

Meet the "Balconites"

SHANNON EHRIN
staff writer

The balcony outside of Bruno's is the prime hangout spot for a well-known group of students known as "the Balconites." Even though this social group has been at Behrend for years, many students are probably unaware of them.

Matthew Barsody, a senior majoring in electrical engineering major and president of the Gamers Club, says that he has known of the Balconites for about twelve or thirteen years. A lot of individuals make up this group, all with common interests.

They are chemistry majors, engineering majors, English majors, History majors, etc. The Balconites discuss anything from movies to video games, and even conduct tutoring sessions for those who need it.

Recently, the computers outside of Bruno's have drawn many more students to the balcony area. Many of the Balconites do not find this to be a problem and enjoy having the computers in close proximity.

However, some Balconites are not so enthused. Before the computers, and even before

many of the renovations that have taken place in the Reed Union Building, there were tables situated on the second floor.

Some of the tables that were previously near the balcony were placed downstairs, where the computers used to be, and the rest of the tables were positioned in different areas around the campus.

Now, there are only a few small benches for people to sit on and those benches cannot exactly fit more than two people at a time. Considering that The Balconites are not a small group, this leaves several issues.

Many of The Balconites either have to stand or resort to sitting on the floor and making use of the benches as tabletops. One student went as far as to

move a chair from one of the rooms near the balcony just so he could sit down and use his computer.

Last Monday, Kris Motta Torok, Director of Student Activities, asked The Balconites to move downstairs because

they are "obstructing walkways," says Kyle Murdock, a junior majoring in political science.

"[The balcony] is not designed for people to hang out

"[The balcony] is not designed for people to hang out there...I don't see why they would do that..."

KRIS TOROK
Director of Student Activities



Jon Klein / The Behrend Beacon

The new balcony computers are intended to be accessible to all students as a readily available source to print papers or check email.

there...I don't see why they would do that because there is no space," Torok says.

"Those tables that were out there were additional seating for Bruno's...we felt there were plenty of seats inside Bruno's and that area wasn't being used as additional seating for Bruno's all the time."

Another reason the tables were removed is "to have [the walkway] open for flow" for students going to the Academic and Career Planning Center, Torok says.

Torok also notes that the benches are for short-term use only, not long-term lounge seating.

Although Torok encourages people to use the tables downstairs as a temporary hangout, there are still not enough tables and seats for a large group of people to congregate. What is also problematic is the poor

cell phone reception downstairs and lack of outlets to plug in laptops.

When the tables were upstairs, they not only allowed easier access to many outlets and better cell phone service, but they were also more useful for students who commute.

Sydonia Ulmer, a sophomore creative writing major and president of the Anime Club, commutes to and from Behrend and feels that the tables had given her a place to go in between classes.

"[I] can't go to the library because it's quiet there, you can't talk," says Ulmer. "Down there is off from everything else and up here, everything is right here. This is the best place to be."

Torok explains, though, that the lack of a lounge area has come to the attention of the Office of Student Activities. Plans

for a new and improved lounge area have been made and renovations are set to begin next May, with it opening in time for the Fall 2010 semester. This lounge will be on the first floor in the back near the vending machines, the computers' previous site, and the current location of the WPSE radio station will be the new game room.

There will be six tables and about 96 seats available, all within reach of outlets, and three televisions for group or individual video game use.

While this proposal finally gives The Balconites, as well as any Behrend student, a future

place to relax with friends, there are still so many months in between now and the time when reconstruction will begin.

Matthew Ritz, a senior environmental studies major, says, "I do not see how they think the Reed Union Building would not turn into a hangout spot. It's the only building that has food, seating, and space for many people in a central location."

While students like the new renovations, many prefer the location where the computers used to be. The lack of space lead the Balconites to agree.

"We're not the Balconites anymore cause we've got no balcony," says Murdock.

"We're not the Balconites anymore cause we've got no balcony."

KYLE MURDOCK
junior political science major

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

A student's passion for the arts

AARON MORELLI
staff writer

Allison Maino's life is much more than academics; with a deep passion for singing, Maino is a member of Concert Choir and Chamber Singers at Behrend. As a senior, this is Maino's fourth year in Concert Choir and her second in Chamber Singers.

"Choir has been a form of stress relief since I have been at Behrend," says Maino.

In High School, Maino performed at the Carnegie Hall with her high school choir. In May, after Behrend's Concert Choir received a \$50,000 grant from a donor, Maino will be returning with Penn State Behrend's Concert Choir to New York to perform at the Carnegie Hall.

Maino is an English literature major. To her, choir is an extracurricular activity and she plans her schedule around it.

After college, Maino plans on becoming an English Literature college professor and hopes to express her belief that "English is about human emotion and spirit, and that's something everyone can relate to regardless of their major, whether it be mathematics, science, or history."

She would also like to join the local philharmonic of the city that she decides to live in.

Other activities and groups that Maino participates in are Tae Kwon Do, Fantasy Gamers Club, Outdoors Club, and the Matchbox Players. Maino has achieved the red belt in Tae Kwon Do. Maino also works as a Spanish and Writing Tutor in the Learning and Resource



Dan Smith / The Behrend Beacon

Singing has been a part of Maino's life since the sixth grade.

Center. To Maino, her students, studies, and choir are the three things she values the most at Behrend. One of the choir's main focuses is the Young People's Choir of Erie. YPC is a group dedicated to helping and teaching children choir from around ages eight to seventeen choir.

"On all of Dr. Bishop's syllabi he puts, 'Excellence is a habit.' And I try to apply that to all my classes, tutoring, and extracurricular activities," says Maino.

Through the course of four years, the choir program at Behrend has become more pop-

ular and well known.

One of Maino's most memorable moments from Behrend's Concert Choir was last year in New York City. While sitting at a Bubba Gump Restaurant, their waitress asked them to perform for the restaurant, and all four choral sections were represented, they all sang "In the Still of the Night."

"Through our determination, Dr. Bishop, and support from our peers, we are able to successfully create beautiful music," Maino says.

THE PLAYLIST

Indie-rock goes mainstream

NATHAN CARTER
staff writer

"No recent US alternative rock band has delved quite so deeply into the world of British folk as the Decemberists, ostensibly an acclaimed indie rock quartet big on wry, bookish narrative songs," says Alexis Petridis from The Guardian.

The Decemberists work in narrative lyricism, so they thought that it was great how her album focuses on three main characters: Margaret, her shape-shifting lover William, and a rake with ever-increasing human qualities.

They've released three full albums through Kill Rock Stars Records [Castaways and Cutouts (2002), Her Majesty

(2003), and Picaresque (2005)] before hitting it big in Oct. 2006 with the release of *The Crane Wife*.

The band really turned the page toward indie/folk stardom with the song "O Valencia!" *The Crane Wife* was released on Oct. 3, 2006, and that same night, the band performed on Late Night with Conan O'Brien - choosing "O, Valencia!" as their set song.

Many of the people who watched wanted to immediately voice their opinion on the new band performance, so they went to National Public Radio (NPR).

Their albums were purchased and their songs listened to, and at the end of 2006, NPR listeners voted *The Crane Wife* best album of 2006.

The band rose to media stardom, reaching an appearance on The Colbert Report to settle a debate on their "O, Valencia!" music video.

Colbert claimed that he was the first to come up with the idea for that type of video, and the guitarist (Chris Funk) wanted to settle it with a guitar duel. Comically, Colbert feigned a hand injury and he ordered a substitution from Peter Frampton on camera, who took over and easily won the crowd's vote.

Later, following an orchestra-accompanied tour through the U.S. under Capitol Records and playing in support of Obama in their hometown of Portland, Oregon the five-some sat down to record.

Their 2009 release, *The Hazards of Love*, holds an interesting story of its own. The album is a tribute to Anne Briggs and a remake of her 1966 EP of the same name.

The Decemberists were formed by singer and songwriter Colin Meloy in Portland. After leaving his band Tarkio, Meloy moved to Portland, Oregon, and once there, met the rest of the band around town within the first month: Jenny Conlee (backup vocals, keyboards), Chris Funk (guitar), Nate Query (bass guitar), and John Moen (drums).

Interestingly enough, the band adds a song in four parts called "The Hazards of Love" because there wasn't one on Briggs' album. This new release brings a little bit of a southern twist to The Decemberists you may be used to, but remains an amazingly "original" CD.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Decemberists played at Lollapalooza this past summer alongside the headlining performance, Snoop Dogg.

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- LIVING LOVING MAID (2:40) (SHE'S JUST A WOMAN) Jimmy Page-Robert Plant
- RABBIT ON (4:35) Jimmy Page-Robert Plant
- MOBY DICK (4:25) Bonham-Jones-Page
- BRING IT ON HOME (4:19) Jimmy Page-Robert Plant

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