



**IMPACT**  | **2024**

Dear Golden Eagle community,

If someone were to ask about impactful people in your life, who would you name? Maybe you would think of a grandparent, high school teacher, university professor, spouse, friend or mentor. How would you want to honor them?

Names have significance and importance. Names define us. An unknown author once said, "Words have meaning and names have power." At Tennessee Tech, many donors have chosen to cement the importance and significance of a name by establishing scholarships, programs and professorships in honor or memory of loved ones. This not only provides a legacy for the honoree; it also provides support for Tech students. The honoree's name and story live on for future generations.

Many donors have also chosen to name a classroom or space on campus. At last month's grand opening ceremony, Tech celebrated more than 30 named spaces in the Ashraf Islam Engineering Building. Each day, students enter classrooms, labs and collaboration spaces, and they see the name of someone worth remembering. Named spaces are part of a campus's identity and character. A name shapes an identity. A name tells the story.

In this edition of Impact magazine, you will read the stories of individuals who inspired memorial scholarships, a history lecture series and a new engineering building. All have a name. All have a story. And we are honored to share their stories with you.

Sincerely,



John W. Smith  
Associate Vice President of University Development



P.S. If you have interest in establishing a scholarship, naming a space or honoring a loved one, we would be honored to help you. Contact [campaign@tnitech.edu](mailto:campaign@tnitech.edu) or 931-372-3055.



# Tennessee Tech celebrates grand opening of Ashraf Islam Engineering Building

Tennessee Tech University welcomed students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors and elected officials, including Governor Bill Lee, to campus for the grand opening of the Ashraf Islam Engineering Building.

The state-of-the-art, 100,000-square-foot academic space marks the university's first new engineering building in 50 years. The three-story structure with laboratories and classrooms surrounds a central atrium adjoined by a two-story student project space, each detail meticulously designed with the student experience in mind.

In keynote remarks, Governor Lee called the event "a really important moment not only in Tennessee Tech's history, but in the history of the state of Tennessee."

Addressing the students gathered at the event, he added, "Thank you for choosing to invest your educational capital in the state of Tennessee in a great institution like Tennessee Tech that is a leader nationally – certainly in the field of engineering."

The new building is named for Ashraf Islam, a Tech alumnus who came to the university from his native Bangladesh in 1965 and graduated with a degree in civil engineering.



Islam, who now resides in Houston, Texas, went on to become a successful transportation infrastructure businessman and philanthropic leader and made a generous \$3 million gift toward the building's construction.

"I am truly humbled to stand before you to celebrate not just the opening of this remarkable facility, but the culmination of my own journey that began more than half a century ago – a journey filled with dreams, determination and an unwavering belief in the transformative power of education," said Islam in his address to the audience.

Islam went on to recall “the kindness of the Cookeville community” and expressed “a heart full of gratitude” for the Tech faculty who shaped his educational journey.

Tech President Phil Oldham praised Islam as “our cornerstone” for the building, adding that “Ashraf’s contribution made it possible for all other donors to realize the hope of their donations in this project.”

In additional remarks at the event, Tech Provost Lori Mann Bruce heralded the building as “a truly transformative step in how we support student success” while Tech Board of Trustees Chair Trudy Harper proclaimed the new facility as “the home of the future leaders, innovators, designers, dreamers – the people who are going to make this country even better than it is right now.”

The Ashraf Islam Engineering Building’s grand opening comes as Tech recently recorded its



highest total enrollment since 2015 and fourth largest freshman class in university history.

Tech’s College of Engineering also set a fall 2024 all-time enrollment record, leading Joseph C. Slater, dean of the college, to declare “the dawn of a new era for the College of Engineering” at the grand opening, adding “the College of Engineering is stronger than ever, driving the prosperity of the citizens of Tennessee.”

Congressman John Rose, Congressman Chuck Fleischmann and Tech engineering student Lakayleh Helton delivered additional remarks, while Tech alumnus and longtime Golden Eagle Marching Band announcer Bob Luna served as emcee. 🙏







# Pauline Hartman Womack History Lecture series honors a mother's love for Southern history

Dr. Chuck Womack established the Pauline Hartman Womack History Lecture Series at Tennessee Tech to support the university that makes Cookeville a beloved college town, provide enrichment opportunities for students and faculty and honor the woman who inspired his love for history: his mother.

Pauline Hartman Womack was born on Nov. 2, 1916. She grew up in Mississippi, graduated from the University of Mississippi with a degree in history education and devoted her career to teaching seventh and eighth grade history and civics.

Womack says he enjoyed hearing his mother's stories – both about her students and about the history lessons she prepared.

"I grew up in a history environment and have been interested in history all my life," Womack said. "I have so many books on history."

Womack says Tech has been an important part of his family for nearly 50 years. His mother lived with them for the last five years of her life and had the opportunity to observe the university's impact on her son's town. Womack's oldest son Daniel and daughter-in-law Wendi graduated from Tech. While not an alumnus himself, Womack has

audited courses at Tech and attended many on-campus events.

"The reason my wife Sally and I moved here in 1975 was because of Tennessee Tech," Womack said. "There are three things that make Cookeville the city that it is: its location on the interstate, its beautiful scenery and its association with Tech."

Womack served as Cookeville's mayor from 1998 to 2006 and was a member of Cookeville's City Council from 2014 to 2022. He enjoyed a successful career as a urologist and was chief of medical staff at Cookeville Regional Medical Center. He has devoted his life to serving others, and that includes philanthropic support of Tech.

Womack credits two other Tech lecture series with inspiring the endowment in his mother's name.

The Stonecipher Lectures on Science and Society series was established by alumnus Harry Stonecipher to invite leading scholars and thinkers to address the relationship between science and contemporary society.

The Nolan Fowler Constitution Day Celebration commemorates the signing of the U.S. Constitution on Sept. 17, 1787. Named in honor of Nolan Fowler, a retired history professor at Tech,



this annual lecture series is held close to Constitution Day each year. It reflects Fowler's love for and commitment to education and allows Tech to bring in exceptional, nationally-renowned speakers.

"I have looked forward to the Stonecipher and Constitution Day lectures for the last 20 years, and I wanted to establish something similar for the history department," Womack said. "I talked to Dr. Jeff Roberts and the late Dr. Michael Birdwell, and they explained that if I established an endowment, it would be perpetual."

In 2016, Womack established the Pauline Hartman Womack History Lecture Series to honor his mother's interest in Southern history, culture and the Civil War. The lecture is presented as close to Nov. 2 as possible each year to honor her birthday.

"There are so many stories in Southern history that you can talk about," Womack said. "We had one lecture about yellow fever. One was about the Indian removal, and one was about chattel slavery. We also had a lecture about Ben Montgomery's book titled 'A Shot in the Moonlight: How a Freed Slave and a Confederate Soldier Fought for Justice in the Jim Crow South.'"

Dr. Kent Dollar, chair of Tech's history department, says he looks forward to selecting a speaker for the lecture series each year.

"Each summer, Dr. Womack will stop by my office and mention the books he read recently, and we try to arrange for one of the authors to speak at that year's event," Dollar said. "The history department is very appreciative of Dr. Womack for his efforts to provide educational opportunities outside of the classroom." ♡



# Carlene Hall Memorial Scholarship inspires Tennessee Tech students with disabilities to never give up

The Carlene Hall Memorial Scholarship honors a woman who never stopped inspiring and encouraging those around her, even when an accident changed her life forever.

In 2005, at the age of 46, Carlene Hall suffered a severe spinal cord injury that resulted in paralysis from the shoulders down. But she never lost her positive spirit. She persevered through the many trials and tribulations that every quadriplegic goes through each day, and she became a bright spot in the nursing home where she lived. She befriended everyone she came in contact with, including one Tennessee Tech graduate and donor (who wishes to remain anonymous) who still remembers the day they met.

“Our church had a ministry where we would visit people in the hospital,” the donor explained. “It was my first day to go, and I was a bit nervous about it. My first visit was with Carlene. She made me feel so welcome and chatted with me and encouraged me. I felt like I was the one who had been ministered to, and not the other way around. That day became the beginning of a sweet friendship. When she moved to a nursing home, I visited her every week.”

Hall’s family says her accident was a difficult adjustment, but the one who seemed to handle it the best was Hall herself.



“She smiled through it all,” said Hall’s daughters, Jamie Godwin and Lindsey Agee. “Her joy was contagious.”

Hall’s family and the donor say Hall’s strong faith in God kept her going.



“She inspired me with her strong faith and will to live, even with her disability,” the donor said. “She did as much as she could within the limits of her mobility and finances. She was always optimistic and upbeat.”

Hall enjoyed painting since she was a child and always had a talent for creativity. After the accident, she learned to paint by holding the paintbrush in her mouth. She turned her paintings into cards and sold the cards to help pay for her living expenses.

“It was a very time-consuming and difficult process for her to paint these cards,” the donor said. “But Hall was persistent, and the outcome was beautiful.”

When Hall passed away in 2009 after battling several infections, the donor wanted to find a way to honor her memory and help Tech students who may face similar struggles.

“I loved my four years at Tech,” the donor said. “I made good friends and got a wonderful education. I wanted to give back to Tech. When Carlene passed away, I thought about how I would like to honor her life with a scholarship for students with disabilities.”

The Carlene Hall Memorial Scholarship is administered by Tech’s Accessible Education Center, an on-campus resource dedicated to ensuring equal access to Tech’s academic and physical environments, providing quality services to students and faculty and offering support programs that promote awareness of the law and other disability-related services. The scholarship is

awarded to students who have a disability and maintain a B average. It is open to all disabilities, but preference is given to students with paralysis or a similar physical impairment.

“The Carlene Hall Memorial Scholarship has been an invaluable resource for students with disabilities on Tennessee Tech’s campus,” said Ed Beason, interim director of the AEC. “I know students who may not have been able to complete their college studies without the generous support from this scholarship.”

Ryan Carrigan, a senior communication major, says he was honored to receive the Carlene Hall Memorial Scholarship because he knows the story behind its name.

“Reading Carlene’s story is very encouraging and inspiring,” Carrigan said. “I myself had a severe brain injury a few years ago, and I also have a strong faith. If you take anything from her story, remember her faith in God and ability to overcome obstacles.”

Carrigan says his dream is to become a journalist for his favorite basketball team, the Memphis Grizzlies, and the Carlene Hall Memorial Scholarship is motivation to achieve this goal.

Lia Nesbitt (’23 human ecology) also received the Carlene Hall Memorial Scholarship.

“With the help of my professors, friends and scholarships, I was able to receive a 4.0 with my bachelor’s degree and graduate debt-free,” Nesbitt said. “However, this would not have been possible



without the help of the Carlene Hall Memorial Scholarship.”

Nesbitt is now pursuing a master’s degree in community health and nutrition at Tech.

“As I continue to pursue higher education, I realize that even if I do have a disability, I can still exceed my expectations when I put my mind to it and believe in myself,” she said. “If other students with disabilities are given the resources that I had, then they will have the motivation and encouragement to pursue higher education opportunities as well.”

The Carlene Hall Memorial Endowment also funds a graduate assistant who serves as an academic coach for students with disabilities in Tech’s Accessible Education Center.

Dessie Avila, a Ph.D. candidate in counseling and supervision, received the Carlene Hall Memorial Fellowship last year and says it promotes

inclusivity by breaking down barriers to higher education.

“The support provided by this fellowship has enabled me to immerse myself in accessible education and gain invaluable experience in catering to the diverse needs of students both on and off campus,” Avila said. “In particular, my role in academic coaching has been transformative. By leveraging students’ strengths to help them achieve their educational goals, I have honed my counseling skills and fostered a deeper understanding of the importance of accessible education. The experience has been both rewarding and enlightening, further solidifying my commitment to advocating for inclusive educational practices.”

The scholarship’s donor says individuals with disabilities face enormous medical expenses, and the donor was reminded of this when visiting with Hall. With the exception of selling her cards, Hall was unable to work.

“Students with disabilities need an education if they are to live and grow and succeed in life,” said the donor. “Carlene was an inspiration to all who met her. By telling her story, I hope it can inspire others who have disabilities to go the extra mile, keep smiling and as Coach Jim Valvano stated in his now famous speech, ‘Don’t give up. Don’t ever give up.’” 🍷



# Fine arts alumnus remembered for making the world a more beautiful place



Tennessee Tech fine arts alumnus Jesse Filoteo made the world a more beautiful place. His artwork graces local businesses, logos, websites and billboards. He was also an advocate for the environment, passionately fighting against pollution and climate change. For Jesse, art and conservation weren't simply a career or hobby. They were a way of life.

Tragically, Jesse passed away in a hiking accident near Snowden Mountain peak in Colorado on July

4, 2024. He was just 25 years old.

"Jesse's life was short, but it was really full," said Gina Filoteo, Jesse's mother. "Jesse touched so many people's lives, and he did so many things around our community. He left a legacy."

Gina says Jesse's artistic talent was evident at four years old, and he always had an entrepreneurial spirit.

"Whatever idea he had in his mind, he would pour himself into it," Gina said. "Jesse was the type of person who put his heart into the things he wanted to do."

Jesse's talent extended beyond traditional visual artwork; he was a gifted writer as well. During his senior year of high school, Jesse won Best in Show from the Interfaith Peace Project for his poem titled "Do It For Mom" about the urgent need for action regarding climate change.

"At first I thought the poem was about me!" Gina laughed. "But it was about Mother Earth – Mother Nature."

Jesse graduated from Cookeville High School in 2016, and he graduated magna cum laude from Tennessee Tech in 2021 with a bachelor's degree in fine arts and a concentration in graphic design.

He worked as a graphic designer for two and a half years before leaving the comfort of a design studio to reconnect with nature and find joy in the great outdoors with the Appalachian Conservation Corps. ACC is a program of Conservation Legacy, a nationwide network of conservation service organizations working to improve the world through healthy land, air and water; thriving people and resilient communities.

“Who would leave an air-conditioned graphic design office to go dig in the dirt?” Gina asked. “But he loved it. He wanted to give back to humanity and make the world a better place.”

Last spring, while serving with the ACC in Virginia, Jesse was part of a small backcountry crew responsible for improving and replacing signs on the South Pedlar ATV trail system. This ensured visitors could navigate the trail system and enjoy nature safely. In May, Jesse transitioned to Colorado where he served with the Southwest Conservation Corps based in Durango. He was a certified sawyer (chainsaw operator) and part of a crew working on the Wood-for-Life program. He saw an opportunity to help indigenous communities by repurposing timber destined for burning into firewood, ensuring families could stay warm during harsh winters.

Gina says she was not surprised by Jesse’s change in career path. He had long been an avid outdoorsman and found a love for hiking and camping through the Boy Scouts of America. Jesse’s ultimate goal in joining the SCC was to become a forest firefighter and put himself on reserve. Then, he planned to earn a master’s

degree in fine arts at Tech so he could teach graphic design at Tech as well.

While at ACC and SCC, Jesse’s passion for art and storytelling never faded. He posted regularly on social media, including short videos of his adventures with the Conservation Corps. He also continued to create art and had plans for an exhibition in Cookeville.

Jesse’s talent touched numerous areas throughout the Upper Cumberland. In 2022, The Silver Fern Gallery in Cookeville featured his solo





exhibition, *The Impracticality of Youth*. And his art helped market local businesses as well. Through an internship with Tech's Center for Rural Innovation (TCRI), Jesse designed artwork and branding for Happy Trails Brewing Company in Sparta, Jackson County's "Explore JCTN" tourism



initiative and the online business Turdcoles and the website for 20 Degrees Frozen Yogurt Lounge in Cookeville.

In 2020, the Fentress County Chamber of Commerce and

Executive's Office reached out to TCRI to find a student who could design an official county seal, and TCRI connected them with Jesse. Jesse set out to create a seal that the county would not only be proud of but that would also capture the spirit of Fentress County with a recognizable design.

In a 2021 Tech press release by Hannah Krant, Jesse reflected on his experience as a TCRI intern.

"The design internship with the Center for Rural Innovation is really a gem," Jesse said. "I've worked with so many clients that I am having to make difficult decisions as to what to put in my portfolio rather than this mad dash to fill in gaps. As for preparation for the 'real world,' it kind of is the real world. We work with real clients and real people and real communities. And my work is out there. I mean, I have a billboard, logos and a number of other things I've been fortunate enough

to be a part of, which is amazing – not to mention the seal."

Gina says she is grateful for the opportunities Jesse received through TCRI.

"When I visited Fentress County, they told me that Jesse is part of their history," she said. "And he's part of Tennessee Tech's history. Tech's Center for Rural Innovation cultivated his talent. Universities give students opportunities, and then of course students must use the tools they have in their toolbox to take advantage of those opportunities."

TCRI staff say that while Jesse will be greatly missed, there is some comfort in knowing his art will remain in the region for many years to come.

"Jesse was an exceptional designer and an exceptional person," said Andrea Kruszka,



assistant director of TCRI. “Beyond his skills as a designer, he was always quick to offer advice or ideas to others and connected us with other designers who could use the same experience he received. He wasn’t competitive or protective of his talent. Instead, he shared his knowledge and helped others be better — whether as artists or as people. Those of us who were lucky enough to know him are better for it.”

Dr. Michael Aikens, assistant vice president for Economic Development, adds, “Jesse’s passion for design and life was an inspiration to his fellow students and beyond. He contributed immensely to Jackson and Fentress counties, among others, and his art will live on as a testament to his talent. Though we mourn his loss, his legacy is immortalized in the art found throughout the Upper Cumberland.”

Molly Perry (‘22 fine arts) knew Jesse as both a colleague and a friend.

“Thanks to Jesse, I was introduced to TCRI as a graphic design intern,” Perry said. “Without him, I may never have found this amazing job! Jesse

was the kind of friend who always showed up for you, and the quality of work he produced for TCRI inspired me to improve and grow as a designer. I first knew Jesse as an artist, but I came to see him as a friend, an athlete, a romantic and someone who was brave enough to really live his life. I am forever grateful to have had him in my life, and I will try to make him as proud of me as I was of him.”

Jesse received a scholarship to attend Tech, and the Filoteo family plans to establish the Jesse Filoteo Art Scholarship to give back and help future generations of gifted artists as well.

Kimberly Winkle, director of Tech’s School of Art, Craft & Design and professor of art, says the School is grateful for the scholarship that will honor and remember Jesse in such a special way.

“Jesse was a beloved member of the School of Art, Craft & Design family,” Winkle said. “I had the privilege of having him as a student in two courses where he was a bright shining star. His artwork was always far above the expectation; it was innovative, well-executed and utterly



impressive. Moreover, he carried himself with integrity. He was honest, polite, very respectful to all who he encountered and willing to lend a helping hand to anyone who needed it. We are heartbroken by his passing, but we're grateful to have had the opportunity to know him. Jesse was one of a kind in all the best ways possible."

David Gallop, associate professor of design and digital media, added, "Jesse exemplified excellence as a design student, marked by his courage, endless curiosity, genuine kindness and unwavering work ethic. Witnessing his transformation over four years into a bold, confident designer was a privilege beyond words. His professional journey, though brief, was guided by purpose and integrity, leaving an indelible mark on everyone around him. While his absence is

deeply felt, his legacy endures within our design studio, continuing to inspire future generations." And Jesse's legacy endures through his art, which was featured in Art Round Tennessee's First Friday series – pop-up art shows on the First Friday of each month this fall – at Meg's Bread in Cookeville in September and at Tech's Roaden University Center in October. Jesse was also featured in Cookeville's Art Prowl Nov. 8-9, an annual art fair and studio tour in Cookeville's historic Westside featuring more than 80 artists Upper Cumberland artists.

Gina says that many of Jesse's friends, classmates and SCC crewmates have reached out to offer condolences and share their favorite stories about Jesse. Some have even gotten tattoos of Jesse's artwork. And they want to stay in touch with the Filoteo family.

"I've lost a son," Gina said. "But I've gained many sons and daughters through all of his friends. We are all holding on to these memories."


The Jesse Filoteo Memorial Scholarship Endowment will be funded through gifts from friends, family and the community Jesse loved, as well as through the sale of Jesse's artwork. To make a gift, visit [tntech.edu/giving](http://tntech.edu/giving) or mail a check to Tennessee Tech, Box 1915, Cookeville, TN 38505, and indicate that you wish to support the Jesse Filoteo Memorial Scholarship Endowment. 🍷

*JF*

# Jesse Filoteo

*Memorial Scholarship  
Endowment*

Scan to donate





# Janet Parsons Jordan Scholarship lends support to students who experienced foster or group homes



The Janet Parsons Jordan Scholarship honors a wife, mother and friend who exemplifies what it means to overcome challenges.

Janet “Jan” Parsons Jordan didn’t have an easy childhood. Her parents were alcoholics and philanderers and often neglected their children. At the age of seven, Jan and her three siblings were placed at Happy Haven Children’s Home. But despite the challenges, Jan was determined to rise above it with a positive attitude, determination and a college degree.

When Jan passed away in 2019 at the age of 60, her husband Dr. Chuck Jordan knew he wanted to honor her memory, support her alma mater and help Tennessee Tech students with a similar background. The Janet Parsons Jordan

Scholarship is awarded to students with financial need, and preference is given to students who spent a portion of their childhood in group or foster homes.

“I believe her experience at Happy Haven was such a formative part of her life,” Chuck said. “Though her early life was marked with hardship, Jan quickly learned how to improve her own life and the lives of those she encountered.”

Jan shared many stories from her childhood with her husband.

“A lot of people don’t talk about these things, but she did,” Chuck said.

Chuck recalls Jan’s stories of her father gambling away her sister’s encyclopedia set, her mother shooting her father in the leg and Jan and her siblings often being neglected.

“In her childhood, she remembers standing by the window, waiting for her folks to pick her up,” Chuck said. “They would show up late, or show up drunk, or not show up at all.”

While Jan was at Happy Haven, she attended a college graduation in Nashville and decided she, too, was going to earn a college degree.

“She saw that graduation and said, ‘That’s what I’m going to do,’” Chuck said. “She was a model student for Happy Haven. They could all see it: That girl’s going somewhere.”

When she was 14, Jan moved back home. When she showed up at the door of her mother’s trailer, Chucks recalls that Jan’s mother looked at her and said, “What have you done now? I’m not going to support you, you know.” Jan was allowed to live with her mother for the remaining years of high school, but she had to earn her own way.

While at Happy Haven, Jan found a job helping out in other people’s homes, cleaning houses, taking care of children, caring for people after surgery and more. She later got a job at a local jewelry store. Despite working so many hours as a young teen, Jan found numerous ways to get involved in high school. She was a cheerleader, secretary of her class and member of the debate team.

“She never missed an opportunity to make her voice heard and her opinion known,” Chuck said.

Jan graduated from high school in 1976 and from Tennessee Tech in 1980 with a degree in chemistry. She later earned a nursing degree from the University of Oklahoma.

Chuck says Jan’s childhood inspired her to give back to her community, and she could never give enough to those around her. She served at First United Methodist Church as a Sunday school teacher and was a board member at the YMCA, Mustard Seed Ranch, Cookeville Cityscape and Community Work Rehabilitation. She was a founding member of the Magnolia Garden Club and the Cookeville Collector’s Club.

“She rarely met a stranger,” Chuck said. “And when she did, they weren’t strangers for long.”

Chuck says even in adulthood, Jan’s tough childhood followed her at times. But she never let it get her down.

“When a local garden club wouldn’t let her in because of her background, she started her own,” Chuck said. “When a woman commented to Jan that she was surprised ‘a woman like you’ would know how to play bridge, she resolved to be even better at the game. She didn’t let comments like that bother her. Her strong personality helped her overcome those obstacles.”

Chuck says Jan’s advice to the students who receive the scholarship in her name, or to any student facing challenges, would be to persevere.

Ashton Brown, a senior biology major from Antioch, Tenn., received the Janet Parsons Scholarship for the 2024-25 academic school year.

“As a pre-med student, graduating with as little debt as possible is very important to me,” Brown said. “The Janet Parsons Jordan Scholarship has helped me significantly in paying for my education and allowing me to pursue my dreams of one day becoming a doctor. I remember waiting in line for coffee on campus during finals week last year when I saw the email informing me I had received the scholarship. In the midst of the stress during finals, this email gave me such joy and relief. I am very grateful for this scholarship, as it has equipped me to continue to accomplish my goals and chase my dreams.” 🌸

# Betty W. Hill Accounting Scholarship provides support for Tennessee Tech students who come from single-parent homes

Richard Hill ('81 accounting) says he would not be the person he is today if not for his mother, Betty.

Betty W. Hill and her husband Joe did not have the opportunity to attend college, but they made a promise to one another that their three children would earn a college degree. When Joe, the family's sole provider, passed away at the age of just 44 when Richard was 10 years old, it could have derailed those plans. But Betty wouldn't allow it. She did everything possible to ensure her children would still go to college. And they did.

"All three of us graduated from college with our bachelor's degrees, obtained additional professional credentials and found careers we love," Richard said. "Surely this is the work of a master teacher and motivator and not just happenstance. Our lives have been greatly enriched by our college education and the careers we chose. Her sacrifices made all that possible."

Now, Richard wants to honor the woman who made his college education possible and provide support for the next generation of Tennessee Tech accounting students. He and his wife Deanna established the Betty W. Hill Accounting Scholarship at Tech to honor Richard's mother and



provide opportunities for students who face similar struggles. The scholarship is awarded to



accounting majors, with preference given to first-generation students and students who come from single-parent homes.

“My mother died in March 2000, but I wonder what her reaction would have been to knowing this scholarship is now in place to help other families who faced what we did in the 1970s,” Richard said. “I am confident that she would have remained stoic while hearing the news (that was her style, for sure), but I hope she would have smiled when she was by herself, knowing her lessons ‘took’ and her sacrifices were appreciated. Those sacrifices directly helped her children and now have inspired a scholarship that will help many more.”

Richard says whatever challenges his parents may have anticipated in funding three students’ college education grew exponentially when his father died. But his mother was determined. She found a job in the office of a furniture manufacturer earning approximately \$80 each week.

“She worked long hours to provide for us, and she did so without complaint,” Richard said. “She was on a mission to complete the plans she and my father made for our futures. Denying her own fears at losing her husband, and now facing an uncertain and scary financial future, she put in the effort to make their shared dreams a reality. I don’t remember a great deal about those first few years after my father died, but I never saw fear in her eyes and never thought for a moment that she was not in complete control of every situation. As an adult reflecting back, I now know that is pretty unlikely to have been the case, but she hid her fears well.”

Kayleigh Griggs (’24 accounting) received the Betty W. Hill Accounting Scholarship for the 2023-24 academic school year and says it made a huge difference in helping to afford college expenses.

“My mom worked endlessly while we were growing up to ensure we had all we needed, since child support didn’t cover enough,” Griggs said. “It’s even more difficult with multiple kids.”

Richard says he hopes the scholarship recipients find a way to pay it forward someday, and he hopes other Tech alumni will consider establishing a scholarship in memory or honor of someone who made a difference in their lives. His only regret about the scholarship, he adds, is that he didn’t establish it sooner.

“My accounting degree from Tech allowed me to earn a comfortable living, and Deanna and I find joy in giving back,” Richard said. “We hope others can find a similar joy and honor someone who has helped make them who they are. It is a gift that will outlive you and provide financial help to a student who may not otherwise be able to finish their education. I would not be who I am without my mother’s willingness to do whatever it took to get me through college. I hope she is remembered as an inspiration for families facing similar challenges. Her sacrifices made higher education possible for us. Deanna and I want others to have the same opportunity.” 🍀

# Tennessee Tech alumni say it is a small world after all

Tennessee Tech alumni live, work and travel all over the world. But no matter where a Tech degree takes them, there's likely a fellow Golden Eagle nearby.

Many Tech alumni have shared stories of running into a fellow alum in an unexpected place. In fact, a group of alumni experienced two small world moments on a Golden Eagle Travel trip to Utah in June 2022.

At a scenic overlook in Canyonlands National Park, one of the travelers noticed that the car parked behind the Tech group's tour bus had a Tennessee license plate. He mentioned to the driver that he was with a group from Tennessee Tech. The driver had just graduated from Tech and was on a road trip out west before starting a teaching job in the fall.



Ellen Amuso and Kelly Chambers

A few days later, as Crawford Alumni Center travel hosts Kelly Chambers ('05 English-journalism and '07 M.A.) and Kathleen Lordo ('00 geology and '24 M.P.S.), who was wearing a Tech t-shirt, led alumni through Arches National Park, they passed a local tour guide who noticed Lordo's shirt and shouted, "Tennessee Tech! I went to Tech!" It was Ellen Amuso ('84 elementary education) who lives in Moab, Utah.

These encounters inspired the Crawford Alumni Center to ask Tech alumni, "Where is the strangest place you've run into a fellow alum?"

**Lauren Addie ('07 industrial technology and '08 M.A.)**

*I ran into a dormmate at a juice hut on an island in Belize in March. We hadn't seen each other in years.*

*Also, I was playing basketball in my neighborhood in Texas a few years ago and had on a Tech track shirt. A car stops and the driver and his wife announce themselves as Tech alum from the '70s and '80s. We see each other from time to time and catch up on life. We are hoping to link up on campus at Homecoming sooner or later.*

**Mark Bradshaw ('82 secondary education)**

*I met a gentleman in the hallway of the casino in Harrah's in Metropolis, Ill. I had on a Tech alumni shirt and he asked about it. He was a proud alum of Tech but graduated several years prior to me. I*

*believe he graduated in the '60s. I explained that myself ('82) along with my wife ('81) and daughter ('08) were alumni and my foster son was still attending at the time. He graduated in 2011.*

**Robyn Brady ('01 business management)**

*Kroger grocery store in Columbus, Ind. And up the street one Halloween when we were trick-or-treating.*

**Charlie Button ('64 industrial technology)**

*I graduated from Tech in 1964, and in 1967, I was in the Army stationed at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Ala. Walking between buildings one day, I saw a familiar face coming toward me. It was Terry Guyn ('65 marketing) who was a year behind me at Tech, but we had some classes together. He was an officer, and I was an enlisted man, so I had to give him a big salute. You just never know where or when you will meet up with a Tech grad you may or may not have known.*

**Michael Campana ('92 foreign language and '93 secondary education)**

*Heidelberg, Germany. I was traveling with my father, who used to be a German professor at Tennessee Tech, and as we were standing up on the overlook above Heidelberg Castle, a person approached and said "Dr. Campana?" It was indeed one of his former students and a Tech grad! My dad knew him and his wife (also a former student and Tech alum), so my wife, daughters and I got to meet them. We had a nice conversation and enjoyed the view while they caught up with each other. I am used to people recognizing my dad around Cookeville (where he still lives), but it was quite the fun surprise to meet someone randomly while touring Europe!*

**Cheryl Crabtree ('88 clothing merchandising)**

*At the Indy500 in 2019! They were sitting two rows behind us! I had a Tech umbrella...for shade...and the race had a red flag, so it was stopped. This guy asked who was the Tech person and I said "ME!" And he said "ME too!"*

**Tracey Narrie DuBose ('88 marketing)**

*President Emeritus Angelo Volpe used to tell the story of meeting a Tech alum on a flight from London to New York.*

**Melissa Edwards ('14 communication)**

*On a deployment in Ukraine in 2019. I walked into the dining facility and saw some of my old ROTC classmates! My unit (101st) replaced the 278th Tennessee National Guard. Small world!*

**Lee Gatts ('13 political science and '14 M.A.)**

*I ran into a fellow Tech alum in Chena Hot Springs, Alaska!*



*Lee Gatts (right) and a fellow Tech alumnus*



**Hillary Gould ('00 multidisciplinary studies)**

*It may not be the "strangest" place, but it was definitely unexpected. Several years after graduating from Tech, I moved with my family to Myrtle Beach. We lived there for more than 10 years. We often visited the Harley Davidson dealership there. So, like any normal Saturday, my husband, three children and I drove up to the dealership to go look at (and dream about) the motorcycles there. As we approached, I saw a man sitting on the bench outside wearing a Tech cap. I normally don't approach strangers and am a bit of an introvert, but I smiled and walked over to him and asked him if he was a Tech alum. (I asked because my father wore a Tech cap often, but he wasn't the alum...just a proud Dad!) The man at the Harley Davidson shop was indeed an alum, and we talked for a few minutes about our time at Tech. He had graduated a few years prior to my arrival at Tech, but we still shared some fond memories!*

**Amber Green ('22 MBA)**

*We ran into an alum in Costa Rica! My husband was wearing a Red Silo hat and the couple came over and asked about it, thinking it had to be a different Red Silo. It turned out they live in Cookeville, are Tech alumni, and the wife was getting a graduate degree in the College of Education at the time!*

**Trent Johnson**

*In 1993, my wife and I moved to Euless, Texas (Dallas). One day I went to the grocery store and a young woman was getting out of the car next to me in the parking lot. We glanced at each other and then I asked, "Were you in my sociology class at Tennessee Tech?" She responded, "Yes."*

**Kelly Crum Maitland ('83 special education)**

*My first teaching job after graduating from Tennessee Tech with a degree in special education was in Augusta County, Virginia. The superintendent came to visit me, as he was also a Tech grad! It was a great way to start my career in 1983!*

**Trent McCullough ('89 electrical engineering)**

*While on a sightseeing cruise from St. Croix to Buck Island, my wife (also a Tech alum) and I met another married pair of Tech alumni who were also celebrating an anniversary. There was about a 20-year age difference between the two couples.*

**Thomas Moore ('09 music)**

*Elkins, W. Va. I am a minister and two of my parishioners are Tech grads – just about 20-25 years ahead of me.*

**Scott Trevathan ('72 secondary education and '75 M.A.)**

*In Canton, Ga., I was playing senior softball and had my Tech hoodie on. Another player came up to me and said he went to Tech. We have played with and against each other for years.*

**Stephenie Tucker ('22 foreign language)**

*I was on my way to Germany after my graduation in Dec. 2022. I flew out of Nashville on Dec. 14, but my flight was delayed due to mechanical issues. I missed my connecting flight in Washington, D.C., and had to stay the night in D.C. I had been re-booked on a flight from D.C. to Chicago and then Chicago to my original destination. In a twist of fate, the flight to Chicago was cancelled and I was placed on the 5 p.m. flight from D.C. to Germany.*

*After all these twists and turns, I was finally on my way to Germany! During the flight, I was having trouble with the tray tables, as they come out of the armrest instead of dropping down from the seat in front of you. I have mobility issues so I was unable to eat my dinner as a result. I discreetly flagged down my flight attendant and let her know that I wouldn't be able to eat my dinner due to the tray table issue. She kindly offered to let me have my meal in the galley with the flight attendants after everyone else had had their meals. It was an act of kindness I still cherish to this day.*

*I took her up on her offer and when I went back to the galley, she had set out my meal in a very nice table setting, even though she didn't have to. While I was eating my meal and chatting with the flight attendants, someone asked me what I was making my trip for. I explained that I had just graduated from Tennessee Tech and that my mother had gifted me a trip home to Germany to spend Christmas with her for the first time in 10 years. My flight attendant's ears perked up at the mention of Tech and she exclaimed that she had also graduated from Tech! She and her husband graduated from Tech some 40 years before.*

*Fate has a funny way of putting people in our path.*

**Christy Rittenberry Vermillion ('91 technical communication)**

*It's not a strange place at all, but we keep hiring Tech grads at Vanderbilt University! (Because Tech graduates are the best, of course!)*

**Brittany Waggener ('08 political science)**

*At an animal rescue fashion show at the now closed Eiffel Society (the reconstructed Eiffel Tower restaurant now located in New Orleans), I found out a fellow Krewe member's husband and best friend both went to Tech. We were all there around the same time and never crossed paths on campus.*

**Michelle Whiteaker ('95 marketing)**

*Kensington Palace in London England in June 2023. We knew the family but neither of us knew the other would be traveling in the same area. Also, on the same trip, we were in the London Eye with a family we didn't know and after noticing we all had southern accents, we discovered my daughter and their son were both current Tech students!*

Golden Eagles love to show their Tech spirit by wearing Tech shirts and hats, carrying Tech umbrellas or placing Tech decals on their car. And who knows? Doing so might may result in meeting a fellow alum in a most unexpected place! 🍷



*Melissa Edwards and ROTC classmates*



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