

MEET THE *PREZ'*

A discussion with Airini,
TRU's new president
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In a sign that spring has sprung, a lily magnolia tree on campus begins to blossom.

Robert McAlaster/The Omega

the **Omega**

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An interview with TRU's new president

Airini may be new to the role, but she has a significant history with the university

ADESIRE AJAYI-SMITH NEWS EDITOR

After a lengthy search, TRU's newest president was publicly announced on April 2. Airini, who once served as the Dean of the faculty of education and social work between 2014 and 2021, returns to lead the university in a time of great challenges and pressures.

The Omega sat down with Airini shortly after the announcement to discuss her path, passions and excitements and some of the difficulties that lie ahead.

Omega: You have a very accomplished career. Please tell us a bit about your journey.

A: It's true that I am fortunate to build up quite a range of experiences over the years, and that's because I've had amazing colleagues and mentors [through] this journey. I started as a trained elementary teacher and ended up at a teachers' college. I moved through to lecturing at a university and ended up coming to Canada and doing my PhD here as an international student. One day, a chance to reciprocate

with Canada came up, and it was here at this amazing institution as the Dean of Education and Social Work. The project came to a close, and I went through to the University of Saskatchewan to be Provost and Vice President Academic. Then, the call back to Thompson Rivers University came, and it was the right time and the right opportunity. I couldn't be happier to be here.

Omega: How are you planning to approach your first year as President?

A: To start off, it's going to be about listening; listening to students, faculty and staff. I've had seven years at TRU already, but there's a lot that's gone on in the last four years and there's a lot that's complicated in the university sector right now. So, it's a good chance, I think, to prioritize listening but not to sit around and twiddle our thumbs, because there's a lot of proactive work to be done to build off the important momentum that's already underway here.

Omega: Artificial Intelligence has recently been a major point of contention

in academia. What are your positions on AI and the possibility of ethical use and what approaches will you take regarding AI in the university?

A: I should let you know that I'm an active user of AI. I've been studying the topic and recently completed some studies at MIT on AI and organizational strategy. Eventually, we're going to find a balance point with AI and it will mean being clear on our ethical approaches and embracing those parts of AI that are going to help us reach our potential as human beings. So, I am very interested in this. One of the questions I have is, in what ways could you best support learning and research with AI? And, being the university of this wider community, what leadership roles could TRU offer in the AI space? I feel pretty excited about the possibilities.

Omega: There's a lot of uncertainty and anxiety amongst international students because of recent federal policies. As a former international student, how will your experience impact

your approach to the international population at TRU?

A: All students matter to the university and all students bring their own experiences and talents. TRU has always been welcoming of that and is a leader when it comes to international education. The challenges are real, and they are not unique to us. Right now, it's about solutions that reflect truth, identity, and responsibilities that shape our university community. There's serious work underway at the university, so I want to respect that. What I can reflect on is that the change in policy, while felt immediately in the international student space, actually sheds light on the importance of talent, [both] talent [which is] being developed and talent [that's] being attracted. And finally, as issues around student demographics and budget arise, it's important for universities as a sector to continue to tell the story of the value that comes from high-quality university education. Value to the students, to taxpayers, to the mums and dads, and the region.

Celebrating university history

Reflecting on 20 years of being TRU

EAGLE ANDERSEN STAFF WRITER

Twenty years ago, the University College of the Cariboo changed its name to Thompson Rivers University, officially reaching coveted university status in British Columbia. Priorities since then have ranged from open-learning initiatives and community partnerships to increased research capacity.

March 31, 2025, marked the 20th anniversary of this momentous occasion for the Kamloops community, and the university has been reflecting on its past two decades.

Becoming TRU

Former UCC and TRU president Roger Barnsley outlined the process leading to TRU gaining university status in an article he wrote recently for TRU.

In 2002, he sent his first email to local MLAs and in 2003, he helped found the Friends of UCC, a group tasked with lobbying in favour of UCC reaching university status.

After a successful campaign, the group was initially met with silence from the government. However, after continued work, their request was approved.

"On March 19, 2004, then-premier Gordon Campbell and then-education minister Shirley Bond came to our Kamloops campus and announced UCC would become a university," Barnsley said. "The government set a date of April 2005 for BC's newest university to be born, but wanted to announce the name that September. Finding a name seemed simple;

how wrong we were."

Barnsley and his team mulled over potential monikers for the university. Names like the University of Central British Columbia, Shuswap University and David Thompson University were all considered before ultimately settling on Thompson Rivers University. The name recognized Kamloops' major rivers — the North Thompson and South Thompson, which combine to form the Thompson.

With the necessary parties on board, the only thing left in the transition was an event to officially mark the occasion, which took place on March 31, 2005.

"The Kamloops campus was decked out in colours and banners. The mood was festive and contagious as everyone celebrated our new university," Barnsley said.

Then federal Conservative opposition leader and eventual Prime Minister Stephen Harper and British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell turned up for the inaugural convocation.

Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin even appeared on campus later in the week to tour TRU, noting how beautiful the campus was and how exciting the university's future would be.

Since Martin's TRU tour, a lot has changed at the school.

20 Years of TRU

Several areas of change from the past 20 years were highlighted by the university in a release.

First, the university highlighted its open



Premier Gordon Campbell is pictured with TRU president Roger Barnsley on the April 6, 2005, cover of The Omega.

learning program, which offers over 500 courses across 60 programs, before taking a look at its relationship with surrounding Indigenous communities.

"Strong relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations have supported TRU's goals of recognizing and reconciling Indigenous rights by taking constructive action on addressing the remnants of colonialism," said Nathan Matthew, a former TRU chancellor and member of the Secwépemc Nation.

TRU noted that they've been a contributor in Kamloops due to their community legal clinic and the work of the law program and faculty with local organizations.

Another change the university observed is its shift towards research.

In 2011, the university joined the Research Universities Council of

B.C. and was even ranked as a top 50 research university by Research Infosource Inc. in 2023, coming in at number 49.

In recent years, TRU has put increasing emphasis on wildfire research—an effort which has even ballooned into new wildfire programs and courses being created on campus this year.

What started as an exciting occasion in Kamloops in 2005 has slowly shaped the institution into the Thompson Rivers University that students recognize today.

"Twenty years later, I am still astonished at what was accomplished by the amazing UCC employees," Barnsley said.

"We have pioneered, developed and refined a model of post-secondary education that creates and fosters accessibility and opportunity for all adult learners. That really is remarkable, isn't it?"

Surviving off of more than ramen noodles

How many students are coping through an economic crisis in Canada

ELLEN KAZEMBE STAFF WRITER

According to Statistics Canada, over half of young adults ages 25 to 44 report that rising costs are significantly affecting their ability to meet daily expenses. At TRU, some students are finding ways to adapt to these financial challenges, adjusting budgets and exploring additional income sources. In recent discussions, students shared their methods of managing increased expenses — from adjusting budgets to exploring additional sources of income. The Omega spoke to students to examine their strategies and gain insights into how students navigate their financial challenges in today's economic environment.

Omega: Do you work while studying? If yes, how do you balance work and school?

Levi Escobar (LE): I'm working while studying. It's been extremely difficult for me to balance my work and education, but I rely on my support system and good planning to help reduce the stress.

Terrence Ngari (TN): Yes, I do. Personally, I try to focus on my main goal, which is my academics. I try my best to inform my employer of the times I'm available [and] the times I don't have a class or exams to study for. At the same time, I don't get carried away with what I earn; rather, I look at the bigger goal in my life, which is my studies. I know I have bigger dreams of pursuing my career, which I believe [will] at some point give me even more income. It's just a matter of knowing your goals and priorities

and looking at the bigger picture because if I end up putting work as my first priority, I might end up dropping out of school.

Marvellous Ifezue (MI):

Yes, I'm working. I barely have time to take breaks. I typically try [submitting] assignments and other things on time so they don't clash with work.

Ruvimbo Marondera (RM): I am not working at the present moment, but busy job hunting.

Omega: How has the cost of living crisis affected your daily life as a student?

LE: Cost of living

has impacted my daily life immensely, and I've been forced to calculate my daily spending and budget accordingly.

TN: It has made me consider other options, such as looking for a cheaper place to stay because my previous place was very costly as the [rental market] was skyrocketing. It has also forced me to look for other online side hustles that can earn me some income.

MI: [The] cost of living is way too high, even as someone making a decent amount, it makes me scavenge for the best deals and coupons, and just settle for lesser quality items or food sometimes.

RM: It is really difficult keeping up with the price increases, especially

when one has not found employment yet. I don't randomly go to the super-market anymore unless I really need something.

Omega: Have you had to make any changes to your spending habits? If so, what?

LE: I've had to reduce my food spending and cancel my gym membership because the economy has gotten significantly worse.

TN: I have to reconsider what I buy in the store. I don't buy [unessential items as often]. For instance, I don't buy groceries or items, electronics, etc., that I don't need. Another instance is that I don't see the [appeal] of buying a car right now since I live on-campus and I know maintaining a car is costly. I also try my best to avoid failing courses in school because that will financially drain me since tuition fees [are] quite costly for international students.

MI: I typically used to be able to save money, but now I'm unable to.

RM: I hardly buy coffee anymore because I realised it's a hidden expense that costs me a bit. I buy my groceries in bulk to avoid frequent visits to the supermarket and overspending. I now hardly buy take-out. I make a budget of what I need. If things go up and the budget is not enough, I make do. I

write a list before leaving home so I don't overspend.

Omega: How do you feel about the availability of financial support (e.g., scholarships, bursaries, student loans) at TRU?

LE: As a domestic student, I think I'm in a more favourable position to receive financial assistance. Unfortunately, I don't believe that international students are being adequately served, especially given the high tuition TRU charges them.

TN: I'm not sure, but I can say that they are not highly available or, rather, they're unpopular or scarce. We all know a number of students in TRU [who] tend to [rely] on their part-time jobs [to pay for] tuition fees. Others depend on their parents or guardians to sort out their tuition fees. I think TRU needs to seriously work on that.

MI: Although TRU has some financial support available, it doesn't ease the burden on international student tuition, coming from someone who has gotten two scholarships.

RM: I feel that would be a great way to lift the cost of living crisis off the shoulders of the students, and it will give us peace of mind.

As living costs rise, TRU students are rethinking their spending and work strategies. However, financial support varies, with international students often encountering more barriers due to higher tuition rates and fewer funding options.

How is the cost of living crisis affecting you? We want to hear from you. Send your thoughts to editor@theomega.news with the subject line "Letter to the Editor."

“[The] cost of living is way too high, even as someone making a decent amount, it makes me scavenge for the best deals and coupons, and just settle for lesser quality items or food sometimes.”

Marvellous Ifezue, TRU student

From embers to infernos

Climate change is making wildfires worse, so what are we to expect this year?

ADESIRE AJAYI-SMITH NEWS EDITOR

An article investigating the trends of wildfires in British Columbia states that the province's most severe wildfire seasons over the past century occurred in the last eight years. The study's co-author, Mike Flannigan, the research chair for predictive services, emergency management and fire science at TRU, said the number of fires in Canada and B.C. has seen significant increases—quadrupling—since the 1960s and 1970s.

Flannigan attributed these statistics to one major factor.

"This is because of human-caused climate change," he said. "It can't be clearer than that."

As we enter spring and draw closer to the summer months, it is essential to remember this reality. As the climate gets warmer, residents are bound to experience increases in the amount, intensity and duration of these fires.

Flannigan distinguished between fires caused by human activity, which usually dominate in the fall and fires caused by lightning, which are prevalent in summer. Human-caused fires can be started by anything from campfires to burning debris, vehicles, cigarettes and power lines.

Though human-caused fires can be managed with effective policy and public awareness campaigns, lightning-caused fires are much less predictable. Lightning is responsible for about half the fires started, but about 90% of the total area burned, making it a major player in the wildfire season.

According to Flannigan, there is a common misconception about how these

fires enter our communities. Though many imagine walls of flames rolling into our neighbourhoods, the reality looks more like millions of tiny, smouldering bits of debris carried by the wind. If these embers catch on something flammable, a fire could start.

Regardless of the source, the effects of any rapidly growing wildfire will be the same.

When people picture major forest fires, they often imagine helicopters dropping large streams of water over the fire to control its spread. According to Flannigan, this image lends itself to another generally held misconception: that firefighters can put out all fires, all the time.

"That is patently untrue," Flannigan said. "Once a fire gets large and intense and it's moved to the crown of trees in what we call a crown fire, very little can be done through direct attack."

Instead, firefighters employ other tactics, such as burnout operations, in which a second fire is created against the wind to limit the wildfire's fuel source.

As mentioned before, climate change has contributed significantly to the current trends in wildfires in B.C.

Rising temperatures are directly correlated with increased intensity of wildfires for several reasons, Flannigan illustrates.

First, an increase in global temperatures will result in longer fire seasons.

"We're seeing fires almost burning all year," Flannigan said. "There's a fire that started in 2023 that's still burning under the snow in northeastern British Columbia. They've overwintered for two winters now. That's the first time I've seen that happen."

A second reason is that

rising warmth generates more lightning, significantly increasing the chances of a fire starting—a process he describes as ignition.

Finally, increased temperatures lead to drier fields and less moisture. This makes fires start and spread more easily and makes them significantly more difficult to extinguish.

Flannigan said we live in a high-risk environment and should always be prepared for the possibility of wildfires.

Beyond the destruction of property and the potential harm to life, wildfires also cause indirect harm through air pollution. According to a recent study published in *The Lancet*, about 1.53 million people die prematurely every year due to air pollution from wildfire smoke.

Flannigan suggests equipping our homes with air filters where possible, wearing face masks like the N95 when outdoors and avoiding vigorous exercise during those intense wildfire periods to curb the adverse health effects of smoke.

In the event of an evacuation alert, where the fires have reached critical conditions, Flannigan encourages everyone to prepare a "go-bag"—an emergency kit with essential items, medications, documents, etc., to make evacuating quicker and easier.

But simply handling the after-effects of a fire is not enough. It is also important to consider the earlier stages of wildfire prevention, monitoring and reporting.

The BC Wildfire Service has been prudent in making information public and up-to-date in these areas. Their website presents information on the number and intensity of fires

currently burning across B.C., the prevention efforts being undertaken by the service and the ways you can report a fire to improve their databases.

To community members, Flannigan said, the first step to prevention is to respect fire.

"If you're out in the woods and there's a fire ban, observe it," Flannigan said. "If there's no ban and you have a campfire, there's a lot of information about how to properly extinguish a fire. If you're driving a car in dry, hot weather and all the grass is dead, don't park in it because your mufflers can be extremely hot and can start fires."

"And if you see a fire," he adds, "report it right away. The sooner we know about it, the sooner we can put it out."

It is still early days, so predicting the upcoming wildfire season is difficult. The fires will depend on several factors—from vegetation to ignition to the weather, which cannot be accurately assessed yet. Still, Flannigan said, some models point to the possibility of an active fire season.

"I don't expect it to be another 2023, which burned 2.84 million hectares," Flannigan said. "But it could be a busy, smoky fire season again."

As we face the possibility of fires this year, it is crucial not to lose sight of the bigger picture.

Though wildfires seem daunting, there's more to them than destruction and displacement. They are an important aspect of our environment and support and sustain ecosystems.

"Fire is great at restoring biodiversity," Flannigan said. "It's mother nature doing her thing and when and where possible, we should let mother nature do her thing."



RCMP: TRU threat investigation ‘ongoing’

Questions regarding the timing of the initial safety update have been answered

ROBERT MCALASTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

On April 9 at 4 p.m., faculty, staff and students received an email from TRU VP admin Matt Milovick advising that the university had received a threatening letter containing “a suggestion of potential acts of violence on the TRU Kamloops campus.” The communication says that the RCMP was immediately informed and that while law enforcement could not find evidence that the threat was credible, the situation was being taken seriously.

When contacted for a statement on the situation, TRU said the following:

“Thompson Rivers University received a threatening letter containing a suggestion of potential acts of violence on our Kamloops campus. The letter was immediately turned over to the RCMP, who are leading the investigation. TRU is cooperating fully and following their guidance.

At this time, there is no indication that the threat is credible, but TRU and the RCMP are taking it seriously and have implemented additional security measures on our Kamloops campus out of an abundance of caution.

We note that this period of time is busy academically, with final exams being written through to the end of next week. Exams will continue

as scheduled. TRU is confident that this matter is being handled in a way that ensures public safety.

TRU cannot provide further details regarding the letter. Please contact the RCMP if you have further questions.”

Since releasing that statement, it has been revealed that the university received the threat two full weeks before distributing the safety update. This revelation has prompted some to question why it took so long for the university and the RCMP to alert the public.

When reached for comment, TRU advised that the delay was the result of advice from the Kamloops RCMP and that any follow-up questions should be directed to them.

In a statement sent to The Omega, the RCMP confirmed that they were responsible for holding off on releasing information.

“There was a proactive presence by police, working in cooperation with the campus community safety team, to monitor and continuously assess the risk, which fortunately, did not materialize into anything further. The threats investigation is ongoing.”

“Regarding the RCMP’s recommendation to TRU related to communications, the release of information is always carefully measured based on a thorough

risk assessment developed through the investigational process.

The media release issued by Kamloops RCMP Detachment was to confirm the presence of a police investigation, following the TRU communication to students.”

“On March 26, 2025, just before 1 p.m., the Kamloops RCMP Detachment received a report of an unconfirmed threat to the Thompson Rivers University campus. The Kamloops RCMP General Investigation Support Team (GIST) and the Serious Crime Unit (SCU) actively investigated the nature and source of the threat to determine its reliability, while being mindful that threats can be made with ulterior motives to incite fear.”

“Throughout the process, the Kamloops RCMP worked with TRU community Safety, prior to the weekend the threat was directed towards, TRU and police released statements to not only keep the TRU community informed of the threat, but also highlight the cooperative approach taken to reducing the potential risk seeking community support to report suspicious activity.”

As confirmed in the statement, the threat assessment has entered its fifth week and is still “ongoing.” No additional details, including the exact nature or type of threats that were made, have been released.

Let's talk about sex

IMAGE CATALOG

A Wellness Centre workshop reminds us that intimacy isn't taboo; it's natural

ADESIRE AJAYI-SMITH NEWS EDITOR

Dedicated to the mental, physical and spiritual health of TRU community members, the Wellness Centre has organized several events over the years tackling sexual and reproductive health. Most recently, they hosted a second part of their sexual health workshop on March 26, this time with a focus on pleasure.

As young adults, many TRU students may be relatively new to the world of sex and sexuality. Workshops like this provide a safe space to generate conversation amongst an audience that is, arguably, most in need of it. In tandem with their research-led initiatives and collaborative efforts with offices like the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response (SVPR), the Wellness Centre uses programs like this to educate about ethical sexual attitudes both on the TRU campus and beyond.

A unique feature of the workshop is that it is made by students, for students, with the student wellness ambassadors taking the lead in researching, organizing and presenting their findings. According to wellness centre coordinator Chelsea Corsi, this student-to-student approach was intended to reduce the power imbalance in the process of sexual health education.

"I've led workshops like this myself and I could lead this one too," Corsi said. "But for me, the strength comes from having students

talking to students."

The student wellness ambassadors presented a 94-slide presentation to workshop attendees, tackling topics from consent to hormones, gender-affirming care and body image. The presentations were both engaging and informative, supported by impressive scientific research.

Despite its length and late timing, the event kept attendees well-engaged throughout, with a noticeably high degree of participation where students seemed to have felt increasingly comfortable sharing their feelings and perspectives freely as the program continued. Guests initiated captivating conversations surrounding the ethics of pornography, the utility of sexual kinks, how to understand body reactions and more, leading the program to feel more like a casual dialogue than a presentation. Differing opinions were respectfully shared and the conclusions reached were often more nuanced and insightful than they had started with.

The fact that attendees were so comfortable contributing was not a mere coincidence. The event emphasized maintaining a shame-free, nonjudgmental and open-minded space where ideas and experiences could be shared without fear of backlash. As a result, the engagement level was high and nearly every student present had something to contribute at some point

throughout the evening.

"Sometimes it's hard to articulate in a report, or just by stating how many students [attend] these events," Corsi said. "But when you see it—when you're a part of it—you can feel the connection."

Tackling conversations around sexuality and pleasure can sometimes be difficult. Still, Corsi has found that a combination of passion and practice has allowed her student wellness ambassadors to succeed in this task.

Monty Armstrong, a student wellness ambassador and fourth-year psychology major, finds their passion in their past experiences or lack thereof. As a queer person, they believe that the sexual health education in the earlier stages of their life was not only inadequate, but unrepresentative of the complexities of real-world experience. The call to take charge in events like this came from their belief that this gap in sexual education was not only unfair but also dangerous.

"No one sets you up for success with your sexual health," Armstrong said. "There are people who don't know they can be assaulted in a relationship. Some people don't know what a 'no' looks like or what a freeze response is. And it's not even their fault. So, for me, it was a way to educate myself and to help other people."

The event offered free food, snacks and prizes at night's end. But the real draw, according to many

of the students present, lay in the simple promise of good company and friendly conversation.

Yet the room was noticeably sparse, with fewer than 20 students in attendance. This low turnout was a combination of several issues, said Corsi, including the late hours and the stress of finals season. But there is also the factor of discomfort or shame, which may hold some back from engaging.

Recognizing that not every student would attend events like this for countless reasons, the Wellness Centre has supplementary outreach programs to bring more community members into the fold. These efforts include Bladder Chatter, the newsletter published for the on-campus washrooms and direct student outreach and dialogue around campus, on the streets and in student residences.

In these highly divisive times, Corsi is fighting to get the word out there because, she believes, the value of inclusive sexual education cannot be overstated.

"A university setting is where students are open to exploring new ideas," Corsi said. "They're open to exploring things about themselves they haven't thought about before and it really is like this awakening. That's why I love this work. I think it's really important to offer these opportunities so that students can really discover who they are and feel safer."

A canvas of flesh and blood

Join the Omega's Arts and Culture Editor in the tattoo parlour with artist Avery Stainton

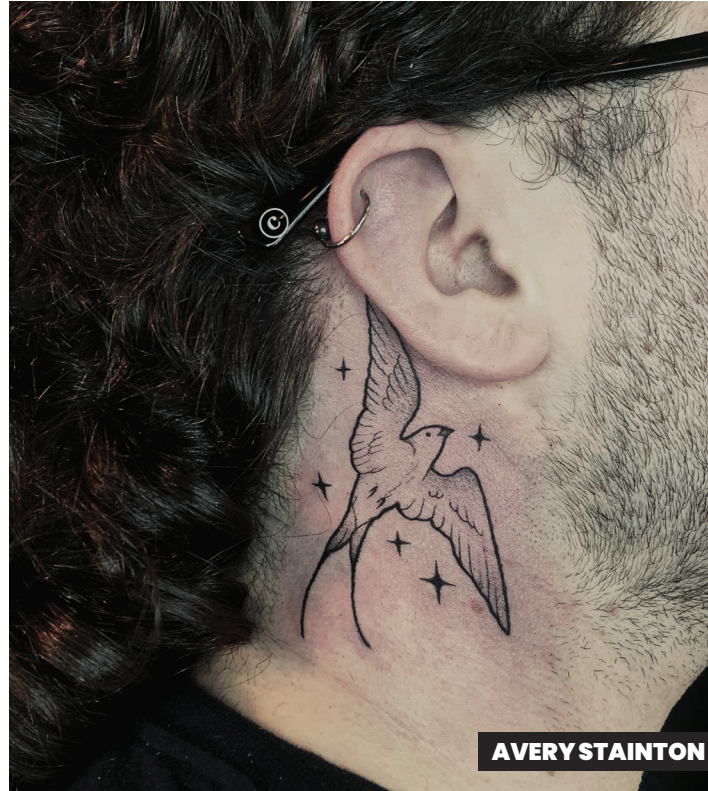
AUGUSTUS HOLMAN ARTS EDITOR

It may not be surprising to people, given my role as Arts Editor, that I have a deep appreciation for the craft of tattooing. I love the skill, the details, the original art pieces I get to keep forever and the thrill of new ink. However, it may be less on brand for an academia-aspiring student to coat themselves with tattoos, precisely my lifelong goal.

Getting this tattoo, even though one of the smallest, was the hardest to book due to many artists in the community having rules against tattooing necks, hands and faces. I had always told myself I would eventually get hand and neck tattoos, but I am not an "eventually" person. When I get the "new tattoo itch," I must scratch it... metaphorically, of course, because you should never scratch a brand-new tattoo.

Graduating TRU student and tattoo artist Avery Stainton responded quickly to my request and told me she had never tattooed that spot before. Offering me a discount for the practice in her freshly opened tattooing space on Victoria Street, I quickly booked an appointment after telling myself, "What the hell, it's only permanent."

Stainton's space was welcoming and personalized with unique paintings, lino prints, fairy lights and more. Each artist in the space had their tattooing bed and their own sanitized tattooing station. The space originally belonged to Dani from Soft Stabs Tattoo but is now a space for several artists to



The swallow tattoo, created and photographed by the artist, is seen on the neck of the Omega's Arts and Culture editor.

continue their practices.

After signing the usual tattoo waiver and proving to Stainton that I'm not a sneaky underage teenager attempting to get some sick ink to show my fellow high schoolers, Stainton and I started polishing up the last edits of the piece.

Stainton brought over their drawing tablet with the design on the screen. She turned it over a few times, compared the design to the shape of my neck and ear, erased and redrew the stars around the swallow a few times, then finally said, "I may need to free-hand the stars." Given the tiny location behind my ear, the stars must be sketched out with a pen rather than

with the original stencil. I put my complete trust in Stainton being familiar with their previous work and their mentor. I had no doubts.

Stainton said that working around the ear was the most challenging part of this new tattoo location. Still, it has helped her develop further knowledge on tattooing in uncommon places.

Once the stencil was on in the place we'd found it had settled the best, and Stainton completed the arrangement of stars with her temporary purple pen, we had to figure out just how to place me on the tattooing bed to reach my neck and ear space without Stainton elbowing me in the face and still

get the most comfortable position for both of us to be in for the next two hours.

I sometimes stared out the window, analyzed the shades of red in the exposed brick wall, or chatted with many artists or other clients inside the studio, doing anything and everything to not think of the pain when the needles moved from my neck space into the space behind my ear.

Overall, the pain was extremely tolerable considering what I expected from the location. Behind the ear was the worst spot, but the lower down my neck the tattooing gun went, the less it hurt. This tattoo would be rated middle ground on my personal pain scale, the worst being my seven-hour, 10-inch-wide chest piece and my least being the two-hour, three-inch bear piece located on the inside of my forearm.

Being a student in the final year and taking the opportunity to become a tattoo apprentice and a current part-time artist, Stainton opened up about the strains of university mixed with building a career.

"It has been so difficult. It has shaped me. I do think [this] whole experience has been really important to me growing as an artist... but the schedule and work-life balance has been really tough," said Stainton.

Stainton is set to graduate from TRU after this semester and hopes to obtain more tattoo clients interested in taking on designing some larger custom pieces in the future.

TRU Motionball sets fundraising record

Generous donations from the event help support special olympians

AIBIIKE ALYMOVA SPORTS EDITOR

The TRU Motionball Marathon of Sport organization is thanking donors for their generous support following a record-breaking donation goal this year.

Motionball Marathon of Sport is a national nonprofit organization that raises funds and awareness for the Special Olympics. The fundraiser runs in 18 cities across Canada, with Kamloops being among them. Allie Shiyuk, a fourth-year defender from women's soccer and Thomas Olsen, a fourth-year forward from men's basketball, are on the 2024-25 Motionball executive committee.

"Motionball is a university program created to help students engage in this movement," Shiyuk said. "It's something that's really popular out east. It brings university students together and [we] participate in the Marathon of Sport, as well as some other events throughout the year that [also] are fundraising [events] and bring people together and engage them with the local Special Olympics community."

One of those events is the *No Good Way Day*, which celebrated its 10th anniversary last year.

"One of our [other] big events is *No Good Way Day*," Olsen said. "Basically, it's to promote getting rid of the 'r word' [from] people's vocabulary. A lot of what we do is [obviously meant] to raise money while also spreading awareness that

these programs exist and they are an important part of our society [that] we need to support."

Motionball started its journey at TRU in 2019 with Olivia McLennan who brought it to Kamloops. Shiyuk and Olsen reflect on their journey with the movement.

"I became involved in my second year [in 2022]," Shiyuk said. "One of the girls in my soccer team was on the executive committee; she talked about Motionball and I thought that it was a great initiative. I was a participant and a team captain, so I gathered my soccer teammates and we all signed up. It was a fantastic day. I really wanted to be part of the executive committee. So I reached out and then became part [of the committee] the year after and then I took the role of event director with Thomas and Ella [Colistro] this year."

"I came in my first year," Olsen said. "One of my vets from the [basketball] team was also on the executive committee and asked me to come in and be a team captain. Similarly to Allie, I developed a passion for that sort of thing. [It's] super fun, engaging and you see the value of a program like that. Three years later, I'm an event director with an awesome crew."

Reflecting on their time with the organization, Shiyuk and Olsen shared their memorable moments from the past.

"We always do a fun



Participants pose for a photograph following the 2025 event.

entrance for the Special Olympics athletes where we announce their names and then they get to run out of a tunnel that our participants create," Shiyuk said. "So I was standing at the end of the tunnel and hearing the Special Olympics athletes' names announced and then watching them run out of the tunnel and seeing the expressions on their faces. That was a pretty cool moment."

"I think for me, just the little moments," Olsen said. "You see a bunch of [those] throughout the marathon of sport, like when a special athlete scores a goal or they hit a basket. You just see the joy that they feel and it's contagious within everyone playing in that sport. Those [little] moments for me build up into an awesome event and experience."

"What makes us unique is that we are a group of students and a lot of us are WolfPack athletes," Shiyuk said. "We've personally experienced how amazing sport could be [thanks to] the relationships it allows you to build and the sense of belonging you get from playing. We want to make sure that everybody has access to that."

"With a lot of charities, you see photos and put your money towards it," Olsen said. "Whereas in Marathon of Sport, you're experiencing it first-hand. You get to play the sport and participate in the event with the Special Olympics athletes. The connection

you build, the memories you foster, that itself spreads awareness. It shows how significant sports are and how important it is to us to support that initiative. So I think when you look at other charities, the connection and the memories and the experience that you build with ours really separates us and makes it special and actually helps us get more fundraising and charity and also a retention of people that joined as we do it year in and year out."

This year, they gathered \$17,000 in donations with around 100 participants.

"I think that growing the brand of Motionball Kamloops is something that we would love to work towards," Shiyuk said. "Getting more university students involved, spreading awareness for what motionball is. I know that there are a lot of people on campus who have never heard of it before. So, continuing to gain that recognition would be amazing. Also looking to engage more businesses and organizations as well. We're always in contact with them in terms of sponsorships."

"I think we had a pretty big financial goal this year of \$15,000," Olsen said. "Two years ago, I think we [raised] \$11,000. Last year we [raised] \$13,000. This year, getting \$17,000 was amazing. We definitely want to up our financial goal. I think we could do a better job of reaching out beyond TRU. Those will probably be the two main goals next year."

Runnin' with the 'Pack: Coach edition

Meaghan Blakley is the former dancer who's taking the cheerleading team to the top

ALEXA LIPTAK STAFF WRITER

From student-athlete to head coach and events and sports coordinator, Meaghan Blakley has been busy since joining TRU in 2011. Recently, the Omega sat down to talk with her about her journey in cheerleading, how it's shaped her career, her perspective on women's sports and the successful season for the WolfPack cheerleaders.

Omega: What first got you interested in cheerleading and how did you get started in the sport?

MB: Growing up, I did dance quite competitively and so did my older sister. She came to TRU [first]. There was already a cheer program going on here and she decided to do it. [When] I came to TRU in 2011, she took over as head coach. She was scared that no one would come to tryouts. So, my mom kind of bullied me into going. She said, "Go support your sister just so she has bodies in the room." I had no intention of joining the team; I was there literally as a dummy in the room. But I had so much fun at the tryouts.

Omega: How has your journey in cheerleading and dance shaped your coaching philosophy?

MB: I had a really intense old-school traditional dance teacher, like very aggressive. I loved it. That's where I thrived. It instilled in me a lot of independence and accountability. As I got older, I had different coaches and learned from different coaching styles and it really morphed my coaching philosophy. I'm really big on learning from others; I think you can always learn from



other coaches and you can learn from your athletes. My coaching philosophy now is that I like to work with my athletes, be humble and work hard, but still having a positive experience is key.

Omega: What do you think is the most rewarding part of coaching?

MB: When I was an athlete in the program, I coached. It changed my life around in terms of finding out who I was as a person, my values and morals, my confidence and my friends. My entire life evolved after high school and it gave me a safe space. So, my [motivation] is that I want to be able to provide that for others. If I know that there's one other person like me who benefited like I did back in the day, that makes me ecstatic. So, it's always about the experience and making sure it's not about the sport, [but also] about their life and giving them a safe space to have a good life for a few years before graduating.

Omega: There's been

a recent surge of visibility and support for women's sports, especially when it comes to women in leadership roles. As a female head coach, how has your experience been and what are some challenges you've faced along with it?

MB: I think it's tough. I'm currently the only female head coach alongside my coaching partner, Heather. We do have a new strength and conditioning coach, Lisa, who works with all the teams. She's not team-specific. I believe [in hiring] who's best fit for the job, regardless of gender. However, there's a huge lack of growing opportunities for females. There are not a lot of opportunities for an athlete to take steps toward getting there. So when you get to the interview process, you are limited in your candidacy because they didn't get the steps and opportunities leading up to it and a lot of male athletes do. Things like assistant coaching, empowerment

programs, coaches in training, volunteer opportunities and female education in sports are really lacking across all sports. For me, with cheer, all of my current coaches are female. I have about eight on staff, so we're a full female coaching team. That's a part of one of my passions: trying to [help them] grow so they can learn to be leaders outside of here, whether it be in sports or in [other parts of] their careers.

Omega: Cheerleading is a very female-dominated sport that often comes with a fair amount of stigma around the athletes. How do you help your athletes face any challenges that may come along with that?

MB: Yeah, there's a big stereotype around it. A lot of people think it's a glitzy and glam kind of thing, but it's [also] a lot of hard work. We face it every day. It's got better over the years as the sport has gained more awareness. I handle a lot of situations with my athletes, dealing with them outside of practice. They face hardships from either classmates or colleagues or their bosses not giving them time off for competitions because they don't view it as a sport, but they'll allow a volleyball player that time off. So, I make sure in those conversations with the athletes that they understand that everyone has a different perspective and even though you don't agree with it, you need to be respectful and take that and think about that. That way, one day, when you're a boss or a leader, you react differently and that's how things are going to change.

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