A STUNNING DECLINE

As St. Petersburg prepares for consolidation, freshman enrollment has plunged. That was expected and won’t last long, university administrators say. But one faculty leader sees at the numbers and sees potential predicaments for the campus.

By Nancy McCann

Freshman enrollment at USF St. Petersburg – including the number of minority students – has plummeted since the campus began raising its admission requirements to comply with the new expectations of consolidation.

From 2018 to 2019, the number of first-time-college freshmen entering in the fall semester fell from 368 to 178, a dramatic drop of 52 percent.

The number of FTIC white students fell from 225 to 134, the number of black students from 14 to five, the number of Hispanic students from 86 to 26 and the number of Asian students from 10 to 5. (Other minority categories are not included.)

Just two years ago, in the fall of 2017, St. Petersburg had 400 FTIC freshmen. There were 231 white students, 31 black students, 80 Hispanic students and 13 Asian students.

Some university leaders say the stunning drop is not cause for alarm. They call it a fully expected consequence of consolidation and predict that the numbers will rebound as the admissions process – already unified across the three campuses – is refined.

In fact, when the Tampa campus raised its admission standards for students entering in 2011, its freshman enrollment numbers fell sharply before bouncing back within a couple of years, said Paul Dossal, the USF system vice president for student success.

But others are not so confident.

One of them is history professor Ray Arsenault, who as president of the St. Petersburg Faculty Senate has warned for months that the Legislature’s abrupt decision to abolish the campus’ separate accreditation and merge the three campuses might rip apart the fabrics that have made St. Petersburg distinctive.

“These numbers look catastrophic, and it seems to me that anybody who sees them should be concerned,” said Arsenault, who said he had not seen the numbers until The Crow’s Nest provided them.

“I hope that Chancellor (Martin) Tadlock is right that the numbers will come back up.”

In fact, Tadlock says, it’s “way too early” to talk about enrollment numbers.

He said it’s complicated, because the “whole picture” includes factors like spring, summer and part-time enrollment, transfer and part-time students, veterans and adult learners, Pell grants and racial and gender breakdown.

“It’s glad to talk about those kinds of things right now, but numbers . . . far too early and narrow,” he said. However, Tadlock does like to talk about numbers for retention rates, which he recently called “remarkable news.”

The projected freshman retention rate for students who entered USF St. Petersburg in the fall of 2018 is over 82 percent. (The “retention rate” is the percentage of a school’s first-year undergraduates who continue at that school the next year.)

The national average retention rate is 75 percent, Tadlock said.

At issue in the plunge in freshman enrollment is a sudden shift in the mission of the little university along Bayboro Harbor.

For decades, St. Petersburg took pride in being a campus that embraced non-traditional and minority students, especially students who lived in Pinellas County.

If those students had borderline high school scores, wanted to experiment and change majors, and took longer to earn their degrees, that was acceptable.

But now, with consolidation pending, the St. Petersburg and Sarasota-Manatee campuses must improve their metrics in student admission requirements, retention and graduation rates, research spending, and other academic yardsticks.

Those are the metrics that enabled USF Tampa to become one of three “preeminent research institutions” in the state university system in 2018.

Keeping that distinction is now the top priority of Tampa administrators and . . .
USF Tampa and USF St. Petersburg
First-time-in-college freshmen

As the university raises admissions requirements, the student profile it uses—the average high school GPA of all FTIC freshmen along with the average SAT or ACT test score—has risen. On the St. Petersburg campus, the profile numbers have climbed sharply since 2016. In both St. Petersburg and Tampa, the profile numbers for students entering in the summer are lower than the numbers for students entering in the fall.

### Predictors of success

One of the metrics for maintaining preeminence status requires fall semester incoming freshmen to have an average weighted grade point average of 4.0 or higher. (A weighted average includes points added by the high school to account for more difficult classes, resulting in GPAs that can be above 4.0.)

Glen Besterfield, USF dean of admissions and associate vice president of student success, said that high school GPAs are the best predictors of student success in college, while ACT and SAT scores are “pretty good” indicators.

“Whether you were admitting students in St. Pete with very low GPAs,” he said. “There are other ways to go. We guarantee admission with an A.A. Get your feet on the ground; that’s a beautiful path.”

Besterfield said that USF (including all three campuses) does not admit freshmen who have a weighted high school GPA below 3.0, with some exceptions for those with a “special talent” in athletics, dance, theater, and other programs.

Students who are not offered admission to USF St. Petersburg are encouraged to participate in pathway programs that start in community college and guarantee admission to the university if they satisfy certain requirements.

The Community Scholars program provides special advising and a $1,000 scholarship if the student obtains at least a 2.5 GPA in their community college coursework. FUSE is a partnership between USF and eight Florida colleges for specific majors.

The dramatic drop in freshman enrollment at USF St. Petersburg also means declines in tuition revenues and the Activities and Services student fees used to finance student organizations like Student Government, clubs and The Crow’s Nest.

At an August faculty and staff meeting in St. Petersburg, Nick Setteducato, the campus’ interim regional vice chancellor and chief financial officer, reported in his 2019-20 budget overview that there was an “anticipated reduction of approximately $400,000 in tuition revenue” due to lower freshman enrollment.

“The good thing about the ($400,000) reduction is that the year before, we anticipated a drop and made adjustments to prepare for it,” Setteducato said in a Nov. 21 interview.

Arsenault said he is concerned about lower revenues on top of other issues that the plunge in freshman numbers represents.

“We work for years to expand our faculty and offer full-fledged programs,” Arsena zale said. “The last thing we want to do is to see our staff laid off or have a shortfall, one thing it threatens is the size and overall quality of our faculty. Any adjustments to the budget could really hurt us.”

“It’s all happening so fast,” he said. “It’s difficult to keep up with it.”

### Decline, continued from P1

the university system’s Board of Trustees.

The start of change St. Petersburg started to raise its admissions requirements in 2018, shortly before Pinellas County legislators sprang their surprise move to consolidate the three campuses of USF—which enjoyed separate accreditation—into one.

The mandate to consolidate, which was signed into law in March 2018, made getting into USF St. Petersburg even harder.

Dosal, the USF system’s vice president for student success, said that it’s important to look at any student numbers with a broader view, especially on the subject of diversity.

“I’m having trouble wrapping my head around the assumption that a higher academic profile necessarily means lower diversity because that has not been our experience in Tampa,” he said.

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CourtesY OF USF

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### Tampa

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** 2019 numbers may change slightly when finalized
Information compiled from data on USF InfoCenter Nov. 29, 2019

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MM BRETTEll | THE CROW’S NEST

### What they’re saying

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They tagged sharks and waded in wetlands

By Kamryn Elliott
Contributor

In a biological excursion spanning five and a half weeks, a group of 16 students spent last summer exploring various ecosystems. Shark tagging, alligator identification and bird surveying, to name a few. These students came from five Florida universities and traveled through the state for a marine field studies course that was sponsored by the Florida Institute of Oceanography. The Institute, which is based at USF St. Petersburg, is an agency of the state university system.

The course is a collaborative effort among the University of North Florida, University of West Florida, Florida Gulf Coast University, Florida Atlantic University and USF St. Petersburg. Each university had a specific ecosystem for the week. UNF covered diverse beach systems and the Atlantic. UWF covered wetlands; FGCU, corals, algae and fish. At USF St. Petersburg the focus was open ocean, with study on Weatherbird II, a research vessel. “It’s a rigorous course with around 40 hours per week, and it is very competitive,” said Dr. Heather Judkins, an invertebrate zoologist and associate professor in the Department of Biology at USF St. Petersburg.

Students need to fill out an application with an essay and their transcripts to be considered. Preference is given to juniors and seniors, but it is open to underclassmen as well. Each university is delegated a certain number of student slots. If empty slots are left over, they are divided among the schools, and students are selected from a waitlist.

“I was actually part of the second draft of students competing for an empty spot,” said Abby Blackburn, a student at USF St. Petersburg studying biology with a concentration in marine biology and a minor in chemistry and geographic information systems.

The course is highly competitive for a reason. Each week the students were tasked with collecting samples using marine science techniques and surveying and identifying land and sea life. There were also tests. “Our main professor for the week would come up with a way to teach us, so sometimes that would be an actual test or other times it would be identifying everything in a room,” said Blackburn.

Students were split into four groups for a final project that covered certain topics: salinity/dissolved oxygen, total suspended solids, nitrates/chlorophyll and micro plastics. The groups took the samples together but produced their final projects separately. On the final day, the groups presented their projects to the professors from each university and donors from the Florida Institute of Oceanography.

There were many professors since students were at a different location each week. Teacher assistants and a graduate assistant were also present. “We have a graduate assistant that attends the course, and this person can come from any one of the universities – whoever is best fit for the role will get it,” said Judkins.

The graduate assistant this summer was Amanda Schaal, who took the course when she was a student and was a teacher’s assistant during the course in 2018.

The program is “great for networking and honing in on what you want to do with your degree,” says student Abby Blackburn. “She bought us food when there weren’t cafeterias nearby, was in charge of room assignments, helped us find locations, drove some of us to where we needed to go for the day if travel was required, and helped with field research. We were lucky to have her,” Blackburn said.

The students had five intensive weeks and gained a lot of knowledge from the experience. They credit the course as well as the institutions. “It strengthened my resolve to do marine work and made me realize how much I wanted to do field work,” said Dennis Deeken, a senior who will graduate this month with a biology major and a concentration in marine biology. “It’s great for networking and honing in on what you want to do with your degree,” said Blackburn.

Judkins said students have reached out and credited the course because it helped them after graduation. Deeken stressed the course is a wonderful opportunity for ambitious students. “One of the professors mentioned that there’s really nothing like this in the nation where you have five universities working with a scientific institution to create a college course,” he said.

For more information on the course visit https://marinefieldstudies2019.blogspot.com.
Santa parade signals start of holiday season

Story and photos by Carrie Pinkard clarice2@mail.usf.edu


These were just a few of the characters seen marching down Beach Drive on Nov. 30 for St. Petersburg’s annual “Santa Parade.”

Parade goers dressed in festive sweaters were handed candy canes by Girl Scouts. Beads were thrown by the fistful. The event felt like a Christmas parade, but instead of pirates, there were elves. The parade featured dozens of floats from people around the community.

Organizations included Sunstar Paramedics, Astro Skating Centers and Kali Kali Dance Company. The St. Petersburg High School marching band played in the parade, and a group of Astro Skate kids break-danced for the crowd.

The one thing missing from most of the “Santa parade” was Santa himself. But he finally made an appearance upon the last float.

After the parade concluded its route near South Straub Park, people gathered for the lighting of the downtown St. Petersburg Christmas tree.

“Who’s ready to light this tree up?” Mayor Rick Kriseman asked the crowd gathered in North Straub Park. He then pointed to the dark Christmas tree and, like magic, it illuminated into an array of flickering colors.

The tree stood about 30 feet tall with a star on top. Its lights transitioned from green and red to white. The waterfront in downtown St. Petersburg felt instantly more festive with the tree lights on. Children gathered on the stage to take pictures with Santa while Kriseman posed with members of the St. Petersburg City Council.

Christmas wasn’t the only holiday being celebrated in the park. A few hundred feet south of the Christmas tree lay a statue of a dreidel, a spining top played with during Hanukkah.

People from all backgrounds came together to celebrate the holiday season. At the end of the night, they returned home with a few more pictures and plastic beads.

The ‘world’s best’ pineapples are his passion

The world’s best pineapple can be found at the Saturday Morning Market in downtown St. Petersburg.

That’s according to Dean Moustafa, a finance student at USF St. Petersburg who runs Rudy’s Fresh Market, a produce vendor that occupies a nook on the east side of the weekly market. Rudy’s serves fresh juice and produce as well as homemade hummus.

The market, which is open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. from October through May, bills itself as the largest outdoor market in the Southeast.

On a typical Saturday, an estimated 10,000 visitors fill the parking lot of Al Lang Stadium at the corner of First Street S and First Avenue to listen to live music and shop for crafts and food like Moustafa’s pineapple.

“This is not just any kind of pineapple; this is the world’s best pineapple!” he chants as each new group of people walks by.

On a table at Moustafa’s stand, there is a cardboard box with the words “College Funds” written in black sharpie and dollar bills poking out. A sign leaning against a table reads, “The World’s Best Pineapple, 2 for 7.”

Moustafa, 24, has worked the Saturday Morning market since he was 6. His parents, Mohamed Elsayed and Mono Khalifa, were among the first vendors when the market began in 2002. Rudy’s used to be associated with a brick-and-mortar location on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Street N in St. Petersburg, but it is now closed because of illness in the family. Moustafa said that his favorite part about working the market is meeting new people and the sense of community it brings. His least favorite part is getting up at 2 a.m. to prepare for the market.

“It takes the whole crew; we hire a few people, but it’s a family operation,” said Moustafa. On a recent Saturday, Moustafa had a steady line of customers and spoke to each one as she sliced their fruit for them.

A few people hovered nearby, recording the scene with their phones as he skinned and cored each pineapple. It was obvious to keep it in the family. Moustafa will soon earn his finance degree from the university. Then Rudy’s will go up for sale, he said, or they’ll find a way to keep it in the family.

What makes it the world’s best pineapple?

Simple, he said. It’s because it’s served by him.

Mayor Rick Kriseman talks with Santa and an elf after the downtown St. Petersburg tree lighting on Nov. 30.

Dean Moustafa has worked at the Saturday Morning Market since he was 6.
Carey Schafer’s graduate research finds her waist-deep in Florida waters, covered in mud and battling mosquitoes. But you won’t find her only in the field or the laboratory. She’s also out in the community connecting people to science.

Schafer, 25, studies geological oceanography in the master’s program at the USF College of Marine Science in St. Petersburg. She was born in the suburbs of Kansas City, far from the ocean, but grew up loving science and wanting to be a marine biologist. “As a kid, I was really curious, always asking questions, and when I had a good science teacher that was the best thing,” Schafer said.

Once she got to college, she gravitated more toward earth science and earned a bachelor’s degree in environmental science from Tulane University in New Orleans. There, she conducted research on how rivers are impacted by wildfires and had an internship with NASA, studying air quality.

She learned about the USF College of Marine Science during an American Geophysical Union conference she attended for her internship. She learned the college would allow her to explore her interests in both earth and marine science. “The College of Marine Science was just a great program with… a great community when I came and visited,” she said.

Today, her research focuses on how mangroves store and cycle carbon. The scientific community knows how much carbon mangroves can store, Schafer said, but not necessarily how long.

“Is protecting mangroves really important for mitigating increased carbon dioxide emissions? Or are they storing carbon for a short amount of time and releasing it as carbon dioxide, or is it being washed away into the ocean?” Schafer said. “I’m trying to get at how long the carbon is being stored there, and is it stable? Especially along the Florida coastline, we need to know if mangroves are going to continue to be stable into the future.”

Ten Thousand Islands in southwest Florida is the site for most of Schafer’s field work. She goes out into the water with a group from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. “I take sediment cores, and we carry them all out with us and bring them back to the lab and analyze all of them,” Schafer said.

Recently, she was awarded the St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership Fellowship in Coastal Science for 2019-2020 to finance her tuition and research. Last year, she was awarded the Paul Getting Endowed Memorial Fellowship in Marine Science. Though Schafer enjoys her mangrove research, outreach is one of her biggest passions. “With research it’s great; you’re piecing together a puzzle and trying to find the answer,” Schafer said. “But outreach is where I want to go with my career.”

She helped found the St. Petersburg chapter of Taste of Science, an organization that teaches community members about science by connecting them with professionals. “We bring professors, researchers, anyone who is involved in science to areas in St. Petersburg – whether that’s a coffee shop, brewery or community center – and have them give talks and interact with people in the community,” Schafer said.

Carey Schafer’s research focuses on how mangroves store and cycle carbon.

“We are making science seem less intimidating and making scientists seem more like (regular) people, which they are.” Her outreach extends to the Saturday Morning Market in downtown St. Petersburg. Schafer established a partnership between the market and the College of Marine Science. Once a semester, the college has a booth to teach community members about scientific issues.

For the past two years, Schafer has also been a part of the Oceanography Camp for Girls, a three-week summer program established in 1991 that encourages girls to pursue science careers by exploring different scientific topics. “Being a woman in STEM, I want to make sure we are funneling more girls into the science pipeline,” Schafer said. “I would love that Oceanography Camp for Girls is free, and because of that you open it up to girls from every socioeconomic status. Anyone can participate, which I think is great.”

Schafer helped lead labs and field trips for the camp. During one trip to Fort De Soto Park, she was able to develop curriculums and teach the girls about mangroves.

“The thing I love about outreach is that not everyone gets to experience science, and those experiences can be so life changing.”

In the future, Schafer hopes to develop more programs like the camp for girls around the country and work in science policy. “If we, as a scientific community, take the time to start educating people on why science matters and how they should seek out information and start critically thinking, then that will start to be reflected in the political realm,” she said.

“Being a woman in STEM, I want to make sure we are funneling more girls into the science pipeline.”
What does a vegan holiday look like, anyway?

By Katlynn Mullins

Gen. Manager & Digital Communication
major

yangmm@mail.usf.edu

Y
es, I’m vegan. My holidays look like every other college kid’s — only with more relatives having an opinion on my diet. My grandmother asks about my love life, and my mother warns me not to talk politics at the dinner table. My aunt gossips with me while my brother and grandfather watch football. My stepdad lingers wherever the dog is sleeping.

Two years ago, at Thanksgiving, there were vegetarian options. My brother hadn’t eaten meat for 11 years, and my grandmother thought I followed the same path, not realizing I didn’t eat any animal products. She was upset. I’m not sure if it was about my diet or that she didn’t know, but I said it wasn’t a big deal. I ate the shepherd’s pie covered in cheese and mashed potato at it was made with butter because, at that point, it really wasn’t.

Three years before, I only ate on a rare occasion, serving mashed potatoes and a spoonful of baked beans that didn’t contain any meat. I’ve never been diagnosed with an eating disorder, and I won’t say I had one, but I lost 50 pounds over a long period of time with my cousins because they wouldn’t ask questions. I was right, and nobody said a word.

Fast forward to 2017, when I had been in therapy and was doing really well. My plate was full and I appreciated food again. Eating dairy wasn’t a big deal. I kept it minimal, though. With time, my body became lactose intolerant, so I refused the butter for my rolls. I learned what Hell was like that day.

“Vegan? What do you mean VEGAN?” my family questioned. “Can’t you just be vegetarian like your brother?”

Meanwhile, I was eating chocolate pie. Last year, I stayed at my parents’ house. My mom was out of town and my stepdad was gone vegan and my stepsister, dairy-free. I know it was Christmas. I had a delicious Christmas dinner full of mashed potatoes, cheese and mashed potatoes, baked beans, corn and green bean casserole. I baked cookies at Christmas and munchcd on potato chips and bread at parties. Sometimes, I’m still learning, but I get to play with my food and experiment with flax eggs and silken tofu.

It’s different, and I feel better knowing where it came from.

Since last year, my stepdad has gone vegan and my stepsisiter, dairy-free. As the normality of dietary restrictions grows, so do the options during holidays.

In April, I wrote an op-ed about eating “whatever I want.” At that point, I teetered a line between vegetarian and vegan. I’m still not perfect, but I’m becoming more OK with the fact that I don’t eat everything offered to me. If I want it that much, I’ll make it at home or find an alternative.

Admittedly, I’ve eaten donuts in the office at work. I’ve said “yes” to cookies that friends have offered me. Even two years later, I’m not perfect and don’t know that I ever will be.

But there was a time when I ate cookies. Something about limiting myself feels wrong.

If I don’t want any this year, I won’t eat them. But maybe it’s time I ask my grandmother for all her recipes.

Those cookies could use a dairy-free update.

In St. Petersburg, vegan cupcakes like these can be found at Cider Press Cafe or Hale Life Bakery, but it’s also possible to find the ingredients at the grocery store.

What does the fuzz a furry?

A look into a one-of-a-kind fandom

By Jonathan Hernandez

Freshman graphic design major
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T
here are many communities in the world known as “fandoms,” where people socialize with other individuals who share the same interests.

There are communities that talk about TV shows, such as The Simpsons or Game of Thrones; movies, such as the good ol’ Star Trek vs. Star Wars; always talking about who is better; franchises such as Disney and Nickelodeon; and even other types of media, like TV news enthusiasts and sports.

Let’s also not forget about people who are in music-related communities and love to talk about their favorite artists — whether it’s Billie Eilish, Shawn Mendes, Cardi B, 5 Seconds of Summer or, as of recently, any Korean pop group — in which people “stare” their favorite guy or girl from groups such as BTS, EXO or Monsta X.

All of these fandoms talk about interests they love, but out of all the fandoms, there is one that is flexible and diverse and resonated with the most.

That community is none other than those adorable and lovable people who are furry. Furries are otherwise known as furries. If you’re a first-year student, you might remember the people who were asked to draw their “spirit animal” during orientation. Well, I was ahead of the curve because I saw myself as a flamingo.

But it was more than just a “spirit animal.” It was my fursona, or in this case, my birdsona. A fursona is basically how someone sees themselves as an animal — in most cases an anthropomorphic one — whether they draw their fursona or dress up in a fur suit.

Many people assume furries just consist of people who see themselves as foxes or wolves. And while there are many furries who consider themselves as such, that is far from the whole picture. Some furries might be cats, ferrets, badgers, kangaroos, deer, birds or even dragons.

There is another aspect of furries that many people get misconstrued. Many people outside of the furry fandom think furries are toxic and lewd. Let me remind you that furries exist in many forms, not just about text emoticons like “owos” and “uwus.” In fact, some furries want to spread positivity, not safety for work. If they do, they keep it separate from their safe-for-work content and are strict about it for obvious reasons.

Another generalization is that furries are toxic and dramatic, which puts the focus on the bad apples of the fandom and is not representative of furries overall. In fact, furries are a welcoming community, and the majority of them have taken measures to weed out those who only want to spread toxicity in the fandom. There are also many furries who have gained a significant following, such as Majira Strawberry, BetaElDeota and Adley the Eagle.

Furries are normal people like everyone else who just so happen to be passionate about a fandom. They still love furries and enjoying furries is a strong interest in creatively expressing themselves by being a fluffy animal, and I’m happy to be a part of it.
International science symposium coming to St. Petersburg

By James Bennett III
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Science experts from as far away as Tennessee, Texas and New Jersey will be visiting USF St. Petersburg later this month. The International Society for Computational Biology’s southeastern regional student group will host its second symposium at USF St. Petersburg’s Harbor Hall on Dec. 13 and 14.

According to the event’s press release, organizers of the symposium hope “to promote, educate and provide opportunities for the next generation of scientists in the field of computational biology.”

There are three keynote speakers scheduled to speak on the first day of the symposium. Katie Farney, who works with the National Institutes of Health, will present “The power of computational biology to probe diverse disease models” from 9:30 to 10:15 a.m.

Sameer Varma, an associate professor at USF, will present “Molecular modeling of protein function, regulation and assembly” from 1 to 1:45 p.m.

Finally, Stuart Gordon, an assistant professor and chair of the biology department at Presbyterian College in South Carolina, will present “The effect of genotype and abiotic stress on maize phyllosphere microbiome composition and function” from 1:45 until 2:30 p.m.

Nathan Beard, whose paintings can be found in the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, is scheduled to give a presentation about how his work couples art with science.

That night, from 6 to 8 p.m., a symposium banquet will be held at The Rooster, 475 Central Lake Drive N.

The following day will be filled with talks about research in computational biology and will be followed by The Cell Apoptosis Social at The Tavern at Bayboro from 6 to 8 p.m.

Roughly 40 people attended the first symposium. Leon Hardy, a physics instructor at USF St. Petersburg and one of the faculty representatives for the event, said he expects roughly 40 people to attend this year, too.

In an email, Hardy said the International Society for Computational Biology “provides opportunities both educational and professional for our students, across the southeast USA and internationally.” He added that job opportunities will be announced at the symposium.

The symposium will be held in Harbor Hall on Dec. 13 and 14.

What to do this week: Dec. 2-8

MONDAY
Need a break from studying? Bingo doesn’t take much brain power. Pinellas Ale Works, 1962 First Ave. S, will host musical bingo at 7:30 p.m. The game is free to play with drinks available for purchase.

Gather your friends and try your hand at team trivia. 3 Daughters Brewing, 222 22nd St. S, will have general knowledge team trivia starting at 7 p.m. The game is free to play with drinks available for purchase. If you RSVP online, you will receive an email on the day of the event with a free question and answer.

TUESDAY
Feeling stressed? The Dean of Student Ambassadors will put up a de-stress table with crafts and activities in the University Student Center from 11 to 1 p.m.

Laughter is the best medicine for the stress that comes at the end of every semester. Subcentral at Iberian Rooster, 475 Central Ave. N, Unit 100, will hold its weekly standup open mic night starting at 9 p.m. The show is free to the public.

WEDNESDAY
Roast marshmallows and get your Christmas movie kick with Harborside Activities Board. The organization will host a classic Christmas movie on Harbor Walk starting at 6 p.m.

THURSDAY
Shuffle your way to the end of the semester at St. Pete Shuffleboard Club, 559 Mirror Lake Drive N. It’s hard to live in the ‘Burg without knowing how to shuffleboard. Join for an introductory class beginning at 7 p.m. The class is free for members or $10 for non-members.

FRIDAY
Bring a toy and join the party at The Bends, 919 First Ave. N, for “Drake Night.” Everyone who contributes to the toy drive will receive free entry, a free Drake mask and a free raffle ticket for prizes. The party starts at 9 p.m.

SATURDAY
Looking for some edgy holiday gifts? St. Pete Punk Rock Flea Market will be at Planet Retro Records, 226 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. St. N, beginning at 11 a.m.

SUNDAY
Find the decor you need to take your apartment back in time. Brocante Vintage Market will hold its final market of 2019 from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. at 2200 Second Ave S.
Old faces return, new acts arrive as NBT turns 19

By Katlyn Mullins

F rom depressed and singing on the floor with a bottle of red wine in his hand, to placing a single glass on his keyboard and dancing on stage, The 1975 frontman Matty Healy has evolved. The band played behind Bastille in 2014 at the 97X Backyard Barbecue, headlined Next Big Thing in 2015 and did it again this year. The quartet’s jazzy, electro-pop sound has led to a younger fan base. The set had those teenagers hanging over the rail, screaming louder than the speakers. “Populism, globalism, all that stuff,” Healy said. “It’s everywhere.” They started into “I Like America and America Likes Me.” “I’m scared of dying. It’s fine,” Healy sang. “Being young in the city. Belief and saying something. Would you please listen?” The band had a message that night, but they also had fun. “We have the 1975’s classic “Chocolate,” the pink and blue overhead lights rolled with the beat, and so did Healy’s hips. “We have the Next Big Thing,” Healy said. “It’s everywhere.” The quartet’s jazzy, electro-pop sound has led to a younger fan base. The set had those teenagers hanging over the rail, screaming louder than the speakers. “Populism, globalism, all that stuff,” Healy said. “It’s everywhere.” They started into “I Like America and America Likes Me.” “I’m scared of dying. It’s fine,” Healy sang. “Being young in the city. Belief and saying something. Would you please listen?” The band had a message that night, but they also had fun. “We have the 1975’s classic “Chocolate,” the pink and blue overhead lights rolled with the beat, and so did Healy’s hips. “We have the Next Big Thing,” Healy said. “It’s everywhere.” The quartet’s jazzy, electro-pop sound has led to a younger fan base. The set had those teenagers hanging over the rail, screaming louder than the speakers. “Populism, globalism, all that stuff,” Healy said. “It’s everywhere.” They started into “I Like America and America Likes Me.” “I’m scared of dying. It’s fine,” Healy sang. “Being young in the city. Belief and saying something. Would you please listen?” The band had a message that night, but they also had fun. “We have the 1975’s classic “Chocolate,” the pink and blue overhead lights rolled with the beat, and so did Healy’s hips. “We have the Next Big Thing,” Healy said. “It’s everywhere.”

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Napoleon the Wilderness’ makes music personal

By Dylan Hart

W hen an employee at Campus Recreation sought a special anniversary gift for her boyfriend, Nikhil Johns had the perfect idea. After sending her a detailed questionnaire about her relationship, Johns developed a custom song to give as a gift titled “Come Home.” But on Nov. 20, he took it one step further.

“Typically, I don’t release these songs,” Johns said. “They’re just for people to give as a present. But this one turned out a bit more emotional, and the issue of long distance added a new dynamic to the song. It’s something people can relate to. So I decided to release it on their anniversary.”

Johns, 27, is an indie musician who plays under the name Napoleon the Wilderness. His acoustic guitar-driven songs explore relationships, travel and childhood, all through an optimistic and saccharine lens. For the past two years, Johns has also been a marketing assistant for Campus Recreation, doing videography and photography for the department.

He was born in Manhattan, but he grew up in St. Petersburg. He moved when his mother, Rebecca Johns, got a job teaching geography at USF St. Petersburg, which she still holds today.

“In high school, I started writing songs for emotional expression,” he said. “Teenage angst — not to show anyone the songs, just for my own emotional expression.”

Eventually, he “got up the nerve to share” his music, which he was quick to dismiss as mediocre. It took him years to improve his music and learn how to sing, he said.

In college, Johns played in a Gainesville band called “Napoleon in the Wilderness,” named after a 1941 surrealist painting by artist Max Ernst. When the band drifted apart, the lead singer offered Johns the name. He omitted the “in,” claiming the new moniker to be a better fit for his style of music — and easier to pronounce.

Last year, on Valentine’s Day, he was given an opportunity to write a custom song, which quickly caught his interest. Since then, he’s written four more, although most are unreleased.

“It’s really nice with these custom songs because it’s a one-to-one ratio of people who are impacted by the songs,” he said. “It’s really rewarding.”

Johns has been working with producer Nicholas Roberts to build a fuller sound in songs like “Late Nights” and “Come Through,” which feature drum tracks, keyboard sounds and ambient noise alongside Johns’ voice and guitar. Most of his songs, custom or otherwise, explore relationships and how they have affected him throughout his life.

“I would say that’s just what has come to me the most,” he said. “Relationships stand out as the most emotional things in my life that I’ve dealt with. That’s what I like to let out through music.”

But the theme of nature — the “Wilderness” — is often present as well. He “basically grew up” going to Boyd Hill Nature Preserve and still goes there often to clear his head. Alongside that, Johns and his family traveled the world when he was a child. He visited India almost every other summer alongside “various side trips.”

Today, Johns plays around St. Petersburg at venues like Hideaway Cafe, The Campus Grind and Iberian Rooster. He’s pushed himself to play around town and write at least one song a month.

“My goal is to be able to continue writing songs. I just like songwriting more than anything,” he said. “Ultimately, my goal is to make a living doing songwriting, whatever that looks like.”

Johns plans to continue releasing music every month via Spotify, but he also hopes to continue making custom songs for others via his website.