

# Home and Heritage



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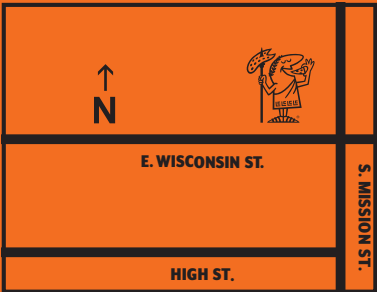


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# A note from the editor-in-chief



**By Masha Smahliuk-Bootz**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

Many of us at Central Michigan Life call this newspaper and Central Michigan University our home. It's where we grow to be professionals in the news industry one day and where we find support, friendship, safety and even family.

In the edition you're holding in your hands,

you can find an editorial photo gallery of things that make CMU home for the team of our photographers and read an editorial that captures the legacy we carry as CM Life's journalists.

But this edition doesn't only feature what home means for our team. You can find the voice of the CMU's community here as well.

Thus, Quarterbacks Joe Labas and Angel Flores told our sports editor that for them, home is the relationships they've built here.

In addition, six students shared what their Hispanic heritage means to them and how CMU was able to provide them with a community.

And of course, this edition highlights what to expect from the CMU's Homecoming this month – from the calendar of events to the family of Grand Marshals.

During this Homecoming, as you walk through the Moore Hall corridors or wear your maroon-and-gold shirt to the football game, we hope you feel at home again as alumni and we hope you find those relationships that will forever feel family-like.

And here at CM Life, we'll always bring you news of what's happening at home.

*Masha Smahliuk-Bootz is Central Michigan Life's 2025-26 editor-in-chief.*

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CM Life has served this community for 106 years, providing news about the campus, city and county. But we can't continue producing quality journalism without your support.



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A quarterback usually stands in the football team's spotlight. At Central Michigan, several players share this leadership role. CM Life spoke with the starting QBs about their dynamics on and off the field.

Central Michigan Life, the independent voice of Central Michigan University, is edited and published by students of Central Michigan University the first Thursday of the month during the fall and spring semesters. The newspaper's online edition, cm-life.com, contains all of the material published in print, and is updated on an as-needed basis.

Central Michigan Life serves the CMU and Mount Pleasant communities, and is under the jurisdiction of the independent Student Media Board of Directors. Kathy Simon serves as the Interim Director of Student Media at CMU and is the adviser to the newspaper. Articles and opinions do not necessarily reflect the position or opinions of Central Michigan University. Central Michigan Life is a member of the Associated Press, the Michigan Press Association, the Michigan Collegiate Press Association, the Associated Collegiate Press, College Newspaper Business & Advertising Managers Association, the Mount Pleasant Area Chamber of Commerce, Central Michigan Home Builders Association, Mount Pleasant Housing Association and the Mount Pleasant Downtown Business Association. The newspaper's online provider is SN Works.

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**On the cover: Illustration by Zoey Lawrence**  
**Inside covers: By Zoey Lawrence and Danica Schmitt**

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# NEWS

## Hispanic Heritage Month Calendar

The National Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated Sept. 15 through Oct. 15. Central Michigan University offers the following events to honor the heritage of its Hispanic students:

**Oct. 8 at 6 pm**

- **Emma Norman Todd Distinguished Lecture Series Featuring Dr. Michael Benitez Jr.**  
Location: Platchta Auditorium

**Oct. 10 at 6 pm**

- **Ballet Folklorico de la Luz performance**  
Location: Townsend Kiva Theater

**Oct. 14 at 6 pm**

- **Annual Tortilla Making Event**  
Location: The Allen Foundation Culinary Nutrition Center, Wightman Hall 100

**Oct. 15 at 4:30 pm**

- **Gather for the Culture**  
Location: Dine & Connect

Scan the QR code for a full calendar of events



# 'Always be yourself, no matter what'

*CMU students reflect on Hispanic Heritage Month and what it means to be seen*

By **Alexandrea Ladiski**  
Staff reporter

For Isabella Caraballo, a Central Michigan University student, Hispanic heritage is in her voice, her values and in the flags decorating her dorm room. The month is a reminder to stay grounded in identity, even when the world feels uncertain, she said.

"Growing up, my abuela took care of me ... and I took care of her when she got older," she said. "So ... being Hispanic, that culture is very family-oriented, and I try to put that into my own values."

But Caraballo isn't the only one.

Hispanic Heritage Month is more than a calendar of events for students at Central Michigan University; it's a deeply personal time to reflect, reclaim and reintroduce themselves on their own terms.

For many Latinx and Hispanic-identifying students, this month is an opportunity to reconnect with their roots, affirm their identities and create visibility for a community that continues to face cultural erasure and political tension. With a shifting national climate, including renewed debates over immigration and fear around racial profiling, students say the act of celebration itself can feel both empowering and defiant.

In a series of interviews, CMU students shared why Hispanic Heritage Month matters to them, how their identities have shaped their experiences, and why showing up, whether through dance, language, activism or art, is more than symbolic.

## Caraballo: Pride in every flag and footstep



Caraballo is Afro-Latina and half Asian. Her parents are immigrants, and she said her childhood was shaped by family expectations, caretaking and translating paperwork at a young age.

"Why Hispanic

Heritage Month means a lot to me is because ... I always took pride in my culture," she said. "And I like having a month ... where I can ... represent myself and ... being proud of my heritage just means a lot, especially with ... everything going on right now."

She said events like the carne asada made her feel like she was "back home" in Texas, surrounded by Spanish music, dancing and good food.

To her, that's the point: "Know your values, know who you are, know where you come from."

## José Medina: Reclaiming culture through community



José Medina, a graduate student at Central Michigan University, said Hispanic Heritage Month is about embracing the identity he once felt disconnected from. "Growing up, I was the only kid from my family that didn't know Spanish, so sometimes I always felt left out of the Latino community," he said. "But as I continued to explore my culture, especially at Central

Michigan University, it opened a lot of perspectives for me."

Now proudly identifying as a Mexican-American student, Medina sees the month as a time to celebrate who he is and help others do the same. He's especially excited by how this year's programming expands beyond traditional celebrations.

"There's a lot of students willing to do Hispanic Heritage Month events and just be able to open it up to different perspectives," he said. Medina, who is bisexual, pointed to student-led discussions on disability and LGBTQ+ media within the Latino community.

He also helped coordinate the welcome-back cookout,



which included groups like Ballet Folklórico de la Luz, Prospanica and multicultural Greek life.

He said it's important to be aware of and to celebrate the many layers of identity that shape a person.

"I also feel like the thing that represents me the most is my personality and how I represent myself to others," he said.

## Datherine Guzman: Strength, visibility and breaking stigmas



For Datherine Guzman, Hispanic Heritage Month is about more than celebration, it's about visibility, education and strength.

"People forget that there's not just one culture in the Hispanic community," she said. "It's not just Mexican, there's Dominican people, Colombians, Puertoorriqueños. There's a whole bunch of communities and cultures that people

should know."

Guzman identifies as both Mexican and Dominican, and proudly calls herself a strong, independent bilingual Latina. As a first-generation American, college student and leader on campus, she said she carries all those identities with pride, but also recognizes the challenges that come with them.

"Sometimes it's scary to speak my native language without being looked at weird or getting racial comments," she said. "I'm not scared of nothing, I'm proud of being bilingual. But not everyone feels safe."

Guzman believes CMU should do more to support Latino students and others affected by immigration policies, including ICE.

"Instead of hiding from it, there should be more open spaces, like meetings or check-ins on mental well-being," she said.

As a member of Sigma Lambda Gamma Sorority, Inc., she helps lead events like "El Corazón" and "Breaking the Stigma: Mental Health Is Real." She says mental health is often overlooked in communities of color, and breaking the silence is crucial.

"If people have questions, I give them knowledge and resources," she said. "I'm not trying to be their mom, just letting them know, 'Hey, that's a microaggression.'"

Her message to others: "Always be yourself, no matter what. Never make yourself smaller for anyone."

## Abelina Sanchez: Learning pride, one celebration at a time

Growing up in a predominantly white town, sophomore psychology major Abelina Sanchez said she didn't always



A dancer from Ballet Folklórico de la Luz performs Danza de los Viejitos, "Dance of the Old Men," at Moore Hall, Townsend Kiva, Saturday, April 19, 2025.

Mark Hoover | Staff photographer



feel connected to her Mexican identity. But Hispanic Heritage Month, especially at CMU, has helped her reclaim it.

"Hispanic Heritage Month is personally meaning to me because I am Hispanic ... and it especially has been given meaning to me once

I'm in college," she said. "I grew up in a predominantly white town where there weren't a lot of Mexicans or Hispanic people, but now that I'm here, there's a lot more, and I can connect with my culture more."

She said recent campus events like

"Brown is in the Rainbow Too," focused on queer Latinx identity, and casual gatherings like a carne asada helped her feel welcomed.

"I think the university is doing a great job doing that

right now," she said.

To Sanchez, being Hispanic means being proud, even when it feels risky.

"I definitely feel that Hispanic Heritage Month has taken a new effect ever since the new president has come in," she said. "I feel more scared. A lot of Hispanics are afraid to come to work, are afraid to go to events, festivals, because they're afraid of ICE."

Still, she celebrates.

"It's important to be who we are, because we exist. You can't get rid of us," Sanchez said.

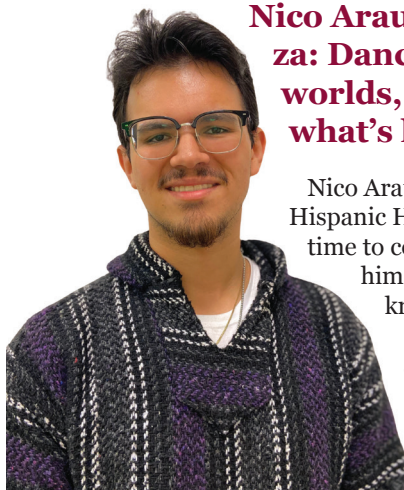
People forget that there's not just one culture in the Hispanic community. ... There's a whole bunch of communities and cultures.

— Datherine Guzman



## MONTH

CONTINUED FROM 4-5



### Nico Araujo-Pedroza: Dancing between worlds, defending what's home

Nico Araujo-Pedroza said Hispanic Heritage Month is a time to connect with a side of himself he didn't always know how to claim.

"My mom is white, and my dad is from Mexico," he said. "And when I was growing up, I didn't really have too much connection with that other side of myself."

That changed when he joined Ballet Folklórico de la Luz seven years ago. Through traditional Mexican dance, Araujo-Pedroza found a community and a cultural identity that made him feel whole.

"For me as a mixed person ... I get to explore that other side of me that when I was a child, I never really had exposure to," he said.

He now identifies as Chicano, a term he says reflects his Mexican heritage, American upbringing and deep pride in both.

The Chicano identity also fuels his activism. After the Supreme Court upheld a policy allowing ICE agents to detain people based on appearance alone, Araujo-Pedroza said the fear hit close to home.

"That's racial profiling," he said. "Regardless of if they're a citizen or not, they still have the potential of being detained. That makes me think about my own family ... my dad is from Mexico."

Despite the fear, he refuses to be silent.

"I just want to represent my culture as much as I can ... and support those people who face those trials," he said.

For Araujo-Pedroza, Folklórico is where pride and heritage meet.

"We get to come together and celebrate our traditions and show there's power in being proud," he said.

### Erick Guillén: A musical tribute to the values that raised him

For second-year music education major Erick Guillén, Hispanic Heritage Month is about honoring the values and community that shaped him.



Ella Miller | Visual editor

Students celebrate the start to Hispanic Heritage Month during the Welcome Back Carne Asada at the Student Activity Center, Friday, Sept. 19, 2025. The event was hosted by Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, Empowered Latino Union, Ballet Folklórico de la Luz, Prospanica and the Multicultural Greek Council.

"Hispanic Heritage Month is really important to me, because growing up, I just had the Hispanic values and community just foster me so much and teach me a lot," he said. "I find a lot of my own personal philosophies grounded in Hispanic values."

Guillén, who plays saxophone and studies on the instrumental path, said his identity is made up of many layers, but being Hispanic and being a musician are central.

"Often I imagine ... if I'm doing a presentation or performance... even if no one from my family is there, I always picture my family or other Hispanic friends that I had growing up," he said. "They've helped me grow so much."

He appreciates the events happening across CMU's campus but hopes to see broader representation across Latin America.

"I'm glad that we [Mexicans] get a lot of representation, but I also wish that it was more balanced out with other kinds of Latinos," he said. "They're just as Hispanic as Mexicans are, but they don't get as much recognition or celebration."

To Guillén, Hispanic identity is rooted in intergenerational respect and care.

"There's a lot of value on respect... I think that's a big part of Hispanic culture," he said.

He hopes others engage with the month sincerely, with celebration, not appropriation.

"It's so important to show allyship and camaraderie," he said. "Even in a perfect world... there are differences that should be celebrated and shared."

We ... come together and celebrate our traditions and show there's a power in being proud.

— Nico Araujo-Pedroza



# The value isn't just the money

By Masha Smahliuk-Bootz  
Editor-in-chief

Central Michigan University is home to fewer international students this semester. The international enrollment is 27% down from last academic year.

CMU President Neil MacKinnon told *Central Michigan Life* last month that this decline impacts the university from a budget perspective.

"Anytime you're down in enrollment, there is a budget impact," MacKinnon said. "Generally, international students ... would pay higher tuition as well. So, when you're using one international student, the budget impact actually is higher than one domestic student."

An international graduate student pays \$1,029 per credit hour, while a resident graduate student pays \$829 per credit hour, according to CMU's website.

This semester, CMU welcomed 1,210 international students. In comparison, there were 1,659 international students in 2024 and 1,726 in 2023, according to the enrollment report data.

Despite the drop in international enrollment, there are 117 more domestic students. Central's total preliminary enrollment is 14,135, which is a 2.29% decrease from last year.

Joe Garrison, the executive director for the Financial Planning and Budgets Office, said he's working with the Academic Planning and Analysis Office to determine what that budgetary impact would look like exactly for CMU. He said he will be able to learn that in the next couple of weeks.

Some of the factors that would have an influence on the budget are how many credits those international students would have taken and whether they had any university scholarships, Garrison said.

"Obviously, fewer students, fewer semester credit hours, would mean fewer net tuition," Garrison said. "There are some mitigating factors on the expense side of the equation. But that being said, the cost of not having those students outweighs the savings."

"So there is going to be a bit of a gap. We're trying to identify exactly what that gap is, and then saying, how much of that gap could be mitigated."

Garrison said that the university has some savings and that it has been "conservative" with planning how much it would receive from the state. Some other things that can mitigate that gap are the attraction of transfer students, employee turnover and reduced travel expenses.

"A budget is a plan," he said. "Every year, no matter the situation, we actively monitor how did things occur against the plan. ... I don't think that we will ever see a

year where we have a budget of  $x$ , and our actuals come in exactly what the budget was."

But while CMU has some options to mitigate the lost revenue for this year, the big questions are what this international decline means moving forward, and whether international students would be able to come to CMU as usual, Garrison said.

"It's hard to understand if this will continue or if this will be an isolated incident," he said.

MacKinnon said at the Academic Senate meeting on Sept. 9 that he hopes the 618 students who wanted to come to CMU but weren't able to, would join the campus community next semester.

Jennifer DeHaemers, vice president of Student Recruitment and Retention, told CM Life last month that some of the reasons for the international student decline were outside of the university's control, such as increased wait times for visa appointments and changes in procedures.

"But the biggest problem for international students ability is just their to get that

For example, Western Michigan University enrolled 1,830 international students this semester, compared to 1,983 in 2024, according to its enrollment data. Grand Valley State University is home to 579 international students this semester, while it had 625 of them in 2024, according to its website.

But for CMU, international students mean more than tuition dollars, Garrison said.

"I'm very hopeful that we will continue to have a decent amount of international students because they add a lot of value to the institution, and I'm not just talking about on the financial side," he said. "It makes it a more rich and robust environment when you have people from different backgrounds connecting one another."



appointment to get their visa and then actually receiving it," DeHaemers said. "Just because they apply, just because we admit them and give them the appropriate documentation, it doesn't mean that ... the consulate would give them the visa to come here."

This situation isn't unique to CMU.



# 'We stand by our values'

## CMU's approach to DEI changes

By Cristin Coppess  
Staff writer

It's been over eight months since the federal government ordered the removal of the diversity, equity and inclusion programming, but what does this mean for Central Michigan University?

Provost Paula Lancaster said CMU is continuing the work as usual.

"We've made no changes to curriculum, majors, minors, programs, courses — no changes," said Lancaster. "In part, that is because what we hear from the federal government ... is that we cannot be violating non-discrimination policies. And we're not, nor have we."

The Policy Compliance and Communications Committee was created in early 2025 to assess changes in federal policy that could potentially impact CMU. The committee works with the CMU administration to send email reports to students and faculty detailing their findings.

An article from The Chronicle of Higher Education, authored by Erin Gretzinger and others and published on

Sept. 26, 2025, reported that other institutions across the U.S. have dismantled their DEI initiatives.

Early in 2025, CMU merged the former Office of DEI and the Division of Student Affairs into a new administrative unit: the Division of University Engagement and Student Affairs.

The division's website describes its focus as helping students succeed in and out of the classroom. The areas of service it provides include health and well-being, community and student advocacy.

The new division is led by its vice president, Shawna Patterson-Stephens, who took the role after serving as the vice president of Inclusive Excellence and Belonging.

Patterson-Stephens said that until the university receives formal guidance and support from the federal government, it will continue to move forward as planned.

"We stand by our values in making sure that people have access to higher education," Patterson-Stephens said. "I think something especially pertinent amongst all regional institutions is our commitment and responsibility to the region and to the communities that we serve, and so it's

just really important that folks feel like they belong in that space, especially because in other capacities, maybe at other institutions, they may not have had that same experience."

CMU's commitment to its students, she said, is founded in the belief that connection and belonging are critical to student success.

"We want people to spread their wings and to feel supported in doing that," Patterson-Stevens said. "And you're more inclined to do that if you feel connected and feel like you belong here."



Paige Jaczkowski | Staff designer

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# Home Sweet Homecoming





# Celebrating the McGuirk's family legacy

By Grace Walker  
News editor

The McGuirk family will be recognized as this year's Grand Marshals for the 2025 Central Michigan Homecoming. This comes after generations of economic ties to the Mount Pleasant and the Central Michigan University community through a number of their businesses.

"It's a tremendous honor," Rick McGuirk said. "A true honor to be part of this celebration for Central Michigan University."

In 1963, the late Jim McGuirk started his family's legacy by establishing United Apartments. These properties became a popular option for students looking to live off campus.

"CMU contributes a lot to our family's success, and so we just give back all that we can for them," Lexi McGuirk, Rick's niece, said.

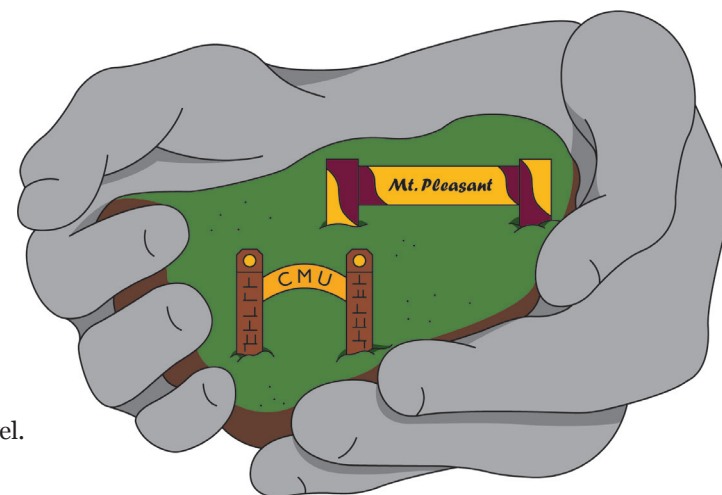
As *Central Michigan Life* previously reported, Jim first purchased a few homes that were converted into apartments in the 60s, and then the number of properties grew in the 1980s.

Property owned by the McGuirks has grown to include 32 locations comprising 1,500 apartment units, the Baymont Inn in Mount Pleasant and an excavating business called McGuirk Sand and Gravel. That's according to Rick, the nephew of Jim.

As time went on, Jim's nephews, Rick and Chuck McGuirk, and Jim's niece, Sandy Dean, continued on with his legacy of giving back to CMU.

Rick is an alumnus and is an active member of CMU's Advancement Board, and has been for around 20 years. After graduating from CMU with a bachelor's degree in science and business administration with a double major in management and marketing, Rick assists with raising money to help support students on campus.

Chuck contributes to many construction projects



Ben Westerhof | Staff designer

throughout campus and follows the football team, Lexi said, while Dean manages family gifts that go to scholarships, CMU Athletics and the university's Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

CMU has been considered a home for Rick since he was younger, and he chooses to continue supporting the university because of this.

"Between the apartments and the hotel and the excavating business, it's home to me," Rick said. "You care about your home and your surroundings. ... CMU is part of those surroundings, and I love doing my part to make sure CMU is welcomed in the community and ... watch it succeed through the next generations."

Many of the McGuirks have chosen to stick around and help support CMU because of the university's support for the family.

"Being born and raised in Mount Pleasant, ... CMU is the backdrop to our lives," Lexi said. "It's like Mount Pleasant would not be here without CMU. ... We were all born and raised in Mount Pleasant, and we wanted to make sure that CMU was taken care of, too."

Lexi is the next generation of the McGuirk family. As she is finishing college at Northwood University, Lexi is working at McGuirk Sand and Gravel, and said she will continue to work and support her family's legacy once she graduates.

"I would like to do something with McGuirk Sand when I get out of school and continue our legacy with CMU," she said. "I think it's still really important. CMU is not going anywhere anytime soon, so there's no point in not continuing what we already have done so much for."

On October 25, 14 members of the McGuirk family will be representing their family in the Homecoming parade at 11 am.



McGuirk family | Courtesy Photo

The McGuirk family will be recognized as Grand Marshals at Central Michigan University's 2025 Homecoming. Courtesy photo of the McGuirk family.



# Gallery: Home at Central



View the **full**  
**gallery** here:



**Mark Hoover, Jo Kenoshmeg, Alivia Cranick, Zoey Morse, Jasmine Brookins**  
What makes CMU feel like home to you? The CM Life Visuals Desk used their cameras to capture their own answers to this question. Their photos tell the story of the way CMU brings people of many different backgrounds together into one place to call home.



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**Ella Miller, Mary Nowosacki, Trevor Sparks, Soli Gordon**

What makes CMU feel like home to you? The CM Life Visuals Desk used their cameras to capture their own answers to this question. Their photos tell the story of the way CMU brings people of many different backgrounds together into one place to call home.



# Editorial: Student journalism is on the front lines; you can help

By Masha Smahliuk-Bootz  
Editor-In-chief

Central Michigan Life has been informing campus and local communities ethically, accurately and independently for more than 106 years. American journalists, professional and student alike, have faced increasing and very public threats to their freedom to do their job, and news organizations need the public's support more than ever.

This fall, CM Life is being recognized by the Associated Collegiate Press as a Pacemaker finalist, the top award in the country. Seven staff members will be celebrated later this month as among the top 10 in the nation for graphic design, column writing and photography.

In just the first month of the new academic year, our student journalists covered the decline of enrollment at CMU, the new budget for Isabella County, the football game against Michigan and a former ROTC instructor's claims that the CMU indoor rifle range gave him lead poisoning.

As the National Newspaper Week approaches, we need your financial support to continue producing quality journalism. To support CM Life students and your local journalism, donate to CM Life at <https://giving.apps.cmich.edu/fund/9500015>.

Now, more than ever, freedom of press and speech requires protection. Student journalists, just like the professional media, are working under pressure and are committed to news, according to a Poynters article published on May 12, 2025 by Liam Scott.

"Student journalists across the country have found themselves on the front lines of some of the most headline-grabbing stories as the Trump administration cuts federal grants to universities that don't

bend to its will and immigration officials detain scores of international students," Scott wrote. "Some student reporters are clocking dozens of hours in the newsroom each week — typically for no money, and all while balancing classes, and sometimes jobs and other extracurricular activities."

Even though CM Life is located in an academic building and receives university funding to cover a portion of two professional salaries, the newspaper is self-sustained, thanks to its student-run advertising agency, Gold Media Group.

This means that CM Life is editorially independent from CMU; we make our own decisions of what to cover, based on the elements of newsworthiness.

This has been the case since our very creation.

CM Life was established in 1919, long before CMU had a journalism department, by a group of students who were interested in journalism and wanted to have a school newspaper. That's according to Jim Wojcik, the first full-time director of student media in the 1970s, who was critical in building up the paper to the extraordinary program it is now.

Wojcik said to ensure this independent status, he signed an agreement with then CMU President Leonard Plachta in 1999. The agreement also created an independent governing body for CM Life, the CMU Student Media Board of Directors.

"This Board (consists of) the following voting positions: five professional journalists from various Michigan newspapers, of which three will be Central Michigan University alumni; (and) three student positions," the Nov. 30, 1999, letter from Plachta read. "You are authorized to convene this new Board and work with it to take care of any necessary business that it required."

Throughout the years, the number of CM Life alumni "that went into and had tremendous successful journalism careers is overwhelming," Wojcik said.

As of 2019, we had four alumni who received Pulitzer nominations, and they attributed their success to the experience at CM Life.

That's why, for us students, CM Life is a second home where we can make our dreams come true and grow as professional journalists.



Danica Schmitt | Staff designer

"From my own personal experience, it's really important as a place where you can learn in a professional setting, beyond whatever you learn in the classroom," said Steve Coon, CMU journalism professor and CM Life alumnus. He was a sports reporter and editor from 1990 to 1993. "You also learn how to work with other students on a team. ... You're also learning how to be a leader of a news organization."

Besides being an essential place of education and growth for students, CM Life is also a resource for the university, local community and alumni.

"It's a community service. You're providing information to this geographic community, but also worldwide, anyone who's interested in CMU information," Coon said. "I think that alumni look to CM Life to keep up on news about the university. ... For a football score, the first place they're going to look at is CM Life."

Whether you're looking for that football score, what's new at your alma mater, or

what parcel of land the city is rezoning, we'll be there for you.

But, we can't do it without you.

We hope you will consider showing your support for student press freedom and help protect your local news source today.

Please donate  
to CM LIFE here:





# Celebrating Homecoming

## Schedule of events:

Thursday, Oct. 23 at 7 pm – Football Coaches Show

Friday, Oct. 24 at 1 pm – Annual Career Awareness Session with the CMU Latine Alumni Chapter

Friday, Oct. 24 at 6 pm – Welcome Mixer with the CMU Black Alumni Chapter

Friday, Oct. 24 at 6 pm – Alumni Takeover: Wayside Edition

### **Friday, Oct. 24 at 7 pm – Rock Rally**

Friday, Oct. 24 at 10:30 pm – Black Alumni Chapter Encore Nightclub Party

Saturday, Oct. 25 at 8 am – Special Olympics Michigan 5k Race

Saturday, Oct. 25 at 9 am – Rehearsal on the Stadium Field with the Marching Chips

Saturday, Oct. 25 at 9:30 am – Alumni Breakfast – Celebrating the Class of 1975

### **Saturday, Oct. 25 at 11 am – Homecoming Parade**

### **Saturday, Oct. 25 at 1 pm – Cardboard Boat Races**

### **Saturday, Oct. 25 at 3:30 pm – Football Game CMU Chippewas vs. Massachusetts**

For more Homecoming events, visit

<https://www.cmich.edu/alumni/events/homecoming>

## This year's Maroon Ambassadors:



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Lanham, MD



Emma Apap Senior  
Livonia, MI



Kathlyn Allmacher Senior  
Clare, MI



Bianca Cabarios Senior  
Macomb, MI



Dan'Yale Wright Senior  
Kansas City, KS



Ava Darbyshire Senior  
Lake Orion, MI



Zainab Naaz Senior  
Muscat, Oman



# Cancer, crown and cause

By **Alexandrea Ladiski**  
Staff reporter

At 19 years old, Eliy Simmer is already many things: a nonprofit founder, cancer survivor and now, Miss Michigan Teen USA 2025. But the work that makes her proudest isn't walking across a pageant stage, it's delivering kits to hospital rooms.

Through her nonprofit, Eliy's Sunflowers, she assembles and delivers "teen kits" to hospital floors filled with comfort items. Each kit includes a card with her story and an invitation to reach out.

"I want to inspire anybody, whether they're going through a life-threatening illness or not," Eliy said. "You can still do great things no matter what ... and you're not alone."

Now a freshman at Central Michigan University, Eliy is using her statewide platform to spotlight an overlooked group in pediatric cancer care: teenagers.

## Eliy's battle with Cancer

At 14, Eliy was diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma, a rare and aggressive cancer that forms in bone or soft tissue. What doctors initially dismissed as a volleyball injury turned out to be a tumor on her scapula.

"My specialist told me my bone looked like popcorn," Eliy said. "He was like, 'You see this side? Yeah, it's supposed to look like this side. It looks like popcorn.'"

Her parents, Joy and Mike Simmer, found out first. As they waited to pick her up from school, they watched her walk out the doors, laughing with her then-best friend, a moment Joy said felt like slow motion.

"I saw them come out the doors and they were just laughing, and I thought, 'Oh my gosh, that's the last time she's going to be like that.' It was almost like losing your innocence," Joy said.

The diagnosis changed everything. Treatment meant 14 cycles of chemotherapy and 31 rounds of proton radiation. She lost her hair, her energy and her sense of normalcy. But she never lost her spirit.

"She was the one holding us together," Joy said. "She sat between us on the couch and said, 'My hair can grow back. I can do this with you and Dad by my side.'"

They made car ride playlists to survive the drive to appointments: Weezer, Billie Eilish, Smashing Pumpkins. After treatment, they always stopped at Starbucks for a frappuccino, a ritual Eliy looked forward to.

What followed was a brutal year of treatment, then the slow process of healing.

Even after she rang the bell in January 2022, survivorhood brought new challenges: PTSD, scan anxiety, the aching sense and survivor's guilt.

But instead of letting those struggles define her, Eliy turned them into fuel.



Capture by Cassie | Courtesy photo

Simmer is a CMU freshman, cancer survivor and founder of Eliy's Sunflowers. She was crowned Miss Michigan Teen USA 2025 and advocates for teen cancer patients through her nonprofit. Courtesy of Eliy Simmer.

## Creating a new normal

Eliy noticed during treatment that teenagers, stuck between pediatric toys and adult expectations, were often overlooked in hospitals.

"They have child life there, but a lot of the activities or the different supplies they have are more towards the littles," Eliy said. "That was tough. With teens ... we have the T.V., we have social media, we have sleep and then we have hospital food. There's not really much for us to do."

So, she started packing care kits filled with items that helped her the most when she was going through treatment. Non-slip fuzzy socks, chapstick, lotion, fidget toys, nose plugs and even pickle juice to help manage chemo-related nausea. Starbucks gift cards also became a staple in her kits.

Each kit is personal. She writes notes explaining the purpose of every item and offers her contact info in case someone needs a friend to talk to.

"It's nice, going and visiting the floors, and her being able to reach those kids and give them a little bit of hope, and for them to see her thriving, and know it's possible they could get there," Joy said.

## A crown and a cause

Pageants weren't originally part of the plan. Eliy had started modeling after treatment, reclaiming her

relationship with her body. Then she heard about Miss Michigan Teen USA and saw it not just as a competition, but an opportunity to spread a message.

"I went into it not expecting to win at all," she said. "I just went into it with the mindset of like, 'I'm going to do my best and I'm going to tell my story.'"

But on a stage in Port Huron this August, Eliy made it from the top 12, to the top 6, to the final two, and then stood, stunned, as the crown was placed on her head.

"I was so shocked," she said. "If you watch the video, I actually started clapping for the runner-up because I didn't know how pageants work. When they called the runner-up, I thought she'd won. She looked at me like, 'girl, you won,' and I was like, 'wait, what?' Then they started putting the sash on me and it clicked ... and I started crying."

Her final question from the judges, about the greatest challenge she'd faced and how she'd helped to raise awareness, couldn't have been a better fit. She turned to the audience and spoke about her fight with cancer, her nonprofit and her mission to support teens like her.

"She was literally in her element," Joy said. "It was like this magical, full-circle moment...then she got in the car afterward, crying, and said, 'this is huge for pediatric cancer.'"



# From zero to 100

By Sydney Neal

Sports editor

When Joe Labas looks back on his earliest memories, football has always been there.

“I remember there’s a picture of me as an infant and there’s a football,” Labas said, smiling. “I’m holding a real-sized football. I remember seeing that picture. Honestly, it just ... dropped into my life.”

That picture, oversized leather tucked into baby arms, became more than a family photo. It was the first hint of a lifelong connection to a game that would eventually take Labas from youth league sidelines in Brecksville, Ohio, to Big Ten football at the University of Iowa, and now to Central Michigan, where he is carving out his own chapter as one of the Chippewas’ quarterbacks.

## Childhood in Brecksville

Labas grew up just south of Cleveland, in Brecksville. A place that has the same small-town feel as Mount Pleasant.

“That’s just south of Cleveland,” Labas said. “It was a good childhood. Played a lot of sports. I was very active growing up, obviously. And yeah, I just kept with that. Had a good friend group, good family.”

Family, in fact, was central in his life. Labas is the youngest of four children and the only boy — something that shaped him in ways he didn’t always expect.

“I have three older sisters and no brothers, and that was different,” Labas said. “I’ve always wanted a brother — my sisters know that. But being able to play football with just, I mean, 100 plus guys (on a team) is awesome.”

For Labas, those early years weren’t about finding a position or even chasing a dream. They were about having fun.

“You’re really young at the time, everyone’s playing all the same positions,” Labas said of youth football. “You’re playing every position. Just the hot summers and having a lot of fun with my friends. That’s what I remember.”

Labas points to his hometown and his coaches as a major influence on who he is today, on and off the field.

“I was taught ... specifically Coach Barth ... him always telling us to tuck our shirts in, tuck our jerseys in, look someone in the eye when you’re shaking their hand, have manners,” Labas said. “Just stuff like that. It goes a long way.”

Those small lessons built a foundation he still carries.

“Do what’s right,” Labas said. “That’s what I took from home.”

## Becoming a quarterback

Labas didn’t always know he would be a quarterback.

The turning point came in middle school. He had played quarterback at that level, but his high school

already had a starter. Then, when that quarterback graduated, the coaches looked to Labas to take over and gave him a chance as a freshman to play varsity, Labas said.

It wasn’t just talent that carried him. It was support from his family and over 100 brothers, who were there at every step.

“They’ve always supported me, no matter what,” Labas said.

## The setbacks

Like many athletes, Labas’s path hasn’t been without obstacles. Injuries and the transfer portal have both been significant.

“Injuries have been a setback for me, for sure,” Labas said. “There’s a lot of things you think about mentally, just thoughts that may not even be your own thoughts. You try not to believe certain lies or doubts, like maybe you won’t be able to come back, or this is the downfall, or everything’s going to go downhill after that.”

After having arm surgery from an injury just six games into the 2024 season, Labas spent months preparing to start this season. Through those moments, Labas leaned on his faith.

“You’ve got to be strong mentally to not go down that rabbit hole,” Labas said. “Just have trust, have faith in God that it’s going to be all right.”

Transferring was another turning point. After starting his career at Iowa, Labas left behind teammates and relationships to come to CMU.

“I just saw a stat that like 84 percent of college quarterbacks end up transferring at the Division I level,” Labas said. “That’s crazy. I transferred and built a lot of relationships at my previous school, and then you have to leave. It’s a business decision.”

“Then you enter a new environment, a whole new team, whole new faces. You start to build those relationships up. That’s been hard, just having to deal with the fact that it’s becoming more of a business than a child’s game. Because you grow up just loving the game first.”

## Brotherhood

At CMU, Labas has found both competition and camaraderie in the quarterback room with Angel Flores and Jaden Glasser.

“It’s been going very well,” Labas said. “We all understand that we have the same position, we all have a common goal. You just respect each other, be professional about it. And you get to know each other a lot more, too, because you spend the most time with each other. It’s been good getting to know Angel and Jaden and everyone in that room.”

That brotherhood has helped Labas feel at home, even as he continues to adjust to a new school and community.



CM Life | Soli Gordon

CMU redshirt senior quarterback Joe Labas points at the camera for a photo in Kelly/Shorts Stadium on Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2025.

“I grew up in the Midwest, so there’s a lot of similarities to where I grew up and what Mount Pleasant looks like. That definitely brings me back home a little bit.”

But it’s not just about geography. It’s about the people who fill Kelly/Shorts Stadium on Saturdays, he said.

“You look out in the crowd and you see how many people are here to support you,” Labas said. “There are times it can be tough out here for us as a team, especially when we lose games. Just having that support from the community, even when our record may not be great, but fans are still coming out ... we see that. That helps us a lot.”

We have the same position. We all have a common goal. You just respect each other, be professional about it.

— Joe Labas  
CMU quarterback



# Behind Number Seven

By Sydney Neal

Sports editor

When Angel Flores thinks back to his first memories of football, it isn't Kelly/Shorts Stadium, or even a high school field in Arizona that comes to mind. Instead, it's Texas, where he was a boy running with his youth football teammates in a league called TYFA, the Texas Youth Football Association.

Flores didn't grow up dreaming of being a quarterback. In fact, until his freshman year of high school, he played linebacker, safety and even receiver occasionally.

The first football in his hands came from his grandfather, a lifelong Pittsburgh Steelers fan who dressed his grandson in Ben Roethlisberger jerseys every Sunday.

"He loved watching the Steelers every Sunday. He was like a father figure to me growing up, and we did everything together," Flores said. That connection explains why Flores wears No. 7 today, a small tribute to his grandfather and those early days watching the Steelers.

## From Casa Grande to Mount Pleasant

Though he spent time in Texas, Flores was born and raised in Casa Grande, Arizona. The desert town shaped him in ways he still carries to this day.

"They're so resilient," Flores said. "People in that city don't always go through the ideal circumstances and just for them to always find a way to persevere ... I often think back to the people back home ... (I) try to put myself in their shoes and that's what helps me a lot."

After a decorated career at Casa Grande Union High School, Flores began his college career at Northern Arizona University. That's where he first crossed paths with Central Michigan's current offensive coordinator, Jim Chapin. At the time, Chapin was the OC at Eastern Washington, and Flores's team faced them in a game Northern Arizona ultimately won.

"Once I got into the portal, we got in contact," Flores said. "I think playing against him and him coming here (CMU), we already knew each other...that's where that relationship started."

Coming to CMU meant new coaches, a new team and a new state with winters very different from Arizona's constant heat. But Flores says the small-town feel of Mount Pleasant makes it feel familiar.

"It reminds me of Casa Grande," he said. "The people here are kind and down to earth. You can start a conversation with anyone — whether it's on campus, at the store or just walking down the street. That's what makes this place feel like home."

## The role of family

Flores' journey wouldn't have been possible without his family. His mother raised him and his two younger brothers largely on her own, something Flores says inspires him daily.

"My mom, she's been the backbone for me," he said. "She raised me and my two younger brothers by herself in Texas. I'm always looking to her for inspiration."

His grandmother, aunt and younger brothers remain his closest support system. He talks to his brothers almost every day, describing them as his best friends. His aunt "posts everything," and is always quick to highlight his accomplishments. His grandmother, he says, is someone he tries to call as much as possible, no matter how busy life gets.

Flores also credits high school coach Jake Barro and his family with being a second home.

"He's a huge person in my life," Flores said with a smile. "He's more like family than anything ... I'm so grateful for them and everything they did for me."

To Flores, the support from not only his family members but also those who care for him means everything.

"You know everyone goes through things and they help me stay grounded," Flores said.

Flores also draws strength from his cultural heritage. As a Mexican American, he grew up visiting family in Mexico and says those trips gave him perspective on gratitude and opportunity.

"As a little kid, I always had a deep perspective on how lucky I am and how blessed I am that God gave me this life here," he said.

## Learning to live in the moment

Flores admits that earlier in his career, he was too hard on himself. He focused so much on mistakes that he often missed the joy of the game.

"Just enjoy life," Flores said. "I know growing up, I was always so hard on myself, but I think I missed out sometimes on the bittersweet moments. Just enjoy every moment and be happy."

He credits CMU's staff with helping him adopt that mindset.

"Coach Chapin and Coach Drinkall do an unbelievable job keeping me in the present," Flores said. "They are definitely people that are helping me transition into enjoying every little part of the journey."

## What makes CMU home

Flores will never forget how welcoming the CMU community was.

For him, it's the combination of resilience from Casa Grande, the unwavering support of family and the kindness of a small-town community in Michigan that has embraced him.



CM Life | Trevor Sparks

Central Michigan junior quarterback Angel Flores celebrates his third total touchdown of the day during the home opener at Kelly/Shorts Stadium on Saturday, Sept. 20, 2025. Flores had two rushing touchdowns and one 22-yard passing touchdown

"Just the people remind me a lot of back home," Flores said. "Just really good, kind people. Every person I met at the store, or just around campus are just extremely nice and really good people."

Drinkall summed it up simply: "Angel's story is one of family, perseverance, and finding your place. And that's exactly what Homecoming is about — celebrating the community that makes this place special."

For Flores, that sense of belonging is clear. Whether he's on the field wearing No. 7 in tribute to his grandfather or off the field FaceTiming his younger brothers, Central Michigan is more than just a stop in his football journey. It's home.

As a little kid, I always had a deep perspective on how lucky I am and how blessed I am that God gave me this life here.

— Angel Flores  
CMU quarterback



# Spotlight: leaders on the field

By Sydney Neal  
Sports editor

When Central Michigan football jogs onto the field on Saturdays, the focus often turns to the quarterback — the player expected to be the leader, the organizer, the face of the offense. But in Mount Pleasant this season, that spotlight isn't shining on just one player.

Instead, it's been shared among a trio: Joe Labas, Angel Flores and Jadyn Glasser. Each has had moments under center, each has brought a different skill set to the huddle, and together they've formed a bond that has been as important as any touchdown drive.

"It's family in there," Flores said. "It doesn't feel like we're competing against each other. It feels like we're supporting each other, no matter who's on the field."

## Building bonds across states

When Labas, a transfer from Iowa, and Flores, a transfer from Northern Arizona, first connected in the quarterback room, it wasn't clear how the rotation would shake out. But before either started running plays together, they started trading stories.

"We've definitely talked about where we're from," Labas said with a laugh. "I'm obviously biased about the Midwest, and he's biased about the West. So that's been fun."

Flores agreed, saying sharing different perspectives made the transition to Mount Pleasant easier.

"It was really easy coming here because Joe had already been here," Flores said. "He's a great guy, just being able to welcome me and the new transfers. That made it all smooth."

Off the field, their friendship has turned meetings into more than just film study.

"For me, it's definitely joking around in the quarterback room," Labas said. "Not only Angel and I, but the rest of the guys, too. I think it's a great group of guys. Really funny guys, too. It just makes every day coming in a little bit easier."

Flores and Labas laughed when talking about the dynamic personalities in the quarterback room.

"Yeah, especially with Danny (Gomez). His high school mascot was a bull pup, so we call him 'pup' all the time. It's those little things that make the quarterback room so fun," he said.

## Learning from each other

Every quarterback brings something different to the table. For Labas and Flores, the key has been recognizing those differences — and learning from them.

"From the jump, I saw (Angel) was detail-oriented," Labas said. "His work ethic, I mean, everything about him, he checks every box. That really stuck out for me."

Flores has leaned on Labas for his experience in the Midwest.

"We were talking about different high schools from Ohio," Labas said. "In that area, Joe was teaching me that not too long ago, about different high schools and different places that produce really good athletes throughout that area. (I'm) not really familiar with the Midwest, being from the West Coast."

Even bigger than geography, though, has been the way they've leaned on each other away from football. Flores, far from home for the first time, said the relationships have been grounding.

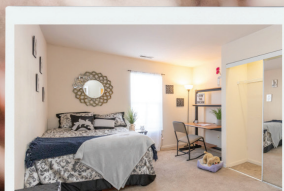
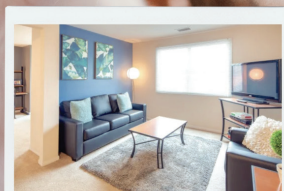
## The absent player

There's a name missing from the current rotation, and both Labas and Flores feel it. Before his injury,

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Glasser was right there with them, splitting snaps and competing for the job.

“(Jadyn’s) a dynamic quarterback,” Labas said. “He can throw the ball like crazy. He’s got a cannon for an arm, and he’s a big guy, too. You can put him in the run game, and he’ll get you those extra yards.”

“When stuff breaks down, he has a good sense of how to make stuff happen. He’s an unbelievable football player, but even more than that, he’s a great person,” Flores said.

Though Glasser’s season was cut short, his presence hasn’t left the locker room. The team still looks to him for energy at the games.

### A home away from home

Both said that being away from family has been easier thanks to the brotherhood inside the quarterback room.

“Just checking in on each other is huge,” Labas said. “Especially for a guy like Angel who’s far from home. I’m not from the state, but I’m still kind of close. ... So it’s a little bit easier for me.”

For Flores, support has been as important as learning the playbook.

“Just being away from home for one of the first times,” Flores explained. “These guys make it really easy on me. Just when I come to the facility and to practice ... all the worries or at school or whether it’s

like, I’m thinking of family problems or anything, everything goes away and I’m able to just to focus on football.”

That sense of family goes beyond the quarterbacks. Head coach Matt Drinkall and quarterbacks coach Jim Chapin have emphasized relationships, and players have bought in.

“The family aspect is definitely there,” Flores said. “And I want to say it’s been there since probably the first week I’ve been here. It’s just so easy, and I don’t think I’ve ever felt that in a quarterback room. So, it’s definitely brought us together.”

For both of these quarterbacks, Mount Pleasant has begun to feel like home. Their ideas reflected the same themes that have defined their journey so far: people, relationships and family.

“For me, it’s the relationships I’ve built,” Labas said. “It feels a lot like where I grew up, which is pretty cool. When I first went to Iowa, that was way different. Then coming back here in the Midwest, it’s just home away from home.”

“For me, home is the people around you,” Flores said. “It’s not necessarily the place you’re at, but the support you get around here. ... The staff, the players, they’re like family to me. The coaches are just great people. I’m inspired to be like them. They’re great mentors, and not only mentors, but great leaders. They inspire me to be a better me.”



Soli Gordon | Staff Photographer

CMU Redshirt senior quarterback Joe Labas, left, and junior quarterback Angel Flores, right, jump for a photo in Kelly/Shorts Stadium on Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2025.

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## HOMECOMING WORD SEARCH

Words can be found in any direction (including diagonals) and can overlap each other. Use the word bank below. SOURCE: [thewordsearch.com](http://thewordsearch.com)

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M | E | B | S | N | O | I | T | I | D | A | R | T | P |
| S | A | D | I | A | N | A | G | R | M | M | T | A | R |
| R | O | R | I | N | A | O | A | O | C | R | S | M | E |
| R | P | H | S | S | M | G | R | C | G | T | A | B | G |
| F | S | U | I | H | Y | U | S | K | U | A | W | A | A |
| P | O | O | E | S | A | A | L | R | I | I | E | S | M |
| A | A | O | R | R | T | L | W | A | R | L | P | S | E |
| R | L | N | T | O | I | O | S | L | K | G | P | A | F |
| A | B | O | Y | B | R | F | R | L | S | A | I | D | S |
| D | E | O | R | C | A | I | M | Y | W | T | H | O | P |
| E | B | R | R | S | A | L | T | T | A | E | C | R | I |
| P | A | A | R | E | A | G | L | Y | E | T | L | R | R |
| E | N | M | O | S | E | C | A | R | T | A | O | B | I |
| W | D | A | L | G | R | A | N | D | L | O | G | A | T |

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| 6v6 Volleyball | 10/15               | 10/22       |
| 7v7 Dodgeball  | 11/5                | 11/7        |
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|---------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| EA FC 2024 (Soccer) | 10/1                | 10/10       |
| Mario Kart          | 10/1                | 10/3        |
| NBA 2K 24           | 10/20               | 10/24       |
| NFL Madden          | 10/8                | 10/17       |
| Super Smash Bros    | 11/5                | 11/14       |

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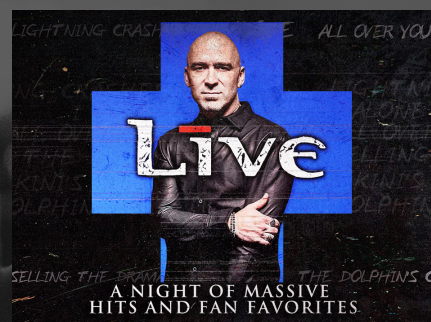


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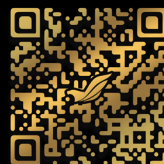
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