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» **Chancellor
Bentley
Wallace**

A HOMECOMING TO
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» **The Dillon
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Greetings,

Welcome to the Spring 2024 edition of The Keystone. Once again, we are bringing you the great news of all that is happening at your college, Arkansas State University-Mountain Home.

I am so pleased to be part of the team at ASUMH! Being the third chancellor at the college and having the opportunity to serve students, faculty, staff, and the community is a great honor. There are so many things to be proud of, including world-class faculty and scholarly work, career education, amazing student supports, the finest commu-

nity college architecture, and unrivaled art and entertainment options. And all those things are only getting better and stronger!

As part of the Arkansas State University System, ASUMH has benefited from the leadership of system president, Dr. Chuck Welch. As of January 2024, Dr. Welch is making a career change to become the CEO of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Dr. Welch's legacy of supporting ASUMH, and all the member campuses of the system, will be felt forever. He provided stalwart leadership and guidance throughout his 12 years at the helm. Thank you, Dr. Welch!

As we look to what 2024 will bring in the life of our college and community, there is nothing but opportunity and positive energy while we focus on finding new and better ways to promote student success, find operational efficiencies, and maintain our spot as the region's premier higher education institution, now and in the

future. We are proud TrailBlazers, and we can't wait to see what comes next!

Thank you for your continued support of ASUMH and our students. We couldn't do what we do without your encouragement and commitment to education.

All our best,



BENTLEY WALLACE, Ed.D.

*Chancellor
Arkansas State University
Mountain Home*



Dr. Chuck Welch

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A PUBLICATION OF
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noun \ˈkē-,stōn\

: a large stone at the top of an arch that
locks the other stones in place
: something on which other things
depend for support

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TOP COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Aspen Institute

Names Arkansas State University-Mountain Home as a Top 150 U.S. Community Colleges

Arkansas State University-Mountain Home (ASUMH) has been named among the top 150 U.S. community colleges by the Aspen Institute.

Dr. Bentley Wallace, Chancellor of ASUMH, expressed pride in this fifth recognition by the Aspen Institute, acknowledging the faculty and staff's commitment. The Aspen Prize highlights

the role of community colleges in ensuring post-graduate success and disseminating effective student success strategies. The 150 colleges selected represent a diverse range of sizes and locations across 30 states.

Josh Wyner, executive director of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, emphasized the importance of maintaining focus on core educational missions, especially in challenging times. The Aspen Prize evaluates colleges in six areas, including teaching quality, degree completion, workforce success, and equitable access.

ART WALK

Unveiling of First Installation

ASUMH and the City of Mountain Home unveiled the first sculpture of the ASUMH/City of Mountain Home Art Walk on October 17, 2023. The event marks a collaboration aiming to enhance local art and leisure activities. The abstract corten metal sculpture, enabled by an anonymous donor, is located at the Sheid-Hopper Bypass and College Street intersection.

Created by metal artist Patrick Shannon of Forest Edge Gallery, the sculpture initiates the Art Walk, which is part of a three-mile recreational trail connecting ASUMH and Donald W. Reynolds Library campuses. The ASUMH/City of Mountain Home Art Walk is a collaboration between the college and city to curate art that blends with nature and foster community in the Twin Lakes area. The three-mile recreational trail stretches across the ASUMH and Donald W. Reynolds Library Serving Baxter County campuses with a connection of the college and city paths underneath the Sheid-Hopper Bypass. The trail extension was planned and built by the City of Mountain Home's Parks and Recreation and Street departments.

Future enhancements will take place on both the college and city sides of the trail. A grant from the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) will allow for solar lights to be installed along the path once an architect designs the landscape, which will feature botanical gardens.

Mayor Hillrey Adams and ASUMH Director of Development Mollie Morgan expressed excitement for the trail's growth and community impact. The Art Walk already hosts the StoryWalk, a 1,600-foot area with reading stations, in collaboration with the Donald W. Reynolds Library.



LEARNING COMMONS

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NEW SPACE

Redefining Campus Spaces for Collaboration and Engagement Among Students, Faculty, and Staff

In an effort to create more collaborative space on campus where students, faculty and staff can work side-by-side in a comfortable environment, the tutoring center on the second floor of Dryer Hall has been reimagined. The new "Learning Commons" is designed as a hub for technology and group-study, where students have access to computers, wireless networking and instructors. The Learning Commons is located just off the main lobby of Dryer Hall. Dryer is home to classes in the School of Arts and Sciences, but students from all majors are welcome to enjoy the space. No reservations are required.

About the space, ASUMH's Chancellor, Dr. Bentley Wallace, said, "This exciting new space is perfect for co-working, collaboration, and engagement between students, faculty, and staff."



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Kelly Baker



Adrienne Blackwell



Katy Page



Kristina Radivojevic

BEST OF THE BEST

From faculty and staff to a vast network of students and alumni, it takes commitment and skill to help make this institution what it is. Every year, ASUMH salutes those who've gone above and beyond to keep the campus running, the quality of instruction high and to use what they have learned to benefit the community.

KELLY BAKER

ACADEMIC ALL-STAR OF THE YEAR

ASUMH's Academic All-Star, Kelly Baker, is pursuing prerequisites for a bachelor's degree in nursing, aiming to focus on clinical education and public health research. As leader of the Association of Students with Disabilities and Chronic Conditions (ASDCC), she's active in the rare disease/disability community, running support groups, speaking publicly, and serving on research panels. Kelly seeks to empower patients through advocacy and patient-focused care and research, drawing from her own experiences with chronic illness and rare diseases.

ADRIENNE BLACKWELL

ALUMNI OF THE YEAR

Adrienne Blackwell, ASUMH's Alumni of the Year recipient, is a 2006

ASU-Mountain Home graduate, and earned a Business Management degree from Arkansas State University in 2011. After 19 years in finance, she now works in health-care philanthropy at Baxter Health Foundation and is pursuing CFRE credentials. Active in her community, she's involved in her church and local organizations. Blackwell enjoys outdoor activities with her husband, Marc, and their two daughters.

KATY PAGE

STAFF MEMBER OF THE YEAR

Katy Page, ASU-Mountain Home's 2023 Staff Member of the Year, is the administrative assistant for the Provost/Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. With two degrees earned at ASUMH, including Funeral Science, Katy is known for her

dedication, service-oriented spirit, and part-time work as a licensed funeral director. In her spare time, she enjoys crafting, shopping with her family, and competing in antique tractor pulling on a 1936 John Deere tractor.

KRISTINA RADIVOJEVICH

FACULTY MEMBER OF THE YEAR

Kristina Radivojevic is a Biology Instructor at ASUMH and teaches Anatomy & Physiology and Microbiology courses. She has worked at ASUMH for six years and enjoys the interaction with her students both in and out of the classroom. She is passionate about Biology and her students. In her free time she enjoys spending time with her husband and three dogs as well as kayaking, paddle boarding, and fishing.

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| EVENT OF THE YEAR

A SHINING SUCCESS

How a Visionary Idea Lit Up Mountain Home, Arkansas

The Coulter Celebration of Lights in Mountain Home, Arkansas, quickly garnered recognition, receiving the “Festival/Special Event of the Year 1-4yrs” award from the Arkansas Recreation and Parks Association within two years of its inception. The event, conceptualized in 2021 by Mayor Hillrey Adams and then-Chancellor of ASUMH Dr. Robin Myers, transformed the ASUMH campus into a mesmerizing drive-through lights festival. Adams, inspired by similar state-wide festivals, chose ASUMH for its accessibility and partnered with Dr. Myers to bring the project to life.

The planning started in February 2021, focusing on a key success factor: a dedicated project leader. ASUMH Development Officer Mollie Morgan was chosen for this role. The festival, named after former ASUMH Chancellor Dr. Ed

Coulter and his wife, Lucretia, following their generous donation, debuted in November 2021.

In its inaugural years, the festival attracted over 14,348 cars and raised around \$77,407 in donations, contributing \$20,000 to ASUMH scholarships. Support exceeded \$450,000, funding electrical infrastructure and over 30 holiday displays with thousands of lights.

Morgan, the coordinator, highlighted the community’s joy and involvement, with over 150 volunteers annually preparing the displays and working the festival. The scholarships generated significantly benefit ASUMH students and the community.

Mayor Adams praised the collective efforts of the ASUMH maintenance crew, Mountain Home’s Parks and Recreation team, and the Street Department for their work beginning each October. ASUMH



(From left) Lucretia Coulter, Dr. Ed Coulter, Mollie Morgan, and Dr. Robin Myers accepting the award for “Festival/Special Event of the Year 1-4yrs” from Stephanie Jones, Past President, of the Arkansas Recreation and Parks Association.

Chancellor Dr. Bentley Wallace attributed the festival’s success to the collaboration between Adams, Myers, the Coulters, and Morgan, noting its impact on ASUMH and Mountain Home.

The award, nominated by Daniel Baxley, Mountain Home Parks and Recreation Director, was presented at a ceremony attended by Mayor Adams, Morgan, Myers, and the Coulters.

This year’s festival, starting on November 24 with a lighting ceremony and the Candy Cane 5K run/walk, will feature nightly displays until December 27, along with holiday treats, food trucks, winter attractions, and appearances by Santa and Mrs. Claus from December 14-17. This event exemplifies community spirit and generosity.

Go to asumh.edu/lights for more info and a schedule of events ■



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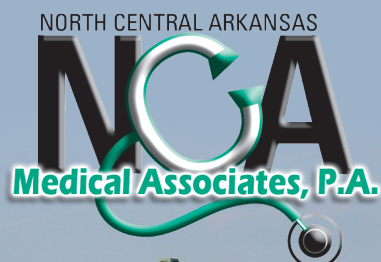
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A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS

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Dr. Bentley Wallace
outside the entrance
of The Sheid at
ASUMH.



When Dr. Bentley Wallace arrived at Arkansas State University-Mountain Home, the occasion felt strangely familiar. That's because the school's newest chancellor regards the job as a sort of homecoming. Wallace grew up in North Central Arkansas in Mountain View and also worked in the ASU System at the Newport campus earlier in his career — all of which adds up to a very easy transition

into the Mountain Home community.

"My wife, Darby, and I are thrilled to be here," he said. "Darby and I love to hike and fish and do all those things. We were up here all the time even when I was working in El Dorado. The beautiful mountains, rivers and lakes were part of the draw for us to come up here. We now get to stay and enjoy it full time. Plus, our daughter, her husband and our three

grandkids live in Harrison. This sense of homecoming has been great."

Wallace said he's also excited to have inherited a campus as vibrant and thriving as ASU-Mountain Home. He comes to the job in the wake of Dr. Robin Myers, who retired this year following 11 highly successful years at the school.

"This college is so much more than just your basic community college," he said. "We own the town's performing arts space and convention space. Because of that, so much of what happens in town happens on our campus. We have an extensive performing arts and visual arts system here at the college and world-class entertainment that's coming up throughout the year. We have a museum-quality gallery space and collections, stuff that you wouldn't normally experience at a small, rural, two-year college.

"The academic programs we have at the college are world-class. We've got some interesting technical programs. We've got a new marine manufacturing program that just launched this fall. With all the boat manufacturers we have in the region, it makes sense that we would have a marine manufacturing technical program and we do. So, we've got an interesting mix of programs, students and highly qualified faculty and staff, many of whom have been here a very long time."

Wallace arrives at the school after nearly three years of serving as president of South Arkansas College in El Dorado. Prior to that, he served two roles in seven years at the University of Arkansas Pulaski Technical College, leaving there in 2020 as dean of technical and professional studies to join South Arkansas College.

In the time he's been in Mountain Home, he's queried the faculty and staff to

discover their views on the most pressing needs facing the university, both in the short and long terms.

“When I first got here, I asked the group what their big, audacious goals were. They’ve got a lot of them,” he said. “They’ve got these great moonshot-type projects they’d love to undertake, and we’ve got to decide which ones make sense for us and go chase some big things. Ultimately, our work here is to allow people to find their path in life and create opportunities for people. We’re trying to find local people to fill local jobs and expand the regional economy by doing that.”

More immediately, Wallace said the drive for growth and expanding the university’s brand of educational excellence is something to be constantly fed and accelerated.

“Sustained growth is our No. 1 priority,” he said. “We know that we are not likely to see increased funding from the state. Our costs continue to rise just like any other business or enterprise, and our remedy to increased costs has to be increased student growth. We don’t want to raise tuition and fees to try and offset costs; we want to grow students, and let those new customers come to us and help offset those costs.”

Chancellor Wallace expressed confidence in the university’s ability to achieve this aim, pointing to the assembled brain power that already resides on campus.

“The challenges of a two-year college are the same whether you’re Pulaski Tech, ASU-Newport or South Arkansas or here,” he said. “The challenges and the opportunities are basically the same with some variations in programming.

“The difference-makers are the people with the eagerness to thrive. This is an entrepreneurial campus. Like many higher education institutions, we don’t always have all the money we need to do everything we want to, but we have creative people here with a track record for coming up with innovative solutions to meet those challenges. That makes it really invigorating from an opportunities standpoint.” ■



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One family's unique and educational journey at ASU-Mountain Home

Chillin' like a Dillon

by DWAIN HEBDA

Upon first meeting the Dillons, it takes a flowchart to keep the members of the family straight. All but the matriarch, Amy, are named with a "J," starting with dad Jay and following through Jared, Jude, Joseph, Jillian and Jediah, making it difficult to address the right person with the right name right out of the box.

ASU-Mountain Home professors have felt this challenge of late as all but high-schooler Jediah are enrolled there at the same time. Not to be outdone and wishing to train for a new career, patriarch Jay joined his brood, putting his money where his mouth is in the process.

"All the bragging I did about how smart I was before they started going to college, that absolutely backfired on me," he said to the glee of the kids. "I find that it's a little bit harder to learn the older you get. But the motivation I get from seeing them excel encouraged me to encourage them to do their best.

"It's an interesting position to be in, but the motivation to be a good example



Jared, Joseph, Jay, Jude and Jillan on campus at ASUMH.



"At first Jared, Jude and I were going to get our GED at the adult education center. Because we got such high scores, we got scholarships and we had tuition paid for, so we thought why not give it a try? That's turned into all this. It's been a really good thing that the scholarship exists."

— Joseph Dillon

is really there. I'm glad that they were very supportive and encouraging of me as much as I was of them when they started. It's really been a nice thing we've shared with each other to keep each other going and be the best we can be."

The family has already accumulated several degrees and all are in the process of earning more from ASU-Mountain Home. Joseph holds a degree in computer technology and networking and is currently finishing up in business administration. Jude earned an associate of arts, focused on writing, and is also about to land his business administration diploma.

Jared is also on his second degree, the first being in programming and mobile development. He will graduate with Jude and Joseph with a business administration degree in December while Jay is in

his last semester working on a degree in cybersecurity. Jillian earned her GED and is considering a degree in graphic design after having completed some art classes on campus.

As neatly as it's all worked out, it's hard to believe that it was never set in the boys' minds to go to college at all.

"I don't think the original plan was to go to ASU-Mountain Home," Joseph said. "At first Jared, Jude and I were going to get our GED at the adult education center. Because we got such high scores, we got scholarships and we had tuition paid for, so we thought why not give it a try? That's turned into all this. It's been a really good thing that the scholarship exists."

The siblings have shared classes in different combinations during their educational journey and support one another

when it comes time for homework and projects, something Joseph said is a main perk of the unique family dynamic.

"Let's say you're taking the same class at the same time, and you don't understand something. A family member might understand it," he said. "You can sort of work it out with them and discuss it with them. Even if they don't understand it, they might understand a portion that you don't and you might understand a portion that they don't."

"A drawback might be you might rely on them too much. They might help you during problems, but you might not fully understand the material. I don't think that has necessarily happened with us, at least not for me, but that is a potential drawback that I think you have to look out for."

Being enrolled simultaneously with siblings provides other opportunities, including trash talking over grades, which as the only girl, Jillian has raised to an art form.

"I'm probably the most competitive one in the family when it comes to college, specifically," she said. "My brothers all

made a point to bring up all their various awards when they were in college and I wasn't. It made me feel like I had a lot of expectations.

"I think the competition that I have with my siblings is the most motivating thing to me. We're not competitive in a bad way, though. Comparing grades and awards and accomplishments really inspires me to work as hard as I can."

Another perk that is emerging is how nicely the family's various degrees seem to nest. As a result, the idea of going into business together has been discussed.

"When we started, Joseph was taking network and Jared was in programming and Jude really wanted to focus on writing. It really kind of led me into the cyber security side of it because it was so different," Jay said. "Then when Jillian came in, she's a great digital artist and traditional artist. While we don't have anything congealed yet, it really does make sense to me to pool all our resources together."

"At one point, I said somehow, some way we're going to be either working for a

business or maybe even start a business," he said, then added with a laugh. "I definitely want to piggyback on their success. They've piggybacked on my success for years, so it's my turn."

To a person, the Dillons all give a lion's share of credit to Amy, who nurtured her offspring, preparing them for the rigors of advanced academia and life.

"I just want to highlight how important our mother has been through this whole thing," Jillian said. "She homeschooled every single one of us, and she's still homeschooling our youngest sibling. Even though she and our youngest sibling aren't currently going to college, they are just so tremendously helpful to all of us."

"I think she'll be delighted, and I think she'll cry," said Jay of his spouse of 31 years on how she'll react watching everyone graduate. "She's very proud of everything that we do, especially her children. They're really the reason she wakes up in the morning and for everything that she does. She is absolutely going to be the proudest mom." ■

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Annie Newman at the ASUMH
Dr. Robert L. Myers Technical
Education Campus.



Paul Mazyck and (above) Gabriel Larrimore (right) working in their program at the ASUMH Dr. Robert L. Myers Technical Education Campus.

There's a lot that's new in the technical education programs at Arkansas State University-Mountain Home these days. Not only has the university recently expanded its curriculum into truck driving and marine manufacturing — to the delight of the industries these majors support — but the very surroundings in which the instruction takes place are new, thanks to the completion of the classroom building's \$1.5 million second expansion.

Even the name over the door is new — ASUMH Dr. Robert L. Myers Technical Education Campus — named in honor

of the recently retired chancellor who poured so much of his time and energy into growing the school's technical education.

The work really begins as students from all walks of life take advantage of the cutting-edge coursework and latest equipment to learn the skills upon which to build a career.

"We opened the tech center in 2014, and in 2016 we added 4,500 square feet. That was primarily for mechatronics and machining," said Karen Heslep, dean of the school of business and technology.

"Currently we are adding 6,850 square feet, and this includes an expansion to our welding lab plus the addition on the front of the building for marine manufacturing, extrusion and injection molding."

Heslep has spent nearly 25 years with the school, most of it in the technical education department. As such she's had a ringside seat for the center's development and the building's transformation from a former car dealership to a state-of-the-art learning center. Curriculum and programs have grown right alongside the added square footage thanks



// We're proud of the fact that we're investing in our students with the skills and expertise that are going to help them find employment upon graduation.

— Karen Heslep

to input from the community and the unwavering commitment of the university administration.

“What is unique to ASU-Mountain Home is our tremendous community support and how they make things happen for us,” she said. “We just feel very blessed to have a community that gets behind us, supports us and helps us make things happen.”

Heslep is particularly complimentary of Myers’ impact during his 11 years at the school’s helm.

“Dr. Myers came at the time when

things were really, on the state level, moving toward technical education and workforce programs,” she said. “He had extensive experience with that from his years at Arkansas Northeastern College in Blytheville, and he brought that expertise to us. He launched our secondary center which is where we have high school students taking automotive, mechatronics, machining and also health professions and criminal justice.

“He also worked very hard to get our first programs established. Welding was the only program we had prior to the

opening of the technical center. When we opened this facility, we launched degrees in automotive, mechatronics and HVAC all at the same time. That was a massive undertaking that really could only have been done with Dr. Myers’ leadership.”

The work of the ASUMH Dr. Robert L. Myers Technical Education Campus is reflected in every student it touches, preparing graduates to move into the working world and build rewarding, satisfying careers. The students come from all walks of life and arrive at all ages and levels of life experience. Each one is enriched with applicable programs, hands-on learning, the latest equipment and the most skilled instruction available.

“Our local employers are anxious to hire our graduates. For those who want to go to work locally, there is ample opportunity for them to do that,” Heslep said. “We’re proud of the fact that we’re investing in our students with the skills and expertise that are going to help them find employment upon graduation. That’s the highest compliment any educator can have and the primary hallmark of our success as a department and an institution.”

Paul Mazyck, Automotive

ALL GOOD UNDER THE HOOD

Paul Mazyck smiles at the memory of his first day in the ASU-Mountain Home automotive repair program last year.

“At the beginning, I was not at all used to hand tools or shop equipment,” he said. “I had nothing but an interest in working. At that point, I had been working digging trenches and doing hand-poured cement. I had a desire to get in and learn how to do something easier than that.”

Mazyck proved an apt pupil, bringing an inquisitive attitude to class every day that helped him get comfortable and excel quickly.

“Getting hands-on with stuff I wasn’t familiar with and asking a lot of questions helped a lot,” he said. I was fortunate to have an extremely experienced and well-informed instructor who has given me great resources and knowledge that I would never have by myself.”

The education has opened up new opportunities for Mazyck, whose upbringing included its share of challenges. In 2020, the Fayetteville native moved to Yellville with his father into a bare-bones living situation that lacked utilities.

“For a period of time, I was roughing it consistently,” he said

“At the time, I was still in my senior year of high school living without utilities but being enrolled in online classes. I was really struggling to keep up. I was also working a full-time job in fast food to keep everybody fed.”

The challenges finally took their toll, and Mazyck left high school and took some time off, earning his GED in 2021. He then turned his attention to learning a skill.

“When I was looking at the different degree programs at ASUMH, I kind of determined a thesis statement,” he said. “I was going to try to find something that I was able to make money with, that was interesting and fun, where I could help other people and that was a practical skill. I settled on the automotive program. It’s been interesting.”

Through his instructors, Mazyck was hired by the local school district to work on buses. “I have since changed many, many gallons of oil and gotten dirtier and greasier than I ever thought I would have,” he said proudly.

Having a skill at his disposal provides a good way to earn money while he works through the next step in his educational and professional journey. Through his newfound faith and church community, he’s also infused with a more hopeful view of the future.

“Ultimately, I want to get a bachelor’s in education,” he said. “I could do the first two years in Mountain Home in person and then probably finish my four-year degree online. I’m very happy with where I am right now. It’s been the best place I’ve ever been.”

“ I was fortunate to have an extremely experienced and well-informed instructor who has given me great resources and knowledge that I would never have by myself.

— Paul Mazyck



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Annie Newman, Welder

STRONG AS STEEL

In the trade world, welding has traditionally been dominated by men, but as ASU-Mountain Home student Annie Newman will tell you, the old guard is changing fast as more women are finding their place in shops, on jobsites and in manufacturing settings.

“When I went (to college) for my first semester, I actually was pleasantly surprised that I was not the only woman in my class,” she said. “In fact, in my first semester, there were about three of us in the class. This semester there’s four or five of us out of about 20 students.”

While that’s a nice bonus, one gets the impression it wouldn’t matter much to Newman if she was the only female on campus, as confident and determined as she is to succeed in the craft she loves.

“When I was about 16, all of my good friends and a lot of my family members were getting into welding,” she said. “I took a free eight-week class at ASU-Mountain Home, and I fell in love with the art of welding. I’m having a pretty great time; it’s a wonderful school. I’ve learned a lot.”

Newman’s passion has allowed her to pile up credentials and skills quickly. At 19, she’s already earned a proficiency certificate and is nearing completion of her technical certificate as well. Her repertoire includes proficiency in MIG, stick, TIG, TIG aluminum, MIG aluminum and flux cord species of welding.

“Hopefully I can get a really good welding job out on the road somewhere,” she said.

It is hard to imagine anything but a good job in her future, not only for the level of proficiency she’s already attained but for the grit and perseverance it took to attain it.

“I have a fine motor skill delay and (instructors) have been able to work with me and my different disabilities,” she said. “They’ve really helped me a lot compared to other schools. My welding instructors will come into my booth and explain different ways to tackle the project, like show me different angles that I can weld at or different ways to hold machines and stuff.”

This extra-mile attention and help has understandably made Newman a raving fan of ASU-Mountain Home. She would recommend the school’s technical programs to anyone.

“I love the courses they have. It’s not like welding 10 hours a day; it’s usually like three

to four hours a day and they give us breaks in between. We can basically go in there and work on our project and take breaks whenever we feel that we need them,” she said.

“I also really love my instructors; they’re always really encouraging. They’ve really made it quite wonderful to go to this school because they help me in a bunch of different ways.”



“When I was about 16 ... I took a free eight-week class at ASUMH, and I fell in love with the art of welding. I’m having a pretty great time; it’s a wonderful school.”

— Annie Newman

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Gabriel Larrimore, Machining

A NEW CHALLENGE

Life has held a series of surprises for Gabriel Larrimore. Growing up in Maryland, he never imagined he'd one day live in Arkansas. While in the Marine Corps, he never thought he'd find himself in a college classroom. Both came to fruition after he and his wife moved to Mountain Home.

"I was stationed at Camp Pendleton north of San Diego, and I met my wife out there," he said. "When I was getting out, I said, 'We don't have to move back to Maryland, but we're not staying in California. We were looking at a bunch of states in the middle of the country, and we looked at (Mountain Home) and said, 'Looks good. Let's move there.'"

"I was working part time and my mom said, 'Why don't you look at going to school?' I was never a really big school guy; when I got out of high school I just started working. But I looked at the tech center and looked at their programs, and I said, 'I'll do machining.'"

Larrimore said he appreciated the hands-on elements of his training and has been a standout pupil in the machining program.

"Half the time it's hands-on. We'll do a presentation where we learn about things, and then we'll go out and do our projects,"

he said. "There's obviously other classwork involved, but doing something where I know what the end goal is makes that a lot easier. Some of the classes they make you take in college are standard requirements, but the English class in this program and the financial class and employment strategies class are all useful and helpful."

Thanks in part to his military experience, Larrimore has taken to the field of machining with gusto.

"For me, machining was fairly natural," he said. "In the Marine Corps, I was a helicopter mechanic and we worked with a lot of hydraulic controls and flight controls. What interested me most about machining was I'd watched a lot of YouTube videos and got hooked on watching people do machine work and repairing stuff and making new parts out of nothing. I really like that idea."

Larrimore has been such a standout in the classroom and shop, he's even been given some teaching responsibility on an as-needed basis.

"Technically, it's a part-time substitute job," he said. "I step in for the instructor of the intro to machining classes when he's out. That's one of the first classes you take for your technical certificate, just learning all the tools, the machines, how they work."

"People have been talking to me, saying I should become a teacher here. I said I'd think about it. I think I want to have some real-life work experience before I start teaching other kids about stuff, but I do enjoy it."



“For me, machining was fairly natural. In the Marine Corps, I was a helicopter mechanic and we worked with a lot of hydraulic controls and flight controls.”

— Gabriel Larrimore



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One of the Team

From homeless to home run: Martha Grant's journey with ASU-Mountain Home athletics by DWAIN HEBDA



The TrailBlazers athletic program at ASU-Mountain Home hasn't been around long enough to develop the hallowed traditions that usually come to a program with time. That is, except for the baseball and softball teams where a unique figure has emerged and quickly taken her place as one thread in the fabric of team lore.

"They've given me a formal title," said Martha Grant, the subject of the story. "Mom."

Grant's path to her place on the team was as unlikely as anyone could ever hear. She didn't play sports growing up, nor did she attend ASU-Mountain Home. In fact, none of the things Grant has achieved in

life were expected of her, given her rough upbringing where dreams were in short supply, often choked out by matters of day-to-day survival.

"I'm from a broken home," she said. "We were homeless and transient until I was in fifth grade. You know that 'Saturday Night Live' skit about being homeless and living in a van down by the river? Well, we actually did, my mother, my brother and myself, except it wasn't a van it was in a pickup with one of those toppers on it."

Education wasn't stressed during Grant's childhood, but she demonstrated natural aptitude despite the chaos that was all around her. Still, a youngster can only paddle against the tide of circumstance and surroundings for so long. By 17, Grant found herself a high school dropout with a baby and staring straight into the face of her family's long cycle of poverty.

This time, however, things would be different.

"I realized I was just like my mom: no education, no support, no way to make money," she said. "I didn't want that. I did not. So, I went to the local community college when I was like, 25 years old with all these little kids just out of high school."

The validation of good grades and supportive teachers set something loose in Grant. Earning her GED inspired her to pursue other diplomas, ultimately including a master of science in operations management and her CPA license. That credential landed her the first of a string of jobs in the accounting field bringing with them financial security, leadership opportunities and heaping doses of self-confidence.

"When you come from a background of low economic status, it's just something you have to crawl out of," she said.

"Community college is where I blossomed and bloomed. I was around people that had goals and dreams, and they were working toward them. And I loved it."

Grant moved to Mountain Home to open her own firm and soon forged a connection with the university. Knowing how much college meant to her — and realizing there were probably many students who had similar challenges to finish as she did — Grant wanted to support the mission in any way she could. To date, that has included volunteering at The Sheid performing arts center, teaching financial literacy and sharing her backstory with campus and community groups to provide a testimony of what is possible regardless of challenges. And then, one day, she thought it would be fun to be involved with the brand-new athletic programs.

"I saw something on Facebook that said they're starting a team," she said. "I wrote them back and I said, 'Coach, I want to

help.' And they said, 'Do you do this? Do you do that?' I said, 'I don't know how to do any of that.'"

Undeterred, Grant showed up and was soon shagging softballs, toting baseball equipment and baking brownies for the athletes and coaches. More importantly, she was a motherly figure to all with whom she came in contact. In return, she gets smiles, the occasional memento — like the baseball jersey and helmet the team gave her, signed by all the players — and the joy of knowing she is helping someone else.



Community college is where I blossomed and bloomed. I was around people that had goals and dreams, and they were working toward them. And I loved it. — Martha Grant

"I like to be the person that says, 'I'm so proud of you. You can do this,'" she said of her "kids" on the team. "I tell them, 'You're building friendships for a lifetime. You're learning goals and dreams.' I'm honored to do that.

"College was my opportunity to get out of poverty and a generational rut. ASU-Mountain Home goes to the nth degree to help its students. And it's not all kids; there are nontraditional students like I was, too. It's a wonderful feeling to be here and make a positive impact on students' lives." ■

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Honoring Mom

Donna Smith celebrates her mother's enduring influence through the Hazel J. Alexander Memorial Scholarship, championing education and resilience by DWAIN HEBDA



Donna Smith in front of the main entrance of the ASUMH campus.

Donna Smith has accomplished much in her life, both personally and professionally, and she always pays homage for that fact to the same person, her late mother Hazel J. Martin.

“To say I’m proud of my mother is an understatement. She was pretty selfless, and she was always doing kind things for others,” Smith said. “I was the first to graduate college in our family. I went to school on a loan, a grant, a scholarship and every job I could get my hands on because Mom couldn’t afford to send me, but she was my mentor, cheerleader and support system through college.”

Born in Martin Springs, Arkansas, in Baxter County, Hazel was accomplished in her own right, even though she didn’t have the same advantages that many of her peers did. Graduating as president of the Norfork High School class of 1946, she would in short order complete business school and marry, eventually moving to Kansas City. But the marriage didn’t work out, and she moved back to Norfork with three kids in tow, supporting the family through jobs as a deputy clerk with Baxter County Clerk Ed Pinkston and with North Arkansas Electric Cooperative.



To say I’m proud of my mother is an understatement. She was pretty selfless, and she was always doing kind things for others”

— Donna Smith



Wishing to not only provide but to inspire her children to succeed, Hazel earned both her insurance broker's license and her real estate broker's license and owned her own businesses, respectively, in Mountain Home. With her entrepreneurial success came recognition — she was the first woman in the region to achieve Graduate of Realtors' Institute credentials, was twice elected president of the North Central Board of Realtors and was honored by that body as Realtor of the Year in 1986. When she retired in 1993, it brought to a close a nearly 30-year career in real estate.

Along the way, Hazel consistently preached to her children the value of education, which when combined with

hard work, would hold the key to a successful future. The message wasn't lost on her children, and so after Hazel's passing,

(Right, top) Elected 1986 Realtor of the Year by North Central Board of Realtors in Mountain Home, AR. (Right, bottom) Hazel Martin in 1973 accepting her GRI (Graduate Realtor Institute) certificate. She was first woman in the region to achieve this credential.

Smith thought of a fitting tribute to her memory: the Hazel J. Alexander Memorial Scholarship presented through ASU-Mountain Home.

"Mom was a big believer in education; both her parents were teachers and she took every training opportunity she could," Smith said. "She believed education opens doors and helps a lot of people be all they can be. So, I know she would be proud to have her

name attached to something that would help others improve their lives and the lives of their community."

The new scholarship targets business majors. Smith said the award can go to

a traditional or non-traditional student, with a priority placed on applicants from Baxter County. She said while the sting of losing her mother is still fresh — Hazel passed in 2021 — knowing her legacy will live on through the award brings her some comfort.

"I'm pleased to honor her memory in this way, and I know she would be proud knowing this scholarship will help someone else achieve their dream of getting a college education," Smith said. ■



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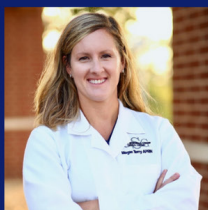
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How a Small-Town Arkansan Paved His Way to Success

Going with the Flow

by DWAIN HEBDA

Growing up in Viola, Arkansas, a tight-knit community with a small school system, Lance Newton knew he needed a little time to find the right path, and the right campus, to start his college classes. He enrolled in ASU-Mountain Home and spent a year honing his study skills.

“Viola is a small school, and I wasn’t really sure where I wanted to go to college long term,” he said. “I knew I wanted to study engineering, and there were three options, basically, in the state of Arkansas. One was the University of Arkansas, one was (ASU in) Jonesboro and then Arkansas Tech in Russellville.

“I chose to go to Mountain Home, start my general education classes and just get a feel for what was out there and what I wanted to do. After that first year, I made the decision to enroll at Arkansas Tech and graduated in December of 2002 with a mechanical engineering degree.”

Newton might not have anticipated it at the time, but the formative years spent at ASUMH were instrumental in laying the foundation for everything that was to follow.

“(ASU-Mountain Home) gave me the opportunity to get my feet under me and prepared me for a larger university,” he said. “Plus, I was able to live at home during this time, and I was fortunate enough to have a good job with the Bank of Salem. They allowed me to work part time as I was going to school. I will always be grateful for that opportunity. This season of life helped prepare me for moving on to Arkansas Tech.”

For as much as it gave him, Newton admits ASUMH looked very different then, having yet to grow into the lush campus it now enjoys.

“When I started school at ASUMH, it was still in multiple buildings downtown,”



he said. “I went to some classes in what I think used to be a feed store. It wasn’t what people are used to today; to see how the campus has evolved is absolutely incredible. It is such a shining star for our community, not only the infrastructure but the programs that are associated with that.”

Once he earned his engineering degree in 2002, Newton made a beeline for home and began working at Ranger Boats in Flippin. In 2017, he was one of a group of visionaries that launched Vexus Boats where today he’s vice president of operations. He’s also been an active supporter of the continually expanding technical programs at his alma mater back in Mountain Home.

“We’ve worked with (recently retired chancellor) Dr. Robin Myers for several years as he was getting these programs off the ground,” Newton said. “We’ve always been a huge supporter of whatever he had going over there — especially their welding program and what is now the marine manufacturing center.

“When they started the marine program, one of the supervisors that worked for us actually took the job leading that program. We hated to see him leave Vexus, but they couldn’t have chosen a better person for the job. We communicate often about the program, and we try to help them in any way that we can — and they do the same for us. If they have students who are about

to enter the workforce, he'll pick up the phone and call me. It is rewarding to provide opportunities for these individuals when possible. It's been a very good thing."

Hindsight being what it is, Newton said that had the technical programs of today existed when he was in high school, he might not have ever left home for the duration of his college education. As it is, he's happy to support the institution in preparing future generations to achieve their personal and professional goals.

"I'm a huge proponent of trade schools," he said. "I'm not one of these guys that thinks everybody's got to go to college because that is absolutely not the truth. However, it is imperative to learn a trade and the soft skills required to be a productive employee. I could have benefited from some of the programs they have now, especially the marine manufacturing program.

"For most people, it takes a lifetime to get the basis of what the students are doing at ASU-Mountain Home right now. That's an excellent thing for the students, for our community and the region." ■

| ASUMH ALUMNI UPDATES

Let us know "Where You Are!" Submit updates to AweSUMH Alumni News, at asumh.edu/alumni.

CLASS OF 2004

Mary Burr graduated from AState with an MSN and worked for 20 years in a large family practice clinic in Mountain Home, AR. She recently opened her own business as a woman- and veteran-owned operation, specializing in laser tattoo removal and medical tattooing.



CLASS OF 2018

Casey Whitfield Since graduating from ASUMH, I graduated from ASU-Jonesboro with a degree in Strategic Communications, focusing on social media and marketing. I am currently living in Springfield, MO, with my fiancé, our dog, and two cats. For the past year and a half, I have been working as a leasing agent and assistant manager at a luxury living apartment complex. Life is good in Missouri, but we still frequently visit the area. I will always remember my time at ASUMH fondly.

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With the addition of competitive sports at ASUMH in the last couple of years, one group is making waves nationally and among two-year and four-year colleges alike. They are a quiet, but hard-working group of athletes and their competitiveness is fierce. Males and females play side-by-side and on the same team at ASUMH; that team is esports.

“Collegiate esports is a growing trend and ASUMH’s esports team is taking that world by storm,” said Dr. Bentley Wallace, ASUMH chancellor. “Thanks to the talent and dedication of our players and coaches, TrailBlazers Esports is an exciting way for students to engage and perform on

a national stage. Our team represents a diverse group of students who represent our college very well.”

ASUMH has joined the National Esports Collegiate Conference (NECC)

which allows players to compete with colleges around the nation. Sara Anderson, sponsor of the esports team at ASUMH, said, “Our first season out, our Rocket League team is tied for first place, undefeated thus far in their division, and our Overwatch team is in third place. We have 15 players and are recruiting for more as we want to launch more games in the future.”

ASUMH looks to add three more esports teams this spring which will include competitors in Super Smash Bros, Valorant, and Rainbow 6. “Our competitors are excited for what’s to come in the future of gaming,” said Anderson.

Esports has grown into a global business that is expanding its market and audience! Statista projects there will be over 318 million esports enthusiasts by 2025. These numbers prove that esports is progressing into an industry that competes with film or music. Our esports center is a great place for students to come together learning teamwork and leadership skills. ■



Our first season out, our Rocket League team is tied for first place, undefeated thus far in their division, and our Overwatch team is in third place.”

— Sara Anderson, ASUMH testing center coordinator and team sponsor

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— Dr. Lawrence Davis and Maria Del Carmen Davis



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