Giddy up with ProCon for a night of fun

By Valentina Toro
Features Editor

Cowboy hats, plaid shirts and the challenge of staying on a mechanical bull transformed the Residence Life Quad into a taste of the country as students gathered for Southern Hospitality.

The Programs Council, hosted "Southern Hospitality" on Sept. 8 from 7–10 p.m., giving students a night away from classes with food, games and activities designed to bring the campus community together.

"I think the biggest thing we wanted to do was an escape," Craig Huydic, the graduate intern for ProCon, said. "An opportunity for students to catch a break, to just get outside, be with each other, do a couple of fun activities."

Students tested their balance on the mechanical bull, pose at a rodeo–themed photo booth and try their hand at a lasso game. Cowboy and cowgirl hats, food and refreshments added to the country atmosphere.

For Huydic, the night was about more than just the activities. He said ProCon's night–time programming is intended to give students an opportunity to temporarily put aside the responsibilities that come with classes, assignments and work.

"Really, the base of all of our events is to let you kind of close your eyes from school for a minute and just have fun," Huydic said. "Nighttime committee does a great job at having these events at night and letting you relax."

As the evening continued, "Southern Hospitality" also became a place for students to spend time together outside of the classroom.

For some freshmen and commuters, events held later in the day can provide another opportunity to become involved with campus life.

Commuters who attended the event said they discovered "Southern Hospitality" through OwlConnect and Instagram. They decided to attend because they wanted to become more active on campus during their first year.

"We're commuters, so we just want to get active in this, and we're freshmen," early childhood education major Julie Cole, a freshman, said. "We just wanted to come out and hang out with people."

Students said they enjoyed watching others attempt the mechanical bull and liked how the theme played off the university's name.

Nighttime programming can also give students a different experience from events held during the school day.

Students said residents have an opportunity to leave their dorms and participate in campus activities, while commuters have a reason to stay after their classes instead of immediately heading home or to work.

"I feel like it helps commuters get out too, because we're here during the day, but then at night it's like time to go or go to work," early childhood education major Isabella Velasquez, a freshman, said. "But then, when there's something to do when we're free, it's like, it's great."

Huydic said relaxation and fun were two of the goals behind "Southern Hospitality," but friendship was also an important part of what organizers wanted students to take away from the event.

"I hope people remember the people," Huydic said. "I hope they make friends, and I hope those friends stay with them for the rest of their semester."



PHOTOS | LILY RAND

Student riding the mechanical bull on Sept. 8.



Attendees participating in various activities in the Residence Life Quad for Southern Hospitality.

Ending the stigma of mental health with Active Minds

By Mackenzie Byerlee
Features Editor

Active Minds promotes openness about mental health and creates a space where students can be vulnerable about their feelings.

Speech, language and hearing sciences major Renee Royea, a senior and president of Active Minds said that she always had big ideas for the club.

"Our goal when I first started was to get our name out there, but now we're making bigger progress," Royea said.

When first joining, Royea said that the club only had a few members.

Since then, she took it upon herself to rebrand from the ground up.

Active Minds is a national non–profit organization that strives to end the stigma around mental health by spreading awareness.

The chapter at the university has been on campus since 2015.

In that time, they have stayed true to their mission. Their ultimate goal is encouraging conversations about mental health and trying to make students feel less alone if they are struggling.

They hold various events throughout the year and collaborate with other organizations on campus as well as external companies.

"We've consistently collaborated with RecFit and tabled at their Goat Yoga event to spread our message, and from there we worked with different brands who also support our mission," Royea said. "We were able to have different sodas, protein shakes and seltzers."

They have also done activities such as passing out flowers to students and hiding note cards around Buley Library.

Small acts such as are great examples that it does not always take grand gestures or large events to show that people care.

Royea also stated that there is an event that she would like to bring back before graduating in the spring.

"The chair project involves setting up chairs to represent individuals per year that were lost due to suicide," Royea said. "We would decorate the chairs and people would see the visual symbolism of the project."

Dealing with such heavy topics while also promoting a positive message showcases how important it is to have organizations on campus that provide students with a safe space.

Although the events that they hold and activities they do are a large part of their organization, Royea shared that the top priority in Active Minds is the well–being of their members.

"We want people to come in and be passionate, but your well–being comes first," Royea said.

The club also highlights the various ways in which people can spread awareness when it comes to mental health.

Speaking openly about the topic as a whole and normalizing conversations surrounding it is one way to make people feel more comfortable.

Starting the conversation when it comes to mental health might seem like a small step, but for some it can be a large leap that helps them navigate through their hardships.

Along with other campus resources, Active Minds serves as a space where students can find support in people who recognize the importance of speaking candidly about one's well–being.

"I think that mental health can sometimes be looked past when you're a college student because you're on the run and busy, so this is a safe space where you can be open to discuss your mental health," Royea said.

As far as the future of the club is concerned, Royea shared that she is searching for a new executive board but cannot wait to see what goals are accomplished within the organization for years to come.

"We are striving to find individuals who are passionate about our organization and our message so that we can continue the club after I graduate," Royea said.

Owls Decide: Matcha or Coffee?

By Mackenzie Byerlee
Features Editor



PHOTOS | LILY RAND

"I've always been a matcha girl; I've never really liked coffee."
- Nursing major Selina Chen, a sophomore



"Coffee, it's more organic."
- Computer Science major Shahzaib Raza, a senior



"I don't like either; Frappuccino all the way."
- Psychology major Freya White, a junior



"I like matcha because I feel like the caffeine effect doesn't plateau as much as coffee."
- Sofia Catalano, a graduate



"Coffee because it's more caffeine and gives you a bigger kick."
- Biology major Dani Jabbour, a senior



"Coffee because I hate matcha; I think it tastes like grass."
- Energy and utility leadership major Alex Ledwitch, a junior