

MONTANA KAIMIN

***DON'T BE A DRAG,
JUST BE A QUEEN***

**THROUGH THE FEAR AND
THE FABULOUSNESS,
I FOUND MYSELF.**

STORY BY KAIRI LISING | PHOTOS BY RACHEL YEAGER



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Photo illustration by Rachel Yeager

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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."

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For comments, corrections or letters to the editor, contact

claire.bernard@umontana.edu

or call (406) 243-4310.

For advertising opportunities, contact

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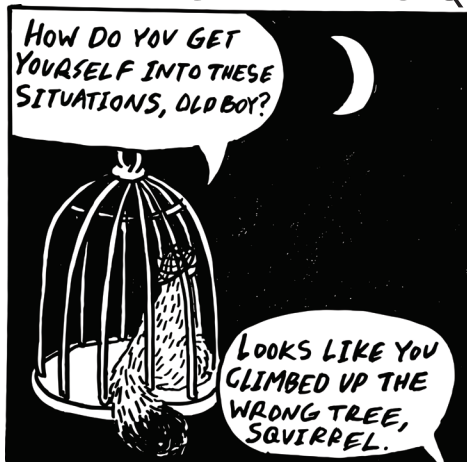
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DETECTIVE SQUIRREL: SE 2 EP 13



The dances we fight for

Lately, I have found myself turning to a quote for strength. It is by the great Dan Savage, a queer writer and activist, and reads: “During the darkest days of the AIDS Crisis, we buried our friends in the morning, we protested in the afternoon and we danced all fucking night. The dance kept us in the fight because it was the dance we were fighting for.”

This week’s feature follows the same arc: finding beauty in times of despair. Like many other great creative movements of our past, drag culture was formed out of a desire to feel connected, to protest through pride and to celebrate those who gave their lives to making the performances possible.

As we navigate through increasingly troubling times on a state, federal and global level, I want to remind readers of Savage’s quote and encourage them to ask themselves: What dance are you fighting for?

The dance has taken different shapes throughout history. Romanticism art first emerged in France and Britain in the late 18th century, soon after the rise of the Industrial Revolution, as a way to embrace natural beauty. Pablo Picasso used his art as activism in the 1930s to draw attention to the Spanish Civil War and campaign for peace.

Soul music began to rise in popularity during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and ‘60s, with pioneers such as activist Sam Cooke bringing Black culture and music into the mainstream media. Artist and photographer Barabra Kruger used her multimedia work in the 1970s to draw attention to the second wave of the feminist movement.

In those times, there were those who told the artists that their work was a waste of time, that it had no place in protest. This is because those in power know the potential of art. Despite what they tell us, they understand art and humanities is what moves a society

forward. They grasp how art can connect us, and because of that, they fear it.

Nazi Germany systematically destroyed artistic and cultural artifacts across Europe as a way to erase history and force conformity across the 1930s and 1940s. The Nazi party designated certain works of art, mostly modern, as “degenerate,” and removed them from the public, burning over 5,000 paintings in one fire.

In 2023, the United Nations told Russia to stop targeting Ukrainian heritage, religious and cultural sites. In America, President Donald Trump has continuously targeted the arts and humanities, including a decision on April 3 to cancel millions of dollars in grants for art and cultural organizations, including libraries, according to NPR.

But art is the heartbeat of humanity. It preserves history, it memorializes struggle, it celebrates beauty. If we turn away from art, we will lose sight of what makes humanity worth fighting for.

Savage’s quote has helped ease my feelings of hopelessness. It has reminded me that every form of resistance, no matter how small, is contributing to a better tomorrow. Marching is impactful. Boycotting and picketing is crucial. But while everyone is out there fighting the good fights, don’t forget to spend time dancing. Visit spaces that feel filled with hopeful light. Lean in to what you care about and create projects that make others care too.

Forever, since the time where humans drew on cave walls, art has called to us. Listen and then pick up your paper, pen and paintbrush.

- Claire Bernard Editor-in-Chief

Like it? Hate it? Let us know.

Email us your opinions at claire.bernard@umontana.edu

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:

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

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

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April mules day



University of Montana students Molly Brandt, right, and Lydia Lauzon, left, pet one of several mules visiting campus for an annual event with the U.S. Forest Service Northern Regional Pack Train on April 1.
HENREY DOELLINGER | MONTANA KAIMIN

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RESOURCE FAIR

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11am - 2pm | UC Atrium

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In this week's briefs ...

MAXWELL JOHNSON
maxwell.johnson3@umontana.edu

OVER HALF OF U.S. FOREST SERVICE LAND LOSES PROTECTION

On April 3, Brooke Rollins, the nation's agriculture secretary, released a memo establishing an "emergency situation determination" on 112 million acres of U.S. Forest Service land, around 59% of the Forest Service's total acreage.

The area includes most of the land surrounding Yellowstone National Park, a majority of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and forest land south and west of Glacier National Park.

The memo speeds up timber harvesting and other land management action by removing the safeguards, committees and objection processes typically required. It stated the emergency as increased wildfire risk due to fuel buildup and broader tree loss due to insects and diseases. The memo does not mention climate change. However, its press release lists President Donald Trump's March 1 executive order calling for a 25% increase in timber production as a part of the reasoning.

"I am proud to follow the bold leadership of President Donald Trump by empowering forest managers to reduce constraints and minimize the risks of fire, insects and disease," Rollins said in the release.

The release also states the action builds on Rollins' earlier announcements to "unleash American energy" by "removing Biden-era regulations that have stifled energy and mineral development on Forest Service land."

FEDERAL CUTS HIT MISSOULA FOOD BANK

President Donald Trump's administration recently cut the Emergency Food Assistance Program created under former president Joe Biden. These funds paid for 8% of the 2.8 million pounds of fresh and nutritional produce the Missoula Food Bank and Community Center distributed last year, according to the Montana Free Press.

Federal funding made up 21% of the bank's budget, including a program that feeds children breakfast and lunch during summertime. Amy Allison, the food bank's executive director, told the Montana Free Press that rising grocery prices and cuts to other safety net programs are expected to increase demand. She said the bank's services will still be available and no one will leave empty-handed no matter what the future holds.

BERNIE SANDERS TO VISIT UM

As part of his Fighting Oligarchy Tour Sen. Bernie Sanders, an independent from Vermont, will be visiting Missoula April 16 and speaking at 1 p.m. in the Adams Center. The tour is advertised as having a "real discussion" on how to take on powerful oligarch and corporate interests. Sanders specifically referenced President Trump and billionaire Elon Musk in his promotion. It will be Sanders' first visit to Missoula since 2017, when he was campaigning for Rob Quist, who was the then Democratic candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives.

The grandfather of Griz softball



William "Spike" Potter leaps from his seat after a successful play during a UM Grizzly softball game against Weber State at the Grizzly softball stadium on April 5. **MARLEY BARBOEISEL | MONTANA KAIMIN**

Listen to this week's Kaimin Cast where Maddie Pandis talks to one of Griz softball's biggest donors is 75-year-old William "Spike" Potter.

Since 2020, Potter has donated roughly \$250,000 to the Griz softball team because he thinks it is unique from other Griz athletic programs. He said the softball team feels like one big family, and its willingness and eagerness to interact with fans after games is what initially got him interested in the program. He said in the past at other sporting events, such as Griz basketball, he would have to flag players down to talk to them after games. He has even seen players sneaking out the back of the gym after a loss because they were too upset to talk to fans. Potter said this is nothing like Griz softball. After every game, the players all line up outside of the dugouts and give high fives. They all take time to interact and talk with their fans without having to be flagged down. This is one of Potter's favorite things about the team.

"They all form a double line and they high five to all the fans," Potter said. "They'll sign posters and do whatever, sit and talk to them. You don't see it. It's just a whole new deal. That just kind of drug me into it."

New episodes out every other Monday. Scan for the latest.



POLICE BLOTTER

MAXWELL JOHNSON
maxwell.johnson3@umontana.edu

Welp, this week it would seem crime on campus has become a group project because just a few people are doing all of the work. Come on y'all, step it up! Actually don't. Hot take here, but less crime is good.

MARCH 29 - CREATIVE CAR THEFT

Two people, who are not University of Montana students, wanted to hike the M together. Sounds like a lovely time between besties, right? Bestie one began his idyllic stroll up the M and texts bestie two to bring him some shoes. But the shoes never came and when bestie one returned to the parking lot, his car and everything in it was gone. A top 10 anime betrayal if I have ever seen one. The bestie-of-betrayal's location is currently unknown. In another twist of fate, bestie one listed the value of his stolen car and items at \$10. Coincidentally, that's the maximum amount of money I'd be willing to pay for a Tesla Cybertruck, sorry, not sorry, Elon.

MARCH 30 - INVESTING? IN THIS ECONOMY?

So a person had a "friend" who was supposedly the absolute Jimmy Garoppolo of investing, the GOAT QB right? This person gave him \$650 to invest for him and the "friend" was never heard from again. Yet another top 10 betrayal. Let me reiterate, a sentient human being, with a brain, who has survived into adulthood, decided that now, the year of our Lord 2025, was a great time to give the stock market a shot. Y'all know that one of Reddit's r/Stocks top post a few days ago was, I kid you not, a suicide hotline, right? Another fun fact, if you invest \$650 into the stock market in quarter one of 2025 and you really played the number, diversified, day traded and got on that grind, then you would have lost \$650. This is why I have the best economic approach, my money never depreciates in value and my stocks never crash, BECAUSE I HAVE NONE.

APRIL 2 - A CRIME OF PASSION

The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library had \$60 worth of new bathroom signs stolen, with signs being taken down as they were put up several times. This was likely in connection with recent legislation concerning the removal of gender neutral bathrooms. There are no suspects and no matter what joke I make here it will get taken politically, so use your imagination to come up with one yourself and stay informed about issues you care about.

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SAT, APRIL 26 10AM - 5PM
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What UM tradition are you?

KATE WIDMER
kate.widmer@umontana.edu

Whether you think of them as culture-defining acts or just peer pressure from dead people, traditions are a part of how we understand our identities. For college students, traditions are a big part of what makes college so memorable, even when they aren't exactly inspiring. So, which University of Montana tradition are you?

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19): Any time a political commentator comes to campus, the whole place feels like it's been flipped upside down. Good luck trying to get to the bus with all the protesters, counterprotesters and media people around! Civic engagement may be a good thing for democracy, but not for your stress levels.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20): Mules on the Oval – April 1 marked the fifth time the mules of the U.S. Forest Service Northern Region Pack Train have made the trot from their home at the historic Ninemile Ranger Station to campus for the annual UM Summer Kickoff. Just like a mule, you're cute, but you smell like shit. Sorry not sorry, Taurus.

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20): While this might not be a UM-specific college tradition, there's something about food poisoning that feels like the ultimate personal betrayal. I got food poisoning from Food Zoo chicken parmesan during midterms of my first spring semester. Pro tip, food that's been out all day, like at The Lodge, might require more of an iron stomach than you think.

CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22): Half the joy of college for you was getting to party for real, and you really went for it! The stories you have make you both the life of the party and a concern your friends. But that's what college is for. At least you didn't join Greek life? No wait ... you did, just later down the road because you needed a place to live.

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): The Freshman Float is many Missoula newcomers' first experience with the Clark Fork River and it's a great time to make some friends and learn the landscape. Or, if you're anything like me, it's a great time to accidentally lose your sunglasses and get a little sunburned. Regardless, a little fun in the sun is always a good thing for you, Leo.

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): So! Much! Construction! If you lived in Craig Hall in 2022, the dual irritation of construction noise for the new dining hall and

the Food Zoo menu made you detest the necessity of sustenance itself. The (ugly) proposal for the new forestry building is sure to keep this tradition alive for the next generation, along with construction's sister tradition, infrastructure failure.

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22): Civic engagement might not seem like your jam at first, but being around so many protests during college has given you the unique opportunity to find some community and catharsis that speaks directly to your empathetic nature. With everything going on lately, you've been getting your steps in, but better that than letting the government (including the University) get away with even more shit.

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21): There's no tradition that better embodies your spooky personality than the annual pumpkin-ing of Main Hall. The tradition has been around since 1995, about as long as most of your favorite movies and albums, so it makes sense that the sight of the pumpkin gives you a little rush of familiarity. Plus, there's mystery: How do they get it up there anyway?

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21): The Foresters' Ball might seem too social for you at first, but the overall event captures your loyalty and love for community better than anything else UM has to offer. Plus, it's an excuse for you to pass off your everyday clothes as a costume.

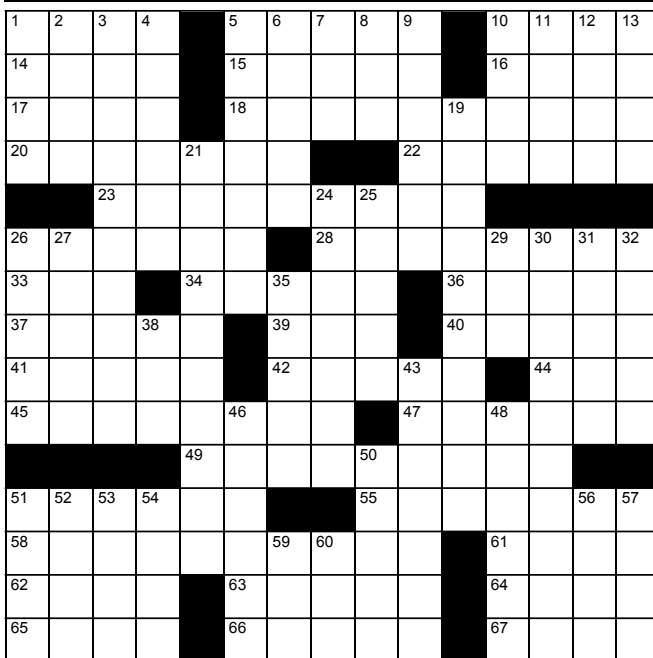
CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): For those who need an ego check, there's no better tradition than the ice skating rink. You think it's going to be fun, that there'll be other people on it and that it'll be easy to use, but it's actually none of those things at all. The way UM markets this thing as an "annual tradition," you'd think that people would actually have something to say about it.

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18): For someone as chatty as you, the Hello Walk is the only logical choice. You basically already do one every time you go into your workplace. The variety of colors and languages reflects how you're an original. That said, your phone addiction has made it so you spend more time looking down than at other people. But we're not here to judge.

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20): We all need to cry sometimes. Apparently even UM's buildings do too. Something is always failing and usually leaking around here – whether it's the 2023 flood of Aber Hall (shoutout to those who had to stay in a hotel), the Mansfield Library basement flooding or even just being forced to endure Eck Hall's bathrooms.



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN



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ACROSS

- 1 Flows back
- 5 Washington's portraitist
- 10 "Fernando" group
- 14 Romance novelist Roberts
- 15 Wall climbers
- 16 Golfer's need
- 17 ___-clad
- 18 Cartoonish portrait
- 20 Like some humor
- 22 Still in the outbox
- 23 Black tie is one
- 26 Coffeehouse packets
- 28 Forsaker of the faith
- 33 Mia in "Pulp Fiction"
- 34 Coconut meat
- 36 Mortise's mate
- 37 Treat poorly
- 39 Falcons, on scoreboards
- 40 Flip response?
- 41 Meat avoider
- 42 Trash
- 44 Singer Rawls
- 45 Constructing, as a building
- 47 Good-for-nothing
- 49 Adding to
- 51 Bassett of "Black Panther"
- 55 Art done with acid
- 58 Shade of red
- 61 Berry in smoothies
- 62 Indigo dye
- 63 Finger-pointer
- 64 "Nail" anagram
- 65 Runs into

- 66 Healing plants
- 67 First Lady of Song

DOWN

- 1 "National Velvet" author Bagnold
- 2 Snoozefest
- 3 Railroad track width
- 4 Justice O'Connor
- 5 "Guernica" painter
- 6 Captain America portrayer Chris
- 7 It can be fresh or hot
- 8 Waikiki welcome
- 9 Old Portuguese money
- 10 Plays a part
- 11 Down in the dumps
- 12 Get too much sun
- 13 Assist illegally
- 19 Numbing drug
- 21 Data ranking term
- 24 Hauling charge
- 25 Milky gems
- 26 Smooth-tongued
- 27 Brownish color
- 29 Three-way joint
- 30 Having similarity
- 31 Big fusses
- 32 Follow as a result
- 35 King protectors
- 38 Small pouch
- 43 Walks unsteadily
- 46 Sumerian goddess of love
- 48 Get some air
- 50 Rapp of "Mean Girls"
- 51 Miles off
- 52 Vessel of 1492
- 53 Dismal
- 54 Snaky swimmers
- 56 Polish place?
- 57 Actress Gershon
- 59 "For Me and My ___"
- 60 "If you ask me," in a text

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

Federal, state legislation causes uncertainty on campus

LOGAN YANTES

logan.yantes@umontana.edu

Federal and state administrations have continued to remove diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and programs from universities including the University of Montana.

Many are fearful of the effects this legislation could and has had on the University of Montana's LGBTQIA+ accessible bathrooms, organizations based out of the Branch Center such as UM Lambda Alliance and funding for programs such as Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies.

But the unclear implementation and legality of these changes has muddled the waters and incited fear among some students, with a Montana bill related to gendered bathrooms being temporarily blocked by a judge and various legislation in different forms of legal limbo.

Students on campus, including Parker Mickel, are frustrated with the lack of communication from the University. Mickel is the president of UM Lambda, an organization based in the Branch Center in the University Center. Lambda strives to be a safe place on campus for students of all sexual orientations and seeks to help students empower themselves.

Mickel is fearful for the future of the 50-year-old organization as well as the Branch Center, which supports diversity, equity and inclusion.

According to UM spokesperson Dave Kuntz, UM Allies, another Branch Center organization, has been on hiatus this year due to an inability to find a student employee for the office and is not directly affected by the shortage of grants. The University is working on bringing it back by fall 2025.

Kuntz said these funding changes are not a result of the University adapting its budgets to meet the requirements of the executive orders, but rather because of the expirations of grants that some of these organizations rely on, such as UM Allies, which is not affiliated with the Student Senate.

Mickel, who is also employed at the Branch Center as a student ambassador, said they haven't heard anything from the UM staff and faculty they know.

"I haven't heard any concrete evidence of any conversations happening. I've heard and I've seen changes silently made," Mick-

el said.

In light of this, Mickel recently helped organize a protest on campus, calling for more transparency from UM regarding these changes.

Specifically, Mickel recounted receiving emails the past couple of months addressed to their dead name from the School of Theatre and Dance, which was surprising as it had not happened before.

A dead name is the name given to a person at birth that they no longer use. Mickel received duplicate emails, one under their dead name and one under their current legal name, an inconsistency they found perplexing.

Mickel suggested UM opening meetings for the public to hear updates directly from administration on how it will be responding to the federal demands.

Elizabeth Hubble from the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies program also highlighted the anxieties among marginalized students due to recent legislation, particularly concerning bathroom safety.

She said students were upset as soon as they knew a relevant bill was being signed, fearing for their safety even in essential spaces such as campus bathrooms.

The bill in question is the recent controversial Montana House Bill 121, which, prior to being temporarily blocked by a judge, banned all-gender bathrooms in Montana

buildings that receive state funding. The bill also introduced the ability to sue if someone believes a person is using the incorrect bathroom.

In response to these fears, Hubble's office has been offering support, telling students they can come and have someone accompany them to the bathroom — a practice that has been an unspoken policy for over a decade but was recently formalized in an email to Women's, Gender and Sexuality majors, minors and students with the LGBTQIA+ certificates and graduate certificates after the bill passed.

Hubble also reached out to Amy Capolupo, dean of students, to inquire about broader communication to all students. Hubble said Capolupo said they are working on it. Hubble said Capolupo clarified that the order came from the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, impacting all Montana campuses and that this was a state legislative change, not a UM policy change.

Hubble said her class, Trans Identities across Western Cultures, has not been challenged, and its LGBTQIA+ certificate was unanimously approved by the Board of Regents in 2024. She said she is in close contact with African American studies, environmental studies and climate change studies, with none of them appearing under threat.

Regarding staff reductions, Hubble confirmed an employee was let go due to funding changes and grant expirations.

This employee was in Student Affairs & Enrollment Management and diversity, where grant funding ran out.

Hubble said although this is an unfortunate timing of these funding issues, the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies students have stepped up to keep the WGSS office open as a safe space.

Student Senate President Elizabeth Kamminga acknowledged the "overall consensus of frustration with the University." She attributed this more to a "lack of information from the federal government, mainly because a lot of things have just been changing so much at the federal level."

Kamminga said the University often has to answer to the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education first, which affects what information they can disseminate.

She said Maya Anderson, the Student Senate's political action coordinator, is trying to keep the student government politics page updated.

The Student Senate wellbeing committee is holding emergency meetings, such as one regarding two bills that remove trans athletes from Montana women's sports.

Kamminga said the student government is open and willing to be a safe space for students to talk and is willing to support student groups who want to protest or send emails to the legislators.

Regarding the rumors of defunding of the Gender Equity Resource Center, Kamminga said the organization is still receiving funding, and that as a student group and not a department, it can have whatever language it wants.

Regardless, many students feel left in the dark, leading to anxiety and uncertainty about the future of vital student resources on campus.

"The University has a duty to tell us, as paying students and as people who are part of this community, what changes to expect or what changes not to expect," Mickel said. "We're in a time of fear. It's not enough to say nothing."



A protester waves an American flag with pride colors hung on a fishing rod during the Hands Off protest at the Missoula County Courthouse on April 5. **MARLEY BARBOEISEL | MONTANA KAIMIN**

Logan Yantes is a news reporter for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at logan.yantes@umontana.edu. For more stories from Yantes and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com.

Frats and sororities host charity fundraising events

SABRINA PHILIP

sabrina.philip@umontana.edu

Fundraising and community engagement were front and center as Sigma Chi, Sigma Alpha Epsilon and Alpha Phi raised awareness about the specific organizations they support in a variety of creative ways.

Throughout the week of March 31 to April 4, acts of service were prevalent throughout Greek row as Sigma Chi organized activities to raise funding for the Huntsman Cancer Foundation, which helps research the disease and provide care.

Alpha Phi and Sigma Alpha Epsilon also held separate fundraising efforts for their own charities including a fun run for women's heart health and various events for men's and children's health, respectively.

"I would say that philanthropy is kind of that center pillar of why we have organizations, and why someone might join one organization over the other," Larissa Rutz, the assistant director of campus engagement and leadership, said.

According to Camden Capser, Sigma Chi chapter president and a senior studying business managing and entrepreneurship, supporting the foundation is an essential part of the fraternity chapter's mission. This year, the chapter has raised \$14,000 and is hoping to raise an additional \$1,000 before the school year ends.

"It means so much to the guys in the house," Capser, originally from Billings, said. "Almost everybody in the house has been touched by cancer, whether it's a family member or a friend. For us right now in the house, it's something even more special, because we have two past cancer survivors. So to have that in the house and really be able to make an impact is something really special."

Sigma Chi's week of philanthropy included the the derbydoll pageant — run by the fraternity, but sorority members and other women can participate. It gives a chance to raise money by competing in a pageant, which includes a talent show, fundraising competition and more.

The community carnival was cut short due to weather. Before the rain, some fraternity members were on the Oval with the opportunity to make a donation for the prize of pieing a featernity member, while others were at the house with a dunk tank, music, cornhole and more games.

The week of events finished with a game



Matthew Oppenheim, the Sigma Chi philanthropy chair, shaves his head after losing a bet to another member who raised more money than him at the Derby Days Philanthropy week at Sigma Chi. **CONTRIBUTED | SIGMA CHI**

night and the most anticipated community concert with live music. The concert included music from "The Josh Farmer Band" and fraternity members dressed in comical outfits they were paid to wear by Greek life and community members with proceeds going toward the charity.

Those in attendance filled the living room turned dance floor, swaying and jumping to the acoustic version of popular pop and country music. The various rooms downstairs were filled with mingling and laughing and flashes of cameras as photos were taken to document the night.

Tension filled the air as the three sororities competed for their house member to be honored with the title of derby doll. As Delta Gamma member Stella Bouchard

won, cheers and applause filled the air.

Additionally, anticipation rose as Matthew Oppenheim, philanthropy chair for Sigma Chi, was forced to shave his head after losing a bet that he could raise the most money in the fraternity. Attendees crowded around a singular chair in the dining room as he sat down to have his head buzzed by a fellow brother.

"They're highly regarded within the field, and it's something that [we] both as a chapter and a national fraternity, are very committed to supporting," Cameron Slade, Sigma Chi advisor, said.

While Sigma Chi, Alpha Phi and Sigma Alpha Epsilon's philanthropies have come to an end for the year, more sorority and fraternity fundraising events are expected

to be hosted before the school year ends.

"I would encourage students to just get involved in these philanthropic events and immerse themselves in that setting," Rutz said. "Philanthropy events are one way to kind of enhance this reputation of our chapters, because I don't think a lot of students or community members who are not familiar with Greek life understand maybe the purpose of what they're doing. Philanthropy is one doorway that you can walk through to kind of see that in action."

Sabrina Philip is a news reporter for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at sabrina.philip@umontana.edu. For more stories from Philip and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com.

DON'T BE A DRAG, JUST BE A QUEEN

**I SPENT
MY LIFE
LOOKING
FOR
MYSELF.
THEN I
FOUND
DRAG.**

**STORY BY
KAIRI
LISING**

**PHOTOS BY
RACHEL
YEAGER**





The sounds of pop music and laughter fill the room as Walker Winterburn, Connor Romandine and Kairi Lising get ready together in the basement of the music building on April 4.



Kairi Lising brushes bright pink eyeshadow onto their eyelid as part of their transition into Mestiza Mango, their drag persona.

EVERY PERFORMANCE ENDS the same way, and the night after this one was no different. I packed my gray Ikea duffel bag with the remnants of everything I left on stage: my lipgloss, for touch ups; my fan, because it's hot as hell in a wig; my brush, because said wig loves to get tangled; and a Bath & Body Works apple and champagne scented body spray.

I waved goodbye to my fellow performers, weaving through decorated bodies to get through the dressing room. Suitcases lay popped open, brimming with glittery outfits. White styrofoam mannequin heads crowded every flat surface. Performers touched up their makeup in the vanity mirrors, laughing and talking about the night.

"You did so amazing!" one queen said to another.

"Oh my god, thank you! You were so fierce," they responded, smiling.

I walked out of the dressing room, leaving the loud, colorful world behind and preparing myself to leave the Zootown Arts Community Center's performance space.

The night marked my 10th performance as Mestiza Mango, my drag persona. In April 2024, I tried drag for the first time, and in the year since, I've fallen in love with it. I've also discovered that for every moment of joy and community, there are moments of realization that not everyone in the United States wants

people like me to exist.

It can be terrifying to live in a state that refuses to acknowledge my existence. Recently, bill after bill have been proposed in the Montana legislative sessions, going after LGBTQIA+ issues from drag to gender to bathroom signage. Just when I've discovered an art form I love so much, legislators are ripping it from my fingertips. I'm holding on, terrified of what the outside world wants to do to me.

In the performance space, the chatter of the last remaining audience members and the quiet pop music was a total opposite from just a few moments ago. House lights flooded the room in sterile yellow light. I made my way to the front door of the venue. But before I crossed the threshold, that ever so familiar feeling crept in again: fear.

Whenever I'm in drag, a million scenarios flash through my head of what could happen to me as I walk to my car. Getting catcalled is the milder option. Being killed is the extreme.

These thoughts lingered in my mind despite every promise of safety the liberal pocket of Missoula offers. I looked out through the windows of the venue's vestibule: barhoppers made their way to the next bar, pedestrians took night strolls.

I tried to feel the ground under my heels. Then, with a deep breath, I opened the door and walked into the night.

LIFE'S A DRAG

When anyone mentions drag, it's usually in the same sentence as "RuPaul's Drag Race," a reality TV show that brings drag queens together to compete for a cash prize and title. With each episode having over 500,000 viewers, it's become the forefront of drag in pop culture.

Drag queens featured on the show are often elevated to higher levels of fame, like Trixie Mattel and Katya Zamolodchikova, who started the popular Youtube show "UNHhhh" together, and Jinkx Monsoon, who recently starred in an episode of "Doctor Who."

The show has also had an impact by introducing Gen Z to a new vernacular. The show took terms like "slay," "yas" and "serving" out of '70s and '80s Black underground ballroom culture where they originated and pushed them into the mainstream lexicon. Ballroom culture has been around for a long time, dating all the way back to the mid-19th century during the Harlem Renaissance era. During its peak, queer ballroom culture became popular as a safe space for members of the LGBTQIA+ community to come together and celebrate themselves.

Long before the advent of slaying and snatching, historians believe drag originated in the theater out of necessity. In ancient Greece and Rome, women were not allowed

to act, so female characters were played by male actors in makeup and dresses. In 17th century Japan, Kabuki theatre used young male actors to play female roles.

Despite its history and presence in modern-day culture, drag is anything but accepted. Across history, there have been bans on people performing drag and wearing clothes of the opposite gender. A recent Montana bill prohibited minors from attending "drag story hour," an event where drag queens or kings read books and host learning activities with children.

The bill banned reading sessions and "sexually oriented performance" in publicly funded schools and libraries. The bill was signed into law on May 22, 2023, but was deemed unenforceable by the Montana Supreme Court after a Montana-based nonprofit organization, The Imperial Sovereign Court of the State of Montana, filed a lawsuit against it.

Most recently, in March 2025, the bill was revised to redefine what drag queens and kings are in the eyes of the law. It did not pass in the Montana House with a vote of 44-55.

The president of the Montana Drag Imperial Court, Eunice Sexx, heavily advocates for accessible drag across the state. The nonprofit is a royal court system that has been the driving force for drag representation in Montana. Existing for over 30 years, the primary goal of the organization is to support LGBTQIA+

issues and charities. For each show it produces, every dollar spent on tickets and tips to performers goes to charities.

“When I was a queer kid, me and my friends didn’t have a place to explore that side of ourselves. That’s why I’m such a big advocate for all-ages drag events and drag story hours,” Sexx said. During events for all ages, Sexx changes their last name to that of their drag mother, Diana Bourgeois.

Through the work of the nonprofit and other lobbyists, opportunities for drag performers are maintaining a slim presence in Montana. Without it, I wouldn’t even know about what drag is and what drag can do for people like me. I would never have found my community. I wouldn’t have found my true self.

In another world, without drag, I’d be an entirely different person. Not the outgoing, expressive person I am now, but introverted and insecure, just like how I was before.

MESTIZA MANGO TAKES THE STAGE

Growing up in Great Falls, there’s no such thing as drag. No local performers and no events — hell, I didn’t even know gay people existed until I had internet access.

I grew up Catholic, going to church every Sunday and praying the rosary every Wednesday night with my grandma. In the summer, I wasn’t allowed to wear shorts unless they reached beyond my fingertips. When I would wear a dress with spaghetti straps, I always had to have a cardigan on to cover my shoulders. As a result, I rejected every form of femininity. I hated wearing dresses and stuffed anything pink to the back of my closet.

My only exposure to drag was the YouTube algorithm, which recommended clips from “RuPaul’s Drag Race.” I remember watching an acting challenge on the show where the competing drag queens acted out a script parodying “Empire,” a popular TV drama. Bob the Drag Queen — yes, that’s her name — entered with her fur coat and dramatically revealed a rhinestone catsuit underneath. Honestly, it’s maybe the funniest thing I’ve ever seen. The moment was seared into my brain.

I’ve watched that three-minute clip over and over again. It was 2018. I was a freshman in high school then and had just started exploring makeup. That felt safe. Just a little eyeliner here, some blush there. But I knew I wanted to do more.

In 2022, I came to Missoula as a college student to study acting and journalism at the University of Montana. I hadn’t explored drag, but I knew I wanted to try it. I just didn’t know how. There’s not exactly a manual for it, especially in such a small community.

One thing I knew I needed to find was a drag mother, an experienced drag performer who mentors and supports a new queen, often considered her “daughter.” Drag mothers teach new performers the art of drag and the community’s traditions.

Through my acting degree, I found my drag mother, known as Miss Honey Doo. Out



Kairi Lising performs “The Thrill Is Gone” by Raye during a performance at the ZACC on March 1. Lising said in the drag show business, they’ll tell the audience to tip them a dollar if they like them or \$20 dollars if not, and maybe they’ll go away.

of drag, he’s Walker Winterburn, a senior in the musical theatre program at UM. I met him in an intro to modern dance class.

“We were paired together to choreograph a little phrase, and we were the only ones who cared about it,” Winterburn said. “I remember being annoyed with you because I wanted to lead and you would shoot some of my ideas down. I was like, ‘Who is this ‘they’ with the eyeliner? Don’t they know I’m a sophomore and I have seniority?’”

In true drag queen fashion, we became friends by being mean to each other in our best moments and being kind at our worst. In August of 2023, he asked me and my partner to attend his drag show at the Zootown Arts Community Center. We filed in early, but the seats were already mostly filled, so we sat in the third row from the front. I really could only see around of the heads of other patrons.

This was my first time seeing drag in person. I held \$10 in singles in my hand and fought the urge to give each performer all of my money. Winterburn was toward the end of the lineup. I saved my last dollar for the incredible talents of Miss Honey Doo.

Taylor Swift’s song “No Body, No Crime” started playing over the loudspeakers. Miss Honey Doo entered, sporting a red 1950’s style housewife dress and yellow dishwashing gloves. The audience cheered as she lip-synced across the stage.

Then at the song’s climax, as the lyrics played “I think he did it but I just can’t prove it,” Miss Honey Doo removed her yellow gloves to reveal red blood staining her hands.

This spoke to everything I wanted my art to be. It had a plotline, rising action and a climax. All the things they taught us in English class had come to life in a singular performance not

even four minutes long.

It was perfect.

As if overcome by the Holy Spirit, I shot up to my feet, screaming, my dollar held high. I wasn’t much of a religious person anymore, but when I saw the drama of the moment, I felt God in the ZACC that night. I knew I wanted to do drag more than anything in the world. If “RuPaul’s Drag Race” opened the door for me, Winterburn and his performance broke it all the way down.

I knew I had to start somewhere, and that somewhere was my name. Every drag performer must have a name befitting, of course. Since Miss Honey Doo was a play on a fruit name and I was her daughter, I decided to go the same route.

I picked my last name first. Mango, after my favorite fruit. It also happens to be a fruit native to the Philippines, where my family comes from. I love alliteration and the Addams Family, so my first drag name was actually Morticia Mango. It went well with my more gothic style, and I liked the way it flowed.

In May 2024, Winterburn and our friends were sitting in the Taco Bell drive-thru when I was telling them the meaning behind a nickname my grandma had given me. Whenever she wanted to get my attention, in a bantering way, she would call me “mestiza.” I never looked it up, I just assumed it was a term of endearment. One time, my mom overheard her calling me that.

“Don’t you know that means halfer?” she laughed.

“You’re kidding,” I said.

Yes, mestiza means half white, which evidently, I am. After I finished telling that story, Connor Romandine, my drag sister named Cherry Berry, jumped up and told me how perfect it was for my name. It was uniquely me, uniquely Filipino. And thus, the starlet queen, Mestiza Mango, was born.

THE FRUIT BASKET

Winterburn taught me the rules of Missoula’s drag world. At shows, there are the drag elders you can’t forget to tip. He showed me who are the mean queens who maybe don’t deserve tips. And, the most important rule: never ever go anywhere alone. Always have a person with you, even when you’re going to the bathroom or going outside for a smoke break.

This rule was written in blood. Winterburn stressed to me how important it was. A performer hasn’t been assaulted in Montana yet, and everyone wants to keep it that way. According to GLAAD, the world’s largest LGBTQIA+ media advocacy organization, as of April 2023, there have been 161 anti-drag attacks nationwide. This includes protests and threats. At every show, the organizers always make sure to stress safety in numbers and to look after each other. You don’t want to become a cautionary tale — or another statistic.

In lighter ways, Winterburn helped me with every aspect of my performances, from how to glue on lace front wigs to how to submit my music to the DJ. Most importantly, he taught me Miss Honey Doo’s signature look:



Alannah Skye performs to “BattyRap” during the burlesque drag show on March 1.

blush. Not a soft kiss of pink on the cheeks like I used to do in high school, but sunburn levels of blush.

“My favorite part about drag is that you have full creative control,” Winterburn said. “I can lip sync, I can be funny, I can be sexy. I can do whatever I want and I don’t have to check in with anybody.”

Winterburn discovered drag because of the Imperial Court nonprofit, after it partnered with UM’s Lambda organization, the on-campus LGBTQIA+ student group, to host a drag event. There, he met Sexx, who quickly became Winterburn’s drag mother. Before Eunice Sexx became the performer they are today, Raymi Samson was a theater kid just like me. They went to Cornish, an arts university in Seattle, but quickly found the competitive environment wasn’t for them.

“There was a point in time in my life where performance was going to be my life, and among many other things, I decided that I didn’t want to walk into a room with 30 other women that looked like me, who could probably, perform better,” Samson said.

Originally from Helena, they moved back to Missoula after meeting their future husband. Samson also discovered drag through the Imperial Court nonprofit, reconnecting with their love of performance through a new medium.

“Drag is such an amalgamation of different types of art,” Samson said. “Makeup is es-

entially just paint that you put on your face. Hair, wigs, it’s sculpture.”

Samson said that, like sculpture, they carve couch cushions to make their hips bigger and create an hourglass figure.

“Then we add music, and then that makes it a performance,” Samson said. “Being able to have a lot more freedom in that art and that performance makes me so much happier than when I was a stage actress.”

Outside of drag, Samson makes a living as an esthetician, a licensed skincare professional. They keep their drag persona on the down-low, only divulging it to clients who are accepting.

“It’s about protecting myself. It’s not about stifling who I really am. It’s about picking and choosing who deserves it. I have to look after myself,” Samson said. Otherwise, all they say is that they do makeup sometimes.

For Samson, their drag is something that is unique to themselves. “Now I know there’s things that people can do that Eunice Sexx can do, but only I can be Eunice Sexx. Just kind of the same, as I can also only be Raymi,” Samson said.

Samson has expanded past the nonprofit, creating other opportunities to perform and be paid for it. With their drag sisters, Iris Von Moxxi and Stella Kinesis, they created Bounce Haus in October 2023. The Missoula-based drag house aims to uplift and fund local performers. I’ve been fortunate enough

to be invited to perform with them. Nothing beats getting your first paycheck doing what you love, even if it comes in all ones.

WE’RE ALL BORN NAKED, THE REST IS DRAG

Over the year I’ve been doing drag, it’s done so much for me. It’s opened a door of expression that I wasn’t afforded the chance to explore when I was younger. I still carry around fashion tendencies from my childhood. Sweatshirts and baggy jeans were my go-to.

With drag, I’ve been able to express myself femininely but without restrictions. I’ve learned how outgoing I can be and how much I love making friends and talking to people.

I’ve also discovered a found family of lifelong friends. Winterburn is one of my best friends, and we’re planning our lives after college together. Eunice Sexx is always there to help, offering an outfit or some padding if I need it. The queens across Montana have been so supportive of my drag journey, always cheering me on in the comments of my Instagram.

Unfortunately, I don’t get that same support from my biological family. My grandma, who still calls me “mestiza” to this day, has no idea about this other side of myself. My mom just knows that I do drag, but she has never seen it. The rest of my extended family has no idea.

Even though I’m sharing my story with thousands of readers, I’m still scared to tell my family I’m doing drag. That same fear of crossing that threshold creeps in again. I’m afraid of rejection. In Filipino culture, family and God are everything. If they find out, I know it’ll go against everything I’ve been taught to be: a good little church going, conservative girl. Despite this being ingrained in my mind, I’ll never be that girl. I am loud, obnoxious and flamboyant, and that is here to stay. The joy and community have far outweighed the fear and terror. Maybe they’ll never find out. Either way, I know what I’m going to keep doing: being Mestiza Mango.

That’s exactly what I did when I took to the stage in March for the Imperial Court nonprofit’s latest drag show, because before I had to pack my bag up, before I said good-night and crossed the threshold into the world outside, there was a show to put on.

I donned my signature blunt micro bang black wig and one of my favorite dresses I got from a thrift store. I put on my dollar-store pearls and my Amazon platform heels. I took one last look in the vanity mirror of the dressing room before I stepped out, waiting for my entrance. My eyes trailed over the features I’ve painted on. The heavily arched brows. The defined cupid’s bow of my overlined lips. My sharp contour cheeks.

I am beautiful. I am art.

“Please welcome to the stage the incredible talents of Mestiza Mango!” Eunice Sexx announced over the microphone.

I tear myself away from the mirror and step past the threshold.

“Thrill is Gone” by RAYE started playing. I entered through the left side of the stage to rapturous applause. My adrenaline always races before a number, no matter how many times I’ve rehearsed it. It’s made a million times worse when my beating heart is held down under layers of clothing and a steel boned corset. But I threw my anxiety out the window and put my gay face on the second the music starts.

I lip-synched with the vigor and the heart of a pop star. The pop-rock beat changed from upbeat to jazzy, slower and sultry.

“The thrill is goooooone,” RAYE’s voice sighed.

Then the music cut out. It went completely silent. My heart started racing again. The crowd waited with bated breath. I got up and went to the side of the stage where my drag sister, Cherry Berry, waited with a Dr. Pepper and a bendy straw.

As I took a sip, the crowd went wild. I love a planned bit, especially a silly one, and so does the audience. In that moment, amidst the stage lights and lipstick, the fear driving my heart transforms into that feeling I’ve been chasing: euphoria. I feel sexy. I feel in charge. I feel feminine. I feel like Mestiza Mango. I feel like myself.

Kairi Lising is the arts and culture editor for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at kairi.lising@umontana.edu. For more stories from Lising and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com.

UM student volunteers as Spanish medical translator in Honduras

JULIA BRANEN

julia.branen@umontana.edu

It took about an hour's drive to climb up the rural roads of Honduras to get to the village where a pop-up clinic was tucked away within one of the school houses. There, Isabel Hammond sat down with a 90-year-old patient, her daughter and a physician. With the older woman clasping her hands, Hammond asked, "What can I do to help?"

For two weeks, Hammond, a 22-year-old University of Montana senior and pre-med and Spanish major from Salt Lake City, lived and worked in Honduras as a medical translator for her capstone project. From Feb. 15 to March 1 she traveled to various villages accompanying physician assistants, interpreting their guidance as they treated patients who needed anything from general physical exams to assistance with kidney failure and domestic violence.

With graduation less than a month away, Hammond and many other honors students must begin to reflect the work of their semester long capstones, which are one of the most daunting requisites within the Honor's College.

Every spring, honors students must brainstorm ways to channel their academic interest into a cumulative project of a semester or year worth of learning.

Capstones range from research projects and presentations to displays at art galleries, but all are under the guidance of a mentor, which is often a UM professor who facilitates the project's focus. For many, these projects will be shared with the public at UM's Conference of Undergraduate Research.

While many capstones are independently developed, Hammond's internship with Missoula Medical Aid was recommended by her Spanish professor, Jannine Montauban, who knew it would meld Hammond's two passions.

Montauban said she and her colleagues within the Spanish department are always searching for ways to get students practical language experience that connects back to their major.

Montauban said language is a card up someone's sleeve they can always fall back on. "Why limit your world to one language?" she said.

Montauban said the already numerous Spanish speakers in the United States, and Montana in particular, are rapidly increasing. For medical students such as Hammond, being able to speak Spanish is becoming a necessity to provide accessible healthcare.

While Hammond had always envisioned herself as a doctor, her interest in language came later from her family. Growing up she



CONTRIBUTED | ISABEL HAMMOND

watched her aunt, who also majored in Spanish, speak the language with neighbors, which inspired her to pursue it.

When Hammond applied as a volunteer for Missoula Medical Aid, she anticipated she would work as an intern. But plans quickly shifted after a few volunteers dropped out last minute from one of the nonprofit's three annual trips to Honduras.

Though the transition into any new culture can be overwhelming, Hammond embraced it with open arms. She was curious and humble, observed David Cates, the executive director of Missoula Medical Aid, a UM alumni and a medical interpreter himself. He immediately noticed her ability to connect with locals onsite.

"She'd sit with kids and the kids would ask questions about her life and she would ask them," Cates said. "She was at ease and comfortable in a situation which is a lot different from here. It can be hard for people to relax, but she was relaxed from the beginning, which is what I was impressed with."

The teams Missoula Medical Aid sends to Honduras each year consist of groups of volunteers, each different from the last but reliant upon the connection of trust previous volunteers had established.

"You have to get to know people, talk to people, have a relationship and begin to understand what is happening and what you can do to help," Cates said. "That doesn't happen just because you show up and say 'I want to help.'"

For Cates, the core of building trust is humility. As volunteers, he said, they have to recognize that individuals are there to assist with

needs, something one can't determine without seeking guidance. It is up to the volunteers to ask and then listen.

"But if you hang around, if you keep coming back and if you keep listening and if you make only the promises you can keep, people begin to trust you," he said.

Building on that foundation of trust, Missoula Medical Aid has cemented its 26-year long partnership with Honduran partner organizations, including Save the Children Honduras.

Though support has been focused abroad, the work of the medical program serves national interests, such as immigration through keeping communities intact.

"Most people don't want to go someplace where they don't know somebody and have to start over again. Most people would like to live where they live," Cates said. "But if someone is hungry and can't feed themselves they have to do something. They have to leave."

For Hammond, international aid extends beyond national interest. For her, it's a duty.

"We are a pretty wealthy country and a lot of the countries who are not so wealthy are that way in part because of us," Hammond said. "And so I think that it is our responsibility to take the fact that we have a lot of specialties and professionals and quite a bit of money, usually, and take that to where we can help."

The importance of her role as an interpreter on this trip was not lost on Hammond. She diligently studied her Spanish on the 36-hour trip to the country and further developed it through bonding with people she met along the way. She made an effort to have lunches with the Honduran partners and to converse

with the local translators and patients.

Yet, working with patients as an interpreter required skills beyond simple language fluency — it includes simplifying the doctor's diagnosis to patients.

"A lot of medicines will be explained to a patient and the interpreter will be repeating these things and you begin to see the patient's eyes glaze over," Cates said. "An interpreter has to really hear what the patient is saying and not just translate the words verbatim. Words are just a part of what we are ultimately communicating."

While many patients were open to explaining their conditions, Hammond said a few required a bit more coaxing. She asked about their life, shared her own and expressed the ways she fell in love with their country. Self-deprecating humor was especially helpful, Hammond said.

"In a vulnerable situation like a doctor's appointment, it feels better to be able to talk to a real human," Hammond said. "It is about human connection and maintaining warmth. It is important to keep things from becoming too clinical and too sterile."

This intimate style of care was a direct contrast to Hammond's experience working for a for-profit hospital in Missoula, where she said she was often encouraged to prioritize profit rather than patient experience.

"We could afford to be a little more gracious and a little more generous in Honduras," Hammond said.

She said the house supervisor here often accepted patients from other hospitals to earn more money, which sacrificed emergency room beds in Hammond's already understaffed unit.

Hammond was also encouraged to scan supplies to keep track of use and charge patients if they used more than one, even if the medical practitioner made a mistake or simply required more to properly serve the patient.

"It is difficult to work in health care in the United States and maintain your own integrity treating people as they should be," Hammond said.

Inspired by her experiences in Honduras, Hammond ultimately decided to transition away from emergency care toward pediatrics and preventative care — teaching families how to care for themselves so they don't have to use the American healthcare system, and solidifying her passion for non-profit work.

Julia Branen is a designer for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at julia.branen@umontana.edu. For more stories from Branen and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com.

A quiet look into 'Hush Hour'

FIONA DAVIA

fiona.davia@umontana.edu

While reading is often considered a quiet, solitary hobby, a Missoula brewery has welcomed it to become something communal.

At "Hush Hour," strangers gather not to talk, but to share the silence of a good book. It's a place where community and literature meet in silence and stillness.

On March 25, readers climbed the stairs to the second floor of GILD Brewing to be met with a bulletin board adorned with pins and scraps of paper scattered around bookmarks. The board displayed a sign that read, "What are you reading today?" inviting guests to write down their current reads before pinning them among the others.

On the first floor, the lounge burst with a rush of sound, loud music tangled with conversation. The last light of the day poured through the windows lining the front of the building, spilling across the room, falling on the faces of a mosaic of people.

Each wooden table was topped with lamps, glasses holding a variety of drinks and books of every shape, color and size. It was a scene worth pausing on, a small space brimming with an energy that felt both intimate and infinite.

"Onyx Storm," "Sunrise of the Reaping," "Fearless" — book titles blurred together as attendees moved through the room, scanning familiar titles and searching for open seats in this literary haven.

At the back of the room, the line for food dwindled as the clock crept toward 7 p.m. While I stood in line to order food, a stranger approached me and offered me a seat at their table. After ordering, drink in hand, I sat down and thanked them for the welcome. Their names were Angel Griego, Zero Romrell and Rae Maurer.

Griego had thick brown hair falling to their shoulders and a crooked smile. Romrell had fresh pink and green hair complemented with a brilliant smile containing gems that shimmered in the soft lighting. Maurer's striking purple hair stood out among the crowd and shone even in the light of the setting sun.

"Wind and Truth" by Brandon Sanderson, "Notes of a Crocodile" by Qiu Miaojin and biology lab notes were spread across the table.

When I asked Maurer about their choice to bring their lab notes, they said, "Sometimes it's just nice to get out and have a change of scenery."

A soft bell rang out, cutting through the noise, and a hush fell over the room. Aimee McQuilkin and Nicole Vanek, the organizers

of the free event, stood and welcomed everyone to the event. Subtle, quiet cheers popped up throughout the room as the organizers exchanged smiles.

Vanek thanked the brewery for hosting and welcomed both new and returning readers. She listed the upcoming meetings before explaining the structure of the night. "In a few minutes, I'll ring the bell, and our hour of silent reading will begin. You'll know the hour is up when I ring the bell again. You're welcome to stay and chat or leave when you're done."

Though "Hush Hour" is a relatively new event, started in 2023, Vanek, McQuilkin and Connie Brueckner are all members of the same Missoula book club, Book Club for May-or, which was founded in 2005. The idea was inspired by a similar event that takes place in New York called "Reading Rhythms."

The crisp sound of the bell rang. Like a switch had been flipped, conversations stopped, and the entire room opened their books to read. Paperbacks, hardcovers and e-readers filled the space, while the noise of the bar scene below slowly faded beneath a playlist curated by Slant Street Records.

Toward the end of the hour, Romrell's jaw dropped, and they flipped their book over on the table, a move every reader knows. Something big just happened.

My hour consisted of 55 pages, two tacos and a root beer. As an introvert, it was a perfect way to spend my Tuesday evening.

Though being surrounded by strangers would usually be my nightmare, there was a certain familiarity with the 30 or so people that sat on the second floor of the small-town brewery.

The bell rang once more, signaling the end. Another humorous minute passed as readers hurriedly finished their pages before conversation began again. The numbers diminished as people returned to their lives, but a few tables remained, chatting about what had happened in their books, mine included.

Griego reached the long-anticipated turning point in their book, Romrell had three pages until the end of theirs and Maurer had made it through a single question on their lab homework.

We called it a night and stepped into the fresh spring air as a hint of a new friendship began to form. With plans already in motion for the next "Hush Hour," Romrell called out into the night, "We'll save you a seat."

Fiona Davia is a designer for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at fiona.davia@umontana.edu. For more stories from Davia and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com.



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An unexpected career path for UM men's head tennis coach

RILEY COMSTOCK
riley.comstock@umontana.edu

A former Griz tennis athlete, poker player and business owner, Jason Brown, has had a unique path to the position of Griz men's tennis head coach.

Originally from Conrad, Montana, Brown wanted to play college basketball growing up, but his smaller stature held him back.

He said his mother stands at 4 feet 11 inches. "I was lucky to make it to 5' 8," so at one point when I was like 14 or 15, I knew college basketball was not gonna happen," Brown said.

He decided to pick up tennis instead. He said it didn't take long to become the best tennis player in town. But, he said, it wasn't hard in Conrad, where the population in the '90s was a little under 3,000.

"You realize quickly that being good at tennis in Montana doesn't mean a lot," Brown said.

Regardless, his goal had been to play college sports and he was a lifelong Griz fan. So when it came time to choose schools, he made his way to University of Montana, securing an academic scholarship and walking on to the tennis team. The program wasn't quite as high-level as today, though.

"Tennis was a little bit more like a glorified club sport in the early '90s. I think maybe we got like one T-shirt, we had to buy all our own stuff," Brown said.

He said he mostly practiced instead of competing, but he still enjoyed it and made lasting connections with the team, specifically with Griz coaching legend Kris Nord.

As a small-town kid, he loved the access to higher quality facilities, including at the

time a three-court bubble in East Missoula. The team would practice at night, often arriving at 11 p.m.

After his four years on the team, Brown wasn't totally done with his degrees. He described a long meandering road through college, starting as a pharmacy major and eventually graduating with degrees in religion and humanities.

When he was no longer receiving scholarships but was still in college, Brown found he could make money off playing poker to support his schooling, alongside his jobs at Bob Ward's Sports & Outdoors and teaching tennis.

"My little brother always laughed, he's like 'You've never had a job, you just turn your hobbies into jobs,'" Brown said.

In his post-tennis playing years, Brown helped develop an online poker website, had interest in casinos and owned a poker room in town.

"It's similar to tennis strategy, and you look at, 'Am I hitting the ball to the right spot repeatedly?' and 'Is that gonna give me advantage?' and it does over time," Brown said.

He was still connected to the UM team in various ways after he finished school. He had been playing with another former Griz player for a while, and eventually worked his way back in as a volunteer, helping individually and "hitting with the guys."

In the spring of 2013, Brown was diagnosed with cancer. Over that summer, he beat it, but his career in the gambling industry didn't suit him anymore.

"For whatever reason, poker didn't feel good to me anymore. Beating people out of their money because I was better at a game than them, it just didn't sit with me. I was

like, 'I want to give something back,'" he said.

That fall, he started as an official volunteer assistant coach with the tennis team.

"At the time I felt young enough that I wasn't disconnected age-wise, now I feel like their dad, but then, I felt like an older brother," Brown said. His players, especially the international ones, also described him as a father figure.

In his first year as assistant coach, the team won its first, and only, Big Sky Tournament title.

From then on he was hooked on coaching. The feeling of winning with the team was electric. He started taking on more responsibilities, including recruiting and one-on-one practice as head coach Kris Nord started stepping away from the team. Nord had coached both the men's and women's teams for decades by that point.

During his time as an assistant coach, he learned a great deal from his mentor, but also developed his own style.

"The things I learned were he always expected you to compete hard, he was a very consistent, hard-nosed guy," Brown said. "He really pushed people to get the most out of them, and I think in the end that is kind of what coaching is about."

Brown's relationships with his athletes are a big part of his coaching style as well.

"Not everybody gets to be number one, not everybody gets to be a star, so I try and create that great experience for the guys who are maybe on the sidelines or are more of a role player or a practice player, because I remember what that felt like," he said.

Brown has a bright energy that brings people up, but also a disarming presence. His passion for tennis and coaching shines through in personal conversations. When working on getting his athletes to perform better, he is cool and calculated, carefully describing slight adjustments.

"The first time I spoke with him I knew this was the place where I wanted to come," Dragos Bucurescu, a 20-year-old communications major from Romania, said.

It's part of what has allowed him to bring in international athletes, an oddity among Griz sports. Bucurescu remembers that conversation in a positive light.

"He was very honest," Bucurescu said. "He had a calm voice when he was speaking with me, he had patience to explain to me everything that was going on here, and I just felt that this was the guy I wanted to spend the four next years with."

Brown's team culture is one dedicated

to not only developing great tennis players, but great people as well.

Bucurescu and Eivind Tandberg, a junior from Norway, both said his commitment to excelling in their studies is a big part of the team culture.

"I wanted to be in an environment where progress is the most important thing," Tandberg said. "A lot of college tennis can be about winning, winning, winning, just finding a way to win, but here also it's about developing as a player and person."

Tandberg transferred to UM pathway through his sophomore year and has enjoyed being a Griz and part of Brown's team.

"Being able to talk with him about everything, both tennis and life, that has just helped me a lot," Tandberg said.

But Brown doesn't just have a positive influence on his players, his praise is sung from leadership as well.

"He's been, I think for his entire life, somebody who's achieved a lot and made the most out of every circumstance he's been given," Kent Haslam, the director of athletics, said.

For tennis, making the most is important. The only indoor facility is across town at Peak athletics, and the program is consistently underfunded, according to Haslam. Travel can often be a limiting factor for where the team goes. But part of why Haslam hired Brown was because he knows he has the skills to make it work.

"He's just a great human being," Haslam said. "He's always positive, he always holds himself accountable. When they lose a match, I'll get a text from him and he's like 'Hey, sorry we let you down,' and I'm thinking, 'Jason, you just lost to a team [where] the temperature never gets below 40 degrees in that place, you're good.'"

In his eighth year as coach, Brown is making progress on building another championship team. In 2025, Griz tennis has been keeping near the top of the Big Sky, with only two team losses in six conference appearances.

As Brown works his team through the end of the season, his journey as a coach continues to push him to innovate new ways to keep a scrappy team relevant with several historically dominant schools in the conference, University of Idaho and Northern Arizona.

Riley Comstock is a sports reporter for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at riley.comstock@umontana.edu. For more stories from Comstock and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com.



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Long trips, bus rides create connection for Griz softball

HANNAH BENITEZ

hannah.benitez@umontana.edu

The University of Montana softball team has sparked its own success finding home off the field through friendships and lasting connections.

Out of its 32 games, the team has won only around 20% of its games. The team is working on and off the field to bring up its confidence and strengthen its bond.

Currently, the team only has two pitchers with an earned runs average under six. Something crucial to winning more games is lowering this statistic.

“The big thing is we have to lower the amount of walks and batters hit in games because of those forced runs,” head coach Stef Ewing said. “We didn’t have many in the beginning of the season, but this past weekend we had a couple. We bought a smaller net for the pitchers to practice, so hopefully we’ll see those stats start to drop.”

But even if the team doesn’t have as many wins as it would like, it still recognizes that there is something to learn from the losses.

“Winning means everything, but you can lose a game and still come out with a win, you can learn from that game. Take what might have gone wrong and apply it to practice and fix whatever went wrong,” Presley Jantzi, a senior from Oregon, said.

While the team is trying to figure out what might be producing these unsuccessful games, it understands that one factor might be the amount of time the team spends away from Missoula.

Throughout the season, the team plays 14 away games compared to the 11 games it plays on home turf, with three being over 550 miles away.

“Any player when they come to UM understands that because we’re a northern team we tend to start our season mainly on the road. It’s just something that you have to get used to,” Ewing said.

The team completes another set of road trips with its upcoming games, traveling through Oregon and Idaho before coming back to Missoula. However, the team looks forward to these games since they’re closer, which means instead of boarding a plane, the team simply has an eight hour drive.

“It is nice being home, we’ve been on the road a lot this season,” Ewing said.



Grace Lopez, left, and Makena Strong, right, fight over an incoming softball at a team practice on April 3.
DIEGO HERNANDEZ | MONTANA KAIMIN

“But luckily our upcoming games are bus games, so we don’t have to catch a flight. We get some characters during these trips.”

It’s those long flights and bus trips that force this team to have a strong bond, a bond that stretches outside of the field, whether it’s checking to make sure first base is covered or grabbing weekly dinner at the coach’s house.

“We’re a really close team. We go to [Ewing’s] house each week for dinner and just hang out. It’s not a time to think about softball. It’s not a team meeting, but instead a time for us to just bond and really become good friends,” Jantzi said.

Jantzi, who is in her final year at UM, has been using her last month to enjoy what these last four years have been about. “I want to make these moments last,” she said. “When you spend as much time with a group of people, you form an everlasting bond and it’s sad to know that I’ll be gone in a month.”

The teammates also use their bonds and friendships to help push each other on the field, cheering each other on from the sidelines and picking up each other when they feel down. Jantzi has been able to find success on this team within her batting. She currently holds the best batting

average on the team with a .333.

“A lot of it derives from having confidence and just letting me be myself,” Jantzi said. “One of our core values on this team is building each other’s belief in the team, but also in their own capabilities.”

It’s not just a community that is being created within the team. They’ve also fostered a love for the game with their local fanbase. During game days, the stands of the stadiums fill with family members, students and Griz fans.

“A lot of people on this team are from this area, so their families can come to watch them play. It’s also great because the Missoula community can see how much effort we put into this team. We just love putting on a show for them at home,” Brianna Lachermeier said.

Lachermeier, a sophomore from Colorado, came to the University for a fresh start and found a home on this team.

“I was in a place, back at my old school, where it was affecting not only my love for softball, but many other aspects of my life,” Lachermeier said.

Before transferring to UM, Lachermeier played at an Otero Junior College in Colorado. She finished the 2023-24 season with an earned run average of 6.71 in 63.2 innings pitched. During her run for the Griz, she lowered her average to 5.47 in 64 innings pitched.

As she has the most innings pitched, Lachermeier has set her eyes on finding her place. “I want to earn my spot on this team, prove that I deserve to be here,” she said.

While she is still new to the team, Lachermeier can feel a sense of a family. “Due to the amount of time we’ve spent together during travel days, we’ve become a sort of family. I know whenever I have a problem my teammates will have my back,” she said.

Hannah Benitez is a sports reporter for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at hannah.benitez@umontana.edu. For more stories from Benitez and other reporters, visit online at montanakaimin.com.

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'In Pieces' musical explores love, identity

RACHEL YEAGER

rachelyeager@umontana.edu

In a dimly lit black box theater, the hum of a live band and the resonance of close-knit harmonies filled the room as "In Pieces" by Joey Contreras opened at the Zootown Arts Community Center, inviting audiences into an intimate, musical exploration of love and identity.

The cabaret ensemble, presented by the University of Montana School of Music and School of Theatre and Dance, starred eight principals with an ensemble cast serving as a Greek chorus. Every significant interaction within the cast's romantic endeavors occurred through song.

David Cody, the professor of the cabaret, said the show gives students a chance to apply what they've learned in class.

"It's creating an opportunity for our students to combine what they learn in acting and dance and their voice lessons," Cody said. "And just show what they can do."

Lucy Schindler, a senior from Whitefish, plays Sam, one of the eight characters.

"Joey Contreras has storylines written into the script, but they're a little vague," Schindler said. "So, Sam and Hunter go on a date. Then they break up. Then they meet in a grocery store. And we had to find the story in between those beats."

For Schindler, the experience is particularly meaningful.

"This is my last University show," she said. "It's bringing up a lot of emotions ... like my voice teacher, [Cody]. I've worked with him for four years. And it's hard to think about not performing with these people again."

Cody, the director and vocal coach, said there wasn't much time for rehearsal, only three hours a week for students.

"We're teaching these students how to blend all the components of what they've learned in voice, dance and performance," Cody said. "This isn't just singing — this is staging and storytelling."

He said since it was such a limited time frame, the students in the ensemble sang and acted like professionals. The cast consists of college-age students, region alumni and some professionals.

"They all worked as if they owned the pieces they needed to own," Cody said. "We gave them the freedom to explore emotionally and explore musically."

With little staging and a confining performance space, the show is intimate, something Schindler said added emotion to the show.

"I could see my grandparents all the way

in the back row and still feel connected," Schindler said.

This performance means a lot to Schindler personally, as it's her last before heading to Chicago for a professional theater career post graduation.

"It's emotional," she said. "It holds a lot of weight."

"In Pieces" runs through this weekend at the ZACC, with tickets available through the ZACC website.

Rachel Yeager is a photographer for the Montana Kaimin and can be contacted at rachelyeager@umontana.edu. For more galleries from Yeager and other photographers, visit online at montanakaimin.com.



TOP LEFT: Mikayla Kay, Lucy Schindler and Eliza McNelly comfort Schindler as they sing "Like you don't miss me."

TOP RIGHT: Makenzie Grotto plays "With Him," filling the room with the gentle sounds of her violin on April 5.

BOTTOM: The cabaret ensemble performs "A Young kind of Love" as one of their opening numbers.