

Celebrating 100 years of The Tech Oracle

The Alumnus Special Edition

2024

Tennessee Tech celebrates centennial anniversary of student newspaper, The Oracle

BY JONATHAN FRANK

Nearly 100 Tennessee Tech University students, faculty, staff and alumni gathered in April to honor the centennial anniversary of Tech's student newspaper, The Oracle.

First published on April 25, 1924, the newspaper has remained an independent, student-led media source on Tech's campus operating continuously over the last century. The reunion event, years in the making, drew Tech alumni from as far back as the 1950s and was planned by the university's Crawford Alumni Center with the help of current Oracle staff.

"I've been looking forward to this day for a couple of years," said Bee Goodman, current editor of The Oracle and a senior communication major at Tech. "The Oracle is a part of history. There's 100 years of voices that we get to hear."

Brenda Wilson, a longtime professor in the Department of Communication, former faculty advisor for The Oracle and former student journalist at Tech, served as emcee and kicked off the event by reflecting on her own experiences with the newspaper.

"Everyone here understands the important role that student media plays and the milestone it is to have our student newspaper turn 100," said Wilson. "Before I became a journalism professor here at Tech, I was on The Oracle staff. I've seen it from many vantage points ... I still hear the buzz of the newsroom and it's a special thing."

Event attendees included local journalists and community leaders who launched their careers as student writers for The Oracle, such as Lindsay Pride, editor of The Herald-Citizen, Heather Mullinix, former editor of The Crossville Chronicle, Mandy Wilson, marketing director at HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Joy McCaleb Poteet, longtime local educator and former writer for The Nashville Banner and The Herald-Citizen, Penny Grace Judd, former White House aide and current chair of Habitat for Humanity of Tennessee, and others.

Monica Greppin Watts, former associate vice president for communications and marketing at Tech and current associate vice president for communications at The University of Alabama, reflected on her years writing for The Oracle beginning in 1984 and how relationships forged through her time as a student journalist helped pave the way for her 22-year career at Tech.

"There's something about The Oracle that creates a family," said Watts. "My closest friends



Alumni of The Oracle pore over previous issues of the newspaper and other memorabilia.

are people I studied journalism with and worked with at The Oracle. It's something that becomes a part of you. There's a special family bond that gets created. It's a family like no other."

Throughout the event, attendees perused archived photos and past issues of the newspaper on display, including the first color edition published in 1990. Speakers and audience members also paid tribute to the late Hix Stubblefield and Earl Hutchison, longtime journalism professors at Tech who passed away in 2019 and 2022, respectively.

"I'm here to talk about the two people who made a big difference in my life: Dr. Hutchison and Mr. Stubblefield," said McCaleb Poteet. "Dr. Hutchison I love, and Mr. Stubblefield made me into the person I am today."

Watts added that it was Hutchison who first convinced her to be a journalism major and Stubblefield who helped her begin her career with the university. Eva Dingwall, the

Communication Department's longtime administrative associate, shared that Hutchison had "adopted" her daughter as his granddaughter.

Teddy Burch, assistant professor of communication at Tech, now serves as The Oracle's faculty advisor. In remarks to attendees, he called his involvement with the newspaper "a blessing."

"Anybody who's gotten to know him knows that he is such an amazing person," added Goodman.

The Oracle publishes throughout the fall and spring semesters and is distributed on Fridays. Learn more at www.tntechoracle.com. *AF*

A letter from the editor of *The Alumnus*



On April 13, Tennessee Tech's Crawford Alumni Center hosted an event celebrating 100 years of *The Oracle* student newspaper, and Oracle staff members representing every decade from the 1950s to present attended. Planning that event was both personal and professional for me. I wrote for *The Oracle* during my time on campus, and now I enjoy a career writing for alumni.

The Oracle is meaningful to the alumni who worked on it, of course. But it's meaningful to many other alumni as well. In the days before email, social media and cell phones, this was how Tech students learned what was happening on campus. It was a big part of their campus experience.

In preparing this special edition of *The Alumnus*, I searched through old editions of *The Oracle* in University Archives. I read the very first edition of *The Oracle* published on April 25, 1924. I also read the Nov. 22, 1963 edition, printed on the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated, and the Sept. 14, 2001 edition, published just three days after one of the worst days in United States history. Finally, I searched for editions of *The Oracle* published in spring of 2020. I found the March 6 edition, and reading it gave an eerie sense of foreshadowing. While many of the articles in that edition were sad (covering the March 3rd tornadoes in Putnam County), the paper was business as usual. Articles mentioned club meetings, sporting events and an upcoming debate team tournament. Students were excited for spring break. That would be the last full edition until Sept. 8. We all know why.

By simply reading those newspapers, I saw how the campus responded to historic events. Suddenly, I was transported back to 1963, 2001 and 2020. I wasn't alive in 1963, but *The Oracle* showed me what it was like on campus that day. I was a freshman at Tech in fall of 2001, and the Sept. 14, 2001 edition brought all of those memories back.

If I didn't already know how valuable *The Oracle* is to this university, I certainly know it now after reading through those old editions. There is no better record of campus history.

Tennessee Tech's University Archives has digitized every edition of *The Oracle* at tntech.edu/oracle-archives. They are easy to search, read and download. I hope you'll take a moment to read a few editions of *The Oracle* from your time on campus. It really is like going back in time.

Kelly Chambers ('05 B.S. English-Journalism and '07 M.A. English)
Assistant Director, Crawford Alumni Center

1971 *Oracle* article introduces first Tennessee Tech student to wear a turban

BY KELLY CHAMBERS

Inderpal Singh Gumer ('71 civil engineering and '73 M.S.) has saved the Feb. 26, 1971 edition of *The Oracle* for 53 years. For Gumer, the newspaper symbolizes acceptance — at a university that prepared him for success and by fellow students who were unfamiliar with his faith. The 1971 edition features a photo of Gumer and an article written by *Oracle* staff reporter Walter A. Presswood ('71 journalism) titled "15 feet long, 3 feet wide: Turban for protection; religious symbol."

Gumer follows Sikhism, and a Sikh is never allowed to cut his hair or shave his beard. Gumer believes he was the first student at Tennessee Tech to wear a turban which is a long piece of fine cloth and an article of faith for Sikhs that represents equality, honor, self-respect, courage and supremacy of God.

"When I came to Cookeville, a lot of students had not seen a person like me before," Gumer explained. "I looked different from others, even other international students. There were 65-70 other Indian students at the time, but I didn't look like them. Students were curious about me.

They wanted to talk to me and see who I was. I believe I was an ambassador for my country and my faith."

In 1971, Presswood, who was a senior journalism major at the time, reached out to Gumer and proposed an article to introduce Gumer and his faith to the Golden Eagle community.

"I remember writing that story," Presswood said. "It was as much for my own understanding as anything else. Coming from a rural part of the state, I had never met anyone who wore a turban and felt there were other students who would like to know its significance. And I remember that the year 1971 was similar in some ways to 2024. We had an unpopular war going on, college demonstrations, political upheaval and graduates faced an uncertain world. But we left Tech full of optimism and hope."

Nine years later, Presswood participated in a Rotary Group Study Exchange program to India. He spent time in Punjab and met a number of Sikhs. Presswood says the knowledge he gained from Gumer served him well on that trip, and the knowledge he gained writing for *The Oracle*

prepared him for a career teaching and practicing journalism.

"I was very happy with Mr. Presswood's article," Gumer said. "The title was good, and it gave a good introduction to my faith. I kept it all these years because I was so happy that Tech had accepted me as an international student."

Gumer also says the article inspired additional students to approach him.

"Anytime I had a free period, I would meet so many people," he said. "If I was sitting at lunch, people would come talk to me to learn more about me. I think the article had a good effect on the student body."

Gumer admits, however, that looking different isn't easy.

"Sometimes, people would drive by as I was walking on the sidewalk, and they would honk at me," he said. "They would say, 'Why do you have that on your head?' But I realized that those students just hadn't experienced other people like me. I didn't look like them."

Gumer says the positive experiences at Tech far outweighed the rare negative encounter.

He enjoyed serving as an Associated Student Body senator (now known as Student Government Association or SGA) for the College of Engineering and was a member of the International Student Union. He was also assigned a host family who invited Gumer and other international students to their home for Thanksgiving, Christmas and other special occasions.

Gumer came to Tech from India in 1969 and recalls that the college application process was very different back then.

"There was no internet," he said. "We did not have a telephone line at home in India, and we were on a long waiting list to get a telephone. So, I had to write letters to universities to ask about admission."

Gumer's older brother was a Ph.D. student at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville and suggested that Gumer consider several universities in Tennessee, including Tennessee Tech. Gumer had earned an associate's degree in civil engineering in India, and Tech agreed to give him two years of credit towards a bachelor's degree. Gumer graduated from Tech in 1971 with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering and in 1973 with a master's degree in civil engineering as well.

Gumer enjoyed a successful engineering career in Houston including 15 years with Bechtel. He says his Tech education — especially his master's degree — helped him get a job.

"Tennessee Tech is the MIT of Tennessee," he said. "It's a good name. I did not have any issues getting a job. People recognized the name Tennessee Tech, and they knew I was qualified."

Gumer says he believes strongly in staying connected and giving back to his alma mater. He is 17 years True To Tech, meaning he has given to Tech for 17 years consecutively.

"I have learned that giving is very important," he said. "Universities rely on donations by alumni. Tech was my home for four years, and it's a good feeling to give back to a place that gave to me. Because of Tennessee Tech, I got a job and had a family and supported my wife and children. I should give back to Tech and to my school in India because they prepared me for that. Giving provides for the next generation of students. Alumni set an example, and the next generation will follow."

15 feet long, 3 feet wide

Turban for protection; religious symbol

It was almost two years ago when the majority of Tech students first saw an International student walking around the campus with a turban on his head.

"That was the time I had just arrived in this school and this country," Inderpal Gumer said, in talking about the problems he has had in explaining why he, an Indian, wears a turban while other students from India do not.

Gumer, an ASB senator from the College of Engineering, explained that he is the only Indian on campus who belongs to the Sikhism religion and this accounts for his wearing the turban.

A Sikh, or believer in Sikhism, is never allowed to cut his hair or shave his beard at any time in his life, Gumer said. "These are God's gift to us and we are supposed to maintain them," he said.

Gumer never worries about the price of haircuts nor is he burdened with the morning ritual of shaving. He said that his long hair and



Inderpal Gumer

No morning shaving task here

beard are part of the physical uniform that the Sikhs must maintain. At one time, rulers would impose punishment by ordering a person to have his hair cut, he said.

A Sikh wears a turban as protection for his head against weather and dust and to keep the hair neat and clean. Gumer said that it is a piece of fine cotton cloth 15

feet long and three feet wide. Color has no significance, he said. Sometimes the color is chosen to match the other dress. Normally the turban is starched before it is wrapped.

According to Gumer, Sikhism was founded in India with the birth of Guru Nanak in the 15th century and has been nursed by nine successors. The Sikh religion is little known, Gumer said, but in its simplicity and directness, is perhaps the most pragmatic of all religions. The present-day principles by which the religion is governed were established by the tenth Guru, Govind Singh, in the 17th century.

Most of the Sikhs live in the northwest Indian state of Punjab. They represent about two percent of the Indian population. Their major professions are agriculture and military.

Gumer is a senior chemical engineering major from Ludhiana, India. — **WALTER A. PRESSWOOD**

Gumer also says he is happy to now have another article to share with his grandchildren.

"Fifty-three years later, and I'm being interviewed again!" he said. "I saved that newspaper because Walter Presswood respected me enough to tell something about me and about my faith. I may look different, but I am still one of you." *W*

Inderpal Gumer welcomes correspondence from any Tennessee Tech alumni he may have come in contact with through the years: isgumer@yahoo.com

The Oracle's 2023-24 managing editor reflects on 100 years

BY BEE GOODMAN



One hundred years is pretty special. I think we all can agree that it's rare that we actually get to be present for the 100th anniversary of something. Those anniversaries happen around us, but rarely do we get to take an active part in the celebration.

So, what does 100 years actually look like? How do you measure 100 years? That's a lifetime — multiple lifetimes. If you remember the song from Rent, "Seasons of Love" tells us 525,600 minutes is one year. But what about 100 years? It's roughly 52,596,000 minutes.

One hundred years can be measured in 100 different ways. My favorite way to think about it is 100 years of voices — 100 years of celebrating

graduating class after class, 100 years of games won and lost, 100 years of stories. The Oracle has been a part of history — 100 years of voices that may have never been heard.

The thing about journalism is that we take it upon ourselves to find voices that are silenced, and we give them a platform to be heard. Sometimes that platform is to just to announce a new restaurant on campus, but sometimes it's something special that demands to be heard.

The Oracle has followed a century's worth of stories. It followed the worries of World War II. It reported how a student here was personally affected by 9/11 and shared a letter written to the editor about how violence wasn't the answer

when the war on Afghanistan began. Hanging on a wall in The Oracle lab is an issue from 1963 when John F. Kennedy was killed. Students shared their voices about how scary it was and what it could mean for America. The Oracle, and newspapers everywhere, have been a part of history since the beginning.

The Oracle was here before change. One hundred years ago, Tech was not a friendly place for a person of color. It's because of once-silenced voices being heard that we can say that's

not the case anymore. There are people of all colors here, of different languages and places, of different voices. It's something that I think is vital to The Oracle's history and future and to journalism everywhere. Those kinds of voices are still here. We still orchestrate a crescendo of voices that demand to be heard...that need to be heard.

I think because of that spirit and dedication to others, journalism can keep going. Regardless of how it's done — print, online, video — as long as

we remember our purpose as journalists, to seek and share the truth, we can go on. The Oracle can go on.

In the time I've been here, I've seen so many talented people come through The Oracle, and I know that as long as The Oracle continues to house talented people as it has, The Oracle will be here. I have faith that The Oracle has the ability to keep going for another 100 years. Here's to the next 100 years! *SV*

From editor of The Oracle to editor of Cookeville's Herald-Citizen, Tennessee Tech alumna takes 'Pride' in sharing news of the Upper Cumberland

BY KELLY CHAMBERS

As the editor of five newspapers including Cookeville's Herald-Citizen, Tennessee Tech alumna Lindsay Pride knows the value responsible reporting brings to a community.

"One of the best parts of being editor is the honor of carrying on the tradition of creating the first draft of history for the communities we serve," she said.

Pride's career in journalism started 28 years ago when she moved to Cookeville to attend Tech.

"I took Dr. Russ Witcher's Intro to Mass Communications class and was hooked," she said. "My first beat was Tech's radio station. At the time, the Student Monies Allocation Committee was considering cutting funding to the radio station, so I wrote my first editorial in The Oracle in favor of saving WTTU."

Thanks to Pride's editorial and the efforts of other station champions, WTTU celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2022.

"Tech's journalism program gave me the opportunity to try everything I wanted in media," Pride said. "I served as news director for WTTU, managing editor of The Oracle and people section editor of The Eagle yearbook. During my tenure, The Oracle went from being designed in a 'copy/paste' format to being digitally designed on the computer. I also worked in Tech's Office of Communications sending out press releases, and I had internships with the Gallatin News Examiner and Carthage Courier. The leadership and news judgment experience I gained at WTTU and The Oracle have definitely helped me in my current leadership position at the Herald-Citizen."

Above all else, Pride credits a Tech journalism professor for instilling knowledge and confidence.

"Hix Stubblefield was a true champion of journalism students," she said. "He had worked at the Knoxville News Sentinel and was able to share valuable lessons he learned as a reporter. He really encouraged me to apply to be managing editor of The Oracle. He taught me a lot about accepting criticism of my writing and becoming a better writer."

After graduating from Tech in 2000 with a bachelor's degree in English-journalism, Pride landed a staff reporter job at the Crossville Chronicle. In 2002, she was recruited to the Herald-Citizen by longtime reporter Mary Jo

Denton. In 2008, Pride participated in then-Gov. Phil Bredesen's Teach Tennessee program which allowed mid-career professionals to earn an alternative teaching license through a summer fellowship program. She taught English for three years in Putnam County Schools and advised a Lottery for Education Afterschool Program (LEAPS) newspaper class after school.

"My experience with The Oracle prepared me to start the first student newspaper at Prescott South Middle School," she said.

In 2015, Pride returned to the Herald-Citizen and in 2021, she became its first female editor, a title that had previously been reserved for the newspaper's publishers.

"The challenges of being a female in an industry that has a history of being male-dominated were more prevalent at the beginning of my career," Pride said. "I was often one of a few women or the only woman in the room reporting on city and county government. Now, there are more women in leadership positions in our community. When I was named editor, I was truly appreciative of all the supportive and kind cards I received from our readers. It makes me want to work harder to be worthy of that praise."

Pride says there is a unique connection between the Herald-Citizen and Tech. In 1903, the first edition of Cookeville's newspaper — then known as the Putnam County Herald

— was printed by Elmer Wirt and his son Ralph Wirt. In that first edition, Elmer wrote an editorial in support of reincorporating the City of Cookeville which had become unincorporated during prohibition. A month after his editorial, the overwhelming majority of Cookeville residents decided they wanted to become a city again. In 1960, the Putnam County Herald merged with another newspaper, the Cookeville Citizen, to become the Herald and Citizen. In 1969, it was renamed the Herald-Citizen, which readers know it as today. Elmer was Putnam County's representative in the Tennessee State Legislature and wrote the bill that helped establish Tennessee Polytechnic Institute, which would later become Tennessee Tech.

"The reformation of Cookeville has strong ties to the establishment of the newspaper," Pride said. "That legacy is meaningful to me, and I feel like it's meaningful to a lot of Cookeville residents."

Under Pride's leadership, the Herald-Citizen has earned numerous Tennessee Press Association awards including first place in breaking news for its coverage of the March 2020 tornadoes in Putnam County.

Pride says the editor position comes with a tremendous amount of responsibility, and it's one she doesn't take lightly.

"I recently read an article about how social media is driven by hatred and outrage," she said. "At a newspaper, we are held to a different standard. We are liable for everything we publish. If we knowingly publish something we know is false, we can be sued. It's not the same for social media where you can sit behind a keyboard and not face any real consequences."

Pride says a society is always going to want information that's accurate and tells the story of a community, and it's rewarding to be in a position where she can help and educate others.

"It's common to want to highlight injustices, but we are also here to celebrate milestones and accomplishments," she said. "People are always contacting us for old stories. Tech's University Archives is preserving and digitizing our old editions so people can search through them. You can't clip out pieces of news items on Facebook the way you can with a newspaper. When I see framed newspaper clippings hanging on the walls of offices or homes, it's really wonderful to be a part of that." *SV*



First woman named to The New York Times masthead says Oracle experience was essential to career

BY KELLY CHAMBERS

When The New York Times announced a new assistant managing editor in 1990, Carolyn Lee became the first woman to serve on the newspaper's masthead. Lee credits her Tennessee Tech journalism professors and The Oracle student newspaper for inspiring the knowledge, experience and confidence required to work among the best of the best in journalism.

Lee admits, however, that being the first comes with great responsibility.

"It was gratifying to experience so many female (and male) colleagues' approval and support," she said. "But it was humbling to also realize that my success or failure could impact many other women's futures at the newspaper."

Lee's journey to The Times began at Tech nearly 60 years ago when she enrolled as a physics major. Originally from Cookeville, Lee says there was no question that she would attend Tech. Her uncle, an engineer, encouraged her to major in physics.

In the 1960s, Tech didn't have a formal journalism curriculum, so Oracle staff came from all disciplines. A student in one of Lee's math classes encouraged her to join The Oracle staff and introduced her to Tech journalism professors and Oracle faculty advisors Hix Stubblefield and Doug Norman.

"Writing came first, then editing, and ultimately the position of managing editor, then page editorial editor," Lee said.

When Lee graduated from Tech in 1967 with a bachelor's degree in physics, she had already decided that physics wasn't the career for her. Instead, she took Stubblefield's suggestion and attended the University of Missouri for graduate study in journalism.

Lee's first job was at The Houston Post, and she was hired as a temporary employee to produce a special section on Houston women's clubs, write copy and headlines, edit copy and lay out pages. She was later offered a position as a rim editor, or copy editor.

"Because of my Oracle training, I quickly moved into page design, 'slotting' [distributing stories to copy editors and checking their work] for the copy desk and subbing on the news desk," she said. "I also experienced some of the indignities of 1960s sexism – being told a man should make more money for the same work because he had a family to support, being passed over for a promotion I felt I had earned, etc."

Lee decided it was time to move on, and her next stop was at the Courier-Journal in Louisville, Ky.

"On a visit to see Kentucky relatives, I talked my way past a fiercely protective secretary and spoke with the managing editor," she said.

Lee accepted a position as an editor on the national/international copy desk, handling mostly wire service stories. Various promotions followed until she was named news editor, overseeing all copy desks and designing the Courier-Journal's Page One.

"At the time, the Courier-Journal was considered the third or fourth best newspaper in the country, after The New York Times, The Washington Post and (maybe) The Los Angeles



Photo credit: Marilyn K. Yee, The New York Times

Times," she said. "Its newsroom had the highest ethical standards of any I've known."

When Lee attended professional conferences as the Courier-Journal's news editor, she started receiving job offers from other large news organizations. After a two-year courtship, she accepted a copyediting position on The New York Times' national desk. She later served as assistant national editor, assistant news editor and picture editor (director of photography). In 1990, Lee was named assistant managing editor and became the first woman to serve on The New York Times masthead. In addition to being the first woman to serve as assistant managing editor of The Times, Lee had also been The Times' first woman picture editor.

"Of course, there were challenges," she said. "What do you do when a male subordinate is in fact insubordinate, especially if he is golden to the all-male rest of the masthead and considers himself your intellectual superior?" she asked. "A complaint to the managing or executive editor makes you seem weak, but if you let it go, it will only happen again. Those kinds of dilemmas cropped up more than once."

But Lee says she is grateful for the opportunity to help shape The Times' voice. A 2003 Tennessee Tech Visions magazine article by Laura Clemons ('88 journalism) titled "A lone voice" describes how Lee was an early and forceful advocate for racial and gender diversity in the newsroom.

The Times is also remembered for its coverage of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Clemons wrote, "For months after Sept. 11, 2001, the paper gave a voice to the silent as the staff took on the extraordinary task of writing obituaries for the 2,300 World Trade Center victims."

"That was the most amazing experience of my career," Lee told Clemons. "People worked

seven days a week, 15 hours a day. Reporters were brilliant, photographers were brilliant, designers were brilliant. Writing the obituaries was phenomenal. Just about everyone, even guys who'd retired, wrote at least one or two. One retired Washington Bureau editor told me it was one of the most meaningful things he'd ever done. But it was hard. There were people on staff who'd lost relatives. And even though for most of us it wasn't as immediate as that, we were still a part of the whole atmosphere of loss and grieving. I've never experienced anything like that in a work environment, where people were so unselfish, so caring for one another and the paper and the community."

Lee retired in 2003 after a 25-year career with The Times.

"My Oracle experience was essential to my career," Lee said. "Every basic skill — writing, copyediting, assigning, page design and production — was in my arsenal by the time I graduated, and subsequent jobs only honed those journalism tools. More, the attitudes instilled by Mr. Stubblefield and Dr. Norman proved themselves over and over again."

As The Oracle celebrates 100 years, Lee says it's as important to Tech now as it's ever been.

"I worry about the next generation of journalists," Lee said. "Too many readers/consumers are not discerning and think anything they read online, no matter how flagrantly outrageous, must be true, or they choose news outlets that reinforce their biases rather than aim for objectivity. Today's graduates need to be freelance entrepreneurs and agents for improvement, even as journalism's traditional shape morphs into something other. That's why journalism needs practitioners of the caliber I saw produced by The Oracle." *✍️*

“A Pulitzer Prize-winning article if ever there was one”: The Oracle article that announced John F. Kennedy’s assassination

BY KELLY CHAMBERS

On Friday, Nov. 22, 1963, students gathered around the only television in Tennessee Tech’s Student Union as Walter Cronkite announced that President John F. Kennedy had died.

One of the students watching was Glenn Ballinger ('66 business management), the business manager for The Oracle.

“Everyone was somber and quiet and couldn’t believe that this could happen in the United States,” Ballinger said. “John F. Kennedy was such a popular president. It just devastated everyone.”

Ballinger walked around the Student Union, asked students how they were feeling and recorded their answers. He then ran upstairs to the second floor of the Student Union, which was where The Oracle offices were located.

“There was no one there,” he said. “We were going to press that day, and everyone involved in putting the paper together had already put it to bed. I was the business manager — I sold all the ads. I wasn’t a reporter. But I thought, ‘I have to write this.’ I knew we had to pull the front page and redo it, so I just took it upon myself to write the story.”

Richard Boughner ('64 mathematics) had previously served as editor and sports editor of The Oracle and knew what it meant to go to press on short notice. He remembers Nov. 22, 1963, Ballinger’s article and a subsequent article by Gordon Webster ('66 history) well.

“It was a Pulitzer Prize-winning article if ever there was one,” Boughner said. “He only had a few hours to do the article, and it’s one of the best articles I’ve ever seen. It’s a real testament to how good a student writer can be in a time of crisis, and publishing at the spur of the moment is a real testament to the dedication of The Oracle staff as well.”

Boughner explains that The Oracle was printed at Cookeville’s local newspaper office, and the

local paper and The Oracle would have been competing for space and printing equipment that day.

“The speed at which The Oracle was published surprised me,” Boughner said. “We had to type our stories and get them approved prior to publishing. We also had to manage the type-setting of columns at the printer on the day of printing. Every letter was individually cast, and sentences and/or paragraphs had to be moved around to fit the printer page trays. Sometimes, whole sentences or paragraphs had to be moved

or cut to fit page space. The page text had to be edited for typesetting errors by reading the text upside down and backwards. That is what impressed me about the staff getting the assassination edition out so quickly.”

Ballinger recalls placing the “hot off the presses” newspapers in the Student Union.

“They disappeared real quick,” he said.

Ballinger and other staff members received recognition from a national association for student newspapers for The Oracle’s coverage of Kennedy’s assassination.

After graduating from Tech, Ballinger transitioned his experience in advertisement sales for The Oracle to a career in insurance sales and eventually started his own insurance company.

Boughner worked at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and in industrial technology and software applications. He says Tech and The Oracle helped launch his career.

“The Oracle provided deadlines to meet and forced my writing skills to be clear and concise, which helped me produce agendas and presentations of technical information in management positions,” Boughner said. “I still remember the journalism motto, ‘Who, what, where, when and why in as few words as possible.’”

And Boughner says Ballinger’s article, titled simply “President assassinated; Tech students shocked,” couldn’t have followed the motto any better. *SC*



Glenn Ballinger, Photo source: Eagle 1964

The Alumnus E-Newsletter

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President assassinated; Tech students shocked

BY GLENN BALLINGER



President John F. Kennedy

President John F. Kennedy, 35th President of the United States, was killed today by an assassin's bullet.

At approximately 12:25 p.m., Cookeville time, President Kennedy and Governor John Connally of Texas were shot while riding in an open car during a parade through downtown Dallas, Texas. Three shots were fired, according to Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas, who said the scene was too horrible to describe.

The President was shot in the temple and Governor Connally in the back. President Kennedy died about 1 p.m., CST. The governor was reported in serious condition.

President Kennedy was rushed to a Dallas hospital and surgeons and Roman Catholic priests were summoned.

Neither Mrs. Kennedy nor Mrs. Connally, both in the car with the President, was injured. Mrs. Kennedy is reported to have screamed, "Oh, no" when the President slumped into her lap, blood gushing from the wound in his head.

Approximately 250,000 persons had lined the streets of Dallas for the President's visit to that city. The shots reportedly came from the fifth floor of a building on the parade route.

President Everett Derryberry of Tennessee Tech: "President Kennedy's assassination represents a tragic loss not only to the United States but to the free world at a time when international leadership is desperately needed. I think history will record that John F. Kennedy bore the mark of greatness upon him. In a very real sense he is a martyr to the tensions and frictions seething in this nation which bears the burden of leadership in the world as it is in the throes of great change."

Stunned Tech students had these comments on the tragedy shortly after the news was first reported:

"It's bad; that's all that I can say about it." —Warren Wilson

"It is a terrible thing, just terrible to describe or talk about." —Tommy Neighbors

"I think that it is tragic. I think that it is time for everyone to stop and think just what it means to be in America." —Pat Waddell

"I was shocked to hear it. I think that it shows we need ever greater national spirit than ever before and faith in our leaders." —Lee Simpson

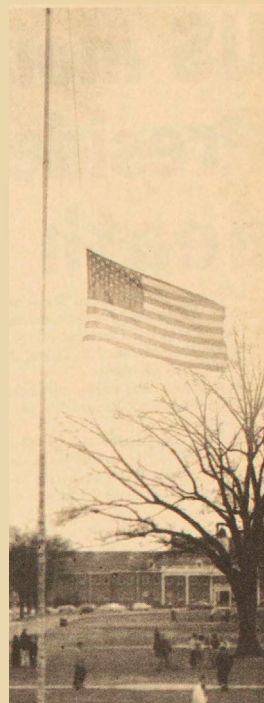
"There is no doubt that this is the worst thing that has happened in my lifetime." —James Buford

"It's a shock to me. I don't know what else to say." —Tom Muehlehauser

"What can you say about things like this?" —Jackie Hendrixson

"Kennedy was a great individual. He stood up for what he believed in. This may have cost him his life." —Tony Beasley

"I think that it is a shame that there are fanatics in this country that would do something like this. There is really nothing you can say." —Steve Breman



Tech mourns

THE TENNESSEE



TECH ORACLE

Friday, November 22, 1963

TENNESSEE POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE, COOKEVILLE, TENNESSEE

VOL. 41, NO. 5

... a student's record of today

Many Tech students heard the shocking news of President Kennedy's death over the television set in the Tech Union. A large crowd gathered rapidly. Most viewers were silent, but there were some comments.

One onlooker recorded his impressions and feelings on paper. He is Gordon Webster of Nashville. Here are his reactions:

Everyone looks stunned. They are saying on TV that they think he is dead. No one seems to believe it. Everyone is standing around looking at the TV and at each other. They

seem to be holding on to some hope that the reports that he is dead are not true.

The TV just said that Johnson was possibly wounded. No one seems to notice. There is some small talk among the students but no one has really acted as though the President is dead.

The TV just said that he may be alive. They seem to not believe it either.

A correspondent confirmed the death.

They still don't believe it.

"It will take official confirmation.

Probably not even then."

The last rites have been given. The priest said he didn't know if he was dead.

I'm a nervous wreck. Some are crying. I hope I don't.

The priests now say the President is dead. No one moves yet. They still don't believe it. I don't want to either.

1:32 A little talk is starting now; not much. There is not a happy face to be seen. Government spokesmen say that he is dead. It's not official though. They are starting to believe it, but no one seems

too sure. They aren't moving. I feel better now, probably because I am writing instead of thinking.

1:36 The TV says President is dead. They believe it now. They are moving out to classes or somewhere. Most are moving. Some are just sitting and shaking their heads. Some are just sitting and staring. I believe some still don't believe it, although they say it is for sure. Everyone is talking now.

This is probably the most emotionally felt historical event in the lives of most in

this room and on this campus.

1:40 The ones that are left are still sitting and staring here or there or at the TV. The impact hasn't really been felt yet, I believe.

I see one girl with tears in her eyes. A few more are on the verge of tears. I think most people here believe it now. They are starting to talk now. It is a rising roar. What to do? What will happen? How will this affect us? Now what? Will L.B.J. be a good President? Some questions I hear around me and some are my own.

Some seem not too concerned, but maybe they are just stunned. The crowd is thinning out. Everyone going their way, leading their own lives. Perhaps it hasn't affected us enough, but what else can we do?

Everyone believes it now. It lifts a weight off the crowd seemingly. Is hope a weight?

Why should I think of little Caroline now and little John? No father.

I believe the students here don't realize what is happening and what effect this can have.

1:55 It's time for classes and almost everyone is leaving — none with a smiling face.

There was one boy on his knees a few minutes ago saying his rosary, with tears in his eyes.

Everyone respected his felling — no one grinned as I would expect.

A girl laughs at something but immediately looks back to the TV and frowns in sadness again.

How could someone do such a thing, a girl asks? I can't believe it. I can't. I just can't, another girl says sadly. "I lost

a lot of money in stocks," said a boy.

2:04 Floors are being swept, people talk, a laugh now and then, people going to class as I must. The world is moving again, but what, what will happen now?

Remembering the 9/11 edition of The Oracle: “Everyone came together to tell the story”

BY KELLY CHAMBERS

On one of his first days working in The Oracle lab, Thomas Corhern ('05 interdisciplinary studies) found the Nov. 22, 1963 Oracle, published the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Corhern recalls imagining what it would feel like to be part of such a historic newspaper. Less than a year later, when he was a sophomore at Tech and serving as The Oracle's assistant sports editor, Corhern got his answer. Corhern and the 2001 Oracle staff would face a similar challenge to what the 1963 staff faced: How do you tell the story of one of the worst days in United States history?

On the morning of Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2001, Corhern arrived at The Oracle lab early to work on his sports articles for that week's edition.

“Dr. Brenda Wilson came into the room and said an airplane hit one of the towers of the World Trade Center,” Corhern recalled. “At first, I didn't think much of it. Pilot error, perhaps. Mechanical failure, maybe. I didn't even realize it was a commercial passenger jet. I was originally thinking it was a small private plane. We didn't have televisions in The Oracle lab, so I looked the story up online and realized the scope of what had just happened. Then reports of a second plane started to emerge. Suddenly, the story became surreal. This wasn't an isolated incident. This was an attack.”

Wilson served as faculty advisor to The Oracle in 2001 and recalls that The Oracle was set to go to print in three days. The editor and sports editor had finished their pages early — getting ahead of the usual Thursday night deadline — because they were scheduled to travel with the Tech football team that week.

“The front page was pretty much made up and ready to go,” Wilson said. “But once all the news of what was happening in New York City, Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania and around the United States became clearer, the staff knew they had to cover the 9/11 events on The Oracle's front page. So, while everyone on campus was coming to grips with the biggest news event of our lifetimes, The Oracle staff was working on covering campus perspectives on it.”

Corhern's regular column, which would have covered the first week of college football, also had to change. For the first time since World War II, every college football game was canceled.

“We all played a part in The Oracle's production, since those were the days where we still cut and pasted the pages down on large sheets rather than sending them digitally,” Corhern recalled. “We came up with a plan for who was going to cover what, how to get as much detail as possible

and how to put everything together. It's not easy to cover something like this. There are so many emotions in play, but as journalists, we have a duty to perform and that's to tell the story fairly and free from bias. Everyone came together as a team that day to tell the story.”

In the years that followed, Corhern took on additional roles with The Oracle, serving as managing editor, editorial editor and sports editor.

“I tried my hand at everything,” he said. “I tried to expand my horizons for wherever it might lead after graduation.”

Today, Corhern works in Tennessee Tech's Sports Information Office where he oversees all media relations efforts for Tech football, women's basketball and softball. This includes writing press releases, designing media guides and record books, overseeing the Tech Athletics website and social media platforms and recording statistics. Corhern also assists with efforts across all other Tech Athletics programs and serves as a photographer for many sporting events.

“I've always loved being able to tell a story,” Corhern said. “There's a quote I love from Earl Warren, former chief justice to the Supreme Court: ‘I always turn to the sports section first. The sports section records people's accomplishments; the front page has nothing but man's failures.’ And I think it resonates, because on the sports page you see what humans can accomplish. Every one of our student-athletes has a story to tell, and we're the ones to do it.”

Corhern's nearly 25 years of writing about Tech sports have earned widespread recognition. He has received awards from the Tennessee Press Association, the Tennessee Sports Writers Association and others.

“Without Tennessee Tech, I probably would not have received the opportunities I've had in my career,” said Corhern. “After enrolling at Tech, almost immediately I began working on The Oracle. I was writing for The Oracle as a freshman. If I had gone to any other university, I might not have had that opportunity. Without The Oracle, without Tennessee Tech, I have no idea where I would be. The education you receive in the classroom is important; however, there's nothing like the experience of actually doing the job. Through my time with The Oracle, I learned how to work on a deadline and the importance of working as a team. No one part is greater than the other.”

In addition to inspiring a profession, Corhern says The Oracle also inspired great friendships.



He actually met one of his lifelong friends on Sept. 11.

“That evening, I continued to work in The Oracle lab,” Corhern recalled. “I was sitting at the computer, trying to figure out the best things to say. I was angry. I was sad. I was in shock. Then I heard a voice talking to me from across the dividing wall. That was the night I met Ryan Nation. He was working on WTTU at the time, and we just started talking, contemplating the gravity of the situation and asking what happens next. For years after that and even to this day, Ryan has been an important friend, a friendly voice and a sympathetic ear for me. It's strange how a day like that can create lifelong friends.”

Corhern says it's been nearly 20 years since his last edition of The Oracle, and he remains grateful for the memories, friends, education and experience that inspired a career.

“We spent so many late Thursday nights in the Roaden University Center putting together every issue,” he said. “I miss those days. I miss those people. I loved every minute of working on The Oracle.”

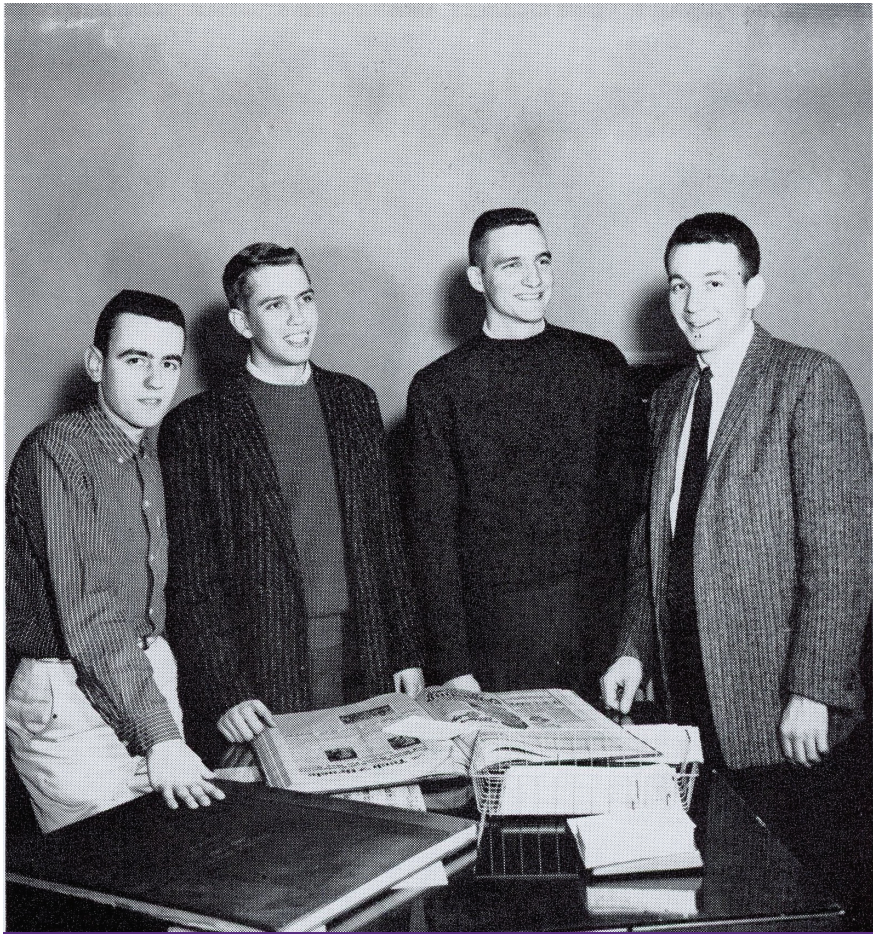
The full Sept. 14, 2001 edition of The Oracle is available to read at tntech.edu/oracle-archives.

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Left to right: Clarence Guyette, Jim Fitts, Tommy Huffine and Jack Werner, Photo source: Eagle 1959



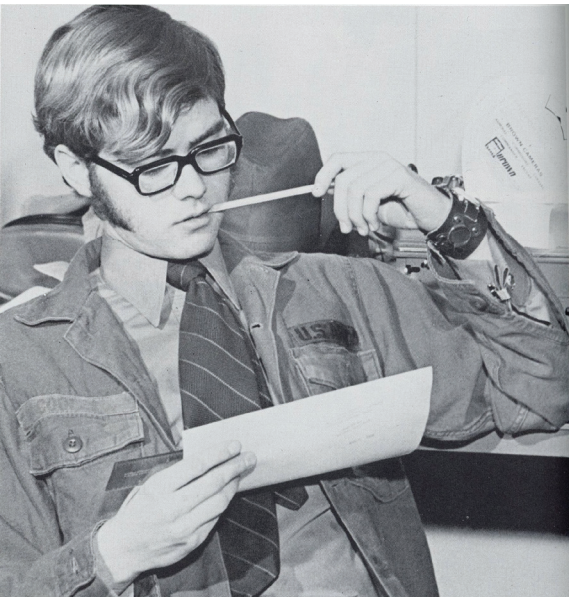
Becci Earhart, Photo source: Eagle 1969



Left to right: Chris Cantrell, Frankie Hendrixson, Sue Haste, Diane Hartnett and Janice Rogers, Photo source: Eagle 1959



Left to right: Don Lyell, White Watkins, Charles Womack, Larry Roberts, Betty Harward and Tommy Huffine on their way to a conference, Photo source: Eagle 1960



Mike Pirtle, Photo source: Eagle 1970



The Oracle Staff, Photo Source: Eagle 1980



Becky Rhea, Photo source: Eagle 1970



Hix Stubblefield, Photo source: Eagle 1981

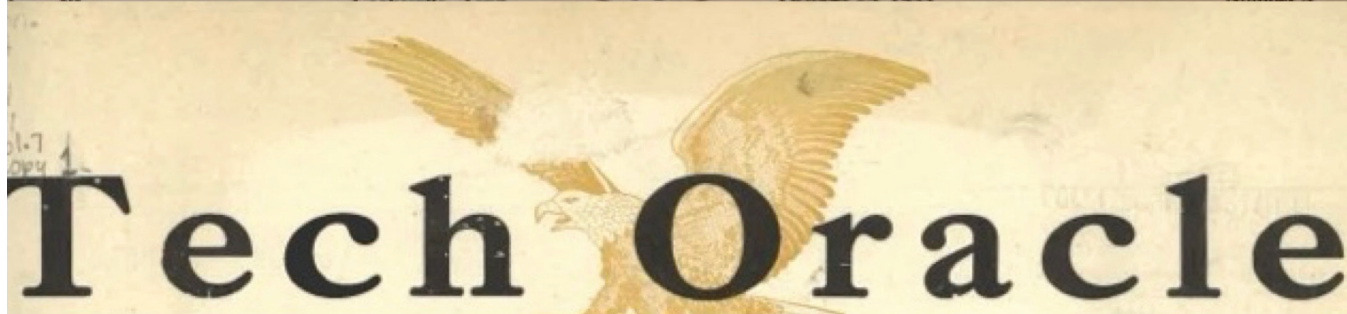
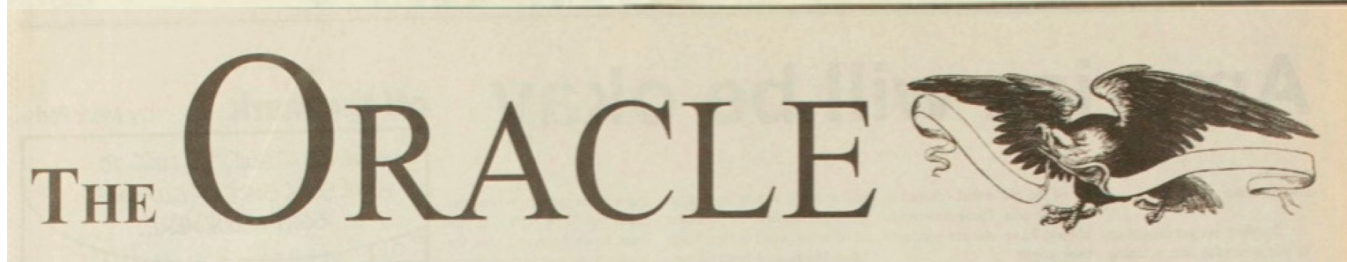


Left to right: Scott Jared, Dave Johnson and Wade Jaynes, Photo source: Eagle 1981

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www.tntech.edu/alumnirecords



The Alumnus: Special Edition

Celebrating 100 years of The Oracle

A publication by Tennessee Tech’s Crawford Alumni Center

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