



# The Ferris State Torch

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Big Rapids, Michigan

Week of April 1, - 8, 2026

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## Local flavors shine at Taste of Mecosta event

More than 200 attendees sample food and celebrate the community



Photo by: Gannon Thomas | News Reporter

Taste of Mecosta County event attendees were given the opportunity to try many different samples from local businesses.

Gannon Thomas  
News Reporter

The Taste of Mecosta County event on March 24 brought together a plethora of local restaurants, bakeries and caterers to showcase what they are cooking.

The event, which was hosted at The Peaks Event Center, gave attendees a chance to sample from multiple local vendors and listen to live music all in one place. More than just a night of food, this event highlighted the important connection between local businesses and the community, giving residents a chance to try new things while supporting small businesses across Mecosta County.

Vendors included a mix of well-known local favorites like Crankers and Hungry Howies, as well as some smaller businesses trying to expand their

reach within the community. Each vendor offered sample-sized dishes, allowing attendees to experience a wide range of flavors throughout the night.

One of these local favorites, Crankers Brewery, brought both classic and new items from their menu to showcase at the event.

Jim Crank, owner and operator of Cranker's, explained some of the new options they were bringing to the table.

"The dishes we brought to the event were chicken parmesan with Garlic Spaghetti and our new torpedo submarines made with premium Italian meats and cheeses," Crank said.

Attendees were encouraged to vote for their favorite vendors to foster competition among local vendors. Attendees were also given tickets upon entry to participate in a prize giveaway that ran all

night. Another local business, The Sugar Daddies LLC, participated in the event for the first time and offered a wide range of delicious desserts.

One of The Sugar Daddies owners, Jamie Larson, spoke about his dishes.

"We offered a variety of cupcakes, brownies, cookies, macarons, and cake pops," Larson said.

This event offered local restaurants, bakers and caterers a chance to connect with the community and showcase what sets them apart. Events like this help small and even well-known local businesses reach new audiences and grow.

"These types of events are not only fun," Larson said. "They are a great way to get our name out to community members who maybe haven't heard of us before and give them the opportunity to try

out some of our goods before deciding to book us for future events."

The event gave local businesses not only a chance to connect with the community and existing customers but also to reach new clientele.

"We had a great mix of regulars and fresh faces at this event, and had the opportunity to pass out a lot of business cards," Larson said.

Guests were able to try new food and learn about the people and ideas behind the taste. The combination of food, live music and conversations created an atmosphere that emphasized both entertainment and community involvement.

Crank emphasized the importance of community support for local businesses like his.

"The Big Rapids community and surrounding communities mean everything,"

Crank said. "We invested in Big Rapids because it really has a lot to offer with the university and a small-town feel with a lot of local resources to bring great food."

Throughout the night, the event space remained busy as attendees moved from table to table, sampling dishes, asking questions and interacting directly with local business owners. The setup allowed for meaningful conversations between vendors and guests.

"Participating does showcase your business and lets the community know you care and want to be there," Crank said.

Danette Doyle of the Pioneer, the organization hosting the event, said the event exceeded expectations and reflected strong community support.

"We were thrilled with the turnout for our first Taste of

Mecosta, welcoming more than 200 attendees and 12 incredible local vendors," Doyle said. "It was a fantastic night filled with great food, live music, and community connection. We're excited to build on this momentum and grow the event even more in 2027."

With more than 200 attendees and a wide range of participating vendors, the event demonstrated a growing interest in supporting local food and the important connection between these vendors and their customers.

The Taste of Mecosta County went off without a hitch and was a night of food, fun, and community bonding. Leaving both vendors and attendees looking forward to future events and the continued growth of the local food scene across Mecosta County.

### News

Books and Beats, a new used book and record store will be opening later this month. Read more about the young siblings running the store together. **PG. 2**

### Culture

Students across all years and majors come together to present the spring show, "That Guy Who Didn't Like Musicals". **PG. 5**

### Opinions

College brings a number of different experiences and perspectives that can help shape political beliefs through exposure to new people and ideas. **PG. 9**

### Sports

Erik and Kevin Kovacs have accomplished many things while playing for Ferris tennis. Learn about their story and how they got to where they are in their careers. **PG. 10**



# News

Harmony Goodman | Interim News Editor | goodmah2@ferris.edu

## Michigan

Nolan Matthews  
Sports Editor

**Sterling Heights -** A judge within the 37th District Court in Warren has been arrested this past week for allegedly driving drunk and hitting a SMART bus, according to Michigan State Police records. Judge John Chmura was taken into custody on Wednesday for a misdemeanor traffic offense, according to a Michigan State Police background check. The case number for the background check matches the case number on a Sterling Heights Police Department crime incident report that marked a crash that occurred at 11:30 pm on Wednesday. Sterling Heights police said in a press release that a car rear-ended a SMART bus, and the driver is suspected of

## National

Nolan Matthews  
Sports Editor

**Jupiter Island, Florida -** Golfing icon Tiger Woods was arrested and charged with driving under the influence Friday afternoon after he was involved in a rollover crash. The crash occurred just before 2 p.m. in Jupiter Island, the Martin County Sheriff's Office said. Woods was driving a dark Land Rover at high speeds and clipped a truck pulling a trailer that was starting to pull into a driveway off a two-lane road. The truck's driver attempted to get off the road but the Land Rover "overtook" the truck, and Woods swerved to avoid the crash but clipped the back of the trailer.

## Global

Nolan Matthews  
Sports Editor

**Paris, France -** One suspect has been arrested and two have been detained in what authorities in France are investigating as an attempted terrorist attack. They allegedly tried to detonate an explosive device outside of a Bank of America in Paris, according to a police source. The incident occurred shortly before 3:30 a.m. local time on Saturday, according to police and the French Interior Ministry. One suspect was arrested after he allegedly left two bottles of flammable liquid attached with adhesive tape and 650 grams of explosive powder, authorities said. The suspect was attempting to set fire to the device with a lighter, according to police.

# Book and record store to open in Big Rapids

Siblings opening Books and Beats



Photo by: Nolan Matthews | Sports Editor

**A look inside Books and Beats, set to soft open on April 7, 2026.**

Nolan Matthews  
Sports Editor

Two siblings are preparing to open Big Rapids newest business, Books and Beats, a store selling vinyl records, used books and music lessons in downtown Big Rapids.

The store is owned by 17-year-old Hudson Pease and 19-year-old Bella Pease, and will be opening directly next to Quinn's Music at 210 S. Michigan Ave, Suite 2.

The shop will offer many used books and records, while offering lessons in guitar, bass and piano, while also hosting small events alongside Budd Greenman, owner of Quinn's Music.

Hudson spoke about the events that they could host in the future.

"For bigger events, we will be working with Quinn's due to the space," Hudson said. "I would like to have some smaller piano players come in so we can host some smaller events on this side.

Anything bigger than that we will host on Quinn's side. I will be involved with as many jam sessions as possible, which will bring new musicians to the area."

The store's inventory will be entirely used inventory, but will also rely on donations from the community. Up to this point, Books and Beats has already received thousands of donated records, including a donation from a Big Rapids community member that included over 1,500 records alone.

Bella spoke about people who would like to get into physical media and why they should check out their store.

"Well, books are really popular and I know lots of people who have Kindles and read books on their phones," Bella said. "But just to have the physical copy, and me personally, I just like the way they look, or the way they feel when you hold them while you are reading, and even the smell. As for records, you find

so many older singers that you would never find on Spotify, especially with the older records; you might find someone you love, and records expand on that more than what you could find online."

Bella said that most of the time, setting up the store has come from preparing the inventory. This has included sorting the books, checking for damage and making sure records match the sleeves. They have found many records from donations broken or scratched, while some records' sleeves have been incorrect; this has led Hudson and Bella to spend extra time playing the records to confirm the actual musical content.

The siblings said the business fills a gap that Big Rapids is missing, specifically for vinyl buyers. Big Rapids used to have a large bookstore closer to campus, which closed down in 2017, and its audience was mainly Ferris students.

Criminal justice freshman

Manny Tiffany is excited to have a record store opening in Big Rapids, and believes supporting small businesses is important.

"I'm really happy that a record shop is coming to Big Rapids. When I heard the news, I was so excited," Tiffany said. "The key thing about having a record store in Big Rapids is being able to look at the physical copies. You can see the quality of the records instead of buying them online. Also, it's great to support a local shop in Big Rapids."

Originally, the siblings were hoping for a soft opening at the beginning of March, but rebuilding the space and sorting the inventory have taken longer than expected.

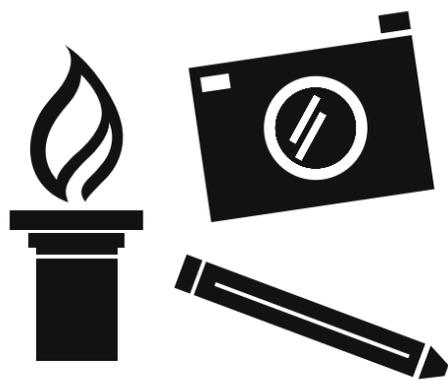
The pair now plans on a soft opening of April 7, with a grand opening to come in the coming months. They plan on partnering with Quinn's to make a grand opening event with live music.

# Why work for the Torch?

The Ferris State Torch is an entirely student-run publication created by students and for students. We publish 27 Wednesdays throughout the academic year and serve as a platform for student voices. From covering campus news to community stories, our mission is to inform, engage and represent the Ferris community while giving students hands-on experience in journalism and media. We pride ourselves on welcoming any student who is interested in working for the Torch, regardless of prior experience in writing or media. Whether you are an experienced writer or someone looking to try something new, the Torch provides an inclusive learning environment where students can grow their skills at their own pace. Our staff members gain real-world experience in reporting, interviewing, editing and photography while learning the core values of journalism, including accuracy and integrity. Reporters for the Torch have the freedom to choose what they want to cover, from campus news and Ferris athletics to student organizations, events and issues that matter to the community. Working for the Torch is an opportunity to build your portfolio, develop professional skills and actively contribute to campus life while being part of a collaborative, student-led team.

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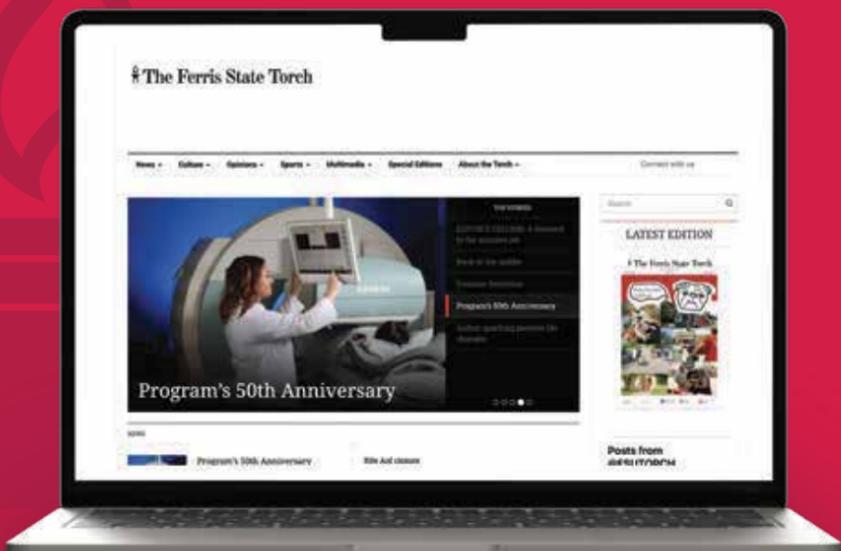


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# Jim Crow Museum wins advertising award

## Turning history into powerful awareness



Photo courtesy of Ferris State University

The “Overcoming Hateful Things” exhibit features many artifacts featuring propaganda.

**Davaria Pharr**  
News Reporter

On March 14, Ferris State’s marketing team won three American Advertising Awards in Memphis, Tenn, for promoting the Jim Crow Museum’s exhibit “Overcoming Hateful Things.”

The team created a cross-platform campaign and a 30-second television commercial that earned two Gold American Advertising Awards and the Mosaic Award for di-

versity. The awards were presented by the Memphis Museum of Science and History during the exhibit’s run.

The work was judged by advertising professionals on creativity and impact.

Cyndi Tiedt, collections manager for the Jim Crow Museum, described how the exhibit came to light.

“The inspiration came from the powerful objects and stories in the exhibit. The campaign invited people to witness difficult history, un-

derstand its impact, and start conversations that support healing, which aligns closely with the museum’s mission.”

Tiedt explained that the museum’s mission is to witness, understand and heal. The Memphis campaign helped audiences witness the realities of racism, encouraged understanding through education and created space for reflection and dialogue that supports healing. She emphasized the importance of students know-

ing their history so it does not repeat itself.

The awards are more than just an accomplishment, they make statements and foster education.

“These awards highlight the meaningful work happening at the Jim Crow Museum and Ferris, showing how the university is contributing to meaningful conversations beyond campus,” Tiedt said.

She added that the impact of the commercials will be extraordinary, and she hopes

the message resonates with the audience.

“Storytelling is central to our work,” Tiedt said. “The objects tell real stories that help people connect with history and understand why it still matters today. Storytelling isn’t just about entertainment; it’s about education and capturing key themes that drive the point home.”

Tiedt discussed how she balances education with keeping the audience’s attention.

“Using video, social media, and clear storytelling helps reach younger audiences and people who may not be familiar with the museum. It makes the content more approachable and relevant,” Tiedt said.

Her goal is to focus on education first and invite people into thoughtful, respectful and meaningful learning experiences. Sharing difficult history may be a challenge, but it is important to make content accessible while remaining respectful and grounded in education.

The awards left a positive impact on audiences and highlighted the collaborations it took to create the media. The campaign helped build awareness in Memphis and brought new audiences to the exhibit. The awards also reflect the campaign’s effectiveness. Collaboration was a crucial component while establishing this exhibit.

“The Memphis Museum of

Science and History worked closely with their creative partners and with our team at Ferris to ensure the campaign reflected the exhibit and its mission,” Tiedt said.

She explained that every message is created with care to reflect the seriousness of the history; Tiedt also discussed the museum’s future after the collaboration. She said the recognition encourages continued collaboration and creative storytelling that supports the museum’s mission to witness, understand and heal.

The collaboration allowed the university to do something it had never done before, presenting the dark history of Jim Crow, while reaching a target audience came with many challenges. Tiedt noted that everyone has their own perception of history, but education must remain at the forefront.

She offered advice for other institutions that want to get involved and make a difference.

“It’s not easy putting these kinds of projects together. It takes hard work and dedication. If you are passionate about getting a message out there, you shouldn’t let challenges get in the way. Having others who want to get involved can make your project easier,” Tiedt said.

For more information on the Jim Crow Museum, visit Ferris360.

## ON THE RECORD

**Blase Gapinski**  
Editor in Chief

### Warrant

March 21, 8:21 p.m. - Ferris State police officers arrested a wanted individual on March 21 after spotting a vehicle linked to an active warrant on Ferris Drive. The individual had been sought for several months on a probation violation. After locating the vehicle parked near West Campus Apartments, officers attempted contact at a nearby residence. The individual was then observed nearby and taken into custody without incident. The individual was transported to the Mecosta County Jail and lodged on a probation violation warrant.

### Operating while intoxicated

March 22, 3:24 a.m. - Ferris State police officers arrested an impaired driver on March 22 after observing a vehicle traveling the wrong way on South State Street. The driver showed signs of impairment and registered a blood alcohol level more than twice the legal limit before being lodged at the Mecosta County Jail.

### Disorderly conduct

Feb. 23, 5 p.m. During a routine health and safety inspection, Community Advisors observed alcohol in the apartment’s common area. An underage resident was advised of the violation and disposed of the alcohol while staff were present.

### Alcohol law violation

Feb. 22, 12:06 a.m. - Ferris DPS officers assisted Big Rapids DPS with a retail fraud investigation involving a male who attempted to evade officers by crawling under a semi-trailer in a motel parking lot. The individual refused commands and resisted efforts to be taken into custody. After repeated commands, officers secured and handcuffed the subject without further incident.

### Criminal traffic

March 27, 12:47 a.m. - Ferris State police officers attempted a traffic stop on March 27 on a speeding vehicle, which fled and was later found crashed near Woodward Avenue. The driver was not located, and the case remains under investigation with charges being sought.

# Culture

Grace Heethuis | Culture Editor | turnek29@ferris.edu

## Spring musical debuts Ferris presents “The Guy Who Didn’t Like Musicals”



Photo by: Blase Gapinski | Editor in Chief

Characters Paul, Bill, Ted, Charlotte and Emma get confronted by infected singing and dancing cops after Charlotte called her husband Sam.

**Blase Gapinski**  
Editor in Chief

March 26 marked the opening night of “The Guy Who Didn’t Like Musicals,” presented by Ferris State’s theatre department, bringing together students and faculty for a night of song and dance.

Originally produced by Starkid Productions, the musical blends comedy and horror as a man named Paul navigates a world where people suddenly begin singing and dancing against their will. This happens after a meteor crashes into a production of “Mama Mia!” in the fictional town of Hatchetfield, where aliens begin to infect the citizens.

The production ran from March 26 to the 29, making Sunday the final performance.

For the cast and crew of this year’s musical, production was both a creative challenge and a rewarding experience.

The production was selected by theatre director and assistant professor of humanities, Dennis Henry. Henry played a key role in guiding students through the creative and technical challenges of the show. Drawing both on student input and his own vision, Henry helped bring the quirky, high-energy musical to life.

“The Guy Who Didn’t Like

Musicals” was the most requested in the play suggestion box I keep in my classroom,” Henry said. “I hadn’t heard of it, but I found out that the original production was available on YouTube. So I watched it, and I thought it was hilarious and a little crazy and just right for us.”

The production’s flexibility also aligned with the theatre program’s emphasis on student involvement. However, bringing the show to life came with its own challenges. Because many cast members were already familiar with the original version, Henry mentioned how important it was to create something new.

“The big, flexible cast size allows us to include as many performers as possible,” Henry said. “Since the cast knew the original production, it was a challenge to make this production ‘our own’ and not try to imitate the talented performers from the original.”

One thing Henry mentioned was how well the students fit into their roles and their ability to fully embody their characters on stage. Preparation for the show began months in advance, with students dedicating significant time both in and out of rehearsal.

Henry also mentioned how the demanding rehearsal schedule reflected the cast’s dedication to the production.

“This was an outstanding cast. The actors fit their characters well. One of my favorite songs is “Inevitable,” Henry said. “It is the final number and the entire cast is involved. It is also the revelation of the surprise ending. We started rehearsing in late January and met four times a week for about eight weeks. The cast started their memorization work over the winter break.”

At the center of the story is Paul, who is the guy who doesn’t like musicals, played by fourth-year Digital Animation and Game Design Jason Zawacki. Zawacki brought energy and humor to the role, capturing the audience’s attention from the very first scene.

Unlike the character he plays, he really enjoys musicals, so it was entertaining for him to be in this role.

“It was really fun to play this character, because in the songs that I am not in, I was backstage, literally just dancing to them, just vibing out so much, but then I have to go on stage and act terrified of them,” Zawacki said. “It was. It was definitely fun to just have that difference.”

Zawacki mentioned how difficult it can be early on, while trying to figure out how he wants to portray a character. In a production like “The Guy Who Didn’t Like Musicals,” he mentions how figuring out what movements

and intonations he wanted to use for Paul took some time to get used to.

Trying to find how you want to play the character is usually a struggle for me early on, but as the shows go on, you just get more and more comfortable,” Zawacki said. “You really lock down how you want to play the character, and how you want the character to come across to the audience.”

Since this was likely his last performance at Ferris, Zawacki reflected on his first performance and how much he and the rest of his peers had grown. He mentioned how this was one of the tightest productions he has been a part of during his time at Ferris in terms of everyone

“I know for me, this is like the best possible final show that I could have had here at Ferris and I feel like a lot of them share the same sense of it, that it was just one of

the best possible shows to have had as our final one,” Zawacki said.

Digital Animation and Game Design senior Micah Graham shared a similar sentiment regarding the production. One of the most memorable moments for him was also the final song, where the whole cast came together for the final number.

“This production has been significantly different from everything else I’ve done in that it’s just so tonally different and so irreverent,” Graham said. “It takes so many of the things that make theater fun and interesting and flips them on their head and spins them around, so as someone who’s been in it for so long, it was so it was such an interesting take on all of these tropes I’m so intimately familiar with.”

Reflecting on both the production and his time in the program, Graham said the

most meaningful part wasn’t just the performance itself, but the growth he witnessed in himself and others.

“It’s honestly kind of magical, seeing the difference between read-through and the final show,” Graham said. “I’ve watched the people who have been around me grow. It’s so interesting, and that has always been my favorite part to an extent. Theater has been one of the main things that’s gotten me out of my shell. I went from not talking to anyone to starting conversations with anybody.”

For many of the students involved, “The Guy Who Didn’t Like Musicals” was more than just a production and it was more of a culmination of their time, growth and connections. The two shows scheduled for the 2026-27 academic year will be announced in May, with details on auditions to follow.

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# Media minute

Switch 2 exclusive game Pokopia causes reflection on video game culture



Graphic by: Harmony Goodman | Production Manager

## Harmony Goodman

Production Manager

Pokémon Pokopia, released on March 5, has sold over 2.2 million copies.

The long-awaited game is a Switch 2 exclusive, meaning it's not just copies of the game selling; more and more Switch 2 consoles are being bought out of stock in stores.

Popular indie pop musician and video game streamer mxmtoon has even joked in a daily affirmations video that she doesn't need to buy a Switch 2 just to play Pokopia. Going on to say in the comments that she would most likely be buying a Switch 2 and Pokopia later that week.

So why has the release of this game increased sales for an entire console? To understand this, esports coordinator and professor of digital animation and game design

Vaaran Singireddy explains that we have to look at the effects of video game culture, the role our generation plays in it and Nintendo's history.

"Between the period of 1984 and 1989, Nintendo was the monopoly. They were the leader of the video game console realm," Singireddy said. "Competitors started catching up in technology, and that's when we saw companies such as SEGA and Microsoft start joining the competition."

Singireddy explains that because the majority of the new generation has been exposed to video games, especially at a young age, we are starting to see the repercussions of this exposure. "Fear of missing out" is a term that has become more popular in recent years. This fear of missing out stems from hearing about friends play-

ing a game; a person is likely to worry that they will not get to share the experience with their friends.

Nobody likes to feel left out.

With an over \$400 paywall, many video game enthusiasts who have been looking forward to the game's release are facing the dilemma of just how unhealthy and predatory the video game industry has become.

"Generation Z hopped onto a moving bus that was already going towards a destination. They did not know what the destination was," Singireddy said. "The addiction kind of consumed them, especially at such a tender age. When you're consuming products you shouldn't be, it takes a toll. I always tell my students it's about how you advertise these games. For example, Pokémon is an ev-

eryone-rated game, but Pokopia has lines of text that you have to read. What four-year-old is going to understand this game? It is not a game for everyone. Parents trust these ratings and don't realize the content that is actually present in the game."

It's hard to direct the blame, Singireddy described. The content being consumed is bad, and the reality is that nobody cares. He believes that you can't blame the kids, and you can't fully blame the parents either.

The video game industry doesn't care because it is making money. But without control and management, Singireddy believes that the problem has already gotten out of control, and it goes deeper than just the price.

"These companies will do everything in their power to protect their company, the

name and the fame that they have built up with it. At the end of the day, it is the consumer who is going to suffer and take the biggest hit," Singireddy said.

Psychology freshman Mason Nicholas has always had a longstanding interest in video games. Starting from playing games such as Plants vs. Zombies and Call of Duty 3. He has been excited for this release since the trailer, but plans to enjoy the game from afar because of its high price.

"Nintendo has never explored the world of Pokémon like this. We have gotten the same game for the past decade, just rebranded," Nicholas said. "I have priorities, though. I could save up enough for a proper gaming laptop. Nintendo consoles are a big investment because I have to get the Switch 2 and then get the game, which is

another \$70 after that."

While Nintendo caters to getting families and friends back in a room together playing games such as Mario Kart and Mario Party, consumers like Nicholas are forced to face the fact that Nintendo has a monopoly over certain games.

Nintendo isn't the only monopoly anymore: there are other games and systems, ranging in price, that can be more accessible to consumers, but at the end of the day, it's up to the consumer.

"If you want to get yourself this game so that you can play with your friends, go ahead. As long as you can afford to play it and have time to play it," Singireddy said. "Otherwise, trust me, you're not missing out on anything."

# Celebrating Azerbaijan

Ferris students gather to celebrate an overlooked culture



Photo by: Blase Gapinski | Editor in Chief

Many traditional Azerbaijani dishes were served for students to sample, which allowed them to get a taste of the culture for themselves.

**Tate Zellman**  
Culture Reporter

Last Friday, the Office of International Education hosted an Azerbaijan Night to celebrate the country and help students from other cultures learn about Azerbaijanis.

Native foods, history, fun facts and interactions with students from various cultures allowed those from Azerbaijan to share their country with others.

The event took place on Friday, March 21, at International Resource Center 109 from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Just under 40 members of the Ferris community attended.

There were three students from Azerbaijan, and they

had the opportunity to talk about their country and what it meant to have it represented at the university.

Biotechnology junior Zeynab Aghabayi is one of the three Azerbaijani students. She shared a specific holiday that Azerbaijanis celebrate.

“One of my favorite holidays is called Nowruz,” Aghabayi said. “It’s a spring holiday where we celebrate the awakening of nature. Before the actual holiday, which is March 20 and 21, there are four different weeks we celebrate the awakening of land, water, wind, fire. There’s also a tradition that goes with these holidays. Kids will take their hats to their neighbors and they will knock on the

door, only to then run and hide. The person who opens the door will find sweets and fruits in the hat. It’s kind of like trick-or-treating, but they don’t see who it is.”

Attendees could try multiple types of food, including rice, chicken, vegetables, yogurt, bread, and garlic sauce. There was also a drink called Ayran, which is made from yogurt, salt, and water, and is a staple in Turkey.

Artificial intelligence senior and the admissions assistant in the Office of International Education, Mohammad Meezaan, emphasized the importance and rationale for centering the event on Azerbaijan.

“We have a lot of interna-

tional students,” Meezaan said. We often hold events like these to gather all the international students. We have a small community, probably 100 international students as of now, but the active students who come to events vary from 30 to 40. We like to include diversity, and it’s always fun for people to represent their countries and their cultures.”

Meezaan mentioned that he is the vice president of the International Student Organization and that the event was a collaboration with the Office of International Education.

The main activity of the event was a Kahoot game. There were 24 Kahoot questions, including fun facts and

interesting information about Azerbaijan. Some facts include that it’s the land of fire, that it’s home to about 400 volcanoes and that its capital is Baku.

Operations and supply chain management junior Yunis Hajiyevev talked about what it meant for his country to be at the center of the celebration.

“Tonight has sentimental value,” Hajiyevev said. “It’s fun to share my country here because a lot of people don’t know about Azerbaijan, and they don’t know where it is. It’s interesting to educate other people about my country.”

Even with his country represented, Hajiyevev felt it wasn’t too pressurizing to represent

it in a way others admired.

“Being an international student, you tend to connect with other international students the first moment you step on campus,” Hajiyevev said. “So I don’t feel much pressure about how I’m going to look representing my country or what people are going to think of my country, but I’m honestly very appreciative of this opportunity to represent my country because I don’t think there has been an event centered around Azerbaijan before.”

For upcoming events, the International Office of Education is having a Korean Night on April 8 and then a late-semester Halloween Party on April 15.

# Opinions

Jackie Moglia | Opinions Editor | [mogliaj@ferris.edu](mailto:mogliaj@ferris.edu)

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## EDITOR'S COLUMN: The final steps

Reflecting on my college experience thus far



Photo courtesy of Blase Gapinski

Gapinski taking in the views of Panama City Beach, Florida, as he ponders his experience and the hard work he has put in.

**Blase Gapinski**  
*Editor in Chief*

With graduation right around the corner, I have been thinking a lot about what my time at Ferris has meant to me and how it has shaped me as a person.

I have mentioned this in some of my previous op-eds, but I truly never thought I would consider Big Rapids my home. I never even thought I was going to be able to finish college because it felt like it was something I couldn't handle or manage on my own.

While being here, I have learned so much about myself and after reflecting on the time I spent at college, I realize how special these years really have been. The ability to build connections with people who have similar interests and are of a similar age and even the sense of freedom and individuality, are all things I have definitely taken for granted.

When you're at college, it can sometimes feel like these days are going to last forever. Sometimes, that feeling can be grueling but it can also be a breath of fresh air as well. It's only when you get

to the end that you really realize that these days indeed do not last forever, and when you take a step back, you can really see how good the times really were.

During spring break, I really started to think about this concept even more. I had been writing the op-ed that was released two weeks ago by the pool at our condo in Panama City Beach, Fla and came to the realization that this was the last time I would have a spring break.

I won't lie, after having this thought come to my mind, I put down my laptop and told myself it would be okay to get started on my work a little later in the week.

For those who know me, it is super hard for me to drop the tasks at hand and take a break. It is especially hard for me to do things that I enjoy or rest because I constantly feel like I am getting behind and can't shake my mind of the workload that sits at the end of relaxation.

Looking back at everything I had accomplished throughout my previous years of schooling, and also looking at the hell of a senior year I have been having, it made me feel a sense of relief and

comfort to sit back, spending time with my family and new friends I had made in Florida.

For once, I wasn't scrambling to get things done or feeling the need to reach out to section editors or reporters. I recognized how much work I have been putting in and finally figured out that it was okay for me to take some of these moments to myself.

That, to me, is what college is. A collection of moments. Moments where we can grow and reflect on the person we once were and even the person we want to become.

For me, being able to take that step back and see how much I have grown or changed over the years, while actually seeing the progress in front of me, helped me see why college has been so valuable.

Before getting into why I think college has been so valuable, I can already see people ridiculing me, saying that I needed to pay for these experiences or relationships. To that I say you're completely right.

Sure, am I leaving school with a lot of student loans to pay off? Of course, I am, but if that is the only thing you are focusing on in your life,

how much things cost you, or how much you are going to have to be paying back, I can already tell you that we value very different things.

I have made countless relationships with friends and faculty here on campus, those that I know will benefit me for the rest of my life. These connections are the reason I am still going. They are the reason I feel comfortable in my own skin and I know that I can blossom into whoever I want to be.

I have spent countless months in Big Rapids. Some have been way better than others, but I have always had this place to count on, and in some ways, I have been able to count on it more than my hometown. Even when I felt worried or anxious about coming back, I was always able to find my groove and continue working hard.

The number of opportunities I have been given here at Ferris also makes up for those times of distress. Not many people can say they have had the opportunity to cover a national championship, attend a national championship game and not to brag, but say they got to sit in the pressbox as well.

I wouldn't have been able to visit the beautiful city of New Orleans, La for the Fall National College Media Convention, if it weren't for my time and experience with the Torch.

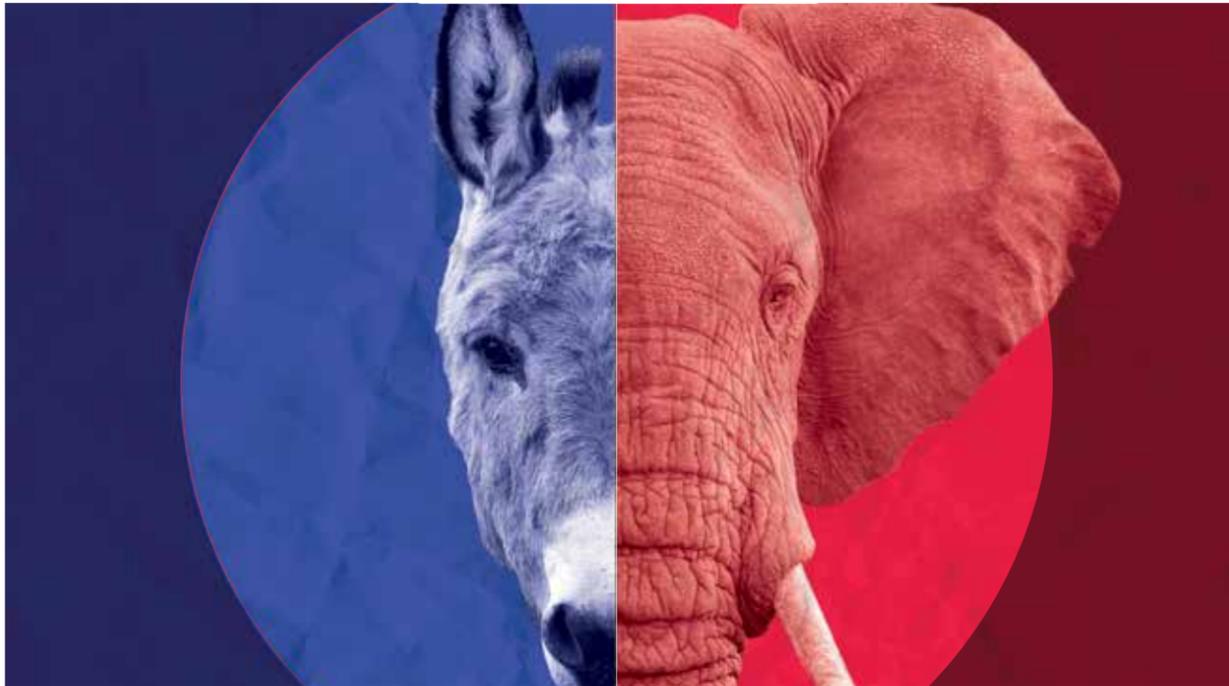
My time with the Torch is another experience I am truly grateful for. Those who know me do know that I complained about my job a lot, but the truth is, I wouldn't have changed it for the world. I know that at any other university or school, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to become the leader of such an amazing, tight-knit newsroom.

For some time now, I have been saying I am ready for my final semester to be over. I think everyone who is starting down graduation is likely in the same boat until we see how quickly the time has actually gone by.

Taking that time to step back and really look at the amount of work I put in helped me realize how much I have grown as an individual. Even through all of the tough times, I don't think I would change how my college experience has shaped who I am. I love who I am now more than I could have ever imagined.

# My political change

## Why my political identity has changed



Graphic by: Hailey Nye | Production Assistant

**Nolan Matthews**  
Sports Editor

Every day I see more and more headlines about the political state of America and I just wonder to myself, "How did I ever support that party?"

I used to be a diehard Republican and a diehard Donald Trump supporter. This was true for the majority of my life. I had a Trump bumper sticker, a MAGA hat and I even went as Trump for

Halloween one year.

Growing up in a conservative family, in a conservative town, I grew up surrounded by many people who influenced my political ideas for most of my life.

At the time, I believe I was blinded by just wanting to fit in with everyone, because I never really knew what the government was doing at the time. I never kept up with actual policies during Trump's first term and I was just blindly supporting him.

Then Trump lost the 2020 election, and I started to really pay attention to politics during Joe Biden's presidency. At this time, I was still conservative, but I was noticing things that seemed off, such as Trump and his supporters believing the 2020 election was "rigged" and that it was stolen from him. Even though there was significant proof showing that there was zero evidence that it was rigged.

As time went on, I became more aware of how the Re-

publican Party operated, always preaching what they do not practice.

Saying the democratic party is the party of intolerance, saying that the democrats can never agree with someone who has differing views from themselves, but I have seen first-hand that it is quite the opposite.

I have met quite many conservative people who treat anyone with differing views in contempt, often yelling at them for just having a differ-

ent view than themselves. Now, I know this is not true for every single conservative person, because I know quite a lot and not everyone is like that.

I started going to Ferris in January of 2024, and this would be the turning point when my political views started to change. I was in a place where I met people from all walks of life, something I did not have when growing up.

My views started to change as the year went on, eventually moving to the middle of the political spectrum. In the 2024 Presidential election, I voted for Robert F. Kennedy Jr, something I regret to this day. He seemed like the best candidate for me, even though I knew he would not win the election, I agreed with most everything he said and most of his proposed policies.

Then RFK Jr does a complete 180 and turns his back on his moderate supporters, and takes a cabinet job for Trump. For years leading up to the 2024 election, RFK Jr was staunchly against Trump and his policies, then as soon as he was offered a job in his cabinet, he threw his personal ideals out the window and took the job.

Day one of his second term, Trump reversed many

Biden-era policies, declared a national emergency at the southern border, initiated mass deportation efforts and withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord.

I thought this was insane, but if only I knew that this was just the beginning of what was to come in the next year. Starting from the sweeping ICE raids across the country to not even doing his main campaign promise: bringing down inflation and increased cost of groceries.

With Trump's sweeping tariffs, the administration has actually raised prices for food and household appliances, adding an estimated \$1,700 in annual costs to the average household, according to the Center for American Progress.

Returning to my first line of this article, "How did I ever support the republican party?" The answer is I blindly supported them, without really understanding what the party did and how they actually operated.

I hope more people who were like me in high school have the same experience I had, because we are the next generation and we need to lead this country to the best of our ability.

# The pressure of college pursuit

## There is too much pressure on high school graduates

**Grace Heethuis**  
Culture Editor

There is way too much pressure on young people to know what they are doing. One of the most asked questions to high school seniors is "What do you want to do when you graduate?"

I don't believe anyone is asking this out of malice, but I do believe it shouldn't be such a popular question to ask young people. It reinforces the belief that many of them already have that they should know what they want to do for the rest of their lives.

That is way too much pressure to put on an 18-year-old just graduating high school. When young people are preparing to graduate, they already have so much on their minds, even without the added pressure from others.

There is no reason they should feel so much pressure to make an immediate decision about their futures. Most people don't even stick to one career for their whole lives, and that is okay. I am a firm believer that people are led to the right opportunities as long as they put in the effort.

It deeply bothers me that so many people discourage graduates from taking a gap year. In fact, I would actually encourage people to take a gap year if they are even considering it. I believe that if someone is considering a gap year, they are not ready to make such a weighty decision.

We shouldn't expect or encourage 18-year-olds to potentially go thousands of dollars into debt for something they are not even sure they want to do. Every year, so many high school graduates make this exact plan.

According to the Education Data Initiative, 39% of first-time, full-time bachelor's degree students do not complete their program within 8 years. That is a startling statistic, yet so many people apply to and begin college each year after graduating.

I'm not saying college is a waste or that nobody should pursue higher education. I believe education is very valuable, even outside of college. What I'm saying is that we need to remove the pressure on young people to know what they want to do fresh out of high school.

Additionally, we should be having way more conversations with young people planning to take out loans for college. While some loan entrance counseling is required, I don't believe that is enough. Taking on debt, especially the amount that college often requires, is very serious.

It is one thing to take on such debt if someone knows what they want to study in college and is confident in their decision. It is another for a young person to pick something they think sounds kind of interesting and go thousands of dollars into debt for it.

Even worse, parents are often the culprits. So many parents pressure their children to go to college, even if they don't want to. I can't even count how many times I've heard people say they need to go to college or choose a certain major so their parents won't be disappointed.

I always jokingly say that I have a "loser degree." I truly believe English is a very valuable and versatile degree, and I am proud of my choice. However, that's not how the vast majority of people feel when I tell them I'm majoring

in English.

It's usually disappointing to people because it's not in healthcare or something else that's "actually" important. Sometimes, people try to give me the benefit of the doubt and ask me, "Oh, so you want to teach English?" To which I respond, "No, I am a writer." Cue the discomfort and awkwardness.

I've learned not to care because I am very proud of my choice. I have known for a long time that it is what I want to do, and I don't really care who that disappoints.

Most of the time, the same people pressure young adults to go to college for something they don't really care about. Should I mention again that it's ridiculous to place that kind of pressure on someone so young?

My point is, higher education is very valuable... IF it is something you're genuinely interested in pursuing and have a good understanding of how serious it is to take on debt for it, if necessary. There is too much pressure surrounding it all, though, and that is the part we need to change.

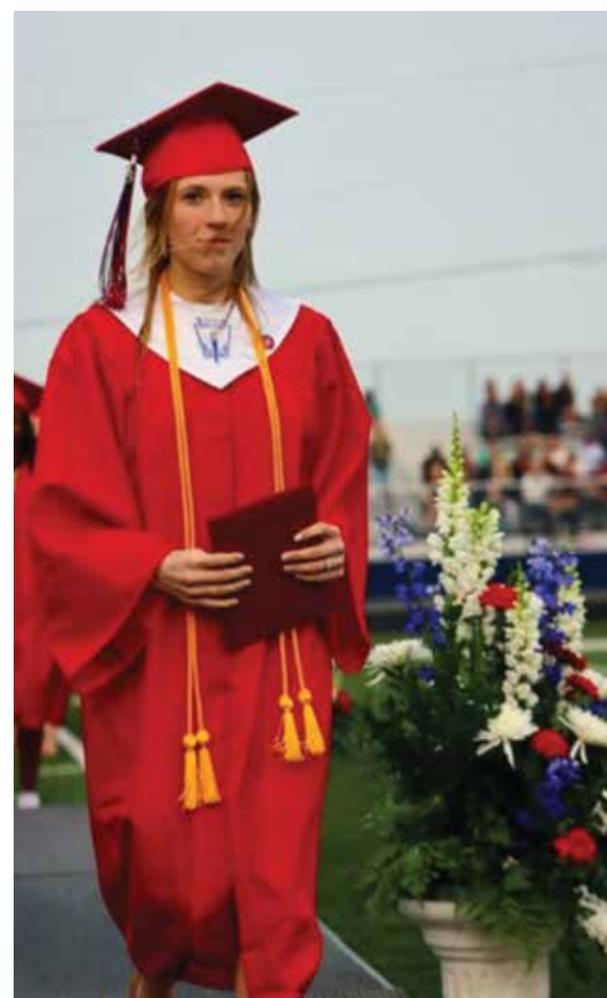


Photo courtesy of Grace Heethuis  
Heethuis during her high school graduation.

# Sports

Nolan Matthews | Sports Editor | matthen4@ferris.edu

## Dueling rackets

The Kovacs brothers talk about their tennis experiences



Photo courtesy of Kevin Kovacs

Kevin and Erik Kovacs present their first team all GLIAC trophy in the 2025 season.

**Devin Wardrop**  
Sports Reporter

Growing up in Toronto, Erik and Kevin Kovacs knew they wanted to play collegiate tennis together.

The brothers got into sports at a very young age, starting with tennis when they were six years old, while playing soccer and basketball around that same time. They played both sports for a while before their parents told them they had to choose one. The brothers were very good at soccer, with Erik on the defense and Kevin on offense, and they played on one of the best soccer teams in their league.

The brothers ended up picking tennis, even though their dad played semi-pro soccer in Hungary.

They took tennis seriously

at around 12 years old and got into the Top 25 in Ontario at 14 years old. When they reached 16, they won the doubles nationals and started playing national tournaments.

The two brothers talked about what tennis players inspired them growing up.

"Growing up, it was Rafael Nadal," Erik said. "I'm a lefty, and I just always liked the way he played. He was always a grind in getting every ball back. He was one I always looked up to. I love his game style."

"For me, I like Roger Federer the most," Kevin said. "The way he blasts the balls to the corner. He's so smooth around the court, moving side around, and his technique is so perfect."

Erik also mentioned how, since he played doubles

tennis with his brother, a big inspiration to them were professional tennis players, Mike and Bob Bryan. They were a big inspiration to him and Kevin, and they had the opportunity to hit with the Brian Brothers when the Kovacs were eight years old.

They were in Montreal for the Rogers Cup, and as they were walking around, they found where the Brian brothers were practicing, and their mom went up to them and asked if her sons could play with them. After giving Kevin and Erik racquets, the two sets of brothers played some points.

The brothers didn't play a lot of tennis at the high school they attended, as high school sports weren't very competitive where they lived, so they decided to focus on international tournaments.

They went to countries like Turkey and Uruguay to continue to get their international rankings up.

Erik talked about what it was like to play in all the different countries he's been to. "It was definitely a really fun experience," Erik said. "It's different. Obviously, the pressure and the stress are higher because you want to perform so well and you're spending all that money. I also think it was worth it because that's how we were able to grow our rankings internationally and get known when we started applying for colleges."

Kevin and Erik knew they wanted to play together in college, so finding a spot where they both got offers from was important.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Erik was talking to

Texas Tech, and Kevin was talking to Cornell. They had a verbal commitment to Bucknell University, but the pandemic happened, and Bucknell's coach reached out and told them that their scholarships were being cut by 50%.

Once that happened, they took a gap year and continued reaching out to colleges when head coach Mark Doren reached out and wanted both of them.

During their freshman year and last year, the two played doubles together, which is something they knew they wanted to do when they went to the same college.

The brothers love being student-athletes here at Ferris because of how the students look up to the athletes. They also love the facilities and the indoor tennis facility.

"They're pretty much unmatched at the Division II level," Erik said. "Having our own indoor tennis facility, which Grand Valley doesn't have, is a huge plus."

On the court, they play quite a bit, and Kevin won the majority of times while growing up, but they are now very back and forth in their matches.

Off the court, Erik is studying criminal justice, and he wants to work in federal policing in Canada for the RCMP, which is Canada's version of the FBI. Kevin is studying business administration with a minor in marketing, and he wants to take over their dad's construction business when he retires.

# Softball continues road trip

## Ferris softball takes on Roosevelt and Wisconsin Parkside

Nolan Matthews  
Sports Editor

After a 2-2 week where the Bulldogs swept Purdue Northwest, but got swept by Grand Valley, the Ferris State softball team continues its road trip against the Roosevelt Lakers and the Wisconsin Parkside Rangers.

The Bulldogs' offense was strong against Purdue Northwest, with freshman outfielder Ava Gardner continuing her hot streak, hitting another home run, in the first game of the two-game series. While senior infielder Jacy Joseph hit two home runs and four RBIs during her three at-bats against the Pride.

Ferris then took on Grand Valley, where the pitching struggled to find a groove, al-

lowing seven earned runs in game one, losing by a score of 7-4. The fielding for the Bulldogs struggled in game two, with two costly errors, one coming in the second inning, allowing three unearned runs. While the other came in the following inning, allowing one unearned run, they ultimately lost game two 6-0.

Head coach Jake Schumann spoke about how he feels the team has performed this season.

"We have done a better job on defense, allowing us to be in games and allowing our offense to play with a little more relaxed freedom," Schumann said. "Cecelia Bell has been a dog on the mound, and we have found multiple ways to score. We need to work on our con-

sistency. There are days we play like a top 10 team in the country and then others when we struggle to focus and play with energy."

The Bulldogs (18-15, 4-4 in GLIAC) will first take on the Roosevelt Lakers (7-18, 1-4 in GLIAC) in a two-game series. Last season, Ferris had the Lakers' number, winning all five games against them, while outscoring them 29 runs to just five last season.

While coming into the matchup, Roosevelt has hit a cold patch in their last 10 games, going just 1-9 while managing to score only 15 runs in those games. With eight of those runs coming against Purdue Northwest in an 8-4 victory.

The Lakers' pitching staff is led by junior Kailey Hancock, who, thus far in the

season, has appeared in 15 games, pitching 65 innings. In those innings, she has a 2.89 ERA and a 1.30 WHIP, while striking out 22 and walking 13.

The rest of the Lakers' pitching staff has struggled outside of Hancock, as in 93 innings, the Lakers have allowed 76 earned runs to the tune of a 7.33 ERA, 110 hits and 88 walks. Maybe change

The Bulldogs will look to take advantage of this, one player who matches up well is junior first baseman Alexis Kozlowski. Kozlowski on the season has a .343 average, 10 extra base hits, three home runs and 26 RBIs, while walking 10 times and striking out 19 times.

Ferris then will take on the Wisconsin Parkside Rangers (11-19, 2-6 in GLIAC) at the Case Softball Complex in Kenosha.

The Bulldogs have played the Rangers tough in the past, as since 2021 the Bulldogs have a 12-8 record against the Rangers, but went 0-2 against them last season.

The Rangers have one of the better players in the GLIAC, that being senior catcher Mia Johnson. She has a GLIAC leading nine home runs and is also first in batting average with a .470. Johnson currently leads in doubles with 16 and is second in the GLIAC with 26 RBIs and for hits with 39.

Freshman pitcher Katie Shuboy gave her thoughts on how they plan to attack the Rangers offense.

"Going into this weekend, we know we're facing good competition and a tough lineup," Shuboy said. "So it's important to execute our game plan and stay disciplined. Taking the game one pitch at a time and trusting my strong defense behind me will play a big role in that."

The Ferris State Bulldogs will take on the Roosevelt Lakers on Friday, April 3 at 2 p.m. then again at 4 p.m. Before traveling north the following day to take on the Wisconsin Parkside Rangers at 1 and 3 p.m.



Photo by: Nolan Matthews | Sports Editor

Junior outfielder Ella McDonald prepares to lay down a bunt against Saginaw Valley on March 24.

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# STUNT heads to Missouri

## Bulldogs to participate in GLVC Championship



Photo courtesy of Ferris State Athletics

**Bulldogs STUNT team took down Texas A&M Kingsville on March 6th by a score of 21-13.**

**Devin Wardrop**  
Sports Reporter

The No. 16 Ferris State STUNT team has had a hot start to its inaugural season with a record of 9-6 and 4-3 in the month of March.

STUNT is a competitive, female head-to-head sport that comes from cheerleading but removes the crowd-leading to focus on the technical and

athletic skills. The teams perform identical, choreographed 30-second routines in four quarters, including partner stunts, pyramids/tosses, jumps/tumblings, and team performance. Then, officials score based on the execution, synchronization, and technique.

First-year head coach, Permella Harris, spoke very highly about the team she

has this year.

"We are a first-year program, but we don't look like it," Harris said. "They have a lot of grit; they work hard. Practices are from 6-8:30 a.m. They lift right now twice a week, and they are doing absolutely amazing."

The Bulldogs started the season hot, beating two Division 1 teams in Michigan and Northern Kentucky on

Sunday, Feb. 8, in Big Rapids at Wink Arena. Ferris beat the Wolverines 22-0 before taking down Northern Kentucky 31-13 later in the day.

"We have nine wins and six losses, and the losses are very close, so it wasn't like anyone blew us out," Harris said. "We were staying with teams who have been around for six, seven, eight years and we're staying with them and doing a really great job with that. Our routines are getting more and more solid, and they're just getting more confident in what they do and how they perform."

Ferris State ended February with a 5-3 record, with three games in that span won by ten points or more. After Northern Kentucky, the Bulldogs beat Quincy 23-9 on Feb. 15. Then on Feb. 28, Ferris State beat Southwest Baptist 12-0. Their three losses came against Treve-

ca Nazarene, Purdue Northwest, and Drury and were by a score of 11 points or less.

In their recent matches on Sunday, March 22, down in Ashland, Ohio, Ferris State split the matchups. In the first match, they fell to No. 10 Malone 26-17 before beating No. 24 Walsh 24-19. In the Malone match, the Bulldogs took a 5-3 lead after the first period before Malone came back to win the last three frames of the match.

Against Walsh, Ferris State again jumped out to an early 3-1 lead in the opening quarter before holding onto its lead to win by five.

Freshman backspot Hanayah Cannon talked about the culture the STUNT team has.

"When it comes to the culture on our team, one thing we all have in common is genuine passion for our sport," Cannon said. "Every morning we wake up at 5

a.m., and no matter how tired and drained we are, we know how to put in 100% effort at practice. The work ethic my teammates and I have is truly amazing, and that's one of my favorite things about my team. We all have the same goal and want to be a better version each day we come into practice."

Next up on the schedule for STUNT is the GLVC Championships, which is a three-day, double-elimination tournament taking place starting on Thursday, April 2, and going to Saturday, April 4 at the O'Reilly Family Event Center in Springfield, Missouri, on the campus of Drury University.

The championship match is currently slated to start at 2 p.m. on Saturday. Eight teams will be there, including host Drury, Ferris State, and Purdue Northwest.

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