

SUMMER 2025 • A UNIVERSITY PRESS MAGAZINE

# UPbeat



## MOON DANCE

Troupe celebrates  
Lunar New Year

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INSIDE:

EMT SLEEP, SHOWBIZ ALUM,  
WOMEN'S SPORTS,  
AND MORE



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## Spinning Grooves

*Text and photo by Maria Rodriguez*

In the age of digital streaming, the number of people buying physical copies of albums is declining. However, **FERNANDA LARRAZABAL** is old school — she buys her music on vinyl or CD, defying the trend. The Groves senior received a record player when she was 15. “I really liked having physical copies of the music,” Fernanda says. The business major puts thought into the next vinyl or CD she will purchase. “I usually will listen to the album first and decide if I like the majority of the songs on it,” she says. If she had to pick her favorites, Fernanda chooses “It’s going to be ‘Solar Power’ by Lorde, ‘When the Pawn...’ by Fiona Apple, and ‘NFR’ by Lana Del Rey,” she says. Fernanda does not just collect the albums, but she tries to play all of them, although some of the ones she bought when she was 15 or 16 years old may not be so frequent in the rotation. Collecting albums is more than just supporting the musicians, Fernanda says. “To me it’s like a collection of my youth,” she says. Fernanda’s tastes may change, but the memories stay. “It’s just kind of like the trademark at this point in my life — I really enjoyed this kind of music,” she says.

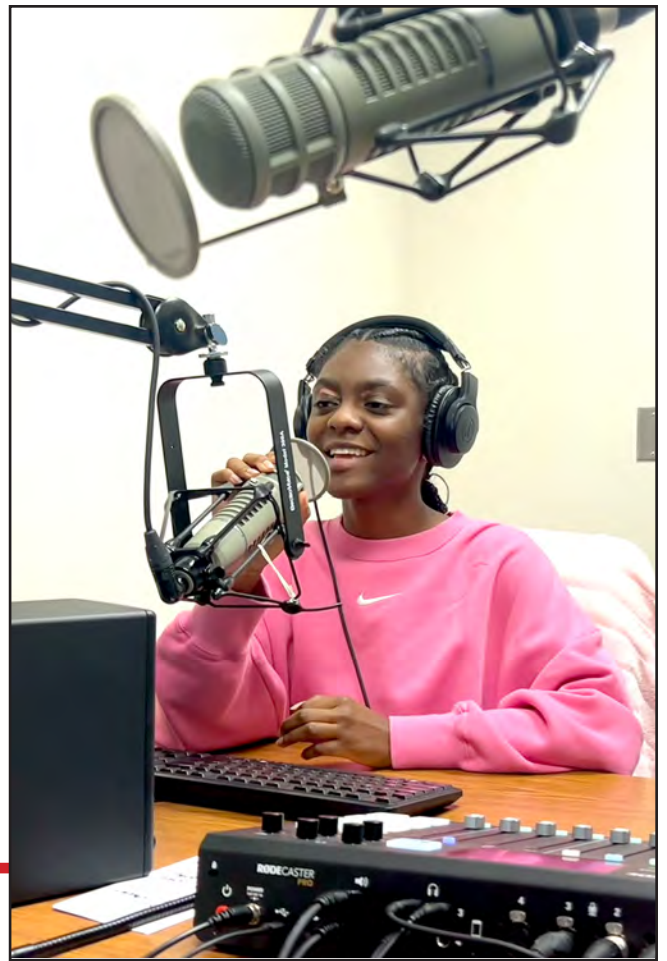


# If You Ask Her

Many students listen to podcasts on their way to class or while they do their homework, but **BRILEY O'CONNOR** takes it a step up. The Humble freshman hosts her own podcast, "If You Ask Me," on the Apple Podcast app. "I really wanted to have an outlet to be able to share my experiences with so many people that will be able to relate," the political science major says. "It is just really a weekly source of wisdom. You tune in and you hear some uplifting and positive affirmations." All of Briley's posts incorporate the color pink.

"Pink is associated with femininity, and although anyone can benefit from my messages, I often have women in mind when I'm planning what to share," Briley says. "Pink is also often associated with love, and I share all of my messages to promote a love of self." However, Briley's favorite part of hosting is receiving feedback and hearing how it encourages other people. "I think the growth, encouragement, and love of self and others is a huge cause," she says. If you're looking for some uplifting advice, just ask Briley. You may find just what you need.

*Text and photo by Rayna Christy*



## Picturing Feelings

**KAITLYNN ELETTE** utilizes her hobby, art, to help others using art therapy. The Buna senior has a dream to open an art therapy clinic after graduating Lamar University. "Art therapy is not just painting your feelings away. It is more in-depth research that there is not a lot of," the university studies with multi-disciplinary studies says. Kaitlynn says she is eager to conduct research into what type of traumas create certain subjects of artwork. "I think that over time, (art therapy) is going to get more accreditation for it, and that there will be more coming out on the benefits of it," the self-taught artist says. "There was a case where they found out who sexually abused the child through his art. I believe more cases like this can happen." Kaitlynn hopes to work with children who have been abused, those with autism and veterans with and without post-traumatic stress disorder. Kaitlynn uses symbolism with her artwork. "I use reference pieces when I am working because my dad told me to draw what I have seen." Kaitlynn comes from generations of artists, but she is the first to use art therapy.

*Text and photo by Becca Wallage*





# Pez=Lamar+R

From Chicago's Frosty Faustings tournament to Boomtown Beatdowns in LU's Maes Building, **DAMIAN "PEZ" PEREZ** is a strong "Guilty Gear XX Accent Core +R" player, currently ranked No. 240 in the world. "Here, locally, in Beaumont, I pretty consistently rank first" he says. The Nederland MBA student has won all of the Boomtown Fighting Game Community's tournaments this semester without losing a single set. Pez gained control of the Beaumont scene with the aid of his main character, Testament. "My primary motive whenever I'm playing is to limit options," he says. "Testament really excels in controlling space and cutting off movement." Beaumont is not the only scene where Pez has a presence. "There's going to be Texas Showdown, which I'm going to at the end of March," he says. "Because the game is older, the entrants are notably lower than most games, but we're looking to still hit roughly 30-40 people." The Texas Showdown takes place in Houston and is the largest fighting game tournament in Texas and last year, he placed fifth. Pez is always trying to get people to try the game, most often by advertising its price tag. "I put 600 hours into it off of a \$3 purchase. To me, that's worthwhile" Pez says.



*Text and photo by Waylon C. Brooks*

## Hooked on Rugs

*Text and photo by Maddie Sims*

It's hard to imagine a living space or comfortable bedroom without a colorful plush rug. **MAIYA BOWDEN** knows that all too well and has made creating custom carpets her business venture. "I really wanted to find another form of income, so I decided to do something that I can use for my creativity and artistic vision," she says. The Port Arthur junior started her business, Kali Rugz, in the middle of 2024. "I was always interested in custom rugs," she says. "I said, 'Let me try to learn this myself, and let's try to profit off of this creative mission.' So, I started looking up YouTube tutorials, and of course, TikToks and Instagram reels." Since Kali Rugz was established, Maiya has sold roughly around 730-750 custom rugs. Each rug ranges from two to five feet and is commissioned to the customer's request. The communication major projects the desired rug onto a material fabric and draws it out. Then, she uses a tufting gun, an automatic device which threads yarn through fabric, and glues down the backing. The base price for a rug is \$150, but Maiya says she is offering a discount of \$100 for LU students. For more, visit @kalirugz on Instagram and TikTok.





# Elly Loves Eilish

There are fans and then there are superfans — and then there's **ELEANA CAMPOS**. She is obsessed with Billie Eilish. "I became a fan when I was 13 because she seemed like someone I could relate to," the Freer sophomore says. "The first song I ever heard was 'Watch,' which was on her first EP," Eleana, whose nickname is Elly, says. "I loved her voice and the music video." Eleana has seen the singer several times. "I saw her at Austin City Limits," Eleana says. "There were a lot of people performing but I only went to see her. It was a great experience, and I just felt so happy." Eleana surrounds herself with Eilish memorabilia. "For a long time, I didn't have much merch," she says. "Then I started to make my own money, and I bought everything that had Billie Eilish's name or face on it. My favorite thing in my collection is the Billie Converse, because it was inspired by her last album, which is my favorite. They're also stylish." The singer is now part of the nursing major's daily routine. "I can't go a day without listening to her music, and if you see me walking around, odds are I am wearing something Billie themed."



Text and photo by Aaron Saenz



# FEATURE



Story package by Maddie Sims and Meagan Lafley NRP

## SLEEP IS FOR THE WEAK

### Sleep deprivation negative part of emergency services culture

CAREERS IN EMERGENCY MEDICAL services are uniquely demanding. EMTs and paramedics work long hours with unpredictable off times. They endure the stress of both administering lifesaving care and piloting large emergency vehicles at above-average speeds, often doing so while having been awake for 24 to 48 hours or longer.

The practice of working long shifts has become widely accepted as the standard for EMS providers. Many agencies seldom mandate rest periods or downtime.

The effects of chronic sleep deprivation directly inhibit EMTs' ability to

complete their life-saving duties. The chronically sleep-deprived struggle to pay attention, to make decisions and to think critically, and their overall vigilance is compromised.

There are two different classifications of sleep deprivation; total sleep deprivation, where an individual does not sleep at all for an extended period of time, and chronic partial sleep deprivation, where people sleep regularly, but get insufficient rest. Both types of sleep deprivation are commonly found among EMTs and paramedics.

#### Obligated to the call

Paramedic Michael Cummings has worked in the field for eight years and EMT Logan Butts has worked for three. Both said they preferred not to disclose where they work. They work long hours sometimes with little sleep.

On a typical day, Cummings and Butts respond to 911 calls and treat and transport patients. They also do facility transfers, which includes transferring bed-bound patients to facilities that can handle their level of care.

When Cummings first started, he was



on a modified “DuPont” schedule for two years, working a 12-hour rotating shift pattern commonly used in 24/7 operations.

“I flip flopped from nights to days in different rotations,” he said. “I did five nights on, six off, four days on, five off, three days on, two off, and a 24-hour day. It was a very bizarre schedule.”

Now, Cummings and Butts work a 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. seven day on, seven off schedule.

“But if someone calls 911, at 5:59 p.m., and we’re the closest unit to it, and our relief has not shown up to relieve us, then we have to,” Cummings said. “We’re obligated to run that 911 call. So now, our 12-hour shift has turned into a 13- or 14-hour shift, but that’s our truck.”

Butts said being sleep deprived has taken its toll.

“In the past, I’ve noticed myself getting more and more impatient, quicker to anger, the less sleep I get,” he said.

“When you think about it, we work a 12-hour shift plus a 20-minute drive. We get off at 6 p.m., we probably leave at 6:15, so we’re home at 6:35 at best. You have stuff you need to do just in life, including making dinner, preparing the next day’s lunch, laundry, cleaning, just regular stuff. I like to work out, so then we wake up at 4:15 a.m. So, if we are not asleep by 8:15 p.m., we don’t get eight hours of sleep. That’s a best case scenario.”

## Consequences of sleep deprivation

Research has found that total sleep deprivation hinders attention and working memory, as well as long-term memory formation and decision-making capacity.

Sound decision-making is paramount to providing adequate patient care, especially for EMTs and paramedics who often find themselves treating patients with the assistance of only one partner or alone. A provider that cannot make sound, quick decisions poses a great risk to medical outcomes of the patients that they treat.

Difficulty forming memories is also counterproductive to the completion of an EMT’s duties, which includes producing several pages of detailed charting every time a provider makes contact with a patient. It is common for a provider to be dispatched to several emergencies in

rapid sequence, with little to no time between emergencies to keep notes, much less finish a patient care report.

An EMT who struggles to form memories will find it difficult to sit down at the end of a busy shift and accurately chart the care that they administered several hours, or sometimes even several shifts prior.

Cummings said by the seventh day of his and Butts rotation, they are “pretty darn tired.”

“That’s sort of the biggest problem with a 12-hour shift. It’s just hard to find time to do stuff without sacrificing sleep. The average person works eight hours a day, so we work a minimum of four hours more.

“Then the problem with night shifts, I found, is that life doesn’t really exist at night. The doctor’s appointments are during the day. If you want to go out with your friends or go out during the day, you don’t stay consistent with your sleep schedule.”

Both Cummings and Butts said they’ve become reliant on caffeine.

“I’ve never been the type that needed coffee or energy drinks until I got into EMS,” Butts said. “It’s gotten to the point where it’s a safety issue. Just the other day, I drove up and worked a shift in Lufkin. It’s a two-hour drive there, two-hour drive back. I had to drink a couple of energy drinks that day just to keep myself from driving off the road.”

## Sleep deprivation vs. alcohol impairment

Chronic partial sleep deprivation diminishes one’s capacity to pay attention. An EMT who struggles to pay attention is a danger behind the wheel of an ambulance. Likewise, a paramedic who is struggling to focus has a diminished decision-making capacity and cannot be expected to efficiently and reliably make life-saving decisions.

The prevalence of EMS personnel suffering from chronic fatigue can also jeopardize the lives of anyone sharing the roadway. The dangers of driving while drunk are generally well understood by the public. Less known are the dangers of driving while fatigued, nor are the similarities between drunk driving and fatigued driving often recognized. In a clinical trial from 2000, subjects per-

formed comparatively the same in tests of cognitive and motor performance while sleep deprived for between 17 and 19 hours as they did with a blood alcohol concentration of 0.05%.

Similarly, an article posted by the Sleep Foundation claimed that after 24 hours of sleep deprivation, an individual can expect to experience inhibition of reaction time, vigilance, multi-tasking, and hand-eye coordination that is equivalent to what they would experience with a blood alcohol content of 0.1%. To offer perspective on these figures, an individual caught driving with a BAC of 0.08% or higher would be considered to be driving under the influence in all 50 states.

The article also states experts estimate drowsy driving could be responsible for as many as 6,000 fatalities in the United States every year. That presumes normal driving conditions.

Those piloting ambulances, however, are often moving at 10 to 20 miles per hour above the posted speed limits. This practice presents an increased risk of injury or death to all ambulance occupants, even in the absence of a sleep-deprived driver.

“We’re lucky our company has a bunch of safeguards in place,” Butts said. “The average person gets pretty tired after hours 11 and 12, but there’s some companies that have 24 or 48-hour shifts and you’re driving the entire time. Our company has at least realized that’s a safety issue, and they won’t let us work more than 12 to 18-hours on a 12-hour truck. Plus, we’re allowed to call down-time, no questions asked.”

Butts said every ambulance has advanced cameras which can detect when a driver is starting to feel fatigued, and will notify them to take a break.

“It’s dinged at me a few times because it’s recognized that I’m tired,” Butts said. “Oddly enough, it’s never towards the end of my shift, I’m actually more lively at the end. It’s at the very beginning where I’m yawning and trying to get awake. That’s a little safeguard they’ve put in place for us.

“And if for some reason, you’re too tired to go out of town, you can always express that. We’ll pull over and call down-time, go to the nearest station —





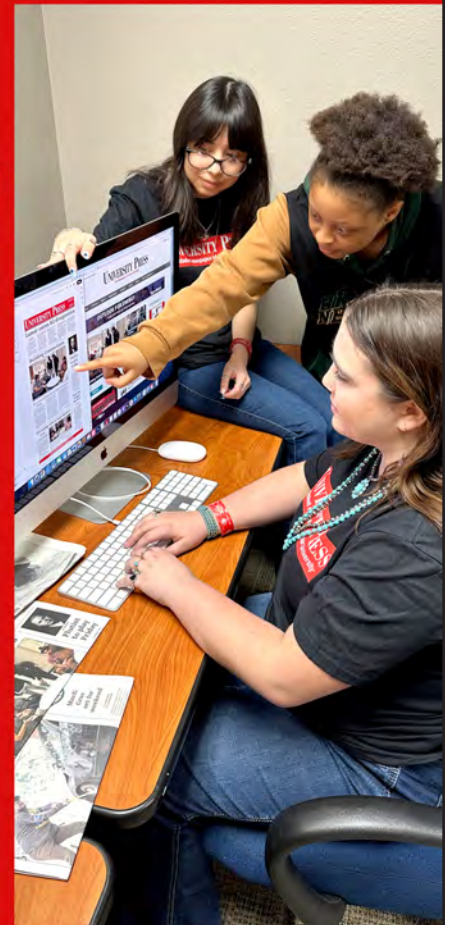
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Through a sleep quality index,  
a fatigue questionnaire  
and a demographic survey completed by EMTs,  
results found severe mental and physical fatigue  
were present in 44.5% of all subjects.



UPbeat graphic by Maddie Sims

#### SLEEP— from page 9

or swapping drivers is pretty common, especially on the way back. Our company's been very good about that.”

#### Effects on mental and physical health

Insisting providers continue to treat patients once they are beyond the point of exhaustion does little more than set them up for failure. For EMTs and paramedics, whose high-stress occupation already predisposes them to below-average mental health, the consequences can be even greater.

Research shows chronic shift work correlates heavily with diminished general mental and physiological health in prehospital. In a 2010 academic journal, researchers studied EMS providers who completed a sleep quality index, a fatigue

questionnaire, and a demographic survey. Results from both the sleep quality index and the fatigue questionnaire indicated that severe mental and physical fatigue was present in 44.5% of all subjects. The results from the demographic survey found that a majority of subjects were overweight or obese, and 59.6% had been diagnosed with one or more health conditions.

The Division of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School found that sleeping fewer than eight hours a night on a regular basis can increase an individual's likelihood of developing medical conditions such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, compromised immune function, and an increased instance of developing symptoms of the common cold.

Excessive shift work results in fatigue and lessened overall physical and mental wellness for EMS providers.

#### Adopting a cultural norm

A widely held belief among EMS providers is that shifts lasting 24 consecutive hours or longer, consistent, excessive overtime, and chronic sleeplessness are integral to the condition of being or becoming an EMT or paramedic.

“When it comes to being in the medical field, workers have to get used to, be okay with, and consistent with the limiting amount of sleep,” Cummings said.

The cultural mindset is that if a person is not “tough enough” to endure chronic sleep deprivation, then they must also be unfit for the other physical and psychological challenges of the job. The condition of being tired and overworked has become suffused throughout the culture — which is to say, to be an

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**PROFILE**

# **FRUIT CITY TO BIG APPLE**

Story package by Kami Greene



# Alumni Robards learned showbiz skills at LU

KATE ROBARDS, A SMALL-TOWN girl from Orange, Texas, is living the big-city dream as a writer, stand-up comedian, actor and producer living in the not-so-small borough of Manhattan, New York City.

One would think after living in six major cities across the globe, Robards would have lost her Texas twang. Still, when she walked back into the LUTV studio in February wearing bright yellow suede cowboy boots, it was clear that you can take the girl out of Southeast Texas, but you cannot take the Southeast Texas culture out of the girl.

With a list of accomplishments including having articles written about her work in *The Washington Post*, winning awards at Stage 32, a social network and educational platform for film, television, and theatre creatives, writing live scripted shows like “The Shorty Awards,” and headlining the Red Room in Austin, growing up, Robards said she never put self-respect on her achievements.

Although, her life may seem to be all glitz and glamour, it wasn’t always that way as she came from a low-income household, which affected her choice of university.

“My mom is a local reporter in Orange,” Robards said. “She doesn’t make a lot of money and is a single mom.”

Coming from humble beginnings, being a Pell Grant student and feeling like a loser, Robards said she found herself as a Cardinal at Lamar University, where she was a part of “literally everything.”

“I was in numerous Lamar commercials, even for the engineering school when I could barely pass math,” she said. “Obviously, I didn’t do everything, but I was very involved. I was involved in any activity that involved free stuff. We love a free shirt.”

Besides featuring in campus commercials and stacking up her Lamar swag, Robards became immersed in the communication department as she wrote for the University Press student newspaper, worked at KVLU, the campus radio station, and at LUTV.

Having a personality as big as hers, and with a face made to be in the limelight, it’s a no-brainer she was also involved in theatre, where she landed the role of Colum-



Kate Robards, visited the LUTV studio, left, on a recent visit to campus. Robards, above, performs standup at New York’s famous Apollo Theater.

bia in “The Rocky Horror Show.” She was also in LUTV professor Gordon S. Williams’s film “The Example,” where Robards made her small part as big as she could.

“When Gordon gave me the dishwasher roll, I respected that, and then he let me be a runner,” she said. “I was like, ‘I am gonna be the best.’”

As they filmed a fight scene, Robards was just supposed to run by and look.

“Well, I said, ‘I’m gonna look, and I’m gonna take a picture of them,’” she said. “I gave myself a whole thing that wasn’t in, and, you know, it was not required or desired, but you gotta milk that part.”

Despite being heavily involved in the Lamar community, Robards said she

wasn’t necessarily proud of her school, seeing it as just all she could afford. However, as she moved into the entertainment industry, she began to see it is not always about the name of the university on your degree, but rather the name of the person who earned that degree no matter what school one attends.

“And there was absolutely nothing wrong with going here, but even when I talk to students, sometimes this isn’t our dream, but there’s real, tangible shit to be gained here,” she said.

Robards realized that after landing a theatre fellowship in Washington DC.

“I applied and got the job — shocker,” Robards said. “Then being nosy, I searched through the files of all the applicants to see who I beat out, and it was like Yale, Harvard, all these Ivy League kids, and I went to my boss because she had known me by this point, and I said, ‘Why did you choose me?’” Robards said. “Those little insecurities were bubbling up; how do I stack up against these people? And she goes, at the end of the day, yeah, schools are great. You need the education to apply for this opportunity. But I want to know, will I like the person sitting next to me? Are they competent? At this point, everybody’s competent, so will I like them?”

Although reprimanded for her nosy behavior, Robards realized that even though one can have a degree from the most prestigious school in the world, if you are not likeable, then people are not going to want to be around you.

As Robards got started in her career, she met other former Cardinals, including Evan Wimberly, who Robards met through comedy. The university name was further-reaching than Robards knew, and she began to realize Lamar has helped her succeed in countless ways.

“You get the experience you’re supposed to have, and everything is what you put into it,” she said. “If you for a second discount the people here — the professors, the teachers, your fellow students — then you sure as H-E-double hockey sticks aren’t going to be able to respect people anywhere else.”

Comm administrator Cheryl Fitzpatrick guided Robards towards scholarships as the soon-to-be graduate began prepping to



leave the nest.

"I was like, 'Hey, it's finally happening, I'm graduating,'" Robards said. "Every person who's helped me should give me graduation money and presents and should help me find a job. I was just asking for jobs, jobs, jobs."

The choir teacher at Robards' high school knew someone who's looking for a nanny. After graduating in 2009, Robards began working for a Grammy Award-winning opera singer. Alongside caring for a child, who was just as important as the artist's Grammy Award, she said, Robards used her comm skills to write for the singer.

"Because she was a Grammy Award-winning opera singer, I would write her bios," she said. "I helped with a lot of different things outside of just the task of (nannying). It goes to the thing of, like, are you willing to work always trusting that there's skills to be learned?"

While at Lamar, Robards anchored the LUTV newscasts, where she said she felt insecure because she could not afford the nicest clothing compared to the students



A still from "The Example," featuring Robards, above, which focused on the 1943 Beaumont race riots. The poster below, promoting Robards' autobiographical one-woman show "Ain't That Rich."

around her. Despite that, Robards knew that instead of becoming a news anchor, she'd rather become an actress who played a news anchor.

Acting before the camera and on stage led Robards to discover she had a talent for making people laugh. Before long she was putting that talent to good use writing and performing stand-up comedy in New York.

Although comfortable in the comedy

scene now, her first experience in a comedy club, which happened when she was 21 and living in Beaumont, initially steered her away from the comedian lifestyle.

"I went to this comedy club, and the owner, who is a friend of mine now from Orange, said something about, guys and girls aren't going to like you," she said. "It was very discouraging, and I was like, 'Well, I never want that to happen.'"

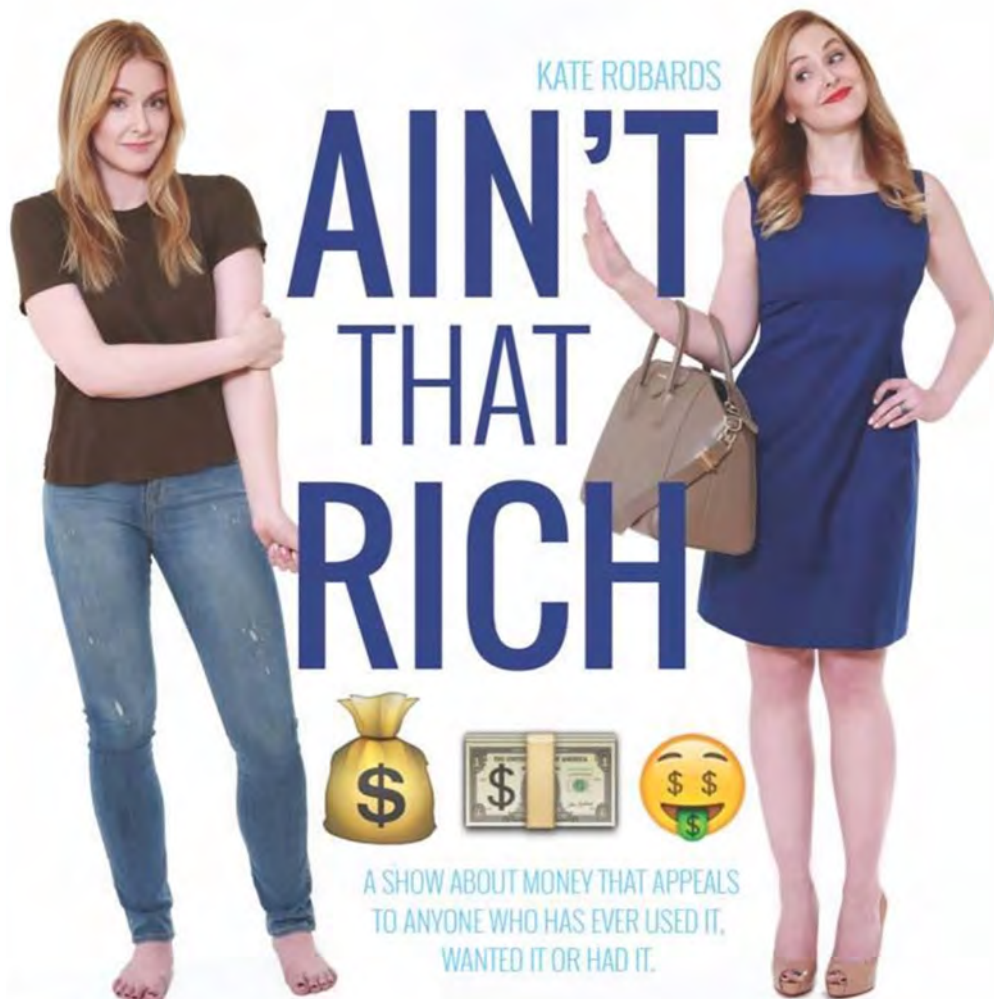
Robards said the club owner implied that girls wouldn't like her because they would think their boyfriends were trying to have sex with her and that she would be hated by the girlfriends.

"I was like, whoa, whoa, whoa," Robards said.

Growing up as a conservative Christian and being taught that temptation in any form is a sin, Robards steered clear of the comedy clubs for a while until she found herself in New York, which she said is "the comedy Mecca." She frequently attended open mics, and before she knew it, she began performing solo shows, and monologues from plays. Robards began getting booked more often, and eventually she found herself performing at the famous Apollo Theatre in Harlem, the iconic home to many Black comedians.

"There were like 1,600 people there, and I went with some other comedian friends who were Black, and I was very new in comedy," she said. "I got really self-conscious because I asked the Black woman who was running the audition, 'Should I be doing these jokes here?' and she goes, 'Did they get you here?' and I was like 'Yes ma'am,' and she's like 'Do those.'"

Being a newer comedian, Robards thought this was her "American Idol" moment. Not the moment where the judges hit the golden buzzer, but the part in the





show where they bring on someone only to humiliate them on live television. However, it turned out to be a golden buzzer moment after all, or at least close enough.

“I didn’t get booed off, but I have never heard more both boos and laughs in my life,” she said. “Some of my white friends were there who weren’t familiar with the culture. Some of them were looking around like, ‘Oh my gosh, I can’t believe that happened,’ and I’m like, ‘No, it happens to the best.’”

Robards has written for well-known entertainers such as Simu Liu, Pheobe Robinson, Busy Phillips and Kathy Griffin, as well as Stacey Abrams.

The comedian describes herself as someone who “excels at writing about herself in third person omniscient.” She has also written several plays that focus on identity, class and her roots, such as “Mandarin Orange,” a solo play about her journey from Orange to Shanghai, China; “Ain’t that Rich,” a solo play about Robards’ adjustment to having money and realizing what money can’t and can buy; “Madame Pearl,” a four-person play about four lives that intertwine around a “mystic bayou woman;” and her award-winning solo play, “Polyshamory,” about polyamory in her marriage.

“I married this guy who was super rich and also ugly, but at least he had money, and he wanted to become polyamorous,” she said. “My family, like I said, super Christian, and they were like, ‘What has Satan got hold of you?’ Like they were praying for me. But I wrote the play about it, and I had a Broadway producer who wanted to take me up with my dream.”

Robards has since closed that chapter of her life and is now in a monogamous relationship with her boyfriend in their Manhattan apartment. Although Robards enjoys the city, she recently took a short break from The Big Apple and flew back home to connect with her roots and create work that reflects her identity as an individual from Southeast Texas.

“I’ve met a lot of great people in New York and have been collaborating with them, and I’ve been working for companies on things that pay, but it wasn’t fulfilling me on a spiritual, intellectual and emotional level,” she said.

Showbusiness can be a rollercoaster career. Robards said she worked on several projects in New York that never got to see the light of day, and after getting laid off



from her last job, she realized that her current situation “was not it.” She wanted to create work that reflected who she was down to her southern core without having to worry about her work being up to industry standards.

“My favorite thing about being here, as opposed to Manhattan or New York City, is that since I’ve been in New York, my brain has become like, here is what the industry wants — this is what you should do,” she said. “Whereas here, you have the freedom to be like, this is what I want to tell a story on. I want to take all of those skills that I have been honing and learning for the past seven years in New York and bring them here, but for the right reasons, because I want to tell a story.”

“My identity is so much that of a Southeast Texan, and specifically someone from Orange. I don’t want to get so far removed that I’m repping Southeast Texas and I’m not still able to be an active part of the community here.”

Robards said she thinks of herself as

LU alum Kate Robards performs her standup, above, at the Apollo theater in New York. Robards poses with her fellow LUTV students, left, from her time at Lamar.

being like Matthew McConaughey who works all over but still has strong ties to his home state.

“I really just have these stories to tell as a person and as an artist, and in some sense, you need to be on the ground floor and connect with what your roots are,” she said.

And that is where Robards is currently in her career. She has given up on chasing the Hollywood dream to tell home-grown stories and then, one day, sell them to Hollywood. However, if anyone from Hollywood is reading this, she said she is just kidding about giving up.

“The future really involves me making projects for myself and the community that I am from and giving back,” she said. “Having worked on the corporate side of the industry, I want to work on getting some grant money so that I can hire people locally in Southeast Texas. That’s a dream of mine, and a goal that I am actively working towards every day.”

From being a college student sitting in the LUTV studio knowing she’d rather become an actress to being a writer, stand-up comedian, actor, producer — and Southeast Texan, through and through — Robards is nothing short of a go-getter. She proves that one may come from humble beginnings, but they do not have to define one’s end.

For more, visit [katearobards.com](http://katearobards.com).



**IN PICTURES**

# MOON DANCERS







Photo story by Sydney Vo

# INSIDE A LUNAR NEW YEAR LION DANCE



AT THE STRIKE OF 12 on Jan. 29, the Vien Thong Tu Lion dance team hosted their annual mid-night performance to welcome the Year of the Snake.

The non-profit organization founded in 2004, consists of volunteers of all ages from the Houston area.

Dedicated to preserving tradition and supporting their temple, the team celebrates the

Lunar New Year with a lively lion dance performance.

"This event is very special to us because it gives a nostalgic, homey feeling dancing at our temple versus dancing for businesses. It is the best way to start the year," Cecilia Thai, the team's coach, said.

The night featured a dragon show and rhythmic drum show.

"I am very passionate about the dragon instrumentals, and I am really proud of how well we did," drummer Alan Do said.

After the ground routine and table routine, the celebration continued with firecrackers.

Reflecting on the excitement and joy of the evening, Kenny Lam, a team member, shared, "This is the most fun I've ever had."













A graphic for LUTV NEWS. The top half features a red and black abstract design with a world map. The text 'LUTV NEWS' is in large white letters, with 'CAMPUS | COMMUNITY | CULTURE' below it. At the bottom, it says 'Find us on' followed by Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube icons. Below the icons are the handles '@lutvnews', '@\_LUTVNews', and 'LUTV News &amp; Media Online'.





EMT or a paramedic is to be utterly and ceaselessly exhausted.

This culture puts newcomers under pressure to agree to extremely long hours. Tolerating sleeplessness has become so commonplace that it could result in a negative rite of initiation, where new employees are purposely expected to stay awake for extended periods or risk being rejected or passed over by employers in favor of those with a higher tolerance for exhaustion.

One may even fear being ostracized by coworkers and regarded as an undesirable partner, as coworkers may fear finding themselves on the scene of an extreme emergency with a partner who is too inhibited by tiredness to properly provide assistance.

This incentivizes newcomers to conceal or be dishonest about their levels of fatigue to avoid appearing weak or unfit for duty.

### **Sleep deprivation in American culture**

The idea that “sleeping is a vice, but sleep deprivation is a virtue” is not exclusive to the culture surrounding EMS; more broadly, it is rooted deeply in American culture.

In the book “Dangerously Sleepy,” author Alan Derickson writes about the shift in perception, especially among blue-collar shift workers, from the 19th century to the present, that a hard-working man is one who works long hours with little rest. Being chronically overworked and, as a result, chronically sleep deprived, has become synonymous with being motivated and generally successful.

This praise of chronic exhaustion resulted in the demonization of prioritizing the biological need for rest. The belief that tiredness is integral to one’s identity as an EMT or even just a hard-working provider, coupled with the belief that seeking adequate levels of rest labels one as lazy and unmotivated, is a dangerous combination.

Long-time EMTs and paramedics have found an environmental niche and have built their lives around long hours. Fear of competition or apprehension of

change, may cause EMS providers to push back against attempts to regulate shift length or impose limits on overtime hours.

Plagued by a mindset of, “This is how we have always done things,” EMS workers have largely internalized this exhaustion culture.

### **A need to adapt**

Culturally, what is needed is not simply a change of practice, but also a change of ideas, perceptions and culture. This change cannot happen until an honest evaluation of data surrounding sleep deprivation and its consequences is embraced.

The United States has experienced a crisis of staffing of EMTs and paramedics in the past few years because of the working conditions and high demands of the job.

### **Awareness and self-care**

Cummings said he and Butts strive to take care of their mental health as much as possible.

“Logan and I are both, I feel, pretty good at that,” Cummings said. “We travel relatively often on our seven days off.”

Butts said he spends a lot of time outdoors and has a therapist to deal with the mental stress that accompanies the job.

“There have been times when we’ve experienced some awful, traumatic things that’s kept me up, and that’s caused some sleeping issues,” Butts said. “I just didn’t sleep as much because my brain was just going off about the things we’ve seen. That’s something that we’ve had to learn to cope with.

“A big cause of it is just, ‘How could I have done this all better? Could I possibly have saved this person’s life?’ And luckily, with Michael and I, we know that our skills are where they need to be to where if that patient had a chance to make it, it was with us.”

Butts said people who have worked in the field longer develop coping mechanisms.

“I’ve only been in it three years,” Butts said. “It takes a while to see almost everything. Michael has seen it all. I will say, though, that even just after my three years, I’m doing much better.”

One way of coping is to dehumanize



EMT-paramedic Meagan Lafley was photographed by her coworker in the ambulance during a long shift.

the patient, Butts said, almost looking at them as machines to be fixed, although it is hard when they could not save a patient.

“(It) separates the emotion from it,” he said. “If I can separate the emotions on the call, it prevents me from getting tunnel vision and letting the emotions take hold and prevent me from doing my job. That kind of disconnect has to be there for mental health’s sake.”

Despite the difficulties of sleep deprivation and trauma, Cummings and Butts said they love their jobs. Cummings said the second he stops enjoying it, he will stop.

“It’s not a job you do for the money,” he said.

Butts said he always wanted to work in the medical field and being an EMT gives him a more direct connection with his community.

“You are going into these people’s homes, and we even work in the town I grew up in,” he said. “I’ve driven past these houses my whole life, and now I’m going into them, seeing what it’s like inside, seeing what these people’s lives are like, and helping them.”

Emergency medical service workers perform a vital role in the community. It is a hard and often thankless role. Recognition of their working conditions is integral to continued quality of service and well-being of the workers so we can all benefit from their work.





Story by Brian Quijada • Photos by Carlos Vilorio and Brian Quijada

## Are Lady Cards too good for us?

### Women's sports lead LU but fans don't seem to appreciate them

AFTER WINNING 24 GAMES to win the Southland Conference regular season title and reaching the SLC tournament final, one would think the Lamar women's basketball team would be playing in front of packed houses. Unfortunately, it's quite the opposite.

Attendance actually decreased by about 30% over the 2023-2024 season.

The Lady Cardinal soccer team won the SLC regular season title and the conference tournament, before making an appearance in the NCAA tournament in 2023. That's good enough to draw big crowds to the LU Soccer Complex, right? Apparently not.

The same goes for softball. Across the board, women's sports do not get the attention they deserve. Lamar students clearly don't care about women's sports.

Over the last three years, Lamar women's athletics have racked up eight championships and have represented Lamar and the Southland across many NCAA tournaments.

The Lamar athletics marketing department is doing everything they can to bring students into the stadia. Despite free T-shirts and food at almost every game, students still don't show up. It costs nothing for a student to attend a game, yet there

seems to be more non-student fans at the games that actually have to pay.

"That's been some success," athletics director Jeff O'Malley said. "I think where we struggle is just trying to outreach and get the information into the students' hands about when games are. We promote everything on social media. We send out emails as well, but not all students are reading emails anymore. We try to find the best way to communicate with our students, but it's tough when they're not all attracted into one place."

The Neches Federal Credit Union Arena at the Montagne Center holds 10,080, but



the average attendance for women's basketball games this past season was 761, compared to last year's 1,089. Lamar is sixth in attendance in the SLC, despite being the second best team in the conference. Attendance has dropped to the lowest it's been in the last four years.

"The fans are a huge part," head coach Aqua Franklin said. "If we can get home court advantage, playing in front of our fans, there's clutch free throws and having the gym loud from them cheering on the Lamar team. Our opposing team can't hear their plays or hear their coaches trying to direct them and things like that. That plays a huge part.

"But also our players feed off of that. They feed off the support."

On Feb. 8, 2025, the Lamar softball team faced off against No. 1 University of Texas at home. That game saw an attendance of 1,200 people, but the stadium was burnt orange. Despite Lamar being the only university in Beaumont, and Austin being four hours away, students would rather support UT than their own alma mater.

Attendance really matters for the athletes. It gives them something to play for.

"Smaller crowds just don't really affect our game," catcher Cimara-lei Wessling said. "When we're in front of a bigger crowd, I feel like my dugout is a lot more fired up. We want people to hear us. Like one time, one of our sold out games had people in the stands banging on stuff to the beat of the music and everything. It was like such a good environment for us to be in. And we were like, these guys, they have our back."

Admittedly, Lamar used to be the laughing stock of SLC athletics, winning only eight softball games and four volleyball games in 2021, and the basketball team was under .500. However, since then, Lamar has built a winning culture throughout all sports.

In 2024, softball won 26 games, volleyball won 15 games, and basketball won 22 games. Lamar even won the 2024 SLC Commissioner Cup, 14 points ahead of McNeese, led by the women's teams.

When football was taken away in 1989, the city got used to not having athletics to

root for, softball head coach Amy Hooks said. When football was reinstated in 2011, women's soccer and softball were brought in to balance scholarship opportunities under Title IX rules.

While it took a while to build the programs, all of the women's sports made an appearance in the SLC tournaments last year. One couldn't look at the Southland postseason without seeing Lamar in it.

So why is attendance struggling? Clearly performance isn't the issue. Students need to support women's athletics. Imagine how much better they would be knowing they have a loyal fan base to support them, instead of having the away team supporters making all the noise.

"We beat Baylor, and it was so funny because everyone that was there was Baylor fans," Wessling said. "But, like, why couldn't it have been our fans as well? I think the score would have been probably even better."

The teams are doing everything they can to get the word out. The Lady Cardinals are

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**“...our  
players feed  
off that. They  
feed off the  
support.”**  
— Aqua Franklin

## SPORTS— from page 23

always up to date on social media, posting on game days to let the people know they’re playing. The Lady Cardinals have also gotten involved in the community, not only at Lamar but also in Beaumont.

“We’ve had a ton of people that we’ve met at a community service event or maybe we were out putting posters up or whatever, say, ‘Hey, I’m going to come to this game.’” Hooks said. “And the girls were like, ‘OK, make sure you stay and say hi because we want to make sure you’re there.’”

Hooks said community outreach pays dividends and she receives emails from people telling her the players were “awesome.”

The Lady Cards aren’t your stereotypical stuck up athletes whose egos are too big to talk to anyone. They always engage with anybody that supports them, no matter who they are. All of the teams can be found interacting with fans, signing posters, giving autographs and taking pictures after games.

Despite the teams’ successes, small crowds can negatively impact recruiting, making it hard for the teams to maintain their high standards. When a recruit comes

to Lamar to see the campus, how many leave disappointed after seeing the lack of student body at the games? How is Lamar supposed to attract new players with an empty fanbase?

Lamar’s women’s athletics have proven time and time again that they are among the best in the Southland Conference. With championships, NCAA tournament appearances, and an undeniable winning culture, these athletes have given their school and community every reason to rally behind them. Yet, the lack of support continues to be a glaring issue.

Winning should bring excitement. Success should bring pride. But without a strong fanbase, these achievements feel hollow.

The Lady Cardinals have done their part, now it’s time for Lamar students to do theirs. Showing up to games isn’t just about entertainment; it’s about fostering school spirit, supporting fellow students, and creating an atmosphere that fuels even greater success.

Lamar’s women’s teams aren’t just representing the university, they are defining its athletic legacy. The question remains: will students finally recognize and support them, or will these champions continue to compete in near-empty stadiums?

Being a Cardinal is more than going to class. It’s also about being a member of a community. And the so-called big schools should not have a monopoly on spirit.



Softball coach Amy Hooks talks to her players during a recent game at the LU Softball Complex.



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