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Champion Alyssa Naeher returns home

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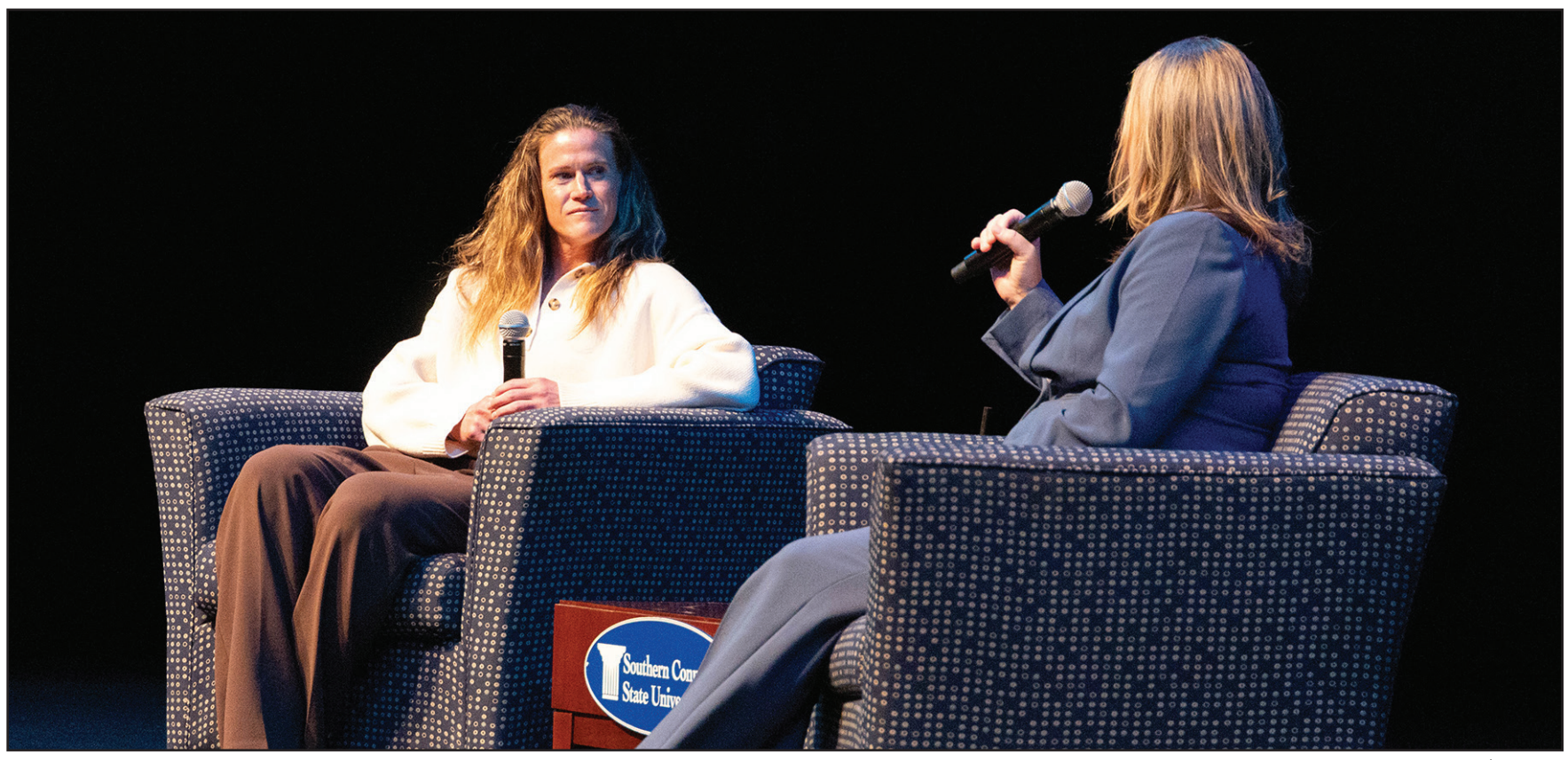

PHOTOS | LILY RAND

Alyssa Naeher, goalkeeper of the Chicago Stars, being interviewed by Christine Huber, a lead sports broadcaster, in John Lyman Center on Friday, Oct. 24.

An Olympic gold medal, a bronze medal and two World Cup Championship trophies: this is just some of the hardware that belongs to retired U.S. National Team and current Chicago Stars goalkeeper Alyssa Naeher.

Naeher, a Bridgeport native, made a stop at the university to speak about her career. It was the first leg of a homecoming trip in which Naeher would be honored by the national team for her accomplishments.

"We had a countdown going," goalkeeper Abby Aughe, a senior, said.

Her appearance at the university was especially exciting for the members of the women's soccer team.

The team had a chance to ask Naeher questions before the ticketed event.

She fielded technical questions, gave personal anecdotes and even remembered specifics from games that occurred years ago.

She also had the chance to give advice.

"Never stop learning. There's always ways to better yourself and continue to grow," Naeher said. "I love learning new things every day."

Naeher grew up playing alongside her twin sister, Amanda Naeher.

She made her way through the highest levels of youth soccer, even spending some years training on the university's campus, before playing at The Pennsylvania State University.

Naeher went pro in 2010, but resources backing women's soccer still lagged behind the men's game.

She talked about the lack of resources available to her and her professional teammates at the time.

"We were getting taped leaning onto rocks on the side of the field," Naeher said. "We didn't even have training tables."

Naeher and her national team teammates were vital in bringing women's soccer closer to its rightful place alongside the men's game.

They fought for equal pay and won. The women's national team has inspired countless girls across the world.

"There is still a ways to go," Naeher said, "but the women's game has come so far."

With friends, teammates and family in attendance, Naeher talked about finding her voice as a young goalkeeper.

She described her first practice with the senior national team as "awe-inspiring."

Naeher is the only goalie in World Cup history to score, take and make a penalty in a penalty shootout. She is the all-time leader in starts, minutes and saves in the National Women's Soccer League.

Naeher is humble, but she is a role model.

"She's an inspiration," Aughe said. "I grew up watching her as a kid. I'm almost 23, now."

Naeher was mostly dismissive of her own personal accomplishments. She credited her teammates and her coaches.

Her advice to the university's athletes encompassed more than just athletics.

"The friendships and memories are even more important than what you do on the field," Naeher said. "People remember you for who you are and how you treated them, not for what you did on the field."

Naeher insisted that her legacy is centered around her character rather than her play.

"I always remind myself to stay true to my roots and who I am," Naeher said. "I wanted to be someone people could rely on, both on and off the field."



The women's soccer team standing with guest speaker Alyssa Naeher.

Dining for a Difference fights food insecurity

By Valentina Toro
Contributor

A warm atmosphere filled the Adanti Student Center Ballroom on the evening of Oct. 22 as students, faculty and staff gathered for Dining for a Difference, a fundraiser dinner organized by the university food pantry to raise awareness about food insecurity on campus.

The three-course pasta dinner, hosted by the Dean of Students Office in partnership with the Student Government Association and the Office of Student Involvement, aimed to unite the community while supporting students facing financial hardship.

"We just wanted to be able to have an event to bring the community together and support our pantry," Angelina Ovalles, the graduate intern for the Dean of Students Office, said. "So, just the space for faculty, staff and students to mingle, have dinner, but also kind of like a good way to fund our food pantry."

The university's food pantry has become a crucial resource for students who face challenges meeting basic needs. With more students visiting each semester, the need for operational funding and supplies has continued to grow.

The funds raised from the dinner will directly help sustain and expand those services through the university's Support Our Students Fund.

"The funds directly raised by this go towards a foundation within the university that is focused on supporting students in need, students in distress," Alandre Alexis, the dean of student affairs and the pantry supervisor, said.

The event aimed to combine community building with gathering support for the food pantry.

"The biggest part of funds that are collected throughout the year goes toward purchasing merchandise for the food pantry, office supplies, pretty much operational things for the food pantry," Alexis said.

Attendees shared dinner and conversation while learning about how food insecurity impacts the campus community.

Each table displayed flyers with QR codes for guests to donate directly to the food pantry, while students' testimonies about how the pantry has supported them were featured on the screen.

The shared stories served as a reminder that the event's purpose went beyond dinner — it was about helping students in need and inspiring continued support.

Nursing major Hailey DeNucci, a junior, said raising awareness about the issue is key to creating a more understanding campus environment.

"It's important for us to know that there are students on campus that might not have the financial resources, and they're actually food insecure," DeNucci said. "So, I think that just bringing attention to that is important so people are just aware of it."

Organizers said events like Dining for a Difference go beyond fundraising by fostering connection and empathy across the university. They added that the strong turnout reinforced how meaningful events like this can be for the campus community.

"A lot of new students get introduced to the food pantry at some point or another, so events like this bring together the community, make them aware of the efforts and the contribution with our communities towards things like this," Ovalles said.



PHOTOS | VALENTINA TORO

Attendees eating dinner at Dining for a Difference in the Adanti Student Center Ballroom on Oct. 22.



Angelina Ovalles, the graduate intern for the Dean of Students Office, Zaina Gebril, the graduate intern for the food pantry, and Alandre Alexis, the dean of student affairs and the pantry supervisor, at the event.