

UNSEEN FACES



By the Montana Kaimin Photographers

From designers to janitors, an array of students and staff across campus work to curate UM's environment every day.



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14 Taking a spin

16 Forestry days

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

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POLITICAL CARTOON

HEY EVERYONE! AS YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD POLITICAL CARTOONIST, I'VE GOTTEN TO HIGHLIGHT THE MANY FLAWS IN OUR PATRIARCHAL AND CAPITALIST SOCIETY, DEPICT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AS A GIANT NONFUNCTIONAL DILDO, CALL THE PRESIDENT A CONTEMPTUOUS FUCKWAD, AND MUCH MORE. AS MUCH AS I'D LOVE TO ILLUSTRATE ONE MORE BIG "FUCK YOU!" IN THIS FINE PUBLICATION, INSTEAD I WANTED TO USE THIS LAST CARTOON TO EMPOWER YOUR OWN ART AND REMIND YOU OF ONE THING:



THIS MACHINE KILLS FASCISTS!

BARRETT
2026

KAIMIN KOMICS: THE FINALE



When photojournalism takes the lead

SUDOKU

Difficulty: Easy

Edited by Margie E. Burke

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

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:

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

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Polo-cycle



Members of Missoula Bike Polo play on the roof of the University of Montana's parking garage on April 26. The group meets twice a week.

HENRY DOELLINGER | MONTANA KAIMIN

This week, the Montana Kaimin called on its visual team to tell the stories of several behind-the-scenes-workers on campus.

The decision to tell the stories of the unseen characters influencing our day-to-day lives through our photographers and videographers was an obvious one.

From lab technicians maintaining the gear you use in class to the woman that plays Main Hall's bells every school day at noon, the lives of these sources are not always in the minds of the student body. It was crucial not just to tell the story of their work in words, but to show their faces.

I've crossed the Oval almost every school day for two years, and it wasn't until a semester ago that I realized a woman, Barbara Ballas, assembles and plays a 10 minute performance from the clock tower every day.

I've begged custodians to unlock the Montana Kaimin office after hours, but I've never stopped to ask who they are, or what they notice when they're alone in the spaces we fill during the day.

Documentary photography has long held the power of rawness, truth and uncensorship. In the era of Reels, Shorts and artificial intelligence, our relationship with this medium is more important than ever before, which is why the Kaimin maintains a staff of eight dedicated photographers and videographers. Despite the gear, these journalists are no different in their passion and strength for storytelling.

Our staff does not alter the scene, ask for specific behavior from their sources or change the content of their photos and videos. Photos are toned, which is the editing of the exposure, contrast and light, and some may be cropped or denoised, but all of these carefully calculated actions center on the common goal of telling the truth of an image.

Websites have revolutionized newsrooms. We can publish a breaking news story the minute it is ready, we can link audio and video content to reach a wider audience and we are not restricted by our 16 valuable pages of weekly print space.

With that being said, we strive to view our Thursday print issue as a sort of news magazine, a tangible device for visual storytelling that can live on forever.

Our readers need a reason to pick up our paper and take it with them, and one aspect of that is the visual appeal. These stories maintain a longer shelf life than a breaking news update, and when the photographs flow cohesively with the text, they have the power to pull you through the pages.

As this semester comes to an end and we prepare for the next, these are the values our newsroom will continue to emphasize in our weekly production. I hope you enjoy this week's issue.

- Henry Doellinger, photo editor
Like it? Hate it? Let us know.

Email us your opinions at
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In local news...

JACK SNOW | NEWS EDITOR

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CITY COUNCIL AWARDS \$1.5 MILLION FOR HOUSING

The Missoula City Council allotted a sum of over \$1.5 million in funding for affordable housing for the next fiscal year.

Housing officials said last Wednesday that this money will serve more than 755 people and preserve 206 affordable housing units, according to Missoula Current.

City Council's funding allocations include four separate sources of federal and local money, but some members have said that affordable housing is still in need of more support.

"Every year, the need is greater than the amount of funding that we have," Mirtha Becerra, a council member, said. "These are all deserving projects that we'd like to see funded every year."

One major funding source is the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which is expected to serve two projects, including the United Way's Housing Solutions Fund and the continued rehabilitation of Creekside Apartments. Currently the fund has \$309,000 to expend, though \$1.4 million was requested.

The available funding will still make a big impact, according to Liz Stotts, the program manager for Homeward.

"We're finding that a little extra money is going to go a long way for the integrity of the buildings and the health and safety of the residents," Stotts said.

In addition to the money from the Affordable Housing Trust, the awarded funding includes \$322,000 from the Community Development Block Grant and \$604,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act. The programs slated to receive the funding include the Human Resource Council's houseless prevention program and the Partnership Health Center's Navigating to Stability program.

"We've been able to stand up supportive services at PHC, typically supporting around 30 to 40 people who walk in every day, sometimes up to 80," said Amy Krzyzek, a program development manager with Partnership Health Center. "These funds are making a really big difference in us being able to provide tenancy support service, basic needs services and the supplies that a lot of our unshoused community members need."

MARIJUANA RECLASSIFICATION COULD AFFECT MISSOULA DISPENSARIES

Missoula cannabis dispensaries may have new business options after a federal order reclassifying state-licensed medical marijuana as a less-dangerous drug.

President Donald Trump's acting attorney general, Todd Blanche, signed the order last Thursday. Advocates who argue against marijuana's criminal status have long sought an order like this, according to KPAX.

Missoula dispensary owners like Brandon Madland, who owns Madhouse Cannabis Farms, said the change could be impactful for those who use medical marijuana.

"It should open up the options for patients to take deductions on their products," he said. "It should, you know, so it should be able to at least on a medical card holder level. Yeah, I would say that in this year, you're gonna see a ripple effect that actually can mean something for the customers."

The order does not legalize marijuana for medical or recreational use under federal law, but it does shift licensed medical marijuana from a Schedule I drug to the less strictly regulated Schedule III.

ADVOCATES EXPRESS CONCERN OVER MISSOULA PESTICIDE USE

Missoula advocates continue to push back against pesticide usage in public spaces.

Alison Reintjes, who serves as the director of Grow Safe: Non-Toxic Missoula, is among those fighting for the reduction of pesticide use, according to Nonstop Local.

"Many herbicides are highly toxic, not just to the plants they're intended to kill, but also to you and me and to the entire ecosystem," Reintjes said.

According to Reintjes, this issue encompasses a wide array of chemicals, with varying uses.

"Pesticide is an umbrella term, which means it includes everything from insecticides to fungicides to rodenticides to herbicides," she said. "Herbicides are the most widely used pesticides around the world and most likely here in Missoula as well."



This week on the Kaimin Cast ...

Every Friday for 25 years, Missoula's Women in Black chapter has stood at the south end of Higgins Avenue in promotion for a just, peaceful world.

Women in Black is an international network of women committed to peace and nonviolence. Carel Schneider, 82, has been an inspiration in Missoula's peace movement since she got involved with the Jeannette Rankin Peace Center. She started the city's Women in Black chapter in 2001 in response to military actions after 9/11. Under President Donald Trump's administration and with the recent conflict in Iran, Schneider said peace is getting harder to find.

"We've lost our way somehow. I don't think I'm in the minority, but it's really hard to walk with kindness and compassion and awareness of the other in our environment where there's so much distraction and people are frightened," Schneider said.

Listen in on this week's podcast, Why war: 25 years of promoting peace. Learn more about Schneider and Missoula's movement for peace by heading to our website at montanakaimin.com.

- Grace Golbach,
audio editor



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



WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT SHOOTING SUSPECT MAKES COURT APPEARANCE

The suspect in the attack on the White House Correspondents' Dinner appeared in court on Monday, where he faced felony charges of attempting to assassinate the president.

Cole Tomas Allen, a 31-year-old teacher and engineer from California, stands accused of firing shots outside the ballroom of the Washington Hilton.

Allen was charged with three criminal counts in his appearance on Monday before federal magistrate Judge Matthew Sharbaugh in Washington.

Attempting to assassinate the president carries a sentence of up to life in prison if convicted. Allen's second charge was transportation of a firearm and ammunition through interstate commerce with intent to commit a felony, which could carry a sentence of up to 10 years. The last charge was discharge of a firearm during a crime of violence, which carries a mandatory minimum of 10 years.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Jocelyn Balantine said that Allen traveled to Washington with a pump-action shotgun, a semi-automatic pistol and other "dangerous paraphernalia." She also called for him to be held in pre-trial detention. Allen's attorneys said he has no prior charges and is presumed innocent.

Allen sent a note to family members about 10 minutes before the attack, where he said it was his duty to target officials in the Trump administration. He also apologized to his parents and described his opposition to the current administration.

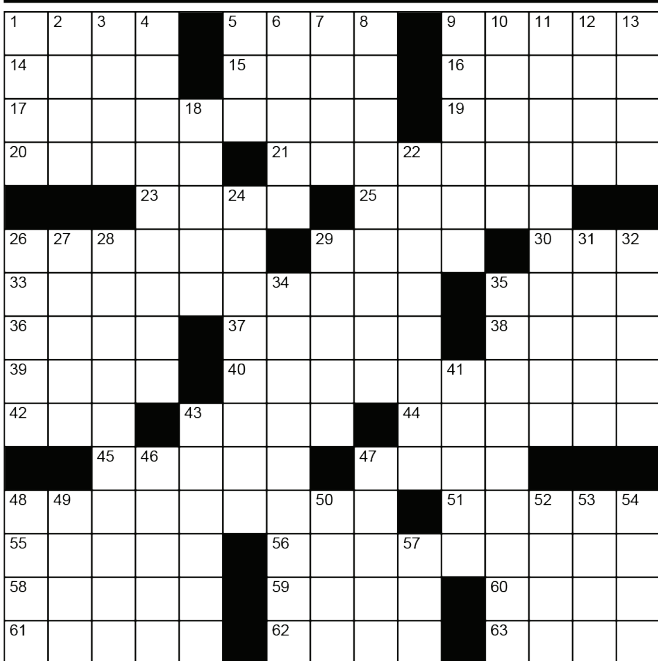
The attack itself took place at around 8:40 p.m. on Saturday when Allen ran through a magnetometer at the hotel and U.S. Secret Service heard a gunshot, according to the complaint.

One Secret Service officer was shot once in the chest, but was wearing a ballistic vest, the document continued.

The complaint said that the officer fired back on Allen, who "fell to the ground and suffered minor injuries but was not shot," before being arrested.

Trump and members of his cabinet were escorted from the hotel ballroom in which the event was held.

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said at a press conference that Trump and the other attendees of the event "were safe" at the time of the shooting.



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ACROSS

- 1 Turning point?
- 5 Unruly crowds
- 9 _____ in the right direction: 2 wds.
- 14 Part of the Corn Belt
- 15 On _____ (without a contract)
- 16 Mecca native
- 17 Burt of 1960's "Elmer Gantry"
- 19 Clean completely
- 20 Items on to-do lists
- 21 Seismic source
- 23 Caviar fish
- 25 Outspoken
- 26 Lucky charm
- 29 Out of shape?
- 30 Where Switz. is
- 33 Penalty
- 35 Beheaded Boleyn
- 36 Begged
- 37 Peter, pumpkin-wise
- 38 Portion out
- 39 Cleanse
- 40 Etcher's fluid
- 42 OH to MA direction
- 43 Kind of curve
- 44 Thanksgiving fare
- 45 Regarding birth
- 47 Depend (on)
- 48 Sponsorship
- 51 Works, as a field
- 55 Buyer's proposal
- 56 Wistful for the past
- 58 Smelled awful
- 59 Icicle former

- 60 Hogwarts librarian Pince
- 61 Puts a stop to
- 62 Fax button
- 63 Equinox mo.

DOWN

- 1 Scottish garb
- 2 Weather tracking org.
- 3 Admits, with "up"
- 4 Fall off the wagon, perhaps
- 5 Publisher's pile: Abbr.
- 6 Chose
- 7 Microwave sound
- 8 Copyist of old
- 9 _____ ratio (TV spec)
- 10 Spa feature
- 11 High-collar top
- 12 Result of honing
- 13 Fishing spot
- 18 Contents of some urns

- 22 Penitent
- 24 Plato was one
- 26 Eden fruit
- 27 Disney's Chinese warrior
- 28 Humdrum
- 29 Midler of music
- 31 Loosen a knot
- 32 Oboe-sounding
- 34 Views from isles, often
- 35 Lilylike flower
- 41 Mea _____
- 43 Baby birds?
- 46 "_____ we all?"
- 47 Varnish ingredient
- 48 Luxurious
- 49 Shaving lotion brand
- 50 1990s VP
- 52 Grimm villain
- 53 Spineless sort
- 54 "Beat it!"
- 57 Covered in Cottonelle, say

Answers to Previous Crossword:

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

Goodbye-o-scope

KAIRI LISING | ARTS & CULTURE EDITOR
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I started working at the Kaimin almost four years ago. Over the course of my career, I've written a lot of horoscopes. From sex positions to musicals to which AI robot would you hook up with, I've seen every side of the zodiac. At first I thought it was pseudoscience, but as time went on, I realized the people in my life are just like their signs. This horoscope will be my last at the Kaimin and I want it to serve as a tribute to all the people who have made me the journalist I am today. Here are the best features of every sign, modeled by the people in my life who I love.

TAURUS (APRIL 20-MAY 20): The best friend I met in college is a Taurus and they are amazing. They're such a grounding presence in my life. Any time I share my worries with them, they know exactly what to say to bring me back to Earth. Tauruses are intuitive and surrounded by love, just like my bestie.

GEMINI (MAY 21-JUNE 20): My late grandpa was a Gemini, but he was not stereotypically two-faced. He was quiet but loving and showed his care with actions rather than words. Buying my grandma flowers or picking me up from school, he was always a calming presence. Gemini, don't believe the bad press. You're great.

CANCER (JUNE 21-JULY 22): As a Cancer myself, I know just how sentimental we get. I mean, more than half of the articles I've written this year are personal narratives, droning on about my feelings. But that vulnerability, I believe, is our strength. We care deeply about the people we love.

LEO (JULY 23-AUG. 22): OK I lied. Surprisingly, I don't have any Leo friends or family. But, one thing I do know is that Leos are leaders. You may be dramatic but you're not afraid to get creative to get it. Hopefully a Leo comes into my life soon!

VIRGO (AUG. 23-SEP. 22): My best friend from middle school is a Virgo and she is such an incredible human being. She graduated early from the school of business and is now working on her master's. Just like my friend, Virgos are hardworking and practical. You inspire me to always pay attention to the details.

LIBRA (SEP. 23-OCT. 22): Just like one of my oldest best friends, Libras I've learned are extremely kind and gentle. When I was going through a dark time in my life, my best friend was there for me. We stayed up all night one time talking about the future and what's next. He helped me realize that everything is going to be okay. Libra, you're a great friend to all.

SCORPIO (OCT. 23-NOV. 21): My grandma is a Scorpio and one thing about her is how fierce she is. She's strong, independent and doesn't take shit from anyone. She knows what she wants and she goes out and gets it. Scorpios, you may be strict, but you do it out of love.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22-DEC. 21): Just like my cousin, who is basically like a sister to me, Sagittariuses are creative yet stubborn. My cousin is an incredible artist, but growing up, she also liked to hog the Nintendo DS. Despite that, I love Sagittariuses and the art and passion they surround themselves with.

CAPRICORN (DEC. 22-JAN. 19): Working part-time at a movie theater helped me meet one of the most independent and thoughtful people I know. Whenever I had a bad day, an iced coffee and a hug would be waiting for me. She's graduating this year with her filmmaking degree. Just like her, Capricorns are pioneers of their craft, whatever it is.

AQUARIUS (JAN. 20-FEB. 18): I love Aquariuses! You guys are fun and eccentric, just like my dear boyfriend. You always fight for what's right. You see people without prejudice and welcome new people wherever you go.

PISCES (FEB. 19-MARCH 20): I've known many Pisces in my life on opposite sides of the spectrum. On one hand, many Pisces are my friends. Compassionate, artistic and so friendly. On the other hand, my ex was a Pisces and he cheated on me so ... I guess you guys aren't all perfect. Sorry I always gave you a mean horoscope, Pisces. I guess you could say I was venting.

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 19): Some of the most intelligent and strong people I know are Aries, one of them being my best friend I met here at the Kaimin. She's written a book over 300 pages long, with the second one on the way. Aries, you inspire me to be just as courageous and determined as you are.



BARRETT CLEMENT | MONTANA KAIMIN

Parking changes receive mixed feedback

JOCELYN HOOD | NEWS REPORTER

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The University of Montana's Transportation and Parking Services increased permit and ticket prices, restricted overnight parking and implemented two new permits to manage congestion of cars in lots this school year, but students still struggle to find spots on campus.

According to Director of Parking Bill Donovan, the standard commuter permit cost \$292 annually last year, but is now \$308 annually, an increase of \$16.

Tickets for parking without a permit in non-reserved spots went from \$50 last year to \$65 this year. Tickets for parking in reserved spots without a permit cost \$40 last year and cost \$65 this year. Donovan said it's the first time in four years ticket prices have increased.

Scott Pintar, a 28-year-old communications major and junior from Rancho Santa Margarita, California, said that he got a ticket this semester.

"I thought I could park over right by where the interdisciplinary and the medical buildings are, and that ticket alone was like \$60," Pintar said. "I think there should be more signs of where students who pay for parking can be at versus others who can't."

Madison Norris, a 24-year-old biology major and junior from Raleigh, North Carolina, said she doesn't like the ticket price increases.

"I feel like that's a little bit rude, especially when there's such a squeeze for parking already," Norris said. Norris has been parking on campus for two years. "There shouldn't be such a steep penalty, and it definitely shouldn't be going up, because at the end of the day, these resources are here for us to use."

Another big change this year is that students who live on campus can now choose between two new permits. A resident student main campus permit costs \$400 per year and allows drivers to park in specific lots on campus as well as at Dornblaser Field and Missoula College. A resident student remote permit costs \$200 per year and is only valid at Dornblaser Field and Missoula College.

According to Donovan, UM only sells 450 resident main campus permits despite about 1,700 students living on campus. He said that without the cap,



UM Parking Enforcement patrols near Aber Hall on April 27. This year, parking in a reserved spot without a permit went up by \$25. WESTON FUDGE | MONTANA KAIMIN

about 930 resident students would likely purchase permits.

"We had some pushback from resident students and their families on those," Donovan said. "They felt a little more restricted than they had been in the past, and they were, because we had to get control of resident parking."

However, he said he's received fewer complaints from commuter students, and it's been easier to host events on campus.

Norris said she thinks that is not a good solution to the lack of parking availability.

"That's like a circular problem, because if you don't live on campus and you don't like that the parking situation is not favorable to living on campus, then you're just going to move off campus and then contribute to the commuter problems," Norris said.

Hunter Steinebach, a 21-year-old forestry major and junior from Deer Lodge, said that he no longer lives on campus, but he used to. He struggled to find parking before it was limited for resident students, even though he had a permit.

"When I was living in the dorms, I could never find parking anywhere near campus," Steinebach said. "I was in Duniway and I always had to park four

blocks away."

Donovan said that commuter parking has a 30% oversale rate, meaning that if a lot had 100 spaces, they could sell 130 permits. He said that most spots aren't taken by one singular car for the whole day, so having an oversale rate allows more people to park.

"I think because of the way classes are scheduled here, it doesn't actually work the way they want it to," Norris said. "Theoretically, no, not every spot should be full at all times of the day, but like, I got here at eight this morning, and it was like I couldn't really find anywhere."

Overnight parking was restricted to just students living on campus with main campus permits, according to Donovan, to make early morning parking more available for students.

Donovan said that none of the changes were financially motivated and the intention was to make the parking less congested, but sometimes price increases are necessary because operating costs for things like repainting stripes and filling potholes also increase.

UM Transportation and Parking Services makes about \$2 million in revenue each year, Donovan said, but about 80% of that goes to fund the UM Police Department. It also doesn't receive

any money from UM and the revenue it generates has to pay for all of its expenses.

This lack of funding is why Donovan said the University is about five years away from a new parking garage being built. There are plans for a parking garage to go in either lot P or G that would add 1,000 parking spaces. It would cost around \$50 million to build, and that funding is not currently available, Donovan said.

"I mean, there's only so much parking out there, and we keep losing it when they decide to build another building, like that new dorm that's coming in," Donovan said.

The new dorm is being built on top of an existing parking lot, lot H, and it is a loss of about 300 spaces.

"I'm concerned," Donovan said. "I should say that the plan is, when that dorm opens, a couple of the others will be decommissioned. If that happens, we'll be okay, but my fear is that the new dorm will open, and the University will decide to put the decommissioning on hold for a year or two and keep bringing in resident students."

If the buildings aren't taken down on time, Donovan said about 300 additional resident students from the new dorm would be wanting parking permits.

"That fills me with incredible amounts of dread," Norris said in response to Donovan's prediction. "I'm not going to lie, that's crazy."

According to Donovan, the UM administration doesn't involve the parking department soon enough in decisions like building the new dorm. He said it's easy for them to decide to build on top of parking lots because they are flat, but then later realize the parking issues that come from that.

"If they would bring parking in on those discussions when they start thinking about a building, I think we could get our input in there a lot earlier," Donovan said.

Donovan said that the parking department always accepts feedback from students and staff.

"We know everyone has to park, and we try to make it as fair as possible to everyone," Donovan said. "We're always open to ideas and suggestions. If anyone wants to just talk and say, 'Why do you do this? Why do you do that?' Man, I'm all ears."

John Ruffatto Startup Challenge notches record number of participants

COLBY SUKO-CLARK | NEWS REPORTER

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The John Ruffatto Startup Challenge logged a record high number of participants in its 37th year of competition on April 17, where all Montana college students can pitch their ideas for a company and product to entrepreneurs.

The challenge was founded in 1989 for the College of Business, and has since been open to all students at Montana colleges to compete for over \$50,000 in prizes and pitch ideas to investors. This year's competition boasted over 100 teams that were parsed down to the 12 finalists that competed on April 17.

"It was a cool experience, and helped me narrow the scope," said Camden Capser, an master's in business administration student at the University of Montana and the founder of Hustle Fundraise, which was a finalist for the Startup Challenge for two years in a row. Capser first competed in 2025 with an idea for a fundraising website, and spoke about how much help the experience offered.

"Each time that I pitched in front of people, I got more feedback, and it was super helpful," he said. This year, Capser participated in the competition as well, and has seen a lot of success with the product.

Hustle Fundraise is a fundraising website that helps make it easier for teams to fundraise more actively by allowing multiple transactions. Hustle Fundraise launched two months ago and has raised almost \$45,000 for teams.

Capser attributed a lot of the success to the director of the Startup Challenge, Erik Guzik.

"Dr. Guzik has been phenomenal for me and many other students," Capser said. "He has been such a powerful force in student projects." Capser participated in the most recent challenges, but the challenge started in 1989 and was the second business plan competition in the United States.

"It shows how very forward looking and innovative our leaders were at the time," Guzik said. The program quickly gained prominence and offers came from other places to help start a similar plan.

"It attracted a lot of attention from around the state and created a bit of an interest for students," Guzik said. "There were requests for similar programs in New York City." This demand allowed for the University to create a summer program for students to help pitch their ideas.

Guzik has been on the program since 2022, and has helped launch the startup studio for students to use when designing their products.

"In 2024, we established the Startup Studio and it's one of the first of its kind,"

Guzik said. "We looked at how to revamp, and give better support for students." The Startup Studio offers help for students prior to the competition day to get feedback on designs and prepare for the competition.

StarSync Studios won the competition and the top prize of \$15,000 in 2024. Since then, they have competed and had success in other competitions around the country.

"We like to support them while they are still students," Guzik said. "They have four years to test, and then by graduation, they have a full business at the time of their degree." This is something that the program hopes to work up to in the future, along with expanding the number of students.

The competition is also expanding to include a World Cup Challenge in which the winner will get a free ticket to the National Startup Challenge in San Francisco.

The Folley Family Foundation and Chris Ruff have helped fund students' projects and help them attend competitions around the country. They also have investors at the competition to help the experience aid as a networking opportunity for students.

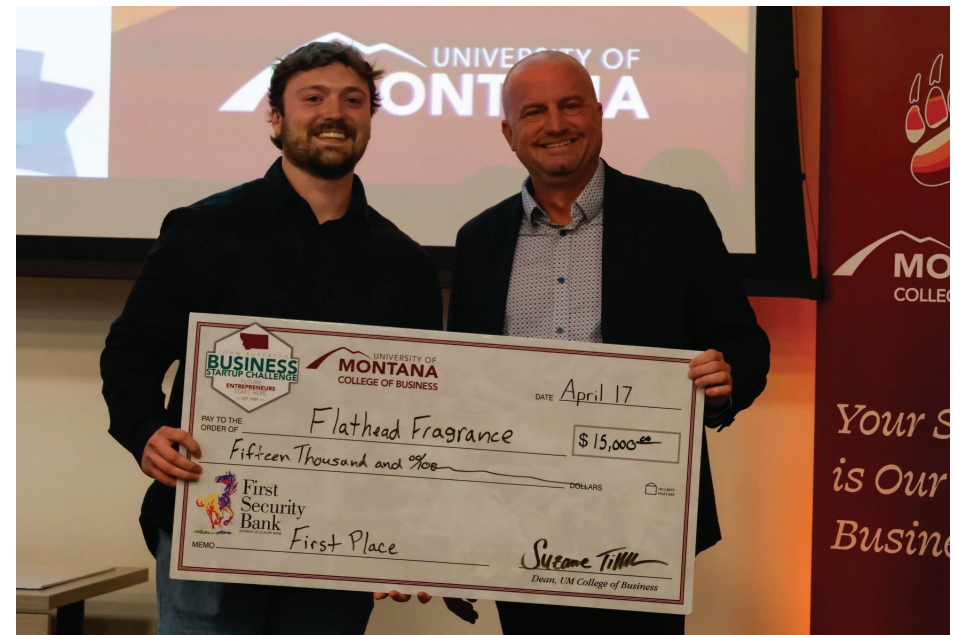
"It completely changed my life overnight, with how many people you meet, it is one of the biggest things in my life," said Schafer Bungay, a senior majoring in marketing and founder of the 2026 John Ruffatto Startup Challenge winner, Flathead Fragrance. In total, Bungay won \$16,500 for his company to grow and expand.

"I was kinda in shock, and I'm still shocked," he said. Bungay competed in the competition with colognes and perfumes that smell like places in the Flathead Valley and Glacier National Park. The competition has helped his company grow, and his products are now available in 13 retailers across Montana. However, he had help throughout the process to make his idea a reality.

"I had four total mentors, and they were super influential in the process," Bungay said. These mentors help students with all aspects from pitching an idea, to the design of a concept.

The other companies that were in the top three included Novara, a fiber optic sensing to detect underwater military attacks, which won second place, and Macro-lite, which plans to use research done by the Berkeley Pit to find a shelf stable antibiotic to fight infections in war torn countries, took third place.

The Challenge received its highest participant numbers to date, but its organizers want to expand even more. "The recognition and the distillment of confidence from the competition, you can't replace it," Bungay said.



Schafer Bungay, founder of Flathead Fragrance Company, poses with a judge after winning the first place prize of \$15,000 in the Gallagher Business Building on April 17 during the John Ruffatto Startup Challenge.

WESTON FUDGE | MONTANA KAIMIN



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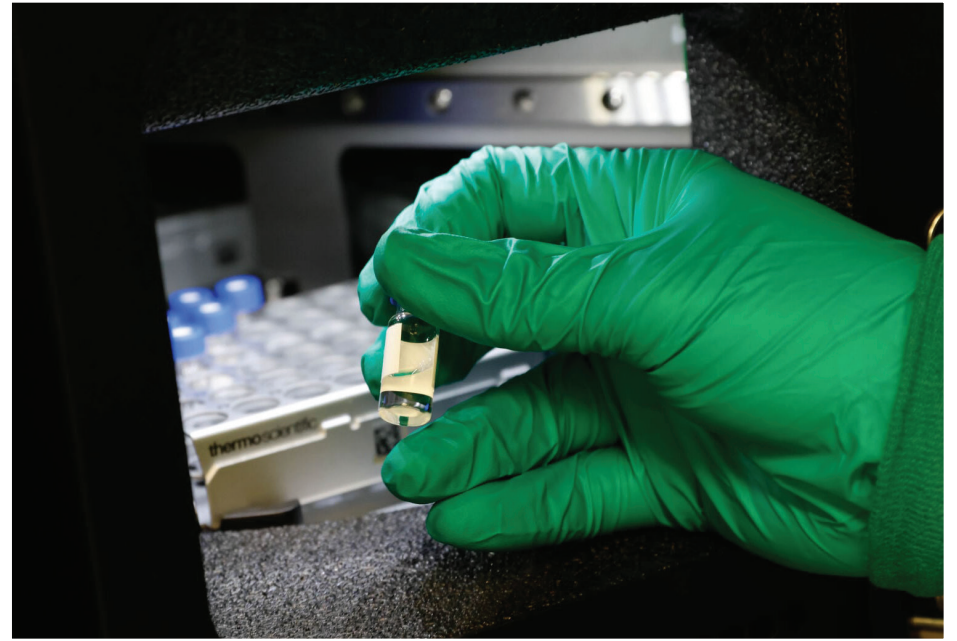
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UNSEEN FACES

From designers to janitors, an array of students and staff across campus work to curate UM's environment every day.

By the Montana Kaimin Photographers

Many individuals work behind the scenes, turning the gears of the small city that is the University of Montana. Together, they create the face of campus that the public interacts with. Some, like custodians and lab technicians, find themselves in high demand, advocating for their skillsets.

Others, like carillonneur Barbara Ballas, have spent years developing their interest in a rare instrument into a daily job. In one case, an art student calls on their strengths to assemble the intricacies of theater productions, creating the visual aesthetic of an entire performance.

Behind the seams

Deep in the basement of the PARTV building, tucked behind a set of double doors, sits a costume shop.

Bins of fabric fill the shelves on the walls, hats and jewelry lay sprawled out across tables and sewing machines sit quietly on the tables, waiting for their next project. For anyone who has seen a theater production at the University of Montana, this is the place where every vibrant costume came to be.

Sara Wheeler, a University of Montana student in the process of getting her Master of Fine Arts degree in costume design, took charge of the attire for the University's most recent show, "Murder on the Orient Express." But for Wheeler, costume design took a while to discover as an option for her career path.

"I had a lot of trouble figuring out what I wanted to do with my life," Wheeler said. "I oscillated between English literature and visual arts and psychology and fashion design, and got to a point where I couldn't decide between them."

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Wheeler to take a break in her studies. During that time, she learned the ins and outs of costume design through time spent on YouTube and fell in love with the process.

"I realized that it was a little bit of everything that I wanted to do on a daily basis," Wheeler said.

When designing costumes for a show, Wheeler's process begins with a moodboard of textures and colors that she is focusing on, and those eventually turn into physical renderings, which are drawn by hand.

For "Murder on the Orient Express," she used markers to create her renderings, but said that she typically enjoys working with watercolor. Once the renderings are complete, Wheeler takes them to the University's costume storage to see what options are available with the actors' measurements. From there, she decides what needs to be purchased.

"Being able to see it on stage, having it go from a rendering to real life was an amazing process," Wheeler said.

While costumes are often visually striking during a production, they also add to the story being told.

"It gives a lot of information on the character first and foremost," Wheeler said. "It can do everything from show their socioeconomic status to their personality. How they take care of themselves, and their character development, and then it can just add an extra layer of visual delight."

Wheeler said designing for shows can be hectic. Having questions thrown at you from different people and departments can get overwhelming. Deciding what to put into a rendering often presents challenges.

"But they're all really fun decisions to make," Wheeler said. "Even on my bad days, I'm still working with costumes, and that's something that I really love. When I'm not feeling my most energetic, it's still something that gets me through, and it inspires me."

Craftsmanship isn't just confined to costumes and stage lights. Across campus, this same passion for craft takes on a very different form.

- PHOTOS AND WORDS BY TORI KUEHL



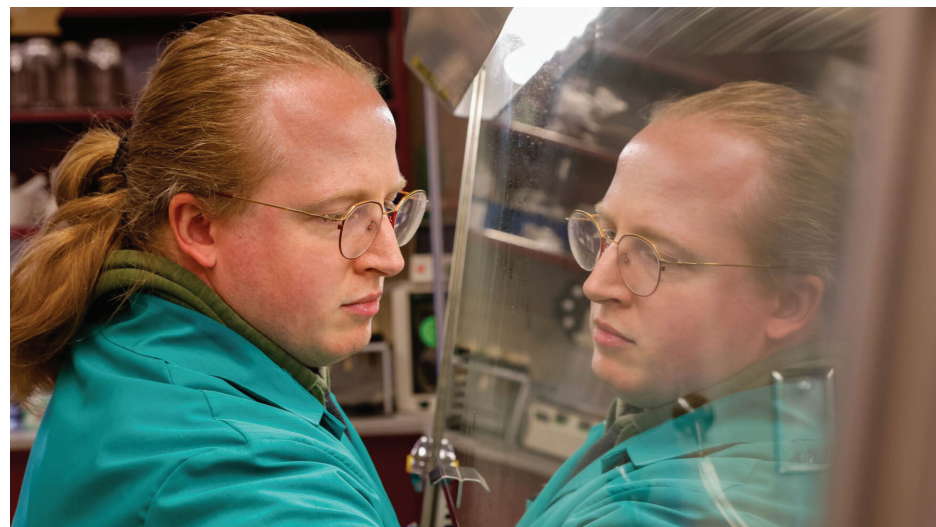
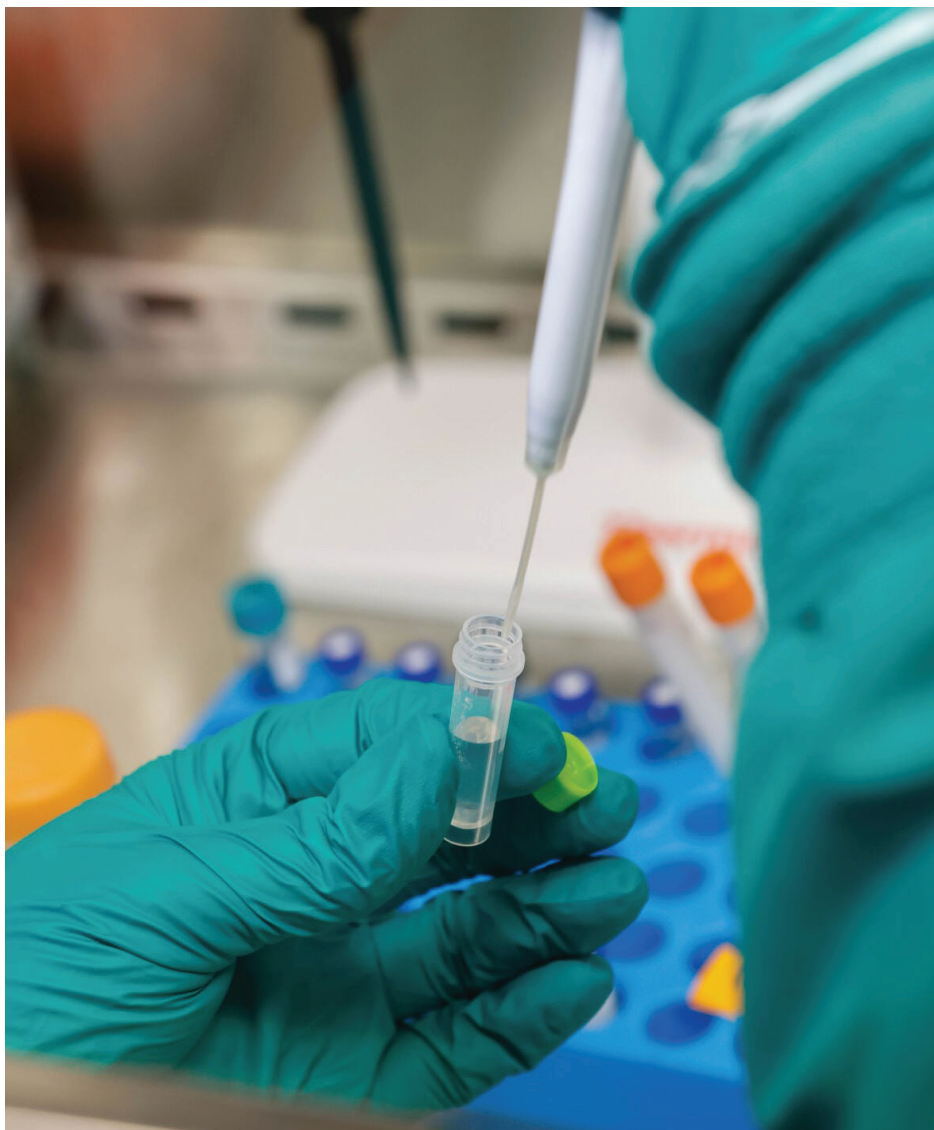
Jewelry, hat and shoe costume options sit on a table in the costume shop on April 21.



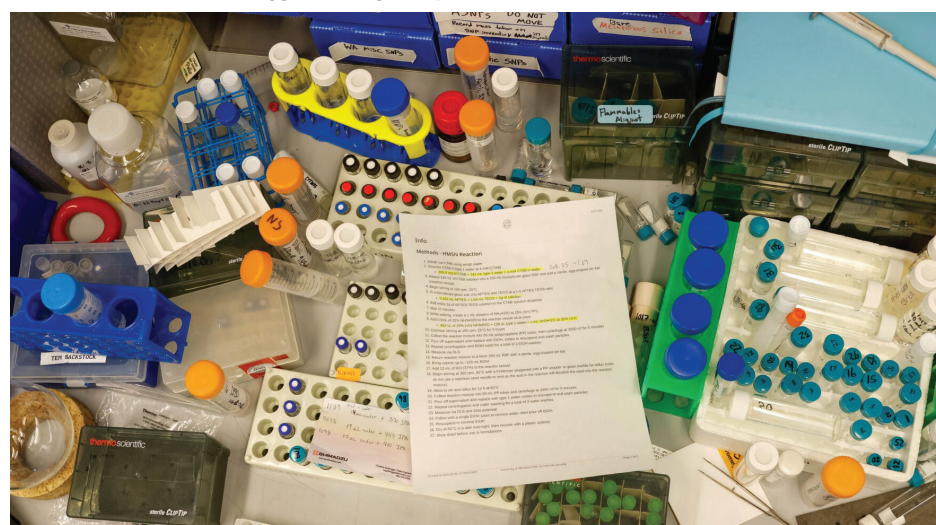
Sara Wheeler stands for a photo in the PARTV building's costume shop on April 21.



Sara Wheeler works on her computer in the costume shop on April 21 in the PARTV building on the University of Montana campus.



LEFT AND ABOVE: Alex Riffey, lab technician at the University of Montana, mixes molecules in a fume hood at the Skaggs Building on April 24.



Riffey's lab desk space, filled with molecules he has created over the years.

Ask Alex

Beakers, ampules and pipettes line the shelves of the cramped lab. Various machines cover the remaining desk space, with pictures of flowers and poetry taped onto them in an attempt to appease the “spirit in the machine” so that they will work for at least one more experiment. Some machines have tape with “Questions? Ask Alex,” written on them.

The Alex in question? A 37-year-old lab technician with the University of Montana’s Center for Translational Medicine who has been working for 10 years.

Alex Riffey dropped out from the University of Montana three times before finally coming back a fourth time and getting a bachelor’s degree in chemistry in 2016.

“I realized I liked chemistry for some reason, which before 2016 I had never liked,” Riffey said. “I hated chemistry. I liked working with chemistry, but I

hated chemistry classes. I’ve been mixing random shit together since I was a little kid, I guess.”

Riffey, as a lab technician employed by the University, is expected to know everything about the lab. This includes instruments, training scientists and students, finding and implementing new lab tech and even learning to do graphic design.

“The idea behind my position is to be the foundation of the institution that stays long term,” Riffey said. “A lot of students and post-docs come here for only three to six years, and then they leave with all their knowledge, and that’s really painful for an organization. Having some people who know how to do everything and have that base of knowledge is really beneficial as an institution. That way, when someone leaves, we still know how to do the things they were doing.”

A lot of Riffey’s work involves repairing machines no one else knows how to fix, but he also does his own experiments.

“There’s certain molecules that our lab uses that nobody in the world has worked with more than me,” Riffey said. “Right now, I mainly work on projects related to tuberculosis, though I’m also doing some fungal infections and cancer research.”

According to Riffey, the lab next door synthesizes molecules and passes them onto his lab, which then works to turn them into a “more workable form.” The lab then passes the molecule to the next lab, which tests its application and effectiveness. Currently, most of their work involves trying to create molecules that better protect against tuberculosis in mice.

Though lab technicians such as Riffey have to know the nuts and bolts of everything in the lab, that doesn’t necessarily translate to the pay sheet.

“Usually, we get paid less for the work that we do compared to people with higher degrees, and then whether you get recognition in terms of papers, it is highly dependent on who your manager is,”

Riffey said.

The principal investigator responsible for Riffey’s lab, Blair DeBuysscher, an assistant research professor at the University, said she understands the struggle of Riffey’s position.

“They are kind of the heart of the lab and keep things running. They take on a lot of mundane tasks that have to be done but aren’t the most fun tasks ever,” DeBuysscher said. “They’re often unsung heroes in the lab because they’re not a student who’s going to present and get their Ph.D. and have a big celebration. These people do a lot of similar work just in the background.”

As Riffey continues to work in the background of a small lab tucked away in the Skaggs building, across campus a musician prepares for her daily performance.

- PHOTOS AND WORDS BY WESTON FUDGE

The Carillonneur

Her work begins two hours before noon in the music building. Once she's warmed up, she walks across campus to Main Hall, and as she climbs the levels of the old building, the stairs get narrower. The final flight is the steepest, until the creaky wooden path opens into the brick room that holds the carillon.

Barbara Ballas has played UM's carillon for years. The rare instrument is the centerpiece of a square, brick-walled room below the clock face. The carillon features a clavier of batons and pedals, somewhat like an organ, that manipulate wires and clappers to play bells at the top of the tower.

Ballas grew up in Missoula, studying piano and pedagogy for her undergraduate degree, and composition for her master's degree, all at UM's School of Music. She first gravitated toward the carillon in 2011 and sought instruction from Nancy Cooper, the instrument's longtime player and caretaker.

"I just thought the idea was so interesting, about playing bells like that," Ballas said. "It just seems like such an unusual thing to do, so I just thought it was fascinating from the get-go."

Carillons are not common in the U.S. Invented in the Netherlands, only 180 exist across the country. The next closest to Missoula is at a church in Spokane, according to Ballas. The instrument uses two rows of rods, like keys, to pull wires which then chime a hammer against the bell. In Main Hall, these wires extend through the ceiling of the carillon's room, to the level that houses its 47 bells.

Three weeks after Ballas played a carillon for the first time, Cooper sent her up to the brick room above the Oval. She was excited.

"[I played] 'Let it snow! Let it snow!' But I was so excited. That really made me certain that I'd like to learn how to do it really well," Ballas said.

After that first trial performance, Cooper invited Ballas to play duets with her during the homecoming concert, which the carillon is also used for, in addition to commencement.

She soon began playing once a week as a volunteer, then gradually took on more work, volunteering for six years until she retired from piano teaching and landed her current staff position in 2018.

Playing the carillon offered Ballas a chance to apply the skills she had honed in a lifetime of musical practice to a new medium.

"I can still use all the things that I've built up over the years," Ballas said. "Which is a great way to be in retirement because you don't have to just quit doing

everything, you still contribute."

For students like Anthony Rangel, a freshman percussion student from Great Falls, the daily performance represents the continuation of an important tradition.

"It's a very grounding experience for me," Rangel said. "If you research the sort of harmonic world of the bells, they're tuned much differently than the average instrument, which gives it such a characteristic sound. And I find that super super fascinating."

Each of the 47 bells can be named for a university donor, or as a memorial, such as for the 13 smokejumpers killed in the Mann Gulch fire.

Ballas arrives on campus around 10:30 a.m. on weekdays, and practices

that day's song selection on a carillon in a small room on the second floor of the music building. Each day's music selection is unique, according to Ballas. She also transposes songs to fit the necessary key.

Ballas tries to get to the bell tower 10 or 15 minutes early, setting her wristwatch two minutes off to be accurate to Main Hall's clock. Often, she sets a recorder outside one of the room's floor-level windows so she can listen back to her performance, because the carillon makes too much noise from the batons, wires and pedals for the player to accurately hear the music from the bells.

Then, at noon, the large bell, originally taken from the football stadium, rings automatically, and Ballas jumps into

action. The action required to hit each baton is greater than that of a piano or organ. Ballas' arms swing forcefully as she plays each note, and her shoes feel their way across the pedals.

After the 10-minute performance, Ballas gathers her things and makes her way down the steep stairs to meet her husband waiting to pick her up behind Main Hall.

Ballas' live performance happens as flocks of students crisscross the Oval, at the peak of campus crowds.

Once the school day ends, the sidewalks empty and the hallways are quiet, custodians begin their work maintaining each building.

- PHOTOS AND WORDS BY
HENRY DOELLINGER



Barbara Ballas plays the batons of Main Hall's carillon with a lightly closed fist on April 14. Because the bells are located a floor above, a high action is required to chime the instrument.



Ballas wears special sensitive shoes to play the pedals of Main Hall's carillon, which are similar to that of an organ, on April 14.



Ballas prepares for the noon performance on Main Hall's carillon on April 14.



ABOVE: Crowley walks his cart to another bathroom in Aber Hall on April 24.

BELOW: Crowley puts on his gloves before he cleans a bathroom in Aber Hall on April 24.

Cleaning campus

As people walk past a cleaning cart in Aber Hall, University of Montana graduate, avid jazz listener and custodian David Crowley keeps things clean, wiping down all the nooks and crannies that most don't even see — but still get dirty anyway.

Crowley, originally from Harlowton, has lived in Missoula for 40 years, working as a custodian at UM for almost 30. He's cleaned every building on campus. His least favorite building to clean is the chemistry building, and his favorite is the music building.

"I love listening to the music all night long," Crowley said. "They have in-class ensembles playing that I can listen to."

Crowley takes on other positions at UM as well. He is the vice president of the Montana Graduate Employee Union and is also on the Staff Senate board.

Crowley graduated with a bachelor's in political science with an emphasis in history. He believes the common misconception that people think about custodians is that they're not educated.

"I know a guy with a law degree, and he's a bus driver," Crowley said. "My advice to anyone is never judge a person just because of a job that they do."

The favorite thing that Crowley likes to do as a custodian is mopping and cleaning the floors.

"It gives me a sense of pride when I see a floor look immaculately shined," Crowley said.

He has even taught other custodians how



Custodian David Crowley pulls out a new set of gloves to clean the bathroom in Aber Hall on April 24. Crowley uses a new set of gloves for every bathroom he cleans.

to clean wood floors, which, according to Crowley, are "specialty floors." First, water is poured onto the wooden floor, then a sand disk sucks up all the water. He then refinishes the floor through the process called "tacking," which uses a wood finish to put an extra shine on the floor.

His least favorite part of the job, however, to put it lightly, is cleaning up human waste in the bathroom.

"You know it's really not great, and it's inconsiderate," Crowley said, "But you know when you're drunk, you're not gonna be

considering the person who has to clean up after yourself."

Crowley does the job, though. He believes the most important part is for students to feel welcome at UM.

"I want students to say 'Hey, this place is really great to come to' because the facilities are clean," Crowley said. "People can walk into a bathroom, and it is absolutely spotless."

According to Crowley, after he cleaned the Natural Science building's bathrooms, the students tried to do a germ count. They

swabbed the toilets of the bathrooms, using petri dishes to find bacteria, but couldn't find anything.

"That's the pride I take in my cleaning," Crowley said.

Whether it is cleaning the many buildings of UM or tastefully creating the University's next production wardrobe, the unseen faces of campus continue to shape the environment students and staff in Missoula live in everyday.

- PHOTOS AND WORDS BY JACKSON MAILEY

Keeping a plant alive helped me grow

BEE REISWIG | ARTS REPORTER

bee.reiswig@umontana.edu

The amount of plants I've killed is absolutely absurd.

My sole survivors in high school were the ultimate easy-going flora: cacti and air plants. I left the cacti in my bathroom, where the steam from my scalding showers was enough to keep them chugging along. The air plants were watered on a more random than weekly schedule, sometimes left to soak in a bowl for entire days and nights.

I decided it was best to give up on owning plants for a while.

Coming to the University of Montana, I opted to have a plant-free dorm room. Sure, I bought flowers from the farmer's market once, but that was the extent of non-human life in my care. I kept telling myself that I wasn't good with plants, that they would just end up withering away in the corner of my room and that it wasn't worth the money.

But the thing is, I really wanted to have some greenery in my room. Not only do they brighten up a space, but "just one plant in a six-inch diameter pot will purify a 10 foot by 10 foot space," according to the University Center Gardens page. From the same source, these little green friends act as a sound barrier and have a calming effect. According to University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, indoor plants can improve workplace productivity by up to 38%.

Now, I didn't really know all these lovely statistics. I just knew that I loved my grandmother's house, which had plants tucked in every room. It felt both lived in and alive.

I was lucky enough to move into a little house this August, where I was able to really get the feel for my own space. Adjusting to multiple roommates was a fun new challenge, balancing who took out the trash and whose responsibility it was to wipe down the kitchen counters. I settled into a new routine and my new room, freshly decorated.

Something, though, felt missing. I felt trapped by my knowledge of past failures. I was someone who was bad at having plants, so what was the use of trying?

One day, after walking past Bitterroot

Flower Shop and finally catching its open sign illuminated, I popped in.

There are so many kinds of plants in this world, and certainly way more that can be put in one's home. But the plant shop felt like an infinite variety of opportunity, like something had to be compatible with my lack of ability. It turns out, pothos plants are supposed to be pretty impossible to kill.

So, armed with a freshly-repotted pothos and a handmade plant hanger, I started my journey of foliage motherhood. It was the first stride toward mediocrity. Allie Jellison, one of UM's Wellbeing Coaches, recommended that I start small.

"Just find one actionable step to take, breaking it down," the social work master's student said. "Acknowledging all the steps that you take, too, because there's a lot of things you do that you don't realize are adding up."

I've had my first baby step hanging in my window now for about seven months. I've certainly forgotten to water it a fair few times, and had to pluck off an excess of crispy brown leaves because of that lapse. I've overwatered it to the point that water came rushing over the cupped edge meant to trap any last drops that don't soak into the soil. It's been a far-from-perfect process.

Despite, frankly, sucking at plant care, I love it. I love having a pop of green in my blue-and-white room. I love watching the sun hit its leaves and knowing that will help it keep growing. I love watching the hanging vines grow longer and longer.

It's been a worthwhile experience.

And you know what? I never would have gotten it if I had lived with this version of myself in my head that couldn't own plants. The kind of person who knew she was bad at taking care of them, so she didn't even want to try.

Honestly, I'm still bad at it. I don't know any more types of plants than I did seven months ago. I don't pay close attention to watering cycles or east-facing light. But I've kept this pothos plant alive, and that's enough for me.

Now that I've gathered some unearned confidence, I've expanded my collection. I bought an aloe plant while in Great Falls over spring break – everyone's dream destination, I know, but at least I got a plant out of it. I stopped back by

Bitterroot Flower Shop for a sale and snagged a snake plant. According to the Asian Journal of Research in Botany, snake plants may reduce carbon dioxide concentration by 10 to 20%.


Most excitingly for me, with some free planters on the side of the road, free seeds from the Coeur d'Alene Library and a \$7 bag of soil from Lowe's, I'm trying to grow my own veggies through the whole cycle. So far, the lettuce is the most eager to pop up out of the dirt.

They might not all grow. I might have added too many seeds to the rather small containers in which they're placed. The light in my dining room might not be perfect. But I'm proudly embracing the fact that trying is better than nothing. And to get good at anything, you've got to suck at it first.

So that's what I'm doing. Sucking. Failing. Trying again, even if I'm embarrassed. I suggest you all do the same. What's something in your life that you've been missing or craving? You can do it mediocrely. Or even God-awfully. Just do it anyway.




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The spin on pole dancing

BLUE ROGALSKI | ARTS REPORTER

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When people hear the words pole dancing, usually their immediate thoughts are images of scantily clad women in strip clubs, but now as the sport has developed, it may conjure up that of a typical fitness class.

The sport of pole dancing has made a transition from something seen exclusively in strip clubs to a mainstream form of exercise. A class provided through the University for almost a decade shows the morphing perspective on pole dancing.

The studio, called Pole Fiction, is dimly lit, with wall-to-wall mirrors, resembling a ballet studio in all ways but one: a maze of poles that extend from floor to ceiling. Here, small groups of students meet biweekly to learn and practice pole dancing with instructor Gracie Niswanger.

Niswanger starts a new class every semester. “I begin my classes assuming none of these people have touched a pole in their life,” she said.

She likes to start at a beginner level and the moves they practice get progressively more complicated. She said in the very first class of the semester, she doesn’t have her students touch the pole in any way, but rather have a conversation about why they chose to be there.

“I think people are here for more confidence, and obviously, strength,” Niswanger said. “You can see the evolution through the semester.”

One way in which she said she saw this bump in confidence was the way students dressed for class. She said that at the beginning of the semester, students were very modest, wearing full coverage athletic gear. Once they discover the importance of skin contact with the pole for their performance, students tend to get more comfortable with more appropriate clothing for the sport. “I see modesty really decrease and eventually people will just show up and be in their underwear,” Niswanger said.

The dancing itself is something of a cross between ballet and aerial silks. The pole seemed to not be what is holding dancers up, as they move fluidly around it, holding up their own body weight. They appear to be floating as they spin and maneuver their bodies upside-down.

Jozlyn Baumann, a senior at the University of Montana, enrolled in this class during her last undergraduate semester at the University. She said that

she loves how much stronger the sport makes her feel.

“It is very freeing, while also being extremely active,” she said. “I love to dance and did for a decade growing up, so getting to combine my past experiences with the new skills I’m learning during pole has been really rewarding.”

Despite the intention of gaining confidence and strength, some people still have their reservations about the sport, even while participating. “Some people will say stuff like ‘I could never tell my boyfriend I’m doing this’ or ‘My parents could never find out this is what they’re paying for,’” Niswanger said.

She maintains that pole dancing is an homage to sex workers, particularly strippers, who she gives credit for the origins of this particular kind of pole dancing that the fitness industry has adopted. She said that despite the reservations some people may have about pole dancing’s close ties to stripping, she thinks that staying educated on these roots and being respectful of sex workers is important for people who do the sport.

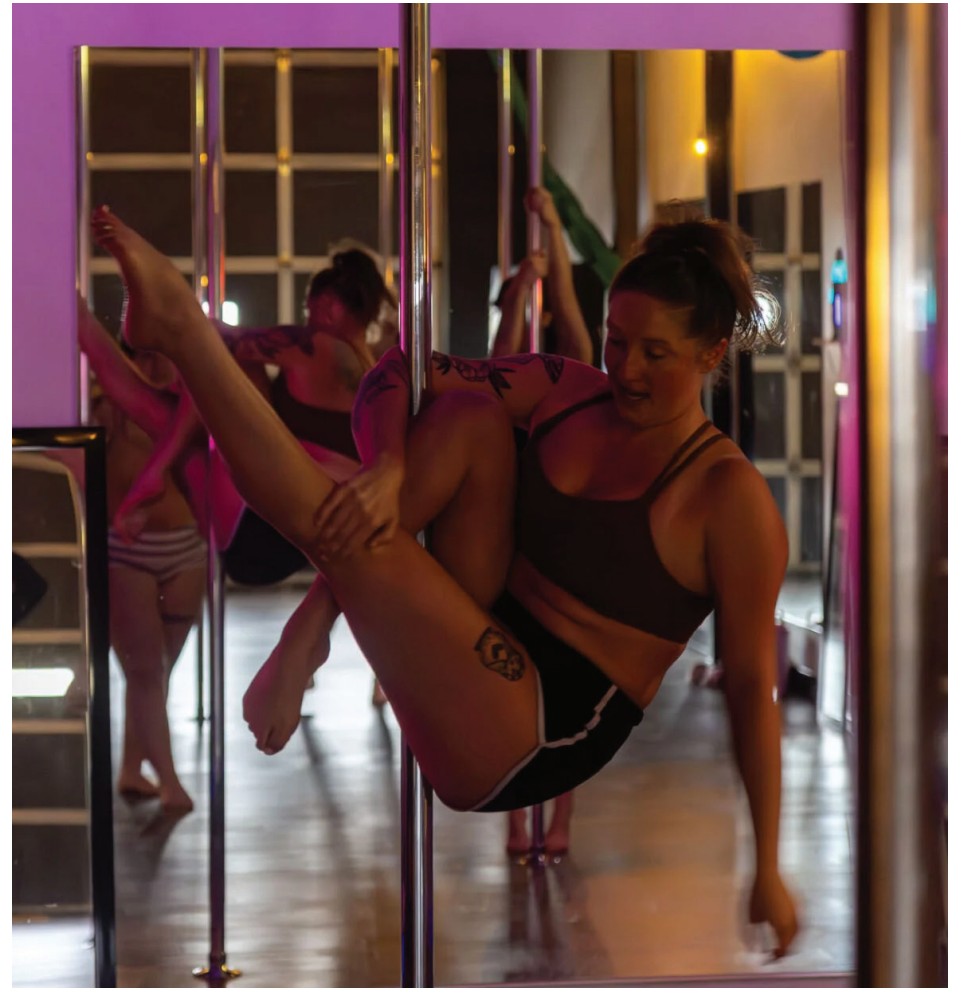
“At least for pole studios I’ve experienced, they’ll have strippers as instructors,” Niswanger said.

Baumann said that when she first started the class, she didn’t feel like she had a negative connotation associated with her participation in pole dancing. She said that she wanted to be active, but didn’t have the time or mental capacity to go to the gym or do traditional workouts. For her, the class offered an alternative that worked.

“Pole dancing has been a way to keep me active while allowing me to enjoy the workouts and training,” she said. “I always feel better after class than when I am convincing myself whether or not I should go.”

Niswanger said that she observed that in Missoula, pole dancing from a fitness perspective had begun its climb in popularity within the last decade and has only become more and more popular.

Niswanger shifted to pole dancing after doing aerial silks for several years. She said that it was a natural progression, as many of the poses and movements are similar, but allows her to work on different skills than those used in aerial silks. “I’m definitely guilty of walking into a pole dancing class and thinking it’s going to be easy because of my experience with aerial silks,” she said. “I hated it at first because I didn’t like being bad at it. I thought ‘Strippers do this naked and look like they enjoy it and I’m fighting for my life up



Gracie Niswanger performs a routine at the end of the pole dancing class at Pole Fiction on April 16.

WILL LADYMAN | MONTANA KAIMIN

here.”

You could never tell by watching her or her students. Transitions between poses look easy. Holding the poses is even more impressive, as the stillness is what gives the illusion of ease. The class moved through poses like one called “figurehead,” where their hands and feet don’t even touch the pole, while pressing their hips and bending their knees around it is what keeps them suspended. It looks like it would be an illusion arranged by a very particular distribution of muscle.

These kinds of movements are a good way for people to get in touch with their bodies, Niswanger said. These bodies are almost all female, though she said that a

new trend she’s been seeing is cisgender, heterosexual men looking to be involved in the class.

In the last few years, she said it’s been rare for her to not have any male students in her classes. “They recognise it’s an inherently more feminine space,” Niswanger said. “Almost all of them ask if it’s OK for them to be there, because they don’t want anybody to feel uncomfortable.”

Niswanger said she doesn’t expect everyone to understand or agree with sex work and stripping, but in the studio, it is important to her that her students pay respect toward those who cultivated the sport. “I feel like it’s my duty to educate people,” she said.

Griz softball is ready for a conference comeback

DILLON RICHARDSON | SPORTS REPORTER
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The University of Montana's softball team has finished its regular season, and a program that has struggled mightily over the past few years seems to finally be turning a corner.

The Griz were picked to finish last in the conference prior to the season after finishing 2025 with a 1-14 record in conference play, but this year was different. The team swept both Portland State University and Weber State University en route to a 9-6 conference record.

The Griz had a winner-take-all game on Sunday against Idaho State University, but were unable to take the regular season championship, ending the year tied for second in the Big Sky.

Second-year head coach Stef Ewing said she knew what her goal was when she took the job at UM.

"My job was to get this team competitive," she said. "To me we're just getting started. Now we've just got to continue to do it and do it more."

Ewing said that the team's results during conference play weren't surprising due to the level of play the Griz have had recently.

"[We're] playing all three facets of the game well," Ewing said. "We're not getting panicked if we give up a run, we're not getting panicked

when we make a mistake on defense, and we continue to have quality at-bats."

Another important part of Montana's play this year has been comebacks, including game two against Weber when the Griz trailed 6-0 and ultimately won 11-6, as well as a four-run seventh inning against Idaho State to win 7-6 in game one.

"The thing I tell our team all the time is 'Don't look at the scoreboard,'" Ewing said. "Because we are certainly capable of scoring runs in bunches, and we can't get caught up on what the other team does. We have to stay true to what we do."

And what the Griz do as of late is hit home runs. Since March 21, the team has hit 28 out of the park, putting the team up to 40 on the season, which is three short of the single-season record of 43.

Ewing said that the team's power can be attributed to something very obvious: the weight room.

"We've talked about it all year. 'Believe in the weight room,'" Ewing said. "It certainly is showing now all of the work they've put in the weight room. We're hitting the ball farther, we're hitting the ball harder, we are throwing the ball harder, we're faster."

One of the players that has seen improvement through the season is Alanna "JoJo" Christiaens, who was named Big Sky Conference Player of the Week on April 20

after going eight-for-15, including two home runs, against the University of Utah and Weber State.

According to Ewing, Christiaens does a lot of things right.

"That kid has come in the most to look at her video and ask about what she can do better," Ewing said. "When a kid puts that much time in, it's not a surprise when it pays off."

One of the adjustments Christiaens made was to start hitting under the ball more, which led to her hitting six home runs since March 23, the most on the team in that time.

Christiaens said this award was exciting for her because of how little she played last year.

"It means a lot," Christiaens said. "I mean last year I didn't really do anything too crazy. I only played like half the games, so to be able to come out here and get that is really cool."

She said her game has improved because of her plate discipline, as well as getting stronger in the weight room.

"In the beginning of the season I was really in my head and I swung at a lot of balls," Christiaens said.

Montana has had struggles at times, but has always seemed to bounce back, which according to Christiaens is because of the attitude her teammates have.

"Our 'locked in' is a little bit loose and comfortable," she said. "We have to have fun or else we're in our heads."

Christiaens added that everyone is super excited because of how the season has turned out.

"Literally no one thought we would be in this situation but us," she said. "For it to actually pan out the way we wanted it to is really rewarding."

Another player who has had a late-season resurgence is pitcher Kaiana Kong, who had some key outings against Idaho State and Weber State to help the Griz secure wins.

"Kong has just had tremendous success late in the season in her whole entire college career," Ewing said. "Her demeanor to be somebody who can come in as a closer, which she kind of has been for us in conference play, has been great."

Ewing said that Kong has the perfect mentality for a closer.

"Pressure isn't even a thing to her. I don't even think it registers in her brain," Ewing said. "She's just like 'Give me the ball, I'm gonna do my job,' and she stays calm, cool, collected, and doesn't get shook if she gives up a hit or gives up a run, and she just continues to do her job."

Kong said her success of late has been due to that mentality.

"I think the key is just taking it pitch by pitch. I think in the start of the season I was thinking a little too big," Kong said. "Just slowing down and taking a lot of breaths and relying on my defense [has helped]."

Another part of the success was how the

pitching staff came together throughout the season, Kong said.

"I think at the start of the season, we were all six individual pitchers, and right now we're all one group," she said. "We've really leaned on each other, and that's what's worked for us. Like if one person doesn't have a good game, someone else is gonna come in and back them right up."

The Griz got the advantage of playing at home this past weekend, which Kong said is always great to do.

"I love Griz fans. They're awesome," she said. "I think it makes playing the game so much more fun. I think when we get to see the youth teams that come out and the older people that still come and support us, it's just really nice and it gives us a little bit more energy."

And the energy is fantastic on the team, according to Ewing, both in games and at practice.

"I mean we show up to the ballpark every day and have a great time," Ewing said, adding that every game, "We're gonna bring it. We're gonna go mano a mano, and we're gonna bring it."

Even though the Griz had a great end to the regular season, the double-elimination Big Sky tournament will be a challenge, but according to Ewing, the team is ready.

"We've beat every team in the conference at least one time, and we know what we're gonna see," Ewing said. "We just got to play our game and do our thing. I told the girls that, yeah, I would love to win a conference regular season, but the conference tournament winner is who goes to the postseason."

The tournament this season is in Pocatello, Idaho, which is notable due to its higher altitude of around 4,500 feet, which means the ball flies farther. This was shown by Idaho State hitting almost 40 home runs at home, and Ewing said she thinks the field could play to Montana's advantage.

"You miss-hit balls that fly out of there," she said. "We've got to just know that with one swing of the bat a lot of things can change."

She added that the batters need to "swing like they've never missed before."

Ewing added that losing in the regular season championship could help the team succeed in the postseason.

"We learn things the hard way," she said. "That's what I love the most about this team and about the youth of this team, and they're quick to reset, they really are. That's the thing we've really done a good job of this year is just bouncing back"

The Griz will play in the conference tournament as the fourth seed due to losing the tiebreakers with the University of Northern Colorado and California State University, Sacramento. The first game for Montana will be on May 4 against Weber State.

"The time is right now for this team," Ewing said. "We've got one more shot."



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Forestry days keeps up with its woody ways



Chloe Brown swings her axe at a pieces of wood at the Forestry Days logging competition on April 25.

JACKSON MAILEY | MONTANA KAIMIN

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In a secluded area of Fort Missoula on April 24 and 25, the city celebrated the 29th annual competition of Forestry Days, the only professional-amateur logging competition in the country.

Scott Kuehn, founder of this event and the founder of the UM Woodsman Team, started the team back in 1978 when he was in Forestry school. He ended up going pro in 1979 and coached the team.

The University originally gave the team their first arena in the space where Lewis and Clark student housing is today. The University then shifted to the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula, where the team now practices and holds events. Between 1,500 and 2,000 people attended the event this past weekend.

Kuehn started Forestry Day with the goal to mix collegiate competitors with the pros. "Several of the pros put on workshops for the collegiate competitors and they learn more in 20 minutes than training on their own without the supervision and help of the pros," he said.

There was something for all ages, including snow cones, food trucks and local vendors. All of the wood used for the event was cut by the UM Woodsman Team to get it in shape for the competition.

Kuehn said "Both Eric Hoberg, current coach of the UM Woodsman Team, and I are foresters so we have great contacts with loggers and sawmills."

Chopping wood and white pine came

from Thompson River Lumber and Vincent Logging Company by Bull Lake. The sawing wood and larch came from Mark Cheff.

Since 1994, not much about the arena has changed, just a few climbing poles and bunk logs over the years. Something that changed the game for the team and this event was a building for training and equipment storage.

"The team used to shovel snow out to the practice stands and practice in the snow," Kuehn said. "Now they can train year-round, work on equipment all winter. Huge addition. We rent bleachers from the fairgrounds where the first 10 years, folks just watched through the fence. The UM Woodsman Team members continue to be top notch."

University of Montana woodsmen did a lot to make sure this event ran smoothly. Elizabeth Armstrong, a member of the UM Woodsman Team and senior studying environmental science and sustainability originally from Omaha, Nebraska, explained all the behind-the-scenes work.

"Our team basically lathed all the wood, organized every single pile," Armstrong said. "We were the cleanup crew, and we were also the communicators back-and-forth from judges and captains and announcers. We also ran the merch booth along with the raffle with major help by some of our volunteers."

The fastest time determines the majority of winners.

Friday was the collegiate competition where college students competed. The events offered on Friday were chopping, sawing, pole climb, axe throwing and log birling.

Saturday was the pro-am division, where professionals competed in all the same events, except log birling. Armstrong said, "This event is the only professional-amateur event in the United States. For our professional competition, we have competitors from all over the world. Some from Canada and Australia. Also, some of these competitors are world record holders thrice over."

Chopping events involve using sharp axes to cut through a log, like standing block chop and underhand. The standing block involves a log anchored vertically, and the participant must cut clean through the whole thing.

In speed pole climbing events, competitors use spurs, a steel-core climbing rope and strength to climb a cedar pole as fast as they can. After touching the mark either 60 feet or 90 feet high, they rush to descend.

Sawing has both men, women and Jack-and-jill competitions. There is a single buck, double buck and hot saw. All are about speed and precision, and involve cutting clean rounds off a log as quickly as possible using traditional and electric saws, depending on the event.

Sylvia Blodorn, a recent graduate of the University of Montana originally from Bakersfield, California, competed in the pro division on Saturday. She was a member of the woodsman team at UM her junior and senior year. She didn't grow up around this type of competition.

Blodorn said, "I had a friend who did this and I went out one time to just hang out with her and I did one block, and I thought

that was fun."

Her favorite event to compete in is the underhand chopping event, which she took first place in at University of Idaho's competition last year. The underhand chop is when people stand on top of a log and have to cut through it. It requires precision and balance since you are chopping toward yourself on the rounded log.

"It's kind of a tougher event," Blodorn said. "It's the first event that you learn when you start timber sports. So it's been something that I've been building for a while."

She says the environment around timber sports is energetic and supportive.

"The whole reason I'm here right now is because two of my teammates were like, 'you should consider competing,'" Blodorn said. "Everyone is just very supportive, and such sweet folks."

Armstrong competed in four events: axe throw, power saw, underhand hard hit and underhand speed. The last two are the same action but with different objectives. "It's less hits versus faster break time," Armstrong said.

She scored fifth in power saw, which is her first placement. Overall, the University of Montana team won first place.

Forestry Days are coming up on their 30th anniversary of the event. "We are going to go big," Armstrong said. "We love working with Fort Missoula, they give us so much freedom to put on this amazing show and we are grateful that they continue to host us."



UM Woodsman team member McKinley Verhulst walks and balances on a log at the 29th annual Forestry Day logging competition on April 25. JACKSON MAILEY | MONTANA KAIMIN