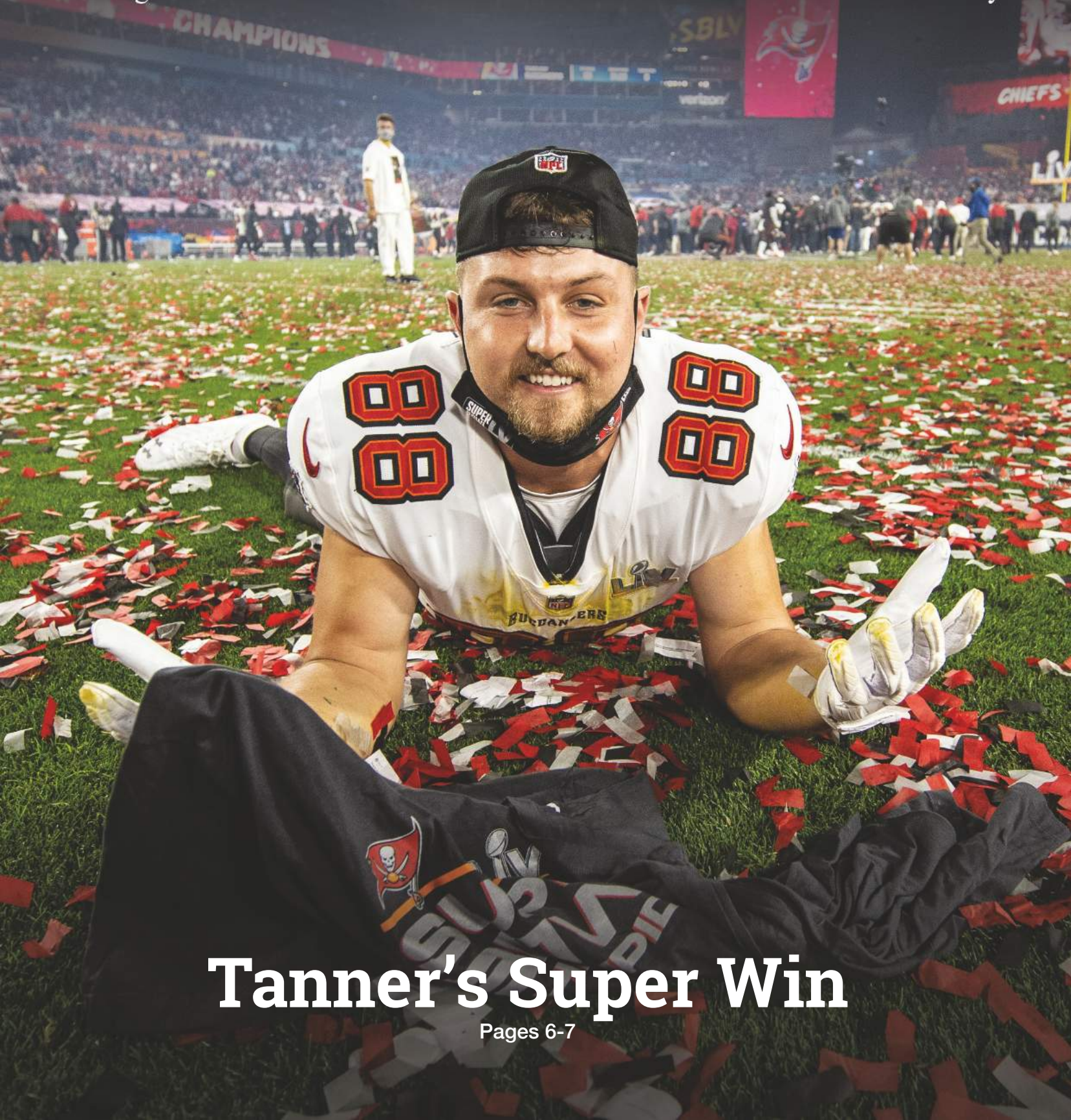


# The Stater

A Magazine for the Alumni and Friends of Southern Arkansas University



## Tanner's Super Win

Pages 6-7



# SAU Firsts

Exceeding goals and setting precedents are important milestones during any year. This was especially true at SAU during this past challenging year. While keeping our campus safe in the midst of the pandemic, our university, faculty, staff, and students continued to achieve and exceed expectations by setting many “SAU Firsts.”

Within these pages, you will read wonderful success stories, including our pre-med students’ 100% acceptance rate into medical school and our nursing students earning a 100% pass rate on their national exam (NCLEX) two years in a row. Additionally, 32 students have been admitted into our inaugural doctoral program to pursue an Ed.D. in Rural and Diverse Educational Leadership.

Thanks to the efforts of our Advancement team, and the unwavering support of Mulerider alumni and friends, our university achieved another milestone during 2020. SAU recorded its most successful annual fundraising year in its 112-year history, surpassing \$6.46 million raised to support all areas of campus.

Even though athletics and student activities competed in many unusual formats, several students earned special individual honors and many of our teams had championship seasons.

It is not, however, that we achieved these firsts that was most important – it was that the people of SAU continued to dream, innovate, and excel despite all of the challenges around us. That same spirit will continue to keep SAU healthy and vibrant in the years to come!

Go Muleriders!



Trey Berry



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## Upcoming Events

**August 17**

Blue & Gold Day

**August 21**

Dr. Downing's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party

**September 11**

SAU vs. Southwestern Oklahoma State Univ., Home Football Game

**September 16**

SAU Giving Day

**September 18**

Family Day, SAU vs. Harding University, Home Football Game

**September 30 - October 1**

Fall Break

**October 8-9**

Love & Loyalty Campaign Celebration

**October 9**

Homecoming 2021

SAU vs. Southeastern Okla. State Univ.

**October 16**

SAU vs. Arkansas Tech University, Murphy USA Classic

**October 30**

SAU vs. Oklahoma Baptist University Home Football Game

**November 4-6**

SAU Rodeo

**November 13**

SAU vs. University of Arkansas at Monticello, Home Football Game

**November 16**

Farmers Bank & Trust Distinguished Speaker Series

**December 2**

Celebration of Lights

**December 10**

Fall Commencement

\*Dates are subject to change, please see SAU website for updated information.



## Senior Celebration

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## The Stater

Summer 2021

The Stater is published twice a year by the University Communications and Marketing office as a service to the alumni and friends of Southern Arkansas University.

**Submissions** Please send any story ideas and/or photographs to [stater@saumag.edu](mailto:stater@saumag.edu).

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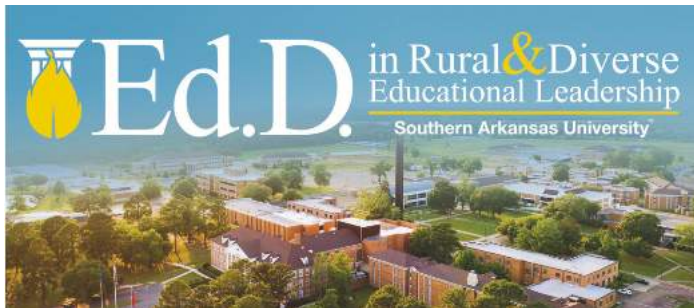


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# A Year of FIRSTS



SAU's first cohort of doctoral students will be admitted in the fall of 2021 to pursue the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Rural and Diverse Educational Leadership. The program provides advanced training in research and practice for professionals holding or seeking leadership positions in rural schools, colleges, and universities, and community and government agencies. Dr. Katherine Berry, Director of the Ed.D. Program, said the University is excited to offer this opportunity for "an advanced, terminal degree to equip our educational and community leaders for the future." It is the first doctoral program offered through a College of Education south of Little Rock.



gives working professionals greater flexibility in completing their degree in a timely manner.



accomplished through the hard work of the Advancement Team. The University now has more than \$46 million in its endowment, another tremendous milestone, increasing the fund by the largest amount ever. SAU now boasts 17 endowed professorships and over 926 individual donor established endowment.

Extending students' prior knowledge of safety and injury prevention, physical conditioning, sport skills and tactics, and evaluation is the purpose of the University's first Online Master of Science in Kinesiology-Coaching. Delivered entirely online, the program

In fundraising efforts, the University's alumni and friends have truly shown their dedication in a very trying year, contributing more than \$6.46 million during the pandemic. It marks the first time the University has broken the \$6 million mark, an achievement



Whitney Brown, a Marine Biology major at Southern Arkansas University, has been named the 2021 College Disc Golf Women's Individual National Champion, another important first for SAU. The native of Alexander, Arkansas, has returned to the University for a second

degree after graduating in May 2020 with an Exercise Science degree. "We are extremely proud of Whitney and congratulate her on being the College Disc Golf Women's Individual National Champion," said Sarah Adcox, Director of Mulerider Activity Center/Intramurals. The men's and women's teams participated April 7-10 in the 2021 College Disc Golf National Championship in Marion, North Carolina. Brown participated on the Women's Disc Golf Team that won the National Championship in 2019 and currently works in the Mulerider Activity Center.



SAU's standout point guard, Aaron Lucas, became the first Mulerider basketball player to receive national postseason recognition since 1992-93. The senior from Tulsa, Oklahoma, was named Honorable Mention All-America by the Division II Conference Commissioners

Association (D2CCA). The honor comes on the heels of Lucas earning National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC) South Central All-District First Team honors, marking the third time since 1995-96 that a Mulerider earned all-region accolades and the first time one appeared on the first team. Lucas joins eight other Muleriders that have been mentioned among the nation's best performers in any given season and is one of just 20 players honored by the D2CCA.



SAU's Nursing program continues to reflect its excellence, with the graduating classes of spring 2020 and fall 2020 scoring a 100 percent first-time passing rate on the NCLEX examination. Last year, graduates of the BS in Nursing Program ranked first among state-funded supported four-

year universities in Arkansas for first-time NCLEX pass rate, as reported by the State Board of Nursing.



# 100% Medical School Acceptance Rate



Thomas "T.C."  
Graham



Cameron  
Nichols



Katherine  
Pletcher



Ashley  
Stewart



Jesse  
Tompkins

Southern Arkansas University's Pre-Health Advisory Committee proudly announces that SAU has achieved 100 percent success on its medical school acceptance rate, with five students being accepted. Three Pre-Health Biology majors, Thomas "T.C." Graham (of Magnolia), Katherine Pletcher ('21, of Magnolia), Cameron Nichols ('21, of Magnolia) as well as Agriculture major Jesse Tompkins ('21, of Taylor, Arkansas), will attend UAMS in Little Rock beginning this fall. Ashley Stewart ('20, of Lewisville, Arkansas) will attend the Edward Via School of Osteopathy in Monroe, Louisiana.

"These are exceptional students who demonstrated the work ethic, determination, and discipline to get the most out of their classes at SAU," said Dr. Antoinette Odendaal, chair of the Committee and associate professor of biology and chemistry. "Their professors and peers couldn't be more proud to see them become leaders in the medical field, and we look forward to hearing about their career adventures."

Several SAU faculty commented on this remarkable group of pre-medical students. Dr. Jeff Miller, chair of Agriculture, said, "Jesse Tompkins is an engaging and studious young man who will excel at whatever he puts his mind to. We are delighted to see him graduate from the Ag program and attend medical school at UAMS."

"Ashley Stewart has been an outstanding student in the biology program and was an integral part of the biology department as a student worker for a number of years," said Dr. James Hyde, a neuroscientist at SAU who works closely with many pre-med students in his cell biology and neuroscience courses. His sentiment was echoed by many biology faculty.

Dr. Jeremy Chamberlain, who teaches many of the pre-med students in his Anatomy and Physiology courses, said it is rewarding "to see two incredibly hard-working, dedicated, and intelligent students like Katherine Pletcher and Cameron Nichols make it to the next level in their education and achieve their career goals. I am sure they will thrive

in medical school, as they did in our courses at SAU. We are proud to send such compassionate and capable individuals to UAMS."

Thomas "TC" Graham, who plans to attend UAMS this fall, has been a student leader as a Supplemental Instructor for several biology courses. Dr. Daniel McDermott, assistant professor of Biology, remarked that "Both in my Immunology and Microbiology courses, TC always had a fresh perspective on how ideas discussed in class would apply to real-world situations. We are confident that he will continue to take things forward and be a driving force in the medical field."

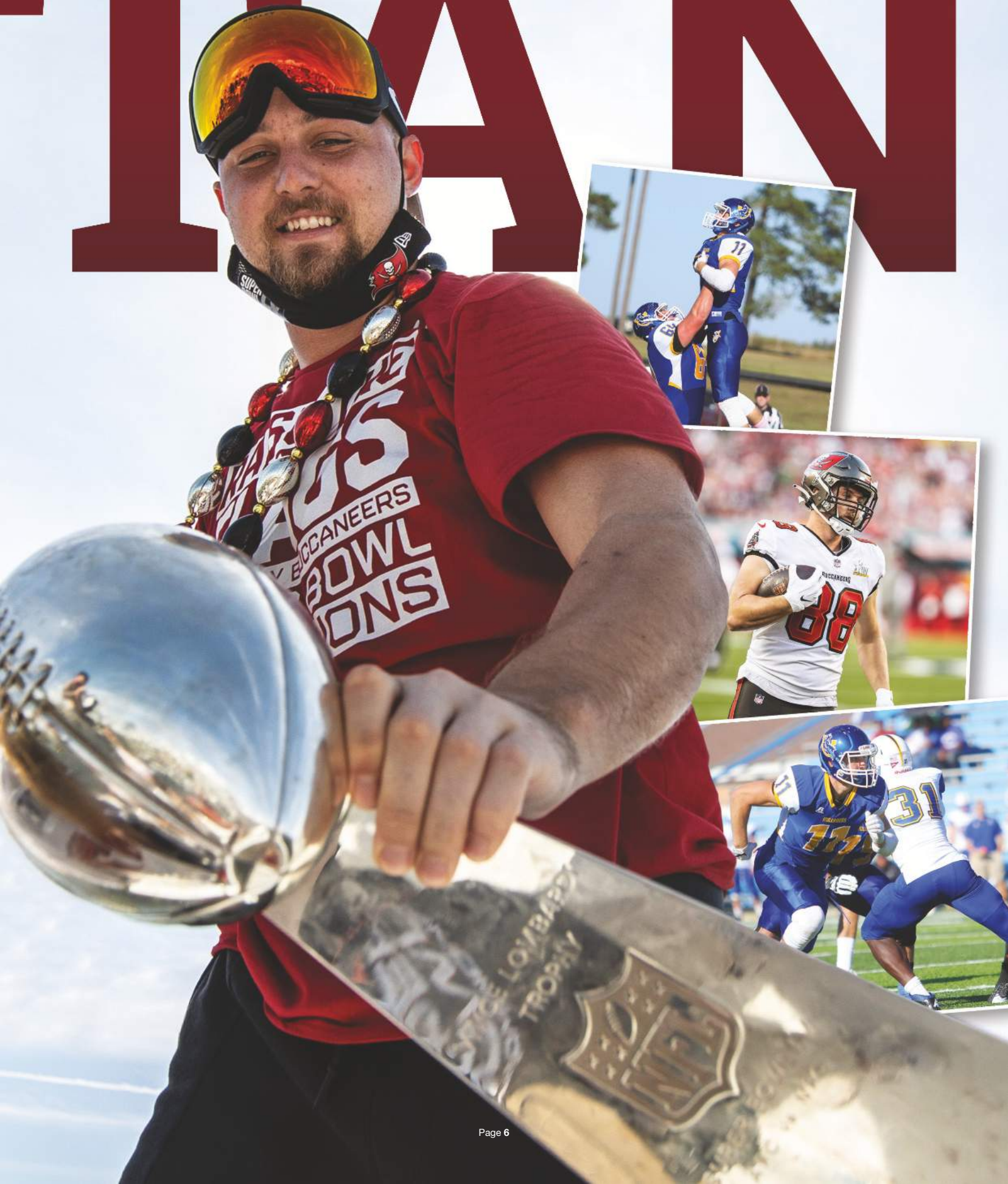
The Biochemistry and Chemistry Department faculty was also pleased to see pre-med students enter the medical field. Dr. Gija Geme, professor of Biochemistry and Chemistry, said, "These students were great scholarly examples to their peers even in their early years at SAU. Being a Pre-Health major is not always easy, but these students learned to adapt, change and succeed. I love to see our students develop into professional, successful people, no matter what field they choose to go into. I'm very proud of these students, and I know this is just beginning for them."

The Pre-Health Advisory Committee helps advise students interested in the pre-health fields, including those studying to be medical doctors, physician assistants, dentists, veterinarians, occupational and physical therapists, optometrists and other related professions. The Committee consists of SAU faculty in the Biology and Chemistry Departments who teach many of the upper-level classes taken by pre-health students. Members of the Pre-Health Advisory Committee include the chair, Dr. Antoinette Odendaal, Associate Professor of Biology and Chemistry, Dr. Gija Geme, Professor of Chemistry, Dr. Daniel McDermott, Dr. Jeremy Chamberlain, Dr. James Hyde, and Dr. Abe Tucker, all faculty in the Biology Department.

For more information about SAU's Pre-Health program, please contact [ayodendaal@saumag.edu](mailto:ayodendaal@saumag.edu).



# TEAM





# NIEB

## Tanner Hudson '17 and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers sail to victory in Super Bowl LV

In the moments following Super Bowl LV, the game clocks in both the north and south end zones of Raymond James Stadium read 0:00, the digital LED ribbons flashed “CHAMPIONS” accompanied with the colors of red, pewter and orange and the finality of the 101st season of the National Football League nestled slowly like a light fog over a lake. Multiple, smaller celebrations began to take place succeeding the night’s pinnacle moment: the presentation of professional football’s most coveted hardware, the Vince Lombardi Trophy.

Among those sharing in more intimate revelries, and there were plenty of them as the Tampa Bay Buccaneers became the first NFL franchise to win the world championship in their home stadium, was third-year Tampa Bay tight end and newly-crowned Super Bowl Champion Tanner Hudson. The Camden, Tennessee, native could be found around the 35-yard line on the south end of the stadium, amidst the fallen confetti on the grass playing surface, taking in the nearly unbelievably surreal moment in time.

“It was honestly unbelievable to think that I was on a Super Bowl-winning team,” remarked Hudson. “It was amazing to have my fiancé and mom lying on that field with me and knowing that my dad was looking down from above.”

Ninety-one players played at least a single snap on that cool, Sunday night in central Florida, including Hudson whose white jersey front was plastered with a yellowish end zone paint from a late third quarter target from legendary teammate quarterback Tom Brady.

Hudson added that playing in the Super Bowl is “an incredible feeling” with the week leading up to the game and the pregame certainly standing out. “Once you get rolling in the game it definitely calms down a little bit but it is still the Super Bowl.”

A former two-time All-American, recipient of multiple all-region and All-GAC plaudits and a member of the Great American Conference’s All-Decade Team, Hudson’s eight snaps played in Super Bowl LV pushed him into the elite company of former Muleriders that

have competed on professional football’s biggest stage.

Hudson became just the third Mulerider to play in a Super Bowl joining 2005 SAU Sports Hall of Famer Dennis Woodberry, who played for the Washington Football Team in the franchise’s Super Bowl XXII win over Denver, and 2018 SAU Sports Hall of Famer Jordan Babineaux, who recorded three tackles and a pass breakup in Seattle’s loss to Pittsburgh in Super Bowl XL.

Signed by Tampa Bay as an undrafted free agent in 2018, Hudson was activated for the team’s final two games that season, before erupting the following preseason which propelled him onto the team’s initial 53-man roster in 2019. During the Super Bowl-winning campaign, Hudson played in 11 games, including all four of the Buccaneer’s playoff games.

Hudson’s playing career as a Mulerider served as the final stepping stone in his journey to the NFL. During his time in Magnolia, the playmaking pass catcher hauled in 143 passes for 2,152 yards and 25 touchdowns, and in each of his final three seasons he recorded at least 40

receptions for over 600 yards with at least six touchdown grabs.

Hudson and the Buccaneers officially begin their title defense on September 9 in a Thursday night primetime matchup at home against the Dallas Cowboys. Mulerider fans can get their first glimpse of the former Mulerider in his fourth year as Tampa Bay’s two-game preseason slate begins on August 14 against the Cincinnati Bengals inside Raymond James Stadium.

When asked about his role for the ’21 season, Hudson feels that it will be very similar to the title-winning season of 2020. “I feel that it will be a lot like last season. We still have Gronk [Rob Gronkowski], Cam [Cameron Brate], and OJ [Howard], so I just plan to do my job and whenever I get my chance to go in the game [I’ll] make the best of it. We all still have to grind through camp and prove that we are worth putting on this team.” He added, “I look forward to the competition.”

“ It was honestly unbelievable to think that I was on a Super Bowl winning team. ”  
Tanner Hudson



# The School of Graduate Studies

## A GROWING NEED

Though all universities have faced unprecedented recruitment challenges due to the pandemic, Dr. Trey Berry, president of SAU, is enthusiastic about this past year's graduate school enrollment and the quality of the programs.

"Those numbers continue to grow," Berry expressed of graduate programs and students. "We are seeing promising signs for the fall."

An exponential reason for this increase is due to the great programs offered and advisors. The most common response to "How did you hear about SAU's graduate school?" on applications is Word of Mouth. Students enjoy their experience in graduate school at SAU and tell their friends about it.

Several programs have received national recognition from Intelligent.com, Get Educated (Best Buy), Most Affordable Online Programs (College Consensus), and Most Affordable College (Online U).

The new Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Rural and Diverse Educational Leadership begins this fall with the first cohort of 32 students. "This is the first class, and we are extremely excited," Dr. Katherine Berry, Director of the Program said. The significance of the program in the lives of the students "speaks to what our mission is all about," she said.

Applications for all graduate programs have increased. Domestic and international applications for fall 2021 greatly exceed numbers from fall 2020.

"These are great signs our programs are growing even in the pandemic," Dr. Trey Berry said.

### School Counseling

The School Counseling program offers students a week-long, hands-on teaching/learning experience during each summer. Students come from as far as Alaska to participate in this immersive experience during Mulerider Kids College.

### Library Media Summer Intensive

During the Library Media and Information Specialist program's on-campus summer intensive, practicing teachers return to campus to participate in a library makeover project. The project proves to be an effective and beneficial activity for both the students and area participating public schools.

### Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)

The MAT program continues to grow as more working professionals choose to shift their expertise from the workforce to the classroom. Candidates who enter the program during the summer qualify to begin a teaching career during the fall. The program is only 30 hours long, making it easily completed in a 12-month period.

### Master of Business Administration

Contributing to the stability and growth of the School of Graduate Studies is the MBA program. The program has doubled in size during the past four years. The MBA Advisory Council aides in curriculum development, the overall program agenda, and is developing a mentor program for students. The innovation and leadership of Dr. Christie Hough continues to keep the MBA program a top pick among students seeking advanced business degrees.



Photos by Thomas Turner

(Above) Be an educational leader in your school and district – learn more about SAU's EDAS program at [web.saumag.edu/ed-admin](http://web.saumag.edu/ed-admin). (Right) To learn more about how SAU's Master of Public Administration will prepare you for the workforce, visit [web.saumag.edu/mpa](http://web.saumag.edu/mpa).





## The School of Graduate Studies Program Awards

### Master of Science in Computer and Information Science



#1: Intelligent Pick



#5: Most Hands-on Experience



#7: Best Value (Cyber Security Option)



#8: Industry-Leading Faculty

### Master of Science in Agriculture



#4: Best Online Masters in Agriculture

### Master of Science in Kinesiology-Coaching



#1: BestValueSchools.org



#6: Student Recommended

### Master of Arts in Teaching



#4: Best Elementary Focus



#20: Best Specialization Options

### Master of Education in Special Education



#5: Best Master of Education Degree

### Master of Education in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education



#10: Best Lifelong Education Focus

### Master of Business Administration Supply Chain Management Emphasis



#21: Most Affordable Masters

The College of Education

# A GROWING PROGRAM

The College of Education and Human Performance has a brand new educational space for the Departments of Teacher Education and Counseling and Professional Studies. Located between Wharton Nursing Building and Blanchard Hall, the state-of-the-art Education Building contains modern model classrooms, student meeting spaces, and for the first time in SAU's history, a home to all faculty and staff who serve in the two departments. Students and faculty will benefit greatly from the new facility, and the growth that the College has experienced in recent years will no doubt continue by having so many great new resources, said Dr. Trey Berry, president of SAU.

“Our students, faculty and staff are very excited about the new home for the Departments of Teacher Education and Counseling and Professional Studies. The new education building will facilitate the development of a community focused on excellence in educator and counselor development.”

Dr. Kim Bloss

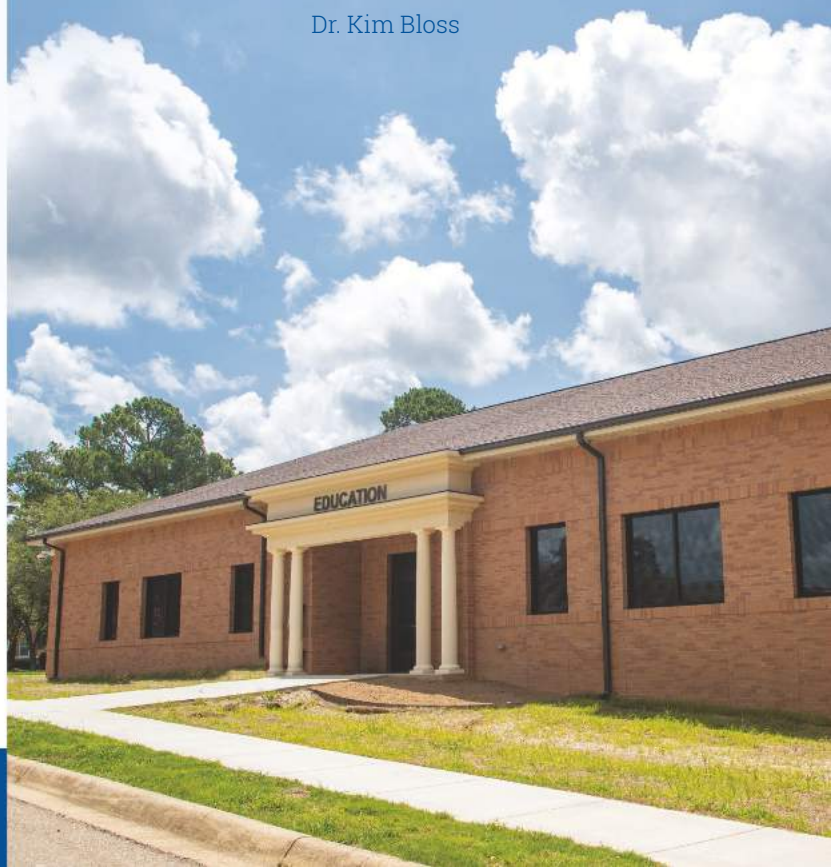






Photo by **Matthew Wilkins**

SAU is very proud of everyone who walked at this spring's Commencement Ceremony. SAU is sad to see them go, but is confident that they are well prepared for the rest of their lives.



Photo by **Matthew Wilkins**

Masks? On. Snow? Cold. Fun? You know it! Students made the most of the winter weather on campus this year.



Photo by **Matthew Wilkins**

Due to COVID-19, events at SAU had to meet mask and social distancing guidelines. This year's Jazz Concert took place in the Greek Theatre in March, and each performer had a special mask that allowed them to play their instruments and also be safe. Go Band!



Photo by **Matthew Wilkins**

SAU President Dr. Berry gives a warm welcome to SAU's new Mullerider, Malli Dooley! Malli looks forward to continuing the mascot's tradition of showing the public what SAU is all about.



Photo by **Matthew Wilkins**

SAU's Bell Tower, transformed into a beautiful candle as part of SAU's holiday lighting display, will stay illuminated as a Candle of Hope for the remainder of 2021. It serves as a symbol of promise that we are all in this struggle together as we battle COVID-19.

# around campus



Photo by **Matthew Wilkins**

A lot of normal SAU events looked far different this year, but thankfully, Greek life made the best of it! Students had a blast participating in the Greek Games on the campus mall in March.





Photo by **Matthew Wilkins**

(Above) To do our part to win the battle against COVID-19, SAU quickly provided vaccines for faculty, staff and students, meaning "normal" life is officially on the horizon. A huge thank you to the SAU Health Services staff for working so hard to take care of our Mulerider Family. (Left) With life slowly returning to normal, SAU students closed their spring semester by letting loose and painting beautiful portraits... all over each other!



Photo by **Matthew Wilkins**

Photo by **Matthew Wilkins**

The SAU Men's and Women's Track and Field teams got a running start when they hosted the fourth annual Dan Veach Invitational for the first time in two years. This was the first meet the Muleriders have hosted since the Mulerider Relays in February 2020.



Photo by **Thomas Turner**

Get one favorite SAU event, get another one FREE! Students bust a move and eat good food at the Headphone Disco and Feeding Frenzy, which happened at the same time this year.







## College of Education and Human Performance

- Tiauna Young '16, marketing educator and DECA advisor at Pea Ridge High School, received the Association Career and Technical Education (ACTE) New Teacher of the Year award, allowing her to compete for the ACTE Region IV New Teacher of the Year in the spring. In fall 2021, she will compete at the national level for the same award. It recognizes Career and Technical Education leaders who have made significant contributions toward innovative and unique CTE programs.
- The Instructional Facilitator/LEAD Teacher M.Ed., one of a number of advanced programs offered to educators through SAU, is offered fully online. It provides teacher leaders the opportunity to hone their craft while learning to apply the acquired skills in assisting other educators. It is the first approved program of its type to be offered in Arkansas. Dr. Denise Moseley '91, '11, assistant professor of education, is the program director.

## College of Liberal and Performing Arts



**Dr. Svetlana Paulson**

- History professor Dr. Svetlana Paulson recently published her article, "Face to Face with the Tsars' Capital: American Diplomats and Urban Spectatorship in Imperial St. Petersburg," in the prestigious *Journal of Russian-American Studies*. The article is based on Dr. Paulson's extensive research in American and Russian archives. A research grant sponsored her travels through SAU.



Windgate Foundation studio art scholarships were awarded to Kayla Morrow, Estelle Ramage, Jordan Scrivner, and Chanda Nail.

- A \$20,000 Windgate Foundation grant was awarded to the SAU Foundation for Studio Art scholarships in the 2020-2021 academic year. Four scholarships were awarded to Kayla Morrow, Estelle Ramage, Jordan Scrivner, and Chanda Nail. All four students were brought to tears when they received word that they were selected as recipients of the Windgate Foundation Scholarship. The Windgate Foundation recently funded an additional grant of \$25,000, expanding the annual scholarships available in the fall from four to five.



**Sarah Fincher**

- Sarah Fincher '21, who received her bachelor's degree in Social Work from Southern Arkansas University, was named the 2021 Outstanding Student for the Behavioral and Social Sciences Department and was recently accepted into the Texas Tech University Health Science Center Doctor of Occupational Therapy program. Fincher credits her success to her experience as a Mulerider.

## College of Science and Engineering

- The Master of Science in Agriculture program has been ranked fourth in the nation through OnlineSchoolsReport.com. The report encourages students to obtain an MS in Agriculture at SAU, noting the program incorporates modern technology into critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Student satisfaction with the program achieved 76.6 percent, and its admission rate registered 69 percent.
- Samantha Jones, a biology student at Southern Arkansas University, presented her research at the 104th Annual Meeting of the Arkansas Academy of Sciences, winning first place in the Medical Science and Parasitology division.



Dr. Puska Chapagain, Dr. Lionel Hewavitharana, and Alexander Golden collaborated on potential discoveries in future technologies.

- Dr. Puska Chapagain, Dr. Lionel Hewavitharana (Albamarle Professor), and Dr. Abdel Bachri collaborated with researchers from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock to discover the potential applications of gold nano dumbbells in future technologies such as nano/microelectronic circuitry, solar cells, and photonics. This work was published in March 2021 in the journal of the American Chemical Society, ACS Omega. The published article is an example of SAU's core vision involving students in top-notch research projects and providing them with the highest level of education.



## Rankin College of Business



**Dr. Jennifer Logan**

- Dr. Jennifer Logan, Puterbaugh Professor of Free Enterprise and director of the SAU Center for Economic Education and Research (CEER), was named the 2021 Honor Professor at the end-of-year faculty ceremony. Dr. Logan earned a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Oklahoma and joined SAU's faculty in 2007. At SAU, she teaches various classes in economics and finance, promoting economic decision-making and free enterprise. As CEER Director, Dr. Logan works with other educators to encourage economic education throughout the state and provide training opportunities for teachers in K-12 economics.
- The online MBA program, offered through the David F. Rankin College of Business is fully accredited body for colleges and schools of business. Fewer than five percent of all business programs worldwide are accredited by AACSB,

which indicates the quality of the program offered at SAU.

- Southern Arkansas University is the most affordable online MBA program in Arkansas, according to rankings by College Consensus.
- The Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center (ASBTDC) at Southern Arkansas University was honored for its quality rural outreach by receiving the 2020 SBA Arkansas Small Business Development Center of the Year award at a virtual awards ceremony. ASBTDC Director Janell Morton '11 and business consultant Kristen Pickett Cribb '16 were recognized for achieving performance milestones, helping new and established small businesses increase revenue and create and retain jobs, and opportunities for entrepreneurial development. As part of its innovative mission, the Center also educates the community about SBA programs and services.
- Rankin College of Business is adding a Healthcare Administration Degree approved to begin in fall 2021. The program was developed with help from alumni in the healthcare field. It will prepare graduates to understand and respect the value of people (patients, employees, community) in the healthcare system and prepare them to lead people, teams, and departments. The program will help meet the needs of the expanding healthcare industry and fit with other university healthcare degrees.
- The David F. Rankin College of Business at Southern Arkansas University announced the 2020 Hall of Fame Class, including Dr. David Rankin, president-emeritus of SAU; Mr. Ron LeMay '67, managing director and co-founder of OpenAir Equity Partners and CEO of Main Street Data; and business honoree Murphy

Oil Corporation. The Hall of Fame recognizes and memorializes remarkable business leaders and organizations for professional success, community service and dedication to SAU and the College of Business.



**Naija White**

- Naija White, a junior majoring in Information Systems at the Rankin College of Business, has been selected for the inaugural class of the Tjuana Byrd Summer Internship Program. White was among 15 successful applicants in this highly competitive process among those pursuing careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Naija will be placed in an internship at Windstream in Little Rock.
- Dr. Tim Wise, Jean McFadden Turner Professor of Business Management, had four cases selected for publication in Strategic Management and Entrepreneurial Cases edited by R. Stevens, M. Bressler, and L. Silver. The collection includes a case on Geauxsicles of Louisiana. Dr. Wise is well known for using the cases he writes on regional and national businesses in his courses.

# BETTER Together

**September 16, 2021**

A day to unite in demonstrating  
our Love and Loyalty for SAU  
leading into Family Day 2021!



Matching Funds  
will be available.

For more information visit:  
**[givingday.saumag.edu](http://givingday.saumag.edu)**





# Blaise Northern's battle with COVID-19

“ Walking into 2021 with him breathing and alive was a miracle. ”

Addison Bennett

The coronavirus pandemic stopped the world in its tracks a year ago, but many encouraging survival stories have emerged. One SAU student, Blaise Northern, of DeWitt, Arkansas, is a case in point. After suffering COVID-related multisystem organ failure last fall, Blaise celebrated his birthday in March at an inspirational party thrown by family and friends.

Though limited by the effects of the virus, Blaise expects to return to SAU full-time this fall, something his sister, Addison Bennett, calls miraculous. A junior at SAU, Addison helped take care of her brother when he first began suffering from the virus and helped arrange the party in DeWitt that, in a sense, welcomed him back to life.

“It was good to see Blaise happy and involved again,” Addison said. “Blaise got the social interaction he’d missed out on for so long due to his hospitalization and treatment.”

She, along with her family and Blaise’s close friends, Parker Cram and Adam Blazek, organized the socially-distanced party. They interacted with Blaise on a limited basis while enjoying food, a campfire, and sharing encouraging words.

“It was a celebration of his life,” explained Addison. “Walking into 2021 with him breathing and alive was a miracle. We sat around a fire and talked about our blessings. Everyone brought their own tent and spent quality time with Blaise. He needed that positivity.”

“Dr. Berry has been so great about keeping in touch, and the nurses at SAU did a great job of keeping an eye on Blaise,” Addison said. “He kept up with his school work online, and we are super-excited about him coming back to classes.”

Blazek said the party was his first chance to hang out with Blaise since the fall. “He’s become one of my best friends,” said Blazek. “We were sorry he couldn’t be around for the fall and spring semesters. As he gets better, he is able to do more things. The party was definitely a milestone in his recovery.”

Cram along with Blazek and Jacob Currie drove to DeWitt to help set up the birthday decorations. “We all came together to celebrate,” Cram said. “We did not know in November if Blaise would make it to his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. He battled to stay alive.”

Cram said Blaise is taking physical therapy, working to strengthen his heart. “I’ve been his best friend since first grade, and it was hard for me while he was in the hospital,” said Cram. “Now as he recovers, we cherish every moment. I am grateful my best friend is with us today.”

Addison said she and her family are grateful for the care shown by SAU, particularly Sheryl Edwards, assistant to the president, during Blaise’s battle.

“We definitely chose the right school,” she said.



Blaise Northern



# Running toward a challenge

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**Jacob Pumphrey**  
Director of Athletic Communications

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“Like a photographer adjusts their camera lens to capture an astounding shot, we must also adjust our perspective lens on life or else miss new possibilities.”

Those are wise words from Carley Hale, who has lived out that statement and taken advantage of abundant opportunities during her time at SAU. The Panhandle, Texas, native has experienced success as a Mulerider student-athlete with major plaudits coming both in the classroom and during athletic competition.

However, it took a persistent recruiting pitch from SAU Head Men's & Women's Cross Country and Track & Field Coach Tim Servis and brief indecision and uncertainty of wanting to compete collegiately by Hale as a high school senior to solidify Southern Arkansas University as her college home.

Despite Servis being out of scholarship money during that recruiting cycle, the talented Hale became a Mulerider student-athlete after accepting a \$1 offer, at 50 cents a semester, for her first year in Magnolia.

“I laugh now because running and this University have turned out to be the best things I've experienced thus far,” noted Hale. “It's so much fun, and the team is amazing. As for everything I've done and accomplished [athletically], it just happened. I never planned it, never! I didn't even know I was capable of achieving [such] awards.”

Hale's latest achievement occurred in late April as she graduated summa cum laude with a 4.0 GPA in Art and Design: Media and Marketing with a minor in English. Additionally, Hale is a two-time CoSIDA Academic All-American. At the Fourth Annual Mulespy Awards, Hale became the first student-athlete to be twice named the Murphy USA Female Scholar-Athlete of the Year.

Additionally, she has volunteered her time in roles such as serving as the Secretary of the

SAU Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, the Communications Director of ISI Ministries, and sponsoring a child in Bolivia through Child Fund International.

So what drives Carley Hale? Hint: it isn't any of the accolades listed above or the fact that she has a combined seven All-GAC honors in cross country and track and field or that she was named SAU's Outstanding Senior in Art and Design this past academic year.

“Honestly, being the underdog,” remarked Hale. “I love watching the underestimated ones do the unexpected and show out.” But that's not all. “Change, growth, and improving. That also drives me. I always want to become and do better than I did before.”

Certainly, the well-deserved honors that she has received in her collegiate career are a by-product of her desire to constantly improve, accept change, and experience growth, but “being the underdog”?

You wouldn't know it on the outside or even by looking at the laundry list of accolades that she has obtained, but Hale fights daily to live as normal of a life as possible, like that of an underdog. Hale suffers from narcolepsy with cataplexy which is a “chronic neurological disorder caused by the brain's inability to regulate a stable sleep-wake cycle” coupled with “a sudden loss of muscle tone that causes feelings of weakness and loss of voluntary muscle control.” (sleepassociation.org)

Diagnosed in February of her senior year of high school, Hale perseveres daily as the disorder has prompted intense attention to her nightly sleep patterns, a low-to-no sodium diet, and the overall daily struggle with a disorder that at times affects even the simplest of functions.

“If I could go back and change my condition, I

don't think I would,” noted Hale. “It has taught me so much about priorities, time management, to have compassion for others, and not to make assumptions about people.”

Hale's current plans will keep her at SAU, where she will serve as a member of the University's VISTA program while working towards her Master of Public Administration with an emphasis in Social Entrepreneurship. She also plans to compete in her final seasons with the Mulerider Women's Cross Country and Track and Field programs. But after SAU?

“I really want to change the world for the better. I know I'm only one person, but I truly desire to implement change for the overall good of humanity. Being a graphic design/marketing major, I hope to work with non-profit organizations. I have a passion for ministry and would love to do that along with [helping] non-profits.”

More insight on Hale's incredible story and her time as a Mulerider student-athlete will be available in the fall of 2021 on [www.MuleriderAthletics.com](http://www.MuleriderAthletics.com).

“ I love watching the underestimated ones do the unexpected and show out. ”

Carley Hale





# A Night Under the Stars with Mulerider Athletics

Fireworks. Figuratively and literally. Figuratively speaking, the Fourth Annual Mulespy Awards, which took place on Monday, April 26, sent the spring semester out with a bang. The stars of Mulerider Athletics gathered together for the first time in over a year underneath the bright lights on the playing surface of Wilkins Stadium, Rip Powell Field, for the department's annual celebration honoring top athletic performances, outstanding academic achievement, and senior recognition. Literally speaking, an impressive fireworks display, accompanied by music and action shots on the stadium video board, lit up the Columbia County sky and served as the proper ending to a special night on the campus of Southern Arkansas University.

Photo by **Mulerider Athletics**

(Below) Top award winners from the Fourth Annual Mulespy Awards conclude the night with a group photo to commemorate a challenging, but successful athletic year. From L to R: Murphy USA Male Scholar-Athlete of the Year Charlie Thomas, Murphy USA Female Scholar-Athlete of the Year Carley Hale, Male Newcomer of the Year Sander Jans, Female Newcomer of the Year Jessica Jones, Dr. Margaret Downing Female Athlete of the Year Victoria Taylor, Female Comeback Player of the Year Issah Traylor, Male Comeback Player of the Year Tucker Burton and Auburn Smith Male Athlete of the Year Aaron Lucas.





Claiming the department's top two athletic honors were Mulerider Men's Basketball senior point guard Aaron Lucas, who was named the Auburn Smith Male Athlete of the Year, and SAU Softball's senior right-handed pitcher Victoria Taylor, who earned the Dr. Margaret Downing Female Athlete of the Year award. The player of the year awards are given to the top Male and Female Athlete in a given year at SAU regardless of classification. The nominees must possess conduct that has been a positive influence for good and exemplifies the ideals of Auburn Smith and Dr. Margaret Downing, each an SAU Sports Hall of Famer who left an indelible mark on Mulerider Athletics during their storied tenures at the University.

For their outstanding academic achievement, extracurricular involvement, and athletic ability, the Murphy USA Male and Female Scholar-Athlete of the Year awards were presented to SAU Men's Basketball senior forward Charlie Thomas and Mulerider Women's Cross Country senior Carley Hale, respectively. Hale is the first two-time winner of the award after receiving the honor in 2018-2019.

Both student-athletes are members of the inaugural induction class of the SAU Chapter of Chi Alpha Sigma, the first and only national scholar-athlete society to honor four-year collegiate student-athletes who have excelled in both the classroom and in athletic competition.

In all, twenty-two student-athletes were a part of the ceremony that took place following the handing out of the Murphy USA Scholar-Athlete of the Year awards.

Special addresses by Murphy USA President and CEO Andrew Clyde, SAU President Dr. Trey Berry, and Peoples Bank Senior Vice President for Marketing and 2020-21 Mulerider Club Chair Debbie Arnold highlighted the middle portion of the evening. Clyde delivered a thought-provoking message on how student-athletes are more prepared to handle the world's adversity than any other student group on a collegiate campus. Berry's message included context about the Mulerider family and the importance of integrity. Arnold briefly spoke on the Mulerider Club and of its impact past, present, and future, on Mulerider Athletics.

In 2018, through feedback from the SAU Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, two new award categories were established with the Male and Female Newcomer of the Year Awards and the Male and Female Comeback Player of the Year Awards, with both now being presented annually. Capturing the honors in the newcomer category were Women's Basketball junior transfer Jessica Jones and Men's Tennis junior transfer Sander Jans. For the Comeback Player of the Year award, SAU Women's Track & Field sophomore Issah Traylor and Mulerider



Photo by Mulerider Athletics

Murphy USA President and CEO Andrew Clyde addressed those in attendance as the keynote speaker of the Fourth Annual Mulespy Awards. Murphy USA, the title sponsor of the scholar-athlete of the year awards, and Southern Arkansas University have a strong, longstanding relationship.

Baseball junior Tucker Burton claimed the hardware.

Fifteen outstanding student-athletes and one outstanding athletic training student were honored while 37 senior student-athletes were recognized and gifted a special framed letterman patch to commemorate their time as a Mulerider.

To read more about the individual seasons of the superlative award winners and to watch the Fourth Annual Mulespy Awards, visit [www.MuleriderAthletics.com](http://www.MuleriderAthletics.com).



## Congratulations to our champions

### Baseball

Led by fifth-year head coach Justin Pettigrew, the Mulerider Baseball team captured a share of its fifth Great American Conference Regular Season title and punched a ticket to the program's 13th NCAA postseason tournament. Southern Arkansas finished the year 30-16 overall with a 23-10 mark in GAC play. Six players were named All-GAC and four were selected to the Natural State Baseball All-Arkansas Team, including senior Austin Baker who received a pair of All-America honors.

### Softball

Behind an impressive 22-5 league record, the Mulerider Softball program claimed the Great American Conference's Regular Season crown for the third time in as many full seasons. With a 29-10 overall record, seventh-year head coach Jason Anderson's squad competed in the NCAA postseason for the sixth time in the program's history and for the fifth consecutive season. Eight players were honored as All-GAC selections with four players receiving all-region plaudits.

### Men's Basketball

It was an historic season for ninth-year head coach Andy Sharpe's SAU Men's Basketball team as the Muleriders earned the program's first-ever trip to the NCAA postseason. In a shortened, spring-only season, the Muleriders posted a 15-6 record, claimed a share of the GAC Eastern Division title and finished as GAC Tournament Runner-Up. Three players earned GAC accolades highlighted by All-America senior Aaron Lucas' GAC Player of the Year and Defensive Player of the Year honors.



## First Financial Bank Poultry Education Facility/Baseball Player Development Center Dedications



Contributed Photos

Donors, Board of Trustee Members, and administration dedicated the First Financial Education Poultry Facility through an "egg cracking."



Contributed Photos

Caleb Plyler '04, SAU alumnus and Arkansas Farm Bureau Board Member, shared how excited he was to see SAU providing these educational opportunities in agriculture.



Contributed Photos

Chris Hegi, CEO of First Financial Bank, shared their interest in partnering through making the poultry education facility a reality.



Contributed Photos

During the dedication, attendees toured the facility and learned of the various aspects of the facility which features the latest equipment from Chore-Time.



Contributed Photos

The University and Mulerider Athletics recognized alumni and friends who made the Johnson-Dawson Player Development Facility possible.



Contributed Photos

Donors enjoyed a tour to experience the multi-faceted facility.



Contributed Photos

Justin Pettigrew, Head Baseball Coach, shares the impacts of the player development facility.



Contributed Photos

Amy Dawson throws out the first pitch on behalf of the Charlie Dawson family.



Contributed Photos

Norm DeBriyn throws out the first pitch on behalf of the Willard and Pat Walker Charitable Foundation.



Contributed Photos

Jeff White '98, Executive Vice President, throws out the first pitch on behalf of Bodcaw Bank.



Contributed Photos

Pictured from left to right: Dr. Berry, Patrick Johnson, Clayton Johnson, Haley Johnson, Lillian Johnson, Kim Johnson, Pat Johnson, and Coach Browning.



# LOVE AND LOYALTY

## Campaign Update

### Number of Donors

**4,023**

Goal: 4,500  
87% Towards Goal

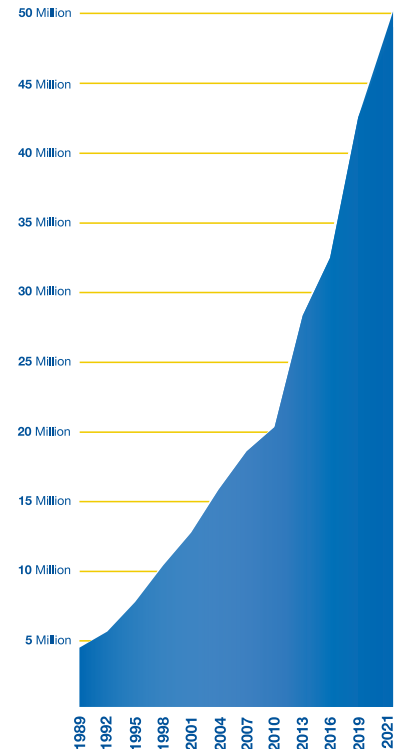


### Total Raised

**\$27,412,380**

Campaign Goal: \$22,275,000

### Endowment Growth



### Number of Gifts



**16,209**

### Campaign Timeline



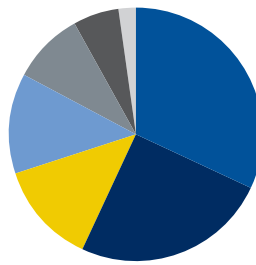
**5 Years**

(Ending Sept. 30, 2021)



**Over 100 New  
Endowments Initiated  
During the Campaign**

### Where They Gave



- Student Enrichment – 32%
- Academic Programs – 25%
- Annual Giving/Other – 13%
- Athletics – 13%
- Student Life and Community Engagement – 9%
- Faculty and Staff Support – 6%
- Revitalized Facilities – 2%

Southern Arkansas University™

# LOVE AND LOYALTY

## and Legacy

**October 8-9, 2021**

Celebrating the completion of the Love and Loyalty Campaign at SAU's Homecoming.  
Learn more about the campaign at [www.sauloveandloyalty.com](http://www.sauloveandloyalty.com).





INTRODUCING the

# Mulerider® Alumni App

**The One App  
Every Mulerider Needs.**



Search for '**Mulerider Alumni**' and download  
our free, easy to use app today!



# Southern Arkansas University™ **ALUMNI ASSOCIATION** **SCHOLARSHIP**

The SAU Alumni Association Board of Directors is proud to present the 2021-22 recipients of the SAU Alumni Association Scholarships. During 2020, the board restructured the alumni scholarships to service two students; one incoming freshman and one senior. The committee selected the scholars through a blind review process.



## *Senior Scholar* **Samantha Clanton**

Hermitage, Arkansas  
Animal Science Pre-Vet.  
3.90 SAU GPA

Daughter of  
Kristi Clanton McDuff '97

“ I am so grateful to be the recipient of the Senior Scholarship. To be chosen out of the many applicants means the world to me. Following in my mom's footsteps as a Mulerider has really made my experience at SAU very special for me. ”

Samantha graduated from Hermitage High School in 2018. During high school, she won multiple national championships for livestock judging and forestry through the Future Farmers of America (FFA) organization, where she also served as the Hermitage Chapter President for two years. She was a competitive livestock exhibitor and won many grand and reserve champion awards. She currently has a 3.9 GPA and has made the President's or Dean's list each semester at SAU. She is in the Ag Club, Pre-Health Club, Pre-Vet Club, Sigma Sigma Sigma Sorority, and the Arkansas Cattlemen's Association. She enjoys volunteering at district FFA competitions and many other youth events. After graduating from SAU, Samantha strives to earn a spot at an accredited veterinarian school on her journey to become a licensed vet. During 2020, Samantha tragically lost her father. She considered her father one of her biggest supporters and is determined to become a vet, a goal her father always encouraged her to accomplish.



## *Pat Weaver Scholar* **Clara Beth Souter**

Magnolia, Arkansas  
Nursing  
4.16 MHS GPA

Daughter of  
Kelli Broome Souter '93

“ I am so honored to receive the Pat Weaver Scholarship and eager to continue the tradition that my mom started at Southern Arkansas University. ”

Clara Beth Souter graduated from Magnolia High School in May 2021. Clara Beth loves to challenge herself and enjoyed taking AP classes. She successfully juggled many extra-curricular activities, such as the Yearbook Committee and National Honors Society. She was also a team leader for the Magnolia Softball and Volleyball Team. She enjoys volunteering for Laundry Love, Stewpot, Salvation Army, Ozark Mission Project, and the Southern Christian Mission. After college, Clara Beth plans to work in a critical care unit for a couple of years to earn working experience before earning her certificate to become a Nurse Anesthetist.



Learn more and apply today at  
[www.sau alumni.com/scholarships](http://www.sau alumni.com/scholarships)





# Legacy Family THE REEVES



Contributed Photos

(1st from Left) Granddaughters of Barney Hugh Reeves '62: Top left, the late Whitley Reeves Barnard, top right, Samantha Reeves-Thurman; bottom, Lindsey Ruth Reeves, Mallory Emma Reeves. (2nd from Left) Orma Pearce Reeves, Mr. Reeves' mother, pictured while she was a student at the Third District Agricultural School. (3rd from Left) Barney and the late Nelda Reeves. Barney believes deeply in the spirit of SAU. (4th from Left) Barney Hugh Reeves and his sons, Cris, Gregory and Sam.

If words could summarize the passion Barney Hugh Reeves feels toward Southern Arkansas University, those words might be faith, family and friends. "I believe in those things as God intended," said Mr. Reeves. For him, establishing a legacy of support for the Mulerider spirit has been one way of exemplifying that belief.

Magnolia native Reeves used his time as a student at Southern State College in the 1950s as a springboard for careers in industry, politics and law enforcement. Graduating from Magnolia High School in 1954, he studied Industrial Engineering at SSC before moving to California for a job. But prior to his studies at the college, his mother attended the Third District Agricultural School in 1919, and his wife's mother received an LPN degree at Southern State. Two of Mr. Reeves' sons graduated from SAU, another son attended summer school at SAU to supplement his university studies before heading to law school. And one daughter-in-law graduated from SAU with a teaching degree. His brother and sister attended, and two of his grandchildren are alumni, with a third grandchild attending SAU before attending culinary school, and a fourth grandchild for a semester before becoming a US Marine. His granddaughter recently received a master's degree from SAU, and a host of his nieces and nephews have called SAU home.

Scholarships provided to the University through the Reeves family include: the Barney Hugh Reeves Endowment for Criminal Justice or Criminology; the Lucy Ann Reeves Wyrick Scholarship Endowment, to a student in the College of Business; the Lenna Frances Sanders

Furlow Scholarship Endowment for Nursing; the W. O. "Bill" Furlow Scholarship Endowment for Criminal Justice; the Elsie Orma Pearce Reeves Elementary Education Scholarship Endowment, to an Elementary Education major from Columbia County; the James Harold Reeves Music Scholarship Endowment, provided to a student participating in music at SAU; the Whitley Reeves Barnard Finish Strong Scholarship, to benefit a College of Business student majoring in Marketing; and the Nelda Ruth Furlow Reeves Scholarship, recently created by Mr. Reeves' son and daughter-in-law. These funds have made it possible for many students to enroll at SAU and enjoy fulfilling careers.

Reeves, who turns 85 in July, amassed 70 hours at SSC before accepting an industrial job in California. He returned to Arkansas in 1976 and started his own Magnolia business, Reeves Aluminum, which he owned and operated for several years. "The Good Lord kept taking care of me," he said.

Reeves indulged his love of politics by assisting with several local campaigns and serving as a justice of the peace before becoming Columbia County judge, an office he held for six years. "Our judge was retiring," he explained, "and I decided I would run. I wanted to help our county."

In addition to serving as county judge, Reeves was an active civic volunteer. A member of First Baptist Church, he was a Little League and Boys' Club volunteer and member of the Dorcheat Community Rural Water Board. He also served as an

International Jaycee Senator and an auxiliary deputy sheriff. In January 1995, he was named director of the Alcoholic Beverage Control Enforcement Division, serving for nine years before retiring in 2004.

He and his wife had three sons: Gregory Jess Reeves, Anthony Cris Reeves, and Samuel Marvin Reeves, seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. He noted that one of his great-grandchildren "already has his Mulerider t-shirt!"

In 2003, the Arkansas Senate adopted a resolution commending his leadership in the City of Magnolia, Columbia County and the State of Arkansas.

Through the years, Reeves and his family have had one other major commitment: their continued support of SAU. "About 30 people directly tied to my family have gone through SAU over the years," he said. "We have always considered it important, both to our family and Columbia County."

Reeves said he always stressed the importance of SAU as an economic engine. "It is one of the largest employers in our county. It definitely helped my children in their careers," Reeves emphasized, "and it helped me. We have always been involved with SAU." He praised the growth of the campus as well as enrollment over the years and all of the University presidents he has known. "They have been pillars of our community," he said.

Reeves encouraged alumni giving. "It's so important to remember SAU and to help SAU because it has given so much to all of us," he said.





# The Be Right Back Crew

After a life-changing experience as a student at Southern Arkansas University, L'Tarius Heath '05 '19 of Dallas, Texas, now organizes worldwide trips for fellow Mulerider alumni, sharing his passion for travel with people who also share his passion for SAU.

"Coming to SAU literally changed my life," enthused Heath, "I love SAU, and I love Magnolia. My brother, TaVarius "Bubba" Heath, is also an SAU alumnus. We never miss a year to visit. SAU is like a second home for us. It is so much fun traveling the world together and with other Muleriders."

In Dallas, Heath operates a travel agency, Platinum Getaway Vacations, and regularly puts together packages for fellow Mulerider alumni. This year, the group traveled to Mexico for seven days. "The whole purpose is just to reconnect with people from SAU, but it's open to anyone," Heath explained. "When I first started going on these trips, I just invited friends. That group has grown from five or six people to over 30 or 40. This July, for our Los Cabos trip, we had 170 attend."

Heath majored in biology at SAU but has always enjoyed travel. "It's great to get outside your comfort zone and experience other cultures firsthand," he said. "Coming to SAU from Daingerfield, Texas, allowed me to make a lot of good friends who were international students. That prepared me for a life of travel."

The travel group is called the Be Right Back (BRB) Crew. "We tell the world we will Be Right Back because we will go on a trip, come back and go on another one," he said. This year, plans are set for the group to travel to Jamaica and Greece. Rome and Dubai are a couple of Heath's favorite getaways, and he looks forward to traveling to China and Singapore in the future.

"My wife, LaTonja, and I are really only home during the week," he laughed. "On weekends, we'll say, let's go to San Francisco or New York. We love going different places all the time."

Heath books the trips to ensure the group has exclusive access to unique excursions, swimming pools, and other

popular amenities. At Los Cabos, the group enjoyed a private beach party, went on tropical excursions, and went sightseeing aboard a yacht. "To be honest, the BRB Crew would not be as successful without the help of my wife or my sister, Shan Heath. They have been the backbone of the organization," he said.

"It's safer and so much more fun to travel as part of a group," he said. The group, which varies in size, travels together 12-14 times per year. "I'll set up activities, but we don't all have to do the same thing," Heath said. "I tell people, 'it's your vacation. If you want to sit by the pool for three days and read a book, that's your vacation. But we do have activities planned so that when you get there, you're not wondering what to do. We can all participate in things together.'"

It's all about sharing experiences and making memories. However, the 2020 pandemic did cause the group to postpone some trips. "We had a Carnival cruise package that we had to cancel," Heath said, "and we had a trip set for June to South Africa that we canceled. A lot of us are just tired from the pandemic and ready to travel."

For Heath, the fun all stems from SAU. "This is my extended family," he said of his Mulerider travel crew. "It is good to catch up with people. There are a couple of guys I hadn't seen in 20 years who brought their wives to Mexico. It was a big SAU homecoming in Los Cabos."

Travel makes Heath more aware of and grateful for what we have in the United States. "We are truly blessed," he said. "I want to see all these great things that I read about growing up." One of his travel goals is to visit every state capital in the U.S. "I have only about 20 more to go on that list," he said with a laugh. "I also want to visit 40 to 50 countries. So far, I've seen 18 or 19."

If you are interested in traveling with the Be Right Back Crew, contact [info@berightbackcrew.com](mailto:info@berightbackcrew.com) or visit [www.berightbackcrew.com](http://www.berightbackcrew.com). You can find them on Facebook at the Be Right Back Travel Group.

"I am in the process of planning a Greek trip and would love for all Greeks from SAU and other universities to be a part of it," said Heath. "Anyone would be welcome to join us."



# Senior CELEBRATION

## SAU ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

### Welcoming our New Alumni

The SAU Alumni Association (SAUAA) hosted a special drive-thru celebration for Mulerider Seniors who graduated in April 2021. During the event, held on April 15, seniors drove through Butler Circle at the SAU Alumni Center for a special celebration parade to welcome them to the SAU Alumni Family. They also received a free SAUAA T-shirt. "We are hopeful that this is the beginning of a fun, new tradition for the Alumni Association. It is always special to welcome more Muleriders to our Alumni Family, and we look forward to staying connected and cheering them on in their life goals," said Megan McCurdy, Director of Alumni Relations. The Mulerider Alumni Family has now grown to more than 32,000 living alumni located across the globe.



To watch our quick recap video, visit  
[www.saualumni.com/seniorcelebration](http://www.saualumni.com/seniorcelebration).



Contributed Photos

Seniors remained in their cars for the parade. They received an SAUAA t-shirt and were entered to win special prizes from the Alumni Association.



Contributed Photos

The event was held at the newly-renovated SAU Alumni Center, located on the SAU Farm Road behind Wilkins Stadium and the Mulerider Track.



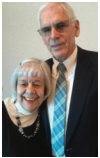


**1940 – 1949**



**Eleanor Corinne Vetrano '42** celebrated her 100th birthday at her home on May 13, 2021. Family members and close friends were present to honor her on this very special occasion. Letters from President Bill Clinton, Governor Asa Hutchinson, and Governor Greg Abbott were received congratulating her on her 100th birthday. Governor Hutchinson congratulated her "from one Razorback fan to another" and Governor Abbott commissioned her as "an Honorary Texan." She also received an Apostolic Blessing from Pope Francis in her honor.

**1960 – 1969**



**Charles '68 and Jane Purtle '78** celebrated their 50th anniversary on December 22, 2020. They were wed in Abilene, Texas, December 22, 1970. They were missionaries to the Dominican Republic before returning to the area in 1980. Jane was a high school Spanish teacher in Prescott and Gurdon high schools before retiring in 2008. Since then she has volunteered her time as secretary and treasurer at Calvary Baptist Church in Hope. Charles has been a tree farmer as well as the pastor of the Hispanic congregation of Calvary Baptist Church for about 10 years. He also served as a chaplain at Tyson Foods for 20 years. Jim and his wife, Michelle; Brad and his wife, Stephanie; and Beth and her husband, Augusta Owens, who all live in Texas. They have four grandchildren: Jackson, Simon, Bailey, and Sydney Purtle. The whole family celebrated in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

**1970- 1979**



**George Wheatley '70** recently celebrated his 25th anniversary with Waste Management in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he serves as Senior Manager of Market Planning.

**Ken '71 and Kay (Porterfield) Bland '71** recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.



**Mike Waters '73**, Magnolia School Board president, was recognized on February 8, 2021, as Superintendent John Ward presented Waters with a plaque from the Arkansas School Boards Association (ASBA). The ASBA recognized Mike for his service and dedication as he recently served as director on the ASBA Board of Directors.



**Bill Skains '76** was recently elected president of the Branson Board of Aldermen.



**Tinka Rogers '77** recently earned her real estate license and is starting a new career with Crye-Leike, Realtors in Benton.



**Dr. Samuel D. Smith '77** recently retired as Chief of Pediatric General Surgery for Arkansas Children's after a 28-year career. Throughout his career, Dr. Smith impacted the lives of thousands of

children and their families; mentored and inspired numerous students, residents and fellows; and, built a division of six surgeons serving both hospitals in the AC system.



**Ken Williams '77** retired from Murphy USA (MUSA) after 44 years of service. He has been the longest-tenured employee at MUSA for a number of years. After graduating from SAU, he immediately began a career at MUSA and has been there since.

**1980-1989**



**Bruce Maloch '80**, Vice-Chairman and Legal Counsel of Farmers Bank and Trust is celebrating 35 years with the FB&T.



**Joan Dempsey '81** was recently elected Vice-Chairman of the Board of SRC, Inc., of Syracuse, New York.



**Debbie Friday '82** is retiring from Farmers Bank & Trust as the Deposit Operations Representative after 38 years of service to the community.



**Phillip Lansdell '82** recently received the 2020 AHSAA State Merit Award. Phillip is the Athletic Director for the El Dorado School District. The State Merit Award

is presented by individual state athletic director associations annually, the most prestigious award a state presents to an individual in conjunction with the NIAAA for outstanding leadership and meritorious achievement in interscholastic athletic administration.



**Eugenia Boulden-Ford '84** recently received the Meet Me at the Court Black History 2021 Community Person of the Year award in El Dorado, AR. Eugenia worked for the Department of Human

Services, Division of Children and Family Services for 28 years and retired in 2013. She returned back to the same department in Union County in 2014 for another six years and retired again in 2020.



**Mandy Antoon '88** recently published a children's book, "Edna the Almost Inch Worm." Purchase your copy from Amazon.



**Leann Byrd '88** recently accepted a position as K-5 counselor at North Heights Community School in the Texarkana Arkansas School District.



**Eric Cowling '88** was named President/CEO of Helena Chemical. Helena is headquartered outside of Memphis in Collierville, Tennessee. Across the country, Helena has over 4,000 employees that

work in about 450 branch locations, as well as division offices. Founded in 1957, Helena Chemical Company (now Helena Agri-Enterprises) has grown to be one of the nation's foremost agricultural and specialty formulators and distributors in the United States. Products and services offered include Crop Protection Products, Fertilizer and Fertilizer Application Services, Specialized Nutrients, Seed and Seed Treatments, Financial Services, and Precision Ag Services and Software. Helena also offers its own line of products — Adjuvants, Bioscience, Branded Fertilizers, Nutritional, Seed Treatments and Value-Added Products — through the Helena Products Group (HPG).



**Vicky Chism Walters '88** retired from the Mena School District after 33 years in education. She served as counselor at Holly Harshman Elementary School.



**John Armour '89** recently accepted the position of Chief Financial Officer at Methodist Hospital San Antonio. An 811-bed acute care hospital, Methodist is the flagship of the HCA

San Antonio Division. This complex facility is a partnership between HCA and Methodist Healthcare Ministries, the largest non-public funding source of community health care in South Texas. John currently serves on the SAU Alumni Association Board, the SAU Love & Loyalty National Campaign Cabinet, and the Rankin College of Business

Advisory Council. John received the SAU Distinguished Alumni Award in 2006.



**Leann Rogers '89** was recently promoted to Vice President of Key Client and Consultant Strategy at Arkansas Blue Cross Blue Shield. Leann has been with AR BCBS for six years.

**1990-1999**



**Ginger Payne '91** was selected as Magnolia Central Elementary School Teacher of the Year. She has spent her entire 30-year teaching career at Magnolia Schools.



**Boomer Brown '92** led the Nashville Scrapperettes Softball Team into the Arkansas High School state tournament as Region Champions. Brown and the Scrapperettes were

semifinalists with a record of 31-2.

**Dr. Stacy Nason Hendricks '92**, Associate Dean of the Stephen F. Austin Perkins College of Education Student Services and Advising Center was promoted to full professor.

**James and Janet Watkins '92** of Vandervoort were named the Polk County Farm Family of the Year. Their selection is part of the 74th annual Arkansas Farm Family of the Year program. They will be visited by a set of judges to determine eight district winners, who will be announced June 15. All winners are judged on their farm production, efficiency, management, family life and rural/community leadership. The state Farm Family of the Year will be announced in December at the Farm Family of the Year luncheon in North Little Rock.



**Kyle Slayton '94** led the Nashville Scrappers Baseball Team into the Arkansas High School state tournament. Slayton and the Scrappers were quarterfinalists with a record of 26-6.



**Barbara Pearson '94** was named Magnolia Chamber of Commerce Educator of the Year. She started her teaching career in 1998 and has been teaching high school science at Columbia

Christian School since 2012.



**Dr. Jason Ellen '95** was named 2021 Oklahoma Optometric Physician of the Year. The Oklahoma Association of Optometric Physicians gives this award to a doctor who not only serves patients but also serves their profession and the community in which they live and practice.





**Dr. Lee Smith '96** was recently promoted to Superintendent of Mena Public Schools. Dr. Smith is also an affiliate professor for the University of

Arkansas at Little Rock, where he teaches masters and doctoral level courses for Educational Leadership and Administration.



**Chris '97 and Denise Sweat '00** of McCaskill (Hempstead County) were recently named the 2020 Arkansas Farm Family of the Year. The Sweats have two daughters,

17-year-old Sara and 13-year-old Anna. Their 505-acre farm consists of natural mixed timber, along with hay, cattle, registered seed stock, hair sheep and Californian and Jersey Woolly rabbits.



**Shelly Malone '98** was recently selected as the 2020-21 SHAPE Arkansas Elementary Teacher of the Year by The Arkansas Society of Health and Physical Education (SHAPE). This award

recognizes PE teachers who promote and support quality physical education in Arkansas and a physical education curriculum that supports the highest quality for excellence in teaching. Shelly is employed at East Side Elementary School in Magnolia.

## 2000-2009



**Traci L. Hughes '00** recently started a new position as Regional Administrator of Programs for Individual Case Management (ICM), Inc.



**Shaneil "P.J." Yarbrough '00** of El Dorado, Arkansas, was recently appointed to the ForWARd Arkansas Board of Directors. Currently, she is a training advisor with the University of Arkansas

Early Care and Education Projects (ECEP). She assists in researching and writing professional development curricula within the early childhood field, presenting and teaching ECEP courses to participants, and coaching early childhood professionals across Arkansas. P.J. was Miss SAU in 1999 and competed in the Miss Arkansas pageant. P.J. is married to Larry D. Yarbrough, Sr. They are parents to two sons, Larry D., Jr. (L.J.) and Lance.



**Stephen Collier '02** recently celebrated 10 years as the Director of Information Technology with Magnolia Regional Medical Center.



**Jonathan Gosdin '03** was recently named the new Monticello High School principal.



**Rhett and Holly Hanry '03** have been selected as the Union County Farm Family of the Year. Their selection is part of the 74th annual Arkansas Farm Family of the Year program.

They will be visited by a set of judges to determine eight district winners, who will be announced June 15. All winners are judged on their farm production, efficiency, management, family life and rural/community leadership. The State Farm Family of the Year will be announced in December at the Farm Family of the Year luncheon in North Little Rock.



**Brian Lee '03**, a Spring Hill native, was named 2021 Hempstead County 20 Under 50. He has worked in finance for 18 years since he graduated from SAU with a BBA.

Hailing from a long line of farmers, Brian decided to utilize that knowledge of agriculture and combine it with his advanced math skills by working in agricultural and commercial lending to help other farmers achieve their dreams and goals. Brian also serves his community by working with United Way. He is extremely dedicated to this organization that keeps 99 percent of all funds raised here in Hempstead County. As a part of United Way, Brian works with groups like the local boy and girl scouts, Rainbow of Challenges, and the Hempstead County Closet, a program helping foster children. One program with United Way that especially inspires him is a partnership with Harvest Texarkana; it is a backpack program that sends food home with children who are in need. Currently, over 70 children in the Hempstead County area are receiving assistance with this program. Brian also serves as a board member for his church, Spring Hill Christian Church.



**Maria Mercedes Pittman '03** was selected as the Magnolia High School 2021 Teacher of the Year. Maria teaches Spanish at MHS.



**Jordan Babineaux '04** recently released a new book, "Pivot to Win: Make the Big Plays in Life, Sports, and Business." The 2018 SAU Sports Hall of Famer celebrated the well-deserved

success of his new book and is now a #1 International Best Selling Author (Amazon's #1 in two categories in the U.S. and a best-seller in Canada and the United Kingdom). Grab your copy on Amazon or Walmart.com.



**Cassandra Montgomery Stevenson '04** recently graduated from the University of Arkansas with a Master in Education degree focusing on Adult Life-Long Learning. Cassandra

plans to reopen her adult education center (Opportunities for Success Education Center) offering GED Test Preparation and other adult education programs. She will serve communities in Dallas and surrounding areas.



**Caleb Plyler '04** has been appointed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue to a three-year term on the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research

Board. His term begins in February 2021. He owns Plyler & Son Charolais in southern Hempstead County and serves as chairman of the Arkansas Beef Council.



**Justin Reynolds '04** was recently promoted to director of Organization and Member Programs at Arkansas Farm Bureau. In his new role, Reynolds will assist with supervision and direction for the

organization's district directors, who work with county-level Farm Bureaus to implement legislative, leadership, and agricultural outreach programming. He will also coordinate work with the women's Leadership Committee, the Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee, and the eight Collegiate Farm Bureau chapters in Arkansas.



**Jimmy Walker '04** was recently hired as Assistant Superintendent at Columbia Christian School and will work alongside current superintendent, Ted Waller. Jimmy began his educational career at

CCS in 2002 as a teacher and coach. He served as the school's principal from 2004-2012. Over the last three years, Jimmy and his family served as missionaries to the Philippines, where he established The Darlene Christian Academy.



**Claude Wells '04** recently announced the opening of Lafayette County Family Practice Clinic in Lewisville, AR. The clinic is now open and taking new patients.



**Brigitte Biley-Olatunji '05** was recently selected 2020-21 Teacher of the Year at Arkansas High School in Texarkana, Arkansas.



**Wilt Leak '05** recently celebrated 20 years with Magnolia Motor Company. His unparalleled work ethic and determination have been an integral part of Magnolia Motor

Company's growth and success. He prides himself on being a key element in taking Magnolia Motor Company from a five-car operation to the largest independent pre-owned dealership in south Arkansas.



**Tina (Hofstetter) Moore '05** recently accepted a new position at the Texarkana Arkansas School District (TASD) Digital Learning Academy where she will be teaching virtual sixth, seventh, and

eighth grade math.



**Grant D. Smith '05**, Software Lead Engineer for the Department of Information Systems for the State of Arkansas, was named as one of Arkansas Business's 40 Under 40 Honorees for

2021. The annual feature highlights 40 people under the age of 40 who are making a significant impact on their companies, organizations and communities. Grant was featured on the cover of the Summer 2020 edition of *The Stater*.



**Brandon Stout '05** was recently honored by MDRT as a 2021 MDRT Court of the Table and received his membership certificate for membership in the 2021 Million Dollar Round Table. Brandon

currently serves as a Regional Financial Consultant for Farm Bureau Financial Services.



**Amanda Warren-Newton '05** received the Award of Valor during the 82nd Annual Magnolia-Columbia County Chamber Banquet. Amanda is the owner of Columbia County

Ambulance Service and has been instrumental in the coordination of the county's COVID-19 clinics.



**Candi Bailey '06 '12** recently accepted a position at Springdale High School as a teacher and head volleyball coach.



**Gregory Edwards '06** recently started a new position as Channel Partner Manager at HR&P Solutions in the Houston area.



**Matt Jackson '06** was recently promoted to Director of Education and Outreach for the Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation's Organization and Member Programs. In his role, he will be responsible

for coordination and implementation of education programs for the organization. Additionally, he will work closely with FFA, 4-H and vocational agriculture programs in the state.



**Deniesa Jamerson '06** and her co-worker, Chris Ludwig, were named Business People of the Year at the 82nd Annual Magnolia-Columbia County Chamber Banquet.



**Melissa (Holland) Shores '06** was recently appointed Cass County Treasurer by the Cass County Commissioners' Court.





**Hugh '07 and Lindsay Bragg '04** have been selected as the Columbia County Farm Family of the Year. Their selection is part of the 74th annual Arkansas Farm Family of the Year program.

They will be visited by a set of judges to determine eight district winners, who will be announced June 15. All winners are judged on their farm production, efficiency, management, family life and rural/community leadership. The state Farm Family of the Year will be announced in December at the Farm Family of the Year luncheon in North Little Rock.



**Anthony "Tony" Falconio '07** received the designation as a certified emergency manager from the International Association of Emergency Managers.



**Jessica Talley '07** was recognized as Magnolia East Side Elementary School's 2021 Teacher of the Year. Jessica has taught at the Magnolia School District for 14 years.



**Thomas Watson '07** has been named the Emerson High School principal beginning in the 2021-22 school year.



**Jessica Ferguson-Bilbo '08** was named Teacher of the Year at College Hill Elementary School and recognized for her 13 years of service as a librarian.



**Alan Garrett '08** was recently promoted to Vice President/Loan Operations at Peoples Bank. Alan has six years of banking experience. He rejoined Peoples Bank in February 2017 as a

loan assistant. Alan gives back to the community by participating in Relay for Life, Magnolia Blossom Festival, SAU Mulegating, Emerging Leaders Council for SAU, SAU Alumni Board and the Applied Skills Internship for SAU.



**Curtis Box II '09** recently released a new book, funded by Kickstarter. This book is a love letter to his daughter in celebration of the magical stories they create during their daddy-daughter

talks. One day, she asked her dad, "Would a fox eat an orange?" They wrote "Fox Eats a Rainbow" to find the answer. In this story, we follow a curious fox who discovers a rainbow and decides to take a bite. Readers discover the colors, fun animals and tasty fruits. This story reminds us to embrace our imaginations and follow creativity wherever it may lead. Purchase your copy on Amazon or Walmart.com.



**Adam Camp '09**, Head Softball Coach for Taylor High School, recently led the Lady Tigers to become the 2021 Class 1A State Champions. This was Adam's fifth state championship in softball and fourth consecutive title. Adam has also recently been named Softball Coach of the Year and was presented the award at the Arkansas Prep Banquet in Little Rock, Arkansas, on June 19. Earlier this year, he also led the men's golf team to secure the state championship.



**Matt Cantley '09** recently accepted a new position as Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Coordinator at Interfor Sawmill in Monticello, Ark.



**Zach Fowler '09**, Associate Principal of Pleasant Grove Middle School in Texarkana, TX, has been selected to represent the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP)

as the Region 8 Outstanding Assistant Principal of the Year. TASSP recognizes outstanding principals and assistant principals from the twenty region Education Service Centers in the state. School administrators are nominated and chosen by their peers within their regions. Nominations are based upon exemplary performance and outstanding leadership. As a Region 8 winner, Mr. Fowler is eligible to compete for the state title of Texas Assistant Principal of the Year.



**Mandy Gray '09 '18** Started a new job as the counselors' secretary at Magnolia High School.

## 2010-2019



**Jenna Brown '10** was recognized as "Rookie of the Year" Teacher for her hard work and dedication to students this year. Jenna is currently a teacher at Springhill Elementary of Greenbrier

Public Schools.



**Everett Green '10 '20** recently earned his M.Ed. in Educational Leadership. He currently serves as sixth grade math and science special education teacher and football, basketball, and track

coach at Marshall Jr. High in Marshall, Texas.



**Cannon Lester** has been named the head coach of the new baseball program at SouthArk Community College in El Dorado, Ark.



**Caitlin Pennington '10** was recently named to Zweig Group's 2021 ElevateHER Cohort for Garver. For over four years, Caitlin has served Garver as a corporate recruiter, helping the firm find and attract the industry's best talent. She will now use her insight and expertise to help solve recruiting and retention challenges throughout the industry.



**Brent Walker '10** was recently named Columbia County Officer of the Year. Brent is a Trooper First Class with the Arkansas State Police. Brent was previously employed by the SAU Police



**Valerie (Brown) Arnold '11** recently started a new chapter of her career and is now serving as an optometrist at C Klear Vision Optique in Little Rock, Ark. Valerie currently serves on the SAU Alumni Association Board of Directors.



**Kathleen Dingman '11** was a recent recipient of the AHSCA Outstanding Coach Award presented by The Arkansas High School Coaches Association. Coaches are nominated by their conference or have won their state championship. They are voted on for this award by the AHSCA membership. Kathleen coaches the girls swim team at Magnolia High School.



**Janell Morton '11 and Kristen Cribb '16 '18** recently received the SBA Honor for Excellence and Innovation award by the U.S. Small Business

Administration for the Arkansas Small Business and Technology Development Center at SAU's contributions to the small business community. Janell currently serves as the Center Director and Kristen Cribb currently serves as the Business Consultant.



**Wayne Banks '12 '14** recently announced his retirement from SAU Tech after a 26-year career. He served as college registrar for 21 years.



**Kristi Bennett '12** was named the new Texarkana, Arkansas, Police Chief. Kristi is the department's first woman chief of police and first new chief in 31 years.



**Heather Creech '12** was named Magnolia Middle School's Teacher of the Year for 2020-21. Heather teaches eighth grade English.



**Kayla Rasberry '12** recently graduated with her M.S. in Library Science from the University of North Texas (UNT). Kayla presently serves as Circulation Supervisor and Public Services Librarian for the Magale Library at Southern Arkansas University.



**Jarrin Walton '12 '15** '19 was recently promoted to Talent Search Program Director for SAU.



**Raven Wagner '12** was promoted to Assistant Vice President of Lending at Union Bank of Mena, Ark.



**Justin Wiedower '12** '14 has accepted a new position and will be leading Quitman Agriculture Education and FFA.



**Dianna Burrow '13** recently accepted a new position at Citi as a Compliance Escalation and Incident Reporting Vice President.



**Elliott Endel '13** recently earned his real estate license with the National Association of Realtors and the Texas Real Estate Commission. He lives in Fort Worth, Texas, with his wife, Mary Katherine Odom-Endel '12, and their two children, Phillip and Katie. Elliott is an agent for Gregory Group, a division of Fathom Realty.



**John Michael Ferguson '13** recently started a new position as Managing Pharmacist at Walgreens on Main in Little Rock. John received his Doctorate of Pharmacy from Harding University in

May 2017.



**Josh Proffit '13** and his wife, Bethany, recently opened Biscuit Blue Nutrition -- a fun and tasty way to be healthy, energized, and focused -- in Helena, Arkansas. Josh is also a staff pharmacist at Hickory Hill Pharmacy and is a board member for the East Monroe County Fire Department.



**Lauren Rowden '13** recently adopted two-year-old Dakota Glyn on November 24, 2020. Dakota had been a foster placement in the home for 677 days.

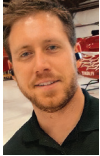


**Matthew Wise '13** recently accepted a position as the Pastor of Families & Assimilation with The Journey Church in New York. Matthew and Kaylee, his wife, moved to Manhattan in May.





**Colton Capps '14**, a Spring Hill native, was named 2021 Hempstead County 20 Under 50. Colton has many roles in the local agricultural community to promote progress for Hempstead County. He is a loan officer at Diamond Bank, with the bulk of his lending rooted in agricultural loans. Colton is also co-owner of JACO Meats, a meat processing plant that is the first USDA inspected and approved beef slaughter facility in Hempstead County. Colton also has his own cattle farm with about 90 head of Beefmaster cows. In all of these roles, he is allowed the privilege of helping other farmers, and in effect, all residents of Hempstead County.



**Colby Goecke '14** recently began a new career at Survival Flight as an emergency medical pilot.



**Kelly Dionne Muldrew '14 '17** was recently selected to be the Head Girls Basketball Coach at Hope High School.



**Elizabeth Roshell '14** recently started a new position as Area Coordinator at University of Arkansas at Little Rock. While at SAU, Elizabeth was the president of the Residence Hall Association, was on the Student Activities Board (SAB), and is a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.



**Staysha Sisk '14** recently started a new position as an accountant at J. Richard Morgan, CPA in Smackover, Ark.



**Arlesia Taylor '14** has been named to the Board of Directors at the AROSE Foundation. Its mission is to provide learning opportunities, support, and resources for future success to youth in trauma-prone communities. Arlesia is a native of Flint, MI, and a former educator at International Academy of Flint. She worked with youth affected by the Flint water crisis. She made it her mission to help cultivate and empower young people to achieve greatness.



**Dr. Leah Jamison '15** recently passed her National Physical Therapy Examination (NPTE) and is officially Dr. Leah Jamison DPT, PT. She recently started a new job as a Physical Therapist at Baylor Scott & White Institute for Rehabilitation in Dallas, Texas.



**Austin Lester '15** has accepted a position with Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation as the District Director for the South Central District. His responsibilities include serving as liaison between

county Farm Bureaus and the Federation in the 13 counties in his district. He also will assist in the development, implementation, coordination and evaluation of programs and activities in the district.



**Jessica Voss May '15 '18** recently accepted the math facilitator position at Camden Fairview Elementary School.



**Fonda Miller '15** was recently promoted to Vice President/Loan Compliance at Peoples Bank in Magnolia, Ark. Fonda joined Peoples Bank in July 2011 as a loan assistant. She has a total of 24 years of banking experience, nine with Peoples Bank. Fonda supports her community by participating in Relay for Life, Magnolia Blossom Festival, SAU Mulegating, and Leadership Magnolia Alumni Association.



**Kinder Patton '15 '20 and Brooke Haynes '16** recently began a new catering and events business, Oakstreet Girls Catering and Events, located in Northwest Arkansas. To learn

more, check out "Oak Street Girls" on Facebook.



**Shelby Sanders '15** recently graduated from Chamberlain University College of Nursing with a Master's of Science in Nursing.



**Jimi Ann Scott '15** recently accepted a position at Bobby Barrett Elementary as the third grade math and science teacher. Jimi is currently earning her Master of Arts in Teaching at SAU and completed her first semester of graduate school with a 4.0.



**Trey Tatum '15** was among 30 Arkansas State Police recruits who received their trooper commissions recently. Graduation followed the conclusion of a 14-week training academy session.

The 30 recruits were hired from a field of 172 applicants previously certified by the Commission on Law Enforcement Standards as Arkansas law enforcement officers. The graduating class received 860 hours of specialized training and classroom instruction since reporting to the Arkansas State Police Training Academy in Little Rock on January 19. Trey will be assigned to Highway Patrol Division, Troop F, Union County.



**Ashley Howard '16** recently received the Nurse of the Year Award at JRMHC. Ashley has been with Jefferson Regional Medical Center for four years and was a DAISY Award winner in October of 2018. Jefferson Regional serves the 280,000 residents of 11 counties in Southeast Arkansas.



**Mason Powers '16** recently joined the financial planning team at Capital Resource Management.



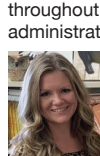
**Norma Smith '16** was recently featured in the "Q&A with Arkansas Influencers + Social Media Creators" article from the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*.



**Andrew Coburn '17 '21** recently accepted a position with MTech-Systems as a software project manager. Andrew will be working out of the Northwest Arkansas area covering all poultry operations for the Atlanta, GA, based company.



**Kate Kidd '17** has been selected to participate in Cohort 6 of the IMPACT Arkansas Fellowship. The IMPACT Arkansas Fellowship was designed to benefit low income schools throughout Arkansas by preparing future administrators



**Caroline Lester '17 '20** was recently named the Arkansas Farm Bureau Foundation 2020 Outstanding New Ag Educator. Caroline, originally from Vilonia, Ark., earned the top new

ag instructor award for her work at Westside, where she has 208 students involved. Eighty students are also members of the school's FFA program. While at SAU, she was involved in the Agri Club, Collegiate FFA and Sigma Alpha.



**Karleigh Shaffer '17** recently accepted a position as veterinarian at Countryside Animal Hospital in Hot Springs, Arkansas.



**Jaela Talley '17** was recently promoted to AVP/Operations and Innovation at Peoples Bank in Magnolia, Ark. Jaela began her banking career in 2015 and has experience as a teller,

internal auditor, special projects, and accounting and operations officer. She also serves as secretary to the Peoples Bank Board of Directors and the Golden Oaks Bancshares, Inc., Board of Directors.



**Colton Taylor '17** recently completed pharmacy studies at UAMS College of Pharmacy.



**Ashley Vickers '17** recently earned her Master of Biomedical Sciences degree at Kansas City University and has been accepted to ASU Medical School.



**Connor Williams '17** was recently promoted to AVP/Financial Operations at Peoples Bank in Magnolia, Ark. Connor began his banking career January of 2015 and has served as logistical

support assistant, executive assistant and financial analyst. He also serves on the bank's IT steering committee, investments committee and is the logistical support assistant supervisor.



**Sunni Wise '17** was recently featured by "The Communications Group, Inc." for the weekly "Women in Agriculture" spotlight. She was featured on episode #8 of the WIN

Podcast. Currently, Wise is the program advisor at the Arkansas Department of Education in the Division of Career and Technical Education. She also serves as Arkansas Agricultural Education & FFA's Executive Secretary. As an advisor, Sunni provides support for more than 50 agriculture programs, coordinating professional development opportunities and curriculum for teachers across the state. As Executive Secretary for Arkansas FFA, Wise spends much of her time on the road, traveling with the State FFA Officer Team and coaching them to lead and set an example for their peers. The inspiration Sunni found in FFA during her youth has never stopped. According to her, the promising students and members she works with each day continue to inspire her - and many who know her will tell you she inspires them.



**Forrest Woods '17, M.D.** recently earned his Doctor of Medicine, from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.



**Shelby Borek '18** has accepted a position at Superscapes Landscape and Irrigation as a commercial account manager.



**Gabrielle Davis '18** graduated on May 8 with her Juris Doctorate degree from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University. During her time at SAU, Gabrielle

was a President's Ambassador and a member of the Honors College, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Black Students Association, Student Government Association, Student Activities Board, Political Affairs Club, Heritage Singers, Chamber Singers, National Society of Leadership and Success, and a Greek Banquet Scholar. She was also SAU's Homecoming Queen in 2016.

Gabrielle has also created the Gabrielle Davis Give Back Fund LSAT Scholarship. The scholarship will provide funds for one LSAT for a graduating college senior or recent college graduate.





**Michael Dexter '18** was recently named as Director of Professional Development at the Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing. BCEN is the national certification body for emergency, transport and trauma nurses.



**Bryce Fincher '18** recently earned her Master of Science in Genetic Counseling degree at UAMS. She has accepted a job in the molecular genetics lab at the University of Alabama at Birmingham as a genetic counselor.



**Reagan Grubbs '18** recently completed her master's degree at the University of Arkansas where she studied Agriculture Education & Extension with an emphasis in 4-H Youth Development.



**Stacy Lawrence '18 '20**, an engineering, chemistry and MBA graduate, recently left his career in aerospace engineering and accepted a position with the United States Army as an officer and helicopter pilot.



**Elizabeth Mangus '18** started her new career as an Arkansas middle school cheer coach. Elizabeth was captain of SAU's Competitive Cheer Squad for part of her time at SAU.



**Taylor Wiseman '18** was recently featured by "The Communications Group, Inc." for the weekly "Women in Agriculture" spotlight. She is featured on episode #10 of the WIN Podcast. Currently, Wiseman is a staffer for the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry.



**Laura Bolt '19** recently completed pharmacy school at UAMS. Laura graduated with honors, as a Rho Chi member and as the recipient of the Olsen Excellence Experiential Education Award.



**Mary Cole '19** was named the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media Representative and won the University of Memphis College of Communication and Fine Arts Creative Achievement

Arts Award.



**Abby Forbes '19** was recently awarded the DAISY Award. A patient nominated Abby as a result of her extraordinary nursing care. The DAISY Foundation expresses gratitude to nurses with programs that recognize them for the extraordinary skillful, compassionate care they provide patients and families. The expression of gratitude helps nurses always remember the unforgettable

impact their care has on patients and families, inspiring nurses to provide extraordinary care not only with their brains but also with their hearts.



**Jeff Foreback '19** was recently named an assistant principal at Arkansas High School. So far in his career, he has taught math and coached basketball, softball, track and volleyball. He has also served as the Dean of Students. Jeff is committed to excellence, and his goal as a leader is to make a positive impact.



**Lily Giles '19** was recently hired as Financial Aid Analyst at Southern Arkansas University.



**Ashley Henthorn '19** recently graduated with a Master of Science in Operations Management from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.



**Daniel Pletcher '19** recently accepted the position of Outreach Coordinator for the Upward Bound Program at Southern Arkansas University.



**Zeb Prothro '19** recently started a new position at Beebe School District. He now serves as Assistant Principal at Beebe Middle School.



**Neha Shrestha '19** was elected to serve in the Southwestern Psychological Association as an undergraduate. In early April, she was elected to serve as the graduate student representative in the same organization.

## 2020 - 2021



**Shanara Ellis '20** was recently hired as Financial Aid Specialist at Southern Arkansas University.



**Kyle Fitzgerald '20** accepted a position with GenWealth Financial Advisors as a Financial Advisor.



**Jennifer Freeman '20** was recently hired as Payroll Specialist at Southern Arkansas University.



**Pearlline Gill, MPA '20** recently self-published a book discussing her life and educational experiences at SAU. The book, "Pearls of Wisdom: My Journey to Success," can be purchased on Amazon.



**Ta'Ru Harris '20** recently earned a featured role at Tecumseh Theatre in Ohio.



**Colten Lindsey '20** recently started a new position as a recruiter at Southern Arkansas University.



**Tyler Linton '20** recently accepted a teaching position at Yocum Primary School in the El Dorado School District.



**Nina Martinez '20** recently accepted a position as an assistant band director at the Magnolia School District.



**Emily McFerrin '20** recently accepted a new position as fifth grade writing teacher for Texarkana Arkansas School District (TASD).



**Jacob Misenheimer '20** was recently hired as assistant registrar at Southern Arkansas University.



**MaKenna Thomas '20** and **Chelsea Fagan '20**, local AmeriCorps VISTAs, recently graduated from Southern Arkansas University with Bachelor of Arts in Public Health degrees. Both Thomas and Fagan have volunteered full-time as AmeriCorps VISTAs at SHARE Foundation in El Dorado, Arkansas, since June 2020. SHARE Foundation recently recognized both for their recent graduation and amazing work and dedication to help alleviate poverty in Union County.



**Ashley Stewart '20** has been accepted and will attend the Edward Via School of Osteopathy in Monroe, Louisiana, beginning this fall.



**Trey Davis '21** was recently hired as the head basketball coach of Magnolia Junior High School. Trey played on the Mulerider basketball team during his time at SAU.



**T.C. Graham '21** was accepted into the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and will begin medical school in Little Rock during August.



**Emma McWilliams '21** recently accepted a position teaching third grade science and social studies at Magnolia Central Elementary School.



**Cameron Nichols '21** was accepted into the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. Cameron will begin medical school in Little Rock during August.



**Katherine Pletcher '21** was accepted into the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. Katherine will begin medical school in Little Rock during August.



**Jesse Tompkins '21** was accepted into the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. Jesse will begin medical school in Little Rock during August.

## Weddings



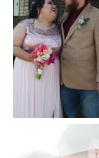
**Ty '16 '17 and Hannah (Springer) Alford '17 '18** were married on November 7, 2020.



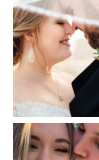
**Michael '16 and Bryce (Fincher) Brown '18** were married on May 28, 2021.



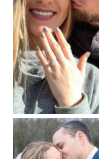
**Sam and Sarah (Higginbotham) Codomo '15** were married on April 9, 2021.



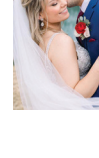
**Paul and Carmen (Galvan) Cole '14** were married on March 20, 2021.



**Cory '10 and Jordan (Linker) Davis** were married on March 13, 2021.



**Daniel '18 and Payton (Sims) Gann '19** were married on May 22, 2021.



**Jared and Stephanie (Nelson) Gold '16** were married on March 12, 2021.





**Caleb and Jayci (Whitley) Haltom '14** were married on November 20, 2020.



**Danny and Emily (McPherson) Harley '14** were married on May 1, 2021.



**Dalton '20 and Katie (Graham) Keith '20** were married on January 2, 2021.

**Jacob '20 and Kailey (Fenton) Knotts '20** were married on July 24, 2021.

**Austin '15 and Alec (Seale) Minor '17** were married on May 22, 2021.



**Aaron '17 and Amanda (Crye) Stanich '17** were married on October 24, 2020.



**Brett and Chelsea (Ivy) Suggs '16** were married on December 12, 2020.



**Bryce '17 and Macy (Moseley) Szadewicz '18** were married on December 5, 2020.

## Little Muleriders®



**David Bell '14 '17 and Haley (Jones) Bell '13** announce the birth of their son, Lance William Bell, born on April 23, 2021. He weighed 8 lbs. 15 oz. and was 19 inches long.



**John Tyler Cribb and Kristen Cribb '16, '18** announce the birth of their Daughter, Saylor Elisabeth-Kay Cribb, born on May 17, 2021. She weighed 7 lbs. 0 oz. and was 19 inches long.



**Colby '07 and Whitney (Black) Hall '08 '19** announce the birth of their daughter, Stevie Sutton Hall, born on February 1, 2021. She weighed 8 lbs. 2 oz. and was 20 inches long.



**Jes '17 and Lindsey Holtzclaw** announce the birth of their son, John Monroe Holtzclaw, born on November 21, 2020. He weighed 9 lbs. 7 oz. and was 21 inches long.



**Chris and Chelsea (Lewis) Lash '12** announce the birth of their daughter, Cora Lash, born on February 15, 2021. She weighed 5 lbs. 14 oz. and was 18 inches long.



**Christopher '16 and Megan (Bodiford) Phillips '16** announce the birth of their son, Reece Emmett Phillips, born on May 24, 2021. He weighed 7lbs. and was 20 inches long.



**Blaine and Melissa (Holland) Shores '06** announce the birth of their son, Jeter Shores, born on March 6, 2020. He weighed 5 lbs. and was 17 inches long.



**Cody and Candace (Ederington) Stringer '15** announce the birth of their daughter, Charleigh Ann Stringer, born on November 20, 2020. She weighed 7 lbs. 14 oz. and was 20 inches long.



**Kyle and Carly (McCluskey) Wise '13** announce the birth of their son, Thomas Rio Wise, born on November 8, 2020. He weighed 9 lbs. 1 oz. and was 20.5 inches long.

## In Memory of

### 1940-1949

**Melba Jewell Anthony '41**

November 24, 2020

**Elizabeth Driscoll '42**

March 21, 2021

**Frances Haile '45**

March 14, 2021

**Leoda Walker '42**

February 28, 2021

**Cora Ellen Norman '45**

January 11, 2021

**John Alexander, Sr. '47**

April 17, 2021

**Robert L. Cummings '47**

July 22, 2020

**Billie Jo Jones '47**

February 7, 2021

**Calvin Peters '48**

April 20, 2021

**Mary Ella Martin '47 '55**

January 8, 2021

**Bonnie Kaufman '48**

September 25, 2020

**Julia "Tootsie" Marian Schmidt '48**

January 18, 2021

### 1950-1959

**JoAnne Powell '51**

March 24, 2021

**Leatrice Joy Landers '52**

February 2, 2021

**Mary Evelyn Jameson '53**

January 14, 2021

**James "JW" Walter Rowe '54**

February 7, 2021

**Robert Arlen Scott '54**

January 15, 2021

**Wanda Frances Stewart '54**

January 20, 2021

**Emil Sanka Breckling '55**

July 20, 2020

**Bobby Ray Hood '55**

April 3, 2021

**James Robert Wilson '55**

January 15, 2021

**George Franklin Barnes '56**

March 28, 2020

**Lewis Kennedy '56**

January 26, 2020

**Clyde J. Arnold, Jr. '57**

December 23, 2020

**Lester Richard Darden '57**

January 16, 2021

**Morris Harvey McKinnon '57**

April 6, 2021

**Rodney Thayer Chambers '58**

March 29, 2021

**Donald Ray Henderson '58**

April 14, 2021

**Charlie Martin '58**

November 14, 2020

**Winston Wilson '58**

January 24, 2021

**Leslie Nicholas Longstreth '59**

December 19, 2020

### 1960-1969

**Marjorie Harrell '60**

November 15, 2020

**Andrew Knight '60**

October 23, 2020

**Mary Ann Waters '60**

January 20, 2021

**William Hugh Ezelle '61**

March 7, 2021

**Ronald F. Johnson '61**

April 28, 2020

**Carlton Rhodes '61**

April 19, 2021

**Cleve Arden Bond '62**

April 1, 2021

**John William Harrell '62**

March 31, 2021

**Pat Roy Lewis '62**

November 11, 2020

**Roxy Ann Pike '62**

October 22, 2020

**Danny Ray Greenfield '63**

November 11, 2020

**Janie Tipton Matthews '63**

April 20, 2021

**Sammie Carr '64**

November 12, 2020

**Henry L. Greene '64**

February 2, 2021

**James Harold Harvey '64**

January 15, 2021

**Robert "Bob" Thomas Aaron '65**

February 26, 2021

**William "Bill" Goodwin Hammond '65**

May 5, 2021

**John Holt Tisdale '65**

April 21, 2021

**Norman Jackie Vines '65**

February 1, 2021

**James Mac Allen '66**

January 5, 2021

**Michael Bird Camp '66**

January 31, 2021

**Ruddy Joe Morgan, Jr. '66**

January 19, 2021

**Carolyn Hall '67**

November 28, 2020

**James Dwight McDonald '67**

February 15, 2021

**Thomas Allen Owen '67**

January 2, 2021

**Bonnie Salley '67**

February 13, 2021

**William Wayne Thomas '67**

January 9, 2021

**Sidney West '67**

September 5, 2020

**Don Lynn Bryan '68**

December 10, 2020

**Chloris "Cody" Niebergall '68**

March 1, 2021

**Tommy Peace '68**

April 12, 2021

**Troy Waller '68**

March 5, 2021

**Charles Arthur Hadden '69**

October 28, 2020

**Carol Royal '69**

November 19, 2020

**Carol "Susie" Sue Williamson '69**

May 17, 2020

### 1970-1979

**Robert Alan Colvert '70**

December 7, 2020

**John Hardage '70**

October 23, 2020

**Danny Hayes '70**

January 27, 2021

**Paula Jackson '70**

April 5, 2021

**Allen Wayne Timmons '70**

February 17, 2021

**Alvin Lee Barker '71**

April 16, 2021

**Gregory Isaac Brown '71**

January 16, 2020

**John Jerry '71**

January 10, 2021

**Donald Casper Kilgore '71**

March 8, 2021

**William Rayburn Austin III '72**

February 23, 2021

**Lewis Orus Gentry '72**

March 25, 2021

**Lanelle Atkinson Purdy '72**

April 25, 2021

**David Brooks Rider '72**

February 25, 2021

**Donna Jeanne Zahniser '72**

March 10, 2021

**Halbert Dale Dodson '73**

January 30, 2021

**Gary Frank Mauney '73**

April 16, 2021

**Earnestine McDonald '73**

July 6, 2020

**Cecile Nelson '73**

March 31, 2021

**Carrie Mae Bowie '74**

April 8, 2021

**James Aubrey Granger '74**

November 20, 2020

**David H. Nale '74**

April 23, 2021

**Betty Sue Hutcheson '74**

September 28, 2020

**Chief Master Sgt. Ronald C. Hall '74**

January 15, 2020

**Doug Neely '74**

January 4, 2021

**Mildred Maddox '75**

August 13, 2021

**Judith (Judy) Ann Choate '76 '99**

May 4, 2021

**Charles Sheppard "Shep" Miers '76**

November 5, 2020

**Joey Douglas Clark '77**

March 2, 2021

**Mary Elizabeth Griffith '78**

December 22, 2020

**Jane Jackson '78**

January 1, 2021

### 1980-1989

**Delores Anita Kerr '80**

November 29, 2020

**Mitzi Lyn Garlington '80**

May 4, 2021

**Helen Williams Landes '80**

January 12, 2021

**Marilyn Daigre '81**

June 5, 2020

**Amelia Sue McAdams '83**

February 28, 2021

**Vonner Dean McKnight '83**

December 12, 2020

**Chad Steven White '83**

November 22, 2020

**Sheila Cannon '86**

March 29, 2021



**Syble Smith '86**  
 November 29, 2020  
**Leesa Stephens '86**  
 January 17, 2021  
**Rebecca Anne Blount '87**  
 April 15, 2021  
**Karl Moody '87**  
 September 11, 2020  
**Cheryl Elaine Bell '89**  
 February 18, 2021  
**Leland Callaway '89**  
 February 4, 2021  
**Donna McCoy '89**  
 December 4, 2020  
**1990-1999**  
**Debra Benson '92**  
 January 31, 2021  
**Janis Gail Millican '94**  
 March 30, 2021  
**Stephany Yvonne Morris '94 '04**  
 December 15, 2020  
**Rose Bailey '95**  
 February 3, 2021  
**Todd Manuel Griffin '95**  
 November 23, 2020  
**Mary Ellen Hughes '97**  
 November 13, 2020  
**Christy Michelle Owens '98**  
 February 11, 2021  
**Amy M. Thomason '99**  
 January 28, 2021  
**2000-2009**  
**Judy D. Hudman '03**  
 December 9, 2020  
**Porcha L. Johnson '05**  
 April 29, 2021  
**Quantrell Robertson '08**  
 March 19, 2021  
**Brandon Cole Hogg '09**  
 May 19, 2021  
**Amy Michelle Hodge '10**  
 March 3, 2021  
**2010-2019**  
**Megan Marie Whitson '17**  
 April 2, 2021  
**2020-Present**  
**Valerie Kay Davis '20**  
 August 20, 2020  
**Katherine Makalia Hall '20**  
 February 11, 2021  
**Sharnes Bea'Sha McGhee '20**  
 January 2, 2021  
**Staff, Faculty, Students, and Friends**  
**William Clifton Carpenter**  
 March 31, 2021  
**William L. Cook**  
 November 17, 2020  
**Jeremy Crew**  
 July 17, 2020  
**Eric Joseph Engelberger**  
 February 23, 2021  
**Olga English**  
 May 3, 2021  
**Mary Harsh**  
 May 13, 2021  
**Carrington S. Jackson**  
 August 19, 2020  
**Sharnes B. McGhee**  
 January 2, 2021  
**Helen Membreno**  
 April 3, 2021  
**Patsy Jean Reece**  
 December 25, 2020  
**Frank Schambach**  
 April 5, 2021  
**Joshua Keshun Smith**  
 August 11, 2020  
**Albert Stecker**  
 January 5, 2021

# In Loving Memory

## Tribute to Dr. Larry McNeal

It is with great sadness that we share the passing of Dr. Larry McNeal, Class of 1962. He was so very special to our Mulerider Family.

Larry began his journey at SAU (formerly Southern State College), after being offered a football scholarship. He was a fullback for the Muleriders and enjoyed telling stories of his days practicing on the field with no water breaks, and making memories with his teammates in Cross Hall. Little did McNeal know, he would later be inducted into the SAU Sports Hall of Fame in 2017.

Dr. McNeal graduated from Southern State in 1962, and was proudly married to the homecoming queen, Judy Sessoms, of Mount Holly. While he wanted to coach, McNeal realized there was a shortage of teachers and signed to coach and teach at Camden. He then went on to become a graduate assistant at Auburn University, teaching swimming, soccer and weight training.

In 1965, Southern State was hiring during an enrollment surge and McNeal began serving SAU as the health, physical, and recreation teacher and intramural sports director. Dr. McNeal taught many sports activities, including kinesiology, theory of gymnastics, personal and community health, and a graduate workshop in gymnastics. For decades, he taught in the summer Upward Bound program. He inherited an intramural program of 11 activities, which he expanded to 50.

Dr. McNeal received his Ed.D. degree from North Texas State University in 1971. He served as the academic affairs assistant for more than three years, but missed teaching so much that he asked administration if he could return to the classroom. McNeal enjoyed being the director of continuing education and community service. He expanded the program to include courses in swimming, gymnastics and children's theater. He also helped implement a kindergarten program, similar to today's Mulerider Kids College.

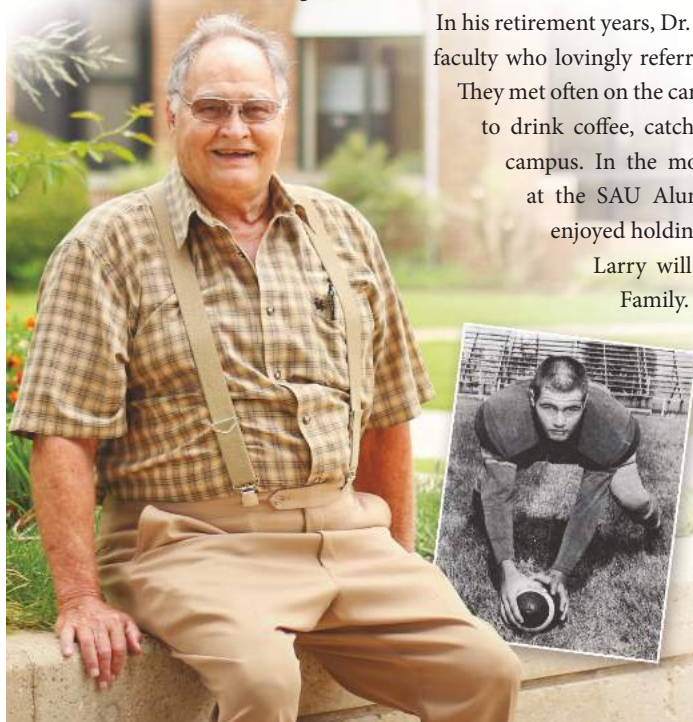
In the early 1980s, McNeal began working for the College of Education. McNeal was passionate about educating students and was involved in restoring SAU's accreditation -- saving programs and jobs. During this process, McNeal began teaching part-time and began working in the Advising Center before retiring after 50 years of service to SAU.

McNeal supported SAU students in many ways. He believed so strongly in SAU and the mission of higher education. Dr. McNeal was the longest-running donor to the SAU Foundation with 45 consecutive years of giving. He always said he believed that alumni owe their careers to SAU and have a responsibility to give back.

In his retirement years, Dr. McNeal helped lead a group of retired faculty who lovingly referred to themselves as "The Dinosaurs."

They met often on the campus of Southern Arkansas University to drink coffee, catch up, and reminisce of their days on campus. In the most recent years, The Dinosaurs met at the SAU Alumni Center, where Dr. McNeal also enjoyed holding his annual family reunion.

Larry will be greatly missed by his Mulerider Family. He lived a beautiful life serving others.







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JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE

*Dr. Margaret Downing's*

90<sup>th</sup>

*Birthday*

August 21 • SAU Alumni Center • 2 p.m.

RSVP by August 7 at  
[www.saualumni.com/downing90](http://www.saualumni.com/downing90)