

THE MINARET

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INK & AFFECTION Valentine's Edition



Chili's desserts can come with two spoons, making it easy to share with someone special. Photo courtesy of Famartin, Public Domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

The University of Tampa Students' Ultimate Date Guide for Valentine's Day

By Gloria Falach

Whether you're planning a Galentine's Day or going on a first date with someone you finally brought up enough courage to ask out, Tampa Bay makes it easy to pick a spot to go to this Valentine's Day.

For those students who live on campus without a car, Downtown, Armature Works, and Hyde Park are walkable from the UTampa campus and filled with restaurants, coffee shops, and more.

Downtown is filled with small restaurants and coffee shops to bring someone special to. Visit Eddie and Sam's N.Y. Pizza, Urban Cantina, First Watch, Tampa Burgers and Pirates, The Bagel Nook, and Buddy Brew for a quick bite to eat or coffee.

Students can walk to Armature Works on the Riverwalk. Armature Works can be described as a food court with lots of options. These include: Butcher n' Barbeque, Dalmoros for your pasta needs, Empamamas for Mexican food, Graze for a brunch spot, Han for sushi, The Fold for pizza, Juicys Famous Fair Food, Lings Dumplings, and many more.

Armature Works is also popular for a sweet treat date by getting ice cream at Chill Bros.

Oxford Exchange, Jump Cup, and Edison are also located right on Kennedy Blvd, making it a short walk to and from campus.

For those of you who are missing home, Tampa also has the classic nostalgic chain restaurants that you and your date can connect over. Take your date over to the International Mall and visit California Pizza Kitchen or The Cheesecake Factory.

Or visit Chili's on N. Dale Mabry Hwy for affordable food that has been viral on TikTok for over a year. Share a Triple Dippler with that someone special. Or for a sweet treat, the cookie skillet is a great addition to any Valentine's Day meal.

Exploring Hyde Park and walking on Bayshore is a simple activity for a group of Galentine's or something to do on a first date to get to know each other. Some popular spots in Hyde Park for a bite to eat that are budget-friendly include Forbeci and Bar Taco.

Some other activities downtown and in Hyde Park are going to Curtis Hixon



Waterfront Park, visiting the Tampa Museum of Art, where all students get in free, seeing a film at the Tampa Theatre, and painting pottery at Color Me Mine in Hyde Park.

Interested in comedy and want to make your date laugh? Stand-up comedian Kortney Shane will be hosting a Valentine's Day-themed comedy show at the Commodore in Ybor City. Use promo code "Student" for \$8 tickets. For students without a car, take a trip on the trolley from Downtown to Ybor for free.

For students who have a car, take a day trip to Busch Gardens or take a trip to the beach and Downtown St. Pete.

St. Pete is also hosting the 13th annual Localtopia on Valentine's Day this year. Localtopia is St. Pete's largest "community celebration of all things local." This year, the festival plans on having over 300 small businesses and organizations there.

Whether you are celebrating Valentine's Day with the girls or going on a first date, check out these restaurants for something new or something old and nostalgic. Or consider taking that special someone to try something new on Feb. 14th, for a date that will stand out from the rest.

CONTENTS

NEWS

02 | ICE Attempt to Enter Ecuadorian Consulate Sparks Diplomatic Objections and Community Fear

03 | How the Cold Snap Affected Tampa Bay

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

04 | Florida State Fair Celebrates America's 250th Anniversary on Opening Day

05 | Bad Bunny's Super Bowl halftime performance: A love letter to Puerto Rican and Latin culture

OPINION

06 | Is networking the only way to get a job after college?

SPORTS

07 | Spartans Honor 2025 National Championship, Continue Hot Start to the Season

08 | Photo Story: Lacrosse Home Opener Recap

09 | UTampa Women's Basketball Team Loses to Eckerd After a Tight Game

10 | Photo Story: Spartans Open Home Season With Championship Banner Reveal

12 | Club Soccer Practice

13 | Club Lacrosse Practice

CAMPUS LIFE

14 | What to Wear to Where: The UTampa Guide

15 | New Homemade Shelters in Place for Campus Cats

16 | Photo Story: Spring 2026 Involvement Fair

17 | Greek Week Recap

18 | Knitt Club Ad

FEATURE

19 | Inside the Nursing Shortage at Tampa General Hospital

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

20 | Benchmark International Arena Gives Sustainability Tour to UTampa Student

22 | Mangroves Provide Ecosystem Services to Florida's Communities

23 | Activities

24 | Bulletin Board

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Photo courtesy of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, PDM 1.0, via Flickr.

ICE Attempt to Enter Ecuadorian Consulate Sparks Diplomatic Objections and Community Fear

By Genesis Aviles

Federal immigration agents attempted to enter the Ecuadorian consulate in Minneapolis on Jan. 27. Ecuadorian officials say this incident violated diplomatic norms and has raised concerns among legal experts and immigrant community members.

According to reporting by *The Guardian* and *CNN en Español*, Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents arrived at the consulate while searching for an Ecuadorian national. Consulate staff denied the agents entry, citing diplomatic protections afforded to consular facilities. The agents did not enter the building and later left. No arrests were made.

The Ecuadorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the attempt, stating that consulates are inviolable under international law and that foreign law enforcement officials may not enter without explicit authorization. According to *CNN en Español*, Gabriela Sommerfeld, the Ecuadorian Foreign Affairs Minister, said the government formally communicated its objection to U.S. authorities.

According to a statement cited by *The Guardian*, ICE said its agents were conducting a lawful operation and

denied forcing entry. They said officers are instructed to respect diplomatic facilities and that the encounter concluded without escalation.

Legal scholars note that such incidents are rare and potentially serious.

"The idea of diplomatic immunity has long been a custom," said Dr. Kevin Fridy, chair of the political science department at the University of Tampa. "I am not a lawyer, and I'm sure there is nuance I am glossing over, but generally speaking, it's the idea that diplomats and embassies are not subject to the domestic laws of the country in which they reside."

Fridy added that recent changes within ICE could be a factor in this event. "The number of ICE agents has more than doubled in a year, and there is reporting that training has been dramatically reduced to accommodate the massive influx. It might be an isolated incident or the result of poor training."

He expresses concerns about whether incidents like this continue to happen and the broader international consequences.

"Agreements like the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations rely on reciprocity for enforcement. If the U.S. begins to routinely violate or threaten to violate the convention, one would expect other countries to do the same to our diplomatic staff and compounds."

For members of the Ecuadorian immigrant community, the incident carried emotional weight beyond diplomatic protocol.

Jorge Poveda, an Ecuadorian citizen and alumnus of Lynn University in Florida, said he felt angry. "It wasn't just another news story; I felt it was a violation of a space I consider sacred. The consulate is, literally, the only piece of 'homeland soil' we have abroad."

Poveda said the incident has altered the way he views government institutions. "My trust in the authorities has transformed into constant vigilance. I feel that the institutions that should protect us are more interested in persecution than in upholding the rule of law."

Camila Bravo, another Ecuadorian citizen living in the U.S., said the episode worsened fears that immigration enforcement could extend into other protected spaces. "My 'sense of security' has been diminishing day by day. If we can't trust those who are supposed to provide us with security, who can we trust?"

Both Poveda and Bravo emphasized the importance of consulates as points of access for essential services, including documentation and birth registration. Bravo claims to know individuals who have avoided registering their children out of fear of deportation. She explained that, without consular documentation, immigrants can become "legally invisible."

Neither ICE nor the U.S. State Department has taken any disciplinary action or made policy changes related to the Ecuadorian Consulate incident. Ecuador's Foreign Ministry announced it handed an official letter of protest to the U.S. embassy in Quito on Jan. 27.

Quotes from Jorge Poveda and Camila Bravo were originally given in Spanish and translated into English.



Cropfields after the cold snap at Meachem Urban Farms. Photo courtesy of Nicole Droeger Stephens.

How the Cold Snap Affected Tampa Bay

By Nicole Droeger Stephens

A winter storm passed over Florida last weekend, bringing in freezing temperatures and reports of snow flurries across the Tampa Bay Area. The effects of this storm impacted farming, wildlife and electricity.

The Weather Channel reports the cold snap intensified into a bomb cyclone. Dr. Nick Grondin, associate professor of environmental studies at the University of Tampa, explains that the storm was a mid-latitude cyclone that rapidly intensified.

"These types of systems are more likely to develop when extremely cold and dry arctic air masses from northern Canada move south into warmer, typically humid air masses," Grondin said. "What typically makes bomb cyclones unique to other mid-latitude cyclones is that they are usually associated with extreme snowfall amounts and particularly strong winds near their center."

Grondin explains that the cyclone developed over the Gulf and spread across the state, bringing cold fronts from Central Florida toward the Bay Area.

"We get gusty winds, moderate to heavy rainfall, and usually, after it passes, cooler temperatures with lower humidity," Grondin said.

High School Students Protest ICE in Tampa Bay Walkout

By Nicole Droeger Stephens

On Friday, Feb. 6, multiple high school campuses had planned student walkouts. According to a report from the Tampa Bay Times, students from St. Petersburg and Hollins high schools protested in Pinellas County, while students from Wharton, Blake, Plant, Hillsborough and Alonzo high schools protested in Hillsborough County.

The walkouts were a response to Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity in Minnesota, as well as the deaths of protestors Renee Good and Alex Pretti. A report from *The New York Times* shares that the Trump administration is halting the deployment of ICE agents in Minnesota, effective Feb. 12.

These protests follow a student walkout that occurred on Jan. 30 at Lennard High School in Ruskin. State Representative Danny Alvarez Sr. called for the termination of Lennard Principal Dennis Savino on X, claiming the effort was coordinated among school faculty. Tampa Bay 28 reports that the Hillsborough County School District is investigating the incident and has yet to find evidence of Savino's involvement.

In response to the protests, Florida Education Commissioner Anastasio

Kamoutsas released a statement claiming the state "will not tolerate educators encouraging school protests and pushing their political views onto students, especially ones that disparage law enforcement." Governor Ron DeSantis reposted this statement, adding, "Our kids are not pawns for political activism. Education, not indoctrination."

The Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association released a statement on Feb. 13 in response to lawmakers calling for disciplinary action. They said that student walkouts are not uncommon in the district and that the School Board already has policies in place to ensure safety.

"What is new is the attempt by state officials to place school employees in the crosshairs of political disputes," the statement reads. "That approach puts educators and administrators at risk of being unfairly targeted for actions they did not initiate or control."

Students maintain their freedom of speech in public school settings as protected under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. The *Tinker v. Des Moines* (1969) Supreme Court ruling states that prohibiting a student's free speech is not permissible if there is no "evidence that the rule is necessary to avoid substantial

The temperatures dropped to the point that frost developed. Raymond Smith, farmhand at Meachem Urban Farms, shares that the cold snap caused crops to slow in growth.

"Most of the stuff we had was in the Brassicaceae family, which is, like, your cabbage, kale, broccoli, and they are pretty cold-tolerant," Smith said. "Mostly the tropical stuff was where that hurt."

Smith shares that the bananas, pineapples and mangoes took the hardest hit. He explains the farm had to purchase frostcloth to protect the crops during the cold snap.

"If we get any more frost in the future, we are prepared now."

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) issued an executive order on Jan. 30 that temporarily allowed citizens in Southwest Florida to remove cold-stunned green iguanas and bring them into FWC offices. Green iguanas are classified as an invasive species, the FWC stating they "cause damage to residential and commercial landscape vegetation."

The FWC reported the removal of 5,196 cold-stunned green iguanas during the executive order. The order has been lifted and a permit is once more required to humanely remove or kill green iguanas.

Colder temperatures led to a higher demand for electricity. Duke Energy shared that the heating systems would have to work harder during cold spells to maintain

warm temperatures. This leads to higher electricity bills. They requested on Feb. 1 that consumers conserve their power from 5-9 a.m. on Monday, Feb. 2nd. They claimed it was to "protect the grid and keep electricity flowing for as many customers as possible."

Duke Energy released a statement on Feb. 2 thanking customers for conserving energy, claiming it "helped lessen strain on the electric grid and supported reliable service."

The winter storm has concluded. Temperatures in Tampa are projected to rise throughout the month, with an average high of mid-70s and an average low of mid-50s.



Photo courtesy of Nicole Droeger Stephens.

interference with school discipline or the rights of others."

In *Bethel School District v. Fraser* (1986), a student delivered a speech containing sexual innuendos during a school assembly. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the school district, stating, "it is a highly appropriate function of public school education to prohibit the use of vulgar and offensive terms in public discourse." These allow schools to restrict speech that disrupts the learning environment, and "the determination of what

manner of speech is inappropriate properly rests with the school board."

The Associated Press reported that funding for the Department of Homeland Security expires on Feb. 15. Democrats in the Senate are pushing for policy changes with ICE to reach a funding deal with Republicans.

As the investigations into the walkouts continue, the full consequences Tampa Bay school districts face have yet to be determined.



Students from Wharton High School protest ICE activity. Photo courtesy of Dave Decker.



Photo courtesy of Dave Decker.



Photo courtesy of Dave Decker.



Florida State Fair Celebrates America's 250th Anniversary on Opening Day

By Izzy Alexander

The Florida State Fair opened its 2026 celebration on Feb. 5 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States. Opening day showcased centuries of tradition, fostering a multigenerational environment that honored the past 250 years of America while revealing the future of entertainment.

With unicyclists playing guitars, 100-year-old Bavarian nut roasting, men on hydro-propelled jet packs, and live music, the fairgrounds blended old and new.

Originally known as the South Florida Fair, the event began in 1904 on the grounds of the Tampa Bay Hotel, now home to the Henry B. Plant Museum and the University of Tampa. The fair was established by hotel manager T.J. Laud-Brown to increase tourism.

It became known as the Florida State Fair in 1915, and remained at the hotel for 70 years before moving to the Florida State Fairgrounds, located nine miles northeast of downtown Tampa.

Minutes after entering the grounds, the smell of fried dough was thick in the air from Fluffy's hand-cut doughnuts. The stand featured a pink, polka-dotted wrap outlined in blinking, yellow lights. It was reminiscent of a 1970s food stand.

Just down the midway, the Miller and Company barbecue stand filled the air with the smoky scent of chicken, steak, and pineapple. Stand worker Billy Davis explained that the smell barely scratches the surface of the complex production behind fair stands.

Davis said that his team had just arrived from West Palm Beach, Florida, that night. For the past 17 years, the team has broken down the entire stand, packed up, driven to the Florida State Fairgrounds, and set up again — all within 48 hours.

He added that after nearly two decades, they had become very familiar with the fairgrounds team.

"This crew here, the staff on these grounds, are very accommodating," said Davis. "They say, 'We got you. Come on in.' They get you back in, then they move you to the next place. It's very orchestrated."

William Weinrich, owner and operator of a balloon-pop fair game stand, said the fair means more to him than most may think.

"I love it. I've been coming here since '97," Weinrich said.

Before working at the fair, he was an attendee. He loved it so much that he decided to make it his career, and for more than two decades, he has worked at the fair.

Electric covers of classic hits such as "I Melt With You" by Modern English and "Rock and Roll All Nite" by Kiss could be heard



throughout the north side of the grounds. Local band Bynge has been together since 2022, and the Florida State Fair has provided a place for them to share their passion for rock music and grow their audience.

On the other side of the entertainment, Circus Hollywood performed on opening day and will continue to host multiple shows daily through Feb. 16.

A mix of modern and traditional circus acts, including exotic animals, aerial rope dancing, juggling, hula hooping, extreme acrobatics, and motorcycle tricks are just a handful of the unique skills that were featured during the inaugural performance.

Additionally, the fair offered countless events appealing to a wide range of interests. "My time at the fair was super fun," said University of Tampa freshman Lauren Forster.

Forster took an interest in the barn filled with handmade products. Creations spanned

from homemade beard care and soap to handwoven pine baskets and hand-carved cutting boards.

Opportunities to learn about agriculture and livestock were available in the Cattle Ranching Exhibit, the Learning Garden, and with Little Farm Hands.

Opening day performances from the Mark Dobson One Man Band, Actual Bank Robbers, Something Major, and Rekindled Bits of Grass appealed to music fans of all tastes.

Opening day of the Florida State Fair was much more than just a way to spend the day. It was a large-scale production that allowed thousands of sellers, artisans, and chefs to share their passions with a broader community, all while creating a classic fair experience for visitors across Florida.

The fair will remain open through Feb. 16, 2026.

Callan Potter, Robbie G.K., and Ksenia Daniela Kharlamova.

The 6-episode show's release spanned from Nov. 28 to Dec. 26, and was extremely well-received, both socially and critically. Almost immediately after it began airing, *Heated Rivalry* was picked up for U.S. release by distribution company HBO Max.

On IMDB, all episodes are ranked as a 9.2 or higher out of 10, with the fifth episode ranked highest, at 9.9 out of 10.

But the show has excited more than just the general public and television critics — it's caught the attention of multiple professional athletes as well.

In an interview with Andy Cohen on his SiriusXM show *Radio Andy*, Williams spoke about the messages he's received from professional players about his portrayal of Shane and the importance it has held for them.

"The people who reach out, somewhat anonymously," Williams said, "are like, 'I'm a professional player still, and I'm still in the closet.'"

Often, the messages are directed to the original novel's author, Reid, and then sent to Williams. Sometimes, however, they are sent directly to him through the player's social media accounts.

"Those ones are the ones that really just kind of hit you," Hudson said. "This is a fun show, and it's celebratory, but also sometimes it's just hitting people right in the nerve."

The show scored its first major award show nomination for Outstanding New TV Series at the upcoming GLAAD Awards. The nomination came just before the announcement that actors Williams and Storrie had been chosen as Olympic torchbearers for the winter Olympics.

Though fans are still embracing re-watching the first season of the show, some are already looking ahead to more.

"I don't have details," showrunner Jacob Tierney said when asked about season 2. "I have not started writing, so I'm not just trying to be evasive. I genuinely don't know."

Yet, in an interview with *Today*, Storrie was a bit more open about the question of season 2's timeline. He shared with audiences that filming for the second season would likely begin before the end of the summer.

Likely, it can be expected that there will be a turnaround time of a year to a year-and-a-half between seasons 1 and 2. However, nothing is currently confirmed regarding the timeline or filming schedule.



Bad Bunny's Super Bowl Halftime Performance: A Love Letter to Puerto Rican and Latino Culture

By Carla Morales

It is no surprise that Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, better known as Bad Bunny, dominated the Super Bowl stage last Sunday. During his 13-minute set, the star brought multiple elements of Latin American culture to the show. The goal of his performance was to highlight Puerto Rican and Latin American culture for a national audience. From the sugar cane fields in the opening song to a finale featuring multiple national flags, Bad Bunny transformed the halftime show into more than just entertainment — it became a statement. However, while many praised the show for its cultural significance, it also sparked controversy, igniting debate over what a traditional Super Bowl halftime show should look like.

Here are some of the halftime show's representations of cultural heritage:

Sugar Cane

At the beginning of the performance, a clip of a sugarcane field transitions to the physical set, revealing the singer walking through it as actors surround him, wearing straw "pava" hats and white clothing. This symbolizes the legacy of colonialism in the region, as sugar cane was the economic engine for Puerto Rico and many other Caribbean countries during the 19th and 20th centuries. Highlighting this during the performance helped raise awareness of Puerto Rico's rural past that the general public may not have been aware of.

La Casita

La Casita directly translates to "the little house," and was first seen in Bad Bunny's *Debi Tirar Más Fotos* short film released in 2025. La casita is the representation of a traditional Puerto Rican house from the midcentury. While these homes are becoming less popular with new developments on the island, he needed to remind the people of what the homes began like. Family is a central component of Puerto Rican culture. La Casita is always full, with many celebrities coming together under one roof, symbolizing



unity. On Super Bowl Sunday, La Casita welcomed a host of important Latino celebrity guests, such as Pedro Pascal, Young Miko, and Karol G.

El Apagón reference

El apagón translates to "blackout," a situation that residents regularly face on the island. Highlighting the island's ongoing struggles with its power grid under LUMA Energy and broader socioeconomic issues, the performance featured electricity poles with sparks flying and lighting effects mimicking the blackouts.

Coconut Stand, Piragua Cart, and Taco Stand

The inclusion of typical food stands representing familiar sights in Puerto Rico and Mexican street culture — like the taco stand — highlighted the shared cultural connection within Latino communities. While performing, Bad Bunny stopped at each stand.

The piragua stand is an icon of Puerto Rican street food culture on hot, sunny days (which most days are on the island). This nostalgic, cone-shaped, shaved ice can be found around the island and is a staple of street vendors.

The coco frió cart — a quintessential, fresh, coconut water street stand common across Puerto Rico, from which actual chilled coconuts are sold — is another staple. These coconut stands are typically close to the beaches, to attract tourists or locals with this iconic taste.

Additionally, Mexican culture was represented through Villas Tacos, with the first-generation Mexican-American

immigrant owner Victor Villas behind the stand.

Placing vendors and recognizable street foods as a prominent focus of his performance helps establish it as a celebration of Latino culture.

Young Boy Sleeping on Chairs

It is extremely common for Latino events or parties to go on until very late hours of the night (way past young kids' bedtime). Parents' solution to this is combining two chairs to create a makeshift bed. Many Latino children have experienced this tradition at least once. Seeing that exact moment on national television was a pure connection with all Latinos, as only that demographic would understand the reference.

The Finale: "Together We Are America"

Bad Bunny has always been an artist who speaks very loudly about his beliefs, especially now in reference to ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement). On Feb. 1, while accepting the Grammy for Best Música Urbana Album for *Debi Tirar Más Fotos*, he said, "before I say thanks to God, I'm gonna say: ICE out! We're not savage, we're not animals, we're not aliens. We are humans, and we are Americans."

Additionally, during his halftime performance, he had the opportunity to make his opinions known to even more people from a public stage, but instead decided to begin the conclusion of his performance by shouting "God Bless America" and publicly uniting everyone with many Latin American, Caribbean, U.S., and Canadian flags.

He ultimately ended his performance by

Photo courtesy of Ana Toledo via Unsplash.

holding a football and saying, "Together we are America."

While many celebrated Bad Bunny and his performance for being so culturally empowering, not everyone had the same reaction. To further understand how this iconic performance was perceived locally, students at the University of Tampa shared their thoughts on this Super Bowl halftime performance.

"I don't think that the halftime show fit the Super Bowl audience," said class of 2029 political science major Vito Scibilia. "As for himself, who is from Puerto Rico, that makes him an American. Overall, I would say he should've incorporated more lyrics in English to appease the majority."

"I didn't like it because I don't typically listen to him, and I couldn't understand what he was saying, but I liked it because it did send a message of unity and inclusion because he included everyone with their flags," said class of 2029 international business and marketing major, Ellie Luber. "I think I would've liked it more if I could've understood his words."

"I think a lot of people are ignorant and think America is just the United States, but in reality [it's] all the countries Bad Bunny showed [the] banners from. I think he made sure to send a message of unity to all of America with the performance," said class of 2029 allied health major, Diego Feijóo. "Being myself Puerto Rican and seeing all the props and symbols that represent our culture made me feel proud of where I am from."



Heated Rivalry is Changing the Game

By Marissa Johnson

The queer hockey show *Heated Rivalry* took the world by storm following its initial Canadian release on Nov. 28. The show was adapted from a novel of the same name, written by Rachel Reid, the second in her *Game Changers* book series.

The narrative follows characters Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov as rival hockey stars in the "MLH," or Major League Hockey, the fictionalized stand-in for the real-world

NHL. Both face the necessity to keep their attraction to one another secret, struggling between engaging in a relationship and balancing the fame of global stardom.

The show has been widely praised for its intricate world-building, as well as its use of sex within the storytelling. Audiences have embraced the attention to detail given to the show's sex scenes, as well as their necessity to communicating the overall plot.

Heated Rivalry stars Hudson Williams as Shane, and Connor Storrie as Ilya — alongside a cast including François Arnaud,

Is networking the only way to get a job after college?

By Emily McLaughlin

As students enter the workforce, networking is increasingly seen as the gateway to job opportunities.

While college does offer some really amazing learning opportunities, it's the connections that make students thrive after college. In today's job market, success is often dependent not just on what you know but who you know.

I'm sure many of you have tried to secure a job position on campus or an internship outside of the University of Tampa (UTampa) community, and they ask you about your experiences. While experience is not everything, networking and connections help students even get considered.

Wendy Kaufman from WUSF NPR interviewed Matt Youngquist, the president of Career Horizons, who said at least 70% to 80% of jobs are not even published.

"And yet most people — they are spending 70 or 80 percent of their time surfing the net versus getting out there, talking to employers, taking some chances [and] realizing that the vast majority of hiring is friends and acquaintances hiring other trusted friends and acquaintances," Youngquist said.

Many jobs are filled through referrals before the public even sees the posting of the jobs. Employees trust recommendations more than random applications.

Hiring is not just about qualifications; it's about trust. Imagine if a hiring manager at a Tampa marketing firm has 120 applications to look through with similar cover letters, resumes, and degrees. Then one of the higher employees comes into the office and says, "Hey, I used to work with Richard. They never miss a deadline, handle big client campaigns well, and are great to work with."

Now, instead of the employer having to review 120 applications to prove someone can be reliable for the job, they have a trusted

employee who vouches for an applicant with real experience. This way, it also lowers the risk of making a bad hire.

If someone is willing to put their reputation on the line for a candidate, that recommendation shows they are worth hiring.

For those wondering where to even start with networking, LinkedIn has become such a hot spot for getting those connections. It has been reported through LinkedIn stats that over one billion people use LinkedIn across 200 different countries. Imagine all the networking that can be done?

No matter if you're looking for a job or internship, a tip from Youngquist is to make at least 100 new contacts a month. Making these contacts can be done by making phone calls, sending emails, or even showing up at the company's doors and presenting yourself to them right on the spot.

Another great way to start getting these connections is by asking your academic advisor, professors, or even friends who have had an internship or job for help. Career fairs are also another great way to physically meet employers face-to-face. UTampa Career Services Events are hosted throughout the

year for students, alumni, employers, and community partners.

I know putting yourself out there can be scary at times. Especially when it's something you are not used to. But ever since I started my time here at UTampa, the motto I have always gone by has been being comfortable with getting uncomfortable. Which will be exactly how you get the job or internship you want.



Photo courtesy of Thirdman via Pexels.

The Sand Problem

By Daniel Mongiello

A couple of weeks ago, I was surfing back in my hometown in New Jersey, and I was having a conversation with my friend when a set rolled in. I leaned back on my longboard, gave my friend a nod, and began paddling.

To my surprise, the wave did not break in its normal spot; it carried for another 3 to 4 yards and broke on a much steeper angle than I was expecting. This caused my board to nosedive and my body to be unceremoniously plunged into the water. As I scampered on my board and paddled back to my friend, who was greeting me with a muffled grin, he said to me, "Enjoying the new seabed?"

I had no idea what he meant, so I said, "What's different about it?"

He then began to tell me about the process called beach reclamation or beach renourishment. This plan helps prevent beach erosion, and I honestly was blown away by everything he was talking about.

So, I decided when I got home to do more research into the subject. For starters, the beach reclamation projects have been around for a long time, with the first records of them beginning in 1923 on Coney Island. The reason is that the beaches were sinking into the ocean.

One of the solutions they came up with is a process called dredging. Dredging now is solidified as the modern way of beach renourishment. It involves taking a crane out onto a barge, fitting it with a massive claw, and pulling huge chunks of whatever the

seafloor is made out of onto the barge, where it is then dumped onto the beach or onto dunes.

Sounds very environmentally friendly, right? If you caught my not-so-subtle sarcasm, you can most likely guess that dredging has huge environmental impacts both where the dredging is taking place and where they are dumping the sand. First, the obvious consequences for micro marine life, algae, and the butterfly effect that is caused by disrupting the habitats where these organisms reside are a problem.

Where they are dumping the sand is a problem. They are mainly pumping the sand back onto the beach, using it in construction projects, or just dropping it deep offshore.

Dropping the sand back onto the beach or offshore are really the only two that cause problems. The mass amounts of sand disrupt habitats, trapping nutrients and possibly adding unwanted pollution to the area.

Furthermore, a lot of the data and arguments to promote these reclamation projects come from large hotel or apartment companies looking to get more space on the beach to hypothetically attract more customers. This was subsequently what was occurring at my beach in New Jersey.

This arcade called Wonderland had been bought by a large hotel company, which said that the beaches were suffering from a lot of erosion, even though multiple jetties were in place that were said to already slow the beach erosion.

This entire process is then taken a step further when, after some digging, you find

out that most of the companies in charge of dredging are using taxpayer money to pay for most of it, if not the entirety of the alarmingly expensive process. The initial dredging cost, which is a lot lower, is picked up by the hotels and apartments, while the maintenance and after-dredging in public waterways, such as public beaches, is paid for by taxpayer dollars.

After the dredging is done, due to the sand eventually crumbling and filling in where the initial dredge was done, this costs way more due to the fact that they have to keep coming back every couple of years. This scam, as I am now going to call it, is perpetuated all over the U.S. and other parts of the world, as dredging companies can go to hotels and apartments on the water, scare the owners and lobbying factions of the area into believing that their hotels and apartments are going to sink into the ocean.

The dredging companies then say the only way to solve this issue is to pay them millions,

with most big renourishment programs being \$20 to \$100 per cubic yard for sand and silt, and around \$100-\$300 per cubic yard for tougher material such as mud and rock. The hotels agree because they don't have to pay for it, they get more bodies on the beach, which means more revenue for them, and the dredging companies pick up millions along the way.

So, how do we go about fixing this problem? The easy answer is to talk about it, bring this issue up to your local government and local officials who actually care about keeping our beach environments safe and healthy.

Beach erosion can be a problem, but dredging is not the solution. Our beaches are here to stay, and it's up to us to keep them that way.

Seagulls Sit on a Jetty made to stop beach erosion, 7th Street, Ocean City, NJ
Photo Courtesy of Nick Kashuba.



Spartans Honor 2025 National Championship, Continue Hot Start to the Season

By Jeremy Fishman

The UTampa Spartans baseball team honored its 2025 national championship-winning team before their 8-0 home-opener win on Friday.

Part of last season's team stood behind the pitcher's mound as freshman student manager Nick Creek pulled the curtain to reveal the new 2025 championship sign in left field. The team then turned its attention to right-center field to watch the unveiling of the new "Fred E. Pollock '70" video scoreboard.

The scoreboard is named in honor of Fred E. Pollock, class of 1970, and his wife, Jeanette, who have shown their support over the years through fundraising and attending games.

"None of the success that we have had for this many years would be possible without the support of many, and they have led that charge," said Joe Urso, head baseball coach.

Nico Saladino, former Spartan infielder and recipient of the 2026 Hindman Wall Spartan Warrior Award, threw out the first pitch before the game. Saladino is part of a family legacy at UTampa. His grandfather, a 1958 graduate, was very active in the Hillsborough County baseball community before his passing in August. He founded the

Saladino Baseball Tournament and the Tony Saladino Baseball Award, which is given out to the top high school baseball player in Hillsborough County.

Nico Saladino said throwing out the first pitch was a meaningful way to honor his grandfather.

"It means the world to be able to continue that legacy and then do it for my grandfather," said Nico Saladino.

Following the pregame events, the Spartans took the field behind Robert Satin, junior starting pitcher. Satin set the tone early, striking out the side in the top of the first.

Jesse Ponce, junior shortstop, jump-started the Spartans' offense early with an infield single against Zach Wyatt, junior starting pitcher for Montevallo. Brayden Woodburn, senior second baseman, followed with a 112 mph single to left field. Jake Books, senior designated hitter, brought both runners in on a double into the right-center field gap. Walker Vanecek, junior first baseman, hit a dribbler through the hole on the right side, allowing Books to score as he came stumbling into home plate. The Spartans ended the first inning with a 3-0 lead.

In the top of the second inning, Satin continued to pitch well, striking out the side in consecutive innings. Wyatt held the

Spartans scoreless in the bottom of the inning.

In the top of the third, Satin struck out the first two batters he faced, totaling 8 in a row to start the game. Montevallo put their first ball in play on a groundout to second base to end the inning. The Spartans added one more run to their total in the bottom of the third on an RBI single from Javi Soto, junior outfielder.

Satin added two more strikeouts in a hitless fourth, and the Spartans added two more runs on a 407-foot home run by Jesse Ponce, bringing the score to 6-0.

"I want to just keep swinging it well and keep seeing it well," said Ponce. "[I'm] just trying to get on base and trying to help the team win."

In the fifth, Satin struck out the first batter and induced a flyout to left field. Junior second baseman Caleb Karll ended the perfect game bid with a single before Satin recorded strikeout number 12.

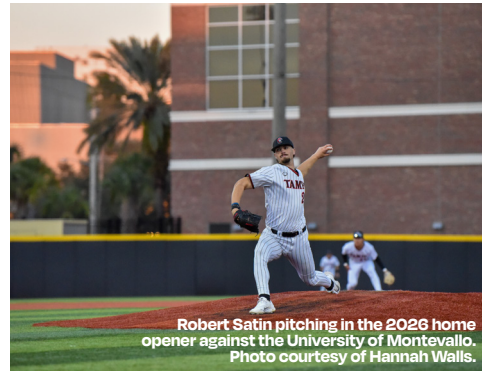
"I was just throwing the ball over the plate," said Satin. "It's a good feeling knowing you can throw whatever and you're going to get outs."

Urso credited Satin for setting the tone of the game early.

"He pitched ahead, strike one over and over again, and he pounded the ball in on their right-handers," said Urso.

The Spartans loaded the bases in the bottom of the fifth and scored via a wild pitch and an RBI walk to Woodburn, making the score 8-0 where it would stay for the rest of the game.

Alex Laiche, junior relief pitcher, and Tobin Moran, senior relief pitcher, finished the game on the mound, combining for 4 innings pitched, 3 hits, and 2 strikeouts.



Robert Satin pitching in the 2025 home opener against the University of Montevallo. Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls.



The new University of Tampa Spartans Baseball 2025 national championship sign. Photo courtesy of Jeremy Fishman.



Players and staff from the 2025 Tampa Spartans National Championship-winning team, behind Fred E. Pollock and his wife, Jeanette. Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls.

UTampa Earns Three-Game Sweep During Greek Week

By Lilly Bouchard

As UTampa baseball let up 10 runs in the first two games against Post, they entered their last game with a stronger defense, beating Post in a shutout.

After UTampa's last two wins against Post this past weekend at Bailey Field, they looked to close them out for their final game of the three-game series. Adjustments had to be made to get away with the win since on Saturday's Valentine Red Out game, the Spartans struggled defensively, letting up eight runs. Yet their offense pulled through, scoring 19 runs to walk away with a victory, which Jhoander Irigoyen had a huge role in.

"The pitching, we weren't doing the job properly yesterday, but today we had B.J. Bailey, he did a great job, and that is why we could come out as a team and do well offensively," said Irigoyen.

Head coach Joe Urso said that the Spartans had a "mental lapse defensively."

"I've never seen my team play that bad defensively. We went a couple of weekends

with no errors, and yesterday was a five-error game, very uncharacteristic of us," Urso said.

They turned that around with only one error in Sunday's game.

Irigoyen, a senior coming off two back-to-back titles, led the team offensively this past weekend with three RBIs on Friday and four RBIs on Saturday, going two-for-two at the plate.

"The freshmen have a big responsibility knowing that the team is looking for another natty," Irigoyen said. "They have to learn from the others and lock in and work together."

Irigoyen explained that they do bible study every weekend and preach as a ritual.

"Most guys on the team have a faithful pathway, and I think that has contributed a lot to our team and come out as a family and win many games," said Irigoyen.

Urso believes that the team has to be a family to see success as well. With 23 new players coming in this season, including Jesse Ponce, junior shortstop, and Gunnnett Carlson, senior first baseman, they talk about their strategies to follow up on their success.

"Bringing in 23 guys and seeing them coming together as a family as we preach to be, I am seeing signs of that," said Urso.

Carlson, a transfer from Rice University, started off the game in the bottom of the second with two RBIs, giving the Spartans a two-run lead.

"We knew someone was going to have to do that, and it is cool that it got to be me to get it started," Carlson said.

"We are supposed to win, and I don't like losing very much," Carlson said. "Tampa is definitely my final stop; there is no place like it."

Greek Life hosted fun games throughout the game. Events such as a corn-eating competition between different fraternities in

between innings and a "Junk in your Trunk" game, where frat brothers tried shaking out all of the balls of a tissue box wrapped around their waist.

The sororities had a costume race, running the perimeter of the field in costumes to see who was the fastest, as well as a poster competition where the audience got to vote who had the most artistic one.

There is a lot of new talent that has entered the program, and a lot of pressure for the three-peat.

"We will see if the team is a championship team or not," said Urso.

They start their first conference game next week against Saint Leo at 6 p.m. on Feb. 20 at the Tampa Baseball Field.



Photo courtesy of Lexi Smith.



Lacrosse Home Opener Recap



UTampa Club Lacrosse opened their season at home with a shootout win against UMiami. The game ended with a final score of 20-17. Spartan Freshman Benny Besztery earned MCLA Warrior player of the week honors with a 5 goal and 4 assist performance, and Junior Connor Coolahan was named to the Pearl Goalie of the Week Honor Roll.

Photo Courtesy of Jacob Tomaneng.



UTampa Women's Basketball Team Loses to Eckerd After a Tight Game

By Genesis Muckle

The University of Tampa women's basketball team battled through four intense quarters but fell short in a 71-63 loss to Eckerd College.

The Spartans entered the matchup aiming for consistency as the season continued. Tampa's starting lineup included guards sophomore Georgia Palmieri and junior Olivia Davis, graduate wing Alanis Diaz, sophomore guard Amy Thompson, and junior center Ryan Franklin.

Tampa opened the game with confidence and got right on the board when Diaz made the first basket with the assistance of Palmieri. However, Eckerd answered quickly after, and the opening of the game saw both teams scoring within minutes. Tampa was able to find an offensive rhythm, particularly from Davis and Thompson, putting Tampa in the lead.

Following a timeout midway through the first quarter, Tampa led the game 14-10. Free throws from Davis and consistent scoring from Diaz gave the Spartans the edge, but Eckerd remained persistent, and the Tritons tied it 20-20 by the end of the first quarter.

Eckerd stuck first in the second quarter, taking a brief lead, but Tampa caught up quickly and tied the game once again. The quarter consisted of strong momentum, with neither team letting up. Franklin set a spark

after re-entering the game after a short break, while Palmieri and Diaz continued to add pressure to Eckerd's defense.

Despite Tampa's drive during the quarter, Eckerd remained relentless, and defensive breakdowns from the Spartans allowed the Tritons to take advantage, leaving Tampa trailing by halftime at 38-33.

"There are a lot of things to learn, especially when it comes to defending on the perimeter by our post players," head coach Thomas Jessee said. "(But) the team played hard all game and with great effort. When these two teams play each other, it's always a hard-fought game."

As the third quarter began, Tampa emerged from the locker room focused and ready to take on Eckerd. Free throws from Thompson and Franklin helped chip away at the deficit, and the Spartans found themselves tied at 38-38.

Freshman Faith Pickens made her first appearance and was instantly locked in. Tampa pushed further into the lead at 47-38 as the offensive execution improved and the defense put on more pressure.

The Spartans remained united, but Eckerd showed discipline and took advantage of free throws to take the lead, and the Tritons reclaimed the lead in a 48-47 decision by the fourth quarter.

The final period put the Spartans' composure to the test. Eckerd capitalized on key possessions and maintained control down



Georgia Palmieri during the University of Tampa vs. Eckerd College game. Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls.

the stretch. Tampa pushed but was unable to regain momentum.

Despite the loss, Jessee emphasized the bigger picture for his team. "We have a very new team, with 10 of the 13 players being new this year," he said. "They'll continue to work together. We play again on Saturday, so there's no time to feel sorry for yourself. We'll watch film and learn from what we see."

Jessee also pointed to the confidence gained from close games against strong opponents.

"We can play with anyone, and that's what they see when we have close games like this

with good teams," he said. "They're really great at bouncing back."

Following the game, the message to the team was centered around growth and trust in the process.

"Tonight was about playing a complete game and following our scouting report," Jessee said. "They're getting better every night out. It takes time to create a team with so many new players, and I wouldn't want anyone else but the ones we have. They're a great group of young ladies."

Tampa Bay Rays Closing in on New Stadium

By Ben Rosen

The Tampa Bay Rays of Major League Baseball (MLB) are putting the finishing touches on a deal that would see the team get a new stadium on the current Dale Mabry campus of Hillsborough Community College (HCC). Raymond James Stadium is directly across the street from this location. If everything goes as planned, the Rays will move into the new stadium for the 2029 season, according to MLB.com's Adam Berry.

On Feb. 5, the Rays released the first renderings of the new stadium and the entertainment district development around the venue. The capacity of the new stadium will be around 31,000 seats, according to what the team told Berry. Renderings of a redeveloped HCC are also included in the release.

According to a Tampa Bay Times report from Feb. 3, the Rays plan to cover at least half of the stadium costs as well as all possible overrun costs. The state government will not be paying for the stadium, and all government funding for the project will be contributed by Hillsborough County.

"Today's an important day, a milestone along a path that I believe will lead to the Tampa Bay Rays being part of this community for decades to come," MLB commissioner Rob Manfred said during a Feb. 3 press conference at HCC with Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Rays CEO Ken Babby.

The Rays will return to Tropicana Field for the 2026 season after having to play the 2025 season at George M. Steinbrenner Field because of damage to the Trop caused

by Hurricane Milton. As AP noted, the Rays' lease at Tropicana Field expires after the 2028 season at the earliest, but further specifics are unknown.

"We will go far and wide to ask questions, to learn, to take feedback, and have community huddles throughout the region to learn how to make our project the right, perfect public-private partnership," Babby said during the press conference.

Given the length of the Rays stadium saga, Manfred reiterated the need to find a new stadium in the region to keep the team in the Tampa Bay area for the long run.

"I do think we're at a point in the history of the club that something needs to get done, but I would be hesitant to characterize it as it's this or never again," Manfred said during the press conference.

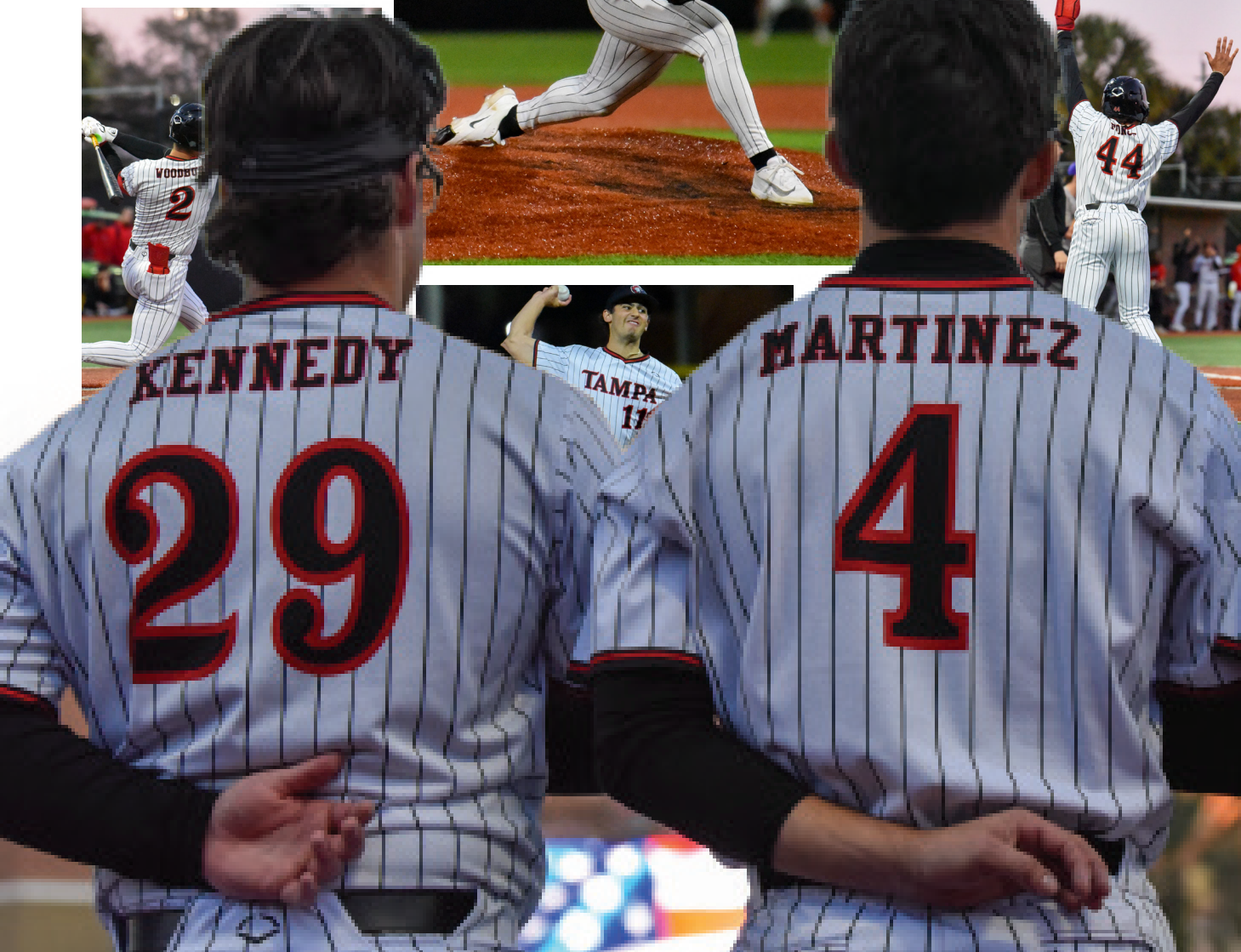
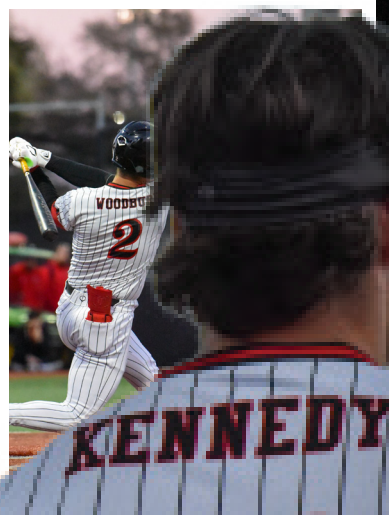
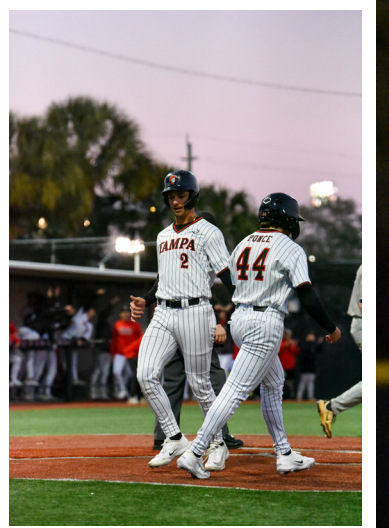
DeSantis, who is from the Tampa Bay area, believes that the critics are wrong about having a major league team in the region.

"Baseball belongs in Tampa Bay, baseball could succeed in Tampa Bay," DeSantis said during the press conference.

Manfred also emphasized the point DeSantis made about the league having a place in the Tampa Bay region.

"One thing that has been consistent during my time as Commissioner was my view that Major League Baseball belongs in Tampa Bay," Manfred said during the press conference. "That support has been, I hope, clear and unwavering."

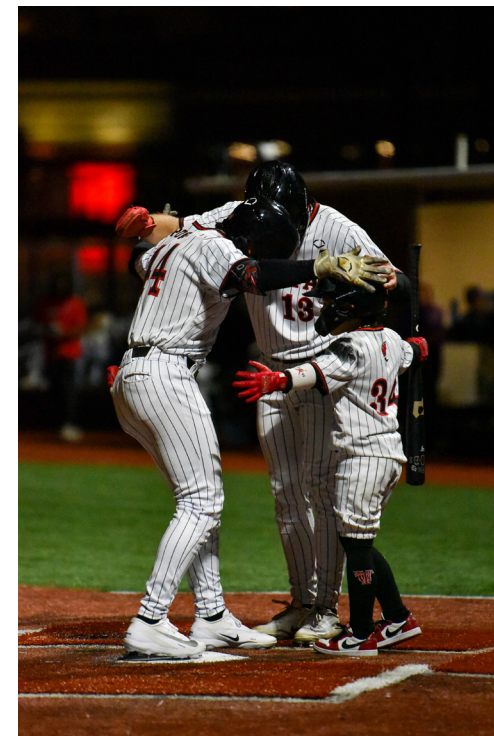
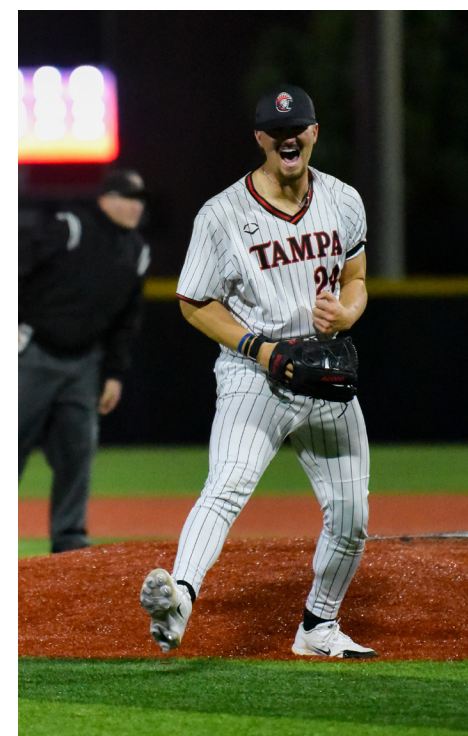
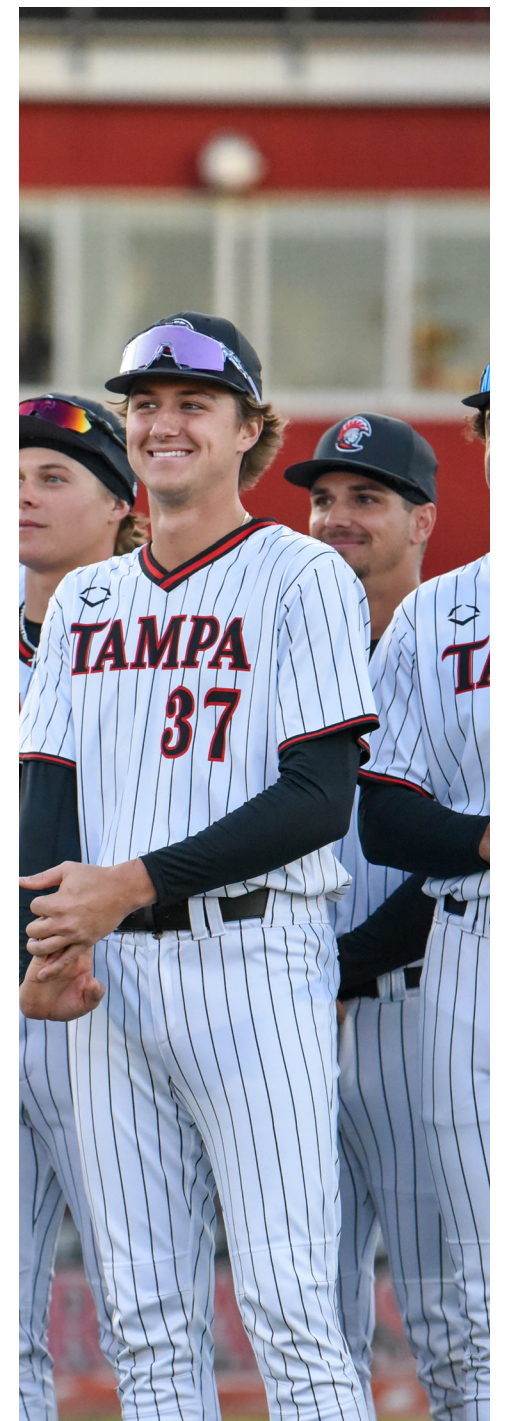
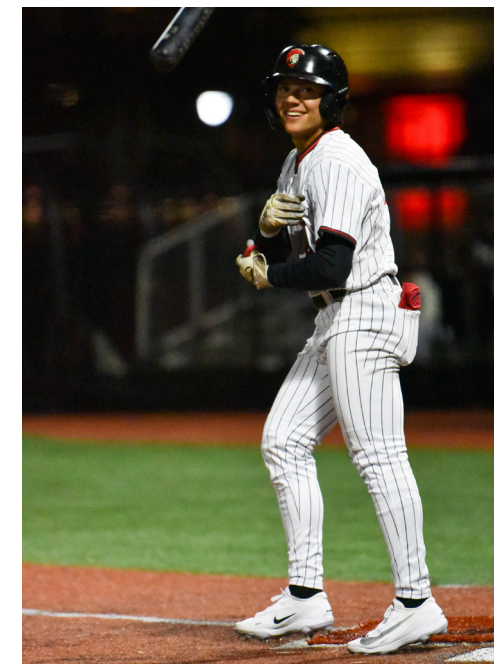
While some steps remain to complete negotiations with HCC, the Rays are on track to remain in Tampa Bay.



Spartans Open Home Season With Championship Banner Reveal

By Hannah Walls

The University of Tampa Baseball Team won their home opener 8-0 on Friday, Feb 6th. Starting pitcher, Robert Satin, had a dominant outing going five innings with zero runs and 12 strikeouts.



Club Soccer Practice

By Genesis Muckle

Energy fills the field as the club soccer team at the University of Tampa works on team dynamics and field scrimmages. As communication echos across the field, every sprint reflects their resilience and growth as they represent UTampa with pride.



Club Lacrosse Practice

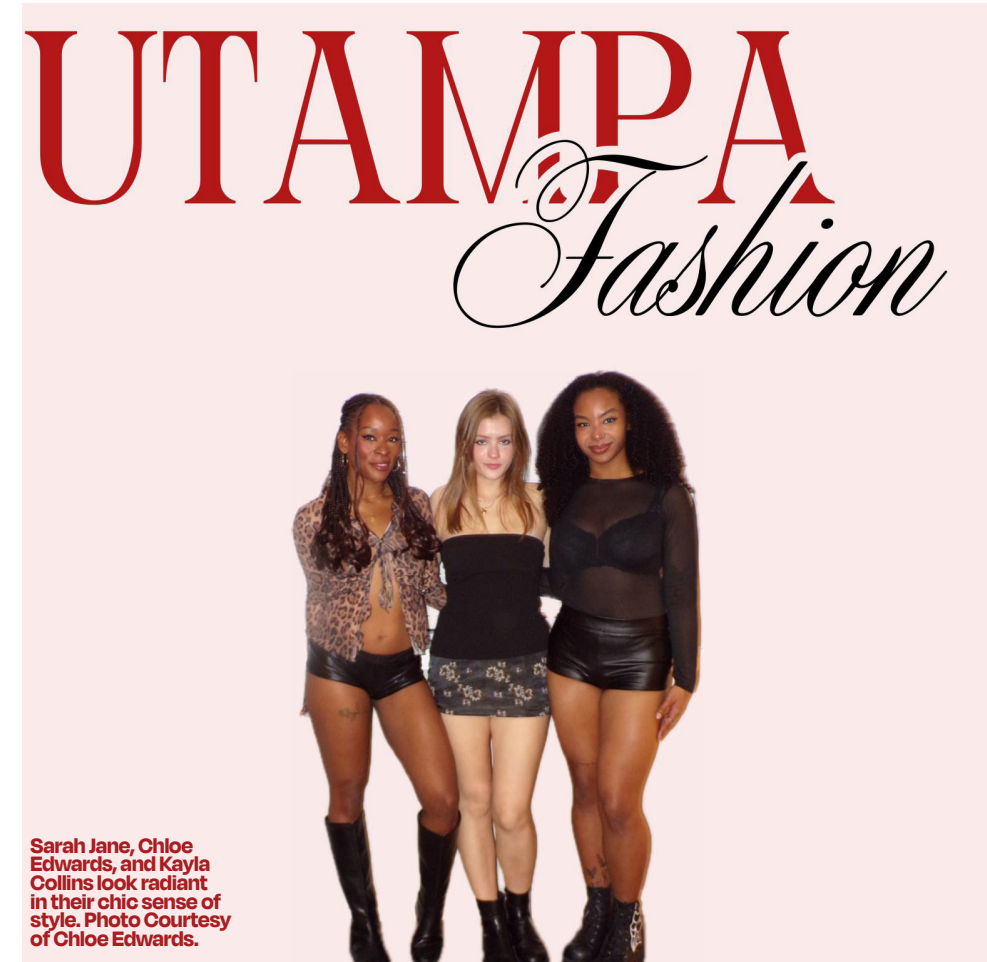
By Genesis Muckle

Under the Stadium lights, the University of Tampa club lacrosse team sharpens their skills. Players move through fast drills and build their on field chemistry. Every rep and drill is a reflection, but they're discipline and competitive drive for the game.



What to Wear to Where: The UTampa Guide

By Elijah L. Conley



Sarah Jane, Chloe Edwards, and Kayla Collins look radiant in their chic sense of style. Photo Courtesy of Chloe Edwards.

“Am I chopped? Or am I not chopped?” A question that has run through the minds of many since fashion became a form of expression. College students, tiptoeing the line between teenager and adult, battle with this as every outfit can make or break someone’s day, week, or semester. Thankfully, UTampa has a fashion club to help navigate your closet.

Gianna M. Van Valkenburg, senior at UTampa, is the founder and president of the fashion club on campus, but that doesn’t tie her down to a certain look.

“I don’t really have a specific style,” said Van Valkenburg. “It’s always changing depending on my mood, where I’m going, or the weather.”



Gianna M. Van Valkenburg showcasing a stylish, “beachy vibe” inspired outfit that could come straight out of a Hollister ad. Photo Courtesy of Gianna M. Van Valkenburg.

Van Valkenburg walks her own runway, merging the 2000s and modern trends, but opting out of wearing makeup for a daily look. But when she goes out, Charlotte Tilbury is her go-to.

Her love for old trends is only matched by her usage of a secondhand best friend.

“Vintage is my best friend”

Besides thrifting and using Depop, an independent shopping site, Van Valkenburg is also shopping at With Jean, Revolve, and Brandy Melville.

“I think almost every girl, and maybe even guys, [in] Tampa can say they love Brandy Melville,” said Van Valkenburg.

It doesn’t require you to be the president of a fashion club to put together an outfit. You can even be a chemist. For Chloe Edwards, senior, a statement piece is all she needs to take on the town.

“I feel like UTampa has a chic going-out vibe,” said Edwards.

Edwards focuses on a sleek, clean-cut look when preparing for her nights out. She credits the early 2000s and TikTok shop as her main inspirations and source of her outfits. Edwards begins her process with her statement piece and builds from there to create a balanced outfit.

“My makeup routine is all over the place, but right now I’m obsessed with Fenty Bronzer,” said Edwards.

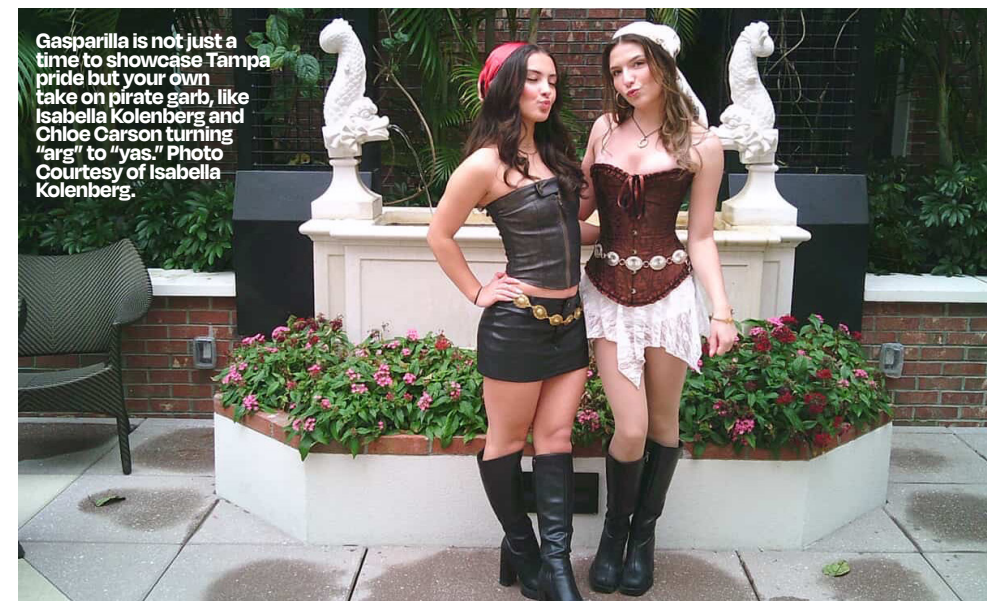


A chic orange and denim combo brought together by Chloe Edwards, taking the town in a sleek outfit. Photo Courtesy of Chloe Edwards.

Van Valkenburg’s process involves her checking the weather and then referring to the popular inspiration app, Pinterest. After finding the perfect outfit, she begins bringing it to life in her closet, which can be on the first try or could “take hours.”

Seniors are not the only ones with style who can offer guidance to others; some freshmen come in with an already curated vibe, idea, and plan of execution. Isabella Kolenberg, a freshman at UTampa, has been stepping into college with boots that weren’t just made for walking.

“I honestly never really was truly inspired by anyone’s style...[I] like the idea of taking little elements I found to make my own,” said Kolenberg.



Gasparilla is not just a time to showcase Tampa pride but your own take on pirate garb, like Isabella Kolenberg and Chloe Carson turning “arg” to “yas.” Photo Courtesy of Isabella Kolenberg.

Kolenberg credits her sister’s love of shopping and trends as the start of her fashion journey. Her pieces range from Zara to Aritzia, focusing on dresses in the warmer weather. Kolenberg’s time in Tampa has drawn her to more creative outfits and wearing them throughout the week. As a musical theatre major, the importance of your outfit choice can make or break your auditions in the professional world. Fashion is not just a tool she utilizes in her personal life, but also in her career.

“I always first look at what I have in my closet...,” Kolenberg said. “I’ll look at Pinterest or call my sister...”

Pinterest seems to be a campus go-to, which would explain the “UTampa look.” The “UTampa look” usually consists of mini skirts, black boots, and a cute top.

Kolenberg views this as the typical going-out outfit for freshmen. With the temperatures dropping, the typical going-out outfit might need to be modified for some.

Edwards, originally from Philadelphia, is used to the cold weather and is willing to put the outfit over comfort.

“I get hyper fixated on my statement piece and make whatever sacrifices I need to make it happen,” said Edwards.

It seems that is the mindset for all these next few months.

“Nothing a jacket won’t fix,” said Van Valkenburg in reference to how the weather has affected her ability to go out. Kolenberg’s experience from living in Connecticut has prepared her for layering an outfit together.

“I think this cold weather is definitely different for Florida,” said Kolenberg. “It hasn’t affected me going out because I just add elements to my outfits that I would have at home!”

UTampa’s campus, location, and student body offer a diverse, rare, and uniquely Spartan experience that can reflect down to the clothes. Whether you’re a Brandy girl, or boy, or a common thrifter, showcase your best outfit that shows you off, or ask for help. One thing about a Spartan, we know how to have a good time and look great while doing it.

New Homemade Shelters in Place for Campus Cats

By Nicole Droeger Stephens



A shelter is temporarily located near Fletcher Lounge until the relocation begins. Photo by Nicole Droeger Stephens.



Alfredo is drinking water next to his new shelter. Photo by Nicole Droeger Stephens.

On Jan. 25, UTampa Campus Cats placed wooden shelters along the University of Tampa’s (UTampa) campus. The club’s staff advisor, Corey George, used \$200 of Registered Student Organizations (RSO) funding to build the shelters in-house.

Last semester, the University of Tampa Administration reported an infestation of fleas under Fletcher Lounge’s basement in Plant Hall. Assistant VP of Communications and Public Affairs Eric Cardenas shares that the university and UTampa Campus Cats reached an agreement to relocate the cat colony behind the Macdonald-Kelce Library.

“Once the cats are relocated, the administration plans to seal the Plant Hall crawl space to remove all wildlife that may contribute to the flea infestations,” Cardenas wrote via email.

UTampa’s campus is home to at least seven stray cats.

Two reside near the old schoolhouse, a white building located next to the parking lot near Smiley Hall. A Siamese cat named Alfredo is in a bonded pair, or emotionally connected, with a 3-year-old tabby female named Fettuccine.

The least social members of the colony are an orange domestic shorthair named Nemo and a mixed-tabby tortoiseshell domestic shorthair named Dory. The pair linger near the Rick Thomas Parking Garage.

Four cats reside near Plant Hall: a female Siamese mix named Lulu; a female tabby named Queen, who is bonded with the male gray short-haired, King; and a male tabby named Remy.

Isabella Doland, club president of UTampa Campus Cat, shared that she assisted George with the shelter locations.

“I decided to put one next to the old schoolhouse for Alfredo and Fettuccine because of their close bond,” Doland said. “The two other shelters were put behind the bushes of Plant Hall for King, Queen, and a separate one for Remy.”

George built the homes out of a three-quarter-inch sheet of plywood and composite roofing panels. The shelters were placed on wooden boards to prevent flood damage during storm season. They were also built to keep the cats warm.

“It helps with ventilation and warming if it’s not sitting on the cold ground,” George

said. “We put in animal straw...so that the cats can kind of make their own bed in there, and the straw actually provides a good bit of insulation for them.”

George plans to use a similar design to implement feeding shelters in the future.

“Right now, they’re just plastic boxes,” George said. “I want to make something that’s going to be a little bit more durable and not quite as unseemly as dirty plastic.”

As the semester progresses, students can keep an eye out for their feline neighbors relaxing in new dens.

UTampa Campus Cats is an RSO focused on providing care for the cat colonies at the university, as well as implementing trap, neuter, vaccinate, and release programs to reduce overpopulation.

The club will have its first meeting this semester on Feb. 13 at 7:30 p.m. in the Southard Family Building, room 147, for Valentine’s arts and crafts.

Remy keeps watch near his new home. Photo by Nicole Droeger Stephens.



Spring 2026 Involvement Fair

By Lexi Smith



On Jan. 28, the Involvement Fair gathered more than 200 registered student organizations on campus on the Grand Lawn, sharing information with new and returning students about their clubs, upcoming events, and ways to get involved. The event gave students a chance to explore a wide range of organizations from Skydiving and Scuba and Snorkel club to Photography Club to the student newspaper, The Minaret.



Greek Week 2026 Preview

By Gloria Falach

The University of Tampa (UTampa) Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL) office is hosting Greek Week starting on Feb. 15 and ending with the Greek Variety Show (GVS) on Feb. 21.

The 2026 Greek Week theme is Battle of the Bands. The eight bands assigned to each team are Queen, Destiny's Child, One Direction, Black Eyed Peas, ABBA, AC/DC, NSYNC, and Maroon 5.

Team Queen is Delta Zeta, Pi Kappa Phi, and Lambda Gamma National Sorority, Inc.

Team Destiny's Child is Sigma Kappa, Lambda Chi Alpha, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Team One Direction is Delta Gamma, Phi Delta Theta, and Chi Phi.

Team Black Eyed Peas is Sigma Delta Tau and Zeta Beta Tau.

Team ABBA is Kappa Alpha Theta and Alpha Tau Omega.

Team AC/DC is Zeta Tau Alpha, Alpha Epsilon Pi, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Team NSYNC is Delta Phi Epsilon, Phi Gamma Delta (Fiji), and Delta Upsilon.

Team Maroon 5 is Alpha Chi Omega, Tau Kappa Epsilon, and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.

The Greek Week philanthropy this year is The Merciful Project. All money raised by each team will be donated to The Merciful Project at the end of the week.

Emma Gillanders is an FSL Programming Intern and she coordinates events for all students in Greek Life throughout the year. Planning Greek Week is the biggest part of her job.

Day one is the Greek Week baseball game, where students will participate in mini games during a U'Tampa baseball game. These mini games are a Fruit Roll-Ups eating contest, a corn on the cob eating contest, and a costume relay race for women.

Monday is Guess the Song and Pie a Caption. Gillanders will be playing eight songs, one from each different band, and teams have the chance to guess it right or wrong. They also have the opportunity to pie different team captains.

Tuesday is Sidewalk Chalk. Each team will sketch their own design related to their assigned band with chalk. Guests from The Merciful Project will be judging which team has the best chalk art.

Wednesday is Greek Field Day, which is a new event this year. There will be two events: a tag team relay race, where there'll be three girls and three guys from each team participating. The second event will be the tug of war event that was done last year.

Thursday is Bubble Soccer, where each team will play soccer in inflatable bubbles.

"This is a fan favorite event," said Gillanders.

Friday is the Greek Development Workshop, where students get to work on their resumes and get extra career advice.

Saturday ends Greek Week with the GVS, where each team puts together an eight-minute dance according to their theme.

"Events each weigh a certain amount of points," said Gillanders. "With GVS points and proceeds from fundraising, all weigh in to determine who will be the Greek Week winner."

GVS is the most attended event of Greek Week. This year, GVS will be held in the Falk Theatre.

Each team takes the GVS dance seriously, with long practices as they get closer to show day. This allows relationships to be built between the different fraternities and sororities as they team up together.

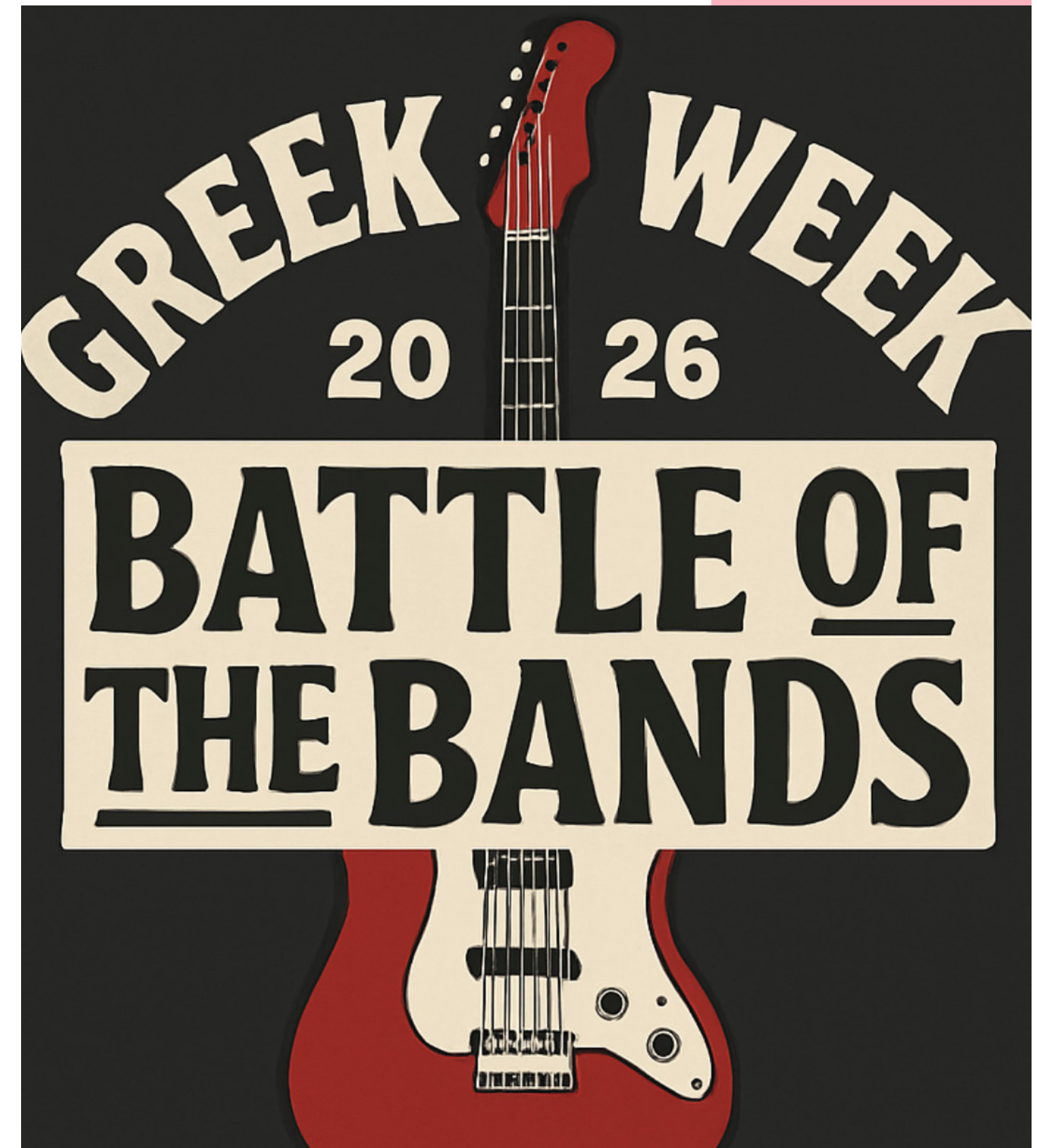
"Doing GVS is a super fun experience that allowed me to get closer to my sisters and other people in other Greek organizations," said Mackenzie Bell, Team NSYNC Spirit Captain. "I also love that the whole experience is for charity."

As Greek Week approaches, all teams need to make sure they are as prepared as they can be to win.

"With a week left, we focus on cleaning and making the dance more polished," said Maile Fisher, Team ABBA Choreographer. "Final touches are placed, and it all comes together."

To find out which teams are at the top of the leaderboard and how much money is being raised during this year's Greek Week, check out the FSL Instagram, @utampafsl.

Battle Of The Bands graphic for this year's Greek Week. Photo courtesy of Emma Gillanders.

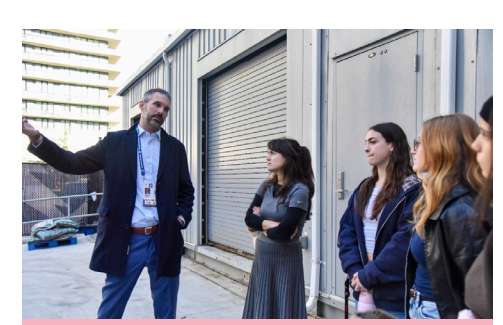


Benchmark International Arena Gives Sustainability Tour to UTampa Students

By Genesis Muckle

On Tuesday, Feb. 3, environmental studies students from the University of Tampa got the opportunity to speak with the vice president of facility operations, Rhett Blewett, about the sustainability of the ice arena that is home to the three-time Stanley Cup winners, the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The Benchmark Arena, previously known as Amalie Arena, announced its fifth name change since it opened as the Ice Palace in 1996 on Aug. 13, 2025. This name change has not affected the sustainability of the arena. There are many other factors within how the arena is able to operate while preserving as much energy as possible.



Rhett Blewett and students from the University of Tampa. Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls.

Rhett explains that while the arena does not have a fully established sustainability framework, active progress has been made through increasing operational changes and consistent planning. Many of these sustainability decisions and efforts are determined by the city of Tampa, along with the arena's corporate partners.

One of the most significant challenges of the ice arena is energy, particularly when it comes to maintaining the ice within Florida's climate. During times when Lightning does not have home games, the ice is covered. On game days, the ice is dried to improve efficiency.

The arena relies on a central energy plant that cost \$13 million and was built approximately three years ago to help address energy efficiency. Blewett said that the system has helped the arena reduce energy usage by approximately 8% to 13%.

"While it cost 13 million to build, it's probably saving us somewhere between 8% to 13% on energy," said Blewett.

While there have been improvements, Blewett notes that the arena still consumes more energy than Raymond James Stadium.

However, the energy usage does improve during concert season, when ice demands are reduced.

Additionally, waste reduction has become a major focus and accomplishment for the arena. Blewett introduced U Tampa students to the new composting system that was implemented just a week prior.

"We just introduced composting last week; they did 12 [barrels] last week and increased it to 15 this week," said Blewett.

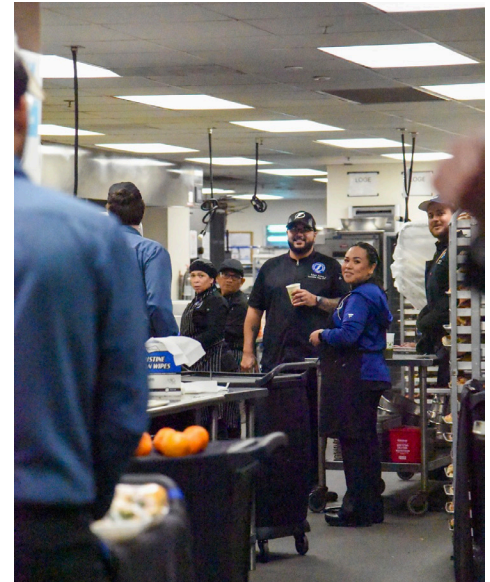


Compost barrels are behind the Benchmark Arena. Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls.

The composting system is supported through the arena's partnership with Waste Connections and has been designed to make it as easy as possible for the staff working there. The kitchen and food preparation areas all include buckets that are easy to access and roll around, allowing the staff to dispose of the kitchen's organic waste efficiently, without disrupting the flow of the kitchen.

"If you're trying to get them to make the right decision, you've gotta be easy," said Blewett. "You have to make it easy, and you have to make it simple."

Blewett also expresses the importance of understanding behavioral design in regard to sustainability. He goes on to explain that even small inconveniences can simply impact individual participation.



Back-of-house kitchen in the Benchmark Arena. Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls.

The tour also took students behind the scenes to look at the arena's operations. The behind-the-scenes facility has extensive amounts of storage for staging equipment. When hockey season is over, the facility also has an in-house kitchen with an energy-efficient laundry room. There are designated recycling areas throughout. There is a designated space for all of the cardboard boxes disposed of, where they are placed before they are picked up.

Blewett also opened up about the ongoing discussion surrounding partnerships with beverage sponsors. He shared that the arena is currently looking into alternatives for plastic bottles, such as aluminum packaging, though factors like cost and compatibility complicate the process. While these ideas and solutions have not yet been finalized, Blewett says that having these conversations alone is a step forward.



Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls.



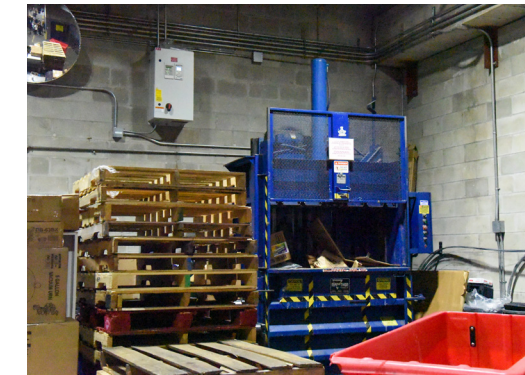
Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls.



Photo courtesy of Hannah Walls.



Environmental studies students at The University of Tampa took a tour of Benchmark International Arena on Tuesday, Feb 3rd. They got to see the behind the scenes practices that reduce environmental impact while still supporting large scale events multiple times a week.



Inside Benchmark International Arena's Sustainable Design

By Hannah Walls.





A mangrove habitat at Weedon Island Preserve in St. Petersburg, Florida, on Feb. 23, 2025. Photo courtesy of Hayden Randolph.

Mangroves Provide Ecosystem Services to Florida's Communities

By Hayden Randolph

Florida's mangroves protect its coastlines from threats like storm surge while facing threats of their own.

"They protect coastlines by reducing wave energy and storm surge, which helps limit erosion and flooding during hurricanes and other extreme storms," David Kaplan, director of the University of Florida's Center for Coastal Solutions, said. "They are also highly productive nursery habitats for fish, crabs, and shrimp that support both commercial and recreational fisheries."

According to the National Wildlife Federation, the ecosystem serves as habitat for breeding and feeding for several aquatic species. Mangroves can be valued at \$80,000 to \$360,000 per acre.

"When mangroves are lost, communities become more vulnerable to storm damage, flooding, and shoreline erosion," Kaplan said.

"These losses translate into higher costs for infrastructure repair, insurance, and disaster recovery."

Mangroves face threats from natural disasters, climate change, deforestation, aquaculture, coastal development and pollution, according to the Mangrove Action Project. Development can release carbon dioxide stored in the habitat's soil because mangroves act as carbon sinks. Additionally, sea level rise from climate change is pushing mangroves inland.

"Florida has some of the strongest mangrove protections in the United States. Mangroves are protected under state law, and permits are generally required for trimming or removal," Kaplan said. "At the federal level, mangroves are also protected as wetlands under the Clean Water Act."

In Florida, there are several statutes and administrative codes that protect mangroves through different means. Based on aerial monitoring from 1984 to 2011, Florida has gained 3,000 acres of mangroves during that time frame.

"Florida lost a substantial portion of its mangroves during the mid-20th century, largely due to coastal development, dredging, filling, and mosquito control efforts. In some urbanized regions, losses exceeded 50% or even more," Kaplan said. "Overall, conservation groups estimate about 50% mangrove loss across the state."

Amna Vu is a graduate finance student at the University of Tampa. Vu said that she knew little about mangroves.

"Everything has a value in the ecosystem," Vu said. "I do want to hear more about what they bring to the ecosystem."

Taylor Pawlyk is a freshman accounting major at the University of Tampa. Pawlyk said she knew "little to nothing" about the mangrove ecosystem.

"I am taking biodiversity conservation right now so I know that ecosystem has a big role," Pawlyk said. "They are very intricate and they have value no matter what it is."

While Florida has experienced some recovery of mangroves since 1984, Kaplan mentions that the threat to them is still present.

"While Florida has seen stabilization and even some recovery in recent decades, due to protections and warmer winter temperatures," Kaplan said, "development pressure and climate stressors continue to pose risks, particularly in highly developed coastal areas."

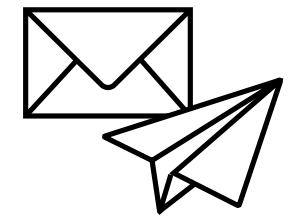
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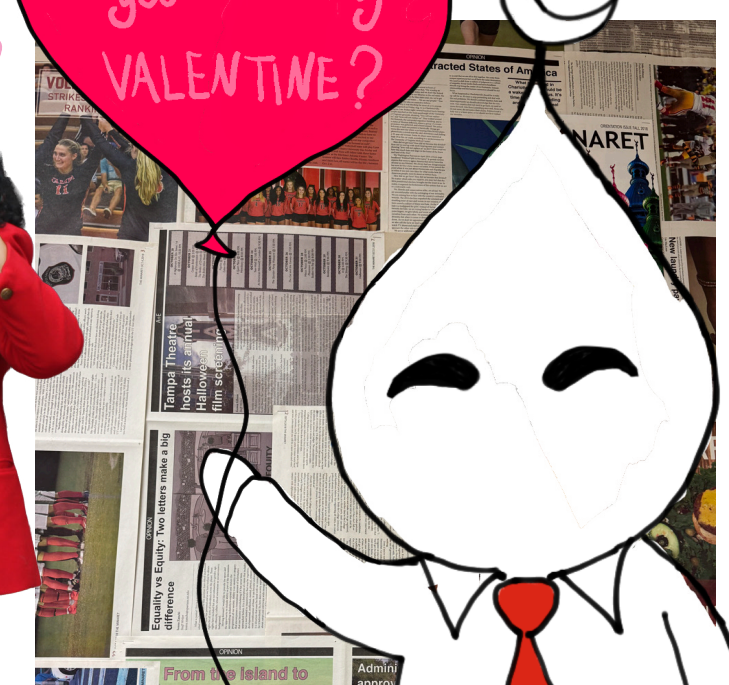
WRITE TO THE EDITORS!



We value your thoughts and ideas. Your voice helps shape meaningful conversations in our pages.

We want to hear from you!

Share your letter with us at 401 W Kennedy Blvd #33P Tampa, FL 33606-1450 or alyssa.cortes@spartans.ut.edu



Be Heard. Be Seen. Be The Minaret.

Join our WhatsApp Community, and then go to "Minaret Open Chat"

BULLETIN BOARD

The Minaret

Join The Minaret, UTampa's student newspaper! Weekly meetings are on Mondays at 6:30 pm plus office hours in the Vaughn Center, 2nd floor, Room 211. These meetings are a chance to pitch article ideas, share updates, review upcoming deadlines, celebrate wins, and keep everyone on the same page as we work to put out the next edition of the newspaper. Follow us on Instagram (@theminaret) and email alyssa.cortes@spartans.ut.edu for more information. Everyone is welcome!

Graduate Admissions

Stay at UTampa for Grad School! With UTampa2UTampa, current students and alumni can seamlessly continue to earn a master's degree right here at UTampa. Learn more at our Graduate Open House: Thursday, April 16, 5:30 pm, Jenkins Skyview Room. No RSVP required!

Macdonald-Kelce Library

Come join the library for the Spring 2026 UTWrites lecture series! All events take place in the library room #203, AV2. Discussion of current scholarship on memory with Sara Festini, Psychology, on Wednesday, March 4, at 4 pm. Reading from his new book Other Shane Hintons with Shane Hinton, English & Writing, on Wednesday, March 11, at 4 pm.

Office of Undergraduate Research and Inquiry

The Office of Undergrad Research is accepting grant proposals for Undergrad Research & Inquiry Grants for the 2026/27 school year. Please go to <https://ouri.submittable.com/> submit by Friday, March 13th to apply. Contact ouri@ut.edu with any questions.

Student Productions

Looking for something fun to do? Check out our upcoming events on Instagram @utampasp or on Involve UT. From movie nights and craft events to bingo and our biggest event of the year, Party in the Park on March 6, there is something for everyone.

UTTIV

UTampa TV: Student Television is in full swing this spring semester! Follow us on Instagram and YouTube @uttvspartannews and stay tuned for new content.

UTampa Law Review

Want to see your work published in an academic journal? Join Law Review on Wednesdays at 8:00 pm in Grand Center 151. Develop legal writing and research skills, strengthen your resume, and contribute to meaningful discussions on today's most pressing legal issues. The law affects us all—add your voice.

Roots & Shoots

Join Roots & Shoots! We host environmentally focused meetings biweekly on Mondays at 8 pm. We will be hosting a 2-day Environmental Youth Summit in Plant Hall on Feb. 27 and 28, 2026. Check out our Instagram @utrootsnshoots for more information!

Moroccan Yearbook

Did you know UTampa had a yearbook? Come write, edit, and design with us for the fall and spring semester! Staff will also learn the fundamentals of written copy and generating photogenic content. All majors are encouraged, with internship credit available for writing majors! For information, contact the editor-in-chief at kamilyah.mcmiller@spartans.ut.edu

STAFF SHOUTOUTS!

Huge shoutout to three leading ladies who truly keep Francesca and me grounded. Without them, The Minaret just wouldn't run the way it does. Lexi Smith, Head Photographer, has been with the The Minaret for two years, starting as a photographer. Lexi has completely stepped up, taken ownership of her section, and brought consistency, creativity and reliability every single week. Samantha Linares, Head Graphic Designer, was hired last spring and has moved up quickly because she's just that good. Sami constantly brings fresh ideas, new energy and a willingness to jump in wherever needed. Ariana Fromm, Head Copy Editor, was also hired last spring and is somehow balancing graduate classes while stepping fully into her role. Ari keeps everything clear and publication-ready. These three don't just lead their sections; they elevate them.

-Alyssa Cortes, Editor-in-Chief

WANT TO BE FEATURED?

The bulletin board page will be a recurring feature in every print moving forward, which is released biweekly. Reach out to alyssa.cortes@spartans.ut.edu with any other announcements, shout-outs, or updates you'd like to share! Message needs to be 50 words or less.

