

SPRING 2025 VOLUME 11 | ISSUE 2

THE KEYSTONE

A PUBLICATION
OF ASUMH

THE FOURTH ANNUAL

COULTER CELEBRATION OF LIGHTS



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Dear Friends,

As we embark on another year of innovation and growth at Arkansas State University-Mountain Home, I am thrilled to welcome you to this edition of The Keystone. Within these pages, you will find inspiring stories of transformation and perseverance that exemplify our mission to create opportunities and change lives.

This spring, we celebrate significant achievements, such as ASUMH being ranked the #1 community college in Arkansas by WalletHub. This recognition reflects the unwavering dedication of our faculty, staff, and students in making ASUMH a beacon of academic and career success.

Our feature on the Dodd Creek revitalization project showcases our commitment to environmental stewardship and hands-on education. By collaborating with local organizations, we are offering our students invaluable learning opportunities in a living laboratory.

I am particularly excited about the stories highlighting our students and alumni. From Academic All-Star Madison Caple to State Representative and Alumni of the Year Stetson Painter, their journeys remind us of the far-reaching impact of an ASUMH education.

Additionally, we've introduced initiatives like the Plumbing Apprenticeship Program and the Center for Student Success, ensuring our students have access to the resources and skills needed to thrive in today's workforce.

Finally, this issue captures the vibrant cultural life on campus, from the Coulter Celebration of Lights to upcoming performances at The Sheid. These events not only enhance campus life but also strengthen our connection with the broader Mountain Home community.

As always, thank you for your continued support of ASUMH. Together, we are shaping a brighter future, one student at a time.

All our best,



BENTLEY WALLACE, Ed.D.

Chancellor
Arkansas State University
Mountain Home

THE KEYSTONE

A PUBLICATION OF
**ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
MOUNTAIN HOME**

key-stone

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

VISION

Creating Opportunities~Changing Lives
ASUMH will provide expertise and resources to
create opportunities and change lives.

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LEADING THE WAY

ASUMH Sets Retention Record

Fall-to-fall retention rates for Arkansas's public two-year colleges reached a five-year high with the fall 2022 cohort, and ASU-Mountain Home (ASUMH) emerged as the top performer, according to an analysis by the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

Retention rates track the percentage of first-time undergraduate students who return to the same institution the following fall. ASUMH's retention rate of 82.1% marked a nearly 7% increase from the previous year's cohort, significantly surpassing the national community college average of 61%.

A high retention rate reflects student engagement, satisfaction, and commitment to their academic journey, positioning ASUMH as a leader in fostering student success.

WINTER CLASSES

Accelerate Your Education This Winter

Catching up on classes during the winter holidays can keep you on track to graduate or finish fast! The fully online winter classes are the perfect way to earn credits quickly without breaking the bank. Classes begin December 16 and end January 9. Students in intercession classes earn 3-4 credit hours in just four weeks. Courses that are included: ART - Fine Arts - Visual, COMM - Oral Communication, ECON - Principles of Macroeconomics, ECON - Principles of Microeconomics, ENG - Composition 1, ENG - World Literature since 1660, HIST - World Civilization to 1660, MATH - College Algebra, PHYS - Physical Science + Lab, SOC - Principles of Sociology. To accelerate your education this winter, call 870-508-6100.

AWARDS

#1 Community College in Arkansas

ASUMH has been named the #1 community college in Arkansas by WalletHub for 2024! Citing several factors, the national ranking compared community colleges across the state and said that ASUMH offers a higher education without having as much financial strain, flexible schedules, small class sizes, and rigorous coursework. Using 18 metrics, schools were evaluated on three key dimensions, including: Cost, Education Outcomes, and Career Outcomes. Data used to create this ranking were collected as of July 16, 2024 from the National Center for Education Statistics, Campaign for Free College Tuition, U.S. Department of Education and Council for Community & Economic Research.



PAY IT FORWARD

Making a Difference with Blaze Bucks

The Criminal Justice Club generously donated \$200 to the Owl Cove this semester to support the Blaze Bucks

program. With daily specials priced at just \$5, this contribution provides 40 meals for students in need.

Blaze Bucks is a vital equity initiative aimed at addressing food insecurity among students. The program allows others to "pay it forward," ensuring that students can receive meals free of charge when necessary.





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UPCOMING SHOWS

Grand Ol' Christmas
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HOLIDAY ENDOWMENT
Date: Saturday, December 14,
2024
Time: 2 p.m. Matinee
Tickets: Adults: \$40 +fees
Students: \$20 +fees

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1225 AM, N-OE-L Radio, it's Will
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and entertainers in Texas like
Dalton Flake, the Dirty River
Jazz Band, Americana standout
Blue Water Highway, and the
NOEL Radio Orchestra and
Gospel Singers! This raucous



rollicking retro radio show
features all-time favorite
festive Christmas classics
like you've never heard them
before and sketch comedy
shenanigans that progressively
and cleverly blur the lines
between nostalgia and satire.
Made for music and comedy
lovers alike from boomer
to millennial, The Grand Ol'
Christmas Show is an inspiring
Holiday tradition!



Forever Young
PRESENTED BY THE HALEY
CULTURAL ARTS ENDOWMENT
Date: Tuesday, March 11, 2025
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Tickets: Adults: \$40 +fees
Students: \$20 +fees

Forever Young follows one
unforgettable group of friends
as they discover the greatest
hits of all time! Set in a music-
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powerhouse vocals, dynamite

choreography, and one
sensational true story that is
guaranteed to make you feel...
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Suzy Bogguss
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During the creative explosion
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1990's, Grammy winner Suzy
Bogguss sold 4 million records
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South," and "Hey, Cinderella."
In the midst of her country
popularity, she made albums
with the legendary Chet Atkins
and Ray Benson of Asleep
at the Wheel. An album of
original music in 2007 landed
her on the jazz charts, and her
folk music roots show through
in her frequent appearances

on public radio's A Prairie
Home Companion. Her latest
offering, "Prayin' For Sunshine,"
is an Americana tour de force.

Michael Cavanaugh:
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Time: 7:00 p.m.
Tickets: Adults: \$45 +fees
Students \$22.50 +fees

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Roll Songbook made famous
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Broadway musical Movin' Out.
Michael began playing piano at
age seven, but an opportunity
to play in Las Vegas at the
famed New York, New York
Hotel and Casino changed his
life. It was there that Billy Joel
spotted Michael and joined
him on stage one fateful night
of February 2001. It only took
two songs before Billy was
convinced that he had found
his new Piano Man: Michael
Cavanaugh. Michael moved
to New York City to work
alongside Billy Joel and Twyla
Tharp to shape the Broadway
Musical that would be called
Movin' Out. In the lead role,
he received both Tony and
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ASU-Mountain Home Plumbing Apprenticeship

A Pathway to a Rewarding Career

Are you ready to start a rewarding career in plumbing? The ASU-Mountain Home Plumbing Apprenticeship program offers a unique opportunity to gain the skills and experience necessary to become a journeyman plumber, all while earning while you learn. This four-year program, designed for individuals interested in plumbing, provides a structured pathway to enter one of the most in-demand trade industries in the country.

What You Need to Know

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS: To be considered for the apprenticeship program, applicants must meet the following requirements:

- » Be at least 18 years of age.
- » Have a valid driver's license.
- » Be employed by a partner employer for at least 30 days prior to acceptance into the program.

A Four-Year Program with Real-World Experience

The ASUMH Plumbing Apprenticeship is designed to give students both hands-on training and classroom instruction. During the program, apprentices will work under the supervision of a licensed master plumber, completing 8,000 hours of on-the-job training (OJT) while also attending weekly classes.

The program structure is flexible and allows apprentices to balance work with learning. Classes meet one night a week on Tuesdays for two hours of in-class instruction and two hours of homework. There are also occasional makeup days on Thursday nights.

Cost and Financial Support

The cost of the program is a very affordable \$300 per year, and all textbooks are provided by the program at no additional cost. High school graduates or those with a GED who are Arkansas residents may also be eligible for the Arkansas Workforce Challenge Scholarship, which will cover the first year of tuition.

The Road to Becoming a Journeyman

To earn the title of journeyman plumber, apprentices must complete a combination of both hands-on training and classroom instruction. This includes:

- » **8,000 hours of on-the-job training** under the mentorship of a licensed master plumber.
- » **640 hours of related classroom instruction**, covering everything from plumbing codes and safety standards to advanced technical skills.

Once these requirements are met, apprentices are eligible to sit for their journeyman plumbing exam, opening doors to a variety

of career opportunities in the plumbing industry.

Partner Employers: A Collaborative Effort

The ASUMH Plumbing Apprenticeship program is a collaborative effort between the university and local plumbing businesses. Currently, 12 local plumbing companies are partnering with the program to offer apprentices valuable on-the-job training opportunities. These businesses span across a broad region, including Mountain Home, Norfolk, Midway, Flippin, Salem, Bull Shoals, Cotter, and even Mountain View.

Plumbing businesses interested in partnering with the program are encouraged to contact April Bentley, Director of Workforce Development, 870-508-6302. Partnering with the apprenticeship program offers businesses a chance to develop and train the next generation of skilled plumbers while expanding their workforce. ■





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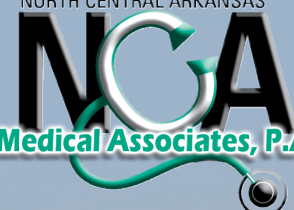
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| CELEBRATION OF LIGHTS

MERRY & BRIGHT

COULTER CELEBRATION OF LIGHTS
RETURNS BIGGER, BETTER

by DWAIN HEBDA
photography by JAMES MOORE

| CELEBRATION OF LIGHTS

Roseanna Harris is one of these people who puts up holiday lights way ahead of the actual holiday season, but the 22-year veteran of the Mountain Home Parks and Rec Department can be forgiven for her early enthusiasm.

As the point person for the Coulter Celebration of Lights display that transforms the campus into a twinkling winter wonderland, Harris and her crew need all the time they can get. Starting in mid-October, she and her crew of eight descend on campus to start constructing the displays and wrapping the trees. As the clock counts down to its Black Friday opening, the crew is augmented by other city employees and a cadre of community and student volunteers, from the ASUMH baseball team to the local Kiwanis Club.

It is a massive undertaking that gives even a seasoned vet like Harris butterflies until the switch is finally flipped.

“Oh, it’s extremely stressful,” she said with a nervous laugh. “We have to get this done because people are expecting this. It’s a deadline that’s just in my face all the time. But my crew is amazing, we get tons of volunteers and they really help get it done.”

Now in its fourth year, the Coulter Celebration of Lights returns bigger and better than ever with 87 total displays and every tree along the tour wrapped in more than a million sparkling lights. The event is named for Dr. Ed Coulter, founding chancellor of ASUMH and his wife Lucretia, whose generosity as headline sponsor makes the display possible.

Harris said the display has steadily grown, including this year with the addition of two new displays, a girl in a wheelchair petting a reindeer and a massive arch, the latter of which has haunted her dreams of late.

“That new arch, also sponsored by the Coulters, is like 65 feet long, 30 feet tall, something like that,” she said. “I’m a little nervous about that one. You know, we do test runs but sometimes it goes perfectly on a test run. Then opening night, we have stuff go down and it’s a huge panic, but we get it.”

If a seasoned veteran like Harris can still stress over the undertaking, one can imagine what Becca Bouldin, who arrived at ASUMH on Oct. 1 has experienced jumping into the deep end of the massive event.

“It’s been an experience. A lot of my time was spent on rounding up volunteers and soliciting sponsorships,” she said. “We definitely couldn’t do this without the support of the Mountain Home Parks and Recreation team, Rosie Harris specifically, and the street department team.”



“ We couldn’t do this without the support of the Mountain Home Parks and Recreation team, Rosie Harris specifically, and the street department team.”

— Becca Bouldin



“ The Coulter Celebration of lights is extremely stressful, ... But my crew is amazing and we get tons of volunteers and they really help get it done.”

— Roseanna Harris

“Also, our ASU-Mountain Home maintenance crew, led by Nikki Robbins, is so instrumental to this event. They work tirelessly, not only now but during the holiday season spending extra time away from their families to put on the show for everyone in the community.”

In fact, the city and college departments are a well-oiled collaborative team and work together to untangle the many technical and logistical challenges provided by the display, not the least of which is providing power sources within reach.

“ASUMH has brought in more power to do this, and it’s all done by timers,” Harris said. “The ASUMH maintenance staff, they’re pretty amazing. There are no generators out here, they just do some very cool things to get electricity to the displays.”

The tour, which runs nightly from 5:30 to 9 p.m. through Dec. 29, is designed to be viewed by car. Guests enter through the Thompson Martin Gate off of College Street and exit via the Hurd Gate to Highway 62/412. There is no admission charge, but donations are gladly accepted. The donations at the gate and additional sponsorship dollars fund the infrastructure and operations of the lights displays and provide valuable student scholarships.

Bouldin said there are also several special events planned during the Coulter Celebration of Lights, starting on Nov. 29 with the lighting ceremony and Candy Cane 5K. Runners participating in the race get the honor of viewing the displays first as the 5K course winds through campus.

Other special dates to remember include Dec. 13, 14 and 15, which are Festival Nights offering additional attractions on campus. During Festival Nights, patrons can park on campus to take advantage of the other attractions in addition to the light display.

“On Festival Nights, we bring in bounce houses, appearances by Santa and Mrs. Claus and a food truck,” she said. “People can come out and get their photos made with Santa and Mrs. Claus. It’s a nice thing to do midway through the event. It gives families an opportunity to come out with their kids and experience the magic of the display that way.”

Harris said all the work and worry is ultimately worth it once she sees the lights come on and watches the faces of families as they experience the display, some for the first time.

“Leading up to the lighting ceremony I’m like, ‘Oh, please all come on. Please make sure we did this. Please be sure we didn’t forget that,’” she said. “But then, when it does come on, it’s a breath of relief. It really is. Like I like to tell my crew, we just need to step back once it’s done and be like, ‘We freaking did this.’ It’s very cool.” ■

(From left)
Roseanna Harris,
Becca Bouldin and
the Coulters.



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| BEST OF THE BEST



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. We are pleased to introduce and congratulate this year's honorees.



FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION

» When Brandy Proctor was a teenager, her parents moved her from Pocahontas, where she'd spent her entire growing up thus far, to Mountain Home. To say it was an unpopular move with the high schooler is putting it mildly.

The community grew on her, however, enough that after graduation, she stuck around and attended Arkansas State University-Mountain Home back in the days when it was known as North Arkansas College. After earning her associate degree, she joined the workforce and was extremely successful — until the company she worked for went out of business right out from under her.

She decided to go back to school, earning her bachelor's degree and then her master's degree in education, attending both ASUMH and Arkansas State University in Jonesboro. When she started applying for jobs, she discovered a very tight job market, a stressful situation that almost led her to forego applying at her alma mater.

"I was nervous looking for a job," she said. "I was a brand-new teacher, and I remember going into the HR office (at ASUMH). The person I was supposed to leave my resume with wasn't there. I was so glad; I just quietly put my resume on their desk and left.

"Lo and behold, I got a phone call. They interviewed me over the phone, and I passed that interview. Then they wanted to set up an in-person interview, and by some miracle, they picked me. I was thrilled! I'd never really dreamed I'd get the chance to work on the most beautiful campus in Arkansas."

Over the past 15 years, Proctor has repaid that faith and then some, working in the developmental education department. There, she helps prepare college students for the rigors of college

coursework and serves as a resource for individuals navigating the college experience for the first time.

"A lot of our students come to us as struggling students. They're unsure of themselves," she said. "They've always been told that they were not going to make it, that they are not college material. They're beaten down. My job is to overcome those barriers, and that takes some time, patience and empathy.

"I tell my students, you know, things are going to happen in life, and they're going to be unexpected. I tell them having their education is like having an insurance plan; they get a piece of paper that says, 'Hey, look what I can do.'"

Proctor said being named the Faculty Member of the Year came as a great surprise, especially given the many excellent faculty members who she sees as equally deserving of the honor.

"I was so shocked. I did not expect it. I could not believe I was chosen," she said. "I really did not expect that to happen

because I look at the caliber of people that I work with, and I see some of the best faculty members in the country. To know that they chose me is an honor, and I'm humbled by it."

Proctor added that as nice as the award is, the real prize for her is playing a role in students' development and impacting their future.

"I always tell them that the reason why I do my job is because I like to see them succeed," she said. "My greatest accomplishment is watching them graduate because I've seen them in the beginning when they're unsteady, when they're unsure of themselves. Then, suddenly, they're walking across that stage with such confidence and a smile on their face; it's like a different person. It's like watching a flower bloom. And that's my favorite part of the job."



BRANDY
PROCTOR
FACULTY
OF THE
YEAR

SEEKING A LIFE OF SERVICE

» Growing up in a single-parent household, Madison Dawn Caple developed a deep-seated sense of family. Today, she's looking to leverage that into a career that helps families in crisis work constructively through issues.

"I am working toward my associate degree at ASU-Mountain Home where I'll be taking all of my pre-requirement classes for when I transfer to Arkansas State University in Jonesboro," she said. "When I go to Jonesboro, I will be pursuing a bachelor's program in social work, and then I'll be taking the one-year advanced standing coursework for my master's degree."

"My goal for my master's in social work is to do professional counseling. With my bachelor's in social work, I could do counseling through school environments, but I'm hoping to do a master's so I can work with a group or work privately as a family and marriage counselor."

A 2023 graduate of Cotter High School, Caple said she was inspired to go into counseling work because of the closeness she felt within her own family and wanting to help others improve their familial relationships.

"Family is really important to me," she said. "My dad was a single father, and he and I are very close — as I am with all of my family members. When problems would come up, we would always try to work through things together."

"I know nowadays, a lot of people need support in overcoming problems, and I want to help them by offering advice and helping with whatever they're going through, especially with children involved. A family is a big part of the foundation for how that child grows up."

Caple, 20, said she has been very satisfied with her decision to choose ASU-Mountain

Home after high school, saying faculty and staff have gone out of their way to set her up for success.

"ASU-Mountain Home is a very peaceful place. It provides an environment where I feel like I'm learning more," she said. "I am pretty close with my instructors, and I've been able to get all the support I need."

While getting herself established academically, Caple has looked for ways to become more involved on campus and with community groups and activities. Last summer she volunteered with area faith-based organizations working in the thrift store and stocking the food pantry.

As for being named the Academic All-Star of the Year, Caple said she was

initially surprised but is grateful for the recognition. She also offered some advice to the next generation of college students as they consider their next steps after high school, including choosing a two- or four-year college.

"Transitioning from high school to college can be, at first, a little stressful because you're getting into a new environment with more responsibilities," she said. "It takes some time to adjust and get used to how classes work, scheduling and everything else. But overall, after some time, you start to feel a lot better about it."

"I genuinely enjoy my college experience with everything they provide here, and I'm really looking forward to what the future holds."



MADISON
DAWN
CAPLE
ACADEMIC
ALL-STAR

NEVER GIVE UP

» There was a time when Rita Swafford could not see herself on a college campus in any capacity, not as a student and not as an employee. Yet that's exactly where the road of life has led her, albeit along a rather circuitous route.

"When I started college here, I was nervous because I had been out of school for several years," she said. "I just surprised myself. I did better than I ever thought I could. I always wanted to do well, but I just didn't know if I had what it took."

Swafford's early life took her into the working world where she did factory work for 17 years until her job was shot right out from under her. Unclear on what to do next, she took the opportunity to go back to school at the urging of her husband, Tim.

"When I went back to school, I would get really stressed out, thinking I was going to fail," she said. "My husband just kept saying, 'Here you are crying about something, and you wind up doing fine.' Like I said, I surprised myself."

Not only did she excel in the classroom, earning an associate degree from ASU-Mountain Home that she'd parlay into a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies from Arkansas State in Jonesboro, but she also got the opportunity to do a work-study program in 2003 on the Mountain Home campus that led to a job in the business office in 2005. She's been reporting to work at her college alma mater ever since, today serving as a fiscal support specialist.

Unlike some people who deal in numbers and forms all day, Swafford said she relishes the human connections at work the most.

"Mainly I like working with my coworkers," she said, "and, I enjoy helping people."

Swafford's collective expertise and team spirit have come in handy to keep student inconvenience to a minimum during several

software upgrades. Her skills were also in high demand over the past few months, as the team worked to recover from the unexpected death of Clay Barry, ASUMH financial aid director, who passed in June.

"Clay and I worked closely together, and when he suddenly passed away, I never expected I would be doing this job without him," she said. "It has been a real challenge this year at work because of it, and everybody's kind of had to pull together through it."

For her leadership, compassion and dedication to her role, Swafford was named the 2024 Staff Member of the Year.

"I was really surprised," she said. "I mean it's an honor because to get nominated, somebody has to write something about you. That was really nice. It was an

honor that somebody thought enough of me to nominate me.

"Then when I won, of course, that was really a shock. It was just one of those things where I thought, 'Well, maybe people do like me.'"

In return, Swafford enjoys being a resource for others, especially nontraditional students and those who are first-generation college students trying to navigate the process for the first time. To each, she shows a helping attitude and words of encouragement from one who has been in their shoes.

"If you want something in life, you can achieve it," she said by way of advice. "You just have to buckle down, study hard and turn in your work. Remember, if you need help, reach out. Most of all, always have faith in yourself; whatever it is, you can do it."



RITA
SWAFFORD
STAFF
MEMBER
OF THE
YEAR



VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

» There are a couple of things that put an immediate and undeniable spark in Stetson Painter's voice. One is talking about his family; another is talking about his alma mater, Arkansas State University-Mountain Home, where he has been named this year's Alumni Award Winner. A third is talking about service.

On this latter point, he is particularly enthusiastic. Born locally and raised in a single parent-household, his mother moved around during his growing up from Flippin, Arkansas, to Texas and eventually back to Conway, Arkansas, where he graduated from high school and joined the Army at age 17, a branch he continues to serve today in the Army Reserves.

Coming off of active duty in 2008, he came back to Mountain Home to help his grandparents and figure out his next step. It led him to the door of ASUMH.

"I've always said that ASU-Mountain Home took a chance on me," he said. "They took a chance on a guy that grew up in a single-parent home, poor and a veteran. I remember walking in there on day one to financial aid, having no clue, because when I graduated college, I was the first person in my family to do so. They didn't have to help me apply for scholarships, but they did."

Painter leveraged his education to the fullest for the good of his future family and for the good of his state at large. The former he accomplished by becoming a successful entrepreneur and the latter he achieved by seeking public office.

"I was a nerd. I watched CSPAN when I was young," he said. "I was in student government in high school and I was SGA president at ASU-Mountain Home."

Painter was encouraged to apply for

an internship set up by U.S. Sen. John Boozman and Rep. Rick Crawford through the university. Although he recalls his intern status today as "low man on the totem pole, the coffee-getter, the note-taker," Painter was enthralled. He landed jobs on both Rep. Crawford's and Sen. Boozman's respective staffs.

By 2022, he'd be elected in his own right to the House of Representatives of the Arkansas State Assembly. His freshman legislative session was a largely surreal experience but one that he attacked with characteristic gusto.

"In my freshman term, I voted to lower the state income tax three times," he said. "One of the big things I did was I helped bring almost \$10 million back to Baxter Health hospital (in Mountain Home) so not only could they provide more and better health care here, they could also do that in Fulton County, which my district also covers. They're now providing a level of health care that they've never had in Fulton County — ever."



STATE
REPRESENTATIVE
**STETSON
PAINTER**
ALUMNI
OF THE
YEAR

Painter, 36, was elected Majority Whip for the next term of the legislature, an impressive accomplishment considering his relative youth and an important responsibility given the dominance of the Republican Party in the statehouse. He said while he is obviously honored with the role, it's not something he intends to use as a cudgel on his Democratic colleagues to get things done.

"Not to sound cliché, but I always want to give back," he said. "So many people invested in me who didn't have to, and I never want to let them down. My mission statement that I carry with me every day is, 'How can I make District 3 in the state of Arkansas better today than it was yesterday?' That's something I try to think about and live by every day." ■

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ALIGNED for SUCCESS

New organizational structure seeks to streamline student experience by DWAIN HEBDA

» After months of discussion and careful planning, Arkansas State University-Mountain Home unveiled a new organizational structure designed to help make the student experience more streamlined and easier to navigate.

Chancellor Bentley Wallace said the issue of reorganization was a priority of faculty and staff when he took over leadership of the campus. The new organizational chart was constructed from input provided by three committees made up of various stakeholders.

“Before I arrived at ASU-Mountain Home, I surveyed the leadership of the college, about 35 people, and I provided them a list of things that I know to be challenges and opportunities

associated with running a college,” Wallace said. “I asked them, of the 25 or so things on this list, to tell me what I should focus on when I arrive. On my first day as chancellor, right there at the top, was organizational structure.”

Wallace said it is not uncommon for such measures to be taken over the life of a college or university as changing times and changing needs often require a reexamination of organization systems embedded within an organization. Looking at such matters regularly helps leadership examine the efficiency and effectiveness with which the organization fulfills its mission, at times requiring adjustments on how positions are aligned and structured.

PHOTO BY JAMES MOORE



"The org structure itself hadn't been fully revamped in a while, and when I got here, it was pretty clear that it was time to take a good look at it," he said. "Everybody at the college — students, faculty and staff — was invited to participate in the process, and my only guidance to the three groups was, basically, if we were to start this college new today, what structure would lead to student success and operational efficiency? Those are really the two hallmarks of what the structure should look like."

Wallace said all suggestions advanced from the three groups were considered in the strategic planning phase, paying special attention to the recommendations they held in common, which were many.

"From all the best parts of each of those proposals came the new structure, and what we landed on was actually a very traditional model with four functional areas within the college, identified with a vice chancellor over each of those areas," Wallace said, reiterating the final version was not dictated from above but generated from the ground up.

"Quite frankly, that process and the structure that we came up with was very much the product of those working groups' suggestions on what the structure should be," he said. "What we came out with was very much crafted by our stakeholders around the college."

The outcomes of the process, which took several months to complete, included some university positions being eliminated, others being modified and it also brought wholesale physical relocation of most academic personnel and several administrative functions campus wide. Wallace said the new structure will help students complete their college experience more efficiently and with less confusion.

"We were very purposeful to make sure that there was no major upheaval in terms of student interaction from a negative perspective," he said. "In fact, most of the proposed changes were focused on serving students better, which we did by physically moving a number of student-facing departments that were scattered around the campus. Departments such as registration, financial aid and advising, for example, are now in one location within a newly formed Center for Student Success. Our goal was to streamline operations while providing students with enhanced student services."

"Was there some short-term pain and drama over moving everything around? Yes, of course, as is to be expected with change. But I also want to point out how proud I am of the committee members and the work they did here to allow ASU-Mountain Home to serve as many students as we possibly can at the highest level. The outcome of their work shows that they were motivated by that singular focus, and I couldn't be more excited for the opportunity we now have to grow as a result of this new structure."

VICE CHANCELLORS BRING EXPERIENCE, VISION TO ROLES

» *The four vice chancellors created by the new organizational chart are key elements in the new structure. The positions were filled by experienced individuals whose records of excellence in higher education over decades of service are unmatched, Wallace said. The following is an introduction of these leaders and their vision for the future of Arkansas State University-Mountain Home.*



BRIAN CARLISLE *Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs*

The lone vice chancellor hailing from outside the university, Brian Carlisle, said the opportunity to come to Mountain Home felt like a homecoming. The Alabama native, who comes to the new role from Northeastern University in Boston, said he welcomed a return to the South and a smaller campus and community environment.

"It has been a smooth transition, and it's been a welcome transition," he said. "I was the dean of students at the Northeastern University law school, and I found Boston to be a little large, a little overwhelming. I am definitely more of a small-town kind

of guy, and so it has been wonderful to return to a small town in a Southern state."

Carlisle began his educational journey at a two-year college, earning an associate degree from Faulkner State Community College in Alabama, before earning his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Later on, he also earned a law degree from Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles.

Having been exposed to colleges in multiple states and locales gives him a sense of perspective on the amenities of ASU-Mountain Home, which he said stacks up nicely against any school in its class.

"I think one of the things that's incredibly innovative and exciting about the reorganization is the creation of the Student Success Center," he said. "This is really going to be a force for moving students through processes that can oftentimes be very confusing and very unusual for new students. The center will provide the support, the care and open access to students who need academic advising or who need career coaching and support."

"That, to me, is a brilliant and innovative office, and I think

they're going to be able to do some very powerful things on behalf of students."



Tamara Daniel

Provost/Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

Tamara Daniel, having joined ASUMH in 2019 in a role that remained unchanged by the reorganization process, has technically been in her job longer than the other three who stepped into brand-new positions.

"As vice chancellor for academic affairs, I primarily lead initiatives that drive academic excellence and student success," she said. "It's basically strategic oversight of things like curriculum development, faculty members, support services for students, workforce development and aligning programs with the workforce. My area basically supports students to meet their academic needs and also their career goals.

"I am also the regional accreditation liaison for our college. We are accredited to a higher learning commission, and I have to ensure that we are meeting those accreditation requirements."

A first-generation college student, Daniel holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and both a master's and doctorate in mathematics, all earned from the University of Mississippi. Among her professional stops have been community colleges in North Carolina and two stops in Tennessee where she served in

a similar capacity to the role she occupies at ASUMH.

She said even though her department's job responsibilities remained essentially the same post-reorganization, there were still changes to accommodate in the form of grouping academic offices, requiring many to relocate to different spaces on campus.

"The moves uprooted almost every office as we changed and reconfigured in a manner that would help the flow for students. The motivation for doing that was completely student-focused," she said. "I also want to say that the physical plant department was absolutely fantastic in those moves. What they did in the amount of time they had in the summer was incredible."



Waynna Dockins

Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration

Formerly the university's chief financial officer, Dockins first joined ASUMH in 1997 and served the university for 14 years before joining the staff of the University of Arkansas Community College at Batesville for eight years. She returned to ASUMH as CFO in 2020.

A native of Calico Rock, Dockins earned her accounting degree from the University of Central Arkansas in Conway and later an MBA from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro.

With that set of credentials, Dockins would be in demand

virtually anywhere in the business world but said she has remained in higher education to be a part of the mission of helping people reach their full potential.

"Higher education gives people the opportunity to better themselves," she said. "As a university, we serve the students as they get their education to improve their employability or just to strengthen their knowledge base. It's rewarding to know that what we do could help a single mother provide for her children or a nontraditional student land a better job. Seeing our students graduate and go on to a career they really like is very rewarding. I consider what I do more than a job."

While Dockins and her departments mostly work behind the scenes to make ASUMH run, the impact of their work is significant to the success of faculty, staff and students. Making sure purchasing, accounts payable, payroll, maintenance, student accounts, and information technology are always taken care of, ensures ASUMH is in good condition. "That's a big part of providing an excellent learning environment where students can focus on their studies and our faculty and staff can be at their best!"



Christy Keirn

Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement

In the 17 years she has served the university, Christy Keirn has

seen much change, growth and development. As vice chancellor for institutional advancement, she's responsible for telling ASUMH's evolving story while also overseeing the activities needed to fund the university's future.

Joining ASUMH in 2007 as director of marketing, Keirn has served the bulk of her tenure as associate vice chancellor for marketing and community relations. She holds a BSBA in communications from Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi, and a master's degree in higher education administration and institutional advancement from Bay Path University, located in Longmeadow, Massachusetts.

Keirn said the new organizational structure gives all stakeholders the opportunity to align behind a common vision.

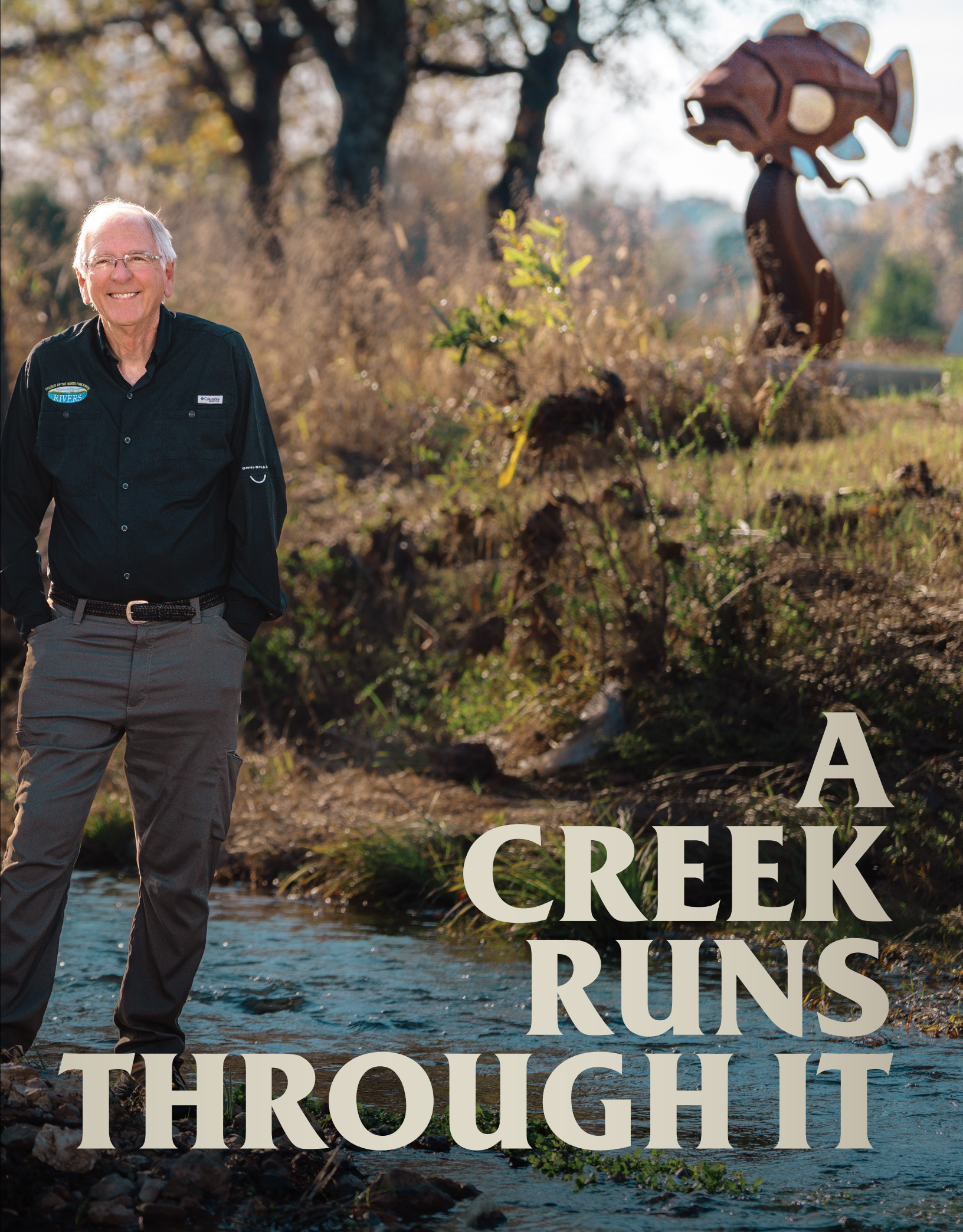
"The new org chart will allow all of us to look at everything we do every day more strategically," she said. "I think the most important thing is we have a holistic view now, and what I'm most excited about is that we have the opportunity to reevaluate what our processes have been and how we can make adjustments to serve our customers better, whoever they are."

As the public-facing division of the school's administration, Keirn and her team explore ways for the university to remain firmly entrenched in the community of Mountain Home, including recruiting, fundraising, and through the college's robust arts offerings to name a few.

"My department works with all external groups in various ways from the media to the performing arts in our beautiful venues to institutional advancement," she said. "We have brought people to campus as varied as Willie Nelson and Tibetan monks, we have a walking trail and disc golf course that are heavily used by the greater community, and we support a selection of classes that people can take just for fun. Not many colleges can say that." ■

DODD CREEK





A CREEK RUNS THROUGH IT

If, as Shakespeare opined, “All the world’s a stage,” then it must be true that all of creation is a potential classroom, ready to share the secrets of the natural world in ways scientific, sacred and secular. Such is the case with Dodd Creek, the meandering and much-beloved waterway that provides a natural outdoor lab for students as well as a soothing, gurgling soundtrack for those enjoying the campus’ popular walking trail.

Observers of the creek in recent months have noticed some changes to the areas surrounding it — taller and more rustic-looking plants and shrubs than what residents and students have been accustomed to. The new approach has nothing to do with aesthetics but everything to do with helping to rehabilitate Dodd Creek from continuing rapid erosion.

The erosion issue, which has been studied for several years by Friends of the North Fork and White Rivers, its offshoot called the Dodd Creek Stream Team made up of local high schoolers, and various ASU-Mountain Home student groups, has gotten progressively worse due to a lack of sturdier smaller plants allowing the general degradation of the creek bank.

Once a vulnerable patch is exposed, the problem can accelerate as water chews away at it until the problem starts to affect larger plant life such as trees, the root systems of which serve to keep soil from washing away in the first place. This destructive cycle is currently playing out on campus.

“Dodd Creek is unhealthy because the banks are eroding the riparian area, which is the area on either side of the creek lacking meaningful vegetation,” said Steve Blumreich, a local retiree and president of Friends of the North Fork and White Rivers. “The root systems of trees have grown into the bank and because erosion is taking place, those root systems are exposed now, and the trees, a number of them, have died or are dying.”

Erosion doesn’t just happen on patches of bare dirt; grasses that would otherwise protect the creek bank are

often hampered in their effectiveness by being cut too short. To counteract the Dodd Creek erosion, grasses and other plants along the bank have been allowed to grow up considerably to hold the soil more firmly in place.

Blumreich said while people enjoy the aesthetic look of a manicured fairway right up to the edge of the creek bank, the new strategy is necessary to avoid further degradation of the waterway itself.

“Dodd Creek is a living, breathing creek, and that’s what we’re hoping to preserve,” he said. “There are three general reasons why we’re concerned. One is the riparian area has to be protected, to protect the vegetation, especially the big trees that are there.

“Secondly, the area is home to a lot of wildlife, everything from insects to birds to amphibians, toads, frogs, etc. There are some beautiful bream in the creek as well as darter minnows. Another reason to protect against more erosion is that the sediment from the stream bank is one of the main items contaminating the water.”

Eddie Dry, an ASU-Mountain Home assistant professor of biology who has also been active in the study and rehabilitation of the creek, explained how destructive silt can be in choking out aquatic life found in water ecosystems.

“The riparian zone increases biodiversity because it helps filter sediments in the water,” he said. “What happens here in Dodd Creek ends up eventually in the White River, and if we lose too much sediment here, it’s going to end up somewhere downstream. The unmowed grass, as unused to it as people are, is really performing a pretty important function for the overall stream health.”

Dry, who is a past board member with Friends of the North Fork and White Rivers, noted the overgrown grasses as just a first step meant to stabilize the situation. He said more strategic plantings can and should happen in the future to balance ecology with aesthetics.

“Certainly we could investigate plants that are riparian zone-friendly,” he said. “Sycamore trees are really well-known riparian zone trees as are certain shrubs.

The buttonbush is an important riparian zone plant in many habitats. I think when we talk about succession of the environment, the logical next steps are to let some of these larger plants start to take over.”

The organization brought the creek’s condition to the attention of college leadership and was met with immediate cooperation in addressing it said Mike Risk, another local with Friends of the North Fork and White Rivers, who joined Blumreich in appealing to the chancellor’s office to intervene.

“We are very appreciative of the chancellor and the college for being supportive because this is a bold step, if you will,” he said. “In the past, the stream banks have been stripped down to the ground, and the university has let the stream become a little more back to its natural state — the state that it really wants to be in.

“This is a major change to what people have seen in the past. We’re working with other groups within the college to come to a compromise, if you will, on what works best for the stream and what also works best for the community.” ■

DID YOU KNOW?

- » Dodd Creek starts in the hills surrounding Baxter Health in Mountain Home, feeds into Big Creek and empties into the White River.
- » Water that flows past ASU-Mountain Home reaches the Gulf of Mexico in about two weeks’ time.
- » According to research by the Stream Team, Dodd Creek has experienced an average rate of erosion around 1/2 to 3/4 of a foot annually in recent years.
- » The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission has pitched in on the efforts, providing advisory expertise and installing rock barriers along portions of the creek to slow erosion.
- » While silt is a natural element of any ecosystem, from rivers and streams to farmland, excessive silt in a waterway is a form of water pollution known as siltation, also called sediment pollution. Excessive silt suspended in the water or accumulating on the bottom can seriously disrupt plant and animal life.

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BIG APPLE TO BAXTER COUNTY

*Kaylee Wise brings big-time
experience to ASUMH*

by DWAIN HEBDA

There's an old joke that reads, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice."

A modified version of the quip, as it pertains to Kaylee Wise's circuitous route from Texarkana, Arkansas, to ASUMH via New York City, might be, "How do you get from Manhattan to Mountain Home? Progeny."

"Living in New York, honestly, was like anywhere else: You find your routine, and you find your groove," she said. "New Yorkers are much kinder than people give them credit for. They're not warm and they don't have time to stop and talk to you, but if you're in trouble they'll help you out. I always felt very welcome, and we found an amazing community there."

"We started tossing around the idea of coming back because our son, Ozro, was starting to get a little bit older, and he really loved to be outside. We were also missing so much being so far from family, so when there was an opportunity, we saw it as a now-or-never kind of a thing. Moving to be closer to family was the main draw."

After graduating from high school, Wise earned a degree in theater from Southern Arkansas University in Magnolia, a degree that is somewhat misleading to the kind of skills she gained.

"The wonderful thing about the Bachelor of Arts in Theater at SAU is that it was a generalist degree. It covered all elements of theater," she said. "Within that, there are lots of different

professions, and the ones that I loved the most were the behind-the-scenes options. I took a couple of graphic design classes and really leaned into the theater management area while I was there, and that has served me well throughout my entire career."

After graduation, she spent five years with a theater in Fort Worth, Texas, and then she and her husband Matthew worked in Central Arkansas before Matthew's career took them to New York City. There, she joined the marketing team of legendary Carnegie Hall, an experience she describes as both inspirational and affirming.

"At Performing Arts Fort Worth, we used the same industry systems that Carnegie Hall uses. So I had hands-on experience in those systems, an arts background and nearly 10 years of work experience," she said. "When we got to New York and I applied to Carnegie, that really set me apart."

"Working at Carnegie Hall, a globally revered institution with such a rich history, was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The experience was everything I hoped it would be — challenging, elevating, and fun! I was working alongside a team that made it easy to come to work every day."



The couple found a similarly soft landing when they decided to return to Arkansas. Matthew took a job as a theater teacher at Mountain Home High School and Kaylee was welcomed with open arms by the ASU-Mountain Home Marketing Department. She, in turn, has fallen right in step in her role as marketing director, where she handles a number of branding, communications and publicity duties on behalf of the university.

"Every marketing position I've had, at the core of themselves, they're all the same basic elements when you boil it down; they're all just in different fonts," she said. "In this role, I'm using the same basic concepts to talk about the university as I did a performing arts center. It's certainly different than any position I've had elsewhere, but it's not completely unfamiliar."

"It's all storytelling; no matter where I am and no matter what the position is, it's about telling the story of the product. It's just that every audience is very individualized, and every area has something very individual to tell." ■

PHOTO BY JAMES MOORE

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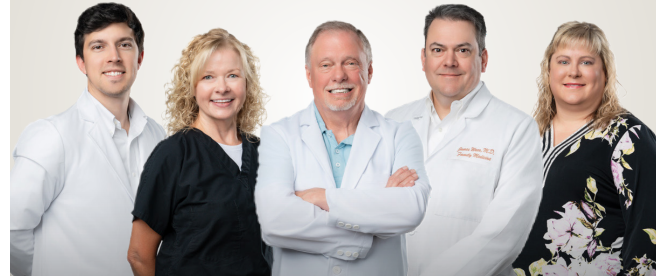
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Walk of Life

Art exhibit brings new sculpture to campus by DWAIN HEBDA

Residents who have taken the time to stroll the walking trail on ASU-Mountain Home's scenic campus have no doubt noticed they aren't alone. Since August, a new generation of art lovers has been developed with the installation of animal sculptures by the celebrated artist Dale Rogers.

The six-month showcase has provided whimsical metal works of art and large-scale sculptures that ingeniously blend iconic and geometric shapes, all crafted from stainless and Cor-Ten steel. Eight of the 17 works are displayed along the James and Sally Moore Recreational Trail on the ASUMH campus while the remaining seven line the Shirley Baker Nature Trail in McCabe Park.

"ASU-Mountain Home was thrilled to partner with the City of Mountain Home to bring this first major exhibit to the ASUMH-City of Mountain Home Art Walk," said ASUMH Chancellor Dr. Bentley Wallace. "Dale Rogers' brilliant and fun sculptures have delighted visitors of all ages and provided an exciting opportunity for guests on the trail to enjoy art, nature, education and health benefits all in one place."

Known for creating thought-provoking work that is sophisticated, easily recognizable and that serves as a mental postcard for viewers, Dale Rogers' sculptures can be found on more than 20 public school, college and university campuses. One of the Massachusetts-based artist's traveling exhibits, Big Dog Show, visited 23 cities across the United States, raising more

than \$250,000 to support animal care.

The Art Walk committee behind the exhibit worked for a year to create a policy for temporary and permanent pieces exhibited in the public space along the Art Walk trail system. The group developed guidelines for any public art that will be displayed and how that work will be chosen.

"The Dale Rogers exhibit has been enjoyed by many and has brought a new group of users to the local trail system," said Hillrey Adams, Mountain Home mayor. "This is another great example of how the City of Mountain Home and ASUMH working together can bring something new and exciting to Mountain Home for so many to enjoy."

Joe and Kathryn Miles, local retirees and art lovers, were heavily involved with the exhibition. Joe served on the Art Walk committee, and the couple also made the decision to generously sponsor one of the sculptures on their own.

"The notion was that we would just have a vote of the public on favorite pieces along the art walk, and (the committee) had sufficient monies in our coffers to purchase about five of the 17 pieces that are on display," Joe said. "We just saw the opportunity to step up and sponsor the artwork and that would supplement the committee's dollars that are in the bank, so to speak, and we would be able to retain more pieces."

The canine-loving couple chose a piece entitled "Happy Dog" in honor of the hounds they owned and had brought them such joy.

"Both Joe and I love animals, but we particularly love dogs," Kathryn said. "I was a biology professor for many years, and I would bring our two dogs to the classroom. They were schnauzers, and I would just let 'em run loose."

"We've always had dogs in our lives, both of us, forever. Life isn't complete without them," Joe said. "Happy Dog' pretty well represents our existence together because we've had happy dogs with us. Regrettably, their lives aren't as long as ours, but they brought us great joy and this piece just spoke to us."

The couple said they got involved to the level they did because of the lasting positive impact that public art brings to the community.

"I see (this display) as a kind of a jumpstart to Mountain Home being recognized as one of Arkansas's more artistic centers," Joe said. "It's complementary to a really strong performing arts initiative we have here, both at the campus and in the community. I see this art walk expanding far beyond the campus and McCabe Park where these pieces have initially been set. I see it ultimately going throughout the community and tying all of the community together from an arts center perspective."

In addition to Joe Miles, members of the MH Art Walk committee include Dr. Eddie Dry, Christy Dyer, Mindy Fulcher, Dane Hustead, Beth Ivens, Arnold Knox, and Dr. Kathy Loyd. Mayor Adams and Chancellor Wallace, along with Institutional Advancement staff, also serve as ex-officio members of the committee. ■



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— Joe Miles

PAYing it Forward

ASUMH helps local group combat substance misuse

by DWAIN HEBDA

During the course of its history, Arkansas State University-Mountain Home has always sought to remain a part of the community, be it providing educational opportunities, giving exposure to the arts or developing the workforce of the future.

Recently, the university demonstrated that long-held commitment in another way by partnering with the Prevention Awareness for Youth Support (PAYS) Coalition to land a \$625,000 federal grant to combat youth substance abuse in Baxter and Marion counties.

"About 18 months ago, the (PAYS) group came to the college and met with the team here to tell the story of what we can do to protect children in our area from substance abuse," said Dr. Bentley Wallace, chancellor. "The college agreed to be the fiscal agent, the partner through which any grant funds were secured could be spent on this initiative, and the college was happy to do it."

The PAYS Coalition, which applied for the grant, is part of a larger group, the North Arkansas Partnership for Health Education, which covers Baxter, Marion, Boone, Searcy and Newton counties. Carry Manuel, chairman and a graduate of ASUMH, said the award would not have been possible without ASUMH's participation.

"Part of the application for the grant stated we must have a fiscal agent, and ASU-Mountain Home is the ideal partner for that purpose," Manuel said. "I think the college is going to be instrumental in that grant process as we walk through our programs."

The money will fund various program elements of PAYS' mission for five years as well as enable ASUMH to hire a full-time Drug Free Communities coordinator. The DFC coordinator will be a key link between the high school's Student Education Against Drugs club and local children and youth.

Manuel said the grant money will be put to good use to reach young people and dissuade them from picking up cigarettes and other substances.

"There are many different variations of activities that will be a part of it," he said. "We're going to bring in some powerful speakers to present programs like In 'Plain Sight,' a program where you teach parents what a bedroom would look like for someone who has addiction issues or abuses substances. We'll be educating parents on things like that.

"We will also be looking at various misused drugs specifically. Nicotine

vaping is going to be high on the list. Opioid misuse, as well as prescription drugs, are high on the list as well.

The group plans to leverage social media as another means of reaching their desired demographic.

"Social media can be a double-edged sword, but for us to get what we need, we need to use these platforms to try and be able to change the attitudes and the minds of some young folks who have not yet used substances but that may otherwise end up trying to abuse substances," Manuel said.

At the end of the five-year period, PAYS/ASUMH can apply to renew the grant for another five years.

"We want to increase our sustainability within our community," Manuel said. "Someday the grant funds will run out, and when that happens, we want to be able to continue the work. We will be working diligently on building capacity and sustainability within our community over the years so we can continue."■



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