COVID-19 Flips Campus Life

Kathryn DePauw & Emily Slater  Teresa Noah left campus early last spring with a feeling of unease. She, and many student residents like her, did not fully understand what leaving halfway through a semester meant.

The college made the decision on March 13 to pivot to virtual instruction. Campuses were fully closed and remote work for campus employees went into effect on March 17. NMC president Nick Nisley released an open letter to students and employees on the same day, explaining the decision. “Late last night we learned of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Traverse City,” Nisley wrote. “This is a trigger event we identified that would necessitate the closing of the college, to be consistent with public health protocols and to ensure campus and community health and safety.”

A statewide shelter-in-place order was issued by Governor Gretchen Whitmer the following week and went into effect on March 24. All but 130 of the nearly 800 students living on campus departed the dorms in March, leaving those who could not easily return home on a virtually empty campus.

Noah shared the stress and uncertainty she felt during this time with the White Pine Press back in March. A follow-up with Noah revealed that she returned home to Illinois to finish up her semester with less focus and enthusiasm than she typically shows. “The semester went poorly due to abruptly moving home and losing all semblance of a schedule, along with having little motivation.”

Since March, NMC has continued to provide necessities to its students—whether they’re on campus or are learning remotely—with groceries provided by the free student pantry. In addition, more than $1 million in CARES Act emergency funding has been dispersed to 795 NMC students. Updates were given regularly throughout the last six months via email and social media; the college worked to reassure students that it was doing everything that it could to create a safe environment to return to in the fall.

West Hall Opens Its Doors

Stephanie Jones  Staff, faculty, students, and community members alike have longed for a space at Northwestern Michigan College where people can gather as a community. As the West Hall Innovation Center opens its doors, that moment is finally here.

“The college has been on the list with the state for a new West Hall for over 10 years,” says Vicki Cook, NMC vice president of finance and administration. “It is a large project that took the support of our legislatures.”

Construction for the new building began in 2018. A couple delays pushed back the date of its opening, with COVID-19 being the main one. “The target completion for West Hall was the end of March or beginning of April,” Cook explains. “The building was completed in July 2020.”

“I really like the new innovation building,” says Early Childhood Education major Alexis Reid. The expansive three-story building holds several services for students. It has the library, West Hall Café, Northwest Grind, NMC security office, classrooms, computers, and many study spots.

What makes this building unique is that it’s NMC’s first 24/7 building, allowing students to utilize the space at any time convenient for them. “It’s in the center of campus and makes it easy for students and community members to access,” Cook says.

West Hall’s unique study spaces are different from any other place on campus. “Our library has a fireplace now, making it a cozy area to study,” describes Kerrey Woughter, NMC director of library services.

NMC is using a four-stage reopening plan, and is currently in Phase 2 of the process. The college is taking several measures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 on campus. The cafeteria has a one-way flow to help lessen contact between customers. The college has placed an “X” with tape on seats and desks throughout the building to ensure that students and staff are keeping a six-foot distance between each other.

“Students can’t check out books 24/7 from our library while we are in phase 2 of reopening,” Woughter says. “There is a process for sanitizing the books, making sure all the pages are clean.”

The library will be open 24/7 once NMC reaches Phase 4.

Until NMC advances in phases for reopening, the college asks students to do as much work remotely as possible to help prevent the spread of the virus and keep everyone safe. “It’s important that everyone wears their mask when inside a building,” Cook says. “Wear your mask even when seated at your table to keep everyone safe and keep from shutting down again.”

Continued on pg. 4
The original West Hall on Northwestern Michigan College’s main campus was constructed in 1964. In this 1964 photograph, students picked up meals in a serving line at the new cafeteria. This semester, the new West Hall Innovation Center opened its doors to students following two years of construction.

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The Troubling Rise of QAnon

Nick Moug  
Staff Writer

Over the past few years, a conspiracy theory centered around the presidency of Donald Trump has found its way from fringe internet message boards into mainstream politics in the form of QAnon. In a recent press briefing, when asked for his thoughts on QAnon, President Trump responded, “I don’t know much about the movement other than I understand they like me very much, which I appreciate.” When pressed about its tenets, Trump nonchalantly replied, “Is that supposed to be a bad thing or a good thing? I can help save the world from problems; I am willing to do it. I’m willing to put myself out there.”

It’s a challenge summarizing QAnon. Since its inception, the core beliefs and ultimate scope of the theory have adjusted as many of the predictions from its anonymous online prophet either fail to occur or an actual news story gets incorporated ad hoc into the narrative. What is known is that sometime in 2017, a poster called “Q” on the internet message board 4chan claimed to have exceptionally high clearance in government intelligence. Q began posting about a far-reaching plot allegedly involving Donald Trump’s undercover take-down of a global cabal of Satan-worshiping, sex-trafficking pedophile elites trying to sabotage his presidency.

The tone of the conspiracy has grown increasingly apocalyptic. Its adherents often recite the refrain of a “day of reckoning” that is perpetually forthcoming for celebrities, journalists, and politicians considered to be members of the cabal. Its adherents can be seen at rallies holding large letter Qs and are often reciting a call to arms: “Where We Go One, We Go All” — sometimes shortened to WWG1WGA.

QAnon is now labeled a domestic terrorism threat by the FBI. In Arizona, Matthew Wright, a 32-year-old man armed with a rifle, created a barricade at the Hoover Dam with an armored car. He held a sign reading, “Release the OIG Report,” referring to a theoretical report from the Justice Department’s Office of the Inspector General. According to QAnon lore, Trump possesses this report and followers believe it proves that the FBI, the Justice Department, and the Democratic Party broke the law before the 2016 election. Two assault rifles, two handguns, and 900 rounds of ammunition were found in Wright’s vehicle.

In another instance of QAnon-inspired crime, Cynthia Abcug in Colorado plotted with QAnon supporters to kidnap a care home where her son was living, Abcug’s son was taken by Child Protective Services when she was suspected of suffering from Munchausen-by-proxy. Abcug’s 15-year-old daughter reportedly told authorities that her mother is a believer of the QAnon conspiracy.

There are at least 11 Republican congressional nominees who have expressed support for QAnon and its beliefs: Lauren Boebert in Colorado, Marjorie Taylor Greene and Angela Stanton-King in Georgia, Mike Cargile, Erin Cruz, and Alison Hayden in California, Johnny Teague in Texas, Rob Weber in Ohio, Philianise White and Theresa Raborn Illinois, Billy Prempeh in New Jersey, and Jo Raw Perkins in Oregon. President Trump’s original National Security Advisor Michael Flynn has also expressed support for the movement.

In a time of increasingly fractured concepts of reality due to the explosion of niche and partisan sources of news and information, the media landscape has created the optimal pressure cooker for conspiracies like QAnon to flourish among the vulnerable. Dispossessed Americans caught in a country whose cohesion has been shattered while their quality of life continues to decline can only be sympathized with for turning to extravagant narratives to explain why everything has become so rotten. All it takes now are bad actors and true believers in places high and low to lead us toward evermore absurd American futures.

Be a Voice at NMC

Stephanie Jones  
Staff Writer

There is a group at Northwestern Michigan College that allows students to get involved and make a difference. The Student Government Association (SGA), run by faculty advisor Paul Kolak, gives students leadership training. It also provides opportunities to make decisions for the college, event planning, website design, and more.

“The Student Government Association acts as a bridge between students and administration,” returning SGA member and Engineering major Hannah Krohn says. “It’s a great way to be a voice.”

Every fall semester, SGA members go on a retreat (this year’s will be virtual) to connect as a team through various activities and collaborate on ideas to share with the administration on student body interests. On top of the retreat, SGA attends a conference each year. Each year the conference is something different, but it always focuses on leadership and an issue the college is facing at the time.

The SGA also helps fund NMC’s student groups. “Students can fill out a request form and request money for funding future events,” Krohn explains. SGA often hosts events with Student Life, like bowling and a trip to Jacob’s Corn Maze. Members of SGA have many opportunities to volunteer at events like these throughout the year.

“Our ears are always open for what issues are going on,” Krohn says. The group coordinates with BATA to provide students with drop stops that accommodate student needs. They also communicate with students and to get input and feedback on ideas such as events and policy changes. SGA strives to make the college the best learning environment it possibly can be.

The deadline to join the Student Government Association for the current academic year has already passed. Instructors nominated a student or the student was able to set up a meeting with either Kolak or NMC’s dean of students, Lisa Thomas. Members must be enrolled in at least one academic class and have a 2.0 GPA or higher (which is waived if it’s a student’s first semester at NMC).

SGA meets every Friday over Zoom from 11:30am to 1:00pm. Students interested in attending can email NMC’s Dean of Students, Lisa Thomas (lthomas@nmc.edu) or Kolak (pkolak@nmc.edu) for the Zoom link.
Though many classes continue to meet virtually, with about 63% of courses being taught via livestream or online, heavy COVID-19 precautions are in place for in-person instruction. Masks are mandatory, social distancing is required, and those experiencing symptoms are asked to stay off campus. Signs reminding people of these rules are posted liberally throughout NMC and ample floor markings help to enforce social distance in common areas, hallways, and stairways.

Students who live on campus are fully immersed in these changes and are still adjusting to many of the new guidelines. Noah returned several weeks ago to a new dorm and a new reality. Despite how the spring semester ended, she was optimistic, excited, and relieved to be back at NMC where she could fully focus on her schoolwork. Here, she has the space and freedom she missed while at home.

She resides in North Hall this year, which allows her to have her own room and a common area she shares with three others. Students living within the same dorm building are restricted to their own rooms, so no one is allowed in this space except the four residents. Within the buildings’ hallways and gathering places, masks must be worn, and visitors are not allowed. Noah claims that students have been communicating with outsiders through the glass doorway or by stepping outside, an option that will become more difficult once the weather cools.

Living with these restrictions day in and day out can be tiring and challenging for students who yearn for the traditional college experience. According to Noah, the school has been very communicative about the rules but in the chaos of getting settled into a new semester, sometimes students miss things. Early in the semester, Noah admitted that she and a group of her friends were stopped for playing basketball outside without masks, a rule that she was previously unaware of.

While several mask infractions have been witnessed by Noah, she believes that most students want to be safe and follow the guidelines. "Most students are following the new procedures as we don’t want to be forced home once again," she explained. Failure to comply with NMC’s housing contract, which entails strict mask requirements among other rules, could result in removal from the dorm.

While these precautions are new to the campus, services that were already a staple at NMC are ramping up their services as well. Flyers with QR code lists that link to information and resources can be found around campus. Noah praises the school’s promotion of these programs, which she feels is needed during this challenging semester. "They have made it pretty easy to use and find these resources with the lists along with the My Success tab in Moodle," Noah said, also noting that she has already accessed the library and met with a success coach.

In addition to the plethora of health services already provided by Student Health Services, including but not limited to immunizations, chronic disease management, gynecological exams and cervical cancer screenings, physicals, and health education on a myriad of topics, the NMC health clinic has also taken steps to prevent and prepare for COVID-19 cases on campus and within the student body at large.

Student Health Services, located in the Biederman building, has set up a room in Osterlin for students who have COVID-like symptoms and are in need of testing. The room, which has its own private entrance, allows for possible COVID cases to be contained while receiving care. NMC is able to order COVID testing for students but also has a small amount of tests available to administer on site for those unable to get to an off-campus testing facility. NMC has had multiple opportunities to test its response with three cases having been confirmed already.

July 15: The first confirmed COVID case on campus was a Maritime cadet who was four days into a two-week quarantine when diagnosed. The quarantine was voluntary in preparation for a training cruise. The student was asymptomatic at the time and there was minimal exposure to others.

Sept. 1: A student who had recently visited the main campus tested positive. They attended a lab class on Aug. 24 and were at the library on Aug. 25. The student was exposed to a COVID-positive patient on Aug. 22 and was urged by the Grand Traverse County Health Department to quarantine and get tested on Aug. 29. Contact tracing was performed, with affected individuals self-monitoring for 14 days. Deep cleaning of labs occurs nightly.

Sept. 8: An employee at the University Center was contacted by the county health department to inform them of contact with a COVID-positive patient. The employee had been showing symptoms since Sept. 1, but had not been on campus. The only possibility of campus exposure was Aug. 24, when the employee was asymptomatic. This person is currently presumed positive for COVID.

Since the discovery of exposure can take time, students should know that even if they aren’t on campus they can still take advantage of the college’s health resources. It is possible to contact the clinic and meet with staff via telehealth visits, or speak with a nurse on the phone.

Physical health is not the only aspect of the health of the student body that NMC has focused on, however. Student Health Services provides care for anxiety and depression. Students wishing to speak with a counselor may do so for free through Student Life Success.

NMC Student Health Services director Koleen Kerlin-Spigarelli reiterates the importance of both physical health and mental health. “Take care of yourself. Get fresh air, exercise. Do what you can within the guidelines to socialize,” she says, “and reach out. Because there are resources.”

**Campus Quotes**

**How the NMC Community Spent Their Summer**

**CHELSEA COOPER, INTERGRATIVE STUDIES MAJOR**

“I took on full-time dog sitting during the shutdown that lasted through the summer, so I had to stay pretty close to Traverse City - which is okay, because there’s always somewhere to explore!”

**ISAAC CHILDS, CIT DEVELOPER AND ENGLISH DOUBLE MAJOR**

“Besides lots of hiking, video gaming, and working, we adopted two new kittens this summer. That kept things interesting.”

(Pictured here: “June”)

**NICK AND ELISE AT SLEEPING BEAR DUNES**

The NMC President and his wife, Elise Ballinger, enjoyed a summer hike at Sleeping Bear Point. Nissley has hiked more than 25 trails in northwest Michigan since arriving in January. He notes that he’s partial to hiking in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

**COLIN TATE, ELECTRONICS TECHNOLOGY MAJOR**

“I spent the summer working at the Maker Space and hanging out with my family and close friends on Elk Lake.”

**ABBEY HULL, FRESHWATER SCIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY**

“My family took an all girls trip to the UP and spent the week going to nine different waterfalls. It was so much fun! I was also proposed to and bought a house two days before before the stay-at-home order was put in place!”

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September 25, 2020

NEWS

COVID-19 Flips Campus Life (continued)
The Argument for Universal Basic Income

Randi Upton  At the beginning of March, the United States was surprised by COVID-19. Businesses shut down as people feared a virus that was new. On March 23, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced a stay-at-home order for the state. All non-essential businesses closed, including restaurants, who were only allowed to offer take-out and curbside service.

Soon after the shutdown announcement, I was called in for an all-staff emergency meeting at one of my jobs, a restaurant downtown. Confused and worried, I went to go pick up my paycheck and await the news.

For the first time, I was laid off from a job. A setback, but my partner still had his job at a medical cannabis dispensary. Everything would be fine since we had his income. Two days later, he was laid off when that business closed. We found ourselves with no income, and the unemployment website was impossible to get through with the flood of others like us.

Filing an unemployment insurance claim (UIA) was a nightmare. The system was backlogged, servers overrun, people desperate. Pandemic Unemployment Insurance (PUIA) was introduced as a stimulus of extra money for people on UIA—an extra $600 a week. It took us seven weeks to finally get our unemployment and PUIA benefits. During that time, a one-time stimulus from the government was given to people, and NMC gave us emergency aid as well.

Once the benefits went through, we were making much more money than we had before. Even before COVID, each month we had a detailed Excel spreadsheet that noted every penny earned and every penny spent. We moved money around because at the end of the month there was never enough for all of our basic needs. Suddenly, we were able to pay all of our bills, buy groceries, purchase things we wanted, and still had money left at the end. We paid off the emergency credit cards and a loan, got the car repaired and new tires. For once, we were comfortable.

The state remained closed, but we were able to purchase bikes for the family. Not the treaded used ones we got at a yard sale, bikes with brakes. Before the pandemic, I worked multiple jobs and did school full time along with homeschooling our son. My partner worked two jobs and went to dialysis three days a week. We didn’t have time or money for fun. Our lives were spent with our partner and tagging someone being home with our son. In the past three years, we have spent only holidays together. Now we were going to parks, riding bikes, and walking around.

This breathing room, without the burden of money problems, allowed us to finally relax and be a family. We hadn’t realized how stressed and miserable we were. We never had a day off together and every hour was monetized to use for its best financial gain.

PUIA benefits have ended, but it does not have to be the end. Universal Basic Income (UBI) is an income given to citizens by the government, a basic stipend without work requirements. Standard UBI is a $1,000 monthly payment. Politicians in the United States, such as recent Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang, have brought UBI in the past—only to be shut down.

Americans have issues with “welfare programs.” It is seen that if you do not sweat and bleed for that dollar, you do not deserve it. When Yang was campaigning to be the Democratic presidential nominee, he discussed UBI and its uses. Yang knows that jobs are disappearing—not because of immigrants or jobs moving overseas, but because of automation.

Yang believes that we could move the country to automation and let UBI take care of the necessities. Some people would retain their jobs, but that is not a reality for every assembly line worker.

Another argument against UBI is that if people are given money that they didn’t work for, it would be spent on tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. A study by Massachusetts Institute of Technology that monitored spending has shown that with a UBI given unconditionally, there was a 0% effect on alcohol and tobacco spending. Studies since the 1970s, funded by Give Directly, has shown that the only reduction in hours worked—a 5% decrease—were those of new mothers.

According to The World Bank, “Currently, no country has a UBI in place, although there have been (and still are) several small-scale pilots and a few larger-scale experiments.” The World Economic Forum in August stated that Germany began a three-year UBI trial study with 120 citizens participating. Each participant will receive €1,200, or $1,400, per month. Norway has the closest system to UBI. As a welfare state, Norwegian citizens are ensured access to fundamental goods such as health care, education, and income. However, a report by World Population Review describes that there are stringent conditions that must be met such as “requiring citizens to try and find a job, be law-abiding, participating (voting) in elections, and paying taxes.”

Within the United States, Alaska has the Permanent Fund Dividend, an annual dividend collected from oil pipeline profits and given to people who are residents of the state for at least six months of the year. However, due to the variable nature of the annual payment amount, whether or not this is considered UBI is arguable. “Such payments should be unconditional, extended to everyone, and generous enough to live on,” University of Alaska economist Mouhcine Guettabti told Science News in Oct. 2019. According to Guettabti, the dividend “amounts to too little to support the third criterion.”

Other U.S. cities are exploring the idea of UBI, and the city of Stockton, California, is at the forefront. Stockton launched its UBI pilot in Feb. 2019. For this pilot experiment, 125 residents receive $500 monthly payments. The Guardian reported in March that 40% of participants’ monthly spending went toward food. On May 28, Stockton mayor Michael Tubbs extended the pilot, originally scheduled to end this summer, through Jan. 2021.

As America continues to stay at home even though PUA has ended, it’s time to look at alternatives. A little bit of breathing room with money can be a life changer.

Universal Basic Income is the future.
David Hoster  Contributing Writer  On March 13, Northwestern Michigan College made the difficult decision to close in order to help prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. Faculty, staff, and students had to change their approach to education the remainder of the semester. With support from the Educational Media Technology department, most faculty transitioned to remote learning within a few days. At the forefront of this change were technologies that many faculty had little experience with, including video conferencing software like Zoom and Discord.

These video conferencing companies were unprepared for the inundation of instructors and classes being delivered remotely around the world. Zoom Video Communications, Inc., experienced major outages in the first days of shutdown, often leaving instructors and public school teachers without a venue to teach their classes. "We did not design the product with the foresight that, in a matter of weeks, every person in the world would suddenly be working, studying, and socializing from home," Eric Yuan, a Chinese immigrant and founder of Zoom, stated in an April 1 blog post.

Yuan rose to the challenge presented by such an influx of users. According to NPR's Bobby Allyn in a May 7 article, "Daily use of the remote-meeting service ballooned to 300 million from about 10 million in a matter of months." Over the past five months, Zoom has updated at least 49 times. These updates have addressed many instability issues caused by the surge of daily meeting participants.

With the transition to version 5.0 of its software, the company addressed a growing problem—Zoombombing. This is an event where random individuals randomly guessed a Zoom meeting number to join it. The first security upgrade to address this issue enforced default password requirements on new meetings. A later update changed the meeting encryption to a more secure algorithm. This provides a much higher level of data integrity, ensuring that the meeting can’t be intercepted and modified for malicious purposes.

"I am committed to being open and honest with you about areas where we are strengthening our platform and areas where users can take steps of their own to best use and protect themselves on the platform," Yuan explained.

Some instructors instead transitioned to using Discord, a service often associated with video gaming. The Discord software allows many people to join the same channel and chat using text or voice. Its Go Live feature enables a user to stream their screen or a webcast to other users in the channel. In a blog post on March 11, Discord CEO and creator Jason Citron announced an increase in the limit of the number of users watching a Go Live video from 10 to 50. This change allowed instructors and students to utilize its software for classroom activities. "We'll maintain the higher user limit as long as it's critically needed," Citron said. "We hope it makes peoples' lives just a little easier and a little less stressful day-to-day."

Google Meet is an educational software tool available to G Suite users. It has been made more accessible during the pandemic by allowing all advanced features without the standard monthly fee. These features include larger meeting sizes, up to 250 participants per call, up to 100,000 viewers for a single domain, and automatic saving to an attached Google Drive. The fees are waived until Sept. 30, with the expectation that it will be extended longer as needed while the virus is still active.

While the pandemic still ravages the nation, and colleges and universities around the world are using remote learning tools, the companies that are relied on need to meet new challenges. Yuan, Citron, and Sundar Pichai of Google have all steered their companies to help educators from around the world, and will continue to do so throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

David Hoster is an instructor in the CIT Infrastructure program at NMC.

Conquering Zoom Fatigue

Micah Mabey  Staff Writer  Have you gotten to that point in a day, after a FaceTime breakfast with your friends, a Zoom call for lunch, and a Skype interview in the evening where all you want to do is throw your head through the computer screen and pray that you'll wake up back in your office where you can fall asleep during staff meetings and play Sudoku in your cubicle?

Well, there's a term for that. "Zoom Fatigue," otherwise known as "Screen Fatigue," is a very real issue. In the age of COVID-19, we're all experiencing it. So, what can you do about it?

I'm happy to give you some tips and tricks to help the days pass between bouts with your screen and rubbing your eyes.

1) Play Chess Against Yourself

Now, I know this is a tough start to the list, but hear me out. Just play a game. You don't really even need to know any of the moves. Just get to a point where you get bored, and wipe your arm across the board. You'll be playing alone, so there won't be anyone to yell at you for it. You don't have anything to lose.

Disclaimer: You will have to pick up the pieces when you're done. That'll take a bit. Use this time for reminiscing about the olden days, when you could walk the supermarkets without fear of touching the runch dressing.

2) Scream Into the Shared Abyss

It's not just a regular abyss these days. We're all sharing it now, because they ran out at the store once we all realized how hopeless it all was. We all went mad. But somehow, all of our personal abysses connected, and now we're all screaming into the void together. If that doesn't make you feel better, I don't know what will.

3) Play Animal Crossing: New Horizon For 29 Hours Straight

Go ahead. Who's gonna stop you? Your cat? They won't. They'll play with you if you'd just turn it on. Go ahead. Press the button at the bottom of the TV. Get that monitor going. That's right. Now press play. Good. Don't stop yet. Let it wash over you. Enjoy the music. It changes by the hour, you know.

4) Ignore Your Work

That's right. Look at what you have to do up and down, then calmly, carefully and methodically move it to the other side of your desk. Take a break. Watch a movie. Go for a walk. Just get away—you deserve it.

Speaking of ignoring your work, I've gotta go. I have an article to write.
Music That is Sometimes Good But Also Sometimes Not Good

Kelly Lee Owens - “Inner Song” (2020)

Liam Strong  Contributing Writer

In my hermitage during the pandemic, I’ve stayed away from artists and genres of music I would, under normal circumstances, listen to without committing much thought to it. In June, I listened to a lot of mindless death metal, in July a swarm of sunny lo-fi hip-hop, and for the better part of August I revisited old jazz fusion groups I hadn’t listened to in a few years. Lately, though, ambient techno and house music have been on my mind, because, well, they’re genres that sound like they’re being played indoors, with the atmosphere of a closed room surrounding me.

And I stay inside a lot these days. Or, these months, really.

Welsh techno producer, Kelly Lee Owens, in her sophomore LP, “Inner Song,” develops a 50-minute isolation chamber that feels fitting for the current state of the world. At times eerie, and at others relaxing in its gentle, synth-laden soundscapes, “Inner Song” is a seminal work of music created in lieu of isolation. Songs like “Jeanette” make me want to spend an afternoon playing an old 8-bit video game. Along with chill and bouncing beats, Owens wields restraint to her advantage, mixing wondrous pop vocals with sparkling, minimalist synthesizers in tracks like “L.I.N.E.” and “Wake-Up.” Likewise, Owens’ cover of Radiohead’s “Arppeggi” makes me feel all the feelings, which I didn’t necessarily ask for, but I’m not refusing the emotional rollercoaster her interpretation gives, either.

In finding a desire—no, a need to relax while I work from home—minimalist electronic music has been something of a saving grace. I can (and do, sometimes) have records like Owens’ “Inner Song” playing all day long in the background and I wouldn’t get tired of it whatsoever. What I need isn’t music to help cope with isolation, but music that converts isolation into an enjoyable experience, albeit one that (still) requires plenty of getting used to. Since the pandemic isn’t going away anytime soon, my Spotify queue should anticipate the abundance of techno coming its way. Spotify probably already knows this, but I want to believe I still have some shred of choice in my life. And, well, techno is my choice, Spotify.

Game Review: Lily’s Garden

Ann Hosler  Copy Editor

Lily’s Garden is a free-to-play match-3 Android and iOS app released by Tactile Games in 2019. Unlike other match-3 games I've played in the past, this one has a narrative linked to it that infuses the gameplay with a true sense of progression aside from just visual level changes.

You play as Lily, a socially-awkward 30-year-old woman who inherits a rural mountain estate from her deceased Aunt Mary. Lily is saddled with a caveat of that inheritance: in order to keep the estate, she needs to repair it within 30 days. To accomplish this, Lily lends on her new neighbor, Luke, and friendly local carpenter, Regina, to renovate overgrown and crumbling areas such as a pond, greenhouse, and more.

The narrative is compelling, but each game day is progressed by enacting a multitude of actions, all of which require spending anywhere between one and three stars to unlock that piece of the story. This is where the match-3 comes in: each match-3 level completed rewards one star. Spending a lot of time on the match-3 levels will allow you to bank stars for the narrative. As you delve deeper, however, more actions seem to require two or three stars, slowing down your progression, especially as the match-3 levels become more difficult.

In earlier levels, you simply have to match X amount of colored tiles to complete the level goal. Next there are stones that you have to break to unblock parts of the puzzle screen, which are still easy to overcome. More difficult blockers pop up in higher levels: boxes of gnomes that require multiple matches of the same tile color, sunflower pots that need three matches beside them to grow, cameras that require two consecutive matches beside them to clear, and so on.

Three different boosts can aid in the more difficult levels: bombs, rockets, and colored potions (which clear the tiles of the same color). These boosts can be combined for a more powerful effect. Two rockets will clear a line both horizontally and vertically; a rocket and a bomb will clear three lines (either in a single direction for one rocket, or both directions if there’s two), and a potion plus either the bomb or rocket will change every colored tile into that type of boost and launch them.

Some of the match-3 levels get so difficult that the use of boosts are basically required. You’re limited by the number of lives you have for failing puzzles, though the game has frequent unlimited lives boosters, so it’s rare that running out of lives is a problem. Daily events reward group milestone chests containing both boosts and lives; the narrative has two or three milestones each “day” that offer the same.

Despite the plethora of boosts and unlimited life rewards, it can be discouraging when a single level can take 10 or more attempts just to complete it. This difficulty level is confounding when the introduced blocker disappears a handful of levels later, only to be replaced by simpler puzzles that segue into a new, even-more-difficult blocker. Some blockers will make a re-emergence, often in conjunction with others, so the match-3 levels seem to fluctuate wildly in how challenging they can be.

Overall, I enjoy the unique take on a match-3 game that Lily’s Garden has, especially as I’m drawn to games with interesting narratives. Though it will take a lot of effort and time to get through Lily’s first 30 days of renovation, it’s rewarding to earn my way there.

The New Movie Theatre in Your Backyard

Micah Mabey  Staff Writer

It's been a tough summer. The numbers rising, hope fleeting. Not to be morbid, but where has the time gone? It was just March, and within a blink time has stopped, started, and moved to another world without us knowing.

Backyard movie projections have taken the Covid-bubble-sphere by storm in this time, and thank God, too. “They’ve been the perfect thing for the cool summer nights,” one movie goer, Carson Clarke, said.

Friend group bubbles all across the world (and by the world, I mean Pinterest and Instagram) have taken to their backyards, either with old projectors that were passed down from someone’s sister or freshly store-bought, where the tint of green that it displays just before it fully turns on makes you feel only a tad uneasy.

But then, suddenly, a glow of white emits from the projector. You’ve got it working! Good job. Go ahead and put yourself on the back, you’ve earned it. Now, the hard part. What the hell are you gonna watch?

There are options, you know. Netflix, Hulu, HBO, Showtime, Disney+, Peacock. The list goes on.

But here’s the fun part. It’s just you and your friends. You can watch whatever you want to watch. For Christ’s sake, you can even get your own movie theatre snacks—and you’re not conformed to choosing only what they have there or at the closest gas station. No longer do you have to hide a bottle of Mountain Dew in your jacket sleeve pretending it’s your arm.

You want a whole pizza? Order a feast from Filling Station or Charles & Reid. It’s your backyard! That’s the kind of movie theatre that you’re even allowed to drink in. Private property, baby!

So go ahead and whip up a cocktail, order some takeout, and queue up a few old episodes of Saturday Night Live before all your friends show up—in masks, obviously. Project your favorites onto a screen, or a sheet, or an old boat sail that you strung up between a few trees.

Get a fire roaring, too. You’ll want it. It’s getting colder everyday.
Between the Pines

Across
2. Avoid hand sanitizer containing methanol alcohol because it is _____.
3. NMC’s IT ____ Desk can be reached at 231-995-3020.
6. To practice appropriate social distancing, stay _____ feet apart.
9. The NMC library website has a citation generator called _____.
10. Everyone is required to wear a ____ on NMC campus, unless alone in an office.
11. On NMC campus eating is only allowed in _____ areas.

Down
1. Virtual or phone appointments for counseling are scheduled through the Student ____ Office.
2. It takes _____ seconds to thoroughly wash your hands.
3. The “My Success” button on your Student ____ Page gives links to student services.
4. The NMC Library website has a link to academic area research guides called _____.
5. Covid-19 can live on surfaces (e.g. metal, wood, paper, etc) for _____ amounts of time.
7. Fall semester 2020 appointments with the Writing & Reading Center are held over _____.
8. A mask is most effective when it covers your mouth and your _____.
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