

## SURF research deadline is Feb. 23



Courtesy photo

Attendees listen to a presentation during the 2025 SURF conference in Galloway Business Building. The proposal deadline for this spring's event is Feb. 23.

**Regina Ruiz,**  
UP staff writer

Proposals for Lamar University's Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship are due Feb. 23.

The program offers undergraduates up to \$6,000 in funding to conduct independent research during the summer.

The program, offered through the Office of Undergraduate Research, provides selected students with funding to conduct research under the guidance of a fac-

ulty mentor.

E.J. McMillen, administrative assistant for the Office of Undergraduate Research, said SURF is designed to help students explore their academic interests beyond the classroom.

"It is just one of the various opportunities that the OUR provides to our undergraduate students here at Lamar to help support and facilitate any independent research projects that students want to do," he said.

Students selected will have

multiple options for funding. These include a \$2,700 student stipend, up to \$1,400 for research supplies, \$500 for travel reimbursement and \$1,400 for on-campus housing in Cardinal Village during the summer sessions, McMillen said.

Carolina Hernandez, senior American Sign Language interpreting major, said the program allowed her to research a topic that was both academically and personally meaningful.

See **SURF**, page 2



## BoomFest set for Feb. 19-22

**Caraline Otte**  
UP staff writer

The Boomtown Film Society will host the annual Boomtown Film and Music Festival, Feb. 19-22. The festival includes screenings of independent films, live music by Southeast Texas bands, workshops and opportunities to meet filmmakers.

The festival will hold events at the Jefferson Theater, the Texas Energy Museum and the Tyrell Historical Library. Festival director Stephanie Orta said she is excited that the festival will collaborate with the Beaumont Public Library system.

"I utilize the festival to learn more and more," she said. "If you are interested in how things are done in the industry, our workshops are very informative."

The workshops will touch on topics including animation and music in film, Orta said.

"I, myself, am not a movie geek," she said. "So, getting into the workshops, it was really eye opening for me, especially with animation. We did a stop motion workshop last year, and it was just so cool."

Lamar University film professor O'Brien Stanley will be honored with a Lifetime Achievement award at the ceremony, Feb. 21, at the Jefferson Theater.

"I'm undeserving," he said. "Gee, I'm honored to tell you the truth. I'm really honored. I've been associated with this film festival for a good while, in one form or another. It's had a big impact on my life and I have loved being connected to it."

Stanley helped start the film program at Lamar in 1998 and

See **FILM**, page 6

## Lifetime in the clouds

Retrospective looks back of LU alum's artistic career

**Rayna Christy**  
UP editor

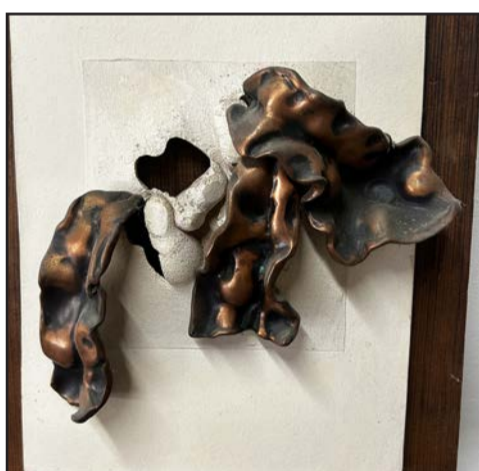
Porcelain clouds create a story in the same way the Sandi Laurette's collection of artworks create a life.

The exhibition "Retrospective: 42 Years at The Art Studio, Inc." guides the viewer through Laurette's journey as an artist and tenant at the non-profit arts space. The exhibition will be on display until Feb. 27.

Laurette said the retrospective caused her to think about the meaning of life.

"As I was kind of daydreaming this morning, I was thinking about how your life path is poetic," she said. "No matter what your path is, sometimes it's rhyme-ish, sometimes it's a haiku and very short, or sometimes it's Dante's 'Inferno.' It's all poetic, not all happy,

See **LAURETTE**, page 8



UP photos by Rayna Christy

Sandra Laurette, right, cleans one of her sculptures to be included in her show, "Retrospective: 42 Years at The Art Studio, Inc.," on display through Feb. 27. The show will include ceramic and metal sculptures, above, many reflecting her love of clouds.



## Learning healthy relationships

Health services to present Cohen workshop, Feb. 19

**Rylee Zapotoschny**  
UP contributor

Award-winning author and speaker Marissa Cohen will present a Healthy Relationship workshop, Feb. 19, from 12:30 to 2 p.m. in the Setzer Student Center Ballroom A.

The event is hosted by the Student Health Center, Health Education, Student Conduct and Care Services, and the Title IX

Office.

The interactive workshop will include activities and prizes.

"Our job is to brainstorm and recognize what issues resonate most with college students," Jayna Bonnette, assistant director of health education services, said.

Cohen is the founder of the Healing From Emotional Abuse philosophy, and the author of the "Breaking Through the Silence" series. According to her website, Cohen's mission is to empower all survivors of sexual abuse, narcissism, emotional



Marissa Cohen

See **HEALTHY**, page 2

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK

One day, in retrospect,  
the years of struggle will strike you  
as the most beautiful.

— Sigmund Freud

## NOTICE

The University Press can be read online at [www.lamaruniversitypress.com](http://www.lamaruniversitypress.com). For updates, follow us on Facebook, or on Instagram and X @uplamar.

## SURF from page 1

“I myself am a Hispanic, Latina sign language interpreter, and I experience a lot of hardships and struggles,” Hernandez said.

Her project studied the experiences of Hispanic and Latino sign language interpreters working in the field.

“Through this research, I wanted to make our voices a

little bit louder,” she said.

Hernandez’s project used qualitative interviews to explore challenges faced by Latino interpreters, including issues of representation and professional barriers. She said one of the biggest challenges was recruiting participants who had time to commit to interviews.

“The coding process was actually much longer than I expected,” she said. “But it helped me understand the data in a deeper way.”

Hernandez used her SURF funding to attend the Texas Society of Interpreters for the Deaf conference, where she networked with professionals and recruited participants for her study.

“That conference really helped my research grow,” she

said. “I met so many interpreters, especially Hispanic and Latino interpreters, and it helped me collect more information.”

Hernandez credited her faculty mentors with helping her navigate the research process.

“They weren’t just holding my hand,” Hernandez said. “They guided me, encouraged me and helped me understand how to actually do research.”

McMillen said seeing stu-

dents develop their projects is one of the most rewarding parts of the program.

“We had a full 15 projects last year,” McMillen said. “It was really great to see those projects develop, and I’m looking forward to potentially having another full cohort.”

Students interested in applying for SURF can find eligibility requirements and proposal guidelines at [lamar.edu/our](http://lamar.edu/our).

# UNIVERSITY PRESS

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## HEALTHY from page 1

abuse and domestic violence to release their trauma, build resilience and rebuild their lives, so they can feel complete, happy, and confident.

Bonnette said the workshop will provide Lamar University students with external resources and tools they can apply to their lives.

Sarah Chavez, health education program coordinator, said with Valentine’s Day coming up, and April’s Sexual Assault Awareness Month, the workshop is particularly timely.

“Marissa Cohen is helping students identify healthy vs. unhealthy relationships, notice if something is toxic, and give them tools to help rebuild relationships,” Chavez said.

Bonnette said the workshop is not limited to toxic relationships.

“I think that anyone should attend, even if you’re in a really great relation-

ship,” Bonnette said. “This doesn’t always have to apply just to romantic relationships either. Any relationship, any family friend, acquaintance, anything like that — it’s always good to have those tools to recognize what a healthy and unhealthy relationship is.”

Support resources will also be available beyond the workshop.

“We are also going to have some of our Student Health Center counselors on standby in rooms behind the ballroom,” Bonnette said. “Outside of the event, we will also have some of our resources tabling there as well.”

The presentation will not require attendees to share personal experiences, Chavez said.

“You’re not expected to give a life story or anything like that,” she said. “It’s very low stress.”

The workshop will offer a new perspective on information already provided to students, Bonnette said.

“Especially as college students, y’all are navigating so many things,” Bonnette said. “We wanted to offer something different that is impactful.”

Bonnette said students should feel free to participate in whatever way they feel comfortable.

“If you ever feel uncomfortable, you do not have to stay,” she said. “We understand this could be triggering. If you need to step out, that is absolutely OK. We hope to have more events like this in the future, so if now is not the right time, that’s OK. We’d love to have you.”

“Healthy relationships don’t just stop at Valentine’s Day.”

For more on Cohen, visit [marissafayecohen.com](http://marissafayecohen.com).

## GET INVOLVED AT LU!

# LU Division of Student Affairs

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### FRIDAY, FEB. 13

Show Us Your Red • 11am - 1pm • Galloway 102

#### MONDAY, FEB. 16

Popcorn Mondays • 11am - 1pm • Galloway 102

#### TUESDAY, FEB. 17

Random Acts of Kindness • 10am - 2pm • SSC Ballroom  
Health & Wellness Fair • 10am - 2pm • SSC Ballroom

#### WEDNESDAY, FEB. 18

Coffee & Connect • 12pm - 1:30pm • SSC Ballroom

#### THURSDAY, FEB. 19

Red Flags: Healthy Relationships Workshop  
12:30pm - 2pm • SSC Ballroom

#### FRIDAY, FEB. 20

Show Us Your Red • 11am - 1pm • Galloway 102

#### SUNDAY, FEB. 22

LU Dance Team Audition Prep Clinic  
12pm - 4pm • Rec Center  
*Register at [lamar.edu/danceteam](http://lamar.edu/danceteam)*

#### MONDAY, FEB. 23

Popcorn Mondays • 11am - 1pm • Galloway 102

#### TUESDAY, FEB. 24

LifeShare Blood Drive • 9:30am - 3:30pm • SSC Cypress 125

#### WEDNESDAY, FEB. 25

Career Prep Rally • 3pm - 5pm • Galloway 102

#### MONDAY-THURSDAY EACH WEEK

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See event details & more on **LUHub!**

## ROM-COM RESURGENCE

### New wave of movies resurrects '90s genre

A hasty chase after a potential soulmate and quick, witty banter make for the perfect romantic comedy. A notable meet-cute and a big gesture of love bring joy to viewers.

Some viewers label them unrealistic, but from “Sleepless in Seattle” to “How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days,” there is an endless stream of rom-coms. The genre dominated through the '90s and early 2000s, but suddenly, the love stories concluded.

Now the rom-com well has dried up and nobody is giving the genre the time of day. Along with actors wanting to make the move to serious movies that create buzz during awards season, the push for the rom-coms is obsolete.

Rom-coms are no longer successful at the box office. Movie studios no longer want to invest in a movie that creates no profit. Generally we have seen the death of the mid-budget movie, into which most rom-coms.

The public no longer seemed to want to watch a so-called unrealistic movie. The introduction of streaming services seemed to be the final nail in the coffin.

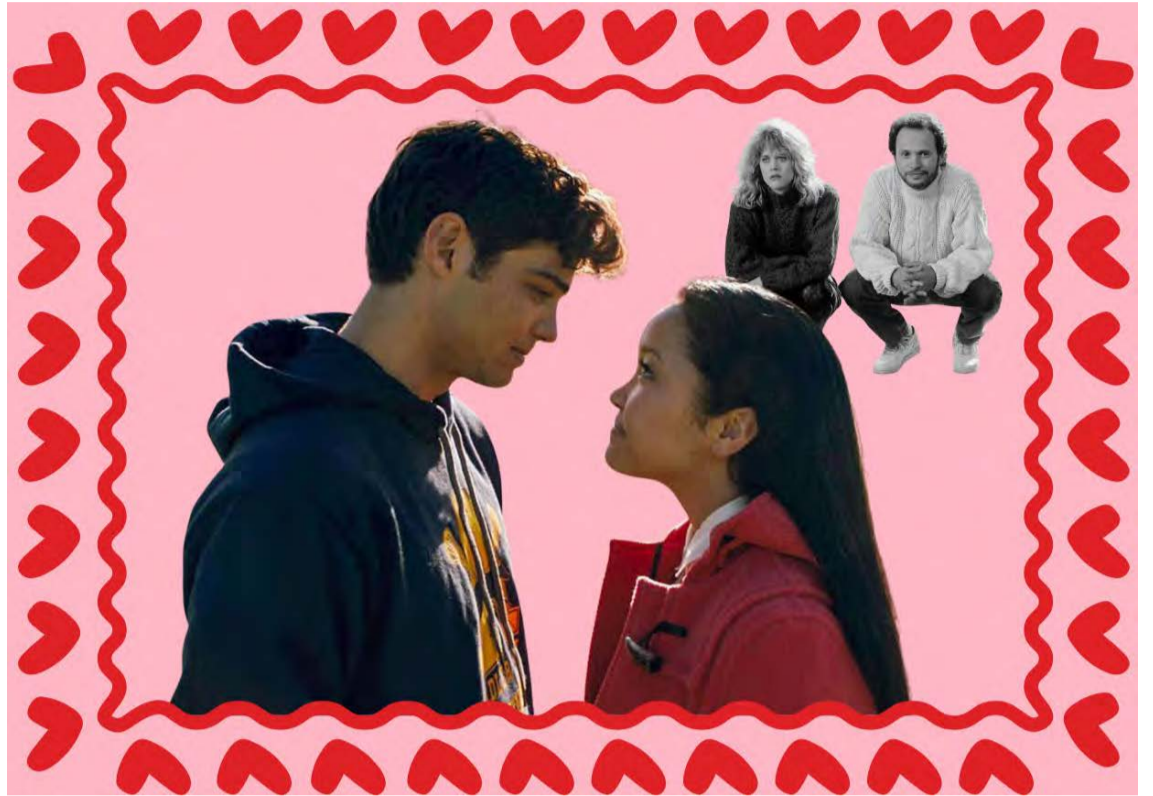
However, after the successful theatrical release of “Crazy Rich Asians,” in 2018, the rom-com tide began to turn. Viewers wanted more.

Those same streaming services may be the savior of the rom-com. Streaming services have been the leaders in releasing rom-coms, filling the void.

The old rom-coms have flaws. For example, the classic “When Harry Met Sally” lacks diverse characters, featuring an all-white cast. Additionally, Harry has a constantly condescending attitude towards Sally when they first meet.

This is where streaming services put in the work of delivering what the modern viewer wants.

The classic tropes have been rewritten to fit mod-



UP graphic by Maria Rodriguez

ern-day tales, such as the introduction of social media and dating apps. It's a clear reflection that the new wave of rom-coms is pandering to their new audience.

There has been an increase in book adaptations, such as Netflix's success with “To All the Boys I've Loved Before.” The movie deals with a fake-dating trope which has been seen before. However, it's the personal development of both characters in the relationship

that sticks out the most. They experience personal growth as the relationship develops.

These adaptations are derived from a source material providing a layout for a beloved rom-com. They create a new story without becoming a rip-off of a beloved classic.

The new rom-coms have added their own twist by blending the meet-cute with drama becoming a romantic dramedy — a rom-dram?

The new stories strive to have relatable characters in whom the audience can see themselves.

The old rom-coms can be appreciated mainly for the nostalgia, but they can also pave the path for the new generation.

Whether or not they will have the lasting appeal of the classic '90s rom-coms is unclear. It may be the cycle of old trends coming back to life, but this one looks to be the most promising yet.

#### Commentary



Maria Rodriguez

UP news editor

#### UPeditorial

## Swipe right for safety

If you're searching for love this Valentine's Day, dating apps can be an appealing download. Whether it's Tinder, Bumble or some other application aimed at pairing people together, it is important to exercise caution when swiping right.

While someone's account may make them seem like the perfect match, looks can be deceiving. Apps have safety regulations, but they are not always upheld.

Emily Elena Dugdale and Hanisha Harjani's article, “Dating App Cover-Up: How Tinder, Hinge, and Their Corporate Owner Keep Rape Under Wraps,” states that Match Group, the owner of Tinder and Hinge, has a policy that an account will be banned if someone is found to have harmed an individual on a date. However, Hinge user Stephen Matthews was reported for committing an assault in 2020 but was still active on the app in January 2023. He was not removed until he was arrested two months later. Matthews was sentenced to 158 years to life in prison in 2024 for assaulting 11 victims.

Even though Matthews is now off of the app, there is no guarantee other accounts with similar intentions don't exist. While there is no filter to avoid potential abusers, one can exercise caution while swiping.

Firstly, if an account seems too good to be true, trust your instinct.

Secondly, when texting to meet up, decide on somewhere public where one can find help if the date goes south.

Thirdly, don't share overly personal information such as address, place of employment, or places you frequent. Even if the first date goes well, if anything changes, you won't want them finding you and placing you into uncomfortable situations.

Dating apps can be a good place to find love, but they do come with risks. Be careful. Be aware.

Have fun this Valentine's Day, no matter whether Cupid's bow strikes or not.

## V-Day is the worst

St. Valentine's Day originated in the fifth century, after the death of the Roman saint.

During a time of promiscuity and bloodshed, St. Valentine would secretly marry soldiers after Roman Emperor Claudius II forbade marriages and Christianity.

St. Valentine wanted to honor the young couples who wished to be wed, despite marriage being against the law. He was tortured and decapitated for the “crime” of healing a nobleman's daughter's blindness, thus causing the family to convert to Christianity and angering Emperor Claudius II.

#### Commentary



Heather Harmon

UP contributor

Valentine was martyred on Feb. 14, in the eighth century. So, the traditional day where we are expected to express our love by spending too much money to show how much we care is built on a foundation of pain and bloodshed. How romantic.

Nowadays, Feb. 14 is a day where we are expected to buy bouquets of flowers, heart-shaped candies, stuffed animals, and tell your partner how much you love them, as if you only tell them you love them once a year.

It makes no sense to focus on one day out the year making your partner feel special. Are the other 364 days spent making them feel subpar? If you wanted to make your partner feel special you would have done so already.

If you decide not to celebrate Valentine's Day — because you're alone or you “choose” to be single this year — there's a small amount of shame that you are not celebrating the loveable holiday.

You're forced to watch the happy couples on TV and

watch stupid rom-coms while you hide away sulking at the lovey-dovey world around you.

Valentine's Day has become more about promiscuity and consumerism, rather than the type of love St. Valentine intended all those years ago.

A day that is meant to be about friendship, appreciation and love is all about who can buy the best gift. Every year there's a different lingerie commercial or a jewelry commercial telling you why you need to buy their products to make your partner feel extra special. The holiday is just an excuse for businesses to upmarket to upmarket their defective products and make you feel penniless, all to make that special someone feel “extra special” on that one particular day.

I, for one, refuse to give in to the rampant consumerism. I shall be watching a non-rom-com, eating popcorn, quietly, on my own.

But if anyone wants to hang out, I'm available. And my favorite chocolate is pecan clusters.

They are quite cheap.

#### Letters Policy

Individuals who wish to speak out on issues should send a letter fewer than 400 words in length to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 10055, Beaumont, TX 77710, or drop letters off at our office in the Communication Building. The writer's name, address, telephone number and ID number must accompany each letter. Letters

received without this information cannot be printed. Letters may be edited for length, grammar, style and possible libel.

Opinions expressed in letters are not necessarily those of the UP student management. Letters by the same writer on the same subject will not be published. Poetry and religious debates will not be published.

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# SWEET MESSAGES

## Sweethearts conversation candy has roots in Civil War

**Kami Greene**  
UP managing editor

According to Google, more than eight billion conversation hearts are manufactured and sold during February.

Three thousand of the heart-shaped sweets are produced each minute, making up 40% of the non-chocolate Valentine's Day candy.

Although they are a well-known candy during the love season, their history is not so much.

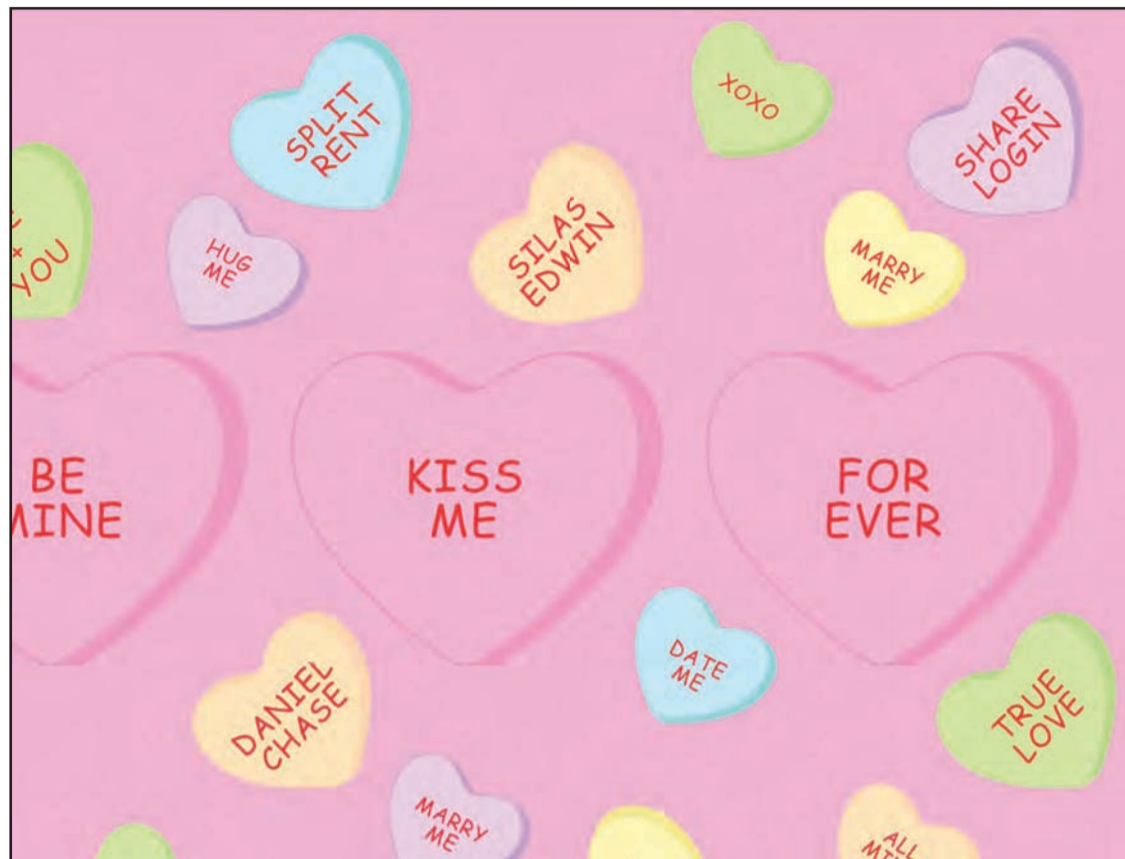
So, what is the conversation behind the sweet, pastel candy hearts better known as Sweethearts?

In 1847, lozenges were in high demand from apothecaries. To help with production, Oliver Chase invented a medicine cutting machine, reducing production time.

Chase began producing lozenges, a mixture of sugar and medication that soothed sore throats and reduced bad breath. He later transitioned to candy production.

Through collaboration with his brother Silas Edwin, they created Chase and Company, later to be renamed as the New England Confectionary Company, better known as NECCO, which gained popularity during the Civil War.

"Necco Wafers continued to be a popular candy for



UP graphic by Kami Greene

decades," Bailey Fink in All-recipes writes. "Because they were portable and wouldn't melt, they were often shipped overseas."

So, how exactly did the idea of conversation hearts come about?

Friends and families were sending love letters to soldiers. Since they were already receiving Necco Wafers in the mail, loved ones thought that instead of sending the letter and candy separately, they should combine them.

However, this wasn't an original idea'

Fink writes, "The idea for conversation hearts came from the candy's predecessor, a scalloped candy that had a message written on colored paper tucked inside like a fortune cookie."

To appease the consumers, Chase's brother Daniel invented a machine that stamped messages on the Necco Wafers in the 1860s using a red vegetable dye.

Daniel expanded his

candy range by printing messages on candy of all shapes including horseshoes, baseballs and watches.

Instead of the short, sweet phrases that are imprinted on the candy hearts, Daniel's candy had longer phrases such as, "How long shall I have to wait? Please be considerate," "Please send a lock of your hair by return mail" and "Married in satin, love will not be lasting."

In 1901, the heart shape

was introduced and the Sweethearts became a staple Valentine's Day candy with sweet and short one-liners like, "Be Mine," "Me + you," "Kiss me" and "True love."

While NECCO produced Sweethearts for years, Fink writes, "NECCO declared bankruptcy and shut its doors in 2018, with Spangler Candy acquiring the rights to the candy in 2019. Because of this, Necco Wafers and Sweethearts were not produced for two years, but both were brought back in 2020 due to popular demand."

Since their re-introduction, Sweethearts has continued to be the most popular Valentine's Day candy outside of chocolate with new heart themes and phrases being introduced each year.

This year's Sweetheart theme is "Love is in the Economy." The theme is targeted towards modern daters and acknowledges how financial troubles can affect relationships.

Some phrases include, "Split Rent," "Share Login," "Car Pool," "Buy N Bulk" and "Cook For Two."

While Necco Wafers kicked off the candy message trend, Sweethearts sweet messages continue to be a Valentine's Day staple, perfect for lovers or even a friend.

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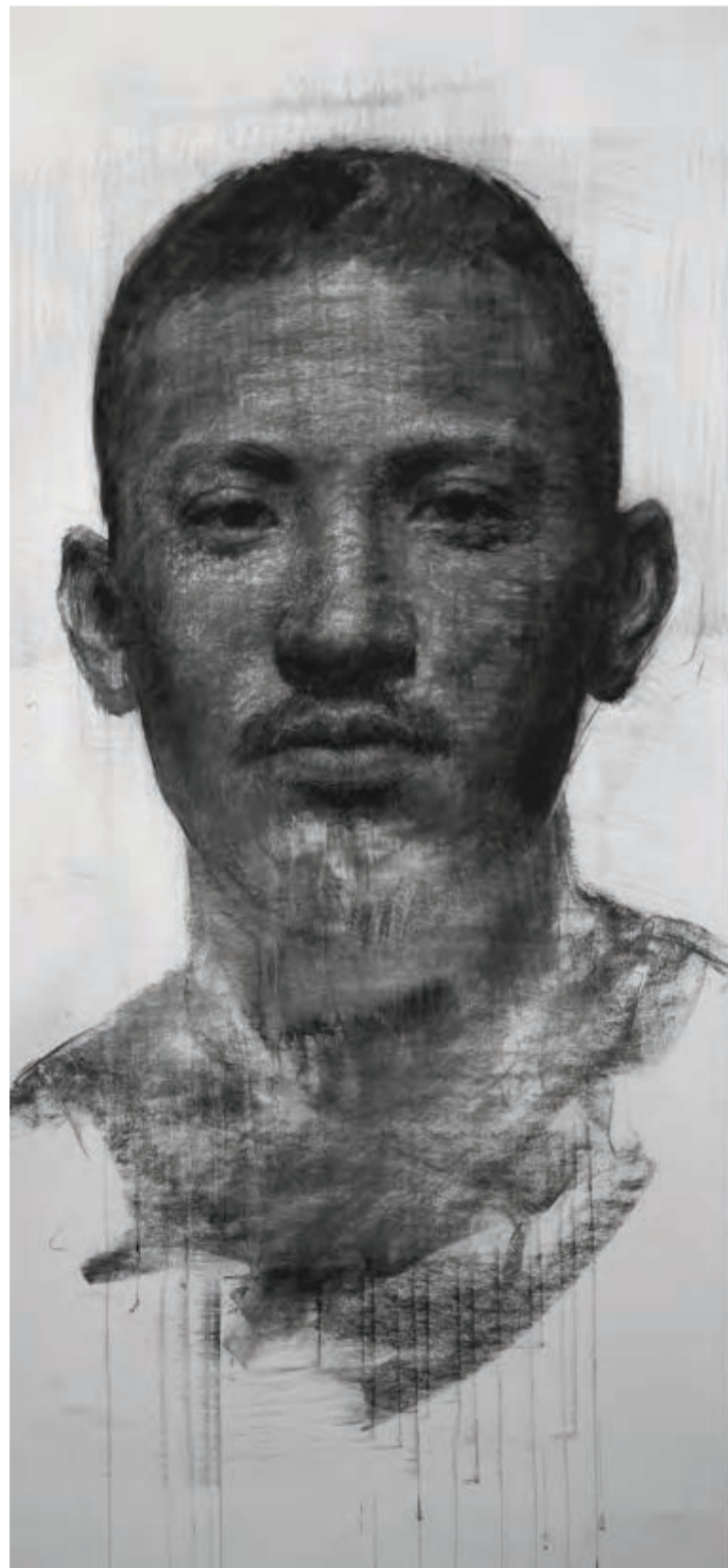
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# Taking a Break

## Time off from college can be right choice

**Presleigh Peveto**  
UP contributor

For many college students, the path to graduation is not always a straight line. While some move seamlessly from semester to semester, others choose to step away from school to reassess their goals, finances or personal circumstances.

Taking time off can be a difficult decision, but for many students, it becomes an important part of their academic journey. Students take time off from school for several reasons, including financial stress, uncertainty about their major or the need for a mental break.

Haley Ryder, Port Neches junior, said her decision to take time off was driven by uncertainty about her future. "I didn't know which direction I wanted to go in with my major, so I thought it would be best to take time off rather than waste money," Ryder said.

For some students, the decision to take time off comes before college begins. David Vaquera, Groves junior, said he needed time to reset before jumping into something new.

"I took time off between high school and college because I needed a break to feel more confident before starting a new chapter in my life," he said. "When I came back, I knew more about what I

wanted to do and I was ready to commit and give it my full effort."

Returning to school after a period of time away can present challenges, particularly when it comes to navigating financial aid, Shale Cochran said.

"I did try to go back and dropped again due to issues with my FAFSA and not having anyone to help through this process," Cochran said. Students can be discouraged by a lack of guidance and support which often makes the process feel overwhelming.

"I did not have anyone at home who knew how to help me through the process of everything," she said. "I reached out to a few people in the scholarship department at Lamar, and they were able to help me, but I chose not to go back to school because that ended up being the best option for me."

Students who go back to college after time away often gain a new perspective. Ryder said returning to school was difficult at times, especially when she compared herself to peers.

"I don't really like being behind my friends who have already graduated, but everyone will finish when they finish, and that is OK," Ryder said.

Vaquera said he encourages others to trust their instincts and prioritize their well-being. He emphasized



Haley Ryder works on homework at Rao's Bakery in Port Neches, Jan. 31.

UP photo by Presleigh Peveto

the importance of listening to one's self.

"Do it," he said. "If you feel like you need a break, then do it. There is nothing wrong with needing time to yourself before throwing yourself into something new. It will definitely help you in the long run."

Ryder said she wanted to find what she was passionate about.

"After trying out different things, I found a passion for teaching," she said. "I chose to return to Lamar because they offer a great education

program for me to do that." Cochran said taking time off allowed her to pursue her career goals outside of a traditional college setting.

"I have a full-time job at a daycare that will set me up for what I want my future job to be, and I have never been happier," she said. "I don't regret stepping away from school at all, if you are unsure about your end goal, my advice is to trust yourself and do what you believe is best for your future."

While there is societal expectation to going straight

through a degree plan, stepping away can be a meaningful part of the college journey. With time, support, and self-reflection, many students return more prepared to continue their education and move forward with confidence.

Resources are available to help navigate the process of taking time away or looking to return.

Financial aid resources can be found at [lamar.edu/financialaid](http://lamar.edu/financialaid). For registration, visit [lamar.edu/students/registrar/registration](http://lamar.edu/students/registrar/registration).



## Financial Literacy Seminar Series

OFFICIAL CREDIT UNION OF LAMAR UNIVERSITY.

**Tuesday, February 24**

**Money Concepts 101**  
Setzer Center Neches Room | 1pm

**Wednesday, April 1**

**Build Your Budget**  
Setzer Center Neches Room | 1pm

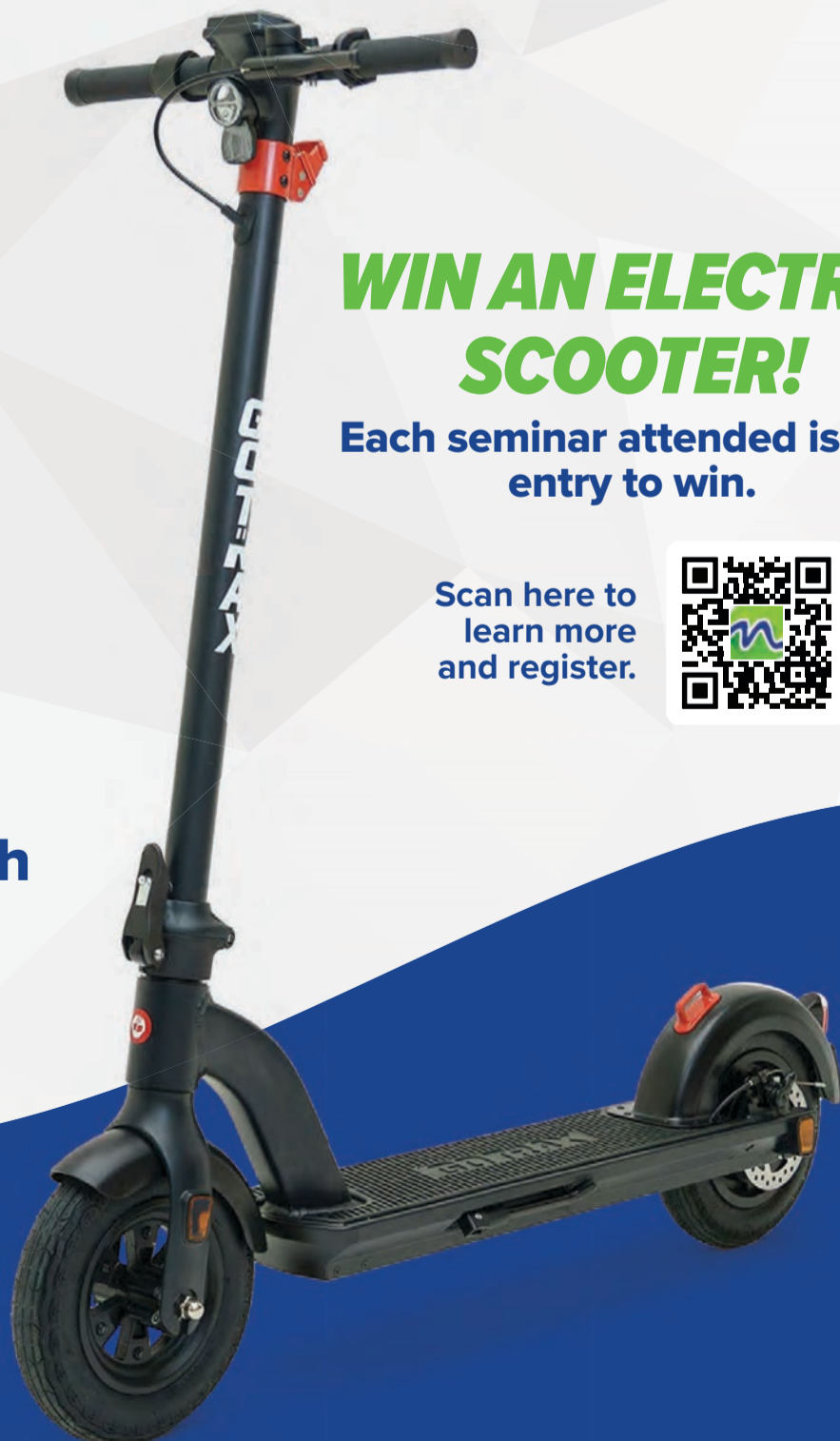
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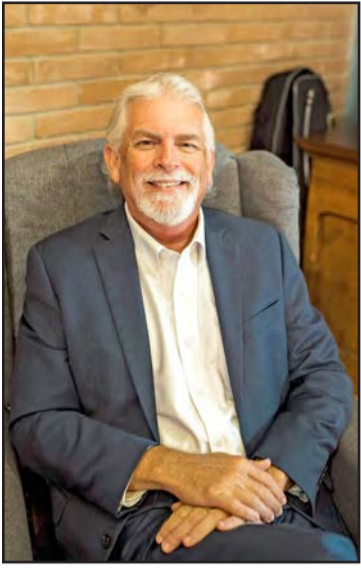
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# MWH hosts lecture on Texas citrus history



Dale Murden

## Press Release

The McFaddin-Ward House Museum will present “The Juicy Story of the Texas Citrus Industry,” a lecture by Dale Murden, Feb. 19, at 6:30 p.m. in the Museum’s Visitor Center Lecture Hall.

Murden, president of Texas Citrus Mutual, will highlight the rich history, current farming practices and future of Texas citrus orchards.

“I’ll be covering a complete history of the Texas citrus industry from A to Z,” Murden said. “I’m curious how many people even know Texas has a

commercial citrus industry.

“If you’re a Texan, and you’re proud to be a Texan, you should know about the Texas citrus industry. The climate in south Texas allows for citrus to be grown in that area. We produce a grapefruit developed by Texas A&M scientists that is redder and sweeter than pretty much anything in the world.”

A fifth-generation Texan, Murden developed his “pure love” of the land and farming while growing up on his grandparents’ farm in Santa Rosa, Texas. He began his career in citrus right after high school and continued in the industry

through devastating freezes, uncertainty and change.

“Farming is a freedom you can’t find in an office,” Murden said. “The ability to grow something and help feed a population is one of the most honorable things you can do. When you’re passionate about something and you love something, why not stick with it? I’ve had a lot of trials and a lot of tribulations – you can’t control the weather; you can’t control the prices – but I’m doing what I love.”

Murden has held numerous positions within the citrus industry. In 2014, Murden be-

came president of Texas Citrus Mutual and its subsidiaries.

“It’s rewarding working to solve problems for hardworking people,” Murden said. “I’ve learned that anywhere I’ve traveled in the world, farmers are all the same. We love what we do. We share a common bond, regardless of race or nationality.”

The museum’s lectures are free and space is limited. Doors open at 6 p.m.

The museum is located at 1906 Calder Avenue in Beaumont.

For more information, call 409-832-2134.

## FILM from page 1

in 2000, he co-founded the “Spindletop Lamar University Film Festival.”

“We ran that until 2006 and we stopped doing it, because it was kind of too much for us,” he said. “Former students picked it up. They said, ‘We don’t want the festival to stop.’ So, they started the Boomtown Festival.”

Stanley said filmmakers and artists come from all over to submit their work to the festival.

“The creativity you’re seeing is fantastic – they really are polished films,” he said. “They get national filmmakers that are trying to work their way to Hollywood or New York, wherever they want to make films.

Red beak Productions, Lamar’s film club, are an important part of the festival, Orta said.

“Red Beak has shown up as

volunteers and has wiped the floor in participation,” she said. “Whether it be the music video challenge, the 48-hour challenge or documenting the festival itself. I mean, this is their history – it’s the beginning of their careers.”

The festival showcases the results of the 48-hour Film Race, an event where participants write, shoot, edit and submit a short film in two days using certain prompts.

“We had to incorporate oil in some way into our film and then also emulate another director,” Adam Baeza, Beaumont senior, said. “I’m really interested to see how other people take those few guidelines and make something out of it, because that’s a very hard thing to do.”

Baeza is Red Beak Productions’ president. He has been involved with the festival for three years.

“You see movies coming out at all these big movie theaters, so that kind of leaves local films and smaller budget films out in the dust,” he said. “This festival was a way for talent to get recognition and to have an audience for once. That’s really why we do this – we want to share that art with other people.”

Baeza said the festival is a great way for students to find entertainment in Beaumont.

“People complain about Beaumont not having a lot,” he said. “We’re not Houston, where we have the Galleria, IMAX theaters or huge concert halls. But this festival brings together a bunch of people who demonstrate that there is stuff going on. There is life in Beaumont, Texas. There’s movies being made in your backyard. There are bands and concerts that happen every week at a little record shop.”



Stanley will be honored with a lifetime achievement award at this year’s Boomtown Festival.

Stanley said he recommends Lamar students get involved with the festival.

“My students get to go see films that they wouldn’t otherwise get to see, and they get to

use the festival as a networking opportunity to get into the business themselves,” Stanley said. “It’s just a fantastic event.”

Attendees will have opportunities to meet artists and independent filmmakers throughout the event, Orta said.

“We had a couple of artists that were from big cities, and they come down here, and they’re like, ‘We didn’t think y’all were gonna be this rad,’” Orta said. “And I’m like, ‘Yeah, what’d you think?’ You don’t have to go to New York, you don’t have to go to Los Angeles, you don’t have to leave across the world – (you can) find it here.”

Tickets are available in three packages: a \$15 day-pass, a \$30 festival pass or a \$60 VIP pass.

For more information, visit boomtownfestival.com.

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**NEW LOCATIONS COMING SOON**

# LU stands out for low debt

## Press Release

As student loan debt continues to affect college graduates across Texas, Lamar University leaders say a focus on scholarships, grants and early financial advising is helping students graduate with less financial burden. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), Lamar University ranks first in the state for lowest average student debt among public four-year institutions.

Lamar University awards more than 2,000 scholarships annually, totaling more than \$20 million in student assistance. According to university data, 90% of full-time students receive financial aid, and 47% of graduates complete their degrees with no

student loan debt.

“Our mission is to make attending college possible for every student, regardless of financial circumstance,” Megan Begnaud, director of student aid said. “We work closely with students and their families to communicate the scholarship and grant opportunities available to them and guide them through the steps needed to be considered before deadlines.”

Begnaud said early financial planning plays a critical role in limiting unnecessary borrowing.

“When students and families plan early, they’re better positioned to make informed decisions and may avoid taking out loans they don’t truly need,” she said. “We focus on sharing clear, upfront information about the real cost of attending Lamar University

and the financial aid options available.”

Graduating with less debt can have long-term benefits for students, Begnaud said.

“Lower debt gives graduates the freedom to begin pursuing their goals sooner,” she said. “That could mean saving for a home, starting a family, or choosing a career they’re passionate about without financial stress holding them back.”

Vice President of Enrollment Management and Marketing Katrina Brent said Lamar University’s emphasis on scholarships and individualized advising helps students stay on track to graduate while relying less on loans.

“At Lamar University, scholarships and financial aid play a major role in student success,” Brent said. “By

prioritizing grant aid and one-on-one financial advising, Lamar helps students reduce their dependence on loans and remain focused on graduation.”

“Low student debt, paired with the access of an opportunity university, allows students to focus on their future and graduate ready to move forward with confidence into the workforce,” she said.

Lamar University President Jaime Taylor said affordability is central to expanding opportunity for students across Southeast Texas and beyond.

“We are committed to being an opportunity university where access to education leads to real possibilities after graduation,” Taylor said. “By investing in scholarships and providing clear financial guidance, we help ensure our

students leave Lamar with options — not obstacles — as they step into their careers and communities.”

As a Carnegie-designated Opportunity College & University and ranked number one in lowest student debt, Lamar University is poised to help students turn access and education into opportunity.

By keeping college affordable and aligning academic programs with high-paying, in-demand careers, Lamar graduates can build meaningful lives while strengthening the workforce across Southeast Texas. The entire region benefits from local industries to families and communities who rely on a strong, educated workforce.

To learn more about educational opportunities at Lamar University visit [lamar.edu](http://lamar.edu).

## CAMPUS BRIEFS

*Got a campus event you want to publicize? Let us know. Email us at [editor@lamaruniversitypress.com](mailto:editor@lamaruniversitypress.com)*

### CARDINAL VIEW

Lamar University will host the spring Cardinal View, Feb. 28. The recruitment event gives high school students the opportunity to meet with the various departments and student organizations on campus.

Organizations may register for a table through LUHub. Setup for the event is scheduled for Feb. 27.

### IOWA AVENUE PARTIAL CLOSURE

Iowa Avenue, located between the

G-2 parking lot and the Science and Technology Building is partially closed for construction. Alternate routes to enter the G-2 parking lot are available through Georgia Avenue and Cunningham Street. The closure is expected to last no more than two weeks.

### RED BULL BUSINESS IDEA COMPETITION

LU’s Venture Center and Red Bull have partnered offer students a chance to compete for \$100,000 and a trip to

Silicon Valley. An information session will be held, Feb. 23, at 4 p.m. in the CICE Building’s Hatchery.

### TEMPORARY LIBRARY LOCATION

Gray Library remains closed for renovations. All of its services have been temporarily relocated. Circulation services can be found in the old Student Health Center near the tennis courts and Communications Building. Computer lab and printing services have been relocated to the 271 and 273

Setzer Student Center. The IT Help Desk and Cardinal Connect Laptop Loaner Program are also available in 271 SSC.

### LUTV AUDITIONS

LUTV News will hold auditions for news anchors and reporters, Feb. 13, at 11:30 a.m. in 116 Theatre Annex. For more information, call 409-880-8038, or email [gswilliams@lamar.edu](mailto:gswilliams@lamar.edu) or [sawais@lamar.edu](mailto:sawais@lamar.edu).

— Compiled by Rayna Christy

FEB. 19 - 22

## MIDDLE TOWN

APR. 9 - 12

## NEXT DRAFT: STUDENT WORKS SERIES

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**LAURETTE** from page 1

not all beautiful, but very poetic. I think mine was very poetic.”

Laurette said that the bamboo and trees outside of her home provoke thoughts of her life as a journey.

“We sleep on a sleeping porch,” she said. “I could see on this side there was bamboo with its lovely fluttering leaves in the early morning breeze, and on the other side are the silent trees, the pecans, and everything else, just the ones without the leaves. So, you had a choice. You could roll this way or that way, and I considered a lot of this.”

“It’s been a good journey, because in my life, I have gotten to travel and learn.”

Laurette lived in Japan for a year while her husband, Richard, was stationed there in the Navy.

“That was probably as wonderful as anything could be for me,” she said. “It has a culture that Americans have trouble dealing with, because it has rules that everybody knows.”

As a “gaijin” — an outsider, Laurette said she didn’t have

to follow the same rules that women had to follow in Japan.

“I was openly defying the tradition and such during the time I was there,” she said.

A Michigan native, Laurette has lived in Beaumont since the 1970s. She has a bachelor’s degree in fine arts from Lamar University alongside an art education degree from Western Michigan University.

With 58 years in the arts, Laurette has advice for those just starting out on their journey.

“Be aware that it’s a tough life,” she said. “There are very few stars in the art world.”

She also noted one of her biggest creative challenges has been finding the time to make art while earning a living.

“I always thought I’d get a part-time job, but that didn’t work out,” Laurette said. “I got a supervisory job every time I turned around. That’s not a thing that is good for four hours and you get to go home.”

Laurette joined The Art Studio as its first tenant when



UP photo by Rayna Christy

Sandra Laurette polishes an art piece at home before transporting it to The Art Studio Inc., where her exhibit, “Retrospective: 42 Years at The Art Studio Inc.,” will be on display through Feb. 27.

it was located on the corner of Milam and Neches. When the organization moved to the old White House department store building downtown she moved with it, before ending up at its current location at 720 Franklin St.

She said she feels lucky to have found partners at The Studio most of the time to motivate her to make art even when she was tired after working all day.

“The first was Noel Sargeant, who now lives in Canada,” Laurette said. “My best partner was Suzanne Garrett. We encountered each other working side by side in the White House, I think around 1989.”

Garrett and Laurette would

go to The Studio in the evenings after work.

“You leave work at five, six, seven o’clock at night,” she said. “You close the work you’re doing. You head for your car and you get home and make some dinner, shove some dinner down your face. Eat quickly and jump into the car after you throw off the work clothes because you certainly don’t need to wear them to wedge clay in or fire up a kiln, or all kinds of things that destroy clothes. And so you’re off until 10, 11, 12 o’clock at night.”

“We did it three days a week, and (Suzanne) was with me for most of these years. She probably did close to 20 years with me like that.”

The retrospective includes work made from various materials, including cast iron, porcelain and clay. Over the years, she has moved from one idea to another seamlessly. One of her favorite themes involve clouds which she creates in a variety of media.

Laurette said she encourages people to look for the shifts in her work when looking at the works and she is happy to answer questions about specific pieces and her artistic life in general.

“It is clouds and figures and landscapes and such,” she said. “And if you don’t understand that, that’s OK — I have a story that matches that.”

For more, visit [artstudio.org](http://artstudio.org).



UP photo by Rayna Christy

Sandra Laurette hangs a piece titled “Kathleen’s Belt” at The Art Studio Inc.



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Lamar's Shaila Forman drives to the hoop during the Cardinals' 54-45 Southland Conference win over the Northwestern State Demons, Feb. 5, in the Neches Federal Credit Union Arena at the Montagne Center.



UP photo by Gerrod Fuller

# Cardinal Sports Wrap

**WOMEN'S BASKETBALL**  
The Lady Cardinals had two Southland Conference games against Northwestern State, Feb. 5, and Stephen F. Austin, Feb. 7. The Cards knocked down the Northwestern State Demons 54-45. The team was led by sophomore Jacei Denley with an 18-point performance. Fourth-quarter defense was the highlight of the game, as the Demons were held to only four-points. The Cards game against SFA was unlucky. After coming back down from a 15-point deficit, Big Red was leading by two with 0.6 left on the clock. Unfortunately, SFA hit a three at the buzzer to end the game 58-57. Sophomore Kamryn Wilson led the way with 14-points.

loss puts the team seventh in the Southland Conference.

**MEN'S BASKETBALL**  
The Cardinals came up short Stephen F. Austin, Feb. 7, 84-74. The team was led by sophomore Braden East with 33-points. The

**SOFTBALL**  
The Lamar softball team opened their season at the LSU Tiger Classic, Feb. 5-8. The Cards opened the tournament with a loss to North Carolina State, but shocked Big-10 Illinois not once, but twice. In the first game, freshman Isabella Flores walked off Illinois in extra innings, giving Lamar the win 4-3. In the second game, Lamar had a commanding 5-2 win. They lost the remaining two games of the tournament against LSU and Nevada.

**MEN'S TENNIS**  
The Lamar tennis team swept Alcorn State 7-0, Feb. 8, in Vicksburg, Mississippi. The team was dominant in the doubles, only giving up one game combined. The Cardinal's next match is home against Dillard University, Feb. 21.

# Seahawks' D stifles Pats in SB LX

**Aaron Saenz**  
UP sports editor

Another year of football is over with the Seattle Seahawks defeating the New England Patriots, 29-13, in Super Bowl LX.

Clear skies and cool weather set the stage for both teams. In the biggest sporting event in the country, the Seahawks took advantage of the opportunity. They won in dominant fashion and the game never felt close.

Both teams got off to extremely slow starts, with the first quarter ending in a 3-0 Seahawk lead. The second quarter was more of the same, with the Seahawks kicking two more field goals and the Patriots continued to be shut out, bringing the score to 9-0 at the half.

The third quarter was more of the same, with the only scoring coming from another Seahawks field goal to put the

game at 12-0, but then Seattle started turning their fantastic defensive play into turnovers. With almost two minutes left in the third, the defensive line broke through and got to Patriots QB Drake Maye for a strip sack, giving them the ball at the 37-yard line.

Seattle QB Sam Darnold capitalized on this opportunity almost immediately. After a five-play, 37-yard drive, Darnold found tight end A.J. Barner wide open in the corner of the endzone for a touchdown to give the Seahawks a commanding 19-0 lead with 13-and-a-half minutes left in the season.

The Patriots responded almost instantly, with a three-play, 65-yard drive ending in a Drake Maye 35-yard touchdown pass to receiver Mack Hollins to bring the score to 19-7.

The Patriots would get the ball back after holding Seattle to a three-and-out, but the

Seahawks defense took over. For the rest of the game, every scoring opportunity happened because of their unit. It started with forcing a Maye interception which resulted in a field goal. The very next drive, the defensive line collapsed on Maye, causing him to wildly throw the ball into Seattle linebacker Uchenna Nwosu's hands, which he would return for a touchdown, bringing the score to 29-7.

The Patriots scored again, but it was meaningless and too late. The Seahawks got the ball back and ran out the time, becoming Super Bowl LX champions in a 29-13 dominant game.

Running back Kenneth Walker III was named Super Bowl MVP with 161-yards of total offense, but the Seahawks defensive line is what propelled the team to the championship. The unit got constant pressure on Maye, causing him to miss easy

throws and turn the ball over during desperation heaves. Seattle D-line had six sacks, one off the Super Bowl record. The sacks came at crucial times as well, such as on important third downs. The defense also is what ultimately put the nail in the coffin with their late game pick-six when New England was finally getting some momentum.

To say the Patriots came out slow is an understatement. They couldn't do anything for most of the game. The offense only made three first downs across the first three quarters, and only had 78 yards of offense during that time.

Their scoring just came too late when the game was already out of hand. Second-year QB Maye played one of his worst games of his season, finishing with a 16.3 quarterback rating. The fault doesn't fall only on him, however, as his offensive line couldn't block a peewee football team. Maye

was pressured on nearly every single one of his drop backs and could not find open receivers quick enough, resulting in either getting sacked, throwing the ball away, or having to make a play with his legs. If the Patriots want to get back to the Super Bowl, they are going to need to address these issues.

The Patriots defense played well for most of the game, holding the Seahawks to five field goals and one touchdown. Standout cornerback Christian Gonzalez made play after play and held Offensive Player of the Year Jaxon Smith-Njigba to two catches and 26 yards. But, the defense just couldn't make up for a lack of offensive spark.

The Seahawks will look to retain most of their core, but under head coach Mike Macdonald the defense is still going to be scary next year. Although it is hard to be repeat champions, don't be surprised if Seattle is here to stay.

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Tyrrell Historical Library

## Search for community theme of LU theatre's 'Middle-town'

**Regina Ruiz**  
UP staff writer

Ordinary life is rarely ordinary in "Middletown." Lamar University's department of theatre & dance will present Will Eno's eponymous play, Feb. 19–22, in the Studio Theatre.

The play follows the residents of a small American town as they navigate love, loss and the quiet moments that define everyday existence.

Senior Porter LaPray, who plays John Dodge, said the script's naturalistic dialogue drew him in immediately.

"The text is very conversational," LaPray said. "Whenever I question whether I'm saying a line right, I just think about how I would say it in my own voice."

John's story tackles depression and a suicide attempt, giving the role emotional weight. LaPray said playing such heavy material has required balancing vulnerability with personal boundaries.

"I've had to remind myself that I'm playing John Dodge — I'm not Porter," he said. "It's important to tell stories like this, but it's also important to protect yourself while doing it."

Senior Gracie Parsley por-



Gracie Parsley, left and Porter LaPray play Mary Swanson and John Dodge in LU's production of "Middletown," Feb. 19-22.

UP photo by Regina Ruiz

trays Mary Swanson, a warm and uplifting presence in the town. Parsley said she was drawn to the play's ensemble approach, which gives space to many voices.

"There's so much going on with so many different characters," she said. "It makes the town feel full and alive."

Mary's positivity contrasts with some of the play's darker themes, something Parsley said challenged her as an actor.

"She's very uplifting, even when things get heavy," Parsley said. "Finding how those two things exist together has been really rewarding."

Sophomore Mallory Craigen, who plays the town's doctor, said the play initially reminded her of Thornton Wilder's "Our Town", but its voice quickly stood out as something uniquely Eno.

"It's a text I've never dealt with before," she said. "The language expresses itself in a

really different way. Rehearsals have taught me the power of really listening to each other on stage."

Despite its philosophical undertones, the production still leaves room for humor and humanity. LaPray describes it as "heavy," "mundane" and "funny," noting that its focus on everyday life is what makes it resonate.

Parsley said the town itself is a place defined by connection and simplicity.

"They're fulfilled with their everyday lives," she said. "The small moments feel like the best days ever."

The actors said they hope audiences leave the theater feeling reflective rather than overwhelmed.

"I hope people feel a renewed sense of how important their lives are and how much they affect the people around them," Parsley said.

For tickets, visit [lutd.ludus.com](http://lutd.ludus.com).



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