Local students receive CFMT scholarships

Oct 3, 2020

The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, a charitable organization working to improve the quality of life in 40 Middle Tennessee and three Kentucky counties, announces it is awarding scholarships to 328 individual students pursuing secondary education at accredited schools throughout the United States.

A total of $742,000 is being awarded to students from 101 different scholarship funds within The Community Foundation.

The students are attending 147 unique colleges and universities from 29 states, with eight international students from Canada.

"The Community Foundation has helped thousands access educational opportunities they might otherwise have been unable to afford by connecting them with the generosity of others," said Ellen Lehman, president of The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee. "This year we are honored to help hundreds more improve their futures, and the futures of their families, through the transformation offered by an education."

The recipients from Wilson County are:

- Macy V. Lee of Lebanon, from Lebanon High School, received the Lebanon High School Alumni Scholarship Endowment to attend Tennessee Technological University.

- Carson E. Shipley of Mt. Juliet, from Mt. Juliet High School, received the Cynthia and Alan Baran Fine Arts and Music Scholarship to attend the University of Tennessee at Martin.

- Hunter T. Sawyer of Lebanon, from Wilson Central High School, received the Genesco Scholarship and John and Belinda Havron Scholarship to attend Tennessee Technological University.

- Ira M. Ballard of Lebanon, from Lebanon High School, received the Lebanon High School Alumni Scholarship Endowment to attend the University of Tennessee.

- John W. Poston of Watertown, from Watertown High School, received the Watertown High School Scholarship to attend the University of Tennessee.
Madison Co. Commission special election features college professor against insurance broker

Adam Friedman
Jackson Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK — TENNESSEE

The special election to fill the seat of former county commissioner Billy Spain will pit a Jackson insurance broker against a local activist and professor.

Trey Cleek, 38, is the Republican Party's nominee for the 4th district seat, and Cindy Boyles, 61, the Democratic Party's.

Boyles is a retired corrections department counselor who now works as an associate criminal justice professor at the University of Tennessee at Martin. She's known as a local activist, most notably organizing the community behind a lynching memorial marking.

Cleek is an insurance broker who's lived in Jackson for most of his life. He graduated from South Side High School and attended college at Jackson State Community College and the University of Tennessee at Martin before receiving a degree from Trevecca Nazarene University.

When asked about experience, Boyles said her passion for poverty relief and criminal justice reform would be valuable to the county commission, which has dealt with numerous problems over its jailing and policing practices over the years.

Cleek said his experience and deep roots in the community provide a good foundation for a county commissioner. One of his top priorities is the county's financial health, and he said he would focus on a budget that prioritizes the community's needs while keeping taxes low.

The Jackson Sun both spoke to both candidates and asked them a range of questions, including motivations for running and pertinent issues either candidate may have to deal with as a commissioner.

**Question:** What motivated you to run for county commissioner?

**Cleek:** "My primary concern is the financial health of our county. I have been in business my entire adult life, and one of the challenges I see in our community is maintaining a healthy budget. I think going straight into the guts of [the budget] is where my strengths lie. I want to keep our taxes low. Low taxes help generate business opportunities, and businesses look at tax rates when they decide where to settle."

**Boyles:** "I really want to serve Madison County. I love living here and enjoyed going to the county commission when I was trying to get the historical marker approved. I think I have leadership skills from past experiences. I have experience in criminal justice and also experience in education, which are some of the issues facing us now."

**Q:** The commission has 37 different committees. Which ones would you like to serve?

**Cleek:** "I don't have any committees I'm eyeing. I feel confident I could serve on any committee and understand what they are doing. With my background, obviously, I would be good on any committee dealing with insurance. I worked in retail banking, so any committee that is talking about financing, I can definitely bring my insight to that. But I also grew up here and lived here almost all my life. I know this county so I could be on almost any committee dealing with local issues."

**Boyles:** "I would like to be involved with committees that have to do with quality of life issues like public arts, parks, and multicultural events. I would also like to be involved with nonprofit agencies, education committees, or anything that has to do with criminal justice. A training center oversight committee would be a good fit because of my background."
Q: Do you think the commission should create an oversight committee for the West Tennessee Training Center, which was a significant issue over the last year?

Cleek: "I think the idea of an oversight committee makes perfect sense. It’s a county-owned facility, and the county needs to have oversight over it because we need to know what is happening in our facilities. It’s part of managing the county affairs."

Boyles: "It looks like the sheriff made some promise that it would turn a profit, and it hasn’t done that. I understand what the sheriff is saying by ‘saving the county money’ because he brings in nationally recognized experts into the training center, and then the department gets so many free seats. That’s the model I used when I was in charge of a Florida training facility, so I understand that model. But, we need to find a compromise on oversight and what county wants out of the facility."

Q: What is your view of the current lawsuit between the Madison County Sheriff’s office and the county commission?

Cleek: "I don’t really know the specifics of the sheriff budgetary requests, but I would say this: I’m not for defunding law enforcement. I am 100% for law enforcement. I think it would be a mistake for anyone to comment on the record about the lawsuit because I don’t want to limit anything the commission might do because I got out in front of something that I didn’t fully understand. Don’t get me wrong, I’m interested, but I have not been behind closed doors with the lawyers to know what is going on."

Boyles: "The feuding is kind of an embarrassment for the county. I think when [Madison County Sheriff John] Mehr came in, he needed to upgrade their equipment and do a lot of things that he did, but I think it maybe got a little out of control. Now the county commissioners are in position where they don’t want to keep giving the sheriff’s department more and more money. There has to be some agreement on that."

Q: In what ways do you want to see the city and county work together?

Cleek: "The big divide came over the sales tax issue, and there are a lot of people with hard feelings. The way it was done definitely put the county in a hard spot with the timing of it. I harbor no old grudges. In fact, I count [Jackson Mayor Scott] Conger as a friend. I’m going to look at every issue from the same lens and my responsibility to the taxpayers. I will also look at every issue from a morally upright standpoint."

Boyles: "We should be working hand-in-glove with the city. For example, the city had a report from its anti-poverty task force, and it just focused on the city of Jackson, but obviously, poverty is not limited to the city limits. Those are things we should look at and see how we can work together. Many of the things that can be done in the city can be done in the county, and that would improve quality of life for everybody. We should work very closely, and there shouldn’t be any animosity because we are too closely linked to let something like that stand in the way."

Early voting start Oct. 14, election day is Nov. 3

The special election is the only commission race during the Nov. 3 election. The winner will have to run again in 2022 when every commission seat is up for election.

District 4 covers a centerpiece of Madison County, lying entirely within Jackson city limits. The southern part of the district starts on North Parkway and runs just north of Volunteer Boulevard. The district is bound by Highland Avenue, Russell Road and Pleasant Plains Extension.

Early voting for the Nov. 3 election starts on Oct. 14 and will run through Oct. 29 at the Madison County Election Commission office at 311 North Parkway.

Early voting hours from Oct. 14 to 27 will take place from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to noon Saturdays. Hours will be extended Oct. 28 and 29, taking place from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Voters can also request absentee ballots, check registration and view polling locations by visiting the Madison County Election Commission website or the Tennessee Secretary of State website.
Students at the University of Tennessee at Martin are holding a Zoom forum today on the need for a required class in African American History and Culture.

The forum explores questioning whether or not it is "possible to be a 'responsible citizen' without an education in African American History and Culture."

The forum at 6 p.m. is hosted by the university's Black Student Association, the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, and the Black History Matters Coalition. According to a press release, UTM students and alumni have been campaigning for the past four months for the general education requirement.

The University's Faculty Senate Executive Committee will vote tomorrow on a resolution that UTM include a study of the African American Experience within its General Education curriculum.

People can register to attend the virtual forum here (https://www.eventbrite.com/e/black-history-matters-tickets-123963834165?utm-medium=discovery&utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&aff=escb&utm-source=cp&utm-term=listings&fbclid=IwAR1vUn4lt1w2k4ZbpO-SB2HRyc-bQC3m0CZiT4v_1lC75FzdJ7ikDTo).

MARTIN, Tenn. — University of Tennessee at Martin students and alumni are campaigning for a university class requirement in African American history and culture.

The UTM Black Student Association, Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and the Black History Matters coalition all sponsored a forum Monday evening on the necessity of the class.

Those who joined the forum on Zoom discussed why they believe it's not a wanted course, but a needed one.

They expressed education as the first step in giving society an understanding of black history and culture.

"When you allow people to be ignorant their whole lives you just create more problems in the world and you can easily solve these problems by educating people about our race issues especially in college because you're signing up for an education," said Devin Majors, a panelist.

"I feel like this education makes an impact. There's classes I took in all kinds of different stuff that I didn't know about and once I knew about it, I became passionate about it," said Hailey Williford, another panelist. "I think once they were educated, a lot of racist people wouldn't be racist anymore."

The university's Faculty Senate Executive committee votes Tuesday on a resolution.
The University of Tennessee at Martin reports 7,119 students enrolled for the 2020 fall semester, including both undergraduate and graduate students. This represents a 2.4 percent decrease over the fall 2019 enrollment of 7,296 students and ends three consecutive years of enrollment growth. Despite the decline in total student numbers, several positives are found in the final fall enrollment report prepared by the university's Office of Institutional Research.

First-time freshmen were down 43 students compared to fall 2019; returning students increased by 34; and graduate students increased 205 or almost 40 percent.

The university's dual-enrollment program declined by 252 students compared to last fall, a likely reflection of the uncertainties faced by K-12 schools during the pandemic. Dual-enrollment courses offer college credit to high school students in West Tennessee and other parts of Tennessee.

"The pandemic is affecting higher education on several fronts and, given the health concerns and financial challenges facing our students and their families, this is really an amazing outcome," UT Martin chancellor Dr. Keith Carver said.

"Everyone is trying to adjust to these new circumstances, and I applaud our students, their families and our outstanding faculty and staff for adjusting to the realities that we currently face. You always hope for better, but I'm extremely pleased with where the university is positioned moving forward."

Also encouraging to Carver and university officials are the full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers that provide the basis for public university funding in Tennessee. Undergraduate FTE declined by 160 or 3 percent this fall compared to 2019, but graduate FTE rose by 123 or 42.5 percent. Overall FTE declined by 38 or .7 percent. FTE is determined by dividing undergraduate student credit hours by 15 and graduate hours by 12.

"We're grateful to the state for its financial support of higher education during these uncertain economic times," Carver said. "Our own UT System leadership and the UT Board of Trustees also continue to support the positive direction that we're heading with our new Strategic Enrollment Plan. UT Martin is in good financial shape, which allows us to pursue our educational mission at a high level."

UT Martin continues to earn solid regional and national rankings both for the university and individual academic programs. The four-year graduation rate has increased 14.4 percent since the start of the Soar in Four tuition program that was approved in 2016 by the UT Board of Trustees.

Soar in Four encourages students to take at least 15 hours per semester in order to graduate in four years. Among other academic success stories are Skyhawk athletes who earned the highest combined grade point average in UT Martin history in spring 2020 with a 3.26 GPA.

UT Martin joined other University of Tennessee campuses by opening fall semester for in-person classes. About half of UT Martin's classes offered an in-person component, and all faculty members prepared to offer classes both face to face and online to allow for possibly changing conditions.

The fall semester is also accelerated with the cancellation of fall break and classes ending by Thanksgiving. Final exams will then be offered online so that students do not return to the main campus or the five centers in Jackson, Parsons, Ripley, Selmer and Somerville for fall semester.

Plans for spring semester are still being determined.
Music programs slated

The department of music at the University of Tennessee at Martin has announced the following musical programs:
- UTM Aviators Marching Band will have a live performance at 4:30 p.m. today in the Library/University Center Courtyard.
- Live from the Tent: Wind Ensemble and New Pacer Singers will be held Thursday at 6 p.m. It is available as a free drive-in performance, will be live-streamed on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages or may be listened to live on WUTM 90.3.
- Dr. Roberto Mancusi and Dr. Elaine Harriss will have a faculty recital, The Darkness and the Light, today at 8 p.m. It will be available on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages.
- Dr. Steve Darling and Dr. Chan Mi Jean will have a faculty recital Thursday at 8 p.m. It will be available on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages.

To learn more about upcoming events, visit utm.edu/music/events.

UT Martin names local students to summer Chancellor’s Honor Rolls

The outstanding academic achievements of undergraduate students at the University of Tennessee at Martin have been honored with publication of the summer 2020 Chancellor’s Honor Rolls for the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences, College of Business and Global Affairs, College of Education, Health, and Behavioral Sciences, College of Engineering and Natural Sciences and the College of Humanities and Fine Arts.

To be eligible for the Chancellor’s Honor Roll recognition at UT Martin, a student must take at least 12 hours of credit (pass-fail courses are not included) and achieve a 3.2 (B) grade point average based on a 4.0 scale. Students can make the Chancellor’s Honor Roll with honors (3.2 through 3.49), high honors (3.5 through 3.79) or highest honors (3.8 through 4.0).

Gibson County students receiving recognition are:
Bradford – Katrina M. Tyler, High Honors;
Dyer – Brandt G. Wright, Highest Honors;
Humboldt – Colton M. Beasley, High Honors; and
Olivia P. Lovell, Honors;
Medina – Jason L. Mollitt, Highest Honors;
Milan – Jason M. Carter, Highest Honors; Shellie R. Kosark, Highest Honors; and Elizabeth A. Wilson, Highest Honors;
Rutherford – Cassey D. Faulkner, High Honors;
Trenton – Morgan G. Campbell, High Honors; and Deeana R. Denton, High Honors.

UT Martin is a comprehensive regional institution in the University of Tennessee System offering 18 bachelor’s degree programs and five master’s degree programs. The main campus in northwest Tennessee is one of four primary UT campuses. For more information, visit utm.edu.
University of Tennessee at Martin students and alumni in a virtual forum Monday are taking a stand against racial injustice and calling on the university to require students to take an African American History and Culture class.

The UT Martin Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and the Black History Matters Coalition (https://www.instagram.com/utm_bhm/) sponsored the forum for students and the public to express their need and want for a general education requirement in for the class.

Students in the forum believe an African American History course would highlight the importance and achievements of individuals who have been oppressed in the United States for more than four centuries. Devin Majors, an alumnus and former UTM Student Government Association President, said he has always felt disconnected from the campus.

"As a black male on campus, when I first arrived on campus I did feel disconnected from the campus. There were not many black males who were there. In the classroom, I never had a black male professor while at Martin," Majors said.

Alexis Millsaps, the Black Student Association Civil Rights Chair and Black History Matters Coalition leader, isn't satisfied with the feedback they have received from the faculty on campus.
"I love this campus so much that I’m willing to call it out on what we need to improve on. We need this to be on our campus. Where’s the urgency? I keep asking people to prioritize this and I keep hearing that it’s a big concept," Millsaps said. "So what I’m hearing is that my life as a black person just isn’t important enough for it to be on the top of the list."

Major said he’s also experienced pushback from faculty at UTM who are alumni.

"You have a cycle of people who went to Martin and they never had a African American history class and they never really learned about diversity, so they end up working at the university," said Major. "They get in these leadership spots as chairs of the committees, and all of these roles that are crucial to implementing a class like this, they have no idea what you’re talking about when you say you want a mandatory African American history class. So when you bring the idea to them, it sounds like you’re speaking a different language."

In February, the UTM Black Student Association hosted a forum with a panel of students to discuss the threats of white supremacist violence (https://www.wbbjtv.com/2020/02/11/utm-black-student-association-to-host-forum-on-threats-of-white-supremacist-violence/) after racist flyers were found on vehicles on campus. Then in June, a video came to light of UTM students making racist statements towards the Black community. (https://www.utm.edu/news/2020/06/30/statement/)

Kayla Gooden, alumnus and panelist, said she isn’t comfortable UTM hasn’t put forth an action plan after these disturbing events took place.

"If we keep pushing off this course, then people are going to start getting comfortable with acting out with racism, and I do not appreciate that at all. If I can respect you and your beliefs, then you should be able to respect me," said Gooden. "I should not hear someone on a video being ok with saying the “n” word. I should not hear that and then nothing really happening about it."

The UTM Black History Coalition is hoping the university Faculty Senate Executive Committee will present their resolution at the next meeting on Nov. 10.
MARTIN (September 24) — Dr. Harriette Spiegel, lecturer of educational technology at the University of Tennessee at Martin, has earned the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program award to conduct research and lecture at St. Mary’s University in Nova Scotia, Canada.

Spiegel will continue her project “Disseminating Digital Accessibility: Exploring Pathways to Reaching Full Awareness” at St. Mary’s University beginning in January.

Her research will explore questions about digital accessibility, and she will deliver training on creating accessible digital materials.

“I am honored to have been awarded this wonderful opportunity to serve as a Fulbright Research Chair at St. Mary’s University and to be able to explore several aspects of digital accessibility,” said Spiegel.

“I will be researching how best to spread the word on the importance of producing accessible digital output. I also look forward to the possibilities of scholarly exchange with my host community and will deliver some training in how to follow guidelines for digital accessibility.”

Fulbright award recipients are chosen based on academic and professional achievement, service and leadership.

Spiegel is one of more than 800 Fulbright U.S. Scholar recipients who will teach and conduct research abroad for the 2020-21 academic year.

The Fulbright Program was established in 1946 by U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright to build lasting international connections through education.

For more information, contact Spiegel at hspiegel@utm.edu.
UT MARTIN CHANCELLOR CARVER SIGNS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH PROCLAMATION — University of Tennessee at Martin Chancellor Keith Carver signed a proclamation, which went into effect October 1 that recognizes this month as Domestic Violence Awareness Month at the university. The proclamation was created in order to bring awareness to the ever-growing domestic violence rates in Tennessee and to encourage safe, stable and nurturing relationships. Tennessee has remained in the top 10 states for domestic homicide in the U.S. since 2001, with more than 70,000 incidents reported in 2019 alone. Through a partnership with the Wo/men Resource and Rape Assistance Program (WRAP), the university offers supportive measures for victims of domestic violence. UT Martin will host events during October in recognition of victims of domestic violence to bring light to the destructive nature of abusive relationships. To read the proclamation, visit www.utm.edu/dvaproclamation.
Two student organizations at the University of Tennessee at Martin (UTM) hosted a virtual forum on Oct. 5 in support of an African American History and Culture course requirement for all programs. The students expected the UTM Faculty Executive Committee would vote on the measure during the Oct. 6 meeting, but later learned the resolution had been removed from the agenda.

Dr. Sean Walker, Faculty Senate President, said he believes there was a miscommunication between his office and the advocating groups. A representative with the Black History Matters Coalition (BHMC) said she believes it's indicative of the university's unwillingness to prioritize Black history in education.

BHMC representatives had a meeting two weeks ago with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC) during which FSEC reportedly advised the BHCM to shorten their proposed resolution before the Oct. 6 meeting. Hailey Willford, a member of the BHMC Steering Committee, said the resolution they created was too important to alter, so the group decided not to make recommended changes.

"We felt like it would take away from the resolution to delete anything, and we felt like everything on the resolution was important," she said.

Willford said a representative of the BHMC emailed Walker on Oct. 4 to verify the measure was scheduled for a vote during the upcoming meeting. She said Walker replied saying that because a new draft had not been submitted, the measure had been removed from the agenda. She told WKMS they weren't aware they needed to resubmit the original draft again in order for consideration.
"We were not notified that it would be taken off. We were not followed up with in any way until we emailed him," Willford said.

She said now the BHMC is waiting for UTM faculty and administration to make the next move.

"We're not UTM faculty and administration. So we feel like if this is something that the administration and faculty are passionate about and that they believe that 'Black history matters,' and that this is important to the university, then they're gonna do the work to get this done," Willford said.

"A lot of the Faculty Senate have said, 'This is a really big idea,' and we've said, 'This is big, but racism is bigger,'" she added.

During an interview with WKMS, Walker verified the resolution was removed from the Oct. 6 agenda ahead of the meeting.

"I was asked by one of the faculty members with the Black History Matters Coalition, asked me to please pull it from that agenda with the request that it would be put on at a later date," Walker said.

Walker said he is also required to follow procedures in order for a vote to take place.

"If there's going to be a vote, I have to submit those one week before any meeting. So we got to that time and I hadn't heard anything from them," he explained. "Now I will admit, I did not directly reach out to them. That was not a reflection on this coalition or the subject matter of it. I just don't reach out to folks. I figure if they want it in there, they'll contact me and so forth. I will admit in hindsight, I should have reached out just to clarify what was going on. I will admit there was that issue there."

Walker believes there was miscommunication between the BHMC and the FSEC,

"That's what it was, it wasn't anything malicious or intentional, it was simply a miscommunication on what was going on. If you say you're gonna revise something, I can't put the default on there."

Walker said he reached out to a faculty member who is affiliated with Black History Matters Coalition to present the resolution during the Nov. meeting, but is concerned about presenting the resolution since President Trump expanded the ban on racial sensitivity training to federal contractors.

(https://www.npr.org/2020/09/22/915843471/trump-expands-ban-on-racial-sensitivity-training-to-federal-contractors) He said he plans to speak with a legal representative about the new executive order before proceeding with the Black History Matters resolution.
UTM To Offer BSME Degree

The University of Tennessee at Martin Department of Engineering has established a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering (BSME) degree that began accepting students in the fall 2020 semester. Previously, the department only had a Bachelor of Science in Engineering (BSE) degree with a concentration in mechanical engineering.

Dr. Shadow JQ Robinson, dean of the College of Engineering and Natural Sciences, says the new degree program was a result of the mechanical engineering industry-required qualifications students need to find careers in the field after graduating from UT Martin. While the new BSME degree consists of the same classes as the BSE with a concentration in mechanical engineering, the formal designation of a degree is more widely recognized by employers.

“For many large employers and for many prospective students, they want to see the bachelor of science in mechanical engineering,” said Robinson. “The curriculum we had in the concentration was every bit of the curriculum we would have for the full degree. Once the change was approved by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, we shaped it into a full Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering.

“By getting that degree title changed, it now broadcasts to everyone that this is the full curriculum that you would get at any other four-year university offering the Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering, and you can get it here,” Robinson continued.

Sarah Craigie, a senior engineering major with a concentration in mechanical engineering, said she is excited about the new degree and how it can help her future career. While she will graduate just as qualified in the mechanical engineering concentration as the degree, she knows employers are looking for, as she explained, a master of the trade.

“When you tell an employer that you have a BSME degree, you are saying that you have a base covering of each engineering field. This basically means you know a bit about civil, mechanical and electrical engineering instead of just focusing on a single field. The saying, ‘a jack of all trades is a master of none’ is a very true statement, and employers will keep this in mind when sizing your skills up against other applicants,” Craigie said. “Employers obviously want the best fit for a job so (they) will choose ‘masters’ over ‘jacks.’ ... I personally want to embark in the very competitive field of aerodynamics once I graduate, so every edge I can get above my fellow job seekers (such as graduating with a BSME) is very welcome.”

The Department of Engineering already requires students pursuing a BSE with a concentration in mechanical engineering to pass the FE Mechanical Engineering licensing exam before graduating in order to ensure the students are capable of succeeding in the field. Now with the BSME, the faculty are sure the students are fully equipped with the knowledge to be mechanical engineers.

“What that does for our students is makes them more marketable, more recognizable,” said Dr. Tim Nipp, chair of the engineering department. “What we’re excited about is what it offers the students. It gives them more options, and that is what it’s all about; it’s about the students.”

The BSE degree also features concentrations in civil, electrical, computer, manufacturing and mechatronics engineering. The Department of Engineering plans to expand more concentrations in the future to serve more students and industry.

Although the UT Martin Department of Engineering is accredited through the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, ABET, the new degree program will not be accredited until the first students enrolled in the program graduate, which is expected to happen in spring 2021. ABET will review the program’s accreditation in fall 2022 during the department’s next accreditation cycle, and if successful, the accreditation will be backdated to 2020 when the program began so graduates will earn their degrees from an accredited program.

ABET is the global accreditor of college and university programs in applied and natural science, computing, engineering and engineering technology. For more information about ABET accreditation, visit abet.org.

For more information about the Department of Engineering, contact Nipp at tnipp@utm.edu.
Music programs slated

The department of music at the University of Tennessee at Martin has announced the following musical programs:

- Live from the Tent: Wind Ensemble and New Pacer Singers will be held today at 6 p.m. and UTM Big Band and Small Jazz Group will be held Oct. 15 at 8 p.m. They are available as a free drive-in performances, will be live-streamed on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages or may be listened to live on WUTM 90.3.
- Dr. Steve Darling and Dr. Chan Mi Jean will have a faculty recital today at 8 p.m. It will be available on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages.
- Douglas Owens will have a faculty saxophone recital Tuesday at 8 p.m. It will be available on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages.

RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIPS — Carson Hutchison (left) and Mikayla Shupp (right), both of Troy, received the Annette Sublett Ferguson Graduate Scholarship, created in memory of the longtime Obion County educator. They were congratulated by Donna Neblett, director of the UT Martin Educator Preparation Program. Both are senior early childhood education majors studying to teach K-5 following graduation. Mrs. Ferguson taught for 11 years in the Obion County School System before she passed away Sept. 18, 2016, after a battle with breast cancer. Her husband, Scott Ferguson, established the scholarship endowment in 2017 in honor of his wife with the hope future Obion County educators would benefit from her legacy. Mrs. Ferguson was a UT Martin alumna, earning her bachelor’s degree in 1982 and her master’s degree in 2005. The scholarship is open to junior- and senior-level students from Obion County schools upon entry into the educator preparation program.
UTM engineering department introduces mechanical degree

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- Douglas Owens will have a faculty saxophone recital today at 8 p.m. It will be available on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages.
- Live from the Tent: UTM Big Band and Small Jazz Group will be held Thursday at 8 p.m. It is available as a free drive-in performance, will be live-streamed on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages or may be listened to live on WUTM 90.3.
- UTM Choirs and Big Band Throwback will be the focus of UTM Music From the Vault Thursday at 8 p.m. It will be available on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages.

To learn more about upcoming events, visit utm.edu/music/updates.
Board discusses athletics, enrollment and diversity

The University of Tennessee at Martin Advisory Board met recently to discuss the Skyhawk athletics program and the university's diversity and inclusion plan, as well as enrollment. The annual fall advisory board meeting served as the first meeting for two new advisory board members: Dr. Philip Smart, professor of natural resources management; and Emma Hilliard, a junior health and human performance major from Bells.

UT Martin chancellor Dr. Keith Carver acknowledged that while the world is in the midst of unrest, and the university is learning how to educate its students from afar, he remains excited and hopeful for the future. Across the nation, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected enrollment, but Carver announced the university's full-time equivalency rate was only down by 38 since last fall.

"I am real encouraged by what we're trying to do with the university," Carver said.

Kurt McGuffin, UT Martin intercollegiate athletics director, gave an overview of intercollegiate athletics concerning the university's response to COVID-19 and what programs have been implemented to help student-athletes succeed academically. All fall sports were postponed due to COVID-19 because of safety concerns for athletes and staff, but fall sports will be allowed to compete in the spring.

Academically, the athletics department boasted 285 student-athletes on the Ohio Valley Conference Athletic Director's Honor Roll, which McGuffin said was achieved in part by the newly-renovated study spaces created through a NCAA grant the university received last year.

Dr. Mark McCloud, interim chief diversity and inclusion officer, discussed the 90-day diversity campus plan, which included the drafting and signing of the "Skyhawk Creed," as well as the "Beyond Colorblind Tour" and the campus diversity plan. The 90-day plan was created to establish a guideline of goals for the university in order to ensure campus is welcoming and open to all students, faculty, staff and visitors.

"Never before in recent history have we dealt with a global pandemic and a national racial epidemic at the same time, and we had the opportunity for over 100 students, faculty and staff to have a conversation around race to talk about the things we need to do to move forward as well," McCloud said.
Dr. Spiegel named Fulbright Scholar

Dr. Harriette Spiegel, lecturer of educational technology at the University of Tennessee at Martin, has earned the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program award to conduct research and lecture at St. Mary's University in Nova Scotia, Canada.

Spiegel will continue her project "Disseminating Digital Accessibility: Exploring Pathways to Reaching Full Awareness" at St. Mary's University beginning in January. Her research will explore questions about digital accessibility, and she will deliver training on creating accessible digital materials.

"I am honored to have been awarded this wonderful opportunity to serve as a Fulbright Research Chair at St. Mary's University and to be able to explore several aspects of digital accessibility," said Spiegel. "I will be researching how best to spread the word on the importance of producing accessible digital output. I also look forward to the possibilities of scholarly exchange with my host community and will deliver some training in how to follow guidelines for digital accessibility."

Fulbright award recipients are chosen based on academic and professional achievement, service and leadership. Spiegel is one of over 800 Fulbright U.S. Scholar recipients who will teach and conduct research abroad for the 2020-21 academic year.

The Fulbright Program was established in 1946 by U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright to build lasting international connections through education. According to the Fulbright Program, the educational exchange organization has "given more than 390,000 students, scholars, teachers, artists, and professionals of all backgrounds and fields the opportunity to study, teach and conduct research, exchange ideas, and contribute to finding solutions to shared international concerns."

'THE HAWK' CELEBRATES WORLD COLLEGE RADIO DAY

The University of Tennessee at Martin award-winning, student-run radio station, WUTM 90.3 FM "The Hawk," celebrated World College Radio Day with on-air giveaways and interviews. Dylan Ingram, a sophomore communications major from Martin and digital media director for WUTM, interviewed UT Martin Chancellor Keith Carver. In 2020 alone, WUTM has earned 43 national and regional awards from organizations including the Tennessee Press Association, the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System and the Southeast Journalism Conference.
CHANCELLOR CARVER SIGNS PROCLAMATION — University of Tennessee at Martin Chancellor Keith Carver signed a proclamation into effect that recognizes October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month at the university. The proclamation was created in order to bring awareness to the ever-growing domestic violence rates in Tennessee and to encourage safe, stable and nurturing relationships. Tennessee has remained in the top 10 states for domestic homicide in the U.S. since 2001, with over 70,000 incidents reported in 2019 alone. Through a partnership with the Wo/men Resource and Rape Assistance Program (WRAP), the university offers supportive measures for victims of domestic violence. UT Martin will host events during the month of October in recognition of victims of domestic violence to bring light to the destructive nature of abusive relationships. To read the proclamation, visit www.utm.edu/dvaproclamation.
Dr. Elaine Harriss contributes to the new Martin Public Library

Dr. Elaine Harriss, Chair Emeritus of the UT Martin Department of Music, recently telephoned the Martin Public Library Foundation, and said she wanted to make a gift to the new library. Harriss said, “This library is important to Martin and I want to help.” With those words, she pledged $10,000 to the community-wide effort. Harriss was a part of the UT Martin family before officially becoming a faculty member in the Department of Music in 2001. She spent 6 years as the department chair and continues to teach as a full professor. Her career is focused on teaching young people, and she has always expressed a love for anything associated with furthering the education of kindergarteners to college students. As the director of Kindermusik of Martin, she taught over 1500 students and was the President of the International Kindermusik Educators Association for 4 years. She was very active in the Tennessee Music Teachers Association and was also named Music Teacher of the Year for Tennessee.

While her music related talents are recognized regionally, nationally and internationally, she is also a person who appreciates and participates in her local community. Harriss served on numerous UTM committees and was the President of the Faculty Senate for 2007-08. She served on the Martin Historic Zoning Commission and the Martin Beautiful Committee. “I live about 2 blocks from the library and I am so proud of what this community is doing for not just young people, but for all of us who value books and life-long learning. I’m looking forward to frequent walks to the new library, enjoying a cup of coffee, meeting friends and stretching my mind,” said Harriss.

Library Foundation President Nick Duna-
University of Tennessee at Martin Rodeo Team member standout and 2020 graduate Robert Haley takes the oath of enlistment at Coach John Luthi’s training center in rural Martin after being accepted into the United States Army.

UTM Rodeo Standout and Grad Joins US Army as Elite Pilot

BY SABRINA RATES
sabrina@dresdenterprise.com

MARTIN (October 2) – On a plot of land in rural Martin, American flags stood tall in front of the backdrop of cattle gates and fencing that is used for members of the University of Tennessee at Martin Rodeo Team to practice and refine their skills. Typically, one might see lassos, cattle and horses within the fence, but Friday, October 2, a handful of people witnessed a different side to Rodeo standout Robert Haley.

That afternoon, Martin Army recruiter Sgt. First Class Jeff Steinman, along with Rodeo Team assistant coach Nelson Davis, buried pipe holding American flags into the dirt floor of the arena. Those flags served as the backdrop for two enlistees who were recently accepted into the US Army. The recruits weren’t just typical soldiers.

The pair were accepted and guaranteed candidates for Warrant Officer Flight Training and upon completion of basic training, their schooling will train them as pilots in the United States Army.

Haley, who is a 2020 graduate of UT Martin and member of the university’s rodeo team, said he had always been interested in service in the military. He has family members who enlisted and once Haley knew he was going to be guaranteed a slot as a pilot, he said he is able to fulfill his dream of being an Army Aviator.

It is a rare occasion to be able to offer a recruit candidacy for Warrant Officer Flight Training, but in this case, Steinman worked to recruit two candidates who are bound for the pilot’s seat. The second recruit is a Class of 2020 graduate of Dyersburg High School, Derick Figueroa.

Figueroa and his family traveled to rural Martin that day as he took his oath of enlistment within the ring of the training center.

The pair were sworn in on a sunny, fall afternoon. Steinman said he wanted to make the experience something special for his recruits.

Beyond scoring well on the military’s ASVAB tests and displaying above average physical ability, the two had to compile packets that highlighted their academic achievements, recommendation letters and create resumes to be presented by Steinman to the recruiting command panel, who would make the final decision to allow the candidates into WOFT.

Steinman worked with all entities to ensure Haley and Figueroa fulfilled their dreams of becoming pilots.

As a recruiter, Steinman demonstrated patience and diligence in completing their applications for approval.

Three days after Haley and Figueroa took their oath of enlistment in rural Martin, Steinman completed his final enlistment with the United States Army, having been in service for 14 years.
On hand for Robert Haley’s oath of enlistment into the United States Army that took place outside of Martin at one of the training sites for the UT Martin Rodeo Team were coaching staff members (L to R) Robbie Van Holten, Nelson Davis, Haley and head coach John Luthi.

UT Martin Reports Final Enrollment

MARTIN (September 25) — The University of Tennessee at Martin reports 7,119 students enrolled for the 2020 fall semester, including both undergraduate and graduate students. This represents a 2.4 percent decrease over the fall 2019 enrollment of 7,296 students and ends three consecutive years of enrollment growth. Despite the decline in total student numbers, several positives are found in the final fall enrollment report prepared by the university’s Office of Institutional Research.

First-time freshmen were down 43 students compared to fall 2019; returning students increased by 34; and graduate students increased 205 or almost 40 percent. The university’s dual-enrollment program declined by 252 students compared to last fall, a likely reflection of the uncertainties faced by K-12 schools during the pandemic. Dual-enrollment courses offer college credit to high school students in West Tennessee and other parts of Tennessee.

Plans for spring semester are still being determined. Contact UT Martin’s University Relations at 731-881-7615.
DESSERT PACKAGE AVAILABLE — The coronavirus pandemic may be causing local music lovers to enjoy the University of Tennessee at Martin music department’s offerings in new and different ways. Among the upcoming performances will be the UTM Choirs and the Small Jazz Group. Their performance may be viewed Oct. 24 at 5 p.m. live from the UTM Music Tent by Pacer Pond as a free drive-in performance, live-streamed on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages or listened to live on WUTM 90.3. Those who plan to be in attendance may wish to partake in some sweet delights as they support the UTM Choirs and the Small Jazz Group. Dessert care packages are available for purchase online for $12 each prior to the event. The packages will then be delivered at the performance. Advance purchases may be made at https://secure.touchnet.com/C21608_ustores/web/product_detail.jsp?PRODUCTID=523&SINGLESTORE=true or a limited supply may be available at the event when paid for with cash or check. Beverages will be available at the concert for those who purchase dessert care packages.
The latest “Everywhere You Look, UT” mural is located on a University of Tennessee at Martin student’s family farm in Mohawk, facing State Route 348, in Greene County in East Tennessee. Here in West Tennessee, the second mural in the statewide UT campaign is located in Weakley County — just seven miles south of UT Martin — on a Robinson & Belew Inc. grain bin in Sharon (inset photo).
Soon, every county in Tennessee will be painted with an “Everywhere You Look, UT” mural created through a campaign by the University of Tennessee. While spaces in each of Tennessee’s 95 counties are being donated to further the message of UT’s reach, one mural in Greene County — over 380 miles away from the University of Tennessee at Martin — reminds one student of the impact the university has had on her life.

Sarah Douthat, a senior health and human performance major from Mohawk, says her family didn’t hesitate to offer up their barn facing Tennessee State Route 348 for a UT mural and encourages others to do the same.

As a multigenerational family of Vols and now a Skyhawk, the Douthats say they are proud to represent UT and the opportunities made available through its mission.

“It’s an honor, really,” Miss Douthat said. “I am so proud that we get to help further the message that UT is everywhere.”

While Miss Douthat hails from a family of Volunteers, she said she knew UT Martin was for her as soon as she visited campus. She says her studies in public health and her connection to the Baptist College Ministry helped her find her home and purpose in life, just like her parents and grandparents did at UT Knoxville.

“Every time I step on the campus, it feels like I’m meant to be there,” Miss Douthat said. “The whole campus feels like a family.”

For Miss Douthat, having a piece of UT Martin and her family’s alma mater on their farm is just proof of the impact the universities have had on their lives. She hopes others who see the murals and are interested in the University of Tennessee will pursue an education and enjoy the experience just as her family has.

“We just want everyone to know that UT is everywhere,” she said.

For more information about the ongoing campaign — including how to participate and a list of completed and upcoming murals — go online to everywhere.tennessee.edu.
Weakley County mural in local campus' own backyard

The University of Tennessee is spanning the state from east to west — with the second mural in its campaign located in Sharon, just seven miles south of UT Martin and home to Robinson & Belew Inc.

Founded in 1950, the family-run operation is the community's largest business enterprise and ships corn, soybeans and wheat grown across the region to end-users around the world, according to UT's "Everywhere You Look, UT" website.

As the story goes, Bob Robinson established a small business near the railroad tracks in Sharon during the first half of the 20th century. He initially sold strawberries and coal and used the railroad to ship sweet potato slips throughout the United States.

In 1950, he purchased the Sharon Feed Mill with his partner, A.L. Belew, and Robinson & Belew Grain was born.

Robinson's son, Robert Dean "R.D." Robinson, earned a bachelor's degree in agriculture from the University of Tennessee at Martin in 1961 and came home to expand the business even further.

The Robinson family boasts three generations of UT Martin ties, beginning with R.D., and including his sister, Betty Robinson Eddings (Class of 1972); his wife, Dianne Palmer Robinson ('71); daughter, Linda Robinson Fowler ('85), and her husband, Keith ('85); and two of the Fowlers' three children: Chris in 2012 and Rachel in 2015. (See related photo below.)

R.D. and Dianne Robinson have established the R.D. and Dianne Robinson Agriculture Scholarship for agriculture students attending UT Martin.

Keith Fowler currently serves as president of Robinson & Belew Inc. and runs the day-to-day business operations.

"My father is a UT graduate in agriculture and my mother worked at the UT Martin bookstore for 33 years, so UTM has always felt like home to me," Fowler said. "UT Martin means a lot to me and my family, and it plays a vital role in our community. So, when (the University of Tennessee) asked (to paint the mural), I thought it was something we definitely wanted to be a part of to help promote UT and UT Martin."

Stretching about 46 feet high by 66 feet wide, the mural is painted on one of the many grain bins and storage facilities on the impressive property.

The site is about 500 feet from U.S. 45 East, with unobstructed visibility from the highway. Information compiled by the Tennessee Department of Transportation estimates annual average daily traffic counts total 5,385 — thus, it's possible the mural will be seen by as many as 1.9 million people a year.
The Keith Fowler family is featured in front of the Weakley County mural, painted on a huge grain bin at Robinson & Belew Inc. along U.S. 45 East in Sharon. The family has strong ties to UT Martin.

Floyd Flippin is featured at the Gibson County mural on the Flippin Law Group building on Main Street in Humboldt. On his way to a ball game at UTM, he saw the Sharon mural and knew he wanted to be involved. He has many family and community ties to UT.
County students receive Community Foundation scholarships

SUBMITTED
Oct 19, 2020

The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee has announced it is awarding scholarships worth $742,000 to 328 students, including 15 from Wilson County.

The Community Foundation scholarships, established by individuals, companies and civic groups, will assist students with tuition and other school-related expenses. The scholarship committee considers applicants’ academic records, test scores, extracurricular activities, work experience, community involvement and personal recommendations.

“The Community Foundation has helped thousands access educational opportunities they might otherwise have been unable to afford by connecting them with the generosity of others,” said Ellen Lehman, president of The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee. “This year we are honored to help hundreds more improve their futures, and the futures of their families, through the transformation offered by an education.”

The 2020 scholarship recipients from Wilson County are:

Macy V. Lee from Lebanon High School received the Lebanon High School Alumni Scholarship Endowment to attend Tennessee Technological University.

Carson E. Shipley from Mt. Juliet High School received the Cynthia and Alan Baran Fine Arts and Music Scholarship to attend the University of Tennessee at Martin.

Hunter T. Sawyer from Wilson Central High School received the Genesco Scholarship and John and Belinda Havron Scholarship to attend Tennessee Technological University.
The president of the University of Tennessee at Martin Faculty Senate is clarifying past comments following controversy and allegations over the removal of a resolution in a faculty senate meeting that would require students take a Black history and culture course.

Two student organizations at the university hosted a virtual forum on Oct. 5 in support of an African-American History and Culture course requirement for students. The student organizations expected a resolution on the committee's agenda on Oct. 6, but the resolution wasn't included on the agenda.

Faculty Senate President Sean Walker said in a previous interview with WKMS he was notified by a faculty senate executive committee member, who is affiliated with the Black History Matters Coalition advocating for the course requirement, to remove the resolution from the agenda. The Black History Matters Coalition describes itself as students, faculty, and alumni calling for African-American History and Culture course requirement for students.

UT Martin Professor of History David Barber, affiliated with the coalition, said that he did not ask that the resolution be pulled from the agenda.

“They said they would send it back to me so I could share it with the committee members to help them work on rewording. To this day, I have not received any revisions from them. Because of this, the resolution was not included on the agenda.”

Barber said since the coalition decided not to revise the resolution, the coalition thought the original resolution would be presented but was unaware the resolution needed to be resubmitted to the committee. Barber added Walker didn't reach out to him or anyone else in the coalition about making sure the resolution would be presented in the committee's November meeting. He said he emailed Walker on Oct. 6 to verify the resolution would be on the November agenda.

Walker in an interview Friday with WKMS said his past comments to WKMS regarding the removal of the resolution was referring to the September meeting, not the October meeting.
"That meeting on Sept. 1, I was asked by that faculty member to pull it from the agenda to be considered at a later date. I was referring to the September meeting, not the October meeting," Walker said. "It's my responsibility as Senate President to make sure what I say is clearly understood. I think it was clear as night yesterday."

Walker said he emailed Barber to say he was concerned about President Trump's recent executive order (https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-race-sex-stereotyping/) against "divisive concepts" in federally funded programs.

"I did express to the faculty member who is affiliated with this committee that I was concerned about the executive order, and that I would prefer not to include it until we got a clear interpretation of that executive order. The last thing I want to do is put it on the agenda again, or make them think that it's gonna be discussed, then it have to come off."

Walker said all resolutions must be submitted by a faculty member seven days before a faculty senate meeting in order for there to be a vote on the resolution. Walker said the Black History Matters resolution was not submitted, and that he has spoken with a faculty member of Black History Matters Coalition to ask for an updated copy of the resolution to be presented during the November meeting.

"I did ask him to please send me the version that you want because I have the most recent one they sent me, but I just wanted to verify. So, that faculty member has been informed," Walker said. "Now, the alums and students that are involved in this coalition may not have been informed that it was going to be included, but I have made the decision that it is going to be included because I was urged."

Walker emphasized if a resolution isn't submitted, then there won't be a vote.

He said he's willing to work with any UT Martin student to make sure issues on campus are solved. He also apologized for the misunderstanding of his past comments and said he should have been clearer about his remarks.

"I truly mean it when I say I look forward to working with all skyhawks. This is an issue that is near and dear to my heart. I just want to see us moving the discussion forward," Walker said.
Stephanie Brackman Wins Prestigious Award for TN Leadership Educator

The University of Tennessee at Martin WestStar leadership program presented the Robert M. Smith Outstanding Tennessee Leadership Educator Award to Stephanie Brackman, of Murfreesboro, during the 2020 Tennessee Associate of Community Leadership conference held virtually Oct. 15. Brackman, chief operation officer of the Rutherford County Chamber and director of the Leadership Rutherford adult and youth programs, received the award for her dedication to the advancement of leadership education in Tennessee.

Brackman is the president of the board of directors for the Tennessee Chamber of Commerce Executives, a member of the American Chamber of Commerce Executives and is a graduate of the Institute of Organization Management, Leadership Middle Tennessee and Leadership Rutherford. She graduated with her bachelor's in psychology and a master's in education from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Virginia Grimes, program coordinator of WestStar, says Brackman was "chosen because of her significant contributions to the advancement of Leadership Rutherford and her dedication to leadership development over the past 30 years."

"I am deeply humbled and flattered to receive the Robert M. Smith Outstanding Tennessee Leadership Educator award. This award isn't about me though," said Brackman. "It's ultimately for the alumni and supporters of Leadership Rutherford who believe so strongly in the initiatives of the program. I am honored beyond words and so appreciative to everyone for giving me the opportunity to lead."

The award is given in honor of Dr. Robert Smith, UT Martin chancellor emeritus, who co-founded WestStar and is a nationally recognized leadership education expert.

About Brackman:

Stephanie Brackman joined the Chamber staff in 1999. After graduating with a bachelor's in psychology and master's in education from the University of Tennessee, Stephanie worked for Whistle Communications in Knoxville for six years.

She then came to Rutherford County and worked at Middle Tennessee State University for six years on special projects for the Athletic Department and the President’s Office. She is a graduate of the Institute of Organization Management, Leadership Middle Tennessee and Leadership Rutherford, is a member of the American Chamber of Commerce Executives and serves on the board of directors for the Tennessee Chamber of Commerce Executives.
UTM reports fall enrollment decline but hopeful signs amid pandemic

The University of Tennessee at Martin reports 7,119 students enrolled for the 2020 fall semester, including both undergraduate and graduate students. This represents a 2.4% decrease over the fall 2019 enrollment of 7,296 students and ends three consecutive years of enrollment growth. Despite the decline in total student numbers, several positives are found in the final fall enrollment report prepared by the university’s Office of Institutional Research.

First-time freshmen were down 43 students compared to fall 2019; returning students increased by 34; and graduate students increased 205 or almost 40%. The university’s dual-enrollment program declined by 252 students compared to last fall, a likely reflection of the uncertainties faced by K-12 schools during the pandemic. Dual-enrollment courses offer college credit to high school students in West Tennessee and other parts of Tennessee.

“The pandemic is affecting higher education on several fronts and, given the health concerns and financial challenges facing our students and their families, this is really an amazing outcome,” UT Martin Chancellor Carver said. “Everyone is trying to adjust to these new circumstances, and I applaud our students, their families, and our outstanding faculty and staff for adjusting to the realities that we currently face. You always hope for better, but I’m extremely pleased with where the university is positioned moving forward.”

Also encouraging to Carver and university officials are the full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers that provide the basis for public university funding in Tennessee. Undergraduate FTE declined by 160 or 3% this fall compared to 2019, but graduate FTE rose by 123 or 42.5%. Overall FTE declined by 38 or .7%. FTE is determined by dividing undergraduate student credit hours by 15 and graduate hours by 12.

“We’re grateful to the state for its financial support of higher education during these uncertain economic times,” Carver said. “Our own UT System leadership and the UT Board of Trustees also continue to support the positive direction that we’re headed with our new Strategic Enrollment Plan.

UT Martin is in good financial shape, which allows us to pursue our educational mission at a high level.”

UT Martin continues to earn solid regional and national rankings both for the university and individual academic programs. The four-year graduation rate has increased 14.4% since the start of the Soar in Four tuition program that was approved in 2016 by the UT Board of Trustees. Soar in Four encourages students to take at least 15 hours per semester in order to graduate in four years. Among other academic success stories are Skyhawk athletes who earned the highest combined grade point average in UT Martin history in spring 2020 with a 3.26 GPA.

UT Martin joined other University of Tennessee campuses by opening fall semester for in-person classes. Approximately half of UT Martin’s classes offered an in-person component, and all faculty members prepared to offer classes both face to face and online to allow for possibly changing conditions. The fall semester is also accelerated with the cancellation of fall break and classes ending by Thanksgiving. Final exams will then be offered online so that students do not return to the main campus or the five centers in Jackson, Parsons, Ripley, Selmer and Somerville for fall semester.

Plans for spring semester are still being determined. For more information, contact the UT Martin Office of University Relations at 731-881-7615.
UTM STUDENTS HOLD OUTSIDE CLASS — The University of Tennessee at Martin students are meeting outside for the first day of fall semester classes. The university reports 7,119 students enrolled for the 2020 fall semester, including both undergraduate and graduate students.

STUDENTS RECEIVE ANNETTE SUBLETT FERGUSON GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIPS — Carson Hutchinson (left) and Mikayla Shupp (right), both of Troy, received the Annette Sublett Ferguson Graduate Scholarship, created in memory of the longtime Obion County educator; They are senior early childhood education majors who are studying to teach K-5 following their graduation from UTM. Ferguson taught for 11 years in the Obion County school system before she passed away Sept. 18, 2016, after a battle with breast cancer. Her husband, Scott Ferguson, established the scholarship endowment in 2017 in honor of his wife with the hope future Obion County educators would benefit from her legacy. Annette was a UTM alumna, earning her bachelor’s degree in 1982 and her master’s degree in 2005. The Annette Sublett Ferguson Scholarship is open to junior and senior-level students from Obion County schools upon entry into the educator preparation program. For more information on this scholarship, contact Donna Neblett, director of the UT Martin Educator Preparation Program, at 731-881-7686 or dneblett1@utm.edu. Pictured (l-r) are Hutchinson, Neblett and Shupp.
UT Martin academic programs ranked nationally and regionally

The University of Tennessee at Martin recently received multiple national and regional Top 10 rankings for its on-campus and online academic programs. The UT Martin nursing program was ranked fourth in the southeast by nursingprocess.org for its high NCLEX-RN pass rate, academic quality, reputation and affordability. Over 700 schools offering nursing programs were evaluated for the 2020 Best BSN Programs in the Southeast ranking.

The online master of science in education with a major in counseling also placed fourth nationally in collegerank.net's 30 Best Online Master's in Mental Health Counseling. The program was ranked on its accreditation, affordability and estimated salary graduates will earn with the degree.

Learn.org ranked the university's agriculture degree programs 10th nationally, including its bachelor's and master's degree options, for a wide variety of concentrations offered both on-campus and online. Its 640-acre teaching farm and agriculture living-learning communities played a factor in ranking.

https://www.waste360.com/

The Recycling Education and Research Foundation Awards Scholarships to 75 Students

Oct 21, 2020

Washington, DC - The Recycling Education and Research Foundation (RERF), a 501 (c)(3), not-for-profit organization closely associated with the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI), has announced that 75 students were awarded scholarships, between $500 and $3,400, to be applied to their respective college educations. RERF awarded over $122,000 to college bound students across the United States and Canada for the 2020-21 academic year.

Funded by ISRI national chapters with scholarship programs, scholarships are awarded to dependents of employees of active ISRI member companies located within a chapter region. There are 14 active participating ISRI chapters with scholarship programs. Each chapter supports their scholarship program through fundraisers, donations, and other initiatives throughout the year.
2020 Recycling Education and Research Foundation Scholarship Recipients

**ISRI Southeast Chapter**

Hailey Wade - Virginia Tech
Adam Brown - Samford University
Dulce Labra - University of South Carolina Upstate
Guillermo Labra - Spartanburg Community College
Samuel Schaer - Brevard College
Courtney Shearin - The University of Tennessee at Martin
Mason Weaver - Middle Tennessee State University
Cole Scott - Western Kentucky University
Hannah Rutherford - University of Alabama-Birmingham
Garrett Crumes - Owensboro Community and Technical College
Jackson Trumbly - Western Kentucky University
Brandon Parker - Southern New Hampshire University
Jamie Erwin - Austin Peay State University
Lydia Schulz - University of South Carolina
Arrington Schulz - Clemson University
Blake Bernard - Clemson University
Mason Bernard - Clemson University
Alexandria Laughter - Converse College
Hannah Smoke - Auburn University
Sarah Smoke - Auburn University
UT Martin Kicks Off Week Of Homecoming Events

MARTIN (October 18) – While the University of Tennessee at Martin annual homecoming festivities are hosted virtually this year, the Office of Alumni Relations is ensuring students, alumni and employees stay connected through social media events to celebrate UT Martin's history by "Soaring Through the Decades" throughout this week.

To kick off this year’s homecoming event, visitors lined the parking lots near Pacer Pond to catch a 3-minute fireworks display, illuminated to music and free to the public Sunday evening.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the university will not host its normal events like rope pull, Quad City and the homecoming football game. Instead, the Office of Alumni Relations planned a week full of online and socially-distanced activities for students and alumni to participate in.

See UT Martin on Page 3

UT Martin ...From Front Page

“UT Martin Homecoming 2020 will feature virtual events as we "Soar through the Decades,” said Jackie Johnson, assistant vice chancellor of alumni relations and annual giving.

“This year, we invite alumni to reminisce about their time at UTM by participating through their social media networks. While we are not able to celebrate in person, we hope to spread the Skyhawk spirit across our region as we flood social media with all things UTM on October 19-25.”

Virtual weeklong events include a spirit-decorating competition and virtual interviews with alumni, hosted by the Student Alumni Council. The Office of Alumni Relations is posting historical photos and feature alumni showing school spirit on its social media throughout the week. All online events will be featured on the UT Martin Alumni Facebook page.

The events are:
- Friday, October 23: "Different World – Different Decade Day" presented by the Black Alumni Association, 5 p.m.; UT Martin Black Alumni Association Facebook; Learn about the homecoming logo design with the League of Striving Artists, 5 p.m.;
- Saturday, October 24: Skyhawk virtual 5K, all day; UT Martin Fight Song video, 9 a.m.;
- Tailgate tips with Chancellor Keith Carver, 11 a.m.; Dessert Evening with UT Martin choirs and small jazz group, 5 p.m.;
- Sunday, October 25: Walk through the Quad with special guests.

Alumni relations has partnered with the Office of Student Life and Multicultural Affairs to host in-person activities for students on campus throughout homecoming week.

The schedule for student events is as follows:
- Wednesday, October 21: SAC Drive Thru, 12-4 p.m., Dunagan Alumni Center;
- Thursday, October 22: Petting Zoo in the Quad, 12-2 p.m.;
- Friday, October 23: SAC Car City, 4-6 p.m., Pacer Pond parking lot.

For more information, visit alumni.utm.edu/homecoming.
Over 1,100 University of Tennessee students received UT Promise scholarships this year

Monica Kast, Knoxville News Sentinel  Published 1:58 p.m. ET Oct. 26, 2020

Over 1,100 students took part in the UT Promise scholarship program (story/news/education/2019/03/14/university-of-tennessee-launching-free-college-tuition-program/3139831002) in its first semester at the University of Tennessee System.

UT Promise, a last-dollar scholarship program modeled after Tennessee Promise, was announced last year as a way to cover tuition and fees for students with a household income of less than $50,000 per year.

This fall was the first semester for the program and 1,191 students took part in the program across the UT System. At Friday’s Board of Trustees meeting (story/news/education/2020/10/23/university-tennessee-can-manage-covid-19-financial-hit-trustees-say/3708875001), UT System President Randy Boyd said the UT program is aimed at helping more students attend UT and graduate debt-free.

More: University of Tennessee to launch free college program that mirrors successful Promise, Reconnect programs (story/news/education/2019/03/14/university-of-tennessee-launching-free-college-tuition-program/3139831002)

"We want to be a university that provides opportunity for every person that can academically earn the right to come, regardless of your financial means," Boyd said. "This will do that. We also want to retain our students. We don't want them to drop out because of financial reasons. This will also make it less likely for more students to drop out."

This year, the UT System set a record enrollment (https://news.tennessee.edu/2020/10/23/ut-system-sets-record-enrollment-during-covid-19-pandemic/), despite declining enrollment trends nationwide and the COVID-19 pandemic. Enrollment across the system increased by nearly 2% to over 52,500 students.

Chattanooga had the most Promise students

Most of the UT Promise students who enrolled were at the Chattanooga campus, with 449 students. UT Knoxville, the largest campus in the system, had 409 UT Promise students and UT Martin had 333. The Health Science Center had several applicants, but ultimately, none were eligible for the scholarship, Braddock said.

Randy Boyd, photographed in his campus office Tuesday, March 3, 2020, at the University of Tennessee, shortly before officially being named president. (Photo: Brianna Paciorka/Knoxnews Sentinel)

"We're excited about the first year's success and we expect to build on this foundation to grow it in the future," Boyd said.

In total, the program cost over $864,000 in its first year, which was funded by donations to an endowment. UT Knoxville, which has higher tuition and fees than Chattanooga and Martin, used most of the total, at $619,306. UT Chattanooga, which had the most UT Promise students, used $129,224.

At UT Martin, $116,442 went toward UT Promise scholarships. The average amount given to students across the System was $709, Braddock said.
Demographics

Freshmen make up the majority of UT Promise recipients, at 52%. Around 68% of UT Promise students are female and 32% are male. Approximately 47% of UT Promise students are first generation college students.

The average household income of eligible students is $25,859, Braddock said.

Of the UT Promise recipients, 64% are white, 17% are Black, 8% are Hispanic, 5% are multiracial and 4% are Asian.

Community service and mentors

Part of the UT Promise program requires students to complete 8 hours of community service before the semester begins. Several students did not complete their community service before the start of the fall semester, which made them ineligible, Braddock said.

With COVID-19, completing community service was a challenge for some students, she said.

Another key component of UT Promise is mentorship, where students are paired with a mentor for two years to help guide them through college. UT had over 1,400 mentors available for students this year. Because of that, mentors were paired with students on a one-to-one basis, Braddock said.
Prevent racism from continuing at UT Martin

Recently, I attended a zoom conversation hosted by the group Engage at the University of Tennessee-Martin. Towards the end of the zoom, attendees were allowed to make comments and I heard directly from a current Black student what their campus experience is like.

Hearing a current Black student say he knows he attends a racist campus, that Black students know which campus security officers don't like them, and that they feel unsafe on the campus especially with the added surveillance, was heart-wrenching.

What’s even more hurtful is knowing the campus admin continues to not listen to Black students and Alumni, while putting out statements and videos saying they care about Black students and are taking racial incidents seriously.

I attended UT Martin from 2012-2015 and until I attended this university I had never experienced a racist encounter with anyone. On UT Martin’s campus, I was called a racial slur, had racist stereotypes asked of me, and was often mockedingly called Angela Davis.

My mother, aunt, and uncle also attended the school and had numerous racist experiences, in the ‘90s.

It’s clear that racism has continued to plague the campus, and the administration has yet to take a stand and protect Black students.

Over three months ago a video surfaced of UT Martin students saying they “hate blacks” and “what’s up n****” while wearing UT Martin shirts. The video immediately went viral and the University put out a statement saying they would investigate.

Since then, multiple statements have been put out to do damage control, the chancellor has hosted zoom townhall calls, and an interim Diversity and Inclusion chair has been announced. But the demands of Black students and alumni have continued to be ignored.

We ask that racist students be expelled from the university, and a required class in African American history is implemented. Black history is American history and it should be automatically taught but it’s not due to white supremacist systems put into place to prevent the knowledge from being shared.

The university responded to our demand of expelling the students by citing that students have rights to free speech.

There is a clear difference between free speech and hate speech exhibited by those students. The continued push for a required African American history class has been met with red tape and excuses consistently.

The faculty senate members that could approve the class have continued to make statements such as “this is such a big idea” and “this has never been done before” and in the same breath will say they care about Black students.

I’m sick of the blatant lies. If they cared about Black students’ lives they would recognize how important a required class in our history was and do everything you could to advocate for that.

Two other schools in the UT System, UT Knoxville and UT Chattanooga, took a stand when racist incidents occurred from students, but all we get from UT Martin is lip service.

The UT Martin administration has continued to ignore Black students pleas to see them, keep them safe, and educate those around them responsibly.

At what point are we going to continue to endure this continual trauma? And most importantly why are we expected to?

Amber Sherman resides in Memphis and is an activist and CEO of The Law According to Amber.
Addressing UT Martin racial bias, inequality

Your turn
Dr. Keith Carver
Guest columnist

Many of our students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends have reached out to me as we work to address racial justice and diversity issues.

I appreciate each person’s willingness to share very personal thoughts and feelings with me and the university community.

Some of the discussions have been painful. Other conversations have been hopeful, but ultimately, all of these exchanges have been beneficial. Empathetic words are important but have little meaning without action.

The following initiatives are among those in process and will drive our work for the 2020-21 academic year.

• In June, the UT Martin Faculty Senate solicited proposals from the faculty for courses that would address race and diversity, which would be required for all students. The faculty senate will begin reviewing the proposals in early November. Four proposals are currently being developed by different faculty groups.

• Dr. Mark McCloud, a UT Martin alum, accepted an interim appointment beginning Aug. 1 as the university’s new Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, a position recommended as part of the UT Martin Strategic Plan implementation, which began in 2019. This full-time, cabinet-level leadership position serves as an adviser to our university and me in the areas of inclusion and cultural awareness.

• Strategic plan implementation includes developing UT Martin’s first diversity statement and a comprehensive, clearly articulated university-wide diversity plan.

• The Skyhawk Creed was announced in August and features three core values to promote a diverse and inclusive university environment: Respect, Responsibility and Right Choices.

• Captain’s Courageous Conversations, named for our Captain Skyhawk mascot, engage students in meaningful and challenging conversations around racial justice and other diversity issues.

• The university currently engages in various employee recruitment efforts to attract and retain diverse faculty and staff. Advertisements in publications, websites and distribution lists appeal to diverse populations. Recruitment through professional organizations and conference attendance provides additional opportunities.

• A new bias-reporting process is in place that allows students to notify the university of incidents of bias they witness at the university.

• The safety of our students, faculty, staff and visitors is of paramount importance to everyone at UT Martin. We have a new director of public safety and we’ve added 210 more security cameras to provide increased monitoring of our university grounds.

• We’re fully engaged as a university community with our City of Martin Town and Gown Association to strengthen our relationships with partners and allies across Martin and Weakley County to enhance the student experience.

We have much work to do, but I’m excited and hopeful about the future.

However, I cannot make these changes alone, and it will take all of us working together to confront racism and hatred head on.

Dr. Keith Carver has worked in the University of Tennessee System for 22 years and became UT Martin chancellor in January 2017. He is a Crockett County, Tennessee, native.
**SPOOK-TACULAR PARTNERSHIP —** Wendell Alexander Realty, Skyhawk Rentals and Weakley/Obion Carl Perkins Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse put together a team to make sure 1,600 pre-K through fifth-graders in Weakley County have lots of treats. UTM students, Martin Elementary students and other volunteers packed the bags. Among those taking part were (from left) Stacey Coleman, victim Advocate for Carl Perkins Center; Tommy Flanigan, AGR community service chair; Katey Swann, director of marketing for Wendell Alexander Realty and Amber Whitten, Director of the Carl Perkins Center.

**Businesses and nonprofit partner to treat Weakley County students**

By Karen Campbell
*Special to The Press*

Wendell Alexander Realty and Skyhawk Rentals partnered with Weakley/Obion County Carl Perkins Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse to ensure 1,600 pre-K through fifth-graders in Weakley County receive treats this Halloween.

UTM students and other volunteers packaged the goodies while in costume and will help make deliveries a fun sight as well.

This has been a year unlike any other and as more events continue to be canceled for the safety of our community and our children, Wendell Alexander Realty and Skyhawk Rentals saw Halloween as one more holiday that would be different for local children this year.

Wendell Alexander Realty owner Alexander Bynum and Skyhawk Rentals co-owner Ashley Pinkston wanted to sweeten this holiday for the children of Weakley County as much as they could.

Their businesses are big supporters of the Carl Perkins Center and the critical work they do for the community. For this project, they wanted to be able to positively impact all the elementary school students by providing goodie bags for 1,600 Weakley County students.

The businesses are represented on the community board of the Weakley/Obion Carl Perkins Center as well. Kate Moore Bynum, Wendell Alexander Realty partner, is the Carl Perkins board president; and Katey Swann, director of marketing for Wendell Alexander Realty and Skyhawk Rentals, is the board secretary.

SEE CARL PERKINS
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Vanguard Theatre to present ‘Doubt, A Parable’ virtually

The University of Tennessee at Martin Vanguard Theatre will perform "Doubt, A Parable" by John Patrick Shanley at 7 p.m. Nov. 5-7 and at 3 p.m. Nov. 8.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the performances will be closed to the public and, instead, live-streamed on the Department of Visual and Theatre Arts Facebook account.

"Doubt, A Parable," a 2005 Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning play, is set at St. Nicholas School and Church in the Bronx in 1964 and follows a skeptical nun, Sister Aloysius, who questions the relations of Father Flynn, the priest, and Donald Muller, the first African-American altar boy in the school. As confrontation leads to deceptive actions, Sister Aloysius is left with doubt for the future of the church.

The four-person cast allows for social distancing onstage and follows CDC guidelines in order to safely present the play.

The Vanguard Theatre will not charge admission for the fall play since it is being live-streamed but is encouraging viewers to donate the price of a ticket, $15, to support the production costs of this and future performances of the UT Martin theatre company. Donations can be made to the UT Martin Support the ARTS Campaign at utm.edu/starts.

For more information, contact the Department of Visual and Theatre Arts at 731-881-7400.
Theater Dedicated — The University of Tennessee at Martin Department of Visual and Theatre Arts recently dedicated and renamed the Vanguard Little Theatre in memory of longtime faculty member and Vanguard Theatre director William H. Snyder, who taught at UT Martin for 32 years and directed almost 200 plays during his tenure. Snyder died in 2008 at the age of 78. The William H. Snyder Little Theatre will feature a memorial plaque above the entrance in honor of Snyder’s dedication to the performing arts at UT Martin. On hand for the dedication were (from left) Doug Cook, retired chair of the Department of Visual and Theatre Arts; Dr. Keith Carver, chancellor; Dr. Philip Acree Cavalier, provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs; Dr. Lynn Alexander, dean of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts; and Dr. Carol Ecker, chair of the Department of Visual and Theatre Arts.

“William H. Snyder was an incredibly influential teacher, artist and mentor here at UT Martin and was the leader of Vanguard Theatre for 32 years,” Cook said. “Many of us remember him with the utmost love and respect, and I personally credit Bill with much of what I have achieved as an artist, but frankly as a human being. Placing Bill’s name on this theater facility is a small gesture compared to the many accomplishments and impact he had on so many lives, the lives of hundreds of UT Martin alums and the veterans of Vanguard Theatre.”

Music programs slated

The department of music at the University of Tennessee at Martin has announced the following musical programs:

- Roots of Rhythm 2020 Replay will be held this evening at 8 p.m. It will be available on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages.
- Faculty Performance Throwback, UTM Music From the Vault will be held Thursday at 8 p.m. It will be available on the UTM Music Facebook and YouTube pages. To learn more about upcoming events, visit utm.edu/musicevents.

Vanguard to present production online

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Amid Pandemic, Some College Students Take Precautions, Avoid Parties On Halloween

By RETIAZSHA CHAMBERS • 10/28/2020

Halloween is days away as Kentucky and Tennessee face new COVID-19 case surges, and some college students have decided not to participate in normal festivities and parties, fearing a COVID-19 case spike on their campuses following the holiday.

Ashanta Johnson, a freshman at the University of Tennessee at Martin, said she doesn't plan to attend any off-campus events or parties, although her friends might. Johnson said some students have made Halloween an excuse to gather since they have not experienced a traditional college semester due to COVID-19 precautions.

"I think now it's becoming, 'Like, well you know if we're gonna get it, we're gonna get it anyway.' It's not right that they say it, but people will find any reason to try to do stuff like that in a time like this when most people shouldn't be [partying]."

Johnson thinks the weeks following Halloween will dramatically increase the amount of positive cases on UT Martin's campus. On Oct. 26 UT Martin reported 116 people (https://tennessee.edu/coronavirus/dashboard/) were either isolated with COVID-19 or quarantined from potential exposure, down from 148 people isolated or quarantined on Oct. 21.

"Nobody's really listening, and it's bad because it's the people on campus that are just like, 'Oh no, we're gonna try to be safe. They want us to wear masks and stuff,'" Johnson said. "But at the same time, they're gonna go out that night and just do whatever."

She also worries UT Martin won't have enough space to isolate COVID-19 positive students after a potential spike in cases following Halloween, and doesn't think the university will even have in-person classes next semester.
Mikiyah Mitchell, a freshman at the University of Louisville, also doesn’t plan on attending any Halloween parties off campus.

“Due to me being hours away from my family, I do not have any plans with my family. I will also be social distancing on Halloween night as well due to coronavirus on campus,” she said.

Mitchell doesn’t think parties in Louisville will be socially distanced and expects many college students not to wear masks with their costumes. Although Mitchell would like to experience the typical college Halloween experience, she realizes she could put herself and others in danger.

“I’ve handled it pretty well. It’s been a little different. The experience has been weird, but it’s a part of staying safe,” she said.

Mitchell believes UofL has taken this semester seriously amid the pandemic and is cautious of students who leave and return to campus.

“I think they’re doing an okay job. They do make us take tests every time we come back,” Mitchell said. “If we have a long break, like Labor Day weekend, we have to get tested. They stay on top of us about that,” Mitchell said.

Precious Lynch, a senior at Murray State University, does not plan to go out on Halloween, but looks forward to planning a movie night with her friends and family.

Lynch said some faculty and staff have promoted social distancing and advised students in her classes not to attend gatherings off campus that do not follow Gov. Andy Beshear’s executive order against mass gatherings. (https://governor.ky.gov/covid19)

“I think that some students have been listening, but at the end of the day, some students are going to do what they want to do,” Lynch said. “But, I feel like the majority on Murray State’s campus have listened to that because I haven’t seen any social media post flying around about a Halloween party.”

Although MSU requires students to wear face coverings and masks on campus, Lynch believes that won’t stop people from doing the opposite off campus.

“Some of them might think, ‘Oh well, I’m already here with a bunch of people, so why wear a mask?”

Lynch also believes Murray State will take precautionary safety measures if there is an increase in coronavirus cases on campus after Halloween.

“Resulting from how long we’ve been here on campus, I feel like they’re doing a good job. Murray State will continue to do that and above if there is a tremendous spike in cases,” Lynch said.
UT-Martin Innovation Facility Makes Recommendation List

Posted on October 29, 2020 by Charles Choate

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission has moved UT-Martin’s “Innovation and Product Realization Facility” to the commission’s Capital Projects Recommendation List.

University of Tennessee President Randy Boyd said the $17.5 million, 50,000-square-foot innovation center is one of three recommended University of Tennessee projects.

The announcement came during the Fall meeting of the UT Board of Trustees.

The facility is a joint effort by UT Martin, Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology and Dyersburg State Community College, to support and expand workforce and economic development in rural Northwest Tennessee.

Reports said the Innovation and Product Realization Facility will be located on the main campus, and will combine educational facilities, entrepreneurial centers and manufacturing workshops.

UT-Martin Chancellor Dr. Keith Carver said the prospect of the innovation center comes at a critical time, as the university seeks innovative ways to support students and contribute to the region’s economic development.
FINDING A BETTER WAY

UT MARTIN CLASS LEADS TO PATENT

By SARAH KNAPP
Special to The Messenger

"There's got to be a better way to do this," Shawn Butler muttered to himself as he hand sprayed cover crops with herbicides to prepare the field for cotton planting.

Butler (University of Tennessee at Martin '14, Knoxville '16, '19) knew there had to be a more efficient way to terminate strips of living-cover crop than the single-nozzle boom sprayer he was given. Butler, then an employee of the West Tennessee AgResearch and Education Center, worked on a trial herbicide experiment in 2013 that was designed to destroy cover crops planted between cash-crop seasons for weed suppression, and when the first round of trial herbicides proved ineffective, he was left to respay hundreds of rows of cover crop, each 300 feet in length, by hand in the middle of February's 35-degree temperatures.

Cover crops help maintain healthy soil during the offseason by keeping the soil saturated and locked with nutrients. When terminated, cover crops act as an organic mulch to suppress weeds and reduce herbicide usage, but the process of terminating those cover crops can be difficult, as Butler learned spraying the fields.

After finishing spraying the fields, Butler started researching ways people managed cover crops in the past and came across the roller crimper. The solid metal steel cylinder with blades fixed around the cylinder allows the machine to pinch the plants stems when making contact with the ground, cutting off the flow of water and nutrients. But the solid cylinder alone just temporarily lays the plants down and is not able to adapt to the changes in terrain.

Butler thought it would work better if he adapted it. "Why don't I just take this roller-crimper, slice it into a bunch of sections, and then I can roller crimp this cover crop in these strips instead of a spray killing it?"

The idea stayed just that until a class at UT Martin in 2014 changed everything.

Butler, along with his friends Austin Scott (Martin '14) and Daniel Wiggins (Martin '15), were students in Paul Gale's soil and water conservation course when Gale gave her students the option of taking a final or competing in the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences entrepreneurial pitch competition for an A. Butler described his idea to his friends, and the trio formed a business model to present in place of studying.

Butler's flex roller-crimper is designed as individual drums, allowing each crimper to pivot and meet the ground individually, ultimately killing the cover crop, no matter the terrain, in a time- and cost-efficient manner.

WORKING TOGETHER

Former University of Tennessee at Martin students (above, from left) Daniel Wiggins, Shawn Butler and Austin Scott worked on an idea formulated by Butler to compete in the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences entrepreneurial pitch competition while in Paul Gale's soil and water conservation course at UTM. Together they helped create a flex roller-crimper (see prototype below) which uses individual cylinders with fixed blades to pinch the stems of cover crops as it makes contact with the ground. The crimper is able to maintain contact with uneven surfaces, resulting in a more efficient way to cut cover crops into strips before planting cash crops. Butler (shown at right) holds the dollar he received from the UT Research Foundation.
“You need some type of unit that is more flexible... and there just hasn’t been a lot of good options out there.” Butler says. “It would be a tremendous honor in itself to develop a product that solves a problem with adoption of a sustainable practice.”

When the students first presented at the ag innovation competition, Gale says they did a good job.

“I had looked at the competition as an opportunity to give them some public speaking experience and some teamwork experience, and they got both of those and more,” she says. “They learned more than anything I could have taught them. You have to learn by doing.”

They won UT Martin’s ag innovation contest but also continued to compete in regional and national competitions, winning enough prize money to begin a formal business called FarmSpec, or Farm Specific Technology. From competing in UT System contests like the Boyd Venture Challenge, sponsored by UT President Randy Boyd, to national contests such as the Farm Bureau Rural Entrepreneurship Challenge and the Howard Buffett Ag Innovation Contest, FarmSpec began making a name for itself in agriculture.

However, Butler, Wiggins and Scott were each pursuing individual careers in agriculture. While Wiggins and Scott still hold equity in the flex roller-crimper, they recognize that it was originally Butler’s creation and allowed him to continue marketing the product as he desired.

“Shawn had the idea... but I think all of us combined together troubleshot it and made the idea into something,” Wiggins says. “I knew it was a good idea, and I knew there wasn’t anything on the market, but I didn’t think we could have a company and a product that one day (he) will be able to sell... I just think from the standpoint of seeing them in use and knowing that I was a part of that, from an ‘easy A’ contest at UT Martin, would be the coolest thing.”

Butler partnered with the UT Research Foundation to begin the patenting process while still a UT Martin student in 2014 with the hopes of seeing it manufactured to help farmers incorporate organic farming practices in a cost-efficient manner. After graduation, he continued working toward his goal while earning his master’s ('16) and doctoral ('19) degrees in agronomy at the UT Institute of Agriculture Herbert College of Agriculture.

“One of my bucket-list items was always to get a patent,” Butler says. “Initially I was like, ‘If I can just make a dollar off of this, I’ll feel great.’ Literally, when I signed the license over to the UT Research Foundation, they sent me a dollar in the mail along with 60 other documents that I had to sign, but I got my dollar bill. I was happy at that point.”

But he still wants more. “It would mean the world to (manufacture) a physical piece of equipment that helps a grower’s efficiency and profitability,” he says.

Butler, now a cotton development specialist for PhytoGen in Central and Southeast Georgia, received the patent for the flex roller-crimper in October of 2019 and says none of it would have been possible without the UT Martin innovation contest created by Todd Winters and Gale encouraging him to compete.

“Without generating a platform for potential entrepreneurs at UT Martin, (FarmSpec) would have never happened. I am very thankful for UT Martin,” Butler says.

While Butler is the patent holder, all three men said it would be special to see the flex roller-crimper in use after all of their hard work.

“It’s good to just see something that you helped build be put to use and see other people gaining something from it,” Scott says. “It’s just that feeling of accomplishment that I can change something about the industry I work in every day for the better. So, seeing somebody else benefit from an idea that I helped develop would be awesome.”

“I’d be tickled to death to see them in any field in West Tennessee as I drive by,” Wiggins says.

Butler is still considering how to manufacture and distribute or license the flex roller-crimper and best market it to farmers looking for innovative techniques to implement on their farms.

While it may have taken seven years, two partners and three degrees, Butler found a better way.

Editor’s note: Sarah Knapp is staff writer and Addenda editor with the office of university relations at UTM. Reprint permission was granted by Tennessee Alumni magazine, where the article appeared in its Fall 2020 edition.
UTM music set
Live from the Tent:
Percussion Ensemble
Concert Part 1 will be
held Sunday at 3 p.m.
at the University of
Tennessee at Martin.
It is available as a free
drive-in performance,
will be live-streamed on the
UTM Music Facebook
and YouTube pages or
may be listened to live on
WUTM 90.3.

Performance funding, innovation facility among UT Board highlights

MARTIN, Tenn. – The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) has recommended that the University of Tennessee at Martin receive $393,000 in additional outcomes-based formula funding in the next budget year based on established standards. The announcement was
Continued from Page 2

made by University of Tennessee President Randy Boyd in comments Oct. 23 during the fall meeting of the UT Board of Trustees. The meeting was conducted by webcast in accordance with recommended safety standards during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Boyd also announced that THEC has moved UT Martin's Innovation and Product Realization Facility to the commission's Capital Projects Recommendation List. The $17.5 million, 50,000-square-foot innovation center is one of three University of Tennessee projects recommended by THEC. The facility is a joint effort by UT Martin, Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology and Dyersburg State Community College to support and expand workforce and economic development in rural Northwest Tennessee.

Both the additional outcomes-based formula funding and the innovation center are agenda items for the fall 2020 commission meeting Nov. 6 at Middle Tennessee State University.

Mike Krause, THEC executive director, visited UT Martin on Oct. 21 and previewed both announcements during a weekly faculty and staff town hall. "UT Martin will be one of the institutions that's actually performed well enough in the outcomes-based funding formula to receive new money. ..." Krause told the Zoom audience. "And succeeding in the outcomes-based funding formula, without question, only happens if every layer to the university has bought in.

"You have an incredible chancellor, you have an incredible senior leadership team, you have an incredible faculty, you have an incredible staff, and when all of those pieces come together, the (funding) formula takes care of itself."

Petra McPhearson, vice chancellor for finance and administration, said that the funding news comes at an opportune time for the university. "Funding formula investments allow us to pay for initiatives that help our students to be successful," she said in a statement. "This fiscal year, the formula resulted in a reduction of over $1.1 million. The money will help us recover from the funding loss in fiscal year 2021. The new funding in fiscal year 2022 will certainly give us a step in the right direction."

The Innovation and Product Realization Facility will be located on the UT Martin main campus and combine educational facilities, entrepreneurial centers and manufacturing workshops surrounding a shared industrial maker space. "You all sent in a great (innovation center) proposal, and as a result, you're on our list, and our mission now, my mission, is to work with Chancellor (Keith) Carver and President Boyd to work to get that building funded and to work to get the outcomes-based funding formula funded," Krause said.

"The pandemic is challenging higher education and UT Martin in multiple ways," said Carver in a statement. "THEC's recommendations for additional outcomes-based funding support and the new innovation center come at a critical time as we seek innovative ways to support our students and contribute to the region's economic development now and in the future. We never take for granted support by the commission, the state and the University of Tennessee."