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January 22, 2020

Volume 82, Issue No. 1

New Business Building Under Construction



The new \$38 million building for the School of Business, located between Sampson Hall and the Dial Humanities Building, is currently under construction. PNPPhoto/Karyn Lindsey

By Ky'Aire Goode
Editor-in-Chief

UNCP has begun construction of a new building for the School of Business featuring 14 classrooms, an auditorium, computer labs, a food court and a video-conference room.

Scheduled to open in 2021, the building will also

offer a “market-style trading room” as well as study spaces for students.

Local Robeson County general, contractor Metcon, will be responsible for constructing the new building.

The cost of the facility is reported to be around \$38 million by the university. \$23 million comes from the

2016 NC Connect Bond the University received. The additional \$6 million comes from an appropriation from the General Assembly. An additional \$7 million was given to UNCP’s School of Business via donation to complete the project.

Chancellor Robin Gary Cummings expressed excitement about the project

now being underway and what the new building means for business students on campus.

“This building will be a modern learning environment second to none, a space worthy of our world-class faculty, our exceptional staff, and most importantly, our students,” said Cummings.

The construction project will mean changes to parking availability for faculty and commuter students near the Dial Humanities Building and Sampson Hall.

Police and Public Safety will continue to update students and staff via email of any parking changes that are to come.



The building is slated to open in 2021. File Photo/UNCP School of Business

Construction Parking Changes



Students will have to adhere to new parking regulations and use the new lots pictured to have ample parking during construction. File Photo/UNCP Police and Public Safety

UNCP Achieves Divine Nine

By Madison Long
Staff Writer

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke is now within 5% of American universities to host all nine National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) organizations. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., Iota Phi Theta Fraternity Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. form the NPHC.

The nine organizations follow a uniting mission as shared on the UNCP Campus Life website. The University of North Carolina at Pembroke National Pan-Hellenic Council purpose is to provide service to the campus and community, maintain unity, promote high standards of scholarship, and foster brotherhood and sisterhood. The council provides: a means for preserving the cultural heritage of the historically African American Fraternity/Sorority organizations; a forum for addressing items of mutual interest to the NPHC organizations; an experience of self-governance necessary for development of the emergent leader; and an opportunity to make recommendations to member organizations for the greater purpose and interest of the University and community.

Diamond Whitted, member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. said that having all nine is historical and looks forward to serving the Pembroke community.

Iota Phi Theta was welcomed onto the campus of UNCP in fall 2019 when they had their new member presentation on November 11th. Iota Phi Theta currently have three new initiated members and once they obtain more members, they will receive their chapters letters.

“Completing the Divine Nine on our campus has been nothing but an honorable achievement. As a member of an organization of the Divine Nine here on our campus, I am proud to say that we are a part of this five percent now. I am looking forward to the positive outcomes that will come from this. Most importantly, I am looking forward to having events with all nine of the organizations acting as one unit to reach the objectives that we have as a whole,” said Caleb McMillan, senior, and member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc.

Iota Phi Theta was originally founded on September 19, 1963, on the campus of Morgan State College that is now known as Morgan State University.

“It’s an honor to be a member of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc. here on the beautiful campus of UNCP. Iota had always been about the business of change and to see that expansion here on campus is more important to me than a title of being a chartering member,” said Joseph Ivey, Junior, and member of Iota Phi Theta Fraternity Inc.

The Pine Needle
UNCP Student Newspaper
Founded in 1947

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Associated Collegiate Press

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The Pine Needle is supported by student fees and is printed twice a month by Mullen Publications on 100 percent recycled paper.

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UNCP Football open Tryouts

Carson von Taborsky
Staff Writer

Coach Shane Richardson invited athletes to walk-on tryouts on Friday, Jan. 17. Every year players graduate, and new positions must be filled before the upcoming season. “I think we have the fullback and tight-end position that’s potentially open...We’re just looking for guys that are going to be at the standard. We’re also looking for somebody

that can work themselves into a spot,” said Coach Richardson. At Friday’s tryouts, Richardson was looking for potential players that could run and move well. He wanted people who could bring athleticism to the team and benefit them when playing college football. “I played one year at North Carolina Wesleyan. My big thing is just finishing, I’ve learned to finish what I started. I just love playing football,” said

potential running back, Gartrel Barnes. “I’m also all about finishing. I played two years at St. Andrews, and I just wanted to see if I can still come out here and still get it done,” said potential tight end, Allen Kinley. Both players feel as if they did well, and they are taking this tryout as a learning experience. In the future, Coach Richardson hopes to “build a mentality to improve on what the team did towards

the end of last season.” “We are given the opportunity to join a new conference and we want to be highly competitive against a whole new schedule of teams,” said Richardson. Despite last season not going as smooth as intended, Coach Richardson, and the rest of UNC-Pembroke feel that the future is bright for Braves football.

FDA Raises age of Tobacco Sales

Jackie Porter
Staff Writer

President Donald Trump amended the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act that raises the legal age to buy tobacco and vape products from 18 years of age to 21. “It is now illegal for a retailer to sell any tobacco product – including cigarettes, cigars and e-cigarettes – to anyone under the age of 21 years” the FDA Tobacco Twitter posted on December 21, 2019.

This change was enacted due to rising national concern about the harm and health effects of traditional tobacco products and vape products on young people.

Along with retailers scrambling to adhere to the new regulations in stores, students on college campuses are reacting to this change.

Cori Shelton, a student at UNCP said that she understands the change, but it does cause some frustrations.

“I understand the



A box of vaping items confiscated from students at Boulder High Tribune Photo/John Daley/ Kaiser Health News

government wants to prevent nicotine addiction in the younger generation, but people will still be able to get ahold of the product,” said Shelton.

While the change does not affect her personally,

she did say she sees how it could cause issues for her fellow students on campus who smoke or vape.

The FDA said that there would be a ramp-up period that would “continue to only use minors under the

age of 18 in its compliance check program.”

The amendment also does not state any new restrictions on the purchase of paraphernalia, such as tobacco pipes and cigarette papers.

N.C. Poet Laureate
Jaki Shelton Green

January 27
10-11 a.m.
UC Lounge



Join us for a public reading of Jaki Shelton Green’s work. Immerse yourself in poetry that celebrates the people and places of our state and seeks to welcome the stories that make us who we are. Green once said, “So when I’m writing, it’s like I want to turn the words and look at the back side of the words. And that’s where I go.”

Sponsored by the Teaching & Learning Center and Pembroke Magazine

Photo by Sylvia Freeman

Following the reading, Green will offer a CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP open to UNCP faculty, staff and students. Seating is limited and preregistration is required. To register, email Scott Hicks at scott.hicks@uncp.edu.

Train Safety Provisions Discussed

By **Stephanie Sellers**
Copy Editor

On Oct. 22, 2019 a pedestrian died after impact with a CSX train at the corner of Vance and W. Railroad Street, only two blocks from UNCP’s Old Main entrance.

UNCP’s Environmental Health and Safety Officer, Michael Bullard, advises students to follow the guidelines posted on NC Vision Zero:

- Stay alert. It is easy to get distracted, especially by phones, music, and conversation.
- Stop. Look both ways and listen.
- Follow all signs and instructions.
- Cross tracks only at a designated pedestrian or roadway crossing.
- Cross quickly. Never stop on the tracks.
- Cross at a 90 degree angle if crossing with a bike, stroller, or wheelchair.

“Students should never crawl under a stopped train – I’ve seen them do that. They should only cross at crossings. I have seen students walk parallel with train as it is going. Stay back 15 to 20 feet, and never try to beat the train,” Bullard said.

On Dec. 8, videos of three dark parking lots involving railroad tracks were submitted to the Office of Environmental Health and Safety for investigation.

The parking lot in front of Old Main which requires crossing railroad tracks was submitted, along with video of the lot behind Burger King, and the one on the southwest end of Old Main, which are used to avoid crossing railroad tracks.

The videos revealed that there was hazardous footing and little to no lighting at the Burger King lot.

The southwest lot is paved, but it lacked sufficient lighting at a far corner, leaving half of the lot in the dark.

The parking lot in front of Old Main adjacent to the railroad tracks had better lighting due to illumination from businesses, but it had indistinguishable dark areas between vehicles.

In 2019, the Federal Railroad Administration recorded 820 fatalities in the United States, 23 of which were in North Carolina.

Currently, there are no lighting



People respond to fatal pedestrian-train accident near UNCP campus in October 2019. PN Photo/ Stephanie Sellers

standards for any of UNCP’s parking lots, but Vice Chancellor of Facilities Annie Angueira is drafting lighting standards.

While NCDOT is responsible for 90% of the project and CSX is responsible for 10%, the plan adds pedestrian fencing under the Town

appropriate sidewalks at crossings for safer crossing movement.

The study features a three-tiered plan: short, mid, and long-term, as a concentrated effort to improve safety for pedestrians accessing the university and downtown Pembroke.

It was presented to the Pembroke Town Council on May 6, 2019. Once the plan is confirmed, public hearings will be open.

Provisions directly impacting UNCP are mid-term.

Old Main’s railroad crossing area plans include removing the existing pedestrian z-crossing and constructing a complete pedestrian z-crossing across the entire railroad corridor. It is drafted to be west of the existing pedestrian crossing. Fencing along the northern and southern boundaries of the railroad corridor between the corridor and the university is planned.

Odom Street railroad crossing plans include removing the existing crossing and replacing it with a sidewalk starting at the eastern end of the parking lot that connects to Odom Street. This will connect to the western sidewalk along Odom to serve UNCP. This area is also designated for fencing.

The Federal Railroad Administration recorded 820 fatalities in the United States, 23 of which were in North Carolina.

The university is responsible for parking lot lighting while the Town of Pembroke is responsible for streetlights. Until parking lot lighting is improved, students are advised to follow safety measures, especially when crossing railroad tracks.

The Town of Pembroke’s safety provisions concerning roadway-railroad crossings must wait until the North Carolina State Senate resumes tackling the state budget on April 28, 2020.

In 2017, the Town of Pembroke invited a Traffic Separation Study with North Carolina Department of Transportation and CSX Transportation to evaluate 12 roadway-railroad crossings.

of Pembroke and NCDOT.

The estimated budget for the proposed safety provisions is \$978,000.

“The Town of Pembroke does not have a whole lot of responsibility, as the railroad track is owned by CSX.

CSX has rights and owns the property that’s within 100 feet of the track on both sides,” said Town Manager Tyler Thomas.

The Traffic Separation Study identified eight at-grade crossings that need improvements.

The study also stressed the importance for the Town of Pembroke and CSX to work together to install fencing along the SE Line within the UNCP campus to direct pedestrians to the



Plans from the Traffic Separation Study for the Town of Pembroke to change pedestrian railroad crossing by commuter parking lots 1 and 2 in front of Old Main. Photo/ WSP USA

Art Spotlight: Amber Tyler-Elliot



Amber Tyler-Elliot with her entomology inspired art. PN Photo/ Stephanie Sellers



“A Beetle’s Day Off,” by Amber Tyler-Elliot at A.D. Gallery. PN Photo/ Stephanie Sellers

Amber Tyler-Elliot, UNCP studio art major with a concentration in printmaking, was featured at the A.D. Gallery through Dec. 5 and shared her passion for beetles with honor and humor. Her 16-panel card, “Coleoptera” was a tenacious work began after a book-binding class in Nebraska. Each panel features a different species of Coleoptera, the scientific name for beetle. There are over 350,000 beetle species.

Thick white frames mark the vast differences between each beetle while the continuous folds invite the viewer to further study the detail of each little insect. The gay cover portrays the home of hardy beetles as it lures the curious viewer. This piece is deal for a mantle, shelf, desk or library.

Inspired by “Metamorphosis” by Franz Kafka, artist Tyler-Elliot pinned this “beer-guzzling” beetle in a box and then delicately glued him onto the chair.

“He kept moving. I used JB Weld to adhere him. All but one of his limbs fell off,” Tyler-Elliot said.

Perfectly encapsulated, this art mimics anthropomorphism (human traits portrayed in animals) at its best. “A Beetle’s Day Off” is unique, clever, and suggestive because beetles are hardworking insects.

Crossword!

- Across
- 1 Drains of strength

5 Hoops player

10 Immortal Middle-earth dweller

13 Suffix with switch

14 Gladiator's realm

15 Henry __, who had six marriages

17 Gets an A on, as a test

18 Bench __: exercise

19 Red sky at morning, to a sailor

20 Long. crosser

21 Darjeeling and oolong

22 Fire stirrers

24 Writer Wharton

26 "Indubitably!"

28 Hawk's nest

29 Shrinks back

31 Like a student arriving ten minutes after the bell, as opposed to five

33 "Golly!"

34 Greek cross

35 Old PC component

36 Midmorning work time-out, and a hint to this puzzle's circles

40 Santa __ winds

42 Convert (hide) into leather

43 Dada pioneer Jean

44 Roasted holiday birds

47 Clickbait links, e.g.

51 Movie critic, when giving stars

52 As well

54 Religious belief

55 Hider's location-revealing words

57 Japanese wrestling

59 Half a Latin dance
- 60 Put __ on: limit

61 Fashion designer Emilio

63 Christmas carol

64 Toy building block

65 Sir __ Newton

66 Word-of-mouth

67 Bear's shelter

68 Chili con __

69 Moistens
- Down
- 1 Putty, for example

2 Video game area

3 Written in verse

4 Sailor's "Help!"

5 Flowing garb for Batman

6 Orderly arrangements

7 Sextet after the golden rings

8 USN rank

9 Abrasive tool

10 Brought to mind

11 Funny five-line verse

12 More passionate

16 Newspaper leaflet, say

21 Porch pirate, for one

23 Rowboat mover

25 Like takeout food

27 Wild guess

30 Southpaw

32 Surrounding glows

34 Decalogue number

36 Rome's Punic Wars foe

37 Toward sunrise

38 Muse of poetry

39 Church recess

40 On __ basis: for testing purposes

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	
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- 41 Characterized by subtle distinctions
- 45 Not turn off
- 46 Be wrong
- 47 Bird on a Froot Loops box
- 48 "Sing another one!"
- 49 Warm up, as leftovers
- 50 Hems and haws
- 53 Grouchy Muppet
- 56 Large-scale tale
- 58 Computer devices bearing little resemblance to their real-life namesakes
- 62 Can. neighbor
- 63 "It's __ or never"



“Shark and Swimsuit” by Cali Stuckey. PN Photo/ Stephanie Sellers

Cali Stuckey, art major at UNCP was featured in the A.D. Gallery through Dec. 5 and is willing to instruct small groups on how to create her intriguing wall hangings. This collection of four 11-inch-17-foot hangings is titled “Biomickery Reflection” and explores human progress with technology as it responds to nature.

“Nature inspires us to make things better,” Stuckey aimed at her hanging, “Shark and Swimsuit.”

An aerodynamic swimsuit designed to work



Cali Stuckey, art major at UNCP poses with her work, “Biomickery Reflection.” PN Photo/Stephanie Sellers

Art Spotlight: Cali Stuckey

like sharkskin proved remarkably efficient in increasing swimmers’ speed times, however, this aerodynamic swimsuit was banned because not all swimmers used this type.

The process for creating the hangings includes carving a stamp into a rubbery material and using “litho” paints on mulberry paper.

Sharp lines trace time and pulsate energy as each of the hanging’s messages delight viewers with the relationship between nature and technology. Each hanging may be displayed

horizontally as a border or add height to a small room by hanging vertically. As a grouping, the hangings combine a menagerie of nature-inspired technology.

“Bird and Train” races down the wall reflecting the history of Japan’s flat-faced trains that made sonic booms disrupting communities. The stealthy fishing bird, the kingfisher, inspired new “quiet” train designs.



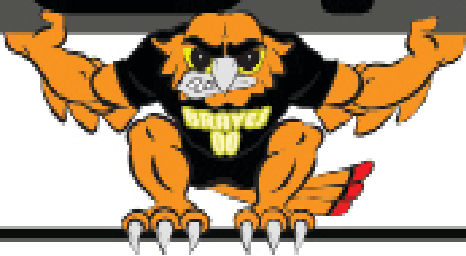
“Bird and Train” by Cali Stuckey. PN Photo/ Stephanie Sellers

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SPORTS



SECTION
B
The Pine Needle

Women’s Basketball

Lander Outlasts Braves Despite Comeback

By: Carson von Taborsky
Sports Writer

The UNC-Pembroke Braves faced off against the Lander Bearcats on Jan. 15, and the matchup did not disappoint. The first quarter belonged strictly to Lander, as the Bearcats started the game with a 9-0 run. It wasn’t until the Bearcats reached 10 points that the Braves would finally score. Lander executed a full-court press perfectly throughout the first half, leading to 16 first half turnovers. As the first quarter came to an end the score was 19-11, with Lander leading. Pembroke’s head coach, John Haskins, huddled his team together and found a way to break the press. Haskin’s plan worked, as the Braves started the second quarter with a 12-4 run of their own. This forced Lander to scratch the press and start playing defense around the basket. The first half would end knotted up at 28-28. After an electric first half, the Lander Bearcats started the second half strongly. In the third quarter alone, Lander completed 47% of their field goals, compared to the Braves 22%. Lander proved to be too much in the third quarter, outscoring the Braves 21-10. As the quarter came to an end the score was 49-38, with Lander in the lead. The fourth quarter started much like the third, with the Braves going on a run of their own, and then Lander immediately reply. Both teams scored 18 in the quarter ultimately leading to a final score of 67-56 in Lander’s favor. Some of UNC-Pembroke’s stand out performers include Melanie Horne (14 points, 7



Melanie Horne drives between two Lander defenders on the way to the basket. Horn put up 14 points, 7 rebounds, and 3 steals in the 67-56 loss. PN Photo/Carson von Taborsky

rebounds, and 3 steals), Courtney Smith (12 points, 6 rebounds, and 3 assists), and Alcenia Purnell (11 points, 5 rebounds, and 3-6 from 3). Despite the performances, the loss leaves the Braves at 6-9 on the season, as the team hopes to bounce back in their next game on Jan. 22 against USC-Aiken.



UNCP Wrestlers Hard At Work Over Winter Break

By: Victoria Brousseau
Sports Writer

For most UNCP students December highlights a break from the stress and responsibility that comes with the role of being a student. And while most students went home, the men of UNC Pembroke’s wrestling team were hard at work, training and competing across the country. The team’s standing currently comes in at 8-8, including two pairs of wins on December 7th and 22nd. Coach Othello Johnson hopes that with the final four matches of the season the team can improve the record before the conference match on February 1st. Senior Tyler Makosy, a UNCP wrestler of 5 years who will graduate this May, said that the struggle and responsibility of being a student-athlete has taught him exceptional time-management skills. Kaleb Warner (left), sizes up his opponent from Fort Hays State on January 8th. Photo Credit: UNCP Athletics Department

“The great thing about our sport being an individual sport is, regardless of how the team does you still want to see certain individuals make gains and I think we are definitely starting to see that,” said Johnson. He speaks highly of multiple individuals on the team including several of the 8 seniors, the biggest class to leave in his 14 years UNCP. Coach Johnson says he is optimistic about the team’s ability to compete and win the Mountain East Conference, saying that he has seen substantial improvement from wrestlers like Makosy and fellow senior Kaleb Warner, both of whom changed weight classes this season and have excelled in their new positions. After the Mountain East conference matches in West Virginia, Coach Johnson believes that the outcome will show the athletes what to expect for the regional championships taking place on February 29th in Pembroke, NC.

Braves Defeat Lander Bearcats, Career Night for Tyrell Kirk



Senior Guard Micah Kinsey (#1), looks for the pass inside. He was responsible for four of UNCP’s twenty-one assists. PN Photo/Carson von Taborsky

By Zachary C. Young
Sports Writer

The UNCP Braves hosted the Lander University Bearcats at the English E. Jones Center on Wednesday, January 15th. The final score was 104-85 in favor of the Braves.

With this victory the Braves improve to 11-4 overall and 5-2 in conference play where they are currently ranked second in the Peach Belt Conference.

UNCP made it a point to control the pace of the game from the start of the first half, resulting in the Braves scoring 100-plus points for the second time this season. The Braves went 18 of 35 shooting in the first half, outscoring Lander by 13 points. In the second half UNCP went 19 of 32 shooting from the field, outscoring the Bearcats by only 6 points. For the game UNCP shot .552% against Lander, this was the ninth game this season where the Braves have recorded a .500 or better field goal percentage and the fourth straight such game. As a team the Braves were effective with the three ball, ending the night with a percentage of .423 on 11 of 26 shot attempts.

Junior guard Tyrell Kirk had a career and game high of 33 points, going 10 of 16 from the field while making 7 of his 10 attempts from beyond the arc. Tyrell Kirk filled the stat sheet with 2 assists, 3 steals, 5 rebounds and 1 block. Kirk is currently fourth in steals this season in the

Peach Belt Conference.

Defense seemed to be the focus for the Braves, insisting on controlling the turnover margin. UNCP allowed just 5 points off 13 turnovers compared to the 21 points scored off the 17 turnovers committed by Lander University.

Other notable Brave performances included Sophomore guard Jordan Ratliffe, Junior guard David Strother and Senior forward Akia Pruitt. Ratliffe finished with 16 points, 3 assists and 5 rebounds; while Strother recorded 16 points, 6 assists and a game high 8 rebounds (tied with Pruitt). Pruitt contributed with a solid 8 points and 8 rebounds. In conference play this season Pruitt is currently second in rebounds per game with 8.9 and first in total rebounds with 133 on the year.

The Braves are 8-2 in their last 10 matchups against the Lander University Bearcats. After the game, Interim Head Coach Tony Jones expressed satisfaction in the play of Tyrell Kirk.

“I challenged him [Kirk] and said ‘I haven’t seen you in the gym lately.’ Next day he is in the gym getting shots up... Next game [against Lander] he’s on fire. That’s a testament to his work ethic. He’s a great kid, he’s a great talent. Tonight, just showed it.” The Braves have two remaining home games this month: the 18th at 3:30pm against the Augusta University Jaguars and the 29th at 7:30 versus the Patriots of Francis Marion University.

UNCP Baseball Focused On Improving in 2020

By Isaiah Dunovant
Sports Writer

With the upcoming season rapidly approaching, Head Coach Paul O’Neil is excited to talk about this year’s team. After having an uncharacteristically losing season 21-27, this year’s Braves team is looking to get back to their winning ways. During the Christmas break the players had a chance to enjoy the holidays with their families and have now returned and are preparing for their home opener against Shepherd University.

In 2019 the Braves went 3-0 against Shepherd and are looking to continue their winning streak. During their practice sessions so far this year the emphasis has been building chemistry amongst the infield and outfield and individual batting practice to prepare for the season. “Our biggest loss would have to be Luke Jackson; he was a senior, All-American and All-Conference player,” O’Neil said. However, a lot of players from last year’s team are beginning to “step up to the plate.” O’Neil was ebullient about players such as Ethan Baucom, who is emerging as a leader for the team. “[He] is a natural leader, a senior this year and he is coming off of an All-American season,” O’Neil said.

Other leaders that are emerging for the Braves this year are seniors Jarrett Mobley and Trevor Clemons. Some newcomers that will contribute to this year’s team are Gage Hammonds and Wellington Guzman. Other additions to bolster the squad have been in the bullpen with pitchers Jalen Scott, Jake Mayhew and starting second basemen/pitcher River Ryan--who is coming off a season of not pitching due to recovering from a surgery in 2018-- is returning to the mound this year. The team seems to be reloading for this upcoming season.

“This year’s motivation is the team feels like it has something to prove and the guys have a chip on their shoulder. They want to return to the standards that have been set by previous teams,” O’Neil said. There have been two goals for the season, as set by O’Neil: for his team to have 3.0 GPA and for them to not lose. He did not demand for the team to not lose a game, but told them “...to not let silly things like errors happen...if we can play good, consistent, clean, team baseball then we should have a successful season.” O’Neil also emphasized the fact that the team should continue to do the right things and have a high character throughout the season to be successful. The 2020 Braves baseball team is poised to have a successful season.



Members of UNCP’s baseball team pose for a photograph after practice on Tuesday, January 21st. Photo credit: PN/Zack Young

Disney Conjures Up More Magic



Mena Massoud plays Aladdin and Will Smith is the Genie in the live-action Aladdin. Tribune Photo

By Mitchell Doub
Staff Writer

Aladdin

Most students grew up watching Disney animated movies, and any child’s right of passage included “The Lion King” and “Aladdin.”

Recently, Disney Studios has begun re-imagining these mega-hits as live-action films.

The movie makers at Walt Disney studios who have spent the last few years recreating their much beloved “princess & hero” franchises into live action/CGI, have a major box office hit in “Aladdin.”

The film has already grossed over \$1 billion worldwide and was surely a favorite stocking stuffer this past Christmas.

There is a major conundrum though, the new film has been met with lackluster reviews even as it rakes in the ticket sales.

The story begins by letting you know what the beloved Genie, played by Will Smith did with his freedom. Viewers get a sense of satisfaction knowing that “the big blue lout” did not waste his gift

and are drawn into the characters’ personality as he tells the opening story in both words and song.

Aladdin, played by Mena Massoud, is an excellent choice as are Jasmine (Naomi Scott) and the Sultan (Navid Negahban). The major weak spot in the casting is that of Marwan Kenzari, who tackles the role of Jafar.

It’s not so much that he does a bad job, he is just too young and un-foreboding to make a viewer cringe.

The CGI effects are excellent, as the “cave of wonders,” the “magic carpet ride” and “Jafar’s transformation” are awesome. The animated animals do not disappoint as well.

Director Guy Ritchie, chose to have the animals act in a more “animal-like” manner, which robs from the “comedic” side but adds to the “believable” side.

The songs are fantastic; “Arabian Nights,” “A Friend Like Me,” “Prince Ali,” “A Whole New World,” and several new numbers. All show Disney’s musical genius.

So far, Disney has done no wrong with their live action remakes (well, there is “Dumbo”);

“Maleficent,” “Cinderella,” “The Jungle Book” and “Beauty and the Beast” have all met with box office success, and “Aladdin” is no exception.

Viewers will not be able to resist comparing the live action to the animated and that’s ok.

The Lion King

If anyone wants to see the sheer beauty of CGI graphics, they need go no further than “The Lion King”. Stunning is too small a word. The animals, the scenery, the emotion, the CGI are amazingly life-like (only the opening sunrise scene was shot on location).

Director John Favreau has achieved what many felt would be impossible: to equal, or even top the original animated version.

James Earl Jones reprises his role as Mufasa (as no one else could) and Chiwetel Ejiofor does a fine job taking over for Jeremy Irons as Scar. JD McCrary and Donald Glover voice young and older Simba while Shahadi Wright Joseph and Beyonce’ handle the young and mature Nala.

From the opening sunrise scene

to the triumphant presentation of Mufasa’s firstborn, Simba, viewers are taken for a masterful retelling of one of Disney’s most beloved tales.

There are a few story changes: viewers get a deeper look at Scar’s motivation and his interest in Sarabi. The relationship between the Hyenas and Scar is far less friendly than in the animated version, and the hyenas themselves are much darker in this version. Viewers won’t find any comic-relief in this shady group.

All the beloved Lion King songs are performed faithfully.

The irony of the song “I just can’t wait to be King” is, as always, lost on younger viewers: because in order to become king, Simba must lose what he cherishes most; his father.

It is often debated just from where the story originates. Some say it retells Shakespeare’s “Hamlet,” some say it is an African folktale, still others say it originated in the minds of Disney Imagineers.

Wherever it came from, the story is beautifully told both in the original animated and the new live-action version. Enjoy.

Black Pumas Talk Grammy Nomination

By Chris Riemenschneider
Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

The co-founders of Texas soul-rock band Black Pumas find the “new” part of their best new artist Grammy nomination to be inaccurate.

“Some of these songs date back 10 years, and I’ve been a working musician going on 20,” mused guitarist/producer Adrian Quesada. “So it definitely doesn’t feel like an overnight success thing to us.”

It’s been two years since Quesada plucked his bandmate Eric Burton off his favorite street-busking corner to start working on their debut album.

A fresh-sounding mashup of retro-soul and psychedelic rock, the ambitious record clearly didn’t come from a bunch of newbies.

It arrived in June with a strong buzz off Austin’s South by Southwest festival before landing the Grammy nomination on its way to many critics’ 2019 year-end lists.

Black Pumas are starting off 2020 strong, too. Their Raconteurs-accompanied “Austin City Limits” episode hit PBS stations last week ahead of a “Tonight Show”

appearance Tuesday. There was an instant chemistry between Quesada and Burton when they first got together in 2017. At the time, the guitarist was bouncing around between various projects.

“I already knew Eric was a great singer because I had looked up a couple of his songs on YouTube,” he recalled.

Once they started working together, though, he continued, “I really liked the way he played guitar. He has this very unique way of playing, and it really complemented the way he sang. As a guitar player myself, it just sort of put him over the top in my mind.” Their album wound up being a mix of the tunes that Quesada was already working on, songs that Burton had in his back pocket and new collaborations.

The former included last year’s slowly stormy breakout single “Black Moon Rising,” which Quesada wrote the day of the solar eclipse in 2017.

Burton’s contributions included the newest single “Colors,” a buoyant, Al Green-flavored soul



Eric Burton and Adrian Quesada of “Black Pumas.” (Lyza Renee/Star Tribune/TNS)

workout with a hopeful outlook. “As soon as he played me that one, I said we had to do it,” said Quesada, who thinks Burton’s experience as a street busker, including several years in his native Santa Monica, California, shows up now that he’s playing packed clubs.

“As a busker, you have to find a way to get people’s attention or you don’t get paid. He still does that. He goes from the first person to the last person in the room and engages them in one way or another. It’s kind of amazing, really.”

Just as Burton has come into

his own as a frontman, Quesada said the expanded Black Pumas lineup now on tour has also grown exponentially in just a short time.

“There are a few songs we still intentionally play close to how they sound on record, but most of the arrangements now are very different,” he said. “We recorded the album before we ever played a show, so there was a lot of room to grow.”

Whether or not they win the Grammy on Jan. 26, it sounds like Black Pumas still has a lot of “new” territory to explore.