EMU students are digging deep—into dumpsters, that is—in search of discarded treasures and late-night excitement.

While students at almost any other university usually steer clear of pastimes that involve wearing one’s worst clothes on a Saturday night, exploring caches of trash and food, and piling the salvageable finds into an empty car trunk to clean up and put to use, there is an active crowd of EMU students who list dumpster diving among their favorite weekend activities.

A frequent and long-established pursuit of a surprisingly large portion of EMU students and alumni, dumpster diving presents a means of saving money, reducing waste from local businesses, and bonding with fellow dumpster divers. However, it also presents deeper questions of economic privilege and integrity of packaging, and necessary to give their dumpstered goods.

The act of dumpster diving in its traditional form involves a small group of comfortably dressed people who drive from one area business, grocery store, or distribution center to another searching the dumpsters on site for any usable products, food, or random items that the "diver" feels warrants salvaging. The hunt is undertaken after dark, and close encounters with security guards or late-night workers provide extra challenge and excitement.

The actual dumpster search often requires the diver(s) to climb in the dumpster and dig through unwanted material to inspect the items buried underneath. Divers often emerge strewn with waste material and dumpster residue. Despite this, many find the "getting dirty" aspect of dumpster diving worth the effort and even part of the fun. Second-year student, Linell Smith, along with other active divers, are undaunted by the threat of "dumpster-juice" on hands, clothes, and salvaged goods. "You can get some really good stuff—even when it’s covered with goo," she said.

"The best salsa I’ve ever eaten came from the dumpster . . ." Divers often find it necessary to give their dumpstered goods a thorough cleaning back at home. Divers use caution particularly with food products, taking expiration dates into careful consideration. In fact, most of the food waste in dumpsters is still in excellent condition, according to Warner. Fifth-year student Chrissy Lowen estimated that there are always common sense rules of thumb to follow with any dumpstered food item. "The best salsa I’ve ever eaten came from the dumpster, but steer clear of the meat products," said Lowen.

While the motivations for dumpster diving vary slightly among EMU students, they most likely do not include a need to scrounge food from dumpsters in order to get by. For many, the feeling of utilizing the community’s excess and saving money is an incentive. Said Smith, "I think it’s a waste of food, and using what other people throw away is pretty efficient."

While fourth-year Thaddeus Hollingsworth dives "to conserve resources—financial resources, and not letting other things go to waste," he also notes social interaction as a major perk of dumpster diving.

"It’s a good bonding experience," said Hollingsworth. "I learned how to dumpster dive when I lived at Martin House last year.

Students and on-campus communities such as Martin House, which derives a significant portion of its food from dumpster diving, often participate in the activity predominantly for the purpose of simply having fun. Others, however, question participation in an activity that for the millions of hungry and homeless in our nation is a means of survival. Fifth-year Deeryck Weaver encourages more thoughtful consideration of what it means to have the privilege to choose between going inside the grocery store to buy your fresh food and searching the grocery dumpster outside for the leftovers. "I think from the perspective of someone with no choice, to see a bunch of college students choose to search dumpsters for food is a mockery of true homelessness and true poverty," said Weaver.

Undoubtedly many students will continue to look to area dumpsters as a reliable source for extra goods and entertainment, issues of consciousness may deter others. Dumpster diving’s nature as a symbol of poverty at least makes it, says Weaver, "something to think about."

Keeping in Touch
Migrant Education Connects Cultures
By Emily Baumann
Staff Writer

While adjusting to college may be difficult, adjusting to a new school setting in a foreign language can be downright daunting—a prospect a number of children in Rockingham County face.

In addition to language barriers, the life of migrant workers located in the Shenandoah Valley often does not allow children complete the school year in one place. Through tutoring and mentoring, the Migrant Education Program of Harrisonburg (MEP) enables migrant students to achieve success.

One of the main goals of the MEP program is to help students who speak another language adjust to the classroom setting. Junior Raquel Miller works with a second grader who she said, "has been in school up to this point, but this is his first year learning in English."

For many, attending a school situated in a foreign language is not only frustrating, but psychologically demoralizing, especially when one is placed in the low reading levels. "We’re just starting with the basics, strength-ening literacy skills, going over the alphabet, until he can catch up with the others in his class," said Miller.

MEP attempts to bridge the gap between migrant families and the school system by answering questions, helping to fill out paperwork, and acting as a go-between. For the student participants they offer practice in language, assistance in reading comprehension and other vital skills, as well as much needed encouragement. Anica Warner, an associate at MEP, said, "These students for once have a support system."

For both Wenger and Miller, who are getting to know a new second grader from Mexico, who she said, "These students for once have a support system."

The MEP program holds immense benefits not only for migrant students, but for tutors as well. Work with MEP can be used as work-study. Those who work with the individuals receive experience teaching English to people who speak another language for people, and a positive attitude are the only essential requirements according to Warner. Since migrant students come from a variety of places such as Puerto Rico, Mexico, or California, and ages range from 3 to 21 years, the needs of each individual vary immensely. MEP takes the time to match migrant students with a compatible college student.

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Miller explained that a year-long commitment is recommend- ed so that “you can really build connections . . . I really enjoy interacting with the families.” For both Wenger and Miller, who traveled to Central America with the EMU cross-cultural group last spring, tutoring keeps them connected with the Hispanic culture. Wenger laughed as she described a recent visit to Juan’s home, “It reminds me of Guatemala. She was making tortillas when I got there last time.”

Tunnel of Oppression
Wednesday, Oct. 9
7 p.m.
University Commons