

Northampton campuses raise mental health and suicide prevention awareness

By: Kayla Gerard, Staff Writer

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, with World Suicide Prevention Day taking place on September 10. It's not only a time to focus on ways to prevent suicide, but also to honor the memories of those who have tragically lost their lives due to struggles with mental health.

On Tuesday, September 23, NCC's Pocono campus hosted a panel discussion to speak on mental health and its importance of recognizing the signs. Speakers from Fruitful Seeds Counseling, LLC talked about their backgrounds in counseling and therapy. Their most frequently mentioned topic was the comparison between mental and physical health.

Each member of the panel noted that one's mental health is just as important as one's physical health. They used an example of someone with a broken arm, and how they would likely discuss it with a friend or family member, explaining how it's affecting their day-to-day lifestyle. On the other hand, if that same person is having a bad day, they are not as likely to talk about it as they would with their broken arm. The example helped demonstrate the importance of opening up and not feeling ashamed to talk about one's own mental health.

Additionally, NCC's Bethlehem campus hosted its own mental health presentation on Thursday, September 25. The presenters, Nan-

cy Solomon and Jessica Keith, discussed the different signs of someone struggling, including verbal and nonverbal cues and behavioral changes.

They talked about negative self-talk, neglecting to take care of oneself, or even sleep and appetite changes. Recognizing these cues can be the first step toward offering support or encouraging someone to seek help. If there is any concern about someone, a gentle check-in can make a big difference.

To raise awareness and funds for suicide prevention, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter is hosting its annual Out of the Darkness Walk in Allentown on Sunday,

October 5. Everyone is welcome to take part in the walk to honor friends and loved ones lost to suicide, connect with survivors, and support the foundation's goals to raise awareness to mental health.

Participants can register on Northampton's official website by visiting the events calendar.

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health, talk to a friend, a trusted adult, or a counselor. You can also contact the National Suicide Prevention Hotline by dialing 988, or you can contact the Crisis Text Line by texting "HOME" to 741741.

Hispanic Heritage Month kicks off at NCC with annual flag raising

By: Tiffany Judge, Staff Writer

On Thursday, September 18, NCC's Hispanic Caucus hosted the annual Hispanic Heritage Month Flag Raising Ceremony in the Quad, held in collaboration with the Counseling Office, the Center for Community, Equity, and Inclusion, and the Office of Student Life, Leadership, and Development. The event offered attendees music, food, and community, as well as an opportunity to learn about the rich history of Hispanic Heritage Month and the plans for its celebration on

campus.

The Hispanic Caucus at NCC is a voluntary group of individuals dedicated to promoting Hispanic culture and advocating for the inclusion and success of Latinx students and staff on campus and in the local community.

The day's festivities centered on the raising of the Hispanic Flag in the Quad. The Hispanic Flag was first developed in 1932 by a Uruguayan Army captain to represent the unity of Hispanic people across

the world.

However, despite its long history and global reach, the flag is still not widely recognized, even within the Hispanic community. "That is part of what makes today's event so meaningful," said James Colon, MHSC, Associate Professor, Counseling and NCC Hispanic Caucus Co-Chair. "Here we take time to learn, time to reflect, and time to celebrate together."

continued on page 7



HACC members raise the Hispanic Heritage flag in NCC's Quad
Photo by: Tiffany Judge



**Spartans Volleyball
off to hot start!**

See pg. 3



**NCC's 9/11
Rememberance!**

See pg. 8



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By: Amelia Kafka, Staff Writer

McKinley Dixon – “Magic, Alive!” (Jazz Rap) - 5/5

An absolutely magical experience from front to back. With a live jazz band that has all the energy of the best hard bop outfits, a rapper with a mountain of charisma, and features from equally talented underground hip-hop voices such as Quelle Chris and Ghais Guevara, Dixon’s latest effort is unquestionably his best record to date. What truly pushes “Magic, Alive!” over the edge, though, is the songwriting. An unfiltered celebration of life, culture, the beauty of nature, and the perseverance of humanity, this is a fittingly magical listening experience from front to back. In an era where countless gifted emcees are making waves in the underground, perhaps none can wear their heart on their sleeve quite like McKinley Dixon can.

Wednesday – “Bleeds” (Indie Rock/Country Rock) - 4/5

North Carolina’s indie rock favorites of the 2020s return for what is arguably their most consistent and personal record yet. The country influences are dialed up (though never to an obnoxious extent), and Karly Hartzman is at her absolute best as a songwriter and vocalist alike. A thorough exploration of love, pain, life, and death, “Bleeds” immediately ranks itself as one of the most literate records you could get your hands on in recent months.

Deftones – “Private Music” (Alternative Metal) - 3.5/5

Coming five years after the disappointing “Ohms” in 2020, Private Music is a welcome return to form for these shoegaze-and-metal-fusing legends. The walls of sound and dense guitar tones that Deftones fans have come to expect are here in full force, but with a renewed sense of purpose that can be seen in emotionally powerful climaxes and impressive production from the band and Nick Raskulinecz. It may not win over any new fans, but this is Deftones doing what they do best and doing it well.

Maruja – “Pain to Power” (Experimental Rock) - 2.5/5

After a series of much-hyped EPs starting in 2022, Maruja’s first full-length album feels like a massive let down for the music nerds following their jazz-influenced post-punk sound. While the instrumentation may still be relatively impressive, the songwriting leaves much to be desired. Platitudinous lyrics that feel like a half-baked attempt to move the listener with meaningless slogans ripped straight from Hallmark cards makes the listening experience an utter chore.

Ed Sheeran – “Play” – 2/5

A relatively tepid collection of unremarkable pop songs. There isn’t anything there that will make you keel over with sickness just from hearing it, but maybe that would be preferable to reality: that you won’t remember a single one of these tracks the moment after they end. You could do a lot worse than Ed Sheeran, but you’d be hard-pressed to find a mainstream pop album less fun to listen to in 2025 than “Play.”

First of its kind: Northampton partners with Influxer for first NIL deal in Region XIX history

By: Jacob Sweitzer, Editor-in-Chief

On August 25, Northampton Community College and the athletic department announced its partnership with Influxer, a name, image, and likeness (NIL) company that specializes in providing income opportunities and supporting futures for student-athletes.

Founded in 2022, Influxer has worked with over 500 colleges and has over 40,000 active athletes. The brand provides athletes with the opportunity to use their school’s official branding and sell personalized merchandise using their last name and number.

As of the signing of the deal, Northampton is one of only a few Division III junior colleges (JUCOs) with an NIL deal, and they are the only school in the NJCAA’s Region XIX with one.

Athletic Director Troy Tucker mentions that Influxer will likely sign with the remaining colleges in Region XIX soon enough, but for now, the Spartans are the only

school region-wide that gives athletes the opportunity to monetize their name and market themselves.

“I think this is one of those things that separates us from other junior college athletic programs,” remarked Tucker. “We just won our tenth Champions of Character Cup, more than anyone else in the region, we travel by charter bus. It doesn’t mean other programs can’t come here and beat us in something, but it just means the way we do things is at a slightly higher level.”

To access their personalized merchandise, athletes were given a QR code which brought them to Influxer’s sign-up page. From there, athletes can customize their bio and the products they wish to sell. Products range from t-shirts, hats, sweatshirts, tank tops, tote bags, mugs, and even jewelry.

Spartan fans can access athletes’ pages through the Influxer website by searching for the college or an athlete’s name. The college and the

athletes get a percentage of revenue generated from their merchandise.

As of September 16, fifty Spartans across all nine sports have created portals on Influxer. While their income is confidential, the athletes and the college get a small percentage of revenue from every product sold.

The possible income an athlete can earn is limitless, and while it becomes taxable income after \$600 earned, Influxer sends the tax information to the athletes and then handles the rest for them.

“The fact that [Influxer] was geared towards the smaller collegiate athletic programs, I think that was what bought me in,” said Tucker. “They were super genuine and responsive.”

While the partnership is between Influxer and the college itself, athletes have complete control over their page and their marketing.

The number of profile views, purchases, and total revenue is com-

pletely in the athletes’ hands, something Influxer highlights as a goal of their brand. “The kids jumped into it and figured it all out on their own,” said Tucker. “They’re fully in control of their own thing; it’s not like your typical fundraiser.”

Influxer’s mission is to help all student athletes navigate NIL by presenting income opportunities, providing professional education, and supporting a future beyond college athletics.

The department and everyone involved feels great excitement about the partnership, and it comes at a time when the Spartans are seeking regional and national-level hardware. Tucker and the athletic department look to move the needle any chance they get, and with this partnership coming before any of Northampton’s rivals, the Spartans have once again gained a step on the competition.

Women's volleyball begins season red hot, looks to sustain success

By: Mitzy Orlic, Contributing Writer

In the pre-season, the Northampton Spartans women’s volleyball team “received votes” in the NJCAA’s Division III national poll. Only 18 out of 99 schools were either nationally ranked or received votes. Last season, the women’s volleyball record was 16-7, their lowest mark since 2021. As of week four in 2025, Northampton Community College is ranked eighth in the country, and holds a record of 12-0.

The Spartans’ women’s volleyball team is stacked this season. They have thirteen players: three outside hitters, three middle hitters, two opposite hitters, one libero, one setter, and three defensive specialists.

“New team, new attitude, and great girls that just want to leave everything on the court once they step on it,” assistant coach Frankie Santiago stated.

The Spartans lost six of their ten players from last season. The incoming freshmen have a lot of pressure to bring improved results to the team this year. Head Coach Rachel Aquila did a great job recruiting

nine incoming players. Two of the nine are incoming sophomores.

“The recruiting process this past year was a mix of looking at and staying on top of certain players and having players reach out to us with interest due to the previous seasons we have had since I started coaching,” said Aquila. “The recruiting process for women’s volleyball is always hard in this state because every school has a program, so it has been about trying to figure out the best way to sell my program, my goals and promises as a coach, and everything that we have to offer here at Northampton.”

Mitzy Orlic and Isabella McDonald, defensive specialists, Alyssa Eilenberger, opposite hitter, and Lexi Womack, outside hitter, are the only returning sophomores this year. When asked what she thinks will be the toughest battle the Spartans will face this season, Isabella McDonald answered confidently, “Nationals. Especially with the harder teams we usually don’t play during the regular season.”

Alyssa Eilenberger spoke on what

she is most excited for this season, “I am most excited to grow with the team and keep winning games so that we can keep our national ranking and make it to nationals as the end result.”

Last season, Northampton fell short to Harrisburg Community College during the NJCAA Region XIX East District Semifinals, and they did not receive an invitation to the NJCAA Division III National Tournament.

Sophomore Lexi Womack is determined to go to the tournament this year. When asked what the team needs to change to make it further in the postseason, she answered, “By communicating and pushing through the hard teams. No matter how many mistakes, errors, or bad calls are made, 0-0 mindset all day.”

The Spartans have 12 remaining matches in the regular season until the Region XIX playoffs begin on October 25. Should the Spartans continue their dominance against region opponents, the playoffs will take place at Spartan Center, giving Northampton a great home-court

advantage as they look to bring the Region XIX championship back to Northampton.



Lexi Womack sets up for a kill in Northampton's match against RVCC
Photo by: Onias Richardson

Falling from grace: How Spotify may be losing its indie musicians and young fans alike

By: Amelia Kafka, Staff Writer

Spotify may seem like an immovable titan of the music streaming industry for those who were not around during the days before their existence. Recent revelations regarding CEO Daniel Ek’s investments in AI-based military technology as well as a mass exodus of users and artists may be just the first sign of the status quo being shaken. In 2021, Daniel Ek’s venture capital establishment, Prima Materia, invested well over 100 million dollars into the German business start-up, Helsing.

Helsing was founded the same year by Torsten Reil, Gundbert Scherf, and Niklas Köhler. While specializing in developing AI-based military and surveillance technology, the company has faced backlash for its mission of instilling AI

into these settings. Detractors have claimed that their focus on incorporating AI into preexisting military technologies decreases the amount of job openings in those fields. But increases the already volatile nature of military weapons, while further expanding the surveillance state on a global scale. While these investments, which have only continued since this first donation, were largely made behind the scenes, and became publicly known after several reports on them in May 2025.

In June, the initial wave of artists removing their work from Spotify began with indie rock veterans, Deerhoof. They were quickly followed by several acts of equal and higher caliber alike. The lists of artists who have removed their work from the platform now include King

Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard, Xiu Xiu, The Mynabirds, Hotline TNT, and several others. Shared amongst these names are awards and accolades such as the Australian Recording Industry Association’s Award for Best Hard Rock/Heavy Metal album and several iterations of Pitchfork’s Award for Best New Music.

This is not the first time that musicians have removed their works from Spotify. Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, and Radiohead’s Thom Yorke have all done similar things in the past for reasons unrelated to Ek’s investments. This will be the first time that artists have begun to cite the platform’s CEO as the specific reason that has caused them to abandon the service.

With the world’s most popular

streaming service in turmoil, many smaller artists have developed strong reactions to independent artists pulling their music from Spotify. Experimental electronic music artist Wendy L., known for her artistic pseudonym “Girl Show F*** Factory,” had thoughts about the platform’s future when asked. “I don’t necessarily think that Spotify is going to completely go belly-up,” the largely anonymous composer said, “but I do think that this is a changing of the tides for streaming services.”

She continued, “Even just as a musician myself, I can tell you that I’m not the only one who thinks that this could make Spotify lose a lot of its userbase.”

continued on page 6



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Quad Fest returns for successful day of club recruitment and student involvement

By: Kalei Pietraszkiewicz, Deputy Editor

The social networking hub, bond-starting event, and absolute star of Fall semester events, Quad Fest, returned to NCC on September 4. With over a dozen tables, many fascinating clubs were able to present what they offer to the student body. Behind the scenes, much coordination and preparation went into making this year's Quad Fest shine. Student Life outdid themselves with another outstanding representation of the energy at NCC. In addition to the upbeat music and delicious food, the Quad was filled with eager students ready to learn about the wide range of extracurricular activities our campus has to offer.

Miles Molerio, Assistant Director of Student Life, Leadership Development & Student Clubs, shared a glimpse into what it was like putting Quad Fest together this year. "Club sign-ups were early last semester," he shared. "We worked with facilities to make sure we had enough tables, and food services to provide the food." And to build the anticipation, promotion was key. "In the days leading up, we do a lot of advertising. We have a student, Kelly, who handles our social media and does an amazing job getting the word out."

Even once the event began, the work didn't stop. "We're checking people in and making sure the map is accurate, so clubs know where to set up, and delegating tasks to ensure everyone has what they need," Molerio explained.

He exuberantly described the atmosphere of the event. "I love the

energy that people have here. I think the most important thing students can get out of this experience is finding their communities and their people on campus, so they feel more connected to NCC."

For many clubs, Quad Fest is more than just a promotional opportunity—it's an outreach to the students to build relationships and communities across campus. Many club leaders expressed their enthusiasm for the semester and shared why getting involved is important to the college experience.

Ayla Skubera, Phi Theta Kappa (PTK)'s Public Relations officer, encouraged students to involve themselves. "Students should get involved because it's really fun, and a great way to make connections and make a lot of friends."

Carol Renna and Alix Gonzalez, Secretary and Co-Editor/VP of The Laconic, NCC's literary arts magazine, shared their outlook on clubs shaping social and emotional well-being. "It's a really good place to find your social group," said Renna. "Clubs create a safe place to try new things."

Gonzalez added, "A lot of times, as life gets busy, we tend to isolate ourselves in our dorms or houses... Quad Fest is a great way for all of us to interact with each other. At the end of the day, [students] need community and a space where they can go to maintain their mental health, make sure they have a group to support you, and keep themselves occupied in ways that may advance their

professional career."

Rafiek Key and Alexis Lehmann, President and Treasurer/Secretary of the Film Club, highlighted the opportunities that club involvement can offer. Both began as members just last semester and have since stepped into leadership roles. Reflecting on Quad Fest, Key shared, "Everyone interacting with one another definitely has to be my favorite part of the day."

Students walked away not just with flyers and free goodies, but with new connections and a stronger sense of belonging. With a semester full of opportunities ahead, Quad Fest once again sparked the momentum for students to get involved, build community, and make the most of their time at NCC.



Students and current members of NCC's Pride Club set up their table at Quad Fest
Photos by: Marcia Young



Two students speak to officers of the Women's Club of NCC, showcasing the importance of involvement at Quad Fest



An overview of NCC's Quad during Quad Fest as students learn about clubs and organizations on campus, and clubs recruit their newest members

From page 4

"I've taken my music off the platform for the same moral reasons that King Gizzard and Xiu Xiu did, but everyone else who's a part of my music—my manager, my fellow producers, and all those people—wants to jump ship because they don't think the benefits outweigh Ek's investments." It is not surprising that many favorite artists are stepping away from the platform.

Meanwhile, Apple Music has seen a non-stop rise since the controversy surrounding Daniel Ek's investments became public. In a recent report, the service had increased to nearly 100 million concurrent subscribers. This is up from 88 million users in 2023. While Spotify still has a significantly large userbase (626 million users), Apple Music's rapidly expanding userbase is not hard to correlate to the time in which Daniel Ek's controversy was first circulated amongst news outlets.

In terms of age demographics, Apple Music's 18 – 24-year-old user

base has increased from fifteen to seventeen percent since 2023. Once again, this change seemingly lines up with the investments of Spotify's CEO and the time they were made known to the public.

Only time will tell if Spotify falls from the pedestal that it currently sits upon in the music streaming service sphere. There is increasing evidence to show that it will be losing some of its younger fanbase who are switching over to the service's biggest competitor. Apple Music still has quite a way to go before it even manages to achieve a close second place behind Spotify's success, but the reality is it's currently gaining the most traction it has ever seen before. If larger names with an equal appeal to younger demographics wind up leaving Spotify, it could have a devastating effect on the streaming service that removes its once seemingly immortal place in the lives of almost all young music fans.

Lehigh Valley Wicked Plant Fest returns for fall edition

By: Riley Happel, Contributing Writer

On Sunday, September 14, plant enthusiasts gathered at the ArtsQuest Center in Bethlehem for a day filled with music, food, and, of course, plants. The Lehigh Valley Wicked Plant Festival, a bi-annual event, is organized by The Wicked Botanist, Dawn Ash.

Ash, who owns a plant nursery and gardening shop in Bethlehem, has built the festival into a community celebration that blends local artisans, plant vendors, and entertainment.

This fall's festival featured more than 30 vendors. Attendees browsed tents offering crocheted masterpieces, quilts, handmade clothing, candles, pet care items, and a wide variety of plants.

Shoppers wove through the tents with armfuls of ferns, bonsais, cactus plants, and more. For those nervous about keeping a plant alive, air plants offered a low-maintenance option.

Plant selections ranged from small 3-inch air plants to towering 10-foot exotic species, including monstera. In addition to shopping, festival goers could enjoy snuggling with baby goats or watching a pop-up drag show with three up-and-coming queens.

Food was also a highlight, with three food trucks offering a mix of cuisines, alongside a coffee bar and a banana-based ice cream truck.

Festival goer Miranda M., who also attended the spring edition of the event, compared the two. "I came for the spring fest earlier this year, it was very similar except there weren't any pumpkins for sale," she said, laughing.

Others came after discovering the event online. "I love plants and the whole gardening aesthetic," said attendee Katy T. "I saw an Instagram post and was like, 'I have to go to this!'"

Miranda added that what makes this festival unique is the sense of shared passion. "I think it's different because it's people who all have the same passion for nature and the beauty of growing something with your own hands."

With pumpkins, exotic plants, and plenty of surprises, the Wicked Plant Festival continues to grow each season. For Ash and the Lehigh Valley's plant lovers, it's already clear: spring can't come soon enough.



A tent at the LV Wicked Plant Festival
Photo by: Riley Happel

The stories that save us:

A column exploring how sharing our hidden struggles brings us closer

By: Dante Lorenzo, Staff Writer

This story contains material that some readers may find troubling.

I believe we are more alike than not. People like you and me experience things that all humans deal with. It sounds like a simple concept, but you'd be surprised just how many people think they are alone in all this.

Over the last century, the western world (the one you and I live in) has become obsessed with individualism and the self. We praise and even seek to be different from the people around us. Perhaps you got the best score on your test, or you were the first in your family to get a degree. We are constantly focused on what sets us apart rather than what brings us together. No one wants to talk about the things that are not publicly admirable or sought after. No one wants to talk about the epidemic that has plagued the western world - dare I say the word shame.

What happens to the person that went for the job promotion, but didn't get it? Or what do you feel behind closed doors when that plan doesn't work, or you question your ability? What does it feel like when your best friend gets married before you, or your parents don't approve of the person you're with? What do you do when these really big emotions that are fueled by what is seemingly unsuccessful come knocking at your door? The answer is that most people let it pile up while they continue to pretend that things are okay. If you're really lucky, you'll find the courage to isolate yourself and become one with the big emotions that you don't know what to make of.

So what is ultimately the problem? What is causing people like you and me to stay silent about things they are embarrassed of, or things they think would make themselves outcasts?

"If you put shame in a Petri dish, it needs three things to grow exponentially: Secrecy, Silence and Judgement." - Brene Brown

In my personal journey and years of study, I've found that shame has become one of the greatest battles of the human mind and experience.

The fallacy that shame perpetuates is that we are all alone in this. In fact, shame makes us believe there is no one else on the planet that deals with the things that we deal with. It tells us that in the dark we are safe and no one will judge us for our shortcomings. It reminds us that people are meant to be great in the public eye and that we shouldn't show signs of unknowingness or weakness. Shame holds hands with guilt and brushes shoulders with fear in an attempt to silence our humanity.

To be human (as we all are) is to be imperfect. Humanity is to sometimes fall through the cracks because we were built that way. It is to share our humanity with others because we can and should. When I think about shame at large, I find myself thinking about community. It is no secret that we are meant to live communally, and if that is true, we are meant to be human together in all ways. To lift one another up through accountability, love, and care, and I feel this is executed best through storytelling. I'll share a personal story with you:

Back in September 2023, I was in an inpatient center after attempting to take my own life in Grass Valley, California. I'd gone out there to do my bidding while I looked at the California sunset (my dying wish). I stayed about two weeks while I convinced myself it was the right choice to make. I wouldn't have been leaving behind much. I don't have kids, and my family didn't talk to me much at all. I felt alone most days, even before I'd gone to Cali. I was living in Philadelphia for the last couple of years and felt there was nothing for me there either. I hopped on a flight from Philly to Chicago and took a train from Chi-Town to Sacramento. I tried my hardest to deprogram myself from doing what I did, but I couldn't help but think I was alone in this. I would occasionally want someone to talk to. But I quickly decided that nobody would understand what I was going through.

continued on page 7

From page 1

The Hispanic Caucus has hosted celebrations like this for more than three decades, adding the annual flag raising 15 years ago. “It’s been a long tradition,” said Elba Carides, Professor, Counseling and NCC Hispanic Caucus Co-Chair. “Everyone expects it each year. It’s very well accepted.”

The flag features a white background with three purple crosses and a rising sun. The three crosses symbolize Christopher Columbus’s three ships: the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María. The rising sun symbolizes the awakening of the new lands. “Overall, this flag serves as a reminder to us of the enduring strength of the Hispanic people who were born from the blending of different worlds into a powerful shared identity,” said Colon.

Dr. Gina Turner, Executive Director of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office at NCC, emphasized the importance of honoring diversity on campus in her address at the event. “NCC is the largest and most diverse college in the region, and that diversity is our strength.”

According to Turner, 30% of NCC students self-identify as Hispanic or Latinx. “We are extremely fortunate to have an amazing His-

panic Caucus dedicated to supporting our students and we have so much to celebrate today,” Turner remarked.

To continue the presentation, Dr. Millie Roman Buday and Beatriz Messina read Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro’s proclamation of Hispanic Heritage Month in Spanish and English.

The ceremony concluded with members of the Hispanic American Cultural Club (HACC) adding the Hispanic flag to one of the Quad’s three flag poles, where it will remain for the duration of Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs from September 15 to October 15.

Afterwards, participants enjoyed homemade Mexican and Caribbean dishes, cupcakes, and lively music in the Quad.

The HACC has additional events planned for Hispanic Heritage Month:

September 30, 11 AM – Hispanic Trivia Game, Student Life Zone (SLZ)

October 7, 11 AM – On the Road to NCC Panel, Laub Lounge, College Center (2nd floor), featuring staff sharing personal stories, challenges, and insights on navigating higher education.

All NCC students, faculty, and staff are welcome to join in the monthlong celebrations.



HACC members display the Hispanic Heritage flag while James Colon (far left) speaks to its significance
Photo by: Tiffany Judge

From page 6

The moment I stepped forward, the tightness around my neck confirmed what felt like the point of no return. Then the rope came undone. I should have watched a YouTube tutorial before I started. Two days later I found myself in a circle with a bunch of strangers who I didn’t know or looked anything like me. It was what they called an “open circle,” whatever the hell that means. Silence persisted for a minute, or five, until Dusty, a 300lb backwoods blue collar white man, who was in for beating a police officer to a pulp, started to tell his story.

Sentence after sentence, I tried to resist caring about what he was saying. But I couldn’t help noticing that he and I weren’t so different. He talked about how he wanted to do the same thing that I tried. He said he couldn’t do it because he has kids. He talked about how he is afraid to speak out because people don’t want to listen to him, that he didn’t feel safe to have such vulnerable emotions and be such a big guy. He also talked about how much he doubted himself even though he’s accomplished everything that he wanted in his life.

Dusty, without knowing it, saved my life.

He was brave enough to share his story, not knowing if people would care. To this day, I’m not sure what made him share his story, but he did, and I’m here because of him. What happened in that circle was more than just a couple of clinically diagnosed crazies talking about what makes them just that. It was the power of telling stories that built connection, ultimately giving

shame less of an opportunity to intrude.

You see, storytelling is as old a practice as humans are. It’s a tool that we use to connect and empower. Dusty was, is, and will continue to be unique and different, but his ability to tell his story is what brought the circle together.

I believe the more we tell our stories, the more we connect as humans, and the less power shame has over our lives. My goal for this column is to share the stories of people just like you and me. I want to talk about the good, the bad, and the in-between. We live in a world that is becoming more volatile each day. The news stories that we read show how we have similar enemies and not friends. We are constantly thrust into narratives that are fueled by psychologically-engineered stories that are meant to make us angry or divided. That is the antithesis of humanity, and we certainly don’t need more of that.

In each issue of The Commuter, I will be telling someone’s story anonymously. I find that people are more honest when their identities are not attached to the story. It gives the person(s) the autonomy they deserve for the sake of their safety and the authenticity of the story.

If you know anyone who would be a good candidate for telling their story, please contact me at dante.lorenzo@student.northampton.edu.

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NCC and Band of Brothers host 9/11 remembrance

By: Natalina Rigelon, Staff Writer

On September 11, Northampton Community College hosted its 9/11 commemoration ceremony organized by the Band of Brothers organization. Student Veteran Brandon O’Cain performed the National Anthem before the event’s speakers took to the microphone.

Former flight attendants Evelyn Proffitt and Sharon Hogan, 35- and 20-year veterans, respectively, performed a reenactment of the flight crews from that fateful day, as well as shared their stories of being at work the morning of the attacks.

Following the speeches, former Federal Air Marshal Brandon Kehr led a four lap walk in remembrance of the four planes that crashed that day. Proffitt and Hogan, members of the Band of Brothers, and some NCC public safety officers joined in the walk, reflecting upon the spirit and bravery of the first responders and the nearly 3,000 lives lost during the tragedy.

All photos taken by Marcia Young, Staff Photographer.



(From left to right) Collen Hennessy, NCC public safety officers Daniel Luxenberg and Patrick Rudnic, Hogan, an NCC public safety officer, Proffitt, Millie Roman-Buday, SSG Cynthia Perez, O’Cain, Private 1st Class Ronald Young pose after completing the four lap walk during NCC’s 9/11 remembrance



(From left to right) Proffitt, Hogan, O’Cain, Roman-Buday, Alexis Sullivan, and Demetrius Hullen pose with a handmade wreath which reads "We Remember" to honor those lost on September 11



(From left to right) Roman-Buday and her sister, Evelyn Proffitt. Proffitt is a retired flight attendant who worked with American Airlines for 35 years, and worked the morning of September 11, 2001