



La Roche's Festival of Lights offers horse-drawn sleigh rides through the illuminated campus

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Festival of Lights kicks off the holiday season, luring kids and adults alike

BY KRISTEN SPEZIALETTI
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Festival of Lights isn't just about the lights anymore. La Roche has been hosting this event for 22 years, but its name might not be around for much longer.

Brady Butler, Associate Vice President of Marketing and Media Relations, said, "I think most of [the Festival of Lights] will stay the same, but we have been considering on whether to change the name. While the lights are a large part of the festival, there's much more too." He has been involved with this event for six years.

La Roche began hosting the festival in 1995 after partnering with UPMC Passavant's Santa Land, which soon became a Christmas tradition. La Roche and Passavant decorated trees with festive holiday lights and hosted tree lighting ceremonies, parades, sculptors, music, and Santa visits.

Around 2008, Cumberland Road, which now divides the Motherhouse and Passavant, led to Passavant's withdrawal from the event. But that wasn't the end of the Christmas tradition, "We weren't willing to walk away from it," Colleen Ruefle, Vice President for Student Life & Dean of Students, said. Since then, La Roche, the Sisters of Divine Provi-

dence, and the Alpha School have been hosting the Festival of Lights. Ruefle is the "point person" for the Festival of Lights has been working with the event since 1996.

La Roche's clubs and organizations participate in this event by hosting activities and crafts for children. While the wide-eyed children visit Santa and make crafts in the gym, crafters and vendors sell items such as books, jewelry, decorations, and scarves around the college square.

The Festival of Lights has something for everyone, which is why people come back year after year to celebrate the beginning of the Christmas season at La Roche.

The event attracts alumni and their

families, students, and other members of the La Roche College Community. "I think the College continues to host the event because we have a full crowd of alumni, friends and family every year who attend. It's a great way for the College to give back to the community," Butler said.

La Roche used to have another Christmas tradition: the Madrigal Dinner. The Madrigal Dinner was a mediaeval-themed event in the dining hall, where there would be food and entertainment. Students dressed up in costumes and served dinner.

The dinner also involved a show.

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Bradley Gray (left) and Dominique Greaux participate in a meeting of La Roche College's newly-founded karate club © JESS LEE

See page 2 for the full story

The fate of the Writers' Center

Dr. Christine Abbott's retirement stirs up uncertainty among tutors

BY HEATHER RADICK
MANAGING EDITOR

All over the country, writing centers have become one of the most valued resources on a college campus. From undergraduate freshmen to grad students writing their dissertation, writing centers provide academic and

communicative support to anyone open to seeking it out.

The concept of a writing center developed in the late 1940s during the implementation of the G.I. Bill, which offered a range of benefits for returning World War II veterans, commonly referred to as G.I.s. Ben-

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Clubs

Criminal justice club knows whodunit

By JESS LEE

ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

On Nov. 7, a murder occurred in the Ryan Room, and the students of La Roche helped to find the culprit.

The La Roche criminal justice club hosted a murder mystery dinner for students, faculty, and staff. The theme of the dinner was Mobsters, Molls, and Marinara. Seirra Anderson, president of the criminal justice club, said, "this is kind of a tradition [for the criminal justice club]."

The group that performed was Mystery's Most Wanted. The show featured four actors and told the story of the murdered mob boss, Vinnie Vermicelli. Anderson was not sure how the club began to use this group for the dinner, but says they have a long history of performing at La Roche.

Only two participants correctly guessed the culprit. Each winner was given a Starbucks gift card and the runner up, who gave the most creative description of how it was done,



Randy Oliva (left) and Joseph Martinez are actors from *Mystery's Most Wanted*, an improv group whose comedic performances are requested all over the country

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received a Mystery's Most Wanted coffee mug.

"We did this last year. It was suc-

cessful but I wish more students would have come," Anderson said. So far, the criminal justice club has

hosted a murder mystery dinner every year.

Anderson believes the dinner this year was more successful than last year. "We had an equal amount of students to faculty this year," she said. "Therefore, I see it as a success. Usually not many students are aware of this event."

The response to this year's dinner was positive, Anderson said. "A lot of students liked it as well as faculty. The feedback from returners to the event say that it was funnier this year, which I would have to agree with."

Anderson said she isn't sure if the criminal justice club will host another murder mystery dinner next year, but is excited to look into other, different activities to plan.

Anderson said, "This is an event that [definitely] has the potential to grab students from various departments. Student involvement is very important for me. I want the members to have fun as well as learn and this event manages to do just that."

Karate club is kicking into high gear

By LAUREN VILLELLA

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Things have come full circle for Julia Felton.

Felton was about 12 when she earned a first place in a karate tournament at the Kerr Fitness and Sports Center. It was her first visit to La Roche College.

Now Felton, a freshman professional writing and journalism major, has launched a karate club at La Roche. The club began in October and currently has four to five members who regularly attend the hour-long Tuesday night meetings.

Felton said she has practiced the Tang Soo Do style of karate for 13 years. She noted she is a third-degree black belt and a certified instructor through C.S. Kim Karate in McMurray.

"I tried dance lessons and hated them," Felton said. "After one dance lesson I signed up for karate instead. I immediately took to it. I loved it."

Felton said she approached Jeff Dailey, assistant director of student development, with her idea for a karate club. She said she needed to ob-

tain approximately 20 to 30 student signatures in support of the club. Felton added Dailey referred her to Omari Souza, an assistant graphic design professor and kickboxer. Souza serves as the karate club's sponsor.

The club welcomes all styles of karate, Felton said. She added the club's current members have no prior experience.

"We're starting at a white belt, basic level with them and trying to train them up a little bit in Tang Soo Do style," Felton said.

Currently, Felton noted, she teaches members basic blocks, punches and kicks, as well as self-defense techniques.

"It's pretty basic at the moment," Felton said. "If we can get some more people involved, get people to come repeatedly, then we could build up on that and we could eventually teach some more advanced things. Right now we're starting as if you walked into my school and (said), 'I've never done this before and I'd like to start.'"

Club members do not have to



(From left to right) Bradley Gray, Barrington Ratliff and Tray Johnson practice basic self-defense techniques at a karate club meeting

© JESS LEE

bring anything to the meetings, Felton said, although it is ideal if they wear athletic clothing. There are no financial obligations, she added, and club members do not have to join the World Karate Federation.

Felton described the weekly meetings as relaxed, non-judgmental and supportive.

"It's really informal," Felton said.

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Correction:

In our last issue, we incorrectly identified as daisies the flowers recently planted on campus. Those flowers were, in fact, daffodils. The Courier apologizes for the error.

Community

Retiring international studies professor reflects on four decades in the classroom

BY DANIELLE DiNATALE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Donald Orr had a dream, one unlike what most imagine their future to be. He wanted to buy a boat, and live on it for three years. During that time, he would work around the British Islands. And when he was finished, he would then take his boat and sail around the world.

Instead, he did the one thing he never wanted to do: he became a teacher.

Now that he's planning to retire, Orr reflects back on what brought him to La Roche, and all that the college has taught him.

Born in Malta, a small country

made of two islands situated in the Mediterranean Sea, he graduated from St. Aloysius College at the age of 18. At 19, he taught literature for high school. He then attended the University of Pittsburgh and studied economic and social development. He has been teaching here at La Roche for 40 years.

La Roche College is a far cry from Orr's dream of living out on the sea. In fact, he was never meant to be teaching in the first place.

"I came here through a series of mishaps," Orr said with a laugh. "It was purely an accident."

Originally, in 1978, he was waiting to see if he would get a contract for a job in the British Virgin Islands in economic development. The job would pay \$45,000. The problem with this job was that he was not guaranteed that the bid on the contract would be successful.

During this wait, Orr said he had hit a rough time in his life. Going through a divorce, he needed a job to pay the bills. While studying at the University of Pittsburgh, a friend asked if he would teach a spring semester at La Roche College. He accepted, needing a job, and, to his surprise, enjoyed it. The college asked after the semester if he would apply for full-time. At a crossroads, he had two options: wait to see if his contract went through, or take the teaching position.

In the end, Orr chose teaching. He said, "If it's good for you, you have to do it. If you do it for the money, you'll be miserable."

For Orr, teaching was what he needed, and the classroom, he added, was an oasis. At the time he started, he was depressed. But being in the classroom brought him relief.

"It was like wearing an overcoat," Orr said. "When I entered the classroom, I could take the overcoat off."

The college itself is a place that Orr commends for its atmosphere. The La Roche community describes itself as a place that is accepting of all backgrounds and beliefs. To Orr, the college holds up to that mission. He said that La Roche is a place of value.

"People here really try to do the right thing," he added.

Since starting here in 1978, Orr has witnessed the college go through many changes. Overall, he said that the college has changed for the better, especially due to the international program. He added that he thinks the

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"Some students have an old wisdom. Sometimes they have different takes on something that I wouldn't have thought."

- Donald Orr

International desserts spotlight diverse customs and culture

BY KRISTEN SPEZIALETTI
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On Nov. 14, the college center was filled with Chinese almond and pineapple cakes, Vietnamese bánh khoai chiên, Saudi Arabian basbousa, and traditional desserts from 11 other countries.

This event, Global Day: A Celebration of La Roche's Many Cultures, was part of La Roche's new International Education Month.

Previously, La Roche hosted International Education Week, but devoting a whole month gave students a better opportunity to showcase their cultures.

"This year we are excited to brand November as International Education Month and continue these popular programs beyond a single week. The activities included are designed to build a greater global understanding and strengthen the cultural awareness of the full campus community," Emily Markham, Assistant Director of Global Engagement, said.

According to Sister Veronica Kim, Assistant Director of International Student Services, there are about 300 international students on campus. That's 20 percent of our students.

"To international students, this is a home. They have good friends here," she said.

This is why November's cultural events are important to the community. "Our diversity is beautiful. We learn from each other," Sister Veronica said.

Students, faculty, and staff participated in these events by preparing and eating food, teaching and learning about different cultures, and hosting events on campus. "[International students] learn how to open their culture, their mind and their heart," Sister Veronica said.

Senior psychology major Sijal Mokhtar is from Saudi Arabia and wanted to participate in this month's events "to show people from around the world a part of Saudi culture."

Ly Nguyen, a junior international management major from Vietnam said, "by [participating] in [Global Day], I had the opportunity not only to learn more about other countries, but also to share with others a little bit about my country."

SEE DESSERTS, PAGE 9

Sister followed a singular path to religious life

BY JULIA FELTON
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Sister Donna Tracy, a member of the Sisters of Divine Providence Congregation, was 19 years old when she decided to dedicate her life to God as a religious sister. Her decision to join a religious community, however, came in an unconventional manner.

Tracy said that when she was in elementary school or high school, she would have denied the call to become a sister. The reason she became a nun was actually thanks to her sister. Tracy recalled that one day, she found her sister writing a letter to the Mother Provincial at the Sisters of Divine Providence congregation, inquiring about joining the community. She told her sister to add her own name to the letter.



Sister Donna Tracy (above) co-founded Deborah House, a convent that benefits single mothers

© JULIA FELTON

Tracy and her sister entered the community on the same day. Tracy

SEE SISTER, PAGE 10

Accomplishments

IT students earn chapter recognition

BY JESS LEE

ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

CompTIA Association of IT Professionals (AITP) awarded La Roche College's AITP chapter with the Student Chapter Outstanding Performance Award (SCOPA) along with awards in two other categories.

According to current President of the AITP, Jigar Prajapati, to qualify for the SCOPA award, the chapter had to submit an excel sheet of the AITP events that were held and participated in. The leaders of the conference analyzed everything and gave points for each event.

The criteria for the SCOPA award give points in the following categories: education, membership, public relations, meetings and association participation. The La Roche chapter exceeded in three of the five categories, the primary faculty advisor of the chapter Michaela Noakes said.

Prajapati said, "Winning this award means we will get more members. We try to set an objective each year and we want people to come to our events. We focus on giving students IT exposure. Computers are a basic skill everyone should know so our club is open to everyone, in any

major."

The previous AITP president, Joe Malachosky, and the current Vice President, Johnny Nicholson, put the report together.

The two additional awards won by the chapter were in programming and networking, according to Prajapati.

In the Programming Competition, the participants were Prajapati, Antonio Munoz, and Hemang Sharma. The participants in the Networking Competition were Angela Cisneros, Mohammad Sohail, and Kenneth Swegman.

"I don't want to forget the team

behind the club's success, such as our faculty advisors," Prajapati added. "I want to thank all the student members that are continuously supporting us. I also appreciate the entire La Roche College community for supporting us."



(From left to right) Dr. Christina Bahm, Angela Cisneros, Hemang Sharma, Mohammad Sohail, Jigar Prajapati, Antonio Munoz, and Kenneth Swegman. La Roche's AITP club qualified for an award © JESS LEE

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Man on the Street

*Entertainment Editor Jess Lee asked students:
“What would you name your autobiography?”*



Name: Suron Tomlin
Year: Junior
Major: Neuroscience
Quote: “Chronicles of Ron.”



Name: Kailee Burfield
Year: Freshman
Major: Child and Family Studies
Quote: “The Short Chronicles.”

Name: Sam Terry
Year: Junior
Major: Computer Science
Quote: “Journey of a Soccer Player.”



Name: Morgan Zubasic
Year: Junior
Major: Professional Writing and Journalism
Quote: “The Complete Series of Morgan Zubasic’s Failures.”



Name: Derrick Izumi
Year: Sophomore
Major: Performing Arts and Dance
Quote: “Bold and Brash.”



Name: Ashley Waltz
Year: Junior
Major: International Affairs
Quote: “The Confessions of a Book Addict.”

Interested in joining our staff?

The Courier is always looking for new writers and photographers.

Contact either Lauren Vilella or Heather Radick for more information on writing for the Courier.

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Writing

NaNoWriMo members share month-long project's challenges and insights

BY LAUREN VILLELLA
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

During the month of November, speedwriting takes on a whole new meaning.

November is National Novel Writing Month, or NaNoWriMo, a project that challenges participants to write a novel in 30 days.

Since 2014, La Roche College has hosted a National Novel Writing Month Club. Dr. Joshua Bellin, Ph.D., founded the club the same year Simon & Schuster published his debut novel, "Survival Colony 9."

This year, Dr. Bellin said, the club has 15 members, which includes himself, students, alumni, a faculty member and a staff member. Dr. Bellin noted this number of participants is an all-time high for the club.

Sade Valderrama, a junior communications major, said this is her first time participating in NaNoWriMo. She said the experience has thus far been positive and described the project as a riveting challenge.

"It's like you're racing against yourself," Valderrama said. "It's you versus time. Nobody else."

Kathleen Kenna, a freshman literature major, is also participating in NaNoWriMo for the first time.

"I really like to write," Kenna said. "I've had a few ideas in my brain and I thought this was a good way to really buckle down and get to work."

Kenna noted she aspires to be a writer or professor and views NaNoWriMo as an opportunity to improve her writing.

Valderrama said she has always enjoyed writing as a hobby. She noted she is a resident assistant and decided to re-introduce writing into her life during self-care training.

"As an RA, we learn a lot about self-care and they tell you you should always have something, like a hobby, that when you're feeling stressed you can do," Valderrama said. "I used to write in high school and I kind of fell out of it."

Writing can have therapeutic benefits, Valderrama added, because it requires a person to focus on one task.

"During the day you've got thoughts in your head, people are tell-



(Clockwise, from bottom left) Heather Radick, Susan Snow, Danielle DiNatale, Isabella Wallace and Angela Irene are members of La Roche's National Novel Writing Month Club. © DR. JOSHUA BELLIN

ing you things, you're thinking about deadlines," Valderrama said. "When I'm writing I can just sit down and focus on this one point, or this one character, and then when it's done I

feel like, 'I'm back to reality now.' But at least I got that time to myself."

For NaNoWriMo, Valderrama not-

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Veteran journalist encourages students to unleash, foster their inner storyteller

BY SARAH HEFFERIN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Gardeners always want to share their secrets.

Doug Oster is currently the home and garden editor for the Tribune Review. He came to share his secrets with a group of journalism students at La Roche College on Nov. 9.

"Gardeners always want to share their secrets," Oster said, "fishermen never do."

Oster used his life so far to show students how to become better writers. He shared the secret that everyone has a story, and every story is special.

Oster's resume is long, beginning with an interest in photography and an education at Kent State University.

"I fell in love with photography very young," Oster said. "I had a great science teacher; she let me have two quarters of independent study where I just worked in the dark room instead of going to science class. I was in fifth grade, and that was how I really got the bug."

Oster recalled a trip to Washington D.C. in eighth grade, where he took photos of Arlington Cemetery. His mother entered one those photos into a contest, and he won an award.

At Kent State, he joined the local

paper as a photographer. When another company bought that paper up, Oster said that his workload doubled.

"I all of a sudden became the photographer for five papers, which meant I didn't get any days off. After two years of that," Oster said, "I asked for two days off a week and they declined. They gave me one day."

Oster moved from paper to paper, because he said he could never get enough of it. In 1998, he said he moved to Pittsburgh where he became Picture Editor for the Post Gazette, where he managed a team of photographers.

Along with photography, Oster's passion for gardening grew. He recalled spending his spare time writing about gardening, which was a topic that he explained he enjoyed from the very beginning.

Oster said, "I had always gardened with my mother. My oldest memory is of my grandmother taking care of her tomato plants."

Oster said his passion for gardening took over, as he began to write more and more about it. Oster started his own radio show, and his articles on gardening exploded with popularity at the Post Gazette. They had to move him from the photography desk

to something bigger.

Gardening was his new, full-time job.

Oster spoke of his experiences on TV along with the radio and his documentary titled "The Gardens of Pennsylvania," which won an Emmy Award.

But, as a garden writer, Oster came to speak in front of the students to share his secrets with aspiring journalists.

Journalism is not for everyone. Oster stressed that to love journalism, one must like working with people, because they are what give the journalist their stories. The secret to becoming a great journalist is loving the job, Oster said.

"You should be doing this (writing) because you enjoy it," Oster said. "I've been doing this since 1979 and I really love what I do."

Student journalists may feel limited because of their confinement to campus; however, stories exist everywhere. Oster said to never miss an opportunity, and to constantly search for new and exciting stories to be told.

"The number one thing to know when you're going out to do any kind of story is that everybody has a story," Oster said. "It's your job to find it."

Along with this, each story must be special, Oster said. He has known colleagues and other writers that just write to get a certain quota out, not really caring about what they are writing.

Oster said, "They (the articles) can't be special if you're just cranking them out. No matter what it is, I'm going to make that thing special. Whatever you're writing, the challenge is to make it good, to make it great, to make it better than anyone else could do."

One of the most important things a writer can do to write a good story is to get on a personal level with anyone they are interviewing, Oster advises.

It is about the conversation between two people, and the story it produces.

"I'm a storyteller, not a writer," Oster said. "My greatest strength is to go in and sit down with somebody and get to reveal things they wouldn't normally reveal."

It is always important to know that not everyone will agree with everything a journalist puts out there, Oster said, but when there is a sense of accomplishment after finishing something, they should feel that they did something right.

This Day in History

Sarah Hefferin remembers past events...

This one took place on Dec. 1

BY SARAH HEFFERIN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Dec. 1, 1955 – Rosa Parks, an African American woman, was arrested in Montgomery Alabama for refusing to move to the back of a bus.

At the time of her arrest, buses were divided into colored and whites-only sections and the whites-only section was filled. After being asked several times to vacate her seat for a white passenger, she refused and was arrested for her defiance.

Parks had gotten involved with activism in 1943, when she became the acting secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or the NAACP. Founded in 1909, the NAACP is a biracial organization that advocates for the justice and rights of African Americans.

Through the NAACP, Parks sat in on many cases where African Americans were falsely accused of crimes, with the most notable being the murder of Emmett Till.

Parks' resistance on the bus in Alabama is considered by many to be the beginning of the Civil Rights movement, which was followed directly by the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

On Dec. 5, 1955, over 35,000 handbills were distributed to every African American in the area which read: "We are ... asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial ... You can afford to stay out of school for one day. If you work, take a cab, or walk. But please, children and grown-ups, don't ride the bus at all on Monday. Please stay off the buses Monday."

Many took part in carpools that

day, rode in cabs, or walked, even though it rained.

The years that followed were bittersweet for Parks and her husband. While she became a figurehead for the Civil Rights Movement, she lost her job at a department store and her husband quit his after he was forbidden to speak about the events involving his wife.

Parks continued to work within activism for as long as she could; she worked until she began to suffer from

diverse student body, there are celebrations of diversity everywhere, and teachers who continue to fight for the inclusion of outsiders.

Candace Okello, a professor and the head of diversity and inclusion at La Roche, finds it imperative to discuss diversity not only in a college setting, but in a worldwide setting as well.

"(Diversity) is the acknowledgment, celebration, and respect of differences. I think people are kind of

ferent.

Okello said, "I think segregation existed because of the unwillingness to accept difference and that's why we still work today to be more inclusive, and to be more diverse, because of this history of separating races, ethnicities, and genders."

To truly understand diversity, one must teach about the wrongdoings that occurred because of segregation, Okello said. The two go hand-in-hand.

"It is imperative that we do understand the history of segregation and that connection (to diversity)," Okello said.

Okello spends her time teaching the topic of diversity and inclusion to students and helping them to understand the impact they can make if they participate.

Part of her advocacy for the issue comes through the showing of "Films for Thought," where Okello shows a movie rooted in history every month that focuses on an issue stemming from oppression or racism.

"People think we're so distant from our history and what has happened then in terms of segregation and racism," Okello said, "but yet we still experience some of that today. So, to bring in a film to highlight that and bring a discussion from that, I think has been helpful for students to kind of see it and be a part of the conversation and to recognize what is their role in helping to forward this agenda of inclusion and social justice."

Even in the classroom, Okello tries

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*"(Diversity) is the acknowledgment, celebration and respect of differences. I think people are kind of scared of the word diversity because they're scared of what's different and what's outside of their norm."
- Candace Okello*

health problems due to old age.

Those messages of separation and racism were prominent throughout the Civil Rights movement, and people fought for equality and the celebration of diversity and acceptance for that fact.

With racism and hatred still being serious issues in the world today, many argue that there is more to be done, and more ways to celebrate being different and human, rather than segregating those who are.

At La Roche College, with such a

scared of the word diversity because they're scared of what's different and what's outside of their norm," Okello said. "I think that's something that we need to embrace because that's the beauty of it – to understand and get to know someone who doesn't think like you or look like you."

Looking back at a time where people of different races were segregated, solely because of the color of their skin, the United States experienced a lack of diversity because most people failed to see the beauty in being dif-

Karate, continued from page 2

"It's not like your typical drill sergeant. (I cover) basic techniques, trying to get everybody to learn a little. Not everybody is necessarily athletic, not everybody has experience. I'm not worried about that. It's meant to be fun and relaxing."

Felton noted she began practicing karate around age 6 and credited it with helping her break out of her shell. The benefits of karate, she added, are both physical and mental.

"I definitely think it teaches a lot of respect and discipline," Felton said. "(It has a) focus on things like etiquette. I think there's a lot to be said about dedication, determination. It takes you like four years just to get your black belt. So if you really stick with it, you really have to learn some patience, perseverance. I think it's a really good confidence-booster."

While karate is an individual event, not a team sport, Felton noted, it can have social benefits.

"You're not going to get that etiquette and that discipline and that respect and that self-confidence run-

ning on a treadmill by yourself," Felton said. "That whole group mentality and learning martial arts – I think that really contributes to a mental aspect you can't get from just anything."

She added people may be surprised at the impact karate can have on individuals' overall well-being. She noted karate can enable individuals to thrive in areas aside from physicality.

"It's beneficial and I think people may be surprised by how much you could see the benefits of karate transfer into other parts of your life," Felton said. "It boosts confidence, it's good for respect, it's good for discipline. It's not just punching and kicking. When you have those positive qualities that you gain from karate and you see that, it's going to translate into your academics or your job searches and your personal life and relationships."

The karate club meets every Tuesday from 7 to 8 p.m. in the upper



Julia Felton (right) demonstrates basic blocks and kicks to Bradley Gray (left) and Barrington Ratliff

© JESS LEE

dance studio of the Kerr Fitness and Sports Center. Felton said she

plans to continue holding karate club meetings in the spring 2018 semester.

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“Actors and actresses dressed as the characters of King Goldwyn, Queen Columbia, Princess Vista, and Prince Morgan will mingle about the crowd,” a 1994 Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article said, “Following the reception, guests will cross a ‘moat’ into the dining room where they will be served a full-course medieval meal.” The actors and actresses were La Roche students, alumni, faculty, and staff.

This tradition ended in 2004 so that La Roche could focus on the Festival of Lights and allow students to have more fun.

There have been international tree displays, live performances, and tree lighting ceremonies that did not withstand the test of time. However, there are things that have remained over the years, such as carriage rides, vendors, and fireworks.



(Above) The dining hall decorated for the Madrigal Dinner

© COLLEEN RUEFLE

“The event attracts people for different reasons. Some like to browse the craft tables and purchase gifts. Others like the choral music and car-

riage rides. Children love the activities set up in the Kerr Fitness Center,” Butler said, “and who doesn’t like fireworks over campus? The

event brings the community together and kicks off the holiday season.”

Center, continued from page 1

efits included dedicated payments of tuition to attend college or vocational school, and consequently colleges all around the country saw an influx of adult students seeking to complete their education.

Non-traditional students like veterans often had to be reintroduced to basic writing models, and required additional support outside what was learned in the classroom. Thus, the writing center was born.

Through the years, writing centers have evolved to become safe spaces for all who strive for improvement and crave dialogue with other community members. Since 1999, La Roche College has boasted its own Writers’ Center, helmed by Dr. Christine Abbott, a PITT graduate who worked passionately in writing centers all throughout her academic career.

When she entered La Roche as an English professor, the college did not have a writing center, and Dr. Abbott was determined to fix that immediately. She saw a large population of international students that needed supplementary support that basic tutoring could not supply.

Since then, Dr. Abbott has created an environment dedicated to both learning and teaching where students of all ages and disciplines come for anything from semester-long guidance to individual proofreading sessions.

After nearly 20 years of service, Dr. Abbott is retiring from her position as director of the Writers’ Center. “I have lots of plans,” she said, looking forward to beginning a freelance editing business once her time with La Roche is over.

While students and faculty alike will miss Dr. Abbott’s cheerful exuberance, the Center is eagerly preparing for a new director to take her place come 2018.

Additionally, the Writers’ Center will be moving from being an amenity under the English department to a branch of Student Academic Support Services. Marie Deem, the associate



Kristen Spezialetti (top) and Lauren Ranalli both utilize the Writers’ Center in a variety of ways © HEATHER RADICK

dean of academic affairs for student academic support services and the facilitator of this transition, said that while some things may change in the center, student and staff tutors will remain an integral part of creating and living out the Center’s mission.

“It depends on the vision of the new director,” Deem said, but she is confident that whoever secures the job will only amplify the legacy that Dr. Abbott has left behind. A legacy that, according to Deem, “epitomizes life-long learning.”

Dr. Abbott firmly believes that learning does not stop after graduation. Rather, it continues across a lifetime, and is most poignant when shared with others. She said she hoped this message has been absorbed by those who spend time in the Writers’

Center.

“Writing is a craft,” she said. “It’s hard work.” Deniz Laurent, a senior majoring in psychology, said he has been coming to the Writers’ Center at least once a week for the past four years. He said that he has tirelessly worked to improve his writing skills, because good writing habits are necessary even for those not

majoring in English studies.

“[The Writers’ Center] has brought out my full potential,” Laurent said. He is not the only one who finds comfort and support at the Writers’ Center; in November alone, the Center saw 169 students between eight tutors.

Considering the sheer intensity of love and dedication that Dr. Abbott has poured into the Writers’ Center, tutors wonder if new leadership will fall short. “Change is inevitable,” Deem said. “When someone retires, it’s time to rethink some things.”

“I trust Marie,” Dr. Abbott said. “I don’t think [the new director] will dramatically shift the direction of the Writers’ Center.”

Student tutor Lauren Ranalli agrees.

“I have faith that the next person chosen will be more than qualified to fill Dr. Abbott’s shoes,” she said.

One thing that will remain the same, Deem assured, is the Writers’ Center commitment to collaboration. “SASS is very team-oriented,” she said. “It is important to me that integration happens.” The nature of writing is inherently communal; because it is a vehicle for communication, it must always be in conjunction with the ideas and perspective of the people who wield it. As such, teaching writing requires a certain level of cooperative understanding that Deem will not sacrifice.

“When I’m teaching others,” said Derrick Izumi, another student tutor, “I’m also learning myself.” This open reciprocity is an aspect of the Writers’ Center that has inspired such loyalty in its tutors, and commitment to excellence even through large changes.

“The Writers’ Center is my favorite part of La Roche,” said Kristen Spezialetti, a senior student tutor. She will be spending her last semester at La Roche under a new director, and, while she said she has grown comfortable with Dr. Abbott, she will not put any less effort into her work nor will she resist adjustments.

“Ultimately,” said Deem, “we all want the same thing; student success.” If the student body’s positive reviews about the Writers’ Center are any indication, student success is its first priority, and the overall consensus among tutors is that it will continue to be.

Dr. Abbott might be leaving the Writers’ Center, but she is not taking it with her. “The Center is alive and well.”

Desserts, continued from page 3



Exchanging cultures has become an integral aspect of campus life

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Ly Nguyen (above) shared Vietnamese sweet potato fritters with her community

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Sijal Mokhtar serves Saudi Arabian sweets

© KRISTEN SPEZIALETTI

Nguyen made Vietnamese sweet potato fritters for Global Day and was pleased that students, faculty, and staff were so willing to try it. After the first hour of the event, the fritters were gone.

November was filled with other events, like Global Game Night, Food Truck Fest, Sushi Cooking Class, and Study Abroad Thursday

“We are proud of our increasingly diverse and global community at La Roche,” Markham said, “Internation-

al Education Month is a great way for us to embrace our global identity and provide international students with a platform to share their cultures in a unique way.”

One of the major events was the Global Problems, Global Solutions conference that focused on the “progress, plans, and initiatives related to the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals,” according to La Roche’s Nov. 1 press release.

Throughout the week of Nov. 13-

17, the conference examined health care as a social justice issue. The sessions included a panel on “Strengthening Health Care for Pittsburgh’s Underserved,” and a Keynote Address titled “Health Care: An Issue of Social Justice?”

Sister Veronica said she wanted this month’s events to educate domestic students about different cultures and “open their hearts and their minds” to increase cultural awareness and global citizenship.

The events also included “Coffee From Around the Globe” and “Tastes of the World” throughout the entire month.

Additionally, 10 local families hosted 18 international students from La Roche for thanksgiving dinner.

Sister Veronica stresses the importance of making international students feel comfortable, welcome, and safe at La Roche. “We try to be their mom, their home, their friend,” she said, “like their family members.”



Korean culture was also displayed

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“We are proud of our increasingly diverse and global community at La Roche.”
- Emily Markham

Sister, continued from page 3

stayed. Her sister did not. Tracy said she still teases her sister about the unique way in which she entered the community.

Once she became a sister, Tracy said she felt she found her call.

She had not always felt called to become a religious sister, though. As a matter of fact, she said she had previously believed she was called to be a missionary. Tracy recalled that she had always been excited when missionaries would speak about their work.

"I always had the great heart to be a missionary," Tracy said.

During her 61 years as a nun, Tracy has spread that love. She worked as an elementary school teacher, she

worked in parish social ministry, and she advocated for social justice issues.

Tracy co-founded Deborah House, a repurposed convent where single mothers from poor economic backgrounds could come together. They lived in the home, where they were given support as they raised their children. Deborah House also offered resources to help these women find employment.

When she reminisced about the work she did with Deborah House, Tracy called it "one of the greatest things I ever saw happen in my lifetime."

Tracy said no matter what kind of service she was involved with, she always loved being part of something

larger than herself.

One of Tracy's most recent positions was working as the volunteer coordinator for Providence Family Support Center. She said she often recruited La Roche College students to volunteer.

Tracy still advocates volunteerism for college students. "When a volunteer opportunity is offered," Tracy said, "try to do it."

Though Tracy said she loved vol-

unteer work, she admitted it is not always easy. Still, she encouraged students to overcome their fears, try to find new ways to get involved in the community, and find social justice issues about which they are passionate.

For La Roche College students, Tracy offered an encouraging message. She said, "To me, the great hope is that you would use your four years to become more aware of how you could change the world in the future."

"To me, the great hope is that you would use your four years to become more aware of how you could change the world in the future."

- Sister Donna Tracy

Orr, continued from page 3

college especially improved due to the Pacem In Terris program. Established in 1993, the program brought students from war-torn countries to study at La Roche.

"Before, most students were from Northern Allegheny," Orr said. "There were many close-minded people. Now students are exposed to so many different people and cultures. It's fantastic."

In his opinion, La Roche does its best to discuss important topics and combat those closed-minded thoughts. Orr said La Roche Experience classes such as Economic Justice are great examples of how the college tries to make students more aware of the world around them.

"They can make an impact in the right hands," Orr said. "The more you put in, the more you get out."

While Orr has spent much of his life teaching here, he said that if he had the chance to go back, he wouldn't change anything. Instead, he would make the same decisions, but try to do better. He said that he would be more demanding of his students, and not let them shortchange themselves.

Orr added he would also work harder to instill a spirit of inquiry and curiosity in his students. In his opinion, professors, and colleges themselves, sometimes put too much emphasis on students going to school in order to get a job. They miss the point of schooling completely.

"You get an education to get an education," Orr said. "Not to get a job."

Although he is the teacher, the students have taught Orr over the years

as well. He said that through his students he learned to be more patient.

"The biggest lesson they've taught me is that what I say doesn't always make sense to others," Orr said. "And that was a hard lesson to learn."

Students have also taught him, he added, to not assume that a group is all the same.

"Some students have an old wisdom," he said. "Sometimes they have different takes on something that I wouldn't have thought."

In a similar way, Orr tries to impart knowledge onto his students other than the subject that he's teaching. Never a fan of conformity, Orr said that he'll often go off on tangents during his lessons, but they're all meant to teach his students something beyond subjects of economics, which many students find boring.



Different cultures come together to eat some fantastic desserts. (First row left to right) Dipina KC, Sister Veronica Kim, Ashley Waltz, Jaynil Patel, Isabelle Wallace, and Neemu Sherpa, (second row left to right) Dung Thuy Tran and Ly Nguyen.

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"That's the fun of it," Orr said with a smile. "I like to weave things in when the time is right."

While Orr has enjoyed his experience in teaching, he said that it is time for him to move on. No longer dreaming of living life at sea, he now has a new dream to fulfill: living in Malta. Orr said he bought a house back in his home country, where he plans to spend eight to nine months of the year. There, he said he plans to take part in activities he enjoys such

as writing, playing music, and taking walks.

"The hardest part will be the psychological adjustment," Orr said. "You work your whole life saving for when you're old. Well, now I'm old. So now it's going from accumulation to depletion. But I'm looking forward to it."

Orr plans to retire in May 2018.

NaNoWriMo, continued from page 6

ed, she tries to write 1,000 words per day.

"It is very difficult," Valderrama said of the balancing act NaNoWriMo requires. "The first four days I was meeting my 1,000 word count, but then I started getting assigned projects, so it's been harder to (reach) 1,000 words. And then if writer's block is there, then I really don't know what I want to write."

Writer's block, Kenna said, is one of NaNoWriMo's frustrating elements. She said she aims to write for 30 minutes to one hour each night, but has had some days where she doesn't write at all. Kenna added people and elements of nature, like the moon, can provide her with writing inspiration.

"I'm definitely a big people-watcher, so that definitely helps me out with a lot of stuff," Kenna said. "Nature always puts me in the mood."

Valderrama said she likes to write to movie soundtracks, such as the "Wonder Woman" and "Transformers" soundtracks. She said she finds soundtracks helpful because there are no lyrics and the varying tempos can encourage writing production or relaxation.

"If you think of movies, those are stories as well," Valderrama said. "So their soundtracks or scores have to match what they're trying to convey out to the audience. So that's how I feel when I'm writing. Whatever I'm listening to, I'm matching the energy that I'm putting into a scene."

Another challenging aspect of NaNoWriMo, Valderrama said, is maintaining confidence in one's novel.

"I may think my story is great, but then as I'm writing it I'm thinking, 'Are other people going to like it?'" Valderrama said. "I think staying confident in knowing that your story is good, your material is valuable – that really can be a challenge to the whole thing."

Valderrama described her novel as a teen romance drama. She added she would like to continue editing and revising it after November concludes, and she has not ruled out the idea of publishing.

"I'm basing it around that coming-of-age time," Valderrama said. "The two main characters are 16

and 17-years-old, they're young, it's like first love. But then I decided to throw in a little plot twist to make it a little dramatic and something to keep somebody reading it."

Kenna said she would also like to edit, revise and possibly publish her NaNoWriMo novel, which she described as realistic fiction. NaNoWriMo, she added, can provide aspiring writers with a solid starting point.

"I think it's nice to have some foundation to start with," Kenna said. "Especially since Dr. Bellin said the novel he just got published ('Freefall') was a project he had worked on. I was like, 'Wow. Dreams do come true.'"

Diversity, continued from page 7

to bring in that social justice conversation into what she teaches, because everyone has the right to learn and benefit from diversity.

“Whatever major you are, how are you going to bring social justice into what you do? Are you going to be the problem, or part of the solution? I think that’s the question that needs to be asked,” Okello said.

Long term, Okello would like to see students take action in promoting diversity. As a teacher, she hopes to inspire and empower her students to become the change that the world needs to see.

Okello said, “I want to see students more so take the lead on (diversity discussions). I can always do programs and have conversations and dialogue, but I want students to be the ones to take hold of the responsibility of being a part of it too. I want to see students facilitate the dialogue and plan the programs and do social justice work outside of the institution.”

As she inspires others to make a difference, Okello knows that all change in the right direction is good, no matter how big or small. Like Rosa Parks, small changes have the ability to spark something that has the po-

tential to change the course of the diversity conversation, Okello said.

“I think sometimes we think that in order to move the needle and make a big impact, we need to do something big,” Okello said. “What (Rosa Parks) did was, she sat on a bus and refused to move, recognizing that she is just as welcomed there as anybody else. And it was that small action that made a huge impact, like to shift history and move forward the trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement.”

Rosa Parks set an example that Okello hopes to follow. As people who have the ability to make chang-

es in how other groups are treated, Okello said it is important to continue the activism of Rosa Parks. Students can make a difference by fighting for equal rights, and promoting diversity and inclusion in everything that they do.

“If we don’t continue this work, we will shift backwards. In some ways, (racism) has never gone away; it’s resurfacing and showing itself in different ways,” Okello said. “So, unless we continue the work, we will just be telling all those who have fought for us to get to this point that their work was in vain.”



The diverse La Roche community spent the month of November demonstrating the unique foods and and ceremonies of various international cultures, including Korea, Japan, China, and Vietnam. (Front row left to right) Emily Markham and Sr. Veronica Kim, (second row left to right) Mohanad Zahrani and Ly Nguyen, (third row left to right) Shai Wudkwych, Teylor Cargo, Muath Alotaibi, Natasha Garrett, Jeon-Ghye Chae, Cynthia Ncuti, and Minhyun Kim, (fourth row left to right) Justin Hsieh, Ryusuke Kobayashi, Jaeyong Chang, and Tran Chi Duc Bui © SARAH RODGERS



(From left to right) Sijal Mokhtar, Maha Alrajab, Hind Al-Manjoomi, Shekhah Alrasheed, Maram Alghamdi, Razan Basalem, Mayisah Mokhtar, and Deema Aljanady offered a taste of Arabic food and dance during International Education Month

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