

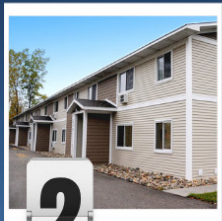


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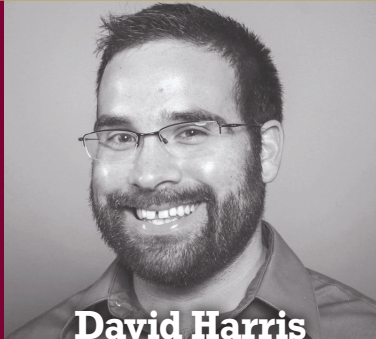
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A note from the editor-in-chief



By Masha Smahliuk-Bootz
Editor-in-chief

As this edition publishes in April, graduating seniors have about a month left in Central Michigan University's classrooms.

We're finishing up our final papers, preparing to present our capstone projects and ordering our caps and gowns. Soon, we're going to cross the stage at commencement and pick up our diplomas.

This chapter of our lives will be fully written.

I am graduating this May as well. My heart is filled with nostalgia, anticipation, but also excitement for the future.

But before I get emotional, dear reader, let me introduce the new edition of *Central Michigan Life* for the final time.

As many of us are getting ready to transition into the next chapter of our lives, similarly, this edition captures many stories about change around us and what the future holds.

Our sports editor presents to you a touching feature on linebacker Dakota Cochran as he prepares for the NFL draft.

Our news editor studied the salaries of CMU's

employees amid the coming budget cuts.

Throughout the paper, you will also find many infographics and photos by our talented artists.

And of course, don't forget to check out our social media videos for this edition.

The edition you're holding in your hands truly features the talents of the whole newsroom. It's been such an honor to work with every single CM Lifer, and I know that the paper will be in good hands next year.

It has also been such a privilege to write for you, readers. Thank you for reading.

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

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CMU prepares for the NFL draft

Fourteen players from CMU participated in Pro Day. CM Life's sports editor Sydney Neal breaks down who could enter the NFL.

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.

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On the cover: Photo taken by Jasmine Brookins

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Dakota Cochran Football Stats

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By his side

CMU linebacker leans on support from friends, family and his dog



Jasmine Brookins | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University senior linebacker Dakota Cochran stands with his dog Future at Kramer/Deromedi Field at Kelly/Shorts Stadium on Wednesday, March 25, 2026.

By Sydney Neal
Sports editor

For linebacker Dakota Cochran, his journey from Mount Pleasant to Central Michigan's football field has been anything but easy. Now, as he prepares for the NFL draft, every decision carries the weight of years of hard work, determination and the dream of taking his next step.

Growing up between the west side of Cleveland and Shaker Heights, Ohio, getting to school was never something he could take for granted, requiring two buses and two trains just to make it through the day.

There were times when school felt secondary to simply figuring things out, but the expectations at home never changed.

"I missed like 40 days one year," he said. "But my mom never made excuses. So, I never made excuses."

That mindset carried him long before football became serious to him. Cochran didn't grow up playing sports; he was just fast. Known around his neighborhood as "Sonic," his speed is what caught the attention of his first coach.

Even in high school, the idea of Division I football felt unrealistic when he was not starting consistently.

"I didn't start my senior year," he said. "I truly didn't

believe I was going Division I."

The belief had to come from somewhere else first, and when his coach told him he could be a Division I linebacker, Cochran didn't buy it right away.

"He said, 'I guarantee you are a DI linebacker,' and I was just saying, 'You're just talking,'" Cochran said. "Who knew he was right."

During his recruiting process, there was serious interest from Harvard University and Columbia University, two paths that could have completely changed his future. But one ACT point stood in the way of Harvard, and just like that, the direction shifted again.

In that moment, it left him stuck while sitting at home during the uncertainty of COVID-19, unsure of what came next or where football would take him.

Finding his footing

Then came Central Michigan, not as a perfect situation, but as something that felt right when he stepped into it.

"They showed the most love," Cochran said.

Cochran arrived early in 2021 after COVID-19 delayed the recruiting cycle, giving him extra time to learn the system, but also exposing the gap between where he was and where he needed to be.

"You're used to being the best player, but now

everybody was the best player,” he said. “Now you’re playing with grown men. It was eye opening.”

He showed up out of shape to practices, trying to catch up physically while also learning a new system, a new environment and a new level of expectation. For a while, it felt like everything was moving faster than he could keep up with.

Still, he stayed with it, working through the early struggles and slowly finding his footing. Just as things began to settle, everything changed again.

An injury in 2022.

“I was just getting in the flow, then I tore my MCL,” Cochran said. “It was like a restart button. I never got hurt in my life and that was a really a culture shock for me.”

It wasn’t just the injury itself, but everything that came with it — the isolation, the distance from home, the loss of routine and identity that football had always provided.

Four and a half hours away from his family, without a car and without the ability to fully connect the way he wanted to, Cochran found himself navigating a different kind of challenge.

“My mom can’t see me, I can’t see her. ... I didn’t even have a phone that was on at this point,” he said. “I was trapping off an iPod or an iPad and she had no iPhone.

“I’m down here alone. Everybody’s at practice, and I’m just here.”

Even getting home required effort, coordinating rides with teammates to Detroit and then taking Greyhound buses the rest of the way, piecing together whatever route he could find.

“Only a few people know that like my true roommates, my close friends, only they know the real struggles I’ve been through here,” he said.

A different support

Aside from his mom and close friends, one of his most notable supporters is his dog, Future.

“That was probably the lowest I’ve been in college,” Cochran said. “I’m at home all alone, ... everybody’s at practice, and I’m just down here lonely. Then I was like, ‘I should get a pet.’”

At first, he wasn’t even sure a dog was what he wanted. But when the opportunity came, he didn’t hesitate. He didn’t expect a dog to change much, but when Future arrived, something shifted.

“He was so small; I could just fit him in my arm,” he said. “Then from that day forward, it was bright days. I recommend anybody get a support animal ... a dog, a cat, anything that makes you happy.”

In a time when he felt isolated and disconnected, Future became a constant presence.

“You can always count on them,” Cochran said. “No matter what, they’ll always love you unconditionally.”

That consistency mattered. When teammates were at practice and his routine was gone, Future gave him something steady to come back to.

“You’re having a bad day, go upstairs, he’s energetic, and it’ll put a smile on your face,” he said. “You go in to sleep, they come lay on you. He’s basically another human



Jasmine Brookins | Staff photographer

Central Michigan University senior linebacker Dakota Cochran hugs his dog Future after an interview in his apartment, Mount Pleasant, Michigan on Wednesday, March 25, 2026.

being for me. Love him.”

Now, even as everything else begins to move forward, Future remains right there, part of the story in a way that goes beyond football.

Finding strength in loyalty

There were opportunities to leave CMU, especially as the program went through changes, as coaches moved on and teammates entered the transfer portal. Despite his love for his teammates who transferred, the decision for him came down to something simple.

“I’m a loyal person,” he said. “Loyalty runs deep.”

For him, it wasn’t just about football or opportunity; it was about the people he had gone through everything with.

“The number one thing that made me stay is the people around me,” he said. “If anything, we got each other. Forget the coaches, we got each other. We know each other.”

That choice to stay became part of his identity at Central, shaping not just how he played, but how he was seen.

Off the field, Cochran made a point to be present in the community, understanding early on that his impact didn’t have to be limited to football.

He spent time in schools, offered advice and showed up in ways that mattered, especially in a small town like Mount Pleasant.

“I tried to do everything I could to make my name outside of football,” he said.

Over time, that presence became part of his reputation,

with people recognizing him not just as a player, but as someone who was part of the community in a real way.

“It takes one second; it takes nothing to help someone,” Cochran said. “You never know what somebody’s going through.”

Into the future

Now, as he looks ahead to the next step, Cochran isn’t trying to predict what will come next. Instead, he leans on the same principles that carried him from Cleveland to Mount Pleasant.

“Proper preparation prevents poor performance,” he said.

Before everything changes, before football possibly takes him somewhere new, Cochran pauses to reflect on what has already been built, on the people and places that shaped him along the way.

“I love everyone and appreciate everyone who has done something for me,” he said. “Countless people, friends or not, strangers or not. Every coach, every single person had an impact on my life, whether you believe it or not.”

Now, as the NFL draft approaches, Cochran isn’t thinking about the finish line. He’s thinking about the next challenge.

No matter where the road leads, he’ll step forward knowing exactly who he is and what got him there.

“I just want to thank everyone for accepting me and just know I’m here for anyone,” he said about the Mount Pleasant community. “I love you all.”

NEWS

Top Highest-Paid Positions at CMU:

- Interim Dean for College of Medicine, \$633,450
- Central Michigan University President, \$500,000
- Head Football Coach, \$427,450
- Senior Associate Dean of Research, \$401,408
- Associate Dean of Clinical Education \$367,586
- Provost and Executive Vice President, \$360,500
- Vice President of Finance and Administrative Services and Chief Financial Officer, \$328,846
- Head Coach for men's basketball, \$319,300
- Associate Vice President and Director of Athletics, \$318,130
- Dean for the College of Business Administration, \$318,130

'We're to the marrow'



Trevor Sparks | Staff photographer

CMU President MacKinnon works at his desk in Warriner Hall early in the morning on Thursday, Oct. 23 2025.

By Grace Walker
News editor

Central Michigan University President Neil MacKinnon announced in March that the university will be planning to reduce the budget next year due to low enrollment. MacKinnon said this is after a significant decline in international student population and “rising operational costs” at the Academic Senate meeting on March 3.

“We held some hope that (international students) would receive their visas for January start, and as you know, only 40 did,” MacKinnon said at the meeting.

In September, MacKinnon said that he hoped the international student decrease was one semester glitch.

MacKinnon said every department leader will be looking at ways to reduce their budget.

“Senior leaders across the university, ... they’re working with their teams right now to review their strategic priorities, their pressing goals in the unit budgets in an effort to identify a potential cost saving measure,” MacKinnon said at an Academic Senate meeting on March 24.

“I also will note that this also includes Paula (the

provost) and I and our office,” he said.

President of the Faculty Association Amanda Garrison said after seven years of budget cuts, faculty do not have the resources to keep cutting programs and staff.

“There have been cuts forever to the point where, in this college (School of Politics, Society, Justice and Public Services), we are to the marrow,” Garrison said. “We’ve lost a great deal of trust, and it feels that our goals have not been aligned.”

CMU employees and the budget

The main source of the university’s income is from students. Tuition, room and board made up 61% of all revenue within this year’s budget. The compensations of all faculty and staff within the university make up around 58%, or \$179 million, of the total amount the university spends.

Cali Clark, director of employment and compensation, said enrollment affects the amount of money that’s available to pay employees, but each group of employees is affected in different ways.

“No matter how many students are here, we still have the same acreage to mow. We still have the different offices to support,” Clark said. “It’s more about how it impacts the

staff to reduce the staffing to meet our budget.”

Each department has its own budget and decides the number of employees and what kinds of employees it wants, Clark said. If the department is interested in creating job positions or hiring new employees, the department will then work with Employment Services to approve salaries and classifications.

Clark said employment services determine salaries based on an individual's education and experience, current union contracts and how other universities pay those positions. The university compares the salaries to those of other universities, including CMU's peer universities, those within the Mid-American Conference and those across the nation that have a similar budget range.

“When we make any decision, we look to CMU's guiding principles: our mission, our vision, and our values, as well as our strategic plan,” MacKinnon wrote in an email to *Central Michigan Life*. “Making decisions about staffing is no different. When we make those choices, we look to our mission that calls on us to ensure the success of our students and our graduates, and the work we do in communities locally and around the state.”

The average salary of all employees on campus is \$77,800, according to the most recent salary list for the 2025-26 fiscal year.

Within the salary list, there are 12 different employee groups on campus. Here are the averages of the different employee groups on campus:

- Administrative office assistants, \$39,094
- Dispatchers, \$55,907
- Faculty, \$93,522

- Maintenance and service, \$44,260
- Medical faculty, \$152,829
- Police, \$73,613
- Police lieutenants and sergeants, \$90,306
- Postdoctoral research fellows, \$54,648
- Professional and administrative, \$71,693
- Public broadcasting, \$55,515
- Senior administrative, \$244,060
- Supervisory and technical, \$47,010

Faculty and the University

The salary list shows there are 762 faculty members on campus, including 32 medical faculty. Scott Hoffman, executive director of faculty and personnel service, said faculty do not tend to be affected by enrollment as much as other groups on campus.

“Our turnover numbers have ebbed and flowed for all our various employee groups, but faculty are not generally more beholden to enrollment impacts than our staff employees,” Hoffman said.

Despite this, Hoffman said fixed-term faculty, or faculty hired on for a limited period of time, can experience more layoffs than tenure-track faculty, or faculty with more permanent positions.

“However, that doesn't necessarily mean they're going to experience enrollment challenges, any more directly or severely than some other staff employees might,” Hoffman said.

Garrison said in the past budget cuts, programs, classes and staff have been more affected than faculty.

“We have fewer custodians,” Garrison said. “We are now being asked to do (custodians) jobs. ... We are not supposed to be doing other unions' work.”

There are 68 custodians on campus, according to the salary list. In October, CM Life reported that there was a 25% decrease in the number of custodians on campus since 2017, with one of the factors being declining enrollment.

Resources, programs and classes have also been cut, Garrison said. If there are not enough students for certain classes, she said, departments will make a decision on whether to keep those classes.

Looking at the future

MacKinnon said in an emailed statement that university will be working with department and division leaders to discuss their budget. These decisions will be announced towards the end of April.

“We've made the decision as an institution not to address our budget through 'across the board cuts,' because we know those are rarely an effective strategy,” MacKinnon wrote. “Instead we're engaging all department and division leaders, administrators and others in this deliberative process. And that takes time, collaboration and a lot of difficult conversations and decision-making.”

Garrison said she believes MacKinnon's approach to budget reductions is positive.

“I'm hopeful that this is not gonna be something that is as painful as the past has been,” she said. “The targeted cuts are intended to make it less painful, and to continue operations in a growing way. He's also continuing to invest.”

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Breaking down the President's Office budget

By Masha Smahliuk-Bootz
Editor-in-chief

The President's Office at Central Michigan University accounts for 0.3% of all expenditures on campus. Its budget is \$1.2 million, according to the 2025-26 operating budget.

Erica Peters, the President's chief of staff, said she and Amy Turley, administrative coordinator, are responsible for managing the President's Office budget.

"At the start of each fiscal year, we receive our allocation in terms of our base budget and then manage that responsibly over the course of the year, and so just being really diligent stewards of our resources and making sure the President is aware of any ... anomalous expenses that come up," Peters said.

The President's Office expenses cover six staff salaries, benefits, supplies and equipment. President Neil MacKinnon's salary is \$500,000, according to the 2025 salary list.

In comparison:

- Western Michigan University's Office of the President budget is about \$1.8 million, said Paula Davis, WMU's spokesperson. WMU's president's

salary is \$525,000, according to WMU News.

- Ferris State University's president's salary is \$450,000, according to its budget report. The President's general fund discretionary budget (doesn't include staff salaries) is about \$200,000.
- At Eastern Michigan University, the President's Office's expenditures are \$1.8 million. The President's salary is about \$482,700.

When it comes to revenue, CMU's President's Office doesn't have a traditional revenue-generating function, said Joe Garrison, the university budget officer.

Presidents can fundraise, but donors' funds aren't included in the general fund budget because they are marked for specific purposes, Garrison said.

This way, the office receives part of its revenue from tuition and part from state funding. That's because the university has a hybrid budget model, which means if some areas of the university don't generate revenue, they are funded internally, Garrison said.

"We have some areas that are part of our infrastructure," he said. "Everybody needs to utilize those. ... Everybody benefits from the snow being plowed. Everybody benefits from being able to use the network."

In addition, CMU's Operating Budget reflects

the President's Division revenue and expenses. The President's Office is a small component of the overall division budget, Garrison said.

Some other offices in the division are: Office of Information Technology, Office of Civil Rights and Institutional Equity, Office of General Counsel, Legal Services, University Transformation Office, Office of HIPAA Compliance and University Communications.

Garrison said these divisions are a part of the president's division because they shouldn't function elsewhere.

"The Office of Civil Rights and Institutional Equity, HIPAA privacy and internal audit, those three areas, they have a responsibility to the entire institution," Peters said. "It would be challenging to embed them one layer down in a separate division. They may lose some of their ... independence."

However, organizational structures can change over time, Garrison said. For example, former President Robert Davies moved the Office of Information Technology under the President's Division, and current President MacKinnon created the University Transformation Office.

In total, the division's revenue is about \$1.2 million, and expenses are \$32.8 million.

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Combating enrollment decline

By Ethan Wallace
Staff reporter

Central Michigan University's enrollment has dropped by over 10,000 students in the last 10 years. This drop has brought enrollment to nearly the same level as it was in 1970, when CMU had 14,112 students.

Jennifer DeHaemers, vice president of student recruitment and retention at CMU, said enrollment fell because of causes like competition, slow changes to modernize online learning, demographic changes and a devaluation of education.

The university reached its highest enrollment ever in 2015 with 25,528 students. At the end of 2025, it reached 14,171, according to CMU enrollment reports.

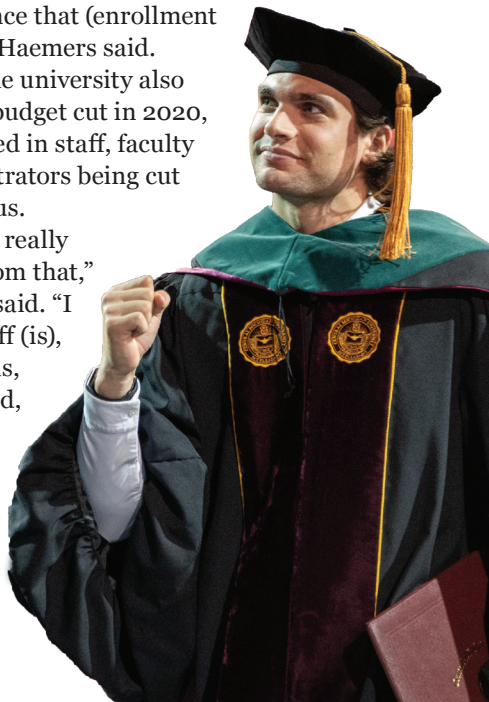
Central, along with others in Michigan, grew complacent from having high enrollment numbers, DeHaemers said. When enrollment started to drop, the university expected to recover in the following years, but numbers continued to decline.

The Michigan Association of State Universities coordinates 15 Michigan universities. Its data shows that 12 of the universities, including CMU, declined in enrollment and 35,080 students in the last decade.

"I think what happened is that certainly the people that were leading enrollment effort were not putting the right things in place to counterbalance that (enrollment decline)," DeHaemers said.

She said the university also faced a 15% budget cut in 2020, which resulted in staff, faculty and administrators being cut across campus.

"We've not really recovered from that," DeHaemers said. "I think the staff (is), in many areas, very stretched, very thin."



Marie Underwood | Staff photographer

CMU graduates walk down the aisle after receiving their doctoral hoods during CMU's College of Medicine commencement ceremony, Friday, May 3, in McQuirk Arena.

The budget cut happened largely because of both the COVID-19 pandemic and enrollment decline, Joseph Garrison, CMU Budget Officer, said.

The university has been trying to modernize itself, such as updating the university's online program, Innovation Online, to combat enrollment decline, DeHaemers said.

Garrison said CMU has had the infrastructure for its online program to help with its growth.

He said the university had been working on its online program for many years, especially during the decline in enrollment during the 2010s, but the pandemic helped the university see how viable it was.

"We are looking to offer more programs online with a persistent intention to grow, in the neighborhood of 5% to 10% annually for the next five years," Patrick said.

To get an idea of this, there are currently 3,383 students in IO, according to enrollment reports. An increase of at least 5% would mean that CMU should have around 4,300 students (nearly a 1,000 student increase) in five years.

CMU has always had a long-distance/online program, but has fallen behind and faced competition, DeHaemers said.

The university's long-distance learning originated through learning packets being mailed during the '70s, but has changed with the development of technology to reach everyone, said Kaleb Patrick, vice president of IO. The university also used to have in-person classes at military bases. Now it only has one at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

"(Other universities) moved very quickly into online. They hadn't done very much long-distance where it was slower for us to modernize," DeHaemers. "Making that transition was a little slow, so that hurt with the enrollments as well when we lost personnel in the Global Campus."

DeHaemers said society has also changed since the '70s, where CMU's targeted demographic and the public's value of a higher education have both changed. She also said that there are fewer high school graduates going to college.

"Over the last probably 15 or 20 years, there's been a really hard devaluing of education in the United States," DeHaemers said. "A lot of people (are) questioning, is it worth it?"

In a survey conducted by Pew Research Center, about 49% (2,549) of Americans say that a four-year college degree is less important to getting a well-paying job compared to 20 years ago.

By having CMU expand its online program, it can reach a larger demographic for enrollment.

Alongside CMU's online program, the university has a Strategic Enrollment Management plan.

It consists of 33 strategies that aim to combat enrollment decline. For example, the university is the first in Michigan to promise students a job or graduate program within six months as part of the Central Career Guarantee initiative.

In addition, universities across the U.S. are competing for international students.

Garrison said he has seen international students who have gotten their visas go to other universities, like Michigan State University (MSU).

MSU faced only a slight decline in international students from 4,768 to 4,589 in the fall of 2025, reported by The State News. Comparably, CMU experienced a larger enrollment decline from 1,659 to 1,204 in 2025.

DeHaemers and Garrison also said no university has been doing well with international students and has contributed to the enrollment decline. However, online learning has given a few international students the ability to attend classes.

The university doesn't want to leave international students out, even though visas are difficult to get, and some students have gone through online, but understand why others chose not to, DeHaemers said.



Marie Underwood | Staff photographer

A graduate smiles during the fall commencement ceremony, Saturday, December 16, in McQuirk Arena.

Union for CMU Maintenance shares concerns over university budget

By **Blace Carpenter and Ethan Wallace**
Managing editor & Staff writer

The Fraternal Order of Police Labor Council, which oversees custodial, facilities and trade employees at Central Michigan University, expressed concerns about the university's budget in a press release earlier in March.

Despite concerns about CMU's recent decline in enrollment, the Director of Labor Services for the FOP Labor Council, David Willis, wrote in a press release that the union is "optimistic" as it moves into union negotiations with the university.

Currently, custodial members earn between \$15 and \$17 per hour, depending on their shift.

"The Fraternal Order of Police Labor Council is proud to represent the dedicated members of the Facilities Management Staff Association—custodians, landscape maintenance workers, floor care specialists and skilled trades, including journeyman carpenters, masons and

painters," wrote Willis.

"These professionals work long, often irregular hours to ensure Central Michigan University remains a safe, clean, and welcoming environment for students, faculty, staff, and visitors."

In the press release, Willis stated he believes that CMU is facing critical staffing challenges.

"Custodial staff are critical to university operations," Willis stated. "They foster a safe, hygienic and welcoming environment that directly impacts student success, health and the university's reputation. Yet they remain among the most underappreciated employees in the campus hierarchy."

In a statement to *Central Michigan Life*, CMU said it is hoping to find a deal that works for both parties.

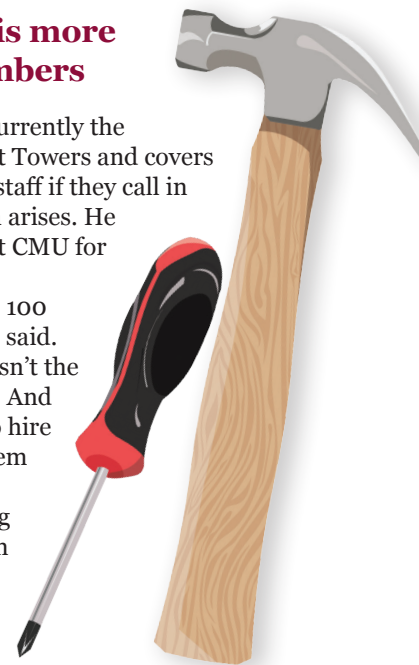
"As we prepare to enter good-faith bargaining with our union colleagues, we look forward to engaging in productive dialogue and reaching a mutually agreeable outcome," CMU's spokesperson Ari Harris wrote in a statement.

Low staffing is more than just numbers

Rollie Brown is currently the custodial steward at Towers and covers for other custodial staff if they call in sick or if a situation arises. He has been working at CMU for 11 years.

"We used to have 100 custodians," Brown said. "With our wage, it isn't the best—we're behind. And so it's really hard to hire people and keep them here."

He said, including him, there are seven custodians who clean the Towers and around 60



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who clean the campus.

“We just want a fair market value wage for all our departments on this campus, not just custodial, but custodial is really behind in their pay compared to other universities,” Brown said.

Sunday through Thursday, starting at 4 a.m., Brown cleans the lobby, some of the classrooms, the fitness center and more. While Brown’s shift ends at 12:30 p.m., the shortage of staff causes custodians to frequently work overtime for events.

Brown said if people don’t sign up for events, they get mandated. He said sometimes they need around 50 custodial staff members for events, and there are just over 60 available.

Since there are just enough people to cover the events, he often works on Friday and Saturday for the mandated overtime, which are his days off.

It has been hard hiring new people, Brown said. Many people don’t want to get paid the current wages, or the benefits aren’t as important to younger people.

Brown said he is currently staying because of the benefits, such as health insurance and tuition benefits for his children.

He said there also used to be communication meetings every six months with the old management, but there hasn’t been one since around 2020.

These communication meetings allowed the custodians to express their needs and input on their jobs, such as shift changes.

“They (upper management) don’t worry about what the

students want or what we want, which they don’t have to, because they run our department,” Brown said.

He said that the reason why the custodial staff, faculty and upper management are at CMU is because of the students.

Brown said the custodians are doing their best with being short-staffed. He said students should tell upper management if they are frustrated, and faculty should speak up for them.

“We just want to be heard and listened to,” Brown said.

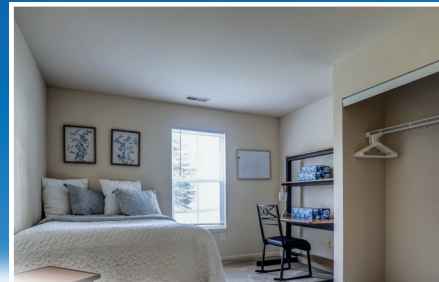
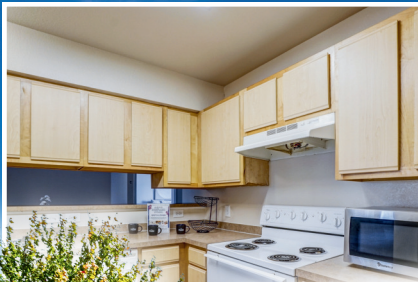


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Claire Vachon | Staff Photographer

A cow inside of Josh Neyer's cow farm in Mount Pleasant, Michigan peaks its head through a fence and looks at the camera on March 23, 2026.

High costs, hard choices



Claire Vachon | Staff Photographer

A cow inside of Josh Neyer's cow farm in Mount Pleasant, Michigan pokes its head through a fence and looks at the camera on March 23, 2026.

By Elizabeth Sadecki
Staff reporter

As Mount Pleasant farmers prepare to plant their spring crops, they face some of the highest input costs seen throughout their careers. One of these farmers is David Zeien, owner of Zeien Farms Inc.

"My dad always said it's a seven-year cycle. There'll be seven good years followed by seven bad years," Zeien said. "But sometimes I don't believe the seven good years ever stay long. Feels like the bad years are outnumbering them once in a while."

Weather permitting, Zeien will join local farmers in late April to early May to plant corn and soybeans on his 1,200 acres of land. He said his input costs are skyrocketing, especially since the war in Iran. Specifically, the cost of fertilizer.

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, the Middle East's role in globally exporting fertilizer contributes to the spike in its cost. Zeien said if he can't buy enough fertilizer to plant corn, he'll need to switch to a crop that requires less.

"I can't think of anything that's less expensive today than it has been in the past. Nothing," owner of McDonald Farms Mark McDonald said. "All of those costs are higher, and some of them exponentially higher."

During the spring, McDonald will work 12- to 14-hour days to plant crops on his 9,500 acres of land. In his 46-year career, today's costs are the highest he's ever seen. He said his biggest expenses are seed, fertilizer and herbicide.

"In some years, you have really good luck," McDonald said. "In other years, it's a struggle."

Until it's time to plant for spring, McDonald and Zeien will prepare by calibrating and adjusting their equipment for efficiency. They've also noticed an increase in the cost of fuel.

"There isn't a pricing problem for farmers nowadays," owner of Neyer Farms Inc. and Custom Harvesting Josh Neyer said. "It's more of a cost problem."

This year, Neyer will plant corn and possibly hay to feed the cattle he raises. He said since the cost to grow corn increased more than the price it's sold for, profits this year will be a lot tighter for most farmers.

"You don't want to work all year long to actually lose money or break even," Zeien said. "There's hopefully going to be a little profit there."

Adam Gallaher, an assistant professor in the Geography and Environmental Studies department, said it's more expensive for a farmer to farm the same acreage of land today compared to 10 years ago.

Neyer said from start to finish, it costs about \$800 to

farm one acre of corn.

“Things are probably tighter than they’ve ever been right now,” Neyer said. “The only way anybody can survive still doing it is you have to be really, really good at what you do, extremely efficient or you have to be extremely diverse and have kind of a niche market that not everyone else does.”

In addition to his baseline farming expenses, Neyer also put in a \$70,000 water storage runoff pit to reduce contamination in the Chippewa River from their site. The Nature Conservancy helped him fund its installation this year.

First-generation farmer and owner of Mid Mitten Sustainable Farm LLC, Todd Geurink, said that because of their expenses, farmers often need to cut back and live a

simpler lifestyle than in other careers. With smaller profits and larger amounts of time and cost put in, he said, it can be difficult for farmers to stick with it.

“It’s pretty much all or nothing, and you have to continue forward if you want to stay in farming or stop,” McDonald said.

Gallaher said that in the last 30 years, a lot of small family farms have started disappearing. Because of increasing costs or no lineage to take over ownership, farmers end up selling or leasing their land out to other farmers, he said. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, the number of farm operations has decreased by 7%.

For generational farmers like Zeien and Neyer, farming is in their blood.

“You just take a lot of pride knowing that you’re your own boss and that you can basically control your destiny a bit,” Zeien said. “It also comes with a little bit of hard work, but then there’s times where you don’t have to work quite so hard, and you can enjoy life a little bit too.”

McDonald continues to farm for legacy and hopes that the future will be brighter. He said that for him, farming is a way of life.

“It just takes a couple good days to really remember why you do it,” Neyer said.



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From Iran to gas prices

By Ava Harmon
Staff reporter

In the current world of international war with Iran, there are various aspects that trickle down to the lives of college students.

The cost of energy and oil has hiked since the start of the airstrike, and around 20% of oil and liquefied natural gas is transported from the Strait of Hormuz.

“It’s very clear that this is going to affect the global economy, and you can see how it affects us,” said David Jesuit, Central Michigan University faculty member in the College of Politics, Society, Justice and Public Service. “I mean, fill up your car with gasoline.”

The current gas average in Michigan is \$3.94 as of March 30, according to American Automatic Association. The state average is one dollar higher than it was at this time last year.

Jesuit said the war affects more than just filling up gas in your car. It affects all forms of transportation and the cost of groceries due to trucks delivering their stocks.

“We’ve already been struggling in this country with inflation, and this is contributing, this is inflationary,” he said.

Asia is experiencing similar gas prices due to the disruption of oil in the Strait of Hormuz.

The stock market is facing massive impacts across the map, as many economies rely on imported energy, according to U.S. Bank data.

Fidelity said the S&P 500 is a stock market index that tracks the stock performance of 500 of the largest publicly traded companies in the U.S.

It fell about 7% below its prior peak before stabilizing, while developed and emerging international stock indexes declined roughly 8% to 12%, U.S. Bank said in a post, with U.S. Bank Asset Management Group Research cited.

Jesuit said people aren’t willing to make investments, and it results in the stock market declining. He said it could turn to stagflation, which means the markets are in recession at the same time as it’s experiencing inflation.

Stagflation occurred in the 1970s, worldwide, according to Tufts Now.

Resources are also being diverted due to the conflict in Ukraine, which began in 2014, with Russia launching a full-scale invasion in 2022.

“You’ve seen sanctions on Russian oil that were just lifted that added some inflationary pressures on oil already,” Jesuit said. “So, the conflict there is also driving, I think, concerns or adding to concerns that people have about economic security moving forward.”

The Pentagon is currently considering diverting Ukraine military aid to the Middle East, the Washington Post reported.

The United States is sending about \$127 billion in aid to support Ukraine,

according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

The biggest parallel between the current conflicts and World War I is the unanticipated conflicts, Jesuit said. “Nobody wanted to start the First World War, but the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand was seen as lighting the tinderbox, unanticipated calling,” Jesuit said. “Leading others to other alliances to get involved, and I mean, they stumbled into the First World War.”

At the end of WWI, gas prices were \$0.25, but adjusted for inflation in January 2020 dollars, it equates to \$4.27.

Jesuit said the cliché is that it’s much easier to win a war than win the peace.

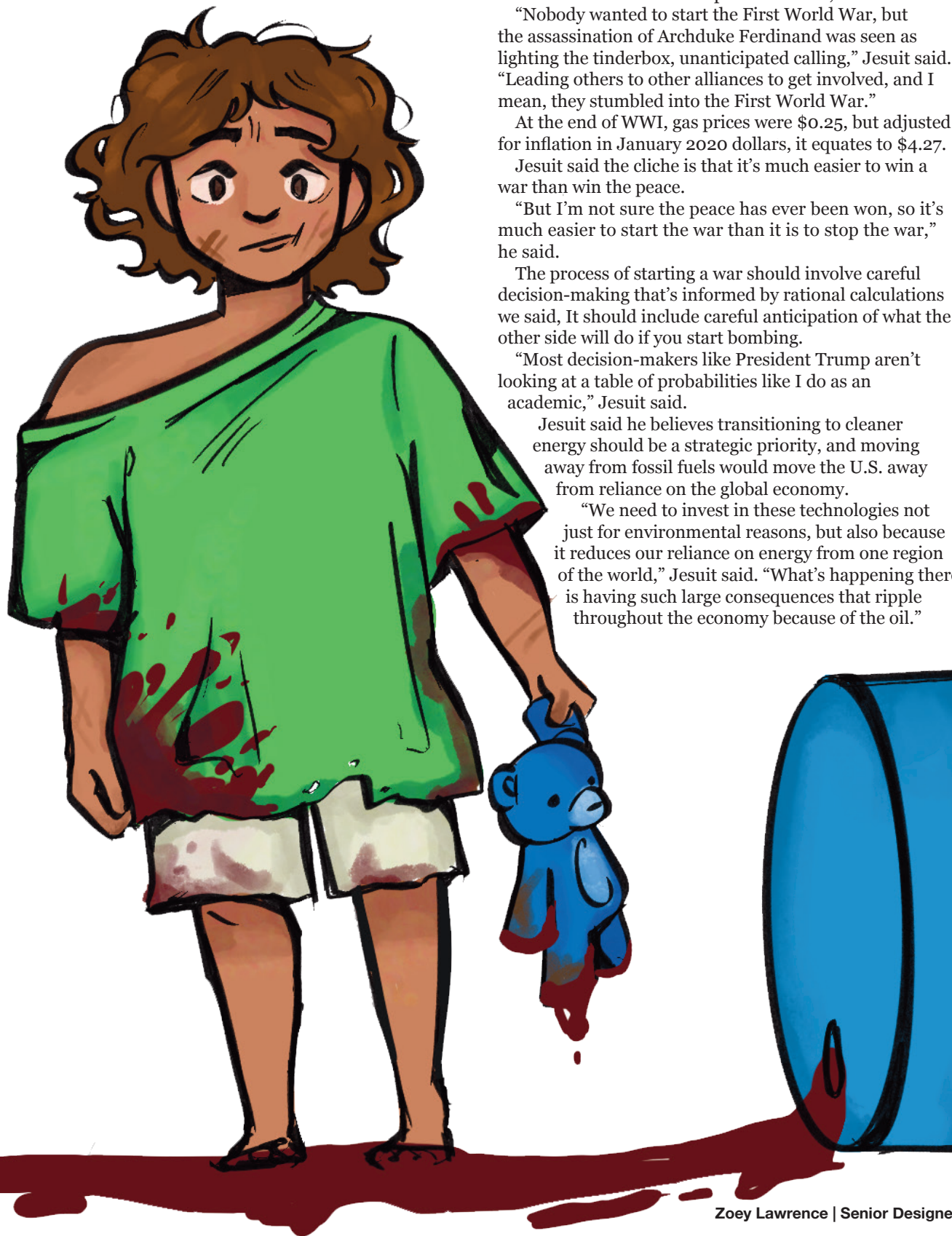
“But I’m not sure the peace has ever been won, so it’s much easier to start the war than it is to stop the war,” he said.

The process of starting a war should involve careful decision-making that’s informed by rational calculations we said, It should include careful anticipation of what the other side will do if you start bombing.

“Most decision-makers like President Trump aren’t looking at a table of probabilities like I do as an academic,” Jesuit said.

Jesuit said he believes transitioning to cleaner energy should be a strategic priority, and moving away from fossil fuels would move the U.S. away from reliance on the global economy.

“We need to invest in these technologies not just for environmental reasons, but also because it reduces our reliance on energy from one region of the world,” Jesuit said. “What’s happening there is having such large consequences that ripple throughout the economy because of the oil.”



Belian: World Cup Predictions

By Bar Belian
Staff reporter

Every four years, the whole world stops to watch the greatest athletes from the greatest game compete for the FIFA World Cup. No matter where they were or what country they supported, five billion people engaged with the last World Cup, according to FIFA's website.

However, in the middle of Michigan, there aren't a whole lot of options for experiencing professional soccer.

In fact, from Mount Pleasant, it would take just over 300 miles and five hours of driving to see any player who may be selected for the USA men's World Cup spot. With that, those who want to cheer for their team should have a quick study guide on their players and their competition.

The competition

This tournament is the first to include 48 nations, an increase of 16 since the last World Cup. This also means there will be a round of 32 for the first time in World Cup history.

The teams are divided into 12 groups of four. The top two teams automatically qualify for the knockout stages, while eight of the 12 third-placed teams will also qualify.

The home teams

For the first time since 2002, and the second time ever, there are multiple host countries for the upcoming World Cup. The hosts are Canada, Mexico and the USA.

The Americans are led by AC Milan attacker Christian Pulisic. Pulisic, who was briefly a Michigander, is by far the most decorated player on the team, having won the UEFA Champions League with Chelsea in 2021, one of the most desirable team trophies in soccer.

Other USA players to keep an eye on are Fulham defender Antonee Robinson, Juventus midfielder Weston McKennie and Bayer Leverkusen midfielder Malik Tillman.

The USA is placed in Group D, with Australia, Paraguay and Turkey, who defeated Kosovo on March 31 to qualify.

Although the Americans are the favorites based on the FIFA rankings, both Turkey and Australia remain major threats to winning the group.

Turkey, which reached the Euro quarterfinals in 2024, will rely on the skills of youngsters Arda Guler and Kenan Yildiz at this tournament.

Australia, also known as the Socceroos, advanced from its group at the last World Cup.

Canada and Mexico are both looking to bounce back from a couple of lackluster intercontinental tournaments.

During the last World Cup in 2022, neither team advanced past the group stage, with Canada losing all three games. Although Canada looked better in the 2024 Copa America, losing the bronze-final game, Mexico was left in the group stages once again.

For the Canadians, Juventus striker Jonathan David,

Celtic fullback Alistair Johnston, Villarreal winger Tajon Buchanan and Bayern Munich defender Alphonso Davies will have to be their key contributors for success.

Unlike many of the other big national teams, the Mexico team is built mostly of players from its nation's league, Liga MX. The Mexican team is led by Fenerbache's defending midfielder Edson Álvarez and Cruz Azul's defending midfielder Érik Lira.



The favorites

The two nations with the best anecdotal odds are Spain, which won the 2024 Euros, and Argentina, which won the last World Cup and Copa America.

Some other heavy-hitters are France, Brazil and Germany, who are perennial contenders and have won the World Cup in the past 25 years.

The underdogs

Just like Morocco in 2022, many nations can make a surprise run for the trophy.

Senegal, which just had its 2026 Africa Cup of Nations trophy stripped away, may have a new fire lit under the team, with national superstar Sadio Mane trying to win one more trophy before his career ends.

Japan is also another team to watch out for. As a Japanese-American myself, it is hard not to have some bias for this team. However, as long as I have been watching this team, it has only missed the knockout rounds once. At the last World Cup, it topped a group that included Germany and Spain.

I have, however, been duped by this team.

In 2018, I was a 12-year-old kid watching the first-round matchup between Japan and Belgium.

After a scoreless first half, the Japan team scored two goals in five minutes, giving my pre-teen self an injection of enthusiasm and belief. However, after 20 minutes, the Belgians leveled the score with its own two goals in five minutes.

Yet, being the naive child I was, I had hope. Being minutes away from the end of regulation, Japan had a corner. However, the corner kick was immediately caught by goalkeeper Thibault Courtois, a man who has haunted my dreams and was the catalyst for the counter-attack.

The Japanese team was evenly matched in numbers, but the Belgians advanced further up the field, and I grew more fearful until they had gotten into Japan's penalty box. The ball was heading toward Belgium's star striker Romelu Lukaku.

Yet behind him came Nacer Chadli, who was playing in his last World Cup.

Chadli struck the ball, hit the net, and sent adolescent me through all the stages of grief, besides acceptance.

Belian's pick

I do not have clear favorites, but after looking at every matchup and seeing the roadmap to the final, Brazil beating Spain makes the most sense.

In the third-place game, Colombia will upset France, with my predicted golden boot, Luis Diaz, leading the squad.

The World Cup starts on June 11, with Mexico playing against South Africa in Mexico City.

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Gymnastics

- **NCAA Regionals**
April 2-5
- **vs. Rutgers @ Away**
April 2 at 2 p.m.
- **vs. Kentucky, Oklahoma and Ohio State @ Away**
April 3 at 7 p.m.

Lacrosse

- **vs. Eastern Michigan @ Away**
April 4 at 1 p.m.

All eyes on them

By Sydney Neal
Sports editor

The excitement is loud and undeniable for the 14 football players who participated in Pro Day on March 18. But underneath the surface at Central Michigan University football's indoor facility, there's something quieter unfolding—months of preparation, uncertainty and personal growth, all compressed into one day in front of NFL scouts.

For defensive back Elijah Rikard, that moment is built on routine.

"For the past three months, I've really just been training ... speed stuff, strength stuff ... working on flexibility, mobility," Rikard said. "Just coming out here trying to put on the best performance I can."

The work started long before Pro Day. After the season ended, the

structure of weekly games and practices disappeared, replaced by his own self-discipline.

"Just trying to be consistent with it, doing the same thing every day," he said. "Not getting too high, not getting too low... just keeping the base consistent."

That consistency is what Rikard believes separates him from others. Not just in performance, but also in mindset.

The weight of the unknown

While Pro Day offers a chance to perform, it doesn't provide answers. For players like Rikard, the hardest part isn't the training, it's the waiting.

"The unknown," he said. "You don't really know what's gonna happen ... so just staying open to it."

That uncertainty is shared across the locker room.

For linebacker Dakota Cochran, the pre-draft process has tested both his physical and mental limits.

"It's been difficult ... a difficult, fun road," Cochran said. "We go through adversity, plateau at some points, but reach a peak."

Cochran's preparation has been complicated by a torn meniscus, an injury that forced him to adapt rather than follow a traditional training plan.

"I had to find out what I can and can't do ... and make ways around some of the things I have to do," he said. "Just so I can come out here and show myself off."

Despite the setback, Cochran chose to participate in as many drills as possible on Pro Day.

"I make no excuses, and I came out here and did it," he said.

Quarterback Joe Labas echoed uncertainty from a different perspective.

"It's pretty much what it is. It's just unknown, and that can be scary," Labas said. "You just don't know what's gonna happen. Sometimes you worry about what's gonna happen in the future."

For Labas, the transition is especially significant. After a lifetime of structured seasons and clear roles, the draft process introduces something new.

"I've been playing sports my whole entire life... I've never had an actual job. This is getting real right now," he laughed.

Proving value

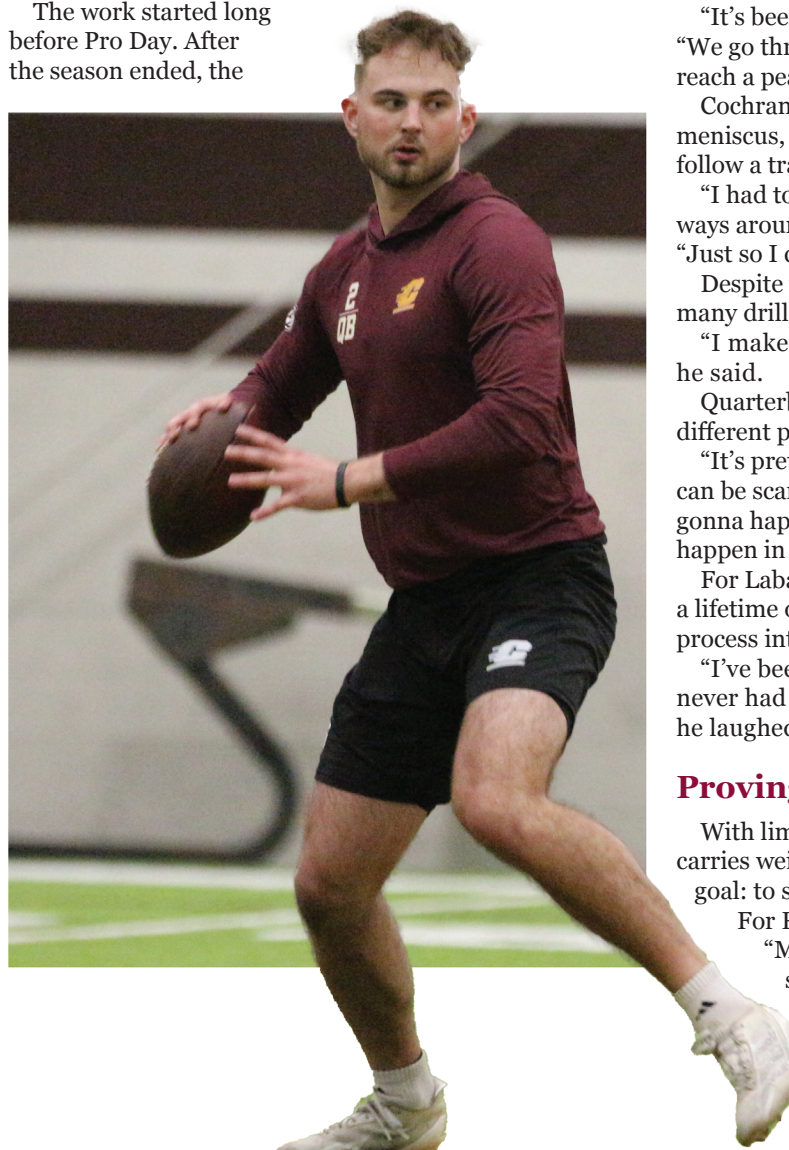
With limited opportunities to impress scouts, every drill carries weight. Each player enters Pro Day with a specific goal: to show what makes them different.

For Rikard, it comes back to effort and self-belief.

"My work ethic... my confidence in myself," he said. "Every time I go out there... I'm trying to get a little better each time."

Sydney Neal | Sports editor

Senior quarterback Joe Labas throws to teammate during NFL Pro Day at the Indoor Athletic Complex on Wednesday, March 18, 2026.





Sydney Neal | Sports editor

Redshirt senior defensive back Elijah Rikard stands on the turf for NFL Pro Day at the Indoor Athletic Complex on Wednesday, March 18, 2026.

Cochran highlights versatility and football IQ.

"I'm a very smart player. ... I can simplify stuff. ... I'm very versatile," he said. "I play special teams. ... I can play multiple positions."

Labas points to experience and adaptability at quarterback.

"I have a lot of knowledge ... playing time ... and I'm a dual threat," he said.

Different positions, different skill sets, but the same objective: stand out in a crowded field.

More than football

As the drills conclude and conversations with scouts begin, the focus shifts from performance to possibility. For many players, the dream of reaching the NFL started long before college.

For Rikard, that dream is deeply personal.

"It means everything," he said when asked what hearing his name called would mean. "It's every kid's dream."

That dream is supported by his family, who have attended every game since his freshman year.

"It gives me the motivation every time I come out here ... knowing I'm doing it for something bigger than just myself," he said.

For Labas, the moment would represent more than individual achievement.

"It would be a dream come true ... not only for me, but

my family and my friends," he said.

Regardless of where they each land, each player leaves CMU with more than just football experience.

"I appreciate everything ... the ups and downs ... the winning seasons, the losing seasons," Rikard said. "I learned a lot of lessons from it."

Cochran hopes to carry that experience forward by giving back.

"My line is always open ... I love helping out and mentoring," he said.

Labas reflected on the support that defined his time in Mount Pleasant.

"Just having people behind your back ... through struggles, through adversity ... it means a lot," he said.

Waiting for what's next

As Pro Day ends, the spotlight fades. The measurable results are sent off to teams, and conversations continue behind closed doors.

For the players, there's little left to do but wait. But for Rikard, the mindset remains unchanged.

"Just my work ethic ... how hard I'm gonna go out and compete every day," he said. "No matter what."

While the NFL Draft may determine the next step, it doesn't define the journey that got them there.

That journey is already complete.

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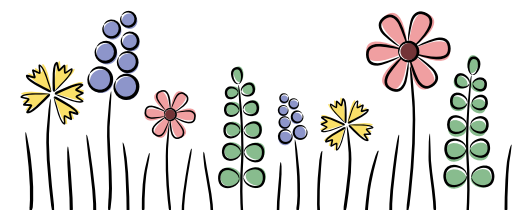
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L	I	D	O	F	F	A	D	U	L	R	C	R	R
C	B	L	O	S	S	O	M	N	F	G	H	M	E
I	T	E	E	C	O	P	S	S	R	A	A	O	E
N	R	U	N	L	D	O	N	H	E	R	P	O	Z
C	N	T	L	B	I	L	I	I	T	D	R	L	E
I	I	U	O	I	C	L	R	N	T	E	I	B	Y
P	S	O	N	G	P	E	A	E	U	N	L	N	N
S	O	R	T	R	H	N	I	N	B	A	N	H	L
T	P	P	S	S	P	L	N	D	C	U	Z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

RAIN
SPROUT
BLOOM
BUTTERFLY
FRESH

EASTER
GARDEN
RENEWAL
PICNIC
TULIP

APRIL
BREEZE
BUNNY
SUNSHINE
NEST

BLOSSOM
POLLEN
DAFFODIL
CHICK
MEADOW



GOLD ROUTE

SAC/Indian Trails	:13	:43	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Stadium Mall			UPON REQUEST
TJMaxx			UPON REQUEST
Walmart			UPON REQUEST
Copper Beech	:26	:56	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
The Reserve	:28	:58	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Jamestown Apts.	:30	:00	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Broomfield Mall			UPON REQUEST
Music Building Lot #33	:42	:12	EVERY 1/2 HOUR

MAROON ROUTE

Village@Bluegrass	:21	:51	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
University Meadows	:25	:55	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Union Square	:29	:59	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Target			UPON REQUEST
Music Building Lot #33	:42	:12	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Washington/Ojibway	:44	:14	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Anspach/Pearce	:45	:15	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Ronan/Grawn	:47	:17	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Main St./Gaylord	:48	:18	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
MMC/Doan Center			UPON REQUEST
Washington/Clayton	:05	:35	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Larzalere	:06	:36	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Wightman	:07	:37	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Park Library	:08	:38	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Music Building Lot #33	:12	:42	EVERY 1/2 HOUR

DEERFIELD

Towers	:15	:45	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Deming/Edgewood	:16	:46	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Westpoint Village	:18	:48	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Lexington Ridge	:25	:55	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Theunissen Lot#70	:27	:57	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Commuter Lot #75	:29	:59	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
SAC/Indian Trails	:30	:00	EVERY 1/2 HOUR
Music Building Lot #33	:42	:12	EVERY 1/2 HOUR



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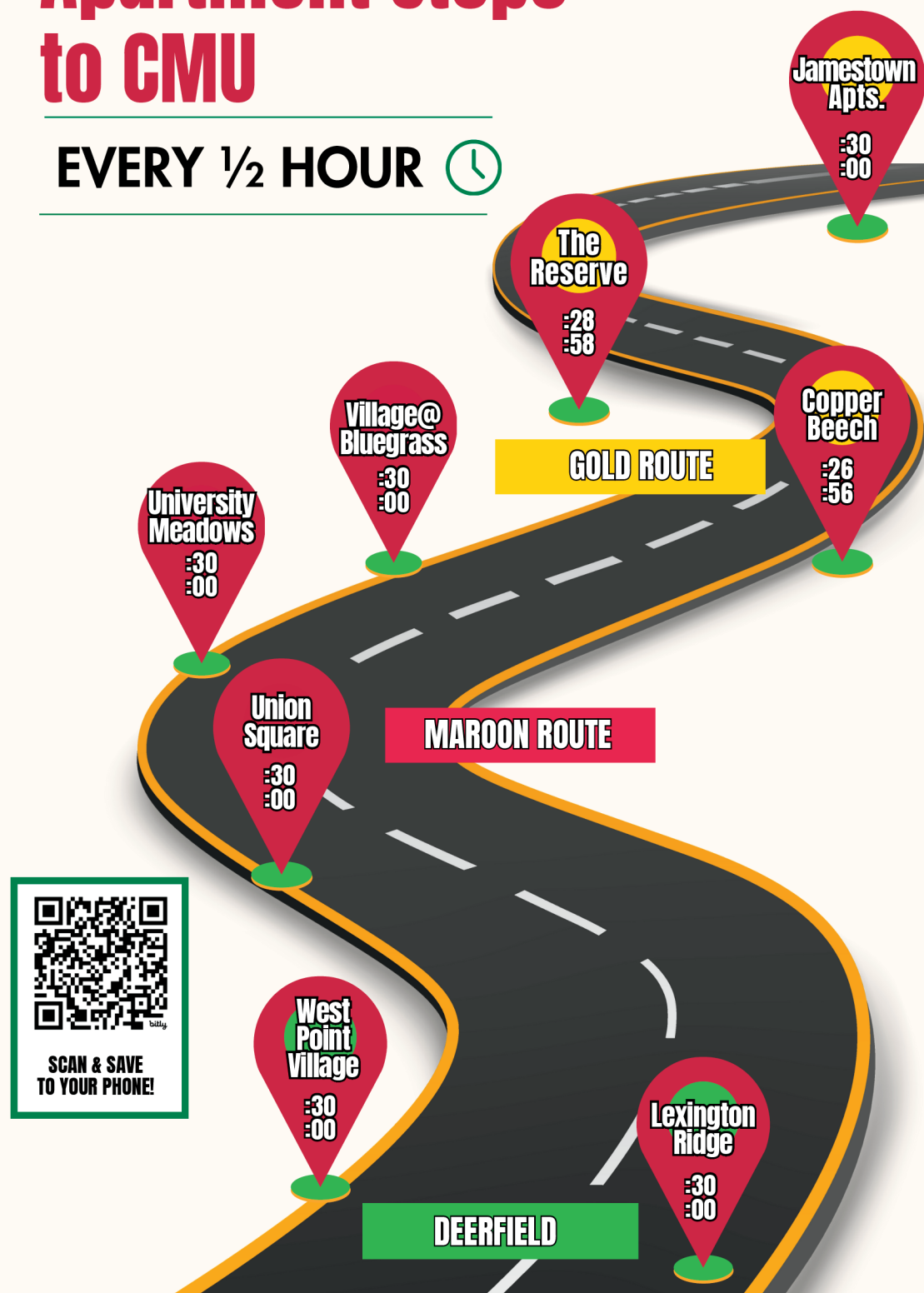


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