WILDWOOD FARM
Largest Commitment
in UT System History
I’m an optimist, a character trait that has served me well during challenging times.

In some ways, this past year has brought some of the most complicated problems in all my time with the University of Tennessee. But difficulty is part of being human. You must take the good with the bad. It’s how we respond to adversity that matters.

Despite the challenges, this year has also brought some of the most rewarding experiences of my career, which only makes me more optimistic about the future of our world, nation, state and UT Martin.

In October I traveled to meet our partners in Italy at the Dante Alighieri Society of Siena and the University of Siena, a trip that was postponed twice because of the pandemic. I was blown away. Our students are learning Italian culture and architecture. They’re studying music and agriculture. But there’s so much more to learn outside of the classroom. The students are being exposed to new places, classic literature and international cuisine. There are field trips and excursions all over Italy, but they’re especially fond of their “home base” in Siena. They’re also eating gelato. Lots of gelato.

Studying internationally is one of many ways to enhance the UTM experience. And watching our students and faculty thrive in Siena makes me #UTMproud.

This year the Skyhawks won OVC championship titles in football, soccer, golf and women’s basketball. But, best of all, our Skyhawk athletes set a school-record in the spring with a 3.29 cumulative GPA. They get it done on the field of play AND in the classroom.

But, quite possibly the most significant thing that happened this year was receiving the largest single commitment in UT Martin history when Melanie Smith Taylor and her family announced that Wildwood Farm in Germantown, Tennessee, will be transferred to the university in the future. This transformational commitment will allow UT Martin to increase educational program offerings in veterinary health technology and other agricultural disciplines in the near future.

Forest Gump’s mom said it best: “Life was (is) like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.” I believe at the end of the day, the good always outweighs the bad.

Please join me in being optimistic, because every day is a great day to be a Skyhawk!

Dr. Keith S. Carver Jr.
Dr. Jerald Ogg (’76), professor of mass media and communication, has taken on various roles throughout his 34 years at UT Martin. For the past four years, however, Ogg has been serving in his favorite of the roles: a full-time professor working to make an impact on his students. The beginning of Ogg’s professional career at UT Martin was unexpected. While meeting with the late Dr. Richard Chesteen, a former professor of political science who served as a mentor to Ogg during his undergraduate years, Ogg applied to teach a communications law class for the next semester.

“This institution absolutely changed my life, so when I was given an opportunity to come back to do a one-year teacher’s contract, it was like, ‘This is a chance to give back and to maybe impact the students the way I had been impacted by the university,’” Ogg said. One year became many more as he fell in love with teaching, and in his 10th year at UT Martin, Ogg became the chair of what is currently the Department of Mass Media and Strategic Communication, which would set him on the path to 20 years of administrative work at the university.

Through his administrative work, Ogg was able to shape the future of UT Martin by assisting with the hiring of new faculty and staff members. “Particularly in the dean’s job and the provost’s job I was able to interview all of the faculty for all of the positions that were open. … I enjoyed the opportunity to explain to the candidates what we were about, what kind of institution that we were,” Ogg said.

After spending 20 years on the administrative end of higher education, Ogg was ready to get back to teaching full-time. He had continued to teach the communications department’s public relations principles class since he created the public relations sequence, but he was ready to dive back into building relationships with his students to help them succeed, just as his own mentor did for him.

“I would go to (Chesteen’s) office usually two or three, four times a week. I would sit in his office and talk about options for the future and talk about how we wanted to make an impact in the world. It always felt like when I would go to visit him, he was just sitting in his office hoping I would come by,” Ogg said. “I want to be that kind of professor that helps students figure out all the pieces with going into the real world.”

Through his work on both the administrative and professorial sides of higher education, Ogg has impacted UT Martin student experiences for decades, whether through his teaching or his 20 years of leadership.
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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

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LEARNING BY DOING – UT Martin natural resources management students, Nathan Rorie (left, front) and Austin Morphis (left, back), speed across Kentucky Lake on Aug. 3, 2021, with workers from North American Caviar, Inc. on their way to catch Asian carp that have invaded the lake. Rorie and Morphis interned during the summer with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency to study the reproduction of Asian carp. According to the TWRA, there are four species of Asian carp in the United States and in Tennessee. They were imported into the U.S. for various aquaculture purposes back as early as 1970. They were unintentionally introduced into the country’s water system in the late 1980s and early 1990s when they escaped from aquaculture ponds in the delta areas of the Mississippi River during extreme floods. All four Asian carp species were first found in the Mississippi River, where they are still abundant. Carp are also known to have entered Reelfoot Lake during high flows through its spillway. All four Asian carp species can affect fish and aquatic life in numerous ways.
EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK, CO-WORKING SPACE — UT System President Randy Boyd (right) and the "Everywhere You Look, UT" statewide tour stopped Aug. 25 at the UT Martin Regional Entrepreneurship and Economic Development Center in downtown Martin. The tour began Aug. 3 and traveled to more than 50 counties celebrating UT’s impact across Tennessee. The initiative also doubled as a listening tour as Boyd heard ideas to enhance the university’s service to Tennesseans. The Martin program concluded with a ribbon-cutting ceremony for The Runway co-working space located in the REED Center, which serves as an office space for entrepreneurs, small business owners and remote workers to connect and collaborate on business-related projects. Also pictured shortly after the ribbon was cut are (foreground, l-r) Dr. Ahmad Tootoonchi, dean, UT Martin College of Business and Global Affairs, and Landy Fuqua ('84, '13), director, REED Center; (background, l-r) Dr. Nassar Nassar, CEO of Savant Learning Systems Inc., and Dr. Keith Carver, UT Martin chancellor. Learn about the REED Center and The Runway at www.utm.edu/reed, or contact Fuqua at REED@utm.edu.
GROUNDBREAKING HELD FOR BLAYLOCK INSPIRATIONAL ORACLE — A groundbreaking ceremony was held Oct. 9 during UT Martin Homecoming for the new Blaylock Inspirational Oracle. The structure will be named for Dr. Paul Blaylock ('68), a UT Martin graduate from South Fulton, Tennessee, who has worked more than four decades as both a trauma physician and as a trial attorney in the Portland, Oregon, area. The structure will be designed as an open-air Greek Parthenon and will be located near the Boling University Center. Some of the expected uses include as a reflection area for students and alumni, an outdoor classroom and as a meeting space. The facility will include a fountain and a large plaza. Participating in the groundbreaking were (l-r) Dr. Charley Deal ('92, '96), UT Martin vice chancellor for university advancement; Petra McPhearson, senior vice chancellor for finance and administration; Dr. Keith Carver, chancellor; Blaylock; Dr. Phil Watkins ('56), vice chancellor emeritus of student affairs; and Dr. Andy Lewter ('94), vice chancellor for student affairs. Watkins was a close friend and mentor to Blaylock during Dr. Blaylock’s time at UT Martin.

MEHLHORN NAMED DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES — Dr. Joey Mehlhorn, professor of agricultural economics and chair holder for the Gilbert Parker Chair of Excellence in Agriculture and Natural Resources, was appointed in July as graduate studies dean at the University of Tennessee at Martin. Mehlhorn has served as the interim dean since 2019.

“During the last two years as interim dean, Dr. Mehlhorn has overseen significant increases in graduate programs, developed strong partnerships with the program coordinators in each graduate program, improved the application and review process, and coordinated the graduate program components of the strategic enrollment plan,” Dr. Philip Acree Cavalier, university provost and senior vice chancellor for academic affairs, wrote in an email announcement to university faculty. “I am confident that Dr. Mehlhorn’s skills as a leader and collaborator will contribute to the continued growth of graduate studies at UTM.”

Mehlhorn joined UT Martin in 2003 as a faculty member and has since also served as both assistant director and director of the Tennessee Governor’s School for the Agricultural Sciences; chair of the Department of Agriculture, Geosciences, and Natural Resources; interim chair of the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences; and director of the Center of Excellence in Experiential Learning in the Agricultural Sciences. He earned the rank of full professor in 2008 and will retain his position as Gilbert Parker Chair of Excellence in the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences.

Mehlhorn holds a bachelor’s degree in agribusiness economics from Tennessee Technological University, and both master’s and doctoral degrees in agricultural economics from Mississippi State University.
The University of Tennessee at Martin
CAMPUS SCENE

noteworthy

UT RECOGNIZES SIX FACULTY AND STAFF WITH 2021 PRESIDENT’S AWARDS – UT President Randy Boyd recognized six employees from across the UT System during the summer Board of Trustees meeting June 25 in Memphis. This year’s winners represented UT Martin, the UT Health Science Center, UT Chattanooga and UT System administration. Among the six honored were UT Martin’s Dr. Ray Witmer and Anthony Prewitt (’05).

The President’s Awards were established in 2016 to annually consider the exceptional achievements of employees across the UT System in the areas of the university’s three-part mission to educate, discover and connect as well as to acknowledge outstanding contributions in the areas of support and diversity. The awards spotlight success and inspire excellence.

“It is a privilege to work alongside these inspiring individuals who intentionally lead in our efforts to serve the people of Tennessee,” Boyd said. “They represent our best-in-class thinking and strategic work across our great state and remain an essential part of building the greatest decade in UT history.”

President’s Awards are the highest honor a UT employee can receive from the university. Honorees are selected each year from a system-wide pool of candidates nominated by campus and institute leaders. Winners receive commemorative plaques and $3,000.

Witmer, a highly respected professor of engineering, was honored in the “Educate” category. He has made a lasting impact on the UT Martin Department of Engineering, as well as countless students and staff members. As a civil engineer, Witmer’s real-world experiences have benefited the department in numerous ways. He created courses not offered at many other schools to provide his students state-of-the-art knowledge and experiences.

He constantly modifies and updates his courses to ensure his students are getting lessons that could later be applied to larger challenges. He focuses his recruitment efforts in middle schools and high schools across the region. One of his favorite aspects of his position is getting to visit local schools to show students demonstrations of what a career in STEM can offer. As a result of his efforts, the UT Martin engineering program has seen a tremendous increase in students studying STEM.

Prewitt, UT Martin interim director for multicultural affairs, has been a driving force in diversity for many years and was honored in the “Diversity” category. Prewitt is a consistent voice for all students, and in the past year, he has ensured COVID-19 would not keep UT Martin from celebrating those who fight for equal rights. Since assuming his role, Prewitt has led more than 50 programs aimed at celebrating diversity, promoting thoughtful discussion, addressing tough issues and creating a sense of belonging for his students.

Prewitt helped establish the Black Student Mentoring Collaborative to connect Black students with faculty and staff members from the same background who can share and understand their experiences as students of color. Prewitt was the driving force behind Captain’s Pantry, which is stocked by students, faculty, staff and community members and is open to all students in need. Prewitt ensures every student has a voice regarding their ethnicity, religious differences, lifestyle choices or other cultural characteristics.

IMPROVE YOUR LIFE – Jared Newson (’06), UT Martin Athletics Hall of Fame member and former professional basketball player, spoke about his new book, “30 Minutes That Can Change Your Life,” during an Oct. 14 visit to the university. Newson’s presentation, based on his book, offered ideas on how a person can improve his or her life by investing 30 minutes of time daily. The book is available through Newson’s website newaynation.com.
UT MARTIN EARNED STATE, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL RANKINGS – UT Martin has earned state, regional and national rankings during 2021. Those rankings and listings include the following:

- U.S. News & World Report 2022 Best Colleges edition ranks UT Martin 14th among Best Colleges for Veterans; 15th among Top Public Schools-Regional Universities South; 31st among Regional Universities South (public and private); and 45th for Social Mobility-Regional Universities South. The Princeton Review also named UT Martin one of the Best Regional Colleges for the 19th consecutive year.

- UT Martin’s Online MBA is ranked second in Tennessee and 18th in the South by www.onlinembareport.com. According to the website, more than 400 U.S.-based online MBA programs were evaluated through school surveys, publicly available information on each school’s website and other reputable publications. Ranking criteria included academic reputation of a school’s online and campus-based MBA program, value related to tuition and student indebtedness, relative MBA program enrollment numbers, admissions selectivity, and program quality and rigor. Business programs in the UT Martin College of Business and Global Affairs are accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International). Information about the Online MBA is found at www.utm.edu/departments/mba/online_mba.php.

- The Nursing Schools Almanac’s 2021 rankings list UT Martin’s prelicensure Bachelor of Science in Nursing program #5 in Tennessee.

- University HQ ranked UT Martin’s Master of Science in Education degree with a major in counseling #35 out of 100 programs nationally for the Best Affordable Counseling Degree and #58 out of 100 programs nationally for the Most Affordable Finance Colleges.

UT MARTIN AND NILE UNIVERSITY PARTNER – UT Martin and Nile University officials announced a dual MBA-Executive MBA program agreement Oct. 13 during a Zoom call that linked the universities virtually. Nile University is in Giza City, Sheikh Zayed District, which is about 28 minutes driving distance south of Cairo, Egypt. The agreement allows Nile University students to take UT Martin’s core courses and MBA capstone course, in addition to enrolling for courses at Nile University. Students who successfully complete the curriculum will be awarded the dual degree from UT Martin’s AACSB-accredited program. AACSB is the top business-school accreditation and is achieved by only five percent of the world’s university business programs. “Our university’s reputation will be affected positively, our college’s reputation will be affected positively, and then when the AACSB peer review team comes for accreditation visit around October 2024 … this will be one of the highlights in our report,” said Dr. Ahmad Tootoonchi about the partnership's significance. Tootoonchi is UT Martin College of Business and Global Affairs dean. Pictured from the college as UT Martin and Nile University officials join the announcement virtually are (l-r) Dr. Christie Chen, associate professor of management; Dr. Mahmoud Haddad, professor of finance; Jenny Killebrew, MBA Program and Student Services coordinator; and Tootoonchi.
SEVENTEEN UT MARTIN GRADUATES ACCEPTED TO VETERINARY SCHOOL – Seventeen members of UT Martin’s spring 2021 graduating class were accepted into veterinary schools, which is one of the largest to be accepted from the university.

Nicole King, of Collierville; Sarah Hawk, of Dandridge; Celia Gelpey, of Knoxville; Emily Sutherland, of Hendersonville; Erica Brown, of McEwen; Matthew Katzmarek, of Bruceton; Elizabeth Whitt, of Murfreesboro; Jordan Wilburn, of Leoma; Mary Yarbrough, of Memphis; and Devon Woods (pictured above at commencement), of Escondido, California, are attending the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine in Knoxville.

Katlynn Hacker, of Atoka, is attending Mississippi State University, and Marissa Parks, of Tomball, Texas, is attending the University of Florida. Taylor Heathcock, of South Fulton, is at the University of Missouri; Kiara Nobbe, of Greensburg, Indiana, is enrolled in Purdue University.

Some students were accepted to study at international universities. Becca Byrd, of Germantown, is attending the Royal Veterinary College in London. Johnnie Parker, of Newport, is a student at the University of Melbourne; and Gwen Bracey, of Goodlettsville, is enrolled at the Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine in Basseterre, Saint Kitts and Nevis.

“The faculty and staff understand what it takes for these students to be successful, and they are passionate about relaying this information to students beginning in their first semester as freshmen and continuing that advising and support through graduation,” said Dr. Jason Roberts ('99), professor of animal science and director of the Veterinary Health Technology Program. “We also have a large teaching and demonstration farm, which includes veterinary facilities where students can gain hands-on experience throughout their undergraduate careers. These experiential learning opportunities, in addition to multiple internship opportunities, really strengthen the applications of these aspiring veterinarians.”

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2021 OVC CHAMPIONS – For the first time in 15 years, the UT Martin football team became Ohio Valley Conference champions after a 42-3 win over Tennessee Tech on Nov. 13. The Skyhawks set a new program win-loss record (9-1, 5-0 OVC), and boasted the second-longest winning streak in the nation. Along with the league title, the Skyhawks were guaranteed an automatic berth in the FCS Playoffs. After the win the team claimed a No. 8 ranking in the AFCA FCS Coaches’ Top 25, their highest ranking since 2006.

Canary guided the Skyhawk softball program to 581 victories – fourth-most in Ohio Valley Conference history – during his 18 seasons at the helm. He led UT Martin to a pair of OVC regular-season championships, two OVC Tournament titles and three postseason appearances – including the program’s first two NCAA Tournament appearances in 2009 and 2012.

The second head coach in Skyhawk golf history, Carpenter lifted the program to new heights as UT Martin won the 2016 OVC championship – the first such title in school history. He led UT Martin to a pair of OVC regular-season championships, two OVC Tournament titles and three postseason appearances – including the program’s first two NCAA Tournament appearances in 2009 and 2012.

Carr was quite simply one of the most prolific quarterbacks in OVC history as he still ranks in the league’s top-10 in pass completions, passing touchdowns, passing yards and total offense. He was named to the All-OVC second team squad (alongside current San Francisco 49er Jimmy Garoppolo) as a senior in 2012, shattering the school’s single-season record for pass completions, passing yards and touchdowns.

A two-time All-American, two-time OVC Male Athlete of the Year and two-time OVC Player of the Year from Memphis, Hudson dazzled on the hardwood as a Skyhawk. He set the OVC record for most points in a single season in 2008-09, ranking second in the nation with 27.5 points per game – trailing only to eventual two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Stephen Curry from Davidson College.

Hailing from Lawrenceburg, Taylor was bestowed with a conference Coach of the Year award a remarkable 10 times in his career, including an OVC record seven awards. He accumulated 535 wins – ranking fifth amongst active NCAA coaches before his retirement in December 2019. He directed the Skyhawks to nine conference championships during his 32-year tenure, leading the women’s squad to its first-ever NCAA Regional appearance in 2005.

Eakin was a three-time All-OVC honoree as she became just the second Skyhawk to be named OVC Player of the Year in 2012. The speedster also nabbed All-American accolades that same season, helping UT Martin sweep both the OVC regular season and tournament championships for the first time ever. Despite the fact she only played three seasons, the Brownsville native remains the program leader in runs scored, triples and stolen bases while ranking in the top-10 of eight other major offensive categories.
KIM LEITER NAMED PERMANENT EQUESTRIAN HEAD COACH – University of Tennessee at Martin athletic director Kurt McGuffin removed the interim tag and officially tabbed Kim Leiter as full-time head equestrian coach.

Leiter had served on an interim basis since being promoted from assistant coach on Nov. 19, 2020. She is the second head coach in the history of Skyhawk equestrian, which began in 2006.

Last season, Leiter was voted as Eastern College Athletic Conference Coach of the Year – becoming the first recipient of that award in school history. Against an abbreviated spring schedule that featured a trio of nationally ranked opponents, the Skyhawks posted a 3-5 record with two of those setbacks coming via raw points tiebreakers. UT Martin advanced to the ECAC championship competition for the first time ever and won the league’s reserve championship after battling against eventual national runner-up SMU in the finals.

Outside of the arena, the Skyhawks boasted 26 NCEA All-Academic honorees and combined for a 3.45 Grade Point Average during the 2020-21 season.

A Janesville, Wisconsin, native, Leiter spent six seasons as a Skyhawk assistant before serving as interim head coach last year.

PHIL DANE INDUCTED INTO OVC HALL OF FAME – Former UT Martin director of athletics Phil Dane ('84) was announced as one of the newest members of the Ohio Valley Conference Hall of Fame.

Dane is just the third Skyhawk honoree to be enshrined in the OVC Hall of Fame, joining former Chancellor Dr. Margaret N. Perry (Class of 1998) and former men’s basketball coach Cal Luther (Class of 2000).

For 13 years, Dane served as UT Martin’s vice chancellor for business and finance before moving into the role of athletic director, a position he filled from 2000 until his retirement in December 2013. He oversaw 21 OVC championship teams – 15 of which came from 2009 through 2013.

Seven different UT Martin sports programs captured an OVC championship under the direction of Dane, five of which (volleyball, football, men’s basketball, softball, soccer) won their first-ever OVC title. His tenure also included the supervision of the highly successful non-OVC rodeo and equestrian programs.

Skyhawk Athletics set a program record for most OVC Medal of Honor (4.0 Grade Point Average) and OVC Commissioner’s Honor Roll (at least a 3.25 GPA) recipients in three straight years under Dane.

A big part of Dane’s legacy was a $50 student fee increase in the fall of 2007. That generated roughly $600,000 annually and provided salaries for additional assistant coaches for volleyball, soccer, baseball and softball while creating a new full-time slot in the sports information office. While the additional funds also increased the operating and recruiting budgets, it also allowed Dane to make several facility upgrades for football, basketball, baseball, golf, soccer, softball and tennis during his time as athletic director. Almost $2,000,000 in private funding was raised and aided a significant portion of the Bob Carroll Football Building and the state-of-the-art Rhodes Golf Center, amongst other amenities. UT Martin’s football pressbox, a facility that was spawned by Dane, officially opened in the fall of 2016 and includes the “Phil Dane Athletic Director Suite” on the third floor.
ACADEMICS are on the UPSWIN

By Ryne Rickman
Photos by Steve Mantilla & Nathan Morgan
Academics are on the Skyhawk student-athlete Kenzie Hinshaw ('21).
With the many twists and turns that everyday life has delivered since the spring of 2020, one thing has remained consistent in the University of Tennessee at Martin athletic department: the emphasis the Skyhawk academic support staff has placed on the first half of the phrase “student-athlete.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic halted collegiate sports in March of 2020, uncertainty was abound everywhere. Amongst a new academic curriculum that no student-athlete had encountered in their life — online-only courses and isolation from teammates/friends/family, to name a few — UT Martin’s athletic department generated a 3.26 Grade Point Average for the spring 2020 semester, a record at the time.

Seven months later, the Skyhawk Athletics grades were tallied for the fall 2020 semester, and UT Martin had delivered a new benchmark for academic excellence with a 3.28 GPA.

The spring 2021 semester brought another highlight for academic success as the Skyhawks were responsible for a 3.29 GPA — its third record in as many semesters.

To find the root of the athletic department’s recent academic boom, four UT Martin alums are key benefactors. Ashley Bynum ('13), Emily Anne Sparks ('08), Jodie Duncan ('18) and Tony Bufford ('19) make up four of the five academic counselors who help keep the engine running through a multitude of challenges.

Athletic director Kurt McGuffin calls the Skyhawk academic support staff the dark-horse MVPs of UT Martin’s recent surge.

“Our staff deserves a lot of credit for all the records we have broken over the last 18-plus months,” McGuffin said. “They are professionals in every sense of the word — they care for our student-athletes like they are family. Of course winning is important — we hang scoreboards for a reason — but at the top of every athletic director’s priority list is establishing a track record of sustained academic success. Thankfully, we have done that here at UT Martin and I truly feel the best is yet to come.”

A Martin native, Bynum attended the University of Tennessee College of Law after earning her degree from UT Martin. Following her 2016 graduation in Knoxville, she started a private practice in nearby Dresden before joining the Skyhawk athletic department in a compliance role in April 2017 — a month before McGuffin was hired to lead the department.

“Kurt identified that while compliance is more my skillset, academics was something I was passionate about, too, as far as making sure kids have the adequate resources to be successful,” said Bynum, who oversees the academic support staff. “I was able to transition into the academic area of helping student-athletes build their self-esteem to a level of being able to excel in the classroom when they’ve always just been successful on the field.”

Sparks also joined UT Martin Athletics in 2017 as it was just her and Danelle Fabianich heading the departmental academic...
progress at the time. Sparks brought along experience in two other full-time roles on campus before her move to athletics, which was a breeze for the Union City native.

“I’ve been around UT Martin all my life — I don’t know if I’ve ever missed a Homecoming,” Sparks said. “Growing up, I saw Skyhawk student-athletes who had become my coaches, role models and mentors. I wanted to make an impact on our current wave of student-athletes like they’ve made on me.”

A little under a year later, Duncan (pictured right with Skyhawk student-athlete Benny DeTrude) was wrapping up an All-Ohio Valley Conference career on the softball diamond at UT Martin and was in the midst of an internship under Fabianich studying all facets of the athletic department. When McGuffin began making plans to reshuffle the department’s academic chain of command, Duncan was immediately interested in the gig.

“One of my biggest motivating factors was being that person that I needed when I was in the student-athlete’s shoes,” Duncan said. “Whether that’s on the physical stance, academic stance, emotional, mental — whatever is needed of me during the day, I want to be that person. It means a lot to me as an alum to know that this university keeps growing and figuring out ways to better serve the student-athletes, and the academic branch of our organizational chart is no exception.”

All parties agree that a turning point in the department’s recent rise in academics came in February 2019. After months of hard work and countless hours of research, Bynum submitted an application for an NCAA grant regarding the Accelerating Academic Success Program (AASP) initiative. In July, the NCAA announced that UT Martin was one of three universities to each receive $100,000 to help their student-athletes earn their degrees.

In addition to $20,000 raised by private donors, Skyhawk Athletics now had the funds to implement a real change. The biggest identifiable need was a state-of-the-art computer lab, which would turn out to be more valuable than anyone would know when the collegiate academic world turned all virtual just a few months later.

“We had a three-computer lab in athletics that was basically just a small office space where our student-athletes would print items and then go study elsewhere,” Bynum said. “We wanted to give them a space for collaborative work that featured supplies, nutritional snacks and drinks in a comfortable common area setting.”

The vision soon became a reality as the computer lab officially opened in October 2019, located in the main hallway of the athletics suite. The spacious room is open during all lab hours and is commonly used for various team study hours as there are usually an average of six to 12 student-athletes in there at all times of the day accessing the 18 computers.

“The academic computer lab has made a world of difference,” Sparks said. “If anybody has a question or needs anything, we’re just right down the
hall. The academic results speak for themselves but even taking academics out of it, it’s brought our student-athletes closer because they’re in there mixing and mingling — interacting with each other outside of their majors and teams. It’s led to an outpouring of interdepartmental support where our student-athletes are showing up at each other’s games.”

Sure enough, the first full semester that the academic computer lab was in operation was spring 2020, which started the active run of record GPAs for Skyhawk student-athletes.

The final piece of the academic support puzzle came in September 2020 in the form of Bufford, who was teaching in his hometown of Trenton when he got a call from Bynum. A position had opened up thanks to the McLendon Minority Leadership Initiative, which provides minorities a jumpstart to their careers through practical experiences, opportunities to build their network and instilling the values of the legendary late Coach John McLendon: integrity, education, leadership and mentorship. Bufford was the perfect match, and he has fit in seamlessly to UT Martin’s budding academic operation.

“I draw great pride in my role,” Bufford said. “I wake up every day really motivated and ready to help our student-athletes actualize their goals, whether those are in this semester or long-term within professional development or career placement. I see their potential, and I’m extremely grateful that I get paid to support them and help them figure out this stage of their lives.”

Fabianich says she is blessed to work alongside four alums who show a passion for their job on a daily basis.

“We have a really good team, and all four of them are great
at their jobs," Fabianich said. "They hold our student-athletes accountable, and that’s shown in our GPA growth. Ashley did an amazing job putting in the work to get the grant that made this all possible. Nothing has made us happier than seeing our student-athletes rise to the occasion semester after semester."

In addition to the educational guidance that the academic support staff has provided in recent semesters, all five members have also placed a big emphasis on mental health. Their office doors – and ears – are always open for any struggling student-athlete who has had to adjust to the unprecedented circumstances the world has dealt.

“We are a second eye to what they do on a daily basis,” Duncan said. “We’re always making sure they are progressing towards their degree and are always down to help for graduate school and internship applications, but it’s more than that. Speaking as a former student-athlete, I knew if I was doing better in the classroom, I did better in practice and games because I wasn’t stressed about as many things — I could actually enjoy playing the game I love. There are a lot of outside factors like time-management skills that we also try to hit to make our student-athletes successful in all stages of their collegiate experience.”

“We check in with our student-athletes regularly and let them know we are in their corner,” Bufford said. “They are the captains of their ship — we’re their shipmates. The last year-and-a-half has been a mental and emotional strain for everybody involved, but our student-athletes have been resilient across the board and shown an ability to change. They’re at a very formative time in their lives where it was easy to quit, but they put their hardhat on and kept at it. If they can show that type of determination as 18-to-22-year-olds, there’s no telling what they can do in their field of profession.”

With a departmental roster boasting 475 student-athletes the Skyhawks’ academic support model has proven to work. At the heart of that achievement has been a personalized approach that Bynum is proud of.

“We sit down with the student-athletes, look at what they have to do, and provide information to them in a way that they can take it and do it on their own time and succeed with that objective-based list," Bynum said. "What that does is instill the ability to understand that they are fully capable of doing this. A lot of what we’ve done has been geared towards ‘how are you as a person?’ instead of ‘how are you as a student-athlete?’: We’re giving kids opportunities that they may not have gotten elsewhere, and they’ve maybe never had anyone believe in them before. I’ll take 10 days of staring at spreadsheets if it means I’ve made a difference for one student-athlete.”
UT Martin Receives LARGEST COMMITMENT in UT System History

By Bud Grimes | Photos by Steve Mantilla & Nathan Morgan
UT Martin Receives LARGEST COMMITMENT in UT System History
Officials with the University of Tennessee System and the University of Tennessee at Martin knew that the Wildwood Farm commitment to UT Martin announced June 24 in Germantown was the largest in university history. A property appraisal announced in August, which includes the property value and $3 million in new construction, confirmed the total commitment’s value at $79,534,920 – the largest ever to the UT System.

Melanie Smith Taylor and her family announced in June that Wildwood Farm will be transferred to the university upon her death. The commitment will allow UT Martin to increase educational program offerings in veterinary health technology and other agricultural disciplines in the near future. The commitment will also provide opportunities for UT Martin to collaborate with the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture.

UT System President Randy Boyd, UT Martin Chancellor Keith Carver and Taylor, a 1984 Olympic Gold Medalist in equestrian, were among those making the official June announcement. The commitment will make possible educational opportunities in animal science and horsemanship, plant and soil science, environmental management, and natural resources management. Early programming will prioritize adding a cohort for veterinary health technology.

“This transformational commitment will support our academic and research mission for generations to come,” Carver said. “The extraordinary generosity of Melanie Taylor and the Taylor family will allow UT Martin programs to expand into Shelby County and will greatly enhance our ability to promote agriculture, horsemanship, and plant and soil science. We are extremely grateful.”

The farm includes 350 acres of mixed pasture and mature oak woodlots surrounded by dense residential development. The Big Barn was completed in 1935 and became the hub of equestrian history in the Mid-South. Originally built as one of the top American Saddlebred show stables in the country, Wildwood transformed into the setting for many equestrian events.

The farm was originally chosen as the site for the National Steeplechase Tour and the U.S. Open Polo Championship. The property has served as a world-class training ground for polo ponies, hunters, jumpers and pleasure horses. In March 2017, Carnival Memphis presented Melanie Smith Taylor and Wildwood Farm a joint award of excellence “in recognition of outstanding achievement and service to the sports industry and the Mid-South community.”

The relationship between Wildwood Farm and UT Martin began in 2015 and led to the announcement and plans for the property’s future. The plan meets Taylor’s vision to both preserve the farm
in the current state and to honor the Taylor family while providing a benefit to students studying all agriculture disciplines. The farm will be used in a similar manner to the UT Martin Teaching Farm located adjacent to the university’s main campus. Wildwood Farm will remain in its current state and provide a much-needed hands-on teaching and demonstration laboratory in agricultural sciences in Shelby County.

“The Wildwood Farm and UT Martin partnership will keep the beauty of this incredible land while leveraging its multi-use property to create new opportunities to benefit faculty and students for generations to come, and also sustain Wildwood Farm – which is the ultimate goal of the Taylor family,” Boyd said.

Kerry Witcher, UT Foundation Inc. president and CEO, said, “This commitment is the direct result of building lasting relationships between friends and alumni and our university. Transformational commitments of this magnitude positively impact generations to come, and the UT Foundation is excited to play a role in helping Ms. Taylor realize her dream.”

In her comments at the June announcement, Melanie Taylor recalled her late husband, Lee, and this vision for Wildwood Farm. “Lee wanted to be sure the farm continued to be enjoyed by me and the Wildwood family for the duration of my lifetime,” she told those present for the announcement. “But he also hoped it would be a gift that keeps on giving and growing through scholarship, horsemanship and friendship to best promote this unparalleled natural resource by an equestrian and an agrarian focus. … And so for the Taylor family and all of us at Wildwood, we welcome UT Martin to our home and shared dreams.”

Recognition for Taylor and her family’s generosity continued during 2021 UT Martin Homecoming when she received the Chancellor’s Award for University Service from Chancellor Keith Carver.
They were told a National Forensic Academy (NFA) collegiate program would never work – it would not be sustainable.

Ten years and 213 students later, the NFA Collegiate Program (NFACP) hosted its three-week course at the Law Enforcement Innovation Center (LEIC) in Oak Ridge this summer with students from 16 different universities. LEIC is an agency of the UT Institute for Public Service.

“We fought for two years to get this thing going. We were told it wouldn’t work because UT Martin is academic and IPS is not,” said UT Martin Professor of Criminal Justice Dr. Brian Donavant, who founded the program along with former Law Enforcement Innovation Center Executive Director Don Green. “Seeing it succeed has been phenomenal.”
“SOAK IT ALL IN. ASK AS MANY QUESTIONS AS YOU CAN AND ASK THE WHAT IF’S,” SHE SAID.

“YOU NEVER STOP LEARNING.”
The collegiate program was borne during a trip Green made to the UT Martin campus to discuss potential partnerships for training. In those discussions, Green and Donavant brainstormed how they could help students in the Criminal Justice Program at UTM.

“We were consistently getting calls from students and parents whose kids wanted to attend the professional NFA,” Green said. “But that’s a 10-week program, that wouldn’t work for students. I’m excited about the fact that it’s in its 10th year and excited to see it progressing.”

During the three-week program each summer, students learn crime scene investigation techniques with the same instructors who teach the professional, 10-week NFA. They study digital photography, latent fingerprint processing, crime scene management, bloodstain pattern analysis, forensic anthropology and shooting scene reconstruction. Students earn course credit for completing the three-week program.

“This program is not what it was 10 years ago,” Donavant said. “We’ve found what works for college students and what doesn’t. The first year we did the forensic anthropology piece during the last week of the session, but we found that it was so intense we moved it to the second week.”

Donavant said he’s seen interest in the program ebb and flow, but was amazed this year at the response he received from students at other universities. In addition to students from UT Martin, other class members came from Boise State, Illinois State, Iowa State, Michigan State, University of Arkansas, Salem State (Mass.) University and Texas Christian University among others. This year’s class expanded to 30 from the typical 24, and 25 additional students were on the waiting list. They will receive priority on enrollment for the 2022 class.

His continued outreach to university criminal justice programs across the country has helped spread the word about the NFACP. The program wasn’t established to be a recruiting tool for UT Martin, but in the case of Ashley Yoakum, that’s exactly what happened. Yoakum, a native of Fort Wayne, Ind., was attending Indiana Wesleyan University when she first learned about the NFACP.

“The head of the criminal justice program (at Indiana Wesleyan) forwarded an email from Dr. Donavant, I sent it to my mom and started looking into the collegiate program and UT Martin,” Yoakum said. “The criminal justice program wasn’t as robust at IWU as it is at UT Martin with different concentrations in the field.” Yoakum enrolled in the three-week NFACP this summer and will begin her sophomore year at UTM in the fall after making the decision to transfer.

While Yoakum is getting her first experience in the field of forensic investigations, an alumna of the first NFACP session and a detective with the Collierville Police Department has come full circle by returning to Oak Ridge for the 10-week NFA for professional law enforcement officers.

“It was like going back to my old classroom, like coming home,” said Madison Zuck, a 2013 graduate of UT Knoxville, who said the NFACP gave her a good baseline in the field of forensic investigations. “It helped me see that I enjoy the forensic side of investigations and that this was an area I wanted to work in. It also gave me a good start with setting myself up career-wise.”

After graduating from UTK, Zuck started her career at the Collierville Police Department as a patrol officer before her promotion to detective earlier in 2021. The CPD committed to send a detective to each session of the NFA, and Zuck was selected by the command staff to attend Session 55 of the NFA. Not only did she complete the 10-week session, but at the conclusion she was named winner of the Dr. William Bass award as the most outstanding student.

Zuck is just one example of the multiple NFACP graduates who have gone on to the professional law enforcement ranks. Green and Donavant made sure that the NFACP curriculum would give students an advantage when they started to look for jobs during their senior years.

“The program has about an 85 percent placement rate in law enforcement for those who completed the program,” Green said. “The Tennessee (police) chiefs give preference to those students and I know the Georgia Bureau of Investigation looks at it as an advantage.”

Zuck’s advice for students enrolling in the NFACP?

“Soak it all in. Ask as many questions as you can and ask the what if’s,” she said. “You never stop learning.”
Skyhawk help is coming to Waverly, Humphreys County.
Nation STEPS UP to Help Waverly, Humphreys County

By Bud Grimes
Photos by Steve Mantilla
Imagine you’re having a nightmare and then realize that it’s all too real. The worst of nightmares confronted Waverly and Humphreys County residents Saturday, Aug. 21, when torrential rains created rapid flooding, massive property destruction and the tragic loss of 20 lives in this community of 4,100 residents. Houston, Dickson and Hickman counties also experienced related flooding, but the brunt of the devastation occurred in Humphreys County and particularly in Waverly, where lives and livelihoods were forever changed.

No description seems adequate for the devastation: piles of debris along city streets and roadways, large dumpsters beside houses awaiting water-damaged materials and belongings, damaged roads and bridges, houses and businesses destroyed, school buildings rendered unusable. A short drive through the town on Highway 70 reveals a frightening story that brought national news attention and the need for volunteers to assist churches, relief organizations and others with relief and recovery.

Among those moved to action was Jackie Johnson (‘08, ‘10), UT Martin assistant vice chancellor for alumni relations and annual giving. The Fayette County native has strong Humphreys County ties through her mother, Phyllis Waggoner Taylor (‘82), who was raised in the Plant Community near New Johnsonville. Her Aug. 31 call for volunteers included a simple plea: “Our friends in Humphreys County have supported our alma mater over the years. Now, it’s our turn to support them.”

University of Tennessee alumni number 482 in Humphreys County, 280 of which are UT Martin graduates.

The group assembled Sept. 18 at the designated Volunteer Reception Center (VRC), a former Save-A-Lot grocery store located about a mile west of downtown Waverly. Volunteers carpooled or traveled separately to Waverly because of COVID-19 restrictions, and masks were required in the building that contained donated work supplies and was staffed by volunteers. The UT Martin group was assigned clean-up duties at a mobile home park located across the Highway 70 Bypass near the Walmart next to Trace Creek.

Arrival at the site revealed mobile homes either destroyed or rendered unlivable weeks earlier by the raging creek. One mobile home straddled a ravine, and while other units were still in place, piles of debris were deposited on the street and between the homes.

The VRC site and work are coordinated by Inspiritus, formerly Lutheran Services of Georgia and Lutheran Services in Tennessee. Before work begins, Inspiritus team leader Tony Vanella is careful to ensure that volunteers work safely. He
advises volunteers to pace themselves in the heat and humidity, and he reminds those who help to clean the ravine to watch for snakes. The main tasks are to sort and move debris piles to an open area for easier loadout. Quickly evident in the wet piles are everything from insulation and plywood to furniture and personal items. As the work progresses, volunteer Jerry Reese ('87, '88) discovers a family photo album and is asked to set it aside to display on one of the numerous tables in the VRC where salvaged photo and personal items are kept for possible return to their owners.

Although the work is slow, some progress is evident when, about 90 minutes into the work, Vanella sends the team back to the VRC because of potential storms and flash flooding. Caution is especially high because of debris upstream possibly creating a potential unknown flooding hazard. Back at the VRC, lunch is provided by the Waverly Church of Christ, one of several local churches whose work in the tragedy is evident in a hurting community.

While volunteers wait out the rain, Inspiritus volunteer and Austin, Texas, native Regina Pineda put the disaster into perspective. “It’s definitely one of the most difficult. The loss and the destruction is just so great,” she said. “And just hearing the stories of people who live here, and it literally happened within 12 minutes — not even just flash floods. It was like a tidal wave.” Her organization’s task is daunting “because we’ve had over 250 homeowners and even small businesses or businesses come in, requesting services from us.”

One of the organization’s important duties is registering volunteers and recording their hours, which are assigned a value to help offset some of the city’s and county’s recovery costs with FEMA. This means that every volunteer hour is important, and more workers are needed because “the progress of what we’re able to do is just going a lot slower than we’d expected and wanted and hoped.”

Pineda said that other challenges include little to no construction material storage space, the need for dehumidifiers to dry in the insides of homes and finding people with trade skills such as electricians and plumbers. Flood damage in neighboring locations has made obtaining supplies more challenging, and other relief organizations had left to assist Hurricane Ida survivors. Given the circumstances, the road to recovery is going to be long and strenuous. “With just how everything’s going at the moment, at least five years, if not more,” Pineda said. “We’re thinking, ‘We’ve been doing this for a while, and this is some of the worst we’ve seen.’”

Gwen Reese ('88, '93) traveled with her husband, Jerry, from their home in Franklin to volunteer with fellow UTM alums. “First of all, incredible for the group of UT Martin alums living in the area
Those assisting in Waverly flood cleanup efforts included UTM alums, family members and friends. Pictured are (front row, l-r) Greylon Price, Gabrielle Price, Priscilla Price ('01, '17), Jenna Freeman (current UTM student), Melanie Morris ('93), Gwen Reese ('88, '93), Andy Lewter, Andrew Lewter ('94), Mitchell Lewter, Megan Lewter, Vicki Whitworth ('79) and Jackie Johnson ('08, '10); (back row, l-r) Michael Price, Gavin Price, Jean Williams ('95), Joe Croom ('73, '81), Bud Grimes ('78), David Stanfill ('87, '89) and Jerry Reese ('87, '88).
More Skyhawks Lend a Hand

Other UT Martin groups have assisted with the Waverly/Humphreys County relief efforts. These are examples of other relief efforts known at the time this story was completed.

• On Saturday, August 28, 43 students in the UT Martin University Scholars Program traveled to Waverly to assist TEMA, the Tennessee State Guard, and local citizens with cleanup efforts and the distribution of donated food and supplies. The effort was coordinated through the Emergency Management Agency of Humphreys County.

  Students were accompanied by Dr. John Glass, Honors Programs director and associate professor of English; Dr. Emalee Buttrey ('03), associate professor of animal science and Humphreys County native; Dr. Abigail Shelton, Honors Programs assistant director and associate professor of chemistry; and Dr. Chris Hill, associate professor of English.

  One team of 10 students assisted the non-profit disaster relief organization, Mercy Chefs, with the preparation and distribution of meals. Lunchtime service provided 1,250 lunches in a two-hour period and prepared approximately 650 dinners for distribution later in the day. Meals continued to be provided throughout the day and ended with a dinner service for volunteers and Waverly residents.

  A second team of 27 students delivered a pallet of bottled water donated by Rural King in Martin to the Humphreys County Fairgrounds pavilion, which had been set up as the collection and distribution point for donations of relief supplies.

  Over the course of the day, under the direction of members of the Tennessee State Guard’s 911th MP unit, University Scholars assisted in the sorting, packaging, palleting, and moving of many tons of relief supplies.

• The Level 3 nursing students at the Parsons Center hosted a drive to collect items for the flood victims. Over four SUV loads of items were delivered to Waverly as well as $200 in donations. The monetary donations were used to purchase a kitchen table and chairs for a local family that posted the need. Several Waverly students attend the Parsons Center.

• Amy McLean, associate professor in the Social Work Program, took a group of social work majors on September 15 to volunteer. They spent the day taking a house down to the studs so that it can be rebuilt.

Donations to assist relief efforts in Humphreys County are accepted by several organizations, including local churches, United Way, Red Cross and the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee. Inspiritus, the organization featured in this story, remained onsite in Waverly when this story was finalized, and donations to Inspiritus can be made to the link below and choose “Tennessee Floods August 2021” from the dropdown menu:

https://app.etapstry.com/onlineforms/LutheranServicesofGeorgia/Donationpage.html

#WaverlyStrong
#HumphreysCountyStrong
Vietnam War veterans who are alumni of UT Martin’s Alpha Upsilon Chapter of the Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity were honored May 15 during the chapter’s annual Founders Day celebration held at the Martin Parks and Recreation Complex. Fourteen of the 17 living alumni returned for the event that included the presentation of Vietnam War veteran pins as part of the Founders Day luncheon program. Twenty-one AGR alumni served in Vietnam.

The event, which fell on Armed Forces Day, was delayed a year by the COVID-19 pandemic and attracted an enthusiastic crowd that participated in an alumni meeting, heard several recognitions and speakers, and were treated to optional helicopter rides. The UT Martin Army ROTC Color Guard posted the colors and also presented taps at the event’s conclusion in honor of the four deceased veterans.

The program included recognition of Cindy Kent, biographer and editor of the book “Better Men: Alpha Upsilon in Vietnam” released in 2020. The book includes her interviews with each of the 14 veterans about his Vietnam War experiences. “It’s been the honor of my life to do this,” Kent said. “We all want to do something that matters to somebody else that we know. … These men that you read about (in the book), they’re my brothers.” A Friday night reception held in honor of the 14 veterans provided opportunities for each to collect signatures for personal copies of the book and to share college and war memories.
The pinning ceremony was conducted by three retired generals who are UT Martin graduates: John “Glad” Castellaw ('72), U.S. Marine Corps; Dennis Cavin ('69), U.S. Army; and Dr. Ron Sholar ('71), U.S. Army Airborne (middle photo, left). A composite photograph of the honorees was then unveiled and is now displayed in the AGR house located on 225 University Street. Buddy Mitchell ('66) acknowledged the recognitions on behalf of his fellow Vietnam War veterans and called his friends a “band of brothers” for the bond they share.

“Certainly, the wonderful thing here today is we all came home, and but for inches we would not have,” Mitchell said. “I believe the greatest tragedy of war is not just that the soldier dies, and we would not have been able to live the fulfilling lives that we lived. Our children would not exist. Our beloved grandchildren would not exist, and any contribution that that lineage would make to the world would not exist.”

Dennis Cavin offered the event’s keynote remarks and expressed appreciation for his part in honoring those who served. “It’s the most humbling and a sincere privilege for me to acknowledge the lives, the service and the sacrifice of 21 men, brothers – 19 soldiers, one Marine, one sailor – who served our nation during possibly the most difficult time in our nation’s history.”

Cavin thanked veterans and their families but acknowledged that gratitude for their sacrifices was delayed. “Today’s recognition, belated though it may be, is designated as corrective effort to make sure you know how much your service and sacrifice are appreciated,” he said.

“… Freedom more often than not comes cloaked in uncertainty. The cost of independence remains high, but we’re willing to pay it. We do not pay it gladly, but we pay it in deep reverence and thanks to those who shoulder the burdens, the pain, the loneliness of separation for us.”

Cavin said he closes many of his presentations by quoting Isaiah 6:8 that says, “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’” He used the verse to honor the courage of those who responded to the call of service in Vietnam. “For 19 soldiers, one Marine, one sailor – their response was, ‘Here am I, Lord, send me,’” Cavin said.

“Through your presence today, you have chosen to honor America’s soul, this generation of Vietnam warriors. A hardy welcome home, brothers. Stand tall, be proud, and we salute you.”

The Alpha Upsilon Chapter of Alpha Gamma Rho was established in 1963 at UT Martin. More than 1,100 members have been initiated since the chapter’s installation.
(l-r) Ray Geddings ('67, '71) and Russell Cox (UTM, '67 UTK) are recognized for their service.
A Note From Alumni Relations

The founders of Hall-Moody Institute might have only dreamt of a time when 50,000 individuals would receive a higher education degree in Martin, Tennessee. At one time, Martin was home to two colleges, Hall-Moody Institute and McFerrin College. In 1911, the Dresden Enterprise declared Martin to be the “Athens of West Tennessee,” an accolade we can appreciate even today!

UT Martin’s early founders would be pleased to know that the 50,000th graduate is a Tennessee native and came to UT Martin to pursue a degree in agriculture. Chloe Anderson (’20) (pictured on page 45), participated in 4-H programs growing up and knew she wanted to attend a University of Tennessee System school. She chose UT Martin, where she could visit one-on-one with faculty. Entering her freshman year, she knew UT Martin was home. She currently lives in Gallatin and works as a vet tech at Gallatin Animal Hospital. While 2020 is a year many will remember, it is also a milestone year for the accomplishments that UT Martin alumni have received.

Join us in our RISE Campaign to ensure UT Martin will see the 100,000th alumnus/a walk across the commencement stage. give.utm.edu

Jackie Johnson (’08, ’10)
Assistant Vice Chancellor for Alumni Relations and Annual Giving

Jackie Johnson
GET INVOLVED!

As a UT Martin alumnus, your continued engagement and involvement are critical to our success. Your personal commitment of time, talent and treasure will ensure our future growth. Visit our website to discover meaningful ways you can impact your university.

- Volunteer Opportunities
- Reunions
- Alumni Council
- Development Council
- Mentoring Program
- Young Alumni Council
- Speak Out for UT
- Alumni in the Classroom

ALUMNI.UTM.EDU

In addition to visiting the website, feel free to write, call or email the UT Martin Office of Alumni Relations for more information.

Office of Alumni Relations
Dunagan Alumni Center
1900 Alumni Way
Martin, TN 38238
(731) 881-7610
alumni@utm.edu

Ken Yager ('69, '72) has served the state of Tennessee as a state senator from Roane County since 2009. He currently sits as the Tennessee Senate Republican Caucus chairman, a role he was elected to by his senate colleagues. Before being elected to the senate, Yager completed 24 years of service to Roane County as county executive. Recently, he was elected to chairman of the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR). The 25-member group is made up of public officials from the state, county and municipal governments as well as two private citizens and two members of the executive branch. TACIR is a forum for the discussion and resolution of intergovernmental problems. With extensive experience in state and local government, Yager is uniquely qualified to lead TACIR. At UT Martin, Yager earned his bachelor’s degree in 1969 and completed his master’s degree in 1972. He then went on to earn his J.D. from the University of Memphis in 1977.
A photo Sarah Knapp ('19), reporter for the Homer News in Homer, Alaska, captured during the evacuation of the Homer Spit after the July 28, 2021, 8.2 magnitude earthquake rattled the Gulf of Alaska was featured in several national media outlets, including National Geographic, The Associated Press and the Washington Post. The earthquake was recorded as the largest in the U.S. in the last 50 years. Knapp moved to Alaska in April 2021 to work for the newspaper.

Robert “Bob” Duncan ('99) was appointed in May 2021 by Gene Dodaro, comptroller general of the United States and head of the U.S. Government Accountability Office, as one of five new members to the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission. MACPAC was established to review Medicaid and CHIP access and payment policies and to advise Congress on issues affecting Medicaid and CHIP. Duncan is the executive vice president of Children’s Wisconsin, where he oversees the strategic contracting for Children’s systems of care, population health, and the development of value-based contracts. He also is the president of Children’s Community Health Plan, which insures individuals with BadgerCare Plus coverage and those on the individual marketplace, and Children’s Service Society of Wisconsin. Previously, he served as the director of the Tennessee Children’s Health Insurance Program, overseeing the state’s efforts to improve the health and welfare of children across Tennessee, and held various positions with Methodist Le Bonheur Health Care. Duncan is a 1998 graduate of the UT Martin WestStar Leadership Program.

Members of the Winburn family, of Cordova, were among those attending UT Martin Family Weekend, Sept. 10-12. Pictured clockwise from left are Mark Jr., Isabelle, Erica Lee, Mark ('98) and Jenna ('98). Isabella is a current University Scholars student and UTM accounting major; Jenna is an ESL teacher for Bartlett City Schools, and Mark is regional director at Barnhart Crane and Rigging.
Nathan Hammond (’10) received the 2021 Best Doctoral Dissertation Award from the Family Firm Institute. The FFI website notes that the award encourages and recognizes outstanding academic achievement in the field of family business study. The dissertation is titled “Towards a theory of legacy: The proposal, development, and validation of a family legacy orientation scale.” About the award-winning research, he wrote, “The dissertation follows extant scale development practices to propose, develop and validate a measurement instrument for the family legacy orientation construct. Family legacy orientation (FLO) is understood to be the shared intentions and preferences a family has regarding the biological, social and material components of the family legacy. The dissertation builds and extends our understanding of family legacy within the field of family business research.”

Emily Keeton (’14), who is an adjunct instructor at the UT Martin Parsons Center and 8th grade English and language arts teacher at Decatur County Middle School, competed on “Wheel of Fortune” as part of the gameshow’s Teacher Week, Sept. 16. Keeton received her Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education degree in 2014 from UT Martin and earned her Master of Science in Agricultural and Extension Education from Mississippi State University in 2017. Although Keeton didn’t win the game, she walked away with a trip to Barbados.

Chloe Anderson (’20) was announced as the 50,000th UT Martin graduate.

Dr. Ronald Kirkland, (’70) was formally installed May 22, 2021, as the 167th president of the Tennessee Medical Association. The TMA is the statewide professional association for more than 9,500 member physicians and their patients. The longtime physician will serve as president until May 2022. Kirkland has been board chair for many community organizations across West Tennessee, including Aspell Recovery Center in Jackson. He has served as president of the Jackson Rotary Club, as commander of the Milton Talley American Legion Post 20 in Union City, and as chairman of deacons at First Baptist Church of Jackson. He served in the Vietnam War as a U.S. Army counterintelligence agent in 1970-1971. He resides in Jackson with his wife, Carol, of more than 50 years. Together, they have four children and eight grandchildren. (Courtesy of the TMA)

Jamie Evans (’81) has served as assistant manager of the Ames Plantation in Grand Junction since 1981. He also serves as the manager of the Ames Plantation’s Cultural Resource Program. Evans, who earned an agriculture degree, described the historic site that has been the focus of his career in the Tennessee Encyclopedia: “The 18,576-acre Ames Plantation, owned and operated by trustees of the Hobart Ames Foundation under provisions of the will of Julia C. Ames, is located in Fayette and Hardeman counties. Serving as an agricultural experiment station within the University of Tennessee System, the Ames Plantation is the location of intensive research efforts focusing on agriculture and natural resources management.”

The inaugural 10-member class of the Weakley County Sports Hall of Fame was announced in July 2021. Those with UT Martin ties who were selected for the class were: Lin Dunn (’69), college and professional women’s basketball coach; Bettye Giles, UTM women’s athletic director, coach and faculty member; Dr. Mark Hardy (’93), UTM men’s basketball; Tara Tansil-Gentry (’95), UTM women’s basketball player and coach; and Paul Tinkle (’76), broadcaster.
in memory

Names, graduation years, hometowns and dates of death are noted. Other names listed are UT Martin faculty, staff and university supporters. Names were submitted or identified by the Office of Alumni Relations or the Office of University Relations. Graduation dates are noted in parentheses for UT Martin graduates.

- Archie Ross Austin ('91), of Shepherd, Michigan, passed away April 2, 2020.
- Kelli Barnes, of Martin, passed away Sept. 23, 2021 (current UT Martin staff member).
- Sharon Barnes ('73, '90), of Union City, passed away July 12, 2021.
- Dr. Stacey Bruff ('86), of Union City, passed away Sept. 23, 2020.
- Barbara Castleman ('71), of Martin, passed away Nov. 7, 2021 (former UT Board of Trustees member).
- Marie Chester, of Martin, passed away July 13, 2021 (retired UT Martin staff member).
- Allan Francis Cox ('69, '72), of Milan, passed away Aug. 7, 2021.
- Destin McKeel, of Martin, passed away July 22, 2021 (current UT Martin student).
- Ben O’Guinn, of Martin, passed away Aug. 8, 2021 (current UT Martin student).
- Nancy Overton ('71), of Martin, passed away June 1, 2021 (former UT Board of Trustees member).
- Mike Rudolphi ('70 UTM, '71 B.S. UTK, '75 M.S. UTK), of Huntsville, Alabama, passed away May 24, 2021.
- Dennis M. Richardson ('75), of Camden, passed away July 26, 2021.
- Richard Shadden ('66 B.S. UTK, '69 M.S. UTK), of Martin, passed away July 6, 2021 (retired UT Martin faculty member).
- Joe Taffoni ('72), of Chapin, South Carolina, passed away July 26, 2021.
- Betty Unger, of Martin, passed away June 15, 2021 (retired staff member).
- Charles “Chuck” Vernon West ('82), of Dresden, passed away Nov. 9, 2021.
- Gary Wilson ('75, '85), of Martin, passed away (retired UT Martin faculty member).

Correction – The memorial listing for Mr. Charles Callis in the Spring 2021 edition of Campus Scene was incomplete. We are pleased to provide additional information for Mr. Callis and apologize for the omissions.

- Charles Callis ('58 Certificate UTM, '60 B.S. UTK, '62 M.S. UTK), of Union City, passed away Nov. 29, 2020 (retired UT Martin faculty member).

class notes

1974

Jana Fuqua ('74) received an Honorary Letterman Award from the University of Tennessee during the UT and Ole Miss football game on Oct. 16. She was one of three former UT athletes to be honored for their dedication and service to the university.

1975

Jerry Harwood ('75) was presented with the Federal Aviation Administration’s “Master Pilot Award” during a ceremony in Orlando, Florida. He has accumulated over 22,000 hours of flight time throughout his career.

1978

Myra Gideon ('78) began working as a clinical therapist at Professional Care Services in Dyersburg.

Thomas Rothschild ('78) designed a hydroponic plant feeding apparatus that will help prevent mold and rot associated with pond water. This product is available for purchase on Etsy.

1979

Donna Berg ('79) recently retired after 40 years of teaching special education in Murfreesboro.

1988

Dr. Brian Clardy ('88) was elected vice chair to the Kentucky Humanities Council Board of Directors. He was previously selected by Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear to serve on the council in 2020.

1993

Brent Bradberry ('93, '07) was appointed by Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee to fill the vacant judge’s seat for the 24th Judicial District Circuit Court. He previously served as assistant district public defender for the 27th Judicial District. Bradberry earned his law degree at the Nashville School of Law and is filling the Honorable C. Creed McGinley’s vacancy.
2002

Erik Fuqua ('02) was promoted to major in the United States Air Force after completing his master of law degree from George Washington University Law School. He currently serves as an acquisitions attorney at Robins Air Force Base in Georgia.

Tyler Menne ('02) has more than 20 years of experience in the landscaping design business for residential and commercial customers in Chattanooga and the surrounding area as owner of Appalachian Land Design. His work with the Volkswagen Chattanooga solar power plant and Silicon Ranch to sustain the 79 acres housing the solar plant is featured in an online article at www.regenerativenergy.org titled Regenerative Energy®: Making Solar Do More in Chattanooga and Beyond. Find the feature under the “Stories” menu.

2003

Crosby Childress ('03') was promoted to director of engineering at Forcum Lannom Contractors. He has progressed his professional career from intern, designer, design manager, senior design manager and now director of engineering.

2004

Nicole Young (Iddings) ('04) was announced in August as the news director for The Leaf-Chronicle in Clarksville. The Mobile, Alabama, native graduated from Dickson County High School and earned her communications degree at UT Martin. (Courtesy of The Leaf-Chronicle)

2005

Joel Howard ('05), who served more than six years as area director for the Union City office of USDA Rural Development, became the new business programs director for the agency Aug. 1. He will be stationed in Jackson and also working remotely in the new position. Howard is a 2016 graduate of the UT Martin WestStar Leadership Program.

2007

Dr. Soner Altas ('07) has served as senior inspector (auditor) since 2011 for the Ministry of Industry and Technology in Ankara, Turkey. While attending UT Martin, he was nominated for the Faculty Scholarship and selected as a member of the Beta Gamma Sigma International Business Honor Society in 2007. He has written numerous books and has had many articles and columns on company law published by peer-refereed journals and economy newspapers. He is married and has two children.

2008

Andrew Rhodes ('07) accepted a job promotion as a special investigator assigned to the State of Tennessee Internal Affairs Division. He and his wife, along with their two children, recently moved to Jackson.

2011

Laura Butkovic ('11) is continuing her education with seminary and started a new appointment at Henderson United Methodist Church in July 2021. She has served in ministry for four years.

2014

Keonna Baker ('14) moved to Texas after graduation to pursue a career in HR management. She was recently married in Anna Maria, Florida, and the newlyweds now live in Waco, Texas.

2015

Dr. Mikaela Holland ('15) earned a Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Medicine and is currently a resident at John Hopkins All Children’s Hospital in St. Petersburg, Florida.

2016

Clare Saum (McConnell) ('16) has joined the Discovery Park of America’s leadership team as director of marketing. In her position, she manages marketing, public relations and promotions for the museum and heritage park located in Union City. She worked as a marketing intern at Discovery Park while attending UT Martin and later worked in media advertising at WZDX in Huntsville, Alabama, and WPSD in Paducah, Kentucky. (Courtesy the Discovery Park of America)

2018

Elysia Duke ('18) received a Master of Public Administration degree from Murray State University in May 2021.

2020

Jessica Davis ('20) accepted a position as communications and meeting specialist with the Tennessee Business Roundtable.

class notes

Lizzie Emmons ('14, '17) joined the Jackson (Tenn.) Arts Council on Aug. 2, 2021, as the council’s new executive director. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music and a Master of Science in Education. Emmons is from Dyersburg, and her husband, Jerry Emmons ('17), is also a musician and a percussion instructor for Union City High School and UT Martin. (Courtesy the Jackson Chamber)

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On Thanksgivings past, Sidney Church, a senior political science major from Santa Fe, was awoken by her mother early in the morning to serve at Feed My Sheep, one of her hometown’s local ministries. While there, they would package dinner after dinner so less-fortunate members of the Maury County community could enjoy a hot Thanksgiving meal with their families.

It was through reflecting on these childhood memories that Church felt the urge to begin a similar project here in Martin.

“I’d be in class, and I’d think about packing these plates to be sent. I would wake up, it was the first thing I thought about, so it was heavy on my heart and on my brain, most definitely, to do something,” Church said.

The project began with a Facebook post a week before Thanksgiving, asking for donations from those around her. Throughout the week, she would receive support from her fellow Panhellenic and Rotaract members, who contributed according to their skill set.

“We had one person on our team who was an artist, and so she made our donation boxes. She got paper and decorated the box to make it look nice, so they weren’t just a plain brown box,” Church said. “So many other people who helped me, who contributed in their own skill sets, whether that be mobilizing, packing the boxes, delivering them, because I had no idea this was going to blow up.”

By the time that the dinners were ready to distribute, Church had accumulated enough food through donations and her own personal contributions to provide 38 Thanksgiving dinners to local families, as well as a homeless shelter and a women’s shelter. The dinners each consisted of a turkey, an array of sides, desserts, drinks, cooking utensils, and a $15 gift card to E.W. James, a Martin grocery store, for the recipients to use later.

Church’s main goal is to continue or even improve upon the momentum she started in 2020.

“As long as the event is as successful as last year, I will be content. I obviously want it to be more successful, but I want to feed as many families as I can,” Church said.

Through hard work and the support of her colleagues, Sidney Church found a way to give back to a community that has given so much to her – one Thanksgiving meal at a time.
COMING THIS SPRING

CAPTAIN’S CHALLENGE

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