

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN RIVER FALLS STUDENT VOICE

February 19, 2024

www.uwrfvoice.com

Dance Theatre showcases spring concert

Jack Van Hoof

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The University of Wisconsin-River Falls' Dance Theatre showcased 13 dance routines at its 2024 spring concert, which was held from Jan. 31 to Feb. 3 in the Blanche David Theatre. The event featured various dance forms, including modern, ballroom, jazz, ballet, hip hop, and represented the efforts of 24 dancers, 12 choreographers, and ten supporting crew members.

"They do it because they love it," said Mari Kline-Kluck, the director of the Dance Theatre. "[The concert] is the result of these folks' passion, hard work, and care for each other." Students, alums, faculty, and professionals performed at the event.

The concert opened with the Afro-Peruvian piece "Festejo," and moved through "The Dance of Life," "Apex," "A Little Bebop," "Love is Heartbreak," "Your Empty Chair," "Leave," "Spicy Cha Cha," "Outside (In)," "Mutationem," "Into Our Moment," and "Spellbound," before concluding with the Charleston-inspired piece "Meep Mop Beep Bop."

While some of the dancers have been performing for many years, others are newcomers to the art. "They all support each other," Kline-Kluck said. "We know as a company, if we help each other, we're all going to look better in the piece. We're going to have a stronger piece."

The concert is the result of countless hours of work, which begins even before the start of the semester. Mari Kline-Kluck reaches out to students who participated in Dance Theatre the previous semester, and students who are interested will find choreographers to work with. Then, they submit a proposal for the piece that they want to perform.

Some students choreograph their own routines. Kline-Kluck mentioned one student, Lily Callander, who is both a dancer



Dance Theatre dancers pose after performing one of their pieces. (Photo courtesy of Liz Rust)

er and a choreographer. "She created the dance," Kline-Kluck said of "Into Our Moment," which was choreographed by Callander, as well as students Claire Brindley and Cassie Fay. "She picked the music; she picked the movement. She figured out what the costumes were going to be, and taught her peers how to do the steps."

On Jan. 21, the Dance Theatre set up Blanche David Theatre, in what Kline-Kluck called "load in." Technicians set up the lights, position them, and then apply a marley dance floor to the stage so the dancers will have the traction necessary to perform their routines. Next, is "teching," where the technicians and choreographers finalize the lighting, and the dancers can practice on-stage for the first time. Before this, they practice in a studio in the Falcon Center.

Kline-Kluck is not only the director of the Dance Theatre, but a choreographer as well, who created "Outside (In)," "Spellbound," and "Meep Mop Beep Bop." Many choreographers, she said, begin with music. "For me personally, I'll be moved by something or inspired by something. Sometimes there's a piece of music that I'm like, 'I have to dance to this.'"

The choreography process is collaborative in nature. "As a choreographer, I have this idea in my head," Kline-Kluck said. "Then, when I see it on the dancer, sometimes I go, 'Oh, that doesn't look like it does in my head.'" The choreographer will then adjust the routine until it fits. Kline-Kluck takes her dancers' feedback into consideration as well. "Oftentimes, my dancers come up with way cooler things than I do," she said.

This year, the concert featured a commissioned piece, "Spellbound," where a donor chose the song "I Put a Spell on You" by Nina Simone for Kline-Kluck to choreograph. Kline-Kluck and her dancers completed the choreography in two-and-a-half rehearsals.

Kline-Kluck received her MFA in Dance-Choreography and Performance from UW-Milwaukee in 2008, and has been an instructor at UWRF since 2004, teaching dance classes, Health and Human Performance courses, and Stage and Screen Arts courses.

"My love and passion is for modern dance, which the [Dance Theatre] is based on," she said. Modern dance is a contemporary form of dance that uses abstract movements to convey ideas, emotions, and narratives. "When modern dance started, it

was trying to break away from ballet and its strict, codified movements," Kline-Kluck said. Most dancers study ballet, however, as it provides the strength and flexibility needed to perform modern dance pieces.

Not only does the Dance Theatre practice modern dance, but Kline-Kluck listed hula, Japanese, Korean, and Mongolian, among others, as forms the Dance Theatre has experimented with. "We've had all kinds of different dance forms over the years," she said.

Some routines include over a thousand individual movements that dancers must remember. "Some people have referred to dance as like another language," Kline-Kluck said. "It stimulates a part in your brain that's very similar to language." This isn't the only benefit of the art, however. "I think a lot of people are finding it because it's almost therapeutic," Kline-Kluck said. "Dance is so good for expressing emotions. It's a very unique experience."

UW-River Falls no longer offers its dance education program, as budget cuts led to the program's cancellation in 2015. "I'm not sure we'll ever get it back, unfortunately," Kline-Kluck said. Despite this, she said that she has noticed a growing interest in dance and dance theater at UWRF. "I'm so proud of all these dancers. They're so amazing," Kline-Kluck said. "Dance Theater is such a supportive experience. It's our defiant way of keeping dance on campus."



Dancers take flight at their annual spring concert. (Photo courtesy of Liz Rust)

What does having your support system attend graduation mean for you?

Lexi Janzer | lexi.janzer@my.uwrf.edu



Kalli Kubly

As a 2020 grad, it's really important that my family is able to come as they have supported me through everything and this will be their one opportunity to see me graduate.

Connor Tanck

As someone who isn't graduating this year, it is really special for me being able to go to some of my friends' graduations and showing them support. Because I know that if I were them I'd love to have all my friends there.



Sasha Resig

It means just being thankful for those who have supported you along the way and showing that their investment and their time into you kind of paid off for them, and that you're going to continue the work that they put into you.

Bella Weber

I think it's really important to have a support system at your graduation because each of us obviously have our family members and friends, but I like the way you worded it with support system. So you can choose your family, your friends, and significant others if you would really like to. But we all go through things in our family that make us super close and maybe not so close. For me personally my family lives three hours away so I feel like I'm doing this alone but in the end I have two older siblings and I was with them all across the way when they graduated from college, high school and they were there for me, so that really hits close to home.



Mayala Keita

For me my support system is very important. I'm the daughter of first-generation Americans. My parents were refugees and fled to different countries and they barely found each other outside of Liberia. So just knowing that even with that history and everything they put into for me and everything they have been through that all my family members that were separated and able to come together get to see this moment and see their hard work of them forcing their way into this country and forcing themselves to success and see me walk is just very important. As a 2020 grad I never got that opportunity before and I really really want my family to be there and, you know, be loud and be boisterous as Liberians are.

UWRF wins \$5,000 state sustainability award

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UW-River Falls won first place in the Higher Education Kit Challenge, a statewide sustainability competition sponsored by the energy efficiency organization *Focus on Energy*. 11 Wisconsin colleges participated in the challenge, which was held from July 1 to Oct. 31, 2023. *Focus on Energy* presented UWRF with a \$5,000 prize on Dec. 7, 2023.

"We were thrilled," Sustainability Coordinator Mark Klapatch-Mathias said. "The hard work of everybody was amazing." According to *Focus on Energy's* website, the competition was intended to both increase awareness and assess Wisconsin universities' commitment to sustainability.

Staff and students in UWRF's Sustainability Office were elated by their first-place victory, which was delayed for a recount between UW-River Falls and UW-Oshkosh.

The second annual Kit Challenge had universities give away free sustainability kits to students and faculty at their respective campuses. These kits were stocked with a variety of different supplies aimed at sustainable living practices.

"They had three different kits," Klapatch-Mathias said. "One of them was a focus on baths, one was a focus on showers, and one was a focus on comfort."

Some items included in the different kits were insulation tape, eco-friendly lightbulbs and nightlights, and high-efficiency showerheads. According to *Focus on Energy*, UW-River Falls gave away over 140 total kits over the duration of the challenge.

To raise awareness during the challenge, participation was conducted through a variety of different avenues, Klapatch-Mathias said. Some of those routes included events, as well as social media. "It was a grassroots effort of everybody trying to get the word out," he said. "There were about 19 sustainability events [held] throughout the challenge."

According to Klapatch-Mathias, the Sustainability Office hires between eight to twelve students and volunteers interested in a variety of different sustainability approaches.

"I have a phenomenal group of students," Klapatch-Mathias said. "One [group] focuses on waste; one on water and energy efficiencies. There are a variety of things



Sustainability team poses around first place prize for the Focus on Energy competition. (Photo courtesy of UWRF)

they focus on, but they all help with our events or our broader initiatives."

The challenge led to greater participation on campus, Klapatch-Mathias said, and it opened the door to many students recognizing and thinking about sustainability issues. "Some people, when you talk about sustainability, they only think about environmental things, or they might not have a direct connection or interest," he said. "But that's why this program is unique and beneficial for us; it opens the door to have this conversation."

Getting people to consider sustainability issues is a goal that Klapatch-Mathias has worked on throughout his 14-year career at UWRF. After he started as a custodial supervisor, Klapatch-Mathias was introduced to sustainable waste management, which broadened his horizons and led to his eventual hire as the full-time Sustainability Coordinator.

Plans for the Sustainability Office are currently in the works. One of these plans is the rewriting of the university's climate action plan, which has not been revised since 2012, and working on the university's STARS report, which is a framework for colleges to measure and assess sustainability performance.

"Anything that we can be doing to elevate our overall efforts and bring positive recognition to our university is a good thing," Klapatch-Mathias said.

The \$5,000 award is yet to be utilized by the university, but the Sustainability Office is currently working in tandem with UWRF's Facilities Management to find a project where it will be distributed.

Deb Toftness: the woman behind the Falcon Daily

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Since the first issue of the Falcon Daily was sent to UW-River Falls employees on Nov. 1, 2005, the email newsletter has provided the university's faculty and staff with news and information relevant to UWRF and its community. "Employees and others may submit short blurbs about events, speakers, retirements, new employees, condolences, to [the] Falcon Daily," said Deb Toftness, who has been the editor of the Falcon Daily since its 2005 debut.

Toftness edits these submissions, and provides additional information, checks facts and links, and prepares the submissions for publication in the newsletter. Over 1,500 people are currently subscribed to the Falcon Daily; over 850 of these subscribers are UWRF employees, who are automatically added to the newsletter, as well as UWRF volunteers. "The Falcon Daily is an important tool on campus to communicate with all employees since we are not all located in the same building or even all on campus at the same time," Toftness said.

The Falcon Daily was created to be a quick and efficient way for faculty to stay up-to-date with basic information each day. It replaced UWRF's "This Week" publication, which included much of the same information but was pub-

lished less frequently. "It was hoped that a daily digest of campus information would be more useful than a weekly offering," Toftness said.

In 2005, email newsletters were a new concept, and the Falcon Daily earned various national awards around this time. Since then, the content and purpose of the newsletter have remained the same. "It has always included a quote, announcements, upcoming events, HR news, campus reminders, as well as a sampling of important higher education news," Toftness said. "A daily highlight photo of an event or happening on campus was added soon after it debuted."

Toftness said that she starts work on an issue of the Falcon Daily each day at around 7:30 a.m. and finishes it at around 11:00 a.m. First, she reads over submissions. "There is no way I can know everything that is going on around campus, so I rely heavily on submissions, the FalconsConnect event calendar and word of mouth," Toftness said. Next, she includes a quote, upcoming events, a "Now You Know" item, and links to articles related to higher education. UWRF campus photographer Pat Deninger provides the daily highlight photo.

Toftness is the only person who works on the Falcon Daily, and, as the newsletter editor as well as a communications specialist, her schedule is a busy one. Besides

her Falcon Daily responsibilities, she works on the UWRF website, edits and distributes UWRF news releases, and edits various campus publications, such as Falcon Features and Falcon Online. These are just a few of her many responsibilities. "There is never a dull day," Toftness said. "It's a lot to keep track of, but after all these years, I have a system that seems to work rather well."

Toftness graduated from UW-Eau Claire with a print journalism and business administration degree. After she moved to River Falls in 1985, she worked first at Chalmers Davee Library, then in the English Department, and finally, at the News Bureau, which is now the University Communications and Marketing Department. Toftness has been a part of the UWRF community for many years, and had this to say to the university's students and employees: "Meaningful small things add up to strengthen our sense of well-being and help us feel part of the UWRF community, which is very important to our mental health."

The Falcon Daily is a small but important part of that community. The newsletter is available to anyone and can be subscribed to at www.uwrf.edu/UCM/FalconDaily.cfm.

Sam Anzai nominated for Hockey Humanitarian Award

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Sam Anzai, a player on the UW-River Falls Men's Hockey team since 2019, has received one of only 18 national nominations for the 2024 Hockey Humanitarian Award. The award recognizes college hockey players who have shown significant commitment to surrounding communities and organizations when they're off the ice. It is now in its 29th season and is given to male and female college hockey players from Division I, II, or III.

"My parents put me on skates early; I don't remember a time when I wasn't playing," said Anzai. Sam grew up in Los Angeles, where he gained much of his love for hockey. His uncle is an equipment manager for the Los Angeles Kings, and his parents had season tickets throughout his childhood.

Sam visited UWRF in 2019 and said he instantly clicked with the school and hockey program. He has become a very familiar face on the UWRF men's hockey team in the last five seasons, participating in 115 games for the Falcons.

Sam admitted the nomination caught him off guard at first, as he had never heard of the award. He said, "I looked at some of the past winners, and there are some remarkable student-athletes on there."

Anzai credits the athletic department for providing many of his volunteer opportunities and emphasizes the connection be-

tween being a student-athlete and having opportunities to help the school. Much of Sam's volunteer work went into building the future of Falcon sports and providing unique insight as a student-athlete.

Sam is in his fourth year serving with the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, which features volunteers from many of the school's varsity teams. With the organization, Anzai has helped organize events such as Run with the Cops and Trick or Treat for Canned Goods. "We're like a liaison between the athletic department and our teams."

Anzai has done many hours of work for the Strategic Planning Committee. He has served as a student representative, developing the map of what Falcon Athletics would look like in the near future. Sam has also worked closely with the Faculty Senate on campus, serving as a voice on how the athletic department was doing and where it was heading.

Sam admits his schedule has been hectic over the past four years. "I had a day off the other day for the first time in I couldn't tell you how long." However, he says that he's at his happiest when being productive and helping people. The winner of the Hockey Humanitarian Award will be announced on April 12. In the meantime, Anzai will be helping his team in the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference tournament.



Sam Anzai nominated for Hockey Humanitarian Award. (Photo courtesy of UWRF Athletics)

Innovation Challenge sees increase in participation

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This February, student teams will present their business ideas in front of local business leaders at UW-River Falls' 9th annual Innovation Challenge. The event will be held on Feb. 28 from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. at UWRF's University Center. This year, seven groups will be participating; the most the challenge has seen since it was founded in 2015.

"The Innovation Challenge teaches lean startup business tools [and] provides business mentorship," said Dr. Sheri Marnell, Director of the St. Croix Valley Business Innovation Center.

The lean startup method is a process for creating and testing businesses and products in a relatively short time.

This process seeks to benefit entrepreneurs for theorizing and testing those ideas with potential customers. It helps entrepreneurs find success in their business ventures by allowing them to experiment and find potential faults early on in development.

"This process is a powerful tool for entrepreneurs to address the most critical facts about their business by talking early with customers and industry leaders," Marnell said. The challenge is centered around recent research that encourages entrepreneurs to "get out of the building," or leave the office and interact with real customers to gather insight into business ventures.

The group that wins the Innovation Challenge will be awarded a first prize of \$2,000 and be registered into the Wisconsin Big Idea Tournament, where they will compete

against students from universities all across Wisconsin for a first prize of \$2,500. The prize money can then be used to fund the development of their business or idea.

The UWRF Innovation Challenge was founded to support business startups at UWRF and reward innovative ideas. Past winners include Didomi, a startup that sells reusable water bottles and uses the proceeds to combat the water crisis in Africa; Unmanned Ramp Manager, an artificial intelligence software program that improves the efficiency of parking ramps; and Songen, a product designed to improve the lives of those with adult incontinence.

The winner of this year's Innovation Challenge will be announced in early March. For more information, contact Dr. Sheri Marnell at sheri.marnell@uwrf.edu.

Voice Shorts

1. Wisconsin Secretary of State Sarah Godlewski visited UW-River Falls on Tuesday, Feb. 13 to speak about the importance of the younger generations' participation in local government. Godlewski spoke about her office's effort to get college students more involved in their local government, and stated that she is working with county clerks across the state of Wisconsin to create a paid work-study program to support local clerks. The initiative will officially begin in the fall of 2024, and will involve local technical schools and UW System colleges.

2. The UW System's Reciprocity Bill passed the Wisconsin state finance committee and will be voted on the State Assembly floor this week. The bill will allow Minnesota students' additional tuition money to be used by UW-River Falls instead of the state. "We lost over \$4.3 million in earned revenue because of the current, outdated reciprocity mechanism," Chancellor Gallo said. Currently, almost half of the students at UWRF are Minnesota residents and are paying reciprocity money.

3. UWRF is bringing back Active Minds, a student organization that focuses on mental health. UWRF also offers a variety of supplemental mental health services like MantraHealth, the UW mental health support line, and U@College. MantraHealth is a teletherapy and telepsychiatry service offered to all UWRF students. The UW mental health support line is open 24/7 every day to offer emotional support. U@College is a self-help and student-centered wellbeing platform for students, faculty, and staff.

Noah Hanson: Six years of basketball and perseverance

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Noah Hanson entered his sixth year as a member of the UWRF Men's Basketball team in the fall of 2023. His journey to eligibility this year follows some ups and downs: Hanson's success, the COVID-19 pandemic, a season-ending injury, and, this season, a comeback story.

In 2018, as a freshman, Hanson participated in 17 games for the Falcons but started none of them. He emerged as a star and a starter in his sophomore year, starting 23 games and averaging 11 points per contest. The following season, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented many athletic programs from completing a normal season of competition. The men's basketball regular season was condensed to only eight games, one of which was canceled. Hanson averaged the second most points on the team but only played in six total matches.

The 2021 season gave Noah a fresh start, and he became the face of men's basketball at UWRF. He led the team with nearly 18 points per game and won the team's scoring title with 430 total points. He was nominated for two Male Falcon of the Week awards and was featured as the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, or WIAC, Men's Basketball Player of the Week. At the end of the season, he made the All-WIAC First Team, joining the other nine most elite players in the conference.

Following a dominant 2021 campaign, Noah suffered the most brutal injury of his career. Just weeks before the season, UWRF participated in a scrimmage in Rochester, MN. On a routine transition,

Hanson felt his knee buckle. The result was a torn ACL, a torn meniscus in two places, and an end to his 2022 basketball season. The surgery and follow-up appointments went well, but Hanson was on crutches for a full six weeks. He worked with Twin Cities Orthopedic for therapy and gave its trainers much of the credit for his recovery.

Hanson says his long-term goal while in rehab was to play in the 2023 home opener against Gustavus Adolphus on Nov. 15, 2023. Despite missing this goal, Noah made his debut only six days later, playing against the University of Northwestern-St. Paul. He was on the court for 13 minutes and scored five points. Since then, Hanson has started 18 games in a row and is third in points per game for the Falcons.

His signature moment this season came on Jan. 13, 2024 vs. UW-Oshkosh. Tied 76-76, Hanson shot a corner three as time expired. The shot found a way to the glass, and the Falcons won 79-76. Noah says he had to consider the benefits of playing another year on the varsity team, saying, "Do you want to put in the time, the effort, the training, and rehab, and deal with the little uncertainties?" He has certainly made an impact this year, as the Falcons are in a prime position to host the first round of the WIAC tournament. Hanson said, "Once I started playing, it made it all worth it again." His journey is one of adversity and success, and he has maintained this competitive spirit throughout his entire UWRF career.



Noah Hanson plays his 6th year on the UWRF basketball team. (Photo courtesy of UWRF Athletics)

The Bottom Line: Two locally owned businesses, and their struggles under the threat of corporatism

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To see a new film, I went to the Falls Theatre on Main Street. The theater's marquee sign was brightly lit, showing the two movies that were playing. The theater has two auditoriums. One is large, with a few hundred seats. This one usually shows the larger blockbusters and *Marvel* movies on its screen. The second is a smaller room about a third of the size of the first. There it almost feels as if you are watching the movie *with* the people around you, and not just having strangers by your side.

I walked into the theater with a small notebook in hand, hoping to get more contact information for this story. Michelle Maher, the owner of the Falls Theatre was hastily giving out tickets to the crowd entering. Behind the concession stand, Michael Maher, her son, was dishing out fresh popcorn, and pretzels to the audience. In the small showroom, I watched a spin-off movie on the origin of the *Hunger Games* villain.

According to its website, The Falls Theatre was built 96 years ago. Its first film was *Painting The Town*, a silent comedy. Michelle's father bought the theater in 1972. After

his passing in 2002, Michelle Maher has run the theater.

Just outside of River Falls is the city of Hudson. Hudson's downtown has many local businesses on the riverside of the St. Croix. However, commercial Hudson looms over it. Multiple 20-foot tall pylon signs surround the highway and blot out the green hills behind it. An all too common sight in corporate America. Only 14 minutes away from The Falls Theatre lies its competition, the Hudson 12 Theatre. Owned by CEC Theatres, who boast on their website about having 150 theaters in the Midwest.

Maher Said, "I drive over sixty-thousand people to our main street every year. And that is incredibly important to our main street. . . The Falls Theater has anchored so many of our downtown businesses for decades. Main streets die off because the downtown theater is gone. And then what happens, is maybe another eight years go by and the whole downtown is just dead. And the community gets together and says, 'We have got to get this theater open.' Like for example, in Little Falls Minnesota, they just finally got their movie theater reopened. A beautiful Main Street theater. Little Falls is where that famous pilot is from. . . his son was kidnapped. Lindberg. Charles Lindberg is from Little Falls, Minnesota. And that downtown theater closed,

because the owner *before* was not owner operating, and it was getting visually rundown, and he shut when COVID hit. It stayed shut, and the local doctor, and his wife, have gone into their main street, and have bought businesses, and gotten them reopened again. They did buy the Little Falls Theater. . . and got that theater open. And so now they're open up again. Their competition is further than I have, which is right in our backyard. If they lost people who go to Little Falls they go to St. Cloud to see movies."

Local businesses in the past few years have seemed to struggle immensely in the last few years. According to the Federal Reserve, over 700,000 businesses shut down within the first 90 days of the year 2020. Within the entertainment business, AI technology has also threatened people's livelihoods, which sparked the SAG-AFTRA strikes, which ended earlier this year. Within the last decade, the largest threat specifically to local theaters is arguably the increase in streaming services.

Story continued on page 6.

Continued from page 5

I optimistically told Michelle Maher that I hoped that people are starting to buy more locally, and appreciate local businesses more. In response, she said, “I think people are more unconscious than ever, to be honest with you, Riley. Too many people are buying on Amazon. How many people are consuming these streaming services that own every aspect of the media that we are taking in? And I don’t mean to say that I don’t order on Amazon, and I stream. I mean, it would be hypocritical to say that I don’t. We’re living in a world where things are so much more centralized. From the healthcare that we get to the media that we can consume. And people don’t realize, well maybe they do, but that in itself is a huge problem. It just is. So, Disney owns ABC, and Fox, you know? And they’re controlling what we perceive about our world.”

Around 6 companies own about 90% of the media in the United States. This accounts for both news media, as well as entertainment media. Locally owned media businesses are some of the few independent media outlets that are not owned by the Big 6 companies. Their impact is often much greater on their communities. The effect that larger corporations have on small businesses is excruciatingly negative, and sometimes detrimental to the well-being of local business owners.

People tend to go to what is popular, to what they know. Small businesses do not have nearly as many advertisement opportunities as corporations do. Having money makes it more possible for a business to make more money. Maher Said, “People just unconsciously go to Hudson. Every year I work harder to sustain that business and watch people make those kinds of choices. It gets forever more discouraging. It truly does. We love what we do, but you know, the whole market has changed, and there are fewer people seeing movies in general. . . There was a time, and you don’t remember this Riley, but I do, that there was nothing to watch on TV so you went to the theater, you know? And then our younger families that are moving to town, the only thing that they have ever known, and what they grew up with is a multiplex, and anonymous, and they sit in a recliner. Therefore they think ‘That’s what a theater experience is.’ They have no value for my theater. They walk in and their kids go ‘Well I like Hudson better.’ It’s like somebody walking into your home and saying, ‘I like so-and-so’s house better because it’s bigger.’ I don’t know Riley, that is, that’s heartbreaking. It breaks my heart. . . You get educated in college about it, but you don’t do a damn thing about it, because you’re buying on Amazon, and you’re streaming. You don’t realize how powerful your choices are, you don’t. I see it because I live on the other end of it. So, it matters. It matters to stay local, it matters

now to go to your local coffee shops because we got Starbucks coming to town. And who doesn’t love Starbucks? I mean they’re great, but the impact that’s gonna have is going to be felt.”

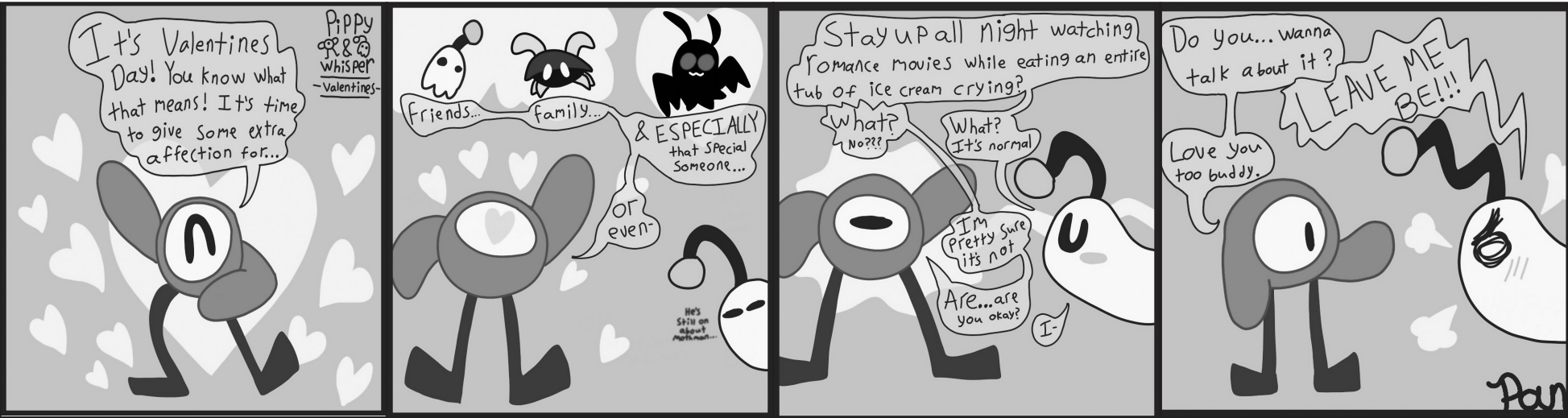
Within the last year, *Dunkin’ Donuts* has opened up in River Falls. It was built out of the old *Burger King* that was abandoned for over a year. Its presence has most likely put a strain on local coffee shops and cafes. The construction of the new *Starbucks* will also likely hurt these local businesses as well.

Waystone Coffee Company is a locally owned coffee shop just off of Main St. in downtown River Falls. It is only a two-minute walk from the Falls Theatre. A metal sign hangs above its door, representing a coffee cup, and a twenty-sided dice popularized by *Dungeons and Dragons*. The entire shop is fantasy-themed. One of its green walls is painted to look as if it is made of dragon scales. The bathroom sign has outlines of a centaur, and a mermaid, instead of the shapes of men and women. Even the drinks are fantasy-themed and are named after fantasy classes. My go-to drink is a “*Rogue*,” which is a vanilla chai latte. I’m also a fan of the chocolatey “*Barbarian*,” and the “*Wizard’s Fog*” black tea.

Read the rest of this story at uwrvoice.com.

Pippy & Whisper

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UWRF admin wants graduates to leave Grandma at home

After navigating a tumultuous fall semester and promises made by UWRF administrators to listen to the students on campus issues, the administration has failed to keep these promises less than a week into this semester. In an email obtained by the Student Voice, and included in full on page 7, Mesa Carlsen, the University Event Coordinator, explained the new rules and setup for UWRF’s Spring Commencement. Some changes being made are that only four tickets will be allotted per student, and the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environmental Sciences will be paired with the College of Arts and Science. The newly combined College of Education, Business and Allied Health and Graduate students will be graduating together. In addition, commencement will be taking place in Page Arena. The email also stated, “These changes have been updated on the Commencement website and when students apply for graduation.”

This email was sent as an ‘update’ to student organization leaders, who help run commencement every year. After hearing the news, students were outraged, with many thinking about boycotting the ceremony altogether, and others sending emails demanding change. After seeing the backlash from students, the administration decided to hold

a closed meeting that included the student leaders who received the email. In this meeting, they reached a few compromises. These include no longer requiring tickets, and, instead, strongly suggesting that students only bring four people to the ceremony. Also, speeches are no longer going to be shortened, and student leaders from the Student Government Association, Chancellor’s Student Ambassadors, and fraternity Alpha Gamma Rho will be on the commencement committee so this doesn’t happen again. As of Feb. 15, there has been no official statement about these compromises from the administration.

We at the Student Voice find many of the reasons for switching from Knowles Fieldhouse to Page Arena nonsensical. These reasons include “warm up-lighting in red tones and new facility equipment/surroundings/live stream will allow for a better viewing experience...more up-to-date, Falcon-feel to it, photography will be fantastic and will provide opportunities for future student recruitment, and 2000+ spectators in Page Arena results in changing the acoustics in a “positive” manner (bodies are eliminating hard surfaces which act as a transmission of sound). Acoustics will be far better than the experience in Knowles.”

Many of these seem like brand-centered changes in-

stead of student-centered, as the positives came down to little more than good vibes. UWRF is advertised as a student-centered organization, but what does it mean for students when you are robbing them of their own graduation?

Upon finding out the ‘compromises,’ students were appalled by the four-ticket limit that was going to be enforced. Students with more than four direct family members would not be able to invite all of them, much less extended family. This also means current UWRF students would be unable to attend to support their friends. Many students graduating in the upcoming semesters are 2020 high school seniors who didn’t get a graduation because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For many of them, this is their only chance to have this celebration.

UWRF also has a large population of first-generation students whose extended families share pride in seeing a loved one be the first to graduate college and, under the changes, wouldn’t be able to attend. Sure, the pictures of graduates might be better, but many students have expressed they would rather have their entire support system present and take their own pictures later if given the option.

Story continued on page 7.

Continued from page 6.

Another reason stated that Page Arena will bring “a feeling of togetherness.” Nothing like having to pick who can and can’t attend your graduation to bring a family and community together. We’re sure there will be no drama at all.

In the way that Page Arena will bring a “feeling of togetherness,” it also brings many practical concerns. The email states that Page Arena can fit around 2,924 people. This prediction does not account for attendees’ comfort, unless they’re into strangers sitting on top of one another, but, hey, who are we to judge? People will basically be sitting on top of each other if the arena is full. Another large concern is the accessibility of Page Arena, or the lack thereof. Not only is that a safety concern but it’s yet another problem that shows just how inaccessible UWRF is. Having Spring Commencement on the football field was suggested but the bleachers are not up to code.

Other reasons include saving time on set up, take down, and production as well as saving money on chairs. By not renting chairs the university will supposedly be saving around \$4,000 a semester. It feels rather dystopian that the university is trying to find budget cuts for the celebration of one of the biggest accomplishments one of its students can achieve. Is saving \$4,000 which is less than the average UWRF student pays in tuition a semester worth all of the backlash? Additionally, student workers don’t get paid enough as it is and many of those students might even depend on setup time for commencement to pay rent. It is never directly said in the email, but the university would also be saving money by not having to pay their student employees since they are not working as long.



UWRF graduates at a commencement event. (Photo courtesy of UWRF)

Not only do these decisions made about commencement changes leave a bad impression on current students but they affect alumni and potential students’ opinions of UWRF. Commencement is one of the few, if not only, times UWRF is able to make any impression on students’ support systems, so it had better be a good one. Many students come from legacy families whose parents also graduated from UWRF, and if they believe their child had a poor graduation, they could choose to stop supporting the university. Any students with younger siblings or any family members

deciding on colleges could decide not to attend because the ceremony felt insincere. This email being sent as an “update” to only three students without any input from any other students on their own graduation shows a clear lack of transparency and feels insulting to graduates who have dedicated the last four or more years to the institution to get a budget-cut celebration.

Hello X, X, and X,

I am reaching out to each of you hoping you will share updates regarding Commencement with your organizations.

The realignment of the four colleges to three has changed the structure of Commencement beginning Spring 2024:

9:00am Ceremony (CAFES, CAS)

1:00pm Ceremony (CEBAH, Graduate Students)

Commencement has been moved to Page Arena for the Spring ceremony. We are very excited about the change of location for so many reasons-

- Page is a bright, fresh opportunity with great sightlines for each attendee due to the stadium seating.
- Photography will be fantastic and will provide opportunities for future student recruitment. Easier for photographer to zoom in to capture close ups having the height of bleachers/surrounding areas to stand.
- The space will give a feeling of togetherness over the long, flat seating we had in Knowles.
- Digital Display boards, warm up-lighting in red tones and new facility equipment/surroundings/live stream will allow for a better viewing experience, more up-to-date, Falcon-feel to it.
- The setup time in Knowles took an entire week, taking the UC and Knowles offline from a production’s standpoint. Page will take 2-3 days which means the Falcon Center can

be used more freely for sporting events and members. Since it took UWRF Productions a week to set up in Knowles, the University Center was taken offline for events during that week, this will also open the UC to events, internally or by external partners.

- Tear down of the event would take a few hours rather than a few days and the cost of Productions labor would be far less 7) 2000+ spectators in Page Arena results in changing the acoustics in a “positive” manner (bodies are eliminating hard surfaces which act as a transmission of sound). Acoustics will be far better than the experience in Knowles.

We will have 600 chairs on the floor for graduating students, faculty/staff who are there to support students and guests with accessibility issues. By renting 600 chairs rather than the 2,800 I rented last Spring, we will save almost \$4,000 a semester.

Page Arena can accommodate for 2,004 guests when three sides of the bleachers are down, 400-500 in the upper deck walking space, and 600 chairs on the floor. We will have space for around 2,924 people. At the Fall ceremony we had seats for 2,500, so Page will have more total seating than we had in December. We will need to ticket attendees to ensure there is enough space, especially since the morning ceremony is so large. There will be overflow seating in Hunt Arena with the ceremony casted on the digital screen. All students will be asked to bring no more than 4 guests to

the ceremony, unless it is understood that additional attendees will be in Hunt Arena.

We will be trimming down the length of speeches (2 speakers at ceremonies: keynote and student). Keynote will be given about 2 minutes to speak; student will have 5 minutes. The alumni president will say a few words at the close, but his speech will also be trimmed down to about a minute. As diplomas are awarded, a “rapid-fire” process will be utilized where graduates will be coming up on stage from both the right and left sides with two active readers on each side reading names. This will allow for a much more efficient process of awarding diplomas and cut down on the overall time. The chancellor will hand the diploma to the student and pose for a photo.

We feel all of these revisions will allow for an improved experience for all graduates and spectators. These changes have been updated on the Commencement website and when students apply for graduation, they will receive an email with important information pertaining to the ceremony, what to expect, possible ticket information, etc.

Thank you for sharing this information with your organizations. Please feel free to reach out with any questions you may have.

Looking forward to the best Commencement UWRF has ever had!
Mesa

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The Student Voice is a student-written and managed newspaper for UW-River Falls, and is published monthly during the regular school year.

All editorial content in the Student Voice is determined by the newspaper’s Editorial Board. The opinions expressed in editorials and columns do not represent those of the newspaper’s advisor, student population, administration, faculty or staff.

Letters to the editor must be 300 words or less, and include a first and last name and phone number. They can be submitted at 304 North Hall, River Falls, WI 54022 or to editor@uwrfvoice.com.

The Student Voice reserves the right to edit any material for content, libel or space. It also reserves the right to withhold letters. All letters, news releases, briefs, display ads and classified ads must be able to be submitted no later than Wednesday at noon during the week of publishing. Information on publishing schedule can be obtained by contacting the editor.

Because of high production costs, UW-River Falls community members are permitted to collect one copy of the Student Voice per issue. A single copy of the Student Voice is valued at \$1, and additional copies may be requested from the editorial staff via email. Newspaper theft is a crime. Those who violate the single copy rule may be subject to civil and criminal prosecution.

Career Services hosts spring career fair

Career Services hosted its annual spring career fair on Feb. 14. 90 employers attended the event and looked to hire UW-River Falls students for internships and full-time positions. Free headshots were available to students throughout the whole fair. After two administrators left Career Services in the past few months, Melissa Slaght, the Employer Relations Coordinator, is now the only administrator left in the office. Slaght has been at the university for a year and is planning to continue to run the career fair as it has been in the past. There are currently no known plans to hire new staff to support Career Services or plans to merge the office with other student support offices. (Photos by Lexi Janzer.)

