

**THE APPALACHIAN
PRESENTS**



Rest OF
Boone
2023

**LIFESTYLE
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CAMPUS**

FOOD BEST OF



Stick Boy Kitchen's Kluckin' Klop sandwich, a fan favorite, served by employee Maddie Dooley. Stick Boy Kitchen is located at 211 Boone Heights Drive Photo by Evan Bates.

BEST SANDWICH STICK BOY KITCHEN

PRUETT NORRIS

From the steamy sourdough savor of the Soo Cheesy to the hummus and veggie goodness of The Chick Pea, all the way to the hardy bacon-draped chicken of the Kluckin' Kop, there's a sandwich for everyone at Stick Boy Kitchen. That's why the people of Boone have given the local bakery's restaurant branch the venerable title of Best Sandwich in Best of Boone 2023.

Lisa Pearce, general manager of Stick Boy Kitchen, has a theory for what keeps customers coming back for Stick Boy's sandwiches.

"I think everyone knows that Stick Boy has everything made from scratch," she said. "Just with raw ingredients. We take that bread at the bakery, we slice all our meat and cheese, we make all our condiments."

Pearce is modest about how Stick Boy maintains their steady stream of customers.

"It's nothing incredibly unique," Pearce said. "But it's the quality of the food and the service of it and the atmosphere. And that's, I'm sure, collectively what made it the best."

The atmosphere of Stick Boy Kitchen is certainly an important part of the equation. Not only are the sandwiches delicious, but service is fast, friendly and prompt. The open floor layout of the restaurant is colorful and airy, with staff members who smile as brightly as the hues of their Stick Boy T-shirts.

When asked how the Stick Boy staff maintains such

positive attitudes, Pearce shared "the whole model behind it is for everyone to be involved, to provide a service kind of like the Golden Rule: providing a service you would want to receive."

Stick Boy Kitchen's secrets to staff success, to Pearce, are as simple as "treating your people well, being involved, being good listeners and helping the business grow with people you're employing." It's no wonder Stick Boy's sandwiches are Boone's best when the staff is giving their best crafting them. Speaking of sandwich craft, another part of the Stick Boy experience is the menu's options for a variety of diets.

"I like offering a vegetarian sandwich that's outside of the basic lettuce, tomato, onion, cucumbers sort of situation," Pearce said. "So we tried to create at least one hot and one cold vegetarian sandwich for that."

While all of Stick Boy Kitchen's sandwiches will share the Best Sandwich in Boone accolade, Pearce does have a favorite.

"It depends on the day," she said. "The one I came up with when we originally started was the Hearty Arty."

Stick Boy Kitchen is open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m.-6:30 p.m., and on Saturdays from 7 a.m.-5:30 p.m. The Hearty Arty and its accompanying award-winning sandwiches can be previewed on the online kitchen menu.

BEST PIZZA

LOST PROVINCE

BRILEY TURPIN

Nestled quietly away from the hustle and bustle of King Street is Lost Province Brewing Co. Specializing in wood-fired pizza and craft beers, Lost Province is a farm-to-table restaurant and brewing company that has been a Boone staple since 2014, said Director of Communication Megan Mason.

Located in a two-story brick building behind the Mast General Store, Lost Province has a traditional pub vibe. The main dining room holds several tables, a bar and the backdrop is a wall of beer taps.

The dining room has a cozy feel and the warmth emanating from the large, circular wood fired pizza oven can be felt throughout the room. The upper level of the restaurant has more seats overlooking the lower dining room. There is also a patio to the side of the building that is open for indoor-outdoor seating year round. Lynne Mason and Andy Mason opened the restaurant in Boone after years of practicing home-brewing beer, according to the Lost Province website. Since opening nine years ago, Lost Province has continued to entertain the community of Boone and has even expanded into new locations, Megan Mason said.

"I think the most exciting thing we've done over the past couple of years is expand and open Lost Province at Hardin Creek," she said. "It's primarily a production facility and tap room that houses our sales and distribution team."

Boone has long been home to the Mason family, she said, and the support they've found here is what has kept them in the community for nearly ten years now.

"The Boone business community itself is extremely supportive of one another, and from what I hear, that isn't always the case in other communities," Megan Mason said.

In addition to support from other Boone businesses, Megan Mason said, is the support from the community of Boone as a whole.

"We're grateful for the business to business support here, and just grateful for the overall community support. Whether that's from locals who've been here for many years, or students who are only here for four years, all of y'all make Boone the special place that it is, so thank you for the support over the years," she said.

The restaurant has a rotating seasonal menu, traditional pub food and their main staple: 13 different wood-fired pizzas with the opportunity to build-your-own pizza.

In addition to plenty of food, Lost Province offers visitors a rotating beer menu consisting of dozens of draft beers brewed in house.

Lost Province is located at 130 N. Depot St. and is open Sunday to Wednesday from 11:30 a.m.-9 p.m. and Thursday to Saturday from 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m.



Lost Province Brewing Co, voted Best Pizza in Boone. Pictured is one of their popular wood fired pizzas. Lost Province is located at 130 N Depot St. Photo by Samuel Cooke.

BEST BURGER

COME BACK SHACK

ERIN SMITH

Defending its legendary title, Come Back Shack remains victorious and won Best Burger for the fourth year in a row. This family-owned and operated fast food restaurant has overtaken the Boone community with its delicious classics since it first opened almost 12 years ago.

Whether you wait in the double wrap-around drive-thru line or eat inside, you will receive your food in a timely manner, fresh and piping hot with a smile. This fast-paced environment offers a delicious experience that puts it on the map as Boone's go-to burger joint for locals and visitors alike.

Ricky Cecil, manager at Come Back Shack for over five years, said there is "never a dull moment here," and emphasized that "everyone in our community is so fun to work with."

From their hand-breaded chicken tenders, hand-cut fries and hand-spun milkshakes, Come Back Shack has earned its moniker among locals, tourists and App State students.

Another prominent feature at Come Back Shack is their all-beef burgers. Sourced from a local farm and made fresh daily, this "fresh, never frozen" philosophy is the key to their delicious food.



The Come Back Shack's fried green tomato burger is one of their most popular menu items. Come Back Shack is located at 1521 Blowing Rock Road. Photo by Evan Bates.

Although, what makes this the best burger in Boone is their house-made Come Back Shack sauce, which is a fan favorite of customers and employees. This legendary sauce is made in-house every day and puts the perfect spin on their already juicy and delicious burgers. But that is not all Come Back Shack has to offer; the sense of community this fast paced and family owned meeting spot has brought to its

workers and customers is irreplaceable.

"What I liked most about working here is that it is a family owned business and if I need to talk to someone I can go directly to the guy who owns it, their door has always been open to hear me out and help. This is for anyone from our management to our newest hire," Cecil said. Come Back Shack is open every day from 10:30 a.m.-9 p.m.

BEST BBQ THE PEDALIN' PIG

WILL HOFMANN

"BBQ. Ribs. Brisket." The large black sign outside of this Boone staple is simple, yet elegant. On the inside of the restaurant, the soft lights and open space allows customers to settle in, grab a beer and devour some classic, Carolina-style barbecue.

While pigs cannot ride a bike, the brisket offering, pig roasting and local hotspot, The Pedalin' Pig, flies right into its fourth year of winning Boone's best BBQ.

General Manager Blake Bostain attributes the rock-solid support for The Pig to bringing new talent on board.

"This year, we've got some new changes. Some new talent that's been able to join our company," Bostain said. "So we're really kind of doing an overhaul on a lot of our recipes. And so just letting the community know that, you know, we're super appreciative of the

support."

Alongside modifying recipes and expanding outreach to the community, talent is one of the things both locals and students have brought to the restaurant in the past year. Every Wednesday, The Pedalin' Pig holds a bluegrass night, where local musicians can come perform their own renditions of their favorite bluegrass songs or hear a band perform them.

"We're starting to see Appalachian studies students come out and be a part of something that's really kind of paying off in respect to the traditions musically of this area," Bostain said.

Moreover, the community has come out to support and continue their love for the Boone barbecue restaurant. Many customers return after their first visit, and Bostain knows that many come to share a beer, have a sandwich or take a moment away from work.

"It's really a family vibe," Bostain said. "We've got a good set of them. A lot of local trades-folks, some professors and some students that really have kind of bonded across different paths in life at the restaurant."

For Bostain, the restaurant is based in the community, where customers and co-workers are as familiar to each other as family.

"I could probably name 40 by name that come and spend every day with us to some capacity," Bostain said. "Whether that's winding down after work to have a beer and a sandwich, or if it's just coming in to grab a bite in the middle of the work day."

Even as the restaurant has remained on-top of the Boone barbecue scene for the past several years, Bostain wants to let everyone know: more is still to come.

"You know, we're not done progressing," Bostain said. "We're excited to grow as this town grows, and really, hopefully be kind of a staple for Carolina barbecue."

BEST WINGS RIVERS STREET ALE HOUSE

ELLA MCINTOSH

Ever since its grand opening in 2015, the citizens of Boone have enjoyed rockin' live music, rambunctious nightlife and delicious wings at Rivers Street Ale House. For the second year in a row, this beloved restaurant and bar has won Best Wings in Boone. Ale House offers 16 mouthwatering wing flavors either bone-in or boneless and serves them in a variety of sizes depending on how hungry you are. Servings of eight, 12, 16, 24, 48 or 96 wings are available. A few of their wing flavors include Bourbon Glazed, Carolina Reaper and Cajun Dry Rub.

Co-owner Jeff Lamont's personal favorite combination is an order of the mango Habanero wings with an 828 draft beer from Appalachian Mountain Brewery to wash it down.

Lamont is a self-proclaimed

"Boone-rang-er." Much like a boomerang, 20 years after graduating from App State in the class of '91, he traveled right back to Boone with his wife to start planting roots. These roots grew into money trees for Lamont in the form of three successful restaurants across the High Country. These restaurants are Town Tavern locations in Blowing Rock and Morgantown as well as, of course, Boone's Rivers Street Ale House.

Lamont met his co-owner and friend Justin Davis in 2011 at a tailgate party across the street from Walker Hall, where they had parked a minibus to celebrate one of App State's home football games. Soon after, they became business partners and the rest was history.

Their award-winning wings aren't the only thing Ale House

is well-known for. Special daily events are hosted inside the restaurant. Particularly popular is their Wing Thursday, where DJ Trilogy plays a set and boneless wings are just 45 cents each and bone-in wings are 75 cents each starting at 4 p.m.

"It's kind of cliché, but we like to call it our 'Ale Home,'" Lamont said. "Our student staff members usually like to stay with us right up until they graduate, sometimes longer."

The restaurant and bar's other fun-filled events include Monday Night Football, Tuesday Night Trivia, Wednesday Night Music Bingo and Friday Night Live Music and Karaoke. More information about these events can be found on Ale House's Instagram.

"We like to keep up an entertaining atmosphere," Lamont said.

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CELEBRATING 35 YEARS

BEST BREAKFAST TROY'S 105 DINER

JENNA GUZMAN

From the checkered floors and neon lights, to the steel exterior of the diner and the old-school music playing from within, walking into Troy's 105 Diner is like walking into a time machine and finding yourself in the '50s.

Troy's 105 Diner is a '50s themed diner which offers breakfast, lunch, dinner and a feeling of nostalgia for all ages.

When one enters through the big steel doors and sees the array of vintage decor and posters on the walls in addition to smelling the aroma of freshly cooked food, curiosity and hunger may grow. But when one leaves Troy's, they leave with a full stomach and a love for the olden days.

"The experience is everything," said part-owner Conner Snyder. "That's what you do when you walk in this place. It's just incredible."

Troy's 105 Diner is this year's Best Breakfast winner. Given their all-day breakfast menu, one can take a seat at the bar or in the bright red cushioned booths and try out some of their breakfast staples, fulfilling every craving.

Do you have a sweet tooth first thing in the morning? Then you can go to Troy's to satisfy it. From pancakes to the "killer" French toast to waffles Snyder said, you can start the day sweet by having one of the sugary specialties such as the Mama Lulu or Flo's Frenchie.

If you are wanting something more on the savory side, Troy's has a variety of options to fulfill that craving such as bacon, eggs, biscuits, hashbrowns and more. Snyder recommends customers order the Big Daddy; a plate of eggs, bacon, sausage, grits or hashbrowns and bread because "it's a little bit of everything."

No matter what the breakfast order, any food item can be paired with a classic diner coffee or milkshake. In addition, if one is not full from the meals, a dessert such as the cobbler or the pie is only waiting to be served to the table.

Built in the '90s, Troy's has been serving the Boone community for decades.

"We just love our community, that's for sure," Snyder said.

The majority of the customers who eat at the restaurant are regulars, Snyder said.

"I see the same person three times a day," he said. Snyder said he hopes people who enter the restaurant leave with good memories of their time at the diner.

"That's what we're all about, just having good times here," Snyder said.



Troy's 105 Diner, voted Best Breakfast in Boone. Pictured is their popular Flo's Frenchie and Big Daddy breakfast entrees. Troy's 105 Diner is located at 1286 NC-105 Hwy. Photo by Samuel Cooke.

BEST MEXICAN- INSPIRED LOS ARCOIRIS

EMILY ESCOBEDO RAMIREZ

The sound of eccentric Latin music runs through the establishment. The colorful paintings on the wall beckon you to sit down and relax. The hostess welcomes and leads you to your table, where you're presented with a menu filled with delicious meals and beverages. Welcome to Los Arcoiris.

Established in 1991, Los Arcoiris has been a local staple for Mexican-inspired cuisine in the community. After bouncing from multiple locations in Boone, it currently resides at Boone Heights, where its popularity has continuously grown. Despite having lots of options for Mexican cuisine here in Boone, there are many reasons why one should love Los Arcoiris.

One reason is its authenticity and the environment that it provides, specifically in regard to its Latin American roots.

"We keep the essence of Mexican culture and hold onto it to remain authentic," said Alfredo Alvarez, owner of Los Arcoiris.

With wall paintings of Frida Kahlo, the decorative art of papel picado floating in the air and the artwork on its chairs, the homage to Mexico's traditions is beautiful to see. Eating authentic Mexican food

that's affordable on a college budget is a great way of supporting this Mexican-inspired establishment. An important aspect of Los Arcoiris is its family-run atmosphere.

"We are a family-owned restaurant; our family is important to who we are," Alvarez said. Family is an important component of the restaurant and one that they are incredibly proud of. Stationed near the entrance, one can see family and restaurant photos that showcase this.

Los Arcoiris expands their definition of family to include the surrounding community.

"App State students and Boone residents are a part of our family, and we welcome them. We have seen alumni grow older and visit us, and remember our presence, and it's precious to see our impact," Alvarez said.

With the kindness and love they have for the community, it's hard to not feel welcomed at Los Arcoiris.

The last major reason for its popularity? The love and support from the App State community.

"Students and alumni are our biggest customers. They motivate us and are the main reason we are still in business," Alvarez said.

Both academics and athletics at App State are beacons that bring people to Los Arcoiris. When you enter, you'll see many posters highlighting the soccer and football teams; you may even catch a glimpse of a prominent community figure.

"Jerry Moore comes by often, he's one of our fans," Alvarez said. "We hope to keep serving the Boone community and that they love Los Arcoiris for many more years to come."

The ambience, kindness and speedy service that Los Arcoiris offers are just a few reasons to visit and enjoy the food. Ranging from tortas and tacos to arroz con pollo and carnitas, there's a variety of food waiting for everyone. Its doors are open to all that come, so next time you need a place to eat, look no further, and buen provecho.



Los Arcoiris storefront, located at 168 Boone Heights Drive Photo by Justin Hernandez.

BEST SWEETS

APPALACHIA COOKIE COMPANY

KAITLYN POTOCHNIK AND BRIONNA DALLARA



An employee at Appalachia Cookie Co. stacks trays of cookies to cool down. Appalachia Cookie Co. is located at 208 Faculty St. Photo by Samuel Cooke.

Chocolate chip, snickerdoodle, peanut butter and oatmeal raisin. What more could you ask for in a cookie? Maybe cheesecake, s'mores or maple bacon bourbon? Appalachia Cookie Company, the 2023 winner of Best Sweets in Boone, has all of that and more, all to satisfy your sweet tooth.

This local business was founded in 2012 by former App State student David Holloman. According to their website, Holloman "saw a need for an alternative to the traditional late night pizza and sandwiches."

Holloman's dreams came into fruition when he opened Appalachia Cookie Co. in 2012 and continues to blossom in Boone where the demand for its fresh batches is still prominent.

Each cookie is baked from scratch using fresh ingredients. They even offer gluten and dairy-free cookies, such as the brownie cookie and the Yosef cookie.

"It's really interesting to see how our boss will like even tweak the smallest things in our recipes to make it perfect," Megan Seger, senior nutrition major and employee said.

Fresh cookies can be purchased as singles, half dozens, dozens or in bulk for any amount over 50.

Fellow Appalachia Cookie Co. employee and sustainable technology major Adam Galbraith said that their many flavors is what draws people to the shop and that there is a new flavor every month or so.

Single-flavor packages start at \$13.99 for a half dozen and \$25.99 for a dozen. However, Holloman's community contributions don't just stop at curing local sweet teeth, they also lend to local nonprofit organizations.

In fact, Appalachia Cookie Company has partnered with the Hunger and Health Coalition to feed families across the community by creating the 30 Thirty Project, which, according to their website, is an "easy avenue for our customers to give back to the local community." Individuals who subscribe to be a part of the project will pay \$35 to provide a local family with 30 pounds of food every month and receive one dozen cookies of their choosing to their doorstep on the first Monday of every month.

Appalachia Cookie Co.'s current hours are from 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 10 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

BEST ASIAN-INSPIRED CUISINE

COBO SUSHI

MIA SELIGMAN

Founded in May 2013, CoBo Sushi provides a welcome blend of Japanese sushi and non-traditional, contemporary menu items.

Voted Best of Boone for Asian-inspired cuisine, CoBo has become a hotspot for students and residents alike. Located on Howard street, CoBo brings a fusion of Japanese-style food and American comfort food to Boone.

When App State graduate Joseph Miller returned from living in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, he felt the need to do something different with his life. He

decided to open a restaurant to bring what he had learned in Colorado back to Boone and he founded CoBo Sushi.

In an interview with *The Appalachian*, Miller shared that the name comes from a combination of Colorado and Boone, saying it took "roughly 50 times to get right."

Many diners compliment the interior decorations, often commenting on the "upscale decor," Miller said. Some features that contribute to this atmosphere are the heavy wood and raw stone, which Miller chose

BEST VEGETARIAN OPTION

COYOTE KITCHEN

WILLIAM BECKER

Adorned with local art, multicolored walls in shades of orange, red, yellow and blue decorate the interior. Seated around the restaurant or at the cozily lit bar, customers chat over Caribbean-inspired meals as soulful music plays softly in the background. Outside, colorful lights are strung across the ceiling of the patio amid ceiling fans and heaters to ensure comfort in every season.

This is Coyote Kitchen, a local restaurant specializing in "southwest Caribbean soul food," according to their website. Kitchen manager James LaBarbara said the restaurant has existed for approximately 20 years and has gone through several owners. It is currently owned by Lost Province Brewing Co.

"There's not really any Caribbean scene in Boone or anything, you know?" LaBarbara said. "The vision is to have something new and exciting that is kind of one-of-a-kind in town, you know, kind of like a spotlight."

LaBarbara said Coyote Kitchen provides numerous vegetarian and vegan options, especially considering the limited options available in the High Country for those seeking that type of meal.

"I think it's really important that everybody gets a chance to enjoy food," LaBarbara said. "It's a collaborative effort. Food brings people together, so you don't really want to single people out."

While Coyote Kitchen's vegetarian and vegan options are designed to be accommodating to those with dietary preferences or needs, they are also intended to be enjoyable for all customers.

"If you can make a really good vegetarian dish, that meat eater is going to eat it as well because it's delicious," LaBarbara said.

LaBarbara said Coyote Kitchen's staff want "to make a sense of community and bring people together over the food."

Coyote Kitchen's newest vegetarian item: The Nomad. Coyote Kitchen is located at 200 Southgate Drive Photo by Maggie Busch.

intentionally to mimic the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Miller wanted to create a sense of home in his restaurant inspired by traditional Japanese themes and cuisine. Sushi, hibachi and teriyaki dishes are offered as well.

One of the most popular items is the Appalachian Roll, a tempura-batter fried roll consisting of salmon, kani kama, cream cheese, avocado, nitzume and spicy aioli. CoBo is also home to the famed Yosef roll, which has tuna, panko shrimp, crab mix, avocado, nitzume and spicy aioli.

They uphold this by creating meals that are accommodating to dietary restrictions without being "so out in your face" about their vegetarian or vegan status. These include The Isabella, a burrito made with grilled tempeh as a base, and the Terra Cotta, a boat made with "red eye rub tofu" as a base, as well as numerous other options.

"It's just really good food cooked simply," LaBarbara said.

The restaurant's menu has recently been redesigned, incorporating new starters, salads and sauces. LaBarbara said these additions will make it "a little bit more traditional in a sense."

"The idea was just to bring the vision a little bit more true to its theme of Southwest and Caribbean food," LaBarbara said. "So I think we did a really good job with that, bringing in the sopes, some elote hushuppies, yuca fries."

LaBarbara said the restaurant's staff is very grateful to have a special place in the Boone community and to have been recognized for their vegetarian offerings.

"We're really honored to be part of the community and I'm really happy that this, that so many people have found this place to be the best vegetarian option in Boone, you know," LaBarbara said. "Like, it's really high praise."



The father-son team aimed to keep their food businesses community-oriented and driven, while also staying competitive with other businesses in the area.

"All of us are helping to grow the community," Joseph Miller said in regard to other Boone businesses and restaurants. "As competitive as restaurants can be, we are all trying to build this community competitively together."

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BEST OFF-CAMPUS COFFEE

ESPRESSO NEWS

GABRIELLE TROUTMAN

Worn wooden floors, gently groaning steps and bustling tight spaces — Espresso News. Out of the nine years of Best of Boone, ENews has won Best Off-Campus Coffee six times.

The shop is tucked into the back of King Street with an old European feel that has been drawing in gusts of wind, regulars and downtown walkers for nearly 30 years. Those who decide to pop in should file in behind the line on the left and make sure to leave to the right with barista favorites: honey cinnamon latte topped with foam art or, for warmer weather, in-house Yerba Mate with a splash of simple syrup, orange juice, lime and mint.

Manager Kathleen Petermann says the shop prides itself on not doing “anything too crazy” because they love offering a “consistent, delicious product” and being “a staple of many regulars’ every day routine.”

“You’ll find professors, students, business professionals and tourists all enjoying a cup of coffee and a pastry, and you’re sure to see someone you know,” Petermann said.

Due to the small space, the in-house roastery is often going three to five times a week, Petermann said. ENews sources beans from several different countries, but they always try to have some from Colombia, Sumatra and Brazil for the regulars’ favorite dark roasts along with attempting to prioritize Fair Trade and organic coffee whenever they’re able, Petermann said. ENews also features the traditional espresso and coffee setup, seasonal drinks, a variety of cold and frozen drinks, plus beer and wine.



A quiet afternoon at Espresso News, as a few customers get work done. Espresso News is located at 267 Howard St. Photo by Ashton Woodruff.

Along with the drinks, baked goods and soups are made daily in-house by the three rotating bakers throughout the week. Though the flavors change, ENews always offers muffins, scones, coffee cake, cookies and “fan-favorite” vegan banana bread, Petermann said. The soup offerings vary day-to-day, but are sure to be a hit each time.

If you pop in for the first time, be sure to try the signature chai latte. Dirty chai, iced or hot, adds a shot of espresso to what Petermann says is “the most popular drink by far” at ENews.

“But you also can’t go wrong with any of our specials or flavored lattes,” Petermann said.

While waiting on your refreshing drink, you can meet the proclaimed “music nerd” baristas on staff or listen to their eclectic tunes playing throughout the building while trying to snag the last pastry in the glass case to the left. Be sure to grab a holographic sticker or tiger merch on your way out to remember Boone’s best coffee.

BEST SMOOTHIE

CASCADE CAFE'S BLENDED

ABBY BUCKNER

Mixing its way to the top of the Best On-Campus Smoothie category this year is Blended, Cascades Cafe’s resident smoothie bar. Nestled into the corner of the cafe in Plemmons Student Union, Blended has no shortage of loyal and thirsty smoothie lovers waiting for a flavorful and revitalizing beverage. No matter what the day entails, the constant whirling of a blender is always present humming underneath the hustle and bustle of the union. Students are constantly zipping through the union for class, a meeting or to catch up with a friend, making Blended a perfect speedy stop for a quick energy-boosting smoothie.

Cascades reopened in the spring of 2022 after being closed briefly during COVID-19. The cafe quickly mixed its way into being a favorite student go-to by utilizing classic fruity and rich ingredients to create yogurt and juice-based smoothies ready to be devoured. The blends can be taken to the next level by adding protein, chia seeds and more for an extra nutritional enhancement to amp up the excitement. These components come together to create all kinds of wonderfully tasty, convenient and healthy smoothies.

Freshman astronomy and physics major Derrick Carter has been blending up refreshing smoothies at Blended since the start of the school year. He said he enjoys working for the vibrant smoothie bar with its friendly managers and fellow employees.

“It’s just super chill and fun here,” Carter said.

“People should come by and try out new smoothies more often.”

Carter shared that the Merry Mango and Vita-C Burst smoothies are some of the most popular signature smoothie choices on the menu.

Whether looking for a midday pick-me-up, a protein-packed workout boost or even just a cold sweet treat, Blended is sure to satisfy with its convenient and nourishing smoothies.



Madison Heye, an employee at Cascades, serving a Merry Mango smoothie for a customer. Cascades is located in Plemmons Student Union. Photo by Maggie Busch.

BEST FOOD DELIVERY

DOORDASH

BELLA LANTZ

Imagine wanting to eat off-campus, but not having a car or having a last-minute cram session and no time to grab food. Imagine needing to make an extra bit of cash, but not wanting to work full-time. Thankfully, DoorDash provides the solution to all of these issues. DoorDash was founded in the spring of 2013 but made public in 2020.

DoorDash has now raked in a total of \$3 billion in 2021 and continues to climb from there. DoorDash is well-known among college students who want food but do not have a car. It also caters to people who cannot drive or who do not have time in the day to go and pick up food. It is advertised that DoorDash is available in all 50 states around the U.S., along with over 7,000 cities and is incredibly well known, due to the constant ads seen on social media.

Jessica Hallman, a freshman psychology major, said she picked DoorDash over other food services because “some don’t work up in this area.”

Another appeal to DoorDash is the fact that there are normally always drivers to pick up food at any point in the day. All users have to do is download the app and order food. DoorDash takes care of getting the drivers to grab the food.

“DoorDash is easy and it’s quick,” Hallman said. This is not the only thing DoorDash is known for. It also thrives by letting people become self-employed. There are no assigned hours to work and instead, students can work on their own timeline. DoorDash prides itself on being a business where you can work where you want and when you want.

“I like that I can work, like, on my own time, like I can make my own schedule, do it whenever I want and for as long as I want,” said freshman Evan Stone.

DoorDash continues to make its application process easy, making more people want to apply. To apply, one is required to be 18, have a vehicle and do a background check with one’s social security number and driver’s license number.

“It was super easy. I just downloaded the app, made an account, I think I had to get approved, and

that was it,” Stone said.

Another aspect that keeps DoorDashers is the extra cash you get from DoorDashing. There is a base pay, but there is constantly more money involved with tips, promotions and bonuses.


Stone said whenever an area has a lot of order requests, there is usually a small bonus for each order

he delivers.

DoorDash has created a loyal customer and employee base. They have many different options, responsible for 45% of food deliveries. All one needs to do is download the DoorDash app to see the amazing opportunities from becoming self-employed to getting food delivered to the door.



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Lily's bartender shows off their skills creating one of their signature drinks. Lily's Snack Bar is located at 455 Blowing Rock Road. Photo by Landon Williams.

BEST BAR LILY'S SNACK BAR

EL SHEDRICK

From drinks, to tots, to drag shows, Lily's Snack Bar has something for everyone. The bar offers a positive atmosphere for both students and locals. Since its opening in 2019, Lily's has served a variety of foods and drinks.

"Personally I love the drink, Smash It Up!," said bartender Trey Pressley.

Smash It Up! is a cocktail with bourbon, mint and brown sugar. In addition to their drink menu, Lily's menu features many vegan, gluten free and vegetarian options for those with dietary restrictions.

The bar and sandwich shop describe themselves as "bringing the party in a safe environment," which many can agree with.

Drag king Dorian Grindr, who performs at Lily's, said the bar will "take care of situations that will make their guests uncomfortable and they actually hold their staff to that standard as well."

Pressley said he gets along with everyone, and that's what makes the work environment at Lily's something to be admired.

"The staff is incredible, I get along with everyone, so the work environment is good," Pressley said.

Lily's inclusive environment is something that draws many into the bar. They take the safety of their customers very seriously, which is shown through staff training and interactions with the drag community.

"We have to complete OASIS training pretty frequently, and everyone on the staff cares about

making it a safe place," Pressley said.

Aside from offering a safe environment for queer people, they "host events for a diverse group of folks because they have their Latinx nights, which no other bar does. They are the only bar actually making an effort to hold a space for queer POC people and everyone else," Dorian Grindr said.

Lily's is also a venue for live entertainment while having a drink. The motivation for having consistent drag shows at Lily's came from the co-mothers of the Boone Barbies, Benadryl and Molly Pocket. Since the start of the Boone Barbies in April 2022, Lily's has continued to offer a space for people to perform in drag.

"We knew we wanted drag to be more prevalent because you only see it once every so often, so we wanted to see it at least once a month," drag queen Molly Pocket said.

The management of Lily's is also something to be admired. The owner of Lily's was the first person that Boone Barbies' leaders, Benadryl and Molly Pocket, ever sat down with to discuss putting on a drag show.

"He is kind of just the definition of not being performative, like he puts in the work to get the drag shows, he donates his own money to charity, it's not performative, and that's the difference," Benadryl said.

With delicious food, live entertainment and fantastic drinks, Lily's is certainly a go-to bar that has something to offer for anyone. Just like Boone's drag life, Lily's is here to stay.



Appalachian Mountain Brewery bartender pours a seasonal beer from tap. AMB is located at 163 Boone Creek Drive Photo by Mayesivy Carlson.

BEST LOCAL BREWERY APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN BREWERY

HOLLIE MOORE

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, Appalachian Mountain Brewery reclaimed its Best of Boone title from Booneshine. The brewery had its last win as the Best of Boone: Best Local Brewery in 2020.

It all began when Nathan Kelischek called Chris Zieber on the phone one day and explained his plan, asking for some help to open the brewery. Zieber, a recent UNC-Chapel Hill graduate, didn't have a plan yet and agreed. The rest is history.

Zieber said one of his favorite parts of the job, something that never gets old, is getting the "oh my god, that's amazing," when introducing a customer to a new drink. He said they offer an assortment of beverages including ciders, seltzers and wines.

"We're about to launch a non-alcoholic mocktail program ... we want to make sure that everyone is welcome, and I think we do a really good job," Zieber said.

Co-founders Kelischek, an App State alum, and Zieber intend to open a second location for the brewery in May in Mills River, right outside of Asheville. Zieber said

the location will feel a lot like AMB but "a little bit more refined."

The two have worked to draw students to the Boone location through live music and events, something their new stage will play a role in. AMB held a Flannel Fest March 4 and to have the AMBlock Party on May 27.

The brewery partnered with Bojangles to release its first hard tea in the Boone location on March 12, releasing it across the state on March 13. Both organizations are rooted in North Carolina.

When asked what Zieber thinks makes the brewery "the best of Boone," he credited the quality of the craft beer and ciders offered each day.

"I think we always have a focus on quality service and fun, and I think those are like two of the big tenants here," Zieber said. "We have almost 30 beers on tap and ciders on tap right now, and, you know, it's just such a wide range. They rotate frequently and that's a big draw for a lot of people as well."

BEST FOOD TRUCK

EL TACORRIENDO AMENA MATCHESWALA

College students and their never-ending search for good, affordable eats is a tale as old as time. App State students are no exception, and their solution is a familiar favorite nestled between Blues Brews and a collection of living spaces.

Those on foot can't help but stop at the well-loved El Tacorriendo, tempted by the scent of spiced taco meat and the sound of Latin hits coming from the bright red food truck on King Street.

"The smell from the street is absolutely wonderful," said freshman environmental science major Laken Harvey. "The community here is great, sometimes they have games out for everybody and they have bands out here, it's really good and everyone's super nice."

El Tacorriendo, co-owned by husband-and-wife duo Alex Leon and Ashley Leon, is a family production serving classic Mexican staples to foot traffic and providing a fun, family-like environment for their mostly college student employees. The truck, which opened in 2016 and started coming to Boone in 2017, boasts a previous Best of Boone win, among other awards, for its homestyle authentic Mexican food.

Among their crowd-pleasers is their collection of ACP wraps. ACP stands for arroz con pollo, which means chicken and rice. These wraps were a customer invention that soon became what the truck is known for.

The customer creations have now led to what they call a "secret menu," which are unique menu items that can only be found on their Instagram or, for long-time customers, if you know exactly what to ask for. Among these are a crunchwrap, a Dorito-filled favorite, and the ACMountaineer wrap.

While the couple lives in Lenoir, where the food truck occasionally parks, Alex Leon spends nearly every day in Boone, where foot traffic gives them a strong customer base. Alex Leon, from Guadalajara, Mexico, learned to cook from his family, where he was the youngest of 11 kids. Having worked in the restaurant business for most of his life, from bussing tables in his younger years to being a cook, the couple decided to open a food truck when Alex Leon's brother, an Asheville native, sold his truck to them.

In the future, they hope to move to a brick-and-mortar location and add staples such as margaritas, aguas frescas and horchata to their iconic menu.

BEST TAKEOUT

COME BACK SHACK JADE OGLE

After a long day of classes, making dinner can be too much work — time for takeout. Conveniently located in the center of Boone is Come Back Shack and with the click of a button it can be right at your door.

The restaurant is known for its burgers but the menu doesn't stop there. They have chicken, salads, shakes and vegan options. The family-owned and operated restaurant prides itself on serving fresh food and advertises no freezers to emphasize that fact. Come Back Shack is popular with students, parents and locals alike.

This is the second year in a row Come Back Shack has won Best Takeout for Best of Boone along with other categories in previous years.

"I'd say as a team we get food out quickly and it tastes great. It's hot and fresh," said Brooklynn Bass, Come Back Shack manager. "As an individual, I make sure my team has what they need to do that."

Bass said she also accredited Come Back Shack's ever-expanding menu and styles to the restaurant's success.

Hailey Snyder, a senior communication major, dined at Come Back Shack with fellow App State student Nissy Gatland, a senior dance studies major, and her mother Susie Gatland. Snyder said the food "doesn't feel like takeout."

"It kind of feels more like restaurant food and they're more creative than, like, typical fast food," Snyder said. "And even if you try something new, it's gonna be good because all their basics are really good."



A Come Back Shack employee drops the takeout bag into the pick up trays, all ready to go. Come Back Shack is located at 1521 Blowing Rock Road. Photo by Evan Bates.

Susie Gatland said she visits Come Back Shack "every time I'm in town."

Come Back Shack employee and junior graphic communication major Caleb Sizemore said he focuses on "making sure that every customer interaction is a positive one."

From a creative menu to positive customer service, Come Back Shack has it all and has been deemed a winner in another year of Best of Boone. Experience all they have to offer next time you order takeout.

"Thank you for allowing us to be in this and all that good stuff. I'm really excited that we won," Bass said.



El Tacorriendo owner Alex Leon fires up the grill while cooking their popular carne asada tacos. El Tacorriendo is located at 362 W King St. Photo by AnnMarie Goodwin.

BEST GROCERY STORE

PUBLIX ELLA WILSON

Publix, the large store on Blowing Rock Road, is filled with plenty of culinary options that are sure to make any shopper's mouth water. The store has plenty of walking room for customers to push buggies through the aisles on the way to find ingredients for their next savory dinner.

Publix was first opened as a grocery store in Winter Haven, Florida, in 1930. After decades of growth and expansion, Publix Super Market at Three Creeks opened its doors to the residents of Boone back in 2017. Publix is open every day from 7 a.m.-9 p.m.

Publix provides weekly ads for their customers that offer deals on name-brand and Publix-brand items. Some of these deals include discounts on the many ready-to-eat food options available at the store's deli and hot bar. Publix also has some BOGO deals in store as a way for shoppers to save on their must have items

kept around the house. Many students flock to Publix solely for the sub sandwiches made in the deli section.

"It's pretty much a ritual at this point that me and my roommates go get 'Pub Subs' for dinner on Tuesdays when we go grocery shopping. We don't get subs from anywhere else," said sophomore recreation management major Sophie Soller.

Publix services also include event catering for any scenario, according to Publix. Whether it be a family dinner or an office party, they have an abundance of food platters to choose from, ranging from charcuterie boards to chicken wings. These aspects, along with others such as their bakery filled with fresh pastries and an in-store pharmacy that prides itself on "care for the whole family," makes Publix a grocery store that serves its community well.

blush.

Gosh! Thank you! The votes are in, and we're so flattered our Grocery Store is a favorite of so many readers. Thank you for all the times you've chosen Publix to shop for your grocery items. And thank you, especially, for one more thing: for making our day.

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BEST OF Lifestyle

BEST PLACE TO SKATE

BOONE GREENWAY SKATEPARK

WILL HOFMANN

On the bright white concrete of the Boone Greenway Skatepark, sophomore interdisciplinary studies major Hank Yusko pops his board into the air and grinds across a concrete slab.

The skateboard's metal trucks grate across the slab, creating a distinct scraping sound, a noise familiar to Yusko, a skater for 14 years.

Halfway through the maneuver, Yusko snaps his board back into the air and flips it around. The moment is delicate. For just a second, Yusko is suspended in the air as the board flips, turns and spirals forward alongside his body. His blue shirt flies into the air as he follows his board toward their destination.

On the way down, the ballet falls apart. His skateboard spins into the earth, landing on its side, but Yusko falls forward across the pavement, rolls over his head and bounces back up again. He looks at his friend back on top of the half-pipe and smiles.

With two half-pipe ramps, a rail and a few boxes to do tricks on, the Boone Greenway Skatepark provides students and locals with the opportunity to expand their skating skills and skate in an area provided for just skaters.

Yusko's friend, junior graphic communications management student Jackson Hall, looks on as Yusko practices multiple different tricks.

"I'd love to do a half cab crook," Yusko said to Hall as they skated alongside each other.

Alongside Yusko and Hall are other skaters. One has a distinct band T-shirt of The Garden, and another drifts around with a black T-shirt with bright white letters stating ZOMBIE RESPONSE TEAM. All are wearing baggy, hiked-up blue jeans. Open from dawn to dusk, the park is connected to the Boone Greenway Trail system, and is adjacent to the Town of Boone Water Treatment Facility. If you've spent any time at the park, its scent is noticeable after a slight breeze.

"It's more funny than it is annoying," Hall said about the treatment facility. "We like to call it 'Flush Factory,' like in Fortnite."

Yusko and Hall are both skaters and snowboarders, but as the season changes, the transition to skating for the summer becomes apparent.

"If it's not winter, then I'm here every day or every other day," Hall said.

Hall has only skated actively for the past four years and says he likes the "Boone skating scene more" than the parks back in his hometown of Winston-Salem.

"I like how tight everyone is," Hall said. "It is more of a community, especially with Recess and everything."



App State student, Danny Foppiano, skates up the quarter pipe at Boone Greenway Skatepark. The skatepark is located at 201 Casey Lane. Photo by Hiatt Ellis.

BEST OVERLOOK

ROUGH RIDGE

ELLA LEWIS & ETHAN SMITH

Rough Ridge is this year's Best of Boone winner for best overlook for the fourth year in a row. As the weather warms, cars will begin to double stack in the lot at Milepost 302.8, on the Blue Ridge Parkway, and people and pets from all walks of life will meander their way along the trail for the views all along the way to Rough Ridge's summit which stands at 4,773 feet in elevation.

After parking, the first view many will see is a waterfall flowing down the rocks in the parking lot. There are breathtaking views of Linn Cove Viaduct and Grandfather Mountain with distant views into the Piedmont. While pets are not permitted, even on leash, hikers can still pack a picnic and enjoy the spectacular views at this peaceful spot. During the fall, hikers can see the gorgeous scenery of the leaves on the trees changing colors.

The trail has two options for starting out, with both options containing beautiful sights and amazing photo opportunities. Starting off at the main parking is the more difficult, but the more popular way to reach the Rough Ridge Overlook. Typically, it's more crowded with other people and features a series of small-boulders that can be challenging, especially after rainfall.

The other way to reach the overlook is to park at the Wilson Creek Overlook and go along the path of the stone stairs. From there, follow the trail taking you to the parkway and the Tanawha Hiking Trail.

Along the trail, there are multiple boulders to relax on to take in every second of the beautiful views. With views like these, there are many photo-worthy snapshots to take.

"This is my favorite overlook, it has such beautiful scenery," said freshman Trinity Robinson. This overlook is a favorite for students to relax and take artsy pictures of the scenery. Rough Ridge is the place to experience and enjoy all of the stunning views the mountains have to offer.

BEST PLACE TO BIKE

GREENWAY

SAM VANOLINDA

For the expansive biking community in Boone, the Greenway is the most reliable place for students and locals alike.

It may not be the intense mountain biking trails found elsewhere in the High Country, but the paved, mostly flat paths provide a chance to get some great exercise and enjoy the unparalleled Boone nature — making it the best place to bike.

The Greenway is a short five-minute drive from campus. It is located right next to the Watauga County Recreation Center, with parking lots located on Martin Luther King Jr. Street.

BEST HIKE

ROUGH RIDGE TRAIL

GEORGIA DIXON

For those seeking a bit of solace, right outside of Boone lies a trail including views of one of the highest peaks in the Blue Ridge Mountains: Grandfather Mountain, as well as Linn Cove Viaduct, a \$10 million engineering marvel of a bridge. The hike at Rough Ridge is in the Pisgah National Forest and a part of the 13-mile Tanawha Trail.

Rough Ridge is only a one-third of a mile uphill hike from Milepost 302.8 on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Coming out to a 1.5-mile hike round trip, the hike is fast and satisfying.

Kevan Bloomgeren and Lillie Bloomgeren are semi-retired Linville residents and frequent Rough Ridge summiteers.

"We come here probably eight or 10 times a year," Kevan Bloomgeren said.

"The fall time is the best, you have all the colors and just the layers of mountains, it is very peaceful," Lillie Bloomgeren said. "The location is prime."

The spot is also an ideal location for a scenic picnic Kevan Bloomgeren said.

Lillie Bloomgeren wants future and past Rough Ridge goers to mind the beauty of the surrounding mountains and practice leave no trace principles — to pick up their trash and belongings. The couple said they try to pick up trash, often water bottles and miscellaneous debris, on their hikes around the Blue Ridge Parkway.

"People are fairly good here," Lillie Bloomgeren said. "But we try to bring something to pick stuff up."

Reagan Williams, a junior art education major, first discovered Rough Ridge last fall. She said she fell in love with the hike. The fact that it is near Boone is "so crazy," Williams said.

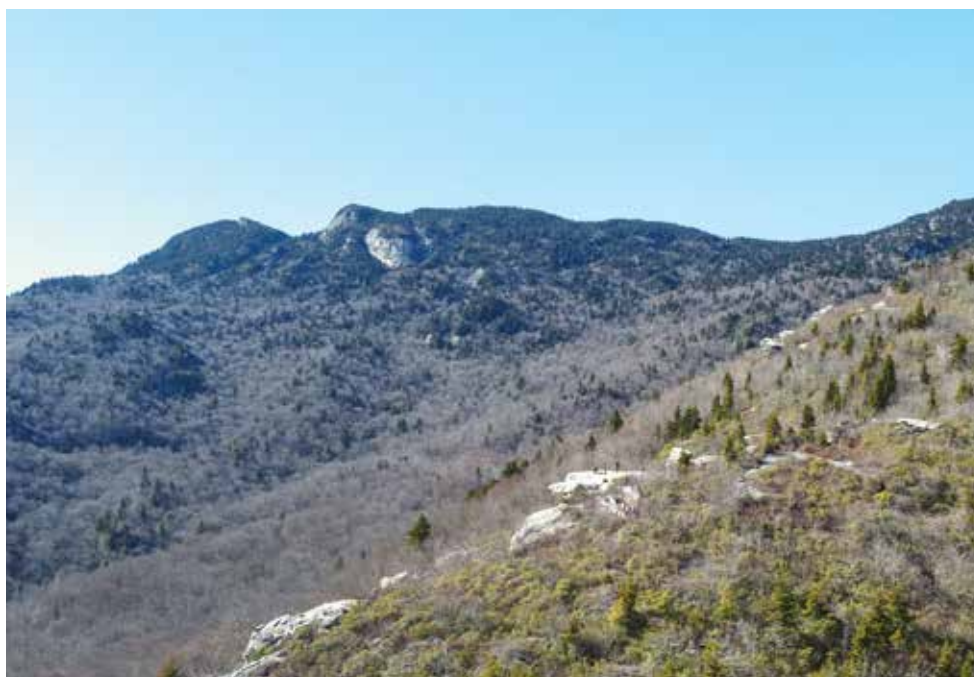
When her classes got canceled, she decided to take the opportunity to hike Rough Ridge.

"My two classes got canceled this afternoon so I thought I would take advantage," Williams said. "I just really enjoy how close it is to Boone."

The core area of the trail is around 3.5 miles from either entrance. Some of the main trails include Kennedy Loop, a wooded path that takes you up into the hills above the fields, and the core Greenway Trail, which takes you toward Watauga High School; a trail more preferred by bikers because it is paved.

For those who want to hop off their bikes and take a break, the park contains numerous benches and other seated areas to admire the always-green fields, preserved wetlands and the western Carolina fauna. The trails are used by both casual and more devoted bikers, as well as a host of different vehicles including skateboards, scooters and even the occasional unicycle.

The Greenway won't provide steep hills and hard-



Rough Ridge trail and overlook located on the Blue Ridge Parkway attracts students, locals and visitors to view the Blue Ridge Mountains, Grandfather Mountain and Charlotte skyline. Photo by Zac Miller.



The Greenway Trail delivers a peaceful and scenic ride for all bikers. Photo by Landon Williams.

to-manuever tracks, but it will provide an experience anyone can enjoy, from lifelong bikers to those picking up the hobby for the first time.

Senior political science major Micheal Rapp is one of the casual bikers who will occasionally make his way to the Greenway on a nice day.

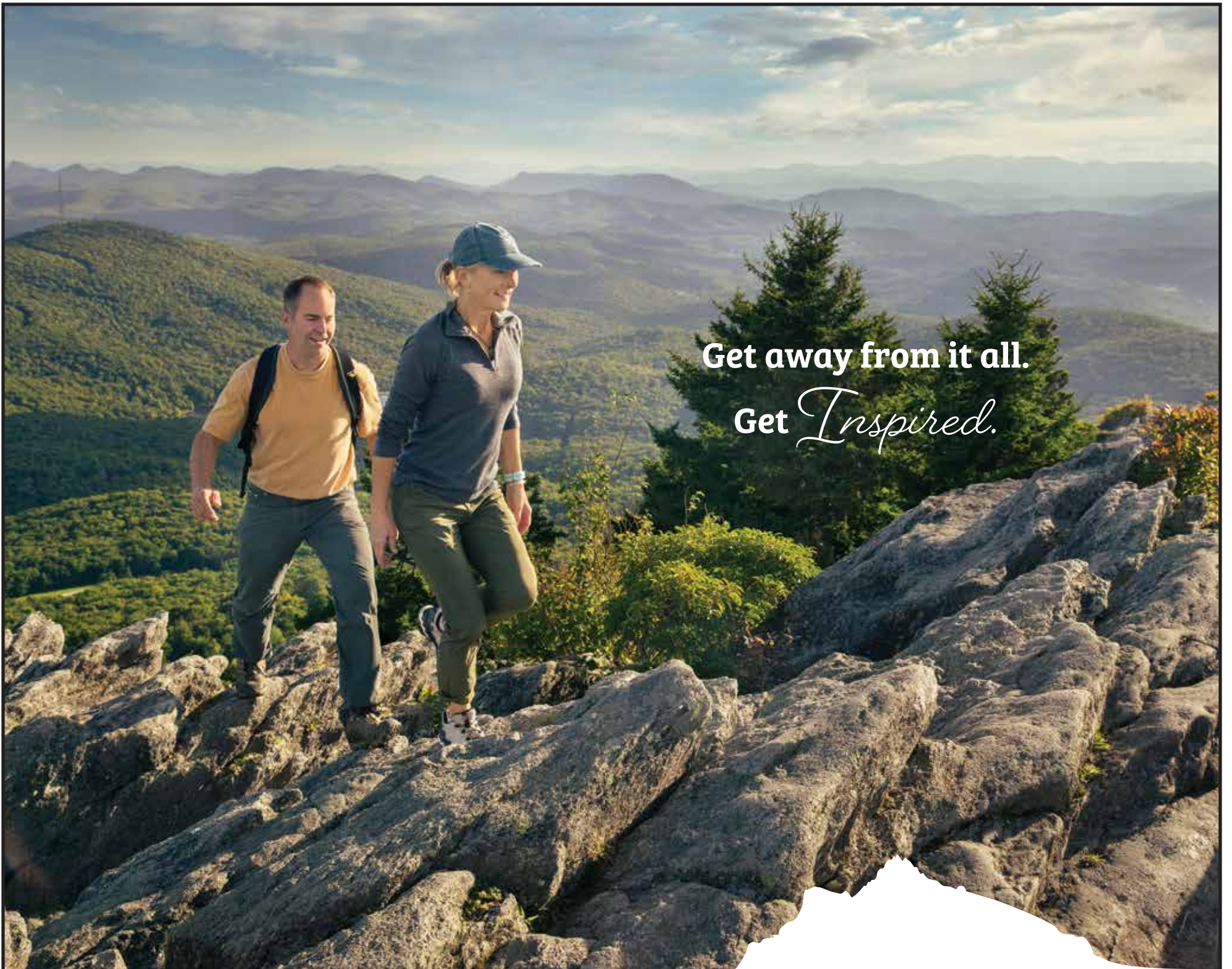
"I love biking at the Greenway," Rapp said. "It's always a really fun time alone or with friends. There's a variety of trails and places to explore off-trail."

Rapp's favorite part of the Greenway is being able to

see the Boone community.

"I love seeing the diversity of my community," Rapp said. "I see everything from little kids to my professors here, makes me feel like I have an insight into what's going on around me."

The Greenway is the perfect place to spend a spring afternoon in Boone, especially if you want to bike away from the busy roads and highways around town.



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BEST OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING UNIVERSITY HIGHLANDS

EMILY MILANO

University Highlands won Best Off-Campus Housing Complex for the fourth consecutive year. The apartment complex offers many amenities and easy transportation to and from campus at a low cost, making it a consistent favorite for many students and very competitive for potential residents. The apartment complex is located two miles from the university's campus, making it in high demand for off-campus housing.

"I absolutely love living here. The pool is amazing during the summer and it is so convenient to have the AppalCart come every 15 minutes," said Payton Rolland, a junior exercise science major.

The apartment complex is located at 289 Ambling Way and is dedicated to meeting the specific needs of university students, according to the University Highlands website. The amenities offered by University Highlands include a fitness center with a weight lifting section and cardio section, sundeck, tennis, volleyball and basketball courts, computer lab and printing and many more.

"I love using our fitness center, there are so many treadmills and elliptical machines, it makes it easy to stay active as a college student because I don't always

have time in my busy schedule to make it to the gym," Rolland said.

University Highlands offers two-bedroom and four-bedroom apartments, which are fully furnished and include utilities such as a washing machine, dryer, dishwasher, refrigerator and microwave. The apartments also come with cable TV and an entertainment center.

The apartment complex also offers roommate matching so students can apply to live in the apartments without already having roommates lined up. Students fill out a questionnaire during the application process and the University Highlands staff matches new residents with suitable roommates. Rent per month for a four-bedroom apartment at University Highlands is \$575 and is \$635 for the two-bedroom apartments starting next leasing year.

"I really like living in the highlands because you get so much for a pretty decent price," said junior management major Becca Harrelson. "The front office staff is always so nice and helpful, I wouldn't want to live anywhere else."

Parking is also included in residents' rent and the complex offers free guest parking in the visitor lot.

BEST SKI MOUNTAIN BEECH MOUNTAIN RESORT

ANDREW RICE

First opened in 1967, Beech Mountain Ski Resort is located at 1007 Beech Mountain Parkway in Beech Mountain. During the winter, the resort is open from 9 a.m.- 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 9 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

According to its website, Beech Mountain Ski Resort's elevation is 5,506 feet above sea level, making Beech Mountain the highest town in the eastern United States.

The resort has 17 trails for skiing and snowboarding on its property, including three terrain parks.

Charles McLendon, a junior exercise science major,

has spent two seasons working at Beech Mountain and said it is distinct from other ski resorts in the area because of its distance from Boone.

"Beech Mountain is the most well-rounded resort near us and it's far away to the point where it kind of feels like a mini vacation," McLendon said.

McLendon also said Beech has been helpful for him as he has learned how to snowboard.

"It has more than just two trails," McLendon said. "It has all areas you need to learn instead of just jumping into it and that helped me actually learn how to snowboard this season which is pretty fun."

The mountain being one mile.



Beech Mountain Ski Resort won Best Ski Mountain in Boone, pictured is a snowboarder grinding a rail at Beech Park. The resort is located at 1107 Beech Mountain Pkwy. Photo by Samuel Cooke.



BEST SWIMMING TRASH CAN FALLS/LAUREL CREEK FALLS

SIRI PATTERSON

The only person enjoying the warm weather at Laurel Creek Falls on the afternoon of March 6 was Joseph Butler.

Without any clouds in the sky, the sun poured down and sparkled against the white rapids. Butler, a Boone native of 30 years, stood on the riverbank between a colossal slab of rock and a small set of ferns. He cast his line from a short, white fishing rod into a shallow pool below a set of rapids.

He said he's seen better days fishing in the same spot over the years. Inches of rain deposited by recent storms made the rapids intense, and Butler said he blamed them for the lack of fish.

Although the fish were scarce, Butler said he still liked coming to Laurel Creek Falls, locally known as Trash Can Falls, because it is the best spot to swim in Boone.

"They need to change the name of this place because there isn't really any trash up here and it's just beautiful," Butler said.

Trash Can Falls has served as one of the most popular swimming holes for locals and students for years. In recent years, posts on social media and blog sites have spread the word about the natural beauty of the falls and it has also become popular among visitors to Boone.

Trash Can Falls went viral in 2020 when it was

featured in a TikTok posted by App State alum Max Renfro that garnered 11 million views. The video showed former wide receiver Thomas Hennigan slowly emerging from the pool of water below a towering rapid in his all-black football uniform.

There is a variety of depths to the different pools formed by the rapids, making it a great spot to visit whether you're looking to jump in or just dip your toes. The smooth, mossy beds of rock along the creek provide plenty of sunbathing opportunities.

On days following heavy rain like March 6, the unofficial trails leading further upstream can be washed away and steep, and both hands and feet may be needed to get through.

Butler said he has taken the plunge from the 15-foot boulder forming the largest rapid into the deep pool below, like many of the other risk-takers that have visited Trash Can Falls. But, he said he did not recommend attempting the jump on rainy days, when the excess rainwater can make the rapids swell to a monstrous size.

Trash Can Falls is located in Laurel Creek, right before it meets the Watauga River, and there is a gravel lot close by that is recommended for parking on Highway 321. Look for the sign that reads: "No Parking on Pavement." Butler said he has been scolded for parking further down the road before, but has never gotten in trouble using the gravel lot.

BEST OUTDOOR SHOP MAST GENERAL STORE

ZOEY SIGMON

The Mast General Store has again been voted Boone's Best Outdoor Shopping.

Boone's Mast General store has long been a part of local history and, in its lifetime, witnessed many changes both to the area and the business itself.

Boone's Mast location began as Hunt's Department Store in the early 1940s, later becoming a part of the "Mast Store family" in 1988 after being purchased by John Cooper and Faye Cooper, owners of the original location in Valle Crucis.

Purchasing the original location in 1979, the

A customer reaches for a bag of candy at the multi-leveled Mast General Store, which also offers outdoor gear, knick-knacks, clothing and more. Mast General Store is located at 630 W King St. Photo by Evan Bates.



Coopers opened the refurbished store to the public in 1980 and soon realized expansion was necessary. The family later took over The Mast Store Annex, an expansion of the shop, which eventually became the well-loved outdoor department in 1985.

Three years later, Boone's Mast location was born and has since grown into a downtown staple. Today the store sits proudly amid the hustle and bustle of downtown Boone, welcoming locals and visitors from all walks of life, just as the original store once did.

"We are so excited to be recognized as part of our community that encourages people to get outdoors, to enjoy our town and enjoy our weather," employee Sarah Oliver said.

Oliver, an alum of the recreation management

department, said she's been with the store for five years and encourages people to visit the location, saying the team would be "happy to meet you and show you what Mast is about."

"We can get you a good pair of shoes to hit the trail, whatever outdoor gear you need," Oliver said. "If we don't have it, we'll find another local shop in the area that does."

Oliver said the store welcomes a lot of business over the summer as locals and travelers stop by and students return to campus, selling many backpacks, water bottles and other outdoor essentials. Oliver said the store is also happy to advise visitors about local trails and gear, again encouraging people to "enjoy" the local outdoors.

BEST WINTER SPORTS SHOP RECESS SKATE & SNOW

COLIN BROSS

In 2008, Board Paradise, a beloved shop for all things skating, snowboarding and other outdoor activities, closed. The community felt a void at its departure. However, it wouldn't be long before that void was filled, and shortly after in 2009, Ashley Parady and JP Parady opened Recess Skate & Snow.

"Having a core skate and snow shop that's involved with the community, doing events, stuff like that is so necessary," JP Parady said. "With that other shop leaving, you know, it kind of opened up the door for that opportunity to exist."

Fourteen years after their initial opening, Recess continues to serve the Boone community. Recess provides products and services for winter sports and skateboarding, offering a variety of brands as well as their own products. This is their third consecutive year winning Best Winter Sports Shop in Best of Boone.

Along with offering a variety of products to every level of rider, Recess also has a team of North Carolina

based athletes the shop sponsors. From the opening of the shop, JP Parady began to construct a team of local riders sponsored by Recess.

"We opened up on Oct. 3 and you know with the team we were doing video premier kinda kickoff events for the season next week. Straight out of the gate we were doing events and had a team," JP Parady said.

Recess' team consists of riders from every level, from X-Games participants to riders as young as 12 years old. They also sponsor female riders like Charlotte Flowers and Brantly Mullins.

"To have a diverse team, it's like having that, I feel, represents and caters that inspiration to the youth and keeps them going up," JP Parady said. "Having those female riders might encourage those younger female riders, having those younger kids encouraging even the younger kids, you know?"

Since their opening, Recess has been active in the Boone community. They consistently hold events and



Left to right, Carson Farthing, JP Parady, Ashley Parady and Walker Stutts pose for a portrait inside the snow section of Recess Skate & Snow. Recess is located at 1158 NC-105. Photo by Samuel Cooke.

competitions such as The Park Rat Classic for all levels of snowboarders. They have also been at the forefront of developing a skate park in Boone's greenway.

"The skateboard and snowboard community here is amazing, and as a local, and a local business owner, the whole community here is awesome," JP Parady said. "There's a ton of local support from obviously the

local community itself but even the small business here. Everyone works hard together, you know, we're lucky to be a part of a community that supports itself so much."

BEST APP GEAR MOUNTAINEER MANIA

KOLBY SHEA

First opened by the Corriher family in 1981, Mountaineer Mania has been a long-standing favorite for App State fans looking to proudly wear the black and gold.

Mountaineer Mania isn't the only fan gear store in Boone, and it isn't even the only fan gear store on King Street, but according to the Best of Boone votes, this store stands out among the rest.

In 2020, Melody Pineda purchased the store from the original owners. A Watauga County native, Pineda received her masters from App State and made a name for herself in High Country real estate. Since buying Mountaineer Mania, she has continued the tradition Bill Corriher and Wanda Corriher established for the store.

The shop advertises the "widest selection in town" for App State merchandise. The store has been faithfully serving App State students and fans for just over 40 years, and they've now won Best Place for App Gear eight years in a row.

Mountaineer Mania's selection is a wide assortment. If fans are looking for App State T-shirts or the popular black and yellow striped bibs, many stores will provide what they are looking for.

Mountaineer Mania, however, not only provides those essentials, but also novelty items like App State footballs, magnets and tree ornaments. They've also shown they provide the "widest selection in town" paired with some of the most affordable prices.

"When I went, they had everything I was looking for," said Cam Carrow, a Mountaineer Mania customer. "My sweatshirt was extremely high quality and I really enjoyed it."

It isn't just the merchandise that makes this shop unique, but the ability for customers to leave their mark on the store. On the far-right wall is a mural of App State's beloved mascot, Yosef. Students or alumni can ask to be photographed next to the mural for the picture to then be placed on the wall under their year of graduation. It's a way for fans to get their App State gear while also leaving something of themselves behind.

To top it all off, the customer service has received high praise.

"Everytime I went to the shop, everyone was really great," Carrow said.



Anna Banana's employees Shaina Scolnick and Rachel Newberb maintain the many racks of the storefront. Anna Banana's is located at 641 W King St. #2. Photo by Darcy Sluder.

BEST THRIFT STORE

ANNA BANANA'S MEGAN KOCH

Humans have been expressing themselves through clothing since they knew what clothing was. Fashion fosters community by allowing people to communicate through their tastes, and at 641 West King St., they also incorporate some dance moves.

Since October 2010, Anna Banana's has been doing exactly that; creating community through clothing.

Greeted with bright colors and warm employees, it is hard to not smile. The store is split into two different spaces with a consignment store in the front and vintage finds in the back. With all the inventory, there is something for everybody.

What makes Anna Banana's shine compared to other shops is the employee's love and respect for Anna herself. Grant White, an employee of two years, described her as sweet and the best owner.

"I am glad I have her in my life to guide me through," White said.

Andre Edwards, who has worked there since the fall 2020, echoed similar sentiments.

"She just wants the best for everyone ... instead of jumping to conclusions about an employee, maybe they are having a bad day and that's reflecting on their work ethic today," Edwards said.

The positive work environment seeps into the store atmosphere. Many of the current employees were once regulars at the store. Hailey Costar, an employee since October 2022, said she worked there because of the energy and overall vibe. When she walked into the store she felt like the workers knew her and went on to reflect the importance of the customer feeling good about themselves. Plus, she was already there all the time.

No matter how different everybody who walks through the door may be, they are all unified by one thing: a love for fashion. When talking to employees about their favorite customer experiences, everybody had a hard time choosing one.

"After a few months of me working there and I styled a mannequin, vibe was very ice queen in Narnia, very chic Narnia. This lady comes in and she sees the mannequin and starts freaking out because she, like, loves the outfit ... She tried on the entire outfit and bought it," Edwards said. "Styling myself is one thing, but when you style others and they feel good, that makes you feel good because they feel good."

With a 10% discount if you dance at checkout and good tunes, Anna Banana's is a bright light even on the cloudiest of Boone days.

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BEST PIERCING

NOBLE TATTOO & PIERCING K. SLADE



Sloan Blinsink of Noble Tattoo & Piercings tattoos their client, Annie Forgrave. Noble is located at 432 W King St. Photo by Hiatt Ellis.

BEST TATTOO ARTIST

SLOAN BLINSINK

CAMERON MILLER

Sloan Blinsink has only been tattooing professionally for about two years, but in that short period of time has become a Boone favorite.

Blinsink said tattooing is the only thing they've ever really wanted to do.

"I told my parents I wanted to be a tattoo artist when I was 13 or 14 and at first my dad said 'no more Spike TV, we're not watching 'Ink Master,'" Blinsink said. "But by the time I turned 17, they bought me my first tattoo machine."

Their dad went on to be their first client. Blinsink's work is brightly colored and heavily influenced by pop culture. It also has a sense of humor with pieces including Dolly Parton portraits, Junji Ito panels, "Total Drama Island" characters and memes.

"I'm a big fan of any sort of flat-color cartoons, but I like lots of different styles of tattooing," Blinsink said.

They have experience in a range of styles including black and gray work and even putting on freckles, and they recently took a class on cosmetic tattooing. One of their most memorable pieces was an image of Betty Boop covered in tattoos, one of which is Blinsink's name.

"That was cool because I had never gotten to put my name on anyone before," Blinsink said.

Blinsink came to Boone from Lake Norman in 2019 to pursue a degree in art education, but left school during the pandemic. They waited tables and even designed cans for Lost Province Brewing Co. until they had saved enough money for their apprenticeship at Noble Tattoos & Piercings.

"Noble gave me a shot when it was hard to be taken seriously as someone who didn't have experience tattooing yet and enjoyed whimsical, non-serious art," Blinsink said.

They apprenticed for a year and a half under Noble's owner Colin Fields who inspired Blinsink with his own dark sense of humor.

Blinsink likes Boone for its weather and the tight-knit community.

"I have a friend everywhere, everyone knows each other and I've really enjoyed being a part of what's happening up here," Blinsink said.

As for the future, Blinsink hopes to continue tattooing in the community.

"It feels like every year I meet people who are so lovely and I'm like 'it can't get better than this,' but it keeps getting better," Blinsink said. "I like that people of all different backgrounds get tattoos. That feels really cool to me."

To check out Blinsink's work you can follow them on Instagram or call Noble Tattoos & Piercings to book a consultation.

A silicone hairless cat greets visitors of Noble Tattoos & Piercings. From the tip of its ears to the rubbery skin of the chin, its face and head are adorned with metal jewelry.

Sandwiched between original artwork and tattoo mockups, the cat lounges from a high ledge, overseeing the piercing process from start to finish.

Purple tongue rings, curved blue barbells and long industrial bars made of titanium are displayed in a protective glass case. Noble cautions for foul language and "mild nudity." Only those 18 years and older are allowed upstairs.

Since 2017, Noble has served the High Country's piercing needs and for the third year, it's been voted the Best Piercing Shop in Boone.

Standing at 432 W. King St. across from the Turchin Center for the Visual Arts, Noble opens at noon every day and closes at 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 7 p.m. Sunday.

Chelsea Mauney has been piercing for almost 12 years, starting with Tattooing U in Charlotte before moving to Boone after the pandemic.

Previously working with Noble's owners at Tattooing U, Mauney is one of two of Noble's body piercers with another person currently in training.

She said she wanted a change from what Charlotte offered and contacted Noble to see if they had any

available positions. Mauney said it was like her "stars aligned."

"I kind of wanted something more secluded and things," Mauney said. "I understand what everyone's been telling me my whole life about a small town. It's very nice and like such a tight-knit community."

For body modifications, Mauney connects with the aesthetics of the culture and freely creates art for clients to appreciate and enjoy.

"I can make people feel good about the skin they're in," Mauney said.

The vulnerability someone exhibits when undergoing body modifications is something that resonates with Mauney and why she tries to be as friendly and welcoming as possible.

"I used to absolutely hate my left ear because it's big and it sticks out," Mauney said. "I've decorated it so much it's now my favorite ear so when I get to recreate that for people, it's really nice to help them out and give them something awesome that they can enjoy for the rest of their life."

Mauney has long-term plans to stay in Boone and work in a community she adores.

"I've traveled all over the world and all over the place and this is the first town as soon as I came into the town, I had cold chills and I said that there's something here for me," Mauney said.

**SLOAN
BLINSINK**
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432 WEST KING ST. BOONE

BEST LOCAL BAND LUSKA

K. SLADE

Huddled between the front door and a TV, Luska makes their debut performance in their lead singer's house. String lights draped from high ceilings, lamps illuminate their makeshift stage as Barrett Conner belts out his original song "Solid Ground."

He looks beyond the wall-to-wall crowd. One hundred and fifty people filled his cramped home, gathering in the living room, kitchen, and extending back into his bedroom. The members of LUSKA didn't anticipate such a turnout, only expecting around 30 people.

Despite officially forming in January, the community voted LUSKA for this year's Best Local Band. Serving as the lead guitarist and main vocalist, Conner named the band after a historic area of his hometown, Junaluska, wanting to encapsulate the feeling of freedom the area brought to him during his teenage years. He is the band's songwriter as well and most of their songs were written prior to LUSKA's conception. Conner said it was hard to book venues and it was too cold to host an outdoor show so he offered his living space to house the concert. LUSKA feared the floor would cave in beneath them.

"I was like 'why not do it in our living room, only 30 people will come' but then a lot of people came and we had to worry about the floor," Conner said.

Gavin McDowell is the band's guitarist and balances academics, work, performing and his passion for rock climbing. He started dedicating one day a week for practices.

"Whenever we do have the same opening, then it's like 'clear everything else' like that's the most important thing," McDowell said.

BEST HAIRCUT CANVAS BEAUTY BAR

BOBBY PHILLIPS

Bombshell blonde, sunset red, jet black, a drastic break up chop, or gentle layering and trim, one southern chic salon is the place in Boone to do so. Founded in 2015, Canvas Beauty Bar is the winner of Best Haircut.

Canvas Beauty Bar aims to make getting a haircut or styling a luxury, not an obligation. Two local stylists, Heather Rogers and Miah Zimmerman, from Boone started the business and strive to create a unique atmosphere and ensure the best experience for their clientele.

Canvas makes each experience memorable for their customers, they shape their service around what you need and what works for you. Canvas also offers wedding and event styling, ensuring you have the best event possible.

"We want to ensure that each customer feels important and welcome to our store, no matter if it's your



Band members from left to right: Micah Carroll, Gavin McDowell, Barret Conner and Lee Dees, practice originals and cover songs in preparation for their next show. Photo by Ashton Woodruff.

While another band member, Lee Dees has a full musical roster including skills in 11 instruments, the guitar, banjo, mandolin, and accordion are all featured in some of LUSKA's songs.

"I think that for me, music is something that comes very, very naturally," Dees said. "Out of all the instruments that I play, the only ones I've ever had actual lessons for were the guitar and the mandolin." His musical prowess is where Dees said he feels he can be at his best creatively.

"Like yeah, 'why not have an accordion in a full band garage rock sound?' or 'this song would sound really

sick with a banjo behind it,'" Dees said.

Dees thanks God for his ability to create such sounds and explore his "creative wackiness." For as long as LUSKA's drummer Micah Carroll can remember, he always pounded on his chest, thighs, and surroundings to deliver booming percussions. The band's Instagram page introduced the drummer, Micah Carroll as someone who likes "shiny things" and "hitting stuff."

"I don't have silence in my brain because it's just drums all the time," Carroll said.

LUSKA wants to push out a blend of music and create a space to be musically free.

"I feel like we're one thing I don't want to be is just like another Boone jam band," Carroll said. "I think we want to try and be something that maybe hasn't necessarily been done before."

LUSKA drew inspiration from artists like Mumford & Sons and Harry Styles to craft a "neo-garage rock" and "folk-indie" sound.

"Just to see this place packed and everyone like vibing and jumping along to the music we were making, the art that we were making was nuts," Dees said.

LUSKA's next performance is at Thaw Out 2023, presented by Appalachian Mountain Brewery on April 22.



Canvas Beauty Bar stylist Heather Rogers, a business partner since the beginning of the company works on Lauren Byrd's hair, who is getting highlights and extensions. Canvas is located at 181 Meadowview Drive Photo by Evan Bates.

BEST LOCAL BOUTIQUE COMMON GOOD CO.

MADDIE LIPE

On the second floor of Common Good Co. on King Street sits an unfinished painting of a buffalo, propped up on a wooden easel waiting to be completed by store co-owner Jacob Daniels.

Co-owner Melina Daniels sat holding her 5-month-old baby, Amelia, while she accepted the news that her store won Best of Boone's Best Local Boutique.

"That's a sweet surprise," Melina Daniels said. As a graduate of App State, Melina Daniels said, "to have a positive influence on App State is always encouraging." Husband and wife, Jacob Daniels and Melina Daniels, both App State graduates, opened Common Good Co. in August 2019 as a space for aspiring artists to grow in their careers.

Both Melina Daniels and Jacob Daniels were art majors during their time at App State and worked as artists right out of college, with the extra help of some side jobs in Boone.

However, Melina Daniels said both she and Jacob Daniels were "influenced by God to open Common Good."

The store features three different levels, starting with the bottom floor, which is where customers can find local, handmade goods as well as products from different artists and makers throughout the High Country.

The first floor also offers a coffee bar where customers can buy a cup to sip on while they shop, or while they browse the gallery upstairs. The neon-lettered sign behind the coffee bar reads, "hold fast to what is good," which aligns with Common Good Co.'s mission.

Melina Daniels and Jacob Daniels created the shop with the intention to promote intentional consumerism, which to them means "to make more, want less and do good for the common good of everybody," according to Common Good Co.'s website.

The second level of Common Good Co. is home to a fine art gallery featuring artwork from various local artists. Among these local artists are Kim Feuling and Paul Feuling from Mabel Studios, Rachel Van Dyke and others.

The gallery also features artwork by App State alum Chloe Purpero, who was an art intern for Jacob Daniels and Melina Daniels, but now works professionally out of Charleston, South Carolina.

"The greatest joy is to see people launch into a full-time career," Melina Daniels said.

That is what both Melina Daniels and Jacob Daniels hope to help accomplish through the renovation of the



Common Good Co. owners Jacob and Melina Daniels pose with their 5-month-old baby Amelia in the fine art gallery of their store on King Street. On the easel to the left of Jacob Daniels is the buffalo painting he is working to finish. Common Good Co. is located at 685 W King St. Photo by Maddie Lipe.

third floor of the shop into a community workshop and studio.

Melina Daniels and Jacob Daniels, whose paintings are also featured in the gallery, want to be able to mentor aspiring artists and create a community space for collaboration.

"We want to move away from retail to more community goods," Melina Daniels said. "We want people to be inspired to create something when they leave."

Melina Daniels said she wants her shop to be an "organic, peaceful and creative atmosphere" for those that enter.

Common Good Co. is open every day from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. and the espresso bar is open from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. each day.

"Maybe they leave the shop and are inspired to take a pottery class," Melina Daniels said. "We want to show people they can really do anything that they put their mind to."



"My family and I were planning on moving into a shed until we found Hospitality House.... and they moved us into a three-bedroom apartment."

HOSPITALITY HOUSE NORTHWEST N.C.

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High Life of Boone is a friendly, and welcoming smoke shop with a wide variety of products. High Life is located at 221 Howard St.

BEST NAIL SALON APPALACHIAN NAILS & CO.

NATALY G. AGUIAR



Two of the employees at Appalachian Nails & Co. completing acrylic sets for the customers. The nail salon is located at 324 NC-105 Extension Suite 6. Photo by Maggie Busch.

Appalachian Nails & Co. has been loved by locals since 2020, who can't stop coming back to their locations at 324 NC-105 extension suite 6, and new salon on 151 Howard St. due to their low prices, 10% discount offered to students, teachers and military, as well as their wide variety of services and skills.

Sisters Lisa Nguyen and Lily Nguyen run this family owned business alongside manicurists they view as "basically family" said Lisa Nguyen.

"My salon is more like a family than friends, we take care of each other," Lisa Nguyen said. "We spend our holidays together, and Tet too."

Tết is the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, and it's short for Tết Nguyên Đán, meaning "Festival of the First Morning of the First Day."

After opening for the first time the business faced the many struggles common among business owners who opened their business during the pandemic.

"I wish I knew COVID was gonna shut us down two

months into opening January 2020, but we made the best of it," Lisa Nguyen said. "Working and owning Appalachian Nails & Company is my life."

There's no shortage of color and design options at App Nails & Co. Once you've made your decision, all you have to do is lay back and relax as their professional and friendly crew show off their skills and trained, certified expertise to make your dream nails come to life. Whether it be regular polish or gel, a dip powder manicure with a complex design, a spa pedicure or waxing, you'll be satisfied with whichever luxurious treatment these two local nail shops have to offer.

Stop by either of their two locations Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m.-7 p.m. and Saturday's from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Allow Appalachian Nails & Co. to show you why they have won Best Nail Salon in Best of Boone for two years in a row.

Lisa Nguyen wants customers to know that, "at Appalachian Nails & Co., we put our customers first."

SMOKE SHOP HIGH LIFE

BEN GOSEY

Puff, puff and passing the competition again; High Life was named Best Vape Shop in Boone for the third consecutive year. Located on Howard Street, the store has everything a toker could need, from rolling papers or vapes to one of a kind glassware, High Life makes sure to keep its inventory stocked for its customers.

"It is definitely appreciated and we value all of our customers greatly," said High Life employee Pete Halier. "Though the pandemic things were tough, everyone kept coming and we are getting through it."

Known for having some of the best prices around Boone, people love stopping by the shop to get their smoking needs met. The staff is very helpful through the process, making sure the customer is catered to, answering any questions, while also educating the customer about their products.

High Life's store also promotes an open and chill environment, playing a variety of music in the store. They want their customers to leave with quality products and a good vibe.

"Customers enjoy our customer service, the vibe we have in the store, the music and friendly environment," Halier said. "It is nice that everyone still shops here."

The store offers a wide variety of goods and smoking needs. The store is split in half between vapes and rolling papers on one side, the other holding tons of unique glassware and CBD products for fitting everyone's needs.

The staff makes sure to educate everyone coming in the store on what they might be buying, while never hesitating to answer any questions a customer may have about the differing CBD products they offer. They also give customers their personal recommendations on products, giving customers the best opportunity to make the best selection.

The smoke shop is open 9 a.m.-9 p.m. six days a week and 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Sundays. So the next time you need to blow some smoke, head to Boone's best: High Life. Please enjoy responsibly.

BEST TANNING SALON PLANET TAN

BEN BRADY

As the weather warms and natural tans and sunburns begin to appear, avoid all of that by going to Boone's best tanning salon. For the second year in a row, Planet Tan has held the slot.

The salon provides the use of tanning beds, purchasable lotions and spray tans. In addition to walk-in services, unlimited plans are available for both tanning bed and spray tan services, and some include discounts on lotions.

Planet Tan also offers other beauty services like teeth whitening and eyelash extensions.

The business routinely has holiday specials, discounts and giveaways on its Facebook page and in the salon. It also offers monthly discounts to students, school system affiliates, healthcare workers, law enforcement and military.

The salon is open 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturdays. Established as a locally owned and operated business in 1999, Planet Tan is the longest standing tanning salon in Boone. Owner Kara Tester started her relationship with the business as a customer

in 2009 and began working there in 2014. In 2018, Kara purchased the business to become its sole owner.

Since becoming owner, Tester has expanded the salon with six new bronzing beds and added a spray tan booth in 2020. This summer, the salon will acquire an unreleased, state-of-the-art spray tan machine.

For Tester and her team, the customer experience goes beyond tanning services and products. She says Planet Tan's goal is to leave customers as satisfied as possible.

"I think we are different from the pack simply because our team goes above and beyond to ensure a great experience for each individual customer," Tester said. "I could not be more proud to work alongside the women that I do."

Tester emphasized that regardless of a customer's tanning experience, Planet Tan aims to meet each individual customer's needs.

"Whether they are brand new or an experienced tanner, we take pride in servicing each person who walks through the door as if they are our only customer," Tester said. "Everyone deserves to feel important and welcomed at some point in their day, and if we can do that for someone, we will do it."



THANK YOU FOR VOTING

PLANET TAN

FOR THE BEST TANNING
SALON IN BOONE!



BEST NONPROFIT HOSPITALITY HOUSE OF NORTHWEST NORTH CAROLINA

MADALYN EDWARDS

For those in need in the local community, the Hospitality House of Northwest North Carolina offers life-changing assistance.

Todd Carter, chief development director of the Hospitality House, said the organization was originally founded in the late 1970s by seven different faith organizations that provided shelter in their facilities. In 1984, the Hospitality House officially became a nonprofit organization and has been providing assistance to communities ever since.

The organization serves seven counties, covering over 2,500 square miles, including Watauga County.

Carter explained the goal is to elevate quality of life by helping people get out of and stay out of homelessness. “We believe housing is a human right,” Carter said.

The organization offers many services, including assistance with bills, fuel, electricity, food and medical services, including medical care for mental health and therapy programs.

The Hospitality House runs food pantries and a food kitchen, which serves 1,200 meals per month alone. In the last two years, the Hospitality House helped move 303 people out of homelessness. They also provide shelter to approximately 120 people per night through their homeless shelter program. Of the 400 to 425 different individuals in the shelter, 156 of them were housed by the Hospitality House this year.

The Hospitality House has a shelter program and eight housing programs for transitional housing. Additionally, three food access programs and two crisis assistance

programs are run by the organization, and the Hospitality House works with other local groups such as OASIS and FARM Cafe that help those in need.

Currently, the new food access program being offered is a remote food locker program in the Bethel community where residents can request items which will then be stocked by the organization in food lockers assigned to the individuals.

The program, Carter said, is the only one of its kind in rural America.

“There’s one in downtown Houston, and there’s one in downtown Pittsburgh, and we said we want to put one next to a cow pasture,” Carter said.

The organization works closely with students at App State through volunteer opportunities and internships, such as a new music therapy program that a student intern assists with. Currently, 11 student interns work with the Hospitality House, and several other volunteering opportunities will be offered, such as helping with the organization’s outdoor garden.

Carter said the two fastest-growing demographics of homelessness within the organization are college-aged students aged 18-24 and adults over 65.

“Our vision for our organization is a community where every individual thrives,” Carter said.

Those who wish to donate to the Hospitality House can visit the organization’s Facebook page or go to www.hospitalityhouse.org/donate. Contributions via PayPal, Cash App and Venmo are also accepted.

BEST LOCAL GYM ANYTIME FITNESS

JAMES PARKER

After coming out on top in last year’s debut of the category, Anytime Fitness has once again claimed the title of Boone’s Best Local Gym.

Founded in 2002, Anytime Fitness has ascended to the top of the list of 24/7 gyms and has expanded its reach to all seven continents.

Its convenient placement next to Dancey’s Comfort Footwear and across from Serenity Hair Studio has contributed to its immense popularity among Boone residents and App State students alike.

The gym offers its members 24-hour access to its free weights, strength machines, cardio area and other training equipment.

Anytime Fitness also offers tanning booths, private showers and restrooms and private parking. While members have 24/7 access to the facility, the gym is staffed 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, noon-5 p.m. Friday, noon-4 p.m. Saturday and is unstaffed Sunday. A membership also includes entry to any of the 5,000 chains globally.

For those looking for a guided fitness routine, Anytime Fitness also offers personal training, fitness assessments, small group training and specialized fitness classes.

The facility’s personal trainer Jaxson Smith enjoys

working with the Boone community.

“I really enjoy talking with our members and helping them with fitness advice,” Smith said.

The gym’s cardio area boasts treadmills, elliptical cross-trainers, exercise bikes, stair climbers and HDTVs. The facility’s strength training area is just as impressive as it includes squat racks, free weights, various strength machines, as well as kettlebells and battle ropes for functional training.

The chain’s comprehensive website encourages those who are interested to schedule a tour of the facility. The website also includes a full list of the amenities as well as a personal training staff directory, a fitness blog, photo galleries and a mission statement. Although rates vary based on factors such as location and current promotions, the cost of membership starts at \$36 a month and includes a seven-day free pass for local residents that are new customers.

The official Anytime Fitness Instagram account has over 126,000 followers, and the account for the Boone location has nearly 300 followers and includes a link to the signup form for various group fitness events. While the Boone location does not currently have a Twitter page, the official Anytime Fitness Twitter page has nearly 200,000 followers.



Senior Logan Coring, left, and Senior Lo Ben-Israel, right, rinse off a cart following dinner service at The Hospitality House of Northwest NC, located at 338 Brook Hollow Road. Photo by Maysesivy Carlson.

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KING STREET URBAN MARKET

BEST RENTAL COMPANY

THE WINKLER ORGANIZATION

TREY BLAKE

With the 40th anniversary of The Winkler Organization opening, it was only right they were voted Best Rental Company in Boone for the third year in a row. After decades of service to App State and Caldwell Community College students, it's a no-brainer decision for people looking for close-to-campus housing.

With 16 properties being within walking distance of App State campus there is a huge reason why it's supported by many. It doesn't stop at distance though as their website says over 91% of their tenants have recorded a "good" to "excellent" experience and that their one goal is "helping you find the perfect place to call home. Your experience is still our top priority."

One amenity the organization provides is its discount cards. They provide discount cards to their tenants to 15 restaurants and businesses in Boone, including 10% off at Mellow Mushroom, buy one entree get another half off at Red Onion and 15% off all food at Stick Boy Bread Company.

"The cards are amazing," former resident Kyle Gamariello said. "I mean you're telling me I can get discounts at the Come Back Shack or Blue Deer Cookies? Sign me up."

With 1,000 bedrooms in 25 properties surrounding Boone, there are many options to choose from the

organization. The variety inside the properties is immense, there are one or two beds in places such as 494 Lofts or the Cook House. Appalachian Manor sits firmly on the east side of campus facing Dogwood and Cannon halls and is only a 50-yard walk from campus. The Cardinal Apartments find themselves the farthest at 1.7 miles from campus, but with a multitude of five-star reviews and the complex having the cheapest rent within the organization, there's value to be found in every Winkler property.

While the discount cards and short-distance walks to campus are nice, The Winkler Organization offers complimentary housekeeping services to every location.

"The housekeeping services were the best part," Gamariello said. "Moving out here after being at home for so many years with my parents was a big change for me and my cleaning habits, but the complimentary housekeeping kept me in line and I couldn't be more thankful for it."

After being open since the 1980s and servicing young Boone residents attempting to find their footing, The Winkler Organization finds itself the runaway option for being Boone's number one rental company.

BEST PLACE TO LIVE ALONE

KING STREET FLATS JACK JACKSON

If you're looking to live alone with access to downtown, look no further than King Street Flats. Located along King Street and across App State's campus, it's voted the Best Place to Live Alone in 2023.

King Street Flats provides a vibrant community with comfort and convenience for all residents.

"Enjoy all the comforts you need and none you don't — privacy at home and community within reach," mentions their website.

With easy access to the heart of downtown, you can reach App State, Blue Deer on King and the main AppalCart terminal with a two-minute walk. In about five minutes, you can reach the Walker College of Business at App State.

Within seven minutes, King Street Flats provides access to Espresso News, Neighborhood Yoga and Melanie's Food Fantasy. Finally, in approximately a 10-minute walk, you can reach the George M. Holmes Convocation Center, Mellow Mushroom and the Schaefer Center for the Performing Arts, among other desired locations along the way. "Out of the box living. All the luxuries one would expect from curated living," said their website.

Despite the price of renting an apartment, King Street

Flats provides all the amenities needed for a successful school year. Americans with Disabilities Act accessible-compliant options, alongside internet, heating and cooling, all-in-one washers and dryers, General Electric energy-efficient appliances and furnished kitchens make out-of-the-box living easy. Additionally, with secured entries, covered bike parking storage, mailing services, professional maintenance services, car parking and elevator services, King Street Flats meets the needs of all Boone residents.

The belief of well-considered design equating to a well-designed life alongside thoughtful and convenient details provides all the layers needed to feel at home. With King Street Flats, 11 different floor plans varying from 395 square foot studios to 528 square foot apartment plans, there are plenty of options when choosing how you stay.

"KSF is built on an authentic blend of old and new. One vision is to encourage a vibrant downtown and easy access to the Appalachian State University campus. King Street Flats realized the vision with an attractive mixed use of commercial and residential buildings on West King Street and townhouses on Wallace Circle combining for one of Boone's best neighborhoods," their website mentions.

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BEST PET-FRIENDLY COMPLEX

THE FINMORE KURT ZOTTL

For Best of Boone 2023, The Finmore has come out on top for the Best Pet-Friendly Complex for a person to live with their furry friend.

While most apartments in Boone require no pets in their complex, The Finmore prides itself on having pets in their facility.

The Finmore, a newly established apartment complex opened in 2021 located about one mile from campus, features a big outdoor play space where pets are able to run around in a large area of space. There is also a patio located on the second floor if your pets are looking for a place to relax in the sun.

Additionally, if you go to the front desk with your dog, the staff will provide a treat.

"Give your pets the life you both deserve! With a dog park, and being just minutes away from the Greenway Trail, The Finmore has both of you in mind," stated The Finmore's Instagram page.

Kendall Jabakoski, a Finmore resident, lives with his shepherd Labrador dog and has nothing but good things to say about The Finmore and the amenities they provide for his dog.

"I believe the Finmore is an absolutely perfect complex for people with furry friends," Jabakoski said. "From having an amazing staff who gives treats to your pups to having a dog park in your backyard and endless walks up and down Shadowline Drive."

Just about a ten-minute walk from the complex are the State Farm fields as well, where

residents can take their pets to run around, walk on different trails and give their pet a great outdoor experience. The State Farm Field features a 24-acre sports complex, six recreational fields, picnic shelter and much more.

Residents are only allowed one pet per apartment, and must pay an additional \$25 a month on top of their rent to own a pet. There is also a one-time fee of \$200.

"All of the amenities make up for a perfect pet-friendly environment," Jabakoski said.

All of the apartments for the 2023-24 leasing year are currently sold out, but the application still remains open online for the future.

BEST PLACE TO TAKE VISITING PARENTS

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

CHANCE CHAMBERLAIN

In the heart of Appalachia, a 469-mile stretch of scenic highway has attracted visitors since its completion in 1983.

The Blue Ridge Parkway spans the Appalachian Mountains, connecting Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina. Just a short drive from Boone, it makes an ideal weekend getaway or day trip spot, and has been voted the Best Place to Take Parents in 2023.

“I think it’s a great way to show parents Boone’s greatest features,” said freshman music education major Shelby Arnold. “It shows that while Boone is a small town, it’s also beautiful and unique.”

The Blue Ridge Parkway offers breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains and valleys, especially during the fall when the leaves turn brilliant shades of red, orange and gold. Parents can take a leisurely drive, stop at scenic overlooks and explore the many trails and picnic areas. Along the parkway, there are plenty



The Blue Ridge Parkway is the perfect place to see a grand view and capture photos. Photo by Maggie Busch.

of opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors, including hiking, biking and camping.

For those who don’t know where to start, sophomore electronic media and broadcasting major Savannah Brandon points out two particular overlooks to check out.

“The Blue Ridge Parkway is a great place to go with parents, particularly Thunder Hill overlook and Rough Ridge,” Brandon said. “The beauty of the mountains is such an amazing thing to share with family.”

An additional highlight of the Blue Ridge Parkway is

the numerous historical sites and cultural attractions. Visitors can explore the region’s rich history, including visits to the Cherokee Indian Reservation and the Blue Ridge Music Center. For art enthusiasts, several galleries and museums showcase the work of local artists.

In addition to its natural beauty and cultural attractions, the Blue Ridge Parkway offers a variety of dining and lodging options off the various exits in the small towns and regions the parkway winds through. Families can enjoy farm-to-table cuisine at one of the many restaurants in nearby towns or opt for a cozy bed

and breakfast or cabin rental along the parkway. Overall, the Blue Ridge Parkway is the perfect destination for families and students looking to explore the beauty and history of the Appalachian Mountains. With its scenic drives, outdoor activities, cultural attractions and dining and lodging options, there’s something for everyone to enjoy.

“I think it’s a great way for a student to show a parent why they chose App outside of the school,” Arnold said.

BEST HOTEL

THE HORTON HOTEL

SIRI PATTERSON

A thin, bronze statue of H.W. Horton on a horse sits atop the roof of the Horton Hotel, silently watching the traffic on the street below.

King Street looks much different today than it did in the early 20th century, but the building Horton built himself, which now houses the Horton Hotel and Rooftop Lounge, is still standing. The Horton Hotel uses an image of Horton, adorned in his uncle’s military uniform riding a horse during a parade, as part of their logo, according to the employee handbook. Additionally, many black-and-white snapshots of historic Boone are hung throughout the lobby, halls and lounge.

Although the building is around a century old, The Horton Hotel is keeping with the times by offering guests the unique experience of staying in the only boutique hotel in downtown Boone, said Abby Carson, the director of hotel operations.

“The original owner did a really good job of creating the Horton brand as an elevated hotel and high-end bar,” Carson said.

Denise Lovin and Fulton Lovin opened the hotel in 2019 and designed the interior to “surround guests in modern yet down-to-earth beauty and comfort,” according to a press kit released by The Horton.

Because of its central location, guests are within walking distance of many restaurants, shops, bars and App State’s campus. Guests are also offered parking on Howard Street, which can double as a tailgating spot during football season as it is only a 10-minute walk to Kidd Brewer Stadium.

There are two lounges within The Horton, one on the first floor which is open year-round, and an outdoor rooftop lounge which can be accessed year-round, but only provides bar services seasonally. From the rooftop lounge, there is a panoramic view of Boone and King Street, making it a great spot to people-watch and relax to the sounds of the town. Carson said helping to take pictures during the engagement of two guests on the rooftop lounge has been one of her favorite experiences while working at The Horton.

“I love interacting with guests and helping them have the best experience possible, and so him coming



A few guests enjoy a drink at the first floor bar of The Horton. The hotel is located at 611 W King St. Photo by Ashton Woodruff.

to us and asking for help and us being able to help create, like, the best moment for them was really awesome,” Carson said.

There are 15 different rooms for guests to choose from. One is wheelchair accessible and five are pet-friendly. Other amenities include a complimentary breakfast, 20% off at the retail gift shop and a 24-hour coffee machine with tea options.

Guests looking to add a special touch to their booking at The Horton can purchase flowers, cookies, champagne and more to have waiting in the room upon arrival.

“The service we provide, being a high-end boutique, it creates a really special experience that you don’t get every day at larger, chain hotels,” Carson said.



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BEST OF Campus Life

BEST SIDE OF CAMPUS WEST SIDE

AARON BARLOW

After a long day of classes, a student enters one of the expression tunnels beneath Rivers Street. When they exit, they are welcomed by a familiar sound: quack. A few quacks, in fact. The student smiles, knowing they are home. This is a common experience for the West Campus resident.

For a second year in a row, the west side has been voted the better half of campus. West side has seen an influx of new residence halls in recent years, creating a modern atmosphere on a historic campus. Jackson Varner is a freshman and resident of New River, the newest residence hall. He said that west side has the “coolest dorms” and there is “absolutely no competition” between west side and east side.

Another bonus to West Campus is its tranquility. “At Sanford, with how busy it gets, it sometimes can be hard to go out and really relax,” said freshman Keeley Parton. “On west side it’s a little more secluded, but you’re still able to come out to the quad area, hang up your hammocks and hang out.” Despite the quietness, there is much to do on the west side.

If you’re hungry, go to Park Place at the Pond. You’ll be served “homestyle favorites fused with metropolitan flavors,” according to the Campus Dining website. Alternatively, you can buy groceries at Trivette Hall Market.

If you’re in the mood for a performance, the Schaefer Center for the Performing Arts is sure to delight. If there isn’t a show right when you want it, just take a stroll next door to Broyhill Music Center. Wait outside long enough and you’re bound to hear a talented student practicing.

The Student Recreation Center gives access to an Olympic-size swimming pool, 50 foot tall climbing wall, indoor track, various courts and more. The Quinn Recreation Center is modest in comparison, but still likely to meet your exercise needs.

For basketball and volleyball fans, there is the Holmes Convocation Center. For softball fans, there is the Sywassink/Lloyd Family Stadium. For baseball fans, there is the Jim and Bettie Smith Stadium.

The quietness of the west side disappears on football game days, when Kidd Brewer Stadium explodes with activity. The tailgates are endless and the energy is electric.

At the center of the west side sits the iconic duck pond. Lauren Sande, a senior sustainable development and former resident of the now demolished Gardner Hall, still comes here to relax.

“I like to sit around here; it’s just really, really calm,” Sande said. “We have Higher Grounds Coffee. Trivette’s right there. I get to sit with ducks.”



The west side residence halls hold new renovations and easy access to Kidd Brewer Stadium. Photo by Darcy Sluder.

BEST RESIDENCE HALL

THUNDER HILL

KAYLA MASTERMAN

Entering the inviting lobby in Thunder Hill after a long, hard day of classes and a chilly walk up Stadium Drive provides residents with serenity and relaxation. Located across the street from Kidd Brewer Stadium, living at Thunder Hill makes for fun game days and a short walk to The Rock.

Thunder Hill has suite-style and apartment-style rooms and a convenient on-campus location.

"I really enjoy having a suite style dorm, and how spacious it feels. After a long day of classes my room feels very comforting and I find it enjoyable to relax in," said Abigail Bonser, a sophomore public relations major and resident.

There is full-time access to the kitchen, study rooms and common living areas equipped with TVs that residents enjoy 24/7.

"My personal favorite amenity of living in Thunder Hill is the availability of a big study room," Bonser said.

In addition to its proximity to the football stadium, Thunder Hill is close to parking lots such as the New River Hall Lot, Rivers Street Parking Deck and the Stadium Parking Deck.

Thunder Hill is also close to Trivette Hall, home to Park Place at the Pond. Trivette is also equipped with a market that includes fresh produce and pharmacy store products.

"I also enjoy how close we are to Trivette as it is very convenient, especially having the market so close," Bonser said.

Residents said the community aspect Thunder Hill obtains makes for a pleasant living environment.

"I feel like overall, the residents are pretty respectful, toward each other and staff as well," Bonser said.

Being a fairly new building, Thunder Hill has a fresh new modernized look.

"Another cool thing is the decorations in the lobby and the detailing throughout the building," Bonser said.

The residence hall was opened to App State students in August 2020 and has been enjoyed by students ever since. Thunder Hill can accommodate 573 residents.

Students have access to a laundry facility located in the lobby, accompanied by vending machines in the hallway. Wireless internet access is available alongside air conditioning and heating.

The lobby also houses a computer monitor and printing that residents are welcome to use. In the rooms in Thunder Hill, an XL twin mattress is provided with an adjustable bed stand. Some students prefer a low rise bed, while others like their bed to be high up where you can touch the ceiling. The main card entry at the front door is open and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

BEST ON-CAMPUS DINING

CASCADES

COURTNEY QUINTON



Cascades, viewed from the second floor of Plemmons Student Union. Photo by Gwyn Wetzell.

Fruit smoothies, sandwiches and warm biscuits entice students and faculty to enter Cascades everyday, located conveniently inside Plemmons Student Union. The location is ideal for those on east side who do not always feel like walking to Roess Dining Hall or Trivette Hall. Cascades is open 7:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Friday. The food and drinks Cascades offers imitate a cafeteria, making it an accessible and healthy food option on east side.

Cascades has a menu serving all types of students' diets, including yogurt and juice-based smoothies that have an added protein or vitamin C option. A create-your-own sandwich station is a popular stop for lunch for not only students but staff as well. From rye bread to white bread, turkey to ham and lettuce to tomatoes, the options are endless. The student union is a place where students and staff regularly visit, which contributes to its popularity along with its long list of desirable foods and drinks.

Cascades is open for everyone on campus including students, professors, professional staff, tour groups and everyone in between. Between location, create-your-own sandwiches, creative smoothies, waffles and more, Cascades is the go-to on campus for all types of appetites.

In 2022, Cascades opened back up after over a year-long staff shortage. After the reopening of Cascades, the presence of life was booming.

Cascades opening at 7:30 a.m. allows students to get food or drinks even before the earliest classes begin at 8 a.m.

Cascades has full-time staff as well as many student employees. Many students depend on Cascades daily and that is thanks to those student employees and full-time staff.

"I chose Cascades because I like the environment and the food that they serve," said Ashlynn Swanson, a sophomore public health major.

She continued discussing more food options.

"The smoothies are really good and super healthy, my go-to is the Merry Mango," Swanson said.

The environment of Cascades is discussed across campus; the music and livelihood of the staff ensures you have a pleasant experience.

The smoothies at Cascades seems to be its most enticing feature, along with the food they serve. A smoothie is the perfect blend to a successful meal and it seems to be the reason Cascades is the favorite.

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Presented By: App State Cycling Club

BEST ON-CAMPUS COFFEE

CROSSROADS COFFEE HOUSE

LEAH BOONE

Three people rush to the counter to collect their beverages as the next orders are called out.

“Iced white mocha. Raspberry matcha. Split smoothie.”

A table of faculty members discuss their class sizes while at the next table over, a student studies for her midterm. A calming playlist soothes the customer’s ears through the speakers as each individual and group goes about their lives in one common area: Crossroads Coffee House.

Crossroads Coffee House offers a variety of coffees, teas, smoothies and other beverages, alongside freshly baked Stick Boy pastries and other grab-and-go foods.

Throughout each weekday, one can expect to find almost all tables filled with students, faculty and staff, as well as long lines of customers waiting to order.

Open from 7:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 7:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Friday, Crossroads is located in Plemmons Student Union. The coffee shop is a hub for catching up with friends, doing homework or hanging out during a break. One of the most popular parts of the coffee shop is the large assortment of music always playing.

“Baristas are on aux. We come in and we barter with each other, and we’re like ‘Can I have it in, like, an hour?’ and then we play as long as we want,” said Unique Perez, a senior barista majoring in social work.

The coffeehouse aims to create an environment suitable for everyone who comes in, and the first step to accomplishing this is the musical variety.

“We actually kind of have a joke that sometimes it’s, like, ‘Crossroads the Coffee Shop’ and sometimes it’s ‘Club Crossroads,’ because depending on who’s on aux and, like, the vibes of the day,” Perez said.

The range of music playing also has an effect on what people are doing while there.

“I do not think it provides a good study environment



Crossroads, located in Plemmons Student Union, is a popular coffee-shop amongst students to enjoy coffees, lattes and other drinks. Photo by Maggie Busch.

because the music is loud. I think it’s a fun place to hang out with your friends over studying,” said Bella Tahsler, a first year elementary education major.

During high-stress weeks such as midterms and finals, however, Crossroads tends to have more calming and quiet music playing in order to create a more serene environment.

The coffee house also has an abundance of different drinks, including specialty beverages that are concocted by the staff.

“We literally are behind the counter and we just talk to each other, and we’re like, ‘Okay, what’s the theme that we’re trying to go for? What have we not used in a while?’ and we just bounce ideas off of each other,”

Perez said.

With Crossroads having an array of meals, beverages and snacks, it has something for everyone. As the end of the spring semester approaches, the three-years-running winner of Best On-Campus Coffee is sure to be a popular location.

BEST PLACE TO STUDY

BELK LIBRARY AND INFORMATION COMMONS

JULIA WOODRING

Dusty tomes are stacked high on shelves, and archives sit piled up and tucked away in the special collections room; you could get lost in the rich catalog of texts here. However, most students prefer to crowd around tables in group study rooms or curl up in cushioned chairs, typing out long essays on their laptops.

Belk Library and Information Commons is App State’s hub for research, technology and, of course, studying. The services Belk Library offers to students make up an extensive list on the library’s website; a few of the most notable services include online databases of e-books and scholarly journals, print zones, technology checkout and research assistance.

What makes the library a prime study location is the

diversity of environments.

The first floor contains many computers, some open to the public and some only for student access. One corner is dedicated to printing, another corner holds seating and a small selection of browsing books and the front desk is in the middle.

The front desk is where Brenna McNamara, a junior psychology major and student library assistant, works a few days a week.

McNamara has worked at Belk Library for a year and a half. She enjoys the flexible schedule and the fact that it’s on campus. McNamara sits at the front desk waiting for students to come up and ask questions, occasionally helping them find a book.

She said she sees many of the same people come in day after day.

“They walk in and they go to the second or third floor, then they stay for a good amount of time,” McNamara said. The second and third floors are always home to students studying, so much so that it may be hard to find an empty seat at peak hours of the day. These levels are for those looking to avoid the constant traffic and noise on the first floor while still studying in the company of others.

The second floor holds a large selection of academic books and many tables, chairs and group study rooms. The third floor is often referred to as being for quiet study. Students there are cocooned in their own cubicle-like sections and will not hesitate to hush those who dare to

speak.

Madison Hay, a sophomore special education major, and Jordyn Trimberger, a freshman elementary education major, said they spend about six to eight hours a week studying in Belk Library, mostly on the second floor and prefer to do so with friends.

Hay said the rocking chairs are a reason why the library is a staple in their study routine.

Trimberger, on the other hand, said, “I like to hear people chit-chatting, it helps me focus.”

Some students choose to study on the less popular floors. The lower-level, or the Instructional Materials Center, may be most attractive to education majors. The fourth floor, home to the archives, is for those who want to escape the hustle and bustle of the rest of the library.

BEST ELECTIVE SKIING THOMAS TURNER

It's 11 a.m. on a Tuesday as senior digital marketing major Grant White steps onto the bus, 30 degrees Fahrenheit air biting at his exposed hands and face.

As he and his fellow classmates ride further up the mountain, he looks outside to see not only the condensation forming on the glass windows, but also the distant image of the top of Black Diamond Ski Run. As the bus comes to a stop and the doors open to the below-freezing weather, White realizes that, despite the daunting slope lying before him, he has learned everything he needs to succeed. As he pushes off, he experiences something that very few college students around the country can say they've done: skiing down the mountains of Appalachia.

Voted by the Boone community as the best elective course offered at App State, the skiing course offers an experience unique to the Boone area: learning a new activity and getting college credit for it.

"If you look at the schedule of physical education courses offered here at App, the ones that always fill up the fastest are ones like hiking, backpacking, kayaking, canoeing, fly fishing, skiing and snowboarding; things that you can't really do anywhere else ... because this may be the only time in their life that they could have the chance to do these kinds of things," said Edgar Peck, director of the physical education activity program at App State and one of the skiing course instructors.

While Peck manages the classroom aspects of the skiing course, the actual skiing practice is handled by the French-Swiss Ski College in Blowing Rock, which works with several universities in this area of the country, offering skiing lessons to college students interested in the activity.

Over the course of six weeks, students are grouped together and trained by experienced instructors to learn skiing at their own pace, allowing for anyone to tackle the task of speeding down a snowy slope.

Starting with the beginner green slope, students learn the ins and outs of skiing in a controlled environment before moving on to the blue slope, where beginner students can test what they've learned. Once students have mastered skiing, they will be able to try the most difficult slope offered in the course: the black diamond ski run.

"I could take a yoga PE course or a weightlifting PE class at any university, but not many colleges offer the chance to receive class credit for an activity that so many people travel to Boone to do anyways," said White, a student who took the skiing course last semester. "That's why it's so special, because it's unique to Boone and App State."



A snowboarder slides a rail at Appalachian Ski Mountain, where the elective class takes place. Photo by Evan Bates.

BEST FITNESS CLASS TWERK N' TONE

NADINE JALLAL

Anticipation, shy smiles and light chatter fill the Quinn Recreation Center aerobic floor as junior dance studies major Christian Canastuj queues up his playlist to begin the latest hit fitness class on campus.

"Repeat after me: We are kings. We are queens. We are icons," says instructor Canastuj as soon as the clock hits 8:30 p.m., kicking the class into full gear.

University Recreation hosts a large number of fitness classes on campus, including Canastuj's Twerk n' Tone. With two evening classes a week, Tuesdays at 8:30 p.m. and Wednesdays at 8 p.m., University Recreation's website says Twerk n' Tone "combines afro-beat, latin and club-like moves such as twerking, with Cardio Dance and Zumba styles in order to create an immersive, fitness experience."

Canastuj was passed down the fitness class in spring 2022, now going on his third semester teaching it. Canastuj stumbled upon the class as a participant when the former instructor handed him the reins after graduating.

"I didn't want it to die because it had definitely been a safe space for me not only as a dance outlet but also a fitness outlet," he said.

Canastuj kept some choreography from previous instructors, but has since added more songs and original choreography to his setlist.

Now, the class has many regulars and also sees several new faces every week.

"I love the energy of not only Christian, but the people," said regular participant Alysa Lujan, a junior communication science and disorders major. "This is stuff I do on my own time, I dance in my own room, so getting to come out here, have fun and get a workout in is the best."

Canastuj recognizes that the class may seem intimidating.

"You don't need to know how to dance. You don't even have to know how to twerk. Just come have fun, you won't be judged," Canastuj said.

For those nervous about joining the class, Canastuj said, "the support system is already there. I will always hype my participants up."

The class is meant to spread positivity and encourage fitness in a fun way. Canastuj said he wants "to spread self love, enthusiasm and pride."

Canastuj will continue to teach the class in the next academic year and looks forward to it, seeing how much attention his class has received this semester.

"It's grown so much this semester, everybody is talking about it," Canastuj said. "I'm really happy."



Junior Christian Canastuj leads students in dance stemming from African dance roots during Twerk n' Tone. Photo by Mayesiviy Carlson.

BEST PLACE TO HAMMOCK SANFORD MALL

KAITLYN KITCHEN

Dreary, winter days and inches of thick, fluffy snow cover Boone during the wintertime. Unless, of course, it is a warm casual day in the middle of February. Students all gather in one place, like moths to a flame, on beautiful days such as these. Where are these students gathering? On Sanford Mall.

Sanford Mall hosts a large, grassy area for students to do homework, play games, host events and more. However, the most relaxing part of Sanford Mall is certainly the trees on which students can hang their hammocks.

There are trees surrounding Sanford Mall, however, the most commonly used trees to hammock on are central to the mall. On any given sunny day, there are students relaxing outdoors. That is where students choose to spend their days.

Getting to hammock on one of these trees can be a task, as there are only a few spots with many interested students. Although it may be intimidating, it is certainly worth a shot to hammock on the mall.

"I hammock as a way to relieve stress and also people watch," said Mary Momsen, a first year East Asian linguistics studies major.

Sanford Mall is the central hub of student activity on the campus.

"The best part of hammocking on the mall is getting to see so many people," said Hailey Bonczek, a first year international business major.

People watching is an excellent activity to do at this location. Hundreds of people cross through Sanford Mall to get to their classes daily and many people can be seen having fun on any given sunny day. Student-run organizations are often hosting events here as well.

Hammocking has become a part of App State culture.

In addition to all of the activity and people, one can enjoy the views of Boone from Sanford Mall. One can see mountains, trees, the football field and academic buildings all within one spot of viewing.

"I like hammocking on the mall because of the scenery. You can watch people playing sports on the field, you can see the mountains and other wilderness," Momsen said.

Sanford Mall is the place to be when the weather is favorable. Whether you want to do homework, pet someone's dog, play hacky sack or of course, hammock, Sanford Mall is the place to do it.



Hammocks set up on Sanford Mall in front of Plemmons Student Union on a sunny afternoon. Photo by Gwyn Wetzell

BEST PROFESSOR VOLHA KANANOVICH

JENNA GUZMAN



Volha Kananovich poses for a portrait in her office located in room 225 in the Beasley Media Complex. Photo by Maysiviy Carlson.

Coming into App State as a digital journalism major, there is a high chance you will encounter journalism professor Volha Kananovich.

Whether this is one's first or fourth class with her, one can expect multiple projects and tutorials, class discussions, feedback and guidance when one signs up for a class with Kananovich, as she leads her students as this year's best professor.

Originally from Belarus, Kananovich moved to the U.S. to complete her masters degree in journalism and for her doctorate in mass communication at the University of Iowa. Since then, she has been teaching at App State for four years.

"I'm really happy that this is the place where I am now, where I can be, where I can teach," Kananovich said.

Kananovich teaches numerous classes within the communication department such as Journalism Matters, News Reporting and Writing, Data Journalism and Multimedia Storytelling.

"I feel that I'm lucky to be teaching classes that put into our students hands some of the really much

needed skills that help them succeed," Kananovich said.

Kananovich said her love of teaching started at a young age without her even realizing it. At about 5 or 6 years old, she and her sister would line up their stuffed animals and pretend to teach them. From there, the rest is history.

"I feel that it's really a dream come true without me realizing that this was actually my dream," Kananovich said.

Before teaching, she worked in different organizations such as the Eurasia Foundation, serving in different roles such as a journalist, a communication officer, an assistant editor and more.

"There was a lot of communication work that I was happy to leverage and draw from when I came to the U.S.," Kananovich said.

Being born in Belarus, Kananovich said the reason for her getting into journalism had to do with her being born in the then-Soviet nation.

"I could see firsthand how journalism can be used to shape some narratives about social and political

lives," Kananovich said. "It made me very sensitive about the constructed nature of it and also about the importance of it for democracy."

Before journalism, she went to school for economics. However, after the fall of the Soviet Union she realized "how much journalism matters in society" which is what got her interested in the field.

Kananovich said based on feedback and evaluations left by her students, students in her class end up with a "better understanding of how things work in journalism, in storytelling"

"I want my students to be confident in their ability to make sense of the world in a more comprehensive way," Kananovich said. "And know that they can translate their passion, commitment, their interests into work that is meaningful, that is professional, that will eventually help them succeed in the professional world."

Kananovich said she is "honored" to work alongside her colleagues and is "really, really, really touched" to be recognized as best professor for this year.

BEST DEPARTMENT DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

AUBREY SMITH

At any given time, there's an array of students stretched across patches of green grass in front of Walker Hall. Some sit in groups practicing interviewing exercises, eager to write the most compelling story about their classmate. Others gather around cameras collecting B-roll for a video story or huddle together to create an advertising campaign for a fictional client.

These are all students of the Department of Communication — a division of App State that, according to the department's website, is the culmination of "all facets of contemporary communication."

From training public relations professionals to broadcast journalists, the department offers five majors that cover all the bases in the communication field: advertising, communication studies, digital journalism, electronic media/broadcasting and public relations.

With advertising, students choose to either concentrate in strategic or creative advertising, which equips students with an "industry specific professional portfolio," according to the department's website.

A degree in public relations prepares students with experience in research, writing, critical thinking, ethics, graphic design and more. Communication studies "prepares students to enter many different professions" and teaches students about various communication theories.

The digital journalism major prepares aspiring journalists with the basics of interviewing, reporting and writing a range of stories, from features to breaking news.

Electronic media/broadcasting provides students with "hands-on experience in all aspects of the digital storytelling process," according to the department's

website.

The department also houses a range of student-run clubs and organizations, which are open to students regardless of major. You can become a member of App State's advertising agency, Second Story Media; submit poetry, prose or other literary works to the literary arts publication, The Peel; DJ at 90.5 WASU-FM; or tell stories on AppTV or for The Appalachian.

Scott Welsh, chair and associate professor in the Department of Communication, wrote that he is "especially proud" of how the department teaches students to "think very deeply about practical things."

"I like that students can study the history and philosophy of communication on the same day that they practice skills that will help them get their first job," Welsh wrote.

Department of Communication students have

landed internships at places such as Bank of America, WBTV Charlotte, SiriusXM Satellite Radio, Country Music Television and more. Notable alumni range from Carolina Panthers interim coaches to Miss North Carolina winners. With communication being a top skill employers seek in job candidates, the department has plenty of opportunities to broaden and hone in on those skills.

"There are lots of different ways to major in communication and succeed as a student," Welsh wrote. "Every organization needs graduates with the ability to think carefully and communicate effectively." Next time you've got a vacant spot in your schedule, consider taking Thinking Through Communication for an introduction on all things communication, Public Speaking to expand on those verbal communication skills or Intercultural Communication to learn more about multicultural communication practices.

BEST BUSINESS HONEST JEWELERS

MADALYN EDWARDS

When she was seven years old, the owner of Honest Jewelers went to Doc's Rocks Gem Mine in Blowing Rock and was immediately transfixed by a variety of gemstones.

Savanna Bradford, a senior business management major at App State, said she began researching gemstones at a young age, increasing her interest in them and starting her own gemstone business.

"My friends were reading 'Magic Tree House' and 'Harry Potter,' I was reading gemstone classification manuals," Bradford said.

She started collecting gemstones and minerals and would bring them to school to show her friends.



Photo Courtesy of Honest Jewelers.

"I remember back in elementary and middle school when I had show-and-tell I would bring my rocks and do a different rock each week," she said.

Before transferring to App State, she started working for a jewelry company in Raleigh. What she found was an industry she described as "corrupt" and full of "price gouging."

"They're making all this beautiful stuff unattainable for most of the population," she said. "I don't think it needs to be that way."

Bradford said she believed the gemstone industry needed to change. During the pandemic, she started Honest Jewelers.

She started to search for pieces of jewelry needing restoration from sources such as pawn shops and

estate sales. She would then mix and match gemstones, some of which come from her collection that has grown over the years, making new pieces.

"I replace the stones, fix the bands, spend a long time cleaning them up and do my research so I can give them a rough estimated appraised value, and charge around a quarter of that," she said.

Bradford said she sells her jewelry at a fraction of the appraised value because she believes everybody deserves to enjoy such products. "Regardless of how much money they make, regardless of where they're from, regardless of how much they know about jewelry and the stones that are in it, they deserve to be able to appreciate these beautiful things," she said. "Honesty comes back to you."

BEST CLUB REFORMED UNIVERSITY FELLOWSHIP (RUF)

ASHTON WOODRUFF

"There's no pressure to be anybody but yourself!" Senior Reformed University Fellowship member, Moriah Heffner, credits the "open-minded" community as the main reason why she continues to come back to RUF each week. For many students, the group is a place of community, friendship, worship, learning and open discussions.

RUF is an App State ministry for any student that wants to explore more about Christianity, no matter what their religious affiliation is, according to their website.

The group meets on a weekly basis in the Grandfather Ballroom on the first floor in Plemmons Student Union. These Large Group meetings consist of worship, weekly raffle, student testimonials, a sermon and a closing song. Led by campus pastor Rob Herron, one of the main missions of the group is to welcome students of all ages, demographics and religions, according to their App State website.

"Rob, the campus pastor, is amazing," said junior exercise science major Riley Carlson. He said Herron is "a great leader," and someone he "can look up to." Through the organization, Carlson also said he has found a Christian community he "can lean on."

The organization is composed of students with a wide range of backgrounds, driven by everyone's eagerness to learn, help others, build relationships and develop a community that is inclusive and supportive.

In addition to their weekly meetings, Small Groups are held on a weekly basis for students who wish to participate in further

discussion and fellowship. Small Groups are student led and aim to create an environment that encourages questions and a safe space for conversation, said junior languages, literatures & cultures major and group leader Josh Hickey.

RUF is a national organization that hosts yearly events like their summer conference, which this year, is taking place in Panama City Beach, Florida. Members of RUF around the country come together for a week of "fun, deepening relationships and biblical teaching on relevant, important topics for faith and life," according to their website.

Other activities the organization participates in include occasional free spaghetti dinner nights before large group meetings, pick-up soccer games, group prayer opportunities and formal dances. They also aim to help the community through volunteering with App Builds a Home and hosting a canned food drive competition for the Hunger and Health Coalition.

Freshman music industry studies major, Jacob Tolar, spoke on his experience as a first year, and how this group of organization and people have gifted him with "some of the highest highs, and some of the greatest times he's had."

Tolar said that while at college he has also had "some of the lowest times I've felt most alone." Though Tolar has had his share of struggles, he encourages others by reminding them that they're not alone, and that "there are plenty of people that are wanting to walk alongside you."

As humans, we're wired to want to connect with others, and

most of us don't enjoy being alone. For many students, college can be a difficult place to make friends and meet new people, but organizations like RUF say they want to facilitate an environment where people can connect on both a social and spiritual level.



Members of RUF gather for a group photo after finishing their weekly meeting in the Grandfather Ballroom of Plemmons Student Union. Photo by Ashton Woodruff.

NEXT GENERATION NOW

Join us Sunday mornings.

8:30 am for Praise & Worship in Sanctuary

10:55 am for Crossroads in Family Life Center

11:00 am for Traditional in Sanctuary



APP STATE ROTC



Take leadership classes and train to become an Army officer, while learning skills and tactics!



@appstaterotc



BEST OF Alumni

BEST CITY FOR ALUMNI CHARLOTTE

BRIONNA DALLARA

Those preparing for life after college will find a divine mix of urban and suburban living options in Charlotte. It's no surprise it's been deemed the "Queen City" because according to App State graduates, this concrete jungle rules.

App State alum Andrew Jarrett, a certified public accountant, can attest to the professional and personal opportunities Charlotte has provided post-graduation. In his experience, Jarrett said the city's close proximity to both Carolinas provides many professional and personal benefits and opportunities.

Thrill seekers can visit Carowinds for one such opportunity. This amusement park spans the North Carolina-South Carolina state line, and it is even accessible to city-dwellers via the light rail, the first major rapid rail service in the state.

According to Forbes Advisor, who ranked the metropolitan area the fourth best place to live in North Carolina in 2023, this accessible transportation is key for young professionals commuting in "North Carolina's largest city." Graduates who foresee interstate or international travel in their commutes have access to a major international airport and a quick beach vacation is just three hours away.

"As a CPA, Charlotte has allowed me to work with clients from an array of industries — restaurants, breweries, real estate development, manufacturing, sport-related industries and professional industries — which not only affords me diverse work experience but keeps the work interesting," Jarrett said.

Located in the city are both the Bank of America headquarters and the bank's stadium that is home to the Carolina Panthers, but the corporate presence in the metropolitan area doesn't stop there. Future residents can learn about the 25 largest companies in Charlotte and their job opportunities in a career guide posted by Indeed in March.

Jarrett said with so many different types of businesses in one area, networking and opportunities for connections are vast.

"From a personal standpoint, our family values Charlotte's convenience to both the Appalachian Mountains and the Carolina Coast, as well as the proximity to entertainment such as concerts, professional sporting events and renowned performances through Blumenthal Performing Arts," Jarrett said. "And the food. The food is great." Jarrett's mention of The Blumenthal Performing Arts Center and the food is a testament to the culture and cuisine that's accessible to residents of the urban hub.

Those who love the performing arts can attend a slew of events at the Blumenthal, ranging from performances by the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra to musicals like "Legally Blonde." On the other hand, those wanting to explore the city with their taste buds can navigate the restaurant scene using local publications like Charlotte Magazine. Their annual restaurant list is a culinary compass to your next meal in Queen City.

BEST ALUMNI CHAPTER CHARLOTTE

MADISON NANCE

The App State Alumni Association aims to ensure alumni remain connected with the university and those within it, and to provide countless opportunities even after graduation. The Charlotte Alumni Chapter maintains the promises they committed to by creating opportunities for dozens of Charlotte alumni to continue to be involved with each other hosting many App State related events.

The website mentions the chapter is "committed to fulfilling the mission of the Alumni Association; to foster a mutually beneficial, lifelong relationship between the University and its alumni; to inspire loyalty and pride among current and future alumni; and to advocate for excellence in teaching, research, and public service."

Among the variety of the App State themed events hosted by the Charlotte Alumni Chapter, things like hAPPY hour at local bars and restaurants, hockey games for friends and family, adopt-a-street volunteer cleanups and annual holiday parties are common occurrences. Alumni are also prone to gathering to watch Mountaineer sporting events.

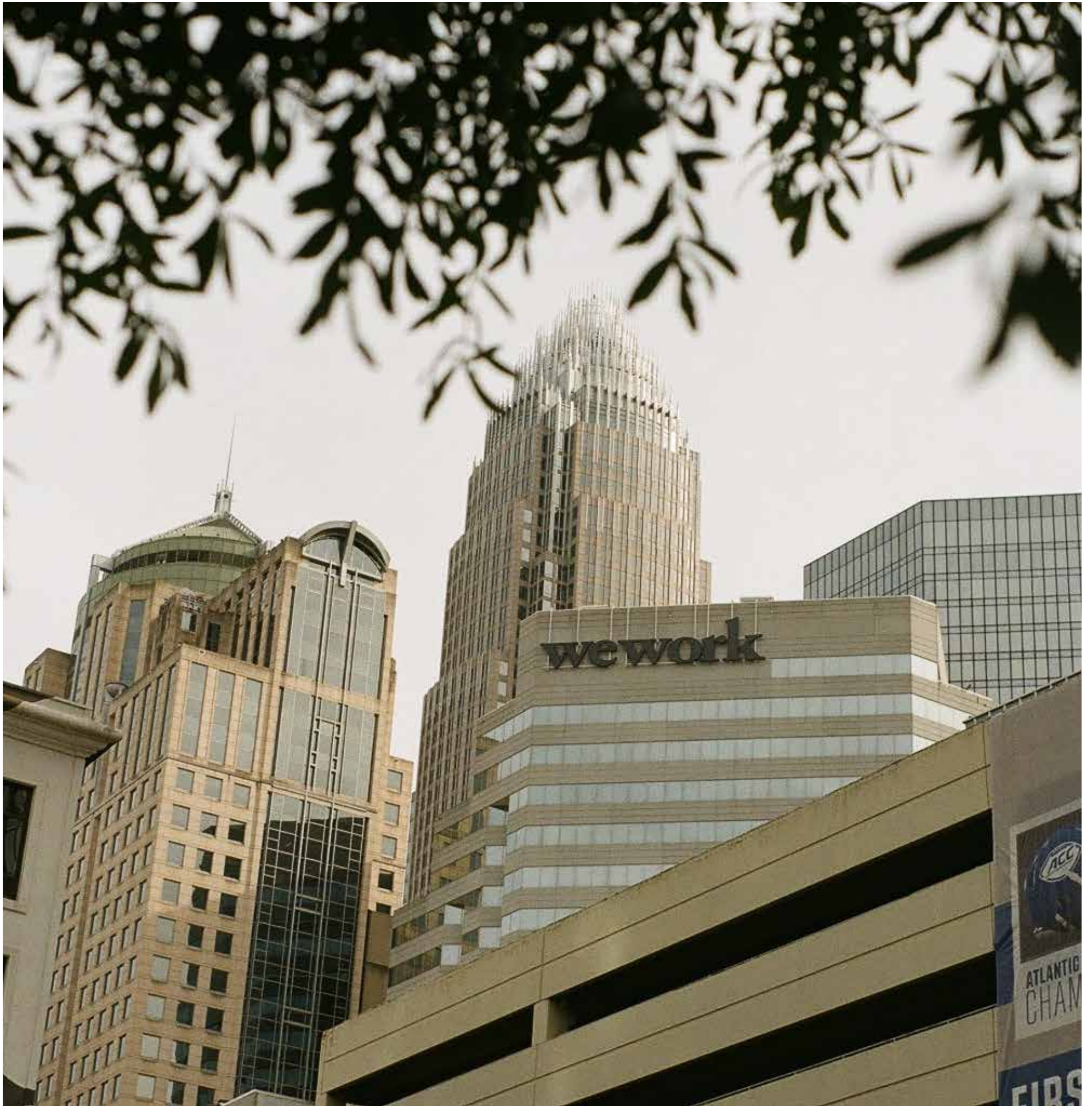
Alongside the social gatherings made to support alumni, the chapter also continues to find ways to support the community via school supply drives and frequent local clean-ups of public streets. Frequent posting on their Instagram page, @appstatecltalumni, also assists in ensuring veteran members of the chapter and newcomers continue to interact and connect with one another.

Their website also aims to bring alumni together, stating, "Our chapter hosts events and activities for App State alumni and friends throughout the year, and there are many ways for you to get involved! Check back regularly for new and exciting events in our area."

Continuing to bring together App State alumni is of great importance to the Charlotte chapter, and is part of what makes them the Best Alumni Chapter and one of the best places to go for fresh graduates or App State alumni who are looking to engage with others in a familiar community.

On top of social and community events held to bring alumni together, the chapter also offers dozens of programs and services to assist alumni in connecting back to App State. With over 8,882 alumni in the Charlotte area alone and 142,000 alumni around the world, the alumni chapters continue to encourage connection between all former students. The Charlotte chapter has certainly proved that with effort and the incredible community connections that can be formed, no matter the year of graduation.

Best Alumni Chapter: Charlotte's skyline on a cloudy summer evening at sunset. Photo by Hiatt Ellis.





Fans get excited on Miller Hill prior to the start of the App State football game vs North Carolina Sept. 3. Photo by Hiatt Ellis.

BEST PLACE TO VISIT AS AN ALUMNI **KIDD BREWER STADIUM**

LEAH BOONE

The crowd erupts into cheers. The student section storms the field. Yosef sprints through the streams of fans as the band begins to play the victory song. This is App State football.

The App State football team has been involved in a conference since 1931, with the popularity growing more and more annually. As the back-to-back-to-back NCAA national championship winners in 2005, 2006 and 2007, the Mountaineers have been known as a force to be reckoned with for quite awhile.

Throughout the years, App State has only grown in size and supporters. A fair amount of people with season passes are alumni who come back to support their alma mater every chance they get.

“I think a lot of alumni go, especially now since

it’s just grown so much. It’s really fun to see, you know, how far we’ve come. It’s very, very exciting,” said Lara Pinnix, a 1993 graduate.

Since App State has grown so much, and the football team has become much more well-known, many alumni feel that the football scene is more enticing nowadays.

“When I was a student, I mean, I would go to football games, but I was not into the actual football. It was the social scene,” Pinnix said. “And App was not nearly as good as they are now, I mean, they’ve come a long way.”

App State also has a very active tailgating scene before all home games, which many alumni attend. A large majority of adult fans found tailgating throughout the campus are alumni, wearing as much App State gear as they could find and

showing their utmost support.

Boone in general, but specifically App State, has grown significantly over the course of a couple decades. Many alumni also enjoy coming back to campus simply to walk around and see how things have changed.

App State football has had many historic wins, the largest arguably being the victory over Michigan in 2007. Since this upset, App State has shocked fans multiple times with last-second or seemingly impossible victories.

App State hosted ESPN College GameDay Sept. 27 following the 17-14 win against Texas A&M, which was a tremendous occurrence for App State football and added to the amount of support for the team.

“We made the big times when Armanti Ed-

wards was there, and it’s only gotten bigger and better since; the level of play and the excitement,” Pinnix said.

Alumni of App State are a very important part of the campus community and will remain so for years to come. Football games especially bring back nostalgia for graduates of the university while also bringing excitement due to the amount of success the team has had in recent years.

Regardless of how long ago one graduated, App State remains in a special place in each alumni’s heart.

“Every Thanksgiving we go up and just take it all in, and we always go all around campus and downtown. It just takes me right back; even though it has grown tremendously, there are certain things that are still the same,” Pinnix said.



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