

A Firsthand Experience at Radford's Annual Advocacy Day

By: RYLEE MEADOWS
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This past week, I had the privilege of participating in Radford University's annual Advocacy Day trip. On Tuesday, February 3rd, I boarded the bus for Virginia's state capital, accompanied by 37 students and faculty members from both Radford University and RUC. Around 1:30 p.m., we all arrived safely in Richmond, Virginia.



We split into groups to walk around the State Capitol for a self-guided tour of the building. Afterwards, we headed upstairs and had the pleasure of sitting in on a Senate session, watching Virginia bills and resolutions come to a vote. At 2:30 p.m., we headed to the Lieutenant Governor's office to **meet with Lt. Gov. Ghazala Hashmi**. We went around the room with introductions and personal stories about our experiences at Radford. **Freshman Noah Mendiola** had the opportunity to tell his story to the Lieutenant Governor. "I told her my experiences at Radford University so far, and why I love it, which is because of the sense of community we have here. In her response, she stated that she believes community is a key part when it comes to finding a place to stay for college and can create lifelong connections with other students and your professors." Noah said,

"Speaking with her was an incredible experience."

After amazing conversations with the Lieutenant Governor, we arrived at our hotel for an hour of downtime and dinner before the Alumni social networking event at the Richmond Hippodrome. Insightful conversations with Radford Alum about our future careers, our hometowns, and our love for Radford University lasted until about 9 p.m., before we headed back to the hotel to end day one of Advocacy Day on a good note.

We woke up bright and early on Feb. 4 to begin day two of Advocacy Day. After breakfast and a meeting with our designated group, we boarded the bus and headed back to the Capitol to meet with various legislators. I had the pleasure of meeting my own representatives-

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Letter from the Editor

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Throughout the academic year I have heard a common theme among the student body and faculty. It seems like the campus is plagued with a state of perpetual boredom. There are clubs seeing recruiting numbers dwindle and campus events not meeting attendance standards. For me, as a first year editor I have had the opposite experience. Joining the Tartan and interacting with Highlander Student Media as a whole has been my favorite part of my experience at Radford. Although I truly believe HSM has something for everybody, I won't be biased here and make this a huge ad for our club but I would like for each student to find a space where they feel at home. Obviously this is a part of the university marketing strategy, helping students "find their place" and I would like to do more with this platform to help other students find their place.

Starting with our next edition we will be implementing new strategies to increase engagement among the student population. **From now on you can always check this column to find a list of upcoming events on and around campus. We will also continue to repost and work with as many clubs as we can on our social media by reposting events there, so follow us @rutartan on Instagram.**

We will also make this section the "Club Corner" where each week we will highlight a club on campus and help the student body get to know their leaders and what they offer.

If you are interested in advertising with us or having your club/event featured in a future edition, email us at tartan@radford.edu.

Senator Travis Hackworth and **Delegate Jason Ballard**. We had insightful conversations about the Commonwealth's continued support for Radford University. **Sophomore Emerson Sims** recalls the great experience of meeting her representatives. "Delegate Stacey Carroll was incredibly kind! She introduced herself using her first name and had such a comforting presence. She asked our group leader what specific legislation was for and that it was the funding of our University and immediately gave her support for funding Radford University." Emerson says, "Overall, I really enjoyed Advocacy Day, and it makes me want to be more involved in public health."

After back-to-back meetings with Virginia legislators, **we headed to the Executive Manor in Capitol Square to meet and take pictures with Governor Abigail Spanberger**. The mansion was beautiful, and everyone was so welcoming. **Senior Ella Woods** had the opportunity to shake hands and take a one-on-one picture with Gov. Spanberger. "It was a great experience meeting the Governor; she was super kind and encouraging, and going inside the mansion was such a unique experience." The excitement in the room when the Governor walked in was palpable. It was so uplifting to see her take her time to take pictures with us. She showed her support to us as a University and personally as we enter into our careers.

Once we departed the Executive Mansion, we headed to our final activity of Advocacy Day. A group of fifteen of us had the opportunity to sit in on a House of Delegates session, where Delegate Jason Ballard gave us a greeting and an introduction to the House. We were shown on the TV and applauded for advocating for Radford University.

We headed back to board the bus for the last time, then to dinner and back to Radford. Ella Woods gave us insight into her experience of day one and two of Advocacy Day.

"Advocacy Day is always a great experience. I value the first day because it helps get us into the groove and gives us a great opportunity to network with alumni and explore the Capitol. The second day is nice but in a different way because we are able to speak with the people who represent us, and it truly feels like we matter and our voices are heard. We also get an insight into the legislative process and how we actively affect it." We arrived back at Radford around 7 p.m. Wednesday night, tired but feeling accomplished.

The Advocacy Day 2026 trip was and continues to be an incredible experience, advocating for our own Radford University. The firsthand experience of legislation, governmental processes, and networking was a great opportunity. Advocacy Day allows for RU and RUC students to represent the University at the state level, strengthening connections between the campus community and Virginia lawmakers.



Photo Credit: Radford Student Government Association

From Highlanders to Honorees: Radford Alumni Receive NCAA awards

By: RYLEE MEADOWS
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Two Radford University Alumni were recognized with prestigious NCAA awards this month.

The late Charlene Curtis, a former Radford women's basketball player and coach, posthumously received the NCAA Gerald R. Ford Award for her significant leadership and advocacy for intercollegiate athletics throughout her career. Curtis had an impactful athletic career, being the first African American woman to play basketball at Radford, the first African American women's basketball head coach at Temple, and the first African American women's basketball head coach in the Atlantic Coast Conference. Curtis had a successful coaching career at her alma mater, Radford University, as well as Wake Forest, Temple, and UConn. She also introduced instant replay and created standardized training clinics while officiating in the ACC after her coaching career. Curtis was considered a person of integrity and inclusiveness, as well as a lifelong mentor to many.

The NCAA Award of Valor is presented to an individual who shows courageous action or noteworthy bravery when confronted with a situation involving personal danger. Radford Alum and Head Baseball Coach, Alex Guerra, was recognized by the NCAA for his courage in a situation that occurred in September 2024. In his athletic career, Guerra played at the Division III level before transferring to Radford Uni-



Alex Guerra and Charlene Curtis Photo Credit: NCAA.org

versity for his final two years of eligibility. Now he serves as the head baseball coach at his alma mater, Radford University. While walking along the New River with his wife, the couple heard screams coming from the river. Out of concern, they ran towards the riverbank and saw Nick Barton and Cody Duncan struggling in the water. The two Radford students were fishing when Duncan fell into the water and struggled against the river's current. Barton tried to help his friend, but could not pull them both out of the water alone. Guerra jumped into the water to help and successfully saved both of them from being swept away. Thanks to Guerra's immediate response, Duncan and Barton made a full recovery.

Both NCAA award recognitions are the first-ever for Radford Athletics alumni. Charlene Curtis and Alex Guerra showed leadership, service, and commitment to the Radford Community throughout their careers. These honors highlight the extraordinary impact Radford alumni continue to have on Radford University athletics.

Searows “Death in the Business of Whaling” Review

By: FRANKIE PELLETIER
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Searows, the musical project of Alec Duckart, has been a constant staple in my music rotation since he released his first album, *Guard Dog*, in September 2022. I sank into his music, and *Guard Dog* consumed me for months. I was obsessed not just with his sad songs that made me feel seen, but also with Duckart’s innate ability to fully encompass me in his music and storytelling through thoughtful metaphors and beautifully melancholic melodies.

Four years later, Duckart’s sophomore album, *Death in the Business of Whaling*, has finally arrived, and Duckart’s sound is bigger and better than ever. This album is indie, as Searow’s music always is, but it features a wonderfully wide array of instruments that allow Duckart’s folkier side to



Alec Duckart Photo Credit: daybydaybreak.com

shine through and his sound to flourish. A beautiful blend of acoustic and electric guitars, drums, bass, upright bass, banjo, and even harmonica and tambourine creates a deeper, heavier sound

that takes the lead on this album, more than Duckart’s previous softer acoustic tendencies. With the increased instrumentals and beautiful production on this album, it really feels like you are living inside of each song with him.

FLOOD Magazine writer Tom Morgan described the album in his review as “[pushing] toward doom-metal territory” with the heaviness of the emotion and instrumentals.

Duckart’s strong metaphorical songwriting and love for a theme have always stuck with me. While canine metaphors are a staple in his writing, evident especially throughout *Guard Dog*, his new album, *Death in the Business of Whaling*, has taken on a nautical theme that is perfectly paired with the depth



Photo Credit: “Searows - Death in the Business of Whaling” spotify.com

and heaviness of his music.

Duckart’s guarded metaphors and fragmented writing make it really easy to find your own meanings in his songs, which outline his skill as a songwriter and storyteller. *Guard Dog* held a much more hushed tone, sticking mainly to vocals and an acoustic guitar, fitting for an album self-produced in his bedroom. Now signed to singer-songwriter and producer Matt Maltese’s record label, The Last Recordings On Earth, Duckart has much more support in terms of band members and

Frost Does More than Bite... It Cracks

By: JOHN RATLIFF II
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With the start of a new year, the weather has brought severely cold temperatures and precipitation. In fact, these last few Januaries have been the coldest recorded ones since 1988! With cold temperatures come the cautions you must look out for and avoid. These dangers could include freezing temperatures, pneumonia, power outages, icy roads, and even falling icicles. These are all dangers we are used to, know how to prepare for, and can avoid. Recently, however, an all-natural phenomenon has become more mainstream, and many people are worried about it, calling it “Exploding Trees!” While in the state of Virginia, you may not have to worry about these land mines, but in more northern states, you may need to watch the trees as you hike through the wintery wonderland.

Exploding Trees?

While they may seem to be exploding, that is not the actual term or definition for what the trees are doing in cold air. **The actual term for this is called “Frost Cracking.”** As the name suggests, the bark of the tree begins to crack due to frost in the air. While people may believe this is a new phenomenon and that the government is trying to blow us up, it is actually a natural occurrence when freezing temperatures meet weak wood. To be more exact, the water in the tree sap freezes and expands inside the usually thinner tree. The pressure built up in the tree causes the bark to crack and sometimes explode off the tree. The sound it makes is very loud and could easily be misheard as firecrackers or gunshots. If a tree happens to frost crack or explode in the woods and no one is around to hear it, then it must be really deep in the woods. Another misconception is that exploding trees could harm you. As it is not an actual

explosion, there isn’t much shrapnel in the bark to blow you away. The tree will usually remain in the ground, forming giant cracks throughout the bark. There are zero reported deaths from these events.

So Why Now?

As mentioned before, frost cracking is a natural process that affects trees in cold weather. So why are we only hearing about it now? The start of 2026 has been extremely cold, with unbelievable snowstorms and freezing temperatures from the south to the north-east of the United States. Temperatures haven’t been this cold since the 80’s, and something the 80’s lacked was social media. On social media apps like TikTok and Instagram, users have posted videos online showcasing their environments under these harsh conditions. **This year, a trend of TikTok videos showing exploding trees in the Midwest has been blowing up online**, leaving many viewers confused and questioning its possibility. Luckily, some people in the comment sections have been kind enough to share information about frost cracking with those who are unaware. Many people speculate that the exploding trees are AI-generated videos, since they only learned about these events now. There are, in fact, AI-generated videos of these exploding trees, but they are much more dramatic in their explosions than compared to real ones.

Unfortunately for us, on February 2, 2026, Punxsutawney Phil, the groundhog, saw his shadow, predicting six more weeks of winter. We do not need more winter, Phil. I would advise everyone to stay safe and warm during these six dreadful weeks, and remember that the exploding trees are very unlikely to injure anyone. To all the trees out there, stay hydrated.

Salem Civic Center Sets the Stage for a Big 2026

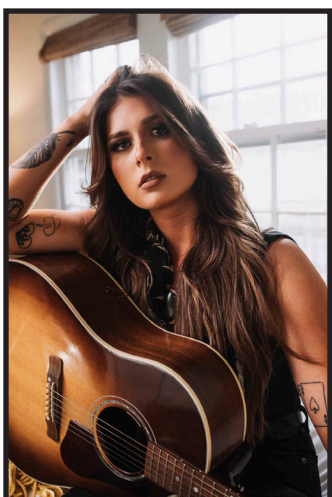
By: LUCAS BURTON
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There have been many music artists that have announced their tours for the year. Just down the road from Radford, in Salem Virginia, the Salem Civic Center already has quite the lineup of concerts scheduled for 2026.

A couple have already taken place. On February 5, **Sam Barber** brought **Waylon Wyatt** and **Wild Horses** to Salem. Just two nights later, **Parker McCollum** took the same stage, bringing along **Jake Worthington** and **Tyler Halverson** to open on February 7. This began what will be a busy year for the Salem Civic Center in the world of music.

On May 16, **Gary Allan** will make a stop in Salem. Allan has had many hits over the years, getting his start in the late 1990s with success lasting into the late 2000s. His hits include “Her Man,” “Right Where I Need To Be,” and “Nothing On but the Radio.” Allan had a bit of a resurgence in the 2010s with major hits like “Watching Airplanes,” “Every Storm (Runs Out Of Rain),” and “It Ain’t The Whiskey.” No openers have been announced for this show.

Ella Langley will bring her **Dandelion Tour** to Salem on June 25. Langley has been one of the fastest-growing stars in country music over the past year. Her breakout single “You Look Like You Love Me,” featuring fellow rising country star **Riley Green**, reached number one on the Country Airplay Chart. The song earned her several awards including Single of the Year, Song of the Year, and Music Video of the Year in 2025. Langley’s follow-up single “Choosin’ Texas,” has reached number two. She’s bringing along **Gabriella Rose** and



Ella Langley Photo Credit
countryevolution.com

along **Gabriella Rose** and



Salem Civic Center Photo Credit: WDBJ7

Dylan Marlowe. Marlowe is best known for his hit “Boys Back Home” with **Dylan Scott**, which reached number two on the Country Airplay Chart. To round out the year, **Weird Al Yankovic** will bring his **Bigger & Weirder Tour** to Salem on October 7. He is best known for parodies such as “Amish Paradise” (parody of “Gangsta’s Paradise”), “White & Nerdy” (parody of “Ridin,”), and “Eat It” (parody of “Beat It”). Yankovic has won five Grammy Awards during his career including Best Comedy Recording for “Eat It” in 1985, Best Concept Music Video for “Fat” in 1988, Best Comedy Album in 2003 for **Poodle Hat**, and Best Comedy Album in 2014 with **Mandatory Fun**. Yankovic is once again bringing **Puddles Pity Party** to open for him this year.

Concert season isn’t in full swing yet. As summer approaches, more artists will announce major tours with stops in cities across the country and even worldwide. Many artists have already announced their tours and are stopping in a small city not that far from Radford, giving fans in the New River Valley a place to go experience some live music without the inconvenience of travelling long distances. Salem has already attracted some big names for 2026, and it looks like that momentum won’t stop anytime soon.

Highlander Highlights: Women's Basketball Achieves Big Conference Win on Senior Day, Track and Field Teams Shatter School Records

By: RYLEE MEADOWS and BRANDON WHITAKER

Women's Basketball Bombs Away on Senior Day, Highlanders Shoot the Lights Out Against High Point

The Radford Women's Basketball Team defeated High Point University in a heated rematch on Feb. 7. Back in January, the Highlanders fell to the Panthers ending the match 78-40, but the Highlanders fought for redemption on Saturday afternoon.

Freshman **Georgia Simonsen** led the Highlanders in scoring putting up a career high 19 points. Junior **Anaiah Jenkins** also scored 13 points for the Highlanders, both forwards, Simonsen and Jenkins were a perfect five-for-five from deep. The Panthers could not defend the outside shooting from the High's as Radford finished with a 52.6 shooting percentage from three-point range.

The Highlanders gave the home crowd plenty to cheer about Saturday, not only defeating the High Point Panthers but also celebrating Senior Day for **Kirah Dandridge** and **Ellie Taylor**.

Head Coach Mike McGuire shared his thoughts on the seniors postgame, "Ellie and KD (Kirah Dandridge) they've been a special group of seniors, what they've put into this season, what they've put into this team to set a tone was crucial ... these two have been phenomenal, they mean the world to me ... I am proud of their growth too, not just as players but as people. I'm glad we got this win for them cause they earned it, they deserve it."



Ellie Taylor (top left) and Kirah Dandridge (top right) attack the basket.
Photo Credit: Hailey Hutchison

Track and Field Sophomore Jeylah Hamrick Sets Big South Record in the 400m



On February 6-7th the Highlanders participated in the Doc Hale Invitational in Blacksburg and the VMI Winter Relays in Lexington. On Friday at 7:40 PM the athletes in the 400 meter race lined up and **Jeylah Hamrick** finished first with a time of 53.82, setting the new record for the entire Big South Conference. In the 4x400 relay the team including **Hamrick, Raichelle Cornelius, Jordan Jackson and Mattie Flores** broke the school record that they had just broken two weeks prior at the Hokie Invitational. The team finished first with a time of 3:40.20.

Original photo above via: @rsimmonsphotographer on Instagram

Upcoming **Radford Athletics** Home Games: **Baseball vs Iona** February 13th @3:00 PM, 14th @2:00 PM 15th @1:00 PM | **Men's Basketball vs Charleston Southern** February 14th @2:30 |