

Guilford plans to drop Coca-Cola, Starbucks, and Nestle

By Eric Ginsburg
STAFF WRITER

After numerous student initiatives and three open forums, the college has announced its plan to switch the school's soda, juice, and coffee suppliers beginning Jan. 1.

Currently, Guilford holds an exclusive contract with Coca-Cola for all soda and juice products on campus, with the exception of products in the school bookstore. As of now, Nestle provides the coffee in the dining hall and Starbucks in Grill 155.

The college plans to switch to Pepsi-Cola, which will buy out Coke's exclusive contract for soda and juice, and Green Mountain, which will provide fair trade, organic, shade-grown coffee in the dining hall and the Grill 155.

According to a public statement by the college placed in the Guilford Beacon on Nov. 16, the school began considering alternative beverage suppliers after the Sodexo Independent Study Group brought up concerns in a presentation last April on Coca-Cola, Sodexo, and Starbucks.

Coca-Cola has been widely criticized for their alleged involvement with the assassinations of over half a dozen union leaders who worked at Coke's bottling plants in Colombia. Since 1990, Coke continues to deny any connection to the eight murders. In addition, the Coca-Cola Company is one of the three largest water privatizing entities in the world, restricting access to water and allegedly poisoning local water supplies around their plants in India.

During the first open beverage forum, which was the most highly attended, students

rejected the notion of switching to Pepsi because of its similar corporate background. Pepsi-Cola is also one of the three largest water privatizers worldwide.

Referring to a recent conflict in the Indian state of Kerala, ecologist and scholar Vandana Shiva explained in her book "Earth Democracy." "The local movement of women in Plachimada triggered recognition of people's community rights to water in law, while also triggering movements against the 87 other Coca-Cola and Pepsi plants where water is being depleted and polluted."

However, after student research into alternatives, Dean for Campus Life Aaron Fetrow contacted a number of smaller, seemingly more ethical companies by e-mail to see if they were viable alternatives to Pepsi or Coca-Cola.

Only Pepsi and Coke responded to the questions, which were generated in the second forum, but a number of other companies reported never receiving the e-mail. Students contacted some of the companies by phone and requested they call Fetrow to express interest in the contract. Though company representatives told students they were interested, Fetrow maintained that none followed through and called the college.

"If anything, this lack of response worried me as it would relate to how the company would respond to service calls and needs we may have on campus if they were the next beverage provider," Fetrow explained.

Citing the lack of alternatives, a better match for "social responsibility and environmental sustainability," service, and the fact that Pepsi is based in North Carolina,

"Pepsi is just as bad as Coke when it comes to human rights abuses and pollution in foreign countries, so I don't think it's the lesser of two evils. It still goes against our Quaker principles and ethical procurement policies."

Olivia Bailey, freshman

Guilford College announced their plan to switch to Pepsi-Cola.

"Pepsi is just as bad as Coke when it comes to human rights abuses and pollution in foreign countries, so I don't think it's the lesser of two evils," said first-year Olivia Bailey. "It still goes against our Quaker principles and ethical procurement policies."

Once the school contacted Sodexo regarding student concern over coffee, Sodexo offered to switch to Green Mountain, a company they already do business with elsewhere. In addition to being fair trade and organic, Guilford's new coffee will be shade grown, which means that ecosystems have not been destroyed by clear-cutting forest to create coffee fields.

Starbucks was specifically mentioned during the Sodexo Student Research group presentation last April to administrators for their lack of fair trade products and questionable treatment of workers attempting to organize with the Industrial Workers of the World in New York City, Chicago, and Maryland. Nestle is the third of the top three water privatizers internationally and their coffee is not fair trade. Over the years, they have been repeatedly accused of using forced labor for the production of their chocolate.

Many students see Green Mountain as more in line with the college's stated values and a significant improvement over Starbucks and Nestle.

"Kicking out major corporations with a strong history of human rights violations, such as Coca-Cola, Nestle, and Starbucks, is an important step towards a more ethical campus," said Shaina Machlus, who has been involved in the process. "Because colleges and universities are essentially major businesses within themselves, it is of the utmost importance the whole community monitors where our money is being spent."

It is unclear whether the bookstore, currently managed by Follett, will make the switch from Coca-Cola and Starbucks as well, though Vice President for Finance and Administration Jerry Boothby submitted a written request to Follett last week asking that they do so immediately. If Follett does so, the campus-wide switch will be complete.

"When Guilford purchases from a corporation it is investing not only in the corporation but all of its practices as well," Machlus said. "I hope this is only the beginning of continual student input and dedication to ensure more ethical purchasing for Guilford."

Midge Potts: "Transcending traditional politics"

Transgendered social activist speaks of her experience in American politics

By Elysa Polovin
STAFF WRITER

"My mom told me when I was a little kid that I could do anything I wanted with my life and I really took it seriously," said Midge Potts to a small gathering of Guilford students in Bryan Jr. auditorium. "I took her seriously when I decided to become a woman, and I took her seriously when I decided to run for Congress."

Potts came to Guilford on Nov. 15, brought by GPeace, Guilford's peace oriented club.

She is a 37-year-old transgender social justice activist who ran for Congress in southwestern Missouri's Aug. 8 Republican primary.

Potts is a Persian Gulf War veteran and served on the USS Yosemite as Mitch Potts, a male.

After being injured by evaporated mercury in an engine room aboard the ship, Potts was

offered an honorable discharge and became more active in politics.

"This political system is such a huge joke that I thought I ought to put the exclamation point on it," said Potts on her Myspace page. "I am tired of hearing everybody say 'there's nothing we can do.'"

She based her campaign on three goals: to create a balanced budget, to set term limits in the Constitution, and to enforce direct democracy.

Potts ran a creative campaign, connecting with people through recycled signs and folk music.

"I am not limited by preconceived notions of what the media says I should do to run a campaign," Potts said. Although Potts lost the election, she doesn't view it as a defeat.

"I could win, just by running for office, by raising the vibrations in the area I was running in," Potts said.

Potts now continues to spread her message in every way possible. Traveling around the country and talking to schools is just one of them.

"It is important (to hear what Potts has to say) because we are a school based on Quaker values,

with a large interest in peace and diversity," said sophomore Emily Warren, vice president of GPeace.

Potts has also learned to send her messages in creative ways. She has become an infamous "woman in pink," known to pop up behind politicians, posting her opinions on the newscaster's screen.

From a sign reading "I have nothing to hide ... except the truth," behind Alberto Gonzales, former U.S. Attorney General, to "Impeach Bush" behind Valerie Plame, former CIA undercover operative, she has successfully made her voice heard while remaining completely silent.

It would be wrong to say, however, that Potts always keeps quiet.

She was arrested for interrupting the U.S. Senate chamber with her opinion on the Iraq war and then stating "I yield the remainder of

my time back to the committee." She was found guilty by a jury yet doesn't seem to regret speaking her mind.

"If we have something to say to the government, then we should be able to," Potts said. "If this really is a government of the people, then people shouldn't be afraid to be autonomous."

Potts continues to fight for her cause and plans to run for Congress again in 2008 as a Green Party representative.

She also has a Sundance film coming out entitled "Citizen Potts."

One of her main goals, however, is to get youth more involved in politics, which is one of the reasons she's speaking on college campuses.

"I was hoping her passion could spark some interest on Guilford's campus (and) maybe eliminate

some apathy," said sophomore Airlie Parham, president of GPeace, who met Potts last summer in Washington D.C.

"The biggest thing young people can do is talk to each other," Potts said. "Your whole future depends on the decisions these guys are making now."

Potts spoke about the beginning of American politics and the formation of the U.S. Constitution.

She quoted Thomas Jefferson and discussed how his words are still relevant today in that our government isn't really "of the people."

"No society can make a perpetual constitution or even a perpetual law," said Jefferson in a letter written to James Madison over 200 years ago. "The earth belongs always to the living generation."



Midge Potts

"The biggest thing young people can do is talk to each other. Your whole future depends on the decisions these guys are making now."