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Carrying the College Burden
Whether it is to pay the bills or to establish a career, more students are having to balance school with a job.

The Concert Is About to Begin
Presenting four Kent State musical groups for your viewing pleasure.

Rafting Is Not a Spectator Sport
On the river there's no room for worries.

Assisting Independence
These Kent State students are working in group homes to help the residents become more self-reliant.

Lifestyles of the Not-Yet Famous
A student-run record label, Donut Friends, distributes local talent throughout the country.

From Kent State to the Dawg Pound
This alum is now starting for the Cleveland Browns.

Fighting to Win
Support from the football team has helped Dean and Melody Pees deal with her sudden diagnosis of cancer.

Nocturnal Tendencies
Cigarettes, coffee and conversation are the ingredients for a late night at Country Kitchen.

From the Editor
Calling yourself a wimp to the 10,000 readers of The Burr takes some courage. And going white water rafting for the first time does, too. Chief Copy Editor Lisa Hofmann overcame her fears and took a trip down the “Yach” River in Pennsylvania. She shares her story in the cover story, “Rafting Is Not a Spectator Sport” (page 20).

In this issue, our staff tried very hard to find something of interest for everyone. I hope you find we have been successful. Along with the sports stories, we have included a local band and the label that is helping it, a woman’s struggle with cancer during an already stressful time in her family’s life and why some people choose to sit in Country Kitchen in the wee hours of the morning. There is also an entire section dedicated to working students – why and where they are employed.

I hope you find something in this issue that entertains or touches you. I thank the entire staff who worked on this magazine. And thanks to all the readers. Enjoy.
College costs are rising. And students are working harder and longer to make up for this. Whether it is to pay the bills or to establish a career, more students are entering the work force. These are the stories of students who work while in college and how they deal with

Carrying the College Burden
He woke up at 5:30 in the morning and did not see his bed again for about 22 hours. But he wasn’t out having fun. He was working to pay for a degree from Kent State.

Paul Dinehart, then a freshman education administration major, worked at his first job at the Old Mill Winery in Geneva in the morning. He then went to his second job, Wal-Mart in Streetsboro, for a 13-hour shift. He regularly worked 60 hours a week with 14 credit hours.

Now a sophomore, Dinehart works an average of 50 hours a week at the same jobs in addition to taking 17 credit hours. He is part of the growing trend of students who work long hours while also taking classes, in part because of the changes in college costs and financial aid. With these longer hours sometimes comes excessive stress.

“Students are more stressed out in a sense that they go to classes and work a lot more,” says Thomas DiNardo, a psychologist at Psychological Services. “What they usually do is cut out sleep, and that’s what produces stress. Some people are busy and can get away with it for a while, but it catches up later, and it’s a vicious cycle.”

For Dinehart, his stress catches up to him when he’s most tired.

“It’s just when you want to go to sleep that you wonder is it worth it,” he says. “It is because I don’t want to do these small jobs forever.”

Even though he has scholarships from his summer job at Kirtland Country Club in Willoughby and from the Northern Ohio Golf Association, Dinehart still has to maintain his busy work schedule to pay for school without taking out any loans. At the same time, he must maintain a 2.5 GPA to keep both scholarships.

“I don’t take out loans because of job security when I get out,” he says. He wants to avoid debt, even if it means working longer hours in college.

Simply being able to afford school is becoming a major obstacle for many students.

“In the ’60s, it was possible to work your way through school,” says Ronald Shunk, director of financial aid at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania. “The minimum wage students earn and loans haven’t kept pace with the inflation of costs. It’s conceivable they could borrow that much, but would they want to? They would have to consider the debt obligation later.”

Although in 1999 the average increase in the public college costs was only 3.4 percent and 4.7 percent for private, the lowest increases in 12 years, tuition has still passed the current rate of inflation, according to the College Board, a non-profit educational association. The Consumer Price Index, a measurement of inflation, rose only 2.3 percent.

Tuition has also grown faster than family income, making a college education increasingly out of reach. The average tuition for full-time undergraduate students rose 44 percent from 1990 to 1996, according to the General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress. But the CPI rose only 15.4 percent, and the median household income rose just 13.8 percent.

Shunk says the fast-paced increases are largely from the costs of technology and faculty, both of which have been crucial for colleges in recent years and whose costs also have grown faster than inflation.

Nancy Scott, vice president for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, says these components have accounted for most of Kent State’s tuition hikes. She adds the university set aside an additional $1.1 million for scholarships and building renovations out of the money from the 5.5 percent tuition increase for this fall.

Scott says the Ohio Board of Regents sets 6 percent as the limit for tuition increases.

“I know it’s difficult. We’re very sympathetic to those needs,” Scott says of students who work and face rising costs, which invariably means more work. Scott adds Kent State’s tuition raises are...
Carrying the College Burden

Available student aid was more than $64 billion in the academic year 1998 to 1999, which was an increase of 4 percent from the previous year, according to the College Board's 1999 annual report, "Trends in Financial Aid." In just the past decade, total aid grew about 85 percent.

But loans fueled the majority of this increase. In fact, loan aid has doubled, growing about 108 percent in the past decade, compared to grant aid at 63 percent. In 1998 and 1999, unsubsidized loans totaled more than $33.7 billion, or 52 percent of the total aid awarded nationally.

Evans says the federal student aid program is reevaluated every year. In 1992 the government decided to make loans more available, letting loans grow faster than grants since.

"It was so students could borrow more, and they have," he says. "With the cost of education increasing the way it has, it has become a vehicle they have used."

But Shunk sees more political overtones to the redistribution of aid. He explains the government prefers loans to grants because loans circulate the money back to the government, plus interest from unsubsidized loans.

"With financial aid they gave out money but didn't get any back," Shunk says. "They increased the loan debt obligation and in the end got more back than with grants. But students have to repay it."

Responding to these changes, most colleges have worked on their own aid to attract and retain students.

"Aid to our students comes in college-endowed funds," Shunk says.

Evans says Kent State is also working to provide other answers for students besides loans.

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**Total Financial Aid Awarded at Kent State: $163 million**

- **Grants:** $42 million (6%)
- **Scholarships:** $7 million (4%)
- Federal Loans: $114 million (70%)

† Grants: Awarded from outside the university, usually federal or state governments, mostly need-based but also merit-based.

†† Scholarships: Awarded from within the university, mostly merit-based but can be need-based.

Source: Nancy Scotts, vice president of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs.
"A number of things are going on to close the gap between loans and grants," he says. "The problem didn't happen overnight, and it can't be fixed overnight."

Some new programs at Kent State are aimed at expanding the federal Pell grants, increasing state grants and scholarships and creating college and departmental scholarships that can be renewed.

Still, Kent State students use loans to get through school. Scott says the average undergraduate student indebtedness is about $18,000, where the national average is about $15,000 by graduation.

"Our students are taking out more loans," Scott says. "The background most of our students come from is the middle class, and college takes a lot of money. Even though it pays back in the future, it's a huge cost."

With or without loans, working can have its own effect on students.

Classes often suffer as a result of heavy workloads, according to the U.S. Department of Education's report, "The Condition of Education" in 1998.

The report found that in 1995 and 1996, four out of five undergraduates worked while enrolled in college, with one-half of those students saying they worked an average of 25 hours per week to pay for school. Also, of these full-time students, 19 percent worked full-time, and 27 percent worked 21 to 34 hours per week.

Fifty-five percent of students who worked full-time reported that working had a negative impact on their grades. Students who worked fewer hours experienced a lesser effect on their grades.

Dinehart has had trouble keeping his grades up while maintaining his heavy schedule. He also expects to take five years to graduate. He says his GPA dropped from 2.9 to 2.7, so he has started studying at work and skipping sleep. His GPA is starting to climb again.

Even though her school is paid for through the G.I. Bill from the Army National Guard, Amy Hill, a senior political science major, works about 20 hours a week as a security aide while taking 15 credit hours, down from 18 in the spring.

"[That] semester was the first time I worked and had a full 18 hours, and I wouldn't recommend it," she says, adding she was more stressed finishing work for her classes even if her grades didn't go down.

Outside of classes, working can take a toll on students. Working for mostly spending money and other costs of living, Hill says her biggest source of stress is her lack of time.

"If I look at the next three weeks and all I have to do, it's so overwhelming," Hill says. "So I have to plan just each day. It's all just how you look at it and what your perspective is."

Even though Hill only works an average of 20 hours, the nature of her job is stressful.

She works as a security aide three to four nights a week. She is an area advisor in charge of five buildings. Her shift usually lasts from 8 p.m. until 4 a.m. Hill schedules her classes late, about 1:45 p.m. at the earliest, so she can sleep at least six hours after studying.
• Kent State seniors work an average of 14 to 16 hours a week off campus. The average for similar institutions is 10 hours.

• Kent State students graduate with an average loan debt of $18,000 compared with the national average of $15,000.

• Ohio ranks 36th nationally in financial support of higher education. State money now accounts for less than 39 percent of Kent State's operating budget.

Source: Nancy Scott, vice president of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs

“Those last couple of hours, everyone else is in bed asleep, and I always end up thinking about what I have to do to catch up,” she says.

Also, Hill says working at night is not the same as working during the day.

“You've been up all day, and the day job is just part of your day,” she says. “But my job starts at the end of the day.”

Hill also has a commitment to the National Guard, where she acts as a platoon leader. She has to leave one weekend every month to work.

“It doesn't sound like a lot, but it's one weekend that I have to get everything done during the week,” she says. “It pays for school, but it also seems like it gets in the way.”

Dinehart’s major source of stress is in the sheer amount of hours he works every week. While he has some flexibility with his work schedule, he must work at least 30 hours a week at Wal-Mart to retain his status as a receiving manager, plus 20 hours at the winery.

After classes and work, Dinehart plays in intramural sports, attends meetings for various groups, then studies.

In the spring, going to sleep at 3 a.m. and waking up at 7 a.m. was his normal routine. On the weekends, Dinehart makes up the rest of his hours and catches up for himself.
"Sundays are my nice days," Dinehart explains. "I sleep in until noon. I make myself breakfast, see a game and go to the [fraternity] chapter meeting."

Despite the packed schedule, Dinehart says managing everything is becoming easier, mostly because of time management skills he has learned.

DiNardo is familiar with this scenario, even though Dinehart and Hill are learning to manage their schedules. "It's usually about time management and high expectations," he says. "They want it all, but the price they end up paying is high. And change is very hard."

DiNardo adds changing schedules or attitudes is especially hard for students who are determined there is no way to work things out. He says in these cases, change usually only comes after a disaster such as being fired or failing a class.

For Angie Behymer, drastic change was exactly what she needed. She is now attending Hocking College in Nelsonville, Ohio, but she went to Kent State for two years, first majoring in zoology and then later conservation. Behymer first worked at the Gym Annex, then at the Student Recreation and Wellness Center when it opened her sophomore year.

Working during the transition period, Behymer, a facility supervisor, was working about 30 hours a week plus any extra time she was needed at the Annex.

"I was constantly stressed," she says. "I felt like I had no free time. No matter how hard I studied, I felt like I didn't get the grades I should have."

Behymer had to get loans, but she tried to work to diminish them.

"I felt like I was stuck," she says. "It seemed they always wanted more out of you."

Behymer left Kent State following her sophomore year, and she is now majoring in backcountry horsemanship. She says finances were one reason she changed schools, but the curriculum of her major also played a role.

She says she pays vastly less now for school, even though the room plans are different. Most important, she does not feel as stressed out, and she enjoys her classes more.

"It's much easier," she says. "I don't have to sit down every night to do homework. I have more free time."

For people who do not change their situations like Behymer did, DiNardo says even temporary success is just as bad as a setback.

"Some students pull it off and that's the terrible part because then they think they can pull it off again," DiNardo says. "When they don't, it leads to failure, disappointment and feelings of worthlessness."

DiNardo says there are no concrete methods to change a stressful life. Most important, he says, small steps such as keeping up with sleep or making time for oneself may help stressful schedules.

"If someone makes a little change, it serves as a model for larger changes later," he says. "But they have to be willing."

Hill says her parents offer stability. "They're the people I go to when I have too much," she says. "They put it back in perspective and keep me focused on what's important."

DiNardo, who has been a counselor at Kent State since 1979, says he has seen students face different types of stress. He says they usually have high expectations and try to perfect themselves in all areas, including school and work. At the same time, they are developing relationships and deciding what they want to do with their lives, all of which are stressful. He says being bored and having no stress can be just as bad as having too much.
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"People have to find that balance, and that’s what college students are trying to discover," DiNardo says.

In dealing with stress, DiNardo says some people try to reduce stress by drinking or using drugs, but "those are short-term solutions that have long-term consequences."

For healthier treatment of stress, DiNardo recommends either thinking everything through or talking to friends or a counselor to find ways to reduce stress and manage time. People can find answers in themselves if they listen, he says.

"It seems to me that [the people who deal well with stress] pay attention to their bodies and that becomes a feedback system and shows them they need to change," he says.

Dinehart, who belongs to the fraternity Sigma Phi Epsilon, says at first the fraternity took up time he could barely afford, but later it became a good support system.

"When I first rushed, the opportunities were overwhelming," he says. "It’s great. I consider it the best decision I ever made."

While Behymer was at Kent, she also found solace in an organization. She was active in both Kent Interhall Council and intramural volleyball.

"KIC took away time, but it gave me a chance to get out," she says. "It was something else to do besides homework."

Hill follows one of DiNardo’s suggestions and tries to prioritize everything, so she can accomplish tasks with less stress.

"Something has got to give somewhere," she says. "It just matters what you pick, what’s most important because you can’t do it all."

But if she does feel stressed, she knows when to take time for herself.

"I just take a break and do something else," Hill says. "Then you realize what you’re doing all this for."

Even though Shunk notices the difficulties students have in paying for their educations, he still thinks it’s possible.

"For those who have a determination to do it, they will find the resources to do it," he says. "They probably won’t go through without loans, but most people who want to can get through it."
It's Friday evening, and the show is just getting started at Chaser's Country nightclub in Rootstown. Multi-colored stage lights penetrate the thick cloud of smoke hanging in the air. Scantily dressed cocktail servers weave their way through crowds of boisterous men. The bouncers, dressed in T-shirts and jeans, keep a watchful eye on the stage.

As the first strains of bass-heavy music pound from the speakers, the room erupts into cheers. Forming a semi-circle around the stage, women model seductive, form-fitting outfits while each dancer is introduced. Audience members then pick their preferred entertainers for the evening.

Jane, a 22-year-old fine arts student at Kent State who doesn't want her real name used for privacy issues, says being a successful dancer depends on attitude. "You can be beautiful, or you can be marginal," she says. "It really doesn't matter. But you need to have a good personality to make money."

Jane has been working at Chaser's for eight months. After her four-year scholarship expired, she needed to find another way to pay for her last year of college. "Dancing is always something I have been curious about," she says. "A friend of mine had a good experience at a nightclub, so I took her advice and decided to try it. So far I like it a lot."

On a weekend night, Jane can make as much as $220. The weekdays are usually slower, so her earnings drop to about $100 a night, which is still more than enough to pay her bills.

"My parents offer me no financial support," Jane says. "I pay my tuition, rent, books, insurance and my car."

Mary Anne Anderson, who owns Chaser's, says she tries to give college students no more than three shifts per week. Since six of the 18 women who work at Chaser's attend college, Anderson says she understands when her dancers need extended periods of time off. "I had one girl request off the entire week because of tests," she says. "I'd rather work with their schedules so they don't get stressed out and quit."

Despite the financial security and flexibility, dancers also have to deal with the negative reactions of others. With the exception of her closest friends, Jane says she was initially reluctant to reveal her occupation to anyone.

"When people ask me about what I do, I'll tell them," she says. "And if you want to judge me for what I do with my life, that's entirely up to you."

Jane says even though she isn't ashamed by what she does, she prefers to keep her job a secret from her family. "I think they have figured out what I do, but they've never said anything to me," she says. "They aren't stupid."

Anderson says the safety of the dancers is always her first priority. "We have a touch-and-go policy here," she says. "You touch the girls, out you go. Period. Just because they dance here doesn't automatically make them whores. They are here to work, and they will be treated with respect."
STARTING A DOT-COM IS MORE THAN A 9 TO 5 JOB

Justin Walford's Web site is no monkey business.
Instead, www.marketingmonkey.com is a Web design
and promotion site launched by Walford, a Kent
State graduate student.
He chose the name “Marketing Monkey” because it
was unusual.
“Sometimes when I was working away on it, I felt like a
monkey. It was enjoyable, but it was busy.”
Walford, who received his bachelor’s degree in
marketing from Kent State in 1997, is pursuing a master’s
degree in concentrated information systems.
He launched Marketing Monkey in August 1999
after working with the Cleveland affiliate of I-JOBS.com,
a job search engine site. There he helped develop the
company’s Web site.
When he set out to start his own site, Walford
wanted to get more exposure for his clients.
“There used to be a large market share, and
everyone could have a piece of the pie,” he says. “We
help our clients get more hits on their sites and get more
market exposure — help them compete on the Web.”
Walford has 14 clients from his own company and
also works for two other Web design firms.
Funding was hard to find in Ohio because it isn’t as
evolved as other states in financing entrepreneurs, he
says. He used personal savings to launch the company,
and his previous experience helped, too.
“My background was great because I had made
contacts,” Walford says. “It’s not so hard to find Web
site design people, but it is hard to find people who can
do Web site promotion.”
When Walford began the company, he put in
14-hour days for months. He now works about 65 hours
a week and has two part-time employees. He recently
joined a cooperative venture, which will give him more
time to focus on Web site promotion.
On top of his workload from Marketing Monkey,
Walford is enrolled for six credit hours this semester,
which he says leaves little time for anything else.
“It’s a constant struggle between work, school work
and social life,” he says. prioritizing them in that order.
When he completes graduate school, he plans to continue
with the company and enjoy more leisure time.
Even though some might be cautious about starting
a dot-com, Walford says he didn’t worry too much about
his site.
“Mine’s not risky because the market is already
there,” he says. “I just have to promote my services. The
reason dot-coms fail is because there is nothing to it. Take ebay — three guys with a server in their basement
could run it.
“No time in history could a guy in Kent start up a
business and get clients in Vermont and Connecticut and
all over the world. There would have been a much greater
risk. Now you just throw it up and see how it flies.”

Justin Walford is the entrepreneur behind
Marketing Monkey.
Photo by Bridget Comimso.
Kent State Police Officer Jeff Futo understands students. In fact, he is one.

"I find it a lot easier [to deal with students] because I understand what everybody is up here to do and where they are coming from," he says.

Futo, 28, has been with the university’s police department for three years since graduating in 1996 with a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice. He is now pursuing a bachelor’s degree in psychology. Futo has considered entering graduate school and pursuing a master’s degree in psychology, but now he is not sure what his future will entail.

"I am putting in a lot of hours and don’t have much time for my studies," Futo says. "It is hard to go back once you are finished."

Futo says his life as a student does not alter his life as a police officer when it comes to breaking up parties.

"The difference between myself being a cop and a college student is that once I put on the uniform and badge, I am just there to enforce the law," Futo says. "My personal opinions are thrown out the window. I have to do what I have to do to enforce whatever laws are being violated."

That was the case when Futo was on duty at the Cinco de Mayo festivities in the University Townhomes apartment complex last spring. During the night, a BMW was flipped over, and couches were set on fire in the street. The police used tear gas to break up the crowd.

"[In the Townhomes situation], it’s not a position of understanding where kids are coming from," Futo says. "It is an understanding of a situation that has presented itself to you and what needs to be done to disperse a rioting crowd."

"It has nothing to do with who those people are. It’s more about the dynamics of the crowd and what needs to be done to bring it back to a peaceful state."

In his service, Futo has never had to arrest a friend.

"I have arrested people that I know or talked to at some point, but they understand that I am just doing my job, so I haven’t had a problem with them or anyone in general for that matter," he says.

After three years of police service, Futo says serving the law-abiding citizens of the community is the most rewarding aspect of his work. He says handling the law-breaking citizens is an aspect of the job he dislikes.

"It’s hard when you come across people who are being disorderly or rude. Then you have to put on the ‘game face’ to get the job done."

Futo plans to stay in the Kent area and work while pursuing his academic interests.

"I enjoy Kent and the college atmosphere," he says. "So I have found being a Kent State police officer a happy medium."

Jeff Futo puts his psychology and criminal justice studies to use by moonlighting as a Kent State police officer. Photos by Allison Waltz.
The Concert Is About to Begin

PLEASE TAKE YOUR SEATS, AND ENJOY THE SHOW

photos by Bridget Comisso

Even though they are unknown to many at Kent State, these four student music groups put in long hours to perfect their sounds. This is a behind-the-scenes look at making the music.
Clockwise from right:

- Mesmerized by the piece, Jameson Cooper becomes lost in the music that he is playing.
- Jennifer Vahn practices the cello. She is pursuing her second master’s degree.
- The bow is the voice of the instrument. The sounds mimic how the musician strokes the strings.
- Playing off each other, Jacob Murphy and Cooper rehearse on their violins.
- Renata Hornik practices the viola and feels the music.
- Murphy puts in long hours on his violin.

Euclid String Quartet
Clockwise from right:

- Priwan Nanongkham pauses during practice.
- Sara Stone Miller plays the sawu, which has the sacred monkey face, "Hamuman," carved on the back from the Indian epic Ramayana.
- Nanongkham concentrates intensely on the khawng wong yai.
- Eric Murray plays the ching, which makes him the conductor of the ensemble.
- Terry Miller, head of the Thai ensemble, plays the ranot thum during practice.
- United with string and bow, the saw duang creates a beautiful sound.
- The chakhe is similar to the abstract form of a crocodile, derived from the word chirakhe.
- David Badagnan tightens the strings on the chakhe during practice.
- David Leadingham plays the khawng wong yai, which translates to "big gong in circle."

Thai Ensemble
Clockwise from right:

- Tyler Rounds sings her heart out.
- Tony Donofrio is a part of steel drum band, Flash in the Pan.
- Intent on the music, Greg Richards creates rhythm on the drums.
- Ann Kolenick strikes the different notes in the “pan.”
- Kolenick feels the Carribean beat.
- Two mallets per hand, Eric Carrawa adds some keyboard percussion.
- Professor Ted Rounds enthusiastically shakes maracas.
- Richards gets into the groove.
- Flash in the Pan performs at Art in the Park in September.

Flash in the Pan
Clockwise from above:

- Attentive to the conductor's direction, Liam Cloyd plucks his bass strings.
- Andy Alt strums his guitar.
- Dan Stack and Romn Paras jam on their saxophones.
- Everyone together now – Laura Kurtz, Johnathan Battista, Doug Bryant and Curtis Wakely practice their trombones.
- Sarah Rosian uses a mute to alter the sound of her trumpet.
- Paras and Nick Reardon add woodwind power.
- Engrossed in the music, Mike Stephens provides high-pitched notes from his flute.
- On the drumset, Justin Watt keeps the rhythm.
- Mark Russo, Rosian and Jeff Markov blurt out brass notes.
- Stack, Dave Nay and Reardon play their saxophones.
- A moment of rest for Kurtz and her trombone.
Rafting Is Not a Spectator Sport

HELMETS AREN'T REQUIRED, BUT THE VISIONS OF CRUSHED SKULLS THAT DANCE IN MY HEAD COMPEL ME TO WEAR ONE

by Lisa Hofmann
photos by Allison Waltz

All forward!” is the command, prompting me to dig my paddle into the rushing water. I struggle to synchronize my strokes with the others, while exerting all the energy I can muster. A wall of white foam breaks against our raft, rendering my attempts futile and knocking me into the center of the boat. I flounder to regain my position and to resume paddling as the currents jostle both the raft and my composure.

The pursuit of adventure found me here, testing my mettle against the Lower Youghiogheny River in
Pennsylvania. Adventure is not something I normally seek, and rarely do I feel the need to pit my strength against nature's. But I am an active participant in the sport of proving people wrong, so when an opportunity to skew others' perceptions of me arose, I went for it.

7:30 a.m. – The Hour of Adventure?

Kent State's Adventure Center seems to think so because that is when its white water rafting trip departs from the Student Recreation and Wellness Center. When I arrive with sleep riding my eyelashes, the van is already packed with camping gear and rafting apparel we might need to keep us warm, like wet suits and spray jackets.

“You don’t have to wear any of these things,” says Becky Baldwin, graduate assistant at the Adventure Center. “You have to wear clothes, though,” interjects the trip leader Rich Bebb.

It’s a small group of us going, only five, which translates nicely to me: Only four people to see me embarrass myself. But everyone else seems more fitted than I to the sport of white water rafting. Rich, a junior marketing major and former Marine, has been rafting a dozen times. Becky is a graduate student in sports and recreation administration. Adventure trips and sports are what she is building into a career. And freshman journalism major Lauren Krupar has gone white water rafting a couple of times out West. Mike Phillips, a
Mike, a guide for the Mountain Stream rafting company, gives his safety and “What to Expect” speech for both beginners and experienced rafters.

junior criminal justice major, is the only other rafting novice, but he looks athletic and works at the climbing wall in the Rec Center.

But I am assured my lack of experience won’t negatively affect the trip, and I become more excited about this new experience.

It’s a three-hour drive to the Youghiogheny, or “Yach,” as people refer to it. Our fatigue seems to overwhelm any excitement, but Rich talks about his last trip on the Yach. It was his first rafting experience, and it was his 18th birthday.

“They pulled a dead body out of the river that day,” he says. “I was really scared.”

I’m sure my expression betrays me because Rich quickly explains, “The guy had been stupid and drunk. He did things you aren’t supposed to do.”

He ended up having a great time and says, “It was the greatest thing since sliced bread after that.”

Rich’s reminiscing wanes as he ponders what the greatest thing before sliced bread was, and I am left a victim to my overactive imagination. Well, I certainly won’t be drunk. But what if I do something dumb today, and I become a casualty of the river, too?

The Easiest Point off the River

B

ecause of hazy directions, we cut it close arriving at the “put-in,” where we’ll enter the river with other rafters and the guides from Mountain Streams, the vendor that arranged this trip.

There’s no time to change into bathing suits, so it looks like I’ll be rafting in my fleece pajama bottoms and turtleneck. With feet half in my sandals, I reach and grab a life jacket and helmet. Helmets aren’t required, but the visions of crushed skulls that dance in my head compel me to wear one. Lauren and Mike sniff the perspiration-steeped life jackets with distaste. They’re like putting on giant, buoyant gym socks.

Outfitted for adventure, we pick a raft for our group and designate a captain. Becky, probably the most experienced rafter among us, is our captain, the one who will yell steering directions from the back of the boat.

While all of the groups sit in their rafts on the shore, one of our guides delivers a well-rehearsed safety spiel, complete with carefully inserted puns.

“If anyone’s here by peer pressure, this is the easiest point off the river,” he says. I think about what would happen if I get out of my raft and declare I am not going. Fearing mockery from the boat of 13-year-olds next to us, I stay put.

“With all sports come risks...” He begins a barrage of safety instructions. He warns against waving our paddles around haphazardly. It could result in “somer” teeth. Some rafters anticipate the punch line.

“Some are in the raft. Some are in the river,” they say in unison.

The most important lesson is not to stand up in rushing water. The force of the water could paralyze your legs and send you face down into the river with no means of getting up. If we fall out, we’re supposed to float downstream and wait for a raft to rescue us.

If I fall out, will I remember these instructions?

A guide in a kayak attempts to push the stuck Kent State rafters off a rock.
We wade out into the river and climb into the raft. I’m not keen on sitting on the edge of the raft. It seems so much easier to fall out into the water.

Becky begins her commands. “All forward” means we all paddle forward. On a “back left,” the left side gives a short back paddle to correct any veering to the right. “Back right” does the opposite.

We struggle to orient ourselves correctly before the entrance rapids.

“All forward!” Becky cries, but our boat veers too much to the right.

“Becky, don’t paddle on the left. There’s too much strength on that side,” Rich calls back. I, of course, am not part of the overpowering left side. Rich has to pick up my slack, even though I’m paddling my hardest.

Our maneuvering fails, and we hit the rapid askew. Helpless, we head down our first rapid backward. The confrontation of water, rock and raft hurls waves of frothy water into our boat.

But it’s an easy first rapid, and my fear is gradually replaced with exhilaration. We don’t have time to revel in the thrill, though. The bumpy ride has knocked a woman out of her raft, and she is floating downstream.

“Somebody get her!” a guide yells.

Our raft is heading toward the woman, so Rich and Mike reach out to her. Rich grabs the shoulders of her life jacket and pulls her into our boat.

Our rescued passenger accompanies us down the next set of rapids, known as Cucumber Falls. We still haven’t mastered our direction, so the rapids take control of our raft, jolting us through backward again.

We paddle over to calmer waters near the bank to reconvene with other rafts and guides. I’m glad for the respite. Already my arms feel the tax of plowing through the rapids. We deposit our acquired passenger with her original crew. The guides deliver lost paddles to their owners. They explain how to maneuver through the next set of rapids, Charlie’s Washing Machine.

“Let’s go first,” Becky says. “I don’t like being behind everybody.”

It’s true. If you are following another raft and they get stuck, you have to encounter them and the rapids. We pull out in the lead. This time we’re in control. We reach the rapid at the correct angle, but the clash of our raft against the rocks still makes our trip turbulent.

As our raft slams over the rapid, a crest of foam engulfs our boat. It snaps my head back, and water fills my nostrils. The force of the water pushes me into the
center of the boat, which I appreciate much more than being tossed into the river.

"Whoa," I exclaim as the swells diminish. Lauren shares my sentiments because she fell into the boat, too.

We gladly let the river carry us down to a calmer section of water, dipping our paddles in whenever we drift too far to the left or right.

"Do you want me to tell you a little about the river?" Becky asks.

She points out the V-shape the current takes through the rock formations. We want to follow through the point of the V when we're going down a rapid. It makes the ride smoother. Becky also explains eddies, which are currents running contrary to the current of the river. They're created by rock obstructions.

"Sometimes you'll get a whole section of water running upstream," Rich adds.

Welcome Rations

After negotiating a few more rapids, we break for lunch on the bank. Standing up feels strange after sitting in a raft with my feet tensely tucked in for two hours. I feel gross in my sweaty life jacket, and my pants are nearly falling down with the weight of saturation.

Rich told us about lunch on the river in the van.

"You're so hungry that the peanut butter and jelly sandwich tastes so good you're like, 'Damn! Where'd they get this?'" he had said.

He is right. There's no peanut butter, but there is turkey on squishy, white bread. And it never satisfied my appetite so well.

Twenty minutes later we are back in the boat, switching sides so we can alternate arm muscles. Not that it matters because my muscles are pretty much spent.

Dimple Rock

We dock against a rock near the bank, which means Becky tries to hang onto the slippery boulder to keep us from floating away. Assembled with the other rafts, we await our turn for Dimple Rock.

We have been warned this is possibly the hardest rapid of the river, surpassing the standard Class 3 designation of the others on the Yach. If you hit this rapid wrong, your raft will slam against a large boulder, Dimple Rock, and dump everyone out of the raft. If you think you'll try to play it safe and veer far right of Dimple, you'll probably hit Pinball Rock, which will ricochet you right back to Dimple anyway. From our vantage point, we can't see the other rafts travel through the rapid.
"Oh, they flipped!" we hear one report.  
Another observation: "They're down."

Realizing the increased danger, I gnaw at my nails. 
"Is anybody nervous?" Rich asks. 
"I'm a little scared," I understare my nervousness. 
"I'm excited," Mike replies.

Rich's reassurances still don't quell my worries of being catapulted out of the raft and landing splayed across a rock. At the same time, I realize I haven't fallen out yet, and neither has anyone from our boat. The increased turbulence could mean more fun.

A guide signals it is our turn to take the rapid.  
Another stands on top of Dimple Rock to direct our passage. Other guides are positioned after the rapid with throw ropes and boats to rescue any castaways.

"All forward!" Becky yells out to the group. "Mike, give me a back right!"

Our arms pump strong strokes through the choppy water. The guide on Dimple signs that we're doing fine. I dig my feet tighter into the grooves of the raft anyway.

Crashing against Dimple Rock, water explodes into foam sprays. But our raft just brushes the rock. We don't topple, but we still have to battle the clashing currents that hurl water at us and make our ride bumpy. The roughness makes me want to withdraw my paddle from the water, but persistent paddling creates more stability.

We make it through unbruised and elated. It is a conquest. Downstream from Dimple Rock, we look back and assess the damage. One overturned raft. One empty raft. A pair of sandals floating near the bank.

We pick up two stray paddles heading downstream. One of the guides paddles his boat, full of those who fell victim to the river's swells, to the waiting rafts. And they reassemble their crews.

A kind of superiority washes over me in recognizing I succeeded at what others failed. I'm so accustomed to being relegated to the role of the wimp, the last one picked for gym class, that this is a new feeling. But also, I'm proud of myself.

**Double Hydraulic**

The success at Dimple Rock fuels excitement, not nervousness, for the last difficult rapid, the Double Hydraulic.

We're the lead boat from here on out, and I think we all feel somewhat like seasoned veterans, leaving the novices in the dust (or water, rather).

We skillfully approach the Double Hydraulic. If we hit it head-on it could suck our raft into a hole and then pop it back up. We veer correctly to avoid a turbulent ride, but Rich and Mike hope to hit the edge of it to add some excitement. To their disappointment, and also surprisingly mine, we miss the rough part.

"We missed it," Rich laments. "We were too good."

By this time, the spirit of rafting gets to me. I'm hungry for a more challenging rapid. But it's nearing the end of the river. The last rapids are fun, but they seem a little too easy now.

Nevertheless, I'm also glad to give my muscles a break, and I'm anxious to get dry. We're in agreement the trip was awesome, but we don't really discuss the adventure until we're at our campsite in Pennsylvania's Ohiopyle State Park that evening.

**Hot Dogs & Memories**

We set up our tents, get a fire started and eat a nice spaghetti dinner. But we're camping and have to partake of real camp food, too. Mike, Lauren and I whittle the ends of some long, thin sticks, so we can roast hot dogs.

"You can't go camping and not eat hot dogs," Mike explains. "It's like going to the movies and not watching the movie."

I mix the baked beans and hot dog cuts on my plate, listening to Mike extol the goodness of hot dogs.

"Do you want to hear something sick?" he asks.

"No," Becky replies, but her request is denied.

"It's four weeks into the semester, and I've already eaten seven packages of hot dogs," he answers.

With that, I turn the subject to our trip.

"I thought it was going to be a lot harder," Mike says.

"Yeah, we were the only boat with no people to fall out," Rich adds.

"I thought it was funny when you guys thought I was going to fall out," Beck says. Her position at the rear put her in the easiest position to go overboard.

"I thought you were going to fall out for sure," Mike laughs, remembering her hanging halfway out of the boat

Rich remarks it would have been cool to have been overturned raft.

"If we hit that we wouldn't be sitting here saying, 'Oh, we did so good, not falling out,'" Mike points out.

I'm rather relieved we didn't fall out. That may have marred the experience for me. Maybe I wouldn't have thought it was funny when you guys thought I was going to fall out, Rich remarks it would have been cool to have been overthrown raft.

By this time, the spirit of rafting gets to me. I'm glad I went. Rich's reassurances still don't quell my worries of being relegated to the role of the wimp, the last one picked for gym class, that this is a new feeling. But also, I'm proud of myself.

“Everyone teaches you how to play basketball,” she says. “Chances are you’ve never rafted in your life, backpacked in your life. It’s cool to see people go through the learning process.”

“I like leading somebody and seeing the look on their face that they enjoy it,” Rich agrees.

We assure him we enjoyed ourselves. I'm glad I went. It would be something to come away from this experience saying, "I did it," but it is something more to come away saying, "I did it, and I want to do it again."
Assisting Independence

Kent State students help group home residents learn everything from crossing the street to cooking dinner.
It's just after 2 p.m. on a Monday in late September. The men of Ravenna’s Meridian group home, run by the non-profit Independence of Portage County, are getting back from their jobs at Portage Industries.

First come Rick, Bert and Doug off the PARTA bus. They climb the porch steps, enter the house and begin their afternoon routines. Soon Morgan, Ricky, Bob, Mike and Kevin will arrive on the Portage Industries’ bus, and the house will be abuzz with after-work activity.

The men change their clothes, gather dirty laundry, help put away dishes in the kitchen, munch on cookies and Popsicles, prepare coffee mixed with envelopes of instant cocoa, watch television and just relax a bit.

These may seem like common, simple activities. But to the eight developmentally disabled men at Meridian, it took a lot of work to learn to perform many of the tasks. And to retain the ability to do them, the men must practice again and again with the help of Independence’s workers, who are habilitation aides. The aides also cook for the residents and help to manage each of the households.

Quite often the habilitation aides are Kent State students majoring in psychology or another related field of study. Most come to Independence seeking work experiences, but many come away from the job with experiences that go beyond practical toward profound.
Independence operates five Portage County group homes and 12 supported living apartments. It calls the people who live in their homes consumers. But to Brian Van Almen, the guys at Meridian — Bert, Doug, Ricky and all the rest — are far more than consumers. They’re friends.

“That’s really one of the cool parts of the job,” says the Kent State senior psychology major and habilitation aide at Meridian. “You get to be friends with them. Then it’s not working. You want to hang out with them, find out how it’s going, what’s going on with them. They’re your friends.”

Van Almen spends time with the group home residents off the job as well. He visits the house, takes the men to dinner and goes to bw-3 Grill & Pub with them for evenings of hot wings and football. He even invited some of the consumers to his house for Christmas and Thanksgiving.

“If I got another job, I would still stop by at least once a week to see the guys,” Van Almen says. “They’re your family.”

Meridian resident manager and 1995 Kent State graduate Tom Burick also worked for Independence while attending college. He began in 1993 as a habilitation aide like Van Almen.

When he graduated from Kent State with a therapeutic recreation major and a psychology minor, he took an open management position with Independence.

“I would say that school helped me, but at the same time I’ve learned a lot on this job,” Burick says. “Reading a book and listening to a lecture can give you so much information. When you get to deal with a different array of people, you see firsthand.”

Developmental disability is the common diagnosis for Independence residents. But the severity varies greatly from person to person. Many of the consumers in the homes also have secondary diagnoses for disorders like manic depression, autism, obsessive compulsion, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and seizure disorders.

As a qualified mental retardation professional, or “Q,” Burick is in charge of developing programs for the residents at Meridian and Highland. The programs are intended to help the consumers develop everyday living skills like cooking, cleaning and bathing.

“Our whole philosophy here is active treatment,” Burick says. “Tooth-brushing, hair-combing, tying your shoes. As they become better, we work on personal and community safety skills — things we can do ourselves but a lot of times we take for granted — that others can’t do.”

More advanced programs include calling the police or fire department, crossing the street, making purchases and dealing with people in the community.

The ultimate goal is for the group home residents to reach a point where they can progress to Independence’s minimally supervised supported living apartments. Right now, three of the Meridian residents are on a waiting list to move to the apartments. But it is difficult to say how far the others will progress, Burick says.

“As sad as it is to say, some of them do not have the skills and retention to the point where they may move out,” he says. “They will be in a group home for the rest of their lives.”

Working with the developmentally disabled is a taxing job, Independence employees and Kent State students Linda Rohr and Madeleine Mayher say.

“It’s constant stimulation,” Rohr says. “The job is totally frustrating. It’s enough to freak you out a bit.”
The aides face a constant barrage of things to be done, including running the programs, cooking, running more programs, staying alert to every consumer’s needs, filling out reports and dealing with seizures or other complications. Only two habilitation aides are usually working at once.

“I’ve had times where I’ve gone home at night, and I can’t focus on anything,” adds Mayher.

Mayher, a Kent State sophomore psychology major, is a residential support specialist, supervising supported living apartments in Ravenna. Mayher pays the bills for the apartment, arranges doctor’s appointments, gives the consumers their medicine and helps out with their grocery shopping.

Rohr, a Kent State junior psychology major, worked as a habilitation aide at Highland, a women’s group home in Ravenna. She recently took another job with a similar agency in Summit County and is now only on substitute status at Independence.

The difficulty of working with the developmentally disabled sometimes goes beyond managing a number of activities simultaneously. Occasionally a consumer will become aggressive or violent. One consumer threw a garbage can at Mayher.

“One woman at Highland has psychotic disorders,” Rohr says. “She’s pushed me down the stairs. She pushed a girl I was working with down a flight of stairs when she was pregnant.”

But the habilitation aides are trained to deal with aggressive behavior. They know how to calm and restrain the consumer without inflicting harm on him or her.

“You give them a couple verbal prompts to settle down, chill out, relax — it’s nonviolent intervention,” Rohr says. “You’re trained to deal with it. You know that they’re not doing it out of spite.”

They try not to let it bother them.

“It’s not anything that’s personal,” Van Almen adds. “You just keep that in mind.”

Burr greets the men as they arrive at Meridian. He points out that Bert’s shirt is on backwards. Bert reaches his arm back and discovers he’s wearing the breast pocket over his right shoulder. He quickly disappears into his bedroom. When he returns, the shirt is on properly.

Bert heads downstairs with Ricky and Doug. Bert cradles his prized possession, an AM/FM cassette radio. They pass through the kitchen, where habilitation aide April Jewett is preparing dinner with Kevin’s help. The three proceed out the back door and gather around a picnic table that sits in the backyard.

Before dinner there’s one more program to complete — the street-crossing program.

Habitat aide Priscilla Fox emerges through the back door with Rick and Michael. She calls to Ricky, Bert and Doug. They form a line behind her and march to the sidewalk. At every intersection and driveway they stop. The first resident steps forward, then stops at the threshold. He looks back and forth, scanning for traffic. Then he marches across the intersection and waits on the other side for his friends.

They proceed toward downtown Ravenna, pausing at the intersections, looking both ways and crossing. Fox looks both ways with them, then observes them attentively as they cross.

They are downtown now, gazing at the shops and traffic on Main Street. They swing their arms as they follow Fox down the street, five men in shorts and sweat pants walking briskly in the pleasant autumn weather.
When the men at Meridian sit down to dinner around 4:30 p.m., Burick leaves and passes by the Highland women’s group home a few blocks away. Highland is currently without a resident manager, so Burick is filling the position in addition to his regular duties at Meridian.

At Highland, the three habilitation aides are still bustling around preparing dinner for their residents. The kitchen is a flurry of motion, a symphony of clanging pots and pans and rattling dishes.

Marne Patterson couldn’t stay away from Highland, she says as she puts the finishing touches on the evening’s chicken and biscuits.

Patterson graduated from Kent State in December 1999 with a degree in special education. She has a full-time teaching job now, but she still returns to her college job at Highland a few days every week.

“Nobody can leave for good,” Patterson says with a smile as she butters a biscuit.

The food is ready, and the table is set. The habilitation aides call the consumers to dinner. Nine hungry women, many of them already milling around the area, take their places in the dining room.

Habilitation aide Christine Palkovic, a speech pathology major at Kent State, walks around dishing out food on each plate. She sits down to eat with Diane, a consumer who has seated herself at a small round table in the kitchen’s alcove. Surrounded by potted plants and a view of the side lawn, Palkovic and Diane chat softly and eat their dinner.

Palkovic says she heard about Independence in an ad placed in the Daily Kent Stater.

“I came to work here to see if I could handle working with this population,” Palkovic says. “I knew I could work with kids, and I worked at a nursing home before, so I know I can work with older people.”

At 5:30 p.m. Patterson passes the dessert bowls, then makes a second trip to serve pineapple. Diane finishes her dessert while Palkovic gets up and helps several consumers wash the dishes.

Palkovic works twice a week from 2 to 10 p.m. She also works every other weekend from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. She admits the job can be stressful, but she says she has learned a lot from working at Highland.

She has realized that people without disabilities often take basic skills for granted. She says she also learned how to take the consumers’ feelings into consideration. The women at Highland are adults, and it is up to the habilitation aides to treat them as such.

“You have to have the understanding that even though they have developmental disabilities, and they have been diagnosed with
the mental level of a 3-year-old, you can’t treat them like a 3-year-old,” she says.

By 6 p.m., the dining room has been cleared of all dishes. The floor is clean, and only a few crumbs remain on the table. Palkovic is busy scrubbing dishes at the sink.

While a lot of tasks are involved with the job, Palkovic says the most important skill for working with developmentally disabled individuals is a basic one.

“Patience,” she says. “Lots of patience.”

More difficult than managing the day-to-day tasks at Independence is dealing with the emotions that come with the job. It can be frustrating to understand the consumers’ situations when the consumers themselves can’t do so, aides say.

“You see things that are bad and wrong — aspects of their life — when they’re going through a time they can’t grasp,” Mayher says.

“They don’t know how to deal with these emotions because they haven’t had the experiences we’ve had,” Van Almen says.

“They’re four-year-olds with grown-up problems. And they can’t verbalize or express it because they don’t know how to. But they do appreciate that you’re there and you’re helping them.”

In addition, sometimes it’s difficult for the aides to fathom what it must be like to live with a disability.

“Sometimes it’s hard to put yourself in their shoes,” Rohr says. “Going home and trying to live a normal life is hard.”

Van Almen is most frustrated by the thought of something he hasn’t dealt with yet.

“What I’m scared of more than anything is that with Down Syndrome, your life span isn’t very long,” he says. He hates to think of the day when one of the familiar faces at Meridian will be gone.

But Van Almen is content with his job, given the things he’s learned.

“You ask anybody who’s worked there, and they’ll tell you that you’ll learn 10 times more about psychology in the homes than you will in school,” he says. “And it’s true.”

Above all he has his friends at Meridian.

“These guys give me more than I could ever give to them,” Van Almen says.

“They love to talk to you. They don’t care who you are or where you’ve been. It makes me know myself better, too.”
Lifestyles of the Not-Yet Famous

by Erin Kosnac
They slowly make their way to the stage and become a part of the homogenized mass, leaving behind their pool games, conversations and seats at the bar. They appear to have fallen from a Calvin Klein ad or the streets of Greenwich Village and straight into Kent’s Europe Gyro. Clad primarily in black and dark denim, they all stand with feet shoulder-width apart. With arms folded across chests, or hands on hips or shoved in pockets, they motionlessly watch the band on stage. Green and blue amoebae-shaped blobs dance on a screen behind the drummer.

Their faces reveal nothing. They seem unimpressed, unmoved by the band playing before them. One girl in a long white jacket stands out. One of her shoes, with a 3- or 4-inch wooden platform, suddenly begins to tap on the tile floor littered with cigarette butts. One tap. Two taps. Movement ceases. She returns to a state of idleness with the others.

Even when the band finishes a song, there is not much audience reaction — no eruption of applause and no screams or shouts. They just continue to look contemplative, as if they are in a gallery looking at a piece of art. And the title of this piece: The Party of Helicopters.

The Party of Helicopters is just one area band getting the chance to live out the rock ‘n’ roll dream. Putting out records. Touring. Just making music. And behind this dream is one Kent State student and his record label.
Ryan Brannon checks the levels on his bass amp, which also serves as his beer table before the show. Photo by Tim Harrison.

"I Buy Pants at the Mall"

He walks into Ray's Place in all black except for a white T-shirt under a thin sweater. He sits down in the booth, and his dark hair falls over his eyes. As he pushes it away, a tattoo circling his wrist creeps out from beneath the cuff of his sweater. His foot taps almost nonstop under the wooden table, but it isn't because he's nervous. It all seems regular for him: running a record label, playing in two bands, working at the Kent State Ice Arena, majoring in graphic design.

It's all part of being Jamie Stillman.

Most freshmen and sophomores in high school are looking forward to going to their first homecoming dances or playing varsity sports. But when Stillman was at that age at Roosevelt High School in Kent, he was starting his own record label: donut friends.

"It started with these bands we just made up because everybody we knew played instruments," Stillman says. "We'd just do that on the weekends and put out like 20 tapes or something."

Stillman was undergoing a sort of musical epiphany. "I had just started figuring out punk rock," he says. "I saw that record labels were basically being started by kids in their bedrooms. And I saw that it wasn't that hard to come up with the money to press records, or just to figure out how to do it didn't really take much thought."

This was something Stillman was willing to invest in.

"I'd been playing music since I was 5, so it was something I cared about," he says. "And there were a lot of bands that I like that I didn't think anybody would ever put out their records."

Stillman now deals with eight bands that keep doing records with donut friends and about four or five that also have records on other labels. Bands that put out a record through donut friends are not tied to the label.

Stillman doesn't handle just one kind of music.

"All the bands on my label are totally different," Stillman says. "There's metal bands. There's pop bands. And there's bands that are just straightforward punk bands or rock bands."

"The only real thing that ties them all together is that they all have something that makes them a little bit off-center," he says. "They are pretty straightforward and accessible, but they're still arty. And all of them aren't afraid to write what they want to write. They're not trying to play to anybody."

These traits are also evident in Stillman's own bands: The Party of Helicopters and "New" Terror Class.

And people seem to like his bands a lot.

"We definitely have people everywhere we go that are like, 'Hey, that's that kid,'" Stillman says. "And then they'll ask me some insane question. And I'm like, 'I just go to school, and I'm in this band. I go out on the weekends. I buy pants at the mall. I'm not that special.'"

Maybe Stillman doesn't realize everything he does. And he definitely doesn't think anyone else fully comprehends it.

"There's like — I have to count on my hands. This is really embarrassing," Stillman says as he forms the closest thing he has shown to a smile so far and raises a finger for each person who lives in his house.

"Right now there's like eight people living in our house, and five of us are in bands. They're in bands, but I seriously think they have like no clue what I do."

"I think they think I'm just on the Internet all the time just fuckin' looking at — I don't know what they think I'm looking at," Stillman says. "But I think they think I just screw around all the time. Their job is to make fun of me for being on the Internet and ask me when we're playing shows. I get to be the businessman of the house or something."

But being the businessman is quite appropriate for the man who runs donut friends out of his two rooms in that house on Lake Street.

Stillman is as comfortable talking about the business aspects of donut friends as he is the musical aspects. Like a person who's been in the business for years, Stillman cites all the lessons he's learned along the way about distribution, promotion and business in general.
Bands record in a studio, then Stillman sends out the digital audio tapes to be made into records.

As he pulls out a Winston, Stillman rattles off the production figures as easily as he plays the guitar or the drums: For an LP, $2,500 for 1,000; for a seven-inch, $1,500 for 1,000; for a CD, $1,100 to $2,000 for 1,000. Everything is then sold wholesale to Independent Music Distribution, based in Los Angeles, which then sells the records to other distributors and stores.

Stillman works on credit with Erika Records, a record pressing plant that is part owner of IMD. IMD pays Stillman for the records, and he uses that money to pay off his credit. He hopes to one day start turning profits and split them 50-50 between himself and the band, which he has never done yet.

But this exclusive distribution with IMD is not the route Stillman has always taken.

"I used to have like 10 distributors, and it seems in my head like it worked out a lot better when I used 10 distributors," he says. "And in punk rock, people have a problem with exclusive distribution because they see it as being like a corporate conglomerate, and that's what everyone is aiming to stay away from.

"Because of that a lot of the same people don't really buy my records who used to. I kind of lost a lot by going exclusive, but I've also gained a lot by going exclusive because it's seen as being more, like, I guess, important. It kind of helps and hurts at the same time. I can't really tell which one it is doing more."

But both Stillman and donut friends have come a long way since his high school days of making only 20 cassette tapes.

"The way it's progressed is that the bands actually exist and play and tour," Stillman says. "When I first started, we just made bands to have a record label and to put out cassettes.

"But now there are bands that seem to stick with it, and I'll put out more than one record by them. It seems a little bit more permanent. Basically it's gotten to the point that if I wanted to quit, it would be just as big of an ordeal as starting a record label — not that I really want to quit or anything."

Joe Dennis gazes past the crowd. Photo by Tim Harrison.

Joe Dennis and Stillman were at The Record Revolution in Cleveland. A box of demos for the Deftones sat outside the store — free for the taking. These were the tapes The Party of Helicopters' first demos would be recorded on.

"The only thing I recognized on the tapes was Madonna's record label Maverick," says Dennis, the band's singer. "And I remembered she put out Candlebox, so I figured they must be pretty bad.

"Jamie and I took all the tapes and made our first demo on those. Some of the covers were napkins, and some were brown bags cut to fit inside a tape case. I haven't seen one of those things in three years."

Madonna Would Be Proud
The four members of The Party of Helicopters, a heavy metal-influenced rock band, have all been friends since their days in high school. For Dennis and drummer Jon Finley, it was an instant friendship.

"Finley] said he liked my Anthrax shirt," Dennis says. "And it was only the first day of school of our freshman year."

Dennis and Finley, bass player Ryan Brannon and Stillman on guitar, form the band, which has been together for about five years.

"Most of us just like to play music and can play all the instruments," Stillman says. "We're actually not playing the instruments we started out playing. They're the same instruments we've always played in the band. But the drummer is really a guitar player. And our singer is really a guitar player. And our bass player is really a guitar player. And I'm really a drummer."

"But we formed it just because we were bored, and we're like, 'Let's just form this band so we can play these instruments.' And then it became fun, and people liked it. So we kept playing and went on tour. And before we even realized it, we were a band."

Dennis realized he was part of something special when he first sang with the band at a party.

"I remember I told some people they were all really lucky to be there. This was something special," he says. "And here we are now," Dennis says. "And it seems like we have done a bunch of stuff."

Five years. Eight records. Seven tours.

"...THERE'S THE LAST TIME I'M EVER GOING TO SEE THEM AGAIN..."
Tattooing With a Safety Pin

Brantron, a senior education major, remembers it like it was yesterday. “We were gone for a month, maybe like two summers ago. We had to drive from Florida to Texas and then leave to drive to San Diego. It was the worst planning ever. “We played the show in Texas and left and were driving through the worst part of the desert. We were driving in our van, and Pankration [another Kent band] was driving in front of us. White smoke just started pouring from their van. And they were swerving everywhere. And finally we both pulled off. “It was, like, the hottest day ever, and we were just standing on the side of the road in the desert – no cell phones, no AAA. Two guys decided to walk to the nearest place. I stood there talking with a guy from the other band about how The Party of Helicopters and Pankration together generate the worst luck possible. “A guy came and figured out what was wrong. He said it was going to cost a lot and take a couple of days. But Jamie didn’t want to miss the show. He said, ‘That’s their van. That’s their problem.’ “So we all piled into our van except two guys from the other band,” he says. “As we drove away, I looked back and thought, ‘That’s the last time I’m ever going to see them again.’”

They all have them. They carry them like war stories. They retell them with a nostalgic tone in their voices, as if trying to remember every detail from their mental scrapbooks. The emotion conveyed in their voices brings life to their stories of being on tour.

For Stillman, who has been on more than 25 tours, touring is probably the most fun aspect of anything he does with music. “You can get a little surprised because you’re out of your hometown, and there are lots of people there to see your band,” he says. “And they know everything about us. But here nobody knows anything about us. “There’s probably like 50 to 100 people here that know our bands exist or what it is that we’re doing. But everywhere else, we’re just more popular.”

Stillman’s bands are willing to play in most places: houses, clubs, rented VFW halls. They don’t really have any requirements – except for maybe one. “We’ve been asking for loud PAs,” Stillman says. “But that’s the most we’ll ever demand.”

Stillman says many other bands are disillusioned about what is needed to do a tour. “Lots of bands think they need a manager and agent and all this shit to do that stuff,” he says. “And that’s why they don’t do it. But they don’t need that. You just need to care a little bit and not be afraid to go out and try it.”

He speaks from experience. He’s toured the entire United States and Canada and parts of Europe. He’s gotten eggs thrown at him in Hollywood. He’s been

Cramped quarters are typical for house party shows like this one in Knoxville, Tenn., during The Party of Helicopters’ 1999 tour. Photo by Esther Choi.
arrested at Devils Tower in Wyoming for taking rocks.

“Our tours definitely aren’t terrible, and they’re always fun,” he says. “You’re always gonna play those shows where it’s 15 people or two people even. And they’re going to pay you with like two cigarettes and 50 cents. But we’re all basically at a point where it’s never like that. It’s nothing totally comfortable or anything like that, but it’s self-sufficient.”

But Stillman wonders how some of his bandmates are able to make it.

“I don’t know how the other people in my bands can go on tour as much as we go on tour because it involves a lot of not working for lengthy periods of time,” he says. “And it definitely disrupts shit, especially for students because we have homework to deal with on top of touring, and we’re trying to go out of town and do our homework and work.

“It just gets fuckin’ crazy. But I can do it because I run the label, and that’s basically like a traveling store. It’s like I’m working while I’m on tour.”

The memories seem like payment enough.

“There was this time when our drummer was getting his girlfriend’s name tattooed on his shoulder with a safety pin,” Dennis says. “And he was laughing about how that’s the worst idea for a tattoo anybody could have while we were all listening to Motorhead at full volume, so we couldn’t talk to anybody.

“And there’s this porno going on the TV in this house in Florida, and all of us are just sitting in this room. Then there’s this giant pit bull in the room, and everyone is so afraid to move. It’s the biggest dog I’ve ever seen in my life. It’s got a triangle-shaped head and a huge mouth. If you made eye contact with him, he would start growling at you.

“It was just so funny. There were pizza boxes everywhere. The one guy had a piece of pizza in one hand and was doing the tattoo with the other.”

Where in the Hell is Tidioute?

But tonight is just a regular Tuesday night at Europe Gyro. No broken-down vans in a desert. No tattoos with a safety pin. Just the regular crowd that has gathered in front of the small wooden stage to watch The Party of Helicopters play.

It is almost 1 a.m. when the four members of The Party of Helicopters take the stage. The drummer sits shirtless, a tattoo of a spider leaping from his upper arm onto his chest. As the band starts to warm up, you can feel the deep thumping in your chest. Then the floor begins to shake.

Most of the people in Europe Gyro have moved closer to the stage. Those who haven’t start to take notice. Even those huddled by the Golden Tee 3D Golf machine turn to look.

Stillman, dressed in all black again, almost blends in completely with the black wall behind him. As his head shakes violently with the music, his dark hair covers his eyes. The sweat on his face begins to glisten when the light falls on him.

But at center stage is Dennis.

He cradles the microphone stand in his hands, wearing jeans ripped in both knees and a red shirt reading, “Where in the hell is Tidioute?” He captures your attention. He makes it nearly impossible to look away.

Dennis’ eyes look above the audience as if he is staring into infinity. With hollowed cheeks and circles under his eyes, he casts a vampire-like gaze on the audience.

And then he sings.

The screech-moan-howl combination sounds like it comes from somewhere deep within and is unexpected from Dennis’ slight build. It is almost as if he is possessed, and at any moment some demon will be released.

Al Gore is on a TV screen by the bar, but he goes unnoticed with The Party of
Helicopters on stage. Dennis commands attention as he moves on stage almost like a sex kitten, his hands running all over his body. Somewhat seducing. Somewhat teasing. Definitely entrancing.

**Are We There Yet?**

Dennis' voice is quiet and calm and almost soothing as he talks about The Party of Helicopters' success.

"It's really nice to think about it," he says in a voice not at all resembling the one that filled Europe Gyro. "I'm really glad, I guess. I'm really glad that it happened. And I feel kind of lucky."

And he feels lucky even though he isn't exactly where he imagined himself at this point in his life.

"When I started being in bands and was just a musician, I loved the idea that this was all I had to worry about," Dennis says. "At that point I decided that's all I was going to do forever."

"I thought then that by the time I was 23, I would be riding around in a limo. That's what I told myself when I was 17. Wouldn't that be the coolest life ever? Now it seems like these things could really take a long time.

But I still imagine myself doing it for a long time or forever as easily as I can imagine myself doing anything - just not as a 23-year-old anymore."

But being at the front of the stage for The Party of Helicopters has its own perks.

"It's kind of neat to be at the front of that wall of noise that we're creating," he says. "It's kind of like enjoying a kind of buzz you might get off of whatever you might want to catch a buzz off of - at least right now that's how it seems to me."

And now a large portion of The Party of Helicopters' success can be attributed to Stillman, Brannon says.

"I have to give Jamie credit," he says. "I'm sure his head will be big enough. But if he didn't do stuff, nothing would ever get done. We'd never take the initiative to follow through with ideas."

"When I first met Jamie in high school, he was in bands and making tapes and selling them at school. It never seemed like a big deal to him - putting out records, selling them at shows. None of this has ever been a big deal to him."

Brannon doesn't make it a big deal, either.

"When we go around the room in class and say something about ourselves, I don't usually say anything like, 'I'm Ryan. I'm in a band,'" he says. "I don't want to seem like I'm bragging. We've done it without trying too hard. If I'm really honest about it, I feel like I'm being a dick. We've all been really lucky."

After five years, things are still looking up for The Party of Helicopters. And there's no point in calling it quits anytime soon.

"I just want to play music my whole life," Brannon says. "We've been together five years now. Once our drummer tried to quit the band, but we set up a tour anyway and told him he had to go. It seems silly to stop now. Things only get better every year."

"What else do we have to do besides live in Kent and go to the Loft? We might as well play in a band. I can see us playing in bars when we're 40 with a bunch of men who are in their 40s, and women, too."

Their faces still reveal nothing. They still seem unimpressed, unmoved by the band that is playing before them. There is no movement.

Even when the band finishes a song, there is little audience reaction - no eruption of applause, no screams or shouts. And they still look contemplative, almost as if they are in a gallery looking at that same piece of art. The Party of Helicopters.
From Kent State to the Dawg Pound

As the Browns returned to Cleveland, so did former Flash Steve Zahursky

by Phil Novak
photos by Mike Nash

After his first day of training camp with the Jacksonville Jaguars, Steve Zahursky knew he could play in the NFL.

"Once I got to Jacksonville and realized what I was up against, I said, "Hey, I can play with these guys if I just work a little harder and get a little bigger," Zahursky says.

At 6 feet 6 inches and a solid 305 pounds, the former Kent State standout is certainly not small. But in the NFL his size is average for an offensive lineman. Even though he played well in camp and made it past several roster cuts, he ended up being the last one cut from the Jaguars at the end of the 1998 training camp.

"It was between me and another guy who was there the year before, and they were confident in the other guy," Zahursky says.

But he didn't give up. He went back home and hit the weights, knowing he would get another shot. In late December 1998, the Philadelphia Eagles called, though it was not the big break he was hoping to get.

"I got four weeks with the practice squad," Zahursky says. "At least it gave me some more experience."
It wasn't until February 1999 he received the opportunity he really wanted. The new Cleveland Browns called him and invited him to training camp.

"Actually, [the Browns] called, Philly called and Jacksonville called, but I felt like this was the best opportunity for me to play," Zahursky says. "Plus, it was my hometown, so it made it even better."

Zahursky, now a starter at right tackle for the Browns, grew up in Euclid, a Cleveland suburb. He always rooted for the Browns and players like Bernie Kosar, Ozzie Newsome and Eric Metcalf.

A tight end at Euclid High School, he played with star running back and future Ohio State standout Pepe Pearson, who is now playing with the Pittsburgh Steelers. During his senior year, the team made it to the regional playoffs, but then lost to state powerhouse St. Ignatius High School.

"Steve was kind of a quiet kid," says Tom Banc, Zahursky's coach at Euclid. "But he had a great work ethic and a whole lot of skill."

After high school, a number of schools tried to recruit him, but they all wanted to switch him to the offensive line. He wanted to stay at tight end, and only Kent State offered him that chance.

But when he came to practice, the coaches quickly made him a lineman. He says he was a little upset at the time but took it in stride.

"It didn’t work out the way I wanted it to, but you don’t really have a choice after that," Zahursky says. "You’ve got to do what they want you to do."

Kent State’s offensive coordinator Charley Molnar says Zahursky’s talent was evident immediately, and he knew it was the right move.

"When he came in, he was 6 feet 6 inches and about 230 pounds with a huge frame," Molnar says. "We knew he would grow into the size that an offensive lineman needs to be to compete at this level."

Molnar adds that "Z" also had very average speed for a tight end but very good speed for an offensive lineman.

"We felt that within a year he would not only be able to be as big as the other [linemen], but he would definitely be as good as or better than they were."

"He quickly assimilated the position," Molnar says. "By the first game, he had only been a lineman for a little over a week. And he actually played quite a bit and graded very, very high, especially for a guy who had never played the position before."

Zahursky says he worked hard to bulk up, getting bigger and stronger each year.
“I gained about 20 pounds a year, and I ended up being about 310 by my senior year,” Zahursky says. “I did a lot of heavy lifting.”

Molnar says it took little encouragement to get him to work, and he knew Zahursky was going to be an exceptional player.

“He really just took off,” Molnar says. “He was really self-motivated. You could see the way he was growing, and you could see his desire, his toughness and his work ethic.

“To be frank, we knew by his sophomore year that he would make it,” he adds.

Zahursky’s hard work eventually paid off, but he endured some rough times while at Kent State.

“It was tough going out there and not winning games,” Zahursky says. “You just go out there and try to play the best game you can.”

Despite the losses, Kent State’s total offense was No. 12 in the nation after the 1997 season, Zahursky’s senior year. The offense scored more than 40 points three times, including a season high of 60 points against Central Michigan University.

He played on that team with three other current NFL players: wide receiver Eugene Baker and center Bob Hallen, both of the Atlanta Falcons and tight end Jason Gavada of the Carolina Panthers.

He also enjoyed playing with quarterback Jose Davis and Kent State’s all-time leading rusher, Astron Whatley, for whom Zahursky often opened up some big holes.

“One game my senior year, Whatley had about 370 yards rushing in one game,” Zahursky says. “He was just a great back to block for.”

Even though Zahursky played with a good group of guys, his time at Kent State was marred by numerous injuries.

“He’s truly a class guy. He does the university proud, but he’s also very proud of this university.”

“I had a fractured foot I played on my whole junior

Above: Cleveland Browns right tackle Steve Zahursky stretches before practice. Right: Zahursky takes a break from practice. Far right: Zahursky, former offensive lineman for the Kent State, practices drills.
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People often think going to Kent State or some low-profile football school may discourage teams from selecting a player, but Zahursky and Molnar both say this is not the case.

"They're looking for athletes," Molnar says. "We have more players in the NFL than some of the Big Ten teams do. Coming from Penn State or Kent State really has very little to do with being drafted."

Outside of his football career at Kent State, Zahursky also enjoyed just being a student majoring in criminal justice. If he were not in the NFL, Zahursky says he would probably be a probation or parole officer.

"I came back last year and got my degree," Zahursky says. "That was probably the best thing I could have done. The way injuries are in all sports, you're not going to play forever, so you've got to have something to fall back on. The biggest thing is getting your education."

Zahursky's former coaches have respect for him on and off the field.

"He's truly a class guy," Molnar says. "He does the university proud, but he's also very proud of this university. It's nice to know that somebody hasn't forgotten his roots."

His high school coach agrees.

"I'm really proud of him," Banc says. "He wasn't drafted, but he just kept working and plugging away, and I'm really happy with what he has accomplished."

Zahursky helped make history when he ran out onto the field with the expansion Browns on Sept. 12, 1999, for the first game in the new Cleveland Browns Stadium. He started his first game at right guard the very next week in Tennessee. It was a moment he won't forget.
“Our first play was on our own one-yard line,” Zahursky says. “They punted the ball, and we got it all the way down there. The crowd was so loud we couldn’t hear anything.”

Zahursky went on to play in nine games that season, starting in seven of them. He has been moved around between right guard and right tackle, but he says he does not prefer one over the other.

“It doesn’t matter where they play me,” Zahursky says. “I just like to be on the field. I like to be playing, so wherever they want to put me is fine with me.”

Even though he has been named a starter this year, Zahursky is not growing complacent.

“You can’t ever really get satisfied because the past is behind you,” Zahursky says. “You have to look to the future. I’m raw right now. I can always get more strength and quickness. Technique-wise, there’s some other things I need to learn and get better at.”

Zahursky says he works hard to try and place himself among great lineman in the game such as Tony Boselli from the Jaguars and Jonathan Ogden of the Baltimore Ravens.

But the games every Sunday are only a part of the work. Life in the NFL is not all fancy hotels and expensive restaurants. The job can be very difficult, especially for an undrafted player who still needs to prove himself.

Practices are five days a week, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and the body can take a real beating. The career of a professional football player averages less than 10 years, and then they often have to work after retirement.

“People think you make so much money, and it’s an easy job,” he says. “It’s not. You’re working more than 40 hours a week. You’re busting your hump, and you get home and all you do is sleep because you’re so exhausted from the day. It’s not as easy as people think.”

Zahursky says the fans have not really begun to recognize him, even though the Browns’ games are televised every week.

“[Offensive linemen] don’t get much of that,” he says. “But maybe when we start winning.

“When we do, it’s going to be really fun.”
Fighting to Win

KENT STATE'S HEAD FOOTBALL COACH AND HIS WIFE STRUGGLED WITH MORE THAN A SEASON RECORD THIS FALL

by Lisa Aichlmayr

She had a few of the symptoms, so they decided to run a few tests. No big deal, she is only 46. The doctor said she would call if any problem came up. Otherwise, Melody Pees would receive a card in the mail stamped Normal.

But the card didn't come.

"I had to go in to talk to them, and from the look on the receptionist's face and on the doctor's, I knew there was something they didn't want to tell me," Melody Pees says.

What no one would want to tell her was she had cancer in her uterus, already in the second of three stages. The disease "reached up and smacked me in the head," she says.

After hugs from her doctor and a referral to an oncologist for immediate treatment, Melody Pees left the office to begin dealing with this abrupt turn.

"So I came here [to the MACC] to tell my best friend," she says.

Melody Pees met her future husband, Dean Pees, head coach of Kent State football, when she was working at her alma mater, Elmwood High School near Bowling Green. He was coaching football.

Both were separately married at the time, but their love story doesn't start with a sappy pick-up line followed by dinner and a movie.

Melody Pees' husband was killed in a car accident, and Dean Pees called to offer his condolences to her, five years after they first met. Dean Pees, who in that time had divorced, was being a supportive friend when he asked her out to dinner.

"I said yes, and he hasn't been able to get rid of me since," she says. The couple married in 1990. They each had three children from their previous marriages, and three of them are students at Kent State.

Melody Pees is the director of operations for Henschel & Associates, a software development firm based in Bowling Green. She handles the local clients from her home office. She grew up in Jerry City, Ohio, a town so small that "when they got their first blinking light, everyone showed up to see it," she says. She became a paralegal after studying at the Institute for Paralegal Studies in Columbus, later working in the Bowling Green area at a juvenile detention center.

Dean Pees, who graduated from Bowling Green State
University in secondary education, coached in various positions at Ohio universities plus Michigan State University and others. In 1994, he was a secondary coach under the legendary Kent State graduate Lou Holtz at the University of Notre Dame.

Melody Pees once praised Holtz for his motivational speaking, and he gave her a key chain inscribed, “Thank you for your loyalty to Notre Dame.”

“What was a great experience for me,” she says.

I thought, ‘How do I tell him this?’” Melody Pees says, remembering the afternoon during the week of Aug. 15 when she was framing the conversation with her husband. She met him in his office in the MACC.

“I knew his frame of mind [with the newly started football season] and thought what bad timing,” she says.

After she told him about her cancer, she says she just looked at her, trying to digest what she had told him.

“It was kind of, ‘Why us? Why her?’” Dean Pees says. “Then immediately after that all the thoughts about losing all of a sudden or winning [in football] didn’t seem as important. It put everything into perspective.”

But on the other hand, Dean Pees says, he knew something was coming. He knew she would not have come to his office after the doctor’s visit if nothing was wrong. Also, two of their daughters were with her, and she had been crying. Still, he could not be completely prepared for her news.

“When someone tells you something,” he says, “you understand, but all the ramifications don’t hit you. You don’t want to let on that it hurts you as much, but as time goes on it gets to you.”

They called the oncologist and discussed treatment.

“It wasn’t until later that day, he called and said it just hit him. He cried,” she says. “He said I mean the world to him, and I said I know.”

There was one good thing about the timing.

“It was all very quick, which was good because my mind was concocting all kinds of scenarios,” Melody Pees says. “So if it happened slower, I’d just have time to think about it.”

Unfortunately she would have plenty of time to think after surgery on Aug. 21.

After she told her husband, Melody Pees faced the problem again when it came to telling the rest of their children.

“I made up my mind I was going to tell them very matter-of-factly and not let my emotions in,” she says. “I tried to be that way but not cold about it. Their response was hugs and tears and, ‘Are you going to be OK?’”

She says she wanted everyone to go about life as usual, so that fear of the worst-case scenarios did not get a chance to creep in.

Dean Pees says he and their children agreed to try this for her.

“We have all taken the approach to be very positive and be supportive,” he says. “It’s just how you handle it in your everyday routine. To all of a sudden change your lifestyle wouldn’t make it easier for her.”

But he admits working to make life normal can become very difficult.

Aside from her family, Melody Pees was reluctant to tell others, including the football team.

“If I told people, it validated it,” she says.

But her husband asked her to tell the football team because, with her surgery to remove the cancer quickly approaching, he would not be with the team on Monday, Aug. 21.

“In 29 years, he never missed a practice or anything, so it was a big thing to miss a practice” Melody Pees says. “He wanted the team to know it was something very important.”

Dean Pees says there was also a personal reason.

“We always talk about the team as a family,” he says, adding he wants the team to trust him in similar cases.

What the Pees hadn’t expected was the outpouring of emotion and support from the players.

“It was the best thing to do, to tell his team,” Melody Pees says. “They have been such a big part of the healing process.”

After her husband told the players, they “came in looking like they just lost their best friend,” she says.

Dean Pees says it was extremely difficult to tell his players the day before her surgery.

“I knew some of the guys would take it pretty hard,” he says. “It was also hard to talk about it since I hadn’t talked openly about it. Watching the reactions on their faces was hard.”

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Coach Dean Pees has a large commitment to his football team, but his wife is a higher priority. Photo by Allison Waltz.
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Melody Pees says the players, and even their parents, sent her daisies and cards while she was in the hospital.

Within two weeks of her surgery, when the average rest time is about eight weeks, she traveled with the team to the Purdue University game.

"I knew I needed to be with them because they were instrumental to my healing," she says.

As Melody Pees talks about the team's support, her eyes begin to water, as she is perhaps thinking about the scores of flowers in her hospital room, or maybe the heartfelt how-are-yous that the players are sure to ask.

Whichever scene crossed her mind, it was the one thing that began to break her composure, began to show the intense feelings behind her experience with cancer along with the strength she felt from the support of those around her.

With this support, she then took the attitude to "hit it head on and do what you have to do and believe that you are going to be fine," she says. "Along the way you have a lot of people who sincerely care about what you're going through."

Where she was once reluctant to let people know, she saw after the Purdue game the opposite was true.

"I didn't know how badly I needed people to know," she says.

In an almost ironic twist of her decision to let others know, Melody Pees now volunteers at Summa Health System Akron City Hospital in a program called the Stephen Ministry Program, designed to give hospital patients a chance to talk to someone about their fears and concerns.

One year ago she responded to an article about the program. She did not get involved then because she thought she would not have time.

About a week after she got out of the hospital, Melody Pees received a letter asking her to join.

"It just hit me like a ton of bricks," she says. "With what I had just gone through, there was no decision."

Even though the class had already filled up, the instructor agreed to let her come to see if she would be right for the program.

"Within two minutes, we both knew that's where I needed to be," she says. "I know how beneficial a person like that would have been for me in the hospital."

Bob Nolan, manager of volunteer and customer services for Akron City, says the usual process for finding volunteers consists of months of interviews before 10 weeks of training. But Melody Pees went straight to the training after an initial session.

"We allowed her to come in, and it was a good choice," Nolan says. "She's outgoing but very concerned and caring about all people, and that's what we're looking for."

Nolan says the volunteers are trained to talk about spirituality plus cultural and religious diversity. They are prepared for the kinds of conditions the patients will be in and how to respond to difficult situations.

When Melody Pees was in the hospital, scenarios that had been held at bay by the quick pace of her illness suddenly gained free rein. Because of this, she now knows the importance of having someone to listen.

"I had nightmares," she says. "I was afraid to go to sleep. I was just afraid of all those issues when you have something that can take your life."

Melody Pees says the nightmares were not of her

At first Melody Pees wanted her cancer to remain a private issue. But she is now glad she opened up because of the amount of support she has received from her family, the football team and the Kent State community.

Photo by Bridget Commissio
### Spring Leadership Retreat
(Mandatory for Compensated Leaders)
Date, Time and Place to be Determined

### All University Leadership Day
Date, Time and Place to be Determined

### An Evening with the Honorable Alan C. Page, Chief Justice
Minnesota Supreme Court
February 22, 2001
KSC Ballroom

### Who’s Who in American Colleges & Universities
March 8, 2001

### Honors Day
April 8, 2001

### Student Leaders Inauguration & Awards Ceremony
April 16, 2001
KSC Ballroom
6:30 PM

### Spring 2001 Leadership Series
Conflict Resolution
March 7, 2001
KSC Music Listening Center
12:10 PM

### Orienteering
April 4, 2001
12:10 PM

Watch for other leadership events that will be publicized soon.

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Steamtunnels

Mag Cum Laude

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dying from cancer. But they were of other vivid events, such as car accidents.

“You want your life to be normal, and all of a sudden you’re thrown into this other realm, [when you] just want to be normal again,” she says.

“I have a really strong faith,” she adds.

“Death never really frightened me. It was not that I was afraid of dying but of not being there for the rest of my family.”

A very real and physical source of her nightmares was also the possibility the cancer had spread into her lymph nodes, a situation where cancer can then spread quickly to the rest of the body. After her Monday surgery, Melody Pees did not know her status until the end of the week.

“On Friday when I was discharged, my oncologist came bouncing in and told me, ‘Get out of here,’” she says.

The cancer had not spread. And it was gone, as far as they could tell.

“It was such a sense of relief — all those thoughts, those worst scenarios,” she says.

“Next it was a sense of sadness because I thought of all the women who weren’t getting the same news that day.”

But that doesn’t mean the story is over.

Melody Pees had radiation treatments every day for five weeks to make sure the cancer did not return.

With the football season in high gear, she says her husband’s demanding schedule presented more stress.

“It’s the absolute busiest time of year for him, where he’s been running in all different directions. Now I added another direction,” Melody Pees says.

Just as she thought the suddenness of her cancer was also a good thing, Dean Pees says his schedule helped him in a way.

“The negative and good thing about football is it’s so time-consuming,” he says, pointing out it prevented him from dwelling on the situation, even though he always thinks about his wife.

When she was in the hospital, she says the exhaustion was clear on his face as he stayed through her surgery, then came to visit her during the week.

“He also was torn between knowing what he had to be doing and what he was doing,” she says. She adds she told him it was OK to go home when he came to the hospital late at night, eyes bloodshot from exhaustion after long days of practice.

“Football is in his blood,” she says. “It’s what he has to do.” She adds every year holds the same stressful schedules.
Dean Pees says that he often feels pulled in different directions. “Sometimes I feel guilty I’m not home more,” he says. “Sometimes I feel guilty going to practice, but it wouldn’t be any good to be at home except to be comforting. But that’s not usual for me to be at home, so she wouldn’t be comfortable.”

She remembers the day she came back after her first radiation treatment, where she was prepared for the regimen. “I knew he was anxious to know what happened, but I tried to keep it light. But he was staring out the window,” Melody Pees says. “I asked him what he was thinking, and he said that for the first time in his life he wished he wasn’t a football coach because he wanted to be there for me.”

She says her children have also seen the depth and seriousness of her cancer. “They try to put on a ‘no big deal’ shield when we talk,” Melody Pees says. “They are very doting but in a subtle kind of way. They don’t want me to feel like they’re afraid, but they’re a little worried.”

“The Big C,” as Melody Pees once called it, does not go away in a day, and its effects on her family are not short-lived. Dean Pees hopes his players may learn something from him and his wife.

“As important as football is to me and the players, it’s not the top priority in life,” he says. “They know how serious I take my job, so when I say this is more important, they may learn something, too.”

For Melody Pees, sharing her experiences and talking about it with others is a common denominator for healing. “At first I wanted it to be personal,” she says. “I didn’t want anyone to know. But then I wanted people to know, to have players hug me and see people I didn’t know saying they saw my name in the church bulletin. Each time, I thrive on the hugs, and I think that’s been a part of my healing.”

She adds that people often assume others are too busy to care about someone’s feelings or life, but the support she has found has changed her mind. “I was amazed at how people responded,” she says.

In a broader sense, Melody Pees believes she and her family came to Kent for more than a mission to build a football team. “I think God knew I would need this place to get through this part of my life,” she says, pointing out the hospital, her doctors, the players and other people at Kent State. “People say it alters the way you look at life, and it does,” she says. “I love my life.”
What would compel a person to sit in a booth at Kent's Country Kitchen on West Main Street at 10:57 on a Saturday evening? Loneliness, boredom, insomnia or a sudden urge for a skillet breakfast.

Dozens of Country Kitchen regulars seem to be there almost every day of the week. Their base of operation is the smoking section at the back of the restaurant.

Everyone in the back seems to know everyone else. They bounce from table to table, bumming cigarettes and sharing greetings, news and gossip. They might arrive in groups of three or four, but the entire dining room is an extended family.

The third-shift waitresses are just as comfortable placing food in front of these customers as they are sliding into the seat next to them and chatting for a bit.

Liz

Liz Bailey started as a waitress at Country Kitchen in July, though she worked there from 1996 to 1998. She has always worked third shift and wouldn't have it otherwise.

"Third shift is the bomb because third shift is different than all the rest," she says, scurrying past with an 11 p.m. order of French toast. "First is seniors, second is families, third is people."

Liz says she savors the friendships she's made working third shift — friendships that have remained strong even though she took some time off from Country Kitchen.

"Somebody came in tonight that I haven't seen since before, and I wanted to give them a hug," she says. "It's kind of weird having a relationship like that with someone who you're just supposed to be giving food to."

Steve

Steve Buckus is the quintessential Country Kitchen late-night regular.

"I'm a night owl and occasionally an insomniac," Steve says.

Steve comes to the restaurant so often that they have asked him to take a job as a cook. They ask him frequently, but he always declines. It would ruin the feel of the place for him. The 20-year-old man from Stow has been coming to Country Kitchen since he was 15.

Steve usually visits Country Kitchen twice a day, seven days a week. Tonight he's here with his fiancée Lisa Mosely, two friends and his cousin.

Steve says he only sleeps three or four hours a night. And at least once a week he stays at Country Kitchen all night, going in the morning straight to the University of Akron, where he is a second-year freshman majoring in chemical engineering.

His eyes, narrow slits, are barely visible beneath the brim of his beret. His temple bears a permanent crease from his perpetual sleepless squinting. Steve looks beyond tired, but his pink, goateed face is fixed in a slight, closed-mouth grin.

He fishes a Camel cigarette from one of the two packs stacked in front of him. He lights it then pours another cup of coffee with the same practiced precision he's demonstrated all night. He fills the cup, plops the creamer out with a few well-timed finger taps, shakes and pours from a sugar packet, stirs and sips.

Steve smokes his cigarette like he sips coffee — slowly and methodically, with the nonchalance that comes with years of practice.
A SLICE OF THIRD SHIFT AT COUNTRY KITCHEN

by Tim Bugansky
photos by Michele Lenni
The waitress passes by to see if they want any food. The others place their orders, but Steve declines.

"I think I'll just stick to my regular diet of cigarettes and coffee," he says.

Allison

Allison Kinney has been waitressing at Country Kitchen for one year, but she's been frequenting the restaurant since she was a freshman at Roosevelt High School in Kent. She's a second-year photo illustration major at Kent State, taking 17 credit hours and working full-time at Country Kitchen.

Allison says the tips during third shift are usually very good. It's not rare for a regular to leave $5 for a cup of coffee or $1 for water.

"Their check might only be a cup of coffee," she says.

But along with refilling the coffee, Allison also offers conversation, and she cleans up the huge mounds of cigarette butts that blossom from the ashtrays.

When they can't spare enough for a generous tip, many of the regulars leave poems on napkins or draw pictures for Allison. As a tip, Steve once drew her a picture of himself with a coffee pot attached to his arm via an IV tube.

"They tip when they can," she says. "Like some days, they're close to their paycheck and they don't have money. We understand. They're college kids, just like we are. We're all poor."

She considers all her third-shift regulars good acquaintances, at the very least. And she thinks of many of them as good friends.

"They have a bad day, I talk to them," she says. "They know what goes on in my life, I know what goes on in theirs. We share good news, bad news. It's a big group of friends."

She says Country Kitchen has a different feel at night, making it an appropriate hangout for college students.

"The atmosphere changes once it hits third shift," Allison says. "It's no longer a hometown, bring-Grandma-and-little-Joey kind of place because Grandma and little Joey are sleeping."

Allison still spends free time at Country Kitchen, even though she already works there 40 hours every week.

"This has always been my homework place," she says. "I have my coffee, my table, my books. If I want to take a quick study break, I always have someone to talk to."

She glances out the front window, exclaims softly and waves. More of her regulars are here.
Bottomless Cup

It's almost 1 a.m., and Steve needs more coffee. A look not so much of satisfaction but of fulfillment spreads across Steve's face when he drinks coffee. It is the sign of an addiction being fueled.

"Coffee is his crack," Lisa says, laughing. She and the others have received their orders and are digging in. Steve sips his coffee and lights another Camel. If it's a long night, he'll sometimes drink three or four pots of coffee himself. With free refills, he says, it costs, "$1.09 for like 3 gallons of coffee." But he always tries to leave $5 after an all-night coffee spree.

"It pays for the coffee, and they have to put up with my shit," he says.

Steve drains his mug and automatically reaches for the carafe. Only enough coffee for half a cup remains.

"Cashed it," he says, watching the final drips dribble into the mug.

The relaxed mood draws Chris Prosser to Country Kitchen.

Chris

Insomnia originally brought Chris Prosser to Country Kitchen three ago. Now he's a certified regular.

"I had insomnia for awhile, so I just started coming up when I couldn't sleep," the Stow resident says.

Chris sits in a back booth with his back to the wall, smoking Marlboro 100s and drawing on a yellow legal pad with a blue Bic pen. He comes to Country Kitchen three to five times per week. Tonight he's alone.

"On a weekend, you're pretty much guaranteed you're gonna know someone here," he says. "Like most of these people -- I can go up and talk to them, and they can talk to me. It's pretty much understood."

It's common for one regular to walk over to another table and join in on the conversation. But for now, Chris is content to sit and observe the interactions around him.

"The more you come alone, the more complex it seems," he says. "When you're with a group, you're not really paying attention to anyone else."

Chris smokes in a thoughtful manner, exhaling slowly. His voice seems to drift with the smoke as he talks, floating calmly through the air.

Dan Nikitin of Stow spends a late night at "The Kitchen" with members of his band I.R.S. (Idiots Running Society).

“It’s no longer a hometown, bring-Grandma-and-little-Joey kind of place because Grandma and little Joey are sleeping.”
"It’s got some subtle qualities that just make it easier to relax," he says. "It’s kind of like a sanctuary, I guess. You really don’t have to worry about anything in here. Or you can come in here to figure out what’s going on in your life."

Waiting for the Drunks

It is after 1:30 a.m., and the mood in the smoking section has toned down considerably. Solitary customers now outnumber the larger groups. Classical music can be heard distinctly over the conversations. An hour ago the opposite was true: Tiny patches of music barely pushed their way through the din.

Steve had left to take Lisa home, but now he and his cousin are back. It’s 1:53 a.m., but he isn’t ready to call it a night yet.

“We’ve decided we’re going to stay up all night," he says, ordering a cup of coffee.

Just before 2 a.m., Allison pauses to look out the window. She spies a trio of men, dressed in going-out clothes, staggering slightly as they walk toward the door. “Here they come,” she sighs. “The drunks. I hope they’re nice. I hope they’re happy drunks instead of angry ones. For some reason, all the angry people in the universe seem to go to the same restaurant at the same time. They hate the world and think it’s my fault.”

As the night has progressed, the customers and waitresses alike have mentioned the drunks. Because it’s a Saturday night, what goes on will not be a pure picture of Country Kitchen because of the added dimension of the weekend drunks, they say.

They describe them in almost horrible terms, as if the drunks pour from the bars of downtown Kent and invade Country Kitchen like barbarians.

Not that the regulars don’t drink. Many do. It’s just that Country Kitchen is their everyday place. It’s not their 24-hour detox center only useful for its strong coffee and skillet breakfasts.

The bar rush can happen anywhere from 2 to 4 a.m. The initial drunks Allison spied through the window are actually behaving themselves. This turns out to be a good omen. The packs of drunks don’t descend upon Country Kitchen this night. It’s cold out, some regulars muse, maybe they just stayed home.

So Allison fills the void of the drunks’ absence by recounting past experiences. The things that can occur in a Country Kitchen full of tipsy twentysomethings, she says, would never happen on a day shift.

“Since it’s third shift, it’s OK to bring all the sick people and stick food down their throats,” she says, her voice full of sarcasm.

But Allison won’t play nurse or janitor along with being a waitress.

“I don’t get paid to clean up their bodily excrements. I give them the towels, and I say, ‘This is for your friend’s puke.’”

Jeremy

It is approaching 3 a.m. The atmosphere in the dining room is much more fragmented and mellow than it was an hour before.

No one darts from table to table in the constant activity that had kept the groups interconnected before. Now Country Kitchen is full of decidedly separate tables and booths.

Jeremy Falkenstein sits alone at one booth, smoking casually. He is seated sideways, with his legs folded in front of him. Jeremy comes to Country Kitchen to write, draw or talk.

“For some reason this place just stimulates conversation," he says. “There’s something about having coffee, smoking a few cigarettes and talking about political and social issues. You’ll find an eclectic group of people who show up and generally meet another group of people with a like mind.”

The Country Kitchen scene even sparked novel and film ideas for the former Kent State student, now a junior at the University of Akron, majoring in communications and film.

“In a way, this place has its meaning for me," Jeremy says. “I’ve broken up a couple of times in this place — with the same girl, in fact.”
Jeremy finds Country Kitchen to be a good place to study, too.

"Every time exams roll around, I always see the sun rise through the windows here," he says.

And chances are it will be the same this semester. Country Kitchen is the place to be for Jeremy.

"I really like it," he says. "It's really laid back. Kent has some jewels when it comes to hangsouts. Not to say a greasy spoon is a jewel, but you have to look at what's beneath the rough."

Almost Over

It is 4 a.m. Steve and his cousin have just left, saying goodbye to the waitresses and the remaining regulars on their way out. Chris is still sitting in the back booth, contemplating his yellow legal pad and smoking another Marlboro 100. Jeremy has found some friends and now shares a table with them.

The smoking section is slowly and steadily emptying. The elevator music is louder there, with little conversation to fight it. But up front in nonsmoking, a few tables have filled, and the sounds of talking softens the elevator music’s impact.

In another two hours, Allison will be getting off work. A few regulars may still linger in the dining room, clinging to the tail end of a Country Kitchen all-nighter.

If the urge seizes them, the regulars could stay longer. They could watch as the truckers and retirees filter in for morning coffee. They might see a few businesspeople stop by before work. The third-shift regulars could sip their bottomless cups of coffee past noon, watching the lunchtime diners bustle in, quickly eat their lunches and leave before an hour is up.

The regulars could stay, but chances are they won’t. They’ll have to go to work or school. Or they’ll just go home because the atmosphere at Country Kitchen isn’t nearly the same with daylight filtering in the windows. The pace is a little too frantic, everyone needs to be somewhere else. For the daytime crowd, Country Kitchen is a stopover instead of a destination.

But soon enough, the second-shift families will finish their dinners and the third-shift waitresses will arrive. The regulars will follow soon after and the endless coffee parade will begin. People will move endlessly from table to table. Conversations will grow and shift, mountains of cigarette butts will spill from the ashtrays.

Thus it continues, 24 hours a day with no locking of the doors to signal any sort of finality. It’s part of an endless, sleepless existence to the insomniacs like Steve and Chris or late-night intellectuals like Jeremy. So on and on and on it goes, like a bottomless cup of coffee replenished until the end of time.
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