

MTSU MAGAZINE

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

January 2015 Vol. 19 No. 2

Beyond Critical Mass

Under Dean **Ken Paulson's**
leadership, MTSU's
multifaceted and innovative
media offerings
come of age

**MIDDLE
TENNESSEE**
STATE UNIVERSITY

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From the Ground Up

MTSU's brand-new, state-of-the-art, \$147-million Science Building opened to students in fall 2014.

With more than 250,000 gross square feet for teaching, faculty and student laboratory research, and collaborative learning, the new building is the biggest improvement ever for science education and research at MTSU and for the more than 13,000 students who enroll annually in biology, chemistry, and other science courses.

Pages 4–7 offer a look inside the new building.

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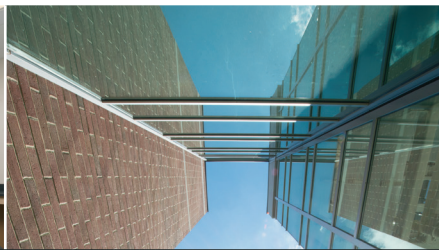
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photo: J. Intintoli
cover photo: Andy Heidt

**MIDDLE
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Consistent with MTSU's rich tradition of teacher training, the new Science Building's design is grounded in the science of education.





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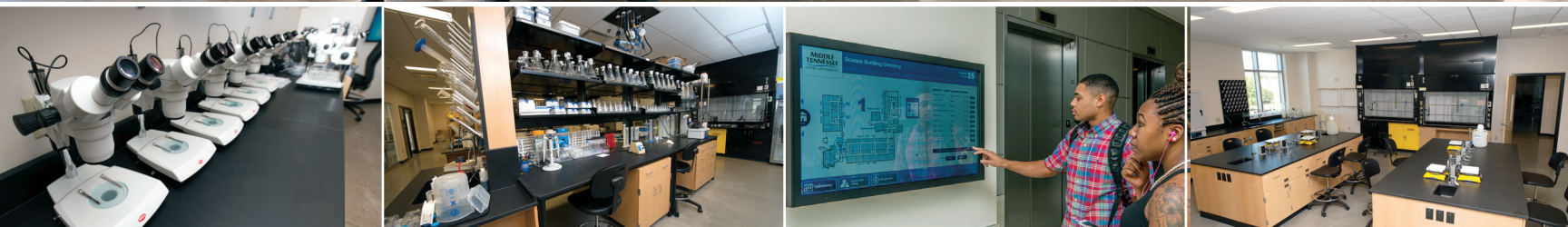
The building is designed to make learning and teaching a more productive and compelling experience.



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The building's design follows ideas put forward by the nation's top science and technology experts in what works best for effectively teaching these subjects.



A Long-Awaited Celebration

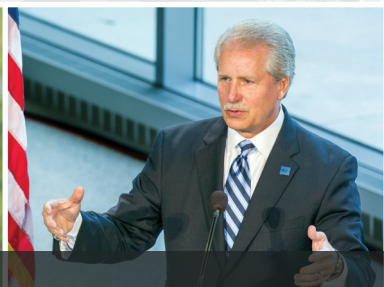
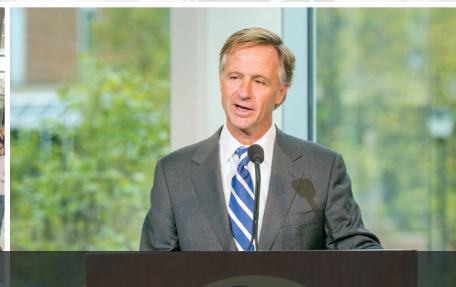
On October 15, 2014, in the newly named Liz and Creighton Rhea Atrium, a large crowd celebrated the dedication of MTSU's new Science Building that's considered vital to the University's future scientific endeavors. About 300 people joined Gov. Bill Haslam and President Sidney A. McPhee to formally open the building.

Haslam led the collection of guest speakers, which included Chancellor John Morgan, Tennessee Board of Regents, state senator Bill Ketron, and respective faculty and student representatives Tammy Melton and Kenneth Ball.

"By 2025, at least 55 percent of Tennesseans will need a certificate or degree beyond high school to find a job," Haslam said. "Attracting and growing jobs in Tennessee is directly tied to education, and if we are not prepared to fill those jobs of the future, they will go somewhere else."

"Graduates with STEM degrees are important to our state's ability to thrive, and the additional space to train these students provided by this building will help us compete in today's global economy," he added.

Haslam challenged MTSU to produce highly educated, STEM-trained graduates to continue to attract high-tech jobs for the midstate workforce.



While thanking many in the public and private sectors, McPhee reminded the audience that the building had long been a hope and a dream, surviving an economic recession and remaining the state's number-one capital project in higher education for nearly five years.

He praised the governor and legislative leaders, local lawmakers, and elected officials "who advocated our need in every corner of the Capitol until they were heard."

Speaking on behalf of the local legislative delegation as its senior member, Ketron (R-Murfreesboro) recalled the political wrangling needed to move the project forward. "We weren't going to let any other [building] project get on top of the pipeline," he said.

Faculty member Tammy Melton, who came to MTSU in 1999, praised and thanked faculty members who preceded her and those who joined her in the effort to secure the Science Building.

"The building is a magnet," Melton said. "In the recruitment of new students and new faculty, we no longer need to apologize for existing poor facilities and offer promises of future construction. In 2014, the 21st century has come to MTSU chemistry and biology. The future is here. Now."

Kenneth Ball, a senior general science major from Savannah, Tennessee, thanked everyone who had a hand in the project.

"When I stepped in the door, I was blown away," said Ball, who attended classes in the old buildings starting in 2011. "It's all directed at us—the students. I don't think they could've made it any better."





“Support from this ASPIRE grant put me one step closer to achieving my dream of becoming a teacher. It encourages my dedication to college and eventually my teaching career. Not only did it make a difference in my life, but it will make a difference in the lives of the children I will teach.”

—Cassie Judkins

EVERY GIFT MATTERS

Gifts large and small have a tremendous impact. Our microgrant program demonstrates that a small gift can make the difference between a student staying in school or having to leave. Please consider making any size donation to support this and the many other programs MTSU has in place to support our students.

Visit www.mtsu.edu/ASPIRE

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Sharpening Our Skills

by Drew Ruble

Among the topics of discussion at a September 2014 *Nashville Business Journal* roundtable with the presidents of four Tennessee universities (including MTSU's Sidney A. McPhee) was the need for college graduates entering the workforce to possess greater "soft skills."

Soft skills include **the ability to communicate** clearly, to work well in a **team** environment, to **solve problems**, and even to **show up** for work or meetings on time. They are professional and personal traits that characterize good working relationships with others. Business owners say **soft skills are as essential as technical ability in performing a job** and are absolutely necessary to make business relationships productive for all involved.

McPhee and his peers outlined several ongoing efforts to ensure that their universities are working to address this lack, from focusing on more **experiential, real-world learning** to adjusting classwork and programs to **emphasize ways to think through problems and work with others**.

A recent collaboration between the MTSU Jennings A. Jones College of Business and an internationally recognized professional development training organization holds perhaps the greatest potential to profoundly teach soft-skills development.

Led by David Urban, Jones College dean, an exclusive partnership has been forged with Dale Carnegie Training to embed soft-skills training into the college's curriculum.

Carnegie, author of the seminal self-improvement book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, famously developed courses in self-improvement, salesmanship, corporate training, public speaking, and interpersonal skills that are taught nationwide by institutes bearing his name. Because of the new alliance, Jones College students will have taken at least one such course for credit before obtaining their degrees.

MTSU's partnership with Carnegie Training of Tennessee will not be duplicated at any other university in the state, and, in fact, **will be unique across the country**.

"Even in the 21st century, business is still about people," Urban said when the partnership was announced. "A person might have the manual dexterity to transmit text via a smartphone within a few seconds to anyone on the planet. But if that person expects to be successful in business, success is all about relationships with customers, clients, and colleagues."

Peter Handal, CEO of Dale Carnegie Training Worldwide, said the partnership with MTSU represents "a unique opportunity for our organization."

"For over 102 years, we've been developing the engagement levels of employees across multiple industries as companies realize that the engagement level is a key differentiator in creating growth," Handal said. "The partnership with MTSU will create students who not only understand business issues but also are able to thrive by having developed communication, leadership, and



other human relations skills that are crucial to business success."

How will it work? The Carnegie course will teach students effective personal interaction, stress management, persuasive communication, problem solving, leadership, and positive attitude formation. Jones College faculty members are busy becoming certified Dale Carnegie instructors who will teach business students, and the first courses are expected to be offered during spring 2015.

As a former business editor for various Nashville-area publications for many years, I'll admit I'm a sucker for a good business story. As University Editor at MTSU since 2010, I'll also admit I have not lost my appetite for storylines that reveal the significant economic impact MTSU has on the local, regional, and state economies or the unprecedented work it does preparing the workforce for the Nashville area. That's one reason I was drawn to the *NBJ* article about preparing today's workforce. It's also why I think the recent agreement between Jennings A. Jones College of Business and Carnegie is so noteworthy.

True Blue! [MTSU](#)

The Student Success Advantage

GRADUATE IN **FOUR** AND GET **MORE**

If you maintain a steady pace to graduation in four years, we will do all we can to help you achieve your goal.

Q In September 2014, during a six-city tour to convince the best and brightest students across Tennessee to attend MTSU, you unveiled a new initiative—the MTSU Student Success Advantage. You’ve described the plan as a game changer for students who want to do more than just go to college. You’re talking about students who expect to get the support they need to actually succeed and graduate. Give us the short version of what this new plan is and what it does.

A The first two years are critical to a university student. A bump in the road, especially at the beginning, can derail the progress of those struggling to stay enrolled.

The MTSU Student Success Advantage plan, which has the tagline “Graduate in Four and Get More,” will supplement by \$1,000 the HOPE Lottery Scholarships of incoming students who seek a four-year degree and stay on track to graduate on time. Our University will provide a \$500 supplemental scholarship to students receiving the HOPE Scholarship after each of their first two years. Students must remain eligible for the HOPE Scholarship to get the award from MTSU.

Under the plan, we will provide what we call a Finish-Line Scholarship to graduating seniors that will return any tuition increases incurred during the four-year period of their studies.

We expanded the eligibility to qualify for five major scholarships guaranteed to eligible students. We changed our Transfer Academic Scholarships from being competitively based to guaranteed for students from all Tennessee community colleges. And, even in a time of reduced state budgets for higher education, we made a major investment in student success by reallocating money to hire 47 more academic advisors, who will help students maximize their investment and these incentives by providing the support, guidance, and encouragement to stay on track to graduate on time.

Q What is the overall goal of these new initiatives?

A These changes and the overall Student Success Advantage plan are actually just part of MTSU’s overall Quest for Student Success initiative, a series of reforms launched last year to increase retention and graduation through changes such as academic course redesigns, enhanced advising, and new student data-tracking software.

Our goal at MTSU is to make higher education more affordable for incoming freshmen who meet our competitive admission standards and choose to start college at MTSU.

We also developed this program to complement and reinforce Gov. Bill Haslam’s Drive to 55, which



Dr. Sidney A. McPhee

seeks to increase the percentage of Tennesseans with postsecondary degrees or certificates to 55 percent.

Q Any last thoughts?

A We know firsthand that \$200 to \$300 can make a difference in terms of whether a student comes to or stays at MTSU. All these incentives, plus our increased emphasis on advising and other reforms, represent our desire to address obstacles through the University's resources.

We do hope that future tuition increases are minimal, but if that occurs, the net effect of our Finish Line Scholarship will hold students harmless from any increases—provided they stay on track to graduate in four years.

We believe the MTSU Student Success Advantage is unique among our state's public universities.

And, at its core, the Student Success Advantage has a strong message: **If you maintain a steady pace to graduation in four years, we will do all we can to help you achieve your goal.**

Thank you, Mr. President.

For more information about the Student Success Initiative, visit www.mtsu.edu/student-success-advantage.

Editor's Note:

It All Adds Up

A New York Federal Reserve study released in summer 2014 and analyzed in an article by the *Wall Street Journal* found that **four-year degrees remain solid investments.**

In the study, economists Jaison Abel and Richard Deitz calculated the annualized return on investment for the money put into a college degree over a graduate's career, pegging it at about 15 percent for current graduates, a figure that far surpasses typical returns for stocks and bonds and one that has held largely constant for more than a decade.

The economists also found that the difference in wages between two-year and four-year degree holders has also remained relatively constant, with **bachelor's holders last year making about \$65,800** and **associate degree holders making about \$46,300.**

Separately, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education issued its first "return on investment" report in 2013 and found that Americans with four-year degrees made **98 percent more** an hour on average in 2013 than those without a degree, up from 89 percent five years earlier, 85 percent a decade earlier, and 64 percent in the early 1980s.

The report also found that the average salary for a graduate with a four-year degree started to surpass that of an associate degree holder five years after graduation, with the gap growing to nearly **\$7,000 annually** after 10 years.

A May 2014 *New York Times* article, citing an Economic Policy Institute report that used Department of Labor statistics to reach its findings, recently found that the wage premium for people who have attended college without earning a bachelor's degree—a group that includes community college graduates—has not been rising.

"The big economic returns go to people with four-year degrees," the article said. "Those returns underscore the importance of efforts to reduce the college dropout rate."

"College is worth it, and it's not even close," the article continued. "For all the struggles that many young college graduates face, **a four-year degree has probably never been more valuable.**"

"A four-year degree has probably never been more valuable."



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MidPoints

A look at recent awards, events, and accomplishments at MTSU

compiled by Gina E. Fann, Jimmy Hart, Gina K. Logue, Paula Morton, Drew Ruble, and Randy Weiler

Bend, Don't Break

One of the stars of *Breaking Bad* offered an evening of uplifting advice in conversation with fans last October in Tucker Theater. **RJ Mitte**, who played Walter White Jr. on the Emmy-winning program, talked about his career and his cerebral palsy. Mitte described a grueling childhood regimen of speech therapy, braces, and counseling sessions. He said his family and friends supported him completely. "I never knew I was different until I went to school and someone said, 'What's wrong with your feet?'" Mitte said. The 27-year-old said he was cast in the show because of his cerebral palsy. His character, the son of a chemistry teacher who makes and sells illegal methamphetamine to pay for cancer treatments, has a more severe form of the malady. Ironically, said Mitte, his first acting job was a public service announcement about the dangers of methamphetamine.



RJ Mitte

Best and Brightest

Another MTSU student received a stipend from the nation's oldest and most selective collegiate multidisciplinary honor society. Phi Kappa Phi awarded a \$1,000 study-abroad grant to **Samuel Kane Hulseley**, a junior in Spanish and Global Studies. He is one of only 50 students in the country to receive the award. Hulseley used the money to pay for a summer 2014 conservation biology and ecology field course at Serra do Mar State Park in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The park is the largest protected area in Brazil's Atlantic Forest and one of the most endangered rainforests in the world.

In June 2014, **Robert Daniel Murphy**, who graduated in May 2014 with degrees in Physics and Philosophy, won a \$5,000 national fellowship from Phi Kappa Phi. Murphy, a Murfreesboro resident, will use the money to pursue a doctorate in physics at UT-Knoxville.



Alberto Gonzales

Law and Order

A September 2014 talk by former U.S. Attorney General **Alberto Gonzales** covered politics and breaking news and included stories about his days in the West Wing. Gonzales served President George W. Bush as the first Hispanic White House counsel and the 80th U.S. attorney general from 2005 to 2007. Gonzales encouraged students to include community service in their careers. Now dean of Belmont University's College of Law, Gonzales said of his previous job, "Every day, every moment, is special when you get to work in the White House."



Samuel Kane Hulseley



State Sen. Bill Ketron (left) and MTSU President Sidney A. McPhee (center) present Guangxi Vice President Shang Nahong with a medallion at a meeting in Nanning, China.

West Meets Middle

The partnership between MTSU and **Guangxi University** will allow 140 students from the south China institution eventually to come to Murfreesboro. Fifty-three students are expected to study finance, 34 plan to study business administration, and 46 intend to study mathematics. This makes Guangxi University, with enrollment of more than 24,000 students, one of MTSU's most productive and successful partners in just one year. Students will enroll in a newly developed three-plus-two program, which will allow Guangxi students to finish undergraduate degrees and earn graduate degrees at MTSU. The relationship between the schools began in May 2013 when President Sidney A. McPhee and State Sen. Bill Ketron ('76) visited Guangxi and announced the opening of a recruitment office.

From Flora to Pharma

MTSU signed an agreement extending its research partnership with the world's largest medicinal herb garden through 2021. The pact with **Guangxi Botanical Garden of Medicinal Plants** also secures MTSU's worldwide rights, excluding China, to patent and market products developed in the partnership. The partners agreed to a 50-50 split of profits from the collaboration. The exclusive agreement began in 2011 between the Tennessee Center for Botanical Medicine Research at MTSU and Guangxi Botanical Garden to hasten the development of Western medicines from plant extracts. Chinese researchers cultivate and prepare extracts that MTSU scientists screen to determine their promise. Using traditional Chinese medicine to treat disease is gaining awareness in Western cultures. An analysis of 52 plant extracts recently provided by the garden identified 29 with promising results, including 12 with anti-cancer potential, eight with indications of anti-inflammatory properties, and one that may be useful to treat diabetes. Almost 40 analyses last year showed promise in the treatment of cancer, viral infections, and other ailments.



Drs. Don Morgan and Sandy Stevens work with John Robert.

Not So Run-of-the-Mill

MTSU's exercise science experts have worked wonders with people who suffer from incomplete spinal cord injuries. Now the **National Institutes of Health (NIH)** has given them the opportunity to perform a comprehensive study that could change how health professions treat these patients, who retain some sensation or motor function. With a \$388,894 NIH grant, Drs.

Don Morgan and **Sandy Stevens** have been recruiting, testing, and following up with clients suitable for treatment in MTSU's nationally recognized underwater treadmill laboratory. Participants will help the scientists determine the effect of underwater treadmill training on mobility, health, and quality of life of the partially paralyzed. The study is unusual for a

university not connected to a college of medicine or a teaching hospital. According to Morgan, "We're doing work here at MTSU that, as far as I know, is not being done anywhere else in the world at this level."

From left: James Griffin, Kerry Hammonds Sr., Larry Joe Inman, Micah Otis, and Jennifer Martinez

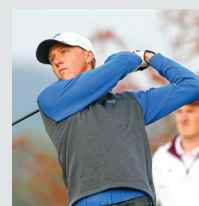
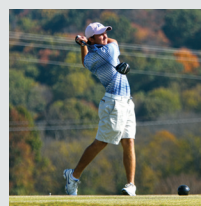
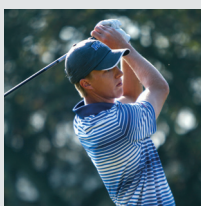


Raider Royalty

The 2014 class of the **Blue Raider Athletic Hall of Fame** featured basketball standout **Kerry Hammonds Sr.**, legendary trackman **Micah Otis**, softball trailblazer **Jennifer Martinez**, former pro football player **James Griffin**, and pioneering women's basketball head coach **Larry Joe Inman**. Hammonds ranks second all-time in rebounding and games played and sixth all-time in games started. Otis earned six Ohio Valley Conference championships and was a 1994 All-American long jumper. Martinez ranks first in wins, shutouts, strikeouts, and ERA for Lady Raider softball. During her career, she tossed a perfect game and three no-hitters. Griffin still holds the school record for interceptions with 17. Inman took over a fledgling women's basketball program and put it on track to earn the championship reputation it enjoys today. Between 1979 and 1986, his record was 161–73, and he led his squads to four NCAA tournament appearances.

New Look for Murphy Center

The \$12.64-million renovation of **Murphy Center** was completed just before the opening of men's and women's basketball for 2014. Gone is the waffle ceiling, and new lights are a noticeable improvement. Window shades, a new HVAC system, better acoustics, and new concession stands and restrooms were included in the renovation. Concurrent with the building's reopening was the announcement of the signing of a five-year contract with Nike. Some MTSU teams have worn Nike apparel, but not all sports were officially sponsored.



The Old College Try

A new golf tournament hosted by MTSU last October drew 12 teams from across the country. Called the **Intercollegiate at the Grove**, the tournament was a success, and participants said it could become a marquee event for top college teams. Played at The Grove in Williamson County, a course designed by PGA tour legend Greg Norman, the contest included MTSU, Troy, GRU Augusta, Lipscomb, Southern Miss, Ohio State, the College of Charleston, Tennessee Tech, Mississippi State, Cincinnati, Tulsa, and Belmont. MTSU head coach Whit Turnbow spent nine months planning the first annual fall tourney. Turnbow says he's already heard from teams wanting to play in 2015. "It's going to be a special event and one we continue for many, many years to come," Turnbow said. Members at the host course gave up their exclusive club for four days to accommodate the collegians. "I can't say enough about the membership letting us have their golf course for a few days," Turnbow said. "It's pretty tremendous." Ohio State won the tournament in comeback fashion. MTSU finished fourth.



The Art of Happiness

Some MTSU art students learned first-hand why people in Scandinavia continually top the United Nations “World Happiness Report.” Their own report was **Passport to Happiness**, an art exhibit last August in Todd Art Gallery. Created by MTSU students and Danish and Norwegian children during a special study-abroad program, the exhibit featured multimedia pieces and artifacts created in Denmark, Norway, and America, all focusing on happiness. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are known for relatively high incomes, good healthcare and schools, generous parental leave and vacation time, and inexpensive childcare. Dr. **Debrah Sickler-Voigt** took seven of her students to Denmark and Norway in May to study art, stay with families, and teach in local schools. Students made stops in Copenhagen and Oslo, swam above the Arctic Circle, visited Legoland Billund, climbed mountains, and admired fjords, churches, and museums while immersing themselves in the region’s culture.



The Future Worker

By 2020, the so-called Millennial generation—those raised in a digital age and possessing a different outlook than generations past—will make up 40 percent of the workforce. Jennings A. Jones College of Business hosted a half-day conference last October, “**2020 Millennial Game Plan: Maximizing Millennial Entrepreneurship and Innovation**,” to help educate corporate leaders, marketing executives, human resource managers, nonprofit leaders, economic development and community leaders, and anyone else interested in learning about the impact millennials may have on the economy.

Horse Sense

MTSU’s **Horse Science Center** and **Tennessee Miller Coliseum** hosted national and regional conferences on equine-assisted activities and therapies and therapeutic horsemanship in August 2014. Therapeutic horsemanship helps people with a wide range of emotional, cognitive, and physical challenges.

The Horse Science program has been a pioneer in providing equine-assisted activities and therapies to veterans, particularly in its work with the Alvin C. York Veterans Administration (VA) Medical Center in Murfreesboro.



Mike Novak

Art and Commerce

A receptive audience turned its attention to China as seen by **President Sidney A. McPhee** while helping raise scholarship funds for students at a September 2014 exhibit in Todd Art Gallery. ***China Through the Eyes of an American University President*** was presented by MTSU Arts and included more than 300 digital images and 30 large prints of McPhee’s photographs taken during his travels to more than 100 Chinese municipalities and provinces. Framed copies were auctioned, raising \$2,300 for a graphic design scholarship.



Confucius Hires

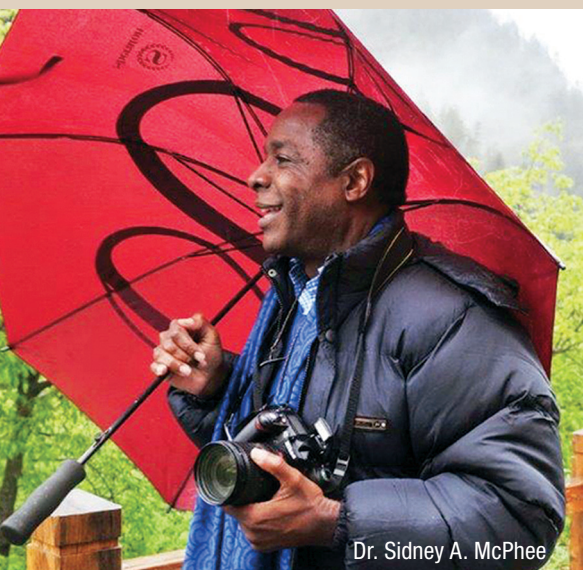
MTSU’s Confucius Institute hired a midstate educator to help promote Chinese language and culture in K–12 schools. **Mike Novak**, most recently principal of Liberty Elementary in Shelbyville, became the institute’s new assistant director in July 2014. As a principal, Novak was one of 10 people chosen to serve on the National Assessment of Educational Progress principals’ panel. The Confucius Institute works to enhance understanding of Chinese language and culture and to help facilitate opportunities for exchange and collaboration between China and Tennessee.

MTSU's mobile production lab demonstrated how TV stations could bring satellite trucks to TEMA headquarters, tap the live feed, or broadcast their own footage.



Safety First

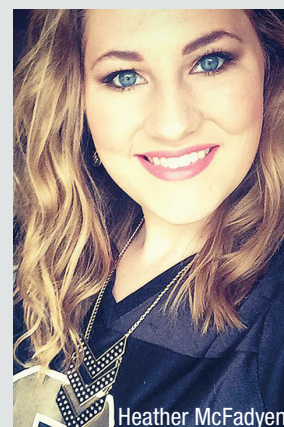
MTSU recently helped create an emergency communications center that will provide live, high-definition satellite uplinks that government agencies and TV stations can use to broadcast information during tornadoes, floods, and other public health emergencies. The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA) unveiled the Multi-Agency Joint Information Center (MAJIC) in October 2014. Staff from the College of Education's **Center for Educational Media** and the College of Mass Communication's **Department of Electronic Media Communication** shared technical expertise to properly equip the information center. TEMA director David Purkey said the partnership could lead to valuable experience for MTSU student interns at his agency.



Dr. Sidney A. McPhee

Keep On Keepin' On

Junior **Heather McFadyen** received MTSU's first Chitwood Award for Excellence for her plan to help beloved children's author Beverly Cleary reclaim ownership of her popular book *Ramona Quimby, Age 8*. The award recognizes the best proposal by a Department of Recording Industry Management student in a copyright law class taught by Associate Professor Deborah Wagnon. McFadyen said the Recapture Project, which allows creators of copyrights to terminate the rights of their publishers and reclaim ownership of their songs or books, not only gave her the chance to continue Ms. Cleary's mission to help children "but also sparked a new path that I hadn't imagined. In doing this project, I discovered a passion for law." The Chitwood Award honors RIM major David "Ritt" Chitwood, 28, who died in a January 2014 traffic accident near campus.



Heather McFadyen

From left: Phil Cox, who represented Luther Masingill; Bob Johnson; Otis Sanford; event emcee Demetria Kalodinos; Sam Venable; Alex S. Jones; Joe Birch; and Hooper Penuel, the hall's cofounder.



Journalism Giants

Six journalists made up the second class inducted into the **Tennessee Journalism Hall of Fame** in August 2014. The hall is an independent partner of the College of Mass Communication, which houses it at MTSU. The 2014 honorees were Joe Birch, co-anchor, WMV-TV Action News 5, Memphis; Bob Johnson, co-anchor, WTVC-TV News, Chattanooga; Alex S. Jones, Pulitzer Prize winner, *New York Times*; Luther Masingill, WDEF Radio/TV, Chattanooga (who died on Oct. 20, 2014); Otis Sanford, editor/columnist, the *Commercial Appeal*, Memphis; and Sam Venable, columnist, *Knoxville News Sentinel*.

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Beyond Critical Mass

Dean Ken Paulson
College of Mass Communication

MTSU's multifaceted and innovative media offerings come of age by Allison Gorman

WHEN *USA Today* LAUNCHED IN 1982, THE JOURNALISM establishment was startled by its bold colors and condensed stories. The new national newspaper was quickly derided as “fast-food journalism.”

In retrospect, the newspaper was actually pretty traditional. Like two centuries of papers before it, it printed the most important news of the day, shared its views on an editorial page, and tried to be as timely as the medium would permit. It also adopted strong policies on accuracy, attribution, and ethics.

But those core values were also complemented by a groundbreaking design, tighter editing, and a Technicolor weather map.

Ken Paulson was a young editor on the team that launched *USA Today* in 1982. He returned there as editor-in-chief in 2004 after a scandal cost the paper its hard-won credibility. Paulson later left *USA Today* to head the Freedom Forum and Newseum in Washington, D.C., and then the First Amendment Center in Nashville, where a search committee contacted the nationally recognized First Amendment expert about the dean's post at MTSU's College of Mass Communication—the fifth-largest in the nation.

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Pursuit of Excellence

Pat Embry, a former editor of both the *Nashville Banner* and *The Tennessean*, was recently named director of the John Seigenthaler Chair of Excellence in First Amendment Studies. Seigenthaler, who died July 11, 2014, at age 86, was a reporter, editor, publisher, and CEO of *The Tennessean*. After serving as founding editorial director for *USA Today*, he established the First Amendment Center in Nashville in 1991. MTSU established the chair in his name in 1986 to honor the iconic journalist's lifelong commitment to free expression. The Seigenthaler Chair supports activities related to free speech, free press, and other topics of concern for contemporary journalism.

Seigenthaler championed civil rights and women's rights, Embry says, so those issues have become his early focus as he builds a website and social media presence for the chair and revitalizes its speaker/symposium program. Noting that journalists in Ferguson, Mo., were handcuffed for recharging their laptops and cellphones in fast-food restaurants, he says, "If the events of Ferguson and its aftermath . . . have shown us anything, it's that the First Amendment remains a strong but fragile foot soldier on the front lines of American justice."



Pat Embry



Val Hoepfner



Whitney Matheson

Leader in Innovation

Val Hoepfner, who had been serving as journalist-in-residence in MTSU's School of Journalism, became director of MTSU's nationally recognized Center for Innovation in Media in July 2014. Hoepfner was previously director of education for the Freedom Forum Diversity Institute and spent 20 years in newsrooms as a photojournalist, newsroom leader, and multimedia director at the *Indianapolis Star*. Replacing Hoepfner as journalist-in-residence is pop culture critic **Whitney Matheson**, who built a large audience as writer and editor of *Pop Candy*, the award-winning blog she founded during her 15-year tenure at *USA Today*.

Beyond Critical Mass (continued from page 19)

Paulson immediately saw possibilities, starting with a *USA Today*-like melding of old values and new approaches as the key to the college's future.

"This is a college in which I truly saw unprecedented potential," he says. "I believe that it can position itself as the most multi-faceted and innovative program of mass communication in the country, and for a variety of reasons."

Those reasons include a Department of Recording Industry (RI) that's the largest and, arguably, one of the best in the country—not to mention one located a short drive from Nashville, Tennessee, a cradle of the music business; a Department of Electronic Media Communication (EMC), whose students and state-of-the-art facilities have attracted national recognition; and a tradition-rich School of Journalism that houses the John Seigenthaler Chair of Excellence in First Amendment Studies.

For Mass Comm to fulfill its potential, though, Paulson knew it also needed retooling.

"All traditional media have been buffeted by digital technology, and that in turn has led to cutbacks and job losses," Paulson says. "But there will always be news. There will always be music. And film. And commercial art. And communication. Our challenge is to prepare our students for the new era of opportunities."

Preparing students to succeed despite those realities isn't just about having tech-savvy faculty and cutting-edge tools, Paulson says. It's about reinforcing traditional communication skills (research, writing, ethics, critical thinking) while breaking down traditional academic barriers, thinking beyond traditional media platforms, and finding nontraditional ways to communicate.

"It's not enough for us to just teach journalism, media, and production skills; we need to anticipate the future and help reinvent these industries," Paulson says. "What better place to thoughtfully explore the future of media than a forward-looking College of Mass Communication that now also boasts a Center for Innovation in Media?"

In July 2013, Paulson accepted the position as dean of the college and received a blunt directive from President Sidney A. McPhee: make the College of Mass Communication as contemporary, innovative, and prominent as possible. Or, as interpreted by Paulson, make it "famous."

"We're embracing that challenge," Paulson says.

Beyond Industry Standard

Taylor Thompson is a huge music fan, but she doesn't sing or play. Until she enrolled as an undeclared freshman, she didn't know she could make a living in music.

"It's not enough for us to just teach journalism skills; we need to anticipate the future . . ."

“I read about the MTSU music business program and I thought, ‘Murfreesboro, Tennessee, has the number-one program?’ It just blew me away.”

The Department of Recording Industry has been blowing people away for 40 years. In September 2014, *Billboard* reinforced the department’s well-established reputation when it named MTSU one of the nation’s five top universities for learning about the music industry. More recently, *The Hollywood Reporter* listed MTSU’s music business program among its “Top 25 Music Schools” for 2014, ranking it ahead of nearby Belmont University’s Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business.

Chair Beverly Keel, an award-winning music journalist, former recording industry executive, and longtime professor, says that in her 19-year association with the RI program, it has selectively narrowed its enrollment from 1,800 to 1,200 while expanding its digital curricula and continuing to invest in the recording studios that serve as its classrooms. An outside reviewer recently called those facilities “second to none,” Keel says, “even topping NYU—and without the subway noise.”

With concentrations in Audio Production, Commercial Songwriting, and Music Business, the department boasts many alumni, former students, and current faculty who are firmly established in the industry. More than a dozen have been nominated for Grammys, and seven have won the award. Former students, including country music stars Chris Young, Hillary Scott, Eric Paslay, Sam Hunt, and Brett Eldridge, have recently found themselves on the *Billboard* Country Airplay chart simultaneously. Sony Music Nashville Chairman and CEO Gary Overton and multi-Grammy-winning producer Blake Chancey are just two other examples of prominent RI graduates.

“The list of UMG Nashville staffers and artists who have attended MTSU is too long to put in print,” says Mike Dungan, president and CEO of Universal Music Group Nashville. “There is no doubt why this university has always been at the top for music industry study.”

The faculty as well is a who’s who of industry insiders, including John Hill, a double-Grammy-winning recording engineer; John Merchant, a Grammy-nominated producer and recording engineer; and Odie Blackmon, a Grammy-nominated songwriter who is currently hard at work building up the department’s fledgling songwriting program. Blackmon recently used his industry connections to hire as adjuncts three highly regarded songwriters/musicians whose real-world experience, like his, can benefit students.

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Spring Fed Middle

For nearly 30 years, the world-renowned Center for Popular Music (CPM), located in the Bragg Mass Communication Building, has been a resource for all things related to American vernacular music—from country and folk to gospel, blues, jazz, and rock. It is the largest and oldest research institution for popular music in the world.

New director **Dr. Greg Reish** is bolstering the CPM’s role as a place where music and ideas about music are made—for instance by producing (with students’ help) new reissues of historic Americana music for Spring Fed Records, the Grammy-winning label devoted to issuing historically significant recordings of traditional Southern music that Reish helped the center acquire. What comes out of the CPM, Reish says, should be just as important as what goes into it.

Music City Mavens

Beverly Keel, chair of the Department of Recording Industry, and former student **Hillary Scott** of Grammy-winning music group Lady Antebellum were among honorees at the *Nashville Business Journal’s* inaugural Women in Music City Awards last fall.

Keel (’88), an award-winning music journalist and longtime MTSU professor, most recently served as senior vice president of media and artist relations for Universal Music Group Nashville, where she developed extensive media campaigns for a roster including Lionel Richie, Scotty McCreery, and Sugarland, among others. Scott, who attended MTSU before launching a successful music career, keynoted the red carpet event. Also honored was MTSU graduate Jill Napier (’99), director of copyright management at Music Services Inc. in Brentwood.



From left to right) Beverly Keel, Hillary Scott, Dr. Sidney A. McPhee, and Liz McPhee

Journalism, media, and production
and help reinvent these industries.”

Keel says that faculty diversity and depth of experience is what separates the department from similar programs at other universities. Faculty members can connect students with jobs and internships—“We’re the first to hear about job openings,” she says—and students get real-time advice about succeeding as entrepreneurs in a rapidly changing industry.

“As record companies shrink in size, you’re seeing more independent contractors, because the work still has to be done,” Keel says. “So there’s more employment at social media companies, marketing companies, and artist management companies, and we’re seeing real growth in live entertainment and talent agencies.”

Thompson, now a junior, says she honed her skills at Match Records, the department’s working record label, which gives students experience in every facet of the music business from production to promotion. After graduation, she hopes to be an artist manager in Nashville.

“I have a lot of connections already set up there, and so I’m not really willing to say I’ve been promised a job,” she says. “But . . .”

As an industry hub, Nashville provides a lot of fieldwork opportunities for MTSU students, Keel says.

“I think Nashville is as close to perfect as you can get on this earth,” she says. “We do amazing business here that reaches the world, but the people are friendly and there’s still a level of accountability, because you’re going to run into them at Kroger.”

Beyond the Buzz

The Journalism Department’s new Center for Innovation in Media is fast becoming a mecca in its own right. The state-of-the-art facility in beautifully renovated space in Bragg Mass Communication Building houses all student-run media—

television station MT10, radio station WMTS, and monthly print and daily digital newspaper *Sidelines*—as well as student-run Match Records and professional National Public Radio affiliate WMOT.

After the \$700,000 center opened in 2012, the Associated Press Media Editors recognized it as “a model for journalism schools and professional news organizations” for its converged newsroom, where some 250 students can collaborate to create content across media platforms.

Just like a real newsroom, it gets loud.

For the center’s new director, Val Hoepfner, quiet time is over by 9:30 a.m., when she meets with leaders from student-run media and the students who work at WMOT. A veteran multimedia journalist who worked at newspapers including the *Indianapolis Star*, Hoepfner says she’s a bit like publisher for the student organizations (which are editorially independent).

“I run a daily news meeting, I make a lot of suggestions, and I offer support,” she says. That could mean anything from helping students create interactive graphics for a website to advocating on their behalf for the prompt release of public records.

Hoepfner says she’s been impressed by the students’ enthusiasm. This year, more than 140 students tried out for 82 positions with MT10 News, she says, and most who didn’t make the cut now work production for the station.

With so many students sharing the newsroom, Hoepfner has to close her office door to have a conversation. And that’s a good thing.

“There’s just this buzz out there,” she says, “and it’s cool to sit back and listen to it every day.”



Street Cred

Students don’t usually get to do the kind of big projects available to Electronic Media Communication (EMC) students at MTSU. Here is just one example of the type of remarkable opportunities the EMC Department (chaired by multiple Emmy-winner Billy Pittard) has recently offered.

Freedom Sings is a celebration of free speech and music that has toured college campuses across the nation under the direction of College of Mass Communication dean Ken Paulson, president of the First Amendment Center. When the event celebrated its 15th anniversary with two concerts at Nashville’s landmark Bluebird Café, MTSU students were there working behind-the-scenes deploying the college’s 40-foot, \$1.7 million HD mobile video production lab, managing social media content, helping with public relations, and covering the event for student media outlets.



Billy Pittard

Emily Kinzer ('14), a reporter for the ABC-affiliate TV station in South Bend, Ind., recalls staying up all night putting together her first on-air piece for MT10 News and learning to stand her ground as a field reporter when she covered a homicide for the station. The hands-on experience was invaluable, she says, and made her feel “locked, loaded, and ready to go” for a career as a broadcast journalist.

Beyond Broadcast Borders

Senior Chris Davis says he was drawn to the University's Department of Electronic Media Communication when he toured the Mass Comm building and was told he could work on camera starting day one with MT10.

“That’s exactly what I ended up doing,” he says. He went on to intern with WTVF-TV in Nashville and produce football and basketball broadcasts for ESPN3, experiences that contradicted dire predictions about the future of broadcasting.

“Instead of gloom and doom, I see promise and opportunities on the horizon for this industry,” he says.

Billy Pittard, department chair, seconds that opinion. Though broadcasting has changed—a TV journalist is now a “one-man band,” reporting and producing—there are still jobs in the industry, he says. (At last count, there were 35 MTSU alumni working in Nashville’s four television news stations.)

And the department’s reach goes beyond broadcast television and radio. Its students can also learn to create content for film, the Web, and live events—e.g., big-screen video.

“There are still films being made,” says Pittard, who joined MTSU in 2011 after an award-winning career in media and entertainment design that included several Emmys. “There is still a lot of television and video being shot. . . . The disruption is in the traditional structure of those businesses, and that’s a concern for people who are established in them. But for students, it spells opportunity.”

As in the recording industry, today’s electronic media professionals often freelance, Pittard says. So they need more than technical skill—they need to understand where the jobs are and how to market themselves.

Pittard covers that territory in a new class, Create Your Career. He also offers a freelancing workshop. He says he’s trying to foster an entrepreneurial culture throughout the department.

Senior Scotty Wright has been networking and building his professional reputation since his freshman year. The aspiring filmmaker started at MT10 operating a camera and then producing and directing. He eventually started freelancing. His portfolio now includes music videos, live concerts and sporting events, reality TV for cable and network, Web series, and short films—among them *Sbocciare*, a group project that won top

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Lights . . . Camera . . . Action!

Eleven College of Mass Communication students invited the public to see their cinematic work from summer travels in Paris during a September 2014 screening at Nashville’s historic Belcourt Theatre. Led by Documentary Channel founder and MTSU associate professor **Tom Neff**, the students made films about up-and-coming fashion designers and musicians. “These students went to a foreign city, worked with new artists for only three weeks, and produced three documentaries of the highest caliber, comparable to any films coming out of any film school, bar none,” Neff said.

Pitch Perfect

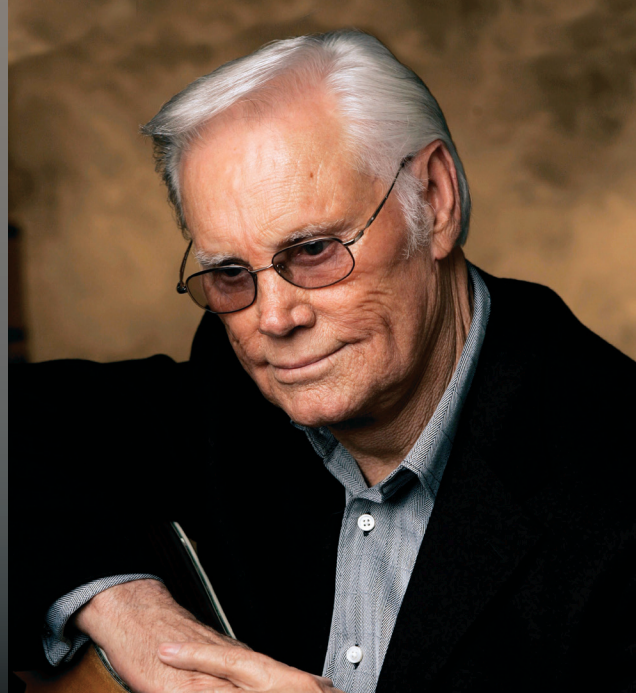
A new partnership between **Sony/ATV Music Publishing Nashville** and the MTSU Department of **Recording Industry** allows students to submit two of their songs directly to Sony/ATV’s creative team. Sony/ATV will then choose students to perform two more songs at a live showcase. Ken Paulson, dean of the College of Mass Communication, said “This bridges the gap between the classroom and recording industry in a creative and positive way.” Troy Tomlinson, president and CEO of Sony/ATV, also lauded the collaboration, saying “We are constantly searching for new writers and writer/artists.”

MTSU’s Commercial Songwriting concentration, one of just a few songwriting programs offered nationally, is led by MTSU alum and esteemed Nashville songwriter Odie Blackmon, whose past cuts include country artist Gary Allen’s hit “Nothing On But the Radio.” Other hit songwriters who have studied at MTSU include Grammy-winning songwriters Luke Laird and Josh Kear, among many others.

A Legend's Legacy

In 2014, the family of country music icon George Jones established a scholarship fund at MTSU to serve as a living memorial to the late singer, who died April 26, 2013, at age 81. "George would have liked the fact that MTSU attracts so many first-generation college students, as well as students who face financial challenges," stated Jones's widow, Nancy, in announcing the gift. "Like George, they are hardworking folks who are determined to make their dreams a reality."

The College of Mass Communication is working to preserve and promote Jones's legacy in numerous ways, including by offering a course on Jones's life and music and developing opportunities for scholars to offer analyses and interpretations of his music that can be shared with scholars internationally.



Beyond Critical Mass (continued from page 23)

honors from the Broadcast Education Association and was screened at the Newport Beach Film Festival.

EMC Productions (the department's "varsity team" for live-event TV) recently placed first nationally among student-produced sports broadcasts. MTSU also swept 11 of 12 categories at the 2014 Tennessee Associated Press College Broadcast Awards.

Beyond the Printed Page

Blue Raiders regularly win accolades for traditional journalism, but in the College of Mass Communication, as in the real world, journalism is bursting out of the confines of print.

The college's aforementioned journalism programs—the School of Journalism's traditional program, for print, and the Electronic Media Communication Department's multimedia program for practically everything else—are currently being melded together in a single, vibrant, multi-platform program poised for roll out in the fall of 2015. From a curriculum perspective, it's a savvy shift in approach by the college that better reflects the media industry students will enter after graduation.

Dwight Brooks, director of the School of Journalism, says there will always be a need for trained journalists in a democracy. "But we've got to prepare our students for the careers that are out there," he says. "And they all involve being able to shoot video and write for the Internet, in addition to the traditional skills of reporting and writing. That's the tricky thing: balancing. Ethics are still important, and we still do a lot of that very effectively."

In addition, Paulson plans to expand the role of the Center for Innovation in Media as "a laboratory for change, anticipating where the media are going and how we can ensure that our

students get there ahead of it." Brooks calls it a "teaching hospital model": professional journalists working with students and professors to create a real product.

Paulson also reworked a practicum course under the purview of the Seigenthaler Chair of Excellence, headed by former *Tennessean* and *Nashville Banner* editor Pat Embry. The original model, an idea of the late *Tennessean* editor John Seigenthaler, allowed students to work as beat reporters covering federal courts for the newspaper. This year, Paulson expanded the concept as the Music City Project, with students contributing stories, videos, and photos about the music industry to local media. Media partners provided \$15,000 in pilot project funding, from which each student receives a \$1,000 scholarship at the semester's end.

"This model makes sure that students get something for their hard work, and it also guarantees them a professional outlet under the guidance of a professor," Paulson says. "And that model is going to grow."

The college is also collaborating with music industry partners such as the Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival and the Americana Music Festival in Nashville to build on the natural synergy of all its disciplines. In June, the Music City Project covered Bonnaroo for *The Tennessean*, and in April and October, Bonnaroo founders Ashley Capps and Rick Farman visited the college as guest speakers. "It's simply unprecedented for the management team of a world-class music festival to take a full day to engage and educate the next generation of music and media professionals," Paulson says.

In September, the project covered the Americana Music Festival, whose organizer brings guest artists like Billy Bragg to campus.

Meanwhile, Pittard says EMC is building partnerships with local tech companies that support Nashville's growing reputation as "the live-event video capital of the world." (An example of such a firm is DWP Live: six recent department grads are now on staff there.)

"So many opportunities come out of our proximity to Nashville," Brooks sums up. "Most of these opportunities cross all our departments. . . . At a certain point, these divisions are so artificial."

The convergence of print and other forms of communication suits the college particularly well. For years, it has been the nation's only college of mass communication offering fully functional journalism, electronic media, and recording industry academic units. Now, "with the walls crumbling everywhere," Paulson says, that arrangement seems prescient.

The cumulative effect of this newfound departmental synergy, alongside such high levels of activity and industry engagement, will result in graduates better prepared not just to work in modern media, but also to help infuse the fields of journalism and recorded music with the fresh ideas needed to resurrect them.

"The young people entering our college are members of the Google Generation, many of them born the same year as the dominant tech company," Paulson says. "They are intuitive communicators who value instant information and interaction. They engage with technology like no generation before them. But they also decided not to pay for music, leading to layoffs in the recording industry. They decided newspapers had little value, which fueled a downward spiral in print journalism. And their preference for YouTube and viral videos took a toll on television broadcasting."

As a result, Paulson says he often jokes with incoming Mass Comm students planning to one day graduate and work in the

media professions "that the new motto of our college should be 'You broke it; you fix it.'"

Beyond "Famous"

Soon after Paulson became dean of the college, he and President McPhee visited the Newseum in Washington, where they gathered 12 of the nation's leaders in news media to discuss the future of the industry.

Last January, Paulson, Keel, and McPhee flew to the Grammy Awards (three former Blue Raiders were involved with Grammy-nominated projects) and held a West Hollywood reception in partnership with the Americana Music Association for the late Phil Everly. MTSU was the only university represented at the Grammy event.

"We are doing what a nationally prominent program would do, and that means going well beyond the borders of Murfreesboro or Tennessee," Paulson says.

Creating a buzz about Mass Comm, he says, will help it attract the main thing it lacks to fulfill its tremendous potential: significant support—financial and otherwise—from the industries it serves.

Paulson and his team of leaders in the College are fully aware of their college's past successes and its potential, and they know that the best kind of fame must be earned. But with an innovative, multifaceted vision for the future and the backing of an enthusiastic University administration, they also know that the college is meeting new challenges, shaping its own destiny, and writing its own special definition of what becoming a contemporary, innovative, prominent, and, yes, "famous" College of Mass Communication really means.

Bookmark The Leading Edge (mtsumasscomments.wordpress.com), the blog of the College of Mass Communication, for news about faculty, students, and alumni. **MTSU**



Survey Says . . .

Not every state is fortunate enough to have a University-led, independent statewide poll that can reliably and regularly inform its population. Starting in fall 1998, the MTSU Poll, a product of the College of Mass Communication, has collected public opinion data every spring and fall on major social, political, and ethical issues affecting Tennessee. The latest MTSU Poll in 2014 showed a close vote would be likely in Tennessee's proposed constitutional amendment on abortion. (The measure passed with 53 percent of the vote.)



MTSU's SPIDE

HOW “SPILL DOCTOR” RYAN OTTER FOUND TRUTH IN THE ASHES OF TENNESSEE’S WORST ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER

by Allison Gorman

In early 2009, Dr. Ryan Otter (Biology) stood awestruck on the banks of the Emory River in Roane County. What two months earlier had been a serene fishing alcove now looked like a lunar landscape or a present-day Pompeii. Under his boots, where there should have been vegetation, there was gray sludge. And the water in the alcove was simply gone, displaced by wet fly ash, a thick chemical stew that had spilled into the river when an earthen retention pond ruptured at the TVA Kingston Fossil Plant.

“It was amazing, the volume of this thing,” Otter says. “I mean, it was a billion gallons of fly ash that clogged up a river. It looked like a war zone. And I thought, ‘This is a billion gallons of something that we know contains metals that can be toxic. How can this not be catastrophic?’”

That’s the kind of loaded question Otter doesn’t allow himself—or his students—to ask. An ardent “science nerd,” he’s all about design and data: assume nothing, develop a bulletproof experiment, and see what the numbers reveal.

However, the scope of the spill was unlike anything Otter, an environmental toxicologist, had ever seen. It was also unlike anything the United States had ever seen. The slurry blanketed



RRMAN

everything in its path, pushing homes off foundations, choking two tributaries of the Tennessee River, and burying a 300-acre ecosystem.

For the people who lost their homes, the event was a life-changing disaster. But for the area's quieter (and far more numerous) residents—the water and land animals—the prognosis wasn't so clear. Despite the ubiquity of fossil fuel plants worldwide, Otter says, there had been very little research on fly ash, a byproduct of coal combustion that contains trace amounts of many potentially dangerous elements, including arsenic, lead, and mercury.

Weeks after the spill, Otter joined a coordinated effort of several agencies to answer a slightly different version of his gut-level question: Is this an environmental catastrophe?

He found the answer in an unexpected place, and that answer surprised everyone.

COMPLEXITY AND CONFLUENCE

More than six years after the Kingston spill, cleanup is ongoing. It's projected to cost \$1.2 billion and is slated for completion in 2015. Environmental monitoring of the site will continue for years afterward.

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photo: J. Intintoli



photo: J. Intintoli

Scientific analysis of the spill has involved university researchers, federal and state government agencies, and private consultants.

Otter was initially called to the scene by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, which asked him to study the effects of dredging on mussels. Then he was connected with TVA and Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), which asked him to test fish for toxins to help gauge immediate and future implications of the spill.

He says the project was the most complicated he has ever worked on, and not just because of its massive scale. There were also the complex dynamics of the Emory River, which regularly runs backward when water is released from Melton Hill Dam on the Clinch River, which merges with the Emory. “The water literally goes back and forth, depending on what the dam is doing,” Otter says. “I had divers in the water who were three miles upstream of the spill, and they were sitting in ash.”

And while the Emory was relatively clean before the spill, the Clinch has long been polluted by runoff from ORNL. Researchers had to find out whether the toxins they found came from fly ash or from previous contamination. Then, in 2010, widespread flooding of the Tennessee River system further muddied the waters.

“All this made the hydrology crazy,” Otter says.

SPIDERS AND THE FLY

Otter’s test subjects were problematic, too. When analyses of toxin levels in fish proved inconclusive, he knew he needed a different animal—something whose diet was more closely connected with the fly ash. Then he remembered his Ph.D. work with researchers from the Environmental Protection Agency, who used a commonly found spider to measure contamination at polluted sites. The spiders are ideal indicators, he says, because they have high fat levels that store toxins.

The spiders, known as long-jawed orb weavers, are easy to find on any riverbank in the country. Shy and harmless, they hide in trees near the water during the day, and at night they spin webs to catch mosquitoes, black flies, and other bugs that live in and feed on sediment. With the help of two students, Otter spent two days on the river, shaking tree branches and bagging several hundred spiders, which he sent to a lab for chemical analysis.

Otter says he tries to conduct research with no expectations about the outcome. But when the lab results came in, he was as

“SO THESE SPIDERS ARE REALLY COOL INDICATORS. THEY CAN TELL A STORY ABOUT WHAT’S GOING ON IN THE WATER AND HOW MUCH [CONTAMINATION] IS LEAVING THE WATER TO COME ONTO THE LAND.”

shocked as anyone. The spiders tested negative for every toxin but selenium—levels of which, while concerning, weren’t “off the charts,” he says. Further field and controlled studies supported his initial findings. Apparently, the other toxins had bound with carbon in the fly ash and settled, uneaten, on the river bottom.

While media images of the Kingston site were terrifying, the spiders told a more accurate story. Because they bridge the ecosystems of river and land, says Otter, spiders reveal more than most animals can.

“All fish can tell you is the impact on fish . . . and how contamination moves through water systems in one way,” he says. “But how is that contamination impacting things on the land? Fish can’t really help with that.”

Long-jawed orb weavers aren’t the only creatures that eat aquatic bugs, he says. So do birds and bats, which then become part of the terrestrial food chain. “So these spiders are really cool indicators,” Otter says. “They can tell a story about what’s going on in the water and how much is leaving the water to come onto the land.”

Thanks in great part to Ryan Otter, there’s no longer a dearth of research on the environmental effects of fly ash. (His phone rang in early 2014, when a pipe ruptured at a Duke Energy fly ash

pond in North Carolina.) And while his work on the Kingston spill site is complete, he’s just beginning his research with long-jawed orb weavers, which he considers invaluable but overlooked subjects in the study of food-chain dynamics. “They can tell a huge story that typically has not been told,” he says. [MTSU](#)

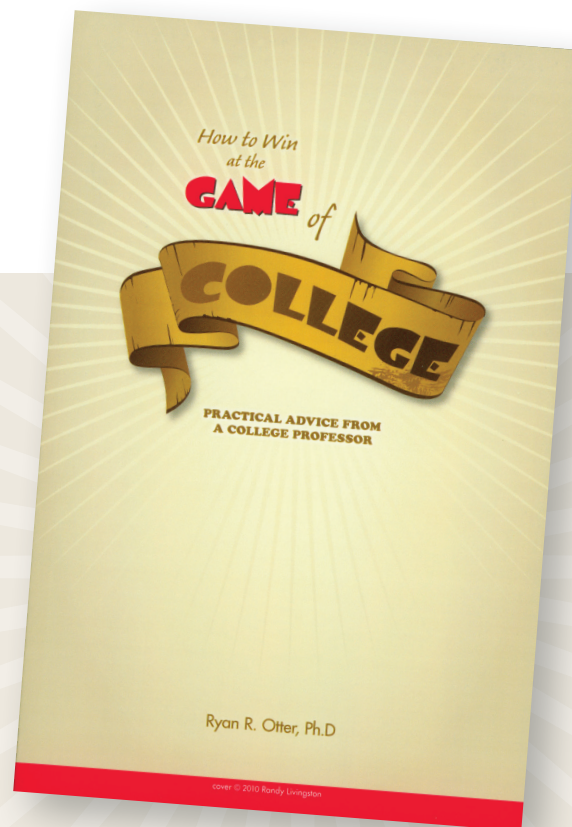


Ryan Otter might think of himself as a science nerd, but his students think of him as a guy they can go to for advice. Since he joined the Department of Biology in 2007, Otter has spent many office hours talking to rudderless students about strategies for college success and guiding them toward fulfilling careers. He’s given so much advice, in fact, that he wrote a book on the subject, *How to Win at the Game of College*.

Otter sees himself in these students, who have been told they need a degree to get a job but who don’t know how to find their way or even where the path will lead.

“That was me,” he says. “I went to college with no idea what I was doing.” As a zoology major at Michigan State, he plugged away at his classes, driven by the vague promise that a degree equals a good job and good money. “Then I started looking at the data and I thought, ‘I don’t think that this is very accurate. I don’t see a diploma setting me up for what I think it’s going to.’”

As all scientists know, the data doesn’t lie. The trend Otter discovered when he ran the numbers still holds true: there are more college graduates than there are jobs for them. While graduation is critical, it doesn’t guarantee a job, much less a rewarding career. So college student Otter developed a detailed game plan to get where he wanted to go.



“[College is] just like any other game that you want to win,” he says. “You have to know who the other players are; you have to know what the rules are; and you have to have a strategy.” The plan worked for him, and at MTSU he began sharing it with students. He didn’t write it down until 2010, when his wife suggested that a book would save him time in the long run.

The book turned into a website, [TheCollegeGameProject.org](#), with the tagline “Be Weird” (statistically weird, he explains.) The website has led to speaking engagements across the country.

Okay, call him a science nerd. But call his book and website great tools for playing and excelling in the college game. [MTSU](#)



FAITH HANDLERS

by Allison Gorman

A folklorist studies a widely
misunderstood Appalachian tradition

YEARS BEFORE THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL SENT FILM CREWS TO Middlesboro, Ky., to document the life of preacher Jamie Coots for the show *Snake Salvation*, Associate Professor Patricia Gaitely (English) was there doing some documenting of her own. Equipped with a simple recorder and camera, a notebook, a Bible, and sometimes a tambourine, she traveled to Coots's church and other small congregations in the rural Southeast to immerse herself in the culture of snake handling. She'd long been fascinated by this unusual Appalachian tradition, and she hoped to interview women in the insular, generally patriarchal denominations in which snake handling is practiced. What she learned changed many of her assumptions about these people, whose lives bear little resemblance to reality TV.

photo: Andy Heidt

Gaitely began with more than a passing knowledge of the subject. Raised Anglican, she started attending Pentecostal services at age 22, before she left her native England for graduate school in Alabama. “I was familiar with fairly lively expressions of worship,” she says. “I believed in the supernatural, in healing, and speaking in tongues, that kind of thing.” But snake handling was a different matter. Only a few Pentecostal congregations—usually identified as “Holiness” churches—believe in a scriptural mandate (Mark 16:18) to take up serpents as a sign of faith.

The first known snake handler practiced in East Tennessee in 1909, but the tradition is older than that, Gaitely says. It spread throughout southern Appalachia, where it still attracts a vibrant subculture with hundreds of adherents. When Gaitely joined MTSU in 2006, she saw an opportunity to explore that subculture from its birthplace. “As a Christian, I am very interested in how others of the same faith express that faith,” she says. “I’m also interested in snakes and belonged to a reptile club in Alabama. So it was an intriguing combination for me.”

services, rather than passive,” Gaitely says. They couldn’t preach, but they “testified” (often a slim difference), sang and played music, and handled snakes as the spirit led them.

They also seemed socially empowered, as Gaitely noted in an article for the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*. They set their own standards for biblically appropriate dress and behavior. And because their congregations functioned much like extended families, sharing practical and sometimes even financial support, child rearing was less onerous and lonely than it can be for many mothers, especially those facing economic hardship. That might explain why many of the women Gaitely met weren’t raised in the tradition, as she had assumed, but had joined it voluntarily. As she concludes in her article, “The way of life they have chosen, and the way these women have chosen to express their faith, grants them a degree of freedom, autonomy, and self-expression that some with more material resources might find enviable.”

Television has portrayed these communities as anything but enviable, as Gaitely predicted it would when she was visiting the

“As a Christian, I am very interested in how others of the same faith express that faith,” she says. “I’m also interested in snakes and belonged to a reptile club in Alabama. So it was an intriguing combination for me.”

The Internet and fellow researchers led her to Del Rio, Tenn., Sand Mountain, Ala., and Middlesboro, to churches that seemed remote from the world, although they weren’t far from the interstate. “Many are in quite depressed areas,” she says. “Every time I went to Middlesboro, it seemed like something else in town had closed down.”

When first visiting a church, Gaitely usually sat in the back, near other women. (“I would *never* have presumed to sit behind the pulpit with the men who were sitting there,” she says.) To interview the women, however, she typically went through a male “gatekeeper.” But once she had access, what she saw and heard surprised her. The women acknowledged their traditional biblical roles as subordinate to men, yet they felt spiritually empowered. “I found that many women were active in these

Del Rio church and the BBC arrived to film a service for its documentary *Around the World in 80 Faiths*. “I remember saying, ‘I know what they’re going to focus on. They’re going to film the toothless person or the person dancing around with no shoes on’—and that’s pretty much what they did.”

Gaitely has never seen *Snake Salvation*, but she understands its appeal; fascination with snake handling sparked her own research. (The subject got fresh media attention when Jamie Coots died of a snake bite in last year, and again when his son Cody, who succeeded him, suffered a nonfatal bite as well.) But she says focusing solely on snake handling—which, if it happens at all, might take up 10 minutes of a two-hour service—misses the larger picture, which is about people searching for spiritual authenticity. That’s a tradition as old as humankind.

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Folklorist Trish Gaitely isn't the only MTSU professor with an academic interest in serpent handling. **Dr. Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand**, assistant professor of religious studies in the Department of Philosophy, is frequently quoted by news outlets that cover the practice, specifically regarding legal aspects of the Tennessee law passed in 1947 that banned it. The last formal legal challenge to the law occurred in 1975, when the Tennessee Supreme Court weighed public safety over religious liberty and confirmed that serpent handling was too dangerous to be legal. **MTSU**



Left: Gaitely at Pastor Jimmy Morrow's church in east Tennessee holding a snake box (securely) containing a copperhead. Photo by Rhonda L. McDaniel. Middle Pam Morrow (Jimmy's wife), Gaitely, and Jimmy Morrow at their home. Right: Pastor Morrow handling a copperhead during a worship service.

Photos courtesy of Trish Gaitely.

Dates to Remember



February

- Alumni Legacy Scholarship Deadline, February 27

March

- Conference USA Basketball Championships, Birmingham, Ala., March 11–14
- MTSU Alumni Board of Directors Nominations Deadline, March 31
- Alumni Awards Nomination Deadline, March 31

April

- Alumni Spring Weekend, April 16–19

May

- Alumni Mixer and Tour at Sweet Water Brewery, Atlanta, May 15
- MT Alumni Day at the Atlanta Zoo, May 16
- Alumni Night at the Nashville Sounds, Nashville, Tenn., May 30

June

- Alumni Summer College, The Science Around Us, June 24–26



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COMPETITIVE

EDGE

Honors student-athletes excel on the field and in the classroom

by Carol Stuart

For many student-athletes, the competitive drive, discipline, and intensity that make them successful in their sports can also make them successful in the classroom. MTSU baseball player **Kaleb King** and cheerleader **Kailey McDonald** are evidence of that.

King and McDonald have challenged their minds as well as their bodies by becoming Honors College students.

photos by Darby Campbell

“We’ve had some top students who have gone through here and competed at a very high level, but it is unusual for them to be in the full-blown Honors College,” says MTSU Director of Athletics Chris Massaro. “We encourage that; we think it’s the ideal. You strive for academic excellence, and you push for it as hard as you push for athletic excellence.”

King, a sophomore from St. Louis, and McDonald, a junior from Murfreesboro, also are among 20 students annually awarded the prestigious Buchanan Fellowship through the Honors College. Named for Nobel Prize-winning alumnus Dr. James M. Buchanan, the full-ride scholarship is the highest award given to an entering freshman at MTSU.

According to Massaro, it perhaps shouldn’t come as a surprise to find that some student-athletes can achieve as much in the classroom as they do on the field of play, especially considering that they are “used to a reaching a very high standard of excellence in everything that they do.” The key, he says, is learning how to balance their time. Those who master that, he says, are deserving of high praise.

“[In athletics], it is hours upon hours of training,” he says. “To balance that with the rigors of the Honors College program . . . well, it takes a special person to be able to accomplish all that.”

Here is a closer look at two such people, Honors student-athletes King and McDonald.

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TIVE



ATHLETES & HONORS

McDonald and King aren't the only MTSU Honors College-qualified athletes:

Aaron Aucker, baseball

Reid Clements, baseball

Brad Jarreau, baseball

Ronnie Jebavy, baseball

Mackenzie Sells, women's basketball

RAIDERS

KALEB KING #22



KALEB KING, BASEBALL

King, who scored an impressive 32 on the ACT, is among only five out-of-state Buchanan Fellows in his class.

He attended St. Louis University High School to challenge himself academically as well as athletically. He knew that baseball usually has a dozen college scholarships to award among teams of 35.

“I knew that would help me make college a lot more affordable and make me a lot more recruitable,” King says.

His dad, who as a young ballplayer himself was considered a major league prospect, played a year at Missouri–St. Louis under

current MTSU baseball coach Jim McGuire. McGuire mentioned the Buchanan opportunity during recruiting, and school officials showed King how being in the Honors College and playing baseball could be a winning combination on a résumé.

“Ultimately, it will open up a lot of doors,” King says.

He says pushing himself both athletically and academically is a way to thank his parents for giving him opportunities and to prepare for the future. King’s mom is an elementary school teacher; his father studied business and sells security systems.

“My dad just kind of told me that he was in the same situation I was and to remember that someday baseball was going to come to an end,” the outfielder says.

Baseball players have some of the busiest athletic road schedules, especially in springtime. Practice is 2 p.m.–4:30 or 5 p.m. on nongame days, followed by weight training. Although Monday is the NCAA-required off day, most players work out individually. The squad usually travels every other weekend, missing Thursday and Friday classes.

“It’s an every day thing,” King says. “It’s like another class or two a day, to be able to play a sport. But it’s definitely worth it.”

King, who is thinking of majoring in Business Administration or Marketing, carries a 3.8–3.9 GPA, has

KAILEY McDONALD, CHEERLEADING

McDonald, a junior on the cheerleading squad, took a 10-day study-abroad trip to Israel before the fall semester for three hours interdisciplinary credit in the Honors College.

“That’s an opportunity that I’ve had at MTSU and with the Honors College that not everybody gets,” she says.

McDonald had a 4.0 academic record as a Siegel High valedictorian, and the Buchanan scholarship sealed the choice of her hometown university.

“The Honors College is basically funding my education,” she says.

She still has a perfect GPA after four semesters at MTSU, despite balancing studying, working at a gymnastics gym, and cheering for Blue Raider football, basketball, and volleyball.

McDonald bursts the pop-culture stereotypes of both bubble-headed cheerleaders and Computer Science majors. She wants to follow her father’s example and secure a career in computer programming.

“People usually don’t know in class that I’m a cheerleader,” McDonald says. “Last year, I had to miss a couple of classes for

an away game, so when I told my professor, one of my friends was behind me. He’s like, ‘Wait you’re a cheerleader?’ It was super funny.”

McDonald grew up participating in competitive sports, winning individual and team Level 8 state championships in gymnastics before moving to competitive and school cheerleading.

As a spirit squad member, her schedule is demanding. Practices are usually three nights a week in the fall and start at 6:30 a.m. in basketball season. Cheerleaders chosen to travel for road games leave Thursday or Friday for the whole weekend. The cheer squad divides into three rotating groups for men’s and women’s basketball home games and tournaments. Home football games require cheerleaders to arrive four hours before kickoff for Raider Walk and tailgating.

“Pretty much all day Saturday is football games,” McDonald says.

“Being in competitive gymnastics, I used to practice 24 hours a week, so I’ve had to prioritize and manage my time ever since I can remember. That really helps me in college,” McDonald says. “Sometimes I have to say no and make sacrifices to my friends or not do other things that I want to do.”

That said, there are times when McDonald gets a little relief from her hectic schedule. Her team understands that from time to time McDonald may

made the Dean's List two semesters, and has received a Conference USA Academic Medal. Collectively, the baseball team had one of its highest GPAs in spring—in part with the help of King's high marks.

King also excelled on the field his freshman season, starting 10 games at designated hitter or outfield and pinch-hitting. He also recently played in a Midwest summer league and had a July 4 walk-off hit at his home stadium, where *A League of Their Own* was filmed.

His rigorous high school studies, including two hours of homework a night, prepared him for demanding Honors College studies.

"When the professor assigns something, I'm able to get it done and then be able to go to practice and get to bed at a decent hour," King says.

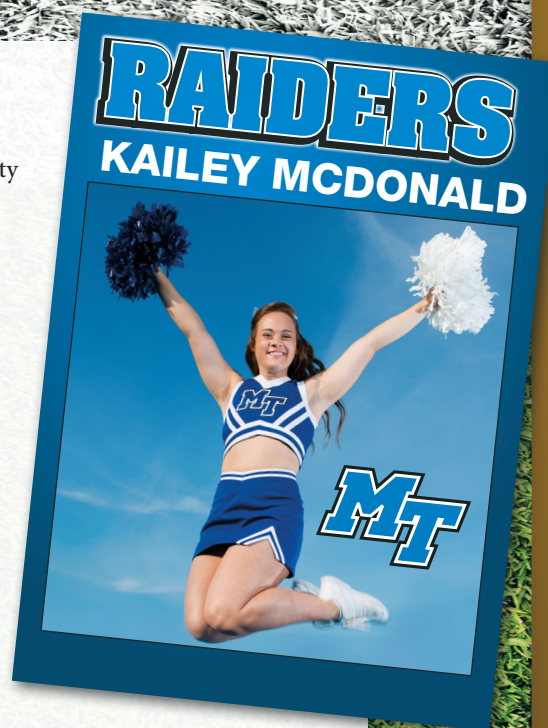
A lot of his MTSU teammates work to come out on top in schoolwork, too, because of the same competitive drive, he adds.

"There's no camera on you while you're studying for a test, but in your mind you're thinking 'I want to be the best. I want to be the one the teacher calls out,'" King says.

miss a community appearance or activity due to her difficult academic schedule. It is not unusual for her to be left off the squad selected to travel on longer road trips that require missing several days of classes. But she has traveled to Memphis, North Carolina, and Southern Miss football games and to the NCAA Women's Tournament in Louisville.

According to McDonald, Honors College classes have been her favorites during her first two years.

"The professors are always really open, and the classes are usually more discussion-based instead of just lectures," she says. "That's been really cool getting to see other Honors students' perspective on things." **MTSU**



TEAM EFFORTS

It's not only MTSU athletes who are also Honors students who are excelling on both the fields of play and in the classroom. Check out some of these academic statistics worth crowing about!

Lady Raiders soccer (3.604) and softball (3.299) programs earned Conference USA 2013-14 Sport Academic Awards for the league's highest team GPA in their sport. The women's tennis team (3.299) received an academic award from the Intercollegiate Tennis Association. For the fourth consecutive year, ITA also recognized the men's squad for academic excellence in 2014.

All 17 of Middle Tennessee's athletic teams earned adequate multi-year Academic Progress Rates from the NCAA for the academic years 2009-13. APR is a term-by-term measure of eligibility and retention for Division I student-athletes developed as an early indicator of eventual graduation rates. The current threshold for adequate progress is 925, below which the NCAA can hit a program with sanctions.

Middle Tennessee's football team (972) was second only behind Vanderbilt in the state in the APR released by the NCAA.

Men's golf and women's golf, with perfect 1,000s, won Public Recognition Awards for APRs in the top 10 percent in their sport nationally. Standout golfer Brett Patterson was named the Conference USA Men's Golf Scholar Athlete of the Year, boasting a perfect 4.0 GPA with a major in business administration.

Middle Tennessee's NCAA Graduation Success Rate set a new school record at 87 percent and is five points higher than the NCAA average. Middle Tennessee's men's and women's basketball teams both recorded a 100 percent GSR score, while the Blue Raider football team turned in an impressive 87 percent score. **MTSU**

The ABCs

of MTSU's

Quest for Student Success

by Drew Ruble

An alphabetical look at MTSU's commitment to student retention and graduation

Governor Bill Haslam's Drive to 55 initiative aims to increase the percentage of Tennesseans with postsecondary credentials from 32 percent to 55 percent to meet the state's present and future workforce and economic needs.

According to the governor's office, more than 20,000 Tennessee high school graduates choose not to continue their education each year, and there are approximately 940,000 adult Tennesseans who have some college credit but haven't earned an associate or four-year degree. The question is: how do colleges and universities in Tennessee do a better job of attracting and retaining college-degree seekers to reach the 55 percent goal?

Every college and university says that student success is its number-one priority, but not every institution lives up to that claim. **We decided to find out if MTSU is doing more than just talk about student success.**

We looked high and low across campus to identify concrete examples of the University putting its money where its mouth is regarding retention and graduation. What we found is perhaps best expressed in this alphabetical look at the many ways MTSU really *is* all about student success!



BUILDINGS

The \$65 million, nearly 211,000-square-foot **Student Union**, opened in 2013 and dedicated entirely to student activities, speaks to the University's student-centered focus. The recent opening of a \$16 million **Student Services and Admissions Center** and **MT One Stop** help center (both connected to the Student Union by a walking bridge) is another example of MTSU's emphasis on keeping students enrolled and working toward a degree. Everything dealing with financial aid, scholarships, records and scheduling, bills, transcripts, and holds (and more!) is now located in one place. Last but not least, the brand-new state-of-the-art \$147 million **Science Building**, which opened in summer 2014, is offering classes and labs for approximately 80 percent of all students!



ADVISORS

Even with significant budget cutbacks in higher education across Tennessee, MTSU has reallocated many of its precious dollars to hire **47 new student academic advisors**. Housed in individual colleges and schools, these new hires are working with faculty on a **more proactive, real-time approach** to students who are struggling.



COURSE REDESIGN

In recent years, MTSU has launched a mammoth effort to change how it structures and delivers some General Education courses in which too many students were failing. With much effort and painstaking faculty review, these courses have been redesigned in an effort to **increase attendance, engagement, and eventual success**. As President Sidney A. McPhee is quick to emphasize, this is not grade inflation. It's taking a good look in the mirror and doing what's right by our hardworking students.

© ROBERT BENSON PHOTOGRAPHY

MTSU Science Building

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

While great emphasis has been placed on increasing graduation and retention, MTSU has also given careful consideration to ways it can ensure that students graduate with the skills to get a job and a realistic understanding of the job market. MTSU's University College, in particular, has distinguished itself with programs to help each incoming student **identify an appropriate major and chart a path to a career**.



EXPANDED SCHOLARS ACADEMY

Seven years ago, the Scholar's Academy was developed to attract and acclimate qualified low-income, Pell-eligible students to the University and equip them for success. Historically, the program enrolled a small group of students (32 or less) and gave them an opportunity to earn six credit hours, **learn success strategies, get used to college life, and develop a network of peers**. By summer 2014, the number of participants had jumped to a total of 114. These students continue to meet with student-success staff to strengthen their academic and social connections and participate in workshops on topics like note-taking techniques, how to study for exams, and financial literacy.



FUNDRAISING

MTSU's most ambitious quest for philanthropy in its history—the ongoing \$80 million Centennial Campaign—has **student success as its focus**. Priorities are increasing financial aid and support for students, maintaining the finest teaching and research faculty possible to educate students, improving physical facilities and academic opportunities for students, and enhancing the Blue Raider athletic program to give student-athletes a world-class educational and athletic experience.



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GRANTS

Many MTSU students are first-generation college students who juggle academic and work demands in pursuit of a degree. For many, a relatively small financial barrier—say, an emergency room visit or unexpected car repair—can delay their studies and their progress toward a degree. Students who find themselves in a financial pinch can now apply for one-time **emergency microgrants** aimed at keeping them in school and on track to earning a degree. These smaller sums can help with verified needs such as tuition, fees, books, housing, and transportation. Grants up to \$250 are available and do not have to be repaid. To be eligible, students must be in good academic standing.



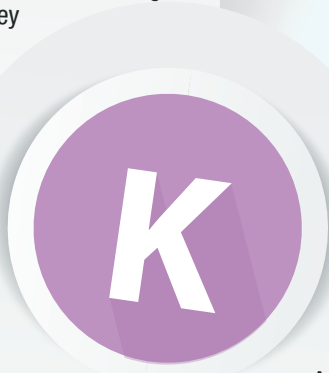
INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Today's students simply must communicate across cultures effectively if they are to participate successfully in the international workplace. At MTSU, internationalization of the student body is a priority. **International student enrollment has increased** from 396 to 789 in five years, and the University placed 335 students in its **study-abroad programs** last summer. International student undergraduate new enrollment increased 20.7 percent in 2014, and new applications increased by 35 percent. For the first time, more than 400 MTSU students studied abroad during a single academic year. MTSU was recognized last year by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as a top producer of **Fulbright award winners**. The Fulbright Program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, is the government's flagship international exchange effort. MTSU was the only Tennessee college or university to earn the *Chronicle's* distinction. Finally, MTSU has **more than 40 exchange agreements** with institutions around the world, including in China, where MTSU's strong academic partnerships in research and industry rival those of any university in America.



HIGH-TECH, HIGH-TOUCH APPROACH

Remember those aforementioned 47 new advisors the University has hired to ensure that struggling students get the help they need? They do their jobs in part through the use of **new, cutting-edge software** the University has adopted that allows them to reach out to students who might be having trouble academically as identified through instructor alerts or the software's predictive analytics function. Other universities have seen great results from similar, more proactive methods of advising. But although technology can boost efficiency, President McPhee is quick to warn that nothing takes the place of **genuine relationships that faculty and advisors create with students**.



KNOWLEDGEABLE TEACHERS/PROFESSORS

An internationally renowned forensic scientist who is regularly called to crime scenes across Tennessee and consulted by the FBI's top forensic lab. A contamination expert who used native spiders to gauge nature's recovery in the aftermath of the TVA-Kings-ton coal ash spill. A pair of exercise scientists who have successfully used underwater treadmills to treat paralysis victims others had given up on. A nationally recognized economist who regularly appears on business talk shows televised around the world. A music recording instructor who is also a Grammy winner. The only National Teacher of the Year ever to hail from Tennessee. No matter what subject area claims the interest of a prospective college student, **there is an expert at MTSU** who can deliver real knowledge to help get that student where he or she wants to go professionally.

JUST GRADUATE IN 4 AND GET MORE

MTSU recently unveiled a bold new **financial aid package** to encourage students to graduate in four years. The Graduate in 4 and Get More program promises to **supplement by \$1,000 the Hope Lottery Scholarships** of incoming students who stay on track to graduate in four years and to award a **Finish Line Scholarship** to graduating seniors that will return any tuition increases over that span. Both initiatives are part of the new **Student Success Advantage** (see next page), which is part of the overall **Quest for Student Success** (see next page).

L LONG DISTANCE LEARNING

Distance learners comprise more than one-third of MTSU's undergraduate population, and unlike many universities, MTSU does not have a separate faculty serving its online student body. Distance learners have access to the **same core faculty** that traditional students have in on-campus classroom settings.

O ALTERNATIVE DEGREE OPTIONS

Many students change majors during their college careers (sometimes more than once), or they are faced with candidacy issues and are forced to make changes. Often, credit hours earned in one major can't be applied to others, and students can lose time and money. In fall 2013, the **Bachelor of Science in Integrated Studies** (formerly Bachelor of University Studies) was launched with the goal of providing a valuable option to make use of these potentially lost hours.

M MIDTERM GRADES

MTSU's **midterm grading initiative** ensures that students know where they stand academically when they most need to know it and can receive appropriate **updates and feedback** from their professors. The full participation of faculty members in this initiative shows how committed they are to the overall success of their students. The University's **academic alert system** also allows faculty to send electronic messages to students and their academic advisors about their progress at any time. Faculty members believe their job is not only to teach students but also to help them succeed and graduate.

P CONNECTION POINT

Studies show that students who are involved in campus life tend to perform better academically and are more likely to graduate than those who don't. Connection Point is a program that **connects students to the University through extracurricular activities** with the goal of improving retention and graduation. In 2013, its first year, more than 2,700 first-time students participated in Connection Point, and more than 2,100 first-time students attended at least one event during fall semester. More than 1,100 first-time students attended four or more events during the semester.

N NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION

CUSTOMS is MTSU's new student orientation program. It helps new undergraduates feel comfortable at the University, prepares them for MTSU's educational opportunities, and starts their integration into the intellectual, cultural, and social climate of the institution. CUSTOMS shows new students the ropes. During CUSTOMS, students are shown how MTSU works hard to develop a community devoted to learning, growth, and service. A simple phrase that describes that devotion is "**I am True Blue**." Each time members of the MTSU family repeat those words, they give voice to ideals the University wants to share with students, and they reaffirm the institution's **commitment to a student-centered culture**. Reciting the True Blue Pledge—which commits new students to honesty and integrity, respect for diversity, community engagement, and reason, not violence—has become a tradition at MTSU Convocations.

I AM trueBLUE™

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THE Q QUEST FOR STUDENT SUCCESS ITSELF!

A presidentially mandated, provost-driven **blueprint for student success at MTSU** is proof of how seriously the University takes this mission! The plan, unveiled last year, is designed to make sure that every student who attends MTSU with a drive to achieve will be met with the best instruction from excellent professors who care about student success. Instead of focusing on external factors beyond its control, MTSU undertook this quest to focus its energies and talents on **tackling internal factors** over which it has direct influence and which it knows can positively affect learning. Key initiatives include recruiting students who value academic success, enhancing the academic experience by implementing curriculum innovation across all disciplines, emphasizing the role of quality advising, championing enhancements in administrative processes, and **eliminating barriers to student success**. The whole plan is geared toward staff and faculty discovering and developing new and innovative ways to help students be successful.

RECAPTURE AND R.E.B.O.U.N.D.

Advisors at MTSU now call all previously enrolled students who have not registered for each upcoming semester to encourage them to stay on track and to help them deal with issues like work responsibilities and family issues that might be hindering them. That's recapture. Another initiative called R.E.B.O.U.N.D. helps students recover from a bad semester. Approximately 600 first-time, first-year students will achieve below a 2.0 grade point average in their first fall semester, and of those, only about 20 percent will return the following year. Advisors use the new R.E.B.O.U.N.D. program ("Retake classes. Engage your purpose. Be intentional about attendance. Own your future. Understand what went wrong. Narrow your activities. Determine that you are going to succeed.") to intervene.

STUDENT SUCCESS ADVANTAGE

As mentioned above (Graduate in 4 and Get More), the **Student Success Advantage plan** provides a \$1,000 **supplement to the Hope scholarship**—making up for a recent state reduction in that program—and also promises to **refund any tuition increases** that occur during a student's college career if he/she graduates in four years. The Student Success Advantage also scales back minimum ACT scores required to qualify for five major scholarships guaranteed to eligible students. And the University's **Transfer Academic Scholarships** are now guaranteed for students from all Tennessee community colleges.

TUTORING

Tutoring can be crucial to student success. At every step of the academic journey, students discover that tutoring helps understanding, recollection, and application of what is presented in class. **Tutoring opportunities can be found all over campus**, and an ambitious new tutoring space in Walker Library is available. MTSU students enrolled online can take advantage of tutoring support 24 hours a day!

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OFFERINGS

MTSU is the only college or university in Tennessee designated an **Adult Learning Focused Institution** by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. Officially, half of MTSU students are classified as adults. MTSU operates the **most successful summer school program in America**. In terms of participation, no other U.S. university comes close. Data strongly suggest that students who attend summer school (including those still in high school or attending another college in fall and spring) graduate at a higher rate. The Middle Tennessee Education Center (MTEC) in Shelbyville is a partnership of MTSU, Motlow State Community College, and Bedford County that offers additional higher education opportunities to those living in south middle Tennessee. That's **higher education in your own backyard**. MTSU has been repeatedly named a **Military Friendly School** by *G.I. Jobs* magazine. No Tennessee university does more to embrace military service members, veterans, and spouses as students and ensure their success.

V ICE PROVOST FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Dr. Rick Sluder is MTSU's new vice provost for student success. Sluder was previously vice provost for recruitment and outreach at University of Central Missouri, where he helped increase enrollment and led an initiative to improve student retention and graduation. Dr. Sluder has one mission at MTSU: **ensuring academic success!**

REAL-WORLD OPPORTUNITIES

As an estimated 14,000 fans on Lower Broadway in Nashville enjoyed the music of **Capitol Records** artists including Luke Bryan back in October 2012, 53 MTSU students were modulating audio, operating high-definition cameras, conducting interviews, and recording the concert for the label. A year later, MTSU students did the same for the second annual Capitol Street Festival.

Other **real-world experiences** await MTSU students in the research arena. In fall 2014, students in Dr. R. Drew Sieg's Honors biology courses joined the search for natural sources to isolate new medicines and drugs through the **Small World Initiative**, a research experience designed in conjunction with Yale University that addresses the increase in antibiotic-resistant pathogens. Collaborators from more than 60 universities are crowdsourcing the search for new antibiotics and making it a unifying theme for introductory biology lab experiments. In Dr. Sieg's class, students isolate bacteria from local soils, identify them through gene amplification and sequencing, and screen bacteria and their chemical extracts for inhibitory activity against bacterial strains closely related to common pathogens. Students may or may not isolate the next wonder drug, but they will definitely **get first-hand experience** in the pursuit of scientific discovery.

EXL

The Experiential Learning program gives students **practical experience in real-world environments** related to their fields of study. The idea is to **engage students directly in public service** and offer them experience **beyond textbooks and lectures**. More than 200 courses are now approved as EXL courses University-wide. Students have worked with local organizations such as Room in the Inn, Make a Wish Foundation, and Habitat for Humanity. Participation has demonstrated promise as a way to increase engagement with a corresponding increase in retention. The six-year graduation rate for students taking EXL courses is 86 percent—well above average.

Y EAR-TWO EXPERIENCE

The freshman-year experience gets lots of attention, but research indicates that many second-year students feel a sense of abandonment, which can cause them to leave school. **Increasing student involvement in campus life and academic programs** during the sophomore year is a key issue MTSU is addressing through more academic guidance and extracurricular opportunities.

ZEROING IN ON UNDECLARED/UNDECIDED STUDENTS

Academic advisors often meet students who begin college without a clear direction. It is also common for them to work with students who begin by charting their own courses but, after facing roadblocks or detours, realize that an alternative route is necessary. Without the right support system in place, **indecision can negatively affect commitment to academic and career goals** and be a strong hindrance to graduation. Recent mandates by the Tennessee Board of Regents require MTSU to modify how it deals with students who are not ready to select a particular major. These students now get **extra advising support**. [MTSU](http://mtsu.edu)



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Alumni Association broadens field of Distinguished Alumni

by Randy Weiler

Alumni bring the University prestige and distinction through outstanding professional careers and loyal support.

Since 1960, the MTSU Alumni Association has recognized accomplished alumni with its highest honor: the Distinguished Alumni Award. Younger alumni who are having a positive impact in the world have received the Young Alumni Achievement Award.

New in 2014–15 were the True Blue Citations of Distinction in the categories of Achievement in Education (current or retired faculty), Achievement in Education (for accomplishment outside MTSU), Service to the University, and Service to the Community.

The 2014–15 honorees include two individuals with strong aviation backgrounds, two lifelong educators, a third whose vision and passion for education has affected thousands of students, and a politically savvy alumna whose talents have taken her all the way to the White House.

The six were recognized many times during Homecoming Week on campus in October. Here is a glance at the 2014–15 honorees.

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Distinguished Alumna

Vernice “FlyGirl” Armour
(1997)

Armour went from being a beat cop to a combat pilot in three years and became America’s first African American female combat pilot, serving two tours overseas. Armour enrolled at MTSU, joined the Army ROTC program, and, after earning an Exercise Science degree, served three years as a Metro Nashville police officer. Following her father and stepfather’s military path, she became a second lieutenant and pilot in the Marine Corps. Now a noted motivational author and speaker, Armour has been featured on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, CNN, the *Tavis Smiley Show*, National Public Radio, and in many publications.



Young Alumni Achievement Award

Ashley Elizabeth Graham
(2012)

Graham’s passion for politics landed her a role in a state senator’s campaign while she was an MTSU student, and then it catapulted her to Washington, D.C. Early in her career, she was writing speeches for the General Services Administration, a job that required security clearance. Later, she worked at the White House for the Bush administration as deputy director of presidential writers. She was one of six speechwriters for a recent Republican National Convention, and she’s now deputy communications director for U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee’s 7th congressional district. Graham, a Nashville resident, received the Maverick PAC 40 under 40 Award in 2013.



trueBLUE™

Citations of Distinction



Achievement in Education

(current or retired MTSU faculty)

Ray Phillips
(1966)

Phillips, who lives near Bell Buckle, is Professor Emeritus of Mathematical Sciences and a former department chair, associate dean of the College of Graduate Studies, and interim dean of the College of Basic and Applied Sciences. He served MTSU from 1990 to 2003 and was active in research, curriculum development, and crucial grant writing that garnered several million dollars. He was a leader in the push for STEM education, and he established the Tennessee STEM Education Center at the University. A colleague said his “illustrious career in education . . . brought distinction to MTSU.”



Achievement in Education

(non-MTSU)

Linda Gilbert
(1972, '79 and '91)

Gilbert, a Murfreesboro resident, has been a Murfreesboro City Schools administrator for many years and is now director of schools. Her leadership and knowledge have benefited both city schools and MTSU. She coauthored grants for MTeach, a University effort designed to increase the number and quality of math and science teachers, and encouraged dual enrollment between MTSU and county schools. Her involvement and service include sitting on and chairing many advisory boards and committees—from the College of Behavioral and Health Sciences advisory board to the Band of Blue executive board.



Service to the University

Donald McDonald
(1963)

McDonald and his wife, Frances, are avid MTSU supporters, scholarship benefactors, and 1911 Society members who have made a gift to the University through their estate plans. The aerospace maintenance laboratory at the Flight Operations Center at Murfreesboro Airport is named for McDonald, and he serves on the MTSU Foundation board and the Aerospace Department’s advisory board. The McDonalds open their home and personal hangar to aerospace students and faculty for many MTSU functions.



Service to the Community

Matthew Little
(2008)

Little, who lives in Huntsville, Alabama, has been a part of many service initiatives in Tennessee: running camps for 2,000 students, providing leadership for Tennessee’s statewide service day, and creating a National Park educational program. Tennessee named Little as a delegate to its first Truancy and Dropout Prevention Conference, and he participated in the Mayor’s Summit on Children and Youth in Nashville. He also works with the nonprofit ServeAlabama to support volunteer work. Little’s leadership has guided three institutions to places on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. He is senior associate director of admissions at the University of Alabama—Huntsville. [MTSU](#)

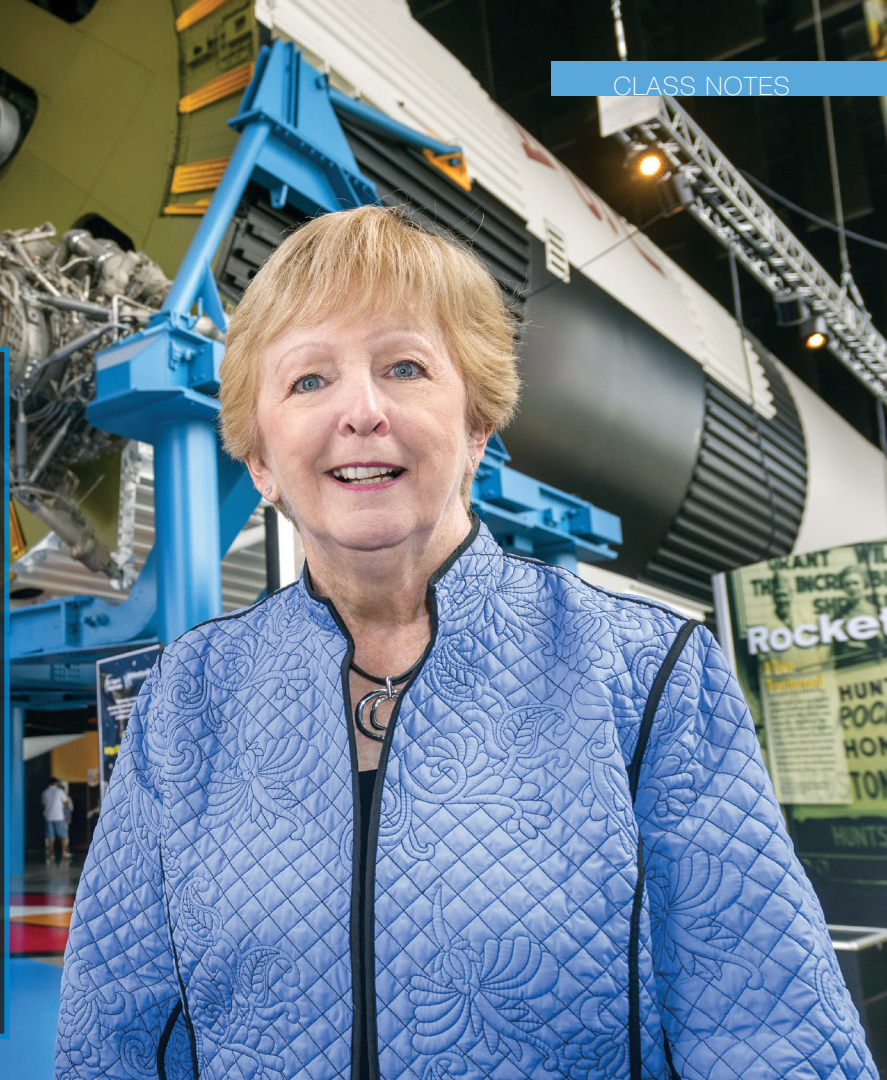
You Do What?

Gayle Duke ('65), helped Neil Armstrong reach the moon. Now her love for MTSU will help generations of students who will study in MTSU's new \$147-million Science Building reach for the stars.

Duke and her husband, Dwayne, are including the University in their estate. It will endow scholarships for science students who, like Gayle, will be the first in their families to go to college.

Duke understands the value of a degree in the sciences. After graduating with a degree in mathematics and the experience of taking the first computer science class ever offered by the University, Gayle joined IBM in Huntsville, Ala., where NASA was taking the first steps toward the moon.

"President Kennedy had decided we were going to the moon. It was exciting—such a special time," Gayle says.



“President Kennedy had decided we were going to the moon. It was exciting—such a special time.”

She recalls working on an Apollo flight control computer with only 16 kilobytes of memory to help guide the moon capsule on its round-trip journey of more than 475,000 miles. (Today, even a smartphone's capacity is measured in gigabytes.)

Gayle worked on Skylab (the first U.S. space station), Spacelab, and the space shuttles.

At MTSU, Gayle had the support of mentors whose encouragement helped her graduate in just three years. Her work-study scholarship helped make college possible.

She was barely aware she was one of just a handful of women studying mathematics, much less pioneering the then-exotic field of computer science.

"I always had professors I could go talk to. You felt cared for," she says. She developed confidence and rose through the ranks at IBM, eventually managing a department of male engineers.

"I've never been one to be intimidated," Gayle says. [MTSU](#)

Class Notes

Thomas "T" McFerrin

Thomas "T" McFerrin ('64), a Murfreesboro native and graduate of Murfreesboro Central ('60) was inducted into the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association Hall of Fame in 2014. During his 38 years as a head football coach, McFerrin built winning programs at nine high schools. His 340 career wins is fourth all-time among



Georgia football coaches. He won two state football championships—at Elbert County in 1995 and at Jefferson in 2012. Neither program had ever won a state title before McFerrin. The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* named him high school football coach of the year in 1982, 1995, and 2012. The NFL's Atlanta Falcons awarded him a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013. [MTSU](#)



Larry Williams

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) presented **Larry Williams ('71, '76, '95)** of Murfreesboro with its Master Pilot Award in 2014. Williams learned to fly in 1964 at the Murfreesboro airport and has had a long and distinguished aviation career as a flight instructor, charter pilot, airline pilot, corporate aviation department manager, university faculty member (Auburn and MTSU), aviation author, and FAA aviation safety inspector (for more than three decades). Williams retired in 2010 but has since worked internationally as a safety consultant for foreign civil aviation authorities, airlines, corporate aviation departments, and others. [MTSU](#)

1970s

Randy King ('73, '84), Murfreesboro, was inducted into the TSSAA Hall of Fame in April 2014. The 23-year head boys' basketball coach for Oakland High School is now athletic director for Providence Christian Academy in Murfreesboro.

J. Steven Fults ('77), Wilson, North Carolina, was given the Lincoln Financial Faculty Member

of the Year award at the 112th commencement exercises of Barton College. The award recognizes teaching excellence and commitment to student success. Fults is director of the gerontology program at Barton and has a combined 25 years of teaching experience at Utah State University, the University of Tennessee–Knoxville, Bowling Green State University, and Barton.

Gregory L. Wade ('77), Franklin, has a new book, *Broken Valley: A Wartime Story of the Hopes and Fears of Those Left Behind in a Remote East Tennessee Valley*. He works to preserve Civil War battlegrounds and is founder of the Franklin, Tennessee, Civil War Round Table.

Robert Campbell ('79), Columbia, is working with the Martha O'Brien Center in East Nashville as a mentor and teacher.

Donna Landrum Tarver ('79), Rossville, Georgia, retired from Hamilton County Schools after 30 years of service.

1980s

Kathryn Williams Jones ('83), Murfreesboro, accepted the position of sales manager/broker for Bob Parks Realty Murfreesboro's Northfield Office.

Tammy Lamberth ('86), Cotton-town, was named Teacher of the Year for North Sumner Elementary School, where she teaches special education.

Mark Stout ('86), Spring Hill, has been named Nissan's divisional general manager, global talent management, at the company's headquarters in Yokohama, Japan. Stout will oversee global Nissan talent management and coordinate with the Renault-Nissan Alliance HR group.

1990s

Kathryn Arce ('90), Kissimmee, Florida, and Rebecca Grinnals



Eddie Gossage

Eddie Gossage ('82) is president of Texas Motor Speedway (TMS), where in 2014 he introduced the Big Hoss, a huge video screen along the backstretch. It's the largest HD screen in the world and was used at races last year. In 2012, *d magazine* credited Gossage with turning the 1,500-acre, \$250-million TMS into one of Dallas-Fort Worth's "most underrated sports success stories, annually making millions of dollars for its owner."

A legendary promoter, Gossage is well known for using creative, even outrageous, methods to promote the track and NASCAR. In 2010, he offered a Dallas-area radio personality \$100,000 to change his name to TexasMotorSpeedway.com and get a tattoo with the new name. The prank got international attention. [MTSU](#)



Nancy Williams

The Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development named **Nancy Williams ('84)** Tennessee Main Street program director in 2014. Main Street helps Tennessee communities revitalize downtowns and central business districts. Williams has more than 30 years of experience in communication, community development, historic preservation, and association management. Most recently, she was Main Street's director at the Heritage Foundation of Franklin and Williamson County, which included directorship of the Downtown Franklin Association. During her time at that position, Franklin got national recognition including fourth place on the 2012 Best Places to Visit for Historic Preservation list compiled by livability.com. [MTSU](#)

run an international wedding consulting firm called Engaging Concepts. They were among the top innovative people with one of the best events strategy brands of 2014, according to BizBash, a trade journal website.

Karen Simpson Palin ('92),

Madison, has been promoted to director of technical operations for the Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC). She supervises technical staff and maintenance and coordinates tech production and theater use with clients and other TPAC departments.

Craig Boswell ('93), Smyrna, is a correspondent for CBS

Newspath, the network's 24-hour news service for CBS stations and broadcasters around the world. Boswell began his broadcast journalism career as a producer at WKRN-TV in Nashville and later was an anchor and reporter for the station.

Lewis Harkness ('93), Fort Mill, South Carolina, a television sports journalist who recently joined ESPN, began work on the production team for the new Southeastern Conference television network, SEC, in August 2014 at ESPN headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Donald Gandy Jr. ('94) is vice president of North American

sales for London-based Cognia Inc.

Lori Sain Smith ('94), launched her own interior design firm, Daffodilly Design, primarily serving middle Tennessee for residential and commercial applications, garden design, and holiday and event styling. Smith grew up working in her mother's antique business, The Daffodilly, in Bell Buckle. She began her professional career in retail operations and health-care marketing and PR with the Reeves-Sain Family of Medical Services in 1997.

Philip Crabtree ('97), El Paso, Texas, transferred to Fort Bliss, Texas, to serve as deputy public

affairs officer of the 1st Armored Division. Maj. Crabtree's duties include planning all public affairs communication for the division and Fort Bliss, including digital and social media. He is also principal speechwriter for Maj. Gen. Sean MacFarland, commanding general of the division.

Brian Gray ('97), Soddy Daisy, has been promoted from sales manager to Comcast Business Services regional sales coach.

André (A. J.) Bahou ('99),

Brentwood, was elected president of the Tennessee Intellectual Property Law Association (TIPLA). Bahou has been a leader in the organization for several years, most recently as vice president on its board of directors. He's a registered patent attorney who practices intellectual property law.

Heather Jensen ('99), Hermitage, has been appointed community relations officer for the Tennessee Department of Transportation's Region Three, based in Nashville. She has more than 10 years of experience in television news reporting, anchoring, editing, and producing in major markets, most recently as a reporter/anchor for WKRN News 2.

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Randy Knight

Randy Knight ('83), who grew up in Rutherford County and was hired by Nissan at age 22, was named vice president of Nissan Manufacturing USA's plant in Smyrna in 2013. The plant is the largest producer of vehicles in the nation. At the time of his appointment, *Automotive News* described Knight as "the hometown kid who made good." Formerly director of material handling and production control, Knight joined Nissan in 1983 as a production technician. The plant he now runs employs more than 7,000 people and has an annual payroll of more than \$275 million. It produces Altima, Maxima, Pathfinder, and Infiniti vehicles plus the all-electric, zero-emission Leaf. It houses the country's largest lithium-ion automotive battery plant to support production of the Leaf. [MTSU](#)

1990s, cont.

continued from page 49

Clarence Parks ('99), Nashville, has been appointed president of First Columbia Gold Corp.

2000s

Henry Bedford IV ('01), Brooklyn, New York, was an associate producer on the film *Foxcatcher*, a psychological thriller released in November 2014.

Sonya L. Sanderson ('02), Lake Park, Georgia, of Valdosta State University's Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education, was

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Chad Hutson

Chad Hutson ('94) is cofounder and president of Leviathan, a Chicago-based conceptual design company. Leviathan projects are in the spotlight at art exhibits running in different parts of the world, including the ongoing *CHGO DSGN* exhibition at the Chicago Cultural Center and *Digital Revolution: An Immersive Exhibition of Art, Design, Film, Music, and Videogames* at London's Barbican Centre. Hutson is a past presenter at the annual South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas. **MTSU**



Britnee Kinard

The Lincoln Awards, recently created by the charitable arm of the Friars Club to recognize outstanding achievement in providing support to veterans and military families, selected MTSU graduate **Britnee Kinard ('05)** as one of its 10 inaugural, national recipients. Kinard is a full-time caregiver for her husband, U.S. Army Purple Heart recipient Douglas H. Kinard Jr., and a full-time mother to two sons, including her eldest Blayne, who was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder in 2013. Last year, inspired by her 15-month struggle to get her husband's service dog, Gunner, approved by the V.A., Kinard founded the SD Gunner Fund to assist Veterans and disabled children with expenses associated with owning service animals. Kinard also works with several other Evans County, Georgia organizations to provide support to military families and those with autistic children. **True Blue! MTSU**



Demetria N. "Dina" Elosiebo

In her first semester at MTSU in 1998, **Demetria N. "Dina" Elosiebo ('02)** was the only African American and the only woman in her aviation class. Now, 1st Lt. Elosiebo is a rotary wing pilot of Army Black Hawk helicopters in the District of Columbia National Guard. A platoon leader with an air ambulance unit in the D.C. area, she flies two or three times a week and stays in a constant state of readiness. Her unit hoists people from difficult-to-reach places with as little as one hour's notice and cares for the critically injured en route to hospitals. She's the first African American woman in her current post. She became a Black Hawk pilot in February 2014 at age 33. **MTSU**

Mary Esther Reed

Mary Esther Reed ('92, '94, '96), mayor of Smyrna, has served on the Smyrna Town Council since 2003. Reed is a former classroom teacher at John Coleman Elementary and Smyrna Primary Schools. Today, she owns and operates the Learning Circle, an educational supply store. She has served on the boards of the MTSU National Alumni Association and the Blue Raider Athletic Association. **MTSU**



Bobby Bosko Grubić and Robert Rowles

Mass Comm alumni **Bobby Bosko Grubić ('99)** and **Robert Rowles ('99)** produced an award-winning short film, *The Parting Shot*, which was one of ten semifinalists out of 500 entries in the 2014 Producers Guild of America Make Your Mark competition. The awards ceremony was held at the AT&T Theater in Los Angeles. Entries were judged by a panel including Kathy Bates, Danny DeVito, and Michael Douglas. *The Parting Shot* is an action-drama about a government undercover agent who struggles to keep his family safe. Grubić is known for his corporate production and TV commercials, and he won Emmy Awards in 1999, 2006, and 2007. Rowles, a visual effects compositor, has worked films including *The Hobbit*, *The Hunger Games*, *The Incredible Hulk*, and *Day After Tomorrow*. He also worked on the team that won the 2007 Academy Award for Best Visual Effects (*The Golden Compass*.) [MTSU](#)



services manager for the Tennessee Performing Arts Center.

Ynetia Avant ('07, '11), Murfreesboro, is the new principal of Kittrell Elementary School.

Jenna Kelley ('07), Cleveland, joined the sales team of the Chattanooga office of Full Media.

Andy Lowe ('07), Knoxville, now heads the valuation, litigation and business transition services group for Lattimore Black Morgan & Cain in Knoxville as an accredited senior appraiser.

Jordan R. Haskins ('08), Lafayette, received his Doctorate of Osteopathic Medicine from Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences and has started a three-year residency in family medicine at Oklahoma State University Medical Center in Tulsa.

Brian Solomon ('08), Nashville, is marketing and communications manager for Franklin Theatre.

Ashley DeSabetino Stearns ('08), Murfreesboro, received a J.D. from the Nashville School of Law. She is an associate with the Law Office of W. Kent Coleman.

Nikki Etemadi Watson ('09, '11), Brentwood, has joined Lattimore Black Morgan & Cain as a senior staff accountant in the shared services internal accounting department. She was previously staff auditor with Byrd, Proctor & Mills CPAs.

2010s

Matthew E. Wallace ('10), Nashville, is a managing partner at Wallace/Hinote. He is a member of the American Institute of Certified Public

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2000s, cont.

continued from page 50

awarded the 2014 VSU Faculty Excellence in Advising Award.

The History Press published the latest book by **Gordon ('03)** and **Traci Nichols Belt ('03)** of Kingston Springs. *John Sevier: Tennessee's First Hero* examines the extraordinary life of Tennessee's first governor.

Carla Hayes ('03), St. Louis, was named diversity leadership fellowship director for FOCUS St. Louis. Hayes was previously named one of 30 Leaders in Their Thirties by North County Inc., a regional development group.

Benjamin Henson ('03), Atlanta, recently became manager of communications for the Georgia Association of Broadcasters.

Ryan Blazer ('04), Long Beach, California, is working with Signature Entertainment (in conjunction with Nederlander Concerts) to develop a casino division. He is also opening an artist management division for Signature Entertainment.

Michael Knight ('04), Lafayette, Louisiana, is in-school suspension coordinator at Ossun Elementary School.

Jason Cox ('05), Keizer, Oregon, is a communications specialist for the Oregon School Employees Association.

Audrey Starr ('05), Dayton, Ohio, associate director of communications at the University of Dayton, was recently appointed communications vice president of the Junior League of Dayton, an organization of women committed to promoting volunteerism, developing the potential of women, and improving communities.

Courtney Vickers ('05), Murfreesboro, has taken a position as director of student support (special education) at the Nashville Academy of Computer Science, a charter school that opened in 2014.

Katelynn Baker ('06, '11), Nashville, is events sales and



Courtney Blooding

After moving from Tennessee to Los Angeles, **Courtney Blooding ('03)** began working for David Foster, a multiple Grammy winner and Academy Award nominee. Blooding worked closely with Foster on demanding, high-profile productions worldwide, including coordinating, managing, contracting, engineering, singing, and producing with the likes of Josh Groban, Cher, Paul Anka, Michael Bublé, Richard Marx, Celine Dion, Whitney Houston, Andrea Bocelli, Seal, Quincy Jones, Stevie Wonder, Oprah Winfrey, Donna Summer, and Michael Bolton, among others. Blooding studied voice and recording industry management at MTSU and auditioned for *American Idol 7*. Recently, she became head of business operations for Momentum, a California-based custom music provider. [MTSU](#)



Allison Bradley Frazee

Allison Bradley Frazee ('08, '10) was named one of six new assistant athletic directors at Vanderbilt University in 2014. Frazee is assistant AD for sales and marketing. She was once a graduate assistant at MTSU.

MTSU

Matt Vanderpool

Matt Vanderpool ('05) is executive director of the Tennessee Golf Association (TGA), which comprises approximately 200 golf courses and more than 32,000 members. The TGA conducts 17 annual state championships and administers the USGA Handicap and Course Rating Systems for Tennessee golfers. A native



of Rutherford County, Vanderpool began working for the Tennessee Golf Foundation during his freshman year at MTSU. The TGA hired him in 1999. He became assistant executive director in 2002 and executive director in 2008, replacing the legendary Dick Horton, who had served since 1974. In addition to his TGA responsibilities, Vanderpool regularly serves on the Rules Committee at various USGA national championships and other regional and national competitions.

MTSU

Emmanuel (Manny) Tyndall

Veteran law enforcement professional **Emmanuel (Manny) Tyndall**



('09) was named to lead Tennessee's Office of Inspector General (OIG), which pursues fraud connected to TennCare, the state's healthcare insurance program, and has investigated cases leading to more than \$5 million repaid to TennCare. Tyndall has been with the OIG since its inception in 2004 and was one of the first five special agents hired to work in the agency's criminal investigation division. **MTSU**



Jeremy Qualls

Jeremy Qualls ('08) was named athletic director and physical education specialist for Williamson County Schools. Qualls earned his master's in Administration and Supervision at MTSU. After playing basketball at Austin Peay, he taught and coached at Northeast High School in Clarksville. He has since taught and coached basketball in Tennessee and was athletic director at Lexington High School. For the last four years, he has been principal of Hickman County Middle School. **MTSU**

▶ To submit class notes and pictures, go to www.MTAlumni.com, or email alumni@mtsu.edu.

Wes Compton

Back in 2013, MTSU's first Student Business Idea Competition, held in conjunction with the University's observance of Global Entrepreneurship Week, offered \$2,500 in cash prizes, including \$1,200 for first place. The Wright Travel Chair in Entrepreneurship in Jennings A. Jones College of Business and MTSU's Tennessee Small Business Development Center sponsored the then new annual contest. **Wes Compton ('13)** of Chattanooga, a senior at the time, won the top prize for his business software

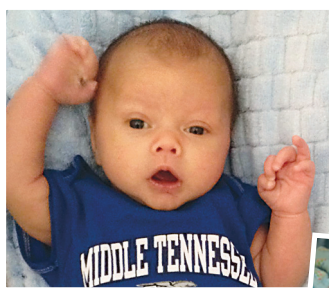


idea to prevent cyberbullying by alerting parents to potentially harmful keywords and phrases in their children's online communications. (The idea was that software could flag questionable interactions before they appear in social media.) Compton, who later graduated with a B.B.A., today works as an equity controls analyst for financial services giant UBS. [MTSU](#)

Ava Jayne Goedecke



Lydia Elizabeth Bishop



Jamison Kohlton Bradford



Ethan Frederick and Asher Christian Steurer
Beckett Richard Steurer

Addison Hope Wright



Kinleigh Capri Bills, born August 28, 2014, to **Jeremy ('08)** and Heather Bills of Murfreesboro.

Lydia Elizabeth Bishop, born July 7, 2014, to **David Bishop ('13)** and Lihong Wang of Spring Hill.

Fiona Everly Black, born May 29, 2014, to Sam and **Alison Black ('02)** of Nashville.

Jamison Kohlton Bradford, born May 21, 2014, to **Joseph ('98)** and Emily Bradford of Lewisburg.

Harper Paige and Fletcher Drew Gallian, born July 21, 2014, to **Keith Gallian ('97)** and Elizabeth Bronson of Mokena, Illinois.

Ava Jayne Goedecke, born September 17, 2013, to **David ('11)**

and **Jayna Whitaker Goedecke ('11)** of Mountain Brook, Alabama.

Identical twins **Vera Elizabeth and Violet Helen Graham**, born May 17, 2014, to **Matt ('00)** and **Ashley Swafford Graham ('01)** of Chattanooga.

Davy Lee Hicks, born April 4, 2014, to Lee and **Kelly Dewey Hicks ('07)** of Bradyville.

Gianna Bella Mason, born April 1, 2014, to Marc Mason and **Asia Vanatta ('01)** of Alexandria, Virginia.

Bristol Marie Reed, born January 2, 2014, to **Josh ('04)** and **Toni Little Reed ('06)** of Lexington.

Ethan Frederick and Asher Christian Steurer, born September 9, 2012, and **Beckett Richard Steurer**, born May 14, 2014, to **Ron ('99)** and Lisa **Steurer** of Nashville.

Ava and Gavin Travis, born December 22, 2013, to **David Travis Jr. ('05)** and **Crystal Baker-Travis ('05)** of Murfreesboro.

Addison Hope Wright, born September 24, 2014, to **Richard ('07)** and **Debbi Hope Wright ('02)** of Murfreesboro.



Harper Paige and Fletcher Drew Gallian



Kinleigh Capri Bills



Gianna Bella Mason



Vera Elizabeth and Violet Helen Graham

2000s, cont.

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Accountants, the Nashville Entrepreneur Center, and the Tennessee Society of Certified Public Accountants.

Matthew Wozniak ('11), Chattanooga, is president and cofounder of Angels of Care, based in Annapolis,

Maryland. The in-home senior care business offers personal companionship and medication management to senior citizens and people with disabilities.

Richel Albright ('12), Franklin, has joined McNeely Pigott & Fox Public Relations.

Charity Blair ('12), Austin, Texas, recently graduated from the pastry and baking program

at Austin's Escoffier School of Culinary Arts. She works for La Condesa restaurant in Austin as a pastry cook.

Lauren Eddings ('12, '14), Murfreesboro, has joined the assurance and audit services team at Lattimore Black Morgan & Cain as a staff accountant working with healthcare, not-for-profit, and real estate companies.

Elliott Elsey ('12), Charleston, North Carolina, is manager and engineer of Truphonic Recordings Studio, where he records local and major label artists as well as ADR (looping) for film and television.

Trisha Thompson Murphy ('12, '13), Rockvale, has been named assistant director of annual giving at MTSU.

In Memoriam

1930s

Jewell Goodman ('38), Pelham, May 18, 2014

Evelyn Meadows Saine ('36), Dallas, Texas, May 7, 2014

1940s

Margaret Cox Bibb ('40), Clarksville, April 22, 2014

Robert L. Couch Jr. ('49), Tullahoma, August 11, 2014

Sarah Case Harris ('42), Valley, Alabama, July 11, 2014

James Kennon ('41), Memphis, August 22, 2014

Doris Mason McGregor ('45), Hillsboro, Texas, July 3, 2014

Jane Maxwell Tucker ('45), Murfreesboro, April 20, 2014

Betsy Foutch Willis ('49), Murfreesboro, April 19, 2014

1950s

Cary Armstead ('56), Columbia, July 12, 2014

Evelyn Johns Dooley ('57), Fayetteville, May 3, 2014

Dorothy Douglass ('54), Gallatin, September 24, 2014

Robert Dyer ('52), Blacksburg, Virginia, May 29, 2014

Bob Hardison ('52, '55), Franklin, September 7, 2014

James Hayes ('51), Murfreesboro, July 9, 2014

Charles Henry ('50), Chattanooga, January 27, 2013

Rebecca Seat James ('50), Franklin, September 20, 2014

Evelyn La Fevor ('57), Watertown, February 18, 2014

Mildred Lassiter ('53), Oak Ridge, May 3, 2014

Odie Lowery ('56), Hendersonville, May 20, 2014

James McKee ('57), York, South Carolina, March 27, 2014

Mary Nelson Pennington ('52), Hermitage, July 18, 2014

Samuel Rigney ('57), Snellville, Georgia, August 2, 2014

Neuva Sears ('54), Franklin, August 21, 2014

Dewey Simpson ('51), Maryville, March 31, 2014

Joseph Smith ('51, '57), Murfreesboro, May 7, 2014

James Taft ('58), Nashville, September 5, 2014

1960s

Helen West Alexander ('60), Readyville, July 12, 2014

Vernon Amos ('67), Hermitage, June 2, 2014

Sandra Bates ('65, '66), Corryton, August 3, 2014

Loren Carswell ('67), Culver, Indiana, June 16, 2014

O. David Cline ('60), Greenbrier, September 5, 2014

Ronald Coleman ('65, '69), Murfreesboro, May 1, 2014

Robert Compton ('66), Fletcher, North Carolina, January 9, 2014

Jerry Daly ('67), Athens, Alabama, August 23, 2014

John Dillon ('61), Franklin, August 12, 2014

William Ealy ('65), Nashville, January 12, 2014

Glenn Harris ('69), Tacoma, Washington, July 22, 2014

Robert Hatcher ('60), Brentwood, July 22, 2014

Margaret Bardin Mason ('66), March 21, 2014

James Painter ('62, '63), Columbia, June 3, 2014

Christopher Parker ('61), Tucker, Georgia, May 11, 2014

William Perkins ('64), Counce, August 15, 2014

Joe Pollock ('61), Huntsville, Alabama, June 13, 2014

James Roberts ('64), Soddy Daisy, May 2, 2014

Carol Rose ('69, '78), Florence, Alabama April 11, 2014

Jacob Rowe Sr. ('67), St. Augustine, Florida, September 13, 2013

Dwight Storey ('62, '67), Frankewing, May 21, 2014

Margaret Weeks ('66), Seymour, March 21, 2014

Barbara Williams ('68), Decherd, May 20, 2014

Charlene Buchanan Williamson ('66, '67), Donna, Texas, July 26, 2014

1970s

Michael Abston ('76), Las Vegas, Nevada, April 24, 2014

Guy Anderson ('71), Farmersville, Texas, May 14, 2014

David Attaway ('79), O'Fallon, Illinois, August 29, 2014

James Avaritt Sr. ('77), Murfreesboro, August 14, 2014

Hugh Blair IV ('73), Soddy Daisy, May 20, 2014

Jerry Blevins ('71), South Pittsburg, June 7, 2014

Anne Rhea Browning ('70), Chattanooga, July 16, 2014

William Brunson ('75), Columbia, August 21, 2014

Carol Ward Cannon ('79), Nashville, July 10, 2014

Robert Cook ('70), Colorado Springs, Colorado, March 21, 2014

Fadia Patterson ('12), Murfreesboro, has joined ABC affiliate WEHT in Evansville, Indiana, as a reporter and producer.

Devin Wayne ('13), Mt. Juliet, has joined Lattimore Black Morgan & Cain as a staff consultant in the security and risk services department. She will primarily be performing

information technology compliance audits.

Phillip Dixon II ('14), Goodlettsville, was a video intern aboard the exploration vehicle *Nautilus*, a 64-meter research vessel operated by Ocean Exploration Trust, on its 2014 expedition in the Gulf of Mexico. (The trust's founder

and president is Robert Ballard, leader of the team that discovered the wrecks of RMS *Titanic* and the German battleship *Bismarck*.)

Alaya Howard ('14), Nashville, is communications assistant for Titan Web Marketing Solutions, a Murfreesboro-based digital agency. Howard

assists the agency and clients with social media and email marketing.

Katie Tierney ('14), Gatlinburg, has joined Lattimore Black Morgan & Cain as a staff auditor. She will be working in industries including real estate, restaurants, professional service organizations, and manufacturing. [MTSU](#)

Willie Coleman ('76), Nashville, August 17, 2013

Melvin Daniels ('75, '81, '01), Murfreesboro, August 2, 2014

Marilyn Denlinger ('75), Lisle, Illinois, September 13, 2014

Barbara Dodd ('77), Mt. Juliet, May 20, 2014

Clara Duesterhoeft, Collinwood, August 29, 2014

Deborah Ann Freeze ('75), Murfreesboro, February 6, 2014

Larry Grantz ('77), Ponca City, Oklahoma, April 17, 2014

Patricia McNeal Harris ('71), Paducah, Kentucky, September 4, 2014

Jean Harsha ('70), Fallbrook, California, May 2, 2013

James Holmes ('72), Nashville, July 25, 2014

Murrey Holton ('71, '73), Chapel Hill, April 15, 2014

Robert Hooper Jr. ('71), Lynn Haven, Florida, May 9, 2013

Huey Johnson ('73), Plainfield, Illinois, April 14, 2014

Christopher Wayne Keen ('77), Huddleston, Virginia, May 2, 2013

Arthur Kinzel ('73), Columbus, Georgia, June 11, 2014

Darrell Knox ('73), Murfreesboro, September 16, 2014

Cheri Garner Miller ('75, '87), Tullahoma, May 23, 2014

Naomi Parker Pedigo ('76), Murfreesboro, September 19, 2014

Joseph Robinson ('72), Deltona, Florida, April 10, 2014

Albert Stone ('71), Murfreesboro, May 14, 2014

Robert Tittsworth ('79), Knoxville, July 6, 2014

Kathleen Vaughn ('74), Madeira Beach, Florida, September 15, 2014

William Weldon ('73), Readyville, March 23, 2014

Jimmy Wheeley ('70, '77), Lafayette, July 4, 2014

Darrell K. Williams ('74), Franklin, July 9, 2014

1980s

Donna Crutcher ('81), Lebanon, May 11, 2014

John Evans ('86), Maryville, August 5, 2014

Richard Johnson ('85, '88), Christiana, May 1, 2014

Kevin Kyle ('82), Cedar Rapids, Iowa, June 28, 2014

Thaddeus Mason ('88), Murfreesboro, June 13, 2014

Jeffrey Moore ('81), Nashville, June 9, 2014

Anita Patrum ('88), Beechgrove, July 26, 2014

Sterling Seat Jr. ('80), Mt. Juliet, May 10, 2014

Greggory Simerly ('84), Murfreesboro, July 19, 2014

Elizabeth McAllister Smith ('83), Murfreesboro, May 31, 2014

Diane Grimes Stikeleather ('82, '87), Gallatin, August 4, 2014

Lori Worthington ('86), Murfreesboro, July 22, 2014

1990s

Jere Gardner ('95), White Bluff, February 10, 2014

Rawlin Jernigan ('91), McMinnville, April 18, 2014

Lynn McGuire Glessner ('95), Renton, Washington, June 22, 2014

Barbara Gunter Hall ('92), Piedmont, South Carolina, August 30, 2014

Annie Peels ('95), Shelbyville, August 6, 2014

Thomas Price Jr. ('94, '02), Murfreesboro, July 30, 2014

Kerry Rushing ('93), Nashville, July 16, 2014

Will G. Shipley ('96, '01), Hendersonville, September 4, 2014

Louis D. Stringer ('90), Lucedale, Mississippi, September 21, 2014

2000s

Janice Adcock ('03), Smyrna, September 23, 2014

Robert Biddle IV ('09), Hermitage, January 29, 2014

Erik Blom ('09), Fairview, May 1, 2014

Kristin Hayes ('05), Franklin, May 15, 2014

Shonta Whorley Lamb ('02, '11), Shelbyville, August 27, 2014

Chad Lemons ('02), Nashville, April 26, 2014

Karen Martin ('06), Murfreesboro, May 14, 2014

Cameron Parnell ('06), Pecos, Texas, April 28, 2014

James Parnell ('01), Nashville, June 29, 2014

David Pierce ('00), Nashville, July 22, 2014

2010s

Brandon Clark ('11), Hermitage, July 17, 2014

Michael Schussler ('12), Greenbrier, April 10, 2014

Ashton Thomas ('13), Smyrna, September 28, 2014

Austin Troutt ('13), Murfreesboro, September 13, 2014

Bonita Woitkowiak ('10), Murfreesboro, August 31, 2014

Jay Wolf ('13), Tampa, Florida, August 13, 2014 [MTSU](#)

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