

Creating East Neighborhood’s ‘gateway’ to campus

Elon University to break ground on new residence building in June 2023, building plans approved by town of Elon

Kyra O’Connor
Executive Director | @ko_reports

Beginning in June 2023, Elon University will be home to an additional residence hall in East Neighborhood. The new building will have 90 beds as well as a common area for students located at the front of the building. The building plans, presented by Elon University architect Brad Moore and town of Elon

Planning Director Lori Oakley, were approved by the town of Elon council Oct. 24.

“We’re excited to have more opportunities for on-campus housing,” town of Elon Mayor Emily Sharpe said.

The plans for the new residence hall include 52 units, a “flex space” in the front of the building, student lounges and an office space. The building will be three stories tall and be called East Neighborhood Commons, according to the application submitted by Moore. The project aims to finish in August 2024, which will allow residents to call the new building home beginning in fall 2024.

“This is going to be a great addition to our campus and our community not only for this neighborhood, but for the campus

overall,” Moore said. “It will almost serve as a gateway coming in from the East to campus.”

Jane O’Boyle, faculty member in residence for the East Neighborhood, said the addition is a huge improvement for an already “fantastic neighborhood.”

“It’s very exciting. East is going to be a really exciting, active neighborhood after that building is done,” O’Boyle said.

O’Boyle said the most important aspect of the plans is the new common space similar to LaRose Commons in the Historic Neighborhood. Up until this point, East events would need to be held either outside or outside of the neighborhood.

“This will just change everything. We’re going to get more engagement with residents,

for sure,” O’Boyle said. “There will be a central hub for people to get to know each other and to do activities and to engage more with the faculty director and community director.”

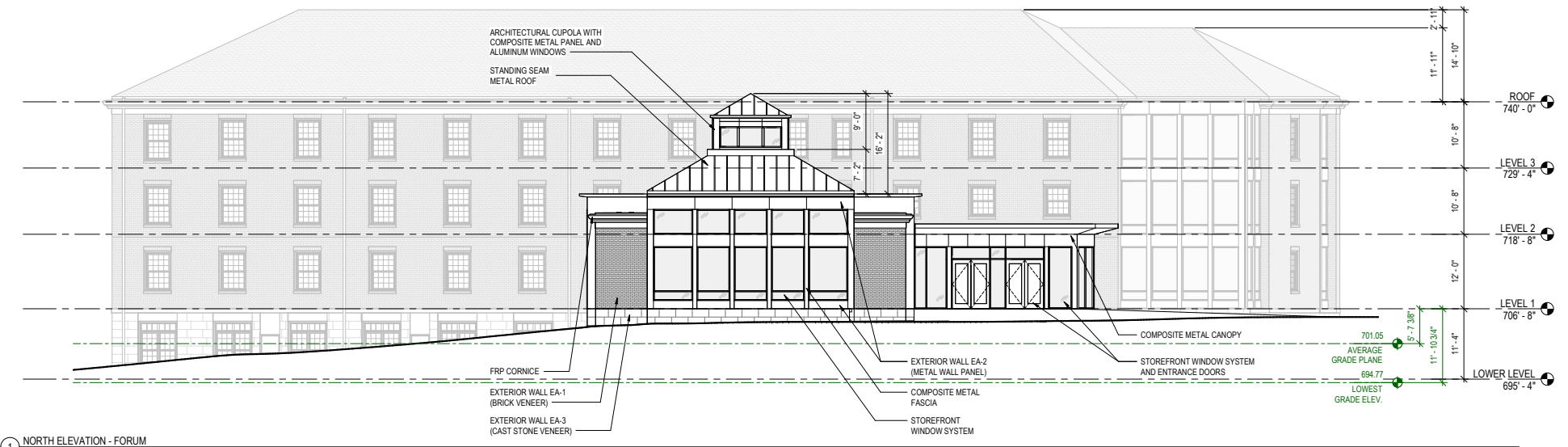
Additionally, the staff members for the East Neighborhood also live outside of the neighborhood, rather than in the neighborhood like in Colonnades or Danieley. The new building will also feature apartments for live-in staff members.

Oakley, who started at the town of Elon in June, said this is the first project she has been involved with from start to finish, which makes the East building even more exciting in her eyes.

“EAST IS GOING TO BE A REALLY EXCITING, ACTIVE NEIGHBORHOOD AFTER THAT BUILDING IS DONE.”

JANE O’BOYLE
EAST NEIGHBORHOOD FACULTY MEMBER IN RESIDENCE

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Part of the master plan for Elon University’s new residence hall, East Neighborhood Commons, which was approved Oct. 24 by the town of Elon council.

COURTESY OF TOWN OF ELON

Years after diagnosis, Elon baseball player overcomes diabetes

Diabetic college athlete manage classes, sports with stresses of diabetes

Jacob Kisamore
Elon News Network | @jacobkisamore

When his doctor first informed him that he had Type 1 diabetes, Will Vergantino’s mind began to race. In a state of shock, tears began to fill his eyes as he choked up.

Vergantino, who was 13 years old when diagnosed in 2015, did not know much about the disease at the time. His mom took him to the doctor after they noticed he lost weight.

Upon hearing the diagnosis, Vergantino’s first instinct was to ask the doctor if he would still be able to play sports. The Lumberton, New Jersey, native played travel baseball at the time and dreamed of playing in college and beyond.

For a moment, Vergantino thought his dream had vanished; however, the doctor assured him that he would be able to continue playing competitive baseball with some alterations to his routine and lifestyle.

“That’s all I needed to hear,” Vergantino said.

Seven years after his diagnosis, Vergantino is a redshirt sophomore infielder on the Elon University

baseball team. While he has achieved his goal of playing for a Division I program, Vergantino said he is always thinking about diabetes.

“I would love not to have diabetes, for sure. That would obviously be the easy answer, but I do think it’s made me a stronger person,” Vergantino said. “In some aspects, I think it has helped me. It’s made me more thoughtful and aware of what I’m putting in my body and how what I do affects my overall health.”

Type 1

Diabetes is a chronic disorder in which the pancreas no longer produces insulin, which causes the level of sugar in one’s blood to fluctuate outside of the normal range. There are two types of diabetes: Type 1 and 2. Type 2 diabetes normally appears later in life and is mainly lifestyle-related. Risk factors for developing Type 2 diabetes include being overweight and a lack of physical activity. Type 1, on the other hand, is usually a genetic condition that often shows up earlier in life.

Type 2 diabetics can produce insulin, a hormone produced in the pancreas that regulates the amount of sugar in the blood, but their bodies cannot use it effectively. Type 1 diabetics cannot produce insulin because their immune systems attack and

destroy the insulin-producing cells in the pancreas. Only 5 to 10% of diabetics are Type 1.

Vergantino is one of more than 1.45 million Americans and 8.7 million people worldwide living with Type 1 diabetes, according to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF). All diabetics must manage their blood sugar levels to keep them in a healthy range. For Type 1 diabetics, a healthy blood sugar range before meals is between 80 and 130 milligrams/deciliter . Blood sugar levels should reach no higher than 180 mg/dL within two hours after eating. For non-diabetics, a normal pre-meal blood sugar range is between 70 and 80 mg/DL and levels should not exceed 140 mg/DL after meals.

If a diabetic’s blood sugar levels are too high, they can inject insulin into their blood, which lowers the amount of sugar in the bloodstream. Other ways to manage blood sugar levels include eating a healthy diet, eating at regular times without skipping meals and maintaining a healthy weight.

The severity of effects from having low or high blood sugar differ for all diabetics, but as Vergantino explained, there are consequences for diabetics when their blood sugar levels are outside of the healthy range.

“If they’re way too high,



JACOB KISAMORE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Will Vergantino swings his bat inside a batting cage in Elon baseball’s new training facility adjacent to Latham Park.

you’re going to feel sluggish. Your eyesight’s going to be off. You’re going to kind of feel like you’re drunk in some way. You feel horrible,” Vergantino said. “If you’re low, you start shaking, you start sweating. For me personally, I see two dots in the peripheral of my eyes every time that happens. If you ever have seen a TV screen when it goes fuzzy, that’s what it’s like. You’re a whole different person.”

BY THE NUMBERS

1.45

million Americans live with diabetes, according to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

See **DIABETES** | pg. 4

THE PENDULUM

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ENN is committed to accurate coverage. When factual errors are made, we correct them promptly and in full, both online and in print. Online corrections state the error and the change at the top of the article. Corrections from the previous week's print edition appear on this page.

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CHEAT SHEET

THE CHEAT SHEET IS AN INTERVIEW WITH A RELEVANT EXPERT TO EXPLAIN COMPLEX TOPICS

Elon approaches post-pandemic flu season

Biology professor discusses symptoms of influenza, how it is transmitted and who is at high risk

Michael Leung
Elon News Network



Eryn Bernardy

In response to lowering COVID-19 case numbers, Elon transitioned to a mask-optional policy March 14, 2022, meaning this will be Elon's first flu season without enforced pandemic precautions.

Eryn Bernardy, professor of biology, shared what to expect for the upcoming flu season.

How does the flu affect the human body?

"It mainly infects our upper respiratory tract: your nose, your throat and the top part of your lungs. It causes things like congestion, cough, a high fever – that's very indicative of flu; body aches because the flu is very good at stealing your water, and it makes your muscles really painful. Those are the typical symptoms of the flu."

How is the flu transmitted?

"Same like COVID. Respiratory droplets, sneezing, coughing. Basically if you wipe your snot and you hold or shake somebody's hand, or if you sneeze on the table and someone grabs it, if you touch someone's dirty tissues, all transmitting the same way that COVID transmits."

What are the basic ways which people can prepare for the flu season?

"Thankfully, it's things we've all been used to for the past couple of years. Wash your hands frequently, go get checked up if you feel any symptoms at all, get your flu vaccine. They're similar to the COVID vaccine. They're not perfect at preventing you from getting the flu, but it will prevent you from severe illness, just like the COVID vaccine."

Also, masks are not just for COVID. If you feel symptoms, wear a mask. It will protect the people around you. If you hear someone coughing, wear a mask. I carry a mask with me at all times because if my students are sneezing and coughing in class, then I put on a mask. I have a 1 year old to think about at home, and so I'm wearing my mask more than other people. But yeah, same things we've been doing. Wash your hands, get the vaccine, be vigilant. If someone is sneezing or coughing around you, leave or meet outside."

Are there any specific measures that students should take inside a classroom or social setting?

"I would just wipe down a surface again if you see someone sneezing or coughing, maybe sit outside or put on your mask, or before you take it off to eat, go in a corner, maybe take your lunch out rather than sit inside. Same things we've been doing with COVID will help you with the flu."

Are there any people who would be considered high-risk for the flu?

"Anyone that's immunocompromised. One great thing about COVID, even though it's horrible, is that people got a lot more education about their own health. So if you're on an immunocompromised list for COVID, you're still at a high risk for flu. People that are around people who are immunocompromised; the elderly and infants, usually under the age of three and above the age of 65, they're at high risk, and then anyone that's immunocompromised in between those ages as well."

Are there any extra measures that immunocompromised people can take?

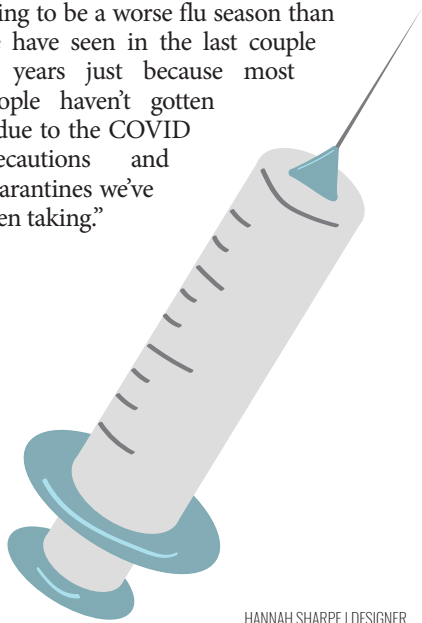
"They have special vaccines for those

individuals. People over the age of 65 get a different flu shot than we do. It's supposed to help with a stronger immune response. The kids don't get a different flu vaccine from my knowledge. A lot of people that are immunocompromised might just want to avoid indoor, big social settings similar to what they did during COVID, or wear their masks when they are in those settings."

Will the flu stack up on other diseases and viruses like COVID or monkeypox?

"No. There will be two different viruses. You're unlikely to get them at the same time, though it's possible. It would be separate for sure. It's not going to make any one thing worse. Your immune system is going to be working on the flu just like it will be working on COVID. So overall you might feel worse, but that is going to be because you're being infected by two viruses at once. But I would find it rare to be infected with both at the same time because everyone has such high immunity to COVID now. It's still possible but it's not going to make anything particularly worse."

We haven't been hearing about the flu for the past two years because it hasn't been rampant since people have been masking up and not hanging out and doing all these things. So we expect this is going to be a worse flu season than we have seen in the last couple of years just because most people haven't gotten it due to the COVID precautions and quarantines we've been taking."



HANNAH SHARPE | DESIGNER

New polling location opens at South Gym

The location was created as an alternative to Holly Hill Mall

Margaret Faust
Elon News Network | [@MargaretFaust5](https://twitter.com/MargaretFaust5)

For the first time, there is an early voting location in the town of Elon. Elon University's South Gym was added as a polling place by the Alamance County Board of Elections in July. Now, voters registered in Alamance County can cast their votes on campus.

Town of Elon resident Joan Kimbro has lived in Alamance County her whole life and her daughter works for Elon, but she hasn't been over to south campus before until now.

"There was no reason not to come and vote early when all you had to do was come right up the street and vote," Kimbro said when she voted at South Gym.

Holly Hill Mall used to be one of the early voting locations in the county. However this year, the mall is under construction, isn't being used as a location and needed to be replaced. Alamance County Board of Elections Director Dawn Hurdle said the board was looking for a place



JOSEPH NAVIN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Poll supervisor Chip Allen talks with election worker Donna Eng inside Elon University's South Gym Oct. 20. This was the first day of early voting in North Carolina ahead of the Nov. 8 elections.

that was centrally located.

As of the 2020, the most recent data, the voting rate of registered students at Elon was 82%.

The Alamance County Board Of Elections said picking a polling location on Elon's campus was not purposely an effort to increase voter turnout among college students.

Voters like Laparys Phillips said parking was easy and the line was short, making it

convenient.

"Voting is something I cherish. Something I think is very important," Phillips said. "However, time is often limited. I have a nine year old, she has soccer practice. So thinking about the logistics of getting voting in after having a very busy day and then a busier afternoon, location matters."

Phillips said this was the fastest voting experience she's ever had. She said she plans to vote here from now on.

Kimbro said her voting experience was quick, easy and safe. She encouraged young people to vote in elections because she said it's a privilege.

"If you care about your country and you care about things that are going on, you've got to stand up for what you think is right, and you've got to vote people in that are in line with how you feel things should be run," Kimbro said.

Early voting is open until Nov. 5. Election day is Nov. 8.



The Elon University volleyball team celebrates after winning a point against College of Charleston on Oct. 23 at Schar Center. Elon won in five sets.

JACOB KISAMORE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Head coach Marc Reeves high fives a young fan before the Elon University men's soccer game against College of Charleston on Oct. 22. Elon won 3-2.

ELLA PITONYAK | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



The North Carolina State Fair took place in Raleigh from Oct. 13 to 23 and featured a variety of rides and rollercoasters.

SARAH MOORE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Campaign signs litter the ramp next to the entrance to Elon's South Campus Gym on Oct. 20, which is serving as an early voting location.

JOSEPH NAVIN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Elon University President Connie Book and her dog, Beaux, enjoy the men's soccer Oct. 22 game against College of Charleston at Rudd Field. The team won 3-2.



JOSEPH NAVIN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

SPORTS

DIABETES ON THE DIAMOND

DIABETES | from cover

While there is no definitive data available to determine how many college athletes currently compete with the disorder, a study by Albright et al. found that the prevalence rate of Type 1 diabetes among former college athletes is 0.57%.

Diabetes can negatively impact an athlete's performance, as the side effects of high and low blood sugar make it difficult to concentrate and physically function at a high level — such as swinging a baseball bat.

Tyler Moos, an athletic trainer for Elon, said the disease is an additional stressor college athletes must worry about on top of what their peer athletes must endure.

"It's another thing that you have to force yourself to control," Moos said. "It's hard enough to get in a batter's box and be able to hit a mid 80s, 90 mph fastball or curveball. At the same point, if your blood sugar's off and your reaction time is slowed slightly, then it makes it that much harder."

Type 1 diabetes is most often diagnosed between the ages of 10 to 14, as was the case for Vergantino, who had to adjust his lifestyle at age 13 to continue playing baseball. Yet, the disorder can also be diagnosed much earlier or later.

Lily Anderson works at JDRE, the world's largest Type 1 diabetes research funder, and has few memories of life before her Type 1 diabetes diagnosis. In 1994, Anderson received her diagnosis at 3 years old. Anderson went on to play Division I golf at Illinois State University but was hesitant to talk about her condition because of her status as an athlete.

"I did not feel comfortable telling people that I had diabetes," Anderson said. "It was almost like I was ashamed of it because I thought, especially in athletics, if somebody sees you taking a shot, they're automatically going to think it's steroids. But it was also me kind of trying to hide the disease from people and wanting to be the cool athlete that didn't have the disease."

For Anderson, being prepared to swiftly deal with blood sugar

fluctuations prior to playing in competitive games is crucial.

"Throughout an athlete's career, they're going to have low blood sugar, and their blood sugar is going to be too high. It's bound to happen," Anderson said. "You need to have conversations to come up with a plan for these situations. Don't be afraid to bring it up before the season starts."

Moos said at Elon, plans for dealing with Type 1 diabetes as an athlete vary depending on what sport they play. In a sport like baseball or softball, there is downtime in between every inning for a player to assess their levels. In sports like basketball or hockey, play is continuous with few gaps for an athlete to check their levels.

While diabetes is a manageable condition, it is also the eighth leading cause of death in the U.S., as over 100,000 people died in 2021 from Type 1 and 2 diabetes. When handled correctly, diabetes does not prevent people from living a normal life or keep athletes from competing at a high level.

"It is a very manageable thing," Moos said. "The hardest aspect of being a college athlete with it is it's just another thing you have to manage. And then on top of that, trying to figure out where you sit best, what level of blood sugar, what level of hydration, what level of all those things do you need to be at to perform the best takes a lot of refinement."

Balancing act

Monitoring diabetes is an around the clock job. Every morning, Vergantino checks his blood sugar levels as soon as he wakes up. If his level is too high, he administers a shot of insulin to his leg to bring the level down. 15 minutes prior to eating every meal, Vergantino gives himself another shot of insulin. For each of these shots, he must calculate the amount of carbohydrates he will eat to determine how much insulin he needs. He said he usually gives himself between five to seven insulin shots per day.

Vergantino lives off campus with three of his teammates, one of whom is junior Connor Offshack. The

two have lived together for the last two years and are also travel mates when the team goes on the road. Offshack first found out Vergantino was a diabetic when he visited his dorm room during their freshman year.

"There were about 5,000 needle caps just laying around his room," Offshack said. "When I first met him, I would always ask him like, 'Dude, doesn't that hurt?'"

Vergantino has an app on his phone that connects directly to his glucose meter, a device that measures the amount of sugar in his blood. The app provides him with a live read of his blood sugar level at any given time and sends him alerts if it goes out of range. Additionally, both his mom and dad in New Jersey receive these alerts and can contact him if his levels are reaching dangerous levels and he does not notice.

While he checks his level periodically throughout the day, he said he looks at it every 10 to 15 minutes during practices or games to make sure he is within a stable range. When his levels get too high or too low, he communicates it to coaches and pulls himself from the field to get his levels back under control.

Vergantino said he learned to manage the disease by himself and does not rely on Elon's coaches or athletic trainers to help him with his daily routines.

"All my coaches and training staff have an understanding of diabetes and how to take care of it, and they're empathetic if I'm having a situation where I have to treat it," Vergantino said. "But it's on me to take care of that. I never wanted that to be anybody else's responsibility. It's my job. It's my issue that I have to deal with, and I try to take care of it on my end rather than putting it on

them."

Elon baseball head coach Mike Kennedy is entering his 27th season as a Division I baseball coach — both in his career and at Elon. He said he has coached just two players with diabetes in that time — Vergantino and Justin Needles, a sophomore who transferred to the University of North Carolina Asheville last spring.

While Kennedy and his staff scouted and recruited Vergantino in high school, they were unaware he was a diabetic. In fact, they did not find out about his condition until they discovered it in the paperwork from his first physical at Elon.

Kennedy said Vergantino rarely pulled himself off the field during practices or games when his levels began to fluctuate, as he did not want to lose chances for playing time. After working with him for over two years,

“

HERE'S A KID WHO HAS DIABETES, AND YOU WOULD THINK HE WOULD TRY TO TAKE CARE OF HIS BODY, BUT ON THE FIELD, HE'S RECKLESS, AND I LOVE IT.

MIKE KENNEDY
HEAD BASEBALL COACH

Kennedy said he and his assistant coaches can now recognize when Vergantino's levels are fluctuating, in which case they make sure he takes the necessary steps to deal with it safely.

"I think he's comfortable with us, and he knows that we don't look at it as a crutch or anything that's going to impact what he does, as long as he gets

healthy and he's ready to go, then he's going to be on the field," Kennedy said. "I think he appreciates that and knows that there's no pressure for him to have to be out there. If he needs a break, he gets his break and he knows that and he probably functions a lot better because of it."

According to Kennedy, Vergantino is one of Elon's best defensive infielders. He said he loves Vergantino's toughness

and appreciates that he is willing to lead by example — even with his condition.

"Here's a kid who has diabetes, and you would think he would try to take care of his body, but on the field, he's reckless, and I love it," Kennedy said. "He lays out, he dives all over the place. He gets dirty. He's on the ground more than any infielder we have, and that rubs off on others. It really catches our eye that this kid's willing to do whatever it takes. And that's what I love about him."

Kennedy said it is important for athletes with diabetes to communicate their condition and their needs to the coaching and training staff so they can help be a support system.

"Let's try to work together on trying to figure out how we can get you in the best place to where you can do this and not cover it up and not try to work around it and put yourself in a worse position. Let's take care of it and let's get you to be the best guy you can be," Kennedy said. "But if you don't do that and you try to do some things and don't make us aware of it, it probably is going to impede how well you do and put you in a bad place and it's not worth that. We can make it work."

Upon receiving his diabetes diagnosis, Vergantino had to adjust his diet to eat more healthy foods. While he has adapted his diet over time, it was not an easy sacrifice for the self-described food lover to make in the beginning.

"I love cheeseburgers and I love fries, but I had to realize that was going to be a treat meal for me," Vergantino said. "I had to clean the foods that I'm eating and make a lot cleaner diet, and as a result, honestly, it's just made me feel like I'm a healthier person in general. The way I eat now is the way I think a lot of people should eat."

While he has given up many of his old eating habits, Vergantino keeps candy in the dugout to manage his blood sugar level during games. Skittles have long been his candy of choice, and he eats them



whenever he sees his levels dipping below where he wants them.

“They have a ton of sugar in them, and they pack a punch when you eat them. So if my sugar ever went low, I’d just start pounding Skittles, throwing handfuls back,” Vergantino said. “I’d run out in the field with a glob of Skittles in my mouth, but they boost your sugar up and made me feel better in the moment.”

While some days are better than others for Vergantino, Offshack said Vergantino has become better at staying on top of his levels and does not bring it up as much as he did during his freshman year.

“He doesn’t really complain about it at all. It’s more of a reality, and he knows that,” Offshack said. “The days that it is hard for him, we all try to help him in the house. He tends to be a little moody when that happens, so it’s kind of hard to deal with him. But at the same time, we understand where he is coming from and what he’s going through, so we really just do anything to help out.”

Offshack recalled several instances of Vergantino’s levels falling out of the desired range when his phone was either dead or turned off. Because his parents get notifications when his levels fluctuate, they reach out to his roommates to alert their son when they cannot get a hold of him.

“There have been numerous scenarios when his phone has died and his parents have called us,” Offshack said. “They call us, and then we have to go in his room, knock down the door, wake him up and tell him just to eat some sugar.”

Diabetes has never been an excuse for Vergantino. Offshack said

if you did not know Vergantino has diabetes, you would never know it with how he carries himself.

“Verg loves baseball. He wouldn’t do it if he didn’t love it, especially with the condition that he has,” Offshack said. “I respect that he really works hard, and he always brings a smile and a certain type of energy to the team that most people can’t.”

Future of diabetes in athletics

Technology has transformed the diabetes landscape. While Anderson played golf at Illinois State in the early 2010s, she could not afford a way to monitor the changes in her blood sugar level as they were happening.

The only way for her to check her levels was to prick her finger to test her blood, which was not something she could do during a round of golf.

“It was terrifying because you’re out on the golf course and all of the sudden you start to feel weird, and you’re just like, ‘What do I do right now?’” Anderson said.

Technology like Vergantino’s allows diabetics to monitor their blood sugar levels 24/7.

Anderson said she has to deal with “diabetes burnout” as a college athlete, in which she gets overwhelmed by having to manage the disease and stops trying to control her levels. Anderson said she stopped taking the disease seriously in college and tried to manage it on her own, which she admits was a mistake.

“I needed support, but I didn’t know how to ask for it,” Anderson said. “There were so many things going on and it just wasn’t a priority. It was just a mess.”

Anderson said it is much easier for athletes to find support systems to help deal with the stress that comes with diabetes, as social media and online message boards have allowed diabetic athletes to connect and create a community. She said she wishes these resources were more prevalent when she was a college athlete, as she believes it may have helped her find people who could help her with what she was going through.

While Vergantino has not experienced “diabetes burnout” to

the extent Anderson did, he recalls several moments where he has broken down out of frustration when he has been unable to keep his levels where he needs them to be.

“Sometimes, that does get to me, and it can be frustrating for sure,” Vergantino said. “Honestly, I always go back to what I’ve gone to since I was a little kid and when I first got diagnosed – there’s always somebody out there that’s got it worse. So, if I’m complaining about diabetes when I can still eat whatever I want and do whatever I want and somebody else can’t even walk, it’s like, all right, you’re being a little, little selfish here.”

In Anderson’s opinion, coaches and athletic directors at the college level need to be better about communicating with athletes with diabetes to make sure they can provide them the resources they need and be there to support them when they must take breaks. For her, an accepting environment where athletes with diabetes can be comfortable to share it and manage it with the help of the team’s athletic staff is crucial.

“Everyone handles their diabetes a little bit differently, so having that initial conversation with them to discuss how they can best manage the disease without singling them out is important,” Anderson said.

Several notable professional athletes have made their battle with diabetes public in recent years. Among notable athletes with diabetes include MLB player Adam Duvall, Indycar driver Charlie Kimball and NHL player Max Domi. As a kid, Vergantino did not have any specific athletes or role models with diabetes he looked up to. But, he hopes to serve as inspiration for young athletes dealing with diabetes.

“At some points, I had my doubts. Realizing that nothing is actually holding you back and you’ve just got to go at it in a smart way, in a smart manner, I would’ve loved to hear that from somebody older in my position as a kid,” Vergantino said. “It would’ve given me such a boost of energy and hope, that like, hey, this is really possible. I would love to be that inspiration.”

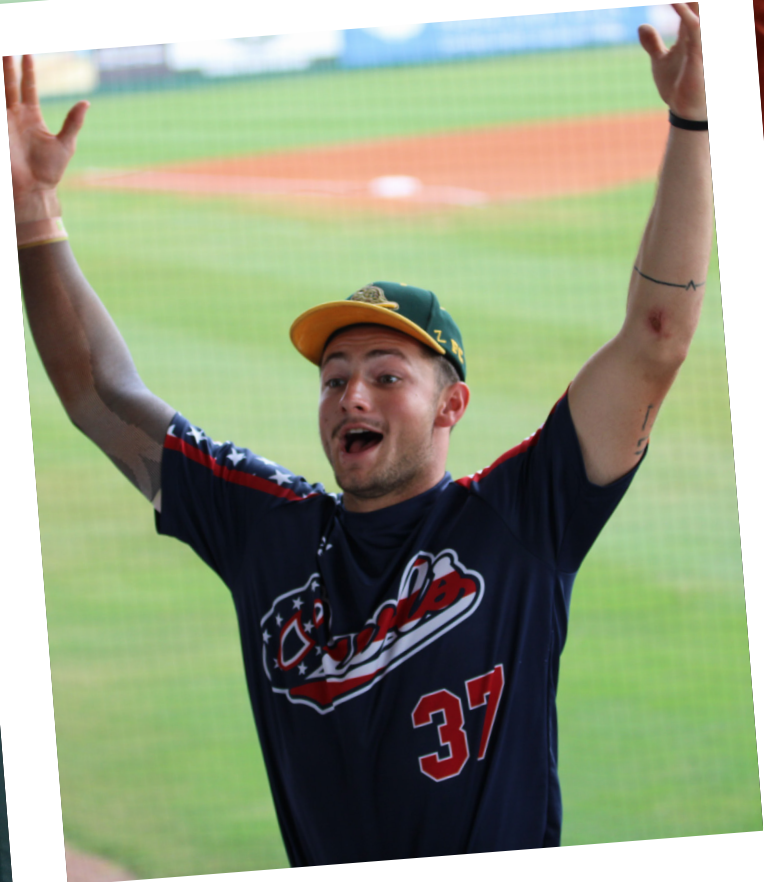


JACOB KISAMORE | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

BY THE NUMBERS

41

Starts in 55 games. Redshirt sophomore Will Vergantino had 15 hits, 7 RBI and 2 home runs in his 2022 Elon season.



Students navigate sobriety on Elon's campus

Phoenix Free president Syd Danziger hopes to reduce stigmas around alcoholism and recovery

Annemarie Bonner
Elon News Network | @ABonnerNews

Junior Syd Danziger vividly remembers the day they decided to stop drinking alcohol, only a few months before they started school at Elon University in fall 2020.

Danziger, who uses they and them pronouns, sat alone in their bedroom closet and drank a bottle of wine, which led to a blackout and a broken rib. This was the turning point for Danziger — who now serves as the president of Elon's collegiate recovery group, Phoenix Free.

"It only took a couple binge drinking moments to realize that I wasn't going to live. If we were going to be in lockdown for weeks and weeks and months, I wasn't going to live through it," Danziger said. "I was going to end up dying, and I no longer wanted to do that. I wanted to live, and I wanted to live differently."

Danziger said they began using alcohol and drugs as a teenager to escape trauma and bipolar disorder that wasn't diagnosed until later in life.

They got sober at 20 years old and have never had a legal drink of alcohol. When they came to college in the fall of 2020, they were only four months sober.

"I didn't know how to live, I

didn't know how to be sober and do well at school. I had to hit the ground running," Danziger said. "I think that the only reason that I stayed was because I had to believe that there was something better."

They found that through Phoenix Free, Elon University's collegiate recovery group on campus, which welcomes students recovering from issues such as eating disorders and substance abuse. The group meets every week to discuss recovery and the challenges they face on campus.

Danziger said one of their biggest hurdles on campus is feeling isolated because they don't drink.

"It can be a lonely existence to some degree. I think there's a culture on Elon's campus that in order to exist on the weekends, there must be a level of intoxication," Danziger said. "I've definitely found healthier solutions for myself, but I feel like the odd man out. It's a lonelier path to walk."

“

I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO LIVE, I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO BE SOBER AND DO WELL AT SCHOOL. I HAD TO HIT THE GROUND RUNNING.

SYD DANZIGER
ELON JUNIOR

Elon issues an annual policy notification to comply with Part 86 of the Drug Free Schools and Campuses Act, stating the university recognizes the negative effects of alcohol misuse on the community, provides treatment resources and expects employees and students to abide by local, state and federal law.

Danziger said while Phoenix Free has provided them with a community of like-minded students, their social experience has been limited at times because of Elon's drinking culture.

"It's definitely something that I think it's not for the faint of heart to be on Elon's campus and to be recovering from substance use disorder or to be in a position where you just aren't interested in drinking or using. It's isolating," Danziger said.

With a background in college-specific health and wellness, including sexual health and substance education, Collegiate Recovery Community Program Director Charlotte Williams said the issues that Elon students face are not unique to this campus, but access to substances may be more prevalent at Elon.

"The more financial means you have, you have more access to purchasing, not just anything, but in particular substances because that can be kind of a luxury to be able to afford, whether it be alcohol, drugs or other substances," Williams said. "There's just that pressure of fitting in, belonging and being able to do so in a way that you don't have to be under the influence to make friends or to be

in relationships or to connect."

Williams said solving this problem starts with decreasing the stigma with allyship training for faculty and staff. She said stigma is prevalent when it comes to mental health. This includes substance use disorder, a mental health disorder that affects the person's brain and behavior and causes an inability to control your substance use, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

In 2020, 24.4% of 18 to 25 year olds — 8.2 million people — reported having a substance use disorder, according to data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

Looking ahead, Williams said she hopes to have a campus that is recovery friendly and stigma free. Currently, she said there is still work to be done to grow Phoenix Free and educate the campus community about recovery.

She also hopes students in recovery can have a dedicated space where they can go to do homework, chat and feel comfortable in a sober environment. Danziger said this can help those in recovery avoid triggers, such as students discussing heavy drinking and hangovers.

"When someone's trying to practice active recovery, saying no to a drink is huge and it's scary and it's hard," Danziger said. "I'm faced with that all the time and that's part of why I put my sobriety on blast, so to speak, so that hopefully I don't have to deal with those awkward interactions, but it goes deeper too. There's a lot of situations where the culture on Sunday mornings is how

hungover are you?"

Danziger said they want to keep fighting to change the traditional narrative that college is only for those who drink. Their personal goal is to continue to translate their passion for recovery and make it their career.

"I plan to become a therapist eventually. And I think anything that I can do as a student to facilitate that open conversation, releasing of the stigma, creation of health and healthy, safe conversations," Danziger said. "That's crucial for me as a person, or I'll shrivel up."

Anyone who is or knows someone struggling with alcohol use can reach out to phoenixfree@elon.edu or visit the Substance Education section on Campus Recreation and Wellness' website.



COURTESY OF SYD DANZIGER

East Neighborhood Commons set to break ground 2023

BUILDING | from cover

"It's always exciting actually seeing them or watching them break ground on a project that you've watched go through the process from infancy and then actually see it built," Oakley said.

For a plan to be approved by the town council, it must also be approved by town staff as well as the technical review committee. While the staff review consisted of Oakley and an additional staff member, the TRC review involves

additional entities, including the county inspections department, the county fire marshal's office, the local fire department, members of the town of Elon Public Works department and the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

"There's a lot of eyes on it, but it's a good thing because you want to make sure that there's no surprises for anyone," Oakley said. "By having all the different departments engaged early on in the review process, I think it helps the applicant, the staff, definitely the council, just everyone involved in the project."

Oakley said she looks to the town of Elon Land Development Ordinance, which governs any building or construction projects that take place in the town of Elon. Part of her role as planning director is to ensure the project is in line with the zoning regulations in place, such as parking and landscaping.

For the new residence hall, Oakley said each department involved in the planning process looked the project proposal over from their area of expertise; for example, the fire department checked accessibility for emergency

services to the building.

After any necessary changes or revisions are made to the plan following the TRC review, the plans are presented to the town council and the public. In the town of Elon regular meeting on Oct. 11, the plans were reviewed in a public hearing, and citizens and town council members were given the chance to ask questions.

The plan was finally approved by the town council Oct. 24. But the review process does not end there, Oakley said.

"Their next step is to actually submit construction drawings,

so we even do a more thorough review, if that's possible," Oakley said. "It's just making sure that all the i's are dotted, all the t's are crossed."

As she gears up to complete the next steps in the process alongside the university, Oakley said she is excited to get closer to breaking ground.

"I like seeing the actual project constructed because seeing it on paper ... it's one thing to review it on paper and it's one thing to see the project come to life and actually be built and then see folks utilizing it," Oakley said.



TOP COLLEGE FOOTBALL RECRUIT TACKLES CHALLENGES ON AND OFF THE FIELD

Cummings High School junior Jonathan Paylor credits past, present coaches for success

Mason Willett
Sports Director | @MasonWillett20

With over 20 scholarship offers and a state championship under his belt, Hugh M. Cummings High School junior and running back Jonathan Paylor has emerged as the second-best player in North Carolina and 34th-best in the country for the class of 2024.

The four-star athlete faces opposition each day in



JOSEPH NAVIN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

decided it would be best for him to move in with his former middle school football coach, Bernard Pinnix. “I built a strong relationship with him since middle school, I was with him everyday,” Paylor said. “We did bowling, different types of locations to workouts just to get out, and everything, such as going to the mall, shopping around. Over time we have built this relationship.” This decision came after Pinnix approached Paylor’s mother and said he didn’t like the influences that he saw around him. “Once I started training Jon and dealing with Jon and just watching him as a young man, I saw a need,” Pinnix said. “What made me see the need was I would see a lot of stuff around him that I particularly didn’t like.” Growing up, Paylor said he never had a true father figure. His mom raised Paylor and four other children

on her own. Since Pinnix stepped in, Jonathan said he’s become more than just a coach — he’s a father. “He means everything to me, does everything a coach and father should do, and I really appreciate him for everything,” Paylor said. In the years since, they’ve only gotten closer. Paylor said he and Pinnix spend most of their days together. “We would go to different gyms, so when he got back, it might be 9:30 or 10. All he could do was eat. If he had a lesson to learn, we would get back earlier. All he could do was eat and go to bed, and then the next morning, he would go to school, so we did that for a long time,” Pinnix said. “It kept him away from a lot of those kids because he was always with me.” Pinnix was not the first coach to support and mentor Paylor. One of his former coaches, Connell Graham, also helped raise Paylor. Graham died in July 2021. Paylor said Graham meant so much to him and he now plays in honor of him. Paylor said words can’t describe the relationship they had. “He’s a guy where if you have a conversation with him, he will change your whole perspective of life, and being with him was just a role model to me because he actually raised me also as a player and a son,” Paylor said. “I really can’t explain what he has done in my life because it’s a lot of things in life

that I can’t gather.” While Paylor is the one scoring the touchdowns, his coaches are helping him score opportunities and connections that will last a lifetime. Cummings head coach David Grimm said Paylor has a strong work ethic and is proud of the man he has become. “He’s developing into a leader, something he wasn’t earlier on but that just comes with maturity and he’s filling that role nicely,” Grimm said. “He’s just a hard working football player and he deserves everything that he’s getting.”

“HE MEANS EVERYTHING TO ME, DOES EVERYTHING A COACH AND FATHER SHOULD DO, AND I REALLY APPRECIATE HIM FOR EVERYTHING.”

JONATHAN PAYLOR
CHS RUNNING BACK

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