around telling people there is a 100% chance that they are going to die,” President Orleans said.

Orleans laments the bad timing of the impending natural disaster getting in the way of the upcoming midterm election.

Lawrence and DiCaprio do a fantastic job portraying scientists who are clearly not suitable to spread sensitive and drastic information to the masses. DiCaprio’s character experiences extreme anxiety, among other ailments, which he curbs with a massive number of daily medications. Lawrence’s Dibiasky becomes an instant meme when she

loses her cool on a popular national television show. Both play their comedic roles incredibly well and prove they are anything but solely dramatic performers.

Oscar-winner Mark Rylance delivers a fantastic performance. His portrayal of Uber-rich billionaire scientist, Peter Isherwell, is the standout of the movie. Rylance’s character is so obnoxious and memorable that Isherwell’s marshmallow voice echoes in the viewers’ head for hours after screening the film.

The voice he used is silky soft and angelic, though it is the ridiculous dialogue that makes the character great. His eccentric ideas range from hilarious to frustrating. The character is a mix of Amazon Owner Jeff Bezos and Tesla company creator Elon

Musk, both successful businesspeople and billionaires.

Director Adam McKay is known for some hilarious and well-received comedies. He brought us Will Ferrell’s “Anchorman” and Ricky Bobby characters as well as the ‘08 cult classic “Step Brothers.”

“Don’t Look Up” is a film where the initial script required more of the unbelievable. McKay explains he penned the script pre-pandemic. After experiencing life during 2020, the director went back and rewrote the script to make it more realistic, and therefore unfortunately more ridiculous.

It subverts audience expectations through the film’s tone and delivery. Usually, a film so packed with Oscar-winners would have a more serious and grounded approach

to the material. “Don’t Look Up” is a satirical dark comedy that borders on parody yet still contains genuine dramatic and serious moments. American society within the film becomes heavily divided about the comet.

Those who stand with the president inhabit the mantra “Don’t Look Up.” Everyone who believes in the science behind the meteor and the impending devastation repeatedly say, “Just Look Up.” The comet is a blatant and obvious metaphor for global warming as well as COVID-19.

“This was originally a metaphor for the climate crisis, then [COVID-19] hit and a whole new wave of denial of science,” DiCaprio told The Today Show. The politically created division saturating this fictional society

makes real and lasting change impossible. The film depicts numerous celebrities and important figures backing one side of the spectrum or the other, much like in real life.

The film is very reminiscent of the 2006 Mike Judge Film “Idiocracy.” That film involves the future and how IQ levels are lower due to a combination of ridiculous yet now realistic factors.

“Don’t Look Up” is long for a comedy, 138 minutes. The film is an enjoyable watch. There are so many famous A-list actors in the film. The characters are well developed and mostly likable.

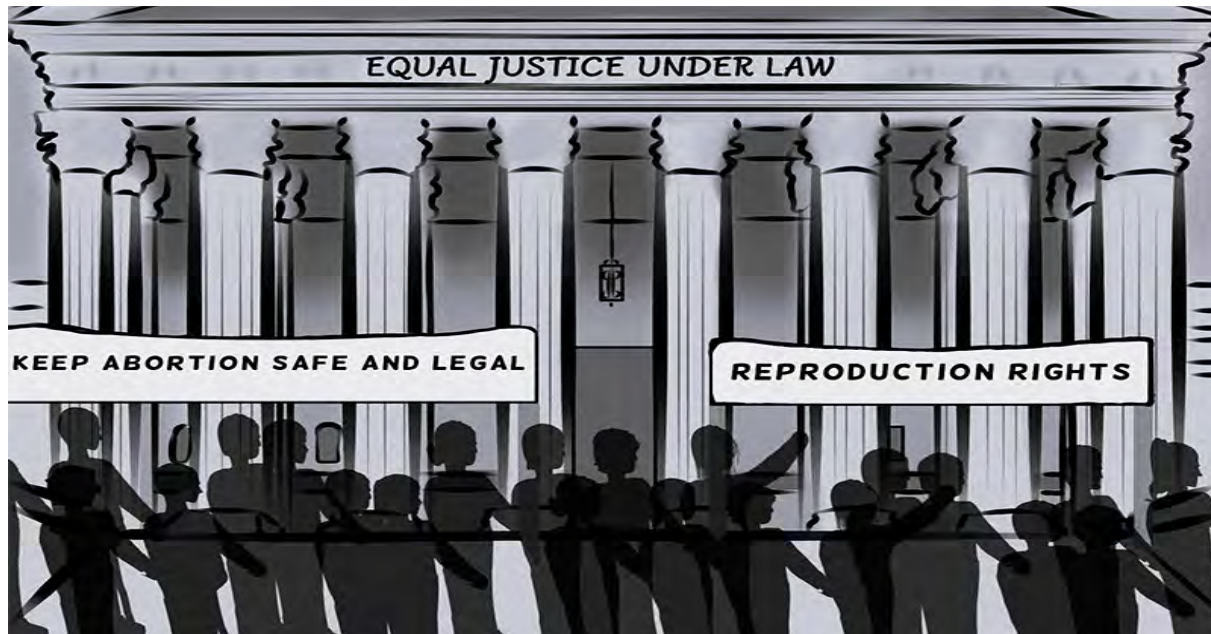
Enjoy the film from the comfort of your home. “Don’t Look Up” was released on Dec. 24 on Netflix.

The fight against Roe Vs. Wade is a fight against women

BY YASMEEN AMMOURAH

Rights for women have always been off and on in the U.S. government and many other governments for that matter. Although the 19th Amendment was passed 101 years ago, the Texas government and right-wing states have taken away the right to have an abortion, creating an even larger barrier to women's reproductive rights.

On Sept. 1, 2021 the Texas "heartbeat bill" took effect four months after the bill passed on May 19, 2021. The bill, formally known as Texas House Bill 1500 and Texas Senate Bill 8, states that once a heartbeat in the fetus is detected, conducting an abortion



Credit: Giselle Oviedo

will result in a penalty charge leading to a criminal offense. The earliest a doctor would be able to detect this would be three weeks into the pregnancy.

At three weeks, many women still do

not know that they are pregnant. Pregnancy symptoms may be overlooked as it could take pregnant women four weeks or longer to notice a missed period. Not to mention a myriad of other symptoms

that may not become apparent until closer to two months into a pregnancy.

The knowledge of paternity wouldn't even be able to be processed because now the labor of childbirth

would be on the shoulders of the mother.

The decision to abort or continue with a pregnancy is not one for Republicans to make. It shouldn't be the decision of any outlier to the child

except the bearer. To have laws written by a male majority government is misrepresentation of the extreme diversity in Texas. With 111 men compared to only 38 women in the Texas House of Representatives and 21 men compared to 10 women in the Texas Senate, an unprecedented bias can be foretold through these votes.

Overall, there is a larger risk in banning abortions than giving resources needed to help women. Overturning Roe Vs. Wade could end up as the second temperance movement and create secretive organizations for these actions at the cost of women's economic and physical lives.

No more children should suffer at the cost of unrestricted gun laws

Editor's note: If you are sensitive to the topic of school shootings, you may want to avoid this article.

BY YASMEEN AMMOURAH

With grade schools coming back in person for the first time in two years, there are lots of events going on once again in these communities.

Clubs are meeting, sports and games are occurring, the arts are holding shows, and gun fires are taking place in the lunchrooms once more. In 2021, after reopening schools 100% during the pandemic, 34 school shootings occurred and most took place after Aug. 1. What is causing this to occur once again?

Since the 1999 Columbine shooting, there has been a rise in shootings in all manners. Even after countless victims have suffered, there have still been no changes, especially in

accessibility to weaponry. Since the March for Our Lives movement, middle schoolers and high schoolers have been calling for changes in gun restriction.

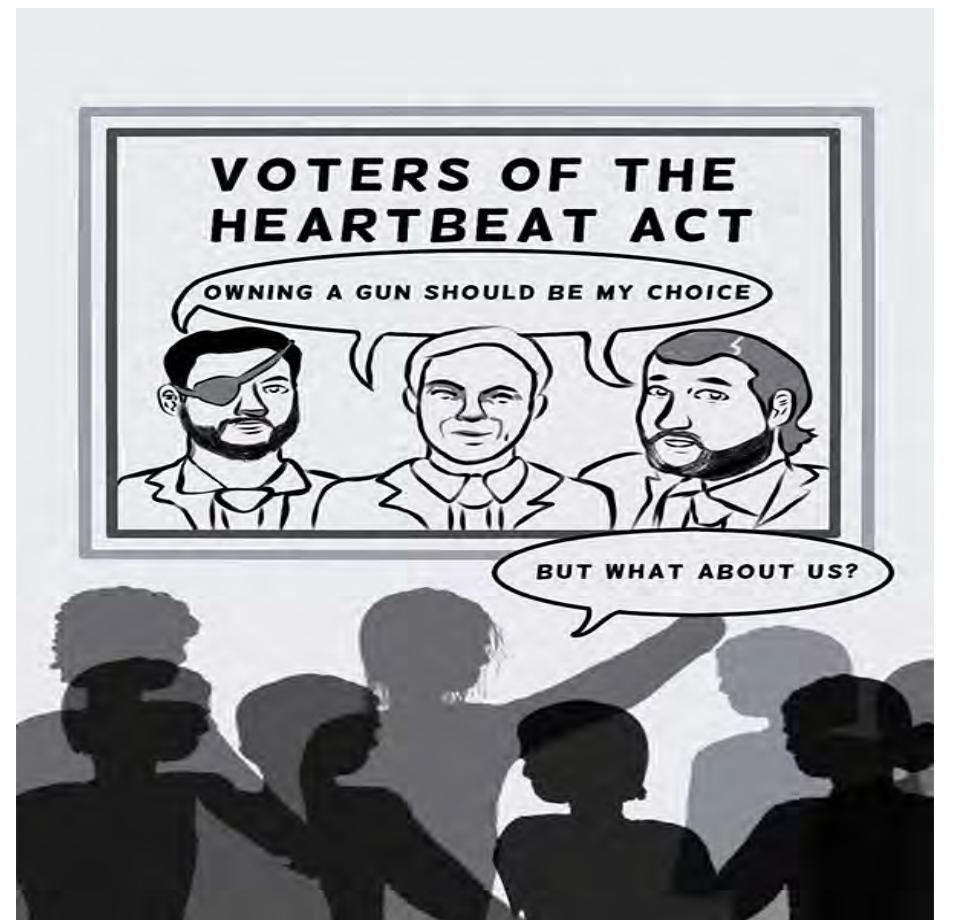
The leaders of this movement were the Parkland shooting survivors who witnessed the perpetrator, a 19-year-old former student with easy and legal access to a semi-automatic rifle. The shooter of the Parkland incident was younger than the legal drinking age in the U.S. and was able to easily get a gun with no psychological or background checks.

Though easy access to weapons is a large contributing factor in shootings, another issue is that some public schools do not take extensive and serious action regarding students who pose a threat. This past month in Michigan, Oakland High School saw the first extreme case of a mass

school shooting in over two years perpetrated by a 15-year-old who had access to gunnery from his father. Though this wasn't a legal source of weapons, the high school administration had knowledge of the student's depression and fascination with guns.

When this information was brought to his parents, responsibility was passed to them to take him home that day, but they refused to. The prosecutor in the court case argued that "instead of paying attention to their son and getting him help, they bought him a gun," which would prove there was a great deal of ignorance on the son's antics.

More than 3,500 children are killed in shootings per year and 15,000 more are shot every year, according to Everytown Research and Policy. The idea that school perpetra-



Credit: Giselle Oviedo

tors committing these acts because they were bullied is nothing more than a myth after over 20 years.

In almost every school across the nation, children are required to partici-

pate in shooting drills since Columbine.

Why should there be a shooter drill every single year in all schools? Children are constantly scared of violent intruders but why is it something that

students need to prepare for when it's not their fault? Action needs to be taken seriously by the government and school districts.

Guns should not be easily accessible.

“Pandemic brain” reaches far beyond just COVID-19 victims

BY ANITA GOOLCHARAN

As the U.S. approaches the second anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic, many find themselves easily burned out. The lockdown that began in March 2020 quickly influenced a wave of exhaustion that has affected the mental health of millions in the working class. Business administration Professor Anthony Klotz coined the event the “Great Resignation”. Adjusting to the pandemic has created a state of constant pressure and stress.

Many have faced obstacles that could fit in an entire lifetime in the duration of the pandemic. According to research from Harvard Medical School, the pandemic’s mental strain can increase neuroinflammation even in people who’ve never had COVID-19. This

Credit: Giselle Oviedo

phenomenon dubbed “pandemic brain,” explains many of the effects of lockdowns and other measures taken to prevent transmission such as working from home and distanced learning.

Neuroinflammation is often associated with major mood disorders like depression. The condition can contribute to symptoms such as brain fog, fatigue, increased stress levels, trouble focusing,

and other neurological symptoms. The most prominent example of how pandemic brain has affected society is the healthcare staffing shortage. Doctors, nurses, and other health professionals have been met with a dramatic demand during the pandemic which has led to strikes, pay cuts and outsourcing.

These factors contributed to a massive exodus of other professions as well.

Corporate America has also been severely impacted by the Great Resignation. In a study conducted by global management consulting firm McKinsey & Co., 42% of women and 35% of men in the U.S. feel burned out often or almost always.

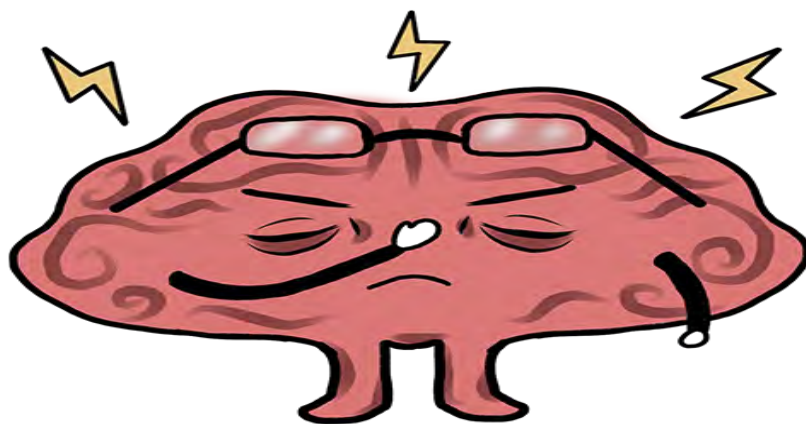
For many professionals, the transition to work from home has led to a greater level of uncertainty. Uncertainty is the perfect incubator for burnout.

Working from home can blur the boundaries between social and work life. For many, working from home has become a hassle in parenting. Parents have to find a new balance when their children are learning from home at the same time they are working. For others, their workload has doubled or even tripled, increasing their stress levels which can mimic other symptoms of pandemic brain.

Pandemic brain has been used to describe the recollection of life before the pandemic and how many do not recall many social cues or topics of discussion. For instance, many topics of discussion during the pandemic reflect global efforts of relief, vaccines and public health.

However, many cannot recall conversations where these topics do not come up. Some find themselves forgetting social cues such as etiquette at parties or other social settings.

The symptoms of pandemic brain are not definitive yet as scientists are still researching the effects of the pandemic. However, it is safe to say the pandemic has affected the mental health of more than only those who have been infected with COVID-19.



Scan to complete the "Technology Needs Survey" for the Spring 2022 semester.

The Information Technology team will contact approved students within 1-2 working days from notification of approval.

Questions? Contact Dean of Students Office at uhdstudentaffairs@uhd.edu

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Go Gators!

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Have a technology need?

IMPORTANT!!!
Computers, webcam, internet and more technology are available to students enrolled in the fall 2021 semester thanks to partnership by the Dean of Students Office and Information Technology.

The season of giving should not end with the holidays



Credit: Giselle Oviedo

BY ANITA GOOLCHARAN

As the world enters the new year, many begin to focus on their New Year’s resolutions. For most, this means eating better, hitting the gym more often or spending more time with family. However, for many charitable organizations, January marks the beginning of a dry season.

The holiday season is the peak time for donations and volunteerism due to many people feeling moved by the holiday spirit. Charities often have more donations and services between Thanksgiving and New Year’s than any other time of the year. A prime example is when food banks and soup kitchens are fully staffed on Thanksgiving

but normally understaffed and underfunded throughout the year.

Beginning in January, charitable organizations resume rationing their funding. Many will have their donations or volunteer numbers dwindle. The season of giving is never really over, especially in a pandemic. While it may feel gratifying to volunteer or donate to

those in need when the holidays are around the corner, it is important to remember that there are people in need year round.

The recipients of charity are dignified people, therefore, gratitude should not be the center of why someone should donate their time or money to charity. Volunteering and other charitable acts should

not be limited to the holidays.

Continuing to help others by contributing to a clothing drive or food bank year round is a simple way to start. Another way someone can continue their charitable acts can be to serve as a mentor. UH College of Public Service’s Collaboratory for Aging Resources & Education are offering

a pandemic-friendly service to help seniors.

Led by CARE, the “Adopt a Grandparent” program aims to help console seniors who may feel isolated during the pandemic. Giving back to the community should not be limited to the holidays when there are those who may need help year round.

The Dateline is always hiring!



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