

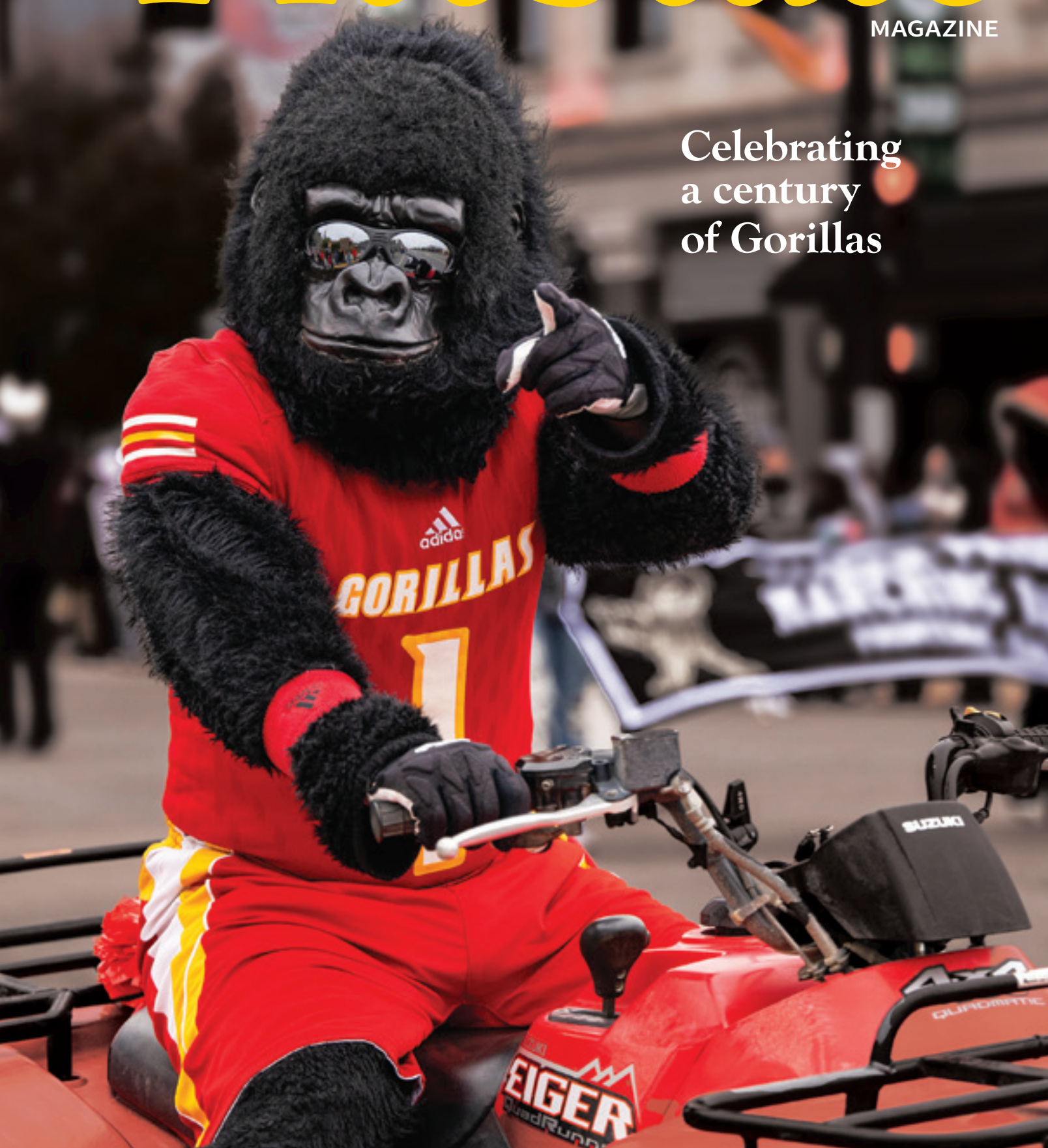
January 2024



# PittState

MAGAZINE

Celebrating  
a century  
of Gorillas





## From the editor

My younger son became a fourth generation Gorilla last fall (above right), which of course took me on a nostalgic stroll down Memory Lane. He loves being a drummer for the Pride of the Plains Marching Band — one of my fondest memories as a student, and one of my brother's (also a drummer, below right!). Playing the same pep tunes in the stands at Carnie Smith Stadium to help the Gorillas get a win, marching down Broadway with floats and Homecoming royalty... there was nothing like it!

Some of his experiences are new, though. His concert space is the magnificent Bicknell Family Center for the Arts, where he and other students perform on the same stage from which a former U.S. president, a former First Lady, and numerous celebrities have delivered remarks. It was built 10 years ago on the site that his grandmother — my mom, Janeil Atterbury (Education '62, MS '67) and late dad, Larry Bryan (Education '62, MS '64), once lived in married housing.

Having been connected to this campus now for a half century, I now have perspective to know why it's so special: because cherished traditions remain even as change occurs. New programs, new titles, new buildings help move us forward, while we continue to embrace from generation to generation the heritage and culture that is uniquely Pitt State.

We strive to bring you a little of both in this magazine twice each year — a look back, and a look to the future. We'd love to hear from you: what are your favorite memories from your time here?

— Andra Stefanoni



6



12

The PittState Magazine is the official magazine of Pittsburg State University. Circulation: 65,500.

The PittState Magazine is produced by Creative and Strategic Communication for alumni and friends of the university.

### For extra copies or information:

PSU Creative and Strategic Communication  
106 Russ Hall  
1701 S. Broadway  
Pittsburg, KS 66762-7575  
620-235-4122  
[psumag@pittstate.edu](mailto:psumag@pittstate.edu)



# PittState

MAGAZINE

## In this issue

**6 NEW SPORT**  
One of the fastest growing sports in the U.S. has been added to the options for women at Pitt State.

**10 DAN GOLFS THE FOUR STATES**  
President Dan Shipp is hitting the links with alumni and friends to raise money for the Silverback Fund in support of student-athletes.

**12 LIFE CHANGING**  
A program that often flies under the radar in Pittsburg has become a national model, drawing the attention of state departments of education.

**16 FULL CIRCLE**  
It took Gizelle Sisson a bit longer than some college students to find her passion, but once she did, she never looked back. Now, she's using that passion to serve the community in Pitt State's first AmeriCorps position.

**18 GREEN RESEARCH**  
Freshman Anjali Gupta hopes to combine her love for chemistry and her desire to help people by contributing to advancements in the medical field.



**President**  
Dan Shipp

**Vice President for University Advancement**  
Kathleen M. Flannery

**Associate Vice President for Creative and Strategic Communication**  
Abigail Fern (BA '98)

**Creative and Strategic Communication**

Sam Clausen (BS '14)  
Gregor Kalan (BS '01, MBA '19)  
Paulina Scholes (BS '95, MS '21)  
Andra Stefanoni (BA '91, MA '94)  
Aaron Thompson (BS '09)  
Erin Warner

**Editor**  
Andra Stefanoni

**Content**

Andra Stefanoni  
Bethanne Elliott (BS '18)



**Design**

Paulina Scholes  
McKennah Ring (student)

**Photography**

Sam Clausen  
Addie Hinterweger (student)

More photos and stories at:  
[pittstate.edu/GorillaConnection](http://pittstate.edu/GorillaConnection)

Podcasts at: [buzzsprout](https://www.buzzsprout.com)   




@pittstate



@pittstate



@pittsburg\_state



@pittsburgstate

# CONNECT WITH US!

## GORILLA CONNECTION

Subscribe to the weekly Gorilla Connection digital newsletter, a snapshot of the inspiring people, innovative projects, and milestone moments that make Pitt State unique. Listen to the Gorilla Connection podcast on Buzzsprout or Spotify.

[pittstate.edu/gorillaconnection](http://pittstate.edu/gorillaconnection)

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

[bicknellcenter.com](http://bicknellcenter.com)

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

[pittstate.edu/backgrounds](http://pittstate.edu/backgrounds)

Many of you have gone on to become published authors, prompting one of our librarians to start an alumni book club! Learn more:

[pittstate.edu/alumnibookclub](http://pittstate.edu/alumnibookclub)

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

[pittstate.edu/info/fightsong](http://pittstate.edu/info/fightsong)

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

[pittstate.edu/magazine](http://pittstate.edu/magazine)

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

[pittstate.edu/tour](http://pittstate.edu/tour)

## Finding Gus



**Gordon Pennock** (Marketing '68) traveled the Danube River and showed his Pitt State pride in front of Golubac Fortress in Serbia.

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

## And the winner is...

We continue to be amazed at the number of you who enter our popular "Finding Gus" contest! We wish we could give a prize to each and every one of you for having such Gorilla spirit! This time, the winner is Christine Baker, class of 2007, who spied it on Page 8 next to the Champions Gorilla sculpture.

## Can you find it?

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





## University plans for GoPitt!Fest

For the first time, multiple events will be combined into a week-long focus on Pitt State.

Called GoPitt!Fest, it is planned for the first week in April and will include activities involving students, faculty and staff, alumni, donors, and the community.

“Our goal was to combine resources and activities to create a week-long celebration that connects our students, constituents, and community. We have a lot to celebrate!” said Becky McDaniel, associate vice president for University Advancement and chair of the planning committee.

Students will thank donors, the Office of Development will hold Gorilla Giving Day, the Apple Day Committee will host festivities on the lawn of Russ Hall, and a reception will recognize donors to the PSU Foundation.

A reception will be held at the Wilkinson Alumni Center to celebrate recipients of the Meritorious Achievement Award and the Distinguished Service Award. Recipients will visit their academic departments to connect with students.

The Student Government Association will fan out to homes across the community to volunteer for lawn and clean-up chores as part of The Big Event. The Scott Speaker Series will be open to campus and community. And, a GoPitt! party will wrap up the week in the parking lot of the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts featuring local bands.

The annual Student Leadership Awards will be held in the Overman Student Center.

Details: [pittstate.edu/calendar](http://pittstate.edu/calendar).

## Rainn Wilson tabbed as next in Scott Speaker Series



Noted actor, author, producer, and philanthropist Rainn Wilson will be the next in the Scott Speaker Series. He'll deliver his remarks at 7 pm April 4 at the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts.

Tickets will go on sale at the PSU Ticket Office on Feb. 27 for students, Feb. 29 for faculty/staff, and March 5 for the public. Details: [bicknellcenter.com](http://bicknellcenter.com)

Wilson is perhaps best known as Dwight Schrute, owner of Schrute Farms and Assistant to the Regional Manager, on NBC's long running and acclaimed series, *The Office*.

But the Emmy-nominated and SAG award-winning actor also started a foundation to help girls in Haiti; and spent years exploring the ways we all seek connection, hope, truth, identity, and purpose — themes that have unfolded in content he has created for digital media, television, books, and live engagements.

He is the co-founder of the digital media company SoulPancake, whose tagline is,

quite simply, “We make stuff that matters.” He co-wrote the New York Times bestselling “SOULPANCAKE: Chew on Life’s Big Questions,” as well as his comedic memoir, “The Bassoon King: My Life in Art, Faith and Idiocy.” His newest book, released in April 2023, is entitled “Soul Boom: Why We Need a Spiritual Revolution.”

Wilson, who has been very open about his mental health, is also the host and producer of the unscripted travel series Rainn Wilson and the Geography of Bliss, which aired on Peacock in 2023 and focused on finding the secrets of happiness.

### About the Scott Speaker Series

The mission of the H. Lee Scott Speaker Series is to deepen the level of discourse, enrich the university experience, and elevate the university's reputation by examining American life from the perspective of nationally prominent leaders and innovators. The series was created in 2015 as the result of a gift made by PSU alumnus and former Walmart CEO Lee Scott (Business Administration '71) and his wife, Linda.

## Anthony named new head football coach

Former associate head football coach Tom Anthony was named the 16th head coach of the Gorillas in December, replacing Brian Wright, who accepted the head football coach position at Northern Arizona University.

Wright achieved a 33-8 record the past four seasons, including a 23-3 mark the past two seasons with back-to-back MIAA titles and NCAA Division II playoff appearances.

After serving as defensive coordinator at Western Illinois University, Anthony joined Wright on his initial staff in December 2019 as defensive coordinator. He also served as defensive coordinator at Texas Southern University and coached at St. Ambrose University.

At Pitt State, he was elevated to the role of associate head coach/defensive coordinator prior to the 2022 season and helped fashion one of the top defensive units in NCAA Division II. He stepped away in June 2023 to move to Ohio with his family.

"We are tremendously excited to pass the torch to Tom Anthony. His passion for the game and his expertise was evident immediately when he joined Coach Wright's staff," said Director of Intercollegiate Athletics Jim Johnson.

"I'm thrilled to be moving back to Gorilla Nation to lead this incredible program," Anthony said. "Thank you to the administration and leadership for putting their trust in me. And, thank you to Coach Wright for giving me my first opportunity here and his entire family who will remain lifelong friends."

Tom and his wife Kelsey have two children, Becca and Michael.



## University, KBI to partner on regional crime center and lab

Pitt State will partner with the Kansas Bureau of Investigation to create a state-of-the-art regional crime center and laboratory to serve law enforcement and provide educational opportunities for the next generation of forensic scientists and criminal justice professionals.

Modeling the success the KBI has had with Washburn University, the new center will help battle the fentanyl epidemic, violent crime, and the explosion of internet crimes against children.

It is targeted for just off of South Rouse Avenue near the Tyler Research Center and would offer space for the Kansas Highway Patrol, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Pittsburg Police Department, the Office of the Kansas Attorney General, the U.S. Marshals Service, and the Pitt State Police Department.

It would house KBI agents, an evidence control center, a drug chemistry section, a child victims unit, a garage for collecting evidence from automobiles connected to criminal cases, a state-of-the-art training room, classroom space, a crime scene simulation for students, and more.

The university will expand its education offerings in the Criminal Justice field with the goal of doubling the number of graduates.

The estimated cost is \$40 million, which would be provided from a mix of state and federal funds. The timeline calls for groundbreaking in January 2025, and completion in July 2026.

Until then, the KBI and Pitt State are creating a temporary space in the Tyler Research Center; the anticipated move-in date will be this spring.



## Around the world

Global Fest, an event started on Lindburg Plaza by the International Student Association in 2022, continued last fall as a fun way to help to bridge the gap between cultures and help international students feel at home.

Popular among those who live and work on campus as well as community members, it gives several hundred attendees the opportunity to travel



around the world in a few hours.

"It's an event in which you don't need to take a plane to try food and

hear music from more than 10 different countries — you can do it in a single night," said Psychology major and ISA President

Freda Herrera, who is from Mexico.

Plans are in the works to repeat the event in September 2024.

## Construction scholarships pass \$1 million mark

A milestone has been reached: since an alumni-driven fundraising effort began in 1988, more than \$1 million in scholarships have been

given to students in the School of Construction.

During the Nov. 11 football game, the School of Construction Alumni

Association presented the latest fundraising effort: a \$170,000 check.

This year, more than 100 students will receive scholarships totaling more than \$102,000.

The funds are raised at annual golf tournaments in Pittsburg, Wichita, and Kansas City, and at sporting clay events in Kansas City and Wichita.

Dan West (Construction '15), now a project manager with McCownGordon Construction, remembers interviewing for a scholarship when he was a student.

When he got his dream job, he made it a point to give back and be an active part of the association.

"I won't forget the impact that scholarship had on me and the amount of respect I gained for the School of Construction with how they gave back to their students and wanted them to find success.

Knowing I now play a part in helping current students in the program is a great feeling."



President Dan Shipp was joined for the check presentation by SOC Director Don Colegrove and several alumni. The group included Jim Otter, Joe Levens, Erin Jordan, and Chad Crain who are now faculty in the SOC; and Larry Weis (retired), Scott Casebolt (Key Construction), Dan West (McCownGordon Construction), and Luke Brand (Conco Construction).

# Women's soccer



**Women's soccer, one of the fastest growing team sports in the U.S., will be added to Pittsburg State Athletics for the 2024-25 season.**

"THIS IS THE FIRST WOMEN'S SPORT WE'VE ADDED SINCE 1986, and that's a big deal," said Jim Johnson, director of Intercollegiate Athletics.

Johnson estimates the addition of the sport will bring 25 to 30 competitive student-athletes to Pitt State who would not otherwise enroll. It likely also will bring many more students who won't compete, but for whom soccer is part of their lifestyle.

"For many areas of our country, for many populations, and in many other countries, soccer is the primary sport," said President Dan Shipp, whose three sons are active in the sport as part of club teams that play across the Midwest.

In addition to being the number one youth sport in Kansas City, it's also at the top of the list in Omaha, Dallas, Oklahoma City, and Tulsa. The popularity extends beyond the field to the stadiums, where fans crowd in with tremendous support.

"Athletics provides a heartbeat of spirit and tradition for a campus and a community," Shipp said. "This adds more beats to our heart."

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

The addition will have a positive economic impact to the region.

"We have a good business plan to make this affordable, with private funds and many great local partners helping us with this," Shipp said.

Johnson said it's been on the university's to-do list for awhile, but cost was a factor.

"There has been a need for us to grow our athletic program — we just needed to find the right time, the right direction, to do that," he said. "This is it. It was a natural choice. We are the only MIAA school that doesn't yet play."

A Gallup poll in 2019 asserted that 52 percent more adults considered themselves soccer fans compared to 2012 — a growth that outpaces the other four "major" American sports of ice hockey, basketball, baseball, and football.

In 2021, there were just six days on which a soccer game was not broadcast on TV in the U.S., with more than 4,600 individual matches that year — a staggering statistic.

Similar polls show the game is quickly becoming the choice sport for young people, with high school soccer participation growing 32 percent from 2002 to 2019, beating out baseball, hockey, basketball, and football.

And globally, it's been one of the world's most popular sports for decades, followed by an estimated 3.5 billion people — or half the world.

In 2026, the FIFA World Cup will come to North America.



# coming to Pitt State

## CHAMPIONSHIP LEVEL

“We’re one of the top D-II athletic programs in the country, and in this sport we intend to be no different,” Johnson said. “It will be a great thing for us to have another sport to play at a championship level; another opportunity for female student athletes to come to Pitt State.”

“We’ll recruit at an elite level and will build out an extensive youth camp program that aligns with it, thanks to our excellent facilities and location.”

Those youth camps got a jump start this summer and were a tremendous success.

## NUTS AND BOLTS

The university hired Wes Branstetter as the program’s head coach. He has served the past nine years as an assistant coach at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the past four seasons as the Golden Eagles associate head coach.



Branstetter

Branstetter helped ORU post an 8–7–4 record and advance to the semifinals of the 2023 Summit League Women’s Soccer Championship. He earned a Bachelor’s in Marketing from the University of Tulsa in 2006 and a Master’s in Business Administration from TU in 2008.

Work will begin this year on plans to build a soccer stadium and facilities at the Gene Bicknell Sports Complex — home to the Pitt State Baseball and Softball programs.

The season takes place in the fall semester and will feature an 18–game regular season schedule. The top eight MIAA schools advance to the MIAA Postseason Tournament, with the champion earning an automatic berth to the NCAA D–II National Championships.

The addition of women’s soccer brings the total women’s offerings to seven: basketball, cross country, soccer, softball, volleyball, and indoor and outdoor track and field.

The university offers six men’s sports: baseball, basketball, cross country, football, and indoor and outdoor track and field.

## EXPERT HELP

Consulting for the program has been Marcus Kelcher, a longtime elite soccer coach, competitive soccer camp director, and current director of Club and Player Development at Kansas City Scott Gallagher. He holds both USSF and USC Licensing and Diplomas and is highly respected across the country in the soccer community, Johnson noted.

“This is a pretty special place,” Kelcher said. “When I got here, I was just blown away by the facilities and the community.”

Artists renderings show what a proposed soccer pitch and stands could look like for the new Pitt State Women’s Soccer program.



# Construction capstone

The Pitt State motto “By Doing, Learn,” and mission statement, “Making lives better through education,” both are on display each year when senior Construction Management program complete community projects for their capstone class.

Last fall, they did concrete work to replace a 270-foot section of a cart path at Four Oaks Golf Course in Pittsburg, helped build a Habitat For Humanity home in Arma, worked on a new house for a family in need in Frontenac, and improved baseball/softball diamonds in Girard.

“The projects are beneficial in two ways,” said Assistant Professor Chad Crain. “They give the students an opportunity to practice industry skills in the field before they graduate, and they provide a valuable service to the community. We love to be part of the community as much as we can.”



Photo credit: Addie Hinterweger, junior, Graphic Communications (Digital Media) and Communication (Multimedia Journalism).

Golf Course Superintendent Kris Loy said he was appreciative of their labor and expertise, calling it a win-win: “The work gave them a chance to practice skills, and it helped the City of Pittsburg check a task off our to-do list.”

Students were responsible for managing a project from start to finish, including costing projects, creating contracts,

running surveying equipment, and determining batch work for concrete.

Senior Payton Lane said he appreciates the fact that they will “know something about everything” when they graduate.

“It’s crucial — you need that going out into the workforce,” Lane said. “It will be great to have hands-on experience to be ready to go so we can hit the ground running.”

## Making life better

### COLORFUL CROSSINGS

The University Art Association, Kappa Pi Art Honorary Society, and other student groups combined their talents to paint crosswalk murals at each of the Pittsburg elementary schools. This service-learning opportunity, led by the Department of Art faculty, allowed students to learn about design and execution of larger scale works, but also shared their talents with the community while brightening the entrance to the schools.

### CONSERVATION AWARENESS

Tessa Poolman (Biology '23 / Wildlife Ecology & Conservation) used her degree and experiences at the Southeast Kansas Nature Center to educate Kansas City residents on nature conservation. Poolman works with the Missouri River Bird Observatory and the Missouri Department of Conservation to develop conservation programming throughout the KC metro.

### FEEDING YOUTH



Members of Sigma Chi fraternity presented a check to the superintendent of the Pittsburg school district last fall, paying off all existing lunch debt for students with outstanding accounts. Funds were raised through an auction.

### IMPROVED HEARING

Christian Stacker (Electronics Engineering Technology '23), started his career at Elektromedizinische Geräte Gesellschaft, in Austria, last summer. He is part of a team designing the electronics in cochlear implants, which should have a life changing impact on thousands of people.





PITT STATE RECENTLY EXPANDED its commitment to Pittsburg and the region by reaching an agreement with the Colonial Fox Theatre Foundation to incorporate this historic property into the downtown Gorilla Rising project, which encompasses the Kelce College of Business. Completing this treasure for the community brings new opportunities to the university and radically shortens the timeline for the Theatre Foundation to begin using the space for performing arts events and community outreach.

AT A CEREMONY IN NOVEMBER, the Southeast Kansas Recycling Center named its primary building after James R. Triplett, retired longtime professor and chair of the Biology Department, in recognition of his efforts to create and sustain the center. Triplett has been active in recycling and sustainability since the first Earth Day celebration at Pitt State in 1990 and was a driving force behind the center. As a result, thousands of tons of recyclable materials have been diverted from the landfill.



## TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHY



For the last two summers, a travel photography course to Chicago ('22) and Washington D.C. ('23) led by Professor Rion Huffman has given students the chance to learn how to capture their surroundings to create stunning, professional quality images. Coming up this summer: New York City.

## TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE

Health and Human Performance graduate students Kam O'Dell and Kiefer Tucker have been working with Assistant Professor David Boffey to bridge the gap between science and practice, conducting studies that examine how various training programs affect the performance of Pitt State student-athletes.

## REMOVING BARRIERS

Megan Stoneberger Johnson (English '09, Education '12, '21), a first-generation graduate, became the coordinator of a unique new program at Pitt State last year: she's helping students who face barriers like poverty, food insecurity, foster care, and being first generation themselves, adjust to life on campus. Pitt State is a pilot for the program, called SparkWheel — one she hopes can be replicated at other universities.



## ATHLETIC VOLUNTEERS

Members of the Pitt State football team greeted elementary and middle school students as they arrived at school; basketball players read and made crafts with elementary students; softball and basketball players helped set up for the Big Brothers–Big Sisters fundraising event; and the volleyball team attended a middle school volleyball game to cheer for the Dragons.

# Dan Golfs the Four States

LAST SUMMER, PRESIDENT DAN SHIPP embarked on an ambitious fundraising campaign to raise \$8 million for scholarships and the student experience at Pitt State by riding his bike across Kansas and meeting with alumni and donors along the way. He called it Dan Bikes Kansas, and it worked.

This summer, he's continuing the idea with another campaign: Dan Golfs the Four States, this time with a focus on scholarships for student-athletes.

From May 13 through May 24, he'll golf at locations across Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, to raise funds for the Silverback Fund by playing golf with alumni and other supporters. He'll be joined by Athletic Director Jim Johnson.

"We have nearly 400 student-athletes at Pitt State, and none of them receive a 'full ride'," Johnson said. "Scholarships from the Silverback Fund enable them to focus on their performance and the championship culture we expect in Gorilla Nation."

The goal: \$3 million.

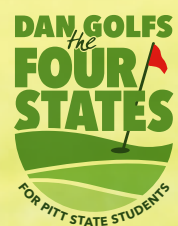
Foursomes will play over eight days at eight courses across the four states, and Gorillas around the globe can participate remotely on their home courses. Each of the eight days will also include an evening gathering for all alumni and friends in the area.

Those competing from their local course can do so individually or form a team. A leaderboard combining in-person and remote play will be featured online, with daily and overall winners.

"We ask a lot of our student-athletes, and what they bring to Pitt State impacts the entire community," Shipp said. "Growing their financial support is critical to continued success and our ability to recruit and retain the best athletes in NCAA Division II athletics."

Details: [pittstate.edu/dangolfs](http://pittstate.edu/dangolfs).





# “Life changing”

## Hurford's Center for Reading helps struggling readers

A PROGRAM THAT OFTEN FLIES UNDER THE RADAR IN PITTSBURGH has become a national model, drawing the attention of state departments of education grappling with high numbers of children with reading disabilities.

It's called the Center for Reading, and for now it's located in an unassuming office on the second floor of Whitesitt Hall.

“I'd guess that most people in Pittsburgh, and certainly many right here on campus, don't know we are here and what we do,” said Executive Director Dr. David Hurford, a professor of Psychology who for many years also served as chair of the Psychology & Counseling Department.

Hurford founded the Center in 1996 to serve individuals with reading difficulties using a science-based system he developed. It provides evaluation, intervention, and advocacy, all based on best practices.

University President Dan Shipp, who has dyslexia, is working with Hurford to elevate the visibility and accessibility of the center and has assigned it to the Economic Development and Community Engagement division under the leadership of Vice President Shawn Naccarato.

By 2026, it's tabbed to be part of the Gorilla Rising project in downtown Pittsburgh near Block22.

“This has the capacity to put our community, our region, on a new and exciting trajectory,” Naccarato said. “What David is doing is life-changing — it has significant impact.”

Individuals with reading difficulties are more likely to drop out of high school and experience a negative self-image. Learning disabilities such as dyslexia are often associated with lower academic achievement, lower income, higher rates of suicidality, and higher rates of unemployment.



*“Reading failure is a systemic problem that is correctable and we are here to help with the changes that will be necessary for all children to learn to read.”*





Nearly 40 percent of students across the country read below the basic reading level.

“Reading failure is a systemic problem that is correctable and we are here to help with the changes that will be necessary for all children to learn to read,” Hurford said.

Families with children who are struggling to read bring them to Pittsburg from near and far.

Hurford, considered a noted

expert, has written and published a curriculum now used by classroom teachers across the country, is often interviewed by national publications, and was invited to serve on a statewide dyslexia task force. Last summer, governors visited his center to find out how they could implement strategies in their states to improve literacy.

“When you see a child who

struggles to read and who believes that he or she is simply not intelligent enough to learn to read, to become a competent reader, is mind-blowing,” he said. “Confidence soars in other areas once someone can read. We are experiencing a renaissance in reading, and it is exciting to be part of it.”

For more details, visit [pittstate.edu/reading](http://pittstate.edu/reading).

# "A DREAM COME







# TRUE

*“I want to raise future generations of educators and performers from Kansas and the world!”*

---

AS A CHILD GROWING UP IN PARAGUAY, Ramiro Miranda played in a youth orchestra directed by the visiting conductor of the Southeast Kansas symphony — an ensemble based at Pitt State and made up of students, staff, faculty, alumni, and community members.

As an adult, he’s come full circle: he was chosen as the symphony’s new conductor and kicked off the 2023–24 season with two dynamic concerts in the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts.

“I remember back then we heard about this donation to build a fabulous hall and I was so excited. I thought, ‘maybe when I’m a senior here, I’ll get to play there,’” he told the audience as he introduced his first concert. “That didn’t happen because of course these things take a long time.”

Little could he have dreamed then that he would one day be on the stage as the conductor.

“Being here in this hall is a dream — a dream come true,” he said.

In his childhood, Miranda dreamed of becoming a performer. It made sense to for him to study music at Pitt State — for more than 50 years, the university has had a close connection to Paraguay through a partnership program.

He earned his Music degree in violin performance at Pitt State in 2011.

“Many Paraguayan music students, myself included, have had the amazing opportunity to study at PSU and gone on to great careers in the United States, back home in Paraguay, and even around the world,” Miranda said.

He has performed in Latin America and China, is a frequent guest conductor in Kansas City, and has shared the stage with internationally acclaimed musicians.

But he also was drawn to education.

“Conductors, whether they want it or not, are teachers. We cannot make a sound without the combined forces and emotions of our musicians, so our job is to find a way to teach effectively and convey what we want verbally and through gestures,” he said.

Miranda previously taught and directed at Emporia State University and is one of the founders of the Emporia State University String Camp and Stringfully, both of which serve K–12 students. He is exploring options for youth camps at Pitt State.

“I want to raise future generations of educators and performers from Kansas and the world!” he said.

For a current symphony schedule, visit [pittstate.edu/symphony](http://pittstate.edu/symphony).

# Full circle:

Biology grad  
returns  
to share  
passion  
for animals



IT TOOK GIZELLE SISSON A BIT LONGER than some college students to find her passion, but once she did, she never looked back. Now, she's using that passion to serve the community in Pitt State's first AmeriCorps position.

Her goal? To improve environmental literacy in youth pre-K through Grade 12.

Sisson, 29, graduated in December 2022 with a degree in Biology and an emphasis in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation.

Last fall, she began serving Nature Reach, a Biology program that uses live animals to teach on campus and in schools and parks. It has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years, leaving Director Delia Lister in need of people power.

Sisson presents to Scout troops, students, and adults; oversees animal care including training the program's captive birds of prey; and assists with special projects.

"I'm passionate about educating

children about nature, to make sure to help them appreciate and respect wildlife but not be scared of it," she said. "I want them to know the difference between facts and myths, and to understand why conservation is important."

It was not what she started college in 2012 with dreams of doing.

After trying a few majors and stopping out for semesters — and sometimes a year or two — at a time, she saw a social media post about Nature Reach.

"I've always loved animals, especially wild ones native to this area, but was discouraged by others from making that

my career path," she said. "I looked into it, and I knew immediately that was what I wanted to do. I became fully committed to school."

She enrolled as a Biology major and gained experience by working in Nature Reach as a student employee. She still had

to take occasional breaks — she is the mother of two young children.

And then finally, she made it across the finish line.

She was the perfect candidate for the new AmeriCorps position.

"She knew the program quite well and was ready to go from Day 1," Lister said. "She already has made a huge difference."

Sisson is passionate about bringing together student organizations like the Wildlife & Fisheries Society, the Wildlife Club, and the Sustainability Club, to solve environmental problems — like reducing the amount of light in the night sky on campus. The goal: to help reduce the deaths of migratory birds who fly into buildings when they become disoriented.

"That's what this job is all about," she said. "Making a difference."









# GREEN research

FRESHMAN ANJALI GUPTA HOPES TO COMBINE HER LOVE FOR CHEMISTRY and her desire to help people by contributing to advancements in the medical field. She's off to a great start: since high school, she's conducted research at Pitt State's National Institute for Materials Advancement (NIMA).

She is following in the footsteps of her father, one of the top 2 percent of scientists in the world. Associate Professor Ram Gupta teaches in the Department of Chemistry and leads research at NIMA that focuses on green energy production and storage using nanomaterials.

His daughter plans to earn her degree in Chemistry with an emphasis in Pre-Medicine to be able to pursue her passion for medical research.

"Ultimately, I plan to become an infectious disease doctor and research treatments in that field," she said.

Her work at NIMA has given her experience in a laboratory setting and the ability to understand scientific processes.

"What I really like about working here at NIMA is that I contribute to something for the greater good," Anjali said. "Even if I don't discover a breakthrough, somebody could read about what we are doing and use it to help them come up with a solution."

Any qualified high school and university student with an interest in chemistry and research may apply to work at NIMA alongside scientists from around the world.

Their goal is to find ways to convert

agricultural and household waste — chicken fat, used coffee grounds, and the parts of the soybean plants that are left in the field after harvest — into sustainable, eco-friendly products like energy storage devices and flame-retardant foams used in construction and automobiles.

More scientifically speaking, students and scientists are working with polyurethanes, bio-based materials, polymers, and electroactive materials.

NIMA then collaborates with industrial partners, organizations, state and federal agencies, and producer associations to develop and commercialize their research findings.

The labs, meanwhile, give students like Anjali access to cutting edge equipment like a scanning electron microscope, X-ray diffraction, infrared spectrometer, thermal analyzer, and equipment used for synthesis and electrochemical testing.

Their work has attracted national attention, bringing to campus a U.S. congressman, the head of the National Science Foundation, and a top state official — all of whom agreed that research here could lead to significant manufacturing and employment opportunities.

"There is so much potential here," said NSF Director Sethuraman Panchanathan. "The kind of work that is happening here at Pitt State should happen across the U.S. The ideas that are generated here can be the basis for us to become stronger, more competitive, and prosperous as a nation."

*"What I really like about working here at NIMA is that I contribute to something for the greater good."*







# A century of Gorillas

IT'S DIFFICULT TO SAY EXACTLY WHEN GUS GORILLA WAS BORN, but we do know this: in 1920, a group of 24 young men dissatisfied with the state of school spirit organized themselves as the Gorillas.

Their goal: "to accelerate college spirit and enthusiasm until it shall permeate the state."

Their first public appearance: Oct. 7 during an all-school assembly.

"The campus newspaper reported this new club was organized to 'accelerate college spirit and enthusiasm until it shall permeate the state'," said recently retired Dean of Library Services Randy Roberts, who served for many years as the university's archivist.

"They called themselves the Gorillas and their motto was 'we want pep and we want it at all times,'" Roberts said.

The reason the group chose to call themselves Gorillas is lost to time, but usage of the term was well understood in that day and age.

"According to Mathew's 'Dictionary of Americanisms,' to call someone a gorilla in 1920 meant they possessed characteristics of strength, intimidation, and untamed rowdiness," Roberts said. "That's exactly the characteristics the first Pittsburg Gorillas hoped to portray."

The group could indeed be rowdy; it sponsored pep rallies, freshmen hazing, special trains to athletic events, mock burials and weddings, and nightshirt stampedes through downtown Pittsburg.

Written accounts from the time vary, but it appears that in 1923, the pep club recruited art student Helen Waskey to make the first drawing of a gorilla mascot.

By 1924, the Gorillas had grown to about 200 members and on Jan. 15, 1925, the student body voted to adopt the gorilla as

The organization known as the Gorillas is a comparatively new organization in the State Manual Training Normal School. With the idea of banding together and concentrating their surplus amount of "pep", a number of the students met and in the discussion that followed, it was decided to call a meeting of all the men of the college and organize into a society. Said meeting was held and the following persons were chosen as officers of the organization:

Pres.—"Babe" Alyea.

1st Vice-Pres.—John McCray.

2nd Vice Pres.—Bernard Trinder.

Sec. and Treas.—Ellsworth Gilbert.

Field Marshall—Carl Lake.

A committee met and drew up a constitution which was adopted by the organization.

The Preamble follows: "We, the Gorillas of S. M. T. N. in order that we may accelerate college spirit and enthusiasm, until it shall permeate the entire State, do adopt this the Constitution for the Gorillas.

You who were here last year know something concerning the activities of the Gorillas. You will probably be able to recall the numerous parades and "night shirt" stampedes in the down-town district, in an effort to instill the town people with the spirit of the institution, and to advertise our football games. Also.



the mascot for its athletics teams.

Other historic happenings of that time:

Calvin Coolidge was sworn in for a full term as president of the U.S. in the first inauguration to be broadcast on radio.

F. Scott Fitzgerald published *The Great Gatsby*.

The Chrysler Corporation was founded.

Mount Rushmore National Memorial was dedicated in South Dakota.

In his first 50 years of life, the gorilla mascot became less ferocious and more lovable in appearance. He was dubbed “Gus” and in 1952, he found a mate: Gussie, created by Charles

Galvin for a display in the Student Center.

That same year, he became a cartoon figure drawn by Lee Green, Kanza yearbook art editor.

Members of the Class of '65 had him cast in fiberglass — a creation of Art instructor Larry Wooster — and set in front of the Student Center, where he still keeps watch over The Oval today. That spot is one of the most photographed on campus, and one that prompts memories in graduates of all ages.

“I remember gathering around Gus — the Wooster Gorilla — in November 1963 discussing what the

world had come to after the news of JFK’s assassination,” wrote Art Tice, a 1968 graduate.

Since its installation, Gorilla statues have popped up across campus, the community, and beyond. It also inspired the “Finding Gus” contest we offer in each issue of our magazine, which draws hundreds of entries each time.

In 1980, nationally acclaimed sports artist Ted Watts (Art '66) set about to create the original ferocity of the mascot.

“I recall how disappointed I was the first time I saw Gus the Gorilla,” he said at the

time. “I was expecting King Kong, which he wasn’t.” On Sept. 5 that year, he signed a limited edition of 500 lithographs of his painting of the Pittsburg State Gorilla, commissioned by the Alumni Association.





University historian Gene DeGruson wrote at the time: “And thus, for the first time in almost 30 years, the mascot is once more virile and dynamic, a symbol of strength and power.”

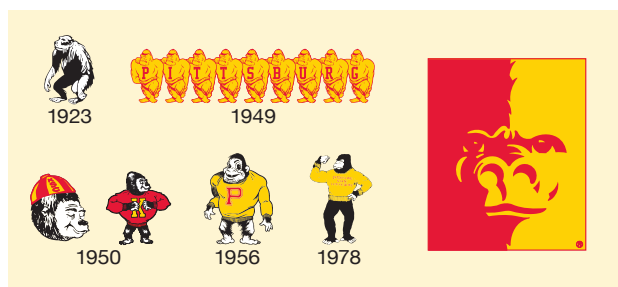
On Oct. 31, 1989, another chapter in the history of the Gorilla was written. Members of the women’s athletic teams voted to change their name from Gussies, which had been used since the women’s program began in 1974, to Gorillas.

Over the years, the official emblem representative of the Gorillas also evolved, from Waskey’s initial sketch that looked a bit like Bigfoot, to the iconic crimson and gold splitface we know and love today.

It was designed in 1986 by Michael Hailey, a loyal Missouri Southern alumnus who was given the task of creating a new logo when he came to work at Pitt State in 1984. He tried working with some of the many gorilla drawings that were circulating at the time and found it daunting.

The logo had to work in multiple types of environments, in many sizes, and be instantly recognizable.

“I studied the gorilla for a while and tried to determine its essence,” Hailey said 20 years later during an anniversary recognition of the logo. “I



decided it was intelligence and extremely powerful. All of that was in the eyes.”

The response to his logo was immediate and positive.

Roberts said the university’s adoption of a gorilla as its mascot was fortunate.

“The school’s name changed from State Manual Training Normal to Kansas State Teachers College in 1923,” Roberts said, “but in 1925, the city newspapers still referred to our teams as the Pittsburg Normalites or the Manuals. That’s not a mascot I think would be popular today.”

Today, Gus the Gorilla remains wildly popular among alumni and fans. When he appears at events, he attracts mobs of children,

and his image appears on everything from t-shirts and coffee mugs to license plates and key chains.

In October, he was the star of the show in the annual Homecoming Parade and at other Homecoming festivities, the theme of which was “Gorilla of the Century.”

In November, Gus achieved national media exposure when he appeared on College GameDay on ESPN, proudly holding a sign that said, quite simply, “Go-Rillas!”

He quickly made it home that day to Carnie Smith Stadium, where he



entertained the crowd in Gorilla Village and on the stadium’s iconic stone wall, helping the team end their MIAA regular season with a victory over the Central Oklahoma Bronchos.

“No other university has a gorilla as a mascot, so there is a great deal of pride in that uniqueness,” Roberts said. “The students in 1920 wanted to increase pep and enthusiasm for the school. The enduring popularity of Gus the Gorilla 100 years later is proof that they were successful.”

# Gary Tredway

A visit by then-President Tom Bryant 15 years ago inspired Gary Tredway to give back to his alma mater. In the years since, he has become a supporter of the Silverback Fund and served on the Foundation Board of Trustees, making a difference in the lives of countless students.

Tredway, now a resident of Edmond, Oklahoma, earned a Bachelor's in Physical Education in 1970, followed by his Master's in 1972.

"Pitt State gave me the educational foundation that positioned me to attain career growth opportunities over the last 53 years after graduation," he said.

During his 45-year career with American Fidelity Assurance Company, he served in every sales and management opportunity the company made available, and in executive leadership roles. Today, he serves on six for-profit corporations boards and three non-profit boards.

"Over my business career I have demonstrated the ability to recruit, train, and motivate high performing teams to excellence," he said. "I attribute much of my success in the business world to the years I spent teaching and coaching at the high school level. I have been proud to display my diplomas in my offices during my corporate career."

In 2011, he was named Meritorious

Achievement Award recipient, the university's highest alumni recognition for career and lifetime achievements.

Bryant, who was once Tredway's academic advisor, paid him a visit to reconnect. A few years later, Tredway visited with then-president Steve Scott about needs his family foundation could help with. Those visits inspired him to give back.

The Tredway Family Foundation chose to build out the football coaches' office in the Weede Building. The Silverback Fund was started a few years later, and the Tredway family's support of Gorilla Football continued.

In 2014, he began serving as a Foundation trustee and in 2023, was elected chair.

He enjoys attending Gorilla gatherings in the Oklahoma City area; attending home football games when travel allows; and seeing the Gorillas compete in Oklahoma in football, basketball, and baseball. He also has attended Scott Speaker Series events at the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts.

"I would like to encourage all Gorilla alumni to stay involved. For those like me who have re-engaged later in my career, there is much work and many needs to be met at PSU to support our students as they strive to be the best they can be," he said. "I have really enjoyed coming back to Pitt State as it stirs so many good memories of the years I spent as a young Gorilla."

*"Pitt State gave me the educational foundation that positioned me to attain career growth opportunities over the last 53 years after graduation."*





## “Stay connected”

This year’s president of the Alumni Association Board of Directors has a message for fellow alumni: “Get involved! You’ll gain more than you give!”

For Jeremy Hildebrand (Graphic Communications ’97), his own involvement began as soon as he graduated.

“I started attending Wichita Gorilla Gatherings, and I absolutely loved it,” said Hildebrand.

He now attends them throughout the region, logging miles and time out of loyalty to Pitt State.

Gorilla Gatherings occur throughout the year in a variety of locations, often at a local restaurant or brewery, and famous Southeast Kansas chicken often is brought in from Pittsburg. Guests are treated to a meal, an update by a special guest such as the university president, college deans, professors, or coaches, and usually go home with swag!

After Hours Gorilla Gatherings are less formal and feature appetizers, drinks, networking, and prizes in the company of fellow Gorillas.

Hildebrand has made such gatherings a priority while balancing a successful career as a business broker and a production graphic artist in the Wichita metropolitan area.

“For all the miles and time I’ve given, I’ve gotten something in return,” he said. “I’ve been able to meet



so many different alumni from different walks of life, in different age groups, and it’s so rewarding. It’s important to bridge that gap between young and old. You gain friendships, you get to hear stories that spark fond memories, and you get great networking opportunities.”

He encourages alumni to invite a former classmate to an alumni event.

“Get involved. Bring your kids to campus. Go to games and concerts. Stay connected,” he said. “You won’t regret it for a minute.”

Hildebrand will serve as president of the Alumni Association through June 2024.



## College of Education Distinguished Service Awards

A rising administrator and a storied educator were chosen for two annual distinguished service awards, presented at the College of Education Awards Ceremony on Dec. 14 by Dean James Truelove.

Taylor Holland (Education '14), assistant principal for Oskaloosa School District, is the recipient of the Distinguished Service Administrator Award. She has been a K-12 building administrator for two years. Prior to Oskaloosa, Holland worked at Clark Middle School for six years and Campus High School for two.

Principal Felicia Yoakam described her as a “dedicated, knowledgeable, student-focused administrator” who builds positive relationships and balances many roles, including ACT and PSAT coordinator and CTE Pathways development, and curriculum implementation.

Holland said she had a “one of a kind” educational experience as a

student at Pitt State that helped mold her into the educator she is today.

Jeff Shaw (Education '88), longtime eighth grade science teacher in Arkansas City, Kansas, is the recipient of the Distinguished Service Teacher Award. He has taught in the same classroom in his hometown for 30 years.

A member of the Track and Field team at Pitt State, his love for athletics extended to his career; he has been a coach in multiple sports and helped students become state champions.

Shaw volunteers with the After School Program and Summer School, creates Project Based Learning



projects to connect students to the community, volunteers to give students individual lessons to improve a skill or their sport, and attends local youth recreation events to cheer them on.

“Jeff has had a storied career; ask any Ark City resident about this man and you will see a smile break out on their face followed by a story of how he has made a positive impact on their life,” Burke said. “He is an outstanding educator that Pitt State can be proud of.”



THE PITT STATE MEN'S AND WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY TEAMS made school history last fall by sweeping the MIAA championships in Columbia, Missouri: it was the first time both teams took the trophy in the same season. The men then raced to an 11th place finish — the highest NCAA finish in program history — at the 2023 NCAA Division II National Championships, while the women raced to an 18th place finish. It was the university's fifth trip to the National Championships in six seasons (2017–19, '22–23) – the 2020 campaign was canceled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



# Honorary Family

When Strategic Communication major Olivia Tavernaro's family was recognized as the 2023 Honorary Family, it was on a football field that holds some of their most precious memories: where her father Bobby played football, her mother Jennifer performed with the dance team, and her grandfather Al Ortolani Sr. became a storied athletic trainer.

Her family's connection to Pitt State began when her grandfather moved to Pittsburg in 1946 from New York. Al (Education '74, MA '83, EdS '87) was the first person in his family to attend college.

Al soon met Olivia's grandmother, Virginia Sullivan, and knew this was home. All five of their children attended Pitt State.

Virginia cooked pregame meals for the baseball team and Sunday dinners for athletes who couldn't afford a meal, and on holidays invited international students who couldn't travel home to join in their family celebration. She was voted Apple Day Queen.

Al went down in history as the university's first baseball coach and the longest serving athletic trainer, from 1949 to 1998. He also represented Pitt State at four Olympic Games. The baseball field is named in his honor.



**Top:** The Tavernaro family: Jennifer, Bobby, and their two daughters, Olivia and Sully



**Left:** Legendary athletic trainer Al Ortolani and his daughter, Jennifer Tavernaro, in Carnie Smith Stadium in the early 1990s.



**Right:** Bobby Tavernaro and his then-girlfriend, Jennifer, at Carnie Smith Stadium.

Their daughter, Olivia's mother Jennifer (Education '92, MS '98), spent game days assisting Al on the sidelines as a student athletic trainer, and was a dedicated member and captain of the dance team.

In her first few years as a teacher, Jennifer won the Clyde U. Phillips Outstanding Young Educator Award

from Pitt State and was named a finalist for the Kansas Teacher of the Year in 1996.

Olivia's father, Bobby (Business '94), was a member of the legendary 1991 National Championship football team and was inducted into the Pitt State Athletic Hall of Fame.

His late sister, Lynn Tavernaro (Education '89), was a member of Sigma Sigma Sigma, and Olivia is carrying on that legacy.

Olivia and her sister, Sully, grew up considering her father's football teammates and her mother's dance teammates aunts and uncles.

Her extended family includes more than 30 Pitt State graduates who were members of Tri Sigma, Alpha Sigma Alpha, Sigma Chi, Phi Sigma Kappa, Pride of the Plains Marching Band, and other organizations.

"Something I will forever be thankful for is family, and family now has a bigger meaning to me, thanks to this university," she said.



## Coach of the Year

Distance coach Ben Barrows was named the MIAA Coach of the Year for both the 2023 men's and women's cross country seasons.

Barrows was voted both the MIAA men's and women's cross country Coach of the Year by his peers. Barrows is an assistant coach on the Pitt State cross country/track and field staff and leads the cross country and distance programs.

The Gorillas swept the 2023 MIAA Cross Country Championships, hosted by Lincoln University at the Gans Creek Cross Country Course in Columbia, Missouri, on Oct. 20.

## Outstanding Alumni Award Winners

Three alumni with successful careers in construction, automotive technology, and medicine were given the 2023 Dr. Kenneth K. Bateman Outstanding Alumni Award, given annually by Pitt State's Alumni Association.



**Dr. David L. Baker, D.O.**

BS '00 – Biology

Dr. David Baker is the chief medical officer for Freeman Health System in Joplin, Missouri, and a specialist in general and bariatric surgery.

After graduating from Pitt State, he attended medical school at Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences in Kansas City, Missouri, completed his residency at Doctors Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, and a fellowship at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville.

In 2009, Baker joined Freeman, the hospital where he was born, and now works with Freeman General and Vascular Surgical Group.

Named CMO in October 2021, he provides oversight and direction of medical care at Freeman and provides leadership to the Freeman medical staff and Medical Staff Governance.

He is board certified by the American Osteopathic Board of Surgery.

Baker grew up in Galena, Kansas.

The university will present the annual Meritorious Achievement Award and Distinguished Service Award to recipients in April. Check Pitt State Alumni & Constituent Relations on Facebook for an announcement.



**Kelly Burgess**

BST '01 – Automotive Technology

Kelly Burgess is an electrification specialist for Case New Holland and the president of Action Charging & Energy, LLC, based in Nebraska.

He joined CNH Industrial as a service technical specialist in 2002 and was quickly promoted. He has held positions including quality test engineer, product quality, and technical specialist.

In his current role, he develops electrification strategies for CNH agricultural and construction equipment products. These efforts are aimed to target direct greenhouse gas emission reductions for a pathway to future sustainability and growth.

He is a member of the Pitt State Automotive Technology Advisory Council, the Central Community College Diesel Technology Advisory Board, and the Pittsburg High School Automotive Advisory Board.

Burgess has arranged for the donation of a number of training aids, engines, and transmissions to the Automotive Technology program to help the next generation of students.

Last spring, he donated and installed a new EV charging station in Downtown Pittsburg in partnership with the City of Pittsburg, local sustainability advocates, and the Colonial Fox Theatre.

Burgess grew up in Pittsburg, Kansas.



**Samantha Pinkal-Jefferson**

BST '08 – Construction Management

Samantha Pinkal-Jefferson is the vice president of business development for the Greater Phoenix Economic Council in Phoenix, Arizona.

Her specialty is acting as a liaison between clients and communities, from site selection to site layout and logistics.

Past positions have ranged from economic development project manager for the City of Surprise, Arizona, to serving as project engineer and business development manager for The Weitz Company.

This year, she was named to the 25 Women Leaders in Commercial Real Estate to Watch list.

She is a member of the Arizona Association for Economic Development, Advancing Women in Construction, Chief — a private network designed for women in executive leadership — the Pitt State School of Construction Leadership Council, and the Pitt State Alumni Association Board of Directors.

She currently serves as president of AZCREW, the premier commercial real estate organization that dominates in the advancement and success of women within the commercial real estate industry.

Pinkal-Jefferson grew up in Imperial, Nebraska.



Where have you traveled with Gus or wearing your Gorilla gear? Email your photo, a caption, and your degree and graduation year to [psumag@pittstate.edu](mailto:psumag@pittstate.edu).



Alpha Sigs and Pitt State grads — Barbara Nelson Hersh (Social Work '76), Vicki Vaughan Dennett (Accounting '76), and Deanne Chapman Krisch — ran into each other and a stranger wearing a Pitt State shirt in Nashville, Tennessee, so had to get a photo!



Gene Beauchamp (Biology '66) took his Gorilla pride along on a trip through Silverton, Colorado.



These Gorillas took a trip to Salvador, Brazil, proudly wearing their crimson and gold: Matt McLeod (Biology '94, MS '99), Rhonda McFarland (Communication '91), Abby Johnson (General Studies '21), Ryan Zafuta (MA '21), Leo Borghi (MBA '20), João "Dito" Simões (MET '21), Karlie Zafuta (Nursing '20), Hope Zafuta, and Karen Johnson (Nursing '96, MSN '05), associate professor in Nursing.



Gorillas traveled all the way to Barcelona, Spain, to support the Pitt State Women's Basketball team led by Coach Amanda Davied (Education '03, MS Human Performance and Wellness '08).



Sharon Bertolio (Education '91) and Nicole Guerrero Foster (Education '01, '03) took Gus along when they climbed Torreys Peak in Colorado in July 2023. They were celebrating Bertolio's retirement after 31 years in education and already are making plans for more climbs in the future.

Janet Houser, a Foundation Trustee (Nursing '76) showed her love of Pitt State in Tuscany, taking cooking lessons at the International Academy of Italian Cuisine with chef Gianluca.





Mark Sappington (MBA '21), Stephanie Wolkar (Biology '91), Gretchen Wolkar-Caswell (Education '87, MS '92), Brian Caswell (1983-84), Lori Kingrey-Kellum (Education '82, MS '08), Bert Kellum (Automotive Technology '80), and Robert "Bob" Weaver (Technology Management '88) all live in Baxter Springs, Kansas, except for Mark, who lives in Alabama, and they enjoy traveling together and showing their Pitt State pride. Last summer they visited Alaska and took a ride on the White Pass and Yukon Railroad Route, a route once used by those hoping to strike gold.



Penny Knoll Massa (Social Work '74) and John Knoll (Social Work '65) dressed in their crimson and gold at the famous Mission Church in Taos, New Mexico.

Diane Heublein (FACS '75), Daryl Roller (Industrial Technology '71), and Christy Roller (Business Administration '73) represented Pitt State at Steinsdalsfossen waterfall near the Hardanger Fjord in Norway on their way to Iceland.



Bobbie Cissell (MBA '23), held her own graduation ceremony at sea in Alaska after scheduling a cruise long before she knew when her commencement would be at PSU!



After spending a week cruising down the Rhine river from Amsterdam to Basel, a group of Gorillas went to Rome to show off their shirts before heading home: James Burke (Education '72, MS '75), Dr. Allison Burke Gardner (Nursing '00), Blaire Burke (Education '08), and Beverly Dugan Burke (Education '71, MS '74).





Gavin (Education '11) and Brittney Graff Wuthrich (Nursing '11) celebrated their 10-year anniversary at Seven Falls in Colorado Springs with their future Gorillas!



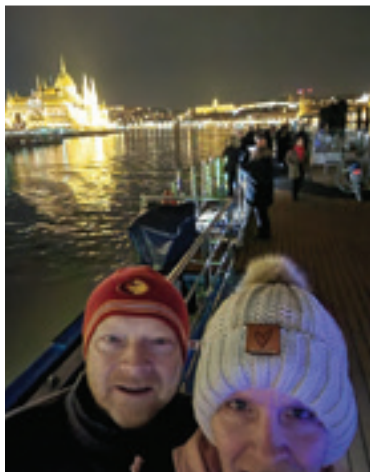
Brad Giles (Automotive Technology '93) and his brother Craig visited Cairo where they saw The Pyramids and Sphinx, Egyptian museum, the Nile, and the Valley of the Kings and Queens — and Brad remembered to pack his PSU t-shirt!



Nick Schmitz (Biology '80) Allison Fitts Schmitz (Communication '81) Greg Fitts (Business Administration '72) took their Gorilla gear to Liverpool to visit the Beatles!



The Stotts Family went to Prince Edward Island in July 2023, and posed with their Gorilla-wear at the West Point Lighthouse. Avery is a sophomore, Jeff (Automotive Technology '85) is the university's campus environmental and safety officer, B.B. is the associate director of First Year Programs, and Madison was part of the Alicante, Spain Study Abroad group in Summer 2022.



Marty Whitworth (Electrical Technology '92, BSVTE '12) and his wife Brenda stopped for a photo in front of the Parliament Building in Budapest, Hungary, while on a 12-day tour and river cruise up the Danube River through Hungary, Slovakia, Austria, and Germany) in Fall 2023.



Paul Sherman (Plastics Engineering '00), was showing Gorilla spirit in Kyoto Japan at Fushimi Inari Taisha, Shinto Shrine, this summer while there to celebrate his son's graduation.

## WHERE IN THE WORLD IS GUS?



Chris Johnson (Political Science '71) Carolyn Sage Johnson (Education '72) Joni Johnson Jones (Education '77) took a fun adventure to the New England States as well as a stop in Niagara Falls Canada showing off their Gorilla Spirit!

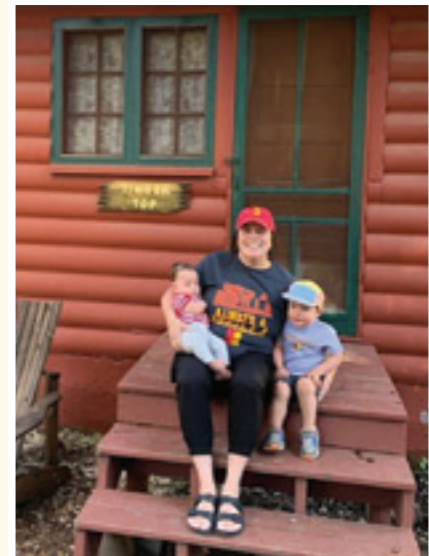


Tod Hessong (Computer Science '03, Secondary Education '06) and Danielle (Krusich) Hessong (Elementary Education '02) and their children Reese and Carter visited the nation's capital, where Gus got to see Washington's Monument. They also visited many other monuments, museums, and Mt. Vernon, and while wearing their shirts, they met someone who recognized Gus and said he went to high school in Pittsburg!



Three 1969 Pitt State grads who also attended high school together in Pennsylvania have maintained strong friendships and got together to play a round of golf. All three are approaching their 50th graduate school reunion years. From left: Bob Heusser, (Biology '75), Randy Byrnes, (Counseling '74) and Jim Slobozien (Counseling '75).

Allie McDowell (BSE '11) with her little Gorillas on their first family vacation to Wickiup Village Cabins in Lead, South Dakota.



When sisters Anne Marie Gartner-Moravac (Communication '18) and Mary Kate Gartner (Elementary Education '15) went to Charleston, South Carolina, they spotted a massive gorilla AND a street named Pitt St — so of course they had to stop and take a picture at both! “We love our gorillas and are proud to be alumni of the best school ever!” — Mary Kate



## 1978

**Cheryl Giefer** (Nursing) was chosen as one of 12 Women of Distinction for 2024 by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. Giefer is the director of the Irene Ransom Bradley School of Nursing at Pittsburg State University.

## 1982

**Todd Midfelt** (Education – History, MS '89) and **David D. Schafer** (History '85, MA '87) are celebrating the publication of their book, "Abolitionist of the Most Dangerous Kind," based on the true story of James Montgomery, a Union colonel who helped hundreds of enslaved people in Missouri reach freedom in Kansas via one of the least-explored underground railways in the nation.

## 1983

Professor **Mark Johnson** (Business Administration, MS '87, EdS '89) was asked to officially receive HB 2292 signed into law by Gov. Laura Kelly in Topeka this fall as the Secretary of the Kansas Apprenticeship Council, a position he was appointed to by Kelly. It is the first major legislation in Kansas that provides tax credits for organizations wishing to establish apprenticeship programs — a great step towards helping solve the state's workforce development shortages. Johnson has taught in Technology & Workforce Learning since 1986.

## 1984

**Willie Fritz** (Education '84) was named head football coach at the University of Houston. He most recently served as coach at Tulane University in New Orleans. As a member of the Gorilla football team, he played on two conference title teams and was a four-year starter at defensive back.

## 1985

**Kay Dunbar** (Biology '85) was chosen as one of 12 Women of Distinction for 2024 by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. Dunbar is employed by HIX Corporation.



A GROUP OF 20 ALUMNI FROM AFRICA traveled to Pittsburg for Homecoming weekend for a reunion they organized themselves. They met with President Shipp, walked in the parade, attended the football game, and gave a public presentation. It featured Dr. Femi Oluwafemi (Physics '02), now a senior director and principal engineer at Intel Corporation; Dr. Seleipiri Iboroma Akobo (Nursing '07), now a hospital medicine physician and addiction medicine fellow at Maine Medical Center in Portland, Maine; both are from Nigera. It also featured Appiah-Brafoh (Communication '02, Human Resource Development '05), now the corporate affairs manager for the Petroleum Commission in Ghana.

## 1986

Professor **Cynthia Huffman** (Mathematics Education, MS '87) was recognized by the national mathematics honor society Kappa Mu Epsilon with their highest award, the George Mach Distinguished Service Award. Retired faculty member Harold Thomas received the award in 1997. Huffman joined the faculty in Fall 1994.

## 1988

**Bruce Stancell** (Education) was inducted in the Missouri Sports Hall of Fame. While playing Gorilla Football, he received NAIA All-America honors, was a two-time all-conference selection, and helped pave the way for Pitt State's entire starting backfield to earn All-American honors in 1986 as the Gorillas led the NAIA in rushing, scoring and total offense. He worked 25 years for McDonald County High School as a teacher and coach, starting the wrestling program before retiring in 2017.

## 1993

Assistant Instructional Professor **Shelly Grimes** (MS '96) was recognized with Wayne Osness Honor Award — the most prestigious award given by the Kansas Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance and named for an expert in exercise physiology. The award recognizes exemplary leadership, significant contributions to the discipline, participation on the board of the KAHPERD, and advocacy for healthy, active Kansans.

## 1994

**Angela Neria** (Marketing, MBA '95, SpEd '99) was chosen as one of 12 Women of Distinction for 2024 by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. Neria is the chief information officer at Pittsburg State University.

**1996**

**Amanda Mohr** (Business Administration) was profiled by the Kansas City Business Journal as one of the “2023 Women Who Mean Business.” Mohr is the second woman and first non-family member to become president of Superior Bowen Asphalt, based out of Kansas City, Missouri. She previously worked in public accounting and as a restaurant franchisee before joining the construction industry.

**2000**

**Jenny Ehling** (Elementary Education, MS '07) was chosen as one of 12 Women of Distinction for 2024 by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. Ehling is employed by The Family Resource Center.

**2001**

**Mandy Arck** (Elementary Education, MST '09, EdS '14) was chosen as one of 12 Women of Distinction for 2024 by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. Arck is employed by Pittsburg Community Schools.

**2003**

**Jeff Bair** (Computer Science & Information Systems) was promoted to director of information technology for The City of Pittsburg. He began his career in the city's IT Department in 2000 and held many positions. He now oversees the city's networking security, radio communications, geographic information systems, data center, software applications, IT support services, and facility maintenance division.

**2004**

**Rachael Peterson** (Psychology) was chosen as one of 12 Women of Distinction for 2024 by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. Peterson is employed by Watco Companies as an executive vice president.

**2005**

**Austin Rhodes** (Education) named Assistant Principal for Primary 2-3 for the Carl Junction School District.

**2008**

Associate Professor **Jordan Backs** (Wood Technology, MST '09) was named to the elite 2023 Wood Industry “40 Under 40” list by The Woodworking Network. Backs was recognized for taking students to trade shows and leadership seminars, connecting them with employers, and partnering with a YouTube influencer.

**2010**

**La'Mour Romine** (Sociology) was chosen as one of 12 Women of Distinction for 2024 by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. Romine is employed by the Pittsburg Police Department as a sergeant detective.

**DePrice Taylor** (Social Work, MS '12) was appointed to the Kansas City Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners by Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas. She began her term in October 2023. DePrice currently serves as the Executive Director of Community Relations for the KC Current.

**2012**

**Jordan Giesler** (Art) and his collaborators were recently named the bronze winners from Clio Sports in the design category for the Super Bowl LVII Championship ring. Giesler is a creative director for the Kansas City Chiefs.

**2013**

**Benjamin Cochran** (MS Nursing, DNP '16) was named the recipient of the 23rd Annual William and Allene Guthrie Van Meter Outstanding Alumni Achievement Award at Labette Community College, which honors graduates with significant professional and community service achievements.

**2014**

**Jake Stevenson** (Physical Education, MSED '21) was hired as principal for Primary 2-3 for the Carl Junction School District.

## First gen grad becomes college president

Matt Seimears (Education '95) was named the next president of Lower Columbia College in southwest Washington. He was the first member of his family to go to college, entering the workforce as a MIG/TIG welder after being told in high school that “college isn't for you.”

His curiosity was piqued after reading about American colleges in a book he purchased at a thrift store for \$.25, and he enrolled at Butler Community College. After transferring to Pitt State, he nearly had to withdraw due to a lack of funds.

With the help of a university administrator, he landed a job for \$35 a week that kept him afloat. After graduation, he began teaching English Language Learning elementary and middle school students and coached high school wrestling and university rugby teams.

He earned his Master's from Wichita State University, a second Bachelor's from Newman University, and his PhD from Kansas State University. He taught at Cowley Community College for six years, as a GED instructor for three years, and worked at Emporia State University for 15 years as an instructor/academic advisor, professor, associate department chair, and department chair.

In 2019, he became dean of the College of Education at Eastern Oregon University and in 2022, was appointed interim provost.

Seimears has considerable experience with grants and fundraising, enrollment and academic initiatives including leading EOU's efforts to become the Pacific Northwest Hub for the Rural Schools Collaborative, and has published a number of textbooks and scholarly articles.

He has a new e-book coming out soon about teaching science to English Language Learners.





**Kaylyn Hite** (Psychology) was chosen as one of 12 Women of Distinction for 2024 by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. Hite is employed by Fleming Law Firm, LLC.

Assistant Instructional Professor **Carol Meza-Bakke** (Social Work) was appointed to the Kansas Governor's Military Council. She is a veteran of the Kansas Army National Guard who earned a Purple Heart in Iraq. As a member of the statewide council, she will advocate for service members. She also was chosen by the Council on Social Work Education to help revise the "Specialized Practice Curricular Guide for Military Social Work," scheduled for publication in February 2024.

## 2015

**Dominic Martinez** (Education, MEd '18, EdS '20) was hired as the assistant principal at Renner Elementary in Kansas City, Missouri, after serving eight years as assistant principal in Leavenworth, Kansas. He also has taught as a career exploration teacher and coached cross country and track and field. He also earned his master's and educational specialist degrees from PSU.

## 2016

**Melanie A. Golubski** (Education) was chosen as the Spring Hill Schools elementary honoree for the 2025 Kansas Teacher of the Year award, which recognizes the district's outstanding certified teachers who excel in the areas of student success, service to the profession, and more. She is in her seventh year in the district and teaches first grade.

**Adrienne Towner** (Communication) was named to the 40 Under 40 KC Top Producers list by KC Real Producers. She is a licensed realtor for Realty Executives of Kansas City working in both Kansas and Missouri.

## 2017

**Erin DeWeese** (Communication) earned two 2023 Prism Awards from the Public Relations Society of America for the "Grow with Grandview" community advertising campaign designed to promote Grandview, Missouri. Prism Awards are the pinnacle of excellence in the public relations industry, showcasing exemplary campaigns, initiatives, and acknowledging individuals who have made a significant impact in the field.

## Graduates perform in Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade

Three graduates of our Music Education program were among the 415 band directors selected from all 50 states to perform in the Band Directors Marching Band in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade!

Andrea Dinkle ('08), a Pittsburg resident who directs the band program in Galena, played piccolo; Lindsey Chambers ('20), who directs the band program in Riverton, played clarinet; and Jenna Morris ('21), who directs the band program at LeRoy-Gridley, played sousaphone. Combined, the band has taught for more than 7,000 years and has made a difference in the lives of tens of thousands of students!



## 2018

**Allison Ramsey** (Business Administration, MBA '22) was promoted to director of finance for The City of Pittsburg. She previously worked in financial administration for Pitt State; Safehouse Crisis Center; NPC International; Diehl, Banwart, Bolton, CPAs; and Leggett & Platt. She began her career with the city in January 2023 as deputy finance director. In her new role, she compiles the city's comprehensive annual financial report, manages the city's budgeting process, and creates the five-year forecast.

## 2019

**Kaden Wimmer** (Communication) was recognized in the healthcare category by NextGen Under 30 Kansas, which aims to identify and encourage individuals who

demonstrate talent, drive, and service to their communities. He is the regional director of patient experience at Compass One Healthcare.

**Katherine Pinto** (Health, Human Performance, and Recreation), was chosen as one of 12 Women of Distinction for 2024 by the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce. Pinto is employed by K-State Research and Extension as a SNAP-Ed and EFNEP Agent.

## 2020

**Isaac McClure** (Automotive Technology) won the "hands-on" portion of the Top Tech competition for Premier Truck Group in Dallas after being named a finalist on the written portion. As the winner, he received a \$10,000 award.

**2021**

**Emerson Tice** (MS Communication '21) was recognized by NextGen Under 30 Kansas, which aims to identify and encourage individuals who demonstrate talent, drive, and service to their communities, in the Media & Public Relations category. Tice is a photographer at Emerson Creative LLC and an Associate Account Manager at Signal Theory Inc.

**2022**

**Macy Gray** (Education) has begun teaching reading and ELA intervention at Galena Middle School.

**2023**

**Isabelle Redford** (Communication) landed her dream job as the communication director for Labette County school district.

**Taylor Michael** (Biology) was recognized by the Botanical Society of America with its annual Outstanding Young Botanist Award. The BSA gives out just 25 of these nationally each year. She began her PhD at the University of Kansas in the fall.

## Hogard chosen as director of Admission

A Pitt State alumnus with more than 28 years of experience in higher education has been chosen as the university's next director of Admission.

David Hogard (Business Administration '93, MBA '95), will begin on Jan. 8, 2024.

Hogard's career has been spent at Pitt State, beginning in 1995 when he was hired as the assistant director of Alumni Relations.

He has served as the assistant director for Experiential Education Programs and the assistant director for Employer Relations — both in the Office of Career Services — and as a professor in Kelce College of Business.



From 2018-2022, he was the director of Academic Advising & Career Readiness, and last fall he was named director of Academic Advising — a new position overseeing a new office.

He'll now work closely with Karl Stumo, vice president of Student Life and Enrollment Management, and the team in Admission to develop a clear focus and specific objectives to meet enrollment targets.

He and his wife Susan, an educator, live in Frontenac, and have two daughters, Kaylee and Anna. His wife and daughters also are Pitt State graduates.





**1945**

**A. Faye Teegarden**, Augusta, Kan.

**1947**

**Dorothy J. Thompson**, Lincoln, Neb.

**1948**

**Shirley L. Divoll**, Mission, Kan.

**1951**

**Martha L. Hoefling**, Broken Arrow, Okla.

**Welby G. Parson**, Frisco, Texas

**James A. Skahan**, Columbus, Kan.

**1952**

**Betty A. Grisham**, Frontenac, Kan.

**1953**

**Jo Ann Brinkman**, Santa Fe, N.M.

**Arden W. Sanderson**, Kearney, Neb.

**1954**

**Arthur D. Corpolongo**, Lebanon, Mo.

**Andy Hornbaker**, Salt Lake City, Utah

**1955**

**Florence A. Bramble**, Algonquin, Ill.

**Norma J. Hamm**, Denver, Colo.

**1956**

**Sally M. Edmiston**, Chesterfield, Mo.

**Herbert H. Hickman**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**Michael N. Skahan**, Columbus, Kan.

**1957**

**William M. Roehling**, Joplin, Mo.

**1958**

**Delbert R. Fluty**, Overland Park, Kan.

**Sally M. Hart**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**Charles J. Matous**, Wichita, Kan.

**1959**

**Dolores A. Albertini**, Prairie Village, Kan.

**Jack D. Ball**, Rogersville, Mo.

**Patricia E. Kazmierski**, Colorado Springs, Colo.

**Gary M. Munsinger**, Tucson, Ariz.

**Patricia A. Seckman**, Hillsboro, Mo.

**Paul E. Welch**, Webb City, Mo.

**1960**

**Dan D. Mosier**, Girard, Kan.

**1961**

**Chester R. Bilke**, Riverton, Kan.

**Barbara A. McCord**, Edna, Kan.

**1962**

**Leslie W. Alexander**, Bloomington, Ill.

**Bob O. Blunk, Jr.**, Denver, Colo.

**James R. Clark**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**Ailene Dewelt**, Joplin, Mo.

**Richard J. Wiencek**, Frisco, Texas

**1963**

**Maurice H. Cotter**, Cedar Park, Texas

**Donna J. Erisman**, Joplin, Mo.

**James A. Gerdes**, Altamont, Kan.

**William D. White**, Independence, Kan.

**1964**

**Nelda K. Cuppy**, Moran, Kan.

**Robert L. Fulton, Jr.**, Collins, Colo.

**Jeannine M. Hepner**, Broken Arrow, Okla.

**Larry P. Lee**, Carl Junction, Mo.

**Carl R. McEntire**, Colo. Ilege Station, Texas

**Patrick B. Page**, South Africa

**Dale W. Sullens**, Joshua, Texas

**1965**

**Ronald G. Chilcott**, Alexandria, Va.

**Francis L. Felts**, Wichita, Kan.

**Larry L. Hardesty**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**Judith K. Hutson**, Carthage, Mo.

**Gary P. Lindsly**, Wichita, Kan.

**Carl F. Mundis**, North Platte, Neb.

**Rachel A. Torbett**, Lawrence, Kan.

**William T. Waller**, Denton, Texas

**1967**

**Jerry W. Cicero**, Raymore, Mo.

**Vanetta C. Sabine**, Girard, Kan.

**1968**

**Mary L. Blair**, Boulder, Colo.

**Lynn W. Bousman**, Lee's Summit, Mo.

**Ray E. Funk**, Chanute, Kan.

**Pamela A. Musick**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**Sherwin E. Patton**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**Forrest A. Young**, Carthage, Mo.

**1969**

**Jerry H. Lo**, Carol Stream, Ill.

**Ronald L. Stang**, Louisburg, Kan.

**1970**

**Rodney L. Cook**, Neodesha, Kan.

**James F. Pippin**, Houston, Texas

**Jimmie D. Steen**, Stigler, Okla.

**William L. Stephens**, Winfield, Kan.

**1971**

**Jim A. Atkinson**, Iola, Kan.

**Monna L. Bulkley**, Topeka, Kan.

**Shirley M. Doty**, Fort Scott, Kan.

**Chester C. Johnston**, Fort Scott, Kan.

**Ronald R. Patchin**, Parsons, Kan.

**Thomas J. Restivo**, Frontenac, Kan.

**Richard E. Saporito**, Overland Park, Kan.

**Brack Treloggen**, Chanute, Kan.

**Mary J. Walterscheid**, Coffeyville, Kan.

**Marie S. Webster**, Chanute, Kan.

**1972**

**Beverly J. Cook**, Independence, Kan.

**Steven M. Klein**, House Springs, Mo.

**Dennis K. Sutton**, Webb City, Mo.

**1973**

**Garold R. Billionis**, Fort Scott, Kan.

**Emma C. Cunningham**, Omaha, Neb.

**Lorella M. Fulton**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**Richard D. McMichael**, Hooker, Okla.

**1974**

**Winnie L. Aston**, Flower Mound, Texas

**Margarette A. McReynolds**, Beloit, Kan.

**Mark L. Mitchelson**, Battlefield, Mo.

**Gale D. Pipkin**, Aurora, Colo.

**Michael D. Powell**, Arma, Kan.

**Janet M. Saunders**, Lenexa, Kan.

**1975**

**Rono G. Bowyer**, Joplin, Mo.

**Mary A. Mabrey**, Charlotte, N.C.

**Stephen A. Miller**, Coffeyville, Kan.

**Alice L. Thomas**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**Arlen K. Wiens**, Bartlesville, Okla.

**1976**

**Donnie R. David**, Moran, Kan.

**David E. Turnbull**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**Deanna J. Wyckoff**, Arlington, Va.

**1977**

**Gary D. Butler**, Lee's Summit, Mo.

**1978**

**Gary L. Johnson**, Buena Park, Calif.

**1979**

**Gary L. Dykman**, Overland Park, Kan.

**1980**

**Sandra F. Fox**, McCune, Kan.

**Cheryl C. Hazen**, Parsons, Kan.

**1981**

**Jewel M. Barker**, Afton, Okla.

**Richard J. Bustos**, Chandler, Ariz.

**Catherine J. Campbell**, Oswego, Kan.

**Roy R. Hanna**, Jasper, Mo.

**Debra J. Steele**, Lawrence, Kan.

**Abbie L. Taylor**, Leawood, Kan.

**1982**

**Jeff A. Brooks**, Asbury, Mo.

**Gregory J. Roberts**, Hutchinson, Kan.

**1983**

**Stephen L. Jones**, Webb City, Mo.

**John J. Manley**, Wellston, Mich.

**Beverly A. Mashburn**, Tulsa, Okla.

**1984**

**Ella M. Bryant**, Independence, Kan.

**Ladonna Buchman**, Spring Hill, Kan.

**1985**

**Frank S. Russell**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**Kelly L. Swartz**, Overland Park, Kan.

**1987**

**Keith W. Abbott**, Lee's Summit, Mo.

**Dennis R. Lumley**, Owasso, Okla.

**Scott A. Wilson**, Orlando, Fla.

**1988**

**Rick S. Bland**, Girard, Kan.

*continued on next page*

**1989**

**Dorothy M. Hilderbrand**, Wichita, Kan.  
**Helen I. Hines**, Erie, Kan.  
**Marie T. Yaghmour**, Leawood, Kan.

**1993**

**Diana K. Hoffman**, Independence, Kan.  
**Charlene H. Tripp**, Saint Joseph, Mo.

**1995**

**Phyllis P. Talley**, Carthage, Mo.

**1997**

**Norbert L. Forst**, Saint Paul, Kan.  
**Julie B. West**, Nevada, Mo.

**1998**

**Jenifer L. McDonald**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**2000**

**Courtney A. French**, Columbia, Mo.

**2001**

**Shawn R. Ames**, Joplin, Mo.

**2002**

**Vicki L. Smith**, Columbus, Kan.

**2003**

**Gwen J. Dobson**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**2005**

**Amber J. Hughes**, Joplin, Mo.

**2007**

**Charles E. Toler**, Greenfield, Mo.

**2012**

**Charles C. Hamman**, Pittsburg, Kan.

**2014**

**Carly A. Twarog**, Farlington, Kan.

## Robert “Bob” Blunk

### ART

Robert Blunk, a noted Midwest regional artist and retired longtime professor of art, died on Oct. 21, 2023, in Denver, where he resided for the past 12 years although he always



considered himself a Kansan. He would have turned 100 years old in December.

Blunk earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1950 from the Kansas City Art Institute after serving in the Pacific in World War II. He earned his Master of Fine Arts from Pitt State in 1962. He taught K-12 and community college in Chanute, Kansas, then joined the art faculty at Pitt State in 1962, teaching here until 1988.

His seven-decade career encompassed painting, sculpture, and public designs and installations in museums and galleries including the Chanute-Wright Brothers Memorial; courthouses in Erie and Burlington; Emprise Bank in Wichita; the Spencer Museum in Lawrence; the New England Foundation for the Arts in Boston; and many private collections. Much of his artwork is now housed by the 6th Floor Project in McCook, Nebraska.

He was the co-creator of the Etcetra Studio, a group of talented artists who created super graphics and murals throughout the Four State Area, and who sold bicycles.

His studio in Denver was filled with his art, which he continued to create until

shortly before his death. He was actively involved in planning a retrospective show of his work at the Salina Arts Center, held Sept. 20 to Oct. 29, 2023.

He is survived by his wife, Diane Kelly; sons Scott Blunk (Lisa Kay) of Philadelphia, and Judd Blunk (Cyndy) of Woodacre, California; four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. His daughter, Rebecca Blunk, died in 2014. His first wife, Katherine, died in 2007 after 62 years of marriage.

Funeral services were private.

## Jeffrey Brooks

### ELECTRICAL TECHNOLOGY

Senior Instructor Jeffrey Brooks, a three-time graduate of Pitt State who taught for 40 years in the Electrical Technology program in the College of Technology, died Aug. 30 following an illness. He was 61.

Brooks grew up in Pittsburg. He earned a Certificate of Completion in Electricity in 1982, a Bachelor's in Vocation-Technical Education in 1990, and a Master's in 1993.

In addition to teaching, he was a member of the Aircraft Owner Pilot Association and the KNEA Teacher's Association.

He is survived by his wife, Kathy, as well as a daughter, Emily Brooks-Davis, and her family, two sisters, and several nieces and nephews.

Services were Sept. 12 in Pittsburg.



## Wilmer “Bill” Huffman

### ACCOUNTING

Wilmer “Bill” Huffman, an accounting professor at Pitt State for 20 years and winner of the Outstanding Faculty Award in 1988, died Nov. 19 at the Kansas City Hospice House. He was 91.

Huffman's daughter, Professor Cynthia Huffman, has been a faculty member in the Math Department since 1994. He began his career as a professional accountant and was a CPA and partner in the Hampton-Huffman Accounting Firm before earning an MBA and doctorate in accounting and joining the faculty in the Kelce College of Business.

While teaching at Pitt State, he was active in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, serving as the district coordinator and Kansas Training Specialist for AARP Tax-Aide.

He also served in a number of civic organizations and for more than 20 years in the Kansas National Guard and Army Reserve, retiring as a major.

He is survived by his wife, JoAnn, of the home; his daughter Cynthia and a son, Dr. William Huffman and his family; and several great grandchildren, nieces, and nephews.





# Planned Giving

The PSU Foundation would like to recognize the following individual for making a planned gift through his will or estate.

His contributions will make a positive impact on the success of PSU students through scholarship support.



## **Ronald Roderique**

A graduate who went on to achieve success in business and philanthropy decided before his death to give back to his alma mater with a planned gift.

Ronald Roderique (Business Administration '53) was very active as a student, serving as Student Council President and as a member of the Board of Publications and the pep club, the Newman Club, and the Men's Residence Hall Association.

After graduating, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served in the Pacific Theater aboard the U.S.S. Wasp. He earned an MBA from the University of California Berkeley in 1958 and embarked on a career in marketing.

As senior vice president of marketing at United Bank of Arizona, he introduced the first automated teller machine ("The Ugly Teller") to Arizona banking in 1973. He retired from the bank in 1988.

Roderique was a 50-year member of Rotary International, serving as president of the Phoenix Midtown Rotary Club and Governor of Rotary District 5490. In 1999, he was presented with Rotary's highest award, "Rotary's Service Above Self Award."

An Eagle Scout and military veteran, he also was a 30-year member of Arizona Town Hall. He traveled the world and touched the lives of many.

Roderique died in June 2023 at the age of 93. A planned gift to the PSU Foundation will create a scholarship for students majoring in business who also are involved in student activities and have financial need.

Learn more about how you can make an impact and make lives better through education with a planned gift. Contact Erica Martin, senior director of Development and Planned Giving, at [ermartin@pittstate.edu](mailto:ermartin@pittstate.edu) or 620-235-4863.

For more information on the Heritage Society and leaving a legacy, visit [pittstate.giftlegacy.com](https://pittstate.giftlegacy.com).



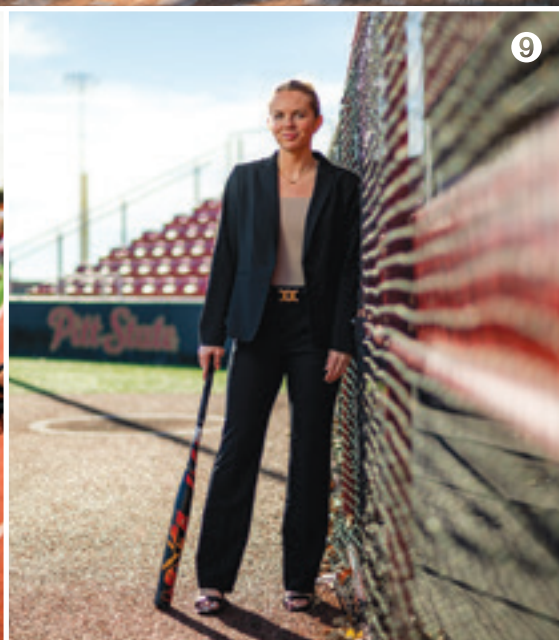
Addie Hinterweger, a junior from Overbrook, Kansas, dual majoring in Graphic Communications and Communication, captured the people, places, and events of the Fall semester.



1. Student organizations performed dances, stunts, and cheers to compete in the annual Yell Like Hell competition during Homecoming week. The men of Pi Kappa Alpha placed second in the small division.
2. Riley Cruss, a sousaphone player in the Pride of The Plains Marching Band, entertained the crowd with music during an intense football game against Emporia State.
3. On Family Day, the Chandler family danced around their jumping “cheerleader” in Gorilla Village. Inside the stadium, they cheered for football player Cleo Chandler, Jr. in the game against Nebraska-Kearney.
4. Senior Jayden Sanford, a Marketing and Graphic Communications major, posed for a fall portrait near University Lake.
5. The 2nd Annual Global Fest, organized in Lindburg Plaza by members of the International Student Organization, took students, campus, and community on a journey “around the world” to sample food and culture from several countries.
6. The Veterans Memorial north of the Student Recreation Center provides a beautiful and reflective space for visitors to pay tribute to those who served. It is open 365 days a year.
7. The flower beds and banana trees south of the Overman Student Center add a touch of “the jungle” to campus.
8. ROTC cadets watched the Gorillas take on the Central Oklahoma Bronchos during Operation Gameday — an annual theme that raises scholarships for students in ROTC, raises awareness for the program, and honors veterans and military personnel.
9. Senior Gabby Schultz, a softball player and marketing major, posed for a photo in her business attire while on the field where she competes in the Gene Bicknell Sports Complex.











Pittsburg State University

1701 S. Broadway

Pittsburg, KS 66762-7500

NONPROFIT  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Pittsburg State  
University

# ONCE A GORILLA. ALWAYS A GORILLA.

## RIDE WITH GORILLA PRIDE

Invest in a Gorilla license plate and support future Gorillas.

Plates are available in Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma. The donation is tax-deductible and supports student scholarships.

Learn more at:  
[pittstate.edu/  
licenseplate](http://pittstate.edu/licenseplate)



## HALF-CENTURY REUNION

SAVE THE DATE:

MAY 9-10, 2024

**Classes of 1972, 73, & 74:**

Reconnect with classmates, march in commencement, socialize at a dinner and dance, be inducted into the Half-Century Club, and more!



Visit [pittstate.edu/halfcentury](http://pittstate.edu/halfcentury) or call 620-235-4758.

## GATHER AND STAY CONNECTED

Stay connected with Pittsburg State by attending a Gorilla Gathering in your area hosted by Alumni & Constituent Relations.

For a list of upcoming events and e-newsletter information, visit [pittstate.edu/alumni](http://pittstate.edu/alumni).



@pittstatealumni



@pittstatealumni



@pittstatealumni