

# THE PENDULUM

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VOLUME 54, EDITION 14

## BEST OF 2025

LOCAL  
CAMPUS  
FOOD & DRINK  
SPORTS  
STAFF PICKS

A PUBLICATION OF

**ELON NEWS  
NETWORK**

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ENN seeks to inspire, entertain and inform the Elon community by providing a voice for students and faculty, as well as serve as a forum for the meaningful exchange of ideas.

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Each year, Elon News Network sends out a “Best Of” survey where community members are able to vote on their campus and local favorites. This special edition of The Pendulum is based on the results from the “Best Of 2025” survey. Find more online at [www.elonnewsnetwork.com/bestof2025](http://www.elonnewsnetwork.com/bestof2025).

**LOCAL**

**DOWNTOWN ELON BUSINESS**  
The Oak House  
See page 4, 10

**DOWNTOWN BURLINGTON BUSINESS**  
Burlington Beer Works  
See page 4

**DOWNTOWN GIBSONVILLE BUSINESS**  
Maple View’s County Line Creamery  
See page 4

**FITNESS CENTER**  
Koury Athletic Center  
See page 5

**VETERINARIAN**  
Elon Oaks Veterinary Hospital  
See page 5

**BOOKSTORE**  
Persnickety Books  
See page 6

**THRIFT STORE**  
Triad Goodwill Store & Donation Center Burlington  
See page 6

**ANNUAL EVENT**  
Alamance Pride

**TOWN OF ELON EVENT**  
Farmer’s Market

**TRANSPORTATION**  
Elon Express

**OIL CHANGE**  
Take 5 Oil Change

**MECHANIC**  
Thomas Tire & Automotive

**DRY CLEANING**  
A Cleaner World

**YOGA STUDIO**  
Feel Better Yoga Burlington

**HAIR SALON**  
102 North Salon

**NAIL SALON**  
Magic Touch Nails & Spa

**BARBER**  
Blast Barber Studio

**PET STORE**  
The Natural Dog Pet Food Market

**FLORIST**  
Roxie’s Florist

**LIVE MUSIC SERIES**  
Music at the Plaza

**GROUP ACTIVITY**  
Breakout Games - Greensboro

**SHOPPING SPREE**  
Tanger Outlet Center

**PLACE TO VOLUNTEER**  
Burlington Animal Services

**PARK**  
Beth Schmidt Park

**CAMPUS AND STUDENT LIFE**

**UNIVERSITY TRADITION**  
Festival of Lights and Luminaries  
See page 7

**FOUNTAIN**  
Chandler Fountain  
See page 7

**STUDY SPOT**  
Carol Grotnes Belk Library  
See page 7

**STUDENT OWNED BUSINESS**  
Papa Freddough’s Pizza  
See page 8

**CAMPUS INITIATIVE**  
Reusable To-Go Boxes  
See page 8

**STUDENT BAND**  
Thistle Ridge Band  
See page 9

**PERFORMANCE GROUP**  
Elon’s Finest  
See page 9

**LIVING LEARNING COMMUNITY**  
Communications

**RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD**  
Global Neighborhood

**OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING**  
Oak Hill Village Apartments

**CAMPUS BATHROOM**  
Inman Admissions Building

**ON-CAMPUS BREAKFAST**  
McEwen Dining Hall

**ON-CAMPUS LUNCH**  
Clohan Dining Hall

**ON-CAMPUS DINNER**  
Qdoba Mexican Grill

**FOOD AND DRINK**

**COFFEE**  
The Oak House  
See page 10

**TEA**  
The Oak House  
See page 10

**MEXICAN FOOD**  
La Cocina Mexican Restaurant  
See page 11

**ITALIAN FOOD**  
Prego’s Trattoria  
See page 11

**ASIAN FOOD**  
Red Bowl  
See page 11

**BREAKFAST**  
Press Coffee+Crepes  
See page 12

**FOOD TRUCK**  
Chirba Chirba Dumplings  
See page 12

**GROCERY STORE**  
Harris Teeter

**BAR**  
The Fat Frogg

**SWEET TREAT**  
Andy’s Frozen Custard

**LATE NIGHT FOOD**  
Cook Out

**VEGETARIAN AND VEGAN FOOD**  
Mediterranean Deli

**PIZZA**  
Pandora’s Pies

**BURGER**  
The Root Trackside

**SPORTS**

**MEN’S VARSITY**  
Soccer  
See page 13

**WOMEN’S VARSITY**  
Soccer  
See page 13

**CLUB SPORT**  
Baseball  
See page 14

**PHOENIX SPORTS MOMENT**  
Soccer Undefeated Starts  
See page 14

**STAFF PICKS**

**SCRABBLE GAME**  
Deluxe Travel Edition  
See page 15

**PICKLEBALL COURT**  
Joe C. Davidson Park  
See page 15

**HOT DOG**  
Circle K

**BEST OF PAGE**





Using the list of winners on page 2, search for and highlight the hidden words below.

F	A	R	M	E	R	S	M	A	R	K	E	T	A	J	N	R	A	P	I	O	H	M	F	A	Y	W	V	U	T	P	O	J	M	G	P		
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C	H	A	N	G	I	P	W	A	R	N	I	D	E	J	K	I	D	E	I	R	H	T	M	O	F	A	G	B	U	H	C	F	O	R	S	W	
H	A	N	G	I	P	R	E	S	A	D	S	O	F	U	G	D	E	O	N	S	H	L	O	B	A	I	H	C	F	O	R	S	T	E	R	S	
A	N	G	I	P	R	E	S	A	D	S	O	F	U	G	D	E	O	N	S	H	L	O	B	A	I	H	C	F	O	R	S	T	E	R	S	W	
V	R	A	S	C	O	F	U	T	K	A	F	N	D	H	A	M	O	R	T	H	C	A	L	H	T	G	E	B	A	K	E	S	M	B	R	I	S
R	A	S	C	O	F	U	T	K	A	F	N	D	H	A	M	O	R	T	H	C	A	L	H	T	G	E	B	A	K	E	S	M	B	R	I	S	W
A	R	G	O	F	U	T	K	A	F	N	D	H	A	M	O	R	T	H	C	A	L	H	T	G	E	B	A	K	E	S	M	B	R	I	S	W	U
G	A	L	T	H	E	N	T	W	M	F	A	L	S	C	P	E	N	V	R	G	O	S	P	I	E	G	A	T	F	R	O	G	M	I	V	A	
A	L	T	H	E	N	T	W	M	F	A	L	S	C	P	E	N	V	R	G	O	S	P	I	E	G	A	T	F	R	O	G	M	I	V	A		
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Burlington Beer Works won “Best Downtown Burlington Business” for Best Of 2025. Located at 103 E. Front St. in Burlington.

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

## BEST DOWNTOWN BURLINGTON BUSINESS

### BURLINGTON BEER WORKS

**Avery Sloan**  
Elon News Network

Burlington Beer Works is a co-op in downtown Burlington — meaning it is owned by the community itself and made up of 2,300 owners. Tracy Schmidt, general manager of Burlington Beer Works, said most of its sourcing comes from Alamance County farms and includes over a dozen partnerships with local businesses such as Converge Coffee and Haand pottery.

Burlington Beer Works also employs

Elon students and hosts several events for the Elon community, Schmidt said. “There are several departments within Elon that held their Christmas parties with us,” Schmidt said. “This spring we are looking to partner with the greek life community to do profit share events here.” Burlington Beer Works has a rotating draft beer menu with 12 beers on tap at a time that are brewed on site, according to its website. Its food includes burgers, sandwiches, soups and salads. One thing that is less widely known about the restaurant is that Burlington Beer Works

“

I DON’T KNOW THAT A LOT OF STUDENTS REALIZE, BUT IT’S NOT JUST WEEKENDS, BUT EVERY DAY THAT WE’RE OPEN.

**TRACY SCHMIDT**  
BURLINGTON BEER WORKS GENERAL  
MANAGER

serves brunch until 4 p.m. everyday, Schmidt said. “I don’t know that a lot of students realize, but it’s not just weekends, but every day that we’re open,” Schmidt said. Burlington Beer Works has been open since 2019 and, according to its website, its goal is being a community space as North Carolina’s first cooperative brewery and restaurant. According to its website, for \$100 one can buy an ownership share of the co-op, which means access to owners only events, a vote for the co-ops board members and discounted merchandise.



ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

Maple View Creamery won “Best Downtown Gibsonville Business” for Best Of 2025. Located at 113 E. Main St. in Gibsonville.

## BEST DOWNTOWN GIBSONVILLE BUSINESS

### MAPLE VIEW’S COUNTY LINE CREAMERY

**Lilly Molina**  
Elon News Network

For store manager of Maple View’s County Line Creamery, Sydney Brooks’ favorite flavor is the “Gibson.” With a wide range of ice cream options and even special edition combinations during holidays, the Maple View’s County Line Creamery is a staple within downtown Gibsonville. Brooks said all of the ice cream is homemade. Its main location, known as the farm location, is in Hillsborough and that’s where all the ice cream is made. Brooks started in 2019 and has stayed

because the hours of the shop are so flexible with her demanding schedule as a mother. What she loves most about working at the creamery is serving ice cream to customers, especially kids. She loves to see a smile on their face. “It’s definitely worth it when you hand a little kid an ice cream cone and their face just lights up,” Brooks said. Brooks said she wishes people knew about Maple View. “Some people like to live next door and they don’t even know it’s here,” Brooks said. Despite this, Maple View continues to be a hit within downtown Gibsonville.

## BEST DOWNTOWN ELON BUSINESS

### THE OAK HOUSE

SEE PAGE 10





Koury Athletic Center won “Best Fitness Center” for Best Of 2025. Located at 104 E. Haggard Ave. in Elon.

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

# BEST FITNESS CENTER

## KOURY ATHLETIC CENTER

**Liya Rike**  
Elon News Network

The Koury Athletic Center was voted the “Best Fitness Center” of 2025. Since opening in the spring of 1994, the building has become a place of exercise, relaxation and community for Elon students.

The center features Jordan Gym, a 7,700-square-foot gym with six basketball hoops and space for two volleyball courts. It also includes Beck Pool, an indoor facility with more than 190,000 gallons of water

and six 25-yard lap lanes. Additionally, the fitness center offers an aromatherapy program developed by Campus Recreation and Wellness to enhance emotional well-being and regulate sleep quality.

Sophomore Parker Stevens, an employee who works at the front desk, compared the Koury Athletic Center to those at other universities, noting Elon’s center offers free access for students and their guests. He highlighted the welcoming environment and supportive community.

“I visited other colleges, I went to NC State and UNC. First of all, you don’t have

to pay to get in here if you bring a guest. That’s nice because I went to UNC and you have to pay like 10 bucks,” Stevens said. “We also have much friendlier staff. We’re big on customer service and just being very friendly to everybody. Make sure everybody feels welcome. It’s not like a judgmental area.”

Sophomore Kat Kester, a cycling instructor, said the fitness center stands out for its excellent facilities and friendly staff. She highlighted Koury’s strong sense of community, where students and staff interact and support each other.

“Everyone is so loving and supportive. I’m a new hire but everyone has been so supportive of the whole process, and it’s just a loving environment, even the front desk people when they come and greet you they’re always asking how your day is and remember you by name and all that good stuff,” Kester said.

# BEST VETERINARIAN

## ELON OAKS VETERINARY HOSPITAL

**Charlotte Pfabe**  
Elon News Network

One of the newest veterinary practices in the Elon community, Elon Oaks Veterinary Hospital opened its doors in 2021 when owner and veterinarian Kristina Belton decided to start her own practice.

“I wanted to own a vet clinic because I wanted to have the opportunity to shape the practice culture and build a place that was a great place for people to work,” Benton said.

Located beside the town of Elon offices, Elon Oaks prides itself on being community-centered, according to its website. Belton said the veterinary hospital focuses on education, which is demonstrated through its partnership with Campus Alamance. She said after this past summer, the practice invited two of the student interns to join as team members.

“It’s really fun to have students around, because when we have a student that’s shadowing or in the internship program, they just get so excited about learning new things and seeing new things,” Belton said. “And it really helps to remind us, as people that are in this profession, of how cool the things that we do can be.”

With Elon University only a few blocks down the road, Belton noted the practice frequently helps the pets of Elon students. She said she appreciates the strong commitment many students have to

looking after their animals.

However, Belton said what truly sets Elon Oaks apart from other veterinary hospitals is its promise to be an inclusive space.

“We believe that part of being really active and a partner for the community is making sure that everyone knows they are

welcome here,” Belton said.

Belton said she is grateful for the community support and to have her practice acknowledged for its work.

“I’m just really grateful that we had the opportunity to receive this award,” Belton said. “We’re looking forward to continuing to support the community.”



ABBY GRAVELY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon Oaks Veterinary Hospital won “Best Veterinarian” for Best Of 2025. Located at 110 S Williamson Ave. in Elon.





Persnickety Books won “Best Bookstore” for Best Of 2025. Located at 347 S. Main St. in Burlington.

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

# BEST BOOKSTORE

## PERSNICKETY BOOKS

Reagan Sizemore  
Elon News Network

The Elon community voted Persnickety Books the “Best Bookstore” for 2025. The shop opened its doors in 2017 and is located on Main Street in downtown Burlington. As soon as they walk in, customers can find stacks upon stacks of books and a seating area where they can enjoy a drink from the coffee bar.

The bookstore has three floors and carries a large variety of titles in store, as well as an online store. The coffee bar is located on the main level and serves a variety of drinks. Persnickety Books often hosts events including things such as open

mic night, which happens the second Friday of every month; writers club on Wednesdays; and other specialty events like tarot card readings.

The owners, Ian Baltutis, Shawna and Herb Gentert, opened Persnickety Books when they realized that there was no used book store in Burlington.

“I thought that’s really sad, so we opened one,” Shawna said.

Shawna describes Persnickety books as “a third space.” She hopes that Persnickety Books can become a space for Elon students to get away from campus, and who want a comfortable safe place to read, study and relax.

Persnickety Books has recently started

ordering in a few new books, rather than just selling used copies. Shawna said they have started ordering titles that students ask for frequently and they are able to order in specific books that students request.

“When we overhear someone in the store go ‘Oh my gosh!’ because they have found that unexpected treasure,” Shawna said. “That’s the beauty of carrying used books.”

Persnickety Books is open Tuesday to Thursday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Visit Persnickety Books’ website for more information about events and to purchase books online.

# BEST THRIFT STORE

## TRIAD GOODWILL STORE

Gaby Maldonado  
Elon News Network

Triad Goodwill Store and Donation Center Burlington was named this year’s Best Of winner for “Best Thrift Store,” a popular place for affordable items and making a positive impact in the community. The store offers a variety of gently used clothing, furniture, home goods and more.

Lisa Perkins, senior store manager, credits the store’s success to its dedicated team and the quality of its donations.

“We’re the biggest and the best. We get a lot of stuff. My staff works really hard to get it out, and we get great donations,” Perkins said.

Triad Goodwill is more than just a place to shop — it’s a way to give back to the community.

The store uses 87 cents of every dollar to support programs that help people in the five counties it serves.

“When people shop here, it really does help the community,” Perkins said.

The variety and impact of Triad Goodwill stand out, especially in how donations and sales contribute to the community. Perkins said she enjoys seeing the different items donated and the impact of each purchase.

“People get good deals and good bargains on it, and then all of it goes back into helping the community when they sell it,” Perkins said.



Triad Goodwill Store and Donation Center won “Best Thrift Store” for Best Of 2025. Located at 3740 S. Church St. in Burlington.

GABY MALDONADO | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



# BEST CAMPUS TRADITION

## FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS & LUMINARIES

Gaby Maldonado  
Elon News Network

Every year, Elon University’s Festival of Lights and Luminaries transforms Elon’s campus into a bright community celebration, earning it this year’s title of “Best University Tradition.” Organized by the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life, the festival features thousands of luminaries, live music, treats and activities that bring students, faculty and residents together.

Junior Emily Menjivar said she appreciates how the event offers a chance to unwind.

“One of the reasons why I like the event is that I get to go with my friends and just take a mental break from worrying about finals,” Menjivar said.

She also enjoyed the event’s unique elements, such as the floating lanterns people could personalize with messages.

For freshman Peyton Shaw, the festival is an opportunity to create new traditions with friends while away from home during the holidays.

“Since my mom won’t be here, I’ll be spending it with my friends, and I’m really excited for us to look around at the lights and maybe get some hot chocolate and apple cider,” Shaw said.

Shaw said events like the Festival of Lights and Luminaries are important during the busy finals season as it allows students to take a break from studying and spend time with friends.

“I think this is a good way to get some stuff off your mind and just enjoy Elon for what it is,” Shaw said.



The Festival of Lights and Luminaries won “Best Campus Tradition” for Best Of 2025.

# BEST FOUNTAIN

## CHANDLER FOUNTAIN



Chandler Fountain won “Best Fountain” for Best Of 2025.

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

# BEST STUDY SPOT

## BELK LIBRARY



Belk Library won “Best Study Spot” for Best Of 2025.

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR





ERIN HRONCICH | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The reusable to-go boxes won “Best Campus Initiative” for Best Of 2025.

## BEST CAMPUS INITIATIVE

### REUSABLE TO-GO BOXES

**Katharyn Macdonald**  
Elon News Network

Elon Dining and Harvest Table Culinary Group have had a partnership with ReusePass to provide reusable to-go boxes at Elon dining locations since the start of the 2023-24 academic year. Students and staff can sign up for ReusePass, which is used on 64 college campuses across the country with their Elon credentials. A mobile QR code allows to-go boxes to be checked out for three days. Multiple to-go boxes can be checked out at once, while previously they were traded for a carabiner to check out and needed to be returned to check out another box.

Harvest Table Culinary Group Sustainability Coordinator Leslie Bosse said the process is designed to be easy for students to reduce food waste and promote sustainability.

“ReusePass has really upgraded our green to-go system to be even more convenient,” Bosse said. “You almost always have your phone, so you almost always have your ReusePass.”

Billy D’s Fried Chicken and Village Juice and Kitchen have recently been added to the list of locations where the boxes are available, which was previously limited to McEwen, Lakeside and Clohan dining halls. Bosse said this was decided because of high levels of use of ReusePass to-go boxes.

“

AS THE POPULARITY OF GREEN BOXES IN RETAIL (LOCATIONS) GROW, WE WOULD LOVE TO CONTINUE TO EXPAND THIS INITIATIVE.

**LESLIE BOSSE**  
HARVEST TABLE CULINARY GROUP  
SUSTAINABILITY COORDINATOR

“As the popularity of green boxes in retail (locations) grow, we would love to continue to expand this initiative,” Bosse said. “We are always thinking about what we can do to increase our sustainability in the future.”

According to ReusePass, Elon University saved 1,620 pounds of waste from going to landfills in 2024, as well as saved 11,696 gallons of water and 12,211 pounds of GHG CO<sub>2</sub>e, or Greenhouse Gas Carbon Dioxide Equivalent.

Bosse said ReusePass allows Elon Dining to collect data on the environmental impact through the number of box check-outs.

“It helps us to ensure that our program is as sustainable as possible,” Bosse said.

## BEST STUDENT OWNED BUSINESS

### PAPA FREDDOUGH’S PIZZA

**Megan Walsh**  
Elon News Network

“The first day I had my event, I saw people that bought one pizza and then would come back and get more. And that’s when I knew, OK, I should really start doing this.”

This moment was when senior Vince Freddo realized the potential success of his self-owned pizza-making business, Papa Freddough’s Pizza.

Freddo began his pizza business his sophomore year at Elon University and it has expanded to a large customer base. He can be found almost every Saturday set up at a party and spends his summers catering from his home in Boston.

Freddo said his love of pizza started with his family in his hometown.

“My family has two pizza restaurants in Boston, so I’ve been doing pizza for seven, eight years,” Freddo said.

In the beginning, Freddo’s business was nothing more than making pizza in his apartment and sharing it with friends and neighboring residents.

“I registered my LLC as a sophomore, and then I started posting on my Instagram and getting more texts to come to parties and events on the weekend,” Freddo said. “And that’s really how it grew.”

Now as a senior, Freddo said his business

is in high demand. His set up — consisting of a tent, mobile pizza ovens, tables and everything needed to serve the pizzas — is often found at sorority and fraternity parties.

“It’s grown from me hitting people up and trying to connect with students, to them texting me or emailing me and asking me to do events for them months in advance,” Freddo said.

Getting to be up close and personal with his customers is his favorite part of working events Freddo said.

“Not a lot of business owners get to have this be right with the people,” Freddo said. “Usually they’re in the back of the kitchen and making the food and stuff like that, but I think having a mobile pizza unit that I have, it’s pretty cool.”

In terms of pizza options, Freddo said his favorites always include hot honey.

“My go to is usually bacon or sausage somewhere around that realm, with a hot honey drizzle on top,” Freddo said. “I love that. That’s my thing.”

After graduating in the spring, Freddo said he plans to dive head first into Papa Freddough’s, including starting a petition to establish a location on Elon’s campus.

People looking to hire Freddo can contact him by messaging his Instagram account @papa.freddoughs.



PHOTO COURTESY OF VINCE FREDDO

Papa Freddough’s Pizza won “Best Student Owned Business” for Best Of 2025.





Thistle Ridge Band won “Best Student Band” for Best Of 2025.

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

# BEST STUDENT BAND

## THISTLE RIDGE BAND

**Katharyn Macdonald**  
Elon News Network

From Mississippi to Elon to Nashville, Thistle Ridge Band has been spreading the sound of its music. Named after founder and Elon senior Lucas McKeown’s grandfather’s farm, the band has changed in members, performance spaces and genres over the years. Elon senior Nicole Bazos was the band’s audio engineer her freshman year before joining as a vocalist and pianist, and she’s seen many versions of the band. But they’ve kept the same mission for years —playing sets where every person in the audience will like something.

“What’s cool about the band is that when we choose covers, we all get a say in it, so it kind of makes our set list all over the place,”

Bazos said. “It’s good, because it’s something for everyone.”

Along with covers ranging from pop to classic rock to country, Thistle Ridge Band’s original songs fall into the indie folk genre. Bazos said leaning into country is something unique about them as a band at Elon.

“We play Luke Combs, Morgan Wallen, like country country, and that’s kind of something that sets us apart,” Bazos said. “If you hear someone playing Johnny Cash, they’re typically like, that’s probably Thistle Ridge. They just already know, which is cool.”

With McKeown, Cole Campbell and Justin Lanzalotti on guitar, Elon senior Julian Brown on bass, Elon sophomore Nick Fauza on drums and Bazos on piano,

the band has an uncommon element — they are all singers.

“Everyone will sing a song, or we’ll all do the harmonies together,” Bazos said. “I feel like that fills out the sound more than just having one or two vocalists.”

Its gigs and performances at Elon have included The Fat Frogg Bar and Grill, The Oak House, parties, and philanthropy events for Greek organizations.

“We play like three shows a week, so it never ends,” Bazos said. “It’s a lot, but it’s not that hard to balance it, because it’s how I would want to be spending my free time anyway.”

Thistle Ridge Band performed at The Last Laugh, a student stand-up comedy event hosted by Elon Student Television on Dec. 5.

“It felt like SNL when they panned to the band,” Bazos said. “That was super cool.”

Bazos said she and McKeown are moving to Nashville together after graduation.

“We’re going to try to keep it together in some capacity,” Bazos said. “We’re going to try to get shows in Nashville, write a ton of songs, and play in the real world.”

Bazos said her favorite part of it is having best friends who are just as into music as she is.

“That’s hard to find,” Bazos said. “Just being able to play and sing every weekend and get paid for it is ridiculous too, because I never imagined that would happen.”

Thistle Ridge Band released an EP entitled “I Hope You Know” in June, available to stream on Spotify, Apple Music, iTunes, Deezer and iHeartRadio.

# BEST PERFORMANCE GROUP

## ELON’S FINEST

**Fiona McAllister**  
Elon News Network

Established in 1991, Elon’s Finest is rounding out its 33rd year on campus by winning this year’s “Best Performance Group” by the Elon community. President of Elon’s Finest and senior Uwera Izabayo said she’s honored her organization has been selected to win this recognition.

“There’s so many great orgs on campus, so to be recognized as one of the best is just awesome,” Izabayo said.

Izabayo has been a part of Elon’s Finest since her freshman year. What Izabayo loves most about Elon’s Finest is the variety of skill each member brings to the team.

“Everyone’s really talented,” Izabayo said. “It’s just been a really great community of dancers and friends to be a part of.”

Elon’s Finest has two annual showcases, along with other performances for various philanthropy events. But Izabayo said her favorite performance throughout her time with Elon’s Finest was her first choreographed performance her freshman year in the spring semester.

“The first time I ever choreographed anything for that big of a group and to perform it to that big of an audience,” Izabayo said. “And so that was really cool to see.”

Izabayo said she looks forward to the future of Elon’s Finest and what they have to offer.

“I think the team just gets better every year, honestly, we’ve had new people that we’ve had join who are really talented,” Izabayo said. “Everyone’s dances are really unique, and so that is super fun to see — that creativity.”



Elon’s Finest won “Best Performance Group” for Best Of 2025.

FIONA MCALLISTER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER





The Oak House won “Best Coffee,” “Best Tea” and “Best Downtown Elon Business” for Best Of 2025. Located at 112 N. Williamson Ave. in Elon.

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

# BEST COFFEE, BEST TEA & BEST DOWNTOWN ELON BUSINESS

## THE OAK HOUSE

**Ruby Burckle**  
Elon News Network

Nestled in downtown Elon between All That Jas and Mediterranean Deli sits a university favorite — The Oak House.

Part coffee shop and part bar, it is a popular spot for members of the Elon community. The Oak House offers a warm and inviting atmosphere just across the street from Elon University’s Snow Atrium. Apart from the drinks and food, the community’s favorite downtown business also holds social events, including trivia nights on Wednesday’s, guest speakers and even a mini stage for those Friday night live performances.

Freshman Ayla Gonzalez frequents the business and said she spends time at The Oak House working on assignments and being productive.

“I love grabbing a latte and getting some

work done,” Gonzalez said. “It’s a nice change of scenery that isn’t far from campus at all.”

The Oak House is also one of Elon University’s merchant partners and accepts Phoenix Cash, making it even more accessible and convenient for students.

For freshman Sam Hagopian, visiting The Oak House during her Elon University tour made a memorable impression. While enjoying coffee with her dad, Hagopian immediately felt excited about the prospect of having the coffee shop nearby as a student.

“I turned to my dad, and I said, ‘Wow, I’m really excited to go here so that I can drink this coffee and have it nearby,’” Hagopian said.

Now a frequent visitor, Hagopian appreciates the great drinks and quality coffee The Oak House offers.

“If I had to choose anywhere to get a cup of coffee, I would definitely choose Oak House,” Hagopian said.

“

THE VIBES ARE IMMACULATE, AND IT’S A GREAT SPACE TO GET NICE COFFEES AND THINGS TO WARM YOU UP WHEN YOU’RE COLD OUTSIDE.

**SAMANTHA PEREZ**  
ELON FRESHMAN

Senior Lauren Cicale said she is more of a coffee person than a tea person, but she

has tried a few of the tea options offered at The Oak House, including its chai latte and raspberry mint tea. Cicale said she thoroughly enjoys the quality of The Oak House’s chai latte and orders it often.

Besides their drinks, Cicale said she enjoys coming to The Oak House for several different reasons, such as the snacks they sell and different seating areas.

Freshman Samantha Perez said she enjoys going to The Oak House, especially during colder months.

“The vibes are immaculate, and it’s a great space to get nice coffees and things to warm you up when you’re cold outside,” Perez said.

Gonzalez said she also utilizes the space to catch up with friends and relax.

“It can be hard to slow down sometimes, but The Oak House offers a spot just for that,” Gonzalez said.

*Gaby Maldonado and Neil Parmar contributed to the reporting of this story.*



ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

The Oak House won “Best Coffee,” “Best Tea” and “Best Downtown Elon Business” for Best Of 2025.



ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

The Oak House won “Best Coffee,” “Best Tea” and “Best Downtown Elon Business” for Best Of 2025.





Red Bowl won “Best Asian Food” for Best Of 2025. Located at 3140 Walden Ln. in Burlington.

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

# BEST ASIAN FOOD

## RED BOWL

**Ruby Burckle**  
Elon News Network

This year, Red Bowl Asian Bistro was voted “Best Asian Food” by the Elon University community. Server Natalie Huffman only began working at Red Bowl a few months ago

but said she fully agrees that it is home to the best Asian food in the area. “I love it. I’ve eaten here for years, I thoroughly enjoy working here also,” Huffman said. Huffman’s current favorite dish at Red Bowl is the chicken broccoli dish with fried rice, but she is still trying different dishes to determine which is the best they

have to offer. “I have a plan to try everything on the menu,” Huffman said. The restaurant serves a variety of Asian cuisines including Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese and Japanese dishes, so there are many menu options to choose from. Huffman said she believes the restaurant environment and atmosphere

are a big part of what keeps her and others coming back to Red Bowl. For those interested in trying out the restaurant, Huffman thinks the amazing quality of the food is really what makes Red Bowl stand out from other Asian restaurants in the area. “It’s amazing, it’s the best Asian food I’ve ever had,” Huffman said.



La Cocina Mexican Restaurant won “Best Mexican Restaurant” for Best Of 2025. Located at 309 Huffman Mill Rd. in Burlington.

NEIL PARMAR | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

# BEST MEXICAN FOOD

## LA COCINA MEXICAN RESTAURANT

**Neil Parmar**  
Elon News Network

For 2025, La Cocina Mexican Restaurant was voted “Best Mexican Food” by the community. With three locations in Burlington alone, the restaurant has since grown to 11 locations across the state. The family-owned restaurant originally opened in Mebane in 2000. Offering authentic Mexican food for the residents of Burlington and Elon, La Cocina is the spot for when the community

is looking for something a little different. Freshman Olivia Love visited one of the locations with her family. “The restaurant had good food and a fun environment,” Love said. With music playing and fun decor, the restaurant not only focuses on food but the experience as well. “You could tell that the restaurant had put a lot of thought into their business beyond the food,” Love said. “The welcoming atmosphere and lively music really created an experience.”

# BEST ITALIAN FOOD

## PREGO'S TRATTORIA

**Avery Sloan**  
Elon News Network

Albert Hernandez’s father opened Prego’s Trattoria in 2006, and now Hernandez runs the family business. Prego’s in Burlington fits into the Elon community — particularly for events such as Family Weekend and graduation, Hernandez said. “It’s been amazing,” Hernandez said. “We’ve been pretty honored to be like a partner with Elon and their students and their parents.” Prego’s serves traditional Italian food. It is open for lunch and dinner and offers event space. Being a family-owned business is important to Hernandez, he said. “I’m here every single day,” Hernandez said. “I think that’s a big thing that makes it apart from other restaurants. Feels like

the amount of attention that we put into the restaurant and I’m getting to know everyone that comes into the restaurant, that has been a big factor for us.” Hernandez’s father took a chance opening the restaurant in Burlington. Their family had a cousin in Burlington and his father went to visit one day and saw a small Greek restaurant was for sale. His father started as a chef in New York City, then began learning other aspects of running a restaurant — with the goal of one day owning his own. Hernandez said he feels connected to the Elon community because of his proximity to the campus as well. “I actually go every morning with my son,” Hernandez said. “He’s 12, so we go running every morning, we go running through Elon’s campus.”



Prego's Trattoria won “Best Italian Food” for Best Of 2025. Located at 422 Huffman Mill Rd. in Burlington.

ENN FILE PHOTO





Press Coffee + Crepes won “Best Breakfast” for Best Of 2025. Located at 133 N. Main St. in Graham.

CHARLOTTE PFABE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

BEST BREAKFAST

PRESS COFFEE+CREPES

Abby Gravely  
Elon News Network

In the heart of downtown Graham, a restored 1850s building is now home to Press Crepes and Coffee. With the tagline “European inspired, Carolina made,” Press serves a menu of crepes ranging from European styles to southern classics. Co-founder Jason Cox said the goal of Press was to bring people together. “The origin is the idea of a community

gathering space and then something a little fun,” Cox said. Creating a space for the community to come together was essential to Cox when he first opened the restaurant. He said he felt that individuals rarely have the opportunity to come together with strangers in a comfortable environment and wanted to create that opportunity locally. “I can have young kids who look like they just woke up on a Saturday, in sweats and big hoodies beside a group of 70-something blue-haired ladies that have

lived in the community their whole lives,” Cox said. “And they’re across from a guy and his wife.” With a range of options and prices, Press Crepes and Coffee brings together community members of all income levels and price points. Cox said he believes that “if the average person who works in the same setting can’t eat there, then it’s not really a community place.” Along with community gathering, Cox founded his business for a second purpose:

downtown revitalization. Press is “a downtown revitalization project disguised as a business,” according to Cox. He likes to think that Press plays a role in bringing people, particularly Elon students, into downtown Graham. He believes that Graham has a lot to offer and he wants to introduce that to community members. Cox is honored to have Press voted best breakfast, both as a reflection of his business and Elon student’s exploration into the local community.

BEST FOOD TRUCK

CHIRBA CHIRBA DUMPLING

Avery Sloan  
Elon News Network

Nate Adams, owner of Chirba Chirba Dumpling Truck, grew up in Taiwan where his love for dumplings began. Adams and his business partners all went to school together at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and were “raised in between cultures.” “The whole idea behind Chirba, the whole mission statement was, when all, partners and I, were together at school, at UNC, we couldn’t find Chinese food like we remembered, ... so we started making it,” Adams said. “The idea behind Chirba is that with globalization, access to ingredients, knowledge, there should be no reason that kids and people here in North Carolina can’t have the same tasting dumplings that we had growing up in Asia,

Taiwan for me, China for my partners.” Adams described Chirba Chirba as “authentic Chinese food with Western style marketing,” meaning the ingredients are the same as traditional dumplings, but the names and descriptions of dishes are different in order to be more accessible to customers who might not have had dumplings before and don’t speak Chinese. Chirba Chirba has been open for 13 years — and began as an operation in the dorms at UNC. “We started trying to replicate food that we remembered in our dorms as best as we could,” Adams said. “Later on, we got much better at it. We always seemed to have some type of test stuff in the freezer. So we realized that people liked them whenever everyone would just invite themselves over to our place after going out on the town or whatever and just be like, ‘dumplings?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘All right, come on over.’”



Chirba Chirba Dumplings won “Best Food Truck” for Best Of 2025.

ABIGAIL HOBBS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



# BEST MEN'S VARSITY

## SOCCER

Miles Hayford  
Elon News Network

The men’s soccer team was voted “Best Men’s Varsity Sport” by the campus community after a successful season that saw the Phoenix secure a regular season Coastal Athletic Association championship.

The team had many electric moments including starting the season 7-0-1 and entering the top 10 of Top Drawer Soccer’s national rankings for the first time since 2015. The season also included senior Scott Vatne being named the CAA Player of the Year. After a strong start, the team dropped four straight losses but bounced back to capture the regular season title against Campbell University in the regular season finale. Head coach Marc Reeves, who was named the CAA Coach of the Year, said the win at Campbell was one of the more special moments of the season.

“I mean, the win at Campbell to secure the league is why you work so hard year round; For those countdown moments, the lift the trophy moments and the guys dumping me in Gatorade is always fun,” Reeves said.

Graduate student and co-captain Victor Stromsten also said the Campbell game was one of his favorite moments.

“We did not play a great game, but it was just heart and work ethic,” Stromsten said. “The feeling of everyone just dropping down to the floor when they blew the final whistle was a great moment for everyone. I’ll take that with me wherever I go next.”

Stromsten said he was especially proud of how the team bounced back from the series of losses in the middle of the season to secure a title.

# BEST WOMEN'S VARSITY

## SOCCER

Benjamin Berfield  
Elon News Network

Going into the season, junior defender Rachel Buckle said she immediately noticed how invested was in the team succeeding. As Elon kept winning, she said the team’s all-in approach only continued to grow.

“What made this year memorable is that everyone was all-in and wanted to give 110% every day,” Buckle said. “Once we started seeing results, it only pushed us to keep doing that more.”

Elon University women’s soccer was voted “Best Women’s Varsity Sport” in Elon News Network’s Best Of Survey.

After a 3-9-5 record in 2023, expectations weren’t high for the Phoenix. They were ranked near the bottom of the standings but went on to start the season with a red-hot 8-0-1 record. Elon finished with a 13-4-1 record. In the CAA Tournament, the team won its first game against College of Charleston before losing to Stony Brook in the semifinals.

Buckle said it was fulfilling to be a part of a team that was able to turn things around in just one season. She listed the team’s work ethic and commitment to their program standards as primary reasons for their turnaround.

“It’s extremely rewarding,” Buckle said. “It means everything to stay consistent in our work, and what we believe in and how we play the game. We were all dedicated, and it shows that hard work and consistency



Men's soccer won “Best Men's Varsity” for Best Of 2025. Junior August Guinle runs with the ball during a game against Charlotte on Oct. 23, 2024.

WILL MOSS | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

“I was very frustrated at times — not getting the chances I wanted, not getting the opportunities that I would have loved to have had,” Stromsten said. “It can bring a lot of frustration, but the fact that we rallied, and at the end, on a personal note, being able to score the game winner against Northeastern, and then doing my last game against Campbell, it means everything. The fact that we went through a great start, a little rough patch, and then built our way out of it at the end meant a lot.”

Despite a regular season title, Elon fell to the eventual champions Hofstra University in the semifinals of the CAA Tournament.

It was the fourth straight year of making the CAA Semifinals and the second regular season title in the last three seasons.

“I think we’re trying to build a consistency in our program, and that comes from having a cohesive culture that really values the people element and the development and the character aspect of our group,” Reeves said.

Stromsten said the lack of egos on the team helped set the season apart and led to their success.

“The entire team did really good at not putting themselves before the team,” Stromsten said. “It was really great to

see that we were working as a unit rather than individuals trying to prove something.”

Reeves said he was glad that the team secured a regular season championship to cement the success of this season into history.

“It’s only us and Hofstra that end up with some tangible trophy, something that keeps this team in the history books,” Reeves said. “They’re a championship team at Elon forever. So I’m really pleased that this group were able to do it again.”

does pay off.”

Buckle said one of her biggest takeaways from the season involved the relationships between players. She said while last year was difficult, it motivated the members from that team to improve the team chemistry.

“Although last year was difficult for us, we used that as motivation,” Buckle said. “It allowed us to form a really strong bond this year.”

Buckle said a big part of that was the friendships among the upperclassmen and freshman. She noted how the upperclassman went out of their way to be welcoming, which was appreciated by the team’s newcomers.

“I think that a big goal for us this year was to not make them feel like they should be scared of us,” Buckle said. “They’re just as much a part of the team as we are, and they deserve to feel included. We all got recruited to play here for a reason, and so we wanted to make it known that we went through the same thing as they did.”

For the 2025 season, Buckle said the team must maintain the same expectations they had going into last season. She particularly listed preparation as a major component, saying that anything could happen.

“The biggest thing from this season is to keep the standards high and hold each other accountable,” Buckle said. “I think our preparation is key whether it’s staying focused in film or stepping up when someone gets injured.”

She also said she hopes the team will



Women's soccer won “Best Women's Varsity” for Best Of 2025. Now junior Rachel Buckle, #10, fights for the ball during a game against Northeastern on Sept. 22, 2022.

ENN FILE PHOTO

continue to appreciate some of the fun moments during the season. Buckle believes it helped players become closer with one another.

“It’s important to have fun when you’re

playing together,” Buckle said. “The funny moments at practice where we were laughing and spending time together all add up. We should take all of those small things that built up and carry them into next year.”





Club baseball won “best Club Sport” for Best Of 2025. Club baseball members leave after practice April 4, 2024.

ETHAN WU | PHOTO EDITOR

## BEST CLUB SPORT BASEBALL

Abigail Hines  
Elon News Network

Elon’s club baseball team was voted “Best Club Sport” by the Elon community. Club baseball reached the playoffs last year for the first time in program history, and club president senior Joey Generalis said he hopes to use that success as motivation for this season.

“We got a little bit of a taste of playoffs, and that’s something that really kind of sticks with us,” Generalis said. “I definitely want to get that taste again, and I definitely think we have the squad to do it.”

This spring, club baseball will face seven teams with 21 total games scheduled from February to April. Club baseball faced five opponents in the fall and ended the season with a 7-7 record. Generalis said they use the fall season to let newer members take the field.

“The fall season, it’s kind of more of experimentation instead of putting our nine guys, our nine best guys, out there to go

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BEING A PART OF CLUB BASEBALL, THERE’S NO EXPECTATIONS, THERE’S NO DEADLINES, THERE’S NO RULES. IT’S REALLY JUST A GROUP OF GUYS THAT REALLY LOVE EACH OTHER AND ALSO LOVE TO PLAY BASEBALL.

RYAN MCCASKILL-SCHOCK  
ELON SOPHOMORE

win a baseball game,” Generalis said. “We’re just really doing anything in the fall that could possibly prepare us for the spring.”

Club social chair sophomore Ryan McCaskill-Schock echoed Generalis and said the team will work to make it even farther this year.

“This year we’re looking to build on that and then some because we feel like we have the guys to absolutely get there, and we will play our best baseball once we get there,” McCaskill-Schock said.

McCaskill-Schock joined the team his first year of college and said he appreciates the support from his teammates, both on and off the field.

“I was looking for some sort of brotherhood, some sort of camaraderie, that would always be there for me emotionally and physically whenever I needed them,” McCaskill-Schock said. “Being a part of club baseball, there’s no expectations, there’s no deadlines, there’s no rules. It’s really just a group of guys that really love each other and also love to play baseball.”

## BEST PHOENIX SPORTS MOMENT MEN’S AND WOMEN’S SOCCER UNDEFEATED STARTS IN 2024

Kathan Gandhi  
Elon News Network

To open the 2024 season, Elon’s varsity soccer programs could not stop winning. Both went undefeated over the first few weeks of play, performing at a high level on offense and defense.

It was a scorching start to the teams’ campaign and an equally exciting time for many Elon fans, including for freshman Jack Torres.

“Coming to Elon, I was unsure about how our sports culture was going to be,” Torres said. “I love soccer. It was fun to get caught up in our success.”

The teams collectively won 16 games during the undefeated streak before the men’s team suffered its first loss to Hofstra on Sept. 28. The women’s team would remain undefeated until Oct. 3. The nonstop winning added an extra element to the viewing experience.

“Having a streak on the line each time was thrilling,” Torres said. “Even with it broken it was cool to watch.”

Although the unified unbeaten streak was eventually snapped, both teams played strong throughout the season. The women’s team finished with a ranking of third within the Coastal Athletic Association. The men’s team peaked at a ranking of #10

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IT DEFINITELY CAUGHT MY ATTENTION WHEN WE STARTED DOMINATING. I WENT TO WAY MORE GAMES THAN I WAS EXPECTING.

MICHAEL GALLAGHER  
ELON FRESHMAN

in the nation during the season.

The success did not go unnoticed. Lots of new fans found themselves watching Phoenix soccer for the first time, including freshman Michael Gallagher.

“I was never really into soccer that much,” Gallagher said. “But it definitely caught my attention when we started dominating. I went to way more games than I was expecting.”

Ultimately, both programs lost in the CAA Conference Championship tournament. Despite falling short, there is still lots of positivity.

“They had great seasons,” Gallagher said. “I’m looking forward to the future.”





Deluxe Travel Edition won “Best Scrabble Edition” for Best Of 2025.

ERIN MARTIN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

# BEST SCRABBLE EDITION

## DELUXE TRAVEL EDITION

**Abigail Hines**  
Elon News Network

Since Scrabble’s inception in 1948, the board-and-tile game has advanced in design and structure to make gameplay easy for all. The first edition, dating back to the 1940s, featured a completely flat, thin board, with letter tiles made from laminated plywood. Today, over 20 different editions make the game customizable to any player’s needs. However, Hasbro’s Deluxe Travel Edition (2010) ranks highest on my list because of several vital features.

As a college student, it’s important for my luggage to be easily transportable from home to school. Luckily, the Deluxe Travel Edition folds neatly in half with convenient indents on the top that act as handles. I can carry the board around from place to place with one hand, a feat not possible with the older, much bulkier boxes. Additionally, all pieces can be stored in the two drawers found on the bottom half of the board. There’s no need to make extra room in your luggage for a huge box when everything you need, minus pen and paper, fits in the compact board. Lastly, and in my opinion, most

importantly, the bottom side of the board features four small wheels, a game changer for game night. The board’s ability to rotate means no players have to move from their seats, allowing everyone to get comfortable and focus on their next move. The tiles fit nicely in their place on the board, so no tiles go flying when the board is spun for the next player’s turn. All around, the Deluxe Travel Edition of Scrabble is perfect for all, but especially college students because of several features that make moving from one location to another uncomplicated. I highly recommend adding this game to your list.



# BEST PICKLEBALL COURT

## JOE C. DAVIDSON PARK

**Erin Martin**  
Elon News Network

Pickleball is a game for all ages and skill levels, but where you play can make the experience even more special. For me, Joe C. Davidson Park is the best place to play pickleball, even if it doesn’t feature traditional pickleball courts. The courts at Joe C. Davidson Park are tennis courts with pickleball lines painted on them, which means it can get a little confusing. However, what these courts lack in perfection, they make up for in charm. One of the standout features is the lighting, allowing you to play after the sun sets. What truly sets Joe C. Davidson apart is its vibrant community. It’s a local hub where players of all skill levels come together to enjoy the game. Playing here gives you the chance to meet fellow enthusiasts, learn from more experienced players or simply enjoy the sport. Personally, these courts hold a special place in my heart. Joe C. Davidson is where I learned the game, improved my skills and created some of my favorite pickleball memories. The friendships I’ve made and the joy I’ve experienced here outweigh the imperfections of the court itself. While it may not be perfect, I believe that pickleball is about more than the game — it’s about the connections you make and the memories you create. For that reason, Joe C. Davidson Park will always be my favorite.



Joe C. Davidson Park won “Best Pickleball Court” for Best Of 2025.

SARAH T. MOORE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER







PHOTOS BY KATHERINE MARTIN, MEGAN WALSH, ERIN MARTIN, MILES HAYFORD, ETHAN WU, PAUL BARRETTO AND CHARLOTTE PFABE

Photos from 2024, including the professional bull riding team series, Elon's fall dance concert, a Greensboro Trump rally, a protest outside the Democratic National Convention, men's soccer practice, post-election art display, women's soccer game, football game and move-in.