

It is a sunny and windy October day. Cars line up along the bypass and overflow parking lots all around campus. Students and their families can be seen everywhere this weekend exploring Richmond. There is a buzzing excitement in the air. This can only mean one thing: Eastern's Homecoming is here.

Homecoming signifies many different things to different people. To some, it is a huge home football game, this year against Murray State. To others, it is literally a welcoming home to our school's alumni. It can be about Homecoming courts, kings and queens, parades, or even decorating one's dorm. One thing that everyone seems to agree on, however, is that a crucial part of Homecoming weekend is one of America's favorite traditions and pastimes, tailgating.

Tailgating is a hugely popular event generally seen in parking lots outside of stadiums before sporting events or concerts. Setting up in the back of one's vehicle, people enjoy cooking out, playing music, and socializing with friends, family and strangers. And in this way, ECU is no different. People from all walks of life join together outside of Alumni Coliseum each Homecoming weekend for one singular purpose: to have a great time.

It is immediately clear after stepping foot in the parking what a good time is being had by all. Tents are set up all around with fraternities and other organizations' flags waving high in the air. Grills are blazing every couple yards throughout the lot. Port-a-potty lines are growing by the minute. There are plenty of games of cornhole and hillbilly golf, plenty of dancing and music blaring, and of course, plenty of drinking.

Given that this weekend was also when Halloween fell, many students even came out in costume. Among these students was "Super-Senior" Anthony Miller, who came in full Captain America garb. Claiming he had been out since 6 AM with hopes of making it on the field during the game, Miller exclaimed, "I'm just here to roam around and have a good time, man...Captain America, spreading the love for ECU!"

Another who came out in costume was a recent alumnus who would only identify himself as "Kris Kringle". Dressed in full Santa Claus attire including a spray painted beard, Mr. Kringle, who seemed to be enjoying a little too much "eggnog", shouted "HO! HO! HO! Go Eastern! Is that all?" when asked for a quote.

Others in Halloween dress included rugby players Duke Mann, dressed as Walter from *The Big Lebowski*, and Tyler Wade, dressed as one of several gorillas wandering about.

"We're just here to chill out, drink, maybe sing a few rugby songs. It's always a pretty good time!" Wade stated. Mann agreed: "Nothing quite like tailgating in the south!"

Senior Megan Pigman had a few choice words of her own to describe her feelings on the event. "I LOVE Homecoming!!!" she cried out while celebrating her recent LSAT score with some friends. "Homecoming is my absolute favorite event because of the never-ending spirit in the air here! I love seeing all of the past alumni present, especially knowing that I will be returning next year as one myself." Pigman had been coming out to tailgate every year since she was a freshman as the official "grillmaster" in her group of friends.

Though there was alcohol present, it was not necessarily everywhere. A pair of "Eric's", Eric Highfield and Erik Seaman, were occupying themselves in a different way. Both were members of ECU's Dance Theatre, and the two were enjoying a game of water pong with friends. "It is healthier this way!" laughed Highfield.

Some people had made Homecoming a yearly tradition. A Fire Science Sophomore named Jim was one of these people. “We always try to keep the same spot for tailgating and usually even stay out throughout the whole game. We are also the reigning champs of the tricycle race!”

Though many followed their example and kept tailgating the entire game, many still looked forward to the upcoming game. Senior Ryan Gleeson, after spending his morning working the President’s Brunch with Student Alumni Ambassadors, had high hopes. “We will win. I can feel it.”

The majority of people in the lot were either students or recent graduates, but not everyone fit this bill. Alumnus Jamie Jenkins from the Class of ’86, with her husband Cedric and son Elijah, was visiting the school for the first time in nearly 20 years. She was here for a reunion with her old sorority Alpha Cappa Alpha, the first African American women’s sorority on campus. “It is certainly a lot different from when I was in school. There used to be a lot less cars for sure!” Jenkins chuckles. “Still, I remember coming out for each game, and it is nice to revisit that entire social experience.”

And at the end of the day, that is what it’s all about. Homecoming tailgating isn’t just about the beer, the music, the food, or the games. In the end, it is about the sense of unity that connects all ECU Colonels, both new and old. The college experience all wrapped up on a small slab of asphalt.