

Pitt, IUP initiatives aim to foster civil discourse

Universities set out to build campus culture where differing opinions can be heard, debated

by **KELLEN STEPLER**

For the most part, students weren’t afraid to have difficult conversations on controversial topics when Gwen Torges started teaching at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 1997. That’s no longer the case.

“There has always been, and will always be, people who say ‘that’s not me,’ but there were always students who thought a good-natured debate was invigorating and they wanted to hear what other people say,” said Torges, a political science professor at IUP. Now, “they don’t want to.



“At the end of the day, we want to have students who say, ‘It’s OK. You have a different opinion than I do. Let’s talk about it.’”

GWEN TORGES
POLITICAL SCIENCE PROFESSOR AT IUP

And because they don’t want to, they become unable to,” Torges said. “They think disagreement, itself, is a bad thing.”

A \$2.29 million federal grant awarded to IUP is hoping to change that.

IUP will use the funding from the U.S. Department of Education to create a Center for Dialogue and Civic Life.

It will be a physical space on campus staffed by a director and students, Torges said.

“The bold idea is it will change the campus culture toward having difficult conversations and difficult dialogue,” Torges said.

In addition, the University of Pittsburgh was awarded about \$2.7 million to develop a university and regionwide model for civil discourse and civic leadership.

Initiatives at Pitt include bringing in visiting faculty to tackle issues, building out a social media platform to incentivize students to navigate differences and starting a civic discourse network with student and faculty events focused on universities in the region, said Pitt professor Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili.

Across the board in higher education, civil discourse has

DISCOURSE · A2

DIFFERENT BREED



Mindy Maryai of Whiskey Acres Animal Rescue and Sanctuary in Homer City socializes with a recently rescued dog. (Photos: Louis B. Ruediger | TribLive)

No-kill status, affordability helping Homer City shelter gain momentum with municipal animal control contracts

by **HALEY DAUGHERTY**

After decades of being the only animal control business in much of the Alle-Kiski Valley and Westmoreland County, Hoffman Kennels is beginning to see competition from an upstart service in Indiana County.

After announcing its first municipal animal control contract in December, no-kill shelter Whiskey Acres Animal Rescue and Sanctuary in Young Township now boasts four municipal contracts.

“I’m still getting calls almost every day from different municipalities,” said Mindy Maryai, owner and founder of Whiskey Acres. “We’re just trying to do what we can for this first year. It’s great, so exciting — very overwhelming.”

The most recent additions were Allegheny Township and West Leechburg. Each community approved one-year contracts Jan. 5. They join Leechburg and Latrobe, which signed contracts with Whiskey Acres late last year.

WHISKEY ACRES · A7



Emily Todd of Whiskey Acres visits with a rescued dog. Whiskey Acres has contracts with four municipalities: Allegheny Township, West Leechburg, Leechburg and Latrobe.

Trump hits 8 European nations with 10% tariffs

Until deal is made to purchase Greenland, levy on goods to begin Feb. 1, rise to 25% in June

BLOOMBERG NEWS

President Donald Trump announced a 10% tariff on goods from European countries rallying to Denmark’s side in his pursuit of Greenland, a dramatic escalation in the standoff that will further strain U.S. ties with many of its closest allies.

Trump threatened in a social media post to impose the tariff Feb. 1 and raise the levy to 25% in June unless and until “a Deal is reached for the Complete and Total purchase of Greenland.”

The tariffs will apply to Denmark, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and Finland, he said.

The explosive move targets several members of the NATO alliance, which includes Denmark. Those countries now face the prospect of punitive tariffs from an ally seeking to pry loose territory within the bloc.

The European Union said Saturday it stands behind Denmark and Greenland and will coordinate a joint response to Trump’s announcement.

“Tariffs would undermine transatlantic relations and risk a dangerous downward spiral,” EU chiefs Ursula von der Leyen and Antonio Costa said in a joint statement. “Europe will remain united, coordinated and committed to upholding its sovereignty.”

French President Emmanuel Macron dismissed Trump’s threats as “unacceptable,” and Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said his country wouldn’t be “blackmailed.”

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer quickly echoed their remarks, calling the use of

“Europe now has no choice but to confront this hostile act with strength and without hesitation, including by resorting to its anti-coercion instruments.”

SIMONE TAGLIAPIETRA
SENIOR RESEARCHER, BRUEGEL THINK TANK IN BRUSSELS

GREENLAND · A2

Live Casino Pittsburgh puts proms on table: Derry Area, Mt. Pleasant all in

Venue says it has security, dance floor, arcade to provide students with safe, fun evening

by **QUINCEY REESE**

Live Casino Pittsburgh is making its debut in offering to hold proms as Derry Area and Mt. Pleasant Area high schools plan to host their spring dances at the Hempfield venue.

Both proms, scheduled on different dates, will be held in the casino’s Venue Live event space on the second floor. The Sports & Social restaurant and PBR Pittsburgh night club, also on the second floor,

will be closed during the dances, according to administrators.

Students from both districts will be taken to and from the casino via bus, said Derry Secondary Head Principal Lisa Dubich and Mt. Pleasant High School Principal Robert Gumbita.

They will enter the event space from the casino’s parking garage — which has direct access to Venue Live — or by walking up the set of

stairs located just before the gambling floor at the building’s front entrance, said Sean Sullivan, the casino’s executive vice president and general manager.

The casino has hundreds of security cameras and an in-house security staff, Sullivan said.

“We’re more secure, I guarantee you, than any other place can be,” he said.

PROMS · A2



The proms will be held in the casino’s Venue Live event space, which opened in 2022. Students will then have access to PBR Pittsburgh’s dance floor and play Sports & Social’s arcade games. (TribLive)