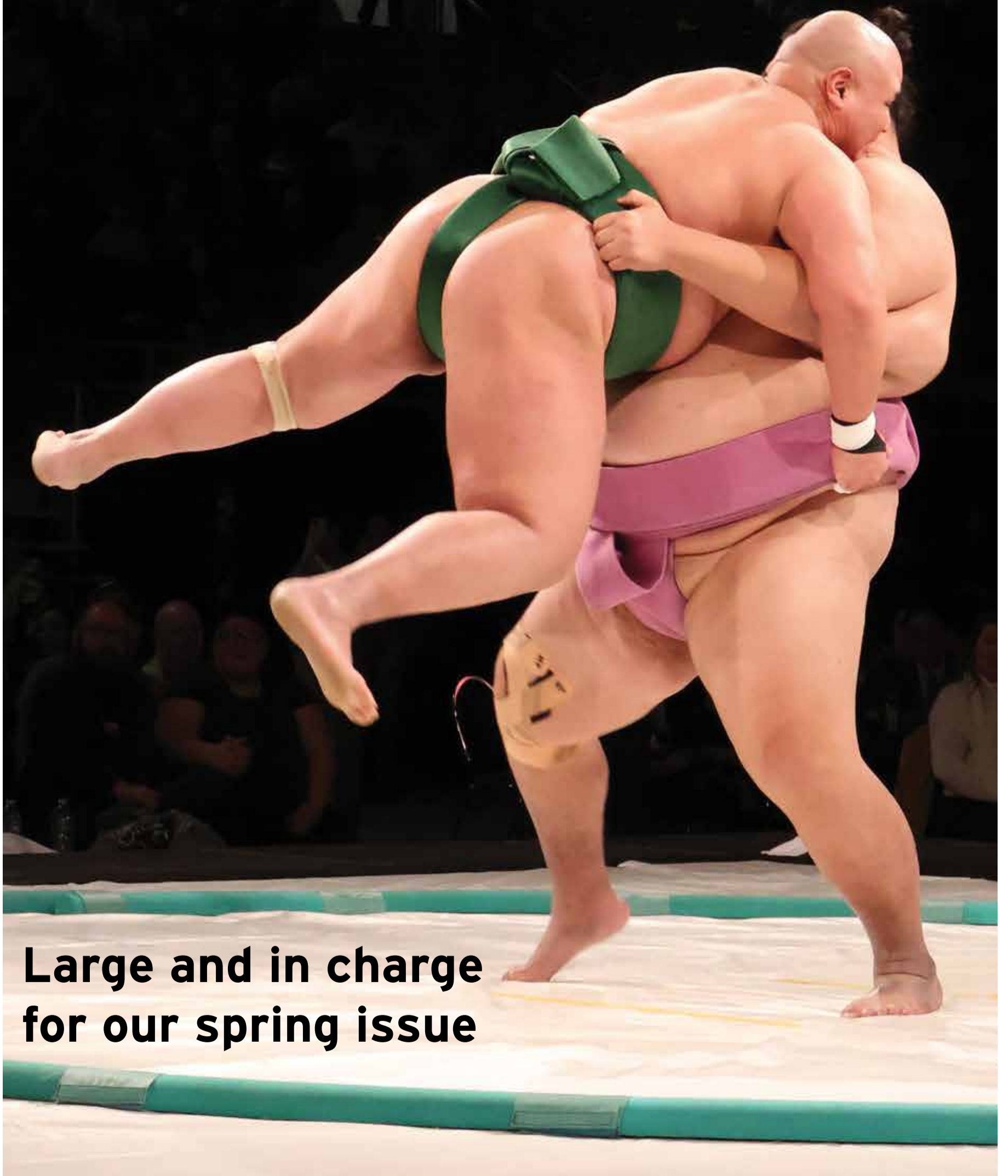


the reflector

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**Large and in charge
for our spring issue**

Calgary Wildlife's Eye for the Wild photo contest returns

Wildlife photographers are putting their cameras to use for a good cause

Serena Kanji-Ramji

Staff Writer

Calgary Wildlife Rehabilitation Society's eighth annual photo contest, "Eye for The Wild," is in full swing. The contest kicked off on World Wildlife Day, March 3, and will run until April 15.

Answering over 8,000 calls annually, Calgary Wildlife is one of six wildlife rehabilitation centres in Alberta, and the only wildlife hospital in the Calgary area.

With over 500 species that call Alberta home, this photography competition is where local talent can showcase these amazing creatures in their natural habitat.

This year's winners will have the opportunity to be featured in Calgary Wildlife's 2027 calendar, as well as in the newsletter, website, and social media. Prizes are offered for the winners of first, second, and third place.

The judging panel for this year is packed with star local talent. The judges include Darryl MacDonald, a Calgary-based photographer whose client roster includes National Geographic; Kyle Matthews, a talented wildlife photographer; and Brian McDonald, an

interactive design instructor and photographer. The panel for this competition sets the standards high for participants.

Changes in the competition

A major rule change comes this year for competitors. Photos of baby owlets are no longer being accepted. According to the official rules document, this new policy is in place due to the possible negative effect that photographing these animals has on both themselves and their nest.

The other rules for participants are simple and regard ethical best practice when photographing wildlife:

-Do no harm and do not disturb animals for a better shot.

-Keep it authentic.

-Photographers are prohibited from luring the wildlife closer to them.

-Follow the environment and wildlife laws.

-Write cutlines and captions honestly

Competitors have to be mindful of law changes based on location within



2025's first-place photo: "Plucking a Dream from the Earth - Richardson's Ground Squirrel" by Tanner Belcourt. Photo courtesy of Calgary Wildlife Rehabilitation Society / Tanner Belcourt

the province and the type of wildlife they're photographing.

Photographers are also required to be transparent about how the photo was taken.

In the photography industry, reputation is

everything. Calgary Wildlife warns that the wildlife photography community will spread news of unethical photography practices quickly.

More in-depth information about this year's rules is available on the Eye for the Wild website.

Beki Hunt, Calgary Wildlife's executive director, says the contest does its best "to promote ethical wildlife photography practices."

"We just want to show appreciation for all of the animals that we are so fortunate to share our spaces with in Alberta," Hunt says. "I think it's something that native Albertans probably take for granted and don't realise that we're so lucky to have wildlife living in our cities and so close to the outskirts of our cities."

Hunt has always been an animal lover. She has been working in her role for four years, but has been involved with the organisation for five years now. She served as a board member for a year before accepting the role of executive director. Before joining Calgary Wildlife, Hunt co-founded the Taiwan

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. It is now one of the most well-respected animal welfare organisations in Taiwan.

Hunt says one of the most exciting aspects of this year's photo contest is the youth category. Youth compete in their own bracket, and every photo must be submitted by a parent or guardian.

"It's the first time we're trying it," she says. "We've had some youths apply in previous years. We didn't know they were underage. We only found out after the fact. But we didn't have any regulations around that, but we thought, why not open this up to have a youth section?"

The point Hunt wants people to take away from this contest is respect for wildlife.

"Just to remember anytime you're out in the wild, or in our urban spaces, to give wild animals the space they need to be wild," she says.

The contest is ongoing and requires a \$15 donation to enter. For more information, head to the Calgary Wildlife Rehabilitation Society's website.



2025's public choice photo: "What Do You Have Mom?" by Melissa Brathwaite. Photo courtesy of Calgary Wildlife Rehabilitation Society / Melissa Brathwaite

International Women's Day at MRU highlights campus leaders

MRU hosts an annual event for International Women's Day to celebrate adversity and discuss change

Karra Smith

Staff Writer



A panel discusses the question of 'what if' during IWD held at MRU. Photo courtesy of Mount Royal University

At Mount Royal University (MRU), International Women's Day (IWD) is recognised as a time to celebrate and learn about leading women within our campus, community, and beyond.

Ross Glen Hall and the surrounding classrooms hosted a range of panels on March 10, with speakers from all walks of life discussing topics including women in STEM, overcoming workplace barriers, mentoring, and more.

Tala Abu Hayyaneh, president of the Students' Association of Mount Royal University (SAMRU) and one of the panellists at the IWD event, spoke about the challenges women face in positions of authority and the need for strong role models within the community and workplaces.

"We also talk about brave spaces and what it's like to cultivate these and allow women to step into leadership not having full answers for everything," she says. "But also embracing messy leadership along the way and allowing other women who have been in leadership for a longer time to lead by example."

For Abu Hayyaneh, IWD at MRU is an opportunity to

share unique perspectives and platform the struggles women face and overcome daily.

"I think women have long proven themselves in many different spaces," Abu Hayyaneh says.

Another advocate for more leading female figures in male-dominated fields is Melanie Rathburn.

Rathburn is a vice dean in MRU's Faculty of Science and Technology. A barrier she has recognised for women entering or looking to enter STEM for the first time is the low representation.

"Sometimes it's a lack of confidence. They might not have mentors or role models who emulate who they are, so they don't see themselves as doing it," she says.

For Rathburn, this is why celebrating female voices and incorporating both faculty and student perspectives is important.

"I think students sometimes have a more nuanced and a more developed understanding of some of these issues than some of the faculty," she says.

Rathburn has witnessed many women in STEM overwork themselves to prove they belong, which she says is understandable but not sustainable.

"You know, you want to do well, you want to succeed, you want to get that right mark. But it's not always about that. It's about the journey along the way," she says.

And Rathburn isn't the only person to recognise this pattern of overexertion, particularly among women.

Liza Choi, an associate

professor in the School of Nursing and Midwifery at MRU and a speaker at IWD, says the invisible workload women carry in addition to their preexisting job description is normalising exhaustion.

For Choi, this day of advocacy is a chance to not only celebrate women but also learn what actionable

steps can be taken to ensure movement in the right direction.

"International Women's Day is a powerful moment to say, strength in community is not a slogan, it is infrastructure," she says.

While discussing the topic of 'Burnout to Breakthrough', Choi says oftentimes the care women demonstrate in their jobs, or schooling, is "exploited as an unlimited resource."

Her lecture focused on the idea that achieving one's goals doesn't mean working to the point of feeling drained.

"When burnout becomes normal, it is not a personal problem. It is a cultural signal," she says.

For many, the idea of burnout means failure, but Choi says this issue is systemic and changing the narrative to focus on strength and growth is the first step in resolving these inequities.

"Breakthrough doesn't mean we fix everything. It means we stop carrying it alone, and we start shifting conditions together."



Women gather to share stories at Ross Glen Hall at MRU. Photo courtesy of Mount Royal University

Smith's proposed referendum raises questions

Non-permanent residents are left wondering what social systems they may lose access to

Karra Smith

Staff Writer



Premier Danielle Smith announced her plans for the referendum, bringing in controversy and questions. Photo courtesy of the Government of Alberta

Many of Alberta's temporary residents are currently left in limbo, with their future access to social systems being left in the hands of other Albertans and Premier Danielle Smith's government.

Come Oct. 19 of this year, residents across the province will have the opportunity to respond to Smith's five-question ballot, which asks whether temporary residents should be allowed to access provincially funded systems, such as education, healthcare and social services.

Although one driving point for the referendum is regaining economic stability in the province, many are wondering how effective these results may be, given that the most recent data collected by Statistics Canada show that non-permanent residents only make up about 5.5 per cent of Alberta's population.

With the referendum looming, not all experts agree with the reasoning behind the ballot. Dr. Rachel Talavlikar, physician and director at the Calgary Refugee Health Clinic, isn't convinced the issue is so black-and-white.

"I find it's a very unfortunate approach to regulate costs and manage

the budget because it's sort of asking or putting questions out to people around whether or not people should have access to social services based on immigration status, it's actually quite a complex system," says Talavlikar.

Smith says individuals in the province temporarily should be treated as "tourists" and permanent citizens should take priority.

"This is what we're talking about—making sure the services are prioritised to the people who've registered a permanent stake in our country and our province," Smith told reporters.

However, Talavlikar questions how many temporary citizens are connecting with these systems.

"But the reality is the amount of services that those people actually, likely access during that period of time is often quite small," Talavlikar says.

And she is not the only one questioning the referendum.

Peter Szigeti, an associate professor in the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta—with a speciality in immigration—says when it comes to profit for the province, he's not totally optimistic with the policy's logistics.

"Whether this is a real and substantial way of saving costs for either Alberta or Canada, really, I have my doubts," he says.

Szigeti says that as of right now, both the federal and provincial governments have concurrent powers

over immigration—a notion many Albertans think should change.

According to a poll done by Leger, 63 per cent of Albertans were in favour of Smith's idea of more provincial control over immigration. The national average from this poll was 65 per cent of Canadians agreeing with Smith's desire for more provincial control over immigration.

While Talavlikar says the "false dichotomies" created by this proposal could be very dangerous, others are calling the entire referendum blatantly prejudiced.

"The level of racism and hate that has been expressed has risen, undoubtedly, and it is aligned with this premier's attempt to pin all of her failings on newcomers to this province," NDP's Rakhi Pancholi told the press.

While tensions continue to rise over the state of temporary immigrants' position within the province, the outcome of the referendum will not be known until after ballots are cast on Oct. 19.



Dr. Rachel Talavlikar works as a medical director and family medicine specialist at the Calgary Refugee Health Society. Photo courtesy of / calgaryrefugeehealth.org

THE REFLECTOR

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EDITORIAL STAFF:

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Contributors: Hermie Ann Ocanar

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Wyckham House
 Mount Royal University
 4825 Mount Royal Gate SW
 Calgary, AB T3E 6K6
 All depts.: 403.440.6268
 Fax: 403.440.6762
 TheReflector@TheReflector.ca

Ranchman's announces relocation after nearly 55 years

Iconic Calgary honky tonk set to shift from Macleod Trail spot

Amy Jaquish
Staff Writer



Ranchman's Cookhouse and Dancehall's current venue on March 10, 2026. Photo by Amy Jaquish

Established in 1972, Ranchman's Cookhouse and Dancehall has been an iconic part of Calgary's bar scene for almost 55 years. But in late February, its owners announced that 2026 will be its last year at 9615 Macleod Tr. S.E.

Until its 2027 relocation to a nearby but not yet disclosed location, the venue will continue to operate, hosting live performances, dance lessons, and Stampede celebrations over the next year.

"2026 will be a milestone year for us," said Wendy Daniel, director of marketing for Ranchman's, in a Feb. 26 press release. "We're planning full calendar concerts, community celebrations, and special events to recognise what this building has meant to Calgary."

Planned revitalisation of the property sparked the venue's move. Spearheaded by Deveraux Group of Companies and Lansdowne Equity Ventures, the property is expected to be replaced by mixed-use redevelopment, including plans for five mid-rise residential buildings built atop ground-floor commercial spaces.

Denis Jones, CEO and president of Deveraux Group of Companies, shared

in the press release that the redeveloped area will be named Ranchman's Village and that by doing so, they intend to uphold the dancehalls' legacy.

"The proposed redevelopment, named Ranchman's Village, is about reinvesting in this section of Macleod Trail Corridor while making sure the character and stories that matter to the community continue," said Jones.

Relocation sparks mixed reviews among residents

The news of Ranchman's relocation has come as a bittersweet moment for patrons like Kaitlin Friesen, owner of Kaitlin Art and Design, who says that the bar held a special place in her heart between the ages of 18 and 22.

"Ranchman's is a very nostalgic place for me," she says. "It was just a really fun place to go. It had a different vibe than going downtown."

Friesen is a local artist who paints iconic Calgary locations. She says that Ranchman's had been on her list of places to paint for a while, and when she finally put the paint brush down, she received the news.

"As I finished it, I saw the

announcement that that building's being torn down," says Friesen. "That was a bit of a surprise. I was really glad that I had chosen to do that one when I did."

Even with Ranchman's continuing at a new location, she feels the old building is quintessentially Calgary, and hopes the new version includes its roots.

"I'm sure they'll keep all the character of it, but it's sad to see that building go," says Friesen. "It kind of feels like an iconic Calgary spot that's been here for over 50 years, I think, so it'll be weird not to see it anymore."

With the bar announcing its move and Friesen finishing her painting, many

Calgarians have expressed interest in supporting her art. She says she finds comfort in providing residents with an outlet to memorialise what the venue means to them.

"I've had a few people reach out to buy a print of that painting, and they met their significant other there or they've had special memories there," says Friesen. "That's been a nice story to hear during the release of that news."

But what exactly makes Ranchman's an iconic place in the city?

History of 'Canada's greatest honky tonk'

According to Brian Brennan, a Canadian author, the bar was originally Bar X-Steakhouse, which, as Brennan described, was "a struggling steakhouse" before being bought by Harris Dvorkin.

When Dvorkin took ownership of the building, he was quick to fire the dining room pianist and replace them with Wayne Vold, a champion saddle bronc rider turned country musician, whom Brennan said brought quite the crowd.

By 1976, Brennan wrote

that the bar was doing so well that it financed millions of dollars toward installing a 250-seat show lounge.

By the 21st century, it had expanded its indoor seating to 1,150, making it the largest nightclub in Calgary at the time.

In its 55 years, Ranchman's has hosted several big-name country artists, including stars like Shania Twain, Keith Urban, Toby Keith, Rascal Flatts, and Billy Ray Cyrus.

Music aside, the bar has been a filming location for several movies and TV shows. Most notably, the building served as a set for both *Cool Runnings* and *Brokeback Mountain*.

Even in its final days, the site is still being used as a film set, with *Cowgirl for Christmas* currently shooting there.

One of the key defining factors of Ranchman's is its embrace of cowboy culture, which they continue to show through their weekly line-dancing lessons, mechanical bull rides, and a local vocals event that spotlights country artists in the area.

Ranchman's marketing director says, "We intend to send it off properly, with our stage active and our dance floor full."



Kaitlin Friesen's painting of Calgary's iconic bar. Photo courtesy of Kaitlin Friesen

Letter to the reader

The Reflector regrets to inform you that factual errors were made regarding the World Famous Gopher Hole Museum's funding model and reason for closure in Issue 8, Vol. 68, published March 6, 2026. These errors have been corrected online and can be viewed at thereflector.ca. We apologise for the error.

A look at Pastafarianism

Canadians are getting a taste of this religion

Julia Finot

Staff Writer

A deity made of noodles and meatballs may sound like a joke, but for followers of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, it represents something deeper.

Pastafarianism is a religion that encourages curiosity, skepticism, and healthy humour while challenging traditional norms.

What began as an argument against American high school education quickly captured global attention and changed the way society views religion.

In 2005, Oregon State physics graduate Bobby Henderson wrote a letter to the Kansas Board of Education expressing his disapproval of teaching intelligent design theories in high school evolution classes.

He argued that if intelligent design were included in the curriculum, they would have to consider teaching another theory: that the universe was created by a Flying Spaghetti Monster.

Henderson did not receive a response from the board, so he posted his letter online, which quickly gained traction and went viral.

The official creation of Pastafarianism occurred when Henderson wrote *The Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster* one year later, a handbook for the religion that outlines its commandments, comparable to an avant-garde version of the Bible.

By the (cook)book

Pastafarians value critical thinking, kindness, personal freedom, as well as humour and humility. They see that



A member of the Pastafarianism religion stands beside someone wearing a Flying Spaghetti Monster costume at a convention in 2007. Photo courtesy of Andrew Guyton / Wikimedia Commons

critical thinking allows for the separation of religious belief from government policy.

Kindness and personal freedom tie into the Gospels' Eight I'd Really Rather You Didn'ts, also known as the Eight Condiments. These phrases are suggestions for Pastafarians, urging followers to treat people with kindness, avoid judgment, and responsibly enjoy life.

Humour and humility encourage followers to laugh, as laughter is a healthy way to respond to the mystery of the universe.

The book encourages

Pastafarians to wear religious attire. Pirates are believed to be the original Pastafarians, so the Gospel encourages believers to wear traditional pirate dress wear as a symbol of faith.

In modern day, Pastafarians wear this attire at formal events, most commonly seen at weddings.

Another thing commonly associated with Pastafarians is their wearing of colanders. Wearing a pasta strainer on their head is meant to honour the Flying Spaghetti Monster and advocate for equal religious representation.

Spaghetti and metaphysics

The entire belief system of Pastafarians revolves around the Flying Spaghetti Monster. It is the central embodiment of the faith, the deity of the Pastafarians, and exists as a complex carbohydrate-based entity consisting of willowy eyestalks, two large meatballs and a multitude of noodly appendages.

The symbol is known among its followers as a kind and benevolent figure, but on a deeper level, it is also intellectual, bringing a sense of spiritual humility and humour to belief.

Followers posit that it created everything in existence, calling it the single reason gravity exists because it holds everything together with its long noodles. Additionally, they believe it is the sole inspiration for the invention of the oscillating sprinkler.

They say that the spaghetti monster is a reminder to everyone that no one has perfect knowledge of the universe, and that curiosity, skepticism, and kindness are more valuable than certainty.

Ahoy, pyrate!

Dread Pyrate Higgs is the captain and ministeroni of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster of British Columbia.

His involvement in the church began back in 2016 after a conversation with a self-proclaimed Pastafarian. Higgs felt that Pastafarian beliefs aligned with his own values and views, inspiring him to commit to the religion.

He said he has always been attracted to philosophy, theology and spirituality, and he has explored many faiths, but none seemed to fit his needs.

"Pastafarian allowed for belief and spirituality that was flexible, like an al dente noodle, that encouraged humility in that we ought not to take ourselves too seriously in thinking we have the one true answer to existence," Higgs wrote in an email statement to *The Reflector*.

His faith encourages questioning, creativity, and community, allowing him to reflect seriously on philosophy and ethics while also enjoying freedom of expression.

"My favourite part is that the religion invites people to combine thoughtfulness with joy and to consider modifying the Cartesian maxim: 'Cogito, ergo sum' to 'Dubito, ergo sum,'" Higgs explained.

This means changing "I think, therefore I am," to "I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am."

Being a Pastafarian in Canada has had some mixed results. While the majority of the community has been accepting of Higgs, the federal government has looked unfavourably on the faith.

"In practice, they have demonstrated a desire to hold up traditional religions as protected institutions, rather than a champion of ideals enshrined under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms," wrote Higgs.

While Pastafarianism began as a satirical response to debate about science and religion, its followers say the movement carries a message beyond pasta-loving pirates. Believers like Higgs see the Flying Spaghetti Monster as a reminder that humility and curiosity should guide people's understanding of the world.

Whether seen as satire, philosophy or faith, Pastafarians continue to spark conversations about belief, freedom, and the role of religion in modern society.



Captain and Ministeroni of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster of British Columbia, Dread Pyrate Higgs. Photo courtesy of Dread Pyrate Higgs

The rise and fall of Duolingo

Examining the marketing pioneer's switch to scrutiny

Serena Ranji-Kamji

Staff Writer



More users are growing discouraged by the language-learning app's use of AI. Photo courtesy of appshunter.io /

Unsplash

After capturing the internet's attention with a green bird costume and unique marketing, the language-learning app Duolingo became a popular online phenomenon—until May 2025, when the company announced it was transitioning to an AI-first model.

With the backlash coming in swiftly and decidedly, Duolingo is arguably facing its biggest PR crisis to date.

Rise of the green owl

In 2021, Duolingo became much more than just another education app—it transformed into a content powerhouse. Spearheaded by the company's former social media manager, Zaria Parvez, it unleashed unprecedented marketing strategies that permanently altered how brands interact with their audiences.

It started with a green owl suit. Duolingo's owl has become an ambassador for its brand. To achieve this, Parvez took a unique approach: she personified the mascot, naming it 'Duo' and giving it a distinct personality.

"He's pure and nice, but with a diva personality," is how chief marketing officer Manu Orssaund described Duo. Orssaund goes on to say that "we've used [these traits]

as a source of inspiration to build narratives and turn him into an influencer."

Create an influencer, the company did. Duo, the mascot's personality, became bigger than life through several marketing stunts. Among the most memorable are the thirsty tweets addressed to English singer-songwriter Dua Lipa, reading, "do you love me back @DUALIPA." A simple tweet that went viral because of its memeability.

Another staple of the Duolingo team's marketing was Duo "jokingly" threatening users to do their daily lessons. Often, this took the form of responding to comments left by followers, such as "it would be a shame if you lost your streak."

The company leaned into the joke of the owl issuing thinly veiled threats, even going as far as to have the avatar of Duo threatening to kidnap users' families.

While the concept of a big green bird threatening to break into your house and kidnap your family may have been dismissed as lame humour from a company trying to be relatable in other circumstances, for Duolingo, it only led to further notoriety.

In an interview with Digiday, Parvez spoke about how she achieved that.

"The way I think about

it, especially when I'm commenting as Duo or creating content as Duo, is Duo is that pushy friend that motivates you," she said. "But we never want Duo to be that pushy friend that makes you hate your existence. He wants you to do well and will always be up in your business. The way to make Duo love you is to do your lesson."

Parvez often generated the most engagement by inserting Duo into trending pop culture moments. In one instance, Duo appeared on the pink carpet at the *Barbie* movie premiere, a marketing strategy that generated over 150 million impressions across social media platforms.

In 2021, the very year Duolingo leaned into "unhinged" marketing, the monthly user base grew from 40 million to 116 million. By all accounts, Duolingo's marketing antics were cementing its status as a pop culture icon.

The great fall

Last spring, the CEO of Duolingo, Luis von Ahn, announced in a LinkedIn press release that they were transitioning to be an AI-first company. While it was shifting how the company was run, it was still, at its core, an organisation that cares about its employees,

and the switch was simply to boost productivity.

"This isn't about replacing Duos with AI," read the post. "It's about removing bottlenecks so we can do more with the outstanding Duos we already have."

As a result of the company's shift towards AI, it laid off around 10 per cent of its contract workers, according to a CNN report.

The backlash was instantaneous—starting in the comments section of the press release.

"Your hypocrisy knows no bounds. I hope more and more people will uninstall your app, which has clearly betrayed its own mission," wrote one LinkedIn user. Another wrote, "My 2,276-day streak ends here."

The criticism wasn't limited to the press release, as it started gaining traction on other platforms as well. In one day, Duolingo lost 300,000 followers across platforms.

TikTok creator Kimberly Online made a video explaining why so many people are upset, saying that when companies move towards AI and openly talk about it, it creates such a strong response from people because "most people aren't stupid enough to mindlessly clap for something that could well enough replace them

themselves one day."

But AI replacing people in Duolingo headquarters isn't the only reason Duo fans were so upset. Fans of both the app and the Duolingo owl persona reacted as if they were personally involved in the situation.

Marketing professor at Mount Royal University, Kylie McMullen, says that when a brand becomes personal with its customer base, in this case by giving the mascot a personality, it can create a parasocial relationship.

People become very attached to the brand and begin to view it almost as a permanent fixture in their lives rather than as an entity they are giving money to.

"You're giving your brand a personality, you're almost anthropomorphizing a company into a singular entity, or an individual, that people can feel friendly towards, or friends with," says McMullen. "Then, when the company does something that a person might disagree with, it feels like a personal affront as opposed to a business decision."

When examining why AI in particular felt like such an affront, she explains, "we imbued this owl with a personality. So to discover that a company is also investing heavily into AI and taken away from that human element and that human touch, from what they do in other angles, it feels disingenuous."

Is Duolingo really dead?

While Duolingo has lost much of its social capital and isn't the pop culture staple it used to be, saying the app has lost most of its users is incorrect. In November 2025, six months after the company's press release, they are reported to still have 50 million daily users.

They also still have a strong social media presence, with 17 million TikTok followers and over four million Instagram followers.

So, in the end, did Duolingo really fall off the face of the earth? The numbers show that it did not. But it remains to be seen whether the company can win back the public's good graces. Maybe one day you'll see a green owl on a red carpet again.

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Bif Naked, unfiltered

New documentary explores the resilience behind the Canadian icon

Anais Loepky

Staff Writer



Bif Naked playing an acoustic set at the Bella Concert Hall this month. Photo by Anais Loepky

If resilience were a person, it would be Beth Nicole Torbert, known on stage as Bif Naked.

The Canadian punk artist has built a career on an unapologetic refusal to back down. Her story is one of survival and turning pain into power. Now, that story is reaching audiences in a new way.

Her documentary, *Bif Naked*, premiered at the Calgary International Film Festival in September 2025, further cementing her place as a Canadian icon.

Now, Bif is making rounds on her Canadian tour. On March 2, she stopped in Calgary for another showing of the documentary, followed by a beautiful acoustic set and Q&A at Mount Royal University's Bella Concert Hall.

Bif's film captures the impact she has had on generations of fans who saw themselves in her long

before they saw themselves represented anywhere else.

"Whether or not she wanted to, she became this icon for girls who wanted to be different," said George Stroumboulopoulos, Canadian broadcaster and media personality, in the documentary.

Turning pain into punk

To understand how Bif Naked became the punk icon we know today, you have to look at the story behind the music.

She was born in India and adopted as a baby before moving to Canada. In her documentary, she talks about the abuse and sexual assault she endured in her early years. She battled an eating disorder, came face-to-face with drugs and experienced more violence than any child should have to.

For many people,

experiences like that could define a life. For Bif, they became fuel.

Music became the place where she could finally let it all out. Bif quickly made her mark in Canada's punk scene with a fearless, tell-it-like-it-is style that fans couldn't get enough of.

Over the years, she built a career that includes multiple albums, international tours and a reputation as one of the most unapologetically authentic voices in punk rock. Songs like "Moment of Weakness," "I Love Myself Today" and "Spaceman" solidify her as a staple of Canadian alternative music.

Breaking into the boy's club

The documentary also explores what it was like for her as a woman navigating the punk scene, a space that wasn't always welcoming.

"In punk rock music, you don't give a f*ck," Bif explained in her film.

But that didn't mean the industry treated her fairly. In the film, she recalls moments that highlight just how difficult the environment could be.

"I was barred from walking on stage," she said on screen. "Bands that we had played on the bill with asked me who I was gonna f*ck."

Rather than letting those experiences silence her, Bif responded the only way she knew how. She would "tell them to go f*ck themselves."

It's that refusal to be intimidated that helped shape the fierce, outspoken persona fans know today. Bif has never been afraid to take up space, speak her mind or challenge the systems around her.

Humour as armour

On the flip side, the documentary also reveals a

softer and deeply human side of her story, particularly when she talks about friendship and girlhood.

In the Q&A that followed the screening at MRU, Bif Naked was asked about her resilience.

"I didn't identify ever as a sexual abuse survivor or as a sexual assault survivor," she said. "Nor did any of my girlfriends."

For Bif and many of the girls she grew up with, coping with trauma didn't look the way people might expect.

"We used to compare notes back when we were growing up," Bif recalled. "And I had girlfriends who would, you know, we would light a smoke and wait for the bus to come and compare notes on terrible events in our lives... we would laugh our heads off literally, and that was our therapy."

In those moments of dark humour and shared understanding, they found something important.

"We felt a sense of belonging, and we found a sense of connection, validation, and almost a sense of community in that way," she said.

That sense of community has remained a defining part of Bif's career. Fans have long connected with her willingness to talk openly about the difficult parts of life.

Her humour, however, is never far away.

More than music

I had the privilege of speaking with Bif myself.

When I asked her what she credits for her strength and resilience, she didn't point to something glamorous or self-ritualistic—instead, she offered a simple and very human explanation.

"I think that you fake it 'til you make it, because there's a lot of anxiety that goes along with being a human," she

said.

That honesty is part of what has made Bif so relatable to so many people. She's never pretended to have it all figured out—and that honesty is something fans connect with.

When I asked her what inspires her to continue speaking out on issues she cares about, Bif did not hesitate. With her usual humour and conviction, Bif explained that "the older I get, the bigger my mouth is."

And that voice has been used to advocate for causes that often don't get the attention they deserve.

"I feel like using my voice where it is needed," she said. "I feel like there are lots of people that make lots of noise for really popular topics. They don't need me."

Instead, she focuses on issues that don't always have the same spotlight.

"There's lots of different causes that don't have a lot of eyes and ears on them. Those are the causes I'm interested in."

Among the causes she highlights were encouraging people to vote, improving healthcare, addressing disability poverty, and advocating for animals.

Still unapologetically Bif

Through it all, Bif Naked has remained exactly what she has always been: outspoken, resilient, and unapologetically herself.

For many fans, that authenticity is exactly the point. Long before conversations about trauma, resilience, and belonging were common in music, Bif was already talking about them—loudly, honestly, and without apology.

OUT'N ABOUT

Indigenous Science Night

Join the Telus Spark Science Centre on March 20 for Indigenous Science Night: Sport, Survival, Spirit. From 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., learn more about ancestral survival knowledge through guided activities and teachings based on movement, community and connection. Visit sparkscience.ca for more information.

Imaginarium Show & Tell

On March 20, explore the historic Lougheed House re-imagined by Recess Calgary. The venue will feature a pop-up display of micro-installations by artists from Recess Calgary's Imaginarium Workshops. Enjoy this 18+ event from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., with more information available at lougheedhouse.com.

Greenhouse Yoga

Hosted by Blue Grass Garden Centre, Mindful Yoga in the Greenhouse is a gentle-flow class suitable for all experience levels. From 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. on March 21, enjoy realigning poses and soothing breathwork in Blue Grass's tropical greenhouse. For more information, visit bluegrassnursery.com.

The Barn Artisan Market

Spring has sprung with The Barn Artisan Market. On March 22 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., the market features two floors of local artisans and vendors, focusing on handcrafted, Alberta-made products. The market offers free admission all day, with more information available at thebarnartisanmarket.ca.

Whiteout thriller *A Killing Snow* blows into Vertigo Theatre

Paul Ciufu's rural mystery turns a snowstorm into a fight for survival

Emma Marshall

Publishing Editor



Vertigo Theatre debuts its latest production, *A Killing Snow*, by playwright Paul Ciufu. Photo courtesy of Fifth Wall Media

Snow starts as a whisper against the windshield. Then it howls.

A rural highway disappears in a matter of minutes, swallowed by white. The lines on the road vanish, sky and ground blurring to one. Driving any further would be unsafe, but it's the middle of the night, and there's nowhere else to go.

Except for a farmhouse in the distance. Its lights are glistening through the storm like a promise.

In *A Killing Snow*, that promise may be the most dangerous thing of all.

The thriller by playwright Paul Ciufu runs at Vertigo Theatre from March 14 to April 12. Performances are at 7:30 p.m. from Tuesdays to Saturdays, with additional showings at 2 p.m. on select weekends.

a person who's a danger to you," he says. "But what do you do against the power of nature?"

The ominous, Latin phrases on the wall are no coincidence either. Ciufu was inspired by his wife's upbringing in Clinton, Ont., where Latin was unexpectedly part of the high school curriculum.

"I really couldn't believe it," he says. "For whatever reason, in this high school in this rural area, the students were taught Latin."

That detail became foundational. The farmhouse owner, Gerald Goldie, was imagined as a retired Latin teacher, a choice that opened the door to references drawn from ancient Roman culture and moral philosophy.

Playwright's past

From aspiring novelist to successful librettist, Ciufu has brought his writing through many media. He says each form begs for something different, but that he fell in love with theatre after moving to Ontario and witnessing the lively scene there.

"I've been open to different writing opportunities, and I'm glad, because it's been really enriching," he says.

This play was first commissioned by Eric Coates for Blyth Festival and premiered on June 25, 2010.

Ciufu explains how each production is different because theatre is a world filled with creatives.

"I don't think you can be overly prescriptive," he says. "Each team of artists... bring a different perspective and a different approach."

This rendition is directed by Tara Beagan, and the cast is five deep, featuring Katherine Fadum, Nimet Kanji, Linda Kee, Andrew Moodie and Bernardo Pacheco.

For all its suspense, Ciufu insists the play isn't without moments of release.

"I think people will find it thrilling and suspenseful," he says. "I hope they'll also find it in spots to be quite hilarious."

Plot, process, production

Set during a brutal Huron County blizzard, the play follows four strangers who take refuge in an isolated cabin owned by a fifth man—a retired Latin and history teacher named Gerald Goldie. As the storm rages outside, Latin phrases begin to appear mysteriously on the walls, and the tension inside the house rises.

"The characters are facing a terrible dilemma: stay in this house with a killer, or venture outside and freeze to death," says Ciufu.

Ciufu notes that when he looks back on the play, "there are 100 ingredients that led to it." The first being a "terrifying" drive home in a whiteout, which he claims is "the norm where he lives."

"I live near the shore of Lake Huron, and these terrible snow squalls come off the lake and make driving really treacherous in winter," says Ciufu.

He was also struck by stories of locals seeking shelter in strangers' homes during storms—a kind of reluctant intimacy forced by Canadian winters. That tension between hospitality and vulnerability shapes the heart of the story.

"It is a realistic play at least you can try to fight against

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Jam-packed: Preserving spaces for alternative youth

Rockin' 4 Dollar\$ shows the importance of care and community

Lacey Holowaty

Staff Writer

The spunky, all-ages event that graces the BLOX Arts Centre's stage every week, *Rockin' 4 Dollar\$*, continues to rack up a sold-out audience with each show. But a growing audience means newcomers who may not be used to the tight-knit alternative subculture that makes up the crowd each week.

Rockin' 4 Dollar\$ history finds its roots in the Maritimes. BJ Downey, founder and host of the event in Calgary, says the event originated by two of his friends in Halifax. Downey moved to Calgary in 2012, and two years later—with permission from his Nova Scotian friends—brought the event to Cowtown.

Each week, anywhere from six to 10 bands have the opportunity to play a 15-minute set in front of a packed and passionate crowd. After each set, bands have the opportunity to hop off the stage and shake hands with the audience in what Downey likes to call a “hockey lineup.”

After all the bands have played their sets, each band has the opportunity to spin a wheel for prizes like free tattoos, skateboards and cash between \$200 and \$1,000.

While the event has solidified itself as a weekly staple among Calgary's young alternative community, Downey's recent appearance on CBC Radio has made way for an even larger audience. For the past five weeks, the event has sold out within 40 minutes of doors opening.

“It absolutely blew up,” Downey says.

According to Downey, the recent uptick in attendance has caused the event to raise ticket prices from \$5 to \$8—its first price increase in seven years—in order to increase event security.

The all-ages nature of the event is one that Downey has fought to maintain. Downey grew up in a small town in New Brunswick and was very involved in the flourishing punk rock scene of the '90s and 2000s. He says the scene focused heavily on respect

and taking care of community members, which allowed it to thrive.

He compares how there aren't as many all-ages spaces like the one *Rockin' 4 Dollar\$* provides as there were in his time, especially in a city as large as Calgary.

“It's kind of weird that there's less spots now, compared to when I was in a small town on the East Coast,” he says.

Rory Overwater, drummer of local punk band, Toxic Fem, has participated in *Rockin' 4 Dollar\$* as a performer and audience member many times. Toxic Fem played their first *Rockin' 4 Dollar\$* show back in 2024, when the event was being held at Modern Love.

The event moved to the BLOX shortly after, and Overwater says the environment is a great outlet for young adults to safely express themselves.

“Not just physical aggression, but that energy that often comes out in aggression and other ways



Guitarist Nicole Lastauskas, lead singer Faith Doyscher and bassist Emi Howerton of Toxic Fem chant the lyrics to an energy-packed number. Photo by Lacey Holowaty



Australian singer-songwriter Nick Murphy, who releases his music under the name Chet Faker, returns after four years with his latest album, *A Love for Strangers*. The romance-focused record feels like a gentle farewell to a love that slowly fades out. Blending hazy piano, energetic beats and introspective lyrics, Murphy continues to showcase his emotional depth and range.

The album begins with the first track, “Over You,” where Murphy reflects on how time can act as a thief. He also touches on the evolution of emotional pain into memories and the acceptance of something that just wasn't meant to be.

The album bounces between emotional ballads of longing and electronic beats, and in true Faker fashion, *A Love for Strangers* retains his classic blend of electronic soul, hip-hop and R&B. Murphy's unique

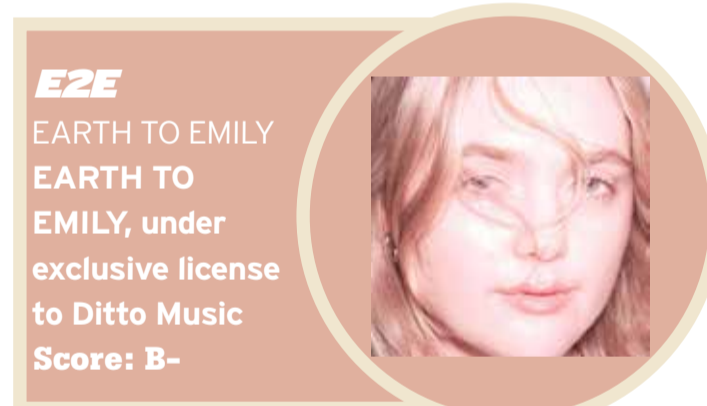
voice stays true to who he is as an artist, retaining his deep and aching vocals.

The track “Remember Me” feels almost like a follow-up to his song “Talk is Cheap,” which was featured on his 2014 album, *Built on Glass*. Both songs lean into Murphy's low vocals and saxophone backing.

Murphy's vocal delivery is what keeps the album solid, with his soft, restrained voice creating an intimate listening experience between the audience and artist. Murphy's vulnerable lyricism and overall production create a sound that feels vibrant, melancholic and reflective.

He presents the theme of heartbreak, but rather than making it feel dramatic, he creates a world where you can dance along with your own heartache.

—Hermie Ann Ocenar



Toronto-born artist EARTH TO EMILY released her debut album, *E2E*, on Feb. 13.

Creating a name for herself in the Canadian pop scene, Emily's identity is carved through her range as a singer and songwriter, where she pulls inspiration from famous artists like Charli XCX and Chappell Roan.

The album's first track, “don't listen to this,” is a coy and raw introduction to the record and artist, setting the tone for what's to come. The track then seamlessly transitions into the second song, “ROCKET.”

E2E touches on queerness, romance and party culture, but the lyricism throughout feels more familiar than something new. While the lyrics are not groundbreaking, Emily establishes her strength as a performer and artist through energetic and confessional tones paired with her confident and almost cheeky vocal style.

“SADDERN RETURN” is a decent attempt at creating a hyper-pop inspired track,

although it loses momentum by the end, with it ultimately feeling out of place on the album.

Overall, *E2E* is a solid introduction to EARTH TO EMILY. The album's strength lies within its overall production, which includes smooth transitions between tracks and the blending of catchy beats and classic pop elements. While some tracks stand out more than others, it's clear that EARTH TO EMILY is creating her own presence in Canadian pop.

—Hermie Ann Ocenar

is then channelled towards jumping up and down, head banging, chanting, moshing,” they say.

Overwater is very passionate about the alternative community, especially when it comes to Calgary’s youth. In particular, Rockin’ 4 Dollar\$ has become a safe space for alternative and queer youth to gain experience as members of their audience and community.

They say that, aside from the sensationalised image of the spike-wearing punk rocker, the alternative community consists of people who want better for themselves and the world around them.

“I think alternative culture can be for anyone who has something to say against the status quo,” they say. “We need to really emphasise that alternative culture and shows, and getting loud and rowdy is not synonymous with going off the rails.”

According to Overwater, there are pros and cons to the event’s growing popularity.

“We have that mutually acknowledged code of conduct where everyone understands to take care of each other. This is a safe

space, but some people are coming in without that prior culture.”

On the other hand, Overwater says that exposing the alternative community to those with more mainstream interests can be a good thing, but it has to be done with care. They say it should be encouraged, especially among young people, as exposure to different ideologies can allow young people to decide which values they align with.

Overwater is currently in their second year of study in Mount Royal University’s anthropology program. Through classroom discussions and projects in a women and gender studies class, they’ve been able to gain a deeper appreciation for alternative and queer youth spaces.

“I think, if we want less inequity and injustice, and we want more acceptance in this world, then we should let these spaces grow,” Overwater says.

Through their own research and anecdotal experience, they’ve found that kids really like unstructured spaces where they don’t feel overwhelmed by parental guidance and

expectations. They say that Rockin’ 4 Dollar\$ provides a perfect environment for youth to mess around and make mistakes, since the community is great at picking people up and having each other’s backs.

“Are you someone who likes to stand in the front and headbang, or someone who likes to sit outside on the steps and hear the music from outside the venue?”

They’ve decided to look into the BLOX Arts Centre as a model for queer and alternative youth spaces, and are taking a look at what is working well and what could be improved upon either in the future or by the creation of a new, youth-focused arts space.

“I want to be able to take that to a city council meeting or something and say, ‘hey, we have initiatives for investing in youth and LGBTQ initiatives. This is an intersection of all of those things, and here’s why it’s important,’” they say.

However, they’ve found difficulty in gathering research-based data on the impact of these spaces on 2SLGBTQIA+ and alternative youth, and how it can positively impact factors



Rory Overwater performed with their band, Toxic Fem, at the Rockin’ 4 Dollar\$ 12th birthday show this March.

Photo by Lacey Holowaty

including mental health, crime, suicide and addiction rates, as well as overall community engagement.

“I honestly see these kids putting back into their communities what they get

out of it by going out and enjoying these spaces,” they say. “I really want to highlight why it’s such a positive thing.”

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Athletes finding balance during Ramadan

How Muslim athletes juggle faith and competition

Serena Kanji-Ramji

Staff Writer

Finding balance as an athlete is a challenge in itself, but what happens when you throw faith into the mix? Every year, Muslim athletes have to find a way to maintain their competitive edge while taking their personal beliefs into account.

During the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, Muslims all over the world observe Ramadan. This is the month it is believed the Quran was first revealed. For Muslims, this time is for deepening spiritual practice—dedicated to community and prayer. The most notable aspect of Ramadan is fasting.

The Muslim calendar follows the moon's cycle, meaning Ramadan takes place during a different month every year, altering fasting times accordingly. However, the fasting perimeters remain the same. No food or water from sunrise to sunset.

When the sun does set, Muslims break their fast with a special prayer and meal called iftar. It's common that during this month, most Muslims slow down in their daily routines, but most athletes don't have that option.

Improvise. Adapt. Overcome.

Staying competitive is essential, and the alternatives to train or compete after iftar are limited. How every athlete adjusts comes down to individual preference. In his interview with Men's Health, British basketball league player Radwan Bakkali dove into how Ramadan affects his training routine.

"When your body is not focusing on digesting food, you have all that energy to just focus on what you're actually doing. I find I feel more dialled in—more efficient," he explained.

Bakkali went on to explain in his interview that he's been playing sports for so long now that the annual fasting has become integrated into his life.

"I've been practicing fasting since I was 7 years old, and



Kyrie Irving is one of the most well-known athletes to fast during Ramadan while still performing at a high competitive level, even winning playoff games and series during the month. Photo courtesy of Instagram / @kyrieirving

"I've always been a very sporty person. I'm now at a point where it doesn't impact me too much."

Fasting off the court, feasting on it

While it seems improbable that abstaining from food and water wouldn't severely affect competitive performance, sleep specialist Qanta Ahmed breaks down how it's possible. He explained that athletes who are fasting during Ramadan are able to "adjust because once they've established a routine, which included the sleep, changing the calories and of course, the limited hydration...most of the shock to their system would be in the first week."

Even with that adjustment

period, many of these athletes continue to play at elite levels without waiver and continue to be top of their game. In 2022 NBA player Kyrie Irving—currently with the Dallas Mavericks but playing for the Brooklyn Nets at the time—dropped 39 points, five rebounds and six assists in the first game of the playoffs during Ramadan.

Irving isn't the only one either. Enes Kanter Freedom, formerly of the Boston Celtics, played the 2019 playoffs, part of which overlapped with Ramadan. When reflecting on the experience, Freedom said, "I want to be an example for children everywhere, showing them that you can thrive when challenged—fasting for Ramadan, for instance, but also going all out in the NBA playoffs".

Cougars fast, too

Closer to home, the Mount Royal University Cougars have Muslim athletes present on many of the teams, like Reem Saif, a first-year student enrolled in the health and physical education program. Saif is also a middle blocker for the women's volleyball team, and the only person to wear a hijab on any of the university's teams.

When talking about her place on the team, Saif is proud of all she's achieved and feels honoured to represent her culture on the volleyball court.

"I worked my butt off trying to get this spot on this team," she says. "I never thought about it, as in, like, I need to work extra hard, because I'm a Muslim or I openly

show myself as a muslim by wearing the hijab and everything, but it's been such an honour."

Since the women's volleyball season came to an end in early February, the team has been on a 3-week break that overlapped with the beginning of Ramadan. Heading back into the regularly programmed practices and workouts, Saif already has an idea about how she's going to handle it.

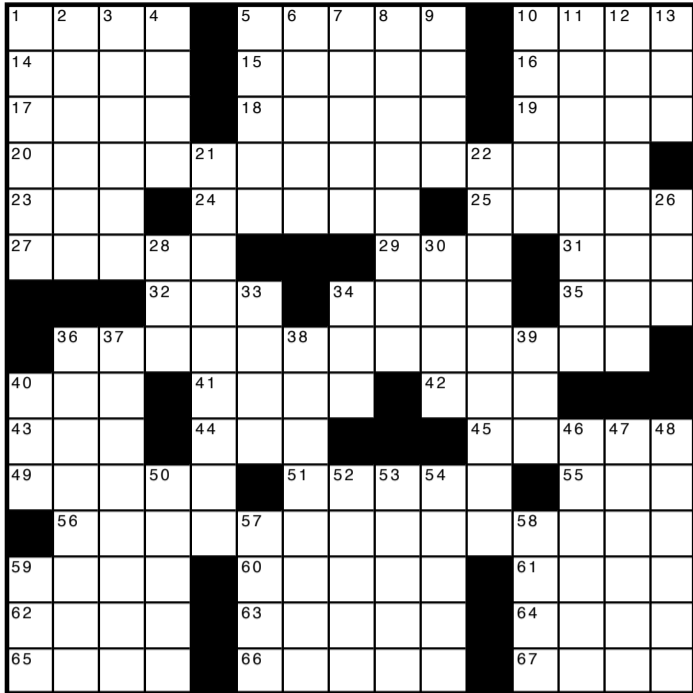
"I'm gonna have to talk to my coach about it, because the intensity of having to lift and practice back to back to back is a little hard for me, and I'll just have to find out about myself," she says. "I haven't started, but I have a game plan of how I'm gonna do it. Maybe limiting my practises, the volume, like timing, or, intensity of practice."

Still, Saif knows that whatever the circumstances, the MRU coaching staff will have her back.

"I'm so glad the coaching staff and all the varsity athletic staff don't look at me as someone different," Saif said. "The hijab doesn't affect them, whether I follow what I believe, it doesn't affect how they treat me, which is amazing."

With more Muslims making names for themselves in the sports world, understanding and respecting global traditions is as relevant as ever. Never count these athletes out of the narrative—even during Ramadan.

REFLECTOR DIVERSIONS



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com (<https://www.bestcrosswords.com>). Used with permission.

ACROSS

- 1 Hindu queen
- 5 Office subs
- 10 Jr.'s exam
- 14 North Carolina university

- 15 Love, Italian-style
- 16 Horrors!
- 17 Mil. leaders
- 18 Metal pin
- 19 River to the Moselle
- 20 Achievement

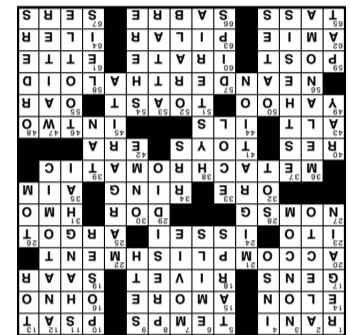
- 23 Judge Lance
- 24 Japanese immigrant
- 25 Lingo
- 27 Chinese menu phrase
- 29 Golden, in France
- 31 Patient care grp.
- 32 Mine find
- 34 Fight site
- 35 Intention
- 36 Capable of changing color
- 40 Hi-___ graphics
- 41 Playthings
- 42 Memorable period
- 43 Cockpit abbr.
- 44 French pronoun
- 45 Halved
- 49 Lout
- 51 Raise a glass to
- 55 Crew's control
- 56 Resembling a prehistoric human
- 59 Pillar
- 60 Fit to be tied
- 61 Kitchen addition
- 62 French friend
- 63 Covered with hair
- 64 Robert of "The Sopranos"
- 65 Soviet news service
- 66 Buffalo skater

- 67 Sun. speeches

DOWN

- 1 Recover
- 2 One of the Furies
- 3 Sarge, for one
- 4 Not ___ many words
- 5 Diamond protectors
- 6 Ludwig and Jannings
- 7 Motion picture
- 8 Military post
- 9 Clockmaker Thomas
- 10 Riddle
- 11 China's largest city
- 12 Pertaining to bodily structure
- 13 Rocky hilltop
- 21 Exodus
- 22 Cocktail
- 26 Male cat
- 28 Barfly
- 30 This one's ___
- 33 Biol. branch
- 34 Monopoly quartet: Abbr.
- 36 Skin tumor
- 37 Sensation
- 38 Emotional outburst
- 39 Convert into leather
- 40 Beam
- 46 Proceed in a leisurely

- way
- 47 Table attendant
- 48 Commands
- 50 Novelist Joyce Carol
- 52 Toothbrush brand
- 53 Essential oil
- 54 Author Hite
- 57 Immerses
- 58 Fragrant neckwear
- 59 One way to stand



SUDOKU

Easy

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4		7		9		6	8	
6	9					2		
		2	9		7		4	
	1	9				7	6	
	4		3		1	9		
		8					1	4
		4		2		3		7
3					9	8	2	

Medium

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3								

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						8	4	
6								5
	7	1						
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		4				5		7
						8		3

WORD SEARCH

St. Patrick's Day

U D E C A B B A G E J O L L Y P Z J F M
 Z M V T M S F S A I N T I U L V J C X P
 C Z D L Q P L L A U G H T E R E Q S W Z
 A J Q U R S H A M R O C K Z Z V Y I I A
 L P X W K P A T R I C K L N C K T E B B
 K M X M A R C H M H I D Q I R E L A N D
 C E L E B R A T E L N G J R F S N B X S
 G A O Q C O I N S D P O T L U C K Y Z A
 U W Y W R H H I B R N F M I Z N Y M S U
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 C L O V E R I C L W T E A A U X P W Q S
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BLARNEY PATRICK
 CABBAGE POT
 CELEBRATE POTATO
 CELTIC RAINBOW
 CLOVER SAINT
 COINS SHAMROCK
 GAELIC TRADITION
 GOLD
 GREEN
 HARP
 HOLIDAY
 IRELAND
 IRISH
 JOLLY
 LAUGHTER
 LEPRECHAUN

A heavyweight debut: Calgary hosts Canada's first Sumo fest

Wrestlers bring a 1,500-year-old Japanese sport to curious Canadian fans

Julia Finot

Staff Writer

“San, ni, ichi.” In Japanese, it means three, two, one — the countdown before two sumo wrestlers charge at each other. Now, the centuries-old spectacle of sumo wrestling has landed in Canada, bringing a one-of-a-kind show to Calgary.

Sumo Fest is Canada’s first professional sumo wrestling festival. Held March 13 and 14 at the Nutrien Western Events Centre in Calgary, the event featured live sumo matches, a market and a showcase on Japanese culture.

After touring more than 40 countries, the travelling sumo showcase is now bringing the ancient sport to Canadian audiences.

The sport dates back more than 1,500 years to Japan, where it began as a Shinto ritual meant to entertain the gods. Ancient Japanese communities believed that entertaining matches would ensure a successful harvest.

What began as a sacred ritual has evolved into a globally recognised sport. While most wrestlers are

Japanese, the sport has gradually begun allowing foreign competitors in tournaments.

Embracing the spectacle

Sumo wrestling is slowly gaining popularity in Canada. While there have been few professionals from Canada, viewership is rising as people become more intrigued with the sport.

“It’s something we have never seen before,” said attendee Kiki and Mackenzie. “The wrestling looks like it’s going to be super fun.”

One of the most unique aspects of sumo wrestling is the absence of weight classes. The sport relies on explosive power, balance and raw strength.

Sumo wrestlers look different from most professional athletes. Wrestlers are known for their massive physiques and wear a traditional mawashi belt.

On average, sumo wrestlers stand at six feet tall and weigh



Sumo wrestlers have immense strength and coordination, presenting one of the most unique physical builds of any athlete in any discipline. Photo taken by Ava Morrison

around 320 pounds.

“It’s different from the other [sports] because they move slow,” said sumo fan Joanne. “How are they going to grapple one another, right?”

In partnership with the Calgary Japanese Community Association, Sumo Fest also featured many locally owned Japanese businesses. From jewelry makers to florists, Sumo Fest was a true celebration of Japanese culture.

A combined 1,970 pounds

The Nutrien Western Events Centre was sold out for the first night of competition. Spectators from all over the city came together to get a glimpse into Japanese culture and live sumo wrestling.

“The fact that I get to see sumo wrestlers actually take on one another is pretty cool,” said vendor Spencer Tulloch. “To be honest, I’m really stoked for 580 pounds to take on 570 pounds.”

The event featured four athletes. They are all world champion sumo wrestlers, with each having over 15 years of professional experience.

The first wrestler introduced was Waka. Standing at six feet and weighing 330 pounds, he was the smallest athlete of the night. He is known as the ‘little guy.’

Then there was six-foot-four, 530 pound Ramy. He is a rare type of wrestler, hailing from Egypt. He said he started wrestling simply to try a new sport. Because he is not Japanese, it is harder for him to compete professionally, as there is a cap on the number of foreigners allowed to compete in events.

Next was Hiroki. He is recognised as the heaviest active sumo wrestler in the world. He also stands at six-foot-four, but he weighs an astounding 570 pounds. Hiroki was the most playful entertainer of the evening. From blowing kisses to drinking beer with fans,

he showed off his giant personality.

Last to come out was one of the most decorated wrestlers in recent history, Ichi. He is known as sumo royalty, having won some of Japan’s biggest tournaments. Standing at six-foot-four and weighing 540 pounds, he is one of the biggest names in the sport.

There were a handful of matches throughout the evening. Each wrestler competed six times, and in the end, a tiebreaker was needed to determine a winner. On the first night of competition, with the support of fans, Hiroki emerged victorious.

For each athlete, it was their first time in Canada, and the fans at Sumo Fest welcomed them with open arms. They cheered, chanted, shared food and even tried to ask some of the wrestlers out.

For spectators, Sumo Fest was a rare opportunity to immerse themselves in Japanese culture and experience food, festivities and sport.



Sumo wrestlers can weigh anywhere from 265 to over 440 pounds, with the heaviest of all time, Orora Satoshi, weighing nearly 700 pounds! Photo taken by Ava Morrison



35 points scored by Carleton’s Aubrey Dorey-Havens to help the Ravens win the 2026 W.P. McGee Trophy

83 points scored by the Miami Heat’s Bam Adebayo, the second-most points scored in a single NBA game

39 points recorded by Connor Bouchard for the MRU Cougars’ men’s hockey team this year—eighth most in the country

24 kills scored by TWU’s Kaden Schmidt to help the Spartans win this year’s U SPORTS Men’s Volleyball National Championship

Opinion: NBA? Not buying it anymore

What the U SPORTS Final 8 in Calgary showed us about big-league sports

Zafir Nagji

Sports Editor

The 2026 U SPORTS Final 8 National Tournament put on a must-see three-day show for fans who attended the game and those across the country who watched it on their various screens. It might have ended in a predictable result—the Carleton Ravens secured their 18th national championship—but not in the way anyone expected to.

“Two years we haven’t been in the Final 8 just shows how hard it is to get there,” Calgarian Carleton guard Marjon “MJ” Okado said after the Championship Game. “Just to be here and accomplish that goal, it means everything. All the work, all the perseverance, the dark days, this is what it was all for.”

Furthermore, this tournament showed everyone who was a part of it why college sports are so special to behold, while simultaneously making the issues with modern professional basketball glaringly obvious and painfully unignorable.

Widening the gap

After losing a close Ontario University Athletics (OUA) Final to the Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) Bold, the Ravens entered the Final 8 as the sixth seed.

Carleton triumphed over the Laval University Rouge et Or by an 85-69 margin in the quarterfinals, but lost Okado to a devastating knee injury that left him in a wheelchair after the game.

That meant they’d have to face their OUA foes, the TMU Bold, without their 16-point-per-game scorer, just to make it to the Championship Game.

The OUA Final rematch was a defensive dogfight, as it was the only game of the entire tournament where neither team eclipsed the 60-point mark, with Carleton getting closest as they took a 58-52 revenge victory.

“Winning’s hard, the semifinal game was hard, it wasn’t pretty,” Ravens head coach Taffe Charles said. “We were down a starter, a guy who scored 16 points a game, so we had to figure out a new way to win.”

On the other side of the bracket, the Bishop’s University Gaiters were defying odds against each of their higher-ranked opponents on their way

to meeting Carleton in the Championship Game.

Everything on the line

There were 15 ties and 18 lead changes in the Championship Game, and neither side established a lead larger than seven points.

Ravens guard Aubrey Dorey-Havens earned Tournament MVP with a masterful performance, elevating his scoring output every quarter for a game-high 35 points. None were more significant than his final four, though, with his first two giving Carleton a late one-point lead and his final two putting them up three with just 21 seconds left.

Bishop’s missed four shots on their final possession. The buzzer sounded and their final three-point attempt clanged off the basket, and Dorey-Havens and the Carleton Ravens celebrated their 18th national tournament with their injured Calgarian star.

“I was ready to rebound and play defence, I honestly could’ve done a way better job of that today,” Dorey-

Havens said after winning. “I picked it up in the scoring department, but I definitely could’ve done a better job rebounding, I know I’m gonna get ripped in film for that. I just knew I wanted to come out aggressive, the first few shots hit and it just kept going from there.”

Putting the pros on blast

It’s more than likely that no one in this tournament will be an NBA superstar, or all-star, or even player, for that matter. Many of them will find professional opportunities within the sport globally, with 957 players from U SPORTS having signed pro basketball contracts since 1968, but talent and skill were not what made this tournament and college sports as a whole so incredible to watch—it was the competitive energy and the purity of the basketball being played.

High-stakes games in any league will be entertaining—watching people operate with the weight of the world on their shoulders brings out the human empathy in all of

us, and we become invested in seeing someone under pressure overcome the odds and succeed.

However, in the case of the NBA, we don’t get very much of that until mid-April, when the playoffs start. On an average regular season night, the majority of star players may be resting, the commercial breaks are excessive at best and the athletes on the court playing barely look engaged—unless the game is close at the end.

Meanwhile, at the collegiate level, every game matters—most of the sports play around 20 regular-season games, so going on a two-game losing streak means losing 10 per cent of your total games. Add in the pressure of play-off games within your conference, and double it when it comes to the national tournament, and every game gets progressively more exhilarating until it reaches its peak during the championship game.

Furthermore, NBA players have already reached their peak in life, playing in front of billions across the world for hundreds of millions

of dollars and the most prestigious awards in the highest league in the sport. At the collegiate level, a player’s five years of U SPORTS eligibility are an audition to the global market for their sport.

Many college athletes use the scholarships from their sports to pay for their tuition, too, so even if chasing a professional athletic career isn’t in an athlete’s cards, it can be the road to their future career outside of the sport.

Things are on the line all the time in college sports, and they’re happening to the same people you, me and everyone else on campus walk by every day.

I implore those who read this to attend the next collegiate sporting event they can. Take in the atmosphere, feel the competitive edge and watch the athletes leave everything they have on the field of play. After the game is done, ask yourself if a regular-season professional sporting event would feel anywhere near the same. Then, answer this question:

Are you not entertained?



The Carleton Ravens claimed their 18th national championship behind Aubrey Dorey-Havens’s 35-point explosion, which included plenty of tough jumpshots like this one. Photo by Zafir Nagji