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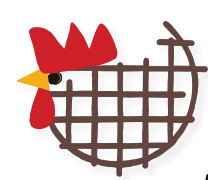
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Emily Alger, president of the ACC professional firefighters union, poses for a portrait on Monday, Sept. 16, 2024, in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/SAMANTHA HURLEY



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Birkley Heynen in Costa Rica in the fall of 2023. PHOTO COURTESY/AMANDA RUGENSKI



A photo of Wyatt Banks. PHOTO COURTESY/WYATT BANKS FOUNDATION

A lasting legacy

How these UGA students are being honored after their deaths

Guinevere Grant & Briar Bundy

The spring 2024 semester was unexpectedly sorrowful for many members of the University of Georgia community following multiple tragic, unrelated student deaths in just a few weeks of each other. Six months later, the families, friends and communities of Birkley Heynen and Wyatt Banks are working to ensure the legacies of their beloved Bulldogs continue.

Birkley Heynen

“Go getter,” “incredibly intelligent,” “high energy,” “friendly” and “larger than life” are words friends and family commonly use to describe Birkley Heynen.

Heynen, who died on March 4, was vocal about wanting to help the environment — now his loved ones are ensuring his legacy will be carried on.

The Birkley Heynen Environmental Foundation, founded by his parents, was formed to help issues Heynen was passionate about. You can donate on the Athens Area Community Foundation website.

“We wanted to figure out a way to continue for him to have an impact on people’s lives,” Nik Heynen, his father, said.

The foundation is currently focused on fundraising, but Nik Heynen said that he sees them working on various environmental projects in the future. He mentioned that his son was passionate about the coast and marine sciences, so they will be highlighting issues in those environments.

“We want people to think about those issues, and think about Birk and what he stood for, what he would maybe be doing if he was still around,” Nik Heynen said.

The foundation’s first grant went to Shell to Shore, an oyster shell recycling program that Birkley Heynen interned in the first cohort of during the spring 2022 semester. Nik Heynen said that the internship made his son realize he wanted to attend graduate school.

“We just wanted to honor that impact on him and hope that we can help other people have similar impacts and experiences and kind of get plugged into some environmental questions,” Nik Heynen said.

Malcolm Provost, Shell to Shore program coordinator, said that Birkley Heynen made a “tremendous splash” in the organization through his leadership and way of bringing people together.

“Birkley was a really amazing person ... whatever he was doing, his spirit really shined through,” Provost said.

While working with Shell to Shore, Birkley Heynen met Mary Margaret Cozart, a fellow intern. Cozart said they really bonded because of his spirit, and that, no matter who you

were, he was able to take you out of your comfort zone and make you laugh.

“He just had a way of connecting people that was so magnetic,” Cozart said.

Cozart said the foundation is a great way to honor Birkley Heynen and his legacy, and that his passion for the environment was beyond what most people thought about.

“He has already connected so many people in different places that will continue to cherish his memories and honor him through his passions,” Cozart said. “I think whether it’s people coming together to volunteer through organizations like UGarden or Shell to Shore, or being able to donate to the foundation, there’s going to be a significant environmental impact because of him.”

Wyatt Banks

Wyatt Banks, a freshman in the Morehead Honors College majoring in political science and economics, died on Feb. 21. He was a member of UGA’s chapter of Kappa Sigma and was elected to serve as a recruitment chair for the chapter this school year.

In his memory, the chapter began a GoFundMe that raised over \$100,000. The money went to a foundation Wyatt Bank’s father, Sean Banks, has since established. According to his father, the fraternity is planning an annual fundraiser to remember Wyatt Banks’ legacy and continue raising awareness for suicide prevention.

Now, the Wyatt Sean Banks Foundation, Inc. is accepting donations, which can be sent via Venmo to @wyattseanbanksfoundation or mailed to 4628 Stella Drive, Sandy Springs, Georgia, 30327.

According to Sean Banks, the foundation is close to being able to make its first grant and is in the process of determining where the money will go.

“No firm decisions have been made yet as to where that money’s going,” Sean Banks said. “[The foundation is] really just to honor his legacy and remind people about the kind of person he was and go to further the causes that he felt passionately about.”

Sean Banks reflected on his son’s love for travel and community service as well as his kind, helpful personality.

“He seemed to be very well adjusted and well respected in all aspects of his life, whether it was in the classroom, in the fraternity, with his friends from both high school and his new friends in college,” Sean Banks said.

Gone but not forgotten

Birkley Heynen and Wyatt Banks lived and died in their own, unrelated ways. But, they still share one key thing: loved ones who are making sure their kindnesses and memories continue to have a positive impact on the world.

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Emily Alger, president of the ACC professional firefighters union, poses for a portrait on Monday, Sept. 16, 2024, in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/SAMANTHA HURLEY

Paving the way

How the ACC Fire Department unionized and made history

Lizzie Rice

The Athens-Clarke County Fire Department saw a historic milestone come to fruition this past summer after more than half a century. They successfully lobbied for ACCGov to pass an ordinance enacting Georgia state Title 25-5, which created the local Firefighter's Mediation Act. The ordinance gives firefighters the right to collectively bargain with their employer — and therefore unionize.

The ACCFD was the third in the state of Georgia to achieve this and become an officially recognized union.

"I never thought that we would have a contract ever, in a million years ... and then, when it did happen, it was unreal," Aaron Claas, ACCFD chief and union member, said.

Mayor Kelly Girtz and the ACCFD Professional Firefighters Union signed the department's first collective bargaining agreement on June 5, and it went into effect on July 1.



Emily Alger, president of the ACC professional firefighters union, poses for a portrait on Monday, Sept. 16, 2024, in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/SAMANTHA HURLEY

Several firefighters, community members, supporters and local elected officials came out to show their support.

The local union has been in the making since Title 25-5 for Fire Protection and Safety was passed in Georgia's constitution in 1971 by former Gov. Jimmy Carter. Title 25 was adopted in Athens 52 years later, and it took another year before the first Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) was made official.

The ACCFD finally had a voice, according to the president of the Local Firefighters of ACC Union, Sgt. Emily Alger.

"It just gives us our rights to be able to do what we're doing but also to have fair representation," Alger said.

Alger explained that having a CBA reinforces being formally recognized by ACCGov and fire department leadership. In action, this looks like monthly meetings between Local 2795 and the fire chiefs within the department.

This and similar practices set in place after unionization promote transparency and collaboration to solve problems to satisfy both the department and the firefighters, according to Alger.

One change granted in the CBA was the pay period for firefighters. Previously, the pay cycle for all public safety sector jobs was 28 days; now it is 14 days. According to Alger, this change helps to give firefighters more opportunities to get overtime pay without it being docked by absences such as sick days. This not only benefits the firefighters but also keeps fire stations better staffed.

Even smaller benefits outlined in the contract have helped the firefighters. Before, firefighters were expected to mow the grass at their station every Saturday, which could be difficult to accomplish amid their other duties. Now ACCGov mows for the ACCFD.

Before the agreement, tension had been building up for firefighters. Pressure to keep up with calls persisted while staffing dwindled. Alger said they weren't going for a pay

raise — they wanted to "fix the system." Lt. Jeremy Williams says that the biggest change has been morale.

"We got 99% of a very diverse group to all agree on one thing [and] morale skyrocketed," Williams said.

Before the act

Before unionizing, low morale, increased call volume and dwindling staff were putting pressure on the fire department. These issues ultimately spurred Alger and others to take action.

As the population of ACC has steadily grown, accidents, injuries, fires, car crashes and other kinds of calls that the ACCFD receives have also "skyrocketed," according to Alger. The department receives over 8,400 calls a year — which averages to 23 calls per day.

"At the end of the day, it was never us trying to be us versus them," Juleigh Fouche, Local 2795 member, said. "We wanted a say, and we felt like our voice wasn't getting to where it needed to go to make a change."

As the need for firefighters grew with the increased call volume, firefighters were steadily leaving, which ACCFD members said they had never seen before.

"The fire department historically has one of the lowest turnover rates of any industry," Williams said. "People are not firemen for a year. We never lost people."

Williams said there was concern with how the lack of firefighters would impact public safety after staffing continued to dip.

According to Williams, firefighters were feeling the pressure of doing their jobs with limited staffing. Stations were having to make decisions on which trucks to prioritize and which trucks to shut down because there were not enough personnel to keep each station running at full capacity.

"We're trying to prioritize what we need to keep in the county to keep the community safe," Fouche said. "But we couldn't help it because, if we're not staffed, then what do you do? It was a hard time."

Journey to the CBA

The union started presenting their case in front of the mayor and commission, while also working to garner outside support.

This journey did not come without struggle, according to Fouche. Local 2795 spent months gaining the trust of the public, organizations, small businesses and elected officials. There were even times when they thought they would be shut down and voted against by the commissioners, which would render the union powerless, Fouche said.

For two years, Local 2795 continued to present their arguments in front of the local government.

"It's a really dangerous job," ACC District 2 Commissioner Melissa Link said. "It's literally life saving, and it's really important that we understand the needs that they have in order to keep our community safe."

"I never thought that we would have a contract in a million years ... and then, when it did happen, it was unreal."

AARON CLAAS | ACCFD CHIEF AND UNION MEMBER

While Link was one of the commissioners who supported the union, it took time to gain the support of others in government. According to Link, there were concerns about potentially politicizing the fire department, how unionizing might affect firefighters' work in serving the public and the backlash this could present.

About 50 firefighters, approximately a quarter of the force, left ACCFD during the two years leading up to the signing of the collective bargaining agreement, according to Fouche. Firefighters said that they would not have an adequate force to keep operations running safely if ACCFD kept losing firefighters.



Emily Alger, president of the ACC professional firefighters union, poses for a portrait on Monday, Sept. 16, 2024, in Athens, Georgia. PHOTO/SAMANTHA HURLEY

Although ACCFD established its union in 2007, it was not formally recognized by the ACCGov and had no real power. Williams said firefighters referred to it "as a club" before Local 2795 became officially recognized under the Firefighter's Mediation Act.

In recent years, the group took a turn toward a path to be officially recognized when Alger took the reins in 2020 as President of the Professional Firefighters Union of ACC. She sought out and made it her goal to enact Title 25 in Athens.

"I became president, and then I started realizing that we really had no voice," Alger said.

Changes for the better

Becoming officially recognized by ACCGov as a union and getting collective bargaining rights has "saved the department," according to Claas, after years of struggles that were negatively affecting the department's ability to be their best and best serve the community.

Now, ACCFD firefighters have a space to advocate for themselves and their needs, boosting morale and retention.

Before unionizing, if there was a problem or an unmet need for firefighters, they would have to go up the ladder of department leadership to get that problem resolved. After going through that process, if ACCGov help was required for the problem, the Fire Chief would then go to the City Manager. This process did not guarantee that the problems raised would be solved, according to Claas.

Looking to the future, Williams said Local 2795 is working toward better benefits for its firefighters, such as better pay and health benefits.

"Did the collective bargaining get us better pay? No," Williams said. "Pension has not changed one bit. Health insurance, no change. But the firefighters are so happy that we now have a voice to speak to our boss. They're coming to work. They're bringing their friends with them, and every single truck is staffed right now."

Beyond these tangible goals, the union is now working toward becoming "the crown jewel" of Georgia Fire Departments, according to Claas.

"The end goal and the future goal for us is to be the department that everybody wants to be at, to be the department that has the whole package," Fouche said. "We've got the people, we've got the training, we run the calls, we've got the benefits. Athens is the place you want to be, and the union had a part in getting us there."



GRAPHIC/LORELEI USCHOLD

OPINION

Morbid Curiosity?

Navigating the line between fascination and respect in true crime media

Gabrielle Gruszynski

I have a morning routine. After hitting the snooze button a few times, I'll reach for my phone and open a podcast. Some days, I'm in the mood for Alex Cooper's "Call Her Daddy." However, other mornings I'm in the mood for something riveting and informational. Greg Polcyn and Vanessa Richardson's "Serial Killers" podcast has become a staple.

After the murder of a fellow female student on campus last semester, I have taken a much greater interest in the true crime genre. I believe in part in trying to understand why some individuals commit the heinous acts they do and in learning how to protect myself from these types of situations.

There's such a delicate balance between raising awareness and crossing into sensationalism. The challenge lies in creating content that captivates the mass public, yet remains sensitive to those affected and their loved ones. I

wanted to find a way to bridge the gap between true crime content creators, victims and the responsibility listeners have while consuming this type of media.

"Cameron Jay" Harrelson, creator, producer and narrator of "Classic City Crime," provided me with some insight into his process of creating a compelling narrative while remaining victim-focused.

"That was one of the antheses for me starting 'Classic City Crime,' was I wanted to change that narrative and really focus on victims and their families, as opposed to just what happened and who did it," Harrelson said.

I believe there is a stigma built up around true crime podcasts in particular. Creators don't always reach out to the loved ones of victims. In this way, the few ruin it for the many. Relatives are hesitant and, in some cases, outright opposed to working with podcasters.

To combat this narrative, Harrelson writes handwritten letters to potential subjects for his podcast.

"I actually was raised by my grandmother, and one thing that my grandmother taught me was the power of the written word. And so I actually send handwritten letters to every family that I would like to work with," Harrelson said.

He finds this method more effective, as it allows the recipient to sit down and process their thoughts while reading. Receiving an email or a cold call are much easier mediums to ignore, especially when they are from some-

one you don't know.

Additionally, Harrelson and I discussed the growing popularity of true crime as a genre. I've often feared I'm becoming slowly more desensitized to violent situations, being a consumer. However, there is an inherent psychological factor at play.

"When you're going down the road and you see a car accident, you automatically jerk your head to look at it and see what's going on, even though you might not want to see it, right? That's just our natural curiosity," Harrelson said.

Perhaps we find a warped sense of security in listening to these tales. For women, there may be an underlying desire to understand the risks they face in the real world. In this way, we can feel more prepared or in control of a given situation.

I believe that true crime can paradoxically offer both comfort and caution — a delicate balance between fear and fascination.

Ultimately, it's up to us as listeners to be mindful of how we consume true crime media. This allows us to enjoy the genre while still acknowledging the weight of the subject matter behind each case. We can have both fascination and respect in equal measure.

"I think the biggest thing for me, though, is the listener's responsibility of understanding that every case has a victim, yes. But, those victims have people who love them, and, as a direct result, they, too are victims. So we have to be cognizant of that," Harrelson said.

STUDENT VOICES

UGA parking

A logistical nightmare

Ivy Baugher

Parking at the University of Georgia gets intense. With over 2,000 new transfer students and a freshman class of over 6,000 students, UGA's campus is packed. Getting a parking spot on campus can feel impossible.

Many students were left without a parking spot on campus after permits came out in July. For some, this inconvenience has impacted class attendance and raised safety concerns. Others received a spot but were forced to make extended treks to get to class or were frustrated at the lack of parking payoff for their senior status. Overall, students are frustrated with the absence of parking spaces on campus.

The Red & Black asked students about their experience with parking at UGA.



Lily Morris

SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS MAJOR

"I definitely feel like I'm getting the short end of the stick as a senior. I don't know why I got stuck with Park and Ride. I called, I emailed, I did everything I could but they said 'that's all we can offer you,'" Morris said.



Asim Khimani

JUNIOR MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS MAJOR

"There's some parking behind Hull deck. It's like a line of parallel parking ... There's no guarantee of getting parking there," Khimani said. "So I usually go to class an hour early, just going in circles trying to get that free parking."



Kaia Shue

FRESHMAN BIOLOGY MAJOR

"My family friend found me a spot at the Marathon gas station," Kaia said. "I'm scared to go there at night, but it's not too bad. I always walk with friends, though."



Naureen Kakhani

JUNIOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS MAJOR

"I've definitely skipped classes because I couldn't get to campus," Kakhani said. She described the shuttle as "super unreliable" and "cramped."

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Corrections for online-only articles are posted at redandblack.com/corrections. In the Aug. 15, the A3 story did not properly attribute information to the Athens-Clarke County Transit website. We regret this error, and the article has since been update online to accurately reflect our reporting standards.

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Alabama head coach Nick Saban during the College Football National Championship on Jan. 10, 2022, in Indianapolis, Indiana. PHOTO/JESSICA GRATIGNY



Dominic Lovett (6) runs the ball against Alabama's Caleb Downs (2) during the first half of the 2023 SEC Championship NCAA college football game at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia, on Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023. Georgia lost the game 24-27. PHOTO/MADY MERTENS

End of an era

Nick Saban's retirement ushers in new chapter to Georgia-Alabama rivalry

Bo Underwood

When Georgia takes the field on Saturday to play Alabama in Bryant-Denny Stadium, the opposing sideline will be without a familiar face.

That's because legendary Alabama head coach Nick Saban officially hung up the headset in January after a decades-long career that saw seven national titles. Six of those came in Tuscaloosa, where he had been the coach since 2007. Saban leaves behind an unparalleled legacy in college football and is almost unanimously regarded as the greatest head coach in college football history.

Saban became known not only for winning championships and producing NFL talent, but for his illustrious coaching tree. From Ole Miss head coach Lane Kiffin to the New York Giants' Brian Daboll, several of his former assistants have gone on to earn head coaching jobs both in

the college ranks and the NFL. But the most successful of them all is Georgia head coach Kirby Smart, who was Saban's defensive coordinator at Alabama from 2008 to 2015 before taking the head coach job at Georgia.

"He's the best assistant coach we ever had, on defense especially, and seeing the big picture of the game," Saban said of Smart on SEC Network this summer. "Our players were happy when Kirby had the opportunity to go to Georgia, because he did such a great job of helping them develop them and he did a great job for us, and you know, that's their motivation. So you're happy to see it happen for them and he's done a great job at Georgia."

Georgia and Alabama had their fair share of memorable matchups before Smart took the reins in Athens, most notably in a nail-biting 2012 SEC championship game where Georgia came up just short in the final seconds. But the rivalry kicked into another gear once Smart returned to his alma mater.

The two teams met a total of six times with Smart and Saban as head coaches, with three of those being SEC championship games and two being national title games. Smart is only 1-5 against Saban, though his lone win came in the 2021 national championship for Georgia's first national title in 41 years. Smart said in March that his respect for Saban kept him from being too irritated about his less-than-stellar record against his old boss.

"I think if I had never coached under him, I would probably be more frustrated because it would be like, 'Man, I never got to beat the GOAT as much as I wanted to,' or whatever," Smart told ESPN in March. "But with him, there's so much respect having worked for him that I'm happy for him that he's chosen to do what he wants to do. He deserves to go out how he wanted."

Smart has taken the Georgia program to unprecedented

heights, following up his title win in 2021 with another one in 2022.

Much like his old boss, he's started to develop a coaching tree of his own, with five of his former assistants now holding head coaching jobs. This includes Oregon's Dan Lanning, South Carolina's Shane Beamer and Arkansas' Sam Pittman. Fran Brown and Dell McGee are the newest branches after taking the head gigs at Syracuse and Georgia State, respectively, this past offseason.

"I want coaches to say, 'Man, I want to go there because guys get an opportunity because what they do for us while they're there is what gives them an opportunity to go somewhere,'" Smart told Paul Finebaum in 2022. "We buy into that ... I want guys to get an opportunity to be head coaches. I've got some really good coaches on my staff right now that I think should be head coaches, and I hope they get that opportunity."

Georgia's new adversary in Tuscaloosa is now Kalen DeBoer, who was hired this year after leading Washington to a national championship appearance in 2023. So far, the Tide are undefeated and ranked No. 4.

"Don't know much about Kalen," Smart said in May. "I've been in a couple meetings with him, SEC head coach meetings. Been great to get to know him. Shared some thoughts in those meetings that we all share, kind of in our little head coach family, but seemed like a great guy."

With how much college football is changing, it's unlikely that another infallible dynasty emerges quite like Saban's Crimson Tide. NIL, the transfer portal, playoff expansion and conference realignment have done quite a bit to level the playing field, but Georgia might be the most likely candidate to get the closest. If DeBoer can pick up where his predecessor left off, fans could be in for many more years of this heralded rivalry.



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Breaking the mold

Mike Macdonald’s path to the NFL without playing college football

Braden Brownell

At 37 years old, Mike Macdonald achieved what many in coaching can only dream of — becoming the youngest head coach in the NFL. Named head coach of the Seattle Seahawks in January 2024, Macdonald’s rise through the coaching ranks has been meteoric.

Macdonald’s path to the NFL began at Centennial High School in Roswell, Georgia, where he played baseball and football. Despite his athletic ability, injuries curtailed his playing time. However, his passion didn’t wane; Macdonald became obsessed with the game of football, immersing himself in film and analyzing strategy. Yet, as he prepared for college, football took a backseat.

Upon enrolling at the University of Georgia, Macdonald shifted his focus to academics, majoring in finance. He engaged in campus activities by joining the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity and participating in Terry College’s Institute for Leadership Advancement. Macdonald credits his return to pursuing football to his peer group.

“The caliber of people around me in the fraternity was phenomenal,” Macdonald said. “I saw everyone around me excelling, and it inspired me to be a better man.”

While at UGA, he coached linebackers and running backs at Cedar Shoals High School. His understanding of football became apparent, and the team recognized him as coach of the year in his first year.

In 2010, Macdonald joined Mark Richt’s coaching staff at Georgia as a graduate assistant. His role evolved, leading him to serve as a safeties and defensive quality control coach with the Bulldogs from 2011 to 2013. One of Macdonald’s most crucial responsibilities at Georgia was preparing the scout team to emulate upcoming opponents during practice. In the 2012 matchup against Florida, his early preparation during bye week played a significant role in Georgia’s upset victory.

“If you watch the [Florida] game and see how the defense played, how different it was, it was just flying around,” said Jack Loonam, a walk-on tight end at the time. “I was really proud of that as a scout-teamer because that really kickstarted that 2012 season.”

Macdonald’s responsibilities extended beyond coaching the scout team. He paid his dues by handling tasks like setting up tables for team dinners. These behind-the-scenes duties were a significant part of his early career, teaching him the importance of hard work and attention to detail.

“Back then we didn’t have iPads, so we had the playbooks, and I remember just having a rough relationship with the printer,” Macdonald said in 2021 of his time at Georgia. “Just being in on the ground floor, doing anything you can to help the team win was really valuable.”

After the 2013 season at Georgia, Macdonald found himself at a crossroads. His time as a graduate assistant was ending, leaving him jobless. He was ready to pivot away from football and pursue consulting. That’s when Rodney



For four seasons, Mike Macdonald served on Bulldogs coach Mark Richt’s staff—first as a graduate assistant then as a safeties and defensive quality control assistant during his time with Georgia. PHOTO COURTESY/JOHN KELLY, UGA ATHLETICS

Garner, then Georgia’s defensive line coach, recommended Macdonald to the Baltimore Ravens. Head coach John Harbaugh wanted to start an intern program, and Macdonald fit the bill.

“I was just really fortunate that John Harbaugh was looking to start an intern program, and I was able to kind of go through that process,” Macdonald said. “Talk about luck of the draw. Man, am I blessed that that happened. Otherwise, we wouldn’t be sitting here.”

Macdonald quickly proved his worth, rising from an intern to a defensive assistant in 2015 to a defensive backs coach for a year in 2017, and eventually the linebackers coach from 2018 to 2020.

In 2021, Jim Harbaugh, on the recommendation of his brother John, brought Macdonald to Michigan to run the defense. The impact was immediate — Michigan’s defense improved from 95th in the nation in opponent points per game to 8th under Macdonald’s leadership.

After a one year stint with Michigan, Macdonald returned to the Ravens as a defensive coordinator from 2022 to 2023. In January 2024, after impressing in Baltimore, Macdonald was named head coach of the Seattle Seahawks. At 36 years old, Macdonald became the youngest active head coach in the NFL.

Former Georgia colleagues often recall how Macdonald’s traits were evident during his time in Athens. Christian Robinson, a former inside linebacker under Macdonald who later became a Georgia graduate assistant coach, was influenced by his approach.

“He really taught me how to be an assistant coach,” Robinson said. “I knew the football side — practice, the playbook and that stuff. But learning how things run off the field and upstairs, that was all from Mike.”

Even though Macdonald coached before the Kirby Smart era, his success is yet another example of Georgia producing talented players and coaches. His rapid rise through the coaching pyramid may puzzle some, given his nontraditional football background, but it reflects the philosophy emphasized by those around him at Georgia.

“If you want a better job, apply enthusiasm to the one you already have,” Richt said. “When you take care of business, people notice. He just took care of business and was super reliable and sharp. And when you do things like that, people trust you and give you more responsibility.”

Macdonald joins an exclusive list of Georgia graduates named NFL head coaches, following in the footsteps of John Rauch and Marion Campbell, who both played for the Bulldogs before coaching.



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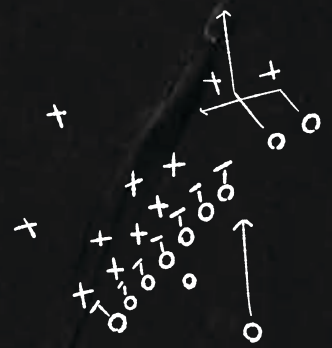
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BEHIND THE CURTAIN

An inside look at Athens
Showgirl Cabaret



The Church-Waddel-Brumby house doubles as the Historic Athens Welcome Center.
FILE/STAFF



Stand-up comedy group Moms Unhinged in Athens, Georgia on Monday, Sept. 16, 2024.
PHOTO/ASHTIN BARKER



The Waffle House Vistas by Micah Cash at the Georgia Museum of Art in Athens, Georgia.
PHOTO/CAMILA NAKASHIMA



Club Pilates at the Beechwood Shopping Center on Friday, Sept. 13, in Athens, Georgia.
PHOTO/ELLA KROLL

COMMUNITY

Stroll around town

Historic Athens tour

The city of Athens is known for its rich history, historic buildings and monuments. The Historic Athens Welcome Center offers daily guided walking tours of historic downtown Athens and the University of Georgia's North Campus. I attended one that started at 10:30 a.m. and ended around noon.

The tour started inside the Historic Athens Welcome Center, originally known as the Church-Waddel-Brumby House built in 1820, and is believed to be the oldest residence in Athens. We continued the tour throughout downtown Athens and stopped briefly near City Hall and a monument that sparked my interest: the Athens Double-Barreled Cannon.

According to a nearby plaque, the cannon was deemed a failure of a weapon and presented to the city of Athens to be preserved as an object of curiosity.

My tour guide knew his way around the city very well, and it was clear how passionate he was about his job. He took the time to describe each monument's history with a lot of detail, and it was impressive how often he was able to recite each fact and story from memory. At some points, it was too much information to stay engaged for the entire tour, but his friendly attitude kept the tour relatively interesting and worthwhile.

Though I frequently walk through downtown Athens and the North Campus areas, I was unaware of Athens' history. My tour guide provided me with a new perspective of the city and North Campus.

-Anna Izquierdo

★★★★☆

COMEDY

Moms gone wild

Entertaining the unhinged moms of Athens

Stand-up comedy group "Moms Unhinged" visited Athens on Monday, Sept. 16 for a show at the Morton Theatre. The Colorado-based group consists of "all mom comedians (and the occasional token dad)," according to their website. The 480-seat auditorium was filled with hundreds of women and a handful of men.

First was Emily Holden whose set mostly consisted of jokes about hating her children, along with quips about being an actor and casting mishaps.

Holly Ballantine followed Holden, and she was my favorite comedian with great jokes about buying her children Build-A-Bear lingerie and her husband calling her "pretty, but without the 'R.'"

After a quick intermission, headliner Amy Brown took the stage and charmed the audience with her former musical theater kid charisma. My favorite joke was after she compared Northeastern food to Southern food, having grown up in Rochester, New York, saying that her baby who was born in the South came out bacon-wrapped.

The show was thoroughly entertaining and was definitely made to cater to their audience of typical moms in America. There was however, a noticeable lack of diversity between the comedians, and I think some multicultural perspectives would've enhanced the experience for some. Overall, the night was filled with belly laughs and whistles of excitement from me and the moms alike.

-Ashtin Barker

★★★★☆

ART

Waffle House art

Georgia Museum of Art highlights a Southern classic

The "Waffle House Vistas" exhibition by Micah Cash at the Georgia Museum of Art is located on the second floor of the museum. This free exhibition, which will be on display through June 2025, presents a series of pictures taken from inside different Waffle House locations throughout the Southeastern United States.

The views from the windows of the Waffle Houses show the landscapes of the different American cities to represent uniqueness and individuality among us. However, certain Waffle House elements are present in the pictures, such as the iconic red booths, ketchup and mustard dispensers and the blinds on the windows, signifying how similar we all are.

Waffle House is a place of comfort for me, with the lack of formality and its ability to bring people from all paths of life. The lighting of the gallery did a great job of instilling a warm feeling as I walked in. I am not an art expert, but I recommend this exhibition for anyone whose heart has a special place for this Southern cultural icon. The pictures made me feel like I was sitting in a Waffle House booth, staring out at the window. The video was especially captivating, since it shows real-life where you can hear the conversations taking place inside the diner as well as the people moving outside. It is a beautiful use of landscape to illustrate human nature and interaction.

-Camila Nakashima

★★★★★

HEALTH

Working it out

Trying the Club Pilates intro class

Club Pilates is a fitness studio located in the Beechwood Shopping Center that offers reformer Pilates, barre, Total Resistance Exercise suspension training and more. The studio offers a free, 30-minute introduction Pilates class, and I was excited to attend.

In the days leading up to my class, customer service was highly attentive, sending texts and making calls to confirm my time slot and inquire about any previous injuries, conditions and experiences.

Grip socks are required for all classes, which attendees can either bring from home or purchase in the studio. There is one large room for classes in the building that boasts two rows of Pilates stations lined up so that the instructor can walk down the center of the aisle.

Each guest has a station with a traditional Pilates reformer, springboard, mat and additional equipment. Guests are also asked to write their names on a whiteboard at their station, allowing instructors to refer to them by name, which gives a personalized touch to the experience. Our instructor, Kate, was down-to-earth and eased beginner tension by making the class laugh.

The introduction class made efficient use of its limited 30 minutes by giving guests a taste of both the reformer, which is used laying down, and the springboard, which is used standing up. It left me satisfied with the experience, yet wanting to try more classes of different durations and levels.

-Ella Kroll

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Athens Showgirl Ms. Slatla Dragon performs at Hendershot's in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 14, 2024. The show was an open drag night which allowed new and experienced drag queens to sign up to perform in the cabaret. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES

‘Purest expression of queer joy’

The glitz and glam of Athens drag

Gabrielle Kutsup

Bold eye makeup. Teased, volumized hair. Glittery get-ups. Fake boobs.

Drag is a key form of expression of LGBTQ+ culture, using clothing and makeup to exaggerate traditional femininity. Athens is home to a group of drag queens who belong to the Athens Showgirl Cabaret, bringing the art of drag to the Classic City.

ASC was founded 14 years ago in 2010 by Kellie Divine and Alice Divine, according to the ASC website. At the time, there were no drag in Athens except for the annual Boybutante event that happened in the spring, Kellie Divine, show director at ASC, said.

“So a couple of friends were like, ‘Let’s put together a show,’” Kellie Divine said.

The drag performances originally began at Little King’s Shuffle Club before moving to the now-closed Go Bar for five years. Today, the drag queens regularly perform at Hendershot’s, as well as local bars, venues and festivals around Athens.

Kellie Divine said that since its inception, ASC has given hundreds of entertainers the opportunity to perform in Athens, along with close to 200 special guests, such as Angeria Paris Van Michaels from Season 14 of “RuPaul’s Drag Race” and Abhora from Season 2 of “Dragula.”

Drag design

Tyler Casper works at a fast food establishment during the day and performs as Freya Diva through the ASC by night. Freya Diva became a member of ASC in 2017 and has been “hooked ever since,” she said. For Freya Diva, drag was the “form of therapy that [she] needed.”

Freya Diva said that she dressed up in drag for the first time in 2009 for Halloween and has been continuing to express herself through it ever since. She began sketching looks during her sophomore year of high school in 2006 — the same creative process she uses to this day.

Not only does Freya Diva design her own looks, but she also makes them herself. She said that some of her outfits can take up to a month and a half to assemble. Many of her supplies and base garments come from Walmart, Amazon, Coquetry or dumpster diving.

“I cut, I shred, I shred and I stone. I don’t sew yet, because the sewing machine — we have a love-hate relationship,” Freya Diva said.

The iconic, bold drag makeup process varies between performers. Freya Diva said that her makeup routine takes her approximately 30 minutes because she has been “doing the same face for years.” On the other hand, Jenn Sparx, assistant show director of ASC, said that it takes her an hour and a half.

“I cut, I shred, I shred, and I stone. I don’t sew yet, because the sewing machine — we have a love-hate relationship.”

FREYA DIVA | DRAG QUEEN AT ATHENS SHOWGIRL CABARET

“When I started, it took me three hours just because you don’t know how to do it,” Jenn Sparx said. “I didn’t have the skills. Now, I could almost do it without my eyes open.” Kellie Divine said that many who are just starting out in

the world of drag watch YouTube videos or look to famous drag queens for inspiration, but once the newcomers get their foot in the door, they become more comfortable in what they are doing.

“You got to do these baby steps to get to where you’re at,” Kellie Divine said.

Alice Divine, the co-founder of ASC, took Kellie Divine under her wing to be her “drag mother” and show her the ropes of the drag world, Kellie Divine said. At the beginning of Kellie Divine’s drag journey, she was unsure about showing skin, but Alice Divine gave her the confidence to do so and grow into the performer she is today.



Athens Showgirl Lori Divine helps Show Director Kellie Divine before their performances at Hendershot's in Athens, Georgia on Saturday, Sept. 14, 2024. Kellie Divine was a founding member of Athens Showgirl Cabaret in 2010 and has been performing in drag since 2008. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES

Lights, music, performance

Drag shows involve crowd engagement, lip-syncing, live singing, dancing and more. Though Hendershot’s has a smaller stage, this does not stop the queens from letting their personalities fill the entire space.

The performers let their personas shine as they get face-to-face with audience members by dancing in front of them, collecting cash tips and shimmying through the crowd.

Each number starts with the performer’s choice of song or remix. On Saturday, Sept. 14, that ranged from “Kiss Me” by Sixpence None the Richer to “Tell it to My Heart” by Taylor Dayne. While the pink lights of Hendershot’s shone down, performers danced onto the stage from the left side in outfits ranging from a sleek white and gold dress to a sequined purple coat.

ASC hosts three different types of regularly scheduled shows throughout the year at Hendershot’s: Fabulous Fridays, Drag for All and a quarterly Sunday Drag Brunch. They also perform at various community events such as BreastFest and Athens Pride, along with private events.

Fabulous Fridays takes place once a month on Fridays from 9 p.m. to midnight at Hendershot’s, and Drag for All takes place once a month on Saturdays from 8 to 11 p.m. at Hendershot’s. Drag for All is open to people under 18 with a parent or guardian and includes cursing, but does not include sexual themes like Fabulous Fridays does.

ASC also hosts Open Drag Night four times a year, which is open to performers who are new to the drag performance scene. Some at Open Drag Night are first-time performers, while others come in with more experience.

“I think it’s a beautiful thing for [Kellie Divine] to have these open drag nights, to let people ... show up in light and not be judged,” Ashleigh Parham, photographer for ASC, said.

While the drag queens are not paid by ASC, the performers split the door entrance fees collected from audience members after paying for show expenses such as a DJ, and they are able to keep the tips they earn from the audience. Patrons can tip in cash by giving it directly to the performer, placing it in the bucket next to the stage or sending money digitally.

Leaving an impact

ASC and Hendershot’s provide a space for the LGBTQ+ community to openly express themselves and feel safe while doing it.

“A space like Hendershot’s [is] where we can go and be authentically queer and not have to worry about our safety, not have to worry about our comfort, not have to worry about being judged or ridiculed,” Lucy Loop, a nonprofit worker, said.

Loop said she moved to Athens for the promise of a thriving LGBTQ+ community, and is an avid watcher and fan of ASC shows. Loop said she grew up in small towns that did not have a drag or LGBTQ+ community, and that she’s been welcomed into the Athens queer community despite initially not knowing anyone.

“Drag, for me, is the purest expression of queer joy, and I didn’t have that as a kid,” Loop said. “Now that I have it, I’m trying to soak up as much as humanly possible.”

ASC donates to charities, mainly the Boybutante AIDS Foundation. According to Jenn Sparx, at the end of the show they do a closing number and those tips go to charity. Sometimes they also do shows where all of the show money gets donated.

“One of the reasons that I continue performing with Showgirls is that there’s such a big charity component to it,” Jenn Sparx said. “I like getting up there and people clapping and tell me I’m pretty, but it also feels like it’s for a good cause.”



A showgirl's tips sit to the side while she preforms at Hendershot's in Athens, Georgia on Saturday, Sept. 14, 2024. PHOTO/FOREST X. DYNES

Through makeup, outfits and music, Athens Showgirl Cabaret has supported the Classic City community by donating to charity, and according to Loop, creating a space where the LGBTQ+ community can be authentic.

“It’s kind of like a little tiny Gay Pride every time and just a gathering of queer people,” Loop said. “If you’re looking for a safe space, Hendershot’s with Athens Showgirl Cabaret is a nice, safe, queer space if you just need a little getaway.”

Relish today, ketchup tomorrow

The story behind a drunk food favorite

Jesse Wood

Picture this: A night in downtown Athens. Music flows from the bars lining Clayton Street, creating a distant hum. The bustle of locals, visitors and everyone in between making their way through the streets electrifies the night. And, through the chaos, the smell of hot dogs drifts in from a cart with a bright yellow umbrella. For many downtown-gers, this is where their night will end.

Trava Barnett, the owner of Trava’s Dog Gone Good Cafe, said that while driving tractor-trailers through cities for several years, she noticed mobile food carts in many of the places she traveled to.

“I said, ‘Man, that looks like so much fun. I would love to do that,’” Barnett said.

Barnett soon made the career change from tractor-trailer driver to hot dog cart owner in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 2016. She settled on specializing in hot dogs because they are the “most profitable thing cost-wise.”

Apart from receiving a degree in business in 2013 from Gateway Technical College in Kenosha, Wisconsin and working in the restaurant industry in her twenties, Barnett said that most of her ventures as a mobile food business owner have been “trial and error.”

Barnett moved to Athens in 2018 and opened a storefront in Lexington, Georgia in November 2020. But when she caught wind of a highly profitable location on the streets of downtown Athens potentially opening up, she immediately began the process to acquire a permit for the corner of East Clayton Street and College Avenue.

“You got to have a good crew to be able to do what we do ... I ain’t got but two speeds: stop or go. [When] we got here, I said my goal is to sell every one of them hot dogs as fast as possible and go home.

PAUL MADDOX | EMPLOYEE

The location of the hot dog cart is coveted by many late-night vendors, as it’s heavily trafficked throughout the night. To acquire the necessary permits to sell hot dogs, Barnett said that it was a “first come, first serve” basis.



Trava Barnett prepares an order at her hot dog cart in downtown Athens, Georgia on Friday, Sept. 20, 2024. PHOTO/SARAH COYNE

“I spent the night at the permit office to be the first one at the door to get the spot,” Barnett said. “I knew it was a hot spot.”

Barnett debuted the well-known hot dog cart in downtown Athens in 2021 and has since closed her Lexington restaurant, but she still uses its kitchen to prepare food for the hot dog cart.

Cate Goldman, a senior computer science major at the University of Georgia, was a sophomore when the hot dog cart made its first appearance downtown. She said that since then, the hot dog cart has become a key part of her downtown experience.

“It’s fun to eat outside, and the [employees] are always really friendly to chat with,” Goldman said. “You often end up seeing a lot of friends ... in the hot dog line.”

Athens has been a completely different market than Barnett was used to in the past. She said that in Milwaukee, she could have operated the cart by herself, but because Athens is a college town, the cart is much busier and she “could never do it alone.”

Paul Maddox, a part-time employee at the hot dog cart, said that he agreed to give Barnett a hand with the intention of it being a short-term gig to help a friend but is now going on three years of working at the cart.

“It’s something I never thought I would ever have done, but it’s fast-paced, exciting,” Maddox said. “I’m an older

person, maybe it makes me feel younger.”

Currently, there are five employees including Barnett. Barnett said that she handles all of the transactions. However, two other employees at the cart quickly assemble the orders and another person operates the DoorDash orders.

Barnett said that they pride themselves on getting orders out really fast.

“You got to have a good crew to be able to do what we do,” Maddox said. “I ain’t got but two speeds: stop or go. [When] we got here, I said my goal is to sell every one of them hot dogs as fast as possible and go home.”

Barnett said the hot dog cart sells approximately 500 hot dogs on an average night, and around 1,000 on weekends when the Georgia football team plays a home game. Barnett also said she tries to create a new hot dog every three to four months, and right now, the most popular hot dog they sell is the “Hot Cheeto Dog.”

Though dealing with drunk college students is not everyone’s cup of tea, Maddox said that the employees have fun with the customers. In fact, Barnett said that she finds connecting with students in downtown Athens to be her favorite part of the job.

“I didn’t connect with the students in Wisconsin. There’s something about UGA that I just connected with,” Barnett said. “That’s the best part, hearing their stories.”

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Mocktail moment

Non-alcoholic drinks around Athens

Ella Pine

In 2024, 61% of Gen Z Americans and 49% of Millennial Americans surveyed said they plan to reduce their alcohol intake, showing an increase in the percentage of Americans who answered the same way in 2023, according to data by NCSolutions.

With the “sober curious” movement gaining momentum, Athens restaurants and bars have jumped on this trend and expanded their drink menus to include a range of non-alcoholic options.

I embarked on a tour of Athens’ vibrant dining scene, driven by a desire to explore the latest innovations in mocktails. I experienced a variety of inventive flavor combinations and techniques that cleverly repli-

cate traditional cocktails without alcohol.

The increasing availability of non-alcoholic beverages can be particularly significant for individuals who wish to partake in social gatherings without consuming alcohol, contributing to a space where everyone, regardless of their drinking preferences, can feel included and enjoy themselves.

Trapeze Pub

Trapeze Pub’s journey with non-alcoholic cocktails began last summer through experimentation with Lyre’s Non-Alcoholic Spirits, a company crafting zero-proof spirits that encompass the intensity and balance of alcohol.

They began with three different flavors of spirits — Italian Orange, Orange Sec and White Cane — and quickly developed a selection of mocktails.

During my visit, I sampled the “Sunshine Spritz,” inspired by an Aperol spritz, which effectively mirrored its traditional counterpart in appearance, color and taste.

Emmy Squared Pizza

This summer, Emmy Squared Pizza introduced four new mocktails to its menu, and I was able to sample all of them. Among the offerings were “Cherry Sundrop,” a

sparkling cherry lemonade, “Pineapple Express,” similar to a pineapple mojito, and two variations on classic cocktails: the “Paloma” and the “Mule.”

“Pineapple Express” stood out with its refreshing minty twist, while “Paloma” was pleasantly sweet with the right amount of bitterness from the grapefruit. “Mule” delivered a very classic and familiar ginger beer and mint blend. Overall, the standout mocktail was undoubtedly “Cherry Sundrop,” with a unique balance of sweetness and tartness.

The National

The National provides an array of inventive mocktails available throughout the day. I sampled two of their signature creations: “Turmeric Tonic,” a year-round staple, and “Seedless,” a seasonal zero-proof cocktail.

“Turmeric Tonic” blends turmeric juice, honey syrup, lemon juice, ginger juice and water to provide a refreshing experience with its cleansing properties. Despite the intensity of its ingredients, the drink surprisingly offers a pleasant sweetness.

In contrast, “Seedless” utilizes one of Lyre’s Non-Alcoholic Spirits to craft a creative and authentic execution of a watermelon-lime cocktail. It was refreshingly

flavorful, striking the ideal balance of sweetness and bitterness to deliver a taste that closely resembles a traditional cocktail.

Chuck’s Fish

Chuck’s Fish offers a diverse range of zero-proof options, and most drinks from their regular menu, with the exception of martinis, the 1887 Manhattan and similar drinks, can be prepared without alcohol upon request. Additionally, bartenders can prepare custom mocktails for customers upon request.

During my visit, I sampled several of their offerings: “Semester Abroad,” which had the creamy, tropical taste of a virgin piña colada; “Hey Baby,” a refreshing cherry lemonade; “Guava Sour,” featuring a blend of guava juice, lemon and Thai basil, and the classic “Mojito,” a minty and refreshing mocktail.

With these innovative mocktail options, Athens restaurants showcase how non-alcoholic beverages can be both sophisticated and inclusive, ensuring that everyone can enjoy a drink regardless of their alcohol preferences.

Cut these recipes out!

GRAPHIC/ABBY CROWE

Recipe

Cherry Sundrop

@ Emmy Squared Pizza

- 1.5 ounces cherry syrup

- 1 ounce lemon juice

- soda water

- dehydrated lemon wheel

Recipe

Seedless

@ The National

- 1.5 ounces Lyre’s Agave Blanco Non-Alcoholic Spirit

- 1 ounce lime juice

- .75 ounces watermelon agave

- .5 ounces Ghia Non-Alcoholic Apéritif

Recipe

Sunshine Spritz

@ Trapeze Pub

- 1 ounce Lyre’s Italian Orange Non-Alcoholic Spirit

- 1 ounce Lyre’s Orange Sec Non-Alcoholic Spirit

- 3 ounces Fever-Tree’s Blood Orange Ginger Beer

- topped with soda water

Recipe

Guava Sour

@ Chuck’s Fish

- 4 ounces guava juice

- .75 ounces lemon juice

- basil, shaken and double strained

- basil expression on top

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Highlights from the 15th annual LatinxFest



Smiling ear to ear, a dancer from Tonalli dance group strikes her final pose at LatinxFest in downtown Athens, Georgia on Saturday, Sept. 14, 2024. The festival celebrates the diverse cultures of Central and South America. PHOTO/EMILY LAYCOCK



Dancers from Tonalli dance group strike a pose during their performance at LatinxFest in downtown Athens, Georgia on Saturday, Sept. 14, 2024. Dancers of a variety of ages performed several dance routines during the festival. PHOTO/EMILY LAYCOCK



Performers Kevin Casas, middle, and Angel Jacobo, right, watch other dancers on stage from afar at LatinxFest in downtown Athens, Georgia on Saturday, Sept. 14, 2024. The trio stood in front of Pain and Wonder Tattoo and Piercing Studio on Washington Street. PHOTO/EMILY LAYCOCK



A photo of food at LatinxFest in downtown Athens, Georgia on Saturday, Sept. 14, 2024. PHOTO/EMILY LAYCOCK



Raquel Jimenez puts the finishing toppings on a Sonoran-style hot dog at LatinxFest in downtown Athens. Jimenez works at her family's local business called "El Perrito." PHOTO/EMILY LAYCOCK



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