

LIMITED EDITION

*PROOFED BY BRODY REXING AND ANNA BRYSON

GUN VIOLENCE: A NATION DIVIDED

A spate of high profile school shootings in 2018 stokes fear. The violence sparks youth marches and activism for gun control, provoking a backlash from gun-rights advocates. Where will the debate lead?

A RURAL VIEW

BY JALEY ADKINS
Belfry High School

Ryan Varney, Mason Varney, Ben McNamee and Haley Blackburn live in rural eastern Kentucky close to the West Virginia border where they attend Belfry High School in Pike County.

The area is predominantly white and conservative with 80 percent of voters supporting Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election.

The youth of this area grow up being taught about guns and gun safety. For rural residents, they say the use of guns is part of their culture and has been taught for generations.

"Guns have been pretty prominent in my life and the lives of people in my area," Ryan Varney said. "I have grown up being taught how to be responsible and safe around guns and I'm very thankful for that."

This is something urban residents don't always understand which some students admit can lead to negative opinions of rural people.

"In my area, we get called rednecks and hillbillies," Mason Varney said. "We get looked at as people that carry around guns all the time. This makes me feel bad because people in my area aren't like that."

SEE RURAL, PAGE A5



SPECIAL REPORT

This special report of the Xposure 2018 High School Journalism Workshop was compiled by Aanya Agarwal of Omaha, Nebraska; Jaley Adkins of Canada, Kentucky; Anna Bryson of Bowling Green, Kentucky; Brennan Crain of Glasgow, Kentucky; Faith Lindsey of Louisville, Kentucky; and Brody Rexing of Evansville, Indiana.

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MORE INSIDE, A4-5

- Impact of guns
- Voices of Xposure

AN URBAN VIEW

BY FAITH LINDSEY
duPont Manual High School

Thomas Robinson, 15, and his aunt entered a gun shop and she chose a small pistol, signed a paper and walked out with a new gun.

"That means anyone can just walk in and buy a gun," Robinson said.

In her home, Jennifer Bencom-Suarez, 20, stumbled upon a Facebook post for an event hosted at her school, University of Louisville, supporting open carry on campus.

"I just think it's ridiculous, but it is also a concern in colleges, and in high schools, and in schools in general, because often they correlate gun violence to police

brutality. I do think in order to have a healthy conversation about guns, you also need to talk about police."

Nick Wright, 18, rang the doorbell at Ballard High School and, without any identification, was admitted into the school immediately.

"I was thinking to myself, 'When I press this buzzer they don't even look at the camera to see who is outside,'" Wright said.

"I'm like, dude, I can have a rifle in my hand and then come and blow up the entire office."

These students live in Louisville, where instances like these aren't extraordinary. Their

SEE URBAN, PAGE A5



BRODY REXING/ F.J. REITZ HIGH SCHOOL

SNAKE EYES

Lost River Cave naturalist Mitch Kerr gets close with Lost River resident ball python, Mattie. Snakes like Mattie are a staple in pet stores across the nation. The Lost River Cave Nature Center works to educate the general public about Mattie and creatures like it, especially exotic pets. SEE MORE PHOTOS, A6



BRENNAN CRAIN/ BARREN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Jean West talks on the air at Louisville Public Media's studio. West, an Emmy Award-winning TV personality and health reporter, hosts Louisville NPR's "All Things Considered."

Media grows in new ways in Louisville

BY GEORGIA MALLET
Ellensburg High School

Kentucky's largest city has deep roots in journalism, but the news business in Louisville is rapidly changing as technology transforms traditional newsrooms.

Changes to the Courier Journal, which has been Kentucky's primary news source for a century and a half, are driving that transformation, both within the newspaper that has reduced its staff and adopted a digital-first stance and in competitors that have expanded to fill voids in coverage.

Two expanded news outlets show the evolution: Insider Louisville, a non-profit completely online news source, and Louisville Public Media, which operates three public radio stations and has invested heavily in what it calls "deep-dive" investigative journalism.

Both trace their expansions to the Courier Journal – which recently rebranded itself from the traditional, 150-year-old name of The Courier-Journal – and areas they saw as neglected in those changes.

"Other newsrooms started cutting back on their information and we began to see a void," said Rachel Firkins, membership and volunteer coordinator for LPM.

At the Courier Journal, editors see the changes in coverage as responding to feedback from readers – both from comments on social media and from the amount of traffic stories and topics generate.

"Not only do we have interior editors, but we have exterior editors," said Joel Christopher, executive editor of the news organization.

INSIDER LOUISVILLE

Inside the historic Stockyards Bank building in downtown Louisville, journalists from the online Insider Louisville newsroom work in a suite heavy with orange and gray tones and modern touches.

SEE LOUISVILLE, PAGE A2

Hilltopper Hall opens new housing era at WKU

BY CAMIRYN STEPTEAU
Presentation Academy

When WKU students return to the Hill for the fall semester in August, they'll find a new residence hall – Hilltopper Hall, a \$27 million project that will provide a new home for 410 students.

The new building, located across the top of the area of campus known as the Valley, is the first step in a 10-year, \$107 million master plan to renovate and rebuild much of WKU's on-campus housing for freshmen, sophomores and upperclassmen.

Hilltopper Hall will be unlike any other residence hall at WKU. The six-story building will offer hotel-style accommodations, with each bedroom containing its own

bathroom. The building also has glass-enclosed common areas with plush furniture and scenic views of historic campus buildings – and WKU's first 24-hour dining hall.

"On each floor there will be a kitchen, multipurpose spaces, and on the end of each hall there will be a seating space for students to go," Brian Kuster, vice president of student affairs, said.

Each of the residential floors has the same layout, said David Baskett, coordinator of facilities for WKU Housing & Residence Life.

Kuster said multipurpose spaces throughout Hilltopper Hall are meant to help enhance education outside the classroom and help WKU recruit and retain students.

"Everything we do is to create



ANNA BRYSON/ BOWLING GREEN HIGH SCHOOL

The finishing touches are on the outside of WKU's newest residence hall, set to open in August 2018. It will feature a \$3 million dining facility, "hotel style" rooms with granite counters, vinyl flooring and climate controls.

environments that are conducive to the students success," Kuster said.

The building is also meant to keep more upperclassmen on campus.

"We really designed this building with (junior- and senior-level) class students in mind and how we can bring them out of their rooms," Kuster said.

Freshmen and sophomores are required to live on campus in most instances, but juniors and seniors can opt for off-campus housing.

Kuster said the building will have a mix of students, including athletes, freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors.

Inside the rooms, Kuster said,

SEE HOUSING, PAGE A2

Collins leads Lady Tops

BY JOHN HUNDLEY
Kirkwood High School

New Lady Topper head coach Greg Collins has been around basketball for years, but this year is his first head coaching job beyond high school.

Now is his time to show he can be a successful head coach at the collegiate level and he's looking forward to the season opener against the University of Louisville.

Collins' father was the one who introduced him to basketball and eventually coaching, but he wasn't alone.

"He inspired me to really work with kids, to work with young people, and the coach that I have learned the most basketball from wasn't even a coach that I worked for...but when I coached at the University of Louisville, Coach Rick Pitino allowed me to come to his practice every day," Collins said.

Collins said Pitino allowed him to go to his practices for two years and there he learned a lot about basketball and coaching.

Collins, who was previously the Lady Toppers' assistant and associate coach the past six years, inherited a challenging situation in his first season with the graduation of two star players. Tashia Brown and Ivy Brown combined to score 39.4 points per game which was more than half of the team's total scoring.

"The biggest challenge is not filling those rosters spots. The biggest challenge is making sure you fill those spots with the right person and the right talent," Collins said.

Adding size is crucial to replace 6-foot-1 Ivy Brown who grabbed 25.8 percent of the team's rebounds last season.

Two recruits, Akira Levy and Kallie Searcy, were released from their commitments after Coach Michelle Clark-Heard left to become head coach at the University of Cincinnati.

Despite those losses, Collins and



TIANA WILSON/ GALLATIN HIGH SCHOOL

Lady Toppers Head Coach Greg Collins addresses WKU Xposure workshopppers at press conference. His son Parker clings to him.

his staff have been working with building chemistry, a big part of the offseason.

The team had a cookout to watch the WNBA draft where they hoped to see former teammate Tashia Brown selected. They have been staying in the dorms this summer and working out together almost every day.

It also allows young players to take the torch from the graduated seniors.

Collins said junior Whitney Creech, who scored more than 5,000 points in high school and averaged 50.3 points per game her senior year, could be a big help to fill the scoring vacuum left by the two graduates.

Last year she was needed as a point guard to handle the ball, Collins said, and she focused on getting the ball to the Browns and other scorers.

Collins said he is ready for the challenge this team presents. He has been offered various coaching jobs at other schools but decided to stay with the Toppers.

"Being in a good place with good people was more important than chasing the next job," Collins said.

When Collins, who also has been an assistant at U of L and Arkansas, got the job, he searched for coaches he could trust and built his staff with people who had experience in a variety of places.

Even with all of the changes to the team, Collins said he believes his team can compete for a conference title. But it will take time.

"My goal, my focus is on continuing to improve each day to put ourselves in a position to win three games in three days," Collins said, referring to the Conference USA tournament that determines the automatic bid to the NCAA tournament.

Collins said he hopes to be coaching this team for many years to come and is planning for the future.

In addition to playing Final Four participant Louisville, the Lady Toppers will face Oklahoma, Central Michigan and Arkansas-Little Rock this year, all teams that played in last year's NCAA tournament.

"The goal would be to continue to build the program over consistently competing with the type of teams we have scheduled in our non-conference," Collins said.

Housing

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

residents will find top quality. The flooring looks like hardwood, but is actually a durable vinyl. Each room has tall ceilings, the baths are fully tiled and the countertops are granite. And each room has its own temperature controls, Kuster said.

The building and finishes are top-grade materials to ensure the rooms will last long and remain nice through all the years. "We're building this to last 50 or 60 years," Kuster said. At some universities, he said, new housing is built with lesser quality materials that won't be as durable.

The rooms are also designed to make maintenance easier for residents, Baskett said.

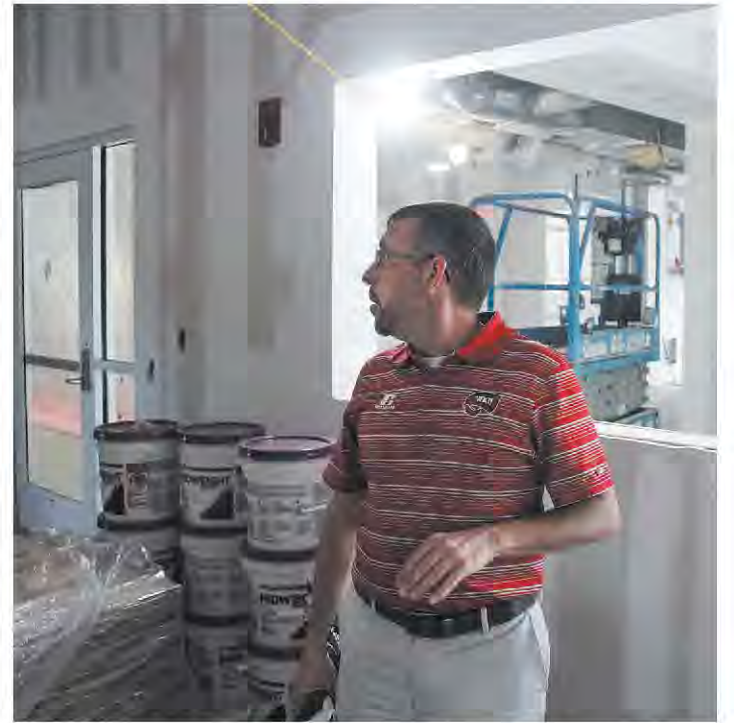
Hilltopper Hall has a total of 110,935 square feet of space and, according to a construction foreman, more than 300,000 bricks in its brick-and-stone façade.

Students will pay \$2,867 a semester to live in the hall, a bit more expensive than older dorms.

Once Hilltopper Hall is open, attention will turn to a project on the south end of WKU's main campus, where two new halls will replace the aging Barnes-Campbell and Bemis Lawrence halls. Those buildings will be generally in the large parking lot adjacent to Pearce-Ford Tower, and much of the asphalt in the area will be replaced by green space, Kuster said.

The new buildings will be pod-style, with 22 students sharing common and bathroom facilities in each pod, and they'll be designed as a first-year complex, with students in each pod taking some classes together. "We plan to build two buildings with 400 students in each," Kuster said.

"Our goal is for all students to learn about themselves and others, experience meaningful connections and reach their peak potential," Kuster said.



GEORGIA MALLETT/ ELLENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL

WKU coordinator for facilities David Baskett presents the unfinished Hilltopper Hall to WKU Xposure workshopppers. They stand in a room on the first floor of the new residence hall.

Louisville

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The group's motto is painted on the wall in big, orange letters: "Buy Local. Read Local."

An editor's dog with an underbite and wearing a "chick magnet" sweater has the run of the newsroom and offices.

Insider Louisville covers a range of subjects from politics, health and arts to public safety, education and economy – all areas that Insider Louisville editors and reporters felt had been under covered as the Courier Journal cut back its newsroom workforce.

The free news site recently became a non-profit organization and raises money by selling memberships. Its main goal is to create a more civically engaged community.

Darla Carter is a reporter recruited to Insider Louisville after her job at the Courier Journal was eliminated in a downsizing.

While at the CJ, Carter worked in a newsroom transitioning from a print focus to online. When she arrived at Insider Louisville in April, she thought the online newsroom might be completely different – but it wasn't.

"It hasn't been that big of a transition because at the Courier, there was a big push of digital first," Carter said. "The downside of digital first is that it can get old fast once it gets posted."

Because of the 24-hour news environment, Carter said people get information on everything all the time. The focus at the CJ, she said, was to post a story quickly before readers see it elsewhere.

"My old editor told me, 'Just get it up, even if you only know one sentence of information,'" Carter said. "If you're an old-school journalist, it sort of gives you the willies."

While she covers the same general area – health care – at Insider Louisville, Carter said the environment of the upstart newsroom brought back her appreciation of being a journalist.

"Because you can post stories whenever you need to, it's more laid back," Carter said. This gives more time to fact check, put information into context and make the story readable and important to the audience, she said. "We must do something to hook them."

That process differentiates journalism from others online, such as bloggers, Carter said.

"There's been such a blurring of the lines," she said. "Just because you're a blogger online doesn't mean you're a journalist."

LOUISVILLE PUBLIC MEDIA

Louisville Public Media stands in a vintage building in the heart of downtown Louisville, blasting



BRODY REXING/ F. J. REITZ HIGH SCHOOL

Retail and restaurant reporter Caitlin Bowling and her colleague, culture editor Sara Havens, stand in the multipurpose room at Insider Louisville. They explain what it is like being professional journalists.

"Print is still very important to our business, but we are more concerned about the content than delivery."

Joel Christopher, Courier Journal executive editor

new age music onto Fourth Street.

LPM was created when three independent public radio stations combined forces to operate under one umbrella that could more effectively raise money to support the operations. Originally called the Public Radio Partnership, LPM now reaches about 200,000 people a week through its three stations – an NPR affiliate, a classical music station and an alternative music station. Together, the stations cover news, music, fine arts and more.

Five years ago, leaders at LPM saw what they considered a retrenchment from "deep-dive" investigative journalism across the state, particularly as the Courier Journal began to focus more on metro Louisville than the entire state.

Their response: launch the Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting, a non-profit division that hired reporters and editors to focus on watchdog journalism, both in Louisville and around the state. Initially funded by major grants, the KyCIR now generates enough financial support that it is self-sustaining, Rachel Firkins,



INDIA RICE/ WESTLAKE HIGH SCHOOL

Joel Christopher, executive editor of the Courier Journal, discusses journalism tips and tricks with Xposure workshopper Georgia Mallett, a student from Ellensburg High School.

Membership and Volunteer Coordinator at LPM, said.

"A lot of local media miss the wrongdoings happening," Firkins said. KyCIR reports are offered free of charge to Kentucky news organizations, and its reporting has led coverage on many issues, such as Louisville's mayor's spending of taxpayer money to entertain a secret list of people during the Kentucky Derby, sexual harassment in the Kentucky Statehouse, Kentucky police being associates to prostitution rings.

This year, the KyCIR won a Peabody Award for its investigation of state Rep. Dan Johnson of Bullitt County, called "The Pope's Long Con."

Through a seven-month investigation, KyCIR found the conservative preacher turned politician to have been accused of

attempted arson, false testimony and child molestation. The center interviewed more than 100 people and searched through thousands of public records to expose Johnson's record, which traditional newsrooms did not catch when he was running for office.

"For years, Johnson broke laws. Now, he helps make them," wrote R.G. Dunlop and Jacob Ryan, the reporters on "The Pope's Long Con."

The report – originally crafted as five-part radio segments and podcasts – generated intense attention after the third installment, when Johnson committed suicide.

The Peabody Award the story earned benefitted KyCIR's credibility. However, it resulted in some terror for the people who aired it.

"We received threats from his

church members to avenge his name," Firkins said, noting that LPM called in extra security in the days after the report aired.

For LPM, the project demonstrated that in-depth investigative reporting – long the territory of newspapers – had a home in a radio-based environment.

"Audio is more intimate than print. The audience feels more connection and trust," said Ryan Van Velzer, a reporter for WFPL, the organization's NPR affiliate. "Having someone tell you news breaks a whole other level than just on print. Radio tells stories for the ear, not the eye."

COURIER JOURNAL

The newsroom at the Courier Journal looks to be rooted firmly in the 1970s – something that Joel Christopher said will be a thing of the past by the end of the year, thanks to a \$2 million renovation project getting under way.

The newspaper has a rich tradition as Kentucky's main source of news, four times winning the Pulitzer Prize, the top honor in American journalism.

Today, though, the news organization is deep in transition. The newsroom is less than one-fourth the size it once was. Its focus is metro Louisville, no longer the entire state. And the sweeping changes of technology has forced it to move from a print-first to a digital-first mentality.

Today Christopher, executive editor, said about 90 percent of the newsroom's energy is focused on its digital report, with the content of the printed newspaper being handled by a design center three floors above the newsroom that also pieces together dozens of other newspapers owned by the CJ's owner, Gannett.

"Print is still very important to our business," Christopher said, but "we are more concerned about the content than delivery."

He said the Courier Journal is trying to become more diverse within its newsroom to gain different perspectives into different people's lives. "The diversity of thought, of experience, is way too narrow right now," he said.

Refocusing the newsroom on digital delivery, he said, has brought more interaction with readers, with direct feedback on how popular a story or topic is, as measured by website traffic, as well as an ongoing commentary on the newsroom's social media outlets.

The newsroom, which has been through several reorganizations, must be more nimble to respond to the community's wants and needs, he said.

"These days, there is a deeper connection more than ever in journalism and the readers," Christopher said.

Brewery closing, program will continue

BY INDIA RICE
Westlake High School

The College Heights Brewery and Altech's contract is ending.

The brewery's future is uncertain and officials are trying to figure out what to do.

"I was like, 'Oh my gosh, what's going to happen to us,'" said Andrew McMichael, an associate dean in WKU's Potter College of Arts & Letters who has spearheaded the project.

The brewery itself is shut down, but the brewing program for students will continue, McMichael said. WKU cannot get a liquor license by state law so there will no longer be College Heights Ale or any other associated labels.

Altech is planning to vacate the space in the WKU Center for Research and Development within 90 days.

In 2015 WKU reached out to Altech to create a brewing education facility.

"We (WKU) were interested in brewer education and making our brewers educated," McMichael said. Altech was similarly interested in the partnership.

"We (WKU) were looking to educate brewers. They (Altech) were looking to educate brewers," he said.



BRODY REXING/ F.J. REITZ HIGH SCHOOL

Associate Dean and co-coordinator Andrew McMichael leads Xposure workshopppers through the production brewery. The brewery on Western Kentucky University's campus has closed.

The contract was an attempt to get the brewery off the ground and provide hands-on education and it did just that. Altech contributed equipment, liquor licenses (in the production and distribution of

College Heights Ale), a facility and jobs.

Education was the main reason for the brewery program. "Our program is to help people fulfill their passion."

"It was a way for us to work with Altech, but it brought back money to the students," McMichael said, primarily through jobs, scholarships and internships.

According to WKUHerald.com,

the collaboration also included a \$300,000 donor commitment from Altech to WKU over a five-year period, beginning in 2015. That commitment will continue.

McMichael said the negatives are obvious. However, there are positives. WKU will have more opportunities now and possibilities for other sponsorships.

"It will take away some uncertainty away from other breweries, more possibilities for us, and it forces us not to be lazy," McMichael said.

He said it could create partnership with Jim Beam and other distilleries and breweries around Kentucky.

"If we ever do another collaboration, it won't be in this building."

Though Altech has left the equation, the brewing program still exists, he emphasized. And related activities continue.

"We have some folks down at the (WKU) farm growing some experimental hops," McMichael said.

"It was only two weeks ago that we found out this was going to happen," McMichael said. Uncertainty prevails at this point. Faculty working with the brewery education program are still trying to answer that question.

"I just can't tell yet."



ANNA AGARWAL/ MILLARD NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

Horses roam the countryside of the WKU farm a 780-acre farm that houses livestock, crops and research.

BY TIANA WILSON
Gallatin High School

The sun beamed down on the Xposure journalism workshopppers as they toured the WKU farm via hayride.

The students, who are a part of a journalism experience exposing them to a variety of speakers, field trips and tours, learned about life on a university farm.

Paul Woosley, the director of the Agriculture Exposition Center, showed the 12 students around the 780 acres of farmland.

"I'm in charge of all the people... who make sure everything is good," Woosley said.

While on the two-hour tour, the students got an up-close view of crop research, vineyards, hemp plants and horse stables, among other things.

"I thought it was fun – it was really informative. I didn't know about all those things before," Jaley Adkins, an Xposure workshopper, said of the tour.

Sierra Earnhart, 17, of Bowling Green was impressed with the hemp production.

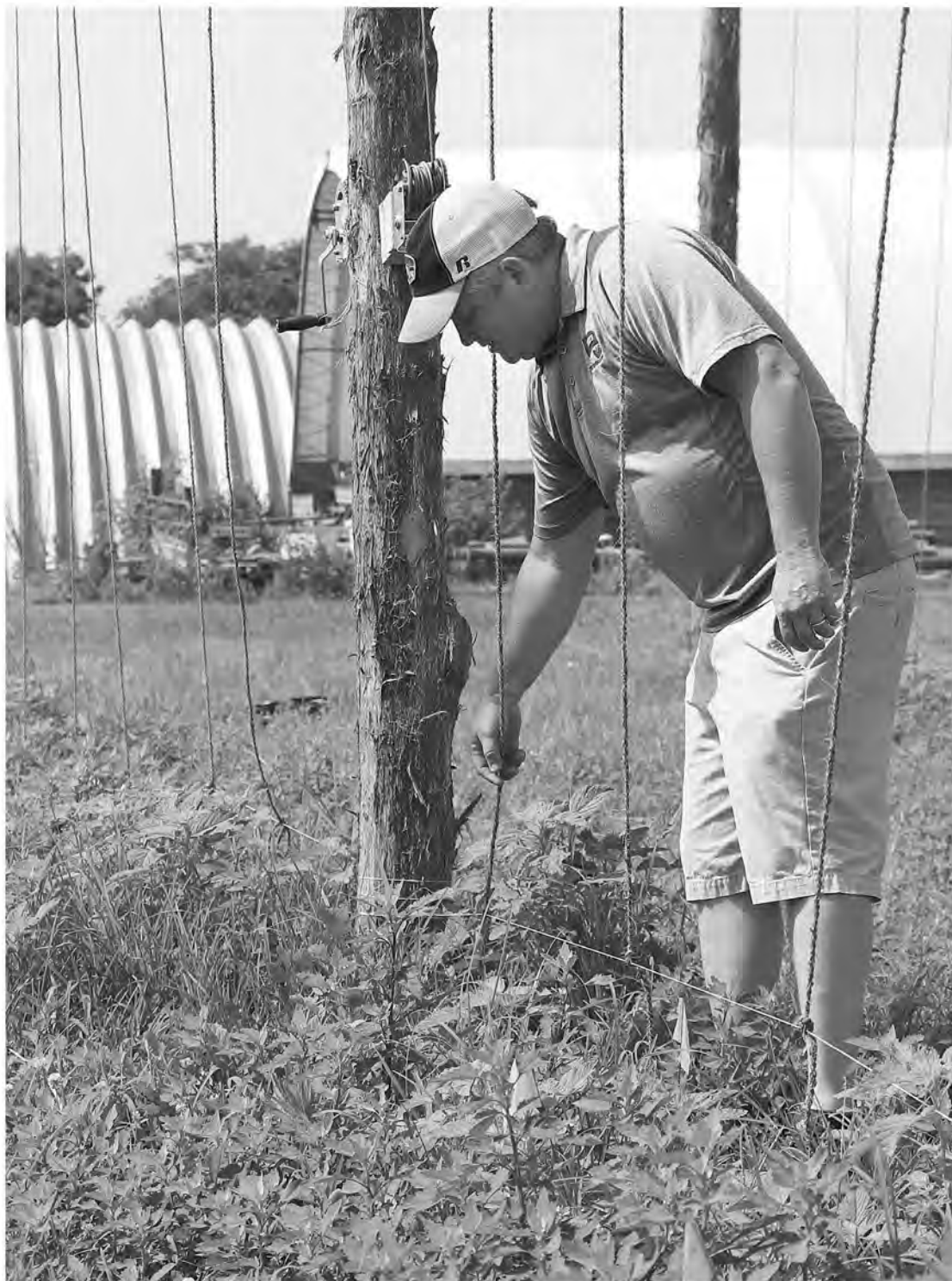
"I learned about hemp and how it produces CBD (cannabidiol) instead of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol)," she said. "Another thing I learned they don't want to legalize marijuana, they don't want the hemp plant to mix up with the THC."

WKU is participating in five hemp research projects. The small research plots were planted in June, the farm's website said.

On the farm are labs where students can do experiments and research.

"The farm is a tool used by a wide variety of students pursuing career in all aspects of agriculture such as agribusiness, ag education, ag mechanics and composting," the website said.

There have been a few additions to the farm over the years, including a new 27-horse stable.



FAITH LINDSEY/ DUPONT MANUAL HIGH SCHOOL

Director of Agriculture Exposition Center Paul Woosley stands in hops experimental vines. He addresses WKU Xposure workshopppers at the WKU Farm.

The WKU Farm has a total of 30 horses. The stables come with showers for the horses as well.

"The most interesting thing I learned about the horse stables is how much they don't stay in the (stables) we visited," Anna Bryson of Bowling Green said. "That's essential. It's a difference between big-named farms and smaller hometown farms being that big-named farms tend not to let their horses be outside as much as smaller farms do. And that's important because horses need that time outside."

The 15-year-old said the farm treats "all members right, even four-legged members."

Finally, the students got an up-close look at the farm's weather monitoring station, part of WKU's statewide Mesonet.

Stuart Foster, a professor of geography at WKU, talked to the Xposure students about the weather-monitoring system. He said the Mesonet which people can get on an app, gets weather out to residents quickly. He's hoping to spread the word about the forecast system.

"I would love to reach out to journalists to get the word out about the Mesonet," Foster said.

India Rice, a 16-year-old from Atlanta, Georgia, liked what she saw of the weather station.

"I thought it was innovative," she said. "It created a medium for technology and agriculture to work together."

WKU's farm, however, is not just a place of weather forecasts and hemp research. The farm also produces dairy products, and consumers can buy meats and cheeses at the farm's store.

They have all kinds of cheeses, including plain cheese, pepperjack, bacon cheese (their most popular), mild cheese and sharp cheddar.

"I like that they use all natural products," 17-year old John Hundley of St. Louis, Missouri, said.

SPECIAL REPORT: GUN VIOLENCE



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN HUNDLEY/ KIRKWOOD HIGH SCHOOL; CHALK ILLUSTRATION BY GEORGIA MALLET/ ELLENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL AND STAFF

“ School shootings spark changes ”



"Guns are necessary, but what they're being used for these days is not. The number of deaths by gun is at an unacceptable high, so I pray that America wakes up."

Anna Bryson,
Bowling Green High School



"The need to put gun control in check is long overdue. The rampant gun violence that has ravaged the nation over the course of a year stands on trial in the case of protection for the youth of our nation."

Brody Rexing,
F.J. Reitz High School



"Guns need to be regulated at the very least. Guns give people the power to possibly kill other people and it isn't a risky situation we should put ourselves into."

Georgia Mallett,
Ellensburg High School



"Gun violence is a gargantuan issue because of lax laws surrounding the procurement and carrying of these weapons. Gun control is inherently a good thing because it would help mitigate the effects of police brutality and mass shootings."

Aanya Agarwal,
Millard North High School



"When followed properly, the laws and safeguards we have in place in regards to gun control are effective considering our country's population. I would like to see mental health become more of a focal point with gun control because guns themselves do not make the choice to pull the trigger to commit violence against others."

Jaley Adkins,
Belfry High School



"Guns should be controlled because gun violence is out of control."

Camiryn Stepteanu,
Presentation Academy

BY BRODY REXING
F.J. Reitz High School

It seems shocking to Americans that shootings and the practice of preparing for "active shooters" has become so widespread so fast. The issue becomes pressing when, according to CNN, there have been 23 shootings in 2018 alone.

No one in Benton, Kentucky, knew that their high school would be the site of the year's first deadly school shooting.

Marshall County High School was no different than any other high school. MCHS is a small-town school with small-town charm. Fewer than 2,000 people are enrolled, and it's the type of school where everybody knows everyone.

Before the turn of the century, a discussion of school shootings was rarer than a shooting itself. In a study from digital media company Ranker, 16 shootings had occurred in America before the Columbine Massacre. But since the 1999 shooting, there have been over 200, according to a news article in the Denver Westword.

How do schools address this issue? How do administrators identify killers disguised as students? How do teachers teach their students not to become another statistic?

The Marshall County School District implemented a backpack ban for its two middle schools and two high schools, following the Jan. 23 shooting at Marshall County High that claimed the lives of two 15-year-old students and injured 16 others. The ban will go into effect this fall.

"These decisions were not made lightly; they are the result of many months of careful deliberation, expert advice, and frank discussion," Superintendent Trent Lovett said in a press release regarding the new policy.

Lovett also identified mental health as a key issue. "We have added mental health counselors at all of our schools," Lovett said. "We hope with this addition, we will be able to detect mental health issues at a very early age."

MCHS student Lily Dunn created two Change.org petitions following the shooting. The latter was a direct response to the district's new backpack policy.

"While some changes are welcome," Dunn said in the petition description, "others are an invasion of privacy and unnecessary."

Dunn, like her peers, believes the ban of backpacks will hinder her learning experience.

"Taking away our backpacks is not only extremely inconvenient for many students who have to go from building to building, but it's also taking away what little privacy we are allowed to have during the school day," Dunn said in the petition.

Lovett was unaware of the petition but said there was no easy method for processing students.

"I was at the high school every day from Jan. 23 until the end of the school year, checking bags and wanding students" with a handheld metal detector, Lovett said in an interview. "The manpower it takes to check bags and wand students was OK to finish out the year; however, to sustain this for a lengthy amount of time would be very difficult."

Parents from districts, and states other than Dunn's, disagree with Lovett's "no backpack" rule as well. Ana Rodriguez is one of them. Rodriguez has sent her children through the Sumner County school system in Gallatin, Tennessee, which was itself home to gun issues when a student brought a handgun to Gallatin High School in April 2018.

"I feel like they're taking it too far," Rodriguez said. "It's not really a solution."

Rodriguez, like Lovett, believes school districts should focus on mental health above everything else.

"As a parent, once I know a child is isolating

themselves, an alarm goes off," she said. "Some parents don't care or pay any attention, and they don't know exactly what's going on."

Kendra Glenn, a third grade teacher at Sharpe Elementary School in Marshall County, said her meetings with Lovett are productive, concerning a topic which many teachers have trouble contemplating.

"Superintendent Lovett is very open," Glenn said, "listening to all ideas and concerns that we have."

Glenn taught Bailey Holt and Preston Cope in the fourth grade, both of whom lost their lives during the Marshall County shooting. While Glenn's teaching may have not been affected much by the shootings going on in the nation, it cut deeply into her personal life and outlook.

After the MCHS shooting, "it made me really appreciate my family and my classes," Glenn said. "It made me appreciate life a lot more."

Glenn holds a special role in the changing climate. Her students are young, and may not understand what's happening or why schools do so many lockdown drills.

On June 6, Twitter user Georgy Cohen posted an image of a poster in her elementary-bound child's school. On the poster was a rhyme instructing students what to do in the event of a shooting lockdown, to the tune of the nursery rhyme "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

"This should not be hanging in my soon-to-be-kindergartener's classroom," Cohen wrote in her post.

The classroom environment is different from classrooms 20 years ago — it even differs from classrooms in other countries.

"I am so sorry for all of you," a user identified as "Nuclear Football" replied. "Kids in Austria only know fire drills."

Across the state in Warren County, Superintendent Rob Clayton created a school safety task force after the Marshall County shooting.

"Our focus remains on increasing the available resources that we provide our students (student resource officers and mental health specialists) and we will move expeditiously as possible through Board action," Superintendent Rob Clayton said in an email when asked about the most important aspect of his task force.

Clayton emphasized his point on mental health, citing psychological research on school shooting.

"Research clearly demonstrates that we must be proactive by addressing the mental health needs of students well prior to any act of violence," Clayton said. "In addition to creating a healthy culture in all of our schools in which students feel comfortable to report concerns, I find that addressing the social/emotional needs of students to be the best way of ensuring their safety."

Clayton isn't without support. The American Psychological Association in 2013 said: "Although it is important to recognize that most people suffering from a mental illness are not dangerous, for those persons at risk for violence due to mental illness, suicidal thoughts, or feelings of desperation, mental health treatment can often prevent gun violence."

The communities in Kentucky, and communities across the nation, continue to work with the end goal of being safe. The reality of the situation for Clayton, however, is that it will always be hard to predict where gun violence will take the nation next.

"Because much of what we do is to make students and our community 'feel' safe in our schools," Clayton said, "we must be prepared to make future adjustments based upon the realities of our ever-changing world and specific feedback from our community."



"I am a firm believer in loose interpretation of the Constitution and the Second Amendment.

I believe gun rights are privileges such as driving and voting, and guns are subjected to confiscation or stricter gun laws in context of violence today."

Brennan Crain,
Barren County High School



Gun violence is an issue that has happened for years. It is not only an issue in schools but

those of other social institutions, too. People rely too heavily on guns and if they didn't, consequently, the nation would be a better place."

India Rice,
Westlake High School



"Guns, especially semiautomatic ones that can easily be turned automatic with the purchase of

bump stocks, are too available. An 18-year-old shouldn't be able to obtain them."

Sierra Earnhart,
Greenwood High School



"Gun control should first be regulated in communities ravaged by gun violence, not

by imprisoning those who use them but by keeping them away from people who prove to be a threat when a gun is in tow."

Faith Lindsey,
duPont Manual High School



"Gun violence is a big problem in the U.S. and steps need to be taken to fix this epidemic.

This epidemic should be fixed as soon as possible to keep the U.S. citizens safe."

John Hundley,
Kirkwood High School



"We should have more control on guns. We should do something to prevent these shootings before

they get worse."

Tiana Wilson,
Gallatin High School

Boyce General Store focuses on family

BY SIERRA EARNHART
Greenwood High School

Brie and Brad Gollhofer bought the Boyce General Store August 2012 and turned it into a restaurant that serves authentic country cooking and locally famous pies.

The rural crossroads near Alvaton, Kentucky, hasn't been the same since.

"Our whole mission statement is family tradition," Brie Gollhofer said. "I grew up just down the road. My boys are sixth-generation Boyce residents."

The Gollihers started the restaurant with community in mind. Built in 1869, the family-oriented country store brings visitors from all over the state. They have Friday night fish fries, which attracts hundreds of people, and an annual Peach Party festival taking place June 26 that averages about 500 guests.

Brie Gollhofer's famous pies have dubbed her as the "The Pie Queen."

"We are very active in our local food. Almost 60 percent of what we serve is locally produced," Brie Gollhofer said.

Brie, a graduate of Western Kentucky University who majored in photojournalism, said she has been baking her whole life.

"I love to bake," she said.



Brad (left) and Brie (right) Gollhofer, owners of Boyce General Store, pose inside of a cutout made especially for them as an attraction when customers enter their restaurant.

"Baking is my love language."

Brie Gollhofer sold pies for three years at a local farmer's market before purchasing Boyce General Store. In 2015, she opened "The Pie Queen" in downtown Bowling Green but closed it a few months later because she was working 14-hour days, seven days a week.

"I have two boys, you know," she said. "I just couldn't keep making the commute."

The Pie Queen did, however, bring a bigger clientele to Boyce. Most of the customers now make the drive to get some of Brie Gollhofer's desserts.



PHOTOS BY GEORGIA MALLET/ ELLENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL
Diners enjoy eating dinner at the Boyce General store Friday evening. On Fridays, they offer a fish fry dinner.

Southern Living, Garden & Gun, Country Living magazines, and USA Today Travel have all praised Boyce General Store and Brie Gollhofer's pies.

"I was sitting on my couch

when my friend texted me about the [Southern Living] article," she said. "Then my phone just started blowing up. It was pretty nuts."

Sef Gonzales' Hamburger House Party at Miami's Magic City

Casino even invited the Gollihers to cook a burger for them back in March.

Gonzales was traveling through Kentucky and made a stop at the Gollihers' store. He tried their popular Pimento Cheese Burger and later asked the Gollihers to prepare a jalapeno-pimento cheese and pig candy, a bacon variant, burger. They called it the "Pimento" burger.

She and Gonzales "just kind of hit it off and stayed in touch," said Brie Gollhofer.

It's not all just biscuits and gravy for the Boyce General Store, though.

In the winter, the Gollihers have trouble keeping their numbers up for the Friday Night fish fry.

Friday is the only day they serve dinner.

"Hopefully we can just keep a face of clientele year-round," Brie Gollhofer said.

They plan to make more space for indoor seating during the winter so they can attract more customers.

The Boyce General Store is a staple in the Boyce community. It's more than a restaurant. It's a place of belonging, history and home-made country-style cooking.

"If I was on the outside and I was looking in," Brad Gollhofer said, "I would think Boyce, to me, represents family."

SPECIAL REPORT: GUN VIOLENCE

Two shootings bring gun violence home for youth

BY AANYA AGARWAL
Millard North High School
AND BRENNAN CRAIN
Barren County High School

Millennials wake up each day with varying challenges associated with the new age, especially gun violence. From small communities to larger areas, gun violence has become a burning political issue centered on options for obliterating and defining the source of senseless acts in modern society.

Recent acts of gun violence have filled the news from a small Kentucky community to a suburb in South Florida. These two areas have sparked tremendous growth of millennial activism and support for a new age in the fight for safer schools and communities.

The morning of January 23, 2018, was unremarkable in Benton, Kentucky, a town of roughly 4,500 people.

The normal, small-town morning was disrupted when gunshots ripped through 18 students, killing two of them.

Reactions of the public were immediate. Students, particularly from small towns like Benton, felt these situations were occurring everywhere, not solely in metropolitan and suburban communities that had gained notoriety for school shootings.

High school junior Caroline Kinsman of Glasgow, Kentucky, a town roughly 180 miles from Benton, said she heard of the shooting in Marshall County while at school that morning.

"Our history teacher told us exactly what had happened to the best of his knowledge," Kinsman said. "I remember everyone seemed really on edge that day."

Being in the same state in a similar high school to Marshall County, the proximity of the shooting developed terrifying feelings for her.

"I had been aware of all the other school shootings happening in our country, but it never really hit me how real it was," Kinsman

said. "This was so close to us. There was a lot of fear."

Similar situations have been successful in gaining inner-city support with little rural support. Marshall County changed that.

Days following the shooting, Kinsman said school officials were adamant about hearing from students.

"We were allowed to vocalize our fears to the administration and they went over the plan with us if something like that ever happened," Kinsman said.

Marshall County not only impacted Glasgow, but smaller communities like Gamaliel, Kentucky.

Sixteen-year-old Cassidy Huber said Marshall County opened her eyes to a simple solution rather than thoughts she pondered before following larger shootings.

"I think there should be more community services," Huber said.

Gabe Parker, the alleged shooter, has been reported to have experienced bullying. Huber said Marshall County changed her view on mental health and that more community services should be made available to reduce mental complications resulting in senseless acts.

Huber said the community was led to support efforts for safer schools after Marshall County as well, but at this time no large-scale groups exist.

Several groups throughout the country have formed amidst school shootings, but a major shooting in South Florida placed awareness on a new platform.

Parkland, Florida, home to Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, was the platform for additional gun violence talks after Nikolas Cruz opened fire at the school this past February.

Students began becoming activists for stricter gun laws.

The 17 dead and 14 wounded at Parkland started a revolution. Their untimely deaths on Feb. 14 lead their classmates and many

in the nation to reevaluate their views on gun violence.

"The shooting made me want more gun control in the U.S. because a 19-year-old shouldn't be able to get firearms of that power," said John Hundley of St. Louis. "There needs to be a change."

And a change did occur. The shooting led to forms of protest against current gun laws such as rallies, walkouts and the hashtag #neveragain, which was coined by MSD students.

In fact, out of five students questioned about the walkout, every single one knew about it and every single one wanted to or did participate. This fact speaks to the diffusion of the gun control movement across the country.

"The shooting really affected my views on gun control because it was mind boggling," said India Rice of Atlanta. "Why should an underage kid have the ability to obtain a firearm and use it to the worst extent? I was really upset."

The large number of school shootings have caused many to feel numb and unsurprised when new ones occur.

"My first reaction was just thinking, 'oh, it's another one,' because there had been so many school shootings recently," said Bowling Green High School senior Sierra Earnhart.

MSD students are trying to combat the sense of numbness one feels after hearing about the shootings in multiple ways. For example, they try to humanize the students that were killed and collaborate with other high schoolers to raise awareness about gun violence.

"I can't imagine the sorrow each of those 17 families are going through, but it just shows how lucky I am," said Stoneman Douglas senior Jenna Korsten in a letter to her friend Brooke Wilczewski to read at the walkout at Millard North High School in Omaha, Nebraska. "We all have to work together, one by one to make a change."

Rural

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

"The people that carry guns aren't crazy like people outside of my area think. They're smart and well-educated on how to use them safely."

The students said growing up around guns makes rural teenagers appreciate them. It does not mean, however, they are short-sighted on the gun debate.

"Rural residents are often perceived as more closed-minded when it comes to the Second Amendment, not only by urban residents, but by the rest of the world," Blackburn said. "For many of us, guns serve as a way to provide food and protection, but that doesn't mean some of us aren't open to discuss this issue of gun safety and regulation."

Fifteen-year-old McNamee is one of those people. Though he says he sees the necessity of the Second Amendment, he also recognizes it can be improved.

"I believe that it is a vital amendment and that all people should have the right to bear arms," McNamee said. "I don't think it should be changed but I do believe there should be limits placed on some guns as they do military grade weapons."

All the students say they have not been in a situation in their lives where they have personally been affected by gun violence.

"I am blessed enough to say that I have not directly experienced gun violence," Blackburn said. "As the media shows: Gun violence is growing and we are all affected in some way. It may not be a direct effect, but we all find a new fear from even the simplest things like school or public outings due to violence."

Ryan Varney and Mason Varney, who along with McNamee are best friends, said their experiences with guns have been hunting-related. They also said they are always accompanied by an older family member.

"We use them when we go turkey hunting and you have to have a shotgun for that," Mason Varney said. "We pretty much use them to hunt and occasionally go to gun ranges, so we can practice and learn how to use them better, so we can be even more safe."

Although Pike County has not

experienced gun violence at school, it is taking precautionary measures to improve security.

The Pike County Board of Education voted unanimously on Feb. 27 to allow certain teachers to carry firearms.

The Lexington Herald-Leader reported that the teachers will volunteer to serve as conceal-carry guards for the school.

They must complete background checks, mental health evaluations, firearm training, a drug test, and a qualification course.

"It's certainly not a simple solution - just arming teachers is a crazy thought," said Nathan Coleman, a teacher at Belfry High School.

"Every teacher is not capable or willing to carry a firearm, and no amount of training can combat physical limitations or mental ones," he said. "It's not right for every school or staff, but for my county it's a good decision."

Coleman said with 19 schools in the Pike County district spread across 79,000 square miles, the state police's ability to protect his county and three others, can be a challenge.

"Response time is certainly not ideal even in the best case scenario. Our staff also has 8-10 individuals who are already comfortable with firearms," he said. "Again, every staff won't have this and a gun in the wrong hand could be a nightmare."

Coleman, however, is confident that a gun in the right hands will allow the teachers to be able to defend their students.

"It has been shown time and time again, mass murderers look for soft targets," the teacher said. "It's time for the first responders to already be on campus; instead of our current option which is shielding kids and praying."

Meanwhile for students like McNamee, the gun debate rages on.

"I think urban people don't understand that it goes back to our culture," McNamee said. "Rural areas typically have a culture of guns that other areas don't understand."

As for the solution to guns in American society, the teen sees a middle ground as a plausible solution.

"It's not going to be possible to get rid of all guns and it's not going to be possible to keep all guns," he said. "I think we can meet in the middle on limiting some."

Urban

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

experiences vary widely, but the issue of gun control connects them.

Louisville, Kentucky's biggest city, is one of only two counties out of 120 that voted Democrat during the 2016 U.S. presidential race.

The views of urban students often vastly different from those who live in rural areas.

"Urban residents tend to be more liberal-leaning and rural residents tend to be more conservative-leaning," Robinson, a sophomore at duPont Manual High School, said.

In light of the increase in school shootings and last year's highest homicide rates in decades in Louisville, the conversation on gun control and the power of the Second Amendment has created a gray area

for many.

"I was very pro-gun and everything, but after these recent shootings I had to re-analyze the way I think about guns," Robinson said.

He values the Second Amendment and still says he's a supporter of it, but admits there is a need to enforce some laws regulating whose hands guns end up in.

Just like Bencomo-Suarez and Wright, Robinson believes strict background checks and intensive training would be a solution to the epidemic.

Robinson also believes psychological tests proving a person's mental capacity to own a gun are needed.

"That way safer people are getting guns," he said.

Some people, like Wright, believe that while these solutions sound plausible, it would be difficult to make sufficient progress.

"The fact that this many people can die and we just let the same crap happen - we get mad and we get sad about it, then we march and we cry, then we get on Twitter and then the same stuff happens," he said. "It's like an endless cycle."

The debate on gun control transcends race, culture and socio-economic status.

Bencomo-Suarez, a Cuban American female, says she steers away from guns because of her upbringing in a Cuban household. When Fidel Castro was Cuba's leader, he mandated strict gun laws.

"My parents, because they are Cuban, they come from the background that in Cuba you couldn't have guns as a civilian. That's something that they've never really grown out of. That's not something that they believe in having, so nei-

ther my brother and I don't really want to own a gun either.

Meanwhile, Wright, an African-American male, was raised in a home where his father kept a gun inside the home.

"I support the Second Amendment. I understand that some people live in neighborhoods in which having a gun is productive where you can actually help yourself or keep yourself from getting hurt," Wright said.

Even though he supports it, Wright believes the amendment is due for some changes. "Not completely doing away with the Second Amendment but tailoring it to our current situation in America," he said.

One of Wright's proposed solutions is outlawing military-style weapons.

"I would say that the people that

like really support it are always like, 'Well, I should be able to have any type of gun I want.' I don't believe that," Wright said. "Like you don't need military-grade weapons."

He thinks certain groups of people, however, fight to keep guns that aren't needed.

"The issue is white people love their guns. They love them. They don't want to let them go. It's like a part of their society," Wright said.

Similar to Wright, Robinson also grew up around guns.

"My dad hunts. He owns a lot of guns. His dad hunted. He owns a lot of guns and that's just how I was brought up and that's how he was brought up," he said.

"Guns are definitely not important but they've just always been in my life, and so I think that there's often misinterpretation of what guns are."



Lost River Cave naturalist Tosha Clark holds Salvator the Argentine Black and White Tegu at the Lost River Cave Nature Center.

GEORGIA MALLET/ ELLENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL



In the Butterfly House at Lost River Cave a butterfly lands on a flower. The Lost River Butterfly House is home to dozens of Monarch butterflies just like this one.

JOHN HUNDLEY/ KIRKWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

LOST RIVER FINDS

Faith Lindsey pets Lucky, Dutch Cottontail rabbit, at the Lost River Cave Nature Center. Dutch Cottontail rabbits live 5 to 8 years on average, but have been noted to live as long as 15 years.



JALEY ADKINS/ BELFRY HIGH SCHOOL



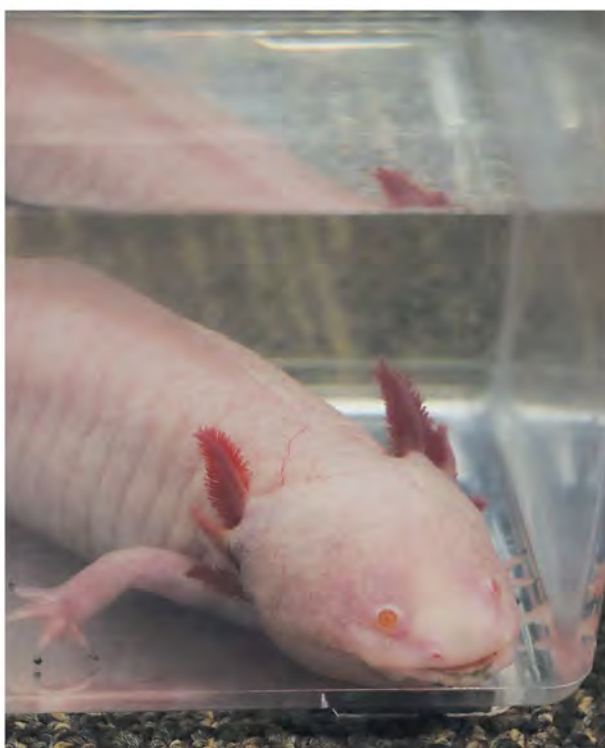
JOHN HUNDLEY/ KIRKWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

A visitor at Lost River Cave enjoys the Flying Squirrel Zipline. The zipline was added to Lost River in 2017 to attract patrons.



ANNA BRYSON/ BOWLING GREEN HIGH SCHOOL

Lost River Cave naturalist Tosha Clark shows off Harry, a Rose Hair Tarantula, in the Nature Center. Harry's species originates in Chile, and is common in pet stores across the U.S.



ANNA BRYSON/ BOWLING GREEN HIGH SCHOOL

Lost River Cave's Albino Mexican Salamander, Axel, rests in a plastic container. Axel's species is native to lakes in and around Mexico City, but is nearly extinct in the wild.



BRENNAN CARIN/ BARREN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

On the Lost River Cave trail, Chief Naturalist Delaney Rockrohr drops hydrochloric acid on a sample of calcite. Calcite is a mineral that can be found in the waters of the Lost River.



SAM UPSHAW JR./ XPOSURE COACH

BACK ROW (from left): Sierra Earnhart, Tiana Wilson, Anna Bryson, India Rice, Hayley Watson, Aanya Agarwal, Faith Lindsey. FRONT ROW: Gary Hairlson, Nicole Ziege, Camiryn Stepteau, Kayla Golliber, Brennan Crain, Toni Mitchell, Kathy Williams, Bob Adams, Georgia Mallett, Brody Flexing, Jaley Adkins, Michael Casagrande, John Hundley and Chuck Clark.

CAMIRYN STEPTEAU PRESENTATION ACADEMY

BY ANNA BRYSON
Bowling Green High School

Camiryn Stepteau stood in front of her mirror, straightening her posture to flatter her 6-foot stature. Her dark brown eyes gravitated toward the girl in front of her. Stepteau's eyes proceeded to scan over herself. She saw a future woman of fashion in that moment.

Stepteau recalled how the idea of fashion came about in her life.

"Multiple people ask me, because of my height, should I model but I've never tried it – except for maybe a few photos on Instagram maybe, but nothing more," Stepteau said.

She described how she plans to pursue fashion as a lifestyle and career.

"I've loved journalism ever since I could think about it," she said. "I am very interested in fashion journalism, specifically."

However, fashion is her second passion. Stepteau is a Catholic, baptized when she was 2 years old in the church she currently attends. She is a member of Christ the King Catholic church in her hometown of Louisville, and she was recently confirmed, a sacrament in the religion.

"I do consider myself a religious person because I have a great relationship with God," said Stepteau, 14, a rising 10th grader at Louisville's Presentation Academy. "I love to talk about faith. I go to a Catholic school, so I am always learning about faith and my



ANNA BRYSON / BOWLING GREEN HIGH SCHOOL

religion.

"I feel like God has called me to do fashion or else I wouldn't be going with the idea of it."

Stepteau's religious beliefs influence how she treats people.

"I think just to be myself and to be positive and to help others," she said.

Her faith directs her opinions about differ-

ent aspects and issues of fashion and how she responds to different controversies, she said.

One controversy of fashion Stepteau is aware of is the prevalence of eating disorders developing among models.

"I think it's so unfortunate how they feel pressure to be a certain weight and size that they have to go to extreme measures, and I don't agree with it," Stepteau said.

She also acknowledges different fashion controversies on a personal level.

"I've looked into it personally with me being my height," she said. "A lot of people tend to comment on my weight as being one of the attributes to why I should model."

Despite those concerns, Stepteau said she feels that the fashion industry is progressing toward a future where health and safety are the primary concerns over setting a social standard.

"The media and the people have made fashion companies aware that it's not OK to be so exclusive," she said. "I see stores in the mall and advertisements with more diversity of body types in models."

She concedes that the fashion industry is making some modification to regulations regarding the health of their models. However, she feels that there is still much work that needs to be done. Stepteau would like to start facilitating change by landing a job at Teen Vogue.

"I admire it and I feel like I can improve the level of diversity and representation of different traits," Stepteau said.

Stepteau said she hopes to continue to evolve the fashion industry based upon how she believes God sees her.

"I know that if I was ever to become a model, I'd try to make sure that everybody gets represented equally," she said. "I believe that God truly wants me to accept people for who they are and to not judge."

SIERRA EARNHART GREENWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

BY INDIA RICE
Westlake High School

Life hasn't always been a smooth ride for 17-year-old Sierra Earnhart.

The senior from Bowling Green admitted there have been some financial struggles along the way.

However, the hardships helped shape the teen into the independent free-spirit she said she is today.

Earnhart's parents divorced when she was 5 years old and it made life difficult financially. "In 2008 the housing market crashed," Earnhart said. "My mom, a real estate agent, was not making money. She couldn't find a job."

Earnhart quickly learned how to entertain herself and didn't rely on her parents to buy her things.

"I had to make and save my own money," she said.

"I'd sell friendship bracelets, do lemonade stands and sell my stuff at garage sales so I (could) buy my own toys and pay for a field trip at school," she said.

During those early years, Earnhart said her mother made a difference in how she perceived herself.

"Looking back, I wasn't the most attractive. I was a chubby kid. My clothes didn't fit right... my glasses didn't fit my face."

Her mother always told her, though, that she and her sister would be Miss America one day. It changed the teen's perspective.

"I wasn't ashamed of myself because of what she told me," said Earnhart, who is part white and part Korean and has learned to be comfortable in her own skin.

"It's a lot to do with accepting who I am. You can let it define you or you can grow from it and accept it," Earnhart said. "Knowing who I am and being comfortable with who I am sets me free... it's liberating."

Earnhart attends Greenwood High School and is making her mark. She serves as vice-president of the international club and is co-editor of the school yearbook. She also is the head producer of a TV show called Gator News at her school and is a member of the Student Council. She is a Gold Key Scholastic Art and Writing recipient and attended the Kentucky Governor's School for entrepreneurs.

If all her academic responsibilities aren't enough, she also plays varsity tennis, where she's been a member since her freshman year. "Not fitting the profile of a privileged kid



INDIA RICE / WESTLAKE HIGH SCHOOL

fitting into the right family, I had to work for it," Earnhart said. It meant working "twice as hard as other students."

As for her future, it doesn't include staying in her hometown forever: "There's more to see than Bowling Green."

She has her eyes set on Florida, recalling her father's property in New Port Richey.

"It's far away from here," she said. "I'm really familiar with it because I've been there a lot of times. That salty smell – although terrible – reminds me of Florida. It makes me happy."

Earnhart said the thought of making her own decisions would be "really cool... not having to follow anybody's rules."

But for now, the teen has her future to think about and career choices to decide. Earnhart once considered a career as a computer engineer; recently, she has found a passion in writing.

"For the longest time I said I wanted to be a computer engineer, but after winning a Scholastic Gold Key, I feel compelled to write," Earnhart said. It sparked a fire inside the teen.

"Journalism feels like the one outlet that when I can be truly creative, and potentially change other people's lives."

JOHN HUNDLEY KIRKWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

BY BRENNAN CRAIN
Barren County High School

Perspiring. Clammy. Nervous. John Hundley felt the pressure of trying out for the Kirkwood High School freshman basketball team.

Hundley, a Kirkwood, Missouri native, grew up playing basketball with friends and played competitively from 6th-8th grade.

But that didn't stop him from trying out for his freshmen high school basketball team. It was the first step in the process to finding his true passion away from the court.

Something, however, wasn't right during the try out.

"I was really nervous," Hundley said, "and was not my normal self, for sure."

Hundley's nerves caught him off guard since he felt prepared.

"I went to school work outs and worked out at the YMCA," said Hundley who wanted to play since sixth grade.

It just didn't work out. Hundley didn't make the team, but this setback did not lead Hundley to diminish his aspiration in life: pursuing something new that he loves.



TIANA WILSON / GALLATIN HIGH SCHOOL

"I think that [being cut from the team] opened my eyes because after that, that's when I really went into other things and looking into doing other things," Hundley said. "That's what opened me up to journalism."

Hundley, now 17, began his pursuit of journalism by taking a class at his school the next year. He later found photography. "I took the class and it just kind of clicked with me," Hundley said.

When basketball aspirations were on

his mind, journalism was the last thing Hundley thought of pursuing. Ultimately, it was best for Hundley who is now a two-year veteran behind the camera.

Hundley has attended multiple workshops since finding photography where he says he has learned a lot regarding the field. Being attentive is an important skill he has learned.

"I feel like if you're a photographer, you have to be attentive at all times," Hundley said. "And, I feel like that's a key thing. And, if you're looking at your photo stream, you could miss something."

From trying out for the team and not making it, to picking up a camera, Hundley found that his purpose is much more than on the court.

"At that moment," Hundley said, "I noticed that I was not the worst at what I was doing."

Since then, Hundley said he has grown as a photographer and developed his persona along the way.

"I just feel like that if there is a story to be told, it should be visualized," Hundley said. "For those that may not be able to read, I feel like taking photos is one of the ways for people to see things and to see stories."



JOHN HUNDLEY / KIRKWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

BRENNAN CRAIN BARREN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

BY JOHN HUNDLEY
Kirkwood High School

Barren County High School student publications were on the downfall and eventually faded away in 2005. For over a decade, there was not a publication at the school before Brennan Crain and a few classmates got started.

Together, they helped start The Burgundy Media Network in 2017. They produce BCHS Live!, which is a live video production program, the Trojan Times, and 88.7 FM Trojan Radio.

"I feel like whether there is an opportunity available or whether the opportunity is not, there are people willing to give you the time to create that opportunity," Crain said.

Crain said it was not much of a process until the summer when they began to work on logos and what they were going to do for newscasts.

"It was a little complicated," Crain said. "You have to approach administration but luckily administration was pretty open about the situation."

Kelley Ross, an English teacher at Barren County, has been a big motivator along the way. She has been around to be a support for Crain and his classmates trying to revive the publication.

"She allowed us to come together as students and voice what we want to do or wanted to see in school," Crain said.

Before that, medicine was Crain's main interest since his stepmother is a nurse.

Crain has been curious since he was young after hearing stories at home.

"I have been to her workplace before, shadowing," Crain said. But his interest was really peaked hearing stories at home about her career in medicine.

Crain, 16, loves to connect with people, and he thought medicine would give him the ability to do that by treating patients and creating bonds with them.

With Crain finding other interests, it showed him that he could be doing what he likes to do, which is to connect and learn, but that he could do it on a greater scale with journalism.

"I like learning about people. I like learning in general," Crain said. "I like exploring things whether its diving into a good book or having a conversation with someone I don't know."

Crain said besides learning, he likes to cook and experiment with his father in the kitchen. When the two cook together, he enjoys it.

With medicine still an interest but on the back burner, Crain thought about specific things he wants to do in journalism. It's become a passion.

"Lately, journalism – and specifically broadcast journalism," Crain said. "You can reach people through print... but the average person is going to flick on their TV at night and catch the headlines on the news versus taking the time to sit down and read a story."

Growing up, medicine was one of the things Crain saw as an interesting topic but since then journalism has taken over and is now a passion.



GEORGIA MALLETT / ELLENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL

FAITH LINDSEY DUPONT MANUAL HIGH SCHOOL

BY GEORGIA MALLETT
Ellensburg High School

For Faith Lindsey, a trip to St. Louis this spring helped her find her direction.

"I want to make sure that no one's voice goes unheard," Lindsey said. "The trip made me realize my purpose and recognize what I needed to do to make actual change you can see."

She thought the trip with the Muhammad Ali Center Council of Students to St. Louis would make her feel enraged by seeing the chaos and corruption in disenfranchised communities. Instead, Lindsey said she was calm, ready to take on the world.

"I can do this."

A big part of Lindsey's purpose is wanting to fight for justice in this country. "The world sucks! It really does," she said in a serious yet sarcastic tone.

"The United States has too many standards of what people should or shouldn't be and that's crazy," said Lindsey, 15, a rising sophomore at Louisville's duPont Manual High School. "Rules aren't always needed because the human heart isn't a place of hate and evil. You aren't born that way."

Lindsey's teacher jokingly called her an anarchist because of these beliefs. But Lindsey said anarchy would be only possible "if the world started over again."

The main problem that needs to be addressed in the U.S. is racial and social segregation, in Lindsey's opinion. "It isn't allowing people to be the best they can be," she said.

"I speak up a lot," Lindsey said frankly. "I am not afraid to ask questions. I say what

is on my mind and combat what people say. I am equipped with the facts and knowledge to do so and I am not going to lessen myself to make people feel uncomfortable."

Lindsey lived in Chicago with her mother, father and brother while her father attended DePaul University in Chicago. After he finished school, they moved to Louisville.

She said she loves her family with all her heart. She elaborates on her love for her parents and her relationship with her brother. "We had problems," she said, looking back. "My brother could be cruel."

Lindsey's parents kicked her brother out of the house because of his defiance some nights. She said she stood up for him and begged for him to come back despite the tense relationship.

"It taught me how to love people even when they don't show the same love back," Lindsey said, smiling. "Even if people aren't nice to you, you can stay nice to them ... It showed me the basic form of loving people truly."

Lindsey said that the love for her friends and family, along with the example of the powerful women in her circle inspired her to try to be the best woman she can be.

"I have been taught and observed the women who have raised me," she said. "Women are just so beautiful and so powerful and it amazes me what women can do."

Lindsey prides herself on communication. "I have a God-given talent to be able to connect with people no matter who they are," she said. "I don't consider myself very vulnerable because I'm pretty open. I don't let things overwhelm me."



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TIANA WILSON / GALLATIN HIGH SCHOOL

JALEY ADKINS

BELFRY HIGH SCHOOL

BY TIANA WILSON
Gallatin High School

Jaley Adkins has visions of sugar plum fairies dancing in her head.

The 16-year-old junior from Belfry High School dreams of one day dancing for the Nutcracker as the Sugar Plum Fairy, one of the lead ballerinas.

"I've been picturing myself since I've been little," Adkins said. "Every girl dancing growing up... sees the pink tutu and pointe shoes."

At the age of 6, Adkins got a glimpse of the Sugar Plum Fairy and it made a lasting impression.

"I was playing a mouse in the Nutcracker and I saw her for the first time. She was wearing a tiara," said Adkins, who lives in Canada, Kentucky. "She had the shoes that she could go up on and the tiara."

It was everything young Adkins could hope to be and she knew at that moment, she wanted to one day be in those pointe shoes.

The honor student, who has a perfect 4.0 grade point average, began ballet at 3 years old.

She moved up from ballet shoes to pointe, which really meant a lot to her.

"I went from practicing one day a week and then three to five hours the week before a show, to practicing twice a week and being there two or more hours every day for two to three weeks before a show," Adkins said. "Ballet takes a lot of discipline and sacrifice."

Blisters are common and so are bruises. Sometimes, following a performance, she said, she would take off her pointe shoes and her foot would be covered in blood – something she didn't even realize while performing.

But for the teenager, she said the pain, which sometimes can register at a 10, is "worth it."

"You build your tolerance. I can keep them (pointe shoes) on for like three hours. It takes a while to build it up."

Adkins, who plans to one day visit Uganda with her church when she turns 18, now also teaches ballet to the younger kids.

"I got to teach 3- to 4-year-olds and I was that old when I was taught by the older girls and I looked up to them," she said, adding that she enjoys mentoring them as they get older and more experienced.

Adkins said she tries to encourage the kids not to be afraid to try something they think they can't do.

"When they think they are not good at something, they won't try at all," she said. "When it's something new, I try to encourage them to try it and give it a chance, to always do that."

One of Adkins' favorite quotes is, "If you stumble, make it part of your dance."

She loves this quote because her ballet teacher Peggy Davis always said that if she messed up in front of the audience, they wouldn't know it and to just keep going like it never happened.

"I feel like it applies outside of dance because if you messed up just keep on going."

INDIA RICE

WESTLAKE HIGH SCHOOL

BY SIERRA EARNHART
Greenwood High School

Headstrong, caring and diverse, India Rice is far from ordinary. She's homecoming queen, a strong student with a 3.3 GPA, and a teen reporter for Vox ATL.

But behind Rice's striking, deep-brown eyes, lies a heartbreaking past.

Her uncle, Devin Smith, was murdered on Christmas Eve when she was 13 years old.

She woke up to her grandmother screaming. She found her brother in the bathroom where he had locked himself for hours. She watched her dad cry for the first time. Rice was emotionally paralyzed in the moment.

"That was probably one of the most traumatizing moments in my life," Rice said.

On top of that, Rice's father also had congestive heart failure at the time.

A defibrillator that was installed had sent an electric shock to his heart to get it to its normal rhythm. Shortly after, Rice's father got an LVAD, an electromagnetic device that completely replaces the function of his heart.

"A machine is completely running his heart," Rice said. "At first, it was really hard for me to accept because it was life changing, but it reminded me that life is really short. It made me more cautious over exactly what was going on."

Both Rice and her father are well and living happy and fulfilling lives. Rice's father credits the doctors for his well-being, and Rice credits her granddad for helping her move on.

"During my uncle's funeral, he showed me the positives in every situation and he reminded me to focus on them. He made the situation better," Rice said. "One of the hardest things I've ever had to do was forgive my uncle's murderer. My granddad made me feel like life is much more fulfilling if you live it with joy and not hate."

Being exposed to so many cultures as a child has inspired Rice to reach out to people from all walks of life.



JOHN HUNDLEY / KIRKWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

"I'm a military brat," Rice said with a laugh.

Born in Columbus, Georgia, to a father in the military, Rice has traveled everywhere from South Korea to Hawaii. In 2014, her dad medically retired and settled in Atlanta.

"There are amazing people to see. You never know what someone is like beneath the surface."

However, in Rice's search for other's individuality, she felt she started to lose herself.

"Have you ever felt misunderstood?" Rice said.

At 15, as Rice was trying to find her place in the world, she turned to journalism and felt at home.

"Journalism helped me figure myself out. It gave me something much greater worth fighting for," said Rice, now 16 and

a rising junior at Atlanta's Westlake High School.

So what is it that Rice wants to fight for? Individuals who were in the exact same spot she was. Rice hopes to unite people through writing by creating a platform where everyone can feel accepted.

It's not just writing where Rice hopes to reach out to her community, it's at her school, too.

"I like to talk to the kids that no one wants to sit with at lunch," Rice said.

Rice wants her peers to understand that she's not going to judge them. She wishes the most for everybody and strives to see others break out of their shells. Rice just wants people to be themselves.

"I think it's important for you to live your life how you want to live and not live it based off other people and their expectations," Rice said.

GEORGIA MALLETT

ELLENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL

BY FAITH LINDSEY
duPont Manual High School

The battle cry of around 500 students and community members sounded on a brisk Monday afternoon.

"Love conquers hate! Don't discriminate!"

Georgia Mallett, a 17-year-old incoming senior at Ellensburg High School in Washington, documented the scene through her camera lens that may have displayed a couple of middle fingers, or families fighting to feel loved and a town organizing around them.

For Mallett, all roads never intentionally led to moments like this.

Her mom, Cynthia Mitchell, the head of communications at Central Washington University and the recipient of two journalism degrees, is a prominent fighter for free speech.

In addition to documenting community activism, Mallett has been a drummer since the sixth grade.

"You get to bang stuff, and it really channels your anger through that," she said humorously. "It's like a punching bag. Drumming helps me get all of my anger out."

When the hands of Matt Helders flew through the air in her first viewing of an Arctic Monkeys music video, she was hooked, she said.

In sixth grade Mallett was enrolled as the only female drummer in her school band. As middle school progressed, she acquired a few other interests along the way.

"In middle school, I wanted to make a YouTube account — embarrassing as it is," she said.

Those videos never happened, but Mallett turned to still photography.

"Instead of taking videos with my camera, I started taking pictures of nature and



BRENNAN CRAIN / BARREN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

stuff," Mallett said. "I thought it was an interesting way of capturing the beauty of the world."

Her passion for photojournalism flourished as she acquired more merit, including being chosen as the best high school photographer in her county in 2016.

Mallett finds the pictures she enjoys taking the most often are of candid moments. She finds people-watching a source of inspiration.

"It's a cool way of capturing true nature of people," Mallett said. "It's capturing the rawness of the world."

Her photos evoke emotion and inward reflection of the human experience.

Mallett's vivid images capture the power of truth and unrefined energy; through the lack of editing, natural beauty emanates from within.

"I didn't intend to follow her (Mitchell's)

path," Mallett said of her mother's journalism career. "I didn't say 'I'm going to follow in her footsteps.' One day I realized, and I was like, won't you look at that."

"It's not like you can run away from destiny."

Mallett continues to capture scenes like the peace march against the Ku Klux Klan in her community where, yes, images may contain victims of targeted racism being flipped off, but also show the interconnectedness of a community when a piece of their puzzle is targeted.

Music for now is set on the back burner, but who's to say Mallett can't have it all?

One day Mallett aspires to see her name in the bylines of the Rolling Stone Magazine, taking photographs of musicians from around the world while never forgetting her roots in covering controversial topics.

BRODY REXING

F.J. REITZ HIGH SCHOOL

BY AANYA AGARWAL
Millard North High School

Children laying on the floor, adults sitting close to each other to conserve space or leaning on the wall. Christmas lights twinkle and reflect their multi-colored hues on the energetic clan. The air was easygoing with no plan for the night other than to enjoy.

The Christmas reunion was one eagerly anticipated by the Rexing family, a few days where the world seemed whole and devoid of the complications of daily life.

That feeling, that sense of togetherness — that is one of Brody Rexing's fondest memories.

"It was controlled chaos," Rexing chuckled.

The same phrase can be used to describe his life, which has been a series of lofty highs and sunken lows. The lowest point in the Evansville, Indiana, native's life was when his parents divorced when he was 5, and the once boisterous Christmas dinners were no more.

"My parents splitting up was one of the worst things that could've happened to me," Rexing said. "It was a system shock. In that point it felt like everything was crashing

down. That moment was the worst because it led to the other hardships I've had to face in my life."

Despite the hardship that came with his family breaking apart, Rexing continued to look at things in a positive light.

"At the same time, the divorce could be considered one of the better things that could've happened to me," Rexing said. "That kind of gut punch set me up for dealing with hardships."

The self-proclaimed "music aficionado" turned to theater as an outlet for his emotions and hopefully redemption as his home life got more and more complicated.

As a freshman, he got a lead role in a school drama production for the first time. "It was the best thing that happened to me, not only because I got to enjoy the limelight for a moment, but also because I could get over something I'd been struggling with, which was trying to prove myself to others and be respected."

"I realized that the end goal was just to satisfy myself."

The 17-year-old rising senior at F.J. Reitz High School dreams of graduating college, but despite all his setbacks he is already well on his way due to his own hard



FAITH LINDSEY / DUPONT MANUAL HIGH SCHOOL

work, love for reading and writing and the support of his family. When — not if, when — he graduates, he will be the first in his immediate family to do so.

"The thing about me that distinguishes me from my relatives is that they were never the scholastic type," Rexing said. "I'm the only one who's really pursued college. However, I've had a lot of push from relatives on all sides of my family because I've gotten the closest to having a promising college career."

Rexing is always trying to improve himself, a characteristic he believes will help him achieve his goals.

"The reason I get up in the morning is because I'm always trying to better myself so I never get to a point where I feel like there's no reason to even leaving my bed," he said. "I'm always trying to find new things to achieve and that's my driving factor."

As for those Christmas dinners, they still convene every holiday season but the feeling is different.

"Christmas now is separated and it doesn't feel whole but there's still a family Christmas feeling there," Rexing said. "It's still fun, but in a different way."



JALEY ADKINS / BELFRY HIGH SCHOOL

TIANA WILSON

GALLATIN HIGH SCHOOL

BY JALEY ADKINS
Belfry High School

In a hectic world, it is important to have a voice that can be heard and held onto through the chaos. Tiana Wilson has found her voice and makes sure it is heard through her singing and she plans on using it in her future.

Wilson and a friend, Yazmin Venegas, both agree that she is loud and uses this voice to bring people joy.

Wilson has been a member of Gallatin High School's chorus since she was in the sixth grade. The 2017 Christmas performance was her favorite. That performance was an emotional moment for her because she is leaving the chorus to focus on her drawing and painting.

"Everyone was very tearful and sad but also very happy," Wilson said. "There were seniors leaving, too, so everyone was emotional about that. We gave flowers to my teacher. We're all just one big happy family."

Wilson was also a member of the Ladies' Ensemble — a girls' choir for sophomores through seniors.

"That specific group was closest to my heart because we were all so close and that has left the biggest impact on me," she said. "Times like our Christmas party, when we were all together having a good time, is something that I'll always remember."

Wilson tries to inspire people with her voice, but also finds inspiration in other singers, including Ariana Grande.

"She is fearless and makes me want to be fearless too," Wilson said.

Her biggest inspiration comes from her religion, though.

"Finding out Jesus is my anchor" was a life-changing moment for Wilson.

Singer Tori Kelly's song, "Help Us to Love," matches with Wilson's feelings.

"This world is weeping, hurting, broken and begging for change," Kelly sings. "But still we marching, praying, dying, and things stay the same / When will we see? / Till everyone's free / There'll never be peace between you and me God, your love is the cure / For the rich and the poor / God, please will you open our eyes?"

"She's speaking facts and this part can't go unnoticed," Wilson said. "In this song, she talks about how we need to change the world — love instead of hate, and make people happy instead of bringing them down."

Loving and making people smile are Wilson's top priorities.

Her family has also been an influence. Wilson has two brothers, Ananiyas, 11, and Malaki, 7. She also has a sister, Alayzia, who is 14.

Wilson recalled one of her favorite memories with her family. "We were all at my Nana's, sitting on the porch, talking and laughing. I think that would be my ultimate, favorite memory because we were all just having fun and messing around."

Wilson, a rising junior, knows that times like that with her family may become limited since she plans on attending college at Western Kentucky University. She will continue to use her voice to become a Spanish translator and artistic voice as an artist.

"Ever since I was little and watched 'Bring It On: Fight to the Finish' and saw the main character speaking Spanish, I wanted to start taking Spanish classes," Wilson said. "Then I met Yazmin which made me want to start speaking Spanish even more because she speaks Spanish."

"I'm really passionate about it because I have always loved the Spanish culture and language and want to learn more about it."

She also loves drawing and painting but knows it is hard to make that a career. Wilson plans to pursue her art in her spare time.

Wilson said she hopes to live "somewhere shiny," near a beach, very different from where she has grown up in Tennessee.

"It is a very small town," she said. "You cannot meet a new person. Everybody knows everybody."

Wilson said she intends to use her voice to make a difference in her community and the world and to accomplish all of her goals.

"I'll never stop what I'm doing, I'll just keep going and going until I get there."



GEORGIA MALLET/ ELLENSBURG HIGH SCHOOL

White squirrels can be seen on WKU's campus and around Bowling Green, Ky. They are often mistaken to be albinos but they are not.

AANYA AGARWAL

MILLARD NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

BY BRODY REXING
F.J. Reitz High School

"Aanya" is a word Sanskrit in origin, meaning "inexhaustible fire." To Aanya Agarwal, it reflects her burning ambition to make a difference and "unwillingness to stop."

Agarwal was born in Delhi, India, and moved to Chicago with her family when she was 2.

"My dad gave an interview for a U.S.-based company, and he was like, 'There's no way I'm getting this. I'm not good enough for this' — and he gets it."

Three years later, the Agarwals moved to Omaha, Nebraska, while she was in kindergarten.

Although Agarwal left India at a young age, she didn't leave it's issues. Her top priority is to stop the unmonitored and rising number of child brides there.

It is illegal to marry girls younger than 18 in India and violators face jail time. However, men 25 to 30 years older than their adolescent brides regularly force them into binding marriage contracts. Agarwal said the practice continues because young women don't have educational opportunities.

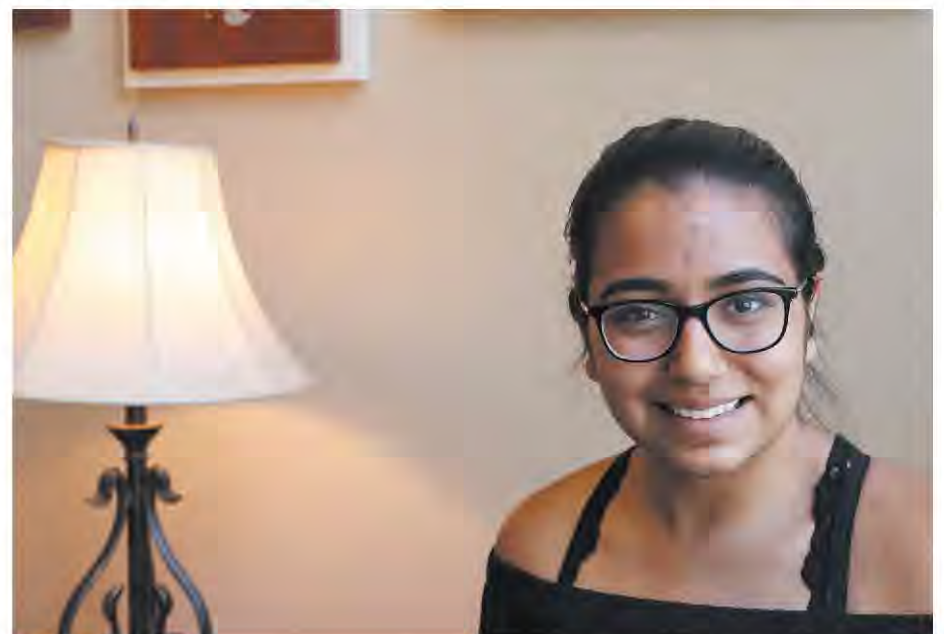
Agarwal said she has watched close friends, including the daughter of her grandparents' caretaker who is her age, fall victim to the child-marriage machine.

"The last time I went to India, I started to realize: If she's my age, why isn't she in school?" Her conclusion was that her friend did not have the opportunity to receive the same education she had.

"In India, private school is basically the only option," Agarwal said. "All schools cost money, unless you want to go to government school, which is nothing like school at all."

Government schools in India are notorious for low passing rates and poor merit.

Her friend's dilemma is mirrored across India, Agarwal said, and her friend's mother could only hope to keep her daughter at home to marry into a stable future.



BRODY REXING / F.J. REITZ HIGH SCHOOL

While her friend will be about 17 when she gets married, Agarwal knows girls far younger facing the same prospect.

"There are girls [in the 6th grade] getting married, and that's terrifying," she said. "I see all of the poverty in India, and I see the problems that kids my age and kids younger than I am are facing."

The dilemma is far from hopeless to Agarwal, though. Through the Xposure Workshop, she hopes to build a website that will bring light to the child bride issue.

Agarwal's own schooling has been blemished by bullying and exclusion which started in elementary school.

While bullies typically halt success, Agarwal drew inspiration from her detractors. "I feel like I kind of have to prove my worth to them and to myself," Agarwal said.

Agarwal aims high: she wants to attend Harvard University to secure a future in either law, medicine or journalism. Her choices are influenced by her desire to help better a world in "terrible condition."

She will be the opinions editor for the Hoofbeat, her school's student newspaper, next year after working as a staff writer in 2017-2018.

"The main reason I joined is because of the whole 'fake news' crisis going on," Agarwal said.

"I was like, 'Can nobody write good news?'" she said. "And then I was just like, 'Fine, I'll do it myself.'"

In addition to taking journalism "into her own hands," Agarwal is a member of her school's debate team, French Honors Society, peer tutoring and volunteer program.

Agarwal is an Indian immigrant, but her story and her work are without borders, titles or labels. Her goal is to speak out against child marriage in India and fight for equality and education for women everywhere.

"I want to make at least one person's life better. If I can do that, I'd consider it a success."

ANNA BRYSON

BOWLING GREEN HIGH SCHOOL

BY CAMIRYN STEPTEAU
Presentation Academy

Anna Bryson wants to make a big impact on the world with her passion for Jesus and love for her Chinese background.

At the age of 7½ months, Bryson was adopted in Hunan, China. Bryson's parents took 12 months, while working through Children's Hope International adoption agency, to get a referral full of pictures and information from the Chinese government.

They traveled from Bowling Green to California to meet with other adopting families. After a 32-hour flight to Changsha, China, they finally had Bryson in their arms.

"Her dad and I couldn't be happier," Anna's mother, Rachel Bryson, wrote in a text message.

She is using her experience as a platform to raise awareness about adoption. She plans to start a campaign called Adoption is an Option, which will financially aid families going through international and domestic adoption.

Bryson didn't think much about being adopted as she grew up and even found herself forgetting that she is adopted at times.

"For a while, I just went on with my life. I didn't want adoption to define my life because I didn't want it to define me negatively," she said.

Bryson's friends and family make it easy for her to forget that she doesn't come from the same background or look the same.

Still, it's sometimes hard for her to look into her background.

"I haven't done the best with connecting back to my Chinese roots," Bryson said. "I feel like sometimes if we try to pull too much, it becomes a racial thing. I don't think that's what defines me. It's God that defines me, not race."

She tries to connect with her Chinese heritage by celebrating Chinese holidays with her friends and family. She celebrated



CAMIRYN STEPTEAU / PRESENTATION ACADEMY

Chinese New Year every year when she was in elementary school. Bryson and her family threw parties in honor of the holiday. Her friends loved celebrating different cultures and learning new things.

"I think the most interesting part is about bringing my heritage back is, I'm learning with my friends; it's not me teaching them," Bryson said.

Not knowing much about her background has been frustrating for Bryson, a 15-year-old rising sophomore at Bowling Green High School. Things can get weird when topics like family trees and genetics come up in class, she said, considering she doesn't know much about her biological parents. Getting in touch with them would be difficult.

"It's from my understanding that the orphanage never came in contact with my birth parents," Bryson said.

She doesn't have much of a desire to

meet her biological parents.

Bryson does want to meet her siblings, though, since she has grown up being an only child. She would like to go back to China as a missionary and visit underground churches in China.

Many religious facilities are hidden to avoid execution, persecution or harassment. "I think we don't know how free we are until we get our freedom taken away," Bryson said.

The most important thing to happen her, though, was becoming a Christian, Bryson said, and God is a big reason she is involved in reporting.

"I feel called by God to do journalism," Bryson said.

She grew up in a Christian household and went to a Christian school for two years, but wants people to know that she chose Christianity because she believes in it.