

MONTANA KAHN



The Big Sky Documentary Film Festival Issue

The beloved meeting of filmmakers celebrates being old enough to drink with bears, riots, cults and more



7 Black Solidarity Summit

8 Documentary reviews

15 Softball's better beginning

Cover illustration by Barrett Clement

February 15, 2024 | Volume 126 | Issue No. 19



The Montana Kaimin is a weekly, independent student newspaper at the University of Montana. The Kaimin office and the University of Montana are located on land originally inhabited by the Salish People. Kaimin is a derivative of a Salish language word, "Qe'ymin," that is pronounced kay-MEEN and means "book," "message" or "paper that brings news."

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KAIMIN KOMICS: SE 1 EP 9



It's time to pay attention to what's happening at MSU

Last month, Montana State University received notice of a third investigation from the Office of Civil Rights, looking into sex-based harassment a student reported while on campus in the 2022-2023 school year.

This follows a tumultuous fall semester, where reports of the University's failure to respond to discrimination of the campus' Queer-Straight Alliance and antisemitism against Jewish people at MSU came to light through multiple stories by the Daily Montanan, leading to two ongoing federal investigations.

Officials from the U.S. Department of Education headed to Bozeman to assess the University response themselves, with input from students and staff welcomed "by invitation only," according to a letter from MSU President Waded Cruzado.

With a college rivalry and a look at the University of Montana's own history of discrimination issues – the 2012 federal investigation into systemic issues with sexual assault, the ousting of law school leadership over mishandling reports of sexual misconduct and the recent Title IX lawsuit settlement come to mind – it can be easy to point the finger with one big "Ha, ha! At least it isn't us this time."

Instead of reveling in our rival's alleged pitfalls, however, UM should take this opportunity to learn, be aware and be proactive.

We shouldn't have to have an investigation from a federal agency or a lawsuit to become more inclusive; UM should be working toward it every day.

Change comes from the ground up, so if this University wants to be as inclusive as we claim it is, us students need to start speaking up for ourselves and one another.

The investigations at MSU started with one group, the Queer-Straight Alliance, sticking up for itself after receiving death threats. Members thought MSU wasn't taking appropriate action, and the Office of Civil Rights listened.

You have the same power at UM to take action if you or one of your friends faces discrimination. So if you want to inspire change on our campus, pay attention to what is happening next door and find places where you can improve the culture of UM. And if you're unsatisfied with UM's response to things that have happened to you on campus, go higher up.

Like it? Hate it? Let us know.
Email us your opinions at emily.tschetter@umontana.edu

Letter to the Editor

UM is great. We love UM. It has some of the top-ranked higher education programs in the country. It's even in the coolest college town ever. UM is No. 1. Go Griz.

But, you know what isn't No. 1? UM's film program. In fact, it has a number, and that number is 160. Of all the filmmaking schools in the country ranked, UM sits at a disappointing 160, a whole 62 spots below MSU (we oughta be proud).

I came to college as an aspiring filmmaker and almost went to MSU. I even had the T-shirts and other commemorative merchandise long bought and paid for, but I chose UM hoping that the art culture of Missoula would be reflected in the educational opportunities. I was incorrect.

My big stink with UM's "film program" is that it technically isn't even that. It's a media arts program with a handful of film classes. The bachelor's degree I've been working toward isn't a degree in film, it's a media arts degree with a focus track in digital filmmaking. That sounds a lot less badass than "film degree," and I'm only in college to be a badass.

Every media arts student is grouped under one umbrella, meaning us film students have to take courses in coding, art history and drawing just as those students have to take classes in filmmaking.

I'm only in my third year at UM, but I'm at senior standing, 91% finished with my film degree. And I added this major late. Half of those classes have been for artforms I'm not in college to study and all but four of those classes have been online.

My specialty in filmmaking is editing. You can imagine my disappointment in the fact the media arts program doesn't offer anything above the basic, introductory film editing course that every media arts student is required to take.

I had to teach myself advanced editing techniques like video effects and transitions, masking and color grading, just to name a few, OUTSIDE of school. What the hell is this? Bullshit is what it is.

**– Not mad, just disappointed,
Chris Shields, "film student"**

SUDOKU

Edited by Margie E. Burke

Difficulty: Medium

				3				
	2						1	
	7		4		9		8	5
1		7		9			3	
8				7	3		6	
		6		2				
			3	4		9		
3		5						1
	9				2	6		

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HOW TO SOLVE:

Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

Answer to Previous Sudoku:

6	9	3	5	1	8	7	2	4
5	8	4	7	3	2	1	9	6
1	7	2	4	9	6	5	3	8
2	1	8	6	5	9	3	4	7
9	6	5	3	4	7	2	8	1
3	4	7	8	2	1	9	6	5
4	5	6	2	7	3	8	1	9
8	3	9	1	6	5	4	7	2
7	2	1	9	8	4	6	5	3

'Snowglobes' on stage



University of Montana dancers perform "Snowglobes" during their dress rehearsal the night before the annual benefit concert to raise money for the Northwest Regional Conference of the American College Dance Association. Some of the dancers will travel to Utah for the conference this March.

CHRIS LODMAN | MONTANA KAIMIN

Briefs & Blotter

Missoula City Council kills effort to ban short-term rentals; Proposed plan to move mail sorting to Spokane stirs up opposition

EMILY TSCHETTER

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MISSOULA CITY COUNCIL REJECTS MOVE TO BAN SHORT-TERM RENTAL TOURIST HOMES

The boom of tourist homes has impacted housing prices across the country, and the number of short-term rentals in Missoula has risen 25% since the pandemic began in 2020. While the City Council tries to find solutions, it has only passed one ordinance in 2016 requiring people to pay a registration fee and get safety inspections on rental homes.

City Council shot down yet another proposed solution last week to ban new tourist homes in residentially zoned neighborhoods by a 10-2 vote. The ordinance would have allowed tourist homes in commercial districts and grandfathered in existing ones.

Despite the registration system, a 2022 city study found there were 445 short-term rentals total in Missoula with 263 of them unregistered. Tourist homes account for less than 2% of the city's housing, but 54% of the registered tourist homes are in residential neighborhoods, according to reporting by the Missoulian.

Last year, City Council increased registration fees for new short-term rentals from \$60 to \$555 to help cover the cost of staffers monitoring rental registration. The renewal fee was also increased from \$31 to \$206. The required inspection process also takes an average of 20 weeks.

Bozeman's city government voted to ban new short-term rentals last October. Bozeman had 35.3 short-term listings per 1,000 households, while Missoula had 11.8 per 1,000, according to a 2022 data report from Missoula's rental monitoring software.

Eran Pehan, Missoula Community Planning, Development and Innovation Department director, told the Montana Free Press the city is mailing notices to owners of unregistered rentals with steps to get into compliance. Those owners won't be fined as long as they work with the city.

If unregistered short-term rentals continue running, city staffers refer their cases to the city attorney if the owners do not comply after a final warning, according to Missoula City Attorney Ryan Sudbury's comment at a Jan. 24 City Council meeting.

TESTER, POSTAL WORKERS VOICE CONCERN OVER MOVING MAIL SORTING TO SPOKANE

U.S. Senator Jon Tester sent a letter to the U.S. Postmaster in response to a U.S. Postal

Service review that could move outgoing mail processing from Missoula to Spokane, Washington.

The Postal Service announced a plan to review Missoula's facilities to be more efficient and said it could lead to the shift to Spokane for outgoing mail processing, according to the Missoulian. All mail, including items being shipped from one Missoula location to another in Missoula, would be trucked to Spokane for processing. Mail going to places in western Montana would then return to Missoula for delivery.

Robert Hopp, the president of the American Postal Workers Union Local #113, told the Missoulian "100%" of his unionized coworkers are against the plan, and it could lead to non-career employees losing their jobs. He also believes federal healthcare checks, mailed ballots, legal documents, bills and tax refunds could be delayed.

"The [Missoula Processing and Distribution Center] employs over a hundred Montanans and has served the community for decades. If processing were to be moved out-of-state, mail would get sent from Missoula more than 200 miles over two mountain passes to Spokane to be sorted before any of it is sent back to be delivered," Tester wrote in his letter. "This plan would involve driving our mail-in semis over Lookout Pass, which is a precarious route and is often closed due to bad weather. I fail to see how this transfer would result in improved postal service for Montanans."

MISSOULA CITY COUNCIL APPROVES \$1 MILLION FOR CLARK FORK RIVER IMPROVEMENTS

Missoula City Council approved spending \$1 million of the 2018 Open Space Bond to limit erosion on the Clark Fork River banks downtown.

The money, according to Missoulian reporting, would focus erosion prevention efforts under the bridges downtown and create new access points at Caras and Toole parks. Senior Landscape Architect Nathan McLeod said the Milwaukee Trail is so severely eroded in some parts next to the bridges it could collapse into the river during a major storm.

McLeod plans to start work this summer on around 3,200 feet of the riverbank that will undergo restoration efforts, with special focus on the south bank of the river.

Other funds are being used to improve Caras Park by upgrading seating and creating new pathways to the river by Brennan's Wave, through a \$1.2 million grant. According to the Missoulian, there is \$5.5 million left in

the 2018 bond that can be used for other city projects.

UM TO HOST DEMOCRACY SUMMIT IN MARCH

For the first time ever, the University of Montana is hosting a Democracy Summit on March 27 with student and faculty-led events to discuss what a democracy education means and how to improve it at UM.

Michael Rohd, the head of UM's Co-Lab for Civic Imagination, organized the event as part of his Democracy Project, and said it will be an opportunity for students to share their perspectives and have "some cool encounters with folks on campus they wouldn't otherwise meet," according to a GrizHub event description.

The event will include a talk by UM Tribal Outreach Specialist Carla Bird on Indigenous perspectives on democracy, a journalism faculty workshop on curiosity, a Missoula County Election Board session on election integrity and more. A detailed schedule for the summit will be available soon, according to the GrizHub event.



POLICE BLOTTER

SAV CHAVEZ

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For the past week, students have been quiet — almost too quiet. Especially for the week of Foresters' Ball, nobody wanted to get Wild West rowdy? From Feb. 2 to Feb. 9, the University of Montana Police Department responded to two crimes, one off-campus. But that doesn't mean nothing else was going on. Suspicious luggage, locked-out partners and a series of not-so-nice texts gave UMPD a run for its money.

THURSDAY 2/1 – LUGGAGE LOCKDOWN

On Feb. 1, some bags were lounging in the Lommasson Center, overstaying their welcome. Being safe rather than sorry, someone who worked at Lommasson called UMPD over to check out the bags. After sniffing around, UMPD discovered the bags were just a student's luggage. They have since been taken to the UMPD station for safekeeping. So, if your luggage grew legs and ran away, just know they are chilling with UMPD officers.

THURSDAY 2/1 – BURNT CITY BITCH

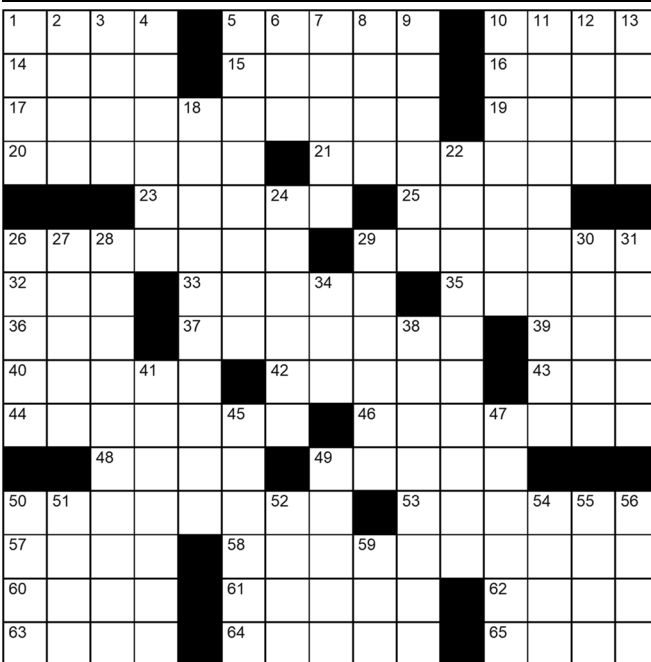
Someone must've been spitting bars on Feb. 1, around 7 p.m. at Miller Hall because a fire alarm filled the courtyard. Was it a real fire? Did a little pothead set off the alarm? No. This was another case of burnt popcorn. When will people learn how to use a microwave?

FRIDAY, 2/2 – JIGSAW TEXTER

It was around 11:30 a.m. on Feb. 2 when UMPD received a call from a student after they received threatening messages. Taking a deeper look into the messages, officers were unable to find the mysterious danger. According to UMPD, there are many ways to make numbers and messages untraceable, even by creating a fake number. This trickster must've already known this because they used a random number, remaining anonymous. Call this texter Jigsaw, the way they're trying to play stupid games.

FRIDAY, 2/2 – ABANDONED AND DESERTED

Banging doors and pleas to be let into the house is what neighbors on Landusky Court heard at about 1 a.m. on Feb. 2. Neighbors in the house over called UMPD because it was so fucking late and the woman banging on the door was too fucking loud. When officers approached the house, there was no one in sight. After knocking on the door themselves, the owner of the house responded and said he was sleeping and his girlfriend had been out. Whether this was a case of accidentally locking his partner out or not wanting her to come home, we don't know. All we do know is he was warned to keep the noise down.



ACROSS

- 1 Dundee native
5 Scene with stuntmen
10 Traveler's aids
14 Use a whetstone
15 Skating sites
16 Equipped
17 Not real-world
19 Eastwood film, "____ Torino"
20 Footnote word
21 Motionless
23 One of the Brontë sisters
25 Pot pie tidbits
26 Wind instrument
29 Small boater's woe
32 WWII female
33 Busch Gardens locale
35 Not at any time
36 "This is Us" network
37 Calgary's province
39 Ostrich's cousin
40 Campaign word
42 Cut and ____
43 Slice (off)
44 Close copy
46 Wall Street worker
48 Handyman's need
49 Martin or McQueen
50 80s Soviet policy
53 Winter hand warmer
57 Piercing place
58 Stubble-free cut
- 60 Night fliers
61 Singing Carpenter
62 Top spot
63 Actress Amanda
64 Perspiration
65 Pre-Easter period
- DOWN
- 1 Ocean liner
2 Musical ending
3 Washington bills
4 Movie promo
5 Jackson hit, "Smooth ____"
6 That guy's
7 On pins and needles
8 "Laugh-In" segment
9 Make a run for it
10 Business bigwig
11 In a rude way
12 Something to hatch
13 Mailed out
- 18 Handicap
22 "The Accidental Tourist" Oscar winner
24 Sorority letter
26 Deed holder
27 Monthly bill
28 Satisfactory
29 Western prop
30 Audition tapes
31 Fly off the handle
34 Part of w.p.m.
38 Slum dwelling
41 Like a best friend
45 Time machines?
47 "____ Weapon"
49 Cache
50 Lcky stuff
51 Rob who hosts "The Floor"
52 Picnic dish
54 Scotch ____
55 Roulette bet
56 Counter call
59 Mermaid's home

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Answers to Previous Crossword:

N	A	S	A	S	A	L	S	A	G	A	R	M
A	I	L	S	W	R	A	P	S	A	Q	U	I
P	R	O	S	P	E	C	T	U	S	S	U	N
A	S	W	E	L	L	T	R	E	S	P	A	S
S	E	L	F	E	S	T	E	E	M	S		
W	A	S	S	A	I	L	S	E	D	A	T	E
A	W	E	S	N	O	W	S	K	A	R	E	N
L	A	R	K	G	R	A	C	E	L	I	N	T
L	I	V	E	S	A	R	O	M	A	N	O	R
S	T	I	R	U	P	P	E	P	P	E	R	Y
		C	O	L	L	A	T	E	R	A	L	
I	C	E	S	K	A	T	E	G	R	O	V	E
T	I	M	E	S	T	R	E	E	T	W	I	S
C	A	A	N	M	A	S	O	N	E	S	P	N
H	O	N	E	A	R	E	N	T	D	A	Y	S

KAIMIN SUTRA 3: KINK-O-SCOPE

HALEY YARBOROUGH
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After two whole years without the Kaimin Sutra, we decided it's time to give your sex-deprived brains a break and get kinky. Whether you spent Valentine's Day doing the Devil's Tango with your partner or crying alone in your bed while listening to "The Night We Met" on repeat, love is in the air and so is the musk of your weird sexual escapades. Sucking toes, BDSM, erotic electrostimulation, nothing stops you from breaking backs and getting into cracks (sorry, not sorry.) So, handcuff yourself to a telescope and look to the stars to find out the best way you bust a nut.

AQUARIUS (JAN 20-FEB 18): Nothing quite gets you going like insects crawling where the sun don't shine. Fuck sex in the bedroom. You need sex in the woods, and you need it now. Bugs may be up your butt, but you better bet your partner is gonna mow that ass like it's grass.

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20): Edward? Is that you? You may not sparkle, but the sight of blood got you feeling some type of way. One little papercut and you better bet you're coming for shawty's heart. Like, literally.

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19): SOCIETY says you're a sadist. But SOCIETY doesn't understand your sex life like you do. You insist you just like hitting balls with a bat. No, sex isn't baseball, but you sure treat it like it is. Keep hitting those home runs, hun.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20): You're a basic bitch. You've listened to the audiobook version of "Fifty Shades of Grey" one too many times and now you're convinced bondage is your best bet at spicing things up in your vanilla sex life. The problem is that not even a blindfold and rope can make up for that mid-pipe Mr. Grey is laying.

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20): Piss? Really? At this point, you're basically a walking urinal. Gem, I'm trying not to yuck your yum, but seriously, have some self-respect. At least it's not something solid.

CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22): Forget fucking your partner, you want to watch someone else take them on a trip to pound town. Ignore the haters, you may be a little pathetic, but we don't shame here. Keep watching, cuck-king.

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): Doggy style isn't enough. You need the dawgs OUT and in your mouth. If the excessive amount of feet pics in your camera roll is a sign of anything, it's that you want to suck someone's dirty toes. Don't forget to interlock them too, you need that dawg-on-dawg action.

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): Imagine this: It's the Fourth of July, and instead of setting off illegal fireworks in your driveway, you decide to set them off in your anus. Well, Virgo, firing off fireworks in the bedroom is just one way of showing your love for your country. Nothing is quite so patriotic as a red, white and blue-induced orgasm, am I right?

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22): You're a lover, Libra. Maybe a little too much. Why limit yourself to one partner, when you can have 10, 20, or 100 random strangers going down on you in seven different positions? It's all fun and games until your 70-year-old professor shows up for some student-teacher role-play.

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21): Who's a good dog? You are! We may not have a ball and chain, but with just enough praise you're sure to be barking and wagging your tail in the bedroom. If you're good enough, you might even get a treat. Just don't bite ... unless you're into that too. Bark, bark?

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21): The mask stays on. Sag, you're one of those people who watched "The Mandalorian" purely because you're thirsty for a certain Beskar helmet. You like the anonymity, but we can't blame you for not being confident in the bedroom. Ghostface, Michael Myers, Ghost from "Call of Duty," this is not your typical masquerade.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): Food and foreplay? Fuck yeah.

Bananas and cream are the best way to build up a voracious appetite, but don't forget to incorporate some protein into your bedroom activities. Screw it, bring a turkey. Your partner won't be the only thing you're stuffing.



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN

Provost's Office proposes comprehensive program review

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The University of Montana's academic departments will be undergoing a comprehensive review over the next few years, according to an academic affairs playbook presented by Interim Provost Adrea Lawrence and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs John DeBoer at the Feb. 8 Faculty Senate meeting.

The playbook, a portfolio outlining the plan, will use various metrics to assess and review academic departments. UM administration will then decide what to cut and what to keep, as well as a variety of other possible changes to the departments.

The provost's office first presented this plan in early December 2023 and has been working on it since. The draft playbook is intended to respond to changes in higher education, Lawrence said.

"We have to change. That's the bottom line," she said.

The review will look at the numbers in every department and program, like retention rate and enrollment, to determine what to do with them. This could, in some cases, mean combining one program with another or cutting it entirely. Last year, UM announced plans to dissolve the geography department into another department in the forestry school within three years after looking at staffing and enrollment numbers as well as financial budgeting.

DeBoer said this process would essentially elevate regular program reviews, which UM already does. He said he's hoping to strike a balance between supporting minors and concentrations versus putting resources into majors, which actually drive enrollment.

"We're looking to find balance as a University," DeBoer said.

This multi-year review will focus on a different issue each year, Lawrence said. Next year, for example, the review will look at how curricular complexity impacts paths to graduation, and the third year of the review will likely look at graduate programs.

Paul Kirgis, former law school dean who resigned as dean but remained at UM after allegations that he and then-associate dean Sally Weaver discouraged students from reporting sexual misconduct to the Title IX Office, raised concerns over the initial program review excluding graduate programs from review and possible cuts. He expressed

concern this exemption is only because doctoral programs are important to UM's R1 status.

"We've never had a conversation on campus about why we want to be R1," Kirgis said.

R1 status is a designation given to universities that spend a certain amount of money on research and allocate a certain number of doctoral degrees every year. The R1 metrics are changing to require 70 doctoral degrees to be given per year. According to UM's metrics, it only gave out 47 doctoral degrees in 2022.

"We are committing ourselves to a level of Ph.D.s that is well above what we have historically maintained," Kirgis said. "Even if we could, why would we?"

DeBoer assured the Faculty Senate that graduate programs would see some review once all of the programs entered into DegreeWorks, but he and Lawrence had no answer to why UM would prioritize R1, beyond the fact that President Seth Bodnar and the State of Montana see it as a priority.

Keith Jakob, a professor of finance, said his department went from four tenured professors to two after one retired and one was promoted. The positions weren't deliberately cut, but were never replaced.

"What's the point of having this huge overall thing when the departments aren't stable?" Jakob said.

According to DeBoer, the review should help address this issue by making changes to departments strategic rather than unintended.

Armond Duwell, a philosophy professor, raised questions about the academic restructuring suggestions in the portfolio, including continuations of previous academic restructuring efforts like the reorganizing the College of Forestry and Conservation.

"What problem are we trying to solve by demanding restructuring?" Duwell asked. "What is the big payoff that is going to justify all the problems with the process?"

For Lawrence, that's a common question these days. She cited existing structural barriers to interdisciplinary work as a reason for the changes.

"There's also a good chance that what we initially outlined really isn't what we should be doing," Lawrence admitted. "We could be wrong about what we initially laid out."

At the Student Senate meeting on Feb. 8, students called for discussion of the academic playbook at the upcoming Democracy Summit.

The Democracy Summit, put on by Mi-

chael Rohd, Director of the Co-Lab for Civic Imagination, will take a festival approach to collaborative engagements throughout campus from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.. The summit will focus on topics like voting education, civic pop-ups, dialogues on free speech and a variety of others to prepare and educate students as active members of democracy.

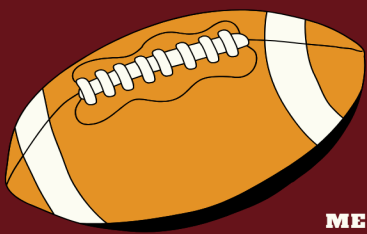
The Student Senate received the summit with support. But Maggie Bell, Student Senate President, added this could be an opportunity to provide a listening session

for students on the new academic playbook. Figuring out a way to get feedback on the changes was one concern from the Student Senate two weeks ago, when the Provost and Vice Provost brought the Senate the portfolio.

Rohd agreed with the idea and said he has been in contact with Lawrence about getting the word out. The listening session would inform students of the changes that could be made to courses and departments at UM when academic restructures happen.

WOMEN'S

RUGBY

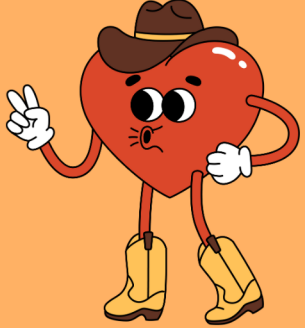


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Black Solidarity Summit faculty lecture discusses 'wokeness' and its origin

SAV CHAVEZ

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Tobin Miller Shearer, director of African-American studies at the University of Montana, would describe the story of Jonathan Daniels and Ruby Sales as one of two key "woke" individuals in history.

But it's a story that would ultimately end in tragedy, after 26-year-old Daniels was shot and killed by a part-time deputy sheriff in Hayneville, Alabama. In 1965, Daniels, a white man and Civil Rights activist, accompanied 17-year-old Sales to the entrance of a convenience store, looking for a fresh beverage.

But instead of being let inside, the pair faced a gun, held by Tom Coleman, a state highway employee and volunteer deputy. After warning Sales and Daniels they couldn't enter, Coleman fired at Sales. Daniels pushed Sales out of the way and the bullet killed him immediately.

As a result of the trauma, Sales became mute for about a year. She grew up to be an important leader and founded the SpiritHouse Project, which uses art, education, action and spirituality to bring diverse peoples together to work for social justice, spiritual maturity and more.

"Ruby Sales is still with us. She's an amazing woman, continues to be so, and her life is with us because of what Jonathan Daniels lecture," Shearer said in his speech, "The Dangers of Staying Woke While Others Sleep."

The white Episcopal seminarian is considered a martyr by many, including Martin Luther King Jr., who said, "One of the most heroic Christian deeds of which I have heard in my entire ministry was performed by Jonathan Daniels," according to the Virginia Military Institute, Daniels' alma mater.

VMI — which at the time was an all-men, all-white institution with a history of resisting integration, according to the Washington Post — has since recognized Daniels, establishing the Jonathan M. Daniels '61 Humanitarian Award in 1997.

"Jonathan Daniels was woke. He knew what he had to do," Shearer, who has a doctorate in history and religious studies, said. "He listened very carefully to the African American leaders around him and responded in that context."

Being woke can look different for people of color and people who are white, Shearer said. For himself, a white man, being woke includes multiple principles, like the responsibility of

education on Black history and culture. Rather than asking colleagues or people of color, he urges people to be proactive and do their own research.

"People need to be clear in their racial identities without getting caught up in any sort of guilt or discomfort about them," Shearer said. "We need to know who we are."

Shearer believes having a clear understanding of who we are is important for being able to educate ourselves.

The word "woke" has attained a controversial connotation among politics in America throughout history and has stirred controversy among different political parties, according to Shearer, who has taught at UM for 11 years.

In the past year, prominent right-wing political figures have shared their stance on people who are "woke." Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis claimed, "The woke mind virus is basically a form of cultural Marxism," during the launch of his bid for the Republican nomination for the upcoming presidential election, going as far as declaring a "war on woke."

As laws and politics in America shift, so does the definition of what racial awareness and education means. For example, Shearer said, during the period of slavery in America, understanding the geographical conditions of the land to prevent a chance of being tracked while escaping was considered awareness. Now in the modern world, it could be defined as being alert to injustices as well as educated on the history of Black, Indigenous and people of color.

Other terminology that helped birth the term "woke" can be traced back to as early as 1923 when political activist Marcus Garvey published, "Wake up Ethiopia! Wake up Africa! Let us work towards the one glorious end of a free, redeemed, and mighty nation," in one of his articles.

According to Shearer, some people believed Garvey was calling on Black people globally to become more socially and politically conscious.

"The term was 'consciousness.' People talked about having consciousness or raising consciousness," Murray Pierce, director of multicultural affairs and administrative rep with the Black Student Union, said.

The actual term "woke" did not become popular until the Civil Rights Movement, according to Murray. During that time, there were talks about having consciousness and



Murray Pierce, middle, and Tobin Miller Shearer, right, present at the Black Solidarity Summit at the University of Montana on Feb. 10. Pierce and Shearer discuss the definition of "woke", the historical context of "wokeness," and how to navigate a climate of "anti-wokeness." **RENNAL-HAJ | MONTANA KAIMIN**

raising consciousness much like Garvey said in 1923. According to the Oxford Academic, the goal of raising consciousness during the Civil Rights Movement was to create a more positive and empowering sense of Black identity.

The term recently became more prominent in 2020, following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Trayvon Martin and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Modern-day "wokeness," as described by Pierce, is an increasing awareness of events and occurrences that impact African American lives and changing social expectations through reactions and beliefs by broadening knowledge.

"The knowledge of history combined with action equals power," Pierce said.



Murray Pierce, left, and Tobin Miller Shearer, right, present at the Black Solidarity Summit, leading discussions about "wokeness."

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Read our full coverage of the Black Solidarity Summit online at montanakaimin.com

The Big Sky Documentary Film Festival Issue

The beloved meeting of filmmakers celebrates being old enough to drink with bears, riots, cults and more

Now entering its 21st season, The Big Sky Film Documentary Festival is an opportunity for film artists from across Montana and the world to share their work on the big and little screens. The annual 10-day event draws roughly 20,000 audience members who can watch films in popular places throughout Missoula and from the comfort of their own homes.

Similar to 2023, the festival has no common theme for all the featured films this year, but offers a diverse array of films about UFO cults to competitive ice skaters to Vancouver riots and more. The festival, which runs from Feb. 16 to Feb. 25, hosts more than 200 visiting artists, with an average of 150 films, according to the Big Sky Film Festival website. The festival also puts on a five-day Doc Shop, where audience

members attend panels, master classes, workshops and the Big Sky Pitch session.

In-person screenings will be shown at the Wilma Theatre, the Missoula Community Theatre, the Zootown Arts Community Center and The Roxy Theater.

Each film is a testament to artists' commitment to their craft, and, as the festival's website attests, a chance to "expand knowledge and conversation around issues that matter."

Kaimin writers previewed a few films before release and shared their thoughts on 20 different stories. Here's 13 of those reviews, with more available on our website, [MontanaKaimin.com](https://montanakaimin.com)

-Haley Yarborough, Arts & Culture Editor

'399: Queen of the Tetons'

On May 18, 2020, in Grand Teton National Park, hoards of visitors lined the road hoping to catch a glimpse of the most famous bear in the world. Among them was Thomas D. Mangelsen, closely watching the landscape for his muse. When she emerges, 399 has four cubs in tow. The grizzly bear, referred to only by her research number, is known for having multiple cub litters, but four is rare and the largest she's ever had.

"She's just one damn special bear," Mangelsen said in an interview, and we're not talking about Monte's girlfriend here.

"399: Queen of the Tetons," the Big Sky Film Festival's opening night film, is as much about 399 and her cubs as it is about the people who care about her and the efforts to protect her species amid the threat of being delisted from the Endangered Species Act. Notable among them is Mangelsen, a wildlife photographer and conservationist, who's become 399's documentarian, in addition to local photographers, workers and bear biologists. It's also about motherhood, survival and adaptation.

Born in 1996, 399 has decades of experience successfully raising cubs to adulthood. The film explores the distinctive choices the mother bear makes to protect her family. But as the number of bears increase alongside the number of people living in bear territory, 399's practice of raising habituated bear cubs is causing problems for the surrounding humans. While 399's celebrity may be exacerbating some of her man-made difficulties, it may also be what saves her in the end.

Featuring a spectacular combination of photographs, footage and testimonials, director Elizabeth Leiter's 90-minute film follows 399 on her journey against the odds to raise her roadside cubs in a human-dominated world alongside natural threats. Whether or not you've heard of 399 before watching this film, it's hard not to fall in love with her by the end of it.

(McKenna Johnson)



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

"399: Queen of the Tetons" screens at the Wilma Theatre on Feb. 16 at 7 p.m.. It will be available to stream Feb. 19 to Feb. 24.

'Welcome Space Brothers'

The word “cult” generates some specific dark associations. A documentary about a UFO cult might seem like a harrowing tale of abuse and oppression, but “Welcome Space Brothers” is surprisingly wholesome.

The film covers the story of the Unarius Academy of Science, a California-based spiritual group founded by Ruth and Ernest Norman. Ruth is the real star, a rare new religious movement leader who seems to leave her followers in a better place than she found them. She comes off as a hippie Betty White, decked out in elaborate costumes while spreading her message of peace, love, aliens and past life regressions.

Unusually for this kind of story, the people interviewed only have positive things to say about the group. Many of those featured still consider themselves Unarians, but those who have left the group look back on it with fondness. Those still involved are treated with respect and compassion, and it never feels like they’re the butt of a joke.

The Unarians make direct-to-video movies and public-access TV shows about their belief in aliens and past life regression. Snippets of these pieces of media are interwoven throughout the film, and they make for some of the best moments. It’s clear how much effort the Unarians put into these productions, and they’re a fantastic mix of goofy and impressive.

“Welcome Space Brothers,” directed by Jodi Wille, comes from a place of compassion and respect. The 94-minute film is a surprisingly heartwarming, life-affirming watch that might leave you crying a little by the end.

(Keely Proebstel)

“Welcome Space Brothers” screens on Feb. 22 at the Wilma Theatre. Doors open at 7:30 p.m. and the show starts at 8 p.m..



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

“Fratelli Carbonai” screens at the Wilma Theatre on Feb. 19 at 5:45 p.m.. It will be available to stream Feb. 19 to Feb. 29.

'Fratelli Carbonai'

Caked in ash on the Italian countryside, Fofana, a migrant from the West African country Mali, focuses on moving forward — but the outside world slowly creeps in.

“Fratelli Carbonai,” Italian for “charcoal brothers,” follows Fofana and a group of charcoal burners under the shadow of Italy’s sudden shift to far-right politics.

In September of 2023, Giorgia Meloni was sworn in as Italy’s Prime Minister, bringing with her a wave of far-right policies — “traditional families,” and national sovereignty, to name a couple. Among these was a movement to deport all illegal immigrants and close Italy’s borders.

Surrounded by 10-foot mounds of carefully placed lumber, the group burns, processes and bags charcoal. Fofana had been in Italy repeating that process for 12 years, but he was suddenly at risk of being sent back to Africa.

Struggling to regularize his immigration status, Fofana was left no choice but to watch the smoldering scene of Italian politics and see what was left in the ashes.

The film explains how more than 200,000 people arrived on Italy’s southern coast in the last three years. Most are facing the same fate as Fofana.

Quiet tension fills each scene. Each sarcastic, condescending comment shared between the crew, every news clip, every breath feels full of smoke.

Directors Felix Bazalgette and Joshua Hughes teamed up once again for this 17-minute film just a year after their last project, “Awoko.” Through simple, still camera work, center-framed shots and Naran Ratan’s score of warm nostalgic synths, the film familiarizes us with the characters, but also creates a strange sense of foreboding.

Dark, but hopeful; simple, but beautiful. “Fratelli Carbonai” does a great job of setting the characters under the looming shadow of Italian politics.

(Clayton Murphy)

'Elladj'

When Elladj Baldé takes to the expansive stretch of frozen lake, there are no expectations. The former competitive figure skater moves free of judges, scores and trophies. This moment is for himself only, and every graceful glide across the ice is a testament to self-expression. It's a mindset that's taken years for Baldé to achieve, as he shares in the eponymous six-minute documentary "Elladj," directed by Mike Schwartz.

When most people think of figure skating, they think of the Olympics, but Baldé's story is not one of post-Olympian success. During the 2018 Canadian National Skating Championships, the top three skaters were selected to compete in the Olympics. Baldé, who placed fourth, was not chosen.

In the film, Baldé discusses losing himself to lofty competitive figure skating goals and the discriminatory pressures to conform. Everything from his skating routine music to the texture of his hair was critiqued. He had to impress the judges, choose the right ice choreography and wear the right outfits. The goal overwhelmed the journey, and when he wasn't selected to go to the Olympics, the loss was crushing.

As he shares his experience, footage from past championships is interspersed with Baldé making his way along a snowy path and onto the frozen lake. The ice, he says, is smoother than any rink he's ever been on. Day by day, Baldé rediscovered himself skating out on the frozen lakes.

Baldé's reconnection with himself and the love of skating is clear. Despite the beautiful mountains and snow-topped forests surrounding the lake, Baldé undeniably is the star of this show. "Elladj" is an uplifting journey that shows no matter the setback you might encounter, it's always possible to come back to who you are — and sometimes, you can even go further. *(Elle Daniel)*



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

"Elladj" screens at the ZACC on Feb. 20 at 4:30 p.m. and the Wilma Theatre on Feb. 25 at 4 p.m.. The film will be available to stream Feb. 19 to Feb. 29.

'Otters of Yellowstone'

In the painted white landscape of Yellowstone National Park, a brown furry head pops up from behind the river bank like a gopher, striking against the snow.

It's a river otter, and it looks directly at the camera like it knows it's the cutest animal to ever exist.

Suddenly, there are three of them, jumping in and out of the river, swimming in what must be freezing water in harmony with a symphonic sound score. Like the shark in "Jaws," a shift in the music announces the presence of a coyote. The otters are its intended prey, as they slide around like penguins and snuggle together in a huddle with their precious high-pitched squeaks.

But as this beautiful six-minute film seems to say — the otters are not totally defenseless. They thrive in the harsh winters, after all. "Otters of Yellowstone," directed by Joshua Bruni, is just one in a collection of short films made by Montana State University graduate students in the MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking program.

From a technical lens, the film is gorgeous, the scenes clear enough to practically count the pine needles on the trees and the hairs on the otters' heads. It's fluid, like the river, so much so it's hard to discern if the majority of the footage is in slow-motion or not (the jury's still out). And the music, composed by Drake Pannell and Judah Seger, goes hard.

The film is simple, sharp and shows off the beauty of river otters in their natural habitat, playing like the water puppies they are in the harsh conditions they face.

(McKenna Johnson)



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

"Otters of Yellowstone" screens at the ZACC on Feb. 20 at 4:30 p.m. and the Roxy Theater on Feb. 22 at 1 p.m.. It will be available to stream Feb. 19 to Feb. 29.

'Anagama'

"Anagama" by Guillermo Asensio presents the story of Chen Su Li/Nancy Fuller and her search for self-realization within her Taiwanese heritage and her artistic aspirations. "I was searching to find myself, somehow," Chen said. Chen was adopted from Taiwan and her adoptive parents gave her the name Nancy Fuller.

The 61-minute film drops you immediately into the start of Chen's process, at the crack of dawn. Throughout her routine of cutting wood, mixing clay and then throwing it, she details her experience of feeling out of place in the world. The cinematography accompanies this with lonely shots of her in her studio forming pots with barely enough light visible through an open window.

Growing up in a white community, Chen never experienced her own culture. After she graduated from art school in the United Kingdom, Chen didn't know what to do with her life. Chen was primarily trained in print-making, but became fascinated with the pottery made through an anagama kiln, an ancient type of pottery kiln brought to Japan from China via Korea in the fifth century.

The anagama kiln is unique in how many different pots it can make. Depending on where a pot is placed within a kiln, the pot's patterns will change due to the use of wood and ash to fuel the kiln. Chen can tell when the fire is getting too hot just by the crack of wood. The process of firing takes a long time and requires constant monitoring to maintain the temperature of the kiln.

"Anagama" portrays the process of not just Chen's pottery, but the process of engaging with her culture in a way that feels like being born: from the darkness to the light. "Maybe home is in yourself," Chen said.

(Kairi Lising)



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

"Anagama" screens its world premiere at the ZACC on Feb. 2 at 6:15 p.m.. It will be available to stream Feb. 24 to Feb. 29.



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

'Balloon Boy'

In 2009, a homemade helium balloon soared across the sky with a 6-year-old boy seemingly trapped inside.

Accidentally taking off from the backyard of a family home in Fort Collins, Colorado, viewers across the nation were captivated by an event that sparked a media frenzy.

"Balloon Boy," directed by Brian Gersten and Arlin Golden, follows the story of the eccentric Heene family and their son, Falcon Heene, who was mistakenly believed to be inside the balloon.

After the balloon escaped the morning of Oct. 15 and soared to roughly 7,000 feet, a large and frantic search operation began to unfold. When the balloon landed two hours later, there was no boy in sight.

The film reveals Falcon, who had been hiding in the attic the entire time, raised alarms of a possible publicity stunt later on during a TV interview. "You guys said that we did this for the show," he told CNN in 2009. Police began investigating the parents of the three boys, Richard and Mayumi Heene, after learning of their past debut on the reality show "Wife Swap." The 17-minute film dives into the frenzy and fallout of the endlessly entertaining nationwide hoax.

(Chloe Olsgaard)

"Balloon Boy" screens at the ZACC on Feb. 20 at 8:30 p.m. and will be available to stream Feb. 19 to Feb. 29.

'Above and Below the Ground'

The Myitsone Dam was proposed by the Chinese government to be built in the northern part of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). It was designed to exist at the confluence of the Mali and N'Mai rivers, which is the source of the Irrawaddy River. If it came to fruition, it would have flooded the nearby regions, choking out the surrounding life in more ways than one.

Emily Hong's "Above and Below the Ground" follows the activism of the local people, who worked tirelessly and in direct opposition to the government to stop the dam's construction. The activists involved include regional women, many of whom live off of land that would be directly impacted by the flood, and a Christian rock band called "Blast," whose protest songs united everyone through their artistry. In just over an hour, the film takes you through the various efforts, failures and successes of the activists and the ways that their work has affected them.

The 86-minute film is not solely focused on the struggle, however. Hong devotes equal attention to the personal lives of the featured community members, allowing the viewer to get to know them for who they are, as well as their work. The result is a deeply moving experience, propelled by themes of community and humanity.

The film is nothing short of visually stunning, both in the perspective of the shots and the natural beauty of the region. In combination with the poignant and timeless narrative, the film is a genuine work of art.

(Kate Widmer)



"Above and Below the Ground" screens at the Roxy Theater on Feb. 20 at 8 p.m.. It will be available to stream Feb. 19 to Feb. 29.

BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

'Confessions of a Good Samaritan'

Would you donate your kidney to someone? Not your sibling, your best friend or someone else you love ... but a complete stranger? Penny Lane would, and she made a whole documentary about it.

Donating a kidney to a stranger is known as a "Good Samaritan donation" or "altruistic donation." Altruism as a concept is at the heart of the film, beyond just kidney donation. Lane went into the film intending to document her donation process, only to find that many people were confused about why she would do such a thing. From that place, the film also becomes an exploration of altruism as a part of the human experience.

The 103-minute documentary is a somewhat uneven mix of concepts. One aspect is the history of organ donation and transplants, another is Lane's experience as an altruistic donor and yet another is the experience of those who have received donations and those who are looking for them. To the film's credit, however, it never feels like too much information is being thrown at the audience, and the transitions between the topics feel natural.

The audience follows Lane as she prepares for her donation, both through interviews and through her daily life. At the same time, Lane takes us through the worlds of organ donation and psychological research through interviews she conducts, as well as her own Google research into the topics. By the time she makes it to the operating table, it feels like she's built a relationship with the audience, making her immediate post-surgery ramblings all the more emotional.

In execution, it's as entertaining as it is informative. Lane's candidness feels relatable and refreshing, even as she wonders aloud if she's "not a very good Good Samaritan."

"Confessions of a Good Samaritan" operates as something of a microcosm of the human experience. It's inspiring, uplifting, heartbreaking, relatable and a little bit gross, all at the same time.

(Keely Proebstel)



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

"Confessions of a Good Samaritan" screens at the Missoula Community Theatre on Feb. 17. Doors open at 7 p.m. and the show starts at 7:30 p.m.. It will be available to stream Feb. 19 to Feb. 29.



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

"Grasshopper Republic" screens at the Roxy Theater on Feb. 20 at 5:30 p.m.. It will be available to stream Feb. 24 to Feb. 29.

'Grasshopper Republic'

Man versus nature; it's a classic story. Man tries to make a tidy profit off of a natural resource, nature resoundingly kicks man's ass for his impudence. The world has profitable resources in abundance: timber, precious metals and ... grasshoppers.

Americans might squirm at the idea of eating bugs, but for Ugandans, grasshoppers are a tasty, deep-fried treat. Like chicharrónes, sort of. They're so beloved, in fact, that they're big business. If you believe the entrepreneurs at the heart of "Grasshopper Republic," they're the most profitable game in town.

The 94-minute documentary, directed by Daniel McCabe, follows a cadre of professional trappers as they prepare for the short-lived grasshopper season. They use incredibly bright lights to draw the bugs in, blinding them as they get too close to the source, and then use ramps to send the falling insects into the trap. It's both ingenious and incredibly disruptive. The lights are so bright that they destroy crops and pose a genuine threat to human health.

The drama really hinges on both the local politics of trapping and the cost to workers. In one particularly jarring scene, a pharmacist tells her client that "you can't catch grasshoppers for three months and expect [to be able] to see in 10 years."

At the same time, the film is both beautiful and deeply disconcerting. Nature documentary-esque shots of insects and wildlife fill the spaces in between the narrative scenes. Much of the film has a gorgeous, eerie blue glow cast over it from the high-powered lights. There are also intense scenes of bug violence and what can only be described as real-life body horror. No one chows down on grasshoppers on camera, if that makes a difference for you.

"Grasshopper Republic" is emotionally kind of a hard watch, but it's a worthwhile one.

(Keely Proebstel)

'Seat 31'

From her seat in the Montana Legislature, to the bench in the hallway across from the snack bar and then to an inventive standing desk in the hallway with a sticky note above her head reading "Seat 31," Zooey Zephyr never stopped fighting for trans rights in Montana. She continued to vote for the legislation with a tablet in the hallway.

"Seat 31" follows Zephyr and her partner through Zephyr's journey being censured by the state Legislature last year. The film tackles not only the statewide and national impact of her fight, but the personal turmoil they faced as a result. This film captures the difficulties they faced: from Zephyr's partner's home being threatened with a raid, to a group of people preoccupying the bench where she was known to work while ousted from the House floor, just to make her job a little more difficult.

But "Seat 31" is not just about the fight. Sprinkled with clips of Zephyr returning to Missoula for a trans rights rally and a gay prom where Zephyr proposed to her partner, the film paints a portrait of queer joy. Running only 13 minutes, "Seat 31" is not only a glimpse into Zephyr's life, but captures her role in one of the most explosive and impactful political movements in Montana history.

(Lauren Reinhart)

"Seat 31" screens at the Missoula Community Theatre on Feb. 18 at 5 p.m. and at the ZACC on Feb. 19 at 4 p.m.. It will be available to stream Feb. 19 to Feb. 24.



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

'Bicycle Island (A donde nos lleva)'

The future of Cuban transport arrived on the island a long time ago in the form of bicycles, but decades of abandon rendered them forgotten. As one interviewee in Mitra Elena Ghaffari's 23-minute film, "Bicycle Island (A donde nos lleva)," puts it, "In time, nothing lasts." They're referring to bicycle infrastructure that once flourished in the 1990s. Some in Havana hope it flourishes again.

In vignettes, select cyclist enthusiasts — the Peanut Vendor, the Artisan, the Paralympian, etc — all refer to the "Special Period," an era that began with Cuba's 1991 economic crisis following the secession of Soviet support. For context, as explained on the film's website bicycleisland.cargo.site, the government imported bikes and infrastructure in Havana during this period and prioritized them until gas-based transportation made a comeback with support from Venezuela. Bikes deteriorated with limited access to parts — and with it, their cultural value. But when transportation disruptions related to COVID-19 began to mirror the struggles of the "Special Period," bikes began to make a comeback.

"Bicycle Island" spends little time dwelling on why bikes fell to the wayside, instead focusing on what Havana's people think about reclaiming the transportation resource. Ghaffari lets them tell their own stories about the empowerment and freedom bikes can bring. The film is a little bit about the "Special Period" and today's parallel needs, but it's really more about the resiliency and complexity of humanity and bike mechanics.

"Bicycle Island" is one of those films that surpasses the language barrier with its color-popping cinematography and infectious music score. The film, narrated entirely by interviews, conveys as much with its imagery and tone as it does with its English subtitles. The music is especially cohesive with an improv score performed by Ensemble Interactivo de La Habana using bike parts as percussion.

By weaving together the tales of people reclaiming a lost mode of transportation with Cuban history and practical infrastructure issues, Ghaffari gives new meaning to the phrase, "it's just like riding a bike."

(McKenna Johnson)



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

'Bicycle Island (A donde nos lleva)' screens at the ZACC on Feb. 18 at 7:45 p.m. and on Feb. 23 at 4:30 p.m.. It will be available to stream Feb. 19 to Feb. 29.

'I'm Just Here for the Riot'



BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL | CONTRIBUTED

"I'm Just Here for the Riot" screens at the Roxy Theater on Feb. 24 at 8:30 p.m..

It starts with blue and green Vancouver Canucks face paint and the dreams of a historic hockey win. Within hours, cars are ablaze, store windows shattered and rioters are falling under a crowd's heels.

The physical uproar ended with arrests, but the "world's first smart-phone riot" was far from over. Today, we know the internet rarely forgets. In 2011, the people of Vancouver were about to find that out.

Directed by Asia Youngman and Kathleen Jayme, "I'm Just Here for the Riot" details the powderkeg that was the 2011 Stanley Cup and the following brutal, public meltdown in an efficient 77 minutes.

Using a smart blend of archived broadcast footage, internet screengrabs and artistic B-roll, the visuals drip with vitriol, placing viewers deep in the thick of the mob mentality.

The early transition points are some of the most well designed. One of the rioters, now in her 30s and regretful, tended to a fire while describing how she was sucked into the fray. As her hands wafted over the smoke, sirens faded in, one of several blended moments that made narration almost unnecessary.

The real magic of this film comes from Youngman and Jayme's rich sourcing. Just after setting the stage and a climactic shot of a man tumbling into a car fire, we pivot to the people on the periphery. About half of the film dives into the rioters' lives long after 2011, showing leaked addresses, lost jobs and a digital riot in its own right.

Police officers are interviewed. Journalists detail why they used the footage they had. Mothers and bloggers defend their sides, raising a genuine question of the role of internet vigilantism.

For an audience that has since accepted the web's grip, this film aims to remind us of our roots. We're not so above it all, and we never have been.

(Christine Compton)

Lady Griz transfer MJ Bruno is transforming culture and trucking competitors with dynamic play style

MAXWELL JOHNSON

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In her first year at the University of Montana, transfer Lady Griz basketball guard MJ (Madilynn Jean) Bruno has doubled her offensive production from her sophomore campaign at the University of Portland while carrying on the legacy of her late father, Andrew Bruno, and sharing his same tenacious play style and outlook.

"I couldn't ask for a better person. She's had more impact from a just overall cultural perspective and defensive perspective on our team than any individual," head coach Brian Holsinger said. "How can you not want to play hard when you have Bruno out here just sacrificing her body and doing everything to help the team win?"

Bruno's aggressive, punishing style on the court and supportive, lighthearted nature off of it personifies an adage often used by United States Marines like her late father, "No better friend, no worse enemy."

Bruno never truly knew her father, who died when she was just a baby.

"My mom always tells me that I get everything from him, just my aggressiveness, even the way I run, just the way I play. She's like, 'That's your dad,'" Bruno said. "I never met him, but I'm super grateful for him, and I know he's had a big impact on a lot of people's lives, including mine and my family's."

Andrew Bruno, who played in a similar style to MJ, did missionary work before the events of 9/11 spurred him to join the Marines with the hopes of becoming a pilot. He completed boot camp and was on his way to achieving that goal when he died in a non-service-related plane crash.

"He was an incredible athlete, incredible person of [Christian] faith and when I think about him, it's just, I feel grateful," MJ said. "I also just want to play for him, you know, just want to make him proud. I know he is proud of me."

Of course, MJ's mom, Holly, and her stepdad, Mat, whom MJ considers her dad, have also played a part in her development. Holly played ball for Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington.

"My mom is a big part of the reason why I'm here playing basketball today. She was my coach growing up for a while, too, and she always just put me in positions that you



5'11" guard MJ Bruno goes for a layup against Sacramento State during the Montana N7 game on Jan. 27.

AVA ROSVOLD | MONTANA KAIMIN

normally wouldn't play," MJ said. "I'm an undersized post, but she had me playing the post and guarding the big girls because she's like, 'Someday you're going to have to do that and you need to be versatile and be able to do that,' and I do that now today."

The skills MJ's mother taught her would prove useful in her first year of college at the University of Portland, where she averaged 12 minutes a night through 18 games, grabbing

37 rebounds and 14 steals as a defense-focused player. However, her freshman season was cut short by a nagging pain that turned out to be a much more severe injury.

"I found out my back was broken my freshman year and that was hard because it's something that's just not fixable," MJ said. "So, I had to learn how to manage it. I'm still learning how to manage it, but I'm just super grateful I still get to play."

The injury didn't stop MJ from having another strong defensive campaign her sophomore year, helping the University of Portland take the second seed in their conference and pull off a gutsy comeback win in the conference championship to advance to the NCAA tournament. Although MJ greatly enjoyed the success in Portland, something was still missing for her.

"I just didn't have any faith community," MJ said. "I tried to start a [Fellowship of Christian Athletes] and things like that, but there just wasn't a community there."

She would find that community, and an opportunity for more playing time, in Missoula, and the opportunity for her family in Spokane to see more games.

In her first 22 games as a junior with the Lady Griz, MJ has averaged 25 minutes a night and seven points a game. Compared to her sophomore campaign at Portland, she is playing 10 more minutes a night and scoring and assisting twice as often. She's also holding a GPA in the neighborhood of 3.9 on her way to obtain a social work degree.

"I'm really passionate about [preventing] human trafficking," MJ said. "The goal is to be FBI or possibly police work, just really working on the hands-on stuff. But I'm also interested in possibly counseling victims who have been trafficked and helping them."

When it comes to the immediate future, however, MJ Bruno will be helping the Lady Griz push toward the playoffs when they play the Brawl of the Wild game at home on Feb. 17 and then go on the road to face Sacramento State University on Feb. 22.

"My mom is a big part of the reason why I'm here playing basketball today. She was my coach growing up for a while, too, and she always just put me in positions that you normally wouldn't play."

-MJ Bruno

Grizzly softball has a successful start in Louisiana

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The Montana Griz softball team started its season on Friday at the Mardi Gras Mambo in Louisiana after four weeks of practice. The team is coming back after a tough 2023 season, when it finished with a record of 10-37, marking the fewest wins in a season in program history.

"We need to learn what put us in those situations last year and understand the steps we needed to take to move forward to make sure those are not the circumstances we put ourselves in again," said head coach Melanie Meuchel in a Griz Athletics press release.

The team batted a .242 last season. Usually softball teams strive to hit around a .300. With that batting average, the Grizzlies put up 2.7 runs per game on average. That is not typically enough to fend off its opponents.

Montana returned five position starters from last season, including outfielder Elise Ontiveros, who earned an honorable mention Big Sky Conference award. She batted a .295 last season, which was the highest batting average on the team. She also led the team in hits. Ontiveros is a senior marketing major from Bakersfield, California, and has been on the Griz softball team for her full four years here.

The team has one senior pitcher, Allie Brock, and behind her are two sophomores and two freshmen. She has 19 career wins and has played in 85 games. The team's pitchers last season averaged 2.15 walks or hit batters per inning. This forced the defense to consistently play with the stress of having players on base.

Joining Brock behind the plate is Riley Stockton, a senior catcher who started 40 of the 47 games last year. She had a .993 fielding percentage last season, which is nearly perfect. She has a strong bat as well, hitting a two-run RBI double in one of the games during Montana's opening tournament this year.

Bringing back only five position starters will mean there's some moving parts to fill the other four spots for the Grizzlies. This fall season, sophomore Makena Strong started at second base and freshman Riley Peschek was at shortstop. Grace Hardy and Chloë Saxton switched off at third base last season, and it looks to be similar for this year. Junior Hannah Jablonski started all 47 contests at first base, and is expected to do the same this season. This, plus the outfielders, gives Montana a defensive core with a

decent amount of experience.

It took Montana 23 games to earn two wins last season, but this year it completed that feat on the first day of the season.

Montana won its first game by a score of 5-4 over the University of Louisiana-Monroe, with sophomore transfer student from New Mexico State University Emmalyn Brinka clinching the win at pitcher. The Griz followed up with another 5-4 win over Southern University. Sophomore pitcher Grace Haegele got the win for that contest, only allowing five hits. The Grizzlies struggled with fielding, though, and had eight errors in those two games alone.

Saturday did not prove to be as successful for the Grizzlies. The day started with a 0-5 loss to Southeastern Louisiana University. Montana only had one hit in the entire contest. Brinka started the game and gave up five runs before the Griz put in freshman Rylee Rehbein for her first performance. She gave up two hits, but did not allow Southeastern Louisiana to score any runs.

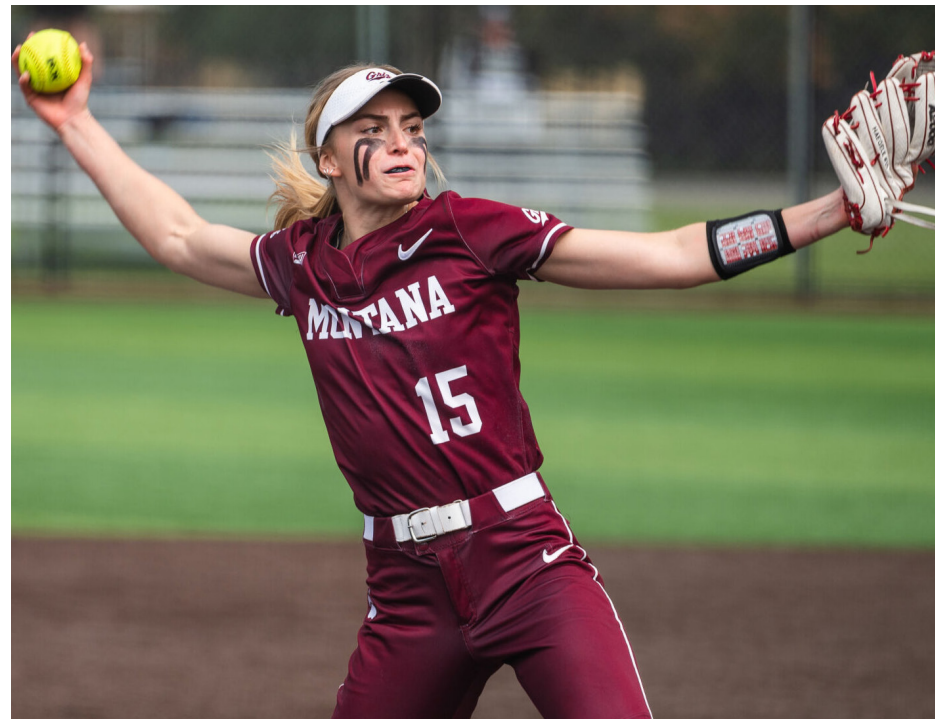
The second game was a 4-9 loss for Montana after it fell behind 0-5 after three innings and couldn't catch back up. Nyeala Herndon made her Montana debut in this game, giving up two runs in the sixth inning. Both teams the Grizzlies played on Saturday are 4-0 in the tournament.

Montana lost the final game of the tournament 2-9 to Nicholls State University. The Grizzlies fell behind 0-6 after the first two innings and scored its only two runs in the fifth, which Nicholls followed with three more. Jocelyn Eisen had a double and a triple in this game, accounting for two of the three total hits for Montana. Brinka started at pitcher again and gave up six runs with Haegele and Rehbein coming in as closers.

This puts the Grizzlies at 2-3 on the season, a much better start than the past few years. The last time Montana started a season 2-0 was in 2020, at a tournament to open the season in Louisiana as well. The team ended 12-12 that year, cut short by the pandemic.

The team has only been practicing for four weeks this spring, but had a good fall season, finishing 7-1. With an unusually dry and mild winter for the state, Montana will probably be able to practice and play on its own field earlier than is typical. Last season, the Griz did not play a game in Missoula until March 20, almost two weeks later than the first home contest scheduled this season.

The team's next contest is Feb. 16 at the University of Texas at El Paso Invitational. It plays in two tournaments after that before coming to Missoula for the Montana Softball Classic on March 7.



Grace Haegele pitches at the Montana Griz vs. North Idaho College Cardinal game on Sept. 24, 2023 at the Grizzly Softball Field. **AVA ROSVOLD | MONTANA KAIMIN**

"We need to learn what put us in those situations last year and understand the steps we needed to take to move those circumstances we put ourselves in again."

-Melanie Meuchel, head coach

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Black Solidarity Summit 2024

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The Black Student Union hosted its 7th annual Black Solidarity Summit at the University of Montana on Feb. 9 to Feb. 10 in the University Center Ballroom. Breakout rooms, poetry readings, lectures, music and events celebrated black identity on and off of campus. Queer people of color, “the dangers of wokeness,” student success and BIPOC identity were a few subjects covered.

The BSU was founded at UM in 1967 and supports and empowers the black experience of students, according to its mission statement. Current President of the BSU, Jasmine Caldwell-Smith, ran many of the events, including a Black history trivia game.

Caldwell-Smith also showed a video presentation created by BIPOC students on the University campus. The name of the

video “I don’t like it when...” displayed on screen with a compilation of students experiences that have happened to them in the Missoula community. “I don’t like being the ambassador for my race,” and “I don’t like when people ask me where I’m really from,” were among the shared comments intended to spread awareness of discrimination on campus.

Throughout the video, BSU members shared advice on how to be respectful when asking Black peers sensitive questions. The summit concluded with surprise keynote speaker UM alumna Meshayla Cox-Luebbe, who gave a talk on recovery and internalized oppression. Cox created the summit and graduated from UM in 2018 with a degree in African- American Studies.



UPPER LEFT: President of the Black Student Union Jasmine Caldwell-Smith, left, and BSU member Sylvie Tower, right, pick out beads to make bracelets on the second day of the Black Solidarity Summit. **CHRIS LODMAN | MONTANA KAIMIN**

ABOVE: Eporu Tower works on a piece at the Black Solidarity Summit on Feb. 10. Tower said he was just sort of “playing around” with this piece in progress, but themes from his art often focus on inner self expression.

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BOTTOM LEFT: Black Solidarity Summit attendees chat before starting the Black History Trivia game on Feb. 10, held in the University Center Ballroom. Questions like “Who played Uncle Phil in the Fresh Prince of Bel Air?” kept the audience engaged. **AVA ROSVOLD | MONTANA KAIMIN**