

Foundation hosts drive-in movie night

Emily Wright
STAFF WRITER

An old-school movie drive-in and its complements- soda, candy, and popcorn, and a film set in the 60s- all lead up to a very exciting night at the movies.

The LSU Shreveport Foundation hosted a movie drive-in on April 12 as a fundraiser for the university. The event was titled “Starry Night” and took place on the LSUS campus.

All of the profits from the ticket sales benefit LSUS scholarships and programs, as explained on the “Starry Night” website.

“By supporting Starry Night, you are supporting the LSUS Foundation. Your support provides much-needed funding for a host of LSU Shreveport needs,” the “Starry Night” website stated. “You are making a difference in both individual lives and the community as a whole when you support our own Louisiana State University in Shreveport. We thank you for your support.”

The festivities associated with the event started at 6 p.m. and lead into the showing of the 2007 film *Hairspray*, starring John Travolta and Queen Latifah.

According to the “Starry Night” website, various package deals were available to movie-goers.

Those 21 and over who bought tickets priced at \$150 for the date night VIP package were able to bring with them a very spe-

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Professor wins competition

Malvy Chintakindi
STAFF WRITER

Associate Professor of History Dr. Alexander Mikaberidze won in the National Calligraphy competition in the Republic of Georgia held in March.

The Georgian National Center of Manuscripts, the state research center that preserves and studies medieval Georgian manuscripts, organizes calligraphy competitions each year. Its goal is to revive and popularize the art of handwriting.

This year, it featured 1,200 people, most of them from Georgia but also from several other countries, including Iran and the United States. At every stage of the competition, each participant was given a specific task to complete within three hours.

“This year, out of some 1,200 people at the first stage, just 96 made it to the third stage, and only five—I was among them—were given top prizes. I did not expect to get even get to the final stage, not to mention to win it, because I have seen the quality and range of works submitted to earlier competitions. So I am quite thrilled,” Mikaberidze said.

Mikaberidze, a part of LSUS since 2007, is modest about his victory and capabilities. He is also aware of different cultures where calligraphy is a part of life.

“I am entirely self-taught and remain just an amateur who occasionally dabbles with his brush. During my last trip to Turkey, which has a marvelous calligraphy tradition, I remember encountering outstanding masters practicing their crafts in streets, especially in the vicinity of Hagia Sophia and Sultan Ahmed Mosque. They could, in just a few moments, create works of incredible design and beauty. I wish I had their eye for design and detail,” Mikaberidze said.

His success comes from his hard work,



Photo courtesy of Alexander Mikaberidze

A calligraphic depiction of the Georgian letter “A,” done by Dr. Alexander Mikaberidze.

perseverance and dedication. Being a person who pays attention to intricacies and detailing, his art reflects the same depth and beauty.

“My homeland, [the Republic of] Georgia, has a long tradition of calligraphic writing so it was only natural that at some point I decided to entwine these calligraphic traditions. By now I have developed my own unique style that blends Georgian calligraphy traditions with Western European, most notably Celtic and French,” Mikaberidze said.

He’s disciplined, organized and flexible when it comes to constant learning. As a self-taught person, he has been practicing for at least a decade.

“I have been doing calligraphy for about a decade. As a rule, I spend one or two hours a week, usually in the middle of the night, once lectures are done, papers are graded, and kids

are fed and asleep,” Mikaberidze said.

Calligraphy is his passion as he derives it from his studies in the history. He studies the history of Western Europe and the Islamic world, both civilizations with some of the most sophisticated calligraphy traditions.

“Calligraphy is the art of beautiful writing that allows one to be creative and adventurous, to experiment with the established letterforms to create your own, whimsical designs while still conveying original meaning of the text. We live in a world where the art of hand writing is slowly fading away as we rely almost exclusively on typed text. Yet, handwritten texts have subtle nuances and eye-pleasing qualities that typed texts cannot duplicate. For me, it is both about having fun and expressing my own creative spark,” Mikaberidze said.

Students refuse to let cloudy skies dampen spirits at Cajun Spring Fling



Students celebrated the annual LSU Shreveport Spring Fling the week before Spring Break.

Left, students line up to pay for their turn at dry side of the dunking booth.

Below, as always, one of the biggest attractions on Wednesday was the free crawfish distributed to students with valid student IDs.

Check out almagestlsus.com for full coverage of the Spring Fling festivities.

Photos by Jessica Ingram





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Introducing campus's most-spirited student

Christopher Talerico
STAFF WRITER

Life for a college student can be tough. Often times a multitude of responsibilities require the student to devote significant portions of time across disparate situations. Students often work full-or part-time, are engaged in extra-curricular activities, are active in their local community and/or at their place of worship, and still have to find time to unwind and decompress. Life for a college student can already be tough without adding further difficulty. Felton Parker is a student at LSU Shreveport. Felton Parker is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, but Parker is not held back by his condition. He meets the challenges of his life and overcomes them just like anyone else.

Parker, while a student, also holds a part-time job at McAlister's Deli on E. 70th St., is a member of the Nonprofit Administration Student Organization at LSUS, a member of the Black Studies Association, a member of the Tri Alpha Organization, involved with his local church and still finds time to participate in a number of student activities held on campus, Fall Fest and Spring Fling being two of his favorites.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a term for complex neural disorders of brain development. ASD, while a term encompassing a variety of symptoms, generally affects a person's social or verbal development. Other common symptoms include compulsive behaviors or interests and poor impulse control, often a consequence of social misunderstandings. 0.5 – 10 percent of those diagnosed with ASD are what is known as Autistic Savants. A savant, despite their disorder, exhibit unusual skills of memory, deduction, or other feats most people would not be able to replicate. Felton Parker is an autistic savant.

Parker does exhibit some of the characteristic signs of ASD, compulsive interests in both global weather patterns and the correspondence between days of the week and dates of a year, mild impulse control, and an occasional difficulty with language, especially figurative language. But Parker is not unaware of his condition. On the contrary, he is not only aware himself, but he is also aware of how other people respond to someone with ASD.

"I was diagnosed with Autism. I was born on April 19, 1984. One reason I can tell that I born on a Sunday is that I am autistic savant," Parker said. "Of course, many people may not understand me when I act out or when I'm asking them a question. They may not understand or they may not know what I'm talking about."

Some of the difficulties Parker faces are common to people everywhere, but, because of his ASD, Parker faces the same difficulties differently.

"Of course, because I may have my ups and downs from time to time with people, but I try not to let that bother me, like when I say something that I obviously do not mean. Sometimes it may be harder to control myself and get to 'normal' when I get completely overwhelmed." A problem that is not exclusive to Parker or to those diagnosed with ASD.

However, Parker does not perceive himself as others do. From an objective, outside perception Parker only sees one difference – a problem common to people with ASD, "some people think differently about me while others will not think any different. But me personally, inside, I think of myself that I am the same as everybody else, that I was not different. Then what makes me different is that I never actually had real friends, just associates and peers."

But Parker is not without allies. He walks up to people on campus that are trying to reach out to the student body and engages them with ease and exuberance. Parker met three young students that were promoting an anti-smoking campaign in preparation of the LSUS smoke-free initiative beginning August 2014. After a moment of conversation, Parker found out where the group was stationed on campus and immediately went to become involved in their activity – and won a free t-shirt.

But not everyone is immediately comfortable with Parker, and he still faces social exclusion due to other people not understanding his disorder and what it means for Parker as a man, as NASO Student President Raelynn Brown, junior, sociology observed.

"A lot of people don't understand how to react to him. Like my best friend has cerebral palsy, she has a walker. And people will freeze up, and they won't know how to speak to her. She totally has no mental disability, but people freeze up," Brown said. "And I think his stuttering throws people. I think they try to talk to him like he is a child, when he very much is not a child. He is a lot smarter than a lot of us."

Despite the fact that he may be stigmatized because of his ASD, Parker's personality and upbeat attitude endear him to others and shine a light on his humanity, as Brown notes,

"He's just always so up, just very, very positive. Whether it's about what we are talking about or not, he says something at some point that

makes everyone laugh. And everyone's just like 'you made my day a little better, thank you, Felton.' We may not say that as much as we should but I think everyone feels it.

Parker, who lives with his mother, finds that even those closest to him and with the best of intentions may sometimes underestimate his agency as an individual.

"It bothers me at times because sometimes [my mother] talks to me like I'm 10 years old. She tells me that she just wants what's best for me. But she supports me going to school and also supports me working as well. She has told me over and over that whatever decisions I make, she will support me."

Parker, however, hopes that in time he will be able to support himself, looking into getting an apartment, while working at McAlister's Deli where he is "a model employee." Parker's General Manager, Tyrone Wilkins, expressed a desire to have an entire store of employees like Parker stating, "if I had 20 employees like Felton, we could open more restaurants and never have a problem."

That statement is more than simple lip service too, as Parker is the employee that trains all new hires – a position anyone who has worked in the restaurant business knows is given to the best employees. His ASD actually benefits him in that situation as a key element to any business is consistency.

"He is very efficient. If there's such thing as what a model employee should do based off your handbook, that's what Felton does. Every guest, every single time, he doesn't miss a thing. He doesn't skip a beat," Wilkins said.

The biggest challenge Parker faces at work, like in many instances, is communication – specifically literal and figurative communication, as Wilkins explains.

"It's just an adopted culture to make sure what you tell Felton is what you mean, because he records very well. His memory is unbelievable. And if you tell him to do this, that's what he's going to do. So if you mean something else, he'll say 'that's not what you told me.' We make sure we tell him exactly what we want to say. We make sure we communicate very effectively and clearly to him."

Parker, like everyone, is a person with strengths and weaknesses. His strengths and weaknesses may be a bit more pronounced, more noticeable, but they are not fundamentally different. They are problems everyone faces, just with a different manifestation. And most importantly, none of his challenges prevents Parker from living a full and satisfying life.

MOVIE cont.

cial someone and enjoy hors d'oeuvres, wine, and beer in a VIP tent. These attendees were also able to experience concessions in a commemorative purple and gold LSUS tote and arrived early at 6 p.m. for excellent parking spaces.

Families of four were able to purchase tickets for \$100. This package included classic sodas, unlimited popcorn, and retro theater candy in a purple and gold LSUS commemorative tote. Attendees arrived at 6:30 p.m. for parking and activities for kids, such as jump houses.

Individual tickets were also available for purchase at \$30 and offered chilled soda, retro candy, and unlimited popcorn in a commemorative purple and gold LSUS tote. Attendees were admitted at 7 p.m. for parking.

Student tickets at \$10 and faculty and staff tickets at \$20 were also available for purchase. These tickets allowed attendees to arrive at 7 p.m. for the perks of the individual ticket holders.

The film *Hairspray* soon began rolling on a large screen as the movie-goers enjoyed their refreshments. As the attendees watched the movie, sound was transmitted through an FM radio station and delivered to movie-goers' car speakers.

Another fundraiser planned for this semester is the "Give for Good Day". Laura Perdue, executive director of the LSUS Foundation, said that the Foundation will be participating in the community's "Give for Good Day".

The "Give for Good" website explains that the fundraiser is a 24-hour online giving challenge led by The Community Foundation of North Louisiana to raise unrestricted dollars for the nonprofits in the community. It is a day of giving to celebrate the nonprofits in our community and a chance to raise thousands of dollars to make our community even better.

For more information about the "Give for Good" fundraiser, visit giveforgoodnla.com.



Photo courtesy of Laura Perdue

All proceeds from the benefit went to the LSUS Foundation to be distributed as student scholarships, general aid, and general improvement for life at LSU Shreveport.



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Staff Writers
Malvya Chintakindi
Corey Drummond
Terrkila Hamilton
Iris MacLean
Jennifer Middleton
Elizabeth Murray
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Jannen Pero
Christopher Talerico
Emily Wright

Executive Editor
Crystal Vandegriff
Managing Editor-Print
Alexandra Meachum
Managing Editor-Video
Zachary Roberson
Photo Editor
Jessica Ingram

Louisiana State University Shreveport
Bronson Hall, Room 344
One University Place
Shreveport, LA 71115
phone/fax: (318) 797-5328
e-mail: almagest@lsus.edu
www.almagestlsus.com