

January 2026



Pitt State

MAGAZINE

INTRODUCING
THE NEWEST
GORILLAS



From the editor

In October, a group of international alumni from around the world reunited on campus after planning their trip for years. Some of them traveled 24 hours to get here!

I asked them: Why?

Each one of them said the same thing: Pitt State was transformative.

Nicole Ritter, of Germany, who studied here in 2011, shared an especially impactful story:

In 2018, she climbed 17,000 feet to Mount Everest Base Camp. Conditions were perilous: there was a snowstorm, and her water bottle froze. When she finally made it — crying and exhausted



— she posed for a photo wearing her Pitt State sweatshirt.

“Pitt State will always be a special place for me,” she said. “It was transformational. My professors instilled confidence in me — they made me think I can achieve anything.”

In this issue, read their reunion story as well as dozens of others that illustrate the transformative experiences that students, alumni, and community members have here.

In addition to seeing you on campus, we love hearing from you. Drop us a line at alumni@pittstate.edu!

— Andra Stefanoni, editor



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PittState

MAGAZINE

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More photos and stories at:
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GORILLA CONNECTION

Keep up to date on milestone moments, innovative projects, and inspiring people:

pittstate.edu/gorillaconnection

Miss a performance by any of the outstanding PSU music ensembles? You can watch them anytime through our archived recordings:

youtube.com/@bicknellcenter

We're convinced we have the prettiest small campus in the land, and photographer Sam Clausen has captured it in every season. Download your favorite view to use as your desktop background:

pittstate.edu/backgrounds

Need a good, old-fashioned Pitt State pick-me-up? Download the fight song to use as your ringtone, played by the PSU Pride of the Plains Marching Band!

pittstate.edu/info/fightsong

Loved this issue and feeling nostalgic? Find past magazines in our digital archive at:

pittstate.edu/magazine

Check out what campus looks like these days: take a virtual tour!

pittstate.edu/tour



Scott Bailey (BSEd '88, MS '90) represented Gorilla Nation in both Newport Beach, California and Kauai, Hawaii this past year. Photo pictured is in Newport Beach.

See more photos of alumni wearing their Gorilla gear around the world on Page 29.

Finding Gus

And the winner is...

We continue to be amazed at the number of you who enter our popular "Finding Gus" contest! We wish we could give a prize to each and every one of you for having such Gorilla spirit! This time, the winner is Jerry Harper (BBA '81), who spied the Wooster Gorilla hanging out next to The J3 Band on an Astra Stage in Gorilla Village.

Can you find it?

Search this issue and email your guess to **psumag@pittstate.edu** to be entered in our drawing. Include your first and last name, the year you graduated, and the page number and location you found it. One entry per person. Entries must be received by **April 1** (no fooling!). We'll mail one lucky winner a hardbound copy of "Pittsburg State University: A Photographic History of The First 100 Years."



Dear Editor,

I read with interest the article about Sam Clausen. I especially liked Photos Number 1 and 8 for the creativity they displayed. This article reminded me of my time at Pitt State.

When I started as a freshman, I was interested in photography but had no real knowledge or skill. I got a student job at Photo Services cleaning sinks and other menial tasks. It was the black and white era. I benefited from tutoring from Jerry Hawkins and Larry Long, but no actual photographing. One day when both had called in sick, the receptionist, Cheri Dean Jernagan, in a bold leap of faith, sent me on my first job. After that, it was onward and upward. Each job was a challenge and learning opportunity. I especially relished the jobs where there was room for creativity. I was living the dream!

Then came that horrible day in August 1967—graduation. I was suddenly hit with a violent attack of adulthood: military service, marriage, family and career kept my love of photography alive as an important avocation. Now I am “stuck” here on the Olympic Peninsula where my subjects are awesome scenery, beautiful birds and, of course, the grandson. I am still living the dream!

I am sending a few photos I took while at Pitt State.

My best to all Alumni.

Richard Smith, Class of '67



Parade: For one of Smith's earliest assignments, he had to run two blocks to get ahead of the university marching band and in position for the photo, taken in 1964 or 1965. He had time for one shot, and this was it. **Artist:** Smith captured this photo of a professor in the art department commissioned to design the medallion that is given to Outstanding Alumni Award recipients each year.

Young woman clapping: At a basketball tournament in Emporia, which Pitt State won, photos were not allowed during the game. After the final buzzer, the court filled up so fast that Smith could not get to the team, so he focused on the head cheerleader. The camera he was using — a Rolieflex — mirrored the subject image in the viewfinder. The only way to get the shot above the crowd? Hold the camera upside down above his head and compose the shot upside down and backwards!

Timmons Chapel: Smith's family lived near Timmons Chapel when he was an early teen. He captured this image in early December in about 1966. The shutter on the camera froze, so he had to use a primitive technique — a pinhole camera. A copy of this photo hung on his mother's wall for 40 years. Now it hangs on his.

New partnerships cover student scholarships in technology

Pittsburg State University's Crossland College of Technology has launched a new partnership with Ignite in Bentonville, Arkansas, and with Franklin Technology Center in Joplin, Missouri, creating an affordable pathway for students pursuing technology-related careers.

The Crossland College of Technology Enterprise Program will award 10 full scholarships each year, covering tuition and fees.

The work-based learning models of Ignite and Franklin Tech align closely with Pitt State programs in Construction Management, Digital Media, Engineering-Industrial Design, and Technology.

President Thomas Newsom said the partnerships help meet



Students in the Ignite program will be eligible for 10 full scholarships through the Crossland College of Technology Enterprise Program.

regional workforce needs.

"We're not going to meet that need if we don't work together in these kinds of partnerships," he said.

Vice President Karl Stumo said the impact will ripple through communities, employers, and families.

Students will receive robust support, including a dedicated academic advisor, internship assistance, and the option to live in a technology-focused learning community. Pitt State also will provide Ignite and Franklin Tech with guest speakers and special events in technical fields.

New facility to advance manufacturing

Pittsburg State University broke ground in November on a new prove-out facility, marking a major step in strengthening the region's economy and expanding opportunities for students, faculty, and industry partners.

Located next to the Tyler Research Center, home of the National Institute for Materials Advancement, the 20,000-square-foot facility will offer space and equipment for companies and entrepreneurs to test materials, refine manufacturing processes, and move products toward commercialization. The project is funded with \$12 million in state, federal, and other support.

President Thomas Newsom called the facility "a place where ideas meet industry," reinforcing Pitt State's role in regional innovation and workforce development. Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce President Blake Benson said it adds to momentum created by nearby projects such as the EaglePicher expansion and the new KBI Regional Crime Lab and Training Center.



Provost Susan Bon said the facility will become a "platform for discovery, collaboration, and learning," giving students and faculty across multiple disciplines hands-on opportunities to prototype materials and solve real-world challenges alongside industry partners.

Supported through years of collaboration and federal advocacy, the facility is expected to be completed in 2026.

"We're turning opportunity into reality," Newsom said.

Addressing the shortage of rural physicians and dentists

A critical shortage of physicians and dentists has left millions in rural America without adequate care. A new partnership aims to change that — and Pitt State is playing a central role.

The Rural Health Scholars program, launched by Kansas City University (KCU) in collaboration with Pittsburg State University, Missouri Southern State University, and eight regional community colleges, will fast-track students from medically underserved rural

counties into careers as osteopathic physicians or dentists.

KCU research shows every county within 100 miles of its Joplin campus — just 30 miles from

Pittsburg — is considered a shortage area for health and dental professionals.

The innovative program will allow qualifying students to earn a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) or Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) in seven years, one year earlier than the traditional route, with the goal of returning to serve their home communities.

“I think we’re seeing something historic,” said Chris Childers, dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at Pitt State. “Southeast Kansans need greater access to health care, which means we need more doctors and dentists.”

Students begin at a partner community college, then transfer to Pitt State or MSSU. Those who meet requirements can interview early for admission to KCU.

“By strategically extending our KCU pipeline out to these community colleges, we now have the opportunity to engage with these potential students further upstream,” said Dr. Richard Schooler (BS ’76) of KCU-Joplin.

The multi-state, multi-institution model is unique within the U.S., offering both medical and dental pathways with conditional early acceptance.



Serving special populations



Students are gaining hands-on experience by coordinating and leading inclusive events that serve special populations — turning classroom learning into meaningful community impact.

The Older Adult Unified Event brings together older adults living in area nursing homes and Special Olympics athletes ages 50 and older. Students in the Pitt State TR program in collaboration with Special Olympics Kansas and Medicalodge create activities that promote connection and movement.

At Immersive Healthcare for Little Explorers, children with developmental disabilities and their families explore interactive healthcare stations — from dentist visits to vision screenings — supported by students in Psychology and Health, Human Performance, and Recreation.

The TR-Iffic Day of Play, a student-directed event, welcomes Special Olympics athletes from surrounding communities for a day of celebration and inclusion.

Together, these experiences reinforce our mission: to make life better through education.

New degree programs address global needs

Pitt State has launched two new degree programs — Industrial Distribution and Supply Chain Management — to prepare students for high-demand careers essential to the regional and global economy. The programs were developed through a collaboration between the Crossland College of Technology and the Kelce College of Business, blending technical and business expertise.

“These programs give students the chance to choose a path that best suits their strengths, whether they lean toward the business side of supply chain or the technical side of industrial distribution,” said Lisa Riedle, dean of CCOT.

The announcement was made at a local distribution warehouse operated by the technology education company Pitsco, which ships products worldwide.

“Having graduates who come in who understand what logistics looks like, what continuous improvement looks like, how sourcing works — that will be a big benefit. It’s a global world now,” said COO Craig Yantis.

Students will learn logistics, procurement, engineering technology, data analysis, and operations, with every student completing an industry internship.

“These degrees will help ensure that future leaders in this field are well prepared,” said Lynn Murray, associate dean of KCOB.

Demand is strong, with 350–400 open entry-level positions in Kansas and median salaries starting at \$77,000.

“These degrees will be a benefit to our community, our region, and our graduates,” said CCOT Associate Professor Byron McKay.

In the right place at the right time

Story and photo by Kaylee Dillow | Student Communication Intern

What started as a group of students who met in the Pitt State Jazz Band quickly evolved into a popular local band that just released its debut album, now streaming on popular platforms.

The Little Green Men is comprised of senior Jude Wolfe (keyboard, and vocals); senior Evan Harries (guitar and vocals), senior Jocelyn Goodwin (tenor saxophone

and vocals), junior Jack Stefanoni (drums and percussion), senior Gavin Burdette (bass), senior Joe Lancaster (trumpet and percussion), and junior Peyton Winnett (baritone saxophone).

Their first gig: playing on the steps of Russ Hall for a fundraiser by the Student Government Association in October 2023.

Offers for other gigs on campus and in the community soon followed, including repeat performances in the U-Club of the Overman Student Center.

By January 2025, they began recording their original songs in a spare bedroom a few blocks from campus. By October, the album was ready. The result: ““Unidentified Funky Object” (UFO), now streaming on Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube Music, and Bandcamp. The album’s cover art was hand painted by Harries.

The band members have played together for several years in several university ensembles, including Jazz Band, Wind Ensemble, the SEK Symphony, and the Pride of the Plains Marching Band, which gave them a chance to develop their chemistry and camaraderie.

“It was incredibly lucky that we all wound up here on campus at the same time, in the same ensembles, or we would never have been able to do something like this,” Wolfe said.



A lifelong connection

Twelve international alumni who studied at Pitt State nearly 15 years ago reunited on campus last fall after spending several years planning the trip and flying thousands of miles to make it happen. Coming from Taiwan, Germany, Finland, Vietnam, and the U.S., they all felt the same emotion upon returning.

"It was very emotional coming back," said Karen Chen of Taiwan.

Chen spent one year as an exchange student before transferring to complete her degree in Fashion Merchandising. She became a leader in the International Student Association and founded the Taiwan Student Association. Now working in Taiwan's global fashion industry, she still thinks often of her classmates.

"The connection we all formed back then is so precious," she said.

The group stayed close through messages and calls, bonded by their shared memories. Among them was Germany's Nicole Ritter, who studied Marketing & Management for one semester and later carried a Pitt State sweatshirt to Mt. Everest Basecamp.

"I remember how much (Associate Dean) Dr. Lynn Murray believed in me," Ritter said. "Here, you feel special as an individual – in Germany, not so much."

During a campus tour, the group marveled at new facilities built since their time at Pitt State, including the Plaster Center, Bicknell Center, Block22, the Nursing Simulation Hospital, and the soon-to-open Kelce College of Business — while also appreciating cherished traditions that remained unchanged, from gorilla statues to the energy of Gorilla football.

Torsten Fischer, also from Germany, spent one semester in Kelce. He still calls it the "best six months of my life."

"The U.S. is completely different,

in that people here tend to connect with their universities," he said.

The group included alumni from Taiwan, Germany, Finland, Vietnam, and the U.S. More international alumni returned for a three-day reunion during Homecoming.



Continuing a family legacy

The Alumni Association provides the Alumni Legacy License Plate Scholarship to incoming freshmen and transfer students — students who continue their family's legacy by choosing Pitt State.

During Family Weekend, the Alumni Association had the honor of recognizing some of this year's recipients, along with their alumni parents and alumni grandparents, on the field of Carnie Smith Stadium. This year, more than \$100,000 was awarded to 182 students. Congratulations to the students and their families!

These scholarships are possible because of



the Gorilla License Plate Program, which is available in Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma.

Learn how you can support our students and ride with Gorilla pride at pittstate.edu/licenseplate.

Construction students tackle community projects

Seniors in Construction Management turned Four Oaks Golf Course into their classroom last fall. Their assignment: build concrete sidewalks between the new pickleball courts, improving access for the thousands who use them.

It was the latest in a long list of community-focused projects completed by seniors each year, including a golf cart path, pavilions at Pittsburg High School and Schlanger Park, and a sandbox for Choices Early Learning Center.

“In addition to valuable skills that prepare them for their careers, they’re getting the experience of dealing with someone outside of our classrooms,” said Associate Professor Chad

Crain. “They’re gaining a deeper understanding of developing relationships with people in industry, and at local agencies and municipalities.”

For the sidewalk project, they collaborated with Pittsburg Parks & Recreation and American Concrete, and took responsibility for contacting Dig Safe.

Students completed dirt work, set forms, laid rock, and poured concrete by early November. Next, they made saw cuts, removed forms, and finished the surrounding area — delivering a completed project by semester’s end.

They also completed a concrete project outside the Weede Gymnasium and John Lance Arena.

Senior Enzo Perez said the



hands-on experience was transformative.

“It really helps us by giving us hands on experience – everything we’ve learned in class

over the years we are now implementing in the field. It’s also a way to learn from our mistakes before we go into the workforce.”

Pittsburg turns 150 this year!

In 2026, Pittsburg will celebrate a remarkable milestone: 150 years of history, growth, and community spirit. Pitt State is playing a role in preparations for the sesquicentennial; campus leaders are serving on committees and planning ways to incorporate the milestone into university activities.

Throughout the year, residents, students, and alumni can expect a full slate of special events — from historical exhibits and speakers to community festivals and collaborative projects. Activities will highlight Pittsburg’s



rich industrial roots, its cultural diversity, and the role it has played in shaping the region.

For Pitt State, the 150th anniversary is more than a

celebration; it’s an opportunity to deepen its long-standing connection with the community it calls home. As plans unfold, excitement is already growing for a year that will bring pride, tradition, and Gorillas of all generations together to mark this once-in-a-lifetime moment.

Follow @Pittsburg 150 on Facebook for announcements about activities and celebrations planned for 2026, as well as historic photos of the campus and community.

Construction update

The university continues to make significant progress on several construction and renovation projects designed to enhance student experiences, strengthen academic programs, and modernize campus infrastructure.

Among them:

Besse Hotel (Fourth & Locust)

Renovation of this historic building by a developer will provide student housing and office/commercial space; the university will lease the finished project. Crews have sheetrocked many interior rooms and installed windows. By the time this magazine is published, they will have completed all wall framing for the apartments to the 13th floor and the interior finishing process will be underway. Students are expected to move in next August just in time for the new academic year, and the ground floor will be the new home for Pitt State's Center for Reading.



Kelce College of Business (Second & Broadway)

Masonry work has been completed, windows have been installed, and interior sheetrocking likely will be complete when this magazine is published. Ribbon cutting ceremonies are planned for the week of Aug. 11 for both the Kelce College of Business building and the Besse Hotel.

A team working with University Architect Lindell Haverstic and Henderson Engineering is evaluating the future of the existing home of the Kelce College of Business.



Heckert-Wells & Yates Hall

Heckert-Wells (Biology and Chemistry) and Yates Hall (Mathematics and Physics) are in the design phase of a major renovation and expansion effort. The first phase of a comprehensive upgrade is planned to begin in the buildings this summer.

The project carries a \$52 million phased construction budget, including \$11 million from the state's campus renewal funds targeted at infrastructure modernization. Additional funding will come from private, state, and federal sources as they become available.

Phase 1 will upgrade a major lab in Heckert-Wells. The project is part of Pitt State's strengthened focus on STEM education.

Fresh eyes



Gabriela Alvarez, an international student from Paraguay pursuing a Master of Science in Technology in Graphic Design, recently unveiled her acrylic-on-canvas artwork titled "Downtown." The piece depicts the signage found in Downtown Pittsburg, Kansas — an image familiar to many in the community.

It was part of an art exhibit in Porter Hall called Emerging Perspectives which highlighted the creativity, fresh ideas, and diverse viewpoints of student artists.

"I wanted to capture the emblematic Downtown Pittsburg sign surrounded by the charm of the city and a few chubby sparrows flying around," Gabriela shared.

COMING UP

Watch for details about a new program, "Grandparents University," that will provide an opportunity for community members and alumni to bring their grandchildren to experience a day on campus. The program will be directed by Alumni & Constituent Relations. Visit pittstate.edu/alumni for information.

Coming this spring in the H. Lee Scott Speaker Series: Bill Nye and Daymond John

Pittsburg State University is bringing two nationally recognized personalities to campus for its ongoing H. Lee Scott Speaker Series: Renowned scientist, inventor, and TV personality Bill Nye and Daymond John of “Shark Tank.”

Nye will speak April 9 at the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts. John will follow on May 8 at the Bicknell Center. Tickets for both events go on sale Jan. 12.

BILL NYE

Nye is best known as the host of the Emmy-winning series “Bill Nye the Science Guy,” which helped introduce a generation to science through humor and accessibility.

Today, he is a leading advocate for scientific literacy and evidence-based education. He continues to bring his love of science and flair for comedy to every appearance — deftly translating complex issues to help inspire audiences of all ages to engage with and improve our world.

Nye currently serves as CEO of The Planetary Society, the world’s largest non-governmental space organization. He is the host and executive producer of “The End is Nye” on Peacock and the science podcast “Science Rules! with Bill Nye.”

He has authored three New York Times bestselling books and has appeared on numerous television programs and films.

During his Pitt State presentation, Nye will address topics including space and planetary science, climate change, environmental issues, and science education.



DAYMOND JOHN

Daymond John is a self-made entrepreneur, bestselling author, and investor on ABC’s business reality TV show, “Shark Tank,” with more than \$6 billion in global product sales.

Known as “The People’s Shark,” John is founder and CEO of FUBU, which grew from a startup idea into a global fashion brand with peak annual sales exceeding \$350 million.

A pioneer in branding and guerrilla marketing, John is recognized for integrating fashion, culture, and music, as well as for his innovative use of social media and pop culture trends.

In his presentation, he teaches audience members how to apply his successful methods to a wide range of businesses; shares practical strategies for negotiation, sales growth, leadership, and team development; and offers insights applicable to students, entrepreneurs, and business leaders alike.



TICKETS:

\$5 for students; \$10 for faculty, staff, and seniors; and \$15 for the general public. They may be purchased at the PSU Ticket Office, located inside the Weede Building, from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday, online at pittstate.edu/tickets, or by calling 620-235-4796 starting Jan. 12.



H. Lee Scott
SPEAKER SERIES
AN EXAMINATION OF AMERICAN LIFE

About the Speaker Series:

Pittsburg State University’s “H. Lee Scott Speaker Series: An Examination of American Life” was created in 2015 with a \$2 million gift made by alumnus and former Walmart CEO Lee Scott and his wife, Linda.

The mission of the series is to deepen the level of discourse, enrich the university experience, and elevate the university’s reputation by examining American life from the perspective of nationally prominent leaders and innovators.

In making the gift for the speaker series, Lee Scott said: “We hope that the exposure to these successful leaders will enhance the educational experiences for students and inspire them to someday be invited to speak about leadership on this same stage.”

INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS HALL OF FAME

Class of 2025



John Brown, Zac Dickey, and Tresa Miller.



John Roderique, Dennis Franchione, and Gene Stegeman.



Lizzy Jeronimus and Amanda Davied.



Leah (Shireman) Smith and Russ Jewett.



Chuck Broyles and Shane Tafoya.



Chuck Broyles and Phil Schepens.

The Class of 2025

Intercollegiate Athletics Hall of Fame is headlined by a cast of decorated athletes and coaches.

The inductees were enshrined in a ceremony at the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts on Oct. 31 and were recognized at halftime of the Gorillas football game on Nov. 1 against MIAA rival Missouri Southern State University.

GRETCHEN (CLARK) LOVE (2010-11)

Four-time NCAA Division II All-America high jumper in track & field

ZAC DICKEY (2009-11)

All-America quarterback in football

DENNIS FRANCHIONE (1985-89)

Legendary football coach who guided the Gorillas to five straight trips to the national playoffs including a pair of national semifinal finishes

LIZZY JERONIMUS (2012-15)

Four-time All-American in women's basketball

LEAH (SHIREMAN) SMITH (2003-05)

Three-time All-America javelin thrower in track & field

SHANE TAFOYA (1990-91)

Two-time All-America linebacker in football

The Legacy category, created in 2005, focuses solely on individuals who completed their athletic eligibility 30 years or more prior to the current calendar year in an attempt to bolster the school's rich heritage from earlier years.

Inductees include:

PHIL SCHEPENS (1992-95)

Two-time NCAA Division II All-America offensive lineman in football

THE 1994 SOFTBALL TEAM

Won a program record 48 games and qualified for the NCAA Division II Midwest Regional Tournament

"What an amazing class of individuals we had the opportunity to honor for their contributions to the unending legacy of Gorilla Athletics," said Dan Wilkes, associate athletics director/communications and chair of the Athletics Hall of Fame Committee. "We are extremely proud of this group."



A GAME CHANGER

THE COURSE OF JOHN LAIR'S LIFE — and the impact he would go on to have on thousands — was decided when a professor offered him extra credit to volunteer at a Special Olympics regional track meet at Carnie Smith Stadium.

"He said go for a few hours and you'll help your grade and get a free t-shirt," Lair recalled.

He went, and it was life-changing.

"I realized I had to find a way to be involved with that organization," he said. "It was an amazing feeling."

Until then, Lair said, "I had no clue what I wanted to do. I was undeclared." The following week, he chose Recreational Therapy as his major.

He soon started his own team in Pittsburg with four athletes, and it grew to 150; today Pittsburg participates in 18 sports year-round.

Now president and CEO of Special Olympics Kansas, Lair has spent more than 35 years with the organization, forging lifelong friendships and traveling with athletes to games in Greece, Italy, China, and South Korea.

He's been honored as one of "50 Kansans You Should Know" by Ingrams Magazine, and received the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award, North America Special Olympics Coach of the Year, the American Health Care Association Hero of the Year, and Pitt

State's Outstanding Alumni Award.

He credits his staff and volunteers, as well as donors, for the program's growth — since 2017 when he took the helm, from 3,000 athletes to 7,000 and from eight staff to 25.

"I have the best staff in the country. They are motivated and passionate about our mission. It's a team effort, not the John Lair show. My football coaches told me put great people around you. We work a lot of hours, a lot of projects, but we do it together.

Everyone has a voice," Lair said.

He also credits former professors Janice Jewett, Chuck Killingsworth, and especially Professor Laura Miller.

"She's taken it to the next level," he said.

"What PSU students do with Special Olympics athletes through their clinics and volunteering

— it's amazing."

"Those days of them being separated have been erased . . . they feel included," Lair said.

He remains active at Pitt State by attending events and serving on the Alumni Association Board of Directors, and proudly brought state powerlifting and flag football to Pittsburg.

"Each summer, 500 athletes come here to compete at Pittsburg High School and Pitt State, where for me it all began."

"What PSU students do with Special Olympics athletes through their clinics and volunteering — it's amazing."

Two Pitt State students turn classroom skills into thriving businesses

By Kaylee Dillow, Communication Major

Two Kelce College of Business students aren't waiting until graduation to put their education into action — they're building businesses now. Quincey Turner and Kelsie Lilly are turning classroom knowledge into real-world ventures, each balancing long hours, uncertainty, and the thrill of entrepreneurship.

KELSIE LILLY: A FOOD TRUCK

Just a short walk from campus, Marketing and Business Studies major Kelsie Lilly is serving one-pound loaded potatoes from her food truck, The Tater Pitt. Long before this fall's opening, she imagined owning a business and decided there was no reason to wait.

Her location was intentional: she wanted to serve the community she's part of, and the response has been immediate.

"The thing that surprised me the most is the amount of community support I have gotten," she said. "It is truly amazing to see a town love and support their college so much and want to see the students that come in this town thrive more than anything in the world."

Lilly relies often on lessons from KCOB and the mentorship of faculty.

"I've been able to reach out to my teachers with any question I have," she said. "If they don't know the exact answer, they always show me how to find it. It means a lot knowing they're cheering me on."

Still unsure where The Tater Pitt will go post-graduation, Lilly embraces the learning curve.

"This entire thing is a learning experience," she said. "The best way to learn from it is to make mistakes. There's never a perfect time. If you keep waiting, you'll never do it. The perfect time is now."

QUINCEY TURNER: AN ART STUDIO

Turner, a Management and Marketing major, owns and operates Quincey Turner Studio, an art business rooted in a childhood spent watching her father craft wooden pieces and traveling with him to craft fairs. Those early experiences "planted the seed" for her own creative career, which has included traveling across Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and beyond to sell original work and prints ranging from \$30 to \$2,000.

A member of the Pitt State Track Team, Turner fine-tunes her schedule around pole vaulting season, scaling back art shows in the spring and ramping up in the summer. Even while juggling athletics, academics, and a business, she credits KCOB faculty and coursework for sharpening her approach.

"My financial accounting class really opened my eyes," she said. "I realized there's an actual method to keeping the books instead of just writing stuff down."

Learning to track expenses, investments, and depreciation helped her professionally organize her finances, and faculty mentors stepped in with guidance on challenges like sales taxes. She's eager to add more business tools to her toolkit.

"As an entrepreneur, it's good to be well-rounded," she said. "Having a general idea of how business works and how to present yourself is such a great foundation."

Turner dreams of opening a gallery in Tulsa or Kansas City where she can create and support other artists. For now, she paints daily, experiments with various mediums, and keeps perspective.

"The biggest lesson I've learned is that forcing art takes the joy out of it," she says. "I have to balance the business and creative sides, because when inspiration isn't there, the work won't have life."



“There’s never a perfect time. If you keep waiting, you’ll never do it.”





A dream wrapped in Pittsburg

Photos and story by Brett Dalton (BA '06, MA '17)

RENATO FERNANDO PINTO MADE HIMSELF A PROMISE: he would own a business by the time he turned 30.

He came close — just a few months shy.

“I got my ducks in a row, made things happen and was able to open this shop a few weeks before I turned 31,” he said.

That shop is Marathon Graphics, a 3M Preferred Installer specializing in vehicle wraps, walls, floors, windows, and more.

Located at 1220 S. Broadway inside the former Malle Automotive building—just blocks from the Pitt State campus—Marathon Graphics blends new energy with a familiar Pittsburg landmark.

“Our goal is to carve out our own identity here and make it something new.”

Here, he’s putting to use many of the skills he learned in the Graphic Communications program at Pitt State. And, he’s leaving his mark on vehicles and other businesses throughout the region, including many owned by other Gorillas.

“For us, it’s mainly a wrap shop . . . that’s what we love to do,” he said. “But we also handle signage. Vehicle graphics, car wraps, floors, doors, windows . . . pretty much anything you can put a sticker on, you can wrap. We do a lot of signage for customers too, whether it’s interior or exterior, whatever they need.”



If the “American Dream” ever needed a real-world example, Pinto’s journey would fit. Born in Peru, he moved to the U.S. at age 10 and lived in North Carolina, Burlington, and Emporia before enrolling as a student at Pitt State.

After years of temporary residency, he became a U.S. citizen on March 17, 2021.

“You take the Oath of Allegiance, they walk you through what it means to be an American, and then you walk out with a document saying you’re a naturalized citizen of the United States,” he said. “It’s something you keep forever.”

Today, Pinto says there’s nowhere he’d rather live than Pittsburg.

“Pittsburg really has something for everybody,” he said. “For us, we found the perfect house, we built a close circle of friends, and we loved getting involved with other people and businesses in the area.

“It’s funny . . . you stick around long enough and suddenly you realize, ‘You know what? I actually do like it here.’ A lot of people graduate from Pitt State and feel so ready to leave, and then they end up staying for a year or two. Then those two years turn into 10, and you’re like, ‘Oh, okay . . . I guess I’m sticking around.’”

That sense of community—and the entrepreneurial spirit running through it—sparked the confidence to launch his business.

“I think part of what pushed me into starting my own business was seeing so many friends and family members doing the same thing,” he said. “There are so many resources and people here who genuinely want to help you be successful. As long as you know who to reach out to and where to start, the support is incredible.”

When he’s not running Marathon Graphics, Pinto is often literally running. A marathoner himself, he founded The Running Collective and the annual Turkey Trot, which in 2025 raised \$28,000 for local charities.

At the heart of his business and volunteer work, he said, is a simple goal: helping people and strengthening the community he now proudly calls home.

Rewriting her future to help others rewrite theirs

AS A SECOND-GENERATION GORILLA, Courtlynn Rose (BS '20) arrived at Pitt State with a clear plan. The daughter of Michael Rose (BS '95), a former football player, and Deatrea Rose (BGS' 96, MS '00), now the university's associate vice president of campus and community resources, she grew up steeped in Gorilla pride.

A political science major, she intended to pursue law. She was active in University Student Ambassadors, Crimson Club, Select Choir, University Choir, Black Student Association, and Hispanics of Today.

But her junior year changed her path.

"I was really struggling personally," she recalls. "I started going to the Counseling Center, and I met with an amazing graduate student who completely changed my outlook on therapy and mental health. She inspired me."

Instead of a class or campus activity shaping her career, it was those counseling sessions. Rose felt called to a future focused on helping others as she had been helped.

Switching majors that late would have added years to her degree, so she and her mom mapped a way forward: add a psychology minor and prepare for a graduate degree.

Her senior year was packed with psychology coursework as she completed prerequisites while navigating the pandemic. After

graduation, she accepted a position at Fort Hays State University and then Independence Community College in her hometown while working on a master's in clinical mental

health counseling.

Rose earned it in 2024 and moved to Overland Park, where she accepted her first clinical role with Armstrong Family Counseling.

Today, at just 27, she sees clients ranging from preschoolers to adults. Her schedule is full, with a waiting list.

"It's been an amazing first clinical job," she says. "I'm thriving. I'm the first one in my family to leave Independence, and it took a lot of thought and prayer. But it's everything I hoped for."

In two years, she'll be eligible for independent licensure and plans to open her own practice.

"There's such a big demand for mental health professionals," she said. "The field is wide open, and students can build a meaningful, well-paid career."

Her advice echoes her own journey: "If you're struggling, give counseling a try. And if the first thing you choose isn't the right fit, don't give up."

Looking back, she's grateful for the courage to pivot, the university that supported her, the parents who encouraged her every step of the way, and the counselor who inspired her.

"This is what I dreamed about," she says. "And I'm just getting started."

"This is what I dreamed about . . . and I'm just getting started."







A GREAT DAY TO BE A GORILLA:

Introducing Pittsburg State's 11th president, Thomas W. Newsom

SIX MONTHS INTO A NEW JOB in a new community at a university he did not attend, President Thomas W. Newsom already has become a familiar face on the Pittsburg State University campus — at football games and groundbreaking ceremonies, in classrooms and alumni gatherings, and at events throughout the community.

For those meeting him for the first time, the connection he has to Pitt State may feel remarkably natural for someone who arrived only recently.

That connection was visible from the start. When he was introduced to the campus and community during a formal event at the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts last fall, Newsom set the tone for the months ahead.

"I plan to build on the momentum you've built here in the past few years," he said. "We're looking forward to being a part of the amazing things happening here."

He and his wife, Vicky, had already made an undercover visit to Pittsburg before he applied — a quiet weekend spent at a restaurant downtown and exploring campus.

"We felt very welcome here," he said. "We truly understand now what it means to say Once a Gorilla, Always a Gorilla. It's truly a great day to be a Gorilla."

They wasted no time engaging,

speaking at local civic organizations, meeting patrons at Pittsburg Public Library, and attending community events.

Deep higher-ed roots

Newsom comes to Pittsburg State with more than two decades of experience in higher education. A native of Sherman, Texas, he earned his bachelor's from Austin College, a master's from Texas A&M–Commerce, and a doctorate from the University of North Texas. Along the way, he served as vice president of student success and dean of students at A&M–Commerce before becoming president of Southeastern Oklahoma State University.

His professional path grew from a family legacy.

"Both of my parents were educators who gave me a solid foundation," he said, adding that they will be frequent visitors to campus.

But he didn't grow up considering himself "president material," he noted. "In fact," he said when addressing the campus for the first time, "I struggled."

Mentors played a key role in helping him find his path.

Newsom's background also includes roles that sharpened his understanding of community life and communication: he once owned a community newspaper in North Dallas and worked in collegiate athletic communications. Those

experiences, he says, shaped how he thinks about storytelling, teamwork, and the role of a university in the life of a region.

He and his wife, Vicky — a London native, elementary school teacher, and former collegiate tennis standout — are the parents of three adult children: Katie, Will, and John.

Hitting the ground running

Arriving just before Labor Day meant jumping immediately into the rhythm of an already-moving campus. In their first few weeks, the Newsoms found themselves immersed in signature Pitt State traditions.

Helping students unload boxes and gear on Move-In Day, leading the Gorilla Walk from the Weede to

Carnie Smith Stadium, standing on the sidelines for home football games, and welcoming families for Family Day left strong early impressions.

“You can see Pitt State’s spirit from afar, but you can’t truly understand it until you’re here living it,” he said.

Those first weeks also brought a flurry of major announcements and events: groundbreakings, partnership announcements, celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the MBA program, and tours of downtown development that will reshape the Kelce College of Business footprint.

The activity, he emphasized, was invigorating — not overwhelming.

“This level of energy and activity is exactly why I wanted to be at Pitt State,” he said. “Being here has only confirmed how grateful I am to be part of it.”

A student-focused vision

Five months in, Newsom’s priorities have come into sharper focus, rooted firmly in the student experience.

He wants Pitt State to be a “student-ready university that understands that students come from different perspectives and different frames of reference, meets them where they are, and finds resources and the capacity to give them what they need to be successful.”

To get there, he believes the university must remain flexible and forward-looking.

“The economy is evolving,” he said. “We need to be flexible enough to meet the demands of a changing market.”

He is fond of saying that Pitt State’s true measure of success is what students do in their lives when they leave — whether they graduate or not, he added.

“Their time here should mean something — they should leave with tools they didn’t have when they arrived.”

Building for the future

The past five months also have marked the start of several ambitious capital and academic projects designed to strengthen Pitt State for years to come.

A new Prove-Out Facility at the Tyler Research Center being built on the east edge of campus will give students what he describes as a more seamless path from the classroom to the workforce — a place where they can test ideas, collaborate with faculty, and work

alongside business and industry partners.

A new regional crime center and laboratory being built next to it by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation will serve law enforcement and provide educational opportunities for the next generation of forensic scientists and criminal justice professionals.

Projects like these, he emphasized, don’t happen in isolation. They are made possible through strong connections with alumni, donors, city leaders, state and federal officials, and industry partners across the region.

“These relationships are the backbone of our progress,” he said. “Together, we are creating an ecosystem that connects education, innovation, and economic growth in powerful ways.”

Upcoming renovations to Heckert-Wells and Yates Halls represent another major leap forward. By modernizing labs, classrooms, and the STEM corridor, the university will be positioned to serve future generations of learners with industry-leading spaces that encourage collaboration.





Finding community in Pittsburg

While Newsom has spent his entire life on or around college campuses, the transition to Pittsburg has been uniquely meaningful. He and Vicky quickly embraced the traditions that define the community — holiday concerts, student performances, local arts events, and bustling Small Business Saturday crowds.

“You don’t have to look far to see the pride and care people pour into this city,” he said. Driving down Broadway in December “feels like stepping into a scene that exists in only a few places anymore.”

That spirit of connection, he says, is one of Pitt State’s greatest strengths. It blurs the borders between campus and community in ways that enrich students’ lives and create opportunities

far beyond the classroom.

“Pittsburg is one of those rare places,” he said. “And Vicky and I feel incredibly fortunate to join you here.”

He concludes each meeting, each address, and each interaction the same way:

“It is truly a great day to be in Pittsburg and a great day to be at Pittsburg State University. Go Gorillas!”

Coming up

Alumni, university employees, community members, and students are invited to the investiture of Thomas W. Newsom as the 11th President of Pittsburg State University on Monday, April 6 at 3 p.m. at the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts. The ceremony will be livestreamed/recorded for those unable to attend.

About Dr. Newsom

11th President of Pittsburg State University
Began his tenure on Sept. 1 with wife, Vicky Newsom

Background

Hometown: Sherman, Texas

Education:

- Doctorate in Higher Education Administration, University of North Texas
- Master’s in Higher Education, Texas A&M–Commerce
- Bachelor’s in Business Administration, Austin College

Career highlights

- President, Southeastern Oklahoma State University
- Vice President of Student Success and Dean of Students, Texas A&M–Commerce
- More than 20 years in higher education leadership
- Former owner and publisher of a community newspaper
- Previous experience in collegiate athletic communications

Family

- Wife, Vicky, is a London native, former collegiate tennis standout, and elementary school teacher
- Parents of three adult children: Katie, Will, and John
- His parents, both educators, live in Texas and will be frequent campus visitors

Leadership priorities

- Becoming a “student-ready university” that meets students where they are
- Flexibility and responsiveness to an evolving workforce
- Strategic enrollment planning
- Strengthening partnerships with the city, region, alumni, and industry
- Modernizing academic spaces, including the STEM corridor

Personal note

- Prefers Thomas to Tom

PAINTING THE TOWN RED!

EACH FALL, Pittsburg is awash in more crimson and gold than usual as the community and the university join for the annual Paint the Town Red celebration, organized by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. What began as a small show of support has grown into a cherished tradition that marks the true start of Gorilla football season.

Local businesses line their windows with spirited displays, departments across campus get creative with decorations, and families show up to a downtown pep rally to enjoy music, food, and the contagious excitement that fills the air.

For students — especially newcomers — it's a first glimpse of what makes Pittsburg special: a community that shows up, cheers loudly, and proudly supports its university.

Heads up: This year, Paint the Town Red will be held the week of Aug. 24, with a rally planned for Aug. 28.



The PSU Foundation

For four decades, the Pittsburgh State University Foundation has been a driving force behind the growth and excellence of the university — like the recent successful completion of the Proven.Promise.PittState. \$100 million campaign and a record-breaking last fiscal year fundraising total of \$19 million.

But its story began long before its official creation, with families and volunteers whose commitment laid the groundwork for a culture of private giving that continues to shape the campus today.

Among the earliest champions were the McPhersons, whose generosity created scholarships and helped build McPherson Hall, home to the Department of Nursing (now the Irene Ransom Bradley School of Nursing).

Their gift strengthened a program that has become an academic cornerstone. Other families followed their lead, supporting scholarships, programs, and facilities.

By the early 1980s, momentum was building, and the once-separate Alumni Foundation and Endowment Association unified their efforts by merging in 1985.

Essential volunteers Rex Crowley, Harold Thomas, and Helen Kriegsman helped create a cohesive, forward-looking foundation.

During annual phonathons, as many as 350 alumni, faculty, staff, and students devoted their time.

With a new spending policy that ensured endowments could grow over time, the Foundation quickly gained strength.

The addition of the Advancement Ambassadors

— a service-focused, student leadership organization that works closely with University Advancement to connect with donors, alumni, current students, and community members — meant an increased awareness of philanthropy and its impact.

In its 40-year history, the Foundation has raised \$300 million.

The results of the Foundation's work are visible today across campus: expanded scholarship opportunities, cutting-edge facilities, and programs that prepare students for success.

And in communities across the nation and beyond, graduates are a testament to four decades of leadership, philanthropy, and service led by the Foundation.



Pitt State graduate David Osborne ('93), known worldwide as “the pianist to the presidents,” performed at the Foundation’s 40th anniversary celebration.

College of Education recognizes top teachers

The College of Education at Pittsburg State University recognized outstanding alumni and graduating seniors with its annual awards on Dec. 11 at the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts during the Student Teacher Recognition Ceremony.

“We’re proud of what our graduates go on to accomplish in schools across the country, and we’re excited to see the next cohort prepare to take their oath and head out to impact young lives,” Associate Dean Jason Clemensen said.

Teachers of Promise awards went to Jaxson

Haraughty, elementary education K–6 from Columbus, and Mia (Anderton) Beebe, biology education from Spring Hill. Both completed student teaching locally and plan to begin full-time teaching next fall.

The Distinguished Service Award was presented to Creigh Bell, a 27-year technology educator at Hillsboro Middle School. Bell, a three-time Pitt State graduate, is praised for his hands-on approach, dedication to students, and leadership in Career and Technical Education. Superintendent Clint Corby said Bell “inspires his students, builds their confidence, and creates an environment where dedication and perseverance lead to achievement.”

The Distinguished Administrator Award went to Nathan Downs, assistant superintendent for USD 383 Manhattan-Ogden. Colleagues describe him as a “dedicated problem solver and builder of others,” with exceptional leadership in special education, fiscal management, and strategic program development.

These awards celebrate educators whose impact spans classrooms, schools, and communities.



Teachers of Promise: Jaxson Haraughty and Mia (Anderton) Beebe.



Distinguished Administrator, Nathan Downs; and Distinguished Service Award recipient, Creigh Bell.



2025 Honorary Family: The Ecksteins

The Pittsburg State University Foundation has selected the Eckstein family as the 2025 Honorary Family, recognizing their deep ties to the university and their enduring commitment to service, leadership, and Gorilla traditions.

The honor, sponsored by the Foundation and Advancement Ambassadors, is based on a student nomination — this year submitted by junior accounting major Emma Eckstein. Her family’s Pitt State roots run deep: her sister Hannah (BS ’25); her mother Heather (BA ’94, MS ’01), assistant vice president for Student Success; and her father Dan (BSEd ’94, MS ’99, MS ’16) are Gorillas through and through.

Game days, tailgates, and campus traditions filled Emma’s childhood — and on Family Day at Carnie Smith Stadium, she took the field as a member of the Crimson and Gold Dance Team before her family received the Honorary Family award at halftime.

The Ecksteins’ legacy is one of service. Heather and Dan have long been active leaders—on campus as students and later as volunteers in their community, school district, and organizations like the YMCA, Girl Scouts, and SEK Student Chess Association. Their support for Pitt State has included annual gifts to KRPS, Admissions, the Alumni Association, Nature Reach, and Biology.

Emma and Hannah continued that tradition through involvement in student government, Greek life, honors programs, and campus service.

“Pitt State has always been more than a university: it has been our home,” Emma said. “It has given us a second family — one that lifts us up and helps us keep moving forward.”

Outstanding Alumni Award

Two alumni with careers in legal counsel and in community engagement were honored with the 2025 Dr. Kenneth K. Bateman Outstanding Alumni Award, given annually by the Alumni Association as part of Homecoming festivities. It recognizes those who have demonstrated significant professional growth and advancement since the completion of their degree.



Caleb J. Hays

BA '12 – Spanish

Caleb J. Hays serves as chief counsel and principal for Section 4 Strategies, a boutique election law firm based in Alexandria, Virginia; and as chief policy counsel for the Center for Election Confidence; special counsel for elections for the Republican National Lawyers Association; and outside general counsel to the Congressional Management Foundation.

During his time at Pitt State, Hays was an active campus leader. He went on to earn advanced degrees at the University of Kansas and William & Mary Law School.

Professionally, Hays has held several leadership roles in election law, including general counsel and deputy staff director for the U.S. House Committee on House Administration, two stints for the National Republican Congressional Committee, and as associate counsel in the 2016 and 2018 election cycles. He worked for former Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins in both campaigns and congressional roles, and chaired the Kansas Federation of College Republicans.



DePrice Taylor

BS '10 – Social Work

MS '12 – Sports Management

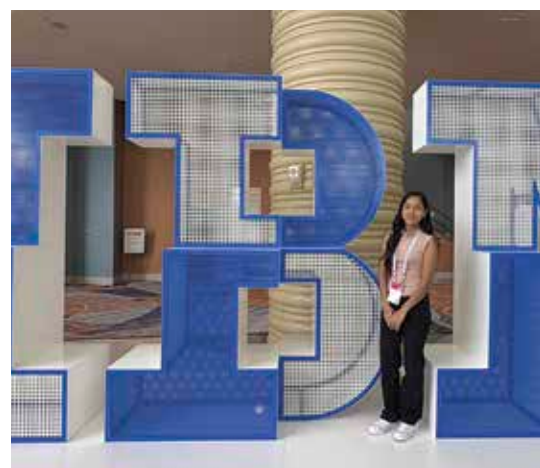
With more than a decade of experience driving youth development, strategic initiatives, and community partnerships, DePrice Taylor serves as the executive director of community relations for the Kansas City Current women's soccer team.

She spearheads the club's community engagement strategy, builds and sustains meaningful relationships with corporate and nonprofit stakeholders, and oversees impactful programming and player civic engagement efforts.

Taylor was a first-generation student and member of the Women's Basketball team who excelled on and off the court, including earning First Team All-MIAA honors.

She has been recognized as a Kansas City Business Journal NextGen Leader, Starland News Community Builder to Watch, Heartland Black Chamber of Commerce MVP, ATHENA Young Professional Leadership Award, and alumna of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce Centurions Leadership Program.

She serves on numerous community boards and committees in the Kansas City area, and the Alumni Association Board.



Student creates safety-first app

Monika B K, a Computer Science major from Nepal, earned a 2nd place award at the Global IBM TechXchange Hackathon for her innovative project.

Her project, AqrayPath, is a safety-first walking route application developed under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal, which focuses on sustainable cities and communities.

"While we have many navigation apps that show the fastest routes, we don't have one that helps people find the safest routes, and that's what inspired me to create AqrayPath," Monika said.

IBM invited her to attend the TechXchange Conference in Orlando, where she had the opportunity to connect with industry leaders, attend technical sessions, and explore cutting-edge innovations in AI and technology.

Gorillas of the Last Decade

Two alumni with careers in book publishing and university leadership were honored with the Gorillas of the Last Decade (G.O.L.D.) award by the Alumni Association during Homecoming festivities. It recognizes outstanding graduates within the last 10 years who have made an impact in their career fields or communities while showcasing Gorilla pride.



Valquíria Vita

MA '15 – Communication

Valquíria Vita is the founder and director of LEGACY Life Stories, a company based in Brazil that specializes in writing biographies for people 80 years and older to preserve their life stories. Since its creation, the company has published more than 50 books and employs 10 people.

Vita first came to Pitt State in 2012 as an exchange student from Brazil. She returned in 2014 to pursue her master's, graduating in 2015 with honors.

During her time on campus, Vita made her mark in student media as a reporter and managing editor for *The Collegio*, where she earned 10 awards at the Kansas Collegiate Media Convention and launched her own column, *People of Pittsburg*, highlighting stories of local residents.

She continues to exemplify Gorilla spirit by sharing her study abroad experience in lectures and at conferences.



James G. Saltat

BBA '15 – Marketing

James G. Saltat is the interim associate director for leadership and service at the University of Missouri.

At Pitt State, Saltat was an active leader in numerous student organizations. He went on to complete a master's degree in educational leadership and policy analysis at the University of Missouri.

Saltat continues to be active in student affairs and leadership organizations through both local and national committees. He serves as a member of Mizzou's Student Affairs Leadership Team, the American College Personnel Association, the NASPA Mid-Level Administrators Steering Committee, an advisor for Omicron Delta Kappa, and as a past regional advisor for Phi Sigma Kappa.

In 2024, he earned the Gallup Strengths Training Coach certification. He teaches two courses at the University of Missouri which focus on the intersection of leadership, civic engagement, and service.

Reflections from the Alumni Board President

Alumni Association Board President Angela Meyer (BS '06) grew up surrounded by Gorilla fans but it wasn't until her senior year of high school that she imagined herself as a Gorilla.



She remembers the moment her Honors College acceptance letter arrived.

"I cried," she said. "It hit me that I wasn't going to graduate with seven years of student loan debt. I'd have three, at most."

It's a message she believes more students need to hear.

"There's an appeal to brand-name universities, but too often students put themselves in a financial hole. Pitt State gave me opportunity without that burden."

As a justice studies major with a business administration minor, Meyer immersed herself in campus life. She worked for President Tom Bryant, served as Student Government Association treasurer, and found mentors who pushed her to grow.

Classes in the Kelce College of Business proved influential — so much so that Meyer later returned as an adjunct instructor.

After earning a law degree, Meyer returned home to build her family law practice, lead the Little Balkans Days Festival, employ Pitt State students, and offer free legal consultations on campus. Active on the Alumni Association Board, she will serve as president through July.

Her advice: stay connected.

"When you're in a room with our alumni, you see what a rural university can do. Their memories, their stories — they remind you why this place matters."

Where have you traveled wearing your Gorilla gear?
Email your photo, a caption, and your degree and graduation year to psumag@pittstate.edu.



Amy Cadman (BS '07) and Aaron (former Resident Hall Director for Nation Hall) traveled around the north island of New Zealand in February 2025 for 11 days. They are pictured on top of Mount Paku in Tairua, Coromandel Peninsula.



Generations of Gorillas, including Darlene Steen (BSEd '71), Betty Stanley Hornick (BSEd '71, MS '73), Don Schaeffer (BS '72, BST '74, MS '82), Mark Hornick (BST '72, MS '74), Janice Schaeffer (BA '75), James Schaeffer (BST '82), and Howard Steen, Jr. (BST '89) met up to walk the five-mile Mackinac Bridge in Michigan on Labor Day 2025.



Becky Brannock (EdS '90) and her husband, Jim (MS '03), enjoyed a trip out west to see Becky's eldest sister in California. Along the way, they enjoyed taking in some national parks, most notably the Grand Canyon, the Painted Desert and Petrified Forest, Carlsbad Caverns, and Guadalupe National Park. A gentleman approached Becky at the Grand Canyon when he saw her shirt and said, "Go Gorillas!"



He's not Gus, but he's wearing the right colors! Brian Sandford, professor in the School of Construction, posed with Ronald McDonald in Antigua, Guatemala, during a two-week fact-finding trip for designing a possible faculty-led study abroad Spanish language construction project for students.



Sigma Sigma Sigma sisters Melissa Zimmerman (BSN '82), Tracy Morris (BSMT '81), Robbi Pazzie (BST '81), Carol Waggoner (BBA '82), Theresa Coillot (AS '82), Joy Welsh (BA '80), Cathy Linaweaver (BSEd '81), Carla Doss (BBA '79), Cathy Albright (BST '80), Kathy Robbins (BBA '79), Brenda Roberts (BSEd '80, MS '88), Diane Letner (BBA '80), Cathy Hess (BBA '82), Vicki Couch (BSEd '82, MS '88), and Janie Smith (BS '79, MS '84) cruised through Alaska showing their Gorilla pride.



The children of the late Mary Frances Duffin (Mt. Carmel School of Nursing '52) took an Alaskan cruise in August. Six of them are Pitt State graduates, as well as two of their spouses. They include Rosalie Duffin Lopp (BSN '79), John Lopp (BBA '78), Bob Duffin (BST '82), Mary Pat Duffin Burgan (BSN '77), Gary Duffin (BSN '85, BSET '87), Martha Fees Duffin (BS '85), Becky Duffin Martin (BSEd '86), and Cathy Duffin Albright (BST '80).



Danielle Driskill (BS '12, MA '14), Wes Driskill (BBA '12, MBA '21), Samantha Geier (BS '06), Scott Geier (BBA '06, MBA '07) with their future Gorillas Gretta Geier, Breah Driskill, Rosalynn Geier, and Clayton Geier at Lake Irene in Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado.



Patricia Dunn (BBA '72) and Deborah Roy (BBA '72) took a cruise to Alaska in June 2025. They sailed the inside passage and took this photo in Sitka, Alaska, in front of their cruise ship. They met on the first day of classes in their senior year at Pitt State and have been friends ever since.



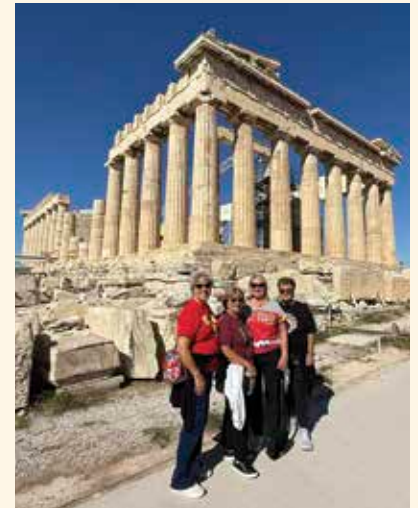
Alpha Gamma Delta alumni Shirley Edmonds Goza (BA, '79), Kaye Williams Winn, Debbie Placke Equels (BSEd '79), Denise Gerken Geier (BBA '80), Sara Esch Moses (BSEd '80), Lisa Esch Schwartz (BSEd '79, MS '81), Sue Maskill Griswold (BSEd '79), Debbie McCoy Mishler (BSEd '77, MS '82), Donna Zirkel Batt (BSEd '78), and Tammie Smith White flew into Budapest, Hungary and sailed on the Danube, and remembered to pack their crimson and gold.



Diana Elnicki Blanco (BSEd '73) showed her Pitt State pride on a trip with Sunflower Travelers to Canada in Summer 2025.



The Mirza Shriners were in Panama (Rui Blanca Playa Resort) for a week in September with several Gorillas in attendance, including Les Thomas (MS '94), Mike Carnes (BBA '75), Susan Bradford Lewis (BBA '84), Darrell Orender (BBA '79), Tamara Hurst Dighero (BSEd '79, MS '84), Paul Brenner (BA '84), Ken Wheeler (BSEd '80, MA '87), Kaley Warner (BSN '04), Nick Cook (AAS '14), Julie Fry (BSEd '94, MEd '07), Debra Cummings (BBA '93, MBA '94), Mirza 1st Lady Sue Wheeler and Mom to three grads, Mirza Potentate Don Wheeler (BBA '85), Jim Kennedy (BSET '92), and Stephanie Kennedy (BBA '92).



Denise Gerken Geier (BBA '80), Dorothy Webb Stice (BBA '76), Donna Benson Klasing (BS '76), and Elaine Rouse Castagno (BBA '79) showed their Gorilla spirit in Greece when they visited Naxos, Santorini, and Athens.



Wisha Rose (BSEd '69), Gary Rose (BBA '68), and Gordon Pennock (BBA '68) remembered their crimson and gold when they visited the Leaning Tower of Pisa while on a cruise from Barcelona, Spain to Venice, Italy.



Gordon Talbert (BSE '70) wore his Gorilla hat when he and Deana Talbert (BSE '69) visited Bar Harbor, Maine, in October.



Nick Schmitz (BS '80), Allison Fitts Schmitz (BA '81), and Greg Fitts (BBA '72) brought Gorilla pride to Oslo, Norway.



Pitt State Nursing graduate Greg Powers (BSN '93) was visiting Urquhart Castle on the shores of Loch Ness in Scotland when he heard the familiar cry: "Goorillas!" It was from Pitt State Nursing graduates Lauren Baker (BSN '17) and Kristen Martin (BSN '18), who spotted his splitface, proving once again that it's a small world after all!



Heather Wilkerson-Probasco (BSEd '02) took along her Gorilla gear when she spent two weeks traveling the Golden Circle of Iceland in June 2025.



Jacob Riemann (BS '16) traveled to Arizona with his father Roger to check out the scenery of the Grand Canyon, as well as take in some MLB Spring Training games.



Jennifer Coberley (BSN '01); her husband Justin; son Andrew (AA '24, BSET '25); daughter Anna, a senior in Strategic Communication; mother Debbie Evans; and father Jay Evans celebrated Andrew's graduation and represented Gus on an Alaskan cruise.



Generations of Gorillas visited Alaska's Mendenhall, Dawes, and Sumdum Glaciers in September 2025. Located southeast of Juneau, Gorillas Cale Longnecker (BBA '19), his wife Danielle Grisolano-Longnecker (BS '20), and dad, John Grisolano (BBA '87), pose in front of Sumdum Glacier.



Nina Strong (BSN '91) with grandson Archer wore the splitface when they visited in Tamuning, Guam.



Steve Medved (BBA '81, MBA '86) and Joyce Medved (BSEd '77) showed their love for Pitt State at the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France.



Rob Lessen (BA '82) took along "Gus" when on a motorcycle ride last summer in Colorado.



Tracy Allman (BST '07) and Amy Cussimano, a former Pitt State administrative associate, chilled in their Gorilla gear in New York before seeing George Clooney in "Good Night and Good Luck" on Broadway.



Rhonda Zafuta McFarland (BA '91) and her son Ross stand before the Town Hall in the Old Town (Stary Rynek) of Poznan, Poland. They are displaying their Gorilla pride in front of the Renaissance-style building that houses the Museum of History of Poznan.

1965

Thomas D. Hankins (BSEd, MS '68) was honored as "Volunteer of the Year" by the Greater Wichita YMCA-West Branch. A retired educator from Wichita Public Schools, he has been an active YMCA board member for 27 years.

1977

Robert Biles (BBA) is celebrating the publication of his book, "Threads of Wisdom - A Wise King's Tapestry." The book examines threads of wisdom Solomon weaves through Proverbs chapters 10-29 and translates that wisdom to business and personal development for today.

Cheryl Barker (BSEd) saw her new book, "Christmas for the Heart: 25 Devotions Reclaiming the Beauty and Wonder of the Season," published by B&H Publishing in September 2025.

1983

Ernie Camerino (MS) was named the 2025 National Social Security Advisor of the Year, earning the distinction through his consulting firm where he partners with financial firms to provide expertise in pension planning, six sigma, and Social Security. Before retiring and starting his consulting firm, Camerino worked in education in Missouri and Florida.

Honoring a century

At a Labette County Gorilla Gathering last fall, Gorillas got to celebrate alumnus Kenneth Ervin (BSEd '50) turning 100 on Aug. 31! Ervin also was honored with a proclamation by the mayor of the City of Parsons, who declared it Kenneth Ervin Day on Sept. 4 in honor of his commitment to service through numerous community boards and volunteer work, including the Parsons Historical Society and the Parsons Arboretum. When Ervin was born, Carnie Smith Stadium was not quite a year old.



1984

Ruth Duling (BBA) retired after 30 years of service to Girard Medical Center, where for the last eight years she served as CEO.

1991

Jeff Elliott (MBA) was selected as the 2025 Distinguished Alumni Award recipient by the USD 250 Foundation, an honor that recognizes Pittsburg High School graduates who have distinguished

themselves through their work, personal accomplishments, or in the lives of others.

1992

Brad Biles (BS) was promoted to the role of senior director of communications and public relations at Park University, previously working as the director of communications and public relations. He was also presented with the replica of the Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of his exceptional media and public relations support for the George S. Robb Centre for the Study of the Great War's Valor Medals Review Project. Biles is a former Alumni Association Board of Directors member, ending his term in 2025.

1994

Angela Neria (BBA, MBA '95, EdS '99), associate vice president of technology-chief information officer for Pitt State, has been chosen as the 2025 recipient of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact Outstanding Service Award for her contributions as a leader of the organization's Technologies Executive Committee, and for her impact in the field of technology. Neria presents regionally and nationally on strategic planning, project management, change management, disaster recovery, leadership, and building buy-in.

1996

John Lair (BS) was recognized as a Blue KC Gamechanger by Blue KC and the KC Current to honor his commitment and dedication to Special Olympics. Lair was recognized at the KC Current match on Sept. 26.

Amy Hite (BSN, MSN '00, EdS '19), director of the Irene Ransom School of Nursing at Pitt State, was inducted into the American Academy of Nursing in Washington, D.C., as a fellow. As a member, she will help advance

Homecoming Gorilla Grind 5K

Homecoming is a very special time for John (BS '67) and Wilma Chambers (BSEd '67), who started dating at Pitt State more than 60 years ago around Homecoming. For many years, the couple, originally from Pittsburg, has made an eight-hour trip from their home in Illinois back to campus for Homecoming festivities and family visits.

This year was even more special. John had cancer and when he was feeling better, he made a plan to participate in the Gorilla Grind 5K in support of ROTC student scholarships — a program in which he participated.

John made it through the 5K with Wilma cheering him on in the distance. Happy tears were shed as he crossed the finish line. Congrats, John!



the organization's mission to improve health and achieve health equity by impacting policy through nursing leadership, innovation, and science. She is one of two nurses selected from Kansas and the first from Pitt State to be chosen.

1997

Rick Scholes, Jr. (BS, MS '03, EdS '07) was awarded the 2024-25 Certified Staff Member of the Year from Fort Scott USD 234 in Fort Scott, Kansas. He is the school psychologist for the district and has spent 19 years in education.

1998

Christa (Long) Holt (BSEd, MS '11) was named the 2024 Kansas High School Physical Education Teacher of the Year by the Kansas Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (KAHPERD). Holt teaches and coaches high school volleyball and softball for Jayhawk Linn USD 346 in Mound City, Kansas.

1999

Alicia Potter-Burk (BGS, MS '00, EdS '04, BSN '16) completed the requirements for a Doctorate in Health Science at AT Still University, with the degree conferred in the spring of 2025 in Mesa, Arizona. Burk lives in Pittsburg with her husband, Bob, and works at the Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas.

2003

Pawan Kumar Acharya (MBA) was appointed as the CEO of a prominent Bank in Nepal. Acharya has been with Sanima Bank since its inception in 2004 and currently serves as the Senior Deputy Chief Executive Officer. With more than 21 years of banking experience, he has led more than 10 departments and branches, specializing in credit assessment, digitalization, and project financing.

2005

Karisa Erwin (BBA) was promoted to vice president of marketing and guest services at the National World War One Museum and Memorial in Kansas City Missouri. After earning her master's degree in public administration, she went on to serve two years in Ukraine through the Peace Corps and upon her return, she enjoyed working at The Newseum in Washington D.C., as director of marketing before returning to Kansas City in 2020.

Amber Shaverdi Huston (BA) was appointed chief operating officer of the Public Relations Society of America, the leading professional organization serving the communications community through a network of professional and student

She means business

The Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce has named alumna Heather Horton the 2025 Kaye Lynne Webb Influential Woman in Business — a recognition that celebrates her role as one of the driving forces in downtown Pittsburg.

This award was named for Kaye Lynne Webb, a long-time administrative assistant to the Pitt State president and who with her husband, Dick, helped found Watco, a full-service supply chain solutions company providing rail, transloading, and logistics services. This award honors women who, like Kaye Lynne, have made significant contributions to business and community life.

Horton (BA '05, MA '07) honed her creative and communication skills at Pitt State that would help shape her entrepreneurial path. She and her husband, Roger, launched Sweet Designs Cakery in 2009 in a renovated downtown building.

Their vision for a thriving downtown expanded with the 2019 opening of TOAST restaurant in Pitt State's Block22 at Fourth and Broadway. Her restaurant is known for supporting other local businesses and helping to train the region's next generation of culinary and hospitality professionals.

Horton co-founded the Pittsburg ArtWalk, has been active in Pittsburg Arts Council, and with Roger launched the Spread the Loaf program to provide bread to local food pantries.



chapters. Huston most recently served as the executive director of the National Association for Campus Activities.

2006

Noah Hoppe (BBA) was hired as executive vice president and chief financial officer of White Lodging, an industry leader in urban and lifestyle hospitality development and management.

Travis Battagler (BSN) was appointed as chief executive officer of Girard Medical Center, bringing 20 years of clinical and operational healthcare experience to the position.

2007

Kristen Livingston (BS, MA '08), an assistant professor in the Communication Department, was chosen as the communication coordinator for the National Board of Lambda Sigma, the National Sophomore Honor Society. This position involves aiding chapters across the country

as an advisor and producing the national newsletter.

2008

Samantha Jefferson (BST '08) joined Site Selectors Guild as its managing director. With more than a decade of experience across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, she brings a strong track record of driving economic growth, corporate investment, and industry collaboration.

2009

Mike Wagner (BST) was promoted to director of transmission and distribution EPC at Burns & McDonnell. Over the past 12 years, Wagner has been a central figure in expanding transmission and distribution work within the firm's Construction Group and has served as a project manager since 2018.

Shawn Daniel (BBA) has been named senior vice president and regional commercial manager at Guaranty Bank in Joplin,

Missouri. He has 20 years of banking experience. He also has served as a commercial loan portfolio manager in Joplin and held various positions such as certified professional teller and business banking relationship manager. He is actively involved in the Joplin community, serving on the boards of several nonprofit organizations.

2010

DePrice Taylor (BS, MS '12) received the ATHENA Young Professional Leadership Award, honoring her early career achievements and commitment to building pathways for women in sports and business. Taylor currently serves as the executive director of communication relations for the Kansas City Current.

2012

Steve Chastain (BS, MS '15, MBA '20) recently earned his Certified Safety Professional through the Board of Certified Safety Professionals and was promoted to corporate safety director at Bishop Lifting, a Houston-based company founded in 1984. Bishop Lifting is a major manufacturer and distributor in the lifting and rigging sector.

Amisha Daniels (BSET, MSET '14) was recognized as a Top Young Professional by Engineering News-Record. This program recognizes young professionals who are achieving excellence by exhibiting qualities of leadership, career progress, rapid experience, and community involvement. Daniels is the project development manager at McCownGordon Construction.

Danielle Driskill (BA, MA '14), the senior director of Alumni & Constituent Relations at Pitt State, was named a Woman of Distinction by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. She leads efforts to strengthen the lifelong connection between the university and its more than 70,000 alumni, and is an active community volunteer for the Pittsburg Rotary Club and her sorority, Sigma Sigma Sigma.

2013

Seth Cable (BS) was a winner of the Marketing Competition for the National Auction Association. Cable is the director of marketing at Equip-Bid Auctions.

2014

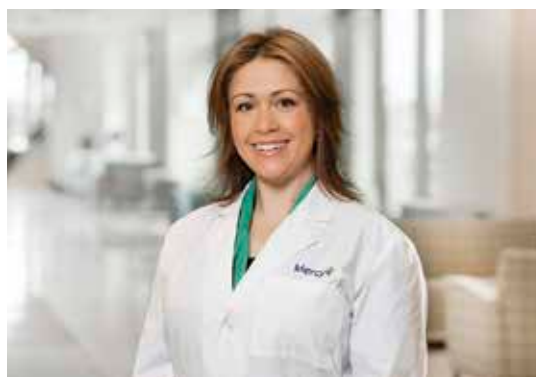
Taylor Crawshaw (MS) was named interim president of Independence Community

Breaking new ground

Dr. Kalee Woody, DO, has built her career around meeting needs that too often go unmet. The Pitt State Biology graduate (BS '17) was part of the inaugural class at Kansas City University–Joplin. In October, she again broke new ground by launching Oklahoma's first full-time perinatal psychiatry program dedicated to supporting women through pregnancy, postpartum, and beyond.

During her residency, she discovered perinatal psychiatry and saw firsthand how hormonal changes, stress, and limited access to care can intensify mental health challenges for new and expectant mothers.

Historically, treatment during pregnancy was limited due to a lack of research, leaving many women without needed medication. Woody



now works to reverse that trend, helping patients and providers weigh risks and prioritize full remission of symptoms. Her focus on early intervention and access is especially vital for Black and Hispanic mothers, who face higher barriers and health risks.

She's now expanding services, with plans for group therapy programs, dedicated inpatient beds, and broader care for women across the lifespan. For Woody, the mission is simple: "It's not normal to suffer — but it is common, and it's treatable."

College after previously serving as vice president for academic affairs.

Kaylyn Hite (BA) was appointed as city prosecutor for Pittsburg, responsible for prosecuting traffic violations and misdemeanor offenses within city limits, as well as providing legal counsel to the Pittsburg Police Department.

Carol Meza (BS), an assistant professor in social work at Pitt State, was named a Woman of Distinction by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. An Army combat veteran and Purple Heart recipient, Meza is a founder of Outside the Wire Veterans Foundation, which provides outdoor therapy and VA disability claims assistance for veterans, and serves on the Governor's Military Council. She was crowned Mrs. Kansas-America 2025, using her platform to advocate for veterans and their families.

2015

Stephanie Potter (BS, MA '16) was announced as the public information

manager for the City of Pittsburg, serving as the primary media contact for the city.

2017

Dacia Clark (MBA) joined the inaugural Kansas Delegation to the 2025 Global Entrepreneurship Congress, representing Kansas' small business community on a global stage.

2018

Brittan Wilde (BS, MA '20) was promoted to director of market strategy at Crossland Construction Company, Inc. She most recently served the company as marketing proposal and division coordinator.

2019

Samantha Guy (BS) was hired as the operations and donor support coordinator for the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas. She spent several years in journalism and advertising before joining the CFSEK.

1925

Fred Lawson, Midlothian, Texas

1928

Ralph Titus, Manhattan, Kan.

1942

Juanita Haskins, Kansas City, Kan.

Wilma M. Perry, Las Vegas, Nev.

1944

Marjorie Letsch, Carlsbad, Calif.

1946

Margaret E. Edgington, Calgary, Alberta

1947

Maxine Breuel, Mound City, Kan.

1949

Weyman L. Edwards, Chicago, Ill.

Marilyn R. Snyder, Newton, Kan.

1950

Nancy L. Howe, Kansas City, Mo.

John E. Johnson, Topeka, Kan.

Gene Montee, Olathe, Kan.

Carol E. Ross, Cheney, Kan.

Ruth I. Steinke, Wichita, Kan.

1951

Elaine M. Hara, Honolulu, Hawaii

Paul J. Hutsey, Pittsburg, Kan.

Orwin D. McCollum, Lago Vista, Texas

1952

Merlin D. Staatz, Shoreline, Wash.

Mamie L. Williams, Kansas City, Mo.

1954

Peggy L. Barto, Overland Park, Kan.

Eugene A. Diggs, Allentown, Pa.

William P. Hamilton, Verona, Mo.

Jack K. Rogers, Huntsville, Ala.

1955

Jo Ann Gilford, Tulsa, Okla.

1956

Jack A. Druart, Frontenac, Kan.

Frank D. Ferson, Salina, Kan.

Kenneth N. Moore, Seabrook, Texas

Tom K. Muskrat, Carl Junction, Mo.

Arlene L. Record, Jefferson City, Mo.

William G. Rinehart, Tulsa, Okla.

Bill L. Triemer, Pensacola, Fla.

David W. Wallace, Overland Park, Kan.

1957

Dean Lakin, Columbia, Mo.

James W. LeBar, Milan, Mich.

Robert W. Mastellar, Hollandale, Miss.

1958

Tom A. Ackley, Saint John, Kan.

Harol R. Beisel, Battle Ground, Wash.

Karolyn K. Bertalotto, Pittsburg, Kan.

Lewis J. Bertalotto, Pittsburg, Kan.

Sylvia A. Borghardt, Humboldt, Kan.

Dale Gillen, Garden City, Kan.

Nancy L. Kazmierski, Tulsa, Okla.

John A. LeBar, Durham, N.C.

Ray E. Paul, Avon, Ind.

Helen S. Sebastian, Independence, Kan.

Wanda J. Tygart, Kansas City, Mo.

1959

John D. Beasley, Leawood, Kan.

Jim W. Billings, Valley Falls, Kan.

Jolene Blancett, Norman, Okla.

Joe M. Byrnes, Springfield, Mo.

George E. Eigsti, Adrian, Mo.

Lowell E. Harp, Cedar Vale, Kan.

Frank E. Morrissey, Olympia, Wash.

Ben O. Newton, Grandview, Mo.

Charles W. Nichols, Olathe, Kan.

Fred D. Nielsen, Stone Mountain, Ga.

Chester C. Owens, Kansas City, Kan.

Tom E. Pingry, Ferdinand, Ind.

Jerry L. Wilson, Springfield, Mo.

1960

Judith A. Ball, Phoenix, Ariz.

Rosie E. Gardner, Raytown, Mo.

Harry W. Graves, Fredericksburg, Texas

Kenneth B. Hart, Garland, Kan.

Clevvy J. Isnard, Kansas City, Kan.

Rosemary Isom, Bartlesville, Okla.

Marvin E. McCollough, Lamar, Mo.

Lawrence G. Pedersen, Locust Grove, Va.

Kay L. Pile, Frontenac, Kan.

Chuck L. Ramsey, Springfield, Mo.

Bob M. Scott, New Paltz, N.Y.

1961

Ruth A. Burton, Overland Park, Kan.

Jimmie Cavanaugh, Tukwila, Wash.

Dwight E. Chaney, Spring Hill, Fla.

John E. Gahagan, Benton, Kan.

Helen L. Rife, Bronson, Kan.

Kenneth H. Roberts, Miami, Okla.

Nona I. Stevens, Wichita, Kan.

Craig Turner, Independence, Kan.

1962

Carolyn A. Depue, Tulsa, Okla.

Donald P. Gardner, Ozark, Mo.

Loretta E. Gardner, Ozark, Mo.

David L. Garrison, Joplin, Mo.

Harold T. Gauert, Leawood, Kan.

Karen A. Kesler, Quapaw, Okla.

Barbara A. Lafferty, Frontenac, Kan.

Samuel D. Mullen, Castle Rock, Colo.

James A. Ridings, Oronogo, Mo.

Georgia E. Spencer, Seattle, Wash.

1963

Paul M. Brooks, Noel, Mo.

Patrick R. Capranica, Lees Summit, Mo.

Jack L. Franklin, Iola, Kan.

Loren R. Giles, Diamond, Mo.

Darlene Kovacs, Tyler, Texas

Karon L. McCready, Prairie Village, Kan.

Wanda J. O'Dell, Wheat Ridge, Colo.

Louis V. Rogers, Sallisaw, Okla.

John R. Sullivan, Wamego, Kan.

William E. Tall, Berkley, Mich.

1964

Ronald E. Coffman, Ellisville, Mo.

Louis A. Dyche, Maryville, Mo.

Larry D. Gilliland, Tulsa, Okla.

Harold D. Hadley, Wichita, Kan.

David L. Ison, Berryton, Kan.

Barabara J. Johnson, Tampa, Fla.

Agnesann Mansfield, Emporia, Kan.

Claudean Paul, Avon, Ind.

Bob C. Rumsey, Murrells Inlet, S.C.

Wayne J. Young, Estes Park, Colo.

1965

John A. Boggs, Pleasant View, Tenn.

Donald W. Dickerson, Arkansas City, Kan.

Luella F. Hershberger, Seligman, Mo.

James P. Secondo, Mission, Kan.

David L. Spangler, Fairview, Kan.

James F. Sprouse, Charlotte, N.C.

1966

Ray A. Bachura, Shawnee, Kan.

William G. Barndt, Wichita, Kan.

Dean R. Bladow, Saint Augustine, Fla.

Michael J. Cleveland, Tulsa, Okla.

Gary A. Craig, Venice, Fla.

Gary W. Johnson, Farlington, Kan.

Finley F. Jones, Raytown, Mo.

Doug F. Page, Prairie Village, Kan.

Clare L. Pelsue, Oklahoma City, Okla.

Barbara A. Pezanowski, Southport, N.C.

Marian R. Roberts, Alva, Okla.

Karen G. Salsbury, Fort Scott, Kan.

Rick F. Taylor, Olathe, Kan.

Earl R. Wadsworth, Richland, Pa.

1967

William L. Binkley, Kansas City, Mo.

Frank W. Duesi, Annandale, Va.

John F. Graves, Billings, Mont.

John R. Harmon, Manchester, Mo.

Phillip R. Wolvin, Mc Cook, Neb.

1968

Jane A. Boram, Nashville, Tenn.

Thomas J. Columbia, Stilwell, Kan.

Paula E. Fritschen, El Dorado, Kan.

Bob R. Graham, Fredonia, Kan.

Mark A. Johnson, Bellevue, Wash.

Keith E. Just, Yukon, Okla.

Kathryn Lancellotti, Fort Scott, Kan.

Connie A. Livingston, Medford, N.J.

Gail E. Misch, Coffeyville, Kan.

Nancy J. Peck, Columbus, Kan.

Arlin D. Ratzlaff, Goessel, Kan.

Larry P. Wooten, Miami, Fla.

1969

Geraldine H. Albins, Carlinville, Ill.

Jack L. Burke, Merced, Calif.

Barbara A. Carroll-Kirkland, Kansas City, Mo.

Bessie R. Chaussard, Joplin, Mo.
Joann C. Childers, Girard, Kan.
Ying C. Lee, Rockville, Md.
Diane M. Lewis, Houston, Texas
James L. Mayhew, Vinita, Okla.
Mary K. O'Brien, Fort Scott, Kan.
Russell W. Pickering, Wichita, Kan.
Steve R. Schultz, Nevada, Mo.
David A. Shufelt, Lawrence, Kan.
Jacqueline Stephenson, Kansas City, Kan.
Terry V. Verdugo, Olathe, Kan.

1970

James L. Chambers, Broken Arrow, Okla.
Terry G. Hersperger, Shawnee, Kan.
Robert A. Hodges, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.
Gary R. Kees, Covington, Ohio
Cheryl L. Kennedy, Andover, Kan.
Harry G. Miller, Lawrence, Kan.
George R. Neas, Kansas City, Mo.
David L. Noltensmeyer, Buena Vista, Colo.
Robert D. Peck, Platte City, Mo.
Gene L. Schimpf, Black Mountain, N.C.
Lloyd W. Schnieders, Valley Park, Mo.
Kathleen A. Whitworth, Roeland Park, Kan.

1971

Jim R. Bugni, Frontenac, Kan.
Joyce L. Draper, Pittsburg, Kan.
Michael R. Falletti, Frontenac, Kan.
James G. Paullus, Neosho, Mo.
Peter B. Pratte, Farley, Mo.
Nancy L. Richardson, Neosho, Mo.

1972

Duane E. Crane, Merriam, Kan.
Gregory H. Quinlan, Topeka, Kan.
Forrest N. Reed, Joplin, Mo.
Lee C. Simms, Raytown, Mo.
James E. Snyder, Lees Summit, Mo.
Glen L. Stone, Joplin, Mo.
Charles E. Sutterby, Blue Mound, Kan.
Marilyn M. Thomas, Nevada, Mo.
Lynn Wilson, Austin, Texas
Charles N. Wood, Olathe, Kan.

1973

Larry E. Beasley, Frontenac, Kan.
Peggy J. Blackburn, Parsons, Kan.
Donald L. Casner, Viola, Kan.
Dan W. Cates, Galena, Kan.
Wayne B. Griffin, Garden City, Kan.
Douglas R. Hufferd, Stockton, Mo.
Stephanie H. Johnson, Fort Scott, Kan.
Jerry A. Lay, Bartlesville, Okla.
John J. Lehnst, Williamsburg, Iowa
Norma J. Mills, Las Vegas, Nev.
Jim R. Newman, Kansas City, Mo.
Steven D. Ray, Broken Arrow, Okla.
Nick Sell, Farlington, Kan.
Dick Smith, Louisville, Kan.
Mary V. Sumner, Topeka, Kan.
Louise Waun, Parsons, Kan.

1974

John R. Farris, Grove, Okla.
Karen J. Garrett, Overland Park, Kan.
Terry L. Gentry, Mountain Home, Ark.
Gary G. Kyle, West Plains, Mo.
Lynnette S. LaForge, Caney, Kan.
Joe E. Maghe, Riverton, Kan.
Manya A. Maples, Pittsburg, Kan.
Delbert D. Metcalf, Leavenworth, Kan.
Gary L. Morella, Lemont, Pa.
Dave Redd, Lufkin, Texas
Gary T. Shull, Lenexa, Kan.
Melanie G. Swift, Leawood, Kan.
Kenneth E. Ward, Lawrence, Kan.

1975

Bill E. Beasley, La Harpe, Kan.
Daniel E. Braden, Pittsburg, Kan.
Dennis E. Browne, Kansas City, Kan.
Rose A. Davis, Galena, Kan.
Harry R. Drake, Winfield, Kan.
Gail E. Garrison, Pittsburg, Kan.
Darlene L. Koehler, Greenwood, Mo.

1976

Genevieve A. Christian, Philadelphia, Pa.
Charles D. Coe, Winfield, Kan.
Brenda J. Evans, Parsons, Kan.
Terry L. Frisbie, Dodge City, Kan.
Kathleen S. Gerdes, Alatomont, Kan.
William E. Gilstrap, Joplin, Mo.
Gabriel L. Gutierrez, Bartlesville, Okla.
Paul E. Hurley, Coffeyville, Kan.
Terry A. Koester, Fort Scott, Kan.
Michael R. Phillips, Carl Junction, Mo.
Connie L. Sarwinski, Columbus, Kan.
Keith A. Small, Lyons, Kan.
Nolan C. Smith, Turon, Kan.
Laura E. Willard, Webb City, Mo.

1977

Jo A. Anderson, Mexico, Mo.
David M. Anspach, Parsons, Kan.
Doris M. Cullor, Fort Scott, Kan.
Steven L. Gaylor, Tulsa, Okla.
Lynn O. Hanzlicek, Potwin, Kan.
Jim G. Kelso, Fort Worth, Texas
Jacci R. McKenzie, Overland Park, Kan.
Steven W. Ohler, Lees Summit, Mo.
Alan R. Taylor, Olive Branch, Miss.
Steven D. Williams, Mounds, Okla.

1978

Charles P. Ganzer, Cumming, Ga.
Sharon K. Grant, Columbus, Kan.
Janice E. Houk, Joplin, Mo.
Rodney D. Page, Parsons, Kan.
Karen S. Schnell, Fayetteville, Ark.

1979

Patricia M. Anderson, Iola, Kan.
Kathie J. Bruce, Paola, Kan.
Patsy J. Holtz, Oswego, Kan.
Jo Ann Thomas, Fort Scott, Kan.
Greg R. Warren, Yukon, Okla.

1980

Joeen Burns, Girard, Kan.
Phillip A. Cowan, Oklahoma City, Okla.
Brad W. Gronquist, Frostproof, Fla.
Douglas F. Reynolds, Leavenworth, Kan.
Matt I. Shepard, Richmond, Texas
Barbara L. Sherrill, Iola, Kan.
Doyleen Turner, Weatherford, Texas

1981

Goldie F. Kiister, Oswego, Kan.
Edward P. Lynch, Pittsburg, Kan.
Jolene J. Lynn, Kansas City, Mo.
Tom K. McDonald, Overland Park, Kan.
James K. Norman, Lawrence, Kan.
Jerri D. Totman, Girard, Kan.

1982

Sue Lutes, Nevada, Mo.
Richard R. Ray, Shawnee, Kan.
Michael J. Stotts, Humble, Texas
Marty L. Wartick, Cedar Falls, Iowa
Scott B. Zornes, Houston, Texas

1983

David R. Barker, Olathe, Kan.
William W. Juby, Independence, Kan.
Cynthia M. Vetter, Chanute, Kan.
Renee White, Holts Summit, Mo.

1984

James R. Bentley, Chanute, Kan.
Joyce L. Storrer, Moran, Kan.
Phil D. Ward, Jay, Okla.
Rob A. Young, Pittsburg, Kan.

1985

Melvin L. Baum, Olathe, Kan.
Tom E. Begando, Columbus, Kan.
Lana K. Brisendine-Smith, Pittsburg, Kan.
Michael L. Holman, Columbus, Kan.
Ruth A. Patrick, Fallon, Nev.
J. J. Swift Lukens, Mountain View, Mo.
Michael J. Veteto, Bartlesville, Okla.

1986

Daniel J. Boeckman, Cartersville, Ill.
Vicki R. Church, Iola, Kan.
Debbie Cussimano, Pittsburg, Kan.
Betty M. Karnes, Baxter Springs, Kan.
Vicki L. Mendicki, Parsons, Kan.

1987

Karen A. Barraza, Eureka, Kan.
Ron A. Hodge, Parsons, Kan.
Peggy L. La Velle, Webb City, Mo.
Kimberly K. Longpine, Girard, Kan.
Neila N. Pearce, Neodesha, Kan.
Pat J. Sponsel, Pittsburg, Kan.

1989

Carl D. Findley, Wichita, Kan.
Anthony W. Ogle, Fort Scott, Kan.
Dorothy J. Watkins, Las Vegas, Nev.

continued on next page

1990

Gregory S. Decker, Cherokee, Kan.
Patricia A. Eastwood, Fort Scott, Kan.
Denny L. Grissom, Weir, Kan.

1991

Dorothy A. Bertoncino, Pittsburg, Kan.
Marcella J. Pancoast, Grand Blanc, Mich.

1992

Joe Carson, Topeka, Kan.
Jeanne N. Hinz, Elkhorn, Neb.
Freda A. Peaster, Pittsburg, Kan.

1993

Julie A. Riggs, Leawood, Kan.
Carl E. Roth, Pittsburg, Kan.
Sylvia L. Spurlin, Joplin, Mo.
Michael J. White, Columbus, Kan.
Jason P. Wiske, Pittsburg, Kan.

1994

Kristi K. Gilmore, Reston, Va.
Stella L. Hartman, Galena, Kan.
Susan A. Hurst, Ada, Okla.
Kathryn G. Morton, Cove City, N.C.
Kraig Oertle, Joplin, Mo.
Shari D. Scribner, El Dorado, Kan.
Sandra E. Stark, Miami, Okla.

1996

Iona L. Wigger, Bixby, Okla.
Ted M. Zogg, Wichita, Kan.

1997

Chris H. Coffman, Spring Hill, Kan.
Brett A. Johnson, Derby, Kan.

1999

Andrew E. Gray, Pawhuska, Okla.

2000

Shane S. Anders, Bentonville, Ark.

2001

Olivia J. Selzer, Carthage, Mo.

2004

Eric C. Wolfe, Branson, Mo.

2012

Craig A. Huskey, Leawood, Kan.

2015

Kody W. Daniels, Grimes, Iowa

2018

Jake R. Long, Olathe, Kan.

2021

Hunter L. Simoncic, Kansas City, Kansas



Michael Fienen (BA '04) shows off the newest Gorilla-themed mural in Pittsburg at 202 W. Fourth St. on a building that is home to Sullivan Book Arts, owned by Olive Sullivan (BA '82). The mural, painted by Wichita artists Chase Hunter and David Bonilla, was commissioned by Fienen's father, Stephen (BSE '05) in honor of Fienen's late mother, Theresa (BSE '05) — an enthusiastic Gorilla fan.

Planned Giving

The PSU Foundation would like to recognize the following individuals for creating a planned gift.

David and Kim Berns

Education shaped not just the careers of David and Kim Berns, who spent a combined 58 years both in the classroom and in leadership roles — it shaped their lives.

As they reflect on the years they spent serving students, mentoring future educators, and contributing to their profession, they have deep gratitude for having found a profession that gave them so much purpose.

“We have been privileged to witness the power of learning to transform individuals and communities,” they said.

Even in retirement, their commitment to education remains unwavering: they have established an endowment for the College of Education — a way to give back to the institution that was an integral part of their professional journey, and an investment in future educators who are well-prepared to lead, inspire, and make a difference.

The “David and Kim Berns Education Scholarship Endowment” will support scholarships for aspiring teachers, ensuring that their shared mission of excellence in education continues for generations to come.

About the Berns:

David graduated in 1983 with a BS in Education and in 1985 with a Master’s in Technology Education. Kim graduated in 1985 with a Bachelor’s in Business Administration. David serves as an Alumni Association Board Member. Their son, Dave, graduated in December with an MBA.



For more information on the Heritage Society and leaving a legacy, visit pittstate.giftlegacy.com.

University photographer Sam Clausen (BS '14) sees the campus through a lens: he takes thousands of photos each year of moments ordinary and monumental — moments that define us. Here, those moments were all during Homecoming Week, a tradition that has endured through generations. Homecoming Week 2026 is planned for Oct. 12-17!



1. The Pride of the Plains Marching Band and its director, Assistant Professor Jobey Wilson, parade through the crowd at Gorilla Walk before the Pitt State vs. Washburn game at Carnie Smith Stadium.
2. International exchange students from South Korea enjoy fun, fellowship, and stuffed gorillas in Gorilla Village during Homecoming Kickoff.
3. Homecoming Royalty Austin O'Hara and Alexa Owens ride down Broadway, as has been the tradition for decades, in the PSU Homecoming Parade.
4. Raft races, another longtime tradition, continue on the University Lake each Homecoming, pitting student organizations against each other in a battle of willpower and duct tape.
5. A new Homecoming tradition began last fall: a bonfire for students, faculty, staff, and alumni after Yell Like Hell.
6. Running Back Zahmari Palode-Gary, a computer science major, led the MIAA in rushing with 964 yards and tied for a league-high with 10 rushing touchdowns.
7. While on campus for Homecoming, GOLD Award recipient James Saltat (BBA '15), spent time with students sharing what he's learned in his career, the importance of being active on campus as a student, and his love for his alma mater.
8. For the second year, the thrill of the Homecoming volleyball tournament for students explodes during Jungle Jump. In this evening of fierce competition, teams battle it out on the court at the Student Rec Center to claim the title of Jungle Champions.
9. In the longtime Homecoming tradition Yell Like Hell, students representing the team of Student Government Association, Sigma Phi Epsilon, and Sigma Sigma Sigma compete for bragging rights.





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SAVE THE DATE

Half-Century Reunion:

May 14-15, 2026

Class of 1976, we invite you back to campus to celebrate your 50th anniversary - reconnect with classmates, socialize at a dinner and dance, join the Half-Century Club, walk in Commencement, and more!



Learn more at pittstate.edu/halfcentury
or call **620-235-4758**.

GATHER AND STAY CONNECTED

Stay connected with Pitt State by attending a Gorilla Gathering in your area hosted by Alumni & Constituent Relations and receive the monthly e-newsletter to stay up-to-date on all the recent happenings.



For a list of upcoming events and e-newsletter information, visit pittstate.edu/alumni.



Pittsburg State University Alumni & Constituent Relations

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