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SMC offers students a myriad of support through annual Wellness Fair

By Vera Kochan



Bart the Horse provides Pet Therapy to SMC students. Photo Vera Kochan

Saint Mary's College began its 2023-24 school year with its annual Wellness Fair, which is held every September. The fair's purpose is to provide vocational, spiritual, financial, environmental, physical, social, mental, and emotional support for not only freshman but for anyone needing a "well-being" void filled in their lives.

Held Sept. 20 at Dante Hall's grassy quad, with the scent of free barbecue wafting in the air, students in between classes came out to enjoy the moment and receive information at several booths touting a variety of services to meet anyone's needs.

Megan Gallagher, SMC Director of Campus Assault Response and Education (CARE) Center, and Interim Administrative Director of Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) and Wellness, explained that the Wellness Fair is designed to help the student community become oriented to campus life. After giving them a few

weeks to settle into a new scholastic environment, some students may discover that certain aspects of college life are more difficult than expected, she said. It is with that expectation that SMC has chosen to provide answers in order to create a holistic experience and make sure that the students are taken care of.

One surprising aspect this year was seeing a horse named Bart surrounded by students who were gently stroking his coat. It was hard to determine who enjoyed the experience more, Bart or the students. This wellness exercise is classified as "pet therapy," and Gallagher explained that in the past, puppies as well as goats (for yoga) have been a success at bringing smiles to faces.

Other booths included the PAW Club (Peer Advocates in Wellness) which hosts on-campus events, the University Credit Union which offers financial services, and County Veterans Service Office which provides representation to the veteran community with regard to benefits. The Center for Women & Gender Equity provides advocacy needs, Student Disability Services works with students to identify barriers and develop effective plans for support, CAPS offers counseling and psychological services through 10 sessions that are included with tuition, both The Gael Pantry and CalFresh help students stretch their food budget, the Mission and Ministry Center provides pastoral support and counseling, and SMC's library displayed examples of wellness-related materials available to check out.

Many booths were manned by students such as the Office of Community Life which focused on the effects of alcohol abuse, Campus Recreation which highlighted recreation center events and retreats, Club Sports that help student athletes start new friendships with their new teammates, and both CARE and SCAAR (Student Coalition Against Abuse and Rape) booth offered information about confidential support provided for assault victims.

And, since wellness comes in many forms, there were also tables set up for students to design their own tote bags, create miniature bottles containing dried flowers in oil (the 2023 version of a lava lamp), and use boxes of crayons to fill fun pages of coloring book-style pictures that helped tap the Leonardo da Vinci hiding in everyone.

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