

THE LEDGER

Native American Heritage Month



PHOTO BY AVERY JENSEN

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UWT Ph.D. candidate travels to UK to share research on driverless cars

Deyang Zhong will be presenting his research related to autonomous cars with other academics and researchers in the UK later this week.



PHOTO BY DEYANG ZHONG
Deyang is a Ph.D. candidate who also earned his Masters degree at UWT.

By REESE RAMIREZ
NEWS EDITOR

From Nov. 20 to the 24, Deyang Zhong, a Ph.D. candidate at UWT, will be attending the British Machine Vision Conference in the UK to share his academic research.

Zhong's research, that was also his master's thesis, focuses on electric vehicles specifically and their ability to read road signs for smart parking.

"Autonomous driving is very popular now," said Zhong. "For current autonomous systems they detect and recognize the road conditions by adjacent cars, traffic lines, and pedestrians. But for the parking sign, it could only know very simple information. Maybe it could recognize a stop or yield, but it could not recognize what the detail are in the parking sign."

Zhong hopes to take autonomous cars one step further by programming them to read parking signs with details such as dates when no parking is available. This way, an autonomous car will not park itself in a spot that is unavailable at a given time or day.

Zhong works on a team at UWT to develop this technology.

"I joined this time about half a year ago," said Zhong. "My focus is the text recognition part. Before I joined the team this was always a big problem."

When Zhong first completed his master's thesis on the topic, he did not imagine it would lead to international travel.

"When I finished my paper, I didn't try to post it in the conference," said Zhong. "But my director, Dr. Juhua Hu, thought we could have a try. She found many conferences in the field of computer innovation, and we

found this one. Fortunately, we were accepted."

Zhong thinks this conference will be a fantastic opportunity to expand and improve his research.

"There will be much research at this conference, and they will give us lots of feedback that will help improve our model and improve our system," said Zhong. "I really think this conference will help us a lot."

Zhong has never been to the UK before, so he looks forward to visiting the country. He will spend most of the time at the conference but should have some spare time to see what London and the surrounding areas have to offer.

Zhong is excited to share his research and represent UWT internationally.



PHOTO BY CAMERON J. BERRENS
Street signs that limit parking like this one is the focus of Zhong's research.

Zhong's research will be consolidated onto this poster for the conference.

PHOTO BY DEYANG ZHONG

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'Friendsgiving': A fast-growing twist on the delicious holiday

COVID-19 and the cost of traveling has led to college students and many others changing up how they celebrate Thanksgiving.

By CELIA WILLIAMS
OPINION EDITOR

Friendsgiving is one of those concepts that Gen-Z has made into something real and normalized in society, here in the US at least. There are a lot of reasons for this. From the busy life of a college student to the COVID-19 pandemic that changed everything, holidays have moved towards something far more inclusive than they used to be. It all ties into the human need to socialize, no matter how minimal that is. It also demonstrates the idea of a 'chosen family', another aspect made popular over recent years.

College students are historically known for two things, being broke and being busy. A lot of them are unable to make it home for the holidays, especially those living out of state. Friendsgiving came in to offer those not surrounded by family a chance to still celebrate the delicious holiday with people they care about. While this is probably something that has

been done for a while, now it simply has become normalized in society. This has cemented the flip on the traditional holiday in society. This just goes to show that we often make a family outside of our family, or a chosen family. It's a powerful thing that has also somewhat been normalized by Gen-Z and others over the recent years. With so many connections being cut from quarantine and other pandemic related things, those that you kept close were there through it all.

The COVID-19 pandemic was extremely impactful on life as we know it, holidays included. With travel being halted and quarantine guidelines, there was almost no holiday celebration to be had. Friendsgiving and other holiday twists like it, centered around friends, were the result of this complete stop off life as we knew it. This was something many struggled with during the peak of the pandemic, it caused a lot to go into states of depression and it was noticeably hanging thick in the air in 2020.



ILLUSTRATION BY COLE MARTIN

Being near those you love or care about has been proven to be beneficial to everyone, even those of us who identify as introverted. Human beings are biologically social and when that is interrupted it can cause a lot of issues. People needed to be around those they loved so friends were there to come together.

It's all about the feeling of being surrounded by those you care about and sharing a good meal. In the past Thanksgiving has been seen as something that was strictly a family affair, but it has since been transformed into a holiday simply about showing thanks and being around those you are grateful for. I

for one have found this shift to be a good new tradition, creating more connections and opportunities for everyone to enjoy the holidays.

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Four Native American artists to celebrate Native American Heritage Month

Discovering new and existing Native American artists who have dedicated their lives to spreading the history and beauty of their culture

BY HEIDI ORTIZ CANDELARIA
A&E COLUMNIST

With Halloween now done and gone, we've swiftly moved into November. As the leaves get crunchier and the air gets colder, we're also on the cusp of Thanksgiving. This is precisely why I thought this would be the perfect moment to celebrate the people who have suffered the consequences of white-washed history and have continuously been at the center of oppression during this season. Native Americans have a profound, embedded history in American soil that should be celebrated and admired. So, I will be showcasing four artists I thought deserved the spotlight for this week's issue.

Many classic rock and Marvel fans might be familiar with the band Redbone. It is a highly influential rock band, signing their record contract back in 1970. It was led and created by two brothers, Patrick and Candido Vasquez-Vegas (also known as Pat and Lolly) with Yaqui, Shoshone and Mexican descent. Their music adven-

ture began by playing "surf" music, as their record label at the time insisted that the world was not ready for a duo of mixed, Mexican American indigenous brothers making music heavily influenced by their ancestry. For years, they continued to perform surf genre music, appearing on musical variety series through cable, and performing at venues on the Sunset Strip.

After multiple name changes, the duo eventually decided to settle on one solid idea: create an all-American Indigenous band. Thus, Redbone was born, with the addition of new band members Peter DePoe and Robert Anthony Avila. Redbone charted number 21 on the Billboard Hot 100 with their single, "The Witch Queen of New Orleans." But the one that perhaps everyone is familiar with (maybe even unknowingly) is "Come and Get Your Love." This song topped as number five on the Billboard Hot 100 and went on to become certified gold.

Most recently, this band has sprung back into recognition after this hit single

was used as the theme of the 2014 "Guardians of the Galaxy" movie. By creating this incredibly iconic and unforgettable song, Redbone made history as the first Native American band charting on the Billboards, but the love for their roots and ancestry is often erased. The band was highly influential to other bands during the 1970s through their unique swamp rock style.

Next, we have Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, a Native American visual artist from the Salish and Kootenai tribes. She is renowned by her community as an educator and activist. Starting her artistic journey in the mid-1970s, she focused on creating abstract paintings and lithographs while also utilizing mixed media with printmaking and textiles. Through her art, she creates socio-political commentary on the cultural appropriation, oppression and abuse that Native Americans have had to endure for centuries.

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PHOTO BY CHARLIE GILLET/REDFERNS VIA REDBONE

The band Redbone posing for a casual group picture.



"State Names" by Jaune Quick-To-See Smith

PHOTO BY PHOTO BY AVERY JENSEN

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Her initial works depicted pictographic symbolism which Jaune described as a form of self-portraiture. Later, she embraced the label of abstract expressionist, as her works could depict the collective emotions of the old and new generations of Native Americans.

Jaune started an impactful series of the name “I See Red,” which she still continues to paint to this day. In this series, she makes perfect use of juxtaposition by painting classic symbols of her Indian heritage branded alongside classic depictions of colonialist-rooted consumerism: newspaper cutouts, sports team flags, road maps, bumper stickers, etc. It’s this collage-esque style alongside her strong use of the color red that distinguishes her from artists around the world. It’s what has won her works a place in some of the most renowned art museums, such as The Museum of Modern Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Smithsonian American Art Museum and many more.

Fawn Wood is a new generation Cree and Salish musician. She made her debut through social media: YouTube, Instagram and TikTok. She has always been loyal to her roots and would often take part in her tribes’ Powwows and Round Dance traditions alongside her parents. She started singing to the beat of big drums from an early age. She began her singing career through nation-wide drumming and singing competitions and eventually earned a spot singing in the 11th Annual Native American Music Awards (NAMMYS). From there, she became well-known and admired by different tribes across the country and signed a record deal with Buffalo Jump Records. She has gone on to be an active social media star and performs live while educating her viewers on Native American music and customs.

Wood’s music radiates a sense of warmth and belonging and comes from a woman who is sure of her origins. Her songs speak about both negative and positive

emotions alike, yet perfectly demonstrate a peaceful balance through symphony. The best way it could be described is that it sounds like nature itself, which Fawn also openly appreciates and advocates for. It’s music that perfectly reflects the connectedness that humans can have with nature. Blood and tradition are shown through her drum work, vocal droning and even throat singing exhibited through her discography, but you can also sense Fawn’s own nostalgia, recounting the stories told by her ancestors and thinking back on moments of her childhood.

Finally, we have a world-renowned queer icon and activist, Trixie Mattel (she/her). Prior to my research, I did not know about Trixie’s Indigenous ancestry, but she is indeed Indigenous, specifically, from the Ojibwe tribe in Wisconsin. Before becoming Trixie Mattel, a young Brian Firkus (he/him) grew up in an abusive household where he found himself seeking comfort in dolls, idolizing Barbie and desperately wanting to own one for himself. It wasn’t until after he was taken away and relocated to his grandparents’ house by Child Protective Services that he was able to fully embrace his true self and begin pursuing a career in music.

From there, he began dabbling in drag as he pursued his studies. But it was only after taking part in a “Rocky Horror Picture Show” musical during college that he decided on the name “Trixie” for his femme persona. “Mattel” came from his love for Barbie, with the explanation that a last name is supposed to symbolize the “unity of your makers” or “your manufacturers of sorts.” So, Trixie Mattel was born, and has now become one of the most well-known queer artists and drag queens in history after winning season three of “RuPaul’s Drag Race: All-Stars.” Although Brian does not speak of his past that often, Trixie feels more comfortable talking about her ancestry and past. Trixie admitted that it’s more comfortable talking about trauma when she’s wearing

her signature doll-like makeup and avant-garde clothing.

But drag – for both of them – is a way to take something negative and make it positive. It’s a way for Brian to feel more comfortable loving himself outside of Trixie, accepting the past and letting go. Though Trixie is by far the most white-presenting individual on this list, many queer and Native American fans have rallied behind Trixie with pride. They have labeled her as a Native American queer activist because she openly stands against discrimination of any kind. She has often talked about these issues on her podcast.

I’d like to close things off by saying that this was a learning experience for me as a writer too. I encourage those reading this piece to read more on Native American oppression, culture, and histories. And if you are interested, check out the artists I covered above.



PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER POLK VIA GETTY IMAGES
Trixie Mattel photographed for Ru-Paul’s Drag Race red carpet.



PHOTO BY J ANICE HUSER, PRECIOUS PICTURES PHOTOGRAPHY, ST. PAUL, ALBERTA, CANADA VIA BUFFALO JUMP RECORDS
Fawn Woods posing for her Buffalo Jump Records artist biography.

How Tacoma Little Theatre encourages students and locals to try acting

The Tacoma Little Theatre offers ways for students and the public to try acting through volunteer work, employment or auditions.

By **RACHEL MEATTE**
A&E EDITOR

Have you ever wanted to try acting but were too scared? Now might be the right time. The Tacoma Little Theatre (TLT) encourages students and locals to try acting even if they don't have any experience or were never interested before. TLT thinks people might be overlooking an important outlet that could benefit them.

Whether or not you have experience acting doesn't impact your ability to grow and learn as a performer. Many of the skills you learn from acting can be transferred to other parts of your life, such as giving a presentation, communicating with others and group work. At the theatre, people can expect to work with a diverse group of people of all backgrounds and ages. When working on a play or musical, everyone has an important role to play.

Depending on your role, you are expected to read scripts, memorize lines, understand set design and improvise. Theatre includes a wide range of roles including actors, directors, vocalists, dancers, set designer, costume designer and more. Each person must work with the group as a whole and learn what each person needs.

The Tacoma Little Theatre has several options for people to choose from.

Chris Serface has been the managing director at TLT for over 10 years.

He oversees all the performances put on by TLT and is the main representative.

"Theatre has been a part of me since I was a young student in the community," said Serface. "It's amazing to be a part of an organization that is more than 105 years old. We don't have many theatres in our country that are that old."

Surface works with everyone at the theatre including volunteers, employees and

students of TLT's workshops and acting classes.

"We teach an improv acting class as well as an audition technique class," said Serface. "These can be very helpful for newcomers or people who are trying to improve on their improv skills. We have frequent auditions which are open to students and the entire public. I always encourage everyone who has any interest to try it out at least once. You might be surprised at what you find. We have amazing volunteers who help run the theatre such as working concession stands, making the set design or behind the scenes work. They are crucial to running a successful theater."

People who suffer from stage fright might be concerned that they don't have the skills or confidence to perform in front of others. However, Serface thinks that people can warm up to the idea by just being in the same vicinity as people acting.

"Watching other people act can motivate you to try it yourself," said Serface. "You might think, well if they can do it surely, I can as well. There are several people I know who start out in one position and work their way up as they gain more confidence and experience. People who are new to acting or too scared should consider this."

The theatre also offers internships for students who might be majoring in film or theatre as class credits. Previously the theatre had students from UWT, PLU and even high school come to intern for a set number of weeks. They learn about how theatres run and what entails putting on a show, such as set design, hair and makeup, lighting and memorizing scripts.

TLT already works with many students through its partnership with UWT. They have put on several shows before with the UWT theatre department. They are currently working together on

the musical "RENT," which will run next year March 8-31 at TLT. Anyone is allowed to audition, and UWT students will have a chance to interact with performers of different ages and backgrounds. Auditions for this musical will be held December 6-11 at UWT. For more info you can contact UWT theatre director Maria-Tania Bandes B. Weingarden.

Those who are interested can find out more about auditions for UWT or [TLT through the theatre's website](#) and [UWT theatre Facebook](#):



TLT managing director Chris Serface (left) and Kids' theatre workshop being taught at the Tacoma Little Theatre (right).

Thank you for reading and we'll see you next week.

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