



DERRYBERRY HALL



GRATITUDE | 2025



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**Graphic Design** Dale Anderson

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**Crawford Alumni Center**

Campus Box 1915, Cookeville, TN 38505

931-372-3205 | [alumni@tntech.edu](mailto:alumni@tntech.edu)

[tntech.edu/alumni](http://tntech.edu/alumni)

Dear Golden Eagle community,

It's hard to think of two places that mean more to me than Cookeville-Putnam County and Tennessee Tech. I grew up watching my grandparents, State Senators Tommy and Charlotte Burks, and my mom, former Putnam County Mayor Kim Blaylock, dedicate themselves to making the Upper Cumberland a better place to live. Following in their footsteps is both an honor and a responsibility I deeply cherish.

I believe strongly in supporting and empowering the local governments, businesses and nonprofit organizations that shape our community. None have a greater impact on this region than Tennessee Tech.



Cookeville is Tennessee's College Town. Our region and Tech are intertwined – one cannot thrive without the other. When Tech succeeds, the entire Upper Cumberland benefits, and every day, I see the incredible ways Tech and Cookeville-Putnam County uplift and strengthen one another.

I was raised to believe in leaving things better than you found them and that it's better to give than to receive. A fulfilling life comes from investing in others, and giving back doesn't require wealth – just a willingness to support the places and people that matter to you. It's inspiring to see so many alumni doing just that for their alma mater. The latest edition of Gratitude magazine from the Tennessee Tech Crawford Alumni Center highlights just a few stories of alumni and donor generosity. But beyond the pages of a magazine, Tech and Cookeville-Putnam County remain grateful for every act of support – whether it's making a gift, attending an event, cheering on the Golden Eagles, hiring a Tech graduate or mentoring a student.

The Upper Cumberland and Tech are growing – together. I'm proud to be a Tech alum, and I'm proud to call Cookeville home.

Wings Up!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy New". The script is fluid and cursive.

Amy New ('08 marketing)  
President and CEO, Cookeville-Putnam County Chamber  
of Commerce

# Tennessee Tech Alumni Association Board member shares time, talent and treasure with alma mater

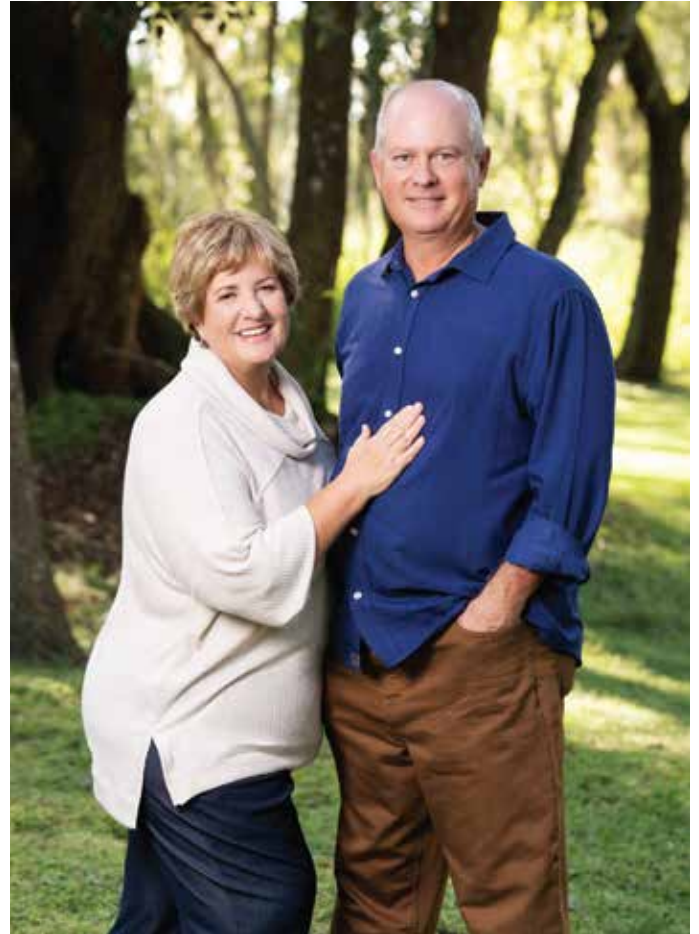
Driven by a deep commitment to their alma mater, the Tennessee Tech Alumni Association Board of Directors is a dynamic group of dedicated individuals who are shaping the future of the university through service, leadership and philanthropy. As passionate ambassadors, they serve as vital liaisons between alumni and the university, hosting events nationwide and fostering lasting connections that help strengthen the Golden Eagle community.

Stan Harper ('80 civil engineering) joined the Board of Directors in July 2024, and in his first year, he and his wife Jamie have already hosted two successful regional alumni events in Florida. They also fund a scholarship for Tech students.

"Years ago, I heard someone say that the first third of your life is about learning," Stan said. "The second third of your life is about earning. The last third of your life should be about giving back."

Susan Luna-Hazlewood, director of Tech's Crawford Alumni Center and executive director of the Alumni Association Board of Directors, says Stan has embraced his role as a board member.

"Stan truly embodies the spirit of Tennessee Tech," she said. "He is passionate about this university and committed to building lasting connections among Tech alumni. Anyone who meets Stan immediately feels like they've made a friend. I'm incredibly grateful for the leadership, service and enthusiasm he brings to the board. He is the perfect example of what it means to be a Golden Eagle for life."



Stan and Jamie attended Lebanon High School, then enrolled at Tech as engineering majors. Stan's father, Jim, was the first in his family to attend college, graduating from Tech in 1958 with a degree in business.



Stan recalled, "My father was very proud to be a graduate of Tennessee Tech. When it was time for me to select a university to attend, he told me that I could go to school anywhere that I wanted but if I went to Tech and majored in civil engineering, he'd help me pay for school. My father wore his college ring every day of his life until he passed in 2023."

Jamie excelled in math and science in high school and felt drawn to engineering, despite the fact that women weren't widely encouraged to pursue the field in the late 1970s. She chose to major in industrial engineering at Tech.

Stan graduated in 1980 with his bachelor's degree and accepted a position with Procter & Gamble. When P&G offered a transfer to Greenville, N.C., Stan and Jamie decided to marry a year earlier than planned so Jamie could join him. Jamie earned a degree in industrial engineering from North Carolina State University in 1982 but still considers herself a Golden Eagle.

Throughout Stan's long and successful career with P&G, the couple relocated several times – to Jackson, Tenn.; Memphis, Tenn.; St. Paul, Minn.; Cincinnati, Ohio and even Geneva, Switzerland.

Stan recalled, "The knowledge I gained by studying engineering at Tech was critical for my success at Procter and Gamble. It wasn't the knowledge of how to solve differential equations, fluid dynamics, problems, etc. Instead, it was understanding the process for how to approach very difficult problems by using critical thinking and analytical problem-solving techniques along with developing basic team leadership skills. P&G looked for evidence of foundational technical and leadership skills during their recruitment process. Tech was instrumental for my growth in those areas."

After many years working as an industrial engineer in product design, manufacturing and utilities, Jamie earned a master's degree in clinical counseling.

"People thought this was a 180-degree turn, but the skills I learned as an engineer (integrating people, systems and information) applied to this field as well," she said. "Education and life experiences constantly build our skills and make us better people."

Stan and Jamie retired to Lakewood Ranch, Fla., and although more than 40 years have passed since they lived in Lebanon, they never forgot their roots. Both grew up in families with modest means, and a few years ago, they decided to establish a scholarship for Lebanon High School students.

"Jamie and I have been very blessed in our lives and in our careers," Stan said. "I had a recurring dream placed on my heart to establish a scholarship for deserving students in Lebanon who, like us, need a little extra financial help to achieve their dream of attending college. Perhaps someday, one of these students will also be able to give back and enable this same dream to be realized by others."

Caroline Willis, a junior nursing major, has received the Harper Family Scholarship every year since enrolling at Tech. She vividly remembers the first time she was honored with the scholarship.

"Stan and Jamie came to Lebanon High School on the morning of my senior breakfast to present me with the award," Willis recalled. "I was surprised by their appearance, although it was definitely appreciated. They gave me gorgeous purple and gold flowers, and after the award ceremony we shared a few minutes of sentimental conversation about their pasts and my future. Their character is shown not only through their generosity and desire to give back, but also in the way they treat people. We need more people like Stan and Jamie! I am grateful for the love they have for Lebanon High School and Tennessee Tech."



*Stan (front row, far right) and Jamie Harper (behind the camera) host Tennessee Tech Alumni Association event in Lakeland Ranch, Fla., in September 2024.*

In addition to the Harper Family Scholarship, Stan wanted to contribute further to his alma mater. He learned of an opening in Tech's Alumni Association Board last year and saw it as a way to connect with fellow Tech alumni in Florida.

"Jamie and I didn't know any Tech alumni in Southwest Florida, but with help from the Crawford Alumni Center, we discovered more than 400 Tech alumni within a 100-mile radius of our home!"

In September, Stan and Jamie hosted an alumni event in Lakeland Ranch where they connected with alumni spanning decades, from a class of 1955 graduate to a 2024 graduate. They enjoyed reminiscing about Tech, sharing yearbooks from the '60s and discussing the newest buildings on campus.

In March, they hosted another event at a spring training baseball game between the Pirates and Red Sox, with plans for more events in the future.

"While Tech alumni are located throughout the country, there are concentrations of alumni in many areas outside of Tennessee," Stan said. "Hosting an alumni event is easy to do, and it's fun to meet new people who had many of the same college experiences that we had. Most of all, it's an opportunity to celebrate and remember the university that helped springboard us into great careers!"

Stan and Jamie say they feel very blessed in sharing their resources with Tech.

"When we invest in something – whether it be time or money – we want to see a positive return," Stan said. "As we have become more active alumni in recent years, we have been very impressed with the longstanding stewardship of Tech, thanks to the school's leadership. The campus has grown and continues to add academic options to meet the needs of Tennessee and our country – nursing, cybersecurity and now a new nuclear engineering program. Alumni should be proud that Tech graduates have the lowest student debt and highest average starting salary of any state university in Tennessee. Why would you not want to invest in something that has a track record of success year after year?"



*Stan and Jamie Harper present Caroline Willis with the Harper Family Scholarship at Lebanon High School's awards ceremony.*



## Graham and Bettye Kash Scholarship honors couple's 100+ years of university service

Through a combined total of more than 100 years of teaching and service, Graham and Bettye Kash left an incredible mark on Tennessee Tech. Now, their family and friends are ensuring their legacies live on through the Graham and Bettye Kash Scholarship, which aims to provide future opportunities for Tech students for the next 100 years and beyond.

A shared love for music and folklore brought Graham and Bettye together. The two met while singing at a

meeting of the Tennessee Folklore Society held on Tech's campus and wed in 1970, spending more than 50 years together. Their legacy includes their daughters, Heather Batchelor and Holly Schauer, and four grandsons. Bettye passed away on March 17, 2024, at the age of 88, and Graham followed just 10 months later, on Jan. 4, 2025, at the age of 87.



In an email to Tech students, faculty and staff after Graham's death, President Phil Oldham and First Lady Kari Oldham reflected on the couple's extraordinary partnership: "While Kari and I join all of you in expressing our sorrow over Dr. Kash's passing, we also celebrate his decades of service to this campus and take comfort in the belief that he is once again making music with his beloved Bettye."

Bettye first came to Tech on a graduate assistantship, teaching speech and English while she worked on her master's degree, which she completed in 1973. In addition to teaching speech and theater on campus, Bettye was a dedicated music educator for more than 20 years at several local K-12 schools. She was an enthusiastic participant in community theater, where she both directed and acted in numerous productions.

Graham arrived at Tech in 1963 as an instructor of speech and literature, serving the Golden Eagle community for an astounding 61 years before retiring as a full professor in July 2024. His courses evolved to include speech and folklore, and he coached the university's award-winning Speech & Debate Team, earning the Debate Coach of the Year Award for the entire southwest region. Throughout his career, Graham earned multiple honors, including a Writer's Digest honorable mention award, the Marquis Who's Who Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award and a third-place harmonica award at the 2021 Smithville Fiddler's Jamboree.

In a 2024 interview with Tech's student-produced Eagle Eye Magazine, Graham shared his love for higher education: "If you don't enjoy what you're doing, then you ought to be doing something else."

Eva Dingwall, administrative associate in Tech's Department of Communication, recalls Graham's deep care for his students.

"He never really liked technology (with the exception of voicemail) and avoided it all costs, preferring in-person

methods instead," she said. "When a student contacted him for a permit into a class, he would walk the student to the office to make sure they received the permit and to make sure it was understood that he'd given his full blessing to grant that permit. He was always a gentleman – never harsh nor curt. He never failed to give students both his office and home phone numbers. Dr. Kash represented communication in its most personal sense."

Linda White ('21 English and '23 M.A.) worked as Graham's office assistant and considered Graham and Bettye dear friends. She remembers many late nights spent on campus when the couple would listen to the







Speech & Debate Team members practice, offering encouragement and insightful feedback.

"I count myself blessed to have watched the students grow in confidence," White said. "Under Graham's leadership and Bettye's support, the team won many awards. But more than that, they developed lasting relationships, skills in communication and a sense of community on and off campus."

Dr. Kevin Davis-Bryant ('12 communication), now a lecturer at Clemson University, credits the lessons he learned from Graham and Bettye as a guiding influence in his own classroom.

"Graham's compassion outpaced every other person I've ever met," he said. "He often quipped 'the more the merrier' or 'be supplied.' He wanted everyone to both come along on the journey and to be resourced

appropriately. He even allowed me, as a student, to travel to tournaments by myself if the entire team couldn't attend. I found out several years after I graduated that many of the tournaments I attended without the team were financed out of his own pocket. He always told me that he would be reimbursed and not to worry, but that wasn't necessarily the case – nor did he ever admit to it."

Bob Luna ('82 speech) is renowned for his "golden voice." He has introduced the Golden Eagle marching band for more than 30 years, served as a master of ceremonies for hundreds of meetings and events and acted as a candidate reader for Tech's commencement ceremonies. Luna says he owes his gift of public speaking to Graham Kash.

"More than anyone else, he is the one who helped me with my communication skills," Luna said. "He always

said that there's a difference between being able to write and being able to speak. He really worked with students to improve their spoken grammar in addition to their written grammar. We are judged by how we speak, and Graham felt like improving students' communication skills was the key to being successful in whatever field they chose. He was one of the most brilliant speakers I've ever heard, and he certainly practiced what he preached. I'm convinced that a lot of the successes I've experienced, both in competitive speaking and in business, are thanks to Graham and Bettye."

The couple's unique personalities remain endearing to those who knew them.

"Like most of us, Dr. Kash didn't really like change," Dingwall said. "He called the computer a 'punch' in reference to the days of punch cards and handwritten notes."

Luna fondly remembers receiving invitations to the annual breakfast Graham and Bettye hosted for former debate team members during Homecoming weekend.

"My invitation was always typed on Graham's old typewriter," Luna recalled. "Even though the envelope was prepared by the English Department, the note inside was always typed personally by Graham. He was pretty skilled with that typewriter!"

Davis-Bryant shared fond memories of long bus rides to debate tournaments where Graham and Bettye would often break into song.

"Graham would often count his students thrice to prevent committing what he called 'the horror of all horrors' which was accidentally leaving a student behind when returning home from a tournament," Davis-Bryant said. "He would even count in French occasionally. When he left a voicemail, you just knew you'd get every detail he could think of, and quite often a second voicemail alerting you to the first voicemail. I loved his sense of humor."

To honor their legacy, the Bettye and Graham Kash Scholarship has been established to support members of the Speech & Debate Team, giving preference to students majoring in communication.

White expressed her gratitude for the scholarship, noting its significance for future students: "Establishing this scholarship in their honor is like continuing their support for the people and things they loved, which is a legacy they both would be proud to have. Graham and Bettye deserve to be memorialized in Tennessee Tech's history, but they also deserve to be eternalized in Tech's present by aiding current and future students."

To contribute to the Graham and Bettye Kash Scholarship, visit [tntech.edu/giving](https://tntech.edu/giving), select 'Other,' and enter the scholarship name, or mail a check to the Tennessee Tech Foundation, Box 1915, Cookeville, TN 38505. A Celebration of Life for Graham and Bettye is planned for July 2025 at Tennessee Tech.





# Winningham Family Scholarship celebrates a family's love for Tennessee Tech

In a heartfelt tribute to their family's enduring connection to Tennessee Tech, five sisters have established a scholarship to honor their parents' service to others while providing opportunities for future generations of Golden Eagles.

Les and Peggy Winningham believed in the transformative power of education. They worked tirelessly to ensure that all five of their daughters could attend college. And all five graduated from Tech, earning 10 degrees among them: Carrie Winningham Scott ('95 multidisciplinary studies and '02 M.A.), Allison Winningham Goolsby ('01 secondary education, '06 M.A. and '18 Ed.S.), Shannon Winningham Railing ('01 human ecology, '21 M.A. and '24 Ph.D.), Sarah Winningham Keith ('03 political science) and Jennifer Winningham Owens ('03 English-journalism).

Though Les and Peggy have both passed away – Les in 2022 and Peggy in 2009 – their daughters are committed to honoring their parents' legacy of education and service through the Winningham Family Scholarship.

"Education has always been important to our family," Carrie said. "Raising five children, my parents knew how difficult paying for an education can be. We were raised to help others when we could, and this is one way we can do that while carrying on our family's legacy. We want others to know how much our family prioritized education, and no matter where you come from, you have the opportunity to better yourself and help others."

Les's dedication to education began early on when he hitchhiked from Byrdstown, Tenn., to Swannanoa, N.C. to attend Warren Wilson College. In addition to facing



financial hardships and a lack of transportation, his educational journey could have also been derailed by a rejection letter.

"He said his first attempt to apply to college when he was a high school senior resulted in a response that he was 'not college material,'" Shannon recalled. "The perseverance he showed in continuing to pursue higher education, including hitchhiking to college in North Carolina, is a shining example of not letting other people define your dreams and abilities."

Les graduated from Warren Wilson in 1961 with an associate's degree in forestry, then earned a bachelor's degree in education from Tech in 1964 and a master's in education from Tech in 1967. He went on to have a remarkable career as a teacher, coach, school administrator, district superintendent and state legislator. From coaching high school basketball to teaching to

serving as principal, his goal was to help every student reach their full potential.

In 1984, Les was elected to represent the 38th district in the Tennessee Legislature. He served Clay, Jackson, Macon, Pickett, Scott and part of Anderson counties for 26 years.

"Education was so important to our parents – especially our dad," Jennifer said. "He was often referred to as 'Mr. Public Education' while he was in the House."

Allison added, "His goal was always the same. Whether he was working in the Pickett or Scott County School Systems or on the floor of the House of Representatives in Nashville, he wanted to give students in rural communities the best education they could get. He was adamant that students in rural and disadvantaged communities deserved as many opportunities as



*From left, Shannon Winningham Railling, Sarah Winningham Keith, Peggy Winningham, Les Winningham, Jennifer Winningham Owens, Allison Winningham Goolsby and Carrie Winningham Scott at Sarah and Jennifer's Tennessee Tech graduation.*

students and families in urban areas. Both Mom and Dad believed strongly in Tennessee's public education system and the value of public-school teachers in Tennessee."

The Winningham sisters say there was never any doubt that they would attend Tech.

"I think we were always very proud of our dad, so attending Tech seemed like a natural path," Carrie said.

Sarah added, "I recall my parents saying, 'You can visit any college you want, but you're going to Tech. The stubborn teenager in me would have fought that on sheer principle had I not already been leaning toward Tech after spending so much time there with my older sisters. It turned out to be a decision I've never regretted. It's a 'roots and wings' environment at Tech. It's small enough to feel a sense of home and belonging, yet it's big enough to offer all the college experiences, opportunities and challenges. We each have different skills and interests, and at Tech, we were each able to pursue our own path."

In addition to honoring their parents, the Winningham sisters wanted to give back to a university that played such a significant role in their lives.

Jennifer fondly remembers the late Dr. Michael Birdwell's captivating history classes, while Sarah enjoyed her political science courses with Dr. Lori Maxwell and the lively debates in the Student Government Association office. All five sisters joined Kappa Delta Sorority, where they formed lifelong bonds and experienced a new kind of sisterhood.

Now, a third generation Winningham family member carries on the Tech tradition.

"My son Dylan is at Tech," Allison said. "I get emotional thinking of how proud my parents would be to see the tradition continue. When he was younger, everyone referred to Dylan as 'Little Les.' My mother nicknamed him 'Tagalong' because he followed every step my dad took at home and on the campaign trail. I can't help but



think they are smiling down, looking at him carrying on the Tennessee Tech tradition."

The Winningham Family Scholarship will be awarded to students in need from the 38th district – the counties that were part of their father's House district during his time as State Representative – as well as students from Clinton County, Ky., to honor their mother's hometown. "These are the students, families and communities that our parents served every day," Allison said. "They knew their stories. They'd heard their struggles. They knew their hopes and dreams for their children were all the same."

The Winningham family left an enduring legacy at Tennessee Tech – through their shared belief in education, 12 degrees among Les and his daughters and Les and Peggy's lifetime of service. Now, the sisters hope the Winningham Family Scholarship will create opportunities for the next generation of Golden Eagles, giving them a chance to leave their own legacies.

"The people Dad represented were important to him," Carrie said. "He took that responsibility very seriously. He went to Nashville to represent all the people of his district and help make their lives better. Through this scholarship, he is still helping his constituents."

# Remembering Poppie and J.J.: A granddaughter's tribute to the Oakleys' enduring legacy



Millard Vaughn Oakley (1930-2022) and Joyce Annette "J. J." Oakley (1947-2023) left a remarkable legacy at Tennessee Tech through Oakley Hall, the Millard Oakley STEM Center, Oakley Farm, the J. J. Oakley Student Health Center, the Millard V. Oakley Scholarship and so much more. They are recognized as the largest individual benefactors in the history of the university, but to their granddaughter Kendall Vaughn Phillips, they were simply Poppie and J.J.

"My grandparents truly cared about the community, and I think anyone walking around Tennessee Tech would see how much they cared and how generous they were," Phillips said.

Millard Oakley, a distinguished attorney and businessman from Livingston, made a significant impact in property and economic development throughout the Upper Cumberland region. A word frequently associated with his approach to business is "opportunity." Oakley consistently recognized the power of opportunity in both his business ventures and philanthropic initiatives. Whether through scholarships, infrastructure projects or community programs, his unwavering vision was to open doors and broaden access to education.

At Tech's spring 2021 commencement ceremony, the university awarded Oakley an honorary doctorate in agriculture in recognition of his exceptional support and service. While Oakley became a Tech alumnus that day, his contributions to the university long predated his honorary degree.



Phillips says her grandfather's decision to support Tech was thanks in large part to the university's proximity to his home in Livingston, Tenn.

"He saw so much potential in Tennessee Tech, and he was really passionate about the agriculture department specifically," she said. "He was always thinking about how Tech could use Oakley Farm and Oakley Hall. He liked to think about creating opportunities for the future."

In March, Tech formally dedicated the newest space on campus to bear the Oakley name; however, this new addition isn't about Millard Oakley the businessman. It's about Poppie the grandfather. Poppie's Ice Cream Shoppe is a tribute to Oakley's love of ice cream, and Phillips fondly recalls enjoying ice cream with her grandfather.

"Every time we got ice cream, he would get a plain vanilla ice cream cone," she recalled. "He would be so happy to have an ice cream shop named after him. I think a lot of students walk around campus and see the Oakley name, but they don't know the story behind the name. Poppie's truly captures his personality and what he loved. I want him to be remembered as a fun person. His legacy is more than just about giving – it's about sharing joy, and that's why Poppie's Ice Cream Shoppe is so meaningful to me."

Phillips is carving her own path and building a career, just as her grandfather did. At the spring 2021 commencement ceremony where Oakley received his honorary doctorate, Phillips graduated with a bachelor's degree in sociology. Today, she owns Oakley's Athleisure, a store offering athletic and leisurewear on the Livingston square.

"I'm incredibly proud of the Oakley name, and it felt right to name the store Oakley's Athleisure," she said. "I gained possession of the building that would become Oakley's Athleisure on May 11, 2023 – Poppie's birthday. And we actually opened on May 11, 2024. May 11 fell on



*Millard Oakley received an honorary doctorate in agriculture from Tennessee Tech at the spring 2021 commencement ceremony.*

a Saturday, and it just happened to work out like that. That's something I will always cherish because it was a way to celebrate him. On opening day, I pictured him standing at the front of the store, welcoming everyone. He would have absolutely loved it. Poppie always told me to chase my dreams, and I've been able to do exactly that."

Phillips credits her grandfather with teaching her valuable business lessons.



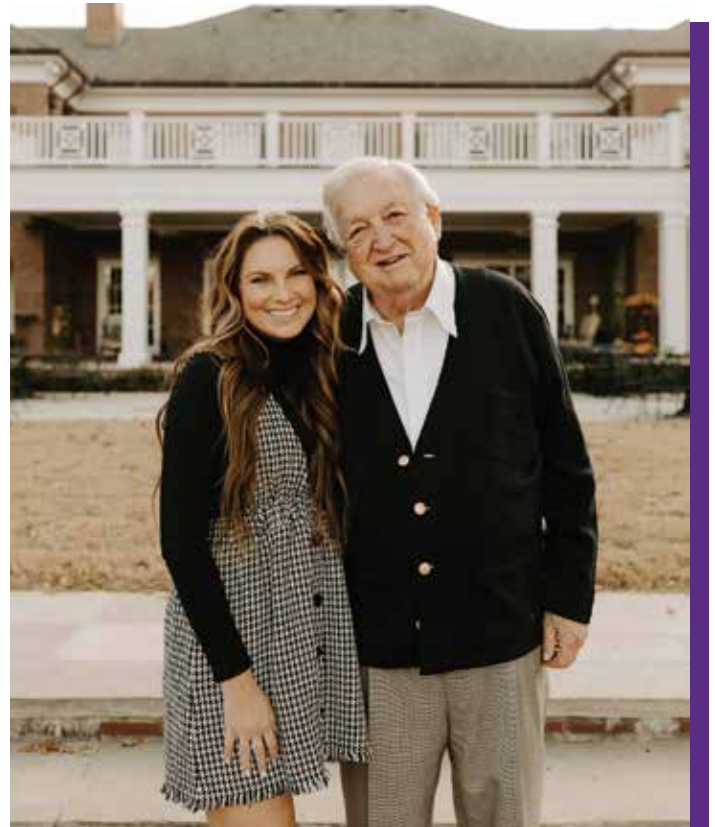
"Poppie would wake up at 4:30 or 5 a.m. every day because he always said his mind was sharpest in the morning," she said. "I used to think that was crazy, but now I always get up at 5 or 5:30 a.m. He also had such a mind for opportunity. He was so good at seeing potential. He would see a rundown building and think of an opportunity that could come from that building."

Phillips and her husband Bailey ('22 marketing) are excited to share the Oakley legacy with their future children.

"I can't wait to bring them to campus, show them the spaces bearing their great-grandparents' names and take them to Poppie's for vanilla ice cream," she said. "I'll tell them, 'This is named in honor of your great-grandfather, and I called him Poppie.'"

Reflecting on the tremendous growth Tech has experienced since she first enrolled in 2017, Phillips acknowledges the pivotal role her grandparents played in shaping its progress.

"I want my grandparents to be remembered as caring individuals who gave generously when they didn't have to," she said. "They gave because they wanted to make the community better – in Overton County, in Putnam County and at Tennessee Tech. I'm so proud of Poppie and J. J. and hope to carry on their legacy. Poppie always said you should put more into society than you take out, and that resonates with me. I hope to do that through my career and my personal life. I want to be remembered as someone who consistently gave back and made the community better, just like my grandparents did."





## Tennessee Tech dedicates food pantry in memory of late staff member with selfless passion for serving others

Tennessee Tech University honored a beloved late friend, staff member and alumna with the naming of a special place on campus in her memory.

The university's food pantry – a campus resource providing nutritional assistance to food-insecure students since 2012 – was dedicated April 15 as the "Michelle Huddleston Memorial Food Pantry," honoring the life of one of the pantry's founders and most enthusiastic champions. Michelle Huddleston was a two-time

Tech graduate who served at the university in various roles for nearly 15 years, most recently as associate director of residential life and service learning, until her passing in October 2023. The food pantry was a hallmark of her time at Tech; something she viewed as a "calling," more than just part of her employment, according to remarks from university leaders.





"Her vision transformed a modest closet into a sanctuary of support, embodying her belief that no member of our community should face food insecurity," said Tech President Phil Oldham. "The Michelle Huddleston Memorial Food Pantry will stand as a beacon of hope and a testament to the power of selfless service."

Robert Owens, Tech's senior executive for access, belonging and community outreach, along with Cynthia Polk-Johnson, Tech's vice president for student affairs, and Alex Garcia, a Tech graduate student and current food pantry manager, also provided heartfelt tributes.

"It feels like such a full-circle moment now that the food pantry is officially dedicated to Michelle," said Garcia. "Now, no one will forget all the good that she did for us."

Polk-Johnson praised Huddleston's "drive, passion, energy and go-get-it attitude," calling her "a true servant who transformed the student experience at Tennessee Tech."

Owens recalled the outpouring of support for the food pantry in the weeks and months following Huddleston's passing, adding that it was "a testament to the incredible belief alumni and donors had for Michelle's leadership and the mission of the food pantry."

The dedication ceremony marked the realization of an ambitious fundraising goal for the food pantry. After Huddleston's passing, the university challenged the campus community to give \$25,000 to restock the pantry and secure resources needed to name the facility in memory of its greatest advocate. Golden Eagles rallied to the cause and have now exceeded the initial fundraising goal by more than \$2,000 – ensuring the pantry can continue delivering on its mission of fighting hidden hunger across campus.

Huddleston's closest confidants on campus, including Sandra Bohannon, Tech's assistant vice president for health, wellness and wellbeing, say the naming of the food pantry is a fitting memorial to a treasured friend.



*Robert Owens, Tennessee Tech's senior executive for access, belonging and community outreach, emceed the Michelle Huddleston Memorial Food Pantry's April 15 dedication ceremony and shared a personal story of his friendship with Huddleston.*



*Michelle Huddleston's husband, Ray, shares a hug with former Cookeville Mayor Ricky Shelton at the Michelle Huddleston Memorial Food Pantry April 15 dedication ceremony. As mayor, Shelton presented Huddleston with an honorary key to the city.*

"I was so hopeful this would happen, and it's so well deserved," said Bohannon. "She will be missed every single day."

Huddleston is survived by her loving husband, Ray, who also works at Tech, and their three daughters: Kaylie, Madison and Aubrey.

The Michelle Huddleston Memorial Food Pantry is located in Tech Village, the university's apartment-style campus housing complex, at 910 N. Willow Ave,

Cookeville. An auxiliary pantry is located behind the front desk at the university's Volpe Library.

The pantry gives away an estimated 1,600 to 2,000 items per week. Over the 2023 – 2024 year, clients made more than 4,200 visits to the pantry for assistance. Learn more, including how to donate or receive food at <https://www.tntech.edu/foodpantry/>.



*Varsity basketball players Wayne Pack, Maury Schwegman, Rich Stone, Dan Furlong and Al Lewis hold an architect's sketch of what would become the Hooper Eblen Center. This photo appeared on the front cover of the December 1971 edition of The Alumnus.*

## Men's basketball alumni celebrate Coach Connie Inman on his 90th birthday

Tennessee Tech men's basketball alumni from the 1970s remember Coach Conrad "Connie" Inman as a teacher, mentor, father figure and friend. Even more than 50 years after graduation, many players have stayed connected – both with Inman and with each other. When Inman turned 90 years old last year, the players knew they wanted to honor him in a meaningful way.

"Coach Inman is a great individual who we all love," said Wayne Pack, a member of the men's basketball team from 1970 to 1973. "It's amazing how we all have stayed

in touch throughout these many, many years. I think it shows the bond we have as a team."

Teammate Maury Schwegman recalls how he approached Pack with the idea of a celebration.

"I called Wayne and I said, 'Coach is turning 90 years old. We need to show our gratitude for all he's done for us,'" Schwegman recalled. "Wayne got the cake, and we got a private room at Olive Garden in Cookeville. It wasn't anything elaborate, but it really meant a lot to him. He was really elated by what we did."



Inman coached tennis and basketball at Tech from 1965 to 1976 and served as the head basketball coach for seven seasons. His 90th birthday celebration gave alumni a chance to reflect on their basketball days – and on a significant chapter in Tech's history. The December 1971 edition of The Alumnus newsletter featured five members of the team – Dan Furlong ('72 health and physical education), Al "Bud" Lewis ('73 physical education and '74 M.A.), Wayne Pack ('73 secondary education), Maury Schwegman ('72 secondary education and '72 M.A.) and Rich Stone ('73 secondary education) – holding an architect's sketch of what would later become the Hooper Eblen Center.

Furlong remembers how Inman explained the proposed center to the team: "He said, 'This is the building you guys built. You are never going to get to play in it, but you and teams from the last 40 years built this.'"

Schwegman thought it would be meaningful to bring the 1971 newsletter to Inman's birthday celebration. The five alumni lined up in the same order to recreate the photo – this time, holding the 1971 edition of The Alumnus instead of the architect's sketch.

"I still had a copy of that newsletter in my scrapbook stuff, and I wanted to see what we looked like 53 years later," Schwegman said. "I'm pleased to say that we're not all that ugly yet!"

The alumni shared deep gratitude for the profound impact Inman had on their lives – not just as players but also as individuals. They spoke fondly of their experiences at Tech, the relationships they built and the lessons they learned.

"I was from Indianapolis," Pack said. "Coming to Cookeville was a touch in reality, being in a small town so far from home. I didn't know anyone there. My freshman year was tough, but I adjusted. The people in the community took me in and I had a great experience at Tech that I always look back on fondly."

Lewis added, "I'm from a small coal mining town in Kentucky. My dad was a coal miner. I was the first person in my immediate family to graduate from college. My mom and dad and everyone came to Tech for my graduation. It was a big thing. Even though Cookeville is still considered a small town, it was considerably larger than the town I was used to. You can't imagine how nice

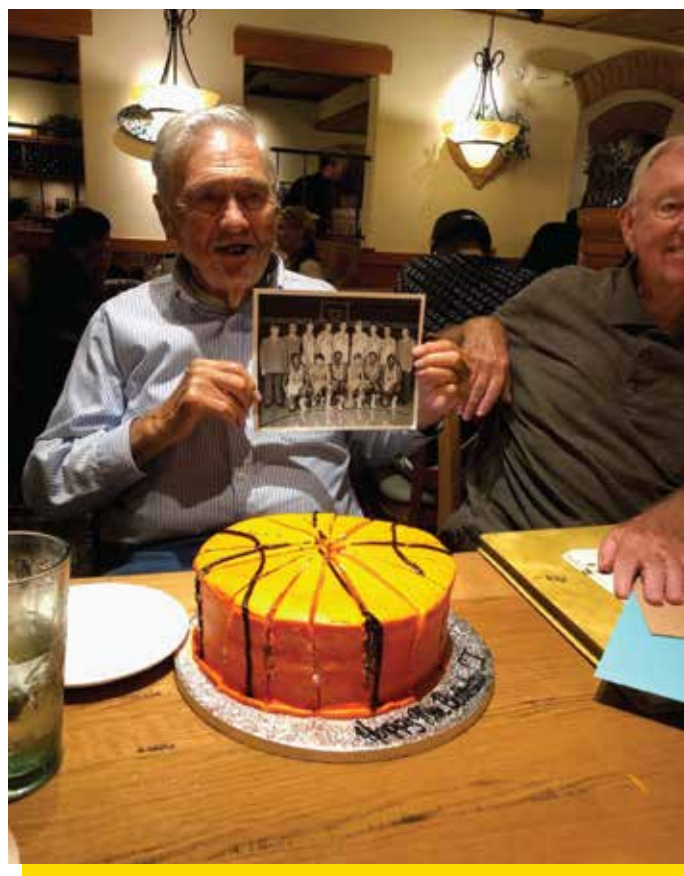
the people in Cookeville were and how well they treated us. It was really enjoyable and I will remember it for the rest of my life."

Lewis says playing for Tech was a great experience because he got to play against Kentucky schools near his hometown.

"We played at Morehead one time, and 43 people from my hometown came to watch the game," Lewis recalled.

Furlong, who came to Tech from a small town in Ohio, had never visited a college campus or seen a college basketball game before his recruitment visit.

"It was all new to me!" Furlong said. "I always tell people that the first college basketball game I saw in



*Coach Connie Inman celebrates 90th birthday with his former players.*

person was a game I was in. I met so many people at Tech – and not just the other basketball players. I became friends with so many students there and student-athletes from other sports. I had roots in Ohio but when I went to Tech, I got to place my roots there, too.”

Like Lewis, Furlong also experienced support from his hometown.

“I remember my sophomore year we played the University of Toledo at Toledo and there were so many people from my hometown who made the trip to Toledo just to watch us play,” he said. “It was such a humbling experience. Those are the experiences you remember for the rest of your life.”

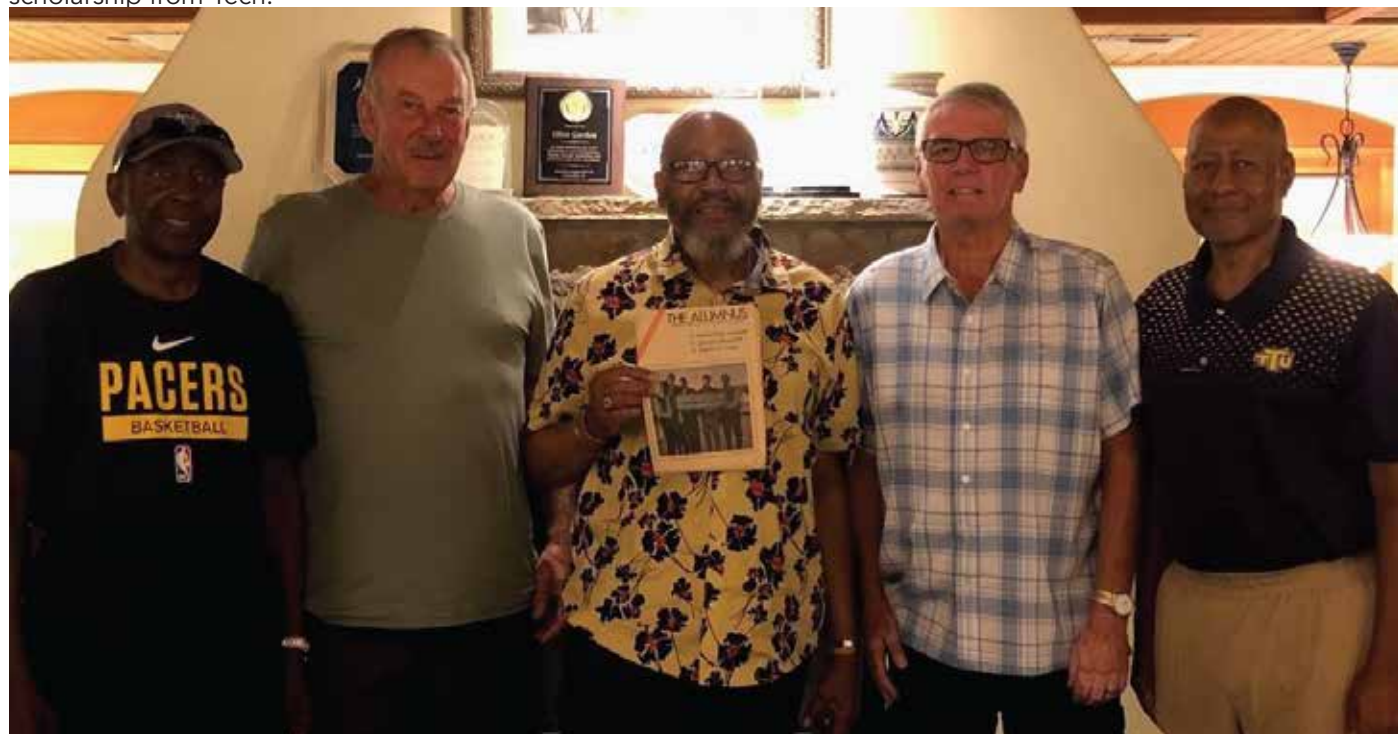
Schwegman came to Tech from a small town in Indiana and dreamed of playing for Indiana University, Purdue, Indiana State or Ball State. He didn’t receive a scholarship from a school in Indiana, but he did receive a scholarship from Tech.

“I felt a little snubbed by the schools in Indiana, especially Ball State,” Schwegman said. “A lot of kids from my high school went to Ball State. But I experienced sweet revenge when Ball State came down to Tech, and we beat them! I went up to the Ball State coach after the game and said, ‘Do you remember me?’ And he said, ‘Well, I do now!’”

Pack added, “Three of my high school teammates went to Indiana University, and I wanted to go to IU, Indiana State or Ball State. Absolutely the only scholarship offer I got out of high school was to Tech.”

In just three seasons, Pack scored more than 1,200 points for the Golden Eagles and set the program’s all-time assists record with 422 assists. He would later go on to play professionally for the San Diego Conquistadors, Indiana Pacers and Iberia Superstars in Barcelona.

“When I was lucky enough to be inducted into the Tennessee Tech Sports Hall of Fame, Coach Inman threw



Wayne Pack, Maury Schwegman, Rich Stone, Dan Furlong and Al Lewis line up in the same order to recreate the photo from the 1971 edition of The Alumnus.

a big party at his house, and all the guys were there,” Pack said. “It was packed from the front door to the back.”

When Pack was inducted into the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame in 2019, Inman attended that ceremony as well. He has always showed up for the big moments in his players’ lives.

“Coach Inman played a big part when I bought my first car,” Lewis said. “The first house I rented in Cookeville – I didn’t have any credit – so he was involved in that. He hired me as his assistant coach at Tech and I worked for him for years. He, Coach Jim Bradbury and John McClellan were like father figures for me. There were very few things I did that Coach Inman wasn’t involved in or I didn’t get his opinion on. I moved six times and Coach Inman always knew because I always told him where I was going. His wife Norma was like a mother to me. Anytime I’d come back to Cookeville to visit, I didn’t stay at a hotel. I stayed at Coach Inman’s house.”

And Inman has always supported his players during the tough times as well.

“Unfortunately, while I was in college, my dad passed,” Lewis said. “Coach Inman came to the funeral.”

Last November, Lewis’s son John also passed away.

“At my son’s funeral, we were all sitting there, and I see someone come in,” Lewis recalled. “I couldn’t believe it. At 90 years old, Coach Inman drove three and a half hours to come to my son’s funeral.”

The former teammates also credit their career successes to the experiences they had as student-athletes.

“We never won a conference while I was there, but we always had a competitive team and we always played hard,” Pack said. “I think that was because of Coach Inman. He just really knew how to get the most out of people. My career was in human resource management for Fortune 500 companies, and when I would assemble the team in the conference room I would say, ‘If I’m the smartest man in the room, we are in trouble.’ You always have to rely on your team.”

After graduating from Tech, Furlong coached basketball for more than 30 years in Ohio.

“The thing I learned from Coach Inman is that it’s not just about the x’s and o’s; it’s about how you treat people and how you get the best out of them,” he said. “I learned how to mold a team and how each person fits a role. It’s about each individual person.”

Schwegman says he and his teammates came from very humble beginnings which made receiving a scholarship from Tech critical in being able to afford college.

“If we had to throw all of the money we had back then in a pot, we might have had \$10,” Schwegman said. “No one came from any kind of money. There’s no telling where we would have ended up if we hadn’t signed on the dotted line to play for Tennessee Tech.”

Furlong added, “Coach Inman was a guy who took a chance on us, and you have to appreciate a guy who will do that. We will appreciate what he did for us for the rest of our lives.”



# Retired Tennessee Tech nursing dean advances health care policy and advocacy



*Dr. Barbara Reynolds enjoys seeing Tennessee Tech's Historic Main Quad decorated for the annual Lighting the Quad event.*

Retired Tennessee Tech School of Nursing Dean Dr. Barbara Clark Reynolds has devoted her life to helping others. She believes strongly in encouraging students and faculty to drive transformational change in health care systems and improve patient outcomes locally, nationally and globally.

Reynolds has supported Tech for 35 years, and her latest gift to establish the Barbara Reynolds Fund for Health Care Policy and Advocacy will provide funding for education and resources to positively impact health care delivery and advance Tech's Whitson-Hester School of Nursing.

"Nursing is a challenging field that requires one to be curious, self-disciplined, conscientious and responsive to change," Reynolds said. "It's important for me to make it possible for faculty and students to see ways they can be active in nursing through political involvement, awareness of community needs and operational ways to meet those needs. I want to create something that will push people outside of their boundaries and outside of what's currently seen as nursing and find ways to make a difference."

Dr. Kim Hanna, dean of Tech's WHSON, says Reynolds is an avid supporter of WHSON students, faculty, staff and administration, in addition to the communities served by the WHSON and its graduates.

"Her passion improves nursing education and increases the number of quality nurses to provide patient care," Hanna said. "Ultimately, Dr. Reynolds' mission is to advocate for patients to have efficient quality care by competent nurses, healthcare providers and effective organizations."

Reynolds has advocated for others through more than 70 years of nursing education, practice, teaching and service. She earned a Bachelor of Science in nursing from Syracuse University, followed by a Master of Public Health and Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Minnesota. She completed coursework at the Center of

Alcohol Studies at Yale and the State University of New Jersey, coursework in the theological education program at the University of the South, and a training program in organizational development and conflict management consultation with the Diocese of Southern Ohio.

Reynolds began her teaching career in 1964 and worked as an assistant professor at Vanderbilt University, the University of Minnesota, the College of Mount St. Joseph, the University of Cincinnati and the New York Medical College's Graduate School of Nursing. She also worked as a counselor for the New York Council on Alcoholism, was a public health nursing supervisor for the Allegheny County Health Department in Pittsburgh and served as both the acting nurse clinical director and a public nurse for the Syracuse Department of Health in New York. She served as dean and a faculty member in Tech's School of Nursing from 1991 to 1998. When she retired, the university established the Barbara Reynolds PhD, RN Scholarship in her honor.

Parvathi Kumar, a junior nursing major, received the Barbara Reynolds Scholarship for 2024-2025.

"The scholarship named for Dr. Reynolds holds such honor and responsibility," Kumar said. "The speech that she gave me on the day of the award ceremony hangs high on my wall. The act of inviting me on stage and delivering her message directly to me made me feel so incredibly seen as a person. Scholarships like this are important for students like me who cannot afford school and housing, because it gives us a chance to show what we are worth. Without financial aid and this scholarship, I am almost certain that I would not be at Tennessee Tech pursuing nursing."

Of her many accomplishments as dean, Reynolds says she is most proud of establishing Tech's first nursing computer lab named in memory of faculty member Carole-Jean Adkisson, increasing the number of scholarships and establishing a development council to expand community visibility and fundraising.

"We would not have as many nurses in our community if we didn't have a school of nursing," Reynolds said. "The community needs nurses – and not just hospital nurses. We need nurses in public clinics, nursing homes and schools, and we need a program that will support them. A Tennessee Tech nurse is well prepared with many skills and at various levels of practice, thanks to a very able faculty. Tech nurses are in great demand across Tennessee."

Reynolds is active in many professional organizations including Cookeville Rotary and the Tennessee Health Care Campaign. She writes frequent letters to the editors of the Herald-Citizen and The Tennessean and makes personal contact with area leaders and legislators. She has received numerous awards for her service and advocacy including the Florence Nightingale Award from

the WHSON, Senator Tommy Burks Memorial Award from the Dismas House of the Upper Cumberland and Humanitarian Award from the Cookeville-Putnam County branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. A longtime member of the NAACP, Reynolds advocates for diversity in nursing.

"Patients are more comfortable and more trusting if they can see a provider who looks like them," she said. "And that provider is much better able to understand their culture and where they are coming from. If you train with people of color, you begin to see them as your sister or your brother."

Reynolds explains that health care policy and advocacy can't be just about doing; it has to be about the education.



*Kevin Braswell, vice president for University Advancement; Cary Cass, lab coordinator; Tammy Howard, assistant professor of nursing; Barbara Jared, director and professor of nursing; Barbara Reynolds; Kim Hanna, dean of the Whitson-Hester School of Nursing; Melissa Geist, professor of nursing; and Jennifer Mabry, professor of nursing meet to discuss the Barbara Reynolds Fund for Health Care Policy and Advocacy.*



"You can go into a community and install a well," she explained. "But if you haven't taught them how to use, maintain and clean the well, it won't work. The education piece is so important."

Reynolds says she's inspired by the work Dr. Melissa Geist, professor of nursing, is doing internationally. Geist has led more than 10 nursing-training outreach visits to Belize. In partnership with the local hospital, the students have worked in emergency medicine, surgery and obstetrics and visited an orphanage to provide wellness checks, vaccinations and hearing and vision screenings.

"Dr. Reynolds dedicated her life to advancing health equity, fighting for vulnerable communities to have access to affordable, high-quality health care," Geist said. "This investment in nurses as advocates for change can shape the future of health care by infusing health policy and advocacy in the everyday fabric of the WHSON. I'm honored to help bring her vision for a healthier Upper Cumberland to fruition."

Dr. Jennifer Mabry, professor of nursing, partners with Geist on the outreach visits.

"I graduated from Tech in 1993 with my BSN, and at the time, Dr. Reynolds was dean of nursing," Mabry said. "I was impressed by her professionalism and ability to recruit advocates for public health causes. Over the years, she has been consistent in her beliefs and advocacy for members of our community who are the most vulnerable. She values equity and improving health care access. Now, the Barbara Reynolds Fund for Health Care Policy and Advocacy will continue her legacy."

WHSON faculty describe Reynolds as both a mentor and an inspiration.

"Dr. Reynolds' focus has always been on the health and wellbeing of the broader community, and she is gifted at pulling people together to meet this end," said Dr. Barbara Jared, director and professor of nursing.

Dr. Tammy Howard, assistant professor of nursing, added, "Dr. Reynolds has worked diligently during her nursing career – including her retirement years – to identify health care needs and enhance the health of our communities. She has promoted awareness about community health needs and brought groups together to work on numerous issues."

Reynolds encourages the next generation of nurses to find what's important to them.

"Consider what brings you joy and makes you come alive," she said. "Focus on what connects you with your deepest self and nourishes a plan for your life. Be very clear about your ethics, your truth and what's important to you, but be open to change. Be open to hearing other points of view. When you think you know and you find out that you really don't know, you become a little humbler about your opinions."

At 94 years old, Reynolds says she's had a wonderful life and enjoys giving back.

"Life has been one of opportunities for me," she said. "I would not have traded my education in nursing for anything. I've been blessed to have the health and ability to stay involved."

# Remembering Tennessee Tech chemistry professor Dr. Dan



Tennessee Tech chemistry professor Dr. Dan Swartling was known by many nicknames: Dan the Motorcycle Man, Dan the Botanist, Dan the Glassblower, Dan the Balloon Artist, Dan the Jewelry Maker, Rebel Dan and Santa Dan. But to the thousands of Tech students who cherished his chemistry classes, he was simply, Dr. Dan.

Swartling passed away on Nov. 21, 2024, but friends and colleagues say his impact on Tech continues through the many gifts of philanthropy, time and knowledge he shared.

"Dr. Swartling was committed to sparking a sense of curiosity and wonder in everyone he met," said Janet Coonce, senior instructor in the Department of Chemistry. "He brought joy to those around him with ice cream made with liquid nitrogen, intricate balloon animals, chemical demonstrations and more. He shared scientific knowledge with memorable lessons and research projects that made him beloved by his students. He quietly and generously gave to others, and he cared deeply about the education and growth of everyone who wanted to learn. Dr. Swartling's spirit lives on in the lives of those he taught."

Swartling's fascination with chemistry began at the age of 12 when he received his first chemistry set. By the seventh grade, he was already conducting chemical demonstrations. He earned a Bachelor of Science in chemistry from Winona State University in Minnesota and a PhD in chemistry from the University of North Dakota. In 1994, he joined the faculty at Tennessee Tech, where he devoted his career to education and mentorship. Swartling received two of Tech's highest honors: the Outstanding Faculty Award for Teaching and the Outstanding Faculty Award for Professional Service. He also served as president of the Tennessee Academy of Science and was an advisor for Tech's chapter of the American Chemical Society (ACS), recognized as one of the top 10% chapters in the country.

Swartling arrived at Tech at the same time as two faculty members who would become his second family. Dr. Jeff Boles, professor and chair of chemistry, and Dr. Tammy Boles, associate professor of environmental sciences,

were more than Swartling's colleagues; they adopted Swartling into their family, and he adopted them in return.

"Our kids called him Uncle Dan," Jeff explained. "They don't even remember a time without him. He was at our house for Christmas and Thanksgiving, and he traveled with us to visit our parents. He always showing up with presents for holidays and birthdays."

Swartling was a master showman, especially when it came to demonstrating chemical processes. From dropping liquid nitrogen into a trashcan filled with water to using nitrogen gas to blow up balloons, he knew how to captivate an audience. He even set the demonstrations to music for dramatic effect.

"One time, I invited Dan to do a chemical demonstration for my CHEM 1020 class," Jeff recalled. "He hung up balloons filled with hydrogen and helium and played the theme from 2001: A Space Odyssey. At just the right time in the music, he held a candle under a balloon and there was a small explosion. Dan was grinning and bobbing his head up and down to the music when he realized students were pointing at his head. He'd caught his hair on fire!"

On Halloween, Swartling often dressed up as Albus Dumbledore from Harry Potter, and he was known for his "flaming pumpkin" demonstration which served as a creative way to teach enthalpy. His experiments were so loud that they occasionally attracted attention from local authorities.

"The bigger the explosion, the better," Jeff said. "One time, he did a demonstration outside Foster Hall, and it was so loud that people in Johnson Hall called the police. Every Tech cop on duty showed up at Johnson Hall and realized immediately that no shots had been fired – it was just Dr. Dan."

Swartling was also renowned for his liquid nitrogen ice cream, which he entered into the Mayfield Ice Cream

Contest. The event took an unusual turn when hotel guests, who saw Swartling carrying chemistry equipment into his hotel room, mistakenly thought he was making something illegal.

"There's Dan, just settling into his room, and the police show up wanting to know why he has all of this chemistry equipment," Jeff laughed. "He had to explain what he was doing. But he actually won second place in that contest, and I recently found the second-place ribbon in his office."

Outside of the classroom, Swartling enjoyed a variety of hobbies including balloon twisting, but he was quick to correct anyone who called him a balloon clown.

"I'm a balloon sculptor...a balloon artist," he would insist.

Jeff fondly remembers Tech basketball games where children would line up next to Swartling's seat and wait





patiently for him to make them a balloon animal, sword or hat. Swartling incorporated balloon sculpting into his classes as well, twisting balloons into shapes to simulate orbitals. Students could look inside the balloon and see where an electron would be.

He also loved origami and would fold dollar bills and foreign currency into the shape of a cross, leaving a cross with an additional tip at restaurants.

His passion for glassblowing and jewelry-making inspired him to create unique pieces, including necklaces and earrings featuring soccer ball, softball and basketball beads for members of the Tech women's sports teams.

"He was purple and gold to the core," Jeff said. "Above his office cabinet there was nothing but Tech memorabilia."

Swartling also considered himself a botanist, and there are approximately 75 of his orchids inside Tech's Lab Science Commons. When he became ill, students volunteered to care for his orchids. Several are still thriving today, and some can be found in local restaurants. The owners of Ocha's – a favorite of Tech students, alumni and employees – even have one.

"He got my family into geocaching," Jeff added. "For a while, he was the top geocacher in Tennessee. He set up themed geocaches for the Boy Scouts of America. I bet a few of them are still active on campus."

As Swartling's beard turned white with age, he began dressing up as Santa Claus each Christmas, handing out handmade earrings to everyone he met.

He also spoke Spanish fluently.

"When he had to go to a nursing home, I asked if I could bring him anything," Jeff said. "He wanted his Spanish chemistry books. I'd visit, and there he was – reading those organic chemistry books in Spanish!"

Jeff says Swartling funded most of his research out of his paycheck and was extremely generous to the department, university and Tech sports teams he loved. He was a member of the President's Club and was 17 years True To Tech meaning he had given to the university every year for 17 consecutive years.

"He lived as inexpensively as he could and put his earnings towards hobbies, research and helping others," Jeff said.

Coonce shared that Swartling often concluded his chemistry research presentations with a quote from Dr. Seuss, which perfectly described his dedication to Tech and his students: "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

Family and friends celebrated Swartling's life on December 8, 2024, with food, flowers and heartfelt words, along with liquid nitrogen ice cream, fireworks and a methanol cannon.

"At the memorial service, we got to see all of the people whose lives he had touched," Tammy reflected. "We learned about things he had done for other people that he had never talked about. It was touching to see so many people show up for him one last time."

To continue Swartling's legacy, Family and friends plan to establish two funds in his name: a scholarship for chemistry students and a fund for women's soccer. To make a gift in Swartling's memory, visit [tntech.edu/giving](https://tntech.edu/giving) or mail a check to the TTU Foundation, Box 1915, Cookeville, TN. Indicate that the gift is for the Dan Swartling Scholarship for Chemistry or the Dan Swartling Fund for Women's Soccer.

"Dan has been such a fixture on this campus for more than 30 years," Tammy said. "It's been a year since he stopped teaching, and it's a huge loss for Tech. Future students won't have the opportunity to take his classes. But it's comforting to know that students can still benefit from his generosity and impact."



And Tech's chemistry alumni carry on Swartling's legacy every day. Veronica Sublett Breeden ('15 chemistry and '17 M.S.) is a lecturer of chemistry at Georgia Gwinnett College and says some of her fondest memories from her undergraduate and graduate education at Tech included Swartling.

"From day one, you could tell that we weren't just another group of students," Breeden said. "He truly wanted us to be involved in the department and the student chapter of the American Chemical Society. Any problem or question – no matter how small – he made time to listen to you. He helped us develop as students, chemists and educators. He inspired many of the ways that I teach and advise my own ACS student chapter. He showed me that a career in academia is a career where students are your focus. You make sure that they are supported and that they are the future."

Dr. Brian Agee ('06 chemistry, '07 biology, '09 M.S. and '15 Ph.D.) also followed in his mentor's footsteps. Agee teaches chemistry at Augusta University, serves as advisor for the university's ACS chapter and, in 2023, received Augusta's Outstanding Teaching Award – just like Swartling won at Tech.

"Half of that award belongs to him, because he taught me what it means to be a professor," Agee said. "It's not just a job – it's a passion. He was the greatest mentor I could have asked for, and he taught me how to think and act like a chemist. I hope I make him proud and will do my best to carry on his legacy. The legend of Dr. Dan continues to this day, as I pass down the stories of his many adventures to all of my students. Dr. Dan may be gone, but he will never be forgotten."

# Fundraising campaign allows Tennessee Tech alumni to incorporate Tech Spirit into their holidays

Nearly 500 Tennessee Tech alumni, faculty, staff, students and friends participated in the university's 2024 holiday fundraising campaign, raising more than \$40,000 for scholarships and programs.

The holiday initiative invited the Golden Eagle community to make a gift of \$25 or more, and in return, donors received a gold Derryberry Hall Christmas ornament.

"The 2024 holiday fundraising initiative is one of the most successful fundraising campaigns we've ever hosted," said Susan Luna-Hazlewood, director of Tech's Crawford Alumni Center. "It gave alumni and friends a chance to make a gift, and as a thank you, we mailed them a gift in return. Alumni could support the department of their major, a scholarship, Tech's Food Pantry or any place on campus that is meaningful to them. Every gift matters, and even small gifts add up to make a big impact."

Chala Cripps McDonald, a 2001 chemistry graduate and member of the Tennessee Tech Alumni Association Board of Directors, says the Board believes strongly in fundraising initiatives that inspire new donors.

"Fundraising initiatives like this are important because it's something anyone can participate in," McDonald said. "We recognize that not everyone is in a place financially to make a large gift to the university, but we do hope alumni will give at least a little something every year. The ornament was a way for us to say 'thank you,' and we hope alumni will think of their favorite Tennessee Tech memories every time they look at their Christmas tree."

Donna Walls, administrative associate in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, collects Tech Christmas ornaments and actually has an entire Tennessee Tech tree!

"We have enjoyed having a Tech Christmas tree and collecting Tech ornaments for years," Walls said. "But even more than collecting Tech ornaments, we love supporting Tech."

The holiday campaign allowed donors to make a gift to any area on campus, and Walls chose to give to the Counseling Center last year.

"The Counseling Center has helped several CEE students, and they do a great job of supporting students through difficult times," she explained. "They also help Tech employees know how best to support students in all situations."

Dr. Richard Rand, professor and chair of Tech's accounting department, made a significant gift to the holiday campaign – enough to receive 16 ornaments – which he in turn gave to his faculty as Christmas gifts.

"I typically give each of my faculty a gift each Christmas, and I look for things that are thoughtful and unique," Rand said. "When I saw the Tech ornaments for 2024, I immediately thought how appropriate they would be. Plus, the idea of making a gift that would benefit our students seemed like a win-win."

This is the second year Tech has mailed holiday ornaments to alumni as a thank you for supporting the university, and they hope to continue the tradition by offering a different ornament design each year.

"We chose to feature Derryberry Hall this year because it's such an iconic image for Tennessee Tech," Luna-Hazlewood said. "Alumni love Derryberry Hall, and there's nothing that says 'Tech' more than the golden eagle perched atop the clocktower."

Luna-Hazlewood says she hopes this will become a tradition where alumni make a gift every December to get a new Tech ornament for their tree.

"Alumni love to incorporate Tech Spirit into their holidays and homes, and I am so grateful for the pride they have in their alma mater."













**Tennessee**  
**TECH**

**Mailing Address**

**Crawford Alumni Center**

1000 N. Dixie Ave.  
Campus Box 1915  
Cookeville, TN 38505-0001

**Physical Address**

705 N. Dixie Ave.  
Cookeville, TN 38501

[www.tntech.edu/alumni](http://www.tntech.edu/alumni)  
[alumni@tntech.edu](mailto:alumni@tntech.edu)  
931-372-3205