

Rider's financial deficit has seen a nearly \$9 million improvement in fiscal year 2025, according to financial audits.

## Fiscal 2025 audit shows decrease in Rider's deficit

By Caroline Haviland

**A**s Rider rebuilds from its ongoing budgetary troubles, the university's most recent audited financial statements show a nearly \$9 million improvement in its operating loss for fiscal 2025, an indication of a positive budget drawing nearer.

The financial deficit for the fiscal year 2025, spanning from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025, showed as \$12.6 million in the audit, further slashing its \$21.4 million total in fiscal 2024.

The improvement came from Rider's operating expenses dwindling down from \$141 million in fiscal 2024 to \$137 million in fiscal 2025, according to the audit. This stemmed mainly from nearly \$2 million cuts in each of two expense categories: instruction and academic support and auxiliary and student services. The universitywide trimmings were a part of former Rider President Gregory Dell'Omo's last efforts to rectify the institution in the final year of his tenure.

Vice President for Finance, Chief Administrative Officer and Treasurer Thomas Papa, who joined Rider in September, said in an interview with The Rider News on Feb. 2 that while enrollment was going down in fiscal 2025, Dell'Omo's administration was "taking cuts around the edges," but they did not target the main driver of expense: labor.

Papa went on to explain the importance of targeting such areas, saying, "We have a historical pattern. In financial terms, it's called a structural deficit, meaning expenses are outpacing revenue in a constant systemic way, year after year after year. My first order of business when I arrived was to address this structural hole."

In order to do so, Rider President John Loyack implemented the March to Sustainability Plan in December, laying off 30 full-time faculty members, as well as removing certain benefits and lowering salaries by 14% for those remaining. Papa said the Plan is projected to save \$15 million in a full fiscal year.

"In fiscal 2025, the administration focused on cuts involving staff rather than faculty. ... Simply put, for the amount of students we had and the amount of sessions of class that we had to cover, we had too many faculty," Papa said.

Chief Grievance Officer of Rider's chapter of the American Association of University Professors Jeffrey Halpern said that while the faculty union is willing to work with the university to make necessary changes, they must come with a time limit as he views them as "not sustainable."

"We're going to make sacrifices if the membership agrees. When we come to vote, the members will either agree to it or not, but [these losses] can't be indefinite," Halpern said.

### Plans for Rider's future

Amid all of the financial worry, Papa said the university has seen a consistent revenue stream, which from a financial point of view, is a "big box to check" as a budget must be built off of that income.

Previous financial audits show that Rider's revenue has been within \$68 million to \$73 million over the past five years.

The fiscal 2025 audit showed Rider's operating revenue totaled to \$124 million in fiscal 2025, increasing from \$119 million in fiscal 2024. With this uptick also came a rise in tuition revenue, which came out to \$72.4 million for fiscal 2025, a slight growth from the \$68.9 million made in fiscal 2024.

Despite this information, Papa said the university projects a decrease in enrollment for fiscal 2027 due to circulating information of Rider's weakening financial situation. He said this forecast emphasized the importance of urgently executing the Plan.

Rider is also set to pay two short-term loans taken out in spring 2024, and without a payment or an extension, Papa said the university would run out of funds.

Each fiscal year presents cash dips and peaks due to the amount of tuition flowing in, Papa said, and Rider, as a tuition-dependent institution, must plan accordingly. With a large chunk of expenses cut due to the execution of the Plan, Rider can now save funds for these loans and additional payments.

Despite these savings, Papa said the university has presented the Plan to the loan providers in hopes of

extending it another year.

"We have to start getting the expenses rolling in a reduced direction," Papa said.

The administration plans to bring Rider's operating loss to around \$3 million to \$5 million in fiscal 2026, according to Papa, since the Plan was put into place at the halfway point of the fiscal year.

With time, Papa said university constituents will hear less about the financial situation and more regarding positive plans to rebuild Rider.

"I'm sure the students and the people watching the campus and what's going on here, they're concerned about the finances of it, of course, but I'm sure they want to stop hearing about the financial problems of the place and start hearing about some of the good things," Papa said.

Even with a path forward, the fiscal 2025 financial statement featured a "Going Concern" opinion that expressed the auditor's doubt regarding Rider's ability to continue through the current fiscal year. This judgment followed suit with Rider's accrediting body the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and the New Jersey Office of Higher Education, which placed Rider on probation and heightened monitoring, according to a Jan. 9 facultywide email from Papa.

The email added that despite the auditor's opinion based on the fiscal 2025 audit, they have endorsed the Plan due to its future financial impacts.

Going forward, the university will continue to monitor purchases over \$1,000 and review Rider-issued credit cards through the Resource Preservation Committee, Papa said, to discuss the nature of charges and needs for any expenditures.

Papa said he also began to reevaluate Rider's choice of food, cleaning and information technology services to further enhance the Plan's financial impacts.

However, while these results will be noticeable in the coming months, Papa said Rider's break-even point will take a bit of time.

"The financial hole I walked into is a significant structural hole. ... When you lose \$20 million a year or more, that's pretty significant," Papa said. "You don't fix that in 12 months."

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It is time to rethink our approach to making resolutions.



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**MEN'S BASKETBALL PLAYERS REUNITE AS BRONCS**  
From Kansas to New Jersey, two men's basketball starters share more than a court.



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# Student media organizations restructure; merge follows universitywide changes

By Cal Sutton

The Rider News, 107.7 The Bronc and Rider University Network are merging into one centralized Student Media Center at Rider, wrote Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs Kelly Bidle in a universitywide email on Jan. 22.

According to Bidle's email, combining the three organizations has a goal to help student media outlets on campus mesh with "today's current corporate media landscape."

In an email to The Rider News and 107.7 The Bronc staff, Bidle stated that the reimagined structure aims to shift student media "into a bold new direction that would provide even greater opportunities for Rider students."

Bidle stated in an interview with The Rider News that bringing Rider's media outlets together and allowing students to earn certificates of involvement is useful when they are looking for jobs in a competitive environment.

"We're looking to develop a certificate program that actually gives you that credential ... to say 'I worked in news, I worked in TV, I worked in radio.' I can't imagine how that won't give you a competitive advantage," Bidle said.

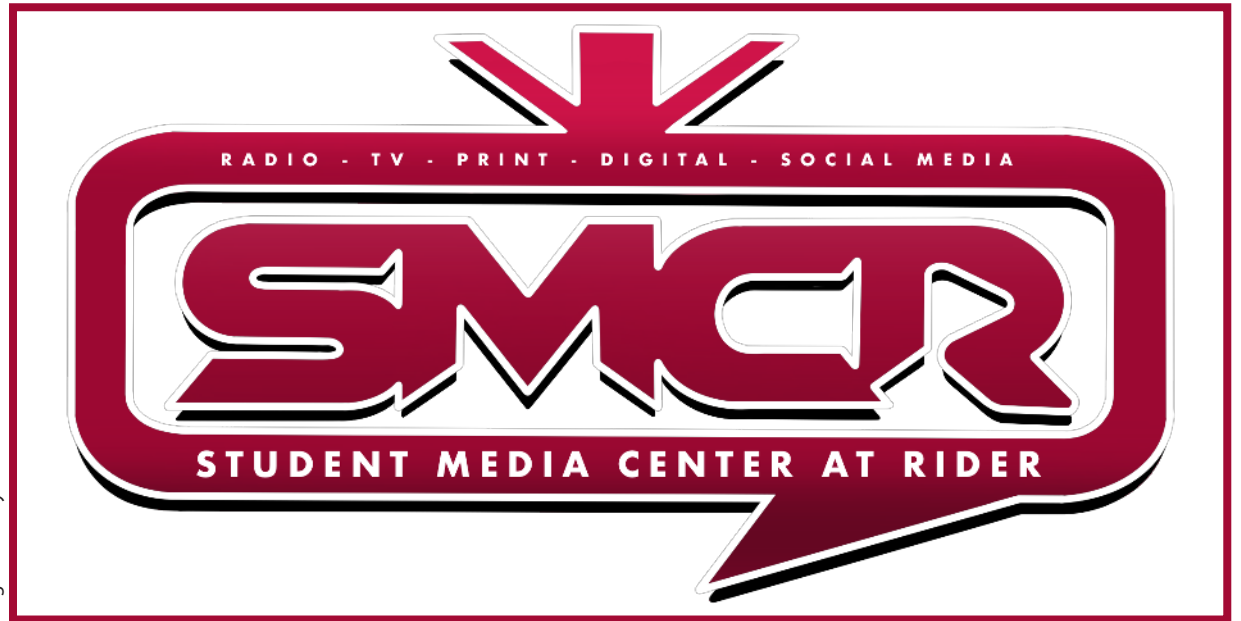
The addition of a certificate-earning program from involvement in the media center helps encourage students from any major to gain hands-on experience that may strengthen a resume or make a candidate stand out to a potential employer.

"The skills they'll learn in the media center will help them in whatever they do in whatever career they choose. ... [hands-on experience] should be great talking points in an interview," Mozes said.

The certificate program is still in the works with the media department chairs and Rider's administration, according to Bidle.

Amid the creation of the centralized media center, administrators appointed John Mozes, general manager of 107.7 The Bronc, to be the executive director of the Student Media Center at Rider.

Mozes initially introduced the idea of a single media center for students on campus eight years ago.



Logo courtesy of Jake Goebel

The Student Media Center at Rider University is a new restructuring of media organizations.

While the development of the SMCR was not related to the layoffs that occurred in the new year, Mozes said, "It just seems now is the right time at Rider to do something like this, to grow the three media entities."

Mozes' plan within the SMCR is to help each of the three student media outlets gather their own revenue through fundraising and partnerships, in hopes for each outlet to reach a level of self-sufficiency so the organizations do not have to rely on funding from the university and can gain access to new opportunities.

"By generating revenue, that's going to give students more opportunities. ... it's going to give them an opportunity to grow their brand," Mozes said.

After multiple attempts to contact individuals involved in Rider University Network, The Rider News did not hear back.

Rosalyn Tiangco, student general manager of 107.7 The Bronc and senior arts and entertainment industries management major, voiced her eagerness for the SMCR to hit the ground running.

"I think that this is a really great opportunity for all three, [The] Rider News, film and TV and The Bronc, to really collaborate with each other and to really benefit off of what each of us does as an organization," Tiangco said.

Tiangco expressed excitement to be in her role at 107.7 The Bronc while student media on campus is going through such a substantial shift.

"I'm really excited to help John get this off the ground. Obviously, with this kind of merger, all of our roles at the station get a little bit more expanded ... but all of us as a team are very excited for this," Tiangco said.

One thing that Bidle, Mozes and Tiangco agree on is how versatile the communications skills are and how important they are to employers in a competitive market for media jobs.

The SMCR, according to Mozes, came to fruition with the help of "an administration that is looking to put student engagement first."

# Students, faculty grapple with aftermath of layoffs

By Grace Bertrand

Coming back to campus after a winter break filled with what senior political science major Heather Schaab called "uncertainty," students and faculty alike are experiencing a shift in campus morale as they adjust and adapt to the missing presence of 30 full-time faculty members.

While the faculty layoffs did not come unexpectedly over the holiday break, since it was announced as part of the March to Sustainability Plan on Nov. 10, the shock and sadness of which professors were laid off still hit students just the same, according to Schaab.

"Students have definitely felt more stressed out about their future here ... and it's realistic to be stressed out. Everyone is feeling troubled," Schaab said.

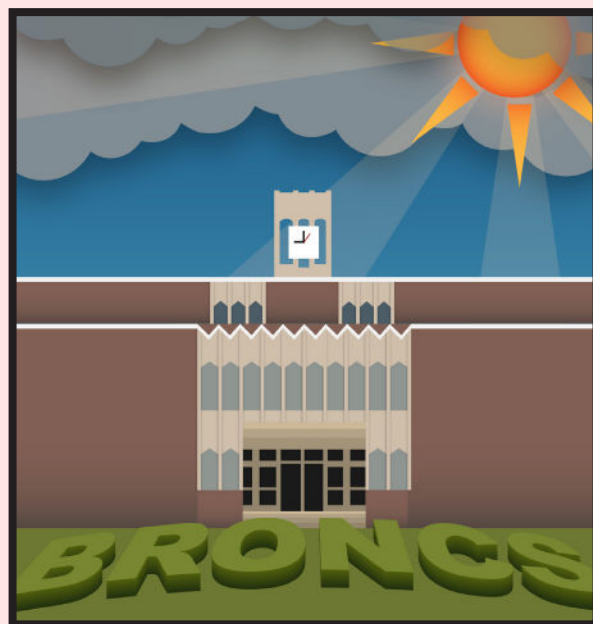
Schaab also serves as the equity and inclusion committee chair for Student Government Association and added that SGA is working to create an environment where students can talk about the added anxiety they might be feeling.

"I know that everyone is trying hard to alleviate that stress toward students and students can come to [SGA] with any concerns and we will happily address it," she said.

## Faculty 'step in' for students' sake

While Schaab had not lost any current professors or advisers in the layoffs, she noted how even students who were not directly impacted "are very aware" of the added workload professors will take on from their former colleagues.

While faculty like Justin Burton, a music professor, understand the stress that may come from the added work that is being demanded of them, he also



Gail Demeraski/The Rider News

The campus community faces various emotions following the layoffs of 30 full-time faculty.

understands just as much how crucial it is for the work to get done.

"I can be — and am — angry about the unfairness of the layoffs and the unfairness of the adjunct job market, and at the same time, I can recognize that it will be important for us, as faculty, to support our influx of adjunct colleagues as fully as possible this spring, for their benefit and the students', too," Burton said. "This will be some of the extra labor that faculty and staff have to pick up in the coming weeks, and my hope is that we're up to that task."

As Quinn Cunningham, an associate professor of management, sees it, the faculty morale "has been low

for the past few years, and the layoffs at the end of December were especially painful."

She added that the layoffs have been an especially hot topic for faculty who came back for the spring semester, saying "Most discussions reflect a sense of heartbreak and loss, as well as frustration that Rider reached this point after years of poor decisions by the prior administration. At the same time, while no one wanted layoffs to happen, there seems to be some understanding among faculty that these actions were taken in an effort to help the university survive."

The Norm Brodsky College of Business lost six full-time faculty members from the layoffs, which Cunningham noted is causing professors to take on additional advising responsibilities.

"Many faculty are feeling the added strain of increased workloads combined with reduced compensation, including significant salary cuts and the elimination of tuition remission that some relied on or planned for in the future," Cunningham said. "Faculty at Rider care deeply about their students and are committed to providing a high-quality educational experience, so people are doing their best to step in where needed. Still, balancing these increased demands with teaching, advising and personal responsibilities has been challenging."

Some professors' roles are not as replaceable, however, as senior graphic design major Calvin Nue puts it.

Nue experienced feelings like "losing a loved one" when he first heard Jessi Oliano, a former graphic design professor, was laid off, noting that "she was family to me."

# Student Navigation Office returns

By Zyheim Bell

**C**ontinuing the mission of providing support to students and a sense of belonging at Rider, the university has launched initiatives to reinstate the Student Navigation Office according to an email from Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs Kelly Bidle.

The office will reopen this semester after a brief hiatus. Bidle's Jan. 23 facultywide email read, "[SNO] will open its doors this semester in its new location on the third floor of the BLC."

The program, before being sunsetted in fall 2024, aimed to provide first-year students, transfers and adult learners an individual support coach in an effort to assist and nurture them through their first year at Rider and beyond, according to an archive of the program's web page — and according to the Director of Student Involvement and First Year Programs Kadi Diallo, that message initiative has not changed.

"At the core of it, SNO has been reimplemented because it is evident that there is a level of continuity that students need in terms of the moment they touch campus beyond orientation," Diallo said.

As one of the members from Rider's faculty and staff chosen to help with SNO, Diallo sees that the program will provide a way for those new to campus and the college environment to make the most out of the opportunities that Rider offers to them.

SNO was originally implemented into the university

in July 2020 under Rider's previous "Lifting Barriers Initiative," run by navigation coaches employed to work with students entering Rider for the first time.

The program mandated a four-week course that taught students how to navigate Rider, with services provided by the Financial Aid office, the Academic Success Center and other resources that would help them succeed in the first year.

Now with its re-implementation SNO will have members across disciplines there to step in and provide new students with the information and tools they need.

"I myself am one of the SNO volunteers, but there are a lot of well-versed individuals that are very connected to students that understand the challenges students experience in the first year," Diallo shared.

However, students will not just have faculty and staff members to count on. Diallo mentioned that the program will always have a mission of interconnectedness, whether that means making sure students have access to resources like the Counseling Center or another peer.

"There is definitely going to be that connection piece, not only student to student, but to student to staff ... Think of SNO as a space where you can get your questions answered and you can get holistic support," said Diallo. "Whether it is academic services or you just need to be directed in the right place, that is



Photo Courtesy of Rider University

**Kadi Diallo** has been chosen as one of the faculty members to assist in SNO's reimplementation at Rider.

what the SNO office is for."

As a first-generation college student herself, Diallo encourages students to understand that SNO and its team is there to help.

She said, "This is a really great conduit for students to get holistic support ... it puts the focus back on 'how can we support students from all angles?'"

# Campus morale shifts as hope arises for Rider's future

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

He said, "I viewed her as a second mother to me as she's been nothing but kind, compassionate and supportive to me and many other students of hers. She's like the perfect professor here so it's such a shame and a stab to the heart to learn that she's been laid off for no reason other than just to 'save money.'"

## Moving forward

Similar to Schaab, Nue has also heard his peers "talking nonstop" about what the layoffs will mean for certain classes and departments.

"People are angry, confused and hurt, especially students who lost professors they were close to or depended on for guidance," Nue said.

While things may start to simmer down in the near future, Nue explained that in the long-term the loss of mentors could affect networking opportunities, letters of recommendation and students' passion for their fields of study.

"Many students rely on certain professors not just for classes, but for advice, encouragement and career



Photo courtesy of Rider University

**Quinn Cunningham** spoke about the hardships of losing 30 full-time faculty members.

guidance. Without that support system, students may feel disconnected, less confident and more likely to struggle or disengage," he said.

Nue also empathized with the professors that are being forced to take on extra workload, adding "Professors who are still here are grieving the loss of their colleagues while also being expected to take on more work. That stress doesn't just stay behind the scenes, it affects the classroom experience. Even the most dedicated professors can only do so much, and students may notice less availability, more pressure and a general sense of burnout."

Cunningham's wish, however, is that "students will feel as little impact as possible." She added, "While there is a great deal of stress and uncertainty, there is also a shared desire to see Rider emerge from this period and remain a strong institution for our students."

As students and faculty alike look to move forward without the people who have been a part of their academic and professional careers for years, Schaab's hope is that the campus can come together to overcome the abrupt changes.



2026-27 

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# Groove and Glide into Black History Month

By Teagan Rotella

**T**he reflecting lights of the disco balls danced on the ceiling, floor and walls of the room, immediately catching the eyes of students as they entered the rink.

Starting off Black History Month strong at the Student Recreation Center, Groove and Glide, a roller skating disco event, returned to Rider on Feb. 1 for its second-consecutive year.

As Rider students adjusted to their new schedules, Groove and Glide provided a fun skating escape while sharing the history of Black culture, the perfect combination of learning and fun.

Students were welcomed into the SRC with tables topped with colorful and informative display boards, sharing the history of Black culture in a fun and interactive way. The stations included “Roll Through History,” “Pouring into Our Legacy,” “The Soulful Soundtrack of the Rink” and “Strides and Smiles,” as mentioned in the The Center for Community and Belonging’s email that shared the news regarding this event.

After reading the information shared at each station, students were able to answer six scavenger hunt questions. Upon successful completion, students earned a custom water bottle that they could decorate with Black History Month and skate-themed stickers provided at the tables.

Michael Nelson, senior game design major, mentioned how important it is to have an event like Groove and Glide at Rider.

“[Groove and Glide] is a chance for all Rider students to come together for a good event, spend time with each other, have fun and also educate themselves on the rich culture of roller skating and how it has a

very impactful stance in Black communities,” Nelson said.

Nelson also recalled how Groove and Glide was introduced last year by Jasmine Johnson, the Director of Community Engagement and Belonging, after she began working at Rider.

Senior sports media major and member of BMU, Nathan Greene said, “We’re trying to keep the tradition going by doing it every year, because it’s a great event and the students seem to love it.”

After completing the scavenger hunt and receiving a custom water bottle, students entered the rolling rink area stationed in the back of the Schimek Family Fitness Center.

DJs played a variety of songs, including “Poker Face” by Lady Gaga, “Ain’t It Fun” by Paramore and “What Makes You Beautiful” by One Direction.

Before skating, students had to provide their name, birth date and sign an agreement on either of two devices on a table. If students needed the skates provided, they shared their shoe size with one of the people running the sign-in table.

After tying up their laces, students immediately took to the checkered rink, half of the floor was colored orange and green, the other half was green and black. The wheels of the skates lit up orange and green with each glide of a person’s move.

The skaters’ abilities ranged from beginner to advanced, with an even mixture of both, creating a welcoming and nonjudgemental environment.



Abby Ray/The Rider News

Students of all skill levels enjoyed roller skating to fun music.

Freshman psychology major Tyler Scherer grew up playing street hockey with his neighbors, making him skilled at roller skating.

“I like that there’s a lot of people coming out and trying new things ... I’ve never really seen anything like this at any school. I think this is such a unique [event],” Scherer said.

Freshman health science major Mamadi Diawara mentioned how he had no experience with roller skating, yet still wanted to attend this event with friends and have fun.

The event proved to be worth students’ time as it was a great opportunity to hang out with friends and learn more about Black culture.

Diawara said, “Bring your friends! The more people that show up to the school events, the better the school becomes.”

## Shining Light on Black Excellence: Leila Johnson

By Sofia Santiago

**L**eila Johnson’s words of advice to anyone struggling with a busy schedule or with a daunting task ahead were, “Be comfortable, be vulnerable and eat that frog.”

Johnson, a senior accounting major, explained that she learned the first two parts of that recommendation in middle school and has carried it with her throughout her time at Rider.

The third part, references a book by Brian Tracy titled “Eat That Frog!: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time.” The book compares a big task that is going to take a lot of effort, to a frog, and suggests that the reader should just do it rather than let it sit until later. Johnson explained that this phrase is something she learned at her internship at Kreisler Miller, a Philadelphia accounting and tax firm where she is currently a busy season tax intern.

Apart from her internship, Johnson is the treasurer of the women’s club volleyball team, the treasurer of the Asian American Student Association, the president of the Korean pop culture club, the president and founding member of Pulse Dance Crew, Rider’s Korean pop dance cover team and has been working at Saxby’s since her sophomore year. Johnson became the student CEO the fall semester of her junior year.

When asked about how she deals with the pressures of balancing academics and extracurriculars, Johnson stated, “Time management is everything, because I can have 15 million tasks but I still have time in the day. I use Google Calendar, it’s my lifeline.”

A big achievement for Johnson was founding Pulse.

“I think it has been, not to be cheesy, one of the best things that I’ve done in my life. I mean, I’ve done a lot of leadership roles but there’s something really different about starting a club at college, because you see so many people from different backgrounds,” she recounted. “Then, being the person who runs it all, you learn a lot about communication and how people operate, and on top of that, it’s a physical club, so I



Photo courtesy of Leila Johnson

**Leila Johnson**, senior accounting major, recounts her achievements at Rider.

have to be a dancer as well.”

Before coming to Rider, Johnson had started a K-pop dance team at her high school because of her passion for dance and Korean culture. When she came to Rider and saw the university did not have one, she decided to create the group herself.

“Be your own way maker. Don’t wait for somebody else to do it. A lot of things that I like didn’t exist before,” Johnson said. “I’ve already made a safe space for myself, but then the safe space for myself has turned into a safe space for other people as well. It’s giving me another group of people I know I can rely on.”

She went on to add, “I’ve been a Black and Korean person in areas where not a lot of other people are

Black and or Korean. I’m always going to be perceived as a Black woman, first and foremost, so I’ve always been in that culture. It’s something that I live every day. As for being Korean, it’s not an obvious feature about me, and that’s why I sometimes talk about being Korean more.”

Johnson’s experience at Saxby’s taught her how to be patient with herself and others, saying, “Such a high capacity leadership role was a testing experience. Even if I was still figuring stuff out, it didn’t change that the cafe still needed to operate.”

Remembering Johnson’s time as the Saxbys SCEO, senior game design major and her coworker and friend, Kay Aponte, said, “She was always willing to help anyone that was in need. She ran a tight ship, but she was very flexible with everyone. It’s always so fun to just see her dance and in her element, no matter where we are.”

Keeping her own words of advice in mind, when looking to the future, Johnson hopes to pursue her Certified Public Accountant and Certified Management Accountant licenses, continue to stay in touch with the Korean Cultural Foundation of Philadelphia and teach dance workshops.

Johnson reminisced, “I didn’t think my senior year would come so fast. It’s literally my last semester in school, which makes it so much scarier, because I’m a person who likes to plan ahead.”

*This article is part of the Shining Light on Black Excellence series by The Rider News to showcase impactful Black figures on campus in honor of Black History Month.*

SHINING LIGHT ON  
**BLACK**  
EXCELLENCE

Maggie Kleiner/The Rider News

# Rider Pets: Artemis the rabbit hops into Rider's heart

By Sofia Santiago

**A**mong all the residents living in Wright Hall, one stands out: Artemis the rabbit. She has a masters in snoozing and cuddles and is earning a PhD in tomfoolery, according to Sela McMullen, senior voice performance major and Artemis' caretaker.

Artemis, a 12.9 pound, 8-year-old New Zealand white rabbit, came to live at Rider as an emotional support animal for McMullen in 2023, following a recommendation by McMullen's doctor.

The pair first met at a shelter three years ago. "Artemis was in a cage when I went to go meet her ... As soon as I picked her up, she nuzzled right between my neck, and I knew that was my girl. When I put her down, she thumped because she didn't appreciate me picking her up," McMullen explained. "Before the shelter, Artemis was used as a breeder rabbit for meat and was found in a garbage can outside a restaurant. So I don't blame her for not liking humans."

Jasmine White, a senior journalism major and a friend of McMullen's, described meeting Artemis for the first time.

"I wasn't expecting to see this huge bunny ... It took a while for Artemis to warm up to me, but after a little bit she was letting me pet her head and was sniffing my hands," White said.

To get permission for Artemis to live at Rider, McMullen had to contact Student Accessibility and Support Services and have them approve the rabbit.

"Since she's supposed to be my emotional support animal, she's not really allowed to leave the dorm unless it's to go outside, and we want to be as allergy friendly as possible," McMullen said. "She's fine with zooming around in here. I like to take her out when it snows because mosquitoes are dead, so there's no diseases being spread by their bites."

Despite her limitations, Artemis still finds ways to stay active. She has a set of stacking cups, a drawer, carrot toys and paper bags in which McMullen will hide treats and foraging activity food that will stimulate the rabbit's brain.

"The foraging mat is her favorite, especially with dried up dandelions. She also loves chewing

cardboard," she explained.

McMullen commented on the misconception that taking care of a rabbit is easy.

"They are very intelligent," she said. "I had a snack drawer, and this little fluffer figured out how to open it no matter what."

Even after McMullen used baby-proof magnets on the inside and outside of the drawer, Artemis would find a way to get in and eat uncooked popcorn kernels.

"That didn't happen once. That didn't happen twice. It happened five times," McMullen recounted.

Each time, McMullen had to spend the whole day with Artemis making sure she passed every single popcorn kernel, or else Artemis would need an emergency vet visit.

"That is why we have enrichment activities to keep her little bunny brain busy while I'm in class or while I sleep, so that she's not constantly trying to open these drawers," she said.

McMullen takes many precautions to keep Artemis safe and healthy. The room is kept at 68 degrees so that Artemis can stay at a cool temperature, and the cable-fence and bedframes that surround the enclosure are laced with peppermint oil to dissuade Artemis from chewing on them.

"Any wires where Artemis lives, for example her water fountain, have a non-bite deterrent. That's a cable protector with a chemical aspect that is safe for pets, but gives them a taste of a really bitter thing, making them spit it out immediately," she said.

As a testament to McMullen's efforts, White commented, "Sela's creativity is beautiful. A lot of people tend to keep their animals in small cages ... but the fact that [Artemis] has her own little sanctuary under the dorm beds, I would've never thought to do something like that."

Additionally, Artemis gets hay around the clock to increase fiber and make sure she is digesting correctly. Her diet consists of pellets with essential vitamins and minerals during the daytime, kale and other leafy greens at night, along with some blueberries to help with her immune system.



Photo courtesy of Sela McMullen

Sela McMullen, senior voice performance major, holding Artemis the rabbit dressed as a taco for Halloween.

"If you have a banana, she can smell it from right outside the door and probably outside the building. And she'll be at the fence, rattling it at the gate because she smells it," McMullen explained.

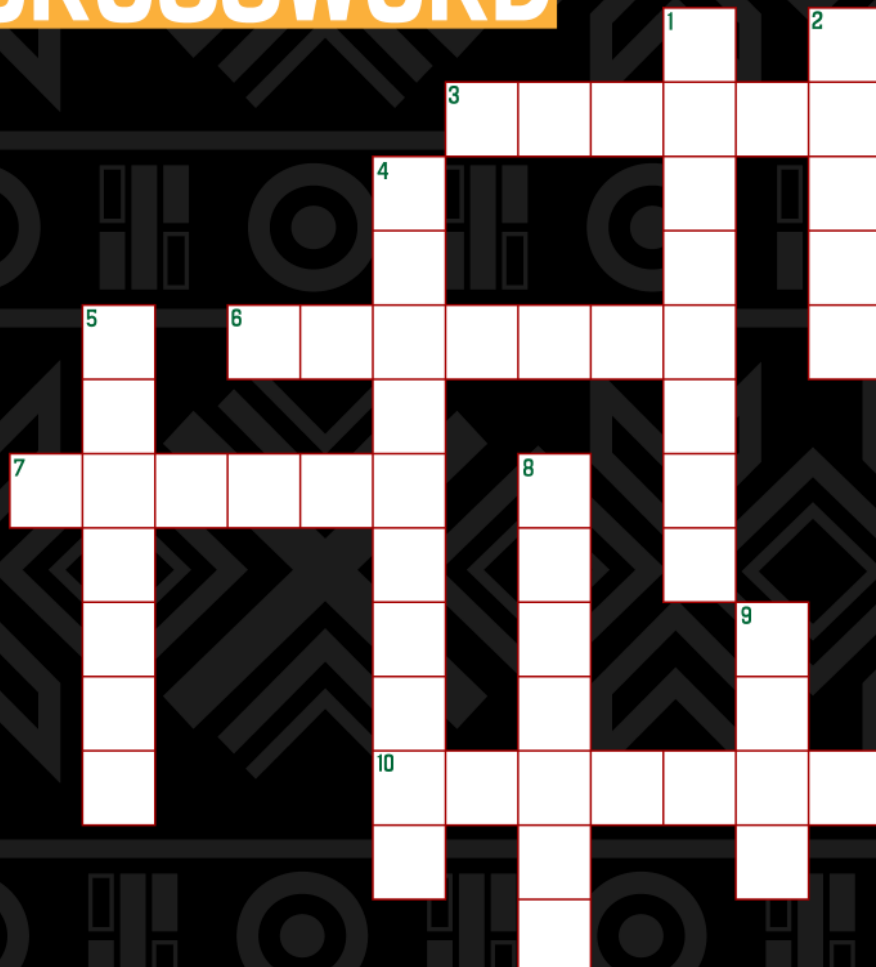
McMullen stated that Artemis' determination was part of how she came up with Artemis' name.

"Her breed is supposed to be docile, but she's not. Nobody informed her of that. I noticed that her behavior was very independent and strong, and I wanted her name to have a meaning," she said. "I looked at Greek mythology, and sure enough, Artemis is the goddess of the hunt and the moon. She's white like the moon, and she's independent and strong just like Artemis."



Gail Demeraski/The Rider News

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH CROSSWORD



### DOWN

1. The first self-governing Black municipality north of the Mason-Dixon Line was located in \_\_\_ New Jersey.
2. The \_\_\_ Rights Act was passed in 1964.
4. The Rider News' series: Shining a Light on Black \_\_\_\_.
5. Known as "The Father of Black History:" Carter G. \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Author of "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" Maya \_\_\_\_\_.
9. This U.S. president officially recognized Black History Month in 1976.

### ACROSS

3. The state where former President Barack Obama was born.
6. Rider Dining's From Roots to \_\_\_ series.
7. \_\_\_ Fest will be held in Gill Chapel on the last Sunday of February.
10. Rider's Black Student Union's Keys to the \_\_\_ event.

# February Horoscopes

♥ Presented and Designed by Gail Demeraski ♥

## Aquarius

(Jan. 20 - Feb. 18)

This will be a defining month for you, Aquarius. You will feel more authentic and driven to shape your life into what you dream. This month you will find others gravitating towards your empowering energy, do not be afraid to enjoy it!

## Pisces

(Feb. 19 - Mar. 20)

You will finally triumph over your hardships, Pisces. January left you feeling drained, but this month you will re-enter the spotlight feeling rejuvenated. February will allow you to find the peace you have been searching for.

## Aries

(Mar. 21 - Apr. 19)

This will be a major period of re-invention, Aries. February will leave you feeling responsible to mature and transform your life. You will find yourself establishing healthy boundaries and committing to positive long-term goals.

## Taurus

(Apr. 20 - May 20)

Feeling nostalgic, Taurus? February is a great time to reflect and let go of things that have been bothering you. Take care of yourself, as this month will include both new beginnings and endings.

## Gemini

(May 21 - June 20)

Pick up that abandoned project, Gemini! You will find yourself feeling more passionate and finding your community. Allow yourself to be sociable and let that enthusiasm fuel you this month.

## Cancer

(June 21 - July 22)

Get ready to succeed this month, Cancer! You will find that your setbacks have been for a reason, and your hard work will finally pay off. Let yourself enjoy this month, and make sure you reward yourself for your efforts.

## Leo

(July 23 - Aug. 22)

Be prepared for recognition, Leo! You will feel a spotlight over you this month, as you find yourself growing into financial stability and making big accomplishments. Be prepared to be seen for your efforts.

## Virgo

(Aug. 23 - Sept. 22)

Be prepared to face challenges, Virgo. You will find your productivity increase, but there will be a struggle with letting go of things that bother you. Take February in stride, and you will find your heart prepared for next month.

## Libra

(Sept. 23 - Oct. 21)

Make sure you maintain a balance, Libra. You might find it hard to juggle your responsibilities and your friendships this February. Make sure you maintain healthy boundaries, and do not be afraid to take that chance!

## Scorpio

(Oct. 22 - Nov. 21)

It might be time to let go, Scorpio. For too long you have been chasing an idea you are not sure you want, so do not be afraid to make some big changes this month. You deserve to be happy, no matter how that looks for you.

## Sagittarius

(Nov. 22 - Dec. 21)

You are about to step into new beginnings, Sagittarius. February is expected to bring creativity and a change of perspective. Broaden your horizons this month, and you will find yourself entering a new mindset.

## Capricorn

(Dec. 22 - Jan. 19)

Stability is on your horizon, Capricorn! February will provide you comfort in your relationships, financial situation and mental health. Make sure you maintain that foundation, and abundance is sure to follow.

# Searows' new album is 'violent and vulnerable'

**H**ow do you feed a monster that insatiably demands for more? This is the overarching question Searows, the pseudonym for artist Alec Duckart, begrudgingly asks within his sophomore album "Death in the Business of Whaling."

Released on Jan. 23, this nine-track album provides his listeners with the inner monologue of someone who will seemingly always bring a knife to a gun fight. Within the thought-provoking title and intricately illustrated cover of the album by Duckart himself, he literally and metaphorically paints a visceral image of what is to come within the content of his lyrics; violent and vulnerable.

Searows' first album "Guard Dog" felt like such a personal journey in which he faces both external and internal forces of evil. This time around, it seems as though the forces have only grown hungrier and more merciless than ever. If you are looking for a feel-good album, this definitely is not it. But if you are like me and seek music that will help you look within yourself and release emotions you might not have known you had, then maybe this is the one for you.

"Belly of the Whale" is the opening track of the album and provides us with our very first impression of it, with the song serving as an admission of defeat with the lyrics; "I've been here for a long time // I tried and I failed." Here, Duckart metaphorically sets the grim scene of him being stuck in the lowest point of life with nowhere to go and no fight left in him.

"Kill What You Eat" is the next song, providing us with some context to how he has gotten to this point. He uses the lyrics "A rotten apple hasn't always been that // I want my body back" and "Fighting like an insect // That nobody wants around" to set a stage in which only he is standing on, with no one around to help. Duckart reveals how he is not the boy he used to be, though he desperately wants to be.

The third song, "Photograph of a Cyclone," is probably the happiest sounding one within the album. Do not let the whimsical, folk-inspired instrumentals fool you though; this one is about facing pure darkness. "Treading careful, God, you look so evil // Letting some big monster in the room" are lyrics that are quite relatable to me as I have so often found myself circling the drain, unsure of how to feel and unable to really do anything about it. How do you fight something bigger than yourself?

"Hunter," the next song, answers that question; you turn into it. "I am a killer with a heart on fire // I'll be the hunter when you tell me I need to be" depicts the internal battle when you become the very thing you hate, whether it is out of necessity or habit.

Perfectly placed right in the center of the album is "Dirt." If I had to choose one song I feel fully encompasses the album, it would be this one. At its core, I believe the album is about the fine line between guilt and innocence, with the lyrics "And you can't see the path that you are on // And, all of a sudden, they're cutting the wings from off my back" serving as a contemplation of how much of his situation is truly his fault as he could only go so far with clipped wings and blurred vision.

Next, we have my favorite song off the album, "Dearly Missed." The grungy, distorted guitar combined with the evocative lyrics work in tandem to provide a heart wrenching work of art. "I really need you to help yourself" is a line that I've never explicitly heard but always felt. Like myself, Duckart simultaneously embraces yet pushes away this sense of becoming the villain in the story. At this point, he is willing to take down anything that stands in his way.

"Junie" is the seventh song of the album and my next favorite. Here, Duckart finally receives a helping hand from a friend, but pushes it away. He has made it this far without any help and does not want to drag anyone down with him. A lyric that really struck with me is "I made this mess from a distance, it's gonna take me next // It's the creature that's moving at a terrible speed." Despite his sense of growth by taking accountability, the monster that's been present from the beginning is still finding a way to catch up to him.

"In Violet" feels like he is taking a pause from all the running he has been doing to catch his breath. I find the lyrics "The last of your honor to die thinking

Spotify discography, so I am very excited to see him perform this amazing album live in concert in May as I have saved almost every song released by him to my library since then.

"Death in the Business of Whaling" is an extraordinary showcase of artistry, created by someone who is able to dig deep within themselves and make light appear from out of the darkness and earns an obvious five out of five stars from me.

Yanuel Santos  
senior graphic design major



Yanuel Santos/The Rider News

"Death in the Business of Whaling" is an intense and dynamic new indie album.

you were a coward // I love you more than the sinking sun // Said I was a god, and I'm not sure that you bought it" to be hauntingly sweet and naive. Whether he is talking to Junie, or to himself, I am not sure, but there is this air of acceptance that flows throughout the song. The story is about to end, and he seems to know exactly how. It is uncertain whether he is about to succeed or fail, but it is clear that he has tried his best.

Finally, we have "Geese." This song, like the entire album, explores how exhausting it is to live, but how even greater of a shame it is to not live at all. I will admit, this is the only song I went to search the meaning for because a big part of me wanted to find where the happy ending was. I do not entirely find comfort in the fact that once this song is over, he just ends right back in the belly of the whale. Though, it does make perfect sense as there is not a limit as to how many times one can reach rock bottom. The lyrics "But, my darling, you cannot live like this forever // Like wild geese flying towards something // You do not have to do good, but you cannot do nothing" depict the quiet strength he still manages to hold on to throughout the peril he has been facing and will seemingly continue to face. In "Dirt" he spoke of being an animal with clipped wings, and he now compares himself to the likeness of geese; birds that fly with conviction. Searows knows he possesses this incredible power, but is still unsure what to do with it. As shown by the lyrics "I will not lay me down in front of the tracks // If I swore that I meant it, then I take it back." He makes it known that he will at least continue to do something.

There is something about musicians who can portray how human they are into such well-written lyrics that really resonates with me. I have never been one to view life as this exciting and fun journey more so as a voracious creature that keeps begging for more. But it is not always like this. Throughout the past few years, I have learned that life is about continuing that path in the best way you can, holding on to the good, and stopping to breathe in the violets.

I have been a fan of Searows since his debut 2022 single "Used To Be Friends" was the only song in his

Gail Demerski/The Rider News



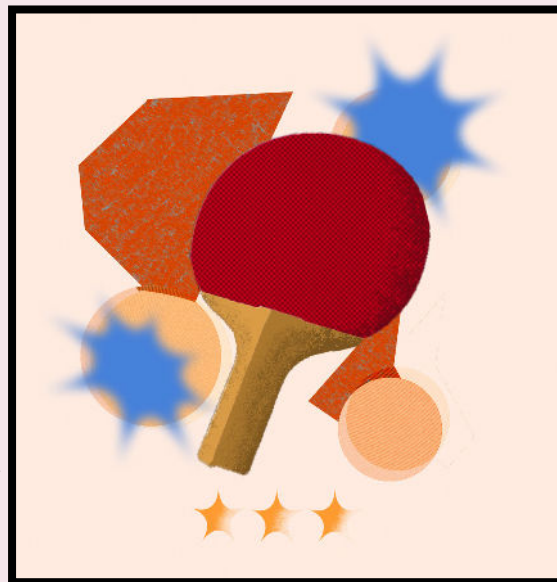
# 'Marty Supreme' pursues greatness — and succeeds

**W**hen directing duo Benny and Josh Safdie split up in 2024, a lot of their fans were patiently waiting for each of their first solo projects. Benny Safdie released his movie, "The Smashing Machine," in October 2025 to mixed reviews. In comparison to his critically-acclaimed films that he made alongside his brother, it was a bit of a letdown. Two months later, on Christmas, Josh Safdie would put out "Marty Supreme."

For about a month, it was nigh on impossible to avoid advertisements for this movie, with Timothée Chalamet going on one of the greatest social media marketing runs in history. Be it the "Marty Supreme" jacket or the Vegas Sphere turning into a giant "Marty Supreme"-branded ping pong ball, or even that giant orange blimp flying over America! Typically, I reserve my ratings for just the film, but the marketing alone deserves five stars.

The movie follows Marty Mauser, played by Chalamet, as he tries to climb his way to the top of table tennis. Per every Safdie movie ever, the number of trials and tribulations he faces in this movie is enough to give anyone a headache. From his relationships falling through, to him being tight on money or getting himself into dangerous situations; you never truly feel like Mauser is safe. I think that is the beauty of a Safdie movie. Unlike most studio blockbusters, it is typical for the main character to triumph and survive. In "Marty Supreme," safety is never once guaranteed, and that lends to some seriously good storytelling.

The constant uncertainty and anxiety that defines "Marty Supreme" are among the film's greatest strengths, but they are only a small part of why it works as well as it does. Much of the film's success rests on Chalamet, who delivers what is easily the strongest performance of his career. While the "Dune" films were able to showcase his range, "Marty Supreme" demands something different: obsession, arrogance and an unmatched drive for greatness. Chalamet gives Mauser a manic intensity; impossible to ignore, especially at times when he is deeply unlikeable. Chalamet does not feel the need to soften his performance to derive sympathy from the audience, because he understands the character too well. Mauser does not care about what others think in the film; his sole purpose lies within himself. Mauser's flaws are



Grace Juarez/The Rider News

"Marty Supreme" scores major points with movie-goers.

fully committed to, and in doing so, it makes him such a compelling main character to watch.

The surrounding cast around Chalamet also deserves major credit. Odessa A'zion had a breakout performance here and will have a lasting place in cinema for years to come. Additionally, Gwyneth Paltrow is great in her few scenes, and the way she bounces off Mauser's young, irrational worldview is engaging to see. Kevin O'Leary, weirdly enough, delivers a great performance, too. I saw a few people complain that he was bland, but I disagree, as he was such a great foil to Mauser's character. Really, all of these side characters were written to bounce off Mauser, and they do that so perfectly in the end product.

I also must give a hand to how well-written this movie is. I cannot praise the pacing enough, for being two and a half hours; it genuinely feels like it is only 90 minutes in total. I saw this film three times in the span of about three weeks, and was worried it would get stale or boring, but it did not. The movie managed to stay interesting and engaging the whole way through, which is difficult for a movie of its length and grandiosity to accomplish.

"Marty Supreme" is a lot of things — but boiled down, it is a story about greatness, about the pursuit of greatness. What it means to be "great," and what it

takes to achieve such status. Mauser is many things. A good person? Not really, but he is driven. He goes about proving himself in all the absurd ways possible, most of which being rather morally questionable. He puts his life on the line, travels across the world, gambles his relationships and his money, all just to silence the doubters and show that he is one of the best table tennis players. There is nothing stopping me from saying that in the end, he does indeed prove that. To an extent, I think Mauser is one of my favorite characters ever written and despite being morally detestable, I loved watching him in this movie. "Marty Supreme" is a five-star film, and one of my personal favorites ever released. For that, it is leagues above every other movie released in 2025 and is without a doubt my pick for winning the Best Picture category at the Academy Awards, also known as the Oscars.

*Alfie Exille  
freshman history and secondary education major*



Gail Demeraski/The Rider News

## COMIC: Harvey and Schnozola

By N. D. Medal



# New year, new approach to resolutions

**B**eing just about anywhere in public during the months of December and January provides you with a near guarantee that you will hear the words “new year, new me.”

Following those words may come a spewed out list of New Year’s resolutions, that when thought about, are entirely achievable. Now before I continue, I want to state that, in general, resolutions are not inherently a bad thing.

New Year’s resolutions have been a thing for 4,000 years, according to the History Channel’s website. As humans, we have become so accustomed to setting these goals for so long that we have lost sight of what the tradition really means.

While New Year’s festivities are said to have started in Babylonia, the ways in which these traditions are celebrated has drastically evolved since then.

Babylonians set intentions to voice their loyalty to their king, return anything they borrowed, and other goals to go into the new year — which used to start in March!

In more modern times, our goals revolve around setting big aspirations of self-change for the year; resolutions that less than 10% of goal-setters actually accomplish, as explained on the History Channel’s website.

Though, there is a reason that a large portion of people drop their resolutions by mid-February every year. Sometimes, people’s goals are just too robust for the new year.

Telling yourself that you are going to change everything about who you are just because the

calendar has changed is what makes resolutions so hard to stick with.

When you think about it, nothing really is changing. The date changes, yes, but the change from 11:59 p.m. on Dec. 31 to midnight on Jan. 1 does not change who someone is.

You can make your goal for the new year to get stronger, but making your resolution “go to the gym 6 days a week,” when you have never set foot in a gym is far too strict. The chances of a homebody miraculously turning into a “gym rat” on New Year’s Day is unlikely.

If we set loose goals and try not to overexert ourselves coming into the new year, resolutions seem far more likely to be accomplished.

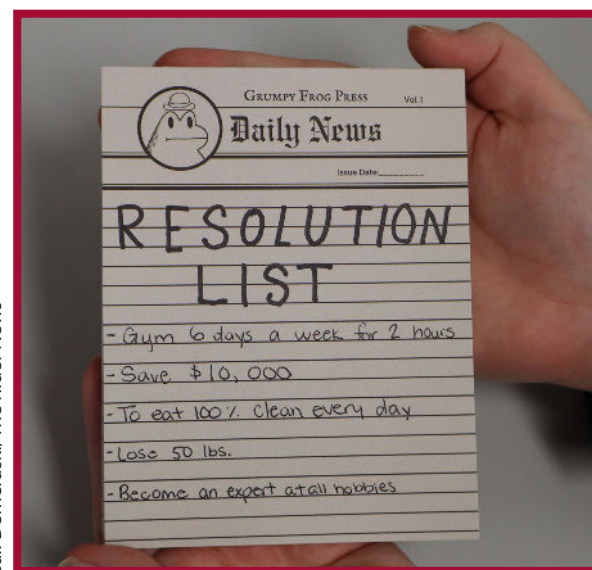
Maybe we should set goals that are not strictly for the new year, either. You can start a habit on any day and the change will be just as meaningful.

Personally, I am tired of feeling forced into a box by society about having to change every fault within myself come each Jan. 1.

In reality, we should set goals for ourselves when we feel it makes the most sense and accommodate to where we are currently.

Stretching ourselves too thin when the new year comes around can lead to burnout and discouragement when there are other times for goal-setting in the future.

Chipping away at progress into making yourself a better person is more important than eating 100% clean every single day of the year or deciding to become a bodybuilder overnight.



Gail Demeraski/The Rider News

Keeping your resolution list simple can help you stick to them.

New Year’s resolutions should start small. For example, if you have been in a reading slump, you can try to read five books this year rather than finish your whole bookshelf of books.

Maybe you could try one inexpensive hobby a month. If you are a night owl, you can set a goal to go to sleep before 1 a.m. on weekdays.

Whatever you do, make it reasonable and remember that you do not have to set a strict, life-altering goal on Jan. 1 for it to be valid.

Cal Sutton  
sophomore journalism major

# Missing out in several ways by skipping events

**H**ave you ever wondered why college students seem unwilling to attend an event at their school? Is it because the college events happening on campus do not live up to the students’ standards and expectations? Or because they do not deem it worthwhile in working toward their future goals?

At Rider, there are events happening on campus every day where students can show their Rider pride and have a good time while taking a break from their academics and relieve some stress. Events like Cranberry Fest, R Factor, 107.7 The Bronc’s Scream Screen, and the spring semester’s Involvement Fair are aimed to garner student attention and appeal to their interests.

Even though these events sound like a lot of fun, some college students would say otherwise. One particular reason that they might say otherwise is that there is not much hype surrounding the campus event, to the point where they choose not to go because they anticipate that the event is going to be boring or waste time. Another reason is that college students are too afraid of going to events alone. Third, college students are too afraid to socialize with other students on campus because they are accustomed to their friend group. Students may not want to open themselves to creating new and meaningful friendships.

That is why it is the university’s job to make sure



Yanuel Santos/The Rider News

Rider has a plethora of campus events to get involved with.

that students at Rider are taking advantage of the opportunities that are offered to them because college is temporary. You have to seize all the opportunities that are knocking at your front door and be open to letting loose a little, have fun and enjoy the unexpected encounters.. One day you can reflect on all the cool

experiences you had, tell your kids what college was like for you and encourage them to create memories that will last a lifetime. For Rider students, going to college events can change their perspective and open their eyes to new opportunities to find themselves.

They can savor the moments that they will remember when they graduate and go out into the real world to pursue their long-term career in their respective field.

My message to you is that if you are a student who is not taking advantage of the events at Rider, you are missing out and it is time to get involved. Similar to high school, you start out as a freshman and then, just like that, you are a senior getting ready to graduate and move onto the next chapter of your life having missed these opportunities. Start getting involved early and find your voice at Rider, because once you do, the sky is truly the limit and new doors will open for you, setting you up for a road of success ahead.

Terrell Munford  
junior journalism major



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## MEN'S BASKETBALL

# Rider falls on the road, wins in final seconds at home

By Samantha Clark

**R**ider men's basketball rounded out their road stretch on Jan. 30 when they faced the Manhattan University Jaspers, falling 95-90, but showed an impressive bounce back after returning home on Feb. 1, prevailing 81-78 over the Saint Peter's University Peacocks, who are tied for the second-best team in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference.

## The Broncos in the Bronx

The final matchup in January against the Jaspers opened with a driving layup from senior guard Zion Cruz, followed by another from senior forward Daniel Helterhoff for the early lead.

Sophomore guard Flash Burton grabbed the offensive rebound off of his own missed shot, driving in the post to tie the matchup at 6-6. Junior guard Caleb Smith did the same a minute later, then sank a turnaround jumpshot.

Sophomore forward Davis Bynum found Smith just beyond the arc, who knocked down a 3-pointer to close the gap to one. Junior guard Antwan Wilson followed with a 3-pointer of his own, tying the game up at 23-23.

Showing continued effort in the paint, Helterhoff put another up and in to regain the lead for the first time since the first two minutes of the half. Cruz and Burton continued to extend the lead with more 3-pointers, marking the Broncos' third and fourth in the half.

Wilson sent the ball up for another 3-pointer, sending the Broncos into halftime down by just two, 45-43.

The Broncos went scoreless for the opening two minutes of the second half, until Cruz splashed a jump shot in the paint.

Smith then floated up with a deep two, Fuller smacked down a two-handed dunk and Cruz attacked the zone for a layup to make it a one-point game. With another dunk, Wilson tied the matchup at 65-65 halfway through the second.

Leading the Broncos in scoring, Cruz finished with a layup to pick up his 16th points. After a 6-0 run from the Jaspers, he splashed a long 3-pointer to push him to lead all scorers and close the gap to six points.

Battling for the rebound, Fuller was sent to the line,

and Smith found himself in the same spot less than a minute later, picking up four to put the Broncos down 95-90 after a hard fought battle.

Burton had himself a double-double performance with 15 points and 11 assists. Smith scored his most as a Bronc with 18 points.

## A buzzer-beater battle

The Broncos opened their first matchup of February with a two-minute drought, setting the Peacocks off on a 5-0 run, until Bynum hit two at the free throw line. Then, for the first field goal of the night, freshman guard AB Coulibaly splashed a corner 3-pointer.

About two minutes later, Burton grabbed the defensive rebound to find Coulibaly once again in the corner for the triple to close the Peacocks' early lead to just four points.

To beat the shot clock, Cruz followed in his teammates' footsteps, taking a shot just beyond the arc and doing the same 45 seconds later, picking up six more for the Broncos.

After back-to-back dunks from Fuller, freshman guard Jamir McNeil threw up an impressive 3/4-court shot from past the logo to beat the 0.6 seconds left in the half, setting the Broncos back by just one heading into the break, 40-39.

"Jamir missed a layup, and he was a little down on himself, and then he goes and instead of worrying about missing the layup, he hits that three," Head Coach Kevin Baggett said.

A defensive rebound from Fuller allowed for Bynum to pick up Rider's first points of the second, fighting through Peacocks for the jumpshot, and doing the same less than a minute later.

After foul shots from Fuller and a driving layup from Burton, the Broncos went scoreless for over four minutes, until Coulibaly hit one of his own from the line. Burton then hit two jumpshots just 35 seconds apart to pick up a pair of Rider's first field goals.

With a field goal and free throw, Helterhoff picked up three points for the Broncos to snap the gap to a single-digit deficit.

Sophomore forward Cole McCabe picked up the defensive rebound, opening the door for a 3-pointer from Burton. Two shots at the line from Cruz, a layup



Liliana R. Basile/The Rider News

Freshman guard **Jamir McNeil** launched and hit a half-court shot before halftime on Feb. 1.

from Smith and a floataway jumpshot from McCabe followed, the gap now sitting at five points with three minutes remaining.

Grabbing the defensive rebound off the Peacocks' missed foul shot, McNeil found Cruz, who put up a 3-pointer to push it to a one possession game, 75-73.

Burton found himself at the line once again, and after making both free throw shots, it was a tie game in the final two minutes. With less than two seconds on the clock, Burton launched a 3-pointer to now lead all scorers with 25 points and bring the Broncos a home win, 81-78.

"We still got to finish out the year. It's a little 'cake and ice cream' for right now," Burton said.

The Broncos look to continue this momentum on Feb. 5 to face the Marist University Red Foxes and later on Feb. 7 to host the Merrimack College Warriors. Both games will be streamed on ESPN+ at 7 p.m.

## WRESTLING

# Broncs stay undefeated in MAC, fall to ranked Rutgers

By Benjamin Shinault

**O**n Jan. 30, Rider wrestling took a bus ride down to Virginia to take on the George Mason University Patriots. Coming into the match, the Broncos were undefeated in Mid-American Conference action and walked away from it still unbeaten, as they dominated 30-13.

The Broncos then arrived back on campus to take on nationally-ranked Rutgers University on Jan. 31. But this time, Rider fell short 21-12.

## 'We controlled the tempo'

Rider came out of the gates aggressive with four straight wins to get out to an 18-0 lead. Graduate student Tyler Klinsky continued his impressive season with a tight win by decision 4-2. Following Klinsky, graduate student Will Betancourt followed up with a major decision victory, 11-2.

The dominance would continue on for graduate student Elijah Griffin who steam rolled through his opponent, winning 17-2. The scoring run would continue with a win for sophomore Dylan Layton.

"I thought we controlled the tempo and pushed the pace," Head Coach John Hangey said to Rider Athletics.

After the Layton victory, the Broncos hit a road block, as George Mason would snag three straight victories over Rider to bring the score to 18-13.

"We let some matches slip away, which we will have to correct before the MACs. We are working on being more consistent at this point in the season, it's critical for success," Hangey said. The Broncos, now



Hope Hall/The Rider News

Junior **Brock Zurawski** continued his dominance with a technical fall win.

only up 18-13 with three matches remaining, were able to get back on track with a major decision win from sophomore JP Hangey.

Following the Hangey win, junior Brock Zurawski destroyed his opponent during his match to earn himself a technical fall to put Rider out of reach for the Patriots.

In the final match, heavyweight graduate student Hogan Swenski took care of business and grabbed a win by decision 6-1 to give Rider its conference-best fourth win.

## Started out hot

The ever iconic Battle of Route 1 went down in a jam-packed Alumni Gym on Jan. 31 as the Broncos welcomed the Scarlet Knights of Rutgers University.

Standing tall by the sweaty mats was the trophy that the Broncos and the Scarlet Knights would be wrestling over, but 16th-ranked Rutgers was able to take home the trophy a bit north as they won 21-12.

The Broncos started out hot, as they won three of the first four matches. Klinsky stacked up another win by decision 8-5.

"He does everything right all the time," Hangey said of Klinsky. "He's a perfect poster child for my team and my guys."

After the Klinsky win, Rutgers was able to take down, but the Broncos responded immediately with back-to-back wins from Griffin and Layton.

Layton pulled off an upset win over the 31st-ranked wrestler in the 149-pound weight class.

"He was long overdue," Hangey said, "Dylan has a ton of talent, he's got a very high competitive spirit."

After the big Layton win, Rutgers would rattle off four straight wins, until Zurawski came in and spoiled the Rutgers parade with a high-scoring decision victory, 14-7.

Swenski came in for the final match of the night, but fell short and cemented the loss for the Broncos.

"Overall, I thought we wrestled well in a losing effort," Hangey said.

Rider returns on Feb. 6 to MAC action against the Bald Eagles of Lock Haven University at 7 p.m. The match will be broadcast on ESPN+.

**A CAREER-HIGH NIGHT WAS NOT ENOUGH**  
READ MORE ABOUT KRISTINA EKOFO'S HISTORIC PERFORMANCE FOR RIDER WOMEN'S BASKETBALL AT [THERIDERNEWS.COM](https://www.ridernews.com)



# Sports

## Old roots, new stage: Smith and Cruz reunite as Broncs

By Samantha Clark

**S**ometimes, chemistry does not need to be built from scratch, it can be carried. For junior guard Caleb Smith and senior guard Zion Cruz, it was before the bright lights of Division I basketball that this on-court synergy was built.

A connection formed during their time on the Pratt Community College roster has now followed them to Rider, where they share the court once again, competing side-by-side as Broncs.

### Childhood courts

Growing up in Atlanta, Smith began playing basketball at 7 years old for the Gresham Park club team.

Although his mother grew up playing the sport as well, Smith's plan was to focus on both basketball and football in college, which he started playing at 5 years old.

Smith's time on the field ended after his junior year of high school, so he took his talents on the court to Pratt, a junior college level team in Kansas.

At the beginning of his first year in 2022, he suffered a shin fracture, sidelining him for the entirety of the season. His second year proved more rewarding, giving him both valuable minutes on the court and a brother for life.

"[My time there] made me play more gritty ... since we were in JUCO, we could play more aggressive," Smith said.

Cruz, on the other hand, is a native to Rider's home state of New Jersey.

At 5 years old he took after his father and first stepped on a basketball court, playing for various YMCA clubs.

It was not until his senior year of high school in 2021 when Cruz moved his roots across the country, traveling to Simi Valley, California, to play for Kanye West's Donda Academy just a few months after the program opened.

During his freshman year of college at DePaul University in Chicago, Cruz entered a transformative era in more ways than one.

While adjusting to the lifestyle of college basketball, he also became a father, where he learned to balance the demands of school, athletics and parenthood.

"I try not to put that pressure on myself, but he's definitely always a thought," Cruz said, reflecting on the way fatherhood shapes his performance and outlook on the court.

After his first year at DePaul, Cruz made the switch to Pratt, a move he says "made me appreciate basketball more, because it's really hard in JUCO ... but I learned to trust in God, just gotta believe in Him."



Graphic by Yanuel Santos. Photos by Yanuel Santos, Liliana R. Basile and Pratt Community College Athletics.

Senior guard **Zion Cruz** and junior guard **Caleb Smith** bring their Kansas connection to Lawrenceville, New Jersey.

### The path to Pratt

Cruz recalled arriving on campus in 2022 and heading straight to the gym for a shoot-around, only to find Smith already there.

"As soon as I got to the school, I met him on the court. That was my first day, and that was the first person I met," Cruz said.

"And it was like one o'clock in the morning," Smith added with a laugh.

From the beginning, the pair clicked, each seeing a reflection of themselves in the other. According to Cruz, Smith "was goofy, he liked to make people laugh," while Smith remembered Cruz as "funny, he was cracking jokes." Their shared sense of humor and personalities grew the friendship beyond the game.

The two pushed each other during practices and learned the game together, laying the foundation for a partnership that would continue to grow on every court they shared.

Ahead of the 2024-25 season, they both left Pratt, temporarily choosing different paths.

Smith stayed in Kansas and transferred to Garden City Community College, another JUCO level team, while Cruz returned to New Jersey, finding his home in Lawrenceville as a Bronc.

Though this distance separated them, it was not long until the pair reunited, their paths crossing once again in the Alumni Gym.

### We're not in Kansas anymore

At the close of his season at Garden City, Smith was looking to make the jump to the

National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I level, so he phoned a friend.

"I called [Zion], talked to him about it," Smith said.

"I told him this would be a good situation for him," Cruz responded. "It was just kind of a no-brainer."

And so, the pair reconnected as Broncs, where they continued to grow through the game, consistently improving their basketball IQ and becoming better teammates.

In the 2025-26 season, the two are ranked as leading players in the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference, with Smith being the sixth best rebounder in the conference and Cruz as the 19th best scorer.

Both Cruz, who was one of four returning Broncs ahead of the season, and Smith, who arrived in Lawrenceville as a more experienced player, have stepped into leadership roles.

Standing side-by-side, the two expressed their efforts to lead by example, growing into whatever role that is asked of them.

In addition to this extra level of support, their connection also provided comfort both on and off the court, which was especially important due to the differences in play between the JUCO and Division I levels, as well as the tough hits the Broncs have faced this season.

"I feel like we know how to talk to each other more since we've played more together ... we know how to communicate with each other," Smith said.

The countless hours and years of experience practicing and playing together allows for a level of nonverbal communication to be shared, strengthening the pair as teammates.

"It helps a lot. He knows where I want to be, I know where he wants to be," Cruz said. "That's my brother, that's my boy."

The two found similar interests off the court as well, extending their bond beyond the sport.

With new ways to connect and years to strengthen their friendship, their ties were more than just a game of basketball, it was a true brother-like relationship.

"We make music," Smith said. "We were just kicking it one day at Pratt, getting to know each other, and I was like 'You make music?' and he was like 'Yeah'. So we made a couple songs in JUCO, made a couple songs here ... we got like 50-plus [songs]."

"And I think we're pretty good at it," Cruz added, laughing.

From late-night workouts at Pratt to the roar of Rider's Alumni Gym, Smith and Cruz have shown that the true teammate connection stretches far past the hardwood.

Their brotherhood, beginning in the grind of junior college and strengthened in a higher level of play, has carried them through distance and time, transfers, life changes and the ups and downs of college basketball.

Every pass, play and shared laugh proves that their chemistry is carried far beyond the basketball court.