

IMPACT | 2023



An aerial photograph of a university campus, likely Tennessee Technological University, showing a central building with a prominent portico, surrounded by numerous other buildings, trees, and walkways. The image has a purple tint.

A publication by :

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Dear Golden Eagle community,

Life is full of experiences, and the most important experiences are those in which we are learning. Whether we are learning about our world, our career or our passions, we are able to grow into a better version of ourselves through the lessons we take away from these experiences.

To say that you learn a lot in college would be an understatement. However, most of the lessons I have learned in college have been from something other than a textbook. While the academic instruction I have received at Tennessee Tech has been outstanding, the experiential learning opportunities I have participated in have been life changing. Tech provides students with robust opportunities to learn in unexpected ways.

Experiential learning has taught me many invaluable life lessons over the past three years. As a student orientation assistant, I learned the value of connecting

with others. Interning at the College of Business Professional Readiness and Leadership Center taught me how to dress, dine and speak professionally. When serving as the 2022-2023 student body president, I learned that being a servant and being a leader go hand in hand. Studying abroad in Spain opened my eyes to the beauty of the world and the diverse cultures that inhabit it. I will be forever grateful for the person this university has molded me into — a person who is bold, fearless, confident and kind.

Many things have changed over the years at Tech. There are new buildings, new faces and new accomplishments each year. But, through all of the changes, one thing has remained the same — Tech's sense of community. It's a community that fosters growth, both personally and professionally. It's a community that uplifts and encourages one another. And it's a community that offers so much to those who call it home. I am thankful to be a part of this Golden Eagle community, and I know you are, too.

As we continue to evolve, our sense of community will be what keeps us grounded and connected. This issue of Impact magazine demonstrates how experiential learning opportunities all over campus continue to strengthen the skillsets, career readiness and tenacity of Golden Eagles. Experiential learning has greatly impacted my life. But, as you read, you will see the positive impact that experiential learning makes in the lives of every student, every day. Thank you for supporting education inside and outside of the classroom.

Wings Up!

Addison Dorris, Class of 2024
2023-2024 Tennessee Tech Board of Trustees Student Trustee
2022-2023 Student Government Association Student Body President

Windgate's gift to Appalachian Center for Craft supports hands-on, craft-centered student experience

Thanks to a generous gift from the Windgate Foundation, Tennessee Tech's Appalachian Center for Craft will see improved facilities and enhanced summer programs to provide a better hands-on, craft-centered student experience.

"The Craft Center is extremely grateful to have Windgate's support," said Kim Winkle, director of the School of Art, Craft and Design and the Craft Center.

"We have shared values, goals and outcomes which yield positive impact on the future of craft at Tennessee Tech and beyond. Education and advocacy are the primary components of the Craft Center's mission."

Tech's Craft Center is a unique educational facility and cultural center that combines teaching, research, outreach and crafts marketing, all operating in partnership. It opened in Smithville in 1979 and shortly



thereafter became a division of Tennessee Tech. The Center offers a bachelor of fine arts in five areas of concentration: glass, metals, clay, fibers and wood. In addition to its academic programs, the Craft Center also operates K-12 outreach, high school workshops, educator training, public workshops and a nationally-competitive artist in residency program.

Erin Knight, '21 fine arts, chose to attend Tech solely because of the Craft Center. Knight, who is from California, says blacksmithing opportunities at the bachelor's degree level are rare, but the Craft Center had what she was looking for in a program.

"The single most important thing that the Craft Center does is exist," she said. "By existing, by doing the outreach that it does, by having the programs that it does, it opens opportunities. The flexibility to study metals and go high-art or deeply craft-focused is very, very rare. Not many places have a classroom full of looms and spinning wheels, dye gardens, forges and electroplating, clay sculpture, glass blowing and all of the marvels that live in the woodshop in a program that also lets you complete a bachelor's degree. People come to the Craft Center and realize that working with your hands can be not only beautiful, but a life path as well."

Knight received the Windgate Scholarship during her junior and senior years at Tech and was nominated for the prestigious Windgate-Lamar Fellowship, one of the largest awards offered nationally to art students.

The Windgate Foundation, based in Little Rock, Ark., is a private foundation established in 1993 whose purpose is to advance contemporary craft and strengthen visual arts education in the United States. For nearly 20 years, Windgate has supported the Craft Center through summer programs, facilities upgrades and scholarships.

Established in 2005, the Windgate Scholarship Endowment provides financial support for approximately 10 students each year. Winkle says this scholarship is



crucial for the recruitment and retention of craft program students.

"Financial support afforded by Windgate Scholarships enables our students to focus more attention on making original works along with providing funds to acquire materials through which they can realize their creative ideas," Winkle said.

Windgate's latest gift focuses on the Craft Center's summer high school program, facilities and infrastructure.

The Craft Center offers housing for students wishing to live and study at the Center, and Windgate's gift provides funding to replace 64 mattresses, upgrade living room light fixtures in all 15 units, add a



stainless-steel rolling kitchen island in all units, upgrade to energy-efficient LED lightbulbs, replace bathroom mirrors, upgrade shower heads, replace sheets and towels, replace kitchen appliances, replace locks on all housing unit doors and make improvements to the Craft Center's cafeteria. It will also fund a new roof for the housing units.

The Craft Center found a way to pay this gift forward as well. They partnered with the regional nonprofit Sweet

Sleep to refresh and repurpose mattresses removed from the housing units and donate the mattresses to foster children.

Windgate's gift also provides funding for a new HVAC, chiller and emergency generator.

"Although many of these items aren't as visible to students and visitors, they are essential for operations and our longevity," Winkle said. "And all of these upgrades focus on improving the student experience."

In 2013, thanks to a gift from Windgate, the Craft Center established a new workshop program for high school students and teachers. The workshop provides an immersive studio experience focused on craft materials and processes. It allows high school students to live at the Craft Center for a week during the summer and immerse themselves in learning a craft in the Center's well-equipped and spacious studios.

"Too few high school art programs have craft programs, so being able to provide an immersive, high-impact, experiential learning opportunity is very important to us," Winkle said. "It helps sustain the legacy of craft and inspires the next generation of craft artists. We love to see the participants' faces as they learn new techniques and gain confidence in our studios. Plus, we hope they will become future Golden Eagles!"

Thanks to Windgate's ongoing support, the Craft Center has offered this summer program continuously since 2013.

"The Center believes in providing high-quality education not only to students in the School of Art, Craft and Design's bachelor of fine arts program, but also to the next generation of craft artists," Winkle said. "It is the School's and Craft Center's belief that craft education at an early age fosters long-term appreciation, understanding and support of craft."

Winkle says response to the summer program has been overwhelmingly positive, and enrollment in the School of Art, Craft and Design has increased as a result.

Knight says she understands why.

“High schoolers who never thought of art as a degree path have that little ‘what if’ door cracked open,” she said. “And maybe not all of them end up enrolling at Tech, but at least they know it’s an option.”

Windgate’s gift has also allowed the Craft Center to partner with the nonprofit organization Crafting the Future which aims to provide equitable opportunities in the arts.

“We wholeheartedly believe in the mission of CTF, and we are honored to work with them to increase accessibility and diversity in the craft field,” Winkle said.

In addition to the week-long summer program, the Craft Center hosts high school outreach programs where regional high school students visit the Center to participate in immersive hands-on craft activities.

“The experience of being on our campus and in our studios has influenced and will continue to influence generations of artists, well beyond the physical boundaries of our campus,” Winkle said. “We believe in the power of craft to connect people and create positive change. We are honored to continue a partnership with the Windgate Foundation towards growing our community and helping to realize this change through high-quality, hands-on craft experiences.”



ESTAR Sanos encourages rural and underserved communities to be healthy

Tennessee Tech's Whitson-Hester School of Nursing is committed to providing health resources and outreach to Hispanic communities and underserved populations in the Upper Cumberland through an initiative known as ESTAR (education, support, training, awareness and resources) Sanos.

"Sanos means 'to be healthy' in Spanish, and that's what we are all about," said Dr. Melissa Geist, professor of nursing. "Our team really wants to share that 'be healthy' message."

The initiative started in 2020 thanks to the Rebecca Tolbert Faculty Research Award, which provides release time and funding so faculty can develop their research.

Geist received the first Tolbert Award in late 2020, just as news reports began circulating that Hispanic and rural populations were being affected more than others by COVID-19. Geist recruited Cary Cass, WHSON lab coordinator, and Dr. Mark Groundland, associate professor of foreign languages, along with several nursing and foreign languages students to help launch ESTAR Sanos.

The team reached out to local schools and churches that serve rural and Hispanic communities to see if they could visit and share information about COVID-19 and vaccines. The program took off from there.

"Since then, I would say we have hosted 40 community outreach programs," Geist said. "We've probably reached around 2,000 to 3,000 people, one event at a time."

The ESTAR Sanos team also served at the Remote Area Medical (RAM) clinic in Cookeville, which provides free



medical, dental and vision care. They partnered with WCTE PBS in Cookeville and a radio station in Nashville to distribute public service announcements. They also developed a one-hour community course on how to confront misinformation and disinformation in healthcare.

"We are really trying to challenge people to think about what they see on social media and where to find accurate information," Geist said.

Cass added, "A big piece of what we do is motivational interviewing and meeting people where they're at with their concerns and speaking to them on an individual basis. We provide them with resources and

evidence-based literature. Maybe they aren't at the point quite yet to get a vaccine, but we can at least tell them about the different options."

As COVID-19 numbers improved, ESTAR Sanos shifted its focus to provide general health education and resources. For example, last spring the ESTAR Sanos team held an event at El Fuente Hispanic Community Center in Cookeville on ergonomics, which is the study of efficiency in a person's work environment.

"A lot of the people we interact with have jobs where they are doing repetitive motions in a factory or lifting heavy equipment," Geist said. "We talked about lifting, bending and twisting without causing musculoskeletal injury. We also did a program for the Tennessee Community Health Workers on metabolic syndrome, which can increase the risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes. ESTAR Sanos is really about overall health."

Groundland says ESTAR Sanos has allowed Tech's Spanish majors to take what they learn in the classroom and implement it in a real-world setting.

"The ESTAR Sanos project allowed the WHSON to collaborate with the Department of Foreign Languages

to meaningfully impact the Hispanic community in the Upper Cumberland," Groundland said. "This collaboration illustrates the importance of learning a foreign language and culture to broaden the reach of STEM areas — in this case, healthcare education."

Aracely Munoz, '20 interdisciplinary studies and '22 nursing, experienced this firsthand, both by working with ESTAR Sanos and as a nurse in the trauma intensive care unit at Vanderbilt. Munoz says co-workers often ask her for help discharging Spanish-speaking patients, and her ESTAR Sanos experience prepared her to do just that. As a member of the ESTAR Sanos team, Munoz recorded a radio ad in Spanish that provided information about COVID-19 to the Hispanic community, and she helped with the RAM clinic.

"My parents are both from Mexico, but I was born in the U.S., so I felt like I had a good understanding of what would get people's attention," Munoz said. "What I enjoyed most about the RAM clinic was helping people who didn't speak English. They would come in, and they were so scared because they knew that most of the people there didn't speak Spanish. But when I would start translating, I could see a quick change in them. Seeing the relief on people's faces when they know they



are going to be able to communicate with someone and not have to be scared — that's such an important thing."

Munoz says ESTAR Sanos and Geist helped her grow personally and professionally.

"I never really saw myself as a leader, but I feel like I have the potential to get there," Munoz said. "Dr. Geist is such a leader and carries herself so well. She's so smart and has published so many articles. I feel like I learn something new every time she talks. As soon as she asked me to join the ESTAR Sanos team, I knew she was going to be someone good to work with."

Tai Payne Hintz, '17 nursing, is a graduate student member of the ESTAR Sanos team and will receive her master's in nursing in December.

"I'm really thankful to be a part of this team," Hintz said. "It's student-oriented and student-led, and we have been able to incorporate undergraduate and graduate students and students from different disciplines. How we work as a team and how we meet our community's needs is really special."

Geist, Cass and Groundland say they could not do what they do without students. They are involved in every part of the process.

"From grant writing to preparing materials to doing presentations to networking to finding places for us to go, every step of the way they are doing everything," Cass said. "And they are contributing so much. We don't just have nursing students. We have engineering, computer science, business, pre-med and foreign languages majors. All of these students bring expertise to what we do. It's pretty amazing what we have created and developed."

And Geist says ESTAR Sanos would not exist without the Rebecca Tolbert Faculty Research Award. The funding Geist received from this award allowed her to pay the student worker members of the ESTAR Sanos team. But

perhaps most importantly, it provided release time so Geist could write two grant proposals totaling \$500,000. This funded a full launch of ESTAR Sanos.

"When you think about that impact — the money from Rebecca Tolbert and what it allowed us to do — it's amazing how far that can really go," Geist said.

Rebecca Tolbert was the first faculty member hired by Tech's School of Nursing when it began in 1980. She later served as associate vice president for Academic Affairs. Tolbert has supported the WHSON for many years but chose to designate her latest gift for faculty research.

"Dr. Geist's project is a very timely and important endeavor to community health," Tolbert said. "I am overjoyed that one of my awards started such a noteworthy health initiative for our community."

Geist says the fact that ESTAR Sanos is a Tennessee Tech WHSON initiative makes a difference.

"One of the great things about the Upper Cumberland is they love the WHSON," Geist said. "Nurses have been voted the most ethical, trustworthy profession for 21 years. So, when we say we are from the Tennessee Tech WHSON, that carries some weight."

Hintz says her experience with ESTAR Sanos taught her many life and career lessons that she would not have received in a classroom.

"I've learned that teamwork is huge," Hintz said. "I've learned how to write and publish a manuscript. I've learned how to go out and talk to people within the community. The conversations we have are so meaningful and impactful. I've learned that it's about respect — respecting people who don't agree with you and knowing it's not always one conversation that's going to change someone's mind. I've seen the growth that all of us have had. I've learned so much."

School of Human Ecology's new Design Studies program encourages exploration

When Tennessee Tech's School of Human Ecology announced a new design studies program, they never anticipated how strong the interest would be.

"The School of Human Ecology has seen an explosion of new students enrolling in our new bachelor of science in design studies," said Melinda Anderson, director of the School of Human Ecology. "This innovative design program is one of a kind in Tennessee. It provides a broad foundation of knowledge in design influenced by quality-of-life components from our accrediting body, the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences. The design studies degree features designing spaces and fashion based on their purpose in the well-being of

the individual, family and community. We are looking forward to expanding our learning laboratories and resources to welcome even more students as the degree continues to grow."

Originally, housing and design and merchandising and design were concentrations within the bachelor of science in human ecology. Now they are their own degree program, and students can choose the architecture and interior design track or the fashion merchandising and design track.

Hannah Upole, assistant professor of human ecology, says the School of Human Ecology looked at programs



across the state and saw that no one else really had a hands-on practical design program.

“Across the board, we are seeing people pursue creative passions where they know they can get jobs in these fields,” Upole said. “The number one thing we hear is, ‘I never would have thought Tech and Cookeville would have a design program that has so many resources.’ It’s the community we live in — most of the individuals running interior design firms in this area are Tech grads or took classes at Tech. Boutique owners are Tech grads. A lot of schools recommend internships; here, they are required for design studies. We hear from parents that it’s important that their students have hands-on opportunities.”

Canaan Jones, a junior design studies major, says Tech’s program is an engaging and enriching option for anyone who has an interest in the fashion industry.

“This program is important to me because it teaches a curriculum that is otherwise rare for an area like ours and serves as a more accessible option for many students,” he said.

Upole says last year they had more than 100 students apply to the program.

“Explosion is a good word,” Upole said. “That’s really what it is. We didn’t anticipate this many.”

But with growth comes additional needs for space and technology. Upole says the greatest need right now is the architecture lab. This computer lab on the second floor of Oakley Hall contains 20 stations with desks that pop up to make drafting tables and inspires hands-on, experiential learning.

“Our students would be in that lab 24/7 if they could,” Upole said. “I’ll go up there at 8:30 p.m., and students will ask when the police will be by to lock up because they are still working on their projects. They are up there doing their projects, yes, but they are also up there

practicing and playing with the tools and having fun and seeing what they can do. It’s more than a computer lab. It’s an architectural graphics studio.”

Upole adds that fashion students can use the lab to print patterns so they don’t have to purchase them. Students also have access to a scanner to digitize hand drafts, a plotter and a sample room with wallpaper books and pieces of tile for inspiration boards.

“We pride ourselves on having the resources students need,” Uphold said. “They don’t have to go out and buy rulers and pens and pencils. They don’t have to invest hundreds of dollars in supplies.”

Another opportunity for students to experience learning in a unique, hands-on way is through the Historic Costume Collection. The Historic Costume Collection houses more than 2,000 pieces dating from the mid-1800s to today and serves as a resource for all human ecology students, especially those majoring in fashion merchandising. In 2019, Mike MacIndoe, '84 civil engineering, and Lisa (Chambers) MacIndoe, '84 human ecology, established the MacIndoe Historic Costume Collection Endowment to provide funds for maintenance, repairs, equipment, digitization and exhibition costs. The collection’s exhibition was formally named the MacIndoe Historic Costume Collection Exhibition in their honor.

“I tell people every day that I cannot thank a couple of people more than the MacIndoes because they took something that was quite literally a closet and allowed us to show it to people outside of the state,” Upole said. “We do research out of that collection. I do articles for a museum up in Maryland. We do exhibits at the Craft Center and with the Women’s Center. It’s been so wonderful.”

The School of Human Ecology offers experiential learning opportunities off campus as well, through study tours to New York City, Los Angeles and Europe. Last year, the school took 19 students to New York City where

they enjoyed an in-depth look at the Brooklyn Bridge; toured the famous Garment District with Mike Kaback, a well-respected member of the New York fashion industry; learned about sustainable textile development at Danish textile company Kvadrat and visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

“We tried to immerse them in what design looks like in an urban environment,” Upole said. “The students learn so much in a five-to-six-day period. They bring that knowledge back and reference it in their classes. We try to make this at as low of a cost as possible for students. We don’t want anyone to have a financial hardship. If they want to go and it’s too expensive, we try to find a way to make it happen. Donor support can help make this trip even more affordable for students.”

Jones says he is grateful for the New York study tour opportunity.

“The experiences I’ve been afforded thanks to this program have been incredible,” he said. “Under any other circumstance, I likely would never have been able to visit New York City, so to be able to have that experience was incredibly affirming for me.”

In addition to hands-on classes and professional development opportunities, Erika Minnear Phillips, a senior design studies major, says she appreciates the hands-on approach from her professors as well.

“The professors are incredible, and you can tell that they truly care about your success and will play an active role in your academic career,” said Phillips. “The courses they teach are interactive and thought-provoking. Many courses encourage students to participate in their education, rather than simply listen to a lecture. My classmates would agree that these teaching methods have made our experiences in the classroom memorable and super fun!”

Phillips adds that the design studies program encourages creative freedom.

“Much of the coursework is project-based, and the prompts encourage students to explore their own areas of interest. One project I’ve had the privilege of working on is Wings Up-Cycled, which is a free thrift store for students. It began as a passion I had for creating something on campus for students to use that would also encourage sustainability. When I brought the idea to Dr. Upole, she was extremely encouraging and helped me get the thrift store up and running. With the continued support of Dr. Upole and other design studies students, Wings Up-Cycled will be a source of community, creativity and relief for Tech students. None of these things would have been possible without the design studies program.”

Upole says the variety of experiential learning opportunities offered by Tech’s School of Human Ecology is one of the main reasons the program is growing so rapidly.

“We get a lot of students from Nashville and Knoxville,” she said. “They love Tech. They love Cookeville. They love the smaller community. They can do the things they want to do and they don’t have to live in a downtown urban environment if they don’t want to. People are realizing that Cookeville and Tech are actually a huge pull for fashion. And for the job market, it’s important that they have hands-on experience and credentials. It opens the door to so many possibilities.”



Gift to University Archives preserves history of Tennessee Tech

When Scott Edwards, '87 business management, wanted to find old photos of him and his college friends for a reunion, he never imagined the treasure trove of information he would find in Tennessee Tech's University Archives and Special Collections.

"I went to University Archives, and they were awesome," Scott said. "I cannot extoll their virtues enough. They

made me feel so welcome, and they helped me so much."

A few months later, when University Archives needed funds to renovate their reading room, work area and teaching space, Scott knew he wanted to support the project.



Thanks to the support of Scott and his wife Mary Alice, '89 accounting, University Archives will convert the existing space into a formal, more traditional library reading room with lamps, a ladder and a bookshelf that displays rare books and artifacts. The reading room will serve as a quiet place for researchers.

The Edwards' gift also funds a 24-seat classroom, which will allow University Archives to welcome student and community groups, provide hands-on experiences with historic documents and host events. Finally, it will provide additional office space for six student interns and additional preservation space for equipment, freezer storage and supplies.

The Edwards' gift to renovate the Archives reading room is the latest in a 35-year history of giving to Tech. They have established scholarships for business, engineering and nursing students; created an endowment for College of Engineering faculty development, equipment needs and technology upgrades and named the Edwards Physiology Laboratory in Memorial Gym. They also donated a SimMan, an advanced patient simulator that displays realistic symptoms and feedback like a living patient, to Tech's Whitson-Hester School of Nursing and funded the Simulation Lab, which is named in honor of Scott's mother, Virginia Edwards, who was a registered nurse.

Scott says he inherited his giving spirit from his father.

"The first thing my dad could afford to give was \$20 to the Boy Scouts (because he was a Boy Scout)," Scott said. "Dad always believed in giving back to the community. We have been very blessed that my business allowed me to do these things."

Scott retired as the chief executive officer of Micro Metals, a powder metallurgy industry leader. Scott's father, Carl Edwards, founded Micro Metals in 1976. Scott recently sold the business and says he enjoys giving to Tech programs that resonate with him.

"We like to support things we have a connection to," Scott said. "Because University Archives helped me so much, now we have a connection to Tech's Archives. I've been a photographer since I was in high school. I have an appreciation for people who keep old photos. I still have pictures of my parents when they were children. I felt a kindred spirit to the employees in University Archives and a shared desire to remember the past. I have an appreciation for history, and they are keeping history alive in the archives at Tennessee Tech."

Mary Alice added, "That's truly what University Archives is — it's the history of the university. It's being preserved, and it's not just stored away. It's a resource and a tool for all of us to use."

Megan Atkinson, Tech's university archivist, says it was an honor to assist Scott in his research.

"It was great to have an alum explore his college days in the archives and get excited about the historic documentation we house," Atkinson said. "Archives puts great effort into cataloging and digitizing, so it is marvelous when we are able to share that with patrons and alumni who acknowledge that the work is valuable."

During Scott's time at Tech, he and 13 other students became close friends while living together in one hallway in Quentin Hall. They named their hallway Hooterville after the fictional agricultural community that was the setting for the television sitcoms "Petticoat Junction" and "Green Acres" and even added a mailbox in the hallway.

"We were the only people who went down that hallway, so we had a little community," he said.

The 14 friends have kept in touch and get together as often as they can. The group planned a 40th reunion this year, and Scott wanted to put together a video of old photos from Tech. He took quite a few photos as a student, but there were photos that he lacked. That's where University Archives came in.

"I would email them what I was looking for, and they would say 'Give me a couple of days,'" Scott said. "Then I'd get an email and they'd tell me what they found, and I'd go to the archives. I kept telling them, 'This is like Christmas.' I knew what period to look in: 1982-87. I knew where we sat at basketball games. I'd say, 'women's basketball 1986' or 'football 1982' or 'Smith Quad mid-1980s' and they'd come to me with binders of slides or photos. And they found a ton of them! They found old pictures from the University Center, post office, student life, blizzard and Smith Quad. They even found photos of us playing intramural sports."

Scott also recalled the day that his friend's dorm room caught on fire. Sure enough, University Archives was able to locate the Oracle newspaper article about the fire.

Mary Alice remembers how excited Scott would be when he returned home from a visit to the archives.

"He was so impressed with them," she said. "He would tell me about the rolling crank shelves they had and how meticulous they were with organization."

In addition to a generous gift to fund the renovation, Scott helped University Archives in other ways as well. He shared the photos he took during his time at Tech, which included numerous student life photos from the 1980s — something the archives lacked. And he shared his 45-minute reunion video slideshow.

Scott and Mary Alice's gift to renovate the University Archives reading room, work area and teaching space will allow the archives to provide a better environment for alumni, employees, students and anyone in the community who wishes to research the history of Tech and the Upper Cumberland.

Additionally, Atkinson says the renovated space will provide a better learning environment for the history course HIS 3420 Archives Management and Research, which teaches students how to find, use and preserve historic materials.

"In the past, the space held as few as 12 students and could not accommodate a larger class," Atkinson said. "While we realize we could host classes outside of University Archives, we prefer to have students come to the archives and be in the presence of history in a comfortable space where they know they can return in the future. The new space design will create a lasting impact for the students who work there. It will also encourage more people to visit University Archives when they are on campus. It will be uniquely inviting and enticing, and we will be able to help even more alumni who are interested in researching the past."

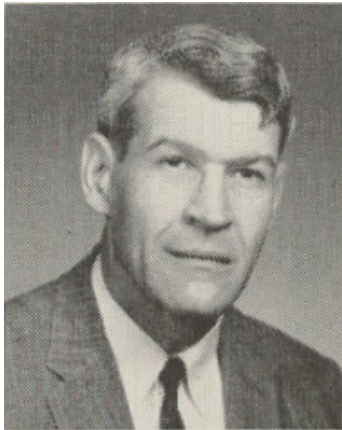


Nolan Fowler Endowment honors history faculty member who loved United States Constitution

Dr. Nolan Fowler loved history, teaching and students, but above all else, he loved the United States Constitution.

Fowler was a faculty member in Tennessee Tech's history department from 1962 until his retirement in 1979 and taught courses in constitutional law and the U.S. Constitution. Although Fowler passed away in 2008, thanks to a generous gift to support professional development at Tech, his legacy lives on through the Nolan Fowler Endowment for U.S. Constitutional Development.

"In a survey conducted by the National Constitution Center, students have more knowledge of pop culture than they have of the U.S. Constitution," said Dr. Kent Dollar, professor of history and chair of the Nolan Fowler Constitution Day committee. "In that survey, less than 2% of respondents knew James Madison was considered the father of the U.S. Constitution, but almost 60% knew Bill Gates is considered the father of Microsoft. This lack of knowledge about the Constitution was a major reason for Dr. Fowler's gift."



Tiff Rector, executive director for planned giving, says Fowler's gift is one of the best examples of matching a donor's interests with a university need.

"This is the epitome of impactful giving," Rector said. "It's not about the dollar amount of Dr. Fowler's gift to Tech. It's about the feeling of joy that donors experience when you find something that really makes an impact. They know they are changing lives."

In 2005, the United States Congress mandated that all educational institutions receiving federal funds institute a day on or near Sept. 17 to commemorate the Sept. 17, 1787 signing of the U.S. Constitution. Constitution Day at Tech is named in honor of Nolan Fowler, and it serves to educate the campus community about the Constitution and citizenship, both historically and as they apply to today's challenges.

Rector met with Fowler in 2005 to discuss Fowler's interest in supporting the university and desire for students to know more about the Constitution.

"Dr. Fowler found the U.S. Constitution fascinating," Rector said. "He said he always felt that people underappreciated how powerful the Constitution is for our country. As a faculty member, he requested permission to start teaching it as a class, and he taught that class for years. He had long since retired when we met, but we talked about why he wanted to teach the history of the Constitution and why it is important — and should be important — for students and people today."

Rector met with several history and political science faculty members to discuss Fowler's passion for the Constitution and find a way to match Fowler's desire to give with what the university needed most.



“We quickly came to the realization that since we will host Constitution Day anyway, it made sense to tie Dr. Fowler’s gift to this celebration,” Rector said. “Ultimately, Dr. Fowler decided that he really liked the idea of bringing in a guest speaker in a constitution-related discipline to talk to the students. Dr. Fowler’s primary focus was to ensure that, above all else, this would benefit the students. Yes, it would benefit the community as well, but his focus was on the students. He wanted students to understand more about how special this document is.”

Dollar says Tech’s annual Constitution Day celebration would not be as successful without the Nolan Fowler Endowment.

“While many institutions struggle to satisfy the requirement set forth by Congress’s act, Dr. Fowler’s generous endowment allows Tennessee Tech to seek out nationally-known, distinguished scholars for its Constitution Day program,” Dollar said.

Dr. Lori Maxwell, professor and chair of Tech’s sociology and political science department, serves as a Constitution Day committee member. Maxwell says the committee members are dedicated to honoring Fowler’s wishes and represent a unique collaboration among history, political science and sociology faculty and students.

“Constitution Day at Tennessee Tech offers a valuable educational enrichment opportunity for both our

students and the Cookeville community, and it is an honor to serve on the Constitution Day committee,” Maxwell said. “Thanks to the continued legacy of Nolan Fowler’s gift, students have the opportunity to annually revisit the tremendous importance of the Constitution through nationally-renowned scholars.”

Cheyenne Douthitt, a junior history and interdisciplinary studies major, serves as a student member of the Constitution Day committee.

“The Nolan Fowler Constitution Day we have at Tech is a wonderful opportunity for the public,” Douthitt said. “Anyone can come and hear what experts have to say about pressing matters regarding our government’s Constitution. I have learned so much from our past speakers, and it allows me to reflect on my role as a citizen.”

Tennessee Tech celebrated its first Nolan Fowler Constitution Day on Sept. 20, 2005.

“That first year, Derryberry Auditorium was full,” Rector recalled. “Dr. Fowler attended, and seeing his vision realized is one of the proudest moments of my career. This shows that donors can accomplish the impact they want to have. And Dr. Fowler was able to experience that impact for several years before he passed.”

Although Fowler passed away in 2008, Nolan Fowler Constitution Day remains an important event for the university — celebrating both the Constitution and Fowler’s legacy and bringing world-renowned speakers to campus, in perpetuity, that Tech otherwise wouldn’t be able to host.

Tech has hosted a variety of speakers through the years, including the Honorable Alberto Gonzales, former attorney general of the United States; Freedom Sings, a critically-acclaimed multimedia experience featuring an all-star cast of musicians; and John Seigenthaler, an American journalist, writer and political figure.



Seigenthaler was editor, publisher and chairman of The Tennessean for nearly three decades.

“Dr. Fowler had the idea of John Seigenthaler but never thought we’d be able to get him,” Rector said. “But, thanks to some Tech alumni and friend connections, we did!” Rector said.

Constitution Day topics have ranged from “How American Women Won the Vote” to “Free Speech in the 21st Century” to “The Constitutional Integrity of Title IX.” And the committee strives to select speakers and topics related to current events. For example, the 2021 presentation was titled “Epidemics and the Constitution: A Contested History.”

“This event ensures that students appreciate what the Constitution does for them,” Rector said. “It ensures that students have an appreciation for how wonderful of a country we live in. I know Dr. Fowler was beyond thrilled with this event. I remember seeing tears in his eyes when he attended Tech’s first Constitution Day — named for him — and anytime he spoke about it thereafter. It continues to be a great legacy for him.”

Explorations in Engineering and Computing Camp brings past, present and future engineers together

Nearly 150 high school students discovered what it means to be an engineering student at Tennessee Tech this summer by attending the Explorations in Engineering and Computing Camp.

This three-day camp, offered by Tech's College of Engineering, provides an opportunity for rising high school sophomores, juniors and seniors to become familiar with the university's seven computing and engineering programs: computer science, computer engineering, chemical engineering, civil and environmental engineering, electrical engineering,

manufacturing and engineering technology and mechanical engineering. Through hands-on projects, industry collaborations, career-readiness activities and mentorship, these prospective engineers explore the world of engineering and computing.

"The greatest thing about this camp is having past, present and future engineers together," said Harry Ingle, director of diversity, recruitment and student success for Tech's College of Engineering. "We have current undergraduate students who are counselors. We have graduate students who help lead activities. Of course,



the campers are prospective students — prospective engineers — who we hope will enroll in the College of Engineering. And we have alumni engineers come and speak to the campers.”

Campers spend three nights in a Tech residence hall and experience what it’s like to be a college student by attending engineering and computing sessions and participating in interactive experiments such as making paper helicopters, building balsa wood bridges and casting. The camp includes fun activities in the evenings as well, such as movie night, ice cream parties and game nights in the Marc L. Burnett Student Recreation and Fitness Center.

The Explorations in Engineering and Computing Camp began in 2018 as an Advisory Council for Engineering project. ACE is the College’s advisory board comprised of engineering alumni, employers and friends of Tech. The first year, 30 students attended the camp. This year, the College welcomed 148 campers and actually had to host two camps — one in June and one in July — to accommodate the increase.

Andre Braden, a junior mechanical engineering major, attended the camp in its second year.

“In 2019, I embarked on a transformative journey as a camper at the Explorations in Engineering and Computing Camp,” Braden said. “Little did I know, this experience would shape my future in profound ways. The camp immersed me in the wonders of engineering, igniting a passion within me that I never knew existed. Inspired by the incredible projects, hands-on experiments and engaging workshops, I discovered my true calling.”

Ingle says employees and interns from engineering and information technology companies such as Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) and Badische Anilin- und Sodafabrik (BASF) speak to the campers.

“We try to make this as real as possible for the students who attend,” Ingle said. “We want them to know what they will do as an engineer in the real world.”

ACE member David Bible, '87 civil engineering, drove up from Signal Mountain, Tenn., to have dinner with the campers this year. Bible, a senior associate with Stantec Consulting Services Inc., shared information about his college and career experiences, projects he’s worked on and why he loves engineering. Bible says he and his fellow ACE members continue to support the camp because they believe it encourages the next generation of engineers and recruits the best and brightest to Tech.

“I love the opportunity to get back to campus and interact with these young, bright minds and share just a little of my experiences in civil engineering and at Tech,” he said. “As I’ve shared with the students many times, I feel younger and smarter every time I get back on campus!”

To encourage campers to enroll at Tech, ACE and the College established an Explorations in Engineering and Computing Camp Scholarship which is awarded to every camper who completes the program.

At the conclusion of the camp, the College hosts a closing ceremony for the campers and their parents, and the campers receive a certificate of completion.

“I then tell them that they all will receive a scholarship from the College of Engineering,” Ingle said. “And the crowd goes wild! It’s pretty emotional. It’s a really great thing to be a part of.”

Ingle says the camp and the scholarship are thanks to donor support. ACE members made generous gifts to get the camp up and running, and they fund the scholarship each year.

“This is really donor-led,” Ingle said. “Our ACE members roll up their sleeves and attend the camp and help out. One year we talked about doing cardboard canoe races,

and an ACE member said he'd bring the cardboard. I said, 'That's a lot of cardboard,' and he said 'I know! I'll bring it!' This camp was our ACE members' idea. It wouldn't be possible without their support. That's the absolute truth. They said, 'We are doing this,' and they have."

Ingle says donor support covers meals, housing, supplies, activities and counselor salaries and adds that with additional support, the College could increase the amount of the scholarship in hopes of encouraging even more students to enroll at Tech.

Justice Kittell, a senior chemical engineering major, experienced firsthand how the camp impacts prospective students.

"The first time I stepped foot on Tennessee Tech's campus was as a camper at the Explorations in Engineering and Computing Camp in summer 2019," she said. "At the time, I was unaware of the impact this camp would have on my life. Prior to the camp, I was unsure where I wanted to attend college. During the camp, I was provided with countless opportunities to connect with other campers — some of whom also attend Tech now and whom I'm still in touch with — and faculty from different departments. After a week on campus, I decided that Tech and Cookeville felt like home, and that's where I wanted to spend the next four years."

After Kittell completed her freshman year at Tech, she became a camp counselor.

"This experience allowed me to create lasting friendships with other counselors, build stronger relationships with faculty and opened more opportunities to get involved on campus," Kittell said. "As someone who loves Tech, working as a counselor and getting to see all of the opportunities students have and how those expand every year is exciting. My favorite thing about being a counselor is watching students arrive to camp a little afraid to be at a brand-new place and then leave with



new friends and more passion about engineering. One of the most full-circle moments is later seeing those campers on campus as college students, loving Tennessee Tech as much as I do."

Former camper and current camp counselor Zak Henson, a junior mechanical engineering major, agrees and says that students discovering a sense of "home" on campus is key.

"Giving high schoolers a taste of college life is invaluable to their college search, and that's exactly what this camp does," Henson said. "Students can look into degrees and facilities offered all day at any given campus. But if they don't feel at home or welcome in the environment, they won't attend that college. That welcoming environment is exactly what the Explorations in Engineering and Computing Camp offers — a one-on-one experience with not only faculty and Tech facilities but also actual Tech students. I believe this camp is invaluable to Tennessee Tech and its future."

Golden Eagle Media provides experiential learning opportunities for 100 years

For nearly 100 years, Tennessee Tech students looking to gain experience in newspaper, magazine, radio, television, advertisement sales or graphic design have had opportunities for hands-on, real-world experience, thanks to Golden Eagle Media.

“Tech’s Communication Department was doing experiential learning before it was cool!” said Brenda Wilson, professor of communication. “Participation in student media activities provides the hands-on experience employers are looking for in graduates. We



are fortunate to be able to offer these activities to students. They learn problem-solving and decision-making skills. They learn to work collaboratively with others. They learn time management and communication skills. And while learning all these valuable skills, they get to create content that tells the story of campus while they are here.”

In 2022, Tech’s radio station, 88.5 WTTU, celebrated 50 years. On April 24, 2024, The Oracle student newspaper will turn 100, and in 2026, The Eagle yearbook will turn 100 as well.

Journalism and communication alumni say the experience they gained as members of the Golden Eagle Media was invaluable in preparing them for careers in the journalism field and beyond. And these experiences are not reserved solely for communication majors; many other majors participate as well, providing a unique collaboration among disciplines.

Haylee Eaton, '17 communication, worked on The Oracle, The Eagle and WTTU during her junior and senior years at Tech, ultimately becoming editor-in-chief for both The Oracle and The Eagle and program director for WTTU. Today, she is a marketing coordinator for Ascend Federal Credit Union.

“Working with student media at Tech gave me the opportunity to learn what those professions would be like without stepping foot off campus,” she said. “They also allowed me to hone skills that I still use day to day, even though I chose to go into a different line of communications and marketing.”

In addition to the career-readiness skills student media provided, Eaton says she is also grateful for the friendships.

“Since we spent so much time together working outside of class, we had the opportunity to connect on a deeper level and knew that we could rely on each other whenever we needed help with anything — from class, to work on the publications and beyond,” Eaton said.

“Though the work could be challenging at times, it definitely helped me grow as a person, and I wouldn’t change anything about my time on the student media staff at Tech. Some of my fondest memories come from spending Sundays in the J-Lab and spinning tunes from the DJ booth.”

Lindsay Pride, '00 journalism, served as news director for WTTU, managing editor for The Oracle and people section editor for The Eagle and says she is grateful to longtime professor Hix Stubblefield for encouraging her to apply for a management position. Today she is the editor of the Herald-Citizen in Cookeville.

“During my tenure, The Oracle went from being designed in a copy/paste format to being digitally designed on the computer,” Pride said. “That experience prepared me for starting the first student newspaper at Prescott South Middle School when I taught English and advised a LEAPS [Lottery for Education Afterschool Programs] newspaper class after school. It also prepared me to take over the majority of pagination as editor of the Herald-Citizen. Of course, the leadership and news judgment experience I gained definitely help me in my current leadership position with the Herald-Citizen. I appreciate the opportunities I had to be involved in multiple forms of journalism on campus.”

Laura Austin Clemons, '88 journalism, says Stubblefield also encouraged her to consider a leadership role.

“Anyone who has ever worked in journalism knows it’s not an easy nor necessarily popular career choice,”

Clemons said. “You have to be passionate and persistent. Having a thick skin doesn’t hurt either.”

Clemons enrolled in Tech’s journalism program because she wanted to write news and features but never considered applying for a management position — until Stubblefield invited her to serve as managing editor of The Oracle.

“I said yes, reluctantly, because I didn’t believe I had the stomach for it,” Clemons recalled. “He proved me wrong. Because he put me in the position to grow, I learned that I was a lot stronger and braver than I had ever imagined. Taking calls from annoyed and angry readers — mostly students but also a few faculty — never got easier but I survived it, managing to hold my ground and defend our reporters and opinion writers. Of everything I learned at Tech, this lesson in courage and conviction has endured the longest. It has helped me in every single career choice I’ve made — and a few personal choices as well.”

Drake Fenlon, '15 communication, served as managing editor of The Oracle and program director for WTTU and says both provided him with rewarding life lessons.

“My staff and I would be hot on the hunt for what was really happening on Tech’s campus,” Fenlon said. “Our management team’s goal was to never have the newspaper serve as an expanded public relations wing of the university. Instead, we strived to go above and beyond and report the stories that actually impacted students day to day. Our managing staff and reporters were crucial players in holding the administration, campus departments and student organizations accountable for their actions and decisions. We would leave no stone unturned in search of the truth, because we believed that’s what students deserved. We took lessons learned in our news and editorial classes and put them into action by reporting and sharing both the hard news and life stories that were happening across campus.”



Fenlon took his role as managing editor seriously, but found ways to have fun with Tech's radio station.

"Once the newspaper was complete, that's when we could kick back and let loose on the radio airwaves of WTTU," he said. "Within reason, weirder is always better in the radio booth of an alternative college radio station."

Fenlon managed approximately 40 DJs who hosted shows ranging from alternative rock to bluegrass to experimental hip hop to sports talk. He also personally hosted a weekly comedy show followed by a live in-studio variety show with call-in segments.

"The true highlight of each semester was our dead week and finals week programming where we would encourage DJs to experiment with their show's format," he said.

During his final week of undergraduate study, Fenlon and two friends manned the airwaves for 24 hours, live on air, from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m.

"We called the show The Final Countdown," he recalled. "Around hour 15 of the show, things really began to go off the rails as the music choices became more experimental and ill-advised. If memory serves, we played one solid hour of 'Revolution 9' by The Beatles on repeat followed by a segment of Dr. Seuss books read over hip-hop beats. It was equally chaotic and rewarding to complete the marathon 24-hour show."

Fenlon says he considers his time as a member of the Golden Eagle Media some of the most formative years of his life.

"The memories my classmates and I made there are lifelong," Fenlon said. "We have all grown up and moved to different parts of the country now, but anytime we all get together, we annoy our spouses and partners because all we end up talking about are the memories and stories from our time on the third floor of the Roaden University Center."

The Department of Communication believes strongly in paying student media staff members a competitive wage. In 2022, Tech established the Golden Eagle Media Fund to provide support for students who work on Tech's newspaper, magazine, yearbook, radio station and television station.

"At times, it is stressful to balance everything along with their courses, but media staff members enjoy the experience," Wilson said. "They build friendships with their co-workers and make memories that will last a lifetime. It is a unique opportunity for our students that sets Tech apart from many other campuses."

Tennessee Tech Athletics prepares student-athletes to WIN academically and athletically

Tennessee Tech Athletics' Academic Support Program helps student-athletes WIN — both in the classroom and on the course, court, track or field.

Through advising, tutoring, study hall and the Work Intensely Now (WIN) program, Tech Athletics is dedicated to ensuring student-athletes have the resources needed to excel not just athletically, but academically as well.

“When I meet with students at the beginning of every semester, I tell them we have two main goals: Graduate with a degree in one hand and a championship ring on the other,” said Dr. Leveda Bridwell, assistant athletic director for Academics and Student Welfare. “Everything we do is to provide opportunities and graduate our student-athletes.”



Ellis Adams, '23 interdisciplinary studies, is a member of the Golden Eagle Football team and credits the Academic Support Program with helping him earn not one, but two Tech degrees. Adams is currently pursuing a master's in professional studies.

"The Academic Support Program helped me be a better student, because they held me accountable for my school work," Adams said. "I can't believe I graduated with my undergraduate degree this past May, and now I'm pursuing a master's degree! The athletic academic advisors helped motivate me to believe in myself when I didn't think I could be successful in the classroom."

Birdwell says the WIN program is designed to help student-athletes progress towards graduation. All freshman and transfer students, along with any student who needs extra academic support, participate in the WIN program. Students have weekly meetings with a coach or academic advisor and attend mandatory study hall, which ranges from two to six hours per week. WIN includes a tutoring program as well.

Birdwell assumed the Academics and Student Welfare role in 2018 and is quick to give credit to those who came before her in making the program what it is today. Birdwell says there probably isn't a student-athlete who attended Tech between 1969 and 2004 who doesn't credit their college degree in some way to Delores Wheatley. From her first position as a graduate assistant in 1969 until her retirement in 2004 as assistant athletic director for Academic Advisement and Student Success, Wheatley monitored the academic progress of student-athletes.

"Mrs. Wheatley set the tone for the entire department," Birdwell said. "If I think about what legacy I could leave at Tech, if I could leave even a small portion of the legacy she left here, I would be very happy. It is my goal that when student-athletes from my time are inducted into the Tennessee Tech Sports Hall of Fame that they might think of me in even a portion of the way I've heard student-athletes talk about Mrs. Wheatley. I haven't

heard many speeches where student-athletes did not say, 'I couldn't have done this without Mrs. Wheatley. I wouldn't be here without Mrs. Wheatley.'"

Frank Omiyale, '14 marketing, is one of many student-athletes who can attest to this. Omiyale was one of the top offensive linemen in the Ohio Valley Conference, was selected by the Atlanta Falcons in the fifth round of the 2005 National Football League draft and spent eight seasons in the NFL.

"Mrs. Wheatley was everything I didn't know I needed in the beginning," Omiyale said. "She was a wealth of knowledge, a mother figure when needed, an encourager, a mentor, an accountability partner and so much more. You knew she cared about you, while at the same time she was setting goals and plans academically for you to attain. Mrs. Wheatley is someone who gave her all to Tech and to every student-athlete who came through her office."

Omiyale wasn't the only NFL player Wheatley assisted. The first person Wheatley tutored was actually Jim Youngblood, '74 health and physical education. Youngblood is arguably the best football player to ever play for Tech and later went on to play for the Los Angeles Rams and Washington Redskins.

"It all started with Jimmy, and then the program snowballed," Wheatley said. "I loved my job. I loved my kids, and I still keep in touch with a lot of them. I still get Christmas cards and calls on my birthday. A lot of them called me mom then and still call me mom today."

Wheatley says she worked closely with the faculty to know when a student-athlete skipped class or needed additional support.

"If they cut a class, I knew it before they could even tell me," she said. "Some may say they were afraid of me, but I think a healthy respect is a good thing. They knew I had the authority to say they couldn't play in the next game."

When Wheatley retired in 2004 after 35 years, she was in charge of the academic performance of all sports and 350 student-athletes.

Dr. Lance Jasitt, who served as assistant athletic director for Athletic Academic Counseling from 2007-2018, continued the program Wheatley started.

“Dr. J. was the most patient man,” Birdwell said. “I learned from him to slow down and make sure that we are being very efficient in what we are doing. He was the most detail-oriented person I’ve ever worked with. You never know who is going to come through the door, and how you talk to one student-athlete is going to be different from how you talk to another student-athlete. He always brought a calm perspective and sound reasoning to every situation. And so much of what he taught me follows in the footsteps of Mrs. Wheatley.”

And the Academic Support Program is clearly making an impact. For 39 semesters, Tech’s student-athletes have posted above a 3.0 GPA.

“When grades are released this fall, if they’re above a 3.0, this will be our 40th semester in a row that we’ve had above a 3.0 department-wide GPA,” Birdwell said. “That’s a big deal.”

Birdwell says donor support has allowed the Academic Support Program to do more for their student-athletes. And one example of donor impact honors the woman who started it all. The Delores Wheatley Academic Enhancement Endowment provides funding for a student who has taken advantage of the Academic Support Program. The endowment was established by Wheatley and Frank Harrell, a former Tech basketball coach and associate director for sports and compliance. Former student-athletes who wished to thank and honor Wheatley contributed to the endowment as well.

“When I retired, we started the endowment right then,” Wheatley said. “I felt it was important to continue the program. I had such a good personal relationship with

those kids, and I felt it was important to continue to help the students.”

In addition to Wheatley’s endowment, donor support also helps pay for tutor salaries and laptops that students can borrow to stay on top of classwork during away games.

“We have a small computer lab in the Academic Wellness Center (former Fitness Center) that students can use,” Birdwell said. “But I would love to have a larger computer lab to host entire teams for study hall, and I’d like to expand our technology.”

While the Academic Support Program’s focus will always be on academics, Birdwell says it has evolved to meet the needs of today’s student-athletes.

“Since 2020 and COVID-19, we are seeing more of a need for mental health and mental wellbeing resources,” she said. “Yes, we are certainly still going to provide academic support, but we are starting to see that students come to us if they are struggling with more personal issues. We now have mental health days where we play video games or do coloring sheets or bring in candy.”

Birdwell says the Academic Support Program is unique in that it touches the lives of all student-athletes.

“Regardless of their sport or major, every student-athlete is impacted by this area,” she said. “We are creating a very positive environment for our students and setting the groundwork for what’s to come in the future. I hope in 10 to 20 years we can say that our goals are still to graduate students with degrees and conference rings. And I hope we can continue the legacy that started with Mrs. Wheatley.”

Pyle Technology in Education Fund puts the “Tech” in Tennessee Tech teacher education

Mary Ann Pyle, '87 elementary education and '89 M.A., says the education she received from Tennessee Tech — specifically, technology in teaching — gave her a competitive edge in her career.

She and her husband Robert established the Pyle Technology in Education Fund to provide the same opportunity for future educators.

“I hope this gift helps students gain the skills they need for their first job,” Pyle said. “And I hope they gain confidence using technology in the classroom.”

Lisa Zagumny, dean of the College of Education, says getting the right tools into the hands of teachers and students can make a significant impact on academic achievement, engagement and creativity.

“Students know when a teacher is excited to share a new opportunity or approach to problem-solving, and that’s

where technology comes in,” Zagumny said. “With ever-evolving advancements and capabilities, technology provides opportunities to see, experience and think differently. The Pyles’ generosity helps the College of Education instill that same sense of curiosity and exploration in future teachers.”

Pyle attended Tech from 1983 to 1989 and says College of Education faculty Carl Owens, James Akenson, Gene Talbert and Richard Fletcher stressed the importance of incorporating technology into lessons whenever possible.

“Carl Owens is part of what inspired this gift,” Pyle said. “He was in charge of making sure teachers understood how to use technology at the time. Bartoo Hall had one of the first Apple labs, and Dr. Owens had one of the first Macs. I remember him teaching us how to use the Macintosh and telling us this was the computer that was going to change education.”

Pyle recalls that when she interviewed for her first job in Metro Davidson Nashville, the principal was intrigued by her experience with Macintosh computers. Pyle says she firmly believes her knowledge of technology was one of the reasons she was hired.

She also says the education and experiences she gained at Tech — both in the classroom and as a graduate assistant — allowed her to have a robust career in teaching and technology. She taught in Metro Nashville for six years, then for Adams 12 Five Star Schools in Colorado, and was a Sun Microsystems teacher trainer throughout her school assignment in Adams 12. She also served on fundraising and technology committees.





Jeremy Wendt, chair and professor of curriculum and instruction, is already putting Pyle's gift to good use. First, he installed a BEAM interactive projector in Bartoo Hall that puts games and learning activities on any floor's surface and engages users of all ages.

Tyree Cripps, '22 secondary education and a current graduate assistant in the College of Education's Jeffers Learning Resources Center, is one of many students who has had the chance to observe the BEAM projector in action.

"The BEAM interactive projector is an asset to learning by having games that focus on math, science, English, social studies, art and physical education," Cripps said. "Having a BEAM on campus allows students to see how content can be taught in a nontraditional format. Some may think that this device is targeted for a young audience; however, this is not the case. The BEAM has been a hit since its installation, and I am sure it will continue to be."

Wendt also purchased a Hovercam eGlass lightboard, which is an illuminated transparent lightboard with a built-in camera that makes teaching online and in person more interactive and impactful. He also purchased a zSpace laptop which combines augmented reality and virtual reality to create lifelike experiences for users.

Finally, Wendt purchased items for faculty to use in face-to-face and online courses, as well as in practicum and residency, including iPads, wireless presenters, virtual reality headsets, a Meeting Owl interactive camera, LEGO educational robotic kits, wireless digital microscopes, Root robot kits and more.

"We've been out in front of other universities in terms of technology in the College of Education," Wendt said. "Mary Ann's experience years ago is similar to what we hear from students today. It is really impactful, and it's part of what drew me to Tech — to be able to teach with technology. There are so many options and ways to innovate with technology. It evolves quickly, and there are so many tools that work for so many different situations. The Pyle Technology Fund has allowed us to purchase items for students and faculty to use to be innovative in their classrooms. It's exciting to have a dedicated fund to pull from."

Wendt agrees that experience using technology in the classroom makes College of Education graduates more competitive in the job market. He says it makes them more confident in their teaching as well.

"We try to make sure we are current in our trends," Wendt said. "With the VISION lab and virtual reality, that's been a big thing. We are actually scaling up that



lab in Bartoo Hall to make it bigger so we can have more students teaching virtually and learning to teach in a completely immersive environment.”

Tech’s VISION research lab is an interactive, technology-based program designed to work with virtual reality experiences while exploring their use in K-12 teaching and learning strategies. The lab virtually immerses pre-service teachers in a classroom environment, providing a sample experience before entering an actual classroom. The VISION Lab is also available to current educators teaching throughout the region who may be transitioning into a different subject and/or grade level. The College acknowledges that the VISION lab experience does not replace hands-on interaction, but it does help prepare future teachers for classroom placements. The lab’s resources provide students and practicing teachers with opportunities to observe teaching strategies, behavior management, classroom

set-up and lesson structure in real classroom settings from teachers practicing locally.

Wendt adds that one result of the College of Education’s focus on technology is they are seeing graduates work for educational technology companies who design and build technologies for K-12 schools.

“That’s been a fun shift that wasn’t really expected, but it makes sense,” Wendt said. “I don’t think our graduates would pursue those types of careers if they didn’t have access to innovative tools while they were students here.”

Wendt says he likes to use the Pyle Technology Fund to experiment. He usually will purchase just one of a new tool or form of technology — at first.

“A lot of these tools are several thousand dollars, so I can only get one to put in one classroom,” he said. “But if I find it’s the best thing ever, I want to buy more and have them in multiple classrooms. Once we’ve tested something and found that it’s valuable, we’d love to scale up and buy five or ten or send them out to the schools with some of our residents. But that can get really expensive really quickly, and it’s why donor support like the Pyles’ is so important.”

Pyle says she and her husband are excited about the software and hardware that the college has been able to purchase, thanks to their generous gift.

“I honestly believe with all the implications of ChatGPT and other A.I. [artificial intelligence] software, teachers and students are entering a new realm of technology use — for both learning and teaching,” she said. “I’m truly hoping that Tech students who learn to use all of these new technologies will have an advantage when they apply for teaching jobs. Then, I hope they share what they’ve learned with the students in their classrooms and with their colleagues in the school systems. Technology is constantly changing, and teachers have to change, adapt and learn daily to keep up.”

Camp CoB student retreat teaches leadership and career-readiness skills

Don't be a Bigfoot Boss.

That's just one of the lessons learned at last year's College of Business student leadership retreat.

"The annual student leadership retreat is an opportunity for students to gain leadership skills to use for themselves — both in their current student organizations and in their future careers," said Sherrie Cannon, associate director for professional development in the College of Business.

Each year, the College of Business offers students the opportunity to experience a three-day retreat outside of Cookeville, meet new people and learn the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) eight career competencies: career and self-development, communication, critical thinking, equity and inclusion, leadership, professionalism, teamwork and technology.

This year's theme was Camp CoB: The Search for Bigfoot, and the retreat connected many of the "NACE Eight" to the mythical creature.

"I take those eight competencies — competencies that employers are looking for in new hires — and build the retreat activities around them," Cannon said.

One of Cannon's lessons discussed what it means to be a "Bigfoot Boss" — a supervisor who stomps on employees' ambitions and successes. The students also learned how not to "Bigfoot" their teammates or colleagues; instead, it's about working together towards a common goal.

Emma Parson, a sophomore marketing and business management major, says she appreciated how the Bigfoot theme related to being a good leader.



“Staying in my comfort zone causes me to risk being a Bigfoot leader,” Parson said. “Pushing myself to do things I normally wouldn’t do taught me that being outside of my zone isn’t as scary as it seems and that doing things I wouldn’t usually do makes me a better leader. New experiences allow us to grow and learn; if you quit learning, you quit growing as a leader.”

Students who previously attended the retreat have an opportunity to return in a leadership role, and last year, eight students opted to return as team leads.

Alyssa Bevacqua, '21 accounting and '22 MBA, experienced Camp CoB as a camper, team lead and College of Business employee. Bevacqua now serves the College as a project coordinator.

Bevacqua says what she hears most often from students who attend the leadership retreat is that they wish they had participated in experiential learning opportunities sooner.

“The students tell me that if they could tell their freshman selves one thing, it would be to start doing things sooner rather than later,” Bevacqua said. “I also hear students say how much they appreciated meeting other College of Business students that they had never met before. Often, you only interact with students in your major, especially in your senior-level classes, but students from all College of Business majors attend the retreat. This year’s retreat included a diverse group of students, and most of them didn’t know each other. Now, months later, I still see them talking and hanging out. It’s a great networking opportunity across our majors.”

Cannon incorporated a throwback camp theme — writing letters home from sleepaway camp — even before the retreat began. She paired students who didn’t know one another and asked them to exchange letters as pen pals.

“The comradery and network that the students built with one another was amazing,” Cannon said. “Even months after the retreat, students reach out to tell me that they talked to their pen pal. The upperclassmen give the lowerclassmen advice and suggestions. Networking is a huge part of this retreat.”

Baylee Dalton, a senior business information and technology major, says the retreat does more than teach leadership principles and networking skills. It instills confidence.

“Sometimes all it takes is one person cheering you on to accomplish things you wouldn’t expect,” Dalton said. “When you have 30 people cheering you on, your confidence soars and you don’t even think about what you can’t do, but more about what you can do. Part of being a leader is knowing how to push people out of comfort zones to allow them to accomplish more than they thought possible.”

Kyleigh Whitehead, a sophomore marketing and business management major, agrees. Whitehead says she is grateful for teambuilding exercises like the confidence course, Camp CoB’s version of an obstacle course.

“I am such an introvert, and going out of my comfort zone is hard,” she said. “However, it was essential to be uncomfortable that weekend, and it made it such a great weekend. I was not confident going into the confidence course, but when I overcame my fears, I felt more confident.”

Donor support allows students to have the opportunity to attend this retreat, and Cannon says she is especially grateful to the family of local businessman George “Hack” Taylor. Taylor owned multiple businesses in Cookeville, including T & H Photography Studio and Players Sports Bar and Grill, and believed in the value of a college degree. While not a Tech graduate himself, he worked closely with Tech students throughout his business career and often hired College of Business

students and graduates. When he passed away in 2020, his family approached Cannon about doing something in his honor. They wanted to provide an opportunity for students to learn the importance of leadership and chose to make several gifts to support the retreat.

“Donor support provides opportunities,” Cannon said. “We would not be able to go to these locations, provide food or offer activities without donor support. This is not a relaxing retreat. Every day is jam-packed with activities and events.”

Bevacqua says that prior to the student leadership retreats, she saw many of the same students at every College of Business event. But the College wanted to expand its reach and encourage more students — and different students — to participate in experiential learning.

“What I noticed when I went to Camp CoB last year is that I only knew about a quarter of the students there,” Bevacqua said. “That means that for three-fourths of the

students who attended, it was one of their first experiences at a College of Business event. Seeing new faces, and then seeing those students come to future events, was exciting. This retreat was a spark for some students. It encouraged them to come to more events and be more engaged with the college as a whole.”

Cannon says the leadership retreats inspire student growth.

“I love seeing students’ willingness and ability to lead,” Cannon said. “Alyssa Bevacqua is a prime example. Alyssa went to the retreat the first year as a student. She took on leadership roles the second year. Because of the leadership lessons she learned during her time in the college, she was willing and able to do more at the second retreat. It’s amazing to watch these students go from being freshmen or sophomores to taking on a leadership role. I see that growth, and that’s what we are all about. That’s what happens in the College of Business. We create leaders.”





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