

FIRE RECOVERY UNDERWAY AT NIELSEN

AUDREY DOTY '29

On Thursday, July 23, at 11 p.m., Houghton University (HU) President Wayne D. Lewis Jr. received a call from Dr. Bill Burrichter, the Vice President of Student Life, alerting him of a fire in the Nielsen Athletic Center. Upon Lewis' arrival, he found the parking lot "filled with tanker trucks and lit by flashing lights" from the Houghton volunteer fire department. The fire originated in the women's volleyball team locker room; however, smoke caused more damage than the fire to other spots in the building, including the classrooms, pool, rock climbing wall and indoor track.

"Security Officer Mark Dashnau first discovered the fire while conducting his normal rounds," according to Director of HU Safety and Security (S&S) Brian O'Gorman. He explained



The front entrance of the Nielsen Center.

that Dashnau located the fire before the alarm system detected it, and commended his vigilance and diligent work ethic. Luckily, no one was hurt. Paul Cronk, both S&S supervisor and the Houghton volunteer fire chief, told O'Gorman that "the fire was extinguished shortly after the fire department arrived on the scene."

O'Gorman says that the cause of the fire is still under investigation, and he would rather not speculate until they have the full report. In order to prevent a fire of this scale from happening again, O'Gorman affirmed that once the full report is released, they "will review the findings carefully and develop any ap-

propriate prevention measures moving forward." O'Gorman also made sure to thank Dashnau and those who helped, including Paul Cronk, facilities manager Chad Plymale and his team, "for the professionalism, teamwork and rapid response demonstrated by everyone involved."

However, the building

sustained extensive damage. Cleanup crews, instructed by Plymale, started the morning after the fire. Lewis says its recovery and reconstruction will likely take up to a year. He's hopeful that they will be able to open the main section of the gym by late October. Matthew Webb, director of athletics, agrees, saying, "We are very optimistic and hopeful about being able to reoccupy the gymnasium prior to Nov. 7," when the men's basketball team is scheduled to have its first home game.

Until then, the athletic department has been running differently. The fall and winter sports teams have been impacted most. Webb explains that finding accommodations for the athletes "has definitely added more meetings" to his schedule. These accom-

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Trump stakes naming rights to "Lake America"

KATE ULRICH '29

On August 27, President Donald Trump signed an official order to rename Lake Ontario, jointly claimed by Canada and the United States (U.S.), as Lake America.

"The United States is the greatest protector of the Great Lakes, including the body of water currently known as Lake Ontario," Trump wrote in Executive Order 14422. He stated that the U.S.'s contributions have established it as a "tremendous asset" and "part of our Nation's heritage." This is the latest fol-

low-up to the January 2025 executive order "Restoring Names that Honor American Greatness," in which Trump instructed that the Gulf of Mexico be referred to as the Gulf of America.

Trade relations between the countries have been strained since early 2025. This August, Trump confirmed 50% tariffs on many Canadian imports and Canada announced its "dollar for dollar" retaliation. Trump released the executive order five days later.

"What makes it interesting is that [Canada] has always been a great ally by the United States. The U.S.-

Canadian border is the world's longest demilitarized land border," said political science professor Dr. Peter Meilaender.

Trump directed the Federal Board on Geographic Names to affirm the Lake's title in official records and communications. Outside of government systems, controversy has erupted over whether the name should be accepted, and if Trump has the authority to enforce it.

"There's a sort of convention. There's a way to rename things; it's generally not done by the president," said history professor Christian Esh. Meilaender agrees: "To me, naming something is more of a legislative action than an executive action."

Canada is under no legal obligation to change its referral, and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney con-



The Lake, shortly after the name change. COURTESY OF GENEVIEVE MORTZHEIM

Campus Dumpster Truck Fire Prompts Sustainability Efforts by Students

LILLIAN EXFORD '29

Houghton University's (HU) Center for Sustainability closed their doors in 2024, ceasing efforts towards environmental friendliness around campus.

Discussions to renew a sustainability-focused group on campus emerged in October 2025 when a dumpster truck fire near the HU townhouses was later determined to be caused by improperly-disposed-of rechargeable electronic equipment that contained rechargeable Lithium-Ion batteries.

Prompted by the incident, Gwenna Haas '28 created the Sustainability Initiative Club (SIC), and now chairs as president. Within its first year, the club plans to meet monthly to discuss sustainable practices. Haas's main goals are to increase awareness for practicing proper disposal methods for batteries and electronics and to have "facilities in place to take care of these batteries", the lack of which she believes contributed to last fall's infamous fire.

"So, awareness would be the first [goal]. The second one would be to connect the community to work together across the campus, to get people in different groups, administration too, to create avenues for pursuing

better care of creation and community."

Vice President of SIC, Wesley Anderson '27, felt a fire lit underneath him, saying, "I felt like there was something lacking at Houghton that talked about sustainability and how to limit use of resources," he says.

Rebekah Janes '28 was drawn to the "endless opportunities" provided by SIC, and "building that sort of community where we are not only aware of the importance of sustainability but are also enthusiastic about it. Immediately when I heard that SIC was official, I jumped on the opportunity to get involved so that I could contribute to building a community of sustainability and stewardship!"

According to Haas, sustainability is defined according to each member's perspective: it's "a lifestyle," not just occasionally recycling, but "looking into possibilities to improve... and staying on top of things that are going on in this world, because everything is connected."

That improvement is exactly what Anderson seeks from promoting sustainability. "Change that brings a positive impact is what sustainability is trying to address," he remarks. "It's not easy giving up a hot shower for an energy efficient cold one. But it's these

small actions that make it count."

Climate change cannot be stopped overnight, but SIC is doing their part by getting to the heart of what HU is all about: community and faithful stewardship. Janes looks forward to curating this within the cohort of the SIC, with a strong belief in providing "hope in the midst of a situation that at times feels hopeless."

Anderson adds, "It might be a speck in the grand scheme of things, but I believe that every small deed focused on stewardship and care for God's creation is immensely important to my calling."

Looking forward, HU students can hope to feel the effects of having a strong push towards sustainable living right on campus. Haas is excited to see how students embrace what she calls the "intellectual involvement" that the club will be encouraging.

Hope for having an outlet to discuss sustainability on campus did not vanish when the Center for Sustainability closed; it grew significantly. The determination of the students in SIC to address the situation will bring a cleaner environment and safer future for the next generation of Houghton students. ★

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firmed his stance on the name. On August 27, 2026 he posted on social media that "Canadians know that naming reality means calling it Lake Ontario— then, now and always."

"It's also true that New York State doesn't have to call [the lake] what the federal government calls it," Esh said. Governor Kathy Hochul quickly attested via X that New York will not use "Lake America." In response, Trump accused Hochul of supporting "a country that has been ripping off New York State for years." Despite executive backlash, only internal agencies are required to follow the order. The Associated Press has already confirmed that it will not recognize the name change, as has MapQuest. State parks, private organizations, and individuals can refer to the lake as they choose.

"I am absolutely not going to call it the Lake of America," said Bea Brooks '27, an American-Canadian dual citizen. "I think that it's offensive to Canadian Indigenous populations to change the name from Ontario and I think it's very inconsiderate of the now-delicate balance between Americans and Canadians." The name "Ontario" comes from the Seneca language, meaning "beautiful lake" or "lake of shining waters." Brooks is concerned about the U.S. seemingly antagonizing Canada, but "when I think about more serious issues, I'm drawn to the Native American

Indigenous problem of, how are we relating to people that we have generally abused? And how are we trying to heal that relationship instead of fracturing it more?"

The Seneca Nation, based in Western N.Y., released their official statement on August 28. Seneca Nation President J. Conrad Seneca asked "federal, state and local representatives— regardless of political party" as well as Indigenous Nations to oppose the edict. He cited 1794's Treaty of Canandaigua between the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy and former President George Washington, which promised peace and respect toward the nations and their land. The Nation President called the order an attempt "to disregard the United States' commitments to the Seneca and other Haudenosaunee nations." He also advised Trump to review the U.S. Constitution's Article VI, which validates treaties as the "supreme law of the land."

Renaming the lake has escalated tensions with Canada and American Indigenous Peoples. The U.S.'s other international relationships may worsen with changes to more multi-country landmarks. The Trump Administration may have some in mind: "So, if you think about it, we have a Gulf and we have a lake. Now all we need is an ocean," Trump said. ★

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modations include finding places for the athletes to practice, hold games and work out. The women's volleyball team has been practicing at local high schools, and right now that has been where their "home" games will take place. The basketball teams have put temporary basketball hoops into the Kerr-Pegula Field House, and they will also be using

some local venues until they can use the Nielsen Center again. Webb acknowledged that the situation "is obviously frustrating and inconvenient," but said, "Our student-athletes are resilient and have responded well and are being flexible and understanding."

Both Lewis and Webb want to remind the community that it could have been worse and that we shouldn't get stuck on the

inconveniences from the fire. Webb acknowledged that the situation is similar to the feeding of the 5,000 in John 6, and he wondered what God will do with the outcome at the Nielsen Center. Lewis urged the community to continue praying about the situation and those involved, saying, "With the Lord's help, I am confident that we will emerge better and stronger." ★

The *STAR* staff is dedicated to reporting news and being the voice of the students on the Houghton Campus. We are excited to work with you this semester and encourage you to bring any news-related concerns to us!

We Only Get One Planet



ABIGAIL MAYS '27

Modern efforts to expedite production through Artificial Intelligence (AI) are almost as controversial as the millennial gray movement; except this digital devil does not only appear to be— but actually is—entirely cold, corporate and soulless.

AI saturates our current internet use, making its way into businesses, education and home life. Many see this as a benefit; for instance, OpenAI says their mission is “to ensure that artificial general intelligence benefits all of humanity.” But how do we actually benefit? It can be argued that there is a time and place for technologies like these (certain uses of AI) in our lives.

Consider spellcheck, which has been around since the 2010s. Over the past 15 years the empire of AI has grown past predictive forms and now includes

generative and conversational abilities. Harvard’s Center for Research on Computation and Society published an article titled “10 Wonderful Examples of Using Artificial Intelligence for Good,” which discusses what researchers believe are valid uses of the technology. Examples from the article include: “cancer screening”, “save the bees” and “tools for people with disabilities”. Interestingly, this list in no way mentions day to day uses for

form us, inspire us and challenge us. At any age, the overuse of AI strips us of the opportunity to partake in these innately human opportunities.

Speaking of resources, if you look down at your feet right now, you’ll realize something... you are planted on the earth. This is the one and only earth we’ve got. We need to consider the consequences of our actions. Adam Zewe from MIT News says, “Rapid development and deployment of powerful

In an academic setting such as Houghton, the desire to defer to artificial intelligence must be called lazy, whether by students or faculty members.

average users. AI is marketed as a tool for problem-solving, pattern identification, communication and writing. But you and I are individuals who can do these things ourselves.

In an academic setting such as Houghton, the desire to defer to artificial intelligence must be called lazy, whether by students or faculty members. Allowing AI to “improve instruction” usurps the need for human connection to develop growth. We live in a world full of educational resources that in-

generative AI models comes with environmental consequences, including increased electricity demand and water consumption.” With the use of water comes the concerns of local ecosystems and concerns build for the carbon footprint. United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reported this year that we are “past the point of no return” in regards to curbing greenhouse gas emissions risks, saying that “if everybody in the world consumed resources at the rate

Nothing about generative AI producing images, music or writing is authentic or beneficial.

people do in the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) and EU (European Union) countries [a collection of the richest countries in the world], the equivalent of 3.3 earths would be needed to keep up with consumption levels.” Our earth needs time to produce natural resources and its resources are a gift that we cannot abuse. In any type of consumption, one must partake responsibly. As AI is a substantial contributor to this, one that is expanding rapidly, we should be mindful of its effects. As sourced from UN news, day-to-day usage accounts for roughly 80-90% of total energy demand. Just one widely used AI service is estimated to process around 2.5 billion prompts in a single day which builds to hundreds of gigawatt-hours of electricity every year.

Let’s look back at the truth of the situation. Everyone gets busy. If you don’t have time to make that presentation or poster, perhaps you should reconsider your priorities. Talk to someone today about a better way to manage your time! If you lack the skills,

there are a multitude of tools that can actually aid you, not take the task away from you completely.

Nothing about generative AI producing images, music or writing is authentic or beneficial. What is instead produced is one more piece of computer-generated noise, thrown out there as “technological advancement” to pacify a society in need of constant entertainment and astonishment. Remember who you’re supporting when you use AI and what you’re sacrificing. Billionaires will drop a datacenter in your backyard and win the court case while you run out of water.

This is your reality check: refuse the use of AI where you can and be educated about the media you use. We share one earth, so let’s all do our best to keep it healthy and abundant. ★

Abigail Mays is a Senior studying Fine Arts. She is currently an assistant at the Ortilip Gallery and president of the upcoming Student Independent Designers and Artists club. After graduation, she hopes to become an illustrator or continue working in the gallery.

Have an opinion
you want to share?

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The mission of the Houghton STAR is to preserve and promote the values of dialogue, transparency and integrity that have been the ideals of Houghton University since its inception. This is done by serving as a medium for the expression of student thought and as a quality publication of significant campus news, Houghton area news, and events.

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The Houghton
STAR

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Meet the 2026-2027 staff of

The Houghton STAR



Members of the Houghton STAR staff .

COURTESY OF ANNABELLE ROOT



ANNA CAHOON

Co-Editor-in-Chief

Anna is a fourth-year student studying English & Adolescent Education. Her goal is to be a late middle-school or early high-school English teacher. Besides being the co-editor for The Houghton STAR, she plays violin for the Houghton Symphony Orchestra, studies piano privately and is working with Fillmore Central School for her educational experiences. Her favorite things include walking, photography, dirty pumpkin chai's, biking and watercolor.



ZILLAH REUKAUF

Co-Editor-in-Chief

Zillah is a sophomore majoring in Education with a minor in English. Her goal is to reach the lives of children in every walk of life, showing the love of Christ in every aspect. She believes every child is capable of learning and will strive to create a space where children can lean into who they were created to be. Aside from studies, Zillah enjoys long walks, deep conversations, going to the movies and spending time with the people she loves.



CARI WASSON

News Editor

Cari is a senior writing major and a graduate from the World Journalism Institute. Besides articles, Cari also loves writing screenplays, poetry and the one novel idea she's had since she was 13. In her free time, she can be found watching movies, reading, writing or hanging out with her friends. She also loves swimming in lakes, kayaking and laying on the dock to watch the stars.



ABIGAIL RENAUD

Features Editor

Abigail is a junior majoring in English and writing. In addition to The Houghton STAR, she also works at the Highlander Shop and as a consultant at the Writing Center. When she isn't reading or writing for school, she's reading or writing for fun. Other hobbies include playing the cello and hiking. Her favorite trails are the ones with a good view or a waterfall, preferably both.



WESLEY STEVICK

Opinions Editor

Wesley is a junior double majoring in politics-philosophy and mathematics with a minor in data science. He also loves talking to people, taking walks, eating ice cream, singing (badly) and being a silly parakeet. Talk to him about your pets, your favorite classes or your opinions on the fate of our modern society and the human race in general. He lives with two succulents and a spider plant named Dracula (and also a human).



LILY WORDEN

Columns Editor

Lily is a junior writing major with minors in English and art. She was part of the London Honors cohort her freshman year and has been involved with Koinonia, Lyric Theatre and the Writing Center since then. In addition to those hobbies, Lily loves crafting, stories and Delaware beaches. In her free time, she can be found hanging out with friends and devouring as much fiction as she reasonably has time for.



ANNABELLE ROOT

Photo and Media Editor

Annabelle is a senior from majoring in communications, concentrating in media arts & visual communication and minoring in political science and psychology. Besides helping edit The STAR, you can also find her working at Java 101 a few nights a week, writing silly movie reviews on Letterboxd and oversleeping. She hopes to work in the field of visual journalism in the future.



JESSE SHARPE

Advisor

Jesse Sharpe has worked both as a librarian and as an English professor. He loves both fields and enjoys the fact that at Houghton he has been able to continue working with the library (including The Star archives) while teaching English.