

SantaCon Shutdown

BY LAUREN RAUSO
Staff Writer

SantaCon, the holiday tradition of Fairfield, draws in crowds filled with college students and is set to make major changes to the operations of the event. Students of Sacred Heart University are concerned about whether they will be welcomed this year amid the changes.

Every year around the first Saturday of December, SantaCon is held on Jennings Beach along the strip where Fairfield University seniors rent homes for the school year. Students from SHU, Fairfield, and neighboring colleges wear their best Christmas and holiday-themed attire and fill the beach.

Students say it is a fun way to ring in the holiday spirit and spend their last few days together before going home for winter break.

“I look forward to SantaCon each year. It is a great day to get into the holiday spirit, meet new people, and spend time with my friends and roommates one last time before we leave for winter break,” said senior Gabby O’Connell.

This year, Fairfield has put in place new regulations to limit the number of people who enter. The event has been moved to a new location that has not been disclosed to the public. Fairfield University students who purchased tickets before the event and their registered guests are the only eligible guests allowed into the event.

Throughout the years, students have noticed an increase in police presence and security personnel as crowds have been getting bigger.

“The biggest difference between SantaCon freshman year and my sophomore year was the amount of police presence all along the strip of the beach houses, along with them walking up

and down the beach asking to see what was inside people’s cups,” said junior Amy Southall.

Many SHU students are upset and concerned about whether they will be able to attend the annual event.

“SantaCon is something I and all of my friends have been going to since our freshman year, and it’s disappointing to hear that it is a ticketed event only this year,” said junior Sophia Falco.

Sacred Heart officials are warning students to stay away from the beach area, specifically the area of Reef Road where there will be increased police presence.

Dean of Students Denise Tiberio is warning students about the risks that will come with attending a private event that SHU students are not authorized to attend. In an email sent out to students on Nov. 21, Tiberio stated the following consequences and offenses that will be available to students: open container offenses, trespassing on private property or private beach associations, public urination, disorderly conduct and parking violations.

Fairfield Police are taking precautions ahead of time and working with Sacred Heart faculty to ensure that their students follow the rules on the afternoon of Dec. 6.

“We have fewer concerns than in previous years because the format of the event has changed for this year. This year’s SantaCon will be a private, ticketed event,” said Tiberio.

It is important to note that only registered guests with a ticket accompanied by a Fairfield University student are eligible to attend.

“Fairfield police have advised all those without a ticket to the SantaCon event to stay away from Fairfield beaches on Dec. 6, and we have given our students the same advice,” said Tiberio.



Contributed by Hailey Toles, Fairfield University '26
Fairfield University and Sacred Heart University students at the annual Santacon beach party.

All SHU students should be aware of the beaches to stay away from to avoid being mistaken as a trespasser.

“All beaches will be closed, and public access will be restricted. Lantern Point will be fully shut down, and there will be a strong police presence in the area,” said Tiberio.

Rather than attending SantaCon, SHU students are encouraged by administrators to attend the Men’s Ice Hockey game at 5 p.m. on Dec. 6 at the Martire Family Arena.

The Senior Experience: President’s 63

BY DECLAN TOLAND
Staff Writer

Sacred Heart University seniors now have the opportunity to apply for the President’s 63 Senior Year Experience, a prestigious senior-year experience designed to help students reflect on their Pioneer Journey and prepare for life after graduation. The program includes five themed dinner conversations and a series of personal challenges tied to SHU’s foundational pillars. Applications are open to all seniors and are due Jan. 10.

According to Dr. Charles Gillespie, director of the Pioneer Journey and associate dean of the School of Performing Arts, the initiative was created to fill a gap in the student experience.

“The President’s 63 was designed to help seniors make meaning of their Pioneer Journey,” said Gillespie. “It gives students space to reflect on who they’ve become and how their SHU experience has prepared them for life after graduation.”

The program, often referred to as P63, brings together 63 seniors for 63 minutes in SHU’s 63’s dining hall. The dinners, appropriately starting at 6:03 p.m., encourage students to engage in conversations led by a faculty or staff facilitator. Gillespie said the dinner format is intentional, both for symbolism and for skill-building.

“Learning how to have big conversations over a meal is one of the skills

students need moving forward,” said Gillespie.

Each of the five dinners aligns with one of SHU’s Pioneer Journey pillars—knowledge, faith, integrity, service and community. Students also complete a corresponding challenge throughout the semester, such as reflecting on their academic foundation or engaging with a spiritual tradition. While the challenges don’t carry academic credit, Gillespie said the program offers something different.

“Seniors actually get something better than a grade,” said Gillespie. “They receive recognition at graduation, including an honor cord.”

Senior Alex Rosario said the reflective aspect of the program is one of its biggest strengths.

“The President’s 63 gives seniors a real chance to look back on our time at SHU, especially those early foundational semesters that shaped who we’ve become,” said Rosario. “It’s interesting to think about how those moments influenced the paths we’re on now.”

Rosario looks forward to the unpredictability built into the program.

“I’m honestly most excited for the mystery of the challenges,” said Rosario. “I don’t know what they involve yet, but that makes it even more enticing.”

Senior Matthew Vene shared similar feelings about the program’s reflective component.

“The President’s 63 has helped me realize all the great memories I have made at SHU,” said Vene. “I’ve made many

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News

More Than One Identity: SHU Students Share the Richness of Their Latin Heritage

BY FERNANDA GUEVARA

Circulation Manager and Asst. Features Editor

Across Sacred Heart University, Latin American students from the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Honduras, and beyond are sharing their stories and traditions. Though united by language and shared values, each brings distinct flavors, rhythms and family customs that reflect the diversity within the Latin community, one that can't be defined by a single label.

Senior Katelyn Díaz, the daughter of Dominican immigrants, said identity is lived through family, faith and community.

"My family is originally from the Dominican Republic, and my culture is such a big part of who I am," said Díaz. "Growing up in a close-knit Hispanic household taught me the importance of family, faith, and community, all values that I've carried with me to SHU."

Díaz serves on the executive board for La Hispanidad, sits on the Student Nurses Association e-board, and works as both a Student Ambassador and Global Ambassador. She previously tutored chemistry and now interns with Make-A-Wish, experiences she says have deepened her appreciation for connecting with people from all backgrounds.

"Through all of these roles, I've realized how much my background helps me connect with people on a personal level," said Díaz. "It's something I really cherish."

Food and music anchor that connection. Díaz often cooks Dominican dishes like rice, beans, chicken, steak, tostones, maduros and empanadas for her friends. She's found local restaurants that remind her of home and says her favorite meal, sancocho, always brings her back to family gatherings.

"My friends love learning to cook and dance merengue and bachata," said Díaz. "It's become something fun we do together."

Sophomore Hillary Rivera, whose mother is from El Salvador and father from Honduras, says that her Central American heritage has also shaped her outlook.

"One of the biggest things I feel that people generalize from having family in Central America is assuming they came here illegally or had some sort of gang violence," said Rivera. "Growing up I was asked if my parents were legal or if I knew someone in MS-13. I was in fifth grade being asked questions no fifth grader should ever be faced with."

Rivera stays connected to her roots through the Agape Center and La Hispanidad, two campus spaces she describes as welcoming and empowering.

"Those spaces help me stay connected to who I am while I'm studying at SHU," said Rivera.

For both Díaz and Rivera, the holidays are a reminder of how culture and family remain at the heart of their identities. Díaz described Christmas as her favorite time of year and a celebration filled with prayer, dancing, laughter and food.

"We do a huge Secret Santa with all my cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles," said Díaz. "It's hectic and loud, but it's one of my favorite traditions and creates the best memories."

Rivera said she also feels that same sense of closeness in the Latin community at SHU. Through groups like La Hispanidad and the Agape Center, she's found connection, understanding and a space to embrace who she is.

Both students agree that while Hispanic culture is often viewed as one collective identity, each country carries its own beauty.

"Here, I've found people who genuinely want to learn what makes each culture unique," said Díaz. "That openness is something I'll always be grateful for."

As the semester winds down and holiday lights begin to shine across campus, students like Díaz and Rivera carry their traditions with pride from cooking familiar meals to celebrating Nochebuena surrounded by family. In their stories, Sacred Heart's Latin community finds what makes it truly special: a shared love of home, heritage and togetherness.

The Senior Experience: President's 63

BY DECLAN TOLAND

Staff Writer

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lifelong friends, and the program has helped me think about how I will grow those friendships in the future."

Unlike Rosario, who is drawn to the challenges, Vene said he is most interested in the group discussions.

"I am more interested in the dinner conversations as a way to further deepen my experience with the President's 63," said Vene.

Vene also hopes to gain a deeper understanding of his college experience as a whole.

"I hope to personally gain more insight on my Sacred Heart experience and how SHU has shaped me as a person," said Vene.

Both students plan to apply for the program.

"It seems like a wonderful opportunity to connect with other seniors who've been positively impacted by their time at Sacred Heart," said Rosario.

According to Gillespie, the program continues to grow following last year's unexpected success. In its first year, the program received exactly 63 applications for the 63 available spots. With increased awareness this cycle, the selection process is expected to be more competitive.

The program is open to all seniors graduating in May 2026, as well as December 2025 graduates who plan to walk in May. Students can apply online through the university's website before the Jan. 10 deadline.

The President's 63 aims to become a long-term tradition, with hopes of

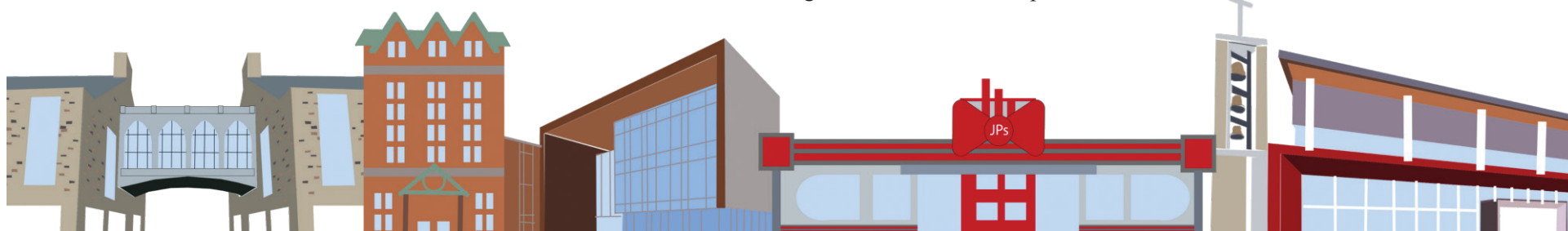


Daniel Passapera, Sacred Heart University

Graduating seniors are now invited to apply for the President's 63 (P63) Senior Year Experience hosted by Dr. Petillo. May 11, 2024.

expanding to multiple cohorts in the future.

"The real goal is to build a culture where being a Pioneer doesn't end at graduation," said Gillespie.



Interested in contributing to the Spectrum? Please consider registering for CM 211 News Writing & Reporting or contact us at spectrum@sacredheart.edu

Features

Courageous Dialogue with the Ramos Institute

BY CAROLINE DAVINO
Staff Writer

Across campus, many people recognize the name Alejandro Ramos. During his time at Sacred Heart, Ramos distinguished himself as a leader. He served as Student Government President, fostered strong relationships within the political science department, and even contributed to the creation of the Campus Life section of Spectrum.

Now, just a few years later, Ramos is leading something much bigger, the Ramos Research Institute.

The Ramos Institute (RRI) is a youth-led, nonpartisan organization focused on strengthening civic learning and democratic culture.

Ramos said the idea for the RRI began when he noticed how many students wanted a research assistantship.

“Originally, the institute was started to give students opportunities,” said Ramos.

Now, their internship program has received over 11,000 applicants across six cohorts.

Since then, this simple idea has transformed into a research institute, providing student fellows the chance to work on projects focused on civics and democracy directly.

“Officially, our mission is to conduct and apply research that advances civic learning, strengthens democratic culture, and supports public policy innovation in education and media literacy,” said Ramos.

A major part of the institute’s work is dedicated to what Ramos calls ‘courageous dialogue.’

“We live in a time where we’re all obviously polarized. Everyone picks a side, and we stick to our side, and we don’t want to get out of it,” said Ramos.

He said these conversations matter because more students are holding back their opinions out of fear.

“We were seeing students, no matter where they fell in the political spectrum, saying that they didn’t feel comfortable expressing their opinions in class,” said Ramos. “I think a bigger issue than what we’re seeing with cancel culture is self-censorship.”

Josephine Hall, the institute’s Chief of Staff, said the student-centered approach is what makes RRI different. Hall began as an intern in 2024, then transitioned to a Junior Research Associate, and is now serving in a leadership position.

“RRI’s position as a new organization allows us the ability to be deeply communicative and engaged with one another,” said Hall. “You won’t walk away with the personal connections and organizational integration that you would get at RRI.”

Hall described Ramos with one word: mentor.

“He is supportive, but pushes me outside of my comfort zone to set higher goals for myself,” said Hall.

Students at SHU remember that same energy. Senior Gracie Patriarco, the current executive president of Student Government, said Ramos made an impression on everyone he met.

“He was a natural leader and engaged with everyone he met and made them feel seen and heard,” said Patriarco. “Alejandro is someone who you immediately gravitate towards. He is full of life.”

Patriarco said he saw her potential before she could see it in herself.

“He told me freshman year that I would be the Student Government president one day,” said Patriarco. “I’m pretty sure I laughed in his face.”

As RRI looks to expand its programs, Ramos said the heart of the organization will always remain the same.

“There’s no paycheck, there’s no award that would make me feel more fulfilled than when a



Contributed by Alejandro Ramos

SHU Alumnus, Alejandro Ramos, Founder and Executive Director of Ramos Research Institute.

student reaches out and says, ‘Thank you for coming in and having that conversation with us,’” said Ramos.

The institute describes its mission in one sentence:

“Empowering the next generation of civic leaders to shape democracy at home and abroad.”

To learn more, visit their website <https://www.ramosresearchinstitute.org/>.

Alumni Rediscover SHU with Monthly Tours

BY INGRID KLIER
Staff Writer

Last fall, Sacred Heart University began offering monthly alumni tours. The tours were created to give graduates consistent opportunities to return to campus throughout the year, instead of limiting visits to homecoming weekend.

The tours are led by the alumni office, allowing staff to speak directly with graduates as they walk through both long-standing and newly renovated spaces.

Robert Gilmore, the Executive Director of Alumni Engagement and Events, stated that the tours focus on construction, renovation, and the evolving purposes of each building. They aim to reconnect returning alumni with their college years while showcasing the changes made to their former stomping grounds.



Daniel Passapera, Sacred Heart University

Sacred Heart University hosts its annual Homecoming on Saturday, Nov. 8.

“Our tours highlight many of the areas of campus while showcasing what that space was used for previously while highlighting all new facilities as well,” said Gilmore.

The format is especially useful for alumni whose experiences span

different eras. Gilmore said graduates who have been away for more than 20 years often see buildings that did not exist during their time on campus.

“Alumni, especially those who have not been back to campus in ten plus years, are overwhelmed by all the changes to campus in a very positive way,” said Gilmore.

He said many of them finish their tours saying they would enjoy experiencing student life again.

Even recent alumni are surprised by the pace of development. Sydney Trowbridge, who graduated in 2023, took an alumni tour shortly after the program launched and said the changes were clear immediately.

“They completely redid the football field, which looks amazing,” said Trowbridge. “In general, I am amazed at how quickly they updated almost everything around campus, besides the main academic building.”

The tours include academic buildings, residence halls, athletic facilities and outdoor gathering spaces. Gilmore said these new additions reflect the university’s broader growth over the last 15 years.

Current students are already imagining what their own experiences will look like on future alumni tours.

“I plan on coming back for an alumni tour,” said senior McLean Signora.

Signora said she plans to return and take a tour after she graduates, and she can’t wait to see how the university continues to grow in the years ahead.

She also mentioned parking, housing availability and updates to the main academic building as changes she will look for on her future tour.

“I would really love to see the main academic building revamped into a more modern center to match the rest of this beautiful school,” said Signora.

She said she hopes future students will have newer classrooms and improved study spaces.

Registration for the tours is available through the alumni events page on the university’s website. Private or customized tours can also be arranged for alumni who cannot attend scheduled dates.

**UPCOMING
EVENTS ON
CAMPUS**

**THURSDAY 12/4:
CHARMS AND
CHEER
3 P.M. LINDA’S
FIREPLACE**

**FRIDAY 12/5:
EGGOS AND ELF
6 P.M. LINDA’S
HEARTH ROOM**

**SATURDAY 12/6:
HOLIDAY CONCERT - SHU
CHORAL PROGRAM
5 P.M. EDGERTON THEATRE**



CampusLife

College Gift Giving 101

BY **MACKENZIE FLYNN**
Staff Writer

Is gift-giving your strong suit, or do you struggle to find the perfect gifts? Well, if you need some assistance, follow along to learn what items are on college students' ultimate wish list.

In recent years, popular gifts for college students have included Keurigs, Ugg slippers, travel bags, and clothes. What new gifts are in demand this year?

"I have been obsessed with the Hatch Rest Clock recently, and I will definitely be putting that at the top of my wish list this year," said sophomore Tatianna Barnes.

The Hatch Rest Clock comes in a variety of colors, including cocoa, putty, and greige. Its main functions are: high-quality nature sounds, simulation of the gradual brightening of dawn, customizable and adjustable sleep routines, guided meditations, sleep podcasts, and phone-free controls. The "Hatch Restore 3 Sunrise Alarm Clock," also known as the Hatch Rest Clock, can be found at Target, Amazon, or on the Hatch website.

Another trending gift this year is Jelly Cats. Jelly Cats have been a hit with all ages, but a few of their new designs have caught the attention of the college-age demographic. Jelly Cats is a new, trending stuffed animal brand featuring unique animated characters. Some of the most sold characters include the Amusable Happy Boiled Egg, Amusable Coffee To-Go, Amusable Birthday Cake, Amusable Cup of Espresso and Amusable Bouquet of Flowers.

"I have had my eyes on the Amusables Fran Pancakes for a while now, but I have been waiting for Christmas to hopefully get one," said senior Evan Schoner. "It will be a fun addition to my bed décor."

These fun characters come in many varieties. Jelly Cat offers a stuffed friend for nearly every interest, hobby, or food/beverage. This allows people to personalize their bedding with a stuffed animal that truly reflects who they are.

"I could use a weighted blanket now that it's getting frigid out," said sophomore Hunter Molway.

Weighted blankets are sold at most major retailers, both online

and in-store. Additionally, they are said to relieve pain and sore muscles, and to help you fall asleep faster and more comfortably.

"I really want a digital camera so that I can take better pictures with my friends," said junior Elizabeth Gallagher.

Digital Cameras have been making a comeback in recent years after a period of switching to iPhones. Digital cameras provide a clear and aesthetic shot that people seem to be missing with today's iPhones.

"I didn't ask for much this year, but one thing I have wanted for a while is the Apple stylus for my iPad so that I can take class notes on it," said sophomore Melia Campbell.

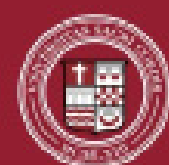
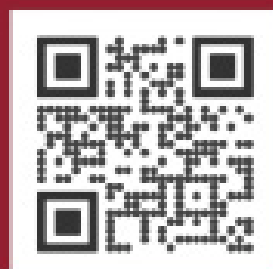
Across campus, students are often seen taking notes on their iPads. It's especially popular among college students, particularly those in lecture-heavy courses. If you have any college students on your list, this could be a perfect gift for them.



Daniel Passapera, Sacred Heart University
A light snow covers Sacred Heart University's Park Ave. Campus on Monday, Jan. 6, 2025.

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CampusLife

A Season of Holiday Favorites

BY NICHOLAS MAISANO
Staff Writer

What puts you in the Christmas spirit? Is it listening to Christmas music, watching Christmas movies, or a combination of both? Students share what their favorite things to listen to and watch during the holiday season are.

“My favorite Christmas song is ‘Last Christmas’ by Wham!” said sophomore James Spoto. “I like the beat throughout the song and also think it brings out the most Christmas spirit with its festive lyrics.”

“My favorite Christmas song is ‘Drummer Boy’ by Justin Bieber because it has a fun beat and makes me happy,” said sophomore Faith Erasmo.

According to Billboard’s “Greatest of All Time Holiday Songs” list, “All I Want For Christmas Is You” by Mariah Carey tops the chart, followed by “Rockin’ Around The Christmas Tree” by Brenda Lee at #2, and “Jingle Bell Rock” by Bobby Helms at #3.

“I like listening to both classic and recent Christmas songs, depending on my mood,” said Erasmo. “My favorite Christmas artist is Michael Bublé.”

Sophomore Tim Via is also a fan of Michael Bublé.

“I mostly listen to him around the holidays,” said Via.

“I like the classic artists better, like Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole, as their songs have more of a Christmas-feel than the more recent artists and their songs,” said Spoto.

“I love the classics,” said sophomore Caitlyn Mascetta. “I grew up performing in the Nutcracker Ballet for 12 years, so any song from that soundtrack brings me back.”

During the season, Christmas music can be listened to anywhere and at any time. Where and when do students listen to these festive songs the most?

“I listen to Christmas music at all times during the season like while studying, driving, at the gym, or casually,” said Erasmo.

“I typically have Christmas music playing if I am baking cookies, opening presents, or decorating the tree,” said Via.

“When I was younger, my family and I would listen to Christmas music when we were decorating the tree or if we were just around the house in the days leading up to Christmas,” said Spoto.

Aside from listening to Christmas music, students also enjoy watching their favorite holiday movies because it connects them to



Nicholas Maisano, Staff Writer and Photographer

Students watching “Dr. Seuss’ How the Grinch Stole Christmas.”

fond Christmas memories.

“My favorite movie, hands down, is ‘National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation,’” said Spoto. “Nothing beats the Griswold family and watching it every Christmas Eve with my dad.”

“My favorite Christmas movie is ‘Elf’ or ‘Home Alone,’” said Erasmo. “It makes me feel nostalgic and brings me back to when I first watched them in elementary school.”

“Every Christmas we watch ‘National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation.’ It is my mom’s favorite Christmas movie, and we always watch it together at some point around the holiday,” said Via.

“I love ‘Home Alone’ and ‘Elf.’ They were my favorites as a child,” said Mascetta.

Each year, TV network Freeform has their “25 Days of Christmas” movie marathon. From Dec. 1 – 25, most of their programming is dedicated to Christmas movies, including classic movies like “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” “Frosty the Snowman,” and “Miracle on 34th Street.”

For more information and the full schedule of movies airing throughout December, visit freeform.com.

Editors Favorite Holiday Picks



Music

“Last Christmas” - Wham!

“Fairytale of New York” - The Pogues,
Kristy MacColl

“It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year”
- Andy Williams

“Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree” -
Brenda Lee

“Mistletoe” - Justin Bieber

Movies

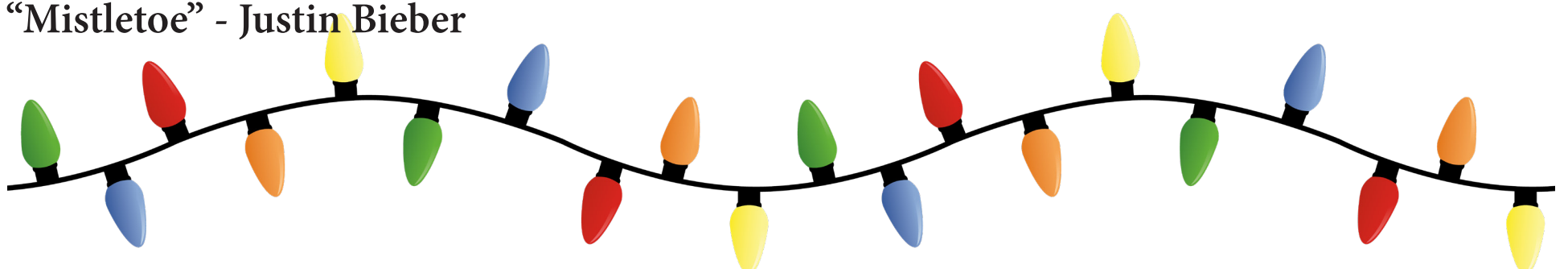


“Home Alone”

“National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation”

“How the Grinch Stole Christmas
Elf”

“It’s a Wonderful Life”



Arts & Entertainment

Changed For Good

BY MIA COPPOLA

Staff Writer and Asst. Arts & Entertainment Editor

Universal Pictures' record-breaking "Wicked: For Good" released in theaters Nov. 21 and drew the largest global debut for a Broadway musical adaptation in history, earning \$226 million worldwide and \$68.6 million on opening day, according to AP News.

As excitement continues, students and faculty are weighing in on whether the hit film is worth watching, and why its message seems to be striking a chord.

"Wicked' is a show that is deeply influential on me as both a scholar and a theatre-maker. I saw it on Broadway four times," said Dr. Charles Gillespie, associate director of the Performing Arts Program. "I adored the movie because it brought that experience of a live show to life for me. It gave me a chance to see a new version of the 'Wicked' story, which is my favorite part of theatre."

Women made up approximately 71% of the film's opening-weekend ticket buyers, according to PostTrak exit polls, contributing significantly to its blockbuster success.

"Throughout many storytelling traditions in film, television, theatre and beyond, women tend to be portrayed as enemies or flighty or always talking about men," said Dr. Rachel Bauer, coordinator of the Bachelor of Arts in Theatre Arts. "'Wicked' challenges these portrayals in this challenging [time] of misogynistic portrayals of women in a lot of contemporary media, which is wonderful."

For students and faculty, the story's portrayal of friendship is one worth watching for.

"I like the movie's relationship of Elphaba and Glinda; I think students involved in the arts here at Sacred Heart University really value friendship," said junior Jack Marzi, Film Club vice president. "It's an environment where people lift each other, especially during rehearsals, projects and performances."

As the movie highlights, friendships can evolve in unexpected ways, a message that resonates with audiences.

"Loathing can shift to loving; enemies can become friends; mistakes can be forgiven," said Gillespie. "It tells a great story about how we can love spectacle and that everyone, no matter how different, can be loved."

Bauer echoed the importance of the progression in character dynamics.

"I really appreciate the depth of character and the robust friendship journey that is depicted in 'Wicked'. It definitely passes the Bechdel test," said Bauer.

"Wicked" has already sparked engagement on campus. The Office of Student Involvement hosted a pink-or-green "sip stop" event in collaboration with First-Year Programs to celebrate opening day.

"Students who follow both our accounts on Instagram, @shu.involvement and @shufirstyearprograms, were able to enter a raffle for a movie-themed prize," said Katherine Morovich, director of First-Year Programs. "This was a chance for both offices to collaborate and spread some joy on the opening day of 'Wicked: For Good.'"

Students who saw the film say it's a blend of theatrical roots and cinematic storytelling made it stand out.

"What stood out to me the most was how intentionally the film blended theatricality with cinematic language," said Marzi. "The plot, technical aspects and music shaped my emotional reaction to the story because they all worked together to make the film feel both exciting and grounded."

According to PostTrak, 83% of audiences said that they would "definitely

recommend" the film to friends, with a 92% overall positive score.

"I genuinely was sucked into the movie. I am a big 'Wicked' fan, and I loved how beautiful the background was and how detailed everything was," said sophomore Kelly Aspras. "The soundtrack was fantastic, and I'm really glad they didn't ruin the musical-theater experience by changing the songs."

Even those who aren't typically musical fans seem to be connecting to the story.

"My brother isn't a big musical fan and thought the movie was very good, so even if you're not a fan of musicals, I would still give it a try. His girlfriend loved it so much, and she cried because of the ending," said Aspras.

Faculty say the film's two-part structure may reflect a larger industry shift.

"I think the two-part adaptation speaks to how film creators want to take their time telling a story fully, instead of rushing to fit it into less than three hours," said Bauer. "Audiences definitely appreciate the character growth and careful storytelling, so I think we will continue to see this format for future film adaptations."

Apart from the film's celebration of friendship and diversity, Gillespie emphasized a deeper message about moral courage

"Maybe we need to spend less energy on fearing being canceled for standing up for the common good, and spend more energy on 'defying gravity' that holds us back from doing what is right," said Gillespie.

For Gillespie, themes of the story also mirror the experience of being an educator.

"We need to be willing to ask hard questions and play a bit more. But also to cherish the time we have together. 'Because I Knew You' is how I think about teaching," said Gillespie. "Any class, any element of the Pioneer Journey, can be a chance to be 'changed for good.'"



Ariana Grande at the Premiere of Wicked For Good on Nov. 10, 2025.

Scott A Garfitt, AP News

Band in Belfast: Pioneers at Friendship Four Tournament

BY SHANNON TUTTLE

Managing Editor

This past weekend, the Sacred Heart band traveled to Belfast, Ireland in support of the men's ice hockey team in the Friendship Four Tournament. This year's faceoffs featured Union College, Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) and Miami (OH) University, with the only band in attendance coming from SHU. The Pioneers finished the weekend in third after a 3-0 shutout over RIT.



Instagram, @sacredheartmih

The SHU Band traveled to Ireland for the Friendship Four Tournament between Sacred Heart University, Rochester Institute of Technology, Union College, and Miami University on Nov. 27-28, 2025.

Sports

Back-to-Back Conference Champions

BY JAMES SCHINDLER
Staff Writer

For the second consecutive season, the Pioneers have claimed the Yankee Conference Championship.

On Saturday, Nov. 15, Sacred Heart defeated Merrimack College on home turf by a score of 42-37. The Pioneer's victory marked a 6-0 record at home and defended their championship title in back-to-back seasons.

"There's nothing like playing with a chip on your shoulder. You can't let someone come into your home and beat you, it's a pride thing," said first-year running back Mitchel Summers.

Summers was highlighted as one of the top performers in the matchup against the Warriors. With 23 carries, 143 yards, and two touchdowns, the rookie's performances sustained the Pioneer's winning title.

In total this season, Summers rushed for over 1,000 yards, averaging just under 100 yards a game with a dozen touchdowns.

The Pioneers had another running back surpassing 100 yards. Graduate student Trey Eberhart III ran 107 yards with six carries and one touchdown. This win marked his final home game as a Pioneer.

"I hope the team doesn't take this success for granted or get comfortable. I want the same mindset to carry into the offseason and beyond," said Eberhart.

Sophomore quarterback Jack Snyder was also highlighted in the championship. Snyder threw for 97 yards and a touchdown, as well as running for 163 yards and two more touchdowns on just eight carries.

"I give all the credit for my success in the run game to our offensive line, the running backs, and the wide receivers for their blocking. My job is easy when they block as well as they do," said Snyder.

"Our entire offense is built on the run game, and we've been really good at it all season. We have a lot of weapons, both quarterbacks and running backs," said head coach Mark Nofri. "But the biggest reason is our offensive line. Those guys don't get nearly enough credit. They're playing at a high level, and they've been outstanding all fall."

With the success at home came struggles on the road as the team finished

with a 34-10 loss on Saturday, Nov. 21 against Villanova. Snyder threw for 286 yards and a touchdown, but it wasn't enough to counter the three turnovers for the Pios.

Eberhart had a strong game on the ground to finish his collegiate career with six carries for 59 yards.

"This team has been resilient since day one. Our kids don't flinch—they play hard for four quarters every week," said Nofri. "I'm extremely proud of what they've accomplished. But we also know we'll lose a lot of upperclassmen, especially up front, so this offseason will be about developing the younger guys and figuring out who's ready to step up next August."

Athletic Communications contributed to this article.



Jayden Hunter, Assistant Photo Editor

Sacred Heart University defeated Merrimack College 42-37 on Nov. 15, securing the Yankee Conference Championship title.

Pioneers' Championship Push Falls Short

BY ALEXA PISCINO
Staff Writer

In front of a packed home crowd and a campus buzzing with anticipation, the men's soccer team walked onto Park Ave Field on Nov. 16 for a moment years in the making: the program's first-ever home MAAC Championship match.

For head coach Anthony Anzevui, the scene alone marked how far the program had come.

"We were incredibly proud," said Anzevui. "Walking out in front of our home crowd, with the whole SHU community and our alumni for a championship game was a moment that showed how far the program has come and what this group has earned."

The Pioneers entered the title match undefeated in conference play. Yet, in the final, despite dominating possession and outshooting Siena 22-7, the Pioneers fell 2-1 after a late push came up just short.

Sophomore forward Brady Poor scored his third goal of the season in the 79th minute, sparking a frantic finish as Sacred Heart nearly erased a two-goal deficit.

Senior captain David Garcia Gallego, who played in his final collegiate match,

said the conditions made the championship unlike any other game this year.

"It was a different kind of final — not as much intensity as the semifinal because of the strong wind, which made it difficult to control the ball," said Garcia Gallego. "We dominated most of the game, but in a final, mistakes cost you. After going down 0-2, we pushed with pride for the last 15 minutes and almost completed the comeback. No matter what, I'll always be proud of my team."

Anzevui echoed that sentiment.

"We played the game we wanted," said Anzevui. "A few key moments went against us, which are the little details that can be decisive in a final."

The loss came just three days after one of the most memorable victories in program history — a semifinal win where Sacred Heart defeated Fairfield University with an overtime goal by Garcia Gallego. In front of an electric Park Avenue crowd, Garcia Gallego said he'll carry that moment forever.

"Scoring the last goal on our home field against our biggest rival is a feeling that will stay with me for life," said Garcia Gallego. "Celebrating it with the whole team and our fans was incredible."

Hosting both postseason matches created an energy unlike anything Garcia Gallego had experienced in his four years with the program.

"The energy in these last two games was different from anything I had experienced before," said Garcia Gallego. "Everyone on campus knew the semifinal and final were being played at Park Ave, and a lot of people showed up."

Though the championship slipped away, both Anzevui and Garcia Gallego say the postseason run represents a turning point.

The men's soccer team took home three All MAAC honors; Anzevui won Coach of the Year, senior Luca Marinelli won Goalkeeper of the Year and graduate student Daniel Losfablos won Defender of the Year.

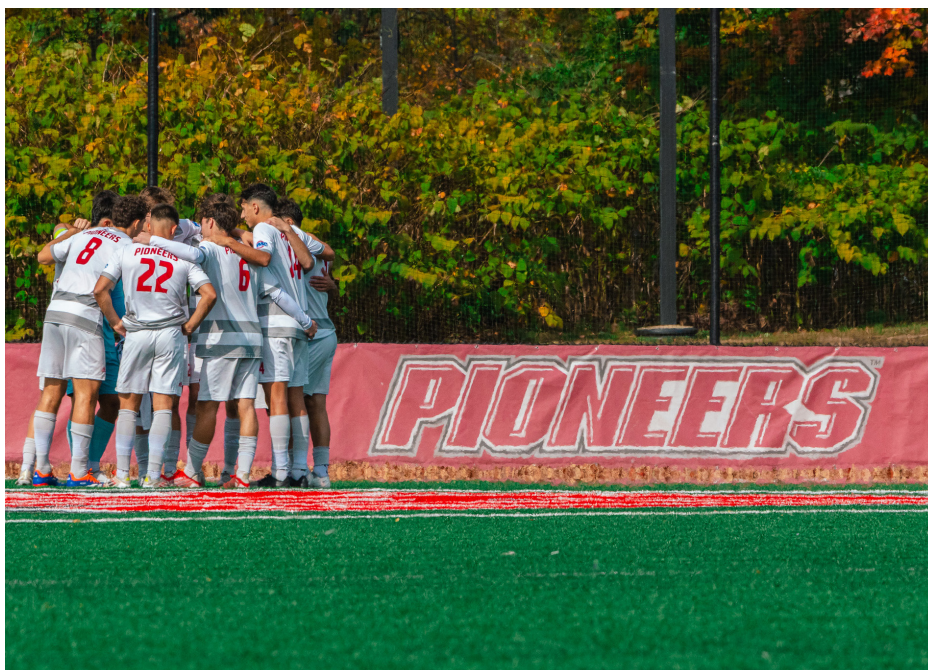
"It raises the bar," said Anzevui. "Now the expectation is to compete for championships every year, and the players know what that level feels like and what it requires."

Garcia Gallego believes the younger players will carry the momentum forward. "If they continue with the same mentality and hunger, they're going to have many opportunities ahead," said Garcia Gallego. "The foundation we built this year stays strong for a long time."

As the Pioneers turn toward next fall, Anzevui said the message to the returning group is simple: embrace the pain and let it fuel them.

"Be grateful for the pain because it meant we put everything into it," said Anzevui. "Use this as fuel to prove we can compete at the top and go a step further next season."

Athletic Communications contributed to this article.

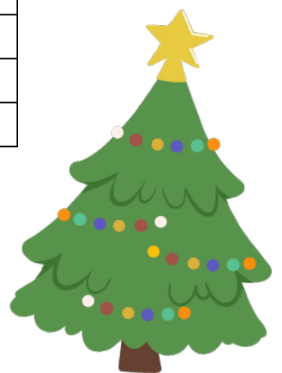


Contributed by Graduate Student Andy Trevino

The men's soccer team huddle before a game at Park Ave Field, Fairfield CT.

Editorial

Holiday Crossword!



Across:

- 5. _____ Christmas
- 6. Sweet Treat for the Holidays
- 8. Santa's Ride
- 9. Hang them on the Tree
- 10. Baby It's ___ Outside
- 11. Happy _____
- 15. Santa has nine of them
- 16. Fresh Holiday Flavor
- 19. A Christman Carol
- 20. People Singing for the Holidays
- 22. Jewish Holiday
- 23. Jolly Fat Man

Down:

- 1. Celebration of Jesus' Birth
- 2. Jingle Jingle
- 3. Four Sided Spinning Top
- 4. Sitting by the _____
- 7. Happy and Cheerful
- 12. Last Month of the Year
- 13. Seven-Branched Candelabrum
- 14. Piece of ice with a design
- 17. Santa's Helpers
- 18. African Holiday
- 21. Frosty the _____
- 24. January 1st

ANSWERS:

- | | | |
|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| 17. elf | 9. ornaments | 1. christmas |
| 18. kwanzaa | 10. cold | 2. bells |
| 19. noel | 11. holidays | 3. dreidel |
| 20. carolers | 12. december | 4. fireplace |
| 21. snowman | 13. menorah | 5. merry |
| 22. hanukkah | 14. snowflake | 6. cookies |
| 23. santa | 15. reindeer | 7. jolly |
| 24. new year | 16. peppermint | 8. sleigh |

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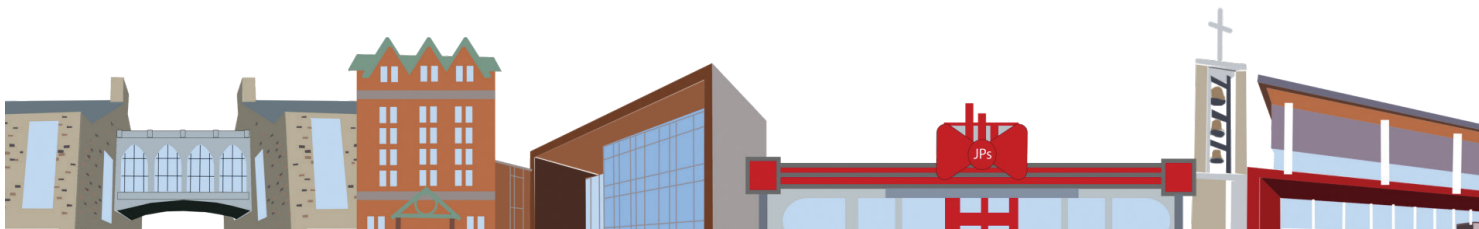
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VALLEY PUBLISHING
Derby, Conn.



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