

STUDENT VOICE

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UWRF women's hockey: achieving two decades of success

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"We have a winning culture, but we don't talk about winning." These were the words of Joe Cranston, the head coach of the women's hockey team at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. He is the first and only head coach since the varsity program debuted in 1999. Over 25 seasons, the women's hockey team has been one of the most consistent programs at the Division III level, with no losing records outside of their first year. After finishing 25-0 in the regular season this year, the Falcons went on to secure their fifth straight WIAC Tournament Championship.

Cranston is the only coach who has seen the program's entire history. However, the roster currently features three others who have been with the team for ten or more seasons.

Assistant coach Jim Walsh has been with the team for 17 seasons. His specialty role is recruiting, organizing visits, and communicating with players and parents. He acts as a liaison between the program and potential recruits. He and Cranston attend many high school games during the season, looking for prospects. In addition, Walsh is a consistent participant during practices and game days.

Amanda Ryder is in her tenth season coaching with the program, working primarily with the defensemen. She also oversees the team's background operations when traveling for away games. As a student, Ryder played under Coach Cranston and Coach Walsh in addition to being on the varsity softball team. She was very passionate when looking back on her time playing at UWRF, which explains why she became an assistant coach so soon after graduating in 2013.

Lastly is Jeremy Weiss, who is second in tenure to Coach Cranston, having been with the program for nineteen seasons. He is the team's goalie coach.

All four coaches graduated from UWRF, all in different decades between the 1980s and 2010s. This season, they each got to experience something the team had never achieved before.

On Feb. 17, the Falcons completed their first undefeated regular season in program history, going 25-0. UWRF was the #1 ranked team in Division III Women's Hockey for over two months, based on the USCHO weekly poll. They went on to win the WIAC Tournament Championship, improving to 28-0 overall.

The Falcon's decades of success and journey to the top this season are not without humble beginnings. The team's inaugural season was by far the worst in the program's history.

Debut seasons typically want to be forgotten. A roster generally isn't full of stardom, and first-year coaches haven't previously worked with the team. Unfortunately, the story is no different for Cranston's Falcons, as the team finished 3-15 during the 1999 season. Cranston sounded noticeably upset when recalling the year. He could only de-

scribe the season as 'frustrating' and 'eye-opening.' Without any recruits, the final roster had little talent.

"I basically took the club team that was here and then had to compete," Cranston said. It was especially difficult because he had previously seen consistent success. Before coming to UWRF, he coached at the high school level in Somerset, Wisconsin. The boys' hockey team saw multiple top-ten state-wide rankings during his time there.

Following the first-year growing pains, the Falcons had the opportunity to rebuild. Cranston said only three or four players from the 1999 roster made the 2000 roster. This considerable change yielded immediate positives for the program. "I just had my own team here," Cranston said. The Falcons went 19-7-1 during the season, setting the tone for the next two decades of women's hockey on campus.

The team had no losing records between the 2000-2007 seasons but were rarely at the top of the conference. The 2008 season and beyond is where the Falcons played themselves into history. Since then, they have finished at the top of their conference in 14 of the last 16 years. They haven't had more than seven total losses in a season during that stretch.

Maintaining consistency over so many roster changes means strict and effective preparation before and during the season. The team begins practicing in mid-Sept. and plays until mid-March. The coaches employ a high degree of conditioning to prepare players for constant in-season play. "I think we skate more than any team, probably in the country," Cranston said.

Conditioning becomes less of a focus as the season progresses; however, the dense training phase does not. Falcon practices are high-tempo and simulate fast-paced game environments. "Everything is about increasing the speed of our game," Cranston said.

As a result of the long season, players spend much of the school year together on the ice. Senior Defenseman Holly Eckers said, "Throughout my four years, my closest friends and teammates tend to be one and the same."

From late Oct. to mid-March, the competitive season is active, and the Falcons generally play one-to-two games per week. The team's only extended break this season came between Dec. 14 and Jan. 4, when they had no matches.

Since the Falcons commonly make the NCAA DIII national tournament, they must play their best late in the season. "The science of peaking your team in March, when you start in September, is really a difficult thing as a coach. That's a long season," Cranston said. The coaching staff understands this expectation and relies heavily on conditioning so players don't peak early.

The Falcons constantly prepare players for what's next, and Cranston highlights the team's ability to develop stars. He cited Maddie McCollins as the latest example. McCollins is a fifth-year forward who had numerous monumental performances during the 2022 season. In 29 games, she had 48 points. 28 were goals, and twenty were assists.

After the season, she was named the USCHO Player of the Year, an award given to the top-ranked player nationally. Cranston highlighted her unexpected breakout year: "Maddie McCollins wasn't even an honorable mention in the conference for freshman, sophomore, or junior year. Right now, she's the best hockey player in the country."

Over 25 seasons, the team has served as a model for UWRF athletics. The long-tenured coaching staff and determined rosters have kept the Falcons near the top of the league for over a decade. As the university continues to implement varsity programs and build a home for student-athletes, women's hockey serves as the standard for establishing and maintaining success.



The UWRF women's hockey team celebrates victory in the 2024 WIAC Tournament Championship. (Photo courtesy of Pat Deninger)

UWRF Esports sees first-season dedication

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UW-River Falls Esports is only in its first varsity season, but the university has shown a clear interest in funding the program's long-term success. With its expansive Esports Arena in UWRF's Davee Library and seven assistant coaches to assist players, the program has set a high bar for other universities to follow. This early dedication to the team has made it one of the most comprehensively run esports programs from a Division III school.

Head coach Dylan Gentilcore was hired in Aug. 2022 to direct the future of the program. He has been working with esports at some level for seven years and has made this position at UWRF his full-time career.

"You're not going to see me leave in three to five years," Gentilcore said. "I really enjoy what we're doing here and what we're building."

The team employs six assistant coaches who constantly work with the team. Gentilcore holds a balance between managing the facility, the players, and the team's internet presence. This allows the assistant coaches to focus on their teams and implement specific strategies for them to practice and play. Each assistant coach is contracted and paid by the university.

The team's practice and competition arena in Davee Library comprises twenty-six high-powered Alienware gaming computers, as well as three separate stations with a Nintendo Switch and PlayStation 5 gaming console at each.

The athletes play most competitive matches online in the Esports Arena. However, some events and tournaments require the team to travel. The Super Smash Bros. team travels most frequently for their competitions, for example. This season, the team has flown to Cleveland, OH; Dallas,



UWRF Esports head coach Dylan Gentilcore at the UWRF Esports Arena. (Photo courtesy of UWRF)

TX; and San Jose, CA, to name a few locations.

Gentilcore said that he sets high expectations for the athletes. He said his players work with their teams four to five times each week at the arena. "Coaches, across the board, let players know what the practice schedule is for the upcoming week," Gentilcore said. Players have a big responsibility to blend their schedules with consistent in-person practice.

Gentilcore doesn't want there to be a limit on how many players can participate in the program. He says there is no prerequisite skill level to join and that the team structure allows players to quickly develop their proficiency. "I want to be one of the spots that, if you're from Minnesota or Wisconsin and you want to play esports in college, [UWRF] is one of the first schools that you think of."

UWRF professor to release first novel in trilogy

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UW-River Falls English professor Joseph Rein will release his upcoming sci-fi thriller novel, *YOUtopia*, this April. Rein originally planned to publish *YOUtopia* as a standalone novel, but was offered a deal that resulted in the book becoming a trilogy.

Rein explained that he came up with the idea for *YOUtopia* around ten years ago, and started writing the novel in 2018. He finished what he described as a "decent draft" in 2021. Rein described his inspiration for the novel: "I had read a lot when I was an undergraduate about utopias. The idea was a perfect world, [where] we're trying to figure out how we can live as a society where everyone is equal, individual, [and] perfect."

"The new takes on [utopias] are really dark and [focus] on the problems that come when people try to [create a utopia]. So the novel came from the idea that a perfect world can only exist for one person, for the individual. Because, once I want something and you want something else, it's no longer perfect. So that's why it's titled *YOUtopia*."

The main character of the novel is an FBI agent who is trying to solve a series of murders. "It's a book about people achieving the perfect world, but they're only achieving it by living out what their own mind fancies," Rein said. "The dark side of it comes in because that's not good; that can't be the way we live."

Discussing writer's block, Rein, said, "With murder mysteries, there's always a 'whodunnit' element, because you need a reader to get to the ending and be surprised, but also be able to say, 'That makes sense.' It can't come completely out of the blue. Knowing that while you're writing the middle [of the novel] is the hardest part. You know your beginning, and you know your ending, but getting there and making sure you're making it interesting along the way, that's where you can get stuck."

Writer's block can be difficult for writers to combat, but Rein is able to address it by leaving his computer and doing other things, such as going for long walks or bike rides, or doing house chores. "Sometimes I do my best writing when I'm doing a big stack of dishes and have my headphones on and can just think. You can let your mind roam, and sometimes answers come to you when you're not under the pressure of being at that keyboard," he said.

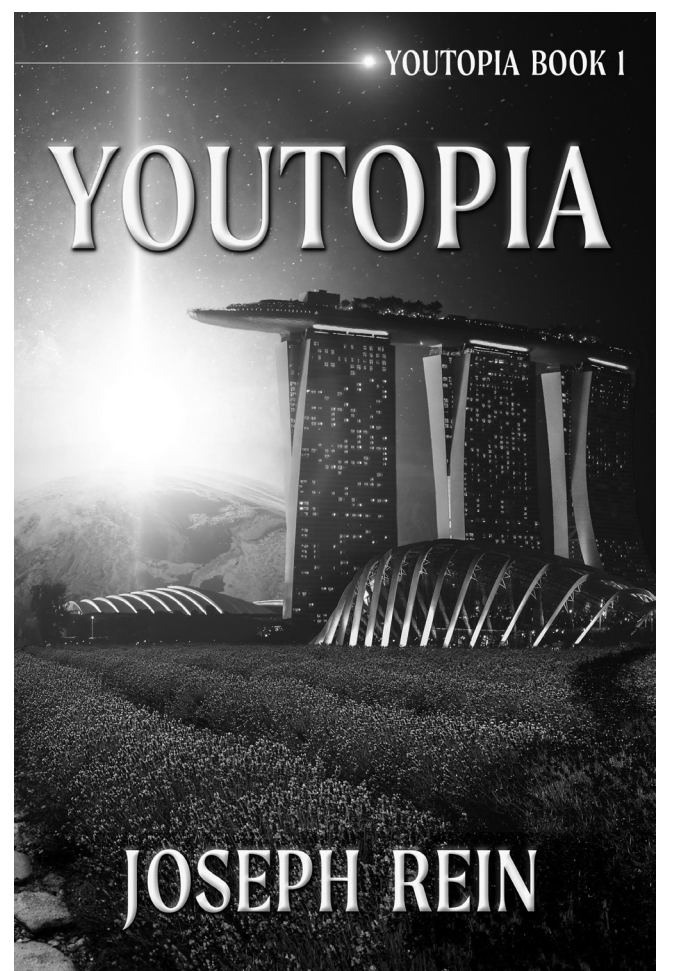
Rein described how he felt when he learned that the publishing company he is working with on *YOUtopia*, Evolved Publishing, out of Butler, WI, wanted not one book, but three. "Part of it was exciting, but knowing the amount of work that goes into writing a novel, it freaked me out a little bit," he said. Because *YOUtopia* was written as a standalone novel, Rein has to adapt to making it into a trilogy.

He worked on the first novel whenever he could, whether it was in between English classes or early in the morning before his four kids woke up. He wrote frequently during the summer, all while balancing his work, family, and social life.

He described the process of submitting to publishers as "heartbreaking. It's really difficult nowadays whenever you get something published out there in the world. No matter how big or small, it's something to celebrate because there are so many people who are trying to do this, and you end up being one of a hundred, one of a thousand, one of however many submissions these [publishers] get. You start to get self-doubt; is this good enough?"

"But it may be that you haven't found the right reader on the other end, the person that [the piece] resonates with. So it's a hunt for finding that." Rein went on to say that submitting involves a lot of rejection and that writers have to steel themselves for it.

"In those moments when you do get some acceptance, I'd say that I remember most, if not all of them: where I was sitting, how I received it, and what I did. It's just a sense of joy and accomplishment that is hard to match."



YOUtopia book one. (Photo courtesy of Joseph Rein)

Rein's first book is coming out in April 2024, his second book is coming out in Sept. 2024, and the third book is coming out in April 2025.

Dance Theatre concert marks three seniors' last performance together

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The curtains of Blanche Davis Theatre in UWRF's Kleinpell Fine Arts building are drawn closed. The stage has been vacant, and the lights have been dim, since the conclusion of UWRF's Dance Theatre Spring Concert, which was held from Jan. 31 to Feb. 3.

The concert, which is an annual culminating performance for the university's Dance Theatre organization, was one of bright lights, artistry, and hard work for the many dancers, choreographers, and club members who participated. This spring concert also marked a bittersweet occasion, the conclusion of three UWRF seniors' opportunities to perform together.

The three seniors—Cassie Fay, Lily Callander, and Claire Brindley—all hold officer positions within Dance Theatre this academic year, with Fay as the President, Brindley as Vice-President, and Callander as Secretary.

"The year before we were all in lower officer positions and then all the seniors left," Brindley said. "[Claire and Lilly] wanted Cassie to be President, [and] she did great."

"I was kind of forced into the president role," Fay admitted. "It ended up working out really well."

The three now-close friends first met during the Dance Theatre's casting week during their sophomore year. "We went into the studio, looked at one another, and we all looked terrified," Fay said. "I realized that those were my people and if I hung out with them, I would be fine. And then three years later, we're here."

Casting week occurs at the beginning of the fall semester, and returning and prospective members of the program perform a dance combination in front of the director, Mari

Kline-Kluck, as well as choreographers and upperclassmen. From there, depending on their availability, dancers choose or are placed in different pieces that are featured in the upcoming spring concert.

"It feels like an audition at first," Brindley said. "But when they reassure you that everyone is getting in [a piece], it feels a lot easier. It is really inclusive."

All three seniors performed in seven of the 12 dances featured in the spring concert, with each tallying several choreography nods as well. One of the dances, "Into Our Moment," was choreographed and performed by all three seniors. "The three of us decided we really wanted to do a piece together because we wanted to have that last moment together as dancers," Fay said.

"It was to show how we came in from different backgrounds... and how we came into this same program and got to know each other, [and] dance alongside each other and grow our friendship," Brindley remarked. "It's the base of our friendship and we wanted to have a piece to commemorate that." The dance was performed to the instrumental of "Fine Line" by Harry Styles and has a deeper meaning to Brindley.

"You're always walking a fine line in between one thing or another. We are walking together, in a way, between what is coming next in our lives," she said. "We started all this in separate places and we're kind of spreading back out again.... As dancers, our dance journey is coming to a close with this piece together."

There were a multitude of different dances featured in the concert, ranging across genres of music and dance alike. From the Afro-Peruvian-style "Festejo" to the modern "Love is Heartbreak," many of the dancers performed in more than one piece and genre throughout the concert.

To prepare for the pieces, dancers met once a week for rehearsals on each individual dance that they would take part in.

For those with dance experience, memorizing routines can be second nature. "A lot of it is muscle memory," Brindley explained. "Most of the pieces we rehearsed at least once a week, and at some point, it just clicks, and your body memorizes it."

Dance Theatre accepts dancers from all levels, while also giving opportunities to those that are involved in other forms of dance at the university.

Mira Meinen, a sophomore at UWRF, is a member of the Dance Team as well as the Dance Theatre. "For the Dance Team, it's a lot more about entertainment and competition," she said in an interview. "Those dances are less than two minutes long whereas these [for Dance Theatre] can sometimes be from four to five [minutes long]."

The artistry and performance of dance are captured via many different aspects, several of which are the lights, props, and costumes. All these aspects are set up during technical week, which typically occurs a few weeks before the concert. According to Meinen, the technical week for this year's concert arrived more quickly than in past years.

"This year was crunch time," she said. "We came back from J-term and immediately started setting up for the show." Following technical week, the concert commenced over the four separate nights, ending on a Saturday for Dance Theatre as well as Fay, Callander, and Brindley.

"We all knew it was coming," Brindley said. "It was definitely emotional, but also a cool moment to remember and run through in my mind."

UWRF's dairy pilot plant begins production

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Four months after the grand reopening of UW-River Falls' dairy pilot plant, production is now underway. The newly-renovated facility, recently renamed the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence, cleared inspection on Feb. 5, allowing UWRF to produce dairy products for sale and consumption. The week of Feb. 12 saw the plant's first production run.

Rueben Nilsson became the new manager of the plant in December, taking over for long-time manager Michelle Farner. Previously, Farner was in charge of developing the renovation, and, now, Nilsson is in charge of utilizing it.

The plant holds the necessary equipment for larger corporations to utilize for small-scale production and research. "If a company wants to try a new formulation of their ice cream or a different flavor of cheese, they can use our facility to produce 300 pounds instead of 30,000 pounds," Nilsson said. Multiple companies have already reached out about incorporating the pilot plant into their research and development.

To distribute dairy products that the plant produces, Nilsson is looking to reopen Freddy's Dairy Bar in UWRF's Agricultural Science Building immediately following spring break, which falls the week of March 17 to March 23. The plant will also distribute its product via an online store, which will then be delivered by mail service across campus. Nilsson also hopes to sell ice cream pints and cheese curds in the C-Store at the University Center.

Nilsson admitted to the slow-moving process of distributing products off-campus. "Because there was such a big gap between the last time we produced our own product



Dairy plant manager Rueben Nilsson at the Wuethrich Family/Grassland Dairy Center of Excellence. (Photo courtesy of UWRF)

and today, those sales channels need to get rebuilt," Nilsson said.

In time, the plant expects to distribute its product to the local community and businesses, including restaurants and

grocery stores. After over a decade of donations, delay, and development, the plant has taken its first steps toward producing high-quality dairy products and bringing them to the UW-River Falls community and beyond.

Student businesses awarded in UWRF Innovation Challenge

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Nine students. Six businesses. One challenge. On Feb. 28, UW-River Falls held its ninth annual Innovation Challenge. The challenge had students volunteer their time and effort into creating a business to be judged by various business leaders in Wisconsin. "It's a great opportunity to compete and show off our hard work," said Luke Heggstad, one of this year's contestants.

The main purpose of the competition is to see which students best follow the Business Model Canvas. This model is used by businesses to test out ideas they have for products and businesses, and then, based on the data they receive from these tests, to either improve or modify said businesses. The students' different approaches to this model were a more important factor in winning the challenge than the products or businesses themselves.

"The Business Model Canvas is a blueprint," said Dr. Maren Valentine of the College of Education, Business and Allied Health at UWRF. "You spit out ideas and you can continue to test the ideas so that they can become viable."

The judges were excited to see the businesses that were presented at this year's Innovation Challenge and to see which of these businesses would best follow the Business Model Canvas. The judges did not know what to expect until the day of the competition. Six groups presented at the challenge, each with unique projects in different fields.

The first was presented by Guma Jackson and his business, Koja's Cafe. The pastry website was designed by Jackson to innovate on sweet rolls and provide flavors beyond the usual cinnamon rolls. These flavors ranged from year-round flavors like peanut butter and Oreo to more sea-

sonal flavors. Aside from a variety of flavors, Jackson also created Koja's Cafe with an emphasis on quick and easy customer service.

Second was the only multi-student presentation, Roweboat, which was presented by Logan Rowe, Spencer Berden, Joe Schroder, and Tony Scarpone. Roweboat's mission is to help companies with high turnover rates reduce the cost of training by providing them with training videos and training programs for their employees.

Jake Regan presented his business, Jake's Window Cleaning. Regan's business is set on providing high-quality window cleaning for business and residential homes, and was inspired by people's experiences with poor-quality window cleaning services.

Michell Stangler presented her podcast, "Positivity in Ag," which is directed toward young adults interested in agriculture. The podcast serves as a basis to help agriculture students start building their careers and resumes after completing college.

Luke Heggstad presented his company, 4U Group, which is an insurance agency that provides customers with various insurance policies to assist them in finding insurance coverage for areas of their lives that are often forgotten.

Finally, August Baumann presented his company, AF Baumann Auto Parts. Via eBay and Facebook Marketplace, Baumann finds and deconstructs scrapped cars, then removes and refurbishes their parts and sells these parts to customers. AF Baumann Auto Parts' shipping and in-person pickup is intended to be consistent and stress-free for its customers.

"I was impressed by the initiative to start a viable business," said Mike Thompson, of Greater Good Greens, a

fresh, local food company that was one of the sponsors of the event. "Each of the entries was truly amazing to see, and it was inspiring knowing that each of these ideas came from the minds of our incredible students at UWRF."

Jake Regan and Jake's Window Company were awarded third place in this year's competition, August Baumann and AF Baumann Auto Parts were awarded second place, and Michelle Stangler and "Positivity in Ag" were awarded first place.

"I entered this competition with the end goal to have the mentorship and mindset to grow," Stangler said. "But I was glad to be here and learn from others!"

Stangler will be using the money to buy equipment for "Positivity in Ag" to improve her ability to record while traveling, and to hire others to help with the podcast. The first-place achievement is a landmark way for Stangler to close out her final semester at UWRF.

Regan received \$500 for their business, Baumann received \$1,000, and Stangler received \$2,000. Stangler was also automatically registered for the Wisconsin Big Idea Competition.

Even though one business was awarded the grand prize, all of the students involved gained experience in running and improving their business and gained publicity amongst businesses and business leaders in the Wisconsin area.

Though this year's challenge has concluded, Stangler had words of advice for future competitors. "Don't fear that you don't have a business," she said, "and don't put yourself away from the competition." This year marked the biggest turnout for the Innovation Challenge, with nine students across six businesses competing.

Moz Rude: one artist versus the world in the Twin Cities

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Enthusiasm shimmers in Moz Rude's eyes as they talk with visitors of Northern Clay Center, a studio in Minneapolis that holds classes and exhibitions, all of which focus on the ceramic arts. One of these classes is Northern Clay Center's ART@Hand Winter Open House Workshop, where visitors of all skill levels can sculpt small, holiday-themed decorations from clay and have them fired. Two stencils are available: a polar bear and a Christmas tree, but Moz Rude is quick to remind the amateur ceramists that these are far from the only possibilities. "Anything can happen in a studio," Moz says. "Reality doesn't exist here."

Moz, who is 25, and is queer and non-binary, is one of Northern Clay Center's teaching artists, and one of its newest. They have been teaching at NCC for about a year, and the ART@HAND event is one of the first workshops they have helped to direct. Studio C, which houses the workshop, is what Moz calls a hand-building studio. For an outsider to the ceramic arts, the room is chaos, a collection of tables, fans, sinks, and buckets, boxes of all shapes and sizes, and walls upon walls of shelves and drying racks, all crammed together beneath bright fluorescent lights. To a ceramist like Moz, however, the layout makes complete sense.

The shelves and racks are filled with more boxes, paper, supplies, and clay, as well as dozens, if not hundreds, of unnamed artworks, each one distinct from the rest. In the corner of the room, behind a massive sink and another

metal rack, there's a wall of ceramic paints, showcased in a mosaic of tiny sections of clay. There are hundreds of them, with names like 'Seafoam,' 'Taffy,' 'White Crawl,' 'Deb's Copper Green,' and 'Lizardskin.' In an adjacent studio, several kids sit at a series of pottery wheels, forming cups and bowls in a process known as throwing. "We have three throwing studios and then one handbuilding studio," Moz says. It's evident that the studios aren't just well-used, but well-loved, as any studio should be.

The front of Northern Clay Center houses the sales gallery, where a variety of items, pots, cups, jewelry, vases, plates, sculptures, and more, are on display for visitors to inspect or purchase. The gallery's bright lights and warm, yellow-orange colors accentuate the colors of the artworks themselves. As I walk through the gallery, it blends into Northern Clay Center's far more functional space. The contrast seems to say, 'This is where the art happens. This is where the creativity exists.' This space, the studios, is Moz's world, or at least, a part of it.

Moz's world: that's what I set out to explore when I met Moz a few weeks before. In March 2023, Moz received their BFA from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, and, a few months later, in June, was commissioned by the city of River Falls to direct the creation of a street mural. In Nov. 2023, I interviewed Moz for a news story on the project. While Moz focused on ceramics in their BFA, they love to paint as well; "Only the people who are closest to me know that I paint just as much as I make ceramics," Moz told me in the interview. This was one reason that they decided to take on the project. Another reason: "[The mu-

ral] was an opportunity for me to learn and grow, and also to engage in the community," Moz said.

At the workshop, Moz instructs me on my project, a polar bear that, by the end of the workshop, has transformed into a rat. "This slab's a little small, so I'll stretch it out," they say, and, "Put newspaper underneath so that the clay can hold itself up," and "When you scratch up clay and mix it with water, it's called slope." Moz's passion for creativity, and especially unorthodox creativity, is evident. "You can put wings on your bear if you want," they say. "There might be experiments that don't work out the way you want them to, but that doesn't mean it was a bad idea." Failed experiments, Moz tells me, are where much of the magic happens as an artist.

Also evident is Moz's love of teaching. When I arrived at the workshop, at noon, no other visitors were in Studio C, but by 12:30, a few have arrived, and Moz moves to help them with their projects as well. Two women sit down at our table, and Moz greets them and asks, "Are you making a bear?" One of the women tells Moz that she has a rat named Luna and wants to recreate her pet out of clay. "That's so cute!" Moz exclaims. "I'll do the critter, too," the woman's friend says. She says that she wants to recreate a bear statue that is outside of her home. "I love teaching," Moz says. "It's definitely where my passion is. If people have an idea, I love helping them nurture it." That's the purpose of the workshop, Moz says: "to get people interested in clay, and taking a class if it's something they want to get into."

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At an adjacent table, two kids, a brother and sister, work with their slabs of clay; as they do, they carefully study an example project, a polar bear, that sits on the table in front of them. “We try to make our projects simple so that everyone can participate,” Moz says. By 1:00 p.m., two other polar bears have joined the first: the brother’s is black-and-white, and the sister’s is pink-and-white. Northern Clay Center will fire the polar bears, Luna the rat, the bear statue, and my rodent, in one of its many kilns. And, after two weeks, the ceramists will return to pick them up, just in time for the holidays, as NCC’s website promises. “I teach a lot of kids,” Moz says. “I enjoy it because I can introduce them to creative thinking, that every option is possible. When I was growing up, there was a lot of ‘Oh, you’re not doing that right.’”

Besides the workshop, Moz teaches other classes as well. Moz introduces me to Alysha Hill, the manager of Northern Clay Center’s outreach program, which offers instruction and materials to schools, community centers, and other locations in the Minneapolis area. “It’s centered on community engagement,” Moz says. “We send teaching artists to their location, and they teach a class at that site.” NCC has ten active teaching artists on its roster, including Moz. Alysha turns to Moz. “I let Ella Baker know that we’re starting up our programming,” she says. “I got confirmation from them, and right away, I was like, ‘I have to let Moz know!’” Alysha’s excitement matches Moz’s. “It’s a school that I taught at last winter,” Moz says, when I ask about it later. “They reached out and wanted to partner again. I’m so excited!”

“The community,” Moz says, when I ask them what their favorite part of the outreach program is. “I love the community, and I love doing it with my coworkers as well. Community engagement is something that really interests me,” they add. Moz has been working as a teaching artist even before they graduated, and holds two other positions at NCC as well. One is a sales gallery associate, and the other is an outreach technician. Moz loves all three of the positions, but admits that they can be overwhelming: “I have four jobs; it’s a little insane.”

Moz’s journey from university to where they are now is one that Moz admits has been long and winding. “I also just moved to St. Paul two months ago, so there’s so much that’s happening that it’s been hard to juggle everything,” Moz says. In August, Moz moved into Schmidt’s Artists’ Lofts, a historic structure that was once Schmidt’s Brewery and, now, prides itself on being a “primary source of local artistic and cultural expression,” according to its website. After Moz arrived in St. Paul, they discovered a small coffee shop, Claddagh Coffee Cafe, which is a four-minute drive from Schmidt’s.

“Ever since I was a kid, I’ve been making stuff,” Moz says. “Drawing, painting, building things out of paper. That has always been there.” Claddagh Coffee Cafe has seating in the basement, and the warm ambience of the cafe drifts down the old wooden stairs as we talk: murmurs of

conversation, the soft clink of coffee mugs, and the little bell over the door that chimes whenever someone enters. Moz sketches absent-mindedly in a notebook as they tell me how much they loved art classes in middle school and high school. “I knew I wanted to make art, but I didn’t know that was an option,” they say.

In high school, Moz struggled with mental health, and art became more than just a passion, but a form of escape as well. “I only got through high school because of my art classes and my art teachers,” Moz says. After high school, Moz attended Minnesota State University, Mankato, to study psychology, and, once again, art was an escape for them. “I was like, okay, I’ll get my degree in psych and then I’ll be a therapist, but I’ll minor in art to get me through it.” However, after three weeks at Minnesota State University, Mankato, they dropped out. “I didn’t want to go to school after that because I was traumatized and afraid,” Moz says. However, Moz’s parents pressured them to return to school; eventually, Moz caved and went to the University of Bethel. This time, Moz took an art major.

“It was just a kind of middle finger to my parents,” Moz admits. “I didn’t even want to go to school, but if I was being pressured to go, I was just going to draw and do what I wanted. I didn’t see a future in art.” However, after Moz took their first art class, an art history course, they “fell in love so hard,” they tell me. In particular, they fell in love with art history, which opened up a new horizon of passion for Moz. “I have a catalog of hundreds, probably thousands, of years’ worth of art history from taking so many art history classes,” they say. Despite this, however, Moz didn’t have many friends at Bethel, except for one. “His name was Adam, and we were in Intro to Ceramics together,” Moz says. “We were each other’s cheerleaders.” Adam is one of the reasons Moz fell in love with ceramics.

Moz’s voice shifts, and turns quiet. “He ended up committing suicide.” Moz’s sketch takes shape: an abstract depiction of a face with a spike protruding from the side of its head. Amidst continued mental health struggles, Moz dropped out of Bethel University after three years. “I took



Moz Rude in St. Paul, MN. (Photo by Jack Schindler Van Hoof)

a long break to take care of myself and my mental health and figure out what the hell I was doing with my life,” Moz says. “I had no direction and didn’t think I was going to make it that far. I never saw myself making it to 20.” After a year and a half, Moz returned to school for the third time, to UW-River Falls, for art, once more, and, this time, for ceramics. Eventually, Moz plans to earn their master’s in ceramics and become a ceramics professor. “That’s my long-term goal,” they said. One of the reasons Moz wants to become a professor is because of Michael Helke, an Assistant Professor of Art at UWRF who was a major influence on Moz. “[Michael] was a big advocate for us students,” Moz says. Aspiring artists must connect with their local art communities if they want to succeed, they add. “[Michael] already had all of those connections, and he was super happy to let us know about opportunities.”

Read the rest of this story at uwrvoice.com.

Small town celebrity and news desert: impacts on a community

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I’m with my parents in our local grocery store called Piggly Wiggly. It has everything from a bakery and deli to a liquor store, all in one building. If you’re from a small town you know a grocery store is where you run into everyone you know or someone who knows you. An elderly couple came up to me in the grocery store and asked, “Are you Sally Kahlhamer’s granddaughter?” I’m in the second grade. My family, made up of my little brother, mom, and dad are all volunteering at our Lutheran school concession

stand when the referee, getting a dark blue Gatorade, asked me, “Is your grandma here today? I was going to ask her if she’s going to be at the upcoming high school volleyball game.”

I am in 7th grade at the time. I’ve just gotten my driver’s license and am working at our local meat market. At least once a day someone would ask me, “Are you Sally Kahlhamer’s granddaughter? Tell her I liked her story in the paper.” For my grandparents’ Christmas present, we hired a photographer and set up a day for all of our extended family to take a picture. My extended family are not the type of people to do anything simple. Of course, that meant color

schemes, specific pictures with a list of who’s in what photo with who, and props all had to be at the shoot. After getting done with the pictures, the photographer walked up to my grandma and said, “I want to thank you for writing such a wonderful story about us.” While talking about it later my grandma laughed while she said, “I don’t even remember

what I wrote.” Now I’m a senior in college, working as a waitress. During our Friday night fish fry an elderly couple who just ordered asked, “Are you Sally’s granddaughter? When is she coming back to the paper?”

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My grandmother, Sally Kahlhamer, is somewhat of a celebrity around our small town of Mayville, WI, though she definitely does not call herself that. Kahlhamer worked at our local newspaper, the Dodge County Pionier, for 32 years, over half of those years as an editor. Those in the industry know that when working as an editor for a small-town paper means you are also a photographer, reporter, and copy editor all wrapped up in one. One of the reasons my grandma is so well known is because she was everywhere with her camera. From sporting events to school board meetings and even parades, my grandma was there, camera in hand. Many people took notice and kids who wanted their pictures taken shouted for “Picture Lady.” Thus, the loving name “Picture Lady” was born, business cards included.

The Dodge County Pionier is a weekly newspaper that has been around since 1892. According to a special edition of the Dodge County Pionier, just three weeks after it started producing news the news office caught fire, but that didn’t halt publication. Henry Spiering was the original founder of The Mayville News and three other papers all based out of Mayville. Spiering had a long-term career as a public servant where he was the mayor, assemblyman, and justice of the peace. The first edition of The Mayville News was published fully in German, which then switched to English. Many different owners later, and the Johnsons who bought the Kewaskum Statesman and the Campbell Sports News bought The Mayville News and changed the name to the Dodge County Pionier. Although the name changed the spelling of pioneer in German is ‘pionier,’ which references the small town’s German roots. “Everybody when we first changed it called and said, ‘You spelled Pionier wrong.’ Then we would have to tell them, ‘No, that’s the German spelling,’” said Kahlhamer. Ironically, I also interviewed Andrew Johnson for a previous story I had written about his involvement with the Wall of Faces where my grandmother was able to help me contact him. Johnson’s son, David, passed away while deployed in Afghanistan, so the Wall of Faces project was an incredibly important and sentimental project for him. Johnson used the power of local papers to help match a face to every name on that wall. Johnson was also the President of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association and was previously my grandmother’s boss.

Originally, Kahlhamer was a part-time proofreader who went in for an interview after a family member recommended she apply because someone was moving and she got the job. “Well, I proofread for many years and then I

started working more with the editor. At that time he was terrible because he would go out and do a story and he’d come back and he couldn’t read his handwriting. So to top it all off, if he couldn’t read it, he would just make it up,” said Kahlhamer. Next, she started working on outlines because “at that time the paper had a lot of pictures.” Then another person left, and she started writing stories and interviewing people. “So you know, I just started writing some stories and then we had another editor come in and it was another bomb,” said Kahlhamer. She then told me how she got “voluntold” to be the editor. She described it as Johnson (who was the owner at the time) saying, “You know what, you can do it.” She said, “No I can’t, I don’t want to” and he said, “Yes, I know you can do it.” So, that was her job interview and, unwillingly, she became editor.

When asked, Kahlhamer did not have a favorite story, but she did have a few that stood out. The hardest story she ever had to write was about a car accident that involved four teenagers who passed away. Kahlhamer said, “Two weeks before that we had been to the WNA convention and I had taken a seminar and the lady that talked there told about, she was a reporter, about how when her son died in an accident, she was so upset because nobody ever asked her about him, about how she felt. She just felt that she could never tell her story about him. So she said, ‘When you have to cover something tough like that, ask the people if they want to talk to you. If not, fine, but if they want to talk to you, you know, they should be able to tell their story.’” Many of the families did not want to be interviewed but one did. The lady invited Kahlhamer into her home to do the interview, “I’ll never forget that because they invited me into their



Sally Kahlhamer with her Mayville Alumni High School Hall of Fame award. (Photo by Lexi Janzer)

home, and she sat down, and we were talking. She got up and went into the kitchen. She came out with a package of hot dogs. She looked at me and she said, “My son loved hot dogs. He would have them every day after school, not just one or two. He might have three.” She said, “So they were on sale, and I bought ten packages. What am I going to do with these hot dogs?” And then she started crying. It’s like, oh. Oh my gosh.”

Read the rest of this story at uwrvoice.com.

Taylor Swift Club attracts interest on campus

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Love her or hate her, Taylor Swift has been one of the most ubiquitous figures in American culture for the last several years. Her first-ever album peaked at #5 on the billboards way back in 2006, and her popularity went truly through the roof with the release of two back-to-back chart-topping albums, Folklore and Evermore, in 2020. She has the love of ardent fans around the country; it’s not unusual to see Taylor Swift merchandise, posters, or even tattoos on the UWRF campus.

Some students have taken their affection for the artist to a new height. Starting in February, the Taylor Swift Club began meeting every other Thursday. This group is built around appreciation of Taylor Swift, but also building a community of “Swifties.” Club President Laney Brabec describes the club as a “safe space to participate in fun Taylor Swift-themed events and jam out to her music.”

The club is also a place to build friendships and find a shared identity in an isolating modern world. Brabec says she feels she grew up alongside Taylor Swift, and that the

pop star’s music is deeply meaningful to her. “I always listened to her music as a way to escape the more difficult things going on in my personal life. Her lyrics are so well written and perfectly express emotions that I sometimes didn’t know how to put into words myself.” This feeling is shared by many students on campus. According to Brabec, the Taylor Swift Club already has 49 members.

Of course, Taylor Swift has her fair share of haters. As the Super Bowl approached, many fans of NFL football came to resent the pop star for her frequent appearances at Kansas City Chiefs games, where she watched her boyfriend, tight end Travis Kelce. These complaints reached a peak as Kelce and his Chiefs went on to win the Super Bowl for the second time in a row. The devotion and admiration constantly expressed by fans of Swift seems excessive to some onlookers.

Some people take their animosity a step further. According to a February poll by Monmouth University, one in three self-identified Republican respondents believes that Taylor Swift is involved in a plot to steal the 2024 presidential election from Donald Trump. Swift publicly declared her support for President Joe Biden in the run-up to the

2020 election. Some conspiracy theorists have come to believe that her relationship with Kelce and recently raised profile is a far-reaching “psy-op,” short for psychological operation, designed to ensure that a second Biden endorsement will be even more impactful. Brabec dismisses these claims, saying, “In my opinion, in healthy relationships, it is important to show up for your significant other and be a supportive partner.” She dismissed the more deranged theories.

Naysayers and conspiracy theorists aside, it’s an exciting time to be a Taylor Swift fan. On Feb. 4 of this year, Taylor Swift won Album of the Year and Best Pop Album awards. This makes the 34-year-old singer the first person to win Album of the year four times. During the show, she announced her eleventh studio album, “The Tortured Poets Department,” which releases on April 19. Brabec and the Taylor Swift Club are already preparing a listening party. “We won’t spoil them all now but there are some fun things in the works,” Brabec said.

Pippy & Whisper

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Students take notice of improvements at UWRF Dining

For thousands of UW-River Falls students, just as a visit to Chalmer Davee Library, the University Center, or any of the UWRF’s other academic buildings, is a part of their daily routine, so is a visit to Riverside Commons. Located in the University Center, or UC, Riverside Commons provides students with a variety of food options, which are sourced through UWRF Dining’s vendor, Chartwells Higher Education Dining Services.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, UWRF Dining has undergone significant changes, and, for the last few years, has been a subject of controversy among student circles. Much of this conversation has been negative, with many students criticizing the variety and quality of the food that Riverside Commons offers. On the website Rate My Professors, for example, UWRF scored a relatively low 2.7 out of 5 in Food. This assessment is not inaccurate; the Student Voice has noticed frequent issues in the past, from undercooked pizza and limited allergy-free dining options to more serious concerns like moldy bread and contaminated chicken.

Recently, however, many students, as well as members of the Student Voice, have seen a noticeable improvement in food quality and variety this semester.

In January, Chad Peterson, of Chartwells Higher Education Dining Services, took over as Food Service Director for UWRF Dining, and it has been his mission to listen to

student feedback and improve dining services on campus. The Student Voice interviewed Peterson, and Max Beeler, a Senator for UWRF’s Student Governance Association, and the Chair of the Dining Services Advisory Committee, to find out if Peterson’s efforts have been successful.

There are many areas where Peterson and UWRF Dining staff have made changes to improve food services. The first is food safety, which we believe to be the most important, and should be prioritized over areas like variety. Peterson said that he and his staff have conducted two-week reviews of each of the stations in Riverside Commons. They have also improved food safety and dietary standards, in an effort to, as Beeler said, not just conform to health standards, but exceed them.

The Student Voice believes that these efforts have paid off, and that students have seen a more positive experience over the last two months as a result. It is nice to see that the money that students spend on UWRF meal plans is being invested to improve the services they are paying for. One example of this is the chicken. Riverside Commons has moved from frozen chicken to fresh chicken, in part because of a new chef that started on March 1. Another example: they have purchased new rice cookers to address widespread concerns that the rice is undercooked and crunchy.

Peterson said that student feedback is the first priority

for him and the rest of the staff. He meets with the Dining Services Advisory Council, or DSAC, every Tuesday to listen to feedback and ideas. He said that he plans to gather additional feedback by emailing a survey to every UWRF student with a meal plan. Beeler said that Peterson sometimes addresses dining concerns even before they can be raised at DSAC meetings. We appreciate this prioritization: UWRF Dining seems to have a genuine interest in taking student feedback seriously.

Another area that has improved is the variety in Riverside Commons, in the form of ‘pop-up menus’ that are scheduled for certain days in advance. These menus are intended, Peterson said, to be custom to River Falls, and to be fresh and different. We at the Student Voice appreciate the effort and experimentation that goes into these menus; one of our members especially enjoyed the boba tea pop-up that was featured a few weeks ago.

The Student Voice would like UWRF Dining Services to keep up these efforts, and continue experimenting with pop-up menus, but, more importantly, continue to prioritize student concerns.

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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.

UWRF students attend lobbying day at Wisconsin capitol

UW-River Falls students, as part of the university's Student Government Association, or SGA, met with Wisconsin government officials on Feb. 21. These officials included Governor Tony Evers and all four of the public officials that represent River Falls. Students met with these officials and staff every 30 minutes from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m., and advocated for additional mental health resources on college campuses; freedom of speech; campus accessibility; support for diversity, equity, and inclusion programs; and for general support for higher education.

According to Brendan Fernlund, SGA's Legislative Affairs Director, UWRF was able to hold the most meetings out of all of the universities that participated. Students were also able to take a tour of the capitol and connect with other UW System students to discuss different talking points that they were lobbying for. "I loved it," said Fernlund. "The capitol is an awesome, inspiring building, and being able to do our civic duty is really impactful. I am so proud and appreciative of all of our members for being real champions for all the unique voices on campus." The photos on the top and middle right are courtesy of Brendan Fernlund. The photos on the left and bottom right are courtesy of Kalli Kubly.

