DCCC graduate humanizes Syrian refugee crisis

By Marwa Renamed-Ali

Khaled Alkurdi, 22, a DCCC business administration major who has transferred to Temple, was 18 when he and his family left Syria for the United States.

Alkurdi was preparing for his final exams when the Assad regime was strengthening in his hometown of Damascus, prompting fear among himself and family, he said.

“Damascus was protected by the regime but there were explosions and helicopters,” Alkurdi said. “I was afraid to leave my house because I wasn’t sure if explosives would kill me or not.”

Because homes and shops were being destroyed by the Assad regime, he said, explosions would wake Alkurdi and his family every night.

According to Alkurdi, his family became more concerned about their safety when the Syrian army invaded their home.

“My brother and I were hanging out on our rooftop and listening to [Syrian] anti-Assad Regime music,” Alkurdi said. “I asked him if he was ok and then tears started rolling down his face. At that point I didn’t know what to say.”

Alkurdi’s professor told him his son was burned alive in an explosion in a Syrian town called Daria.

“His son just finished dental school and was getting married soon,” Alkurdi said. “It broke my heart even more when my teacher told me I reminded him of his son.”

When Alkurdi came to the United States in 2011, he said he felt sad and angry that his country was failing to pieces.

“I didn’t like the idea of moving because my whole life belongs in Syria,” Alkurdi said. “There’s one thing having a house, but having a home is way different.”

Alkurdi said he tried to not lose hope and to keep moving forward.

Alkurdi is not alone in his fears about being an exile.

Alkurdi said there was a torture house close to his neighborhood where Syrian spies, called the Mukhabarat, violently apprehended civilians against the regime. Methods of torture included whipping, electrocution, and death, Alkurdi said.

“The army continued to stop me everywhere,” Alkurdi said. “The army always asked for my ID and cell phone, but they were so illiterate that they had no idea what they were reading.”

His terror in Damascus grew stronger.

Everyday, Alkurdi received news that family and friends were being killed by the regime, including his beloved Arabic teacher’s son.

“One day, my teacher came to class with red eyes and messy hair,” Alkurdi said. “I asked him if he was ok and then tears started rolling down his face. At that point I didn’t know what to say.”

Alkurdi’s professor told him his son was burned alive in an explosion in a Syrian town called Daria.

“My cousin told me ISIS, or Daech as we call them in Arabic, are trying to form a new Islamic State by exterminating people that aren’t devout Muslims,” Alkurdi said. “He told me that they’re the most inhumane people on the planet, that they decapitate men’s heads if they shave their beard.”

Alkurdi said he saw a graphic picture of a good friend on his Facebook, whose body was burned in an explosion.

“Seeing a person die in pain is bad but why did she, or any of the other people, deserve to die? Alkurdi said. “The regime wanted their people to live, not us, meaning the people against the regime. I’ve lost my friends, my family, my life, and my home —Syria.”

Alkurdi is not alone in his fears about his country being destroyed. According to the United Nations, 12 million Syrians have fled from their homes, since the outbreak of civil war in 2011.

The humanitarian organization Mercy Corps reports Syria’s civil war is the worst humanitarian disaster of our time, with more than 12 million Syrians displaced and 240,000 killed.

In March of 2011, anti-government demonstrations began as a part of the Arab Spring. Syrians experienced violent crackdowns from the Assad Regime, according to World Vision, an organization that is helping 2 million displaced refugees.

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Psych professor’s study reveals as some teens text, grades slip

Dr. Kelly Landman is an assistant professor at DCCC and co-author of “The Role of Compulsive Texting in Adolescents’ Academic Functioning,” which can be found in the October 5, 2015 edition of Psychology of Popular Media Culture.

When I realized that this was my passion, I never looked back from that point on.

Tell us more about your research. Absolutely. It’s a study of teens’ texting behaviors, and it looks specifically at not just the frequency with which teens text, but also the compulsive nature of their texting, so in addition to how many texts they’re sending and receiving in a day.

Even if their rate is low it focuses on how often they feel the need to check their phone, how often they daydream about the phone when it’s not with them and how much sleep they’re losing because they’re preoccupied with what’s happening on their phone.

This is the first study that looked at compulsive texting’s relation to frequency of texting, and then applied it to teen’s self-reported academic functioning.

What first inspired the study?

For my master’s thesis, I did a lot of work looking at teen’s social and aggressive behaviors over the Internet. At the time, we were looking at Facebook, but also what people put on their blogs – the biggest format of the time being MySpace.

As you know, that quickly became, not entirely obsolete, but we don’t use it as much. So when it was time to think about future research projects for my dissertation and beyond, we decided to look at what the current social media formats were and saw

that numbers were backing teen’s texting more than they were doing anything else. Plus, on their mobile phone, they could access Facebook and all the other formats that we used to be interested in.

Because you say you focused on teens’ behavior online, how do you feel about current studies in that field? Is there enough? Or should there be more?

There is so much opportunity, and there’s a lot coming out from the last few years where there are so many gaps, and even [after] our study, there are countless more we want to do based on the results of ours.

So we’re just at the beginning of learning about this, and texting is something that, unlike some of our other social media formats, we can tell is not going to go away.

I think the potential is great for where researchers can go in this field, looking at motivation s for texting and the actual content of texts, because we didn’t examine that ourselves.

We’re presuming that the females are communicating about things like relationships, whereas the males are communicating about factual information like making plans and more basic content.

One thing I became interested in is if teens are texting because they have a fear of missing out and the whole “FOMO” idea. There are so many areas where we could go, and we just started scratching the surface of it, I believe.

So, you would say that there’s a new frontier of research?

Yes, absolutely, and there has been a lot in the last several years regarding texting and frequency, so that’s one area where there still can still learn a lot about. Prior to that, there was a lot on internet frequency, and a lot of the texting research is being based on the theories developed in internet research.

[However], this whole compulsive nature – we have a lot more we can do there. We’re not calling it addiction either, because we’re not looking at it clinically, we’re not talking about diagnosis, but it does seem to share some behaviors that are similar to a lot of our other additive behaviors.

A lot of reports that are out there in the last week or two [regarding this study] draw this connection to compulsive gambling, which is a great idea, but some of the headlines are saying we tied it to that and we didn’t. None of the research is causal, although there is definitely potential for looking at the similarities in future research.

Once the data had come in and this study was finalized, for you personally, what was the most significant thing you found?

The biggest take-home message is that boys and girls are texting at similar rates, but girls appear to be texting more compulsively even though the frequency is similar. Then, we looked at the relation to academic functioning.

When you look at compulsive texting, if girls report that they’re high in compulsive texting, they’re [also] self-reporting lower academic functioning than those who report that they’re low in compulsive texting.

For the boys, we don’t see the difference between those who say that they’re higher or lower. Their academic functioning seems to be similar and there seems to be no significant difference there.

We’re not saying in any way that the girls’ performance is lower than the boys, in fact, the girls still report that their [overall] academic performance is higher than the boys, though we’d need to look at actual records to know if they were telling the truth.

Did you find any motivations behind this? Or was it simply the raw data?

Well, those were our results. Then we were given the task to explain why this may be, and this is where the potential for future studies comes into play.

We need to go and look at the content of the messages, because there is a good chance the girls may be texting about things they’re preoccupied with and things they are emotional about, whereas the boys may not be so connected to or worried about the content of their texts.

Some of the other things we want to look at more [include] the role of divided attention and multitasking, and if it’s something in the way that girls are compulsive texting that’s pulling their attention away from academics, and that’s really the part that’s spurring this difference. But we don’t know. These were just some of our presumptions.

Hopefully, it can have a little impact in this field of research on texting, and if it sparks any additional questions or somebody can base a study off what we found and look more causally at some of these things, then that would be wonderful.

Now that this study is out there and appears to be gaining attention, how does it feel to be in the spotlight?

It’s been an exciting week for sure. I’ve never had the experience of speaking to all these media outlets before, so that has been new to me. Some of the first people I heard from were from England. Both The Sun and The Daily Mail on the very first day.

In terms of stretch though, I’ve also seen things pop up in different languages, so I’m not sure where they’re based out of. I was also told yesterday by one of my colleagues here that there was something out of India. The Times of India, I believe it was called.

But it’s been exciting to see how far-reaching this has been, and that it’s impacting people worldwide – everybody can relate across cultures. One other emotion I could say that I’ve experienced is some [pause] concern that the media sometimes handles the statistics.

I’ve never seen it firsthand, only talked about in classes that I’m teaching. I constantly have my students go out and look at the way the media talks about statistics and we try to analyze it together and see, “Is that what this study really found?”

I’m just beginning to see that there are sometimes headlines out there that are not at all [based on] what I found. However, the attention the media is giving it, I think, has been very exciting. I’m just happy for the field, because with all this attention, hopefully it sparks other people to continue research.

Is there anything else you’d like to say?

I think the last thing I’d say is, first and foremost that this is a study designed to look at positive and negative aspects of texting, and the larger study looked at both. The article that was published highlights one worrisome area, and that is when you compulsively text and the correlation to academic functioning. [But] there is so much potential for good when it comes to texting as well, and we’re very aware of that. There also needs to be research in that area, such as how it connects people and nurtures relationships, and I look forward to seeing that as well.

Email The Communitarian at communitarian@mail.dccc.edu

Art Exhibition | A.F.A.
Foundations Exhibition

Location: Marple Campus
Building: Academic Bldg
Room Number: Art Gallery | Room 2305
Date: November 11, 2015
Time: 9:00 am - End Time: 05:00 pm
Event Category: Community and Arts
Division Host: Communications, Arts, and Humanities
Panel educates students on violent trends in America

By Alicia Stearn
Special to The Communitarian

The Business, Computing and Social Science division sponsored a "Violence in America" presentation for DCCC students at Marple campus Oct. 13.

Seven expert panelists discussed mass shootings, police violence and the Stand your Ground laws, before taking students' questions.

Matt O'Donnell, an ABC News anchor, started the presentation by asking the panelists questions, such as why mass shootings are happening and how can they be stopped.

"There's disenfranchised individuals that want to make a name for themselves," said Mike Cuff, a Supervisory Special Agent and graduate of the FBI Academy. "The number of school shootings is [only] a fraction of homicides. It's for media attention."

Delaware County District Attorney Jack Whelan said that mental health issues are the "common denominator" in all mass shootings, including school shootings.

Whelan explained that the Delaware County Council, a committee in charge of legislative and administrative decisions in the county, set up and authorized an alert system for Delaware County schools, K-12. If there is suspicious activity in the school, the alert system allows teachers or staff to press a button, putting the school on lockdown.

"We should start a point of prevention in our schools," said Richard P. Barrett, an assistant U.S. attorney, "to teach at an early age how to prevent hate and warn kids about this virus."

"It's such a shame when mass shootings happen at schools," said Darnée A. Shepheard, a marketing major who attended the presentation. "We want to feel safe and better, but they can't be stopped."

Comissioner Bail explained that there are counselors police officers can talk to after a traumatic event. He then described his own story of having another officer die in his arms in 1999.

Other panelists included Dr. Raymond Albert, a professor and director of the Law and Social Policy Program, and Dr. Clyde Ledbetter, Jr., a graduate student at the University of Oxford and a professor teaching human rights education at Cheney University.

In the beginning of the presentation, information pamphlets were handed out on the rights of American citizens which contained a "My Rights Card" that students can give to law enforcement officials if they are being detained.

"This pamphlet is great," Shepheard said. "There is so much useful information in here that one day could help someone at any moment."

Mary Catherine Roper, the deputy legal director at the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, explained the difference between the Stand your Ground law and the Castle Doctrine. The Castle Doctrine gives Americans the right to defend themselves in their own home or car, she explained.

"If you're in a legally justifiable place and you believe you are in danger, and you have a firearm, and are being attacked by someone with a firearm, you can use it," Whelan said. "But if you don't have [the firearm] legally, you can't even use it."

One student asked, "What is being done to protect our police officers? Not in just a physical sense but mentally."

Commissioner Bail explained that there are counselors police officers can talk to after a traumatic event. He then described his own story of having another officer die in his arms in 1999.

Community members hold a candlelight vigil during a memorial service called 'Prayers for Roseburg,' which is organized in response to the recent Umpqua Community College mass shootings, at Riverbend Park in Winston, Ore., on Saturday, Oct. 3, 2015. (Marcus Yam/Los Angeles Times/TNS)
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Hudock impresses at the EPAC Invitational

By Tom Igndro


Jake Hudock, of DCCC, shot a 75, which was third best out of all the golfers at the EPAC Invitational.

Hudock’s average of 76 strokes per match is tied for fourth best in the league. He is also one of two golfers in the league to shoot under 77 in every match this season.

Despite Hudock’s outing, none of his fellow Phantoms shot better than 90—resulting in DCCC placing last at the EPAC Invitational.

Luzerne County Community College placed first (326,) Harrisburg Area Community College placed second (328,) Bucks County Community College placed third (330,) Lehighton Carbon Community College placed fourth (331,) Northampton Community College placed fifth (332,) while the Phantoms finished sixth (360).

Eagles’ win was mediocrity at its best

By David Murphy

Philadelphia Daily News

(TNS)

THERE WERE moments when it seemed like the proper course of action would have been to disqualify everybody involved from postseason consideration.

The Eagles, the Giants, the referees — everybody except the 60,000-plus who paid to watch. They should get a medal, or a free fast-food sandwich.

There were moments when it seemed like maybe this is one of those years where there isn’t a team in the NFC East that is capable of doing anything except losing to whatever wild-card team finishes with the best record.

For four quarters, the Eagles and Giants treated a national television audience to all of the parts of football that national television audiences hate.

They combined for seven turnovers, 21 penalties, and enough WTF moments to render moot any discussion about big-play ramifications.

The big picture, it seemed, showed two teams with too many flaws to contend for a title.

The Eagles came away with the victory, but only because somebody had to, and the Giants politely declined.

Except... The funny thing about what we saw Monday night is that it looked a lot like what we’ve been seeing across the National Football League all season.

These are strange times on the gridiron, and while the Eagles have yet to look like a team that deserves Super Bowl consideration, the same is true of virtually every other team in the NFC.

The Packers and Seahawks both look like mortals as they have in years: Green Bay clearly misses Jordy Nelson and Seattle’s offensive line is a disaster.

The Falcons are 5-1, but did anybody come away from the season opener thinking that Atlanta was, definitively, the better team?

Then there are the Panthers, whom the Eagles will face in Charlotte on Sunday night. Sure, they went into Seattle and won a game, which is an impressive feat.

But their first four victories came against teams that entered Week 6 looking like contenders for the No. 1 overall pick (Bucs, Texans, Saints, Jaguars).

It is a strange place, this year’s NFC.

Not only do the bad teams seem particularly bad — is it possible to envision a scenario in which the 49ers, Saints, Bucs, Lions, Bears, or Redskins wind up in the postseason? — but the few teams whose records have separated themselves from the pack are all significantly flawed.

And that makes them just like the two teams we saw at Lincoln Financial Field Monday night.

There were times in the first half when it seemed inevitable that the Giants would settle down and seize control of the game the way they did on their opening drive, an eight-play, 80-yard march down the field on which the Eagles seemed incapable of guarding Odell Beckham Jr.

And give the Eagles credit, particularly veterans like Malcolm Jenkins, DeMeco Ryans, Nolan Carroll, and a defensive line that has dominated in the trenches the last two weeks. They created opportunities for themselves, and they took advantage of the ones the Giants gave them. That means something, particularly in a season like this.

Fact is, somebody has to go to the NFC playoffs. Six somebodies, actually. And somebody besides Green Bay has to win a couple of games.

At this point, the strongest case for the Eagles is that, for as flawed as they look, they look just like everybody else.

Just like a Cardinals team that lost to the Steelers’ combo of Michael Vick and Landry Jones.

Just like a Seahawks team that allowed a flawed Panthers team to spring their only viable receiver for a wide open game-winning touchdown.

Just like a Packers’ offense that has often cruised last without Nelson this season.

Sure, we can focus on all of the ways in which the Eagles have not looked like a prototypical playoff team, and that starts with the quarterback.

Sam Bradford and his receivers still do not seem to be on the same page. The quarterback certainly bears the ultimate responsibility for protecting the football, but at some point, it would be nice if one of his receivers stepped up and made a play on a ball that was not perfectly thrown.

Maybe it isn’t fair to expect Zach Ertz to come down with the ball that Landon Collins ultimately intercepted in the end zone in the third quarter, but it is not unreasonable to think that a tight end should be able to put up enough of a fight on a 50/50 ball that, at worst, it falls incomplete.

The injuries, the penalties, the run for zero or negative yards — it’s hard to know what to make of this Eagles’ offense sometimes.

That being said, when you look around the NFC, all you see is opportunity, perhaps more of it than has existed since Chip Kelly took over for Andy Reid.

There are two ways to win a Super Bowl: be a great team, or be the right team at the right time.

On a weekend where Colin Kaepernick again squared off with Joe Flacco, it’s worth considering that second route.

There’s also Monday night, and there is opportunity this season, and for all of the Eagles’ flaws, you can’t help but notice that the rest of the field is wide open.
GOP candidates weigh in on Confederate flag

By Tom Ignudo

Earlier in October, a McGraw-Hill history textbook described the Atlantic Slave trade as bringing millions of “workers” from Africa to the southern United States to work on agricultural plantations. McGraw-Hill later addressed the book’s content on its Facebook page and said it would make the necessary changes to clearly convey the history.

Anyway, it’s no secret one of the Confederacy’s inhumane “heritage” is slavery. In fact, in The Declaration of Causes Seceding States are statements from Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia explaining their secession from the Union, every state mentions slavery and its importance to its secession. Mississippi’s immediate cause states: “Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery – the greatest material interest of the world.” So I ask the supporters of the Confederate flag. Still proud of your “heritage?”

What’s worse, the Confederate battle flag draws parallels to the Nazi flag. Both share archaic ideologies, which promote a belief that some are superior over particular groups of people. Based on this premise, Confederates treated blacks horribly, while the Nazis did the same to Jews.

In Adolf Hitler’s chapter “Nation & Race” from his book “Mein Kampf,” he exemplifies the same kind of hatred towards a group as the Confederacy. Both were also very obsessive in their practice of human breeding. The Confederates, who comprised the planter class, inhumane forced slaves to procreate by establishing breeding farms on plantations throughout the south.

A report by the National Humanities Center, titled “On Slaveholders’ Sexual Abuse of Slaves,” highlights the gruesome atrocities committed by plantations owners. One narrative from the reports states: “If their master thought that a certain man and woman might have strong, healthy offspring, he forced them to have sexual relation, even though they were married to other slaves.”

The report also states how women, typically younger ones, were worth more than other slaves because they could bear more children. In addition, it says the women were treated like “cattle” and if they refused the orders of their master they were often executed.

In the same way, Nazis attempted to breed “The Master Race” at their facility Lebensborn, where paired men and women who were “racially pure” were bred to produce an “Aryan Nation,” according to the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise.

But at least Germany eventually acknowledged the hate sewn into the swastika and banned the flag under the Strafgesetzbuch section 86a. In the United States of America, ignorance flows through every river of this stolen land, especially in Mississippi.

Recently, voters decided to not change Mississippi’s state flag, which contains the rebel flag in the top left corner. Like Carson, Attorney Greg Stewart, who is the administrator of Beauvoir, the last home of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, said the flag should stay because “it’s just a piece of cloth that flies on a stick,” according to ABC News.

As we’ve recently seen in the McGraw-Hill textbooks, remarks like these downplay the history that should be told about the United States. So I ask this question of rebel flag supporters: if you tell African-Americans to “move on” from slavery, why do you get to continue waving the flag that promotes archaic and racist beliefs?

Contact Tom Ignudo at communitarian@mail.dccc.edu

The opinions expressed on the editorial and commentary pages do not necessarily reflect those of The Communitarian staff or College. We welcome your comments on any matter relating to Delaware County Community College, and responsible rebuttal is encouraged. Write to communitarian@mail.dccc.edu. Please write “Letter to the editor” in the subject box.
Am I the right size?

By Maryleigh Sharp

A report on body image prepared by a United Kingdom parliamentary subcommittee states, “70 percent of adult women and 49 percent of adult men have felt pressure from television and magazines to have a perfect body.” These statistics should not be a surprise when the media pressures us to be this “certain” image.

Nearly every magazine, Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest promise the results of a flat tummy or perfect skin. They are portraying something is wrong with the way we look and that we are supposed to have Taylor Swift’s legs, Kim Kardashian’s butt, and Jennifer Aniston’s arms.

Since the early 19th century, we have been trying to achieve a certain image of what society deems beautiful, yet it has become an uproar now more than ever.

Body-shaming, according to the Macmillan Dictionary, is the practice of criticizing people publicly for being too fat, or less frequently, too thin.

I engage in body shaming on a daily basis.

I feel pressured every time I look in the mirror to see if I am too curvy, ugly, or unfashionable because of the ideal or unrealistic images social media portrays.

I go to the gym and lift just to make sure this “curvy” look does not make me a statistic, but a resolution.

This is a problem I struggle with and others do too.

According to WebMD journalist Denise Mann, “The next time one of your friends asks if he or she looks like they put on some weight, you may want to consider being honest with them — even if the answer is yes.”

I understand that gaining and losing weight can have health risks, yet I don’t agree with Mann at all. You can still go out on a date or tell an adult. If someone starts to develop a disorder, get them help.

Sixth, distance yourself from the world, if necessary. I have locked myself in my room and turned off all electronics just to get some time to myself. If your friends keep making you feel bad about not joining in on the gossip, maybe you need to rethink your friends.

Finally, if you see someone developing a disorder, get them help or tell an adult. If someone starts to care a lot about his or her weight and you notice him or her not eating, call the Eating Disorder Hotline 1-855-385-3146. If someone is thinking about suicide or has depression, call 1-800-273-TALK.

Since following these steps, I have been getting better about body shaming myself or others. It’s not easy to stop, but by pulling back a little each day, you can achieve it.

After all, “You don’t encourage people to take care of their body by telling them to hate it,” said Laci Green, a partner with Planned Parenthood and MTV.

In light of an Oregon Community College shooting, what are your thoughts on gun control?

Jeremy Foglietta, 21, general studies

“What took place was very unfortunate, but I believe that it is our right to bear arms.”

Naphtali Jacobs, 18, journalism

“If there are going to be set laws put into place, people need to be okay with that. However, I do believe we need to be stricter on gun owners.”

Long Le, 17, ESL

“Where I come from [Vietnam], most people do not have guns. I believe that people should not have guns, only police officers.”

Neil Herrick, 23, communication arts

“I am not a fan of guns for sport or protection, but I can see why there should be standards for control. It’s a right to own a gun, but I don’t think the country can afford to always trust its citizens.”
Local News

By Shawna Daly

At the end of his week-long visit, Pope Francis left his mark on the city of Philadelphia.

At the intersection of 11th and Thompson, the Saint Malachy school will be adorned with triptych mural masterpiece, “The Sacred Now: Faith and Family in the 21st Century,” signed and blessed by the pope.

In the 1970’s, the Philadelphia art museum chose painting murals as the creative solution to dissolve vandalism and graffiti.

To expand their efforts, the Mural Arts Program was established to support and encourage young artists.

The Communications Network spoke to Jane Golden, the Executive Director of MAP. “We are a city that has embraced public art,” Golden said. “We are city of neighborhoods; scrappy and sophisticated, bold and visionary.”

MAP’s allegiance with World Meetings of Families united over 2700 Philadelphians, and the end result is a historical fixture superseding the previous Guinness Book record of 2,263 people involved in The Simpsons tribute at San Diego Comic-Con in July of last year.

Comprising 153 individual panels, “The Sacred Now” portrays the pope’s dream of finding greater freedom through cooperation.

Artistic team efforts like the construction of “The Sacred Now” is how Philadelphia earned the title, “City of Murals.”

There is no better time than now for a mural scavenger hunt: October is Mural Arts Month, which might be enough time to find roughly 3500 artworks scattered around the city.

MAP offers two hour tours via Segway for $85 per person.

So the changing air of fall whirling through Philly’s streets might be enough to make you grab your boots, scarves, and friends to turn a once familiar walk into an entirely new experience.

Contact Shawna Daly at communitarian@mail.dccc.edu

Philly, a city of murals

A mural located on West Chester Pike in Havertown welcomes hundreds of people to the township every day. Artist: Jared Bader.


“A Give Me Shelter” by David Guinn, located at 1236 Lombard St. Photo by Megan Milligan

Lotus Diamond by Shepard Fairey, located at 1228 Frankford Ave. in the Fishtown area of the city. Photo by Megan Milligan

Crystal Snowscape by David Guinn, located at 629 S. 10 St. Photo by Megan Milligan

“Love Letter” series along Market Street by artist Stephen J. Powers. The series consists of 50 rooftop murals from 45th to 63rd Streets. Photo by Megan Milligan

A mural located on West Chester Pike in Havertown welcomes hundreds of people to the township every day. Artist: Jared Bader.

“Love Letter” series along Market Street by artist Stephen J. Powers. The series consists of 50 rooftop murals from 45th to 63rd Streets. Photo by Megan Milligan

Mural outside of Pat’s Steaks, dedicated to music icons such as Frankie Avalon and Bobby Rydell. Photo by Megan Milligan

“Give Me Shelter” by David Guinn, located at 1236 Lombard St. Photo by Megan Milligan

Local farm flourishes, thanks to supporters

By Michael Blanche

Rushton Farm is one of many examples of Pennsylvania community supported agriculture, or CSA, which encourages relationships between farmers and local residents.

CSA members support farms through membership fees each year. Members take some risk with farmers in terms of cooperative weather, production, and possible crop failure.

Nestled inside Rushton Woods Preserve, the Rushton Farm CSA provides 150 varieties of fruits and vegetables, harvesting about 30,000 pounds of sustainably grown produce each year. Rushton donates around 10 percent of their annual yield to local food banks.

Rushton Farm is a branch of Willistown Conservation Trust, a group dedicated to preservation and appreciation of natural environments. As the trust’s center of education, Rushton Farm collaborates with 25 local schools. Fred de Long is director of the Community Farm Program and sowed Rushton Farm’s seeds seven years ago.

I was fortunate to accompany de Long while he harvested broccoli at the farm on a rainy Friday morning in October.

Q: Is there a daily routine for you and the other farmers here?

On a typical day in the fall, we’ll harvest in the morning and field work in the afternoon. We have a greenhouse that we will plant in to protect crops for the winter.

Q: How many varieties of broccoli are you growing?

So we have two varieties, Windsor and Acadia, and we will do two plantings. We are big on successional planting.

Q: What is successional planting?

It’s planting throughout the season, so we will have broccoli in the spring, and in the fall since it handles the cool temperatures better. We grow 15 varieties of tomato, the diversity of the land is similar to the diversity of our crops.

Q: How is Rushton Farm different from the norm?

A traditional farm system will cut down all the trees, clear all the fields, and remove all the wildflowers and just have an open plain. That’s why so many developments are built on farms because the farmer has created the perfect environment for building houses. When someone does that they have killed the diversity of the landscape, so you have no natural defenses for your crops. You don’t have the birds that feed off the insects; you don’t have the beneficial pollinators flying around.

Q: So the environment is one of your defenses?

Yes, and we actually use a mesh that covers the plants until they get larger, instead of spraying, and it works very effectively. We are looking into what we can do that is not chemical. We have really created a new image of what a natural landscape can look like, where you have the actual ecosystem but you have this smaller diversified agricultural system within. That’s really a new idea of agriculture, you can have food growing alongside a natural landscape without a detrimental impact on the ecosystem.

Q: Rushton Farm is reputable for honey. Can you tell me why bees are important to you?

We’ve had bees here since the beginning. I strongly believe that the idea of colony collapse is largely based on the fact that the majority of the bees in the United States are shipped by truck. The trucks will go to orchards where they spray chemicals, or plant other crops that have GMOs, and all these different interactions.

Eventually, the bees just disappear or die off. Every organic farm I have been on that maintains its own bee colonies and doesn’t spray anything close to them; I’ve never seen a colony collapse. So we started bees here to show that you could maintain bee colonies and produce a lot of honey, which is another health indicator. We get about 400 pounds of honey a year.

Q: What conditions affect honey production?

This year we are light because it was a cold spring, and they didn’t have a lot to feed on. We are above average in terms of not much loss, pretty much all our loss is due to cold in the winter. Another issue is mites, which is a recent development. People have introduced bees from other countries into the United States, and the other species have brought other susceptibilities. When the domesticated European honeybees crossed genetics with these new bees, they became more vulnerable to the mites.

Q: What is a big issue for the farm and other farms like this?

I think our biggest thing here is trying to be as environmentally conscious as possible—most of all, our water usage. Farms use so much water. We use this plastic ground cover, which is actually biodegradable cornstarch that holds water in the ground during a dry season like the one we are in. The water does not necessarily get through, and we still have to water the crops, but it stops water from evaporating.

Q: How does this feel, coming to the end of a harvest?

We couldn’t have known a week ago that weather conditions were going to be exactly like this, we just deal with it as we can. One morning we are going to wake up, there will be frost on the ground and the season will be over. We have had seasons where I am still picking tomatoes in November, or like this one where our last picking is before October.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add?

If you came out here in January in the snow, you wouldn’t know this was a farm. All this would be white except for the apple trees. It will be a clear landscape.

When I walk through in January and I look at how we are going to build out the land, it is creating something different every year. This year isn’t the best year, but every season is a different experience.

The Rushton Farm community supported agriculture provides 150 varieties of fruits and vegetables, harvesting about 30,000 pounds of sustainably grown produce each year.

Email The Communitarian at communitarian@mail.dccc.edu
‘Das auto’ scandal undermines consumers’ trust

But Winterkorn became CEO in 2007, and according to the ICCT, these devices have been engineered in Volkswagen vehicles since 2002. As the CEO, Winterkorn informs the Volkswagen CEO Martin Winterkorn denies knowledge of any company attempts to sabotage emission controls on Volkswagen vehicles.

Volkswagen CEO Martin Winterkorn denies knowledge of any company attempts to sabotage emission controls on Volkswagen vehicles.

Environmental abuse in the form of unwarranted emissions, like CO2 and NOx from Volkswagen vehicles, impacts climate change so dramatically that it resonates globally and unjustly affects non-emitting and non-industrialized countries, experts say.

In a TedTalk, Mary Robinson, the first female president of Ireland, insists experts say. “I know how big auto industries are,” he says. “They use a lifestyle image to scam or control consumers.”

Small believes engineers thrive on inspecting and rebuilding. “I’ve ripped my VW apart too many times, but she’s fast,” Small says. “I have to tinker with it and really make it my own.”

When buying the R32, Small didn’t invest in the supposed integrity of the Volkswagen Company and their environmental mission. Small lives an eco-friendly lifestyle, recycles, and spends time outdoors, but he admits, “I never bought the car for environmental reasons.”

Regardless, Small believes the general population purchases based on trends and ideals, and Volkswagen’s “defeat device” is a bold move, but most likely not uncommon. “I know how big auto industries are,” he says. “They use a lifestyle image to scam or control consumers.”

Small’s inclination was right. According to Tech Times website, Honda, Mercedes-Benz and Mitsubishi is a threat to economic growth of other countries.

In her TedTalk, Robinson references Anote Tong, president of Kiribati, and his address to the panel of climate change at the Human Rights Council. “I opened land in Fiji as an ‘insurance policy’ for his people’s impending migration. Philippine residents will eventually have to leave their homeland because of rising waters and/or the ocean’s malleability to climate change.”

For an “environmentally conscious” company, Volkswagen is a very diverse fleet. From the Beetle’s novel nostalgia to the untamable roar of the Lamborghini Aventador, the Volkswagen brand has lived up to its translation as the “people’s car” until their emissions scandal.

But Small said he is intrigued by the ingenuity of the “defeat device.” And despite the infamy that now plagues Volkswagen, Small isn’t as concerned with the “big business politics,” he says.

The Passat exceeded Nitrous Oxide standards from 15 to 35 times and the Jetta from 5 to 20 times, while the BMW X5 was within legal range. NOx is created when gas is burned at high temperatures and is in the family of poisonous gases.

Based on the ICCT’s results, project leader Francisco Posada said, “the technology needed to meet the U.S. motor vehicle air pollution emission standards for diesels is available.” But Volkswagen created a mechanism to alter NOx emissions.

Annually, cars are tested on a device similar to a treadmill, which stimulates the engine and wheels. Since the car runs in a fixed position on a rolling track, the steering wheel is still. Volkswagen factored the lack of steering wheel operation during emissions test and designed their program to run in testing conditions.

The EPA dubbed this program a “defeat device” that overrides a car’s true NOx output. For the augmented emissions systems, a light diesel vehicle’s output is 40 times greater than NOx standards allow to protect public health.

Winterkorn is the chairmen of the Group Board of Management and Sustainability Board, and on Sept. 28 he publicly acknowledged the company’s corruption. Many news sources, such as Times Free Press, have run the company’s Volkswagen news releases with headlines such as “Volkswagen CEO steps down, takes responsibility for scandal!”

Winterkorn apologized on behalf of the Volkswagen Company as if it were a person, or a CEO. However, Winterkorn says he is “not aware of any wrongdoing on my part.”

Volkswagen’s 2014 Climate Change report was graded an ‘A’ for their performance and disclosure documents. However, their 2015 report was submitted but neither published nor scored.

According to their 2014 sustainability report, Volkswagen made a commitment to UNGF in 2002 promising the promotion of human rights, labor standards, protection of the environment and combating corruption.

Foundation for Climate Injustice, emissions standards are so dramatically at place because of its effect on climate change. She highlights how these unnatural adjustments affect the agricultural calendars and occurrence of unusual natural disasters such as floods and draughts.

According to the Mary Robinson Sustainability Board about Volkswagen’s production and emissions data. These reports are then relayed to the CDP, EPA, and the United Nations Global Impact. According to the CDP, Volkswagen annually replies to their questionnaires that monitor past emissions statistics, their present stats, and Volkswagen’s prospects for lowering waste and NOx emissions in the future, among other emission related requirements. The CDP grades these reports and posts them to their public website.

The reason I bought the R32 was to sabotage emission controls on Volkswagen vehicles.

Winterkorn apologized on behalf of the company’s shortcomings. “I like spending his spare time fixing and fine tuning his cars. Small says he won’t buy another Volkswagen, “If I were to do it again, I’d buy a 911.” Small isn’t the only one with an altered outlook on the Volkswagen cars and company as a whole as a result of the recent scandal.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 11 million Volkswagen diesel vehicles contain software that turns off emission controls when driving normally and turns them on when undergoing standard test conditions in a controlled facility.

Volkswagen’s scandal erupted worldwide: the global company operates in 20 European countries and 11 countries in the Americas, Asia, and Africa. Volkswagen CEO, Martin Winterkorn, was confronted by the EPA after receiving interesting data from The International Council on Clean Transportation. According to the ICCT, the Center for Alternative Fuels, Engines, and Emissions at West Virginia University ran tests in which they implemented PEMS, a Portable Emissions Measurement System, in the Volkswagen Passat, Jetta, ad BMW X5.

The results were criminal. Robinson believes corruption is a social injustice, especially to third world countries that generate trivial amounts of emissions. Robinson believes that superseding emissions standards is a threat to economic growth of other countries.

In her TedTalk, Robinson references Anote Tong, president of Kiribati, and his address to the panel of climate change at the Human Rights Council. “I once told him it is slowly going under water, but I would never buy a Volkswagen again,” he says.

‘Das auto’ scandal undermines consumers’ trust
According to Mercy Corps, the free Syrian Army and other Syrian Civilians, took up arms to join the opposition. Division between ethnic and political groups created more complications in Syria. Now, ISIS has stirred more trouble in Syria, killing minority groups such as the Kurdish and Yazidi. U.N. reports.

According to the U.N., ISIS has killed 24,000 Syrians and has taken control of dozens of towns.

The United Nations Refugee Agency, Government of Turkey (UNHCR) states that only 2.1 million refugees have registered with UNHCR in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. Nearly 2 million Syrians registered in Turkey, and 26,700 in North Africa. According to UNHCR Australia, 440,000 refugees have dangerously crossed the Mediterranean to tiny islands in Greece and Italy. Three thousand men, women, and children have been drowned or lost by crossing the Mediterranean.

Syrian refugees have also fled to Hungary, Austria, and Germany. According to the European Commission, Germany, which has been a popular destination for Syrians, will accept 800,000 refugees. France also vowed to take in 24,000 refugees in the next two years.

But today, 7.6 million Syrians are still internally displaced, according to Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

More than 50 percent of children are affected by the brutal four-year-war, according to the United Nations Childrens’ Fund (UNICEF). Children have been put at risk by extreme violence, destroyed schools, crumbling infrastructure, and food shortages.

“Millions of children inside Syria and across the region are witnessing their past and their futures disappear amid the rubble and destruction of this prolonged conflict,” said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake. “We must rescue them from the brink, for their sake and for the sake of Syria in future generations.”

According to World Vision, Syrian refugees are at risk of becoming malnourished, abused, or exploited. Refugees are in dire need of food, clothing, health assistance, and basic hygiene products.

With so many refugees, The World Food Program recently cut a third of food assistance. Camps are also running out of space for refugees, according to UNHCR.

Alkurdi said he was tired of hearing calls, “Someone dying, someone’s home destroyed, someone starving.”

Alkurdi said he was motivated to take action about the crisis. He decided to be a member of various organizations that send food and clothing to refugees.

“I’m a part of many organizations, including the Syrian American Council and Sawiasa,” Alkurdi said.

Alkurdi added he was mostly active in the Narenj Tree Foundation where his uncle Nizar Alkurdi is the founder and president.

“We’ve sent 12 containers of goods to Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan,” Alkurdi said. “We don’t send any to Syria because you can’t guarantee what’s going to happen to the container.”

Luis Lopez, 19, an engineering major at DCCC, helps Alkurdi collect food and clothing.

“We collect canned goods, and dry beans,” Lopez said. “We also personally go to people’s homes to collect goods.”

Alkurdi said that his uncle opened a warehouse in Norristown where he stores donated goods.

“We collect donations every Saturday from 10-2,” Alkurdi said. “Once containers are full, we will send them immediately. I also went to an event in New York City, called NYC Solidarity with Syrian Refugees, on September 12, to get our government to bring in refugees.”

Alkurdi said he urges everyone to sign the petition to resettle 65,000 Syrian refugees in the United States. The petition requires 100,000 signatures by 2016 and 101,016 have already signed the petition.

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Germany considers charges against Facebook for hate speech

By Matthew Schofield
McClatchy Washington Bureau
(TNS)

BERLIN: The anti-refugee post on Facebook by a 29-year-old Berlin woman last spring seemed little different from many of the hate-filled rants that pop up on social media sites.

"Let's get rid of the filth," she wrote. Then, referring to a series of arson fires that have destroyed refugee housing under construction across Germany, she continued: "Many more refugee centers will burn, hopefully with the doors boarded up."

But there was a difference between her words and many others that appear online: She was a German, posting in Germany. And while social media globally might assume a more American character of erring on the side of free speech over censorship, Germany does not share this view when it comes to hate speech.

The woman was charged with violating Germany's hate speech law, convicted and fined 4,800 euro (about $5,500) for posting:

"I'm in favor of reopening the gas chambers"... 

...We don't want Islam and their supporters. "Muslims are worse than cockroaches. We don't want Islam in Germany or Austria," said another. Another poster, identified as Silvio Bettin, asked, "Aren't we all a little Nazi?"

Now, with the swelling number of refugees prompting still more such posts, German prosecutors are considering going after Facebook itself for acting as a home for posts that advocate racial hatred and violate laws against neo-Nazi speech.

German prosecutors are investigating possible charges against three Facebook managers, prompted by a complaint that they failed to act against racist comments about Europe's refugee crisis.

The complaint came from German attorney Chan-jo Jun, of Wuerzburg. In it, he claimed to have flagged more than 60 Facebook entries that would violate German hate speech laws. In an interview in Die Welt newspaper, he noted that the posts he flagged some even featuring Nazi insignia and people posing while giving a Nazi salute are strictly forbidden by German law.

But, he said, Facebook responded to his complaints by saying the content didn't violate Facebook's community standards, and the posts were not removed. He made copies of the posts and sent them to Facebook's German managers by registered mail.

"We need to put an end to the arrogance with which some companies try to translate their system of values to Europe," he said.

In the complaint be filed, he noted, "Facebook Germany encourages the dissemination of offensive, punishable content through its actions in Germany." Germans have complained for years about what they see as warped morality on Facebook and other U.S.-based social media sites, where nudity is strictly controlled but posters are allowed to spout hate-filled screeds that Germany outlawed after the Nazi reign of Adolf Hitler.

German Justice Minister Heiko Maas recently announced that Germany would establish "a task force to combat hate speech on social media platforms," notably Facebook, and a number of social networks, including Facebook, are to take part.

"Racist, inciting statements are inconsistent with our system of values and cannot be justified under any imaginable aspect," he said. "One thing is clear: If Facebook gets complaints about racist and xenophobic messages that violate criminal laws, then the company must react and delete such posts quickly and reliably."

There must be as little space in social media for racism and xenophobia as there is on the street, he said. "Facebook has agreed to take part in and partially fund the task force, but for many it's showing too little concern about a matter Germans take seriously," he said.

"It is a constant challenge to balance the interests of this diverse community and we are constantly working to adjust our policies and procedures to be even more effective and sensitive to the concerns of local communities," he said.

Konstantin von Notz, a member of the Green party who is considered the group's top expert on the Internet, questioned whether Facebook is following its own anti-hate speech guidelines. He noted that members of his party have been attacked on Facebook and have filed criminal charges.

"Some of what is being posted not only goes against German law but also against Facebook's own terms of business," he said.

This week, the German tabloid Bild ran a two-page spread of nothing but hateful Facebook comments, complete with user names and profile photos. The comments were directed at the large number of refugees seeking asylum in Germany, and those who support them.

"Green Fascist pig, hang them all," said one post directed at Claudia Roth, a pro-refugee Green politician. Another was more general: "A bullet for every Muslim and their supporters." Muslims are worse than cockroaches. We don't want Islam in Germany and Austria," read another.

Another poster, identified as Silvio Bettin, asked, "Aren't we all a little Nazi?"

Facebook recently announced measures to control hate speech. However, in the past it has also noted that the site "allows discussions on the network to be conducted using robust diction." Overall, German officials claim they have received word from Facebook that it prefers a policy of "discuss, not delete," in many cases.

German news stories have quoted German Facebook policy manager Eva-Maria Kirschsieper as defending her company's policies by noting that Facebook reaches a billion users far beyond Germany's borders.

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Iranian-trained Shiite fighters rally to Syria offensive

By Mitchell Prothero
McClatchy Washington Bureau (TNS)
IRIBL, Lebanon’s Hezbollah militia, in an unprecedented offensive launched by Russian air power embarks on a four-pronged offensive to retake territory lost to rebels over the past four years.

Hundreds of thousands of Iranian-trained and -equipped Shiite fighters have joined the battle, providing the government with badly needed manpower, according to a wide range of sources, including Lebanese officials, members of the Lebanese Hezbollah militia, Iraqi militia officials and reports on social media sites.

"The Syrian army was about to collapse because none of the young people wanted to do their military service and went to Europe," said one Lebanese intelligence official speaking from Beirut. "Because of his close personal and professional ties to the Syrian government, he asked that his name not be used."

"Putin brought weapons, planes and artillery, but this is never enough, you need men," he added. "And the Iranians produced them by bringing in more from the Resistance, Iran and even other places." The Resistance is how many pro-Hezbollah Lebanese refer to the organization.

The early days of the Russian bombing, which began Sept. 30, primarily targeted front-line areas critical to the government in Hama, Homs and Idlib provinces in Syria’s west, far from areas that the Islamic State controls.

Those airstrikes brought condemnations from U.S. officials, who said they were clearly intended to bolster Syrian President Bashar Assad in his fight with rebels who include U.S.-supported groups and were not aligned at the Islamic State.

Then, this past weekend, thousands of pro-government fighters backed by Russian artillery, jets and helicopters launched an assault aimed at retaking Aleppo, which has been split in the years-long stalemate between the government and rebel groups.

The attacks resulted in tens of thousands of civilians fleeing, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a flow that is likely to exacerbate the refugee crisis that already has sent millions fleeing to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

Dr. Zaidoun al-Zoubi, head of the Union of Syrian Medical Relief Organizations, told the BBC that several villages he had visited were empty, and he saw thousands of people on the move with no docket or medical support.

The recent influx of foreign fighters mostly from Hezbollah in Lebanon and Shiite Muslim communities in Iraq appears to exceed anything seen so far in the civil war and comes at a time that the Syrian government has found itself short of the manpower needed to reconquer vast areas of its country.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least 52,000 Syrian soldiers have died in the civil war as of Oct. 15, more than 40 percent of a force that was estimated at 125,000 before the civil war. Another 35,000 pro-government militiamen have been killed. Fewer rebels have died, the observatory estimated, with about 81,000, including foreign fighters, killed in their efforts to topple Assad.

One U.S. intelligence official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss classified intelligence, said the Iraqi Shiite militias, which have been a bulwark of that country’s effort to contain the Islamic State, had been diverted to Syria under the leadership of Iranian advisers. As a result, the offensive to retake the western Iraqi province of Anbar, which is almost completely controlled by the Islamic State, has stalled.

Philip Smyth, a researcher of Shiite paramilitary groups for the University of Maryland, warned that Moscow is gambling by relying in part on Iraqi Shiite militias as part of the ground force, because the Iraqi militias have a poor combat record, and it remains to be seen whether they can shift the ground war in Syria in favor of the Assad government.

“That’s the $64,000 question,” said Smyth.

Early reports provide no clear answer. Anti-government activists have reported that the initial Syrian government push met fierce resistance from rebels with U.S.-made anti-tank missiles that destroyed as many as 40 government tanks.

But in recent days, government forces have captured a half-dozen villages, and on Tuesday, Assad traveled to Russia, his first trip outside Syria since the civil war began.

“If they are able to concentrate in one area and in addition put together a good profile for air support from the Russians (and) on-the-ground air control from the Russians, then that would set off warning bells, because it would demonstrate unity of arms. And unity of arms we haven’t seen in the Middle East,” said Smyth.

Still, Smyth recalled that the Iraqi militias have failed to turn the tide of battle in Syria previously, including a counteroffensive in southern Syria that began last fall. Officers from Iran and Hezbollah oversaw the operation, which Smyth said was a total disaster.

They had their shirts handed to them," he said.

Hezbollah, which has a much more successful record fighting in Syria and against the Israelis, has manpower limitations, as the group has been fighting in the Syrian situation to expand far beyond its initial formation as a small but highly disciplined force focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Shiite community in Lebanon has grown increasingly uneasy at the number of casualties the group has taken in Syria.

The constant flow of men and weapons from Lebanon into Syria has made eastern Lebanon’s main commercial arteries targets. On Oct. 6, for example, a remotely detonated roadside bomb struck a van on a narrow asphalt road that cuts through fruit orchards and sprawling farms, parallel to the main highway in Chaura, a major town and crossroads in the Bekaa Valley that teems with Syrian refugees and Lebanese merchants.

The occupants of the van apparently suffered only minor injuries. “They were lucky the bomb was small,” said a Lebanese construction worker who was on a nearby building site at the time of the blast.

An officer from Lebanon’s internal security forces, which has a recent enrollment of hundreds of men from the site, said the van belonged to Hezbollah. He noted that SUVs belonging to the militia traverse the same route several times every day.
By Riley Kirkpatrick
Oyster.com

The 6 most haunted towns in the U.S. for a spooky visit this Halloween

By Michael Phillips
Chic ago Tribune

The Quay Brothers' review: Eerie dreamscapes from master animators

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The Quay Brothers' review: Eerie dreamscapes from master animators
The first 'Star Wars' of the social media age and how a trailer sent fan frenzy into hyperspace

By Josh Rottenberg Los Angeles Times

In one sense, it was just an ordinary trailer, a 2-1/2-minute sneak peek at a movie that won’t hit theaters for two months.

It wasn’t even the film’s first trailer -- it was the third. But when it comes to the “Star Wars” franchise, nothing has ever been ordinary.

When the Walt Disney Co. and Lucasfilm unveiled the first teaser for “Star Wars: The Force Awakens” during halftime of the New York Giants-Philadelphia Eagles football game Monday evening, it set off a disturbance in the Force unlike anything Hollywood has seen in years.

The ensuing clamor among fans wanting to share in the moment and the frenzy of early ticket sales that crashed theater chains’ servers was a testament not just to audiences’ abiding love for the space-opera series but also to a carefully orchestrated marketing campaign that, with the film’s Dec. 18 release date drawing ever nearer, has made the jump to hyperspace, leveraging Disney’s entire arsenal of media assets.

Big-budget spectacles are the film industry’s bread and butter, of course, with a new one coming down the pike nearly every weekend.

But “Star Wars” has long been in a category by itself. What was once an out-of-left-field sci-fi film that drew just a smattering of curious comic-book enthusiasts at the 1976 Comic-Con convention in San Diego has grown over the past four decades into something closer to a national pastime and, for some, almost a quasi-religion.

“The Force Awakens” -- which arrives 10 years after the last installment in the series -- is the first “Star Wars” film of the social media age, exponentially amplifying and quickening word-of-mouth reactions that, in the franchise’s early days, would unfold over days and weeks.

In the first hour after the “Force Awakens” teaser aired, 1.3 million people interacted with it on Facebook, while “Star Wars”-related tweets came at the furious pace of 17,000 per minute, as fans dissected every frame for clues about the film’s plot.

Meanwhile, viewership for ESPN’s “Monday Night Football” spiked heading into halftime, indicating many viewers had tuned in specifically to see the new clip.

The trailer’s release was coordinated with the launch of advance ticket sales, and eager fans by the thousands quickly leaped at the chance to lock in seats for the film’s first showings.

Though such early ticket sales for highly anticipated movies are now standard with major franchises like “The Avengers” and “The Hunger Games,” the volume of orders proved overwhelming to an unprecedented degree, causing several sites -- including Fandango, the leading online ticket purveyor -- to go down.

Despite the technical difficulties, AMC Theatres, the second-largest theater chain in the country, sold out more than 1,000 shows nationwide in less than 12 hours.

That the film will reap massive box office returns is undeniable -- the only question is how massive.

“When it finishes its run it’s going to be one of the biggest movies, if not the biggest, ever to come out of theaters,” said Ken Thewes, chief marketing officer for Regal Entertainment Group, which operates the nation’s largest theater chain.

Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for the box office tracking firm Rentrak, agrees the film could topple records.

“There’s never been a $100-million debut in December,” he said, “but if you think about it, the two top movies of all time were not summer movies, they were December releases: ‘Avatar’ and ‘Titanic.’”

One might argue that “Star Wars” essentially markets itself, making it possibly the most foolproof film franchise in history.

“As long as they stick to the accents of the familiar, you really can’t lose,” said writer-director Kyle Newman, who made a 2009 comedy about rabid “Star Wars” fans called “Fanboys.” “You can’t really mess it up even if you tried. Even if someone says the movie is bad, you’re still going to see it for yourself -- and you’ll see it on a big screen and you’ll probably see it again.”

Indeed, despite largely negative reviews, the three “Star Wars” prequels released between 1999 and 2005 earned roughly $2.5 billion collectively at the worldwide box office.

Still, Disney isn’t taking any chances with what has quickly become one of its most valuable properties, one that the company is counting on to reap billions of dollars in revenues across all of its divisions, from merchandising to theme parks and beyond.

The marketing campaign behind the new “Star Wars” film has intensified in recent months but it stretches back three years to October 2012, when Disney acquired Lucasfilm from “Star Wars” creator George Lucas in a $4-billion deal.

Since then, the goal has been to keep steadily building buzz for the film without revealing too much too early or peaking too soon.

Executives at Disney and Lucasfilm declined to discuss their marketing strategy, but Disney Chairman and Chief Executive Robert Iger outlined the challenge in a conference call to discuss quarterly earnings in May.

“We want to be careful that the demand does not create too much in the marketplace too soon,” Iger explained, noting that there is an entire generation of young kids who have never seen a “Star Wars” movie in theaters and certain foreign markets, such as China, where the franchise is less well known.

“Everything we have done to date has been extremely deliberate, and we have a carefully constructed plan going forward in terms of what we roll out in the marketplace in terms of product and marketing.”

In November, Disney released the first short teaser for “The Force Awakens,” a clip that revealed virtually nothing about the story but was clearly engineered to reassure fans that the franchise was in the hands of people who fully respected its legacy.

“They had the music and the iconic ships -- the X-Wing, the Millennium Falcon, the TIE Fighter -- and it started to reinvigorate people. ‘All right, we’re going back to here,’” Newman said. “They were connecting the tissue.”

In April, an estimated 60,000 die-hard “Star Wars” aficionados descended on the Anaheim Convention Center for the Star Wars Celebration fan gathering, many dressed as their favorite characters.

At the convention, “Force Awakens” director J.J. Abrams and Lucasfilm President Kathleen Kennedy unveiled a second, longer trailer for the film that was greeted with rapturous applause.

In July, Abrams and Kennedy were on hand at San Diego Comic-Con, along with many of the franchise’s new and old cast members, for a “Force Awakens” panel, after which fans were led on masse from the convention hall to a free concert of John Williams’ “Star Wars” music under the stars.

Needless to say, this highly coordinated multimedia campaign is a galaxy far, far away from the relatively scrappy marketing push that initially accompanied the original “Star Wars” film.

The first unveiling of Lucas’ film at the 1976 Comic-Con consisted mainly of a presentation of some pieces of original art and a promotional poster that was handed out to fans who didn’t necessarily know quite what to make of it.

“The poster was for sale for 41 -- they probably had 1,000 printed but word was maybe 500 or 600 got thrown in the trash,” said Cal Burke of McFly’s Comics, who was in attendance. “Now they go for thousands.”

Still, one thing remains the same as in the early days of the “Star Wars” franchise. Even amid the ever-growing blizzard of trailers, toys and video games, the team behind “The Force Awakens” is hoping to preserve the thrill of discovery that has always been a hallmark of “Star Wars” films, an experience that has become increasingly difficult to come by in today’s information-saturated digital world.

“It’s rare that we get these moments,” Gwendoline Christie, who plays one of the new film’s villains, a Stormtrooper leader named Captain Phasma, told The Times recently. “Now in our society we see everything all the time. J.J. and Kathleen are saying, ‘Let us surprise you. Let us be saying, ‘Let us surprise you. Let us be something blissfully childlike about it.’”

*Times staff writers Meredith Weimer, Richard Verrier and Meg James contributed to this report.*
Delaware County Community College

2015-16 Men's Basketball Schedule
Head Coach: Zain Shaw

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2015-16 Women's Basketball Schedule
Head Coach: Christina Johnson

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