

Harley Nefe

Feature 2

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The Disney film “Mulan” was screened through a projector in Room 144 of Belk Library. There were around 25 students sitting in the audience, some with fresh popcorn, candy and other snacks in their hands. Themes of cultural standards, strength and perseverance were delivered through the showing. Inspired by the film, the group of students met again, and while listening and singing along with a Disney music playlist, they wrote letters of appreciation that were delivered to the U.S. Military.

This is one of the events that the App State club Disneyneers planned during the fall semester 2018.

Disneyneers is a service organization that participates in various fundraisers throughout the year, while also incorporating Disney films into the events.

“I envisioned it as a place where people who like me love Disney and love talking about movies with other people and who also want to do good for the community, could get together and have fun and find friends,” Disneyneers Co-President Stephanie Dawson said.

Dawson, with the help of friends, started having ideas that later became the underlying concept of Disneyneers during the fall semester of her first year at App State in 2015.

“We took all of these Disney movies, and we wrote down a cause that could be associated with them,” Dawson said. “So, we had like ‘Lilo & Stitch’ with anti-bullying.”

After brainstorming ways Disney films connected to service-learning projects, Dawson and her friends began planning how the club would operate. They took their work and

application to Club Council, which is the advisory board for clubs and organizations of App State.

Disneyneers grew enough interest by March 2016 to become an official club. At the first interest meeting, around 100 individuals attended.

“That was wild to me,” Dawson said. “I never expected it to be that big.”

The membership requirements of the club include paying dues, which are \$10 a semester or \$15 for the entire year, participating in at least one fundraiser each semester and attending meetings.

“You can come and go as you please,” Dawson said. “We are always here and are always doing events.”

As of May, Disneyneers has 189 members who are signed up, and the numbers fluctuate slightly. Of those members, Dawson said roughly 50 students are active and attend meetings and events regularly.

Other examples of community service events Disneyneers hosted in the past include fundraising for various organizations, collecting a range of products to be donated and focusing on helping to keep the environment clean.

For example, after viewing the Disney film “Frozen,” the club held coat drives. Disneyneers also conducted book drives after watching the Disney movie “Beauty and the Beast.” Additionally, Disneyneers’ members have watched “Pocahontas” and picked up litter on local hiking trails. In previous years, members have also filled bags of candy and delivered them to children in hospitals and created boxes of toys and sanitary products for kids in foster care during the holidays.

In connection to the Disney film “Aladdin” and the issue of food insecurity in the community, Disneyneers conducted a food drive donation table outside of Ingles on Feb. 22 from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. Members collected about 150 cans of food and \$65 that they donated to the Hunger and Health Coalition.

“I love doing food drives,” Dawson said. “Those are always my favorite because it’s very easy to donate to food drives. Cans are cheap, and people are always like, ‘Oh yeah, I’ll give you \$2.’ Two dollars can give you about two cans. I always like seeing the huge impact you can make with just a few people.”

In addition to being a service organization club, Disneyneers is also categorized as a recreational, leisure and entertainment club.

Members also have the opportunity to participate in trips to pumpkin patches in the fall, visit Grandfather Mountain in the spring, watch newly released Disney films in theaters and attend group potlucks.

Disneyneers Co-President Haley Phillips said the trip to Grandfather Mountain was the most memorable event for her, especially the first time she joined the trip.

“We went on what we thought would be a short hike, and later realized it was like 3 miles,” Phillips said.

During group trips, members can get to know each other better, Phillips said. Traveling to Grandfather Mountain has been a yearly tradition for Disneyneers since 2016.

As a leisure activity for the spring semester, the club leaders invited members to lunch and to watch Tim Burton’s “Dumbo” together in theaters March 31.

Disneyneers service and philanthropy chair Megan Barlow said she was not prepared for any of the emotional scenes in the movie.

Junior Sharon Slakter has been involved with Disneyneers for almost three years, after seeing a contact table for the group during Club Expo, which is an event students can attend to learn about group involvement opportunities.

“I love Disney, and it was fitting because the club inspires members to do great things,” Slakter said. “Through Disneyneers, I have fostered a love for people and have been more passionate. Being around other like-minded individuals has further inspired me to take messages we hear in the films and apply them to the real world.”

This is Disneyneers co-president and founder Dawson’s final semester guiding the club, as she graduates in May.

“I gained a lot of friends from this experience, as well as leadership skills,” Dawson said. “It has been interesting having people depend on you, but it has been a good experience to feel important and to know that what you say and do really matters. If you have a chance to start or found something, I definitely think you should because it is a really rewarding experience.”

Students interested in joining Disneyneers can attend club meetings on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. in Room 242 of Plemmons Student Union.

“I’m trusting that it will live on, and that whatever it’s meant to do, will be,” Dawson said. “It has been fun while I have been in college, and you probably know me as ‘the Disney girl,’ and I wouldn’t have it any other way. I think we have made an impact.”