



Winthrop University

December 4, 2025

Rock Hill, SC

CHRISTMAS IN ROCK HILL

The holiday season is officially here, and staff writer Dakota Gold shares the different ways Rock Hill rings in the season on page 3.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Editor-in-chief Clark Vilardebo shares his last story as EIC before graduating later this December on page 5.

WINTHROP VOLLEYBALL RECAP

Staff writer Maurion Jamison discusses volleyball's big regular season and early playoff exit on pg. 4.

Winthrop partners with ACES Flight School to make pilots Winthrop Eagles

A new Winthrop program that simultaneously trains and certifies pilots while they work towards a bachelor's degree aims to admit its first students in Fall 2026.

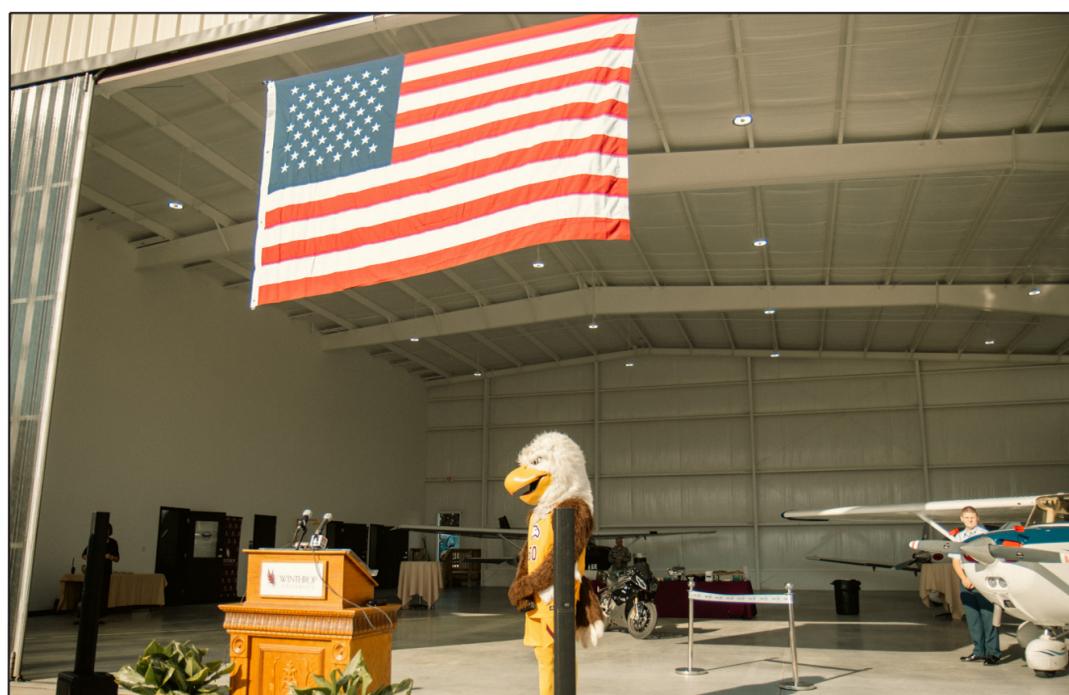


photo by Jackson Stanton

Big Stuff stands in a hangar at Rock Hill Airport during the flight program's ribbon cutting ceremony

Chase Duncan
Copy Editor

For generations, Americans have looked to the sky asking whether they're seeing a bird or a plane, but soon people will be looking up and seeing a Winthrop Eagle flying a plane.

Winthrop University has publicly announced their partnership with ACES Flight School to simultaneously certify them as pilots while they take classes at Winthrop to graduate in four years with a

Bachelor of Science in aviation and business management, tentatively set to admit students beginning in Fall 2026.

The school held a ribbon-cutting ceremony at one of the hangars at Rock Hill Airport on Nov. 19. Representatives from Winthrop University, ACES Flight School, Rock Hill Airport, the city of Rock Hill and the York County Chamber of Commerce attended to see the new program unveiled.

Winthrop president

Edward Serna opened the ceremony by thanking the organizations present for their help in making the partnership possible, hoping that it will take the university to new innovative heights that address job needs.

"We are very fortunate in our location here in Rock Hill, that we are near a major city and an airport with a major airline hub, so it just made sense for us to look at ways that we could do this and

address the pilot shortage that's in the United States right now," Serna said. "Winthrop University is a university on the rise, folks, and we're on the rise because academic innovation is the engine that drives a thriving institution, and we challenged ourselves recently to be innovative, to drive that academic innovation."

Sebastian van Delden, Provost and vice president of Academic Affairs, is

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ICE raids and Border Patrol's presence leave Charlotte area families struggling for normalcy

Residents describe how recent immigration enforcement has disrupted daily routines across Charlotte.

Kira Rich
Staff Writer

When ICE agents swept through Charlotte neighborhoods, families were left in a state of uncertainty and panic.

Operation Charlotte's Web aimed to remove non-citizens with crimes on record, yet ended up detaining numerous law-abiding individuals. Shops and communities grew tense when national agents moved aggressively across town, sparking public backlash. City leaders intensely criticized the mission while locals reacted with frustration and concern.

Federal officers from Customs and Border Protection began

operations on Saturday, November 15, with help from Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

According to government sources, the main goal was to detain immigrants with a criminal background.

On Tuesday (Nov. 25) evening, officials announced over 250 arrests had taken place.

Some areas with large immigrant populations grew silent due to rising anxiety. Numerous shops, restaurants, and grocery outlets shut down over the weekend out of caution.

For instance, the neighborhood spot, Las Americas, in Rock Hill, paused its popular "Taco Tuesdays" – which are normally packed – to reduce foot

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Winthrop's newest gallery explores mortality

A look inside "Ephemerality," Winthrop's most recent gallery and statements from some of the artists.

Gabriela Griggs
Staff Writer

Inside Winthrop University's Lewandowski Gallery, housed in the entrance of McLaurin Hall, a

their creations on the intersecting personal layers of identity, their identity as current or aspiring teachers and education, and their personal experiences

Residence halls, renovations and roads: A look into Winthrop's upcoming construction projects on campus

Vice President of Facilities Management, James Grigg, gives a look behind the curtain on future campus projects, including a new residence hall, the relocation of the Louise Pettus Archives and a reshaping of Tillman Hall.

Evi Houston
News Editor

Despite the numerous construction projects currently happening on Winthrop University's campus, there is always room for more in the eyes of Facilities Management vice president James Grigg.

Grigg provided The Johnsonian insight on

the many upcoming and expansive projects his department hopes to undertake in the next few years. These developments not only seek to address student and faculty needs, but reflect the growing nature of the university as a whole.

New residence hall

Perhaps most critical for the university at its current stage of growth and development is a shortage in student housing. "We are at capacity with residence halls, so we are actually in the study phase of a new residence hall," Grigg said.

While this will be an extensive and lengthy

project, Grigg was excited to share the details on the addition to Winthrop University.

The residence hall will be a four-story building with approximately 400 bed spaces. Costing between \$48 and \$50 million is a constraining factor

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Students viewing art at the Ephemerality reception.

photo by Zoey Molina

brand new gallery has covered the walls. Titled "Ephemerality," this gallery is currently hosting work created by the Winthrop Art Education Cohort.

Ephemerality, as a word, is defined as referring to the state of lasting or existing for a short amount of time. In the context of the gallery, artists turned to utilize this definition and reflect it within

with the world.

"Our identities, how others perceive us, and how we perceive ourselves, perpetually evolve and impact how we conduct our practices as artists who are teachers. We rely on transience and fluidity as we alternate between and synthesize the different roles we uphold. Finding ourselves in these

Cont. on pg. 3

Police Blotter



Chase Duncan
Copy Editor

Squatter in Tillman Hall arrested and charged with trespassing

On the morning of Nov. 11, a Winthrop University Police Department officer responded to a report of someone possibly trespassing and sleeping inside Tillman Hall. The complainant said they had seen the suspect and tried to check on them, which caused the suspect to become “defensive and aggressive”, according to the case log for the incident. The officer was unable to locate the suspect during this incident. Later that night at around 10:45 P.M., a WUPD officer found the suspect sleeping in the faculty and staff lounge. The suspect was arrested on the charge of trespassing and transported off campus to be placed in detention.

WUPD officer responds to vape pen in washing machine

A WUPD officer responded to Roddey Hall on Nov. 12 in response to a student’s report of a vape pen that was accidentally left and rinsed in the washing machine. The student was “concerned about the battery”, according to the case log. The officer advised the student to dispose of the device.

Officer responds to emergency call coming from Owens elevator, no one found

A WUPD officer responded to Owens Hall on Nov. 20 in reference to an emergency call that was dialed and hung up after a single ring. The call was traced to an elevator in Owens Hall according to the case log for the incident, and no one answered the phone when the number was called back. The officer responded to the area of the call and found no one around or inside.



mytjnow.com

Winthrop and ACES Flight School partnership | Cont. from pg. 1

the man at Winthrop most responsible for securing the flight school partnership, garnering support from airline industry leaders and getting the program approved by the various state accreditation agencies.

Van Delden thanked the many people present from various sectors of the university and community who helped make the partnership possible and told the audience that the university-flight school

partnership will be the opportunity of a lifetime.

“We’re staring down the runway, the boundless blue skies, the potential for this region and the entire state of South Carolina, and very soon we’ll get those last approvals to be cleared for takeoff,” van Delden said. “We’re going to gun it, and Winthrop and ACES will be roaring towards an exciting future of opportunities, opportunities that will shape the lives of

generations of students and their families.”

Winthrop will become the first public institution to offer such a program, as Charleston Southern was the first private school in the state to offer both a degree and piloting certification.

ACES Flight School owner Kevin Kyzer thanked his family, his supportive customers, his team of instructors and the different entities involved in making his pilot school possible.

He also thanked the university and the town of Rock Hill.

“It is truly an honor for me to be able to say that my flight school is affiliated with such a prestigious university and in a town like Rock Hill, where they’ve been so supportive, and with an airport manager that’s been so supportive and helping and being very patient, ladies and gentlemen, with me as we go through this process,” Kyzer said.

John Gettys, mayor

of Rock Hill, praised the university for reaching out into the community to accomplish something great and spread growth within the local community of the city.

“And what I do think we’ll see is this airport continues to grow in its capacity, [and] will soon hopefully be recognized as a national reliever for big airports,” Gettys said. “As that happens, more people will learn about Winthrop.”



Provost Sebastian van Delden speaks at the ribbon cutting ceremony photo by Jackson Stanton



(From left to right) Dean Faile, Kevin Kyzer, John Gettys, Edward Serna and Sebastian van Delden cutting the ribbon signifying the beginning of the program photo by Jackson Stanton

ICE and Border Patrol in Charlotte area | Cont. from pg. 1

traffic.”

In several recorded cases, government officers physically restrained people or accessed homes without permission; for example, one case involved agents breaking a car’s window during an approach.

Several staff members from Super G Mart in Pineville, North Carolina, got taken into custody during their shift, leading to chaos and rising stress among workers.

A few of those held turned out to be American citizens. Although one man was a legal resident, he was detained twice.

The distress and ongoing anxiety extended beyond detentions, as school participation dropped sharply in the following days by up to 15%. Due to safety concerns, parents chose to keep kids away from classrooms.

Several locals canceled worship meetings along with local activities. A youth initiative aimed at newcomers paused operations briefly when officials were seen near the facility.

Sophomore Dulce Silva-Salinas expressed

the anxiety and stress her family has been under recently.

“The ICE raids have affected my dad and half-brother in Charlotte by preventing them from working for

outside the community is that ICE Agents are taking just criminals, when in fact they are not, they’re not just taking criminals, they are taking innocent people away from

in the area.

Yet some time afterward, a Department of Homeland Security representative mentioned the action had not ended.

provided transport for employees nervous about traveling solo to worksites.

Local officials shared opinions — some saw it as strict enforcement clashing with Charlotte’s image of inclusivity and variety.

Although federal agents reportedly left Charlotte, locals remain uneasy. Despite fewer major raids lately, routine ICE activities persist across Mecklenburg County, meaning sudden changes could happen anytime.

Authorities admit detentions might resume; because of this, doubt spreads through communities.

For numerous city dwellers, the aftermath of Operation Charlotte’s Web lingers past arrest numbers: daily routines feel fragile, fear of being held affects even citizens and trust in federal authorities stays low.

Local groups, along with advocates for immigrants, plan to keep observing actions, offering legal help while also recording possible breaches of rights. A coordinator explained simply: “Fear shouldn’t stop us from speaking up.”



Outside of Las Americas off Cherry Rd., who had to shutdown their “Taco Tuesday” on Nov. 18 due to CBP presence photo by Zoey Molina

a few days. To make up for lost work days, they resorted to working during the nighttime to avoid the ICE agents from seeing them,” Silva-Salinas said.

She mentions her family stays alert when moving around; they’ve avoided driving pickup trucks out of fear of being judged. Instead, they choose safer options to lower risks on roads.

Silva-Salinas explains that the operation isn’t as it seems. “One thing that is often misunderstood about ICE raids by those

their families with no criminal records,” Silva-Salinas said.

“They are taking hard-working people who work hard to build this country. They are taking people who have come here simply to build a better future for themselves and their families.”

Conflicting messages from officials made ending the raids more difficult. By Thursday, Garry McFadden, a sheriff in Mecklenburg County, NC, stated that CBP had shut down “Operation Charlotte’s Web,” with no major actions planned ahead

In response, people quickly organized protests throughout Charlotte soon after the initial detentions. Protests took place near closed shops and retail spots where officials had appeared. Some carried banners, others shouted slogans, while expressing support for local immigrants.

Some local groups launched helplines while also giving legal help to people held by authorities or feeling unsafe, arranging block-level safety patrols at the same time. Meanwhile, different collectives

Future construction projects | Cont. from pg. 1

for the project, as receiving funding and support from the state is required.

Grigg intends to open the hall in late 2027. This is a landmark project for the university, as traditional-style housing has not been developed on campus since the Wofford and

Richardson Halls of the late 1960s, which were demolished last year.

“We know it’s a priority. It’s a priority for the board. It’s a priority for leadership. It’s a priority for growing Winthrop and growing the student body,” Grigg said about the new residence hall.

Grigg elaborated that

the building would be a hybrid of hall-style and suite-style housing in what is known as “wet core.” “The bathrooms are in the hallway, but they’re individual bathrooms. So you’ll have an individual bathroom room on the hallway that will be a toilet, sink and shower,” Grigg said.

Wet core housing has the benefit of extra privacy for residents while also saving space. Grigg clarified that there will be enough bathrooms to meet building code and ADA compliance laws, with around one bathroom for every 5 residents.

The residence hall will also include lounge

spaces, study spaces, a kitchen on each floor and a small meeting room for administrative and RA needs.

Additional information provided by a university press release on Nov. 3 announced that the residence hall would

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Ephemerality I Cont. from pg. 1

different spaces, we often battle liminality,” reads the introduction near the entrance of the gallery.

In the gallery, there are seven different unique presentations from Winthrop Art Education students. These exhibitions center around “peeling back the layers of artistry and education,” as defined by the Winthrop Fine Arts Instagram.

One of the displays by graduate student Leah Anderson focuses around the intersecting idea of the inner self and the outer self through a lesson taught to fifth graders. This display



Art by Lee Blessing

involves artwork created by younger students through collages, resulting in a self portrait that exhibits all the varying characteristics of the student’s personalities.

“I taught them first

how to draw their self portrait, how to practice drawing themselves, and what represents them. Then, around their picture, we put objects and things that represent them as a person, so their inner self and their outer self are all in one picture,” Anderson said.

Issy Sutton, a fine arts student concentrating in sculpture, curated a display that features her major piece “Astraea” and collage work from adult students independently taught by Sutton.

“I named [Astraea] after a goddess who was really disgusted with the state of her

world. I feel as though right now, I’ve been having a lot of internal struggle with the state of our world and the state of our politics, especially how those politics are attempting to attack teaching.” Sutton said.

photo by Zoey Molina

A new federal proposal introduced by the Department of Education now includes an outline that categorizes degree fields as either professional, or by exclusion, non-professional. Under the new proposed definition of “professional,” education, as a degree, is excluded. This definition seeks to further tighter regulations on loan eligibility for students and their ability to seek higher education in their fields.

This proposal was introduced only a couple days before the opening reception of the “Ephemerality” gallery, hosted on Monday, Nov. 24.

“This is our Art Ed. exhibition, so I feel like what’s going on with schools is very important to talk about. Because of this, I’ve been looking into alternative methods of teaching, so I’ve been hosting adult art classes. They all made their pieces [here] on their feminine experience, and I asked them to focus on unpacking something that might be bothering them, such as the

political climate. Some of them took it really deep, some of them took it more non-objective, but I was



Woman viewing art at Ephemerality reception

overall very impressed with the artwork that they did,” Sutton said.

Senior arts education student Rachel Burroughs utilized a variety of artistic methods and techniques to curate a presentation that honors her identities as both a student and an aspiring educator. She highlights the restraints on understanding individual identity when also creating her identity as a teacher.

“I wanted the pieces to connect. The flower [motifs] represent me in childhood, me discovering myself, and me now focusing on myself and the core parts of my identity. All the fish in the pieces also represent the political climate,

[with] the school of fish of how we’re expected to be normal and not be ourselves, and how that’s being taught. It

[speaks to] how they’re implementing a lot of rules in education when the core necessity is being yourself and learning and growing,” Burroughs said.

“Ephemerality,” while defined at the gallery’s entrance, turns to take different meanings within each of the artist’s individual exhibitions. This word turns to fuel each of the cohort’s member’s creations, even when it varies in meaning from individual to individual.

“[Ephemerality] means to me the layers of ourselves and the layers of who we have to perform as, and how it all comes together in one person. It’s all the different split identities [we hold,] but we are still that person, whether you take

away parts or add more,” Burroughs said.

“To me, ephemerality is a state of being comfortable with yourself knowing that there are different variations of you, based on time and the passage of time, but still loving and consuming all those versions of yourself. You should be open to change in your life, because it’s still you, no matter which layer or step [of life] you’re on,” Sutton said.

“It means to me the layers of being a teacher, an artist, and a student. I taught elementary school art for a year and a half before I came back to school to get my graduate degree, so it’s that transition back to becoming a student after being out of the classroom for such a long time [that helps establish] that new layer of identity,” Anderson said.

The “Ephemerality” gallery will remain in McLaurin Hall until December 16. The gallery is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Monday through Friday, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays.

Where to find the holiday magic in and around Rock Hill

A guide to the festive events and activities taking place to celebrate Christmas and the winter season.

Dakota Gold Staff Writer

Rock Hill and its surrounding areas host an abundance of events and festivities to enjoy with friends or family throughout the end-of-year holiday season.

This year, the city of Rock Hill is hosting its 20th Annual ChristmasVille celebration. It includes a variety of activities such as live performances, art exhibitions, markets, and a parade.

The ChristmasVille theme this year is “ChristmasVille; a Legacy Made with Magic.” Holiday celebrations and local traditions come together for an

experience that is fun for any age.

There is an 18-hole disc golf tournament in Old Town Rock Hill on Dec. 4 from 5 to 8 p.m.

The opening ceremony and the arrival of Santa from 6 to 7 p.m. in Fountain Park on 300 East Main Street.

To warm up after the ceremony, stop by First Presbyterian Church on 234 East Main, for Cookies & Cocoa with Santa from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

The Rock Hill Christmas parade will be held tomorrow, Dec. 5, at 6:30 p.m. in Downtown.

There are a handful of art exhibits and displays throughout the

weekend, including the Vernon Grant Exhibit and People’s Choice, the gingerbread house display, the Lego display, ice sculptures and the Old Town Window Decorating Contest.

Will Gold is a barista at Rock Hill Coffee in Downtown Rock Hill. Gold said, “The arts are a very important part of ChristmasVille, and the work of Vernon Grant is still a big part of it.”

“Not only do I think it’s a big opportunity for local artists, but I think it’s important that they are a part of community events like these to show the talents of Rock Hill.”

Gold, who is also a local artist, has his

window art on display downtown.

“I think it’s great that I’m able to add onto ChristmasVille with my window art, and I’m grateful to the local businesses for their support.”

The closing ceremony for ChristmasVille will be held on Dec. 7 from 4 to 5 p.m. in Fountain Park.

Additional information for events can be found on the ChristmasVille website. Winthrop University also has its share of traditions and festivities.

The Alumni Association and Student Alumni Council are hosting the 90th Annual Tree

Lighting on Dec. 5, at 6 p.m. on the front lawn of Tillman Hall. This Winthrop tradition dates back to 1935.

It will include performances from the Winthrop RockHettes and the Winthrop Chorale and Collegiate Choir.

Jessie Grant, freshman, is a member of the Collegiate Choir. Grant said, “Performing at the tree lighting ceremony not only brings joy to me through song, but it also brings joy to the community in continuing 90 years of tradition.”

Additional Winthrop performances are listed online on the Cultural Event list.

Other towns in York County will also be holding celebrations throughout the month of December and into the beginning of January.

The Kingsley Town Center in Fort Mill will hold its holiday celebration on Dec. 6 from 5 to 7 p.m.

In Charlotte, NC, the Carolina Holiday Light Spectacular, a walkthrough of over a million lights, will be open through Dec. 30.

Truist Field has an outdoor skating rink and snowtubing hill open through Jan. 4.

The Charlotte Ballet will perform “The Nutcracker” from Dec. 5-21 at the Belk Theater.



ChristmasVille Santa Claus spotted on the rooftop

photo by Jackson Stanton



Trees lit with Christmas lights along East Main Street

photo by Jackson Stanton

December 4, 2025

The addition of “oddball sports” in contributing to Winthrop’s unique sports identity

Every Division I college has their standard line up of sports but Winthrop University has shaken up this tradition.

Omar Woods
Sports Editor

Traditionally, every college has a similar line-up of the sports they may offer. These sports are commonly ones that have professional league counterparts such as basketball, football, and baseball.

In the past few years here at Winthrop, the university has taken a huge alternative path to this tradition with the addition of new and unconventional sports that have completely

shaken up the tradition line up of a sports a school may have.

Winthrop’s cornhole team just recently had its inaugural year in Fall of 2024. In their short time of being established at Winthrop, they made waves nationally. Head Coach for the cornhole team, Dusty Thompson, mentioned just how viral their program went.

“When we broke the news to the media, it went viral. We were pretty much on every news channel in

the country,” coach Thompson said. “We made it to The New York Post, and on Good Morning America. We got mentioned on Jimmy Fallon and it just helped Winthrop in general with just getting the name out there even more than it already was.”

The cornhole team at Winthrop made further waves in the sports world by winning multiple championships at the American Cornhole League National Competition that was



Winthrop cornhole players practicing at the ACL Headquarters in Rock Hill

photo by Jackson Stanton

hosted in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina on January 2nd.

The esports team at Winthrop was only just created in 2019 but has also not been slow in making its impact on Winthrop’s sports landscape. This is shown in the amount of players in the esports program reaching a staggering 100. The rise of esports has been a growing trend since the mid-2010’s and the addition of an esports team here at Winthrop only adds to its come up.

The team that plays Valorant, a tactical first-person shooter, recently traveled all the way to São Paulo, Brazil to compete in the VCT Ascension tournament which was hosted from October 17th to the 26th. In this competition, Winthrop University’s Valorant team would find themselves tied for 3rd out of 8 teams that competed.

With the new additions of esports and cornhole, the potential for more of these oddball sports to

join Winthrop’s sports line-up is growing. The athletic director of Winthrop, Chuck Rey, discussed some oddball sports that the school was interested in.

“We have looked a little bit in the past into opportunities for drone racing or there is also what they call drone soccer,” Rey said. “We host the BMX World Championships twice here in Rock Hill. Some type of BMX/Cycling team, that would be exciting because we have those opportunities here.”



photo by Max Prosser

Winthrop Esports VALORANT team in the streets of São Paulo, Brazil at VCT Ascension

Winthrop women’s volleyball rises to the top of the Big South

How commitment, leadership and depth pushed Winthrop to the top of the conference.

Maurion Jamison
Staff Writer

Winthrop women’s volleyball delivered a season that felt like a statement. Head coach Heather Gearhart was recognized as Big South Coach of the Year, honoring her leadership and the program’s remarkable progress this season. Gearhart guided the Eagles to a first-place finish in the conference and helped shape a team identity built on discipline, resilience and teamwork.

Under head coach Heather Gearhart, the Eagles stepped into a new level of identity and discipline. Gearhart has said her players “take great ownership in who they are and how they work,” and that approach guided them through every weekend of conference play. The team carried a confidence that grew with each win and shaped its identity.

Winthrop opened the year with consistent improvement, sharpening its systems and building stronger chemistry. By midseason, the Eagles looked like one of the most composed teams in the league. They executed cleanly, communicated clearly and showed toughness in late-set situations.

The Eagles also

ranked near the top of the conference in hitting percentage and blocks per set, numbers that reflected their structure and consistency. They controlled rallies with disciplined ball control and strong defensive transitions. Their margins stayed steady because the team trusted the system they trained every day.

A major contributor to Winthrop’s rise this season was outside hitter Avery Jolley, who became a central force in the Eagles’ offensive rhythm. Jolley delivered steady scoring on the pin, producing matches with high kill totals and strong efficiency that helped Winthrop control the pace of play. Her ability to swing aggressively, adjust in long rallies and stay patient in out-of-system situations gave the Eagles a reliable option whenever they needed momentum.

Jolley’s performance earned her Big South Player of the Year honors, capping a season in which she consistently ranked among the conference leaders in kills and hitting percentage. Her impact on both the scoreboard and the team’s morale helped shape the Eagles’ identity as the top program in the league.

Sophomore outside hitter Paige Bennett became another important voice in shaping the team’s growth and mindset. When asked about the team’s rise, she described a clear shift in commitment. “Our commitment changed in a real way,” Bennett said. “Everyone bought in, and it showed in how we practiced, how we prepared and how we held each other accountable.”

The Eagles stepped into a stronger identity by embracing difficult training days and honest communication. That shift allowed them to compete with confidence even when momentum swung away from them.

Bennett also reflected on how the team stayed grounded during challenging stretches.

“There were days when we were tired, but nobody checked out,” Bennett said. “We wanted to prove what we believed we could become. Finishing first in the conference shows that our work was real.”

Winthrop’s season included defining performances that showed the team’s improvement. The Eagles collected important five-set wins that required composure in high-pressure situations.

They also posted dominant sweeps that demonstrated their control of the pace of play.

The team improved its defensive efficiency and limited errors as the season progressed. These improvements strengthened their competitive identity and made them difficult to match in extended rallies. Their style reflected patience, stability and discipline.

Gearhart’s emphasis on mental strength and detail played a major role in the team’s development. She said her players “want to be challenged because they want to win,” and her training approach reflected that belief. The team embraced demanding drills and competitive practice environments to prepare for conference play.

As the regular season ended, the Eagles had clearly established themselves as the top team in the Big South.

Their record, statistical performance and consistency made the first-place finish feel earned. They became the program others had to chase.

Now the attention shifts to what comes next. A first-place finish is a major accomplishment, but the Eagles view it as a beginning rather than a final goal. The expectations for next season are grounded in development and ambition.

Winthrop hopes to sharpen its system, strengthen its depth and push deeper into postseason play. The players want to elevate the program beyond regular-season success and into stronger tournament contention.

Gearhart believes the team has the experience and drive to continue rising. Her leadership has helped create a culture that values consistency, growth and competitive pride. The foundation

she has built appears steady and sustainable.

Returning players will bring important lessons from this season into the next. Their experience in high-pressure moments and their understanding of the system will help guide the work ahead. The team knows what it takes to reach the top of the Big South.

Winthrop volleyball has shown that it can lead the conference. Now the Eagles want to prove that they can sustain that standard. The work ahead will require commitment and discipline, but this season showed that the program is ready for the next step.

The direction of the program feels clear and promising. The players are confident, the coaching staff is steady and the standard continues to rise. The Eagles move into the future with pride, continued energy and a deeper sense of identity.



Winthrop volleyball players celebrating

via Instagram/@winthropvolleyball

December 4, 2025

Letter from the Editor: Farewell, Winthrop!



The Johnsonian, editor-in-chief, Clark Vilardebo receiving "Journalist of the Year" by the South Carolina Press Association

photo via South Carolina Press Association

Clark Vilardebo Editor-in-Chief

It's hard to put into words how much my time here at Winthrop has shaped me, but I will do my damndest.

When I first came here, I wasn't necessarily thrilled. While the mass communication department and aesthetic of the campus slightly intrigued me, I mainly came here because it was close to home and I wouldn't have to pay for on-campus housing.

I just wanted to attend my classes and go home or to work, and had no desire to participate in the college experience.

So, suffice to say that the idea of graduation sounded like salvation to me.

Now, less than a month away, it's more bittersweet than anything.

When mass

communication professor Bill Schulte first approached me about the job, it came at simultaneously a rough time for myself and The Johnsonian, as the editor-in-chief was graduating with no succession plan.

I had a strong feeling that the job was just what I needed though, and I was right.

But so was Schulte in asking me to apply for the position, and every new, unique opportunity this job has given me wouldn't have been possible if he had not taken a chance on me. I'm eternally grateful for this opportunity and all the support he's given me.

With that being said though, the first few months on the job were rough. I came in with no experience doing newspaper design and with just three members from last year's staff returning, I also had to essentially

build the staff up from scratch.

But, that may have been a blessing in disguise, as I think I've put together a damn good team.

Nonetheless, despite these growing pains, we still put together an award-winning year. That's when I officially realized it was all worth it, and I needed to cherish my time in college more.

Becoming editor-in-chief completely changed my college experience, work ethic and – not to be cliché – my life, too.

This job has taken me to the Mexican border, allowed me to interview Hollywood actresses, behind the scenes of new Winthrop projects and given me friendships across the U.S.

But, I would also never have been given those experiences if I didn't choose Winthrop as my college.

Which leads me to my next point, which is thanking the professors who have made a massive impact on me. Whether it's simply being understanding, pushing me to be my best or being personable, these professors helped guide me through college and I want to make sure I shout them out.

So, thank you to the following: Bill Schulte, Nathaniel Frederick, Aimee Meader, Katherine Hubbard, Bryan Ghent, William Kiblinger and Ginger Williams.

And a special thanks to the professors I did not have who were huge supporters and monumental to the paper's success: Amanda Hiner, Mark Hamilton, Jo Koster, John Holder, Jennifer Leigh Disney and Margaret Gilikin.

I also want to give a special shoutout to Amy Sharpe and

Miranda Knight in the Dean of Students Office. Without their work and support behind the scenes, we would not be as successful as we are today.

Oh, and obviously a huge thank you to my staff – though I think they have heard that enough from me.

The last thing I want to do is speak directly to my peers. While the student body has been overwhelmingly supportive of The Johnsonian and student publications, there is one problem I've noticed: complacency.

I have received multiple tips for issues on campus that would go on to become actual stories because students wanted to make sure that attention was brought to the situation.

Afterwards though? Nothing.

I'd like to see the

student body take more initiative when there's a glaring problem on campus, because bringing attention to it is not enough. There needs to be a concerted effort to actually enact change.

The definition for complacency is "a feeling of being satisfied with how things are and not wanting to try to make them better," but it's almost like students are UNSATISFIED and still have no desire to make things better.

I don't say these things to put myself on a pedestal, because I've been guilty of it in the past too. But I've seen where it leads to, and speaking up and out does make a difference – contrary to public belief.

With all that being said, I guess there's really only one thing left to say, and that's so long and farewell, Winthrop!

The Johnsonian Wrapped: Students share their albums of the year

Kyan Feser Staff Writer

Spotify Wrapped is right around the corner, so we asked Winthrop students what albums made their semester.

It seems like fun took over, and many students got their groove on. Hudson Mize, an IMCO major, said Tyler the Creator's "Don't Tap the Glass" was a must-listen.

"You can dance to it pretty easily, and I was a delivery driver, so it would be something to hype me up."

For Mark Bontempo, a graphic design major, Porter Robinson's "SMILE" did the trick. Despite the emotionally heavy lyrics, "it's a lot of fun, and kind of anthemic sounding," Bontempo said.

"It's got a lot of highs, a lot of lows, and I've always loved the contrast."

Similarly, Henry Proctor, a choral education major, had Hozier's "Unreal Unearth" in his top spot.

"It's got a lot of contrasting styles. There's a lot of ballad-type songs, but then there's more typical, poppy-sounding songs," he said.

Speaking of ballads, a lot of bluesy, soulful music made the rounds this year.

Jackson Stanton, a mass communications major, had ericco's "DOA" as his winner. The blended genres made the perfect vibe, he said.

"It's more like Brakence, if you know who Brakence is. It's

more like Indie R&B or soulful."

Mikaila Alexander, a psychology major, got in her feels with Teddy Swim's "I've Tried Everything but Therapy."

"Something about it just resonates with my emotions. It has heartbreak, it has happiness, it really just helps whatever type of mood you're in," Alexander said.

Ayaris Dandin, a graphic design major, loved Brent Faiyaz's "Sonder Sun."

"It talks about how people need to communicate with each other if they want something to happen. It was really nice," Dandin said.

Marcus Gonzales, a mass communications major, had Bruno Mars and Anderson

Paak's "Silksonic" in rotation, and for a very sentimental reason, he explained.

"One of my best buddies, we have the nickname Silksonic, and I saw him for the first time in four years. He's living life in LA and he happened to be in town and we reconnected. It's just my way of remembering my best friend, who I know I won't have a lot of time to see. It reminds me of him."

Just like Gonzales, a lot of students' choices came from the heart, and Jess Caltagirone, a theatre education major, was no different.

"Wishbone" by Conan Grey was in her headphones, and songs like "Eleven Eleven" and "Nauseous" were top contenders,

Caltagirone said.

"Nauseous is so sad but it makes me cry, it's really good, and Eleven Eleven, it deals with superstitions and stuff, and I think those themes are interesting."

Vincent Hazan, a mass communications major, loved the soundtrack to Superman 2025, he explained.

"Superman is my favorite superhero and I've been waiting for this move for about three years. Hearing John Williams, who's my favorite composer and artist ever, hearing a rendition of his song kind of lifted emotions for me."

Unfortunately for some, choosing their most-listened was no choice. Grace Fallon, a mass communications major, said her

roommate's obsession with My Chemical Romance sent "Three Cheers for Sweet Revenge" into her charts.

"My roommate made me listen to My Chemical Romance over and over and over again, so it ended up being one of my most listened to albums," she said.

However, Fallon also loved "The Stranger" by Billy Joel, and her feelings towards the album is something we can all learn from.

We always have music in our cars, headphones, and heads, but at the end of the day, we need to spend time with our own thoughts.

"Slow down, like slow down. It really hits home for me," Fallon said.

Revived MSA improves Muslim representation and community at Winthrop

Three student officers of Winthrop's Muslim Student Association (MSA) took the time to discuss their organizations' initiatives and values. They additionally shared insight into their experiences as Muslim students at Winthrop University.

Riley Brodie
AC&T Editor

MSA National is a student organization with chapters across schools in the U.S. and Canada. Its primary missions are to provide resources and serve as safe spaces for Muslim students. They additionally facilitate educating broader college communities on Islam.

Hana Kandil, a senior psychology major and the president of Winthrop's MSA, described the specific chapter's initiatives.

"Our mission and purpose can be divided into three sections; connection, community and volunteer work," Kandil said.

Mohammed Zyara, a sophomore biology major and the vice president of Winthrop's MSA shared similar thoughts on the core motives of Winthrop's chapter.

"We're especially focused on building a safe and welcoming community for Muslims and anyone interested in Islam," Zyara said.

He continued, "I think having brotherhood and sisterhood is really important, because we have to stick together to make this [MSA] work. Trust and dedication are also very important in our group."

Winthrop's Muslim

Student Association was reinstated this academic school year. Kandil played a large role in reviving the organization.

"I always dreamt of having a friend group in college made up of other Muslims and Arabs, and just being able to be around other people like me. When I came to Winthrop, I realized that there wasn't a group to facilitate that. So since my first semester of college, I've been trying to find people to develop the MSA," Kandil said.

Throughout her freshman year, Kandil found that the small population of Muslim Winthrop students and a limited interest in joining MSA inhibited her ability to restart the organization. However, the following year, circumstances began to shift.

"Thankfully, this year I have had enough people and interest. We've now set a tentative schedule and established officers. Division of tasks with my officers have also definitely helped the process," Kandil said.

Zyara has assisted Hana with planning meetings and presentations. He has additionally reached out to other organizations to explore future collaborations.

Samar Alshaman, a freshman business administration major with concentrations in finance and economics, and the event coordinator for MSA, also helps with event planning and communications.

MSA has had a significant positive impact on its members and leaders.

"MSA made Winthrop feel more like home – it's a community where we can share our values and beliefs," Alshaman said. "It's also really important to have these connections for our holidays, which are different from what's common in America. During Ramadan, we have 30 days of fasting, so having people there for you and to support you is really helpful."

"MSA has opened my eyes to many things. For instance, as Muslims at Winthrop we really didn't have a space. For example, before, we only had the meditation room in the library, but once we got involved and formed a group we were able to secure another spot in DiGS. This helped to show me how important it is to have community," Zyara said.

MSA has begun to help fill the disparity in Muslim representation at Winthrop, facilitating a space for students to advocate

and share their perspectives.

"Having other Muslims there makes you feel like you can advocate for a room to pray in, because you're not the only person there," Alshaman said.

"We plan to connect to the broader community, by hosting public events, hopefully cultural events, that educate others about Islam and debunk stereotypes," Kandil said.

Relatedly, the leaders shared their views on the importance of diverse religious and cultural representation.

"America is said to be the 'land of opportunities', 'the mixing pot' and all of that. How could it be the mixing pot if we don't all embrace who we are?" Kandil said.

"Religious and cultural representation brings people closer together. If you just have one perspective on religion, you won't understand other people. There are many religions, many perspectives, and many values – so learning about them is really important. If there are diverse religions represented, it would make misunderstandings happen less, because they would understand what the religion is and where they're coming from, instead of just

assuming," Alshaman said.

They additionally shared their thoughts on harmful misconceptions regarding Muslims.

"Media propaganda portrays a very, very small minority of Muslims as if every Muslim is like that, by using rhetoric such as Muslim are 'all aggressive', or 'are all oppressive towards women'. This makes it more difficult to communicate with non-Muslims to tell them who we actually are, because many have been so stuck on this harmful messaging," Zyara said.

"I feel like the most misunderstood thing about Muslims is that they're really strict on everything or that they're not open minded- They have one viewpoint, and they don't understand the others- when in reality that's not true. The only way people can learn that is if they learn about Islam, and hopefully that's what MSA does for them," Alshaman said. "Additionally, to erase misconceptions, instead of just listening to the news, listen to other Muslims around you, or local Muslims, and see what their perspectives are."

Winthrop's MSA has many plans to continue developing

and contributing to the betterment of the student body throughout the next year.

"I hope that next year we have more Muslim students coming to Winthrop seeing that there are spaces and resources available to them. I want MSA to have a good connection to the mosque in Rock Hill, facilitate volunteer opportunities with local organizations, and collaborate with other on-campus organizations. I also want us to generally embrace and take pride in our culture here at Winthrop," Kandil said.

"I see us being a large enough group to where we can start hosting cultural events," Zyara said.

"Next year, I want us to recruit more Muslims in this community and in college in general. I want to increase engagement with non-Muslim students who are interested in learning more about Islam. I know there are a lot of people that want to learn about it, so I want this to be the place for them," Alshaman said.

For more information regarding MSA, follow their Instagram, "Winthrop_msa" or join their GroupMe "WU MSA".

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Future construction projects | Cont. from pg. 2

be 95,000 square feet, with construction beginning in 2026.

“Winthrop will go before the State for initial approval of the new residence hall in December,” the press release announced.

The hall would be placed exactly where the former Richardson and Wofford high-rise buildings were formerly located, off of Cherry Road. This space could accommodate two residence halls if necessary.

“Ideally, we would like to get to two new residence halls, knowing that we probably need an extra 800 to 1000 bed capacity,” Grigg said.

This would involve a two-stage building process, with 400 bed spaces in each hall. The buildings could potentially bookend each other, creating a courtyard facing away from the road that students could enjoy as a green and event space.

Alumni Drive realignment

In conjunction with a new residence hall, Grigg discussed realigning Alumni Drive with Camden Avenue, right across from the future hall. This would eliminate the Alumni Drive-Cherry Road intersection, a highly dangerous spot for drivers due its the lack of traffic signals, low visibility, and proximity to railroad tracks.

Alumni Drive will instead swerve into the traffic light at Camden Avenue, located right next to the McDonald’s on Cherry Road.

There are complications with the realignment, as it will cut off some of the Dalton Hall parking lot. This project is expected to take multiple years and must be done in collaboration with the South Carolina Department of Transportation.

Ultimately, Grigg hopes to achieve a safer entrance and exit to the university, possibly involving a campus gateway design and our own traffic light.

New cafeteria

When asked how the planning stages for a new cafeteria were progressing, Grigg explained that priorities had shifted to building student housing.

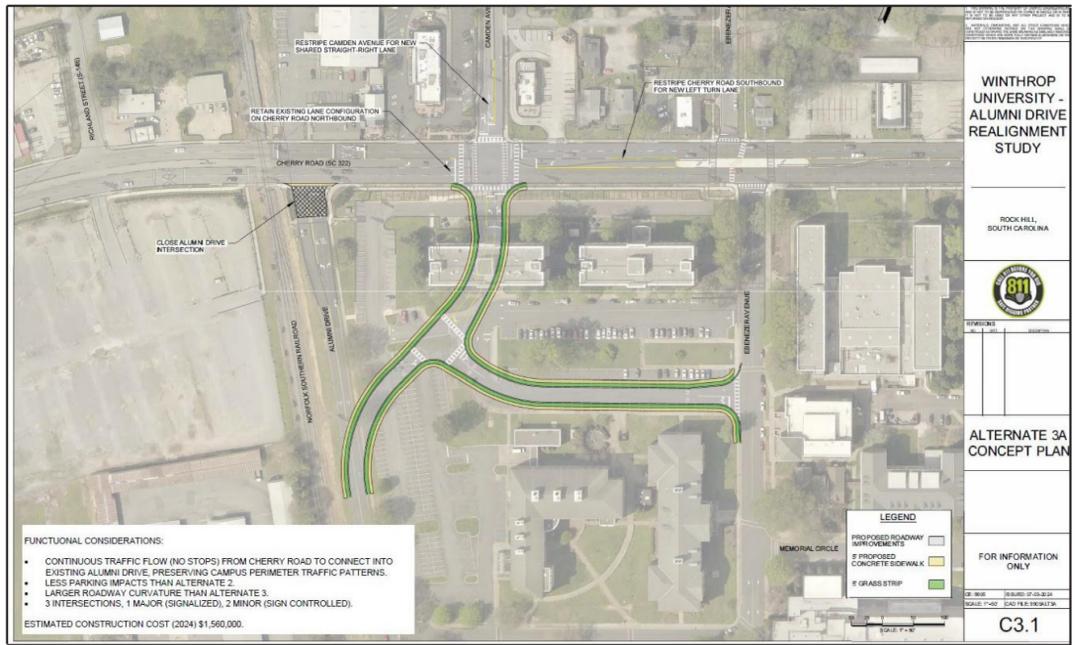
“We still need to address Thomson cafeteria. We’re working through some scenarios for that,” Grigg said.

Interfering with dining services is complicated, especially when considering the timing and cost for a project of this scale. For now, meeting housing needs is more important to the university.

Dacus Library and Dinkins Hall

As previously reported by The Johnsonian, the Dacus Library is slated for a renovation. This \$6 million project is expected to include “behind the scenes” improvements on the building’s mechanical systems, Grigg explained.

The library’s neighboring building, Dinkins Hall, is also



Alumni Drive - Camden Avenue realignment rendition

photo via James Grigg

due for a renovation. This will cost \$4 million and involve an update of the elevators and bathrooms in the building.

More significant is Grigg’s hope to relocate the Louise Pettus Archives, currently off campus on Cherry Road, to the Dinkins Hall basement. This will make use of the vacant areas in the Dinkins Hall basement and make the archives more accessible to the student body.

“We’ll actually do some other renovations in the basement that will make it a mixed-use space, mixed-use classroom space, that will benefit the building as a whole,” Grigg said. This project would work around the activities of the Winthrop Poll and other groups that meet in the basement and would take at least eight months to begin.

University Bookstore

The relocation of the Winthrop University archives is one of many moves in the planning stage.

Facilities plans to “Create a space for Career Services inside the bookstore,” Grigg said. Career Services is currently located in Bancroft Hall and will not move until early 2026.

This project would involve two entrances, with the Barnes and Noble entrance pushed further back into the building and a Career Services entrance on the side of Scholar’s Walk, as it will be taking up the two-story space on the side of the bookstore.

Demolitions

Both Roddey Hall and the Crawford Building are being considered for a future demolition, although a date has not been set.

“We know Roddey is a challenging building, and it doesn’t present

the best to the student body,” Grigg said. Facilities is focused on developing a long-term plan for the building and what might take its place in the future.

The Crawford Building is in the same stage of consideration. Formerly home to Student Health, the building is currently vacant with no future plans for development.

Tillman Hall

One of the university’s oldest buildings, Tillman Hall, is slated for renovations. Grigg wants to “flip the script” on Tillman Hall, making it a more student-centered and lively building.

Ideally, all student services, including the Office of Financial Aid, Records and Registration and the Cashier’s Office would be together in Tillman Hall, instead of split across campus. Grigg calls this a “one-stop shop” for students.

“Everyone can help you together, and it makes [Tillman] a better student service environment,” Grigg said. This might include new services for students, such as an advising center where students can come to prepare for class registration.

Conclusion

Grigg emphasized that student and faculty feedback during these planning stages is critical. Being considerate of the needs of the Winthrop community and accommodating when possible plays a role in all that Facilities does.

“There is no idea that we won’t think about. Yes, some are easier to accomplish than others, but if students have an idea, please let Facilities know,” Grigg said.

Contact Facilities Management at facilitiesmanagement@winthrop.edu.

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