



The Ferris State Torch

91 YEARS OF ILLUMINATING THE TRUTH

Big Rapids, Michigan

Week of August 24-30, 2022

www.fsutorch.com

Ferris cuts back on COVID-19 restrictions



While Ferris is loosening its COVID-19 restrictions, asymptomatic testing is still available at the College of Pharmacy's Care Clinic.

Photo courtesy of the Torch Archive

The hard questions you didn't want to ask have been answered

Johnathen Hart
News Reporter

After two years of enforced campus safety protocols aimed at minimizing the spread of COVID-19, campus authorities have rescinded restrictions and moved the university to its lowest alert level.

Ferris announced in April that at the end of the spring semester masks would not be required in certain spaces on campus for the foreseeable future, though patient care facilities were exempt from this change in policy.

Ferris' Re-entry Committee addressed many concerns in a letter they released to the public.

"At the end of the spring semester, masks will no longer be required in instructional spaces, such as classrooms

and laboratories. It is anticipated that masks will still be required in patient care areas such as the Pharmacy Care Clinic, the University Eye Center and Birkam Health Center. The University will continue to support all campus community members and visitors who choose to wear a mask while indoors on campus."

On the Big Rapids campus, COVID-19 testing remains available for faculty, staff and students at the College of Pharmacy's Care Clinic on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. and on Wednesdays from noon to 1:45 p.m. This testing is for those who are asymptomatic, meaning they are not presenting any symptoms.

Housing will assist students who may find themselves needing to isolate after testing positive for COVID-19.

Communications Officer Michelle

Rasmussen offered insight into some of the changes that are going into effect this year.

"The University continues to encourage everyone to practice daily health habits, such as washing your hands often, keeping hand sanitizer nearby and staying home if you are not feeling well," Rasmussen said. "While the Re-entry Committee has been placed on reserve, the Coronavirus Updates Hub website is still available, and any new information concerning COVID-19 and the University community will be shared there and via e-mail from the Re-entry Committee as needed. As it has done throughout the pandemic, the University will take into consideration the recommendation(s) of the [Centers for Disease Control] and/or local health department."

Other Michigan universities, such as Saginaw Valley State University and Grand Valley University, are also rolling back pandemic safety protocols for the new academic year. Since May 9, wearing a mask was not required or enforced in any SVSU campus setting, though this practice is still recommended. SVSU also encourages members of the university community to get the COVID-19 vaccine booster shot. Additionally, for the members of the community that wish to remain unvaccinated, SVSU recommends regular testing, but, like the masks, neither of these suggestions will be enforced.

As the pandemic continues, the Torch will remain connected with the Re-entry Committee to keep our campus both safe and informed. Stay tuned for any future updates or changes in COVID-19 policies.

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News

Jessica Oakes | News Editor | oakesj3@ferris.edu

Need to Know

Here's the fast pace info on campus and its services

Marissa Russell
Multimedia Editor

Over the summer Ferris renamed the University Center. It is now the David L. Eisler Center named after Ferris' previous president. This building is a place for students to socialize, hold meetings, study and get food. It is open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. from Monday to Friday and hours vary on the weekend. There are three levels

that house a variety of different resources including the LGBTQ+ Resource Center, the Career and Professional Success office, Starbucks, the Quad Cafe and Ferris Outfitters.

On the southeast side of campus is The Rock, Ferris' other main dining hall, and the Market, a mini grocery market for students who can't get off campus.

The Ferris Library for Information, Technology and Education is a building that is

mainly the library but also has the Office of Multicultural Student Services and the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, the nation's largest public collection of artifacts of intolerance. FLITE also has study rooms for students, recording studios, equipment to rent out, as well as the writing center.

Students pay a fee each semester to Birkam Health Center to give them health services while at Ferris. The top floor is the

personal counseling center that provides one-on-one sessions with a licensed counselor. There is potential for the group sessions later on in the year. The first floor is for clinical health that can take walk-ins but students are urged to use the Healthy Dog Student Portal to schedule an appointment through their MyFSU account.

Quick Reference Guide

LGBTQ Resource Center:

(231) 591 2658
LGBTQ@ferris.edu
8am–5pm

CAPS:

(231) 591 2685
FerrisCAPS@ferris.edu
8am–5pm

OMSS:

(231) 591 2617
OMSS@ferris.edu
8am–5pm

Starbucks:

(231) 591 5550
8am–3pm M–F

The Quad:

(231) 591 2210
Diningad@ferris.edu
7am–8pm M–F

The Rock:

(231) 591 2210
Diningad@ferris.edu
8am–8pm M–Sun

Jim Crow Museum:

(231) 591 5873
JimCrow@ferris.edu
12pm–5pm T–F

Birkham Health Center:

(231) 591 2614
The Healthy Dog Portal
8am–5pm M–F

Dr. Barry Mehler settles with Ferris for \$95,000

Results of the nearly two month legal battle explained

Noah Kurkjian
Editor in Chief

Dr. Barry Mehler was suspended in January after his semester introduction video titled "More Bad News" went viral, amassing over 500,000 views on YouTube and over a combined 12 million views on TikTok.

The settlement was reached after Mehler's request for a temporary injunction was denied at his March 7 hearing. The agreement reached paid Mehler out \$95,000 if he elected to retire effective immediately of March 15, the agreement date, in lieu of further actions being taken that could result in his discharge.

In his semester introduction video, Mehler used a variety of profanity to express his concerns about the university's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, namely the lack of a vaccine mandate. He further goes on to describe his fictitious Calvinis-

tic grading system, in which the students' grades were said to be predetermined before they stepped foot into class. This tactic was used to get students thinking about theology and to reconsider the ways they think they know what they know.

Mehler filed a temporary restraining order and a request for temporary injunction. The restraining order, if granted, would have forbidden the university from barring Mehler from campus, communicating with students, both former and current, and would have allowed Mehler to continue teaching, pending the hearing for a temporary injunction. The temporary injunction would have fully reinstated Mehler's teaching privileges and Ferris-bound online accounts. This temporary injunction alleged that Mehler's First and Fourteenth Amendment rights were violated when Ferris deplatformed him by way of suspension. Both requests were denied.

Mehler, along with Dr. David Eisler and

Dr. Randy Cagle, were bound to a three-year gag order, in which they agreed not to criticize or disparage each other. If Mehler were to break this order, he would be fined \$60,000.

"The parties have amicably resolved their differences," Ferris said in a statement released by Sandy Gholston, Ferris' news services and social media manager, at the conclusion of the legal proceeding.

Mehler will exit as Professor Emeritus of history and, per the settlement, will be ineligible to work for or with Ferris in the future. In his final interview with the Torch after the settlement, Mehler said that he was grateful for the controversial end to his career, and he felt honored by how many students reached out to show their support and recall how he touched their lives.

"The word that's used repeatedly is transformative—that my teaching has really affected lives. People have said that

I'm the most influential professor... I really wouldn't have known. So, the controversy has turned out to be a blessing in so many different ways," Mehler said.

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CAPS hosts annual on-campus job fair

Learn the firsthand benefits of on-campus job openings

Meghan Hartley
News Reporter

With the goal of specializing in the exploration of careers, sharing purposeful experiences and attaining essential skills, the office of Career and Professional Success will kick off the new year with new opportunities.

On Tuesday, Aug. 30, the CAPS office is hosting an on-campus student job fair from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the newly named David L. Eisler Center. Students will be able to meet employers from 25 departments, such as the Anti-Violence Alliance, Clinical Laboratory Sciences and the Registrar's Office, who are collectively hoping to fill over 200 student positions.

Michele Albright, a career readiness specialist and business liaison, said via email that the CAPS office hosts numerous recruitment and job fairs annually, which allows them to collaborate with Ferris' various offices and colleges.

"There are hundreds of students and jobs on campus, and our goal is to match as many students with these as possible," Albright said. "We know that, statistically, students that are involved in on-campus jobs are more likely to do well in their classes, find a sense of belonging, have a more rewarding college experience, persist to degree completion and be career-ready when they depart our university."

Social work student Madeleine Howard currently holds a clerical position in the IT Department's central office. In this position she answers emails and phone calls, pays invoices, makes deliveries and hosts meetings.

"My favorite aspect about the job is how flexible it is with my school schedule," Howard said. "I can leave for an hour for my class and then come back to do the rest of my shift. I wouldn't be able to do that with any off-campus job."

Howard used to work at Jimmy Johns, where there was not as much flexibility

or understanding. Joining the IT Department was a pleasant change.

"When I first got hired [in the IT Department], I was told you can only work 24 hours a week during the school year," Howard said. "I didn't know if I would like that much, but I really think it's beneficial because your employers are not scheduling you 30 to 35 hours... I think being able to tell your boss your schedule and have them work around it... is very beneficial."

Howard says, compared to her previous employer, her current boss is also more understanding if she needs to take an entire day off.

While Howard's major and on-campus job concern different fields, she says she will still be able to use her leadership experience and the skills she's picked up, such as delegating tasks, multitasking and organizing, in her future career.

Students aren't just limited to gaining skills from their on-campus positions, either. These can also be found in the

CAPS office. When students are interested in seeking employment, Albright says the CAPS office is able to help engage students in life design and "career support through all stages of career development, from getting to know oneself, exploring opportunities, planning and decision making and taking action."

Albright also said that the upcoming job fair is a great opportunity for students and departments to network and learn about all the services the CAPS office has to offer.

Students who are interested in obtaining an on-campus position can begin preparing their resumes and signing up for the job fair via Handshake, or they can contact the CAPS office directly for more advice and guidance.

Culture

Giuliana Denicolo | Culture Editor | denicog@ferris.edu

Insta-nt information

The best Ferris
Instagram accounts to
keep students informed

Charlie Buckel
Freelance Reporter

Trying to keep up with everything that happens on a college campus can be stressful, but that's where social media can come in handy. Luckily for Ferris students, many departments and organizations have Instagram pages that keep students informed. Here are a few that you should check out.

@ferrisstateu

Students can glean plenty of information from Ferris' official Instagram page. On this page students can find content such as updates on campus construction, countdowns to important dates and other information like President Bill Pink's "Link with Pink Tour."

@ferrishousing

If you're a student living on campus, this is definitely an account that you'll want to be following. The official Ferris Housing page has information on what students will want to bring to campus during move-in, when and where to get parking passes, student move-in dates and the occasional giveaway for items that would be great for dorm life. They also post about events that Housing takes part in during the school year, like open skate nights at Ewigleben Ice Arena.

@ferrisdining

If you want to keep up with anything that involves food on campus, then you're going to want to follow the Ferris Dining page. Much like other Ferris pages, this one keeps students updated on events, special days, such as "National Donut Day" in June where they gave out free donuts, and giveaways. Dining also posts special holiday menus and special occasion foods that are available in the dining halls.

@ferrisoutfitters

Keeping up with the campus store is always a great idea. Ferris Outfitters makes sure to keep everyone up to date on new merchandise, changes to store hours and good causes to support through their Ferris Outfitters Shop to Support program. For example, Ferris Outfitters posted on Aug. 10, that they're supporting Ferris' LGBTQ+ Resource Center from Aug. 15 to Sept. 16. They've also been posting "Fall Picks" that allow students to check out some of the new merchandise that's in store for the start of the fall semester.

Other Great Pages

Alongside these pages, there are a bunch of other pages that are specifically tailored to certain students. Students at the College of Arts and Sciences can follow @ferriscas and students in the College of Business can follow @ferriscob in order to keep up with information from their specific colleges. There are also pages for Ferris' different centers, organizations and offices. These include pages for the LGBTQ+ Resource Center (@fsu.lgbtq) and the Office of Multicultural Student Services (@fsuomss).

Whether you are a returning student or an incoming freshman, you can find multitudes of information on the university's Instagram pages. All you have to do is give them a follow.

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Why we've changed

Noah Kurkjian
Editor in Chief

Thank you for picking up a copy of the Ferris State Torch! If you're a returning reader, welcome back! If you're joining us for the first time, I'm glad we've piqued your interest! Those that know us were probably expecting to see the Lifestyles section when they flipped to page five, however, it's been replaced with the Culture section.

We decided to make this change for a few reasons. Primarily, we decided to make the change to be more inclusive. There are more than 11,000 unique students, staff and faculty that make up the Ferris community, and we wanted to create a platform where we could share their stories however we saw fit.

Furthermore, the moniker "Lifestyles" was really limiting

due to its implications. It felt wrong to place stories regarding topics like race, sexuality, gender, religion and disabilities under a title that implies these things are active choices in our lives and not just part of who we are. We want to foster an environment that is welcoming to everyone, not one that invalidates who we are before we even look past the section header.

We want to amplify the voices and stories of the Ferris community, and this update may just be a single word, but we hope this change shows you we are committed to serving you, our readers the best content we can in the most inviting and comfortable way possible.



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and where we're going

Giuliana Denicolo
Culture Editor

Hello everyone and welcome back to the Torch! If you've picked up our paper before, then you may have noticed a change: this section's name. My name is Giuliana Denicolo, and I'm the first Culture Editor here at the Torch!

This used to be the Lifestyles section, but after some thought, the Torch staff decided that it was too restrictive of a section name. "Culture" includes a bigger and more varied demographic, which allows all students' voices to be heard.

This year we also plan on having some reoccurring segments that highlight our differences. Fundamentally, we want to focus on who we are instead of how we chose to live our lives or, in other words, our "lifestyles."

If you want to speak your

voice and talk about who you are, then please reach out to the Torch. We want to embrace what makes us unique and give everyone a platform so that they feel heard and understood. Never hesitate to reach out; we welcome you to share your stories. Pitch us ideas or submit a guest column to fsutorcheditor@gmail.com, or follow the submission form on our website. We look forward to broadening our horizons with you!

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Opinions

Dylan Rider | *Opinions Editor* | riderd1@ferris.edu

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The Ferris State Torch welcomes comments on topics of interest to the general readership. Letters should not exceed 300 words in length and The Torch reserves the right to edit for length. Letters will not be edited for grammar, punctuation or spelling. The Torch will not print letters deemed to be libelous or obscene. All letters must be signed by their authors and include his or her phone number.

Unsigned editorials appearing on this page are the opinion of The Torch and do not necessarily represent the opinion of the university's administration, faculty or staff. Signed columns represent the opinion of the writer. Inquiries regarding editorial content should be directed to the Editor in Chief at (231) 591-5978.

To advertise with the Torch, contact Julie Wiersma at the Pioneer Group at (231) 592-8373 or Julie.Wiersma@hearst.com

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The Torch and fsutorch.com, the student newspaper and its accompanying online version focused on Ferris State University, are public forums for student expression. Student editors have the authority and responsibility to make all content decisions without censorship or advanced approval for both the print and online editions of the student newspapers.

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EDITORS COLUMN:

Don't forget to figure you out

Noah Kurkjian
Editor in Chief

Welcome, and thank you for taking a moment to get acquainted or reacquainted with the Torch as we embark on another year in academia.

I realized recently that I am enjoying my last official summer off before I graduate and metamorphose into a full-blown adult. In nine short months, my life will no longer be defined by school in the way it has been for the last 16 years. I realized other things as well, such as that I am great at being a student, I have note taking down to a science, I religiously schedule time to do homework, I am nearly an expert at studying and I even catch myself reading academic materials for fun.

But once all of that is over and done with, and the need for these skills is stripped away, what's left? While I realize I will likely get a full-time job after college, I'd argue that this won't consume nearly as much time as school does. In the thick of it, I am sometimes caught dedicating 20 hours a week to a single class with four more on top of it. Sure, it's slowed a bit as I have moved through my degree, but between school and work, I wasn't taking the time to get to know myself.

I had a true "ah ha" moment at the beginning of August. I was working at a polling location for the primaries, as I do for most elections, and this time around I was on the absentee voter counting board. This saw me sequestered for several hours with a few hundred ballots to

process, lots of downtime and no electronic devices, and it sent me into somewhat of a panic. It may sound small, but the struggle to figure out what to do with that spare time spiraled into me discovering that I didn't quite know too much about myself.

I took this opportunity to challenge myself to try something new—a new experience, a new hobby, a new food or basically anything outside my laughably small comfort zone each week. I'm happy to report it's already working. I started small by reading for leisure, and I returned to it. I got lucky with "The Silent Patient" by Alex Michaelides, a good book right out of the gate, and it rekindled my joy for reading and made it less of a chore.

The week after that, my roommates and I decided to turn

some errands into experiences, and we explored two cities we've only ever commuted through. I'm trying to give anything, big or small, a chance to see what I like and what I don't. I am just still getting to know myself.

Peers, we only have a few short years here before we're sent off into the real world. Gather your team, get out there and try something new! Join an RSO, attend campus events, go exploring, pick up a new book, try out a new game, anything, but just don't forget to start to get to know yourself before you get out there.

Top 5 movies to get you ready for school

If our favorite movie character can conquer this semester, so can we

Johnathen Hart
News Reporter

As a fan of almost every movie genre, I have had the pleasure of watching many movies revolving around schools. Today I bring you my top five movies to get you into the school mood.

#1. Ferris Bueller's Day Off

I adore this film. It's a ton of fun, both on its own terms and in terms of nostalgia, and I'm all for going against the grain, going against the rules, etc. But it is impossible to deny the awfulness of Ferris' character.

Bueller's hijinks of lying to his parents and school officials, convincing his best friend to take his father's car, and elaborately sneaking his girlfriend out of class all for a day off is ridiculous, but is what makes the movie so enjoyable.

I don't agree with most of the things we were all witness to in this classic but the one thing I can agree with is sometimes you just need a day off with your friends.

#2. The Breakfast Club

The Breakfast Club is a critique of making hasty decisions, categorizing things right away, stereotyping, having preconceived views and judging people solely on their most obvious characteristics.

To put it another way, it represents a rejection of how high school and the larger world typically operates. It is a rebel shout throughout the 97 minutes of youthful pranks, daring both its characters and the audience to defy convention and think and feel for themselves.

This classic shows us that not all friend groups make sense and that's perfectly okay.

#3. Monsters University

Mike Wazowski's desired career and college major have been intertwined since he was a little child. He therefore finds out that he is not at the top of his class and must work hard to succeed

in his own methods when he enrolls in Monsters University prepared to revolutionize his academic route.

He runs across his competitor, who will eventually become his friend, and the two of them collaborate to fulfill their ambitions in their dream majors.

Concerned that your major may be too challenging or that the competition may be too fierce? Learn from Mike's example: When you're in a new environment and pushing yourself academically, it's normal to feel uncertain.

#4. Toy Story 3

When Andy grows up and prepares to leave for college, the toys in Toy Story 3 unintentionally end up being donated to a new, frightening home. The toys are aware of their difficult but necessary decision to move on as they return to Andy's home.

We understand that starting a new school and meeting new people all at once can be intimidating. Just remember that everyone else is probably experiencing similar emotions to your own, and even Ferris graduates can

recall what it was like to make that decision.

Growth and change are never easy, but that doesn't mean you can't survive and thrive here. Plus, even if you pass your best childhood mementos onto new owners, you'll never have to leave the memories behind.

#5. Pitch Perfect

Becca is a fresh college student who reluctantly joins an a cappella group, where she makes a whole new set of friends and sets out to win a competition through entertaining music mashups and harmonic smack-downs.

If you don't believe you'll join the right group in college. Think again. There are many groups and organizations at Ferris including ones with academic themes, outdoor-themed clubs, political and religious organizations and many others.

Although you may be attending college to learn and gain a degree, there is much more to it than that. Ferris offers a massive amount of extracurriculars. Now is the time to get out there!

In defense of online classes

More than a pandemic relic

Jessica Oakes
News Editor

People from older generations gasp when I tell them about my fully virtual freshman year at Ferris. I appreciate their concern for students during a pandemic, but they overlook the many benefits of online learning.

First and foremost, Zoom, Microsoft Teams and even Discord made it possible for me to start my college life in unfortunate circumstances. When I graduated high school in 2020, Covid cases were rising and a vaccine was still unimaginable. The whole world felt unsure. By the summer of 2021, I completed 29 credits and my first semester at the Torch, all from the comfort of my home in northern Michigan.

The world is somewhat different now. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that over 100 million Americans are fully vaccinated and boosted, plus nearly 80% of the population received at least one dose. With this summer's "silent surge" hospitalizing nearly six thousand new Covid patients per day, I am grateful to still have the opportunity to take half of my classes online this semester.

Online classes offer a unique opportunity for work-life balance. To quote Melanie Kasparian, associate director of assessment at Northeastern College of Professional Studies, "there's really no right time to study, as long as it fits your life." This open time management is invaluable when tuition costs have risen 179.2% over the last 20 years, as reported by the Education Data Initiative.

A professor of mine once said that college students are less involved on campus than in years past. When less than half the class raised their hands when asked who was in any extra-curriculars, I expressed that it is because students have jobs. When asked who is working, the remaining hands went up. Nicole Smith, chief economist at the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, calls working in college "the new normal."

Not only do online classes offer time to make money, they also teach important skills for communicating in the 2020s. An American Opportunity Survey from the spring showed that most workers have the opportunity to work from home one day a week. Thirty-five percent of workers can work remotely full time. Today, people may log-in to their jobs rather than clock-in.

Becoming well versed in online communication is truly a life skill now. I think everyone joining the workforce should be more than efficient with consistent emails, phone calls, Zoom meetings and have the ability to quickly learn new platforms. Remote work can be comfortable, but it still requires real internal discipline.

No matter which phase of the pandemic we are in today, I recommend Ferris students take advantage of the choice to take online courses when they can.



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Sports

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Bulldog soccer wants more

What to expect from the Bulldogs this season

Jeffery Walker
Sports Reporter

Ferris soccer is looking to build on a last year's successful season and go even further this year.

After reaching the NCAA Division II tournament and winning the GLIAC championship, the Ferris soccer team is not going to settle. Their goal is to compete day in and day out and win championships.

Last year, the Bulldogs won their first ever GLIAC championship, and this year the team will be looking to win another GLIAC championship and NCAA Division II bid.

"Our expectations and goals remain the same: to compete and win the day," head

coach Greg Henson said. "[Taking] the season one game at a time [will] put us in a position to compete for the conference championship and a national tournament bid."

The expectations for this team are high, but they are up for the challenge. The team has a good mix of returning players, veterans and newcomers, who will all be looking to fight to make an impact on the field.

A key player returning for the Bulldogs is Darya Mosallaei. She started all 22 games for the Bulldogs last season with 67 saves, including shutouts on 9/3 that resulted in 15 wins and only three losses with four ties.

Another key player returning for the Bull-

dogs is midfielder Jessie Bandyk. She will be looking to continue her success from last season, where she posted three goals and two assists, including one game-winning goal, all while starting all 22 games for the Bulldogs last season.

With a talented roster, the Bulldogs are ready for the season. The veteran players will be helping the new additions get ready for this season, where they will look to make an impact on this team and help the success of this program.

"We have a strong nucleus of returning players and veterans," Henson said. "With a talented group of incoming players that we anticipate making an immediate and positive impact on our program."

This team is looking to be very success-

ful this year, and everyone, fans, players and coaches alike, is excited to see where this team can go.

"We hope to play an exciting brand of soccer and bring a high intensity to every game," Henson said. "Our players play with a passion and grit that makes it easy for fans to get behind. We hope to see stands packed this fall."

The Bulldogs first game of the season is Sept. 2 against the Ashland Eagles at home at 4 p.m. The Bulldogs GLIAC championship ring ceremony will be Sep. 4 against Walsh at home at 1 p.m.

A change is gonna come

A season of much needed change is awaits the volleyball team

Joseph Nagy
Sports Reporter

A heartbreaking loss in last year's Midwest Regional final led to tearful goodbyes. Despite this, exciting changes on campus are welcoming back the Bulldogs.

After saying farewell to the historic volleyball arena after last-year's final regular season home game, the 2022-23 volleyball team is excited for fans to see the new Bulldog Arena, fresh incoming talent and some returning faces who are hungry to match last year's successful season.

The team is looking to replace the roster of reliable players that finished their time with the Bulldogs. Losing all-conference players like Katie O'Connell, Samantha Hermann and Nina Gorgijevska left holes that needed to be filled on both the offensive and defensive sides.

"We have a lot of newcomers, but they've all been here to coach camps this

summer," coach Brandel-Wilhelm said. "They were here for two weeks, so I think the relationships and the foundation [are] already there."

Having players adapt to the winning culture has been an integral factor in the continued success that Ferris volleyball has seen during Brandel-Wilhelm's tenure, but it's not only the volleyball team that instills this type of effort into their practices. The widespread devotion to family and grit has been present throughout all of Bulldog Athletics. Especially with senior Zoe Anderson, who is using her final year of eligibility to put on a volleyball uniform, rather than a basketball one.

Although Anderson has played basketball for the entirety of her collegiate career, it wasn't that long ago that she was garnering attention for her volleyball skills in high school, when she lead the Rockford Rams to a state #1 ranking. Now, she's bringing the leadership skills she's

gained as captain for the women's basketball team to volleyball.

"Zoe is just exactly what our team needed. She brings a level of focus, and maturity and leadership," coach Brandel-Wilhelm said.

Apart from the new faces that will take the court this fall, many key players from last year's post season run are returning to the team. Sophomore setter Kaylee Maat finished the season with over 500 assists in conference and 1,200 in total. The talented young veteran will no doubt be a rock-solid component in this year's offensive pushes, especially with her consistent performances.

Middle hitter Kira Merkle is another name to watch for this season. Averaging 2.4 kills per set through 30 matches in 2021, she tallied a total of 259 kills before the season ended. First year player Claire Nowicki, who would take over at times for O'Connell and Hermann, averaged over

two kills per set and an impressive .318 hit percentage. Both of these players are going to be a tough task for opposing blockers this season.

With the first full off-season since 2019, the team has been working since the spring to get ready for a tough start to the season. Having only one and two-year players return to the squad can make it easy to get lost in all of the expectations set by the departing, decorated players. It's up to players like sophomore libero Leah Bylut to step up into these new roles.

Bylut played behind to Gorgijevska and Brooke Norder, who both graduated last year, seeing action in 22 matches throughout last season.

Seeing as she's been able to learn from such talented players, a breakout out season is on the table for the sophomore.

Like any other year, the ability of incoming freshman to react to the learning curve and jump from high school to collegiate athletics can help push a team to the next level. Now that the team has just over two weeks of practice under their belts, it's safe to say that they are ready to take on the challenges that the new season brings.

"We have been working really hard on our team chemistry and relationships on the court," freshman Karlee Stoll said. "When I get a little frustrated with myself, I know that I have people that are learning new stuff too, and you just got to work through those things together."

Knowing that each player on the team is willing to help each other get better on the court can assure that this team will have a fighting chance in each match this season. However, Bulldog volleyball fans know that Coach Brandel-Wilhelm's motto is to take things one step at a time, which can be applied to everything coming their way this season.

Although it is not yet known when the Bulldogs will make it to the new arena this season, the uncertainty doesn't appear to be having a big effect on the team's mindset.

"We've been all over everywhere these past couple of years, so wherever we get put we'll go there, we'll practice, we'll do our best to get better," Brandel-Wilhelm said. "Maybe the gym will get done this fall, maybe it won't. That's not even in our radar."

The volleyball season will kick off later this month at the Western Washington Invitational. Then, the team will take on some of the top premiere programs in Division II at the 2022 Charger Invitational to finish out pre-season play.

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