

CAMPUS NEWS

A glimpse of the 22nd annual Harambee Dinner held at McGarvey Commons



The 22nd annual Harambee Dinner took place in McGarvey Commons Thursday night. The dinner featured renowned speaker Azeem, along with an authentic Spanish flamenco dancer with two guitarists that took the stage after dinner. The commons were filled with a variety of students, staff and others who filled the room for the catered dinner.

DANIEL SMITH / The Behrend Beacon

Erie city ordinance

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attended a monthly neighborhood watch meeting in which many of the residents were complaining about the college students in the area.

Haas and her roommates says that out of five or six houses in the neighborhood that are occupied by college students, one or two of them have been consistently disruptive in the community. Some problems include loud and late partying, parking on other residents' front lawns, and leaving drinking debris in the area.

The students involved feel that neighbors have been reporting houses occupied by four or more students as a way to target college students and remove them from the neighborhood. More than that, they feel that the neighbors want to remove all college students from the area, not just the ones who have been disruptive. Robert Haas, Ashton's father, agrees that this ordinance has been enforced selectively.

"It's just not fair. They're just four good young adults who have been together since day one, since they were freshmen." Robert Haas has talked with many city officials about this action, and is displeased with how they are handling the situation. Haas says that the city should single out the "problem houses", and use local law enforcement to take care of the issues in the neighborhood.

"What I'm dealing with here is just complete ignorance, and people jumping to conclusions, and not doing research, and not doing their jobs properly," says Haas.

Andy Zimmerman, Manager of Code Enforcement for Erie says that the city has been enforcing this ordinance consistently, not selectively. "This is absolutely nothing new," says Zimmerman. "We've been doing this for quite a while now."

The ordinance has been in place for many years. Zimmerman says that when more than three students are living in the same house, it results in problems in the community, like parking.

According to Zimmerman, the relatively new Rental Licensing program has brought some of the properties in question forward. This program was set up in 2007 to ensure that all rental residences in Erie are within code. Every two years, a residence

is inspected by the city to make sure that it meets proper safety requirements. Inspectors, during their evaluations, will become aware that more than the allowed three people are living in a house.

However, Zimmerman says that neighbor complaints have brought most of these cases to the city's attention. "Our office is complaint-driven," he says. Zimmerman also says that out of all of the complaints pertaining to this ordinance, most of them have been about college students. "When students live off-campus, they become a citizen of Erie first, and a student second."

Mercyhurst College has been working closely with the city of Erie on this issue. According to Zimmerman, the college will turn over a list of students who live off campus, including their addresses, to the city. The city will then look through the

list, and see which addresses have more than three names. Zimmerman also says that the Mercyhurst handbook mentions the ordinance, so that students can be aware of the law when they are looking for housing.

Zimmerman says that no other university or college in the area makes this information known to its students, but that the city is planning on ways to make people more aware. One idea is a meet-and-greet with new residents at the

beginning of every semester.

According to Zimmerman, Penn State Behrend has become more proactive with this issue within the past three weeks. He says that Behrend has contacted the city, and wishes to sit down with them. "They would like to be a good neighbor as well," Zimmerman says.

However, the timing of this issue has raised opposition from at least one Behrend administrator. This administrator believes that although these would be reasonable measures during the summer, disrupting students' living arrangements mid-semester is unfair and unreasonable.

Cara Jones, who has been a roommate of Haas for more than just this year, knows that finding new housing would be incredibly difficult at this point during the year. "We're not moving," she says. "We just don't have the money to find a new place and new roommates in the middle of the semester."

McGarvey hosts 'The Magic of Life'

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On Tuesday, October 2nd, Michael Gershe performed his "Magic of Life" alcohol awareness program in McGarvey Commons. Gershe started his routine with stand up comedy.

He made jokes about being Jewish and his college swimming career. "I picked the one sport where everyone knew my religion," he said.

Gershe also included some audience participation in the act, bringing three people up on stage to act out a scenario about reckless drinking. Once they were up on stage, they were asked to choose from 3 cards. Each card had a bad consequence of drinking on it. The girls on stage were assigned "Raped" and "Dead" while the only male student who volunteered drew the "Pregnant" card.

Even when discussing such serious topics, Gershe kept the audience involved and entertained.

The mood grew serious once again when his own story came up. As Gershe told it, he was born in New York State. He would live there until he was 4 years old, but the turning point in his life came only 8 weeks in.

His mother was holding him in the front seat. "No one used car seats in the 70's when a drunk driver t-boned their car," he said during his show. The crash caused him to break every bone in his body, and it ended his mother's life. She was 28 years old.

"It isn't that hard to talk about my mother's death, because I never knew her," said Gershe. Gershe found it "much harder" to talk about his friend "Big" John Kelly. Kelly was killed while driving drunk.

"He knew my story," Gershe said, "he knew it and he got behind the wheel anyway."

Michael Gershe's philosophy can be summed up best by a statement on his website: "A mother should watch her son grow up. A son should know his mother. Neither of these events would happen due to a drunk driver."

Bruno's Café hosts Debate Watch 2008

By Ryan P. Gallagher
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Bruno's Café was flooded with students Tuesday night for the 2nd Presidential Debate of this year's election. The debate, hosted by former NBC Nightly News anchor Tom Brockaw, aired promptly at 9 p.m. as students from a diversified range of majors packed the café leaving little to no seating. "I showed up a little before nine and couldn't believe how many people were there, I had never seen it like that before," said Sam DelVerne, a communications major at Behrend.

DelVerne was required to be in attendance for a class of his taught by Professor Cathy Mester. Many others were there for similar class requirements, which was partly the reason for the immense crowd.

"I had to go for two of my classes and acted as a discussion leader after the debate had ended," said senior Max Polinski. "Basically, I and about four others formed a small group, and we discussed questions that dealt with a wide variety of things concerning the debate. Professor Mester supplied the sheet for the students that were there from the upper-level classes that served as discussion leaders."

Mester acted as the leader for this event, collecting all of the sheets after students had analyzed and discussed for about 10-15 minutes. She was doing this for Debate Watch 2008, a program that the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD) initiated, which encourages people to watch the debate in groups and then collectively discuss what they saw immediately afterwards. In 2004, the National Communication Association teamed up with CPD and added questions that dealt with how the debate affects undecided voters or causes viewers to shift their stance on their candidate of choice. According to the NCA's website, "the purpose of this study is to find out what you have learned about the candidates from the presidential debate, how you learn about political issues, and if the debates influenced your voting choice."

All of the feedback received from these Debate Watches is analyzed by the CPD and used to better future debates. "Most of the students in my group agreed that there was no clear winner and that neither candidates really focused on issues that specifically dealt with college students concerns," said Polinski.

The Presidential Candidates, Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) and Senator John McCain (R-AZ), debated at Belmont University in Nashville, TN where the University featured a town hall setting, giving the small crowd in attendance the opportunity to ask questions that they personally thought were significant. Many questions went unasked due to Obama and McCain constantly ignoring the time limit that was weakly enforced by Brockaw.

Mike Wachter, a business major, thought that the debate was pretty even. "At the time, one candidate didn't really stand out over the other, I thought the whole thing was even when it came to discussing their stances on the various issues mentioned."

Students unaware of this event found a tremendous surprise when they arrived at the Café for a normal dinner. "Well, this was required by some professors for class, plus we publicized the event, so we were expecting somewhere around 300 students to show," said Dr. Rod Troester, a Professor of Communications who was in attendance with Mester. Troester went on to say that it was the 2nd time they held this event, and are planning a Debate Watch for the third and final debate on Oct. 15.

The website <http://debates.org/pages/dwoverview.html> provides further explanation on what the Debate Watch 2008 strives for, and includes information on how to host your own debate watch since it is not required to be hosted by a university; civic groups, neighbors, friends are all welcome to create their own group.