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“Subculture” is a complex concept that is difficult to define without first looking at the meaning of “culture.” Culture refers to people who are bound by a number of shared traits, such as values, goals, practices and attitudes. Subcultures consist of individuals who not only belong to a larger culture, but share attributes distinguishing them from their overall community.

As you may have guessed, Bellingham has its own culture and Bellinghamsters share common features that make up the skeleton of the ‘Ham’s distinct scene. Just to name a few well-known traits: people living in Bellingham are open-minded, prepared for the rain and likely to respond if a stranger says “hey” on the street.

This issue’s theme, “Slice of the ‘Ham,” looks at the smaller scenes or subcultures existing within the Bellingham culture. Some of the subcultures discussed include people united by common practices, such as the nudist and Dumpster diving subcultures. Others, such as the Lummi Nation and queer subcultures, include individuals bound by shared values and attitudes.

No matter what common ground they stand on, this issue is all about the subcultures, or “slices,” of the ‘Ham.

Thanks for reading,
In a dark alley just blocks from downtown Bellingham, people are gathering. Some chain their bicycles to poles, others slam car doors shut, but all follow painted signs hanging from a chain-link fence. Wind sweeps up the alley and gives the night air a bitter chill. The group hurries toward a warehouse with a sign perched out front that reads, “Welcome to the Cirque Lab.”

Escaping from the cold, the people move inside and crowd together in a small room. Patchwork quilts, rainbow blankets and multicolored pillows decorate the cement floor. Children gather on the textiles and sit cross-legged in front of a plywood stage, which rests on milk crates. Every chair is filled. Those without a seat lean against walls or wooden beams jutting down from the ceiling.

At one point, the colorful space was empty with frigid cement walls and boarded up windows. Today, the multi-purpose warehouse is home to a unique group of performers, the Bellingham Circus Guild. The guild transformed the space into the Cirque Lab for practice and performance.

Maintaining the Cirque Lab is only one objective for the guild—a distinct Bellingham subculture of circus artists. The guild also hopes to create a sustainable group of performers in Whatcom County. Unfortunately, maintaining local circus artists can be difficult when performers migrate to bigger cities, like Seattle or Portland, in order to develop their skills as professional artists. These cities can offer artists more support and a bigger paycheck at times.

Richard Hartnell, 26, is a guild member who is working to sustain the local performing arts scene.

“Becky Renfrow laughs at another club member as they toss pins. “I like to juggle ‘cause I just like to play,” Renfrow says. “I like the way [juggling] delights people when they see it.”

In Bellingham, performers often struggle to earn a living, especially when the guild depends on their support. Each month, members are required to contribute $75 to help pay for rent and other expenses. Without a steady income from the circus, most artists are forced to maintain jobs outside of performance.

“We are all shucking an uncomfortable amount of money into this space because we want it to continue to exist,” Hartnell says.

In the Cirque Lab, tonight’s show is about to start. A woman wearing a black dress and stockings jumps onto the stage. Her name is Becky Renfrow and she is the host for the evening.

Renfrow spends the night introducing acts. Mid-way through the show, she motions to a table resting along one side of the room. Behind it stands Hartnell, one of the sound technicians for the night. Renfrow introduces Hartnell’s act as one that will defy gravity.

Leaving his post for a few minutes, Hartnell takes to the stage to perform. He is a contact juggler. Instead of throwing objects into the air and catching them, a ball travels along his arms and upper body. When he is done performing, Hartnell returns to his spot to continue working the sound for the show.

“Juggling is a meditation,” Hartnell says.

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She picks up a large stack megaphone, the type cheerleaders use to excite crowded stadiums, and she yells, “Welcome to Vaudevillingham!”

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He says he got serious about contact juggling after meeting with a group of performers at Summer Meltdown, a festival held annually in Darrington, Wash.

“I’m part of a school of contact juggling that advocates first learning a particularly difficult trick,” Hartnell says. “It’s called a butterfly.”

He reaches down at his side and pulls an object wrapped in...
a white bandana out of his bag, gently placing it in his lap. As he unrolls the corners, the bandana opens to reveal an opaque white inside. Hartnell rests the ball on the palm of his right hand. In one quick movement, the ball rolls down to his fingertips. His hand flips over. The ball now rests on the back of his hand.

He continues to roll the ball from the tips of his fingers into his palm, switching from right to left occasionally. He laughs and comments that it probably looks easy, but the skill was difficult to master.

"The first 10 hours of contact juggling are putting the ball on the back of your hand and watching it fall off," Hartnell says.

After mastering the basic moves of contact juggling, practicing becomes more enjoyable, he says.

"We put ourselves in positions in life where we forget to do things we are terrible at," Hartnell says. "We stop learning and then we get old really fast." For Hartnell and other members of the guild, the circus offers a space to try something new without worrying about skill level. If he gets bored with juggling club, which meets every Monday in the Cirque Lab, he might try something different, Hartnell says.

For Western junior Alissa French, trying different acrobatic moves led her to be interested in the circus.

"I went to the circus, and I realized that there were so many different things and things I could do with my body that I hadn't learned because they weren't regulation gymnastics," French says.

French practiced competitive gymnastics for 10 years. But when she transferred to Western, she found herself without a gymnastics team and a place to practice. French says she started the Acro Club as a way to fill the needs of herself and other gymnasts.

"It was a success at first," French says. "But it was hard to plan ahead for." Without an adequate indoor space, the Acro Club had to meet on the lawn in front of Western's Old Main. The grass provided a soft surface, which was necessary for practicing different tumbling moves.

In most cases, the weather determined whether or not practices took place. French says having to wait until the morning of the meeting to find out if it would rain made it difficult to keep attendance up.

"In Bellingham, it was hard to find a lot of sunny days," French says. "People couldn't plan ahead for it." With groups like the Acro Club falling apart because of the lack of practice space, maintaining the Cirque Lab is becoming more important for the guild. French says she was invited to check out the lab after guild members attended an Acro Club meeting and told her about the space.

She says she enjoyed the circus, but found it hard to maintain the time commitment and pay member's dues. When classes began in the fall of 2008, she decided to leave the guild to focus on school, she says.

In order to keep performers who are unable to afford monthly dues, guild members are trying to construct a work-trade program. The program would allow interested participants to work a certain number of hours in the Cirque Lab as a monthly payment. The program is not feasible at this time because the guild cannot afford to cut costs for members. The guild will have to find alternative sources of money to help maintain the Cirque Lab before the program will work, Hartnell says.

For Hartnell, this means devoting time to developing an upcoming show at the Black Porch Alley, which is located where the Callaloo used to be. Dinner and Delight is designed to be a two-hour variety show featuring performances by members of the guild. The show is currently scheduled to start in March and run through May, with shows happening the second Thursday of every month.

"That's the funny paradox about the circus," Hartnell says. "To most people, the circus just shows up and you go see the show, and that's it. You don't realize that these are actually human beings that live their lives within the circus scene."

Events such as Dinner and Delight may be a solution to the guild's financial needs. Hartnell hopes the performances will draw large enough crowds to continue on a regular basis.

"No one really knows where we are going," Renfrow says. "But we are expanding and figuring out how to maintain this."

Back in the Cirque Lab, Vaudevillingham is coming to an end, but the audience is hoping for one last performance. Renfrow introduces the crowd to Ukoia Mastin and backends her onto the stage. Renfrow tells the audience that Mastin is one of the founders of Uli Productions, the company that laid the foundation for the guild.

With cheers and applause, Mastin reluctantly stands up from her seat in the crowd. She pulls a piece of purple silk down from the wooden beams hanging above the stage. With one swift movement, she begins to climb the fabric. She twists and wraps the silk around her body. Her movements are simple and smooth but planned to perfection. Each has its own purpose.

She pulls her way to the top of the silk. Her body hangs in the air, several feet above the cement floor. The purple fabric wraps around her hips and ankles. Now she is able to extend her arms and legs and the textile holds her like a harness.

Then with a simple flick of her foot, her ankle comes unhooked. She tumbles toward the ground, her body flipping and turning. With each tumble, another yard of the purple silk is set free. In perfect grace and form, her slender body stops just before hitting the ground. The audience gasps, then bursts into cheers.

WWU Juggling Club president Aaron Pousett (left) and former Juggling Guild president Colum Topolski practice hand rotation techniques used in many juggling tricks.

Jessica Edwards, also known as Hollywood, fixes her hair at the Lummi Youth Academy on Feb. 8, 2009 before going to the mall on a Friday afternoon.

Jessica Edwards, also known as Hollywood, pulls her knee to her chest as she sits in the administrative office of the Lummi Youth Academy – a safe haven and living space for young victims of substance abuse or broken families. Dressed in a bright blue Aéropostale hoodie, the 14-year-old girl sips a smoothie, clutching the plastic cup with fingernails adorned in purple polish. She is soon joined by friend Barbara Jean Lewis, a 17-year-old, self-proclaimed “goody-goody” with red glasses. The girls scavenge the closet for snacks and settle on packages of M&M’s and Capri Sun before they dash off to their mixed martial arts class.

The girls are two of 25 students in grades 8 through 12 who are enrolled at the academy, located on the Lummi Reservation west of Bellingham Bay. Like many other communities, substance abuse is a persistent problem for the youth of Lummi Nation. The problem has led Lummi police and FBI agents to raid homes and to arrest more than 33 tribal members who have smuggled drugs into the U.S. over the Canadian border, according to the Lummi Nation’s Community Mobilization Against Drugs Initiative. Between 2002 and 2003, there were 15 drug-addicted babies born and six drug-related deaths, including the death of an 18-month-old baby who accidentally ingested an Oxycontin pill from the floor of her home.

Edwards says some Lummi youth have access to drugs and alcohol through family members who parosile substance abuse as normal. Some youth begin abusing drugs as early as 8 years old, she says.

Many of today’s youth are losing motivation and turning to drugs as the answer, says Darrell Hillaire, academy Project Coordinator.

“They’re smart. They just need some help [and need some love],” Hillaire says.

A study from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration shows more than 51 percent of Native Americans who are 12 years old and older admit to using illegal drugs such as marijuana and methamphetamine, compared to 20 percent of Asian-Americans and 42 percent of Caucasian-Americans.

The academy houses 17 girls and eight boys from five different tribal backgrounds. The facility opened in September 2008 next door to the K-12 Lummi Nation School to provide services.
students to attend the Lummi Youth Academy.

Living spaces such as the Lummi Youth Academy are sprouting up across the nation. The academy is modeled after several Native American schools, namely the SEED Public Charter School in Washington, D.C., and the Santa Fe Indian School in New Mexico.

Hillaire, a former Lummi chairman, launched a war on drugs when he entered office seven years ago. Under Hillaire’s leadership, a full-time drug detective was hired for the Lummi Police Department and surveillance cameras were installed in common drug-trafficking areas.

Before the creation of the academy, struggling Lummi students were sent to Chemawa Indian School in Salem, Oregon. Magrath says one of the challenging aspects of running a successful academy is bringing families back together rather than tearing them apart. Although the students are no longer under their parents’ supervision, academy staff emphasize rebuilding family connections by keeping the academy open for family visits.

“You have to learn to become a family again,” Magrath says.

Students can invite parents and siblings to Sunday dinners, and families are welcome anytime during the students’ stay. Unfortunately, it is rare for parents to visit, Magrath says.

“The families are just not stopping up and are not present,” he says.

The academy struggles to retain students because of rules placed on all residents, such as the rule requiring students to receive permission to come and go from the facility. The academy has lost more than a dozen students, as well as five students who enrolled in fall 2008 but never showed up.

“We haven’t made it so compelling that they want to stay [at the academy],” Hillaire says.

Edwards describes herself as the self-declared drama queen of the academy. She moved in last fall after finishing treatment at St. Eve’s-Chen, a youth drug treatment facility on the reservation. She attributes her former marijuana addiction to her older brothers who introduced her to the drug when she was 8 years old. Edwards has spent most of her life in and out of foster homes where she says she was given freedom to do as she pleased.

“There are people that care about you [at the academy],” Edwards says. “Before at foster homes, I didn’t really feel like they cared about me. Here it’s different — I’m closer to my family, and it’s more cultural.”

Edwards hopes her 15- and 16-year-old brothers will eventually join her at the academy.

“They make fun of me but they tell me that they don’t really mean it,” she says. “They’re actually just proud of me.”

Lewis came to the academy after her cousin recommended she enroll. Before arrival, she was kept busy caring for her mother who uses a wheelchair. But when summer began, Lewis delved into drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana to lift her spirits. If she returns to her mother’s home, she says she will sink back into her old habits.

“It’s kind of dumb now that I look back on it,” Lewis says. “In the back of my mind, I knew it was dumb. My mind really mean it,” she says. “They’re actually just proud of me.”

Lewis looks forward to her first match in Wenatchee this April.

“No way I’m losing my first fight,” she says. “I want bragging rights.”

Lewis and her roommate Gania-Lee Candie-Ridley, nicknamed Broadway, are trying to assemble a Lummi youth council open to all students on the reservation. The council would raise money for college visits and petition the Lummi Tribal Council to make amendments to the Point Elliott Treaty, the 1855 land settlement forcing the Lummi people onto a 20-square-mile reservation, Lewis says.

Nelson Montenegro, an 18-year-old resident of the academy and a senior at Lummi Nation School, is captain and a center offensive lineman for the Lummi Blackheath football team. During off-seasons, he plays on the school’s basketball, lacrosse and track teams. In his spare time, he is building a computer for his senior project from scratch.

Inside Montenegro’s room, computer parts and small screws are strewn about the floor. A red blanket with a Lummi tribal symbol covers the wall beside his bed. Plastered against the opposite wall is a blown-up picture of himself and his teammates wearing maroon and black school colors during a football game.

Before attending the academy, Montenegro says he lived without rules. The lifestyle led him to deal drugs and commit robbery.

“You got to have responsibility, so I’m pretty happy with how it is right now,” he says. “Right now is better than before.”

Montenegro will be the only one of his cousins to graduate high school, and he is determined to pass, he says. Donning a gray and white superhero T-shirt and muddied shoes, Montenegro says he is obsessed with science and hopes to attend Bellingham Technical College in the fall.

Among Montenegro are seven other male students who live at the academy. Hillaire says these men experience frustration because they grew up without solid father figures or a stable family.

“They’d be the best dads because they’ve been hurt and they know that hurt,” Hillaire says. “I want to show them the mountaintop.”

Hillaire says he vows to show the height of potential for the young men at the academy.

“As we get more educated and are able to hold on to what’s good about our tribal culture, then I think we’re going to be pretty proud of our people,” Hillaire says. “Then we’re not only survived, but thrived.”

On Thursday nights, students and staff gather for dinner as various sports practices and activities come to an end. At one table, a staff member and student laugh and bicker playfully over which artists are better — 50 Cent or The Beatles. At another table, Edwards busts out a freestyle rap to Montenegro’s best boxing.

The laid-back, dormitory-like atmosphere gives students the chance to relax and unwind after a busy day. Tomorrow, they will return to their busy schedules and dreams of success — in a stable environment.
A group of adventurers carefully descend the stairs of the temple of Shar, the evil goddess of darkness. Stopping just short of a pit, they manage to rig a makeshift bridge across and open the door into the inner sanctum where they are immediately attacked by four cultists and two iron dogs.

"The iron dog leaps at your throat," says Travis Gann, the Dungeon Master for the night, as he rolls a 20-sided die. "It ends up missing your throat but gnawing on your shoulder for five damage."

Bellingham resident Bruce Bogle, the player behind the attacked character, shrugs the damage off with a smile. "I'm gonna stab this guy in front of me because he's a jerk," Bogle says, rolling the die, which lands on a 20. "Ooh, a crit."

In the early '80s and '90s, Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), was often seen by the media and American society as a dangerous and subversive game. The game was first made out to be a satanic practice that was bringing American youth to devil worship, says Karl Smith, an officer of Bellingham Society of Roleplayers.

In the '90s, this image slowly changed, but a new stigma was taking its place. D&D was instead the game of social rejects, a subculture of people who squatted in their mothers' basement feasting on Cheetos and Mountain Dew, Smith says.

However, this stigma is starting to fade away because of the influence of online games such as World of Warcraft (WoW) that focus primarily on combat, Smith says. This affected the design for 4th edition, the newest D&D set of rules released in May 2008.

For some longtime D&D players in Bellingham, the change in their subculture is not necessarily a bad thing.

"In playing Dungeons and Dragons, I like a lot of the technical combat scenarios more," says Bogle, who has played D&D for more than 20 years. "There tends to be more of that in 4th edition."

Bogle and Gann play with the Role-Playing Game Association (RPGA), a national organization with a chapter in Bellingham. RPGA allows players to bring their characters anywhere and uses 4th edition exclusively.

The Bellingham chapter of RPGA tends to have about eight to 15 players a night, while the Bellingham Society of Roleplayers range from about five to 10—numbers which showcase local D&D enthusiasm despite 4th edition.

While it is possible the subculture itself will change, the core of the game remains the same. D&D is still a way for people to come together, delve into dungeons and slay dragons.

"He promised us death and destruction and, well, he failed to deliver," Bogle says, as the party finishes cutting their way through the iron dogs and guards, confronting the priestess of Shar. "I didn't promise you death and destruction," Gann says, moments before the party falls upon the priestess. The party slays the priestess and takes her treasure, ending another local D&D match.
It's 11 o'clock on a Wednesday night. The icy January fog consumes Bellingham, covering rooftops, softening traffic sounds and crystallizing every surface outside.

Western sophomores Ciaran Seward, Christina Snyder and junior Alex shiver as Snyder scrapes a hole in the ice on her windshield just large enough to see through.

Bundled up in warm jackets and outfitted with canvas grocery bags and flashlights, the trio drives out of the York Neighborhood onto Ellis Street. Their destination has not been fully determined, but their task is clear.

The conversation stays casual while radio beats play in the background. The roads are clear and the only pedestrian in sight is a man bundled up in a long trench coat.

Seward, Snyder and Alex are on a quest to find dinner ingredients. They plan to collect food from grocery stores – but not from their shelves. Instead, these students are finding food in Dumpsters behind local grocery stores, or in other words, "Dumpster diving."

"Ok, turn your lights off," Seward says to Snyder as they pull into the first parking lot of a grocery store near the York Neighborhood. They approach the grocery store's Dumpster on the side of the building while Alex scans the surroundings for any unwelcoming people.

"Do you think that is a cop?" Alex asks as he spots a white Ford across the street.

Snyder drives away from the Dumpster to get a closer look at the car. The word "SHERIFF" is painted on the vehicle in gold capital letters.

Dumpster diving is a new trend in collecting food, especially in the Seattle area. The trend expanded from freeganism, which is an alternative lifestyle that seeks to distance individuals from the capitalist economy as much as possible. Freegans believe businesses have used unethical methods to gain profits, which motivates them to find and utilize free resources in the community.

According to the Freegan.info Web site, Freegans wish to freely share resources instead of gaining them from businesses, which they view as corrupt. In particular, freegans want to reduce waste, limit consumption, save money, strengthen communities and opt out of the cycle of working for corporations they consider to be socially irresponsible. Through methods such as Dumpster diving, freegans are attempting to live sustainably and reduce contribution to the abuse of humans, animals and the earth.

Seward and Alex say they are not attempting to live a completely freegan lifestyle, but they Dumpster dive in response to American over-consumption and the waste of decent food materials. Due to Federal Drug Administration expiration dates, grocery stores are forced to dispose of food before it is purchased, perpetuating the cycle of waste.

Although the trio's Dumpster diving hunts are usually successful, Alex and Seward sometimes worry about getting caught in Dumpsters.

"If a Dumpster belongs to a business, it is considered private. The phrase “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure” has become a guiding principle for a group of Western students: sophomores Ciaran Seward, Christina Snyder and junior Alex. The students participate in “Dumpster diving,” a subculture within the Bellingham community consisting of people willing to jump into local Dumpsters to find unwanted food and objects. Since Dumpster diving is illegal in Whatcom County, these divers risk their reputation and well-being for what they believe in.

The phrase “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure” has become a guiding principle for a group of Western students: sophomores Ciaran Seward, Christina Snyder and junior Alex. The students participate in “Dumpster diving,” a subculture within the Bellingham community consisting of people willing to jump into local Dumpsters to find unwanted food and objects. Since Dumpster diving is illegal in Whatcom County, these divers risk their reputation and well-being for what they believe in.

"Last name withheld because Dumpster diving is illegal.

Story by Christine Karambelas
Photos by Mark Malijan

Alex plunges into a Dumpster on Jan. 30, 2009. The variety of items found in Dumpsters ranges from food to household products.
property, which makes Dumpster diving illegal, Alex says.

"Usually store owners are pretty chill about asking us to leave [a Dumpster]," Alex says. "Sometimes they just let us leave."

Mark Young, a Bellingham police officer from the Crime Prevention Unit, says he does not see Dumpster diving as much of an issue in Bellingham.

When people take recyclable goods such as bottles and cans from Dumpsters, they are taking property from the local recycling company, which makes a profit from recycling those products, Young says. So, if divers get caught taking recyclables, they could be charged with a misdemeanor, he says.

Dumpster diving behind stores, however, is considered trespassing and the person could be asked to leave the property, Young says. Repeat violators can be arrested if they return to a property after being asked by police to leave.

"We don't dictate procedure policies of the stores," Young says. "But if a shop calls [about someone in their Dumpster], we are going to respond."

On this Wednesday night, however, the Sheriff does not interfere with the divers' mission.

Still in search of food, the divers continue their journey, this time heading to a local business that is known to throw out a lot of produce.

"It's important to leave [food] for other people," Alex says. "Just take what you need."

After Seward jumps out of the Dumpster, Alex closes the lid. He says it's crucial to leave Dumpsters the way they were found, otherwise divers run a risk of upsetting businesses, who might start locking lids. The divers visit three other Dumpster locations in the downtown area that night. They find food in one of the locations – multiple sealed bags of tortillas, still in good condition. The tortillas were thrown away because the expiration date was from the day before they were found. The crew runs into another Dumpster diving posse, who have a bicycle with a baby trailer full of goods found from diving. They trade some packages of tortillas for lemons and announce a community feast that will be hosted later in the week.

Alex says the goal of Dumpster diving is not to find food for free, but it is a matter of sustainability.

"In this culture, we have so [many] to feed," Alex says. "Dumpster diving is sustainable because we obtain what is present."

Seward says they often find more than enough food, and this is why Alex and her friends also hold gatherings to feast on what they find during Dumpster diving.

Seward's roommate and Western sophomore Jesse Chapelle says a common meal of choice in the house is "mush," which includes eggs, hashbrowns and other foods found in Dumpsters or bought from stores.

Western junior Hallie Sloan, another one of Seward's roommates, says through Dumpster diving, their house of five roommates has become a popular diving location. As a result, the owner of the Dumpsters has been on the watch for divers.

"We got to be quiet and quick with this one," Seward says.

After the car is turned off and left facing the street for a quick get-away, the divers step out with flashlights and bags in hand, leaving the doors open to reduce any noise. Alex pries open the first Dumpster lid from underneath a bar that latches it closed. After looking inside and not seeing anything of interest, the divers proceed to the second Dumpster.

The opening of the lid releases a sour, rotten citrus smell that burns the nose. Inside, a mound of bean sprouts and carrot peelings cover all sides of the walls. As Snyder holds a flashlight into the Dumpster, the divers see lemons, oranges and apples. Seward jumps in, sinking into the confetti-like shreds of produce.

"I need to make it my goal to sleep in a Dumpster," Seward says as she collects lemons for what she hopes to make into lemon desserts. Seward fills two grocery bags with lemons, but she leaves plenty of produce behind.

"It's important to leave [food] for other people," Alex says. "Just

Ciaran Seward (front) and Alex discuss their next destination on Jan. 30, 2009.

"Fruit, watermelon, powdered sugar. Fruit, watermelon, powdered sugar..." Seward chants in hopes of finding these ingredients for a special recipe.

In a dark loading zone behind a store, the trio find their next targets – two small Dumpsters. This store in particular, which is known among divers for its produce, has become a popular diving location. As a result, the owner of the Dumpsters has been on the watch for divers.

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Western freshman Isaac Bond, also known as Lillian Cumfterbull, calls up the next participant during a Drag Show Karaoke night at Western's Underground Coffeehouse on Feb. 2, 2009.

Story by Amanda Winters
Photos by Damon Call

"I'll shake your hand," Western junior Josh Foley says to the man next to him as he pours apple juice into a red plastic cup. "I'm a hand-shaker."

Foley, coordinator of the new Western club Queers and Allies for Activism, sets down the jug of juice and plastic cup. "I'm a hand-shaker."

During the three decades Ashworth has spent living in the gay community, there have been new challenges in its on-going fight for equal rights. In January, 11 gay bars in Seattle received threatening, anonymous letters. The letters said bar patrons would be slipped into customers' drinks. Just months before, 11 gay bars in Seattle received threatening, anonymous letters. The letters said bar patrons would be slipped into customers' drinks.

"It's a scary time and an exciting time," Ashworth says, leaning forward, palms on the table. "I think activism is coming back because people are being shaken."

"It brings tears to my eyes, literally," Foley says, blinking with moistened eyes behind his thick-black framed glasses. After marching down Seattle's streets and leading thousands of protestors in chants, Foley says he felt like he could have run a marathon. The rush of adrenaline and feeling of being part of something bigger was what he wanted to bring to Western and Bellingham's gay subculture.

"We need an outlet for everyone to express their anger, to express their need for equality," he says. "You can do it. You can keep fighting, and eventually we will have equality."

The first Queers and Allies for Activism event, possibly a demonstration in Red Square, is in the planning stages. Foley will be sending out invitations to the nearly 200 members on the club's Facebook page. Whenever it does happen, even if only half the members show up, Foley will have a lot of hands to shake.
On a Sunday afternoon in early November, the sun is shining. A large, dark blue truck is parked on the hill of Forest and Cedar Park in Bellingham. The truck bed is overflowing with a white, icy substance. The temperature is about 50 degrees and the sky is cloudless.

A group of seven men hop out of the truck and a nearby car filled with snowboarding gear and a large shovel. One of the men starts unloading the truck bed and shovels the white powder onto the grassy hill to create a man-made slope for doing tricks. Two long wooden frames topped by a flat surface are placed in a line toward the bottom of the hill, followed by more snow shoveled at the base.

Once the creation is complete, a man in black jeans and a green shirt quickly fastens his snowboard bindings and hobbles over to the top of the slope. He hesitates a moment, jumps into the air while rotating his board and descends down the hill. Another boarder follows his lead, this time spinning his board in mid-air after jumping off the rail.

After each run on the roughly 20 to 30 foot man-made slope, the men hop around on their boards to steady themselves enough to unfasten their bindings. Once unbuckled, they walk up the grassy hill to attempt another run.

For Western junior Rhys Logan, building home-made jumps with shaved ice in local parks was a typical weekend activity until Mount Baker ski area opened mid-December. Before the season started, he posted a video on a Transworld Snowboarding Web site, which shows the snowboarders practicing tricks off their creation as local residents and families watch in awe.

Logan is one of many Bellingham snowboarders using this new method – building jumps beyond Mount Baker due to lack of snow. The late winter this year pushed opening day at Mount Baker back by more than two weeks from its usual late November opening. What’s more, season passes are now almost $700 – even with a college student discount. That’s nearly a $130 increase since the 2006-2007 season.

Still, the delayed season and high prices have not prevented passionate snowboarders from doing what they love. Rather, season delays have sparked the popularity of a new way to practice tricks and technique, creating a unique Bellingham subculture in the past couple years.

To keep the activity alive before and after snowboarding season, boarders are building terrains in their own backyards and local parks with household objects such as PVC pipe, wood planks and whiteboards, which the boarders cover with shaved ice from local skating rinks. This set up enables the boarders to do front-side and back-side boardslides, 270’s, tail presses and more.

Logan and his friends are doing whatever it takes to keep snowboarding year-round despite the lack of winter weather in Bellingham.

“It’s great to see people take that extra step to board,” Logan says. “It lets you see people who are really into snowboarding.”

The group of year-round snowboarders started meeting at the end of last September as a pre-season activity open to anyone, Logan says. About six to eight boarders would participate every weekend for around five hours.

Story by Sarah Gordon
Photos courtesy of Rhys Logan

Mark Macias does nose presses on a box under the flood lights at Forest and Cedar Park last September. A nose press requires a snowboarder to shift his or her weight all over the nose of the board while leaving the rest of the board lifted off the snow.
Logan’s, started the group. "It was just trying to get back on our boards before the season," Patitucci says. “A lot of people in Bellingham will just go to Baker to ride the mountain and don’t really care about man-made stuff. I like to do all types of snowboarding, so I don’t limit myself to just riding in one place.”

Patitucci and others in the group have built their own jumps and rails downtown and in their backyards over the past couple seasons. This was the first year they tried it in a local park, however.

Before each session, Logan, Patitucci and fellow snowboarders pick up “snow” from the Bellingham Sportsplex. After scraping ice off the rink with the Zamboni, a truck-like vehicle used to smooth the ice rink, the driver dumps the ice from the Sportsplex, Logan expects that the snowboarders also carpool to Baker because it provides an experience that boarders who are new because if you fall, it’s not there are leaves sticking to you. It’s great for those who are new because if you fall, it’s not big [of a deal]. You just get mud and leaves all over you.”

WWU Snowboarding Club president and Western senior Casey Desmond says riding around the city and building custom jumps and rails have always been a growing part of the snowboarding culture.

"The snowboarders often leave a yellowish-brown path in the grass where they held their sessions in the park, but neighborhood residents have shown an encouraging attitude. One resident opened her garage and offered a power outlet to the group during night sessions, Logan says.

Other than the occasional bumps and bruises, no one has received serious injuries during the park sessions — they’ve just gotten a little muddy. "You get really dirty, and it’s pretty funny sometimes," Logan says. “The snow melts, and there are leaves sticking to you. It’s great for those who are new because if you fall, it’s not that big [of a deal]. You just get mud and leaves all over you.”

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"When I first into the mud. He rolls over with a grin on his face and gets back on his board."

The Transworld Snowboarding video Logan posted continues with various snowboarders in the group practicing their tricks on their man-made set up. As one boarder attempts what appears to be a back-side 270, he plummets to the ground while dismounting the rail for his 90 degree rotation. His board hits the ground first, sending him into the air, then back down, head first into the mud. He rolls over with a grin on his face and gets back on his board."

"Western junior Bart Patitucci, a friend of Logan's, started the group. "It was just trying to get back on our boards before the season," Patitucci says. “A lot of people in Bellingham will just go to Baker to ride the mountain and don’t really care about man-made stuff. I like to do all types of snowboarding, so I don’t limit myself to just riding in one place.”

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"Aside from the strange glances locals give them, Logan and his friends do not receive any negative responses to their snowboarding activities in the park.

"I was surprised with how people embraced it," Logan says. "We’d get some funny looks sometimes because it would be the end of September, and we’d be driving through town with a truck load of snow in the sunny weather. September, and we’d be driving through town sometimes because it would be the end of it," Logan says. “We’d get some funny looks activities in the park."

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"After discovering how easy it is to get shaved ice from the Sportsplex, Logan expects that the group will start meeting up again in the spring."

"The snowboarders also carpool to Baker despite how expensive season passes have become. Last year, the group went to Baker from November to June, and then to Mount Hood in August, Patitucci says."

"The chairlifts usually stop running in April, but I try to snowboard until the snow is gone," Patitucci says.

"In the beginning, Logan says snowboarding can be tough. He keeps himself motivated by watching professional snowboarding videos, which inspire him. In the end, he says it all comes down to having fun with the activity rather than worrying about getting better right away."

"If you’re having a great time even while you’re falling, you can only get better," Logan says. "Snowboarding is a means to travel, and it’s a means to meet new people and enjoy life. It will shake things up."

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of its 270 nudist clubs, resorts and affiliates located in Washington. Although Robertson encourages others to practice nudity in organized settings, exposing his own skin is about extending his senses.

“When I go hiking, I don’t feel like my eyes are open until my clothes are off,” Robertson says. “My senses are not as awake until I include my skin as an organ of sense.”

Robertson first began practicing public nudity about a year ago in social, clothed settings such as parties and on hiking trails. He says the experience was unnerving but inspiring.

“Bellingham is a place where people question things,” Robertson says. “There are many groups of people in Bellingham with wonderful intentions educating each other. There’s an overall culture of sharing things that are beyond the mainstream, and we want to be part of that.”

Esme Dutcher, founder of Western’s Students for Optional Clothing, says nudist friends inspired her to begin practicing a clothing-optional lifestyle. All people are made of the same physical parts, she says, and no one should be shocked by a naked person.

The petite, dark-haired Dutcher says the club strives to transcend the societal implications of sexualized nudity to provide an atmosphere where people can be more comfortable with their own body image. Recently, she and 15 other practicing nudists gathered together in a tiny living room to relax naked under soft blankets while reading stories aloud.

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Although the club has only five official members so far, Dutcher says as many as 15 people at a time have attended events organized by the club. She says the club plans to organize more nude events such as potlucks and game, story and craft nights.

The club has also participated in Western’s annual Info Fair in September for the past five years. “We want to let people know that we’re here, and we’re a good venue for outdoor events,” Ashly King says. “We get welcomed back every year, and it’s always been fun. We have had positive responses from Western students.”

King says she began living a clothing-optional lifestyle because she enjoyed sunbathing nude, but she felt her backyard was confining. After a few years, she became interested in other places where she could enjoy outdoor nudity.

King says LARC not only offers social settings for practicing nudists, it also provides a large amount of property for people wanting to practice outdoor nudity in solitude. She says the club’s members range in age from early twenties to late sixties. Some of the members even bring their grandchildren, she says.

King says she has never encountered anyone who reacted negatively to her being a nudist, but she realizes that some people view public nudity negatively.

“When I go hiking, I don’t feel like my eyes are open until my clothes are off,” Robertson says. “My senses are not as awake until I include my skin as an organ of sense.”

“Seattle is a place where people question things,” Robertson says. “There are many groups of people in Seattle with wonderful intentions educating each other. There’s an overall culture of sharing things that are beyond the mainstream, and we want to be part of that.”

According to the LARC Web site, actions such as intimate contact, sexually provocative behavior, intoxication or use of illegal substances and vulgar language are all against club rules. Taking pictures without specific permission is also not allowed.

At a Students for Optional Clothing event, Dutcher adjusts her glasses and peers over them with her clear blue eyes. Clad in nothing but a red scarf and voluminous brown skirt, she awaits Robertson’s next move as they play a card game on the floor with some of their friends.

Robertson adjusts the only attire he has on, a large fishnet cloak, and lays a few cards down in front of him. Glancing around the room at fellow Western students who have joined him for a night of clothing-optional card playing, he scratches his board appreciatively.

“Hopefully the world will be a more diverse place because of our club,” he says.

King says she thinks most nudists enjoy being unclothed because they feel the body is most natural in its naked state. Until the laws change, Washington nudists like King, Robertson and Dutcher can feel free to enjoy themselves unclothed wherever they please. As long as they don’t offend anyone.
Klipsun is the Lummi word meaning “beautiful sunset.”