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UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON TACOMA



It's time for affordable homes in Washington State

P4

Washington passes \$5 million to support undocumented students

In accordance with House Bill 1368, the emergency relief grant will provide eligible undocumented students financial assistance to help students afford essentials.

By **GARRETT YAEN**
News Editor

Eligible undocumented students in Washington colleges will soon have access to \$5 million in emergency funding. The Washington Student Achievement Council is collaborating with colleges to implement the Emergency Relief Grant program.

According to the WSAC website, the Emergency Relief Grant fund will be available to resident undocumented individuals who demonstrate financial need, have submitted the Washington Application for State Financial Aid, did not qualify for federally funded student financial aid due to their citizenship status, and if they've been enrolled or will be enrolling as a student in the 2020-2021 academic year.

The funding for the \$5 million comes from House Bill 1368 which was signed into law by Governor Jay Inslee in Feb. 2021.

The WSAC's Director of Student Financial Assistance, Becky Thompson, explained that the \$5 million for undocumented students makes up

part of a larger bill with a total of \$2.2 billion dollars used in the support of other programs.

"This relief program bill includes \$2.2 billion dollars of federal aid that is providing assistance to a very wide range of agencies including K-12 education, housing and much larger than just the \$5 million for Student Relief Grants for undocumented students," Thompson said.

According to the WSAC website, colleges can deliver more funds to students from the undocumented student population if they meet residency and other criteria, such as being in a short-term certificate or graduate program.

However, the website explained further noting that colleges may distribute the funds to students in need until June 30, 2021. Students who previously received Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act's (CARES) will not have access to these new funds.

Despite these previous acts, the majority of undocumented students



PHOTO CORTESY OF WSAC OLYMPIA FACEBOOK

The funding for the \$5 million comes from House Bill 1368 which was signed into law by Governor Jay Inslee in Feb. 2021.

have not benefitted from many of the relief programs proposed because most of the bills have benefitted only students with American citizenship. Due to this, Thompson said the emergency relief grant to support undocumented students is especially needed at this time.

"Because undocumented students have been ineligible for the federal relief funds provided under the traditional federal funds referred to as HEERF, CARES, CRF, CRSSA, this will provide what is likely much needed relief," she said.

Thompson explained that those who may not meet all of the requirements for eligibility don't need to lose hope, as they may still be eligible for aid. She also provided some insight on applying for financial aid for the next academic year.

"If they haven't applied for state financial aid for either 2020-21 and/or 2021-22 academic year, it is not too late," she said. "The first step is to complete an application for state financial assistance, at www.ready-setgrad.org/wasfa."

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Another state aid program, available for all students is the Washington College Grant. It can be filed at -

<https://wsac.wa.gov/wcg>

Students eligible for federal aid must submit a FAFSA instead of a WASFA.

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THE LEDGER IS NOW ACCEPTING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR!

Do you want to voice your issues of concern related to news, politics, campus issues and more? Then we invite you to write a Letter to the Editor. Letters submitted to the Ledger may be published through both TheTacomaLedger.com and our print edition.

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- Your first and last name
- "Dear Editor," as the opening of your piece
- Respond to one of our articles or happenings on campus



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Making education more accessible: Seeds Queer Book Club

Founder of the Seeds Queer Book Club, JC Esquina, lends their insight on holding spaces for underrepresented groups outside academia

By ROSIE MENDOZA-BAUTISTA
NEWS REPORTER

Seeds Queer Book Club highlights underrepresented groups within Tacoma outside the walls of a traditional academic environment, according to club founder JC Esquina.

“We essentially started it as a way for people to find a space and build a relationship back up with education,” Esquina said. “Normally, I will be the facilitator, but we try to approach the book club in a non-hierarchical way. So, anyone who wants to be involved in this process or wants to take the lead is welcome to do so.”

This passion for education outside of academia came out of Esquina’s turbulent end to their college experience.

“I started the book club the year after my last year in college,” they said. “I wasn’t able to graduate because of financial reasons, and I really had a lot of emotions when it came to all the energy and time I spent in academia.”

Esquina said that in the end, due to their rigorous work schedule and having financial obligations outside of school, they found themselves burned out and weren’t able to finish their last semester.

“I was working a lot, and I was trying to become the creator in the situation and move past it, but I really needed that space. I missed some of the classes, and I missed the people, not necessarily the grades and the fees associated with everything,” they said.

This loss inspired Esquina to think creatively about what they could do to implement education back into their life in a way that deviates from the setting of a college institution.

“For me, the book club really provided a lot of healing, and it was a way to move past some of that trauma, and I hope that other people felt that as well. I had the honor of meeting so many people within different experiences of not only their queer identity but their Latinx identity,” they said.

Within SQBC, Esquina emphasized the experience of being different and creating an environment where those differences can be celebrated, where change is not feared but rather welcomed.

“At first, we started as a Latinx queer book club. But then as we started interrogating what Latinx meant, we started to see that it meant a merit of different things,” they said.

“While we primarily look at the books from a queer lens, we try to have a revolving list of authors” Esquina said. “We try to keep the gatekeeping away, even when it comes to definitions. So it’s constantly evolving and changing.”

They then said that’s why the mascot of the Axolotl indicates how the club approaches the book club. Esquina said SQBC has had to embrace the changes it and the world around it faced. With the pandemic’s impact, they found themselves shifting toward modifications that would allow them to continue remotely.

“We meet online, once a month. It’s been consistent for the last three years. We meet every first Saturday of the month at 1 p.m.” they said.

“It has been really great to have it virtual because of the pandemic. However, when we first started, we met up at Kings Books, which is a local, very queer-friendly bookstore. So, it just

felt like a natural place to reach out to and see if we could get a book club started,” Esquina said.

Even with the given circumstances of not being able to meet up at Kings Books like they used to, Esquina said they believe that having an online presence has made their book club more accessible to all and has provided close-knit connections amidst the pandemic.

“Having a space to talk, meet and be social when it’s not allowed otherwise has been really important to a lot of us and our mental health. Or it’s just good to have some normalcy when it comes to things we really care about. So the book club has been a really good way to lift us through this pandemic,” Esquina said.

With the growing technology utilized by the club, some of the materials are free and accessibility is at the core of the SQBC. Inaccessibility to obtain a book for the allotted period it’s being read doesn’t stop one from participating in this book club.

“The price of books, especially during this economic time and anytime in general, can be a bit of a burden. So, we try to alleviate some of that stress,” they said. “Some folks have been really helpful by donating to us, so we always have a fund to help folks get access to books as well when they want to join. And we also have a great partnership with the library.”

If a prospective member does not feel comfortable or if someone has bad experiences regarding education or reading as a whole, Esquina and the members of this book club said they understand and relate to this perspective because they have felt these feel-

ings toward education.

“Since I came here when I was 14, trying to learn a whole new language, trying to read, grammar and all that stuff were things that I really hated so much. I still hate grammar, and I hate sentence structure. But what really drives me is having a story that’s so impactful. I feel like especially, stories that are often not within the ivory tower paradigm will propel a lot of people who might also have a tumultuous relationship with reading to connect more with these stories. That has been my case,” they said.

Because of their personal experiences with schooling and understanding the difficulties of getting through a book, SQBC makes many adjustments for those who may have trouble with books or keeping up.

“We also don’t expect folks to finish the whole body of work or the whole text,” Esquina said.

“Even if it’s doing your own investigation of the author or reading a little bit of the preface or chapter, just to get some ideas of what might come next ... It’s always important for us to welcome new perspectives and interrogate what already exists,” they said.

Although this is their philosophy, Esquina doesn’t hesitate in still thinking about what book they believe everyone should probably read at least once.

“‘There There’ by Tommy Orange. It’s not necessarily a queer book, but he is someone who is indigenous, and he talks a lot about identity,” Esquina said. “He has this brilliant way of talking about people who are often left out of the conversation; people struggling with gentrification.”

Aside from this recommendation, Esquina also recommends that people attend events and workshops they will hold in the near future.

“I think we should be having more zine workshops in the future, we really want to get that through and hopefully an open mic night in the next coming months. All virtually, of course,” they said.

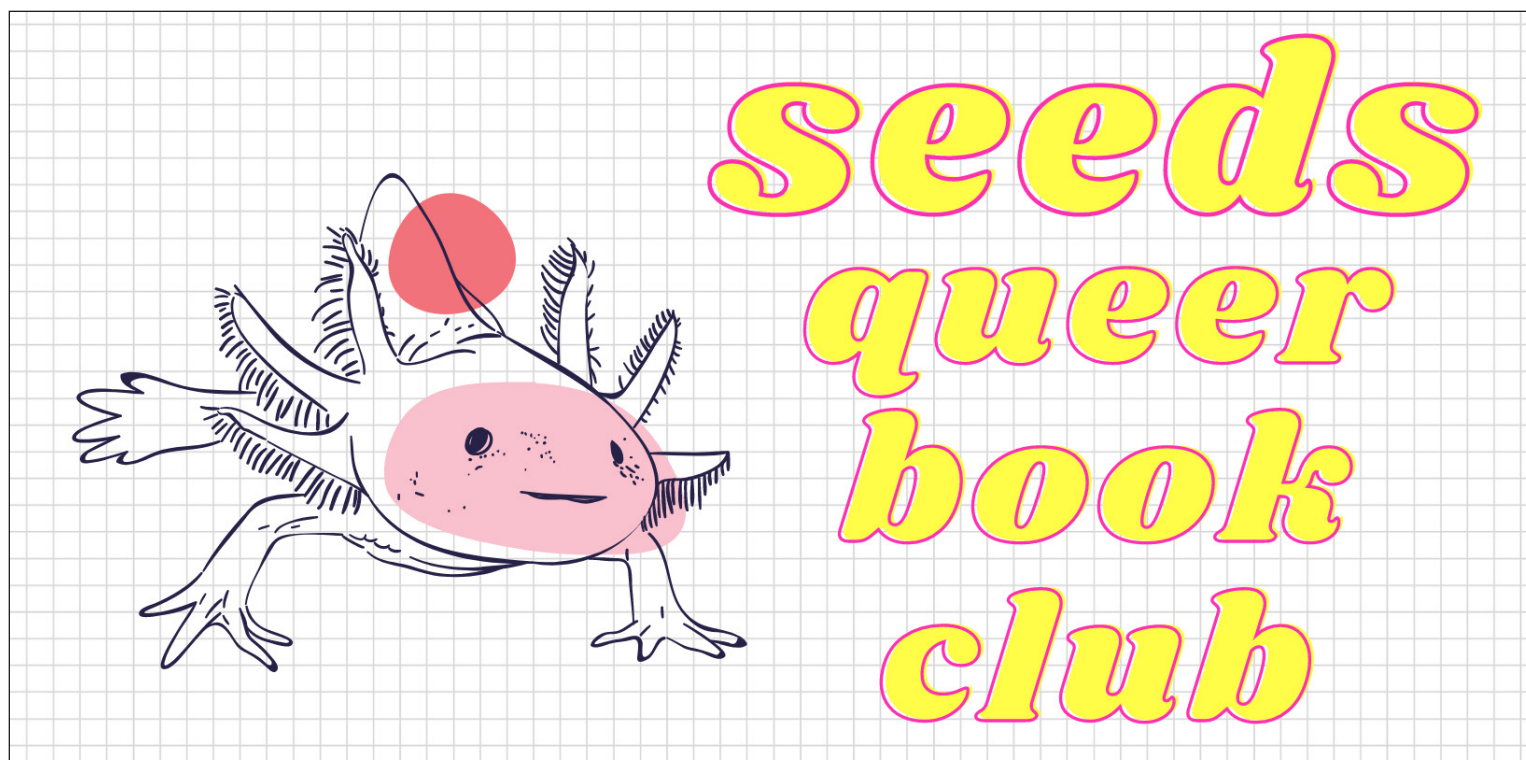
Zines are short self made comics anyone can create about any topic that may be of interest to them. Beside, this workshop, they’re also venturing into new realms.

“We have a workshop with a writer coming up on March 24. It’s going to be free and open to the public, and it’s going to be lead by Gloria Muhammad. That’s going to be one of the first workshops that we do by ourselves,” they said.

SQBC would not have been successful without the help of community groups or members along the way to help uplift them up, according to Esquina.

“I think a big person that has been really helpful and came to a lot of our discussions is Sarah Chavez. She is a professor at UW Tacoma. She has been great to seek out for advice or go to for questions. There’s also a great group called Latinx Unidos of the Southsound (LUSS). They do a lot of advocacy but also a lot of cultural events to build up representation within the city,” they said.

Ready for what the future holds, Esquina said they’re proud of the work the book club members have accomplished so far.



The mascot, the Axolotl, is the representative of the book club.

ILLUSTRATION BY JC ESQUINA

HOW TO CONTACT & DONATE:

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Email is seedsqueerbookstacoma@gmail.com

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It's time for affordable homes in Washington State

Newly constructed or nice family homes in Washington state can cost anywhere from 600,000 to 1 million, and this is just too expensive.

By **BENGISU CICEK**
OPINION COLUMNIST

When looking for homes, apartments or townhouses to rent or buy in Washington state, especially near the coast, the prices are exorbitant.

If you want a nice or newly built family home near the Bellevue, Issaquah or Kirkland area, it will be very hard to find anything below \$600,000.

As we look at the beautiful cities of Bellevue and Seattle, they are convenient places to live due to their close proximity to companies such as Microsoft and various business buildings along with the locality of restaurants and shopping centers. Because of this, many homes are built in the area.

Comparing housing prices in Bellevue versus Tacoma, there is a noticeable gap. For instance, a three-bedroom house in Bellevue is over \$1 million, while a three-bedroom home in Tacoma is over \$500,000.

I can understand why it's more

expensive, because of the amount of businesses and places built in Bellevue. But why must it be higher to the point that only wealthy people are able to purchase?

There are programs varying from state to state that help assist payment for homes or rent especially if you're in a certain profession — such as a healthcare worker, full time teacher or firefighter. Home prices in Washington state are very high, and for first-time homebuyers this is too much money for the average worker.

In "Why is housing so expensive in the Puget sound?" from the Young Women's Christian Association written in 2018, Eric Bronson shared this insight: "Today, King County has 68,600 units of housing affordable to families making under 50 percent of the area median income, but the number of families needing that affordable housing is 116,200. That latter number includes the families who are currently homeless."

Then in Marc Stiles' article, "Home

prices up all over, but especially in 'Zoom towns' like Chelan," on Puget Sound Business Journal from Dec. 2020, Stiles shares, "In the metro, prices rose about 17% in Pierce to \$445,000, 16% in Kitsap to \$329,000, 14% in Snohomish to \$566,000 and 10.4% in King to \$730,500."

Housing affordability needs to expand. Every family deserves to live in a nice area in a family home with a good school district.

On the Census American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year survey, it showed that the median household income for Washington state was \$78,687 in 2019. However, there are many families making lower than this, and with the ongoing pandemic, this adds more difficulty paying for numerous necessities.

Prices are going up but incomes are not. Families, students, newlyweds and all people deserve to be able to buy their first home without having to worry about the price. More direct options and resources need to

be accessible to Washingtonians.

In addition to this, Seattle's homeless population is on the rise. Especially with our harsh winters here, the homeless population deserves to have access to shelter.

The Northlake Tiny Home Village project located in Seattle was disputed in 2020. As stated on March 19, 2020, the city of Seattle's website posted that they have allowed Nickelsville residents from this Tiny House Village project to only stay until June 1.

Projects such as these need to be normalized and ought to be implemented in more cities that have a high homeless population. By doing so, the homeless population will have more safety from risks such as diseases, COVID, harsh weather conditions and more. Knowing you have a safe place to go to with a roof over your head is something everyone should be able to experience.

Due to the increasing cost of housing, there are human beings out

in the streets of Seattle, and many other major cities without a home to go to in 30 degree, or below, weather. Lobbying, taking action and bringing awareness to individual stories and testimonies surrounding the hardships of being able to find homes in Washington state is a step to changing this reality.

Going to leg.wa.gov and searching bills related to housing, as well as sending your own letter to your senator as to why you think projects such as Tiny House Village or student aid to housing is important is a step to changing the issues our state faces with high priced homes and homelessness.

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Home prices are rising in WA.

PHOTO BY JOSH FIELDS

Houselessness: How the state perpetuates the issue

With the pandemic and cold weather persisting the issue of houselessness is urgent, yet the state continues to do little to support those facing this



Black & Indigenous Peoples Garden at CHAZ/CHOP in Seattle near the camp.

COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

BY ANDREA NADAL
OPINION EDITOR

The ongoing COVID pandemic has and continues to exacerbate the already worsening issue of homelessness in this country. Many businesses were forced to close temporarily or permanently due to the pandemic. Resulting in a loss of income for many, this eventually led to eviction and even houselessness for some.

Houselessness or not having stable shelter affects every aspect of life and always carries risks. But with the pandemic, there is an elevated risk associated with not having stable shelter. People are made to seek shelter in overcrowded facilities, camps and other areas that lead to an increase in close quarters interaction with others as well as an elevated risk of being infected with and spreading COVID-19.

Due to this known risk, it should be a priority of the state now more than ever to ensure that people have access to secure and stable housing that allows them to properly follow COVID protocols. Yet, we have seen no change in the cruel tactics used against those facing evictions and homelessness.

Many places enacted temporary eviction moratoria, which were intended to stop new evictions from being filed. This was not the reality though, as many landlords found loopholes that allowed them to evict people regardless of the moratorium. Even when people aren't evicted while the moratoria are in place costs don't

stop and without a change in conditions many are left with outstanding balances that they are unable to pay off, so once these eventually end landlords are able to evict immediately.

Local police are used to enforce these evictions and show up to force people from their homes regardless of the circumstance. We don't just see police enforcing evictions though. Police are also used for what are known as homeless sweeps, a practice where houseless people staying in camps on city property are forcibly removed from the area. With little to no resources provided by the state to aid them in this effort, they are given a short notice before they are expected to pack up their belongings and leave the area.

If and when they are still on the premises the day the sweep is planned, police often take to destroying the encampment and everyone's belongings, leaving them with nothing. Sometimes people are directed to already strained resources that are unable to provide them aid, other times they are just displaced and given no aid.

One popular location for camps is Cal Anderson Park. Large-scale camps have been set up here on and off since last summer. Each time the police have swept the camp people have returned as soon as the presence was gone in order to set up again. The city of Seattle continues to insist that the park is not a suitable place to live, yet residents of the park have no

other options.

Shelters have limited bed space, and even when available, these spaces are not always safe or ideal for those seeking shelter. As such, the park offers a safe place for people to set up their own shelter and be protected from the elements. But due to complaints by housed residents and business owners, the park continues to face violence by the police.

One of the more violent sweeps happened back in late Dec. of last year when a huge resistance had been organized. Dozens of people showed up to resist police presence and build barricades around the park to protect those living there from the sweep. However, police showed up with full force in riot gear armed with airguns to shoot pepper balls and were also accompanied by armed vehicles.

The sweep was carried out, the city bulldozed the camp destroying the possessions of those living there, despite being ordered otherwise. According to "SPD sweeps Cal Anderson to clear homeless encampments and protesters from park — UPDATE" from Capitol Hill Seattle Blog, there were 24 confirmed arrests from that day for charges including obstructing, trespassing and property destruction.

This massive display of state violence is not only despicable and inhumane, it directly violates CDC recommendations for COVID safety. Beyond that, it also carries a hefty price tag. All of the officers, weapons and equipment used during the sweep

cost an insane amount of money, money that could have been used to solve the problem and house people, rather than criminalize them and worsen their material conditions.

In the wake of these devastating and inhumane actions by the state, we have seen communities come together to fight for change and justice. There are many groups that work to provide services to the houseless community, eviction defense and sweep defense.

They are made up of community members who recognize that houseless people are a part of our community as well. Many of these groups include or work closely with houseless individuals to ensure that their voices are always centered in this fight.

Tacoma Housing Now and Olympia Housing Now have both had high-profile occupation efforts to house people in hotels. Demanding that their cities use the funds they received from The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act — or CARES Act — to house people at these locations. Yet the cities refused, also choosing to utilize state violence to evict people rather than provide adequate support.

Their work does not end there though, and many other groups are also taking up efforts to help the houseless community. Tacoma Housing Now also works to help clean up trash and advocate for better sanitation from the city to the encampments. Food Not Bombs Tacoma

provides meals and medical services to encampments, as well as other essential items while also working closely with Tacoma Housing Now. Tacoma Mutual Aid Collective hosts events, such as "laundry days" for houseless people to provide access to laundromats at no expense as well as other necessary supplies such as tents.

Despite the continued use of violence and extreme force by the state, it is important that we look to the community and the real work being done daily for hope. As we continue to demand improved conditions for those experiencing houselessness or those at risk of unjust evictions we can see the ways that the community is working to fill the gaps.

We see people that are resilient in the face of injustice, and those willing to provide for needs that are left uncared for by the state. And there is power in this, in recognizing the ways that we can come together and fill the needs of our community without, or in spite of, state powers. The state upholds the status quo and seeks to cling to its power, it will never change, it will never allow prosperity for the many. We take care of us, always.

Groups working on housing efforts:
Tacoma Housing Now, Olympia Housing Now, Food Not bombs (several cities), Tacoma Mutual Aid Collective, Pierce County Tacoma Coalition to End Homelessness, Tenants Union of Washington.

Tacoma Public School budgets; negotiating costs and inclusivity

The Tacoma Public Schools district is making history by changing the names of some schools. But could that money be better used in other places?



COURTESY OF TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Woodrow Wilson High School.

By Madi Williams
OPINION COLUMNIST

A community divide has formed over the efforts to rename Woodrow Wilson High School to Dr. Dolores Sillas High School. This change was decided on Feb. 11, 2021 and will take effect on July 1, 2021.

In the article “It’s official: Tacoma’s Woodrow Wilson High School will get a new name” from the News Tribune, Allison Needles shares that this change was done with the intention of “pointing out the racist history of the man the school was named after.” And while this is a valid reason for renaming the school, what about where the money could be going to instead of rebranding?

Needles goes on to explain that “The cost of the name change would be at least \$400,000, for changes like building exte-

rior, interior and uniforms.” This is money that could be going towards fixing schools that are in need or bringing activities and classes to the students of Tacoma rather than spending thousands on a symbolic change.

Out of the schools in the Tacoma School District, eight of them are named after a president. Since it’s likely they all have some bad background due to the era of the times, why not rename them all? If the district did this, over time it would cost upwards of \$3.2 million if the price stayed at the \$400,000 mark. This money could be used in other ways to better the student experience by remodeling the schools that really need it and providing classes that will help students grow as not only students, but also as individuals.

Budget cuts have deeply impacted art

programs across the district, resulting in students not being able to have access to these experiences that these classes offer. Students are not receiving the opportunities to express themselves as who they are because schools are more interested in science and math based classes due to the emphasis on testing. When in reality, art classes are a place for students to escape and take a break from classes to do something calming while also being able to express themselves.

It is important to recognize that art classes help with brain development as well. In her article, “Art Enhances Brain Function and Well-Being,” Renee Phillips states that “Research has proven the arts develop neural systems that produce a broad spectrum of benefits ranging from fine motor skills to creativity and improved emotional balance. Quite simply, the arts are invaluable to our proper functioning individually and as a society.” By cutting these classes, schools are taking away valuable learning opportunities and developmental skills.

Whether it be basic foundational art and music classes or higher art classes, any level gives students the chance to grow and make improvements, which is what school is all about. Once the students have taken the basic classes and

show they have mastered them, they then move to higher levels so they continue to be challenged to improve.

Giving students space and time to be able to do something that they enjoy, and show who they really are, helps them get through a school day. These classes help students see that they are growing and improving by comparing past projects to current ones, which gives them that push to continue.

Art is not the only thing that we have seen take a hit over the years. Home economics and woodworking classes used to be standard in high school, now we hardly find them. It would also be important to ensure that these classes were no longer used to enforce gender stereotypes like they often were in the past. Anyone should be able to take these classes and gender should not dictate the skills that a student has the opportunity to learn.

Since many families may not have access to tools like these, students getting the exposure to them at school could help them find a passion, and maybe even learn what they want to do in life. No matter what they get out of the class, it is sure to help them learn to navigate the world a bit more successfully.

Changing the names of schools from

individuals who actively sought to harm minorities and their communities is important, but instead of completely erasing it why not make it a learning moment? Keep the main name of the school like Wilson and find someone in the community who also has the name Wilson and rebrand it after them.

Instead of completely rebranding a school whose uniforms only have the name Wilson on them, then they would only have to take away the first name of Woodrow that is shown along the building. This it would cost less money to take away one name compared to having to put a completely different name throughout the school.

If the district did something like this, they would not have to spend \$400,000 on rebranding and could instead use it to improve student education. Remodeling a school so that students are in a safe building and not one that is slowly falling apart, funding classes like the arts or re-introducing classes like home economics, students will have the opportunity to take classes like woodworking or sewing. The whole part of the school experience is letting students learn about different subjects and have opportunities that they might not be able to have at home.

Trail Blazers midseason report

The Portland Trail Blazers find themselves in the thick of a deep playoff race in the Western Conference. What can they do to improve their standing?

By Brooks Moeller
SPORTS COLUMNIST

We have officially hit the halfway point of the shortened 2020-21 NBA season and our local Portland Trailblazers find themselves in the thick of a deep playoff race in the Western Conference. At the time this article is being written, the Blazers sit in sixth place in the conference with a record of 18-14 and are currently in the midst of a four game losing streak.

Before the four game losing streak, the Blazers had won eight of their last nine and were rolling. They were within striking distance of being in a position of a top two seed in the Western Conference. However, it is clear now that they have come back down to Earth, shooting with much less consistency and struggling in many other areas as well.

During their hot streak, the team was shooting an astonishing 44% from three point range but has dropped to a more dismal 33%. Questions surrounding the Blazers recent performance contemplating whether or not they will be able to

stay afloat without two of their three best players, CJ McCollum and Jusuf Nurkic, are now resurfacing.

McCollum, who is the biggest loss of the two, is expected to return soon after the all star break and will bring a much needed boost to a struggling Blazers offense, who has been forced to put inexperienced players in an expanded role. McCollum remained optimistic after his injury and is expected to make a full recovery.

“I’m battle-tested, man. I’m good,” McCollum said in an interview following the announcement of his injury. “I’ve been through a lot in my life. I’m in a good stage of life. Mentally, I’m at peace.”

Although Nurkic is not as big of a loss as McCollum, the big man is still a huge help for the Blazers, especially inside the paint. Before the injury, he was averaging 9.9 points and 7.7 rebounds per game. He is a force inside and has been missed on the defensive side especially.

Two players who have stepped up tremendously to keep the Blazers high in the standings are Gary Trent Jr. and Enes Kanter. Trent is in his third season

out of Duke and had been a scoring threat off the bench until the injury to McCollum forced him into the starting lineup. He is averaging 15 points per game as well as shooting 41% from beyond the arc. At only 22 years old, he can be used as a foundational piece for Blazers teams in the future.

Veteran big man Enes Kanter has been huge for the Blazers as well and is a walking double-double at times. Again coming into the starting lineup after the injury to Nurkic, he has averaged 11.7 points and 11.5 rebounds per game solidifying the inside.

However, with these two in the starting lineup, it makes the bench much less deep and the team has shown the tendency to become fatigued in the fourth quarter of games and lose leads. With McCollum and Nurkic eventually coming back from injury, Trent and Kanter can move back into bench roles where they can be just as effective.

Another player keeping this team in contention is, of course, all-star point guard Damien Lillard. Lillard is averaging 29.8 points and 8 assists per game.



COURTESY OF THE TRAILBLAZERS

Damien Lillard is once again a legitimate MVP candidate averaging 29.8 points and 8 assists per game thus far in the season.

As a player with the ability to win games on his own if he catches fire at the end of games, if he continues this play he could find himself in the MVP race towards the end of the year.

However, the Feb. 26 loss versus the Western Conference favorites, LA Lakers, showed that he will need help if this team wants to make a run in the playoffs. Lillard dropped 35 points but the team ended up losing by nine to the defending champions.

Even with the recent losing streak, head coach Terry Stotts is confident that the team will get back on track.

“We’ve lost four in a row, we’re coming home, we need to gain some momentum going into the break,” said Stotts following the loss to LA. “I’m really confident about our group and how they compete and how important it is, so I don’t think we need to belabor the point. We know that these three games are important going into the break.”

With the additions of McCollum and Nurkic back into the lineup and how well this team has handled adversity thus far, I can see this team making a run in the playoffs and end up with a top seed.

MeWOW: Cat Cafes

Why just have coffee when you can enjoy it with a cat?

By **LORE ZENT**
A&E COLUMNIST

Cat Cafes, the new trend currently sweeping the nation, are themed cafes whose main attraction consists of interacting with cats while enjoying a drink or a nice treat. Commonly, cat cafes are partnered or sponsored by animal rescues as a non-conventional, casual way of adopting felines in need of homes.

The first cat cafe is said to be founded in 1912 in Vienna. Currently, Japan holds the record for the most cat cafe businesses. However, CNN tells us that there are over 152 cat cafes located in the United States. Here are a few of the locations we have in our local vicinity.

NEKO CAT CAFE (SEATTLE & BELLINGHAM, WA)

The owner of the Neko Cat Cafe, Caitlin Unsell, fell in love with cat cafe culture while living abroad in Vietnam and Japan. After moving back to the states, she decided to open her own company to bring some of this culture back with her. As the website states, “She and her partner have created a place where you can bring your friends for happy hour and your niece on Saturday morning,” offering both cafe beverages and cocktails. Cats here are adoptable as well. On average, Seattle hosts 12 cats, while Bellingham hosts 25. They have an ama-

zon wishlist for those wanting to donate items for the cats.

CATFIENNATED (TACOMA, WA)

6th Ave. is the home of Tacoma's very own cat cafe and is perfect for those not living up north nor willing to travel. It offers a refrigerated deli-style selection of food along with classic cafe drinks as well as bottled and canned alcohol like White Claws. Having just reopened mid-February, they currently have reduced hours and are only operating on week-ends Friday through Sunday. It is a woman, LGBT, minority and veteran owned business. Their adoptable cats are from the Auburn Valley Humane Society. Guests can book general visits as well as private events.

SEATTLE MEOWPOLITIAN (SEATTLE, WA)

Opening its doors back in Dec. 2015, this was the first cat cafe to open in Seattle. Currently, during the pandemic, they are not serving food or drinks. However, their cat lounge is open in 30 minute time slots and guests have the ability to make general or private bookings to spend time with the adoptable cats they host from Regional Animal Services of King County as well as their nine permanent felines. They also offer cat yoga, an hour long Viniyoga-style all-level session beside some furry friends. They also have a gift shop with



COURTESY OF SEATTLE MEOWPOLITIAN

Seattle Meowpolitan was the first cat cafe to be founded in Washington state.

goods and gift certificates.

CATFE (VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA)

Although Catfe isn't technically in Washington, it is a very popular location located right on the other side of the border. Their location has a very rustic look, with kitty-themed wood art and paintings. Catfe goes the extra mile with an expansive menu making their treats

and drinks cat themed as well. They usually host around 25 cats, many of which are adoptable. Since opening in Dec. 2015, it has found homes for over 800 cats.

THE WHOLE CAT AND KABOODLE (REDMOND, WA)

This cat cafe is part of a multi-service cat business. They offer adoptions, retail,

grooming and boarding. Their mission opening the Cat Cafe section was to create a safe space where cats couldn't even tell they were up for adoption. At their cafe, they also have board games, books, plush furniture and free wifi to cozy down with these pets. The cafe is temporarily closed to uphold Covid safety measures.

Spring 2021 book releases

A series of books expected to be released this spring will provide great new reads for any bookworm.



COLLAGE BY MADELINE HILLER

Five of many books due to come out this spring.

By **MADELINE HILLER**
A&E EDITOR

Spring is just around the corner which means a new season of book releases. March alone is full of upcoming books and spring is a great time to discover some new reads. Below is a list of books from different genres from Booklist Queen that are expected to come out.

“LATER” BY STEPHEN KING

Yes, Stephen King released a brand new horror book on March 2. Opposed to his infamous “It” which had 1,138 pages, “Later” is one of his more modest length works at 256. This story takes place in New York where a boy was born with a supernatural ability that his mom has made him hide from the world. The NYPD discovers this as they need help with a killer who has threatened to strike again. The only problem is the killer is already dead, so it's up to the young boy to keep the killer at bay.

“HOW BEAUTIFUL WE WERE” BY IMBOLO MBUE

While this book is classified as contemporary fiction, it is about the very real problem of environmental degra-

dation. Taking place in a fictional village in Africa, the story is told through the perspective of young children who are growing up in a dystopian world. Their pleas for cleanup and help for the sick are constantly ignored while problems, such as kids dying from contaminated drinking water, continue on. Thus, the people of the village take matters into their own hands.

“EVERY VOW YOU BREAK” BY PETER SWANSON

This mystery/thriller novel is a classic love story gone wrong. Abigail falls for a millionaire and vows to marry him, her life was perfect and now she'll have the perfect husband to match. When her bachelorette weekend rolls around, she has a one night stand with a different guy while drunk. Abigail tries to push the events from the night out of her mind so she can focus on her marriage. That is, until this mystery man appears and insists that their one night stand meant something much more and continues to track Abigail down to try and get her to say the same.

“THE LOST VILLAGE” BY CAMILLA STEN

Yet another mystery/thriller book is “The Lost Village.” A Documentary film-

maker named Alice decides she wants to make a film based on a village that disappeared in the late 50s. She sets out to go find the remains of the village and gather information about what really happened there. As soon as she and her friends get there, strange things — such as destruction of equipment and disappearance of people — start happening and before things get too out of hand, Alice must find the truth.

“LIES WE BURY” BY ELLE MARR

While this book doesn't come out until April 1, it is still worth the wait and anticipation. Marissa Mo was born in captivity in a basement prison. Two decades ago, she managed to escape. After moving on from a majority of the childhood trauma she had faced, she obtained a job as a freelance photographer. Her newest gig dealt with a string of murders in Portland that caused Marissa to face her trauma all over again with sinisterly similar situations. Upon seeing basements and sad and broken toys left behind, it all comes flooding back to her. It isn't until she is capturing one of the crime scenes that she gets hit with the biggest wave of trauma: a note addressed to her.

Destiny City Film Festival goes virtual this year

The eighth annual Destiny City Film Festival goes virtual this year and brings its attendees a diverse range of independent films.

By HENRY NGUYEN
FILM CRITIC

Like most film festivals that are happening this year, the Destiny City Film Festival's eighth annual event took place virtually from Feb. 26th to March 3rd. This year's lineup brought attendees a unique range of independent films that celebrate diversity and independent filmmaking.

FEATURED DOCUMENTARY: "FALCONER"

Winning first prize in DCFF's storyteller award this year was "Falconer" directed by Annie Kaempfer. Filmed in Washington D.C., "Falconer" is an intimate portrait that features Rodney Stotts, a Washington, DC based falconer. Falconry is the practice of hunting animals in the natural habitat through the means of trained predatory birds.

On the surface, "Falconer" is a story about a man who becomes a falconer. However, the film is more than this. It depicts a man who, under almost impossible circumstances, grew up in order to turn his entire life around for the better in a racially discriminatory town.

"Falconer" is an inspiring biopic depicting a man growing up in a system that set him up for failure and pushed onwards despite racial discrimination and people rooting for

his failure.

For a lower budget documentary, it is actually very well shot. The narrative's portrayal is well done and straight to the point. They show what he specifically does for a living to get into more of his background that allows you to really get attached to Stotts' story.

Falconer is a great film to check out if you are looking for documentaries about inspiring and interesting people.

FEATURED NARRATIVE: "BEAST BEAST"

The conversation surrounding the second amendment is strong in America today. Winner of DCFF's storytelling award, "Beast Beast" directed by Danny Madden, tells an interwoven story featuring several high schoolers and a neighbor who makes videos showing off and teaching people how to use guns.

It's a piece that questions the use of firearms and makes us think about how we view gun use, vigilantes and crime in our society.

We are first introduced to our three main characters — Krista, Nito and Adam. Krista, played by Shirly Chen, is a high school student who becomes a victim of sexual assault at a house party. The only person who was able to come to her aid was Nito, played by Jose Angeles. Nito creates impressive skateboarding videos and proves

to be an overall good guy. His friends, however, get him into situations that he would rather not be in. Lastly, there's Adam — played by Will Madden — who is trying to launch a career out of filming himself shooting guns.

As the story progresses and Krista becomes more attached to Nito, things start to escalate with Adam's YouTube career which, as a result, leads him to become more on edge and violent. The way these character's stories intertwine, unfortunately, leave some of them devastated.

This film is seriously well acted and has the best acting out of the three featured narratives that were available to watch. Actor Will Madden — who appeared in one of my previous film reviews for "The Wolf of Snow Hollow" — provided an outstanding performance and you can see his emotions come through the screen. Shirly Chen as Krista and Jose Angeles as Nito also give very convincing performances as high school students.

The movie's message is strong and provides a nuanced look into the ways in which gun violence and crime are viewed today. The situation is reminiscent of recent events that have occurred in our society, specifically whenever a protestor is shot dead in the streets. Overall, they did a great job depicting characters that felt very authentic.

SHORTS: DCFF AFTER DARK

The film festival offerings for their shorts are split up into five different subcategories that range from international to specific sets with focused themes. The category that I will be covering is some of the shorts from the "DCFF After Dark" program which features "barrier-breaking, deliciously dark and charmingly comedic shorts."

WOODLAND CEMETERY

In this horror short by Niels Bourgonje, a young photographer played by Josefin Asplund goes to a cemetery to take images. She gets a little too nosy with her camera and ends up with a terrifying curse.

This short is very well shot and manages to create a ton of suspense throughout its short run time.

BABYDYKE

"BabyDyke" is a Finnish short by Tone Otilie. Frede, played by Anna Streitz, accompanies her big sister Natasja — played by Levi Roepstorff — to a queer party in hopes of winning back her ex-girlfriend. However, she has trouble getting along with her sister's friends and has no choice but to keep her chin up and stay strong to take the plunge into the night.

"Babydyke" provides an interesting look at the LGBTQ+ community and a very important critique on labels and what it means to be different from the status quo. The run time is 20 min-

utes, which is longer than the average short, but the way the film is able to build its atmosphere certainly makes it feel a lot shorter.

FLEX

In this comedic short from Matt Porter about finding yourself, our main character Charles — played by Charles Gould — learns at an early age that he's not too sure where he is sexually in life. Fast forward years later, he finds himself in a relationship with his girlfriend Michelle, played by Ellington Wells. However, they end up breaking up which opens up a realm of possibilities for Charles.

It's rare to see sexuality expressed in such a fun way in film. Taking a topic as sensitive as sex, "Flex" argues the idea that sex is something that should be freely explored and destigmatized. It works here as comedian Charles Gould brings his comedic value to his character and makes it a genuinely funny film to watch.

Even though the pandemic continues to force theatres to close, it doesn't stop local theatres from celebrating independent films. There are some seriously interesting and important films that have not been covered in this article and there is certainly something for everyone.



Having gone virtual this year, the festival was able to bring touching films to audiences' home screens.

DESTINY CITY FILM FESTIVAL