



NORTHEAST TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Guardians lend support to abused children



COURTESY PHOTO

Members of the Guardians of the Children organization stand with some of their "little sisters" during a multi-chapter get together.

By ELISABETH LIVELY
Editor-in-Chief

A biker walks into a courtroom with the scent of freshly-baked sugar cookies wafting off her clothes. The sun reflects off her leather vest with the words "Guardians of the Children" embroidered on her back patch.

To her right stands a man with poorly-painted pink fingernails, his face dead serious. In between the two adults is a child holding a teddy bear wearing a vest of its own.

This scenario is a picture of the work that the Guardians of the Children do on a daily basis. After going through FBI and state security checks, members of this international, non-profit organization are sworn to protect, support and befriend children in the court system

"[We do] anything that we can do to empower them to move past the pain," Michelle Ford, child liaison and secretary of the Sulphur River Chapter in Mount Vernon, said.

"We show up, we believe them, we show them that not all adults are bad people, that there are people out there who do care."

Bullied, neglected and abused children, whether, mentally, physically or sexually, from ages five to 18, are referred locally to the GOC by the District Attorney's office, the Child Advocacy Center, CASA, Safe-T, or other agencies. As child liaison, Ford acts as a bridge between the chapter and the agencies.

At courthouse and district attorney visits, the Guardians stay in the child's vicinity, guarding the doors, room, and perimeter. The Guardians are not involved in custody cases, and only appear in the picture after the perpetrator has lost all access to the child.

"When they have to go to the courtroom, we surround them," Ford said. "We're their paparazzi for the day. We walk them to the courtroom, we sit in the back, but they always have an eye view

See *Riding*, page 2

Alpha Mu Chi makes short film

SPECIAL TO THE EAGLE

Alpha Mu Chi, Northeast Texas Community College's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, recently received a grant from the Mellon Foundation to help fund a documentary dealing with the issues of accessibility for the blind and visually challenged.

Inspired in part by the increasing use of the internet for business and education this year, a move that left large segments of the population, such as the blind and visually challenged, underserved, the chapter sought to explore the issues of accessibility in more depth.

"What's been most impressive to me is the way this team has researched and networked," Dr. Matthew Lampert, PTK chapter advisor and professor of philosophy said. "Every

week, they've found and reached out to new people, experts from around the world, organizations working in the field, and dug up new research. They're working with people from Australia, Israel, Britain, and all across the country on this project."

The chapter will interview and film individuals both locally and elsewhere. John Russo, a history professor at NTCC who is totally blind, will be featured in the documentary, along with some of his classes.

Students on campus will be interviewed about various issues regarding blindness, visual challenges, accessibility, and digital affinity in general.

On Nov. 4 the chapter spoke with Dr. Scott Hollier, author of the book

See *PTK*, page 3

BREAKING GROUND



STAFF PHOTO | MANDY SMITH

The Harts Bluff ISD board of trustees and superintendent recently joined with members of the NTCC administration for a ground breaking ceremony at the location of the new Harts Bluff Early College High School. Construction is set to begin in 2021 with early college students occupying the middle school building until the new one is completed.

NTCC cosmetology ends year with limited appointments



STAFF PHOTO | CAROLINA SALAS

Cosmetology student Aby Chavez gives NTCC Director of Student Activities and Multicultural Affairs Rico Willis a clean cut.

By CAROLINA SALAS
Staff Writer

This year, the Northeast Texas Community College Cosmetology Program has not been able to hold many of the service project events they usually participate in such as the Queen For a Day event, working with the public clients, and visiting residents in nursing homes.

"It has been challenging for sure," Necah Posey, cosmetology instructor, said. "We have kind of just adapted, I guess you would say, around those events. But I know that our students are kind of bummed that we're not able to get out there and get in the community and do some stuff like nursing home visits and things like that."

While COVID-19 has not affected the actual program, the ability for students to work with public clients was not possible. Though students have had the opportunity to work with mannequins, Posey said that method is not the same.

"There's just nothing like talking with a human person and having that one-on-one contact, interaction, conversations and things like that," Posey said.

Recently, cosmetology students had the

opportunity to work with NTCC staff members. Posey said that it was a step-up from working on mannequins.

"The students do work on each other so they've gotten a little bit of practice there," Posey said. "Now with them getting to work with employees, I think that all just comes into play, and I think this is topping off their semester and that kind of makes everything come together. All the skills that they've been learning, they're able to use."

Being allowed to work with actual people, many of the students said they were excited to finally get client experience.

"I think it's great for hands-on experience because mannequin heads are a lot different from a human's head," Crystal Carpenter, cosmetology student, said. "It gives you more professional balance to know how you're going to do whenever you get to a salon."

Aby Chavez, cosmetology student, said that he has enjoyed getting to work with the employees.

"I think it's a great experience for me and for the staff that comes in and gets a haircut or whatever they get, because I can help them boost their

See *Salon*, page 2

Quote of the Month:

"What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more."

- Dr. Seuss

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Late registration for December intersession.....Dec. 14
- Christmas Day.....Dec. 25
- Offices reopen.....Jan. 4
- First day of the Spring Semester.....Jan. 19

NEWS

Riding with a heart of gold

Cont. from pg. 1

straight to us. They don't even [have to] look over there at the perpetrator. They can look at us and we'll smile, thumbs up, whatever we got to do for them to know 'We're here, you're safe.'"

Ford explained that it is the confidence they provide the children that makes the biggest difference.

"When they stand in a courtroom and they tell their story, we watch a child that has been a victim become a victor because the abuse will no longer have a hold."

Ford said that it's the biker persona that comforts the children and threatens the perpetrator. What many outsiders don't know is that most of the members are "the biggest dad-burn teddy bears you could ever want to see."

"That's the draw to what we do," she said. "It's the persona. These kids can walk into school and feel empowered that 'I've got the biggest, badass brother you could ever want to see. Mess with me!'"

While waiting to go into court, the Guardians occupy the children with games and food to help them avoid their fears about testifying.

"If a kid wants to paint your fingernails pink and you're a 60-year-old man, guess what? Your fingernails are going to be pink," Ford said with a shrug. "We've had it happen."

Ford explained that in the GOC, everyone is a brother and a sister. She said that they do not act as parental figures, because the children already have them. The Guardians are their friends and brothers and sisters because "that's just a motorcycle thing."

When children become connected with the organization, they attend a special adoption ceremony. In this ceremony, the child "adopts" their Guardian and receives their own leather vest and back patch. The children also receive a teddy bear

with its own bandana, chain, vest and back patch.

"That way they have it if they need a hug and we're not close," Ford said. "They can hug the bear and know that we're hugging them back."

At the adoption ceremony, the children also choose their "road name" or nickname. In the GOC, all the children and Guardians are known by their road names, with their real names being left anonymous to everyone but the child liaison.

Ford, who is a baker, is known as Sweets, while her husband, NTCC EMS Instructor and Chapter President Ray Ford, is known as Knuckles. Russell VanBibber, who is also an NTCC instructor of EMS, is the chapter treasurer and goes by the name Hawkeye.

Because the GOC is a non-profit organization, the Guardians set up tables at local biker rallies, like Dawgfest, to raise funds and awareness for child abuse.

"Our payday is those smiles and seeing them become productive, young adults," Ford said.

After court, the children can either move on or remain with their Guardians until they are 18, where they will be given the opportunity to automatically join the organization as a patched member.

To join the organization, individuals must first and foremost pass state and FBI background checks. It is not until after they learn the ropes of guardianship for a year that they become "patched members."

During a patching ceremony, individuals become official members of the organization and receive a back patch for their vest.

The Guardian who acts as a contact between the child and the chapter is known as the primary, and the children they oversee are called little brothers and sisters.

"[We're] available 24/7. If a child has a nightmare at two o'clock in

the morning, they know they can pick up the phone," Ford said. "We all have those children, at some point, that do need to be assured at two o'clock in the morning. When we put the back patch on our back, we agree to be there 24/7. If that child calls, we're going to be there. If that child is being threatened, yes, we can become a physical barrier. But it's mostly mental support."

Ford said they never make promises because a broken promise will destroy all the trust that has been built between the Guardian and their little brother or sister.

"It is a stronger commitment than marriage," Ford said. "It's a big commitment because I can let my husband down because I said something stupid and I know he's not going anywhere. These children don't understand that. That's why we don't make promises. You don't want to let them down anymore."

With tears in her eyes, Ford said, "Adults have let them down too much. I'm not going to be that adult."

Ford added that they are seeing an increase in child abuse since the pandemic began and schools closed. She said in the past that many cry-outs happened at school or a teacher would take notice of bruises on a child and report it. Since many children have not been attending school, some abuse could be going unreported.

Ford said although her own children grew up in a home filled with love, she knows that not all children have that opportunity. She explained that she feels she is fulfilling God's purpose for her when she is acting as a Guardian.

"I've done what God put me here for, and that's making sure kids know what love is. Our mission is to be the answer to the prayer of an abused child," she said. "And how many kids are out there still praying for help that we don't know about? So until I'm not needed, I'm going to keep going."



COURTESY PHOTO

Above, a Guardian dressed as Santa Claus settles in for a ride on his motorcycle.

Below, a Guardian hugs his new "little sister" during an adoption ceremony.



COURTESY PHOTO

"We help abused children, that's our first and foremost [priority]. The bikes just make it fun. We all enjoy riding, and we hope that one day we can ride to be just riding, but until then, we ride for a child."

- Michelle Ford



COURTESY PHOTO

From left, Nita May, NTCC director of development, accepts a check for the Focus on the Future scholarship from Jeremy Morton and Bryan Jackson of Brookshire's Pittsburg.

Brookshire's starts scholarship

SPECIAL TO THE EAGLE

The Brookshire Grocery Company recently established the Focus on the Future scholarship program which is in partnership with more than 40 universities and colleges in Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas.

This more than \$1 million donation is a substantial representation of BGC's dedication to education and giving back to those who aspire to build a better future in the communities it serves.

As part of this program, the Northeast Texas Community College Foundation received \$25,000 to establish an endowed scholarship.

"We are very excited to launch a lasting program which will help thousands of students achieve their dreams for years to come," Brad Brookshire, chairman and CEO for BGC, said "We support our local communities and value education which is one of our top philanthropic efforts. So many families and individuals have been financially impacted by the pandemic. We are proud to be able to help those aspiring towards their dreams."

The program is designed to reward students in BGC's market areas for their dedication, hard work and outstanding academic achievements.

The Brookshire's and Super 1 Foods Focus on the Future scholarship will provide tuition assistance to graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in the participating institutions starting in fall 2021.

Requirements will vary by school, but the program intends to reward recipients based on financial need and leadership. The majority of the scholarships are established in perpetuity

to be annual scholarships.

Applicants can find a complete list of schools with the Focus on the Future scholarship program at Brookshires.com/scholarship.

"We are so pleased that Brookshire's decided to include NTCC in its scholarship program. As an endowed scholarship, this scholarship will not only make a difference in the lives of current students, but it will continue to do so perpetually," Nita May, NTCC director of development, said.

Focus on the Future is representative of BGC's values. Since 1928, the company has operated on a strong foundation of core values.

One of the six core values is "Results-Driven with a Future Focus" meaning BGC strives for positive results every day which allows the company to better serve their customers, communities and employee-partners. BGC intends for this scholarship program to award students who need financial assistance to obtain a higher education.

Based in Tyler, Texas, BGC is a regional family-owned grocery business that employs more than 15,000 individuals throughout Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas.

The company operates more than 180 stores under the Brookshire's, Super 1 Foods, FRESH by Brookshire's and Spring Market banners, along with three distribution centers and corporate offices.

Scholarship applications for the NTCC Foundation open in December for the 2021-2022 academic year. Prospective students can learn more about this and other scholarships at www.ntcc.edu/foundation.

Salon services to continue

Cont. from pg. 1

confidence, self-esteem and make them feel like a different person and that's what I'm here to do," Chavez said.

Posey said students could have the opportunity to begin working with members of the public in addition to employees in the upcoming spring semester.

"I guess all we can do is hope and pray that it is going in a better direction, that maybe

we will have more ability to do clients and things. If nothing else, in the spring we do plan on offering this to employees every week, probably every Thursday," Posey said.

For more information, call the cosmetology department at 903-434-8208, visit the department in the Business Technology building room 102 on the NTCC main campus or contact Posey at nposey@ntcc.edu or Debbie Lovelady, cosmetology instructor, at dlovelady@ntcc.edu.

Students complete Northeast Professional Driving Academy

SPECIAL TO THE EAGLE

The Northeast Texas Community College Professional Driving Academy recently celebrated the graduation of two students.

Maverick Elwell and Alexandro Ramirez completed the program and were awarded their certificates on Oct. 29.

The four-week Professional Driving Academy includes 160 hours of training, DOT physical, drug screen, MVR and CDL permit.

Students spend 50 hours in the classroom and 110 hours on the road driving. Even with rain and cold weather being a factor, this class managed to stick with it and their perseverance has paid off.

"It's always a bittersweet day to watch them go, but that's part of the job," Program Director, Mike Jones said as he prepared a celebratory meal on the grill for the students for their final day of class.

Jones said that trucking is one of the most essential jobs in the country.

"This is what moves the country," Jones said. "Everything you have around your house is delivered on a truck at one point in time. If



COURTESY PHOTO

From left, Mike Jones, program director, Maverick Elwell, Alexandro Ramirez, Jimmy Smith, NTCC workforce developer, and Garr Farrell, driving instructor.

trucking stops, the country stops. This is one thing that never stopped in the pandemic was trucking."

Classes are held monthly, so students never have to wait too long to get started. The cost is \$4,191 and limited financial aid may be available.

Students must be at least 18 years of age and able to pass a DOT physical, drug screen and MVR check.

To sign up or for more information, please call 903-434-8330 or e-mail continuing@ntcc.edu.

Or visit www.ntcc.edu/continuing.

NEWS

PTK documentary focuses on vision challenges

Cont. from pg. 1

Outrunning the Night: A Life Journey of Disability, Determination and Joy and global digital accessibility specialist.

As the CEO and co-founder of the Centre for Accessibility Australia, Hollier holds academic positions at Edith Cowan University and the University of South Australia, and is an Invited Expert for the W3C Accessible Platform Architectures Research Questions Task Force. Being legally, but not totally, blind, Hollier has both a professional and personal understanding of the importance of accessibility.

A few chapter members also took a field trip to Envision Dallas on Nov. 13 to visit one of the nation's largest employers of the blind and visually challenged.

A small group of chapter members were granted filming access to the location and its employers for their documentary. The group had the opportunity to interview Blake Lindsay, the director of communications and outreach at Envision Dallas.

"It was an eye-opening experience because I was not aware that there was so

much stuff that could be done to help the blind community accessibility wise and work wise," Brian Ramirez, a member of PTK and the cinematographer of the film, said.

On Nov. 24, Dr. Gregg Vanderheiden, professor and director of the Trace R&D Center at the University of Maryland, who has also agreed to be in the documentary, addressed the future of accessibility.

A pioneer in the field of Augmentative Communication, Vanderheiden has been working in the area of access to technology for over 47 years. Access features developed by Dr. Vanderheiden and his team have been included in the Apple Macintosh OS since 1987, IBM's OS/2 and the UNIX X Window system since 1993.

Nine of the first 10 access features built into Windows 95 and later versions were licensed from Dr. Vanderheiden and his team.

Vanderheiden co-chaired and co-authored the W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 and currently co-leads an international effort to create a Global Public Inclusive



PTK members, back row from left, Maritza Quinones, James Buckley, Prof. John Russo, Jaylin English, Eric Taylor, Jaidyn Thompson. Front row from left, Carolina Salas, Mallory Fouché, Mr. Poodleman, Kaitlyn Lester, Jaquelin Fouché.

Infrastructure (GPII) that focuses on lowering the cost to develop, deploy and support access technologies and to make special access features available on demand. "I'm super excited to be part of a group of motivated students working on this

documentary, and getting this award," James Buckley, PTK chapter vice-president, said.

When completed, the documentary, which will include closed captioning and audio descriptions, making it as widely accessible as possible, will be premiered

locally and then posted on the internet and various social media sites.

"I am beyond grateful that we received the grant," Corinne Suits, PTK chapter officer, said "I am thrilled to be able to use the grant for ideas that we have and to put

those ideas in action." To learn more about Alpha Mu Chi, NTCC's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, check out their Facebook page.

For more information, contact PTK at ptk@ntcc.edu or Lambert at mlampert@ntcc.edu.



Above, Lynda Cruzgoo removes the worn brake pads from the NTCC Security patrol car. Top right, the female empowerment sticker on the inside of Cruzgoo's toolbox. Right, Beth O'Brien is the first woman in the program to receive the Shelby Cobra Association of Texas scholarship. Far right, Courtney Jackson is working toward her engine repair certificate.



Women of NTCC automotive program break barriers

By STEFANIE KIRSCHKE
Staff Writer

Northeast Texas Community College has been the home of the Carroll Shelby Automotive program since 2007.

This year, there is a record number of six women currently enrolled in the program. While automotive mechanics is normally a male dominated field, these women have leveled the playing ground.

Lynda Cruzgoo, who previously served in the Army as a diesel mechanic and has been in the Shelby program for over two years, said that the working environment in the program is not as stereotypical as most people might think.

"Being a female in the Shelby program is not hard because everyone treats everyone like an equal," Cruzgoo said.

Over her two year tenure in the program, Cruzgoo helped create a Shelby Mustang GT350R, one of Shelby's original model designs that is also seen in the recently-released film "Ford v Ferrari." The vehicle she helped piece together was on display at the Shelby American Museum during the 2019

SEMA car show. Courtney Jackson, who plans to go into the engine repair business, said that the program has been a bit of a challenge due to her pregnancy.

"I want to do engine repair," Jackson said. "But I can't participate in shop because my belly gets in the way. You have to lean over the car to get to the engine, and I can't do that right now."

While she cannot work on the projects in the shop, she has found satisfaction in reading her textbooks and engaging in class. Jackson said that the main reason she joined the program is because all the men on her father's side of the family are mechanics.

"They didn't want to teach me how to work on cars, so that is the reason why I joined the program," Jackson said. "Now I can go up to them and say, 'Hey, did you ever get that alternator replaced?' It feels good to be able to join in on their group talk."

Beth O'Brien is the first female student in the program to receive the Shelby Cobra Association of Texas scholarship. She also won the Shelby Foundation scholarship.

O'Brien said that most people do not understand how hard it can be for a female mechanic outside the program to get a job in small shops.

"In the real world we are a distraction in the shop. I was told 'I can not hire a pretty woman for my shop. My wife will not allow it,'" O'Brien said.

While many would consider them to be non-traditional students in this field of study, she said that they are still just like normal girls.

"We still like to go get our nails done and our hair done," O'Brien said.

Ron Luellen, director of the Shelby Automotive program, has been teaching Automotive Tech for over 17 years. He said that through all his years of teaching, he has never had a class this diverse.

"This is the largest non-traditional group I have had in the many years I have been working here," Luellen said. "I'm amazed."

For more information about the Shelby Automotive Program contact Luellen at rluellen@ntcc.edu or visit ntcc.edu.

Want to join The Eagle?

Photography, Writing, Layout, On-Camera Reporting and Videography opportunities available!
Visit HUM 108 to learn more

NTCC Eagle safety

What should you do if you have or witness an emergency on campus? If you experience an emergency on campus, you should call 911 first. While NTCC has security officers on duty at all times, it is important to alert local emergency personnel to get help on the way as soon as possible. After you have called 911, please contact campus security at (903) 563 - 1417 so they can render immediate assistance.

CHRISTMAS

12 Episodes of Christmas

EPISODES SELECTED BY THE EAGLE STAFF

HOME IMPROVEMENT

S2, E12
"I'M SCHEMING OF A WHITE CHRISTMAS"



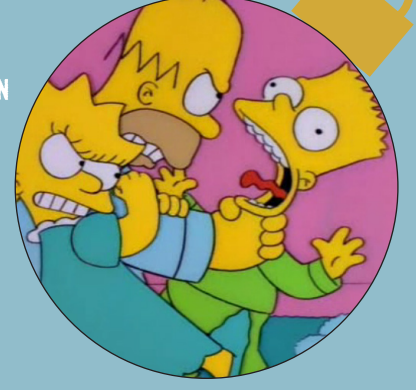
FULL HOUSE

S8, E11
"ARREST YE MERRY GENTLEMEN"



THE SIMPSONS

S9, E10
"MIRACLE ON EVERGREEN TERRACE"



FRIENDS

S7, E10
"THE ONE WITH THE HOLIDAY ARMADILLO"



MODERN FAMILY

S3, E10
"EXPRESS CHRISTMAS"



SEINFELD

S9, E10
"THE STRIKE"



THE FRESH PRINCE OF BEL-AIR

S1, E15
"DECK THE HALLS"



M.A.S.H.

S9, E5
"DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY"



DENNIS THE MENACE

S3, E12
"THE 15-FOOT CHRISTMAS TREE"



LAVERNE & SHIRLEY

S2, E10
"OH HEAR THE ANGELS VOICES"



GOLDEN GIRLS

S2, E11
"T'WAS THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS"



THE OFFICE

S2, EP10
"THE CHRISTMAS PARTY"



STAFF PHOTO | ELISABETH LIVELY

After donating a bag of food, The Grinch insisted on getting his picture taken as he pretended to steal the food.

GRINCH DONATES TO PANTRY

By ELISABETH LIVELY
Editor-in-Chief

After having his heart grow two sizes due to an unnamed medical condition brought on by a child's kindness, The Grinch donated a bag of food to the Northeast Texas Community College Eagle Pantry.

The Pantry is free to all current NTCC students and offers food, clothing and sanitary and hygiene products.

While The Grinch is not a student, Carmen Shurtleff, Eagle Pantry adviser, said that he was allowed special permission to take a business suit from the closet.

The Grinch said he plans to wear the suit to his job interview at the Whoville Post Office.

"Recently, someone showed me what happiness feels like, and it was amazing," the Grinch said. "I want to work at the post office so I can help others feel that happiness too by delivering their presents."

Copycat iHop GRINCH PANCAKES

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cup flour
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tbs vanilla
- 1 egg
- 1 1/2 cup buttermilk
- 2 tabs melted butter
- Green food coloring
- Neon green food coloring
- Red heart sprinkles
- Cream cheese frosting

Instructions

1. Combine dry ingredients into large bowl and sift.
2. In another bowl, mix together the wet ingredients.
3. Melt the butter in the microwave.
4. Add wet ingredients and butter to the dry ingredients.
5. Stir as you slowly add in wet ingredients and butter. You can use a hand mixer or stand mixer. Just mix until the batter is slightly lumpy.
6. Now add in the green food coloring and stir to mix and change the color of the batter. You can use as much food coloring as you need in order to get the desired shade of green.
7. Heat up a pan on the stove top to medium-low heat.
8. When the pan is hot, melt some butter and add a scoop of pancake batter to pan (roughly 1/3 of a cup).
9. Let it cook on one side until you notice bubbles start to form on top of the pancake (roughly five to seven minutes). Flip pancake over and cook for another 2-3 minutes. Trust me, cooking these slow help make them fluffy and keep the green pancake from burning and having an ugly brownish tint to them.
10. Remove from pan and place on plate. You can keep these warm in between making them by placing a sheet of tinfoil on top of the plated pancakes.
11. Once the pancakes are done, make the whipped cream cheese frosting by adding a few drops of green food coloring to a scoop of frosting.
12. Mix well then place into a piping bag with the star tip.
13. Melt a few teaspoons of cream cheese frosting in a microwave. It melts fast so only cook for 10 to 15 seconds.
14. Once you are ready to serve up the pancakes, drizzle melted frosting onto the top of pancakes and top with the green whipped cream frosting and the heart sprinkles.



Recipe by Simplistically Living Recipe

CHRISTMAS

Letters to Santa

college students share their Christmas wishes



Dear Santa,

Being a grown up is hard and not always fun! One thing that's very enjoyable is Mr. Russo dog Mr. Poodleman. He is just as a part of this school as the staff. I think he should get doggie treats this year for being such a good dog.

He continuously makes people laugh and smile. He seems to be forgotten sometimes. He's just not any dog, he's super dog. So, I vote to bring Mr. Poodleman some treats!

From, Avery



Dear Santa,

There isn't much I want or need for Christmas this year. I'm really just looking forward to spending time with my family. But if I had to choose one thing I would want, it would be art supplies.

I used to love painting and drawing when I was younger but eventually I lost interest. While being quarantined, I found the love for art again. I've painted a couple of pieces for my family and friends and I really enjoy seeing the smiles on their faces when I hand it to them.

I could paint you one, Santa and I could leave it for you with your milk and cookies. I wish I could give it to you when you come to my house so I could see your lovely smile but I will be asleep.

Anyways, I hope you have safe travels around the world and tell Mrs. Claus, the elves, and the reindeer that I said hello.

From, Savannah Lockler



Dear Santa,

Could you please try your best to bring my grandma a new heart?

From, Kacie Branch



Dear Santa,

For Christmas I want to spend time with my family, and to have a good wedding.

This year has been an especially bad year for me and I truly wish that I can marry the man I love and to be surrounded by people that love me. I don't want to lose any more people this year.

Besides that, I want to go to a restaurant, probably pizza or Tex-Mex! I haven't eaten from a restaurant in so long. Thank you for reading.

From, Victoria Fuller



Dear Santa,

All I want for Christmas is my kids and I a place of our own to stay.

From, Justiss Evans



Dear Santa,

For Christmas I would like a new suit and shoes to go with it. Considering the career that I am going for is Funeral Director and embalming.

I would also like a PS5, growing up I never had a game console.

But what I want the most out of anything is a sum of money to help pay for my college classes and the books that are required for said classes.

Thank you Santa.

From, Aubrey Bucholz



Dear Santa,

It's been many years since I have sat and wrote a letter to you about what I would like for Christmas, almost makes me feel like a kid again to be honest. This year has been quiet a year for my family and I, as I'm sure it has been for many others as well.

I found out 2 months ago I have idiopathic intracranial hypertension, which means my body produces too much cerebrospinal fluid and pressure around my brain and spine. Due to the medicine the neurologist has put me on for the rest of my life, it has affected my concentration tremendously to where this semester has been extremely challenging for me to complete my classes. I've even went ahead and changed my major to complete an associates degree that would be a little easier than nursing, even though it has always been my dream job.

On top of that my kids and I were in a car wreck a few weeks ago and totaled our car and have not been able to get another one. Kind of feels like this year is just full of surprises. So Santa, what I would love for Christmas this year from you is, LOTS and LOTS of prayers for me to not give up the rest of this semester and this coming year, I want a big Christmas tree for my kids, and I would like for it to snow for Christmas please, so I can play with all of my kids outside, make snow angels and have snowball fights. I hope you have a Merry Christmas!

From, Chelsea Davis



Dear Santa,

I hope this letter finds you and your family in great spirit. Let me start by telling you that the holidays make me sad. Every year I think about my two children that I lost.

I think about when they were small, we had a tradition where we would wake everyone up at 2:00 a.m. They would jump out of bed and run to see what Santa brought them. I love to see my children's faces when they open their first presents, their eyes just light up and they had the biggest smile. My heart just smiles on the inside when I see them so happy.

So, every Christmas and Thanksgiving I feel sad. But I'm grateful for all the memories and that the Lord allows me to have them. My son was 20 years old and my daughter was 30 years old. This year Santa I want to be able to pass my courses and finish by going to the next step to get my certification of becoming a teacher. I have been working hard to achieve this goal.

Sometimes I want to give up and just cry but I have great professors at Northeast Texas Community College in Mt. Pleasant Texas. They have been coaching me and telling me "you can do this! Don't give up! Slow down it will be okay." I know that they deal with so many students a day and some work other jobs as well, but Santa I want you to pray that they are blessed with health and that all their needs are met for their families.

See, I do believe in you Santa, don't get me wrong. But I know the Lord is going to see me through so instead of delivering presents to my house just go make sure all my professor's families are taken care of. That's what I want for Christmas this year for these people to be blessed with good health, finance, whatever the need is just take care of it Santa.

Oh yeah, you probably need the great professors names. They are Judith Hamilton, Leah Reagan, Janice Allen, Meagan Beard, Kenneth Goodson, Mandy Smith, Paula Wilhite, Marlin Allen and Kenzie Messer. And can't leave my own family out. As long I have food and a roof over my head, none of my family is sick and I don't have to prepare an obituary, that would be a blessing. Thank you Santa.

From, Sylvia Hawkins



Dear Santa,

I know I've had a rough year and even though it may not seem like it, I am really trying my best to overcome any and every obstacle that comes across my path. October of 2018 my mother passed away, and January of this year my father passed away, so the holidays haven't really been the same.

I try to make it as pleasant as possible for my children, (boy 13 and girl 10) but with the pandemic hitting, me returning to college, working part time at the bookstore and then being off due to having to quarantine I really haven't been able to save any money to buy them decent presents. Even though it's not all about material stuff they are still children and desire them.

Any and every gift that I could get for them would be greatly appreciated. That is the only thing I ask for this Christmas. To see my children happy, opening presents the morning of Christmas knowing that Mom tried her hardest.

From, Lidia Gonzalez

OPINION

Dear pre-COVID me

BY JAIDYN THOMPSON
Staff Writer

Dear Pre-COVID Me,
Oh, what a vessel you are. So full of life in between your random spurts of depression. As you'll recall, your 19th birthday was a time of resolution for you in October of 2019.

You vowed that you would spend your last year as a teenager to the fullest, so intent on making memories in any way.

You devoted yourself to the big moments, to forcing yourself to stay in motion. You would not spend this year in bed, at home, giving your time to Netflix. You would go see your family more, make more movie dates with your friends, and savor the energy in public spaces.

Oh, the concerts you'd attend, the little parties you'd throw, all the time you would enjoy with others in new places. And then you sat there- December 31, 2019. Anticipation ran through your body.

The clock was ticking. Closer and closer to ringing in the new year.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. The music blared. The crowds of people around you started chanting.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Oh the fun you had anticipated at the stroke of midnight, when the new year full of every possibility and wonder, lay on the other side of it.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Alas, the final countdown to ringing in 2020. Tick. Tock. Finally!

A blaze of light all around you and bursts of color falling from the sky! The year of all years is here!

But oh wait. Little did you know, that tick tock was just a ticking time bomb. The explosion would delay itself just a few months, but its boom would echo for eternity.

Pre-COVID me, you poor thing.

Soon your year will feel stolen. A big-bad virus will overtake the world, and your year of motion will turn into the year of still. No planes, no travel. No seeing your friends or fun little trips to see your grandparents. Cousin sleepovers will come to a halt. Birthday celebrations will be minuscule. No more restaurants or easily accessible shopping trips. Even late night drives with someone outside of your household will cease to exist.

Life will come to a halt. Exactly what you didn't want will come to be. You will spend your days at home, devoting time to Netflix.

You'll spend seemingly too much time away from all the people and away from all the things. You will be forced to sit still.

But don't worry, this is really what you need. Sure it sounds crazy, and it will be. You'll have to adapt to a new-normal, or at least do your best to. You'll start wearing masks everywhere and stop simply going inside any building other than your house.

The country will even start to run out of toilet paper. But you will be forced to be still. These moments that you dedicated yourself to living in that fateful December night become moments even smaller than you realize.

You'll start to spend more time with your mother- more than you ever thought the two of you could handle. Your days will be spent much like they were as a child, before you started school.

You will finally be getting plenty of rest and get to wake up to watch T.V. with her, further implanting her scent and laugh into your memory forever. You'll bond with your dad more closely than you have in a long time, because instead of being separated by screens, you are now connecting with one, watching the greatest

shows ever made and giving yourselves so many "The Office" references to use in your next conversation. Your schedules which once went unnoticed as being so opposite of each other will begin to slow, and you'll find yourself looking forward to the joy on your dad's face as you go fishing together again and again.

You'll get to stay home and enjoy the last few months you will ever have living at home with your big sister.

All of those Saturdays that you used to look forward to as a child, those days your sister wouldn't have to go to school and could stay and play with you will become your everyday. You'll realize the value of a phone call and the importance of checking in. You'll see just how valuable those trips to see your grandparents were and just how sacred those hugs are.

Your family will come together closer than ever before, with traditions you would've never thought would come to be. You'll start to see the joy to be had in the little things.

The joy in simple car rides, in getting fresh air, even just going through a drive-thru.

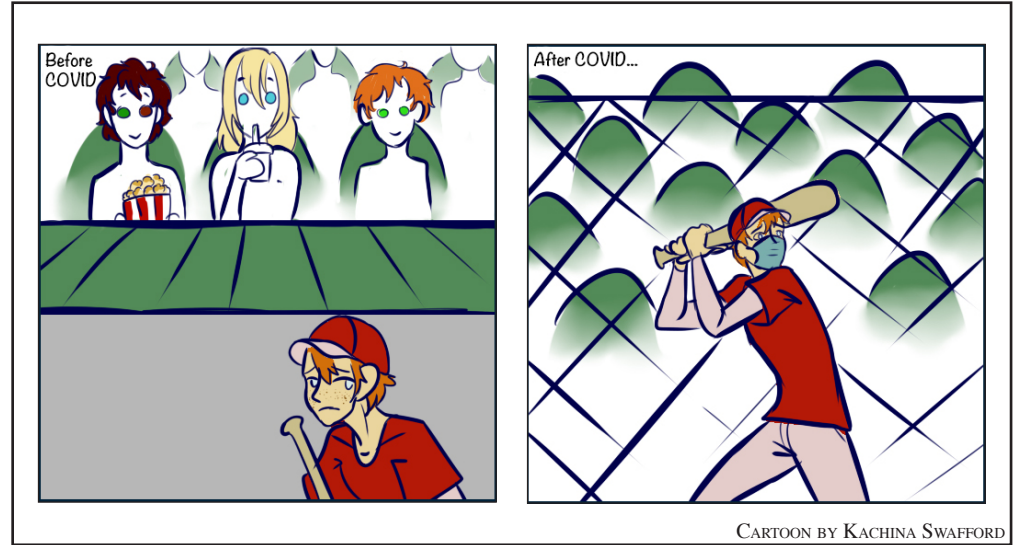
Yes, COVID sucks. It sucks big time. It turned 2020 into a year you never expected or could have anticipated.

But, it turned it into a year of "still". The moments that you once thought made life worth while, became the little moments you often took for granted.

So, as this new year approaches, you'll probably find yourself a little more nervous than usual.

But oh, dear, Pre-COVID me, you will be able to enter the new year with a gift from the year that seemed like it was taking everything. Sure big moments are fun, but maybe it's the little moments that matter most.

So yes, COVID took a lot, but maybe it gave you just what you needed.



Are sports really back?

BY DAVIN WHATLEY
Staff Writer

"It's just not the same," is something I have found myself saying or thinking multiple times this year while watching my favorite sports on T.V.

And change is to be expected with everything going on in 2020. Everything it seems, in one way or another has been affected by COVID and sports is no exception.

When the NFL, NBA, and MLB came out on the other side of the nationwide shutdown, fans' favorite players found themselves playing on the national stage once again, but seemingly with no one watching.

Of course fans still tuned in on T.V., but the NBA resumed in an isolated 'bubble' in Orlando, FL with only the teams players' and coaches themselves as a physical audience. (Players' families were allowed in later on.)

The MLB and the NFL resumed play in their stadiums with little or no fans, which produced an even stranger sight if you ask me.

Some of the stadiums that seat upwards of 60,000 fans now lay either empty or allow a small percentage of the usual capacity during games.

The touchdowns, slam dunks, and home runs are all back and still exciting but the roar of the crowd has yet to return with them.

And that one truth, I believe, means that sports are yet to fully return. Champions will still be crowned, awards have to be given, and the show must go on.

However, 2020 will always be remembered as a dark year for sports.

The cancellations of games, tournaments, and seasons in some cases hit athletes on every level. Not only did fans and players alike have to adjust to the empty seats, but to a new sports calendar as well.

The MLB season's opening day was pushed from April to July. The NBA season, which usually wraps up in early-to-mid June, did not resume until late July.

While basketball fans are accustomed to watching the NBA Finals around the beginning of summer, this season it was

during the middle of both the college and NFL season.

The first game of the NBA Finals averaged 7.41 million viewers, making it the least watched NBA Finals game on record dating back to 1988 according to Sports Media Watch.

The Los Angeles Lakers and Los Angeles Dodgers were both crowned champions in October.

Two of the most historic franchises in each of their sports respectively winning the championship did not feel as impressive this year as it would have most any other year.

The teams won, received the trophies, and there wasn't much more said. The unusual timing, lack of a physical audience, and an attention-dominating presidential election seemed to turn the spotlight away from sports.

Are sports back? Yes. But also no. Sports are as back as they can be without the spectators and with the chance that any game can be canceled or postponed if too many athletes get the virus.

As a fan, I still enjoy watching my favorite teams. I enjoy the games, but I miss the crowds.

I miss the fan/player interactions after huge moments, I miss the eruptions after crazy plays, and I miss the cameras panning around the arenas to show the stands entirely sold-out.

The canned crowd noise played over the speakers at games can only do so much.

As a player, some of my favorite memories from my high school basketball games are not just the plays themselves but the distinct noise in my ears and feeling in my chest as the fans yelled, screamed and jumped up and down.

Those are the moments that are etched forever in the minds of the players and the fans. Those moments when the athletes are counting on the fans for support and the fans are on the edge of their seat waiting for the big play to happen are truly magical for both sides in my opinion.

With empty stadiums, touchdowns still have the same effect on the scoreboard but, yet again, "it's just not the same."

Can I get a free remodel?

BY JOELLE WEATHERFORD
Editor-in-Chief

I love watching HGTV. I could sit on the couch all day watching people renovating and remodeling, buying and selling, loving and listing.

I feel no greater joy than when I get to yell at the people on the screen about how "carpet is actually nice sometimes" or that "you can always paint the walls, it's not that big of a deal" or to "get over the popcorn ceiling, geez".

Of course they don't ever listen to me. And, they would have good reason not to if they ever saw MY house.

While I love to see other people fix up their homes and make them look like they're featured in the latest issue of Better Homes and Gardens, I can't do it for myself.

All of my furniture is either a hand-me-down from my family, such as my plaid sofa and fold-up end tables, or a handout from a friend, such as the extra large recliner that doesn't recline and was their ferret's place of

choice to die.

Now, not everything people give me is bad. I got my bed frame from my aunt and it's pretty nice, although it doesn't match the dresser that I've had since I was seven.

We got a nice dining room table from my sister's finance's brother. Too bad we already had a table without a dining room to put either of them in.

I have the knowledge to make my house look nice, I probably even have the money for it too. But do I have the time?

Even HGTV stars can take up to three months to finish a house.

But, with the semester ending, this just might be the chance I have been looking for. I can clean out the junk that is taking up space and get some furniture that actually fits in the rooms.

I can make my house look the way I have always wanted it to look.

Right now, I have the chance to do so much... or I could just get a bigger house, continue collecting useless furniture, and switch over to the cooking channel.

Send help! And a therapist!

BY ELISABETH LIVELY
Editor-in-Chief

Two years ago I graduated high school and last week I graduated community college. I finally have my two-year degree. Exciting, right?

Well it was, until I learned that a girl I graduated high school with has already received her associate and bachelor's degree, and is currently working on her master's. I'm sure you could imagine my face when I heard that.

She said she worked hard to get where she is, and I know she did, but hearing the cheerful news made me feel like I was two inches tall. Why? Because I don't know what university to attend, what to major in, or what career field to go into.

How do people know what they want to spend the rest of their life doing?

One of the advisers in NTCC Student Services told me "You will not have the same job forever. You're going to switch jobs several times."

This brought me comfort until I realized that she meant that people switch jobs at companies or locations, but they will usually be doing similar tasks in the same or identical

career field.

In recent months, I've studied an abundance of careers and majors. After confessing my struggles to a high school friend, she told me that the key to selecting a career is to pick something that I love doing every day. It makes senses, and I'm sure that's excellent advice to most people, but I literally cannot do what interests me.

I love architecture, but I can't draw or solve math problems. I love marine life, but I can't do, let alone understand, science of any kind. I love caring for animals, but fleas, wounds, and severed limbs gross me out. You may be laughing right now, but I'm crying uncontrollably.

A close friend of mine had a similar meltdown last spring. It only took her a semester to go from one major to another. But I've been struggling for two years, and I've gotten nowhere. I'm dead set on transferring to a university in the fall, so I need to decide ASAP, especially for the scholarships I'm applying for this month.

I've taken various career assessment quizzes and asked many people on social media, but nothing fits. Nothing screams "Elisabeth!" except for my guidance counselor who also says I'm a train wreck!

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ENTERTAINMENT

'National Lampoon's' LEAVES LASTING LEGACY

By STEFANIE KIRSCHKE
Staff Writer

Over the past couple of years, it has become a tradition with my family and loved ones to sit down and watch a Christmas movie together. We all dress in our matching pajamas and house shoes.

Yes, we are that kind of family. We have this game where we all start at one part of the house and race to the living room where all the Christmas movies are lined up on the floor in front of the television. As we hear my mom yell "GO!" we all take off trying to trip each other as we run down the hall. Whoever gets to the movies first gets to pick which movie to watch.

Well, this year I won the right to choose, and boy, did I have a hard time with all of the great movies in our collection. Then I remembered that we all needed a good laugh even if it didn't make sense why we were laughing.

"National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" is a 1989 American family comedy film written by John Hughes. Since its release, "Christmas Vacation" has often been labeled as a modern Christmas classic. Like most normal families during the holidays, the Griswold's bickering

quickly begins to annoy one another. Clark is the father and main character in the movie. No matter what happens or how it happens, he works to maintain a positive attitude, determined to have a "fun, old-fashioned family Christmas."

One of my favorite scenes is where he covers the house's entire exterior with 25,000 twinkle lights, which fail to work on the first try, as he has accidentally wired them through his garage's light switch. When they finally come on, it temporarily causes a city-wide power shortage and creates chaos with Clark's yuppie neighbors, Todd and Margo.

Seeing how determined Clark was to get the lights to work reminded me of when my dad would decorate and cover the house in lights.

He would always get mad if it didn't work right. Dad would tell me the lights were for Santa to see when he was flying over so he wouldn't forget our house.

When I first watched this film I thought to myself, "He is so determined to get the lights to work so Santa won't forget their house either."

Another of my favorite

scenes is when Clark kicks and throws the little Santa and reindeer figurine. It made me think, "That's not nice. He won't be on the nice list this next year."

When most people think about the holidays, they think that they are so perfect. This movie reminds us that life is not perfect, and you just have to go with the flow.

I can really relate to this movie since most years my family acts the same as the Griswolds. I have learned to just sit back, have a laugh and just enjoy the holiday with my crazy family.

So grab your loved ones, put on your Christmas pajamas, pop some popcorn, relax and have a great laugh.

When you get to spend time with your family it is the most amazing feeling in the whole world and this is one of my family traditions that I never want to lose.



Local winery's gourmet Brie Burger uncorks flavor



STAFF PHOTO | ELISABETH LIVELY
The Brie Burger is available at the Los Pinos Ranch & Vineyard.

By ELISABETH LIVELY
Editor-in-Chief

It was a cold evening in the vineyard spent passing out candy to children dressed as clowns and witches on Halloween night. After my shift was over and the costume contest ended, I fled to the rest area in the back of the kitchen.

You see, I don't actually work at Los Pinos Ranch & Vineyard. I was volunteering on behalf of my friend who works there. She said that as a thanks for my service, she would let me have something from their dinner menu. But wineries are expensive. I hated for them to make me something I didn't deserve or pay for.

After some convincing from the staff, I decided to order something basic - a burger.

But this wasn't any burger, my friends. Oh, no, no. This was a magical burger. My mouth is watering just thinking about it as I write this.

Resting on a flawless square bun, the beef patty was topped with savory thick slices of brie cheese, sun dried tomatoes, sticky fig tapenades, fresh arugula and balsamic-simmered sautéed onions, not to mention,

specially requested, onion straws and ketchup on the side.

Are you drooling yet?

It was an odd combination all together, really. Its flavor resembled the scent of a wealthy woman's sun room on a bright, spring morning, right after the maid finished cleaning. It's an odd description, I know, but that's what immediately came to mind. It had a sweet touch with a bitter earthy undertone.

Given that I was sitting in the rest area in the back of the kitchen, I had to eat my burger at a table coated in Halloween face paint and discarded food. But was it worth the free meal? Oh yes. Yes, it was.

At the Los Pinos winery, which is located in the hidden back country of Pittsburg, this unforgettable Brie Burger rings up at a whopping \$17.00. Given the price, maybe it's best that I do forget about it.

Before receiving my food, I noticed a gorgeous slab of ice cream sitting on an Oreo-crust bottom and topped with chocolate fudge, whipped cream and almond slivers. On the menu, this delightful \$9.00 dessert is called a Menage. While I did not eat this dessert, I highly recommend it, because I'm sure it tasted as good as it looked.

'Star Wars' walked so 'Mandalorian' season two could fly

By ELISABETH LIVELY
Editor-in-Chief

I'm not going to sugarcoat it. I don't like "Star Wars." But I love "The Mandalorian." And here's why you should too.

"The Mandalorian" is essentially a bulked up, sci-fi version of "The Adventures of Babysitting." It's funny, dramatic, action-packed, suspenseful, and at times, nostalgic. Meanwhile, "Star Wars" wasted 11 movies and two series telling the exact same story.

For those who are reading this review without ever seeing the series, let me give you the rundown. "The Mandalorian" is about an unsympathetic bounty hunter, nicknamed Mando, who finds it in his heart to save a wrinkly, green baby with puppy eyes from the Empire and return it to its home. He just has to figure out where that home is and why everybody is so determined to get their hands on this baby. Along the way, he faces just about every trial you can think of, and Mando's smart thinking and aloof personality are the only things keeping their heads afloat.

One of the great things about this series is how Mando, never takes off his mask. Normally, it's the face that expresses thoughts, feelings and emotions, but Pedro Pascal, the actor behind the mask, perfectly expresses every thought and feeling through the tiniest of gestures and movement. In season one, his body language spoke louder

than his words. However, in season two, he has shown quite a bit of verbal emotion, and I'm starting to notice that it sounds a bit strange. I'm not sure if his emotion sounds fake because Pascal is a bad actor or if it sounds awkward because Mando is new to showing emotion.

The Child, or Baby Yoda as fans quickly nicknamed him, was the star of season one, we all know it. He's a shy, but unpredictable kid that has a heart for adventure. Following the season one reaction of The Child, the directors are now playing too much on the fans' obsession with the "baby" aspect of Baby Yoda, by having him make an annoying abundance of baby coos, awes and giggles.

At one point this season, The Child left viewers angered with his actions, mixing the feelings they have about him.

In almost every episode, I've had an "ohmygosh, ohmygosh, ohmygosh" moment due to my excitement from the constant plot and character reveals. This season has been filled with "I didn't see that coming" moments and characters that haven't been seen since the original film trilogy or have only ever appeared in the animated series'. I may not be a "Star Wars" fan, but I still know when to be excited.

Disney Plus just announced that it will be releasing nine additional "Star Wars"-based series within the next few years. If they're anything like "The Mandalorian," in the sense that it does not follow the cookie cutter "Star Wars" plot, then I can assure you I will be hooked.



COURTESY PHOTO
Mando kneels by The Child as he studies a trail of footprints.

LIFESTYLE

HOW TO GET MORE LIKES

BUILDING A FOLLOWING ON INSTAGRAM

BY JAIDYN THOMPSON

1 Post consistently

When it comes to Instagram, engagement is key. This means keeping your follower's, or potential follower's, interest levels up. This will result in likes, comments, shares, follows, etc. Posting for your audience, or for the audience you want, is important. When people follow pages, it's because they are interested in what that page has to share. Posting content related to your page type creates an overall aesthetic that those with similar interests will be attracted to.

For example, if you follow a page on Instagram that posts interior design content, but then they start posting about all of their gym workouts and healthy eating, your interest in the page will be lost. This also applies to personal pages. People followed your page because they are interested in your life. So post it. Consistency applies, not only to the content posted, but to the amount of times it is posted. There's a wonderful balance between posting too much, and posting too little. Simply put, posting too much is just annoying. However, posting too little brings about less interest in your page and results in less engagement.

3 Be engaged with followers

Seeing how everything seems to loop back to engagement, let me explain. Engagement is any type of interaction with your page. To increase engagement, you need to be engaged yourself. Besides staying consistent, you should also take the time to reply to comments, follow others back, respond to questions made on your story, and repost other's content. When it comes to anything, whether it be personal or a business page, connection is what drives followers to come and stay active. This can be broken down to likes, comments, and shares, to even simple things like story views, profile clicks, website clicks, etc. Obviously, you need a high engagement on your page to have a thriving Instagram, but what is so interesting about engagement is how it affects your place on the algorithm. Instagram's algorithm for how posts show up on your newsfeed, story feed, and explore page, boils down to your engagement. Simply put, the higher your engagement, the more likely your post is to end up at the top.

Promote 2

If you're using Instagram to grow and promote your business, don't shy away from contests and promotions! People love free or discounted things and that's not changing anytime soon. On the flipside, you as a business owner love to gain new followers who turn into new customers. Hosting giveaways or special promotions via your Instagram, whether it requires a follow or tagging friends, not only gets your business out there, but attracts new customers to it. And being consistent with things like this (maybe once a month) will turn these new followers into loyal ones.

Grow 4

Remember, organic growth does not happen overnight, and likes and followers on Instagram are not everything! Instagram is constantly changing itself to become more accommodating to ads and making money for itself, so it has become more and more of a struggle to gain growth. Despite this, Instagram is a wonderful, and possibly necessary, tool in growing a business in today's world. But even more so, Instagram is designed so that anyone can share their memories, advice, art, and joy with others all around the world. Just remember to use it for what you love and not the like of 1 billion people. It's an addition to your life, not your whole life.

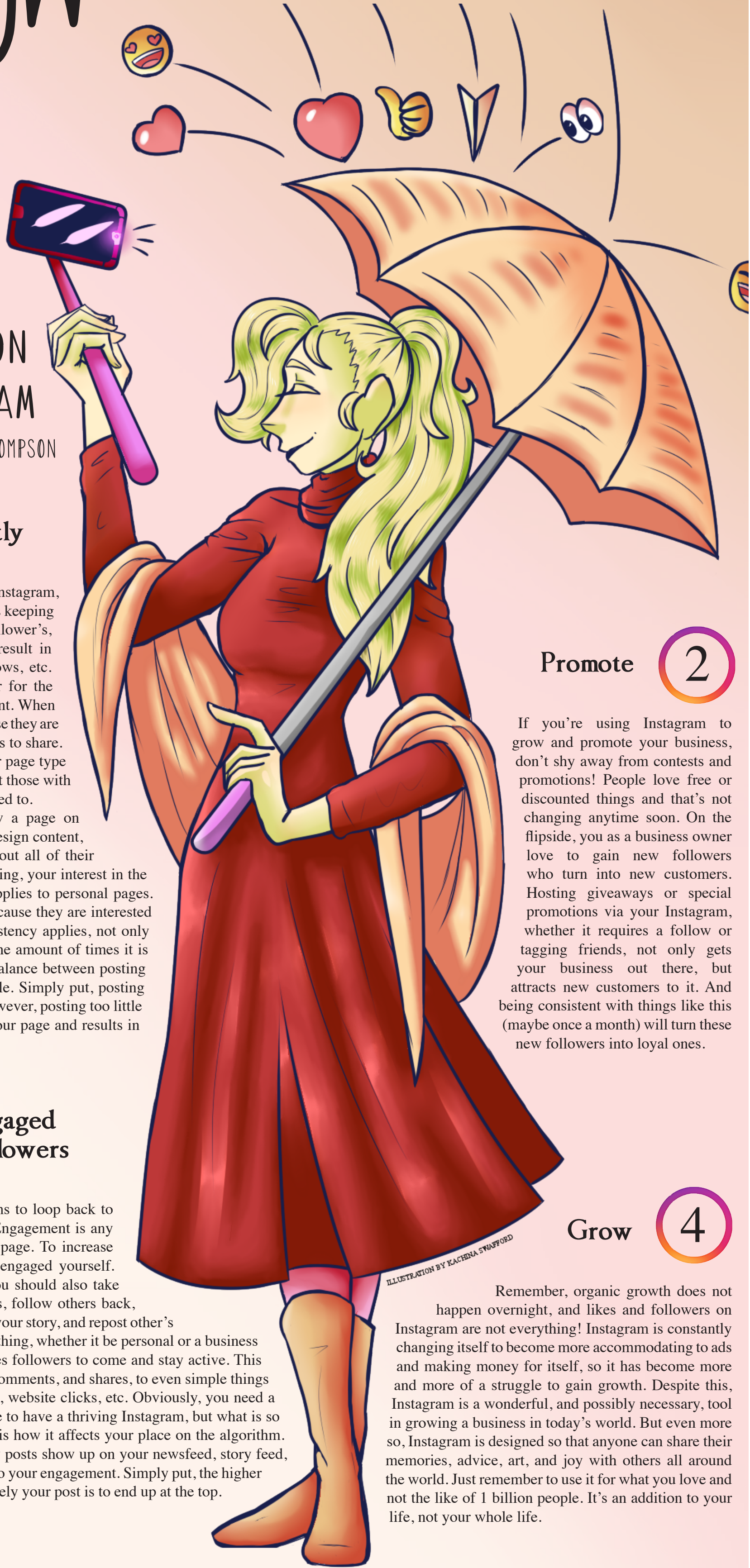


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