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HOOLIGANS INTEGRATE TATTOOS, PIERCINGS AND HAIRCUTS ALL IN ONE PARLOR WITH THE HELP OF HORSES

MODERN MIDWIVES GIVING BIRTH THE NATURAL WAY

BUZZWORTHY

NIMBUS REACHES NEW CULINARY HEIGHTS WITH SCIENCE

GAMING ADVENTURES OF A MADDENITE

STREET PERFORMERS BUSKING OUT

This phrase has a different meaning to everyone. My history dates back 22 years. Klipsun is more than 50 years old. And a few stories in this magazine are about artifacts dating back hundreds of years.

No matter what this phrase means to you, we all have history. Some of us want to never look back and just continue forward to see what our future entails. I personally am terrified of my future and seem to rely heavily on my past. An unfamiliar future scares me, while a past of familiarity comforts me.

For many, reading historical documents is fascinating. Reading about the present is calming. And reading about the future is exciting.

So, sit down with David and explore Aladdin's Lamp Antique Mall, sifting through old records and treasure that you may never have thought you would come across. Get the buzz on Hooligans with Shannon, who writes about a one-stop shop where you can get a haircut, tattoo or piercing all in one trip. And finally, taste the future with Sara at Nimbus, where chefs use chemistry to satisfy your tastes.

Cherish your past. Delve in the present. And look forward to your future.

Thanks for reading,

Brittney Leirdahl
Editor in Chief
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KLIPSUN THANKS BILL HOWATSON, HEATHER STEELE, CRAIG WOOD AND THE REST OF THE STAFF AT WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY'S PRINTING, GRAPHIC, WEB & COPYRIGHT SERVICES.
Bob Dylan's "Highway '61 Revisited" pours out of a well-aged record player and radiates softly through cluttered, makeshift aisles in a basement off of Holly Street. The singing voice hisses like a distant transmission, emerging from the vintage speakers, and mingles in the air with the musk of weathered fabric and wood.

The room is filled with the unmistakable aura of history. It seeps out of every nook and cranny and out of every item, large and small. Aladdin's Lamp Antique Mall is a hidden goldmine for collectors and lovers of vintage goods. The store's insides swell with a collection of countless relics for every purpose and use imaginable. At the front counter, an elderly man asks about one item in particular.

"I'm looking for a '30s-era stove that works on electric and wood," the man says, like a detective hot on a case. "I know you probably don't have one, but I'm looking for it. Do you know where I might find one?"

Requests like this are common at Aladdin's Lamp. People arrive with inquiries that seem obscure or baffling in today's tech-sawy culture of convenience, but are welcomed, and often satisfied, at this store.

Aladdin's is like a bridge to the past. Down a steep stairway, tucked away off Holly Street, the basement store is overflowing with treasures of days long forgotten. Curvaceous wooden furniture from a grand old Bellingham estate, a rack of fur coats, vintage dresses and antique jewelry reminiscent of Hollywood's golden age, and beautifully drawn signs advertising smiling figures with green glass bottles of Coca-Cola all catch a shopper's eye. These and thousands of other tiny gems fill the store from floor to ceiling, stock accumulated during the last two decades.

Aladdin's owner Walter Robinson opened the store in 1984 after finding retail space through a friend. He was working as a furniture salesman at the time and was ready to start something new.

"We thought we would give it a try," Robinson says of Aladdin's opening. "A lot of us were already collectors.

After 23 years in business, Aladdin's is still running strong thanks to the wide range of shoppers it attracts. Many come in for the antiques, but Robinson says a large portion of Aladdin's shoppers are attracted by a different kind of collectible — records. Aladdin's doubles as a dealer of newer and vintage vinyl and stereo equipment, and many people make a special effort to shop at Aladdin's because of this.

"The music aspect is really fun — helping people find music," says store employee Lanie Bolson. The store sells some of the oldest relics of early recorded material, including fragile wax cylinder records, brittle 78-rpm records and new vinyl. Aladdin's also sells 8-tracks, cassettes and CDs. The vinyl selection is especially attractive to Western Washington University students, Robinson says, who come to Aladdin's more frequently than other Antique dealers in order to dig through records and buy vintage and quality stereo equipment.

Alec Bartee, Bellingham native and Western student, remembers coming to Aladdin's while growing up and recalls being dazzled by the vintage toys and older items. Bartee now comes to Aladdin's frequently with friends to shop for records and browse around. He remembers Aladdin's early days.

"It was pretty small to start," Bartee says. "I have always thought it was kind of a cool [location]. It's nice to be able to still come here."

Felix "Sonny Boy" Wilson, a dedicated Aladdin's shopper and local traveling musician, came in to pick up an antique record player and a stack of old 78-rpm records. Sonny Boy says he appreciates Aladdin's because it offers a glimpse into a period of American culture that
The extensive record collection at Aladdin’s Lamp includes numerous genres and artists. Sonny Boy finds solace and comfort at the store and thinks of it as more than a shop. Aladdin’s is also a place to hang out, converse and learn. He says Robinson makes the experience of shopping and browsing enjoyable and personal, and he takes the time to help you find what you need.

Robinson cares about his merchandise and says every one of the items in Aladdin’s Lamp carries some historical significance. Robinson says when he acquires new items for the store, he stays constantly aware of the age and historical value of the material.

One corner of the store is filled with stacks and stacks of old magazines. The magazines are remnants of a time when print media was the dominant source of news and entertainment in America. Well maintained issues Life, Fortune and National Geographic magazines line the shelves and cases, some from as early as 1919. Flipping through any issue is like going through a time warp.

“Some of the history you get in these magazines, you just can’t find anywhere else,” Robinson says.

Bolson adds that the magazines attract artists to the store, who use the old images and print for collage work. She says Aladdin’s is special because it is one of the only stores in Bellingham that makes this kind of item available for purchase.

Aladdin’s staff is constantly amazed by what some people are looking for. Robinson says bizarre requests are standard in the store. Every day they sell something that leaves the employee thinking, “Why would someone need that?” This is the beauty of stores like Aladdin’s.

“You really never know what you are likely to find,” Bartee says.

With a new generation of shoppers frequenting the store and a steady flow of items coming through the doors, Aladdin’s will likely remain a unique source of enjoyment and culture in Bellingham. For young shoppers like Sonny Boy and Bartee, the store will be an important link to a different historical age.

As a Count Basie recording leaks from the same speakers, a man walks into the store and asks Robinson if he knows where to locate a “killer 1940s fridge.” With one look around, it is not hard to imagine such an item magically turning up at this store.

—David Dalton
Design by Patrick Gilbert

A Bob Dylan poster watches over an array of treasures in Aladdin’s Lamp. Porcelain dishes, records and hundreds of other treasures line every inch of the store.
Modern Midwives: A Natural Alternative

Turning away from the sterile and impersonal hospital setting, many women find comfort in natural child birth. Sarah Mason explores the nurturing world of midwives, where doctors become both mentors and friends. Photos by Kathryn Bachen. Design by Jamie Callaham.

The sound of feet echoing down a hallway bounces off a laminated floor and adds to the constant beeping of a heart monitor as it churns out the progress of a pulse. Nearby, saline solution drips down a clear hose and is injected into a patient's arm through a long needle.

Years ago, Christine Gibbs shuffled her feet through such a hallway, attending to patients' bedside to read the output of the heart monitor. As she looked into the faces of her pregnant patients while they sat in an anesthetized haze, watching television and waiting for their child to be born, Gibbs realized she could use her natural aptitude and passion for caregiving in a different way.

Leaving behind the IVs, heart monitors and epidurals, Gibbs now actively assists in the delivery of babies as a midwife at Bellingham Birth Center.

“I felt that natural birth was better for myself, and I felt it was better for the babies,” Gibbs says. “There's a lot to gain when your mind and body are together.”

As a mother of two, Gibbs says labor can be as painful as breaking a bone, but the pain women endure during a natural, drug-free birth adds to feelings of accomplishment and pride after the baby is born.

“Now I hearken back to, ‘I gave birth naturally. I'm strong, I can do this,'” Gibbs says. “And that's something you have to experience. Nobody can teach you that.”

For a lower price, midwives offer a substitute to hospital births for women like Gibbs who desire a different approach to child delivery. With a low number of practicing obstetricians and gynecologists in the area and a growing number of women interested in alternative birth methods, Gibbs says she must turn away a small percentage of potential clients to avoid being overbooked.

Women come to the center searching for someone to lead them through all stages of birth, acting as a counselor, doctor and adviser, who is someone they can know and trust in the delivery of their child.
For Rachel Castor, choosing a midwife over hospital birth meant a potentially safer delivery of her 6-week-old son, Jasper.

"Knowing that birth is a natural process, it's much more likely that it's going to progress naturally if you just let it happen," Castor says.

From the time a patient arrives at the center to about eight weeks after birth, they work with a single midwife rather than an entire hospital staff, says Catriona Munro, who shares the Birth Center with Gibbs and three other independent practicing midwives in the area.

In this time frame, the midwife and client are no longer strangers, but have a relationship more similar to a friendship, Munro says.

The center itself, a small building on Cornwall Avenue, is organized to encourage communication and relaxation. The building is filled with couches and a fireplace, and is decorated with illustrations and sculptures of pregnant women, mothers and babies.

The soft glow of lamplight and colorful wallpaper fill the birthing rooms, which are more like master bedrooms, set with dark wooden furniture and cushy queen-sized beds. The two birthing rooms have large baths, and no fluorescent lighting, strange odors, signs of medical equipment or anything else associated with a hospital.

While giving a tour through the center, Munro reveals the hidden equipment and medication, and admits everyone at the center has many of the tools and much of the knowledge one would find in a hospital.

In a hospital, however, a woman is mostly stationary during birth, and is unable to move because of medical equipment, which is affixed to her in order to monitor the progress of her labor, Gibbs says.

"Now I hearken back to, 'I gave birth naturally, I'm strong, I can do this.'"
—Christine Gibbs
Midwife Christine Gibbs listens to Paloma's heart while she is held by her mother, Michelle Waldron.

"I felt that natural birth was better for myself, and I felt it was better for the babies. There's a lot to gain when your mind and body are together."

—Christine Gibbs

"From the start, the woman is put into a hospital gown, she's hooked up to an IV and told to go to bed," Gibbs says.

In a midwife-guided delivery, Munro says the woman has options throughout the birth to stand, sit, lie down, soak in a warm bath or eat. The client may choose who is in the room during the birth and what role each person has, including the midwife, in the delivery of the baby.

The difference between these delivery practices is enormous, says Gibbs, who has worked as a nurse in a hospital and as a midwife in her own practice. She recalls delivering a baby to a woman who chose to have her husband to play a dominant role in the delivery of their child. As the woman progressed into labor, Gibbs stepped away from the bathtub where the client sat and kept a watchful eye as the husband took over. The husband stood near his wife and bent to whisper in her ear as the woman, without a pain-relieving epidural, struggled with the pains of labor.

In between the sounds the woman made, Gibbs heard his whispering continue so quietly she could not hear the words he murmured to his wife. Minutes later, the woman breathed deeper and her shoulders loosened. With her husband by her side, Gibbs' patient eased into the final stages of labor.

"I felt like it was the most intimate exchange I've ever witnessed a couple experience," Gibbs says.

Like any medical practitioner, licensed midwives such as Gibbs and Munro receive state certification after training. Both Munro and Gibbs were educated at the Seattle Midwifery School, where they completed three years of intensive training, from studying for medical courses to fulfilling the institution's requirement of performing 100 births before graduation.

If a delivery takes an unexpected turn and in any way seems unnatural, such as too much bleeding or
hours of labor with no progress, Munro says she or Gibbs immediately brings the client to St. Joseph Hospital, where they stay to help until the baby is born.

"I have a comfort level of normal birth — I've seen that a lot," Munro says. "But when something goes wrong, the safety of what we're doing relies on us being able to transfer to the hospital."

By the end of a birth, when the child is lain on its mother's chest and the midwife steps away to let the family enjoy its new member, Munro and Gibbs agree they are both physically and emotionally drained.

"It's definitely intense just being around somebody in that much pain for so many hours," Munro says with a sigh.

The ability to constantly go through the physical strain of delivery and build so many short-term relationships stems from a common nurturing instinct, which all members of the midwife profession share, Gibbs says.

In the end, the payoff outweighs any pain the midwife or mother endures, she says with a smile. Speaking of her own experience, Gibbs says childbirth can give mothers renewed confidence and pride in their capabilities as a woman.

"When they have that baby in their arms all that pain and worry is forgotten," Gibbs says.

In that moment, Gibbs says, the room is awash with joy, finally a time of peace after so much struggle. The connection from baby, to partner, to mother, to midwife is almost tangible, as each person has waited nine months to see each other, nine months to look into the eyes of a stranger they already love.
David Skully plays county blues on his guitar, a 1931 Resonator by National. The guitar has a completely metal body.

Sitting on a bench between his friends, Jesse Gilsoal rocks his head and beats his open palms on the drums he has rested between his legs. The skin-covered hand drums, called djembes, punctuate the tones Line Mkwanazi and Archie Dlamini create as they beat the wooden keys of their marimbas on either side of him. The vibrations they create with their rhythmic percussion and vocals fill the ears of the people who have formed a half-circle around the musicians, some of whom dance as the three play, waving their arms and shaking their bodies.

Both Mkwanazi and Dlamini immigrated to the United States more than 10 years ago. Mkwanazi was born in South Africa, where he learned to play the marimbas as a way to bring people together and escape the hateful things, such as apartheid, he saw in his country. Dlamini learned to play while living in Swaziland.
The musicians joined the other entertainers who sit amid the merchants and compete for the attention of passers-by at the Bellingham Farmers Market, which attracts performers of all types to entertain the crowds. Not only does the market provide a chance for the performers to practice their skills, but it also gives them an opportunity to earn some money busking, attracting the pocket change of many who pass by. These performers have become a significant addition to the atmosphere of the market, adding an element of entertainment to the rows of local vendors set up in stands.

On the other side of the market, Jesse Stein and Aviva Steigmeyer add a sound to the air that differs from the beating of marimbas and drums. Sitting on a folding chair in the middle of a row of stands, eyes closed and immersed in his music, Stein runs a bow along his fiddle. Steigmeyer sits next to him on an overturned milk crate, her fingers strumming the strings of the banjo she holds against her chest as her foot taps the ground to the beat of the folk music they play.

Both musicians consider themselves self-taught — they did not take formal music lessons — but emphasize the collaborative nature of how they play and learn new songs.

"Being self-taught, you’re motivating yourself to learn it," Steigmeyer says. "You might not be taking lessons every week, but you learn another song by watching somebody else."

Farther down the market, amid the chatter of people wandering the square and bumping shoulders, at the intersection of two rows of stands, Brit Anders sits on a little folding chair with a multicolored balloon hat on his head and a grin on his face. As the vendors and merchants compete for the attention of those in their vicinity with their produce, crafts and knick-knacks, Anders grabs the attention of passers-by with balloons formed into the shape of colorful flowers, miniature airplanes or dinosaurs that a child could cuddle.

Brother Brit, his chosen name, is a balloon artist, twisting and turning breath-filled rubber into works of art. As he sits on his stool and smiles at people as they walk by, children drag their parents by the hands to watch what Anders is making, with a sparkle in their eye at the possibility of getting a balloon for themselves.

A field of cement comes alive during the Bellingham Farmers Market, filled with the sound of music, the smell of freshly made food and the murmur of the people that come to experience it all. By the end of the day, the crowds start to disperse, and soon the square will be a parking lot. When the weekend comes, the merchants will return, and swarms of people will arrive to drift through the vendors’ stands. The sights and sounds of the entertainers at the market will again fill the square, to the amusement of anyone who comes.

—Nick Rohde

Photos by Nick Rohde
Design by Jenny Leak
The blare of horns fills the air, followed by the swing and bob of a Louis Armstrong trumpet solo. Armstrong’s gravelly voice fills the interval with tales of love and loss. With the flick of the radio dial, jazz gives way to Jimmy Durante’s nasally voice shouting, “Dat’s my boy dat said dat!” Another flick, and Orson Welles haunts families with a fictional account of an alien invasion.

Living rooms throughout America once listened to these sounds during the golden age of radio, which lasted from the 1920s to the 1950s. Today, listeners can immerse themselves in the era of bouncing ragtime, swinging jazz and live mystery theater with the flick of their radio dial, as Bellingham independent radio station 102.3 KMRE-LP pumps out the sounds of America’s golden age.

The station’s programming harkens to a time when radio was young, fresh and local. Radio provided listeners with a variety of entertainment and, for the first time, an opportunity to engage as a community from the comfort of their own homes. KMRE general manager Alena Feeney-Adam says community radio has been lost in the age of commercial radio and decentralized airwaves. With KMRE, Feeney-Adam says they hope to use America’s rich past of community programming to bring that same aspect to modern-day Bellingham.

"[Bellingham is] independent everything," Feeney-Adam says. "There’s buy local, eat local and we kind of have this idea of listen local. If [people] want to talk about public affairs or community news, they use KMRE as a resource to get their message out. And that’s what I’m hoping for, is that the community will embrace the station and make it their own.”

Operating out of Bellingham’s American Museum of Radio and Electricity, Feeney-Adam works as the station’s only paid employee to get started what she hopes will one day become Bellingham’s only independent, community radio station. Providing the backbone for this jaunt into the past is the music itself.

Though some of the music comes from CDs, much of the music KMRE broadcasts comes from the museum’s collection. While the recording quality may not have been as strong back then, Jonathan Winter, co-curator of the museum, says this classic music has a direct and simple sound that appeals to him.

“It’s really live and not manipulated in any way,” Winter says. “In the ’30s there’s no mixing at all. Those guys really knew what the hell they were doing, and when they get cooking it’s a lot of fun.”

The station operates on an automated computer program without DJs. The computer converts the music into MP3 format. Then, Feeney-Adam divides the music into playlists. Despite what Winter calls a shoestring budget, the station has encountered only problem in the two years it has been operating. The computer broke down and had to be sent to the shop for repairs, resulting in an hour of downtime for the station while they replaced the computer with one of a lower wattage. Operating 24 hours per day, the station has been lucky in this regard, Winter says.

One reason for this is the group of station volunteers. Feeney-Adam says the main aspect that separates KMRE from other stations is its ability to accept help from anyone in the community who has the desire to learn broadcast and bring their ideas to the station. In this way, Feeney-Adam can capitalize on ideas quickly and put them on the air.

“It can happen within however long it takes to put the show together,” Feeney-Adam says. “We don’t have to take it to multiple levels of management and see if it’s got a market survey attached to it or will it sell soda.”

KMRE volunteer Don Mitchell pitched his idea of airing a Dracula program, which was originally aired in the ’40s, for the nights preceding Halloween. When Feeney-Adam enters the recording studio to see the progress Mitchell has made on promotions and introductions to the program, her smiling reaction is that of a teacher and supporter. Mitchell says this relaxed atmosphere and opportunity to learn on the job is what attracted him to volunteering for the radio station.
“Even if nobody listens to [Dracula], it doesn’t matter,” Mitchell says. “I’ve spent so much time doing this. I’ve really learned a lot, and now I’m actually teaching other people who come in.”

Mitchell, a former teacher, started his involvement with the station as a consultant for the museum’s education department. He is one of the people Feeney-Adam says she hopes will continue to help expand KMRE’s programming. With a background in photography, Mitchell says he has always been interested in visual and audio technology and would like to eventually do live radio. His plan is to interview people in the community as part of a personality-profile segment for the station. By finding people with stories to tell, he says he hopes to put together a package that would be interesting for listeners and educate them on the kind of people who live in the Bellingham community.

This kind of new programming is already underway with the “Chuckanut Radio Hour.” The show is a collaboration with Village Books in Fairhaven, and features interviews with local and national authors, poetry readings and live performances by local musicians. The show was the brainchild of Village Books co-owner Chuck Robinson, who co-hosts it.

Still, the bulk of KMRE’s effort goes toward broadcasting historical shows that give listeners education and insight into America’s rich cultural background. Even with programming almost half a century old, KMRE finds ways to program for children with golden-age shows such as “The Adventures of Superman.” Though the bulk of the station’s audience seems to be older than 30, Winter says he is shocked by the number of younger listeners he encounters, including his daughter and her friends, who are in their 20s.

Youthful listeners have been an unexpected audience for Winter, who started the radio station as an extension of the museum. What began in 1985 as a small space housing his collection of antique radios, magazines and other objects relating to the golden age, the museum has expanded into a vast display that takes visitors on a journey from the development of electricity to the development of radio.

The radio station was part of this expansion and, with thousands of old records in the museum’s possession, providing a vast and diverse landscape of music was a simple accomplishment. When the opportunity to have a radio station first came, Winter says he envisioned it as another exhibit, something that could reach beyond the walls of the museum.

“I just want it to be a great public station that’s patterned after the great community stations of the ’30s and ’40s,” Winter says. “Once that gels, it will really set us apart from the other stations in Bellingham.”

After two years of applying for Bellingham’s last available frequency and another two years of constructing the station, KMRE finally hit the air on March 1, 2005. In doing so, it joined the likes of Western’s KUGS and Northwest Public Radio KZAZ as one of the three independent radio stations in Bellingham.

Independence is an important factor for the success of KMRE, says Feeney-Adam, and KMRE will never become a commercial radio station. Instead, the station will rely on volunteers and donations to continue running. She says KMRE provides an opportunity for the Bellingham community to showcase a variety of voices and actively shape what they hear on the radio.

“One important piece for the development of community and independent radio is that, without having corporate bottom lines attached to what we do, we are more free to be creative,” Feeney-Adam says.

However, with independence comes low-power broadcasting, limiting KMRE to 100-watts. Feeney-Adam says the station is able to reach much of Whatcom County from its downtown location at 1312 Bay St. The station broadcasts as far as Sudden Valley, though not quite to Fairhaven. To combat this problem, KMRE streams live across the Internet from the museum’s Web site, so anyone can listen from a computer.

The station still needs work though, both in programming and in its home, Feeney-Adam says. Tucked in the right corner of the museum rests a sign promising the space as the future home of KMRE. Feeney-Adam says the studio will eventually host DJs broadcasting live, along with room for live music performances. For now, walls still need painting, floors still creak and a station looking to the past for a sense of community involvement eagerly awaits the full support of a present voice and a present community ready to stand as one.

—Jeff Richards

Design by Jamie Callaham
Ink, Scissors & Needles in One Shop

Cutting-edge entrepreneur Davis Campbell reinvents the salon experience in the tattoo, hair and piercing parlor known as Hooligans. Shannon Deveny describes this friendly, extraordinary environment and the fascinating man behind it. Photos by Kathryn Bachen. Design by Jamie Callaham and Jenny Leak.

The sights: the glint of shiny silver foil engulfing a woman’s head, the splash of bright colors freshly inked on an elderly man’s arm and the sparkle of a gem newly inserted into a teenager’s nose. The sounds: the snips and clips of hair-styling scissors, the deep, sharp breaths of those a needle just passed through and the buzz of a busy tattoo gun. While the sights and sounds engage and entertain, the man responsible for this arena of sensory overload knows all his success began with the smell. With one whiff the sinuses clear, the nostrils burn and the eyes begin to water.

“Rubbing alcohol,” he says with a smirk. “There was the smell of rubbing alcohol, and I thought to myself, ‘That’s it! I just want to be a piercer.’ From there, everything else just fell into place.”

For Davis “Dave” Campbell, owner of the combination tattoo, hair and piercing parlor known as Hooligans Tattoo & Barber Shop, the inspiration for his business was the wafting scent of rubbing alcohol.

Sitting at the bar inside Bayou on Bay, Campbell looks every bit the part of a piercer and nothing like a corporately trained business owner. Instead of a starched and collared dress shirt, the 30-year-old father and entrepreneur is wearing a black T-shirt, exposing his tattoo-laden arms. Large, black plugs in both earlobes and a silver labret piercing replace the expensive watch and tie clip. Rather than a clean-shaven face, Campbell opts for a rust-and-coal-colored goatee. Sipping his Coke and scratching his shaved head, Campbell explains the mix of employment experiences that culminated in his current position as a small-business owner.

“I’m a piercer by trade, but I had a pretty rocky employment history before this,” says Campbell, who, with his doorframe height and linebacker stature, is comparable to a walking mountain.

“I’d work in a piercing or tattoo shop for a while, get burnt out and decide to cover up the tats, take out the piercings and get a corporate job,” he says. “But I always came back to my trade.”

Campbell began his piercing career at the age of 18, when he began an apprenticeship in a tattoo parlor. Even though his most important duty was sweeping the floors, he says it was a great learning experience and permanently infected him with the piercing bug. Now, with 12 years of experience under his belt, Campbell’s passion for the trade remains.

(above) Hooligans offers John Chapman’s homemade tattoo-aftercare products to clients.
(left) Zee Baltrus receives a tattoo from Chapman. When healed, the tattoo will glow fluorescently under black light.
(far left) Manager John Chapman is a tattoo artist, owner Davis Campbell is a piercer and hair stylist Samclaire Hall is the director of salon services.
“What do I love most about piercing?” he murmurs, repeating the question.

After a few pensive minutes of goatee stroking, Campbell answers.

“I love when a piercing is something that looks intelligent and complements the customer’s look. To tell the truth, that is why I’m not into the hardcore stuff. I don’t want to put spikes in people’s heads to make them look like lizards and freaks. I think that piercings are attractive and I want to keep them that way.”

After opening the piercing parlor Steel Expressions Studio in April 2006 and hair salon Jake’s Barber Shop in April 2007, Campbell turned his attention to his third Bellingham business venture: creating a shop that offered hair, tattoo and piercing services. In June 2007, Hooligans was born.

“I looked at it from a marketing standpoint,” Campbell says of Hooligans’ unique set of services. “The hair aspect of the store is an introduction for topics [tattoos and piercings] most people aren’t exposed to. It’s hard to get people into a tattoo shop even if they have questions or are curious, but it’s easy to get people into a hair salon. Once they’re in our store, we can perpetuate getting rid of people’s stereotypes about tattoos and piercings and get them to do what we call ‘jump chair.’

Jumping chair involves people moving from the hair-styling chair to the tattoo chair, potentially in the same trip. In Hooligans, the two chairs sit across the aisle from one another approximately 15 feet apart, making the jump an easy one. So far, the staff’s chair-jumping efforts have proved successful.

The first week Hooligans opened, Dyanna Turner, a San Francisco native visiting Bellingham, came in for a tattoo in celebration of her 60th birthday. While receiving a series of sunflower tattoos on her upper right arm, Turner decided to highlight her hair, recalls Samclaire Hall, director of salon services for Hooligans and Jake’s Barber Shop.

“Being able to get a tattoo and have my hair done all in one place is so convenient,” Turner says. “Everyone in that shop is so nice. I beautified my arm and my hair in just one trip!”

Not many people jump chair in one day, but most do so within two weeks.

“Of the three services we offer, people eventually get two of the three,” Hall says. “A person will come in for a tattoo and then return five days later for a piercing, or they will come back a week later with a friend who needs a haircut.”

Realizing the potential for three seemingly different services to work together profitably is a demonstration of Campbell’s creative concepts and business tactics melding together, Hall says.

“There are two types of people,” she says. “One is a dreamer and one is a visionary. One is simply a dreamer, but the other is a doer. Dave is a visionary — he’s the doer.”

Visionary he may be, but Campbell is also a realist who understands innovative ideas do not always generate necessary profits. “Expensive” is the word Campbell uses to describe the last couple of years, but says he is confident his businesses will make enough money to justify the cost.

Campbell does admit, however, that opening Hooligans posed many problems. First, Campbell had difficulties finding a building and landlord suitable for his business needs. Campbell looked at 72 buildings before deciding on the Commercial Street location, and says he encountered some of the most “miserable and mean” people along the way.

“I met some of the rudest people in Bellingham while looking at spaces for Hooligans,” he says with a sigh. “These people were OK with the hair aspect of my business, but the second the word ‘tattoo’ came up in conversation they stopped answering my phone calls, or they would agree to give us the space, but wouldn’t let us advertise our tattoo and piercing services. They treated us like we were stupid.”

Unfortunately, Campbell says, the problems continued. He and his team ran out of money halfway through construction and had to pull some fancy financial footwork.
to come up with funding. On top of financial troubles, Campbell and his crew spent months doing construction for up to 10 hours a day. Even with all the problems, Campbell says the business' profits and appreciative customers made the ordeal worth it.

Campbell firmly believes if he and his staff get to know their customers as people and treat them like royalty, they will undoubtedly become loyal customers, says John "J" Chapman, Hooligans tattoo artist and shop manager.

"He does not want his businesses run like a drive-thru," Chapman says. "He takes his time, he talks to his customers and makes it a more personal experience. People are more likely to come back and see us if they are our friends when they leave."

While friendship describes the relationship between Campbell and his customers, family describes his staff.

"We work together, we play together, we fight together, we drink together — we're a family," says Bryan "Rodent" Garibaldi Downard, Campbell's younger brother.

Chapman says customer service may bring in profits, but Campbell's treatment of his employees makes his establishments stand out from other businesses in the area.

Inside Hooligans, Chapman is cleaning his tattoo instruments, Downard is lounging on the couch with a Dr. Seuss book and Hall is tidying up her hair station. The employees discuss the best way to describe their boss, brother and friend in three words.

"Compassionate, tenacious and kind," Hall offers.

"How about cuddly, fuzzy bear?" Chapman jokes.

"Smart, hilarious...an ass...OK only sometimes," Downard says.

"Wait! I'm changing mine to best piercer ever," Chapman decides.

Throughout the day, chatter bounces off the brightly colored walls and floats from the tattoo chair, to the shampooing sink, and on over to the comfy black couch next to the window. The shop's never-ending repertoire shifts into a discussion of possible job complaints, but no one seems to have any.

"I've never had a better boss," Hall says. "People should work the way they are treated. If you're treated like gold, work like gold. We're treated like gold."

"We should have naptime," Downard constructively criticizes. "Naptime would be nice."

"I can't complain," Chapman says. "My job is like kindergarten. All I do is have fun, eat lunch and color."

According to Campbell, no one can compile an accurate description of him without first getting to know his people. Whether they view him as a friendly stuffed animal or as the person denying them daily naps, Campbell says he knows his staff supports him and will work hard to ensure his business succeeds.

In a special display of commitment to one another, every staff member received the same tattoo. Dubbed the Hooligans Mark, the tattoo is a simple, traditional-style sparrow on their hands between the pointer finger and thumb.

"The Hooligans Mark started as a half-brained idea that got taken way too far," Campbell says, laughing. "But now, it's something that brings us all closer together."

The future for Campbell and other carriers of the Hooligans Mark involves consolidating buildings and expanding services, Campbell says. The plan is to move Jake's Barber Shop and Steel Expressions Studio into Hooligans and sell the other properties. Campbell will then expand the hair service in Hooligans and improve the appearance of the store.

"Hopefully in five years I will be the owner of the prettiest and most technologically advanced tattoo shop in the region," Campbell says with a smile.

On that note, Campbell wanders outside into the cold, clear day and makes his way back toward Hooligans. With one whiff of the crisp autumn air his sinuses clear, his lungs fill with chilled air and, as always, his nostrils continue to burn as a pleasant reminder of the sharp, sterile odor responsible for his role as head Hooligan.
Brilliant colors in heavy contrast. Vitalized figures juxtaposed against vivid scenery. Bold icons and lettering bursting forth, dominating the fray. Images so full of energy, one might expect them to tear themselves out of their frozen state at any moment and come alive.

It may be hard to imagine such brilliance being confined to an 11-by-17-inch space, laid flat against the wall. But seeing is believing when it comes to the poster art of Bellingham graphic designer Mark S. Brinn.

During the past four years, Brinn has become one of the Bellingham's most promising young designers, producing logos and designs for an array of businesses. In his work for clients such as the American Museum of Radio and Electricity, the Mount Baker Theatre and Old School Tattoo, he has been busy establishing a body of work formidable for his young years. In all he has done so far, Brinn is most widely recognized for his work at the Nightlight Lounge.

In the three years Brinn spent as the resident designer for the Nightlight, advertising the club's concerts and events, he produced some of the most eclectic and enticing images to come out of the city of subdued excitement in recent years. His posters are like a magnet for the eyes, and the strength of Brinn's designs and illustrations is hard to miss.

Perhaps, most importantly, his work is fun to look at.

After finding a passion for art at Sehome High School, Brinn relocated to Seattle, where he received formal training in design at the Art Institute of Seattle. While in school, his studies branched out to include illustration and drawing, talents that are strongly manifested in Brinn's posters.

Much of Brinn's current work is centered on meticulously constructed drawings, from perfectly rendered human forms to cartoonish creatures of his own invention. Brinn says the allure of illustration, artistically and professionally, was inspired early on by the art of Ralph Steadman and his work with Hunter S. Thompson on "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas."

Brinn's involvement with the Nightlight, which ended at the beginning of summer 2007, began in February 2004. After receiving his degree, he moved back to Bellingham to pursue his chosen profession. At the time, the Nightlight was just opening and the club's owners approached Brinn about a design position at their upstart, creating show posters, advertisements and Web design. He jumped at the offer.

"I had always considered it a dream job, but there is not that much opportunity," Brinn says.

He would spend the next three years living his dream.
Brinn's first job as a professional designer allowed him nearly absolute creative freedom, and at the same time provided him with a paycheck — an uncommon scenario for young designers, Brinn says. With his posters, he was able to stretch himself creatively and technically during the design process.

The hundreds of posters Brinn produced in his three-year run are as varying and distinct as the acts that have performed in that time at the Nightlight. With a metal band performing one night followed by a country band the next, Brinn says the diversity in music kept his work consistently fresh and enjoyable.

Brinn's posters are a distillation of their subject: the name, attitude, sound and character of a band or event must be apparent and immediately accessible in the image. His work is typically centered on an image or statement that instantly connects the viewer to the advertisement, usually a play on the name of the artist or event.

A poster for the Bellingham-based band Idiot Pilot depicts an early century biplane crashing nose first into the ground, with spatters of blood overlaid on the image — an unsettling, but effective promotion for the band.

Brinn says this type of shocking or somewhat offensive image is a conscious and deliberate element in many of his posters. In addition to the industry-proven staples of color contrast, big and bold type and clean composition, Brinn crafts images meant to astonish and provoke.

On occasion, reactions to his work have been less than friendly. While working on the poster for a monthly Nightlight show, Brinn's play-on-words approach kicked into high gear. The first poster in the series featured Brinn's girlfriend in a provocative pose, the words "Cuts of the Month" along with the performer's names are digitally "carved" into her back. The Nightlight received a barrage of calls from angry locals, furious that the poster demeaned its subject and encouraged violence against women.

The following month's poster was nearly identical in its design. However, instead of Brinn's girlfriend posing, the image featured an equally provocative pose from a new model. This beauty happened to be one of the members of the Nightlight's bar staff who, Brinn adds, "was a dude."

"Surprisingly, not a single call came in," Brinn says jokingly.

Aside from the occasional local agitation, Brinn's work has given him the opportunity to connect both artistically and professionally with artists he respects, including musicians. Brinn remembers his work with Philadelphia producer and DJ, RJ2, as a particularly meaningful project.

"It was a big honor to work at least indirectly with RJ2, to let people know he was coming," Brinn says. "He is one of my favorite musicians."

In terms of poster art and graphic design, Brinn is also carrying on tradition in many ways, gaining inspiration from what many consider to be the golden age of poster design: the groundbreaking psychedelia of 1960s "Bill Graham Presents..." concerts. A vibrant local history in poster design exists as well, perhaps most strongly embodied in the work of Seattle designer and Western graduate Art Chantry, who created some of the most famous show posters from pre-grunge Seattle to the present day.

Still a relative newcomer, Brinn has produced stacks of posters, work of such high quality and lasting appeal that the Nightlight Lounge dedicated an entire hallway to house a gallery of Brinn's finest images. His work has documented, catalogued and permanently preserved part of Bellingham's musical history.

Brinn says he is looking forward to the next phase in his career, wherever it may take him. Finding work as a freelance designer is difficult, Brinn admits, and he has been constantly searching for work, but if the past three years are any indicator of his talent and drive, his future in design is certainly a bright one.

— David Dalton
Design by Jamie Callaham
Rachel Brown and Kleng are led through the Northwest Therapeutic Riding Center walking trail.

Nicole Lanphear follows the journey of Rachel Brown as she overcomes the challenges of Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism. Riding horses at the Northwest Therapeutic Riding Center helps Brown's coordination and ability to relate to people and animals. Photos by Jake Vorono. Design by Jamie Callaham.

On a quiet Thursday afternoon in the hills of Whatcom County, one horse with fuzzy gold fur stands, saddled and waiting. He has dark eyes that mirror his patience. At 17 years old, he is neither old nor young, but he has been at this business since he was 4. Commotion surrounds him, with another horse brushed and waiting for the saddle. A third horse stands, covered in mud and dirt, waiting for the brushes. Volunteers and staff members rush around and converse easily. The conversation drifts over the horse. He is used to the chaos.

One young woman walks up and pats his neck reassuringly. She is approximately 5 feet 1 inch tall and has dark, shoulder-length brunette hair covered in a white riding helmet. This horse is familiar to her, as seen in the motions of checking her saddle routine. She has ridden this horse for the last nine years, half of the horse's life.

For her, riding is more than a hobby. It's therapy.

Rachel Brown has spent years in weekly lessons at the Northwest Therapeutic Riding Center in Bellingham. Horseback riding has natural benefits of balance and strength training, but for Brown, riding has also improved her social skills and confidence.

"If I told someone I was autistic, they'd probably be surprised," Brown says. "I don't look like the stereotypical disabled person."

Brown, 23, has Asperger's syndrome, a degree of autism. People with Asperger's tend to have high IQs, but don't understand subtle social cues and struggle in social situations. Brown has overcome the strain from years of other kids harassing and bullying her in school. Riding helps her in ways that a classroom can't, providing a safe environment to escape. With the help of horses and determination, she has accomplished more than her doctors or parents thought possible.
Brown's story

Brown's mother, Vicki Brown, says she noticed a change in her daughter at 18 months, but wasn't sure what it was. Through trial-and-error tests with countless doctors, years passed without a reasonable answer.

"I was told when she was 4 and a half that she was retarded and to send her to an institution," Vicki Brown says.

The Browns weren't given a reasonable answer until their daughter was in second grade. A psychoneurologist diagnosed her with Asperger's syndrome and attention deficit disorder. Asperger's syndrome is a degree of autism that specifically targets language skills. She was able to teach herself to read, but didn't speak until she was 4 years old.

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke estimates Asperger's syndrome affects one out of every 5,000 children, and boys are four times more likely to be affected.

With proper medications and therapy, Vicki Brown says by the time her daughter reached third grade she picked up on her studies right away and caught up to her class.

Overcoming a full cup

Dealing with the public-school system was still an issue, Vicki Brown says, because the schools didn't know how handle Brown, who would throw a fit if she thought
In addition to learning how to ride Kleng, Brown is well versed in the tacking process of horse riding. Tacking includes equipping her horse with a bridle and saddle.

...she wasn’t being heard.

Brown also had to overcome teasing and harassing from other children. The family moved from Bellevue to Bellingham for Brown’s freshman year, but the teasing didn’t stop. In high school, the harassment peaked.

“Her cup was always full,” Vicki Brown says. “She was bombarded so much with people pushing her buttons, she found it hard to relax.”

After high school Brown was able to interact with people without the worry of harassment.

“The kids didn’t understand why she looked the same, but acted differently,” Vicki Brown says. Brown says other students have picked on her since the first grade, and the teachers usually didn’t stop it.

One teacher, Brown remembers, was especially mean.

“The teacher just didn’t understand,” Brown says. “She was condescending to me. She treated me like I was stupid because of my disability.”

Finding a way to relax

After the family moved to Bellingham in 1998, a doctor recommended therapeutic riding.

The owner of the riding center, Julia Bozzo, says the rhythmic motion of horseback riding helps normalize muscle impulses and environmental perceptions. People with autism also have a hard time relating to their parents, friends and animals. Riding horses allows them to connect to people and animals.

Vicki Brown says her daughter was stiff and frustrated when she first started riding, mainly because of social stress and the endless teasing from school. She was hard on the horses and volunteers at the riding center. Nearly 10 years later, Brown receives criticism, takes instructions and can ride independently.

Brown says she is able to relax while she is riding.

Bozzo says Brown has made a miraculous change in the past few years.

“IF I TOLD SOMEONE I WAS AUTISTIC, THEY’D PROBABLY BE SURPRISED. I DON’T LOOK LIKE THE STEREOTYPICAL DISABLED PERSON.”

— RACHEL BROWN

“As her confidence has built along with her maturity, her skill level has increased,” Bozzo says. “Riding has also helped her special perception. When she first started, she took tiny steps, so we spent time just walking the horse around.”

Along with her weekly riding lessons, Brown is taking an Asian studies class and a liberal arts class at Western. She also works 10 hours a week at the Human Resources office doing clerical work.

Brown graduated with an associate’s degree from Whatcom Community College in March 2007. She graduated with a 3.4 GPA and is working on a history degree with a graduate degree in archival science at Western. Brown says she would like to work in a library, which she did as a senior in high school.

Western’s disAbilities Resources serves approximately 400 students on campus with various disabilities, nine of whom have Asperger’s syndrome, director David Brunnemer says. He says people with Asperger’s tend to do well academically in some areas but have difficulties in others. Some excel in math and not in writing, he says, while others struggle with math and do well in English.

Brown took a calculus class at Whatcom, Vicki Brown says, and it was the first C she ever received, so she decided to not take any more calculus classes. She prefers history and liberal arts.

When she started at Western in the spring of 2007, Brown taped class lectures and took notes, which helped her remember the information. For papers, she has certain procedures to follow and gets help from tutors to remain independent from her parents. She is even planning to live in a dorm on campus in the future.

“She never could have done that five years ago,” Vicki Brown says.

Brown says she enjoys the professors at Western as well as the classes.
After riding lessons, Brown goes home and works on homework, taking a lot of notes, she says. She also watches anime DVDs, reads anime comics and listens to Japanese pop CDs. Her love for anime began as a child.

"I used to watch anime shows on Nickelodeon, back when Nickelodeon had good shows," Brown says.

Lately, she enjoys watching Mel Brooks movies and reading Harry Potter books.

Brown also lives with two cats, named Ajax and Canaan, who is by definition "Rachel's cat." Canaan was the promised cat and thus named in reference to the Biblical promised land of Canaan. She is called the queen of the house and is partial to cheese sandwiches from Brown's plate.

Another day, another lesson

Brown wears her English breeches and tall, black English boots. She sits straight on her companion, Kleng. They walk and trot around the arena at the instructor's command. She is strong enough to ride independently, but has a volunteer leading her for safety reasons.

Riding instructor Danielle Shimota tells one of the volunteers how to lead Brown's horse.

"She's a very independent rider," Shimota says.

"When he trots, make sure he doesn't go too fast. She will do the rest."

The riding lessons include physical and mental activities. Bozzo orders Brown to ride up to one bucket along the rail and pick up the brushes, in the order of grooming a horse, and put them in another bucket at the end of the arena. It is a race. Twenty minutes later, the lesson ends with Shimota asking Brown to name four parts of the horse.

The sun sets and the wind chills as Brown dismounts and leads Kleng out of the arena. She unlatches the leather straps on the bridle and slides it off Kleng's head, which is at the height of her shoulders. Then she moves to the saddle, loosening the girth, warm from the horse's activities. Silently, she pulls the saddle off and carries it in both arms into the tack room.

The buzz of the barn and its volunteers swarms around Brown and Kleng, but they are in a separate world, connected through a nine-year friendship. Brown finishes up with a quick brushing of Kleng's coat, which is growing thicker as the season gets colder. Brown and her mother slowly wander back to their car, back to homework and to another week of the real world.
Creative juices fill the kitchen as Nimbus chefs create their masterpieces. Sara Edmonds speaks with James Winberg and Josh Silverman, co-owners of Nimbus, to get a taste of how Nimbus chefs use chemistry to stir up imaginative culinary creations. Photos by Jake Vorono. Design by Jenny Leak.

James Winberg and Josh Silverman, co-owners and head chefs of Nimbus, gather in the back of their kitchen to begin brainstorming new menu items. Silverman vigorously stirs a chardonnay juice mixture as Winberg fusses over a one-gallon Igloo cooler full of liquid nitrogen. The liquid nitrogen crackles as eerie fog spills over the top of the opening and onto the metallic countertop, where it dissipates.

“I don’t know if this cooler is going to hold up,” Winberg says to Silverman. “We might have some problems.”

Winberg takes a pastry bag full of homemade pumpkin-pie filling and squeezes an inch-long, pale-orange strip into the cooler. Although the mixture is the consistency of cake batter, the liquid nitrogen freezes the strip instantaneously, and it makes an out-of-place thump as it hits the bottom of the container.

Silverman sucks his chardonnay mixture into a syringe and begins meticulously dropping the juice, bead by bead, into a calcium-chloride bath. This bath causes a chemical reaction that creates a thin skin around the bead of juice and makes a juice bubble that will be served on top of Nimbus’ hand-shucked kumamoto oysters.

Since buying Nimbus in June 2006, the owners have created monthly menus that are culinary masterpieces. Winberg and Silverman combine delicious recipes with chemistry, a technique known in the cooking world as molecular gastronomy.

Cooking creations such as their strawberry “caviar,” pinot noir foam and sparkling sesames put Nimbus on the cutting edge of culinary arts.

“I wouldn’t say that our food is cutting edge on a global scale. I would say it is cutting edge for Bellingham,” Silverman says. “Techniques that we use, such as molecular gastronomy, are starting to be seen more and more in larger cities, but I don’t think anyone else is doing it in Bellingham besides us.”

Winberg says molecular
gastroonomy is inspired by what is happening in the forefront of food. Since 1980, Ferran Adria, a chef in Spain, has been experimenting with how patrons view food. Adria uses techniques such as whipping a liquid until it is frothy and then injecting the froth into a whipped-cream canister equipped with nitrous oxide. This combination creates "culinary foam," and can be done with almost any carbohydrate-intensive liquid.

Molecular gastronomy doesn't change where the food comes from or where its classic roots are, but it determines how chefs and patrons interact with it. Winberg says it's a more playful concept, and any ingredient has the capacity to be any texture, consistency or shape.

"You can take a potato and make it into a clear liquid and it tastes like a potato," Winberg says. "So you can take it any number of directions."

Nimbus frequently uses a technique called encapsulating, which is a chemical reaction in which chefs take a fruit juice and form a slight skin around it using an algae-based food emulsifier that is 100-percent vegan and safe to cook with. This creates a sensation when bitten into, causing the capsule to break open and the flavor to ooze out.

The duo has tried this new culinary technique in several dishes. One being a seared foie gras, which is an enlarged goose liver very rich in flavor, with bebe-sized spheres of strawberry puree. The strawberries are juiced and then dropped with a syringe into the same calcium-chloride bath as the chardonnay pearls. This combination creates a thin skin that dissolves quickly, leaving the juice inside to blend with the buttery foie gras.

"We're just changing what you would normally think of as a strawberry, and giving it a different play," Winberg says.

The same technique with a bigger serving of juice creates the cherries on the banana split sundae. Banana ice cream, fried chocolate pudding, macadamia nuts, whipped cream and encapsulated maraschino cherries make up this decadent dessert.

"They look like cherries on the plate, but they're just bubbles that burst when you eat them."

— Josh Silverman
Chefs write “Nimbus” in balsamic vinegar and olive oil for customers to dip their bread in.

Another creation is seared Alaskan Salmon with lentils, grapes, crispy shallots (small, sweet, fried onions) and pinot noir foam. The chefs juice actual pinot noir wine grapes from Cloud Mountain Farms in Everson, Wash. Then they add a little pinot noir wine and froth it. This creates a cool, bubbly sauce for the salmon. Silverman says this is a way to have a flavorful sauce without it being too rich or creamy. The pinot noir foam has a more of a light, amusing texture when eaten.

“People are always like, ‘How did you make the foams?’” Silverman says. “I say, ‘Well, have you ever made a cappuccino? It’s the same concept.’”

The most pop-in-your-mouth dish on the menu is the Dungeness crab salad with tempura cantaloupe, yuzu rice bar and sparkling sesames. The sesames actually pop when eaten, like Pop Rocks. The chefs turn sesame oil into a powder. Silverman says he can’t reveal how they have the same texture and bite as Pop Rocks, but he can guarantee the sesame dust is completely homemade.

Since Winberg and Silverman have owned the restaurant, Daniel Noonan, a line cook at Nimbus, says comments from customers have been excellent. When restaurants switch owners they sometimes lose money, but Noonan says he feels that, if anything, the new dishes in the kitchen are helping Nimbus.

“When we do get negative feedback it’s that the portions are too small or it’s too expensive,” Noonan says. “But this is what the rest of the world is doing. We’re trying to educate people. It’s not all about value and portion — it’s about good ingredients that make good food.”

Kristin Bonney, a first-time diner at Nimbus and Western senior, says her meal was amazing. She says her roasted pepper stuffed with crab was the perfect combination of sweet from the pepper and savory from the crab meat. Western graduate Joe Christianson says Nimbus is not only a perfect date spot, but it isn’t too stuffy to get drinks with his friends.

“I wouldn’t necessarily pick here to come and watch the game,” Christianson says. “But I have been here with a couple of buddies and just gotten drinks. It’s really relaxing and has a cool view.”

Back in the kitchen, Winberg begins to scoop out his frozen strips of pumpkin-pie filling with a slotted spoon, grinning and giggling as he does so. He plops the twisted, light-orange, smoking morsels onto a towel.


Silverman and Winberg each put a piece of the experiment into their mouths to taste it. They stand there chewing, hands folded, looking at each other. Analyzing the flavors, they each give a slight nod as if to say, “Hey, this could work.”
Sweat beads begin to form on my brow. I reach for a Gatorade to hydrate my parched throat. I can hardly keep my wobbling legs steady enough to support me. The veins in my arms and hands are pulsating feverishly, nearly leaping from my skin. The series of forthcoming plays, bone-crushing hits, deep passes and running-back slashes play on repeat in my head like the latest Justin Timberlake single.

One disappointing play after another, and I begin to see my shot at immortality fade. Madden NFL Football in 1989 for the Apple II computer, the franchise has grossed more than $1.5 billion in sales and sold approximately 60 million copies. Online gaming forums estimate the Madden online gaming community to be more than 900,000 strong, which is only a fraction of the game's total following.

The franchise has had me hooked for more than 10 years. I secretly leave social gatherings or the bars, and neglect homework in order to fulfill my daily Madden allotment. My usual daily intake is between two and three hours. One particularly loser-ific summer evening I played from 10 p.m. until the sun rose.

Until now, Madden has been an obsession, ego booster and forum for trash-talking to my friends. Upon the release of Madden '08, I found myself delving into the competitive gaming world, a place not for the unnerdy, where prizes are won and skills are put to the ultimate test.

I stand alone in the Seattle Pavilion in the Seattle Center among the jersey-clad titans of video-game football, waiting for one of only 17 nationwide Madden Challenge 2007 tournaments to begin. All of my Madden gaming during the past decade comes down to this — my chance at $1,000 and a shot at being immortalized as a somebody in the Madden world.

The crisp Seattle weather and light rain masks the distinct smell of unwashed sweat pants, Doritos breath and the general body odor that envelops many hardcore Maddenites. The popping tops of energy drinks cut through the silence of an early morning.

I force an interception on defense, and score on a deep pass to perennial Pro Bowl wide receiver Randy Moss from golden boy extraordinaire Tom Brady. The mere seven points ends up being enough to pull out a win.

As I wait for my next game to start, my mind prematurely wanders to the prize money. I realize the $1,000 prize would not even cover the amount of money I have invested in Madden and video-game paraphernalia.

I have easily spent more than $600 on Madden games, a few thousand on my gaming systems — Sega Genesis, Nintendo 64, PlayStation 2 and PlayStation 3 — and have somehow managed to balance memorizing playbooks, perfecting plays and hours of practice with school and girlfriends able to share me with my remote control.

My daydream is shattered as I am rapidly ushered into one of the 40 gaming stations where I am placed shoulder-to-shoulder with a kind faced, Broncos-jersey-clad, stone cold killer.

The game is over for me before it truly begins.

In football video games the ultimate insult is to be "put off sticks." Being put off means you are losing by 21 points or more and must forfeit. Needless to say, this was my fate — 23-0 and two games into my first Madden Challenge adventure, I was finished.

My hope for the $1,000 prize and fame in Madden history were shattered. All of the hours I had invested in practice and shamelessly beating my friends were meaningless.

With my tail tucked between my legs, I plodded into the stormy Seattle afternoon. As I wandered toward my car I remembered something Madden has taught me: there is always next year.

—Jake Vorono
Design by Jenny Leak