

A special publication of *The Murray State News*

GATEWAY

2020



Meet the Jacksons
Page 12

Farewell Fannin
Page 16

**Murray State
after dark**
Page 32

**Murray State
across the pond**
Page 48

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Table of contents

06

Ja Morant

The face of Murray State basketball

12

Meet the Jacksons

16

Farewell Fannin

Racer Band assistant director reflects on his time at Murray State

23

Hancock Biological Station

Research that extends beyond the classroom

28

Scholars program gives senior citizens new life

32

Murray State after dark

35

Officer Puckett

Getting to know the people-person behind the badge

43

An agricultural journey

Professor reminisces on his journey to Murray State

48

Murray State across the pond

Student travels from Murray to Regensburg

53

Murray State professor and daughter discovers new species

Letter from the Editor

To the Murray community,

Greetings to you all. As I write this letter, and work on Gateway 2020, I am in the midst of my final semester at Murray State University. That can leave a gal pretty nostalgic.

Many of you reading this letter are already alumni, and your time at Murray State has come and gone; your passion for the school and the community, though, has not. Perhaps you are a member of the Murray community, and you have seen it grow throughout the years. Maybe, you are a current student who found this magazine sitting on a table in the Curris Center, distracting yourself from your studies and homework. It could be that you're a prospective student, wondering what it is you're getting yourself into.

I sincerely hope that this magazine, telling the stories of the people who make Murray State so wonderful, will give you some enjoyment and excitement.

You, the people of Murray, are what make this cozy little town so amazing. Your stories build the history, the present and the future of our homey neck of the woods.

I want you all to consider this year's Gateway an exploration of the Faces of Murray State, a sort of behind-the-scenes view of the people who make this school and community tick. So, as you read this magazine, take time to reminisce and soak in the nostalgia. Murray State was your home before it was ours.

Sincerely,

Megan Reynolds, Editor-in-Chief

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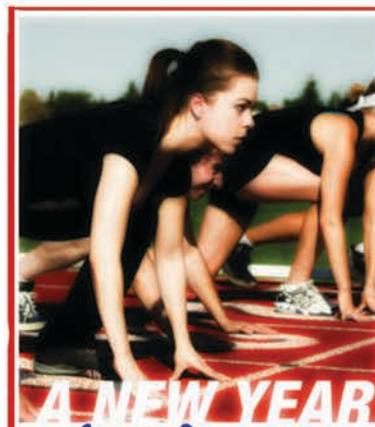
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Ja Morant

The undeniable face of Murray State basketball

Story & photos by Gage Johnson

It doesn't matter where you are, if you tell someone about Murray State you know what the next thing to come out of the person's mouth will be—"Oh, that's where Ja Morant went, right?"

Yes, that's where Morant led the Murray State men's basketball to a 54-11 overall record and a 32-4 record in OVC play, won two OVC Championships and played in three NCAA Tournament games, beating Marquette in one of the three.

It's where the young phenom point guard averaged 24.5 ppg, 5.7 rpg and 10 apg in his sophomore season, became the first player to average 20 points and 10 assists since the NCAA made assists an official stat in 1983, won a Lute Olson award, a Bob Cousy award and an OVC

Player of the Year award and a First Team All-American.

The Racers are the team that helped propel Morant to be referred to as the Patrick Mahomes of college basketball by Seth Greenberg and eventually be taken with the No. 2 overall pick in the 2019 NBA Draft by the Memphis Grizzlies.

To Morant, Murray State is a lot more than all of these incredible accomplishments—it's a second home.

"No question," Morant said. "This is my home. South Carolina, Murray and now Memphis. Murray is just so special. It's always going to be home for me. People [here] will always be my family. You all will see my face a lot and just show where I came from and show some support."

Once a Racer, Always a Racer



“It feels like I was just talking to you guys about going from a nobody to one of the most talked about players in college. I feel like what I went through just keeps humbling me and keeps me hungry and lets me play with that chip on my shoulder.”

- Ja Morant

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On Feb. 1, Morant cemented his legacy by joining 10 other Racer greats in the rafters of the CFSB Center when No. 12 was retired.

While winning with the Racers was his biggest priority, Morant said he'd be lying if he didn't admit he wanted to see his jersey immortalized in Murray State basketball history.

"I'm going to be honest, it definitely was a goal," Morant said. "I fell in love with Murray State—I think everybody knows that now—just coming in I was trying to do whatever I can like I always do to try and be the best Ja I can be on and off the floor. I never thought it would come this fast but it happened tonight and I'm thankful for it."

Meanwhile, Morant is becoming a budding star in the NBA in his rookie season.

He's a main topic of conversation amongst NBA fans, personnel and media coverage. Morant is averaging 17.6 ppg and 7.0 apg, making him the only other player besides four-time NBA All-Star point guard Mark Price to do so while averaging less than 30 mpg. He's being as efficient as the Grizzlies could ask as well, shooting 49.7% from the

field and 37.6% from beyond the arc.

Morant also became the fourth-youngest player to record a triple-double on Feb. 9, going for 27 points, 10 assists and 10 rebounds against the Washington Wizards.

Morant is becoming the consensus NBA Rookie of the Year, was nearly voted to be an NBA All-Star and it's all happened in the blink of an eye.

"It felt like everything has just happened so fast," Morant said. "My parents and family tell me everyday, 'I don't know how you're handling this at 20 years old.' These past two years have been crazy. The accolades, winning, the draft, having my daughter and now I'm one of the most talked about rookies in the NBA. It feels like I was just talking to you guys about going from a nobody to one of the most talked about players in college. I feel like what I went through just keeps humbling me and keeps me hungry and lets me play with that chip on my shoulder."

For Morant, it all started in Dalzell, South Carolina—a town of 3,443 people—where his father Tee Morant helped train him to get to the next level,

having played collegiately and making a run at an NBA career.

However, the two's relationship goes far beyond the game of basketball.

"That's my father, but it's like a brother type of relationship," Morant said. "I can talk to him about anything, and coming up he just taught me the game of basketball. I understand he was a great player when he played, and I have a lot of trust in him because he knows what it takes to get to the next level."

And while Morant's support group is clearly much more than his father with love shown from Racer Nation all the time, his family had sections filled at the CFSB Center in his time at Murray State, making the nine-hour-11-minute drive to Murray, Kentucky, for the Racers' home games.

"I'm big on family," Morant said. "As you can see,

my family is the same way. They travel nine hours just to come watch me play, and even go to away games which is probably farther. It's a good feeling. I know most people don't get that, and it's just an honor to have them travel to come and support."

Morant even extended that family with the addition of his and girlfriend KK Dixon's daughter Kaari, who was born on Aug. 7, 2019.

While Morant may be creating a family of his own while also becoming one of the most electric players in the NBA, he knows that those who suit up for Murray State and the many people who have watched him grow since his arrival to the 270 will always be family as well.

"They're still my guys, my brothers, my family," Morant said. "People in the stands [are] my family. I'm going to continue to show my support whenever I can come down."



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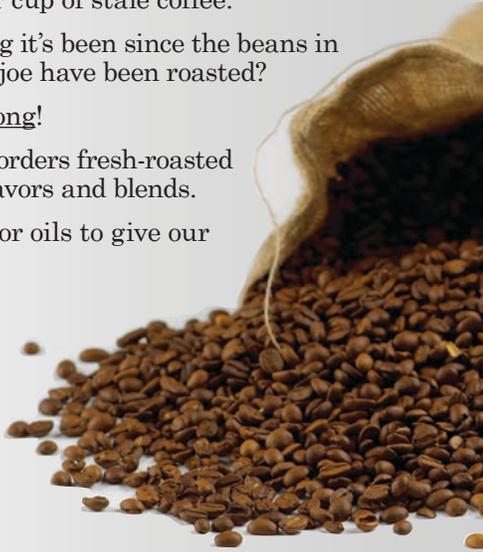
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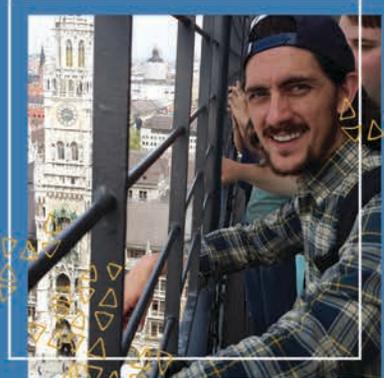
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*Story by Logan Boger
Photos courtesy of Bob Jackson*

The Jacksons

*An inside look into the
first family*



When finding a president for a university, it is essential they want to influence education. The 14th president of Murray State, Robert “Bob” Jackson, has been passionate about education since childhood.

Jackson grew up in the rural town of Magnolia, Kentucky, and is one of six kids. All of Jackson’s siblings are first-generation college students. However, this does not mean education fell to the wayside. Education was highly valued by his family,

and for the Jackson children it wasn’t a question of if they were going to college. It was where they would attend.

“All my siblings have some education beyond a high school degree,” Jackson said. “Three of them have terminal degrees, two of them are MDs and I have a doctorate. So our family valued education.”

Karen Jackson, Bob’s wife, has a similar background, originally from Kuttawa, Kentucky. Her middle-class family instilled a

strong work ethic that still follows her today.

Since high school, Karen has always wanted to follow in the footsteps of her great-grandmother and become a nurse. As soon as she started at Murray State, she enrolled in the nursing program and after she graduated, she had a successful career in the field.

“I just always knew that was what I should be doing,” Karen said. “And it worked. It worked out well.”

How they chose Murray State

Bob considered many colleges before choosing Murray State. While visiting the University, he immediately fell in love with the campus and the people of Murray, describing them as kind, gracious people who want to see you become successful.

For Karen, it was never a question of which college or university she was going to attend. She always knew she wanted to attend Murray State. Her decision was only reinforced by the fact that her sister attended Murray State as well.

How they met

Karen and Bob met at a fraternity house and started dating during Bob's freshman year. He was a new member in Pi Kappa Alpha. They dated for four years and got married once Bob graduated. Both have fond memories of their time at Murray State, with Homecoming being a favorite between them.

"There's always been a Homecoming Parade, and Murray during the fall is one of the most beautiful times of the year," Karen said. "I still remember those falls, the Homecoming Parades and building floats. I think that'll always be a special memory."

Life after Graduation

After graduation, both Karen

and Bob had successful careers in their fields. Bob became the youngest person elected to the Kentucky Senate at the age of 35. After seven years of serving in the Kentucky State Senate and traveling to Frankfort, Kentucky, Bob decided it was time to come home.

Tim Miller, the 12th president of Murray State, asked Bob to be the head of the Murray State Foundation, which serves as the umbrella organization accepting private donations for the University. With his leadership, the Foundation increased from \$60 million to \$130 million between 2005 and 2018.

When former Murray State President Robert Davies left office, there was only a two-week notice for the University to find a suitable replacement. Bob checked all the boxes for a reliable replacement and was made the interim president, before being appointed the permanent president.

"When a president gives two weeks' notice, there's not a lot of time to make decisions internally and administratively," Bob said. "So I, of course, did that—accepted that challenge and gladly did it."

Karen has supported Bob during this past year in very active roles. Karen has overseen many events hosted at their home, along with one of the harder jobs of being the first lady: getting the president to relax after work.

"The most important thing is just to provide a safe haven once you get home," Karen said. "Bob is an overachiever and he works



hard, so sometimes I have to remind him that it's okay to come home on time and say no occasionally."

Tab Brockman, Murray State and Pi Kappa Alpha alumnus, has been friends with the Jacksons for nearly 40 years. Brockman describes the Jacksons as a family that has always had a heart for Murray.

"Bob and Karen have been leaders since they attended Murray," Brockman said. "They are very good, very loyal friends."

The Jacksons are working hard on improving Murray State by increasing enrollment and retention of students, preserving the historical campus and improving it for the students and the staff.

"Our job is to recruit, retain you as a student and all your fellow students, to give you a world class education for you to graduate and for us to help you with internships and ultimately final employment," Bob said.

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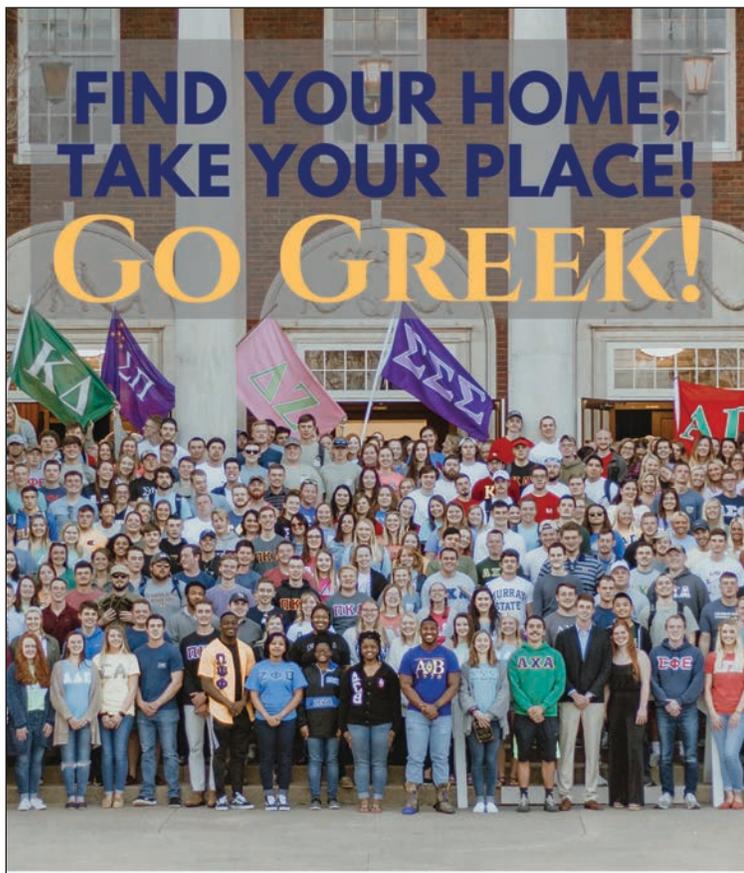
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Farewell Fannin



*Racer Band assistant director reflects on
his time at Murray State*

*Story by Levi Brandenburg
Photos by Jillian Rush and Claudia Kern*



It was just past 11 a.m., still three hours until the football game began. Despite this, the band storage building was bustling with activity as the drumline members scampered around the grill, seemingly drawn to the savory scent of burgers.

Behind the grill, a cheerful man stood, joking with band members and cooking plenty of food for everyone. By offering burgers to those who passed, the man made them feel at home in the group.

He was the assistant director of bands, John Fannin.

From the beginning

25 years ago, in 1994, Fannin had been working for 15 years as a successful band director in New Mexico.

“I shouldn’t say this, but I had some good success,” Fannin said. “I was writing for some college bands, was working with a couple and I just thought there might be something else to do, so I started applying for jobs.”

He said he first heard about the job at Murray State through a brass conference that some of his friends, who were professors at New Mexico State, had attended. They sat beside the Murray State brass faculty and director of bands. The Murray State faculty had talked about a band position, and his friends mentioned they

knew someone fit for it.

“That’s how I kind of got the job,” Fannin said. “I got offered the job, I think, July 17. I had high school band camp two weeks before. So I moved my dog and I across the country here to Murray.”

In 1998, after three years at Murray State, Fannin considered leaving for a different school.

“What’s sort of interesting is, I was sort of on this trajectory where I was changing jobs every couple of years at that time,” Fannin said. “I had my last high school job, I stayed for seven years, but the other 15 years were two or three years in a job max. When I got here, I thought I was still doing that. I applied for a job in Nebraska and was offered the job my third year here and turned it down because I realized that the job here was a much better job actually. And so I’ve been here for 25 years.”

Many students, band members, faculty and staff look up to Fannin. Over his long tenure as a Racer, he has played a major role in many lives. He is well known on campus and across the country.

Trae Blanco, director of bands at the University, has worked with Fannin for two years.

“John’s particular position on campus is one of the most visible positions on campus,” Blanco said. “And over the course of 25 years,

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John has developed a program here that's well known throughout the country, certainly, and that provides a level of excitement to all of the athletic games that we're a part of."

Abby Ward, a junior from Princeton, Kentucky, and senior drum major, has worked with Fannin for three years, including two years as drum major.

"I feel that his footprint on the band is probably a tradition of excellence," Ward said.

Leaving a legend

Last year, Fannin and Blanco told the band Fannin was retiring and that candidates would be coming to work with the band and try out for the position.

"We didn't want the band to find out about my retirement via advertising that went out this summer," Fannin said. "Imagine saying, 'Hey, we're really excited about this year! Oh, by the way, I'm retiring.' It wouldn't be good."

The band hosted a celebration for Fannin during the last home football game on Nov. 16, 2019.

"What I'm really excited about that last weekend at the reunion is that we're going to get decades of Racer Band together, which we haven't done," Fannin said. "We haven't ever done this kind of event before. And getting a picture from all the band presidents from all the years and all the trumpets sections and student leaderships and drum majors and just getting the band. What I'm trying to encourage people to do is get your band friends, come and hang out with your group and experience, you know, have a chance to get together and just relive some old days."

The reunion

On Nov. 16, 2019, Fannin gathered over thirty years of former band members and students for a reunion on the day of his last football game.

For many of those who returned, this was their first time doing so in years and for some like Katie Graves Curcio, an alumna who graduated in 2009, it was a rush of emotion from all angles.

"It's equal parts amazing and overwhelming to be back," Graves Curcio said. "I don't know. I've smiled a lot and cried a lot already. Seeing how many people John Fannin has worked with over his career. It's like you kind of know, but to actually see it is incredible.

There are people here from the 80s all the way up to current members. It's amazing to see his influence."

Graves Curcio was just one of the many Racer Band alumni who attended the event. Despite it being, for some, decades since they had been back to campus, they were all still a family.

"Once a Racer, always a Racer," said Stephanie Caldot, a 2014 alumna. "This event helps to show that current and past members are here for each other and that there are Racers almost everywhere you look."

However, despite the members trying their best to avoid it, Fannin's retirement hung over the alumni and students.

"Every facet of my life has been affected in some way by Racer Band," Graves Curcio said. "John Fannin taught me how to mail merge on an Apple Computer, public speaking, and the importance of learning people's names. He helped make me who I am."

After the event, many of the alumni hung around to take pictures with Fannin, saying thank you for all that he had done for them.

"Thank you for making me who I am," Graves Curcio said.



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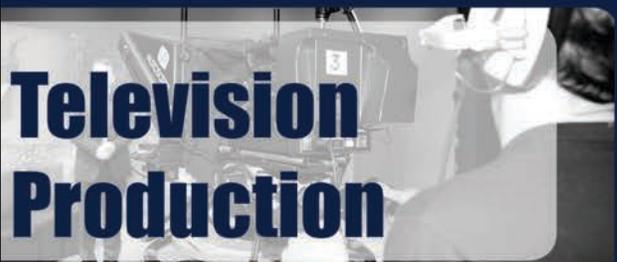
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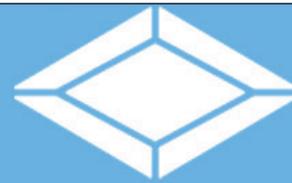
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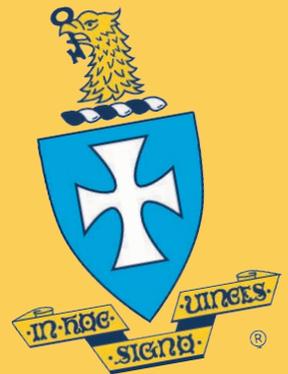
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Hancock Biological Station

Students live in the woods to further their research



*Story by Maggie Helms
Photos courtesy of Melody Feden*

The boathouse bobs up and down and the parked pontoon boats sway with it. Past a shore of shells and rocks, empty kayaks lay ready for use. A dirt path weaves around picnic tables and a bare fire pit to a wooden staircase that leads up a hill.

Damp leaves coat its step. At the top sits the main building's brick back. Double glass doors are propped open and inside two men talk while making their breakfast. Outside, a patio overlooks the woods, the only thing that lies between it and Kentucky Lake. On this morning, sixteen miles away from Murray State's campus, the sun will rise on Hancock Biological Station.

The station has been dedicated to equipping and educating students and scientists since 1972, when the Tennessee Valley Authority gave the University 80 acres for research. The year-round facility offers close interaction with knowledgeable researchers, laboratory

facilities, both field and lake sites, along with a healthy academic environment.

Hancock's new director Michael Flinn has been a professor for Murray State's Department of Biological Sciences for 12 years.

"The beauty of the station is that it's right on Kentucky Lake," Flinn said.

Kentucky Lake is the last of a long chain of reservoirs. Stretching 187 miles long, it is one of the largest reservoirs in the United States.

One of Hancock's most impressive features is its long-term monitoring program. Every 16 days in the summer and once a month during the winter, students and staff go out to research sites scattered all across Kentucky Lake and collect different water quality parameters. The program was started in 1988 and has been on over 600 cruises.

"It's a unique data set," Flinn said.

Other aquatic long-term moni-

toring programs exist on the Great Lakes and some marine stations, but as far as reservoirs go, the Kentucky Lake Monitoring Program has one of the longest and most complete records in the world, said Flinn.

"It's not all about the long-term monitoring program," Flinn said. "I'm an aquatic ecologist and I'm interested in all sorts of questions."

Right outside his office are shelves of fossils and freshwater mussels, alongside a seaweed-green fish tank.

"If I'm at Murray State and I want to do research, we have a fleet of boats here, research boats and pontoon boats docked right down on the water," Flinn said.

A researcher can pay Hancock a small fee to use their boats, while also being assisted by the facility's technical staff. This eases the logistical challenge of doing research, Flinn said.

Outside, at the corner of a service road stands a green street sign that



reads “Hancock Heights P.D.” Cabins line the beaten path. The cabins are painted grey with tin roofs, and each has an air conditioning unit placed outside its window. On one porch there’s a bucket, a couple brooms and towels hanging on the railing. Each cabin is individually numbered. Outside of Cabin Three is a statue of a Native American. A bike and dirty boots lay propped up against another cabin. Seven students currently live at Hancock Biological Station.

“All the grad students and undergrads get their own little cabin out in the woods, and there’s nothing special about it,” Flinn said. He motioned his hand over the small room. “It’s pretty spartan. It’s the size of this office.”

Such a bare bones structure allows students to work on their cabin as they please, letting their imagination run wild.

“They can do basically whatever they want to it,” Flinn said. “They can remodel the whole thing if they want. They can put in a jacuzzi if they want.”

There are pros and cons to living in the middle of the woods. A con: the communal living. The five graduate and two undergraduate students share a laundry and bathroom that’s split into male and female sides. The light above the bathroom door has drawn an entire swarm of bugs.

“This place was built in 1972,” Flinn said. “It’s old, right?”

So, what is so appealing about the crusty cabins? Students can reach out their

windows and touch the trees.

“The nice thing is it’s quiet,” Flinn said. “Most of the people who live out here are ecologists, or they are doing some type of environmental or ecology type research, so they are people who like the outdoors anyway. This is sort of their niche. They feel at home in a little cabin out in the middle of the woods.”

Students can pay 10 dollars a night to stay in a cabin. However, most students work five hours a week at Hancock in order to live there for free. Those five hours can be spent in the chemistry lab, on long-term monitoring cruises or simply cleaning the facilities.

“Because there’s a lot of research that funnels through Hancock, the students out here get an awesome opportunity to get involved with lots of different things,” Flinn said.

As director, Flinn gets many requests that help students develop skills, get plugged in and build a professional resume.

“Our goal is research, education and outreach,” Flinn said. “Not necessarily in that order. Those are all part of our mission. The research ebbs and flows.”

His son sits on the ground by his chair. Flinn pats his son’s head and ask him if he wants something to color on.

Flinn then proceeded to talk about a class of Callo-way County zoology students who had toured Hancock just a few days before. Teaching and inspiring local students is something both himself and his staff love to do.

“We’re all passionate about science out here,” Flinn said.

“If we could share that passion and maybe light a spark in someone else’s passion, that’s what we are all about.”

These mesocosm tanks can be described as self-made ponds. Researchers can examine natural environments while also controlling certain aspects of them.

Seven refrigerators line the kitchen wall, each with its own colorful assortment of magnet letters. Against the other wall is a shelf of canned food. In a separate room to the side sits a couple stoves and a dishwasher. Outside the glass doors, the sun barely risen. Graduate students Clay Bliznick, Alex Woolen and Melody Feden prepare for the day.

Melody Feden graduated from Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington, and has been living at Hancock for a little more than two years. Having completed her class requirements, she is now working on her thesis, centered around how beavers change riparian communities.

“As a grad student you don’t have a lot of time for a social life, but living here makes it really easy to at least have that,” Feden said as she fixed her coffee for the day.

In Feden’s free time, she and her boyfriend Alex Woolen enjoy cooking, exercising, playing board games and socializing with other students. On extended breaks, she explores the outdoors by hiking, cycling, floating and snorkeling in rivers and springs.

Feden found out about Hancock Biology Station when applying to Murray State. She stayed in one of the research cabins while visiting, knowing it was a viable option for housing if she did decide to go to the University. Feden does her field work in Colorado.

“The studies they are doing have never been done and the results of those studies can help fisheries and dam managers decide water levels



and fish management with a better understanding,” Feden said.

Colton Sanders refers to himself as a “super senior.” He is one of the undergraduate students who lives at Hancock Biology Station. Sanders has been at Hancock since January 2018. Sanders started his undergraduate in central New York at Mooresville State College where he studied environmental sciences with backgrounds in forest and soil chemistry. He then transferred to a university in Minnesota, after wanting to go into aquatic biology, but Minnesota lacked opportunity. After a short semester at Minnesota, he transferred to Murray State University.

“Murray was a saving grace,” Sanders said. “Got involved in Dr. Whiteman’s lab, which then got me involved out at Hancock, so I’ve been there ever since.”

Sanders lived on campus for a short time before he settled in at Hancock. Sanders said it was a

transition going from New Franklin Residential College to a tiny cabin in the woods. He loves the rustic lifestyle.

“It’s very secluded,” Sanders said. “You can open your windows at night. I hear just peace and quiet.”

Sanders compares Hancock Biology Station to a community for scientists, especially environmental scientists.

“It’s definitely like a summer camp every day,” Sanders said.

Though there are limited amenities, such as no running water and no bathrooms, the cabins do have electricity and air conditioning.

“It’s very hard as an undergrad out there,” Sanders said. “You really have to be on top of your time management and get your priorities straight.”

Sanders rises at 4 a.m. to go to the gym, then from there he goes to work in the lab. He drives back into town depending on his class schedule. Sanders works two days a week



and on Monday nights he rides for Murray State's dressage team.

"Classes do come first, but you still have commitments to the field station, as in at least your six hours a week to maintain your living which goes towards your work for rent," Sanders said.

Sanders has transformed one of the lab's closets into his own little nook, where he has a desk and study area. Here he can close the door and seclude himself, play music and finish the tasks he needs to get done.

"It's a really good focus study and it's created good study habits for the past two years I've been here," Sanders said.

Sanders spends most of his time in the aquatic chemistry lab.

"I love lab life, it keeps me sane," Sanders said.

The lab is the place Sanders goes to let everything else go. He loves the natural feeling and fluid motions that come with working on a task at hand.

"I think Hancock is at a transitioning point to where the University is realizing it needs ground maintenance, and it needs that attention," Sanders said. "And we're getting that, especially with the new director coming in. It's getting that light that it's needed."

By a trailer that carries shelves of canoes is a mustard colored pavilion with a red roof. A grill sits under the pavilion. Near it is a volleyball net and a rusty basketball goal. Sometimes groups, such as the Wildlife Club, use this cookout area and play volleyball. Residents who live at Hancock full time don't have much time for recreation. When they do, they have a little cabin set aside with a TV and hangout area.

"The day-to-day is sitting there playing games," Sanders said.

Some of the residents enjoy playing a game called "Birdman." If curious, you can always find Sanders and ask him to explain the game. However once the rules are explained, you are automatically playing.

On campus, there's a strong chance Sanders will be found at the library during the gaps in his schedule. He spends most of his time at the round tables in the back of the ground floor retaining information from his classes and doing homework.

"Next plans are just to graduate finally," Sanders said, laughing.

He really plans to go into the Coast Guard officer school. The Coast Guard has a marine environment initiative, and he wants to transition from freshwater to salt

water while using the Coast Guard to survey the country.

"Kentucky Lake is just special, and I think that it's really cool that it went from a river to a lake, and still is giving science some new answers to things," Sanders said.

Hancock is giving local fishermen a better understanding of the lake and the overall watershed area, everything from local biota to the invasive species of carp. The people that live on the lake want to know what they are swimming in, Sanders said.

"Hancock isn't just impacting places in Kentucky, it is impacting places everywhere," Sanders said. "I think of every opportunity and experience and knowledge obtained in the biological sciences and the environmental sciences, it's just a tool in your tool belt, and the more experiences the more tools you have, you can go out and use them to fix these problems and or advise people on what to do in situations."

Hancock Biology Station is always open to visitors, and its students and staff are always willing to answer questions if needed. More information can be found about Hancock Biology Station on its website <https://www.murraystate.edu/qacd/cos/hbs/hbs.htm>.



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Program gives local senior citizens new life

"I am interesting—I'm 70-freakin'-years old. You get interesting after 70 years."

- Alice Alexander

*Story by Gabrielle Sullivan
Photos courtesy of Alice Alexander*

Streaks of silver in her slate gray hair, Alice Alexander sat at a table, sipping a soy latte in a coffee shop.

"Now where are all these flies coming from," Alexander said. "I'm gonna take off my sandal and start swatting these things."

That is exactly what Alexander, who just turned 70, did. By the end of the interview, she was three-for-three on fly killing, and she apologized to the waitress who would have to clean the window later that day.

"That's Murray," she said, smiling. "You smash flies against the window and they say, 'Hey, it's no problem.'"

Alexander is part of Murray State's Senior Scholars Program. The program allows seniors over 65 who have lived in Kentucky for at least a year to enroll in courses at Murray State tuition-free.

She views her age in some

ways as an advantage, as she says her life has prepared her for the course she is currently enrolled in, ENG 408, which is a combination of fiction and creative writing.

"I am interesting—I'm 70-freakin'-years old," she said. "You get interesting after 70 years. Stuff has happened to you."

Alexander does not shy away from using her experiences in class.

A native of Atlanta, Georgia, she studied at Vanderbilt University and initially became a journalist before trying her hand at nursing school.

When she decided she'd end up doing more harm than good as a nurse, she went back to her roots and became a health care journalist, traveling to eastern Africa and South Africa.

"Those were just the coolest trips of my life, and I'm real-

ly drawing heavily on that in class—or at least have so far," Alexander said. "I have all these great memories, and I'm excavating them, going 'Hmm, maybe I can do something with this.'"

She eventually ended up in Murray after leaving her unhappy marriage to reunite with a flame that was initially extinguished 50 years ago.

"I missed him for 50 years," she said about her now-fiancé. "We got reacquainted on Facebook, and I left my husband and came to Murray where he lives. I'm not sorry I did it."

This story of long-lost love was not without its hiccups. Alexander left Atlanta with just the clothes in her backpack, and she and her fiancé had to start over together.

On top of that, her fiancé is chronically ill, so her first few

months in Murray revolved around taking care of him.

She ended up feeling lonely and cut off. But, she described the Senior Scholars Program as a lifesaver.

“This was like a door opened and light came in the door, and it was just grand,” Alexander said. “I mean, I feel like a human being again.”

Joining the Senior Scholars Program was not a hard decision—what was hard, she said, was picking the class to enroll in.

“Originally I thought, you know, I’ll kind of eat my vegetables,” she said. “I’ll enroll in biology or environmental science, something that’ll really work my brain hard. And I thought, no, I’m going to do dessert. I’m going to do fun stuff that I love, which is something to do with writing. It’s just so good to knock the rust off the gears in the brain.”

Additionally, Alexander struggles with technology and was nervous about the application process. She was satisfied by how helpful the people in the Senior Scholars Program and in registrar were.

“They basically took me by the hand and did everything for me,” she said. “They were just so sweet.”

She said anyone who fears the technology aspect of returning to school should just ask for help from the organizers of the Senior Scholars program.

Cindy Wilson, a friend of Alexander’s for 15 years, was not surprised by Alexander’s willingness to learn. After all, she said, they met for the first time in a Spanish class at a nonprofit.



“She’s one of those people who’s just sort of ageless,” Wilson said. “She’s not a fuddy-duddy old lady.”

Nevertheless, Alexander does sometimes feel like she sticks out on campus.

“It’s not like I’m good buddies with the adorable college students in the class, although I’d like to bring them chicken soup and take care of their kitty-cats while they’re out of town and stuff,” she said.

Sometimes, Alexander said, she feels like she enters another world—the world of the young people.

“It just feels like a breath of fresh air to be around kids,” she said. “Young people are delightful. Just by definition they’re young and full of energy and full of hope, and full of funny comments and they know stuff about which I know nothing. It’s like visiting a different world.”

Even as she learns unexpected lessons, she hopes the young students she sits in class with

will learn something from her as well.

“There’s this old grandmotherly kind of person in the back of class, and maybe once in a while she has something that they go ‘Wow, even though she’s old and gray, she did say something interesting,’” she said. “I have no idea—I hope that that happens.”

For the other senior citizens in Murray who are hesitant to do the Senior Scholars Program, she has one piece of advice: do it.

“Get up off the sofa, turn off the TV and get on over there,” she said. “You won’t be sorry. It’s good for your noggin. Who wants to have Alzheimer’s because they didn’t use their brain when they got old?”

Alexander doesn’t let ideas about people her age stop her from learning.

“I want it all,” she said. “This is just the start. I plan to be a Senior Scholar for the rest of my life if they’ll let me.”



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Valerie Strauss, The Washington Post, 12/20/17

www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/12/20/the-surprising-thing-google-learned-about-its-employees-and-what-it-means-for-todays-students/?utm_term=.5119e01758e7

“The National Association of Colleges and Employers conducted a recent survey with hiring managers to find the top 10 most important skills employers are seeking. The top three (1. Ability to work within a team structure, 2. Make decisions and solve problems, and 3. Communicate verbally with people) are soft skills. People skills and emotional intelligence are widely recognized to be as important, if not more important, than technical skills . . .”

Amy Seglin, Fortune, 6/16/17

www.fortune.com/2017/06/16/job-interview-skills/

“It has become fashionable to say that our present epoch is an information age, but that’s not quite right. In truth, we live in a communication age and it’s time we start taking it seriously.”

Greg Satell, Forbes, 2/6/2015

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/gregsatell/2015/02/06/why-communication-is-todays-most-important-skill>



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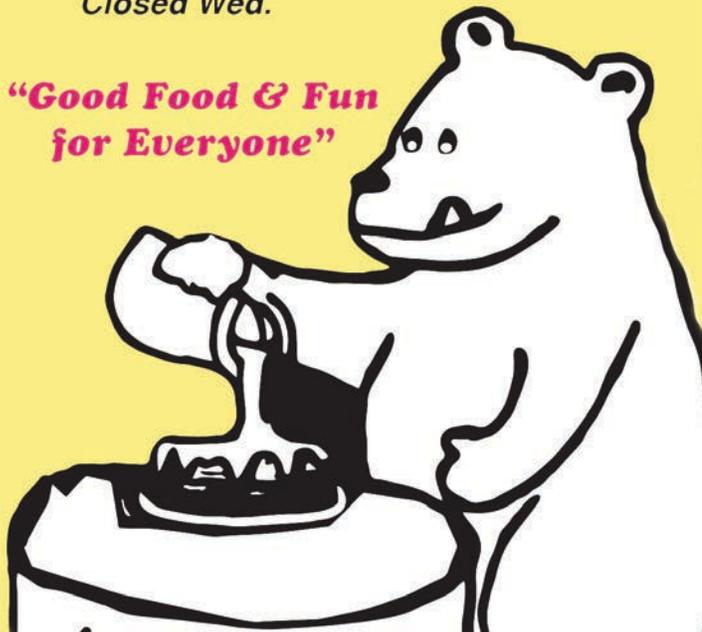
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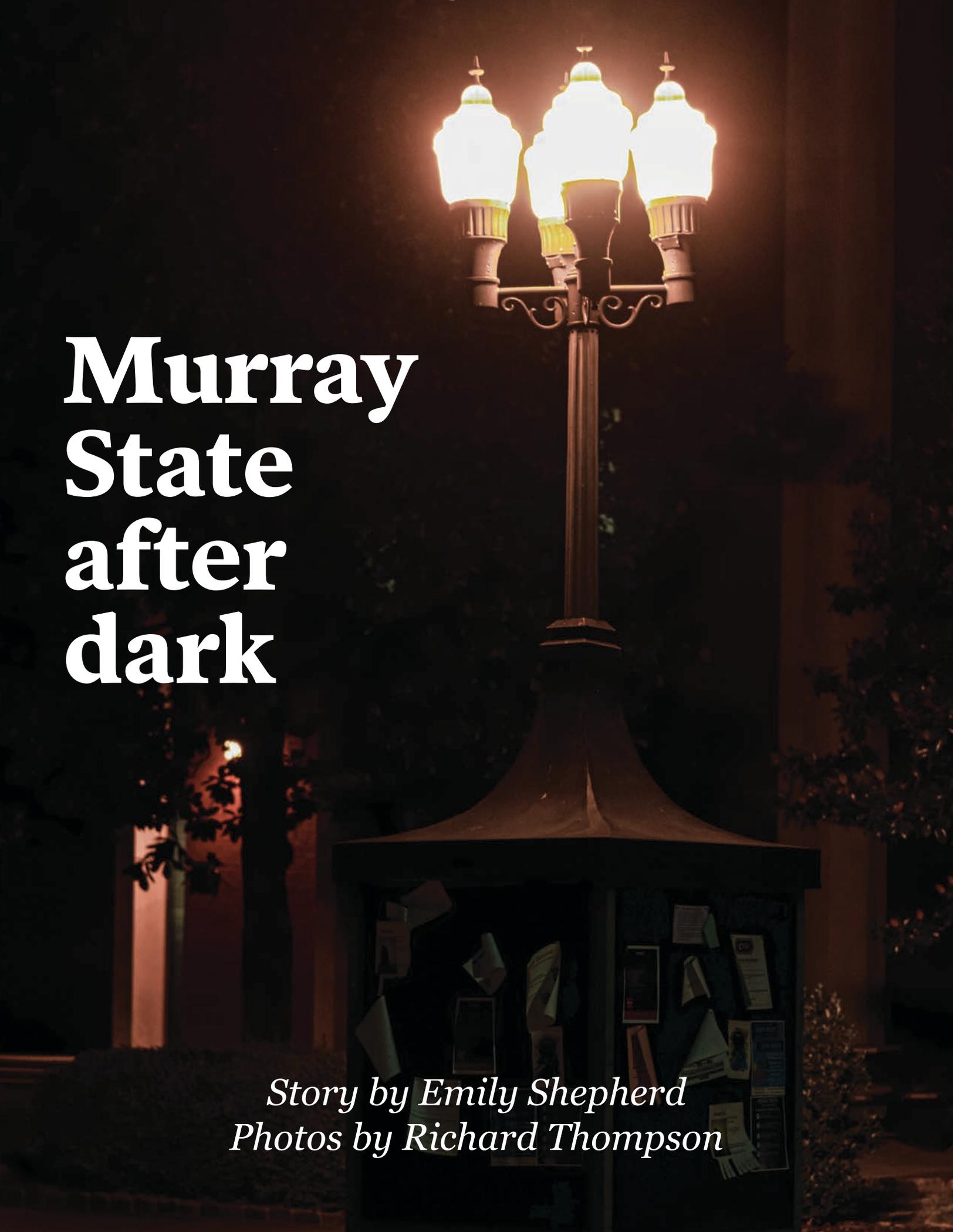
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Murray State after dark

*Story by Emily Shepherd
Photos by Richard Thompson*

Campus street lights cast an orange glow on the pavement, projecting shadows on the trees and buildings; it's enough to give any passersby a spine-tingling feeling. The nightlife at Murray State can be drowsy and calm, but it can also be ominous, haunting.

Odd sounds and eerie lightless windows have caused even the most grounded of night-goers to feel uneasy. The large buildings make security walkthroughs difficult by their mere magnitude.

"These buildings are huge with basements, attics and catwalks," said Sgt. Austin Guill, of the Murray State Police Department's B-shift. "It can be scary."

One building in particular sticks out for Guill.

"Carr Health always comes to mind, that building is huge," Guill said. "It has catacombs underneath it, storage rooms, old locker rooms. If you were a ghost hunter, that would be the place to start."

Guill said the water drips and the wind blows in Carr Health's basement.

"Your mind can play tricks on you in the basement of some of these buildings," Guill said.

Chris Fike, Murray State PD's C-shift sergeant, said he had a coworker who called the station while checking Lovett Auditorium. Fike said his coworker thought he heard someone goofing around in the upper area of the auditorium.

"He's terrified of ghosts," Fike said.

The officers arrived and checked out the area. Footprints on the floor led them to a door in another section of the building.

The officers saw hand prints on the door. There were no prints leading away on the opposite side of the door.

People have experienced odd occurrences in the wee hours of the morning on the residential side of campus, too.

Jenna Carnes, junior creative writing major from Warsaw, Kentucky, worked as a rover, and currently works as a night desk worker in Regents

Residential College.

Carnes had some interesting stories to tell about her time on the graveyard shift.

"It was my first semester roving in the spring of 2018," she said. "I was walking through old Springer, and everytime I would walk under a light, it would go out, and everytime I would walk away from this light, it would come back on."

But how does campus differ from night to day?

The daytime at Murray State brings with it a sense of warmth and comfort. There is peace in the environment around you, and all seems to be in its proper place.

Carnes said if you were to walk around on campus in the middle of the night, however, you might find your surroundings a little strange, creepy even.

"You don't really consider how weird it is not seeing people on campus until there's no one there," she said. "The campus is like a ghost town."

Carnes said she has heard strange noises while roving the buildings on campus, describing the odd voices she heard while walking through Hart Residential College.

"Hart has four wings," she said. "You get so bored going up and down every single wing. I would start thinking that I heard someone behind me, that someone walked out of one wing and then disappeared. It was weird."

Some areas on campus can take on new personas in the sparse light. One entrance to a residential college basement stuck with Carnes.

"On the north porch, the one that faces Hester, there is a super old metal grate, thin with really big gaps," she said. "It looks down into this pit. It has this steep metal stairway, which is rusted and broken. The stairs go down to these two double doors you might lock a bolt behind. There's a basement down there. I would have to go by and peek to make sure nothing was there."

If you find yourself in need of help or an escort on campus, call 2222. This service ensures safety to students required to walk to and from parking lots and buildings after dark. The Police and Information Center is located at 1511 Chestnut St. The office is open for business from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, but is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call 270-809-2222 to reach the Murray State Police Department. Call 911 for emergencies.

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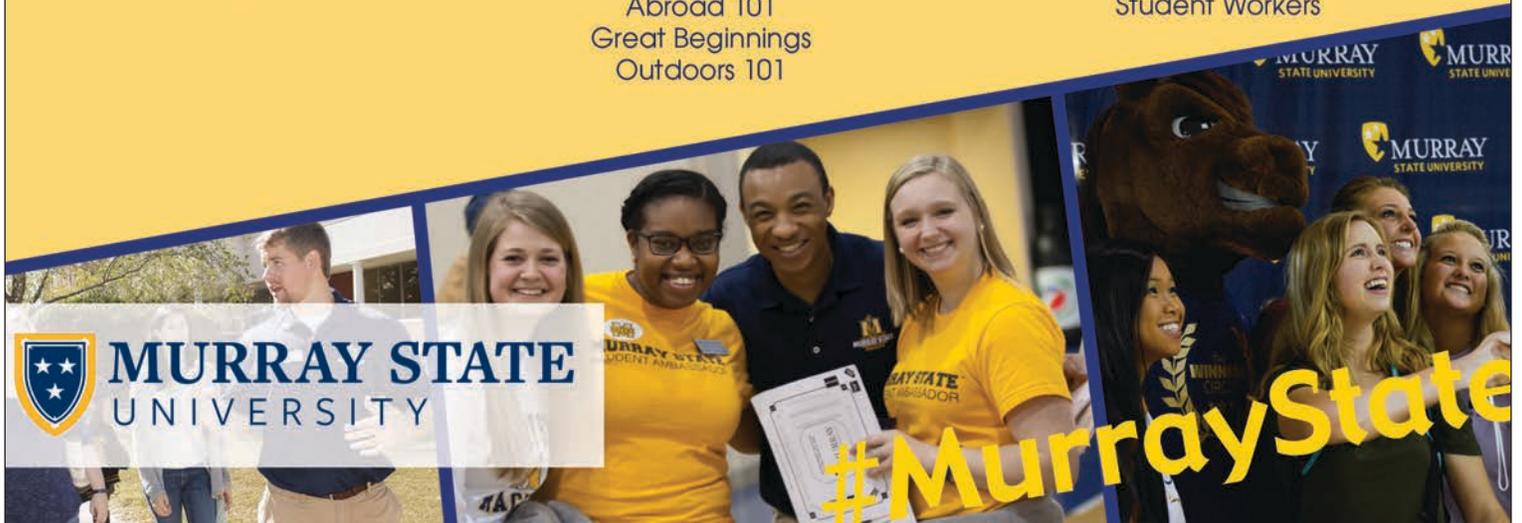
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Officer Puckett

Getting to know the people-person behind the badge



Story and photos by Addison Watson

Being only one of two police officers who patrol Murray State's campus on a bicycle, Shannon Puckett spends the majority of his day meeting new students, bringing smiles to people's faces and occasionally issuing citations.

Puckett has been a police officer at Murray State since October 2015. He hasn't always worked in law enforcement, but his service has been the most memorable time of his life.

"I am a people person," Puckett said. "I love meeting new people and being out and about meeting students, especially freshmen and international students. Being a police officer at Murray State provides the perfect opportunity for me to thrive."

Puckett said sometimes he meets new freshmen who have arrived on campus for the first time, or new international students who are in a completely

different culture at Murray State, which can be overwhelming.

"I look for opportunities to meet them and encourage them and welcome them here," Puckett said.

Puckett was born in Graves County, Kentucky, on Aug. 10, 1962. Growing up, Puckett's family struggled to make ends meet. When he was in high school, Puckett made the hard decision, against his mother's wishes, to drop out and find a job so he could contribute to his family. He found a local job with a major retailer and began walking to and from work daily.

"We were poor as poor could be," Puckett said. "I was trying to help my family survive, more or less."

Dropping out meant that he sacrificed his education, but Puckett promised his mother that he would obtain his GED. Shortly thereafter, he took some

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classes through Murray State to do just that.

In 1980, Puckett found and worked a job in Texas in which he trained cutting horses for a wealthy businessman. Soon, though, he'd head home.

"God called me back home to Graves County," Puckett said.

In 1987, Puckett started a 20-year career with the Mayfield Fire Department and Mayfield-Graves County Emergency Medical Service. Working as a firefighter, he worked 24 hours on and 48 hours off. He picked up a second job working security at the Graves County courthouse.

Puckett retired from Mayfield Fire and EMS in 2007. Having worked at the courthouse, various deputies from the sheriff's office encouraged him to attend the Department of Criminal Justice Training (DOCJT) and become a deputy. Puckett said through much prayer, he took the opportunity and started his training in April 2014.

Puckett graduated the DOCJT in 2014 at age 52 and served as a deputy sheriff in Graves County for one

year. He was awarded the Recruit Award and the Coordinators Award while at the academy for being an outstanding recruit.

Through his experience working as a deputy, he met some Murray State police officers who told him of an opening at the University as a police officer. In October 2015, he started his first day on campus.

"Murray State is more personable—closer to the students—and that's right down my alley," Puckett said. "It's the best job I've ever had... I never dread coming to work at Murray State."

Jeff Gentry, assistant police chief at Murray State PD, says having great officers work for the department makes his job easier.

"Shannon is an outstanding officer and has a passion for helping others," Gentry said. "All of the Murray State officers bring a tremendous amount of knowledge to the University."

Puckett doesn't know how long he will work at Murray State, leaving that decision to God.

"I believe that everything happens for a reason and

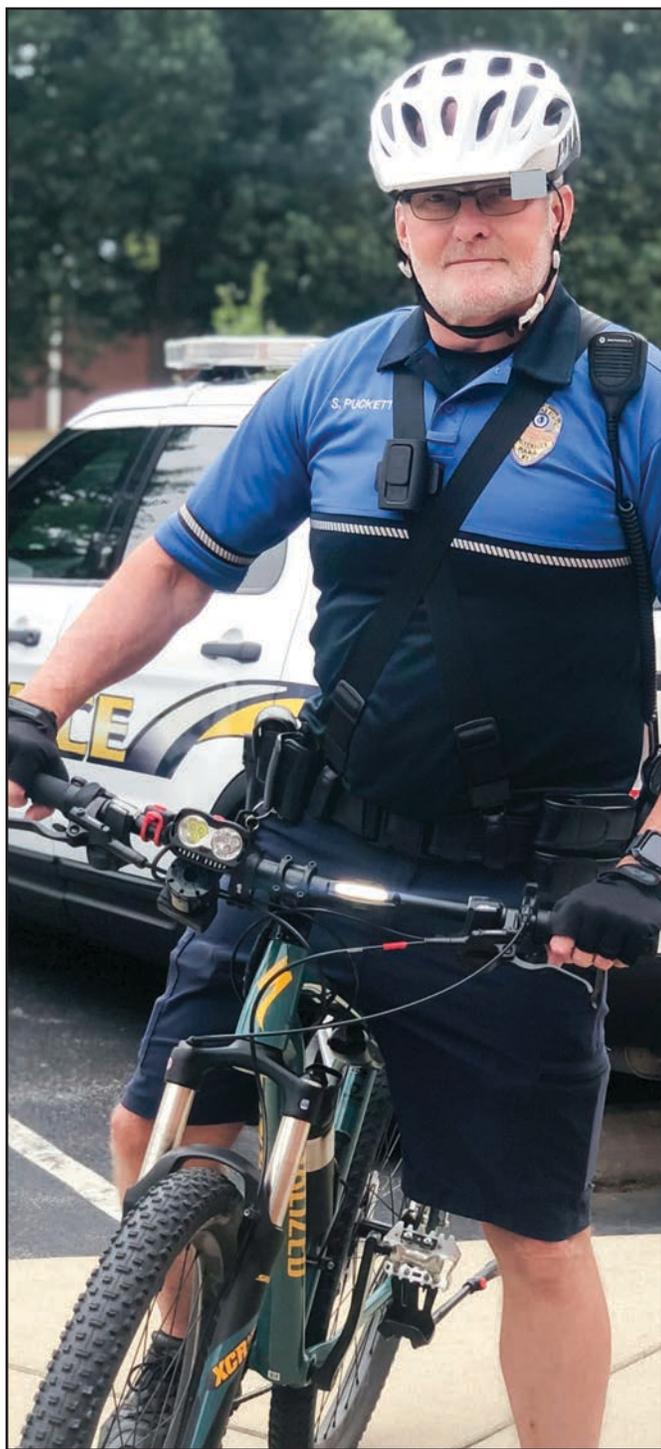
"He supports me in everything I do, as I support him in everything he does."

- Betsy Puckett, Officer Puckett's wife



“Murray State is more personable — closer to the students—and that’s right down my alley.”

-Officer Puckett



that I will know with time when it is time to leave,” Puckett said. “I’m a pretty spiritual person. I depend on God for everything. I just leave it in his hands and he has a plan in place for me, and whatever he sees for me, that’s what I’ll do.”

Puckett has been married for eight years to Betsy Puckett, an administrative assistant in the English department.

“She supports me in everything that I do,” Shannon said.

Shannon’s wife Betsy is the backbone of his recent success and happiness.

“My man in uniform is one of a kind,” Betsy said. “He supports me in everything I do, as I support him in everything he does. Shannon wants to make a difference in the world, and he strives to do that every day. He goes with his best foot forward every day.”

Shannon said looking back over the course of his career, he misses the people he has worked with over the years the most, but he is right where he is

supposed to be as a police officer.

“Life goes by fast,” Shannon said. “Do what you want in life, something you want to do. If you have to be taken out of your comfort zone to do it, go for it.”

Shannon said that he wants Murray State students to see police officers on campus as their friends first and police officers second.

“They need to know that we’re humans,” Shannon said. “I am not above or better than anyone. I am not a policeman first. I am here to encourage someone, talk to someone, but yes we have a job to do and we have to get it done.”

As Shannon looked back on his career, he could not be more pleased.

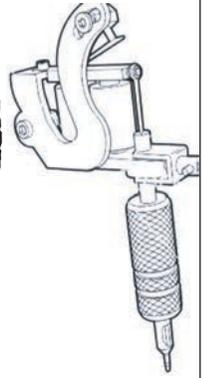
“When God is whacking [you] upside the head and trying to tell you something, listen to him,” Shannon said. “He got me to where I am today, serving the students at Murray State, and it truly is the best job I have ever had.”



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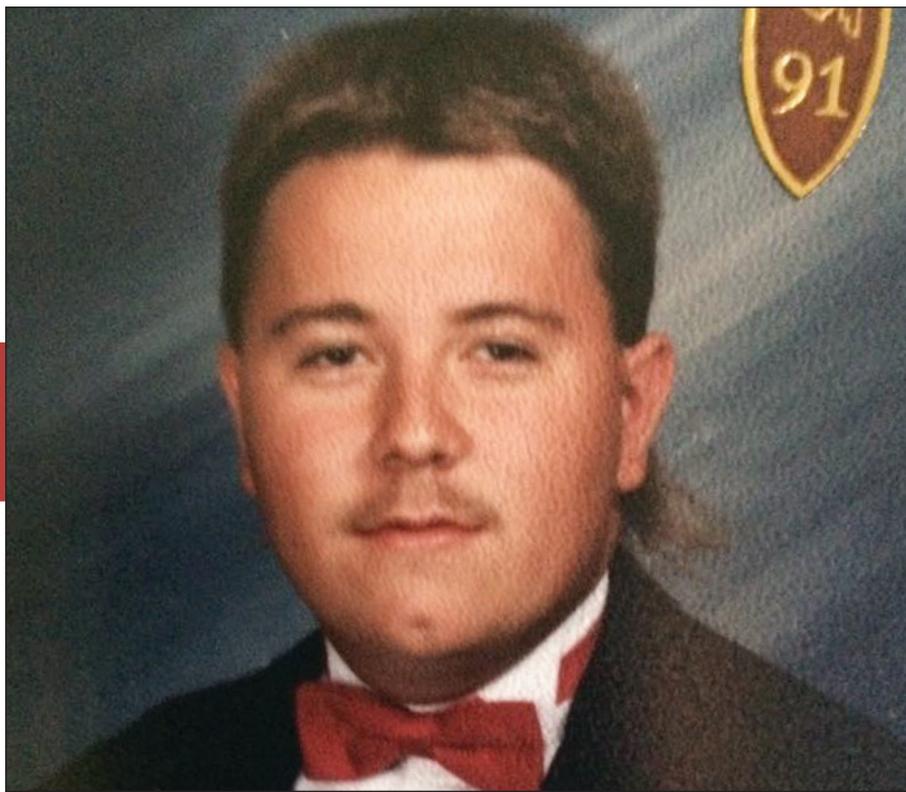
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An agricultural journey

Professor reminisces on his journey to Murray State



Story by Hannah Bullard

Photos courtesy of Brian Parr

As assistant dean of Murray State's Hutson School of Agriculture, Brian Parr sat under his framed doctoral degree and reflected on his path to higher education.

"Community college was the best five years of my life," Parr said.

In high school, Parr had all the makings of a typical drop-out. He never once thought he would attend college. Now, he sits behind a desk, as an assistant dean, with a unique ability to connect to students.

"I'm not supposed to be here," Parr said. "All the demographics you could lay out - the broken home, the poverty, the slow pace - says will never finish high school, will never finish college, will certainly never finish a Ph.D. None of it made sense. My whole life was made of, 'I'm not supposed to be here.'"

Parr and his two younger siblings were raised by

a single mother in Greeneville, Tennessee. They lived on the corner of his grandfather's dirt farm in eastern Tennessee, in a modest home that doubled as his mom's daycare facility. She raised the three on a babysitter's income, which Parr described as "next to nothing."

Parr's mother didn't have a driver's license until he was 10 years old. The only lifestyle he was familiar with was one of great simplicity.

"You don't see a lot happening on a dirt farm in East Tennessee," Parr said. "The same thing that happened one day, happened the next. I could have never expected higher education to open my world up as broadly as it did."

Parr said when it was time for him to graduate, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid came in the mail. Without him knowing, his mother filled out the financial aid form.

"I was a terrible student and had no intention



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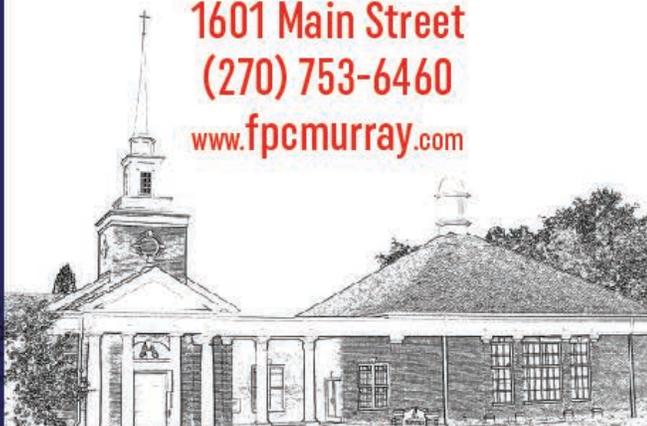
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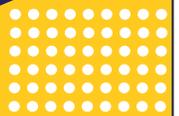
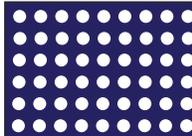


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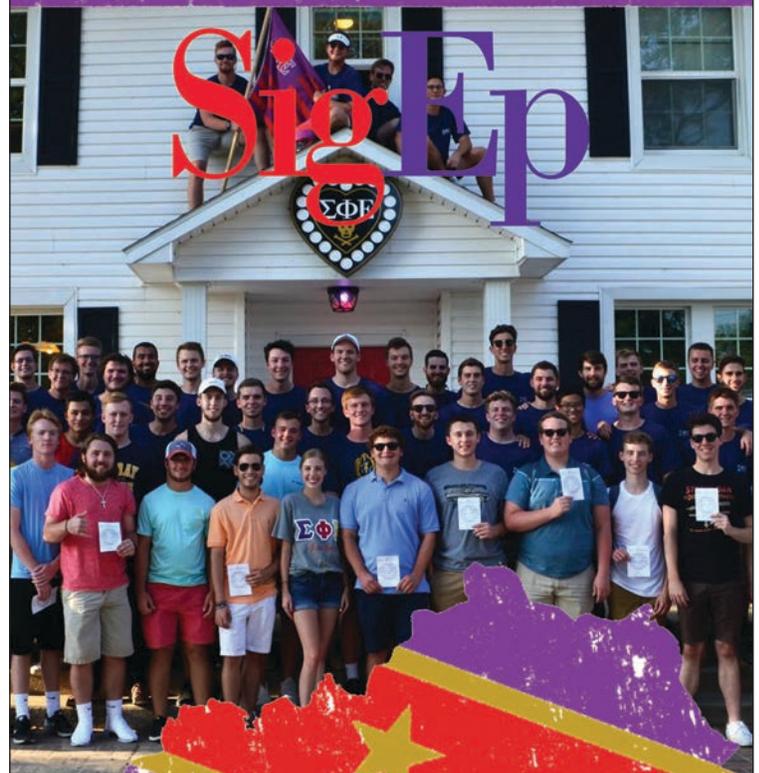
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of going to college, but my mother filled out the FAFSA and said I could go to college for free,” Parr said. “It was good to be poor with the FAFSA.”

Parr didn’t plan on going to college, even if it was free.

However, after classes and books were paid for, he found he would have \$400 left over, so, he decided he would take one year of classes to get the money so he could replace his truck’s balding tires. While at Walter State Community College in Morristown, Tennessee, Parr discovered the agriculture department.

“I actually spent five years at that community college,” Parr said. “I always tell my students community college was the best five years of my life. It’s funny but it’s true.”

Parr took every agriculture class available at the small school. When he transferred his credit hours over to the University of Tennessee, he found he would only have to take three semesters to finish his bachelor’s degree.

Parr was 23 and had just gotten married when he started at UT. He lived a little over an hour from

Knoxville at the time and couldn’t imagine how he could work and be a full-time student commuting 70 miles a day. His wife, Kemaly Parr, eventually got a certification to be a dental hygienist and was able to support the two of them as he completed his degree.

Brian became a high school agriculture teacher, a position he said he held as the pinnacle of success when he was a teenager. Where he was from, Brian said there weren’t many examples of success, but being an agriculture teacher sounded better to him than working in the hydrologics factory with his dad for 35 years.

He decided he would go for his master’s degree after his adviser told him he would get a significant pay raise if he got the degree.

“At the end I’m giving the defense of my thesis in the master’s, and my professor asks me if I’ve ever thought about getting a Ph.D.,” Parr said. “He told me to call Oklahoma State. I did. The school was willing to give me assistantship, so, I went up there with no student debt. It turned out to be one of the greatest things I’d ever done.”

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“I have a really strong desire to help students who are trying to help themselves.”

- Brian Parr



to call Oklahoma State. I did. The school was willing to give me assistantship, so, I went up there with no student debt. It turned out to be one of the greatest things I'd ever done.”

Brian has a younger brother, known for his intelligence in their small hometown. His brother always planned to go to college and become a chemical engineer. Brian said in his hometown, when his mom tells anyone about his achievements they always assume she is talking about his brother. Brian said no one would have thought he would ever take a college class, much less have a doctoral degree.

He said his academic journey is a testament to persistence.

Brian said it's his unique struggle in the journey of obtaining his degree that allows him to appreciate the type of student Murray State has an abundance of.

“I wanted to work at a larger school of agriculture for a while, and I did,” He said. “But when I came back here in 2015, I realized that I had been working with a different type of student than the student I was [when] I came back to Murray State.”

Parr said Murray State works with a larger percentage of first-generation college students than most other universities.

“These students are just some real hard-working people, and that's the type of person I like working with,” Parr said.

Parr uses his position in administration to reach out to students in a way he wasn't able to as a professor.

“There are times when a student needs you to reach out to them,” he said. “There are times when a student needs you to help them solve a problem and not just tell them what the policy is. There are times when I

can't fix the bad situation, but a lot of times, I can.”

Tyler Cook is a recent graduate of Murray State's Hutson School of Agriculture and a first-hand recipient of Parr's comforting style of advising.

During the spring 2019 semester, Cook and his family received the news that his father, battling cancer, would only live a couple more weeks.

“I knew I needed to go home to be with my dad, but I didn't know how I would swing finishing up these last couple of classes I needed to graduate,” Cook said.

Cook and Parr had been close while Cook studied at Murray State, but had never exchanged phone numbers. Cook said Parr took the initiative to find his contact information, give him a call and tell him not to worry about the classes, they would figure something out.

“Dr. Parr really doesn't see students like other administrators do,” Cook said. “Most see students as a number, or just a student. He has a way of seeing each student individually and acknowledging them as more than a student.”

Cook said he believes Parr has this compassion for students because he faced his own struggles trying to get through school. He described Parr as welcoming, personable and focused.

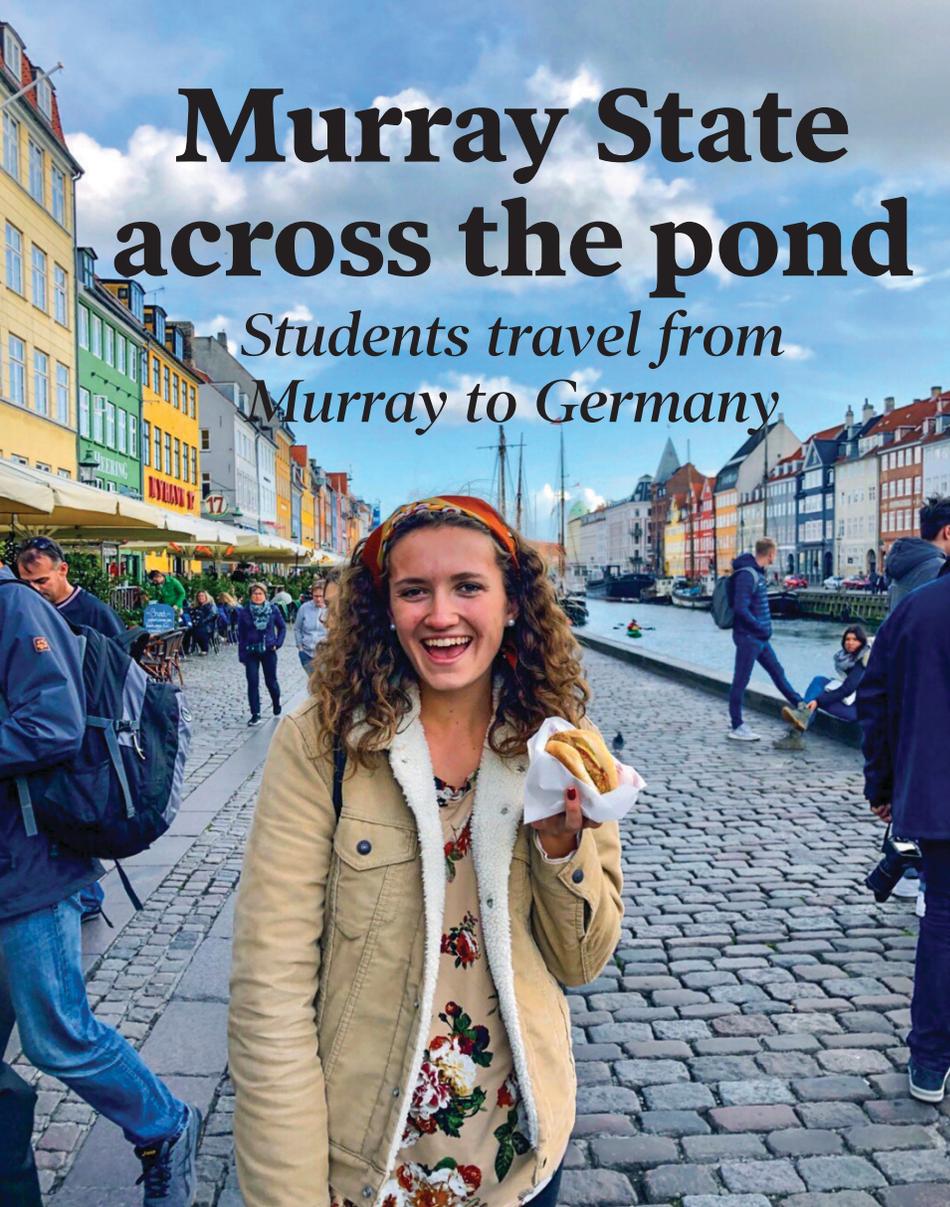
“I have a really strong desire to help students who are trying to help themselves,” Parr said.

He and his wife Kemaly have five children, three biological and two adopted. Parr's oldest son is a student at Murray State, and his oldest daughter is pioneering the first FFA chapter for Murray High School.

Parr said he hopes his children will have a broader scope of what their opportunities are after watching his career in higher education.

Murray State across the pond

*Students travel from
Murray to Germany*



*Story by Alexis Schindler
Photos courtesy of Jenna Straub*

Like many universities across the United States, Murray State offers its students many opportunities to study abroad.

Murray State not only offers its students the chance to study abroad, but the University partners with schools in other countries to give international students the chance to study at Murray State for a semester, or longer if they so choose.

The Semester in Regensburg Program allows a Murray State student to spend a semester at Germany's Universität Regensburg, or University of Regensburg.

Murray State sophomore Jenna Straub from Mahomet, Illinois, took advantage of the program during the fall 2019 semester.

Straub, an agribusiness major with a concentration in global agribusiness, had never studied abroad or been to Europe until the program.

Straub arrived in Germany for the program on Sept. 3, 2019. Regensburg broadened her horizons in many ways, including outside of the classroom.

"This has been my first time in Europe, my first time riding the metro, my first time riding a train and my first time living in an apartment on my own," Straub said in an email.

The program gives students plenty of time to explore Europe on their own.

Straub said at Murray State her schedule would typically include two classes a day, working out in the Bauernfeind Wellness Center on campus, various

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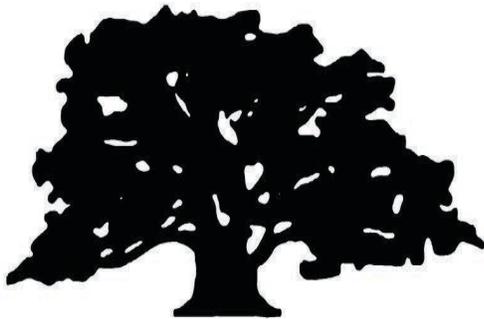


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club meetings, intramural sports and homework.

However, her schedule in Germany was quite different. Straub said at the university in Germany she studied German in her Intensive Language Courses Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. During her lunch break, she either went to the university cafeteria where foods from different countries were offered, or she went back to her apartment to make something for herself. Straub said ILC lasted for four weeks and then the Murray State classes started.

“For my Murray State classes, I only have class on Mondays and Tuesdays, so I’ll be able to travel around Europe Wednesday through Sunday each week,” Straub said.

The biggest difference in the German and American education systems Straub noticed was the grading system.

“They don’t use GPA,” she said. “Instead they have a number scale.”

“You meet people from all over the world and from so many different backgrounds that you gain a whole new perspective on everything.”

-Jenna Straub

Essentially, a 1.0 in the German grading system is an A in the U.S. grading system, and a 5.0 in the German system is an F in the U.S. system.

Straub also said the classes were similar in style but more intense.

“They seem to have more of an appreciation towards education,” she said. “It is very hard to get into college and very easy to get kicked out, so they study and work hard at school.”

The biggest cultural difference Straub said she noticed was how active Germans are, because they walk or bike almost everywhere, and the enjoyment for life that they possess.

“They have a good balance in the fact that they also understand the importance of enjoying life,”



she said. “They aren’t constantly on the go, like in the U.S. we seem to feel the need to fill up our schedule 24/7.”

Straub said she thinks students should study abroad or take the time to travel for several reasons.

“You meet people from all over the world and from so many different backgrounds that you gain a whole new perspective on everything,” she said. “You also learn to appreciate friendships and relationships you had back home you might have taken for granted before.”

Straub said she was excited to share her experiences in Germany when she arrived back home, and that she planned to remain in contact with the people she met during her semester abroad.

“It’s amazing the perspectives I’ve gained here and all the experiences I’ve had,” Straub said. “There’s always something to do or explore.”

The partnership with the University of

Regensburg also presents the opportunity for Regensburg students to study at Murray State.

One international student who seized this opportunity is Franz Knorr. By American collegiate standards, Knorr is a junior. In Germany, the collegiate system does not have these classifications.

Knorr studies law at the University of Regensburg. While at Murray State, he enrolled in courses to study criminal justice, political science, legal studies and philosophy.

He said he didn't feel like his college routine at Murray State was much different from back home. He wakes up around 7 a.m., eats breakfast, bikes to class, participates in the out-of-class activities of his choosing and then goes home. The only difference was Knorr is a student worker in his department in Germany, but while studying in the U.S. Knorr did not work.

Like Straub, Knorr said he

felt like classes in Germany and the U.S. are similar. The only difference he saw was the class size. He said German classes can have up to several hundred students compared to Murray State's classes of 20 or 30 students.

However, opposite of Straub, Knorr believes students in the U.S. are more serious about their studies than those in Germany.

"In Germany, we don't pay tuition fees," Knorr said. "I feel like that changes the students' attitudes towards their studies. I feel like the students are more motivated and less lazy than they are in Germany."

This was his first time studying abroad. Knorr said he chose the U.S. as his study abroad location because the country has always fascinated him. The biggest cultural difference Knorr said he noticed was the relaxed, friendly and open atmosphere of the Murray community.

"I heard that this was espe-

cially a thing in the South," he said. "I think I had more casual small talk conversations on the street with strangers in Murray than in my whole life in Germany."

Knorr said he thinks students should study abroad because of the chance it gives them to break out of their comfort zone and meet new people. His study abroad experience helped him do that.

Murray State senior Samantha Bainer from Fort Knox, Kentucky, participated in the fall 2017 Semester in Regensburg Program.

The Regensburg program is not the only study abroad program Murray State offers. There are numerous opportunities provided for students to travel all over the world.

For more information, email the Murray State Study Abroad Office at msu.study-abroad@murraystate.edu or call the office at (270) 809-2277.



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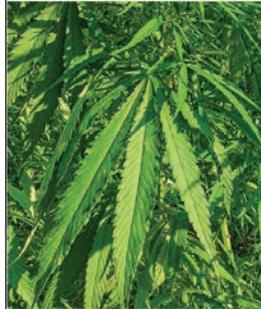
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Murray State professor and daughter discover new species

Story by Simon Placr

Photos by Lauren Morgan, Laura Sullivan-Beckers and Robyn Pizzo

On the second floor of the Biology Building, tucked behind a curtain in a laboratory, is a table full of spiders.

Wolf spiders, to be exact, hand-caught by a team of students and professors, brought back to Murray State's campus to be observed. Their goal is to potentially unlock the secrets of how and why they communicate.

From an early age, Laura Sullivan-Beckers has been interested in sounds, human and animal, and how they're used to communicate. Her hobbies in high school included birdwatching and studying cassette tapes in various languages: Japanese, Italian and Gaelic. She turned this latter interest into a bachelor's degree in Spanish, but upon graduating from the University of Tulsa, she realized she didn't want to be an interpreter or a teacher.

Her love of learning took her to Northeastern State University in Oklahoma, where she pursued a Bachelor of Science in biology with the intention of becoming a park ranger. During her studies, Sullivan-Beckers' fascination with birds made her decide to take a class in ornithology, and her professor took her to a regional animal behavior conference.

"Students and faculty from schools in our region—Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas—would come and present their research at this conference," Sullivan-Beckers said. "I saw these talks on frog communication and insect communication and I thought 'Oh my gosh! This is the coolest thing ever!'"

Realizing she could study animal languages like she did human ones, she decided to pursue a doctorate and continue



her research at the University of Missouri, studying treehopper communication. Treehoppers are a species of insects related to cicadas and are found on all continents except Antarctica.

“It became evident that if I wanted to do evolutionary research on animals, it made sense to work with an animal that’s small, reproduces quickly and is easy to maintain in a lab,” Sullivan-Beckers said.

Birding remained an interest—as evidenced by the many books on the subject she keeps on the shelves of her office, and the fact she teaches ornithology at Murray State—but logistically, insects were the way to go.

“If you study anything with a backbone, there’s a lot more hoops to jump through, a lot more paperwork,” Sullivan-Beckers said, listing another reason she pre-

fers researching invertebrates. “They’re also just fascinating. People are used to thinking about apes or birds using language, but to think about an insect or a spider...using sophisticated behavior is surprising, I think, to people.”

Sullivan-Beckers decided to make the leap from studying treehoppers to studying spiders in part because she was bothered by a quirk the treehoppers possess.

“When they vibrate you can’t see their bodies move, and you can’t hear them without special equipment,” Sullivan-Beckers said. “If there are three guys on a plant and one of them is singing, I can’t tell you which one it is, and that drove me bananas.”

Spiders, on the other hand, move their whole bodies



to communicate, and this put her troubles with treehoppers to rest.

However, in the summer of 2016, while tending to the family's backyard garden with her daughter, Sylvie, who was 2 years old at the time, Sullivan-Beckers discovered something curious. Sylvie had overwatered the soil, and small thorn-shaped objects floated to the surface. Upon closer inspection, Sullivan-Beckers found them to be dead treehoppers, like the ones she studied a decade prior for her Ph.D. Noting that it was odd for the tree-dwelling insects to be dead and buried in the soil, Sullivan-Beckers soon began collecting hundreds of samples.

Three years and countless hours of research later, *Hebetica sylviae*, named for Sylvie, is now on the record as a new species.

"It was crazy," Sullivan-Beckers said. "My brother still doesn't buy it. He was like, 'Laura, when are you gonna come clean and tell the world that you actually planted this treehopper in your backyard? What are the odds that someone who worked on this random group of insects happened to have a new species in her backyard, years later?' The coincidence is pretty astonishing."

Sylvie, now 6, spends her days in kindergarten, proud of the fact that she is the only kid in all of Murray with a bug named after her. Her drawings of insects decorate her mom's office door, and she once went to school dressed as a spider scientist to show everyone what she wants to be when she grows up. She said she wants to help her mom find living specimens of *Hebetica sylviae* next summer.

"I don't think she realizes yet [what it means to be on the scientific record]," Laura said. "I wish she could remember the day she made the discovery, but I know she'll appreciate it when she gets older."

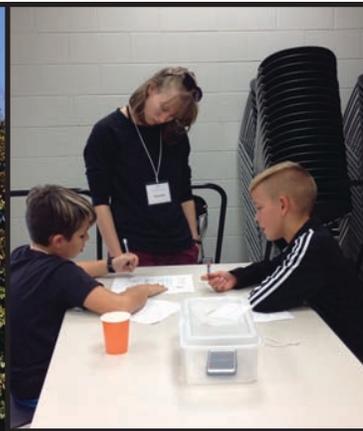
Laura said the next area she's interested in researching is the effect of poisonous bugs when they become prey to spiders. She said she noticed a spider she had been observing in her garden had captured a monarch butterfly in its web. The insect's poison gives them a foul taste, intended to ward off birds, and they are marked with bright orange wings to warn would-be predators. Soon after consuming the butterfly, the spider Laura was observing disappeared, and she said she wonders if the insect was its last meal.

Dan Schoenberg, a graduate biology student, works with Laura as her protégé. He said he's unsure if he's made any discoveries new to science in his three se-

mesters at Murray State, but that he enjoys working with Lauras in her spider lab.

"She is a fantastic adviser: patient, hard-working and easy going," Schoenberg said. "She is always willing to talk about science and will always entertain new ideas."





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