

alligator



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Three black women challenge incumbents in local election

By Jessica Giles
Alligator Staff Writer

Three black women will challenge two incumbents in the City of Gainesville regular election in March.

Five candidates have qualified for the March 20 election, and for the first time in about two decades, all of the challengers are black women, according to city records. Gail Johnson, 40, hopes to unseat incumbent

Harvey Budd for the At-Large Seat 1, while Gigi Simmons and Tyra “Ty Loudd” Edwards aim to defeat incumbent Charles Goston for the District 1 seat. The five-day period to register to run ended Friday.

“It’s really exciting to just be a part of an incredible group of women ready to take



Johnson



Budd

action and run for office in Gainesville,” Johnson said.

Johnson, a single mother and owner of delicious.delivered., a Gainesville catering company, is hopeful to see a ballot that includes several black women in the community, she said.

If elected, she said she’d mend the increas-

ing racial and economic division in the city.

Budd feels that although the representation of people of color and women in the City Commission may fall short, it has rich diversity in other ways. Budd feels he can offer a unique perspective as a senior citizen and naturalized American.

Overall, Budd said he is pleased to see more women getting involved in local poli-

SEE CITY, PAGE 4

APD arrests member of gang for shooting five

THERE WAS A 20-MONTH-OLD BOY IN THE CAR THAT WAS SHOT.

By Robert Lewis
Alligator Staff Writer

An Alachua man was arrested for a five-person shooting in the city about three weeks ago, Alachua Police said.

Kenzel Lashod Edwards, 22, was arrested on six counts of attempted murder Friday morning. Police are searching for his brother, McKenzly Alphae Edwards Jr., 24, who is wanted on the same charges, as well as possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, said APD Chief Chad Scott during a press conference.

On the night of Jan. 15, Jasmine Thomas, 24, drove her three children — a 3-year-old boy, a 4-year-old girl and a 20-month-old boy — to 14223 NW 156 Place. Resident Clifford Snead, 18, and Ron Fairley, then 19, walked out of the house and to the passen-



Edwards

ger side of Thomas’ black Ford Expedition, Scott said.

A black four-door sedan drove behind Thomas’ SUV, stopped and Edwards Jr., who is also known as “Kenny Poo Poo,” and his brother stepped out. They used an assault rifle to fire at least 25 bullets at the Ford Expedition, said Sgt. Jesse Sandusky, an APD spokesperson.

Both men got back in the sedan and drove away, Scott said. Police do not know who the driver was.

Thomas and her older children were shot along with Snead and Fairley, Scott said. Fairley is still hospitalized, he said.

Bullets hit the car seat of Thomas’ 20-month old son, but did not pass through and injure the child, Scott said.

Wallace Mazon, a 23-year-old UF

SEE SHOOTING, PAGE 4



Will Clewis / Alligator Staff

A GAME FOR THE BOOKS

Austin Wilson, a 22-year-old UF applied physiology and kinesiology senior, cheers on the Philadelphia Eagles during the Super Bowl at The Swamp Restaurant. See the photo story on pg. 9.

‘She’s part of the family’: A veteran and his dog fight to live

By Davio Rodriguez
Alligator Contributing Writer

As Michael Gaither lay in his bed with a breathing mask strapped around his face, his best friend Honey nudged his hand.

The house was quiet aside from the hissing of air from Gaither’s oxygen tank and the worried whines from Honey, his 8-year-old service dog.

The 72-year-old U.S. Army veteran and the German shepherd have lived together since 2011. They’ve been best friends since.

“She’s a part of me,” Gaither said. “I don’t know what life would be like without her.”

Now, both are terminally ill — Gaither with multiple sclerosis, and Honey with a fungal infection and spinal cord disease.

When veterinarians found Honey’s diseases in January 2017, they said she wouldn’t live to see her 100th treatment. But on Jan. 26 of this year, black and tan Honey celebrated her 100th procedure at the UF Small Animal Hospital surrounded by family, friends and bone-shaped treats.

Gaither lives in Chiefland, Florida, with

his 75-year-old wife, Kaye Gaither. Gaither’s bedroom is occupied by a hospital bed and various medical instruments, but memorabilia of Gaither’s time as an able-bodied young soldier line the walls.

He has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder since he sustained injuries in the Martin Luther King Jr. assassination riots in Atlanta. He regularly experiences violent flashbacks.

Every day is a struggle — a life that would be impossible without Honey, he said.

Honey was assigned to Gaither by the

Malcom Randall Veterans Affairs Medical Center as part of a national study. She now wears a camouflage service jacket fashioned from an old Air Force uniform once worn by Gaither’s daughter in Afghanistan. The study ended in August 2012 due to allegations of miscare, according to a 2016 article by The Associated Press. Honey’s and Gaither’s treatments have been funded by the VA.

Before Honey, Gaither would throw punches while having night terrors, his wife said.

SEE VET & PET, PAGE 4

GATORS FACE TIGERS TONIGHT AT 7

The Florida women’s basketball team is in Columbia after a week off from action, pg. 14



Visitors can experience life in the 1870s

Some of the events they can do include feeding sheep and pumping water, pg. 10.

UF Senate committee fails amendments

One concerned not using social media during meetings, pg. 5

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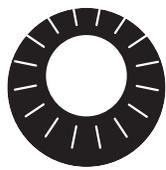


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Today's Weather



AM



NOON



PM

HIGH 70° LOW 45°

Local Events / News in Brief

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Stomp the Swamp for Autism

Impact Autism, a UF organization, is holding "Stomp the Swamp for Autism" to benefit the UF Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Feb. 17 at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium. CARD supports individuals with autism and their families through training and assistance. To learn more about autism and register for "Stomp the Swamp," visit card.ufl.edu or search the Facebook event page.

LifeSouth Community Blood Centers' race

Registration is now open for LifeSouth Community Blood Centers' Five Points of Life Race Weekend on Feb. 17 and Feb. 18 at fivepointsoflife.com. Gainesville's largest running race begins on the UF Cultural Plaza. Both days will include food, free massages and music. All proceeds go to the Five Points of Life Foundation, which educates people on ways to share life with others, including the donation of blood, organs and tissue.

Student Government Elections

Spring Student Government Elections will be held from 8:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Feb. 20 and 21 at locations across campus. All absentee ballot requests are due by 5 p.m. Wednesday. Visit sg.ufl.edu/elections to request an absentee ballot before the deadline.

Words on Canvas: Harn Museum Writing Competition

Words on Canvas is a poetry and prose writing competition at the Harn Museum of Art, located at 3259 Hull Road, for UF and Santa Fe College students inspired by art. The selection of artwork features a variety of media, including pieces from Asian, Contemporary and Modern collections. Winning contestants will be awarded prizes. See guidelines at harn.ufl.edu/wordsoncanvas. The deadline is Feb. 25.

Free citizenship classes

The Latina Women's League will offer free citizenship classes

from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. every Thursday until March 29 at the Millhopper Library Branch, located at 3145 NW 43rd St. To register, email info@latinawomensleague.org.

Tango classes

Want to learn Argentine tango? The UF Argentine Tango Club will hold free classes for all UF students. No dance experience is necessary. Join them from 6:15 p.m. to 8:15 p.m. Sundays at the Reitz Union, Dance Studio A.

Talking Gators Toastmasters

Want to get more comfortable speaking in front of a group? Talking Gators Toastmasters meets at 5:45 p.m. every Tuesday in the Entomology Building, Room 1031. Meetings are free to attend and open to all. For more information, visit talkinggators.toastmastersclubs.org.

Got something going on?

Want to see it in this space? Send an email with "What's Happening" in the subject line to jtavel@alligator.org. To request publication in the next day's newspaper, please submit the event before 5 p.m. Please model your submissions after the above events, and keep them to 150 words or fewer. Improperly formatted "What's Happening" submissions may not appear in the paper. Press releases will not appear in the paper.

News around the world**Amtrak crash in South Carolina leaves 2 dead, over 100 hurt**

An Amtrak passenger train slammed into a parked freight train in the early-morning darkness Sunday after a thrown switch sent it hurtling down a side track, authorities said. Two Amtrak crew members were killed, and more than 100 people were injured. It was the third deadly wreck involving Amtrak in less than two months.

Greeks rally in Athens to protest use of the name Macedonia

Well over 100,000 protesters from across Greece converged Sunday on Athens' main



Have an event planned? Add it to the **alligator's** online calendar: alligator.org/calendar

square to protest a potential Greek compromise in a dispute with neighboring Macedonia over Macedonia's official name. The name dispute broke out after Macedonia gained independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Although about 130 countries refer to it simply as Macedonia, many Greeks refer to it by the name of its capital, Skopje. Greece argues the use of the name implies territorial claims on its own province of Macedonia.

Child abductions rise amid South Sudan civil war

In South Sudan's five-year civil war, child kidnappings between clans have increased as people become more desperate amid widespread hunger and a devastated economy, human rights groups say. One child, no matter what his or her age, can sell for 20 cows, worth about \$7,000, said a Murle tribe youth leader who knows some of the abductors. One opposition governor blamed South Sudan's government for the increase in kidnappings, saying it's trying to create a wedge between the Murle and Nuer tribes to advance its military agenda. South Sudan's government denied it.

Same-sex marriage a key issue as Costa Ricans elect leader

Costa Ricans voted Sunday in a presidential race shaken by an international court ruling saying the country should let same-sex couples get married. The outlook of the elections was cloudy because none of 13 candidates polled at more than 17 percent. If no candidate reaches 40 percent of the total vote, the top two finishers advance to an April 1 runoff. The January decision by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights came to play a central role in the campaign. The court ordered the country to grant same-sex couples such rights as the ability to inherit estates and adopt children.

The Alligator strives to be accurate and clear in its news reports and editorials.

If you find an error, please call our newsroom at 352-376-4458 or email editor@alligator.org.

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City building facility, trying to redevelop East Gainesville

By Veronika Vernachio
Alligator Contributing Writer

A \$2 million complex is being built in East Gainesville in an effort to redevelop the area.

The building will house Mérieux NutriSciences, a food-testing company. Construction for the 22,700-square-foot facility started Jan. 22, said Tricia Lopez, a Gainesville Community Redevelopment Agency project manager.

Lopez said she didn't know the specific address, but the construction is on Southeast Hawthorne Road. The construction, which is set to last between six to eight months, is part of a plan to develop 13 acres along Southeast Hawthorne Road in East Gainesville.

The company hopes to bring in about 30 new jobs and strengthen the industry's relationship with UF.

The facility is being built in a cornerstone, which is a mixed-use complex with space for up to 10 new buildings. The Community Redevelopment Agency has been redeveloping the plaza as part of its Gainesville East initiative, Lopez said, and the \$2 mil-

lion comes from the Community Redevelopment Agency Eastside budgeted funds.

The plan is to have a mix of businesses that complement each other, which could be anything from office spaces to restaurants, she said.

The agency wants to attract new residents, businesses and investments to the east side while preserving what makes it unique, said Stephanie Seawright, a Gainesville Community Redevelopment Agency project manager.

Lopez said the initiative will add jobs and amenities to an area that has not seen the same growth other areas of Gainesville have. Lopez said there's no definitive reason why East Gainesville's growth has lagged behind, but said negative perceptions of lack of income, crime and inadequate schools have vilified development on the East Side.

"It's a positive step for the growth on the east side of Gainesville," said Brian Crawford, the president of Concept Companies, which owns the NutriSciences building.

Mérieux NutriSciences is head-



Courtesy to the Alligator

This is the model of a \$2 million complex that will house Mérieux NutriSciences, a food-testing company. The construction along Southeast Hawthorne Road is expected to last between six to eight months.

quartered in Chicago but is currently located in 22 countries. The company promotes public health through analysis, consulting, auditing, training, contract research and sensory analysis services in the food industry, said Lindsey Roberts, a marketing manager at

Concept Companies.

Susan Davenport, the president and CEO of the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce, said Mérieux NutriSciences will benefit from the talent, research and innovation that comes out of UF.

"The selection of East Gaines-

ville's cornerstone site for Mérieux NutriSciences' newest lab will not only bring new jobs to the area, but it will also strengthen the industry's relationship with the University of Florida and our regional business community," Davenport said.

Woman who hit bank likely won't face charges, police say

SHE WAS TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL AND IS EXPECTED TO MAKE A FULL RECOVERY.

By Robert Lewis
Alligator Staff Writer

A woman facing an unknown medical emergency drove a van over several mailboxes before crashing into a bank Friday morn-

ing, Gainesville Police said.

The woman, was not identified by police, drove a Chrysler van across three lanes of oncoming traffic before driving onto a sidewalk, over several mailboxes and into a SunTrust bank, located at 5080 W. Newberry Road, GPD spokesperson Officer Ben Tobias wrote in an email. The outside of the bank was damaged, but the car was left in far worse shape, he said.

The driver, who is in her 40s, was taken

to the hospital with possibly life-threatening injuries. As of Sunday, the driver's condition has improved, and she is expected to make a full recovery, Lt. Jaret Weiland said.

Police are still investigating the crash. If the driver did have a medical emergency, then she won't be cited for the crash, Weiland said.

Tobias said the medical problem is likely what caused her to lose control of the vehicle. Gainesville Fire Rescue responded to con-

trol hazardous engine fluids that were leaking from the car, according to a GFR press release.

An off-duty paramedic was behind the van on West Newberry Road and saw the van driving strangely and crossing lanes of traffic before hitting the mailboxes, Tobias said.

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Gainesville man stabs wife then cuts himself, police say

SHE ASKED HIM FOR A DIVORCE.

By Robert Lewis
Alligator Staff Writer

A Gainesville man was arrested for trying to kill his wife early Saturday, Gainesville Police said.



Reuschel

Michael James Reuschel, 62, stabbed his wife repeatedly after the pair argued about getting divorced, according to an arrest report. Reuschel then forced her to stay in bed as she bled profusely and cut himself so they could die

together, police said.

Reuschel and his wife had been separated for several months and lived in different homes in different counties, according to the report. On Saturday, his wife returned to the Alachua home they shared to discuss their marriage, police said.

Police said the argument escalated in a bedroom when Reuschel jumped on his wife and stabbed her in the arm, neck and stomach repeatedly.

"Michael, you are going to kill me," she said.

"Yes, that's exactly what I want to do," Reuschel replied, according to the report.

Reuschel then cut his own arm and got in bed, police said.

After about an hour, Reuschel told his wife she could live if she went along with the story that someone broke in, according to the report.

He took off his bloodstained clothing and covered his wife with a robe before calling 911, police said. He gave police conflicting versions of what happened, officers said.

Reuschel was charged with attempted murder, false imprisonment, obstructing police and tampering with evidence. He was taken to the Alachua County Jail where he remains on no bond.

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Investigation continuing

SHOOTING, from pg. 1

political science and African American studies senior, is the uncle of Fairley, who turned 20 on Sunday, and shared Edward's photo on Facebook the next day after the shooting. He said he heard through word-of-mouth Edwards was the culprit.

"It's messed up," Mazon said. "It just happened recently, so I haven't really had a chance to digest it."

He posted again after Edwards was arrested and said his brother is still on the loose while Fairley recovers from seven bullet wounds.

The U.S. Marshals Task Force and Alachua County Sheriff's Warrants Division arrested Kenzel Edwards and Rakeidra Alexandria Neal, 27, on Friday, Scott said.

Neal was arrested on a charge of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon and pointing a gun while taunting another person last Tuesday, Sandusky said. Police are investigating if she is connected to the shooting.

Police suspect gang violence was the cause of this shooting and a fatal shooting of Dana Walker Jr. in Maude Lewis Park the day before. The Edwards brothers and Neal are known associates of a small, local gang, which rivals the gang Kemarri Hampton, who was charged in the shooting of Walker, is in, police said.

"The investigation into these local gangs and their criminal involvement will continue until they are dismantled at their core," Scott said.

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Gaithers started Kids For K9s, an educational program in 2013

VET & PET, from pg. 1

"But now, Honey just comes over and puts her wet nose against his side," she said. "She just calms him down."

During the day, Honey helps Gaither maintain a routine. She fetches his socks, picks up items and keeps him safe.

Just three months ago, Honey saved Gaither's life while Kaye tried to fix a lawn mower. Fumes from the mower were engulfing Gaither in his scooter chair. Kaye said she didn't notice until Honey tried to push his scooter out of the way.

Honey has won five awards for her service, including four bronze medals from the American Kennel Club for canine excellence between 2011 and 2015 and a medal from U.S. War Dogs in 2015.

In 2013, Gaither and Honey founded an educational program called Kids For K9s. The duo went to various school assemblies in Levy County, educating children on proper service animal treatment, he said.

But as Honey teaches children and assists Gaither, she suffers from her own medical conditions. Her fungal

infection took her left eye, and her spinal-cord disease may take her hind legs. Lately, she's been collapsing, unable to support her own weight.

Even in Gaither's condition, he brings Honey to the UF Small Animal Hospital twice a week for treatments.

"She's part of the family," he said. "That's why I'm bringing her over here twice a week. To do for her what she's done for me."

When Honey received her 100th treatment, a tribute was held to honor her bravery. A handful of close friends and supporters came, including fellow therapy dog, Sola, and Sgt. Lauree' Allen of the Levy County Sheriff's Office.

The U.S. War Dogs president Barbara Snow brought a cake saying "Congratulations 100 visits" and "Happy Birthday Honey the Wonderdog."

As the visitors ate and Gaither looked on from his chair, Honey played with Sola, carefree.

Kaye watched over as well, eyes welling up with tears.

"I say they'll recover a lot," she said. "And I keep hoping its a self-fulfilling prophecy. The reality is that neither one of them is going to make it much longer."



Davio Rodriguez / Alligator

Michael Gaither, a U.S. Army veteran suffering from multiple sclerosis, lays in bed with his service dog, Honey, by his side. Both are fighting terminal illnesses and need constant medical treatments.

Five candidates are running for the two commission seats

CITY, from pg. 1

tics.

"I think it's a very positive change," he said. "I'm just sorry that one's running against me."

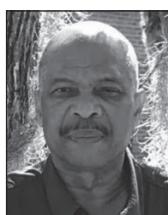
As of press time, Johnson has raised \$14,316 and Budd has raised \$7,450, according to candidate finance reports.

Goston said he isn't worried about maintaining his seat as the District 1 commissioner because he has the political experience and qualifications his opponents lack.

Although he's happy to see three black female candidates running for local office, it's going to take more than just one or two seats occupied by women of color to make a difference, he said.

"Let's see if they're willing to allow some other people of color to represent districts that are not heavily populated by minorities," he said.

Edwards was not available for comment. As of press time, Simmons has raised



Goston



Simmons

\$3,330 for her campaign, Goston has raised \$5,971.60 and Edwards has raised \$770.

Simmons, a fourth-generation resident of the Porters Community and owner of Simmons Tax Services, doesn't feel the City Commission accurately represents the demographic of Gainesville. But she hopes the results of this election will begin to change that.

"We're trying to put people in place that



Edwards

represent the diversity of the community," she said. "I knew that I could make a difference because I've already made a difference in my own community."

Early voting begins March 10 and ends March 17, and candidate forums

will run throughout February.

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'Writing on the Wall' project takes on political climate



Taylor Marks / Alligator Staff

Students participated in the annual Inter-Residence Hall Association's Writing on the Wall Project on Friday, tearing down a wall composed of bricks painted with negative words and stereotypes.

By Sabrina Conza

Alligator Contributing Writer

As Joey McGinn and dozens of others pulled on different strings, a wall of colorful bricks and words tumbled down.

McGinn, 21, and other UF students saw the bricks covered in negative words collapse on the Reitz Union North Lawn on Friday afternoon.

By the end of it, the bricks lay in a pile, the insults and slurs turned into rubble.

The annual Inter-Residence Hall Association "Writing on the Wall" project focused on how the current political and cultural climate has affected the community, said Anthony Sanchez, the association president.

McGinn said this was his third year attending the event, but it meant more this year because President Donald Trump

has said many of the words that were on the wall.

"Us tearing it down shows that just because they're being said by people in power doesn't mean that we're going to stand for it," the UF political science junior said.

Sanchez said this year's wall, which included more than 300 words, had new phrases like "illegal," "terrorist" and "s----- country."

Event Director Samantha Boddupalli, said some words can reappear since the event began in 2002, but no two words come with the same experience.

With everything going on in the world, Boddupalli said, the project is a way to create a positive impact.

"There are people on campus who will stand with you," the 20-year-old UF chemistry junior said.

SG judiciary committee unanimously fails two amendments

THE COMMITTEE ALSO TABLED A SENATE BILL.

By Christina Morales

Alligator Staff Writer

The Student Government judiciary committee met Sunday and unanimously voted down two amendments and tabled a Senate bill.

The committee voted not to amend Senate rules and procedures to limit the amount of committees senators can serve on from two to one. Currently, eight senators serve on more than one committee.

Senator Olin Calvin (Inspire, Graduate-07) authored the amendment and said four judiciary committee members who serve on other committees were biased because they didn't want to lose their positions.

"I'm also concerned there might have been a conflict of interest in their decision," he said about Senators Libby Shaw (Impact, Sophomore-03), Angel Zavala (Impact, Liberal Arts-04), Dylan Santalo (Impact, District A-08) and Graham Boone (Impact, Sophomore-06).

Senator Emily Dempsey (Impact, District A-01) said she doesn't think there's a problem with senators serving in two committees.

"There's many ways to serve your constituency in Senate, like working on projects or advocating for your constituency through resolutions," she said.

The committee also unanimously failed an amendment that would call for senators to report other senators to the Senate president if they were using social media during meetings. If senators were caught on multiple occasions, they'd be referred to the rules and ethics committee for further investigation.

Dempsey said the committee failed the legislation because the process for the rules and ethics committee was unclear and could be a distraction in Senate meetings because it would interrupt the meeting.

Dempsey said the authors should instead write a resolution, which is more informal than an amendment, or talk to the Senate president to remind senators to not use their phones during meetings.

"I definitely think it's something my committee believes could be helped," Dempsey said.

Calvin said he thinks some of the co-authors of the social media amendment will write a resolution.

"It was good to hear from the committee that they agree that this is an issue," he said. "I think a resolution will still be a good idea."

The judiciary committee also tabled a Senate bill to put closed captioning on all videos in SG to give it an opportunity to go to the code revision committee before coming back to them.

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Local students makes toys for children with disabilities

By Lauren Staff

Alligator Contributing Writer

Jackson Fugate helped engineer a toy Jeep to start by pressing a steering wheel button instead of a pedal for children who are bound to wheelchairs to ride.

The 16-year-old was one of about 15 students and five mentors from P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School's First Robotics Club who drove about two hours to Orlando on Saturday, said Leigh Anne Brewster, the club's faculty sponsor. They presented altered toys like the Jeep in the first Assistive Technology Industry Association's Maker Day.

They showed the toys to children with disabilities, like blindness or muscular limitation, and demonstrated how to use them, said Fugate, a sophomore club member.

"Before (Saturday), I didn't really get the chance to see the way (our work) impacted actual people," he said.

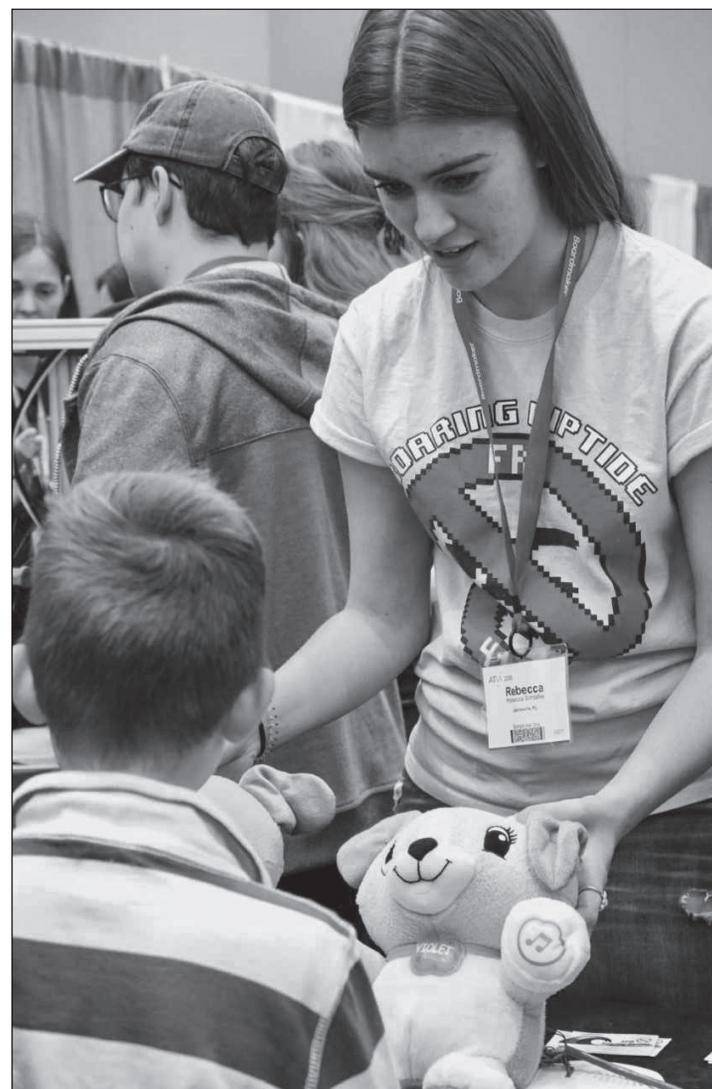
Brewster said the conference put everything into context by allowing them to meet the people they have impacted through their work.

"They learned that robotics is more than robots," Brewster said. "It's about making a larger impact across their state, potentially the nation."

The conference gave the students the ability to interact with the families and children who receive their altered toys and speak with assistive technology experts from all over the world.

Andrea Wright, a 17-year-old high-school senior, said she helped demonstrate the toys at the conference.

"Seeing the families that were so grateful that people like us were working on things like this was really heart-warming," she said.



Lauren Staff / Alligator

A student from P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School's First Robotics Club, 12th-grader Rebecca Schlafke, demonstrates how to use the club's adapted creations to a child at the Assistive Technology Industry Association Maker's Day on Saturday.

Editorial

Diversity is still worth celebrating

Some might think diversity is not worth praising. That “it’s 2018,” so diversity and acceptance aren’t things we have to keep in check. That racism and prejudice aren’t things we have to worry about anymore. That cruelty, judgement and downright bigotry are a thing of the past. Well, dear reader, these assumptions are, unfortunately, incorrect.

This past Friday, the Alligator put out a front page that read “Bigger than Us: Three black UF students vie for president.” The story, focused on the three Student Government Student Body candidates running in the Spring election, detailed discrimination each faced during their lives, as well as how historic this election will be. It also shed light on the fact UF has had only one black female Student Body president in 1986. To top it off, there hasn’t been a black Student Government president in more than ten years.

The race between Ian Green, Janae Moodie and Revel Lubin is historic. More than that, it’s something our school should be proud of, because it signifies a positive change in our campus community. Nonetheless, people continue to question diversity, whether it should be celebrated and if it’s a discussion worth having.

For those who think America has reached a point where we no longer need to celebrate diversity, we invite you to take a look at the numbers.

A look at the statistics on minority representation in the federal government is an example of the lack of diversity. Out of 45 U.S. presidents, one has been black. To date, only 10 African Americans have served in the U.S. Senate. There have been eight members of the Senate who were Asian American, nine who were Hispanic and three who were Native American. These numbers show the racial representation through America’s entire history — not just this past year. The 115th Congress was labeled as the most racially diverse group to be sworn in in America’s history. When you look at the numbers, however, only 19 percent of this Congress is made up of nonwhites. In our opinion, this means there is still progress to be made.

As of October 2017, there were only four black CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and only 32 were female. Let’s keep in mind, this is out of 500 companies and 500 possible CEO positions. Moreover, according to the Atlantic, even when people were able to break through the racial glass ceiling, after retirement, their positions were often filled by white men.

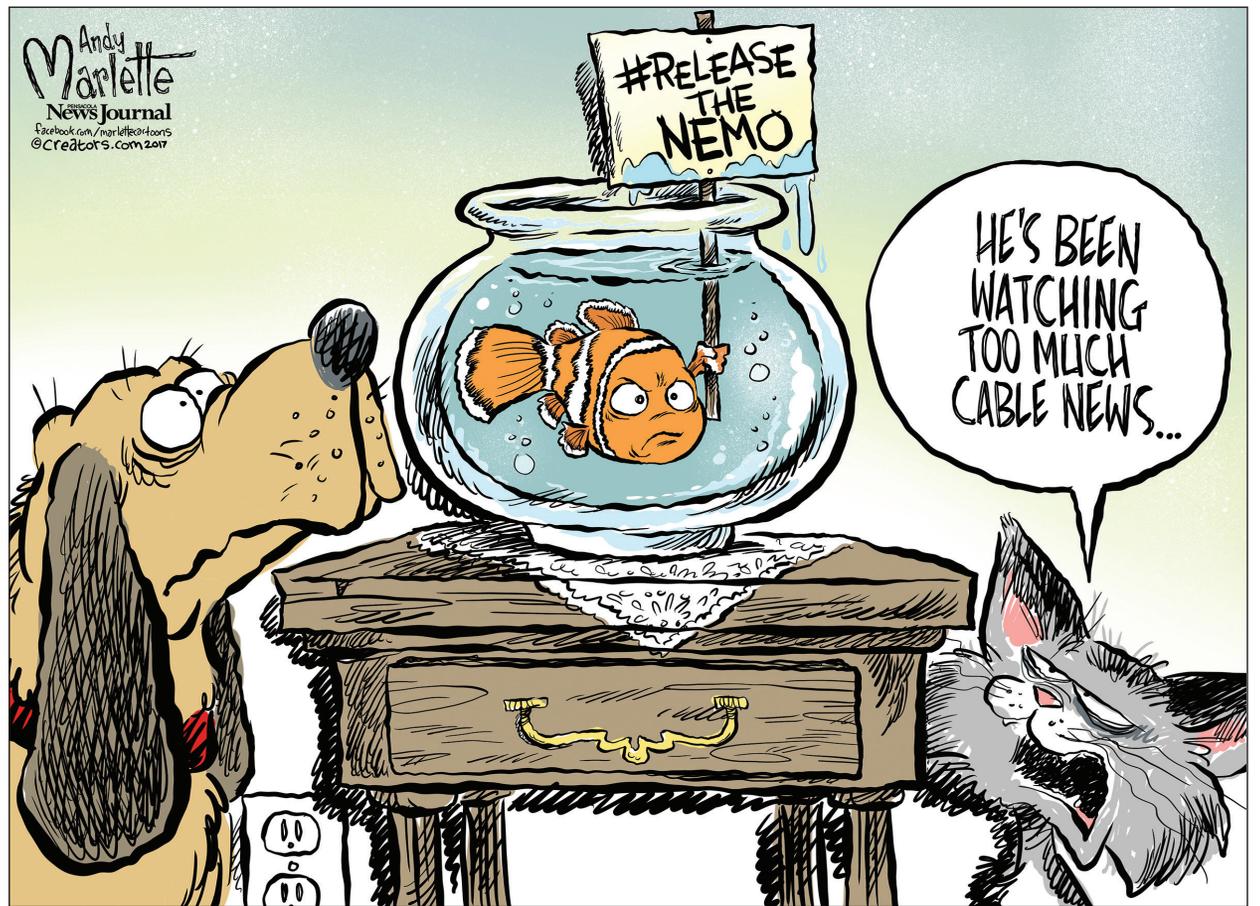
The simple fact is this: Minorities and women are not represented as they should be in positions of power in this country. Is representation improving? Yes. But still, it is doing so at a staggeringly low rate.

The U.S. will never reach a point where we are finished celebrating diversity and equal representation. Our country is nearly 160 years old, and we are only just now starting to see a positive change in terms of diverse representation. To be frank, we have about 150 years of disrespect through lack of diversity we need to make up for, and this is why we won’t stop celebrating.

At a school where only 6 percent of the Student Body is black, having three black students run for president is a huge deal and an incredible stride toward diversity. Sixty years ago, black students weren’t even allowed to attend UF, but the highly qualified candidates are proof that diversity is important.

Melissa Gomez	Abby Miller	Caitlin Ostroff	Jimena Tavel
EDITOR	OPINIONS EDITOR	MANAGING EDITOR, ONLINE	MANAGING EDITOR, PRINT

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Column

Don't use free speech to mix education and religion

Between all of the chaos to come from the current White House administration, it's been frighteningly easy for us to miss important news or dismiss seemingly innocuous political moves as insignificant. This is something we need to take note of. At this point, we need to learn to ignore nothing.

Last December, while working to reauthorize the higher education bill, Republican lawmakers introduced the PROSPER Act. The acronym stands for “Promoting Real Opportunity, Success and Prosperity through Education Reform,” but frankly the details don't seem to encourage anything opportunistic, successful or prosperous at all.

As The New York Times reported last week, the PROSPER Act is making its way through Congress with intentions of reforming education on a national scale. It definitely will not be for the better.

For one, the bill would allow colleges with religious backgrounds to ban same-sex relationships without legal consequences. Yes, you read that right. I repeat: A bill currently waiting for votes in Congress could let religious universities openly prohibit students in the LGBTQ+ community from dating.

I shouldn't have to say this, but the repercussions of this bill are amiss. Why should any educational institution have a say when it comes to who its students date? Some Christian colleges already limit same-sex dating and cohabitation. Having a bill like this — a bill that doesn't seek to change or address problems associated with this, loom in the political background is both disheartening and shameful.

It's shameful, not only because it discriminates against human beings on the basis of love, but also because it operates under the guise of expanding freedom. I'm sorry, expanding whose freedom exactly — the religious, right? I



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don't care what kind of university you are; the First Amendment should not grant you the ability to interfere in the lives of the LGBTQ+ community and its allies. Further, the separation of church and state should make it so political institutions like Congress cannot uphold these practices.

Higher education stands for just that: a heightened level of intellectual thought, a broader understanding of the world, its problems and their potential solutions. Education is

not the place for bigotry, prejudice or terrible -isms; it is the place where we seek to rid ourselves of those practices and ways of thought through careful analysis and intense discussion. Too often, educational institutions are twisted and used to promote just the things they ought to prevent. This is exactly what I accuse the PROSPER Act of doing.

And what else could the PROSPER Act bring about? The New York Times article states “Controversial speakers would have more leverage when they want to appear at colleges.” This seems fine at first: Shouldn't colleges bring in diverse and interesting orators to promote intelligent discussion on campus? But then you'll have to look at the speakers some colleges have either invited or reluctantly hosted over the past several years: disgusting “alt-right” bigots and white supremacists like Richard Spencer and Milo Yiannopoulos. These are not the sorts of speakers who invite rational thought and logical conversations.

We ought to be more careful when we write legislation regarding our educational system — one of the most important institutions in this country. Don't let news like this fade into the background as our president's Twitter account attempts to steal the spotlight. Even if our elected officials don't seem to think so, we're paying attention.

Mia Gettenberg is a UF criminology and philosophy senior. Her column focuses on education.

The views expressed here are not necessarily those of the Alligator.

U-Wire

You do uterus: Turner judge recall signals progress for women's rights

The summer of 2016 will always be one of the most memorable periods of my life — I graduated from high school, watched former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton become the first female presidential nominee from a major political party and voted for the first time all in the span of two months. It was a time of joy and excitement for me, and, for better or worse, the news events I witnessed at this stage in my life exposed me to the real world and forced me to develop my own views.

Around the same time Clinton won the nomination, a county judge in Santa Clara, California, sentenced a male college student to a few months in jail for sexually assaulting an unconscious woman. The assault had been witnessed by numerous people, and the assailant had confessed to his wrongdoing — nevertheless, the trial remained preoccupied with misogynistic questions about the survivor's past and infuriating reductions of the young man's crime.

Progress for women's rights is often a give and take, an alternating rotation of triumph and frustration. No year singularly encapsulated this more than 2016, and as the aforementioned Brock Turner case returns to the public eye, 2018 promises to be another impactful one.

In Turner's case, the sexism underlying the court's treatment of the victim, in itself, wasn't what made the case so upsetting to so many survivors and advocates; sexist speculation directed at female survivors is the norm rather than the exception. What distinguished this case was it had met all criteria to appease the usual skeptics and satisfy the frankly ridiculous standards sexual assault survivors must meet to be believed. And yet, despite this, the assault was still trivialized and the female victim's voice and experience still marginalized — all with a six-month county jail sentence for Turner.

I remember hearing about Judge Aar-



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on Persky for the first time that summer, as justified outrage over the Turner case unearthed his problematic history of leniency involving gang rape and child sexual abuse. At one point, he presided over a trial in which scantily-clad photos of a sexual assault survivor were displayed before the jury, which only reinforces the sexist, age-old "asking for it" trope. Recently, Persky was made relevant once again when the Santa Clara County Superior Court announced a petition to recall Persky had garnered enough signatures to be included on the California pri-

"Progress for women's rights is often a give and take, an alternating rotation of triumph and frustration."

Kylie Cheung
Daily Trojan columnist

mary ballot. In other words, come June, Santa Clara County voters will decide Persky's fate — and in doing so, could decide whether survivors past and future will receive justice.

In many ways, the vote for Persky's recall is taking place in a society vastly different from that of *People v. Turner*. In the age of #MeToo, the bravery and sheer force of women speaking up for themselves and for each other has revamped the political climate into one that amplifies women's voices and holds men accountable. Of course, there's work to be done. But the results of Persky's recall vote could be a crucial measure of how much progress we've made since 2016, and the year that a man convicted of sexual assault was sentenced to six months for assaulting a young woman, the year that media identified him not as the purveyor of an unforgettable crime, but as a gifted swimmer, and withheld his mugshot from the public.

A version of this column by Kylie Cheung originally ran in the Daily Trojan.

Column

The insanity defense: We should try to help rather than simply punish

You may recall a story hitting the news in June 2014 about three girls in the woods in Wisconsin. Two 12-year-old girls lured a third into the woods in Waukesha, Wisconsin, attacked her and left her for dead. This past week, the girl who carried out the attack, Morgan Geysler, was sentenced

to 40 years in a mental institution. Her accomplice, Anissa Weier, was sentenced in December to 25 years in a mental institution. To provide a little context, Geysler didn't merely attack the third girl, Payton Leutner. She stabbed her 19 times, all over her body. Why in the world would they do this? Apparently, they were trying to appease a character from a popular online horror game called "Slender Man."

So, clearly, these two girls were not in their right mind at the time. Fortunately, the victim survived. As a result, Geysler was not charged with first-degree murder. Weier did not actually do the stabbing, but she was charged as a party to the crime. This brings to mind the question that applies to a decent amount of criminal cases: Should this person go to prison or be put in a mental institution? You may think the insanity defense is used often, but it is only used in about 1 percent of cases in the U.S. Out of this 1 percent, the insanity plea is accepted in court less than 25 percent of the time.

That's extremely infrequent, especially when we consider how many crime cases go to trial across the country. If you are a frequent viewer of "Law & Order" or "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation," you have probably had your impression of crimes and pleas of insanity tainted a little. Of course, massive, fascinating crimes do occur, but the cases in these popular crime shows are often dramatized. There is a reason the case of these girls has been in the news for years — it's different and interesting. Homicides, both attempted and



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successful, happen every day. In fact, in 2016, there was a total of 17,250 reported murders and non-negligent manslaughters in the U.S. That amounts to an average of more than 47 deaths per day.

In order for a person to be convicted of a crime, the prosecution must not only prove a person committed a crime, but

that he or she had guilty intent. If a person lacks the psychological capacity to understand what they did was wrong or to conform their behaviors to the law, they should not be held accountable in the eyes of the law.

There is some debate over this idea. How can we prove if someone is actually not in their right mind? How easy is it for people to lie and then evade a prison sentence? Many other countries build their prison systems around rehabilitation rather than punishment. The U.S. doesn't.

If people commit a crime due to mental illness, sending them to prison to serve time rather than try to help them is inhumane. Pleading insanity should not be seen as a cop-out but as a chance for healing. We should not be punishing people who truly do not know the harm they are doing. I believe time behind bars would do more harm than good. How can you punish someone effectively if they don't understand why they're being punished?

I truly hope Geysler and Weier's time in the mental institution helps them. I am confident it will prove more helpful than time in prison as they need real psychiatric help. With the publicity their case received, I hope the two girls can serve as a modern example for the idea that those who are mentally unstable and do not understand the wrong they do should not be punished the same as those who do.

Taylor Cavaliere is a UF journalism and psychology junior. Her column focuses on mental health.

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Gainesville's Greek life: food, tradition at debut festival



Nate Bustamante / Alligator Staff

Crowds gather to get tickets for the first Gainesville Greek Festival, which was held Friday night at St. Elizabeth Greek Orthodox Church, located at 5129 NW 53rd Ave.



Lindsey Crown / Alligator Staff

Demetrios Pylotus, originally from southern Greece, prepares traditional Greek octopus Friday night at the Gainesville Greek Festival.



Lindsey Crown / Alligator Staff

Traditional worship is practiced Friday night during the Gainesville Greek Festival at St. Elizabeth Greek Orthodox Church, located at 5129 NW 53rd Ave.



Lindsey Crown / Alligator Staff

Massina Arvanitis, of Canada, and Olga Petrovic, of Gainesville, sport traditional western Greek attire from the 1800s at the festival. They helped put on this festival to maintain their culture and to fundraise for the St. Elizabeth Greek Orthodox Church, located at 5129 NW 53rd Ave.

Super Bowl at The Swamp: Crowd gathers for food



Will Clewis / Alligator Staff

A packed crowd at The Swamp Restaurant watch the 52nd Super Bowl game between the New England Patriots and Philadelphia Eagles on Sunday night. Those in attendance wore jerseys from the teams playing.



Will Clewis / Alligator Staff

From left: UF students Garrett Morgan, a 20-year-old aerospace engineering sophomore; Philip Ciancimino, an 18-year-old civil engineering freshman; Sammy Cordahi, a computer science freshman, and Jeff Lowell, an 18-year-old criminology freshman, take in the Super Bowl at The Swamp Restaurant, located at 1642 W. University Ave., on Sunday night.



Will Clewis / Alligator Staff

Gainesville residents (from left) Brian Fink, 38, and Michael Jackson, 47, and West Palm Beach resident Amy Allred, 39, enjoy game-night eats during the Super Bowl outside at The Swamp Restaurant on Sunday night. They said they weren't rooting for a particular team and were enjoying themselves.

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Let's meet at **Indigo's**

Visitors experience life in the 1870s at history event

By Laiz Do Carmo

Alligator Contributing Writer

For the past decade, Angelica Torres and Rudy Volenec have made the five-hour drive from Miami to Gainesville to travel back in time.

Sitting in two rocking chairs, Torres, 71, and Volenec, 65, admired how peaceful Florida in the 1870s was at the Morningside Nature Center on Saturday morning. The married couple sometimes bring their grandchildren to breathe in fresh air at the center's Living History Farm for a monthly Living History Day. The all-day event, which is free to the public, is on the first Saturday of every month from September through May and has been hosted since the farm opened in 1976.

"We came here for the biscuits," Volenec said of the homemade biscuits historical actors prepared at the Living History Day.

The actors showed what life was like on a farm in the 1800s, from pressing sugarcane to making a glaze for the biscuits to churning butter.

Bricky Way, a 47-year-old Gainesville resident and the event organizer, said the actors show

how difficult life was before technological innovations.

"It's important for them to realize the amount of work that goes into daily life," he said.

George Chappell, a 78-year-old Gainesville resident, demonstrated how to use a corn sheller, which removes kernels from a cob. He said some aspects of Gainesville haven't changed since that time period.

"Gainesville stayed an agricultural community," Chappell said.

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Courtesy to the Alligator

The one-room Half Moon Schoolhouse was one of Alachua County's early African American schoolhouses.

Toddlers pet reptiles, jump like frogs at educational program



Rachel Chang / Alligator

Sally Wazny shows kids the checkerboard pattern of a red rat snake belly.

By Rachel Chang

Alligator Contributing Writer

Sitting in a circle of kids, 2-year-old Evan Bickford patiently waited to pet Lt. Dan, a red rat snake.

Evan and his brother, Zane Bickford, 4, were two of about 10 people who attended "Frogs and Friends Friday" at Morningside Nature Center, located at 3540 E University Ave., to learn about reptiles and amphibians. The free educational program is held the first Friday of each month and has been teaching toddlers and preschoolers for more than a decade, said Sally Wazny, the nature education supervisor for the city department of parks, recreation and cultural affairs.

The program will continue through May and then start back up in September, Wazny said.

Shermi Liang, Evan and Zane's mom, said they try to visit the nature center every month.

"This is the most interactive they've been," Liang said, noting how the children mimicked animal sounds and movements.

Wazny, who also directed the class, had the kids work on small, interactive activities such as coloring frog diagrams to take home. In addition to petting the snake, the kids were able to see a box turtle, snapping turtle and toad.

Wazny said she came up with the initial conception of the program more than a decade ago, and its success has allowed it to continue.

"We're hoping to inspire an appreciation of the natural environment," she said.

UF students to design proposed Sarasota cultural arts center

By Will Clewis

Alligator Contributing Writer

This Spring, a group of 19 UF seniors will be traveling about three hours south to take their midterm and final exams.

The reason, one professor said, is because their designs for a proposed Sarasota cultural arts center will be judged by local architects.

Martin Gold, a UF associate architecture professor, said the project will be part of a capstone class for architecture and graduate construction management students. In Newtown, a neighborhood in Sarasota, the class will be divided into six groups and tasked with submitting a design to members of the community and the Newtown Community Redevelopment Agency.

The students will work with CityLab Sarasota, a UF-affiliated studio focused on architecture, faculty and other local organizations to develop plans for the proposed center, said Gold, a program director for the studio.

"Sometimes they refer to these projects as service-learning projects where we try to find a need in the community or an interest in the community," Gold said.

The project, titled Good Will Reconsidered, is the reason why the

students in the Integrated Project Delivery Studio course have already taken two trips to Newtown and plan to make more, he said. On the trips, they assess the existing building on the designated plot, which may be used in the redesign for the cultural arts center.

"That could include partial shell or by using the materials in a re-use situation with careful deconstruction," Gold wrote in an email.

Students will also complete budget studies, analyze costs and study the local culture, Gold said.

The Newtown Community Redevelopment Agency can choose to use the proposed designs, said Ravi Srinivasan, an assistant professor in UF's Rinker School of Construction Management.

"The local architects, come and critique the designs of each of the teams," he said.

Jasmine Jimenez, a 21-year-old UF architecture senior, is one of the students involved in the study. She said the groups met with locals to learn more about the local culture. She said she's looking forward to seeing how the arts center contributes to Newtown.

"I think at the very least it'll bring the community together and inspire them to unite and work as one to keep their community alive," she said.

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MEN'S BASKETBALL

Gators trying to stay afloat in midst of back-to-back losses

By **Andrew Huang**
Sports Writer

A common approach to sports is to “control the controllables.” Teams can only focus on their own effort and attention to detail. They have no way of affecting their opponent’s preparation.

In the 2017-18 season, the Florida men’s basketball team is finding that out the hard way, as it has struggled to overcome its deficiencies while competing in one of the toughest conferences in Division I men’s basketball, the SEC.

Florida’s offense, averaging 78.5 points per game this season, showed major signs of regression in Saturday’s 68-50 home loss to Alabama, just days after losing 72-60 to Georgia.

UF (15-8, 6-4 SEC) had a stretch against the Bulldogs in which it missed 20 out of 21 shots, a mark of futility perhaps matched by the Gators’ 17-point second half against the Crimson Tide, the fewest points scored in a half this season by Florida.

The 50 total points scored against Alabama was a season low as well. In fact, UF has more than doubled that total four times this season, scoring in triple figures against Gardner-Webb, North Florida, then-No. 17 Gonzaga and Stanford.

“It’s pretty frustrating,” forward Keith Stone said. “I know the players are mad, I know the coaches are mad, I know the fans are mad, so we just gotta

turn around and get better.”

Consistency has been an issue for the Gators all season.

But for all the things White and his players can control as they try to hold things together, the competitiveness of the SEC this year can’t be ignored as a factor in some of the team’s struggles.

One of the barometers used for selecting the 68 NCAA Tournament qualifiers is the RPI (Ratings percentage index), which ranks all 351 Division I teams based on wins, losses and strength of schedule. It’s not the end-all-be-all evaluation system, but it can help show how much the SEC has improved since last year.

In 2017, the final RPI rankings had six SEC teams — Kentucky, Florida, Arkansas, Vanderbilt, South Carolina and Georgia — in the top 68. Of those six, only Georgia failed to make it to the NCAA Tournament.

As it stands now, 11 SEC teams — all but LSU, Ole Miss and Vanderbilt — meet that criteria.

Another way of looking at it would be to compare the average RPIs, from last season and today, of all 14 SEC teams. The 2017 league average was around 86. Right now, it’s in the high-40s.

Top to bottom, the SEC is a much tougher league than it was last season.

White said these improvements start with experience and depth, adding that

SEE **MEN'S BASKETBALL**, PAGE 16



Alan Alvarez / Alligator Staff

After Florida scored a season-low 50 points against Alabama on Saturday, forward Keith Stone was not happy with the team's offensive production. "It's pretty frustrating," he said.

Sweet and Bauer / Opinion

Esports are just as interesting and competitive as traditional sports

I know nothing — I mean absolutely nothing — about video games.

I owned an Xbox as a kid and spent most of my limited video game time playing either college football or baseball. I still play those games almost exclusively, even now in college.

It took one of my gaming-savvy friends to introduce me to Overwatch, one of the most popular games released in recent years. I remember watching him play it after it debuted in May 2016 while having no idea — as usual — what was going on. As he talked to a friend through a microphone and the two of them played together online, I couldn’t even understand something as obvious as how their characters were dying. It was all just a blur.

What was apparent in the blitz of color and gunfire and magical healing lights was



Ethan Bauer
Twitter: @ebaueri

that he and I were opposites. I enjoyed playing catch with a baseball or football, shooting around a basketball with friends and then, maybe, an occasional video game. He enjoyed playing Overwatch and occasionally playing softball or basketball or whatever else outside with me.

When I’m at his apartment now, rather than watch him play Overwatch, I watch other people play Overwatch on teams. Teams that look and sound and function like teams in the NFL, MLB or NBA. There’s the Boston Uprising, the Dallas Fuel, the Houston Outlaws and even the Florida Mayhem. All of them are members of the Overwatch League.

When he started watching these games, I didn’t understand the intrigue. Again, I still

SEE **COLUMN**, PAGE 16

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Florida facing No. 15 Missouri tonight following bye week

By **Morgan McMullen**
Sports Writer

For Florida women’s basketball players Haley Lorenzen and Funda Nakkasoglu, there’s one phrase that comes to mind to describe the past week.

“Much needed.”

That seems to be the collective attitude toward UF’s bye week, which comes to an end tonight at 7 when the team takes on No. 15 Missouri in Columbia.

This past week was the first time since New Year’s Eve that the Gators didn’t play on a Thursday night. Coach Cameron Newbauer said the off days served a few different purposes: a recruiting trip for himself, and an opportunity to recuperate on and off the court for his players.

With the team finally back together, however, the Gators will need to move past the

second-half woes that have plagued them this season if they want to pull off an upset tonight over the Tigers.

On Jan. 25, Florida (10-12, 2-7 SEC) trailed No. 2 Mississippi State by two halfway through the second quarter. But MSU’s high-octane offense put up 31 points in the third to run away with the game.

Three days later, Florida took a seven-point lead over then-No. 21 Georgia heading into the fourth quarter. Florida surrendered another 31 points in that frame and lost by nine.

After the UGA game, the team took the opportunity to have individual film sessions with the coaching staff to address those issues.

“We’ve had a bit of a tendency to come out a bit sluggish in the third quarter,” Nakkasoglu said. “If we just clean up some small things, we’ll be going in the right direction.”

SEE **WOMEN'S BASKETBALL**, PAGE 16



Former Florida tight end **Trey Burton** threw a 2-yard touchdown pass on Sunday night in Super Bowl LII to help the Eagles pull off an eight-point victory over the Patriots.

Eagles top Patriots in Super Bowl LII

The Philadelphia Eagles defeated the New England Patriots 41-33 on Sunday night to win their first Super Bowl in franchise history. Nick Foles threw for 373 yards and three touchdowns to win the game’s MVP award, while Tom Brady broke a Super Bowl record with 505 passing yards.

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GYMNASTICS

McMurtry leads Florida past Auburn despite minor mishap

By Alana Gomez

Sports Writer

Alex McMurtry was more than ready. She had just recorded her first ever 10.0 on balance beam one week prior against No. 1 Oklahoma, making her the second UF gymnast in program history to tally a perfect score in every event.

So on Friday night in a road matchup with Auburn, she mounted the beam with a smile.

It was a smile, however, that quickly disappeared behind a shadow of disappointment 18 seconds later.

As she prepared to land on the beam at the end of a flip, she misplaced her feet and fell onto the ground, resulting in a season-low score of 9.225.

The feeling was far from foreign to McMurtry, who fell flat onto the mat during a bars routine last year against Missouri on Feb. 24. Similar to her misstep off the beam on Friday against the Tigers, McMurtry's fall last February followed a previous perfect 10.0 on bars in the Gators' match against Georgia just two weeks prior to the Missouri meet.

"We finished off with a solid beam rotation," coach Jenny Rowland said in a release. "We had a miss from Alex, but the rest of the team did really well."

Though her performance didn't follow the same perfect procedure that got her two 10.0s against Oklahoma on Jan.

26, No. 5 Florida (4-1, 2-1 SEC) still took a win over No. 17 Auburn (2-5, 1-3 SEC) 197.400-197.000. Even with the victory, McMurtry wasn't oblivious to her mistake Friday night. Her 9.225 came just after freshman Alyssa Baumann's 9.675, a score the team was hoping to make up for with McMurtry's routine. McMurtry recalled the atmosphere of the team was a little off from the beginning.

"We started a little conservative," McMurtry said. "Luckily, we picked up the energy as the night went on."

Despite the small stumble, McMurtry claimed event titles in both bars and vault, with scores of 9.975 and 9.950, respectively. Junior Alicia Boren, who took first in floor and beam, rounded out the Gators' domination in each event.

"We have more to give and more to show," Boren said. "We are going to get back to the gym and work on that."

Boren matched her collegiate best Friday night in her floor routine with a score of 9.950. Both her and McMurtry's performances were a shining light for the Gators, who were happy to take home their second SEC win of the season.

"The team seemed to take a little more confidence on the road with us after our last home meet," Rowland said.

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Emma Green / Alligator Staff

Alex McMurtry recorded a season-low 9.225 on the balance beam Friday night against Auburn, but claimed event titles in both bars and vault, leading Florida to a victory over the Tigers.

MEN'S TENNIS

Crawford being exposed to high-pressure tennis early in UF career

By Benjamin Brandt

Sports Writer

Alone with only the sound of music playing from his phone and the power of his imagination, freshman Oliver Crawford prepared to serve.

Ahead of the Florida men's tennis team's season opener against UCF on Jan. 22, Crawford had been excused from practice that day after spending the previous week in South Florida competing in a professional tournament.

But Crawford didn't waste the moment. On a back court at the Ring Tennis Complex, he stood beside a small basket of balls and served.

The pop echoed in the empty air. Crawford watched the serve pass through the court untouched by his imaginary opponent and began pumping his arms over his head, exciting his imaginary crowd.

Less than a week later, Crawford played for a real crowd. He loved it.



Crawford

"I've never been that excited to step foot on a court," he said of his first dual match as a Gator.

After three dual matches, Crawford was 2-0 in singles play and 3-0 in doubles with his partner, senior Chase Perez-Blanco.

On Saturday night against Florida State, however, Crawford tasted his first defeat since the start of the dual-match season.

To begin the match, Florida and FSU split the top two courts in doubles play, leaving the opening point down to the duo of Crawford and Perez-Blanco to fight for. It was losing late in the match, but two consecutive forehand winners from Crawford fought off a series of match points for their opponents and evened the score. In celebration, Crawford turned to the wildly enthusiastic crowd and pumped his arms over his head, calling for more noise.

"He stepped up big getting us back in doubles," coach Bryan Shelton said. "He kept us alive."

But the Gators' pair couldn't string together enough points to fight off the eventual 7-6(3) defeat, losing Florida the doubles point for the first time this season.

In singles, Crawford played on the No. 2 court after junior Alfredo Perez was held out of the lineup due to a coach's decision.

The biggest match of his young Gator career became even bigger when Florida State evened the score at 3-3. Like in doubles, the final point was determined on Crawford's court.

Every player and fan watched as the freshman battled from behind, carrying his team's only hope. He fought off one, two, three match points, never letting the pressure slow him down.

At 6-5 in the second-set tiebreaker, Crawford was a single point away from extending the match once more. But, just like in doubles, his efforts weren't enough. Redshirt senior Lucas Poullain sealed Florida State's 4-3 victory with a forehand winner, winning the match 7-6(4), 7-6 (5).

The match was the first of what will likely be many opportunities for Crawford to be a hero for his team. Florida's captain, junior McClain Kessler, trusts his teammate will grow from playing under that pressure.

"Even when he was down, I would've bet on him winning," Kessler said. "But I think from this match, he's going to learn for way bigger moments."

@bhb1227

TRACK & FIELD

McFarland looking ahead to SEC Championships

By Alanis Thames

Sports Writer

AJ McFarland chuckled after Friday's meet in Baton Rouge. He had just broken a school record for the second consecutive outing — registering a mark of 21.89 meters in the weight throw — and took a moment to soak it all in.

Then, his mindset moved on to his next scheduled event: the SEC Indoor Championships.

With the conference championship coming up at the end of February, McFarland's record-setting night on Friday at the Bayou Bengal Invitational merely scratched the surface of where he wants to be.

McFarland entered Friday's meet having improved his weight throw mark in each of the three meets he has competed in this season.

He hopes that this momentum peaks at the right time to carry him through SECs and into a successful run at the NCAA Indoor Championships.

"You get to indoor nationals, and I'm rolling on a good amount of confidence," McFarland said. "Maybe that's the meet where I go 22.50 (meters)."

His performance at Carl Maddox Fieldhouse showed that he's putting himself in position to be a major con-

tributor to his team's success when it comes time for championships.

The redshirt junior's six-throw series on Friday featured two record-setting distances and three marks over 21.70 meters.

McFarland recorded a foot foul on his fourth throw, which he said would have been good for 22 meters. This threw him off slightly, as he posted just 21.59 meters right after, which was his second-lowest mark of the night.

However, McFarland regrouped and locked in for his final throw of the series. He finished with a mark of 21.89, which smashed a 21.76-meter school record he set earlier that night.

"I wasn't crazy excited about it because I did have the goal of throwing 22 meters," McFarland said. "Once we get that, it never stops. You come home ... and then you get ready to throw 22.50."

On a night in which the Gators had just six competing athletes, the team still showed progression, which it hopes will fuel itself heading into the SEC Indoor Championships.

"I just want to keep that engine rolling," McFarland said. "Just try to keep getting a little bit better at every meet."

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White: "We just have to work"

MEN'S BASKETBALL, from pg 14

he also thinks there's more talent and athleticism in the league.

"It's an incredibly competitive league" he said.

Granted, Florida's recent struggles can also be attributed to its lack of health. Roughly half of its frontcourt rotation is out with injuries, and its tallest active player, 6-foot-11 Gorjok Gak, has been limited by a knee injury all year.

Despite the peaks and valleys of this season, graduate transfer Egor Koulechov doesn't want to overreact.

"There's eight games left," he said after playing Alabama. "We can win every single game on our schedule."

White agreed.

"There's time left. We just have to get to work."

A video from FloridaGators.com contributed to this report.

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Cunningham averaging team-high 18.4 points

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL, from pg 14

Newbauer said he wasn't as concerned about physicality, but rather his team's knack for making hasty errors.

"I think you can get flustered and frustrated and sped up to where you try to make the right decision a little too quickly," he said. "Sometimes you just hurry a little too much, and you become so anxious in the situation, the moment, that ends up hurting you."

The Gators will see if their work on those situations has paid off tonight against the Tigers. While Missouri (17-5, 5-4 SEC) has outscored its opponents by 93 total points in the second half this season, Florida has done nearly the opposite, compiling a minus-72 margin over that same span.

The Tigers are led by guard Sophie Cunningham, who's averaging a team-high 18.4 points per game on 54.8-percent shooting from the field. The 6-foot-1 All-SEC junior isn't afraid to shoot it from

distance either. Her next three-point attempt will be her 100th on the year.

Where Florida has struggled defensively this season, however, is in the paint. The Gators will have to work to contain Missouri forward Jordan Frericks. She's shooting an even 50 percent from the field, with most of her shots coming from inside, and is second on the team in scoring with 11.2 points per game.

While Newbauer praised his opponent's toughness, he's excited to see how his team responds to the challenge of facing its third consecutive ranked opponent.

"(It's a) great opportunity on the road to go into a challenging environment to see where we've grown and who we've become in the last week," Newbauer said.

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Alan Alvarez / Alligator Staff

Coach Cameron Newbauer used Florida's recent bye week as an opportunity to hit the recruiting trail.

COLUMN, from pg 14

didn't understand the rules of the game.

I still don't for the most part, just like someone who's never watched football might take a while to figure out the subtleties of the game. I have, however, become convinced that the Overwatch League is on equal footing with any other sports league, at least regarding its value as a sport.

That starts with competition. The Overwatch League, like the NHL or NBA, features players who are the best in the world at what they do. And while they might not be in top physical condition, their sport requires physical skills that normal people just don't have.

As my friend pointed out, most people just can't muster the finger strength, timing or reflexes required to play as effectively as these

players do. Aside from the competition, the games are also interesting to watch. Maybe not for someone, like me, who understands so little about what's unfolding in front of me. But for someone who plays the game, like him, there's regular hollering and yelping and other sounds you'd also hear during the tense final moments of a football game. It's clear that if you take the time and learn the game, it has the potential to be as interesting as any other sport.

It can also be as cathartic. One of the greatest features of sports is how they allow us to escape from our lives and root for something with totally arbitrary value, like how many times men in helmets can move ovular leather up and down a 100-yard rectangle. They give us something to root for when our regular lives don't.

As evidenced by this friend watching the games nightly when he gets home, so does the

Overwatch League.

For those readers who think this friend is an outlier and that interest in the Overwatch League could never rival traditional sports, you're right for now. Overwatch League numbers trail the NFL, MLB and NBA by millions of viewers.

But the inaugural match of the league, which featured the San Francisco Shock and the Los Angeles Valiant, hit a peak viewership of 441,000. The average NHL game during the 2016-17 regular season pulled 459,000 viewers, which isn't too far ahead.

Plus, the Overwatch League has one feature that's yet to be achieved by any of the major sports leagues: It's wholly globalized. There's a Shanghai team, a Seoul team, a London team and various American teams, many of them owned by powerful, wealthy benefactors. New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft owns the

Uprising, for example.

So does all this mean parents should be as willing to push their children to play video games as to play T-Ball? Well, no, for a bunch of reasons. Traditional sports offer more fitness than esports, as well as the opportunity to interact with other kids in person. Esports doesn't have the infrastructure for that yet.

Still, while esports have some differences from traditional sports, they shouldn't be dismissed as lesser. With viewership rising and technology improving, it may not be long before esports achieves the popularity of traditional sports, and why not?

For the most part, after all, they serve the same purpose as their traditional counterparts.

Ethan Bauer is a sports writer. Contact him at ebauer@alligator.org.

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