

MONTANA KAIMIN

HERE TO STAY

BIG SKY FILM FESTIVAL'S RETURN TO THEATERS



6 Unforgiving phishing

14 Softball hits it off

16 Strut your stuff

Cover design by MaKayla O'Neil

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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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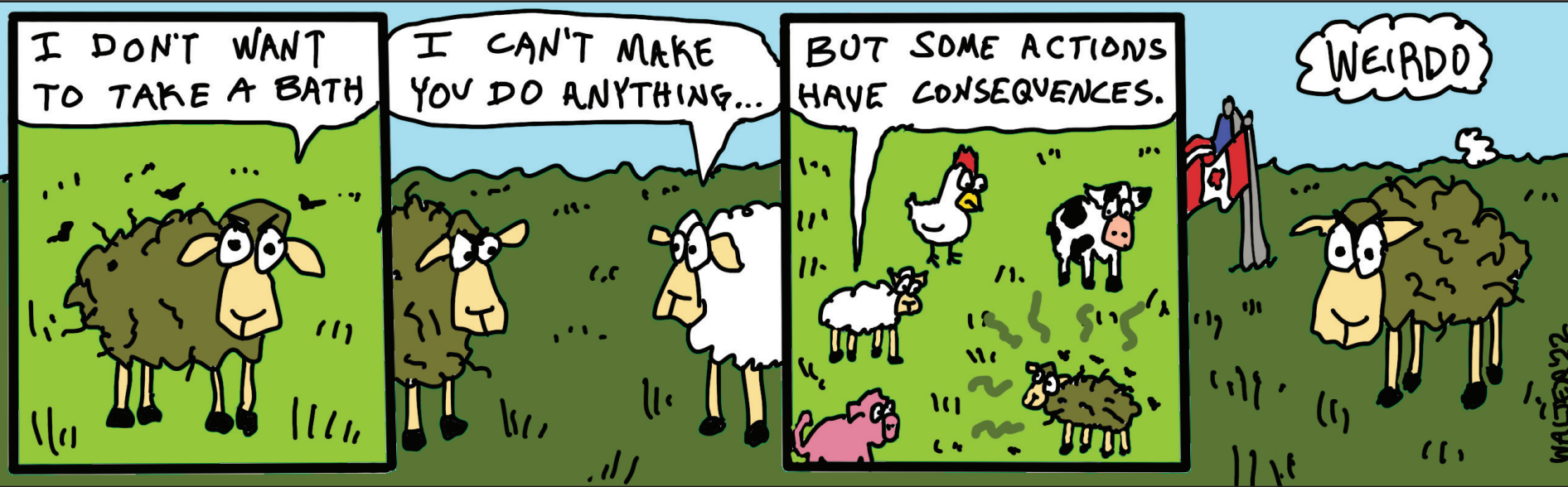


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THE GARAGE: SE 2 EP 5



WALTER MEDCRAFT | MONTANA KAIMIN

All for R1, and R1 for all

Last week, the University of Montana announced it had been awarded the prestigious “R1” designation for “very high research activity” from the Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education – the highest possible tier a research university can achieve. UM joins the company of 146 other universities designated as R1, out of a possible 4,000 eligible.

The recognition comes after UM more than doubled the money it's spent on research since 2014 to \$122 million in 2022. Dave Kuntz, UM's director of strategic communications, said the University anticipated these funds growing after it received R1 status.

This is big news for UM, and will hopefully open the door for exciting new research opportunities and draw prospective students to the University. It couldn't have come at a better time, as last semester UM saw its first enrollment increase in a decade. The momentum seems positive.

Being an R1 university means UM is prioritizing important research – projects like developing opioid addiction vaccines, examining COVID-19 research trends and conducting studies on human wildfire impact.

Another big change R1 status brings: UM now matches Montana State University in recognized research output, as MSU gained the designation in 2006 and regained it in 2019, after a four-year slip.

As UM rightfully salivates at a potential surge of research funding coming its way, it's important to see the Carnegie designation beyond the dollar signs – it's also another milestone in the University's ongoing reimagining of itself following a decade of scandals, plunging enrollment and stagnant growth.

Since 2011, UM has had to make unenviable decisions about how to distribute a tightening budget, with the College of Humanities and Sciences taking big hits alongside shrinking student interest.

But education is a business, and we expect the administration to run the University with that in mind. Scott Whittenburg, director of creative scholarship for UM, told the Kaimin UM's expansion of STEM research fueled the R1 recognition, and a 2021 report from Hanover Research showed that more than three quarters of the fastest-growing degree programs are STEM-based.

After 10 years of head-scratching business decisions, it's nice to see UM investing where it's most likely to make a return, even if that means inching away from its old identity as a beacon for the liberal arts.

Just as the Kaimin is responsible for holding UM accountable when it messes up, it's also our job to recognize good news for good news. We're excited to join the University in celebrating this moment. When UM wins on the national stage, it's a win for all of us.

Like it? Hate it? Have a different opinion?
email us your opinions at editor@montanakaimin.com

SUDOKU
Difficulty: Medium

Edited by Margie E. Burke

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

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

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You had a good run, Craig



Desks and beds hang out of what once was the north end of Craig Hall while a mother and her son watch the demolition on Feb. 8. The area around Craig Hall is one of a few demolition sites planned for a newly renovated dining hall and remains blocked off, forcing students to take alternative routes to get around the construction site. Dining hall renovations are projected to start in early March.
RIDLEY HUDSON | MONTANA KAIMIN

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Briefs: Vaccine protests, free market debates, COVID-19 cases down

GRIFFEN SMITH
griffen.smith@umontana.edu

COMMISSIONER OF HIGHER ED: PHASE OUT COVID-19 GUIDELINES

In a guidance to Montana public universities, the commissioner of higher education wrote last Friday that COVID-19 restrictions on campuses should be relaxed in the coming weeks.

“Each campus [should] begin the process of phasing out COVID-19 restrictions as soon as possible,” Commissioner of Higher Education Clayton Christian said.

Areas the commissioner said should be phased out include mask requirements, event size restrictions and any remaining restrictions on out-of-state and international travel.

Montana State University in Bozeman ended its indoor masking requirement Feb. 14, MSU President Waded Cruzado said in an email to students last Friday.

UM’s fellow Montana University System school had its mask mandate during most of the 2021-22 school year so far. Cruzado said after a drop in cases around campus and the widespread availability of the COVID-19 vaccine, there was no need to continue requiring masks.

UM is currently working on how to end its own mask mandate, according to Dave Kuntz, director of strategic communications. The University’s COVID Response Team began discussions on how to ease back the mandate Monday. As of press time, it was unclear when the policy change would happen. The Kaimin will follow this story online.

TRUCKERS BLOCK BORDER TO PROTEST VAX MANDATE

Travel to and from the Sweet-Grass-Coutts Canadian border crossing in north-central Montana was temporarily closed by the Canadian government Saturday after a series of protests from U.S. truckers clash-

ing with Canada’s vaccine mandate.

The clash is over Canada’s new requirement that all truckers must be fully-vaccinated against COVID-19 to cross the border. Those unvaccinated would have to quarantine in the country for two weeks. Previously, truckers crossing the border did not need to be vaccinated.

The Coutts crossing has closed several times as the protesters, self-named as “freedom convoys,” have blocked roadways with trucks, waved flags and congested Interstate I-15, normally filled with trucks delivering essential goods to more rural regions in the Alberta Province.

Services have remained open at the Coutts port of entry since the protest began on Jan. 29, but lanes have intermittently been open and closed as a result of protesters moving their large trucks and other vehicles onto the highway, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reported.

Dozens of other border crossing protests popped up nationwide, with some crowds as large as 300 in Eureka, Montana, and 700 in Ottawa, Ontario, occupying bridges and clashing with Canada’s Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

PRESIDENT’S LECTURE CENTERS ON THE FREE MARKET

A renowned Harvard professor will Zoom into the University of Montana’s Presidential Leadership Series on Thursday night to analyze the efficiency of free market capitalism versus the bureaucracy of the U.S. government.

Naomi Oreskes, Harvard’s Henry Charles Lea Professor of the History of Science, has written more than 200 scholarly articles, some featured in large publications like The New York Times and the Washington Post.

Her lecture and upcoming book are titled “The Big Myth: How American Business Taught Us to Loathe Government and Love the Free Market.” Oreskes argues Americans’

misplaced faith in the free market has caused many societal problems like opioid abuse and homelessness.

Oreskes and “The Big Myth” co-author Erik Conway take on the idea that the U.S. government has been helpful for citizens in the past, but the perception of it has changed as thinkers and industry heads promoted the idea that “markets are magic.”

The free online lecture is scheduled for 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 17. Attendees must register in advance at the UM Office of the President website (umt.edu/president). Oreskes’ talk is the UM Brennan Guth Memorial Lecture in Environmental Philosophy.

COVID-19: MISSOULA CASELOAD FALLS

Active cases in Missoula County are trending down after an all-time peak of COVID-19 in the region at the end of January. There are 1,700 active cases in the county as of Monday, a figure still far higher than health officials consider safe.

The Missoula City-County Health Department reported zero new UM-affiliated cases Monday as the University’s total active numbers dropped to 81. The seven-day average case rate for the University is just under three new cases per day.

At the peak of late January, UM was averaging 20 cases per day. Active cases in Missoula County rose to 3,600 on Feb. 6, but dropped significantly afterward.

Statewide, there were 4,500 active cases. The state numbers, collected by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, show Missoula with lower numbers than the county reports, at 724 active cases.

The Institute for Health Metrics, which predicts future cases and deaths from the coronavirus, slotted Montana’s COVID-19 peak on Jan. 14. By June, the officials expect little spread of COVID-19.

Blotter

CHRISTINE COMPTON
christine.compton@umontana.edu

Between Feb. 3 and Feb. 11, the University of Montana Police Department booked 14 crimes in the police log. Ten of last week’s charges involved marijuana, making it the most popular way to be written up. That being said, lots of the incidents were plain bad luck.

THURSDAY 2/3 - STALKING BY THE LIBRARY

A stalker by the Mansfield Library was reported at 5 p.m. The stalker contacted the victim at their workplace twice in two days. The incident is unrelated to previous stalking cases. The case is open, and UMPD is working with the victim to identify a suspect.

THURSDAY 2/3 - UNLUCKY #7

UMPD caught not one, not two, but seven students with sweet greens in Duniway Hall at 9 p.m. They all huddled into the same dorm room for an end-of-week smoke sesh, running an air purifier to cover their tracks — which never works, by the way — when an RA picked up on the hazy smell. While marijuana is legal in Montana, the University of Montana prohibits the herb on campus, meaning the seven tokers received conduct violations through the school. Something about those bloodshot eyes just doesn’t scream innocence.

THURSDAY 2/3 - BOW WOW WOW

A dog bit someone between the UC and the Mansfield Library. UMPD arrived at the scene shortly after the dog was restrained by its owner. Thankfully, the bitten person didn’t need medical attention, but my heart still goes out to the two people involved. This sounds like the beginning of a bad Hallmark movie.

MONDAY 2/7 - EVACUATE THE DANCE FLOOR

Student performers fled the music building after a faulty fire alarm detector triggered the system. Good news: no fire. Bad news: students heading to Music History II may have been a tad late. Don’t worry about the music kids, though. Knowing them, they probably tried to find a chord in the blaring “beeeep, beeeep, beeeep.” What is that, a high G sharp?

WEDNESDAY 2/9 - RENTER ROBBERY

A student hoping to rent off-campus was scammed out of \$700 after sending a payment to a fake landlord. Because the exchange happened in the lawless land of Cash App and Venmo, UMPD has no suspects. Keep an eye out, folks. Digital crime doesn’t just target Grandma.

WEDNESDAY 2/9 - EVASIVE EXPLOSIVE

Someone reported a loud bang and billowing smoke at 1 p.m. in Bannack Court, but when UMPD arrived, there were no signs of a disturbance. Neighbors said they didn’t see or hear anything, either. Truly a mystery.

FRIDAY 2/11 - MUSIC AND MARY JANE

Three students smoking weed in the J Lot by Turner Hall at 1 a.m. found an unfortunate end to their hotbox. Here’s the kicker: UMPD originally responded only to their blasting music until an eagle-eyed officer spotted marijuana in their car. One was brave enough to claim ownership of the goods, meaning the other two got off with only student conduct referrals. Now that’s a true friend.

The Weekly Crossword

by Margie E. Burke

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14						15					16			
17						18					19			
20					21			22			23			
			24			25					26			
27	28	29		30		31					32			
33			34							35			36	37
38					39				40		41			
42				43		44				45				
		46			47							48		
49	50			51					52		53			
54			55					56				57	58	59
60					61		62			63				
64					65					66				
67					68					69				

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ACROSS

1 TV miniseries, "The Haunting of Bly ____"

6 Nag, nag, nag

10 Charging option

14 Run to Reno?

15 Leap for Lipinski

16 Bundle of hay

17 Lady's address

18 Phoenix neighbor

19 Pinocchio, at times

20 Difficult to bear

22 Olive center

24 Place to unwind

25 Scoop holder

26 Reason for an "R" rating

27 Product pitches

30 Courtroom plea

33 Medieval soldier

35 Contract details

38 Immunity item on "Survivor"

39 Lukewarm

41 Ante anagram

42 Search for water

44 What tornadoes do

46 Capable

48 Kitten sound

49 Routing word

51 Lion's locks

52 Party staple

54 Artificial tooth

56 Distrustful

60 Superhero garb

61 ____-de-camp

63 Measuring instrument

64 Long, long time

65 Rosie, to the Jetsons

27 Encircled by

28 Carpenter's groove

29 Like some mountains

31 Affirmation

32 Email folder

34 Not only that...

36 Aussie pal

37 Dinner in a pot

40 Fine and ____

43 She played Hermione

45 Hornet's defense

47 Canal site

49 Parish priest

50 Mirror ____

53 Parlor instrument

55 Not as much

56 Surrender

57 Zodiac crossover

58 Feverish chill

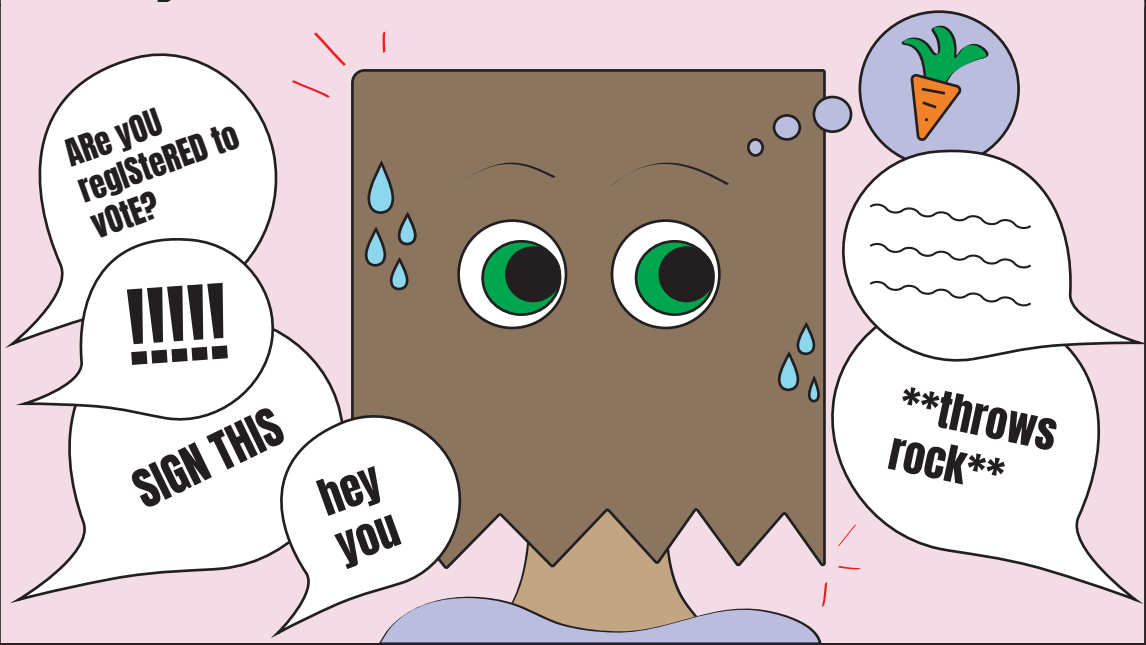
59 Give the eye

62 Bond film, "No Time to ____"

Answers to Previous Crossword:

B	A	L	I		T	A	L	C			S	W	A	G
E	X	A	M		O	P	A	L		S	T	A	G	E
T	E	R	M		I	N	A	T	E		M	O	T	E
A	D	D	E	D		C	E	A		S	E	L	E	S
				D	O	P	E		R	U	L	E	R	
		G	R	I	L	L		C	A	N	T		T	A
G	R	E	A	S	E	G	U	N	S		L	O	G	E
N	E	A	T		B	I	R	C	H		A	W	O	L
A	B	L	E		E	N	D	E	A	R	M	E	N	T
W	E	E		H	I	S		S		D	A	I	R	Y
		S	T	E	A	L		V	E	I	N			
S	A	T	U	R	N	I	N	E		T	A	R	O	T
A	L	A	M	O		N	A	R	R	A	T	I	V	E
S	E	T	I	N		G	I	G	O		E	V	E	N
S	E	E	D			S	L	E	D		D	E	N	T

How you avoid tablers outside the UC



MCKENNA JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN

MARIAH THOMAS
mariah.thomas@umontana.edu

Running into *those* people at *those* tables outside the University Center is a rite of passage on campus, yo. But while it’s important to be “engaged”, sometimes a gal just wants to pop into the UC and grab her chicken tendies (chef’s kiss amirite) in pEaCe. Soooo, here’s a comprehensive guide to how you avoid those tablers (s/o for your work, though, seriously!!!!) based on the stars.

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20–FEB. 18): You tell them you can’t sign their thingy cuz you’re “social distancing” but we all just know you hate being around new people. It’s okay though, so do we.

PISCES (FEB. 19–MARCH 20): You almost cry every time they ask. Then you stop and begrudgingly do the thing. But you feel *gaslighted* every time they bug you and you know they know they’ve asked you already — cuz they asked you as you walked in AND out the damn door.

ARIES (MARCH 21–APRIL 19): You’ve got your AirPods in and the volume is UP. Like, all the way. Can’t StOp If YoU cAn’T hEaR, huh?

TAURUS (APRIL 20–MAY 20): You say yes when they ask if you’re registered to vote, and then you go home to do it yourself cuz you know you haven’t updated that shit. You just don’t need help to do it, and we love a self-sufficient QUEEN <3

GEMINI (MAY 21–JUNE 20): When you walk by you’re sweet as can be, but you’re CERTAIN to uncheck the \$5 fee on your Cyberbear bill for the next semester. Two-faced babyyyyyy yeah aight (Get it? Like blue-faced?).

CANCER (JUNE 21–JULY 22): You get offended when they DON’T ask you to do the thing, even though you HATE when they do. Don’t get in your head about it, you

li’l pick-me, it’s okay, we promise. Not a personal dig against you. <3

LEO (JULY 23–AUG. 22): You’re so busy focusing on getting that perfect Snap selfie to send to your crush that you don’t even realize someone’s calling you. Pay attention to the world around you sometimes sweetie RAWR XD.

VIRGO (AUG. 23–SEP. 22): You don’t avoid anything, bitch. You love, and I mean LOVE, to talk about all the shit going on in the world. Actually, sometimes the tablers avoid YOU. It’s okay to just walk past the political debate sometimes bestie. <3

LIBRA (SEP. 23–OCT. 22): You can’t remember the last time you used the front entrance to the UC cuz your non-confrontational ass HATES letting anyone down. Walking around the tennis courts every time you wanna get some lunch just gets your steps in for the day, right? It’s okay though. Stay nice.

SCORPIO (OCT. 23–NOV. 21): You stop and sign whatever they ask you to just cuz you know if they don’t stop you on your way in, they’ll stop you on your way out. Cut your losses and take ‘em once, amirite?

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22–DEC. 22): Every time you walk past the cute guy/gal/nonbinary pal working there, you think about flirting with them ... and then don’t. You’re not sure whether it’s cuz it’d be embarrassing to be caught in the act or cuz you’re scared of rejection. We say shoot your shot™.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 23–JAN. 19): Your internal monologue en route to the UC goes something like this: *head down* *you can’t hear* *they aren’t calling out for me* *oh shit yes they are* *smile but do NOT go over there* *shit I signed the (insert political participation activity here)*.

UM struggles with advanced phishing emails

EMILY TSCHETTER
emily.tschetter@umontana.edu

When student Beth Wrzesinski lost access to her email for a week after accidentally clicking a malicious link, she did not anticipate her account sending dozens of emails trawling for information from fellow students.

But according to the acting IT Chief Information Officer Zach Rossmiller, the practice of online scamming, known as phishing, is becoming a growing concern of the lean-staffed IT department, as new phishing techniques are compromising more student and staff accounts.

“Over the past few weeks, we’ve seen really sophisticated emails sent to staff and students. Emails would be posing as University administrators and people kept logging into the links they provided thinking they were UMT systems,” Rossmiller said. “People think it’s legit because it’s a known person, so it just creates a grass fire and spreads.”

The UM email server processes about 300,000 emails on any given weekday during the semester, acting IT Chief Information Security Officer Jonathan Neff said. Microsoft’s Office 365, the host program for UM emails, detects about 2,000 emails each day attempting to steal personal information.

The 2,000 phishes Microsoft detects never hit people’s inboxes, but thousands of additional scamming attempts evade the system’s capture.

When Rossmiller took over as CIO a year ago, only one person oversaw the entirety of cybersecurity at UM. Rossmiller increased the IT security team to three full-time staffers, but they are often overwhelmed by compromised accounts.

“There’s some days, like a couple of weeks ago, where they had 20 compromised accounts and they were working all through the evening to stop it. But then there are days where it’s not as noisy, so it goes in weird ebbs and flows,” Rossmiller said.

A phish posing as a known University administrator advertising a fake job position spread through Wrzesinski’s compromised account last fall. Although she regained access to her accounts within 24 hours, she could not send emails for a full week after the attack.

“You’re kind of at a loss if this happens to you and you have online classes. I had two papers due for online classes and I had to basically track my professors down,” Wrzesinski, a sophomore in media arts, said. “There are students that are not as easily able to access

campus because of being remotely located, and it would be a lot harder for them because it was easiest to fix in person with IT.”

Neff said phishing attacks often increase during campus-wide spikes in activity like back-to-school or the COVID-19 pandemic because they can pose as financial aid or job offers. He suspects the recent issues with phishing are not a result of more attacks, but rather the university-specific nature of the attacks.

“I don’t see any real indication that we’re seeing more attacks now than at the same point in 2021,” Neff said. “But there were a few compromised accounts last month that were very noisy and attacked the internal community, so we’re working on better communication with the campus community for information on phishing.”

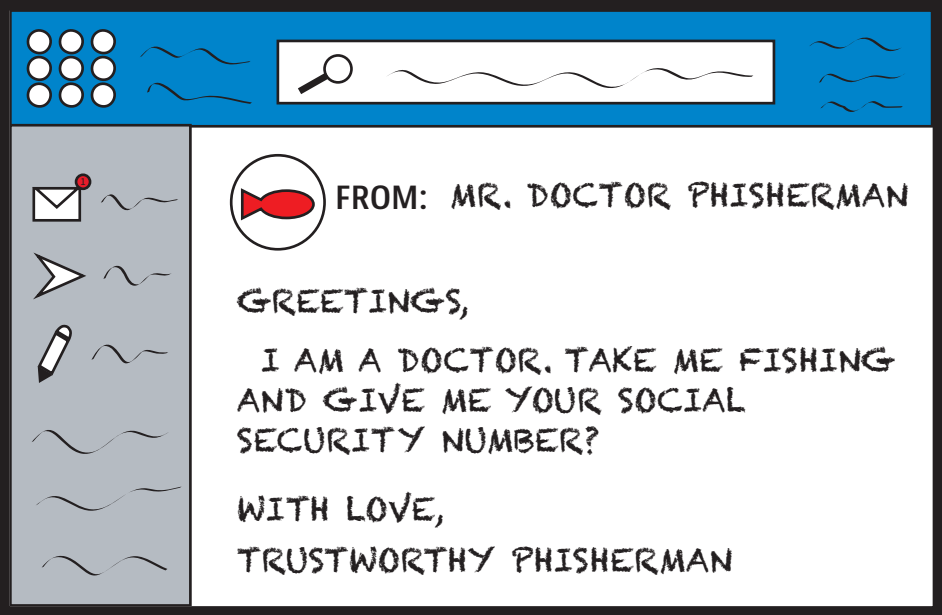
Rossmiller said the IT department recently acquired an advanced threat detection artificial intelligence for greater prevention of scam emails reaching inboxes, but does not want to disrupt email activity while installing the system.

“It would have been great to implement the new system yesterday, but with a small staff constantly putting out database fires, how do we get on these big projects to help actually stop it?” Rossmiller said. “The help desk are the first ones to get phone calls when we transition, so we couldn’t make the switch now with 50% of the staff out with COVID-19 right now anyways.”

Although they cannot implement new prevention systems during the semester, Neff and Rossmiller said mandating multi-factor authentication, which requires two forms of identification, on Moodle accounts will help decrease successful scams. They plan to enroll all UM staff and students in the next six months.

IT can blacklist a phishing email once reported and plans to ramp up its campus scam-prevention education efforts. IT recommends individuals report phishing emails to IT by forwarding any suspicious emails to spam@access.ironport.com as an attachment, or reporting the issue on Outlook through the “security options” tab.

“UM has so many different types of people on campus like foreign exchange students and non-traditional students that may not be as experienced with media literacy or may not understand English as well that could fall for these emails,” Wrzesinski said. “Please don’t feel bad if you get scammed, just get a second pair of eyes on suspicious emails and don’t give them any personal information.”



MCKENNA JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN

THE PRESIDENT’S
LECTURE SERIES

AN EVENING WITH Naomi Oreskes

“The Big Myth: How American Business Taught Us to Loathe Government and Love the Free Market”

A Harvard University professor, Naomi Oreskes is an internationally-renowned Earth scientist, historian and author of both scholarly and popular books and articles on the history of Earth and environmental science.

This event is the Brennan Guth Memorial Lecture in Environmental Philosophy.

FEBRUARY 17
7 P.M. | ZOOM

Register at umt.edu/president to receive the Zoom link.

THIS EVENT IS FREE AND OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY.
Sign language interpretation will be provided for this event.

Native American Natural Resource Program in search of interns

ANNA HENNING
anna.henning@umontana.edu

After a successful first year, the Native American Natural Resource Program is looking to give Indigenous UM students hands-on learning through its annual summer internship support.

The program, part of the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, meets with Indigenous students to share opportunities for scholarships, internships and tutoring.

“The Native American Natural Resource Program is the one place that felt safe,” said Faith Wells, a former intern. “I was getting listened to not because of my race, not because I was being tokenized, but as a person, surrounded by other people that understand that experience.”

The program provided students funding for two paid internships in 2021 through a donation from Jonathan and Merrill Dorman. The grants cover a salary for about 10 weeks.

Jen Harrington is the director of the Native American Natural Resource Program and a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. She works directly with the students to get the most out of their internships. While Harrington can organize an internship, she said many students’ applications already have an internship selected. Harrington works with interns on goals, benefits and other logistics.

Wells’ internship sampled different careers in the parks and recreation study area. She stayed in different parts of Montana, working as a math and science teacher and shadowing U.S. Forest Service employees.

Wells, a member of the Cold Lake First Nations Tribe, said her favorite part of the internship was working with Indigenous middle schoolers for two weeks, where she taught biology with Indigenous context and traditions.

Wells said she enjoyed the experience because she could explore her career options without being pushed toward a career because of her race.

“You can just be yourself with no threat of fetishization or tokenization or being some sort of commodity that gets the grants,” Wells said. “Instead, you’ve been accepted for you.”

While her major has changed, Wells still recommends the program. She wants there to be more awareness of the program and Indigenous students studying STEM on campus.

Autumn Webber also received an internship last summer. She worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a rangeland technician on the Blackfeet Reservation in Browning, Montana. She studied livestock overstocking, overgraz-



Faith Wells, pictured with her dog Oliver on the Oval, was selected last year to intern at the University of Montana’s Native American Natural Resource Program. The program, which is part of the W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, gives Indigenous students support during their time at UM through scholarships, internships and tutoring. ANTONIO IBARRA | MONTANA KAIMIN

ing and pasture authorization for cattle to enter the reservation.

Webber enjoyed field investigations the most, where she would do compliance investigations to check on fences and resources for cattle.

Webber, an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Tribe, said she was struggling to find support at UM before connecting with Harrington. With the Native American Natural Resource Program, Webber got advice on her course schedule and resources for college expenses.

After her internship, Webber graduated in December 2021.

“[The program] was extremely helpful,” Webber said. “I definitely wouldn’t have gotten through it without them. They guided me through a lot of difficulties.”

Harrington helps students with a variety of challenges as the program director. She assists in transitioning undergraduates to graduate programs and career help. She also provides resources like finding childcare and housing.

Harrington wants to make sure Indigenous students are taken care of. She considers herself an “auntie” on campus, and hopes to increase the Native American student population in the College of Forestry and Conservation.

“We have so many [tribes] across Montana,” Harrington said. “Our tribal natural resource departments are wanting to have their own tribal members become the scientists in those positions.”

Harrington is also advocating for more inclusive pedagogy, or education technique, in the department. She is working with UM’s director of inclusive excellence, Dr. Salena Hill, and Amy Kinch, the director of organized learning, to create inclusive pedagogy training for the college and want to expand that training across UM.

Harrington teaches two classes — Tribal Resource Management and Ecological Perspectives in Native American traditions — which feature more Indigenous research methodologies. The program and internships are expanding networks of support and opportunity at UM. They continue to push for more inclusion and resources for Indigenous forestry and conservation students.

HERE TO STAY

BIG SKY FILM FESTIVAL'S RETURN TO THEATERS



AFTER TWO YEARS in a pandemic-ridden world, the return of traditions has been a demonstration of resilience. The Big Sky Film Festival — in its 19th year — is back in person after a year of completely virtual screenings, proving the annual event is here to stay. Rachel Gregg, the festival's director, said she's excited to see people at the event again. "What's really special to me is some of those moments during the Q&A where you get to see how an audience member has been affected by something, or see a filmmaker who's having their world premiere of a film here that they spent, let's say, four years of blood, sweat, tears and passion and bring something," Gregg said. "These are true

stories in documentaries that they're bringing into the world. They get to have that moment where they witness a room full of people watching something. That's something that you can't just experience online." The festival, which runs from Feb. 18 to 27 this year, received nearly 2,000 submissions according to its website. Fifty feature-length films were selected for showings, alongside 95 short documentary films. Many of these are premiere showings. The documentaries will be shown at the Wilma, the Roxy, Zootown Arts Community Center and more Missoula locations. And, in a turn from the tradition of exclusively in-person screenings, the films will also be available online. This year's line up of documentaries depicts snippets of humanity in its rawest form.

Reporters from the Montana Kaimin watched uplifting stories about the love of family and healing from trauma, but also witnessed narratives of sex trafficking and missing and murdered Indigenous women. Among all the films is a common thread of hope — hope which unites us rather than divides us — and artists who have made a commitment to their craft by bringing us these intimate moments.

~ Mariah Thomas, Features Editor and Clarise Larson, Arts and Culture Editor

This year, the Kaimin reviewed feature-length films and short films spanning across all categories of the Big Sky Film Festival. Reporters previewed the films and spoke with directors. More reviews are available online at our website, montanakaimin.com.



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'ARACHNOPHILE'

Laurie Kerzicnik is an arachnophile — a person who loves spiders. To anyone who grew up watching the giant spider Aragog from "Harry Potter" terrorize children, the concept of loving a spider may seem strange. But to main character Kerzicnik, a Montana State University Extension Specialist who studies arthropods and their relatives (arachnids), the spiders aren't the problem. People's perceptions of them are. "Arachnophile," a five-minute documentary film directed by MSU graduate student Spence Scott, works to destigmatize the fear of spiders, fostered by years of negative portrayal in the media. "Knowledge is power," Kerzicnik said in the film. "Everything [people] know about spiders

will help reduce their fear." While this film does not skirt the potential dangers of spiders, it takes away the preconceived notion that a spider is a big, scary monster the size of a small elephant. With a compilation of high-resolution videos and images, Scott shows spiders are an incredibly diverse group of arthropods and play a crucial role in environments across the world, and in Montana specifically. "Arachnophile" is a testament that spiders aren't always scary on the big screen — they, like most wildlife, spin the web that helps Earth's complex ecosystems function. "Arachnophile" is available for screening at the Wilma Feb. 25 at 3:30 p.m., or online streaming Feb. 21 through March 3. (Haley Yarborough)

'TELL THEM WE WERE HERE'

A hot dog cart bearing a large black antique sewing machine slowly hums and rattles as it rolls down a steep hill in San Francisco. Michael Swaine is on his way to meet with homeless people to repair their fraying clothes for free, a project he has called the Free Mending Library Project. Swaine walks the streets of the Bay Area and gets to work putting needle to thread like clockwork, his boot manually pumping the metal foot pedal. He does this one day every month. It's been more than 10 years. With one part ode to the San Francisco art scene, "Tell Them We Were Here" takes the audience into the intimate backroom of people who create art in every medium. From muralists scaling a skyscraper to paint, to a mixed-media artist creating a neon pink spray painted pop gallery of her father's Black Panther police records, this film captures artists in their rawest form. "We wanted to allow people who don't

know anything about the arts to be able to engage with it," said documentary filmmaker Keelan Williams. "I would hope that people get a sense of the possibilities that art-making possesses." Griff Williams, the owner of Gallery 16 in San Francisco, and his son Keelan Williams, a documentary filmmaker who grew up in the art gallery, had a passion for interacting with artists in the Bay Area. This led them to interview 60 artists over the course of three years, trying to capture their unique stories, voices and art. The interviews became a full feature film. It was the first time Griff and Keelan had tag-teamed any type of creative project. "It was infuriating," Keelan said. "It was rewarding. It was joyful. It was teeth grinding. But at the end of the day, it was one of the joys of my lifetime to be able to make this film with [my dad]." This film is available for screening at the Zootown Arts Community Center Feb. 21 at 4:45 p.m., or available for online streaming Feb. 22 through 25. (Mariah Karis)



CONTRIBUTED | BIG SKY FILM FEST

'NUISANCE BEAR'

If you love cinematic shots of polar bears that will make your jaw drop, then Jack Weisman's film "Nuisance Bear" is for you. In the short documentary, Weisman's directing debut, polar bears are seen without narration or music in the small, bear-ridden town of Churchill, Manitoba. The film has a breathtaking series of shots that show the relationship between bears and humans. The Canada-based cinematographer used film from over six years of shooting. "It just seemed like a ripe opportunity to just put the camera at the bears' perspective and not try to say too much," Weisman said. Perhaps the most impactful shot of the film was when Weisman used his old Forerunner to follow a polar bear out of the wild tundra and into a group of tourists watching intently through iPhones. Not only was this shot created with a rig on the Forerunner, but most of the shots from the short documentary were produced with the vehicle Weisman drove over 1,000 miles to Churchill. The film also portrays the relationship between polar bears and wildlife officials in the remote town. At one point, a wildlife



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official drifts his truck toward a polar bear and chases the carnivorous animal until it swims out into the sea. The officials can also be seen shooting rifles in the air to scare a bear away in a separate scene. "I tried really hard to interview them and ride along with them, but they didn't go for it in the end," Weisman said. "No talking and no music is kind of a result of a lack of access in a way." Another intense part of the documentary happens when the townspeople go trick-or-treating while being guarded by officers. A bear can be seen lurking about while children beg for sweets, but it ends up heading toward the town dump instead. The film ends when a "problem bear" is tranquilized and flown away from the town to reduce its interaction with humans. "These bears are really only valuable to photographers and producers when they are in this majestic landscape," Weisman said. "The reality is that just out of frame is all chaos and humans." Available to screen at the Wilma Feb. 20 at 5:30 p.m. and Feb. 22 at 1 p.m. Also available to stream online Feb. 21 through March 3. (Jack Marshall)



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‘CAT DADDIES’

David Giovanni, a man living on the streets of New York City, relies on more than people’s kindness to survive. His savior comes in the form of his beloved cat, Lucky.

“Cat Daddies,” a film directed by Los Angeles-based producer and director Mye Hoang, tells the stories of eight different men navigating the unprecedented events of 2020 in the United States with their cats. These “cat dads” include a group of firefighters, a truck driver, a stuntman, a Bay Area tech worker, a school teacher whose cat turned into a viral meme and an Instagram influencer.

While each cat dad comes from a vastly different profession, all share a general understanding of the stigma surrounding men and cats. It’s known that dogs are “man’s best

friend,” and dogs will love practically anything. These old stereotypes can be damaging — especially in terms of stray cat adoptions. But as “Cat Daddies” attest, this man-and-cat stigma is rapidly going out of style.

Now modern masculinity is defined by men lifting cats like dumbbells, recovering strays from the streets, dressing their cats up in cowboy hats and wooing their dates with their impressive pet collection. Mostly it comes down to showing their furry friends unconditional love.

“I love everything about him,” Giovanni said.

“Cat Daddies” is a heartfelt exploration of the unexpected bond between man and cat.

Available for screening at the Wilma Feb. 27 at 3 p.m., or online streaming Feb. 28 through March 3. **(Haley Yarborough)**

‘SOARING THROUGH LIFE’

“Soaring Through Life” follows Montana State University professor Mikaela Howie and her teaching career, as well as her work as a field ecologist focusing on birds.

The film goes back and forth between shots of Howie talking about her life, and artful shots of the birds she works with — like great horned owls and bald eagles — currently being rehabilitated at the Montana State Raptor Conservation Center. Howie’s life story is told from her own memory through pictures she captured during her childhood and young life.

Jacqueline Ratliff, the film’s director and a MSU student, was looking at a photo of an owl she took in her home state of Ohio when something sparked in her for her final film project of fall 2021. She found the Montana State Raptor Conservation Center and connected with Howie.

After a series of interviews with Howie, Ratliff decided Howie was the perfect focus for

the film. She submitted it for her final project. But Ratliff didn’t know that at the end of the semester, her film was submitted by her professor to the Big Sky Film Festival.

“It was kind of funny because my cohort has a whole group chat and everybody else was saying, ‘Congrats guys, we’re so proud of each other! We’ll have to get an AirBnB and go down for the film festival,’” Ratliff said. “And I was like, ‘I’m down, but what are you guys talking about?’ because I hadn’t read the email yet.”

Ratliff wants her film to leave viewers feeling hopeful, and said she’ll be happy if someone gets some joy from her work.

“Soaring Through Life” is the first film Ratliff will show at the Big Sky Film Festival. Her work can be seen at 3:30 p.m. at the Wilma on Friday, Feb. 25. It will also be available for streaming online from Feb. 21 through March 3. **(Mariah Thomas)**



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‘THE BALCONY MOVIE’

One sidewalk in Poland. One camera. One man, standing on a balcony capturing the lives of neighbors and strangers over the course of 2 and a half years.

Paweł Łoziński, a Polish documentary director, had one goal in creating his film “The Balcony Movie.” That goal lived in the form of a question: Is it possible to meet an entire cross-section of people by putting a camera in a fixed place and not moving it? In other words, can you make a movie with one frame? The answer, it turns out, is yes.

“I managed to create a kind of secular

confessional,” Łoziński said. “They stopped under my camera, talked to me with their heads raised up. I had the impression that they were not only talking to me, but sometimes to somebody who was above us.”

Łoziński captured more than 2,000 people over 165 days of filming.

“I became a bit addicted to my everyday encounters with people,” Łoziński said. “I was inspired by people. I was interested in what they had in their minds and hearts.”

Available for screening at the Roxy on Feb. 21 at 5 p.m., or online streaming Feb. 22 through Feb. 25. **(Mariah Karis)**

‘BEING MICHELLE’

A deaf woman with autism was in prison for years without an interpreter or other accommodations. “Being Michelle” follows that woman, Michelle Ricks, as she tells her story of abuse, trauma and a system that denied her due process.

Mae Thornton Mehra, a producer of the film, hopes viewers will learn more about deaf and disabled people in the prison system.

“We really hope that this film can help all of us from all different backgrounds and communities to rethink what needs to change and how we can change that,” Mae Thornton Mehra said. “We’re really hoping to gather a large family of supporters to figure out how to do this together.”

Now free from incarceration, Ricks lives with Kim Law, a blind volunteer life coach. The film shows Ricks healing through her

bond with Law and sharing more about her past. This all occurs during a fight to have criminal charges dropped.

Ricks uses art to express herself and tell her story. Her paintings are shown throughout the film as she opens up about abuses she experienced. And all captions of Ricks’ works are in her own handwriting.

Director Atin Mehra said one of the most impactful scenes to film was a reenactment of how Ricks was cuffed in prison. The production team considered getting an actress to be cuffed to prevent further trauma for Ricks, but she chose to do that scene herself.

“She said, ‘No, this is my story,’” Atin Mehra said. “And I want to show people what happened to me.’ That’s I think the most powerful thing I heard from her.”

Available for screening at the Wilma Feb. 19 at 7:30 p.m., or online streaming Feb. 21 through 24. **(Anna Henning)**



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‘OBJECTS’

Vincent Liota was going through his desk one day when he stumbled upon a piece of garbage — a movie ticket from years ago. A cheap piece of paper for a film he otherwise had forgotten, to anyone else at least. For Liota, the ticket represented the last movie he saw with his father, who died years earlier.

“That ticket is like a hidden memory that was recovered,” Liota said. “So I kept it, because it reminds me of that time, which I now remember very clearly. I don’t know if I would, if I hadn’t found the ticket.”

From there, Liota started noticing a tendency in people. He saw how everyone has strange little knick-knacks that to anyone else would be nothing but trash. Liota spent eight years collecting, filming and editing “Objects,” a documentary about people and the things they love.

“It was a personal project,” Liota said. “Part of me was like, ‘Nobody really wants to fund a movie about objects,’ right? It sounds unim-

portant or uninteresting or unreliable. But I found it to be the opposite. Everybody somehow relates to this on some level, everywhere in the world.”

While “Objects” tells a multitude of stories, there are three at its core. One man still has an egg made of sugar given to him at a birthday party when he was a child. Another, a handful of grass from a teenage date in Central Park. One woman collects clothes from a long-dead actress that she buys on eBay. Through these individuals, Liota highlights an important part of being human.

“I think people often mix up materialism and sentimentality,” he said. “They conflate them. They think ‘Oh, you’re being materialistic!’ ... But certain things, certain objects have a distinguishing history. That’s why one item is different from another, because of this history that you shared with it.”

Watch “Objects” at the Zootown Arts Community Center on Feb. 20 at 2:30 p.m. or for online streaming Feb. 21 through 24. **(Josh Moyar)**



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‘INTO LIGHT’

At age three, the typical developmental milestones of a child include the ability to say their age and name, answer simple questions and understand the concept of counting. But the mother starring in the film “Into Light” grapples with the reality of her three-year-old reaching an unexpected milestone: transitioning gender.

Director Sheona McDonald’s documentary, shot in the isolated Canadian town Yellowknife, follows a single mother’s journey to navigate and protect her child, who is questioning and transitioning gender in a world full of doubt and disbelief.

Wide snowy shots and intimate moments with the mother and child’s face just out of frame bring the viewers through a voice-over narrative of the journey to raise a child as the person they want to be.

It started with a sparkly dress, and then hair clips. The child loved the way it felt to dress and be who they felt comfortable being. More and more, the mother’s timid and shy son became her bright and happy daughter.

It was never a question of whether this mother

would accept her daughter for who she was. The real hardship came as the mother had to learn to grieve the loss of her son, but to also grieve the lost moments where her daughter wasn’t her authentic self.

“I think it’s for people who are curious or who are interested in the language and pronouns and conversations that we’re having and why we’re having them and why this is important right now,” McDonald said. “I interviewed the little girl who’s in it, and every time I would ask her, ‘What do you think we’re trying to say?’ she would just say, ‘Parents just need to let their kids be who they are on the inside.’ So it’s simple.”

The documentary captures what it means to love someone so deeply that all the hardship and difficulty surrounding them falls to the side. A mother’s love knows no limits, and to this mother, her child’s innocent and desperate need to be her authentic self is no exception.

Available for screening at the Roxy on Feb. 24 at 4:00 p.m., and at the Zootown Arts Community Center on Feb. 26 at 5:00 p.m. It will also be available for streaming online Feb. 21 through March 3. **(Clarise Larson)**

‘NICE TO MEET YOU ALL’

The short film directed by Guen Murroni captures the life and personality of one woman, named Bri, living with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), and her 67 personalities. Viewers learn about how her different personalities interact with one another and how this affects her everyday life.

DID is an often stigmatized mental disorder. It was formerly called multiple personality disorder, but has been recently updated. The disorder is a severe form of dissociation, which produces a lack of connection in a person’s thoughts, memories, feelings, actions or sense of identity.

DID does not mean someone is insane or that they are broken. Pop culture movies like “Split,” “Identity” and “Glass” show DID as something to be scared of, but the documentary “Nice to Meet You All” depicts the truth of

the disorder behind those false narratives.

Throughout the 12-minute film, viewers learn about Bri’s upbringing as a child survivor of sex trafficking and how her trauma triggered her disorder. The film discusses how often people develop DID after highly traumatic events, which can lead to the brain “breaking” into different personalities to protect the individual.

The film’s visuals are lovely. Throughout, the director uses the repetition of Bri’s body, but in each chair, there are different personalities of her’s showing themselves. In addition, there are scenes where five to 20 of her personalities are cut together, allowing the viewer to gain a complete visual understanding.

The film premieres on Saturday, Feb. 19 at 2:45 p.m. at the Wilma or Feb. 24 at 3:15 p.m. Also available for online streaming Feb. 21 through March 3. **(Nancy Beston)**



CONTRIBUTED | BIG SKY FILM FEST

‘TIGRE GENTE’

In Bolivia’s Madidi National Park, misty jungles hide one of nature’s most powerful creatures — the jaguar. Unfortunately poachers have decimated the jaguar population, as is the story for many of the world’s most unusual species.

Elizabeth Unger was attending college in Bolivia when the story of the Madidi jaguars landed on her desk. The big cats were being slaughtered in large numbers to send their pelts, bones and teeth to the Chinese market, where some outlawed traditional medicine rituals still affect wildlife populations. Unger spent six years creating the documentary “Tigre Gente” to share the story.

The wildlife true-crime documentary gives the viewer two perspectives: one of a Bolivian park ranger and the other of a Chinese journalist, in order to examine the illegal industry from two different sides of the world.

“Docs in this genre are always helmed by middle-aged men,” Unger said. “The plot is always ‘Get the bad guy,’ and the Chinese point of view is usually the villain. I’m trying to depict the mentality of the market, and bridge that cultural gap. Not many wildlife crime docs have done that.”

Available to screen at the Roxy Feb. 21 at 2:30 p.m. or at the Wilma Feb. 25 at 9 p.m. Also available for streaming online Feb. 22 through 25. **(Josh Moyer)**

‘RELATIVE’

The movie “Relative,” directed by Tracey Arcabasso Smith, follows her own struggles to break the generational trauma cycle surrounding sexual abuse.

In 2009, Smith was creating a documentary about an animal hospice in upstate New York. Three months into the process, she realized she was creating the film to avoid things in her life she was intentionally ignoring. She decided to turn the camera on herself. That’s how the film “Relative” came to exist.

In her life, her family passed down many things, including the trend of staying silent about sexual abuse.

In the 74-minute film, Smith talks to various family members who have faced the same struggles. When Smith was younger, a cousin — unnamed in the movie — made multiple sexual advances. After her mom discovers a letter detailing the childhood sexual abuse,

Smith finds she is not the only one in her family who’s suffered sexual trauma.

Interviews throughout the film with her grandma, mom and aunts allow viewers to discover how and why the generational trauma has been ignored within their family. Smith asks her family members difficult questions and learns why they stayed silent.

The film is a combination of interviews from family members, vintage footage of her family and some artistic recreations of events. Although this film deals with sensitive subject matter relating to sexual abuse, it does so with respect and hope. There are no detailed graphic renditions of events discussed.

“Relative” is a powerful film that forces the viewer to examine the problems of a seemingly perfect family.

Available for screening at the Roxy Feb 24 at 6:15 p.m., or Feb. 26 at 1 p.m. It will also be available for streaming online Feb. 25 through 28. **(Nancy Beston)**



CONTRIBUTED | BIG SKY FILM FEST

‘ANONYMOUS SISTER’

“Anonymous Sister” is a first-person view of a family slipping into drug addiction and struggling to come to terms with being addicted to prescriptions given by their doctors.

The documentary is intimate and vulnerable, but connects the Boyle family’s internal struggle with the wider fallout of the opioid epidemic, using expert interviews and news footage.

“I always look for the narrative touch points that I think people are going to connect with,” said Jamie Boyle, the film’s director. “We had two different realities of this film and the home movies were one of the biggest undertakings because there was so much.”

The film opens in 1996 and welcomes you to a simple family with normal concerns, but as time progresses, the viewer sees archival footage and legal discussions of how Purdue Pharma falsely marketed opioid painkillers to millions of Americans. This happens while

watching the filmmaker’s mother and older sister consistently get over-prescribed the same medications and seeing how that over-prescription affects their daily lives.

Boyle, a two-time Emmy nominated documentarian, shares home video and film projects from high school, which capture her family in various states of decline throughout their worst years. The footage is interlaced with retrospective interviews after recovery.

“It felt really, really terrifying because it was happening at every level of their medical care, and so I think in that moment, I knew I had to document it somehow,” Boyle said. “But I had no idea what to do with it after that.”

“Anonymous Sister” is playing at the Roxy on Feb. 21 at 7:45 p.m. Boyle said she’s partnered with Open Aid Alliance and the Missouri Prescription Drug Task Force to provide a Narcan training and handout at the screening. The film will also be available to stream online from Feb. 22 through 25. **(Asa Metcalfe)**



CONTRIBUTED | BIG SKY FILM FEST

‘THIS LAND’

Election Day 2020 was a day filled with tension as voters waited to see if Donald Trump or Joe Biden would win the presidential election. “This Land” shows how the day went for people across the country.

Director Matthew Palmer described the film as “a snapshot of daily life in America that just so happens to take place on Election Day.” In a collaborative project, filmmakers across all 50 states documented people throughout the day. The film includes people of different political affiliations, ages, races, backgrounds and cultures.

The film shows a variety of perspectives by putting contrasting opinions close together. It also shows people with similar experiences.

One of Palmer’s favorite moments from the film was when parents from two different places help their kids get ready for bed with the same lullaby.

Palmer hopes people do not use this film to justify their political position. Instead, he wants viewers to gain a greater sense of understanding in a divided time.

“[Decisions] are informed by surrounding and upbringing and that’s not an excuse for hateful language or actions,” Palmer said. “But I think it’s a starting point to realize where opinions are formed and that people are complicated and contradictory.”

Available for screening at the Wilma Feb. 22 at 8:15 p.m. or for online streaming Feb. 23 through 26. **(Anna Henning)**



CONTRIBUTED | BIG SKY FILM FEST

UM launches softball season with opening banquet

HOLLY MALKOWSKI
holly.malkowski@umontana.edu

The Montana Grizzlies softball team sold 400 tickets to its annual “Meet the Team” fundraising dinner before kicking off its spring season with two wins and two losses.

The banquet, held in the University Center ballroom on Jan. 28, sold tickets for kids and adults, along with a silent auction, raffles, a social hour and dinner.

“It’s such an awesome evening for our fans to interact with our players,” Head Coach Melanie Meuchel said. “The players can always name the people at their table and they build relationships. It just makes Griz Nation so special.”

The program includes an introduction of the team, a fall season slideshow and an introduction to the spring season. The centerpieces of the tables are pictures of the players, and each plate is decorated with a photo of the team.

“When [the community] goes to a game it’s more exciting because you’re in it, you know them, you’ve been meeting with that person,” UM softball academic advisor Jen Zellmer-Cuaresma said. “It’s very personable here at the banquet.”

This year, the team feels like it has something to prove.

UM went 19-30 overall with a 8-10 conference mark in 2021. The Griz started to figure out a playing style and made an end-of-season run that not many expected, but the season ended with a tough 6-7 walk-off loss to Southern Utah in the Big Sky Conference tournament.

“I think we came up a little shorter than we wanted, and it just has driven our players on a daily basis,” Meuchel said.

The 2022 season started the second weekend in February with the Nor Cal Kickoff tournament in California, where the Grizzlies faced San Jose State, Saint Mary’s, UC Davis and Santa Clara. UM went 2-2 in the tournament with wins over San Jose and St. Mary’s.

The team will continue with tournaments in Texas, Hawaii and Arizona before coming back to Missoula to kick off its regular season on March 10. The banquet raises money so the team is able to take these trips and compete around the country.

“This season, I’m most excited to travel with my best friends, and to compete with them,” junior outfielder Jaxie Klucewich said. Many of the players said they’re most excited to play in Hawaii.

The team is returning all but one of its starters in the field for this season, but will have turnover in its pitching roster. UM

lost starting pitcher Tristin Achenbach, but brought transfer Maggie Joseph from California and freshman Dana Butterfield. Sophomore Allie Brock, who saw the field a few times last year, will also be in rotation.

Brock took the mound in UM’s win over San Jose State while Brock and Joseph split time in UM’s victory over Saint Marys.

UM brought back fifth-year first baseman Cami Sellers, who was named first-team all-Big Sky conference last season. All-region shortstop Maygen McGrath also returned.

Sellers roped a double in the second inning against Saint Mary’s that helped propel UM into a scoring outburst, which ended with 11 runs on the board.

Montana was ranked fifth out of seven teams in the Big Sky in the preseason poll, just behind Southern Utah. The Grizzlies finished last season tied for third in the conference.

The Griz will take on North Texas on Feb. 19 as a part of the Tracy Beard College Classic and will then take on Nevada and Colorado State in the following days.



TOP: The podium is set for the softball banquet fundraiser to begin at the University Center Ballroom. **NATE SANCHEZ | MONTANA KAIMIN**



BOTTOM: Tables and goodie bags are set at the annual softball banquet in the University Center ballroom, Jan. 28. Every year the University softball team hosts a “Meet the Team” dinner fundraiser for the upcoming season. **NATE SANCHEZ | MONTANA KAIMIN**

Meet UM basketball’s silent killer, Brandon Whitney

JACK MARSHALL
jack.marshall@umontana.edu

Montana sophomore point guard Brandon Whitney has a tattoo on his right arm of him and his dad looking at a basketball hoop. On his opposite arm, there is a tattoo for his mom.

“It says ‘You pushed me to be my best and put my worries to rest. I love you mom,’” he said.

Whitney also has his last name stitched over four roses on his right arm, one bud for each of his family members. He has a tattoo for his sister on the outside of his right arm. Above the roses, he has his home area code and a cross on his shoulder to finish out a sleeve.

“I’m just blessed to have the opportunity to do this and play basketball,” Whitney said. “This is to always remind me that the Lord is with me.”

While he proudly shows off his family and inspirations via body art, Whitney is actually a very soft-spoken player on the court. He rarely reacts to calls by referees and doesn’t seem to talk trash.

The Mission Hills, California native has had a phenomenal year for the UM basketball team thanks to his stellar perimeter defense and scoring outbursts. In a recent game against Northern Arizona, Whitney shut down NAU star guard Jalen Cone.

“He’s a dog, man,” Cone said. “I’m really impressed. [It’s] always fun playing against someone who competes like that.”

Cone sits at second in the Big Sky Conference in points-per-game, despite only making one of his eight 3-point attempts against UM. Though Whitney guarded Cone on defense, NAU put a 6-foot-8 forward on the 6-foot-1 UM guard while he handled the ball offensively.

“It’s a little challenge because they’re longer and taller than me, but I just got to get to my spots,” Whitney, who led the team in scoring with 25 points, said. “Once I get to my spots then I feel like I could score it.”

Whitney’s 25-point total was his second highest of the year, behind his 30-point game against North Dakota.

“I thought he did a phenomenal job,” UM Head Coach Travis DeCuire said. “He’s pretty good at playing through contact.”

Whitney attributes his durability to a middle school basketball coach who would take players out very quickly if they didn’t



Montana’s Brandon Whitney drives past Northern Arizona’s Isaiah Lewis during a conference match at Dahlberg Arena Feb. 10. Whitney, who has been a key player as the Griz approach tournament time, was Montana’s leading scorer for the night with 25 points. **MADDIE CRANDALL | MONTANA KAIMIN**

play well. Because of this, Whitney began to play tough defense, which he still takes pride in.

Whitney graduated from Bishop Alemany High School before attending UM. He started for the Griz as a true freshman in the 2021 season, which was shortened by COVID-19, and averaged over 10 points per game. He was also named the team’s top defensive player that season.

In 2022, he continued to score more than 10 points a game, but with a better shooting percentage, more blocks and fewer turnovers.

After scoring double digits in only four of his first 15 games this season, the guard now is on an eight-game streak in double digits while blanketing opposing guards.

The University of Idaho’s Mikey Dixon led the Big Sky Conference in points-per-

game before Whitney held him scoreless on six shots. Whitney also had good performances against Eastern Washington star Steele Venters and Southern Utah star John Knight III in a stretch of games where he has consistently guarded the opposing team’s best players. During the NAU game, Whitney remembered Cone jokingly asked him to “just leave me alone” while Whitney was locking him down.

Because of his defensive dominance, the underclassman guard is putting together a strong case for Big Sky Defensive Player of the Year.

Despite Whitney’s run of stellar defensive performances, the UM men’s basketball team has at times struggled, losing to both Idaho State and Northern Arizona.

“We’ve dropped a couple of games,” Whitney said. “We can’t get outplayed.”

UM has a record of 17-9 with a conference mark of 10-5. The Griz take on Idaho on Feb. 17 in Moscow, Idaho.

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Can I get an attitude check?

NANCY BESTON

nancy.beston@umontana.edu

"Fuck you, [enter expletive word here]."

These were the phrases chanted during the drag show at the University Center Ballroom on Friday. Four times during the show, which was sponsored by the Women's Resource Center and the Lambda alliance, drag performer Christina Drake demanded an attitude check from the crowd.

When a performer orders an attitude check the crowd goes wild and responds with a "fuck you!" and another profane word.

Although there was a lot of cursing, the event was open to anyone over the age of 16. Drag performers from all over Montana came together to fundraise for the Montana Two Spirit Society. The society's mission is to advocate and educate the Montana LGBTQ+ community and the public about Two Spirit issues, histories and traditions by promoting health, wellness and spiritual well-being.

The Montana Two Spirit Society is one of the foundations that helps distribute AIDS information and access to other organizations that will help pay for medicine and treatment to those who need them around the state.

Queen Drake, an invited professional drag performer, is a member of the LGBTQ+ community who is open about being HIV positive. During the show they said it's important to be tested regularly and "if someone tells you they're positive, treat them kindly because they are people, too."

The performers were not limited to professionals. Four UM students also performed drag for the first time at the show.

"I learned it's okay to be yourself, no matter how you are," UM student Hot Pocket, also known as Owen Baty, said. "It's just so much more fun to get out there because everyone else is doing it and everyone in the audience is cheering and it feels good to be yourself."

The event raised more than \$1,700 from entrance donations and had around 250 people in attendance.



ABOVE: Volunteers were invited to come on stage for a game of "Chicken Dance" between performances.

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RIGHT: Before the show began, Vanilla Wafer, also known as Waffles, sits in the front of a wig train. Waffles got their nickname at a drag show where the announcer was so drunk they announced them as Waffles instead of Vanilla Wafer.

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LEFT: Diana Bourgeois is the president of the Imperial Sovereign Court of the State of Montana, a drag performance group that aims to promote social tolerance for the LGBTQ+ community. Members from the group also acted as mentors to students who performed for the event.

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LEFT: Elani Borhegyi, also known by their drag name, Jackie Rosebutch, whips out a dildo from their corset and uses it as a microphone as they perform at the Drag Show at the University Center, Feb. 11. Rosebutch collected signatures on a pink dildo of all the drag kings, queens and goddesses before the show started.

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BELOW: Tip buckets were placed around the stage during performances for the crowd to put cash in. All proceeds from tips and door donations went to the Montana Two Spirit Society.

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