

The McKendree

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF MCKENDREE UNIVERSITY



VOIGT SCIENCE HALL

The future of
academic success is
transforming on pg. 5

THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

How 57 years of
giving is making an
impact on pg. 24

Fall 2026 Edition



A ONE MCKENDREE GIVING DAY TO REMEMBER

Thank You for Raising the Roar!

February is often nicknamed the "love month," symbolizing the importance of expressing appreciation and gratitude. Love for Bearcat pride certainly filled the air this past February as the McKendree community celebrated the university's fourth annual Founders Week. Held Feb. 16-20, Founders Week marked McKendree's 198th anniversary, celebrating the legacy built since 1828 and the people who continue to shape the university's future through generosity, pride and connection.

During Founders Week, One McKendree Giving Day was a great success. The McKendree community broke records, rallying to raise \$673,000 through more than 640 generous gifts. This year's Giving Day success surpassed last year's record-breaking \$524,000 total. These contributions will further support several funds and programs essential to advancing the university's mission and empowering its students, including the Annual Fund, athletics, the Bearcat Pantry, the Hett, the Lair and other essential campus goals.

"Surpassing last year's record is a testament to the momentum and pride within the McKendree community," said Vice President for Institutional Advancement Stephen Kull. "The One McKendree Giving Day continues to grow each year, and this level of engagement reinforces the confidence our supporters have in the direction and impact of the university. As this tradition strengthens, the involvement of our alumni and friends remains essential to sustaining this impact and ensuring McKendree's success for generations to come."

In honor of the university's founding year, One McKendree Giving Day, held Feb. 18-19, lasted 1,828 minutes, symbolizing

McKendree's enduring legacy since 1828. This year, Bearcats were challenged to "Raise the Roar" and show support for the university. Throughout Founders Week, the McKendree community participated in activities celebrating the power of giving and community engagement through fun, meaningful experiences. Activities included the Dollars for Donuts giving campaign, a campus-wide Day of Gratitude and McKendree's 198th birthday celebration in Ames Dining Hall, bringing the Bearcat community together to reflect and celebrate. Founders Week also featured storytelling signage displayed across campus, sharing the history of McKendree's philanthropy and illustrating how outside support has transformed the campus, enriched the student experience and strengthened the McKendree community.

The success of One McKendree Giving Day emphasizes the profound dedication and spirit of giving within the McKendree community, solidifying its reputation as a leader in higher education. This year's sponsors included Rent One Home Furnishings, RNR Tire Express, Great Expectations Foundation, Holland Construction Services, Impact Marketplace, President **Dan Dobbins '81** and **Mickey Dobbins '81**, **Jim Forrler '65**, the McKendree University Board of Trustees and the McKendree University Alumni Association Board of Directors.

Save the Date! Founders Week 2027 will be held **February 15-19, 2027**. Join us as we celebrate McKendree's history, honor the power of philanthropy and come together to make an impact for future Bearcats. To learn more or get involved, contact **Holly Sallee, Director of Annual Philanthropy & Alumni Engagement**, at hesallee@mckendree.edu.



What's Inside

5 **Feature** | Voigt Science Hall

10 **Commencement**

17 **Feature** | Hooked into Bass Fishing

18 **Bearcats Unleashed**

22 **Alumni Class Notes**

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A Message from President Dobbins



Dear campus community, alumni, and friends of McKendree,

As I look back on the past several months, I am struck by just how much momentum McKendree continues to build. This is a university that keeps proving, year after year, that a small institution founded in 1828 can still be doing some of its best work nearly two centuries later. I am grateful to be part of it, and even more grateful for the alumni, faculty, staff, and friends who make it possible.

One of the highlights of this past year was the Grand Re-Opening of Voigt Science Hall on May 1. What began as a vision several years ago is now a fully realized, state-of-the-art home for our sciences, complete with collaborative learning spaces and modern labs that will shape the education of Bearcats for generations to come. Seeing donors, faculty, and students gather together to celebrate that building was a powerful reminder of what this community can accomplish when we work toward something together.

I am also pleased to share that McKendree continues to break enrollment records, even as many institutions across the country struggle to stabilize their numbers. We seem to have missed the memo about higher education being in decline. This growth is not happening by chance. We are deliberately positioning our programs to meet the evolving needs of employers across our region, ensuring that a McKendree education translates directly into the skills and opportunities our graduates need to succeed close to home and beyond.

Looking ahead, we are entering an especially exciting chapter. With our Bicentennial now less than two years away, we have

begun laying the groundwork for a celebration worthy of 200 years of history, not bad for an institution that started before the invention of the light bulb. Behind the scenes, we are already working toward meaningful investments in our campus facilities and resources, ensuring that the McKendree experience continues to be an exceptional one for every generation of Bearcats still to come. There is a great deal happening right now, and I promise you will hear much more about it in the months ahead.

None of this happens without you. Whether it's a gift, a visit to campus, a conversation with a prospective student in your community, or simply staying connected through this magazine, your engagement is what keeps McKendree strong. I hope you'll consider joining us for Homecoming & Family Weekend this fall or stopping by campus anytime it's convenient for you. And if we're hosting an event in your area, I would love to see you there. These moments of connection, big and small, are what keep the Bearcat spirit alive well beyond graduation.

As we count down to our Bicentennial, I have never been more confident in where McKendree is headed. Thank you for being part of this story, and for all you continue to do to help write its next chapter.

It is through your support and efforts, and the support and efforts of many others, that I remain proud to be a Bearcat!

Daniel C. Dobbins '81
President | McKendree University



Voigt Science Hall: The Future of Academic Success

The scientific method behind Voigt Science Hall began with an observation: What can be done to enhance McKendree University's academic building dedicated to science education? Now, with all the extensive research and experiments completed, the results turned out far better than imagined.

AN EVOLVING RENOVATION

In 1965, McKendree University established Voigt Science Hall as a dedicated building for studying all kinds of science on campus. The new building became home to students who braved experiments in the labs and took courses to broaden their knowledge of science.

Decades later, science has evolved, and labs have changed with the addition of new technology. Yet some of Voigt Science Hall's features were still tied to the past. To better enhance students' experience and focus on learning science, Voigt Science Hall needed to change.

Thanks to generous monetary gifts from McKendree University donors, caution tape and orange cones decorated the science building in 2023, signifying the start of a new chapter for Voigt Science Hall.

"We decided to do a complete renovation of the building... everything from the roof to all the way down," Director of Operations Daryl Hancock said.

From 2023 to 2026, donors, the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff and students came together to provide feedback on the \$13-million renovation project. Architects and designers for the renovation valued input from the McKendree community on the building's design.

"We put out sample furnishings at Ames, and students got to vote on them," Hancock said. "They got to see a bunch of chairs and tables and vote on what they liked best. We collected all [those votes], and so they helped choose the interior of the building."

At every faculty meeting, the Voigt Science Hall renovation team provided consistent updates on the project. They especially sought feedback from faculty who would later teach in the renovated science building. Through architect- and designer-led conversations, faculty became integral to the building's final design.

"We made them all part of the process throughout," Hancock said. "We went through every space and asked them, 'What do you want?' As a result, you got what the faculty wanted. It was a very collaborative process between the faculty and the teams."

ON THE ROAD TO COMPLETION

Throughout this renovation, students still had courses they could only take at Voigt Science Hall. As the renovation intensified with more extensive repair and remodeling projects, Hancock and the construction team faced a challenge: students had to take their classes at Voigt Science Hall because there was nowhere else to move scientific equipment or conduct lab work.

"We had to completely renovate the building while we were using the building," Hancock said. "That's tough for a full renovation."

To solve this challenge, the construction team split the building in half; for one year, they would work on one side while faculty taught on the other. In the following summer, the team would swap sides, and so would faculty and students.

One of the most important parts of the project was installing an elevator in the building. Constructing the elevator itself was a challenge. Hancock said it was like "building a separate building attached to the building." The elevator required its own foundation, and the team worked beneath the building to make the installation as smooth as possible.

In addition to the elevator, the parking lot at the north end of the building and Cassens Plaza are new additions to Voigt Science Hall. Named in honor of the late Allen Cassens and his wife, current McKendree trustee Dr. Linda Cassens, prominent donors to the Voigt Science Hall renovation, Cassens Plaza serves as the building's main entrance. Hancock said he had McKendree's Quad in mind when he presented his concept for the plaza to the design team.

"One of the most attractive things about our campus is the Quad," Hancock said. "So, we wanted something that, even if you're not taking classes in Voigt Science Hall, everybody that goes to the main campus, onto the Quad, will look up to the highest point and see our new science building, and the plaza will draw them in."

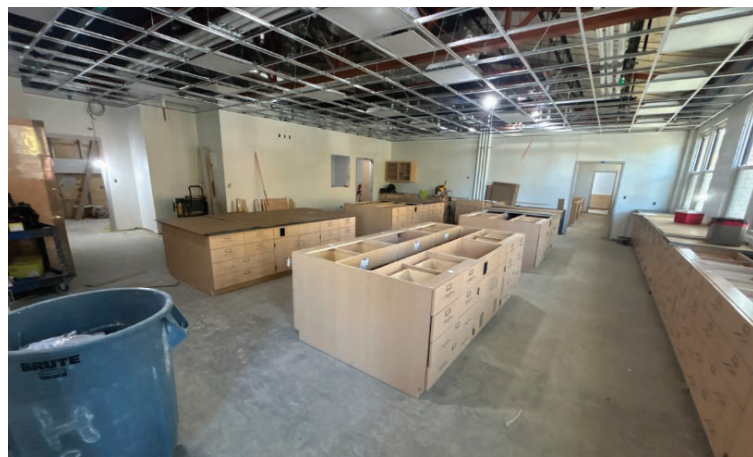
After several years of planning and three years of updating laboratories, completing furnishings and painting the walls a bright white and McKendree purple, Voigt Science Hall's renovation was complete, and the dramatic transformation was now ready for an audience of donors to see up close.

CELEBRATING A NEW VOIGT SCIENCE HALL

On a bright, sunny May evening, Cassens Plaza's atmosphere was rich with McKendree pride and excitement for the special unveiling of the newly renovated Voigt Science Hall. Team members behind the major renovation, William McKendree Society members and the Alumni and Development team spent the evening of Friday, May 1, for a special spring event: "2026 William McKendree Society Spring Celebration: A Special Re-Opening of Voigt Science Hall."

Holly Sallee '18, director of Annual Philanthropy & Alumni Engagement, and the Development team host an annual spring celebration for the William McKendree Society, a group consisting of McKendree University's most dedicated supporters. She said the celebration is a way to thank donors for giving back to the university each year. With Voigt Science Hall's renovation completed in early spring, the Development team came up with the idea of unveiling the building during this year's spring celebration.

"Since we had this special opportunity to show off a newly renovated space, we thought we would mesh the two events together and give our most engaged supporters the first look at the new building," Sallee said. "They supported the renovation, so it made perfect sense for this group to be the first ones to see it."





The evening began with refreshments and socializing on Cassens Plaza, followed by speeches from Vice President for Institutional Advancement Stephen Kull and President **Dan Dobbins '81**, who honored the key individuals involved in Voigt Science Hall's renovation and thanked William McKendree Society members for supporting the future of student academics.

After a special ribbon-cutting outside the building, the big moment was finally here: Voigt Science Hall's re-opening. These donors' generosity opened the doors to a Voigt Science Hall renovation opportunity, and now those doors were a reality as they entered the building.

From the bright walls to the large classrooms and labs, Voigt Science Hall's past appearance was unrecognizable. During the group's tour, the Development team marked each new spot in the science building as an opportunity for donor recognition moments. At each tour stop, the Development team recognized one or more donors for their generosity with ribbon-cuttings for spaces named after them.

Present for these ribbon-cuttings was Dr. Robb Van Putte, a biology professor, who took pride in the named plaque by his office door. His office was named in honor of Mary Marchal, who worked as an assistant to former McKendree President James Dennis and shaped Van Putte's experience at McKendree early in his career.

"To have my office named in honor of Mary Marchal was really cool," Van Putte said. "When I was first here, Mary was a really integral part of my experience at McKendree. She was on the administrative side. I thought it was pretty cool that that connection got made."

Van Putte and other professors played an important role during the special re-opening. After the tour, donors had the chance to become students and participate in four assigned classroom sessions. Some of these "students" sat through a presentation on Voigt Science Hall's renovation process, learned about the science behind fireworks' colors, looked at slides under a microscope and solved a "whodunit" exercise by using DNA to find who committed the crime. However, when Van Putte led the "whodunit" exercise, he recalled most of the donors' attention gravitated toward his students, **Giada Macchiaverna '26** and **MaryAnn Romagna '26**. The two students presented their research on the gut microbiome and its role in health. Van Putte did not mind the shift in attention, as he found it essential for donors to see the success of McKendree academics up close.

"I think that's where the spotlight should be, on our students and what they're doing, and how they're excited to be doing science," Van Putte said. "In the end, it doesn't really matter what they achieve; it's just that they've had that experience. As a donor, to know that you're making those opportunities possible for students, I think is where the real joy of giving comes in."

Van Putte's observation became one of the evening's most significant moments. As donors took photos at a science-themed balloon banner and marveled at how far the Voigt Science Hall renovation has come, they often found themselves in conversation with the student ambassadors who assisted with the spring celebration.

"It's always neat to see students interact with donors," Sallee said. "[The donors] get so much more out of feeling fulfilled after giving their own hard-earned money toward an institution when they see students."

Not only did William McKendree Society members see the impact of their giving on Voigt Science Hall, but they also met the students who embody the meaning behind giving back to McKendree University and how their annual contributions will pave the way to academic success.

THE FUTURE OF STUDENT RESEARCH

Academic success starts in the classroom, or, in the case of science majors, in the lab. Thanks to these donors' belief in the future of McKendree academics, it did not take long for Voigt Science Hall's new appearance to inspire students to return to the lab and put their skills to work through McKendree's summer research program.

Under Van Putte's guidance, biology majors Austin Downing, a

junior, and Cai Leonard, a senior, spent this summer in the lab, turning their questions and observations into experiments and advancing their research skills.

During the eight-week summer research program, Leonard studied bacterial biofilms by testing whether extracts from algae could affect biofilm growth. If the experiment showed effects, Leonard could run additional tests to determine whether these extracts contain therapeutic components beneficial to humankind.

Downing's research focused on lactose intolerance. He tested existing methods to genetically rescue a mutant strain of *E. coli* unable to break down lactose. His project will eventually become a series of labs Van Putte plans to present in his genetics class.

Both Downing and Leonard credit Van Putte for helping them come up with ideas for their summer research.

"[Van Putte and I] finally settled on biofilm, which I didn't really know too much about, but as I've done research, there's not a lot of research on it, so I'm actually surprised with what we have right now," Leonard said.

Van Putte worked with Downing and Leonard throughout the course, providing guidance and support. The one-on-one learning experience was one of the reasons Downing enrolled in McKendree's summer research program.

"The professors are teaching us the correct way of doing things," Downing said. "[Like,] how you brainstorm if something goes wrong, how to work around things... I feel like that's huge."

Leonard said working on his summer research will enhance his educational experience in the lab this academic year.

"When I used to be in the lab, I didn't really know how to use too much," Leonard said, "but being in research, you can learn how to use the equipment effectively. I [told] Austin that we'll go back to classes as experts."

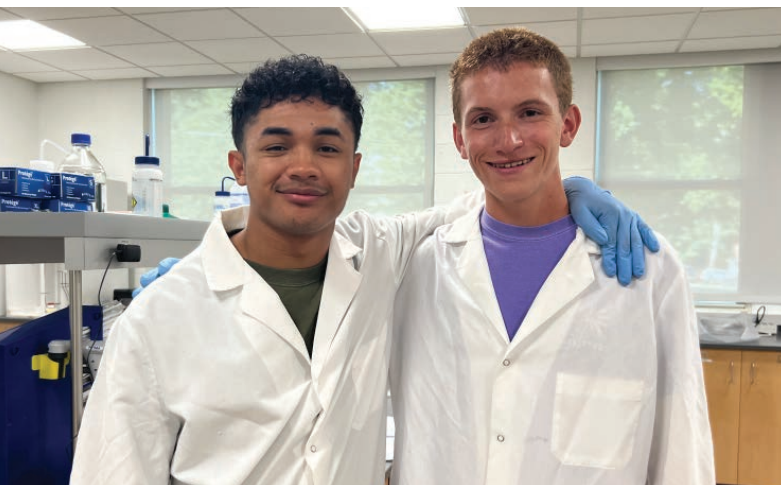
Downing and Leonard are also among the first students to study in the newly renovated Voigt Science Hall. With the renovation still in its final stages during the spring semester, the 2026-27 academic year will be their first full year in the science building. Through their summer research, they observed positive differences between the previous and current Voigt Science Hall.

"Everything is organized here," Downing said. "You can find [things] without having somebody show you."

Leonard said the new labs will benefit students across campus.

"There's more room in labs," Leonard said. "I've never seen some of this equipment before, so I think that'll be really good for other students to go over here and do something they won't be able to do somewhere else."

As Downing and Leonard uncover more in their research and reach new conclusions, Van Putte is eager to see how they progress in the lab.



INVEST IN WHAT ENDURES: JOIN THE WILLIAM MCKENDREE SOCIETY

For nearly two centuries, McKendree University has transformed lives through the generosity of those who believe in the power of education. Every scholarship awarded, every opportunity created and every student whose future is forever changed is made possible because alumni, parents, faculty, staff and friends choose to invest in the next generation of Bearcats.

The **William McKendree Society** recognizes those whose annual leadership gifts demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to the university's mission. Named for Bishop William McKendree, whose vision inspired the founding of the university in 1828, Society members help ensure McKendree continues to provide an exceptional educational experience while preparing students for leadership, service and success in an ever-changing world.

The strength of the William McKendree Society lies in its support of McKendree's greatest needs. Leadership gifts provide flexible, unrestricted funding that allows the university to respond quickly to emerging opportunities, invest in innovative programs, enhance the student experience and ensure today's Bearcats have the resources they need to thrive. In appreciation of their generosity, members also enjoy exclusive benefits, including priority communications, e-newsletters, a holiday gift, invitations to special events like the Homecoming & Family Weekend President's Breakfast, recognition opportunities and more.

William McKendree Society Membership Levels

- **University Ambassador** – Annual gifts of **\$1,828+**
- **University Partner** – Annual gifts of **\$5,000+**
- **President's Circle** – Annual gifts of **\$10,000+**
- **Founders' Circle** – Annual gifts of **\$25,000+**

McKendree's fiscal year runs from **July 1 through June 30**, and membership is renewed annually through qualifying gifts. Faculty and staff may join the Society with annual gifts of **\$1,000 or more**.

Leadership Giving for Recent Alumni

Your first years after graduation are the perfect time to begin building your philanthropic legacy. Recent graduates can become members through special giving levels designed to make leadership giving accessible while establishing a lifelong tradition of generosity.

- **0-5 years after graduation:** \$18.28 per month
- **5-10 years after graduation:** \$42 per month
- **10-15 years after graduation:** \$84 per month

Every leadership gift—regardless of level—helps open doors for future students and strengthens the McKendree experience for generations to come.



Ready to make a lasting impact?

Visit mckendree.edu/wms or scan the QR code to learn more about membership, explore the impact of your gift and join the William McKendree Society today.



Interested? Let's chat!

Contact **Holly Sallee, Director of Annual Philanthropy & Alumni Engagement**, at hesallee@mckendree.edu or **618-537-6824**.

"They're both still learning, but they've picked things up pretty quickly, and they both have done a really good job," Van Putte said.

Students can also pick up research projects in the fall and spring semesters, but Van Putte said one benefit of choosing to research over the summer is having more time to focus. He encourages students to start research projects whenever they can, but if a student wants to study without worrying about other classes, summer research is a good choice.

"A summer research experience is valuable," Van Putte said. "Students get a lot more out of it, and so I always encourage a student to do summer research if they can."

A NEW CHAPTER AWAITS

The origins of Voigt Science Hall and its now-completed renovation began with one goal: to improve the future of innovation and science education for Bearcats. As the fall semester ramps up, students from all majors will fill classrooms and labs named in honor of donors who believed in enhancing students' lives. Years will pass, and new Bearcats will no longer know Voigt Science Hall's previous appearance firsthand, but everyone involved in its renovation will remember what it took to make the science building look refreshed and exciting again.

Hancock said what he will remember most about the project is all the people who came together to work on the renovation.

"It was a very collaborative project," Hancock said. "We talked with all of the stakeholders on campus, the Board of Trustees, the donors, the students and the faculty. We made them all part of the process. They all wanted to be part of it, and I think that's what led to a big success."

Through generous support from loyal donors and collaboration with the McKendree community, Voigt Science Hall's renovation represents what giving back and Bearcat pride can accomplish for the university.

"Those two years went by fast, and now that we have the whole building and we have more classrooms, it's really going to be great for the whole campus," Van Putte said. "It's just a great thing all around."

The best way to get to know the newly renovated Voigt Science Hall and our campus is to come see for yourself! Schedule your campus visit now by contacting McKendree's Alumni and Development department at alumni@mckendree.edu.



FACULTY & STUDENT SUCCESS

At the 2026 Spring Commencement, Dr. Katie Alford won this year's William Norman Grandy Award, with **MaryAnn Romagna '26** winning the Technos International Prize. Earlier this year, Dr. Michael Hahn won the United Methodist Exemplary Teacher of the Year Award.



COMMENCEMENT 2026

On a beautiful day, on the campus's front lawn, students beamed in their caps and gowns, awaiting what they had worked toward for years: Commencement. On Friday, May 8, more than 800 Bearcats graduated from McKendree University. Check out the stats we've gathered from the Spring 2026 Commencement, and take in the McKendree pride by looking through pictures from the day!



Scan this QR code to browse through more pictures from our three ceremonies!





861
NUMBER OF
GRADUATES

***Number of graduates may be double-counted if they earned two degrees



26
STATES



26
COUNTRIES



STATS:

- 521** NUMBER OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES
- 309** NUMBER OF MASTER'S DEGREES
- 16** NUMBER OF SPECIALIST DEGREES
- 15** NUMBER OF DOCTORAL DEGREES
- 71** NUMBER OF SUMMA CUM LAUDE HONORS
- 105** NUMBER OF MAGNA CUM LAUDE HONORS
- 50** NUMBER OF CUM LAUDE HONORS
- 11** NUMBER OF HONORS PROGRAM MEMBERS



Academic Excellence Celebration 2026

Learning beyond the classroom walls

April 23 was not a typical Thursday at McKendree University; honor society inductions, presentations, posters and performances covering a diverse range of unique and impressive topics took center stage at McKendree's annual Academic Excellence Celebration (AEC). During this celebration of academic success, classes were replaced with a variety of AEC events for students to attend. AEC is the highlight of the academic year, offering students an immersive opportunity to learn not only from their own studies but also from other students' scholarly work.



MARY JANE KING TAKES THE CAKE!

One word to describe the Bearcat experience is “sweet.” *Literally!*

You may have eaten an Ames chocolate chip cookie bar or two in the dining hall. The taste of those soft cookie bars makes you think, for just a second, you are back at home snagging a bite of chocolate chip cookie dough from the bowl.

The taste and look of these cozy cookie bars, well-decorated cakes and delectable treats make an impact on every Bearcat's experience. For those mouth-watering moments, you can thank the talented baker, cake decorator and loyal Oak Ridge Boys fan Mary Jane King.

“I attend to detail and perfection on each and every cake, decorated or not,” said King.

This love for cake decoration stems from her childhood and teenage years in Missouri, where she would pore over baking and cut-up cake ideas in magazines. However, the cake decorating featured in these magazines would not become a reality for King until years later during a difficult time in the U.S.

A year into their marriage, King's husband enlisted in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. After several moves for training and schooling, King and her husband settled in Hawaii. He repaired helicopters as part of his Military Occupational Specialty, and King transferred her civil service work as a secretary to the U.S. Army.

Weekly, a sergeant would bring in and raffle off his wife's unique, decorated cakes in the office. Intrigued, King enrolled in the same cake-decorating class the sergeant's wife was taking and learned techniques ranging from basic to professional styles. Little did she know, though, King would go from being a student to leading the cake-decorating course in only a few months.

“I had just finished the cake-decorating course when the instructor had to move out of state and asked me to take over teaching for her,” King said.

From there, King took on the role of “teacher.” Even after moving back to Missouri, the teaching did not stop. For 10 years in St. Louis, she taught wedding cake and advanced courses through an adult education program for several school districts and retail stores. During this time, King said a person had asked her to decorate their daughter's wedding cake. After this request, word-of-mouth about her talent spread, and the orders for her desserts kept flooding in, even to this day.

“I have never advertised, not one time, ever,” King said.

King's journey to bring her talent to higher education began at Washington University in St. Louis. Her decorating took the spotlight on local television news with her ginormous cake for former Washington University chancellor William H. Danforth's birthday and



retirement. The cake, which was 30 full sheet cakes on two 8-foot and two 6-foot cafeteria tables, was decorated in the bakery and then transported to a truck for an outdoor venue.

This huge cake was just the beginning of King's trail of unique novelty cakes. Years later, she brought her decorating and baking skills to McKendree University, and soon people came to know the look and taste of her large vanilla and chocolate cakes.

King said each of the cakes she makes is a “personal challenge.”

“I enjoy inserting my own creativity in the design and execution,” she said. “I like the ‘wow’ factor whenever possible. I strive for ultimate happiness of the customer and guests.”

King is also known for making the opposite of a massive cake: her “petits fours.”

“My petits fours are little moist cakes dipped in chocolate,” she said. “I literally make thousands of them a year.”

However, “petite” won't describe what King has planned for McKendree's bicentennial on Feb. 20, 2028. Another enormous cake will return, and King is planning a one-of-a-kind design for the university. (We won't spoil the details!)

From reading magazines about the craft to being published in them, King's “Cake Lady” title is well-earned. Another title she goes by also holds pride for King; it's a special title the Oak Ridge Boys themselves have given her.

“I've been to 575 of their concerts in 45 years,” King, the dedicated fan, said. “I actually have my name in [William Lee Golden's] autobiography. I bring them petits fours to every concert, and they call me the ‘Petit Four Lady.’”

Even though she is 81, King said she has no plans to retire.

“I always say I get paid to play,” she said. “Work is when I have to wash windows at home. I love what I do, and I am grateful I still have the ability and energy to do it.”

Shine On BEARCATS

HOMEcoming & FAMILY WEEKEND

OCTOBER 9-11, 2026

Join us for Homecoming & Family Weekend as we celebrate the people who make McKendree University shine—our students, alumni, faculty, staff, families and friends.

Come home to reconnect with classmates, cheer on the Bearcats, relive your favorite traditions and make new ones with the people who make McKendree feel like home.

Whether it's your first trip back in years or your annual Homecoming tradition, there's no better place to be than back on campus with your Bearcat family. Come celebrate, reconnect and help keep the Bearcat tradition shining bright.

SHINE ON, BEARCATS!

2026 Homecoming & Family Weekend Schedule of Events

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9TH

6:30 p.m. – 9 p.m. | "A Night to Shine" Alumni Awards Ceremony

@ the Hett on Main Campus

\$25 Tickets / Children 5 and under free

Join us as we shine the spotlight on the Bearcats whose accomplishments continue to inspire our university community. Celebrate this year's Alumni Award recipients during a special evening featuring a cocktail hour at 6:30 p.m., awards ceremony at 7:30 p.m. and dessert reception to follow.

Honoring:

Rising Stars: Taylor Dubose-Harris '17, Brad Groleau '17 and Chase Meier '19

Academy of Excellence:

- **Business:** Martin Duhour '96
- **Community Service:** Lyle Rakers '99
- **Nursing & Health Professions:** Brett Haake '01
- **Social Sciences:** Sarah (Goetze) Anderson '17, '19

Loyal Service: Matthew Olmsted '01

Peter Akers Award: Gerald (Jerry) Cornell '74 and Sharon Cornell

Special Recognition: Former McKendree University President Dr. James M. Dennis will be inducted into the McKendree University Sports Hall of Fame during the ceremony.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10TH

7 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. | Rise & Shine 5K & Kids' Dash

@ Main Campus & Downtown Historic Lebanon

Kick off Homecoming & Family Weekend with a fun run through McKendree's campus and historic downtown Lebanon—perfect for runners, walkers and future Bearcats alike.

\$35 5K / \$20 McKendree Students / \$15 Kids' Dash

Early bird discount available before Sept. 10th with PROMO CODE: EARLYBIRD Race by Final Lap Racing

8:30 a.m. – 10 a.m. | President's Breakfast

(Invitation Only – William McKendree Society & Golden Anniversary Alumni)

@ Ames Dining Hall on Main Campus

President Dan '81 & Mickey Dobbins '81 welcome William McKendree Society members, whose lasting legacy helps McKendree shine on, while honoring the Class of 1976 as our special Golden Anniversary guests. Invitation only.

9 a.m. – 1 p.m. | Craft & Vendor Fair

@ Main Campus Circle Drive on Main Campus

See local talent shine! Browse unique goods from local businesses and alumni vendors. Interested in becoming a vendor? Sign up today!

9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. | Men's & Women's Basketball Purple & White Scrimmage

@ Melvin Price Convocation Center on Main Campus

Men's and women's basketball alumni and supporters are invited back to campus to reconnect with teammates and watch the current Bearcat teams scrimmage!

10 a.m. – 1 p.m. | Alumni Welcome Tent & Tailgating Party

@ Main Parking Lot/Inspiration Statue/Campus Quad on Main Campus

Stop by the Alumni Welcome Tent to check in, pick up your Homecoming swag, reconnect with friends, find your reunion and enjoy food, music and family fun!

Featuring Travelin' Tom's Coffee Truck, Twist & Bounce Inflatables and a **Glitter Bar**—because every Bearcat deserves to **Shine On!** Follow the Alumni Association on social media for featured food trucks and affinity reunion tailgates.

Tailgating Space Rental: \$20 (reserve online at mckbearcats.com or pay at the gate; first come, first served).

Want to host your reunion? Contact alumni@mckendree.edu.

11 a.m. | Dedication of the James M. Dennis Plaza

@ Entryway Monument

Join us as we dedicate the James M. Dennis Plaza in honor of former university president Dr. James M. Dennis and his 26 years of leadership.

11:30 a.m. | Wrestling Alumni Duals

@ McKendree's Sports Performance and Wrestling Center

Men's Wrestling alumni are invited back to campus for a day of activities with fellow wrestling alumni and current members of the Bearcat wrestling family, highlighted by the annual Alumni Duals.

1 p.m. | Football Game: McKendree University vs. Southwest Baptist

@ Leemon Field on Main Campus

Tickets: \$10; children 5 and under are free. Purchase at mckbearcats.com or the Leemon Field Box Office. Alumni: Pick up your game ticket discount coupon at the Alumni Welcome Tent!

1 p.m. | President's Tent (Invitation Only)

@ End Zone of Leemon Field on Main Campus

An exclusive game-day gathering honoring William McKendree Society members, MVP Athletics Booster Club members and this year's Alumni Award recipients. Visit mckendree.edu/give to learn more.

1 p.m. | Golden Anniversary Tent | Class of 1976

@ End Zone of Leemon Field on Main Campus

The Class of 1976 is celebrating 50 years of Bearcat memories during this special Homecoming reunion. A game-day exclusive tent will be hosted in honor of our golden graduates!

4 p.m. – 6 p.m. | "Spark the Memories" All Greek Alumni Reunion

@ Alumni Center (Former Locust Hills Golf Course) 1015 Belleville St.

Welcome all fraternity and sorority alumni back for a special event for all Greek alumni during Homecoming & Family Weekend!

7:30 p.m. | ABBA Mania (Homecoming Show)

@ the Hett on Main Campus

Back by popular demand! ABBA Mania Canada returns with an unforgettable tribute featuring ABBA's greatest hits. Don't miss this Homecoming favorite!

FRIENDS: \$48.00 Adult / \$44.00 Senior / \$24.00 Youth

PUBLIC: \$60.00 Adult / \$55.00 Senior / \$30.00 Youth

Generously sponsored by Mrs. Lynn Cornell & the late Brig. General David Cornell, USAF, Ret., Mr. Gerald Cornell '74 & Mrs. Sharon Cornell and Mr. Frank Wojcik & Mrs. Judith Wojcik '70.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11TH

10 a.m. | Homecoming Memorial Chapel Service

@ Bothwell Chapel on Main Campus

Join us as we remember the alumni and friends we've lost over the past year. Together, we'll honor their lasting legacies by ringing the Bothwell Chapel bell and welcoming their families back to campus.

11 a.m. – 1 p.m. | Bearcat Brunch

@ Ames Dining Hall on Main Campus

\$10 per person. Pay at the door.

*** Campus tours available all weekend and can be scheduled upon request. ***



Come Home. Shine On.

Scan for event details, registration and everything you need for an unforgettable Homecoming weekend.

McKendree.edu/Homecoming

Questions?

Contact McKendree University's Office of Development and Alumni at alumni@mckendree.edu or 618-537-6824.



5 Minutes with a McKendreean

Scott Billhartz

Celebrating 25 years with McKendree

*Once you step into the title of “McKendree alum” after graduation, you may wonder sometimes about what your alma mater is up to and how your former classmates are gliding through post-grad life. **Scott Billhartz ’85**, senior director of Advancement Services & Stewardship, makes sure those questions are answered by not only sending consistent updates but also giving alumni opportunities to connect with each other outside of McKendree University.*

How did your McKendree University journey begin?

I decided to attend McKendree as [a] student back in the early 1980s. It was kind of a different time back then, as high school grads in this area tended to stay closer to home. I was from New Baden, so it was the logical choice to attend McKendree. My family had a history with the college, as well, as I had two uncles and an aunt who were McKendree alumni. I had a good friend from high school (**Scott Gabler ’85**) who also attended, so we carpooled together the first two years as we had similar class schedules.

Following my graduation in 1985, I worked in the corporate world in accounting and information technology for 16 years, mostly at Southwestern Bell Telephone (now AT&T) and Illinois American Water. Both of my positions in these companies were relocating, and I was not in a position to move at that time. The Alumni and Development Office was in the process of converting computer systems, and I had experience in this process from several corporate computer conversions I had managed. I will always be grateful to former Vice President for Development Victoria Dowling for hiring me and giving me the chance to work at my alma mater.

Why have you chosen to serve McKendree University all these years?

It may sound trite, but the reason I have chosen to make McKendree “my daytime home” is because of the people that I have had a chance to work with and the alumni and friends that I have had the opportunity to get to know and learn of their McKendree stories.

You are a McKendree University alum who works and helps with alumni. What does this “full circle” moment mean to you?

McKendree has so many interesting people, and they all have a story to tell. This has been intriguing to me during my career. I would have to say my favorite alumnus that I stewarded was **Dr. Cyril Curtis ’43**. Cyril was a brilliantly talented person. He was a physicist by profession, as he assisted in the Manhattan Project testing during World War II and with proton testing in cancer research. However, he was also an accomplished pianist. I got to know him later in life, and I so enjoyed my trips to his home in Albion, Illinois, to visit him.

What would our readers be surprised to know about you?

I like to travel, but I prefer driving trips to airline travel. I always like to experience the unplanned side adventures that occur on these journeys. In terms of really surprising things, I have collected baseball cards since the 1970s.

Do you have a favorite item you keep around in your office?

Actually, I have two items of importance in my office. The first is a hand-drawn cross-stitch of Bothwell Chapel that an alumna, **Wilma Kennedy ’42**, created for me. She did not have a pattern but drew a replica of the Chapel and then cross-stitched the design. It is a treasure of mine. The second is a signed baseball from the 1984 McKendree baseball team that was given to former McKendree trustee Pete Smith. The family gave me the ball following Pete’s passing, and it is a reminder of my time as a student at McKendree.

What is the best Cardinals game you have ever watched?

I’m definitely a diehard St. Louis Cardinals fan and have been since the early 1970s. I always like to say one of my favorite Cardinals games was the 1985 NLCS, where Jack Clark hit the game-winning home run in Dodger Stadium to send the Cardinals to the World Series. However, the best game I’ve watched has to be Game 6 of the 2011 World Series with David Freese’s walk-off home run to send it to Game 7, where the Cardinals won the series.

HOOKED INTO BASS FISHING

How taking a leap into new waters introduced **Harmon Marien '25** to impressive opportunities.



Fishing rods and early mornings at the lake interested McKendree University alum **Harmon Marien '25** from a young age. When thinking about what hooked him into fishing in the first place, Marien credited both of his grandpas.

“They both just loved fishing for whatever would bite,” Marien said.

However, on these early morning fishing trips, Marien searched for one fish in particular: bass.

“I, naturally, was attracted to bass,” Marien said. “There’s no other freshwater species that fights like a bass, and I think that’s why I was so infatuated with them.”

Then, once he watched professional anglers catch these rowdy bass on TV, Marien wanted nothing else but to immerse himself in the world of competitive fishing.

“I started tournament fishing after watching the sport on TV with my dad on the weekends,” Marien said. “Both of my parents are super competitive, and I came by that naturally. Combining the two seemed inevitable, and once I fished my first tournament, I was completely hooked.”

When it came time to explore his higher education options, a visit to McKendree University reeled him into the reality of fishing for a university team.

“I came across McKendree solely because of the bass fishing team,” Marien said. “Once I visited the campus, talked to Coach Jon and his wife, Carla, and met some of the guys on the team, I fell in love with the school. I loved the small-town feel of the campus and was honored to be a part of the bass fishing program.”

Jon Rinderer, head coach of the bass fishing team, watches bass anglers fresh out of high school grow each year in a new university environment. He challenges his new bass anglers to work and improve upon the skills they learned in a high school environment.

“Our freshmen anglers come into the program fresh out of high school fishing, and there is absolutely no comparison between high school and

college,” Rinderer said. “Being a successful tournament angler requires incredible preparation, skill set, attention to detail and time management. In order to consistently be at the top of the field, our anglers must learn to master so many things.”

Once he left his high school environment, Marien operated on the daily schedule of a university bass fisherman. He described this schedule as not “glamorous, but undoubtedly worth every second.”

From 2020 to 2025, Marien fished in tournaments all around the eastern half of the U.S. Most of his days began at sunrise at the lake, where he and the team would fish until sunset. Some of these sunrises were as early as 4:30 a.m., with sunsets as late as 9 p.m. At the end of the fishing day, the team would refuel the boat with gas, plug it in for the night, re-rig some rods and then it was finally time to eat dinner. By the time he was ready to start on his homework, it was already 10 or 11 p.m. A little later, he would go to bed and start the day all over again right at sunrise.

“It’s not a glamorous lifestyle and surely isn’t what most picture when you tell them you fish in college, but it certainly is the reality we all lived and loved,” Marien said. “All in all, I’d do it all again in a heartbeat.”

Now, since graduating from McKendree University, Marien is a semi-professional bass fisherman, with the ultimate goal of becoming a professional bass fisherman through the Bassmaster Opens and Major League Fishing Toyota Series.

“Seeing them be successful at the [university] level and then move on and fish professionally afterward is both rewarding and just plain fun,” Rinderer said. “Watching them grow and develop into mature adults as well as moving on to fish professionally gives me a great sense of pride knowing our program played a huge role in both.”

From learning about different bodies of water across the country to developing a tournament strategy, Marien said his confidence and knowledge of bass fishing grew with the help of Coach Rinderer and his team.

“McKendree was the absolute perfect fit for me in every way,” Marien said. “I’ll always be thankful for my time as a Bearcat.”

BEARCATS UNLEASHED

NCAA Division II Third-Place Win for McKendree's Men's Wrestling

It was a successful 2025-26 season run for the men's wrestling team. McKendree University men's wrestling took home a third-place team finish on the weekend of March 13 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, at the NCAA Division II National Championships, showing out with an impressive win behind five All-Americans, including two National Champions in 141 Ronan Schuelke and 184 Darion Johnson.

The Bearcats pounced on the competition through their five National Qualifiers, putting four into the semifinals and pushing all five to All-American status in the Friday sessions. Overall, 133 Thaddeus Long, 141 Schuelke, 165 Sam Richardson, 184 Johnson and 197 Logan Kvien collected All-American nods, with Long, Richardson and Johnson all becoming first-time NCAA DII AAs. McKendree's championship matches made the difference in team placement, with Schuelke giving the Bearcats a bump to 71.0 before Johnson's tech fall vaulted his squad into third place at 76.5 Team Points. The Bearcats' third-place finish tied the best at the NCAA Division II level, matching the 2019 placement behind six AAs. The 2025-26 season also included a program first: two individual National Champions in the same campaign, the first time in the NCAA DII era.

Schuelke, who entered the championship unseeded, finished his career in style, taking down the top-seeded, reigning 141 lb champion Johnny Lopez (SFSU) by fall (6:12) to open his weekend. The 141 lb Bearcat then earned two decisions over Kieran Thompson (Adams St.) and fifth-seeded Joseph Airola (Nebraska-Kearney). In the title bout, Schuelke faced the seventh-seeded Khyvon Grace (West Liberty), weathered multiple takedown attempts and took the match into overtime. Schuelke flipped the script in the second round, recording a takedown over Grace to capture the 141 belt. The victory marked

McKendree's first 141 National Champion since 2016 with Darren Wynn, as Schuelke collected his third All-American honor in the process.

Johnson was McKendree's first 184 lb National Champion since 2019. A third-seeded Regional Champion, Johnson had to defeat three seeded opponents to claim the title. He went for every type of win during his championship run, opening with a 14-8 decision over Kyler Pickard of Belmont Abbey before pinning UCO's Branson Britten (6:18). In the semifinals, Johnson took out the second-seeded Keegan Gehlhausen before the redshirt junior toppled fourth-seeded Damon Ashworth, 17-2, for a technical superiority victory in the title bout.

In total, all five Bearcats who traveled to South Dakota to compete earned All-American status, with 197 Kvien and Schuelke each earning their third honor, and 133 Long, 165 Richardson and 184 Johnson each earning their first NCAA Division II honors. The push for all five McKendree qualifiers to reach All-American status led the Bearcats to a third-place finish with 76.5 team points.



McKendree's Women's Wrestling Makes History

Purple reigned on Saturday, March 7, in Coralville, Iowa, as the Bearcats became the first program ever to win an NCAA women's wrestling team championship. McKendree University women's wrestling (16-1, 5-0 GLVC) earned the inaugural NCAA Women's Wrestling Championship with 171 team points, three individual National Champions and 10 All-American finishes, topping second-place University of Iowa (166).

NCAA institutions had previously sponsored women's wrestling, and the sport was part of the NCAA Emerging Sports for Women program beginning in 2020. However, 2026 marked the first year the NCAA conducted an official championship. The milestone was a historic moment not only for McKendree but also for one of the fastest-growing women's sports in collegiate athletics.

McKendree's women's wrestling team put nine in the semifinals before advancing five to the title bouts, with 117 Yu Sakamoto, 131 Cameron Guerin and 207 Tristan Kelly collecting titles in their weight classes. McKendree opened the finals with Kelly's crown at 207, then secured the team title in the 117-pound championship bout as Sakamoto earned her first individual National Championship. 131 Guerin put the icing on the cake with her fifth individual National Championship in the closing battle of the night.

Overall, the Bearcats' All-Americans were 103 Heather Crull (6th), 110 Gabriele Tedesco (3rd), 117 Sakamoto (1st), 124 Shelby Moore (2nd), 131 Guerin (1st), 138 Haylie Jaffe (3rd), 145 Alex Szkotnicki (6th), 160 Savannah Gomez (4th), 180 Destiny Rodriguez (2nd) and 207 Kelly (1st). At the end of the tournament, as voted on by other coaches, Head Coach Alexio Garcia was named National Tournament Coach of the Year.

"It took everybody doing the little things right," said Garcia. "This team believed in the

process, stayed together through every part of the season and earned this moment. To win the first NCAA women's wrestling championship with this group is incredibly special, and I'm proud of the way they competed for each other all weekend."

Guerin capped her career with a fifth individual national championship and an All-American finish, earning four from 2021-2024 before taking a redshirt season and amassing her fifth belt in 2026. Her title run began with a pin (1:01) over Felician's Christina Borgmann before she defeated Kassey Daugherty (Presbyterian) and teched Abigail Mozden (Mount Union). The graduate student's career finale then pitted her against a familiar foe in Alexis Janiak (Aurora), a student she beat in 2023 for her third title, with Guerin coming out on top again behind a 5-5 decision. The Yakima, Washington, native helped the Bearcats capture multiple team titles en route to her individual and program feat with the inaugural Great Lakes Valley Conference Championship and the NCAA Regional Championship in February. Additionally, Guerin

captured the GLVC Wrestler of the Year and First Team All-GLVC nod.

The Bearcats tallied two more individual titles over the weekend, with 207 lb Kelly collecting her second championship and fourth All-American honor and 117 lb Sakamoto earning her first title and second All-American honor. Kelly marked the first individual title of the night as the NCAA Finals matches began at 138 lbs, while Sakamoto's title proved to be the true championship-mark, locking up the team title for McKendree. Kelly's title was, once again, by technical superiority, beating Grand Valley State's Sabrina Nauss, 11-0, marking all four of her match wins coming via tech fall. Sakamoto's title brought every level of excitement; the Tokyo native used all of her skills to hold off an end-of-match flurry by her adversary, resulting in the win for the Bearcat, 4-3, over NCC's Riley Rayome.

All 10 Bearcats tallied double-digit points for their squad, ousting Iowa from the throne by totaling 171.0 team points compared to the Hawkeyes' 166.0 team points.





Pure Magic: McKendree Softball's Season for the Ages

Bearcats win program-record 51 games, finishing as National Runners-Up

The full story of the 2026 McKendree University softball team is difficult to tell. Twenty young women from six states and six colleges came together to accomplish something no major ball-sport team had achieved in McKendree University's 198-year history: play for a National Championship.

Four months before the opportunity arrived, fifth-year Head Coach Heather Tarter brought the Bearcats to Frost Stadium in Chattanooga, Tennessee, the home of the NCAA Division II Women's College World Series. Tarter asked her players if they knew where they were. They knew they were in Chattanooga, but few understood the significance of the field beneath them.

By June, they knew it intimately.

The Postseason Run Begins

McKendree reached the GLVC Tournament Championship before falling twice to Rockhurst, but the loss only set the stage for what followed.

The Bearcats earned the No. 2 seed in the NCAA Midwest Regional and hosted NCAA postseason competition for the first time in program history. Molly Bartz delivered a walk-off single to defeat Rockhurst in the opener before McKendree beat Missouri S&T, 6-3.

Rockhurst forced a decisive championship game, the teams' eighth meeting that season. An emotional home run by Laynee Tapp sparked five unanswered runs, and McKendree won, 9-4, to capture its first NCAA Regional Championship.

One Swing Back to Chattanooga

Next came second-ranked Indianapolis, which entered the Super Regional with 59 victories.

Lauren Harris homered in the first inning of Game One, and Trista Moore added a key two-run triple as McKendree took the series opener. In the finale, the Bearcats trailed 4-3 entering the bottom of the seventh inning.

Sami Huck reached on an infield single, bringing Harris to the plate. After taking the first pitch for a strike, the four-time All-American launched a walk-off two-run home run.

With one swing, Harris sent McKendree back to Chattanooga, delivered the program's first Super Regional Championship and broke its single-season home run record.

Playing for a National Championship

Making its Women's College World Series debut as the sixth seed, McKendree defeated third-seeded North Georgia, 1-0. The Bearcats then defeated Missouri Southern State, 3-2. Against Cal State San Marcos, McKendree erased an early two-run deficit. Bartz drove home the first run, Moore doubled home two more and Harris added a sacrifice fly. Huck held the Cougars scoreless over the final three innings, securing a 4-3 victory.

Then, the Bearcats were playing for a National Championship.

Top-ranked Saint Leo opened the Championship Series with a 4-0 lead, but Myers erased it with a grand slam over the left-field fence. The Lions eventually pulled away for a 15-4 victory.

McKendree battled until the end in Game Two. The Bearcats twice pulled within one run and loaded the bases with an opportunity to tie the game, but Saint Leo held on before adding two seventh-inning runs to win, 5-2.

A Season for the Ages

The final out could not diminish what McKendree had accomplished.

The Bearcats finished 51-17, setting a program record for victories while earning their first NCAA Regional Championship, first Super Regional Championship and first appearance in the National Championship Series.

Twait, Myers, Addie Clark, Moore and Bartz are among the starters expected to return in 2027. Harris will remain with the program as a graduate assistant coach under Tarter.

The season began with a team standing at Frost Stadium without fully understanding where it was; it ended with the Bearcats standing on that same field as the second-best team in the nation.

Celebrating the Cheerleading Squad

MAKING IT TO NATIONALS

From April 8-11, three McKendree cheerleading teams competed at the NCA College Nationals in Daytona Beach, Florida. All three placed in the top three, with two finishing as national champions, marking the program's first two national championship titles since competing in the event.

McKendree's Advanced Large Coed squad for Division II was one of two national champions. They scored 78.77 on the first day, placing second after prelims, counting for 25% of their final score. On day two, they scored 83.67 (75%). Their overall score of 82.44 secured the national crown, beating Montclair State University and Columbus State University.

After winning their division, the Large Coed team competed in the Grand Championships against all other Large Coed division winners, including Weber State University, Texas Tech University, Westcliff University and Trinity Valley Community College.

The squad faced another national champion: the Advanced Small Coed group in Division II. On day one, they scored an 85.68 after prelims (25%), marking the first time ever they sat in first place after day one. They ended day two with an 87.53 output (75%), finishing with a final of 87.07 to clinch the national title. The team surpassed Davenport University and the University of West Florida.

The Small Advanced Coeds also earned a spot in the Grand Championships against the other division winners, including Weber State, Texas Tech, Elmira College and Trinity Valley.

The Bearcats rounded out their time in the Orlando region with their Intermediate Large Coed group in Division II, tallying an 82.79 score on day one after prelims (25%). They scored an 81.30 on day two (75%) for a final score of 81.66, placing second in the division behind only the University of Texas at Tyler and ranking ahead of Millikin University.



MATT COLE '20



A member of McKendree's 25th-anniversary football team, Matt Cole finished his collegiate career with the second-most receiving touchdowns, third-most receiving yards, sixth-most total points scored and eighth-most receptions since the program returned in 1996. Over three seasons, he played for seven NFL teams.

CATY (PONCE) HAPPE '16



Caty (Ponce) Happe shone in basketball and softball. Happe is the 13th member of the 1,000 point club. Her 205 made three-pointers remain at the top of the program record book and also rank fifth-best in scoring (1,533), sixth-best in assists (350) and field goals made (529) and 10th-best in free-throws made (270). She appeared in 117 softball games with a career-best .283 batting average.

COLLEEN LISCHWE MBA '18



The Sports Hall of Fame Committee honored Colleen Lischwe posthumously for her achievements and contributions to McKendree's water polo programs. She accumulated 165 wins as the head men's and women's water polo coach and led the men to the 2018 Mid-Atlantic Water Polo Conference-West championship. She was named CWPA DII Championships Coach of the Year in 2018 and CWPA Midwest Division Coach of the Year in 2017. She was also the only female head coach of a men's NCAA water polo program. Lischwe tragically passed away on Jan. 15, 2025. Her husband, Casey Colgan, accepted her award at the Sports Hall of Fame awards ceremony.

MICHAEL STROBBE '07



While on McKendree's basketball team, Michael Strobbe was one of the nine players in school history to join the 1,000 rebound and point club. He also played 10 seasons of professional basketball in Mexico, playing for the Mexican national team and winning two silver medals at the Caribbean Olympics and the Pan American Games.

JUSTIN TOWNSEND '00



As part of McKendree University's 25th anniversary football team, Justin Townsend averaged 325.4 rushing yards per game (1997) and 40 touchdowns (1999), helping McKendree reach a top-five national ranking and two playoff appearances.

1999 FOOTBALL TEAM

Led by the late Head Coach Carl Poelker, McKendree University's 1999 football team opened their season on an eight-game winning streak and finished with an overall 9-2 record. The team advanced to the first round of the NAIA and finished the season ranked sixth in NAIA rankings. The 1999 MSFA Champion team led the MSFA in rushing yards per game (312.0), scoring (33.5) and rushing defense (129.5).



Alumni Notes

1953

Pearl Spies was recently featured by the *Belleville News-Democrat* for her nearly 70 years of volunteer service with the Memorial Hospital Auxiliary in Belleville, Ill., where the 95-year-old remains the last living founding member and continues to support the organization's annual Book Bazaar.



1972

Roger Aldridge is a composer, qigong practitioner and blog writer in Olney, Md.



1983

Leslie (Carns) Lehman retired from teaching at Coulterville Public School in Coulterville, Ill., after 33 years.

Victor Long is a member of the board of directors of the Bowen Center for the Study of the Family in Washington, D.C.

1988

Chuck Brueggemann received the 2026 St. Louis TITAN 100 Award for the second consecutive year, recognizing the region's top 100 CEOs and C-level executives.

David and Kevin McFarland's annual Christmas card collection will be featured in an upcoming exhibit at the Southwestern Illinois College (SWIC) Schmidt Art Center in Belleville, Ill., celebrating 40 years of creating and sharing their original holiday cards.

1990

Jessica (Joiner) Hasemann retired from Triad High School in Troy, Ill., after a 36-year teaching career. She previously taught at Crossroads School and Edwardsville High School.

1993

Keith Bridges is the head softball coach at Father McGivney Catholic High School in Glen Carbon, Ill.



1999

Rhonda Evans retired as coordinator of counseling services for Godley ISD in Godley, Tex., after more than 20 years in education. Evans continues her private mental health counseling practice in Nashville, Ill.

2000

Justin Townsend was inducted into the Illinois High School Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

2004

Susan Harbaugh was selected as a member of Scott Air Force Base's 2027 Class of Honorary Commanders. Harbaugh is the mayor of Red Bud, Ill.



2005

Tabitha Meador earned the Registered Municipal Clerk (RMC) certification from the Municipal Clerks of Illinois and the Certified Municipal Clerk (CMC) designation from the International Institute of Municipal Clerks.

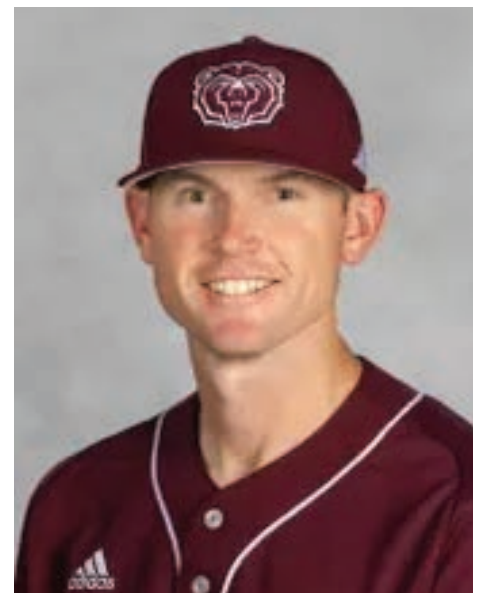
2008

Erin Conner is public administrator and public guardian of Bond, Clinton, St. Clair and Washington counties in Illinois. Conner founded, owns and operates a private law practice, The Conner Law Firm, LLC, in Belleville, Ill.

Katie (Landfried) Crowder is a partner at the law firm Shook, Hardy & Bacon in St. Louis.

2009

Cale Johnson is the pitching coach for Missouri State University's baseball team in Springfield, Mo.



2011

Aaron Fricke is the head football coach for Lincoln Community High School in Lincoln, Ill.

2015

Amanda (Bathon) Pytlinski, MAED '26 is the principal at Damiansville Elementary District #62 in Damiansville, Ill.

2016

Caty (Ponce) Happe is the curriculum coordinator for Edwardsville Community Unit School District 7 in Edwardsville, Ill.

2017

Sarah (Goetze) Anderson, MA '19 was appointed to a four-year term on the Illinois Children's Justice Task Force. She serves as executive director of the Franklin-Williamson Child Advocacy Center.



Brad Groleau received the 2025 Texas League Athletic Trainer of the Year Award for his work with the Northwest Arkansas Naturals, the Double-A affiliate of the Kansas City Royals, his second league-wide athletic training honor.



A.J. Wentland is continuing his football career as a defensive standout for IBM Big Blue in Japan's X League Premier in Tokyo.



2018

Rob Watkins, MBA '20 is the vice president of business strategy for CenterSeat AI in Austin, Tex.

2019

Ashley Fleming was selected for induction into the University of Missouri Athletics Hall of Fame in Columbia, Mo., for her accomplishments in softball and will be inducted this fall.

Kirby Smith is the assistant director of NCAA compliance at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Ind.

2022

Madeline Kuper, MA '26 received the James A. Alexander Newcomer Award from the Illinois Association for College Admission Counseling.

2023

Koran Mason-El is a summer associate with Lewis Brisbois while completing her final year at Saint Louis University School of Law in St. Louis.

Krystin Mitchell, MBA '25 is a shelf project manager at Anheuser-Busch, InBev. in St. Louis.

2025

Peri Clark received an All-Star Award from Wabash General Hospital in Mt. Carmel, Ill., in recognition of her Bachelor of Science in Nursing capstone project, which established a pediatric intravenous (IV) insertion protocol using the BuzzyBee distraction device.



Zane Phillips signed a contract extension to continue teaching English at Technos College in Tokyo.

Larisa Gorgevska-Sharpe, MSAT '26 is an associate athletic trainer at St. Ignatius College Prep in Chicago.

2026

Courtney (Ticknor) Clark is a human resources benefits specialist for the State of Indiana in Indianapolis and is pursuing a Master of Business Administration in human resource management at McKendree University.

Josh Dima is a left-handed pitcher for the Gateway Grizzlies, a professional baseball team in the Frontier League, in Sauget, Ill.

Ian Polus, MSN '26 is the interim chief administrative officer at St. Francis Hospital in Litchfield, Ill.



Want to be featured here?
Visit mckendree.edu/alumni to submit your class note.

THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

57 years is how long Dennis Korte '70 has been giving back to McKendree University. Together, he and his wife, Martha Korte '77, keep the decades-long streak of generosity going, with no plans of stopping any time soon.

Whether it's watching basketball games at the Melvin Price Convocation Center or catching a dazzling show at the Hett, Dennis '70 and Martha Korte '77 are always present at McKendree University. However, this love for visiting and checking in on campus life did not come from nowhere; the Kortes' history with McKendree goes all the way back to their childhood days.

Martha lived right across the street from McKendree, often visiting the campus with her friends or to see her grandfather, who taught psychology and sociology. Dennis lived on a dairy farm, knowing McKendree would eventually become his second home.

With a deep love for basketball and a scholarship waiting for him, Dennis enrolled at McKendree and joined the Bearcats' basketball team. Although he often spent time studying in the library or playing on the Bearcats' baseball team, Dennis always returned to the basketball court, ready to play and talk with his close friends. Yet Dennis did not start at McKendree as a social butterfly.

"Growing up on a farm, I was a pretty shy, young person," Dennis said, explaining why McKendree's small-community feel intrigued him. "Coach Statham did a lot for me as far as confidence-wise."

Around this time, Dennis and Martha began dating after meeting each other at a fireman's picnic. Martha later transferred from Millikin University to McKendree to major in elementary education with concentrations in science and English. Dennis majored in physical education. From there, a marriage now 50 years old blossomed, and decades of teaching at Lebanon CUSD #9 schools followed. Dennis would later gain recognition for his McKendree basketball talents with an induction into the Sports Hall of Fame, a committee he now serves.

However, back when he was still a student, Dennis made a decision crucial to his character and pride for McKendree: he chose to make a monetary gift to the athletic department. This one gift then led to another gift, and then to another, and now, 57 years later, the Kortes knew this yearly giving to McKendree was more than a tradition; it was an opportunity to give back not only to their alma mater but also to their sense of community.

"It's just home," Martha said. "It's part of the community. It was always right in the neighborhood."

At first, the Kortes' gifts were athletic-based. Then, over the years, their gift-giving diversified, making an impact on all parts of campus. One cause they especially support is the Korte-Fertig Scholarship, established by Dennis' sister, Sylvia, after her husband passed away. The endowed scholarship provides financial assistance to students, preferably those studying to become educators.

It was at the 39-year mark of his giving when Dennis realized he wanted to keep adding more and more years to his generosity.

"One thing that inspired me [was that] they used to put out a book of classes, and you'd see your name in it, and it would tell you how many years you have given," Dennis said. "One book said I'd given 39 straight years. I didn't know that, and ever since then, I didn't want to miss. Martha and I want to give."

Around this 39-year mark, Dennis joined the Alumni Board, where he would later make close friends and enjoy Development and Alumni-held events focused on bringing alumni together.



"I had been given the Loyal Service Award, and then, like a year or so later, I was asked to join the Alumni Board," Dennis said. "And I thought, 'I need to do that.' It was neat to be part of some of the decision-making and give your opinions; I enjoyed it."

The Kortes said they want to see McKendree thrive, and after witnessing record enrollment numbers, they know the next generation of Bearcats and alumni is coming to make positive changes on campus. After 24 years, Dennis stepped down from the Alumni Board as a voting member. Although he now holds an "Emeritus" title (meaning he is still involved with the Alumni Board but cannot vote), Dennis chose to leave the board to make room for new people, who he hopes will bring unique ideas and perspectives to McKendree.

"I learned there were people in line who wanted to join the board, but there was no room," Dennis said. "When I heard that, I [chose to] back off and let somebody else get in there, who maybe has some good ideas."

He credits people's growing interest in joining the Alumni Board to McKendree's remarkable growth.

"I think McKendree is doing more now than we've ever done," Dennis said. "We've got really good leadership. This just keeps you wanting to be involved with the campus."

Since their childhood, the Kortes have watched McKendree University transform in meaningful ways, enhancing student enjoyment and enrollment. They encourage fellow alumni and friends of McKendree to recognize this growth by considering giving back to support current and future Bearcats.

"Giving is a chance to pay it forward for somebody else," Martha said. "It gives people the chance to keep the program going that they were interested in, so somebody else can come along later and enjoy the same things."

Dennis' philosophy on giving is similar to Martha's; it's a chance to give back to McKendree's mission to shape Bearcats' lives, just like it did for the Kortes.

"You realize, 'Hey, McKendree did a lot for me,' so this is a small thing I can do for them," Dennis said. "If everybody gives some, it mounts up. You give back a little bit because of what they've helped you do in life. It's important to give back to keep things going."

Men's Basketball Alumni Gathering: January 2026

On Saturday, Jan. 17, we welcomed back McKendree men's basketball alumni for a special reunion as the Bearcats took on Drury University. The Bearcats came away with an impressive 89-76 victory, making the day even more memorable as alumni reconnected with former teammates, caught up with coaches and celebrated the legacy of Bearcat basketball. Thank you to all the alumni who joined us!

Pictured left to right:

Oliver Stephen '22, Landon Zurliene '25, Tom Fischer '72, Jeff Thornton '88, Kyle Elmore '24, Luke Hensler '23, Kurt Klein '79, Dan Moore '00, R.J. Crunk '92, Gary Haverman '81, Darron Randle '92, Wendell Johnson '69, Andy Kassebaum '82, Brian Rudolphi '95, Harry Statham '60, Chaun Lewis '93, Todd Grigg '94, Dennis Korte '70, Brad Weathers '76, Bill Roberts '61, Rick Klingelhofer '82, Michael Schaulat '77, Paul Kettwich '73, Lou Hagenbruch '68, President Dan Dobbins '81 and Rich Stein '56.

Men's Hockey Alumni Gathering: January 2026

On Friday, Jan. 30, we welcomed back McKendree men's hockey alumni for a special alumni night as the Bearcats took on Iowa State. Alumni had the opportunity to reconnect with former teammates, coaches and friends while cheering on the current team to an exciting 4-2 victory. It was a great evening celebrating the tradition of Bearcat hockey and the generations of players who have helped build the program. Thank you to everyone who returned to campus for the special evening!

Women's Basketball Alumni Gathering: February 2026

On Saturday, Feb. 7, we welcomed back McKendree women's basketball alumni for a special reunion as the Bearcats earned an impressive 83-70 victory over Illinois Springfield. The day was even more memorable when former Bearcat standout **Caty (Ponce) Happe '16** was inducted into the McKendree Athletics Sports Hall of Fame later that evening. It was a wonderful opportunity to reconnect, celebrate the program's rich tradition and honor one of its outstanding alumni. Thank you to everyone who joined us for this special day!

Pictured from left to right:

Back row: Madison Hart '20, Jordan Heberg '20, Jordan Morton '19, Megan Jensen '20, Sydney Diekhoff '21, Kristyn Mitchell '24, Madison Jones '22, Emily Pusheck '17, Ellie Pusheck '17, Courtney (Harris) Stone '13, Emily Woodland '13, Haeley (Kreisel) Eichler '15, Sarah (Miller) Rakers '00 and Amy Moore '00.

Front row: Christy Fortune '24, Haley Zylka '23, Maclayne Taylor '24, Erin Golden '24, Madyson Harper '24, Clare Breden '25, Caty (Ponce) Happe '16, Maci Meyer '25, Jenna Krause '22, Shannon McGinnis '17, Kasie Frazier '12, Leann (Voss) Langhauser '13, Brittany Willis '14, Elizabeth (Gilman) Kircher '16 and Kari (Crnkovich) Crask '96.

St. Louis Blues Alumni Outing: March 2026

On Thursday, March 26, McKendree alumni, family and friends gathered at Enterprise Center to cheer on the St. Louis Blues as they took on the San Jose Sharks. The Blues came away with an exciting 2-1 overtime victory, making for a memorable evening. It was great to reconnect with fellow Bearcats, share McKendree pride and enjoy a fun night together. Thank you to everyone who joined us. We look forward to seeing you at our next alumni event!





A.



D.



B.



E.



C.



F.

Future Bearcats

- A.** Matt Henning '18 and wife, Samantha (Lenz) Henning '17, MA '18, welcomed their son, Hayes Henning, on July 31, 2025.
- B.** Michael Kawa '16 and wife, Kayla Kawa, welcomed their son, James Kawa, on June 30, 2026.
- C.** Sean Cox '16 and wife, Nancy (Lilley) Cox '16, welcomed their son, Cassian Cox, on June 12, 2026.

Alumni Weddings

- D.** Courtney Ticknor '26 and Casper Clark were married June 18, 2026.
- E.** Shanece Kersh '22, MSAT '23 and Tyler Love '24 were married June 26, 2026.
- F.** Makenna Kramer '21, MSAT '22 and Matthew Hill '21 were married May 23, 2026. Shannon (Barker) Zeisset '20 was a bridesmaid.

Easter Egg Hunt: March 2026

On Saturday, March 28, more than 400 alumni, families and friends gathered on the Front Lawn of McKendree University's campus for the annual Easter Egg Hunt, held in partnership with First United Methodist Church of Lebanon. The lawn was filled with excitement as children searched for eggs, enjoyed the spring sunshine and met special guests, including the Easter Bunny and McKendree's beloved mascot, Bogey. Thank you to everyone who joined us for a fun-filled morning celebrating the season and making lasting memories with the Bearcat community!

Pictured: Torrey Trampe, son of **Jon Trampe '14** and Leann Trampe, has a big smile on his face after being named one of the Easter basket winners.

Student & Alumni Networking Event: April 2026

McKendree students and alumni came together in April for an evening of connection, conversation and career networking at the Student & Alumni Networking Event hosted by Holland Construction Services in Swansea, Illinois. The event featured an alumni spotlight panel with **Cory Berberich '18**, **Samantha Fagerburg '17**, **Natalie Jablonski '99** and **Brandon Voss '01**, who shared their career journeys, professional advice and the impact of their McKendree experiences. Following the panel, students and alumni had the opportunity to network across a variety of career fields, fostering meaningful conversations and expanding the Bearcat network.

Baseball Alumni Gathering: April 2026

On Saturday, April 18, we welcomed alumni back to Hypes Field for a special Alumni Day celebrating the history and tradition of Bearcat baseball. Former players, coaches, staff and supporters reunited to reconnect, share memories and cheer on the current Bearcats as they swept Lincoln University in a GLVC doubleheader. It was a great day honoring the generations of student-athletes and coaches who have helped shape the program, while celebrating two Bearcat victories. Thank you to everyone who returned to campus to celebrate the Bearcat baseball family!

St. Louis Cardinals Alumni Outing: June 2026

On Sunday, June 28, McKendree alumni, family and friends gathered at Busch Stadium in the Perficent Red Jacket Club for an afternoon of Cardinals baseball. The Cardinals earned a 2-1 victory over the Miami Marlins, and following the game, many of our youngest Bearcats enjoyed the opportunity to run the bases, making the day even more memorable. Thank you to everyone who joined us for another great alumni event.

Bearcat Pop-Up Series

Bearcat Pop-Up events are a series of casual gatherings designed to bring McKendree alumni together in areas where they live. We "pop up" in different cities and towns to create relaxed opportunities to connect, mingle and catch up while staying engaged with McKendree. Whether you're reconnecting with familiar faces or meeting new Bearcats for the first time, these events are all about building relationships, sharing stories and celebrating the McKendree experience—and we might be popping up near you next!

Bearcat Pop-Up | Aviston, Ill

Our Bearcat Pop-Up on Thursday, Jan. 8, took place in Aviston, Illinois, at The County.



Bearcats Across the Map:



T.J. Schaefer '99
resides in
Tarzana, CA



Dr. Khalilah Doss '03
resides in Placentia, CA



Bradley Hoyt '71
resides in Huntley, IL



Shannon McGinniss '17
resides in Lakeview, IL



Dr. Matthew Upchurch '09
resides in
San Diego, CA



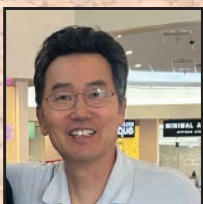
Emeritus Professor of Biology
Dr. Ted Anderson and
Carol Anderson '86
reside in Santa Barbara, CA



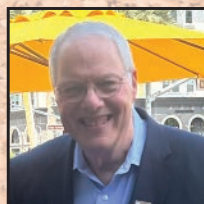
Michael Dermen '04
resides in
Marina Del Ray, CA



Former MCK President,
Dr. James Dennis &
Dr. Cynthia Dennis-Cherrey
reside in Newport Beach, CA



Kevin (Quaid) Lee '80
resides in
Fullerton, CA



Joe Hensley '03
resides in
Trabuco Canyon, CA



Kristin (Kleyer) Mangum '97 resides
in Scottsdale, AZ



**Bruce Hogan '71 &
Dr. Dyanne Ferk** reside
in Fountain Hills, AZ



Sue (Gassmann) Constance '67
resides in
Scottsdale, AZ



Tommie Bonner '07
resides in Gilbert, AZ



Follow along to see whom we have connected with so far, and do not be surprised if we are popping up near you next! Be sure to scan the QR code to update your contact information so we can stay connected!

Because Bearcats aren't just in Lebanon, Illinois. We're everywhere. Bearcats Across the Map is a new series spotlighting McKendree's Development and Advancement team as we hit the road to reconnect with alumni near and far. From coast to coast, we're meeting Bearcats where they live and make an impact by sharing stories, laughter and meaningful conversations along the way. Whether it was a quick hello or a longer catch-up, we are bringing a little piece of McKendree to you.



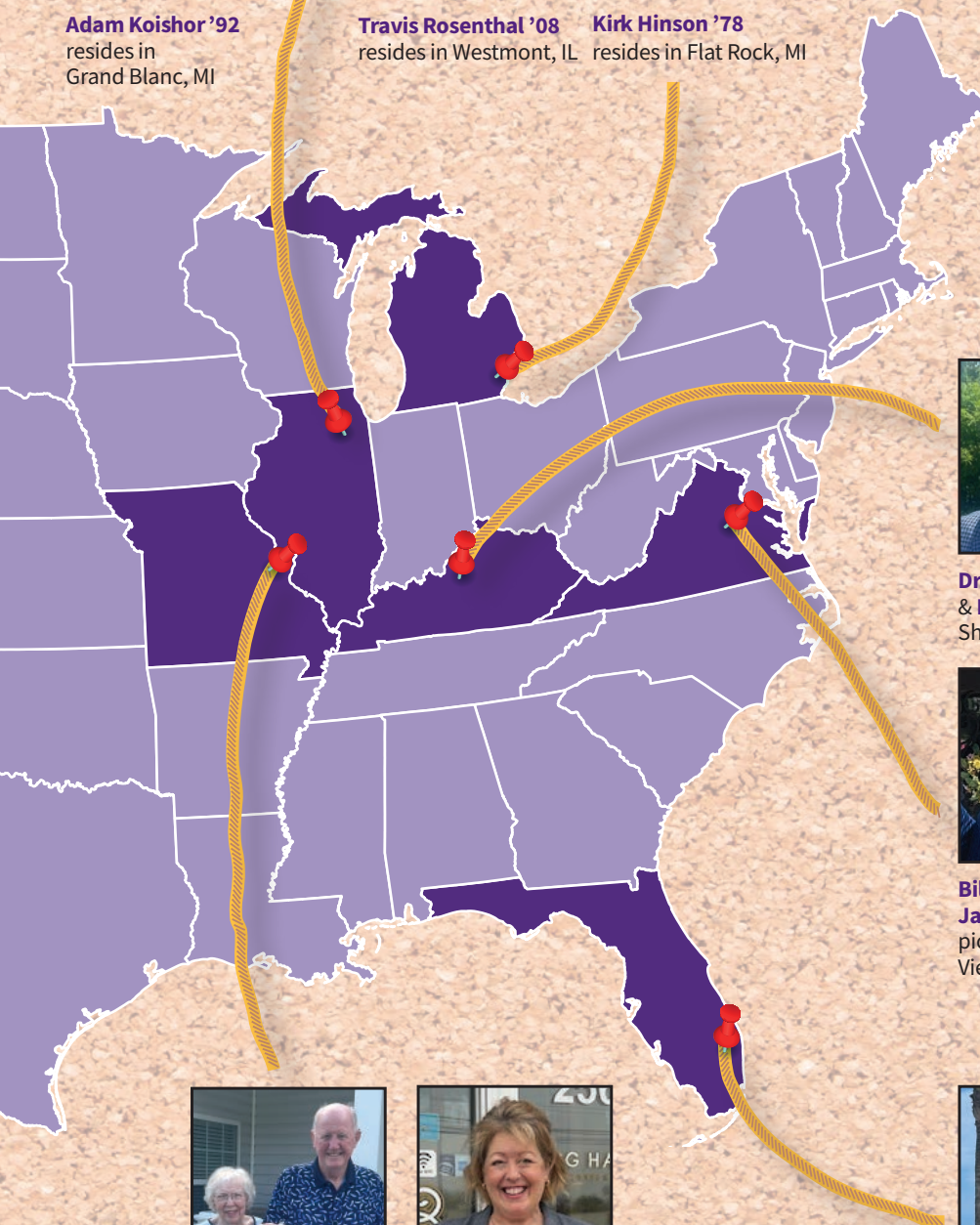
Adam Koishor '92
resides in
Grand Blanc, MI



Travis Rosenthal '08
resides in Westmont, IL



Kirk Hinson '78
resides in Flat Rock, MI



Dr. Darrell Keeling '04 & MBA '13 resides in
Shelbyville, KY



Michio Takeda '67
resides in Carol
Stream, IL



**Bill & Jeanne Cygan
James '76** (Not
pictured) reside in
Vienna, VA



Darren Robards '06
resides in Darien, IL



**Fred '68 & Betty
Robinson** reside in
Valley Park, MO



**Kelly (Holland)
Marrs '93** resides
in Dekalb, IL



Ted Hagnauer '71
resides in
Delray Beach, FL

PURPLE FRIDAY VISITS

The Purple Friday program recognizes businesses and organizations that employ or proudly include McKendree alumni, recognizing the impact Bearcats are making across our communities. Through these visits, the Alumni Association brings a little bit of McKendree to the workplace, connecting with alumni, sharing campus updates and celebrating Bearcat pride alongside colleagues. Purple Friday is a meaningful way to strengthen alumni connections, highlight alumni success and show appreciation for organizations that support and employ our graduates. If your organization has McKendree alumni and would like to host a Purple Friday gathering, please email alumni@mckendree.edu to schedule a visit.



The Alumni Association visits Granite City School District in Granite City, Illinois, as part of the Purple Friday Program. Granite City employees who are McKendree grads include: Pictured from left to right: Front Row: **Ali Jeffers '10, MA E.D '14**, regional philanthropic engagement officer, **Melanie (Mayes) Lohman '08 & MA E.D '12**, **Debra (Aaron) Mills '03**, **Chris Mitchell '99**, **Dr. Justin Warren MA E.D '08, Ph.D '18**, **John Moad MA E.D '08**, **Mary (Geroff) Voss MA E.D '10**, **Shannon McBride MA E.D '21**, **Tiffany (Pryor) Kimmel '14** and **Brandi (Branka) Kordelewski '13**, associate director of alumni & constituent engagement.



The Alumni Association sent a Purple Friday in a box to Sesser-Valier CUSD #196 in Sesser, Illinois, as part of the Purple Friday Program. Sesser-Valier employees who are McKendree grads include: Pictured from left to right: **Gina Tinsley '97**, **Megan Lamczyk '15**, **Brook (Marlo) Williams '00**, **Ashley (Davis) Crabtree '14** and **Jeran Lamczyk '16**.



Remembering Carl Poelker

Bearcats remember and mourn the loss of Carl Poelker, a beloved former head football coach for McKendree University. A 2016 McKendree Sports Hall of Fame inductee, Poelker was a trailblazer in McKendree athletics, whose accolades, coaching style and stoic personality will leave a mark in our university's history.

In 1995, former university president Dr. James Dennis tasked Poelker with reviving McKendree's football program. Poelker took on this challenge to awaken the spirit and strength of a football program once tucked away in a 40-year hiatus. Under his leadership, Poelker guided the Bearcats to 117 wins and remains the program's winning-percentage leader.

On Saturday, April 25, the McKendree football family came together to celebrate the life and legacy of Poelker. Bearcats from multiple generations returned to campus to honor Poelker, sharing memories, stories and the lasting impact he had on countless student-athletes and alumni. Following the heartfelt celebration, many stayed to cheer on the Bearcats during the 2026 Spring Football Game. It was a meaningful day of remembrance, reflection and celebration of the enduring bond of the Bearcat football family.

We will remember Poelker as not only a legend in McKendree's football program and history, but as a coach who recognized the potential and uplifted dozens of Bearcats' lives.

In Memoriam

Deceased alumni and friends through Aug. 25, 2026.

Mr. Rodger C. Cook '86 12/6/25
 Ms. Estelle M. (Krebs) Bruemmer '74 12/9/25
 Mrs. Carolyn (Dodds) Schaeffer '69 12/14/25
 Mrs. Betty J. Treat 12/14/25
 Mrs. Elouise Hahs '49 12/25/25
 Mrs. Judith M. Pariseau '94 1/8/26
 Ms. Georgine Hawley '65 1/20/26
 Mr. Raymond O. Lewis '61 1/21/26
 Mr. James W. Jackson '57 1/24/26
 Ms. Omni D. Hooker '26 1/29/26
 Mr. Charles A. Arnett '80 2/3/26
 Rev. Edward G. Stovall Sr. '83 2/10/26
 Mr. I. Hale Oliver '64 2/13/26
 Mrs. Barbara L. (Wonders) Hall '66 3/2/26
 Mr. Billy E. Rushing '62 3/10/26
 Ms. Mary E. (Tellor) Conner '80 3/15/26
 Mr. Carl R. Poelker 3/17/26
 Mrs. Marlene C. (Simms) Cummins '55 4/17/26
 Mr. Jonathan T. Stanley '05 5/1/26

Ms. D'Lisa Schulte 5/14/26
 Rev. Dr. David A. Eadie '67 6/1/26
 Mrs. Anita Leach 6/1/26
 Mrs. Sandra (Easley) Jones '54 6/12/26
 Mr. John H. Lovin '99 6/18/26
 Mr. Paul D. Allen '67 6/25/26
 Mr. Mark McKenna '73 6/25/26
 Ms. Anita M. Holst '87 6/29/26
 Mrs. Marian R. Hutnick 7/1/26
 Mr. Richard L. "Rick" Tutt '72 7/1/26
 Mr. C. Robert "Bob" Dartt '69 7/5/26
 Ms. Nancy Starnes 7/6/26
 Mr. John M. Hildreth '86 7/7/26
 Mrs. Louise (Simmons) Jensen '57 7/9/26
 Mr. Charles D. "Chuck" May '65 7/13/26
 Ms. Marjorie A. Tebbe '70 7/13/26
 Mr. Kent D. Worley '85 7/15/26
 Mr. Michael J. Reeb '79 7/22/26
 Mr. Larry D. Hundsdorfer '24 7/29/26
 Mrs. Susan (Van Dan) Elzen Knecht '69 8/4/26
 Mr. Nicholas I. Tropiano '69 8/8/26
 Mr. Maynard J. Saunders 8/13/26
 Mrs. Trudy M. Schauster 8/21/26

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