

2026 August



THE LIONS' PRIDE
MEDIA GROUP



Welcome new and returning students

From adjectives to action: Finding your story at *The Lions' Pride*

Elijah Penn
Editor-in-Chief

Well, perhaps it's fate that someone with a writing instrument for a last name became the Editor-in-Chief for Saint Leo University's only fully student-run newspaper.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Elijah Penn, and I am your new Editor-in-Chief. I first joined *The Lions' Pride Media Group* in Fall 2025 and soon became a copyeditor. I am a junior with dual major in English and political science. I'm a born and bred Floridian, Christian, nature enthusiast, writer, and advocate.

I could think of a hundred more descriptors of myself and have heard a heap more from others. As a writer, adjectives have always fascinated me; more so, how people are described or describe themselves.

I've realized every adjective we use comes from a verb we do—or more accurately, how we choose to portray ourselves comes from the actions we take, or the concepts we actively embrace and seek to embody.

In that sense, every new passion

or responsibility has the potential to become your newest favorite introduction of yourself. Sometimes these adjectives like to catch us by surprise.

Indeed, working for *The Lions' Pride Media Group* was never a plot-



My goal as Editor-in-Chief is to build upon the incredible foundation laid out by those before me and increase our engagement with the community. (Photo by Elijah Penn)

point on my envisioned life-map, but it's an experience I'd not trade for the world. Many of our staff over the years would voice a similar sentiment if you were to ask them. The unexpected connections, experiences, skills, and opportunities have forever changed the course of our lives for the better.

The best part is that isn't just my story; I am merely some stranger who knows his way around a keyboard. These adjectives are not just words you can use for yourself, but real skills and enthusiasms that translate into being a change-maker in this life.

You needn't write in Shakespearean prose to have a place on staff. Typos (of which I make many) can be fixed and grammar taught. All we require is a dedication and passion for being the voice of the community and advocating for the concerns and accomplishments of your peers. If these words describe you at all, then we are happy to welcome you aboard.

I urge you to apply to *The Lions' Pride*—not for the money or an impressive résumé (although

both are nice and have a place)—but because of our “Why.” That is, why we do what we do: To record history and be the voice promoting our incredible community.

Don't get me wrong: You can think of your own benefit, too. Servant leadership requires one to develop their own skills before they can help others effectively. But don't lose sight of why. When the self becomes the reason, community becomes a means to be used.

That's just a long way of saying, in short: If Saint Leo's core values resonate with you, and you wish to be part of positive change, I truly hope you consider letting *The Lions' Pride* become a phrase that describes you in some way.

Don't hesitate to reach out to me or any of our wonderful staff. As the Editor-in-Chief, I would love to hear what matters to you.

Go Lions!

Elijah Penn



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The Lions' Pride Media Group is the student-run publication of Saint Leo University, free from institutional interference from conception to print. We publish in print and weekly online at our website and through our social media sites. It is the mission of The Lions' Pride to provide accurate news and diverse opinions that are important to the Saint Leo community, and our goal is to inform and entertain readers while providing thought-provoking journalism without fear of reprisal. We are now located in the Student Activities Building Room 115.

Letter to the Editor & Advertising:
Send letters to the editor to thelionspridenewspaper@gmail.com. Guidelines: 500-word maximum. Do not use profane or slanderous language. Faculty must include name and rank. Students must include name, major, and graduation year. Include a phone number to verify authorship. We reserve the right to edit for grammar, spelling, or libel. To inquire about putting an advertisement in the newspaper or on our social media, please contact Emily Baay at emily.baay@email.saintleo.edu.



Letter from the SGU President

A letter from the Student Government Union President

Aubrey Wallace

SGU President

Dear Lions,

Welcome home! Whether this is your first time stepping onto Saint Leo University's campus or you are returning to a place that already feels like home, I am so excited to welcome you to the 2026–2027 academic year.

For those I haven't had the opportunity to meet yet, hi! My name is Aubrey Wallace, and I have the incredible privilege of serving as your Student Body President. I am someone who is deeply passionate about service, leadership, and bringing people together. My faith has taught me a lot about what it means to serve others, and I try to carry that with me in everything I do. I believe leadership is about showing up for people, treating them with kindness, and leaving the places and people around you better than you found them.

That is the kind of president I hope to be for you. Our Student Government, from our incredible Executive Board to our dedicated Senate, is here to serve you, advocate for you, and represent you. This year, we want to be more present, more accessible, and more transparent. We want you to know who your representatives are and, more importantly, know that you can count on us to show up.

We also want you to hold us accountable.



Aubrey Wallace, Student Body President for the 2026–2027 academic year. (Photo courtesy of Aubrey Wallace)

We are not going to be able to accomplish everything, fix every problem, or give everyone the answer they hope for. But I can promise you this: we will work hard. We will listen. We will advocate for you. We will communicate with you. And when you come to us with something that matters to you, we will not disappear on you. You deserve to know that the people representing you are genuinely working on your behalf.

We are already putting that commitment into practice. From strengthening and expanding our campus Food Pantry to introducing student roundtables, creating more opportunities for direct conversations with students, and working to bring back an even stronger sense of school spirit, we want to meet you where you are. We want to get out

on campus and genuinely ask: How are you? What's working? What's not? What do you need from us, and how can we help?

More than anything, whether this is your first year or another year in your Saint Leo journey, take advantage of the opportunities in front of you. Branch out. Meet someone new. Join a club or organization. Go to an event you normally would not attend. Talk to your professors and staff. Use the resources available to you. There are so many different people, experiences, and opportunities here, but ultimately, you get out of your college experience what you are willing to put into it.

Get involved. There is something here for everyone. And if you don't see a space for you, let's create one.

College should be filled with moments you will remember: the friendships you make, the late-

night laughs, the experiences that push you outside your comfort zone, and the faculty, staff, and friends who make this place feel like home. I want us to build an even stronger sense of community, connection, and Lion pride. I want us to show up for one another and remember what makes Saint Leo special: the people.

There is a lot of work ahead of us, and that work has already begun. My Executive Board, our Senate, and I are ready to work diligently for you. We will not always get everything perfect, but we will continue to listen, learn, communicate, and give our best to this community.

This is your campus. This is your community. And this is your Student Government.

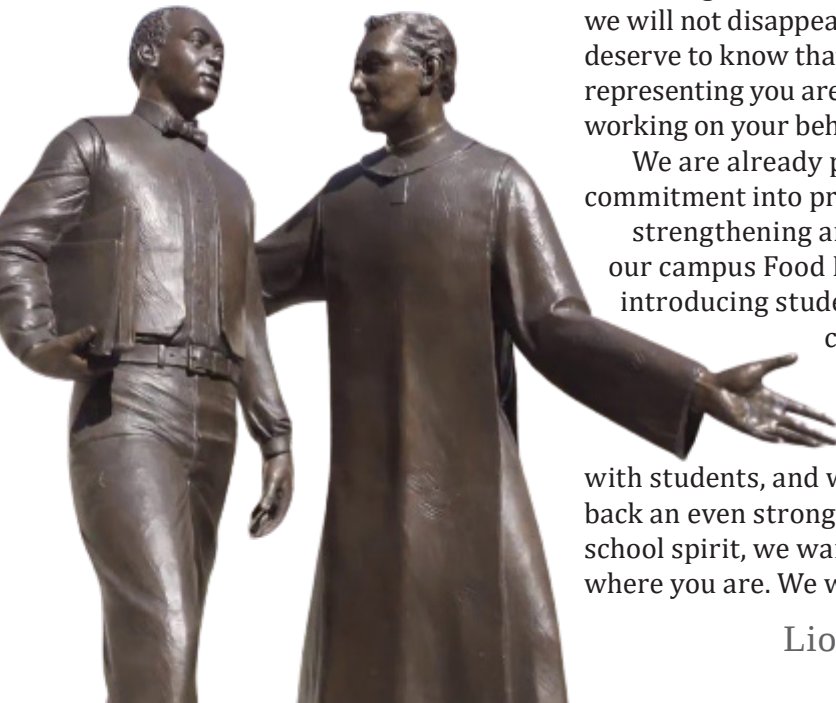
So, to our new Lions: welcome to the family. And to our returning Lions: welcome home.

I cannot wait to meet you, serve you, and see what we accomplish together.

Interested in joining the Student Government Senate this fall? Follow @saintleosgu on Instagram for upcoming opportunities and updates, or connect with us at StudentGovernmentUnion@saintleo.edu.

With Lion Pride,

Aubrey Wallace



New and improved: What's changed at Saint Leo University since last semester?

Brianna Brinker

Arts & Culture Editor

Welcome new and returning lions! The community of Saint Leo has had a busy summer improving Saint Leo University for the benefit of students and faculty. There have been many exciting changes, renovations, and new additions to the campus since last semester, from new palm trees and office relocations to international partnerships!

The State of Florida awarded Saint Leo \$1.8 million to fund the nursing and cybersecurity programs.

Bill Pope gave \$1 million that Saint Leo used to launch the Derek J. Mitchell Collegiate Recovery Program, Florida's only residential collegiate recovery program at a private Catholic university.

Recent investments are supporting several initiatives at Saint Leo. Florida's 2026-27 state budget provides the university with approximately \$1.8 million for nursing and cybersecurity programs. In addition, Dewey and Becky Mitchell gave Saint Leo a \$1



The Student Activities Building (SAB) is now a place that is filled with student organizations and where their offices will be held. The walls were also repainted with a yellow color to represent Saint Leo's school color: gold. (Photo by Brianna Brinker)

million founding gift to establish the Derek J. Mitchell Collegiate Recovery Program.

Organizations, services, and faculty have been moved to different locations.

Faculty in Saint Edwards were moved to Kirk Hall and Tapia College of Business. This was done so professors can be easier to find and surrounded with their colleagues in the same field as them.

"My honest suggestion to students is to walk the halls this semester and get familiar with where your professors now sit. You might be surprised how many good conversations start that way," said Dr. Bryan DePoy, provost of Academic Affairs at Saint Leo.

Saint Leo is proud to welcome "Leo 360," an all-in-one student services location. It opened on Aug. 20 with a grand ribbon cutting.

DePoy stressed that students had an issue with being sent to different buildings for different situations. Leo 360 is how to solve this issue.

"The goal is to get students lined up quickly with the personnel and resources they actually need, all from one location, so in most cases a student can walk in, explain what they need, and get connected right there instead of being sent somewhere else to start over," said DePoy.

Leo 360 is advising, registration, billing, counseling, and financial aid all housed on the ground level in Kirk Hall.

DePoy explained how both the office changes and Leo 360 come back to our core value of community.

"The advising work comes from listening to what students told us they need beyond the classroom. We created a centralized Office of Advising, combining campus advising and online advising into one team," explained DePoy. "That has already opened up more collaboration and cross-training between the two groups, and regular idea sharing about how best to support student success."

DePoy shared the development of a three-phase experiential model. The three steps are explore, immerse, and integrate.

This is for the students to have more of a community and support to go to when they need it. Students will have their resources in one place whether it is all their professors near their classrooms or whether it is questions they have about advising, counseling, or financial aid.

Student clubs and organizations have all been moved into the Student Activity Building (SAB). The idea behind this is to make it a student union. Organizations such as Student Government Union (SGU) and *The Lions' Pride Media Group* (TLPMG) will be there.

The campus store has been relocated to the room across from Kirk Hall, where the robotics room once was. The reason for its move is to have a more enhanced space. It is stocked up with new Saint Leo merchandise!

When you come onto campus, you will also notice the food choices have been expanded. Benedict's has lunch items such as salads, sandwiches, and flatbreads, and they are coming out with more soon. FUZ is being moved to the baseball field and going to be used as a concession stand; it is being replaced with Jimmy John's, a new food option right above the dining hall.

Also, Saint Leo signed a new dining hall services agreement with Genuine Foods to improve the quality of the food.

There are also ongoing projects to improve the entrance of the university and the lakefront. Currently, by the dock, there are new hammocks hung up and a fire pit area for all students to enjoy.

Dr. Jim Burkee, Saint Leo's president has made many partnerships that are going to positively impact Saint Leo. Burkee is finalizing new international partnerships this



Benedict's has amazing lunch options right on campus that are nutritious and delicious. They also added in two vending machines that hold Celsius and Poppi's along with three free water options of lemon, cucumber, and orange. (Photo by Brianna Brinker)

year. This includes UCAM, one of Spain's leading private Catholic universities. As well as, Richmond American University in London.

"Partners are choosing to invest in Saint Leo because they see an institution serious about its future," said Burkee.

Saint Leo launched "Saint Leo Academy" and added new leadership for Benfica Academy.

For those who stepped away from their education, Saint Leo signed a new partnership with ReUp Education to re-engage students who previously did not complete their degree program with a long-term online enrollment strategy.

"None of this happens by accident, and none of it happens without the discipline this community showed over the past year. It happens because Saint Leo did the hard work, and because partners, donors, and prospective students are responding to what they see," said Burkee.

Sandhill Review literary magazine reveals exciting updates

Angeliki Thomas
Contributing Writer

Saint Leo University's *Sandhill Review* literary magazine is undergoing a transformation as the new editor-in-chief, Dr. Anne Barngrover, is developing a new space for the magazine in the form of an online literary journal, creating an expanded range of contributors, and selecting a new theme for its upcoming issue.

The new editor-in-chief, Barngrover is an associate professor of English and creative writing and program director of the Master of Arts in Creative Writing at Saint Leo. While honoring the work of the previous editor-in-chief of 14 years, associate professor of English and creative writing Gianna Russo, Barngrover is fully committed to building upon the literary magazine's solid foundation.

"I want to continue to uphold the kind of pride and joy that she created with this journal and the community around the journal," Barngrover said.

With this goal in mind, Barngrover has been focused on developing new strategies to preserve the heart of the magazine while enhancing its accessibility and prestige.

To expand the magazine's usability and popularity in the literary community, the *Sandhill Review* will be launching an online literary journal at Sandhillreview.com. This online journal will feature easy access to previous publications to preserve the magazine's creative history, and the platform will become the home of *Sandhill's* new publications. The online platform will allow direct submissions through the site.

Barngrover will begin sourcing work from prominent Florida writers in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry while continuing to feature Saint Leo students and other members of the university and community.

"It will be a place where writers

can easily access the publication and share their work through online and social media platforms," Barngrover said.

Several existing traditions and opportunities will remain, including the Crack the Spine Party, which is an event held at Saint Leo University that celebrates the publication of the latest issue and all the writers that contributed to

said Garrett. "You can get your experience with *Sandhill Review* and it can guide you and help you when you submit to other places."

Russo is thankful that Barngrover will be continuing the magazine's mission to be a resource of inclusivity for Saint Leo students and endorsed the magazine's move to an online platform for the literary community.



Dr. Barngrover first gained experience with working on literary magazines during her Ph.D. as an intern for the *Missouri Review* as a contest editor. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Anne Barngrover)

its creation.

Contributions from writers outside Saint Leo, and internships for undergraduate students and graduate students in the university's Master's in Creative Writing program will additionally remain a part of *Sandhill Review's* opportunities.

Student and contributor, Emma Garrett who is an English major and a senior at Saint Leo shared her optimism for the upcoming changes to the *Sandhill Review* and its potential impact for Saint Leo students.

"This low-risk resource available that is not gatekept, is an opportunity for everyone; you don't have to worry so much,"

"It's a very diverse community of writers that have been published in the *Sandhill Review*; and students have the opportunity to be published next to very, very well-established writers," said Russo.

Russo is an ardent supporter of Barngrover's ambitions to publicize the magazine to writers outside of the university setting so that the *Sandhill Review* will have its very own space to grow and reach new audiences. Russo showed full support for Barngrover in her endeavors to continue elevating the magazine.

"It's been a joy and it's been an honor, a total honor," stated Russo.

Considering this period of

restructuring for the *Sandhill Review*, Barngrover has chosen the theme of this upcoming issue to be *creation*. The theme of creation represents the evolution of the magazine into an online journal as well as a general statement towards the practice of creating art being intrinsic in human nature.

"It is also a theme that people can interpret widely; they can take it literally or figuratively, and creation can also come at a time of stagnation or difficulty too," stated Barngrover.

As Barngrover announces this upcoming issue theme hoping that the Saint Leo community may begin preparing to craft their pieces for submission, she also had some words of wisdom for those who are new to submitting work for publication.

"Submitting is not a guarantee of publication; as writers, for better or for worse, get comfortable with rejection," Barngrover urged.

As a heavily experienced writer in submitting her creative writing pieces for submission to various publications, Barngrover has acquired a refreshing outlook on submission rejections.

"Sometimes those rejections can lead to a positive," Barngrover suggested.

She advises students to submit their work for publication regardless of their fears of rejection.

This message mirrors Barngrover's determination to create a positive impact on the magazine and the literary community as she takes on her new role as editor-in-chief. As *Sandhill Review* enters this new chapter, Barngrover hopes the move online will expand the magazine's reach while creating new opportunities for students to share their work with a broader literary community.



Faith-based communities: Religion at Saint Leo University

Aimee McElreath
Campus News Editor

Although Saint Leo University is founded in Catholic roots, it admits students from every religious background. Because of this, there is a sense of diversity on campus, which strengthens Saint Leo's community.

Dr. Randall Woodard, chair of Religious Studies at Saint Leo, shared how religious liberty of all religions affects student life on campus.

According to Woodard, Saint Leo is proud of its religious diversity even as a Catholic school, because despite religious differences, having students of various religious backgrounds allows them to practice the school's Benedictine roots through radical hospitality.

"There's a key element in Benedictine theology that you treat the stranger, and you treat the person who shows up just as you would Christ," explained Woodard.

Benedictine hospitality is based on treating each person as those created in God's image and likeness.

"Saint Leo has tried to retain certain elements of its Benedictine history and tradition," said Woodard, "and that's translated into what people here call radical hospitality, where instead of just treating people nicely, there's an extra step [where] we try to treat the other person with an extra layer of hospitality."

Aside from the practice of radical hospitality on campus, Saint Leo's Catholic roots manifest in other ways.

"Not only do we have daily Mass and weekly Mass, we'll also have the special Masses together as an entire community," Woodard said.

These special Masses include Masses for returning students and Baccalaureate Masses, and Masses for graduating students. Additionally, all students take two religion classes to be formed and informed.

"There's a focus on who are we becoming, what our deeper vocation is, and what we are really called to do as people and people of faith," Woodard elaborated.

"We've been fortunate where we're not dealing with some more

atypical events that have happened on other campuses, where there are tensions and angry protests that turn into violence," said Woodard.

Woodard attributes the lack of violent encounters among religious groups on campus to Saint Leo providing an opportunity for students to respectfully and humbly discuss with one another, ask difficult questions, and learn about different faiths.

Additionally, Woodard shared that there are various opportunities that Saint Leo offers for religion to bring people together on campus.

University Ministry, for example, is considered a major place on campus for the Catholic faith to bring people together. It hosts weekly Bible study, Mass, Theology Thursday events, and retreats.

The Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies (CCJS), run by Dr. Matthew Tapie, offers opportunities for people of different faiths to gather.

For instance, CCJS gathers to read scripture from various world religions.

Saint Leo's Medical Humanities Club has brought people together through religious debates.

"It ended up being a really interesting back and forth dialogue between the Christian students and several Muslim students that were there," Woodard commented. "[It was a] really awesome opportunity for people to learn about other people."

On a related note, Woodard discussed Theta Alpha Kappa, Saint Leo's Religion Honors Society, which students can contact to ask about religion on campus.

"The religion majors and minors are in our Honors Society," said Woodard, "We try to offer a couple of social or educational events every year."

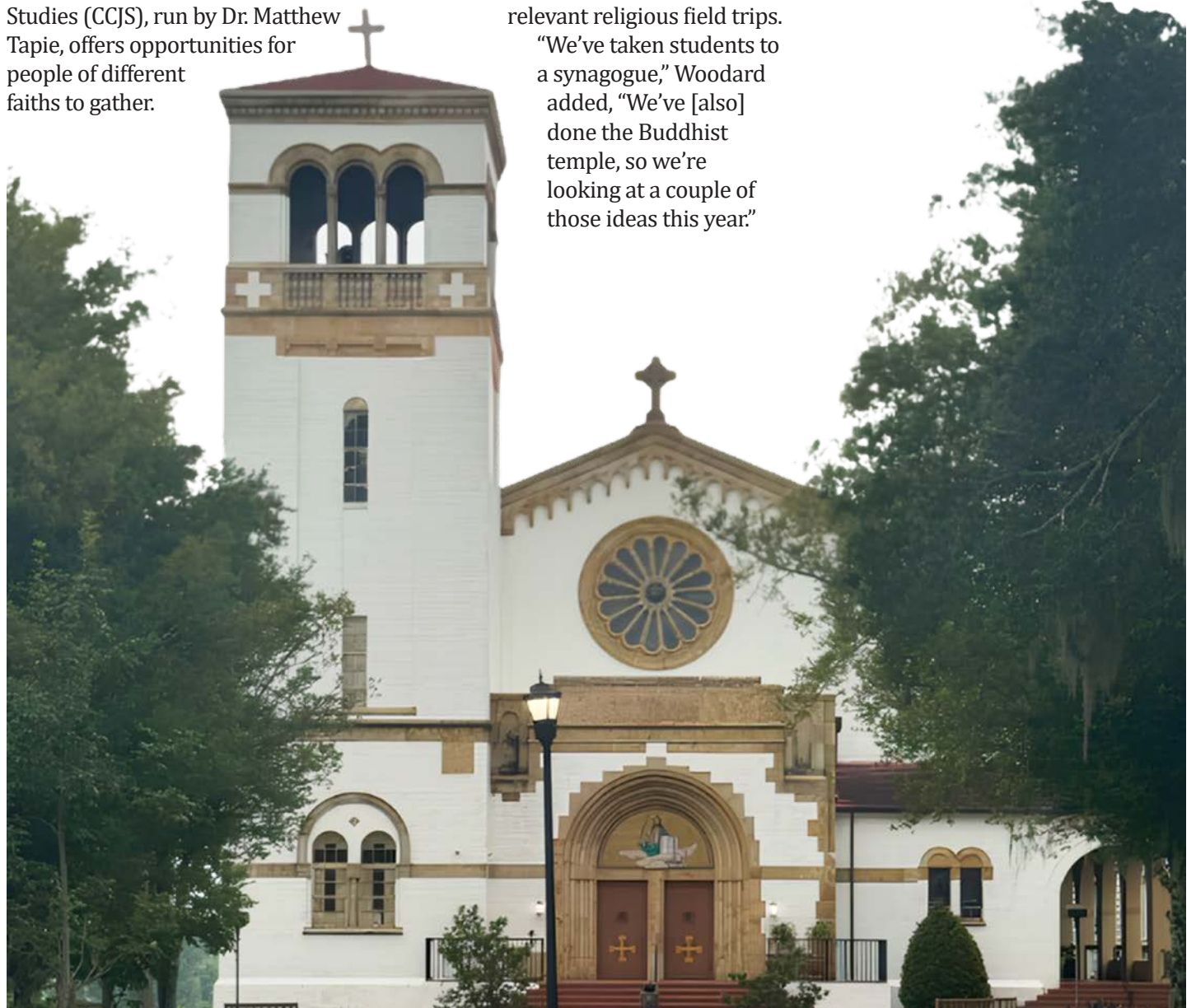
Woodard also hopes to be able to take students in the organization on relevant religious field trips.

"We've taken students to a synagogue," Woodard added, "We've [also] done the Buddhist temple, so we're looking at a couple of those ideas this year."

Students on campus can attend Mass at the Saint Leo Abbey on weekdays at 5:00 p.m. and on Sunday at 7 p.m., as well as gather in University Ministry in Men's and Women's group every Wednesday at 6 p.m. Students can contact the director of University Ministry, Mary Keselicka, for more information through her email, mary.keselicka@saintleo.edu.

On the other hand, anyone can attend Truth Seekers Non-denominational Church led by Pastor Mike. Service is hosted at the Selby Auditorium every Sunday at 6 p.m. and Bible Study every Thursday at 7:15 p.m. at MMR in Apartment Six.

Although education is crucial to Saint Leo, religion and religious liberty play a major role in the gathering of its community.



Saint Leo's Catholic roots, physically demonstrated by the Saint Leo Abbey, are critical in the community it fosters today. (Photo by Bao Han)

Homesickness is normal: A freshman's guide to adjusting to college life

Brianna Brinker

Arts & Culture Editor

Starting college for the very first time is like entering a whole new world. Your routine totally changes from living at home your entire life to living at a university far from home, away from all the people you know.

Although it can be exciting, it is very normal to be homesick. You are not alone in feeling like this. Normalizing homesickness is important because most college students go through it. It is okay to experience sadness and feeling like you're not in the right place.

College is a different environment with different people and the feelings you are going through will pass.

Isolating yourself in your dorm room can make homesickness worse. The best thing to do is go out on campus. Start with a simple walk to Benedict's, grab a coffee you love, and explore! You might come across your new favorite spot or even make some new friends.

Saint Leo University is a very peaceful campus, and just getting fresh air and sitting outside can make you feel better.

The first few days are the hardest because class hasn't started yet. Once your classes start and your routine starts to develop, it gets better. Focusing your time on your classes distracts your mind from being away from home and gives you something to work on that you are passionate about.

Dr. Audrea Maxwell, student success coach and academic advisor, gives advice to freshmen.

"The student should try and build good relationships with other students. They can do this by participating in and attending social activities on campus where they can meet others," said Maxwell.



Make your dorm filled with your style and personality, so it feels like your own space. (Photo by Brianna Brinker)

One of her biggest pieces of advice is to join a club or organization about something you are personally interested in. Don't follow what everyone else is doing or what you think you have to do.

At the beginning of every semester, Saint Leo hosts an event where you can discover clubs and organizations. You can even talk to members of those clubs and organizations and ask any questions.

This is an exciting part of college that eases your homesickness because you will be doing something that interests you! For example, if you love music, join the choir or learn how to play an instrument. If you love cheerleading, try out for the cheer team, and if you love to write, join the newspaper! There is something for everyone at Saint Leo.

If your mental health is declining and you are feeling homesick or depressed, there are solutions right on campus. Saint Leo offers counseling where you can talk to someone on the second floor of the

Student Activities Building. There are people here for you.

Also, Saint Leo offers University Ministry where you can be with people who love Jesus. You can attend Mass, go to women's or men's groups weekly, and go on yearly trips together.

Saint Leo also offers Truth Seekers, a non-denominational church that anyone is welcome to attend. There is a church service every Sunday and Bible study on Thursdays.

If you brought your car, get off campus for a while and see what is around you. Sometimes, college can feel like a bubble that you're stuck in. If you have the chance, go on a drive and you might discover a new store you love or a delicious coffee shop. Walk around Dade City or do your homework at a local Starbucks.

Take a break and even drive home if possible. We all need a break from college sometimes so if home is not too far away, make a trip home on the weekend and spend time with your

loved ones. Going home will always be comforting, and it is always there for you.

"Being away from home, where home was the student's 'normal' for many years can be quite emotionally challenging; however, embracing the 'why' of the reason they are away from their home and family while doing their best to climatize to their new environment can help ease the feeling of homesickness," said Maxwell.

Saint Leo becomes your second home that you learn to love. Give it a chance and don't base your experience on a couple of days. See how you feel by the end of the semester. Even if it takes time, you will find friends that become best friends.

Make your dorm feel homey with decor that feels like you and bring stuff from home that comforts you. Go to the baseball games, head over to the events offered, and romanticize your new college life. It is going to be worth it! Welcome new Lions!

Saint Leo University safety app: It only works if you have it

Emily Baay

Advertising Manager

"You never know what will happen at night, and who will be there," said Ashley Dadka, a senior criminal justice student.

Dadka feels that walking from the Saint Leo University parking garage to her dorm at night can be a "scary task." Many other students, especially female students, have similar perspectives.

Student safety at Saint Leo is important no matter what part of campus you are on. While the university has several safety measures in place for students to use if a situation emerges, many students have not heard about these systems and how to use them.

Part of this safety system includes the Everbridge 360 app. This app alerts students of emergency situations in their area, such as hurricane warnings. It also allows students to notify campus safety if they need help with the push of a button.

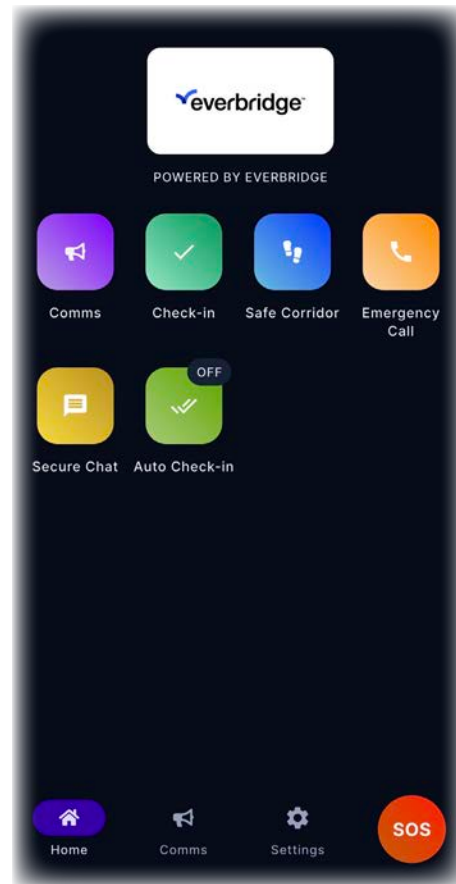
Students may access the Everbridge 360 application by downloading it from either the App Store or the Google Play Store. By entering "saintleo" when prompted to choose an organization code and using the university's single-use sign-on page, students can utilize safety features such as "Emergency Call" and "Check-In" through the icons on the app's home screen.

This app replaces Saint Leo's blue light call box system, which is no longer active on campus.

"I knew of the blue light near the dock," Dadka said, "but I had no idea it wasn't working anymore."

These call boxes also allowed students to directly call campus security but are not as accessible as an app that can reside on a student's phone and on their person at all times.

While safety is a priority at Saint Leo, its status as a small private school in a small town makes many people see the campus as relatively safe. However, many people from off campus can be seen walking the grounds, drawn in for



Saint Leo students have access to online safety tools such as an SOS call button, Check-Ins, and a secure chat with the campus safety team. (Screenshot by Emily Baay)

the scenic views, rich history, or community events.

Vincent "Mike" D'Ambrosio, Chief of University Safety and Emergency Management, notes that, in addition to the app, Campus Safety provides continuous patrols at all hours.

"Our patrols cover residence halls, academic and support buildings, as well as parking lots," D'Ambrosio said. "In addition, we utilize approximately 590 CCTV cameras and over 200 access control points to enhance campus safety and security."

Even with these security measures in place, some students feel as though this could be communicated more effectively.

Madison Wilson, a former Resident Assistant (RA) who graduated in Spring 2026, noted that all resident assistants complete two weeks of training before the school year starts. During this training, Campus Safety provides an instruction manual and presentation regarding the app and shares its importance to Resident Assistants.

From there, RAs are held

responsible for relaying this information to students and residents in their communities. This depends on the RAs being proactive and presenting the information in a way that sticks. Commuters, especially transfer students, are often overlooked.

"I know I explained a bit what it is," said Wilson, "but I can't say for sure if it helped. Maybe I should have gone a bit more in-depth. Maybe I should have pulled up a tutorial on my phone or something."

Simply sharing information about the Everbridge 360 app doesn't ensure student engagement. Even though Resident Assistants advertise the platform, many students never download it. Wilson added that giving the app more importance and stepping up efforts to promote it more extensively on campus, such as professors discussing it in class, would be the perfect solution.

Kaylee Graham, a junior business management major, is one student who has not taken the time to download the app.

"I haven't felt the need to use it," Graham said, "but I think it could be

helpful to have if I need it."

As a commuter student, Graham feels she has the same level of access to the Campus Safety resources compared to a student living on campus.

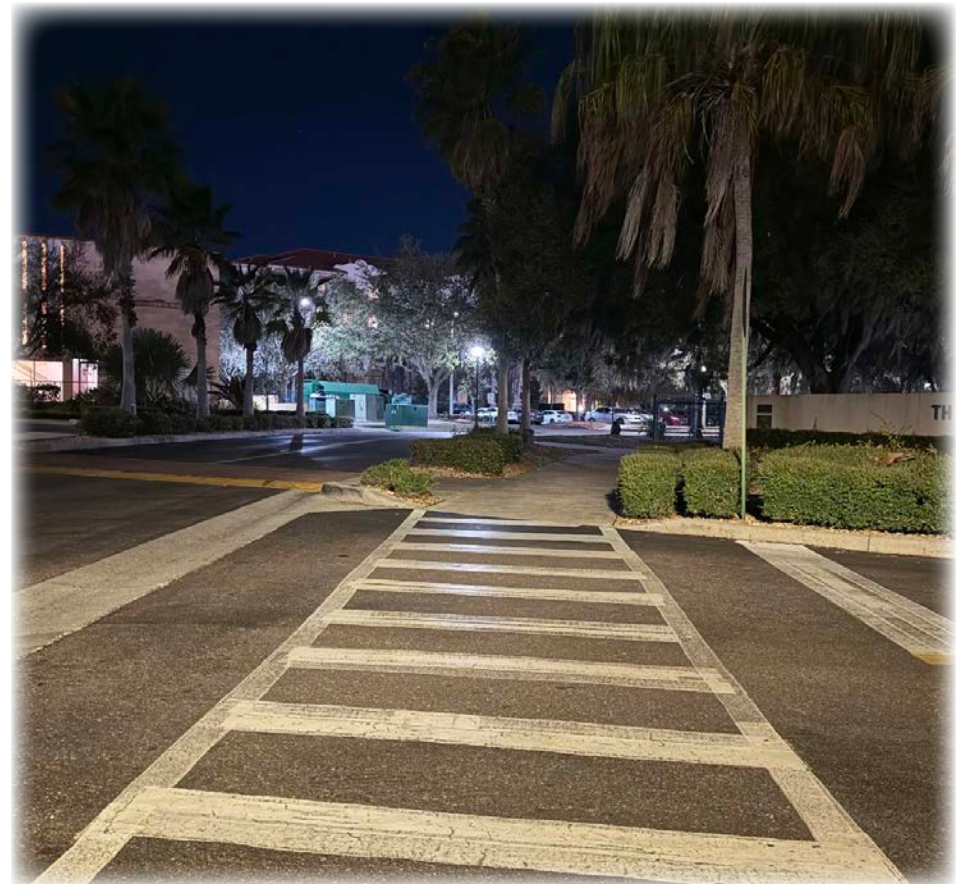
"I generally feel safe walking to my car" she states. "The main difference is that there are usually fewer people around compared to walking to a dorm."

Graham believes the university does a good job accounting for both resident and commuter students in its safety planning, giving a more favorable view than students such as Dadka.

Still, Graham recognizes room for improvement.

"More lighting around parking areas would be a nice addition and could make commuters feel even more comfortable at night," Graham said.

As Saint Leo continues to rely on digital safety tools, students such as Dadka and student leaders like Wilson agree that clearer communication and encouragement to download the app may be just as important as the patrols themselves.



Saint Leo can be quiet and dark after sunset. It's good to be vigilant and know ahead what to do in a dangerous situation (Photo courtesy of Benjamin Hasapidis)

Do you know where you are



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Daniel A. Cannon Memorial Library



Student Community Center

- Stephen Herrmann Mail Center
- Boardrooms
- Dining Hall



Student Activities Building

- Career Services -
- Student Affairs -
- Campus Activities Board -



Department of Information Technology

- Online Support
- Laptop Rentals
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- Bookstore -
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Kirk Hall

Furry friends on campus: Saint Leo's new pet policy

Aimee McElreath

Campus News Editor

Have you ever wanted to live with your pet on campus? Saint Leo University has a new policy in place where students can bring their pet to live with them on campus!

Director of Residential Experience and Community Standards, Kimesha Norris, explained what students can expect about this new policy.

"Any student can bring a cat or dog on campus, and they will be placed in a single room in Snyder," said Norris.

The policy extends to one cat or dog per student, and students must live with their pet in Snyder Hall.

The policy includes a \$500 pet deposit fee per semester. If the pet has not damaged the space it resides in, students receive \$250 back from the deposit at the end of the school year.

The policy also includes some requirements regarding the pets.

"You can only bring one

animal, so if you had a cat and a dog, you got to choose which one you want to bring, just because of the spacing of the room," said Norris, "It just wouldn't fit for two pets to be in that space."

Another qualification is for the pets to be up to date with their shots and other medical necessities prescribed by a veterinarian.

On another note, Norris elaborated on the backstory of why this new residential policy was enacted.

"We would only allow animals if you had an Emotional Support Animal (ESA) or a service animal on campus," said Norris, "But we know sometimes students don't fall into either."

Norris noted that despite the old animal housing policy that only accounted for ESAs and service animals, many students wanted to bring their pets onto campus. She spoke about how this inspired Residence Life to think about how to incorporate pets into student life on campus.

"We looked at different universities and saw what they were doing with pet friendly housing, and we thought it would be something great to bring to Saint Leo," Norris stated.

"I have a pet myself, and I love my dog to death," said Norris. "He's like my best friend," said Norris.

Norris realized many students felt the same way about their pets and thought that allowing pets would improve residential experience at Saint Leo.

For questions about the pet policy, students can contact Residence Life by email at residence.life@saintleo.edu or in-person visits. Students can also read the policy on the Saint Leo website.

Students can also read the pet policy on the Saint Leo website under Residential Experience and Community Standards.

The new pet policy on campus is a great opportunity for students to brighten their student life, as well as improving students'

mental health and alleviating homesickness.

The policy is now in effect, so students can apply to allow their pets into housing today!



Canines are popular pets that can help students thrive on campus! (Photo by Aimee McElreath)



PHOTO OF THE WEEK

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HERE IS HOW IT WORKS:

- Take a picture you love!
- Email it to thelionspridenewspaper@gmail.com and make sure the subject line is "Photo Of The Week Submission"
- Include in the email: your name, major or title, & academic year
- Include a 25-50 word caption that includes the image title, what the photo depicts, and the names of people in the photo (if applicable)

SUBMISSION RULES

- This contest is open to students, faculty, and alumni
- Submit one original photo per week
- The photo must relate to the University
- Photo must be recent (within the last month)
- Basic adjustments such as brightness and color balance are allowed
- No elements may be added, removed, or altered. No use of AI!
- All required information must be provided in the email submission

THE PROCESS:

- Every week, TLPMG staff will select up to 5 finalists! (blind judging)
- The finalists will then be posted to our Instagram! YOU vote for your favorite on @lionspridemedi
- The weekly winner will be featured on our Instagram and in the running to be featured in print
- Two weeks before print, we will vote on the weekly finalists! The winner will be featured in the newspaper!



**YOUR PHOTO
COULD BE
FEATURED!!**

The Saint Leo bucket list: Traditions every freshman should experience

Brooke Brinker
Social Media Manager

It is so exciting to create new traditions, but it may feel intimidating starting college with no idea of what the best events are or what traditions to attend every year. Here is your guide to the traditions you should not miss at Saint Leo University from a senior.

First day of school

On the first day of class, by the Student Community Center (SCC) boardrooms, upstairs above the dining hall, you can get your first day of school picture taken. The best part is that there are dogs that they bring to relieve students' anxiety! You can pet and play with them! It is such a great tradition to be a part of and something to look forward to every school year.

Fall festivities

Fall is always so highly anticipated. Fall is many students' favorite time of the year at Saint Leo. It is when most events happen and when most traditions begin.

One of the most popular traditions of the school year is the Fall Family Festival that occurs every October. There are hayrides, games, music, treats, food trucks, rides, and so much more. It feels like you are in a fall movie! It is family day, so you can bring all your loved ones for a fun fall day. It is a special day where family,

friends, and the Saint Leo community get together for a fantastic day. You don't want to miss it!

It is always fun to start your own traditions, as well, with the new friends you make. For example, painting pumpkins, attending the Dade City Fall Festival, watching your favorite fall movie with friends, and trying new fall coffees on a specific day every week before class. You can make so many traditions that help Saint Leo feel more like home.

"My advice is simple: Say yes early and say yes often. The event you skipped is usually the one where you meet your best friend," said Dr. Christopher Ortiz

Service Day

Every November and April, classes are cancelled for a day so all students and staff can participate in Service Day. Service Day is a day where all Saint Leo community cleans campus, and the community around it. It often includes cleaning the greenhouse, gardening, polishing the statues, food packaging, and



Going to the Saint Leo CAB events helps freshmen get out of their comfort zone and help them make new friends! (Photo by Brooke Brinker)

going to different businesses and helping them organize and clean. It is a day to show Saint Leo love, and all get together as a community to help make our campus better!

Christmas

Christmas at Saint Leo is magical! Every December, one of the best traditions is Moonlight Breakfast. It is an event where students wait outside in a line outside of the dining hall, playing games and trying to be the first ones in the door for the delicious food inside. There are Chick-fil-a sandwiches, iced coffee, pizza, and desserts. It is a night that takes students' minds off finals stress. It is a Saint Leo favorite that you can't miss. You will have core memories every year from this event!

Christmas Festival is like a little piece of the North Pole on campus! There are yummy treats, hot cocoa, different vendors, crafts, free Chick-fil-a, and photo spots. It is so much fun and is a tradition you can attend with your friends every December.

Every Christmas season, create your own traditions that mean a lot to you. Christmas is a family holiday, so it is normal to feel homesick. But traditions truly do help homesickness go away. You can decorate cookies, go to Campus Activities Board's (CAB) Christmas events, dorm events, Bible studies on the birth of Jesus, try the new Christmas drinks at Starbucks, etc.

"Traditions give us a shared story. As a Benedictine community, belonging isn't an afterthought here. It's the foundation," Ortiz, the assistant vice-president of Student Engagement & Leadership said. "When students stand shoulder to shoulder at the same events, cheer for the same teams, and celebrate the same milestones, they stop being strangers and start becoming family."

Creating new traditions is not only fun but will help you love Saint Leo even more. Attend the Saint Leo traditions and make your own! This is your home away from home, and from a senior to a freshman: traditions have been the best part of Saint Leo.



Going to the dorm events will also help you get more comfortable and help you have little memories of your freshman year forever! (Photo by Brooke Brinker)



The Fall Family Festival is a hit every year! It is the best tradition with loved ones! (Photo courtesy of Brooke Brinker)



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Hands-on forensics: Inside Saint Leo's Crime Scene House

Anna Di Domenico
Contributing Writer

Hidden just across from Saint Leo University's campus is an ideal house for criminal justice students. In this house, they can literally turn a lecture into a life-size forensic investigation scenario.

The Crime Scene House is a specialized, multi-room learning laboratory outfitted with controllable environments, outdoor processing grounds, and specialized equipment for evidence recovery. Rather than textbooks alone, students use their classroom learning to examine realistic crime scenes with physical evidence which they can touch and see, such as fingerprint impressions, shoeprints, and blood spatter.

Undergraduate criminal justice majors with a criminalistics focus use this facility most often. It's managed by Dr. Sarah Mormino and other faculty members who have extensive experience.

Mormino, an associate professor in criminal justice, brings extensive knowledge of criminalistics. Besides her academic background, she contributes a firsthand knowledge of the field that comes from spending seven years as a crime scene investigator, forensic diver, and supervisor. She handled approximately 1,600 crimes scenes, from burglaries to homicides, before coming to the university. In her eyes, a key reason she came to Saint Leo was because the



Here is where books and experience come together, the CSI students practise their class knowledge into real life examples. (Photo by Elijah Penn)

university provided a special location for field skills instruction.

"Saint Leo's practical, hands-on program is something I fell in love with while completing my Master's, and I knew it was something special to be a part of," Mormino said.

Mormino designs many of her courses to be an even split between lecture and hands-on learning, ensuring students receive visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and logical instruction.

"There are two primary forms of learning: memorization and application," Mormino explained. "To truly learn the methodology used in crime scene investigation, students need to be able to apply the skills they have learned

in a real-world scenario. This requires a skill I call investigative thinking, which is vital within the field".

To give students those opportunities to apply their classroom knowledge, Mormino carefully designs and stages crime scenes throughout the house.

Setting up the house is a time-consuming, but very rewarding undertaking. Mormino often creates multiple scenes simultaneously to ensure all students have equal access to the space, tailoring the evidence to whatever specific skill is being reviewed that week.

"It allows me to be creative and bring in aspects I have experienced at real crime scenes," Mormino said.

For students, training inside the house completely transforms their understanding of evidence collection and processing.

Jennifer Sanchez-Martinez, a junior criminal justice major, noted that the hands-on environment gives a view no classroom can really match, at least not in the same way.

"Does practicing in the Crime Scene House make me feel like a better investigator than just

learning in the classroom? I say absolutely," Sanchez-Martinez said. "It helps me better understand what even a fraction of the experiences they go through is like."

One key advantage of the facility is its outdoor area, which exposes students to Florida's unpredictable climate, a major factor in evidence degradation during real investigations. Sanchez-Martinez recalled learning how to process nonporous surfaces using cyanoacrylate (superglue) fuming and adapting techniques to changing weather conditions on the fly.

For Zoi Ward, a junior criminal justice major, her first experience inside the Crime Scene House exceeded her expectations. While the realistic environment was initially overwhelming, it quickly became one of the most valuable learning spaces in the program.

"I was definitely extremely excited for all the possibilities of what I could learn," Ward said. "It is the perfect mix of the classroom environment and the real world at the same time."

Ward emphasized that practicing techniques like trajectory analysis and latent print lifting inside a physical house builds the precision required in modern forensic work.

By providing a controlled yet realistic environment where students can make mistakes, adapt to changing conditions, and refine their technical skills, Saint Leo's Crime Scene House helps bridge the gap between classroom instruction and professional practice.

Mormino believes the Crime Scene House will continue to evolve alongside the profession it was built to support.

"Forensics is a continuously evolving field," Mormino said. "As the field changes, the Crime Scene House will change ... You never know what is next!"



An escape place from the same everyday classroom schedule for Criminalistic students. (Photo by Elijah Penn)

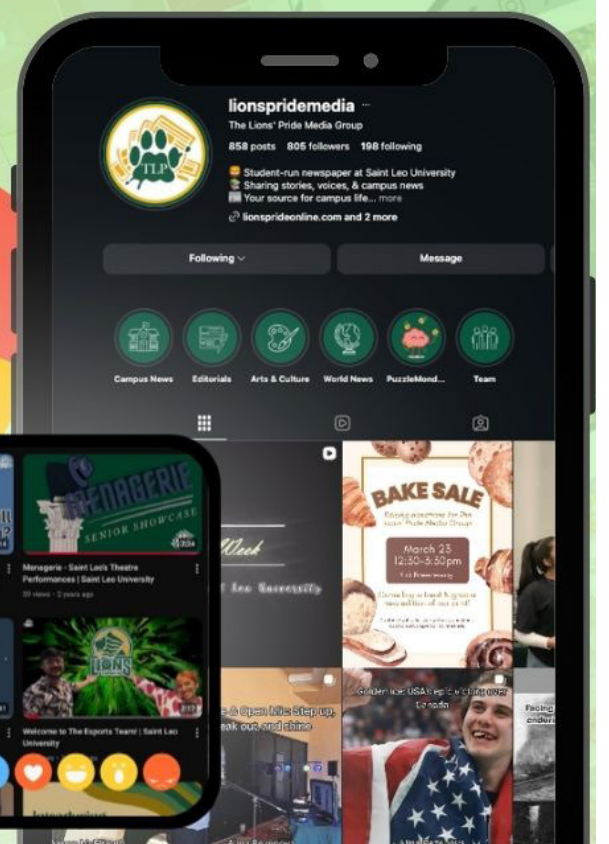
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The new St. Leo History Center brings history to life

Elijah Penn
Editor-in-Chief

Did you know that the monks of Saint Leo Abbey were publicly accused by the Florida Governor of being German spies during World War I? Or that St. Leo's primary founder served as the Chief Justice for the Arizona Territory?

These are just a few of the discoveries that junior political science student and St. Leo History Center intern Ethan Parks has uncovered during his research of the town's rich past.

The St. Leo History Center is just part of a larger plan to create a "Town Center" for the Town of St. Leo. The Center opened in mid-May and is open to the public on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 2 to 4 p.m.

Parks serves as the Center's historian and develops displays based on his historical findings. The displays on exhibit included war history, railroad artifacts, historical photos from prominent Saint Leo University graduates, and more. A few donations are expected as well, such as the original bell from the Abbey Church.

"I am eager to contribute to public education by sharing the history of this region," said Parks.

This is not the first time Parks had worked on a project like this. In his hometown of Bushnell, Florida, he volunteers with Dade Battlefield Historic State Park as a tour guide and U.S. Solider reenactor. Parks plans to use his skills as an interpretive historian to bring St. Leo history to life through living history events and interactive displays based on extensive research.



Located at 12263 Lemon Street, St. Leo, Florida, the Center was designed and built with a welcoming look. (Photo by Elijah Penn)

"I also look forward to organizing and hosting historical reenactments covering the Florida War [Second Seminole War], the Civil War, and other significant periods," said Parks.

The Center also features an art gallery with the work of community

artists. Parks hinted that events featuring community artists and authors may lie in the future.

"I highly encourage everyone, especially students, to come visit us. Our little Town does not have a little history, and you can learn all about it with one visit," stated Parks.

St. Leo Mayor Vincent "Mike" D'Ambrosio noted that the Center came together through great community support.

"The success of the project was truly a collective effort. Our City Commission, staff, interns, and engaged citizens all played important roles, alongside valued community partners such as Saint Leo University, Saint Leo Abbey Church, and Holy Name Priory. This was, in every sense, a community-driven accomplishment," said D'Ambrosio.

Indeed, the goal of the Center is to bring awareness to the accomplishments and heritage of the community.

"The inspiration for the History Center was to preserve, celebrate, and share the rich history of St. Leo," said D'Ambrosio.

The Center doesn't just tell what happened in the distant past; it tells the story of the community and its members.

"It provides a place for reflection, education, and

connection, helping to strengthen our shared identity. Just as importantly, it serves as a bridge between generations, ensuring that the legacy of our community continues to inform and inspire our future," said D'Ambrosio.

In April, before its official opening, the Center held a preview event. Even the local Pasco County Fire Rescue team made an appearance. The attendance showed that St. Leo residents are passionate about learning and preserving the history that built and shaped the town into what it is today.

"The level of engagement and enthusiasm we saw from across the community was encouraging and reaffirmed the importance of this effort," D'Ambrosio added.

Since the preview, the community has aided the Center by providing deeper information on artifacts and pictures displayed and general history of the town. It has also hosted more successful events and fundraisers over the summer, such as Founder's Day.

Parks encouraged anyone interested in learning more about the St. Leo History Center, or its future plans, to contact the Town of St. Leo or reach out to him directly at ethan.parks@email.saintleo.edu.

Sports

Lady Lions rule the diamond

Elijah Alvarado
Sports Editor

Turning your dreams into reality is never impossible, but it takes effort and a strong dose of patience. But every dream cannot be achieved alone. Sometimes, it will take a complete team of dedication and effort.

The Saint Leo University Softball Team competed in the 2026 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II Women's College World Series in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The Lions won their first national championship title in program history, after falling short of the

championship series in their last world series appearance in 2018.

The Lions defeated #14 McKendree University in the first two games in a best of three game series, which took place on June 2 and 3, at Jim Frost Stadium.

This comes after a remarkable overall season that will go down as the best season in program history. Some of the Lions' biggest spotlights of the season have included a 38-game win streak, being ranked #1 by the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA), a 44-3-1 regular season record, a 29-1 Sunshine State Conference score, and being undefeated at home. These impressive stats were a strong testament to their

journey to winning the program's first national title.

Winning the National Championship is not only an exciting time of celebration for the Softball Team who took the field each day to pursue the title, but it is a significant representation for Saint Leo and the supporting community.

"It represents years of hard work, commitment, and belief from our student athletes, coaches, staff, alumni, and supporters," said Marcal Lazenby, vice-president of Athletics, Wellness & Recreation.

"Championships create lasting memories, but they also elevate the visibility and reputation of the university on a national stage," said

Lazenby. "This accomplishment reflects the excellence that exists across our campus and demonstrates what can be achieved when talented people come together around a common goal."

A historical National Championship season is not something that can happen overnight, and sometimes it won't happen in just one season; it takes patience and dedication.

Lazenby explained that the efforts to get into a championship series were clearly displayed in their game execution.

"Their work ethic, resilience, and commitment to one another were evident throughout the season,"

Sports

said Lazenby. "This championship belongs to every player, coach, and supporter who contributed to the growth of Saint Leo Softball."

"People see the talent, competitiveness, and success on game day, but what they may not see is the character of these young women. They are outstanding students, leaders, teammates, and representatives of Saint Leo University," said Lazenby.

Lazenby continued to emphasize the idea of reaching this dream took a complete and collective team effort. He highlights valued characteristics that stood out that displayed evidence of team effort.

"One of the strengths of this team was that success was truly a collective effort. While there were many individuals who made significant contributions throughout the season, what stood out most was how everyone embraced their role and put the team's success first," said Lazenby.

While the girls went on the field and battled every practice and every game to get to this moment, they needed leaders who would teach them and provide them with resources and game plans to execute to win. This was seen in Coach Kinberger and her staff, Zach Carver,

Lexi Carver, and Pat Affrunti.

Success doesn't always come easy and can include adversity. A year ago, Saint Leo head coach, Erin Kinberger was dealing with something that no one should ever have to go through—she was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer and was treated with 16 rounds of chemotherapy. Yet, last season she never missed practice or a game.

Fast forward to now, Kinberger has led the Saint Leo Softball program to their first-ever championship series and first national championship title.

Her dedication and love for the team and sport does not go unnoticed.

"Coach Kinberger's journey over the last two seasons is truly inspiring; she faced significant personal challenges while continuing to lead, mentor, and support her student athletes. Her passion for the game, commitment to her team, and perseverance through adversity demonstrate the type of leader she is," said Lazenby.

After closing out the greatest regular season in Saint Leo Softball program history, the Lions were able to carry the momentum into the postseason, remaining undefeated and breaking NCAA Division II records in the championship series.

These records included fewest losses by a national champion in Division II softball history and many more. Saint Leo Softball head coach, Erin Kinberger explains that those



"Going out there and see our fans out there from home, it made it feel like we were at home and I think that's a big part of why we won. We're just a group that feeds off of each other's energy in general so that was really great," said Tierney Hocquard senior pitcher for Saint Leo Softball. (Photo taken by Elijah Alvarado)



Saint Leo University and surrounding community gathered on campus June 4 to give the softball team the welcome home celebration they deserved. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Karen Hannel)

numbers have no impact on the team's mindset.

"We stay humble, we work each day like we're 0-0. We don't get too high, we don't get too low, we just ride the middle, and we just stay focused on us. That's what we've done all season; that's what they've done. They followed the game plan to a T," said Kinberger in a press conference held postgame.

Junior infielder Alexis Barber was named the 2026 DII Women's College World Series Most Outstanding Player for her dominant performance. Barber ended the world series with .350 batting average, 1 home run and 7 runners batted in.

"I think a big part of my success was trusting the work I had put in all year and staying present in each moment. Our coaching staff prepared us every day, and my teammates constantly put me in positions to succeed," said Barber.

Barber does not hold back when crediting those who have supported her and helped get to the biggest stage, which is the world series.

"There are so many people who deserve credit. First, my coaches for believing in me, challenging me, and helping me grow as both a player and a person. My teammates deserve so much recognition because none of this happens individually, we pushed each other every day and supported each other through everything," said Barber.

Barber also thanked her friends

and family for supporting her through tough times and celebrating her accomplishments with her.

The Lions had several occasions where the fight was not over until the very last inning or even in extra innings.

In the DII semifinals, the Lions were down to their last out by two when catcher Hailey Beurlein hit a clutch three-run homerun to take the lead, which ended in extras after a go-ahead HR by Infielder Alexis Barber. A statement was set that the game is not over until the scoreboard says final.

"We got a lot of fight in us and a lot of sisterhood. Don't count us out. If we have an out, we got a chance," said Kinberger according to an interview held by FOX 13 following the DII semifinals victory.

In game one of the championship series, the Lions lost a 4-0 lead when McKendree hit a game-tying grand slam, but the Lions went on to come back and win 15-4.

"They hit the grand slam, and I knew going up to bat. It didn't matter because we were going to score," said Nia DeBenedittis, a sophomore, right fielder for Saint Leo Softball.

Now that the mission is over, the Lions can sit back, reflect and celebrate this big achievement in Saint Leo history. The celebration began from the moment they won and will continue as the program was awarded with the key to the Town of St. Leo.

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