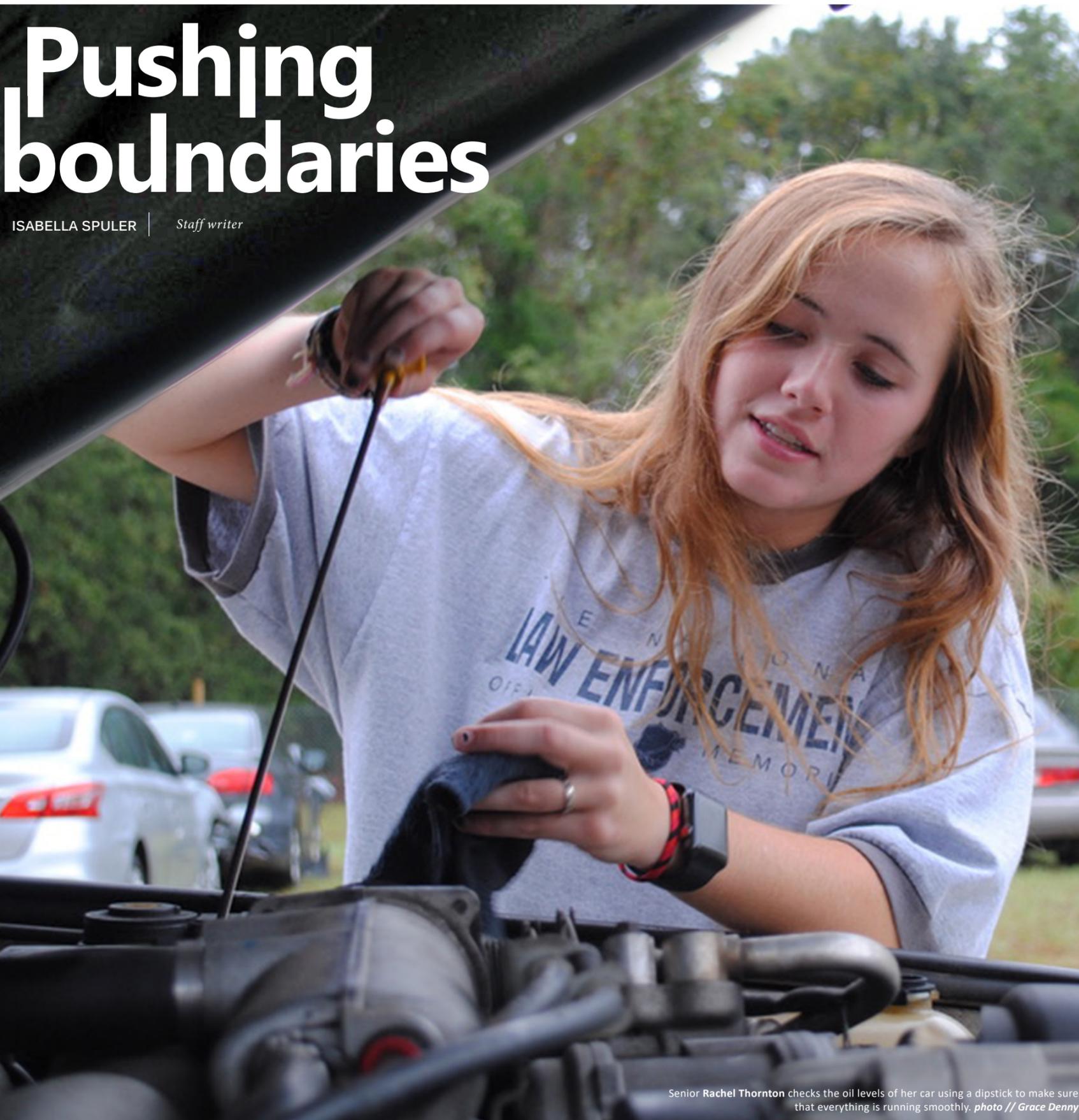


Pushing boundaries

ISABELLA SPULER | Staff writer



Senior Rachel Thornton checks the oil levels of her car using a dipstick to make sure that everything is running smoothly. *photo // Grace Denny*



Senior Rachel Thornton sits on top of her 1999 Land Rover Discovery, her favorite car to work on. Land Rovers are her family's favorites cars -- this is her third one. *photo // Grace Denny*

Thornton follows in her dad's footsteps as an aspiring mechanic

The air is thick with heat and humidity as beads of sweat form on her forehead. The primer and freshly mixed paint leave a bitter odor lingering in the garage. She can hardly hear her own thoughts over the Eminem music that's blaring through the speakers. She takes a deep breath and focuses on the car in front of her. Carefully gripping the razor in her hand, senior Rachel Thornton anxiously follows the lines of the tape, making sure not to scratch the door.

"It's really stressful actually if I were to mess something up or another guy were to mess something up... especially because it's other people's stuff," Thornton said.

But this stress and tension was just a daily part of her summer in the Fender Mender garage where she interned as a mechanic.

"[At Fender Mender], every time I'd go in and meet someone new they'd be like, 'Oh, you're a girl and do this,' and I was like, 'Yeah I'm a girl, and girls can do this too,'" Thornton said, "I never thought it was weird because I had grown up like... I was a girl who liked cars."

Born into a family of mechanics, Thornton has been surrounded by cars her whole life. Her dad, Allen Thornton, has owned multiple shops and currently runs a towing company, Blue Line Towing. Meanwhile, her uncle, who lives in Virginia, has a "graveyard" of cars available for her to search through for any part imaginable.

"We were outside working on something one day, myself and an employee, and she came

out and said, 'What are you doing?' so I told her, and she said, 'What does that do and how does that work?'" Mr. Thornton said, "As I was talking to her, I could tell she wasn't satisfied with that. She wanted to know more about it."

Since about 10 years old, Rachel Thornton has developed a true passion for cars and the way they work. As a little girl, she wasn't concerned with a fancy paint job or shiny new wheels.

She was fascinated by what makes a car run.

Though Thornton has learned everything about the insides of a car from her family, at Fender Mender, she wanted to push her boundaries as a mechanic. Thornton's internship allowed her to sharpen her skills with detailing, sanding and painting.

"So it's like if your car gets dented basically or hit, the people up front will like pull the dent out, and then I'm in the back, and we will just scratch out where it was and make it smoother obviously and no scratches," she said. "Sometimes the scratch isn't as bad, so you don't have to do as much. If it's really bad, you have to fill it in with clay."

Thornton was able to stand on her own as a mechanic.

"I just want to be able to do all parts of a car. I don't want to just specialize in one. I want to be able to take a car and just make it however I want," she said.

Although her summer internship is over, Thornton still works on her own projects with her dad.

"Since my dad is this car person, we have like everything... basically everything you could need for a car like cleaning it like changing oil, just every different type of thing," she said.

Most of the time she works on flipping cars with her dad. They'll revamp an old car by waxing and buffing the outside while completely repairing and replacing the inner parts.

But Thornton's favorite project is more personal -- her 1999 Land Rover Discovery.

"It's my baby," she said.

After a summer spent working on other people's cars, Thornton has the freedom to fix her car any way she wants.

"... Most times, I do a personal job for someone else, and I'm like, 'okay this is cool, but I wouldn't do it this way,'" Thornton said, "but like with mine it's like, 'I want it this way. We're doing it this way.'"

On Thornton's car, everything is personalized down the stickers. She's added a lift kit, fixed the drive shaft, and isn't bothered by the old paint job.

"It feels so good. Just to see once you're done like it like glows basically, and you just feel like so happy because you've put in a lot of work for it," she said.

Despite the challenges and unknown hiccups that come along with mechanics, Thornton will push past anything to get the job done.

"A lot of people panic if something happens, but for me, I know what to do," she said. "It's also funny when men drive by and are like, 'Do you need help?' and I'm like, 'No. Thank you no.'"

"The word tenacious is very good for her. She just won't give up, and even if it's to the point of extremely aggravating her, she will not give up on anything," Mr. Thornton said, "she's not satisfied with not getting it right. She just wants it to be perfect."

Even to her friends, Thornton has become "the go-to car girl."

"... If I'm with my friends, they're like 'We need to call someone... something is wrong,' I'm just like, 'Okay. I got it,' she said.

As for life after high school, Thornton hopes to continue her work as a mechanic.

"Yeah I had planned for a while just going to Trident because I toured their autotech thing," she said, "it's huge and really clean which I like because most shops you go to are like dirty, and you don't want to sit or touch anything..."

Thornton could also potentially see herself running a mechanic business with her dad.

"I think it would be cool to partner with him," Thornton said. "He has a bunch of ideas, so we might even make a new business... after I go to Trident."

No matter what the future holds, Thornton knows "the possibilities are endless."



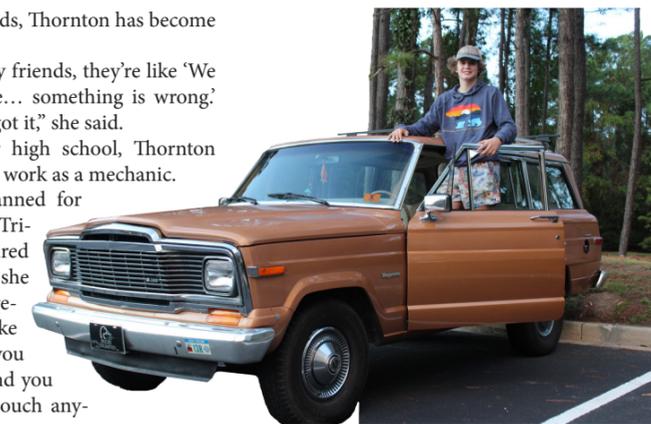
1979 Jeep CJ5

"It's really fun to ride in. I like working with the doors off and it's pretty cool because it's old and no one else has one."

SENIOR
HAMPTON WALKER

What's in our parking lot?

Tribal Tribune takes a look into some of the unique and vintage cars that students are driving to school. See tribaltribune.org for more of the interesting cars being driven around campus.



1984 Jeep Wagoneer

"I like my car because it is unique and has character. My dad got it for me as a surprise for my 16th birthday, and I was so excited. I was shocked that it was actually my car."

JUNIOR
BOYD SMITH