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BEN MANN

Painting a picture of a local artist

BACKYARD BIG-TOP • NO-FI SOULMATES • GENDER QUERY
Signs of spring blossom everywhere. Bellingham is a gorgeous city to be in during the warmer months. Let us help you get outside and enjoy the beauty that Bellingham has to offer. Take a walk around town and discover all of the locations local artist Ben Mann has touched with his brush; use the list on page 11 as your guide. As long as you’re outdoors, try one of the picnics writer Marinda Peugh describes. You’ll be sure to enjoy both the surroundings and cuisine she suggests.

With spring comes romance, and this issue of Klipsun even has that. Check out “No-Fi Soulmates” for a love story about a couple rockin’ the Bellingham music scene.

So go outside, enjoy the sun, throw a disc and relish in Bellingham’s beauty. Happy Spring!

Thanks for reading.

Kira Freed
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KLIPSUN WOULD LIKE TO THANK CHRIS BAKER, HEATHER STEELE, BILL HOWATSON AND THE REST OF THE STAFF AT WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING SERVICES.
Ben Mann's paintings at Mallard Ice Cream in downtown Bellingham embellish the outside of the local business.
Even on a drab winter afternoon, artist Ben Mann finds plenty to inspire him from the third story perch of his Fairhaven studio. Mann says he likes to imagine the many occupants that have used this room since the building was erected in 1895. In the distance, a tugboat pulls away from the harbor and people on the sidewalk below tote shopping bags or walk their dogs past the quaint storefronts on Harris Avenue. Each season brings new life to the maple trees outside Mann’s window; in the fall, the leaves develop rich carrot and golden hues before they wither and drop. In the spring and summer months, the leaves take on a deep green, Mann’s favorite color.

Not every artist finds beauty in seemingly ordinary items, but Mann, 41, sees the magical in the mundane. A 1960s-style camper, an overstuffed easy chair and slices of fruit are a few of the everyday items Mann has captured with the vivid acrylic paints and whimsical brushstrokes that are his signature style.

“Somewhere between photography and the wonky world of Dr. Seuss, I land,” he says. Mann rarely signs his art because he says he finds it distracting. When he finishes a piece, he scrawls his name on the back of it.

Mann, who has sandy hair and blue eyes framed by brown rectangular glasses, grew up on the shores of Lake Whatcom. His six older siblings’ creativity and trips to the Whatcom Museum ignited his passion for art, he says. Mann was 8 when his mother asked him to make place cards for Thanksgiving dinner, and he realized art could be both beautiful and functional.

Mann says sometimes he still feels like “a kid with a crayon,” and he considers it a compliment when people compare the colors in his paintings to a child’s.

“A child will draw a car zooming down the street with the wheels completely detached — that’s genius!” he says. “Children are fearless artists.”

Mann left Bellingham in 1983 to attend San Francisco’s Academy of Art University,
where he graduated with a bachelor of fine arts degree in commercial art in 1992. He moved to Seattle in 1995 and operated a kiosk at the Broadway Market, where he gained visibility by selling his designs on calendars and magnets, and even a tumbler for Starbucks Coffee.

In 1997, he embarked for Antarctica where he spent two years managing a general store at McMurdo, an American science station. He says in Antarctica, all distractions were stripped away, and the desolate windblown landscape left him with little else to do than fill his sketchbooks.

In 2000, Mann broke his right wrist in a bike accident. The injury required surgery and weeks of physical therapy. He was unable to use his right hand to open his mail, much less paint, he says. He began using his other hand to paint but says compared to his dominant hand, his left hand was a “kindergarten.” His wrist fully recovered, but he says he has not forgotten the lesson the injury taught him: creating art is a privilege and he gets to do it.

Mann now paints full-time, but also waits tables at Anthony’s at Squalicum Harbor a few nights a week.

“I like having something social and aerobic to do because being an artist is a pretty solo affair, and pretty sedentary,” Mann says.

He also says working at the restaurant provides a source of fresh ideas. He flips through papers on his work table and pulls out a beverage napkin with a sketch of a woman’s face on it. Mann explains he liked her hairstyle and made the drawing for future inspiration.

Mann not only depicts common items and people in his art, he uses what he calls “found” surfaces as his canvases: records, flower pots and carpenter’s remnants, such as cabinets and scrap wood. He recently started incorporating knickknacks such as address numbers and wooden spoons into his art. He glues the items onto his canvas and paints over them. The result is surprising and unlikely; most people would dismiss the objects as junk, but Mann turns them into fine art.

An old wooden gate bearing Mann’s unmistakable designs hangs at A Lot of Flowers, the tiny floral and gift shop near his studio. Penny Ferguson, the owner of the shop, says Mann has painted flower pots, welcome signs and greeting cards for her to sell at the store, but the gate is a new creation.

“He branches out in some new direction every season,” Ferguson says.

It seems as if Mann hardly has time to rest; local restaurants, businesses and shops commission him to paint murals on their blank walls, ceilings, exposed pipes and doorways. His paintings also embellish the columns in front of Mallard Ice Cream on Railroad Avenue and newspaper stands at various downtown Bellingham locations.

Mallard owner Ben Scholtz says it only took Mann five days to complete the murals with lively colors Scholtz says reflect the friendly atmosphere inside his shop. Scholtz says he notices patrons admiring the paintings or posing for pictures in front of them.

While many artists prefer to create art behind the privacy of closed doors, Mann enjoyed standing on a ladder and interacting with passersby as he worked on his mural at Mallard.

“If I didn’t have bills to pay, art is something I would do for free,” he says.

The possibilities for Mann’s future designs, canvases and color palettes seem limitless as he squints contemplatively toward his window. Countless ideas await him on the other side of the single-paned glass. The world is his for the painting.

To see more of Ben Mann’s art, visit: www.ben-mann.com www.mann-alive.com
Pizza Time delivery driver Joel Heiman is on his first run of what seems to be just another Friday night. Heiman arrives at his destination, walks up the cement pathway to the front door and gives a solid knock, knock, knock, announcing his arrival. The door swings open and a man greets Heiman. In the background, a woman he assumes is the man’s girlfriend chats loudly on the phone. The man opens his wallet only to realize he has no cash. He walks over to the woman and asks her for money. The woman reaches down the front of her pants, pulls out a blood-soaked tampon and gives it to the man to present to Heiman as payment for the pizzas.

The man laughs hysterically as Heiman stands there, frozen in shock from the appalling scene he witnessed. After Heiman explains that Pizza Time does not accept used tampons as a form of payment, the man returns the tampon to the woman who uses the same hand to give him cash for the pizzas. She asks him for $2.69 back so she can buy a can of Hurricane Ice later that evening.

“That was pretty traumatizing,” Heiman says with a look of disgust, recalling the incident from summer 2006. “I went home after that.”

While Heiman says the incident stands out as his grossest experience on the job, it was just one of many drunken customer encounters for the late-night pizza delivery driver.

During his more than two and a half years as a driver, Heiman says he’s just about seen it all, from college students passed out in a yard covered in their own vomit to naked college freshmen answering the door.

Heiman says intoxicated individuals, most of whom are college students, represent approximately 90 to 95 percent of Pizza Time’s business every night after 11:30 p.m. On a weekly basis, he delivers pizza to parties where people want him to take a shot, do a keg stand, smoke a bowl or even have their picture taken with him.

“Late night on Friday, everyone wants to get the pizza guy fucked up,” Heiman says.

Heiman, 23, began his career as a pizza delivery driver at Pizza Pipeline in the fall of 2004 while he worked toward his recreation and leisure major at Western.

After working at Pizza Pipeline for more than a year, he quit and went to work at Pizza Time, where his former manager from Pizza Pipeline worked. He asked Heiman if he wanted the job.

Heiman decided to drop out of college three and a half years into his degree and has been working as a full-time driver for Pizza Time ever since.

“I found out the major I was in only made like $8.50 an hour after you graduate, and with tips, I’m making like 20 bucks an hour right now,” Heiman says.

On a busy night, Heiman says he rakes in close to $200, including his tips. For every delivery he makes, he receives seven-and-a-half percent of its cost to pay for gas and wear and tear on his car, which he says the money doesn’t cover.

Take one look at his car and you’ll believe him.

Heiman drives a small four-door 1987 Honda Accord that looks like it went through a demolition derby and lost, badly. The entire hood of his car has been pushed inward, forming a rusted crater that appears as though an elephant decided to plop down onto it. The hood is in such poor condition it doesn’t lock anymore, so he has tied bungee cords across it to prevent it from flying up while he’s driving.

The floor of the passenger seat is completely covered in a miniature mountain of empty pop and energy drink cans.

He says he’s received threats from the police to impound his car, but they don’t bother him about it as long as he has the lighted plastic Pizza Time topper on his car.

Despite having more than its share of downsides, Heiman says the job still has some bonuses in dealing with so many drunken customers. He says Pizza Time is notorious among college students for having a deal where if a customer calls and orders naked, they’ll knock a dollar off the price of your pizza.

Heiman claims he’s had a few occasions where college girls have mistakenly thought they had to answer the door naked, just to get a dollar off their pizza.

He says he has only once had the misfortune of a college guy answering the door in his birthday suit.

“He answered the door butt-naked, and we made our pizza transaction,” Heiman says. “It was awkward.”

— Matt Boyer
Design by Liz McNeil
Strong in Friendship, Love, and Strength
The time was 10:20 a.m. on Feb. 19. The skies above SeaTac Airport were a dreary, gray Pacific Northwest blanket of clouds. The weather was cold and depressing. It mirrored the emotions of those inside.

Seventy-four exchange students returning to Japan’s Asia University navigated through airport procedure: checking bags, receiving tickets and paying overweight fees. The students were teary-eyed as they said their goodbyes to a receiving line of classroom volunteers, advisers and friends. Ayaka Nakano, a slender 19-year-old, stood near the line’s end with Nanako Koike, the one other student who had also chosen to stay behind. Students approached her. She embraced some, touched others slightly, and to others bowed. She brought many close to her and softly said, “Ganbatte” or “Matta ne,” Japanese for “Good luck” and “See you soon.” By the time the last student reached her, her eyes were wet and bloodshot. She had been awake for more than 24 hours. Her friends were leaving and she was exhausted.

She had arrived with them seven months prior, fresh-faced and terrified. Seventy-six Japanese students ready to learn English the American way. She was excited to begin her educational journey in the states. She had never heard English before, but then again, she had never heard Japanese before either.

Nakano is deaf. She has never heard anything.

For her peers in the Asia University America Program, who spent five months at Western, the task of learning to speak, write and listen to English was a daunting one. This was the first time many were leaving their homes, let alone their native country. The students would experience life as an outsider. For Nakano, the experience was nothing new.

“Japan has an attitude [in general] that it is best not to make other people feel uncomfortable,” says Nakano, who communicates during the interview using Japanese, American Sign Language, writing and drawing. “It’s a hard thing to do when you can’t hear what they are saying.”

Life was bound to be difficult for Nakano when she was born to parents Susumu and Reiko Nakano on Nov. 28, 1987. In a culture that emphasizes group unity, Nakano says it can be uncomfortable when somebody doesn’t meet the societal expectations.

“It’s not the same as being [blind],” Nakano says. “You can’t always tell who’s deaf and who isn’t just by looking at them. Clerks at shops would try to get my attention to help, realize I couldn’t hear them, then apologize and walk away. It is hard sometimes.”

However, Nakano’s parents did not wish for their child to live outside Japanese culture looking in. Nakano began speech therapy when she was 2-years-old, which continued until she was 15 years old.

Nakano performed a number of exercises to stimulate the throat muscles and tongue in speech therapy. Nakano’s tedious practices allowed her to learn something that is second nature to the hearing and speaking population. To strengthen her throat and larynx, Nakano gurgled water for long periods of time while flexing and controlling the amount of air she exhaled to create different pitches. She practiced tongue location for forming sounds by gently moving a damp cracker to various locations in her mouth without letting it stick to the roof.

Nakano communicates with Japanese speakers through reading lips, a skill her parents fostered by only communicating to her by speaking. Nakano’s additional practice consisted of reading the lips of characters on television.

“When I was two, I would just try to figure out what they were saying by the expressions on their face,” Nakano says.

Seventeen years later, Nakano’s ability to read lips is so innate that when she thinks, she imagines a floating mouth and she reads its lips.

Despite years of practice and therapy, Nakano never attended special schools for the deaf or hard of hearing and did not learn Japanese Sign Language until she was 15 years old.

“I always was practicing when I was a child,” Nakano says. “I remember other kids my age would be playing, but I was always practice, practice, practice.”

Her hard work paid off when she became fluent in Japanese and lip reading, allowing her to experience her adolescence as any other school-uniform-wearing Japanese girl.

“I didn’t want to learn [Japanese Sign Language],” Nakano says. “I didn’t like to view myself as deaf. I didn’t have any friends who couldn’t hear. I went through my life telling myself that I was just like them.”

Nakano says she didn’t consider herself deaf. Her voice, aside from being quiet, doesn’t sound like she cannot hear it. Years of practice
helped her communication, but her flawless Japanese is something unique to her.

“When I was young, my [deaf] friend and I would practice the same speech exercises together, but it is very hard for her to speak,” Nakano says. “I really don’t know why I have a great voice when I’ve never heard the language.”

Nakano does wear hearing aids that allow her to hear sounds at approximately 110 decibels — the loudness of chainsaw revving next to a hearing ear. Nakano says though she can hear loud noises, she can’t understand if someone is screaming next to her ear, she can only feel the vibrations.

After successfully living of a hearing Japanese girl, Nakano finally began to take an interest in deaf culture at 15 years old. Her interest began her continuing journey to learn not just about Japanese deaf culture, but all cultures across the world, hearing and deaf alike.

Nakano’s passport is a plethora of colored stamps from around the globe. Thailand and China at age 16, Australia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Sweden, Finland and Denmark at age 17. Now, finally, the United States of America, age 18 to 19. At each destination she visits schools for the deaf and hard of hearing and learns the locale’s individual deaf culture.

Matthew Topping was apprehensive when he learned that one of the students he would be looking after as an international peer advisor for the A.U.A.P. was a deaf woman. He knew his job as a mentor, event coordinator and friend for a group of 8 Japanese exchange students wasn’t going to be the same as usual. But he was pleased how his experience turned out.

“It’s hard to describe Ayaka effectively,” Renae Kibler says.

“I guess the best thing to say is that she puts your mind at ease. She’s gentle and eager to learn. She kicks ass of all kinds.”

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“I felt a little helpless when I met Ayaka at the airport,” Topping says. “My sign language was non-existent. I kept a notepad and pen with me at all times for months.”

Even if Topping was fluent in sign language when he met Nakano, the sign language wouldn’t be the one she knew. Nakano came to America to learn American Sign Language, a much different language than her native tongue.

After a month of indoctrination in American culture, Nakano, with assistance from Kim Thiessen, Western’s DisAbility Resources accommodation counselor, began teaching a weekly, unofficial American Sign Language class to other peer advisors and friends.

“It was as much a learning experience for me as everyone else,” Nakano says. “I often made mistakes.”

Topping attended the weekly class in hopes of learning to better communicate with Nakano. Juggling his job, his looming graduation date and a plethora of Japanese homework, Topping still managed to attend the class every week. Both Nakano and Topping became increasingly comfortable with the language. Eventually, he no longer needed the pen and paper.

“Ayaka unknowingly motivated me to learn another language,” Topping says. “This is not something I will stop practicing when she leaves.”

Nakano’s entire face smiles, says Renae Kibler, a Western sophomore, A.U.A.P. volunteer and friend who uses American Sign Language. Her laugh always sounds genuine, even if the giggle is delayed only long enough for someone to explain why everyone around her is laughing.

“It’s hard to describe Ayaka effectively,” Kibler says. “I guess the best thing to say is that she puts your mind at ease. She’s gentle and eager to learn. She kicks ass of all kinds.”

Which is why at 10:20 a.m. on Feb. 19 she said goodbye to her graduating comrades of the A.U.A.P. She was doing her best to put their minds at ease as they began the long flight home. The prospect of severing the bonds they made with their American friends and each other during the five month span was something only Nakano could help them with, because she had experienced it as well.

She joined her fellow students shortly after. On March 6, Nakano returned to Japan after visiting friends across the country and traveling to Gallaudet University — Washington D.C.’s liberal arts university for the deaf and hard of hearing.

But her travels are far from over. As Nakano says, her passport still has some empty pages in it. ☇
Spring is finally here, bringing with it vivid blossoms and sunshine. Locals scramble to find new ways to enjoy the return of the beautiful Northwest weather. A fun way to enjoy the spring is to plan a picnic. Bring friends together, enjoy gorgeous Northwest scenery and taste some new local treats. Everyone loves to eat, and a picnic can take friends away from their Xbox and into some fresh spring air. The hardest part is deciding where to go, the best time to go and what to bring along. Here are four picnic scenarios to try.

**Tablecloth for Two**

**Where to go:**
For a romantic, peaceful afternoon picnic, Deborah Fredback, a Western senior who works at the Outdoor Center, recommends Larrabee State Park off Chuckanut Drive. Fredback says Larrabee is always fun because it offers so many places to explore. The park includes a nice picnic area with a covered section in case of sudden spring showers. “It’s right on the water, and you have a great view of the San Juan Islands,” Fredback says.

**Best times:** Afternoon to dusk. Rain or shine.

**What to bring:**
Stop by the deli at the Sehome Village Haggen for the meal. Grocery Manager Ryan Kimber says the deli carries classic picnic salads and ready-made sandwiches you can grab and go quickly. Be sure to bring binoculars to search for seals and to admire the San Juans.

**Grill’n Goodies**

**Where to go:**
If you want to get a group of friends together, Fredback recommends Boulevard Park in Fairhaven. Boulevard has plenty of room to throw a ball around or relax in the soft spring grass and feel the sunshine pour onto your pale winter skin. And you never know when that sexy stranger might hit you with a football and spark a new spring fling. The view of the sunlight bouncing off the waves in the bay is beautiful at all hours, and the park has barbecue grills right next to the ocean shore.

**Best times:** Afternoon to dusk. Sunny days best.

**What to bring:**
A fun and easy meal for barbecues is to bring everyone’s favorite vegetables, meats, marinade and aluminum foil. Each person can choose what they want and wrap it up in an aluminum pouch. These tasty treats are called “en papier,” which is French for “in paper.” Make sure to bring plenty of napkins and extras for new friends.

**A Day Away**

**Where to go:**
Mount Baker is always popular in the winter for snowboarding and skiing, but once the snow melts it turns into a beautiful, serene place for hiking. Just follow Mount Baker Highway to Artist Point for an eight-mile hike surrounded by gorgeous mountains and spring blossoms. If you want an active adventure, take the eight-mile loop, or else plop down on the mountain top and scope out the wildlife.

**Best times:** Afternoon to dusk. Sunny days only.

**What to bring:**
On your way up the mountain, stop at the North Fork Brewery and Pizzeria. The North Fork Brewery has a wide variety of scrumptious beers. Kreg Pressley works at the North Fork and says customers can buy a growler for $10.75 that holds a half gallon of brew, or if you bring your own growler it costs $8. The North Fork has a wide variety of brews to sample, each containing its own unique flavor. Next, stop at Graham’s Café to get some fresh sandwiches and fruit. Make sure to bring a jacket and a camera.

**Sunset Snack Time**

**Where to go:**
For the ultimate sunset take exit 240 to Lake Samish Road. Turn left on Barrel Springs Road. Drive approximately one mile and turn right onto a gravel road marked by a “Blanchard Mountain Trail” sign. The view here can make anyone’s troubles disappear. It spans 180 degrees around all the islands, the whole Cedar Valley, Burlington and the Cascade Mountains, Fredback says. This spot is perfect for a first kiss or a moment of escape and reflection.

**Best times:** Afternoon to early morning. Clear skies.

**What to bring:**
For an evening treat, stop by Honey Moon behind Pepper Sisters in downtown Bellingham. Its orange mead won the bronze at the International Mead Festival. It comes in a travel-size bottle and tastes great with chocolate or fresh fruit. Honey Moon sells bittersweet truffles, little round balls of intense chocolate that customers always buy with the orange mead, Honeymoon owner Nana Thebus says. She also recommends checking out the chocolates available at Mount Bakery on Champion Street and Chocolate Necessities in the Public Market on Cornwall Avenue. The honey wine is sweet enough for dessert and light enough you can still drive back down the mountain after a glass.

Bellingham has countless places to sit down for a picnic. Keep trying new places and look for fun foods to bring along. Take time away from your everyday stresses to enjoy all that the Northwest offers. Picnics are a cheap and easy reminder of why locals love living in the Northwest.

— Marinda Peugh

Design by Liz McNeil
Ramsey Campbell identifies as gender queer, a little-known identity that took him 20 years to find.
Ramsey Campbell stands, dressed in worn jeans, a white button-up shirt and black tie a few shades darker than his short brown hair. Looking at a calendar on his bedroom wall he smiles and points to pen marks on several of the dates — his menstrual flow chart.

Born a female, Campbell identified as such until December 2006. Never feeling only female, but male too, Campbell realized fewer than two years ago a gender identity existed for how he always felt.

A Western senior majoring in American cultural studies, Campbell says he now identifies as gender queer, which he defines as a combination of both genders.

"But the problem of saying it that way is it implies there are only two genders," Campbell says. "Everyone can have their own gender identity, but unfortunately it's usually either male or female. I don't feel like a male trapped in a female body — I feel like a person with both genders trapped in a dichotomous world."

Kristin Ericson, Western junior and LGBTQA coordinator, says one misconception about gender identity is that it's directly linked to sexual orientation. Not all gender queer people are homosexual, she says.

Another point of confusion is that various definitions for gender queer exist, Ericson says.

Ericson, who has spoken with at least five students at Western who identify as gender queer, says knowing what people mean when they say they embrace this identity is difficult because definitions vary from person to person. She cites the definition Campbell uses, but says the broadest definition is someone who doesn't identify specifically with the male or female gender. Gender queer also includes those who find themselves somewhere in between, she says.

R, a Western senior and sociology major, also identifies as gender queer. She asked to remain anonymous because she fears future teaching opportunities might be compromised if employers discovered her gender identity falls outside the social norm. R says she, unlike Campbell, doesn't identify as male or female. She says a person's gender isn't as clear cut as their sex. Sex is a product of biology, whereas gender is a product of a person's feelings.

"[Gender] is structured by society and when you take that away, you're not left with anything to really define it with except your own feeling," R says. "I'm just me."

Campbell has short hair and baby-soft looking skin. Men's clothing hangs neatly from his thin, 5-foot seven-and-a-half-inch frame, his breasts restricted by a sports bra. His appearance, like his gender identity, is androgynous — it doesn't fully meet popularly accepted masculine or feminine standards.

"I don't want to leave the woman camp entirely," Campbell says. "At times I feel extremely male, at other times I feel downright girly."

When Campbell started using the "he" identifier it didn't completely fit. Campbell says gender neutral pronouns do exist. But Campbell says he knows little about the neutral pronouns, such as "zie," and doesn't want the burden of researching them in order to explain to others what to call him.

When people say "he" instead of "she," Campbell says he is appreciative because it shows they recognize a "gender incongruency."

“I'm not completely male, but being called 'she' is weird to me because that's not how I identify either,” Campbell says.

Campbell says he had his hand raised in class one day, but the instructor called on another student. The student corrected the teacher and said, "She had her hand up first," gesturing toward Campbell. Confused, Campbell looked around for a female student with a raised hand.

Ericson says more than two gender identities exist, but only male and female are popularly used and embraced.

“Gender identification is a very complicated thing, and it's hard to know where you fit in,” Ericson says. “[Gender queer] is the fluidity of gender — not succumbing to the societal binary of gender.”

Campbell began breaking gender role restrictions early on. A Boy Scout representative visited Campbell's elementary school when Campbell had short hair. The man gave forms to all the boys in his class, and gave one to Campbell as well. Upon arriving home that day, Campbell told his mother excitedly that he wanted to join the Boy Scouts. Campbell's mother took the papers away and made him grow out his hair.

In high school, Campbell started to understand himself more, and his actions gradually reflected his new insight. During his junior year of high school, Campbell came out as a lesbian to a classmate by typing his confession into a graphing calculator. His senior year, he cut his hair short, but in a pixie style. Slowly, Campbell shed his female-only persona. At Western, his self-discoveries, and representation of those discoveries accelerated.

"I haven't done girl drag since high school,” Campbell says.

The long hair, girly clothes and Barbies of his younger years were intended to pacify his mom, Campbell says. In order to get the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle action figures he loved, his mom had to think he played with Barbies and was maternal with the turtles.

Campbell says his mother would respond negatively to his wandering outside gender norms. He says she changes his appearance while visiting his family. In are gender-neutral clothes; out are ties and baggy pants.

"Whenever I would wear baggy pants my mom would cry, so I stopped wearing baggy pants in front of her. She said I look dyke in baggy pants," Campbell says. He explained that, while growing up, his mother would express her dislike of lesbians to him.

"She would tell me it was like the boogie man," he says. "It was a lecture every once in a while about the evils of lesbians."

Campbell says he told his mother he is attracted to women, but came out to her as queer instead of as a lesbian. He says the label of queer leaves room for him to fall in love with a man. Campbell hasn't spoken to his mother about his sexual orientation since the day he came out to her, and he has never felt comfortable enough to reveal the truth about his gender identity to her.

—Ryan Wynne

Design by Terrence Nowicki
After spring's lingering gray clouds clear, the charred smell of hamburgers and taste of icy beer lure Bellingham residents to their sun-soaked backyards. Friends gather to relax in hammocks and toss footballs across the lawn. Children jumping off swings and men flocking barbeques with lighter fluid aside, dangerous stunts are not usually part of the picture. Unless it's the home of Islando Bocock and Ukoiya Mastin, that is. In 2004, the Fairhaven couple's backyard became home to a 30-foot circus tent and a cast of acrobats, jugglers, stilt walkers and aerial dancers.

During September, the Dream Science Circus cast assembles a tent and stage in the 100-Acre Woods neighborhood on Chuckanut Ridge. The cast of 10 to 15 members performs the story of a mad scientist and his “dream machine” for approximately 150 people twice a day for five days.

But, the dream might soon fizzle from reality and back into imaginations. Though neighbors and Bellingham residents continue to welcome the event to the quiet neighborhood, the 1,500 to 2,000 people the circus attracted during the past two years has caused the circus to outgrow its venue, Mastin says. By law, a business cannot be run in a residential area, but the city ignored the rule in the past because the neighbors and community welcome the event, Mastin says. One neighbor even lent the circus his spare land in 2005 and 2006 after the audience outgrew the couple’s backyard. This year, Bocock and Mastin decided the circus had to move to a location that could better accommodate a large audience, offer ample parking and have less chance of disturbing neighbors.

During the last September show, children sat in the usually empty lot on colorful blankets and cushions near the stage, while parents watched and laughed from lawn chairs in back, says Paul Chandler, a Western alumnus and founding member of the Dream Science Circus. The circus allows local artists to showcase their work, which can be any kind of performing art, not just circus acts, Mastin says.

“It's almost like a new vaudeville revolution of people who want to perform and do cool, outlandish things and don't have a venue to do it,” says Chandler, who played the repairman, Bodoole McGillacutty last year and has created sound effects in the past.

Preschoolers marvel at the lights and sounds of the “dream machine” made of recycled hub caps and electrical cords, while older children question whether the machine can really pull dreams from their minds, Chandler says. Stilt performers wear over-sized rainbow pants to conceal the source of added height and transform the artists into 8-foot-tall beings, says Christina Alessandra, 26, who dances and stilt-walks in the show.

Western senior Daniel Sloan, disguised as a white-faced mime, pulls crystals out of children's ears as they wait in line and later “contact juggles” a four-inch crystal ball over the sleeves of his dress shirt. He creates the illusion of the ball floating over his body, he says.

“People in the circus have their own skills to bring,” Chandler says. “We try to write the shows based on what people can offer.”

Mastin and Bocock established the circus because a venue didn’t exist in Bellingham for circus performers to develop and

⭐ LEFT: CHRISTINA ALESSANDRA (far left) AND GABRIELLA CONIGLIO PERFORM A MARIONETTE ACT.
share their talent, Mastin says.

Though the circus now has an established theme and following, Mastin and Bocock started the circus with little professional training. The circus production began four years ago when Bocock and Mastin attempted acrobatic stunts in their 10-foot pond, and hung fabric specially made for aerial dance, from their adult-sized tree house.

Even before they moved in together, each had their own experience with acrobatics. Mastin grew up practicing gymnastics in her yard and dreamed of winning an Olympic gold medal, but her parents couldn’t pay for formal training, Mastin says. At age 15, she received an inheritance and could afford dance classes, but girls at her local studio in Anacortes said she was too old to start dancing. She gave up her professional dance and gymnastics dream until a friend passed her a flyer for the Aerial Dance Festival in Boulder, Colo., Mastin says. In 2003, she completed two weeks of workshops and returned home to share her experience with rock-climbing partner and friend, Bocock. He had just returned from Brazil, where he studied capoeira, a Brazilian martial art that combines dance and acrobatics, such as back flips and handstands.

Later that year, Mastin moved in with Bocock in Fairhaven and the two ordered fabric called “silks” to practice aerial dance. Mastin climbed, wrapped and dropped her body around the suspended fabric. The couple also prepared routines of partner acrobatics in the pond such as standing hand-to-hand with Mastin in a handstand supported over Bocock’s head by his outstretched arms. The couple created U & I Productions to promote themselves and other shows such as the Dream Science Circus.

“It’s getting to the point where you don’t have to be a contortionist from Russia that started when you were two years old,” Mastin says of circus performing. “You can start later in life.”

Traditionally in European circuses, brave men tame animals in rings and “freaks” parade under the “Big Top.” Now, hotels, clubs and restaurants seek circus performers for their events, Mastin says. Before creating Dream Science, the couple traveled to Tokyo for six months to find jobs in these venues, but ended up modeling, dancing in music videos and teaching English for cash. They didn’t have the promotional material to get hired for circus acts and returned to the states to build their portfolio.

In 2004, the couple gathered friends and fellow performers to travel and record video footage of their acts at the Burning Man Festival in Nevada and World Peace Music Awards in San Francisco. On their way home from San Francisco, Bocock expressed his desire to build a circus tent.

“I’ve known Islando for such a long time,” Chandler says. “When he wants something to happen, he’ll make it happen. I knew that (the circus) was a good idea.”

Within a week, Bocock welded a structure for the tent and used tarps and duct tape to cover the structure for the circus’ first season. He ordered inexpensive coverings from Mexico to use for the last part of the second season, Chandler says. After one dress rehearsal and a trial run in Bellingham, approximately 10 performers headed to the Okanogan Family
Fair in Eastern Washington for their first production, Chandler says.

“We come up with grand ideas and see how we can make the impossible possible,” Chandler says. “It’s a compromise of how much we can do, how much we can spend and still realize the grand idea.”

The creators use the idea of “new circus,” which incorporates theatrical performance and art into the show, as seen in Cirque du Soleil, but for only $10 per ticket and in a town that doesn’t have any other kind of circus, Mastin says.

Audiences can see the show for a suggested donation of $10 to $25. Generally spectators will pay $10, but the show merits $25, Mastin says. The circus creators want to promote freedom of expression through accessible performing arts in the Bellingham community, Chandler says.

“I am a performer in their circus,” Sloan says. “They’ll pay me as much as they can through what they earn through tickets, but I’m just happy to perform and be involved in the community.”

Alessandra balances her work life as a massage practitioner with the circus’ creative outlet. She grew up performing as a dancer and still needs to express her more artistic side, she says.

“Something about being all dressed up like that and being that tall creates a spectacle and opens you up for people to talk to you,” Alessandra says of being in costume on two-and-a-half-foot stilts. “It’s an instant conversation starter. Because you’re drawing attention, you can help direct attention to the acts or drawing a crowd for your show.”

U & I Productions attracts clients mainly through word-of-mouth and has enough bookings to keep Bocock and Mastin traveling and performing most of the year. After the failed attempt at making it big in Tokyo, they returned to the city for a second six-month stay. This trip proved more successful, with their most lucrative gig earning them each $1000 for a one-minute act. More recently, they completed a four-month tour in Mexico that included an aerial act over a Four Seasons Hotel swimming pool for a New Year’s celebration.

In spite of drawing audiences around the world, the performers still practice in their backyard and build most of their own equipment. They buy materials from REI and marine supply shops, Mastin says. They also have a program at the private Waldorf School in Whatcom Hills teaching circus arts to third through eighth graders. Members of Dream Science teach basic skills such as juggling scarves to introduce children to circus arts, Chandler says.

“What our circus proves to people is that anyone can do this,” Chandler says. “It’s empowering to people and they go, ‘Wow! I want to do that.’ And we say, ‘Hey, you can!’ ”

Until September, circus members are searching for a new venue for the Dream Science Circus. They’ve considered parks as well as forgoing the tent and moving the show into the Mount Baker Theatre. Mastin says. Ideally, the performers want a new arena to train and perform that provides space for workshops. But, as of now, the company doesn’t have the money, Mastin says.

“We’re not saying, ‘Wouldn’t it be cool if we did this,’” Chandler says. “We’re actually doing it. (But right now) we’re not making enough money for the amount of work we’re putting in.”

U & I Productions also hopes to start a new show in the near future. They’ve imagined a five or six person cast that could perform both a family show, as well as something geared toward a more mature audience and perform in a variety of venues instead of just the tent, Mastin says.

However, the tent performance of the Dream Science Circus remains on performers’ minds. Auditions will be held, the script will be revised and sequins will be sewn. Mastin will practice tumbling through the flowing fabric, Bocock will rig massive metal hoops, Alessandra will climb on her wood stilts. Yet, the tent won’t go up in the Fairhaven neighborhood, and without a new venue for the summertime favorite, the show can’t go on.

WE COME UP WITH GRAND IDEAS AND SEE HOW WE CAN MAKE THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE.

—Paul Chandler
Success in the indie music industry takes serious commitment. Marinda Peugh tells how, through sickness and health, for richer or poorer, Mark and Andrea Heimer make it in the Bellingham music scene. Photos by Lincoln Smith. Design by Taylor Williams.

Andrea Heimer, 26, and Mark Heimer, 27, cuddle up in a corner seat of the Horseshoe Café, drooling over the late-night menu.

“I bet you by the end of this interview I will finish this entire bottle of ketchup,” Andrea says. “I have a serious problem.”

Most patrons coming into the café just see another cute couple and pass by. Then, two teenage girls walk in.

“Oh my god, No-Fi” one of the girls says.

“They plaster themselves against the glass wall separating them from Andrea and Mark.

“That was the best show ever last week,” a girl says, smiling. “You guys kick ass! Hi, Mark.”

Mark grew up in Fairbanks, Alaska, where he strummed the bass guitar in a handful of bands. Eventually tired of playing in bands, he decided to experiment with new ways to perform. He routed out a guitar, put a mini disk player inside and named it the Soul System. Mark played all the instruments and recorded them into the Soul System. Then, Mark asked his friend to play it while he did the vocals, and No-Fi Soul Rebellion was born.

“No-Fi” comes from the band’s lack of instruments and “no fidelity,” meaning they draw from various types of music, Mark says. Or, as he puts it, his “special mix of crap.”
“Soul Rebellion” came from Mark’s idea of the soul fighting against the body and pushing its physical limits, he says.

The food arrives, and Andrea starts drenching her meal in ketchup. Mark and Andrea met three years ago at a No-Fi show in Missoula, Mont., Andrea’s hometown, where Mark was working on his bachelor of fine arts degree at the University of Montana, Andrea says.

All the girls in Missoula loved Mark, she says. He rocked the dance floor every show, making every girl in the building melt. But Mark never had any girls with him. After drinking one night, Andrea asked Mark if he was gay.

Mark thought it was hilarious and told her no. Andrea asked him on a date on the spot to make sure she got to him before another girl. A few weeks later, Mark asked Andrea to play the Soul System in the band and the two started touring.

Andrea told Mark soon after that she planned to marry him and predicted the month and day. A year later, on Friday the 13th (13 is the number on the jersey Mark wears when he performs), the couple stopped at a drive-through gas station in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, on the way to a No-Fi show and tied the knot.

“It’s the Las Vegas of the Northwest,” Mark says as he helps his wife drain the remaining dollops of ketchup out of the bottle.

“Yeah, if anyone wants to elope go to Couer d’Alene,” Andrea says.

They both start giggling.

Most No-Fi fans probably don’t know the significance of Mark’s performance outfit, even though they might not recognize him without it. Mark says he considers the getup a way to wear his failures on the outside. He wears his dad’s old, green number 13 basketball jersey because his father always wanted...
Mark to be more athletic. Mark says he tried, but could never master any sports and didn't enjoy playing them. He wears a button-up shirt under the jersey and a tie on top because his mother always wants him to dress nicer. Mark unzips his navy hoodie revealing a tattered, holey 7UP T-shirt to prove his point. He also wears glasses because not everyone is going to like him, but no one hits a guy in glasses, Mark says.

"Not everyone can be smooth," Mark says. "I try and act cool, but it never works out for me."

The couple has toured the West Coast and created three albums and two EPs. Their fourth album will be released next fall, Mark says.

The couple moved to Bellingham two years ago because they loved visiting when they passed through on tours, and being close to the ocean, Mark says. Bellingham residents seem to enjoy having them too, since every show sells out and attracts a wide variety of fans. No-Fi usually plays a few local shows each month.

"The most important thing is that he's a good songwriter," says fan Michael Mancos. "He's very passionate about his work. He knows how to channel his energy and work the room."

Mark says it's encouraging that their music seems to be ageless. They have a huge all-ages fan base, which Mark says is important because the music people listen to as kids stays with them over the years.

"I still listen to 80 percent of the music I listened to when I was growing up," Mark says.

"Not everyone can be smooth," Mark says.

"I try and act cool, but it never works out for me."

The couple says they feel successful because they are making enough money to survive by performing and continuing to book shows.

"I recommend all bands get married because then you get to keep all of the money," Andrea says.

She picks up the empty ketchup bottle.

"See, I told you I have a problem, she says. "When I was little I would put ketchup on my tomatoes."

Mark laughs.

"You know the creepy thing is my uncle is a tomato farmer," he says.

Andrea starts drinking her Bloody Mary. The secret to living happily ever after is to be support of each other, she says. Because Andrea loves to paint, she and Mark attend art shows together. Mark says he wishes he could give her his art degree.

It also helps to find someone who's really sexy so you always want to be with them, Andrea says.

Mark interrupts that she is his ultimate support by playing in the band with him, because not many people would play a fake guitar.

"I definitely have my moments where I look out over a huge crowd and think, ‘Wow, I'm getting paid to pretend to play a guitar,’" Andrea says. "It's pretty awesome."

Mark thanks Andrea at the end of every show and makes the crowd clap for her even when they don't want to.

"It's a mean, mean world out there," Mark says. "It's nice to have someone have your back."

Forget everything you see on E! True Hollywood Story. This couple proves love can survive the music industry and musicians can make a living in Bellingham. ☺
As thick snowflakes float to the ground, hundreds of bundled-up Western students escape the winter cold, trudge up the stairs and file into the already packed bleachers for a night of fast-paced basketball. Once the stands are full of rosy-cheeked fans, the doors close and the fans wait for the action to start. Vikings guard Mike Kirk enters the court suited up for the game and sees the spectators on the small metal bleachers.

The dedicated fans who couldn’t get through the doors in time head back outside and scale the beams supporting the building. Kirk spots the faces of his friends and loyal fans peering through the windows high above the court. This is where they have to watch the hottest rivalry game of the season: Western versus Pacific Lutheran University. The Vikings’ home court is known today as Gym D. The year is 1960.

The bright lights and glossy floors of Carver Gym are familiar images for hundreds of Western students who attend Viking basketball and volleyball games. Kirk remembers playing games in the early days of Carver Gym. The home game atmosphere Kirk, players and coaches experienced in Carver is unmatched by other facilities. The gym has endured nearly five decades of use and may be receiving its first major renovation since its construction in the 1930s.

Before the gymnasium opened in December 1961, and was dedicated to Sam Carver in 1962, Western men’s basketball team played in the much smaller Gym D, located above the women’s locker room. Because of the limited space in the gym, the bleachers placed fans right on the sidelines.

“It was extremely noisy, to the point where you couldn’t hear yourself think. It made conversing with teammates almost impossible. Growing up with noise levels like that is probably partly why I have hearing aids now.”

-Former Viking center, John Riseland

“The atmosphere was so intense, so loud because the space was confined and the seats were so close to the court,” Kirk says.

Kirk’s teammate and former Viking center John Riseland transferred to Western from Seattle University one year before the team relocated to Carver Gym. Riseland says having so many people in such a small space made the games intense; the voices of screaming fans drowned out the coaches’ orders from the sidelines.

“It was extremely noisy, to the point where you couldn’t hear yourself think,” Riseland says with a laugh. “It made conversing with teammates almost impossible. Growing up with noise levels like that is probably partly why I have hearing aids now.”
The original Physical Education Building, completed in 1936, consisted of the team’s home court (Gym D), a small lap pool, a few offices and classrooms, and shower rooms. At the time it was built, the facility was used for classes and not for playing basketball, Western’s Sports Information Director Paul Madison says. Before the Physical Education Building was built, teams practiced in Old Main and played games at local high schools because the makeshift court wasn’t regulation size, he says.

In 1961, contractors completed a 54,233-square-foot addition to the gym. The new floor space added three gyms, seven offices, two classrooms, a lounge and varsity locker rooms.

Adapting to the fluorescent lights and open space of the larger facility wasn’t difficult for the team because of the number of loyal fans who showed up to cheer on the Vikings, says Kirk, a 66-year-old Western Hall of Famer.

“(Haggen Court) seemed large at the time,” Kirk says. “The new gym held more people, not as many as it does today, but enough people wanted to be at the games that we filled the stands. Once the upper bleachers were put in, they were packed, too.”

Like several other buildings located in Red Square, the gym was built on a peat bog. Construction teams had to drive massive metal pilings into the ground to provide stability for the building’s foundation. Money spent to purchase the pilings meant other additions to the facility had to wait. Carver’s mustard yellow painted exterior was originally supposed to be covered with bricks to match the existing Physical Education Building. Contractors and Western administrators put the plan on hold and eventually decided to leave the building as is, Madison says.

In its first two decades, the new gym provided a stage for popular performers. Western students attended shows from Simon & Garfunkel, the Tubes, the Smothers Brothers and Ike & Tina Turner.

The gym also served as a venue for NBA pre-season Seattle SuperSonics and Harlem Globetrotters games, a match between the U.S. and Canadian national volleyball teams and a speech by Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who gave Western an environmental award, Madison says.

But the primary events taking place in the gym are, and always have been, Viking basketball games. Western’s teams put up a fight when playing on Haggen Court, and garner impressive home-court records.

The war and tear Carver gym endured over four decades of use is becoming apparent to Western Men’s Basketball Coach Brad Jackson.

“When the facility is set up for a basketball game, the aesthetics and the court itself are pleasing to walk into,” Jackson says. “But it’s an antiquated facility for this day in age. It hasn’t kept pace with the type of institution we are, which is a first-rate, mid-sized academic institute.”

The location and design of the building make sporting events in Carver Gym difficult to manage, Madison says. With the gym located in the middle of campus, parking is a nuisance for spectators because the C lots are the closest options, he says. Madison adds that security is also difficult to maintain at the gym because dozens of doors provide access to the building.

The Physical Education Building was the fourth structure built on Western’s campus. The age of the building and the need for various improvements have prompted the administration to look into options for remodeling the facility.

“Carver Gym is on the list for a major renovation,” Western’s Facility Management Assurance Coordinator Greg Hough says. “There has been talk internally about remodeling Carver, but the funding at the state level is not there yet.”

Renovations to Carver Gym and Miller Hall, along with other smaller projects around campus, are
included in Western's 2007-2017 Capital Plan that the administration submitted to Gov. Christine Gregoire. The plan describes the projects the university is requesting state funding to complete, Hough says. The scope of what the project would include has not been discussed in detail, and will not be discussed further, until funding is acquired, he says. During its current session, the legislature will determine Western's state funding for the next two years, Hough says.

Western's 2007-2017 Capital Plan projects that the university will need nearly $52 million to acquire consultant services, draft a design, complete construction and purchase equipment for Carver Gym. The plan spreads the entire process, from planning to construction completion, over six years, from October 2007 to October 2013.

Madison says obtaining state funding can be difficult for renovations not related to academics. Physical education and athletics used to be closely related, but in recent years they are not, he says. In the past, most Western athletes studied health and physical education and later went on to become coaches and P.E. teachers, Madison says. Now athletes at Western study a wide range of subjects that usually have nothing to do with sports, he says.

Despite structural flaws and the building's age, both Jackson and Western's volleyball coach Diane Flick agree Carver Gym is still a great place to play games. Flick says in addition to the home-court advantage teams enjoy, Carver Gym provides an intimacy lost in larger arenas.

"The way the facility is set up, the fans are right on top of the action," Flick says. "We've played at bigger facilities, but the fans are so far away that the game loses some of its flair. Carver brings back that small-town feeling."

The atmosphere of Carver Gym today, and in the 1960s when it fueled Kirk and Riseland's games, keeps them coming back to the gym, more than 40 years later. Both former Vikings regularly attend games and have noticed changes in the feeling of the gym over the years.

"I think the number of people and the loudness is just not as much as most of the games I played in," Kirk says. "The intensity of games like Central this year was what we had all the time. It's just not as intense anymore."

Riseland, who has operated the game clock for men's home basketball games for the last 25 years, says the atmosphere of Carver Gym today couldn't get much better.

"Over the years I've seen a lot of changes," Riseland says. "The atmosphere this year is great. At the Central game (Jan. 20) there was a great crowd. A few years back there was a lot of cursing coming out of the crowd, but now there is a positive atmosphere and the crowd is supportive of Western."

As one of Western's oldest buildings, Carver Gym has undergone numerous changes, and the coming years may hold more. But behind the creaking bleachers and chipped paint of the building will always lie the stories of thousands of athletes, coaches and students from the past four decades. In that time, the building has become beaten and battered. Even if the gym is refurbished, the spirit and memories of those people will stay within the towering brick walls of Sam Carver Gymnasium.
reaches from the depths of the earth, grasping for the overcast February sky above. Emerald blades of grass, drenched in moisture from the winter rain, seemingly restrain the fingers, uselessly attempting to bury the rust-covered, standard-issue sheet metal in the earth below.

Each finger of the six comes to a point, angled palmward, choking the atmosphere for the one thing it craves — fuel. But the claw is not the hand of an iron beast buried centuries before. It is a pyrotechnic sculpture designed as debris of an alien aircraft on the barren, parched lake bed of Nevada’s Lake Lahontan, approximately 30 miles outside of Reno for the 2004 Burning Man Festival.

The sculpture’s creator Mark Tomkiewicz titled the design “Pod,” and developed a story that the spaceship slammed into earth 15,000 years ago, Tomkiewicz says.

When the sculpture is not on show, it resides on the front lawn of 1009 32nd St. in Bellingham. Homeowner Duse Mclean, who resides in Bellevue, says she enjoys having the sculpture in front of the home she owns in Bellingham.

“It is an amazing sculpture that my son and his friend [Tomkiewicz] took down to Burning Man a few years ago,” Duse Mclean says.

Duse Mclean’s son and resident of the house where the Pod resides, Alex Mclean, calls the creation a wondrous piece of art.

Tomkiewicz says he welded the sculpture for the Burning Man Festival in 2004 and displayed it again at Burning Man in 2005.

“I was working for an artist friend, Morgan Hammer, in his bronze fabrication shop making tabletop versions of the shape,” Tomkiewicz says. “It is his design. We began talking about Burning Man art and it eventually led to a very large steel version of the shape into which we plumbed 12 propane cannons.”

He also displayed the sculpture at Bumbershoot in Seattle in September 2006 and plans to take it to Coachella, a music and art festival in Indio, Calif. at the end of April.

Burning Man Festival participants make the journey to the Black Rock Desert in Nevada for one week each year to join in
an experimental community.

The community challenges its members to express themselves and rely on each other to a degree not normally encountered in one’s day-to-day life, Tomkiewicz says.

The festival began on a small beach in San Francisco in 1986 with 20 participants and has grown to more than 25,000 at the Black Rock Desert in 2006.

The festival is dedicated to self-expression, art and encouraging the artistic exploration of its temporary community members, according to the Burning Man Festival’s Web site.

Tomkiewicz says he welded the final sculpture from a smaller design and the sculpture is more than a hunk of metal.

“It is more than a few pieces of sheet metal welded together,” he says. “We can hook it up to propane, and then people will see some fireworks.”

When the sculpture connects to a flammable gas source, sculpture admirers can see the time and dedication Tomkiewicz put into creating his work of art, Alex Mclean says.

“This is an amazing creation,” Alex Mclean says. “When it is hooked up, we can sync it to perform with music. The concentration of gas can be controlled so each spout turns on separately to create jets of fire into the air. The most exciting reaction is when all of the jets meet in the middle and a 40-foot flame bursts into the air.”

The sculpture lies dormant on Mclean’s front lawn, until the day Tomkiewicz takes it to the Coachella Valley Music and Art Festival and lights it into action. The blades of grass fruitlessly trying to bury the mechanized beast will give way to the cool touch of metal, and the beast will rise again to entice the mind and dazzle the eye.

A mere spark will ignite the flames and the imagination.

— Derrick Pacheco
Design by Taylor Williams

Flaming Object

The pod rests on the 1000 block of 32nd Street in Bellingham.

PHOTO BY LINCOLN SMITH
FROM DARK MORNING HOURS until dawn breaks, custodians work to prepare campus for the day’s classes. In three short hours, three custodian teams scurry, cleaning 90 to 100 percent of all campus classrooms before the first instructor begins lecturing.

Michael Smith, custodian day-shift senior supervisor, says 33 people form a south campus team, a central campus team and a north campus team. They work industriously, cleaning most academic spaces between 5 and 8 a.m.

Elzbieta Chala, team leader of the north campus custodial morning crew, stands outside the Wilson Library receiving room in the dark on a Wednesday. Yellow light illuminates her breath as she waits for her team to arrive, which on this morning consists of 11 individuals — five of whom are Western students.
“I call them the tsunami,” Chala says. She explains that today the student team has to vacuum rooms in four campus buildings. That includes one floor of the Wilson library, the sky bridge, the Haggard Hall library, lecture halls and computer labs, Fraser Hall and the first floor of the Humanities Building.

North campus team members arrive one by one in the Wilson basement custodial office.

Cassie Gendlek, a Western senior majoring in psychology, appears in the office just after 5 a.m. singing a line from a Three Dog Night song, “One is the loneliest number,” sporadically repeating the only two lines of the song she knows until her shift ends.

With approximately two years experience, Gendlek has worked the longest among the Western student vacuumers. She says the job is ideal for her because she likes working through the morning and the supervisors are accommodating to student needs, such as time off on test days.

“Sometimes, when I go to class and start waking up a little, I can’t even remember what I did,” Gendlek says. “I made a whole bunch of money and I was walking around asleep.”

The crew sits quietly, waiting for the rest of its members to arrive. Like any good sports team, they don’t start playing until everyone is present. One man sits on the floor reading. One woman sits adjacent to him listening to an iPod. None of them look anxious to start working—they look tired.

At 5:20 a.m. Chala decides to get started. One member of the student crew is still missing, and another already called in sick.

“Sometimes people oversleep, especially students,” Chala says. “They study too late.”

The fifth member of the student team, Nathan Cattarin, rushes into the room and takes off his jacket just as the others stand up to go.

Chala begins spouting orders: “Angel, Haggard Hall 121. You, Seville, go.”

The five students move quickly but are the last to leave the basement. They must mount vacuums on their backs before beginning. Once on, the purple and grey spherical backpacks conjure images of the Ghostbusters.

“When there’s something strange in your neighborhood, who you gonna call? Cleaning team!” Gendlek sings as the group—cassie gendlek

 begins vacuuming the first floor.

I’m not leaving Wendy,” one of the women says as they turn behind,” he says sternly.

Diaz and Gendlek stay as Cattarin descends the stairs.

“We’re gonna leave Wendy behind. If we don’t go we’re gonna get pocket full of them.”

“You get to know a lot of people and their cultures,” Domingo says. Chala is from Poland, Domenico is Filipino and he says other custodians are Vietnamese, Korean and German.

The shift supervisor, Smith, says a lot of people have a stereotype that custodians are here because they have to be—because they can’t do anything else. He says the stereotype is wrong and that custodians at Western are intelligent.

Before their shift began, the five-student team exchanged quips and discussed racism. Most people don’t see this side of custodians because while they work, they remain relatively quiet, only talking to each other when they reconvene.


“I swear this place is riddled with bobby pins,” Diaz says with a pocket full of them.

Weddy See is missing. The team waits for a couple of minutes.

“When we go from one zone to another, we try to go together,” says Cattarin, but they need to move on this time.

“We’re gonna lose Wendy behind. If we don’t go we’re gonna get behind,” he says sternly.

Diaz and Gendlek stay as Cattarin descends the stairs.

“I’m not leaving Wendy,” one of the women says as they turn to retrieve See.

The team continues, vacuuming computer labs, lecture halls and entry ways. The buildings are nearly abandoned. Four or five students are scattered throughout the first floor of Haggard. One lies curled up with his face pressed against the back cushion of a couch sleeping off an all-nighter.

At 7:40 a.m. the student team returns to north campus custodial headquarters in Wilson. After shedding their vacuums, the team members resemble any other groggy students, and as they walk back outside through the receiving room door, they are.

—Ryan Wynne

Design by Terrence Nowicki

Editor’s note: After participating in this story, Cassie Gendlek left her custodial position due to scheduling conflicts.

LEFT: Cassie Gendlek (right) stands ready with Naomi Diaz (center) and Wendy See. The three women, part of a six-member student cleaning team, race to vacuum floors in four campus buildings between 5 and 8 a.m.

ABOVE: The North Campus Student Custodial Crew sits with their supervisor at the end of their shift.
Klipsun is a Lummi word meaning “Beautiful Sunset.”