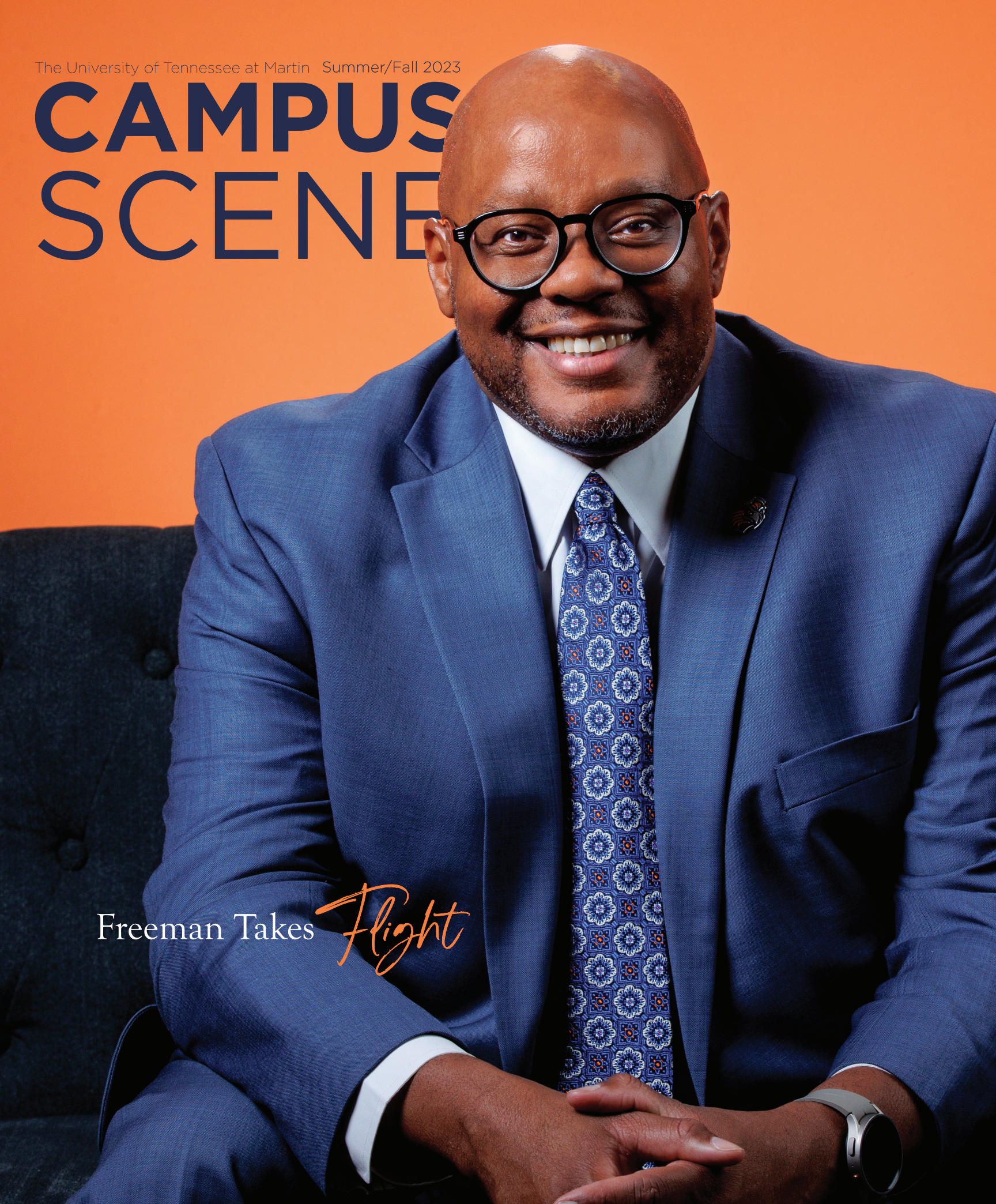


The University of Tennessee at Martin Summer/Fall 2023

# CAMPUS SCENE

Freeman Takes *Flight*





# CHANCELLOR'S CORNER

Dear Skyhawk Nation:

Thank you for connecting with your university through Campus Scene. This is my first Campus Scene alumni magazine edition as your chancellor, and I'm pleased to return to West Tennessee to lead UT Martin. I'm honored by the faith placed in me by UT System President Randy Boyd and the UT Board of Trustees and pledge to work hard and build on the success that has the university poised for an even greater future. Alumni involvement is critical to any university, and I'm excited to see that it means something to be a Skyhawk — people are proud to be associated with UT Martin.

I'm no stranger to West Tennessee as a Memphis native and Central High School alum. My wife, Rafielle, is a 1993 UT Martin nursing graduate. I spent many great years in Chattanooga working for UT Chattanooga where I earned three degrees. I know firsthand that regional campuses are important to the UT System and state, and UT Martin has a special role as an education and economic-development partner in West Tennessee and the surrounding region. I'm not afraid to fail, but I am afraid not to try, so I've identified six focal points to guide my initial work and build on the momentum we enjoy:

- Listening comes before leadership, and I'm anxious to hear your ideas for making UT Martin an even greater university.
- I'll focus much of my attention on enrollment and find ways to make UT Martin a university of choice for students of all ages.
- UT Martin is clearly a great place to work, and we can do more to attract the best and brightest talent to the university.
- Access and inclusion are more than buzzwords, and making everyone feel welcome at UT Martin is a priority.
- I'll soon visit the five regional centers in Jackson, Parsons, Ripley, Selmer and Somerville, which are "opportunity hubs" to enroll at UT Martin.
- Capital projects are the lifeblood of sustaining growth and service, and improving the process for reviewing capital projects is a priority.

I was told early that UT Martin is a family, and I can absolutely affirm that is true. I look forward to meeting you and hearing how UT Martin has made a difference in your life.

All the best,



Dr. Yancy Freeman







UT THE UNIVERSITY OF  
TENNESSEE  
MARTIN  
Dr. Yancy E. Freeman  
Chancellor







## FACULTY SPOTLIGHT ► Dr. Danny Pirtle

*Department of Behavioral Sciences*

Dr. Danny Pirtle Jr. is a UT Martin associate professor of criminal justice, but it was his work experience in public service that has led him to help provide students with mentors to help them find their best futures at the university.

Pirtle began his UT Martin career as a visiting professor in Fall 2019 and is in his fourth year as a full UTM faculty member.

Outside of the classroom, Pirtle serves as an adviser with the Alpha Phi Sigma criminal justice honor society and is a mentor for the “Call Me MiSTER” program and for minority students. He will also be the president of the newly-formed Black Faculty and Staff Affinity group.

“I am really excited about that group coming to campus and providing a resource for minority faculty, staff and students across campus,” he said.

Pirtle said being a mentor – as he is with the Call Me MiSTER program and with minority students – is important to help students grow and learn and seek to learn more.

“It’s critical in the development of students to understand and be able to connect with people who may be able to provide them with some insight to things that they want to do,” he said.

“I was just speaking with a potential student, and she indicated that she was interested in forensics. I shared with her that forensics is one of our most popular – if not the most popular – concentrations.”

Pirtle added that during a meeting with someone in the student’s chosen profession is the time to ask for professional guidance in that field and perhaps find a mentor.

“I feel it is part of my responsibility to serve as a mentor,” he said, “and not just for the academic piece but also just in general, helping young men understand what it means to be a man in this society, helping young women understand ways that they can climb the corporate ladder and learning ways to navigate a male-dominated society.”

Before coming to UT Martin, Pirtle worked as a jailer at a juvenile center in Texas. He had a mentor who gave him opportunities to grow into the job. He worked his way up the ladder before he heard of a graduate program in juvenile justice at Prairie View A&M, the first of its kind in the nation.

Pirtle applied and was accepted, and when he completed his master’s degree, the university was building a Ph.D. program in juvenile justice. With encouragement from two professors who were his mentors, he applied and completed it.

“I’ve been fortunate to have practical experience and academic experience, and my career has been a combination of those jobs in administration on the practical side and having teaching positions primarily on the academic side,” he said. “I frequently tell students in class that we are the sum of our experience.”

The University of Tennessee at Martin

# CAMPUS SCENE

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
TENNESSEE  
MARTIN



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# the big picture

**FURRY FRIENDS** – UT Martin beach volleyball players (l-r) Kambree Lucas, Olivia O’Keefe and Mary Leslie Cranford have their photo taken with Student Health and Counseling Services’ two new therapy dogs, Dolly and Miss Doc, during a beach volleyball match in April. The pups, which were added to the SHCS team of qualified professionals in the spring of 2023, are available for counseling sessions and on-campus events with a goal of engaging the university community with student health. The SHCS staff decided the campus needed this extra support after researching the positive impacts of dogs on college campuses. “Studies show that students have a lower heart rate and less anxiety when they are interacting with dogs,” said Shannon Deal, director of Student Health and Counseling Services. “We want students to have the option to be comforted by Dolly and Miss Doc after a hard day or week.” The dogs came from local breeders **Clint (’01)** and **Charity Riley (’01)**, and are sponsored in part by **Dr. Rodney “Doc” Thomsen (’71)**, professor emeritus of agricultural economics. After graduation from UTM, Thomsen returned to teach as an agricultural economics faculty member from 1975 to 2002. He was the longtime director of UT Martin’s West Tennessee Agricultural Pavilion. After hearing about the need for therapy dogs at his alma mater, he purchased “Miss Doc” and is also helping fund the therapy program.







# SCENE & HEARD



**CELEBRATING THE RISE CAMPAIGN** — UT Martin friends and supporters gathered the evening of Aug. 11 at Discovery Park of America in Union City to celebrate the successful conclusion of the RISE Campaign, the largest fundraising effort in the university's history that raised \$178.2 million. Pictured at the event are (l, r) UT Martin football great **Jerry Reese ('87, '88)** and his wife, **Gwen ('88, '94)**, of Franklin, UT Martin Chancellor Yancy Freeman and UT System President Randy Boyd. The RISE Campaign officially concluded as more than 150 guests gathered at Dinosaur Hall to thank campaign leadership and donors for exceeding the \$175 million goal before the June 30 campaign close. A total of 14,751 donors contributed to the campaign that will support student scholarships, athletics, capital projects and more. To read more about the RISE Campaign, visit [utm.edu/news](http://utm.edu/news).





## OVC ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF INAUGURAL OUTSTANDING FACULTY AWARD

— Dr. Mahmoud Haddad, a UT Martin professor of finance, was among faculty members honored by the Ohio Valley Conference during the OVC Basketball Championship, March 1-4, in Evansville, Indiana, when he was announced as UT Martin's inaugural Outstanding Faculty

Commitment to Student Success Award recipient. Haddad teaches in the College of Business and Global Affairs.

The awards were created by the provosts from OVC-member institutions to recognize outstanding faculty members at each school. Recipients must be associate or full professors in rank and have been employed at the institution for five years. The selection criteria included impacts of students, contributions made to the department, university and curriculum development, consistent professional development as well as community involvement and institutional service.

Haddad began teaching at UT Martin in 1992 after receiving his bachelor of science and MBA degrees from Minnesota State University in 1977 and his doctorate in finance in 1984 at the University of Alabama. Haddad has been a constant for the College of Business and Global Affairs, having been recognized for his work through the 1998 Featured Faculty Scholar Award, the 2005 Excellence in Graduate Teaching Award, the 2016 Cunningham Outstanding Teacher/Scholar Award, the 2019 UT Alumni Association Distinguished Service Professor Award and others.

In 2001, Haddad utilized the Reagan Faculty Leave Program to take a nine-month sabbatical to aid in establishing the Arab American University. During this time in his home country of Palestine, Haddad worked to contribute peace through education in the violent country. He found himself under gunfire multiple times while trying to better the lives of others, giving him a unique perspective regarding educational freedoms.

Haddad says that being the first-time UT Martin recipient of this award is meaningful because it recognizes the commitment that he has for his students and higher education. "It (the award) means that it pays off to be committed to your students, university and community," said Haddad. "This is a great reward and honor for me and the university."

## FACULTY MEMBERS RECEIVE AWARDS

— UT Martin teaching award recipients were honored April 16 during the university's annual Honors Day event held in the Boling University Center's Watkins Auditorium. Faculty and student award recipients from the past academic year were recognized. Faculty members pictured are (top row, l, r) Dr. Matthew Braddock, professor of philosophy, Cunningham Outstanding Teacher/Scholar Award; Dr. David Dietrich, associate professor of counseling psychology, UT Alumni Association Outstanding Teacher Award; Dr. John Oelrich, associate professor of music, Coffey Outstanding Teaching Award; (front row, left) Dr. Renee LaFleur, associate professor of history, UT Alumni Association Outstanding Teacher Award and (front row, right) **Tomi McCutchen ('83, '05)**, instructor of mass



media and strategic communication, Outstanding Academic Advisor Award. Also pictured (front row, center) is Dr. Philip Acree Cavalier, then interim chancellor and now provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs.



## noteworthy

### UT MARTIN, VOL STATE ANNOUNCE PARTNERSHIP TO PROVIDE PATHWAY TO BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN SPRINGFIELD

— Students at Volunteer State Community College in Springfield have a new pathway to earning a bachelor's degree thanks to the introduction of a new university partnership with UT Martin at the Vol State Springfield campus location. This agreement is pending THEC and SACSCOC approval with an anticipated finalization date of December 2023. Students would begin taking classes on this pathway in Spring 2024.

Nicholas Bishop, Vol State Community College vice president for economic development and regional centers said, "We're excited to partner with the UT System via the addition of the UT Martin Campus as our new university partner to serve as their regional center for Middle Tennessee."

The partnership will focus on agriculture, health care and technology sector pathways with agriculture business degrees being the first phase focus. Vol State will focus on delivering technical certificates and associate degrees, while UTM will focus on bachelor's and master's degrees. The concept is aimed at creating the ability for individuals to earn their associate up to a graduate level degree without having to leave Robertson County or the surrounding communities.



"We are excited about this new partnership with Vol State-Springfield," said Dr. Todd Winters (pictured), dean, College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences. "With the help of the UT Highland Rim AgResearch and Education Center for laboratories, we can offer a wide variety of agriculture courses leading to a degree, in some cases without even coming to the Martin campus."

### ART SPARKS HONORED FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE

— **Art Sparks ('76)** is accustomed to holding leadership roles, but being honored for his service doesn't happen every day. That changed when he was honored June 20 by receiving the Jimmy Daniel Make-A-Difference WestStar Leadership Alumni Award during the program's graduation celebration for its 2023 class at UT Martin.

Selected by the WestStar board of trustees, the award is named for the late Jimmy Daniel of McNairy County, a 1990 WestStar graduate, founding WestStar board of trustee member and a West Tennessee field representative for Gov. Don Sundquist. This is the 25th year for the award to be presented.

"Well, people who know me know that I'm seldom speechless, but I was for a second there — speechless," Sparks said following the event's conclusion. "I can't tell you what a great honor it is to be recognized, and I can't tell you what a great organization the WestStar (Leadership Program) is, which is a function of UT Martin, and I think most people that know me know how I care for UT Martin and West Tennessee."

Sparks (pictured with **Dr. Charley Deal ['92, '96]**) is a partner at Alexander Thompson Arnold PLLC in Union City, where he has worked for 42 years. He is a 2016 WestStar graduate and has served two three-year terms on the program's board of trustees.



The 1976 UT Martin graduate remains involved as an alumnus and currently serves as the first and only chair of the university's advisory board. He is also CEO of the Miss Tennessee Volunteer Pageant.





(l, r) Lathon Ross, Logan Davis, Tydarius Blackwell, Justyn “Jax” Johnson, Jonathan Utley.

## FIRST ‘CALL ME MiSTER’ GRADUATES HONORED

— Students in the UT Martin Call Me MiSTER program learn how to change lives through teaching. The first five UT Martin MiSTERS to complete the program are ready to make a difference in the classroom after being honored April 17 during the 2023 Louis C. Glover UT Martin Call Me MiSTER Celebration held in the Boling University Center’s Duncan Ballroom.

The event was named in memory of the late Dr. Louis C. Glover, the initial program coordinator for the UT Martin Call Me MiSTER program and a Department of Educational Studies faculty member. The celebration was sponsored by Tosh Farms in Henry County, and the celebration programs were donated by Rawls Funeral Homes.

The Call Me MiSTER (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) program was founded at Clemson University in 2000 and strives to increase the pool of available teachers from a more diverse background, particularly among the state’s lowest-performing elementary schools.

The teacher leadership program has grown to include 13 states and provides participants with mentoring support and networking opportunities that benefit them both during and after earning college degrees. UT Martin has the only Call Me MiSTER program in Tennessee.

The celebration featured presentations of an official Call Me MiSTER blazer to each graduating senior. The blazer signifies a lifetime connection and commitment to the program’s mission to prepare servant leaders, effective teachers and mentors to future generations. **Justyn “Jax” Johnson (‘23)**, a Union City High School graduate and education integrated studies 6-8 social studies major, told the celebration audience that he had few male minority

leaders in his life before coming to UT Martin. “But over my four years here, not only have I seen how great of a male minority leader I can be, but I’ve been blessed to be in the graces of some amazing people,” he said.

**Jonathan Utley (‘23)** is a health and human performance K-12 major from Jackson who has achieved a 4.0 college GPA. He described participating in the program as one of the best decisions he has made and, like Johnson, thanked those who supported him.

“We have multiple mentors that we check in with. They provide support wherever we need it,” Utley said. “Any time we need something done, they’re always there to provide a helping hand, whether it be academic, social or if we just need somebody to talk to. They’re always there to help and support us.”

Austin Ferrell, program co-coordinator and academic success coordinator, is the oldest of 10 children and sees the new MiSTERS as extensions of his own large family. “I always told them that they’re like my younger brothers. ... It’s almost like I got to see them move from their freshman stage all the way to their senior stage and accomplish so many things, ...” he said. “They have made some great strides, and they’re trailblazers for our university and our program in general.”

Other students honored during the celebration were **Logan Davis (‘23)**, a bachelor of interdisciplinary studies major with a health and human performance K-12 focus from Memphis; **Tydarius Blackwell (‘23)**, an education integrated studies 6-8 mathematics major from Jackson; and **Lathon Ross (‘23)**, an education integrated studies K-5 elementary education major from Jackson.



# noteworthy

## FOUR UTM FACULTY, STAFF MEMBERS EARN PRESIDENT'S AWARDS

— Four UT Martin faculty and staff members were the recipients of 2023 President's Awards, announced by UT System President Randy Boyd during the annual UT Board of Trustees meeting on June 30 in Memphis.

A total of 14 faculty and staff members from across the UT System received awards to celebrate their accomplishments and dedication to the Be One UT values.

The four President's Award winners from UT Martin were the most for any UT System entity this year.

UT Martin faculty and staff selected to receive a 2023 President's Award were:



• **Embrace Diversity Award, faculty:** Henrietta Giles, a lecturer in the Department of Mass Media and Strategic Communication. Giles served as co-creator and producer of the CMT/MTV Networks film "Waiting in the Wings: African Americans in Country Music," which brought attention to underrepresented voices. In 2015, Giles

received an Emmy Award for Best Documentary for her work on "Reflect, Reclaim, Rejoice: Preserving the Gift of Black Sacred Music." Giles's collaborative work with civil rights icon the Rev. Joseph Lowery on his biographical project, "Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land," amplifies marginalized narratives. Since 2015, she has been involved in coordinating the annual UT Martin Civil Rights Conference and chaired the 2023 event. In her classes, Giles creates assignments that prompt students to analyze and document pressing issues and dilemmas facing the world.



• **Excel in All We Do Award, faculty:** Dr. Stephanie Kolitsch, then interim provost and senior vice chancellor for academic affairs as well as the director of accreditation and liaison to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Kolitsch has been a valued member of the UT Martin community for almost 30 years, beginning her tenure

in 1994 as a professor of mathematics. She has been leading UT Martin's reaffirmation of the accreditation process and has successfully developed the Quality Enhancement Plan, which is part of the SACS review process and the Foundations of Excellence self-study. Kolitsch's pursuit of excellence, exceptional leadership and outstanding performance, as well as her commitment to the university's mission and vision, have cemented her status as a visionary leader.



• **Optimistic and Visionary Employees Award, staff:** Destin

Tucker, the director of undergraduate admissions. Tucker has demonstrated great dedication and commitment to her role for the past seven years as director of undergraduate admissions. Tucker also serves as the strategic enrollment management chair, where she plays a

pivotal role in shaping the institution's strategic plan. She turned around a struggling admissions office through bold leadership, intuitive intelligence, willingness to ask questions and integrity. She possesses a keen ability to anticipate obstacles and establishes meaningful relationships with a grateful heart.



• **United and Connected Award, faculty:** Dr. Clinton Smith, a professor

and chair of the Department of Educational Studies. Smith embodies a commitment to service that elevates UT Martin. Joining its faculty in 2012, he has risen to special education professor and chair. He engages in service to the university, his profession and the

community while also making significant contributions to research and scholarship. Smith has authored 17 publications and three book chapters and delivered 57 international presentations and 26 state presentations.

President's Award recipients were nominated by campus and institute leaders and are selected annually from a system-wide pool. They were honored by the president and his Be One UT cabinet at a special luncheon Aug. 3 in Nashville.

"We are certainly proud to have more President's Award winners than any other UT System entity this year," said then-Interim Chancellor Philip Acree Cavalier. "The UTM faculty and staff who earned these awards are definitely deserving and represent our campus well. They embody the spirit of Be One UT as well as the growth and progress that our campus is seeing. My congratulations to these outstanding individuals."

"Our 'Be One UT' values are not just a philosophy but a concrete way we define our culture and way of doing business," Boyd said. "These award recipients exemplify who we are as well as who we continually aspire to be in serving the people of Tennessee."





**BENEATH THE SURFACE** – Billy Gene Wagster (center), director of the City of Martin’s public works department, looks through items recovered from a time capsule that was buried 50 years ago during the city’s centennial celebration in the summer of 1973. Following the centennial events in Martin, a time capsule was buried at the C.E. Weldon Building downtown. A marker that covered the box directed the people of 2023 to open the time capsule on July 4, 2023. Martin Mayor **Randy Brundige** hosted the opening on July 4 commencing the city’s sesquicentennial celebration. Inside the capsule were letters and photos from churches about members of their congregation, along with letters for Martin businesses. Also inside was a baseball that was signed by Martin’s mayor at the time, C.E. Weldon, from “City of Martin Day” at a St. Louis Cardinals baseball game in 1973. Some of those who were there 50 years ago were also there for the opening, including Brundige and **David Murphy (‘61)**, owner of Murphy Funeral Home.

### UT MARTIN BANKING TEAM WINS NATIONAL BANK CASE STUDY COMPETITION

– The Conference of State Bank Supervisors named a student team from UT Martin as winner of the 2023 Community Bank Case Study Competition. The announcement came July 12 from the Conference of State Bank Supervisors (CSBS).

Teams from Iowa State University and Messiah University in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, placed second and third, respectively.

“The work of these three teams was top-rate, and we are pleased to see such in-depth findings,” said CSBS Executive Vice President for Policy and Supervision Karen Lawson. “The University of Tennessee at Martin’s case study earned top honors due to its particularly rich insight and detail as well as its excellent executive summary.”

The annual competition is open to undergraduate students in all fields of study as an opportunity to gain valuable firsthand knowledge of the banking industry.

This year, 34 student teams representing 28 colleges and universities entered the competition. The teams examined how local

community banks are recruiting and retaining talent, approaching succession planning and using technology to advance operations.

The UTM team partnered with Commercial Bank & Trust Company of Paris and its officers, President/COO Clint Davis, Human Resource and Professional Development Director Jennifer Starks, Chief Financial Officer Brent Stoots and Chief IT Officer Scott Freschi.

The members of the UT Martin team are graduates **Dan Hoffman (‘23)** of McKenzie and **Cole Hollis (‘23)** of Trenton and students Ben Arnold of Henderson, Libby Rushton of Waverly and Abbey Strong of Cookeville. John Clark, Dr. Lajuan Davis and Dr. Mark Farley served as faculty advisors.

Clark is the interim director of the UTM Horace and Sara Dunagan Chair of Excellence in Banking, while Davis is an associate professor of information systems and Farley is an assistant professor of finance.

The top three case studies are available at [www.csbs.org/bankcasestudy](http://www.csbs.org/bankcasestudy) and will be published in the CSBS Journal of Community Bank Case Studies, available in October.



the **big** picture  
athletics



2  
NATION  
UT MARTIN







**ROAD SIGN UNVEILED** — UT Martin's 2014 men's rodeo team will forever be immortalized after university officials presented permanent signage in April located on University Street that touts the program's national championship.

The Skyhawks made history after becoming the first collegiate team located east of the Mississippi River to win the national men's rodeo team championship.

The Skyhawks' national championship lineup included **Will Lummus ('14), Tyler Waltz ('14), Clark Adcock ('15), Tanner Phipps ('15, '17), John Alley ('14) and Colt Kitaif ('22)**. Head coach John Luthi (pictured), who retired in the summer of 2022 after 25 years at the helm of the UT Martin rodeo program, attended during the dedication ceremony.



# athletics



## UT MARTIN ATHLETICS INDUCTS FIVE TO HALL OF FAME CLASS OF 2023

– The UT Martin Athletics Hall of Fame Class of 2023 was enshrined on Saturday, Sept. 30. This year's star-studded inductees included **Alex Atkins (football, 2003-06)**, the late **Oscar Bunch (football, 1990-91)**, **Brendon Caballero (golf, 2011-15)**, **Carly Gonzales (softball, 2014-17)** and **Wes Patterson (baseball, 2008-11)**.

Atkins was an All-American and two-time All-Ohio Valley Conference offensive lineman, capping off his stellar career by helping the Skyhawks to a 9-3 record and the program's first-ever OVC championship/Football Championship Subdivision playoff appearance in 2006. After graduation, he was named to the inaugural United States National Team, helping Team USA win the World Cup of American Football event held in Tokyo, Japan. He currently serves as the offensive coordinator at Florida State University.

A tight end out of Vossburg, Mississippi, Bunch was a 1991 All-American after topping the then-Pacers with 39 receptions, 754 receiving yards and seven touchdowns. He concluded his two-year UT Martin career with 69 catches for 1,260 yards and 11 touchdowns after playing his first two seasons at Jones County Junior College. He passed away on March 5, 2021, at the age of 52.

Caballero led the Skyhawks in scoring average in all four seasons, becoming the first UT Martin golfer to win OVC Championship medalist honors in 2015. He won four of his six collegiate tournaments during his senior year alone and set a school record with five career OVC Golfer of the Week awards.

Hailing from Anaheim, California, Gonzales was a three-time All-OVC performer – winning each of those awards after she was named 2014 OVC Freshman of the Year. She ranks in the top-five in school history in runs scored (148, second); doubles (44, second); walks (90, second); batting average (.355, third); stolen bases (88, third); hits (220, fourth); times hit by pitch (24, fourth) and total bases (314, fifth).

Patterson was UT Martin's first-ever Freshman All-American, setting the tone for a productive career on the diamond. The right-handed slugger is the program's all-time leader in home runs (39) and RBI's (171) while also ranking in the top-five in school history in doubles (45, second), runs scored (132, second), walks (85, second), putouts (1,293, third) and hits (200, fifth). His 64 RBIs from his junior campaign still stands as the highest single-season tally in school history as the first baseman hit .344 with a 1.090 OPS that spring.





## JERRY CARPENTER INDUCTED TO A PAIR OF HALL OF FAMES OVER THE SUMMER

— Longtime Skyhawk head coach and UT Martin alum **Jerry Carpenter ('66)** had a busy summer as he was named to the Ohio Valley Conference Hall of Fame on June 2 and the Weakley County Sports Hall of Fame on Aug. 12.

During his tenure as Skyhawk head golf coach (2002-20), Carpenter elevated the program to new heights, helping UT Martin to its first OVC championship in 2016. The Newbern native was named OVC Coach of the Year twice (2014 and 2016) and guided individual Skyhawks to OVC Championship medalist accolades in three consecutive seasons from 2015-17. He also coached three straight OVC Freshman of the Year honorees (2013-15), becoming the first program in OVC history to accomplish that feat. His teams also excelled off the course, consistently achieving high academic marks and winning an OVC-record seven Team Sportsmanship Awards (including six in a row from 2014-19).

The Hall of Fame honors came after the program dedicated the "Jerry Carpenter Practice Grounds" at the Rhodes Golf Center on campus in March 2023.



## MIKE VARGA HIRED AS SKYHAWK SOCCER HEAD COACH

— Mike Varga was tabbed as the fifth head soccer coach in UT Martin history on June 5, 2023, joining the Skyhawks after nine seasons as head coach at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, North Carolina.

Varga brought 28 years as a collegiate head women's soccer coach to UT Martin as he began his career with 65 wins and an .867 winning percentage in conference play at Lincoln Memorial University from 1994-98. He then went on to the University of South Alabama, where he became the program's all-time wins leader with 121 victories from 1999-2012. He led Gardner-Webb to a .541 overall winning percentage and three Big South Conference Tournament championship appearances over his final five seasons there.

It didn't take long for Varga to make an impact at UT Martin. The Mansfield, Ohio, native secured a victory in his first match — defeating in-state rival Austin Peay by a 2-1 margin on the road in the Aug. 17 season opener.

## DAVIS GREGORY JOINS UT MARTIN ATHLETICS AS BROADCASTER FOR SKYHAWK SPORTS NETWORK

— **Davis Gregory ('23)**, an award-winning broadcaster who graduated from UT Martin in 2023, joined the Skyhawk Sports Network in August.

A Knoxville native, Gregory teams up with longtime "Voice of the Skyhawks" Chris Brinkley as the primary broadcast duo for all UT Martin athletic events broadcast on ESPN+ and radio. Gregory will serve as the lead play-by-play announcer for Skyhawk football, men's basketball, baseball, softball, volleyball and soccer productions on ESPN+ as well as provide color commentary for women's basketball.

Gregory served as the sports director at the WUTM 90.3 FM campus radio station for three years, bringing home numerous awards for the station. Two of the most notable are the Intercollegiate Broadcasting Systems awards for "Best Play-by-Play — Other" for his call of the 2022 UT Martin Rodeo and "Best Play-by-Play for a Men's Basketball Game" for his call of the Skyhawks' contest against Eastern Illinois in 2021.

Gregory also called Westview High School football and basketball games during his WUTM tenure. In 2021, he was a part of the broadcasting team that covered the TSSAA 2A Blue Cross Bowl State Championship game where the Westview Chargers captured their first football state title.

In his new position, Gregory will also serve as the sports information contact for the UT Martin soccer, cross country, track and field and baseball programs.



# athletics



## FOUR SKYHAWK ALUMS MAKING THEIR MARK IN NFL TRAINING CAMPS

— A total of four former UT Martin football players were on NFL rosters during 2023 training camp as (pictured, l,r) **Jaylon Moore ('19)** (Jacksonville Jaguars), **Rodney Williams II ('20)** (Pittsburgh Steelers), **Colton Dowell ('21)** (Tennessee Titans) and **Dresser Winn ('21)** (Los Angeles Rams) each earned professional opportunities.

Moore started his NFL career by spending parts of three seasons with the Baltimore Ravens (2020-22) and briefly spent time with the New York Giants in 2022 before joining the Jaguars organization. He signed a reserve/future contract with Jacksonville in January but will miss the entire 2023 season after he was placed on the injured reserve list in May. His Skyhawk career spanned from 2016-19 as the Memphis native posted 39 catches, 1,492 yards and 18 touchdowns.

Also hailing from Memphis, Williams initially signed with the Denver Broncos after the 2022 NFL Draft before agreeing to contract terms with the Steelers, spending most of last season on the practice squad. He played for the Skyhawks from 2016-21,

hauling in 99 receptions for 1,217 yards and seven touchdowns. He was a two-time All-Ohio Valley Conference performer and was an All-American tight end during the 2020-21 season.

Dowell heard his name called during the 2023 NFL Draft when the Titans snagged the wide receiver in the seventh round (228th overall). He was a four-time All-OVC honoree at UT Martin, accumulating 177 catches for 2,796 yards and 19 touchdowns from 2018-22. The Lebanon native was a 2019 All-American and set the program record for career receiving yards during the 2022 campaign.

A quarterback out of nearby Dresden, Winn signed an undrafted free agent contract with the Rams in April. He threw for over half of his career yardage during his graduate season in 2022, tossing 2,928 yards on a .612 completion percentage to go along with 18 touchdowns on the way to All-OVC second team accolades. For his six-year career (2017-22), he registered 5,800 passing yards while completing 60.4 percent of his attempts and 46 total touchdowns (37 passing, six rushing).



## CALEB HOBSON BECOMES UT MARTIN'S HIGHEST MLB DRAFT PICK IN SCHOOL HISTORY

— Caleb Hobson became the highest Major League Baseball Draft pick in program history when the Colorado Rockies selected the speedy centerfielder in the 13th round (382nd overall) in July 2023.

The 6-0, 180-pound right-handed hitter made the most out of his debut season as a Skyhawk in 2023, ranking 10th in the NCAA Division I ranks in stolen bases (36) and 11th in triples (six) on the way to All-Ohio Valley Conference second-team accolades for head coach Ryan Jenkins.

In addition to steals, Hobson also sported a league-best 1.000 fielding percentage in 187 chances. He also ranked in the top 10 in the OVC in triples (6, second), runs scored (55, fifth), walks (38, sixth) and hits (68, ninth). In league play, he led the OVC in triples (3) while ranking second in walks (22), second in stolen bases (13), fourth in hits (37), fourth in on-base percentage (.500), sixth in runs scored

(29), ninth in batting average (.385) and ninth in RBIs (26).

The Pontotoc, Mississippi, native was an integral part of one of UT Martin's most successful seasons at the NCAA Division I level in 2023. The Skyhawks won a school-record 14 OVC contests, leading to their highest finish (third) in the standings in program history. With Hobson serving as one of the main catalysts out of the leadoff spot in the lineup, UT Martin topped the OVC in batting average (.329, 20 points higher than second place), on-base percentage (.409), run scored (191) and hits (276) in league play.



## PAT HEAD SUMMITT INDUCTED INTO THE NAISMITH MEMORIAL BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME FOR A SECOND TIME

— The late **Pat Head Summitt ('74)**, the UT Martin alum who went on to a trailblazing coaching career at the University of Tennessee, was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in August as part of the 1976 United States Women's Olympic Team.

Summitt, who was previously enshrined in the Naismith Hall of Fame Class of 2000 for her coaching accomplishments with the Lady Vols, played for the 1976 U.S. squad in the Montreal Games that helped change the trajectory of women's basketball as increased opportunities to play collegiately, professionally and abroad became the norm. The 1976 U.S. Olympic Team launched the Americans on a run toward dominance in the sport of women's basketball, claiming a silver medal before the program captured a gold-medal finish for the first time ever in the team's next Olympic appearance (the 1984 Los Angeles Games with Summitt as head coach).

After departing UT Martin as the program's all-time leading scorer with 1,405 points, Summitt collected 1,098 victories on an .840 winning percentage over 38 seasons as head coach at



Tennessee. She tallied eight NCAA national championships and a combined 32 Southeastern Conference regular season and tournament titles, winning 112 NCAA Tournament games and making 18 NCAA Final Fours along the way.

A native of Ashland City, Summitt passed away at the age of 64 on June 28, 2016 after a courageous battle with early onset dementia. Summitt is pictured above with UT Martin Chancellor Larry McGehee.



## BIG SOUTH-OVC FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION DEBUTS IN FALL 2023

— The Skyhawk football team's pursuit of a third consecutive conference championship looked a little different on Sept. 30 as UT Martin debuted in the newly-formed Big South-OVC Football Association.

The Big South and Ohio Valley Conferences announced the creation of an association with its football member institutions on Feb. 22, 2022. The 2023 fall season is the first in an initial four-year agreement that combines the two football leagues to ensure NCAA championship access and stability.

In addition to UT Martin, the 2023 Big South-OVC roster includes Bryant University (Smithfield, Rhode Island), Charleston Southern University (Charleston, South Carolina), Eastern Illinois University (Charleston, Illinois), Gardner-Webb University (Boiling Springs, North Carolina), Lindenwood University (St. Charles, Missouri), Robert Morris University (Moon Township, Pennsylvania), Southeast Missouri State University (Cape Girardeau, Missouri), Tennessee State University (Nashville) and Tennessee Technological University (Cookeville).

Western Illinois University (Macomb, Illinois) joined the OVC in all other sports besides football for the 2023-24 academic year and will become a part of the Big South-OVC Football Association in the fall of 2024, replacing Bryant University.



# FROM THE ARCHIVES

## PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER'S VISIT TO UT MARTIN



### THE PACER

The Univ. of Tenn. at Martin  
Thursday, Dec. 2, 1982  
Vol. XII, No. 9  
Eight Pages



## Jimmy Carter to visit UTM campus for dinner honoring Ned McWherter

Former President Jimmy Carter will be among the guests honoring House Speaker Ned Ray McWherter on Saturday, December 4.

The citizens of Weakley County are honoring McWherter, and

also because of his public service on behalf of the people of our area," Chairman Welles said.

In addition to a day-long series of special events on Saturday, a dinner honoring the Speaker will be held at 7 p.m. in U.T. Martin's

Lattin Assembly. U.S. Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker, Senator Jim Sasser, Congressman Ed Jones, Senator Wendell Ford of Kentucky, Lieutenant Governor John Winder, John Seigenthaler, editor of the Nashville Tennessean, and country music superstar Barbra Streisand.

There will be other surprise guests in addition to those listed above.

Because the dinner was an early about a special reception with President Carter, Governor Lamar Alexander, Charlie Daniels, and other head-table speakers has been scheduled for 5

o'clock p.m. at the Lady Pacer Fieldhouse on Saturday.

This special reception, with no charge, is open to everyone and refreshments will be served.

A special day honoring Speaker Ned McWherter was originally suggested by Joyce Hurt, Chairman of the Weakley County Democratic Executive Committee.

Because of the Speaker's service to all Weakley Countians, we decided to make it a non-partisan occasion with a number of events throughout the day in Dresden and Martin," Mrs. Hurt said.

**AMID A LIGHT RAIN** and the chilly December air of 1982, the tranquil campus of the University of Tennessee at Martin was abuzz with excitement and anticipation. Dignitaries and esteemed guests from near and far were set to gather for a momentous occasion—the presence of none other than former President Jimmy Carter himself. The purpose of his visit: To grace a grand dinner held in honor of Tennessee Speaker of the House Ned Ray McWherter as part of "Ned McWherter Day" in Weakley County.

Carter's arrival would signify an unprecedented moment in Weakley County's history, as it would be the first time a president or former president ever set foot in the area. The attendees keenly recognized the magnitude of this occasion, and President Carter's presence bestowed an aura of prestige and historical importance upon the university grounds. The former commander-in-chief,

known for his earnest dedication to public service and his steadfast commitment to humanitarian causes, was a beacon of inspiration for the nation. His presence at the university was a testament to the impact of McWherter's leadership and the respect he commanded in the political arena. Carter said that night that of all the world leaders and governmental officials he has come in contact with, "Ned McWherter stands head and shoulders above many I have met."

According to former UT Martin Chancellor Charles Smith, "Many viewed (this event) as a preview of what inevitably would be a campaign for governor for Ned McWherter."

The evening began with a special reception in the Skyhawk Fieldhouse (then Lady Pacer Fieldhouse), where Carter, McWherter and others delivered brief remarks. A barrage of camera flashes



On December 4, 1982, being election year, brought many congressmen to the University of Tennessee at Martin. Randy Tyree was on campus the day of Homecoming and spoke with Chancellor Smith as well as many others. Governor Lamar Alexander was the Grand Marshall of the Homecoming Parade.

As they moved to the university, a large overflow crowd awaited. The starry-eyed Raub, anybody who was anybody was a clear presence of a future governor. Students and notable figures from across the state gathered to contribute to Speaker McWherter's

anybody who was anybody was a clear sign of the presence of a future governor. Students and notable figures from across the state contributed to Speaker McWherter's address to Weakley County and the state. McWherter was uncharacteristically nervous at the event. "He was never comfortable being the speaker," he said. "He gave me the only directive he ever gave me: 'Don't mess up.' After 15 years as chancellor. Before the event, he said gently: 'Chancellor, everybody

Weakley County and the state. Porter was uncharacteristically nervous. "He was never comfortable being the president, he gave me the only directive he gave me in 12 years as chancellor. Before the event, he said gently: 'Chancellor, everybody knows you're nervous. Just make the introduction short.' Obviously, I

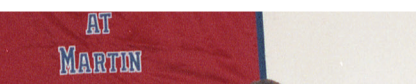
ng included Gov. Lamar Alexander, Chairman Ed Jones, Senator Wendell Ford of Kentucky, and Rep. John Wilder. John Seigenthaler from Tennessee was also present, a representative and later vice president of the Nashville-based country music superstar Charlie Daniels.

with a stirring address from President  
from his own political journey  
e of leadership rooted in integrity  
speech, which was sprinkled with  
longtime relationship with McWherter,  
en he told the audience, "It's not his  
honor to be here."

the camaraderie between President Carter was evident—a testament to the ideals dedicated to the betterment of laughter and heartfelt exchanges, before the attendees' eyes, as the evening of visionary leadership and a e. The event marked an indelible v—a moment when the esteemed



"From the Archives" is a feature highlighting unique and interesting items from the Alliene and Jimmie S. Corbitt Special Collections. For more information or to make a donation, contact UT Martin Special Collections and Archives at 731-881-7094 or [speccoll@utm.edu](mailto:speccoll@utm.edu).







YA



# YANCY FREEMAN

12<sup>th</sup> UT Martin Chancellor

Story by **David Snow**

Photos by **Steven Mantilla & Nathan Morgan**

**THE** pathway for Dr. Yancy Freeman Sr. from modest beginnings to becoming the 12th chancellor of the University of Tennessee at Martin is paved with promoting educational possibilities and advocating for those living in difficult situations.

Freeman began his tenure as UT Martin's chancellor on Aug. 9, most recently serving as the vice chancellor of enrollment management and student affairs at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, but his connection to that campus and the University of Tennessee System goes much deeper than that.

Freeman is the sixth of eight children, having grown up in a public housing neighborhood in Memphis and graduating from Central High School. Before he even attended college, he knew he wanted to find a job that helps others.

"I thought I wanted to work for a nonprofit," he said. "I grew up in a public housing facility in Memphis, one of those housing projects in Memphis," he said.

"It was a very poor neighborhood, so that kind of started my aspiration to say, 'I want to work for the housing authority to improve conditions for families who live in public housing' or 'I want to do something like United Way, raising funds and extending help to families who need it.'"

Freeman went to UT Chattanooga as a first-generation college student. He originally wanted to study engineering, but found that he preferred an occupation that worked with people more.

He earned a bachelor's degree from UT Chattanooga in political science and considered going to law school to become a public advocate.

"I knew I wanted to do work that would be connected to people and work with people, but I was not completely sure," he said. "In fact, in my junior and senior years at college, I did a program called the Tennessee Pre-Professional Program, and it guaranteed admission into the law school at the University of Memphis and the UT

College of Law, so I could have gone to those.

"I did both summers of that and decided that I would take the master's degree route instead of going to law school. Once I finished undergrad, I started the master's of public administration program."

Freeman said he had a friend who suggested getting a master's degree in public administration and he said that once he got into it, "It just came naturally to me."

However, it would take him a while to complete that degree because of a job he was given by UT Chattanooga in a position that would change his career pathway, steering him toward university administration.

"I was recruiting students in the West Tennessee area to go to school at UTC," he said. "That was my very first job."

"I couldn't really take classes in the fall because it was such a hectic recruiting schedule, and it was all the way across the state. At that time, there weren't online



“I am looking forward to the *challenges* that we are going to face and I’m ready to *celebrate the wins*, because there are going to be wins for us as a campus.”

classes where they allowed you to join in. You had to be there in class face-to-face, so it took me about 5½ years to finish the master’s program.”

That would not only give Freeman a familiarity with West Tennessee, but it would also mark the beginning of an academic recruitment vocation that would bring him back to UT Chattanooga and, eventually, to UT Martin.

“I’ve been joking with folks to say my landmarks in northwest Tennessee are high schools,” he laughed. “If I can get to a high school, I kind of know what’s around it, so I do have some familiarity with the area.”

“My wife and I started dating before she graduated from Martin, so I had come and visited her here a couple of times, so that brought a familiarity with the area.”

Freeman said he developed a love for recruiting and working with the admissions process.

“It is what I really like to do because I see it as a pathway for folks; it’s a beginning pathway for folks to be able to transform their lives,” he said. “What higher ed has done for me is just phenomenal. I said that I grew up in a public housing project in Memphis. Never, ever, ever should I be sitting in this seat (in the chancellor’s office). If it were not for higher ed and the opportunities that higher ed provides, I wouldn’t be.”

“In a lot of ways, it saved my life, so for me, I see this as a very purposeful way of giving back to students, to staff, to faculty, to the community. It’s my way of giving

back, so I get energized by it — folks have to forgive me, because I really do. I really get energized by helping students and now, on a broader spectrum, even faculty, helping them to facilitate the outstanding work that they do.”

Freeman completed his master’s degree in 1998 — graduating just three days before his son, Yancy Jr., was born.

Freeman was hired for a position at Baylor School, a private secondary school in Chattanooga, where he would work with recruiting and boarding admissions for two years.

“Then, I came back to UTC in 1999 because the associate director of admissions position was available,” he said. “So, I had gone from admissions counselor to associate director of admissions at Baylor and then, back to higher ed as associate director of admissions at UTC.”

Freeman was promoted to vice chancellor for enrollment management and student success at UTC in December 2017. In that position, he oversaw the operations of admissions, financial aid and the registrar’s office as well as advising and other student success programs like tutoring and supplemental instruction.

In June 2018, the UTC vice chancellor for student affairs left that position, and Freeman took the position on an interim basis. He would eventually earn that position, changing his title to vice chancellor of enrollment management and student affairs.

Freeman said wanting to give back to

others has always been a part of him.

“It’s always been a part of my DNA,” he said. “It’s always been a part of the core of who I am.”

He added that being a first-generation college student has given him a perspective on bringing students with similar backgrounds to campus.

“It’s about access for me,” he said.

“It is giving students who might not possibly think that they could be here and, excelling and doing well, the chance to see themselves here.”

“If I can’t do anything else, sharing and talking about my story and sharing and talking about ‘If I can do it, you can do it.’ That’s the most powerful message that I can give. I care really hard, I care about people a lot, and I will work really hard. Those combinations have always worked for me. If you have those two things, everything else is going to come as a result of that.”

Freeman said that being back where his wife went to college as the chancellor of that university is meaningful.

“I am thrilled to be in this community,” he said. “I am overwhelmed by the generosity and kindness of the people who are in this community and the welcome that I have received coming into this community.”

“I am looking forward to the challenges that we are going to face together, and I’m ready to celebrate the wins, because there are going to be a lot of wins for us as a campus.”



ce together,  
to be a lot of wins





AT A GLANCE

@Chancy Yancy

Scan to learn more  
about Dr. Freeman.



Born in *Memphis*  
on September 17, 1969



'92 UTC GRAD

FAVORITE QUOTE:

“What you are stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary.” – *Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Letters and Social Aims,” 1875*

FAVORITE FOOD:



*Banana Pudding*

*Gamer*



LEARNING SPANISH

*¡Hola!*

FAVORITE  
VACATION SPOT:

*The Beach*



MARRIED IN '96

Rafielle A. Boone Freeman ('93)

*#marriedup*

2 CHILDREN: Yancy Jr. & Camille





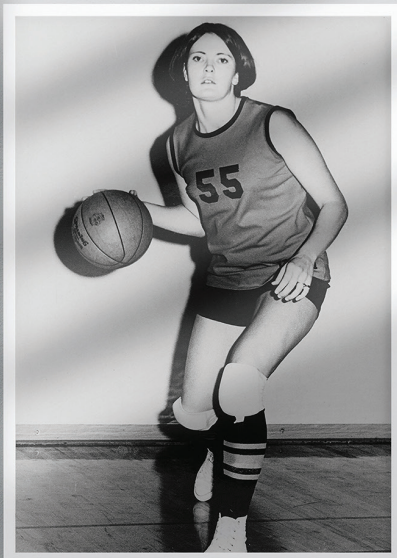
# Thank you for your service!

## 2023 RETIREES

Lynn M. Alexander  
David Belote  
Janet M. Bonar  
Sheryl F. Breeden  
Bradley K. Burkett  
Chris K. Caldwell  
Alice-Catherine Carls  
Sandra Carrington

Tommy A. Cates  
Teresa Y. Collard  
Cindy M. Cooper  
Carol A. Eckert  
Thomas E. Eskew  
Edie B. Gibson  
Michael A. Gibson

Phyllis Hammer  
Lisa C. LeBleu  
Henry H. Parker  
David L. Ray  
Victoria Strickland Seng  
Danny R. Walker  
Sheila Williams  
Calvin Dale Willis



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# READY FOR THE SPOTLIGHT

By **Bud Grimes**

Photos by **Steven Mantilla,**  
**Nathan Morgan & Eric Morgensen**











## Grant Larcom ('21)

has experienced 3,500 people watching and listening while he plays a piano solo. And he likes the feeling — a lot. His love for the piano and performing is taking this Union City native to stages across the U.S. and beyond as he regularly tours with Postmodern Jukebox, the traveling musical collective that transforms popular music into vintage genres.

The ability to play the piano is an enviable talent — in some cases, a gift — and the 24-year-old takes performing to the next level as he carves his own niche in the competitive Nashville music scene.

Larcom was encouraged but never pushed into his love for music. His father, Danny, owns an HVAC business in Union City, and he developed his musical interests while listening to his mother, Lori, play church hymns at home and for local nursing homes. He began piano lessons at age 5, and he continued to study for the next 18 years, including classical training that covers pre-1900s music.

"It (music) was always a major part of my personality," he said. "... As early as my memories go back, it was piano, piano, piano."

He participated in the Union City High School marching band starting in eighth grade, where he learned teamwork and, later, as a piano major at UT Martin, when he discovered his love for jazz piano and honed his technical skills. He chose UTM because of familiarity and cost, and as a University Scholar, the cost of his education was largely covered. His college choice also allowed him to perform in multiple ways by playing different kinds of music.

"I got to do a lot of different styles of music all at the same time and learned how to do those effectively," he said. "I learned how to manage my time and learned how to practice effectively."

Dr. Elaine Harriss, UT Martin professor of music, began teaching Larcom piano in eighth grade, and he continued to study with the longtime music faculty member through completion of his undergraduate degree. Harriss remembers Larcom's excitement for music and music theory.

"I remember him bursting into my studio excited that he found a new way to look at music theory from a website or to show me that he got the extra credit question on a theory test," Harriss said. "He was 'turned on' learning about music theory. This interest spearheaded his University Scholars project, a Mini Music Theory Book, and influenced his senior project on jazz piano."

Larcom recalled two performances in his musical journey that solidified his passion to perform. The first was his high school senior recital at the Obion County Public Library in Union City. His family announced the recital in the newspaper and was surprised with a larger-than-expected turnout, including people they didn't know.

"That felt really cool to me that there was this hidden community of people that apparently had been following me online on social media and knew of me who I didn't know about, and they came



out to support me in person," he said. " ... I'd say that was a pretty defining moment for me in terms of just believing that there are people that care about what I'm doing, and that felt really great."

His other career-affirming performance opportunity happened in September 2021 at Summerfest, held annually in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and billed as "the world's largest music festival." He learned that Jackson-based musician Hunter Cross, who owns a record shop called Third Eye Curiosities, needed a keyboard player after Cross was invited to play at Summerfest. The two artists had never met but connected for a quick rehearsal before heading to Milwaukee the next day.

"We played and then packed up our stuff and went and watched ZZ Top at the same festival," Larcom said. The experience of playing for "complete strangers that actually appreciated what we were doing" confirmed that Nashville was where he wanted to be.

While recitals and concerts had their place in Larcom's musical development, playing extensively at church helped him to reach other important milestones as a musician.

"It (playing at church) got rid of all of my anxiety when it comes to performing for a large crowd," he said of his four years playing piano for Union City Methodist Church. The experience also allowed him to experiment freely because his offertory selection involved playing his own arrangement of a hymn. "I learned how to make something from nothing on the fly and make something sound beautiful. It served as a place where I could experiment freely, not be judged by it."

Larcom moved to Nashville in January 2022, joining countless talented musicians attempting to make a living in the music business. It's not an easy life, and Larcom arrived fully focused on what he wanted to accomplish.

"A lot of people move to Nashville with big ambitions, and then they settle for the Broadway bar scene because it's quick, easy, reliable money. That's the trap of Nashville. You fall into that bar scene and then you never get out," he said. "But I am not in that bar scene. I've stayed really far away from it."

A short time later in March, Larcom's journey led him to Postmodern Jukebox.

Larcom first listened to PMJ in 2015 and was a fan of the music and arrangements. He didn't know that PMJ founder Scott Bradlee had moved the organization's headquarters in recent years from Los Angeles to Nashville.

One day he was scrolling a Facebook group for musicians when he saw a casting call for Nashville talent. Sensing this was the break he sought, Larcom submitted a one-minute audition video



"and then waited, and waited, and waited."

He finally received a call and auditioned live with veteran PMJ pianist Jesse Elder. All of this happened in March, "And then in July, I got an email with a tour offer to do two months in 36 cities in the U.S. ... and that email changed my life 100%."

Larcom said PMJ began as a "Motown tribute to Nickelback," but the group quickly transformed into a much larger concept by rearranging music from multiple artists.

Today PMJ audiences hear a variety of popular and rock songs arranged in old classic music styles. He referenced "Gangsta's Paradise" by Coolio performed as a swing cover as an example to show PMJ's creative musical range.

PMJ's audience appeal is the musical arrangements and not the cast, so several versions of PMJ can tour at the same time in different parts of the U.S. and the world. This means more potential opportunities for Larcom and other musicians to perform, and he's impressed how well the music is received by young and old audiences alike who are treated to a big-time production.

Larcom has played a range of well-known venues that include the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville and the Paramount Theatre in Seattle, where he performed a solo in a packed house of 3,500 concert goers.

The shows generally include 12 musicians and singers who travel together on large buses, and Larcom has no problem with the extended travel, which can last six or seven weeks; overseas tours have lasted more than several months. The group boards a bus at 10 or 11 p.m., settles into private bunks, travels all night and awakens







with the bus parked in the city where PMJ will perform. The cast members then have free time until they attend a sound check scheduled well ahead of the evening show, followed by more free time before show preparations begin.

"So, for some people, it's extremely sustainable (the travel). For some people, it's probably not," he said. "... I think it's a treat in itself just getting to see all these different places all at once. I like traveling, though, so if you're content sitting at home all the time, maybe it's not for you."

Larcom not only enjoys touring, but he also enjoys the people associated with PMJ. Recalling his first tour, he has nothing but positive feelings about the entire experience.

It's very rare that I get to be around 10 other world-class musicians who just speak the same language as I do," he said. "... There was no more anxiety. ... It was the most welcoming, open environment I've ever been in."

Larcom's practice routine is much different these days compared to when he was taking piano lessons or attending UT Martin. The expectation for Nashville musicians is "play a song that you've never heard before and nail it," so he must stay at the top of his game. However, instead of scheduled practice time, he plays to satisfy his musical curiosity and improves by exploring and creating at the keyboard. Conversely, PMJ rehearsals are structured and divided into four eight-hour days. Larcom knows that other musicians would love to be in his situation, so with no day being typical, he stays flexible.

Along with his musical gifts, flexibility and patience might be among Larcom's most valuable assets. He would remind other young

musicians that the music business ebbs and flows, so he has other talents to fall back on, such as web and graphic-design skills. Despite his early success and varied talents, it's not always been easy to persevere.

"I think the goal for everybody in life should be to find something you love to do and then figure out how to make a living off of it, and that's what I finally have been able to do," he said. That said, Larcom has had moments when he's been tempted to rethink his future.

"Even after this last tour with PMJ and I hadn't heard back from them for just a little while, I was like, 'This is it. This is it.' I was considering moving back home," he said. Fortunately, PMJ called again with another touring opportunity, and Larcom has remained in Nashville to pursue his dream.

Elaine Harriss is among those who isn't surprised by Larcom's early success.

"Grant thoroughly enjoys making music, and he does it well," she said. "His pianistic technique, his understanding of music theory, his facility with various styles of keyboard playing, and his ensemble flexibility are the musical characteristics necessary for his chosen field.

"He also has the interpersonal skills, which make him easy to work with and he's interested in trying out new things."

As he makes his way in a competitive and uncertain business, this talented musician can't help but look back to when his parents encouraged him to take piano lessons. Their support pointed him toward the stage and ultimately to the next tour destination – wherever that takes him.

Grant Larcom is in a place he wants to be, and he and his piano welcome the bright lights as he shares his musical gift with the world.

Follow his career at [grantlar.com](http://grantlar.com).

**"Grant thoroughly enjoys making music, and he does it well... He also has the interpersonal skills, which make him easy to work with and he's interested in trying out new things"**

**-Dr. Elaine Harriss**









# GOING NUTS



Story by **Charles Primm** | Photos by **Zack Smith**

There's a phrase in the Farsi language, "from garlic to onion" that roughly translates to "from A to Z."

For **Soheila Maleki ('91)**, with roots in both Iran and the U.S., food encompasses her professional life.

Maleki is a research scientist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in New Orleans, where she studies food allergies and ways to reduce the severity of the problem.

"I've always been interested in the structure

and function of allergenic proteins in food and how they interact with the immune system, as well as the effects of food processing on the allergenic properties of foods, in particular of peanuts," she said. "A lot of my focus has been research on peanut allergies, and more recently, my team has expanded to look at tree nuts as well as other allergens such as shrimp, eggs and milk."

Maleki said her path to studying food allergies wasn't a straight line but featured a few twists and turns.

"My mother is from Illinois and my dad was from Iran, so after graduating high school in Iran, I moved to Tennessee for college. It

was a bit of a culture shock," she said.

Family friends lived in Millington, and their son had graduated from UT Martin, so they recommended it to Maleki.

"I was fortunate to be accepted at UT Martin, she said. "I enjoyed the opportunity to get to know more people, and it was an intimate and friendly environment. I developed great relationships with the faculty and received more personalized attention, which was great."

She earned her bachelor's degree in chemistry with a minor in biology.

"My intention was to go to medical school, but after I took some biochemistry classes, I realized I wanted to go in a different direction."



# RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT EARLY INTRODUCTION OF PEANUTS CAN REDUCE DEVELOPMENT OF PEANUT ALLERGY BY

# 80%

Maleki said she discovered a love for biochemistry during her time at UT Martin.

"The field just fascinated me," she said. "I had to work hard to pass that first class since I also had two jobs, but I fell in love with the topic."

Then a professor gave her the opportunity to assist in the biochemistry lab one summer.

"We were studying hemoglobin and metabolism levels in tadpoles, and I enjoyed it so much that I thought, 'This is it; I want to do this kind of work,' so instead of medical school, I enrolled in graduate school," she said.

During graduate school in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Maleki found her particular research area, studying the structure and functions of proteins.

"I was in Little Rock, I had just finished my Ph.D. and gotten engaged, and I didn't want to leave town," she said. "I

knew that a professor

just down the hall had started looking at peanut allergies. As it happened, one of my best friends was a graduate student, and she had a severe peanut allergy. That's what piqued my interest, and next thing you know, I was hooked."

She began a post-doctoral fellowship studying the proteins in peanuts that cause allergic reactions.

One question she often hears is whether the food allergy problem is getting worse or if it's just a case of growing public awareness of the problem.

"The answer is it's both," she said.

"Peanut allergy has actually tripled in the last few decades, going from 0.4% of the population having an allergy to more than 1.5% in the U.S. Most people now know at least one other person who has a food allergy, and that leads to increased awareness of the problem."

The globalization of markets may play a role in this enhanced level of food allergies, Maleki said.

"Many years ago, we may not have ever seen a kiwi fruit, but now they're everywhere," she said. "The prevalence of food allergy is different in various countries and is somewhat dependent on their diet and environment. In the U.S., rice is considered hypoallergenic, but in Japan, rice is a serious allergy, particularly because it's a staple of their diet."

Another big food allergy in Asia is buckwheat, because it's used to make soba noodles, which are prevalent in the diet.

"In the West, peanuts are a major allergy. The United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the U.S. report the highest levels of peanut allergy, but in the Mediterranean, peanut allergies are at a very low level," she said.

One main way to address the food allergy problem is by reducing food sensitivity in children.

"Here in the U.S., for many years, it was recommended that children should avoid peanuts and peanut butter until age 3 because of the choking factor. But, in the past few years, it has been shown that, if we were to introduce them at 4 to 6 months to infants that are at high risk for developing peanut allergy, we are likely to change the future," she added that research has shown that early introduction of peanuts can reduce development of peanut allergy by 80%. For children and adults who already have the allergy, oral immunotherapy can desensitize them "so that if they have an accidental exposure, they're not going to end up in the emergency room."


Another way to reduce food allergies is by changing the way foods are processed. Recently, it was found that food processing can make oral immunotherapy safer.

"For individuals with allergies to milk or eggs, it's been shown that, if you bake the foods into a muffin, it makes it less dangerous and less painful than giving them a fried egg or a glass of milk," she said. Oral immunotherapy must always be done under a physician's supervision in a clinical setting rather than unsupervised at home, she said.

However, using a food for immunotherapy and marketing a hypoallergenic peanut product to the public are very different things.







"One of the problems is that, with food processing, it's difficult for everyone in the industry to change all of their methods and equipment because, in the grand scheme of things, everything that happens to the peanut once it's harvested can be considered processing," she said. "You can change a few processes along the line, but the global food supply chain isn't open to wholesale changes."

Additionally, changes in the aroma, flavor and texture of food could lead to reduced acceptance by consumers, she said.

Maleki's research has contributed to the development of the first food that has been characterized as a pharmaceutical. The product, Palforzia, is the first food to be approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for treatment of a food allergy.

As a result of her research, Maleki was a finalist for the 2018 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medal, awarded by the nonpartisan nonprofit Partnership for Public Service. Known as the "Sammies," the award highlights the work of U.S. federal employees.

Looking back, Maleki said she's grateful for the opportunities she found at UT Martin.

"I've always appreciated the education that I got there," she said. "I feel like I grew up in Martin because, when I arrived, I had just turned 18. It was such a blessing to go to school somewhere where you knew that people had your back."



# A DEGREE THAT DELIVERS

Story by **David Snow** | Photo by **Steven Mantilla**

**M**adison King Philpot ('22) is a native of Jackson, so when she was able to find a job at Jackson-Madison County General Hospital after graduating from college, she was thrilled, to say the least.

Philpot (pronounced "FILL-poe") earned her bachelor of nursing degree from the University of Tennessee at Martin in May 2022, and is a labor and delivery nurse at the hospital.

"I did residency that started in June 2022 after I graduated," Philpot said. "Then, you go through the rotations of all the different floors, and then, you sit through the interviews of all the departments that you really like, and you hope for an offer from one of those."

"I officially started with labor and delivery in August. It feels great! I was actually born in that hospital."

She said that while her college training was excellent, the real-world experience in the hospital has been helpful as well.

"I've really been blessed with a good group," she said. "They have a bunch of seasoned nurses who have taken us new grads under their wing and taught us so much. Nursing is such a 'team sport' — it really is. You have your patients that you are assigned to, but we all work together to take care of everybody and make sure that everybody has the best care."

"You graduate from nursing school and you think, 'OK, I've got this,' and then, you show up for work and you think, 'Oh, there's so much more that they couldn't possibly cover (in school).'"

Philpot said that while there is a difference between classroom settings and real-world applications, she has been well-prepared by her instructors at UT Martin.

"Martin did prepare us with a very extensive amount of clinical hours," she said. "But, with labor and delivery being a specialty, when you graduate and start in a specialty, you have to really hone

in to the fact that both skills (classroom and real-world) are going to be applicable to that.

"That's been a whole new perspective, too, but I've really enjoyed it, and I've had a really good group that taught me a lot." Philpot has found that she is combining the lessons learned in clinical classrooms as well as those learned in her real-world "classroom" to succeed at her job.

"I feel like Martin prepared me really well with the amount of class time and clinical hours that we had," she said.

Philpot said she was inspired to go into labor and delivery because she was interested in taking care of new mothers and their new family members.

"This is a life-changing event, obviously," she said. "Being able to enjoy that and share that joy with people is great."

"It can be hard sometimes and not always a happy occasion, but I enjoy being at the bedside with those patients and get to build relationships with them and encourage and advocate for them."

Philpot was inspired to go into the field of medicine by her parents. Her father, **Dr. Michael King ('88)**, is a dentist in Jackson (and a UT Martin graduate), and her mother, Michelle, is a dental hygienist in Michael's office.

"I knew that I wanted to work in health care in some capacity from the time I was very young," Philpot said. "That definitely played a part in that, because that's what I saw my parents doing."

"Ultimately I chose nursing because I love working directly with the patients at their bedside. I just really love that aspect of it and getting to build that relationship with them."

Learn more about the UT Martin Department of Nursing at [utm.edu/nursing](http://utm.edu/nursing) or follow them on social media @utm\_nursing.







# ALUMNI NEWS

## A Note From Alumni Relations

The fall semester, almost like the new year, brings a sense of change...or new beginnings. This semester is no different, especially as we begin the academic year celebrating the naming of UT Martin's 12th chancellor, Dr. Yancy Freeman. During the fall semester, we embarked on the "Take Flight with Freeman" tour, where we introduced Chancellor Freeman to our wonderful alumni across the region. This tour has brought a renewed energy to alumni participation, and we are looking forward to reinvigorating alumni engagement across Tennessee.

UT Martin Alumni Relations is searching for alumni ambassadors in every community in Tennessee. Alumni leaders are the front lines of the UT Martin message and help in recruitment, alumni events and advocacy efforts. If you are interested in serving as an alumni ambassador in your community, let us know! Complete our volunteer engagement form at [alumni.utm.edu/volunteer](http://alumni.utm.edu/volunteer).

Whether or not you sign up as an official alumni ambassador, we consider every alumnus and alumna an ambassador of UT Martin. By telling your UTM story to prospective students, fellow community members and even alumni friends, you help to grow the UT Martin network, and we are tremendously grateful.

We hope to see you back on campus soon.

*Jackie Johnson*

**Dr. Jackie Johnson ('08, '10)**

Assistant Vice Chancellor for Alumni Relations and Annual Giving

**UTM**Alumni

### SEE MORE ONLINE

For the most up-to-date information, news and event schedules, check out the alumni website at [alumni.utm.edu](http://alumni.utm.edu).





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## ALUMNI.UTM.EDU

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

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



### **Keith and Monica Driscoll ('22)**

have traveled many a road together. Their story includes meeting while serving in the U.S. Marine Corps, marriage several years later, attending college together and the birth of the couple's first child.

During the last few years, the couple also made a big dent in their bucket-list goal to travel to all 50 states, an unlikely accomplishment as life happened for the couple. They received their UT Martin criminal justice degrees during December 2022 commencement exercises in the Kathleen and Tom Elam Center and keep moving toward the next adventure.

The Driscolls, who live in Gates, married in September 2018, the first semester they started at UT Martin. They continued to live in Lauderdale County and traveled to classes together when possible, which was a 90-minute commute to the main campus. The Driscolls' daughter, Maelynne, was born in July 2019.

Both explored different majors before settling on criminal justice. Among the real-world training in their major, the Driscolls spent a day at the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security Training Center in Nashville (see photo on page 40) and the Lawrence D. Bromley Training Center located in the C.E. Weldon Building in Martin. The Bromley Training Center features a VirTra judgmental use-of-force simulator to recreate realistic law enforcement situations.

Continued on page 40



## spotlight on alums



Continued from page 39

"There's a big emphasis on the de-escalation training in the simulator, and I think that really helps a lot," Keith said. "You're exposed to a number of different scenarios, and how you react determines a certain outcome of the simulation."

While pursuing degrees with a growing family, the Driscolls pursued a goal to visit every state in the nation. Their daughter's birth gave her a head start on her parents' bucket-list item as Maelynne has been a part of many trips in her young life.

"We actually took our first road trip with my mother," Monica said. "We went to the Grand Canyon and a few more places (in the region). That's when our first big road trip started, and then every summer since then, we've kind of taken road trips, cross-country road trips for months at a time."

While the family travel made memories, the ability to take online classes provided a way to continue progress toward their degrees while on the road.

"We've taken a few summer classes while traveling," Monica said. "We've actually taken quite a few of Dr. (Brian) Donavant's classes while we've been traveling. ... We actually like doing the video discussions for his class." Donavant is professor of criminal justice (pictured on page 39 with the Driscolls).

Following years of commuting to Martin, adapting to a mix of online and in-person classes and plenty of hard work, receiving

their bachelor's degrees was a proud moment for the Driscolls. And the moment was made even more special by crossing the commencement stage together. With degrees in hand, the couple is currently partners in a commercial and residential pressure-washing business, and the future is filled with promise.

"It makes me feel so proud of myself because I've never been that great at school. ... And for me to graduate with honors and to actually get my bachelor's degree — nobody else in my family other than my mother has actually gotten a college degree," Monica said.

"Keith and Monica were great students, and I think they both would make outstanding police officers, but I'm confident the skills they gained in our program will transition well to other ventures, and they'll succeed in whatever they do," Donavant said. "After all, life's a journey and situations change. That's what our program and a UTM education is all about — helping folks to get to where they want to be."

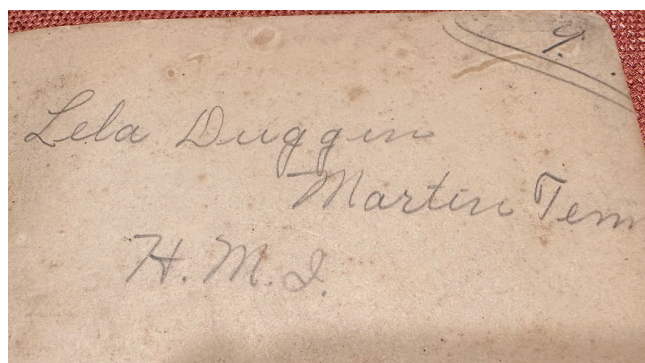
Graduation was memorable for another reason — Monica was expecting the couple's second child when received their degrees, and their second daughter, Laynie, was born May 27. Their growing family will likely plan visits to a few more states to finish that travel bucket list, which became a memorable part of their education journey.





West TN Pharms, a West Tennessee pharmacy chain co-owned by five University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Pharmacy graduates, received its own UT mural in April 2023 as part of the “Everywhere You Look, UT” campaign. Kenton Drug Company, located in Obion County, is home to the 36th mural in the campaign. Co-owner **Derek Holyfield ('98)** is a proud graduate of UT Martin and the UTHSC College of Pharmacy ('02). Holyfield, along with partners **Jennifer Hopper ('95)**, Greg Emison, **Brian Whitby ('01)** and Kelly Weaver, founded the chain of eight pharmacies in rural West Tennessee with the aim of providing high-quality pharmaceutical care to patients in mainly rural, underserved areas. Pictured (l-r) are Greg Emison, Kelly Weaver, Brian Whitby, Jenny Hopper and Derek Holyfield.

When **Jack Miller Jr.**, of West Side Antiques in Fayetteville, Tennessee, came across an old book with an inscription indicating that it came from Martin, he sent the book to his friend, **Larry Holder ('81)**, who works in the university's Office of Information Technology Services. Larry, who attended UTM from 1976-77, looked further into the inscription and soon realized that the initials “H.M.I.” were for Hall-Moody Institute, from which UT Martin originated. The book was a recently published (circa 1910) textbook for education students. The student, **Lela Duggin**, was confirmed by Karen Elmore, of Paul Meek Library Special Collections, who found their name listed in the Hall-Moody School Journal on page 42 under “Complete Enrollment by Departments of Hall-Moody Institute for the year 1910-1911.” An Internet search revealed that Lela Duggin married Watt Epps in 1917 and settled in Rutherford County in the current-day town of Smyrna and taught



at Hunt's Hill School, which operated until at least 1918. Lela was born in 1888 and died in 1973. The textbook was likely part of an estate sale, eventually finding its way to Jack Miller's antique store and his keen eye for historical Martin artifacts.

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# BLACK ALUMNI GALA

In June, the UT Martin Black Alumni Council held its annual Scholarship Gala to raise funds to support the BAC Scholarship and celebrate some of the pioneers who paved the way for future Skyhawks. The event was held at the Great Hall and Conference Center in Germantown. Winners of the Black Excellence Award were **Dr. Mark McCloud ('92), Ruby Armstrong ('79), Ted Williams ('83) and Candace Tate ('04)**. Dr. Keith Carver and **Dr. Charley Deal ('92, '96)** were awarded the BAC Leadership Award. Faith Johnson received the BAC Scholarship Award.



(l-r) Derek Giles, Larry Grandberry ('93), Ted Williams ('83), Dr. Dedrick Messenger ('90), Joel White ('82) and William Edwards ('87)



(l-r) Dr. Charley Deal ('92, '96), Tonya Parson ('93), April Armstrong ('04) and Dr. Lemoyne Robinson ('93)



*A Salute to*





Candace Tate ('04) and Tonya Parson



Brian Bougard ('10), Ruby Armstrong ('79) and Tonya Parson



Dr. Keith Carver and Tonya Parson



Tonya Parson, Dr. Mark McCloud and Brian Bougard

Black Excellence



# in memory



**Roy Herron ('75)**, longtime Dresden attorney and 26-year member of the Tennessee General Assembly, passed away July 9 from injuries received in a July 1 jet ski accident. Funeral services were held Saturday, July 15, at Martin First United Methodist Church.

The UT Martin and Vanderbilt University graduate was a well-known leader and political figure who served as Tennessee state representative from 1987 to 1997 and state senator from 1997 to 2013, representing Weakley County and 10 other counties in West and Middle Tennessee. In 2010, he was the Democratic nominee for U.S. Congress (8th Congressional District) and chaired the state Democratic Party from 2013-15.

He visited the university's Paul Meek Library on Nov. 2, 2021, to discuss his fourth book, "Faith in Politics: Southern Political Battles Past and Present." The book is published by the University of Tennessee Press and provides a selection of his writings over four decades as a legislator, attorney, teacher and Methodist minister. His obituary noted that his legislative career focused on health care, public education, consumer protection and victim's rights.

"I think these essays are at least my best attempt to argue that there's a place for our faith in politics and that when our politics is shaped by our faith, by the best and deepest of our values, that our politics could be lifegiving and life enhancing and can help us be who we are called to be," Herron told the audience.

He is survived by his wife, Nancy Carol, and his sons, Rick, John and Ben.

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

- **Sam Anderson ('75)**, of Martin, passed away Aug. 23, 2023 (former UT Martin International Programs faculty member).
- **John Edward Bell**, of Union City, passed away April 29, 2023 (retired librarian, Paul Meek Library).
- **John Steven Carter ('81)**, of Coppell, Texas, passed away June 22, 2023.
- **Wayne Chester**, of Martin, passed away May 30, 2023 (retired professor emeritus of geography).
- **Robert Conley Sr. ('62)**, of Southaven, Mississippi, passed away May 13, 2023.
- **Dr. Steven Denver Crews ('90)**, of Union City, passed away May 4, 2023.
- **Dr. Dwight Gatwood**, of Martin, passed away July 17, 2023 (retired professor emeritus of music).
- **Bonnie Hernon**, of Martin, passed away June 11, 2023 (former music faculty member).
- **Roy Herron ('75)**, of Dresden, passed away July 9, 2023 (see related story).
- **Joe Lofaro ('88, '12)**, of Martin, passed away March 11, 2023 (former UT Martin Sports Information Director).
- **James Walter Lynch Jr. ('86)**, of Waynesboro, passed away Feb. 28, 2023.
- **Paula Morris ('61)**, of Sharon, passed away June 10, 2023.
- **Richard "Dick" Moseman ('65)**, of Hilliard, Ohio, passed away March 22, 2023.
- **Robert Melvin Page ('76)**, of Memphis, passed away May 1, 2023.
- **Courtney Rea ('08)**, of Martin, passed away March 26, 2023.
- **Dr. Gary Steinke**, of Martin, passed away Aug. 5, 2023 (retired professor emeritus of communications).
- **Stan Suiter ('13)**, of Martin, passed away Aug. 12, 2023.
- **Elsie May Templeton**, of Memphis, passed away Feb. 26, 2023 (retired housing custodian).
- **Dr. James E. Toomey**, of Greenville, South Carolina, passed away March 1, 2023 (retired associate professor emeritus of education).
- **Dr. Bill Zachry**, of Memphis, passed away June 19, 2023 (former psychology faculty member and Honors Programs director).

"My hope is that future generations will not forget those who have worked and sacrificed to make the institution what it is today. They have left behind a lasting legacy."

*Bob Carroll, The University of Tennessee at Martin:  
The First One Hundred Years*



## class notes

1969

**Robert M. (Pete) Counce ('69)**, professor emeritus of chemical and biomolecular engineering, retired from the University of Tennessee in June 2023. He remains active in chemical and electro-chemical separation research.

1976

**David Belote ('76, '80)**, of Martin, was named Weakley Countian of the Year on April 18 at the Weakley County Chamber of Commerce Annual Banquet. In addition to his time at UT Martin, David has served as Martin city alderman and executive director of the Tennessee Soybean Festival. He began work at the university in September 1976 and fully retired in May 2023 from UTM. His final university position was interim director of campus recreation.

1982

**Heather Jensen ('82)** retired from the University of Nebraska at Omaha after an 18-year career as the university animal care coordinator.

1984

The **Rev. Roger Shock ('84)**, a native of Jackson, Tenn., is the pastor of Union City Methodist Church and an elder in the Global Methodist Church. In addition to his UT Martin degree, he holds a Master of Divinity from Memphis Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Jan, a Lambuth University graduate, have five grown children.

1988

**Dr. Brian Clardy ('88)**, an associate professor of history at Murray State University, was unanimously elected the chair of the Kentucky Humanities Council (KHC) board of directors. He was first appointed to the KHC and the Kentucky Oral History Commission by Governor Andy Beshear in 2020.

1995

**Dr. Julie Basler ('95)** was recognized as one of the "Top 20 People Changing Career Education" in 2022. She was selected by an independent committee for her work in improving mental health and the well-being of students, faculty and staff across her campus.

2002

**Tymikia Glenn ('02)** was named executive director of the new, state-of-the-art Georgette and Cato Johnson YMCA in Memphis.

2005

**Nicholas Glenn ('05)** was named a regional director for the Law Enforcement Against Drugs and Violence (L.E.A.D.) national program.

2007

**Latoya Brewer ('07)** welcomed a baby boy in June 2023. The future Skyhawk's name is Chase Alexander.

2013

**Kimberly Woods ('13)** earned a promotion to manager of alumni affairs at Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Rust College, founded in 1866, is the oldest historically Black university on the state.

**Nathan Grasfeder ('13)**, a civil engineer at L.I. Smith & Associates (LIS), earned his engineering license in the state of Tennessee making him the third professional engineer on the LIS staff. He specializes in site development.

2016

**Dr. Hope Becton ('16)** graduated with a Ph.D. in plant and environmental sciences from Clemson University. She accepted a research specialist position at North Dakota, where she will be conducting research in soybean pathology.

2017

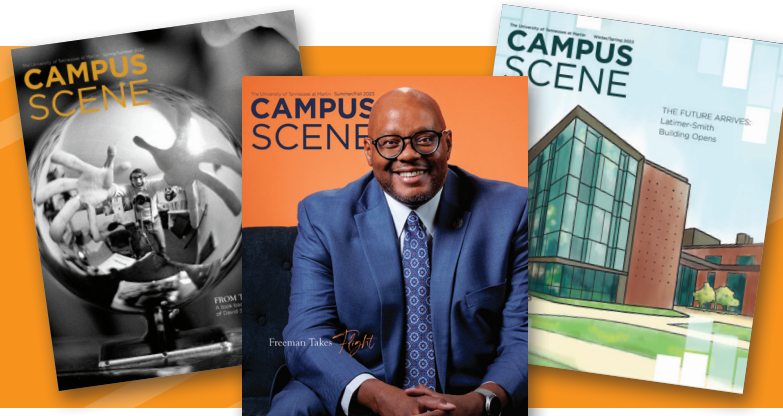
**Alec Richardson ('17)** was appointed in July as a senior advisor to Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee and a member of the governor's cabinet. The Perry County native attended the UT Martin Parsons Center.

2021

**Melisa Haymore ('21)** completed her education specialist degree at Middle Tennessee State University and has started her doctorate at Virginia University in Lynchburg.

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The Lifetime Giving Society is comprised of a select circle of donors whose significant and sustained support profoundly impacts the University of Tennessee at Martin. The society recognizes donors who contribute \$25,000 or greater to the university over the course of their lifetimes or through their estates.



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## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT ► Iman Ahmed, *Memphis, Tenn.*



**Iman Ahmed** has certainly made the most of her time as a UT Martin student.

In Spring 2023, Ahmed served as an intern in the Tennessee Legislature. Ahmed had heard about the internship through Dr. Chris Baxter in the department of accounting, economics, finance and political science. She worked with a state senator from her home area of Memphis.

"I was assigned to the Senate Minority Leader's office, who was Raumesh Akbari from Memphis," Ahmed said. "It was a good experience to learn more about state politics."

A great part of Ahmed's job was researching bills, attending committee meetings and hearing discussion, debate and concerns about the proposed bills.

Ahmed was the student representative on the UTM Advisory Board for the 2022-23 school year.

To become the student representative, Ahmed was elected as one of two candidates to the position in a student election. Those candidates are interviewed by the chancellor and Faculty Senate president, who, at that time, were Dr. Keith Carver and Dr. Anderson Starling, respectively.

"As a student, I had a unique perspective that the other board members did not," she said. "I got to learn a lot about things I didn't consider before, like the university's master plan and retention rates and other things that you don't think about as a student."

Since there was only one advisory board meeting during Ahmed's internship in Nashville, she was able to take part in that advisory board meeting.

Ahmed said she wants to go through the master's degree and doctorate degree programs in political science with a focus on

international relations or comparative politics.

"I want to work in both (as an educator and outside the campus), but I would like to start in working in nongovernmental organizations," she said.

Ahmed is a member of the University Scholars Program.

She said the experience of working in the Tennessee Legislature taught her about government and was one of her most fulfilling experiences.

"I've always been more pulled toward international issues and international politics, but I learned a lot and it was a really enjoyable and informative time," she said. "Also, SGA has taught me a lot about leadership. I was not this involved in high school, so coming into college during COVID, SGA was one of the first organizations I joined, and it taught me about leadership and how to work with other people."





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