



SKY HIGH

Housing
costs rise as
many educators
feel priced out of
Montana



6 AI CABS

12 MUSIC ON THE STREETS

15 THE GRASS IS ALWAYS GREENER

September 24, 2026 | Volume 129 | Issue No. 4

Kiosk



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."

POLITICAL CARTOON



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KAIMIN KOMICS: #4 ALWAYS BLAME THE CYCLIST



ALYSSA JO MURNION | CARTOONIST

Alyssa Jo Murnion signature

A letter to the fallible 20-something

No one is ever going to tell you how exhausting it is to make a change, just like how no one is going to tell you that it's okay to struggle toward changing.

I sat down Sunday to write an editorial on my experience after a month of sobriety, but on Saturday night, in a rash decision after what felt like the longest shift of my life, I broke it. And yes, while I may have spent much of my morning beating myself up, I came to a new realization.

If you'd told me in May that I was able to stop drinking for over a month, spend nights out with friends dead sober and never feel unsupported, I wouldn't have believed you.

At this age, especially in academia, it can feel like you're expected to have it all figured out. You'll move the goalposts, set incredible expectations for yourself, but whether you like it or not, you're going to trip up. You can beat yourself to hell and back about it, or you can see how much progress you made and use it to make even more.

I may have failed my long-term goal, and though I'm not sure when, I can take

it in stride that I did it before and can do it again. Maybe for even longer.

I firmly believe that every experience and every mistake shapes us into the people we're meant to be. And yes, you're going to make more mistakes than you can imagine. But whatever your setback may be — a failed assignment, a drunken mistake, a broken heart — take a quick look back, then look ahead, take action and keep walking. Because where else is there to go?

For the rest of your life you'll have setbacks, and you'll feel stuck, like nothing's ever going to change. But as exhausting as it may be, as many times as you'll have to try again, you'll look up and realize you made it. As long as you're alive, you can change anything.

- Aidan Graham, arts & culture editor

Like it? Hate it? Let us know.

Email us your opinions at
henry.doellinger@umontana.edu

Feature photo & Editorial

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

Edited by Margie E. Burke

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:

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

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

Bear busking



Grayson Baker, 19, busks with his guitar on Sept. 18 by the University of Montana's Griz Statue. MARS JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN

In local news...

JACK SNOW | NEWS EDITOR
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ALLEGED JEWEL THIEF PLEADS NOT GUILTY

A woman pleaded not guilty on Monday to stealing a \$28,550 diamond from Southgate Mall in 2022.

Marioara Munteanu, who has been accused of thefts from jewelry stores in multiple countries, appeared in Missoula County District Court for arraignment on a charge of felony theft, according to the Missoulian.

Charging documents stated that Riddle's Jewelry in Southgate Mall reported two unknown people stealing the diamond on May 25, 2022.

A store manager said that the theft took place when a man and woman entered the store together posing as shoppers and asked to look at the diamond, which was locked in a clear case.

The man gave the manager \$10,000 in cash, which she counted while the diamond rested on a pillow above the case. The two suspects said that they would leave to get the remaining money and return in 10 minutes, but video surveillance footage appeared to show the woman putting the diamond into her purse while the man distracted a store employee. Riddle's employees noticed that the stone was missing after the pair left.

Munteanu was later identified as the suspect when Missoula police learned through a border patrol agent that she had been flagged by a San Diego sergeant. The border patrol agent stated that Munteanu was a suspect in multiple other jewelry thefts around the world.

She is now being held in the Missoula County jail where her bail is set at \$25,000, and her next appearance is an omnibus hearing on Dec. 10.

AI CAMPAIGN ADS RAISE FREEDOM OF SPEECH ISSUES

A U.S. District of Montana judge has blocked Montana officials from policing political campaign ads generated by artificial intelligence due to concerns over freedom of speech.

Judge Susan Watters issued a Sept. 16 order to stop Montana's Commissioner of Political Practices and attorney general from policing the AI-generated ads of Republican state legislator Dan Bartel and the Accountability in State Government PAC.

Montana law prohibits the use of AI to misrepresent a candidate in campaign ads, but the order allows Bartel and the Accountability in State Government PAC to use their planned advertisements, some of which are AI generated, according to Montana Free Press.

One such ad is a series of unreleased mailers from the court filings, which depict Democratic legislator Mary Ann Dunwell of Helena as a pickpocket stealing a cowboy's wallet.

Bartel and the PAC's AI-generated ads became a topic of conversation in the spring, when they targeted other candidates during the Republican primaries by portraying them waving pride flags and supporting diversity, equity and inclusion policies. Jennifer Carlson, one of the candidates, filed a complaint about the ads with the Commissioner of Political Practices.

This incident was brought up by Watters, who ruled that "a credible threat of enforcement exists in the form of the multiple private complaints, the warning letter from Commissioner Gallus and the lack of government disavowal." The order aims to block that enforcement on the basis of free speech.

Commissioner of Political Practices Chris Gallus testified that the ads were satire, a form of critique exempt from Montana's AI law.

Matt Monforton, an attorney representing Barton and Accountability in State Government stated that the case is a straightforward defense of freedom of speech. He also argued that legal requirements for ads to disclose AI content are meant to discredit the message of the ad. "The whole point of the disclaimer requirement is to make sure that the juice isn't worth the squeeze for a candidate who wants to use AI," Monforton told the Montana Free Press.



This week on the Kaimin Cast ...

Beginning in 2025, the University of Montana's Girls Rock! club has opened up a space for women to climb together.

Ushering an influx of female students into the rock climbing community, Girls Rock! helps to make the sport accessible to all, creating memories along the way. Meeting twice weekly — once for indoor climbing and once for outdoor — this club welcomes climbers from all skill levels. From teaching each other to tie knots to out of town climbing trips, this community has created a new, welcoming space for female climbers on campus.

"The club started as a couple friends getting together and being like, 'Hey, we should have more women climbing together more often and maybe have a designated time for that,' and now it's this big club that we have," club president Alpine Griffin said.

Check out our latest podcast, "Women's Climbing Club Rocks UM," by heading to our website at montanakaimin.com or wherever you find your podcasts.

- Miller Sebo,
audio reporter



New Kaimin Cast
episode out this
week. Stay tuned.
Scan for the latest



THREE NEWS OUTLETS SUE OVER WHITE HOUSE BAN

CNN, Politico and MS NOW sued President Donald Trump's administration on Monday after being blocked from the White House, calling the ban a "blatant violation" of the First Amendment.

The ban began over the weekend and represents a historic escalation of Trump's restrictions imposed on news outlets he deems unfair, according to the Associated Press.

In their lawsuit, the outlets argued that the constitution "does not allow a president or any other government official to deprive the press of their First Amendment rights and liberty and property interests with no notice or process based solely on his dislike of the content of their reporting."

The three organizations filed the suit jointly just two days after their reporters were barred from the White House and had their entry badges disabled.

A number of other outlets, including The Washington Post and The New York Times, refused to publish photos of any presidential events on Monday in solidarity.

FAT BEAR WEEK RETURNS

Fat Bear Week, the annual celebration of Katmai National Park's brown bears and their impressive weight, has begun, and features 16 of the large ursids.

The event began in 2014 as a one-day celebration, but has since grown into an international phenomenon where the public can vote for their favorite bear online, according to Alaska Public Media. Last year garnered 1.7 million votes, and this year's polls are now open for people to choose which bear should be the champion of the week.

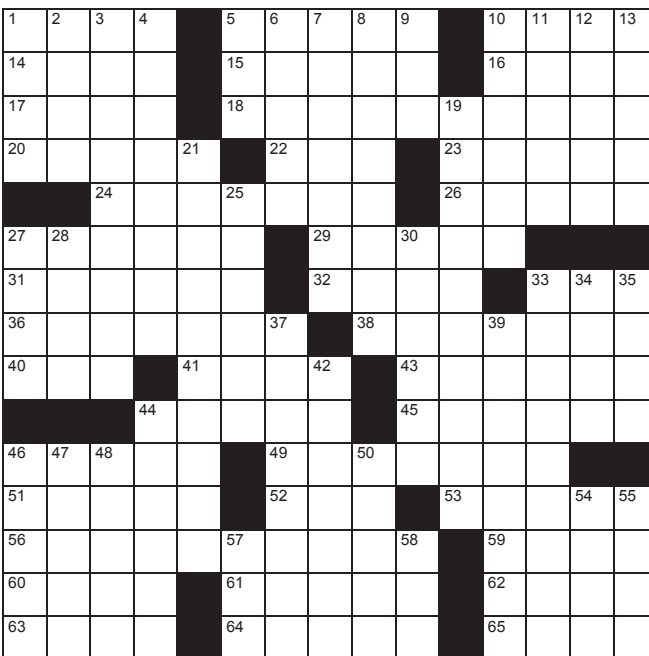
Officials have described this year's sockeye salmon run as larger than usual, good news for a bulking bear preparing for hibernation.

"There is no such thing as too fat of a bear," Katmai park ranger Sarah Bruce told Alaska Public Media. "The fatter a bear is, the healthier that bear is."

Fat Bear Week has gained much of its following on social media, where fans can discuss and post about the bears.

Landin Norman is the administrator of a 20,000 member Facebook group dedicated to the competition, which he said brings people together and serves as a respite from the stress of everyday life.

"I love just the community aspect of it," he told Alaska Public Media. "I love being able to make new friends."



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ACROSS

- 1 Male deer
5 Hose shade
10 Czech or Serb
14 Entice
15 "Li'l" comics guy
16 "La Boheme" heroine
17 Tues., for Tuesday
18 Accounts
20 "Missing You" singer John
22 It may follow a dot
23 Colleague of Ketanji
24 Slow flow
26 Imparts
27 David of "CSI: Miami"
29 Twelfth Hebrew letter
31 Dump-truck filler
32 Dance move
33 Resort
36 Rabbit ears
38 Addict's accomplice
40 Wallace of "E.T."
41 Barnyard cacklers
43 Unbending
44 Raccoon's kin
45 Stew pieces
46 Drink accessory
49 Eager, so to speak
51 Chicago airport
52 Batman and Robin, e.g.
53 Labor leader Chavez
56 MDF, for one
59 Drive-____
- 60 Bulb flower
61 Aquatic mammal
62 Burial chamber
63 Tallies
64 Michelob and Molson, e.g.
65 Online crafts shop
- 13 Some charge cards
19 Blessed with ESP
21 1950s president
25 Eye part
27 Iron follower
28 Top-notch
30 Upstanding guy
33 Goliath's undoing
34 Film legend Gregory
35 Word after martial or performing
37 Poison remedy
39 Clairor choice
42 Put into place
44 Affectionate touch
46 Vergara of "Modern Family"
47 Bronze finish?
48 Fanatical
50 Kitchen gadget
54 Battle needs
55 Like Dorothy's slippers
57 Go up and down
58 E.R. workers

DOWN

- 1 Cole ____
2 Orchestral heavyweight
3 Act as a go-between
4 Writer Stein
5 Go for the bronze?
6 Taken ____
7 Opens, as a sleeping bag
8 Spread
9 Memorable time
10 Lit up the room, maybe
11 Add pep to, with "up"
12 Change, as a bill

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

WWE-o-scope

AIDAN GRAHAM | ARTS & CULTURE EDITOR

AND HANNAH BENITEZ | SPORTS EDITOR

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The world of professional wrestling is one as sanctimonious to this country as baseball and apple pie (meaning, of course, originating in Europe). Among the spotlights and spandex, it's easy to think about who we might be. Will you be a good guy turned evil, aka a heel, or a babyface, who the fans adore? Are you the high flyer, bouncing from the ropes, or the brawler, destroying everything and everyone in your path? Ever wondered what you'd be like in the totally real world of World Wrestling Entertainment? THIS ONE'S FOR THE WRESTLING FANS: ARE YOU READY TO RUMBLE?

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT.

22): Whispers accompany the very speaking of your name. No one wants to be on your bad side. Your unpredictable reputation in conflict has given you such a jarring presence. It might as well be the sound of a bell, much like The Undertaker.

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21):

You're an authority-defying rebel, and you'll put your enemies to bed! You stand your ground no matter the cost, committing the Stone Cold Stunner and demand a respect no amount of flashiness could buy. You're Stone Cold Steve Austin.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21): On the outside, you're an unstoppable force and there's no object you'll find unmovable, but you've got a gentle interior self. It's okay to show it sometimes! You're Brock Lesnar.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): You're a cerebral assassin, a devastating mental force. Your battle in and out of the ring is just as much about words as it is about brute force. You're Triple H!

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18): Aquarius, you have a tough past. While you may have moved toward a gentler life, there's still a cold, calculated killer

inside you. People better watch their backs, or else they'll get the RKO! You're Randy Orton!

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20): Pisces, you started out as a real heel, but you've come so far! While recognizing your roots, you're always trying new paths. However, you're so often lost in yourself. To others, you might as well be invisible, almost like your name is John Cena!

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19): Stylish

as ever, with an almost villainous charm, you're always the center of attention, and you know and love it. However, your high self-image means criticism will likely cause you to karate-chop your opponents into next week. You're Charlotte Flair!

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20):

You're a no-nonsense killer, Taurus. You enter a room with an intensity that would make the strongest man faint. We'll make sure to stay on your good side. You're Samoa Joe!

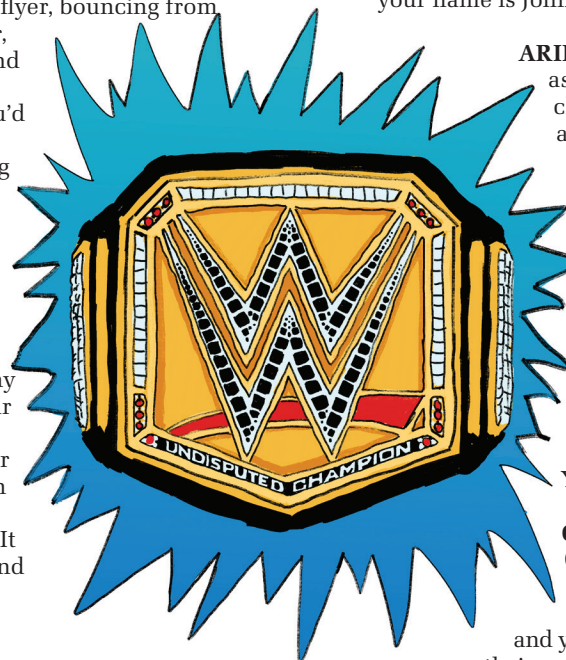
GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20):

Gemini, you can't be trusted. Everyone sees under that cocky, heroic exterior, 2000s good looks and your tendency for betrayal. But with their ones in the sky, fans can't help but to join the family, but that heel turn is right around the corner. You're Roman Reigns!

CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22): Cancer, you're the mommy of WWE. Breaking into the spotlight whenever someone needs to be put in their place. You'll be the demon in everyone's dreams as you force them into the riptide. You're the Aussie Rhea Ripley.

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): You've got an ego and drive that won't quit, Leo. Charismatic and flashy, you're an inspiration who really knows how to work a crowd and how to pile-drive your enemies. Hell yeah, brother, you're Hulk Hogan!

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): You've got a showboating personality and a tendency to break hearts. While polarizing now, we're sure your redemption is coming soon. You're such a Shawn Michaels.



ALYSSA JO MURNION | CARTOONIST

CubCloud AI applies to host Montana's first fleet of Tesla Cybercabs

JOCELYN HOOD | NEWS REPORTER

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CubCloud AI applied to host Montana's first fleet of Tesla Cybercabs in early September, raising questions about passenger safety in autonomous vehicles.

CubCloud AI is a Missoula-based company that creates custom artificial intelligence platforms for businesses that don't want to give their information to large companies. Cybercabs are self-driving vehicles powered by AI with no steering wheel, brake or gas pedal. The vehicles can fit two passengers. They are currently only available for public rides in Austin, Texas.

"Autonomous mobility could really be a game changer," CubCloud CEO and founder Joshua Rhines said.

Rhines is a University of Montana alum who developed commercial real estate and produced music before founding CubCloud AI last October. He said that it's likely their application to Tesla will be accepted, and they will use the cars internally at first to pick up employees and clients. Then, they will start operating around Missoula, calling them CubCabs and looking for partners in other markets, like libraries, parking garages and airports.

"The general assumption is they'll probably roll it out over the next six to 12 months in major markets, and then maybe in 12 to 18 months we'll probably get a crack at it," Rhines said. "It's all kind of anybody's guess at this point."

With no driver, Cybercabs run via cameras on the exterior of the car. According to Tesla's website, passengers can touch "Pull Over" on the touchscreen, request that the cab pull over on the mobile app or press a "STOP" button between the dome lights. Passengers can also pull firmly up on the door lever to "stop in lane as soon as safely possible."

Tesla's website includes a warning about these features.

"Do not use these methods to end a trip unless there is an immediate danger. Improperly ending a trip can cause an accident and put passengers at risk of extreme bodily harm or even death," the



Drew Surratt's Tesla Model Y displays views from its cameras and sensors as it parks in Missoula on Sept. 14. Cybercabs will feature similar screens and technology.

JOCELYN HOOD | MONTANA KAIMIN

website states.

One goal of autonomous vehicles is to prevent accidents. Issues from driving impaired, tired, distracted or during a medical emergency are not things that can happen in a driverless car. Some UM students said they would feel unsafe regardless.

"Why would you get on a highway at 80 miles an hour and just let things drive you?" said Eliza Anthony, a 19-year-old sophomore and human biology and biomedical sciences major from Elko, Nevada. "You need to be able to have that reaction if something goes out."

Daria Waters, an 18-year-old sophomore and pre-med major from

Calgary, Alberta, said that she would feel more comfortable having a human driver than an AI one, even though as a woman, she said she can feel unsafe with strangers.

"I would feel more safe with a human because a human can be held liable for things that happen to me," Waters said.

Recently, driving around Missoula in his Tesla Model Y in fully autonomous mode, Drew Surratt, the chief community officer for CubCloud AI, sat in the driver's seat and watched as his car unexpectedly went an extra lap around a parking lot.

"That was funny," he said. "It just had a hallucination or something. It's like 'How

do I get out of here?'"

There is currently little legislation in Montana regarding driverless vehicles. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, no states have legislation defining who is liable for incidents with self-driving cars.

Rhines called liability an "interesting gray area" if an accident or traffic violation is the fault of a fully autonomous car, but he said that his company would follow the law.

Surratt said that he was pulled over once while his Tesla Model Y was driving itself because it was going 35 mph in a 25 mph zone. He was let off with a warning.

Surratt said that another benefit of

taking a Cybercab is the cost. He said they would cost about 30 cents per mile, roughly a third of the price of other rideshare options. There also would be no tip to pay.

These changes are possible because there is no human driver. Waters, the sophomore pre-med major, said she was concerned about Cybercabs creating a loss of jobs.

"I think we need more public transportation with bigger vehicles," Waters said, adding that the transportation sector provides much-needed jobs in Missoula.

Surratt said he thinks having more Cybercabs available will benefit the job market.

"Who's going to be managing these cars? Well, those are jobs right there that will be created," he said. "I feel like the market will adjust accordingly to create new opportunities and new jobs for people as these new technologies arrive."

Anthony, the sophomore human biology and biomedical sciences major, said she worried about the environmental impacts of Cybercabs as well.

"I know gas prices are high, but the amount of time it takes for a lithium battery to break down is horrible for the environment," she said. "Businesses obviously don't give a shit."

The lithium-ion batteries that Tesla Cybercabs run on can take hundreds of years to decompose.

Another concern about Cybercabs is the potential violation of privacy because they are equipped with a camera and microphone inside the car.

Tesla's website says that cabin camera data isn't sent to Tesla unless Robotaxi ride support is initiated, it is needed for "occupancy detection" or a "safety event." The microphone data, Tesla says, is only sent to Tesla if a support request is initiated or if a "safety event" occurs.

Its website says that data is used for many purposes including "to fulfill contractual obligations with third parties, agents and affiliates."

Riley Bell, an 18-year-old freshman and history education major said he is neutral to being recorded.

"I don't see what anyone's issue with being recorded sitting in a car is," Bell said. "They're just sitting there."

Victor Valgenti, the program director of information technology and cybersecurity at Missoula College, said he is worried about large companies obtaining user data.

"The greater the surveillance, the more chance there is for abuse," Valgenti said.

Valgenti said even if users don't do

anything wrong, the data can be misused.

"Anything can be taken out of context and can be used in ways that nobody would imagine," he said.

Rhines said that the camera and microphone could be compared to a human cab driver seeing and hearing everything that users do, but that his company would be transparent about them.

"Before anyone outside our company rides, we'll publish a plain-language document that spells out what goes to Tesla, what stays here, and what we don't control," Rhines said. "If we fall short of it, people should call us on it."

Valgenti also said that although it's possible for people to hack Cybercars or blind the exterior cameras, that is less dangerous than drunk drivers, because hacking them requires technical expertise.

The future will have more robots doing human jobs, Valgenti said. He cited that a robot named Dax already takes measurements for Missoula County's Americans with Disabilities Act evaluation.

Surratt says he hopes for a future where all cars are autonomous.

"My nephew and niece, they might not have to drive cars at all if they don't want to," he said. "Traffic will be safer. People will drive safer. People will get places quicker."



CubCloud AI CEO Joshua Rhines' Cybertruck sits outside CubCloud AI's headquarters on Sept. 17. The Cybertruck has full self-driving capabilities similar to the Cybercab. **PARKER HOWERY | MONTANA KAIMIN**



Rhines, 37, works at his desk at CubCloud AI's research center and office on Sept. 14. **JOCELYN HOOD | MONTANA KAIMIN**



An apartment listing along Kent Avenue in Missoula on Sept. 21.

Housing costs rise as many educators feel priced out of Montana

Story by Colby Suko-Clark | Photos by Brayden Vallow

For one University of Montana staff member, September marks six years at the campus. However, after living in Missoula and going to college at UM, there is one day that does not get any easier — rent day.

Cale Patenaude, the assistant director of student life, belonging and recreation, used to think about his decision to hold off on buying a house during COVID-19. Now, one of his biggest worries is supporting his family.

Ten years ago, \$100 could buy up to five bags full of the most essential groceries, but in 2026, prices have increased by entire dollar amounts, or in the case of beef, doubled. What once took multiple trips to the car is now a few bags of essentials. Even in a dual-income household, saving is almost impossible.

“I am one accident from bankruptcy,” Patenaude said.

Patenaude has been with the University since September 2020. He helps run the Griz Esports teams and teaches the darts, billiards and table tennis courses in the University Center gaming den. He also serves as vice president of the staff senate. He currently lives in a two bedroom house with his wife and daughter.

“The wages are not lining up with the housing, and we are doing everything we can to make it,” Patenaude said.

THE COST OF EDUCATING

The average salary for workers at UM for 2025 was \$66,855 for the year. This year, professors at the University of Montana received a 2.5% raise, or \$1,560 to \$2,080, depending on their role, according to the collective bargaining agreement for faculty and staff.

The agreement applies to all faculty members, whether or not they are in the union. The University will take the higher amount, and there are staff members where the 2.5% is the higher amount. This puts them well below the housing increase.

The Missoula Organization of Realtors reports that between June 2025 and June 2026, the average rent increased \$51, a 3.5% increase in just one year. This makes



the wage increase for teachers a whole percentage point behind housing.

Since 2019, rent has increased by 70.35%, according to the Missoula Organization of Realtors. The change in wage has increased 19.7%, according to Open Payrolls.

“We have worked very hard over the years to increase the pay of all employees, and we recognize we need to continue to increase pay,” UM spokesperson Dave Kuntz said. The University has grown wages at an average of 3.3%, but the wages are 17.7% lower than the national average, according to Open Payrolls.

Amy Glaspey is the president of the University Faculty Association, where she often thinks about how to help teachers. The Faculty Association acts as the union for the University. Cost is one of



Assistant director of student life, belonging and recreation Cale Patenaude, bottom, and his daughter, top, enjoying the sun after school at Hawthorne playground on Sept. 18.

the problems many faculty members are facing, but she knows the union can only do so much to help.

“I wish we could do more in our role,” she said.

One of Glaspey’s jobs is to make sure the University is honoring its contracts with teachers. However, housing remains off of the contracts of most professors.

Even though the union can’t raise prices more than the state allows, Glaspey has encouraged members of the faculty to fight for their concerns.

“Being involved in campus advocacy, being active in the union and bringing concerns forward can be beneficial to the faculty on campus,” she said.

THE COVID-19 EFFECT

Many staff members continue to bring up concerns as they start to feel the squeeze of the market. Some are pointing to what they have seen since COVID-19 affected the market in 2020.

“You can’t talk about this issue without talking about COVID-19,” Patenaude said. He and his wife, who works as a firefighter, were searching for a home just as the pandemic began. Prices shot upward and stayed there as more newcomers fled densely populated cities.

“People were moving here, and they were putting up numbers way above the price of a house because they could afford to,” Patenaude said. This was sourced by realtors that saw out of staters paying

thousands of dollars above the asking price, and it prevented people from buying a home. This caused numbers to rise even more and is why some people in Missoula see this as the inciting incident of the current state of housing.

According to multiple local realtors, however, prices have been rising for almost 20 years.

“Many people are looking at it way too short sightedly,” Shelly Evans, a broker and owner of Missoula Realty, said. She points to the economic crash of 2008.

That year, the housing market crashed to extremely low levels. Renting and owning a house was not profitable. The price of housing dropped enough that the equity went negative. During the crash, the amount of homes being built slowed down. So in 2009, when the market came back, everyone was playing catch up.

“There was such a small number of new housing in Missoula, and suddenly the supply couldn’t meet the demand,” she said.

Other realtors noted that people were leaving construction for higher paying jobs when the market crashed, and didn’t return in time to rebuild. Housing was still trying to make enough homes for people when the next variable to the market hit.

“When [COVID-19] happened, everything went completely bonkers,” Evans said. Vacancy rates sank to their lowest point — 0.24% — in April 2022, according to the Missoula Organization of Realtors.

This high demand clashed with low housing supply, which pushed prices up. Many people from out of state were coming to Montana and the Missoula area to buy cheaper homes thousands of dollars above the asking price. Many people were not able to compete with those offers. As a result, Missoula started to expand vertically with condos and apartments, which were great for students, but not great for Montanans.

Missoula started to build complexes because they were easier and it was quicker to get the permits for one building than 20 of them. However, it was not what people in Missoula were looking for.

“People don’t live in Montana to live in a complex,” Evans said. She noted that many Montanans want a yard, or at least some sort of outdoor space.

But rents in the complexes have been rising, too.

The average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Missoula 10 years ago was \$623, according to the Missoula Organization of Realtors. This year, an apartment the same size costs \$1,190 a month. The rent for a three-bedroom house in 2016 was \$1,104 — now it’s \$2,293, more than double. For many renters, solo living is no longer an option.

Patenaude said Missoula has stopped being as affordable as when he first talked about living with his wife almost 15 years ago.

“We decided to live together because it was going to be cheaper for both of us, and

that isn't true anymore," Patenaude said. He then described grocery prices, which have added to the cost of living in Missoula.

The housing market has affected his colleagues in the same way as many discuss leaving the state. "I know people that have moved out of the state because it is no longer affordable," he said.

Inflation has also contributed to the higher cost of living. The question then becomes if Missoula is worth staying in as many people feel the squeeze.

"If there is an opportunity elsewhere, we may have to take it," Patenaude said. He discussed that Missoula is a great place, but that price is a factor for location. One of the reasons they have chosen Missoula is because it is safe and secure.

"It hurts saying I would walk away, but the sheer volume of groceries and the price of housing is starting to weigh down," he said.

This sentiment is shared by other staff members that have had previous questions about whether they are going to be able to stay. The problem resonates across the Treasure State, as school districts struggle to bring people in.

A STATEWIDE BATTLE

Bozeman, like most of the state, has seen a rising housing market. This has especially been difficult for K-12 education.

The Bozeman School District lacked applications because many couldn't find affordable housing. The district opened a search and asked renters to lower prices

for teachers so it could staff the schools. "We do have candidates that we're really excited about that end up not making the decision to join us based upon housing," Casey Bertram, Bozeman Public Schools superintendent, said last month.

Last legislative session, the district was approved to provide each staff member with an annual housing stipend of \$1,500 through the Student and Teacher Advancement for Results and Success Act.

The act allows for school districts to meet the TEACH standards, which include paying teachers fairly and the market seeing a spike in housing to qualify for the stipend.

The Bozeman Public Schools District sent out a statement to the Bozeman Community Housing program in the efforts to hire teachers. Missoula has also struggled with the lack of new talent coming to Montana.

This concern stems from people leaving, which creates a gap in the staffing.

"How can you bring in new talent if they can't afford to live here in the first place?" Patenaude said. This then creates a new trend where everyone in the household works, which adds more costs.

"Me and my wife live off dual income, and I couldn't imagine either one of us being able to be a stay-at-home parent with our daughter if we wanted to," Patenaude said.

Because neither can stay home, the couple has to earn more to pay for childcare.



Assistant director of student life, belonging and recreation Cale Patenaude poses at Hawthorne playground in Missoula on Sept. 18.

HOUSING STUDENTS

Even though staff at UM have seen the impact of the pricey housing market in Missoula, they are not the only ones.

"It is not uncommon to hear grumbling from students," John Nugent, the executive director of housing and community standards, said.

Nugent explained that some students and staff will always be upset about any rent raise. He also talked about the faculty that live in the University Villages.

The faculty that live in the villages have a preference for Toole, because of the specific amenities that it has compared to the other villages. However, the villages are not immune to the growth in prices. University pricing

for dorms and villages stays within the bounds of the interest rate growth since 2019, which currently sits around 40%.

The University adjusts prices for dorms and the University Villages every two years. It tries to keep prices consistent with the inflation rate. Yet, that hasn't stopped one group on campus from seeing devastating effects on the market.

"Graduate students at the University are having a hard time finding affordable housing, and we wish we could help them," Nugent said.

Last semester, graduate students at UM represented 27% of total students. Nugent noted they are seeing more market problems with this group than many others, but says that UM Housing can't help more because of balance.



Cale Patenaude sits at his desk in the University Center on Sept. 21.

YEAR	AVERAGE MISSOULA RENT (\$)	%	AVERAGE UNIVERSITY WAGES (\$)	%
2019	\$867		\$55,838	
2020	\$839	-3.3%	\$55,497	-0.6%
2021	\$1052	+25%	\$54,755	-1.3%
2022	\$1222	+16%	\$58,006	+5.9%
2023	\$1313	+7.4%	\$60,574	+4.4%
2024	\$1464	+12%	\$63,324	+4.5%
2025	\$1477	+0.8%	\$66,855	+5.5%
TOTALS	+ \$610	70.35%	+ \$11,017	19.7%

Rent information from Missoula Organization of Realtors and pay information from Open Payrolls shows changes since 2019. GRAPHIC BY LILY PETERSON | MONTANA KAIMIN

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

The University needs to hold a certain amount of balance between student groups that include incoming freshman, returning students and other subgroups. If the University overcorrected in helping graduate students, it would be taking rooms away from undergraduate students or another group.

"If this was back in 2017, we would have empty rooms, but now everything is being filled," he said. Right now, there are open rooms across campus, with three of them in Knowles. With so much concern about everything filling up, the question of whether a crash is imminent has entered many minds.

"I may not have a crystal ball, but I see the rates rising at a steady, consistent pace," Nugent said.

He hopes people will get creative and start working to find solutions to their problems. These solutions include taking on roommates or sharing the burden of housing with multiple people.

The University is not expecting a crash in the market, so its prices will rise and

hold steady after it meets in May next year to discuss new prices. Many are looking to the government.

"I hope the government does step in to help, the University can only do so much, and all the help is necessary," Patenaude said.

Government aid would restrict the maximum rent that landlords can charge. There is also the idea of programs, or loans from banks, being more accepting. He said more should be done for him and his wife.

"My wife is a firefighter. There should be more programs in place for at least them to be able to get a better deal on a house," he said.

A September poll by Montana Free Press found that 80% of Montana registered voters say the cost of living matters a lot in how they vote. As the midterms approach, many candidates have taken stances on the housing market. Yet the solutions often involve nontraditional housing options.

"There are alternatives until the housing market can come back down,"

said Jason Suchecki, a realtor in Missoula for over 25 years. These alternatives include trailer homes, modular homes, or tiny homes. He stressed that you can't beat the market without being in the market.

"You have to do whatever you can to swing it," he said.

Suchecki shared the advice he gave his son when he was buying a house: "sweat equity." This refers to buying something that is a bit of a fixer-upper and taking the time to renovate.

In a post under the Missoula subreddit page on Sept. 17, over 120 people logged in to discuss the fact that some people were leaving. Some said the difference in spending power in Michigan is unmatched by Montana, and others were complaining that there is nowhere left in Missoula that can even be considered affordable. Group feedback is one of the steps for people to speak out about the rising prices.

"This housing crisis isn't just going away, we need to work together to control the environment and keep the cost of housing in a livable price range," Suchecki

said. Working together means advocating, and people being willing to lend a hand for rent or sharing a place. The prices are not just affecting certain groups of people, they have started to affect everyone.

"We need the voices to talk about these issues," he said. "Knowing we are all in this together, and everyone feels this way is when change truly begins."

People advocating together can help bring down the prices through policy implementation. Friends and family can buy a house together rather than everyone doing it by themselves.

"Something needs to give, and we need to work together for this market to become affordable," Patenaude said.

The financial strain of the housing market has its effects on everyone, including teachers, professors and educators who are unable to see their wages keep pace with the growing market. The hope is for creative solutions such as trailer homes, settling and people coming together to rent, or share the equity. "It is so easy to get hopeless, but there is a solution out there," Patenaude said.



Cale Patenaude leaves Hawthorne Park with his daughter and her friend after a playdate on Sept. 8.

Lessons from a street corner

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Amidst the monotonous rhythm of streetlights, exhaust pipes and blinkers, Missoula street musician Rough Buffalo sits beneath the overhang of Cafe Mimosa, ready to play another night.

Buffalo doesn't cut the strings on his 1983 Japanese Alvarez guitar — you never know when a string might break on the road. Buffalo has been busking, performing street art for money, full time for the past 15 years. He makes music, sews clothes and sells paintings. It's a trying career laced with romantic appeal — one that requires patience, adaptability and trust. As technology begins to supersede our transient, storytelling origins, Buffalo is attempting to keep the culture of busking alive.

It all started when he moved to France. After parting ways with his ex-wife, he wanted to stay in the country. However, according to Buffalo, strict labor protection laws in France got in his way.

From there, he started hitchhiking around Europe, assisting other street musicians in their endeavors. He used to run around the plazas where musicians were playing, hat in hand, collecting money, he said.

Eventually, throughout his travels, his own musical identity started to develop. He learned to play the guitar and sing in the middle of the street. "It must've been God-awful in the beginning," he said.

Yet, ultimately, whether they were attracted to a measure or a verse, there was always someone who would stop, he said.

Buffalo recalls living in a squat in Palermo, Italy, with other street performers. He had a drunken Polish roommate who would simply draw his dog all day. The pictures were a mishmash of colorful scribbles that only roughly resembled a dog. Yet, "Inevitably, there was someone who would find that drawing and dig the fuck out of it," he said. "Everybody has an audience."

Finding an audience, however, doesn't always mean making a decent living.

In France, he could make ends meet. However, according to Buffalo, Missoula is a bit different.

"Missoula is probably one of the worst places I've been in the world as far as making money," Buffalo said.



ABOVE: Rough Buffalo, seated on a five gallon bucket, plays his guitar at Missoula's First Interstate Plaza on Sept. 20. MARS JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN

BELOW: Buffalo, 42, plays guitar at First Interstate Plaza on Sept. 20. He has been busking for 15 years across multiple countries. MARS JOHNSON | MONTANA KAIMIN



For a short stint, he lived in Butte, where he believes he would have made enough money to get by solely off music. Here, some people falsely assume he's homeless, he said. He doesn't blame anyone, he just thinks they don't necessarily know what busking is anymore.

He partially attributes this lack of understanding to the "attention economy" on the phone, believing people don't have time to go out and play the guitar anymore.

"I don't think American society has gotten too comfortable. I just think there's a level of a distraction," Buffalo said.

In Europe, being a "street performer" was seen as a job. "People gave you respect there," Buffalo said.

For Buffalo, the freedom of busking isn't just about where he plays. It's about who decides how he plays.

Buffalo has never played in any bands. He attends open mics, jams and has

worked on projects with other people, but has never actually performed in concert with anyone else. While the shared success of a band may bring more comfort, he said he's enjoyed his journey thus far.

"Any sort of success is nice to an extent. However, especially when I was traveling, there was an amount of irresponsibility that I enjoyed — the bigger you get, the more responsibility you have," Buffalo said. "Which leads to managers telling you what is and isn't a hit."

He recalled a low point in his travels when his guitar was stolen, and he had to beg. "I'd set up on a street corner, put my hat out and just read," Buffalo said.

For about two months, he estimates that he read three to four books per day. But even in the rockiest moments of his travels, he's learned something from the life he's chosen.

"A lot of times, when you're doing the busking or the hitchhiking, you're doing something that's a dream for somebody else. Nearly everything is accessible to you. The only person who is stopping you is you."

Despite this, Buffalo's life on the road has never been lived entirely alone. The arrival of COVID-19 brought him a newfound awareness of how much he interacts with the public while busking.

"[Street musicians] make your day. They're doing it for tips and love of the music, and I think it's awesome to see somebody create something they love — I view music as a direct result of creative expression. It's magical," freshman Gwenivere Melish said.

The conversations Buffalo shares with the public are sacred to him. They're part of what busking offers — and part of what he fears society is losing.

"In the beginning, what I was trying to do was kind of a Woody Guthrie thing — if I'm going to be hitchhiking and playing music, there was an authenticity thing I wanted to uphold, sing hobo songs, etc. It's like dementia for societies to lose a culture," Buffalo said.

While the future of busking remains uncertain, Buffalo's life is a reminder that anyone can live freely — if they want to.

Buffalo can often be found playing outside the Union Club on Saturday and Sunday evenings. His art studio is also located on the third floor of Import Market, at 201 W. Broadway.

Abuse in modern reality TV

NIAMH O'FARRELL | ARTS REPORTER
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After a hard day of school and work, it's important to find ways to wind down.

For some people it's a book, a drink or even a joint. But there's nothing like getting to turn on the TV and watch grown adults yell at each other like children.

As much as I might hate to admit it, the first time I watched Teresa Giudice flip a table on season one of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* while calling one of her friends a "prostitution whore," I was the most entertained I had ever been in my whole life.

"It's something to not take seriously," said Madison Nicholes, an 18-year-old English education major. "It's objectively obnoxious."

However, as my time as a reality TV watcher has gone on, I've begun to notice a concerning trend with the content I was consuming. Oftentimes the "entertaining plot lines" involve women being exploited and abused by the men around them.

Popular reality TV shows such as "*The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives*" follow married couples as they navigate living religious lifestyles. These shows often have typical reality TV drama such as people getting too drunk and acting in a way they normally wouldn't. However, multiple storylines have involved watching the couples navigate abusive dynamics.

Mormon Wives is one of the most popular reality TV shows in production today, with the show's first season receiving over 2.14 billion streaming minutes in the first four months of its release.

Taylor Frankie Paul, one of the stars of *Mormon Wives*, became famous on the show for her on-again, off-again relationship with the father of her son, Dakota Mortensen. In early seasons, the two were portrayed as two hot-headed people who couldn't leave each other alone, but on March 19, a video was leaked to TMZ of Paul throwing chairs at Mortensen while her children were in the room.

Despite the video release and the court battle that followed, the couple still appeared together in the most recent season of *Mormon Wives* that aired on Sept. 10.

While toxic relationships on TV might not seem like a major problem, it has a larger impact than some may think.

"Absolutely, media demonstrates, and people internalize things from it," said Aislinn Addington, the director of the University of Montana's Student Advocacy Resource Center, a free and confidential resource students can use to navigate impacts of identity-based harm.

The most recent "*Mormon Wives*" scandal is not the show's first brush with controversy to this scale.

In an earlier season, for example, one of the wives accused a member of the

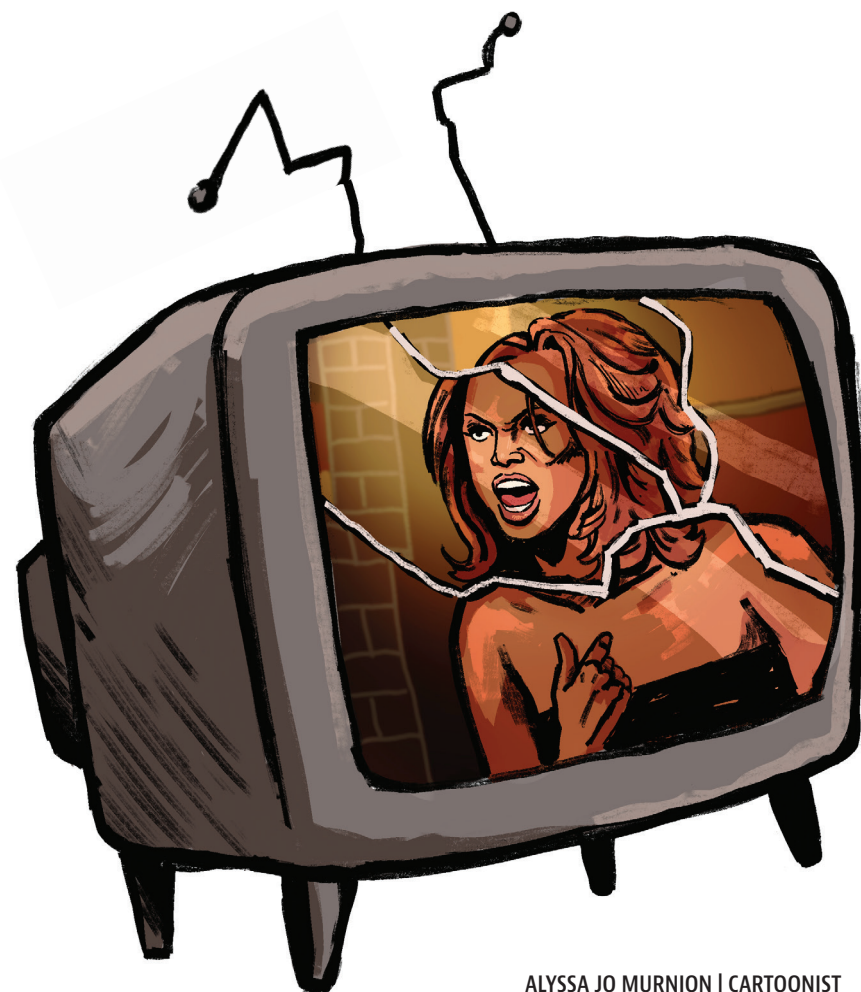
cast of "*Vanderpump Villa*" of sexually assaulting her. A major plot point of the season became discussing whether the situation was truly an assault or an affair the wife was attempting to cover up. "People don't treat gendered crimes in terms of opinion," Addington said. She went on to explain how if you switch the conversation with any other crime, we would find it different, like blaming a victim of a robbery for leaving their door unlocked.

"We are consistently questioning and putting the onus on the person who was harmed to prove that they are a correct sort of victim," Addington said. According to Addington, seeing these conversations played out in this way can translate into how people have them in real life.

"Someone who caused harm could be like, 'Oh, see it wasn't assault there so it wasn't here,'" Addington said. "I think it can be dangerous for sure."

According to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, one in four college women will experience a form of sexual assault. Often this happens within the first six weeks of school and most commonly happens to first-year students.

The media we watch has a much bigger impact on us as people than many would like to admit. When we repeatedly watch shows that show people treating each other in disrespectful ways, we become desensitized to it. With the first few weeks of school underway, these conversations can be more important than ever to people's experiences and healing process.



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Rail authority looks to revive route through Missoula

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The Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority is working to restore the North Coast Limited/Hiawatha route that once brought passenger trains from Chicago through Missoula and to Seattle.

The authority, made up of representatives from over 20 Montana counties, is dedicated to bringing back the old Amtrak route. Dave Strohmaier, a former Missoula city councilmember and chair of the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, said that it's a shame the track closed in 1979.

"A University of Montana student could get on a train at the north end of Higgins Avenue and travel to Seattle or Chicago if he or she wanted to," Strohmaier said. "But for the past 46 years, we've been without that service."

The rail authority formed in 2020 after Strohmaier and county officials from Sanders and Wibaux counties saw

other efforts to revive the route fail. After meeting to discuss their options, they found a 1993 state law that allows the formation of regional rail authorities that act as governing bodies for their railways.

It became the state's first regional rail authority. Strohmaier said it's steadily grown over the past six years. The board of directors now features members from multiple counties, tribal authorities, BNSF, Amtrak and the Montana Department of Transportation. Those members all have a "laser focus" on creating the Big Sky North Coast Corridor, Strohmaier said.

Strohmaier recognized that this plan may seem like a pipe dream, but assured that the rail authority has made real moves to set itself on the tracks. First, the organization went to Congress two years ago and convinced lawmakers to let the Federal Railroad Administration conduct a study to see which discontinued rail lines across the United States would be prime candidates to be

brought back. A year and a half ago, the Federal Railroad Administration delivered its report recommending the rail authority's plan.

"That's a huge deal for us," Strohmaier said. "This is not something that we're just dreaming up and armchairing here in Missoula or the state of Montana."

The rail authority also secured funding from Amtrak to upgrade the existing rail lines with \$15 million to tackle the trail around Malta and \$40 million for work near Havre. As of now, Strohmaier said they are working to develop a service development plan for the Federal Railroad Administration to start the planning process sometime early next year or next fall.

Strohmaier hopes the 2,300-mile-long railway will become a reality sometime in the 2030s. Amtrak closed the original passenger train route in 1979 because of a lack of riders and federal funding. With federal interest seemingly renewed, the question is whether it will

have the customer base to justify its existence.

Ellie Mercer, a University of Montana medical laboratory and dance student from Helena, said she would be very interested in the possibility of a passenger train coming through Missoula.

Last summer, Mercer visited Italy and experienced its robust passenger train system. She said she found the experience efficient and cost-effective; she spent only around \$60 for a train ride from Rome to Venice. Plane tickets for the same distance often cost double that, usually hovering around \$160.

"It would be less expensive than a plane ticket, and it's hard to get flights from Montana because it's very small," Mercer said. "Yeah, it'd be cool to have a train."

Strohmaier said ticket prices will most likely be similar to Amtrak's Empire Builder route through northern Montana, with prices ranging from around \$60 for a short trip to \$113 for

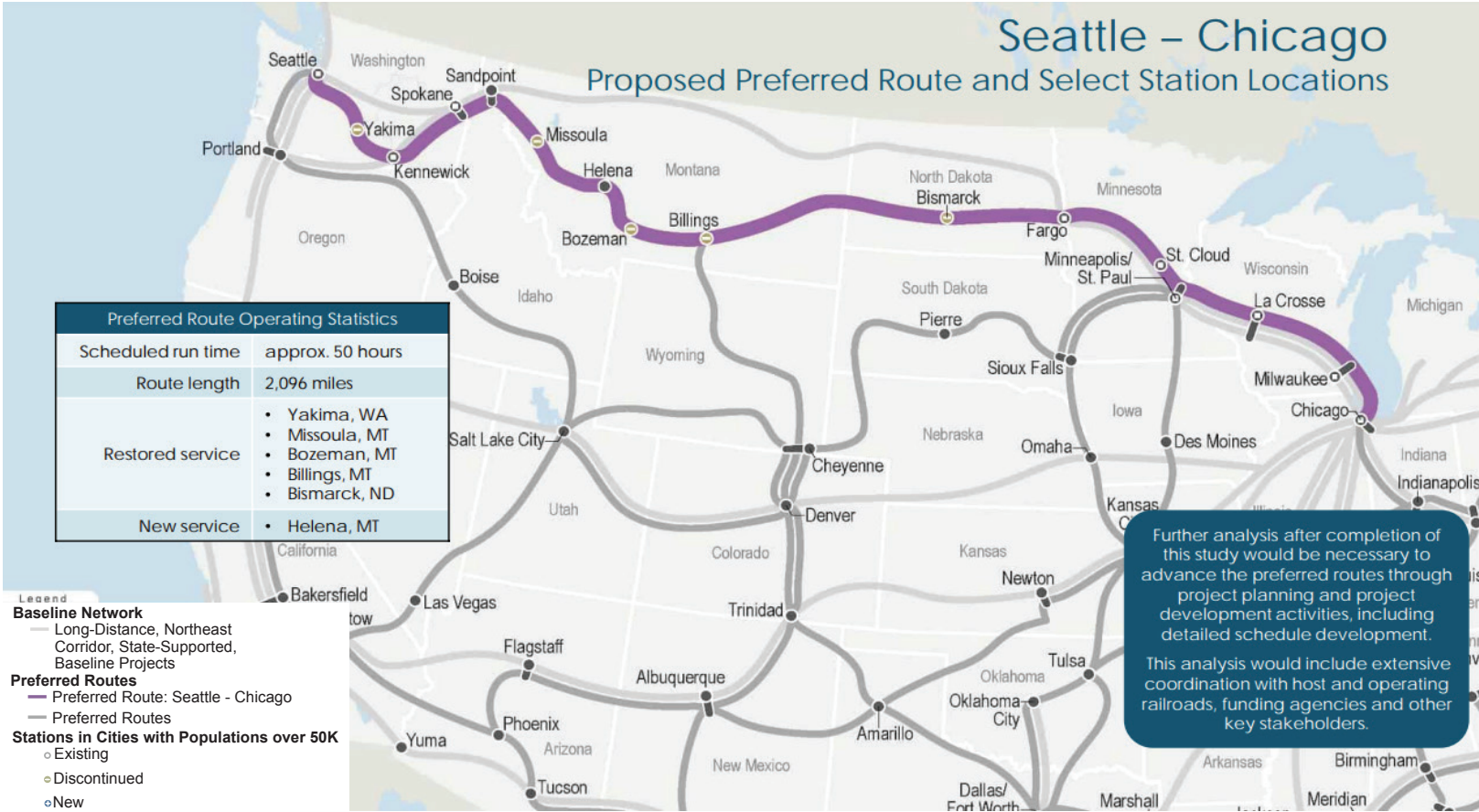
longer trips, depending on the level of amenities the passenger pays for.

Claire Broling, a graduate history student, remembers visiting family in Chicago and being amazed by its train system as a kid. For her, the idea of bringing that to Missoula seems like a no-brainer.

"I would definitely take the train to Seattle from here," Broling said.

With federal and public interest, Strohmaier believes the Big Sky North Coast Corridor could come back to life.

"We put a person on the moon in the 1960s, for crying out loud," Strohmaier said. "Surely we can get trains moving on planet Earth in a more expeditious fashion."



A graphic shows the proposed route from Seattle to Chicago. CONTRIBUTED | FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION

Inside UM's athletic maintenance

JULIAN CLEMMER | SPORTS REPORTER
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To maintain appearances and help University of Montana athletes play at their best, the UM Athletics Department ensures that sports facilities are in good condition between matches and events.

UM is home to 13 different collegiate-level athletic programs and 11 official intramural sports in the fall semester. These programs require space to practice and play, along with opposing teams' locker rooms.

From the Dahlberg Arena to Washington-Grizzly Stadium, there is a lot of work to do during and between seasons.

Brandon Kress, the assistant director of operations in the athletics department, oversees day-to-day maintenance at the Adams Center.

When needed, he helps with maintenance at Washington-Grizzly Stadium and the University's other athletic facilities.

"I'm responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the Adams Center," Kress said. "Any work orders that need to be placed and any general maintenance, changing lights and that type of stuff."

Athletics in Missoula contribute vastly to the local economy.

According to a report from the UM Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Grizzly athletics brings in roughly \$94 million annually. Much of this money comes from season ticket holders.

In 2025, the University sold out of all its available season tickets, totaling nearly 20,000 tickets sold. Season ticket holders have tickets for all the games and are naturally repeat attendees.

"[We] want to make sure the facility looks as good as it can," Kress said. "[Patrons'] first impressions are a big thing for if they want to come back."

Keeping the building in good condition contributes to fan satisfaction and indirectly contributes to increased revenue. "If [the stadium] is looking run-down, if it's old with lots of banged up spots, [patrons] might not want to come back versus if it looks nice," Kress said.

While day-to-day maintenance matters, the yearly floor refinishing takes more work. This is because, by the end of the season, marks left by shoes, vehicle tires and other things can mark the wood.

Dahlberg Arena, the court where UM's basketball and volleyball teams play, is sanded down by private contractors each year to the base layer and a new coating of finish is applied

after. Kress and his crew then clean the new surface with towels and mops to catch any residual debris and dust.

The Adams Center is used not only for sports, but also for other events, like concerts. When an event involving a stage or other platform is held on the basketball court, Kress and his team lay down plywood and rolls of carpet to protect the wood underneath.

While cosmetics matter, proper facility maintenance improves player performance during games and practices.

"Having a nice field is everything," said Lucie Rokos, 21, a senior defender and midfielder on the UM women's soccer team. "We take chunks out of it with our cleats. If a ball hits it wrong, it can bump, it can move and it can just completely go out."

In a soccer game, 22 pairs of cleats constantly dig into the soil and tear it up. The South Campus Stadium, where the soccer team plays, is a grass field that requires filling and reseeding after most games.

Last season, the home field took a beating from the increase in home

games compared to away games. "We would have to fill holes with sand, especially the goal boxes," Rokos said. "There was more mud than grass."

Stuart Gore, the head coach of the women's soccer team, has played on plenty of fields in his professional and coaching career. "You want [the field] to run as true as possible, and that's why the field maintenance side of it is so important."

Gore explained how uneven fields and incorrect grass length can interrupt a team's playstyle, harming teamwork and negatively affecting the outcome of the game.

Improperly maintained facilities can also increase injury risk for players. "When it's muddy out, and the grass is super soft and porous, you just step wrong and the grass kind of caves in on itself and you roll your ankle outwards, that's the biggest one," Rokos said.

As the fall sports season continues, Kress and the maintenance team will continue to work, making sure the stadiums are up to standards. "Facilities are maintained with player safety in mind," he said.

SPORTS BRIEFS

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CRUSHED IN CORVALLIS

The University of Montana's football team lost 52-17 to their PAC-12 opponents, the Oregon State University Beavers on Saturday, the team's worst margin of defeat since 2017.

The Griz didn't find the end zone for the first 43 minutes, until Reese Brooks scored his first career touchdown to make it 42-10.

Montana also found itself down a player early after linebacker Peyton Wing was ejected for a targeting penalty. Wing will still be eligible for Saturday's game against the University of California, Davis.

Montana gave up 510 total yards, tied for the most given up this season, while gaining only 338.

After the game, UM head coach Bobby Kennedy told UM athletics that the Griz had a chance to be in the game early, but didn't capitalize on the openings the Beavers presented. It was his first loss as head coach.

"They're a really good team," Kennedy told UM Athletics. "We just didn't hit some of those early plays that maybe could've kept us in it."

TOP-10 SHOWDOWN

After the loss to Oregon State University, the University of Montana dropped from second to tied for fourth in the Football Championship Subdivision coaches' poll, and will take on the University of California, Davis, the ninth-ranked team in the nation, on the road on Saturday.

It will be a massive game for both teams, as whichever team wins will likely be ranked top five in the nation and remain undefeated in Big Sky Conference play.

UC Davis has been a contender in the Big Sky throughout the 2020s, finishing top five in the conference each of the past six seasons. Montana needs a win on the road if the Griz want to compete for the conference title and the top spot in the nation.

It will be another test for the Griz, especially quarterback Keali'i Ah Yat, who missed key throws early in the Oregon State game, as well as the rest of the offense that has struggled to get started in games. Montana has failed to get a first down on three of its four game-starting drives.

"There's a bunch of teams that have lost today, and the key for us is that we stay together and that we keep fighting as a team," said UM head coach Bobby Kennedy after the loss to Oregon State. "That's how we keep growing."



SUNRISE Saloon

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Karaoke - Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday  9PM

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Western Weadowlarks - Sep 25th  9:30 PM

Clint Reimann Band - Sep 26th  9:30 PM

406 Band - Oct 2nd  9:30 PM

Uncle Funk - Oct 3rd  9:30 PM

 **1101 Strand Ave, Missoula, MT 59801**

Who says you need a horse to polo?

EMBRY ERICSON | PHOTOGRAPHER

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Most nights, when the sun sets over the Missoula valley, the University of Montana parking garage behind the Mansfield Library clears of cars and goes quiet for the night, but not Wednesdays.

In the summer, the top floor of the garage explodes with the sounds of rock music, plastic mallets smacking pavement and bike wheels skidding and clicking around.

But as these bike polo players would tell you, it is not just any silly pastime — bike polo is a lifestyle.

Bike polo works nearly the same as a game of regular polo, but the rider's mighty steed is more likely to be a Schwinn Sierra than a Manipuri pony. At the top of the parking garage, the players set up two small nets, akin to a miniature soccer goal, along with wooden planks, about four inches tall as the boundaries. The players carry plastic mallets as long as a golf club and whack around a small orange lacrosse ball.

Rob Clark, a long-time bike polo player, leaned against the concrete walls surrounding the parking garage and nursed a lukewarm beer. Clark isn't a regular, but he might be in the future. After selling his house in Denver, Clark is now on a road trip around the West trying to find his next home, a home that fulfills his requirement of a good bike polo scene.

"I just didn't want to get off of my bike, but I was running out of reasons to ride," Clark said, recalling life before he discovered the bike polo community in Portland, Oregon, years ago. "I just happened to fall in with the crowd. I moved in with a bunch of guys who played and got hooked," Clark said.

After moving into that house, the "Polo Palace," he started playing in the local games every week. Later, Clark used his welding background to create and sell bike polo-specific parts, such as brake disc guards.

Newcomer Will Meredith, who is originally from the Bay Area, moved to Missoula last November. "I used to go on a bunch of ground bike rides, and my buddies were always telling me I need to come check this out."

He pointed at the bike lying sideways next to him. "It's super easy to get into. They offer loaner gear. This is a loaner bike."

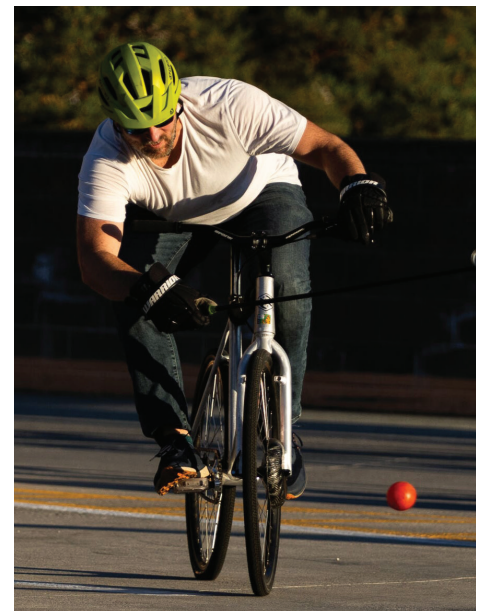
When the snow comes, the Missoula bike polo scene doesn't stop. The players simply ditch the top level for the level right below it. Shielded from the snow, they play year round, never letting the weather get in the way of riding.



Tyler Hocker protects the ball from a defender during a bike polo match on the top floor of the University of Montana parking garage on Sept. 16.



Mike Willard looks on as Rob Clark attempts to fix his broken bike in between bike polo matches.



Bike polo player Rob Clark winds up to strike the ball with his mallet during a bike polo match.