

Bridges





Fall 2025

Points of Connection

Discovering your sense of place makes meaning of your lived experience; in this issue our students explore the confluences that shape learning, creativity, and belonging—tracing how students engage with people, places, and ideas both on campus and throughout Knox County.

Amrin Tasnim Rafa '28 does a deep dive into the history of the Gambier school supply drive that reaches beyond just the Village — a grassroots effort that began as a mother-daughter necessity has grown into a community-effort that ensures local students start the school year with the supplies they need to succeed.

Elianajoy Volin '26 shares what happens when neuroscience students add paint, printmaking, and plant-based reflection to their cache of study materials — this community-engaged learning course transformed connections between brain science, creativity and Knox County, and placed them into vibrant works of art at The Annex.

Eliana also offers her own reflection on her search for connection at Kenyon — and how her time at Exeter inspired her to build deeper relationships with the people and places of Knox County by engaging with gardens, food pantries, festivals, and neighbors.

Nicole Wang '26 sat down with Fulbright Visiting Scholar Henrik Kovács to reflect on how Hungarian folk dance invites participation, community, and deeper connection — for Henrik, dance is more than performance, it's a way of seeing, knowing, and belonging.

Through these stories, we see how community, inquisitiveness, and thoughtfulness intersect to transform experiences into the intrinsic characteristics and emotional depth of where we live.

▼ A Connect(h)ome project by Mira Allen '26 and Sadie Kruger '27 uses watercolor and collage to map the connections of the Kokosing River.



Connecting The Dots

A creative project by Kenyon students that bridges art, neuroscience and a connection to place is coming to The Annex in Mount Vernon.

by Elia Najoy Volin '26

Walk inside The Annex in Mount Vernon — an extension of Kenyon's accredited teaching museum, The Gund— and color explodes off the walls.

The bulletin boards are bursting with student art, from a watercolor of the South Main Plaza Dog Fountain to a print of bright red strawberries. On the far wall, paintings of local flora from the Brown Family Environmental Center and the Kokosing Nature Preserve bloom far larger than life.

Joining these in January will be a creative endeavor with a scientific twist. It's called the Connect(h)ome Project, and it is an interdisciplinary effort by Kenyon neuroscience students. The students must spend time at a place of their choosing in Knox County and then create a piece of art based on a connection they make between the location and a topic they have learned in neuroscience.

My involvement with the concept began three years ago. During the spring of my first year at Kenyon, in both a neuroscience class and an English class on science writing, I wrote a series of poems about how my thalamus, hypothalamus and

hippocampus were integrating my memories.

I loved talking to Assistant Professor of Neuroscience Lauren Rudolph about my project and interdisciplinary learning. The next year, she asked if I would be part of creating a new final project for her "Introduction to Neuroscience" class — a creative project that would involve students in the local community. We worked with Wynne Morgan, The Gund's coordinator of engagement and public programs, who is based at The Annex, and Jodi Kovach, the Pamela and Christopher Hoehn-Saric Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs and Education at the Gund.



The project was inspired by the massive initiative known as the Connectome, which created a cartography of connections in the human brain, mapping how different neurons and regions talk to each other, as Rudolph explains. She added the “(h)” to show how the project’s goal is to connect students more deeply to a sense of place, grounding them in their Knox County home.

Each year, the Connect(h)ome project spans a whole semester, launching during the first week with a class visit to The Gund. Students work in pairs and choose from a list of Knox County locations, including Ariel-Foundation Park and the dog fountain in Mount Vernon and the Upside-Down Tree in Gambier. Students visit their location at least twice, and over the course of the semester they develop a piece of art and a written artist’s statement that demonstrate a connection between their location and a topic in neuroscience.

Students visit The Annex as a class, and are encouraged to return throughout the process to brainstorm, practice techniques and use materials. Past projects have involved painting,

◀ Sam Connors ’26 captured found materials from the Kokosing Nature Preserve with cyanotype, a method of cameraless photography.

drawing, linocut printmaking, cyanotype, plaster, paper-mâché, embroidery, pastel, wood and wire.

Mira Allen ’26 and Sadie Kruger ’27 were students in the inaugural group three years ago. Their project focused on the way the Kokosing Gap Trail bridge over the Kokosing River near campus connects communities, similar to how cerebrospinal fluid connects the brain and spinal cord, “delivering nutrients and removing waste,” as Allen explained. Allen and Kruger gathered leaves from the Kokosing riverbank and visited The Annex several times to collage and watercolor a map of locations the Kokosing River connects.

“At first, I felt out of my depth trying to connect the bridge with the function of the brain,” Allen said. “(But soon) ... I began to understand the way the cerebrospinal fluid maintains our nervous system and how it mirrors the function of the river, the backbone supporting and connecting its surroundings.”

Rudolph says the project has taught her that “physical spaces in Gambier and Mount Vernon can transcend time and build relationships.” One student, for example, connected the carvings on the Upside-Down Tree to the overlapping nature of memory because her parents were Kenyon alumni and loved the tree during their time here.

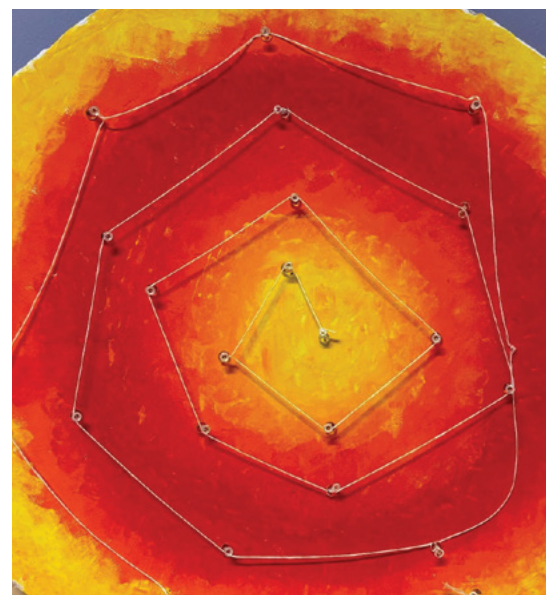
▶ A project by Bridgette Cassidy ’27 and Maggie Wallace ’27 was inspired by the Ariel-Foundation Park tower and their fear of heights.

Another student from Chicago picked Honey Run Waterfall in Howard, Ohio, because she had never seen a waterfall. When she arrived, though, there was no water. A local woman saw that she was confused, and they connected. The woman pulled up pictures of the waterfall on her phone and explained there was usually water at the waterfall, just not right then.

The final results that will be on display at The Annex are so bright and colorful — and different from what the students are often asked to do in a neuroscience class. Morgan said she’s seen Kenyon students transformed when they walk into The Annex to work on the project.

“I know Kenyon students to be so academic and so driven — giving them something a little more nebulous ... (and) the world opens up in this really big way.”

Connect(h)ome projects will be on display starting January 12, 2025 at The Annex in Mount Vernon, 12 E. Gambier St. It is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays. For a schedule of free workshops and other events at The Annex, go to www.thegund.org/the-annex.





Photos on right: Emily Morrison at Emily Morrison Arts

Photo on left: Prince Davenport '28

Dance Is a Conversation

Henrik Kovács talks about how sharing the art of Hungarian folk dance can create community — among students and Knox County residents.

by Nicole Wang '26

This semester, Kenyon has had the special opportunity to host Henrik Kovács, whose mission is to teach traditional Hungarian folk dance to students and the greater Ohio community.

An affiliated scholar in the Department of Dance, Drama and Film, Kovács traveled this summer with his family from Hungary — where he teaches at the Hungarian

Dance University — to our rural Ohioan campus as part of the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program.

He teaches a class in the Bolton Dance Studio twice a week where Kenyon students get the immersive cultural experience of learning Hungarian folk dances. At the end of the semester, the class performed at the Fall Dance Concert in the Hill Theater. Kovács also teaches Labanotation, the scorewriting of the dance, which was developed

by Hungarian Rodolf Lábán a century ago.

In addition to teaching the folk dance technique class, Kovács has hosted multiple community-wide events — both on campus and in Mount Vernon — that encouraged open access to learning about his heritage and culture, including not just dance, but his hobbies as well: beekeeping and the Hungarian card game called *ulti*.

◀(Left) Henrik Kovács during a rehearsal for Kenyon's 2025 Fall Dance Concert.

(Right) Kovács leads folk dancing during the Johnny Appleseed Fall Festival in Mount Vernon.

One of his students, Rhiannon Campbell '27, said she has enjoyed connecting with the Knox County community through dance. "I think it is rare and quite special to have the opportunity to interact with the greater community through low-stakes dance."

Another student, Grace Guiley '26, said the nature of Hungarian dance — and Kovács' passion for it — have helped form connections between participants. "I think because the dance is so group/partner-oriented, it inherently is a dance that develops community," she said. "Henrik is also really funny. He cares a lot, and I think that transfers over to us."

Kovács took some time to speak with me about fostering community, both among Kenyon students and with residents nearby.

Tell me about the foundational elements of Hungarian folk dancing.

Hungarian folk dancing is really for fun, for community-building. They are social dances. And we have a wide range of dances starting from circle dances and couple dances. As a male, as a lad, we can join as the "man" in the group to prove ourselves. And you can dance with a woman to discover the connection between you two.

We can speak and see each other, but to dance with someone means much more. It is a different level of understanding — not just your partner, but yourself, too. I think that is very important.

You mentioned that Hungarian folk dances are very collaborative and community-based. Do you find that you bring that component out through your teaching in class and also in the community engagement?

Yes, I think this is very important, especially because now there are a lot of screens around us and we are usually not part of anything. We are just outsiders. I think this is not a good direction for humanity. We have to be involved and immersed. I feel this way about dancing. We have a lot of programs and we have a lot of shows. This means that people that are not dancers can just see the dance and not take part in it. I think it is better to take part in the dance because you can find yourself, your partner and your community.

Dancing is like a way of seeing people, knowing them beyond just sight. Can you explain how this mode of seeing gets expressed in traditional Hungarian folk dances?

[When you are not dancing] you have the opportunity to judge the dancing. But without the dance knowledge in your body, it is very hard to judge properly. It looks like a spectacular movement, but truly it is not that hard to conduct. And movements that look quite simple, when you try it you are like, 'Oh my God, this is so hard.' That's why I think the right way to understand what's happening on stage is to have experienced it with your body before.

In your class, now that we are about a month and a half into the semester, do you see a difference in the way your students are dancing? Are they more comfortable with each other?

Yes, of course. And I understand that these kinds of dances are really hard to understand if you are not used to it. Not just here but in Hungary, too. ... [Dance] is something like a conversation. Somebody should lead the dance and someone should be leading, and sometimes these roles change. Sometimes I feel like I need a few years to teach this, but I see already in these six weeks that they are beginning to understand this.

How is the class experience different from teaching the Mount Vernon community at the Johnny Appleseed Fall Festival?

That was very interesting. I was very lucky because a lot of Kenyon students came, including some of my students. They could show other people that dancing is easy. Of course, when you see 20 people dancing, it is much easier to connect with them rather than just five or three.

When you think back on all the activities you've done here in Ohio, what will you remember most fondly and why?

Hard question! I cannot highlight a specific activity, because each has its own importance. Lessons and dance events at Kenyon, dancing and playing with elementary students and going to Columbus to learn Polish dances with my students and teach Hungarian ones there and dancing with the many generations of Hungarians in Ohio are for one big reason: to understand each other's culture and learn from each other to make the world better and peaceful!



The Quest for School Supplies

How the Gambier school supply drive keeps classrooms in the community stocked for success

by Amrin Tasnim Rafa '28

For the past 17 years, the Gambier School Supply Drive has been working hard to connect donors in the Kenyon and greater Knox County communities to students in the Mount Vernon area.

A community wide-collaborative process, donations from Kenyon faculty, staff and others around the area come in a range of forms — from pocket change to \$1,500 checks, from a couple of boxes of crayons to cases of backpacks.

This year's drive was led by Liz Keeney, a Gambier resident and retired associate director of the Student Accessibility and Support Services at Kenyon, in coordination with Kenyon's Office for Community Partnerships. It resulted in thousands of dollars worth of supplies: hundreds of pencils, markers and notebooks, as well as 150 scientific calculators and over 2,000 sheets of construction paper.

Carloads of supplies were delivered to Wiggin Street Elementary School, Mount Vernon Middle School, Knox County Career Center, Knox County Head Start and New Directions, which

also received 22 backpacks full of games, crafts and supplies.

The origin of the undertaking is humble and deeply personal to Marne Ausec, director of Kenyon's Center for Global Engagement and Mount Vernon resident, and her daughter, Marisol.

A single mom, Ausec was puzzled when a list of school supplies came out in July preceding the start of elementary school for Marisol. Such supplies were provided by the school back in Marne's day, and she was concerned that every child might not be able to afford them.

"I didn't have tons of money, I

was a single mom, and things were tight. But I could not believe that we were asking kids to be successful in school if they did not have the right supplies,” Ausec said.

Ausec and her daughter decided to do something about it. “That first year, Marisol and I saved up change. You could go to Staples then, and they had weekly ads. Folders were a penny, a pack of paper was 10 cents,” Ausec said. “We bought as much as we could when it was on sale. You would not believe the amount of things you can buy when the sales happen.”

It wasn’t long before people in the community were eager to join the cause. “I asked a few people if they wanted to help; I would shop if they donated. (I) would say that no amount was too small, and I stretched those donations. Liz was one of the first people who donated. And folks at Kenyon helped, I got \$10 every year from a former employee.”

Ausec and Keeney went to great lengths to get the word out, sitting along Middle Path and in front of the College Bookstore.

These days, they work with school guidance counselors to distribute the supplies. “Liz had the brilliant idea to distribute to school guidance counselors. I shopped the sales, and between us we were able to gather carloads of things. One summer it was too much for me, and Liz took over,” Ausec said.

Keeney set up a system of people dropping supplies and donations off at her porch. With the help of her team of volunteers — and now the Office for Community Partnerships — the school supplies drive comes together year after year.

These days, things get rolling as early as spring break, when Keeney

and others reach out to school liaisons to assess needs. In July, they send out solicitation emails and then get to work publicizing, setting up an Amazon wishlist, and placing collection jars for cash and boxes for supplies. After receiving and sorting the funds, volunteers shop and arrange for pick up and delivery, when social workers distribute according to need.

“For our students, having the needed supplies helps them start the school year off with confidence and a sense of being cared for,” said Tamara Carlson, the school social worker at Wiggin Street Elementary. “The generosity of the drive helps ensure that every child walks into the classroom with tools for success, which removes an important barrier to learning. It also allows our teachers to focus on instruction rather than spending time and resources locating the necessary materials.

“From my viewpoint,” Carlson continued, the drive strengthens the connection between our school and the community. Families feel supported, students feel seen, and it reinforces a culture of kindness. That impact lasts far beyond the first day of school.”

Keeney said she is thankful for how generous students and employees of the College have been with both their money and their time.

“It’s my fun job to be the go-between that connects donors and recipients,” she said. “There are a lot of troubling things I cannot do anything about, but kids not having equal access to education is one I can have an impact on. It wouldn’t have happened without Marne and her daughter. I am so grateful to have been invited in.”

Ausec stressed that the initial values behind the supply drive remain unchanged over the years.

“We don’t need to donate a lot to make a big impact. This project is about the little things. It might just be a small amount of spare change, but bundled with someone else’s spare change, it can make a huge difference,” she said. “We cannot expect students to succeed or even think of school as a fun place if they don’t have the supplies they need to be successful. I’m grateful to those who have given their time, donations and good wishes to this project.”

“This project is about the little things. It might just be a small amount of spare change, but bundled with someone else’s spare change, it can make a huge difference.”

— Marne Ausec, director of Kenyon’s Center for Global Engagement

▼ Volunteers, including the author, at the Arch Park Community Garden work day during Kenyon's Family Weekend.



Inspired by Community

Connecting with all that Knox County and its residents have to offer became a natural extension of one Kenyon senior's quest for community.

by Elianajoy Volin '26

What originally drew me to Kenyon was the feeling of community — well, that and the Upside-Down Tree.

It was important to me to make a home in a place of tight-knit connections, a place where I would be seen and known. I felt that sense of connection between Kenyon students, staff and professors the first time I visited campus, and I loved weaving myself into the Kenyon community my first years here. But it took a while before I saw that connecting to the

broader Knox County community was the natural — and necessary — extension of that.

I started to get a sense of this when I went abroad to the University of Exeter in England during my junior year. I missed Kenyon like a missing limb — I felt lost in the crowds of students and yearned for the intimate connections I had made in Gambier. As it turned out, my most lasting feelings of belonging didn't come from meeting with my professors or playing on the Frisbee team, but from investing and volunteering in the Exeter community beyond the university.

A local community garden became the place I felt most at home. Each week, other international students, retired professors and community members — some who have been volunteering in the garden for more than 14 years — would work together to plant new seeds, weed, transplant strawberries, water greens and prune willow trees. At the end of each work day, in true British fashion, the volunteers would gather and drink tea, pass around homemade Victoria sponge cake, biscuits and flapjacks. We would talk about classes and our days, share book recommendations, and

“As it turned out, my most lasting feelings of belonging didn’t come from meeting with my professors or playing on the Frisbee team, but from investing and volunteering in the Exeter community beyond the university.”

hear about someone’s grandchild’s birthday party. We celebrated together. We knew each other. It was a beautiful anchor for the week.

Someone from the community garden introduced me to a nearby community cafe and store, and I started volunteering there, too. I washed dishes and made tea, cleaned up the books in the children’s area, and became an expert at counting out British pence. I loved talking with the women who played Scrabble there each day and then stayed to help us clean and close up. I felt needed, excited, young, bright and valued.

When I think about Exeter now, more than any classes or travel, I remember the community garden and the community store. Knowing I was making an impact to strengthen the community that I didn’t feel part of — until, suddenly, I did.

Arriving back in Gambier for my senior year, I had a new appreciation for the Kenyon community, as well as a new desire to be more involved in the broader life of Knox County. I decided I want to spend my life working in nonprofits, and to spend this year learning how to do that well.

I applied for a job at Kenyon’s Office of Community Partnerships so that I could be in the know about the projects going on beyond the College and learn more about community

▼(Top) The Center of Hope Mid-Ohio Market in Bladensburg.

(Bottom) Austin Swallow, board president of Food For The Hungry, helped coordinate this pop up pantry at Habitat for Humanity in November. (Photo courtesy of Food For The Hungry)



engagement. Each week, we gather and talk about what is coming up in Gambier and Mount Vernon, what initiatives need volunteers, and what student groups are looking for opportunities.

I have loved learning about how so many organizations work together to form an interconnected web of services available to residents of Knox County. I see these connections in action all the time, like at the pop up pantry food distribution events

in November organized by Food For The Hungry, Interchurch Social Services of Knox County and the Knox County Foundation, hosted at Habitat for Humanity. It was amazing how many people mobilized to help and incredible how light we made the work, passing the boxes of food down a line of volunteers like buckets in a fire brigade.

The connections I have made volunteering in Knox County have been invaluable. I have enjoyed

learning from Dawnel Volzke, the CEO of Center of Hope foodbank in Bladensburg, about what it's like to run a nonprofit in Ohio, while helping stock and distribute fruits and vegetables. And I've been so motivated by the energy and enthusiasm of Erin Salva, retired director of student accessibility and support services at Kenyon, who coordinates the Arch Park Community Garden in Mount Vernon in addition to helping with many, many other community initiatives.

I have also enjoyed experiencing all of the fun Knox County has to offer — and there's a lot.

I've been loving events where the community comes together: eating tacos and entering raffles at First Fridays in Mount Vernon, and devouring apple cider donuts at the Johnny Appleseed Fall Festival. My friends and I started going to the Mount Vernon Farmers Market each week, buying fresh flowers, squash, tomatoes and peppers to take home and make into pasta dishes. After the market, we've explored other stores in town, always stopping in Old Mr. Bailiwick's to smell the candles and restock our tea cabinet.

When my parents came for Family Weekend in October, I took them to all of my favorite places. We stopped in Kudos Art Co-op on South Main Street, and I was amazed to find an art piece of my favorite poet, Andrea Gibson, who passed away from cancer

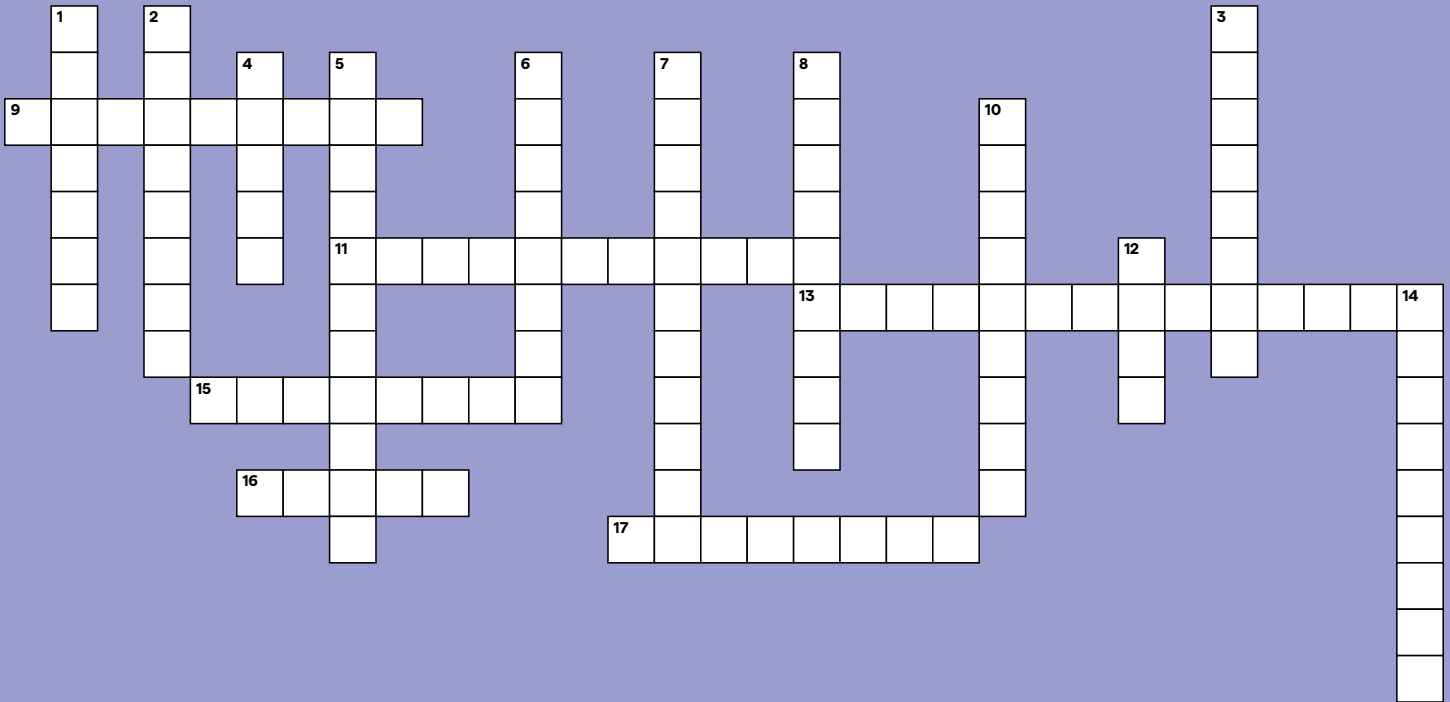
this summer. My mom and I talked with the artist who made the piece for a long time — about his artwork, the classes he teaches at The Annex (the satellite space of The Gund, Kenyon's accredited teaching art museum), and our mutual love for Gibson.

When we were about to leave, he offered the art piece to me as a graduation gift. I cried and cried. Now the poet sits in my little writing nook, and smiles as I write.

That piece of art wasn't the greatest gift I've gotten by exploring Knox County, though. I'll always cherish the warmth of the relationships I've made, and the enduring inspiration I've gained from all the ways the community comes together to organize care for one another.

"The connections I have made volunteering in Knox County have been invaluable."





Knox County Landmarks Crossword

BY LUCY REGNIER-KLINE

Across

9. Gambier college building
11. Place to watch the stars and planets in Gambier
13. Landmark on the Mohican Valley Trail
15. Path that used to be a railroad
16. ____-Foundation Park
17. Park in Howard with a waterfall

Down

1. Regional park in Mount Vernon
2. River that runs through Knox County
3. Opera house in Mount Vernon
4. Arts center in Mount Vernon
5. Fun animal landmark in Mount Vernon
6. Knox _____ Theater
7. Trail that runs through Knox County
8. Trail in Wolf Run
10. Area in the Brown Family Environmental Center (There's a band named after it!)
12. Nature area in Knox County, for short
14. Structure where the Kokosing Gap Trail goes into Howard

Our Student Team



Kendin Basden '26

Volunteer coordinator

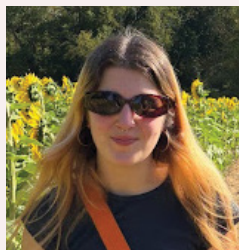
MAJOR: Sociology

FAVORITE SPOT IN KNOX

COUNTY: The bridge on the Kokosing Gap Trail

MEMORABLE COMMUNITY

EXPERIENCE: My most memorable community experience would have to be the first time going to play soccer at Pleasant Street Elementary School with my friends. I had no idea what to expect and if it would go well but everyone had a great time, including myself.



Kate Grobart '28

Volunteer coordinator

MAJOR: American Studies

FAVORITE SPOT IN KNOX

COUNTY: The South Main Plaza Dog Fountain in Mount Vernon

MEMORABLE COMMUNITY

EXPERIENCE: Getting to help serve food at the First Congregational Church for the Harvest Fest Hot Meals was a really fun experience. I got to meet so many new people and serve and then enjoy a delicious meal with everyone.



Angelia Nguyen '26

Data analyst

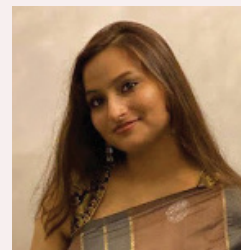
MAJOR: Neuroscience

FAVORITE SPOT IN KNOX

COUNTY: Honey Run Waterfall

MEMORABLE COMMUNITY

EXPERIENCE: I love volunteering with Wiggins Street Elementary School and surrounding myself with kids. They never fail to make my day!



Amrin Tasnim Rafa '28

Editor

MAJOR: English Literature and Economics

FAVORITE SPOT IN KNOX

COUNTY: Old Mr. Bailiwick's

MEMORABLE COMMUNITY

EXPERIENCE: Spotting my professors and classmates having a fun time at my first Johnny Appleseed Fall Festival! It's a great event where you get to share a cozy evening with great music and food with the residents of the wider Knox County community.



Elianajoy Volin '26

Editor

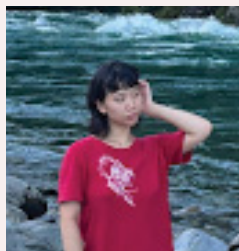
MAJOR: English

FAVORITE SPOT IN KNOX

COUNTY: The Pine Grove in the Brown Family Environmental Center

MEMORABLE COMMUNITY

EXPERIENCE: I love going to the farmers markets in the Public Square in Downtown Mount Vernon. I'm always bumping into people I know, and I love getting beautiful flowers, fruits and veggies.



Nicole Wang '26

Editor

MAJOR: Art History and English

FAVORITE SPOT IN KNOX

COUNTY: The Hill Theater

MEMORABLE COMMUNITY

EXPERIENCE: I loved the community dance events at the BFEC, including square dancing and Hungarian folk dance!



David Bonnen '27

Rural life and bike barn

MAJOR: History and Anthropology

FAVORITE SPOT IN KNOX

COUNTY: Honey Run Park

MEMORABLE COMMUNITY

EXPERIENCE: The Knox County Fair. Everyone you know is there, and the Rough Trucks are incredible to watch.

Office for Community Partnerships



MOUNT VERNON OFFICE

Wright Center
Suite 100
400 S. Main Street
Tuesday and Thursday,
8:30 a.m – 4:30 p.m.

KENYON CAMPUS OFFICE

Stephens Hall
Lower Level
106 College Park Street
Monday, Wednesday and Friday
8:30 a.m – 4:30 p.m.

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Cover photo: Ariel-Foundation Park,
by Alyssa Gómez Lawrence '10.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

Across

- 9. OLDKENYON
- 11. OBSERVATORY
- 13. BRIDGEOFDREAMS
- 15. GAPTRAIL
- 16. ARIEL
- 17. HONEYRUN

Down

- 1. WOLFRUN
- 2. KOKOSING
- 3. WOODWARD
- 4. ANNEX
- 5. DOGFOUNTAIN
- 7. HEARTOFOHIO
- 8. STORYBOOK
- 10. PINEGROVE
- 12. BFEC
- 14. STONEARCH

